

THE ASSEGAI

The 1879 Group



Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift

AUTUMN 2015

Newsletter of the 1879 Group

**The 1879 Group
Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift
Founded 23rd May 1998 at the Barracks, Brecon**

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The 1879 Group

Patrons

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Mrs Nora Bunting

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Mr Douglas Bourne

Mr Jimmy Reynolds

Mr Danny Tully

Mr Glynne Davies

Mr Roger Morgan

Mr Tony Burrows

Mr Jimmy Patterson

Ms Vivien Watkins

Mr Bob Coates

Mr Barrington Evans

Mr Bill Howells

EDITORIAL

The year has been good for the group and two events in particular stand out. The first where we were invited to be present in Cardiff on escort duty for Her Majesty the Queen's visit which is a considerable honour for the group in being recognised for what we do in commemorating the history of the 24th and keeping alive its memory, and secondly a memorable day marching with the 24th Colours on parade at Hay-on-Wye. Details of these events are given later. We also remain the only re-enactment group to have been formally presented with its Queen's colours. During the year we have also increased our membership and in particular our concerns about boosting our numbers for the uniformed branch have been eased as we now have new recruits. It is gratifying to see that the hard work put in by the committee and the uniformed branch in their various roles is bringing its rewards not forgetting for one minute the importance of the ordinary member in continuing to provide the essential support you give through your interest and membership. Thanks to everyone.

REPORTS OF EVENTS

Rorke's Drift Dinner 2015

The annual Rorke's Drift dinner was held once more at the Metropole Hotel in Llandrindod Wells on Saturday 24th January. Fifty attended this time with wives and partners and also guests from other re-enactment groups many in period costume. Pre-dinner drinks were taken in the main lounge where old friends socialised and new acquaintances made. Danny Tully resplendent in his red Dress uniform caught the eye of a young lady staying at the hotel but who was not part of the group. Her curiosity got the better of her as she approached Danny and asked, "Are you a Chelsea Pensioner"? which generated a few laughs through the evening, mainly at Danny's expense!

The venue this time was the Spencer suite which provided a more suitable and intimate setting. Roger Morgan acted as MC for the evening and following grace a hearty three course meal was served. After the meal the Chairman made his customary speech and then the guest of honour and our honorary Colonel Tim Van-Rees addressed the group and as always was very supportive of the group's work. After the formal part of the proceedings was concluded members continued socialising long into the evening. A selection of snapshots below capture the mood of a very pleasant evening.



The Group in the Spencer Suite



Col. Tim Van-Rees during his address.



Jimmy, Douglas, Glynn, Toby and Ruaridh in relaxed mood (other than Glynn's knees!)



Roger presenting Danny with his 'pensioner' purse and bus pass.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2015

The AGM was held at the RRW Museum on 30th May and attracted 30 members, the best attendance for a number of years which included our friends from the Bikers club.

The Secretary thanked everyone for attending and opened the proceedings by tabling apologies for absence for Douglas Bourne, Jimmy Reynolds and Glynne Davies. He also advised that starting with the minutes of this the 2015 AGM, all future AGM minutes will be published in the Assegai.

In the absence of the chairman, Roger Morgan took the chair with Danny Tully supporting.

1. Minutes of the 2014 AGM

Minutes of the 2014 minutes were read out and accepted with no matters arising, proposed by D.Piggott and seconded by R.Dunton.

2. Chairman's Report

The acting chairman advised that his report was necessarily brief as the chairman could not attend to give a full report due to a sudden illness but he had contacted Jimmy Reynolds who was now recovering well and hoped to attend the next event. One pleasing aspect of the past year was that membership numbers had increased but further work was still needed to attract more members to the uniformed branch living history section of the group.

3. Secretary's Report

The secretary then presented his report and thanked members for their interest and particularly phone calls received but requested they be made during reasonable hours.

He gave a brief summary of activities so far this year including Tyntesfield and also outlined the event in Cardiff in June when the group will form a guard of honour and take part in the parade when the Queen will be presenting the Royal Welsh with their new colours, a great honour for the group.

Duncan McDonald was then invited to give details of the TA commemoration day in Hay-on-Wye on 2nd August when the group will be taking part and parading the colours.

The secretary concluded his report by thanking Vivien Watkins for taking over as the new membership secretary and thanked the outgoing secretary Barrie Evans for his past efforts.

4. Assegai Report

The Editor advised that the Assegai continues to be published annually with the Autumn 2014 issue sent out to 59 UK addresses and 5 overseas at a total cost covering printing and distribution of £159. Whilst the annual issue is in Journal form, this Spring a news sheet format has been introduced with the intention of providing members with news of a more urgent nature ie administration/warning orders etc. The next issue of the Journal is planned for the Autumn. Please contribute to the Assegai by sending in any suitable material for publication no matter how long or short. All articles will be gratefully received and duly acknowledged.

5. Membership Secretary Report

The membership secretary reported an increase in membership including the living history section and thanked everyone for the support she has received in her new role. Once all personal details, email and telephone numbers have been confirmed the formal list will be revamped and updated.

Members were reminded that all subscriptions are due on 1st June each year.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Secretary presented the report on behalf of the Treasurer who was unable to attend. The accounts are well in credit standing at £3108 with monies still to come in from Tyntesfield. The final balance sheet for the past year is available to members on request.

7. Election of Officers and Committee

In accordance with the Constitution all officers and Committee members stood down and relinquished their specific roles. All previous post holders then offered themselves for re-election there being no new nominations. On a show of hands all nominees were then elected to serve for a further term of office.

8. Annual Rorke's Drift Dinner

It was agreed that the dinner should once again be held at the Metropole Hotel in Llandrindod Wells, this time on Saturday 9th January 2016. More information will be provided in the next issue of the Assegai to be published in the Autumn. (see page 7. Ed)

9. Kwa Zulu 2017

It is proposed to visit Zululand in 2017 subject to arranging suitable flights, accommodation, local travel and availability of a battlefields guide. Once confirmed a substantial deposit will be required for those interested. More details will be provided as this develops.

10. Any other Business

In answer to a query concerning the availability of ammunition for the living history section it was confirmed that sufficient was held for firing displays for a number of years.

With no other matters forthcoming the meeting was formally closed.

REPORTS OF LIVING HISTORY EVENTS

Tyntesfield

The event this year was held over the early May bank holiday, the weather was not good with some rain and cold windy evenings. This was a three day event the first we have done for some time and shared with the Blue Jackets, Green Howards and No.1 Depot Gun Crew.

The group did two shows each day concentrating on the 24th Regiment history and its equipment and weaponry of the Zulu war period. At the end of the day there was a firing display and a parade involving all the groups. Roger's medical/surgical displays and Russell's Rocket battery drew great interest as usual and overall the event was very much appreciated by the general public.

Cardiff Castle

The group had been invited to take part in this event at the castle on the 9th/10th of May as a warm-up for the Royal Welsh Colours presentation in June and also present were the Sealed Knot society, the Great War society, the 41st Regiment of Foot and the Royal Welsh itself. We did our usual arena displays followed by camp talks. Our new Public Address system also worked well once Danny realised the microphone actually had to be switched to the 'on' position! There were two displays each day and we were also involved in guard duty at the Castle entrance. On the Sunday morning we made new friends with soldiers of the Royal Welsh who had a great time with us firing our Martini-Henrys. The Royal Welsh also had a display but being VE Celebration day the remainder of the day was taken up with camp talks and exploring the castle grounds.

Royal Welsh Colour Presentation

On Thursday 11th June members of the Living History section were at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff when Her Majesty the Queen presented new colours to the Royal Welsh Regiment.

The day started with 1879 group members together with other re-enactment groups meeting and greeting the public as they arrived from 9.00am onwards. The ceremony began at 11.00 when the old colours were marched off and the new ones marched on to the stadium ground.

Her Majesty then arrived and inspected the troops. The new colours were then consecrated and received by the Royal Welsh. The Queen made her presentation speech which was followed by a response from the Colonel of the Regiment. When the parade marched off Danny, Roger, Ian Fletcher and Tony Burrows with other re-enactors formed a historic timeline in the players tunnel as the Queen passed. Glynne Davies went to the Presidential lounge to mount guard whilst Her Majesty lunched and later was very fortunate to have the opportunity to chat to the Queen. Well done Glynne!

Bob Coates then joined others to talk to the public as they left the stadium. When the crowds had dispersed group members made their way back into the stadium and had lunch with the Rorke's Drift B Company of the Royal Welsh.

This was an incredible honour for the group and never to be forgotten by everyone present.

Pictured after the event outside the stadium are Bob Coates, President Douglas Bourne and a Canadian member of the 41st Regiment of Foot on his way to the Waterloo commemoration events.



Hay-on-Wye

Sunday the 2nd of August marked a day of remembrance at Hay-on-Wye to commemorate the Hay Territorials and the 70th anniversary of the end of the second world war. The event was organised by the local British Legion and many ex-service men and women assembled at the town war memorial along with a large crowd of the general public. Leading the service of remembrance were the Lord Lieutenant of Powys, Hon. Sian Legge Bourke, Col. Tim Van-Rees and other local dignitaries.

At 2.00pm the Swansea Pipe Band led by Duncan McDonald paraded into the square followed by our own uniformed branch members headed by Danny Tully and Tony Burrows flying the Queen's and Regimental colours of the 24th. The service included acts of remembrance, exhortations, placing of wreaths, choral singing and Col. Van-Rees delivering a history of the Hay Territorials. The service ended with the National Anthems. A number of Group members were also present to witness what was a very well organised, professional and moving event. A selection of photographs are shown below.



The Swansea Pipe Band led onto the Square.



The Colours on parade.



The March pass.



The Lord Lieutenant laying her wreath.



Requesting permission to march off parade.



Parade march off.

REV. FRANCIS KILVERT'S DIARY

Those of you who attended the Hay commemorative event overleaf may have noted the name Kilvert around the town eg. Kilvert's Hotel and particularly in the many bookshops there. Some may know much about Francis Kilvert and if you do it is through his diaries which were published just before the second world war to considerable acclaim. In the mid-Victorian period Kilvert was curate at Clyro the parish adjacent to Hay just across the Wye. From 1870 onward until his early death in September 1879 he kept a detailed diary of life in the area around Hay. One entry which was dated 11th February 1879 will be of particular interest to members ie.

'Walked in the rain to Wyecliff, took leave of Mrs. Chrichton and carried my bag to Hay Castle. Dinner at 6.00. At 7.45 the omnibus took us to the Volunteer concert at the Drill Hall. News came today of the terrible disaster inflicted by the Zulus on the 24th Regiment at Rorke's Drift, South Africa. Colonel Thomas was much affected by the news and was obliged to leave the concert room. He knew the officers intimately when the 24th were quartered lately at Brecon.'

It seemed the news must have got a little distorted in transit as Kilvert no doubt meant Isandlwana but understandable with the two battles almost concurrent. The Colonel referred to was William Jones Thomas (1839 - 1886) of Llanthomas House at Llanigon, near Hay who was with the 3rd Battalion, 24th Regiment and was also Aide-de-Camp to Queen Victoria.

2016 RORKE'S DRIFT DINNER

The annual Rorke's Drift dinner will again be held at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells on Saturday 9th January, 7.00 for 7.30. The cost of the three course meal with two choices will be £27 per person. Guests of members, spouses, partners, family and friends will be very welcome. If you wish to attend please send the appropriate cheques to the Group Treasurer Mr. Glynne Davies, 5A Chenies Parade, Chalfont Station Road, Little Chalfont, Bucks HP7 9PH.

A special rate for accommodation at the Metropole is available as follows : £46 per person per night for standard twin/double, £56 per person per night for executive twin/double, £56 per person per night for single accommodation all to include full breakfast and use of the leisure facilities.

Tel. 01597 823 700. Dress code will be Mess Dress and uniform, Black Tie and formal dress.

ROBERT HOWELLS MBE

With over 70 members in the group it is not possible for everyone to have met their fellow members but Bob Howells who attends every AGM should be recognised as only the second member of the Group to hold an MBE (Our honorary Colonel Tim Van-Rees also holds this award). Bob's modesty about this honour has needed some gentle persuasion to go public but now we can all learn about his big day at Buckingham Palace but beginning his story with his reasons for being a member of the Group, so in his own words :

"It was on 11th December 2004 that my interest in the Anglo-Zulu war was aroused by a letter written by a Mr. Glen Wade published in the South Wales Evening Post in which he was seeking anyone who knew of Swansea's Rorke's Drift defender James Owen. (NB. James enlisted as 963 Private David Lewis). My father David Owen Howells had spoken to me about his mother's brother who had fought in the Zulu war and I myself had been deeply moved by that magnificent film 'Zulu'. When I decided to make contact with Glen it was inevitable that I would eventually join the ranks of the 1879 Group. I have now enjoyed your company for over a decade and have learned a great deal about the military life of my Great-Uncle James.

After completing my National Service in the RAF in 1951 I became a teacher at Dursley Grammar School where I was invited to organise bird-watching courses for pupils on Steepholm island in the Bristol Channel. This re-kindled my interest in ornithology derived from long walks with my father in the countryside north of Swansea and also with aircraft identification during the Second World war. I returned to Swansea in 1958 to join Dynevor Grammar School where I was encouraged by a colleague to join the Gower Ornithological Society where I held various offices from Assistant Secretary to Chairman, then President and eventually being elected a Life Member in 1984.

By this time I had also joined the British Trust for Ornithology and started surveying wetland birds in the Burry inlet and later organising the General Wetland Bird survey 'WEBS'. I did this for 34 unbroken years and in 1974 I was appointed BTO Regional representative for West Glamorgan where I was involved in arranging fieldwork and surveys until 2008 when I resigned and was then awarded the Jubilee Gold Medal for 'committed devotion to the Trust'.

It came as a complete surprise on Friday 27th April 2012 when a letter arrived from the Cabinet Office saying that my name had been submitted to the Queen for an appointment as a Member of the British Empire in the Queen's Jubilee Birthday Honours List. Subsequently this was published in the London Gazette as 'Robert James Howells, Volunteer British Trust for Ornithology for contributions to ornithology in West Glamorgan'.

On arrival at the palace on 1st February 2013 recipients of the awards were separated from their guests and ascended a red carpeted staircase to enter a long gallery hung with paintings. Here there was the opportunity to meet fellow recipients and where we were informed that HRH Prince Charles was to conduct the Investiture. The whole atmosphere was so welcoming that I felt perfectly relaxed and when my name was announced it was time to walk into the Ballroom and approach the dais where Prince Charles was waiting. He congratulated me on my work and enquired about the various species of birds and the continuing surveys ongoing in the Burry inlet. Finally after a handshake and exhortation to 'keep up the good work' I returned to rejoin the others. The ceremony ended with the National Anthem and the departure of the Prince and his party. All aspects of the ceremony were carried out in a sympathetic and dignified way. It was a very special day for me and a great honour to receive the award'.

Many thanks Bob, it is also an honour for the Group to have an MBE as one of our members. Bob is still active in monitoring bird life in the Burry inlet and also in representing thousands of BTO observers and their work throughout the country. Ed



Bob pictured at the Palace.

ROCKETS AT ISANDLWANA

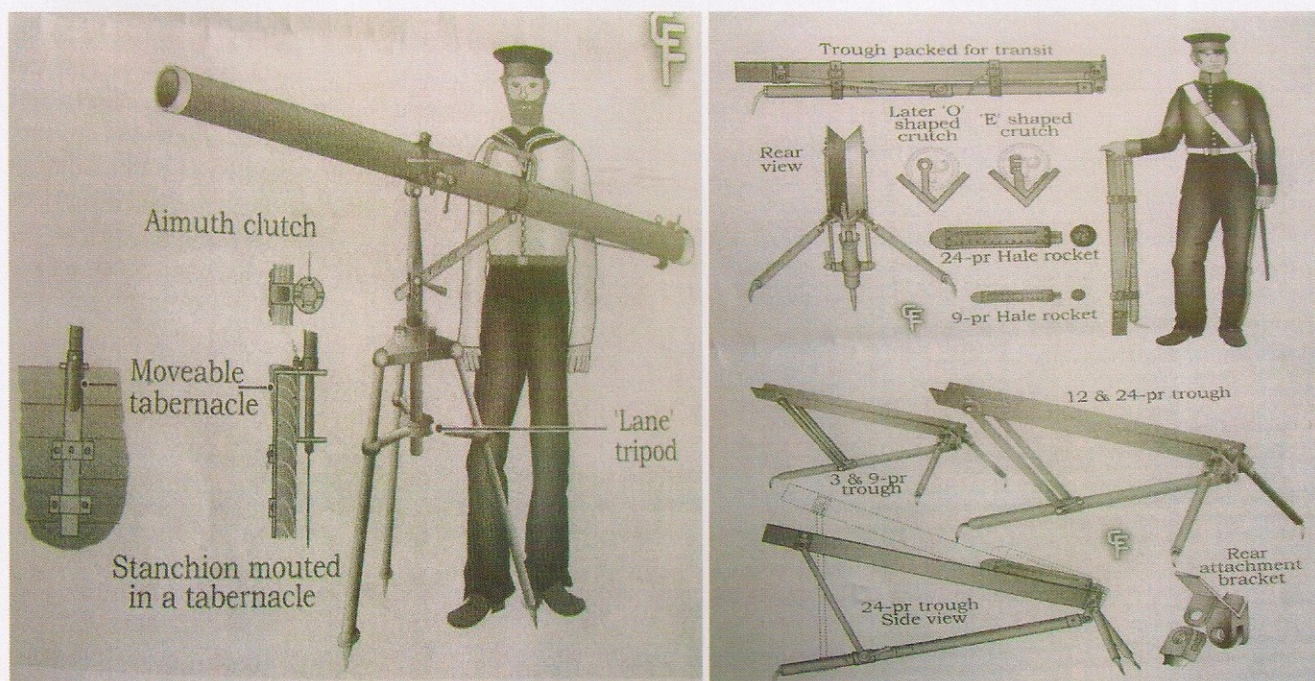
In a previous issue of the Assegai we looked at some of the technicalities of the Rocket launchers used in the Anglo-Zulu war. With the help of Bill Cainan we now take a closer look and also how they were deployed at Isandlwana.

When Lord Chelmsford's army invaded Zululand in January 1879 his invading forces were equipped with two rocket tubes and eight rocket troughs. Most of you will recall the scene in the film 'Zulu Dawn' where Captain Russell's rocket battery were overrun by the Zulus. So why was the British Army using rockets and how effective were they?

The army began using rockets in the Napoleonic wars. They were little different from ordinary fireworks and included in their design was a stick to make them more stable in flight. Their range and accuracy were poor and they achieved little success but the army persisted in their development.

In the 1860's William Hale invented a stick-less rocket. This design had three vents at its base where through curved baffles the charge was deflected and twisted the rocket on its central axis. After extensive trials a number of different sized rockets were developed, mainly the 9 pounder and 24 pounder versions. During further trials conducted in 1866-67 two different types of launchers were used, the tube and the trough. Although the tube proved to have a longer range they did tend to overheat and if not sponged out regularly could lead to extensive fouling which severely reduced their range. Even with this problem and the fact that they were heavier and more difficult to carry, the Royal Navy and the Royal Marine Artillery still preferred the tubes with the 24 pounder as their intention was to use them primarily for siege purposes. The army however decided on troughs with the lighter 9 pounders. There were also 3 and 12 pounder troughs available.

During the invasion of Zululand, the Naval Brigade was part of Col. Pearson's No.1 Column and had two of these tubes which had a range of approximately 1,300 yards. Both trough and tube designs from the period are shown below in the original general arrangement drawings.



The trough sides were fixed at 80 degrees and was supported by three legs made of wrought iron tubing. The front leg ran centrally beneath the launching trough and was attached to it by a sliding gunmetal sleeve. The sleeve could be slid up and down the graduated leg to vary the elevation and thus the range. For the 9 pounder this could be up to 15 degrees to give it a range of about 1000 yards. The length of the trough was 3feet and 5inches, painted black and weighed 27lbs which was easily carried by mules. Troughs were regarded as artillery weapons and were therefore controlled by the Royal Artillery.

In Colonel Glyn's No.3 Column the artillery battery was commanded by Lt.Col Harness (N/5 Battery) and had two 9 pounder troughs as part of its establishment though there is no evidence they were deployed or fired at Isandlwana.

Lt.Col Durnford's Column had three 9 pounder troughs carried by mules. This battery was commanded by Captain Russell RA and manned by a Bombardier Corporal and eight men seconded from the 24th Regiment. The No.2 Column was essentially a mobile column consisting of three battalions of the Natal Native Contingent and five troops of the Natal Native Horse. Initially it was to be employed along the Buffalo river to prevent any Zulu incursions into Natal as the invading force moved into Zululand. On 22nd January Durnford was ordered to move his column to Isandlwana.

At about 11am Durnford moved eastwards from the camp at Isandlwana with the intention of securing Chelmsford's flank and rear, Chelmsford at this point having earlier at 4.30am taken the 2/24th out of the camp moving to the south-east. With Durnford were two troops of the NNH, some miscellaneous cavalry and the Rocket Battery. Although the Rocket Battery was mule mounted it failed to keep pace with Durnford's horsemen and gradually fell behind. In an effort to catch up Captain Russell took a short cut across a ridge and met the main body of Zulus advancing on the camp. Russell gallantly tried to bring his battery into action and is believed to have fired one rocket before being overrun. Russell, his Bombardier and five of the privates from the 24th were killed. Privates Grant, Johnson and Trainer were to survive by escaping on the mules.

Conclusion: It was thought that the use of rockets with their fiery smoking trails would cause panic amongst the Zulus but there is no evidence at all that they were affected by the rockets. The rockets were in fact inaccurate, unreliable and carried no explosive warheads. But they did provide some exciting moments in 'Zulu Dawn!'.

For further information : 'British Rockets of the Napoleonic and Colonial Wars 1805 - 1901 by CE Franklin. 'British Forces in Zululand 1879' by Ian Knight.

ZULU SHIELD

What price a genuine Zulu Shield? Last November on BBC 1's 'Flog it' programme, a Zulu shield was put on auction at a reserve price of £200. There were many bids which eventually ended with the shield being sold for £1100. There was not much actual history to go with the shield but at least it shows that artefacts from Zululand still attract much interest.

CAMP LIFE PAIN AND PLEASURE

Our uniformed branch regulars have done us proud this year in promoting the Group at public events but have the 'civvies' amongst us ever wondered what they get up to on living history days when they are not marching, giving firing displays or talking to the general public? We sent our under cover team in to find out with some surprising results as shown :



*Down under reverse firing position? Not in Queen's Regulations and getting a good old 1879 flogging!
Camp discipline, Ouch!*



*Now a far more agreeable position.
'Hello Soldier, looking for a good time?'
Ah! so that's why recruitment is up!*

Editorial discretion prevents naming our gallant lads but I think we have a good idea who they are!



A quiet game of cards after all that excitement.



Back on duty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Danny Tully, Bill Cainan, Bob Coates, Russell Dunton, Bob Howells and Allen Coles for their contributions to this issue. Also the Group's printer Andreas Haaf and son of Port Talbot.

ASSEGAI EDITORIAL SUPPORT

Any information, articles, comments on any aspect of the content in this issue or any views on the Group which you feel will be of interest to your fellow members would be very much appreciated.



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