

## William Brydon – A Lecture to the History Group by Peter McLoughlin

It was about 2 months after I presented to this history group, the story about the elderly lady in Rosemarkie, around 1955, talking about the village in the past, I received a telephone call from Jean Macarthur giving the name of a gentleman from Cawder who wanted to talk to me about a William Brydon, who was buried in Rosemarkie cemetery. I duly telephoned this gentleman, to be confronted with "Ah, you're the local expert on history in Rosemarkie". Taken aback, I told him that was rather a bit of an exaggeration and that I had only told the story of the old lady, and that was all from a book that the W.R.I. had produced. He asked me did I know about William Brydon? No I said that name did not mean anything to me! He said William was rather a famous man in Afganistan! He further said that he had worked many years in Afganistan himself and that William Brydon was a very well known person within the boundaries of Afgan history. He was also disappointed that within Rosemarkie cemetery, other than the gravestone giving his name and details of when he was born and when he died, there was no other mention of such a famous man. Rather sheepishly I asked him about this man "William Brydon". He told me the following story which i verified on the internet:



The most important event of the first Afghan war (1838-42) was the virtual destruction of the British army in the wintery mountainous terrain between Kabul and Jalalabad in 1842. In 1838, a large British force moved from India to Kabul in Afghanistan to prevent the threat of the Russians moving into Afghanistan. The size of this force was about 16,000 soldiers and, believe it or not, about 38,000 camp followers, who were made: up of saddlers, farriers, cobblers, tailors water carriers, sweepers, laundry men, men to polish brasses, men to put up tents, cooks orderlies and stable boys, plus their wives and children and often scores of other relatives. Hundreds of camels were needed to carry personal equipment. each officer had minimum of ten servants, not counting the grooms for his animals, and, if he travelled by palanquin (a litter), six bearers. There were metal workers, wood gatherers,, herdsmen for the cattle, sheep and goats, and butchers plus all the rif raf of fortune tellers, dancing girls and musicians. There were carts and wagons by the thousand, chargers, ponies, dogs, camels, palanquins and drays. It took this army 8 months to move from Lahore in India to Kabul in Afghanistan, a distance of about 450 miles. William Brydon was a medical officer in this British force.

It is not known how many camels he had to carry his medical equipment, but in those days officers lived in great style with quite elaborate camp furniture. One item was a campaign chest, a chest of drawers, usually 4 drawers high, made of mahogany. teak or rosewood. This chest was carried by a camel, and each night it was assembled in the officers tent and he would change into clean clothes before dinner. William Brydon's chest still exists to this day and is in a Cromarty house and in constant use, When they arrived in Kabul they quickly disposed of the Afghan ruler, who favoured the Russians, and put in his place a puppet king. The country seemed peaceful and gradually the force was reduced to some 3,000 soldiers, in total with 17,000 followers. They became careless of their safety and spent their time playing cricket, horse racing, ice skating, in winter, on frozen ponds and organising amateur dramatics. Two years passed like this and many of the troops' wives and families joined them. Lavish entertainment was the order of the day. They felt so safe that some of them moved out of Kabul City and set up settlements on a plain to the east, among orchards and gardens. But by the end of 1841, the Afghans, who had merely being biding their time and plotting revenge, rose in revolt and murdered any European they could lay hands on.

The army commander at that time was an old man, General Elphinstone. He hummed and hawed for so long that the Afghans soon got the upper hand and surrounded the military garrison of kabul. It

was not long until this large force run out of rations, and the soldiers, keen to get into action, were half starved. With winter setting in and little food, Elphinstone offered to evacuate Afghanistan at once, and reinstate the previous king, provided they were given safe conduct out of the country as far as the Kyber Pass.

The Afghans agreed, although they had intention of keeping to their promises, so in January 1842 the army set off for the nearest British settlement of Jalalabad, some 95 miles away from Kabul. The British garrison of nearly 17000 soldiers and camp followers retreated from Kabul, but the retreat was a rabble from the start, The Afghan horsemen dashed among the camp followers, slashing anyone they could catch and galloped away with loot. The land was snow covered, some soldiers got frostbite within hours, hundreds of Indian bearers threw down their loads in panic and ran away into the wilderness, easy pickings for the Afghan tribesmen. The retreat lasted ten days. They struggled through snowy passes over 5000 feet high and every day they grew weaker and fewer in number. The Afghans played a cat and mouse game with them; ambushes in every gully and snipers above on every ridge. The column was never left alone and their passage was marked by a trail of the dead and dying. After four days the fighting strength of the army was down to 300 infantry, 380 Indian Sepoys and 170 cavalry, most of them severely frostbitten and many snow blind. There was still seventy miles to go. After five days they had still fifty miles to go and about 12,000 people had died so far and for miles the track was littered by their corpses. All the baggage had gone and only two regiments were fighting back. On the sixth and seventh days the survivors struggled through the Jugdulluck Ravine, Here the Afghans had blocked the narrow track with barriers of thorny shrubs, two metres high, which the soldiers had to clear, all the time the snipers from above poured hails of bullets among those still alive, slaughtering hundreds more. Only 65 officers and soldiers survived this massacre and on day eight they reached the village of Gandamak twenty miles from Jalalabad, Here most were surrounded by Afghans and killed and only fourteen, those who had by passed the village, survived. By the ninth day only six remained, three captains, a lieutenant and two army doctors. and they reached Fettehbad, only 16 miles from safety, Here they were falsely welcomed by the villagers, two were murdered as they rested, three others cut down as they fled and only one, William Brydon of the Army Medical Corps, escaped.

As his horse galloped desperately across the last few kilometres to Jalalabad, he was surrounded by Afghans throwing stones at him and trying to slash him with sabres, In the end all he had left was the hilt of his broken sword which he threw in a horseman's face before managing to outdistance his pursuers.

It is thought the Afghans let him go, so he could tell the story of the end of the Afghan war.

The last man "William Brydon", whose remains lie in enclosure 3 of the Rosemarkie cemetery.

Brydon's escape was immortalised in the painting by the famous military artist "Lady Elizabeth Butler" entitled "The Remnants of an Army" which is now in the Tate Gallery in London.

Fifteen years later, Brydon survived another siege, this time at Lucknow during the Indian mutiny, where he was severely wounded, A bullet went through his abdomen and lodged in his spine, which never removed, and eventually died in Westfield at Nigg in 1873, aged 61, from the wounds he received in India, According to the death certificate his wife, Colina, was the daughter of Donald McIntyre, and her mother was a Mackenzie from Kincaig near Invergordon.

Her uncle, Colonel Hector Mackenzie had retired to Rosemarkie and he bought her the house called Rosenburg for Colina after her husband's death.

This Cawder gentleman, the reporter of this story to me, is extremely upset that I was not aware of 'Brydon' as he was such an important man (in fact I was aware of this story and I had seen the picture before, but I was not aware that his name was William Brydon and he was buried in Rosemarkie). He expected some sort of memorial, at least a plaque or similar.

Is he right?

Does this William Brydon not rank above Hugh Millar of Cromarty and the Mackenzie of Avoch, Should we consider giving Brydon some sort of memorial?

This I would like to leave with you, This may be the sort of topic that this history group may want to exploit.

Enclosure 3 is at the far end of the church near the steps down to the shore. I have some slides.

Also buried in the enclosure, which is entitled the MacIntyre enclosure, is Donald MacIntyre, VC (see note below).

Further reading can be seen at:

[khyber.org](http://khyber.org)

See below for obituaries

### **Note on Donald MacIntyre**

He was 40 years old and a Major in the Bengal Staff Corps, Indian Army, and 2 Gurkha Rifles, Indian Army, during the Looshai Expedition in India, when the following deed took place, for which he was awarded the VC.

On 4 January 1872, during the Looshai campaign, North East India, Major MacIntyre led the assault on the stockaded village of Lalgnoora. He was the first to reach the stockade, which at this time was about a foot high, and successfully stormed it under heavy fire from the enemy.