

Melksham and the Boer War



There was an interesting function at Melksham on Saturday afternoon, when Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen unveiled a memorial window in the parish church of St. Michaels and All Angels, to the memory of the soldiers connected with the parish who fell in the war in South Africa.

The window is a handsome four-light stained glass window. Number 1 light shows the figure of David holding his spear and helmet in his right hand, and a shield supported in his left. In the head of the light, the badge of the 1st Wiltshire R.V. is shown. In number 2 light the figure of Jonathan is represented, holding a sword in his right hand. Above his head is shown the badge of the "Duke of Edinburgh's Wiltshire Regiment". Number 3 represents the figure of Caleb, in his right hand he holds a bunch of grapes, and in his left a spear. Above him, the badge of the "Prince of Wales's Own Royal Regiment of Wiltshire Yeomanry Cavalry" is seen. In number 4 light, the figure of Joshua is depicted, armed with a sword in his right hand, and a shield on his left arm guarding his heart. At the head of the window is the badge of the "2nd Volunteer Battalion of the Duke of Edinburgh's Wiltshire Regiment".

At the bottom of the window is a brass plate bearing the following inscription: To the glory of God, and in memory of Henry Burchell, Henry Crook, Albert Edward Galsworthy, Herbert E. Harding, John Lockhead, Stanley Manning, William Rudman, Henry Smelt, and William Stanton, who fell in the South African War, 1900-1902.

The church was crowded, amongst those present being Colonel Colston, M.P., Colonel Rumboll, Captain Tayler, Lieutenant Maggs, of the 2nd Wiltshire Volunteers. The Dean of Salisbury (Bishop Allan Webb), the vicar (the Rev. Canon Wyld), and other clergy, together with Lord Methuen, advanced up the aisle to the chancel steps, and after a shortened service, Lord Methuen unveiled the window.



His Lordship said it was an occasion for both sorrow and joy, as it reminded them not only of the brave deeds accomplished during the war, but also of the many lives, which had been lost there. He thought the Volunteers of the towns and cities were the chief defence of the country. He trusted in after years when people looked upon that window, they would remember the hardships and battles that the men had gone through, and the sacrifice of life for their country in South Africa. He concluded by expressing the hope that the Volunteers of this country would be prepared to train themselves, so as to be able, in case of need to support the great mainstay of this empire, the Navy.

The Dean of Salisbury then dedicated the window. He had lived in South Africa for upwards of a quarter of a century, and paid a high tribute to the manner in which the British soldiers had comported themselves, and the gentle and praiseworthy way in which they had treated their enemies.

The Bath Chronicle, Thursday, April 23rd, 1903.



Family plot in the cemetery of St. Michael's and all Angels, Melksham.

The following information, on the above names, was found on the Forces War Records Website:

Surname	First name	Rank	Service No.	Regiment	Incident Date	Fate	Duty Location
Burchell	Henry	Lance Sergeant	3882	Wiltshire Regiment 2 nd Battalion	21/04/1900	Died on Duty	Bloemfontein
Crook	Henry	Private	2689	Wiltshire Regiment 2 nd Battalion	20/05/1901	Died, no reason given	
Galsworthy	Albert Edward	Sergeant	4682	16 th Lancers	20/12/1901	Killed in Action	Near Doom River
Harding	Herbert E.	Private	29226	Imperial Yeomanry 10 th Battalion	15/11/1901	Killed in Action	Sterkfontein
Lockhead	John	Private	6596	Wiltshire Regiment 2 nd Battalion	20/06/1900	Died Unspecified Disease	
Rudman	William	Private	1711	Wiltshire Regiment	20/05/1900	Enteric Fever	Bloemfontein
Stanton	William George	Trooper	38846	Imperial Yeomanry 28 th Battalion			



Gravestone at St. Barnabus Church, Beanacre.

The gravestone states Harry Crook, but matches up with the details of Henry Crook, Harry is commonly known as a nickname for Henry.

The gravestone inscription reads:

In Loving Memory of
HARRY CROOK
Who dies May 20th 1901
at Netley Hospital after a lingering illness
from fever contracted in the South African War
AGED 35 YEARS



Queen's South Africa Medal (QSA)

The Queen's South Africa Medal (QSA) was awarded to military personnel who served in the Boer War in South Africa between 11th October 1899 and 31st May 1902. Units from the British Army, Royal Navy, colonial forces who took part (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India and South Africa), civilians employed in official capacity and war correspondents. The QSA (without bar) was also awarded to troops who guarded Boer prisoners of war at the POW camp on the island of St. Helena. Troops on the Mediterranean islands were awarded the Queen's Mediterranean Medal, and some personnel on troopships got the Transport Medal.

The QSA was the medal issued to all who served in South Africa up to the end of the war in May 1902. This included those such as the New Zealand 10th Contingent who arrived in Durban in May 1902, and did not fight. The requirements for the King's South Africa Medal meant that few were issued

Poor logistics' and disease made the South African campaign a tough one for the British soldier, men often having to go without basics such as food and water, and enteric fever was a constant drain on manpower. This combined with having to fight a guerrilla war against a capable enemy makes this a hard won medal. The modern published casualty rolls run to over 50,000 names.

The Regiments involved:

Imperial Yeomanry during the Boer War 1899-1902

Formed in 1899 & disbanded in 1908, The Imperial Yeomanry was a British volunteer cavalry regiment that mainly saw action during the Second Boer War. Officially created on 24 December 1899, the regiment was based on members of standing Yeomanry regiments, but also contained a large contingent of mid-upper class English volunteers. In Ireland 120 men were recruited in February 1900. It was officially disbanded in 1908.

On 13 December 1899, the decision to allow volunteer forces serve in the Second Boer War was made. Due to the string of defeats during Black Week in December 1899, the British government realized they were going to need more troops than just the regular army, thus issuing a Royal Warrant on 24 December 1899. This warrant officially created the Imperial Yeomanry.

The Royal Warrant asked standing Yeomanry regiments to provide service companies of approximately 115 men each. In addition to this, many British citizens (usually mid-upper class) volunteered to join the new regiment. Although there were strict requirements, many volunteers were accepted with substandard horsemanship/marksmanship; however, they had significant time to train while awaiting transport.

The first contingent of recruits contained 550 officers, 10371 men with 20 battalions and four companies, which arrived in South Africa between February and April, 1900. Upon arrival, the regiment was sent throughout the zone of operations.

Wiltshire Regiment during the Boer War 1899-1902



The Regiment was officially formed in 1881 when the 62nd and the 99th Regiments of Foot were amalgamated as part

of the Childers reforms but the Regiment can trace its history back 124 years prior to this date.

The 62nd was formed in 1758 when the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Regiment of Foot became independent. The Regiment was its first action as marines during the Seven Years War fighting at the Siege and Capture of the Louisburg Fortress and Quebec.

The Regiment garrisoned Castle Carrickfergus in Ireland in 1760 and four under-strength companies withstood three assaults by a French force of 600 men, having to melt down their own buttons to make bullets and used rocks to repel the third assault. The Regiment had to surrender the castle but the French force was destroyed by the Royal Navy and the men of the Regiment were hailed to have 'behaved like Lyons' and the officers were presented with silver cups. In 1763 the Regiment was deployed to the West Indies and remained there until 1776 and the outbreak of America War of Independence. The Regiment then moved to Canada and fought during the Battle of Trois-Rivières and Valcour Island. After the colonial forces were successfully expelled from Canada the 62nd joined Major-General John Burgoyne's force at the Battle of Saratoga and were surrendered with the entire army following the battle, remaining imprisoned until 1781 when it returned to England.

In 1782 all British Regiments without Royal titles were awarded county titles in order to aid recruitment from that area, therefore the Regiment became the 62nd (Wiltshire) Regiment of Foot and was once again deployed to the West Indies. It spent the majority of the French Revolutionary Wars fighting the French on Haiti and suffered heavily from yellow fever, fit men were transferred to other units in 1797 and the cadre returned to England. During the Peninsular War the Regiment fought at the Battles of Nive and Peninsula. The Regiment returned to Canada and remained garrisoned in Nova Scotia until 1823 followed by 7 years of garrison duties in Ireland.

In 1830 the 62nd was deployed to India and after several quiet years garrisoned in Bangalore the Regiment was then involved in putting down the Bangalore Mutiny and then moved to Ferozepore to join the Honorable East India Company forces there as tensions rose between the Sikhs and the British. The Regiment fought at the Battle of Ferozeshah after which no officers remained to take charge of the Regiment so command fell to sergeants and non-commissioned officers. The diminished 62nd went on to fight at the Battle of Sobaron. The Regiment remained in India until 1847 and then garrisoned in Ireland until the Crimean War where it fought during the Battle of Sevastopol.

The 99th was first raised 1824 by Major-General John Hall and gained its county title 10 years later to become 99th (Lanarkshire) Regiment of Foot. From 1842 the Regiment transported convicts to Tasmania and then rotated through various colonial posts in the region until it was ordered to Sydney. Here it gained a very unsavory reputation and the 11th Regiment of Foot was principally employed to keep the men of the 99th under control.

The 99th went on to serve during the New Zealand land Wars fighting during the Hutt Valley Campaign and the Battle of Battle Hill. In 1846 the Regiment returned to Australia but detachments were sent to reinforce British forces in New Zealand for the next few years. The 99th finally returned to England in 1856 and garrisoned in Ireland and Aldershot. The Regiment was deployed to India in 1859 and then to China to serve during the Second Opium War fighting in the Third Battle of Taku Forts and the Battle of Palikao. The Regiment also took part in the sack of Peking. Among the loot carried off was a Pekinese dog named Lottie which belonged to the Chinese Empress which was presented to Queen Victoria. The Regiment was then returned to Hong Kong and remained there until 1865.

From 1865 to 1868 the 99th served in South Africa and were inspected by the Duke of Edinburgh who was so impressed by the Regiment that it was granted the title 99th (Duke of Edinburgh's) Regiment in 1874 and went on to serve during the Anglo-Zulu War fighting at the Battle of Gingindlovu.

In 1881 these two Regiments were merged into the The Duke of Edinburgh's (Wiltshire Regiment) as part of the Childers Reforms. The Childers Reforms restructured the British army infantry Regiments into a network of multi-battalion Regiments each having two regular and two militia battalions as standard. The newly formed Regiment went on to serve during the Second Boer War and two World Wars.

In 1921, the Regiment was re-titled as The Wiltshire Regiment (Duke of Edinburgh's). In 1959 The Wiltshires were amalgamated with The Royal Berkshire Regiment (Princess Charlotte of Wales's) to form The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment (Berkshire and Wiltshire). In 1994 further amalgamation followed with the Gloucestershire Regiment to form the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment and in 2007 it joined the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment, the Light Infantry and the Royal Green Jackets to form The Rifles.