

Captain John Olphert Gage 1839-1897

83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot - 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment of Foot
Abyssinia Expedition 1868 - Londonderry Militia - Resident Magistrate Ireland



Lieutenant John Olphert Gage Madras circa 1870

John Olphert Gage was born 12th January 1839 in Limavady, Londonderry, Ireland, the second son of the Reverend Robert Gage 1804-1892 and Anne Gage 1813-1897. John was baptised in Drumachose Church, Limavady, Londonderry on 8 February 1839. John had three siblings Marcus Gage 1833-1890, Anna Benjamina Gage 1837-1888, and Thomas Robert Baille Gage 1844-1914.

In July 1860, John passed his entrance examinations for a direct commission in the army, at the Royal Military and Civil Service Institution in Dublin.

Up until 1871, the British Army recruited its officers primarily through patronage and purchase. The system of purchase allowed wealthy individuals to buy a commission in the army with a specific regiment, often with little or no military experience. Many officers came from the aristocracy and gentry, with family connections being a significant advantage. Officers could purchase higher ranks by paying larger sums, which was sometimes used as a form of investment for securing status or further opportunities.

By the mid-19th century, a significant part of the British Army was made up of regionally recruited line regiments of foot soldiers. These regiments totalling over 100, were key to Britain's defence and expansion around the world, especially during the height of the British Empire. In addition to the regiments of foot, other specialised army regiments included Cavalry, Artillery, and Engineers.

Regiments of Foot often carried the name of the city, county, or region they were raised in, such as the 14th (The Buckinghamshire) Regiment of Foot or the 66th (The Berkshire) Regiment of Foot. These regiments were often seen as representing their local communities, and soldiers were usually recruited from those areas. The regimental system fostered strong loyalty and esprit de corps among the soldiers, as regiments maintained distinct traditions, uniforms, and customs that reinforced their identity. Soldiers often stayed with the same regiment throughout their career, forming tight-knit

groups with a powerful sense of camaraderie. Although it was customary practice for regiments to recruit the rank and file from local communities, this was not always true for their officers.

As an Irishman, John Olphert Gage elected to join one of the established Irish regiments, the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot. In March 1861, John purchased a commission as Ensign with the 83rd Regiment.

The 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot had been established in 1793 during the French Revolutionary Wars. Raised to serve as part of Britain's efforts against Revolutionary France, it initially operated in the West Indies and Ireland. The regiment was involved in several key engagements, including the French campaigns in Egypt and the Peninsula War (1808-1814). During the 19th Century the regiment was garrisoned at various colonies throughout the world, including Ceylon, Canada, Gibraltar, and India, while maintaining a significant presence in Ireland. By the mid-19th century, it had become part of the British Army's regular forces.



83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot Colours Emblem
Hand-Painted by Captain George E S Cartwright circa 1866

As was customary when joining the army during this period, new recruits initially spent some time with their regiment's depot companies.

A British army regiment's depot companies played a crucial role in supporting the main body of the regiment. The depot companies were typically based in Britain or Ireland while the main forces were deployed abroad. Their primary purpose was to recruit, train, and equip new soldiers before they joined their respective regiments at home or overseas.

Depot companies were responsible for maintaining the regimental records, handling logistics, and ensuring that reinforcements were adequately prepared for active service. They provided basic military training, including drill, marksmanship, and physical conditioning, as well as instruction in discipline and regimental traditions. Additionally, these companies managed the regimental stores, including uniforms, weapons, and other essential supplies, guaranteeing that the main regiment remained equipped and ready for combat.

The depot companies also served as a haven for wounded or sick soldiers who had returned from overseas postings, offering a place for recovery and convalescence. During this period in British military history, the health of the British Army abroad faced significant challenges. The harsh climate often experienced abroad, coupled with unsanitary living conditions, led to widespread health issues

among the troops. Tropical diseases such as malaria, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid were rampant, posing a constant threat to the soldiers.

On 29th March 1861, John joined his new regiments depot companies based at Chatham, Kent.

One of the essential skills that every soldier needed to master was that of Musketry. In 1861, the British army's primary infantry weapon consisted of muzzle-loading rifles like the Pattern 1853 Enfield, and the Pattern 1861 Enfield musketoon, a shorter version of the 1853. In 1853, the British army created a School of Musketry, at Hythe in Kent. Its purpose was to train Instructors of Musketry for each regiment, which was intended to improve the proficiency in the use of small arms and support weapons, and range management, throughout the army at all levels.

On Thursday 19th September 1861, detachments of the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 20th, 31st, and 83rd regiments, totalling 93 non-commissioned officers and men, marched into Chatham garrison from Eastbourne, where they had completed a course of instruction in long range rifle firing. Included in this number rejoining their depot companies were 83rd regiment newly commissioned Ensigns John Olphert Gage, and Charles Hay Tollemache who had joined the 83rd six months before John Gage. During the previous year over 1,000 men from Chatham garrison had gone through a course of rifle instruction at Eastbourne, in addition to those under daily instruction at Chatham.

The main body of troops of the 83rd Regiment of Foot returned to England in May 1862, after 12 years service in India. For the next five years, the regiment would be based in England before being moved to Ireland. In September 1863, John was promoted to Lieutenant without purchase. Although it was customary for officers to purchase a higher rank at this time, exceptions were made for officers that showed particularly good potential or service. In such cases, officers were promoted without purchase.

It was common practice at this time for officers to exchange regiments in order to increase their chances of promotion or for those seeking to take advantage of a particular posting. In June 1864, John Gage exchanged into the 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment of Foot.

The 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment of Foot was raised in 1741, and saw action during Father Le Loutre's War, the French and Indian War and the American Revolutionary War, as well as the Peninsular War, the First Anglo-Burmese War, and the Xhosa Wars.

In early 1864 John's new regiment had been placed under orders to prepare for service in India. On 28th July, their Headquarters and Right Wing embarked at Queenstown, Ireland, on the troopship the "Donald McKay", followed four days later by the Left Wing on the troopship "Star of India". John was aboard the "Donald McKay" together with 18 other officers, 27 Sergeants, 17 Drummers, 549 Corporals and Privates, 76 women and 63 children. The "Star of India" carried 13 officers 16 Sergeants, 4 Drummers, 292 Corporals and Privates, 34 women and 26 children.

The "Donald McKay" reached Bombay 1st November 1864, where the Headquarters Wing disembarked, and marched to its quarters at Colaba, a peninsula district of Bombay. The Left Wing arrived a few days later and on 23rd November proceeded to Neemuch, 500 miles north-east of Bombay. The Right Wing left Colaba by train for Poona on the 7th November, with the Left Wing from Neemuch joining them on 15th November. In Poona, the whole Regiment was quartered in the Ghorpuri Lines. The move to Poona was much appreciated by all ranks, especially those of the Left Wing who had been quartered at Neemuch. The Left Wing had suffered greatly from cholera since arriving in India, losing a considerable number of non-commissioned officers and men.

Poona, located 120 miles southeast of Bombay in the western state of Maharashtra, was one of the most important military and administrative centres for the British in India. Established in the early 19th century, the Poona Cantonment (permanent military station) became a key base for British forces operating in the Bombay Presidency and the surrounding regions. The cantonment was strategically important because of its proximity to the Deccan Plateau and its distance from the coastal areas, making it a safer, less vulnerable location to potential attacks from coastal insurgents.

The temperate climate of the region also made Poona an attractive location for British officers and troops, especially during the sweltering summer months in other parts of India.

The Poona Cantonment housed various regiments, including the British Indian Army's artillery and infantry units. This led to the development of infrastructure such as bungalows for officers, barracks, hospitals, roads, and a Bazaar. Over time, Poona became a major centre for British military operations in the western part of India, as well as a hub for the distribution of supplies and reinforcements.

In November 1865, John was made Adjutant of the 45th Regiment of Foot. The role of the Adjutant was essential to the effective functioning of a regiment. Typically, a junior officer, such as a lieutenant or captain, the Adjutant assisted the commanding officer with the daily management of the regiment.

John would have been responsible for maintaining discipline and overseeing the regiment's training, ensuring soldiers remained fit for duty and proficient in drills. Additionally, the Adjutant handled administrative tasks, including maintaining personnel records, managing promotions, absences, and disciplinary actions, and ensuring all documentation was up to date.

In December 1865, Queen Victoria approved the 45th Regiment bearing the name the "Sherwood Foresters".

Early in 1867, trouble with the Emperor of Abyssinia (known today as Ethiopia), which for some years had been brewing came to a head. Emperor Tewodros II of Abyssinia, then often referred to by the anglicised name Theodore, imprisoned several missionaries and two representatives of the British government to force the British government to comply with his requests for military assistance. The punitive expedition launched by the British in response, required the transportation of a sizeable military force, hundreds of miles across mountainous terrain lacking any road system.

A significant expeditionary force was assembled and placed under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Napier, then Commander-in-Chief in Bombay, consisting of:

1st Squadron, 3rd Dragoon Guards

3rd Regt., Light Cavalry

2nd Regt., Sind Horse

C. E. Royal Artillery

E14 Royal Artillery

2-21 Royal Artillery

3-21 Royal Artillery

A Rocket Battery from England.

Native Mountain Train Battery from Malligaum

A Mountain Train Battery and a Mortar Battery from Northern India.

10th Regt. Bengal Cavalry

12th Regt. Bengal Cavalry

3 Companies, Bombay Sappers and Miners.

3 Companies, Madras Sappers and Miners.

4th (King's Own) Regt

26th Cameroonians

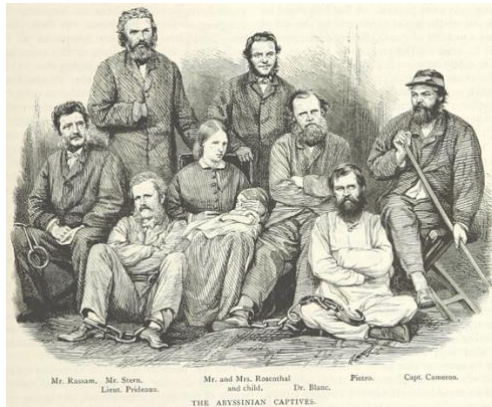
33rd (Duke of Wellington's) Regt

45th (Nottinghamshire) Regt.

23rd Punjab Infantry (Pioneers) and the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 8th, 10th, 18th, 25th, 27th (Beloochees) and 29th (Beloochees) Bombay Native Infantry

The force was to disembark at Zoulla, in Annesley Bay, on the Eritrean coast, where during early October 1867, certain units of the force had already landed. From there lay some four hundred miles of difficult and mountainous road that led to Magdala, and the emperor's fortress, in which the

British prisoners were held. The total force consisted of 13,000 British and Indian soldiers, 26,000 camp followers and over 40,000 animals, including elephants.



British Prisoners held at Magdala Fortress Elephants used to transport guns and ammunition

The 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment left Poona 14th January 1868 and proceeded to Bombay where it would be transported to Eritrea in three ships. Lieutenant and Adjutant John Gage embarked on the Steamer “American” travelling with nine other officers, while the other two ships “Gavin Steel” and “Canova” embarked with the remaining officers and men. In total that day, the three ships carried 27 officers, 3 warrant officers and 723 non-commissioned officers and men of the 45th Regiment, plus 96 public and 203 private followers. On the afternoon of the 16th January, all three ships set sail for Eritrea. In his diary, Captain H B Haywood of the 45th Regiment described the scene, *“the sea was perfectly smooth, with beautifully cool breeze from the N.E. blowing, and without any noise or motion we went quietly along between five and six miles an hour”*.

The 45th Regiment disembarked at Zoulla on the Eritrean coast, at 6.30am on Sunday 2nd February 1868. In North Africa, the men of the 45th Regiment faced both a harsh climate and the threat of disease. Securing sufficient fresh water was an ongoing challenge not only for the soldiers but also for the many animals that the army depended on to transport supplies, ammunition, and all the equipment necessary to support such a large force.



Ships Disembarking Troops at Zoulla December 1867

Disembarking with the 45th Regiment that day, Captain H B Haywood later described in his diary some of the immediate problems faced by the regiment and some insight into how little the men knew about the part they would play in the campaign:

“I cannot help thinking that a grand mistake has been made in selecting Zoulla as the landing place for the army and base of operations. Not a drop of water is to be had except from the condensers, and our allowance is only 1 gallon per day - quite sufficient for drinking and cooking purposes, but a wash is out of the question. Ships and steamers are arriving every day, and the harbour is rapidly filling. Can hear nothing about our moving up country, want of transport is the cause of the delay.

Three companies of the 4th King's Own are still here but expect to be moving either tomorrow or next day. No news of importance from the front - at any rate none is made public, in fact I think we know less of what is going on than do people at home."

By 9th February, it was rumoured that 300 men of the 45th regiment would form part of an advanced brigade, that would *"push on as hard as possible for Magdala"*. The order, however, did not come through until 5th March. It had been decided that the Headquarters (including John Gage) and six companies of the 45th would leave Zoulla 9th March for Antalo. Each officer was restricted to 75 lbs of kit and no private carriage, the men only allowed only 25 lbs kit. There were also rumours that the rations would be reduced, as grain was so scarce that the allowance of bread was to be cut down to ¾ lb for each man.

The 300 men of the 45th Regiment, which included John Gage left Zoulla at 6 a.m., much later than had been intended, delayed by the transport train and baggage animals that did not turn up until half past five. Captain Haywood described the first day of marching:

"Halted at Griffin's camp for coffee, about eight miles from Zoulla. Started again about 9 a.m., sun very hot and the road dusty and very heavy. The men found it very hard work. It was one of the hottest days I ever felt, and the kit the men carried was heart-breaking - greatcoat with waterproof sheet folded or rather rolled, and carried over the shoulder, and sixty rounds of ammunition! Reached Kumayli, thirteen miles, about noon. Bad arrangements made about rations and water, nothing ready on our arrival and it was 3 o'clock before the men had their dinners. The baggage came in very late."

During this period in British military history, the health of the British army abroad faced significant challenges. The harsh climate often experienced abroad, coupled with unsanitary living conditions, led to widespread health issues among the troops. Tropical diseases such as malaria, cholera, dysentery, and typhoid were rampant, posing a constant threat to the soldiers. At a time when the military might of Britain, with its modern weapons and tactics, was far superior to many of its adversaries, deaths from disease far exceeded any that occurred on the battlefield.

After only 4 days of marching the terrain, climate and disease were all beginning to have an effect on the men. Captain Haywood describes the days march 13th March and discusses some of the problems faced by the men in the unforgiving African climate.

Just four days into their march, the men were already feeling the impact of the tough terrain, harsh climate, and spreading disease. Captain Haywood wrote in his diary:

"Marched at 6 a.m., very steep ascent the last few miles. A very fine view from the top looking back towards the sea. The plateau commences from the top and continues nearly level to Senafe, about two miles. Senafe consists of a few wretched hovels, collected under some immense rocks. A depot for stores and invalids is formed here, and it is one of, if not the most, important post on the line. Got in about 9.45 a.m., distance twelve miles. Went down to the hospital in the afternoon to see poor Bayly, who is dangerously ill with inflammation of the lungs, liver, and dysentery. Poor fellow, he was in very low spirits and much disappointed at not being able to go on with us. Very cold at night with a most biting easterly wind. Height above the sea, 6,500 ft."

On some days, progress was much better than others when terrain and the abundance of a fresh water supply was available. On 16th March, the brigade of the 45th Regiment marched 16 miles, reaching about a mile from Focada, where the road is cut along the side of a steep mountain. On the left it looks down upon a plain 1,200 ft below. The camp for the night was pitched on a grassy plain of some considerable extent. The following day, news reached the brigade that Bayly had died painlessly and unconsciously the day later and buried at Zoulla alongside a Colonel Dunn of



33rd Regiment of Foot who had accidentally shot himself 31st January 1868. Their graves at Zoulla are pictured here.

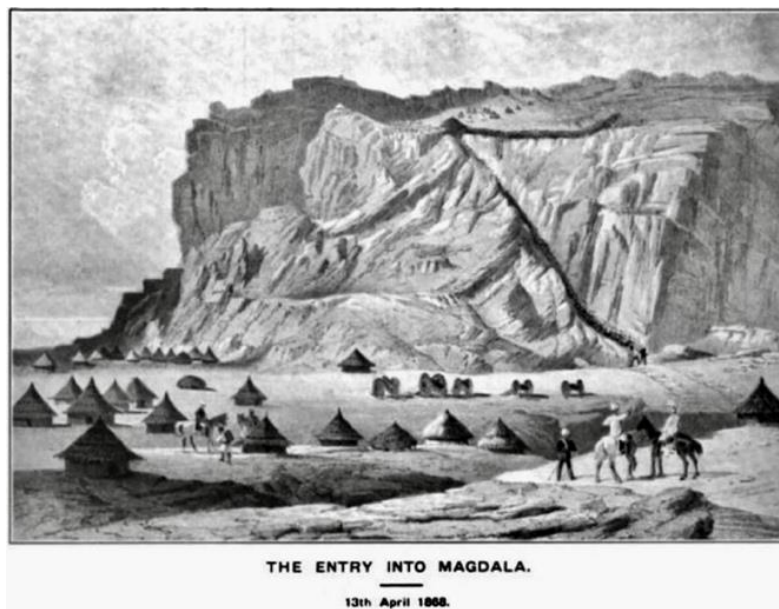
By April 9th, one month after leaving Zoulla, the 45th Regiment arrived at Magdala, the mountain top fortress of Theodorus Emperor of Abyssinia.

Magdala comprised three distinct hills or positions, called Fahla, Selassie and Magdala, placed almost in the shape of an equilateral triangle, of which Magdala is the apex, with Fahla at the western and Selassie at the eastern angle of the base, Magdala being south of both.

Looking at the whole position from Baba Talanta one can see but little of Magdala itself, as the slopes of the hills of Fahla and Selassie run down and hide it. Immediately behind the point where the slopes from Fahla and Selassie meet, the ground falls, a plain of no very great extent lies at the back, and Magdala then rises perpendicularly 300 ft.

The forces now available to Sir Robert Napier at Magdala were two brigades as follows:

1st Brigade: 12th Bengal Cavalry, Scinde Horse, Penn's Mountain Train; Bombay Sappers; Naval Brigade; 4th King's Own; 23rd Punjabis (Pioneers); 1st Beloochees. 2nd Brigade: 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry; Murray's Battery, Armstrong Guns; Twigg's Mountain Train; Mortar Battery: 33rd Duke of Wellington's Regiment; 45th Nottinghamshire Regiment; 10th Bombay N.I.; Madras Sappers.



On 12th April 1868, all the prisoners, with the exception of the Frenchman named Bardell, were released by Theodore. It was rumoured that Theodore had been blind drunk the night before and could not decide what to do, faced by the overwhelming force set out before his fortress. At first, he allowed the prisoners to leave, then ordered them back, but then changed his mind again allowing them to leave. The prisoners reported that he was unlikely to surrender and would fight to the last. Another message was sent by Sir Robert Napier giving Theodore until the night to decide, and that if he did not surrender, Magdala would be taken by force the next day.

From this point, the account of the actions of the 45th Regiment is taken up by John Gage himself.

In a letter written to his brother Marcus, published in The Tyrone Constitution, John recounts the 45th Regiments actions from 13th April.

"Magdala, April 17, 1868

At last I have time and opportunity to write you a letter, and in ink, I have not heard from home since we left Zoulla. The postal arrangements are so uncertain here that it is a wonder any one ever gets a letter, and as for newspapers, they come torn to fragments. On the 13h of April we (the 45th Regiment) reached the Commander-in-Chief camp with some 300 men. He was earnestly expecting us, as he wanted English infantry.

On the 14th we moved on to the River Bashio, preceded by the First Brigade, who advanced from the river towards Magdala and of course all sorts of stories were lying as to what Theodore meant to do. He had made a good road from the river to Magdala, entirely commanded by his guns. But the First Brigade climbed the hills to the right, and about three o'clock he opened fire. Then, of course, the excitement in our camp (from which we could not see what was going on) became intense.

We were served out some food and marched at eleven o'clock by moonlight, expecting every moment to have a round shot sent in among us. But we reached the camp of the First Brigade without interruption and lay down in line facing Magdala. We could see the enemy's fires in thousands. The heights are immense, and all detached, forming each a perfect fort in itself.

At daybreak we fell in, expecting every moment an attack, and heard the news that the enemy, having only seen the baggage of the First Brigade, had attacked it. Rushing on like a wave, some 5,000 strong, over the height, but driven back by the Punjabee prowess, they rallied again and came on, when the Fourth and the mountain batteries opened on them. The enemy suffered most awfully, and being literally blown to pieces, losing in about one hour more than 500 men, an awful example, and, as it proved, most useful to us the next day.

Theodore then sent in for terms and the chief replied, 'unconditional surrender, and to give up Magdala and all the prisoners.' This his pride would not allow him to listen to; so we passed another most uncomfortable night, lying down under arms (this was Saturday, the first brush being on Good Friday). On Sunday morning he sent in to our camp all the prisoners except Mr Flad, who was afterwards sent in during the day. He also sent a large present of cattle, which was sent back, and on Monday the 13th, at 8 o'clock, we were ordered to advance, and, as the 1st brigade had done the work on Friday, the 2nd brigade led, the 33rd Regiment in the vau (valley), we (the 45th) following,



expecting every moment to be attacked, but we were not, and in two hours we planted the Queen's colour of "The Sherwood Foresters" on Salasse, with a splendid view of Magdala right opposite us.

The watercolour (left) depicts the attack on the Kaffir Bir gateway by the 10th Company, Royal Engineers, supported by 'K' Company, Madras Sappers and Miners, and the 33rd (The Duke of Wellington's) Regiment. The capture and destruction of Magdala was the final act in the expedition to defeat the Emperor Tewodros II (or King Theodore) of Abyssinia and release the British hostages he had taken.

Here we heard Theodore had shot himself, but in about an hour we heard him firing on some natives (Gallawallas), who were attacking him. Our rockets and gun batteries then opened fire on Magdala, and, under cover of their guns, we advanced to storm the place, the 33rd leading, and the 45th in support.

Theodore defended the first gate for about an hour. It was an awfully strong place, and the great wonder is how we escaped. We had only eight men wounded. The 33rd and the Sappers at last broke down the gate and we all rushed up. There were about 20 men lying dead inside the gateway-nearly all the few chiefs who stood by Theodore to the last-and about ten yards farther on, the once great Theodore lay on his back with a bullet through his head. The body was taken up and carried into the fort, and our mission was accomplished.

We slept in Magdala that night, having nothing to eat but for some fowl we hunted up and roasted at the watch fires, and next day we marched out to Sallasse, to destroy arms etc. Little or no loot was got, and what there was was sold by auction for the common benefit. We are to move down to Dolenta, where the chief is to review all the troops, and then down country again.

Our regiment behaved splendidly, although we had little or no fighting. They were as steady as a rock, and the chief highly pleased with them. I have not seen a paper or any news for an age. We are all, thank God, well and in high spirits, glad it is over, and only about thirty men and one officer (Captain Roberts, of the 4th) wounded, none killed; and yet there we are some 400 miles in an unknown country, and England's honour and flag gloriously up-held.

I will write soon again. We have had no meat for three days, and have not changed our clothes for a week, our kit having gone astray, you may imagine how clean we are. However, we are all well, fit for anything and in good working order."

General Sir Robert Napier wrote of the services of the 45th Regiment during the Abyssinian Expedition:

" The 45th Regiment, commanded by Lieut. - Colonel Parish, arrived at Zoulla early in February , and remained there employed on the railway and other works until the 19th of March , when at length the obstacles to their advance being overcome , the head - quarters and six companies , making most strenuous efforts to reach the front , arrived at Dalanta in time to share in the operations against Magdala , after having marched 300 miles in 24 days , accomplishing the last 70 miles across the Wandach Pass 10,500 feet high and the Taccassi and Jeddah ravines in four days , a rate of marching in such a country hardly to be surpassed . Four companies being urgently required were detained at Koomeylee until late in March, when they were sent to garrison Addijerat and Antaloo. "

The bad food and water and the insanitary conditions found in Magdala were not without their effect on the troops. On 20th April, Sergeant Jones and Private McCormick of the 45th regiment both died of disease in camp. The total losses of the 45th for the expedition were one officer and eight other ranks died from disease, with no casualties from battle.

By 21st April, what was left of the articles of value taken in Magdala by the 45th was disposed of by auction. On the afternoon of the same day, the men of the 45th regiment began their long march back to Zoulla on the coast. Upon arrival at Zoulla the regiment embarked for Bombay. In the S.S. "Indore" on 22nd May, 7 officers, 290 non-commissioned officers and men and 25 followers. In the Sailing Ship "City of Manchester" on 29th May, 22 officers including John Gage, 308 non-commissioned officers and men and 54 followers.

On 12th June 1868, the 45th Regiment arrived back in Bombay from Abyssinia, having departed from India only 6 months earlier. Arriving at Bombay, the regiment had orders waiting for them, to proceed directly to Madras. The regiment arrived 28th June and disembarked the next day, proceeding to its new quarters in Fort St. George, played in by the band of the 3rd Bn. 60th Rifles which it was relieving. Here in Madras, the regiment settled down for three and a half uneventful years, the ordinary routine of military life in a presidential town in India at this time.



Newly Married Mr & Mrs John Gage Poona 1871

On 8th March 1871, John married Catherine Elizabeth Bell, daughter of Colonel H W B Bell Royal Engineers, at St Paul's Church Poona. By November, however, it seems that John was suffering from an illness that needed rest and possibly treatment back in England. Having served almost seven years in India and North Africa, John had been ordered back to England to appear before a medical board. Appearing before an army medical board, typically meant that a panel of military medical officers would evaluate the soldiers physical and mental fitness for service.

Returning with her new husband, the by then pregnant Catherine Gage, gave birth to a daughter Annie Isabel 13th December 1871 at Desart Rectory, Garvagh, Ireland.

Having passed his medical board, John and Catherine returned to India. In January 1872, the 45th Regiment left Madras and embarked for Burma, the Right Wing and Headquarters under Major Griffin being sent up country to Thayetmyo, while the Left Wing under Major Close proceeded to Tonghoo. During its stay in Burma the regiment suffered a great deal from sickness, especially the wing at Tonghoo, which lost many non-commissioned officers and men, and three officers to Cholera.

Having returned to Ireland, on 13th November 1872 Catherine gave birth to the couples second child, a daughter Kathleen Mary. In November 1873, John was promoted to Captain, without purchase. In January 1874, both wings of the 45th Regiment were united at Rangoon, although " G " Company, under Captain Gage, with Lieutenants Hume and Hudson, was still on detachment in the Andaman Islands.

The Andaman Islands were a group of 200 Islands in the Indian Ocean that lay between India and Burma. In 1789, the Bengal Presidency established a naval base and penal colony on Chatham Island in the southeast bay of Great Andaman. The settlement is now known as Port Blair (after the Bombay Marine Lieutenant Archibald Blair who founded it).

Early in 1875 the 45th Regiment left Burma for India, disembarking at Madras on the morning of 23rd February, at a strength of 9 Officers, 18 Sergeants, 16 Corporals, 4 Drummers, 347 Privates, 61 women and 140 children. The wing spent the night of 23rd and 24th in camp at Fort George and then left the next morning by special train for Bangalore. The regiment was now to be stationed at Bangalore, where " G " Company from the Andaman's was already established, having arrived in the previous month under Captain Gage .

Returning to India in 1875, Catherine Gage died 24th May 1875 at Bangalore, aged just 27 years old.

On the 1st January 1877, the whole garrison of Bangalore paraded at midday to attend the proclamation of Her Majesty Queen Victoria as Empress of India. The proclamation having been read by Mr. Gordon, the Acting - Commissioner of Mysore, a salute of one hundred and one guns was fired by the artillery and a feu de joie (Rifle Salute) by the infantry, followed by three cheers for Her Majesty.

During 1877, a famine devastated the Madras Presidency and was especially bad in the neighbourhood of Bangalore. The outbreak of cholera which followed caused many deaths among the native population, the troops, however, seemed immune, with not a single case occurring in the 45th Regiment . On 1st May 1877, the strength of the Regiment stood at 20 Officers, 45 Sergeants, 40 Corporals, 17 Drummers, and 713 Privates.

In early July, the regiment was ordered to hold itself in readiness to embark for England during the next trooping season. Any man wishing to remain on in India, and who had still not less than three years to serve, were permitted to volunteer for other corps, and as a result some two hundred men did not leave India with the regiment but were distributed among thirty-two different units. L

The 45th Regiment left Bangalore by half battalions on the 4th and 5th February, and finally embarked at Bombay on the 14th February 1878 in H.M.'s Troopship "Euphrates" at a strength of 20 Officers , 39 Sergeants , 31 Corporals , 16 Drummers and 515 Privates ; the officers who embarked being : Majors H. B. Hayward and T. E. Adams , Captains R. H. Dillon , J. J. Martin , J. E. Baines , J. O.

Gage , H. Lambard , A. Wright and J. McCleverty ; Lieut. . G. H. Fort, E. C. Dowse, G. A. Jones (adjutant), H. E. Nield, W. B. Coney, A. D. Bulpett, J. H. B. Todd - Thornton and N. L. Pearse, Sub. - Lieuts. P. H. Dalbiac and J. C. Swann, and Quartermaster M. Higgins.



During its tour of Indian service, a period of thirteen and a half years, the 45th Regiment had lost by disease 10 officers and 262 non-commissioned officers and men. At the time when the 45th arrived in England both battalions of the 17th Foot were abroad, and their new barracks at Leicester having not yet been erected, the triple depot was accommodated with the 45th in barracks at Shorncliffe Kent.

On returning from India with his regiment, John Gage was appointed Adjutant to the Londonderry Light Infantry in Ireland, a position he held for two years. John finally retired from the army in April 1880, after completing 19 years service. In the same month, John was appointed a Magistrate, and

in July 1882 the Lord Lieutenant Duke of Marlborough appointed John Resident Magistrate for County Mayo. In February 1884, John was appointed Resident Magistrate for Londonderry.

Between 1880 and 1894 John Gage remained in Ireland becoming a well-respected Resident Magistrate and member of the communities he served. In January 1894, the Northern Whig published the following article referring to John's transfer from Coleraine to Outerard Galway: -

"At the Ballycastle Petty Sessions yesterday, Mr. John Casement, J.P. (chairman), read the following resolution, which had been unanimously adopted by the Court: -"That we, the magistrates assembled at Ballycastle Petty Sessions, at this our first meeting since the transfer of Captain John Olphert Gage from the district, beg to express regret at his removal, as we have always found him most courteous and obliging, and we were at all times very glad to avail ourselves of his valuable advice and assistance. Mr. Stott said, as the only representative of the legal profession present, that

he had the utmost pleasure in endorsing the opinion of the magistrates with regard to Captain Gage. He had ever found that gentleman most courteous and kind, and in every way anxious to facilitate the business of the Court and of the solicitors who had the pleasure of appearing before him."

On March 7th 1894, John married a Wilhelmina Mary Osbourne, the second daughter of a Mr W Osbourne. The couple were married at St Paul's Church, Birmingham, Worcestershire.

In response to the kind words from the Ballycastle Petty Sessions, John replied in a letter he wrote 10th April 1894: -

"Outerard, County Galway,

10th April 1894

Absence from my station on duty has unavoidably delayed my reply, and the conveyance of my sincere and heartfelt thanks to my many kind friends in not only Coleraine, but the neighbourhood

in general, for their flattering address, and the gift of the beautiful album, in which the former is engraved. It will indeed be long before I forget my friends I made and left behind me in my own County and Antrim or cease to regret my unavoidable separation from them. The gift you have so generously sent me will be valued and cherished as it deserves, and on every occasion on which I look at its pages will be recalled to my memory the valued friends who have signed the presentation to one so unworthy as myself. Will you convey my thanks to the subscribers and assure them of my never-ending esteem and regard,

Believe me, with best wishes,

sincerely yours,

JOHN O GAGE R.M."

In June 1894, John was promoted to a First-Class Magistrate.

In January 1897, John's mother Anne Gage died aged 84, and interred at the Coleraine Cemetery. Sometime later that year, John returned to Birmingham, Worcestershire, for treatment of a long-standing painful illness. Despite his treatment, John died 24th December 1897. He was buried at Yardley Cemetery in Birmingham.

The Derry Journal carried the following obituary: -

"The death is announced of Captain John Olphert Gage, R. M., after a painful illness, at Birmingham.

Mr. Gage, a member of an old and esteemed county Derry family, was associated during part of his official career with Derry and the neighbouring county of Donegal. He had already distinguished himself as a military officer in the Sherwood Foresters, or 45th regiment, before receiving his civil appointment. He was present at the taking of Magdala, receiving the Abyssinian medal. In the famous operation the storming of "the mighty rock of Magdala," the 45th Regiment was assigned the position of second danger, being the supporting regiment of the 33rd Regiment, which led the storming. In 1880 Captain Gage received from the late Duke of Marlborough the appointment of Resident Magistrate. He was the son of the late Rev. Robert Gage, the former rector of Kilrea. Captain Gage's brother is the well-known Mr. Baillie Gage, solicitor to the Post Office."

Researched and written by Gary Hynard 2025