

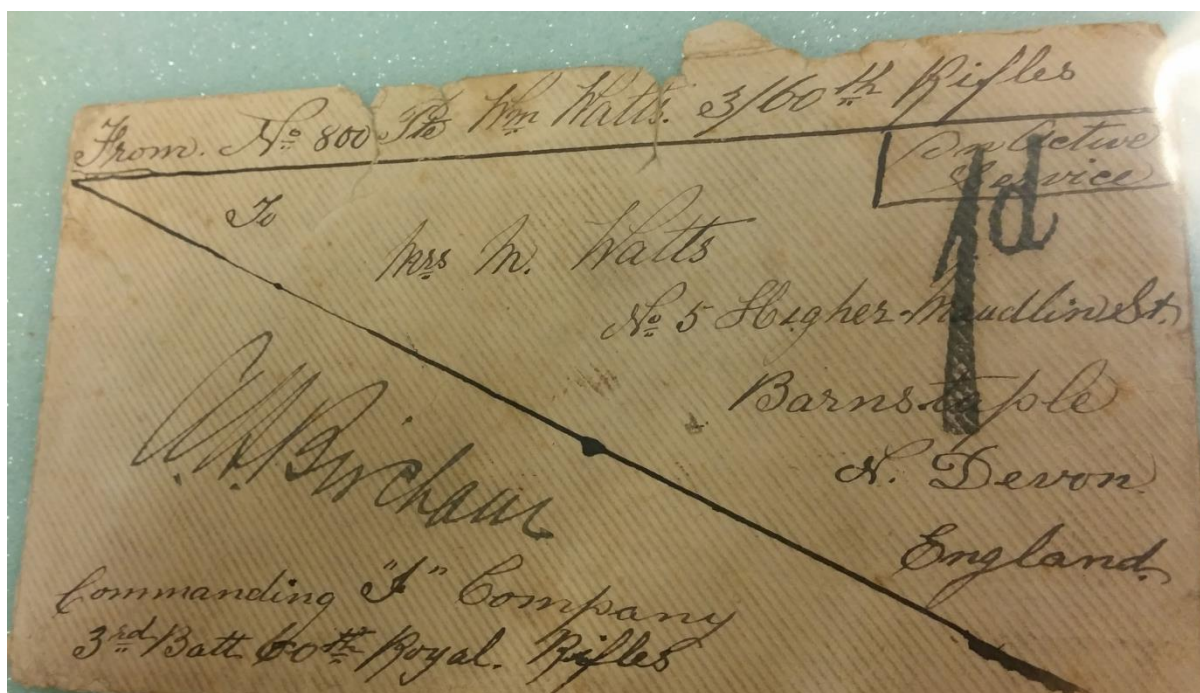
Minutes of BMS meeting 2.8.18

1. Welcome President Roger Bragger welcomed all to tonight's meeting
2. Apologies P Wilson and M Harrison.
3. Numbers Meal 15, drink 5 and ONS 1.
4. New members Pete Fisher, Martin Keyes and David Walters.[Your secretary will update the members' attendance record book in due course].
5. Library requests None.
6. Functions and visits Suvla barracks heritage weekend 8.9.18 – all welcome.
7. Research questions An Imperial Service medal - ? non-gazetted. Dave Seeney unable to locate a relevant entry - Membership suggested would need to view this medal. Also John Barker discussed 'eagle boats'[picture shown] and the U234 which, at the end of the war, was carrying enriched uranium
8. Committee point Secretary read out letter of thanks received from Roy Painter following his receipt of honorary BMS membership. Roger Bragger also congratulated Phil McDermott whose company [Worcester Medals] had been recently awarded the official UK medal supplier contract.
9. Committee point Miniconvention options and viability – membership questionnaire to be circulated [Secretary to action].
10. Committee point - Committee has two vacancies – President invited volunteers from the membership.
11. Committee point – The 2019 research trophy –President requested all entries to John Scott by December 2018 [Thank you].
12. Committee point - Programme amendments proposed. Drummond lecture if available [Simon Peale] to be on 1.11.18. If not available, Mick Atkinson's talk on 'Waterloo' to move to 1.11.18. Dave Seeney's talk on Easter uprising, [previously scheduled for 1.11.18] to move to AGM date of 4.4.19.
13. Committee point President's Cup For 2018 – to be held on the members' 'recent acquisitions' meeting 6.12.2018 – For 2019, to be held on the members' 'recent acquisitions' meeting 6.7.19.
14. Tonight's meeting 'Letters from South Africa 1879-1881 Pte Watts 3/60th Foot' by Paul Murray.
15. Next meeting 'A memorial plaque - the Worcestershire Regiment and Salonika' by Jeff Taylor.

'Letters from South Africa 1879-1881 Pte Watts 3/60th Foot' by Paul Murray.

Tonight's talk focused on the 13 or 14 letters written by Pte William Henry Watts of the 3/60th Foot [Kings Royal Rifle Corps] bought as a single auction purchase. The whereabouts of Private Watts' South Africa medal is unknown and all the accompanying photographs show another soldier's South Africa 1877-1879 medal.

There was one envelope in the purchase. The addressees were various family members, most frequently, his grandmother. Much of the content of the letters concerned general pleasantries and typical greetings you would expect to find in family correspondence. It is clear from the content and the handwriting quality that the author had been well educated. Paul's talk presented Pte Watts' military career with excerpts from these.



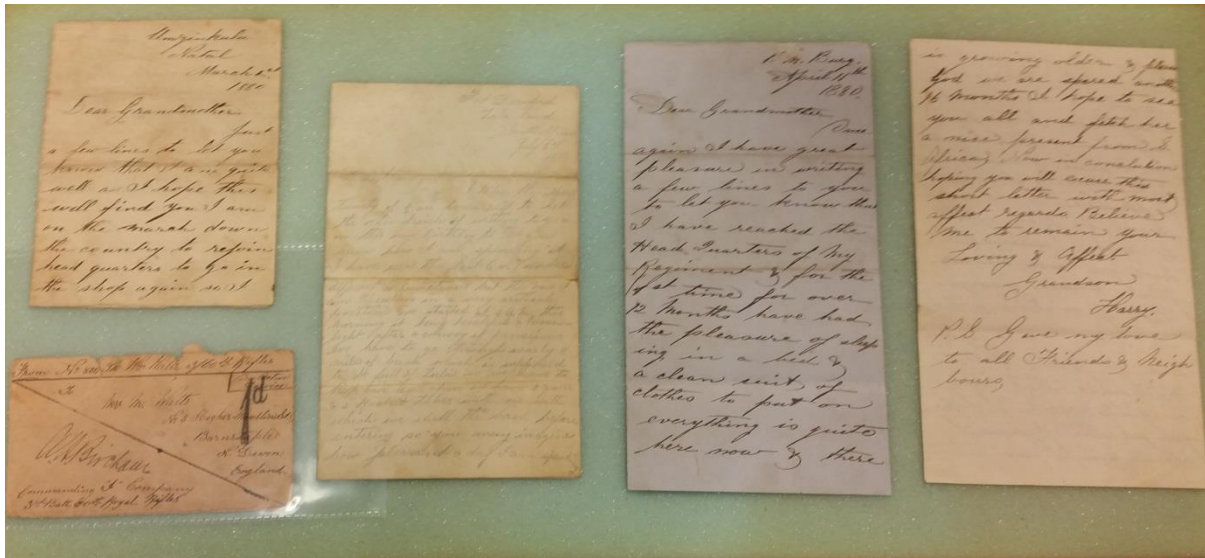
Above: The single envelope with the collection of Private Watts' letters.

The 15 July 1877 finds Pte Watts at Aldershot on a march with a 64lb pack – He was happy to be moved to Colchester by September 1877 a change he referred to as 'back to civilised society'!

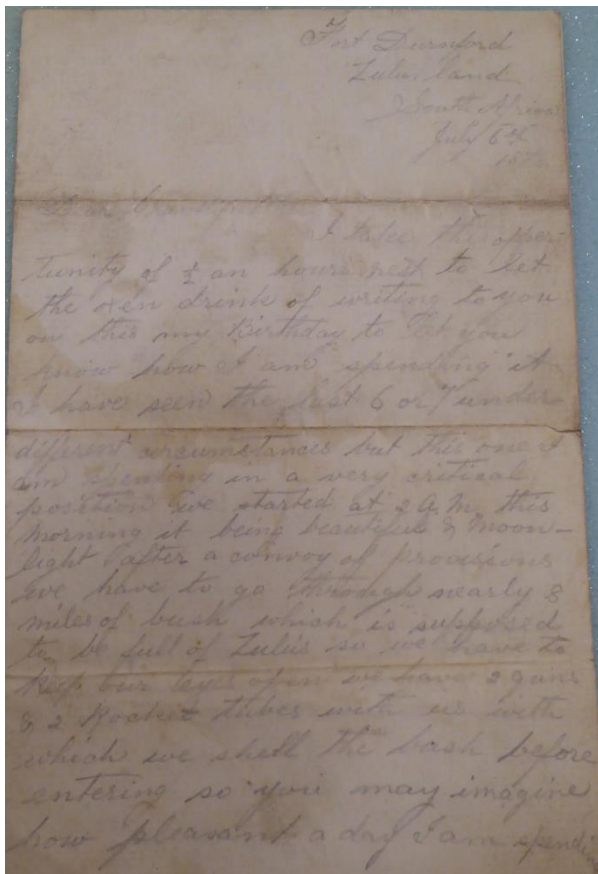
On 22.1.1879, the disaster of Isandlwana triggered in February 1879 an urgent transfer of reinforcements to the Cape. Private Watts reported that there were five different bands on the regiment's march to Colchester station.. Twenty three officers and 700 men boarded the 'Dublin Castle' arriving some four weeks later at Durban 20.3.1879.

The southern column of Chelmsford's forces had been besieged in Eshowe since 25.1.1879 – The 3/60th Foot crossed the Tugela river to join this column.

At Ginginlova, their force was fully entrenched and laagered. Some twelve thousand Zulus launched their attack through the dawn mist but were defeated with 800-1000 casualties – British casualties were very light with nine dead – however, this did include their commanding officer Colonel Northy.



Selection of letters written by Private Watts – one in pencil dated 6th July 1879 whilst the oxen drink is transcribed below.



‘Dear Grandmother, I take the opportunity of ½ an hour rest to let the oxen drink of writing to you on this my birthday to let you know how I am spending it. I have seen the last 6 or 7 under different circumstances but this one I am spending in a very critical position. We started at 2am this morning it being beautiful & moonlight after a convoy of provisions. We have to go through nearly 8 miles of bush which is supposed to be full of Zulus so we have to keep our eyes open. We have 2 guns and 2 rocket tubes with us with which to shell the bush before entering so you may imagine how pleasant a day I am spending’.

Private Watts refers to the general hardships being experienced as 'slavery' and reports the bad water as a cause of much illness amongst the troops. The Zulus were also starting grass fires. There are still floggings in the British army whilst on campaign.

Ulundi falls in July, 1879 and King Cetawayo is in hiding – by September 1879, the fighting against the Zulus is all over. Private Watts' letters contain a lot of narrative regarding the terrain, plant and insect life.

By 17.10.1879 the Regiment is based in Harding, Natal where they receive orders to go to Pondoland a march of 1000 miles – Watts describes this as 'better than Zululand'. He reports, on 9.2.1880, he is reading the newspapers printed some five weeks earlier in Great Britain and at Fort Napier, the great southern comet is visible in the night sky. Watts expresses hope to be transferred to Gibraltar or Malta in the Summer of 1880. In the meantime, he is occupied in a printer's shop at Fort Napier, Pietermaritzburg with production of the regimental newsletter called 'Celer at Audax'. ['Swift and Bold'].

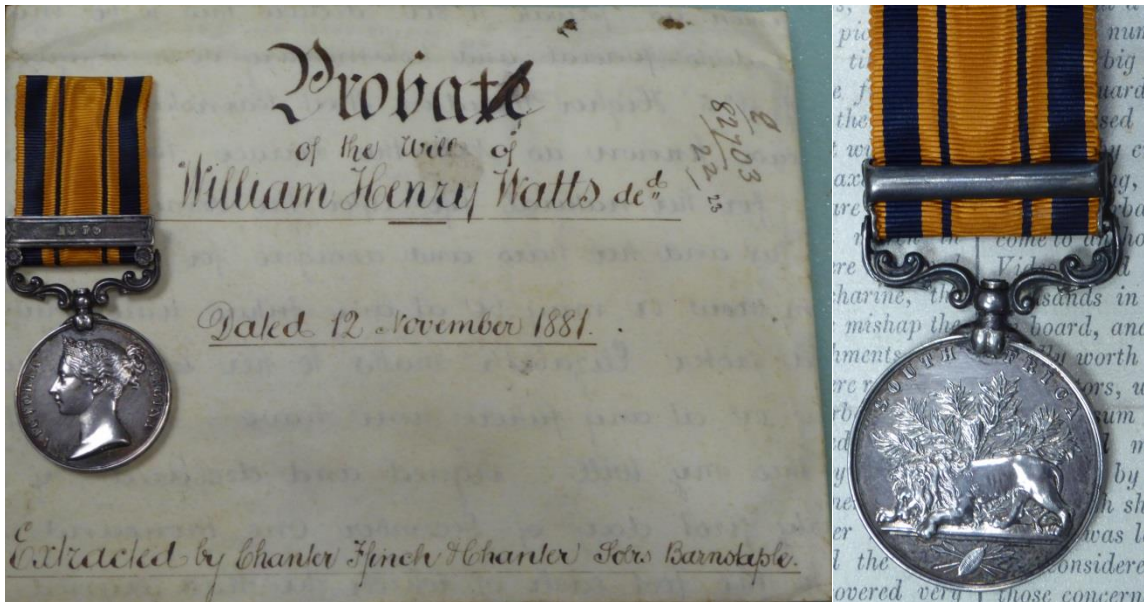


Above: Celer et Audax regimental magazine No 5 dated 1.10.1880

August 1880 brings wintery weather with snow, poor health for the soldiers because of a dysentery outbreak and unrest in Basutoland.

On 22.9.1880, he is moved to the Transvaal as part of the NFF [Natal Field Force] to tackle the Boer disturbance. One of his letters to his grandmother encloses his will. The regiment finds itself besieged at base with the increasing boldness of the Boers. They provide an escort of five companies with guns for the protection of the mail wagon and some field ambulances and are positioned for the defence of the River Ungogo crossing - The Boers duly attacked the Ingogo heights – all the Royal Artillery gunners were killed requiring the Rifles to man the guns – It was in this battle of the Ungogo River that Private Watts is killed on 8.2.1881 - British losses were 67 killed [9 drowned] with a similar number injured. Boer losses were 10 killed and 4 wounded.

Photographs of the grave site and modern memorial were shown along with his probate document.



Left : Probate document of Private W H Watts and South Africa medal bar 1879 [obverse].

Right: South Africa medal {reverse}.

In summary, Private W Watts 3/60th Foot was killed in action at the battle of Ungogo River, never returned to Great Britain or saw his South Africa campaign medal. This was a very stimulating presentation with some of the original letters and documents available for members to view.

C Davies.

BMS secretary. Typed 11-13.8.2018.