



## Local History: The Crimean War – Some Local Connections

That this conflict (1854-6) left a mark on the history of Hampshire is, at first glance, perhaps rather unexpected, but they are still to be seen today in house, street and public house names.

Alma (since rebuilt) and Inkerman Cottages are located off Alton's Orchard Lane and were probably built in 1856. There was also a Florence Cottage (demolished when the inner relief road was constructed in 1994), although that seems to have been built much later, possibly following the death of Florence Nightingale in 1910. In Aldershot, where the Army Camp was created in 1854, one can find Crimea Road and Sebastopol Road, not to mention The Crimea public house with a painting of the campaign medal on the hanging sign. In nearby Hale one can see The Alma public house and a hostelry with the same name is to be found in Lower Upham near Fair Oak. Both have well-painted signboards and such hostelry names may have originated from former soldiers returning home from the war and setting up in an ale house, a feature of many such premises with military connections. There is also a Lord Raglan public house in Emsworth.

Britain became involved in the conflict in March 1854 when it joined forces with France, Turkey and Sardinia against Russia in response to the latter's invasion of part of Turkey. Hostilities continued until the peace was signed at the Treaty of Paris in March 1856.

Strictly speaking it should be called the Russian War, as there was also fighting in Armenia and the Baltic, where Britain sent a fleet from Portsmouth in March 1854, but the events in the Crimea created the greatest impression in Britain as the military administration embarked on what, with hindsight, seems to have been an unnecessary action to capture the Russian Naval base at Sebastopol. However, the French agreed and on 14 September 1854 some 60,000 allied troops landed on the north west-coast of the Crimea and made their way south, towards their goal.

Successful actions were fought at the Alma River on 20 September, at Balaclava on 25 October – which included the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade, immortalised by Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, and at Inkerman on 5 November. A winter campaign had not been anticipated and the following six months were a nightmare for the British army as they besieged Sebastopol, for shortages of food, equipment, medical supplies and exceptionally bad weather reduced the fighting force by 50%. Previous overseas conflicts had suffered similar supply problems, but the Crimea was the first war to be reported by newspaper correspondents and the resulting public outcry at home led to the eventual downfall of the government in 1855 and the appointment of Lord Palmerston (1784-1865), who lived at Broadlands in Romsey, as Prime Minister.

During the war the *Hampshire Chronicle* provided information every week with reports and letters home. In the aftermath of the first of the bloody battles of the autumn 1854, a national Patriotic Fund was formed on 13 October 1854, dedicated to *'the succouring, educating, and relieving those*



## Local History: The Crimean War – Some Local Connections

*who, by the loss of their husbands and parents in battle, or by death on active service in the present war, are unable to maintain or support themselves.'*

All over Hampshire local committees of the great and the good were convened to promote this cause and in Alton there was a public meeting at the Town Hall on 21 November called by Robert Cole and John Wood. A resolution was passed that *'a Committee for the parish of Alton, of the following persons be appointed: - Dr Burnett, H Hall, L Leslie, JW Clement and the churchwardens of the other parishes in the Alton division be requested to form themselves into a Committee to collect and transmit subscriptions; and that subscriptions be received at the bank in this town.'*

Those present started the ball rolling and subscriptions ranging from £25 to £2 were received and it was reported, *'that a handsome sum will be realised in the town and neighbourhood.'* Activities were brought to a halt on the 21 December 1854 when it was reported that £374 had been raised from collections in the town and local parishes.

The Alton diarist, William Terrell Gunner of Will Hall Farm, makes frequent references to the conflict:

*March 6 1854*

*The greatest preparations are being made throughout Europe for war throughout Europe; England sends a fleet to the Baltic & the Black Sea. France does the same & they are both sending a large army to drive back the Czar from the Principalities, if he does not quietly make his exit, which is not probable; Austria is arming too against him, & it is not likely Sweden will be backward to try & take back what he has unjustly taken from her; altogether Russia is in a terrible state; the Czar must be a madman or a fool to venture on war with such a determined resistance from all Europe. Sad to think of the horrors of a European War,*

On both sides the losses in battle and the death of men through disease was horrendous but little compared to the more extensive European War which was to follow 60 years later. The Siege of Sebastopol continued with fierce fighting until the Russians withdrew under cover of darkness in early September 1856.

*September 11 1855*

*The bells were ringing all day, & flags flying – Sebastopol is now evacuated by the Russians, who have set it on fire together with their fleet in the harbour. The French took the Malakoff Tower, & then they [the Russians] had no chance of holding out. Fireworks were disturbing the Town all the evening, & the band playing till midnight; in my opinion the bells should have been muffled, & the knell tolled all day, for the poor dead bleaching on the field of battle.*

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Some of the local casualties of the war were listed in the deaths column of the *Hampshire Chronicle* and amongst these were William George Williams (33) of Holybourne, a Purser in the Royal Navy; Charles Ernest Knight (19) of Chawton House, a Lieutenant in the 77th Regiment and Captain Audley Lemprière (21), 77th Regiment, eldest son of Rear Admiral Lemprière of Pelham House in the parish of Newton Valence.

Captain Lemprière was killed in an attack on Russian rifle positions outside Sebastopol on 19 April 1855. A fellow officer who had been nearby on the night of the attack wrote in a letter home: *Our loss was severe 60 men killed & wounded, & seven Officers of whom Col. Egerton (a tall powerful man) & Capt Lemprière 77th were killed; the latter was very young, had just got his company and was about the smallest officer in the Army, a great pet of the Colonel's and termed by him his child; he was killed, poor fellow at the first attack in the rifle pit, the Colonel, tho' wounded, snatched him up in his arms & carried him off declaring "they shall never take my child"; the Colonel then returned and in the second attack was killed,*

Two days later Colonel Egerton and Captain Lemprière were buried side by side in the 77th Regiment's graveyard. Lord Raglan, Commander of British forces, and Lieutenant-General Sir George Brown, one of his Divisional Commanders, attended the interment.

Memorials that give the sad story of men lost of this campaign, and numerous others, may be seen in local churches including St Nichola's, Chawton.



A memorial to Captain Lemprière was erected by his family in the church of St Mary, Newton Valence near Alton.

There is also a memorial on Clarence Esplanade in Southsea that is worthy of a visit. Made of Portland Stone, the obelisk is inscribed with the battles of the war. It is suggested that it originally bore a further inscription, now lost, which read:-

*'Erected in memory of those brave soldiers and sailors who during the late war with Russia died of their wounds and are buried in*

## Local History: The Crimean War – Some Local Connections

*this garrison. Erected by the Debating Society of Portsmouth and by their fellow townsmen. June 10th 1857'.*

The involvement of Florence Nightingale in nursing the sick and wounded of the Crimea at Scutari is well known, initially through newspaper reports of her work. On her return to England she lived in London and devoted herself to the training of nurses. Her mention here relates to the fact that her family, who lived in Derbyshire, had a winter retreat, Embley House, near Romsey in Hampshire.

As an adult she made a number of visits to the county, the last in the summer of 1891 at the age of 71, before the house was sold in 1896. Following her death in August 1910 she was buried in the nearby churchyard of St Margaret's, Wellow. Large crowds gathered in the narrow lanes and her coffin was carried to the grave by six Sergeants from the Guards.

It is also well known that the Victoria Cross was introduced during the Crimean War and made of bronze from Russian guns captured in the Crimea. It seems that they were in fact of Chinese origin, but 111 of the new medals were awarded in the conflict. On Friday, 26 June 1857 Queen Victoria presented the first Victoria Crosses at a parade in Hyde Park and of the 62 recipients that day, five from the Royal Navy were subsequently buried in Portsmouth - but that is another story.

