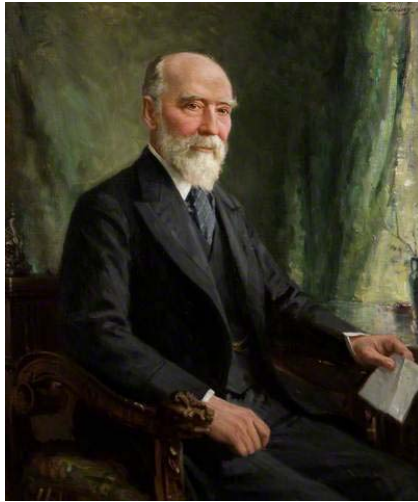


HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



SIR ROBERT HART (1835-1911)

First Inspector General of the Imperial Chinese Customs

Robert Hart (Chinese name He De) was born in Milltown, Co Armagh, on 20 February 1835. He was educated at Queen's College, Taunton, Wesley College, Dublin, and Queen's College, Belfast, where he received a BA in 1853.

The following year he entered the consular service, working in Hong Kong, Ningbo and Canton before resigning in 1859 to join the Chinese Maritime Customs. After working as Deputy Commissioner in Canton and Commissioner in Shanghai he was appointed as the first Inspector General in 1863. He held this post for nearly fifty years until his death and his commitment to the service led him to refuse the post of British Minister to China in 1885.

As well as his work in the Customs Hart was used by the Qing government to further their aims in dealing with foreign powers. He became supreme advisor to Zongli Yamen (the Chinese office dealing with foreign affairs). On behalf of the Qing government he arranged the Lisbon Protocol in 1885 after negotiations with the Portuguese over Macao. He negotiated with the Indian government over Sikkim and with the British over navigation of the Yangtze River. His efforts led to his receiving honours from a number of countries including Italy, Portugal, Norway, and Holland, and a number of Chinese honours.

Hart was also asked to help with efforts towards 'modernisation' such as the establishment of the Chinese postal system and the establishment of Tong Wen Guan (Institute of Education). In 1866 he married Hester Jane Bredon and they had three children. He also had three children from an earlier liaison with a Chinese woman. These children he supported as his 'wards'. In 1901 he wrote *These from the Land of Sinim, essays on the Chinese Question*. He died on 20 September 1911.

Patrick Devlin