

Major-General Robert Clive M.P., 1st Baron Clive KB, FRS

Clive is a figure whose actions, both at home and abroad, have always been controversial. During his lifetime he was openly criticised with Parliament opening an inquiry into his behaviour and the practices of the East India Company. Back in Britain he was also implicated in electoral corruption, using his wealth to exert pressure and buy favour.

Lord Clive's activities on behalf of the East India Company and the profits extracted both by the Company and him personally, resulted in the plundering of India. They inflicted famine, poverty and other atrocities upon the native population.

Robert Clive was born near Market Drayton in 1725. In 1744, his father acquired for him a position as a company agent with the East India Company. Throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries, European trading companies fought for control of various trading posts abroad. They raised troops to protect their commercial interests and to enforce their political control locally. Military might rapidly became as important as commercial shrewdness. In this environment Clive's career prospered. He rose through the ranks as the East India Company began to seize control of most of the Indian subcontinent for the British Empire.



Above: Statue to Robert Clive, The Square, Shrewsbury. c. 1890. Shropshire Archives ref: PH/S/13/S/29/10

During short periods when he returned home, Clive pursued a successful political career. His new wealth allowed him to buy property and gain control of rotten boroughs in Cornwall and Bishop's Castle. This allowed him

to influence the election of Members of Parliament, taking seats both for himself and his friends and relatives.

By using his wealth to support local institutions and causes, Shropshire and its inhabitants benefited from his actions.

Clive died on 22 November 1774 at his London home, probably caused by an opium overdose. Following news of his death, Samuel Johnson wrote that he "had acquired his fortune by such crimes that his consciousness of them impelled him to cut his own throat".



Main image: Mid eighteenth century oil portrait painting of Baron Lord Robert Clive (1726 - 1774), 'Clive of India'. Painted by Charles Clive 1764. Shropshire Museums ref: SHYMS FA/1990/36