



Redcoats Review

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Friends

I trust that all of you are in good heart? Many of you will have heard the news regarding the Wardrobe Trustees' application for HLF support to the proposed Wardrobe Transformation Project (WTP). The decision not to award us any funding was very disappointing because considerable effort, research, planning and consultation had taken place and all the recommendations from the first initial bid had been addressed and suitable solutions/proposals had been included in the second application. There will not be any further bids to HLF and the Trustees are now considering alternative plans. This has been a bitter blow.

A key element to any future development at the Wardrobe will depend on the ability to conduct a marketing and fundraising campaign and whether much or indeed all of the WTP can be achieved and over what time period. The next year will be spent sorting this out. What is clear is that a significant amount of money is needed to support the plans and this will take a Herculean effort.

As far as the Society of Friends is concerned, nothing much has changed. In April of this year we had a fascinating talk, on this occasion at lunchtime, given jointly by Mike Cornwell and Chris Bacon. They described the actions taken by the Royal Berkshires and the Wiltshires at the battle of Anzio in early spring of 1944, with their conflicting rewards. Having recently attended a battlefield tour of the battle site in Italy, they were able to give a very good insight into the events and its consequences and we are grateful for their efforts. A lunch was provided afterwards for those attending and although member numbers were similar to the previous evening events of the past, it is not yet certain whether a lunchtime or evening event is the preferred option. On balance perhaps the more senior generation amongst the membership would prefer the daytime event, so we will probably give next year a similar go.

The SoF was able to grant the Museum the funds needed to replace the front desk cash till that "crashed" suddenly one day in April. A new till and computer system was purchased and the cost of this was covered by a donation from the Friends. At the AGM this action was unanimously supported.

Most of our members have been longstanding loyal supporters and some of you may still only be paying £5 or £7 membership fees by Direct Debit. I would be most grateful if all of you reading this could check your bank statements and determine whether you need to adjust this upwards to the current £10 annual membership fee, which incidentally has not changed for at least the past ten years or more. Still very good value and very much appreciated!

We hope to be supporting a fundraising "launch event" in the autumn, which the Trustees should organise, providing a campaign is started, but as yet this is still undecided. I mention it here because assuming the WTP goes ahead in some form or other there is going to be significant publicity required, which will start with an "event" of some kind. Redcoats Members will be given plenty of notice and will be invited to attend and join in support.

Another decision announced recently is that The Rifles Berkshire and Wiltshire Museum sited at the Wardrobe will continue to receive MOD Funding support for at least the next 5 years and possibly up to 2030, should MOD support be granted that far into the future. So for the immediate future the site at the Wardrobe is safe.

At this point I want to thank all my committee members for their considerable effort over the past year in supporting me and helping the Museum staff when required. Special thanks go to Mike Cornwell and Martin McIntyre who have produced this copy of *Redcoats Review*, gathered and edited all the material as well as contributing articles for publication. On that matter can I point out that I always mention in my notes that anyone is welcome to produce an article for the *Redcoats Review* and I strongly encourage people to do so. In spite of me making this mention regularly however, very few if anyone ever responds! So please take note everyone and get writing.

One final point is worth mentioning but probably only applies to local Wiltshire based members and that is the matter of volunteer staff support at the Museum. Due to recent retirements there are vacancies for volunteers to help run the front desk and the museum is always looking for willing volunteers to give up a morning or afternoon to assist. Please give this serious consideration – your assistance would be really appreciated!

Enjoy reading this and have a good summer (!) everyone.

Nigel Walker



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FUTURE EVENTS

- 2017 AGM.

Please make a not in your diary

17th May 2017 at 1430 at The
Wardrobe.



Richard Joyner doing the research whilst Cornwell waffles

THE "WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE EXHIBITION"

Who do you think you are exhibition - NEC Birmingham - 7 - 9. April 2016

For the third year running Redcoats members and Museum Volunteers have assisted AMOT [Andrew Lloyd MBE] at the Who do you think you are exhibition - NEC Birmingham. This event was the 10th year anniversary of 'Who Do You Think You Are'. The redcoats/volunteers who attended this year were Michael Cornwell, Richard Joyner and Martin McIntyre. Over the three day period all three were tested to the hilt about their knowledge. Fortunately the team had Richard who is a wiz kid with the computer and able to access systems that would otherwise be metaphorically 'Out of Bounds'. He even made Michael and Mac look rather modern !!! All three days were busy, including several Wiltshire Regiment enquiries helpfully sent over by David Chilton from the Wiltshire Family History stand. Our stand was a stones throw from Andrew Tatham's stand where he was promoting his book on the 8th (Service) Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment Officers at the Battle of Loos, 1915. To date he has sold over 5000 copies, a magnificent record.

A number of other Regimental museum volunteers/staff attended which is becoming a regular event and a good location to build up contacts.

Our attendance had the advantage of highlighting the name of our Regimental Museum at a national event.

Whilst Mac looks deep in thought listening to Andrew Tatham's explanation of his book and project on 8th Service Battalion The Royal Berkshires



LIEUTENANT JAMES FITZGIBBON AND THE BLOODY BOYS - AN ARTICLE BY MAC

James FitzGibbon was an Irishman and a soldier of the 49th [Hertfordshire] Regiment, The Irish did not trust the English and the British Army did not accept Irish Catholics until 1799. Nonetheless, FitzGibbon was able to join the Army in 1798 because his family converted to Protestantism. He rose through the ranks and was noticed and guided by Colonel Brock and by 1812 he was a lieutenant directly under by now Sir Isaac Brock. After Brock's death on October 13th, 1812, at Queenstown FitzGibbon was promoted to the rank of Captain in Canada.

At this time the people of Upper Canada were living in a constant battleground, this being the time of the 1812-1815 war in Canada with America.

FitzGibbon convinced his commanding officer, to allow him to create a special unit; and he handpicked men from the 49th Regiment and provided vigorous training in guerrilla warfare. Their role was to chase down, capture, or kill renegade American soldiers who were terrorising the population of the Niagara frontier. As well as needing to have exceptional courage, each man chosen was tireless, quick-witted and skilled at deception. [We believe he selected most of these men from the Light Company, selecting men he knew]

It did not take long for this newly formed force to establish a fierce reputation. They earned the nickname "The Green Tigers" [The Regimental facings] however, they called themselves "The Bloody Boys" which is a nickname that also stuck. Often in disguise, this group of men would roam the Niagara region on horseback, hunting down the most notorious of the American invaders.

FitzGibbon was a natural-born leader and earned the respect and loyalty of his men quite easily.

In April 1813, American warships sailed across Lake Ontario to Fort York (a current historical site in Toronto). They proceeded to invade and destroy the fort with vengeance. From here, the Americans headed towards the Niagara region and attacked Fort George successfully. The British, including FitzGibbon and his commanding officer Colonel John Vincent, had to abandon the fort, retreating to Burlington Bay. The Americans chased the British for four weeks and Vincent was ordered to abandon the peninsula.

Fortunately, Vincent would not give up. The 1600 British men had to prepare for a confrontation with 3000 Americans. Dressed as a butter peddler, FitzGibbon travelled approximately 16 kilometres to the American encampment at Stoney Creek on the morning of June 5th. While selling butter, he was able to count men and weapons. Consequently, he was able to report that the Americans were disorganised and their weapons badly positioned; however, the most crucial bit of information he learned was that the Americans were expecting reinforcements soon.

The British were able to defeat the Americans at Stoney Creek and the Americans retreated to Fort George; however, the Americans continued to raid the surrounding villages.

At this time, FitzGibbon was ordered to take up residence near Beaver Dams, about 30 kilometres south-west of Fort George on the escarpment.

JAMES FITZGIBBON CONTINUED

By way of luck a local, Laura Secord, got to hear of the American plans and was able to warn FitzGibbon about the imminent attack.



Laura Secord giving James Fitzgibbon the Intelligence she overhear from the Americans, having trekked some 25 kilometres

FitzGibbon acted on Secord's information immediately. With the aid of Mohawk warriors, FitzGibbon and 44 "Bloody Boys" made their move. FitzGibbon walked towards the Americans waving a white flag, signaling surrender.

FitzGibbon took several steps toward the man extending his hand, pretending that he was an old acquaintance. Then, in a lightning move, he seized the rifle barrel and ordered the soldier to surrender. The American refused. His companion then took aim at FitzGibbon who, while he had the first rifle still clamped in his right hand, somehow managed to grab the second firearm with his left. Now locked in a struggle with both men, he dragged them outside while yelling at each to surrender.

A local Mrs. Kerby tried unsuccessfully to persuade two passersby to help FitzGibbon, while a small boy threw stones at the Americans. With his free hand, one of the soldiers then pulled FitzGibbon's sword from its scabbard. He was about to thrust it into FitzGibbon's chest when Mrs. Denfield, the innkeeper's wife who had been standing in the door holding her baby, ran up and kicked the sword out of his hand. When the soldier attempted to pick it up, she put her baby down, grabbed the sword and ran with it back to the Inn. Her husband now on the scene helps FitzGibbon disarm the two Americans and take them prisoner. FitzGibbon then re-joined his men and they rode off. This bluff confused the Americans long enough to wait for reinforcements. The British were able to defeat the Americans at the Battle of Beaver Dams on June 23rd, 1813.

After the war he served as local militia commander and as public servant, after employing his name and reputation to quell unrest with Irish immigrants. He also served as acting Adjutant General during the rebellions of 1837, where his actions quelled the rebels march on Toronto. Tough, smart, and cagey, Fitzgibbon returned to England in 1847 after the death of his wife. He became a Knight of Windsor and is buried next to St Georges Chapel in Windsor Castle. [The book written about his life and times is currently being transcribed at the Regimental Museum.]

THE ONLY KNOWN AUTHENTIC IMAGE OF JAMES FITZGIBBON



FitzGibbon as as military Knight of Windsor

HUNGERFORD HISTORY SOCIETY PRESENTATION

In June Martin McIntyre & Michael Cornwell gave a presentation of the WWI events involving the Eight Battalions of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. The twist to the presentation was that the accounts were based on the lives of the Regimental officers and soldiers whose names are borne on the Hungerford War memorial. Mac was able to provide the human story by using material from the Museum's archives. Over 100 people attended and judging by their response it was judged a success.

ANZIO PRESENTATION

Chris Bacon & Michael Cornwell gave a talk on the trials and tribulations of the 10th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment and the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment at Anzio, Italy during the 2nd World war, plus an in depth examination of the Victoria Cross action relating to Sergeant Rogers MM VC. Michael kicked off the presentation to 22 Redcoat members with the actions on the 10th Battalion followed by Chris Bacon about the Wiltshire Regiment and Sergeant Rogers. This was a well researched presentation which followed a Battlefield tour in that area last year with Patrick Mercer [Ex WFR]. The point was well made that the whole story made much more sense after walking the battlefield. At the conclusion of the presentation a number of searching questions were asked and answered to the satisfaction of the audience. [We are not sure the answers related to the subject but nevertheless they sounded right !!]



Chris Bacon providing a detailed account of the action that won Sgt Maurice Rogers MM, his VC

PRIVATE FRANK GRAY BY RICHARD JOYNER

While in Birmingham for 'Who Do You Think You Are? Live', I was shown a photograph by Martin McIntyre, of what appeared to be a tramp. I was informed that his name was Frank Gray, and despite appearances, not only did he serve in the Royal Berkshire Regiment but he was also once the MP for Oxford; my interest was piqued. Within minutes I had found his election posters and his story began to unfold. Showing perhaps too much outward enthusiasm, I was asked to write a short article to share my findings...

Early Life

Francis James (nearly always known as Frank) Gray was born in 1880 in Oxford. He attended Rugby School and a crammer in Woodstock before being articled as a solicitor's clerk in 1898. After working as a clerk in London he returned to Oxford in 1906, and established his own successful legal practice with a partner. He emerged a local celebrity when he and William Richard Morris (later Lord Nuffield) roused public opinion in the struggle to bring motor buses to Oxford in 1913-14.

'CONFESSIONS OF A PRIVATE'

During the Great War, Gray was exempt from conscription as he was serving an appointment to the Inland Revenue, but in February 1917 chose to enlist, recording in his diary:

"To-morrow I go as a conscript to the Army - that may be taken to be my position. I go, at all events to-day anxious to do exactly as the lowest does. I believe I shall find this hard from two standpoints: first I shall be faced with continual temptation to accept something better than others; secondly, my life has had few physical hardships to encounter, on the other hand I have one great help of which I cannot be deprived, and which outweighs all my disadvantages, that is, that I am by deliberate choice the worst lot which is being forced upon others."

After training, he joined The Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and proceeded overseas.

Shortly after arriving in France he was posted to 8th Battalion The Royal Berkshire Regiment.

Gray, on joining 8th Battalion, was posted to No. 6 Platoon, B Company. His recollections provide a characterful insight into the platoon; the Captain **'had more the appearance of an unsuccessful poet than an officer of the British Army...but his merits, if few, were great.** The Sergeant; 'quite a youth but one of the smartest little men [Gray] met.' One of his dearest friends, a clay-digger, was 'by his own confession... a keen and successful poacher, with a dash of apple and other petty stealing'.

Gray served with B Company of 8th Battalion through the Battle of Passchendaele and into 1918. During this time he was offered a commission and transfer to the Transport Command in England which he refused; he wished to finish the war as he began it, as 'Private Gray'.

The Battalion was in in the line south of St Quentin on 21 March 1918 when the German Spring Offensive opened.

At around 4:30am the battalion was subjected to a heavy bombardment prior the attack, Gray recounts:

'It came and overwhelmed me in an unpausing, irresistible and endless wave of sound. It was

caused by the firing of the guns and the bursting of shells and bombs, but in this infernal tornado no discharging gun, no bursting shell or bomb made its individual voice heard above the universal clamour.'

Surviving the attack, he was granted leave to England and on his return was appointed to become a Clerk in the Intelligence Department of III Corps Headquarters. Of the role he writes **'I had expected that this department would provide excitement in war in a much greater degree than it actually did. But, on the other hand, I acquired a knowledge of the general running of an army and of military matters as a whole beyond my expectations'**. He remained in this post until war's end.

'Confessions of a Candidate'

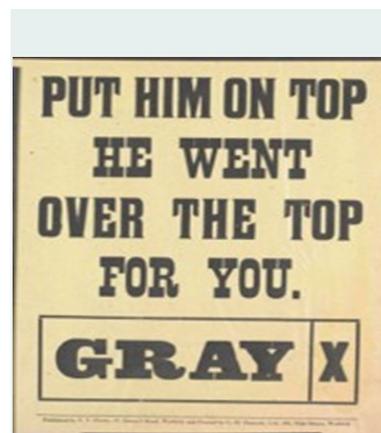
Frank Gray's wartime experiences almost certainly influenced his political views, and motivated him to stand for Parliament. In the General Election of 1918 he ran as the Liberal candidate for Watford, but was defeated. In 1920 he was selected as the Liberal candidate for Oxford City; a seat held by the Conservatives since 1885. Proving himself a popular figure, he won the seat with a majority of 3,806. He defended the seat in 1923, was re-elected with a reduced majority of 2,693, and rewarded with an appointment as a junior Whip in the Liberal party. However, he was found to have exceeded his reported election expenses, and a petition was filed against him for corruption in February 1924. His young and inexperienced agent, Captain J.C Johnstone M.A. M.C., was found guilty of corrupt practices. Although Gray was acquitted, and his election declared void, it was remarked that 'his honour remained untarnished'. He contested the Portsmouth Central seat in 1924 but was heavily defeated, thus ending his parliamentary career.

Across Africa in sixty days

Soon after his defeat in Portsmouth, Gray accomplished a remarkable feat of vintage motoring. In 1926 Gray challenged that 'there was no British car designed for the tropics'. The Jowett Company responded, and offered to refund the price of two cars if he succeeded in crossing Africa with them. He accepted, and two standard 7 h.p. Jowetts were supplied by the company and fitted with safari bodies; they were duly sign-written 'WAIT' and 'SEE'. Frank Gray and his companion, Jack Sawyer, set off from Lagos on the West Coast on 16 March 1926 and in May they arrived at Massawa on the Red Sea, a total distance of about 3,800 miles. The journey had taken just sixty days, a real accomplishment considering the time and circumstances. At a luncheon, provided by the Dunlop Rubber Company to celebrate the success of the journey, he reflected on his having fought four elections and of his role as junior Whip of the Liberal Party and posited 'If such a man is not qualified to face mosquitoes, jungle and swamps, I ask who is qualified?'

'The Tramp; His Meaning and Being'

Following his Parliamentary career, Gray had tried unsuccessfully to find work as a miner in Warwickshire in order to expose working conditions in 1925/26. Undeterred, he made a similar and more successful attempt to experience the life of a tramp in the late 1920s. He conducted research, donned a disguise, and adopted a change in voice, posture and gait. For a time Gray toured the workhouses and casual wards of Oxford. He contributed articles exposing 'the workhouse hells' to newspapers and later published his experiences in 1931 as 'The Tramp: His Meaning and Being'. He established The Frank Gray Home for Boys in the former Bicester workhouse in order to help younger vagrants. He also provided a wing of his own house, Shipton Manor, for the use of those 'on the road' and tried to find useful work for them.



A campaign poster for Frank Gray from the Watford contest in 1918. His war service was a repeated theme of his campaign. ©IWM(Art.IWM)



My introduction to Frank Gray – the photograph I was shown of him in disguise as a tramp.

Remarkably he was not recognised or challenged at any point by a real tramp or a workhouse official.

(Image from The Rifles (Berkshire and Wiltshire) Museum)

FRANK GRAY



Portrait of the author from
'The Confessions of a Candidate'.

FRANK GRAY

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YOUR LOGO
HERE

FRANK GRAY—THE FINAL YEARS

After a period of ill health, Gray travelled to South Africa to recuperate. Tragically, on the return journey he suffered a stroke and died at sea on 3 March 1935 at the age of 54. He was buried in Wolvercote Cemetery, Oxford on 6 March 1935. His coffin was conveyed from Shipton Manor on a flower-bedecked fire engine.

Frank Gray's wartime experience, spent largely with 8th Battalion, was a relatively short period in a remarkable life. However, the experience would influence his decision to stand as a Liberal candidate and his decision to remain a Private was used extensively in his election campaigns, becoming part of the 'character' that was Frank Gray. His 'Confessions of a Private' reveal an honest and genuine appreciation for the help, support and camaraderie he experienced from the men who he trained and fought beside; many of whom were much younger than Gray and from vastly different backgrounds. After his death, an appreciation was published in the Portsmouth Evening News by an A. W. Palmer which concluded: ***'No honours came his way, he was not the sort to get them, but throughout the length and breadth of England there are many who are happier, and better, because Frank Gray came their way'***.

CAN YOU RECRUIT ANOTHER MEMBER?

We are always looking to recruit new members, and on average we get 3/4 new members per year. This of course is offset by members who unfortunately died during the year. As with all good Regiments the best recruiting Sergeants are those who are already serving. With that in mind we are appealing to Redcoat members to consider signing up a friend or acquaintance who may have an interest in our Regiments past, and the future of the Regimental museum. The future brings with it a number of challenges that need a fully manned and vibrant Society of Friends to support the Museum. In particular we need to sign up former members of the Regiment.

APPEAL FOR ITEMS FOR THE REDCOATS REVIEW

The last Annual General Meeting indicated we would only produce one Newsletter/Redcoats Review a year. However if we are to send the Review out electronically we need to reduce the size. To that end the editor will try to produce three reviews a year. At present we have a small number of contributors that provide copy for this document, but we really could do with articles and items from members on matters associated either with their service in the Regiment or an item of Regimental historical interest. The items in question need not be very long and will always be of interest particularly if there is an associated image. If friends are aware of a working practice elsewhere that appears to work then may an item for discussion within the review may bring up further good working ideas ????

Your web page on the Museum web site is:

<http://www.thewardrobe.org.uk/museum/contact-us/support-us/friends-events-and-publications>