

www.lancmag.com August 2018

Lancashire

& North West magazine



Discover Amazing Women by Rail
The latest film created in Lancashire
Andrew Harris visits The Lancashire Infantry Museum
The real history of Blackpool Pleasure Beach
Chief White Elk vanishes
Supercar Showtime
The best of both worlds in The Rossendale Valley

£2.45



THE LANCASHIRE INFANTRY MUSEUM

– Facing a challenging future

By Andrew Harris



The Lancashire Infantry Museum boasts the largest regimental archive in the North of England for which it is the premier centre for historical military research. Yet times are changing with the expected closure in 2022 of Preston's Fulwood Barracks – as reported in our February 2017 edition - where the museum is located. As a result the museum faces a combination of challenges and opportunities.

The Lancashire Infantry Museum is amazing. It was founded in 1929 - as the museum of the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire) – and its collections progressed to feature 120 separate units including the 59 battalions formed by previous Lancashire regiments which evolved by mergers to form today's Duke of Lancaster's Regiment. As well as the Loyal Regiment their famous names include the East Lancashire Regiment, South Lancashire Regiment and the Lancashire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Volunteers) plus the King's Own Royal Border, the Kings and the Queen's Lancashire Regiments which merged in 2006 to form the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment. The museum displays or stores more than 12,000 exhibits to record this history – including 4 Victoria Crosses – the ultimate award for gallantry – won by William Young, Gabriel Coury, Basil Horsfall and John Lucas whose stories can be found at www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk/the-victoria-cross/

The museum was quick to reflect the modern enthusiasm for recording history through objects. It can move through two centuries with just 9 iconic exhibits in its collection and each tells a story -

1. THE MAIDA TORTOISE – On the 6th July 1806 the 81st Regiment of Foot – later the Loyal Regiment – was part of a British force which met and defeated Napoleon's army at the Battle of Maida. This greatly enhanced the reputation of the British and demonstrated to continental allies that the French could be beaten.



The Regimental Council Chamber in the Museum. A splendid venue for functions.



As the 81st were without rations after the battle the Colonel's servant caught and cooked a small tortoise for the commanding officer's supper. Many years later the tortoise shell was presented to the regiment mounted in silver as a snuff box and place before the colonel of the regiment on special occasions. As the shell became very brittle a replica tortoise in solid silver was made in 1906 and to this day is set before the colonel of the 1st Battalion of the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment when he dines with the Battalion on special occasions.



2. THE SALAMANCA EAGLE – The French Imperial Eagle of the 22ieme Regiment of Foot was taken at the Battle of Salamanca on the 22nd July 1812 by Ensign John Pratt of the 30th Foot – which later became the East Lancashire Regiment. It is the finest and most important military trophy in the possession of the Lancashire Infantry Museum and is listed by the Home Office as a British

National Treasure.

The eagle was chosen as the symbol of the French Grand Armee by the Emperor Napoleon Buonaparte in 1804. It was as significant to French Imperial regiments as the colours are to British regiments. To lose its Eagle brought shame to the regiment which had pledged to defend it to the death. Pratt's Eagle and just 3 others were sent to London by sea where they were paraded in the Deposition of the Eagles on Horse Guards Parade in the presence of the Prince Regent. After being stored in Chelsea Hospital for the next 135 years Pratt's Eagle was returned to the 30th Foot – by then the East Lancashire Regiment - in 1947.

3. THE SEBASTOPOL BELL – This is one of 2 bells taken at the end of the Crimean War from the clock tower of the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Sebastopol. Both bells were cast by Nicholas Samtoun of Moscow but the date of casting is unknown. The capture of the Russian Black Sea naval base of Sebastopol was the



principal objective of the allied campaign in the Crimea and its fall on the 10th September 1855 effectively ended the war. The 30th, 47th and 82nd of Foot – later the East Lancashire, Loyal (North Lancashire) and South Lancashire Regiments respectively – were all at Sebastopol when the fortress fell and the 82nd of Foot brought the bell away as a trophy.

4. THE RED FLAG FROM THE SIEGE OF KIMBERLEY – On the 11th October 1899 the Boer Republics in ‘South Africa’ declared war on the British. Within days the diamond mining town of Kimberley was besieged. The commanding Officer of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment – Lt Colonel Kekewich – was appointed to command the garrison. During the ensuing 4-month siege the Loyal Regiment provided the backbone of the defence. The soldiers made good use of scarce resources to feed the townspeople, keep the Boers at bay and deal with numerous bombardments. When incoming Boer shells were imminent this flag was raised at the pit-head of the diamond mine so that women and children could get to safety thus saving many lives. Kimberley was successfully defended until the siege was lifted on the 15th February 1900. The siege and the role of the Loyals is still commemorated by a service in the Garrison Church next to the Lancashire Infantry Museum every year.



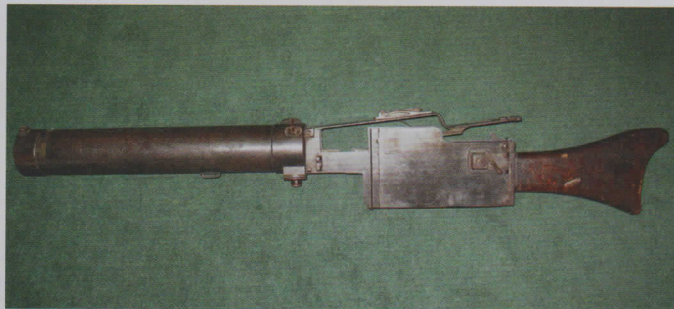
5. PRIVATE STANLEY BEWSHER'S BRODIE HELMET – Stanley Bewsher was wearing a Brodie Helmet on the 1st July 1916 – the first day of the Battle of the Somme. He was one of 720 men of the 11th Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment aka the Accrington Pals. By the end of that dreadful day 584 of those men had been killed, wounded or listed as missing in action. It became known as the bloodiest day in British military history and the Accrington Pals symbolised that horror.

Stanley survived the 1st July but was wounded. You can clearly see where his helmet stopped a ball of shrapnel. He



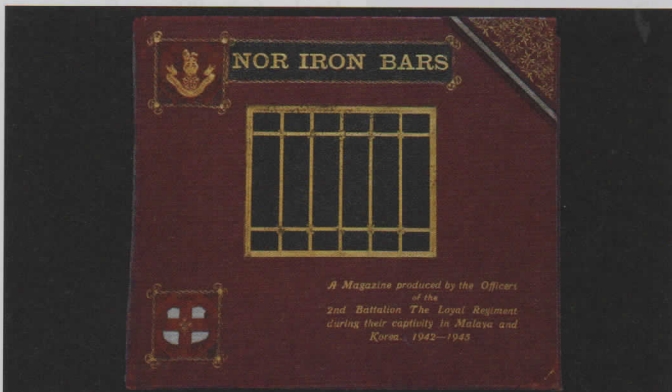
had made it to the German lines but had no back-up because most of his comrades had been killed or wounded. As he made his way back to the British lines he was knocked unconscious and only came round when he was being treated in a Casualty Clearing Station. It took many men to remove his helmet but he had survived. He was awarded the Military Medal for his bravery and lived to a ripe old age.

6. THE MACHINE GUN OF WILLIAM RATCLIFFE VC – The Battle of Messines Ridge was on the 14th June 1917. Private William Ratcliffe of the 2nd Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery. William and his comrades were being raked flank and rear by German machine guns in commanding positions and one was especially deadly. There is great doubt that William was given permission but he dashed straight at the gun and tackled the crew single-handed. After a while he had killed or driven off the gun crew and he made his way back with it. Despite being fired at furiously he made it back to the surprise of his comrades. He then started to strafe the enemy. An observer said ‘Every time they tried to rush him they were met with galling fire and he fairly knocked them out. Snipers there were by the dozen. Ratcliffe stuck gamely to his post and his action made things much easier for us all round.’ When it was all over he spent the rest of the night bringing in the wounded through a heavy barrage. William survived the war and went back to being a docker in Liverpool.



7. NOR IRON BARS – ‘Nor Iron Bars’ was a magazine produced by the officers of the 2nd Battalion of the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire) during their time as prisoners of war in World War Two. After Singapore fell in February 1942 many of the battalion were imprisoned in Changi Jail before being moved to Keijo in Korea. To keep their morale up during this terrible time they produced humorous articles and cartoons. With no spare paper they used old naval message pads and paper from Red Cross parcels.

Reading the magazine was punishable by torture and death. Despite this a fellow prisoner of war said that the grave risks involved and the need for secrecy ‘added spice to our enjoyment and each successive edition of Nor Iron Bars gave a fresh fillip to our morale.’ After the end of the war the magazines were bound and presented to the museum in 1947.



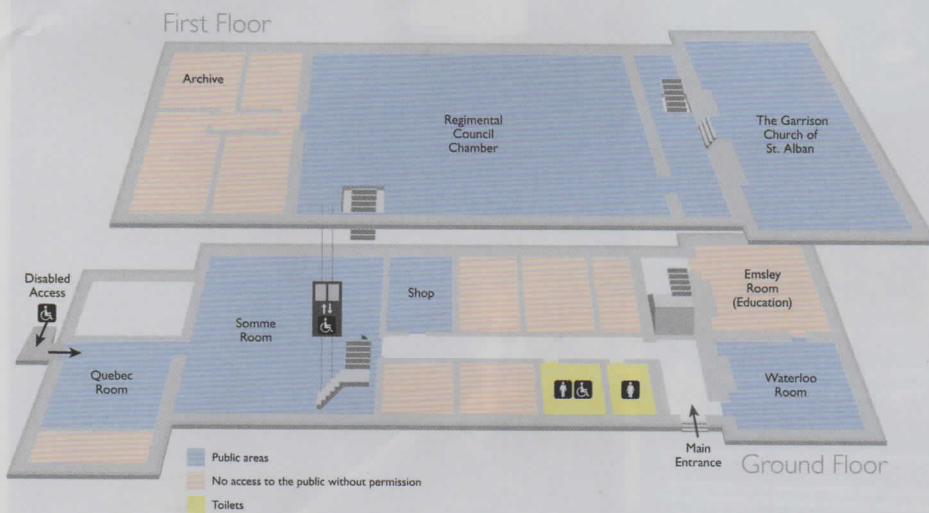
8. THE D-DAY SIGNALLING EQUIPMENT OF LIEUTENANT ERIC ASHCROFT – D-Day was the 6th June 1944. The 1st Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment landed on Sword Beach when Lt Colonel Burbury was the CO and Lieutenant Eric Ashcroft was the Regimental Signals Officer. When the Battalion landed at 07:25 the tide and rough weather forced the landing craft to the left so that A, C and HQ Companies were directly opposite a German strongpoint. As they crossed the beach Colonel Burbury was killed and Lt Ashcroft was wounded in the arm. Despite his injury Eric continued to advance until evacuated with his equipment. The Battalion achieved their objectives and were brewing tea in Herman-sur-Mer by 09:00! The equipment is impressive but not very photogenic.

9. THE BERLIN WALL - This section of the Berlin Wall is a symbol of the Cold War and was brought back to the UK by the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment. It commemorates the Regiment's contribution to the collapse of the Soviet empire through years of high readiness and the 1st Battalion of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment was the last British battalion in Berlin in 1992-94.

The museum now faces change in one form or another. For this it has strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are an amazing collection of exhibits, huge archives for research,



Curator Jane Davies at the museum entrance. Picture by your columnist.



open from 10 am to 4 pm each Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday. Entry is free but bring proof of your identity. For more information visit www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk or call 01772 260584. You will be impressed!

Andrew Harris gratefully acknowledges the help of the museum curator Jane Davies in the preparation of this article but the opinions expressed are his own. The illustrations are courtesy of the museum. Our February 2017 article 'Fulwood Barracks: A Tribute' can be seen under Published Articles at www.andrewharris.co.uk

low running costs of just £75,000 a year, a dedicated team of trustees and curator, support from nearly 300 volunteer 'friends' of the museum and an MoD commitment to relocate the museum if necessary - but at what cost? Weaknesses are a security barrier which deters some, probable closure of the barracks, reducing grant support, equivocal MoD support and a lease with only 14 years remaining which is insufficient to qualify for heritage lottery

and other capital grants.

Your columnist hopes that the museum will play the heritage card which - as proven elsewhere - can add value to nearby development and benefit the museum in the process. The Grade 2 listed status of the buildings can help negotiations and it could accept a remit beyond just infantry. We hope it goes from strength to strength.

The Lancashire Infantry Museum is

