

**A**S he rode along the lines of his troopers, clad in his long white coat, General Sir Hugh Gough must have felt a lump in his throat. Passing the General Hospital, hundreds of soldiers who lay wounded and dying somehow managed to give out an enormous cheer that was heard all across battlefield.

Everyone knew that the battle with the Sikhs had been a close-run thing but the undefeated Limerick man had prevailed over his enemy once again.

Gough's remarkable victory over the Sikhs is one of the key events recalled in '100 Years of War - The Irish Soldier', an exhibition now running at the Curragh Military Museum in Co. Kildare.

Among the items on display is a Sikh cannon, one of four presented to Gough for a triumph which won the Punjab for the British Empire.

Gough's ancestors came to Ireland in the early 17th century when the Reverend Hugh Gough was appointed Chancellor of Limerick Cathedral and Bishop of Limerick. His son or grandson built a house outside Limerick city at Woodstown, near Annacotty, where Hugh Gough was born in 1779.

Colonel George Gough, his father, commanded the City of Limerick Militia during the rebellion of 1798. With a flying column of 500 horse, foot and guns, Gough Senior defeated a force of 4,000 rebels at Johnstown in Co. Kildare.

Gough's mother, Letitia, was a sister of William Bunbury, MP for Carlow.

Gough himself, who joined the army at the age of 15, served during the Napoleonic Wars with the 87th (Prince of Wales Irish) Regiment of Foot, later the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Chiefly comprised of recruits from Tipperary, Galway and Clare, the regiment was known as the 'Faugh a Ballaghs' (Clear the Way) after their battle cry drawn from ancient Gaelic.

In 1807 the tall and handsome young officer attended a military ball in Plymouth in the south of England wearing the green uniform of the 87th.

His blue eyes lit upon a young woman in a short, skimpy muslin frock, with curly black hair rolling down her neck.

Frances Stephens, herself the daughter of a general, had dreamed the night before that she would marry a man in a green uniform. When she saw Gough, she whispered to her father, 'that is the man I saw in my dream'. The couple danced together twice that night, married that summer and went on to have five children.

**M**EANWHILE, Major Gough, as he by then was, led the 2nd Battalion of the 87th to victory at the Battle of Talavera in 1809 during the Peninsular War, despite being severely wounded when his horse was shot from under him at the battleground in the heart of Spain.

Two years later, he commanded the regiment at the battle of Barossa where, outnumbered two to one, the Irishmen overwhelmed the French with a series of grim but effective bayonet charges. Gough's victory was completed when Sergeant Masterton of the 87th captured the Eagle of the 8th French Regiment - the first Napoleonic eagle standard to fall - with the immortal words, 'Bejaybers boys! I have the cuckoo!'

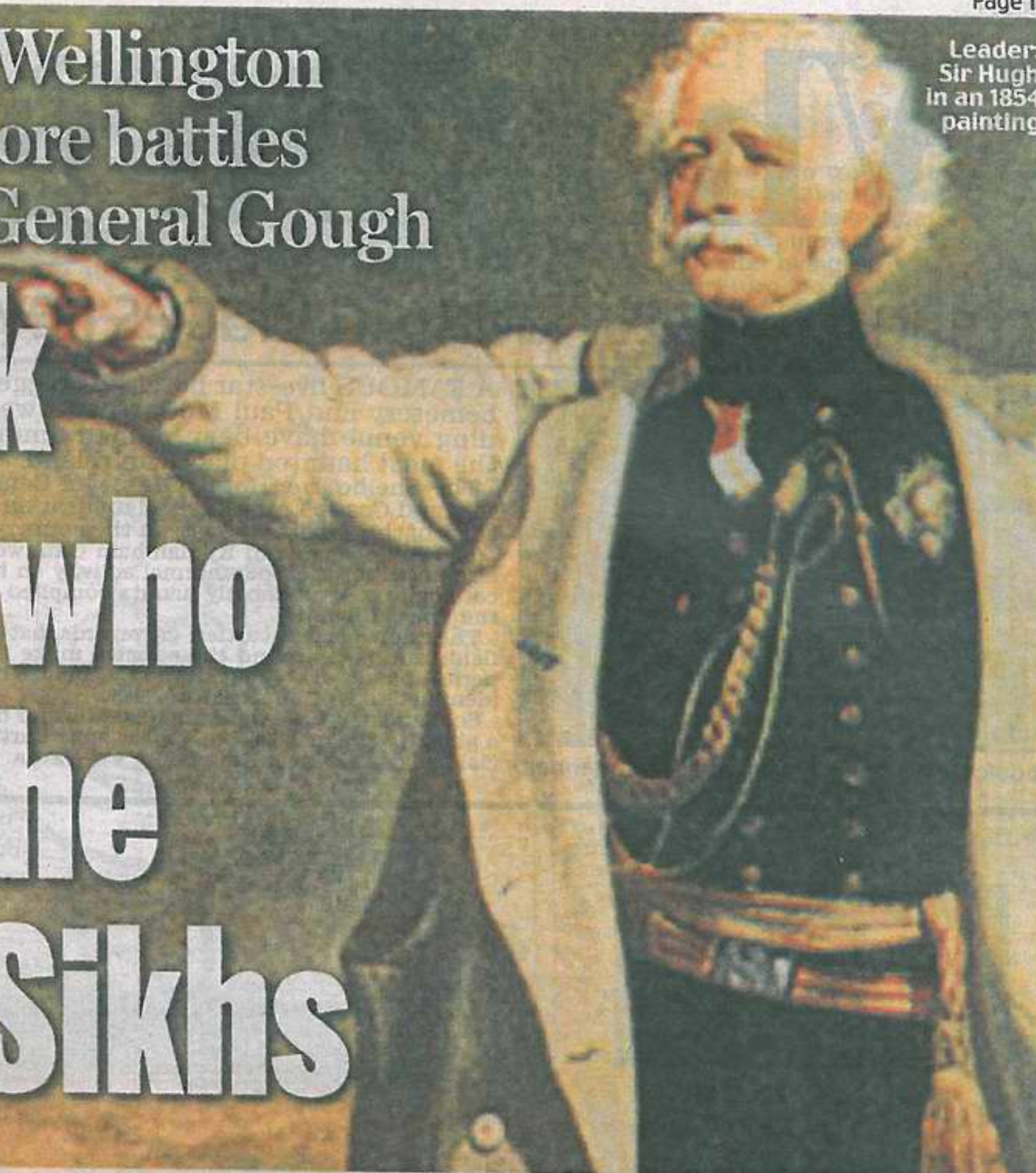
The victory at Barossa was a huge morale booster for Britain and her allies, paving the way for Waterloo and total victory. At the Battle of Vitoria, Gough's men triumphed again, capturing Marshal Jourdan's Baton. Gough returned home to a hero's welcome and was knighted by Britain's King George III in 1816.

In 1837, Major-General Gough was appointed commander of the Mysore Division of the Madras Army in British India. Four years later, aged 61, he was dispatched at the head of an expedition to China where British forces were embroiled in the First Opium War. He subsequently led a series of assaults on China, capturing the forts defending Canton (present-day Guandzhou) and forcing the Chinese Emperor to accept the Treaty of Nanking, by which Britain took possession of Hong Kong and became the predominant European power in the region. For these services, Gough was

# Only the Duke of Wellington commanded in more battles than undefeated General Gough

# Limerick warrior who tamed the Punjab Sikhs

Leader: Sir Hugh in an 1854 painting



by Turtle Bunbury

created a Baronet. In 1843, Gough became Commander-in-Chief of India, leading his army to victory over the Mahrattas at Mahrajpur.

It was then that his attention turned to the Punjab, a region roughly corresponding with present-day Pakistan.

It had been extremely volatile since December 1845 when the Sikh army crossed the River Sutlej in a virtual declaration of war against the British East India Company.

The Sikhs were to prove one of the most powerful foes the British faced during their quest for global supremacy. Not only were they the best natural fighters in India but their artillery was superior to that of the British on every score. Moreover, the Sikhs had been trained in European tactics by mostly ex-French Army officers, while their muskets, rifles and uniforms were every bit as good as British ones.

Gough's first battle with the Sikhs took place at Ferozpur on the banks of the Sutlej where - by dint of a brilliant cavalry charge and a 'cold steel' infantry advance - he comprehensively defeated the Sikhs, capturing 17 of their 22 guns.

He subsequently defeated the Sikhs in a series of other battles, albeit with mounting loss of life. The excellent fighting skills of the Sikhs undoubtedly increased the casualty figures but the losses were also heavier than usual because, in the absence of any suitable long-range artillery, Gough was obliged to rely on old style tactics of 'cold steel' and hand-to-hand combat.

In 1848, Gough led his army across the Sutlej, determined to crush the Sikhs and consolidate Britain's dominance in India. His army nearly came asunder during the battle of Chillianwalla when the Sikhs proved much stronger than anticipated, killing and wounding 2,338 of Gough's men.

However, when darkness fell, the British had captured the entire Sikh line and, while the Sikhs later managed to recapture their guns, it is believed this was the battle that broke their fighting spirit.

Gough's troops certainly felt that way and gave him an ovation. However, the excessive loss of life appalled both the British public

and the directors of the East India Company and Gough's so-called 'Tipperary Tactics' were lambasted in London.

Letters were issued ordering him to relinquish his command in favour of Sir Charles Napier. However, by the time the message reached Gough, he had already sent his army back in for one final battle at Gujrat. As they prepared to advance, Sergeant Keay recalled the 'unrestrained' enthusiasm of Gough's men as he rode down the lines in his white 'fighting coat', helmet in hand.

'The noise grew louder and nearer,' added another officer, 'and we saw the regiments, one after another, cheering like mad. It was Lord Gough, at the head of his Staff, riding along the front. He soon passed out of sight, but we heard the cheering till it died away in the distance'.

**G**UJRAT was an absolute victory for Gough and forced the Sikhs to surrender unconditionally. The Punjab was annexed to British India - 100,000 miles of India's most fertile soil, destined to become the breadbasket of the British Empire and later the heartland of Pakistan.

After his crowning victory at Gujrat, Gough was created Viscount Gough of Gujarat and Limerick while Parliament granted him a pension of £2,000 a year for himself and his next two successors in the viscountcy. He used some of the money to purchase Lough Cutra, a fine estate in Co. Galway, as well as a Georgian villa in Booterstown, Co. Dublin, which is now the Radisson SAS St Helen's Hotel.

An equestrian statue of Gough was commissioned by the eminent sculptor, John Henry Foley, and stood in Phoenix Park until it was blown up by the IRA in 1957. It was sold by the State in 1986 and, restored, now resides in England.

With a phenomenal war record, Gough was undefeated in all his battles, and the only person who commanded more actions than the Limerick man was the Dublin-born Duke of Wellington.

Field Marshal Viscount Gough died in 1869 and was buried alongside his wife in a family vault at St Brigid's Church in Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, just up the road from his family home in Booterstown. To find out more about the Curragh Museum exhibition, see [www.military.ie](http://www.military.ie)

**GERARD MCCARTHY IS**

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