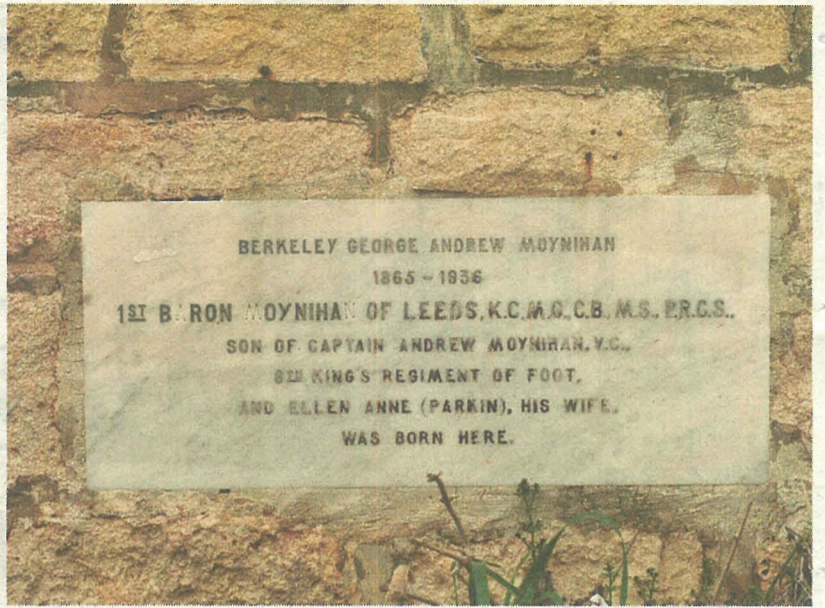


LIFE & WELLBEING HISTORY



Moynihan House in St George's Bay. Right: The plaque commemorating the building's historical significance. PHOTOS: CHRIS SANT FOURNIER

The heroism of Captain Andrew Moynihan



CHRIS GRECH

In Gordon Caruana Dingli's article 'Moynihan House bites the dust' (*Times of Malta*, March 2) and Prof. Joseph Galea's letter to the editor 'Save Moynihan House' (*The Sunday Times of Malta*, March 10), both correspondents made impassioned pleas for Moynihan House in St George's Bay to be preserved.

Given the threat to this structure I would like to draw attention to the bravery demonstrated by Captain Andrew Moynihan, VC, father of the first Lord Moynihan, who lived there in the 1860s and is buried at Ta' Braxia cemetery. Captain Andrew Moynihan of the 8th (the King's) Regiment of Foot, was one of only a few holders of that most esteemed proof of valour and bravery, the Victoria Cross, to have lived in Malta.

My research into the oeuvre of Maltese photographer Leandro Preziosi indicates that Moynihan may well have posed as one of his sitters. The accompanying photo shows an officer of the 8th Regiment of Foot as indicated by the regimental number and the figure of the Hanoverian White Horse on his cap badge.

Few clear images of Moynihan have been located; however, those that have demonstrate similar facial features and hairstyles (both surmounting and surrounding the face), lending credence to the proposition that

the sitter is, in fact, Moynihan. A more detailed justification of this identification will be published at a future date; however, for the moment the main purpose of this article is to draw attention to the fearless deeds of this one-time inhabitant of Moynihan House.

The following account is taken primarily from the *Kendal Mercury* of September 20, 1856.

"One of only a few holders of that most esteemed proof of valour and bravery, the Victoria Cross, to have lived in Malta"

Andrew Moynihan was born of humble parents, at Wakefield, Yorkshire, on September 8, 1831. Being one of a large family he had few advantages of education, and at a young age sought employment first in a cotton factory and then in a tailoring establishment. He was a good workman, quickly mastering everything he undertook. From his boyhood he had nursed a strong desire for military service, and when he was 17, he enlisted in the 90th Regiment, – The Perthshire Volunteers – then stationed in Yorkshire.

He seemed to thrive in this regiment: developing a fine physique and a mind devoted to his duties. He was soon promoted to lance-

corporal and then, at just 19 years of age, drill-instructor of the regiment. Attentive to his duties, Moynihan earned the confidence of his officers and the goodwill of the privates. In May 1851 he was promoted to the rank of full-sergeant. On the last day of 1853 he married Ellen Parkin, daughter of a neighbour of the same village where Moynihan grew up.

When the Crimean War broke out the 90th formed part of the second brigade of the Light Division before Sebastopol. Moynihan's post was immediately in front of the formidable Redan fort. When it was decided to storm the Redan, Moynihan was detailed to the storming party – a certain death warrant. The attack took place on September 8, 1855, Moynihan's 24th birthday and seventh anniversary of his enlistment.

When the order to charge was given a withering Russian barrage brought down many of the British troops. Moynihan experienced the first in a litany of lucky escapes: a shell exploding close to him tore off parts of his trousers but left him unscathed.

Moynihan was first up the scaling ladder, cap in one hand, firelock in the other, cheering his men to follow him. He was fortunate to make it to the top of the ladder, and rather than engage with the Russian soldiers on the battlements jumped down, about four yards into the fort and fought the Russians at close quarters, striking many of them with his revolver. At the same time, British soldiers who had been shot as they reached the battlements fell down into the fort just feet from Moynihan.

After a few minutes Moynihan was joined by friendly troops and



Portrait by Leandro Preziosi of an officer in the 8th Regiment thought to be Captain Andrew Moynihan VC. PHOTO: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

he led a charge on the inner breastwork where the Russians were thickest; however, he noticed that he was soon alone, all the others having been killed. He now had to engage in hand-to-hand combat, killing one adversary and bayonetting another who had just fired at him. Moynihan managed to gather six or seven soldiers and led another charge on the fort, which was successful; however, the Russians soon launched a counter-attack.

In the midst of all this mayhem Moynihan noticed two Russian bayonetting the fallen body of one of his officers. Filled with indignation, Moynihan rushed at the enemy, shooting one dead and felling the other with a deadly blow to the head. As Moynihan was recovering his colleague's body he was set upon by two Russians who bayoneted him through the leg and took him prisoner.

Moynihan was rescued by men led by Major Maud, but the latter was soon struck down by grapeshot; Moynihan, also wounded, hoisted the major onto his back and managed to escape the fort, tumbling down the

ladders into the ditch, managing once again to avoid further injury from the guns and bayonets of the dead soldiers in the ditch.

Having delivered Maud to safety, Moynihan, by now bleeding from 12 wounds, refused medical attention and, learning that another officer was lying in the ditch badly wounded, rushed back into the fray and brought a second injured officer to safety. In this last act of bravery, Moynihan was blessed by another lucky escape: grapeshot caught him on the back, and without harming him, ripped apart his uniform right up to his neck.

Andrew Moynihan was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in the storming of Redan fort during the Crimean War. Furthermore, he was one of the first 62 recipients to have this medal pinned to his breast by Queen Victoria herself at the first ever distribution of this medal on June 26, 1857, in Hyde Park, London.

These are surely additional reasons why the home of such a brave person should be preserved for posterity.