

Postcard of the Maiwand Lion, Forbury Gardens, Reading, pre-1910 Object no. 1976.39.2

The Maiwand Lion, shown in this pre-1910 postcard, is named after a small village in Afghanistan, where 328 men from the  $66^{th}$  (Berkshire) regiment died on  $27^{th}$  July 1880. This was during Britain's last major military involvement in Afghanistan before September  $11^{th}$  2001.

The Battle of Maiwand was part of a British campaign to stop Russian influence in Afghanistan, as this threatened British control of India. In 1880 British and Indian troops stationed in Kandahar were sent to oppose an army led by Ayoub Khan, the brother of Afghanistan's deposed ruler. The British force, led by General Burrows, had to secure the Maiwand Pass in order to stop Ayoub's advance on Kabul.

Burrow's force of 2,565 men was slowed by high temperatures and a baggage train of 2,500 animals carrying supplies. Ayoub had over 6000 men, the advantage of local knowledge and good strategic positions. Despite British attempts, their lines were broken and the majority of the British were forced to retreat in disarray to Kandahar. Casualties were high with 44% of the British forces killed.

The battle inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to base Doctor Watson in his Sherlock Holmes books, on the Regiment's Medical Officer. Watson describes in "A Study in Scarlet" how he was shot while attending to a fallen soldier at Maiwand.

The 31-foot lion was sculpted by George Blackall Simonds, and unveiled in December 1886. The pedestal was originally faced with terracotta but was refaced with stone in 1910.

Reference: Reading Museum & Art Gallery leaflet, Maiwand (Reading, 1980)

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