

Governor, Traveller, Scholar, Spy

The Career of Sir Cecil Clementi

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Introduction

There was in him a silent heroism which was manifested in his later afflictions as it had been in the remarkable travels through Asia in his earlier years.

—Obituary, *The Times*, 10 April 1947

At first, the grave can be hard to find. The churchyard is hemmed in by woods on three sides, and brambles and briars—no respecters of persons—have intruded into consecrated ground at Holy Trinity Church, Penn Street, a small village in the English county of Buckinghamshire. Visitors must penetrate the jungle to identify who lies where.

Such was the situation when I arrived at Holy Trinity at the start of my research into the life and times of Sir Cecil Clementi (1875–1947), the colonial administrator who in 1925 rose to become governor of Hong Kong and five years later governor of the Straits Settlements and high commissioner of the Malay States. It seemed a good idea to begin at the end, as it were, to locate Clementi's final resting place, and then retrace his journey through the British Empire during the first three decades of the twentieth century as a government cadet, scholar, traveller, spy, colonial secretary and finally governor.

Half hidden when I first saw it, his grave gives little away.¹ He died aged seventy-one after a debilitating encounter with diabetes. It is a family grave. The inscription at the foot of an attractive Celtic cross honours, first, the memory of his second daughter, Cecily (1915–1940), who predeceased him. Then comes Clementi himself, followed by his wife Penelope (1889–1970) who, almost fifteen years younger than her husband, outlived him by nearly twenty-three years. In life they were a close couple; and 'in death they were not divided', as the epitaph at the foot of their grave puts it.

Penelope spent most of her widowhood at Holmer Court, the home the couple bought when Clementi retired in 1934, and the site of which now lies under a housing estate some three miles from Penn Street. But the family name lives on there, too: it is known locally as the 'Clementi estate' and is approached via 'Clementi Avenue', off which runs 'Cresswell Way', named after the Clementis' only son (1918–1981), whose

1. 'History, Monuments and Memorial of Holy Trinity, Penn Street', <https://pennstreetchurch.uk>.

remains are also interred in the family grave. The Clementi's first daughter, Dione, is buried there, too. Their youngest child, Alwin (1923–2010), was laid to rest in Oxford, birthplace of her husband, who predeceased her.

Though it ended in a quiet corner of rural England, the Clementi story is a global, indeed an imperial one. Cecil was born in India, the son of a soldier turned lawyer, who spent his entire career in that country. After an education in England and Germany, Cecil also spent his working life overseas but as a colonial administrator: first in Hong Kong, British Guiana, and Ceylon, and then as governor of Hong Kong, where he began his service, and governor of the Straits Settlements and high commissioner in Malaya, where he ended it. His wife Penelope was the daughter of the naval commodore in Hong Kong, and three of the couple's four children were born in British Guiana and one in Ceylon. The Clementis were an imperial family.

So, of course, were many other families when Britain had an empire to run. But Cecil Clementi's career, like the man himself, was anything but ordinary. It began in the high noon of Victorian imperialism and ended some thirty years later when the empire was under attack from what Clementi described as the 'flaming nationalism that is now worldwide'.² His career tells us much about how Britain recruited, promoted, and despatched administrators to its colonies during this period, and the problems they faced in the different jurisdictions in which they served.

And they were *very* different. The challenges Clementi encountered in British Guiana could hardly be more different from those that confronted him in Hong Kong, while the main issues confronting him in Ceylon bore little resemblance to those he had to deal with in British Malaya. In all these places local problems complicated the wider, overriding need to preserve British power and prestige amid the crises arising from the First World War, the Bolshevik revolution, the rise of revolutionary nationalism, the global slump of the early 1930s, and the ambitions of rival powers. Clementi responded to these challenges with vigour, determination, and imagination, and in ways that often placed him at odds with his masters in London.

II

Clementi occupies a particularly important place in the colonial history of Hong Kong. He spent just over half of his thirty-four-year career as an administrator in this most unusual of the regions under Britain's colonial rule, just over four years of them as governor (November 1925 – January 1930). Of Hong Kong's twenty-eight British governors, he was one of only three who began their professional lives as cadets in the territory and rose, after postings elsewhere, to occupy Government House.³ Of the three, only one served in Hong Kong longer than Clementi before becoming governor⁴ and none occupied such a wide variety of positions or played such an influential role in shaping policy in Hong Kong before (as well as after) he reached the top.

2. Clementi to Dormer, 28 November 1934, CP s.352/33/3.

3. The others were Francis Henry May (1860–1922), who began his career in Hong Kong in 1881 and served as the fifteenth governor (1912–1918); and Alexander Grantham (1899–1978), whose first colonial appointment was to Hong Kong in 1922 and who served as its twenty-second governor (1947–1957).

4. Namely, May.

Nor had any governor travelled so widely in China as Clementi. During his first term in Hong Kong, he undertook a series of epic journeys across the country driven by curiosity and the desire to gather intelligence useful to Britain. These extraordinary expeditions did much to enhance his reputation.

None of Hong Kong's governors could match the proficiency in Cantonese that enabled Clementi to cultivate such close relations with the local Chinese community and establish ties with Chinese leaders across the border in Guangdong province and beyond. And only one of them equalled (and possibly exceeded) Clementi's reputation as a scholar of Chinese language and culture:⁵ just over two years after he had begun the study of the language, Clementi published a scholarly translation of a set of love poems that still has its admirers more than a century after it appeared. His facility in Chinese enabled the colonial government to deal with several sensitive issues that might otherwise have proved troublesome, as we shall see.

Indeed, Clementi's fingerprints can be detected on many of the landmarks, physical and symbolic, that defined British Hong Kong during the twentieth century. He played an important role in the incorporation of the New Territories into Hong Kong; the foundation of Hong Kong University;⁶ the construction and (briefly) the operation of the Kowloon-to-Canton railway line; the development of Kai Tak airport; and the provision of a modern water supply for a population too often at the mercy of drought and the associated spread of disease.

Clementi encouraged the formation of the Heung Yee Kuk (鄉議局), the powerful body that represents the interest of New Territories landowners. He nominated the first Chinese person to serve in his executive council and increased (if only marginally) Chinese representation in Hong Kong's legislature. He fostered close relations between the colonial government and Hong Kong's Chinese commercial and cultural elite. He fought tirelessly to secure funding for Hong Kong University and was the driving force behind its creation of a School of Chinese Studies.

By any standards, then, Clementi was a remarkable man. His personality, the times and circumstances in which he operated, and the extent to which he can be said to have achieved his goals deserve thorough investigation. That is the object of this book, the first full-length account of his life and career.⁷ Though the approach of such a

5. He was John Francis Davis (1795–1890), the second governor of Hong Kong (1844–1848), whose translations of Chinese literary and other works while serving as president of the East India Company in Canton established his reputation as a sinologist. The other sinologist to be appointed governor of Hong Kong was David Wilson (Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, b. 1935; governor 1987–1992), who in 1973 completed a PhD on Sino-British relations in the 1920s, the period when Clementi was governor.

6. Hong Kong University was officially renamed 'The University of Hong Kong' in 1966. Both names are used in this book, reflecting common usage.

7. Certain aspects of Clementi's career have received scholarly attention. At the time of writing, the most recent study of his governorship of Hong Kong is in Chinese: 陳學然 & 吳家豪, 中英關係與殖民管治: 金文泰在香港, 1925–1930 (中華書局, 2024). See also Chan Lau Kit-Ching, *From Nothing to Nothing: The Chinese Communist Movement and Hong Kong, 1921–1936* (Hurst & Company, 1999), and her *China, Britain and Hong Kong, 1895–1945* (Chinese University Press, 1990); and Chan Ming (ed.), *Precarious Balance: Hong Kong Between China and Britain, 1842–1992* (M. E. Sharpe, 1994). On his career in Malaya, see, for example, Mary Turnbull, 'Clementi and Malaysia: The Hong Kong Connection', *Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1984), 33–55; Robert Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors, 1867–1942* (Clio Press, 1981); and Philip Loh Fook-Seng, 'Malay Precedence and the Federal Formula in the Federated Malay States, 1909–1939', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 45, no. 2. (22) (1972), 29–50.

study is ‘top-down’, and the perspective, especially in his later years, that of the pro-consul, it is undertaken in the conviction that a biography of Clementi can enrich our understanding of Hong Kong’s history under British rule as well as Britain’s wider imperial experience.

III

It is more likely to do so if we remind ourselves at the outset that Clementi was first and foremost a servant of the British state who vigorously pursued its interests in the various colonies in which he served. This should be obvious. But it is worth stating lest it be inferred from what we have said so far that, especially in Hong Kong, he put the interests of those under colonial rule before the interests of the coloniser. That was far from the case.

Yet Clementi rejected the idea that there was an inherent conflict of interest between British rule in Hong Kong and the well-being of its overwhelmingly Chinese population, or for that matter between British rule and the people in its other colonies. Britain had what he described as a ‘genius for colonisation’, by which he meant that it had a unique capacity to improve the lives of those under its sway.⁸ Technologically, economically, and in other respects, Britain was an advanced country; less fortunate parts of the world were bound to benefit from its tutelage and control. He was not inclined to doubt this article of faith even during the tempestuous events in China during the mid-1920s, when the country was convulsed by strikes, protests, and military campaigns designed to unite the country and drive out the foreigners, including the British from Hong Kong.

This period of Clementi’s career was the most important as well as arguably the most interesting. He was appointed governor of Hong Kong, a post he had long coveted, amid the crisis caused by the Canton–Hong Kong Strike Boycott of 1925–1926 that brought Hong Kong to its knees. The unrest was just one manifestation of the revolutionary upheavals then underway across much of southern China that targeted the foreign (especially British) presence in the country. Clementi was sent to Hong Kong because his expertise on China was thought to make him the best man to deal with the crisis.

However, the British Government and the Foreign Office in particular soon regretted his appointment. As the unrest in China intensified and British interests came under ever greater threat, Clementi took strong exception to London’s decision to come to terms with the ‘new China’, establish diplomatic relations with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Government in Nanking, and start negotiating an end to the treaty privileges it had secured by force during the nineteenth century. Clementi insisted that this was no way to defend hard-fought British interests. Where possible, force should be used to defend the treaty port order on which, among other things, Britain’s possession of Hong Kong was based. Where that was not possible, the toughest stance, backed by the threat of force, should be taken in negotiations with the Chinese authorities, who would regard concessions as weakness.

8. Clementi, ‘Speech on Arrival as Governor of Hong Kong’, *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 2 November 1925.

In despatch after despatch to the Colonial Office, some of them of inordinate length but most of them models of lucidity and cogent argument, Clementi criticised what he regarded as a policy of appeasement towards China. It was an act of folly to negotiate with a so-called national government that did not control all the country; that, even after Chiang had purged communists from its ranks, was still prey to Bolshevik influence; that was deeply opposed to the foreign presence in China; and that might, in any event, be swept from power at any moment.

The standoff between Clementi and his masters in London was an extraordinary affair. It made his governorship of Hong Kong unique in another respect: he was almost permanently at odds with the British government over a major issue of policy.

Clementi believed that his expertise and experience, coupled with the fact that he was the ‘man on the spot’, meant he was best placed to decide how to respond to the events in China. Unlike many colonial administrators, he had from the very beginning of his career thought in geostrategic terms and was constantly weighing up the advantages and otherwise for Britain’s interests of policy decisions taken in London. As governor of Hong Kong, the part of the world that he knew better than most, he was not about to change the habits of a lifetime and comply with erroneous decisions taken by ill-informed people thousands of miles away.

Naturally, the Foreign Office had a different view of such matters. It resented what it regarded as Clementi’s constant efforts to ‘butt in’ on its affairs. It was not the job of a colonial governor to criticise, especially so consistently and in such strident terms, his government’s foreign policy. Clementi was in no position to decide how best to defend Britain’s interests in China, and he knew next to nothing about the attitude of the British public on such matters.

What also became clear—in London and among certain British officials and observers in China—was that Clementi, like many people in Hong Kong, was out of touch (and out of sympathy) with the ‘new’ or ‘young’ China as it was called at the time. This undoubtedly was true. And it had a strong bearing on the way in which Clementi went about governing Hong Kong, as well as illustrating the role of his strong and complex personality.

IV

Clementi was the product of two worlds. One was that of the classical antiquity of the West, the history, philosophy, and literature that he had studied since his schooldays, revelled in at Oxford, and continued to study while serving as a colonial administrator in various parts of the world. In 1911, for example, Blackwells of Oxford published the first edition of his translation of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, a short Latin poem believed to have been written around the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. The poem was something of a lifelong obsession: he constantly revised his translation, studying different versions of the text at the British Museum during home leave and, during the next twenty-five years, publishing two more editions, again with scholarly introductions. The last of them appeared in 1936, two years after his retirement.

Clementi’s other world was that of ‘traditional’ China—the thought, customs, and traditions that he encountered while learning Cantonese as a cadet. He also revelled

Part One

The Making of the Man

Harmony and Discord

The Rise of the Anglo-Italian Clementis

This year is practically certain to see the breaking up of our home, if home it can be called . . . Both my father and my mother will be happier apart.

—Diary, 1 January 1899

You will like to hear about Clementi. He came out first of all the candidates [i.e. for Magdalen, New College, and Corpus] in the total of marks and made a decided impression on all of us, as a very solid capable fellow.

—Diary, 1899, Memoranda, quoting Sir Herbert Warren,
president of Magdalen College Oxford

In 1766, Peter Beckford, a Dorset landowner, collector, writer, and patron, visited Rome. There he encountered a boy, barely into his teens, whose musical skills astounded him. Muzio Clementi, one of seven children, had been appointed organist at his local church at the age of thirteen. Beckford soon realised that here was a talent, indeed a veritable prodigy, who in the right circumstances would go far in the musical world—to the credit of the boy himself and perhaps more particularly of his patron. He promptly ‘bought’ the fourteen-year-old from his father and took him back to his country estate in the south of England, where the youth spent the next seven years in solitary study and practice, interspersed with performances for Beckford’s guests.¹ Muzio’s doubtless lonely adolescence in rural England was the prelude to his emergence in London, beginning in the late 1770s, as a pianist and composer; he was to become a musical entrepreneur of Europe-wide reputation.² His accomplishments ensured that the name Clementi would endure in musical history. They also lent to it a

1. It was not uncommon for aristocratic English travellers, and doubtless those from elsewhere, to ‘purchase’ or bring home skilful musicians they encountered while abroad. For example, Richard Boyle, Third Earl of Burlington, brought back several Italian musicians from his Grand Tour of 1714–1715. See Clive Aslet, *The Story of the Country House* (Yale University Press, 2021), 93.

2. Since the piano had not yet supplanted the harpsichord as the primary solo keyboard instrument, it would be more accurate to describe Clementi as a keyboard player during the early part of his career.

lustre and degree of financial security that would benefit his descendants, among them his great-grandson, Cecil Clementi.³

Muzio's renown was as remarkable as it was deserved. But there is a good reason why he is not even better known outside of musical circles: his contemporaries included three composers and musicians who were even more gifted than he was.

The first of them was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, with whom Muzio took part in a now famous competition in Vienna on Christmas Eve 1781 staged in front of Emperor Joseph II and his guests. It was a contest of pianistic dexterity and musical invention at the keyboard. Mozart is said to have won.⁴ In a letter to his father, Wolfgang acknowledged Muzio's virtuosity but dismissed him as 'a mere mechanicus', devoid of taste or feeling.⁵

The second musical giant was Josef Haydn, whose seasons in London (1791–1792 and 1794–1795) quickly established the preference of audiences for his symphonies over those of Clementi.

No less a figure than Ludwig van Beethoven was the third genius to cast Muzio into the shade. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the brilliance of his symphonies drove Clementi's compositions out of the concert repertoire in Europe, just as Haydn's had done earlier in London.⁶ Yet Ludwig admired Muzio's musicianship, valued his friendship, and agreed that his firm could publish certain of his scores, a move that accelerated the tendency of composers to rely more for their living on the 'music-consuming' public than on the munificence of wealthy patrons, of whom Beckford was an example.⁷

If these towering figures outshone Clementi, he nevertheless made his mark as a composer of sonatas and indeed a wide variety of styles of keyboard music. His masterpiece was the three-volume *Gradus as Parnassum*, a compendium of works written during his long and productive musical life. Still familiar to pianists of various abilities, it has been described as 'a monument to a composer who was called the "father of the pianoforte"'.⁸

3. Among his other accomplishments, Beckford was the author of *Vathek*, a Gothic novel published in 1786. When Cecil Clementi read it in June 1899, he acknowledged the author's role in introducing Muzio Clementi to England but described the book as 'clever but uninteresting'. Diary, 1 June 1899.

4. Sir David Clementi, Cecil Clementi's grandson, told the author in April 2024 that it had always been understood in the Clementi family that, for diplomatic reasons, the emperor declared the contest to have been a 'draw'. Sir David conceded that Mozart was by far the better composer, but that Muzio was an extraordinarily gifted keyboard player, a verdict with which many music lovers would agree.

5. Leon Plantinga, rev. Luca Lévi Sala, 'Clementi, Muzio', *Grove Music Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40033>.

6. Ibid.

7. Leon Plantinga, 'Clementi and London', paper presented at the conference 'Muzio Clementi and the British Musical Scene', Lucca, Italy, 24–26 November 2015; and Nicholas Kenyon, *The Life of Music: New Adventures in the Western Classical Tradition* (Yale University Press, 2021), 158.

8. It is now accepted that he was not the first composer to write for the piano but that 'his contribution to its development was inestimable'. See Dorothy de Val, 'Clementi, Muzio', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37292>. The English translation of the title of Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* is 'Steps to Parnassus', a reference to the loftiest part of a mountain range in Greece, and a phrase used to refer to a book of instruction or guide through which gradual progress is sought. Muzio Clementi's fame was such that he was buried in London's Westminster Abbey; his tomb is in the Abbey's South Cloister. 'Not bad for a first-generation immigrant', Sir David Clementi told the author.

The London piano manufacturing business that Clementi took over at the close of the eighteenth century was also important in popularising the instrument and refining its performance. It was a highly successful enterprise: Clementi and Co sold instruments across much of Europe and the Empire as well as in Britain.

In 1811, Muzio married Emma Gisborne (1785–1864), his first wife, Caroline Lehman (1785–1805), having died less than a year after their marriage. A contemporary described Emma as being ‘as moderate and placid as he [Clementi] is excitable and effervescent’.⁹ They produced a daughter in 1815, Cecilia Susannah. In 1833, she married an Essex rector, the Revd. John Smith (1804–1868), and during the following thirteen years bore two girls and eight boys, all but one of whom retained the (often but not always) hyphenated name of Clementi-Smith.¹⁰ The exception was their fourth child, Montagu (1839–1919), Cecil’s father, who in 1869, by then an officer in the Indian Army, formally dropped the ‘Smith’ in favour of plain ‘Clementi’. He appears to have done so in response to the decision of his father, who died the previous year, to cut him out of his will.

Why Montagu fell out of his father’s favour is unclear. But history threatened to repeat itself thirty years later, when he spoke of doing the same to his own son, John, one of Cecil’s two brothers, because he took his mother’s side when his parents separated. Cecil sought to dissuade him, ‘reminding him of the way in which it had always rankled in his own mind to have been cut out of his father’s—my grandfather’s—will’.¹¹ Curiously, long after his father’s death, John, by then himself a retired colonel in the Indian Army, separated from his wife Augusta (‘Cushla’ née Graham) and changed *his* family name, this time dropping the ‘Clementi’, which he ‘renounced and abandoned’ in favour of ‘Merris’, the name of a village in France that he was said to have been fond of: this was presumably as a result of coming across it while serving on the western front during the First World War.¹² Deep rifts divided certain members of the Clementi family, as we shall see.

The instrument-making firm Clementi and Co included various partners during Muzio’s lifetime, but the most important for our story was Frederick William Collard (1772–1860), the scion of a family with deep roots in Wiveliscombe, a small town near Taunton in Somerset. Frederick William kept the business in the family when Muzio died in 1832. His nephew, Charles Lukey (also known as ‘Lacey’) Collard (1807–1891), eventually became the major partner in Collard & Collard. He and his wife Isabella Mary Wakefield (1815–1884) produced eleven children, among them Isabel (1850–1930), Cecil’s mother.¹³ Some idea of the firm’s success is clear from the fact that, in the early 1870s, Lukey instructed the distinguished architect Owen Jones to build Abbotsfield, a fine country house overlooking Wiveliscombe, henceforth the family

9. Plantinga, rev. Sala, ‘Clementi, Muzio’.

10. I have hyphenated the surname Clementi-Smith throughout the text for the sake of consistency and to help the reader distinguish between the two branches of the Clementi family.

11. Diary, 15 October 1899.

12. *The London Gazette*, 29 October 1935, 6872. Cushla put her husband’s behaviour down to heredity, describing him as ‘A to Z exactly like his father’. Cushla Clementi to Cecil and Penelope Clementi, 6 November 1931, ACP s.600/24.

13. Family Search, ‘Isabel Collard, 1851–Deceased’, <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/9JJB-FT1/isabel-collard-1851>.

home.¹⁴ Cecil would sometimes stay there as a child. With the marriage in London in June 1873 of Montagu and Isabel, who was twelve years his junior, the Clementis and Collards in effect ‘joined the dots’: the flourishing business partnership formed two generations earlier was now something of a family affair.¹⁵

II

Yet if this union of the Clementi and Collard families suggested that Montagu and Isabel could look forward to a long, harmonious relationship, it was not to be. Discord soon set in. In 1899, the year he embarked on his professional career, Cecil confided to his diary, as he would again in subsequent years, the distress he suffered due to his parents’ inability to get on. It had made his life miserable and, along with bouts of ill health, prevented him from securing the First at Oxford he believed, probably rightly, was within his grasp. He also complained that it disrupted his ‘cramming’ for the Civil Service exams. ‘Both my father and my mother will be happier apart. But through what a Gethsemane I have had to pass!’ he wrote.¹⁶

At this juncture, Montagu, Isabel, and Cecil were living in Eldersley, Redhill, in Surrey, south-east England. Cecil regarded it as his last ‘family home’. The ‘split’, though not a divorce presumably on the grounds of its social and religious unacceptability, occurred in February 1899.¹⁷ Seemingly at a loss how and where to spend his retirement years, Montagu, accompanied by Cecil, moved into a flat in London’s Victoria Street. His wife returned to West Kensington, southwest London, where the 1901 census reveals that Isabel ‘Collard’ (she had reverted to her maiden name), then a married woman aged fifty, was ‘living on her own means’ at 75 Perham Road. This was familiar territory, just a few streets from the house in which Cecil, his two brothers, and (occasionally) both parents had lived a few years earlier while the boys attended nearby St Paul’s School.¹⁸

Isabel spent much of her time and apparently a good deal of her money on her local church, St Andrew’s, Fulham. There, to the displeasure of both her husband and Cecil, she is said to have come under the influence of the charismatic (and handsome) vicar Revd. Ernest Hilliard, until, as Montagu put it, the Bishop of London intervened and prevented the cleric from spending any more time with this member

14. Historic England, ‘Abbotsfield’, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1177635>.

15. However, neither Montagu nor Cecil had any role in running the business, which eventually fell upon hard times. ‘In 1929, the Chappell Piano Company took over Collard, whose business had already run down, and production stopped in 1971. A fire destroyed all Collard records in 1964.’ G. C. Boase, rev. H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Collard, Frederick William’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5903>.

16. Diary, 1 January 1899.

17. Adultery was then the only grounds on which divorce could be granted, and neither Montagu nor Isabel appear to have committed this sin. For the mores of the time on such matters, see Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–1990* (Penguin Press, 1996), 165.

18. This was not the first time that Montagu and Isabel had chosen to live apart. Between 1894 and 1896, Montagu lived in Halsdon House, North Devon, while Isabel remained in London. Diary, 1899, Memoranda. Halsdon House later acquired fame as the home of Charlie Watts, drummer with the Rolling Stones.



Photo 1.1: Montagu Clementi (1839–1919), Cecil's father

After entering the colonial service, Clementi corresponded regularly with both his father and his mother (Isabel Clementi) even though their marriage had broken down while he was a student at Oxford, causing him much distress. Source: Author's collection.

of his parish.¹⁹ Cecil described Hilliard as a 'damnable cleric' who 'taught our mother to place church above family'.²⁰

Whether the inability of Cecil's parents to get on was caused by a clash of personalities, age difference, the strains imposed by Montagu's long years in India, or other factors is unclear. Once Montagu had retired with the rank of colonel in June 1890, arguments over money, that great dissolver of otherwise workable unions, seem to have been frequent, though they may have been the consequence as much as the cause of the problem. When the split occurred, Cecil at first wrote in a detached manner about the faults of both parents. 'Damn her, sir! Damn her! My curse shall go to the grave with her!' he recalled his father saying of his mother as they went their separate ways.²¹

19. On the Revd. Hilliard's 'almost magnetic influence' at Fulham at this time, see 'The History of St Andrew's Church', <https://www.standrewsfulham.com/about-us/history>. On the alleged intervention of the Bishop of London, see Montagu Clementi to Cecil Clementi, 10 June 1908, ACP s.600/21. In her adulthood, long after her father's death, Clementi's youngest daughter Alwin apparently regarded her paternal grandmother as a 'religious maniac': private information provided by a family friend.

20. Diary, 17 November 1900.

21. Diary, 29 January 1899.

And when his father complained that his wife had poisoned his food, Cecil dismissed it as a 'suspicion unworthy of a sane man'.²² His father could be 'as vindictive as a Corsican though he can conceal his anger with all the skill of an Italian'.²³

But a few months later, on reading a full account of his father's marital troubles, which Montagu wrote to set out his side of the story, Cecil changed his mind. He accepted his father's view that his mother was an 'unscrupulous liar', that she had made false accusations against her husband among her wide circle of acquaintances, and that she had 'garbled her accounts of money spent in order to conceal the amount given to Hilliard'. She had also 'bribed John [Cecil's brother] to become her confidant'.²⁴ Cecil raised all these issues in a fraught meeting with his mother, who seemed to have had little to say other than 'a son is not judge of his parents' conduct'.²⁵ He decided that his relationship with his mother would in future have to be correct rather than genuinely affectionate; 'I love her, but I cannot honour her', he declared.²⁶

In later years Cecil urged his father to reconcile with his wife and make peace with John. But Montagu was unwilling to forgive his wife for 'deserting him' or John for taking her side. Nearly ten years after the family breach, he told Cecil that 'it has been the conduct of your mother and John which has been the true cause of so much unhappiness in your life . . . I have done nothing to cause it'.²⁷ He advised Cecil not to raise the matter again.²⁸

III

By the time of their split, Montagu and Isabel had been married for twenty-seven years. Yet months and sometimes years passed in which they did not see each other owing to Montagu's military duties. In this regard, India could have done little for their marriage. But Montagu's devotion to military service plainly influenced his three boys, all of whom would serve the Empire, then a major employer of talented (as well as not-so-talented) young men. Indeed, public service in one form or another was ingrained in the Clementi-Smith family. Montagu's younger brother Eugene, also a soldier, served in Canada before he was fatally wounded in the Boer War and died at Harrismith in October 1901, aged fifty-four; he was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Order.²⁹ Three other brothers followed their father into the priesthood.

22. Diary, 7 February 1899.

23. Diary, 4 February 1899.

24. Diary, 28 August 1899.

25. Diary, 30 September 1898.

26. Diary, 4 September 1899. A year later he privately excoriated his mother in sarcastic terms, writing: 'Excellent it must have been in the eyes of the gentle-hearted Jesus, to see a woman wilfully break up a happy English home, make cold the winter of her husband's life, turn son against father, father against son, brother against brother, usurp the moral character of her youngest son, embitter the life of her eldest son, turn joy into sorrow and peace into strife.' Diary, 17 November 1900.

27. Montagu Clementi to Cecil Clementi, 10 June 1908, ACP s.600/21.

28. Rifts were not uncommon in the Clementi/Clementi-Smith family. Montagu fell out with his brother, the Revd. Percy Clement-Smith (1848–1925), in later life over the former's handling of the family trust. Days after Montagu's death, Percy told his nephew he 'deeply regretted' that he and his brother had not been able to patch up their differences. Revd. Percy Clementi-Smith to Cecil Clementi, 19 February 1919, ACP s.600/22.

29. *The London Gazette*, 11 October 1901, 6643.

Yet the most prominent of the Clementi-Smith boys was not Montagu but Cecil (1840–1916), a colonial administrator who exercised considerable influence over his nephew, godson, and (close) namesake. He began his career as a cadet in Hong Kong, as would his nephew, where he became well acquainted with Chinese language and customs.³⁰ He served as lieutenant governor of Ceylon, a colony that, once again, the younger Cecil would administer in the capacity of colonial secretary. And he ended his career, as once more would his nephew, as governor of the Straits Settlements.³¹

The ‘two Cecils’ grew fond of and admired each other. Nephew found solace in the company of uncle’s family, retreating to their home in Wheathampstead, some twenty-five miles north of London, whenever he could, and rejoicing in the warm family atmosphere he found there in contrast to the discord he had to live with at home. Uncle Cecil would later play an important role in helping his nephew onto and then up the Colonial Service ladder. On one occasion they even (briefly) worked together, as we shall discover. Perhaps understandably, the two men have since easily been confused by the unsuspecting or ill-informed.

Montagu, two years older than his celebrated brother, was admitted to the East India Company’s Military College in Addiscombe, Surrey, in August 1856. This was then the standard route to military service, given that the company ruled as well as garrisoned much of the subcontinent. Intriguingly, Collard and Collard had a contract to supply bugles, fifes, and drums to the company’s regiments.³² Moreover, advertisements extolling the firm’s pianos ‘made for the climate’ often appeared in the Indian press and, as Cecil would discover when he embarked on his career, their products were on sale in Hong Kong.³³ In 1858, Montagu was posted as senior ensign to the 38th Native Infantry, the same year in which, following the Indian Rebellion, the Crown took over the government of ‘British’ India.³⁴ Accordingly, he was transferred from the company’s units to Her Majesty’s 8th Regiment of Foot ‘then on field service in pursuit of mutineers and rebels’.³⁵

In other words, his first major duty was to suppress the enemies of the Raj who, in the words of historian Maria Misra, had ‘proceeded to extinguish British power across much of north India in little over a month’.³⁶ The violence and destruction wreaked during the course and suppression of the rebellion lingered long in the memory of both Britons and Indians. More immediately, it led to changes in the way India

30. Cecil Clementi-Smith was one of the first three Hong Kong government cadets recruited under a scheme that Governor Hercules Robinson introduced to improve governance of the territory. The two others were Walter Meredith Deane and Malcolm Struan Tonnochy. All three arrived in Hong Kong in September 1862. Steve Tsang, *Governing Hong Kong: Administrative Officers from the Nineteenth Century to the Handover to China, 1862–1997* (I. B. Tauris, 2007), 19.

31. In April 1900, when Cecil Clementi-Smith was aged 59, Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain offered him the post of under-secretary of state: that is, Chamberlain’s (civil service) deputy at the Colonial Office. ‘There is no post I would sooner fill’, Uncle Cecil wrote to his nephew, who was then in Canton learning Chinese. ‘Alas! I felt it my duty to decline. I know my health would not stand the work, which is very hard.’ Diary, 9 May 1900.

32. Boase, rev. Matthew, ‘Collard, Frederick William’.

33. See, for example, the *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, 22 April 1846. Cecil Clementi was pleased to find that ‘Collard and Collard’ pianos were on sale in Robinson’s, Hong Kong’s biggest music shop. Diary, 2 February 1900.

34. An ensign in the Indian Army at that time was the lowest-ranking non-commissioned officer.

35. Diary, 1899, Memoranda.

36. Maria Misra, *Vishnu’s Crowded Temple: India Since the Great Rebellion* (Allen Lane, 2007), 6.



Photo 1.2: Sir Cecil Clementi-Smith (1840–1916), ‘Uncle Cecil’

Cecil Clementi-Smith exerted a profound influence over Cecil Clementi, his nephew and godson. Depicted here in a cartoon by Robert Wallace Braddell, Clementi-Smith encouraged the young Clementi to enter the colonial service and to begin his career in Hong Kong as he had himself. ‘Uncle Cecil’ rose to become lieutenant governor of Ceylon and governor of the Straits Settlements, and in retirement, he pressed the Colonial Office to promote his ambitious nephew. Reprinted with permission by The National Portrait Gallery, London.

was governed and garrisoned. Shocked by the fact that their rule had only narrowly survived, the British increased the proportion of their own troops to those of Indian soldiers. In 1857 this had stood at 45,000 to 232,000. A Royal Commission recommended there should be at least 80,000 British soldiers to 190,000 Indian, a figure never attained. But the proportion was increased and, as military historian Richard Holmes puts it, ‘In post-Mutiny India, British units were stitched into Indian brigades to ensure their reliability.’³⁷

In 1860, Montagu volunteered for service in China with General Gordon’s ‘Ever Victorious Army’. This was the force put together by the Qing government to defend Shanghai from attack by the Taiping rebels, whose revolt extended across the whole of south China. The course and suppression of that revolt caused the deaths of an estimated twenty to thirty million people. In retirement, Montagu told his son that

37. Richard Holmes, *Sahib: The British Soldier in India, 1750–1914* (Harper Collins, 2005), 81.

he had written to General Gordon ‘offering his valuable services’ but had received no answer.³⁸

Montagu served in several Indian regiments during the 1860s, assuming duties that ranged from transporting convicts to the Andaman Islands to waging war against the Pashtuns on the northwest frontier. He was promoted captain in 1870 and two years later, aged thirty-three, he returned to London, where he entered Lincoln’s Inn as a student of law.

The next few years were important in determining the course of the rest of his life. In 1873, he married Isabel. A year later he was called to the Bar. Captain Montagu Clementi would in future apply his legal training to the maintenance of discipline and order in the Indian Army in the capacity of a judge advocate, presiding over criminal and disciplinary trials of servicemen in courts martial. In 1875 he was back in India, this time with Isabel. And in House No. 28 in Cawnpore (Kanpur), on 1 September of that year, she gave birth to Cecil, whom military chaplain Revd. John Frederick Scobell duly baptised on the last day of that month.³⁹

IV

Montagu’s military duties meant he and his family, when together, were almost constantly on the move from cantonment to hill station across India. Moreover, he was often assigned to duties outside the country. The lack of a settled home troubled young Cecil, who later complained that by the time he reached the age of twelve he had moved no less than ten times.⁴⁰ Shortly after he was born, the Clementis left Kanpur for Sialkot (in today’s Pakistan). Then it was on to Dalhousie in the Himalayas before they settled in Allahabad, a military and administrative centre some 120 miles south-east of Kanpur, where in July 1876 Montagu was appointed deputy judge advocate. John, the first of Cecil’s two brothers, was born there on 17 September 1877. In April the following year, Montagu was assigned to the Indian Expedition to Cyprus, launched to check Russian expansion in the Mediterranean. In June, Isabel and the two boys were briefly reunited with their father in Malta while on their way to what was John and Cecil’s first visit to England, where they would spend a year.⁴¹

The family assembled next not in India but in Australia, where in April 1879 Montagu served as commissioner to the International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne (1879–1880). Modelled on the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London and those subsequently held in Paris, these events showcased what were then considered the greatest achievements of the age. Montagu’s role, a departure from his regular duties described in one report as having been undertaken for the ‘benefit of his health’, was to promote the various Indian products on display.⁴² Isabel and the boys arrived in Sydney in September, having sailed to Australia from London via the Cape.

38. Diary, 19 July 1900.

39. In addition to being deprived of the double-barrelled surname ‘Clementi-Smith’, Cecil was not given additional Christian names, unlike his younger brothers, John and Lockhart. Diary, 1899, Memoranda.

40. Diary, 6 February 1899.

41. I have used the term ‘England’ rather than ‘Britain’ or ‘United Kingdom’ on these occasions because that is what Cecil Clementi usually did.

42. See the *Times of India*, 15 September 1879.

Montagu took Cecil to the exhibition in his ‘pettycoats’, his father recalled.⁴³ In August 1880 the family left for Melbourne, where they remained for the rest of the year.

Then it was back to Allahabad, where Lockhart (‘Lockie’), Cecil’s youngest brother, was born on 11 November 1881. The same year the family moved to ‘Ludlow Castle’, a house in Kasauli, a cantonment in the Himalayas, of which Cecil, by now aged seven to eight years, was very fond. ‘I can well remember how desolate I felt when as a boy we left our home in Kasauli’, he noted later.⁴⁴ In August 1882, Montagu was appointed judge advocate in the Egypt Expeditionary Force. He was awarded the Khedive’s Bronze Star following victory at Tel El Kebir, the decisive engagement of the Anglo-Egyptian War.⁴⁵

The following year was a relatively settled one for the family; it was spent in Kasauli. But early in 1884 they split up again when Montagu was assigned to Simla, military headquarters in India. Isabel, Cecil, John, and Lockie left for England and then moved to Hanover, Germany, where they arrived in September and where the two older boys began their formal education at the city’s Lyceum II. Three years would pass before the family got together again.

V

It is not clear why Montagu and Isabel sent their two eldest boys to Hanover’s Lyceum II. Nor why, nearly ten years later, they would send their youngest to another school in the city, the Kaiserium August Victoria Gymnasium.

Lyceum II, also known as the Goethe School (Goethe Gymnasium), was founded in 1871, its fine buildings erected on Goethestrasse, the street laid over the moat that once defended Hanover. There were of course strong historical connections between Hanover and England in the form of the personal union of the crowns that dated from 1714, when George Louis of Hanover ascended to the British throne as George I. Though interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars, the union lasted until 1837, the year Victoria came to the throne and ended the link with the House of Hanover, whose rules did not permit female succession.

But these matters were in the distant past by the time Cecil and John enrolled at the Lyceum. And they had been eclipsed by the rise of Prussia, which, under Otto von Bismarck in 1866, annexed Hanover and turned it into the capital of a Prussian province. In 1871, Bismarck completed the unification of Germany and served as its first chancellor. For much of his rule, there was admiration in England for Bismarck’s achievements; he had created a ‘new nation’, set it on the road of industrialisation, and recast the geopolitical map of Europe. Perhaps this explains why Cecil’s parents were keen that their two oldest boys studied there rather than in France, which Bismarck had defeated in the Franco-Prussian War.

Yet this is speculation. And once Bismarck fell from power in 1890, two years after Cecil and John left Hanover for London, English admiration for Germany began to

43. Montagu Clementi to Cecil Clementi, 16 March 1917, ACP s.600/21.

44. Diary, 6 February 1899.

45. ‘Egyptian and Sudanese Campaigns (1882–98)’, in Richard Holmes, Charles Singleton, and Spencer Jones (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

give way to anxiety over its rapid economic growth, scientific and technological progress, potential domination of Europe, naval expansion, and imperial ambitions—all of which seemed a threat to Britain's supremacy.

Of course, practical concerns such as tuition fees and the vagaries of the final stage of Montagu's career may have played a bigger part than geopolitics in the decision to send the boys to school in Germany. Whatever the case, young Cecil soon made a mark at the Lyceum; he was so good at German that his master said that 'he wished he had a class of Cecil Clementis'.⁴⁶ Regular visits to the city thereafter presumably enabled him (and perhaps his brothers) to keep up with the language.⁴⁷

In early March 1886, Isabel and Lockie left Hanover for India via Vienna and Trieste, placing Cecil and John in the care of Mrs Turton, who seems to have been known to the family, perhaps as a governess, in their Indian days. Cecil and John next saw their mother and their younger brother in November 1886 at Bad Pyrmont, a spa town south of Hanover, where the two boys had gone partly to holiday and partly to avoid an outbreak of diphtheria in the city. On their return, they moved to Kornerstrasse to be closer to Lyceum II. They remained there until the summer of 1887, when they spent the summer holiday at Abbotsfield in Somerset, Cecil's grandfather's residence. Montagu joined them while on ninety days of privilege leave from Indian duties. All five returned to Hanover for the start of the new school year, but Montagu travelled on to Simla.

Montagu Clementi must have been highly regarded when it came to dispensing justice within the Indian Army, because in 1888 he was appointed judge advocate general for the whole of India and promoted colonel. Yet he served in the role only briefly, possibly because of ill health. Within a few weeks of his promotion, which took effect on 1 April 1888, he was reported to be unlikely to return from leave in Britain.

In the spring of 1888, Isabel and the three boys left Hanover for London, taking up residence in West Kensington. Montagu joined them there in September, apparently having left India for good—though he did not retire from the army until June 1890, aged sixty-one. Cecil looked back on the Hanover episode of his schooling with mixed feelings. 'Having observed the results of a similar experiment on myself, I am inclined to believe that a boy should be educated in his native land'.⁴⁸

VI

Number 1 Mornington Avenue was a new four-storey house in an up-and-coming part of the suburb of Fulham previously known as North End, but which two ambitious property developers, William Gibbs and John Flew, persuaded the local authorities

46. Letter from 'Winks' to Cecil Clementi, undated but probably July–August 1916, ACP s.600/6. The woman known as 'Winks' evidently taught the Clementi brothers while they were in Hanover. She fled to England following the outbreak of war in 1914 but remained in touch with Isabel Clementi. In 1916, Cecil Clementi, then colonial secretary in British Guiana, provided her with financial assistance since she had lost most of her possessions in Germany and relied on her English friends for support.

47. Clementi retained the ability to read German in adult life. While on holiday from his duties as governor of Hong Kong in 1927 he translated, evidently for his own pleasure, Goethe's poem 'Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass' ('Who Never Ate His Bread in Tears'). Diary, 6 October 1927.

48. Diary, 14 December 1899.

to rename as the more salubrious-sounding 'West Kensington'. The railway company changed the name of its nearest station accordingly.⁴⁹ Gibbs and Flew built some 1,200 new houses either side of wide streets in a district conveniently situated between fashionable Chelsea and leafy Hammersmith: West Kensington was on the way to becoming an agreeable, convenient residential district for the expanding middle class in search of comfortable homes that reflected their new status in society.⁵⁰

In his study of the British soldier in India, Richard Holmes observed that 'for most officers and administrators (in India) coming home was a case of readmission into the middle classes'.⁵¹ This was certainly true of the Clementis who, judged by their income, were comfortably off. Isabel had an annual income of £600 of her own, and Montagu considerably more. There was no need to rely on Montagu's army pension.⁵²

Montagu and Isabel chose to live in West Kensington because it was close to the school to which they intended to send their sons—St Paul's, one of the oldest of the then select group of England's nine leading public schools.⁵³ Montagu had himself attended St Paul's. So had three of his brothers, including Cecil Clementi-Smith.

When he founded the school in 1509, John Colet, dean of St Paul's Cathedral and a leading intellectual figure of his day, refused to entrust its governance to the Church, the activities of whose leading members dismayed him. Instead, he asked the Worshipful Company of Mercers, better known today as the Mercers' Company, one of the City of London's most prestigious livery companies, to run the school. Colet believed the married laymen of the company were less corrupt than the men of the Church and could be trusted to manage the endowment he would leave on his death.⁵⁴ Many members of the Clementi and Clementi-Smith families, Cecil among them, would enjoy a close association with the Mercers, which furnished them with valuable connections and influence in the City and beyond.⁵⁵ Cecil made a point of including among the list of his principal attainments the day (18 September 1896) that he became of a member of the company.⁵⁶

In 1884, St Paul's relocated from close to the cathedral after which it was named to a sixteen-acre site in Hammersmith where what *The Times* described as a 'magnificent block . . . of red brick and terracotta buildings with a frontage of some 350 feet' had been erected to the design of Alfred Waterhouse, architect of London's Natural History Museum.⁵⁷ The school needed to expand and was also under pressure to complement its traditional emphasis on the classics with the teaching of 'modern' subjects.

49. Tony Dewick, *Complete Atlas of Railway Station Names* (Ian Allan Publishing, 2002), Map 39, Station 69.

50. Russ Willey, *Chambers London Gazetteer* (Chambers Harrap Publishers, 2006), 545–46.

51. Holmes, *Sahib*, 505.

52. Diary, 21 January 1899.

53. George Cannell, 'Resistance to the Charity Commissioners: The Case of St. Paul's Schools, 1860–1904', *History of Education*, 10, no. 4 (1981), 259.

54. The Mercers' Company in 1542 founded a separate institution, the Mercers' School, which had a history of more than 400 years before it closed in 1959. The Revd. John Smith, Cecilia Clementi's husband, was headmaster of the Mercers' School from 1840 to 1861.

55. Between 1887 and 2010, the two families provided no less than twelve masters of the Mercers' Company. Montagu was master in 1892, Cecil in 1940, his son Cresswell in 1977, and his grandson David in 2010.

56. Diary, 1899, Memoranda.

57. *The Times*, 24 July 1884.

These demands came from the Charity Commissioners under whose authority St Paul's fell. Calls for change grew stronger as the Fulham Vestry (the local authority) and then elected members of the London County Council (LCC) weighed in. They objected to the Mercers' domination of St Paul's governing body (the LCC wanted, at minimum, two of its own representatives to sit on the board); demanded that a proportion of the 153 'foundationer scholarships' (i.e. free places) be opened to competition from candidates at local elementary schools; and, having reluctantly abandoned the former demand, insisted that special weight be given in open competition for scholarships to performance in subjects *excluding* Greek 'proper to a Modern Department'.⁵⁸ The Commissioners also took a dim view of what they regarded as the excessive salaries paid to the staff under Frederick Walker, the high (or head) master and a towering figure in the history of the school.

The defenders of London's oldest school were outraged. In 1893, Walker extolled Paulines for having over the past seven years won eight university fellowships, twenty-six university scholarships and eighteen university prizes, but warned that there was little chance of such success in future. If St Paul's implemented reforms of the kind demanded, it would 'no doubt do good work in the counting house and in the marketplace but would cease within a few years to be a great classical school'.⁵⁹

Montagu, in 1893 both Master of the Mercers' Company and chairman of the school governors, threw himself into the campaign, revealing much about his attitude to the changes underway in late Victorian society. In a long letter to *The Times*, he focused his ire on the LCC, the (elected) body created four years earlier by Prime Minister Lord Salisbury's local government reforms. The Progressive Party—a coalition of radicals and liberals in league with the Liberal Party at Westminster—won the first election in London's new forum for organised competitive politics. As newly empowered local tribunes, many LCC members felt no compunction about including the capital's schools in their remit. Montagu was aghast:

'All the social, all the revolutionary elements, all the discontent, and all the poverty of an unprecedented aggregation of five millions of people were focused in the London County Council. Yet it is from such that the Commissioners propose to furnish a proportion of the governors of a great and ancient classical foundation!'⁶⁰

In 1896, two years after Cecil had left St Paul's for Oxford, the long struggle between the Charity Commissioners and the school went before the Privy Council, the highest court in the land. A legal technicality enabled its defenders to preserve intact the essential character, governance, and classical curriculum of their school. It was a victory for Montagu Clementi, Frederick Walker, and the influential Old Paulines in their struggle to defend a traditional institution against the forces of change.

Cecil later affirmed his father's role in the proceedings and urged him to devote part of what otherwise seemed to his son an unproductive retirement to writing an account of the struggle. 'He is the only man in the world who has the knowledge

58. Cannell, 'Resistance', 256.

59. *The Times*, 6 July 1893.

60. *The Times*, 14 October 1893.

necessary for such an undertaking: the fight with the Charity Commissioners is the history of his life for the last 6 years'.⁶¹

VII

There were 573 boys at St Paul's School when Cecil, aged thirteen, was admitted as a capitation scholar (fee £24 per annum) at the start of the 1888 school year.⁶² Two were cousins. One of them was Arthur Clementi-Smith (1870–1914), son of Cecil Clementi-Smith, then seventeen years old and a year away from going up to Caius College Cambridge, which he would leave without graduating. The other was John Clementi Collard (b. 1874–) the son of his mother's brother of the same name.⁶³

A year into his school career Cecil was joined by his brother, John, with whom he played both cricket and lacrosse but without the flair of the latter. His youngest brother, Lockhart, was admitted in 1894, the year after Clementi left.

Given that three of his uncles—like his father, now a governor—were old boys, and that his mother often gave out the prizes on sports day, Cecil must have felt at home at St Paul's. He may also have felt under pressure. For if the typical boarding schoolboy tended to exchange family for the indifferent embrace of an institution, members of Cecil's family often attended his day school with him.

However, High Master Walker, a small man with a large beard and booming voice, certainly loomed large in Cecil's life. He was said to have an 'unerring eye for a scholar' and was sometimes 'extraordinarily uncivil'.⁶⁴ Yet for Clementi he was 'one of the kindest hearted men, with a wonderful love and knowledge of boys. He is one of the great men of today and certainly the most distinguished school master of his time.'⁶⁵

In his nearly thirty years at the school, Walker is said to have punished seldom, largely because he was good at keeping discipline. But he punished when necessary, presiding over 'rare but terrifying ceremonial beatings' administered by the head porter, a former sergeant in the Brigade of Guards.⁶⁶

The intellectual, social, and athletic preoccupations of the school during Clementi's time there are apparent from the pages of *The Pauline*, the school magazine produced for parents and old as well as current boys. The March 1893 edition, for example, carried articles entitled 'A Holiday in Brittany' and 'Trout Fishing in Switzerland'. A feature entitled 'The Rod in Norway' was written with boys in mind

61. Diary, 17 February 1899. Cecil himself retained the documents relating to the long struggle between St Paul's and the Charity Commissioners. In March 1900, by then in China, he made them over to the assistant master of his old school, presumably for the record. Diary, 29 March 1900.

62. Cecil and John began their education at the school in April 1888, when they attended Colet Court, the foundation's preparatory school. Information provided by Valérie Nolk, Archivist and Head of French at St Paul's School.

63. John Clementi Collard senior was a prominent member of the Musicians' Society and the instigator of the John Clementi Collard Fellowship, from which many promising British composers and performers benefited. Musicians' Company Archive, 'The John Clementi Collard Fellowship', <https://www.wco-marchive.org.uk/john-clementi-fellowship>.

64. R. F. Cholmeley, Obituary of Frederick William Walker, *The Guardian*, 16 December 1910.

65. Diary, 17 February, 1899.

66. A. H. Mead, *A Miraculous Draft of Fishes: A History of St Paul's School* (James & James, 1990), 86.



Photo 1.3: The Clementi brothers: from left to right, John, Lockhart ('Lockie'), and Cecil

The brothers were not close as adults, and John eventually severed his connection with the Clementi family, changing his surname by deed poll to 'Merris'. Source: Author's collection.

who were wondering: 'Where shall we go for the summer vacation?'⁶⁷ A long article by an old boy, 'Notes of a Civilian's Life in Assam', gave an account of the duties of a young official in the Indian Civil Service thinly disguised as career advice. From Ceylon, another old boy wrote about his relationship with his Cinghalese (*sic*) servant, a fellow 'with an evil face adorned by a thin black beard'.⁶⁸

Cricket, lacrosse, and football (rugby) matches were reported in loving detail, reflecting the importance attached to competitive sports in the making of young men. But St Paul's was free of the obsession with games that gripped other leading public schools. There was 'a kind of boy for whom nothing else mattered *but* cricket', *The Pauline* warned in 1892. 'He could name all the members of the last team sent out to Australia and could hold forth at length on the style and achievements of each; but he thinks the Triple Alliance was a kind of matrimonial arrangement and has never heard of Gustavus Adolphus.'⁶⁹

67. *The Pauline*, March 1893, 141.

68. *Ibid.*, 77.

69. *The Pauline*, February 1892, 42.

Those boys (presumably the older ones) who attended the school's debates were unlikely to be so ill-informed about current international politics or Swedish history in the early seventeenth century. The motion at the meeting of St Paul's Union (modelled on the Oxbridge equivalents) in October 1888 was: 'That the retention of our foreign possessions is prejudicial to the true interests of the English people.' It was soundly defeated.⁷⁰

Though keen on cricket, young Clementi performed better in the classroom than on the sports field. His progress in Latin, Greek, French, mathematics, divinity, and English was rapid if not always smooth. He 'learns quickly and shows intelligence but makes astonishing blunders', a master noted at the end of his second year, apparently with reference to his Latin and Greek composition.⁷¹ But as he progressed, the praise was unequivocal: 'Has made excellent progress; promises to be a scholar, especially in Greek',⁷² noted one report. 'Will do the school credit . . . is doing first-rate work in every way', was the judgement in his last year at the school.⁷³ Prizes in German, Latin, and philology confirmed his progress.

VIII

In September 1893, Clementi travelled to Oxford with his father to sit the examination for a group of classical scholarships. He came top and accepted a demyship at Magdalen College.⁷⁴ He performed so well that Sir Herbert Warren, president of Magdalen, was moved to write to Walker:

You will like to hear about Clementi. He came out first of all the candidates [i.e. for Magdalen, New College, and Corpus] in the total of marks and made a decided impression on all of us, as a very solid capable fellow. If he has not reached the top of his power for linguistic fineness and form, he ought to make a really good man. His Greek prose was excellent and his General and Critical Paper got very high marks indeed. I thought his Latin Verse showed a possibility of much improvement. We thought this competition decidedly above the average.⁷⁵

Those who, like Clementi, left St Paul's in 1894 set a record for educational attainment.⁷⁶ The school year ended with 'the almost incredible number of 33 scholarships and exhibitions at Oxford and Cambridge', noted Walker. 'All of the foremost colleges of Oxford and Cambridge had taken one or more of their boys . . . and Classics, Science, Mathematics and Modern History all had their share.' Five Paulines had been

70. *The Pauline*, November 1888, 20, and June 1892, 120.

71. 'St Paul's School Character Report for July 1890', Archives of St Paul's School, SPS-SCH/6/7/25.

72. 'St Paul's School Character Report for July 1891', Archives of St Paul's School, SPS-SCH/6/7/21.

73. 'St Paul's School Character Report for July 1894', Archives of St Paul's School, SPS-SCH/6/7/29.

74. A 'demy', a term used only at Magdalen College, was traditionally entitled to half the income of a fellow of the college. A demy was expected to retain the position for at least five years before becoming a fellow when a vacancy occurred. In practice, fellows tended to hang on to their positions for so long that demies were often kept waiting for years. Information provided by Dr. Charlotte Berry, Archivist, Magdalene College, Oxford. See also L. W. B. Brockliss, *Magdalene College: A History* (Magdalen College, 2008), 901.

75. Diary, 1899, Memoranda.

76. In 1948, a year after Clementi's death, an Indian citizen of Perak, Malaya, established an exhibition and prize at St Paul's School 'in grateful admiration of the life and public service of Sir Cecil Clementi'.

admitted into Woolwich and seven into Sandhurst (though several did not proceed directly there from the school.)⁷⁷

In the annual scholarship record of the public schools, St Paul's headed the list, obtaining more than any other two schools combined. 'It is curious that this signal proof of its efficiency in securing assisted university education for its scholars should coincide with its overhauling by the Charity Commissioners', remarked *The Pauline*, continuing the fight with its would-be nemesis. "Why can't you leave it alone?" will occur even to reformers when they note its excellent record.' There are two things that provoke reformers: 'One is, as it should be, conspicuous failure; the other, apparently, is conspicuous success.'⁷⁸

77. *The Pauline*, October 1894, 150. *The Times*, 26 July 1894.

78. *The Pauline*, October 1894, 150.

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Graham Hutchings is an associate at Oxford University's China Centre and an honorary professor in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham. He was a foreign correspondent based first in Beijing and then Hong Kong and was later director of analysis and managing director at Oxford Analytica, the global analysis and advisory company. His previous books include *China 1949: Year of Revolution*.

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