

The Lendy Memorial at Sunbury



Alan Doyle and Nick Pollard

The Lendy family and Sunbury

Charles and Edward Lendy were the sons of Major Auguste Frederic Lendy and his wife Sophia, who married in Brighton in 1848. Major Lendy was French by birth, attended the military academy at St. Cyr, and moved to Britain in 1850 as tutor to the sons of the exiled French King, Louis Phillippe I. After the disasters of the Crimean War of 1853/56, the purchase of commissions in the British Army was abolished, and professional training for officers was introduced. Major Lendy opened a military academy at Sunbury House, in what is now Fordbridge Road. Here he prepared students for the entrance exams for the army colleges at Sandhurst and Woolwich. One wing of the house survives in Loudwater Close, the main part having been destroyed by fire in 1915. Among many distinguished visitors to the academy was the Duc de Nemours, second son of King Louis Philippe, who lived nearby at Claremont in Esher.

The military academy at Sunbury in 1856. Students are engaged in building practice fortifications, a subject upon which Major Lendy had written a book.



Charles and Edward were born in Sunbury in January 1863 and February 1868 respectively. They had two older sisters – Violet and Alice – and a younger sister, Julia. The family lived at Sunbury House, and later at Riverside House in Thames Street. Under their father's tuition, both brothers passed the army entrance exams. Charles went to Woolwich, where he was commissioned into the Royal Artillery. Edward went to Sandhurst and was commissioned as an infantry officer into the Derbyshire Regiment (the Sherwood Foresters).

Edward August William Lendy DSO

Despite the Sherwood Foresters being his parent regiment, Edward Lendy was immediately seconded to the regular West India Regiment, whose ranks were composed of black Caribbean volunteers. The West India Regiment were often deployed to West Africa, and they were in Sierra Leone when Lendy joined them. The British settlement at Freetown in Sierra Leone had been established in the late 18th century as a place to settle American slaves who had sought refuge with the British during the American Revolutionary War and gained their freedom.

In August 1890 he was invested with the Distinguished Service Order – a decoration for gallantry second only to the VC - by Queen Victoria herself at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight “for services at Foulah Town and its vicinity on the West Coast of Africa, in breaking up a combination of slave dealers and rescuing upwards of 250 slaves.”

By September 1893 Edward Lendy was with the Sierra Leone Border Police, involved in an ongoing war with the Sofas, slave soldiers of the Mandinka empire of Samori Ture which was based in Mali and Guinea, and tasked with patrolling Sierra Leone’s borders with the neighbouring French colonies of Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea. On 4th November 1893, Edward Lendy and forty Police were at the Sell River on their way to open a road which had been closed by the war with the Sofas. There was no bridge – only a rope made from creepers tied from bank to bank. The river had to be traversed - the force’s rations were on the opposite bank – and the men began to cross. A man ended up in distress, and three soldiers, and then Lendy, dived into the water to save him. He and the three soldiers were awarded Bronze medals by the Royal Humane Society for their courage.

Less than two months later, on 23rd December, Lendy was at Waiima near the eastern border of Sierra Leone. Early that morning, in thick mist, they were attacked by a French force of more than 1200 under a Lieutenant Maritz. The French had mistaken the British for Sofas, and by the time the shooting stopped the British had lost seventeen officers and men killed, and a further fifteen wounded. Lendy and two of his Police were among those killed. Maritz died later of his wounds.

Edward Lendy was elected as a member of the Royal Geographical Society in February 1893. The RGS records, however, show that he “never qualified”

as a member, the phrase referring to his not having paid his annual subscription, almost certainly because he had been killed before he could pay it.

Charles Frederick Lendy

Charles Lendy spent seven years with the Royal Artillery in various postings in Gibraltar, Bermuda and Shoeburyness, before he was seconded to the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1890. The BSAC, established by Cecil Rhodes, had been granted a Royal Charter in 1889 to colonise and exploit the land and resources of southern Africa. The BSAC had secured, in controversial circumstances, the Rudd Concession from Lobengula, the second King of the Matabele, which granted the Company mining and other rights in the neighbouring territory of Mashonaland. Lobengula had granted many other concessions to various people.

By 1893 Lendy was the resident magistrate at Fort Victoria (now Masvingo) in Mashonaland. The magistrates were responsible for keeping the peace, as well as adjudicating on cases brought before them. There were growing tensions between the BSAC and Lobengula as to who exactly exercised power in Mashonaland. The men of a Shona chief living near Fort Victoria had stolen cattle from other Shona who held the cattle on behalf of Lobengula. On 11th June 1893, Lobengula sent a “small impi” (regiment) – some 70 men – from Bulawayo to recover these cattle. Lendy rode out to meet them, allowed the cattle to be taken back to Bulawayo, and sent a letter with the impi for Lobengula, warning him about sending his warriors into Mashonaland.

Some weeks later a local newspaper reported that Lobengula was intent on sending a much larger force to punish the Shona cattle thieves, but the cattle rustling continued. On 9th July, 3500 Matabele warriors entered Fort Victoria, and 20 Shona were murdered in the streets. Manyao, the commander of the impi, approached the Fort bearing a letter to Lendy from Lobengula. He and his bodyguards saw Shona sheltering inside the Fort and demanded they be handed over. Lendy refused. The impi retired from the town but remained in the district pillaging and murdering at will.

On 19th July a meeting took place between Manyao and his subordinates, and Leander Starr Jameson of the BSAC, which was marked by intransigence on both sides, and ended in stalemate. That evening, on Jameson’s orders, Lendy assembled a party of 40 men who rode out the next morning with the

purpose of encouraging the impi to return to Matabeleland. Lendy's men were under orders not to fire unless fired upon, it was later said. They came across some 300 Matabele who were the advance guard of the larger Matabele force. Immediately Lendy's force were seen, firing broke out, although there is controversy over who fired first. By the end of the day, some 30 Matabele are thought to have been killed – nine by Lendy's party, and the remainder by vengeful Shona who had ambushed the Matabele as they passed.

Three months later the BSAC invaded Matabeleland. Two columns set out, one each from Forts Salisbury and Victoria, towards Bulawayo. They joined together, with a combined strength of 690 mounted men, about 1000 Shona tribesmen on foot, two seven-pounder field guns and eight machine guns. The Fort Victoria column was commanded by Major Allan Wilson. The Fort Salisbury contingent was commanded by Major Patrick Forbes, who was also in overall command of the combined force once they merged. Lendy was with the guns, although overall command of the artillery was exercised by Wilson.

Lendy would have been one of very few professional soldiers in this column. The vast majority of the mounted men were prospectors, shopkeepers and farmers, riding their own horses and carrying their own hunting rifles. Such was the reputation of the Matabele impis that the residents of Salisbury did not hold out hopes of column's safe return.

The column fought two actions against Matabele warriors. The first was at the Shangani River (a battle the Matabele call Bonko) on 25 October. The Matabele, thought to number 5000, attacked before dawn and fought valiantly until the afternoon before withdrawing.

On 1st November the column was laagered at Bembesi (Egodade to the Matabele) in two small encampments with restricted fields of fire. At midday 6000 Matabele mounted a surprise attack on the laager, with 1000 modern rifles distributed amongst them. Those in the column armed with firearms were thus outnumbered almost nine to one. The Matabele riflemen fired with concentrated accuracy.

The battle was hard and the Matabele charged with the greatest courage three times in the face of machine gun fire, but after suffering very many casualties were compelled to withdraw. 500 Matabele were killed and wounded.

Machine guns were used in both battles, and no doubt contributed to the outcomes. Even so, these battles were close run things. The column's successes could have been very different. They were extremely lucky.

The Battle of Bembesi was the turning point in the Matabele War. Within a week, Lobengula's capital had been razed to the ground, and the Matabele impis put to flight, although they rose again in 1896. Charles Lendy died in Bulawayo on 13th January 1894, apparently from an internal injury he suffered throwing the heavy shot in an athletic competition.

Lendy is often accused of being part of a colonial expedition which seized a country from the hands of those who fought to keep it as theirs. However, it should be remembered that the Matabele themselves, under King Mzilikazi, had invaded the area from the south in the 1820s, displacing the Shona who had previously occupied the area, and treating the Shona in the surrounding areas of Mashonaland as vassals, forced to give tribute to the Matabele. And there were other neighbouring tribes, notably the Barotse in western Zambia and the Bamangwato in Bechuanaland, who had also suffered the raids of Lobengula's impis, and would have cheered the defeat of the Matabele.

The Lendy Memorial



The memorial in its original location on the riverbank in Thames Street.

The deaths of Charles and Edward within three weeks of each other were felt very keenly in Sunbury. There was an appeal for funds to build a memorial to the two brothers in the village where they were born and educated. It was unveiled on Saturday 25th May 1895 by Earl Grey, Chairman of the British South Africa Company. The memorial, carved from white Italian marble, was erected on the riverbank near the ferry house in Thames Street, almost facing the Lendy residence at Riverside House. It incorporated a drinking fountain, and a trough at its base for passing cattle

and horses. The Latin inscription at the top read *"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori"*: *"It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country"*, a sentiment which fell into disuse after the carnage of the First World War.



The lion, with members of the Sunbury UDC, at Benwell House in Green Street in 1973.

The memorial was badly damaged by a bomb in the Second World War, only the lion surviving. This was moved to the grounds of the Sunbury Urban District Council offices in Green Street.

In 1985 Spelthorne Council (the successor to Sunbury UDC) decided to restore the walled garden within Sunbury Park. The garden had originally been the kitchen garden for the adjacent Sunbury Park House, which had fallen into

disrepair and been demolished after World War Two. It was decided to recreate the Lendy memorial using the original sculpture of the lion with a replacement plinth, and make it the centrepiece of the newly restored garden.

Lendy Memorials in Africa

Sierra Leone



Edward Lendy was buried where he died at Waiima in Sierra Leone, his grave marked with a stone cross. This cross was later incorporated into a larger memorial together with a stone cairn commemorating the deaths of the men of the Sierra Leone Frontier Police, the West India Regiment, and the French soldiers, all of whom died in the same incident.

Zimbabwe



There is a substantial memorial to Charles Lendy on Leopold Takawira Avenue, Bulawayo, in Centenary Park. Charles Lendy is buried in the municipal cemetery in Sauerstown in Bulawayo, his grave marked by a simple stone cross much like his brother's.

The Scramble for Africa

The Lendy brothers both served in Africa as part of Britain's policy of acquiring overseas colonies, in order to improve trading links by establishing outposts and ports, act as markets for British manufactured goods, and to some extent to spread what were assumed to be the benefits of Western civilisation such as the Christian religion, the legal system, and organised government, as well as suppression of the slave trade (which Europeans had done so much previously to promote).

Other European powers were also intent on the same objectives, and this led to what was became known as 'The Scramble for Africa'. In 1870 only 10% of Africa was under formal European control. The 1884 Berlin Conference attempted to regulate colonisation of the continent and establish spheres of interest for each power, largely avoiding military

clashes, although the occasional incident such as that at Waiima where Edward Lendy died, did happen. As a result, by 1914, almost 90% of Africa was under European control.



The 'Rhodes Colossus' - Cecil Rhodes bestriding Africa. A 'Punch' cartoon of 1892.

Britain had a particular interest in protecting the trade routes to its most valuable colony in India, but the idea of a continuous swathe of British controlled territory all the way from the Cape to Cairo, linked by a railway, became one of the aims of Cecil Rhodes, one of the main architects of colonial expansion in southern Africa. His dream was never realised.

Sierra Leone achieved independence in 1961, Zimbabwe in 1980.

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Map of Africa in 1896, shortly after the deaths of the Lendy brothers. Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe outlined in red. Territories colonised by the European powers shown in different shades.

Alan Doyle has lived in Sunbury for many years, but he was born and brought up in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, where there is a memorial to one of the Lendy brothers. He has always had a keen interest in the history of both his native and adopted lands.

Nick Pollard lives in Shepperton and is the Chair of Sunbury and Shepperton Local History Society, as well as Curator of the Spelthorne Museum in Staines. He is the author of several books about the history of the area and frequently gives talks on the subject.

Further reading

A History of Sunbury-on-Thames, George Freeman, 2005

The Scramble for Africa, Thomas Pakenham, 1991

The Sherbro and its Hinterland, TJ Alldridge, 1901

Bulawayo: Historic Battleground of Rhodesia, Oliver Ransford, 1968

The Croydon Arsenic Mystery, Diane Janes, 2010

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