



BILLY POPE
A WRAXALL MAN - SOLDIER OF THE QUEEN

PENNANT REPRINTS N^o 3

WRAXALL

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BILLY POPE

A WRAXALL MAN - SOLDIER OF THE QUEEN

William "Billy" Pope was born c1822 the son of Robert and Sarah Pope of Wraxall. Robert was a gardener at Charlton House Wraxall and the family lived at West Hill. William was baptised on 15th June 1823, the same day as his, presumably older, brother Robert.

There were other children in the family and a sister, Mary Ann, younger than William, became great grandmother to Phyllis and David. Nothing is known of William's boyhood or his occupation in the period soon after he left school. At the age of 21 years 4 months he enlisted in the 51st Light Infantry. His service number was 3356.

On 13th July 1843 Billy departed from Deptford as a guard on board the convict ship "Maitland". He was taken ill with what seems to have been typhoid fever and was put ashore at Simonstown in South Africa. It was not until 22nd May 1844

that he obtained passage on the freight ship "Prince Albert" for Australia, disembarking at Perth on 14th August 1844. From there he took further passage in the supply schooner "Water Lilly" to Sydney and rejoined his regiment on 21st September 1844, in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) where, according to his discharge papers, William spent 2 years and 8 months.

In August of 1846 part of the 51st sailed for Bengal(India) while the remainder followed in February 1847. It would seem that to account for his time in Van Diemen's Land, William moved in 1847 to India where he remained for 22 years; he fought in the 2nd Burmah War and later in the Indian Mutiny. The second Burmah War of 1852/3 was similar to many wars fought at the time with a view to extending the British area of influence and trade. Major-General H Godwin was in overall command of two Brigades of Infantry. One comprised the 18th Foot (Royal Irish); 80th Foot (Staffordshires); and 40th Bengal N.I. The other Brigade in which William was present comprised 51st Foot (K.O.L.I.); 5th Madras N.I.; 9th Madras N.I.; and 35th Madras N.I. In addition there were two companies of Madras Sappers and Miners.

William's papers mention an assault on the "White House Stockade". This was a rectangular brick walled enclosure, which had been further enclosed by a wooden stockade, the space between was filled with rammed earth. Within the enclosure stood a white house approached by a flight of steep steps and inside the house was a large statue of the Buddha. This attack was one of many fought in and around the main towns near Rangoon. The Burmese were sure that the attacking troops would suffer sickness and so were prepared to wait. Surprisingly the precautions taken by the British were successful and the amount of sickness was less than in the normal conditions in barracks.

On William's records it states that he received the Burmah War Medal but the troops that took part in the campaign were granted the India Medal of 1854 with the bar "Pegu". He was also entitled to prize money. One share was £50 at the first distribution, £13 at the second and £12 at the third. This was received in India.

Then in February 1854 the Regiment returned to Madras, and in April embarked for England and on their return gave the Burmese Bell to York Minster. 119 soldiers transferred out to the 43rd Light Infantry (later to become the first battalion of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry) and remained in India. Amongst them was William.

On the 26th April 1855, at St George, Madras he married Delphina Ford, a widow whose maiden name was Brodie or Brody. While their ages were given as 27 and 20 respectively it seems more likely from other information that they were both in their 30s. Other dates given in the records do not tally but we do not have the information to correct them. A son was born to them on the 17th March 1856, he was baptised two days later and named William. That so far, is all we know of the baby. Did he grow up, or having been only two days old when baptised was he weakly and died? There was also mention of a baby Robert Pope in records but no parents' names were mentioned. It is, however, a coincidence that William's father and brother were named Robert. There was also another baby Robert, older than William's brother Robert, who died in infancy.

1857 saw the start of the Indian Mutiny. The 43rd were involved in a battle at Kirwi and had marched probably 950 miles to reach there and later, another 350 miles to a destination not known. In 1858 the regiment was employed against rebel forces in the hills and forests of the Jumna country.

During his service he had qualified for good conduct payments. In 1847/8 he received 1d per day (in amount but not in value equal to 3p per week). In 1852-55 he received 2d per day but lost 1d per day in December 1855 although he regained it in the following year. By December of 1860 the amount per day had risen to 4d. His pay at that time would have been 7/6d per week (37p) but from this was deducted 1/10d for washing facilities, barrack charges and for renewal of kit and a further 3/6d per week for food. As can be seen the additional 2/4d good conduct pay was quite large in proportion to his other pay.

On 28th September 1863 at Fort William Calcutta, William Pope was discharged "in consequence of medical disability rendering him unfit for further service". The medical papers prior to his discharge state: "This man is worn out and has not sufficient bodily strength in him through the fatigues of field service aggravated through ague malaria" His discharge was confirmed at Horse Guards (London) on 26th January 1864. On his discharge papers it states "His conduct has been very good and he is in the possession of four good conduct medals". He was also granted the Burmah War medal 1852-3(see note above) and the Indian Mutiny Medal 1857-8. At his discharge he was aged 42½ years old, 5ft 7¾in tall and had a swarthy complexion, hazel eyes and dark brown hair. His trade, a labourer. He was admitted as an Out Pensioner of Her Majesty's Royal Hospital at Chelsea on 27th January 1864, late of the 43rd Regiment of Foot, and received a pension of 1s per day.

Surprisingly, in view of his health on discharge, the India Office has records to show that William joined the Mounted Police in Madras after his discharge from the Army. The entry gives the following information:-

Unconvenanted Service In Government 1864; WILLIAM POPE; Age 42 years, Married, D/Appt 7 Jan 1864; Period In Govt

Service 21 years; Residence in India 22 years. Salary 30 rupees per month. Trooper - Mounted Police. The papers in the file dated 1869 tell of the police force being reorganised with a reduction in numbers, and one wonders if this is why William returned to England in either 1870 or 1871. After December of 1870 his pension, which was paid quarterly in arrears was to be paid at East London, presumably South Africa. This was where the 43rd Regiment was stationed before being transferred to Madras and the area where he had spent time recovering 20 odd years before.

On the census returns of Wraxall and Failand 1871 and 1881 he was living with his widowed Sister Mary Ann Rogers (nee Pope) at the White House Wraxall. It is a coincidence that William had fought at the "White House Stockade" during the Burmah war. It is not known when the cottage at Wraxall acquired its name, but it may only have been from the fact that the exterior was kept whitewashed. On the 1871 Census he was classed as a military pensioner, but on the 1881 Census he appears as an agricultural labourer. According to Phyllis's mother he came to live with his sister when she was widowed. He found work on the Tyntesfield Estate, gave his wages to his sister for upkeep of the home and the last of her children still living with her and kept his pension for his own use. Peculiarly he never appeared to mention his wife after he came back home, in fact the family were uncertain whether he had ever married. So what happened to Delphina? In the register of St Peter's Church Madras is the following entry "Feb 2nd 1909 Delphina Pope aged 84 years a mission pensioner, died from debility. Signed by the convent chaplain A.M. Jeixeira."

So she had apparently remained in Madras in a hospice for poor old women entrusted to the Convent by the mission which partly defrayed the cost of support, shelter and clothing for its 25 inmates. The home was still in being in 1936. Why did she stay in India? Had her marriage broken

up? Was her physical or mental health too weak for her to travel to England? We just don't know.

William passed away in January of 1899 at the age of 78 years. He was buried at Wraxall, of course, where he began his life. He had served his Queen and Country well, had given the best years of his life to the Army and left the family proud to know that he was one of them. He was a man of Wraxall.

Acknowledgements

The information came primarily from Mrs Charlotte Anne Rew nee Youd (mother of Phyllis Horman) and aunt of David. William Pope, known as "Uncle Billy" was Mrs Rew's grandmother's brother. The discharge papers referred to were left to a cousin of the authors. David has spent considerable time at St Catherine's House, London, the India Office Library and the P.R.O. at Kew, adding much material to the information already known.

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