Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Guy Farage and Daniel Taylor

Role: Chairman (GF); Curator and Trustee (DT), The Kent and Sharpshooters Yeomanry Museum Trust

Museum: The Kent and Sharpshooters Yeomanry Museum

Location of interview: in the museum gallery (museum was closed). The museum is in the grounds of Hever Castle in Kent.

Date: 29/10/18

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

For readability the transcript has been made using 'intelligent' transcription (removing ums, ers etc).

[00:00:00]

GF: It's gradually grown, you know bit by bit; bits have been bolted on and other museums have been opened, we have one at Bexley Heath in the drill hall there.

TB: Oh right, so there is another museum, I didn't realise.

GF: Oh yes. Because the 265 Signals Regiment were badged by us. So they come under our our orbit really, and there's a lot of good kit over there. We got so much stuff that we can't really show it, all so it's spread between here, Croydon, there is a good museum in the drill Hall at Croydon. You heard about that.

TB: No.

GF: There's a good collection there.

[00:00:45]

GF: We have got far more than we can show. Although Hever built us this marvellous, marvellous building, it only represents part of the collection.

TB: Yes. So why is it divided up over those three sites?

GF: Because Croydon is the serving squadron's drill hall, right? That is the basically the home of our yeomanry at the moment and Bexleyheath because we had a signals squadron badged by us, a Royal Signals Squadron badged by us you see, and our Royal Yeomanry Squadron are Royal Armoured Corps rather than Royal Signals.

[recording level test, introductory small talk]

[00:03:12]

TB: Could you give your name and date of birth?

GF: Yes, my name is Guy Farage, XX-XXX 1935.

TB: Lovely, and can you tell us what your role has been in the museum.

GF: Yes, my role for the last few years has been chairman of the trustees and I finish my tour very shortly, after many, many years of involvement with the museum. I finish in November of this year and they are dining me out at the Cavalry Guards Club, the trustees, so it should be a good night (laughs).

TB: and how many years has it been?

GF: I joined Sharpshooters with Boris Mollo, our curator, in January 1956 and we were personal collectors of militaria, particularly miniatures and medals. And Boris of course, that was his business, and being a professional curator, and we both had this extraordinarily strong interest in it, along with some other officers of the regiment, like Robin Ludlow and various others, and we were really keen, and Boris was very keen for us to have our own museum, as was Robin Ludlow, and eventually we got another man who served in the Kent Yeomanry with us John Ward, the owner of Squerryes Court in Westerham, his mother let us have the butler's pantry in Squerryes Court for the museum because the space was very limited. The Squerryes Court was a very good venue for an annual parade, when everyone turned out and the armoured cars drove around the park and one of our squadron leaders flew his helicopter around, but it was a it was a good central point, and that

that was working, and then in 1961, we officially merged with the Kent Yeomanry, and they had a collection of artefacts, like the drum banners and paintings and some good things and they are all merged in with our collection. But there was hardly room to show them.

[00:05:36]

And then the Ward family wanted to expand their openings on the public side of the business and they asked us to find somewhere else; and we were a bit shocked, but at that stage Robin Ludlow who was press secretary at Buckingham Palace at one stage, Robin had just been given the job of finding a majordomo for Hever Castle. The Astors had sold it to Broadlands Properties, and Robin was a headhunter, before he went to Buckingham Palace, he was a head-hunter, and he was asked to find someone to run the affairs at Hever Castle for Broadlands properties and he thought 'I just got this guy a wonderful job at Hever. I'm sure he'll get us in there; and then we have the weight of the Lord Lieutenant behind us, who was our honorary Colonel and Governor of the bank of England and various other things. So we had a bit of goodwill behind us from high places, and Broadlands decided to take us on. And of course the premises they had to offer were up in the top of the castle tower, which we were delighted with, it was nice big oblong room, but the conditions up there for collections with the dampness and the cold winter and the bats, and various other, moths and thvarious things, it wasn't ideal, but we got around that and we fitted the place out, and of course the spiral staircase really being the killer.

[00:07:25]

And in spite of that Boris Mollo with his connections with the Ogilvy Trust and with the V and A, we seemed to get around some of these obstacles and get us the odd 500 pounds to buy a picture, or do something, so it didn't kill us, but it wasn't it wasn't helpful. And for years and years and years we lobbied the owners of Hever to build us a place or to give us more room in the castle. Then they appointed a fellow called Duncan Leslie, who is the director in charge of Hever, and he was very proud of the museum and the Guthrie family who owned Broadlands Estates, they were a very military family, a very patriotic family and they were really keen on the idea, but didn't really want to spend the money, but there were two members of the of the board; and I think one of them was Guthrie's son who wanted to play up entirely, or work up the the Tudor and Anne Boleyn side of the business rather than bringing in a more modern military side. So it did stick for quite a long time and the the intent was there and Duncan kept on saying 'oh they're coming down from Scarborough and I'm sure this year they will say will go full ahead for the museum'. That didn't happen and we were getting a little bit frustrated and I went off and had a look at Chiddingstone Castle, to see whether they might take us, I spoke to trustee there I knew; they they didn't want to spend any money and they weren't overly enthusiastic; they had a wonderful collection of Japanese artefacts and the their own things and they weren't really in it, you know. But anyway, then our new honorary Colonel at the time was Nicholas Soames. Now Sir Nicholas Soames and he has enormous influence in the area being the grandson of Winston Churchill, just down the road at Chartwell. So I thought well, he's got a got a bit of clout, and in those days he had a bit of clout because in those days he was wearing I think about 20 stone and very, very outspoken and punchy. So we thought well this is the final thrust, we will take him down to meet the Guthries at Hever, to discuss the possibility of this Museum.

[00:09:55]

Well, I don't know whether by then Duncan had talked the family into going ahead or not. But we had a sort of a buffet lunch in the castle, and Nick Soames didn't mince words. He said 'right, now come on, these boys, we are waiting here for you to give the go-ahead for this Museum. What's happening?' You know, he really put them on the spot, you know, so they said, 'Oh yes. yes it's all going ahead Sir'. So I think that precipitated it a little bit. But having got the go-ahead, Chris Sutton, who is a very very punchy businessman. He said some very big jobs with technology companies in America and he's raised the baits for breakfast basically, and he he got stuck in on the fundraising, you know. And they said well the building would have all the plans out for some time, and you're going to have to raise at least 200,000 for the kit out; they are going to put the building up, and they're going to pay electricity and do various things, and the security, but you will have to raise at least least 200,000 or Dan was saying this morning 300. I never knew was as much as that, just as well that I didn't or I'd probably still be running! But anyway, Chris Sutton absolutely dynamic, he pulled up the trustees, the old trustees like me by the bootlaces. We never never been hit so hard for years, you know, and we had to get cracking and he employed a professional fundraiser who had been working for the Arboretum and I believe that they raised four or five million there; and she was working with Cordingley, who was a member of the Cavalry Guards, you know General Cordingley, on raising the money for the Arboretum. And she had constant meetings and phone calls and emails andreally sending us almost mad, you know, here enthusiasm and the pressure, but golly it worked. If you kick people hard enough, they move! 'And of course, you know, as the as a trustee you will be in for at least a thousand pounds', you know, but anyway, it was all very good stuff it all worked and once they got on very quickly with the building, and and then Sutton and his committee and I was on that, fundraising, and we got on very quickly and in no time at all. I think we're up to 200,000 pounds. So it was a great success, and well worth it, you know.

[00:12:44]

Because we had - I don't know the other museums you meet and how much enthusiasm - they have probably all got enormous enthusiasm for their own project; but this goes back to 1794, the history of Kent and I was born in Kent, and we got an enormous loyalty for our old regiment or yeomanry and Boris and I and Robin Ludlow and all the others were really very enthusiastic on getting something done. And then the money came in, and the building went up.

TB: Yes, I see so when did the museum first open?

GF: Do you know, I don't know the date of that. Yes. Now, I don't know date of that, I was involved then, but I wasn't a trustee, I was on the committee.

TB: OK, I see; in the gestation of that idea, just explain to me; this was just before the regiments combined. So we're just talking about the yeomanry

GF: The Sharpshooters

TB: Sorry, the Sharpshooters Regiment. It had some stuff, which was presumably was in a cabinet somewhere or could you give a sense of what happened to it before there was a museum?

[00:14:16]

GF: Yes, I believe the Kent Yeomanry stuff, they had a few paintings and drum banners and things, and silver and they had that I think in a drill Hall in Maidstone or somewhere, but we had our stuff in the Drill Hall and we had all the silver in the armoury, and we've always have Sharpshooter silver

which is quite extensive, because you get an awful lot of cups given for comparatively minor things and you build up an awful lot of cups. And they had all these lovely models of the First and Second World War vehicles and various types of tanks, but they were all in the in the drill hall; that's where the museum was really, along with the genom(?)

[00:14:59]

TB: I see, and in the drill hall were these things used for anything, so for example the silver, did that come out?

GF: Yes. Oh, yes. It would have been take taken up to London for the regimental dinner in the back of a Land Rover; the guard, you know. Oh, yes, it was always cherished.

TB: and were there any other purposes the collection was put to, thinking about models, were they used for training in any way, or talks, or was the collection used, when it was at the drill hall, more for decoration?

GF: More for decoration at that stage. Yes. And the Sergeants Mess had a lot of stuff in there.

TB: So the so you're trying to find; why didn't you just leave it the drill hall, you could have carried on like that? What was the big motivation to move it into a more of a museumy setting, to open to the public?

GF: It was sheer ambition to raise the profile and go public and have a proper designated museum which people could visit and we could put more and more stuff in; I think it was purely to raise our profile rather than have it locked away in a drawer. Trouble is with the drill Hall, on drill night or the our weekend you get people serving there, you don't get the public in there. The only way to get the public in really is an open day or to have a place like, this which is open to the public.

[00:16:46]

TB: Yes. Yes. So why was it important to raise the profile at that time. I'm just wondering whether any kind of any kind of politics involved here, where it was - I know there have been a lot of re-organisations and things.

GF: No. No, there was no... we started a phase of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and all these things; but none of that political stuff - there was no motivation on that at all. It was all pride in the history of the Regiment or the Yeomanry, and really that was the side of it.

TB: So was there are feeling that the public didn't know about the extraodinary things that the regiment had done and it would be nice to exhibit that?

[00:17:28]

GF: Absolutely, there was a terrific, rich wealth of history here; I mean some of the stories around these medals, you know, with some Valerie, and Mullins was the government broker taking his battery off and escaping from the Germans and then going down onto the beach and getting taken off and it's incredible, Boys Own stories; our father's Boy's Own stories.

TB: Yes absolutely. Yes. And just for you, personally, you're own interest in the subject? You might think this is just damn obvious, because you have been the regiment, but still, can you unpack for me a little bit about how these things are so special to you and to people involved in the museum; is

it the Boy's Own excitement or are there other things that resonate for you particularly resonate for you, that you love about the collection?

GF: Yes. well, I've been an obsessive collector of antiques, particularly one form of antiques, portrait miniatures, you know, so I was always getting catalogues. So I was always very much a collector of artefacts; and this, you know the medals and the pictures and the silver, this all fitted in very well with my civvy job, which was collecting portrait miniatures. I had a big collection which I've sold down now for money for my retirement. And that was rather fortunate because of the ivory ban, the miniatures on Ivory have fallen in value, which is a bit extraordinary, but that's affected the whole market. They're the ones which are not on Ivory on vellum, they've gone down as well because the collectors are not collecting militaries anymore. But I was very always very involved from schoolboy days really in collecting artefacts and silver; like collecting things like the silver snuffboxes, I think when I was at school. My mother started me off on that, you know, so it fitted in very much with my only thoughts, you know, of studying the history of these antiques and collecting them.

[00:19:47]

TB: What was it about the miniature portraits that you loved. Did you look at the stories behind them?

GF: Oh, yes, yes the quality of the painting and the history of the sitter, if you've got it, is very very interesting.

TB: It is striking that in the display there is a lot of stories about people, isn't it? There's lovely little portraits of individuals.

GF: There is one portrait miniature in the collection which I bought many years ago from a dealer. He had bought it at an auction, a Sussex Yeoman or something, and then I looked at it. He showed me, I just bought that, 300 quid or something, you know, he said Sussex and I said 'no, no, no if you look at his tartan, it says Cobham, Cobham troop - Kent Yeomanry, that's us! I want that!' You know, and he said 'Oh God', and he is brigadier, a well-known brigadeer with a great record in Aden when Mad Mitch was there and he was commanding the garrison, but he but he was so pleased in found it really, you know, and it went straight in here. Boris said, 'will you put that in the museum' and I said of course I will, you know.

TB: So going back to those pre-Squerryes Court preparations, really, where did the money come from or did you need any money? I don't know, obviously you got the room for free but to display, that involves quite a lot of A skill but also a budget of some sort. Do you remember?

GF: How he financed it?

TB: Yes, how he financed it, or how you organised that.

GF: I don't. I mean I'd say that Boris and I weren't afraid of putting our hands in our pocket for anything that came up, you know, and so there was no problem from that side.

OK, that's wonderful, so you just did what you needed to do.

GF: Yes, yes.

TB: And what was the display like in Squerryes Court when it was first set up was it, I don't know, it was in any way similar to this?

[00:22:03]

GF: On a very much smaller scale. Of course it didn't have all the wonderful boards here with the histories, but we have one terrible setback at, and I was there at Squerryes Court at an open day, an open house day or something, and a fella called Cotton ,his dad had been at Villers-Bocage and got a medal there, and he had got a good group of medals, and he was quite well known, this fellow Cotton, and he had died, and the sun came to visit the museum and I show him round Squerryes Court. And I said 'what do you think?' and 'No' he said. 'No way are my dad's medals going in in here', he said. 'I don't reckon it', you know.

And we had been sweating blood to get this thing open and get it going and we thought that in this small way it was quite good. And we had of course the Ward of Squerryes Court who raised a troop of Kent Yeomanary at the beginning, the Sevenoaks troop, you know, so we had all that history behind this, and their enthusiasm. John of course, having served with us, was always very keen. And I was very, very upset and hurt by that; Bill Cotton his name was. Bill was a funny chap. After the battle Villers-Bocage it was raining and he was walking around the tanks with an umbrella, and he's wearing a iron cross, which he had got off a German you see, and some of our senior officers when they saw that photograph, they were not at all pleased about that. It went in the Regimetal Album and everything, you know. Bill Cotton, so he was a bit of a... but the son Richard, he ran a nursing home, a very nice man, we were very friendly, he came on all our, after Bill Cotton had died, the son Richard and his wife came on all our trips, all over the place. You know terrific supporters. But he didn't want the medals going in the museum, or his bits, but perhaps; he's not dead, not Richard perhaps it would be different now. He'd probably be very pleased to have this medal cabinet here to show people stuff. He appeared on the Antiques Roadshow years ago with it all, yes.

[00:24:42]

TB: So obviously you have all the regimental history here, were there debates or mixed feelings in the regiment about where it should go, what should happen to it, or did they just let you get on with it?

GF: Well there are always are an awful lot of people putting their three happenyworth in aren't there, always! But I don't think there was any any question about this. I think they're all a hundred percent behind this, particularly if Hever were going to put the building up for us. No I don't think there were any mixed thoughts about that. I think it was always full steam ahead.

TB: And at Squerryes Court, was there more discussion and debate about that?

GF: Only when only when the Wards said they needed the room for their visitors. John, Mum had died. She was absolutely autocratic, Mrs. Ward senior, and she was the one who let us go in there and she called it the Yeomanry Room, because her husband of course had served in the troop all those years before, and she was very keen, but Anthea who married John, she had started up trying to open the house to the public, and this Butler's Pantry where we were, she wanted that for the Women's Institute's teas on Wednesday, they would come in a coach and look over the house, there is a nice collection there. They're closed at the moment, but I think Henry will open it again, the son will open it again; and at least have their tea there, and she needed the space. So then Robin Ludlow came in with his new connection here; the man he had got the job for at Hever, Robert Pullin his name was, and he said can he get us in there, which was done very quickly.

TB: I see. And when you were deciding what to put in, I presume you couldn't put everything on display in Squerryes Court, so when you had to think about what types of things to have on display, how did you make that decision, or was it quite obvious what to put in it?

[00:27:13]

GF: I think it was yes. No, I do; see Boris was already in the business. He was really probably at National Army Museum by then, or something, and you know, he knew the business and he knew what was right to put in; and and of course the archive was building up all the time and new bits were coming in, and we were buying medals and some bits of silver and stuff.

TB: So you had medals, silver, photos I'm sure, models you mentioned?

GF: I don't think we had many models then, Dan would know, not he was with us then but he would know, but I was never into the modelling side. I'm a bit ignorant on that. I mean he is obviously the top model man. I think that's his business, he runs a company that makes models. But that's what we had there mainly.

TB: I'm going to ask a general question which you might think is a bit of an idiotic one, but indulge me. I'm not in a military family, I have got some great uncles who served in the First War, in the desert funnily enough, in Turkey, I think it was, and out in Afghanistan in the early days. But this way distant and I have no real understanding of, or connection to people in the military. So can you tell me; a museum like this or a collection like this, how is it important to - what does it do for people in that regiment? It is serving a purpose, can you tell me the purpose it serves for people that are in the regiment now and have served in it, when they come here, what are they getting out of it?

[00:29:01]

GF: I think they're getting great pride in their history. And I think they all truly think golly, you know, they have enormous pride in the history of the yeomanry and their regiment and it brings out the best in people from that point of view. And it's extremely interesting too, to just to see all the all the exhibits of the other side, of the Germans and relics we brought back, you know, the booty of war. You know, I think in touches most of the senses, particularly if you've had a military connection, but a great number of the people who come in and the foreigners who have no connection whatsoever, never heard of it before, show enormous interest and ask a lot of searching questions about the whole thing, not the moral or the political but about the artefacts and the makeup of it.

TB: Yes. And is there role for remembering as well. I'm just thinking about say the medal cabinet and the roll of honour that you got. That's unusual for museum because you have got a memorial aspect to it, too. So is this somewhere where people can come and reflect.

[00:30:23]

GF: That's a very important side of it. I mean, we go on all these battle field tours and everything and initially my wife said 'I'm worried about the glorification of war, that side of it.' And I say, you come with us, and on these trips to Alamein, places it like that, with people who serve there, this is a battlefield tour some years ago, with people who served their who lost their best friends by their side there. They're buried there in Alamein. And I said you will change that view. you know, it's a terribly important part of homage and remembrance of going to these places, and likewise this is a memorial, to all of that, isn't it? Hmm?

TB: Yes absolutely. I imagine people must come, perhaps family of those who served in the regiment who come and see it and take different things from it. Do they approach you and tell you and give you things? Has it generated more collecting compared to the early days when it was in a drill hall?

GF: yes, I think it has yes. Yes. I really do. We've had a sort of Antiques Roadshow type day trying to get anybody from Kent who was in the Kent Yeo to... the Sharpshooters were basically a London yeomanry, County of London yeomanry, until we moved down here, but it has brought interest and brought stuff in and people in, and that's very useful. But the point that it really is a memorial to what they did and who they were, that's an important side of it.

[00:32:30]

TB: Do you have any dealings with the regiment now, do they come here as part of their training?

GF: No, they use extensively the museum at the drill hall. So any recruits coming in, the chairman of the old comrades, Tim Rosen, or one of them, they take them around the artefacts that are on the show there, to initiate them and give them a bit of history and enthusiasm about the thing. So that's the museum there, they are not brought over here.

TB: I see. and likewise they have the working collection of silver plate for the dinner, so that's not here.

GF: We have got a few of the pieces here, but still, as I say even in the very earliest days the silver was taken up to London and put on the table for the dinner.

[00:33:29]

[The curator, Dan Taylor arrives, he has been showing an antique gun collector around the collection]

TB: Do you get experts like that who come round?

DT: Yes, he got in touch when we were doing the rebuild, because we needed some more interesting handling collection items and they had a machine gun out of a tank used in the second world war. And you find when you're putting on things like our War and Peace, not War and Peace, it's the Home Front weekend we put on here, you have that sort of thing out and it brings out the in a ten-year-old in everyone, they want to come over and fiddle with it, pull triggers and this sort of thing, so we've got in touch with him that way, and he keeps helping us out with odd bits and pieces; he has just helped me finding a bolt for a rifle, he is just useful to have in the background. He put me in touch with a firearms dealer when we needed a pistol deativated.

TB: I see, so a useful contact.

GF: The thing is, talking about the handling collection, in those early days we had never heard of a handling collection. You know, all these things these things have all come in haven't they, it has expanded the museum side of it has expanded enormously, which is good, getting young people involved.

TB: Yes, the display is lovely, you have got some immersive areas and the fox [cartoon character] I guess school trips must be quite an important part of this.

DT: It's a growing thing, the boxes you're resting on, we have sets of haversacks which have activities on so they explain how camouflage works or ones on signaling and other ones on map reading. So so little things to engage you and give you an idea of military problems.

TB: At the very beginning in the Squerryes Court days. What was it essentially set up by ex-officers or people that have served already or was anyone involved who was actually still working in the unit?

GF: No they were nearly all ex-people not not always officers, but most of them were, but that sort of cadre of people, like myself and Boris and Ludlow and then there were later a group of Kent Yeoman, like Hubert Alfrey(?) and a sergeant major, can't remember his name, but there are a few, they didn't come on the scene to later, but there were a few Kent Yeoman involved, but they were all ex-members of the Yeomanries. And at that stage we didn't ever have any serving members actively involved in setting things up.

[00:36:37]

TB: OK and how did you rope people in? I know you had regimental magazines, did you use that to find people to get involved or was it more friends of friends or meetings or how did that work?

GF: both I'd say it was general wasn't it? It was general. I mean, we always had a regimental newsletter and that always had something in about the museum and if you've got an interest to you've got any kit, you know, that sort of thing. They were kept aware of it. I think.

TB: How many people did you have working on it, on that committee in the early days?

GF: Well, it was very loosely formed committee. I mean I was there for the princess Alexandra's opening in 85. With Hubert Alfrey and Clive Aston and Boris.

DT: Still wartime generation then?

GF: Yes, and there weren't very many, half a dozen top whack. Oh, yes.

DT: Well, the previous version of the Museum was more limited in size and scope and it was a little bit difficult to access and so didn't need a lot of looking after, we could pretty much leave it to them to the castle to run, but here I'm in once a fortnight and we've got volunteers who are in, so it's a little bit more permanently engaged.

TB: right I am with you. Did you ever see the Squerryes Court exhibition?

DT: No.

TB: But you did see the one above the gatehouse [at Hever]?

DT: Yes.

TB: So how did it differ from this?

DT: It was a single large open space, frustratingly open to the beams in the ceiling so a little bit difficult to to keep bugs out.

TB: Yes. and bats and things I hear.

DT: Yes, perhaps I can find a copy of the sharp shooter magazine. There's a picture of it as it was, I can pull that out for you.

TB: So it was all glass cases and quite traditional I imagine

DT: Yes, yes wooden glass cases with lots of felt supporting medals and and not very good light, so you can't get an awful lot of light into a medieval castle.

GF: And very poor atmospheric conditions, the humidity and everything was poor. It survived so well really, considering that place.

[00:39:22]

TB: I'm going back to the Squerryes Court beginning, and perhaps this goes into when it got moved into the room at Hever, did you have any help from any networks or museum professionals? I think you did mention one of the trustees worked at the National Army Museum?

GF: Boris Mollo. He was he was involved all the way through, and he had enormous knowledge and expertise and he was a professional curator.

TB: so you didn't need any professional guidance.

GF: No, that was his day job.

DT: He has got a family of brothers who are awesome. John is an Oscar winning costume designer who worked on Waterloo. And so the family is very inculcated with that.

GF: John's drawings are being sold at Barnum's later in the month. The Darth Vader stuff. 80 to 100,000.

DT: Astonishing. And Andrew Mollo, he's a published author on on second world war uniforms. So yes, the whole family.

TB: Did you keep a record of numbers throughout the history at all, obviously now you do, can you tell us what the visitor numbers are here?

DT: Well they have been recorded at around a hundred thousand a year, but as it's just a simple clicker, we can't say how many times that's just me coming in and out when I'm fixing displays and how many times it's other people, but there seems to be a healthy throughput of people during the week.

GF: that's called a ballpark figure.

TB: Yes, and when it was above the gate house I assume it didn't have a clicker, so would be hard to say, and Squerryes Court too, it would be hard to say?

GF: From those days, yes.

TB: Did you ever have a visitor's book, or have you got a visitor's book?

DT: We used to have one didn't we? I can tell you where that is. We work on suggestions form box thing now, and so we get an idea of how many people get through.

TB: and you have got a feedback form on your computer as well which is a nice idea, is it used very much?

DT: It is. That's that's collected by Chris Sutton who's the the incoming chairman.

TB: Have you acted on any of the feedback you have got from that, or perhaps it is very recent?

[00:41:47]

DT: We try to, but the trouble is a lot of it is conflicting. So for example, the WW1 exhibit, the trench system there, it's got some very loud noises. And so you get about 5 percent of the responses say it's too loud and scary for small children, you should have more signs. So we put more signs up for that and then you get lots of people who say, the best bit is noises coming from the trenches, could you make them louder and more exciting! We have got two audiences.

TB: You were responsible for quite a bit of the design here, weren't you, is that right?

DT: Yes

TB: Were you influenced by other museums, I'm just about the trenches in the Imperial War Museum.

DT: We had a chap who was helping out to start with you you came up with a layout so that you had a progression around it. I took over when it came down to the detailing element, and how to put it together. We have a mentor from the Firepower Museum, Mark Smith, and I went and visited him and looked at his displays and so the panel's we've got up here are pinched from that, and they the particularly useful because they all liftoff and so that any space behind we can use it or we can adapt it. So where you've got models built into the wall there, we can put other slots into the wall if we get other models that we want to display. So all manner of things like that. So that's from Firepower.

[00:43:28]

DT: We have largely acted in against the current trends, because a lot of the museums currently are being, to my mind, over curated. You're not allowed to see the original because it's too precious, you get a photograph of something or it is behind lots and lots of glass and so you don't get a sense of what it is. And they like to have one item in a case. Where as we're trying to go for more for the effect you got in the 1970s and 80s when you went to the Imperial War Museum, where you had cabinets that were packed with things, and if you were lucky you came across an old soldier who was on duty displaying it and he would talk you through it, and that's a much more lively and living experience than then being given an artefact and a bit of text.

TB: I see, yes, so you are tying not to cram too much in

DT: No, I'm trying to cram things in and put more and more things in, so that each time you come back you will happen across a different artefact or it might have a different relevance. So on one occasion, you might come and you're interested in the weapons, and then as you get more involved, the badges and there are little esoteric changes in the badges. We have a display of each epoch of the badge, on the way through. And the nuances of camouflage change. And so trying to get more and more in there, so that there is too much to see in one visit. So hopefully you'll come back again.

TB: And has the visitor profile changed over the years? In a way this is quite unique because clearly you're inside another attraction, so it's clearly it's always going to be controlled by people who want to come to see Hever Castle although I'm sure people do come specifically for this.

DT: It is chiefly regimental people who would come to see the museum because they have got a particular interest, but now we are open to a wider group of people. One of the things we need to do is break down the demographic of what proportion are coming, because we have an elite group who are coming because they want to see Museum. Then we've got people who are interested in the military in general, and so this comes onto their radar. Then there are people who are interested in the military who have come to to Hever, and go, well. I'll let my wife wander around the Tudor bit.

So for example - she's interested in Anne Boleyn whereas I can go and have a look around the armoured cars because they look a bit of fun. And then you get at the less interested end, people who are just casually passing by and see something diverting. So getting an idea of what proportion is which would be handy.

[00:46:14]

TB: Well thank you so much, I think I've covered most things; a general question, compared to most regiments, this is an extraordinary place and unusual I imagine in terms of it's very publicly accessible, for a regimental museum. I've seen corners of county museums, to know, where you might get a section. So over the last of a 40 or 50 years is this very typical, that a charity has been set up and taken over the thing; do you get the sense of where you sit amongst other regimental museums?

[00:46:54]

DT: The way of running a regimental museum has changed its become more professionalised because that's the only way you can get funding, you get yourself on to accreditation schemes and that makes you able to apply for funds and so what museums there are do tend to go that way. the thing you're always fighting against is the amalgamations within the army because we are the Kent and Sharpshooter Yeomanry but the regiments we're now portraying, you've got the Royal signals as one of our serving squadrons, and the Royal Yeomanry, another, and they want to have their own identity. And so there is some friction trying to distance us, but fortunately we've got our fingers well hooked into them. So C Squadron know exactly who they belong to and 265 Squadron know exactly who the belong to.

TB: That's absolutely fascinating, so as organisations change there's issues over historical identity and they may draw upon a number of collections of a number of regiments if they are all amalgamated I guess. And there's a moment, you said when they came over and you combined your collections. Was that tricky?

GF: It was, in that the Kent Yeomanry had a sergeant major, what was his name, who was difficult. He didn't like the merger. He didn't want surrendering their artefacts to a joint museum. And I know that he was here one morning with Boris and myself and he was quite stroppy. I can't remember his name, but we got over that.

DT: There are some quite strong personalities, particularly once you reach sergeant level, you've got a passionate interest in your unit that you've served with for a number of years and surrendering that to people who don't know what they're talking about (which you will always perceive an outsider to be) it's hard. And I'm very fortunate in that I'm from the Green Jackets. And so I arrived here not as a sharpshooter, or as ia Kent Yeoman, but as a historian, and so I'd like to think that I've smoothed some of those areas where a friction has existed, but it's, still you do run across it you're aware that someone's holding back on donating something because they want it done in a particular way, and they want it to be on display no matter how innocuous you think the item is.

TB: Yes, I suppose these things are deeply symbolic of all kinds of things.

DT: The army spends a lot of time establishing esprit de corps, getting pride in your unit and making sure that you're trying to make your unit better than the neighbouring one. And then to put the two together means that that's dissipated. It can be perceived as a surrender of authority or interest.

[00:50:00]

TB: Yes, absolutely. And you were saying that there's a challenge now in terms of negotiating that with new regiments.

DT: Well going into the future the the Royal Yeomanry is establishing itself as a distinct entity. And the yeomanry is made up of an enormous number of geographical yeomanry units; some of them over time have gone off and been artillery or signals or other things. We've stayed close to the reconnaissance element of it. And it's that bit that we're possibly perceived as somewhat backward looking, wheras the Army wants to look forward, and have the Royal Yeomanry as the way it is going, and the Sharpshooters is possibly dragging them back a bit; but it depends on who is in charge. The army relies a lot on people who have gone up through the ranks; and the current head of the army, say he was with the Royal Green Jackets, the modern permutation of which is the rifles, which is an amalgamation of different sets of units; as he has influence the rifles are currently a very large proportion of the Infantry within the Army; brought about by that personality. Over time that will change as new requirements come in, but you have still got to reflect from the Rifles, their heritage back to them, the Royal Green Jackets, the King's Royal Rifle Corps, the Rifle Brigade, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and all the different units that have led to that point, because different people will be joining, and aware of that. So for example, if you join the Rifle Brigade, and you come from Oxford, you'll be aware that it's from the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and you'll likely be aware that they took part of the landings at Pegasus bridge on D-Day, and that they've got an illustrious bit of history there. So you don't lose that entirely, but it's a dissipation of you saying that the corporate look is now the Rifles.

TB: So, can you see a day where this collection actually joined some others and became a slightly bigger thing.

DT: No, we are entirely territorial in that respect, in that we will happily take on their collections and show them in subsidiary buildings.

GF: But the big move was forming ourselves into charitable trusts. I mean a chap worked with me who served in the war and was a real character, he was a sharpshooter originally, Terence Lehern(?); but he ended up with the Chindits and he fell out with the Sharpshooters because they had a sergeant major called Gus Fuller who was a particularly foul mouth nasty little man. But anyway, Terence was Jewish, which was, and he was a tiny chap, which was a bad start, and he went to a weekend camp in 1937, I think, somewhere we have got a photo of him, and he is very dark and he has got a dark beard and this Gus Fuller went up to him and said, ' you shaved this morning?' He said 'yes sergeant major'; he said you're a bloody liar, look at you.' He said 'you're on jankers tonight, peeling spuds or something, you know, when all the rest were going up the town on a Saturday night, you know. And he really, he was a very clever man, and he knew war was coming and that's why he volunteered for the TA.

DT: It gives you the chance to choose your unit.

GF: Yes, he joined the Sharpshooters and he didn't like that at all, the way it was treated as a bloke volunteering, and I'm sure he was a terribly meticulous man. He was commissioned actually at Quetta, after he came out of the Chindits. But anyway, he was an amazing chap, and he resented that sort of treatment, and went and joined the gunners and ended up on on an ak-ak thing on the Isle of Dogs.

DT: That's a curious thing because there a lots of stories about how egalitarian it was as a unit.

GF: And then of course he got very involved with the Burma Star Association having been in India and he was treasurer of the Guildford branch and had quite a bit of money. This is going back, he was in the same firm of stockbrokers as me. And he found out that as the Burma Star Association was declining in numbers, that they were closing down, and their monies were going to the MoD. That money became the property of the Ministry because they haven't formed themselves into a charitable trust. So that was the stage when we immediately got the Sharpshooters Museum and the Association to become charitable.

DT: And now whenever certain squadrons have anything of note, paintings or silver. They will sign it over to us in case that unit is suddenly disbanded. It doesn't then just disappear off into Whitehall.

TB: Right, so it is safe here in that respect.

GF: Yes, that's an important aspect of it, yes. So when you ask what will happen to this collection in the future .Well, it's in the trust.

TB: Do you have any worries about the future, or how it might change? Do you have any thoughts on that? Clearly you have just had a big transformation.

DT: I'm quite positive about the future. I do battlefield tours, been doing that since the 1980s. And in those days it was difficult to get together a coach of about 20 people then, and you saw a very few other parties; nowadays you go round Normandy for example, and and it's profuse with coaches that are stopping off at the Beauville Battery, Arromanche, or...

[00:56:38]

GF: And all the school children of course, will be taken over as part of their studies.

DT: Yes. It's, populist is possibly the wrong word, because it's a commemorative act, but there is an awful lot more interest in it, and people are much more interested in finding out about their grandfather than the previous generation was about finding out about what their father did. Because dad's old war stories a bit boring, but granddad, I've never heard this, I want to know why he got this odd little medal or why I have got a bit of paper that says he was wounded in a city(?), I've never heard of it.

TB: That's fascinating and I guess the whole 14 to 18 centenary must have been a big deal

DT: That's helped and researching family history is very much more interesting and popular than it used to be. So if you're a proactive museum, there's lots of ways you can take advantage of that interest, and certainly we're able to receive artefacts from quite a broad range of people who now appreciate that that odd box that granddad kept in the loft isn't just something to be chucked out. It ought to go somewhere, and where ought it to go, well his regiment was the Sharpshooters. We'll see what if there's a museum and we get lots of things that way.

[00:58:03]

TB: And going back to the accreditation, did that happen quite early, when the Museum was accredited.

GF: Well it has to be updated, the accreditation doesn't it?

DT: Yes, but when did it first become accredited, was it the same sort of time as became a trust?

GF: Yes. Yes, shortly after that I'd say. say.

TB: That was in the mid-80s, that it became a Trust?

GF: Yes

TB: Around that time it was a huge boom, so many independent museums were established then, so for us that's quite important because it might be museums such as yourselves needing to be accredited for funding or setting themselves up as charities for these reasons, so that's a really interesting point for me.

DT: I suppose that what we're saying about the trust's being formed, up until then gentleman's agreement had held quite well, but once the artefacts start going up in value, it changes people's perception and so maybe we ought to take a little bit more care of them, so that would be a perfect explanation of why regimental museums, in particular, would have started to need to do something more proactive to protect themselves.

[00:59:19]

TB:Well, that's interesting. Right, so things like medals and the commercial value of military memorabilia changed in that period would you say.

DT: Yes, there starts to be a lot more historical research. The research gets a lot better then; up until then people had written their stories, and almost every house will have a set of medals in, so that's not attractive to pinch of your petty thief or whatever; whereas if it's starting to be a little bit more unusual, and there's a particular metal group that's attractive then that's more sought-after, collector's will want it more, the collectors around in the 1980s start to have more disposable funds, and so they will actively search for particular groups, particular engagements. And Nazi memorabilia took off enormously then as well.

GF: At the moment the medals are a really very high market, a big bull market in medals at the moment.

TB: So that meant that you needed security in drill halls I guess, where this stuff was on display, but also in people's houses, suddenly they thought it would be terrible if this went, I'll donate it to a museum.

DT: Something that is worth £50, I'll put that on the insurance, but something worth 5,000 pounds. Hang on, I don't feel happy with that being under the mattress.

GF: The silver was always locked in the armoury of the drill Hall. Those were the days when the IRA were meant to be raiding drill halls for rifles and things, so we always had a good armoury.

TB: Yes, that's always very secure I guess (laughs). That's wonderful, thank you so much.

[01:01:15]

[Ends]