

Major General Sir James Edward Alexander

1803 - 1885

Col. Alexander's father, Major General Sir James Edward Alexander was born in 1803, and died in 1885. He had a very distinguished military career following the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. Born early enough to have joined the East India Company, he eventually served in a number of colonial wars - Persia, the Balkans, and the 6th Cape Frontier war. He explored the interior and discovered the Orange River. He fought in Canada and commanded the 14th Regiment of Foot at Sebastopol in the Crimea, followed by the 1855 New Zealand Maori war. He retired in 1877 and was largely responsible for the transfer to London of Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment, presumably involved as well in the placement beneath the Needle of a time capsule to be found centuries hence.

The capsule contains a map of London and a train timetable, 10 newspapers, 12 photographs of the best looking women in England, a portrait of Queen Victoria, a box of cigars and some pipes to smoke, children's toys and a baby's bottle, a man's razor and a box of hairpins, a set of weights, a complete set of British coins and an Indian rupee, a 3-inch bronze model of the monument and the story of how they transported it to England, a translation of the inscriptions, and several copies of the Bible in different languages. The plaques on the base of the Needle read:

THIS OBELISK QUARRIED AT SYENE WAS ERECTED AT HELIOPOLIS BY THE PHARAOH THOTHMES III IN ABOUT 1500 B.C. LATERAL INSCRIPTIONS WERE ADDED NEARLY TWO CENTURIES LATER BY RAMESES THE GREAT. REMOVED DURING THE GREEK DYNASTY TO ALEXANDRIA, THE ROYAL CITY OF CLEOPATRA, IT WAS THERE ERECTED IN THE 18th YEAR OF AUGUSTUS CAESAR BC 12. THROUGH THE PATRIOTIC ZEAL OF ERASMUS WILSON F.R.S. WAS BROUGHT FROM ALEXANDRIA ENCASED IN AN IRON CYLINDER. IT WAS ABANDONED DURING A STORM IN THE BAY OF BISCAY, RECOVERED AND ERECTED ON THIS SPOT BY JOHN DIXON C.E. IN THE 42nd YEAR OF THE REIGN OF QUEEN VICTORIA 1879. THIS OBELISK, PROSTRATE FOR CENTURIES, WAS PRESENTED TO THE BRITISH NATION AD 1819 BY MAHOMMED ALI VICEROY OF EGYPT. A WORTHY MEMORIAL OF OUR DISTINGUISHED COUNTRYMEN Abercrombie and Nelson.

Another plaque on the right-hand sphinx says:

THE SCARS THAT DISFIGURE THE PEDESTAL OF THE OBELISK, THE BASES OF THE SPHINXES, AND THE RIGHT-HAND SPHINX, WERE CAUSED BY FRAGMENTS OF A BOMB DROPPED IN THE ROADWAY CLOSE TO THIS SPOT, IN THE FIRST RAID ON LONDON BY GERMAN AEROPLANES A FEW MINUTES BEFORE MIDNIGHT ON TUESDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER 1917.