

## Major General Andrew Gilbert Wauchope

The Wauchope family is one of the oldest in Liberton Parish; a document bearing the name Gilbert Wauchope is dated around 1390.



Andrew Gilbert Wauchope was born at Niddrie House in Edinburgh on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1846, the third of four children born to Andrew Wauchope and Frances daughter of Henry Lloyd of Lloydsborough, county Tipperary, Ireland. He attended school at Worksop in Nottinghamshire, and later at Stubbington House near Fareham in Hampshire. On leaving school, he became a cadet at the Naval College, Portsmouth in 1859, leaving there on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1862. He joined the 42<sup>nd</sup> Royal Highlanders (The Black Watch), as an Ensign in November 1865, aged nineteen. In 1867, he was promoted to Lieutenant, and became Adjutant on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1870. He resigned this position in August 1873, in order to go with his regiment to the Gold Coast, where he arrived on 30<sup>th</sup> November that year. During the subsequent fighting against the Ashanti army, he was severely wounded in the shoulder, the bullet only being extracted some years later. For his actions in this fighting, he was mentioned in despatches.

On returning to Scotland the following year, he was appointed Acting Adjutant at the regimental depot in Perth, and held that post until March 1876. At that time, he went with his regiment to Malta, as Musketry Instructor, later moving to Cyprus in 1878 as a Civil Commissioner. He was promoted to Captain on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1878, and later made a member of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG), for his services in Cyprus. During 1880-81, he saw service in South Africa, returning to Edinburgh on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1881, and became engaged to Elythea Ruth Erskine, daughter of Sir Thomas Erskine Bart, of Cambo, Fife, in November. He embarked for Egypt on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1882, and received the Khedive's Star for his services there. While in Egypt, he learned of the death of his elder brother, and now found himself Laird of Niddrie, and of the family estate at Yetholm in the Scottish borders. He left almost immediately for Scotland, and married at Cambo on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1882, after which he and his wife returned to Cairo on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1883.

On 25<sup>th</sup> October that year, they returned to Scotland, and on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1884, twins were born in London, but unfortunately, his wife died on 3<sup>rd</sup> February. The twins were brought up at Cambo by their grand parents, but one of them William, died in April 1887, and the other developed Scarlet Fever that same month, the effects of which left him handicapped for the rest of his life. Andrew returned to Egypt on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1884, and was badly wounded once again, at the battle of El Teb on the 29<sup>th</sup> February. He was promoted Major on 14<sup>th</sup> March, and to Lieutenant Colonel on 21<sup>st</sup> May that same year. Once again he was badly wounded at the battle of Kirbegan on the Nile, on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1885.

In May 1888 he was promoted to full Colonel, and in June the following year, he was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB). On November 18<sup>th</sup> 1889, he was adopted as Liberal-Unionist candidate for Midlothian at the next election, where his opponent would be William Gladstone. At this election held on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1892, he lost by 5,151 votes to Gladstone's 5,845, from a turn out of 84%. During the summer of 1892, he became engaged to Jean Muir, daughter of Sir William Muir, Principal of Edinburgh University, and they married in October. Whenever he was at home in Niddrie, he always attended Liberton Kirk, where he was ordained an elder on

25<sup>th</sup> March 1894, and took an active part in church life.

From 1896-98, he was at York with his regiment, and in June of that year was promoted to Brigadier. Shortly after, he joined General Kitchener's staff in Egypt; on its march to liberate Khartoum. He took part in the battle of Omdurman on 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> September, leading one of the columns, and his brigade lost one officer killed, four wounded, two other ranks killed and seventy-two wounded. The total number of enemy killed in this battle was officially given as 10,834. Andrew left for home soon after the battle, arriving at Niddrie on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1898. A few days later, he was invited to Windsor by Queen Victoria, and was promoted to Major General.

During the summer of 1899, he lost a by-election in Edinburgh South by 831 votes, and at this time he received from Edinburgh University, the honorary degree of Doctor of Law (LL.D). On 23<sup>rd</sup> October, he left Southampton for South Africa, to take command of the Highland Brigade, arriving at Cape Town on 11<sup>th</sup> November. On 30<sup>th</sup> November, his brigade was ordered by Lord Methuen the commanding General, to make its way to the front, in order to lift the siege on Kimberley from the south. The brigade reached the Modder River 23 miles south of Kimberley on 7<sup>th</sup> December, and learned that the Boers defending the southern approaches were at Magersfontein Hill a few miles south of the town. In virtually every previous occasion where Boers were defending a hill, they had been dug in near or on the summit. A light reconnaissance had been carried out by some of Methuen's officers on December 9<sup>th</sup>, but did not penetrate far enough, as it was considered to be a waste of time in view of past actions. However on this occasion, the Boers had dug trenches on the flat ground a few hundred yards from the hill, and extended them southwards down both sides of the valley. Although an observation balloon had been available to him since the Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>, and would certainly have shown the trench lines, Methuen decided it was not necessary.

It was under these circumstances that Major-General Wauchope was ordered to make a frontal attack with the Highland Brigade on the expected Boer positions during the night of 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> December. Having read of all his previous actions, I am in no doubt that if Wauchope had been given some notice of the attack, and a

free hand, he would have done a full reconnaissance, and used the balloon, with a very different outcome. To make matters worse, Methuen's artillery bombarded the summit of the hill from 3.0pm-6.0pm on the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup>, which not only caused no casualties on the Boer side, but also alerted them to an impending attack. The plan was for the Highland Brigade to move forward at midnight of the 10<sup>th</sup>, up the valley, reaching and attacking the hill just before dawn. When the brigade moved forward at the appointed time, into a thunderstorm and torrential driving rain, the visibility was very low. The only possible formation in these conditions was in mass quarter columns, company behind company in close order. About 3 hours into the march, and before the point of deployment, the Boer trenches opened fire, pouring volleys of shots into the massed ranks of soldiers. One of the first to be shot was the Major General, who was hit by two bullets, which killed him instantly. That night the firing continued, and all the next day the survivors had to lie on the ground, unable to move for food or water in the mid summer heat. The few who survived this, made their way back to safety under cover of darkness. The Highland Brigade lost 64 officers and 706 other ranks killed or wounded of which 17 officers and 338 other ranks belonged to the Black Watch.

The Major-General's body was interred temporarily on the battlefield, and later at Matjesfontein, in the private burial ground of the Honourable J.D. Logan, a member of the Cape Legislative Council, and a native of the Scottish border country.

Memorials to General Wauchope were erected at Niddrie village, in the Presbyterian Church at York, at Perth, on the village green at Yetholm, in St Giles Cathedral Edinburgh, and at New Craighall Church.

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 1905, a stained glass window in his memory was unveiled in his home church of Liberton Kirk, by Lieutenant Colonel R.G. Gordon Gilmour of the Inch and Craigmillar. The window was erected by public subscription in the whole parish of Liberton, and representatives of all the churches in the parish were on the committee. The glasswork is by Messrs A Ballantine & Son of Edinburgh, and represents the angel appearing to Cornelius the devout centurion. In the tracery, are the orders of the Bath and St

Michael & St George, surmounted by the Niddrie arms.

**-John Rennie**  
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