

A P P E N D I X 10

THE SECOND & THIRD OPIUM WARS – 1856-60

Thomas Bruce was the 7th Earl of Elgin and 11th of Kincardine. He was a representative peer for Scotland and a General in the Army. Thomas was a collector of Grecian antiquities, with his greatest treasure gleaned from the rubble of the Parthenon, Athens. He presented this rarity to the British Museum where it is on display as *The Elgin Marbles*. This generous gift has assured his everlasting fame.

George Charles Constantine was his eldest son and heir to the earldom. George never married and died the year before that of his father. The 7th Earl's second son, James, became the 8th Earl of Elgin and 12th Earl of Kincardine in 1841.

James, although possessing a strong face with a determined mouth, was short and portly. He was not a commanding figure and at 46 he looked twice his age. His aloofness was beguiling for it covered a sensitive nature. It was no secret that he preferred the company of his large and beloved family, and the serenity of his streams and glens, to gallivanting around the globe.

Against his better judgment he accepted Prime Minister Lord Palmerston's offer to go to Hong Kong. He was to untangle the mess that the Colony's governor had gotten himself into over the *Arrow* incident. On July 2, 1857, he arrived in Hong Kong aboard the frigate *Shannon*. Governor Bowring's greeting was civil but their mutual dislike was obvious. In a letter to his wife Elgin wrote that Sir John Bowring was a *dangerous person*.

The Indian Mutiny then took a turn for the worst. Lord Elgin redirected the force assigned to the *Arrow* incident to support the hard-pressed British general. There is little doubt that Elgin's timely help saved the sub-continent of India for the Crown. He also rushed to Calcutta where he put himself at the disposal of the Viceroy.

During Elgin's absence in Calcutta, Yeh Ming-chen, Viceroy of Kwangsi and Kwangtung, the province that Canton is the capital of, took control of the *Arrow* controversy. He stated he wanted no dealings with the British and rescinded their trading rights. He further declared that all other nationals could trade using Canton as their entry port. The British merchants were loud in their condemnation of Yeh's unilateral action. They found a ready ear in Bowring. An angry Bowring ordered his admiral, Sir Michael Seymour, to mount a shipping blockade of the Pearl River. The blockade had only limited



JAMES BRUCE – 1860
The 8th Earl of Elgin and 12th Earl of Kincardine.
 (Photo: Ian Diamond – Hong Kong Archivist)



SIR JOHN BOWRING – 1854-1859
Governor of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong.
 (Photo: Ian Diamond – Hong Kong Archivist)

success, for the shallow water approaches prevented the deep-draft British warships from being effective.

In Calcutta Lord Elgin received word a further force of 1,500 marines was on the way to Hong Kong. He left the Indian delta port aboard the P. & O. Steam Navigation Company's ship the *Ava*. She dropped anchor in Hong Kong Harbour on September 20, 1857.

Elgin's already morbid mood deepened when he learned that Bowring had undermined his authority. Sir John's military force was still under strength so he had prepared an attack on Canton with just his navy. Lord Elgin saw the weakness of the plan, for strong military support was essential to success. Elgin was furious and vetoed Bowring's plan. His Lordship then had an aberrant loss of common sense. He rudely refused the invitation to enjoy the comforts of Government House and instead chose the cramped quarters of the *Ava*. His discomfort increased when boils erupted in some sensitive body areas.

At the beginning of December three shiploads of marines arrived from England. Elgin's military strength was now strong enough to attack Canton. Elgin, and Baron Gros, the French representative, sent a communique to Commissioner Yeh. The communique was moderate in tone and made only two demands. The Chinese should honour the treaty, and compensation for damage incurred when they burned the British *factories* (trading posts) at Canton. Commissioner Yeh had 10 days to accept the terms. Yeh misread the calm tone of the communique as conciliatory and lacking in determination. His reply was tersely negative.

On December 15, 1857, the British and French fleets took station opposite Canton. On the 17th he and Gros, from aboard Her Majesty's ship *Furious*, ordered the capture of Canton.

Twelve days later, the Allied force moved against Canton's east wall. The French positioned their scaling ladders and they were first up the wall. Elgin had made a rare miscalculation. The Chinese willpower to fight was less than he had expected. As the afternoon light faded into darkness the whole wall was in Allied hands. A small Allied force of fewer than 6,000 troops had overwhelmed a garrison of 30,000 men positioned behind a wall 25 feet high and 20 feet wide. This was a tremendous victory for thousands of battle-hardened Manchu troops supported the garrison.

AIRPORT OF THE NINE DRAGONS, KAI TAK, KOWLOON

On January 5, 1858, a roving platoon captured Yeh and his entire military staff. Elgin and Gros had a problem – how to deal with an unregenerate Yeh? They exiled him to Calcutta where his health deteriorated and he died in little more than a year.

Elgin and Gros moved their operational base to Shanghai. Admiral Seymour was tardy in obeying Elgin's instruction to bring his fleet north. Elgin suspected Bowring, his old adversary, was exerting pressure on the slow-witted sailor. Letters received by Elgin from the Imperial Court were becoming arrogantly less courteous. The Chinese reverted to their old ways, and their sham of equality was so transparent that Elgin's irritation was becoming obvious to all.

Finally, with his fleet in position, he ordered his admirals to attack the Taku forts. The bombardment began on May 19 and subdued the fort the following day. Three days later Seymour's naval force moved on Tientsin and met no opposition. The Peking Imperial Court was in turmoil and quickly agreed to all the Allied demands. The battle was little more than a walkover and bred an over-confidence that would bring disaster a year later.

On June 4, Elgin travelled to the temple of *Supreme Felicity*, the venue for his first meeting with the Chinese Commissioners, the authorised negotiators. His escort was 150 scarlet-clad marines marching in impressive precision to the band of H.M.S. *Calcutta*. Elgin, not usually a rude man, stormed from the meeting when the Chinese negotiators forgot to bring a special seal. He assigned his brother Frederick to handle British negotiations. Frederick's assistants were Thomas Wade and Horatio Lay.

Lay, at 27 years-of-age, was the stronger character of the trio and lectured, bullied and thoroughly terrified the elderly Commissioners. There was irony in Lay's outbursts. He lacked connection with the British Government and worked for the Chinese Customs. He was castigating his employer. Yet, he did more than anyone else in securing the Treaty of Tientsin. Lord Elgin did not meet the Commissioners again until June 26, the day he signed the treaty.



TREATY OF TIENTSIN – 26 JUNE, 1858

Lord Elgin, seated centre, signing the Treaty. Admiral Seymour sits at the right table with Imperial Commissioner Gui Liang. Seated at the left table is Hua Shang, Senior Commissioner.

(Photos: Ian Diamond – Hong Kong Archivist)

APPENDIX 10

Lord Elgin spent January and February of 1859 between Hong Kong and Canton. The treaty entitled the British to stay in Canton until the Chinese had paid their reparations. On March 4, 1859, he left China with few regrets, and hoping that he would never set foot again in the land he now thoroughly detested. This was not to be!

At Ceylon he spent several days with his younger brother. Sir Frederick Bruce was returning to China as the first British Minister accredited to the Chinese Empire. Sir Frederick was to exchange the now British ratified Treaty with his Peking counterpart.

Some miles from Peking Sir Frederick's delegation came under heavy cannon fire from the Taku forts that forced him to retire. In that deadly action three British gunboats went to the bottom with a heavy loss of life. It was now clear the Chinese did not intend to ratify the treaty. Their attack on Sir Frederick's flag-of-truce proved their treachery.

A few days later, the Taku fort repulsed another British naval attack. It was an ill-conceived plan made from over-confidence. Again they gave a mauling to the British Navy. Rumour was rife that Russians had manned the Taku guns.

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Lord Elgin again allowed himself to be talked into returning to China. His formal instructions were ratification of the treaty, an apology for the attack on Sir Frederick's delegation, and reparations for the losses that had resulted. He was also to annex the peninsula of Kowloon, opposite Hong Kong Island.

So Elgin sailed east again, but his passage was wrought with unwanted adventure. Just after leaving Ceylon his steamship, the *Malabar*, entered thunderstorm conditions. She struck a rock and her captain had to run her on to a beach. His travelling companion was his old diplomatic partner the Baron Gros.



AUGUST 1860

The North Taku fort after the battle.

(Photos: Signor Beato)

AIRPORT OF THE NINE DRAGONS, KAI TAK, KOWLOON

The shipwreck of the *Malabar* is the subject of a delightful sketch. Its caption reads – *An amicable altercation takes place between their Excellencies whether France or England shall leave the sinking vessel first.* The sketch shows the tall, gaunt Baron Gros, and short, portly Lord Elgin solemnly bowing. Each is offering the other right-of-way. Standing in the background is the bearded ship's captain. No doubt he is wondering why they didn't leave together, surely that would satisfy protocol. The scene expresses no hint of hysteria, more of complete composure. The steady strokes and the detail captured by the artist, Colonel Crealock, show he was not in awe of the occasion!

The loss of their ship delayed their arrival in Hong Kong but the British and French continued assembling their expeditionary forces. There was no space for 17,000 troops on the island, so the British rented the waterfront of Kowloon for £160 a year. The camp occupied the area where the Peninsula Hotel stands today.

The one bright spot on Elgin's morbid horizon was the knowledge that Sir John Bowring had completed his term. The new Governor was the gentlemanlike Sir Hercules Robinson (1859-1865).

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The **Third Opium War** was about to begin. The Allies occupied Chusan, the island at the mouth of the Yangtze. Meanwhile, during May, the commanders moved their forces from Hong Kong to Shanghai. On June 16, the military commanders and the two Ambassadors formulated their plan of attack. The French forces were to land south of the Taku forts, and the British to the East. The plan was to outflank and take the guns from the rear. Further minor but irritating delays occurred until, on August 1, the Allied troops landed.

The first military reconnaissance met with accurate sniper fire. Using the cover of darkness the 2,000 men retreated. This victory elated the Chinese. The French General de Montauban refused to make further incursions until he had unloaded his stores. The weather appeared to be siding with the Chinese for the torrential rain turned paths into mud and a shortage of small boats added to the delay. The Allies lost 10 crucial days.

On August 14, the Allies had a change of fortune. They captured a small town that cleared the way for a rear attack on the weakest of the four forts comprising the Taku complex. The advance halted when the British General Sir Hope Grant and his French counterpart differed on the next phase of attack. Sir Hope realised that the northern fort was not only the weakest it held the key position. The British General, losing patience with the Frenchman, told him he was attacking, de Montauban could come along or stay as he pleased.

On August 21, a combined attack carried the day against a determined Chinese defence. The generals received reports of Chinese gunners tied to their guns. That day in 1860 five men and a 15-year-old boy won Britain's highest award for valour – the Victoria Cross.

Confusion was evident at the other forts but white flags soon appeared and the Allies took possession. Two days later the British Admiral Sir James Hope took his gunboats up to Tientsin and found it undefended.

The Chinese negotiators followed their ageless tactics of delay. This did not concern Elgin for Grant had consolidated his forces within reach. On September 9, the Allied forces advanced on Peking. Meanwhile a delegation headed by Harry Parkes (British Consul at Canton) and Henry Loch (Elgin's private secretary) left the Allied lines to negotiate with the Chinese.

On looking back, Parkes saw a strong force of Chinese cavalry had moved between him and the Allied lines. The British and French routed this determined attack. The army then pushed forward to rescue their negotiators but it was too late – they were in enemy hands.



ANDREW FITZGIBBON, VC

Hospital Apprentice (later Apothecary). Attached to the Indian Medical Establishment and the 67th Regiment – later the Hampshire Regiment.

Place & Date of Birth: Gogerat, India – 13 May 1846.

Account of Deed: On 21 August, 1860, at the capture of the North Taku Fort, China, Hospital Apprentice Fitzgibbon, aged 15 years 3 months, accompanied a wing of the 67th Regiment when it took position within 500 yards of the fort. He then proceeded, under heavy fire, to attend a dhoolie-bearer, whose wound he had been directed to bind up, and while the Regiment was advancing under the heavy enemy fire, he ran across the open ground to attend another wounded man. In so doing he was himself severely wounded.

Place & Date of Death: Delhi, India – 7 March 1883.

(Photo: Courtesy Imperial War Museum)

On September 21, a sharp engagement brought glory to the French infantry. They carried a Chinese battery at bayonet point. Their gallantry brought nobility to their general. Napoleon III later bestowed upon him the title of *Count Paliko*, named after the bridge that his men had stormed.

Meanwhile, the Emperor had left Peking. Prince Kung, his younger brother, remained to negotiate with the enemy. They made no progress for Parkes and the others were in enemy hands. Prince Kung guaranteed Elgin that if he pulled back his forces he would release his prisoners. Any attack would bring their death. Elgin's problem was great, should he abandon his expedition to save the lives of 37 men, who already might be dead, or continue his expedition.

The dungeon entombing Parkes and Loch was foul and ridden with maggots, yet they remained undaunted. Parkes wrote a letter to Elgin praising Prince Kung's qualifications and suggested a conference. Loch scribbled a message in Hindustani that he hid in the text. It stated that Parkes wrote the letter under duress. The Chinese then allowed the prisoners to receive a parcel containing a change of clothes and some personal effects. Among the clothing was a beautifully embroidered handkerchief. Hidden in the embroidery was the message, in Hindustani, that – *bombardment of Peking will begin in three days' time.*

On October 6, the French occupied the Imperial Summer Palace that lay outside the northern city wall. The Summer Palace was not a single building, but a huge park crowded with pavilions, gardens and lakes. It extended over 80 square miles. The great riches scattered around proved too much for the French soldiers. They began sacking the pavilions. Later that day some British officers arrived on the scene and joined in the looting. A grave problem of discipline existed.

On October 8, Prince Kung ordered the release of Parkes and Loch. After their escort left they found some of their friends fettered to a nearby cart. They reached the Allied camp without further trouble. Prince Kung had freed them not from sympathy; his concern was their murder would bring greater vengeance to his city. Parkes and Loch had endured 20 days of hell – every minute expecting to be executed. Other members of Parkes' delegation were not as fortunate. Some had died of infected wounds.

The snowy ridges of the Western Hills began to prey on Elgin's mind. Hope Grant did little to ease his fears, for with the fighting over he wanted to be back in Tientsin before the beginning of November and the onset of winter. Elgin and Gros lacked the time for

subtle diplomacy. They must hammer Prince Kung into submission without delay. An ultimatum gave Prince Kung until noon on October 13 to surrender his city.

The walls of Peking were 40 feet high and 60 feet wide and undamaged. The Prince had several options for its defence and delay was his best weapon. Later years would show that Kung was more the diplomat than the warrior. Kung tried to water down the Allied terms, but just before the deadline he ordered the surrender of the *Anting* gate. Allied troops poured into Peking.

The murder of some of his negotiators kept Elgin in a state of morbid depression. How could he avenge them? Only a spectacular act of redress would atone for the atrocity. The surrender of the *Anting* gate meant that he should bring no further burden on the Peking population. Elgin's spectacular proposal to destroy the Summer Palace was not a blow against the people but against the prestige of the Emperor. The British received his decision with acclaim but it appalled the French that such beauty should be destroyed. They conveniently forgot their loutish looting a few days earlier. On October 18, Allied troops burnt the Imperial Summer Palace.

On October 24, Lord Elgin arrived in State. Prince Kung paid Elgin homage in the Hall of Audience. They signed the Convention of Peking and finally ratified the Treaty of Tientsin. Lord Elgin stayed in Peking for a fortnight to introduce his brother to the Prince. With the installation of Sir Frederick William Adolphus Bruce G.C.B., the Chinese had accredited their first British Minister. Elgin's work was at an end.

Elgin enjoyed a long rest in Shanghai and arrived back in Hong Kong soon after the New Year of 1861. On January 19, he formally annexed the Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutters Island. This was a simple but moving ceremony. Harry Parkes scooped up a handful of soil and wrapped it in the proclamation. This he offered to the senior Mandarin who returned it, symbolising the transfer of Chinese land to the British Crown.

Two days later, James Bruce, the 8th Earl of Elgin and 12th Earl of Kincardine, left the Colony never to return. On January 21, 1862, he became Viceroy and Governor-General of India. This great statesman died at Dhurmsala, in India, on November 20, 1863. In his 52 years of life he had done momentous deeds. Yet many historians spurn those deeds and remember him as a vandal and fire-bug.

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Elgin Hill was named for Lord Elgin. The hill supports the Royal Observatory complex. Entry is by a secured lane immediately south of St Andrew's Church on Nathan Road.

Governor Bowring is remembered by Bowring Street. This is one street further north along Nathan Road of that traffic nightmare – Austin Road. Austin Road is the northern boundary of the old Whitfield Barracks now called Kowloon Park.



PRINCE KUNG – 1860

The chief negotiator signed the Convention of Peking and finally ratified the Treaty of Tientsin that formally annexed the Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutters Island. (Lithograph published 1862 by J. Hogarth)