

Bones, buttons and a Livery Company

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How do they link up to the Worshipful Company of Pewterers?

The bones were discovered, in March 2011, by birdwatchers in the sand-dunes of Northern Holland.

They also found, with the bones, some metal buttons, buttons made of pewter.

Whose were the bones?

It turned out that the body found in the sand was that of a 200-year-old Coldstream Guards soldier. The buttons he had worn on his tunic provided the clue to his identity.

That he had been a member of the Coldstream Guards became apparent from the regiment's distinctive star and cross, which was just visible on one of them. At the same time, the faint words "Coven Garden", indicated that the buttons had been made in Covent Garden!



A preserved button

It was in 1799 that Russia and Britain invaded northern Holland. The operation was intended to topple the Batavian Republic and restore the House of Orange. The brevity of the campaign – the British Army had only been in the area for a day – helped the team date the soldier's remains. But it may never be clear what killed him. It seems that he had been buried in his uniform but it is not even clear whether this was a mass grave or one just for him.

The British armies had been under the command of Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany. Was it he who inspired the nursery rhyme? The campaign ended up where it began, so it is possible, though [Wikipedia](#) insists that there are several candidates and no evidence to 'fix' any of them.



One of the rescued buttons

*The Grand old Duke of York, he had 10,000 men,
He marched them up to the top of the hill,
And he marched them down again.
And when they were up they were up,
And when they were down they were down;
But when they were only halfway up, they were neither
up nor down.*

Anyway, originally there were, according to the Regimental Adjutant, Colonel Simon Vandeleur, two battalions of the Coldstream (or 2nd) Regiment of Foot Guards in 1799. Each battalion had about 1000 officers and soldiers.

The Coldstream Guards (then known as the 2nd Foot Guards) trace their ancestry back to 1650 and Cromwell's New Model Army, says Colonel Vandeleur. At the Restoration of Charles II, their commander, General Monck, was instrumental in re-establishing the Monarchy.

Unwilling to be known as the 2nd Foot Guards, they adopted the motto *Nulli Secundus* or 'Second-to-None'. They were later called the Coldstream Guards, because Coldstream was the town on the Scottish borders from which they had, in 1659, crossed to England on their long march to London, to restore order and set the conditions for the restoration of the Monarchy.

The Regiment is famous for having played a critical part in the defence of Hougoumont farm at the Battle of Waterloo, along with the 3rd Guards, now known as the Scots Guards.

Colonel Vandeleur explained to me that the buttons now used by the Guards are a light metal alloy, known as 'stay-bright'. Soldiers' capstars are, however, still made of brass, which achieves a much better shine. The advantage of pewter buttons then, said the Colonel, was that soldiers could easily melt them down, as and when supplies of musket balls were limited, and use them as ammunition for their Brown Bess muskets!

The bones of this unknown soldier, said Colonel Vandeleur, were handed over to the Guards at a ceremony in Holland, brought back to England, cremated and buried in the Memorial Garden at the Guards Chapel in London in a further small ceremony, in the presence of a bugler.

And, apart from the pewter of the buttons, what is the link to the Worshipful Company of Pewterers? Richard Boggis-Rolfe, a Past Master of the Company, was a Coldstreamer! "Is a Coldstreamer," insisted Colonel Vandeleur. "Once a Coldstreamer, *always* a Coldstreamer!"

The Scots Guards, by the way, should not be confused with the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards.



This Coldstreamer is wearing the Garter Star on a cross belt and buttons in twos

Alan Williams

The author would like to thank Past Master Richard Boggis-Rolfe, and Colonel Vandeleur, for their helpful comments on this article but takes complete responsibility for any errors remaining in the text!

- Note 1: The Worshipful Company's collection of pewter buttons comprises 5 odd buttons, purchased in 1988. They had been recovered from the wreck of HMS Invincible, lost in the Solent in February 1758.
- Note 2: With acknowledgment to the BBCNews website from which the images reproduced here were taken
- Note 3: The Guards Brigade (now Division) originally consisted of three Regiments of Foot Guards - Grenadier (1656), Coldstream (1650) and Scots Guards or 3rd Regiment of Foot Guards (1686). Today there are five Regiments, the Irish Guards being formed in 1900 and the Welsh Guards in 1915. The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards are affiliated to the Worshipful Company of Pewterers.

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