

Clan Irving

The Border Irvings & Irvines

Colonel John Beaufin Irving (1844-1925)

Early Life

John Beaufin Irving, the third generation to carry the name, was born on 14th February 1844 at Cheltenham. He was baptized at Cheltenham on 20th March 1844 his baptismal extract showing parents as John Beaufin Irving(2nd) and Diana Charlotte. His father was born in 1810 at Philadelphia, USA, the son of John Beaufin Irving(1st) who was a successful businessman, owner of estates in Carolina and plantations in Jamaica. Irving family research indicates that the forename of Beaufin originated from the 1st aforementioned spouse's family (Motte) who had Huguenot origins. His mother was the third surviving daughter of Jonathan Williamson of Lakelands, County Dublin. They married 6th April 1843 at St. Mary's, Cheltenham. Diana Charlotte died in 1849 after giving birth to several children. She was succeeded in a second union on 12th July 1852 by Susan eldest daughter of the late Reverend Edmund Cronyn of Odogh Glebe, Co Kilkenny, Ireland. She died 20th December 1855 following the birth of two children, neither survived their parents.

He was educated privately and at Cheltenham College where he entered the military department in January 1856 aged 12 remaining there until June 1860. On 17th August 1860 he transferred to the Institution d'Bellerive and also to the Pension Sillig at Vevey in Switzerland. This transfer to schools in Switzerland was to improve his knowledge of European culture and to perfect his command of the French language. He afterwards returned to Cheltenham College until early 1862 after which he became a resident pupil of Walter Wren MA(Cantab)(1834/1898), founder and Principal of Wren's Collegiate Establishment for preparation of candidates for all competitive examinations. At this time his family had begun to apply for a direct commission for him in the British army infantry. Wren's Collegiate Establishment was what was then known as a "crammer" and a regular for sons of gentlemen requiring "additional tuition". His retention strongly suggests that John Beaufin Irving(3rd) was in need of improved focus should he want to succeed with this application for a commission.

The subject himself wrote to the military office in London dealing with direct commissions in January 1862 requesting that he be appointed to an examination. However, correspondence with the Military Secretary in London indicates that the application was not immediately straightforward despite excellent references from his educators. Incumbent on his application for a direct commission was that he should achieve good examination results. A letter dated 14th August 1863 indicates that he was eventually placed 64th out of 106 and an additional paper mentioned that he passed his examination in May 1863. Despite continuing to canvass for a direct commission during 1863, the military authority had offered an ensigncy in the 4th Regiment of Foot

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by purchase for the sum of £450. John Beaufin Irving(3rd) then wrote on 14th December 1863 acknowledging the offer to submit his name for the vacancy and confirming that his father had written to his banker's Herries, Farquar & Co, St. James' Street, Piccadilly requesting them to immediately pay the sum into the hands of Cox & Co, military pay agents in Pall Mall.

Army Service

John Beaufin Irving(3rd) was appointed ensign by purchase in the 4th Foot on 8th January 1864 in the place of Ensign Kemp who was promoted lieutenant. He remained with the regiment at home from this date until 21st July 1865 when he was posted to India embarking on the "Tyburnia on 25th July which arrived at Bombay in September following. An entry in the Evening Standard newspaper of 11th April 1867 indicates that he was sent home on sick leave suffering from fever and ague. He arrived at Plymouth sometime in April 1867 having embarked from Bombay on 24th December 1866 voyaging via Cape Town and St. Helena. After convalescence he remained in Britain until embarking from Portsmouth for Bombay per HMS "Serapis" in September 1867. He subsequently left India again to take part in the Abyssinian Expedition before returning to Britain. Precisely when this took place is unclear from the Military and civilian records held at the National Archives.

His career with the 4th of Foot was generally unremarkable save for his time in the British 1868 Abyssinian Expedition under the command of Sir Robert Napier. This punitive force was launched against Emperor Tewodros II, also known as Theodore who had imprisoned several missionaries and two representatives of the British government. The narrative of the expedition does not really belong in this biography, but the sheer magnitude of the force was such that a brief reference to it is made here

The 4th (The King's Own Royal) Regiment of Foot was part of a huge joint British and Indian force sent to unseat Theodore consisting 13,000 troops, 8,000 labourers, thousands of horses, hundreds of camels and even elephants (a total 36,000 animals in all). They were despatched from Bombay on the 21st December 1867. Travelling via Aden it required little more than two weeks to reach Annesley Bay on the East Coast of Africa. The invading force then took 10 weeks to reach the Fortress at Magdala. Rather than defend his fortress the Emperor decided to engage the British task force on the plains of Arogi before they had a chance to storm the fortification. This reckless decision cost the Emperor, who committed suicide, his army with the result that the combined British and Indian force continued up to Magdala to successfully take it and sack the fortress.

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The expeditionary force consisted one regiment of British cavalry and three of Indian mounted troops plus three British, one Scottish and nine Indian infantry regiments. Additionally, there was an Indian regiment of Indian artillery and two of sappers and miners

Expeditionary timeline:

August	Decision reached to send force to Abyssinia
21 st December	Force Leaves Bombay
21 st March	Expedition reaches Dildi 25 miles from Magdala
9 th April	Battle of Arogi
15 th April	Magdala stormed
18 th April	Fortress set alight
Mid-June	British Troops land at Portsmouth to a hero's welcome, the Expedition taking less than the year to achieve its objective – a remarkable achievement in both strategic planning and implementation for its day

Ensign John Beaufin Irving, of the 4th King's Own regiment, reportedly broke into the Fortress of Magdala single-handedly on the eve of the final battle. According to unsubstantiated regimental accounts, he emerged with "some sacred vessels and a manuscript". Apparently his family is reported to possess "various trophies of the campaign" although on investigation this is not substantiated.

According to *The King's Own Regiment: The Story of a Royal Regiment, Volume II 1814-1914*:

“After breakfast on April 11th, the first food they had had since the Thursday evening, parties were sent out to search for the wounded. It was then discovered that Ensign John Beaufin Irving, having heard that the original manuscript of the Gospels was preserved in the cathedral at Magdala, had in the darkness of the previous night crawled out of the camp towards the fortress. He was 6 feet 6 inches in height and without difficulty climbed the wall of the citadel, discovered the church, and carried off some sacred vessels and a manuscript in his knapsack. After he had dispatched his trophies by post to England, the escapade was discovered and reported to the Commander-in-Chief, who was so much enraged that he sent Ensign Irving back to base with a dispatch, intending thereby to ensure his absence from the assault upon the town which was to take place the next day.

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The Irving family tradition related that Ensign Irving, shrewdly guessing that the General would forget to order his retention at the base and sending a galloper ahead to order fresh horses at each stage, set off down the new military road, delivered the dispatch, obtained a receipt and a reply, and on fresh horses galloped back to Magdala, where he arrived in time to set out with the Battalion at 8am on the morning of Monday, April 13th. This story cannot be true for no man could have galloped from Magdala to Senafe and back in less than two days and nights. Possibly the dispatch was telegraphed from Dildi, to which place the line had been advanced. Ensign Irving was present when the Kings Own marched on to Magdala”

For his services in this campaign John Beaufin Irving was awarded the Abyssinia Medal 1867-1868.

The War Office Paylists indicate that the subject was mustered sick in Europe immediately after the rigours of India and East Africa. Despite this he was appointed lieutenant without purchase on 27th February 1869 in the place of Lieutenant Martin who retired. He remained with the 4th Foot until 27th June 1869 at which point he exchanged commissions and entered the Royal Military Train.

The history of this logistical corps between 1860 and 1880 was rather complex but the changes are important to understand as John Beaufin Irving felt compelled to make mention of them in 1877 when dealing with matters relating to his commission. The Royal Military Train was re-designated in 1856. In 1869 there followed a major reorganisation of army logistical responsibilities. Prior to 1869, supply duties had been the responsibility of the Commissariat, a uniformed civilian body. In 1869 the commissaries of the Commissariat and the officers of the Military Train amalgamated into the Control Department. In the year following the other ranks of the Military Train were re-designated the Army Service Corps (ASC), officered by the Control Department.

As can be seen elsewhere in this biography, John Beaufin Irving was firstly commissioned as an Ensign on 8th January 1864 by purchase. The sum paid was £450.00. He was later promoted Lieutenant without purchase and shortly afterwards exchanged commissions to leave the 4th Foot and join the Royal Military Train. This he did in June 1869. His lieutenancy was however then relinquished as on 12th February 1870 when he was made Assistant Commissary by which time the Royal Military Train had been reformed as the Commissariat & Transport Department. The Commissariat & Transport Department was effectively run by civilians but very much still subject to military law. He was made Deputy Commissary on 27th October 1877, which position was ranked with that of Captain in the Army, and he retired compulsorily from the Department on 1st October 1878.

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On 12th January 1877 prior to leaving the corps John Beaufin Irving wrote at some length to the Officer Commanding, Army Service Corps at Aldershot appealing for the refund of the purchase money of his commission. The paper indicated an earlier correspondence date of 15th December 1876 – the letter has not survived – but quite a deal of legal dialogue took place in the intervening period.

In his letter of 12th January 1877, the subject respectfully wrote to the officer commanding the Royal Army Service Corps at Aldershot that the Royal Warrant and Regulations, referred to in earlier exchanges, appeared to him to allude to the late Control Department, which he stated he voluntarily agreed to join, and not to the present Commissariat Dept in to which he had been gazetted, all without him having any option or his interests having been in any way consulted. He went on to state that had he had had an inclination to serve in the Commissariat Department he would have volunteered to it from the Line some years prior when, had he been acceptable, he would have received the relative rank of Captain and the value of his purchase commission.

Under these circumstances he respectfully appealed for the return of his commission purchase money and the option of serving in the new Department, or, of retiring on Retired Pay of his rank in the late Control Department. He felt he could not be bound by the terms of a warrant which has been cancelled and hoped that it should be possible for the terms of his request to be agreed without it being laid before the Rt Hon. Secretary of State for consideration. This was not an unconsidered move as it was unlikely that the Officer Commanding the ASC would be qualified, or even want, to deal with such a request so the papers were duly forwarded on to the War Office for a decision.

On 19th January 1877 an official remark acknowledged that John Beaufin Irving had appealed against a decision that he might not be allowed any portion of the value of his combatant commission until final retirement from the Service as provided in para 4 of Secretary of State's Instructions to the Royal Warrant CI 1 AC 1878, the argument being that the Control Department had been abolished he should have the option of serving in the Commissariat & Transport Dept or of retiring on the retired pay of his rank in the late Control Department and the return of his purchase money. An additional annotation indicated that the decision had been reached by the Finance Branch and that a legal issue was in question as to the liability of an officer who had volunteered for one Department having completed time in another. By this time the case had reached the desk of Lord Cadogan who, the next day, asked the Legal Secretary to give his opinion on the case. This was duly done and on 1st February Lord Cadogan personally noted in the file that "The positions of these officers was made quite clear to them at time of transferred to the Military Train. Their duties, emoluments and prospects remained

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unaffected by the RW (Royal Warrant) ... and nothing but the name has changed. I fail, therefore, to see any reason for entertaining a claim of this sort and submit that the decision be adhered to”.

What was not clear from the papers which have survived (the file was weeded in 1936) is whether John Beaufin Irving actually really wished to continue serving or whether he found his new position unacceptable and, as a result, hoped to engineer his retirement. His true feelings may now never be known but the retained papers show a logical flow of references that resulted in the subject being granted Retired Pay of 14 shillings per day from 1st October 1878 in accordance with an Army Warrant dated 12th March 1878, Army Circular 78 CI 142. The retirement was regarded as compulsory the term having been held to include cases of officers retiring in view of impending re-organization or reduction.

Following retirement from the Commissariat & Transport Department on 1st October 1878, John Beaufin Irving(3rd) retired to Devon, where he already owned the Fremington Estate near Barnstaple. However, his military knowledge must have been acknowledged for in 1889 he joined the 3rd Militia Battalion The Manchester Regiment with the rank of Captain on 20th February 1889 and is shown in the published Army List to be an Hon. Major on Retired Pay. He was also indicated as a Militia and Volunteers officer qualified as an Instructor of Musketry. The militia was known as the Constitutional Force, or the army at home, and was effectively what we now call the Territorial Army. Earlier militia units had been disembodied but in 1881 the old 6th Royal Lancaster Regiment of Militia became 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Manchester Regiment with headquarters at Ashton under Lyne. He became major in this battalion in 1894 retiring as Hon. Colonel in 1899 having been awarded an honorary colonelcy reflecting a change in army regulations which, in 1896, which changed to officially accommodate the honorary rank.

Retirement

Upon retirement from the Manchester Regiment John Beaufin Irving(3rd) removed from his home in Devonshire when he acquired by entail through adjudication Bonshaw Tower at Kirtlebridge in Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

WW1

The subject's time in First World War service demands some introduction: Despite his age, he was born in 1844, John Beaufin Irving still served in the military in WW1. This is evidenced in his surviving officer file held at the National Archives upon which the most significant point which greets the reader when opening this file are the words NOT TO

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BE DESTROYED on the front cover. He was probably one of, if not the oldest, serving army subject in the Great War of 1914-1918! The contents of this file are doubly interesting for not only are all details of his war service up to 1920 indicated but also numerous details of his days as a young officer in the 4th Foot in the 1860s and, latterly in the Commissariat & Transport Department in the 1870s where he served as a Deputy Commissary until 1878. Also included is the aforementioned original long personal letter to the War Office dealing belatedly with a complicated legal matter of rank and pension which sufficiently complex for their Lordships to take legal opinion upon it.

Despite being a retired army officer, it was from this ancestral family seat in Kirtlebridge in Dumfries-shire that he firstly answered the call of the nation by personally recruiting and enlisting more than 1000 local men for Great War service.

He was already well known in his community. He was a freemason and a member of the Lodge St Andrew Annan No.79, a local Justice of the Peace and one of the Royal Company of Archers in Edinburgh – the bodyguard of the monarch when visiting Scotland – which he joined on 2nd March 1905. Just before the declaration of war on 4th August 1914, he had become chairman of the Territorial Association of Dumfriesshire and Colonel of the 1st Battalion, The Dumfriesshire Volunteer Regiment. In this position he personally travelled around the countryside in Dumfriesshire lecturing and recruiting men for service. With outbreak of war in 1914, and the greater need for recruits to join the military, he often took a piper with him around the county and was most successful in adding substantial numbers to the Dumfriesshire association. This afterwards became known as the 3rd Volunteer Battalion The King's Own Scottish Borderers whose numbers were maintained at 1000 strong throughout the Great War of 1914-1918.

Despite his involvement in the volunteer movement, it was actually not until November 1916 that he formally applied for an appointment of a commission in the Volunteer Force with particular responsibility for drills and training of officers. His application was supported by the Duke of Buccleuch & Queensberry, who had previously nominated him to be County Commandant of the Dumfriesshire Volunteer Regiment and in whose hands such nominations were vested. In his covering letter with his application John Beaufin Irving stated that he had attended every meeting in the county since the battalion was started and had practically raised the Battalion. Because the Duke was not always on hand to attend to correspondence, he stated that he found great difficulty in having practically to recommend himself which put him in a most awkward position of taking the responsibility of carrying on the work but not yet being properly authorized to do so. He added that unless he had gone on and done what he had, there would not have been a battalion! Some notice of his deposition must have been taken as a letter from the War Office to the Duke of Buccleuch & Queensberry followed on 4th

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January 1917 confirming the appointment of Colonel J B Irving to be County Commandant of the Volunteer Corps raised in the County of Dumfries. He took up this unpaid appointment on 17th January 1917 and continued to serve in this capacity until 25th February 1920 when he relinquished his commission at which time he was granted the Honorary Rank of Lieutenant Colonel of the Dumfriesshire Volunteer Corps.

Noteworthy here is the fact that the subject served in an unpaid capacity between 1917 and 1920, although he did write to the War Office in October 1919 asking for re-assessment of his military pension on the basis of WW1 service. The reply sent on 17th June 1920 politely pointed out that only officers who had given paid service could be considered for re-assessment of retired pay under Army Order 324 of 1919. A rather hard knock to take considering his overall service commenced with the 4th Regiment of Foot in January 1864.

After the cessation of hostilities John Beaufin Irving(3rd) continued to reside at Bonshaw Tower at Kirtlebridge dying there on 8th April 1925. He was succeeded by his wife Sarah Agnes who died the following year. Of his children his second surviving son became Captain Sir Robert Beaufin Irving Cdr RNR Ret OBE who had a distinguished naval career in WW1 and who was later Commodore of the White Star Line and Captain of the Queen Mary. Only one of his children had issue that being his daughter Rose Lilian who married Major Alec Duffett Snow of the Royal West of Scotland Artillery.

Primary and Secondary Sources:

National Archives

WO 12/2246-2259 War Office Paylists 4th Foot

WO 76/117 folio 40 Statement of Officers' Services

WO 61/5+6 Commissariat – Registers of Appointments, Services

WO 31/1450 Commander in Chief's Memoranda

WO 374/3689 Officers' Services –First World War - Personal Files

WO 100/46 Medal Roll Abyssinia Medal 1867-1868

WO 25/3502 Embarkation and Disembarkation Returns

Published Army Lists of British commissioned officers

WO 211/61 Alphabetical Lists of officers' services of Lt Gnl. Henry George Hart (Hart's Army List)

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The King's Own Regiment: The Story of a Royal Regiment, Volume II 1814-1914:
Royal Company of Archers, Edinburgh
Grand Lodge of Scotland
Library & Museum of Freemasonry, London

Sources and Consultants:

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