



General Sir Arthur Thomas Cotton



IEI

Tirupati

General **Sir Arthur Thomas Cotton** [KCSI](#) (15 May 1803 – 24 July 1899) was a [British](#) general and [irrigation](#) engineer.

Cotton devoted his life to the construction of [irrigation](#) and [navigation canals](#) throughout the [British Empire in India](#), however, his dream was only partially realized, but he is still honoured in parts of [Andhra Pradesh](#) for his efforts.^[1]

He entered the Madras Engineers in 1819, and fought in the [First Burmese War](#). Cotton was knighted in 1861.

An [evangelist](#), he was the father of [Elizabeth Hope](#).

Biography



Tombstone of Sir Arthur Cotton

Arthur Cotton was born on 15 May 1803, the tenth son of Henry Calvely Cotton, and one of eleven brothers. In 1818, aged 15, he became a cadet at the East India Company .At the end of 1819 he was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Madras Engineer Group.

Lieutenant Cotton started his career with the Ordnance Survey in Wales in January 1820 where he received a high praises for his admirable reports. In 1821 he was appointed for service in India, where he was initially attached to the [Chief Engineer to Madras](#). He was later appointed as an Assistant Engineer to Superintending Engineer of Tank Department.

Cotton has conducted marine survey of [Pamban](#) passage between [India](#) and [Ceylon](#). Cotton was promoted to the rank of "Captain" in 1828 and was in charge of Investigation for [Cauveri](#) Scheme. The Cauveri [Anicut](#)(dam) was successful and paved the way for great projects on [Godavari](#) and [Krishna](#) Rivers. In 1844 Cotton recommended the construction of "[Anicut](#)(dam)" and prepared plans for [Visakhapatnam](#)port. In 1847 the work on Godavari [Anicut](#) was started.

In 1848 he proceeded to [Australia](#) due to ill health and handed over the charge to Captain Orr. In 1850 returned to India and promoted as [Colonel](#). He succeeded in completing the magnificent project on Godavari river at [Dowleswaram](#) in 1852.

After completing the Godavari [Anicut](#) Cotton shifted his attention to the construction of Aqueduct on Krishna River. The project was sanctioned in 1851 and completed by 1855. After completing the Krishna and Godavari Anicuts, Cotton envisaged the storage of Krishna and Godavari river waters.



In 1858 Cotton came up with still more ambitious proposals connecting almost all major rivers of India and suggested drought relief measures in [Odisha](#) and interlinking of canals and rivers. Arthur Cotton was retired from the service in 1860 and was knighted in 1861 and left India. In 1862 and 1863 visited India and offered advice on some river valley projects.

His work in India was so much appreciated and honored with K.C.S.I ([Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India](#)) in 1877. He is a much revered figure in the state of Andhra Pradesh for his contribution in irrigating the area of land also known as Konaseema.

In India due to his contributions the new barrage constructed across River Godavari Upstream side of the [Anicut](#) was also named after him and dedicated to the Nation by the Honourable Prime Minister of India in 1982.

Cotton is revered in the Godavari District for making it the 'rice bowl' of Andhra Pradesh. Cotton is widely known as the 'Delta Architect' of the Godavari District because of his pioneering work in irrigation engineering through his construction of the anicut system. He Died 5 December 1907

Background

Thomas Cotton went to attend an interview for the post of an [engineer](#). There were three candidates, including himself. All that the selectors told them was to have a 'good sleep' and were provided three separate beds. The candidates did what they were told. While the other two candidates slept happily, poor Cotton could not get a wink of sleep. However, after some time, he slept happily.

The next day, all the three were asked if they slept happily by the selectors. While all the three nodded in the affirmative, Cotton added that he felt restless while on the bed—bending down, he realised that one of the four legs of the bed was a little high. To his surprise he found a [pound](#) beneath one of the legs, which he promptly removed. That was the *catch* set up by the selectors.

His works



[Dowleswaram Barrage](#) near [Rajahmundry](#) on [River Godavari](#)

- The [Godavari](#) Canal System
- The Ganges Canal
- Dowleswaram Barrage



An insight

Sir Cotton was hated by his administrative superiors—thanks to his loving attitudes towards the people of India.^[3] At one point impeachment proceedings were initiated by his superiors for his dismissal^[4]

Going through the famine and cyclone-ravaged districts of Godavari, Cotton was distressed by the sight of famished people of the Godavari districts.^[5] It was then that he put in process his ambitious plans to harness the waters of the mighty [Godavari](#) for the betterment of the humanity.

John Henry Morris in *Godavari*^[6] writes about the work of Sir Cotton thus:

The Godavari [anicut](#) is, perhaps, the noblest feat of engineering skill which has yet been accomplished in British India. It is a gigantic barrier thrown across the river from island to island, in order to arrest the unprofitable progress of its waters to the sea, and to spread them over the surface of the country on either side, thus irrigating copiously land which has hitherto been dependent on tanks or on the fitful supply of water from the river. Large tracts of land, which had hitherto been left arid and desolate and waste, were thus reached and fertilized by innumerable streams and channels.

In 1878, Cotton had to appear before a [House of Commons](#) Committee to justify his proposal to build an [anicut](#) across the Godavari.^[7] A further hearing in the House of Commons followed by his letter to the then Secretary of State for India shows about his ambitiousness to build the anicut across the Godavari. His final sentence in that letter reads like this: *My Lord, one day's flow in the Godavari river during high floods is equal to one whole years' flow in the [Thames](#) River of [London](#).*^[8] Cotton was almost despaired by the British Government's procrastination in taking along this project.

That [Government of India](#)'s plans to interlink rivers was long envisioned by Cotton is a fact.^[9]

While at [Rajahmundry](#), Arthur Cotton used to attend the Church of the Godavari Delta Mission.

References

Hope Elizabeth : *General Sir Arthur Cotton his life and work.*
