

Famous Portraits Series

Sir Thomas Maitland

First British Governor of Malta (1813-1824)

High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands (1816-1823)

Born: 10 March 1760; Died: 17 January 1824



1. Thomas Maitland by John Hoppner (1758-1810), painted in c. 1800 (aged 40)



2. Thomas Maitland on his appointment as Governor of Malta in 1813 (aged 53)



3. Bronze bust of Maitland (aged 58) by Paolo Prossalendi (1818) Set on a pedestal in Zante. It vanished during World War II.



Sir Thomas Maitland (c. 1822) by an unknown artist (aged 62)



Left: Maitland's monument at the Upper Barracca Gardens, Valletta.

Right: The Maitland Rotunda or Peristyle located at Spianada Square, Corfu; designed by Col. George Whitmore of the Royal Engineers (1821).



© History Department, Curriculum Centre Annexe, 2021 for Year 10 History (Option)

Image credits:

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Maitland_\(British_Army_officer\)#/media/File:John_Hoppner_\(1758-1810\)_-_Portrait_of_Sir_Thomas_Maitland_\(1760-1824\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Maitland_(British_Army_officer)#/media/File:John_Hoppner_(1758-1810)_-_Portrait_of_Sir_Thomas_Maitland_(1760-1824).jpg)
2. http://arkivji.org.mt/share/PHO/PHO_04250.JPG2
3. <https://www.wikitree.com/photo/jpg/Maitland-265>
4. <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/lieutenant-general-sir-thomas-maitland-17591824-governor-of-malta-18131824-211089>
5. https://www.maltaramc.com/regsurg/rs1810_1819/rmo1813.html
6. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d3/Maitland_Monument_in_Corfu_%28cropped%29.jpg

Lieutenant-General The Right Honourable **Sir Thomas Maitland** was a British military officer and colonial governor. He also served as a Member of Parliament for Haddington from 1790 to 1796, 1802–1806 and 1812–1813. He was made a Privy Councillor in 1803. He was the second surviving son of James Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale, and the younger brother of James Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale. Maitland never married. Young Thomas joined the British army as a captain in 1778. In 1792 he was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and a Brigadier-General in 1798.

Maitland served as Governor of Ceylon (today Sri Lanka) from 1805 to 1811. While at Ceylon, he was attracted to a place at Galkissa (Mount Lavinia) and decided to construct his palace there. During this time, Maitland had a secret love-affair with a local dancing-girl named Lovinia, born to Portuguese and Sinhalese parents. He gave instructions for the construction of a secret tunnel that led to Lovinia's house, which was located close to the governor's palace. Maitland often used the tunnel to meet Lovinia. The Sinhalese village that surrounded the Governor's mansion developed into a modern city named Galkissa. Later the city was renamed Mount Lavinia in her honour.

In July 1813 Maitland was then appointed as Governor of Malta when the island became a crown colony instead of a protectorate. The plague had broken out in Malta in March 1813 and the disease began to spread in Valletta and the Grand Harbour area. When Maitland arrived on the island on 3rd October 1813, he immediately enforced stricter quarantine measures. Overall, 4,486 (or 4%) of the population perished, but it is thought that the number of victims would have been higher without Maitland's strict intervention.

After eradicating the plague, Maitland made several important and far-reaching reforms. His administration was autocratic and he refused to form an advisory council made up of Maltese representatives. For this reason he came to be known by the Maltese as 'King Tom'. He formed the Malta Police Force in 1814 and dissolved the local *università* in 1818. He changed Malta's system of taxation, customs tariffs and the composition of the law courts. He remained governor until his death from apoplexy in January 1824.

Maitland resisted the decision by the British Government to take over the St John's Church in Valletta for use by the British garrison. In 1816, he held formal talks with the Holy See in Rome, where a compromise was reached – St John's Church was raised to a Catholic Co-Cathedral but remained government property. On other issues, his relationship with the local Catholic Church was often stormy. He distrusted the relationship of the bishop with his superiors in Rome, feeling that the British government should be supreme. He also expected to be consulted before applications were made to the Holy See and took a keen interest in local ecclesiastical promotions and could be very obstructive if his proposals were not implemented.

While he was Governor of Malta, Maitland also served as Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands from 1816 to 1823, when those islands were a British protectorate. His seat of government was on the island of Corfu, where he was represented by Sir Frederick Hankey, his private secretary. The Maitland Monument was built in his honour in 1821 in the popular neo-classical style of the time.

Further reading:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Maitland_\(British_Army_officer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Maitland_(British_Army_officer))https://www.ducksters.com/biography/world_leaders/mikhail_gorbahev.php
- <https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/892-2/maitland/>
- <https://clanmaitland.uk/history/century-18th/12-sir-thomas-maitland-1760-1824/43-sir-thomas-maitland-in-the-mediterranean-1815-1824>

Questions

1. What was Maitland's family background?
2. Which positions did he hold in the British army before 1813?
3. Why was Maitland ideal for Britain's interests to be Malta's first colonial governor?
4. Make a list of issues which Maitland had with the local Catholic Church during his term as Governor of Malta.
5. Explain in some detail one major reform in the administration undertaken by Maitland.
6. Why was he nicknamed as 'King Tom' by the Maltese? Mention two episodes from his administration to prove your point.
7. Mention THREE reasons which made Maitland very unpopular with the Maltese.
8. Give THREE adjectives that best describe Maitland's character and personality and give reasons for your answer.