

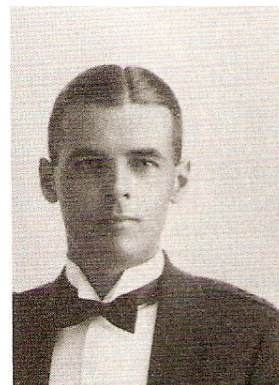
BRIGADIER BASIL BEDSMORE RACKHAM CBE MC AND BAR (1907-12)

The following is based on an obituary written by his nephew and included in the Spring 1994 OF Magazine :-

He was born on 20 November 1896 into the millers family of Wickham Market, Suffolk. He attended the College along with his 2 brothers. On leaving the College he joined 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment (the Duke of Cambridge's Own) and was appointed Lt in 1912.

During WW1 he served in the Royal Naval Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. That elite force of volunteers was largely the brainchild of Winston Churchill, then the First Lord of the Admiralty.

He was posted to Hawke Battalion and from October 1915 to January 1916 served with them in Gallipoli. At this time he was nicknamed "Baby"! It was in the appalling conditions of the trenches there, that he met and formed a close and binding friendship with AP Herbert; many years later they had a hilarious reunion together when AP Herbert appeared on Eamon Andrews "This is your Life".



On evacuation from this ill-fated expedition, the Royal Naval Division (63rd Division) took its place in the line on the Western Front in France. He served with the Hawke Battalion throughout that series of battles, known collectively as the First Battle of the Somme, during which the British losses were appalling and the heaviest incurred in any series of battles on the Western Front by any allied army. In the closing stages of the Somme from 11 to 21 November 1916, the Royal Naval Division particularly distinguished itself in the Ancre Battle, swiftly carrying three lines of trenches at the onset – the famous New Zealand leader, then Col Bernard Frayburg, winning his Victoria Cross there.

He was awarded his Military Cross on 26 March 1917 "For conspicuous gallantry in action. He showed marked ability in preparing gun positions and continually moved from position to position under heavy fire. On occasion he displayed great bravery in going round the whole line during an enemy counter attack."

He was awarded a Bar to his Military Cross on 26 July 1918 in the desperate fighting as the battle began to turn in the allied favour "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. Although suffering from the effects of gas, he remained at duty and materially assisted in keeping the battalion together. It was only when the enemy's advance had been held up and he was directly ordered to do so, that he went to hospital."

On the disbandment of the Royal Naval Division at the beginning of 1921, by which time he had become the Adjutant of Hawke Battalion, he received a regular commission in the Middlesex Regiment joining the 3rd Battalion in Germany in 1921. When this battalion was disbanded he joined 1st Battalion as Adjutant, which in 1927 (when he was appointed Captain) formed part of the Shanghai Defence Force. After a further tour at Mill Hill he returned to the 1st Battalion in Singapore in 1936, only to be recalled to the UK the following year on his appointment as Chief Instructor of Small Arms School, a position he retained until taking command of 1/7th Battalion in 1940.

He took command of the 1/7th Battalion, the Middlesex Regiment (known as the "Die-Hards") at Gondcourt in France on 1 March 1940. Affectionately nicknamed "Granny" in the few weeks that elapsed before the Battalion crossed into Belgium in defence of that country, he had won the hearts and trust of every soul in his Battalion by his deep understanding, natural leadership and sure knowledge. The Battalion fought continuously in the withdrawal and he was one of the last to leave Dunkirk. By the time he had re-formed his command in the early days of June, to his men in 1/7th Battalion he had become virtually a legend and to the survivors still remains so.

In November 1941 he was promoted to Colonel, as second in command of the support group of 9th Armoured Division. The 1/7th Middlesex who he had trained so well were posted to Scotland where they came under the command of 51st Highland Division and so it would remain for the rest of the war. Although the Scots were by no means enchanted to have a Sassenach Battalion in their midst, the mutual respect and friendship which

soon developed was due in no small measure due to his training and leadership. Thereafter for the remainder of the war he served as Brigade Commander in the UK disappointed that his age precluded him from taking part in the Normandy Landings.

On retiring in September 1945, he became Secretary to the Middlesex Territorial Association, coping magnificently with the many problems arising from a return to peace conditions and a great surge of calls on the resources of the Regimental Association that followed. For many years he was a popular and committed Chairman of the Gallipoli Association.

Throughout his long service he endeared himself to all with whom he came in contact by his infectious enthusiasm for anything he undertook and anyone who worked with him and especially those who worked for him developed a deep respect for his inner wisdom, his unfailing fairness and his wonderful company.

He was appointed CBE in 1945 for his service to the Army. In 1947 he was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for the County of Middlesex and then for Greater London.

He regularly gave talks about his war experiences. On one occasion the Imperial War Museum visited him and taped his reminiscences for the archives.

He died in 1988 at his home in Woodbridge at the age of 91.

His brother **Robert Rackham (G07-10)** lived to 100 and featured in the Spring 1994 and Spring 1995 OF Magazines. I've also been sent a copy of the following article by a relative.

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The miller's tale of Wickham Market

IN PERSON

Story: Victoria Ainsworth

Picture: Jerry Turner



Mr. Robert Rackham

THE NAME of Rackham will always be associated with Wickham Market.

Indeed, the village for the greater part of this century owes much of its working tradition to that Rackham family whose Deben Mills have been operating since Mr. Reuben Rackham bought them from Ephraim Waller in 1893.

At 82, it is the proud boast of Mr. Robert Rackham, that, apart from a few years' enforced absence due to service as an officer in the Royal Marines during the 1914-18 War, he has been closely involved with the mills and with Wickham probably longer than anyone else in the village.

Since Wickham Market is now a village and not merely a traffic bottle-neck on the A12, it was only natural that I should choose its most valued resident to talk about the village, and himself — as a miller, an engineer, church warden and so on.

Mr. Robert Rackham has a long and vivid memory; he remembered clearly growing up in the village and "hearing the hooter going for the men to go to dinner at Whitmore and Binyon, the foundry in the High Street".

It was this firm "renowned for their roller mills" which gave the Rackhams' Deben Mills a new lease of life.

Father Reuben decided that since he had four connections so to speak, the installation in 1894 of roller-milling instead of stone-milling would supplement the mills' output of feeding stuffs.

This was also of some help to overseas customers who would come to Wickham to see how the

system worked. So successful was it that "it carried on till 1961.

"Then my brother and I were told by our accountant that we should discontinue the flour milling — this was at a time when plant bakeries were absorbing all the bakes and we were actually sending flour to Yorkshire and so on — just like taking coals to Newcastle."

This was a period also when the small roller-mills — "one of the best was Greens of Beedes" — were being phased out, and as Mr. Rackham said sadly, "Today it is almost impossible to exist as a small country miller".

Clearly this move caused Mr. Rackham much regret. "My lovely steam engine is at Abbot's Hall Museum at Stowmarket, but at least I have the lubricator."

This is a fine piece of brightly polished machinery standing on a shelf in his sitting room.

Away from the early days of milling, Mr. Rackham recalled events in Wickham Market itself. The day, for example, when the bridge caved in following heavy rains. This incident caused much excitement for the village, as such traffic as there was in 1912 had to be diverted around Glevering and Loudham.

The "characters" in the village included Bob Furze, an eccentric whose daily occupation was to walk from Wickham to Woodbridge and back, stopping only in Woodbridge for a cup of tea at the Deben Tea Rooms.

The same gentleman was something of a gambler and Mr. Rackham remembered as a small boy being told by his father how Mr. Furze had "lost" his house, "Grifers" — one of the largest houses on the Hill, over a game of cards at The White Hart Hotel.

During the 1914-18 War the "Hart" suffered because it had a German landlord who didn't

speak and understand good Wickham Market English.

Mr. Rackham thought Wickham would probably have been a very different kind of community had the railway been allowed to run through the village. When a line was first mooted, landowners at Campsea Ash and Sudbourne apparently decided that it would serve the community better if it were located away from the village. Owing to the village's remoteness from the railway station (about two miles) adults and children didn't travel much in pre-war years. They seemed to prefer to make their own entertainment.

Flower shows and fetes were common in summer and there were plenty of church functions to occupy them during winter. Certainly Mr. Rackham had no difficulty in finding plenty to do. Those years as a young man have resulted in his being consulted on anything to do with mills, steam engines, the upper reaches of the River Deben and most aspects of engineering.

Indeed, when the Tide Mill at Woodbridge was going through a bad patch and needed assistance it was Mr. Rackham who came to the rescue.

Another of his interests was model-making, and in his home at Wickham, there are many examples including models of the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth liners, steam engine equipment.

Now he hasn't time to indulge this hobby. "I find that when I have worked at the mill most mornings that is enough, and I have all my other interests to consider."

These include being vicar's warden at All Saints' Parish Church, a life-long member of the Royal British Legion at Wickham — "I am to take the salute at the march past of the 'J' Group annual rally next month".

During the 1939-45 War he joined the Home Guard and became major of the local battalion. He also holds the Police Medal for service as a special constable.

He was a president of Woodbridge Rotary Club at one time.

On many occasions he has been called on to advise millers all over the country.

Mr. Rackham has experienced the build-up of heavy traffic through Wickham, and the subsequent battle by residents, parish councils and the MP, Sir Harwood Harrison to get the by-pass.

Mr. Rackham said "I never thought it would happen in such a short time from the period when all the snags were ironed out.

After all, we have waited for this since just after the 1914-18 War and had it not been for Sir Harwood, I don't reckon we would ever have managed it — he only did by the skin of his teeth before there was a further clamp down on money."

Although Mr. Rackham has no sons, there are two nephews to continue the life of Deben Mills which now supply, as they did about 400 years ago, fodder for domestic animals. The Mill House has been modernised and occupied by a third generation Rackham.

Each day Mr. Rackham does something at the mills. He has no intention of staying at home and putting up his feet though he deserves this opportunity.

"I love being at the mills — I love the engines. In the past I have driven them all night when there was a rush. My family would sometimes say, 'you'll never do it, but never is a long time,' he said.