

SOLDIERS' SMALL BOOK

Newsletter of the

Victorian Military Society

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BRIAN STEWART

It is with a sadness that the Council of the Society has to inform members that Brian Stewart, the Society's "senior member" (he held membership number 32) and a former Council member, died at the end of October. He was 80.

The Council has sent the Society's condolences to Brian's widow Pat. Brian Stewart was a wonderful man and will be sadly missed.

An obituary will be published in March's issue of *Soldiers of the Queen*.

BRIAN STEWART – A STORY

While Brian's obituary will be in the March issue of *Soldiers of the Queen*, the Editor would like to tell one story that he heard from him.

As a young man Brian served an apprenticeship in the Royal Dockyard at Chatham. One of the Dockyard's jobs was servicing the 15 inch guns of the gunnery training ship HMS Abercrombie.

The breeches of big naval guns were so finely balanced that, if the gun was laid horizontally, the breech could be closed by a gentle push.

However if the gun was elevated or depressed by just one degree, then the weight of the breech took over and was a real effort to shut it manually.

When a party was working in the turret, the gun would be laid flat with the breech open. The apprentice could see that when it had to be closed, it took no effort at all.

The apprentice would then be sent off to get something or other and while he was away, the gun would be elevated slightly.

After he had returned, the apprentice would be told to shut the breech. He, of course, would now find this almost impossible and while he was struggling to shut it, there would be a flood of insulting comments about the weakness of modern youth, "*not the men their fathers were*" etc. etc.

Incidentally, one of HMS Abercrombie's 15 inch guns is now standing guard outside the main entrance of the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth.

VICTORIAN MILITARY PROJECT IN WALES

The Society has been contacted by Dr Gethin Matthews, an historian based at Cardiff University who is currently managing a project called "Welsh Voices of the Great War Online" which seeks to safeguard and make available material that relates to the experiences of Welsh people during the Great War. The website is at - www.welshvoices.com.

What is of interest to the Society is that, when this project finishes in February 2011, Dr Matthews and his team hope to secure funding for a further project to gather and share information about the experiences of Victorian soldiers, sailors and their families.

The application for funding (dread words!) has still to be approved but the Society has sent a letter of support so, here's hoping.

NEW EXHIBITION

A new free exhibition at the Museum of London Docklands on Saturday 18th December will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of

Sidney Street in London's East End, including an exploration of Churchill's controversial role at the siege.

[London Under Siege: Churchill and the Anarchists, 1911](#)

will place the events in their historical and social contexts and use film, images and unique objects to document what happened. Churchill's overcoat, which he wore on the day of the siege, will be among the objects on display.

The Museum is at West India Quay, Canary Wharf, London E14 4AL and is open all week 10am - 6pm (galleries begin to close at 5.40pm) and is closed Christmas Eve to Boxing Day (inclusive).

CHELSEA PENSIONERS' RECORDS

Michael Parker has written saying the pension records of some 1.5 million soldiers who served in the British Army between 1760 and 1913 are now available on-line. They cover soldiers who were just given a pension through the Royal Hospital at Chelsea as well as those who lived there.

Included are the great-grandfather of the Kray Twins (infamous London gangsters for non-UK members) who joined the 65th Regiment of Foot in August 1870, a 12-year-old Drummer who served in the East Indies and John Kirk, a Liverpoolian who received the VC during the Indian Mutiny but was also a "drunken scallywag" and imprisoned 12 times during his 18 years' service.

They are now available on the family history website findmypast.co.uk in a joint initiative with The National Archives and FamilySearch.

They are available from today at <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>.

QUICK QUIZ – ANSWERS

The answers to the quiz in the last issue are as follows:

1. Who is the only man to have been awarded both the VC and an Iron Cross?

Answer: Surgeon General William George Nicholas Manley (1831-1901). He won his VC as an Assistant Surgeon in the Maori Wars on 29th April 1864 during the assault on a pah, (Maori stockade) near Tauranga.

His Iron Cross was awarded during the Franco-Prussian War by Kaiser Wilhelm I for service with the British Ambulance Corps caring for German wounded.

His medals (all 18 of them!) are at Firepower – The Royal Artillery Museum in Woolwich in SE London.

2. Major-General Henry Scott and Captain Francis Fowke both of the Royal Engineers designed which famous London landmark?

Answer: The Royal Albert Hall.

3. The 9th Lancers have the title “The Queen’s Royal Lancers” but which Queen is the regiment named for?

Answer: Queen Adelaide, wife of William IV and whose elaborate cipher forms the arm badge for sergeants of the regiment.

4. What was “The Netley VC”?

The VC laid under the foundation stone of the military hospital at Netley in Hampshire by Queen Victoria. When the building was demolished it was retrieved and is now in the Army Medical Services Museum at Ash Vale near Aldershot.

5. What in their early careers links Field Marshal Sir John French and Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood?

Answer: Both started as Midshipmen in the Royal

Navy. French transferred because, it is said, he discovered that he had no head for heights. Wood is supposed to have found in the Crimea that a soldier’s life was more exciting than a sailor’s.

AUSTRALIAN VCs

The Australian War Memorial’s upgraded [Hall of Valour](#) is re-opening soon. The Hall contains the Australian national collection of Victoria Crosses and to mark the occasion the latest 2010 edition of Anthony Staunton’s book, *Victoria Cross: Australia’s finest and the battles they fought*, is now available exclusively from the Memorial.

This latest edition features over 100 rarely seen photographs and includes Victoria Cross for Australia recipient Trooper Mark Donaldson VC.

FOOTBALLER’S VC

The only VC awarded to a professional footballer has been sold for £210,000. It was bought by the Professional Footballers Association and will go on display at their museum in Manchester.

Donald Simpson Bell, from Harrogate, became the first professional footballer to join the British Army following the declaration of war in 1914.

He was a passionate football player and played as an amateur at right back for Crystal Palace FC whilst studying in London. He returned to Harrogate as a schoolmaster and, to supplement his income, signed professionally with Bradford Park Avenue. He also played for Newcastle United.

Bell joined the West Yorkshire Regiment in 1915 and was later commissioned into the 9th Green Howards (then officially called The Yorkshire Regiment (Alexandra, Princess of Wales’ Own)).

His citation in the *London Gazette* reads:

“For most conspicuous bravery. During an attack a very heavy enfilade fire was opened on the attacking company by a hostile machine gun. 2nd Lt. Bell immediately, and on his own initiative, crept up a communication trench and then, followed by Corpl. Colwill and Pte. Batey, rushed across the open under very heavy fire and attacked the machine gun, shooting the firer with his revolver, and destroying gun and personnel with bombs. This very brave act saved many lives and ensured the success of the attack. Five days later this very gallant officer lost his life performing a very similar act of bravery.”

The reason for mentioning this “non-Victorian” item is that as one who lived his first 22 years within walking distance of Crystal Palace’s ground at Selhurst Park and who comes from a family of dedicated Palace fans, the Editor is ashamed to say this was the first he had ever heard of the team having a player who won the VC.

However, it might also explain why a pub fairly near to the ground has the unusual name of “The Victoria Cross”.

AUDIO BOOKS

Also from Michael Parker is a note about *Crimson Cats Audio Books*. *Crimson Cats* specialises in publishing audio books that are a little different, books which are out of print as well as anthologies or original books of its own. Books which you will probably not find in audio format anywhere else.

Of specific Victorian interest is *My Grandads and Afghanistan* which combines excerpts from the poems, stories and journalism of Rudyard Kipling with the family history of writer/actor Brian Wright, many of whose

ancestors served in the British Army in India during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Crimson cats have a website at <http://www.crimsoncats.co.uk> or by post at Crimson Cats Audio Books, The Red Cottage, the Street, Starson, Norfolk IP20 9NN.

PETER DUNN LETTERS & AUTOGRAPHS

Peter Dunn's latest list of autographs, letters etc has the following Victorian items on it:

A signed photograph of Field Marshal Lord Milne who was at Omdurman and later Kitchener's Chief of Staff in South Africa - £32.

A signed postcard of Admiral Sir William May, Arctic Explorer (Nares Expedition 1875) on the deck of his ship - £12.

A letter signed by Sir Reginald Wingate, as Sirdar of the Egyptian Army dated 1910 - £40.

An "inspection state" of the King's Royal Rifle Corps for the 22 July 1886 at Parkhurst, Isle of Wight signed by Colonel A F Terry CB - £28.

Letters from three Governors General of India – Lord Dufferin - £4; Lord Ellenborough - £15 and Sir John Lawrence £18.

Finally (saving the best until last!) an original studio photo of General Gordon pasha taken at Khartoum - £25.

For the full list, contact Peter as 32B Bow Road (Basement Flat), Bow, London E3 4LN. Phone 0208 981 8844 between 8am and 8pm.

RORKE'S DRIFT HOTEL

Charles Aikenhead has written to say that the Rorke's Drift Hotel in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa will be open for business from 1st January 2011 and welcomes visitors who want a different African experience.

The Hotel's unique venue offers panoramic views over the Buffalo River with the historic routes into Zululand towards Isandlwana clearly visible.

Guests can relax on the deck, by the pool or in the lounge to the background rumble of the famous river below. The Hotel has 22 beds in double en-suite rooms.

The Hotel's website at www.rorkesdrifhotel.com gives additional information and accommodation rates as well as a full range of attractions and destinations.

NEW BOOKS

The following is based on publicity material from the publishers. The Editor has not necessarily seen a copy of the book itself.

"Letters from Ladysmith" by Edward Spiers. 192pp. £15.99 hardback. Published by Pen & Sword Books, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS.

Edward Spiers gives a selection of 250 letters from the siege of Ladysmith that have not been seen since their original publication in metropolitan and provincial newspapers.

"British Warships 1860-1906 - a Photographic Record" compiled by Nicholas Dingle. £35 hardback. Published by Pen & Sword Books, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS.

Illustrated with 200 official admiralty photographs, many of them previously unpublished, this book traces the development of Royal Naval ship design from sail to the launch of HMS Dreadnought.

Each photograph is accompanied by full specifications (where available) and a caption detailing any significant design features, while the main text gives an overview of naval developments

across the period under discussion, setting the selected ships in context.

"Nez Perce 1877 - the Last Fight" by Robert Forczyk with illustrations by Peter Dennis. £14.99. 96 pp. Paperback. Published by Osprey Publishing <http://www.ospreypublishing.com>.

In 1877 the Nez Perce Indians, led by Chief Joseph, refused to accept resettlement. Instead, a band of 750 warriors and set off for the Canadian border pursued by 2,000 US troops. The army chased the Nez Perce for three months, until just 40 miles from the Canadian border; the Army forced them to surrender after a five-day battle.

AUCTION REPORT

Wallis & Wallis's Militaria Auction on 16th November was their final Sale of the year and it included a large number of Victorian items from private collections all over the world.

The medals of James Rennie, CB, of the Indian Navy 1827-1857, who was recommended for the Victoria Cross following the Persian Campaign, comprised the CB, China 1842 Medal, India General Service Medal 1854, and a French Ministry of Marine gold medal for services rendered in 1853. The group sold for £3100.

Those of John George Rennie of the Black Watch a DSO, Queen's Sudan Medal, Queen's South Africa Medal with five clasps, King's South Africa Medal, "Pip, Squeak and Wilfred" (1914 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal) the Turkish Order of the Medjidie 4th Class, the Khedive's Sudan Medal and "various other medals and awards". This interesting group sold for £2600 and his officer's dirk went for £1200.

A New Zealand Medal awarded to Corporal Thomas Foster 50th Queen's Own Regiment (Royal

West Kent), of which only 342 were awarded sold to an Australian buyer for £410.

There were a number of Victorian badges in the Sale. A silver NCO's arm badge of the 3rd (Prince of Wales's) Dragoon Guards, hallmarked for Birmingham 1900 made £260. A Victorian silver plated plaid brooch of the Highland Light Infantry sold for £200 and an other rank's helmet plate of Her Majesty's Reserve Regiment of Lancers made £120.

Four white metal helmet plates of the Artillery Volunteers went for different prices: the 1st Forfarshire Artillery Volunteers, £160; the 1st Lincolnshire Artillery Volunteers, £150; the 1st Midlothian Coast Artillery Volunteers, £130 and finally the Duke of Cornwall's Artillery Volunteers, £290.

A Royal Navy officer's sword c1870 with a claymore blade 29½-inches long etched with a crowned fouled anchor and crowned Royal Arms, in elaborately scrolled panels, sold for £500

A similar sword for an officer in the Indian Navy with a very slightly curved blade 31½-inches long etched with a crowned star over a fouled anchor also made £500.

Last of all, a Mark I Martini Henry rifle modified to Mark II with military proofs and government sale marks, made £675 even with part of the ladder rear sight missing. Last of all a Martini Henry Artillery carbine of the Royal Irish Constabulary sold for £775.

WALLIS & WALLIS SALE DATES FOR 2011

11th January 2011 (last entry gone).

15th February 2011 (last entry 15th January 2011).

22nd March 2011 (last entry 19th February 2011).

4th & 5th May 2011 (last entry 26th March 2011).

14th June 2011 (last entry 7th May 2011).

26th July 2011 (last entry 18th June 2011).

6th September 2011 (last entry 30th July 2011).

18th & 19th October 2011 (last entry 10th September 2011).

22nd November 2011 (last entry 22nd October 2011).

LUNCHTIME LECTURES AT THE NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM FOR 2011

Lunchtime talks take place at 12.30pm every Thursday. Admission is free and many lectures are followed by a book signing in the Museum Shop. Occasionally, unavoidable circumstances lead to a change in the programme, so visitors should telephone 020 7730 0717 ext. 2425 on the day.

21st April 2011 - Gap Years: National Service, 1945-1963. Prof Richard Vinen.

28th April 2011 - Prisoners of War in the 18th Century. Dr Erica Charters.

5th May 2011 - War Hospitals for Indian Troops in Brighton During the First World War. Samiksha Sehrawat.

12th May 2011 - Napoleon's Downfall, 1813-1815: Tsar Alexander I of Russia's Major Role. Bob Dammett.

19th May 2011 - Churchill's Spearhead: The Development of the Airborne Forces. John Greenacre.

26th May 2011 - Scars of War: The Visual Legacy of the Second World War in London. Rob Fleming.

2nd June 2011 - Commemorating the Boys of the Veldt: Anglo-Boer Memorials in London, 1902-1914. Mark Connelly.

9th June 2011 - Non-combatants - Really?: Decorated Bandsmen, 1914-1945. Stephen Mason.

16th June 2011 - Where Did General Jan Smuts Go, and Why?: South Africa's Great War. Bill Nasson.

23th June 2011 - The Normandy Campaign. Ian Daghish.

30th June 2011 - Reading Around the Home Fires: The Strand Magazine. Richard Burnip.

7th July 2011 - Crime and Punishment in Wellington's Army. Carole Divall.

14th July 2011 - Wellington's Right-Hand Man: Rowland, 1st Viscount Hill. Joanna Hill.

21st July 2011 - The Development of the Vickers-Maxim Machine Gun. Martin Pegler.

28th July 2011 - Armed to the Teeth: Military Dentistry in the 20th Century. Dr S. B. Spencer.

AND FINALLY...

The Editor wishes all members of the Society and their families a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Soldiers' Small Book is published in March, June, September and December by the Victorian Military Society (Registered Charity No. 1117006). Copyright Hon. Editor Dan Allen 20 Priory Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 7QN. Email vmsdan@msn.com.

Please send any items you think may be of interest to other members to the Editor at 20 Priory Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 7QN or by email at vmsdan@msn.com. The deadline for the next issue is 22nd February 2011.

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