

BULLETIN ISSUE NO. 12 – MAY 2024



Lieutenant-Colonel David Niven & Mrs Primula Niven

Welcome

Ladies & Gents,

Welcome to the May edition of the *HistoryFare Bulletin*. Apologies, for the lateness in issuing this edition as May has been an extremely busy month, with talks, history tours museum projects and of course the fabulous 1940s weekend.

It was great to see some of you down at the 1940s event, either at the stall or at my talks in St Mary's Church.

As always, I hope you are continuing to enjoy these bulletins, and 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.

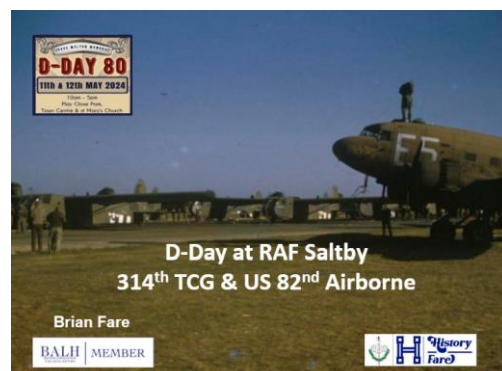
Brian

Next Monthly Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be on **Thursday, 6th June 2024** at the Melton Mowbray Royal Air Forces Association Tornado Club, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HR at 20:00Hrs.

It was planned that the talk would be about the 2nd Leicesters in Mesopotamia but unfortunately our guest speaker, Nigel Atter, has had to pull out due to health issues.

Nigel has promised to rebook when he is well again and so he will hopefully join us in 2025. So please join me in wishing Nigel all the best for a speedy recovery.



Due to this cancellation, and that we are meeting on 6th June, I thought I would repeat my 2 short talks that I gave in St Mary's Church over the 1940s weekend.

The first talk will be about the 4th Parachute Brigade and the second will be about the US 82nd and RAF Saltby.

Admission Cost £3

Seats are to be reserved via the new online HistoryFare Events booking system:

<https://historyfare.co.uk/events/4th-parachute-brigade-and-us-82nd-raf-saltby/> or via email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

Raffle



Many thanks to those of you who have supported the monthly raffles by donating prizes for use the draws, they have all been gratefully appreciated.

If you would like to donate prizes to future raffles, 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 David Niven & Mrs Primula Niven

The image on the lead page is of Lieutenant-Colonel David Niven and his first wife Primula along with their son James David Graham (Jamie) Niven but what, if any, is the connection to Melton Mowbray?

David Niven was born on the 1st March 1910 at Belgrave Mansions, Grosvenor Gardens, London, to William Edward Graham Niven and his wife, Henrietta Julia (née Degacher). His father, William Niven, was of Scottish descent and was killed on 21 August 1915 during the Gallipoli campaign in the First World War serving with the Berkshire Yeomanry. He is buried in Green Hill Cemetery, Turkey, in the Special Memorial Section in Plot F. 10.

Niven's mother, Henriette, was born in Brecon, Wales and her father was Captain (brevet Major) William Degacher (1841–1879) of the 1st Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot, who was killed at the Battle of Isandlwana during the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879.

He was educated at Heatherdown Preparatory School and Stowe School before gaining a place at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. After Sandhurst, he was commissioned as a second Lieutenant in the Highland Light Infantry.

Whilst in the Army, he developed an interest in acting and found a role as an extra in the British film 'There Goes the Bride (1932)'. He grew bored with the peacetime army and resigned his commission in 1933, relocating to New York, then onto Hollywood.

Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, Niven returned to Britain and rejoined the army, being recommissioned on 25 February 1940 as a Lieutenant serving with initially with the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own). Shortly after joining the Rifles, he received commando training and became the Commander of 'A' Squadron in the misleadingly named GHQ Liaison Regiment, better known as 'Phantom'.

It was in the summer of 1940 that David met Primula 'Primmie' Rollo, an assistant Section Officer

in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, who would become his wife.

One version of the story that was being told in 1945/46 was that the couple met during an air raid on an RAF airfield. He dived into a slit trench during a German air raid on an airfield near Canterbury when he landed on a beautiful WAAF and her dog. David even provided a narrative as to how they met "She squealed, and her dog bit me. She said, 'Why the hell did you sit on my dog?', and I said, 'Why the hell have you got a Pekingese in a trench anyway?' and that's how we got acquainted."

Another alternative story, which did not emanate from David, was that he met Primmie at a pub frequented by the well-heeled personnel of 'The Millionaires' Squadron at RAF Tangmere around 50 miles from Salisbury Plain, where David trained with The Rifle Brigade until August 1940. It is hard to imagine David, the storyteller, wanting to leave the story as "I met my missus down the pub".

Another version was recorded in his 1971 book 'The Moon's A Balloon', where he described a first shared glance / stare at the Cafe de Paris in London and then running into her during a lunchtime concert at a museum.

No matter how the couple met, love blossomed very quickly and within a couple of weeks of their first meeting they got married at St Nicholas Church at Huish near Marlborough in Wiltshire.

Primmie was born Primula Susan Rollo and was the only daughter of a well-to-do London divorce lawyer William (Bill) Hereward Charles Rollo and his wife Lady Kathleen Hill.

Lady Kathleen was the daughter of Arthur Wills John Wellington Trumbull Hill, 6th Marquess of Downshire and Katherine Mary Hare. Following the divorce of her parents, her mother Katherine married Brigadier-General Sir Joseph Laycock, the father of Commando General Bob Laycock, meaning that Primmie and Bob were step brother & sister.

Lady Kathleen was actively involved with the ATS during WW2 and went on to become the Senior Commander Commanding Leicester County Group ATS.

Bill Rollo was the son of Hon. Eric Norman Rollo and Constance Maud Hohler. He was educated at Eton College, then Trinity College from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in 1911. He was admitted to Inner Temple in 1914 and entitled to practise as a barrister.

He fought in the First World War gaining the rank of Captain in the Royal Scots Guards and was awarded the Military Cross. After the war he returned to law as a practising solicitor in 1921 with Withers, Nicholl, Manisty & Company.

Bill also fought in the Second World War as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at the Air Ministry. There are some reports that say Bill had taken part in the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk, not as part of the RAF but as a sailor! I have yet to confirm this.

The Rollo's were frequent visitors to Melton during the 1930s regularly staying at Newport Lodge taking part in the hunts, balls, cocktail parties etc. Both Primmie and her brother Peter started their hunting career with the Quorn and Cottesmore Hunts. On the 1st February 1936, the Leicester Evening Mail report that Primmie was taking a holiday at Belvoir Castle prior to leaving



Harlip
CAPTAIN AND MRS. DAVID NIVEN
The wedding took place at St. Nicholas Church, Huish, near Marlborough, of Captain David Niven, son of the late General W. G. Niven, of the Highland Light Infantry, and of the late Lady Comyn-Platt, and Miss Primula Rollo, an officer in the W.A.A.F., the daughter of Flight Lieut. William Rollo, M.C., and Lady Kathleen Rollo, of Cold Blow, Huish

The Tatler 2nd Oct 1940

next week to complete her education in Munich prior to being presented at next year's court.

It was while serving with the Commandos that Niven claimed credit for bringing future Major General Sir Robert 'Bob' Laycock 'Commando General' to the Commandos. See HistoryFare Bulletin Issue No. 3 – August 2023 ([HistoryFare Bulletin - HistoryFare](#)) for the article about Laycock Avenue and the connections to Commando General Bob Laycock.

Bosworth Battlefield Tour

As mentioned previously, I have arranged a guided tour of the Battle of Bosworth battlefield with historian and battlefield guide Ben Mayne.

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.

If you would like to join us on this tour, then please email meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com to reserve your place.

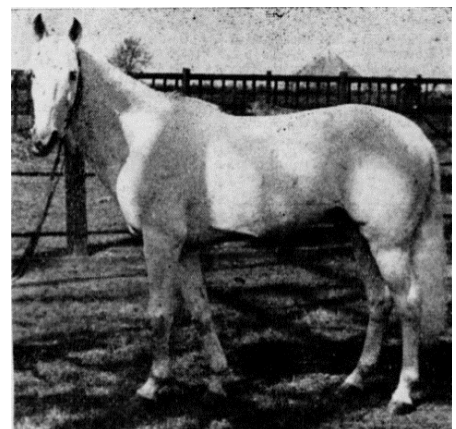
Rommel's Arab Stallion

Following on from the 'Famous Black Labradors' article in last months bulletin, I thought I'd take a look at famous horses.

One that springs to mind is 'Rommel' the grey Arab Stallion that belonged to the former German Field-Marshal and yes, he was at Melton for a while in 1946 & 1947.

On the 7th April 1946, 'Rommel' arrived at Tilbury docks from Hamburg after being captured or taken as a war trophy in Germany. Following his arrival at Tilbury, later the same day, he was transferred by horse ambulance to the RAVC stables here in Melton Mowbray where he went into isolation and quarantine for 6 weeks.

Colonel CHS Townsend, Commanding Officer of the Veterinary Corps depot was personally supervising the arrangements for the exercise, grooming and care of the 'grey', before Monty who was given the horse.



Everyone at the depot took an interest in the horse and calls the stallion 'Rommel'. He was eight years old and stood 14.3 hands high. The scar that he received in the battle for the Western Desert could quite easily be seen as well as the Mahomet's thumb print, which apparently every pure bred Arab horse bears.



The horse was procured by the Germans for the purpose of riding into Cairo, but when the possibility disappeared, the horse was sent back to Germany.

It was captured by Monty's troops at a German Remount Depot at Schleswig-Holstein and when its history was discovered, it was sent to Monty's HQ as it was thought he had a good claim to it!

Back at Melton, the Leicester Evening Mail reported on the 6th June 1946 that 'Rommel' would take part in the Victory Gymkhana organised by the Remount Depot. Also taking part would be 30 black horses presented to the King for the Household Cavalry by the Dutch Government and two horses given to the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret by the King of Transjordania.

It was planned that 'Rommel' would take part in the 1946 Victory parade in London on the 8th June. However, a few days earlier, when the Secretary for War was asked in the House of Commons "this horse had been brought to the country to take part in the Victory parade", he replied "I have no knowledge of it's whereabouts or even of its existence, but I can assure the hon. Member that it will certainly not be taking part in the Victory Parade".

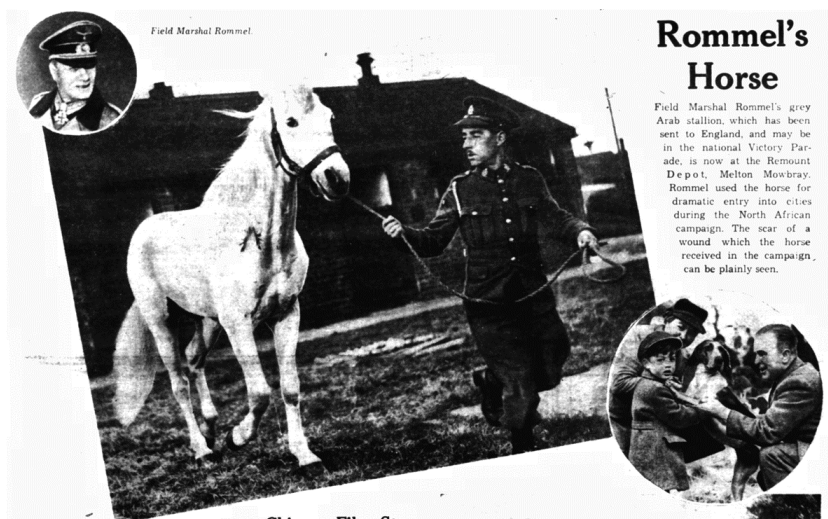
'Rommel' was presented to the King and went to the Mews at Windsor.

'Rommel' returned to Melton in July 1947 and in August, the Asfordby branch of the British Legion organised their first fete which included displays by the RAVC animals and personnel. There were trick riders, a fancy dress parade, boxing and dancing. Over 1,000 people attended but the proposed baby show did not go ahead due to the recently announced outbreak of infantile paralysis in the Melton area.

The Melton RAVC depot put on a spectacular riding display in the afternoon with trick riding and a jumping display. Some of the riders had performed at the Olympia show earlier in the year in front of the King and Queen and the two Princesses.

In one scene, 'Rommel' led the way, ridden by Pte J Woods dressed as a cowboy.

'Rommel' was reported to be "docile, but not very nice tempered" and "a bad ride in traffic" and sadly was put down in September 1947.



Illustrated Leicester Chronicle 13 April 1946

Melton Mowbray 1940s Weekend



Thank you to everyone who came along to the 1940s weekend. Next years event will be on 10th & 11th May 2025, so put a placeholder in your diary now!

It was great weekend, helped out by the marvellous weather. But more importantly, 2023 was the fifth year of this event and it has got bigger and better over the years.

The event received great coverage on Social Media and in the local press. From a personal view, it was great to be part of it and support the event with my HistoryFare stall and also putting on a couple of talks about Melton in St Mary's Church on both Saturday & Sunday.

The event took place in the main park and in Wilton Road Park plus St Mary's Church and the town centre.

The event itself was free to those members of the public attending and that is one, if not the best attraction to draw people in, especially when so many other 1940s events charge for attending.

For this event to continue for future years, it needs the support of people like you. The event itself cost approximately £24,000 to put on and as such, the 1940s team are always looking out for new people to donate money, raffle prizes or even become sponsors of the event.

If you, or someone you know maybe able to help out in any way with donations, funding, sponsorship etc to help keep this fantastic event going for many years to come, then please do get in touch with the team at: melton40sevent@outlook.com

Thank You.

4th Brigade Parachute Regiment Museum Exhibition

As some of you know, I have been working on a community project with staff & volunteers from Melton Carnegie Museum, to tell the story about the Paras that were based in Melton Mowbray during WW2 prior to Operation Market Garden.

The 80th anniversary display in the museum is now 'live' and open to the public. The online exhibition is also available on the museum website, so please do check it out.

<https://www.meltonmuseum.org/operation-market-garden>

I will also be giving a talk about 156 Bn and the other units within the 4th Brigade on Thursday 20th June. If you would like to attend, please reserve your tickets via the museum direct. See the flyers below for further information.

Operation Market Garden



22nd May to December 2024

Local stories about the Parachute Regiment's experiences in the town, the aftermath of the Battle of Arnhem and how we remember them. This display will be split into two parts and has been created to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden.

Co-curated by local historian Brian Fare and Melton Museum Research volunteers, with assistance from the community.

Thorpe End, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 1RB

Tel: 0116 305 3860

Email: meltonmuseum@leics.gov.uk

www.meltonmuseum.org/

156 Battalion Parachute Regiment A Talk by Brian Fare

In this talk Brian looks at 156 Battalion Parachute Regiment's short stay in Melton prior to going to Arnhem and taking part in Operation Market Garden



**Thursday 20th June
at Melton Carnegie Museum**

Doors open at 6.30pm, talk begins at 7.00pm



£4 per person

Pre-booking is essential

Thorpe End, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 1RB

Tel: 0116 305 3860

Email: meltonmuseum@leics.gov.uk

www.meltonmuseum.org/



Preserving Our Heritage


If you recall, in the 1st edition of the HistoryFare Bulletin, I included a small piece about preserving our military heritage.

What has become apparent to myself since doing the guided tours around town, is the number of people who have an interest in the heritage of Melton, not only the town, but also the wider Borough and the concerns they raise about the apparent decline of our heritage and the fact they say there's nothing we can do about it.

Well now you can.

If you are on Facebook, then please follow the Melton & District Heritage Society <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559166274342>. This initiative was started between myself and Councillor Sharon Butcher who is the heritage portfolio holder for the Council.

It is not just us two, we have asked other individuals and organisations to join us and the list is growing. We held our first meeting a few weeks ago and will be holding regular meetings going forwards, with the next one being Monday 10th June at 5pm in the Harboro Hotel.

If you want to come along to any of the meetings or you want to raise any concerns you have about heritage then please get in touch via the message button on FB. 



The Edinburgh Woollen Mill on Nottingham Street is just one example from dozens of Grade II listed building in town that is falling into decline.

Take a look at the wooden window frames etc that have no paint and are all rotting away. Is this acceptable for a Grade II building?

There are many more examples like this around town.

If you don't use Facebook, and have any issues you want to raise, then feel free to email me direct on the email below.

Thank you for your support!

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