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## THE BRITISH RESIDENT MURDERED (ERNEST MAUNDRELL AND BRUNEI 1915 -1916)

A.V.M. Horton

### ABSTRACT

The thesis of this paper is as follows:

1. that Brunei in 1915 and 1916 was overwhelmingly a peaceful country in which the Residential System was working in a routine, if unspectacular, fashion (section 2);
2. that the murder of the Resident during the night of 18/19 May 1916 was not a manifestation of popular anti-British unrest but, rather, the isolated action of a desperate individual about to be arrested (sections 34); and
3. that, beyond the execution of the convicted murderer, no reprisals were taken, nor was a repressive policy instituted (section 5).

It may be suggested, indeed, that if anything the tragedy confirmed the stability of the Residential System because, at the time, there had been no other British official actually in the country. The Sultan himself was obliged to intervene in order to forestall panic. Some reservations are expressed, however, as to whether the murderer actually received a fair trial (section 5).

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## INTRODUCTION

In February 1915 Mr EB Maundrell (1880-1916), an officer of the civil service in Malaya,<sup>1</sup> was seconded to Brunei as Resident in succession to Mr (later *Datuk*) FW Douglas.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Resident' was an administrator empowered by treaty to run the Government. He was responsible to a British High Commissioner based in Singapore (much later Kuching), who, in turn, was answerable to London. This system lasted from 1906 until 1959.

In general Brunei was and remains such a tranquil, inoffensive, easy-going country that the honorific *Darussalam* (Abode of Peace) incorporated in the State's official title is far from being an absurdity. Mr Maundrell had the misfortune, however, to be murdered by a Sikh policeman some fifteen months after taking up his duties there. He was perhaps the most eminent victim of crime, certainly during the Residential Era.

Ernest Barton Maundrell had been born in Nagasaki on 9 November 1880, the third son of a pioneering Anglican missionary based in Japan. Nothing is known about Mr Maundrell's mother, beyond the fact that she was already dead by 1916. His father, at all events, was an exceptional clergyman. The Venerable Archdeacon Herbert Maundrell (1839-1896), ordained deacon in 1863 and priest in 1864, was sent to Mauritius and Madagascar during the years 1863-73. After a brief interlude at Hampstead, he became Chaplain of the English Church at Nagasaki in 1875 (until 1890) and, from 1886 until 1895 he was the first Archdeacon of Nagasaki and Southern Japan. He published several important works in *Japanese* about Christianity. It is almost an anticlimax to record that he died – of pneumonia in Winchester. His importance was sufficient to warrant an obituary notice in *The Times*.<sup>3</sup>

The Archdeacon and his wife had at least five children, three sons – Henry,<sup>4</sup> William<sup>5</sup> and Ernest – as well as two daughters.<sup>6</sup> Like their father, all three sons were educated at the Church Missionary College in Islington (London), followed by attendance at the prestigious Repton Public School (founded 1577) and Jesus College, University of Cambridge. In 1902 the young Ernest Maundrell emerged with first-class honours in classics. He then spent an interlude in Germany before embarking upon a career in public administration in the Far East.<sup>7</sup> By 1907 he had become lieutenant secretary to the Resident of Negeri Sembilan, and, before his posting to Brunei in early 1915, he had also served in Pulau Pinang and Singapore, reaching the rank of Class IV in the Straits' Service by the latter date.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper, the circumstances of his untimely death in Brunei are examined. In order to place the murder in context, however, it is necessary to review Mr Maundrell's term of office in the Sultanate.

## CONTEXT ("THE YEAR WAS ONE OF QUIET PROGRESS")

Its unfortunate conclusion excepted, Mr Maundrell's period of tenure was unremarkable. The tension between Sultan and Resident over the imposition of new land legislation, such a marked feature of the years 1909 and 1910, had long since dissolved. The year 1915 "was one of quiet progress", Mr Maundrell was able to report a mere six weeks before his death, "and, beyond a rise in the cost of commodities, the peaceful life of the kampongs was little disturbed by the (Great War)".<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914 had necessitated a degree of administrative re-organisation in Malaya (Brunei then being considered by Singapore as a sixth unfederated Malay State) because of staff shortages created by government officers volunteering for service with the Armed Forces in Europe. At the very beginning of 1915, therefore, the post of British Resident in Brunei was separated from that of Labuan, with which it had been combined hitherto. Mr Douglas continued, however, to run both offices until 19 February 1915, when Mr Maundrell assumed responsibility for the Sultanate. Meanwhile, the former appointment of Assistant Resident in Brunei had been discontinued (from July 1914 until January 1931) as was the post of District Officer in Labuan; and the 'Superintendent of Monopolies' in