

## **William Knight and Charles Porter – Victorian Soldiers from Wickhamford**

Two of the boys baptised in the Church of St John the Baptist in Wickhamford in the mid-Victorian period eventually joined the Army and went on to serve in distant parts of the British Empire, whilst most of their contemporaries probably never moved very far from the Vale of Evesham. Between them, William Knight and Charles Porter went to India, Burma, Malta, Egypt, South Africa, Ireland and Bermuda.

### **William Knight**

#### Family background

William Knight (senior) married Eliza Crane in Wickhamford church on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1868 and, soon afterwards, Eliza gave birth to a son. He was baptised in the same church on 25<sup>th</sup> October and named after his father, William. At the 1871 census the Knight family, now with another young son, George, were living in an old cottage near Wickhamford Manor. William senior was a farm labourer and Eliza was a gloveress. George Knight was baptised in Badsey Church on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1870 and another son, Charles Ernest, was baptised in Wickhamford on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1872. By 1881 the Knights had moved to Badsey and had five children – Sarah (bapt. Badsey, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1874) and Thomas Henry (b. 9<sup>th</sup> December 1878).

#### Army service

William Knight junior enlisted in the Rifle Brigade at Worcester on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1884, claiming an age of 18 years and two months, although he was still only just sixteen. He was sent to Winchester for his Attestation on the 17<sup>th</sup> and became a Private (No 7321) in the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own). He gave his occupation as gardener and other records give his father as William Knight of Badsey. His Army record gave his description – 5ft 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. tall, weighing 123 lb and with a chest measurement of 33 in. His complexion was 'fresh', his eyes hazel and hair light brown. It was also noted that he had a group of moles between his shoulder blades. It is disconcerting that these details were recorded in case his body needed identification at some stage.

William Knight enlisted for 12 years and joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. The Army records show where he was posted. He served in the U.K from 14<sup>th</sup> November 1884 until 20<sup>th</sup> February 1885 (99 days) and landed at Gibraltar on the 21<sup>st</sup> February – presumably his 'Home' posting continued aboard ship. He remained on the Rock or travelling back to England until 10<sup>th</sup> June 1886 (1 year, 110 days). His next period of Home posting was officially from 11<sup>th</sup> June 1886 until 18<sup>th</sup> October 1887 (130 days) when he arrived in Egypt. This posting was from 19<sup>th</sup> October 1887 until 1<sup>st</sup> August 1888 (287 days) when he disembarked in South Africa. He was to spend from 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1888 until 1<sup>st</sup> February 1889 (287 days) there and in transit to his next posting in India. He stayed in India from 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1889 until arriving back in England on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1892 (3 years, 20 days). The only record found of

where the Battalion was based in India gives the location in Knight's time there as Jullunder (1889-1892).

William Knight was awarded a Good Conduct badge on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1891, whilst in India. He never left the U.K. again, serving out his time from 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1892 until being discharged on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1896 (4 years, 265 days). Once in England he was transferred to the Army Reserve on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1892. Thus his service period came to exactly 12 years and he had seen many parts of the world that few from Wickhamford would see until the Great War. The only other snippet of information on his Army record sheets is mention of his level of education, noted on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1885. He was recorded as having a Certificate of Education 4<sup>th</sup> Class.





*Corporal W.E. Glover of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Rifle Brigade, whose Army service during the period from 1884 until 1892 was identical to that of Private William Knight. He is shown here alongside Lt Col The Honourable M. Curzon of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Glover was 4ft 9 in. and Curzon was 6ft 4 in.*

### Marriage and later life

William Knight married Rosa Jane Jinks (b. 1870) on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1893 and by the 1901 census they were living in South View Terrace, Badsey, and he was working as a market gardener. The couple had no children and by 1911 had moved to 97 Port Street, Bengeworth and William was still a market gardener. A man of his name was market gardening in Aldington on a little under two acres of land at Horsebridge Hill at the Valuation Survey of 1912. His address was given as 'Hazelville, Bengeworth and this may be same man.

No photographs of William or Rosa Jane Knight have been found, so far, but photographs of William Knight senior (1846-1934) and his son George do exist and are reproduced below.

	
<p><i>William Knight senior (1846-1934).</i></p> <p><i>In 1911 he lived at Asparago House, 31 Brewers Lane, Badsey and was a worker in market gardening.</i></p>	<p><i>George Knight (1870-1948).</i></p> <p><i>In 1901 he lived Silk Mill Cottages, Badsey and was a market gardener's labourer.</i></p>

Both William Knight and his wife Rosa Jane are interred in Bengeworth cemetery in Plot E37, but there is no monument. William's ashes were interred there 6<sup>th</sup> December

1954; he was aged 85. Rosa Jane Knight was buried on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1961 and she was aged 90. Rosa died in a hospital in Wells, Somerset and her home address was 28 Swiss Road, Weston-Super-Mare. William died in White Chimneys Hospital, Powick, but no home address was given in the records. This was then a hospital for the treatment of chronic depression and schizophrenia and it was closed in 1989.

## **Charles Porter**

### Background

Charles Porter was baptised in Wickhamford Church on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1874. He was the son of labourer John Porter and his wife, Eileen, *nee* Tustin, and by the 1881 census the family were living at Lower Murcott Farm. In 1891, seventeen-year-old Charles was a farm servant at Oldwell Farm, Murcott, but the following year he enlisted in the Worcestershire Regiment.

### Army service

Charles Porter was initially rejected for military service when he tried to enlist on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1892 because he was under weight. During the Summer he must have gained some weight – although he was still only just over 8stones - for he successfully passed his medical and enlisted (No 3307) on 18<sup>th</sup> August in the Worcestershire Regiment. He was only 5'4" tall, with a fresh complexion, blue eyes and brown hair and he initially signed up for a six-year engagement. He started his service with a Home posting that lasted until 15<sup>th</sup> February 1894 (1 year, 184 days). This was with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, who were based at the Curragh, Co. Kildare in Ireland. His next period of service is described as an East Indies posting. The length of time for this was counted from when he disembarked on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1894 until he arrived at his next posting on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1895 (1 year, 282 days). His whereabouts in the East are not recorded apart from his being in Rangoon, Burma on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1895. Whilst there must have been with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, who were in India at this time.

Private Charles Porter then served in Malta, again with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, from 15<sup>th</sup> November 1895 until 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1897 (3 years, 314 days). This posting period ended as he arrived in Bermuda, where he was to stay for nearly two years, until he landed back in the U.K. on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1899 (1 year 330 days). He was then transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Army Reserve (4 years 352 days) before being discharged from the Army on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1904, having served for almost exactly 12 years.

It seems unlikely that Charles Porter saw any action during his time in the Army, as Malta and Bermuda were quiet postings and Burma had been conquered by the British some years before his service there. The only other details on his Army record are that he received Good Conduct pay of one penny a day from 16<sup>th</sup> August 1894, lost it on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1895 and had the penny restored on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1896. On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1898 it was raised to tuppence !

## Later life

Meanwhile, the Porter family back in the Evesham area had moved to 'The Leys', Badsey, by the 1901 census. John was still an agricultural labourer and their other son, Alfred (19) was living at home. He later joined the Army in the Great War and his service record is related in the article "*Wickhamford Goes To War*".

Charles Porter's parents were still in Badsey in 1911, at "T.Cull's Cottages" on the Bretforton Road. The census form states that they had had two children and that both were still alive at that time. John and Eileen Porter were both on the Badsey Electoral Roll in 1924, back living at 'The Leys'.

Charles had emigrated to Bermuda before the Great War and, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1917, he applied to the American Consul in Hamilton, for a permit to travel through the USA to Canada to enlist in the Canadian Armed Services. This was granted on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1917.



*The photograph of Charles Porter on his application form for admittance to the United States in 1917.*

On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1918 he enlisted in the Canadian Army, aged 44 years and five months. Although he volunteered for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force (No. 2011058), it is unlikely that he was sent to Europe that late in the War. On his Attestation Paper he stated that he had spent 12 years in the 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Worcestershire Regiment. He was employed as a labourer, living in Montreal, and his wife was Sarah Jane Porter. His date of birth was given as 13<sup>th</sup> February 1874 (see also the article "*Wickhamford Goes To War*").

Sarah Jane Porter (nee Greig) and her daughters, Catherine (12) and Elsie (10), arrived in St John, Canada on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1919 and the family were reunited.

Sarah Jane died before Charles and he remarried at the Salvation Army Church in Montreal on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1948. His new wife was a widowed schoolteacher, Jessie Smyth, aged 64, who had been born in Glasgow, and Charles was 74 at the time. Charles Porter died on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1959, in Montreal.

### **Postscript**

One other boy from this period, baptised in Wickhamford (17<sup>th</sup> August 1877) and destined for the Army, was Thomas Smart Phillipps. A son of John and Annie Miriam Phillipps, who briefly rented Wickhamford Manor in the mid 1870s, he twice enlisted in the Worcestershire Regiment. He first joined up on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1893 (No 3759), stating that he was eighteen, but was actually only sixteen, and must have been discharged soon afterwards. He re-enlisted on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1895 (No 4221), in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Worcestershire Regt (a home-based Militia battalion), but was again discharged, after just over a year, on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1896. He probably had no overseas postings. (See also, the article on *The Phillipps Family of Wickhamford Manor*).

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thanks are due to Peter Stewart for the information on the burials of William and Rosa Jane Knight. Information on Charles Porter's later life in Canada was kindly supplied by Jacques Cyr of Quebec.

*Tom Locke – November 2014 (amended September 2015)*