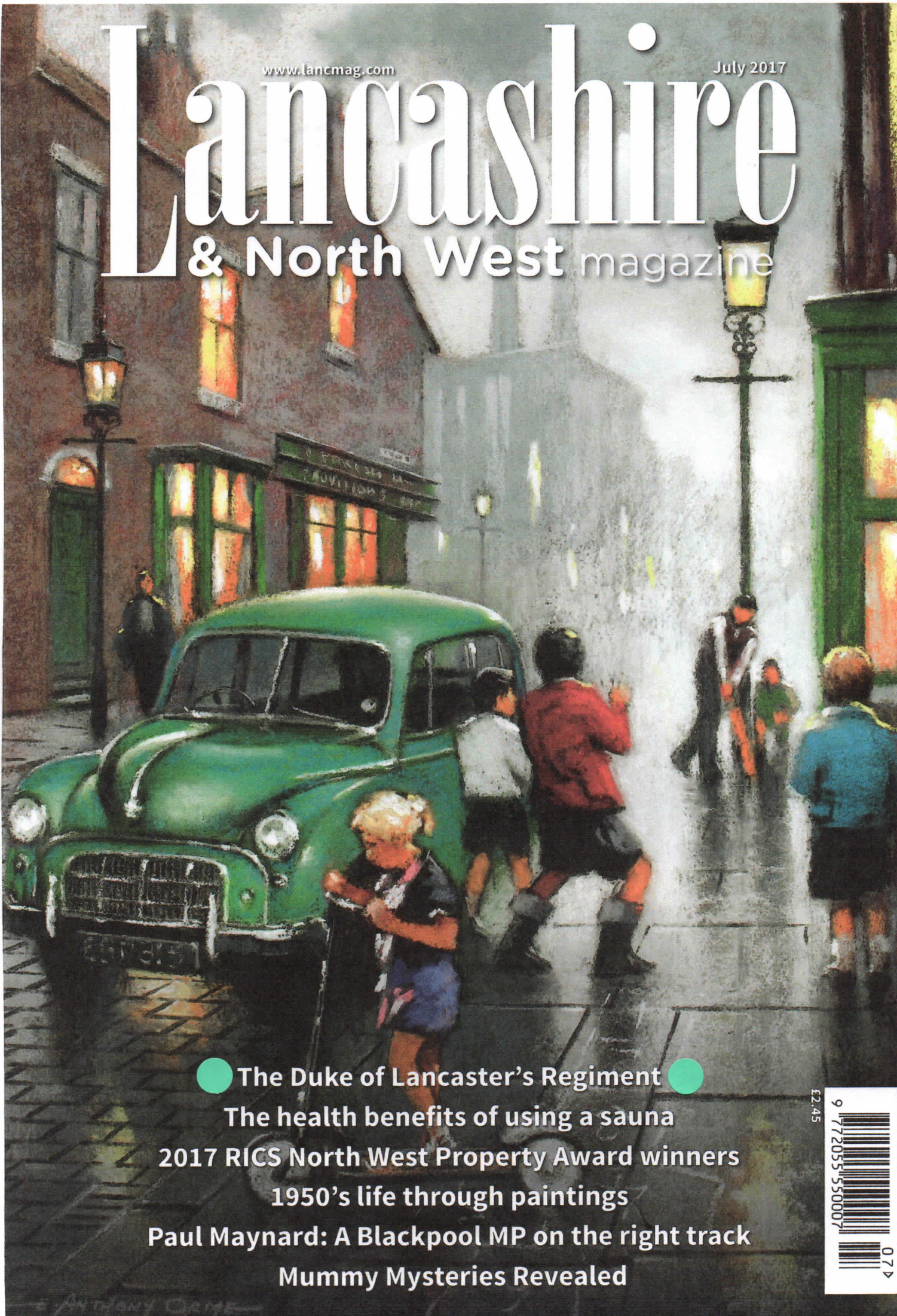


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The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment – Its past, present and future

By Andrew Harris

The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment is the county regiment for Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester. It is our regiment – so what is it and what does it do?

The regiment comprises 3 Battalions each of about 500 soldiers commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel and divided into 5 companies one of which is the headquarters company providing command and support functions. Each

company has 3 platoons of 30 or more soldiers. The battalions are known for short as 1 LANCS and 2 LANCS with full-time or regular soldiers and 4 LANCS with part-time soldiers known as the Army Reserve. So what of the past?

The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment can trace its origin to the 13th July 1680 when King Charles II raised a force later known as the 4th - or

King's Own – Regiment of Foot. This regiment soon became known as the 'Lions of England' which continues to this day and is worn as an emblem by all Kingsmen. Battle honours and amalgamations followed in the next 200 years when 12 regiments were amalgamated to form 7 by the Childers Reforms which aimed to create a more professional army and strengthen the links with areas from which soldiers were recruited. Even at that stage the



TOP LEFT: The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment on parade in July 2016 to mark the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. TOP RIGHT: The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment marching through the streets of Barrow. RIGHT: Soldiers of the Regiment on a training exercise in Germany

links were with North, South and East Lancashire, Liverpool, Manchester and the Border county of Cumberland.

The battle honours earned by these pre-1881 predecessor or antecedent regiments are too numerous to name but included such significant conflicts such as Gibraltar and Blenheim in 1704, the 7-years war 1756-63 which

hugely enlarged the British Empire, Waterloo in 1815, Inkerman, Lucknow and Afghanistan 1878-80. The 7 post-1881 regiments were to distinguish themselves in the Boer War then later raise an astonishing 176 battalions each of more than 1,000 soldiers in the so-called Great War later known as the First World War. 109 of these

battalions saw active service overseas when an amazing 42 Victoria Crosses were earned and 122 Battle Honours awarded for fighting skills and courage in such bloody campaigns as the Mons, Marne, Ypres, Gallipoli and – especially - the Somme.

The same 7 antecedent regiments were in the thick of it throughout the



4th Battalion, Duke of Lancaster's Regiment

Kimberley Barracks, Preston ●

+ Sub Units/Detachments at locations ●



Second World War. Many Battle Honours were earned – yes, earned – and included Dunkirk, Malta, Tobruk, Singapore, Chindits, Anzio, the Normandy Landings, Falaise, Arnhem and the hand-to-hand fighting at Imphal and Kohima. A record of which to be very, very proud.

Politics and the economy in post-war Britain led to the 1957 and 1966 Defence White Papers which amalgamated the 7 regiments to form just 3 – The King's Own Royal Border Regiment, The King's Regiment (Liverpool and Manchester) and the Queen's Lancashire Regiment. By 2003 further government proposals – ironically called 'Delivering Security in a Changing World' – resulted in these proud and historic regiments combining their strengths and traditions by coming together as the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment on the 1st July 2006.

Since 1945 the Duke of Lancaster's predecessor regiments saw active service in Palestine, Korea, the Suez Canal Zone, Malaya, Aden, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo and most recently Iraq and Afghanistan.

In total the predecessor regiments have won 59 VCs and one George Cross. 13 of their 303 battle honours are unique. The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment is the only regiment of any army at any time in history to carry battle honours from every inhabited continent on their Colours. That is the past so what of the present?

1 LANCS was based at the Somme Barracks at Catterick - when it trained in Kenya – until 2015 when it relocated to Episkopi in Cyprus.

It is a light infantry battalion and was initially responsible for protecting our 3 bases and vital infrastructure in Cyprus. Since then it has taken the role of Regional Standby Battalion and is kept at a high state of readiness for deployment anywhere in the Middle East and North Africa. During 2015-17 the battalion underwent training in Estonia, Gibraltar, Jordan and the USA as well as meeting its commitments in Cyprus. It is due to return to the UK in 2018 when it is likely that it will be based at Dale Barracks at Chester. Back home, almost.

2 LANCS is based at Weeton Barracks between Blackpool and Kirkham. All 4 of the battalions non-HQ companies have been deployed separately which is intense and unusual. These include 6 months supporting 4 LANCS and the Mercian Regiment for the UN Operation TOSCA manning the 'Green Line' separating the unreconciled Greek and Turkish parts of Cyprus. Other deployments included the Falklands and training



BELOW: Training in the deadly skill of sniping. **LEFT:** Kingsmen are trained and equipped for jungle warfare. **On exercise in Kenya.** **BOTTOM:** Kimberley Barracks in Preston - the HQ of 4 LANCS.

assistance to Iraqi Forces. All companies are now returning to base at Weeton and from October to March will resume training for deploying as a battalion. A series of serious sporting fixtures such as boxing, rugby and football follow whilst 2 platoons from the battalion will be training in Kenya in September and October. 2 LANCS is due to undergo a more radical change in 2019 when it will relocate southwards and become a 'specialist' battalion adapted to train foreign army units. Interestingly, Weeton is due to expand to accommodate 2 battalions instead of just one – thereby achieving a welcome increase in the army's presence in our region.

3 LANCS was formed from the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Royal Border Regiment but disbanded in March 2007 and their soldiers dispersed to 1 LANCS and 2 LANCS. As a result there is no 3 LANCS.

4 LANCS is an Army Reserve battalion based at Kimberley Barracks in Preston but with units at 8 other locations throughout the region – see the map. It is more community-based than 1 LANCS or 2 LANCS and combines drill nights with full-on army training at Catterick typically 2 weekends out of 4. The battalion has the distinction of heading-up a 6-months Operation TOSCA deployment to Cyprus although support was needed from 2 LANCS, the Mercian Regiment plus soldiers from Argentina, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia. A task they welcomed and discharged. Reserve units have





special challenges as all their soldiers have other interests and commitments. The army is gaining experience and success in coping with this. The trend is for Army Reserve units to 'plug' the gaps in deployed units rather than deploying as units themselves. This works well and enables the battalion to be flexible in matching operational needs and the needs of individual part-time soldiers. Major Gary Turner is second in command of the Battalion and explains "There are frequent opportunities for deploying our soldiers due to the reduction in the size of the Regular Army –from 102,000 to 82,000. We have developed a way of 'pairing' with regular units and this works well. The Army Reserve benefits from the same kit and standard of training as the Regular Army. 4 LANCERS is doing well with recruitment but more volunteers are always needed and welcome – especially if they are team players with good skills."

What of the future? The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment is a credit to the North West and itself. It has 4 special features:

- Soldiers are Kingsmen not Privates
- Apart from the Foot Guards and the Royal Regiment of Scotland it is the only Infantry Regiment to have The Queen – the Duke of Lancaster – as its Colonel in Chief
- An estimated 90% of Kingsmen are recruited from the 4 counties
- The Regiment has a family ethos. Serving soldiers, veterans and their families - plus regimental events and traditions - are supported by the Regimental Charity.

The army says "The Duke of Lancaster's and its predecessor Regiments have recruited in the North West



TOP LEFT: Six Kingsmen of 4 LANCERS: part-time but professional. ABOVE LEFT: Keeping fit at Kimberley Barracks. TOP: The Regimental Colours feature selected Battle Honours: they are a cause of great pride.

since 1782 and the region has a strong military tradition of which we are a key part. The North West continues to produce many of the British Army's finest soldiers and we are proud to be the North West's infantry regiment."

Andrew Harris (www.andreweharris.co.uk) is grateful to Colonel Chris Owen, Major Bob Smethurst, Major Gary Turner, Captain Rob Campbell, Lieutenant Tom Bush, Colour Sergeant Carl Ruffley and Sharon Seymour for their help in the preparation of this article. The pictures are courtesy of the MoD or by your columnist. The map is by Bridge Graphics.

