

BULLETIN ISSUE NO. 5 – OCTOBER 2023



**Lieutenant-Colonel
Percy William Beresford DSO**

Welcome

Ladies & Gents,

Welcome to this October edition of the *HistoryFare Bulletin* and I hope you enjoyed reading the last issue, sent a couple of few weeks ago.

As mentioned in previous editions, if you come across anything that has a military connection to Melton and you think it will be of interest to other readers, then please send it in to me and I will endeavour to include it hopefully in the next edition.

It will also include details of any future events such as talks, tours etc. Let's promote our local military history so it is kept alive for future generations.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our next meeting.

Brian

Next Monthly Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be on **Thursday 2nd November 2023** at the Melton Mowbray Royal Air Forces Association Tornado Club, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HR at 20:00Hrs.

Admission Cost £3

**Seats are to be reserved by email:
meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com**

Austin J Ruddy will be our guest speaker and the presentation will be "The Home Guard and Military Defence of Melton Mowbray 1939 – 1945".



Raffle



At our monthly meetings, I will now be introducing an interval to our talks where I will be holding a raffle prize draw. Tickets will be £1/strip.

If you would like to support this raffle by donating prizes for use in either this draw or future draws, then they will be gratefully appreciated.

Biscuits, chocolates, wine, beer etc are all acceptable proving they are in date! Books and partwork etc will also be accepted.

Social Media

Keep up To Date by following HistoryFare on the following social media sites:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MeltonHistoryFare>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/farebrian/>

Twitter: HistoryFare @FareBrian

Website: <https://historyfare.co.uk/>

Email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com



Lieutenant-Colonel Percy William Beresford DSO



LT.-COL. PERCY WILLIAM BERESFORD D.S.O.
by Rev. Joseph Hall, D.D.
General Commandant, Westchester and Southern Counties
Assisted Priest of Rochester, 1883-1887.
DIED OF WOUNDS, OCTOBER 1914.

In the last edition, we looked at the story of Flight Lieutenant Hugh Richard Aden Beresford, one of 'The Few'.

Opposite the Memorial to Hugh, you will see the appropriately named South Chancel Memorial Window, and as its name suggests can be found in the South Chancel and was installed in the early 1920s. It was gifted to the Church by Hugh's grandparents, Rev Edward Aden Beresford and his wife Annie Mary Beresford and their initials appear at the very top of the window.

The bottom panels of the window list the members of the extended Beresford family who were killed whilst serving their country during the First World War and one of those listed is Lieutenant-Colonel Percy William Beresford DSO.

Percy was born in 1875 and was the son of Frank Gilbert and Jessie Ogilvie Beresford. He was baptised 2nd Dec 1875 at St Phillip and St James Church at Whitton near Richmond upon Thames. He was educated at Rossel School and Magdalen College, Oxford.

After graduating from Magdalen College, he had hoped to enter the Church, but the ill health of his father, a Wharfinger on the Thames, meant he had to join the family business.

In 1900, he was promoted from Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant whilst he was serving with the 4th Volunteer Battalion, the Hampshire Regiment,

In 1902 he moved to Westerham in Kent where he set up the first parish cadet corps in the country – the Westerham and Chipstead Cadet Corps, which was attached to the 1st Volunteer Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment. He apparently felt that military training acted as a sort of national university.

On the 10th October 1903, The London Gazette announced that Captain R. Galloway resigns his Commission with the 3rd Volunteer Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) and Lieutenant P. W. Beresford to be Captain.

In 1905 he went to Kings College London where he studied Theology, after which his earlier wish was fulfilled, and he was ordained as a Deacon. The following year he was ordained as a Priest by the Bishop of Rochester and was fortunate enough to be appointed as curate to the Rev. Sydney Le Mesurier, vicar of St. Mary's, Westerham, where he was working when war was declared.

On 1st April 1908 it was announced that Captain Percy William Beresford of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) is appointed to the 3rd Battalion, City of

London (Royal Fusiliers) Regiment, with rank and precedence as in the Volunteer Force.

In the London Gazette, his promotion from Captain to Major in the 3rd (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers) was published on 16th August 1910.

Following the outbreak of World War One, he was initially sent to Malta after which he saw a lot of action across the Channel in France and Flanders. He was wounded in April 1915 and was gassed at Loos in September the same year and allegedly it was reported that, within a week of him being gassed, he was back with his battalion where he officiated at a celebration of Holy Communion, though hardly able to speak.

It was at Bullecourt in March 1917 where he won his DSO: For conspicuous gallantry and ability in command of his battalion during heavy enemy counter-attacks. The skill with which he handled his reserves was of the utmost assistance to the division on his right, and his determination enabled us to hold on to an almost impossible position. He repulsed three counter-attacks and lost heavily in doing so.

He was killed in action during the 3rd Battle of Ypres on 26th October 1917 whilst commanding the 2nd/3rd Battalion (London Regiment) Royal Fusiliers when a shell burst close beside him and he only lived a few minutes after being hit. He was known to his men in the Royal Fusiliers as "Little Napoleon".

The Adjutant of his battalion was present when Beresford was mortally wounded and gives a graphic picture of the last scene; and so, does Dr. Maude, who was in the same regiment with him. After being hit, he turned to the Adjutant saying, "I'm finished carry on". A painful pause: then, to the field-doctor who went to see what could be done for him, "I'm finished; don't bother about me, attend to the others". A smile lit up his pale, handsome, and still boyish face. "Look after my sister." A longer pause, and "This is a fine death for a Beresford", and he was gone.

He is buried in Gwalia Cemetery, Belgium (Near Poperinghe) where upon his gravestone is inscribed the following inscription "HE BRINGETH THEM UNTO THE HAVEN WHERE THEY WOULD BE".

Walking Tours

The next walking tour will take place on Saturday 21st October, and this will be a general history tour looking at the general history of the town from Lords of the Manor, The Magna Carta, Royalty, Socialites, Fox Hunting and much more.

I am also hosting a tour for the 4th November and this will be the Airborne and Commando General Tour looking at the story of the paras that were based in town during 1944 and also Major General Sir Robert Laycock KCMG, CB, DSO, KStJ who commanded the Layforce and was known as Commando General.

To keep up to date with future tour dates, keep an eye out on social media and my web page <https://historyfare.co.uk/historyfare-tours/>

Tours are £5 per person and last approximately 2 hours. To book a place on one, just email meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

Street Signs



Stirling Road runs behind Sainsbury's joining up with Staveley Road off Nottingham Road and Rudbeck Avenue off Asfordby Road.

It is named after the Stirling family who have been residents in Melton since Major Gilbert Stirling purchased Plymouth Lodge, now known as Sysonby Lodge, in April 1883.

Major Gilbert Stirling was, by all accounts, a 'particularly fine old English Gentleman' and was the head of one of the oldest families in Scotland, Chalmer of Gadgirth, whose founder was the Great Chamberlain of Scotland during the reign of King David I.

He was born Gilbert Stirling Chalmer in Cheltenham on 18th January 1843. He was the eldest son of Major Francis Day Chalmer of the 7th Dragoon Guards and his wife Sarah Mary Emily Robertson. Sarah was the cousin of Sir Gilbert Stirling, owner of Larbert House in Falkirk. Sir Gilbert Stirling did not marry and when he died at Larbert House on 13 February 1843, his large personal fortune was left to the heirs of his cousin, Sarah.

Gilbert Stirling Chalmer inherited the Larbert estate following the death of Sir Gilbert Stirling. Meanwhile, his father Major Frances Chalmer acted as the head of the household and the estate until Gilbert came of age.

Gilbert Stirling Chalmer was educated at Harrow school where he is listed in the entrances for January 1856.

When he came of age in January 1862, there was great rejoicing at Larbert House when Gilbert Chalmer Stirling, started his military career serving in the 9th Lancers when he purchased his rank as Cornet, vice Hepburn.

Following the obtaining of his Majority, lavish celebrations were held at Larbert House where 120 people attended the celebration ball including many elite from across the county and further afield.

His brother, George, who had been born at Larbert House on 16 August 1846, had joined the Gordon Highlanders and eventually gained the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

After serving in the 9th Lancers for 2 years, he transferred to the Royal Horse Guards (Blues) in January 1864. It was in February 1864 that Gilbert obtained a leave of absence from the 9th Lancers to return to Scotland in order to change his name to Gilbert Stirling Stirling.

Gilbert was promoted Lieutenant (by purchase) in August 1864 and to Captain on 31st October 1871.

Captain Gilbert Stirling married The Honourable Norah Josephine Harcourt Westerna, 4th daughter of Henry Robert, 3rd Lord Rossmore of Rossmore Castle, Co Monaghan Ireland, on 3rd December 1873.

Gilbert Stirling sold Larbert House estate in May 1876 and he was promoted to Major on 1st July 1881.

Whilst still serving in the Army, Gilbert was a regular visitor to Melton for the hunts and stayed in various residences in town. Following his marriage to Norah, the couple stayed at Acacia Lodge before purchasing Plymouth Lodge (Sysonby Lodge) in Melton Mowbray in April 1883 on retirement from the Army. Sysonby Lodge remained in the families possession for nearly 70 years.



Sysonby Lodge

Gilbert and Norah went on to have 4 children, Henry, born 1874; Reginald, born 1878; Charles, born 1882 and William born 1887.

Henry served in the Boer War with the Coldstream Guards and received both the Queen's and King's medals. He died at the age of 40 in a nursing home in Tunbridge Wells and was buried at Sysonby St Leonard's Churchyard.

Reggie also served in the South African Boer War as a Lieutenant with the 60th Rifles, King's Royal Rifle Corps during the South African War of 1899 – 1902 and was present at the siege of Ladysmith where he was wounded and invalided home.

Reggie arrived at Melton station on Thursday 7th June 1900 on the 3:17pm train from St Pancras accompanied by his mother, The Hon. Norah Stirling. Upon arrival at the station, he was met by a number of prominent people from the town who had assembled on the platform and gave a mighty cheer as they alighted the carriage. The Melton town band who was on the opposite platform, conducted by Mr J Brewin, played "Rule Britannia" as the train arrived.

Lt Stirling crossed the train tracks with the aid of two walking sticks and boarded an open carriage with his mother to the sound of deafening cheers. As the coachman led the horse and carriage out of the yard by hand, before he got to the gates, the horse was taken out of the shafts and dozens of willing hands pulled it by hand through Burton Street, the Market Place and Nottingham Street where buildings displayed flags and bunting that had been put up to celebrate the entry into Pretoria.

The bells of St Mary's Church rang out and the inhabitants of Melton Mowbray had turned out on masse to welcome him back and were lined up along the Station yard, Burton Street, the Market Place and Nottingham Street, with their numbers estimated to be in the 1,000's.

On the outskirts of town, the horses were re-harnessed and made their way to Sysonby Lodge where the band plus others who had made the journey were hospitably entertained by Mrs Stirling.

Reginald went on to serve with the Green Jackets during WW1 and promoted to Major where he was Secretary to General Sir William Pitcairn Campbell, Commander in Chief Southern Command before leaving England to take up the position of Camp Commandant to General Solly Flood, Commanding the 42nd East Lancashire Division.

Reggie's father, Gilbert Chalmer Stirling passed away at Sysonby Lodge on 7th August 1915 and was buried in the family grave with his son Henry at Sysonby.



The Stirling Grave at St Leonard's Sysonby

Norah died in 1934 and Reggie in 1946 and both were buried in the family grave at Sysonby.



It may not be generally recollected, that Major Gilbert Stirling was at one time well known on the 'turf'. According to the "Sportsman", he won the Ascot Stakes in 1876 with a horse named Whitebait. He was also the owner of another good horse called "Lowlander" which he sold in November 1876. When the Melton Hunt steeplechase was held below Burrough Hill, Major Stirling was frequently seen in the saddle there and claimed several victories to his credit over the years.

Gilbert is commemorated on a plaque in St Mary's Church.

Meltonians Shot for Spies

The following article was published in Melton Times on 2nd October 1914.

Mr & Mrs H D'Esterre, who for several years resided at Elmhurst, Welby Lane, Melton Mowbray, have both been shot for spies whilst motoring in France, the former being killed outright, and the latter seriously wounded.

The intelligence has been received this week by Mr. H Beeby in a letter from Mrs. D'Esterre written on September 28th from 8 Southwood Mansions, Highgate, London, in which it says:

"I have been in the most awful trouble. We were motoring in France, and were shot for spies. My dear husband was shot dead by my side, and I received four balls through my body, one through the arm and one on the side of the knee, so I really had no business to be here. This happened on the 6th August, so I am going on well, only I find I am not able to walk far. Is not this war a terrible business? I shall be thankful when it is all over".

During their residence at Melton, Mr. & Mrs. D'Esterre hunted regularly with the local packs.

Till next time!

Please feel free to share this bulletin with whoever you think may be interested.

For any enquiries or to submit articles, please email Brian at meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com