

Robert Fullerton (1773 – 1831)

First Governor of the Straits' Settlement (1826 - 1829)

Buried in St Marylebone Parish Church June 1831



Robert Fullerton (1773 - 6 June 1831), was born in Edinburgh, the son of the Revd William Fullerton.

Robert Fullerton received his original appointment on 4 Feb 1824 and was Governor of Prince of Wales Isle from 20 Aug 1824 to 1826 after which he became the Governor of the newly incorporated Straits Settlements of Singapore (including Christmas Island and the Cocos-Keeling group), Penang (including Province Wellesley), and Malacca under the British administration in India. The Governor of the Straits Settlements was assisted by three Resident Councillors; the Resident Councillor of Penang, the Resident Councillor of Malacca and the Resident Councillor of Singapore. Robert Fullerton became the first Governor of the Straits Settlements, based in Penang, and served in that capacity from November 27, 1826 to November 12, 1829. The departure of the last

Governor is also recorded in the Gazette. The issue of 29 August 1829 carries the following notification:

"The Honorable the Governor, being about to proceed to Singapore and Malacca, NOTICE is hereby given that this station will cease to be the seat of Government from the date of his departure, and the charge of the settlement will devolve upon the Honorable Robert Ibbetson, Resident Councillor; to whom all local references will be made."

He is credited with the creation of the Municipal system in the Straits Settlements - Buckley stated that the first trace of subsequent Municipalities can be traced to 1827. Fullerton, with the sanction of the Court of Directors and Board of Control, regulated for the appointment of "The Committee of Assessors," for the purposes of ensuring the streets of Penang were cleared, watched and kept in repair.

A major problem he had to struggle with during his tenure as Governor was raising revenue to make the Straits Settlements self-sufficient and less dependent on the Indian Government. He devised a few methods such as the retrenchment scheme, new taxes on land, new fines and fees in the Law Courts. However, the Straits merchants defeated Fullerton's proposals in 1829 to impose export duties and stamp dues so as to preserve Singapore's free port status.

According to Prinsep, Fullerton's career progression was as follows:

1789 - Writer

1790 - Assistant under the Military Secretary

1791 - Assistant at Masulipatam

1797 - Deputy Commercial Resident at the Presidency

1798 - Deputy Commercial Resident at Ingeram

1802 - Commercial Resident at Ingeram

1805 - General Agent for Managing the Monopoly and Sale of Salt

1806 - Third Judge at the Provincial Court, Northern Division

1809 - Third Member of the Board of Trade, and General Superintendent of Investments

1812 - Superintendent of Government Lotteries

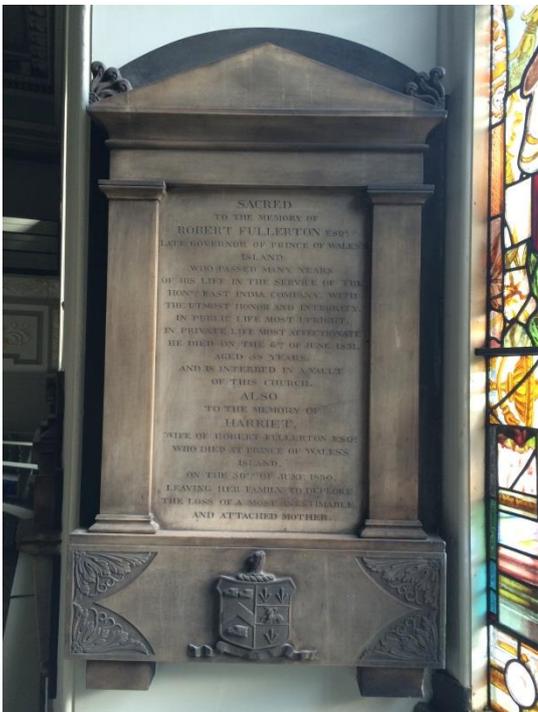
1814 - Second Member of Council, and President of the Board of Trade.

Interest in the Malay States: Fullerton proposed that Malacca be chosen as the capital of the Straits Settlements. His reasoning was that Malacca was centrally situated between Singapore and Penang and thus it was easier to maintain influence over all the Malay States. However, in 1832, Singapore was chosen as the capital of the Straits Settlements instead.

Despite the East India Company's policy of non-intervention in the Malay States, Governor Fullerton with great foresight realised the necessity of checking the Siamese aggression in the Northern Malay States to protect British trade. Going against Supreme Government's orders, Fullerton threatened Siam with war on a few occasions and specially instructed Captain Henry Burney on his mission to Siam to concentrate on the issues relating to the Malay States. He supported Captain James Low in his negotiations with Perak and Selangor guaranteeing British support if their independence was threatened. It could be said that Governor Fullerton stopped Siam from extending their influence in the Northern Malay states especially in Perak and Selangor.

His intervention in the politics of the Malay States brought censure from the Supreme Government in India but Fullerton was able to defend himself and his officers from the reprimands of the Supreme Government

Fullerton returned to Europe in 1830 and died in London on 6 June 1831.



Robert Fullerton's Monument in St Marylebone can be found on the eastern gallery. The inscription reads: Sacred to the memory of Robert Fullerton Esq., late Governor of Prince of Wales's Island who passed many years of his life in the service of the Honorable East India Company with the utmost honor and integrity. In public life most upright. In private life most affectionate. He died on the 6th of June 1831 aged 58 years and is interred in a vault of this church. Also to the memory of Harriet, wife of Robert Fullerton, Esq., who died at Prince of Wales's Island on 30th June 1830 leaving her family to deplore the loss of a most inestimable and attached mother.



Fort Fullerton: Sir Robert Fullerton built Fort Fullerton (now site of the Fullerton Hotel) to defend the town. In 1854, it was expanded by Captain Collyer but was demolished in 1873.

The *Fullerton Hotel* in Singapore, named after Robert Fullerton