



31. Kera



ALEXANDER McMILLAN HERON

(1884 - 1971)

Foundation Fellow

INTRODUCTION

ALEXANDER McMILLAN HERON joined the Geological Survey of India as an Assistant Superintendent in 1906 and rose to be the Director on Nov. 7, 1935. He retired in July 1939. After that joined the Govt of HEH the Nizam of Hyderabad. On the merger of that princely state in 1949, he retired and joined the Pakistan Geological Survey for a two-year spell. Retiring in 1951, he returned to settle down at Conoor in Nilgiri Hills, now in Tamil Nadu. He breathed his last after a prolonged illness on 29th January, 1971, at the age of 87. Heron died a confirmed bachelor.

SERVICE

Heron, with the exception of a brief spell of a couple of years in Burma, spent all his time in Rajasthan. Four Memoirs and a number of papers bear witness to the quality of work Heron was capable of. His published work, even after about four decades, still remains authentic and almost inscrutable. He was not only an exceptionally competent geologist and stratigrapher, but very tough in fieldwork. His talents were accordingly used in training a number of newly recruited officers both Indian and British, introducing the latter to the working conditions in the country. The hardy Scot in him stood him in good stead when he accompanied the first Everest Expedition in 1921, and worked out the geology of the area around. While in Burma, he, along with Coggin Brown, worked out the geology of the Tavoy tin deposits.

As a Director, he was a strict disciplinarian. Indeed, his grasp of the fundamentals, clear perception of the subject matter and balanced judgement made him an ideal choice for the post of Director. Heron's pithy remarks on the files demonstrated his aversion to red-tape and to getting entangled in a maze of detail and argument. Nevertheless, the country was then passing through a depression and a slump in economy that had already resulted in a reduction in the technical staff. The department was, accordingly, left alone to carry on routine work, with no pressure from the industry for mineral resources – the situation changed dramatically with the declaration of War, when Fox had already taken over from him. With his brief experience of Himalayan geology, Heron had realized that



the extra-Peninsular area was rather complicated and deserved a thorough and competent handling. Making the best use of the opportunity he, accordingly, put in some of his best men in the region. Thus, Coulson in the North West Frontier, Wadia in the Pir Panjal area, Auden in Tehri Garhwal and Garhwal, West in the Shali area near Simla and Gee in the Salt Range were all engaged in extensive systematic mapping during the period. Also, Auden's flair for work in the high Himalayas was put to use when he was put in the K₂, Karakoram and Aghil ranges to do some really pioneering work. While working in the Potwar plateau area, during this period, Wadia identified a dome that could possibly be an oil reservoir. Drilling in the Joya Mir area followed and proved him to be correct. Also, Fox completed his work on the Assam Coalfields, whereas Clegg and Iyer continued their work in Burma, politically separated but still technically attached to the Geological Survey of India. Krishnan, PK Ghosh and Crookshank continued to work in the Archaeans. Sondhi, in 1937, accompanied the Sino-Burma Boundary Commission.

During his tenure of office in Hyderabad he laid stress on mineral resources and initiated many an investigation, he himself contributing extensively. He also acted as a consultant with the Govt of Iraq on several occasions.

Heron's grasp of the problem was at a high when during his brief sojourn in Pakistan, although he was not in a new department and handling the administrative responsibilities under very trying circumstances.

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