

THE LION & THE DRAGON



Somme 100 Story - Brothers Thomas and William Britton

There are many instances of members of the same family serving in the Border Regiment. Two of these were brothers Thomas and James Britton who were born, lived and enlisted in Workington. 4922 Private Thomas James Britton joined the 3rd Special Reserve Battalion of the Border Regiment in November 1913. Called up in August 1914 he joined the 2nd Battalion with a large draft of reinforcements on the Western Front in late December 1914. In May 1916 he was hospitalized with trench fever and invalided home to England by hospital ship on 17th June. After serving with the King's and Cheshire Regiments he received a medical discharge in September 1917.



His younger brother 22169 Private William Britton enlisted in July 1915. After training he embarked from England in May 1916 and joined his brother's Battalion on 11th June in the line opposite Fricourt on the Somme. On the night of 28th June nineteen year old William was killed whilst working with a wiring party in No Man's Land. He had missed seeing his brother by a matter of weeks. Thomas and William were the son of Thomas and Minnie Britton of 14 Downs Lane, Workington, Cumberland. William is buried in Citadel New Military Cemetery, Fricourt, Somme France.

The photograph shows William's rosary, and his pocket New Testament damaged by shrapnel.

The Museum continues to forge ahead in its efforts to make Cumbria's M of Mil Life both a valuable research source and an attractive and extensive visitor location for those interested in the history and living conditions of our servicemen and women, past and present.

Despite losing two members of staff in recent months, everyone has worked hard to ensure a full programme of events for the Commemoration of the centenary of the Battle of the Somme later this year. The details appear on pages 6 and 8.



The family memorial in Arthuret Churchyard, Longtown, to Stoker 1st Class Walter Jackson who lost his life on 31st May 1916 while serving on HMS Warrior during that momentous encounter between the great battle-fleets of Britain and Germany we call the Battle of Jutland.

Twenty one year old Walter Jackson was one of the many who died that day.

His body was not recovered and he is commemorated on panel 16 of the Plymouth Memorial to those of the Royal Navy who have "no grave but the sea".

Walter was the son of Joseph and Rachel Jackson, of 9 Mary Street, Longtown.

The fate of HM Hospital Ship Llandoverly Castle

The War Memorial of a small church in Workington bears the name of Pte Robert Williams of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, who lost his life at sea while serving on the Hospital Ship Llandoverly Castle. (The church no longer exists and the Memorial is in the care of the CMML)

Robert Williams had departed his native Cumberland to begin a new life in Canada, leaving his parents James and Elizabeth Williams and the family home in William Street, Workington. But as war intervened he stepped forward to serve his new country. He was 31 years old and married to Mary, from Mifflin St Homestead, Pennsylvania. The hospital ship to which he was posted left Halifax, Nova Scotia, bound for Liverpool, its task to bring wounded Canadian servicemen back home. On 27th June 1918, Llandoverly Castle, though clearly identifiable as a hospital ship, was torpedoed by German U-Boat U86. This was in contravention of international law. The crime was aggravated by the subsequent attempt to destroy witnesses by ramming the lifeboats and machine-gunning the survivors in the water. There were only 24 survivors; 234 died.

This is an extract from a report of the sinking:-

HMHS Llandoverly Castle was one of five Canadian hospital ships that served in the First World War. On a voyage from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Liverpool, England, the ship was torpedoed off southern Ireland on 27 June 1918. Twenty-four people survived the sinking, while 234 doctors, nurses and patients were killed in the attack. In terms of the number of dead, the sinking was the most significant Canadian naval disaster of the war. The incident became renowned internationally as one of the war's worst atrocities.

Sgt A. Knight, commanding a lifeboat which held all fourteen of the nursing sisters attached to the ship, realised the lifeboat would be swamped as the ship sank. He survived to say later at the investigation;

"Unflinchingly and calmly, as steady and collected as if on parade, without a complaint or a single sign of emotion, our fourteen devoted nursing sisters faced the terrible ordeal of certain death--only a matter of minutes--as our lifeboat neared that mad whirlpool of waters where all human power was helpless."

All the nurses were lost.

After the war, the captain of U-86 Helmut Patzig, and two of his lieutenants were arraigned for trial on war crimes, but Patzig fled to the Free City of Danzig, and his trial was stopped on 20 March 1931 by virtue of the Laws of Amnesty. Lieutenants Ludwig Dithmar and Johan Boldt were convicted and sentenced to four years in prison, but were released after only 4 months.

Meet John Pearson, of our enthusiastic team of volunteers at Cumbria's Museum of Military Life. John, who first joined us in 2012, is approaching 70 but has no plans to stop or reduce his support. The visiting public will rarely see him at work but it very much due to his dedicated attention that the silverware gleams and the medal collection shines.



John, a retired Ambulance Technician, with archery and water colour painting as additional hobbies, is often to be found in the workshop, carefully bringing a long neglected artefact back to display condition.

His interest in military artefacts was prompted by his eleven years of service with our local Army Reserves, then the 4th Bn. King's Own Royal Border Regiment. One of his first tasks as a volunteer was to refurbish a First World War German anti-tank rifle. He will proudly show this to the interested visitor and relate with glee the information that it tended to break the shoulder-blade of the firer!

Our volunteers, and they are not all retirees, (many are much younger), support the Museum with a variety of skills and interests. Some work with our visitors at the Museum Reception and at schools and Exhibitions. Others provide technical skills which improve the presentation and display of the many exhibits. Often some find that research or inputting data is their forte. All together they are a diverse group; the Museum benefits greatly from their enthusiasm.

We welcome volunteers from all walks of life, not necessarily military. Just drop in and ask how you can help.

The heroes of Convoy HX84

Many of our readers will at some time have heard of Convoy HX84, either from the film *San Demetrio, London*, or from the action of *HM Armed Merchantman Jervis Bay* and her Royal Navy captain, Edward Fogarty Fegan V.C. Various aspects of this story are available in print.

HMS Jervis Bay was the sole escort for a convoy of merchant ships of various nationalities which left Halifax in Newfoundland on what they knew would be a perilous journey across the North Atlantic, carrying vital supplies to a beleaguered Britain. The *Jervis Bay* was an un-armoured peacetime passenger liner converted for convoy escort duty. She had nine antiquated guns, seven x 6" and two x 3", all manufactured in the late 19th C.

On November 5th 1940, some 750 miles south west of Iceland, the convoy encountered the German Pocket Battleship *Admiral Scheer*. The *Scheer* carried fourteen naval guns, six x 11" and eight x 5.9", and around 47 anti-aircraft guns together with torpedoes.

The future of Convoy HX84 was bleak.

Captain Fegan gave an immediate order to the convoy; "Scatter", and steered his ship towards his fearsome enemy! After twenty-two minutes of fierce battle, the *Jervis Bay* was still firing her remaining guns. Heading straight for the *Admiral Scheer* with the intention to ram, she was hit by an 11" shell and sank in moments. But the convoy had gained valuable time. Most were making good their escape.

One hundred and eighty nine men perished with the *Jervis Bay*; sixty-eight survivors were later picked up by the Swedish merchant ship, *SS Stureholm*, herself risking attack.

However the convoy was still in danger; despite the delay the *Admiral Scheer* had the speed to catch many of the fleeing merchantmen.

Another hero appeared. But this time he was a civilian. Sixty year old Captain Hugh Pettigrew was Master of the *SS Beaverford*. He and his civilian crew were Merchant Navy, and his ship, fitted with one 4" and one 3" gun, was ill-equipped for battle. He had two Royal Artillery teams to man the guns. He had been included in the order to scatter. But he stayed to fight.

For four and a half hours Captain Pettigrew and his crew manoeuvred around their massive opponent as the *Scheer* continued to fire on the fleeing merchantmen. Five, including the tanker *San Demetrio*, were hit but the rest escaped. It wasn't until 10:35 p.m. that *Admiral Scheer* destroyed *Beaverford* with torpedoes. The *SS Beaverford*, having gained valuable time for the other ships to escape in the dark, sank with the loss of all 77 of her crew.

The *SS Beaverford*, a Canadian Pacific Railways liner until conversion for war use, had in 1930 been adopted by the Downhills School in Haringey, London. This plaque, now in the care of another organisation, commemorates the loss of the ship and the heroism of her crew.



The tanker SS San Demetrio, despite being on fire and badly damaged, stayed afloat, and was boarded next day by some of her crew who had earlier taken to the lifeboats. She and the remnants of her crew eventually arrived in the United Kingdom with her precious cargo of aviation fuel. That too is a story of incredible bravery.

The Victoria Cross

On a June day in 1857 the young Queen Victoria joined her Armed Forces in a great parade in Hyde Park, London. The occasion was to honour the 62 Officers and other ranks who were to be invested with the recently instituted Victoria Cross. This award was, and still is, the highest accolade a British serviceman or woman may receive for bravery in the face of the enemy. Each of the 62 recipients had performed individual acts of heroism during the recent war in the Crimea.

Nine-thousand of their comrades stood at attention as each soldier saluted and each sailor removed his hat when Her Majesty pinned the new medal on his left breast. It is thought there were almost one hundred thousand spectators.

Among the VC winners was one from each of the two antecedent regiments of the Border Regiment. And coincidentally, they performed their particular feat of valour on the same day, 29th March 1855.

Pte William Coffey, of the 34th Regiment, confronted with a lighted shell which fell in his trench at Sebastopol, lifted it in his arms and hurled it over the parapet where it exploded without harm to his comrades.

Brevet Major Frederic Elton, of the 55th Regiment, also at Sebastopol, was supervising a trench digging party which was under heavy enemy fire. As his soldiers wavered he took a pick and shovel and worked fearlessly through direct fire thereby encouraging his men by example.



This single CWGC marker stands just inside the entrance to a small churchyard on the north coast of Northern Ireland. It looks out over one of the most restful and scenic places one can imagine. Off in the distance is the North Atlantic and the route of the many convoys bringing much needed materiel to the British people in those dark years of 1914-1918. This seafarer, seeing these friendly hills and glens, would have felt that his long journey from North America was nearly over. But his family would never see him again. His grave marker tells us that while his family does not know his fate, he is "Known unto God". This burial is the last resting place of someone, described here simply as "a seaman of the Great War", who perished near his journey's end. Many of the churchyards around this coast contain such graves, flotsam washed in on the tide as the sea continued its perpetual cycle.



Sadly it was to happen again. In WWII the peace of this area was to be shattered as the defenders of the North Atlantic convoys gave their all to ensure the safety of the ships bringing those precious supplies to a beleaguered United Kingdom. And more Unknown graves in quiet churchyards.

The Air Transport Auxiliary of WW2

In those traumatic early years of the War when this country's primary defence was her control of the air the factories of Britain were put to producing aircraft.

The designers, engineers, and craftsmen of those factories, more used to making cars and trucks, rose to the challenge with a will. Within months the variety and quantity of aircraft coming off the assembly lines was incredible even by today's mass-production methods.

And the young men of the RAF and the naval air services received these aircraft and used them to good effect against a relentless enemy.

But there was one link in this chain of events which sometimes is overlooked. These aircraft, rolling off the assembly lines in the industrial centres of Britain, had to be delivered quickly to air bases all over the United Kingdom. However the services had barely enough trained pilots to maintain the operational role. Sending pilots off to factories to collect these new planes was out of the question.

The solution was to use a pool of older men with flying experience. They became the Air Transport Auxiliary, a new civilian arm of a nation determined not to be crushed.

But this resource was limited; those with such experience were needed in combat command roles.

The women stepped forward. Before the war many young women, not all from wealthy or aristocratic families as is popularly supposed, had joined their menfolk in what was initially a hobby. They had learnt to fly in the very basic aeroplanes of the time. Now they offered their services as "ferry-pilots" in the ATA.

And airfields around Britain would soon see a confident young woman arrive with a Spitfire, or a Hurricane, or a Mosquito, or even a Lancaster, straight out of the factory. They flew many different aircraft, unarmed and often without radio communication, in weather that sometimes

daunted their male counterparts, to remote air stations all over the United Kingdom.

Many were not British born; they came from Poland, from Spain, from Chile and Argentina, New Zealand and Australia and the US, from many allied nations, to help in the struggle against Nazism.

Some lost their lives. One of these was Irene Arckless, the daughter of William and Fanny Arckless, of Stanwix, in Carlisle. Irene's father was a respected organ-builder.

Irene had been fascinated by flying even in her early teens and had cajoled friends into helping her acquire the necessary qualifications. She died on 3rd January 1943 at the age of 27, in an accident at Cambridge. One engine of the Airspeed Oxford she had just accepted from the factory failed on take-off and she crashed on the runway.

She was engaged to be married. When she died her RAF fiancé was a Prisoner of War in Germany.

Irene, the second female pilot of the ATA to lose her life, is interred in the family grave in Stanwix cemetery. The first was Amy Johnston, one of the stalwarts of the ATA, whose plane had crashed in the Thames Estuary not long before.



The late Irene Arckless



The grave of Irene Arckless in Stanwix Cemetery



Voices from the Somme 1916-2016

The Museum has been successful in obtaining Heritage Lottery funding to help with the commemorative project Voices from the Somme 1916-2016. Seven battalions of the Border Regiment were involved in the Somme campaign and the Museum is keen to engage local communities throughout the centenary period.

The project will highlight local connections, the ordinary people involved, the regular, territorial and volunteer soldiers who went to war, and provide some context to the Somme offensive of 100 years ago. Staff and volunteers from the Museum will be working with other County Heritage organisations to deliver a series of roadshows around Cumbria, engaging residents with their family history, helping identify objects, scanning and copying documents and photos. Some of this content will be included in a temporary exhibition scheduled from June to November at the Museum. The exhibition will run for the 141 days of the campaign and bring together archives and objects from the collection. Additionally, there will be family workshops, a community poppy project and a series of Somme talks with some high profile speakers.

To help deliver this project a team of centenary volunteers have been recruited and training has begun to help with a variety of tasks. From research to object handling, exhibition construction to workshop support, this valuable team are working with staff throughout the year to provide assistance with the project. Voices from the Somme 1916-2016 needs your support by promotion to the wider community. We would like the Friends to promote this project and be our advocates. This is the first time we have undertaken community outreach on this scale and we look forward to an exciting few months ahead!

Please check our website for information about this project. www.CumbriasMuseumofMilitaryLife.org Additional details, including Community Roadshow dates, on page 8

The Lonsdales – A history of the 11th (Service) Battalion The Border Regiment (Lonsdale) 1914-1918.

In the late Autumn the Museum will be publishing a detailed history of the Lonsdale Battalion during the First World War. It was the last and best known of the five Service Battalions of the Border Regiment raised as part of Kitchener's New Army, which active service overseas. Named after Hugh Lowther the 5th Earl of Lonsdale, who raised the unit, it drew its recruits from all over Cumberland and Westmorland, from all ages and all walks of life.

The reasons for publishing are several. Firstly, the Lonsdales were the only Battalion of the Regiment to remain in the County to train, which has resulted in an enormous wealth of information and photographs surviving in the Museum's collections, the Lowther Archive, National Archives and private sources. Secondly, it is still a popular misconception that the unit was wiped out on 1st July, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme. Despite suffering devastating casualties, the unit was reinforced and served with great distinction in later actions on the Somme in 1916 and 1917, at Nieuport in Belgium in July 1917, in the Ypres Salient in the winter of 1917-18 and finally the early stages of the German Spring Offensive in 1918. After disbandment in June 1918, many of its soldiers served until after the end of the War with the 5th Territorial Battalion Border Regiment. Thirdly, the time of publication coincides with the 100th Anniversary of the last action of the Somme Battle between Beaumont Hamel and Serre on 18th November 1916, fought by the Lonsdales and the other Battalions of their Brigade. The Lonsdale suffered nearly 400 casualties, almost as bad as 1st July.

The book will be heavily illustrated with numerous photographs, maps and other illustrations and appendices will include a comprehensive roll of all ranks who served 1914-1918 and gallantry awards to members of the Battalion. The main focus will be on the men who served. All proceeds will go to the Museum.

More details will follow in due course – in the meantime, if anyone has any information, photographs, diaries, or anything else of interest relating to the Lonsdales or any other Battalions of the Regiment, please contact the Museum.



Fetch Felix!

On a chilly March day in 1977 a short conversation on a military radio net heralded another mission for "Felix".

'Hello Zero and One Five. This is One Five Zulu. I am en route for incident given by Zero, Over.'

The incident was the report of a bomb in a hi-jacked petrol tanker left outside the Kingsway Memorial Hall, at Dunmurry, in Belfast. The driver had been forced at gunpoint to place a bomb in his vehicle and then to drive it to its target.

Zero was HQ 39 Bde; Callsign One Five was the Explosive Ordnance Detachment of 39 Bde, and One Five Zulu was the Callsign of 'Felix', the Ammunition Technical Officer, now hurrying on his way to neutralise the device. The word Felix had been adopted as the appointment title of those who battled almost daily with the evil ingenuity of terrorists who placed explosive devices in public places in the twisted notion that they were "freeing" themselves from some imagined oppression. The reference was of course a tribute to that agile feline the domestic cat who, by care and cunning, traditionally survived many dangers.

The explosive device was in an empty compartment of the fuel tanker. Other compartments still contained petrol. This was explained by the driver who had been told by the terrorists to lower the bomb in a five litre paint can, into the compartment on the end of a string, and then to drop the string down on it. There was only one way to remove the threat. It would have to be lifted from the tank.

Climbing on top of the vehicle ATO fished for the device using a long rod with a hook. He lifted it carefully through the cover and attempted to lower it on to the roadway. Only to find the rod was too short! Left literally in mid-air the ATO had no choice but to drop the device to the ground. He had reasoned of course that as the bomb had been rolling around in the bottom of the compartment it had no 'tumbler' to initiate detonation.

The bomb was subsequently remotely disrupted (using Wheelbarrow) and was found to have a primitive clothes-peg arming arrangement with a timer and power unit connected to an American-made detonator in five pounds of explosive. The circuit had failed.

Of course the brave man on top of the tanker would not know that.

He was Lieut-Col Derrick Patrick OBE, who would go on to similar acts of courage. And write of his experiences in his book "Fetch Felix", published in 1981 by Hamish Hamilton Ltd. The book is still available.



The insignia of 321EOD Coy RAOC

By 1972 the British Army had developed a very useful device in the battle to neutralise improvised explosive devices with minimal risk to the Bomb Disposal Officers.

In the early years the terrorist campaign had taken the lives of a number of Ammunition Technical Officers as they worked to make harmless the many improvised explosive devices (IED's) placed in public places. This could not continue. A small team led by Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Miller was tasked with finding a solution. And the little remote-controlled vehicle, known as 'Wheelbarrow' by many who used it or saw it in action, was born. The name was derived from the original Heath-Robinson construction of four barrow wheels with the tyres and tubes removed, fitted in a steel frame, and turned into a miniature track-laying vehicle by using large engine fan-belts as the tracks. It was fitted with a battery, electric motors, and a long multicore cable to make it controllable from a distance. Various attachments including video cameras, "disrupter" projectors, (one disrupter version utilised a condom!) and even X-Ray machines, were added. Despite its primitive construction it saved many lives. Modern variations are still doing this all over the world today.

The writer is privileged to have seen one of the first of these in action.



An early "Wheelbarrow."



And its modern derivative.

Tuesday Talks Series

Our Tuesday Talks series continues.

On Friday 13th May Lieut Geert Jonker of the Royal Netherlands Army's Recovery and Identification Service will describe the role of this dedicated organisation in the ongoing work to find the graves of the Missing. Their recent work included the recovery of five soldiers of the 1st Bn Border Regiment lost at Arnhem.

Our Talks Programme continues with a focus on the Somme Campaign to commemorate the centenary. All talks begin at 6pm. Tickets £5.00 Further details on our website or call 01228532774

Tue 14th June - The Lonsdale Battalion -
Stuart Eastwood, Curator Cumbria's Museum of Military Life

Tue 12th July - The Battle of the Somme and British Strategy
Professor Hew Strachan, Oxford University

Tue 13th Sept *Taff Gillingham, Military Historian*

Tue 11th Oct - Gallipoli and The Somme -
Professor Gary Sheffield, University of Wolverhampton

Tue 8th Nov - Ghosts of The Somme -
Andrew Robertshaw, Military Historian

Our Meeting of Tue 19th Jan last concluded with an interesting talk by Mr James Henderson, of the Carlisle and Stanwix Branch of the RBL. The subject was "Public and Private Commemoration of the Fallen of Carlisle and District during and following the Great War".



Voices from The Somme

The first Somme100 community roadshows are scheduled for:

26 April **Keswick Museum**

7 May **Penrith & Eden Museum**

11 June **Cumberland Show**

18 June **Alston Town Hall**

25 June **Carlisle's Armed Forces Day** event

28 July & 30 August **The Lanes, Carlisle**

18 August **Kirkgate Centre, Cockermouth**

Other dates to be announced via the website. The Museum is open every day between November and March 10am – 4pm (closed Christmas and New Year). Visit:- www.cumbriasmuseumofmilitarylife.org.

Friends are asked to note that the 2016 AGM of the Friends of Cumbria's Museum of Mil Life will be at the Castle on 8th June, (7.00 for 7.30). A good representation would be appreciated.

We hope to include a Presentation relevant to this year of Commemoration of the losses at Jutland and in the Somme Campaign. Details TBC.

Friends are asked to note that Ms Doreen Parsons, our Chairman for the past few years has, due to other commitments, regretfully tendered her resignation. We thank her for her past service. Nominations for this position are invited.

The Friends committee invite you to an evening of Fine Dining and Wine Tasting at the Golden Fleece, Ruleholme, Carlisle on 15th Oct, 7.00 for 7.30.

This Newsletter is edited by James Henderson UD., on behalf of the Friends of Cumbria's Museum of Military Life, and is produced tri-annually. Contributors are welcome.

