THE LEGACY OF THE BORDER REGIMENT IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
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Jules Wooding

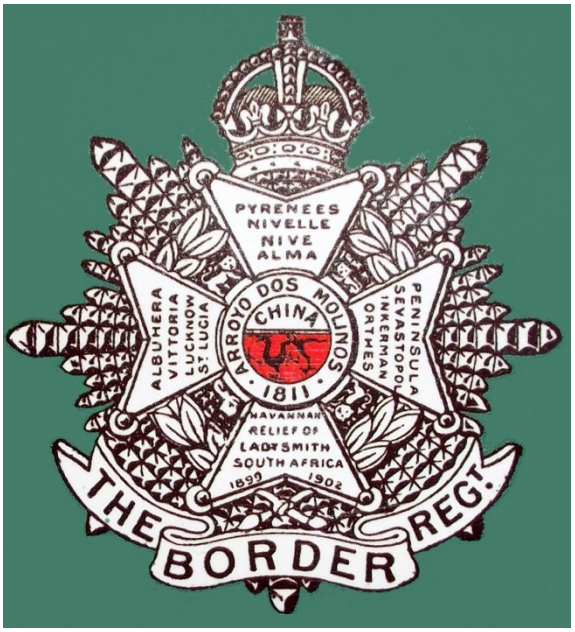
Jules Wooding, from Cumbria's Museum of Military Life, began by talking about collections of military history; the museum at Carlisle Castle is one of over 130 military museums in the UK. Many of the collections, including the collection in Carlisle, were started in the 1930s, not long after the First World War. That war was unusual in that, as it progressed, it became the first war to affect almost everyone in the country; many soldiers either didn't return or were badly injured.

Items collected on the battle field had often been passed on through the soldier's families, from the 18th-century onwards. In the 1930s The Border Regiment in Carlisle started gathering these military artefacts together, not only from WW1 but also from earlier wars. Eventually there were sufficient to start the museum. One of the reasons for a museum was so that officers could inform new soldiers about the heritage of their regiment. All items were logged in as they were acquired, and the log book still survives today.

One of the more unusual items in the collection is a stuffed beaver which was left by a Canadian Regiment. Not only was the castle museum used by the army, members of the general public were also free to see the exhibits. It was thought that they would then feel comfortable within the regimental family.

In 1939 the commander of The Border Regiment at Carlisle Castle received a telegram informing him that war had broken out. This telegram is now an exhibit. There were four battalions which made up The Border Regiment and at this time it was one of the few to be at full strength. Some of the soldiers were in France at the time of the evacuation at Dunkirk but not all of them made it back to England: some were captured.

As the war progressed, the battalions were sometimes split and added to other forces. Some of them were sent to the desert in 1941 with the mission of carrying out surprise attacks on the enemy before ending up in Tobruk. Some soldiers collected soil and sand samples from areas where they fought. These have a significant effect of connecting them with other people and examples can be still viewed in the museum.



After being relieved from North Africa, the 5th Battalion returned to England and were put on airfield guarding duty. They were then retrained to fight using Churchill tanks before being renamed the 110th Border Regiment Royal Armour Corps. Two years later they were disbanded and the men were divided into other fighting groups. The 2nd Battalion

spent most of the war in the Far East and Northern India. Whilst the war progressed, soldiers would constantly send items back to Carlisle Castle for inclusion in the museum.

Following the first Covid lock-down, the museum received many items which had belonged to Border Regiment soldiers. People were spending more time at home and found themselves sorting out possessions. One item received was George MacDonald Fraser's bush hat. George served in Burma and his book *Quartered Safe Out Here* gives an account of his time there. He later became a journalist and author of the Flashman novels. The hat was brought in by his family.

Another item recently received was a Japanese Officer's sword which was captured in Burma on 2 March 1945. It was presented by Lt Colonel C R M Spedding. Also on display is an empty champagne bottle with a note inside it: "if found please return to Carlisle Castle, Cumberland". The bottle had arrived after the war with a note saying that it had been washed up on the shore of the Isle of Wight on 10 June 1944. The wine had been consumed during the D–Day landings and the bottle tossed into the sea. Objects like the sword and the bottle all go towards helping the museum tell its story.

Jules ended her most informative talk by showing pictures of the museum displays, encouraging more of us to visit and expand our knowledge. The museum had just been awarded £250,000 by the Heritage Lottery; this will allow the staff to go through all the stored items and ensure they are catalogued.

Tricia Jagger