

**The Highlanders Museum (Queens Own Highlanders Collection)**  
**Fort George**

**An open letter to all ex Queens Own Highlanders**

Kelvin

When we last spoke on email on 4 December I told you that I felt the need to brief the Museum Board before entering into a public dialogue on either social media or the Association website over the issues you raise in the current petition.

The Board met yesterday; I was able to brief them fully on your petition and take soundings from them. The Board is responsible for running the museum and ensuring that the refurbished venue is sustainable and is a high class addition to the Highland region's visitor attractions. I am pleased to say that most of the comments from visitors in this the first season have been very complimentary although the Director, Mick Low, is the first to recognise that there are things that can be improved. I followed this by briefing the Trustees of the Queen's Own Highlanders Regimental Trust who are the custodians of the Queen's Own Highlanders Collection which owns the exhibits in the refurbished Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection).

The museum is now a limited company and no longer under the control of the Regiment, although the exhibits come from the Queen's Own Highlanders' Collection. The Highlanders Museum is now the only place where that fine history of the Queen's Own Highlanders is retained. The same museum also recognises the distinguished history of the Seaforth Highlanders, the Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, the Lovat Scouts and more recently, the Highlanders. I chair the Board and I am joined by two trustees, both ex Queens Own Highlanders (One ex Regular, one ex TA). The other members of the Board are local people chosen for their business expertise. John Bailey, another distinguished wearer of the Blue Hackle is the Company Secretary. We are all proud to have served in the Queen's Own Highlanders, a regiment widely recognised for its high standards, teamwork and deep friendships amongst all ranks.

The Trustees who are all ex Queen's Own Highlanders are equally as passionate about their old regiment and its heritage and would have preferred, like you and your petitioners that its name had continued beyond the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1994. Sadly the Trustees of the day were ordered to reflect the amalgamation with the Gordon Highlanders.

The Museum Board and Queen's Own Highlanders Trustees, on whose behalf I am writing, both strongly believe that you and the signatories of your petition need a full explanation of the **facts** as they relate to your original 10 points made on facebook to help explain where we are today. We have sought to answer the points that you made in the order that you made them but clearly Point 6, the **Name** of the museum, is the most important and emotive for us all. Hence my putting it first in our reply.

## **Point 6. Get the name Queens Own Highlanders Museum back**

Under the terms of the Army Board paper (ECAB / P (98)6 dated 25<sup>th</sup> June 1998) the Board directed that in future all Military Museums (150 in total then) would have to enter into a Customer Service Agreement (CSA) with their respective Arms Director in order to receive MoD funding. To qualify for MoD support the Museum needed to represent a unit in the Army Order of Battle which in our case was The Highlanders (Seaforth, Gordons & Camerons) and not the Queen's Own Highlanders who, like the Gordon Highlanders, ceased to exist as a Regular Army unit on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1994. Those museums not able to, or choosing not to, meet the Terms and Conditions would cease to be funded by the MoD. The Gordons Museum in Aberdeen opted for this in order to retain the name of the antecedent regiment.

Our Museum signed a CSA with the Director of Infantry (MoD) in 2000, long before any of the current trustees were involved, so we could qualify for future financial assistance, covering staff wages, utilities and office costs as well as infrastructure maintenance. The CSA was signed on behalf of The Queen's Own Highlanders Amalgamation Trust by the Honorary Curator and a trustee on August 30<sup>th</sup> 2000 with Director Infantry signing off the agreement on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2000. The Museum from that day was to be known as:

### **The Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection).**

Under this arrangement The Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection) will receive MoD funding until 2030. Currently 69 military museums qualify for this funding but this figure will reduce by 2015 to 52. This funding is worth some £40k per year to the museum.

The Trustees and Museum Board agree that more can be done to highlight the Queen's Own Highlanders Collection. To that end the internal signage, the revamped website, due to be released in January 2014, and all literature and press releases in relation to The Highlanders Museum will have (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection) after it. I suggest that it might be appropriate were you to design and produce a sign hanging from the ceiling of the museum entrance saying "Welcome to the Queens Own Highlanders Collection"

As a result of the petition, Major Maurice Gibson sought the latest advice from the MoD Heritage Branch and on 27 November this year got the following advice from Colonel Tony Figg:

*I advise the Trustees not to change the name of the museum, the Trust Deed, lease, or Internal Business Agreement in the current financial climate there is a very real danger of MOD funding and support being withdrawn in March 2017.*

It is a stark issue. If the Trustees agreed to change the museum's name to the Queens Own Highlanders Museum, the museum would probably lose all MoD funding from 2017 and without that funding the museum's future would be very uncertain and might have to close for good. The inevitable result would be that the Queen's Own Highlanders Collection would have to be broken up and dispersed.

## **Point 1: To get rid of the 2 function rooms and revert them to display rooms.**

The newly named Blue Hackle Rooms on the top floor of the museum is a multi-functional facility that allows part of the Queen's Own Highlanders Collection to be exhibited in a proper historical context with the Colours being displayed in a Dining

Room - still a normal procedure in both Officers and Sergeants Messes. These rooms can also be used for museum events and is available for hire. Visitors, mainly children, regularly use the Meeting Room tables to complete coursework or projects set by the museum's Education, Learning and Outreach Officer. The two rooms can be laid out as a Meeting Room, Reception Room or Dining Room. They can be set up in a number of different configurations as the customer desires and this flexibility is essential if the Museum is to attract new sources of income in order to be self sufficient and sustainable into the future.

**Point 2. Put all medals out on display as they were before upgrade.**

Whilst it was eye catching to see wall to wall medals in two small display rooms, to the majority of visitors it was just that, rows of medals on coloured ribbons. The need to highlight many sets has not gone away and that principle still exists and can be seen in most rooms on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor today. The Medal Room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor has many boxed sets on display and numerous others are displayed in the drawers of the central island. We have a duty to educate our visitors so they better understand what a specific medal or set of medals is about. The manner in which they are displayed and reported on today is an industry norm which the museum, as an accredited military visitor attraction, is expected to comply with.

**Point 3. Increase personal descriptions back into display cases.**

This is something the museum staff is already doing over the winter months but with the intention of making the displays less cluttered than they were before the upgrade so that they are easier to read and understand.

**Point 4. Address fact and figures which are seen as blunders**

If there are 'blunders' then it would be best for the people identifying them to bring them to the attention of the museum Director or the Curator so corrective action can be taken at once.

**Point 5. Get a few folk you know to address 3 & 4 above to reverse the blunders**

The museum has a growing number of committed regimental and civilian volunteers. We are always looking for others to join the ranks and help spread the word about the Queen's Own Highlanders Collection. Today's accredited museums have a duty to educate their visitors and The Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection) has every intention of delivering that requirement and the museum needs the help of ex Queens Own Highlanders to impart that knowledge.

**Point 7. Stop selling off the collection and only sell what other Military Museums sell in their shops.**

Under the terms of ECAB/P (98)6 dated 25<sup>th</sup> June 1998, the Army Board further directed that going forward all Military Museums must comply with Professional Museum Policies, achieve full museum accreditation, and then comply with all procedures laid down by the National Army Museum (NAM), and the relevant Regional organisations. In our case this was Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS).

This was necessary to achieve and maintain official accreditation for a period of 5 years. Without this accreditation a museum would have to close.

The Clements Report in 2005 reviewed military museums and clearly stated under the headings;

Page 8 - **Development.** *Disposal should be seen as an integrated part of collection development and management.*

Page 9 - **Museum Accreditation Scheme.** *Accreditation provides a benchmark for grant-making bodies, sponsors and donors wishing to support museums. Museums are set minimum standards for the care and documentation of collections, museum governance and management and the information services offered to their users. -*

Page 23 - **Collections.** *Museum should be encouraged to apply the principles of collections management set out by MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives). In particular more use should be made of significant items and the proportion of collections in store should be reduced. Museum should collaborate to increase the mobility of collections develop concepts of touring or satellite exhibitions.*

Page 24 - **Disposals.** *The inquiry report reinforced the principles of disposal of surplus items and recommended that disposals should be a part of a responsible collections management strategy. This would help ensure that money required caring for and maintaining the primary and reserve collection was well spent. Trustees should consult with Army Heritage, AMOT (Army Museum Trust), NAM (National Army Museum) and MGS who can provide pastoral services and advice and share best practice on disposal as appropriate.*

The Regimental Museum Trust Deed dated 20 July 1982 stated; *Trustees should review the Regimental Collection in light of the prevailing storage and conservation conditions that exist within the Museum.*

*Consideration should be given to;*

- 1. Storing the collection in other Museums.*
- 2. Identify items that are most worthy of retention.*
- 3. That Trustees may from time to time dispose of artefacts not required in such a manner as they see fit.*

The disposal procedure adopted in 2011/12 by the Highlanders Museum was totally in line with guidance provided by AMOT and MGS which was;

1. Identify items for disposal. (These were chosen by suitably qualified advisers and historians).
2. Offer items back to donor or immediate family where details were held in the Accession Book.
3. Offer items to other Museums and organisations. (The majority of Museums said “no thank you” as they faced similar space and financial constraints but The Highlanders ACF and Liverpool Scottish ACF battalions both took several old trophies to be used for Cadet Competitions).
4. Regimental Sale. Offer items at silent auction to Regimental Family.

In 1963 a Regimental sale of 421 x Seaforth and Cameron items was conducted following the 1961 amalgamation, which set the bench mark.

The Silent Auction of April 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 to sell 302 x lots of old Regimental Mess Ware, silver plate Trophies, silver plate / EPNS Cutlery and Pictures was

advertised on the Cabar Feidh website. There was a good response from the Regiment and only 92 lots (the vast majority were battered cutlery) didn't sell.

5. Sell 29 items at specialist auction (Bonham's Scottish Sale in August and December 2012).

6. Sell items of surplus clothing to specialist collectors.

7. Sell items by other means (eBay for example. Some of the silver plate trophies not sold at the silent auction on April 10<sup>th</sup> were sold here).

The sums raised from the above went into the Museum's Heritage Fund.

The Museum Shop. This department of the business does not sell items from the Queen's Own Highlanders Collection but it will stock and sell items formerly worn by members of the Regiment amongst other things Glengarries, Badges and Blue Hackles.

**Point 8. Get someone with knowledge on the history of the QOHldrs / Hldrs / Museum.**

The staff and volunteers are always looking to improve their knowledge and readily seek assistance. More volunteers with 'Regimental' knowledge, who can bring the displays to life and continue to pass down the stories that the displays and temporary exhibitions inform on are sought. Perhaps you or someone you know can volunteer?

**Point 9. Consult more and get Veterans involved in decisions about the Museum.**

The Regimental family were widely involved in the early stages of the refurbishment when the Museum Advisory Committee sat before the plans for room layout were finalised. They worked with the Curatorial Advisor and Design team. Regimental Volunteers are urgently sought and would be a vital part of the continued development of the Museum going forward.

**Point 10. Put a lot more on display.**

The reserve collection is in need of conservation. The intention is to rotate displays so that over a period of time the majority of the collection is shown and on display, telling the story of the Highland soldier over 230 years. The idea of simply putting more on display needs to be tempered with the educational message we are required to deliver. Filling display cases with masses of artefacts is known to detract from the visitor experience and send out a confusing message.

The upgrade is in keeping with 'Heritage Business Norms 2013' but the Museum Director, his staff and volunteers are in a position to change displays as they see fit to help tell the story of the Highland soldier. We have already held 2 temporary exhibitions, the first on the Brunei Rebellion in 1962 and the current exhibition highlighting the build up to World War 1.

The Museum Board, Staff, Volunteers and Queen's Own Highlanders Trustees are working hard to conform with all the principles and policies that the Museum Business World and MoD has laid down, so that we comply with current practices, so that we can continue to apply for grants and receive sponsorship which helps greatly to keep the name of the Regiment – **The Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection)** alive.

I would ask you and your petition supporters to study the facts so as to better understand the reasons why we are the Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection). The facts as laid out above are just that, facts. I hope they help to allay the concerns of the petitioners. Many former Seaforths, Camerons, Lovat Scouts, Queen's Own Highlanders and indeed Highlanders all have their story told in Fort George and all would be devastated were your continuing petitioning to cause the museum to close. Instead the museum needs your help and support if it is to continue to record all of our proud history.

Peter Grant Peterkin  
Ex Queens Own Highlander  
Chairman of the Queens Own Highlanders' Trustees  
Chairman of the Highlanders Museum Board of Management

13 December 2013