

The First Hertfordshire Light Horse Volunteer Tyg

By Stephen Vincent

Bishop's Stortford Museum has a large and impressive stoneware tyg – a three-handled mug that measures 18.5 cm in height and 16.5cm in diameter. It was made by Lambeth Doulton in 1874 and decorated with two inscribed horses and a stag in relief by their senior artist Hannah Bolton Barlow.

The tyg commemorates the First Herts Light Horse Volunteers and would have been a commissioned piece – unique and expensive. Hannah is known for her incised animal decoration work with very occasional animal relief work depictions, but this tyg displays both methods, which is rare since the decoration styles clash. Overall, it is a very special piece.



The tyg was donated to the museum in 1998 and was said to have been the property of the donor's Great Grandfather, Ralph Polley Franklin, a Bishop's Stortford ropemaker who worked for a short time in the 1870's as a commercial traveller based in West Ham, London. He passed it to his son John Barnard Franklin.

The First Hertfordshire Light Horse Volunteers were a Bishop's Stortford based volunteer cavalry unit formed in 1862, led and funded by a local maltster John Dobede Fairman. Volunteer forces were being formed around the country in response to an increased risk of a French invasion. By 1864 the unit was 98 strong and Fairman had barracks built for it on his lands at Silver Leys on the Hadham Road. The unit, although prestigious, was costly to upkeep so Fairman found himself in serious debt. In 1878 he fled the country just prior to one of his 53 creditors, Sworders Auctioneers, sued him for bankruptcy.

In May 1879 his property was sold in order to offset the debt, but the sum raised amounted to only a fraction of it. The Light Horse unit was wound down with its liability being funded by its members. Possibly the tyg was purchased by Ralph Franklin at that sale, following and commemorating the birth of his only son John in February that year.

Hannah Barlow, the tyg's decorator, was also of a local family. Her parents came from Little Hallingbury and moved to Little Hadham where Hannah was born in 1851. Moving then to Hatfield Broad Oak around 1860, her father, a Bank Manager, also ran a 250-acre farm. Following his death in 1866, the family moved to Bishop's Stortford on the Dunmow Road. They were a large close middle-class family with servants. Hannah attended the Art School at Lambeth taking up freelance work at Lambeth Doulton in 1870 and joining them as their first full-time female artist a year later. Her elder brother Arthur and two of her sisters Florence and Lucy soon followed her to Doultons. By 1880 the whole family had moved to Lambeth.

Perhaps John Fairman knew the Barlow family; maybe Hannah Barlow knew the cavalry unit that she was decorating the tyg for? Hopefully, Doultons got their bill paid! By 1901 John Fairman was again back in this country, living at Hove in Sussex. He died in 1907 – in Lambeth.

The tyg can be found in the Bishop's Stortford Museum.

The Bishop's Stortford Museum is your first choice for discovering the history of the town. With a mix of local history displays, holiday activities and themed walks and talks, we have something to offer the whole family. Admission to the museum is free and is open Monday –Friday 10am to 5pm and from 10am – 4pm on Saturday's.

Researched and written by Stephen Vincent.

Stephen is retired and has volunteered at the museum for five years, and worked for another museum prior to Bishop's Stortford. He has a lifelong interest in geology, archaeology and history and over the years has undertaken extensive fieldwork and associated research.

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