

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



SIR HENRY POTTINGER (1789-1856): First Governor of Hong Kong 1843

Henry Pottinger was born at Mount Pottinger, then a rural location outside the town of Belfast on 3 October 1789. His father was a political radical who formed the Volunteer Corps in 1799. Henry was educated at Belfast Royal Academy and, after the family had got into financial difficulties, was sent out to the East along with his four brothers to seek his fortune.

In 1806 he joined the East India Company and in 1809 fought in the Mahratta war, as a lieutenant. He later explored much of the land between India and Persia and became Resident Administrator of Sind in 1820; later he held the same post in Hyderabad. Made a baronet, he negotiated in 1842 the Treaty of Nanking, which ended the First Opium War. He went beyond instructions to claim Hong Kong as a crown colony, but was made its first governor in spite of that. The governorship of Madras followed in 1847, and in 1851 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general.

He died in retirement in Malta on 18 March 1856. His brother William erected a memorial tablet to him in St George's Church, High Street, Belfast, in 1861. The window was presented to St Peter's Church, Hinton Road, Bournemouth, by his only daughter, Henrietta Maria Stephens, in 1859.

Patrick Devlin