



Newsletter

No. 15, May 2018

From the Curator's Desk

As usual, my thanks are due to our wonderful and dedicated team of volunteers for all their hard work and support. They are currently engaged in a wide range of activities, including research, collections care and retrospective documentation. We have recently made some exciting but uncatalogued discoveries amongst collections relating to the Malayan Emergency. As you know, we are always looking to enhance our knowledge and the collections, so if any of our readers have any memorabilia, souvenirs or memories they wish to share please do get in touch.

We have continued to receive numerous requests for information about relatives who served in the Regiment, but the nature of these are now changing as the centenary of the First World War draws to a close and the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War approaches.

The Museum was represented on 21 March 2018 at the VC stone laying event to commemorate Major-General Frank Crowther Roberts by our Chairman, Lt. Colonel Mark Jackson. The final Worcestershire Regiment VC commemoration is that of Colonel George Grogan and will take place at Devonport at the end of the month.

The Museum has once again contributed to the University of Worcester History Work Experience Module. Our student placement this year was Alex Yarnold a 2nd year History undergraduate. In his time with us, Alex has undertaken research into the role of the Regiment and the Volunteers in the Boer War 1899-1902 and produced a useful and exciting interactive tool for exploring the conflict in the museum gallery.

The Museum is coming to the end of the Arts Council funded oral history project on the experiences of Afro-Caribbean soldiers in the Regiment. This will breathe new life into the Mercian Regiment Museum's recognition of African Caribbean soldiers legacy in Regimental and wider British military history – starting with the heritage of Black Drummers of the 29th Foot, the experience has been brought up to date with 4 oral history interviews that bring to life Afro Caribbean soldier's experiences in the modern era. Therefore, I would like to thank all those who took part, in particular Capt. Llewellyn Gale, WO1 Owen Lewis, WO2 Angus James and the members of the Worcester Afro-Caribbean Association. Our thanks



Capt. Llewellyn Gale

are also due to Tony Thompson of Sweet Patootee Consultancy and Fran Stovold of the Army Museum Ogilby Trust (AMOT). I must also acknowledge the generous financial support of the Director and Trustees of AMOT which has over the last two years has contributed £10,000 of grant monies towards the purchase, interpretation and display of the Black Drummers including the John Freeman medal and this oral history project.

Editorial

In this issue there is a fascinating insight into the organisation which was responsible for monitoring Warsaw Pact military activity following the removal of the Berlin Wall and the demise of BRIXMIS, and an account of the award of the VC to Brigadier General Grogan when his brigade was under acute pressure during the major German offensive in 1918. Following on from the article on Captain Crowe in the last edition, we also give details of a tour of some 35 members of his family to the site of his epic deed in Belgium. We make no apology for including another article on marksmanship which was such a defining feature of both the Worcestershire Regiment and its immediate successor. We hope you enjoy reading these and the other articles and, if you live within striking distance of Worcester please make a real effort to attend the AGM on 16th May as we need your input to ensure we can provide events which will appeal to you.

How I Missed Out on a Piccadilly Medal

An extract from a letter written in 1994 by Alf Deakin who enlisted in 1933 and then served with the 2nd Battalion in China and India until 1943.



In 1937 I missed out on a gong – albeit a Piccadilly medal. It was this way. In India half the battalion went to Jutogh, a small hill station for a couple of months in the summer to recuperate in the lovely clean, rare atmosphere. Later it changed over with the other half which had been sweating it out on the plains. Simla, the summer capital of India was about eight miles away where government officials, ambassadors, Army HQ and the well-heeled sahibs and memsahibs from Delhi remained in comfort for about six months enjoying the temperate days and cool nights.

The late King George VI had his coronation ceremony in May that year. Fifty picked men (I was one) in their best khaki drill uniforms, well starched, belt and scabbard, brasses, boots, chin straps all polished to high heaven under a sergeant were detailed to proceed by narrow gauge railway to Simla on the big day. An open air service had been arranged on the Mall, a large flat area, to coincide with the proceedings in London. There were many chairs laid out in lines, each numbered and named, and we were issued with a corresponding plan. As

the dignitaries arrived we were required to usher them to their places. On completion of this task we had to join the police who had surrounded the congregation at a discreet distance to prevent the local natives from getting too close.

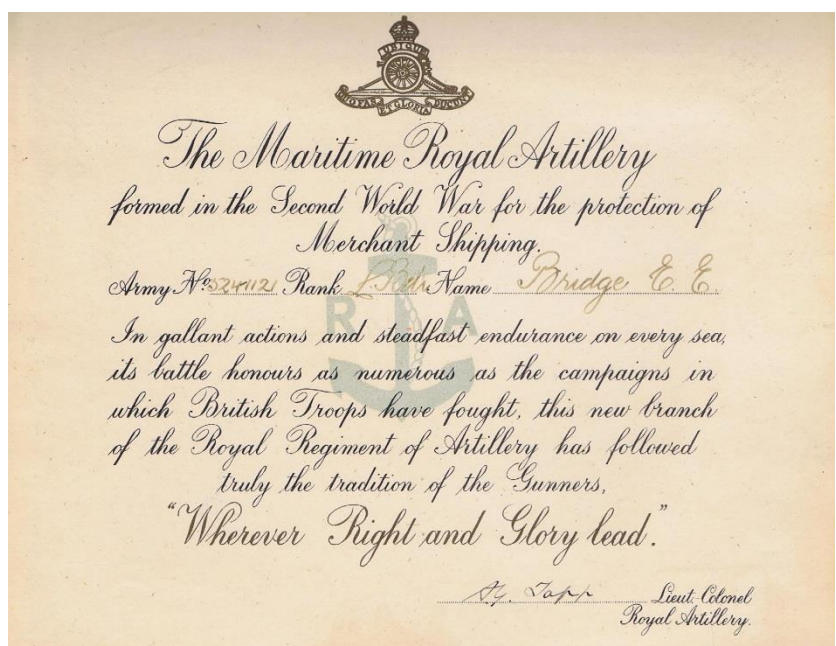
Everything worked like clockwork, no hitches. It had been quite an experience and a very nice day to boot. At last we could boast we had been to Simla, and we had even set eyes on the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow. He was commonly referred to as Big Head. It was said that there wasn't a QM's stores in all India with a hat big enough to fit him.

After the service a major on the Viceroy's staff called our sergeant over. I can see this officer now. He was from an Irish regiment, the 'Skins' or Royal Irish Fusiliers and he had a plume on the side of his topee. He told our sergeant to get our party together so he could speak to us. As well as thanking us for doing a good job, a credit to your regiment and so on, he went on to inform us that in due course each of us would be awarded a medal. We did not know until he explained that a medal was always struck to commemorate coronations. This came like a bombshell and caused a lot of excitement. We hadn't got a medal amongst the whole party. We expected to be the envy of the rest of our company and we talked of wearing the medal on Church Parade every Sunday, and wearing the ribbon on our tunics for the rest of our service. Every time Battalion Orders were published we went to the notice board to read them. But there was no mention of our medals. And so, as the months, and a whole year slipped by, we wrote it off and forgot about it. However, about eighteen months after the event the names of the recipients appeared on Orders. There were not very many. In my company the medal went to three people, the Colour Sergeant, a Lance Sergeant and Bill Bridge, the company storeman who had been issuing out the Four-by-Two for about twenty years. Needless to say not one of the Simla duty party received the medal.

Alf Deakin was later to miss out on another medal, The Indian General Service Medal for service on the NW Frontier, when the 2nd Battalion served two tours there in 1940 and 1941, as it was not issued to units which served there during the war as all units based in India received the 1939/45 Star.

Bill Bridge

When Alf Deakin mentioned him in his letter above he was a L/Cpl storeman after 20 years' service, having enlisted in 1918. On return to the UK in 1943 he transferred to the Maritime Royal Artillery and earned the Atlantic Star as an anti-tank gunner on a merchant ship. At the end of the war he returned to the regiment and was employed as the clothing Sergeant in the 1st Battalion. He was awarded the QE2 Coronation Medal in 1953 whilst serving in Malaya with the Battalion and was discharged in 1955 after 37 years' service, an exceptionally long period for a soldier.



A Deed of Reckless Courage: Grogan VC

By Alan Cowpe

Like many officers in the Edwardian era, George Grogan was the son and grandson of soldiers; and like many officers his regimental affiliations owed nothing to geography or parents. Born in Plymouth in 1875, he was initially commissioned into the West Indies Regiment, and after several years with Britain's Egyptian army, he joined the Worcestershire Regiment in 1908. In November 1914, he joined the regiment's 2nd battalion in Flanders as a major, and only a month later took over command when Major Edward Hankey, who had led the decisive action the previous month at Gheluvelt, was wounded.



Brigadier-General George William St. George Grogan VC CB CMG DSO*

A month later Grogan, like Hankey always leading from the front, suffered the same fate. After recovery he took over command of the 1st battalion in March 1915 as a lieutenant colonel, after its CO had been killed in action at Neuve Chappelle. He soon showed his colours, on his own responsibility countermanding orders for his battalion to attack in the disastrous

battle of Aubers Ridge in May 1915; this prevented what would have been a useless loss of life. Moral courage of this sort is less heralded than the usual physical variety, and less often shown. In March 1917 his battalion led in a large-scale raid to capture a German position in the Ypres salient; the operation was successful, and he was awarded the DSO, leading from the front, regardless of the hazards. Shortly afterwards, he was promoted to (temporary) brigadier general, and later that year was leading his brigade from the front in the muddy and bloody slog towards the Passchendaele ridge at Ypres.

In the following year, the challenge was entirely different. In the spring of 1918, the German army launched a series of offensives (dubbed the Kaiserschlacht) which were intended to defeat the British army on the Western Front and knock Britain out of the war, thereby giving Germany victory before the US forces could become seriously engaged. In the first phase of this operation, in March 1918, Grogan's brigade was in the thick of it, fighting desperately against the German onslaught on the Somme front as the British line was pushed back some 20 miles in the space of a few days, an astonishing distance by the standards of this war. Again he was wherever things were most critical and therefore dangerous, winning his second DSO.

After this ordeal his now seriously weakened brigade was one of a number of formations sent to recuperate on the relatively quiet part of the front bordered by the River Aisne, receiving and training new recruits from England, and working them up to battle standard. The Aisne did not however remain quiet for long, for it was on this very front that the German army struck in May 1918. The British and French defenders were in no state to hold the line. Unwisely concentrated in limited space between the Aisne and the Vesle rivers, with no room to manoeuvre, they were vulnerable to the brief but well-planned and very intense

artillery bombardment which prepared the assault; and the river Vesle to their rear prevented a coherent fighting withdrawal.

Like other formations along the front, Grogan's brigade was devastated; his own former unit, the Worcestershire Regiment's 1st battalion, for instance virtually ceased to exist in close quarter fighting on the first day. The survivors of his and other formations made their way across the river Vesle, but there were few formed units left, there was inevitably much confusion, and the many new recruits were shocked and bewildered by the rapid turn of events, the intensity of the bombardment, and the force of the assault by the German stormtroopers. In the words of one German participant, "The enemy had no time to resist. The English [sic], who could usually be relied upon to hold out in shell holes, firing to their last cartridge, were given no opportunity to display their customary coolness". A fighting retreat under pressure is the most difficult of military operations, which can easily become a rout. It was especially difficult here, given the early losses and the youth and inexperience of most of the soldiers. Disaster was imminent. Desperate measures were needed; one account describes the situation as calling for reckless courage. George Grogan provided it. As the German forces pushed vigorously forward across the Vesle on the third day of their big offensive, Grogan organised a series of stands on the ridges south of the river, finally holding the line on the Bouleuse Ridge, using any soldiers who were available, both British and French. Throughout the day he moved around the battlefield on horseback under heavy enemy fire, rounding up groups of leaderless soldiers, persuading those making their way to the rear to stay, and riding along the front on his horse in full view of the enemy, shouting



The Gilbert Holiday illustration of Grogan mounted on horseback on the Bouleuse Ridge, 29th May 1918.

encouragement to the defenders. For many of these men, mainly teenagers, this was their first experience of combat, and they were struggling to cope with a high quality enemy who knew that they were winning. "Well done boys. You can do it. You're better than they are. The Boche are no bloody good". His words, or perhaps the way he delivered them, also seemed to pass the language barrier with the French

soldiers in the line. When his horse was killed he continued his efforts on foot, until another horse was found, when he continued making himself very visible to his own men – and in the course of doing so, to the enemy. Miraculously he remained completely unscathed. As the day drew to a close, the German attacks petered out, and the defenders could draw breath.

His VC citation referred to his conspicuous bravery and leadership over three days, during which he showed an utter disregard for his own personal safety, resulting directly in a successful outcome. The award was certainly well earned.

The UK Arms Control Implementation Group

This unit was formed in 1989 during the period of 'glasnost' between NATO and The Warsaw Pact following the removal of the Berlin Wall and the demise of BRIXMIS. We are grateful to Colonel Robin Waters, its first Commander, for this article.

In the late 1980's I became the Commander of the UK Arms Control Implementation Group, a group of intelligence experts formed mainly from the Intelligence Corps and other agencies who, under the rules of international arms control treaties, were tasked to inspect major Warsaw Pact exercises in order to satisfy ourselves and our NATO allies that the Russian military and others were not preparing for war. The Russians and their allies had similar forces and inspection rights within NATO.



This photograph was taken during an inspection of the 3rd Shock Army in the Cottbus/ Jutebog training areas, East Germany, in 1989. It is interesting in as much as it shows Russian and East German officers in the rank of Lt Col and below badged as teeth arm officers and aviators. In fact each officer was either a senior member of the GRU, the Russian military intelligence service, or their East German counterparts.

Also of interest were some of the tactics employed. For example all accommodation was wired for sound and had two way cameras/ mirrors in each bedroom. One therefore had to be extremely circumspect in one's behaviour!! It did however have its upside in as much as if I was dissatisfied with the way events were proceeding I could assemble an 'O' group in my bedroom and sound off confident in the knowledge that my grievances would get back to the monitors! Disclaiming a knowledge of the Russian language also helped and allowed one to listen in on discussions and pick up tit-bits from many sources including waitresses co-opted by the GRU and chosen for their good looks and low cut blouses who could also be indiscreet in their conversations to each other!

Psychology also played a big part in the process. For example, prior to an inspection one must issue a challenge designating an inspection area and a time and place of arrival. The receiving nation must then accept this challenge within a 48 hour period technically giving themselves time to prepare a team and the administration involved in the hosting process. However it also gave time to move more sensitive equipment from an area or hide it! We had the means to identify these moves and if equipment had been hidden within the area could seemingly 'come upon it' much to the embarrassment of the opposition. On this particular inspection we were also helped by 'the enemy' in the form of our East German escort who 'nudged' us in the direction of a 2S1, the newly issued tracked air-defence system which had only just entered service and, from the look on the face of our Russian chief inspector, was certainly not on the itinerary!

The inspection concluded at a pontoon bridging regiment on the banks of the River Elbe where we were served blinnies, caviar and ice cream in the soldiers mess tent. At this stage

I was presented with the Col General of Aviation's No 1 dress hat which is now in the museum, and was also given a series of marked maps – Russian humour I gather pointing to who might have been our chief escort during the inspection and what we might have seen if we had been more diligent!!



We departed in our dedicated C130 SF aircraft after a spectacular 'hi-lo' fly pass that took all the escort team hats off heads as they stood at the end of the runway and on arrival at RAF Lyneham were met by RAF police and ambulances who directed us to the farthest reaches of the base. A figure clothed entirely in NBC equipment emerged and hooked into the aircraft communication system. He explained that during our time on the River Elbe three soldiers had been medevaced from the area with typhus and/or food poisoning. Two were VSI and one had died! We were given the choice of a six inch needle in the buttocks or quarantine and having agreed to the needle were then issued with a card to the effect that 'if found foaming at the mouth steer well clear'!! We never verified the casualties but the consensus was that having given them a hard time during the inspection perhaps 'maskirovka' had been employed in the expectation it would be picked up by GCHQ and the appropriate action would be taken.

Knowing what one knows now this would almost certainly have been the case!!

Another encounter with the GRU

I used to meet the Russian 'Assistant Military Attache' at diplomatic receptions in Uganda periodically in the mid-1980s. He always claimed to be a 'tank man' but we used to chide him that he was too tall to fit into a Soviet tank and that we knew he was really a member of the GRU, which he vociferously denied.

In 1989 I was on a major NATO exercise in Turkey when we received notification of an inspection visit by the Warsaw Pact. I was idly thinking about the only Russian I knew when he duly appeared as part of the 3 man Russian team. He spotted me immediately, came over and enveloped me in a bear hug, much to the consternation of the Turkish officers present who assumed I was a spy in their midst. He started firing questions at me including asking what was behind a hessian screen. I started to take him over to have a look but he soon turned away in disgust when he saw it was shielding the latrines.

So we were right after all that he was a member of the GRU!

HJL

The Henry Whitehead Cup

This large cup was presented to the Army Rifle Association by Mr Henry Whitehead "*the well-known match rifle shot*" in 1903 and was the prize that year for the Officers' Competition which was fired for the first time following the Commander-in-Chief's wish that officers should be encouraged to become expert shots. It was won by the 3rd Battalion, The Worcestershire Regiment.

Any dress was permitted. Using the standard service rifle, then the Lee Metford, teams of four fired three practices, 7 rounds from each of 500 and 600 yards, followed by as many rounds as they could fire in six 20 second exposures of the targets at 200 yards. The winning team scored 694 points, 22 more than the runners-up. The battalion kept the trophy for a year and each team member received a miniature replica of the cup in silver gilt, one of which is now in the museum collection.

The team members were:



Standing Left Lieut HH Hughes. He was commissioned in 1901 and was posted to the 3rd Battalion with which he served at home before the war apart from a year in South Africa in 1908. He went to France with the battalion in August 1914 as a captain and took part in the heavy fighting during the retreat from Mons and on the Aisne. He was hit during an attack at Richebourg St Vaast on 15 October 1914 and carried out of the line by his CSM but did not survive. He was the father of Col TF Hughes DSO who commanded the 1st Battalion 1956-9.

Standing Right Capt JFS Winnington. He joined the Regiment in 1895, served in the Boer War and with the 1st Battalion in Egypt and France. He was awarded the DSO at Neuve Chapelle in 1915 for gallantry and

commanded the battalion after the CO was killed during the battle. He then commanded the 4th Battalion briefly at Gallipoli. He was killed in action in Palestine in 1918 while in command of 14th Northamptons.

Sitting Left Capt J Reddie. He was commissioned in 1892 and after 5 years at regimental duty served as Commandant of the North Borneo Constabulary, then as adjutant of the newly formed 3rd Battalion. He was CO of the Depot 1911-12 when he retired to become Secretary of the Worcestershire TA Association until 1936. He formed the Regimental Association in 1913 and was also its secretary for 34 years, He was awarded the CB for his work with many local charities during WW1 and was knighted in 1943 for his work with the TA Association in London.

Sitting Right Lieut (QM) A Whitty. He captained the 3rd Battalion team which won the Queen Victoria Cup four times between 1903-13, was awarded the DSO with the Battalion in WW1, rose to the rank of Lt Col and captained the Army V111 from 1924-28 and then coached it until 1946.

The officers' competition must have been short-lived as by 1909 the cup was presented for a non-central regimental team match which was also won by a team from the 3rd Bn. Seated left is C/Sgt J Crowe who won the VC in 1918. The individual winner of this competition was C/Sgt C. Tough of the 1st Battalion.



The cup has continued to be used at Bisley and was last won by someone in the Regiment in 1976 by C/Sgt John Leighton during the Army Hundred competition. 1976 was a vintage year for the 1st Battalion shooting team when they also won the major unit championship (the KRRC cip) and several other trophies.



*(Tram members: Back row L to R L/Cpl Luke, L/Cpl Wragg, Cpl Hammond
Front row Capt Howse, Maj Lynch, C/Sgt Leighton, Sgt Dennick). (Absent Cpl Tyson)*

Memorial for Lieutenant John Crowe VC

The Department of Media Culture and Sport decided that as part of the World War 1 Commemorations all VCs won during that war should be recognised nationally by the laying of flagstones in, or near, the streets where those national heroes were born on, or near, to the day of the 100th anniversary of their acts of bravery. This decision has brought deserved recognition to these extraordinary men. Nine members of the Worcestershire Regiment earned VCs in that war and the flagstone ceremonies have varied. For example, our Museum's request that the Fred Dancox VC stone be mounted on the external wall of Dancox House followed by the Dinner in the Guildhall. I have attended other ceremonies in Stroud, Streatham, Harrow and Islington.

Whilst stationed in Dover before the War C/Sgt Crowe was a member of the Dover and District Rifle Club. In 2011 the members of that club decided to commemorate their most famous member by erecting a memorial on the building from which he sallied forth to win



The Vicar of St. George's Church in Ypres at the Crowe Memorial with soldiers from the Mercian Regiment.

the Victoria Cross on 14 April 1918. The memorial was unveiled in the presence of club members, representatives of the Mercian Regiment and descendants of JJ Crowe. These descendants and members of what is now the Dover and Ramsgate Rifle Club, wished to commemorate the centenary of his VC action in situ on Saturday 14 April 2018. The Commune of Heuvelland and the owners of the building to which the memorial is attached agreed to assist in a suitable commemoration. The Vicar of

St George's Church in Ypres agreed to rededicate the memorial. The building is now called De Bosgeus and is a children's holiday home that brews and sells an excellent beer named after John James Crowe.

On 12th April 2018 Plymouth Council laid the flagstone for Lieutenant John Crowe in Devonport where he was born. On 14th April 1914 it was a privilege to accompany a battlefield tour of the actual site to Neuve Eglise (now Nieuwkerke) in the Ypres Salient on that anniversary. The excellently researched and presented tour was conducted by Major (Retd) John Cotterill MBE. We were walked through the near annihilation and very



Major Cotterill provides a tour of the battlefield sites.



Captain Crowe rushing the German machine-guns, Neuve Eglise 14th April 1918. From the picture by Gilbert Holiday.

hasty withdrawal of 2nd Worcesters through the village as a vivid picture was drawn of the chaotic fighting that the German Spring Offensive had engendered. Eventually a small party from the battalion were holed up in a hospice building virtually surrounded by machine guns having beaten off repeated German attempts to take the building. Ammunition was becoming scarce and the most likely outcome was surrender. A fortnight earlier John Crowe was the RSM of 3rd Worcesters and had only

joined the 2nd Worcesters as Adjutant on commissioning. Despite the failure of previous attempts he asked permission of the Commanding Officer to try and find a way of escape. This was given although it was made clear that it was not an order. Taking two men he crawled through ditches until he was in a position to launch a flank attack on two of the German machine guns. The three men charged in, killed some of the enemy, with the rest fleeing. Crowe's two companions died in the fighting. He was an outstanding marksman and



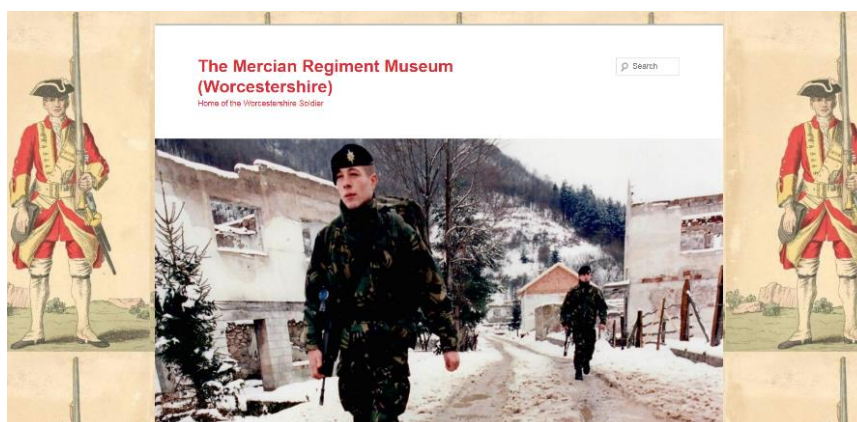
Members of the Crowe family by the Memorial.

proven Bisley shot and he used his skill to great effect. His actions provided the necessary opening through which 30 members of the battalion were able to escape taking most of their casualties with them.

Wreaths were laid at the commemorative plaque by the family, the Rifle Club, the Regiment, the Belgian Regional Commander for West Flanders and the Commune Burgomeister. The tour last weekend was particularly memorable because some 35 members of the Crowe family had gathered from all over the globe to be there including the granddaughter of John Crowe, who later that evening laid a wreath at the Menin Gate on behalf of the family at the daily Last Post ceremony. The party included members of the Dover and Ramsgate Rifle Club and 10 members of 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment from Bulford. It was a privilege to be able to accompany this pilgrimage to commemorate the actions of such a brave member of our Regiment.

New website

Important news - the Museum now has a **new website!** This can be found at the following address: www.worcestershireandmercianregimentmuseum.org. Please do take a look, as this will greatly assist in its search engine rating. Any feedback would be gratefully received.



Current & Recent Events

Those who attended **Alan Cowpe's lecture** in February were treated to a fascinating insight from a former senior civil servant responsible for nuclear policy in the MOD into the reasons behind the controversial deployment to the UK of Cruise missiles, and the subsequent verbal jousting on the subject in the House of Commons between two Parliamentary heavyweights, Dennis Healey and Michael Heseltine, a breed of senior politician sadly lacking today.

On 4th April a group of Friends visited the **14th century library** in **Worcester Cathedral** and were shown a selection of medieval manuscripts and early printed books in several languages. As well as exquisitely illustrated prayer books and other religious documents some Arabic medical texts with Latin translations were a reminder that the medieval West learned much from the Arab World.

In the Worcestershire Soldier Gallery, our current exhibition examines the role of the Worcestershire Regiment in the "The Kaiserschlacht" or The German Spring Offensive of 1918. This opened on the 19th March and runs until 30th June 2018. The Worcesters, as usual, were heavily engaged, winning three VC's between March and May 1918. We do hope those who live locally will find time to see it.

Annual General Meeting Wednesday 16th May, Starts 6.30pm
Dancox House, Pheasant Street, Worcester WR1 2EE

Please attend if you can as there is important business to discuss. A Programme of forthcoming events will be sent out after the meeting.

This newsletter is published by the Friends of *The Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire)*, registered charity no. 276510. Neither the whole newsletter nor extracts from it may be published or posted on the internet without permission.

'The Worcestershire Soldier', The Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire)

Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum, 40 Foregate St, Worcester, WR1 1DT.
Tel. 01905 25381. 10.30am – 4.30pm Mon-Sat (closed Sun and Bank Holidays)

"The Friends exists to help the museum to record, preserve and display the history and traditions of The Worcestershire Regiment, its predecessors and successors from 1694 to the present day including the deeds and sacrifices of those who have and are serving in it", to join, or for further information please email museummercian@btconnect.com or 01905 721982.