

**A RARE EARLY INDIAN CAMPAIGN GROUP TO AN OFFICER OF THE 16TH LANCERS WHO AFTER TAKING PART IN STORMING OF GHUZNEE AND THE BATTLE OF MAHARAJPORE, TOOK PART IN THE FIRST SIKH WAR WHERE HIS REGIMENT WERE FAMED FOR THEIR GALLANT CHARGES AT THE BATTLE OF ALIWAL. AN OFFICER WHO WAS 'CELEBRATED FOR HIS EXTREME COOLNESS', DURING HIS TIME IN INDIA, HE HAD THE RARE EXPERIENCE TO ENGAGE AT DIFFERENT TIMES IN THREE DUELS. HAVING BEEN PROMOTED GENERAL AND COLONEL OF THE 16TH LANCERS, HE WAS MADE K.C.B. IN 1893.**



GHUZNEE 1839 'LIEUTENANT C. J. FOSTER, H.M'S 16TH LANCERS' NAMED IN RUNNING SCRIPT IN REVERSE, FITTED WITH RING AND GILT SWIVEL SUSPENSION; MAHARAJPOOR STAR 1843 'LIEUTENANT C. J. FOSTER H.M'S 16TH LANCERS' FITTED WITH GILT SWIVEL SUSPENSION; SUTLEJ 1845-46, FOR ALIWAL 1846 '.... C: J: FOSTER 16TH L....' FITTED WITH RING AND GILT SWIVEL SUSPENSION, THE RIBBON WITH PRIVATELY MADE SLIDE CLASP 'SOBRAON',

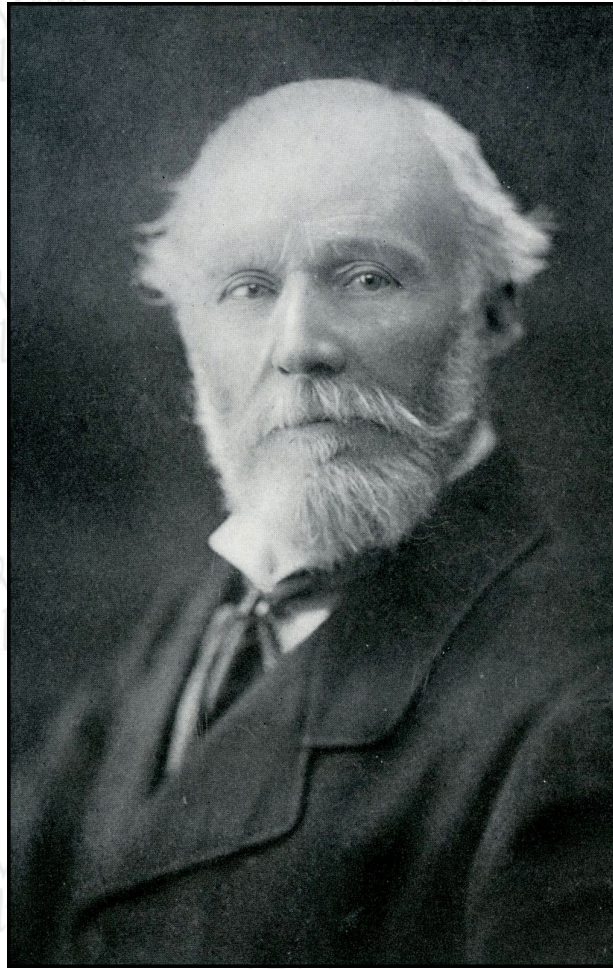
K.C.B. *London Gazette* 3 June 1893

C.B. *London Gazette* 3 June 1877

General Sir Charles John Foster K.C.B. was born in 1818 and was Commissioned Ensign in the 3rd Foot on 8 April 1836 and advanced to Lieutenant on 21 December 1838. Transferring to the 16th Lancers the following day, Lieutenant Foster would spend the next few years campaigning in Afghanistan and India. He served in the first Afghan campaign, being present at the storm of Ghuznee, the Gwalior campaign, including the battle of Maharajpore and the first Sikh War. During the latter, as A.D.C. to Brigadier-General Cureton (16th Lancers) at the action at Budiwal, the battle of Aliwal

At the battle of Aliwal, the 16th Lancers were conspicuous for their gallantry in charging and breaking the Sikh square but at great loss. Mustering around 500 before the battle, the 16th Lancers would lose 2 Officers and 56 men killed, 6 Officers and 77 men wounded, total 141.

These were by far the heaviest losses to any Regiment present and nearly a quarter of the 580 total losses to the British. The 16th would also take part in the battle of Sobraon in February 1846.



**THE BATTLE OF ALI WAL FROM THE ROYAL LANCERS REGIMENTAL WEBSITE:**

*“On 28 January 1846, 40,000 Sikh infantry massed against the British Army of 10,000 men at Aliwal. During the initial stages of the battle the village of Aliwal was successfully captured denying the Sikhs the best ford across the River Sutlej. In an attempt to recapture the ford, the Sikhs sent a force of 1000 cavalry to Aliwal, seeing this, a squadron of 16th Lancers and a squadron of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry were immediately sent to Aliwal.*

*On their arrival, the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry failed to charge while the squadron of the 16th Lancers under Captain Bere did so, and routed 1000 Sikh cavalry (over ten times their number). The ford at Aliwal was secured but at a loss of 42 of the 100 16th Lancers who had charged. After the charge, the main body continued to be harried by the Sikh artillery so the main body of the 16th Lancers under their Commanding Officer, Major Rowland Smyth, were ordered to take the guns. Smyth led his two squadrons in a headlong charge against the guns that continued to fire until the moment they were overrun. The momentum of the Regiment was so great that they charged past the guns and were faced by the massed squares of the Sikh infantry. Smyth realised that to pull up and retire would enable the Sikh infantry to lay a withering fire in his rear, he therefore spurred his horse, jumping into the centre of the first*

square and charging on through. Naturally, the 16th Lancers followed their Commanding Officer and charged head on into the square. Sergeant Gould recounted that “we had to charge a square of infantry – at them we went, the bullets flying round like a hailstorm.”



As a result of the charge, many Lancers were injured including Smyth who received a bayonet wound to his abdomen. Despite his injuries, Smyth managed to reform his Regiment and charge back through the broken Sikh squares. This proved to be the decisive action with the Sikhs breaking contact and attempting to withdraw back across the Sutlej under heavy British artillery fire. As a result of this action the Sikhs left 3,000 dead and all their guns on the British side of the river.

Of all the Battle Honours gained by the 16th Lancers it was the battle of Aliwal that they chose to commemorate each year. A Regimental tradition deriving from this is that lance pennons are starched and crimped 16 times; this commemorates the fact that after the battle they were so encrusted in blood that they stood upright and stiff. Today Aliwal is still celebrated by The Royal Lancers who when on parade have 50% of their lance pennons crimped 16 times.”

<https://www.britishbattles.com/first-sikh-war/battle-of-aliwal/>

Promoted Captain on 10 December 1847 and Major, 21 September 1852, Foster briefly served with the 9th Lancers from 28 March 1854, before transferring to the 3rd Light Dragoons on 6 October 1854. Becoming Lieutenant-Colonel in 1857. He transferred to the 1st Dragoon Guards on 14 August 1857 before exchanging from that regiment, back to the 16th Lancers on 11 February 1859. Advanced to Colonel, 20 September 1861, he went on half-pay in 1862; Major-General, 1868; Lieutenant-General, 1879; General, 1885. Foster was a Member of the Indian Council from 1878 to 1889. He was appointed Colonel of the 21st Hussars in 1882 and transferred to the Colonelcy of his own regiment, the 16th Lancers, in 1886, vice General Shute. He was appointed C.B. in 1877 and advanced to K.C.B. in 1893. Foster died on 11 February 1896, and was buried at Kensal Green.

## GENERAL FOSTER AND DUELING

General Foster was celebrated for his extreme coolness. This was well exemplified by a story told of him in one of his duels in India. The offence for which he had been called out necessitated his receiving three shots without returning the fire of his adversary, according to the usage of the time. His opponent fired and missed him three times whereupon Foster, saying he was tired of standing up, insisted on a chair being brought for him to sit on. He then actually received a fourth shot sitting down, firing again himself in the air, when the seconds stopped the duel. It is believed that he fought three duels during his career in India.

From 'Records of the Chicheley Plowdens':

*'...Sir John Cheape, G.C.B., of the Bengal Engineers, James's lifelong friend, was the second husband of Amelia Plowden, to whom he was married in St Helena in 1835 and from whom he was divorced. James (Captain James Chicheley Plowden, 17<sup>th</sup> NI) was his second in the duel, about 1842, between Cheape, then a Major, and Lieutenant Charles Foster of the 16th Lancers, afterwards General and K.C.B. In one of Mr H. G. Keene's amusing stories of Indian social life is an account of this duel, though, of course, no names are given. It was fought on the race-course at Meerut, both combatants being in uniform. At the first fire Foster fired "correctly" in the air, while Cheape's bullet struck the Lancer in the centre of his leather cap without penetrating, duelling-pistols having very small charges of powder. The seconds declared that "honour was satisfied," but Cheape insisted on another shot, which the seconds were not disposed to grant. The Cornet, however, interposed with "let the old man have his whim," which so enraged the Bengal Engineer that he missed altogether with his second shot.'*

Amelia Plowden was Amelia Frances Chicheley Plowden (born 1811), was a relation of Captain James Plowden. She and Captain Cheape had been divorced in 1841. It was then that Lieutenant Charles John Foster married her, so it is likely the duel in some way was over Amelia!



Foster from 'Grain or Chaff':

*'Few men of his time, I imagine, were better known than my wife's father, General Sir Charles Foster ; not so much as a gallant soldier, for gallant soldiers are never scarce, but in the Clubs and Society, where his singularly handsome presence, old-fashioned courtesy, and rare conversational charm secured him the widest popularity. Beginning his military career as a cornet in the 16th Lancers, he had the rare experience to engage at different times in three duels, of one of which it is related that he insisted on receiving his adversary's fire seated, before discharging his own pistol in the air. But it was not only as a beau sabreur that he was distinguished. He was an admirable cavalry officer, and at the time when the purchase question was agitating the service, his deep and extensive knowledge of army matters brought him to the front as one of the foremost champions of a system which, though doomed to extinction, was not to disappear without a struggle. In the lobby of the House of Commons, where he was in constant attendance during the debates, and by his pen in the columns of the Times, Sir Charles fought the officers' battle with equal good temper and ability. So highly were his services considered that, after serving on an important military commission, he was chosen to succeed Sir Garnet Wolseley as Member of the Council of the Secretary of State for India. He was made a K.C.B., and, crowning honour of all, was appointed to the Colonelcy of his old regiment, a post which he held to the day of his death. To me he was simply the most admirable man I have ever known — more than a friend, much more than a relation. I regarded him with deep affection, and if I had had to write his epitaph I should have been tempted to steal the lines of the Australian poet : —*

*"Life is mostly froth and bubble, Two things stand like stone: Kindness in another's trouble, Courage in your own."*

*Taking him all in all, I do not expect to see his like again. '*

#### **THE 16TH LANCERS AT ALIWAL: A COMPARISON BY PERCY CROSS STANDING**

*"Again our horsemen charged through, and by a happy but singular manœuvre changed the lance to the bridle-hand. The Sikhs being unprepared for this, received in their bodies instead of on their bucklers the thrusts of the 16th; but the latter had to ride a third time through these squares before they were utterly broken, mixed up together, and dispersed : yet it was a conflict in which cavalry, by the use of all their weapons in succession, sword, lance, and pistol or carbine, effected wonders against these brave swarthy infantry. As the impetus of their charge carried them past the dense mass, the Sikhs flung themselves flat on the ground out of reach of the lances, only to rise directly the squadrons had emerged and pour a deadly volley of bullets after them. Thrice did the gallant 16th repeat this reckless charge, losing a hundred of their number in the effort, or nearly one-fifth of the total casualties on the British side. ... To this day Aliwal is one of the most cherished memories of the Lancers.*

James GRANT. BATTLES OF NINETEENTH CENTURY."

*"Cavalry played an imposing rôle in the hotly contested battles of the Sikh campaign of 1845-46, and in none more than on the bloody day of Aliwal, January 28, 1846. In that memorable mêlée the 16th (Queen's) Lancers, who had only recently been armed with the lance, performed a feat unparalleled in the annals of the Cavalry arm of our Service—they broke and utterly destroyed and 'rode over' a square formation in fair fight. The brave Sikhs had come out into the open, A few weeks previously, only to sustain a sanguinary field of Múdkh, where those gallant veterans, Sir Robert Sale and Sir John McCaskill, had received mortal wounds. But shortly thereafter the Khalsa troops had won a smart engagement at Badhowal and had been able to contain a British force in Ludhiana, which was not relieved until January 23, 1846. Their 20,000 men and fifty-two guns, under Ránjur Singh, opposed to our*

10,000 men and thirty-two guns under Sir Harry Smith, then lay entrenched at Aliwal, six miles from Ludhiana. Sir H. Smith had lost his baggage in the affair of Badhowál, and the Sikhs, encouraged by their success on the stricken field of Ferozeshah, awaited the onslaught with the utmost confidence.

The brilliant victory of Aliwal is, however, a familiar because an oft-told story, and we are concerned only with the conspicuous part played by the Cavalry arm. As usual in all battles of this campaign, the Khalsa foe held the advantage of position. But at Aliwal, on that blazing January day, thanks to the exertions of the 16th Lancers (who had until lately been known as the 16th Light Dragoons) and other mounted regiments, the advantage of position availed them not.



'The atmosphere was clear and the sky serene,' we are told, when the 53rd and other Infantry regiments stormed the village of Aliwal the key to the position--under a withering fusillade from the Sikh. Then Major Lawrence galloped to the front with his battery of Light Horse Artillery and fairly raked the Khalsa position. He halted, wheeled round, and unlimbered with such praiseworthy promptitude that in a brief space the enemy's Artillerymen had quitted their pieces and fallen back on the village. And now, as a Napier would have phrased it, was seen with what majesty the British soldier fights. The Sikh Infantry proceeded to put in practice 'a singular disposition, said to be copied from the French. Instead of forming square they closed up in a sort of triangular formation, the apex to the front, so that when the 16th Lancers, who on this day made history for their famous corps, broke through the head of this novel defence, they were confronted by the base, bristling with bayonets. Yet, nothing daunted, and splendidly led by their officers, our troopers broke through the wedge of flame and steel—a feat seldom accomplished by mounted men, even against Asiatic troops.' Brigadiers Cureton, Godby, Hick, Wheeler, and Wilson were the officers most distinguished in the series of charges that finally smashed up and utterly dispersed the Khalsa defence. In the ardour of their enthusiasm some of the 16th Lancers even rode their horses into the River Sutlej, and actually in its turbulent waters spiked some of the guns which the beaten enemy were endeavouring to save !

The late James Grant has graphically related how these gallant Sikhs, at the impact of the charge, 'cast aside their muskets and betook them to sword and dagger.' Ever skilled in the ruse, they would fling themselves on the ground and let the lancers charge right over them, immediately springing up and rushing in to shoot the riders and hamstring the horses. In this fashion a hundred of the 16th bit the dust ere the foe's plucky and desperate resistance was finally demolished and done for. But now our decimated Infantry rushed in to finish the job with bullet and bayonet, until finally the stubborn Sikhs were pushed across the ensanguined river, with the loss of every one of the fifty-two guns with which they had entered the action. Close and bloodthirsty as the fighting had been, we had less than 500 casualties, against a loss by the enemy of 3000 killed and wounded, plus the whole of his Artillery.

It is noteworthy that a French officer named Mouton, and a Spanish officer named Huerta, served the Khalsa power during this Sutlej campaign of 1845-6. The former assured his employer, Ránjur Singh, that the lines of Aliwal were impenetrable, whilst the latter, who was an engineer officer, displayed no little skill in designing a tête-de-pont to cover the bridge of boats across the Sutlej.



The deciding victory of Sobraon (February 10, 1846) does not belong to this story, albeit the 16th were scarcely less distinguished therein. The British siege train had at last come up, enabling a decisive step to be taken. 'After Aliwal the army was sickening for want of another battle,' wrote Sir Herbert Edwardes, and a malignant fever of epidemic horrors must have broken out had it been delayed another week.' To while away the time, General Gilbert and other noted pig-stickers of our army engaged in this fascinating sport, and it was a sight to see so many noted Cavalymen riding a-tilt-not at the dusky foe, but at the innumerable wild boar with which the jungle abounded.

Sir Joseph Thackwell was in general command of the Cavalry corps, but the 16th Lancers were under the more immediate direction of the dashing Cureton. I have compared three or four different accounts of the proceedings of Cavalry at Aliwal, and all are agreed as to the unbridled impetuosity and supreme heroism which the mounted regiments displayed on that memorable January 28, 1846.

The moral effect of the battle on the native mind was tremendous, and the 'Aliwal Dinner,' in which the 16th unite on each anniversary of the victory, is a notable function. This regiment possesses, indeed, more fighting honours than any other British Cavalry corps of the line. The relatively small cost of Aliwal in human life--not to the Lancers, 'tis true, but to the army generally—is a notable point. In this respect a comparison with the subsequent crowning triumph of Sobraon becomes inevitable. There the losses of the Anglo-Sepoy army totalled up

to the great number of nearly 3500, but the outcome was decisive of the fate of the Khalsa power.”



Condition, Suttlej Fine only; rank and part of 'LANCERS' illegible due to pitting from star. The Star and Ghuznee NVF and better. With old display name plate. Medals were consigned by family to DNW auctions in 2015

Given General Foster was a Cavalry Officer who served for 50 years after his last Campaign medal was issued, it is unsurprising that his medals show a fair amount of wear. That said this is still an extremely fine and rare group of medals to a must interesting Officer.