

Medal can shed light on history of British India

During 2019, Torquay Museum invited the community to choose objects for an exhibition celebrating 175 years since its foundation.

Some of the objects chosen have been a surprise and many have multiple stories they can illustrate.

One example is a medal, awarded to Gunner G. Brown for being in the Punjab during the Second Sikh War (1848-1849).

It was awarded to members of the British and Honourable East India Company armies.

The medal was chosen due to its links with the Gilbert family of Compton Castle.

The Gilberts have owned land in Devon since before 1066 and are notable particularly for their involvement in the colonisation of the Americas during the Elizabethan period.

The person who chose the item wrote this label for it: On horseback is Sir Walter Raleigh Gilbert (a direct descendant of Sir Humphrey Gilbert of Compton Castle) with Sikhs laying down their arms before

CLARE HOWE
Torquay Museum

him at the end of the second Sikh War of 1848. There is only one other British General who has been depicted on a war medal, the Duke of Wellington. The Gilbert family have served monarch and country in many different ways as MPs, generals, benefactors, sheriffs of Devon, Lieutenants of Devon, explorers and visionaries for 700 years. This label although accurate only tells part of the story.

Sir Walter Raleigh Gilbert was a Major General in the British East India Company.

He commanded a division in the Second Anglo-Sikh war in the Punjab, fought between the Sikh Empire and the British East India Company.

The Sikh Empire had gained ascendancy under Maharajah Ranjit Singh and its army trained on European lines.

A rebellion began when two British officials: Patrick Vans Agnew and Lieutenant Anderson,

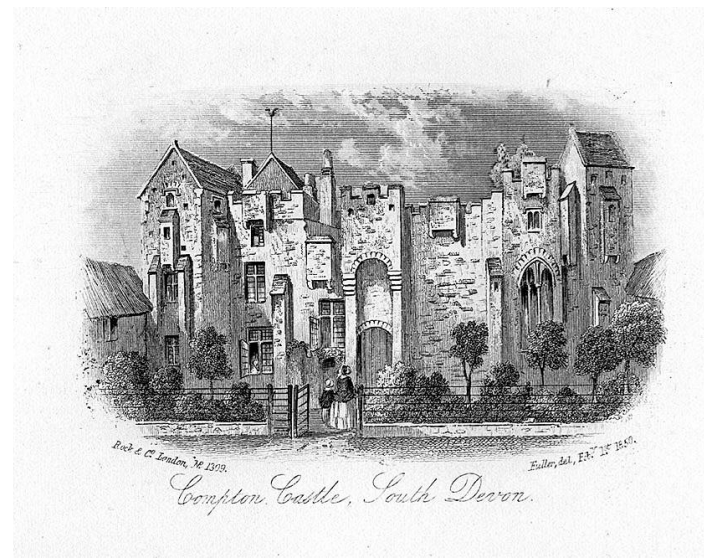


The Punjab Medal from 1849 (N775)

sent by the East India Company to remove the governor of Multan, Diwan Mulraj, were killed.

It didn't take long for Sikh troops to join the rebellion which soon became a war.

The Sikh Army were a match for the East India Company forces and due to heavy British losses at the Battle of Chillianwallah, Parliament recalled the



A print showing Compton Castle in 1850 (PR22583.45) Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM

Commander-in-Chief, Hugh Gough.

At the final battle the British East India Company prevailed and Sikh troops laid down their weapons to Sir Walter Raleigh Gilbert as depicted on the medal.

The war ended in 1849 with the annexation of the Punjab by the British East India Company, which also took possession of the Sikh treasury including the much prized Kohinoor diamond, now part of the British Crown Jewels.

The British respected the military skills of the Sikhs and

many were recruited to fight for the British Indian Army.

This trend continued and a large proportion of troops in the British Indian Army during the First and Second World Wars came from the Punjab.

So the medal is more than just an object linked to an historically important local family; it also sheds light on the history of the British in India.

This article was written with the assistance of Gurinder Singh Mann of the Sikh Museum Initiative.

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