



Dear LDTA Member,

Staffordshire Regiment Museum is seemingly unremarkable from the outside. However, inside it's full of an extensive collection of exhibits related to the Regiment and its military engagements through history. Lichfield District Tourism Association Members received a warm welcome when we visited on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November. On arrival at the museum a hot cup of tea or coffee was waiting for us, just the thing to enjoy while we caught up with news and networked. Ex police officer Steve Hemming, now Assistant Curator at the museum, gave an inspiring talk about the history of the Staffordshire Regiment, formed in 1705, and as well as an insight into the day to day running of the visitor attraction. Although the Staffordshire Regiment was disbanded in 2008, with the help of around 60 volunteers its legacy lives on. The intention of the museum is not to glorify war but to keep the history of the Regiment alive.

As our group was quite large, Steve split members into two groups. Volunteers Eric and Lynne were on call to lend a hand, so while some LDTA members got to hold and inspect deactivated weapons, others toured the museum and visited the WW1 trench. We had the opportunity to handle several types of weapon, we were shocked at how heavy they were and also learnt about the aspects and specifications of each. It was the sight of a bayonet that caused the most unease in our group. Steve explained that the length of this weapon enabled it to reach the enemy on horseback.

The museum's vast collection includes diaries, letters, uniforms, medals and outside, actual armoured vehicles. A lucky discovery was a Grenadier officer's Mitre cap dating from the 1750's, this was found in a rubbish skip and is now on display. A grim reminder of the 1879 Battle of Ulundi is a blood stained red tunic. The uniform belonged to Colour Sergeant Norton who suffered stab wounds but recovered from his injuries. Military uniforms at this time were dyed red for numerous reasons, as this dye was cheaper, worn in combat the bright colour enabled officers to see their troops through the smoke caused by gunfire. Unfortunately the enemy could also see them! Now red battle dress is retained only for ceremonial purposes.

We discovered to our delight and surprise that LDTA committee member Joanne Wilson was related to one of the five Victoria Cross winners featured at the museum. Samuel Wassall was a Private in the 80th Regiment of Foot. In 1879 at the Battle of Isandlwana, the British camp was attacked by the enemy, as Private Wassall retreated towards Buffalo River, he saw a comrade drowning. He rode to the bank, dismounted, leaving his horse on the Zulu side, rescued the man and dragged him across the river under a heavy shower of bullets saving his life.

The weather unsurprisingly was wet on the afternoon of our visit, this however added to the atmosphere when we went outside to view the WW1 trench system. For the benefit of wheelchair users the trench has been widened, in reality the width was as only as wide as a stretcher.

William Coltman VC, from Burton on Trent, trained as an infantry man with the 6th North Staffordshire Regiment. Due to his Christian beliefs, he would not kill another person so became a stretcher bearer in the Great War. Lance Corporal Coltman would bravely crawl into no-man's land to treat both British and German injured men. During operations at Mannequin Hill, France in 1918,

over a 48 hour period without a break, William courageously rescued casualties, helped the injured and collected documents from those who died, so their family would know what fate had befallen them. For these heroics he was awarded the Victoria Cross. In his honour the trench has been named 'The Coltman Trench'.

LDTA members were given a brief idea of the terrible conditions soldiers experienced during the First World War. Lynne our knowledgeable guide explained how trenches were dug incorporating corners to limit the blast of an explosion. Firing steps were integrated to accommodate soldiers varying heights, troops generally slept in dugouts made into the trench walls, the Coltman trench has been designed to show these and many other features .

Although trench life was muddy, uncomfortable and hellish, trench warfare is epitomised by 60,000 casualties British troops suffered on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

There is so much to see and do for all ages at the Staffordshire Regiment Museum it really is worth a



visit. Look out for one of the regular discovery days and special events. For more information call 01543 434394 [www.staffordshireregimentmuseum.com](http://www.staffordshireregimentmuseum.com)

Many thanks to Steve and the team for an enjoyable visit.

Rachael

**Tourism Administrator**

Visit Lichfield