

Village Echoes

Just inside the main body of St Mary's Church, on the west wall, is a bronze tablet erected in January 1904 as a tribute from his fellow officers to the memory of John Gordon Stirling DSO, a Lieutenant in the 9th Lancers, who died at Sialkote in the Punjab region of India (now in Pakistan) on 22nd May 1902. Newspaper reports of his death record that it was as a result of an accident but give no further details.



Stirling, who had been born in London in 1874, was the second son of Lord Justice, Sir James Stirling, whose family had used Finchcocks as their country residence since about 1890. He seemed destined for a military career having joined the Militia at a young age before joining the 9th Lancers in the summer of 1895, and he was promoted to Lieutenant a year later in July 1896. His subsequent army career took him to South Africa where he served with distinction in

the Anglo-Boer War, being twice mentioned in despatches in 1901 by both Field Marshal Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener. Kitchener's despatch concerned his gallant conduct at Twyfelfontein, Orange River Colony, on 27th May "for his coolness in action and for returning to fetch a dismounted man". The despatch also noted that he had lost one arm and been wounded in the other during the campaign. It was for this service that he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, although he had sadly died before the award became known. The insignia and warrant were sent to his father. The newspapers also reported that he had been severely wounded in actions at Belmont and Enslin in 1899. At time of his death he was Adjutant to the 9th Lancers.

His father, Sir James Stirling, was born in Aberdeen in 1836. After graduating from the University of Aberdeen and then Trinity College, Cambridge he became a member of Lincoln's Inn where he was called to the bar in 1862. In 1886 he became a judge in the Court of Chancery and received his knighthood. After a distinguished legal career he retired in June 1906 to his home in Goudhurst. Apart from the law, he took an active interest in science and held the position of vice-president of the Royal Society between 1909 and 1910. Sir James died, aged 81, at Finchcocks on 27th June 1916 after a short illness. His widow, Elizabeth, survived him by two years and was buried beside him in the Victorian Cemetery in Back Lane, on 18th June 1918.

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