

CURATOR'S NOTES

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For Friends of The Royal Lancers and Nottinghamshire Yeomanry Museum

The 2020 Museum season will not be remembered as our most productive, in terms of donations, visitor numbers or shop sales.

Having been instructed to close the Museum on 25 March, our plans for a joint exhibition with Thoresby Courtyard for the 75th anniversary of VE Day were cancelled. It was hoped that we might be able use some artefacts from the VE Day exhibition for the upcoming commemorations for VJ Day, but sadly, this was not to be.

After much hard work by Museum staff as well as our loyal band of volunteers, the galleries and site were made safe and Covid 19 compliant for visitors, allowing the Museum to re-open on July 8th.

On re-opening, it was decided to reduce the number of days opening from five to three (Wednesday to Friday). After a couple of weeks it was noticeable that footfall on a Friday was not great and the decision was then taken to close on Fridays and to open on Sundays. This proved to be a good decision, with visitor numbers averaging 140 on Sundays.



Museum Volunteer Andy Plant working on the Cold War display which was re-designed this year.

With the second lockdown now underway, it is unlikely that the Museum will be open again until Spring 2021. Next year's exhibitions are currently in the planning stage and more information will follow in our next newsletter.

With this in mind, it is my view that social media now plays an important part of the Museum offer. Our virtual tour has proved very popular, as has our Facebook page (pictured below) with regular posts such as stories from the archives, current information from the serving regiments and home headquarters.



We now have over 2,100 followers on Facebook and our grateful thanks go to Wayne Birch, our Volunteer Co-ordinator, for all his hard work in this area.

It may also be of interest for our readers to learn that we are, at this time, re-designing our Museum website. This will provide a clean, fresh and contemporary look to the site which will provide useful historical research information and encourage visitors to the Museum. Work is well underway, and we will keep you posted as to as our progress.

I would urge you all to take the Museum virtual tour www.rlnymuseum.co.uk and to follow the Museum Facebook page www.facebook.com/qrlnymuseum

It only remains for me to wish you all a very Happy Christmas, Covid 19 restrictions permitting, and I look forward to welcoming you back to the Museum in 2021. Stay safe, stay well.

Mick Holtby



FOREWORD

Brigadier W J Hurrell CBE DL

Your museum opened in time for the February schools' half term with great expectations for another good year. We had planned to hold a special exhibition in the Courtyard Gallery to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War. This exhibition was to be in conjunction with Thoresby, which became a training camp at that time. The museum site was a billet for some soldiers and their graffiti of the time has been kept as one of the museum exhibits. Sadly on March 25th the museum had to close because of the pandemic.

As soon as a reopening became possible we did so on July 8th. Nevertheless the museum, which we reopened is different in that we had to put in "covid precautions" including sanitisers, a one way system, removing all hands-on exhibits, an extra volunteer on duty at all times and only opening three days a week. We changed the Friday opening to a Sunday and recently had 170 visitors on that Sunday. Unfortunately we have had to close again with the second "lock down".

The pandemic has given us new challenges: the hotel closed and guided tours ended and whereas in the past museums had been able to enhance their visitors' experience with interactive attractions, these now had to close down.

We hope that we will be able to return to some normality, but we are not sitting and waiting. We have started a revamp of the website and it is worth looking at the current site at www.rlnymuseum.co.uk and taking a virtual tour (top line). We are trying to expand our social media, which is popular with a strong following. Also we are looking at producing a monthly exhibit, which will be sent to all Friends by e-mail if you wish to receive it.

All museums have been hit badly by this pandemic and many may not reopen. Your museum has the resilience to rise above this. We have a superb group of volunteers, who have stepped up to the mark to ensure that we can remain open. We are looking at the all-important visitors' experience and we will meet the future challenges.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII and in the absence of Remembrance Services this year:

FOR THE FALLEN

*With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.*

*Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.*

*They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.*

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

*They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.*

*But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;*

*As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.*

Laurence Binyon



ACTS OF VALOUR – Colonel PJD McCraith MC TD DL

Patrick James Danvers McCraith was born in 1916, the elder son of Sir Patrick McCraith, a leading Nottingham solicitor. After leaving Harrow he joined the Sherwood Rangers at the age of 18 and was commissioned in 1935.

He was mobilised in 1939 and, over Christmas, embarked with the horsed regiment for Palestine, first travelling by rail through France. In autumn 1940 he joined the Long Range Desert Group to form 'Y' (Yeomanry) Patrol with members of other Yeomanry Regiments of the First Cavalry Division.

Of the original 32 recruits eight were selected. McCraith looked out for those who could navigate, a skill not taught to cavalrymen. The successful volunteers were told to forget everything they had learnt up to that point as they were no longer in the Regular Army. Each was given a document to sign: their oath was that they would never for the rest of their lives reveal what they had been doing in the L.R.D.G.

On his first patrol in April 1941 he was wounded when his truck was blown up in a minefield. His second patrol, in July, involved taking a 'Captain Taranto', a British agent, 200 miles into enemy territory and back again.

At the end of that year McCraith returned to regimental duty with 'B' squadron SRY, training the officers in the use of the sun compass for desert navigation. (His sun compass is displayed at Thoresby). In October 1942 he was chosen to lead the Regiment through the minefield at El Alamein.

Captain McCraith was awarded the Military Cross for his actions in the battles of Medinin and Tabaga Gap in 1943:

'On March 6th when the Germans attacked at Medinin and were defeated, this Officer was in command of the Recce section, which enabled an O.P. to get on the ground, which was of vital importance. It was largely due to this position being found and held that the enemy attack was frustrated. On the evening of March 24th after the attack of 3RTR and Notts Sherwood Rangers on the left flank of the TABAGA position the Regiment found itself soon after dark almost surrounded and in immediate contact with the enemy. Capt McCraith realising that the ammunition expenditure had been very considerable collected the required ammunition vehicles and navigated them across extremely difficult country up to the tanks. Throughout the night all movement was being heavily engaged by MG and HE fire, as a result it was only by his organisation, great inspiration and determination that this column was finally brought to its objective in time for the tanks to be replenished before the dawn battle. Again on March 26th this officer led the Regiment into the attack on the TABAGA – EL MADJAL position and was nearing the final objective when his armoured car was knocked out by a direct hit. He remained in observation under heavy shellfire giving valuable information. On both these occasions Capt. McCraith showed complete disregard to his own safety and through his coolness and courage materially altered the issue of both actions. This officer has twice been blown up on mines, but still continues at his job with unfailing courage and with exceptional skill which is the admiration of all who serve with him.'



Captain PJD McCraith on his second LRDG patrol.
Captain Taranto can be seen on top of the cab.

On 9th June 1944 Captain McCraith landed in Normandy with Recce Troop. Two days later he was in his scout car at RHQ in a farmyard in St Pierre when they came under artillery fire: the acting CO, Michael Laycock, the Adjutant, George Jones, and Intelligence Officer, Laurence Head, were all killed outright by a direct hit. McCraith was severely wounded and evacuated to England. He attributed his escape to having been reaching for a dropped pencil on the floor of the turret at the critical moment. Pronounced unfit for active service, he was attached to the Ministry of Information to lecture on the North African campaign and afterwards at Sandhurst.

After the war he rejoined his father's firm of solicitors. He continued to serve with the Sherwood Rangers and commanded the Regiment from 1953-57. He married the Hon. Philippa Robins, daughter of Lord Robins of Rhodesia and Chelsea, and lived in Cranfield House in Southwell, a fine Queen Anne house which has been described as the prettiest house in the county.

Colonel McCraith was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for Nottinghamshire and became High Sheriff in 1963.

He served as Honorary Colonel of 'B' (Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry) Squadron, The Royal Yeomanry from 1968 to 1979 and subsequently as President of the Regimental Association, a post he held until his death in June 1998.

A memorial service for the life of Colonel Patrick McCraith MC TD DL was later held at Southwell Minster, opposite his home.



INTERESTING ARTEFACTS

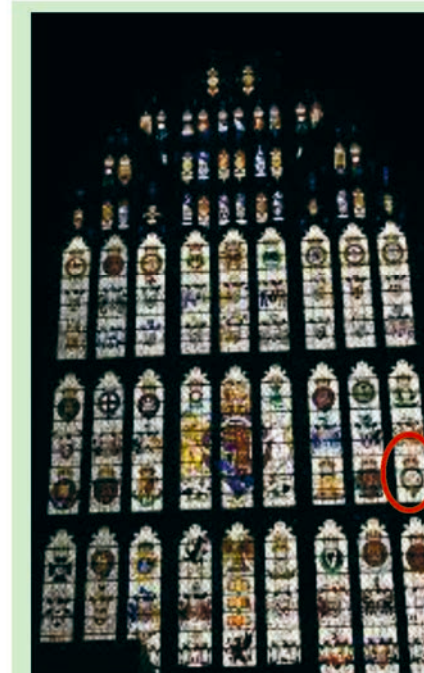


The decisive battle in the war with France in Canada occurred on 13th September 1759 when General James Wolfe successfully took the besieged city of Quebec and established British supremacy. In the final stages of the battle Wolfe was mortally wounded. Before he died Wolfe directed Colonel John Hale, of the 47th Foot (Northamptonshire Regiment), to return to England with his final dispatches and news of the victory at Quebec.

It was a tradition that the King would reward the bringer of good news and King George II granted Hale land in Canada and a commission to raise one of five new regiments of Light Dragoons. Thus, in 1759, the 17th Light Dragoons was born. Hale, in mourning for General Wolfe, chose as his regiment's badge the Death's Head with the words 'Or Glory'.

The gold mounted cornelian seal and wax impression were donated to the 17th/21st Lancers museum by the family of Colonel John Hale in 1930 and show the Motto in its earliest form.

The Motto, largely unchanged, is now worn by The Royal Lancers (Queen Elizabeths' Own).



MEMORIAL WINDOW, WESTMINSTER HALL Col EO Kellett DSO MP, KIA 22 March 1943

The stained glass window in St Stephen's Porch of Westminster Hall is the main memorial to members of both Houses of Parliament who died in WWII.

The badge of the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry represents Edward Orlando Kellett, M.P. for Aston, Birmingham from 1939 until his death in 1943.

Colonel 'Flash' Kellett was commissioned into the Irish Guards in 1922, joined the Sherwood Rangers in 1931 and commanded from 1940-43, taking over from Lt Col The Earl of Yarborough MC MFH. Having led the Regiment through every battle, including El Alamein where he was awarded an immediate DSO, Colonel Kellett was killed by a shell splinter while standing shaving in his tank, three weeks after promotion to Brigade 2I/C. Lt Col JD 'Donny' Player succeeded him as CO.

Lt Keith Douglas, who referred to Colonel Kellett as 'Piccadilly Jim', wrote: *"He embodied all the regimental characteristics he had been at pains to create: that assumption of superiority, that dandyism, individuality and disregard of the duller military conventions and regulations that made the Regiment sometimes unpopular – but always discussed and admired. We knew we were better than anyone else, and cared for no-one. But the focal point of this confidence was 'Piccadilly Jim'."*

Colonel 'Flash' Kellett is buried in Sfax War Cemetery, Tunisia.



REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

With significant changes forced upon everyone and the cancellation of the parade at the Victoria Embankment, The South Notts Hussars service at St Mary's Church provided a focal point for the city of Nottingham.

The service was attended by the Vice Lord-Lieutenant for Nottinghamshire, Col TS Richmond, by the Lord Mayor, local politicians and representatives from the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, and was broadcast live on Notts TV.

The usual order of service was embellished for television and included the release of poppies in front of the SNH war memorial inside the church.



Front page - HQ Squadron Royal Lancers pause during Ex Cerberus on Salisbury Plain at 11 o'clock on 11 November 2020.