

## MEMORIALS

### “Shot by a fanatic” – Lt-Col Edward Henry Le Marchant, 1853-1899

Josephine Ronayne Mustoe

The memorial tablet for Lt-Col Edward Henry Le Marchant, with its distinctive and shocking text, “SHOT BY A FANATIC AT PESHAWUR”, is in the fifth bay of the Cathedral’s south nave aisle.<sup>1</sup> The story of the assassinated officer is of a dedicated Victorian professional soldier from a large church family who built his army career in Burma, India, England and Ireland.

Born at Somerleyton, Suffolk at the end of 1853, Edward Le Marchant was from a family of nine sisters and five brothers. He was the third child and second son.<sup>2</sup> Edward went to Shrewsbury with his older brother Guy but, at the age of 16 and behind with his school work, his father, Rev Robert Le Marchant, removed him and found a private tutor. Later, young Edward was sent to stay with a family at Twistringen, near Bremen, to learn German.



His father Robert was the rector of St Peter’s Church, Little Rissington, Gloucestershire for 52 years where there is also a memorial to Edward and his younger brother Louis who was also a professional soldier and killed in action at the beginning of World War I. Robert Le Marchant was born in Guernsey in 1819 and lived until 1915, dying aged 95.<sup>3</sup>

At 17, Edward joined the Royal South Gloucestershire Militia and three years later was appointed as an officer to the 41<sup>st</sup> (Welch) Regiment of Foot. He later transferred to the 67<sup>th</sup> (South Hampshire) Regiment of Foot which became one battalion of the Hampshire Regiment

<sup>1</sup> Major-General R. F. K. Goldsmith, *The Military Memorials of Winchester Cathedral*, Winchester: Friends of Winchester Cathedral, 1974, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> “Robert Le Marchant”, *Heritage Hub*, <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/records/D13099/3>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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in 1881. Edward was aware of his lack of academic prowess and the family's lack of money. Wealthy relatives financed his school fees and the equipment needed for much of his military career.<sup>4</sup>

He was posted with the regiment to Burma in 1875, and a year later to Madras, India. He limited his social life in Madras, and later Bangalore, partly from choice but mainly because of his lack of money. Regardless, he retained his capacity for self-deprecation and made pen sketches of life in India. His eye for amusing detail may have been the reason in 1878 that he became editor of *Our Chronicle*, the journal of the 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and soon realised that the paucity of contributions meant that he had to write most of the newspaper.<sup>5</sup>

In December 1878, as part of the 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Edward travelled to the North West Frontier to take part in the Second Afghan War which had its origins in the Great Game of intrigue played out between Britain and Russia for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On arrival in the Punjab city of Jhelum, north of Lahore, the regiment was fitted out with khaki clothing, first used in India in the 1850s when it was made by dying white clothing with coffee, curry powder or mulberry juice.<sup>6</sup> They then travelled to the head of the Kurram Valley by train and then marched 300 miles, but Edward saw no action although he and the regiment lived in a challenging environment that swung between severe cold at night and very hot days.<sup>7</sup>

The 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment had a long campaign in Afghanistan but soon after its return to Bangalore it became the 2nd Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, a change Edward regretted, writing: 'The Hampshire Regiment does not sound so well as the 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment,' for they had earned a good reputation in India as the 'Sixes and Sevens'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1879, Edward returned to England for a course at the School of Musketry at Hythe in Kent before returning to India in March 1880. He went on to serve at Cannanore (now Kurram) in

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Boyes, *Dying for Glory – The Adventurous Lives of Five Cotswold Brothers*, Chichester: Phillimore & Co, 2006, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> "Edward Henry Le Marchant", *Heritage Hub*, <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/records/D13099/5>

<sup>6</sup> Boyes, *Dying for Glory*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

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the southern state of Kerala for three years. The battalion then marched 550 miles north to its new posting at Secundapur, the twin city with Hyderabad in central India. Edward went to Burma again, this time as a captain. In 1885, he returned to England in a troopship in charge of 150 invalids, with his own health problems.<sup>9</sup> He recuperated at Little Rissington for over a year and was to spend the next 12 years living and working in Britain before returning to India.

In October 1892, aged 38, he married Mary Christie, the daughter of a prosperous Sussex family. Two years later they had a son, Edward Herbert. Edward senior spent three years as Inspector of Musketry, based in Dover, charged with improving the standard of infantry marksmanship across the army. He rejoined the Hampshires as second in command of the 2nd Battalion stationed at Birr Barracks in Co. Offaly, Ireland.

A year later he was given command of the 1st Battalion, The Hampshire Regiment based at Multan in India (now Pakistan) and the small family sailed there in 1897. Mary and their young son, however, returned to England the following year because of the fear of typhoid and the heat.

In October 1898 the 1st Battalion was posted once more to the North West Frontier as part of the Khyber Brigade. Under his command, the soldiers marched to Landi Kotal, Khyber Pass. When the general in command returned to Peshawar, Edward assumed temporary command. His career was, however, cut short by an assassin's bullet.

On 23 March 1899 while Edward was attending the District Assault at Arms, a regimental display, he was shot in the back by a ghazi, a Muslim fighter dedicated to killing enemies of Islam. He died within ten minutes. After the shooting, four men ran off pursued by soldiers. After being saved from being murdered by enraged soldiers, the assassin was hung the next morning and the other three were imprisoned for life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "Death of Lieutenant Colonel Edward H. Le Marchant, 1899", Royal Hampshire Regiment Museum, <https://www.royalhampshireregiment.org/about-the-museum/timeline/death-lieutenant-colonel-edward-h-le-marchant-1899/>; Also Boyes, *Dying for Glory*, p. 32, 34.

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Much-loved, Edward Le Marchant was buried with full military honours in Taikal Cemetery with the entire Peshawar garrison in attendance. The following year the memorial plaque was placed in Winchester Cathedral by members of the Hampshire Regiment.

The attack on Lt-Col Le Marchant was the third ghazi attack within a few weeks. It was followed a few days later by the murder of another member of the Hampshire Regiment.<sup>11</sup>

For the Le Marchant family the news that he was not the intended victim only heightened their loss. The ghazi's target had been the absent highest-in-command whose seat the unfortunate battalion commander occupied.

Tragically, Edward's only son was fatally wounded in action in 1916 while also serving as an officer in the Hampshire Regiment. His wife died in 1933.<sup>12</sup>

- Josephine Ronayne Mustoe is a Cathedral Guide, originally from Lancashire. She has been a Guide for six years.

### **Photos**

Lt-Col Edward Le Marchant's memorial tablet (Tom Watson)

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Edward Le Marchant", *Heritage Hub*, online.