

A WALK IN THE CHURCHYARD
or
The Life & Times of
Sergeant Major James Fullerton
By Mike Stead

There are many walks around Quorn, with an abundance of short cuts, passageways and jitties to explore. One of these from the Cross takes you down Station Road, past the shops and, after a smart left turn, down Nursery Lane and into St Bartholomew's Churchyard. This is a route I've taken many times and I'm always surprised, not only by the number of people buried in the Churchyard, but also by the diversity of their ages and backgrounds. No doubt this was a reflection of the times in which they lived and died. A survey carried out in 1981 by the Quorn WI, as part of a national survey, recorded all the gravestones and their inscriptions, a total of 784 marked graves in all. The oldest person recorded was a William Inglesant who died in 1912 aged 102, and the earliest was Isobel Danscer in 1683. There are many headstones of local Swithland slate, but one in particular caught my attention on more than one occasion, and this read:

*In Affectionate
Remembrance of
James Fullerton
of Quorndon
Late Sergeant Major of
the 93rd
Sutherland Highlanders.
Died MAY 4th, 1879*

The first question that sprung to mind was "How could it be that a Sergeant Major of the famous 93rd Sutherland Highlanders of 'Thin Red Line' fame was buried in Quorn?". I was intrigued and determined to find out as much as I could about the Sergeant Major. We know where and when he died but where was he born, and what sort of life did he have? The first port of call was the Museum of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in Stirling Castle, Fifehire. The museum curator, Rod McKenzie, was extremely helpful and promptly replied to my query with the information that James has served in both the Crimea and in India at the time of the Mutiny. Remarkably, the museum had a photograph of James taken in India in 1864. This is reproduced below. This shows a rather fearsome-looking and black-bearded James at the age of 34 in uniform with a group of his regimental colleagues. His discharge papers tell us a little more about his appearance, where he was described as 5ft 9-1/4" tall with a fresh complexion, grey eyes and dark hair. The next step was to arrange for the military records in the National Archives and the various 19th century censuses to be searched to see what could be revealed about his life and times.



It turns out that James was born in Liberton, Edinburgh, Scotland, on 24th July 1830 to John Fullarton (sic) and Ann (nee Mathieson). His father John was a baker and James followed in his father's footsteps in this regard. However, this may not have been enough for the young James and in 1848 when he was 17 years and 10 months old, he enlisted as a private in the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders. This was one of Scotland's most famous regiments. The life must have suited him because in May 1853 he received a good conduct award of 1d per day! In October of the same year he was promoted to Corporal. The situation was about to change, however. Britain was now at war with Russia and in February 1854 the 93rd embarked at Plymouth for the Crimea and they were initially based at Scutari, on the outskirts of Constantinople (now Istanbul). The regiment moved on to the Crimea and stayed there for almost two and a half years; the Regiment saw action in some of the most famous battles of the war, such as Alma, Balaclava (where

they became known forever as 'The Thin Red Line') and Sebastopol. The Battle of Balaclava took place on 25 October 1854, but James was unable to take part due to illness. This was the period when the legendary Florence Nightingale, the 'Lady with the lamp,' was pioneering improved care for wounded and sick soldiers suffering from a variety of ailments. James himself became sick and was evacuated to Varna on the shores of the Black Sea, in modern-day Bulgaria. By this time, the 93rd were in Malta and James rejoined them there on his recovery. He was promoted to Sergeant in October 1854. During his time in the Crimea, James took part in the siege of Sebastopol for which he was awarded a clasp to his Crimea Medal. He was also awarded the Turkish Medal by the Sultan of Turkey. The regiment, along with James, returned to Britain in March 1856.

The following year, in April 1857, James was re-engaged at Dover to complete the 21 years service that would qualify him to receive a long service pension. By June, the Regiment was en route to India, where reinforcements were badly needed to help with the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny. In November, he received his last promotion to Sergeant Major. It had taken him just under ten years after enlisting as a private to reach the highest non-commissioned rank, a considerable achievement. He served with some distinction during his time in India, particularly in the Umbeyla campaign, and some details of the action are set out below. He received not only the Indian Mutiny Medal with two clasps, one for operations at Lucknow from November 1857 to March 1858, which resulted in the final recapture of the city and the 'Relief of Lucknow' Medal. He also received the India General Service Medal with a clasp for activities at Umbeyla on the North-West Frontier not far from Peshawar, between 20 October and 23 December 1863. Peshawar was then in India but is now the capital of the North-West frontier province in present day Pakistan and a very unsettled place, both then and today.

Northwest Frontier - Umbeyla Expedition (1863-64) - A larger than usual campaign on the Frontier. The British forces, commanded by Sir Neville Chamberlain, were sent to remove the Pathans from the passes but were beleaguered for several weeks while waiting for reinforcements. Much of the fighting was in defence of hill-top pickets, held by a company against massed swordsmen supported by accurate matchlock fire. Eventually the campaign was brought to a close by a formal two-brigade attack on a strongly held mountain, Umbeyla. At the battle of Shabkadr, the tribesmen were enticed from their heights on to a plain, and then successfully charged three times by British cavalry, and routed by the infantry. Regiments participating included the 7th (Royal Fusiliers), 71st (Highland Light Infantry), 93rd, and 101st (Royal Munster Fusiliers, formerly the 1st Regiment of European Bengal Fusiliers) infantry at Umbeyla; at Shabkadr, the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars, Royal Horse Artillery, 79th (Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders) infantry, and the Rifle Brigade all took part. The Royal Artillery was also there. Source-Falkenstein

Something seems to have happened to him in 1866. In October of that year, he was taken into custody and tried by a Regimental Court-martial. No details of the offence or the proceedings can be found, but whatever had happened, he appears to have been found guilty and reduced to the rank of private. The wheel had turned full circle! However, the offence cannot have been too serious because he was immediately restored to the rank of Colour-Sergeant! What could it all mean?

A year later in October 1867, James left the Regiment, which stayed on in India until 1870. He was transferred to the permanent staff of the Militia in Leicester in October 1868 as a Sergeant, but after only seven months at the Newarke Barracks in Leicester he was finally discharged on 8th June 1869. He had completed 21 years 18 days of pensionable service. It is possible to imagine that his service in India and possibly his Court Martial had perhaps affected his health in some way.

James was now 38 years old and in January he married a local girl from Quorn, the 23-year old Elizabeth Stocks, when he was described as a widower and staff-sergeant in the Militia. The marriage

produced one son (Edward) and three daughters (Ellen, Jessie and Fanny). Elizabeth was a dressmaker and by these means supported herself and her four children after James died from a stroke in May 1879 while living in Leamington Street, Leicester.

Two unsolved questions remained. Firstly, what was the offence that caused James to be court-martialled, and secondly, when and where did he marry his first wife? What was her name and when and where did she die? Were there children from this first marriage?

To sum up, James must have been a man of rare character who lived a full and eventful life. His army career was successful and distinguished, apart from one relatively minor blemish. He served in some exciting but dangerous places and was decorated for his service. He married twice and we know there were four children from his second marriage. How many children there may have been from the first marriage, or where his first wife came from we cannot say. He died at the relatively young age of 47, but it may be that the rigours of army life, war and climate shortened his life. May he continue to rest in peace.

Sources & Acknowledgements:

1. Museum of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (Rod MacKenzie)
2. Army Ancestral Searches (Patricia E. Martin)
3. FindMyPast – UK Census & BMD indexes
4. St. Bartholomew's Quorn – Historical Guide (Alison Cooper)

Postscript

In January 2018 Jane Walker from London, who is James Fullerton's great great granddaughter, got in touch with the museum team. On the right is a photograph of Jessie Freestone, James' daughter, who married Harry Freestone. The photograph was taken in 1905 and Jessie is holding Jane's grandmother, Mildred.

