

Surveyors of Arabia

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SUMMARY

When it comes to well known characters of the twentieth century, it would be most likely that the name "Lawrence of Arabia" would make the top ten list. Even before delving into his history such a title projects charisma, adventure and heroism derived from such an exotic and evocative image. To fuel the great notoriety of this colourful individual his book "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" became a best seller after World War II with such a universal recognition of the man that a number of movies were made in an attempt to portray his fascinating life to an audience craving for courageous figures to try and damn to the furthest memories the horrors of that diabolical conflict. Well, you probably know by now that I would be very unlikely to research and write a story unless that person happened to be a surveyor? Well, you know me all too well! Yes T.E. Lawrence was a surveyor in the Middle East prior to, during and after this major war, but to my enending surprise, I also found three other notable people who surveyed in the Arabian area around the same epoch as Lawrence - Lord Horatio Kitchener, Gertrude Bell and Gordon of Khartoum. This paper will follow the lives of these three historic icons, featuring their mapping and surveying exploits in addition to looking into their personal interactions and joint activities. To my immense delight I even found some movie clips from the 1986 movie "Queen of the Desert", in which our very own Aussie starlet, Nicole Kidman, is depicted carrying out some survey work in the desert in her role as Gertrude Bell, the archaeologist! Rarely written about (if at all?) the amazing feats of these four surveyors in the parched and arid environment of the sandy sun-bleached dunes, put their historic contributions onto another plateau of achievement to rightly honour them as the "Surveyors of Arabia."

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