

# The Colonels' Tale

— Peter Sherred —

Members of the Society were included in the large gathering at the Ramada Hotel, Whitfield, on September 21 when two speakers gave a fascinating talk on the Military Knights of Windsor. Those present, including many from towns within the Confederation of the Cinque Ports, heard an address by Colonel Finlay Maclean, aided by Colonel Simon Durnford and a PowerPoint presentation, which brought to life the history and contemporary relevance of the Military Knights. To qualify for admission to this select and elite community which numbers just 13 including their Governor, who since 2012 is a retired Lieutenant-General, and whose members live within the walls of Windsor Castle, candidates must be married, be under the age of 67, have a distinguished army record of at least 20 years and have no criminal convictions. They must join a waiting list of applicants awaiting a vacancy to arise before being vetted by a selection process, approved by the Sovereign and then

admitted with all due ceremony.

The Dean of Windsor is responsible for the general welfare of all Military Knights, whose *raison d'être* is to pray daily for the Sovereign and members of the Order of the Garter in the Chapel of Windsor Castle. Founded by Edward III in 1348 and numbering just 26 the Alms (or Poor) Knights as they were then called have prayed for the Monarch and the members of the Order of the Garter for the entire 669 years of their existence – even during the Commonwealth period when Cromwell evicted all the clergy from St George's Chapel in Windsor he retained the Alms Knights, the majority of whom had been soldiers. For a brief period after 1795 there were 7 Naval Knights but in 1892 they were dissolved by Queen Victoria due to their *louche* behaviour and her reputed view that “there are no gentlemen in the Navy”. It appears that there were many stories of the elderly naval men becoming very drunk and in particular when drunk they

used to unstrap and beat one another with their wooden legs! During the period of their existence 62 Naval Knights of Windsor are recorded. In 1833 a Garter Statute renamed the Alms Knights The Military Knights. They are often seen in their bright scarlet tail coats, dark blue trousers and distinctive black cocked hats with feathers of red and white in procession but the highlight of their year is Garter Day on the Monday of Ascot week each June when with the Heralds and the members of



*Colonel Simon Durnford*



*Colonel Finlay Maclean*

the Order of the Garter including many members of the Royal Family, they process to St George's Chapel in the castle for the annual service for the Order. For part of the year from Remembrance Sunday until Easter Day the uniform worn by the Knights is their undress uniform of blue frock coat except when a ceremony such as the presentation of a banner or the Installation of a Military Knight takes place, when full dress is worn.

This historic body of people has continued the tradition of uninterrupted worship throughout its history and forms an essential part of the Community of St George and of Windsor Castle. The Military Knights have a specific prayer which runs as follows: Almighty God, thine arm is strong to defend and save; hear us as we remember before Thee our Royal Founder, King Edward III, who, in gratitude for

victory won, and of his charitable purpose caused the Alms Knights to be formed. Grant that we, the Military Knights of Windsor, by dutiful obedience to our ancient calling in offering prayer, both for the person and the kindred of the Sovereign and for the Companions of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, living and departed, may prove faithful to our solemn trust, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Military Knights are listed in the "Active Army List" and regard themselves as the oldest formation in the British Army. Most have duties within the organisation such as Staff Officer, Funerals Liaison, Uniforms and two work for the College of St George, one as Clerk to the Companions and Friends of St George's and one as Concert Manager.

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## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

### Sheila Cope

Our present total is 468 which includes 24 new members, listed below, several of whom were recruited in August at our River Tram Crash commemoration event and at the Regatta. Our two new committee members, Deborah Gasking and Jenny Olpin have spearheaded a sub-committee entitled the Dover Society Marketing group whose purpose is to increase membership and the surge in numbers of new members is largely due to their initiative.

We all recognise that if the Society is to remain vibrant, more and younger members are essential not only to increase the size and influence of the Society but also to replace those of us who have served on the executive committee for many years. Watch this space.

Grateful thanks are due to Merrill Johns who has delivered our Newsletters to homes on the Northern side of Whitfield for many years. With the expansion of the area it is possible that the number of members in that location may increase and we are currently looking for a replacement for Merrill.

We welcome: Mr D Todd, Mr D McRoberts, Mr P Skelton, Mr B Vaughan, Ms A Upton, Revd. Dr. J & Revd. Canon J Walker, Mr D Hawkins, Mr C & Mrs S Precious, Mr I Palmer, Mr W & Mrs P Osborne, Mrs A Devonport, Mr N & Mrs R Winther, Mr W Parker-Gorman, Mr N Hamilton, Mrs L & Mr S Smith, Mr S & Mrs M Buhlman, Miss J Jones and Mr C Hamblin.