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Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

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19 July 2021

Dear Board Members,

**WRITTEN REPRESENTATION FOR THE REVIEW OF THE DURHAM LIGHT INFANTRY (DLI) COLLECTION AND ARCHIVE: 28 JULY 2021**

I regret that I am unable to be present at your special meeting on 28 July 2021 but thank you for the opportunity to submit this written representation to convey the views of the Trustees of The Regimental and Chattels Charity of The Former Durham Light Infantry.

Established in 1922, the Charity has legal title to the Regimental Collection and the Regimental Archive currently on loan to Durham County Council. The Regiment, past<sup>1</sup> and present<sup>2</sup>, is extremely grateful to Durham County Council for their exceptional commitment to the professional conservation, curation and advocacy of the Collection since 1967.

Few, if any, Regiments have been as fortunate as us to enjoy such strong connections with the County from which they recruit. The Durham Light Infantry was in existence for 210 years (1758 to 1968) and served quite literally around the world. There are many in the North East with proud family connections to the Regiment. As a senior Durham Light Infantryman, General Sir Nigel Poett, so pertinently remarked some 60 years ago, 'It is the people of County Durham who have made the story of The Durham Light Infantry.' The Council's Joint Administration review to 'ensure that the proud and significant military history of County Durham is recognised' is thus further evidence, if any were needed, of the esteem felt by the people of County Durham for their Regiment.

The Charity's principal charitable object is the advancement of education for the public benefit by holding and facilitating the display of the Regimental Collection. In so doing we are able to 'uphold the traditions of the former Durham Light Infantry and of perpetuating its deeds.'

<sup>1</sup> The Durham Light Infantry until 1968 and then The Light Infantry until 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The Rifles since 2007.

## **History of the Charity with the DLI Museum and Art Gallery since 2015**

It was with mixed emotions that the Trustees learnt in 2015 that the DLI Museum and Art Gallery was to close. However, the Trustees well understood that the increasing running costs, the financial pressures on the Council and, it has to be said, the falling footfall at the Museum all contributed to the decision. We have been extremely grateful for the arrangements for the Object Collection's care and safekeeping that were put in place at Sevenhills and at the Palace Green Library.

It is worth noting that the Regimental Archive had already been relocated in 1998 because the storage conditions in the Museum building were neither suitable nor particularly accessible. We are very grateful that the Archive, since that time, has been cared for by the Council to the high standards demanded by national Archive Service Accreditation. Furthermore, the Archive is now widely accessible and accessed online daily by a worldwide audience.

## **Views of the move of the DLI Collection from Sevenhills and Archive from County Hall to the History Centre**

In 2019, the Trustees were delighted to learn of – and to contribute to – the plans for the Durham History Centre. It is a rightfully ambitious and exciting project which, in co-locating five important historical collections within the County, will provide a conveniently located 'one stop shop' for all those who wish to explore both personal and County heritage. It is understood that it will not be possible for a permanent space to be allocated to the DLI Collection but we view this positively since exhibitions need to be refreshed from time to time in order to attract visitors and that the display of medals, badges and weapons in endless serried ranks can be a barrier to interpretation. Better the selection of representative artefacts to convey themes and messages and to commemorate significant anniversaries, such as the Battle of Inkerman (1854), as and when exhibition space permits.

## **What you would want to achieve for the DLI Collection and/or Archive?**

We want to ensure that the DLI's unique Collection and Archive will continue to be professionally preserved by dedicated experts for future generations and, through permanent, temporary, outreach and digital programmes, be accessible to a very wide audience. The emerging plans for the exhibitions and activities at the Durham History Centre as well as the outreach activities further afield look to do just that. They will really bring the collection to life and – critically – to many more people. Notably, in our increasingly digital world, the Centre's plans to take the many dimensions of the County's story beyond the traditional confines of a 'museum' will surely enrich the lives of people across the County and the North East.

The Durham History Centre will reunite the DLI Collection and Archives. We hope that there will be scope to combine with the other collections at the Centre to deliver more coherent historical context. We recognise that the DLI is but one seam in the County's overall story. Durham Light Infantrymen were certainly soldiers but they also came from - and returned to - civilian life. It is therefore entirely appropriate to tell our story in that wider context.

Mount Oswald Manor House is an attractive site. It is in a convenient location with good public transport links which will likely draw in some of those visiting the Durham World Heritage Site, some visitors 'signposted' by the superb DLI Collection Gallery on Palace Green.

## **What would you like to achieve for the former DLI Museum and Art Gallery at Aykley Heads?**

We are unable to comment on the current state and condition of the building at Aykley Heads but we assume that a building of over 50 years is not without its maintenance issues. However, it is clear that the tranquil grounds around the former Museum and Art Gallery have become a place for some to reflect and to remember. As far as the Regiment is concerned, the Inkerman Stone, commemorating the Regiment's VC winners and which had been unveiled in 2001 within the grounds, was the last significant item to be relocated - to Palace Green in 2018. There is therefore little, other than fond memories of the Museum, that is of Regimental interest at Aykley Heads.

Although we gather more formally to honour the Regiment in September each year, and at other times, at the DLI Chapel (since 1923) in the Cathedral and in the Memorial Garden (since 1950), the Trustees hope that the grounds at Aykley Heads may remain a place to reflect and remember, perhaps commemorating those who have been lost to COVID-19.

## **What would you like to see the Council take into account in making its recommendations?**

The Charity's principal charitable object is the advancement of education for the public benefit by holding and facilitating the display of the Regimental Collection. In so doing we are able to 'uphold the traditions of the former Durham Light Infantry and of perpetuating its deeds.'

The Trustees' objectives are to ensure that:

- The DLI Collection continues to be professionally conserved for the benefit of all for the future
- Visitors will be able to access the Collection and Archive physically (including outreach programmes) as well as digitally

There is no doubt that the DLI Collection and Archive should be in Durham but the Trustees do not feel tied to Aykley Heads. We recognise the many innovative opportunities that the Durham History Centre presents.

## **Concluding Comments**

The Regiment is extremely grateful to Durham County Council for their exceptional commitment to the professional conservation, curation and advocacy of the Collection since 1967. Few, if any, Regiments have been as fortunate as us to enjoy such strong connections with the County from which they recruit.

Finally, we wish to emphasise our view that the DLI is but one seam in the County's overall story. Durham Light Infantrymen were certainly soldiers but they also came from - and returned to - civilian life. It is therefore entirely appropriate to tell our story alongside the other Collections that are managed by Durham County Council.

We stand ready to assist the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as and when they may require.

'FAITHFUL'

Ted Shields