

Hello Friends! This newsletter will give you details of our programme for 2009 which starts in February with the first of our annual Les Gostick Memorial Lectures. Les was a wonderful Sleafordian, who did a lot of research and published many books about the history of our locality and residents. We have been very lucky to obtain Guy De La Bedoyere who is well known from his link with Channel 4's Time Team which has just started a new series. Guy is going to give us an illustrated talk on The Golden Mummies of Egypt's Western Desert. Details below. **Note - If you join the Trust now, you will only pay for 2 months to our year end, (i.e. £2 individual, £3 household, £4 corporate and you will also save £2 on the February lecture ticket and the April talk. Under 18s join free! This newsletter contains a joining slip which needs filling in and sending to Sue Titmuss with appropriate fee to 35 Whitehouse Road, Ruskington, Lincs NG34 9TP, cheques payable to Sleaford Museum Trust.**

Dr Richard Shaw has resigned as Chairman and from the Committee and several members have retired or moved away. If you have enjoyed our events over the last 12 months, please consider coming on board. It is really not a demanding task, we only have a few meetings a year, and now that our storage problem is solved, that is a major worry out of the way.

We also need contributions for future issues of the newsletter, e.g. museum reviews if you have visited somewhere, articles, puzzles, pictures, postcards or information about local events or places of interest. For the time being, we will be producing the newsletters less frequently. Our virtual museum is online at www.sleafordmuseum.org.uk and is constantly being updated and improved by our Webmaster. **Sue Titmuss, Secretary, 01526 833964, 07949 116564, sootit@btinternet.com welcomes all enquiries.**

2009 Programme of Events

Saturday 21st February, 7.30 pm, Kesteven & Sleaford High School, Jermyn Street, Sleaford, our first Les Gostick Memorial Lecture will be an illustrated talk on "The Golden Mummies of Egypt's Western Desert" by Guy De La Bedoyere, historian and broadcaster, well known from his connection with Channel 4's Time Team. Tickets are available in Sleaford from Walker's Book Shop and the Tourist Information Office, and in Lincoln from SLHA, Jews Court, Steep Hill or ring Sue Titmuss. Tickets include a glass of wine/soft drink and a finger buffet and cost £9, or £7 to members and £4 to under 18s. There will be a raffle with some wonderful prizes, many kindly donated by local businesses. We are hoping for support from our members for this important event.

Thursday 2nd April, 7.30 pm, AGM, followed by refreshments then Charles Raphael will give an illustrated talk about his collection of Sleaford artefacts, which date across the centuries from Roman times. Charles will also explain the laws of Treasure Trove and the important role played by amateur metal detectors.

Thursday 4th June – an evening outing to The Guildhall, Boston, with a guided tour and the history of how they obtained funding etc. and set the whole thing up. There will be refreshments. It will cost £4.50 including the refreshments. We plan to share cars as we did so successfully with the visit to the Romany museum.

Thursday 3rd September, 7.30 pm, Illustrated talk by Kathy Holland, on the St Katherine's Project, in Lincoln, 7.30 pm St Denys Church Rooms, Market Place, Sleaford,

Saturday, 3rd October, 10 am – 12 noon, St Denys Church Rooms, coffee morning. (This coincides with Sleaford Farmers Market) There will be a display of some of our artefacts, a raffle and some lovely refreshments!

Thursday 5th November, 7.30 pm, St Denys Church Rooms, local history talk to be confirmed.

We hope to publish Newsletters in January, March, May, and October.

Museum Review – Redoubt Fortress & Military Museum, Eastbourne

MUSKETS TO MISSILES

Eastbourne's Redoubt fortress was built between 1805 and 1807. It is one of the three Great Redoubts which supplied and administered the system of 74 Martello Towers which were constructed around the coast of South East England in the years when a French invasion was believed to be impending. (Bronze medals were, indeed, struck in France - prematurely as it happened - to celebrate the successful invasion of England). In February 1794, during the semi-permanent Anglo-French wars, a fortified tower at Mortella Point in Corsica had provided unusually stiff resistance to the British forces trying to seize it, in the course of 'liberating' the island from French rule. The situation of this fortress had made a lasting impression on Prime Minister William Pitt, and he concluded that a defensive shield along these lines was required on the channel coast. The Redoubt is a circular fortress, with 24 'bomb-proof' chambers (casemates) built around a parade ground, with steps leading to the battlements and the heavy-gun platforms above.

During the two World Wars, the Redoubt had an observation and storage function, but by the time Eastbourne Borough Council assumed responsibility for the building in 1975, it had fallen into disrepair. A decision was made at this time to turn the fortress into a museum for two regimental collections, and the collection of the Sussex Combined Services. It has now, with funding from various sources, become home to one of the largest military collections in the south of England - fifty thousand artefacts on display and many more in storage. It is open every day between April and November, with a £4 entry charge (and various concessions). Museums & Libraries Association funding has enabled a school visit programme and occasional film shows. Inevitably there are some disability access problems, but ramps and a stair-climber are available. Most veterans and wheelchair users will find that the obstacles can be overcome. The 'feel' of the museum is not unlike that of the Sobraon barracks which now house the Museum of Lincolnshire Life. The exhibits range in size between buttons, medals and cartridges (and we are still biting the bullet) at one end; and cannons, a Centurion tank, and a German General's staff car at the other. The story they tell is of local regiments and militias in Britain's wars between 1700 and the First Gulf War of 1991. The latter display includes items found on captured Iraqi soldiers - magazines, a wedding photo, a first-aid kit.

There is not space here for more than a glance at some of the topics covered. One of them is the role of the horse in the army, from the Battle of Blenheim to the First World War. We are reminded that young Winston Churchill (4th Hussars) rode against the Dervishes at Omdurman. During the Crimean War, a cavalryman would normally be issued a replacement for a horse lost in battle only by producing evidence in the form of a hoof sawn from the leg. And this, inevitably, would frequently have followed the dispatch of a wounded animal with a pistol. A common practice at this time was to keep the hoof as a memento in the form of an inkwell or snuffbox. There are some examples here of polished hooves, fitted with silver or brass lids and engraved with brief details of the circumstances. One is of Judy who died on active service, and another is of Zoe who died at Balaclava. There was no shortage of material. During the Charge of the Light Brigade, 475 horses died in the mayhem. Among the artefacts in this section are horses' identity tags, a leather water bottle, a Russian bugle, and a replica of the first Victoria Cross, awarded during this War in 1856. One of the museum's information sheets has Tennyson's poem on one side and Kipling's later response on the other.

Another topic is the role of women in the military, from camp followers to battlefield personnel. Before their recruitment to the armed forces, nursing provided women with their greatest opportunity for engagement on or near the front line, and two of these stories are highlighted in the exhibition. One of them concerns Mary Seacole (1807-81), a large, and larger than life, Jamaican woman who had read in "The Times", William Russell's dispatches from the Crimea, and in particular his reports of the wretched condition of the injured and sick troops. This was a campaign in which the numbers killed in action was greatly exceeded by the numbers dying slowly from disease and infection. This unlikely heroine decided that as a (largely self-taught) nurse, there was useful work she could do there. 'Mother Seacole' was not a person to take 'no' for an answer - 'Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat dusker skin than theirs?' - and in due course found herself on the battlefield, attending wounded soldiers, in the face of Russian guns - ('Lie down, Mother, lie down'). There is a display of surgical instruments of the period, including a saw, together with examples of contemporary nursing essentials.



The only known photograph of Mary Seacole taken from Thames Valley University Website:
www.maryseacole.com There is an appeal for a statue in her honour.

(By the way, readers of this newsletter may be familiar with 'Notorious Disorderlies' by Gillian Corsellis, which tells the story [pp100-101] of the wife of a Sergeant in the 30th Regiment of Foot, who had accompanied her husband in his various campaigns in foreign climes, from Waterloo onwards, before returning home to Ruskington, where he took up the life of an agricultural labourer).

Anyone who has visited Peterborough Museum will doubtless have seen the remarkable collection of prisoner of war crafts dating from the Napoleonic era. At the Redoubt too, there are some prodigious examples of artefacts crafted from ivory, wood and other materials by Boer, French and Turkish prisoners. Perhaps less covetable, but no less a work of art, is an artificial leg assembled by British prisoners of the Japanese for one of their comrades who had been maimed working on the Burma-Siam railway. It is fashioned out of bits of old locker, a length of hosepipe, and parts of a crashed aircraft, and looks rather like a meccano limb. (And not much practical assembly guidance, presumably, in the pages of 'Rubbing Along In Burmese. Restricted Circulation.1944').

Eastbourne had only rudimentary anti-aircraft defences in World War II and, partly as a result, was one of the most heavily bombed towns on the south coast, with much loss of life -- more than 200 killed. Many of the children evacuated here in 1939 had to be re-evacuated in 1940. Events on the local Home Front are well-covered at the Redoubt, with the familiar memorabilia of rationing, ARPs, posters and photographs, - some examples of which can be found in the Sleaford Museum Trust collection. There is also one of the dreaded letters that begins 'Dear Madam,It is my painful duty...' The presentation of the collection takes the conventional form of display cases, uniforms, wall panels, paintings and illustrations. One of the casemates recreates the 19th century soldier's sleeping quarters. The World War I material, which includes the story of a posthumous Eastbourne VC, is not as atmospherically displayed (in my opinion) as it is at MOLL, but then Eastbourne had less money to spend on the project than Lincoln. The Redoubt is free of the looped commentary and sound effects which (again in my view) become intrusive after a few minutes in their vicinity. As chance would have it, the Curator was on hand during my visit, and out of curiosity I asked about the cost of two of her glass-topped display cases, with wide display/storage drawers beneath, which I imagine we have all seen in some museums. They were purchased some years ago, but she thought they had been about £7-£8000. When SMT finds a home, we shall be busy with the grant applications.

Finally, among the uniforms on display (which include a French General's tunic, taken at the Battle of Vitoria in 1813) my eye was caught by the splendid Officers Mess dinner jacket (scarlet), waistcoat (black) and dress shirt (brilliant frilled white) that had belonged to General Sir John Hackett, soldier turned academic. Thus attired, you would want to take some care in dealing with the soup course. In this peacock display, can we see the vestigial remains of the army of Lords Raglan and Cardigan?

Our grateful thanks go to Steve Woods for this fascinating review of the Eastbourne Redoubt Military Museum

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I would like to join/renew my membership of the Sleaford Museum Trust to April 2010. I am under 18 years old, (free membership but please fill in and return the form, I enclose cheque for £12 (individual), £18 (household), £24 (corporate) (Please circle or underline your choice.)

Name

Address

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.....Post Code

Telephone No. Email address

I am happy to /would rather not receive newsletters etc. by email

These details will be kept confidential but it would be very helpful if you would be willing to let us email you the newsletters etc. as it saves us postage and paper.

Please return completed form and cheque to Sue Titmuss, Secretary, SMT, Applebeck, 35 Whitehouse Road, Ruskington, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 9TP, sootit@btinternet.com, 01526 833964, 07949 116564