

William John White And his Family

(Part One)

Peter Conole

The subject of this piece did the hard yards in two of the most sternly contested wars the British army fought in India. He also went on to prosper, more or less, as an Enrolled Pensioner Force man in Western Australia and started a family service tradition that continued well into the 20th Century (1).

William John White was born at Whitcombe near Bath in Sussex on June 17, 1821. He normally signed his name as William White. His parents were John White and Anne Hatterton. William became a moulder by trade and moved north to Lancashire in his late teens. He enlisted as a private (no.1188) in the 10th Regiment of Foot at Burnley on November 1, 1839. A later record gives some physical details: height 5'6", hair brown, grey eyes, dark complexion (2).

The regiment, raised in 1685 by John Granville, Earl of Bath, boasted a long and notable history. Highlights included various battle honours for the War of the Grand Alliance (1688-1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713), the American Revolutionary War (1775-

1783) and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The regiment collected two nicknames – 'The Yeller Bellies' (because of their yellow uniform facings) and the 'Lincolnshire Poachers' – but had not been involved in major operations for decades. The 10th was sent to India in 1842 and based in the Bengal Presidency. William turned out to be good soldier. He was promoted to corporal on September 2, 1845 and received a Good Conduct badge (3).

Active service in the First Sikh War soon followed. During 1845 a couple of hard fought but far from conclusive victories made it necessary for the British field army under General Sir Hugh Gough to call for reinforcements. The 10th arrived at the front on January 6, 1846 and was included in the 7th Brigade of the army, which in turn formed part of the 3rd Division commanded by Sir Robert Dick. A month later the war ended after Gough led his forces to a crushing and bloody victory at Sohraon on February 10. The 10th Regiment had a rough time of it on the left flank but managed to take part in a counter-attack that decided the issue. The division's commanding officer was killed in the struggle (4).

In the aftermath of the Sikh surrender Corporal White took part in the march on the enemy capital, Lahore. The city opened its gates on February 19, although in deference to local feelings the British troops camped outside in the dusty, smelly

suburbs while diplomats did their work. A British garrison was later placed in the great citadel of Lahore and the 10th Regiment arrived to do its part in early 1847. The young Sikh ruler Dalip Singh visited them in their encampment on January 13 and distributed 2500 rupees to the troops as a welcome gesture (5).

William White, having impressed his officers, won promotion to sergeant on January 6, 1847, very soon after the regiment arrived in Lahore. Things took a turn for the worse for him not long afterwards. William got involved in an altercation with a commissioned officer – no less a man than the regimental adjutant – and was charged with using *‘improper language’*. A regimental court martial convicted him on June 24, 1847. Sergeant White was demoted to private, which meant reduced pay, and also forfeited his Good Conduct badge. He got it back exactly one year after his conviction, which implies William had *‘adjusted his attitude’* after the regrettable incident (6).

Another major conflict broke out with the Sikhs in 1848 and in its early stages operations focussed on the stronghold of Multan, south-west of Lahore. A mixed force of British and Indian troops (including not a few Sikhs) went south under General William Whish to attack the place. The 10th Regiment took part in what turned out to be a lengthy, bitter siege from September 4, 1848 that ended in Multan’s surrender on

January 2, 1849. According to the his War Office record William White distinguished himself throughout *“including fight of 9 September, storming of enemy entrenchments on 12 September 1848, and carrying the heights on 27 December and surrender of fort...”*(7).

Unfortunately, Private White ran out of luck less than a month later. Sir Hugh Gough and the main British army, for once adequately supplied with artillery, met and defeated the Sikhs at Gujrat on February 21, 1849. The victory brought the war to a close but also ended our subject’s time in active service. William was wounded in the left thigh by grapeshot during the 10th Regiment’s successful attack on a fortified village.

Harm was done to his hip joint and various aggravating health problems must have been issues by the time the 10th returned to Britain later in 1849. By then he had received some consoling awards valued by all soldiers. No medals were issued for the *‘Sikh Wars’*; the Army gave them other names. Soldier White will have been entitled to the Sutlej Medal with a clasp for Sobraon and the Punjab Medal with clasps for *‘Mooltan’* and *‘Goojerat’*. Back in England a medical board approved his discharge to pension at Chatham on August 13, 1850 (8).

William White drew his pension first at Coventry then later at Bath in the course of 1850. He married Caroline

Ponting at Bath in 1851. Their first son, Henry White (1851-1929), was born at Bristol in the same year. A second son, William John White the Younger, was also born at Bristol in 1853 (or 1852 – he died in 1931). It is possible that army veteran William plied his former vocation as a moulder in more than one city, for he received his pension at Oxford in 1853 and Coventry in 1854. Within a year he was accepted into the Enrolled Pensioner Force. William John White and his family arrived in Western Australia on the 'Adelaide' on July 18, 1855 (9)

According to Erickson and available family traditions the Whites first lived at the Pensioner Barracks in Perth (10). Things did not go well for them. Two more children were born in WA in the late 1850s but both died very young. Caroline herself died in Perth on February 5, 1861. EPF man White then married Alice Elizabeth Gardiner (1825-1908) on July 14, 1862. Alice was a fairly recent immigrant – she arrived on the 'Gloucester', April 20, 1860.

The couple had three additional children: John Samuel (1863-1957), Eliza Alice (1866-1929) and Emma (1871-1974, of whom more later). Eliza Alice married John Costello (1859-1929), who was himself the son of EPF man William Costello, formerly of the 31st Regiment of Foot and the Royal Canadian Rifles. The latter soldier and his family arrived on the 'Racehorse' in 1865 (11). Family history data generously

supplied by descendants of the couple has helped to resolve a problem or two.

The works of both Broomhall and James provide valuable information on the veteran's activities over the next few years. In 1863 William John White, stationed in the Perth District, was at some point assigned Military Pensioner Lot 114. He applied for title to the lot in 1865. In the meantime, as did so many pensioners, he subscribed to the Lancashire Relief Fund in February 1863 and the Greenough Fire Fund in January 1864. In 1874 his daily pension was increased to one shilling and threepence (12). As will be seen in Part Two he soon experienced difficulties that attracted some rather negative public attention.



Notes

- (1) The writer acknowledges the help of White family descendants for some genealogical aspects of this short series
- (2) GBM-WO 97-0321-103-001 and 003 (cited hence as WO 97 file).
- (3) WO 97 – folio 003
- (4) Fortescue, J.W. *A History of the British Army* (MacMillan and Co, London, 1927), Vol. 12, pp381-389; Whitburn, Bill *Bright Eyes of Danger. A History of the the Anglo-Sikh Wars 1845-1849* (Helion and Company LTD, West Midlands, 2015), pp168-172
- (5) Whitburn, pp186,189
- (6) WO 97 – folios 001 and 002
- (7) WO 97 – folio 001; Whitburn, pp206-209, Fortescue, p466
- (8) Joslin, L, Litherland, A.B and Simpkin, B.T. *British Battles and Medals* (Spink, London,1988), pp115-116;WO 97 – folio 003
- (9) Notes on William John White of the EPF and his family (first version); James, M.S. *A Superior Body of Men* (Author House, UK, 2016), p830
- (10) Erickson, R. *Dictionary of Western Australians, Vol.3. Free 1850-1868* (UWA Press, 1979), p897
- (11) Notes on William John White of the EPF and his family (first version), Broomhall, F.H. *The Veterans* (Hesperian Press,1983), B62; James, pp163-164
- (12) Broomhall, B295; James, p830



Obverse (top left) and reverse (top right) of the medal.

Ribbon: 32mm, dark blue with yellow stripes towards edges.

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William John White And his Family

(Part Two)

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Enrolled Pensioner Force man William John White, late of the 10th Regiment of Foot, met with misfortune in the late 1870s. He was arrested, tried and convicted of stealing firewood before a Justice of the Peace in Perth on August 2, 1877. The offence was obviously not a serious one, but he still received a two-month prison sentence. One month of that was remitted and, thankfully, he was not penalised by the military authorities. The Staff Office of Pensioners (at the time the senior man will have been Major E.D.Harvest) sent in a report recommending no further action be taken (1).

White probably did lose out because of the offence in another way - when the Enrolled Guard was formed on November 11, 1880. Despite his rather impressive war record he was not selected for that unit, which was tasked with guarding Government House and the Fremantle magazine and prison sites. However, on June 25, 1897 he was among the EPF surviving members who were given a banquet in St. George's Hall, Perth as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. William John White wore his Sutlej and Punjab campaigns medals for the event. He live on until April 12 1903, when he died at his Claremont home (2).

The veteran's second son William (John) White the Younger (born Bristol 1853 - see Part One, but note that he gave 1852 as his year of birth when he enlisted in the colonial police) developed good bush-life skills in the colony. There is a tradition that he played some kind of role in one of the notable WA exploration expeditions between 1869 and 1874. Unfortunately,

the most detailed listings of personnel involved in those hazardous adventures do not mention him (3).

William the Younger joined the police as a probationary constable in Perth in early 1875 and confirmed in office with the rank of 2nd Class Constable on December 23 of that year. During the celebrated escape of the Irish Fenian prisoners in 1876 he was sent from Perth to Fremantle with reinforcements on April 4. He searched the area around Rockingham that same evening - in vain, of course. William married Ellen Gregg in Perth during 1879 and received a transfer to Geraldton in the same year. He resigned from the police on November 30, 1881 (4).

The couple were back in Perth when their son William John White (the third) was born in 1881, then in Geraldton again during 1883 when Margaret Anne was born. The family thus lived around old Champion Bay again for work purposes. They were living in Perth by 1885 when Ellen gave birth to their next child, James Henry. The other named children were all born in Perth: Lilly Ellen (1887), Eva Constance (1888), Rose Bertha (1891)) and Charles Edward (born 1895).

There was a family tragedy in Perth in 1894 – William John White (the second) accidentally shot and killed his wife's niece in September 1894. Although completely exonerated by the inquest, William is understood to have never really recovered from the horrific incident. His brother Henry owned land at Wanneroo and William spent time there hunting game, one of the pastimes of bush life. William John White (the second) died on December 20, 1931 (5).

Among other White family members, his younger sister Emma (born on May 2, 1871 to William John White the Elder's second wife) is of particular interest because of her famously long life and an

interesting marriage. She wedded Robert William Allen in Perth in the 1890s. Robert was the son of yet another member of the Enrolled Pensioner Force, the former Royal Artillery sergeant and Crimean War veteran Arthur Allen. Both Emma and her father-in-law are pictured in this article.



Arthur Allen

Arthur Allen was born in Kent about 1829; he enlisted in the Royal Artillery on March 8, 1847 and served in the complex war with Russia which broke out in 1854. He received the Crimean Medal with a clasp for Sebastopol and the Turkish Crimea Medal. After the conflict he continued in the service and rose to the rank of sergeant in February 1867, only to fall foul of his superiors by way of a regimental court martial in the same year. As Diane Oldman reveals in her website on WA Crimean War veterans, no details of Allen's exact offences are available (6).

Allen was discharged to pension at Woolwich on April 20, 1869. Diane's research shows he was living at the Woolwich Dockyard, Kent at the time of the 1871 Census. He had married Elizabeth Sewell in the early 1850s. One

of their sons, Robert William Allen, was born at Dublin Castle on December 23, 1865 - his father was obviously on garrison duty there. Arthur Allen eventually joined the Enrolled Pensioner Force and arrived in Western Australia on the 'Naval Brigade', February 2, 1874.

He prospered to some degree in the colony, obtained property around the port town and became active in local military matters. According to a brief newspaper obituary he joined the Fremantle Naval Artillery (a militia unit) when it was established on February 11, 1879. He also emerged as a founding member of the Enrolled Guard when Governor Broome endorsed its creation on November 19, 1880. Arthur Allen was based in Fremantle but the press tribute indicates he eventually became inactive because of health issues. He is not on the list of Enrolled Guard members still serving in 1887 and passed away at North Fremantle on November 3, 1892 (7).

His son Robert William Allen died in 1937, quite some time after he and his family had moved to New South Wales. Robert's wife Emma lived on for decades, eventually achieving iconic status as a living link to our State's colonial era and the last poignant but honoured years of the Enrolled Pensioner Force (8).



Emma Allen on her 100th birthday

- (1)GBM WO 97-0321-103, folio 4
- (2) Broomhall, F. *The Veterans* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1989), pp77-79, 129-130 and B 295; Notes on William John White of the EPF and his family (first version)
- (3) Kimberly, W.B. *History of West Australia* (F.W.Niven, Melbourne and Ballarat, 1897), pp250-259
- (4) Police Record of Service of William White and family history notes (see Note 2 above); Bentley, M. *Grandfather was a Policeman* (Hesperian Press, WA, 1993), pp133, 115
- (5) Notes on William John White of the EPF and his family (first version)
- (6) For thorough coverage of Allen's life and career, see under his name in the index to Diane Oldman's site: crimean-war-veteranswa.com-veterans/index-a-c
- (7) Apart from Oldman see Broomhall (1989), B5-6 and James, 1879. For Allen's start with the Enrolled Guard, Broomhall (1989), p77. For his newspaper obituary: *Daily News*, November 4, 1892
- (8) *The Australian Women's Weekly*, June 2, 1971 - a report of Emma's 100th birthday celebration.