

Clive of India descendant rejects calls to oust statue

Charlie Parker

A descendant of Robert Clive has defended his ancestor's colonial legacy against calls to pull his statue down outside the Foreign Office.

James Windsor-Clive described his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, who laid the foundations for British rule in India, as a complicated character worthy of recognition for expanding the empire.

He argued that "it's unfair to judge an 18th-century soldier-statesman by 21st-century morals" and called for a debate on contextualising his Whitehall monument with a plaque, rather than "air-brushing our history".

Clive is one of the most controversial figures from Britain's colonial past and earned the moniker "Clive of India" for his military and political exploits. He was made 1st Baron Clive of Plassey in 1762, five years after leading East India Company forces to victory over the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey.

Clive was later held liable for the Bengal famine, which is thought to have killed ten million people. It prompted the historian William Dalrymple to brand him an "unstable sociopath".

Last weekend Baroness Debbonaire, a prominent Labour peer, called for Clive's statue in central London to be torn down, claiming the depiction of "subservient Indians" on its plinth was damaging international relations.

Debbonaire, who was in line to be Labour's culture secretary before losing her Bristol seat to the Green Party in last year's general election, said the bronze statue was "a shocking piece of sculpture".

She described it as inaccurate, as "the frieze shows happy, smiling people really delighted to see him" and because it portrays India "as a country that Britain civilised". The peer said India had been

a "thriving" civilisation that was enjoying the fruits of "incredible technological advances" and blossoming trade before the British arrived.

However, Windsor-Clive, 35, argued that Debbonaire presents a "very rose-tinted" view of India's pre-colonial history.

"I don't think we can airbrush our history as simply as that," he said. "We've got a proud tradition and history and heritage, and we shouldn't be looking to hide it. I personally think that Robert Clive helped make Britain a global power. We shouldn't apologise for our history, but we should learn from it."

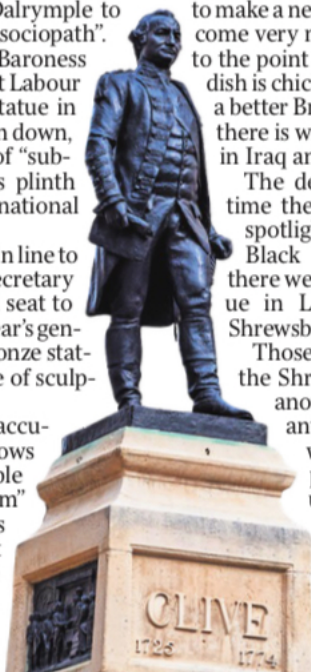
Windsor-Clive, a Tory campaigner, said he had travelled extensively in India. "I don't think there's a fixation amongst the general Indian population of the British being these tyrannical colonial overlords. And I think obviously it's a complex part of history and there are clearly criticisms, especially in academic circles.

"We've recently signed a trade deal with India. We've had very close relations with them since 1947, and lots of Indian people have travelled to Britain to make a new life here. They have become very much part of our culture, to the point where our most popular dish is chicken tikka masala. There's a better British legacy in India than there is with our more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The debate marks the second time the statue has been in the spotlight. In 2020, during the Black Lives Matter protests, there were calls for the Clive statue in London and another in Shrewsbury to be pulled down.

Those in favour of removing the Shrewsbury statue included another of Clive's descendants, the 8th Earl of Powis, who said it was "very imperial" and made him feel uncomfortable.

But the Tory government at the time rejected calls to remove commemorations of colonial figures, introducing a "retain and explain" policy.



Robert Clive won the 1757 Battle of Plassey