

BULLETIN ISSUE NO. 11 – APRIL 2024



Captain Julian Joseph "Lizzie" Lezard

Welcome

Ladies & Gents,

Welcome to the April edition of the *HistoryFare Bulletin*. March has been a busy month, with talks, history tours and meeting with museums in relation to research connected with both the RNLI 200 project and their interaction during WW2 with Dunkirk (Operation Dynamo) and the rescue of downed airmen during the Battle of Britain plus here in Melton, the Paras display at the Carnegie Museum.

I hope you are continuing to enjoy reading these bulletins, and as always, if you have any snippets of local history, or even suggestions for topics to include in future bulletins, please do send them in.

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing you at a HistoryFare event soon.

Brian

Next Monthly Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be on **Thursday, 4th April 2024** at the Melton Mowbray Royal Air Forces Association Tornado Club, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HR at 20:00Hrs.

The Guest speaker Stephen Hallam, who many of you will know as 'Mr Pork Pie' from his days as managing director of Dickinson and Morris and overseeing the operations at the town's iconic Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe.

Stephen will talk to us about his experiences serving for 2.5 years as a Pâtissier on the QE2 and in that time sailed around the world 3 times.



The illustrated talk titled "Sailing with the Queen – Life onboard the QE2 before and during the Falklands Campaign" will show examples of his craft whilst taking us on the World Cruise of 1982, from departing New York and 3 months later arriving in Southampton. The QE2 was requisitioned by the MOD and we see the conversion of the ship to enable the troops of 5th Brigade to be transported to the conflict zone.

We see the troops and their ordinance embark, the journey south to South Georgia, disembarkation, taking aboard the unfortunate wounded from HMS Ardent and Coventry, the journey home and the welcome received when approaching Southampton.

Admission Cost £3

Seats are to be reserved via the new online HistoryFare Events booking system: Sailing with the Queen – Life onboard the QE2 before and during the Falklands Campaign - HistoryFare or via email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

The current talk schedule proposed for 2024 can be seen online via HistoryFare Military Talks Programme - HistoryFare



Viscount Northland

Military College at Sandhurst, joining the Coldstream Guards in 1900. He and Hilda Cooper (aged 17) were married on 12th June 1912. The couple went on to have 2 children, Thomas Daniel and Edward Paul Uchter. Thomas Daniel, or Daniel as he was known, went on to become the 6th Earl of Ranfurly and served with the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry (Sherwood Rangers) – 1st Cavalry Division.

On the outbreak of the war, Captain Viscount Northland immediately rejoined the Coldstream Guards, serving with the 2nd Battalion. He was killed in action on 1st February 1915 by a German sniper.

Following the death of her 1st husband, now aged 22, Hilda remarried again on 26th February 1917. Her new husband was Commander the Hon. Geoffrey Edward Mills who was serving in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, reportedly as the Naval Provost Marshal. Tragically, Geoffrey died on the 14th August 1917 from heart failure.

The following year, the young widow tried her hand at marriage for a third time, marrying Captain Michael Wardell of the Hussars. The Wardell's lived for a while at Mount Pleasant Villa (now the RAFA retirement home Wexford House on the corner of Craven Street). Captain Wardell also bought Craven Lodge after the Baldock's departed and split it up into apartments to lease for the hunting season. The Wardell's were married for 10 years before they divorced in October 1928.



HUNTING-FIELD ROMANCE. — Mrs Michael Wardell, whose marriage at Melton Mowbray yesterday to Mr. Julian Joseph Lezard (inset) was the sequel to a hunting-field romance. Her first husband, Viscount Northland, and her second, Captain G. E. Mills, lost their lives in the war.



Digby House

Following a hunting-field romance, a 'secret' wedding took place at Melton Registry Office on the 24th April 1929 between Lizzie and Mrs Hilda Wardell.

Prior to the wedding, Lizzie's address was recorded as The Bell Hotel in Melton Mowbray, whilst Hilda's was Digby House on Burton Road, opposite Mill Street.

It is understood that no member of the Digby Household staff were aware of the marriage until 09:30Hrs that morning.

Lizzie was a celebrated figure in London society. He was an inspired buffoon - untidy, unshaven, and hilariously funny. Forever gambling, always broke, he had been sent to Kenya not by his father, his regiment or his trustees but by his wife. Men found him an exhausting joke. Women, with whom he was obsessed, found him 'a tremendous relief at weekends full of twits.' They remember, too, his vitality and his profound curiosity about them.

The marriage between Lizzie and Hilda didn't work out and she became tired of funding his gambling addict, which was accumulating considerable losses, so she filed for a divorce just before the Second World War broke out. Lizzie was declared bankrupt in 1938.

With war imminent, Lizzie joined the military, and his quick wittedness and poise attracted the attention of the Field Intelligence Services. He was immediately commissioned as a Lieutenant

and posted to the Sudan before being re-assigned to Kenya serving with the King's African Rifles.

In Kenya, he met Countess Alice de Janzé and he became part of a group of mostly British and Anglo-Irish aristocrats and adventurers who settled in the "Happy Valley" region of the Wanjohi Valley, near the Aberdare mountain range. During the 1930s, the "Happy Valley" group became infamous for its hedonistic, decadent lifestyles and exploits amid reports of drug use and sexual promiscuity.

At the Countess's house, they played the 'sheet' game. A sheet would be strung across the drawing room, half a dozen men would poke their penises through strategically sited holes in the sheet, and the women on the other side would select their favourite appendage. A head start in the competition was enjoyed by 'Lizzie' a lover of both Idina Sackville, the wife of Josslyn (Joss) Hay, the Earl of Errol who was the Assistant Military Secretary and Alice de Janzé who was so proud of his long member that he also liked to display it, along with his cards, when he got a full house at poker.

After a period of Service at Cairo, Lizzie returned to the UK and served with the RASC as a Lieutenant/Temporary Captain, service number 316898.

Lizzie was an agent with the SOE (Codename Église) and was parachuted into the Basses Alpes region of France, on the 8th August 1944, taking part in Operation CATHEDRALE with SOE agent Xan Fielding.

Upon landing, Lizzie damaged his back due to landing on rocky ground and fractured several vertebrae, and consequently, he was unable to take an active part in the operation. Although in great pain, he maintained a close touch with the progress of the Op, and his grasp of the situation and good advice greatly impressed all who came into contact with him, keeping up the morale of the local patriots. Consequently, it was recommended that Captain Lezard was Mentioned in Despatches.

Action for which commended (Date and place of action must be stated)		Recommended by	Honour or Reward	(To be ticked)
Capt. Lezard landed by parachute in the Basses Alpes on the 8th August 1944. He fractured several vertebrae owing to a landing on rocky ground, and was consequently unable to take an active part in operations. Although in great pain, he nevertheless maintained close touch with the progress of operations, and his grasp of the situation and good advice, coupled with his constant cheerfulness greatly impressed all who came into contact with him. His presence and his attitude in adversity did much to keep up the morale of the local patriots in difficult circumstances.		[Signature]	Leutenant-General	Mentioned in Despatches.
It is recommended that Capt Lezard be Mentioned in Despatches.		[Signature]	Chief Administrative Officer	

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Bosworth Battlefield Tour

As mentioned in the last edition of the HistoryFare Bulletin, I have arranged a guided tour of the Battle of Bosworth battlefield with historian and battlefield guide Ben Mayne. For those of you that do not know Ben, he is the Director of Liberation Route United Kingdom (LRUK) and a battlefield guide with Leger.

The tour will be on Saturday 10th August 2024, and Ben will take us on a tour of the key sites connected to the battle involving an approximate 8-mile walk and take about 5 hours. At the end of the tour, there would be an opportunity to visit the Bosworth Battlefield museum/visitor centre if people wish.

This would be a great day out to gain a better understanding of a 'local' battlefield within Leicestershire and as you are no doubt aware, Bosworth was the last significant battle of the Wars of the Roses and the last one where an English monarch was killed in battle.

The cost will be £10 per person and due to safety restrictions, walking on country roads etc, the tour would be limited to a maximum of 25 people, spaces would be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

I already have 4 people signed up for this event, so if you would like to join us on this tour, then please email meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com to reserve your place.

Borough Court

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of going out for lunch with the good lady and we visited a 'rural' coffee shop, called The Larder at Burrough Court.



Burrough Court was built in the arts & crafts style during the 1st decade of the 20th Century for Major Herbert Cyril Allfrey and in 1919, he sold the property to one of the world's richest men, Marmaduke, Viscount Furness who ran it as a hunting lodge.

The Viscount's beloved son, Christopher Furness was killed in action whilst serving with the Welsh Guards at Arras in May 1940 and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Tragically, five months later, the grief-stricken Viscount sadly died in the South of France. Consequently, the property fell into the ownership of Christopher's 13 year old half-brother William.

In December 1943, Burrough Court became home to the HQ Company, along with D Company & some of Support Company of the 10th Battalion Parachute Regiment.

On the 1st February 1944, Burrough Court house was destroyed in a fire, allegedly due to explosives being used to open the door to the sealed wine cellar! This wasn't the first fire at the house as in June 1938, fire crews were called from Melton Mowbray and Oakham to a fire that destroyed 2 up stairs rooms, allegedly caused by an iron on an ironing board being left switched on.

Just before 4am, the alarm was raised and the Melton National Fire Service were the first contingent of fire fighters on the scene from a total of 8 fire engines, including Leicester, Loughborough and other depots across the county. Despite the efforts of the fire crews, soldiers and court staff, the house was destroyed. The main difficulty was the water supply with the eight fire engines having to pump water over $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.

Soldiers, land girls and even a couple of Italian POWs along with workers from the estate helped to remove valuable furniture including a grand piano and one soldier had to escape from the upper floor by climbing down ivy.



In a sequel to the blaze, Private Horace Coleman was arrested and charged with the theft of 128 bottles of spirits and 39 bottles of wine, valued at £250. Det Sgt Jones said he arrested the accused, who later said he would take him to where some of the property was hidden. They went near Burrough Church where a portion of the stash was recovered. A few days later, Coleman, was in court in Melton Mowbray facing the charges.

The charge of stealing 128 bottles of spirits and 39 bottles of wine was reduced to seven bottles of spirits, valued at £14 12s 6d to which he pleaded guilty. An Army Officer had described Coleman as a "good soldier" and the Bench took a lenient course in view of the temptation in his way and dismissed the charge on payment of £2 11s 9d in costs.

Famous Black Labradors

There are some animals that are quite famous in military circles, some more than others, and a couple of black labradors with connections to Melton Mowbray spring to mind.

The first, and probably the most famous is a certain black labrador retriever by the name of 'Nigger' that was owned by Wing Commander Guy Gibson of 617 Dam Busters Squadron fame.

Gibson owned the dog when he was previously a member of 106 Squadron. Nigger often accompanied Gibson on training flights and was a great favourite of the members of both 106 and 617 Squadrons. He was noted for his liking of beer, which he drank from his own bowl in the Officers' Mess.



Nigger (bottom centre) with members of No. 106 Squadron. His owner, Wg Cdr Guy Gibson, is crouching on the right with a pipe in his mouth.

The word nigger was often used as a dog's name during the early part of the 20th century and the term was not considered offensive in the UK until the 1950s, being found earlier in novels and other contexts and causing no remark at the time.

Nigger died on 16 May 1943, the day of the famous "Dambusters" raid, when he was hit by a motorist. He was buried at midnight as Gibson was leading the raid. "Nigger" (Morse code: -. . . --. --. . -.) was the codeword Gibson used to confirm the breach of the Möhne Dam. Nigger's grave is at Royal Air Force station Scampton, Lincolnshire.

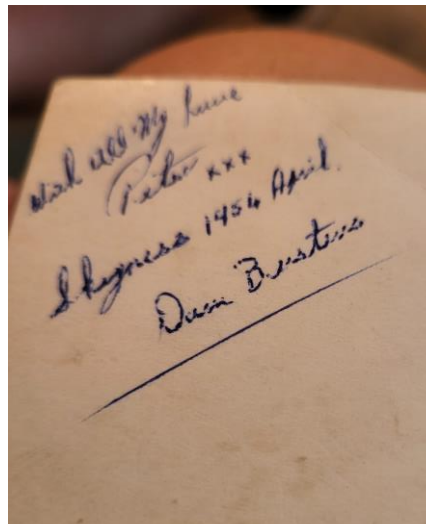


Sadly, in July 2020 the headstone was replaced, with his name removed. The RAF saying "we do not want to give prominence to an offensive term that goes against our ethos".

Richard Todd who played the role of Guy Gibson in the 1955 film *The Dam Busters* recalled: "My work with the unit started in

April 1954 on location near Skegness. The sequences we were shooting were the tests and trials of the 'bouncing' bomb, at first dismal failures and then, after Barnes Wallis had hurriedly made alterations to his calculations, heart stopping success. Then we moved to Hemswell and Scampton. To play Gibson's faithful black labrador Nigger we had a highly-trained army dog also called Nigger. He was totally professional and acted perfectly, and only let us down once, when we were filming a very atmospheric and gripping scene at Scampton which showed all the aircrews clustered in groups, chatting, playing cricket or sprawled out on the grass outside Gibson's office immediately prior to take-off. I, as Gibson, was scheduled to walk with Nigger amongst the crews, having a word here and there. Nigger refused point blank to go near one particular spot and covered back. Even when I put him on a lead, he still would not budge and we had to leave him out of the scene. We later discovered that the spot in question was where Gibson's actual dog was buried. There had been a memorial stone to mark this place but we had removed it for the duration of the filming."

The dog that was used in the film, as mentioned earlier, was a highly-trained army dog called Nigger. This labrador was trained at the RAVC camp here in Melton Mowbray.



The above LH image show 'Nigger' the film star with his RAVC dog handler Lance Corporal Peter Reid. Peter himself actually had a speaking role in the film and can be seen at the main gate playing the role of an RAF service policeman, bending over stroking Nigger just before he runs out into the road and gets run over. Peter had a Scottish accent, but his voice was dubbed over in the film and replaced with a Cockney accent. As you can see from the centre image, Peter wrote on the reverse of the photo "With all my love Peter xxx Skegness 1954 April, Dam Busters".

This photo was given to his girlfriend Gladys Sutton, who is the tall dark-haired lady on the left of the RH image. The younger girl on the right is Brenda, Gladys's younger sister. Gladys & Peter married in Melton Mowbray in Q1 of 1957. Peter died in 2002 and Gladys passed away in July 2023. Many thanks to Tracy, Brenda's daughter for sharing these photos with me and allowing me to use them.

Another famous black labrador with connections to Melton Mowbray, is Sally, the pet dog of Johnnie Johnson, the RAF's top scoring fighter ace of World War Two.

Sally, who you will see in several images featuring Johnny Johnson had been given to him by a 'titled friend' after his previous dog, a mongrel named Pusher, which had accompanied him on 'Ops' was killed by a lorry.



Johnnie Johnson & Sally in Normandy 1944.

Sally was with Johnson when he commanded No 610 Squadron at RAF Westhampnett and later as leader of the Tangmere Wing.

After receiving a phone call from AOC 11 Group informing him that he was posted to RAF Kenley as Wing Leader of the Canadian Wing, he drove from Westhampnett to Kenley in his small Morris with Sally curled up alongside him.

Johnson's Canadian Wing were one of the first RAF units to land in Normandy after the invasion. Whilst the D-Day Ops were being carried out, Johnny sent Sally to stay with Johnny's mother, Beatrice at the family home on Welby Lane.

It was in the afternoon of Thursday 6th July 1944 that Beatrice had a knock on the door and when she opened it, there was a Canadian airman stood there who said he had come to collect Sally. The above photograph was taken in Normandy after Johnny and Sally were reunited.



"Remember Also The Humble Beasts That Served And Died" The Standard of the Royal Army Veterinary and Remount Services at St Leonard's Church Sysonby featuring dogs, cats, horses, elephants, camels and pigeons.

Melton Mowbray's Anti-Aircraft Battalions

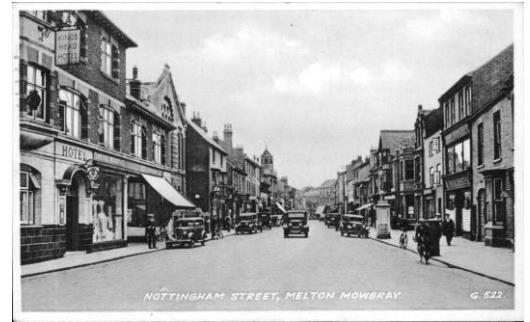
During the Second World War, Melton Mowbray became home to units of the Anti-Aircraft Division, mainly units from the 32nd (Midland) Anti-Aircraft Brigade. 2nd Anti-Aircraft Division, responsible for defending the East Midlands.

In January 1939, Colonel Maurice Fitzgibbon Grove-White was promoted to Major-General and nominated to succeed Major-General J. M. R. Harrison in Command of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Division.



There were at least two searchlight units in Melton Mowbray. The first site was on Welby Road that runs North from Asfordby Hill towards Ab Kettleby. The second site was at Thorpe Arnold, just off Melton Spinney Road, behind Thorpe Arnold Cricket Club, both protected by pill boxes which still exist today.

In June/July 1939, the 44th (The Leicestershire Regiment) Anti-Aircraft Battalion, Royal Engineers (TA) were based in the Melton area. Certainly the site on Welby Road had wooden huts for the 'Other Ranks' to sleep in but the Officers were billeted in the King's Head Hotel on Nottingham Street in the town centre. At the time it was the Officer mess, the hotel was Out of Bounds to Other ranks.



The Rev R Chalmers, Vicar of Holy Trinity in Leicester had been "called up" and was planning his 'parish' services at the headquarters of the 44th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, R.E. somewhere near Melton. He was with the unit for a month, during which time he conducted services at each of the headquarters of the 3 companies now in camp.

By August, the 44th had been replaced by the 45th (The Royal Warwickshire Regiment) Anti-Aircraft Battalion, RE (TA). The following is a transcript of an article that appeared in the Leicester Evening Mail on 5th August 1939.

"With the Anti-Aircraft Men on Duty - A full dress performance of what the anti-aircraft defenders in the Midlands would do in case of an emergency was seen by a Leicester Evening Mail representative when he toured the anti-aircraft system "somewhere near Melton Mowbray" at the invitation of Colonel P Docker, Public relations Officer for the Territorial Army and Air Force Association (County of Warwick).

We set off (writes the representative) under the wing of Major S.B.Sills. The 45th A.A. Battalion, R.E. has four companies with headquarters in Melton Mowbray, Oakham, Corby and Thrapston. Each company is split into sections, each section commander being responsible for six detachments. The detachments have 10 men each, which means that the 45th numbers about 360 men. Those ten men donned their tin hats and gas masks and gave a display of what they are doing the whole of their month of exercises.

We had a look into the more domestic side of camp life by inspecting quarters and rations for the next 24 hours. Everything was remarkably clean considering the bad weather and the morale is excellent. Generous rations were on view. "Somewhere near Rockingham" we visited a sectional headquarters and saw similar things on a larger scale. Here one of us donned the locator earphones and was treated like a raw recruit by the Sergeant in charge.

Back in Oakham for a night visit to the searchlights, Major G Rodgers took care of us, and in driving rain we went through Melton to "somewhere near Thorpe Arnold". We were able to see the detachment at its work in natural surroundings. Because of the weather, exercises were really off, but Thorpe Arnold kindly put on a show."

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