

THE TALE OF A TUNIC

IT'S THE STORIES BEHIND THE EXHIBITS WHICH MAKE A MUSEUM MORE THAN JUST A COLLECTION OF INANIMATE OBJECTS. IN THIS SERIES CURATOR JANE DAVIES REVEALS THE OFTEN REMARKABLE, FREQUENTLY POIGNANT, OCCASIONALLY FUNNY, AND ALWAYS FASCINATING TALES BEHIND THE OBJECTS BEHIND THE GLASS.

Late last year, the Museum was fortunate to be given a World War 1 battledress tunic in exceptionally good condition. To find such a jacket still in such a state today is very unusual, but what is even more remarkable is the story of the man who wore it.

The tunic carries the badges of rank and insignia of a Company Quarter Master Sergeant in the East Lancashire Regiment, and it was worn by a soldier called George Haffner.

George Christian Alexander Haffner was a member of the 5th Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment. George joined the Territorial Army in the early years of the 20th Century. He was a committed part-time soldier, dividing his time between the army and his father's butcher's shop in Burnley.

When in 1914 the call came to go to war, he had no hesitation in reporting for duty. He served with distinction in Gallipoli, France and Belgium, being wounded three times. Each time he fought back to full fitness and returned to his battalion. George was a good soldier, eventually reaching the rank of Company Quartermaster Sergeant (CQMS). He was awarded both the Military Medal and the Belgium Croix de Guerre in 1918 for 'conspicuous good service and devotion to duty'.

This could have been the story of countless numbers of men who served with honour during World War 1. But George had one distinctive difference. His father (also named George) had emigrated from Germany to England in 1879.

UNJUST WAVE

Although Mr Haffner Senior became a British subject in 1896, he and his family unjustly but inevitably became victims of the wave of anti-German feeling which swept the country during WW1.

At the time, such was the strength of feeling against Germany and all things German that it reached to and affected even the highest in the land. King George V was forced to change his family's surname from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor. His cousin Prince Louis of Battenberg, who had served in the Royal Navy since he was 14 years old, had to resign as First Sea Lord despite Anglicising his family name to Mountbatten. It was an injustice which became the lifetime driving force of his son, who was to eventually become Lord Mountbatten of Burma, WW2 hero, First Sea Lord and Chief of



George Haffner in WWI, wearing the tunic and carrying the cane which are now in the Museum.

Defence Staff in his own right, uncle of the Duke of Edinburgh and favourite guide and confidant of the Prince of Wales before he was murdered by the IRA in 1979.

RESENTMENT

The people of Lancashire, and Burnley, were no exceptions to the national mood. By 1915, Mr Haffner Senior, who had long served as a Burnley Town Councillor, felt unable to continue and resigned his seat. It wasn't enough. Resentment towards him and his family still festered. It culminated with local children throwing stones and bricks at his shop window.

Enough was enough. George Haffner had not one but three sons on active service for King and country. To prove his devotion to the British cause, the next time his sons were on leave, he asked them to serve in his shop dressed in full uniform. Alongside George were his two brothers, Billy and Harry, also serving in the British Army with the Middlesex Regiment.

It was a display of support for the British war effort which shamed the people of Burnley

and prevented the animosity turning into something more violent.

Fortunately all three brothers survived the First World War.

George returned safely to East Lancashire and spent the rest of his working life in the shop which he had helped to save.

In 1918 he married Miss Amy Wilkinson and they settled down to married life. Eventually they moved to Cliviger where he named their home "Kriithia," the fabled village on the Gallipoli Peninsula which was the longed-for objective, never achieved, of many bloody battles.

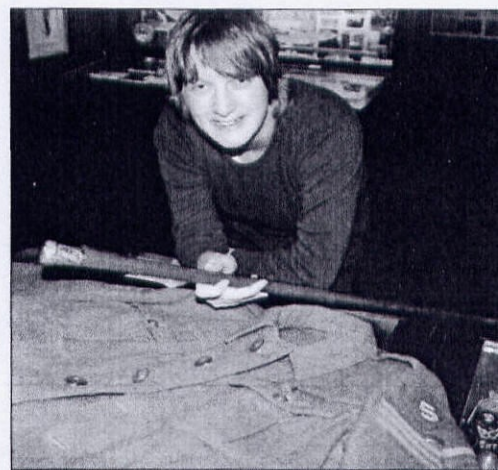
George was rightly proud of his war service, taking part in many reunions and remembrance events. While attending one of them, in London, his overnight bag was stolen while travelling on the Underground. When it was recovered, his precious medals had been stolen, but he had replacements made and these are now on display in the Towneley Hall Museum in Burnley.

More of the Haffner family went on to serve in the British Army during WW2.

And to this day, Haffner's Pork Butchers remains a well respected business in Burnley.

George died in the fullness of his years, in 1979, at the grand age of 92.

His proudly-preserved battledress tunic and cane were presented to the Museum by his son Raymond, and they can now be seen as part of the World War I display in the Somme Room.



Jane Davies in the Museum with George's tunic and cane.