

EXPLORERS & COLLECTORS

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The Buffs



The Buffs

Royal East Kent Regiment

With origins dating back to 1572, The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) was one of the oldest regiments in the British army. Originally known as the 3rd Regiment of Foot, it was renamed after the creamy colour of the soldiers' buff uniform coats. Our display is of items loaned by the National Army Museum, London, which cares for the regiment's collection.

The Buffs and Canterbury

The Buffs became associated with East Kent in 1782, when the government decided to give each regiment a main county in which to recruit. The Colonel of the Regiment at the time lived at Maidstone and asked to be given Kent.

They were given the East District and added 'East Kent Regiment of Foot' to the list of their names. The connection with the County became even closer in 1873 when a depot was established in Canterbury at the infantry barracks on Military Road.



Uniforms of the Buffs, from a postcard in the collection of Canterbury Museums and Galleries



The Peninsular War

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In 1807, during the Napoleonic wars, the French army of Napoleon invaded Spain and Portugal. The next year, after an appeal for help from the Portuguese, the British Government sent an army that included the Buffs.

For the next six years the Buffs campaigned in Spain, Portugal and into France, fighting in battles such as Corunna, Talavera, Albuhera and Vittoria. They were sent to Canada in 1814 to take part in the war with the United States and returned to Europe too late to fight at Waterloo.

Tenor Side Drum

1795c

Unknown maker

Wood, calf skin

.....
Drummers of the Buffs would have carried drums like this one into battle during the Napoleonic Wars. These drums were particularly deep to produce a loud sound as drum signals were used to relay commands across noisy battlefields.

The badge of the Buffs had been a dragon since at least 1707 so it is odd that the drum should have a white horse badge on it. Drums were also used to attract a crowd during recruiting and as East Kent had been given to the regiment as its recruiting area in 1782 it may have been intended to increase the number of local men eager to join up.

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Donated to the National Army Museum, London, by the Trustees of the Buffs Regimental Trust, 2001
National Army Museum reference 2001.04-307

Albuhera relics

1811

Flint and lead

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Framed relics from the battlefield of Albuhera presented to the 1st Battalion of the Buffs by the Mayor of Albuhera in 1926.

The number of musket balls collected for this gift gives some idea of the thousands that must have been fired during the battle. The flint pieces were part of the musket firing mechanism and would strike a spark that fired the gunpowder and propelled the musket ball.

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National Army Museum reference 2001-04-71-1-B

Letter written in blood

1810

Photograph of original

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In November 1810, during the Peninsular War, Captain Joseph Fenwick was wounded in action with a French foraging party at Chamusca, Portugal. He had no ink with which to write a message so he wrote in his own blood: "I am shot through the body and

arm for God sake send me a surgeon English if possible. If I do not recover God Bless you all." Fenwick died of his wounds. In reporting his death the Duke of Wellington wrote: "he is lamented by all that had any knowledge of his gallantry."
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Image courtesy of the National Army Museum, London

India, 1828-45

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The Buffs were sent to India in 1828 and were based at Calcutta on garrison duty. In 1843 the ruler of the Mahratta state of Gwalior died without an heir. The other Mahratta princes and British Government approved a young boy as ruler, with a regent to advise him.

Gwalior's army plotted to remove the regent and replaced him with their own candidate. They refused to remove him and disband the army, which the British Government now regarded as a threat to the stability of the region. The Buffs were part of the 20,000-strong army sent to deal with this threat.

Mahratta flag in a case

Cloth, wood and glass

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The Mahratta (Maratha) Empire was the most powerful in India until conquered by the British in the early 19th century. Mahratta warriors continued to fight the British. At the Battle of Punnar on 29 December 1843, during the British invasion of Gwalior, Mahratta fighters attacked the British forces but were driven off by the Buffs. During the fighting the Mahratta flag was defended bravely by a young warrior, like Lieutenant Latham at Albuhera, until he was killed. The flag was carried by the Buffs as a trophy until 1875, when it was placed in this case at Fort William, Calcutta, India.
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Donated to the National Army Museum, London, by the Trustees of the Buffs Regimental Trust, 2001
National Army Museum reference (nn)

The Crimean War, 1854-56

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The Crimean war was fought over Russian aggression towards Turkey. Britain and France allied themselves with the Turks to prevent Russian expansion. A joint force invaded the Crimea in 1854 to capture the Russian naval base at Sebastopol.

The Buffs were transferred from the Mediterranean to the Crimea in 1855, having missed the famous Charge of the Light Brigade and the battles of Alma and Inkerman.

Replica Victoria Cross and original Crimean War medals of Private John Connors

1855

Metal, cloth ribbon
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During the Crimean War the Buffs took part in the siege of Sebastopol and were heavily involved in the assault on the largest of the city's defences, the fort known as the Redan. During the attack Private John Connors rescued a wounded officer under heavy fire. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery. The men of the Buffs gave him a specially made medal in admiration of his actions, inscribed: 'A token of admiration and esteem from his comrades to Pte J. Connors in recognition of his remarkable gallantry during the assault on the Redan Sept 8th 1855'.
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National Army Museum reference 2001.04-210

Replica Victoria Cross of Major Francis Maude

1855

Metal, cloth ribbon
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Major Maude was the commanding officer of the Buffs in the Crimea. He led the regiment in the attack on the Redan fort and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery. The Buffs and other attackers managed to break into the fort, but were driven out under heavy fire losing 32 killed and 106 wounded from an original strength of 260 men. Despite having held the fort the Russian withdrew from Sevastapol that night. The Buffs were the only British Regiment to enter the ruined city.
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Courtesy of the National Army Museum, London
National Army Museum reference 2001.04-251

Brigadier General Van Straubensee and Officers of The Buffs **about 1855**

Copy of photograph by Roger Fenton (1819-69)

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This photograph shows soldiers of the Buffs in the Crimea with a Brigade commander: from left, an Officer, Major Maude, a Sergeant Major, Brigadier-General Charles Thomas Van Straubensee (seated), a Corporal-Bugler and an Adjutant. Roger Fenton went to the Crimea as the first official war photographer. Cameras needed a long time to create a picture and he was only able to take posed group shots like this one, or landscapes. Despite the poor conditions he produced 350 photographs, which were published in the Illustrated London News.

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Image courtesy of the National Army Museum, London
National Army Museum reference 1964-12-151-6-14

Russian icon

Oil on wood panel

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Inscribed 'At the taking of Sebastopol, on the 9th September, 1855, this was found Enshrined on the Altar of a large Church', this religious painting was brought back to England by J. N. Sargent, an officer of the 95th rifle regiment, who transferred to the Buffs in 1860. In Russian Orthodox churches the nave is generally separated from the sanctuary by a screen wall of icons with double doors in the centre. Icons usually

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Donated to the National Army Museum, London,
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National Army Museum reference 2001.04-328



China, 1860

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In 1859 Britain and France wished to impose a trade treaty on China, which would open all of the country to Western merchants and legalise the

opium trade. When the Chinese refused to admit a delegation, and fired on the British fleet trying to sail up the Pei Ho River, a Franco-British army, which included the Buffs, was sent to impose the treaty by force.

Private John Moyse, the 3rd (East Kent, The Buffs) Regiment of Foot, refusing to kow-tow before the Tartar Mandarin Tsan-koo-lin-sin in 1860 about 1910

Photograph of a painting by William R Scott
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An Anglo French army invaded China in 1860 to enforce trade treaties on the Chinese Emperor. A landing was made at the Pei-Ho river and the Taku forts, which guarded the river mouth, were captured.

John Moyse was a Private in the Buffs, having been demoted from Sergeant for insubordination. He was captured by Tartar cavalry near the Taku forts on 12 August and after refusing to kow-tow (bow) to a Mandarin was executed. His defiant action was later immortalised by Sir Francis Hastings Doyle in his poem A Private of the Buffs.

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National Army Museum reference 2001.04-329-1

Red glazed vase with silver rim and stand

Chinese hard paste porcelain, silver
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After capturing the Taku forts the army moved on to Peking (Beijing), leaving the Buffs to garrison the forts. However, one officer of the Buffs, Colonel Mark Walker, was attached to the General's staff and went to Peking, where the Emperor's Summer Palace was looted and destroyed. Many beautiful items were lost, or destroyed, but some were auctioned and Colonel Walker bought this vase, and possibly the Arabic box also on display. The silver rim and stand were made in Calcutta in 1860.

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Donated to the National Army Museum, London,
by the Trustees of the Buffs Regimental Trust, 2001
National Army Museum reference 2002-10-8

Ornamental screen, taken from the Summer Palace in 1860

Brass, glass, wood, velvet

One of the items taken from the Summer Palace at Peking (Beijing) was this ornamental screen. Its use in the palace, other than as decoration, is unknown.

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National Army Museum reference 2001.04-1033

Dragon sculptures

Carved wood

These two carved wooden dragons were looted from the personal railway carriage of the dowager Empress of China during the Boxer Rebellion in Peking (Beijing) in 1900. It is not known how they came into the possession of the Buffs, as the regiment did not take part in what was known as the 3rd China War.

Donated to the National Army Museum, London,
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National Army Museum reference 2001.04-778-1 & 2

The Zulu War, 1879

In 1876 the Buffs were sent to South Africa and suffered a shipwreck on the way before settling down to garrison duties.

Britain was attempting to bring the various states of Southern Africa

together under British governance.

Local diplomats sent overly aggressive demands to the king of Zululand and ordered an invasion when they were refused. The Buffs formed part of one of the invasion columns.

Paternoster Bay, South Africa 1876

Photograph of watercolour by an unknown artist

The 2nd Battalion of the Buffs was sent to South Africa in 1876. They sailed from Dublin for Capetown in the St Lawrence. At 3am one morning the ship hit rocks in Paternoster Bay on the west coast of South Africa and began to sink. There were only four lifeboats and all the passengers, soldiers and baggage had to be rowed ashore. An officer found a horse and rode to Capetown, 100 miles away, to fetch help. Three days after the wreck he returned with rescue ships. The watercolour shows the camp of the Buffs on the beach.

Courtesy of the National Army Museum, London
National Army Museum reference 2001.04-364



On the knoll at the Battle of Inyezane 22nd January 1879, Lloyds Guns and the Buffs in Actin 1879

Photograph of watercolour by an unknown artist

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During the invasion of Zululand in 1879, the Buffs were in the right of three widely separated columns. They were attacked by Zulus but managed to beat off the attack and push on to their target, the missionary station at Eshowe. The central invasion column was wiped out at the Battle of Isandlwana and the Buffs were besieged at Eshowe. The Zulus did not attack but surrounded the station and the Buffs were not relieved for 67 days.

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Courtesy of the National Army Museum, London
National Army Museum reference 2001.04-365

The Second Boer War, 1899-1902

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Tension between the British Cape Colony and the Boer States of Transvaal and Orange Free State was aggravated when gold was discovered in the former in 1886. The number of foreign miners in the state soon outnumbered the Boers and rather than lose control the latter refused them the right to vote. Britain's desire to incorporate the states into a federation under British control, and demands for voting rights for the foreign miners, led eventually to war in 1899.

The Buffs were involved in several of the battles that led to the conquest of the Boer states, such as Paardeburg, and the guerrilla warfare that followed.

North West Frontier of India, 1895-97

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A battalion of the Buffs was involved in two actions on the unstable North West Frontier of India in the 1890s.

In 1895 the small state of Chitral was invaded by its neighbour, Jandal. A British fort in Chitral was besieged and a relief expedition was sent to restore order.

Another relief expedition was required in the region in 1897, when British troops at Malakand were attacked by Pashtun tribesmen. They were angry that their land had been split in two to provide a buffer zone between the British and Russian empires.

Cigar box commemorating the Relief of Chitral, 1895 and Indian Frontier Campaign, 1897

1898

Silver hallmarked London

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Chitral was a remote outpost on India's Northwest Frontier. In 1895 it was besieged by Pathan tribesmen. The Buffs and the rest of the relief force reached the fort after 26 days clambering over snow and ice of the Himalayas.

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Donated to the National Army Museum, London, by the Trustees of the Buffs Regimental Trust, 2001
National Army Museum reference 2001.04-1039

Replica Victoria Cross awarded to Corporal (later Sergeant) James Smith, 1st Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent Regiment)

1897

Metal, ribbon

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Corporal Smith won this Victoria Cross during the Mohmand Campaign, an expedition against the Northwest Frontier tribes, in September 1897. One of a group answering a call for volunteers, he followed two Royal Engineers officers to the village of Bilot, Mamund Valley, in an attempt to dislodge the enemy. In a night lit by thunderstorms, and despite being wounded, Smith continued to fight and held the position until the return of an officer who had gone for help.

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National Army Museum reference 2001.04-432-1





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