

Another module shows a typical nursing ward scene from the 1950s. There are also displays tracing the history of surgery, anaesthesia, obstetrics and infectious diseases, complete with an iron lung from Prospect Park Hospital.

The museum receives no NHS funding and is run by a team of volunteers from the Berkshire Medical Heritage Centre with Mr David Goodwin, retired consultant surgeon, as Hon Curator. Access is signposted from the London Road car park. Admission is free, but donations very welcome! The museum is open to the public on the first and third Sundays of each month from 2.00pm to 4.30pm. Group visits at other times by arrangement. Tel 0118 9549371. [www.bmhc.org](http://www.bmhc.org)

*Dr Marshall Barr, Chairman, BMHC, July 2008*

#### EXHAM VINCENT



From his lodging at 48 London Street, Reading, Captain Vincent may have had occasion to reflect on his earlier military life and on his childhood in Limerick. His move to Reading had been prompted by a desire to be near to his sister, Anne Fosbery and to her family. In 1857, his nephew Thomas Fosbery had become the vicar at St. Giles, a post he held with some distinction until 1870. Situated in London Street, Vincent was only a short distance away from St. Giles vicarage.

The 1861 census places Captain Vincent in a household headed by a Rosetta Vickery, together with her two servants,

and it was here that he subsequently died in February 1863, aged eighty-one. The cause of his death was gangrene of the foot, a condition, which had deteriorated over the preceding three weeks. He was subsequently buried at the Reading cemetery, in close proximity to Anne who had passed away two years earlier.

Following his death, his collected journals detailing his army life between 1800-1813 passed to his nephew and executor, Rev. Thomas Fosbery, and thereafter to his son, William, himself a veteran of the Crimea.

Vincent's background had been privileged. His father, also unusually named Exham, had been the Mayor of Limerick in 1770, and was for a time the City's Postmaster. Aside from Vincent, his brother John also entered the army where he similarly rose to the rank of Captain. From initially obtaining a Commission in the Limerick City Militia, as an Ensign at the age of 15, Vincent subsequently joined the Dorsetshire 39<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot.

In 1801 he saw action at Abou Kir, in Egypt where he graphically described the harsh conditions of that campaign in his journal:

*"At 8 o'clock on the 23<sup>rd</sup> (March) the troops who had been employed at Marabout, marched to join General Coate, and though the distance was only five miles, the men were nearly exhausted before they arrived. Heavily laden and wading through scorching sand, without a drop to of water to allay the thirst it produced, many often fell down and were unable to proceed, nor was there any water to be found within 4 miles of the army. A small supply of dirty stuff was conveyed by camels, and measured to the men as if it were wine. We had many trials and dug to a considerable depth in search of water, but in vain. There was not a drop to be found".*

Although not explicitly referred to in his journal, the reference in his Will to his "Gold Egyptian medal" almost certainly refers to the Sultan of Turkey's Gold Medal for the Egyptian campaign of 1801, which was given to a number of Naval and Military officers for their service (1).

The journals portray Vincent as a keen observer of local customs with an eagerness to explore new places at every opportunity, whether it was the ancient ruins of Taormino in Sicily, during his posting there, or his ascent of Mount Etna on foot and by mule:

*"The circumference of this cone is reckoned ten miles at the base, and at the top, which encompasses the crater it is said to be three mile. The crater goes shelving down on every side, and forms a regular hollow like a vast amphitheatre. Volumes of smoke issue from many parts of it, the inside is encrusted with sulphur, and the surface is in many places so soft that there is a danger of sinking in.*



*Our feet made impressions as if we stood upon mortar, and this sulphurous substance was so hot, that I could not bear it in my hand. Fortunately the wind was in a direction which carried the vapour from us, and the smell was so powerful as to make my stomach quite sick. Near the centre of the crater is the great mouth of the volcano, it appeared like an enormous limekiln, but was so clouded with smoke, that it was impossible to see any considerable depth”.*

Captain Vincent's military postings took him variously from Egypt to Malta and Sicily to Gibraltar and thereafter to Spain. Like many under arms during the turbulent period of the Napoleonic Wars he travelled extensively. In August 1811 his regiment received orders to join Wellington's army in the Peninsular, and for the following two years Vincent's regiment pursued a game of cat and mouse with the French army, in and around the vicinity of Ciudad Rodrigo.

Characteristically Vincent found time to make some interesting side journeys to the palace of El Escorial, and to the Royal Palace at Aranjuez. The former is described as follows:

*“I this day went to the Palace of Escorial, which is considered by the natives as the pride of Spain in point of magnificence. Two or three officers accompanied me on this excursion. The distance was only six miles from where the army had halted, but the enemy being within a few hours march of the Escorial we found the place entirely deserted except by the old monks who had charge of the chapel, and these worthy gentlemen were absolutely rude to us on this occasion. Hitherto while we were in possession of the country they appeared always glad to see English visitors, but now they said it was impossible for us to get in. They made a hundred excuses for keys being lost & c. and at length it was only by threats we gained admittance. However we were soon so much gratified, that we pardoned them their insolence, and went cordially with them through the different parts of the palace”.*

It was with a degree of relief and happiness that he subsequently returned to England :- *“On the 15<sup>th</sup> we had the pleasure to discover the coast of England, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of June 1813, after an absence from England of 8 years, 2 months and 21 days, I landed at Portsmouth”.*

Vincent remained in the army until 1826 at which point he sold his commission as a Captain for £1800. In the same year he travelled to France, and this visit which required an early form of passport provides a

brief physical description of Vincent, which includes his height at 5ft 8", his brown hair, and grey eyes.

Following his retirement from the army it is likely that he spent the greater part of time in England with occasional visits to Ireland. In the 1841 census Vincent crops up in the company of his sister Anne, with two other relatives in Ramsgate, Kent, however he is unaccounted for ten years later.

A letter written by Thomas Fosbery's daughter, Georgiana, to her mother in 1861 from St Giles vicarage following a visit to Vincent observed "*Uncle Exham is much better. He is in low spirits (and) thinks himself worse than he really is. There is a night nurse to sit up with him although Mrs Cave thinks he is quite able to do without one. He eats and drinks very heartily and looks very well indeed*".

Footnotes: (1) This medal was issued in four different sizes dependent on the rank of the recipient. I am grateful to the Keep Museum in Bridport, Dorset, for kind permission to refer to extracts from Captain Vincent's journal.

My thanks go to Dan Darwish who sent this article to me, I hope it has inspired a few more of you to think about writing up your research.

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## Society News

### Mortimer Local History Group

We have felt that our members were not using the large archive, which we possess, to its full potential. We do find that sometimes members spend much time researching material, which is already available so we showed some of our older documents at our April Meeting. This certainly proved most successful and we hope will encourage more use of the archive.

Our AGM went off satisfactorily with membership maintained and finances in good order, As usual, the committee was re-elected unanimously! We are looking forward to the next meeting, which will be in a member's garden, weather permitting, when we will discuss our local gardens.

*June Woodward*