

**Vol.13.No.1.**

**Spring 1999**

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Continued on back cover



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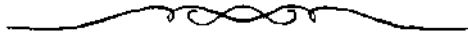
## EDITORIAL

New Year Greetings to all readers!

This year I will not use space by commenting on our weather, but will express my hope that all our readers will have a happy and peaceful year ahead, with opportunities to maintain and pursue their interest in our family history. Kathy Witheridge has helped by sending us a list of variant names from the American IGI which may solve a problem if an ancestor has been 'lost' overseas, and Kim Cook has concluded her powerful story about the sailor who died in South Africa, fighting a land battle.

We appeal to all members to send the information and articles which keep the magazine alive.

Once again, as the Annual General Meeting approaches I am looking forward to meeting old and new friends at the White Hart in Winchcombe, Glos., on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May. Do come and join us!



## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE WITHERIDGE SOCIETY, HELD AT WINCHCOMBE, GLOS. 4<sup>th</sup> MAY, 1998 AT 10.0 a.m.

Our Chairman, Graham Browne, opened the meeting, and welcomed all members who had been able to attend.

He reminded those present of the three deaths from within the Society's membership - Jean Witheridge, Irene Birdsall, and Sylvia Maude Clarke. He said that cards of sympathy had been posted or were in the process of being posted. He read two letters, the first from Judith and Allan Witheridge (Australia) sending their best regards and memories of the previous meeting at Tiverton, and the second from the Reverend David Witheridge who told us that he has found 20 new Witheridge names, and saying that his thoughts were with us on this day.

Annual General Meeting

1. Apologies for Absence

Kathy and Paul Witheridge	Rev. David Witheridge
Brenda and Ron Dixon	Sheila and Tom Jewell
Cheryl Young née Witheridge (and her two sons)	Velma Metcalfe
Annette Witheridge	Judith and Allan Witheridge

2. Minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting at Tiverton on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1997 as published in the Witheridge Times.

These Minutes were taken as read and accepted.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes: No matters arose from those Minutes

4. Officers' Reports (As published prior to the Meeting)

(a) Chairman's Report

5. Secretary's & Membership Secretary's Report      6. Treasurer's Report

7. Research Co-ordinator's Report

Each was taken as read and accepted.

8. Election of Officers

Chairman	Graham Browne
Vice Chairperson	Joyce Stephens
Secretary	John Witheridge
Membership Secretary	John Witheridge
Treasurer	Richard Witheridge
Assistant Treasurer	Sue Witheridge
Editor	Joyce Browne
Research Co-ordinator	Richard Witheridge
Publisher	Philip Witheridge
Australian Representative	Dorothy Witheridge
New Zealand Representative	Velma Metcalfe
North American Representative	Kathy Witheridge

Committee members:- Annette Witheridge, Mark Witheridge, Joyce Stephens  
Philip Witheridge

At this stage Kim Cook proposed that two new committee positions be considered:-

One - to investigate the possibility of a Web Site

Two - to co-ordinate activities concerning the younger generation.

Jason Cook and Mark Witheridge were asked to take these posts with the intention in future years of forming a sub-committee to cover these projects as they grow.

9 Any other Business There was no other business

#### Time and Place of Next Meeting

The Annual General Meeting to be on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1999

Suggestions for venue were:-

Chichester	- KimCook	Plymouth	John Witheridge
Tiverton	- Graham Browne	Winchcombe	Mark and Richard Witheridge

The final choice was a one day event at Winchcombe, at the same venue. For those wishing to stay overnight Philip agreed to provide a list of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

Possible date for the Annual General Meeting for the year 2000

Bank Holiday Monday for the year 2000 is Monday 1<sup>st</sup> May. The possibility of holding a special event, either in Devon or some other suitable area, was discussed  
Suggestions were:-

Plymouth	John Witheridge
Tiverton	Richard Witheridge and Graham Browne
Tavistock	Kim Cook
Chatham	John Witheridge

It was agreed that both Richard Witheridge and June Witheridge would explore possibilities of areas in Devonshire and any details collected by them or posted to them would be brought to the AGM in 1999, so that the matter could be discussed, and a decision made on the venue for the gathering for the year 2000.

This gathering would cover a three day period and finish on the Bank Holiday Monday. Members are invited to post any ideas on this subject to June or Richard.

Graham closed the Annual General Meeting at 12.15 p.m. in good time for lunch.

**John Witheridge, Secretary**

## FAMILY NEWS

We are pleased that the first family news of the year is the announcement of a happy event in the family of member Peter Grafton. Peter's first great grandchild, Matilda Alice Fothergill, was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1998, to Alexander Fothergill and Joanna McGinn, daughter of Drusilla McGinn, née Grafton, Peter's younger daughter by his first wife, Joan Bleachley, who died in 1969.

I thought that readers would like to share Peter's poem, written for baby Matilda on the occasion of her baptism on the 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1998.

"Dear Tillie    "You are much too young as you lie there just listening  
                    To prayers said and praises sung  
                    To celebrate your Christening -  
                    To understand what it might mean  
                    As on your forehead, wrinkled  
                    By puzzlement at what you've seen,  
                    The Holy Water's sprinkled;  
                    While your two special names are given,  
(Both with the Father's blessing)  
                    By Godparents in sight of heaven,  
                    While their own Faith confessing.

                    Though you may not realise  
                    What others sometimes mock,  
                    It helps the Lord to recognise  
                    The new lamb in His flock;  
                    And, hopefully, the love that's shown  
                    You, on this special day,  
                    Will help and guide you 'til you've grown  
                    To live your life your way;  
                    And may you come to recognise  
                    That it is right, not odd,  
                    For you to try to, if you're wise,  
                    Live as a child of God.

---

Another happy piece of news is that baby Eloisa Barnett, grand daughter of Joyce and Terry Stephens, is making more rapid progress and doctors are pleased with her present state of health. Terry is coping with the effects of the treatment for his illness, and is hopeful for the long term result.

**Colonel Anthony Witheridge**  
**1937-1998**

Members of the Witheridge Society will be saddened to learn of the death, on the 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1998, of Colonel Anthony Witheridge, at the age of just 61.

Anthony was a truly remarkable man, for whom Roy and I had the greatest affection and respect. Beneath a quiet and modest manner lay a wide range of gifts and talents, personal and professional academic and artistic.

During his National Service, Anthony served in Suez and Cyprus, and then went up to Christ College, Cambridge, where he gained an MA in archaeology. It was while he was at Cambridge that his mother Connie (nee Gilbart) died.

After coming down from Cambridge, Anthony joined the 15<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> The Kings Royal Hussars, in which he was to serve for some 35 years. Postings took him to various parts of the UK and Germany, as well as to Muscat (where he commanded the last camel troop), to Aden, Lebanon, Jordan, Lisbon Paris, Brasilia and Norway.

Anthony had a quiet yet deep faith, and in 1967, while attending Evensong at the Anglican Church in Zermatt, he met Francoise Burnauld. A year later they were married in Vulliens, and returned to England, where Anthony was posted first to Newcastle, and then to Durham University where he studied Arabic. Simon was born in Aberfeldy, Scotland, in 1970. After a posting in Lebanon, the family went to Amman, where Pip was born in 1972, and twins Ann and Clare in 1973.

By 1976, after a tour of duty in Northern Ireland, Anthony and the family were back in England, at Fort Halstead, Kent. It was here, during the visit of David and Elizabeth Witheridge from Minneapolis, that we first met Anthony, Francoise and the children, as well as Anthony's father, George, and step-mother Gwen.

We found in both Anthony and Francoise that lovely gift of gentle warmth which makes everyone feel welcomed and valued. George, Roy and the boys enjoyed some great rough-and-tumble in the garden, while David, Anthony and I tried to see if our respective family trees merged at any point.

Our contacts after that were intermittent, but I was delighted when the family joined the Witheridge Society. Sadly, Anthony was unable to come to any of the Witheridge Day meetings, as the date always clashed with his regiment's Memorial Day. He always took great pride in marching with the regiment on these occasions, but never more so than when he was joined by Pip, now serving in his father's former regiment.



Whether on the phone, or when we met, we enjoyed wonderful, wide-ranging conversations, in which he wore his learning lightly. His quiet modesty, tremendous integrity, warm interest in others, and unfailing courtesy, made him the epitome of an English officer and gentleman.

In 1991, the family moved to Little Manor, a beautiful, rambling 18<sup>th</sup> century house in Dorset, with a tributary of the Stour running past the gardens. Here again we enjoyed the lovely, warm relaxed hospitality which was the hallmark of Anthony and Francoise. He was greatly interested in his family history, and on this, and other occasions, was keen to learn more about our research.

Anthony retired from the Army in 1994, and embraced a wide range of activities with both joy and commitment. Having been a keen artist since his days in Muscat, he was able to spend much more time exercising his gift for painting. He gave devoted service to his local church of St. Mary the Virgin, where he occasionally preached, and became Deanery Treasurer and a member of the Diocesan Board of Finance. He also became a Trustee of Hanford School, and occasionally taught, providing cover for Francoise when she was unable to teach.

In the autumn of 1998, he was diagnosed as having terminal cancer. Despite this, he and Francoise organised and hosted a wonderful family party to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of his father, George.

Anthony died peacefully at home on 19<sup>th</sup> December, and his funeral was held at the church of St. Mary the Virgin, where he had worshipped faithfully.

His untimely death is a great loss, and we extend our deepest sympathy to Francoise, to Simon, Pip, Ann and Clare and to George.

Kim Cook

(Kim and Roy had planned to attend Anthony's funeral - both in a personal capacity and as representatives of the Witheridge Society. Unfortunately, Kim wasn't well enough to travel, but she has written to Francoise)



**VARIATIONS ON A THEME** by Kathy Witheridge

These variant spellings of the 'Whittridge', 'Witredge', and 'Witheridge' names on the USA -IGI have been supplied by Kathy Witheridge of Ontario.

About 1650	WITTERIDGE, Mary d/o ? Wittridge - Essex
About 1652	WITTERIDGE, Mary d/o ? - Lynn Essex
1682	WHITERIDGE, Thomas - husband of Charity LIVERMORE - Beverley, Essex
Nov. 17, 1684	WHITTERAGE, Silvester, married Mary BUCKLY at Marblehead, Essex*
Oct. 08, 1686	WITHERIDGE, Prudence d/o Silvester and Mary - Salem, Essex*
Mar. 17 1688	WITHERIDGE, Silvester s/o Silvester and Mary -Salem,Essex*
Dec 18. 1694	WITHERIDGE, Mary married Benjamin PROCTOR, Salem, Essex*
Sep.26, 1689	WHITERIDGE, Richard s/o Richard and Phebee - Boston Suffolk
Jan 29, 1690	WHITERIDGE, Richard s/o Richard and Phebee - Boston Suffolk
May 20, 1691	WHITTERIDG, Elizabeth d/o Thomas and Charitie - Beverly. Essex
Dec 18, 1694	WITHERIDGE, Mary married Benjamin PROCTER - Salem Essex
Dec 18, 1694	WETHERIDGE, Mary married Andrew BURNHAM - Ipswich Essex
1702	WHITERIDGE, Abigell d/o William and Marey - Rochester, Plymouth
Jun 27, 1703	WHITERAGE, Charity d/o William and Marey, Beverly, Essex
1704	WHITERIDGE, Charity d/o William and Marey, Rochester, Plymouth
Oct 10, 1706	WHITERIDGE, Mercy d/o William and Marey , Rochester, Plymouth
Oct 28, 1798	WHITERIDGE, Marey d/o William and Marey, Rochester, Plymouth

Nov 12, 1710 WHITERIDGE, Thomas s/o William and Marey, Rochester  
Plymouth

1703 WHITERIGE, Samuel s/o ? - Gloucester, Essex

Feb23, 1711 WHITEREDGE, Susanna married John BILLS (relative) in  
Boston, Suffolk.

Dec 19, 1712 WHITERAG, Abigail d/o ? - Rochester, Plymouth  
May 01, 1715 WHITEREG, Sary d/o ? - Rochester, Plymouth  
Sep 22, 1717 WHITERAGE, Rebackah d/o ? - Rochester, Plymouth

Nov 25, 1725 WHITTERIDGE, Richard married Heber J. GRANT (Relative)  
in Boston, Suffolk

Jan 01, 1728 WHETREDGE, Mary married Joseph ASHLEY - Rochester,  
Plymouth

Oct 23, 1729 WHITERIDGE, Abigail married Seth WINSLOW - Rochester,  
Plymouth

Jul 19, 1730 WHITEREG, Susanah d/o Samuell and Hannah - Gloucester,  
Essex

Oct 17, 1731 WHITEREG, William s/o Samuell and Hannah - Gloucester,  
Essex

Dec 31, 1730 WHITERIDGE, Mercy married Ebenezer KEEN, Rochester,  
Plymouth

Nov 25, 1733 WHETREDGE, Thomas married Hannah HASKELL -  
Rochester, Plymouth

Aug 06, 1741 WITREDGE, Elizabeth married Marke HASKELL, Plymouth,  
Plymouth

Editor's Note \* This denotes names already known to us, and being researched in our investigation of the 'Salem Witches' episode - see Magazine Volume 9, Number 1, Spring 1995.

*I checked all names against the CD Rom of the 'Complete Book of Emigrants 1607-1776, and 'Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1775' but failed to find any who could be the antecedents of those on this list. May I also remind readers that place names and counties are American*

## **BACK AT THE GARDEN GATE !**

by Joyce Browne

When, I wrote my article 'Led up the Garden Path' for the magazine of Autumn, 1995, one of my intentions was to show how easy it is to be misled, and to think that one has 'proved' a connection.

We thought we knew that Margaret Brooking, my 5 x great grandmother, who married John Witheridge at Holy Trinity, Exeter, in May 1728, was the daughter of Samuel Brooking of Exeter, baptised 1704. A great deal of effort and research had been carried out before this conclusion was reached, and more than one Margaret Brooking had been 'investigated'.

This family connection was severed when we discovered that Margaret was a widow when she married John , and therefore her maiden name was not Brooking! Before we could find out her baptismal name it was necessary to find a male Brooking who had married a 'Margaret', and who had died before the wedding of Margaret Brooking and John Witheridge in 1728.

Our John Witheridge and Sheila Jewell applied their best efforts to this, and as a result John wrote his article 'The Brooking Connection' which was published in the magazine, Volume 12, No. 1. Spring 1998. He established that a Josias Brooking , son of Benjamin Brooking and Mary Tavener, had married a Margaret BAKER at Plymouth Charles on the 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1715. Although we have not yet found a death record for Josias, other records point us to the conclusion that we have the right couple.

Once again, parish registers had to be consulted, and in the Newton Ferrers registers Sheila Jewell found the baptism on the 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1690:-

MARGARET daughter of JOSEPH BAKER AND AGNES- ?

We consulted the Newton Ferrers registers because we knew that on the 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1758, 'Margaret Witheridge of Ermington' was buried there - something which had always puzzled us.

Now we had a new family name connected to the Witheridges, and had to try to learn more about the Bakers.

(Wouldn't it be marvellous if we had complete transcripts of the parish registers? As things stand, each time we find something new the registers have to be consulted again, in spite of the fact that we make listings of all names researched each time we look)

I felt quite disappointed that, in spite of all John's link building with the Brooking Society, and all our knowledge of the Brookings around the Ermington area, I had, in fact, no Brooking blood in my veins.

The Newton Ferrers registers are particularly difficult to read, but Sheila agreed to have another try to find out more about the Bakers to enable us to embark on a family tree. We are not yet able to venture on drawing a tree, but what we can show is an entry in the Marriage pages:-

19<sup>th</sup> April 1684. Joseph BAKER and Agnes BROOKING

There were four children (we know of) from this marriage:

Joseph - baptised 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1684 (This does not mean that Joseph was born before his parents were married - the calendar then was arranged so that the year began at the end of March, so that January, 1684, was have been after April 1684)

Robert - baptised 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1687

MARGARET baptised 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1690

Elizabeth baptised 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1699

After all, the Ermington Witheridges do have some Brooking blood in their veins!

Unless - UNLESS - Agnes Brooking was a widow when she married Joseph Baker!

It is 'back to the drawing board' as at the moment we do not know an Agnes Brooking who was likely to have been the mother of Margaret.

I feel that not only have I been led up the garden path, but round the houses and back to the garden gate!



## SEARCHING FOR SAMUEL

### **Part 3 - The Final Hours**

by Kim Cook

On the morning of Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1881, a contingent of British troops under Major General Sir George Pomeroy Colley had captured the Boer stronghold of Mount Majuba, the hill of the doves. Among these troops was Samuel Witheridge, one of the 64 blue-jacketed sailors from the *Boadicea*, hastily drafted into a makeshift Naval Brigade, under Commander Romilly.

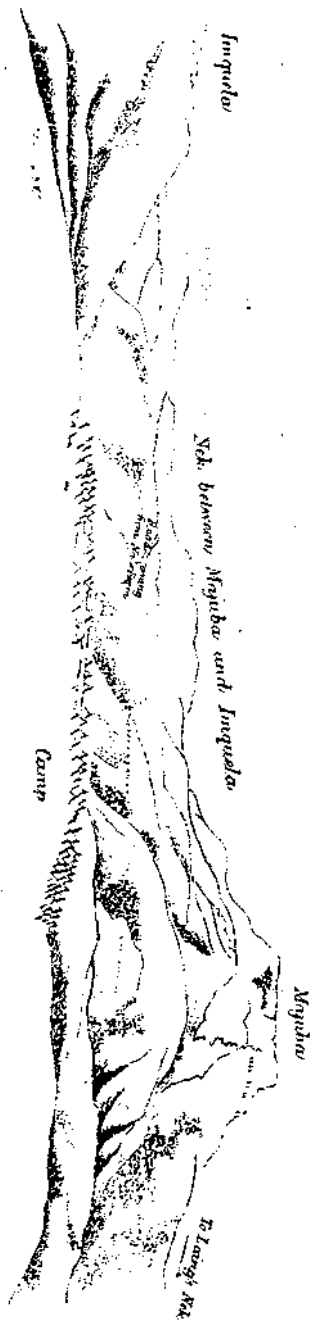
Believing his position on the summit plateau to be impregnable, Colley failed to order the troops to dig in and erect defences. Only the Naval Brigade, on their own initiative, had erected defensive *sangars* around their position on the southern rim. However, unknown to the British, the younger Boer troops were creeping up the face of the mountain, covered by intermittent fire from the older Boers encircling the foot of Majuba. Soon, some 450 Boers were poised, ready to attack the British troops.

Meanwhile, Commander Romilly had been trying to persuade Colley of the wisdom of fortifying other points on the summit. At about 10.15 a.m., the two men stood where the Naval Brigade was positioned, at the corner of the hill overlooking the path by which the troops had climbed up. Pointing to the relevant positions, they had agreed on the construction of three redoubts to be built as rallying points for the troops. During the discussion they were joined by Colonel Stewart and Major Fraser R.E., and the four were considering entrenchment and other defences when disaster struck.

A lone Boer marksman had sneaked through the undergrowth immediately below them. Seeing the two senior men gesticulating, he let off a chance shot at a range of nearly 1000 yards. The bullet (later reported to be an exploding one) hit Romilly in the stomach. Surgeon Mahon found the wound 'to perforate the left side of the abdomen, and coming out at the loins'. The wound was to prove fatal.

Mahon first ordered the injured Romilly to be stretchered to the hospital area, by sick berth attendant Will Bevis and Leading Seaman Daniel Bone from the *Boadicea*. Bone returned to the Naval Brigade, but when the hospital came under fire, Mahon instructed Bevis to move Romilly to a more sheltered spot on the south west front.

SKETCH BY MAJOR ERASER SHOWING MAJUBA AND THE CAMP AT  
MOUNT PROSPECT  
(courtesy of PRO Kew)



*J. Fraser*

rocky knuckles covered with  
 few boulders, but cover for men  
 rocky top.  
 (1) to (8) is grass covered.  
 grass covered.

# TOP OF MAJUBA.

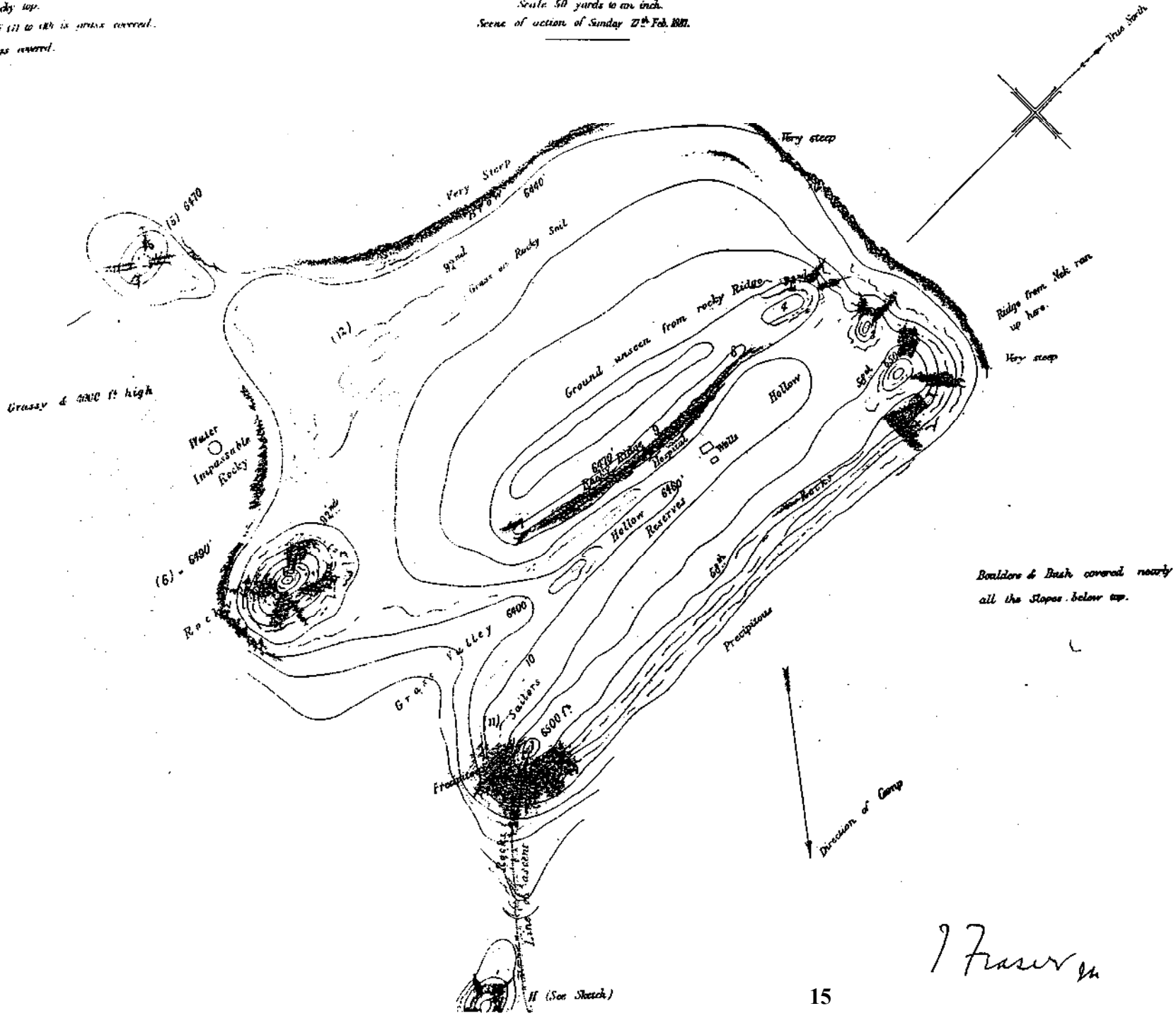
Scale 50 yards to an inch.  
 Scene of action of Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1881.

## CONTOUR SKETCH BY MAJOR FRASER OF THE SUMMIT OF MAJUBA

{courtesy of the PRO, Kew}

Note the wells dug to provide water for the hospital, and the hollow where the 120 reserves relaxed, smoked and slept.

The position of the Naval Brigade is marked 'Sailors'.



7

If (See Sketch)

15

J. Fraser



**AERIAL VIEW OF THE UPPER LEVELS OF MAJUBA**  
**TAKEN BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE**

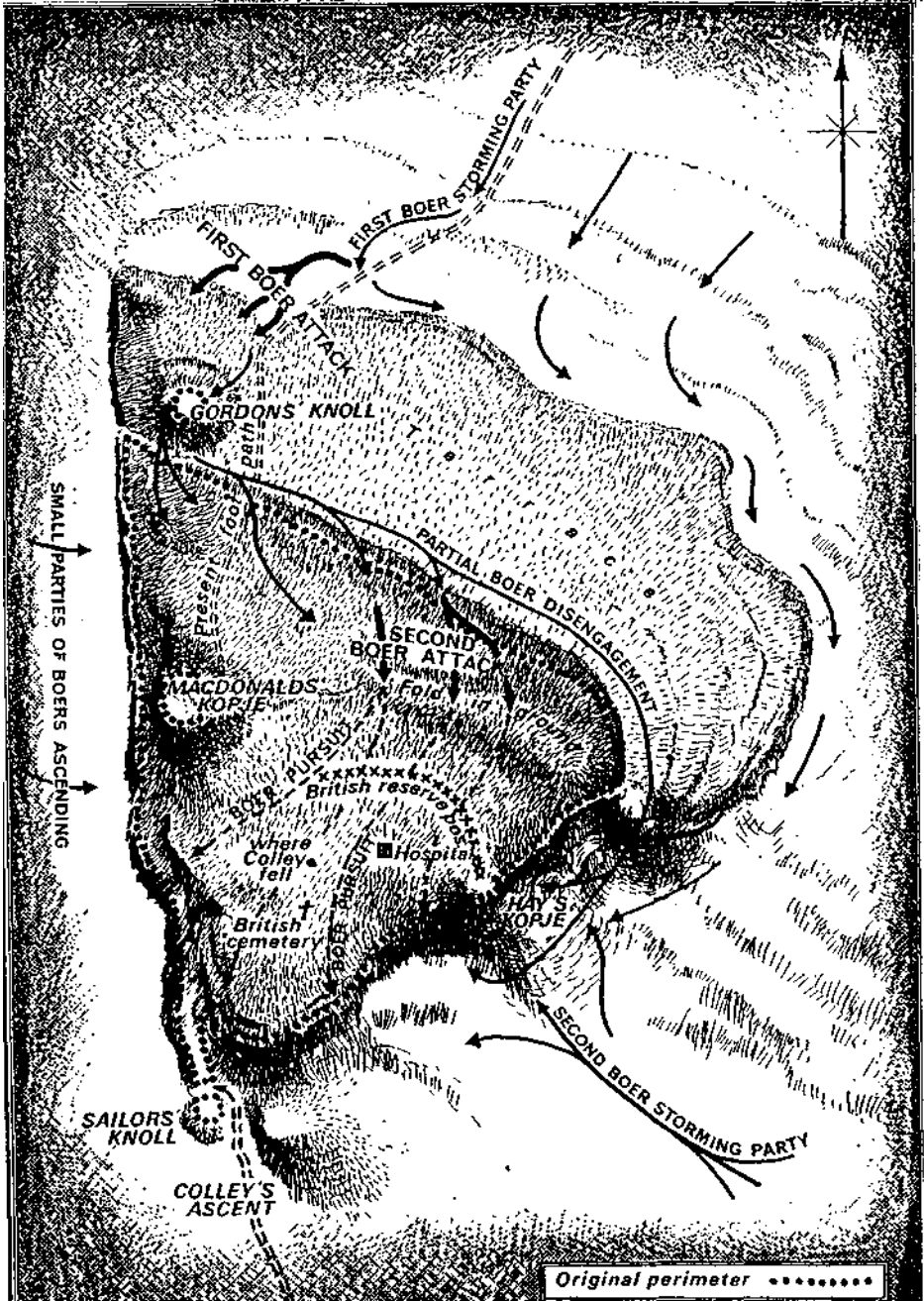
The final steep ascent path can clearly be seen at the southernmost point of the peak, with the more gradual terraces used by the Boers on the northern edge.

*(courtesy John Murray)*



PLAN OF MAJUBA HILL SHOWING WHERE MAJOR GEN. COLLEY  
FELL. COMMANDER ROMILLY WAS SHOT CLOSE TO THE NAVAL  
BRIGADE POSITION MARKED SAILOR'S KNOLL

*(Courtesy John Murray)*



The effective loss of Romilly, his friend and second-in-command, hit Colley hard. In an abstracted manner he dictated a signal to Mount Prospect. 'Boers still firing heavily on hill, but have broken up laager and begin to move away. I regret to say Commander Romilly dangerously wounded; other casualties, three men slightly wounded.'

Colley then retreated into a grave and introspective mood. All thought of building the defences he and Romilly had planned had completely gone. Later Major Fraser was to report that Colley decided against the construction of defences on the grounds that the terrain was too exposed to Boer attack.

For a short time the firing slackened, and during this time some 20 men of the 92<sup>nd</sup> were deployed on a rocky peak on the southern rim, to the west of the Naval Brigade. At about 12.30 p.m., the Naval Brigade came under attack from the east, and were told by Major Fraser 'to do the best they could'. Many were injured, including Daniel Bone, who received a severe gunshot wound in the right thigh.

Suddenly, the 92<sup>nd</sup> Highland Regiment came under a heavy barrage of very accurate rifle fire, pinning them down on their peak. This barrage provided cover for successive groups of Boers to dash across the terrace below. By the time the barrage ceased, about 60 Boers were concealed in the scrub immediately below Gordon's Knoll.

The subaltern in charge, Lt. Ian Hamilton, ran through the enemy fire to report this dangerous advance to Colley, and was amazed to find him in the hollow where the 120 men held in reserve were 'very comfortably eating, sleeping or smoking'.

A war correspondent, Thomas Fortescue Carter of the *Times of Natal*, who was also sitting with the reserves, confirmed the languid atmosphere. He later recalled that when another officer came to the hollow to recruit some extra hands 'he had to make a good deal of noise to wake them up'. Lt. Wright also ran from the Highland position to warn Colley, but like Hamilton he made no impression. Wright was dismissed with the order to 'hold the place three days'.

As the number of Boers in that area grew, Hamilton continued to dash back and forth across the battlefield to report to Colley. Shortly before 1.0 p.m., returning to tell Colley that the Boers in his segment now numbered more than 400, he found Colley asleep, so he 'reported to Lt. Colonel - then Major - Hay, commanding the regiment'.

A few moments later, the 60 Boers below Gordon's Knoll opened fire at point blank range, killing most of the soldiers outright. The Boers then took the knoll, from which they commanded the northern flank of the British forces just 70 yards away.

Colley was 'startled from his sleep' by the heavy firing, but gave no orders. It was left to his chief of staff, Col. Herbert Stewart, to order the reserves into action, although with poor response. Carter reported that 'there was a want of alacrity shown by the men which was not altogether reassuring'. Repeated calls of 'Now will you step up quick there' by the officers, finally got them on the move, raggedly firing at random.

Hamilton also wrote of their tardy response. 'I next saw our Reserve coming up, blue-jackets, 58<sup>th</sup> and about ten men of ours. They had fixed cutlasses and bayonets, and I fancied by their manner that they must have been startled by being so suddenly hurried up - and I did not much like the way they came up.'

As the Boers on the knoll opened fire, killing about forty of the Gordons outright, panic set in. So accurate was the Boer aim, that an officer who examined their bodies reports that 'all were shot above the chest; in some men's heads I counted five or six bullet wounds.'

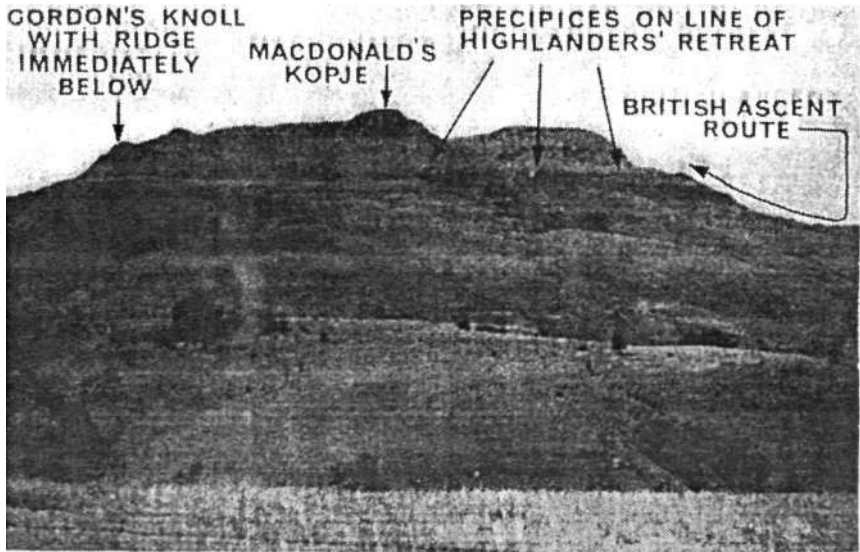
As the remaining Highlanders retreated, they ran straight into the advancing reserves. The call went out from the officers leading the reserves, 'Rally on the right, rally on the right!' But the Highlanders, facing the opposite way, went to their right, in the opposite direction from the rallying point, and ran straight into the main line of the enemy attack.

By now many of the senior officers had been killed or wounded. The confused melee of Highlanders and reserves led to more general confusion. This was augmented by a thick pall of rifle smoke that lay over the mountain top like fog, eddying and swirling around the confused men. Suddenly aware of their peril, men became fearful and disheartened. The junior officers tried valiantly to sort out the muddled troops, encourage them, and get them back into their proper units. But by now many of them were scattered, although nearly 200 did manage to gather behind the ridge, where they had a reasonable defensive position, with about twenty Highlanders on Macdonald's Kopje on their left flank.

However, what had seemed an invincible position on Macdonald's Kopje, was effectively neutralised by the tactics of the Boers. Two widely separated units of

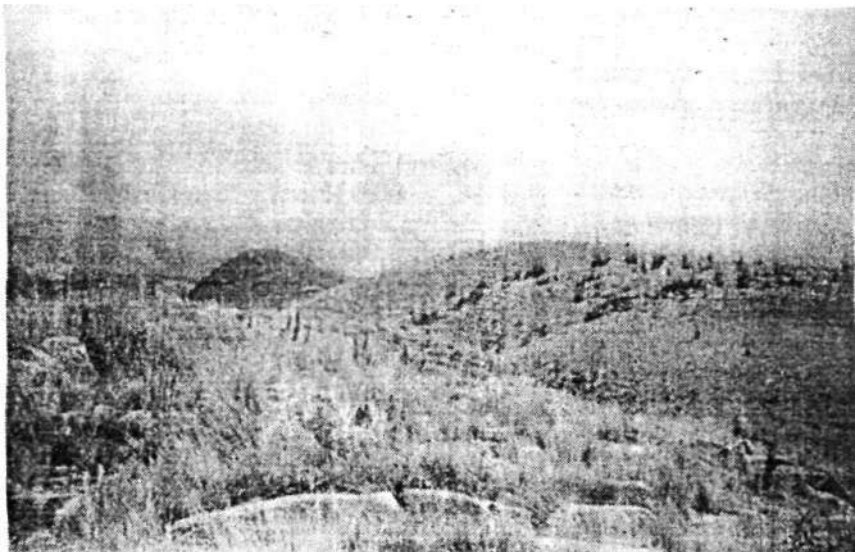
**MAJUBA FROM THE WEST. SHOWING GORDON'S KNOLL AND  
MACDONALP'S KOPJE**

*(courtesy John Murray)*



**GORDON'S KNOLL AS SEEN FROM MACDONALD'S KOPJE**

*(courtesy John Murray)*



Boers were positioned on either side of the kopje, and were able 'to shoot each other free', and in the ensuing fire, the rocks became 'white with bullet marks'.

The right flank, Hay's Kopje, was even more vulnerable, and discouraged soldiers straggled down to join those in the hollow. When the officers tried to order them to return to their posts, many stood and argued the point. Both discipline and morale were at a desperately low ebb.

Soon the Boers were right in front of the ridge shooting not only at the troops immediately in front of them, but also over their heads at the men of the 58<sup>th</sup> on the eastern rim. The sight of retreating soldiers running past them on the way back to Mount Prospect had already undermined the courage of the 58<sup>th</sup>, and under the heavy attack many of the younger soldiers also turned and fled.

Back at the ridge, Hamilton tried to organise a counter attack and ordered his men to fix bayonets, ready to charge. But Major Hay, his commanding officer over-ruled him, on the grounds that 'there were too few men'. Hamilton as persistent in his determination to attack, as he had been in warning Colley of the Boer advance, tried to get Hay's decision reversed by appealing directly to Colley. Colley told Hamilton to sit tight until the Boers advanced.

Later, great controversy raged over whether the proposed bayonet charge would have turned the tide. At that point soldiers outnumbered Boers by nearly three to one, and were much better at in-fighting than the Boers, whose main strength lay in accurate shooting. The Boers hated bayonet attacks, considering them unethical, and dreaded the thought of facing bayonets. Initial losses on the British side would undoubtedly have been heavy, but many believe that a bayonet charge would have saved the day.

However Hay, a sound and experienced professional soldier, was convinced that such a charge would 'have been madness, and could have done no good'. Colley backed Hay's judgment, and the charge was forbidden. Hay's kopje was soon overrun. Calls of 'Deploy!' from the officers were largely ignored by the men. Carter reported on the confusion, the lack of discipline, and the poor morale. 'I saw blue-jackets, redcoats, and brown coats moving in one and twos on their faces to where they were called from; but an insufficient number were willing to obey the command. There was a hanging back, a reluctance of others, which neither entreaties nor threats could move.'

Suddenly a piercing cry of terror rose from the infantry below the kopje. As a mass of Boers advanced, firing accurately soldiers threw down their weapons and ran,

terrified, ignoring the orders, curses and threats from their officers. Nearby units, infected with the fear, and having lost all confidence in their leaders, ran also. Within minutes, the hillside was alive with retreating soldiers running for their lives down the slopes. As they reached the path by which they had come up, many were picked off by Boer fire. Only on Macdonald's kopje did his men stand firm together, but of the twelve survivors, ten were already wounded. They could not hope to check the rout.

Behind the ridge, Colley paced alone. Only one of his staff officers, Captain Maude, remained. Nearby, Surgeons Landon and Mahon, remained at the Aid Post. Soon after Dr. Landon and two of the AHC were shot while tending the wounded. Major Fraser later wrote 'Nothing could exceed the devotion' of Dr. Landon.

Some officers reported that Colley had ordered his troops to cease firing and retreat, but not all confirmed this. What everyone did agree on was that Colley himself made no attempt to retreat, but continued to pace, some said as if in a daze.

Finally even Colley, accompanied by the faithful Captain Maude, turned slowly and calmly as if to follow his retreating men. But then he turned, some say to surrender, and just a few yards from the ridge was hit in the forehead by a Boer bullet, which 'went in at his right side, just over the eye, and made an enormous hole at the back of his head'. Colley too, had paid the ultimate price.

Just an hour or so after the fierce fighting has begun, it was all over, the battle lost. After coming under fire from some young Boers, by 2.30 p.m., Mahon had persuaded the senior Boers to let him and Bevis tend the wounded, and to allow four blue-jacket prisoners to carry the wounded Commander Romilly back to camp. The stretcher party had reached the top of the path when the Boers changed their minds, ordering three of the prisoners to return. One lone sailor was left to tend the Commander, sheltering him under a bush through a night of steady drizzle, until they were picked up next morning.

Where in all this melee and confusion, was Samuel Witheridge? Did he, like the others, turn and flee? Or was he one of the first to die? And where was he buried?

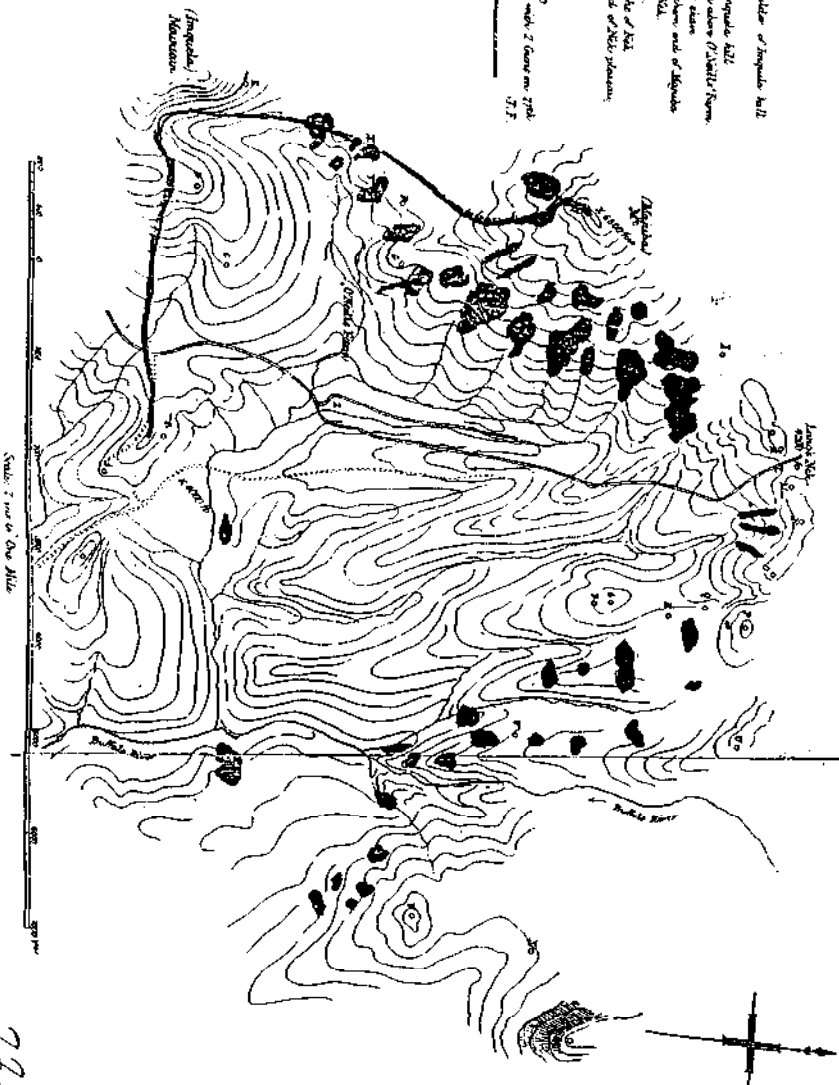
I guessed he had been with the main force of the Naval Brigade, that had come under attack from the east, but I didn't expect to find any firm information about one lowly seaman in a confused battle. Then I read the London Gazette, for 3 May 1881, which carries reports from all the senior officers involved in the Battle of Majuba. The main, and most lengthy report, with maps and diagrams, was from

**SKETCH BY LT. BROTHERTON AND MAJOR FRASER,  
SHOWING THE ROUTE TAKEN BY COLLEY'S TROOPS  
ON THE NIGHT MARCH TO MAJUBA**

(courtesy PRO, Kew)

SKETCH BY LT. BROTHERTON R. E. AND MAJOR FRASER, R. E.

Legend: The  
 dotted line  
 shows on lower shoulder of Inyanga hill  
 where from  
 the  
 position, east of Inyanga hill  
 soldiers left to push down (North) from  
 the top of the  
 mountain, south of Inyanga  
 hill, to the  
 summit of Inyanga hill.  
 The  
 dotted line  
 shows the  
 route of the  
 troops on the  
 night march to  
 Majuba Hill.  
 The  
 dotted line  
 shows the  
 route of the  
 troops on the  
 night march to  
 Majuba Hill.  
 The  
 dotted line  
 shows the  
 route of the  
 troops on the  
 night march to  
 Majuba Hill.



*Fraser  
 Major*



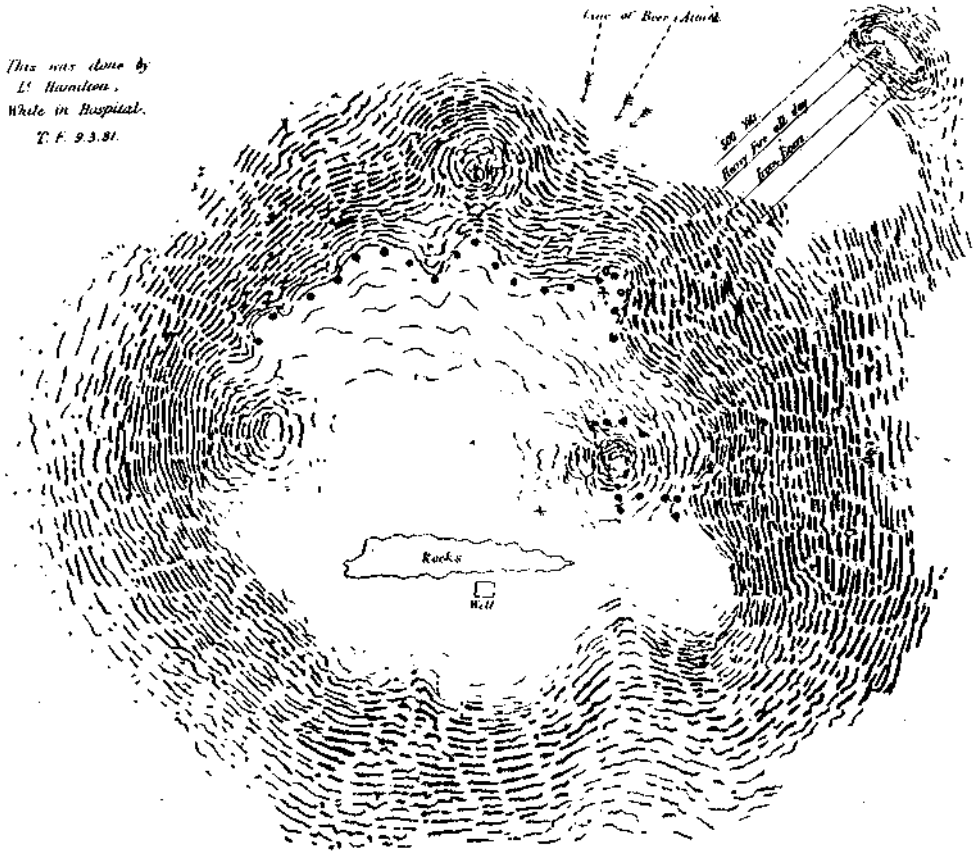
**CONTOUR MAP OF THE SUMMIT OF MAJUBA BY LT. HAMILTON**

This map was drawn while Lt. Hamilton was in hospital recovering from injuries. Although his warnings to Colley of Boer advances and plans for a bayonet charge met with a negative response, he was later commended for conspicuous gallantry.

*(courtesy PRO, Kew)*



*This was done by  
Lt. Hamilton,  
while in Hospital.  
T. F. 9.3.91.*



Major Fraser, but there were also reports relating specifically to the Naval Brigade.

Commodore Richards, writing from the *Boadicea*, off Durban, on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1881, commends four people for bravery. The first is Surgeon Edward Mahon, for 'his duty in action under circumstances of extreme personal peril, as well as of his subsequent devotion to the wounded during twenty-eight hours of privation'.

The second is William Bevis, the sick berth attendant. When they came under fire, some of the fire had come very close to the wounded Commander Romilly. Mahon fixed his white handkerchief to a stick, and held it over the Commander, but it was almost immediately shot away. Bevis then fixed some white lint on a bayonet, and despite being twice shot through the helmet, continued to guard and tend the Commander. Later, under fire, Mahon and Bevis managed to carry the Commander back to the field hospital. Bevis was later awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

Commodore Richards then adds the following paragraphs:

'Lieutenant Cochrane, the officer who was sent out at daylight in charge of a burying party from all corps, reports that he buried on the summit of the mountain fifty-three men in one grave, ten of the number being men of the Naval Brigade'.

'A Boer Commandant pointed out to him the bodies of George Hammond and Samuel Witheridge, quartermasters, as of men who remained to the last, and died at their posts. Lieutenant Trower's body was also found on the extreme ridge, shot through the chest, temple and with left hand shattered.'

Samuel and his fellow quartermaster George Hammond must surely have been among the ten men of the Naval Brigade who were buried on the summit of Majuba, in that tiny walled cemetery with its small memorial.

The lists of the dead and wounded from *Boadicea* and *Dido* follow at the end of the report. Eleven of *Boadicea's* crew were killed in action, and sixteen were injured, six of whom died within a fortnight. Those who died are listed as follows:

### **Killed in action**

**Lieutenant Cornwallis J. Trower**, gunshot wound of right chest and lung.

**Quartermaster Saml. Witheridge**, gunshot wound of head.

**Quartermaster Geo. Hammond**, gunshot wound of head.

### Killed in action

**Corns. O'Connor**, A.B., gunshot wound of head.

**Walter Barnard**, A.B., gunshot wound of head.

**John McClure**, A.B., gunshot wound of head.

**Wm. Passingham**, A.B., gunshot wound of chest.

**Henry Brazier**, Ordinary, gunshot wound (?)

**Henry G. Beddell**, Ordinary, gunshot wound of head.

**Wm. Chapman**, Ordinary, gunshot wound of head.

**George Burton**, Ordinary, gunshot wound of head.

### Wounded

**Commander Francis Romilly**, dangerous gunshot wound of left side of abdomen.

Died 2<sup>nd</sup> March.

**James Loveless**, A.B., dangerous gunshot wound of chest. Died 28<sup>th</sup> February

**Edwin Still**, Ordinary, dangerous wound of chest. Died 28<sup>th</sup> February.

**Wm. T. Plastine**, Leading Seaman, dangerous wound of buttock, perforating abdomen. Died 11<sup>th</sup> March.

**Humphrey Croft**, A.B., dangerous gunshot wound of right chest (fractured rib) Died 6<sup>th</sup> March.

**Tom Lewis**, Krooman, dangerous gunshot wound of chest. Died 28<sup>th</sup> February.

Ten further injured seamen from *Boadicea* are also named, some with injuries described as dangerous, but all had survived at least until March 14<sup>th</sup>. Three of the *Dido's* crew died, and a further three were injured, all with gunshot wounds. Of 64 'blue jackets' twenty died, thirteen were injured, and at least three were taken prisoner a dreadfully heavy toll for such a small unit. How many of the wounded later died I don't know.

What I do know, and am so proud of, is that Samuel John Witheridge was mentioned in despatches, as a brave, disciplined and loyal man. Far from retreating, it seems he had covered the back of those who fled, and paid for it with his life.

His naval service record is also exceptional. After service as a junior, in January 1869, at 18 he signed up for ten years. In January 1879, he signed up for a further ten years, but was to live for only two of those years.

The records show that Samuel at 18, was 5 ft 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  in tall, had light brown hair **and** grey eyes. His complexion was fair, and he had no wounds scars, or marks.

From 1<sup>st</sup> January 1873 to 24\* July 1874 he served as an A.B. on the *Cambridge*, and his character was described as 'V.G' - very good - and during that time he was promoted to T.M. (tradesman?).

He then served as T.M. on *Topaze*, where his conduct was described as exemplary, and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1876, was promoted to Leading Seaman. Again, his conduct is marked as exemplary, as it is in every other entry that follows.

From *Topaze* he joined HMS *Excellent*, as Leading Seaman, on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1877 until 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1878. *Excellent* is the gunnery training school at Portsea, and it was during his time here that, on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1878, Samuel married Mary Ann Cruwys.

Just six weeks after the wedding he was posted to *Boadicea* as Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, and by 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1878, he had been made up to Petty Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class. Where the *Boadicea* went during the next two and a half years, and how much leave Samuel had at home with his new wife, I haven't yet been able to discover.

But the records I have seen leave no doubt whatever that Samuel Witheridge was a dedicated sailor, good at his job, who gained rapid promotion and earned the respect of his superiors, and, at Majuba, of his enemies too.

There is one final entry in Samuel's records. It shows that on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1881 he was 'Killed in Action', and then adds 'Traced Medal 19.4.79'. What that means, I don't know, but if he did win a medal, he surely deserved it.



**MAJUBA. THE HILL OF THE DOVES**  
**PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE 1960s BY SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS**  
*(courtesy John Murray)*



52440

Names in full

Samuel J. Witheridge

Date of Birth

1851

Place of Birth

Charles  
Devon.

Date and Period of O. S. Engagement.	Personal Description.					Trade.	Gunnery Engagements				
	Height.	Hair.	Eyes.	Complexion.	Wounds, Scars, or Marks.						
1 Jan'y 1869 10 years 33985-a January 1879-10 years	5. 6 1/2	Light Brown	Grey	Fair	None	Sea	S.G. I.C. 4/12/73				
Ships served in. Const Guard. Seamen Riggers.	Ships' Books.		Rating, &c.	G. C. Badges worn.	Period of Service.		Time.		Character.	If Discharged. Whither and for what cause.	Remarks.
List.	No.	From			To	Years.	Days.				
Cambridge	13 <sup>B</sup>	325	1st y.m.	1	1 Jan 73	24 July 74			N. G.		28 1865.
Torpæse	5	429			25 July 74				8-27 2. 1275		
Excellent	15	169	Lybnu	2	1 May 76	22 May 77			Exemplary		
Boadicea	5	31	P.O. 2 C.		23 May 77	17 April 78			Exempt		
"			P.O. 1 C.		18 April 78				Exempt		
					1 July 78	27 Feb 81			Exempt	D. D. Killed in Action	G. G. 2. 10. Lady 23. 74. Traced Medal 19. 479

*Admiralty, May 8, 1881.*

**T**HE following Despatch and enclosures have been received by the Secretary of the Admiralty from Commodore Richards, C.B., commanding on the Cape of Good Hope Station:—  
 Letter from Commodore Richards, O.B., forwarding Reports from Officers on the Action of 27th February, and bringing to the notice of their Lordships the services of Surgeon Mahon and others.

*"Boadicea," off Durban,*

SIR, *March 14, 1881.*

I REQUEST you will submit, for the consideration of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, the enclosed reports, forwarded by Lieutenant Ogle, R.N., in temporary command of the Naval Brigade at Head Quarters, on the action at Majuba Mountain on the 27th February.

2. In my letter of the 7th inst., No 53, I referred, to the services of Surgeon Edward Mahon. I now submit the interesting narrative of that officer for the consideration of their lordships, feeling sure that his graphic description of the events of the day will be of interest, and that the modest account which he renders of his own performance of duty in action under circumstances of extreme personal peril, as well as of his subsequent devotion to the wounded during twenty-eight hours of privation, will commend itself to their lordships; and I have much satisfaction in recommending Surgeon Mahon as an officer deserving of especial approbation and reward.

8. The conduct of William Bevis, assistant sick-berth attendant, as reported by Surgeon Mahon, I also submit for the especial consideration of their lordships.

4. Lieutenant Cochrane, the officer who was sent out at daylight in charge of a burying party from all corps, reports that he buried on the summit of the mountain fifty-three men in one grave, ten of the number being men of the Naval Brigade.

A Boer Commandant pointed out to him the bodies of George Hammond and Samuel Witherside, quartermaster, as of men who remained to the last, and died at their posts. Lieutenant Trower's body was also found on the extreme ridge, shot through the chest, temple, and with left hand shattered.

5. There seems (I regret to say from the reports enclosed) no doubt but that the ball which passed through Captain Romilly's body was an explosive bullet. It is the first mention I have received of the employment of those barbarous missiles by the Boers, and was probably an exceptional case.

The wounded men speak in high terms of the kindness of the Boers towards them after the conflict was over. I have, &c.

FREDK. W. RICHARDS,  
 Commodore.  
 The Secretary of the Admiralty, London.

Enclosure No. 1, with Cape and West Coast Station Letter No. 67, of 11th March, 1881.

*Camp, Mount Prospect,*  
 Sir, *March 8, 1881.*

I HAVE the honour herewith to forward you a more detailed account of the action on Majuba Mountain on 27th February, 1881, written by Sub-lieutenant A. L. Scott.

I also beg to enclose a revised list of the killed and wounded.

I have heard from Mr. Scott that Dr. Mahon behaved with great bravery and coolness in his

care for Commander Romilly. I myself also have observed that he has been most indefatigable in his duties, and especially, I believe, on the night following the action.

I have also heard that Lieutenant Trower was

ness to the end.

I have also with much pleasure to report most favourably the way in which Thos. Pyer, first-class signalman, who was sent out to attend the wounded; performed his duties, stopping out a night and a day, and brought in a list of those he had seen of killed and wounded. He also brought in a few articles which the Boers had not taken from Lieutenant Trower.

All the men in the action behaved with great coolness and bravery, and Mr. Scott says he cannot recommend one more than the other.

Commander Romilly was brought into camp the next morning, and placed in his tent. Lieutenant Trower's body was brought in the same morning. T. Lewis, Krooman, came wounded, and died during the night. The two latter were buried yesterday at the cemetery; the remainder of our killed were buried on the field. The bodies of General Sir G. P. Colley, and two I doctors belonging to the medical staff, were buried at the same time as Lieutenant Trower and T. Lewis, Krooman.

The Naval Brigade have lately sent up two 9-pr. field guns and 21 men under Sub-lieutenant Monckton to garrison a newly erected fort on the hill on our right, distant about half a mile; they have also been repairing and improving No. 4 redoubt close to our camp, in which the rocket tubes and rockets have also been placed; and it is at present intended that our whole force, except those with the 9-prs. and 20 men who work the Gatlings in a small round fort close to, should man this redoubt in case of alarm. Our men with one officer take duty now continually as picquets. We have also to furnish a hospital party; and so our hands are full. I am now commencing to take a list of our losses, which are comparatively heavy, many rifles being missing, together with great coats, waterproof sheets, water-bottles, and haversacks.

I have, &c.,

HY. A. OGLE, Lieutenant.

Commodore Richards, C.B.

[For list of killed and wounded, see Commodore Richards' Return at end of papers. The prisoners were Charles George, Ordinary Seaman; James Pafford, A.B.; D. Mortimer, Captain Fore-Top.]

Report of the Action at Majuba Mountain on  
 27th February, 1881.

*Camp, Mount Prospect,*

SIR, *March 1, 1881*

I HAVE the honour to report that 64 petty officers and Seamen, armed with rifles, under Commander Romilly, with Lieutenant Trower, Surgeon Mahon and myself, left the camp at 10 P.M. on February 26, two companies of 58th, 3-60th, and 92nd regiments accompanying us, with Sir G. Colley in command, to occupy Majuba Mountain, on the left front of the camp. The Naval Brigade brought up the rear of the column, and reached the top of the mountain by a precipitous route about 4 A.M. without opposition. The companies of 3-60th rifles were left on a neck of land between the mountain and the camp. On arrival at the top a section of our company was left at the point we ascended, with Lieutenant Trower; the remainder proceeded to the end of the mountain nearest the Boer camp.

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