

## John Brown(e) – Trumpeter 17<sup>th</sup> Lancers

I always knew growing up that I had a relative who had been in the Charge of the Light Brigade. My Dad was keen on genealogy and had traced our family back to the late 1700's. However, it wasn't until sorting out my Mum's house after she moved in with us that my interest really took off. On this **piece of cardboard** I found 5 medals pinned to it under the name John Brown – 17<sup>th</sup> Lancer.

This is where my investigation began.

John Browne was born in Nottingham in December 1815, the son of William Browne himself a trumpeter with the 6<sup>th</sup> Dragoons. At the age of 21, John who had the trade of boot maker by then enlisted, and was soon made up from private to trumpeter.

John Browne was part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Lancers cavalry regiment in action during the Crimean War. During this campaign he was present at the battles of Alma, Inkerman and Balaclava and siege of Sebastopol. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1854, the day of the charge of the Light Brigade, he was the regimental trumpeter and sounded the charge for 'Death or Glory Boys' which was their 17<sup>th</sup> Lancers motto and can be seen inscribed on **John Browne's gravestone**.

John Browne escaped unhurt but lost the heel of his boot shot off by a musket ball and had his coat-tail cut off by a Cossack lance – a close shave you might say.

When John Browne was 81 he gave an interview in which he claimed *"On their return up the valley they found the Russian cavalry barred their way. Browne arrived close behind Lieutenant Gordon who had already been wounded by sabre cuts to the head. A Russian Colonel rode up to Gordon and was about to finish him off when Browne killed the Russian. Gordon then turned to Browne and shouted "Damn you man, why didn't you leave him to me!"*

This act together with rescuing 3 comrades contributed to John Browne being awarded the **French Legion of Honour**.

He went on to serve in the **Indian Mutiny** and eventually returned to England in 1861, where he was discharged from Chatham Invalid Depot being and I quote *"Unfit and worn out – the result of long service in various climates"* this after almost 25 years of service and at the ripe old age of 45! He was awarded a pension of a 1/-a day

On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1875 he attended a Fete and **Banquet in Commemoration of the Charge of the Light Brigade** at Alexandra Palace. Where there were poetry recitals, music, a 6 course meal and firework display in the survivors honour. **He also modelled for Lady Butler's picture "After the Charge"**

John Browne was married to Margaret Barrett and had four children by her – Alice, John, William (my Grandfather) and George.

In later life he was appointed Trumpeter to the Staffordshire Yeomanry eventually becoming Trumpet-Major up until 1880 when he retired to Lichfield, Staffordshire.

In June 1897 John Browne was present at Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations here, and at 83 was the oldest man present. When the veterans were assembled for the procession to pass and were then greeted by the Queen he became so ill from excitement that a local doctor was obliged to send him home at once, where he soon recovered.

However, on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1898 he died aged 84 and was buried in St Michaels Churchyard Lichfield with full military honours (**copy of death certificate**).

It is reputed that John Browne was buried in full uniform, with the silver bugle – and his dog.

Two stories come to light though regarding his 'lost' grave:

Firstly; in 1924 there had been a cobbled path going up from the main road to the church door. In winter though it became very slippery and a big haul for horses pulling the hearse and mourners up the hill. What brought matters to a head was that on one occasion when the road was icy a horse slipped and broke its leg – resulting in it being put down. The vicar at the time decided enough was enough and engaged a gang of men to prepare an alternative route through the cemetery – which meant levelling many of the gravestones. In this account John Browne is purported to now lie half on the green, half in the pathway.

Secondly; In 1976 a relative visited the church in an attempt to find the grave and met the old sexton there. The man told him in 1964 an old elm tree by the side of the churchyard came crashing down on the area where John Browne was buried. On clearing away the tree it was discovered it had broken all the

gravestones in its path, into little pieces and beyond repair, neither was it known who was now buried where.

In 1977, with the national press and the army involved, using mine-detecting equipment, the first location produced a reading. Apparently zinc brass-plated handles of the coffin will not register – could this now be the bugle?

John Browne's gravestone lies next to the war memorial near this spot.