

# A Unique Life of a Former Deputy Constable of Dover Castle

Peter Sherred

One of those attending the induction of the 215th Deputy Constable of Dover Castle, Brigadier Peter Rowell, on 5th December 2019 – reported on page 35 in issue 97 of Dover Society Newsletter – was a predecessor in the post as the 197th Deputy Constable – Major-General John Badcock CB MBE DL.



*l to r: John's wife Gillian, daughter Rosie, son David, daughter Daphne, then John*

At the age of 97 John Badcock was the oldest surviving former holder of the post at the time. Wheelchair-bound he held court in the time-honoured way as 'the life and soul of the party' in Constable's Tower before and after the Induction ceremony. He was an exceedingly jovial character, full of life and humour so it was very sad to learn that he had passed away on the 10th June 2020, having contracted Covid-19 in hospital whilst being treated for a separate infection during the pandemic-induced lockdown. The Confederation of the Cinque Ports mourns the loss of two distinguished Deputy Constables in the space of twelve months, for in July 2019 one of John Badcock's successors in post as Deputy Constable – the 200th – Maurice

Atherton, former President of the Dover Society, died at the age of 92 and his Thanksgiving Service held in Canterbury Cathedral on 23rd September 2019 was reported at pages 6/7 in issue 96 of the November Dover Society Newsletter. These two nonagenarians gave long and conspicuous service to the Army and their Country and were contrasting characters who, in their distinctive ways, enriched the post of Deputy Constable where they both executed their duties with great dignity. While Maurice was a mild and somewhat self-effacing character, John was a person with an infectious sense of humour and extremely outgoing. John was appointed to the post of Deputy Constable in 1968 and held the post during the Lord Wardenship of Sir Robert Menzies until 1970 - while Maurice was appointed in 1976 serving until 1981 during the Lord Wardenship of Sir Robert Menzies and the beginning of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's appointment to that historic post. John Badcock attended Maurice Atherton's Thanksgiving Service at Canterbury Cathedral where he is pictured in the Chapter House seated in front of the Lord Warden, The Lord Boyce, standing left, with three other former Deputy Constables.

John Badcock was born in 1922 in Nazareth in what was then the British Mandate of Palestine. He was born into a distinguished and proud military heritage on both sides of his family so it was no surprise that, after education at St Peter's Preparatory School in Seaford and being a pupil in Sherborne School in Dorset, school motto 'Dieu et Mon Droit' – 'God and my right', this Old Shirburnian was



*l to r: the Lord Warden The Lord Boyce, Trevor Minter (DC 1998-2001), David Godsal (DC 1995-1998), Christopher Claydon (DC 2013-2015), seated front John Badcock*

keen to join up in the army, volunteering as a Signaller in the Royal Corps of Signals. Ostensibly the reason for doing so was that when at Sherborne he had been a drummer in the School's Combined Cadet Force and he thought that drumming rhythms would give him a good understanding of Morse Code! He was commissioned in 1941 following a six-month course at Worcester College, Oxford, reading Electronic Engineering, and while there he rowed for the College. He was assigned to the 79th Armoured Division billeted near Penrith in the Lake District and later as the allies made their way through France and into Germany the "cheerful signals officer" supplied the signals for customised Sherman and Churchill tanks named "Crocodiles", fitted with flame throwers, "Crabs", fitted with rotating cylinders of chains that exploded mines in the path of the tank as well as tanks that dropped bundles of wooden poles to fill ditches. There was a tank that fired a 40lb mortar projectile known as "the flying dustbin." The "Double Onion" tank carried two large demolition charges that could be placed against concrete walls and detonated from a safe distance. Serving under General Sir Percy Hobart, John Badcock was proud of the "Hobart

funnies" and their contribution to the success of the European Campaign. As he recounted in an interview with WarGen, John Badcock apparently kept a very straight face as he used a zoological glossary to explain to military top brass the customised military vehicles, including tanks, that floated and tanks with strobe lights that dazzled the enemy. The interviewer opined that such presentations and demonstrations "could have graced an episode of Dad's Army". John took part in the Normandy landings in June 1944. He landed at Ouistreham and commanded the signals element of Hobart's tactical HQ. He took part in the battles for Brest, the Scheldt estuary, the forced crossing of the Rhine and the drive to the River Elbe.

John witnessed the German High Command surrender to Field Marshal Montgomery on the 4th May, 1945 on Luneberg Heath and on VE day, John recalled how, as a result of the 79th's successful confiscation of a very large stash of naval rum found in a warehouse in Hamburg, they enjoyed a huge bonfire on the Heath and "at the end of the night we were all as tight as ticks".

Following his adventures in Europe, being demobbed and then converting into a career soldier, he was sent to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) as an acting major in command of the Signals squadron, tasked with keeping communications open to the Far East. Upon his return to the UK he enjoyed a successful career in the General Staff. He was GSO 2 (Intelligence) on the staff of HQ 1st (British) Corps in Germany when, as a result of his time at the School of Amphibious Warfare, he was mobilised to play a significant part in the Suez Crisis of 1956. He went on to command a brigade signals squadron in Cyprus and during that time again found himself mobilised to lead the signals operations in Oman, before

becoming a Sovereign Company Commander at Sandhurst and then a colonel commanding 4th Divisional Signals Regiment in Germany. He was appointed Brigadier and the first Signals Officer to command an Infantry Brigade, based at Shorncliffe Barracks, Folkestone when he assumed the role of the Deputy Constable in Dover and after 2 short posts with the MOD he became Director of Manning (Army) with the rank of Major-General in 1972 where, as an independent thinker and problem solver, his talents were directed at meeting the challenges of under-manning at the time. He was the first Royal Signals Officer to be appointed a defence adviser and head of British defence liaison staff in Canberra, Australia in 1974. He retired from the Army in 1977.

In 1979 John Badcock became the Chief Appeals Officer for the Cancer Research Campaign and under his leadership income to the Campaign doubled. He became Chairman of the Royal Signals Association and was appointed Master of Signals in 1982 remaining as such until 1989. He was chairman of a large fruit-growing company and was a Deputy Lieutenant of Kent from 1980.

While in Ceylon he met his future wife Gillian Atfield, the daughter of Tea Planters. They married in 1948 and were married for one year short of a Diamond Anniversary before she died in 2007. They had three children, two daughters and a son: the eldest, Rosie, a medical secretary predeceased John. He is survived by his daughter Daphne, a retired Primary Schoolteacher, and son David, an Industrial manager and trouble-shooter. An extremely inventive man, John Badcock would never travel without a Swiss army knife on his person, which was a hazard when passing through airport security X-ray machines but due to his

forethought for solutions meant he never got caught! After he found his ceremonial sword awkward to carry when travelling, he re-engineered it by shortening the blade and fitted the scabbard with a hinge half way down its length to allow the whole thing to be fitted into a suitcase. John Badcock was a man of immense character verging on the preserve of the British eccentric. He was well known for pranks at his cocktail parties. In the large, vaulted dining-room in Constable's Tower, there were two uninhabited suits of armour. In an effort to put this right, John obtained two mannequins from a local department store. When these proved a bad fit, they were taken through a door leading from the dining-room, carried down a flight of stone steps and laid to rest in the dungeon. Some time afterwards, a decorator arriving to paint the dining-room asked where he could leave his pots of paint. John, with a wink to members of his family, suggested that they were put in the dungeon. Moments after the man disappeared, he came haring back up the stairs crying out that he had found two dead bodies there!

At the age of 96, in 2019, he drove to the annual jamboree weekend for the RCS at Blandford Forum and thence to Devon to visit his daughter. Relatives expressed concern that he was undertaking such a long journey on his own at that age but his riposte was that if he was involved in an accident and he was not at fault the dash camera would prove his innocence but if it was his fault the dash camera would be thrown into a hedge!

It is frequently said that a person is fortunate to have had a long life and John Badcock was certainly fortunate in that regard but more important and more telling is what he put into that long life – scholar, keen sportsman (he represented the Corps at shooting, cricket and hockey), a man of duty and service in the army,

inventive, practical joker, humourist, husband and father. John Badcock did not waste his life. He appeared to enjoy life to the full with considerable zest until, sadly, he fell victim, as have many others, to the virus that has swept the world reshaping lives and nations as it went. John's funeral took place at Barham Crematorium on 23 July 2020 under Covid restrictions where his son David gave a fulsome and affectionate tribute to his father. John was brought into the Chapel in a palm coffin to mark his birth in Nazareth and the palm trees that grew in abundance there. His coffin was draped in the ensign of the Royal Corps of Signals on top of which was his military cap signifying the apex of his military career together with his military sword to represent his ability to improvise

novel solutions. His daughter Daphne and other members of the family were also in attendance. Following John's death the family was inundated with tributes to John, many of which commented on his sense of humour. Two examples from outside the family were "they don't make many like John and I miss his wisdom, friendship and humour greatly" and "he was a remarkable man and a person for whom all those who had served under him had great affection". One of his grandchildren said "Mum told me there was nothing I couldn't do but Grandpa showed me there was nothing I couldn't do".

For an all too brief period Dover and its castle was home to this outstanding man of many parts.

# Curiosity of Dover

17 Cannon Street, Dover CT16 1BZ Tel 01304 202621

A Long Lasting Business  
Of 30 Years

We have a wonderful collection of  
Bears for the established collector  
A wide range of gifts and some beautiful art  
From some very talented  
Artists which include amazing photography  
Come and have a browse I am sure there will be  
Something for you