

Mackinnon, Sir William (1823-1893)



Statue of Mackinnon now in Scotland, but previously in Treasury Square, Mombasa. Birds used to nest in his outstretched hand.

Mackinnon was a Scottish ship-owner and businessman who built up substantial commercial interests in India and East Africa. He established the British India steam navigation company and the Imperial British East Africa Company. He started in the grocery trade in Campbeltown, Argyll, and then went to Glasgow to work for a merchant who had Asian trading interests. He went to India in 1847 and with a friend formed the firm Mackinnon Mackenzie & Company. In 1856 he founded the shipping company Calcutta and Burma Steam Navigation Company, which became the British India Steam Navigation Company. It became a huge company trading all over the Indian Ocean and along the East African coast. In Zanzibar Mackinnon founded the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1888. It was committed to eliminating the slave trade. In 1891 Mackinnon founded the free church of Scotland East Africa and Scottish Mission. He died in London in 1893.

The Imperial British East Africa Company was the administrator of British East Africa which was the forerunner of the East Africa Protectorate, later Kenya. It was a commercial association founded to develop African trade in the areas. It built upon Mackinnon's trading activities in the region, with the encouragement of the British government. It oversaw an area of about 246,800 square miles along the eastern coast of Africa, and from 1890 also administered Uganda. The work involved governing the exportation and management of goods and agriculture and its main role was to facilitate the construction of a railway connecting the east coast region to Lake Victoria. However, Mackinnon lacked the funds for the work. He began building the Mackinnon road, a 600 miles ox-cart track from Mombasa to the Ugandan border, in 1890. The Company also had a steamship, the SS *William Mackinnon*, operating on Lake Victoria. It had been brought out in kit form and then made up on the shores of the lake. The administration of British East Africa was transferred to the Foreign Office on 1 July, 1895, and in 1896 so was the control of Uganda. The British then built the railway.

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