Arthur Rowley Heyland and Mary Kyffin

Arthur was born in Belfast on 27th September 1781, the son of Rowley and Mary Heyland. He had a brother, Hercules John, who was two or three years younger. He also had a half brother and half sister from his father’s first marriage. Langford Heyland and Mary Ann, who were at least nine years older. Arthur probably grew up in the Heyland family home of Ballintemple, near Garvagh, Northern Ireland. His father died in 1800 when he was eighteen years old.

Arthur was educated at Eton and then Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He entered the Army as an ensign in the 49th Regiment. At this time commissions were bought and the Regiment chosen was not necessarily due to local attachment so much as where there was a vacancy in a Regiment which was affordable.

In 1801, when a Lieutenant in the 49th Foot, he was temporarily “reduced” to half pay, but later the same year replaced on full pay in the 14th Regiment at Winchester. This may coincide with the time that he was court martialed for placing his commanding officer on a charge for striking a private soldier on parade. The charge was upheld, but Arthur was transferred to the 14th regiment.

In 1803, when he was twenty one, he married a Welsh girl, Mary Kyffin; and a year later was father of a daughter, Marianna.

On 7th August 1804, aged twenty two, he was appointed Captain to a company in the 40th Regiment of Foot. He went on to have a distinguished career in this Regiment during which he saw active service in the Peninsular Wars, under Sir Arthur Wellesley, (who later became Duke of Wellington). He was only absent from duty for two months during the whole of this time.

The Peninsular Wars concerned the Iberian Peninsular: Spain and Portugal. By 1807, Napoleon was powerful in Europe, had seized the Spanish crown and declared war on Portugal. In order to defeat his remaining great rival, Britain, he intended to impose a blockade against British trade anywhere in Europe by sealing the coasts. However, he had reckoned without the universal uprising of the Spanish people who were assisted by British forces under the command of Wellesley. The struggle that followed has been fictionalized in the books and television series “Sharp”.

Arthur was present in the battles at Rolica and Vimlera in 1808 and was wounded at the battle of Talavera, in 1809. In May 1811 he was with the 40th who formed part of the force attempting to
seize the extremely strong outlying fort of San Cristobal. “On the night of the 10th Phillipon, the French commander, sent up a reserve battalion into San Cristobal and executed a sortie upon the British works. It penetrated into the trenches, but was driven out after a sharp struggle by the covering party. But, pursuing too far, the British came under the guns of San Cristobal, and had to retire to their trenches with lamentably heavy loss.” Boutflower, an Army Surgeon at the time, recalled in his diary that the French “were charged by the picquets and compelled to retreat. Unfortunately our troops pursued them with their wonted ardour to the very Walls, where they were exposed to a most destructive fire of shell, shot and musketry ... it was one of the most painful days of my life.” Arthur was one of the wounded.

He was then appointed commandant of Estremoz.

In 1813, he commanded the 40th Regiment at the Battle of Vittoria, following which he was awarded the Army Gold Medal and the rank of Brevet Major. The medal was rarely awarded to a man of his rank and is the equivalent of the modern DSO. He was also present at the Battle of the Pyrenees. The 40th Regiment was mustered near Pamplona on 24th June until about the 30th June 1813 when they marched with the rest of the army towards the passes at Maya and Roncevalles where they took up a position on the French side of the border. Sgt William Lawrence records skirmishes against the French at Roncevalles and a footnote in his autobiography tells us that between 25th July and 2nd August, the 40th lost 40 men killed and 150 wounded. On the evening of 27th July 1813, Arthur was again wounded, this time severely.

On recovery he returned to duty and became commandant at Toulouse. He later superintended the embarkation of the troops at Bordeaux, and landed at Cork in 1814. He then obtained permission to retire on half pay. However, within a year, on the escape of Napoleon from Elba, he was called upon to take command of the 40th Regiment again at Ghent.

The Record of Services of the 40th Regiment tells us “At 5 o’clock on the morning of 16th June, a sudden and very pressing order was received for the troops at Ghent to march at once for Brussels. Without delay a start was made, and that day the Regiment marched thirty miles. A halt of a few hours only was made during the night, and the next day another long march brought them to within a few miles of the village of Waterloo.”

On the eve of the Battle of Waterloo, 18th June 1815, Arthur wrote the following letter to his wife, Mary:

"What I recommend my love in case I fall in the ensuing contest, is that my sons may be educated at the Military College, except Arthur, who is hardly strong enough: the hazards of a military life are considerable, but still it has its pleasures, and it appears to me of no consequence whether a man dies young or old, provided he be employed in fulfilling the duties of the situation he is placed in this world.

"I would wish my son John, whose early disposition has made us both happy, should serve in the Infantry till he is a Lieutenant, and then by money or interest be removed to a Regiment of Light Cavalry. I trust his gentlemanly manner and his gallantry in the Field will make his life agreeable. Kyffin might try the Artillery Service and make it an object to be appointed to the Horse Artillery, which he can only hope for by applying himself to the duties of his profession. Alfred must get in a Regiment of Infantry, the 95th for instance, and my young unborn must be guided by his brother John and by your wishes.

"For yourself, my dearest, kindest Mary, take up your residence in Wales, or elsewhere if you prefer it, but I would advise you, my love, to choose a permanent residence. My daughters, may they cling to their mother and remember her in every particular:

"My Mary, let the recollection console you that the happiest days of my life have ...... from your love and affection, and that I die loving only you, and with a fervent hope that our souls may be reunited hereafter and part no more.

"What dear children, my Mary I leave you. My Marianna, gentlest girl, may God bless you. My

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1 The loss was over 400, of whom 207 were in the 40th Charles Oman - Peninsular War Vol IV p 285
2 Boutflower, C The Journal of an Army Surgeon during the Peninsular War, p90. Pub. Manchester, 1912. Web access Internet Archive
4 Historical Records of the 40th Regiment, p181. Location: Queen’s Lancashire Regiment Museum, Preston.
Anne, my John, may Heaven protect you. My children may you all be happy and may the reflection that your father never in his life swerved from the truth and always acted from the dictates of his conscience, preserve you, virtuous and happy, for without virtue there can be no happiness.

"My darling Mary I must tell you again how tranquilly I shall die, should it be my fate to fall, we cannot, my own love, die together - one or other must witness the loss of what we love most. Let my children console you, my love. My Mary. My affairs will soon improve and you will have a competency - do not let too refined scruples prevent you taking the usual Government allowance for Officers' children and widows. The only regret I shall have in quitting this world will arise from the sorrow it will cause you and your children and my dear Marianne Symes. My mother will feel my loss yet she possesses a kind of resignation to these inevitable events which will soon reconcile her.

I have no desponding ideas on entering the Field, but I cannot help thinking it almost impossible I should escape either wounds or death.

"My love, I cannot improve the Will I have made, everything is left at your disposal. When you can get a sum exceeding £10,000 for my Irish property, I should recommend you to part with it and invest the money, £6,000 at least, in the funds, and the rest in such security as may be unexceptionable. You must tell my dear brother that I expect he will guard and protect you, and I trust he will return safe to his home.

A R H

The next morning, 18th June 1815, the 40th Regiment, led by Major Heyland, took up its position on the field of battle, arriving there between 9 and 10 a.m. after a short march. The Regiment remained as support until 2 o’clock at the farm of Mont St. Jean. It was then advanced towards the farm of La Haye Saint, taking position on the opposite side of the road. Sgt William Lawrence, who also served in the 40th Regiment wrote later in his diary of the Battle of Waterloo: “The rain had not quite ceased and the fields and roads were in such a fearfully muddy state, they slowed and tired us. In such conditions it was difficult for the cavalry to perform properly, but they were even worse for the artillery.” For hours they were forced to remain stationary, sometimes in line, sometimes in square according to whether it was enemy infantry or cavalry that they had to resist. They suffered great losses. At last, at about 7pm, the Duke of Wellington himself rode up the Regiment and gave the command to advance and with a cheer the line moved forward to clear the farm buildings of the enemy. Here Arthur was killed, by a ball in the neck. His sword had previously been shattered, his horse wounded, and for the greater part of the day he had been riding bareheaded, his cap having probably been also shot away.

Arthur was thirty four years old and his wife was pregnant with their seventh child.

Inscribed on a Memorial at St Patrick’s Church, Coleraine, are the following words: “Sacred to the memory of Arthur Rowley Heyland, of Ballintemple, in the county, late Major in the 40th Regiment of Foot, in which he served with distinguished honour under the Duke of Wellington through the whole Peninsular War, filling during that period many situations of trust connected with his profession. On the memorable 18th June 1815, while in command of the Regiment in the act of leading his battalion to conquest, he fell in the moment of victory on the field of Waterloo, and was there instantly removed by his brother officers with affectionate zeal and regret. His remains were deposited in a garden at Monte St. Jean, where they lie under a tomb subsequently erected by his afflicted widow. Whether as son, brother, husband, father, friend or soldier, his whole career throughout life may be delineated in the characteristic simplicity of his disposition in these few words - He knew his duty and he did it.”

His grave remained by a farm in the village of Mont St Jean, within a few yards of the main Brussels Road for 150 years, marked by a monument erected by the Regiment and surrounded by iron railings put in place to protect it by Mary, his wife. In an article in 1893 it is described as “shaded by a lilac tree and surrounded by purple pansies and jasmine.” However, in 1923, there

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6 Historical Records of the 40th Regiment, p181. Location: Queen’s Lancashire Regiment Museum, Preston.

7 Historical Records of the 40th Regiment, Appendix III. Location: Queen’s Lancashire Regiment Museum, Preston. Other sources say he was shot in the heart.

8 "A Sunday at Waterloo", pub. in the St. James’s Budget of 23 June 1893
were a number of letters exchanged between Arthur’s grandson, H. K. Heyland and others regarding the grave. Arthur’s son, then grandson had paid an amount annually to the landowner for its upkeep. It seems that the stone was still in perfect order and the lettering distinct but that repairs were needed to the iron rail surrounding, and it needed the “removal of a privy which is far too near the grave for decency”. The War Graves Commission had declined to assist because at the time the “powers conferred on the Commission under their charter” were “limited to the graves of those who fell in the recent war”. Sometime after this, Arthur’s monument was removed to the Musée Wellington (Waterloo Museum) for safekeeping. Amongst the letters of 1923 is a letter to H. K. Heyland from an F. F. Adam in which he suggests the 40th regiment have a portrait of Major Heyland “obviously from a miniature”. This led us, in September 2004, to the museum of the 40th Regiment (now the Queen’s Lancashire Regiment) in Preston. The museum is well worth a visit. There is a room displaying Waterloo and 40th Regiment relics, and the archive is a treasure trove of information.

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Mary was born in Bangor, North Wales, on the 14th November 1779. She was the daughter of the Rev. John Kyffin and his wife Ann. She was probably their oldest child as they were married in February 1779. Mary had a sister Lettice, whose birth date is unknown. She also had a brother, John, who was two years younger than her, and another sister, Elizabeth, who was christened twelve to thirteen years later in 1792.

When Mary was twenty three years old she married Arthur Heyland. He served in the 40th Regiment of Foot and travelled in Spain and Portugal during the Peninsular War. The 40th also served in South America before that but we do not know if Arthur was with them there. Wives and families often travelled with the Army, safe, well behind the lines. Did Mary travel with Arthur? She had seven children between 1804 and 1815, and in his last letter to her, Arthur advises Mary to “choose a permanent residence”. The only birthplace we know of any of her children is Alfred, who was born in 1813 at Bangor.

She was thirty five when her husband was killed at the Battle of Waterloo. Family anecdote tells us she received the news by a maid rushing into the room at the family home of Ballintemple and screaming out “Oh Ma'am the coach has come in crowned with laurels, there has been a great victory, and the Major is killed” all in one breath. History relates that Mary never moved in her chair, but simply said "Biddy, leave the room. You have forgotten your manners!" My personal feeling is that this story would fit better with Arthur’s mother, Mary, but the words written by a grandson imply it was Arthur's wife.

Mary was left with their young family: Marianne, aged about eleven; John, just ten; Anne, eight or nine; Arthur, (age unknown); then Kyffin, aged six or seven; and Alfred, about two. She was also pregnant with Herbert who was born shortly after his father died but who sadly died on 26th May 1816 aged only eleven months. It must have been a difficult time for her.

We do not know where Mary eventually settled and raised her family. She had a large memorial plaque erected on the south aisle wall of St Deiniol Cathedral, in Bangor, which remains there today. In 1824, her father died leaving her his house and other property in Bangor. Her mother had died the year before. Mary was the sole executor of his Will. Probate of her Aunt’s Will was granted to her on 8th June 1824. This suggests she maintained strong links with her Welsh family and Bangor. Sometime before 1824, Mary’s sister Elizabeth had died young leaving at least three children. Lettice, her other sister, had died in 1810.

Arthur and Mary’s daughter, Marianna grew up and married Thomas Browne with whom she had
eleven children. Their son, John, became a Colonel in the Army. He served in the Crimean War and was severely wounded at Sebastopol while in command of the 7th Royal Fusiliers. He married twice and had six children. Anne married the Reverend Mitchell Smyth with whom she had five children. Kyffin married Anne Sharpe and had four children. Alfred served in the Army rising to the rank of General. He fought in the Crimea and lost an arm at the battle of the Alma. He had married Eliza St Hill and had five children. We do not know what became of Arthur and Mary's son, Arthur. The letter and lack of records suggest he may have died young.

Mary died at Ballintemple, the Heyland family home in Northern Ireland on 28th July 1858. For all of the forty three years she lived as a widow she carried Arthur's last letter with her. It was buried with her in Errigal graveyard, Garvagh, leaving family members with copies. A tablet was placed in Garvagh Church “by her surviving children - a record of grateful love and reverence.”