

The Highlanders Museum
(Queen's Own Highlanders Collection)

A number of ex-Queen's Own Highlanders handed in a petition at the Museum in Fort George on the 7th of February over its name and style of display. As a result, I need to again remind everyone of the real facts surrounding the museum and to do so in a direct and positive manner. The protesters were invited in to the museum after they had handed over their petition so that they could discuss their grievances but they declined the offer.

The discussion on the various social media sites has been marked by both ignorance of the key facts and a disappointing level of malicious comments and vindictiveness. Hence, my decision that I am not prepared to enter into this debate on social media.

So here are the facts:

- The name of the Museum was changed on 30 August 2000 to **The Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection)** in a Customer/Supplier Agreement (CSA) signed by Lt Col (Retd) AA Fairrie with HQ Infantry. The CSA was signed in order to guarantee:
 1. Supervision of the Museum, in line with other MoD supported military museums.
 2. Assistance in the provision of Museum Staff.
 3. Provision of Services for the Museum.A 50 year lease at a peppercorn rent on the museum building at Fort George was signed 8 July 2002. This funding from the MOD to help cover Museum costs, now amounts to some £40k per year. The funding will continue until 2030 if we comply with the CSA. A copy of the CSA can be seen below this document.
- The Gordon Highlanders opted to accept reduced MOD funding because they believed that their museum business in Aberdeen could be sustained by income from their retail outlets and from the hosting of corporate events. Such an option was never realistic at Fort George. The Gordon Museum, along with 16 other military museums get grant in aid (GIA) amounting to £20k per annum until 2017 when the funding will cease.
- The museum refurbishment project was carried out to modernise the museum building because it did not comply with modern day Health and Safety standards, lighting, humidity and heating requirements, any of which would have resulted in failure to retain accreditation, a criterion of the CSA, inevitably forcing the museum to close.
- £2.5m was raised from various funding agencies (Heritage Lottery Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Inverness Common Good Fund and the Scottish Government) with caveats that we had to recruit advisory committees to ensure compliance with the grant funding rules. Without this funding the museum would have been non-compliant and would have been closed. There is a very strong possibility that grant funders would reclaim grants given should any changes to the name be made as has happened in other funding cases with the same funders.
- The £2.5m raised to modernise the museum was spent entirely on the agreed refurbishment and left no money for other projects.
- The museum display comprises a main collection, which will be rotated regularly, a reserve collection, and a planned series of temporary exhibitions. The reserve collection was in a very poor condition because there was never enough space in the building to store and conserve the collection in a proper manner. The

Trustees, who own the collection, have a duty of care which includes dispersal of items surplus to requirements, which could not be properly cared for. Dispersals were made strictly in line with Museum Regulations governing disposals.

The Highlanders Museum Ltd, a company limited by guarantee, is governed by a board of directors responsible for the funding and financing of the museum to sustain both the business and the collection. MOD funding provides £40k towards staff salaries and in 2013 Historic Scotland provided a fixed sum from gate takings. The annual running costs of the museum currently are greater than this, leaving the business to find £30k just to break even. This deficit must be generated by the trading account which now includes the hire of the Blue Hackle Rooms for meetings, education events, receptions and dinners. Shop sales and research charges are other income streams. Without this additional commercial income and without MOD funding the Museum Board believe that the business would not be viable.

Therefore both the Museum Board and the Trustees are clear that the title of the museum cannot change and that any change would not be supported by those who have supported the other antecedent regiments (Seaforth, Camerons, Lovat Scouts and The Highlanders) whose Trusts and Associations have done much to support the refurbishment of the museum financially. In accordance with the CSA the correct name of the Museum is **The Highlanders Museum (Queen's Own Highlanders Collection)** and this is now featured in the title and all other publicity. This was unanimously reaffirmed by the Museum Board when they met on 13 February.

The museum is the only place where the service of thousands of 'Highlanders' is recorded. The petitioners must realise that their campaign will not alter the name of the museum, it will not change the visitor orientated style of layout of the Queens Own Highlanders' Collection, and that by continuing their protest they are threatening the long term sustainability of the museum by their action. Were the museum forced to close there would be no place where our service as Queens Own Highlanders would be recorded. Such an outcome would be a travesty and surely what none of us want.

The moment has come for us all to accept once and for all the decision made over 13 years ago about the name of the museum, to understand why this decision was taken and the benefits that it brings, and to do all that we can to support the museum as a leading visitor attraction in the Highlands and as the one place that publicises our service as Queens Own Highlanders.

Peter Grant Peterkin
Chairman
The Highlanders Museum Board
The Queens Own Highlanders' Trustees

14 February 2014