

Royal Lodge of Friendship – Famous Brethren



Bro. Teignmouth Melvill VC.

(8 September 1842 - 22 January 1879)

Teignmouth Melvill was born in London on September 8, 1842, the son of Philip Melvill, Secretary in the Military Department to the East India Company. He was educated at Harrow, Cheltenham, and Cambridge, he graduated B.A. in 1865.

Melvill entered the Army in 1865, and became Lieutenant in December 1868. He proceeded with his regiment to Malta and then to Gibraltar.

Whilst in Gibraltar he joined the Lodge of Friendship on 1 April 1874 stating that his Mother Lodge was Glittering Star Lodge No. 322 I.C. A few months later, in September 1874 another young Lieutenant from his regiment (Nevill Coghill) was initiated into Friendship. Both men called off from Friendship Lodge on the 31st December 1874 prior to their departure from the Garrison.

Melvill passed the examination for Staff College and was ordered home to join that establishment. When the Galeka War broke out he obtained permission to rejoin his regiment, and served through the suppression of the outbreak. At the commencement of the Zulu War he joined the Headquarters' Column, and, with his regiment, took part in the attack and capture of Sirayo's stronghold on January 13, 1879.

Lt. Melvill was serving as adjutant of the 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot (2nd Warwickshire Regiment / South Wales Borderers) during the Zulu War of 1879 in South Africa. During the battle of Isandhlwana, January 22, 1879, when the British force was about to be overrun, Lt. Melvill was charged by the battalion commander with carrying the Queen's Colour of the battalion to safety. He cut his way out of the surrounding Zulus and reached the Buffalo River. However, in his exhaustion and encumbered with the heavy colour, Melvill could not reach the other side. He was helped by his brother officer Lt. Coghill, but the colour was lost in the river (it was later recovered). Both men were surrounded on the far side of the river and killed by the Zulus, after having exhausted their ammunition. Their bodies were later discovered side-by-side, and they were buried together where they fell.

The thin red line of the Borderers were no match for the thousands of well disciplined Zulu warriors who overwhelmed them at Isandhlwana. All the officers of the 24th and all but two of the men were killed. In what was later to be immortalized by the film 'Zulu Dawn', Lt. Melville

A memorandum published in the *London Gazette* stated that:

‘...they would have been recommended to Her Majesty for the Victoria Cross had they survived.’

It would be twenty-eight years later before another *London Gazette* would officially announce the award of posthumous Victoria Crosses to Melville and Coghill.

The heroic actions of brothers Teignmouth Melville Nevill and Joseph Aylmer Coghill brought the total of Victoria Cross bearers from Friendship Lodge to four, a record for the number of Victoria Cross held by members in a particular Lodge.

As for the Regimental Colours, although briefly lost they were later recovered and restored to the 24th. The following year Queen Victoria decorated them with a wreath of immortelles, and to this day the Queen's Colour Staff of the successor regiment carries a silver wreath of immortelles in memory of the Regiments valour and sacrifice at Isandhlwana.

Her Majesty the late Queen Victoria, as a mark of her appreciation and recognition of his heroic conduct, caused his name to be placed upon the colour-pole of the 24th Regiment, together with those of Lieutenants Coghill, Chard and Bromhead.

Inside the 14th-century church of St Winnow, Cornwall. there's an exquisite chancel screen and a memorial to Lt Teignmouth Melvill VC, together with an austere account of his heroism (and death) at the battle of Isandhlwana.

He was played by James Faulkner in the film Zulu Dawn.



The memorial window in St Winnow, Cornwall.