

Letters from Sir James McGrigor, the former D.G.A.M.S., mainly re a memorial to Assistant Surgeon James Thomson of the 44th Foot, who died 5 Oct 1854 after nursing hundreds of Russian prisoners from the Battle of Alma

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Dover 29th Sept. 1846

FCO 26/1

My dear Sir

This mornings post
brought me your letter
of the 26th Instant. and
I hasten to assure you
that I never had more
pleasure in recommending
a promotion; than in yours
as my mind was fully
satisfied of your perfect
fitness for the important
duties committed to you.
I will look to hearing
from you on your landing

at the Cape, and frequently
afterwards both in a
confidential as well as
an official shape.

If I had any the slightest
acquaintance with
Sir Henry Pottinger I
would introduce you
to him; but I have not.
Lady Dr. desires to unite
with me in congratulations
on your promotion, and
besides wishes for your safe
arrival at the Cape, we
both regret much that
the suddenness of your
departure prevents us

from having the pleasure
of seeing you in Harley
Street Believe me

My dear Sir

Ever sincerely yours

J. M. G. G. G.

Private

FCO 26/2

London 2^d Dec^r '50

My dear Sir

Many thanks for your
Letter of the 24th Sept^r - I am
now on the very eve of retiring
from the Service having placed
my resignation of office in the
hands of The Duke of Wellington
who received it very reluctantly &
with many expressions of
approbation but after 57 years &
in my 79th year I felt that I
was entitled to some repose in
Dr. Hall the

the evening of life yet I am
thankful in saying that my
general health is good.

I am much gratified by
learning that the principal
Departments of Government give me
much credit on one point - the
Judgment which I have evinced
in selecting officers to fill the
higher ranks of the Department
▽ I myself feel that in these
selections ^{I have been particularly fortunate} in your own case and
I now thank you for the able
assistance which you have given

me, - Whom my Successor may be
I know not but sure I am
that no one can feel more for
the credit of the Department and
the many excellent Officers it contains
than I have ever done.

Lady M. desires to join
me in kind regards & best
wishes for the health & happiness
of Mrs Hall & yourself.

And I am ever my dear Sir
Most-truly yours.

J M L N York



FCO 26/3

London 3 Harley Street

17th May 1854

My dear Sir,

I beg heartily & sincerely to congratulate you on your Promotion to the eminent Station to which you have been appointed in the Medical Department of the British Army and in which I have no doubt you will gain distinction.

I now trouble you with a Letter in favor of

D^r McLeod a Gentleman of high literary as well as professional attainments; he does not want any appointment, but, that he may have your sanction to visit in the British Hospitals occasionally and to see what is doing there. D^r McLeod is the son of the Rev^d Doctor McLeod Dean of the Chapel Royal Edinburgh. — When you have a moments leisure I will be thankful to hear from you.

Believe

Believe me ever

My dear Sir

Very faithfully & truly yours

J. M. G. N. J. N. J.

Constantinople

Sir J. M. G. G. G.
Recd. by me 17 Aug. 1862
Lans 19 Aug. 1862

Dr. John Hall
Inspector General of British Hospitals
&c &c &c

Hon^d. by } Constantinople
Capt. Pigott }



London 3 Harley street

9th June 1857

My dear Sir,

In congratulating
you on your appointment to
be Chief of the Department
in Turkey which I do from
the bottom of my heart I
beg to introduce to you
Captain Pelling Pigott who
goes out as 2nd in Comm^d
of the Ambulance Corps;
he is earnestly & warmly

recommended

recommended to me by Lady
Wilder one of my earliest &
kindest friends on my first
entering the Army, a Lady
whom I have ever held in
the highest esteem and I
will feel much indebted for
any kind attention you may
shew Captain Pigott. I will
be happy to hear that you
continue in the enjoyment of
health on the arduous
Service in which you are
engaged in and which I

I am assured you will gain
honor and renown.

Believe me my dear Sir

Ever faithfully &

truly yours

J. G. Major

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FCO 26/5

3 Harley Street London

21 November 1854

My dear Sir,

Many thanks for your kind letter of the 19th August, since that letter was written I have spared you by abstaining from writing you, knowing how entirely your time is taken up with your public duties. — You will readily believe how sensible I felt the censure cast on the Department by the General Order of Lord Raglan I regret it from the bottom of my heart as from long knowledge of His

Lordship

Lordship I feel a conviction that it came from him in a moment of irritation when he was suddenly disappointed by events occurring in other and higher quarters as from much intercourse with His Lordship during a period of 30 years I have formed a high opinion of his discretion as well as of his kindly feelings to the Medical Officers in particular - I therefore look forward to the period when His Lordship will do ample justice to the Officers of the Department. The position in which he has been placed is ~~both~~ a most

difficult and delicate one more difficult perhaps than that in which any British General Officer has ever been placed in. I was sorry to learn that your health had suffered but I hope you will be able to tell me that you are now perfectly recovered. Believe me my dear Sir
Ever very faithfully
yours.

J
N. C. Rigby

3 Harley Street London

27th June 1855.

My dear Sir,

Several months ago I wrote you a letter which to the best of my recollection congratulated you and the officers of the Department on the Victories in the Crimea but I never received any reply perhaps my letter might have been mislaid & never reached you. I now rejoice to congratulate you on our continued successes & hope

They

They will ultimately lead to a
Peace; but we have had another
Victory which comes more home to
us to wit the exculpation of the
Department from almost in every
case the blame intended to be cast
upon it, and Dr Smith has obtained
a Victory over his Foes and it is
declared that he did everything a
man in his situation could have
done and I am happy to inform
you that he is gradually recovering
his health which was greatly shaken

By

by the unwarrantable attacks made
on him.

I am greatly disap-
-pointed to find that no notice
has been taken of the noble and
heroic conduct of the late Doctor
Thomson 114th Reg^t and I
ventured to address the War
Minister on the subject. Lord
Pannure has promptly & kindly
informed ^{me} that he entirely concurred
with me in thinking that some-
-thing ought to be done but I

Dear

fear his intentions go no further
than some pecuniary grant to the
aged mother of Dr Thomson. - Do
you think that ~~nothing~~ could be
obtained ~~by~~ ^{by some} measure emanating
from the Officers of the Department
themselves.

And I remain
My Lady Mr. has had the
pleasure of ~~receiving~~ ^{receiving} a visit from
Mr Hall but I was deprived that
pleasure by indisposition I will
be happy to hear that you continue
in the enjoyment of health.

And

FCO 26/68

(Copy)

War Department

5/35 June.

My dear Sir James.

I perfectly agree with you that the Family of the late D: Thomson have very strong claims upon the Bounty of the Government and I beg to assure you that the deceased officer's case shall have my serious consideration.

I remain, yours very faithfully

Panmure.

To

Sir James Mc Grigor B: K C B.

V^c &c &c

FC026/60

My dear son

Knowing how fully your time is occupied I have reluctance in troubling you but I think it right to send you the enclosed by which you will perceive that my Father has promised his Cordial support to the Member of Parliament for the County in which the late Assistant Surgeon Thomson was born in aid of the erection of a monument to that Medical Officer whose merits it would be superfluous to mention to you. My Father gave Surgeon Thomson his Assistant Surgeony formerly therefore I think I may affirm that the Director General together with my Father and yourself as Head of the Medical Department in the Crimea are the three who are best able to judge of Surgeon Thomsons merits. The gentlemen of Mr Thomsons native County have most readily answered my Fathers appeal and are now

collecting subscriptions for the monument. I will not speak positively but I am almost certain that my Father has interested Dr. Smith in this matter. Most readily will our Family subscribe to do honour to a medical Officer because an honour to one is in some degree an honour to the whole.

In order to carry out my Father's promise to Sir James Matheson I am willing to receive subscriptions from my own constituents and others. I have already received an order from several to charge their Accounts in my Office with sums in aid of this monument. Might I ask this from you on my Father's behalf so as to give effect to his promise to Sir James Matheson the member for Surgeon Thomson's native County.

With my Father's kind regards I am

Very Sincerely yours
Charles Newmeyer

18 Nov^r 1863

My dear Sir

Prior to the receipt of your letter by this
mail. Had, in consequence of what Dr Smith
wrote to me, issued a Circular Memorandum

to the Medical Officers of this Army inviting them
to support the Subscription set on foot by Dr
Thompson's friends to erect a Monument to his
memory in his native place, and have no doubt
it will be responded to by almost every one in
the Command - In my Memorandum I took
occasion to solicit Subscriptions not only to
record Dr Thompson's untimely fate, but also
that of many other Officers of the Medical Dept^t
who have perished on this Service, and to testify
to the world the sense that we, their professional
Brethren, entertain of their merits and labors

I am Sir

Yours
H. Hall

C. R. McEwen Esq
Army agent

London

Mr. Sugar

about a monument to the
late Asst Surgeon
Thompson 44 Regt

Dec^r 16 Nov^r 1855

and 16 Dec^r 1856

The late Dr Thomson of the 44th

The following letters were then read, and were listened to with much interest.

Stornoway, October 1st.

My dear Seaforth,

There is a melancholy satisfaction in sending you the enclosed copy of a letter addressed to me by Sir James Macgrigor late Director General of the Army Medical Department, suggesting a Monument to mark the birth place of the late Surgeon Thomson of the 44th Regiment, who fell a victim to his noble exertions in succouring the wounded after the battle of the Alma, and who it appears drew his first breath in the vicinity of the Bay of Cromarty, at what particular spot I am not aware.

It seems to me that the most suitable mode of giving effect to the wish so feelingly expressed by Sir James Macgrigor is to request the favour of your submitting his letter to the first County Meeting - not as a matter of official business, but in order that all may have an opportunity of doing honour to the memory of a distinguished Countryman in the most formal and public manner.

I would take the liberty of suggesting to the County Meeting that in addition to a monument, at the place of Surgeon Thomson's birth, a Tablet commemorative of his honourable conduct should be placed in the Dingwall County Buildings, similar to that already placed to the memory of Thomas Simpson.

I beg to be noted as a Subscriber of Ten Guineas for whatever plan the County Meeting may recommend.

I am sending a counterpart of this letter to Mr. Ross of Cromarty with a request that he will ascertain and let you know the place of Surgeon Thomson's birth.

Yours very truly,
(Signed) James Matheson.

Sir James Macgrigor, late Director General of the Army Medical Department, presents his compliments to Sir James Matheson, and though he has not the honour of a personal acquaintance with him, trusts that the subject of this note, which is almost one of public interest, may be considered an excuse for troubling him.

A short time since Sir James Macgrigor wrote to Lord Panmure asking a pension for the Mother of the late Assistant Surgeon Thomson, 44th Regiment, to which he received a kind and satisfactory answer. According to the regulations Mr. Thomson was not entitled to a Pension, but the merit of that Officer in sacrificing his own life after the battle of
Alma

Alma, in the cause of humanity, so far exceeded what the framers of any code of regulations perhaps ever contemplated, that Lord Panmure well and wisely considered his peculiar case a fair ground for deviating from them, and at Sir James Mc. Grigor's request a pension was granted. Though it was Sir James Mc. Grigor's fortune to give this zealous and talented Officer his Commission, yet his merit having been most favourably noticed in both Houses of Parliament, it would be superfluous for him to make them here the subject of remark. The Duke of Newcastle and others may have perhaps exhausted words of praise already on this interesting subject. Sir James Mc. Grigor however has a natural pride in reflecting that a native of the Highlands of Scotland should have been the subject of these well earned eulogiums. Buried near the shore of the Black Sea and the plains of the Alma, Surgeon Thomson was born near the Bay of Cromarty, and the object now of this note is to suggest that some monument or record should mark the birth place of one whose career was alike honourable and useful.

If therefore Sir James Matheson who so worthily represents the County in which this Officer was born would only countenance such a project, the writer of this note would cordially give it his humble support.

3. Harley Street, Cavendish Square,
London, 12th Sept, 1855.

The Chairman reminded the Meeting of the distinguished part taken by the late Dr. Thomson. He had succoured the wounded not of the English only, but also of the Russians after the battle, and in his extraordinary exertions in the cause of humanity had himself fallen a victim to contagion. However desirous they might individually be to show their sense of the conduct

of Dr. Thomson, they could not assess the County for anything of the sort. He quite agreed that it would be well worthy of the County Gentlemen themselves if they saw that steps were taken to perpetuate the memory of so distinguished an ornament of this County, and he thought a public subscription should at once be opened for the purpose. Some expression of the feeling of the meeting to that effect should be recorded on their minutes. It was most creditable to Sir James Matheson to have come forward in the liberal spirit which dictated his letter.

Mr. Robertson of Kindeace said he was sure that no one in that room could have heard these letters read without considerable emotion;— at once with pleasure, and with extreme regret. It must be a satisfaction to all to hear of this proposition. When a person died so gloriously in the service of his Country, they ought to do all in their power to perpetuate his memory. He quite agreed with the Chairman that it was incompetent to them to assess the County for such a purpose, but it was quite competent to them to recommend that Subscription papers should be circulated through the County, with the view of having this object worthily carried into effect. There were two propositions before them— one to erect a general monument to Dr. Thomson, the other to have a tablet placed in the County Buildings in Dingwall. Sir James Mc Grigor had not specified where he thought the monument should be erected. If, as he (Mr. Robertson) hoped it would be at the birth-place of Dr. Thomson, then perhaps the monument would itself be sufficient to commemorate his deeds in the North; but if it were to be erected away from here altogether, in that case it would be proper to put up a small tablet in the County Buildings, as suggested by Sir James Matheson. He suggested that the matter should

be entrusted to some one person.

Sheriff Cameron thought it would be gratifying to the friends of Dr Thomson if some notice were taken of the matter by the County, and suggested as a means of that end that the two letters read should be engrossed in their minutes. Dr Thomson he believed, was a native of Cromarty; his Father had been a Merchant there, and it was probable that the people of Cromarty would claim as a right that the monument of their townsman should be erected there.

Mr Mackenzie of Ord thought the most fitting person to be entrusted with the conduct of the matter, in which they all took an interest, would be the Convener of the County of Cromarty - Mr George Ross.

The Chairman concurred in this suggestion, and was sure the County would cordially support the movement.

The letters of Sir James Matheson and Sir James M. Pringle were ordered to be entered on the minutes, and the Clerk was directed to request Mr Ross of Cromarty to organize measures for raising the necessary funds, and for determining the description of monument to be erected.

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FCO 26 / 7a

(Enclosing FCO 26 / 7b)

N^o 3 Harley Street, London

30th June 1855.

My dear Sir,

With reference to my letter to you of 27th Inst^t I think it would naturally suggest itself to you that my object was that the noble conduct of an officer of the Department after the Battle of the Alma which reflected the highest credit upon the late D^r Thomson and not only on himself but on the whole Department should not be allowed to sink into total oblivion. Finding that the only notice which had reached the Public was from a very able article in the Times Newspaper (Copy enclosed). -

I on the 3rd of June made a communication to Lord Panmure the Minister

for

for War on the subject - (Copy of whose reply
I enclose dated 5th inst^l.) I have reason to
believe that with his usual kindness and
promptitude Lord Panmure has not failed to
communicate with their Lordships of the
Treasury which however I fear refers only
to a pecuniary Grant to the aged Mother of
D^r Thomson, however I am inclined to
hope that by the intervention of other and
more influential and legitimate Advocates
something more substantial and permanent
than a small pension to the aged Mother
may be granted say a Tomb or small
Monument to be erected in the Church Yard
of his Native Parish in the Highlands of
Scotland - Such a notice would tend to
quicken the more successful Recruiting for
the Service in the Highlands. — In the

mean

mean time I would be thankful to you
for such particulars as you can
obtain of the late Dr Thomson
particularly by whom he was ordered
along with his Soldier Servant to take
charge of the Wounded Russian Prisoners
— At what hour he proceeded to them
— What Instructions were given to
him and by whom. What Medicines
and Instruments he had. How he
was received by the Prisoners and
all the particulars which you can
shortly glean regarding him. I would
feel much obliged by an early reply

And I remain my dear Sir

Very faithfully and truly yours

J. C. Roper

FCO26/7b

(Enclosed with FCO26/7a)

From the Times - October 1854

What is that grey mass on the plain, which seems settled down upon it almost without life or motion? Now and then, indeed an arm may be seen waved aloft, or a man raises himself for a moment, looks around, and then lies down again. Alas! that plain is covered with the wounded Russians still. 750 wounded men are still upon the ground x x x We have done all we can for them and now unable as we are to take them along with us, or to send them away we must depart."

" In order to look after their wounds, an English Surgeon was left behind with these 750 men. This most painful and

desolate duty devolved on Dr Thomson of the
114th Regiment & & then provided with
some Rum, Biscuit and Salt Meat he was
left alone with his charge."

"Dr Thomson and his Soldier
Servant deserve to be held up as heroes. For
11 or 5 days they and they alone had to wait
upon and support this enormous mass of
severely wounded men. The task was in
many respects a most dangerous one. As we
have seen, the patients themselves were
not to be trusted. The Cossacks might also at
any time make Prisoners of them on the retreat
of the allied armies. The dead were festering
in heaps around the sick and dying. These
two men frequently had to bury a horrid
mass of carcasses and fragments before they
could

get at some poor wounded wretches. In this way they must with their own hands have dragged out and buried some 200. There was no food of any kind for the sick, so the soldier managed to drive in a stray bullock and with the aid of some Russian Convalescents (their misfortunes seem to have humanized them) he killed it and made some soup for them. At length Her Majesty's Ship Albion, Vesuvius, and the Screw Transport Avon arrived. The whole crew of the first landed and removed the wounded on board the Avon, while the Vesuvius guarded the Shore. — In the midst of this humane occupation a Russian force of some 4000 or 5000 men approached the Village, and the Sailors were obliged to hasten on board as it was beyond the range of the Ships Guns. — However 340 were put on board the

1854

Avon under the charge of their heroic
preservers - Dr Thomson and his
servant - About 40 were left
behind, and many of these poor fellows
who had previously seemed unable to
walk endeavoured with all their might
to hobble after their more fortunate
comrades. The next day the Avon
proceeded with them to Odessa. Now
surely when the Humane Society upward
a man who saves one single individual
Society will not fail to do something for
two men who under such dreadful
trials saved the lives of 340."

Since the above was written
intelligence has been received that Dr
Thomson has died from Cholera.



FCO26/8

3 Harley Street London

7. February 1856.

My dear Sir,

It is with very great pleasure that I congratulate you on the Honor conferred upon you by Her Majesty which appeared in the last Gazette and which your Services have so well merited.

Wishing many years to you to enjoy this Distinction as well

as

as to Lady Hall.

Believe me my dear Sir

Cover very truly yours

J. M. Ensign

Lu^d 15th - Oct^r - 1857

FCO 26/9

My dear Sir John

I take much
blame to myself for not having
sooner thanked you for your firm
and manly refutation, that the
good condition of the Military
Hospitals in the Crimea was
attributable to the suggestions of
D^r. Sutherland & the Sanitary
Commissioners, had you allowed
this circumstance to pass over
unnoticed yourself and the
Medical

Officers of the Army would
have been deprived of any credit
due to them, and to yourself,
for all the care toil and
privation which must have been
endured and I regret much
to find that the praise justly
due to yourself and the Army
Medical Department has been
given to Civilians who could
not have arrived till after the
chief difficulties of the Army
had

been overcome.

Believe me my dear Sir John

Ever faithfully & truly yours

J. Murray

7 Harley Street London

13th. October 1857.