

Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Scrivener 1825-1883

Corps of Army Schoolmasters - 103rd Royal Bombay Fusiliers - Persia Expedition 1857

97th (The Earl of Ulsters) Regiment of Foot - 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot



Major Frederick Scrivener - 83rd Regiment of Foot - Poona India Circa 1872

Born 2nd September 1825 at Westminster, London, the son of Thomas Scrivener 1780-1831, and his wife Mary Scrivener (nee Shepperson) 1790-1852. James was the fifth child born to the couple between 1813 and 1829. Frederick's siblings were Mary 1813-1872, Thomas 1813-1850, Elizabeth 1817-1879, Henry 1823-1875, Alfred 1828-1898, and Edward 1829-1885.

After growing up in London, Frederick began training as a surveyor. By the end of 1846, Frederick had qualified and was working as a surveyor in London, aged 21 years.

In 1847, the army opened a new school, the Normal School at the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea. The new school's purpose was to train prospective army teachers, who when qualified would join the Corps of Army Schoolmasters, which had been established in 1846. The role of the Corps was to educate soldiers and their children, teaching them basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.

Over the next 40 years, both civilian and military personnel were eligible to apply for admission to the school. As time passed, however, it became increasingly difficult to attract suitable candidates, in part due to the demanding entrance qualifications and the rigorous course of training.

Another contributory factor, which not only deterred men from applying but which also encouraged them to seek alternative employment while studying, was their conditions of service. During the two-year course, candidates were expected to attend at least 45 hours a week training and study, for which they received no pay. This led to many of the candidates seeking other means to support themselves, such as providing private tuition.

The first course at the Normal School in March 1847, comprised 24 civilian students who had all responded to an advertisement in The Observer newspaper. The advertisement outlined the conditions under which *“30 unmarried civilian men between 19 and 25 years of age would be accepted for training.”* The advertisement stipulated that *“those applying were to be of irreproachable moral character good constitutions and not under the standard military height. The literary qualifications of candidates are that they shall read fluently, write good hands, be conversant with the principles and practice of arithmetic, be well grounded in sacred and profane history, and have received in other respects a plain but liberal education”*.

The Normal School register for the first intake in 1847, shows that the successful applicants had pursued a variety of different occupations. Some had been teachers, others clerks or tradesmen, one a partially qualified surgeon, another a surveyor, whilst one had formerly been a maker of philosophical instruments' (scientific instruments).

Of the 24 civilian students who began that first course, only 13 completed it satisfactorily. One withdrew to take up a commission and another to join the East India Company. Others simply proved unsatisfactory or dropped out. The fact that students received no pay during their two-year course was a further reason some of them left the course.

The first of the 13 students to complete their training at the newly created Normal School, was a former London surveyor, Frederick Scrivener, who enlisted with the Corps of Schoolmasters 4th April 1849, and whose first posting was as garrison schoolmaster at Preston.

Frederick served with the Corps of Army Schoolmasters for 13 years with various postings in England, Ireland and finally in India. By 1853, Frederick was working in the Bombay Presidency of India with the equivalent rank of Lieutenant.

A photograph of a document showing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "F Scrivener". To the right of the signature, the words "Signature of the Officer." are printed in a serif font. The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper.

In the same year, it was agreed that an improved system of instruction was needed at regimental and other schools attached to the European portion of the East India Company's troops, at the three Presidencies of Bombay, Bengal and Madras. As part of these improvements, it was proposed that each presidency should appoint a Superintendent of Army Schools to oversee the running of and standards at army schools.

By 1854, Frederick was the garrison schoolmaster at Poona and had been appointed Superintendent of the Army Schools for the Bombay Presidency. During the same year, Frederick qualified as a schoolmaster first class.

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 1857, Frederick was granted permission to join the British maritime expeditionary force sent to attack the Persian Gulf coast during the Anglo-Persian War. The war was fought over Afghanistan, which was a disputed buffer zone between the British, Russians, and Persians. Frederick's military records show that he was aboard the steamer "Feroze" and present at the bombardment and capture of Mohumrah.

The following is an extract taken from a letter from Acting Commodore J. W. Young, I.N., Commanding Persian Gulf Squadron, to Rear Admiral Sir Henry Leeke, K.H., R.N., Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Navy. Dated H. C. F. S. Feroze, of Mohumrah, 27th March 1857.

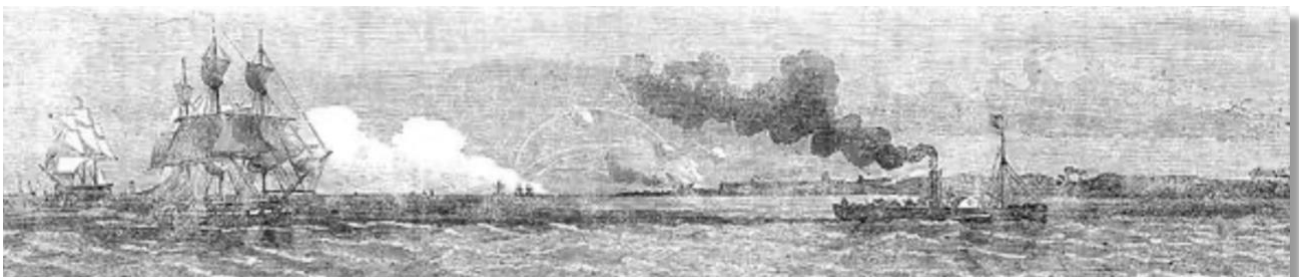
"At this period (7.45 A.M.) of the engagement, the Feroze, flying my pendant, hoisted the rendezvous flag at her masthead, which was repeated by the other vessels engaged, being the pre-concerted signal for the troop ships to advance.

This movement on the part of the vessels in question not being made with such celerity as could be desired, Commander Kennie, of the Feroze, volunteered to proceed through the fire to accelerate their advance, which was accomplished in admirable order, although at the time the fire from the batteries was far from being silenced.

From between 9 and 10 o'clock five heavy explosions in different parts of the fortifications indicated the overwhelming nature of the attack and led me to suppose that the resistance hitherto offered could not continue much longer. I was, therefore, anxious to have the troops landed as expeditiously as a due regard to their security would allow, so as a combined and simultaneous movement by the naval and military forces might be made with the certainty of a successful issue, and with this view passed up river until close to Jaber's Fort, where the debarkation was effected easily and without interruption.

After the batteries had ceased firing artillery, a fire from musketry was opened from them, as well as from breast-works in their vicinity, and maintained with great spirit for some time, when storming parties were landed from the Semiramis, Clive, Victoria, and Falkland, who drove before them the last of the enemy and took possession of their works and guns.

Considering the strength of the fortifications, both as regards position and construction, with the numerous garrison and large number of guns which could be brought to bare on the ships, in consequence to the closeness to the enemy's defences, which likewise were strengthened by breastworks, occupied by large bodies of small arm men, whose fire at times was annoying, I am thankful to say the casualties sustained by the squadron during the engagement, so far as I have yet ascertained, amount only to five killed and eighteen wounded"



The Persian Expedition - the "Abdulla" Transport, the "Feroze", "Punjaub", and "Assaye"... 1857

Following the capture of Mohumrah, the British Forces pursued the retreating Persian army 13,000 strong to the town of Ahvaz, where it was defeated by the British 1st April 1857. On returning to Mohumrah 4th April, the force learned that a treaty had been signed in Paris 4th March, and hostilities ceased.

Returning to India, Frederick once again took up his role as garrison schoolmaster at Poona and Superintendent of Army Schools Bombay. The "Poona Guide" for 1858, a publication containing maps and listings of the residents of Poona and their addresses, records that Frederick Scrivener was sharing Bungalow 89, 3rd European Lines, with a Mr C E Bullock of the Railway Department.

On 11th September 1858, Frederick married Emma Merrett, third daughter of George Merrett, a Civil Engineer and Surveyor at Byculla, Bombay.

Between July 1859 and October 1865, Frederick and Emma had 5 children, although only two survived into adulthood, Emma Merrett 1859-1938, Mary Brittain 1860-1861, Mary Elizabeth 1861-1936, Lucy 1862-1863, and Harriette 1865-1866. On 25th April 1860, Frederick attained the rank of Captain.

Having served 13 years with the Corps of Army Schoolmasters, Frederick accepted a commission with the 103rd Regiment of Foot (Royal Bombay Fusiliers). In August 1862, Frederick joined the 103rd Headquarters as Paymaster of the regiment based at Poona. Frederick's commission coincided with the formal transfer of the regiment into the British Army in July 1862, previously being known as the 1st Bombay (European) Fusiliers, a unit of the East India Company.

Within a few months of joining the 103rd Regiment, Frederick's wife gave birth to their fourth child Lucy, born 6th December 1862. A year earlier, the couple had lost their second born daughter, only weeks after Emma had given birth to the couples third child Mary. Lucy only survived 3 months and died 3rd March 1863.

In February 1863, the regiment left Poona for Bombay, a detachment of three companies sent to Sattara. In December 1863, the headquarters with five companies left Bombay en route for Neemuch, over 450 miles northeast of Bombay. Frederick remained with the headquarters at Neemuch throughout 1864, before moving to Mhow in 1865.

At Mhow, Emma gave birth to the couples fifth and final child Harriet, born 30th October 1865. In August 1866, however, Harriet died aged just 10 months old.

The health of the British Army in India at this time 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. The families of officers, although living in better accommodation, also faced significant health challenges. Particularly high infant mortality rates and a prevalence of disease created a constant source of anxiety and hardship for many of these families.

Frederick and Emma, experienced personal loss, three of their children not surviving past their first birthday.

In May 1866, Frederick transferred to the 97th (The Earl of Ulster's) Regiment of Foot, as Paymaster, perhaps in anticipation that the regiment would return to England in February 1867.

In February 1869, two years later, Frederick exchanged again, this time into the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment of Foot as Paymaster, and by April had joined their regimental headquarters in Mhow, where he had spent some time with the 103rd Regiment, four years before.

By September 1870, the 95th Regiment were back in England and replaced the 97th Regiment at Dover. It was also reported at this time that Frederick had passed his examination in Hindustani higher standard. Having returned to England with the 95th Regiment, Frederick was living at the new military barracks recently built at Alverstoke, Hampshire. In December 1871, Frederick exchanged once more, this time from 95th to the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot, at this time based in Poona, India.

Once again, Frederick made the return journey to India to join his new regiment as Paymaster, arriving at Bombay 27th February 1872 aboard the troopship "Crocodile". In August 1872, Frederick was promoted to Major.



83rd Regiment Officers Poona 1873 – Paymaster F Scrivener (Centre Row 2nd from Left)

Frederick remained with the 83rd Regiment in India for a further 6 years until in December 1878, when he was ordered to return to England to appear before a Medical Board who would assess his fitness for duty. By 1878, Frederick had spent over twenty years serving in India, and in common with many of the officers and men who had served there, his health had suffered.

The impact of both climatic conditions and widespread diseases, can be illustrated by one regiment's losses recorded in a single season. In 1869, the 103rd Regiment (Royal Bombay Fusiliers) garrisoned at Mora, Northern India, experienced an outbreak of cholera, which combined with heatstroke and other diseases, to result in the deaths of one officers' wife and child, fifty-one men, seventeen women, forty-two children and necessitated fifty-one men being invalided back to England.

In the Bombay Presidency between 1825-1845, the British army lost 288 European soldiers and 1,796 native soldiers to Cholera alone. In the Bengal and Madras Presidencies over the same period, the combined total deaths of soldiers from Cholera were over 13,000.

In November 1879, Frederick retired from the army on medical grounds. By 1881, Frederick, Emma and their daughter Mary were living at Augustine Villa, a property overlooking the sea, in Grange Road, Eastbourne, Sussex.

On 11th December 1883, Frederick died at his home in Reigate, aged 58. Frederick was buried at Reigate Cemetery 14th December 1883.