

Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Wexford Gentleman

Mary Harriet Sparks
H. B. Moorhouse

TOWSEY TALES

John Towsey
Just Henley
Henley upon Thames
Essex

Edmund Towsey

Edmund Towsey

Edmund Towsey

NAME: Thomas Philip Sparks

BIRTH DETAILS: 21 April 1819

DEATH DETAILS: 23 Apr.1863 Madras, India

CHART REF: Towsey Chart C1

MARRIAGE DETAILS: 1st M: 11 June 1841 India

SPOUSE: Marion Voyle

MARRIAGE DETAILS: 2nd M: 9 April 1859 Rangoon

SPOUSE: Augusta Fitzwilliam Pollock

Thomas Philip Sparks was the eldest of the four children of Mary Cooper and John William Thomas Sparks (the man who compensated for having a too long name, by drastically shortening his life by passing a bullet through his head).

With good social connections on both sides of the family, growing up without a father

seems to have put no obstacles in the way of success in Thomas' life.

He spent ten years at the prestigious Merchant Tailor's School in London, where he studied Classics and Mathematics, from just before his seventh birthday until finishing in January 1836.

In 1835 he applied for the officer training academy of the East India Company. Because of those family connections, he was pretty-much assured of acceptance. He was nominated by one of the company directors, at the recommendation of Peter Auber Esq. (Company Secretary of the East India Company), a close friend of the Sparks family.

Upon leaving school, Thomas had three



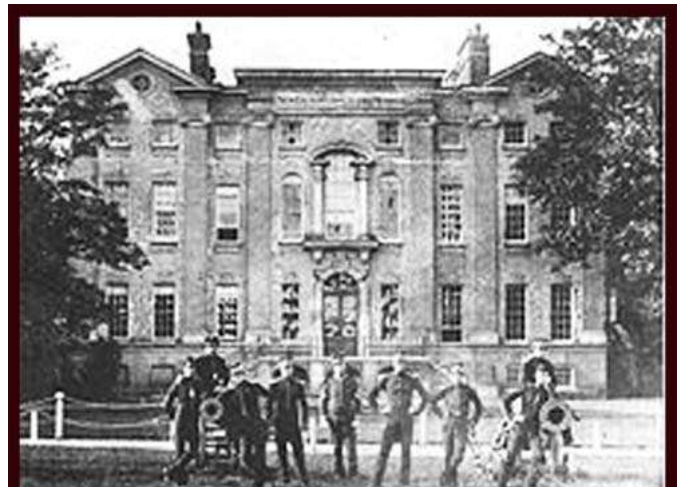
weeks holiday before entering the East India Company Artillery & Engineering Seminary at Addiscombe House, near Croydon, south of London.

In June 1837, after sixteen months, he was awarded the rank of Ensign and six months later, arrived in Madras, where he was posted to the 17th Regiment Native Infantry. A week later he was examined in the Hindustan language and it was remarked that he had made "highly creditable progress".

In October 1839, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant and in the following May he passed the Hindustani language examination and qualified as an interpreter.

In October 1840 he was appointed Quartermaster and Interpreter at the 17th Regiment and a month later became the Adjutant. This is the officer in charge of administration within a regiment. He was by then 21 years old.

His regiment was stationed at Waltair, (Vishakhapatnam) in Andhra Pradesh, which is on the coast



*The East India Company
Addiscombe Military Seminary - 1859*



between Madras and Calcutta, when Thomas married 23 year-old Marion Voyle, daughter of the late Lieutenant Colonel Elliott Voyle, in June 1841.

Colonel Voyle had originally come from Pembroke in Wales, but like so many colonial administrators in the nineteenth century, spent his entire career and then died away from home, in some distant outpost.

Thomas and Marion had their first daughter in May 1843 and in the following January, he was allowed to resign his position as Adjutant for unspecified reasons, but

most likely to allow for a trip back to Britain, perhaps to meet the important in-laws. A report at that time stated that Thomas was "clever and zealous in the discharge of his duty".

They were back in India by August, when Marion had her second daughter, Marion Susanna. It was also noted at that time, that Lieutenant Sparks was "well qualified to command inspections."

In the following month, he was again posted as Quartermaster of the 17th Regiment Native Infantry, with the observation on his record: "conduct and character good".

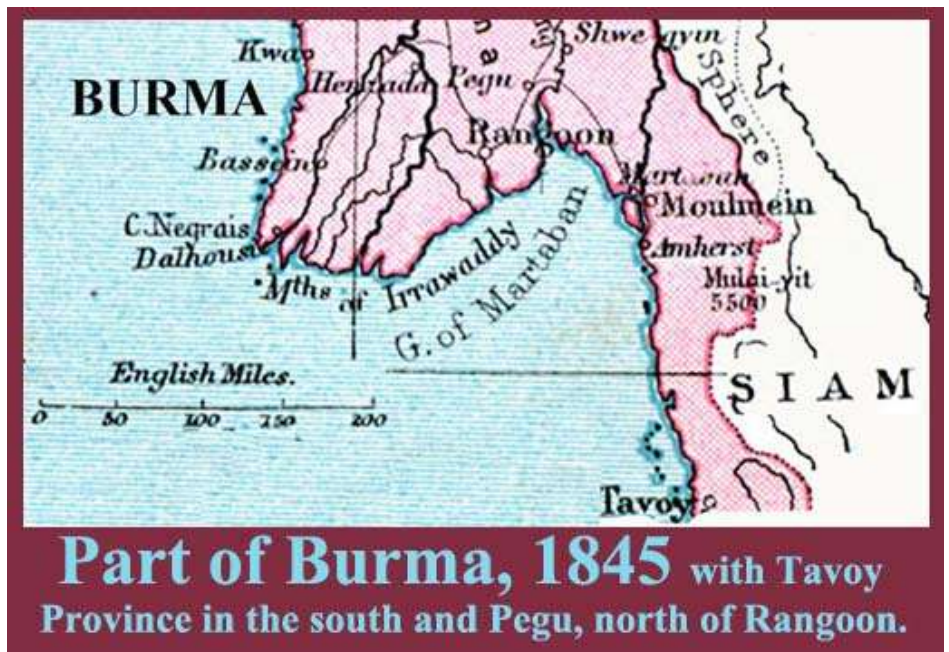
In March 1845, Lieutenant Sparks was posted temporarily to the local Corps in the very south of Burma, presumably to oversee engineering projects, such as road building. Also in that year, his first son, Philip Walter was born.

For some reason, most likely because of poor health, Philip Walter Sparks was sent to live with his mother's relatives in Tenby, Wales, where he died in 1847.

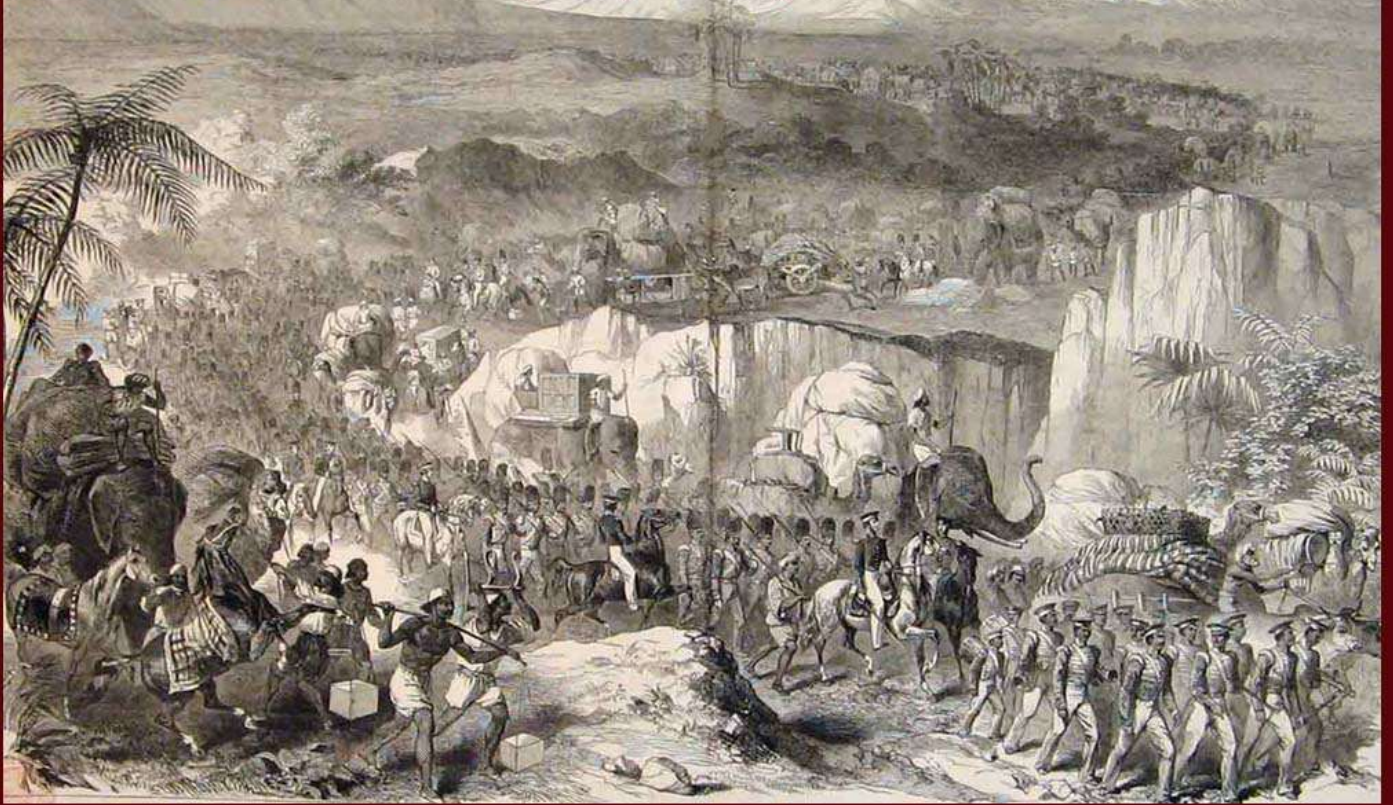
On October 13th, 1845, Thomas was promoted to the rank of Captain and a week later was given temporary command of Tavoy Province for two months, after which we find him surveying and superintending road construction in the province.

Between April 1848 and February 1853, Thomas and Marion had a further three daughters and a second son and then on 30th April 1845, Marion died at Moulmein, south of Rangoon.

The next we hear of Captain Sparks is in December 1856, when he was posted in Chittagong, at the top of the Bay of Bengal, on what is now the coast of Bangladesh. There was a dispute between Captain Sparks, Assistant Surgeon Dickinson and Captain Gaynor, "regarding remedial measures to arrest the great sickness periodically affecting a large portion of the Detachment at Chittagong"



East India Company troops in Burma, 1848



Tabloid Journalism, 1857. Mutinous Indian troops dividing the spoils, as envisaged by the Victorian twittering classes.

Burma, when he married Augusta Fitzwilliam Pollock in Rangoon.

Augusta was born in Madras in 1840, the daughter of William Pollock and an Indian woman called Jumal Bee, whose surname was shortened to a single sound either because the original was too difficult for the English to pronounce, or possibly to try to hide her ethnic origins.

Thomas became Major Sparks in February 1861 and between 1860 and 1862, he and Augusta had three children in Rangoon. The first two died within a week in June 1861. The third for twenty years, dying in 1882.

Early in the following year, Thomas sent a collection of ethnic articles to an exhibition in Paris, after which they were forwarded to Thomas' younger brother, John Sparks.

During the Indian Rebellion, also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, in November 1857, Captain Sparks was attached to General Carthew's column, fighting at Kanpur near Lucknow.

Despite reports of barbaric behaviour by the 'natives', in most instances the rebelling troops went to some lengths to ensure the removal to somewhere safe, of the English officers and families of their own units.

By April of 1859, Captain Sparks was back in

In October 1862, Thomas was promoted to Temporary Lieutenant Colonel, which was the appropriate rank for his new posting as Deputy Consul in Rangoon. After a short time he was sent north to the city of Pegu, as Consul.

It was most likely because of failing health that Thomas was sent back to Madras, where he died on 23rd April, 1863.

Most of the children that Thomas had with Marion, lived at least to middle age. Most returned to Britain, but their first daughter, Mabel Mary Sparks, married a colonel in the Royal Engineers, who had been born in India. After having one child in the relative comfort of Calcutta, she then gave birth to twins in the remote region of Assam, in 1872.

It was usual for the delicate English folk to escape the Indian heat by going to the Himalayan foothills for the summer months. This is most likely what Mabel Mary was doing when she died in Darjeeling in June, 1885.

Thomas and Marion's youngest, Harry John Barrett Sparks, born in 1853, seems to have been set to follow in his father's footsteps. He entered one of the British army military colleges in 1869 (the East India Company having been disbanded by then and Addiscombe Seminary closed). Unfortunately he died four years later at Richmond, outside London.

The entire British presence in India, had been run by the East India Company up to the mutiny of 1857. After that the British government decided that it was time to bring India under their own control. So, from 1858, Thomas Sparks had become an officer in the British army.

