

Lieutenant Colonel Edward Arthur Butler 1843-1916

83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot - Royal Irish Rifles - Ornithologist



Ensign Edward Arthur Butler - Leamington Spa circa 1865 aged 22

Edward Arthur Butler born 3rd July 1843 in Marylebone, Westminster, London, the son of the Right Honourable Charles Lennox Butler 1813-1885 and Eliza Butler (nee Holland) 1813-1866. Edward's father Charles was born in County Clare, Ireland, in 1813, the son of James Butler 1780-1850, 13th Baron of Dunboyne.

After being educated at Eton, Edward joined the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot as Ensign by purchase in March 1864. Having spent some time with the regiment posted at various locations throughout England, the 83rd Regiment embarked at Liverpool in January 1866 for transport to Ireland.

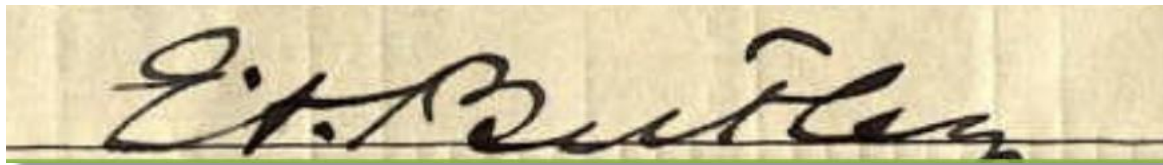
In March 1867, the depot companies of the 83rd Regiment were moved from Dublin to Colchester in England. In April, the regiment embarked the troopship "Himalaya" at Kingstown, Ireland, from where it was transported to Gibraltar. Replacing the 86th Regiment, the 83rd Regiment would spend the next three years on garrison duty at Gibraltar. On board the "Himalaya" that day, were 33 officers and 700 men making up the regiment, plus 66 women and 71 children family members. On 17th April 1867 Edward was promoted to Lieutenant by purchase.

Britain had taken control of Gibraltar in 1713 and thereafter had kept a military presence garrisoned there. During the Napoleonic Wars, Gibraltar had become an important base for the Royal Navy. Designated as one of four British fortresses (together with Halifax, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, and Malta). During the 19th century, the peacetime military garrison at Gibraltar fluctuated between 1,100 and 5,000 troops at any one time.

During their time garrisoned at Gibraltar, officers of the 83rd Regiment would have engaged in a variety of activities. Officers would socialise with one another and with the local civilian population, attending formal dinners, balls, receptions, and occasional outings to scenic spots at Gibraltar and in Spain.

Sports were also a common pastime, and the officers would have played games like cricket, tennis, or racquet sports, as well as participated in riding or hunting. Maintaining military readiness was another priority, so officers spent time leading drills and training exercises with their men, ensuring they were prepared for any potential conflict.

A keen ornithologist, the next three years garrisoned at Gibraltar, gave Edward the first opportunity for him to collect birds from abroad. During his time at Gibraltar, Edward also enjoyed the friendship of Howard Irby, a British ornithologist and fellow army officer, who specialised in the study of birds in southern Iberia.

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, textured background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'E. B. Hankey'.

Having served their time at Gibraltar, the 83rd Regiment commanded by Colonel A. B. Hankey, embarked the troopship “Tamar” 11th March 1870, and proceeded to Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. From Alexandria they travelled by train to Suez on the Red Sea and on 25th March embarked the troopship “Euphrates” for onward transport to India. Arriving at Bombay 8th April 1870, the regiment then proceeded to Poona where it was 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 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.

On 28th May 1870, Edward was promoted to Captain by purchase. Edward remained with regiment stationed at various locations throughout India for the next eleven years.

In May 1872, Edward married Clara Maria Francis, daughter of Colonel J T Francis Bombay Staff Corps. The marriage took place in the Mahableshwar Hills, southeast of Bombay. Over the next five

years the couple had three children, Arthur Lennox 1873-1939, Charles Edward 1874-1960, and Henry Francis 1877-1969, all born in India.



The Omani Owl - Strix Butleri

During his time in India, Edward continued his passion for ornithology and set about studying and cataloging the birds of the region. In 1879, Edward's work was published in a book entitled "A Catalogue of the Birds of Sind, Kathiawar, North Gujarat, and Mount Aboo". In 1880, the Bombay Gazetteer published Edward's "Catalogue of the Birds of the Southern Portion of the Bombay Presidency". Edward was also a keen bird collector and taxidermist, with much of his collection subsequently acquired by the Natural History Museum.

The Omani Owl, *Strix butleri* is named after Edward Butler, who collected the Holotype of this owl. Despite his interest in birds, Edward was not averse to taking part in pigeon shooting competitions and was a particularly good shot.

Towards the end of 1880, the 83rd Regiment was ordered back to England. In January 1881, however, the regiment was diverted to Natal in South Africa, where an outbreak of hostilities with the Boers would see the 83rd Regiment on active field service. In July, the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot became the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, under the Childers reforms.

While on active field service in South Africa, Edward was promoted to Major 1st July 1881. It was here that Edward met with two kindred spirits in Major H. W. Feilden and Capt. S. G. Reid. The three of them devoted as much time as they could to the study of the local avifauna and collaborated in publishing their notes in the "Zoologist."



83rd Regiment encampment The Transvaal 1881

After spending much of its time on rear-area labouring duties in South Africa, the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, 15 officers and 489 men, embarked on the troopship "Tamar" 23rd November 1881, arriving at Portsmouth 3rd January 1882.

On returning to England, the regiment was split between various locations, with a detachment sent to Canada to join the 2nd Battalion. In June 1882, the regiment took on the new rifle uniform. In September 1882, Edward took command of the Depot Companies of the regiment in Belfast.

On 18th April 1885, Edward retired from the army with the honorary rank of Lieutenant Colonel after twenty-one years service. By 1891, Edward was living in Suffolk at Herringfleet Hall with his wife and five servants.

In 1901, Edward and his wife had moved to a new home in Suffolk, Plumpton House at Whepstead. There they retained five servants, a butler, housekeeper/cook and three maids.

By 1911, the couple had moved once more and were living at Winsford Hall, Stokesby, nr Great Yarmouth. In 1912, Edward's wife Clara died 24th July and was buried at St Mary's Church, Thrigby, Norfolk.

Now living alone, Edward remained at Stokesby, until on 16th April 1916, when Edward's body was found in the garden by his butler.

News of the death of Edward Butler was reported in The Journal 22nd April 1916, under the heading "Tragic Death of Col. Butler":

"Considerable sensation was created throughout the villages of Stokesby and Runham on Sunday afternoon last, when it became known that Lieutenant-Colonel Butler, of Winsford Hall, near Stokesby, had been found dead in the grounds adjacent to the Hall. The sad discovery was made by Mr. H. Short, butler at the hall who came across the body of his master lying on the ground with his throat cut, a blood-stained razor lying close to the body, together with a bottle that had evidently contained carbolic acid. Medical aid was quickly sent for, and the body removed to the Hall, but on the arrival of Dr Royden from Flegg Burgh, he could only pronounce life extinct, death having taken place some time previously.

On Tuesday afternoon an inquest was held at Winsford Hall, before the County Coroner (Mr. H. R. Culley), on the body of Lieutenant Colonel Edward Arthur Butler, aged 72, formerly of the Royal Irish Rifles, who was found dead as above stated. Mr. C. W. Waters was Forman of the Jury.

The coroner, in opening the proceedings, said they were met under very sad circumstances for the purpose of inquiring into the death of Colonel Butler. It appeared that on Sunday last, he did not come into lunch as usual, whereupon his son requested the butler to go and search for him. He went into the garden and examined the shrubbery, with the result that he found the deceased lying under some trees.

He was quite dead and had a wound in the side of his neck. It would be for the jury to say, how he came by his death, whether through suicide or otherwise. It appeared that he had been in failing health in consequence of advancing years, and it would possibly be on this account that his mind gave way and under some sudden impulse he took his life.

Charles Edward Butler, son of the deceased said his father was a retired Lieutenant-Colonel of the Royal Irish Rifles and had lived at the Hall for the past eight years. He had not been ill, but his health was failing, as he became more infirm. Witness never heard him say that he was tired of life, nor that he had threatened to destroy himself. He last saw him alive on Sunday morning, when they had breakfast together. He told witness that he had had a very bad night, ate very little breakfast, and seemed to be very shaky. Lunch was at one o'clock, and as he failed to come in, witness became anxious and called the butler and together they went in search of him. He was on the point of returning to the Hall having failed to find him, when he met the butler who informed him that he had found the Colonel lying dead in the shrubbery. At first, he thought it must have been a stroke and sent a messenger for Dr. Royden. He was then told about the wound in the neck and the bottle of carbolic acid and came to the conclusion that he had committed suicide under a sudden impulse.

He thought it was simply ill-health and depression preying on his mind. He did not know of any other reason.

Ethel Esther Patrick, Kitchenmaid at the Hall. said on Sunday morning about 11.15 she heard deceased talking in the Smoke Room. She knew he was alone because his son was at church. He seemed to be talking very quickly and loudly, but as it was a habit of his she did not take much notice of it. He had been complaining about his head for a week or more.

Henry Short, butler at the Hall, said that he saw the deceased on Sunday morning, when he went from the dining room to the smoke room. Witness left the house about 10.30, and at that time deceased was still in the smoke room. He sounded the gong at lunch time, and deceased's son came in. After he had left the room, the bell rang, and he was informed that Col. Butler had not come into lunch. He was very punctual as a rule, so witness looked round the Hall, but could find no trace of him. After hearing the above evidence, the jury returned a verdict of "Suicide during temporary insanity."



Ensign Edward A Butler c1865



Major Edward A Butler c1882

An obituary published in the magazine "The Ibis" said of Edward, "Butler was an extremely good field-ornithologist, with a wonderful "eye for a bird," instantly recognising any species he had previously met with at the merest glimpse of it, and at almost any distance. He was a very keen sportsman, an untiring walker, and a capital shot. The many beautifully prepared bird-skins which he collected in his time remain in the Natural History Museum.

*A remarkably little-known owl, *Asio butleri* Hume, perpetuates his name in ornithology, but the Pipit, *Anthus butleri*, which Dr. Sharpe named after him, has since proved to be only the fully plumaged male of *Anthus chloris*.*

He married in 1872 Clara, second daughter of the late General J. T. Francis, Bombay Staff Corps. Her death in 1912 was a great blow to him, and after it he became somewhat of a recluse, busying himself with his garden and his collections, and going about very little. He leaves three sons—Arthur Lennox, until lately Superintendent of Game Preservation in the Sudan, who has inherited his father's interest in ornithology and has been a Member of the Union since 1899, Charles Edward, and Harry Francis".

Edward was buried with his wife Clara at St Mary's Church, Thrigby, Norfolk.