

Lieutenant Colonel Charles John Wyndham CBE 1844-1930

Commanding Officer 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles - CBE - JP



Captain Charles John Wyndham circa 1878 Poona India

Charles John Wyndham was born 14th June 1844 at Rogate, Sussex, the fourth son of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Wyndham 1796-1866 and his wife Elizabeth Anne Wyndham (nee Hepburne-Scott) 1803-1873.

Charles's father was a career Soldier, who joined the 10th Regiment of Dragoons in 1813. Following service in the Peninsular War, he was promoted to Lieutenant May 1815 and served in the Battle of Waterloo with the 2nd Regiment of Dragoons. In June 1819, he was promoted to Captain and then Major in December 1826. In 1836, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel when he took over command of the Scots Greys. He resigned his commission in 1841. In 1852, he was appointed as the Master of the Jewel Office at the Tower of London and in 1852 the Deputy Lieutenant of Sussex, a position he held until his death in 1866.

One of five children born to the couple between 1836 and 1847, Charles John Wyndham grew up in Sussex, before being educated at Eton 1857-1862. In 1864, Charles passed the entrance examinations for the Royal Military College at Sandhurst.

On successfully completing his training at Sandhurst in May 1865, Charles joined the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot as Ensign without purchase, the regimental depot companies stationed in Ireland at this time.

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.

In January 1866, the regiment that had been in England for four years returned to Ireland, and was distributed Headquarters at the Curragh Barracks Kildare, three companies in Armagh, one company in Monaghan, two companies in Sligo and two companies in Boyle.

In March 1867, the depot companies of the 83rd Regiment were moved to Colchester, and on 6th April the regiment embarked at Kingstown Ireland, and conveyed by the troopship "Himalaya" to Gibraltar, where it would relieve the 86th Regiment in the Casemate Barracks. On board that day, were 33 officers, 700 men, 66 women and 71 children.

Britain had taken control of Gibraltar in the 1713 and thereafter had retained a military presence there. During the Napoleonic Wars, Gibraltar had become an important base for the Royal Navy.



Charles Hay Tollemache circa 1864

Designated as one of four British fortresses (together with Halifax, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, and Malta). During the 18th century, the peacetime military garrison in Gibraltar fluctuated between 1,100 and 5,000 troops at any one time.

Within weeks of arriving in Gibraltar, Lieutenant Charles Hay Tollemache of the 83rd Regiment became ill and died 23rd April 1867, he was aged just 24. The eldest son of Royal Navy Commander Wilbraham Francis Tollemache, Charles had died of what the newspapers reported as inflammation of the lungs, contributed to by the cramped and poor sanitary conditions of army barracks in Gibraltar at the time.

As a result of Lieutenant Tollemache's death, Charles Wyndham was promoted to Lieutenant without purchase 23rd April 1867.

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. Those wealthy enough to afford a commission, typically joined a regiment as an Ensign, the lowest ranked officer. The cost of an ensigncy in 1866 was £450, which is the equivalent to £60,000 today. Having joined a regiment, officers could buy a promotion as and when more senior positions became available.

The army did make exceptions for officers showing great promise or particularly good service, and in such circumstances, promotions could be granted "without purchase."

On 10th May 1867, the Honourable Lady Airey presented new colours to the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot, handing the Queen's Colour to Lieutenant Wyndham and the Regimental Colour to Ensign Metcalfe (both pictured below).



83rd Reg Guardhouse Gibraltar 1868



2nd Europa Battery Gibraltar 1868

In 1853, the British army had created a School of Musketry at Hythe, 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.

In February 1869, Charles Wyndham was appointed Instructor of Musketry for the 83rd Regiment. In the same year, The Broad Arrow newspaper reported:

"By the annual Musketry Return for season 1868/69 we see that the 83rd Regiment still holds its position as best shooting regiment in the army.

The best judges of distance among the officers are reported to be Lieutenant Wyndham, Cartwright, and Metcalfe."



Charles J Wyndham



George E S Cartwright



Booth H Metcalfe

By March 1870, the 83rd Regiment had been garrisoned at Gibraltar for almost three years. On 11th March, the regiment embarked on the troopship "Tamar" and proceeded to Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. From there they were transported by railway to the port of Suez on the Red Sea, and on 25th March embarked on the troopship "Euphrates" for onward transport to India. Arriving at Bombay 8th April 1870, the regiment travelled to Poona, where it would be quartered in Wanourie Barracks.

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 in the 19th century. 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.

Poona's military significance, however, extended beyond its logistical role. It was also a site of political and social importance. It was here that key military events, such as the rebellion of 1857 (known as the First War of Indian Independence), played out. While Poona itself was not the site of large-scale battles, the cantonment area saw unrest and dissent among the sepoys (Indian soldiers) stationed there. The Poona cantonment witnessed mutinies, desertions, and a general atmosphere of discontent, which reflected broader discontent in the Indian army that eventually culminated in the 1857 revolt.

Poona played an important role in British colonial military strategy, highlighting the widespread nature of British military dominance and their use of strategic locations for garrisons. British officers in cantonments like Poona exercised significant control over the local populace and ensured that



their military dominance was firmly established in key areas. These cantonments were designed to support British control over the subcontinent, not only by housing soldiers but by shaping local economies, infrastructures, and communities around military needs.

In June 1870, Charles Wyndham aged 26 was promoted to Captain by purchase.

Charles Wyndham (centre front) with officers from the 83rd Regiment stationed in Poona India 1871.

In 1873, Charles was granted 6 months leave to return to England on “private affairs”. The term “private affairs” was often used as a euphemism for sick leave, hiding the fact that many officers needed to return home for treatment or to recover from illness.

In the 1870s, the health of the British Army in India faced significant challenges. The subcontinent's harsh climate, 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.

By 1875, Charles who had not returned to India, was commanding the regiment's depot companies based in Ireland. During this year, the depot companies were moved from Newry to Fermoy where they were combined with the depot companies of the 86th regiment.

By June 1878, Charles had returned to India to rejoin the regiment and was appointed to officiate as Station Staff Officer at Hyderabad.

In February 1880, Charles sailed on the troopship "Juma" for England, and in May was reported to be in Belfast for two years duty. In June, however, Charles was granted three months leave of absence "for the benefit of his health."

In November 1880, the regiment still stationed in India was ordered to proceed to England, but in January was diverted to Natal in South Africa, where an outbreak of hostilities with the Boers would see the 83rd Regiment. On 15th January, the officers and 574 rank HMS Crocodile at Durban South Africa 15 month, Charles travelled regiment in South Plymouth on the HMS on active field service. regiment comprising 20 and file, embarked on Vingorla and landed at days later. In the same from Belfast to join the Africa, travelling from Danube.



In July 1881, the 83rd 1st Battalion Royal Irish Childers reforms, and at Wyndham was After spending much of on rear-area labouring Royal Irish Rifles, 17 returned to England in January 1882.

Regiment became the Rifles under the the same time Charles promoted to Major. its time in South Africa duties, the 1st Battalion officers and 498 men aboard the HMS Tamar

Charles J Wyndham – Dublin circa 1866

In November 1882, Charles was married to Laura Sophia Wodehouse, daughter of the late Rev. Alfred Wodehouse, at St Peter's Church in Eaton Square London.

In February 1889, Charles was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and took command of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. At this time, Charles was one of only three officers commanding an Infantry Battalion of less service than Colonel in the British Army. Having spent some time in Egypt in 1889-90 the 2nd Battalion embarked at Alexandria in March 1891 for Malta. By November 1891, Charles was back in Ireland, and in January 1893 he retired from the army.

In retirement Charles became involved in local politics, becoming a member of the Midhurst Rural District Council and West Sussex County Council. Charles also became a Justice of the Peace and sat on the Midhurst Magisterial Bench for thirty years.

Laura Sophia Wyndham died 29th August 1904 aged 57 years, the couple had been married 22 years.

Despite having no children, Charles was a Governor of Midhurst College and also Bishop Otters College. Charles also worked as a Director for Sussex of the British Red Cross from 1910-1930.

In 1918, Charles was awarded a CBE for his work with the Red Cross.

Charles Wyndham died 1st May 1930 after a long illness at his home Hatfield Lodge, Midhurst, West Sussex, he was 85 years old.

A handwritten signature of C. J. Wyndham in black ink on a light background.

