

Lambert Brabazon Urmston 1794-1844

Born in 1794 at Chigwell in Essex, Lambert Brabazon Urmston was the fourth son of Captain James Urmston, a senior commander in the East India Company's fleet, and his wife Elizabeth Lawrence. This branch of the Urmston family, originally landowners in Lancashire, had acquired land in Ireland at the start of the 18th century.

Lambert's forenames stemmed from the Urmstons' linkage to the well-known Brabazon family in Ireland. His father James Urmston's maternal grandmother was Jane Brabazon, daughter of William Brabazon of Killalagh, Co. Louth and Elizabeth Lambert. They had a grandson named Lambert Brabazon (1740-1811), LBU's contemporary and his first cousin twice removed.

The manor house at Chigwell, Essex, was Captain James Urmston's residence since the 1770s or 1780s, after he moved from Ireland, and was probably Lambert's birthplace.

Lambert's baptism took place on 27 Jul 1800 at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Chigwell, Essex, at the age of six. The delay was presumably caused by his father's voyages to India in command of the HEIC vessel 'Sir Edward Hughes'. Nothing is known of his education.

Britain was in the later stages of the Napoleonic Peninsula War on 1 April 1813 when Lambert joined the Army aged 19 as Ensign in the 45th, Nottinghamshire, Regiment of Foot. Eight months later he was in South-West France at the battle of the River Nive, 9-13 December, where Wellington's army repulsed the last of Marshal Soult's assaults. Soult had found the Allied army divided by the Nive, but failed to inflict a damaging defeat. This ended the fighting for the year. The French then pulled back within Bayonne's defenses and entered winter quarters. Heavy rains brought operations to a standstill for the next two months.

In mid-February, Wellington's army broke out of its small area of conquered territory near Bayonne. Moving east, the Allies drove the French back from several river lines. After a pause in the campaign, the westernmost Allied corps surrounded and isolated Bayonne. Resuming their eastward drive, the remaining two Allied corps pushed Soult's army back to Orthez where the French marshal offered battle. In subsequent operations, Soult decided to abandon the large western port of Bordeaux and fall back east toward Toulouse. The next action was the Battle of Toulouse. Toulouse, the regional capital, proved stoutly defended by Marshal Soult. One British and two Spanish divisions were badly mauled in bloody fighting on 10 April, with Allied losses exceeding French casualties by 1,400. Soult held the city for an additional day before orchestrating an escape from the town with his army, leaving behind some 1,600 of his wounded, including three generals.

Wellington's army then entered Toulouse on the morning of 12 April. That afternoon, official word of Napoleon's defeat and abdication and the end of the war reached Wellington. Soult agreed to an armistice on 17 April. Having participated in the three final battles of the Peninsula Campaign, Lambert Brabazon and the 45th Regiment of Foot then returned home, the 1st battalion to be garrisoned in Ireland and the 2nd battalion disbanded at Plymouth.



Figure 1 St. Mary, Chigwell, where Lambert Brabazon Urmston was baptised on 27 July 1800



Figure 2 Battle of the River Nive, 9-13 December 1813, in which Lambert Urmston first saw combat.



Figure 3 Lieutenant Lambert Brabazon Urmston, 45th Foot, 1817

Napoleon returned to power in March 1815, and the Allies prepared again for battle. On 11 May 1815 Lambert was promoted, without purchase, to the rank of Lieutenant, but the 45th was not called to join the Allied forces who defeated Napoleon, finally, at Waterloo in June 1815. He remained in the shrinking peacetime Army, but was reduced to half-pay as of 25 March 1817.

At about that time he had his portrait painted by the Dublin artist Robert Lucius West, dressed in the uniform of a Lieutenant in the 45th Foot, and set against a background of mountains, presumably the Pyrenees.

There occurred in the same year an incident, reported in several newspapers, in which friends of Lambert Brabazon Urmston and his older brother Captain George Constantine Urmston RN asked a magistrate to bind the two brothers over after they, and Major Mason Gerard Stratford, son and heir of the 4th Earl of Aldborough, had exchanged threats of violent punishment against each other.

The newspapers did not explain the

background, which was that their older sister Elizabeth Catherine Urmston had married one Thomas Newcomen in March 1806, but four years later, on 10 June 1810 she had left her husband's house and gone to live with Major Stratford, a married man. On 10 February 1811, while living with Major Stratford, she had given birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Newcomen, whose upkeep and mistreatment became the subject of significant and historic lawsuits involving Newcomen, Stratford and the Urmstons. Stratford had a reputation as "a hopeless spendthrift who, when short of funds, would visit London money lenders with a gun and threaten to shoot himself if they did not give him cash. He was also a bigamist, possibly even a trigamist..." He was subsequently in debt prison 1818-26, all of which helps explain why the Urmston brothers threatened to beat him in 1817!

At the start of 1823 Lambert was twenty-nine, and he had spent six years on half pay. It is thus easy to understand why he accepted appointment on 23 January, as Lieutenant in the 38th, Staffordshire, Regiment of Foot, which had been sent to India in 1822, and found himself a wife. She was Ann Dunn, said to be about 22 years old, from Walmer in Kent, and they were wed in

London at St. Anne's, Soho, on 3 February 1823 with a marriage license obtained two weeks earlier. Her parents were apparently not involved in the marriage and are unknown. His parents do not appear to have been present either.

The newly weds embarked for India very soon thereafter, to join the 38th Foot at Berhampore in Bengal. Sadly, Ann died on 8 Sep 1824, a few days or weeks after their arrival. The marriage had lasted only seven months.

The 38th Regiment was next sent to Rangoon in Burma at the start of the 1st Burmese War in 1824, when conditions were extremely unhealthy and difficult, and Lambert participated in the actions at the Kemmendine stockade, outside Rangoon, and from there to Prome in Dec 1824 and Mellown in Jan 1826, before returning to India.



Figure 4 The assault on the Kemmendine Stockade, Rangoon, 10 June 1824

In 1828 Lambert purchased his promotion to Captain in the 31st, Huntingdonshire, Regiment of Foot. This suggests he had received campaign benefits enabling the purchase. It is not clear why he switched to the 31st Regiment – the 38th continued in India for another eight years – unless it was for lack of a vacant captaincy in the 38th.

Three years earlier, in March 1825, the 31st Foot had suffered a tragedy on its way to India when their ship had caught fire in the Bay of Biscay: 54 men, one woman and 20 children had died, leaving 20 officers, 344 soldiers, 43 women and 66 children who survived.

In the fifteen years from 1829 to 1843, the 31st Foot and Captain Lambert Brabazon Urmston seem to have enjoyed a fairly peaceful garrison life at various places in the Bengal Presidency, beginning with Meerut, then to Kurnaul in 1831. In September 1833 he was at Kurnaul for the birth of a daughter, baptised there seven months later as Ellen Maria. The record showed the mother was an unnamed 'native woman'; subsequent records indicate that she was then fifteen but offer no clues as to their meeting place, though they do indicate that they lived together from then onward.

From 15 March 1835 to 14 November 1836 he was on medical leave, during which a second daughter was born: she was Agnes Lavinia, though her birth and baptism records have not survived. It may have been Dinapore, reportedly very unhealthy, whence the regiment had moved from Kurnaul in March 1836. The medical leave was taken in "the Hills" - he was reported to have been granted an extension of leave there; this might have been Landour or Mussoorie, around the time of Agnes Lavinia's birth, if his duty station were Meerut or Kurnaul.

On 1 October 1837, at Dinapore a third daughter was born, Louisa Elizabeth; she was baptised there a year later on 8 October 1838, when the record again named her father without mention of her mother. At some point that year Captain Urmston replaced the absent regimental Pay Master Matthews. Further evidence of his whereabouts was the court-martial of a private in his company at Dinapore on 29 September 1838. In November 1838 the Regiment marched again, this time to Ghazee pore. A fourth daughter, Isabella, was born around the end of 1839, for which no record is to be found, other than her death in May 1842 at age 2½ and burial at Meerut, Bengal.

On 3 April 1839 the Regiment was increased to an establishment of ten companies, consisting of one colonel, two lieut.-colonels, two majors, ten captains, thirty subalterns, six staff, fifty-seven serjeants, nineteen drummers, and nine hundred and seventy six rank and file. Marching orders came again in Oct 1840, this time to Agra, arriving on 30 November, where it was increased again with a large detachment of recruits from England. Lieut. Colonel Samuel Bolton was the commander, and in March 1841 Major Thomas Skinner was added with another large party of recruits. Lambert Urmston became Brevet Major in November 1841, and sought purchase of the full rank of Major.

The British Government had for some years feared that Russian influence in Afghanistan would threaten British hegemony in India, and this had induced the stationing of poorly managed British troops there, which in turn provoked Afghan unrest and, at the start of 1842, murder of the British Envoy W.H. Macnaghten and massacres of the British at Kabul, and Gandamak. The subsequent British retreat from Kabul in Jan 1842, and the annihilation of the Kabul garrison "dealt a mortal blow to British prestige in the East, only rivalled by the fall of Singapore 100 years later". Immediate revenge was planned with the formation of an Anglo-Indian 'Army of Retribution'.

The 31st Regiment was ordered to join the part of this force commanded by General Pollock. Leaving Ferozepore on 10 March, it had nearly 800 bayonets, and the following senior officers: Lt. Col. Samuel Bolton, Major Thomas Skinner, Major Van Cortlandt, Brevet-Major C Shaw, Brevet-Major L.B. Urmston, 4 captains, 12 lieutenants, 5 ensigns and 3 staff. After forced

marches via Peshawar, with Urmston acting as brigade major, they reached Pollock at Jellalabad on 5 May 1842.

In the ensuing conflicts en route to Kabul, Major Urmston is mentioned as having escaped injury at the battle of Mazeena on 26 July, when a bullet struck the blade of his sword. Contemporary accounts of the Afghan campaign, while crediting the prowess of his



Figure 5 The 31st Regiment at Mazeena, Afghanistan, July 1862

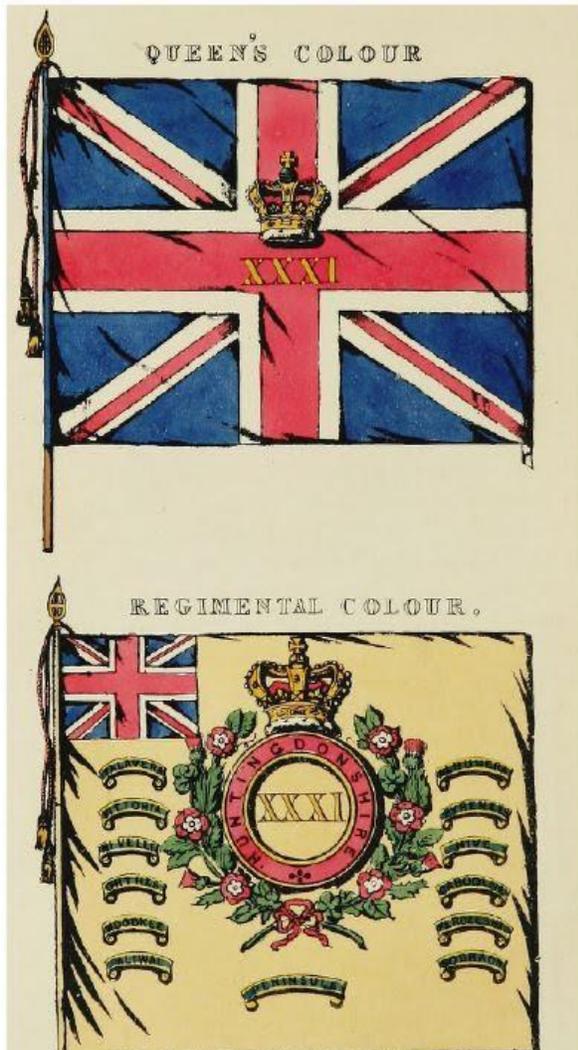


Figure 6 Colours of the 31st Foot ca. 1850, when 'Cabul' had been added after the Afghan and Sikh wars.

commander Samuel Bolton and his colleague Major Skinner, lack mention of Urmston, though he was certainly present at Mazeena, the capture of Kabul on 15 September, and in the cholera-stricken return march to India. Some regimental losses incurred when the Afghans attacked them in the Jugdulloch Pass on 18 October, after which a dispatch paid tribute to the “bravery of... Her Majesty’s Thirty-first regiment [and others]...as well their endurance of privations and fatigue, have been beyond all praise. No troops could, in every respect, have behaved better.”

The returning Thirty-first reached Jellalabad on 23 October, and after destroying the fortifications there, marched to Peshawar and then Ferozepore on 12 December, having been in the field for eleven months. Queen Victoria authorized the word “Cabul, 1842” on the regimental colours.

The British/Indian force was dissolved at Ferozepore, and the 31st was ordered 170 miles south to Umballa, arriving there 27 Jan 1843, to establish a new cantonment, building barracks for the men and bungalows for the officers.

The effects of the Afghan War on Lambert Urmston’s health in the following months are easily deduced. He was assigned in January 1843 to do duty for the summer season at the Landour

convalescent depot in the hills adjacent to Mussoorie. He was not the only one: his senior regimental colleague Major, now Brevet Col. Thomas Skinner C.B., was sent there too and succumbed at Landour on 5 May 1843. Meanwhile at Umballa the whole Regiment was “under canvas, exposed to most intense heat, until July 1843, when the men were housed, and a few of the officers got shelter”.

Lambert’s four daughters and their mother joined him in 1843 after his return from Afghanistan. In Jan 1842 she had been at Kooja (location uncertain) when daughter Edith Sophia was born there, and presumably at Meerut, in May 1842 when daughter Isabella died there. The family clearly rejoined in Landour, avoiding the heat in Umballa. That is evidenced by the death there of their fifth daughter Edith Sophia Urmston, aged 1½, whom they buried in the Landour Cantonment cemetery on 7 August. In November they were still all in Landour, for the mother’s



Figure 7 Landour Cemetery, where infant Edith Sophia Urmston was buried in Aug 1843

baptism on the 21st at the newly built St Paul’s Church, named as Ellen Jeannette Jemiett, a mature adult, born at Rampore District, and resident at Landour. That same day also saw her marriage, as Ellen Jemiett, 25, spinster, to Bt. Major Lambert Brabazon Urmston, 48, widower, both ceremonies conducted by the Mussoorie-Landour chaplain, Rev. R.P. Brooke. Marriage witnesses were Major T. Ryan of the 50th Foot, a fellow officer on duty at the convalescent depot, Maria Dupuis, who ran a school for girls there, and M. Ewart and K. Robinson.



Figure 8 St Paul's, Landour (mid 20thC), where Lambert Brabazon Urmston and Ellen Jemiett were married in 1843.

Ellen Jeannette's parentage and her ethnicity remain a mystery. That she was the mother of all Lambert's children is asserted by a statement in Lambert's will, and is perhaps corroborated by the fact his first daughter was baptised as Ellen, though she was then described as an unnamed 'native woman' and only mentioned in the one baptismal record after their marriage..

The 31st Regiment remained busy: in May 1843 it had been sent to bring the city and state of Khytul under British control; Major Urmston's assignment to Landour prevented his participation in that episode. In October an outbreak in Lahore was responsible for the 31st leaving Umballa again for Ferozepore until April 1844, whence it returned to Umballa on 2 May. Urmston had returned to Umballa at the close of December, and proceeded then to Ferozepore with a detachment from his regiment.

On 26 June 1844 Major Urmston was travelling again from Umballa on sick leave to the newly established military convalescent depot at Kiessowlee (Kasauli) fifty miles north, but a few miles short of the depot, at Kalka, he succumbed and died.

Two days later his commander Colonel Bolton issued the following announcement and testimony:

"Colonel Bolton feels deep regret in having to announce the death of Major Urmston, at 2 p.m. yesterday, while on his way on sick leave towards Kiessowlee. In him the commanding officer has lost an esteemed and faithful friend, and the regiment at large a gallant and good officer. When to these well-known qualities in Major Urmston it may with truth be added, that he was devotedly attached to

his profession, and that he was ever truly kind and considerate towards all subordinates to him, and in every way the soldier's friend, Colonel Bolton is well convinced that deep sorrow will be felt by every individual of the corps at this announcement."

He was buried at the Umballa Cantonment Cemetery on 28 May, and the monument placed on his grave read:

"In sacred memory of Major Urmston H^r M^s 31st Foot who de^{ptd} this life the 26th of June 1844 aged 50 years. This tomb is erected by his brother officers to mark their esteem."

An obituary notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Nov 1844, cited Col. Bolton's testimonial in full, and mentioned similar statements by General Pollock and Brigadier Monteath, Urmston's superiors in the Afghan campaign.

Regrettably, his acquisition by purchase of the rank of Major, for which he had been lent money by his brother James, had not yet been completed, so his final rank was Captain/Brevet Major.

Ellen Urmston, his wife, had been pregnant at the time of his death: three months later, on 22 August, she gave birth to their sixth daughter, Lucy Eleanor, who was baptised at Umballa on 6 Jan 1845; Ellen's name was included in the record, for the first time.

In England the Urmston family – his brothers - erected the memorial to him in the church at Chigwell, shown as Figure 9 below.

Lambert Urmston left a will which reaffirmed his marriage to Ellen, and her responsibility for the upbringing of their children. In this, his final wish, he was successful: his wife raised the four surviving daughters, living in Agra for another forty years, including shelter in Agra Fort during the 1857 Uprising, and finally buried in the Agra Cantonment cemetery in 1885.

These four daughters, all reportedly beautiful, all married, three at Agra in the 1850s, and the fourth at Meerut in 1863. Their four husbands were, or became, senior officials in India: two in the civil service (Edward Bickers, Charles William Kinloch), one in the Telegraph Department (Benjamin Charles Bailey), and one in the Indian Police (Edward Foster).

The fifty years of Lambert Brabazon Urmston's life, which followed the customary military path of a younger son, were commendable and worthy, rather than heroic. Thirty years in the Army, with twenty-five of active duty and participation in many battles in the Napoleonic, Burmese and First Afghan Wars, were marked by brave endurance and the appreciation of his fellow officers, rather than by spectacular feats. Twenty years in India, separated from his English home and family, saw him build a notable family of his own.

Today he has dozens of living descendants from the four families of his surviving daughters – Bickers, Kinloch, Bailey, and Foster – and their offspring. They are known to be living in England, France and Australia, and it is possible that there are others, as yet unidentified, in India, Scotland, Canada and New Zealand.

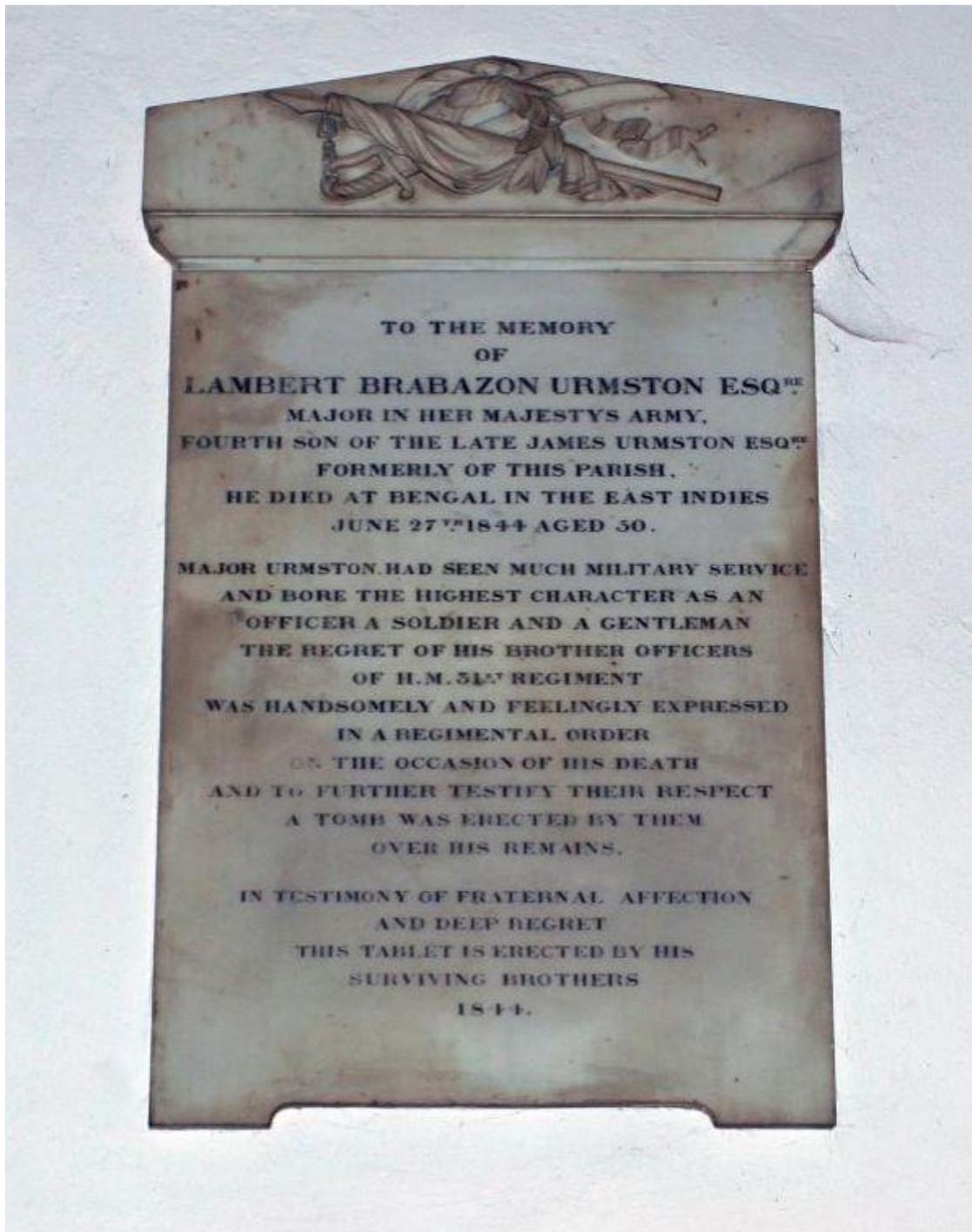


Figure 9 The family memorial to Lambert Brabazon Urmston, St. Mary's Church, Chigwell, Essex