

CURATOR'S NOTES

Captain Mick Holtby - curator@rlnymuseum.co.uk



For Friends of The Royal Lancers and Nottinghamshire Yeomanry Museum

As I write these notes we are well into the 2022 Museum season at Thoresby.

This year we celebrate not only the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, but also her 75 years' connection as Colonel in Chief of the 16th/5th Lancers, The Queen's Royal Lancers and The Royal Lancers (Queen Elizabeths' Own).

2022 also marks the 100th anniversary of the cavalry amalgamations of 1922, which I cover in a separate article.

January saw the refurbishment of the Museum entrance, with the redecoration of ceilings, walls and doors and a wooden banister rail was fitted to the existing metal handrail.

The Museum was open for schools' half term in the third week of February, and it was great to see a good number of families back in the Museum after the last couple of years.

Recent surveys suggest that visitors to Museums are slowly returning after the last two years. To date our recorded visitor numbers are 10,300. Guided tours for hotel guests have also resumed.

Other visits have included the High Sheriff of South Yorkshire and members of The Royal Lancers on Ex Blenheim Lancer, which introduces newly-arrived soldiers and attached arms to their regimental history.

To increase donations, the Museum has recently purchased a digital donor plate, as more visitors are using card rather than carrying cash and early signs suggest an increase in donations, many of which are being gift-aided.



Museum volunteers setting up *Royalty & Regiment* displays.

As mentioned above, our focus for the first half of the year has been The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Celebrations took place on 2nd June 2022 at Thoresby Courtyard sponsored by Nottinghamshire County Council which consisted of a Veterans' Big Breakfast, a live big screen showing of Trooping the Colour and the Daisy Belles trio live music and, of course, a bar.

A special exhibition "*Royalty & Regiment*" ran during the week of the Jubilee celebrations from 28 May to 5 June.



Mick Holtby and Wayne Birch with the QPJ exhibition.

Looking forward, we hope to have a Chieftain tank on display at Thoresby in the next few months, offered on loan from the Tank Museum. More about this in our next edition of the newsletter.

As always, a big thank you to our band of volunteers who help keep the Museum running smoothly.

If you are in the area, do please visit the Museum: you will be most welcome.

JMH



Presentation of the guidon to The Queen's Royal Lancers by HM The Queen, Tidworth, 25th June 1993.



FOREWORD

Colonel T S Richmond OBE TD DL

Brigadier William Hurrell has recently retired as Chairman of the Museum's Executive and Management Boards after over twelve years' dedicated service.

It was in 2007 when, as Colonel of the Regiment and then Chairman of the Queen's Royal Lancers Museum Committee, he led a review of the future of the Queen's Royal Lancers Museum when it had to leave Belvoir Castle where it had been for some 44 years.

At this time, he was also Chief Executive of the East Midlands Reserve Forces and Cadets Association and in close contact with both the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry and the South Notts Hussars Yeomanry, who shared their heritage as the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry.

William's vision was for a museum in a location with an existing and significant visitor footfall and by having a partnership with two local TA regiments it broadened the base of the Museum and ensured strong local links.

An introduction was made to Lady Rozelle Raynes, daughter of Earl Manvers and the owner of Thoresby Estate, by a member of the Queen's Royal Lancers which was supplemented by the existing links which the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry had with the Manvers family members of which had served with both Regiments.

Lady Rozelle and her fellow trustees had established a Charitable Trust (The Stonebridge Trust) to run the former Riding School and Courtyard at Thoresby Hall. With a restaurant, shops etc and the Hall having become a Warner Hotel there was a strong visitor base and successful negotiations followed leading to the present Museum.

He has led from the front, working closely with everyone concerned with the running of the Museum whilst gaining our respect and affection.

Colonel Murray Colville and I were both serving as the honorary colonels of our respective Regiments when the Museum was founded in its present state and there is no question in our minds that this would not have happened without William's personal commitment, acumen and love of his Regiment.

We owe him our thanks for the Museum we have today.



Brigadier Hurrell with HRH Princess Alexandra at the official opening of the Museum on 26th July 2011.

1922 and All That

This year marks the centenary of the post-Great War review of the British Army which saw the amalgamation of 18 out of 31 cavalry regiments and resulted in the formation of the 16th/5th Lancers and 17th/21st Lancers, as well as the conversion of many yeomanry regiments, including the South Notts Hussars to gunners.

The 9th Lancers and the 12th Lancers survived until their amalgamation in 1960. The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry survived until 1967 when they were reduced to a squadron within the Royal Yeomanry Regiment.

Captain Mick Holtby, our Museum Curator, and Colonel James Gunn, former CO and Honorary Colonel of the South Notts Hussars share their thoughts on the inside pages of this issue of Museum News.



SNH gun team firing a 25-pounder, Mersa Matruh, 1940.



100 YEARS AS GUNNERS

Colonel James Gunn OBE TD DL



One hundred years ago, much against their will, the South Notts Hussars lost their horses and became Gunners.

To add to their fury, it had turned on seniority as opposed to efficiency, the Nottingham Troop having been formed in 1794 stood down in 1803 at the Treaty of Amiens (and re-formed when the war restarted) meaning the SNH seniority of unbroken service rested on the Holme Pierrepont Troop formed in 1798 at the home of Earl Manvers (later of Thoresby) which would have put the South Notts fourteenth in seniority. The fourteen senior yeomanry regiments would keep their horses but at the time, due to incorrect information, later acknowledged, the South Notts were placed fifteenth and converted to Gunners.

The Honorary Colonel, Sir Lancelot Rolleston KCB DSO TD DL, wrote in the foreword to the Regimental history in 1924:

'It is an example of the eccentricity of fate that a Regiment which somewhat conspicuously resisted the temporary aberrations of training which followed the South African War, and sturdily remained cavalry, pure and simple, should be the senior regiment to be converted; but it is a regimental tradition that no task assigned to it is too hard to be undertaken, and the new duties are being zealously and successfully performed.'

'The last inspection report of the Royal Artillery Brigade which now represents the Regiment expresses the opinion that "much of the excellent esprit de corps of the Brigade may be attributed to the old tradition of the South Notts Hussars," and though their career as cavalry is over there are now new fields to conquer in the effort to prove a not unworthy unit of that splendid branch of the service for which science, horsemanship and discipline has long been regarded as an example to the armies of the world.'

In hindsight this was perhaps no bad thing as SNH senior officers all ran businesses which depended on mechanical skills and adapted easily to the problems of gunnery and, helped by a certain bloody mindedness and encouraged by Sir Lancelot, they decided that if they were to be Gunners, they would be the best. So they set to, to master different skills and sent a party of young officers and SNCOs on attachment to 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery to learn the skills required of a top regiment.

This paid big dividends when war came. In 1940, as 107th (South Notts Hussars) Regiment RHA, they were posted to Palestine and, when Italy entered the war, to Egypt as the first Territorial gunners to face the enemy in North Africa. They did this with great *elan* including capturing 5,248 Italians and their Commander's flag, mainly using dummy guns.

The next year, while on a routine job on the Suez Canal they were suddenly issued with new equipment and galloped some 700 miles against the tide of the retreating allies to Tobruk which they entered just as the front closed.

There they stayed for 10 months alongside 1RHA and 104th (Essex Yeomanry) Regt RHA where they became expert gunners and an especially close-knit body of men. So it was perhaps no surprise that on 6th June 1942, when the battle of Gazala was going the wrong way, they were picked to save the day against Rommel's concentrated forces at Knightsbridge and fought to the last man - literally - in an action described as 'one of the finest in the history of the Royal Artillery'.

But that was not to be the end: three months after Knightsbridge, having formed a constituted battery of eight of the new 5.5" guns, and initially titled 107 Medium Battery RHA, as part of 7th Medium Regiment, a two battery Medium Regiment and took part in the battles of Alam Halfa (being the first to fire the new 5.5s in action in any theatre) and El Alamein. Thereafter the Regiment chased Rommel to Tunisia and then Sicily before returning to England. As perhaps the best acknowledgement and reward for their achievements, they were re-constituted as a regiment shortly before D-Day and fought from Normandy to Germany.

The second line regiment, 150 (South Notts Hussars) Field Regiment, formed in 1938 having had duties in England and Ireland, became an Army Group RA Regiment in readiness for the Normandy landings and landed (and parachuted) Forward Observation Officers and Signals parties before and at H-Hour on D-Day, directing fire of the Royal Navy's battleships in support of the Airborne Forces including Pegasus Bridge. The guns landed on D+2 and went straight into action and by early August had fired 100,000 rounds in the campaigns for Normandy and in support of the Canadians towards Le Havre and Dunkirk, before being re-constituted as infantry for the remainder of the war.

The Regiment's high quality was restored when the TA was revived post war and they won the Queen's Cup in 1966 as the best of the 40-odd TA Gunner regiments of the day. They also survived the disbandment of the TA by becoming the first TA battery to provide OP parties to BAOR and, thereafter as a Field battery as part of 100 (Yeomanry) Regiment RA TA, subsequently disbanded in the 2015 review of Reserves.

Now, the Army is much reduced in size and SNH is working to re-build a presence with C (South Notts Hussars) Troop in Nottingham as part 210 Battery, a Midlands-based battery within 103 Regiment RA.

It has been an exciting 100 years of Gunnery - watch this space!

JMAG

James Gunn served with the Royal Artillery in India in 1944 and 1947, subsequently joining 307th (South Nottinghamshire Hussars Yeomanry RHA) Field Regiment RA TA, which he commanded from 1962-1966. He later served as TA Colonel for the East Midlands, Honorary Colonel of the South Notts Hussars and Commandant of Notts ACF).



THE 1922 AMALGAMATIONS



Following the end of the First World War, a Committee on National Expenditure was established under Sir Edward Geddes and, as a result, 'The Geddes Axe' fell heavily on the Army.

The effectiveness of the machine gun and artillery had already made it apparent that future warfare would involve much less of a role for cavalry and by March 1921 it had been decided that four junior cavalry regiments were to be disbanded: the 19th and 20th Hussars and the 5th and 21st Lancers.

After the 5th and 21st Lancers had learned that they would be disbanded, orders had been received regarding transfer of Officers and other ranks to other units. Officers could opt for retirement, being placed on half pay or transferring to other regiments; other ranks were either discharged early or transferred.

Both regiments left Bombay for England in October 1921 on *HMT Braemar Castle*. The 5th Lancers with a strength of 9 officers and 317 other ranks. 77 ORs disembarked at Port Said to join the 9th Lancers.

Once back in England both regiments then proceeded to Tidworth ready for disbandment.

Those who went to other regiments barely had time to settle into their new homes when it was decided by the War Office that a further four regiments must be disbanded. Those likely to be disbanded were the 14th and 15th Hussars and the 16th and 17th Lancers.

The howl of pain at the loss of so many famous cavalry regiments now reached the highest echelons of the War Office.

Several schemes had been put forward but all had been considered unworkable. However, Army Order No.133 of April 1922 announced amalgamations rather than disbandment.

It had been Sir Charles Harris, the Financial Secretary to the War Office, who came up with the solution which was deemed acceptable to all regiments concerned and would allow the traditions and honours of both parents to be perpetuated: amalgamated regiments were to bear a double title; viz. the 16th/5th Lancers and the 17th/21st Lancers.

In 1921 the 16th Lancers had embarked for India and were stationed in Lucknow and it was there on 28th September 1922 that the amalgamation with the 5th Lancers took place.

The 5th Lancers were only able to provide 53 men that had originally served in the 5th Lancers. 99 men from the 16th made up the establishment for D Squadron which then became known as the 5th Lancer Squadron. The title of the new regiment was the 16th/5th Lancers.

In the spring of 1922, the 17th Lancers returned to Tidworth from Ireland where, on 30th June, they amalgamated with the 21st Lancers to form the 17th/21st Lancers. The 21st Lancers formed C Sqn and were titled C (21st Lancer) Squadron and were permitted to wear their antecedent uniform and badges.

In early 1929 the War Office decided to discontinue the use of two badges for the amalgamated regiments and it was left to Colonels of Regiments to decide what form the badge should take. Other matters were left to commanding officers.

The 16th/5th Lancers adopted the old 16th Lancer cap badge with the Irish Harp of the 5th Lancers as collar badges.

It was unthinkable that the 17th would lose their Motto and so it was adopted for the 17th/21st Lancers. Sadly, nothing from the uniform of 21st was taken forward, which was probably the only wrong note in what had been a successful amalgamation.

Old Comrades felt it was too sudden and that all had been swept away without consideration.

Having researched regimental histories and journals of the period for this article, I was struck by some of the letters received from serving members at the sadness and sense of loss at having to leave behind their old regiments on amalgamation which they had loyally served.

As they do now, Old Comrades continued to gather and keep alive the old customs, traditions, and memories of their regiments they loved before they themselves passed into the pages of history.

L is for Lancer - Au glory mort.

JMH



The formation of the 17th/21st Lancers, Tidworth, 30th June 1922.