**ROYAL BRITISH LEGION**

**SIDMOUTH BRANCH, DEVON**

**PRESS NOTICE**

**8 October 2014**

**VC HERO’S GRAVE RESTORED**

**SIDMOUTH CEMETERY, DEVON**

The grave of VC hero Colonel Charles James William Grant has been restored to its original condition in Sidmouth cemetery. A new memorial stone has also been added, incorporating a photograph of the Colonel.

The grave had fallen into serious disrepair over recent winters. Its restoration has been undertaken by the Sidmouth branch of the Royal British Legion.

Charles Grant was born at Bourtie, Aberdeenshire, in 1861. He won the Victoria Cross as a young Lieutenant for “personal daring and resource” at the Battle of Thobal, Manipur, in 1891. His detachment of 80 men (40 Ghurkas and 40 Punjabi troops) successfully defended a compound for 10 days, fighting off waves of attack by a large force of professional soldiers. At the height of the battle there were over 2,000 attackers.

After the battle he was involved in further fighting along the road. His horse was shot from under him and later he was hit by a bullet that went through the base of his neck and out the other side, taking fabric from his shirt and tunic with it. Writing to his mother soon afterwards he said, “feeling the wound with my fingers and being able to speak and feeling no violent flow of blood I discovered I wasn’t dead quite yet, so I reloaded my revolver and got up.” He refused medical treatment until the position he was attacking was captured.

He retired from the army in 1913 but re-enlisted with the 3rd Royal Scots in 1914.

Charles Grant died at his home in Sidmouth in 1932. His wife Mary lived on there until her death in 1959, and she is buried with her husband.

Commenting on the refurbishment of the grave, Dave O’Connor, Chairman of the Sidmouth Branch of the Royal British Legion, said:-

“Charles Grant was a remarkable man and a true national hero in his time. We are honoured that he chose to live in Sidmouth and we couldn’t let his grave just fall apart and crumble. He deserves better. Following this restoration I hope more people will want to visit the cemetery and remember his courage.”

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**The Victoria Cross**

The Victoria Cross is the highest military decoration, awarded for valour in the face of the enemy. Since its introduction in 1856 there have been 1354 recipients. Charles James William Grant was the 406th recipient. The most recent VC was awarded in 2013.

**Charles Grant – Early Life**

Both of his parents were born in India, into Scottish military families serving there. His father achieved the rank of Lt-General in India.

Charles James William Grant was born in 1861 at Bourtie, Aberdeenshire, where his mother’s uncle (James Bisset) was minister of the parish church. Charles Grant was educated in Scotland before becoming a Gentleman Cadet at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.

He received his first commission with the Suffolk Regiment in 1882. In 1884 he transferred to the British Indian Army.

**The Battle of Thobal**

In 1891 Manipur was a semi-independent state between Burma and India.

Lieutenant Grant’s detachment had marched into Manipur in an attempt to free British soldiers and officials who had been taken captive. Unknown to him the 5 most senior prisoners had already been killed by the time he set out. Seven miles inside Manipur his column came under fire, so they captured a defensible position at Thobal. A large part of the Manipuri army then arrived to surround them. The attackers had the advantage of two artillery pieces and superior rifles.

For a while Lieutenant Grant managed to deceive the enemy into thinking that he had a whole regiment with him. He also threw them off balance by launching attacks outside the compound. He twice spurned offers of safe passage if he would stop fighting and retreat. The enemy finally withdrew after 10 days.

**Gurkha and Punjabi Soldiers at the Battle of Thobal**

All of the men serving under Charles Grant in the battle were decorated for their bravery. They received their medals at the same ceremony as him. One of them was reported as saying:-

“How could we be beaten under [Lieutenant] Grant? He is a tiger in a fight. When hundreds of Manipuris were coming close he took just 10 [Ghurkas] out to stop them, and in a minute they had driven the enemy back. We could not help winning under such an [officer].”

**Charles Grant - Later Military Life**

Apart from being awarded the VC for his valour, Charles Grant was immediately promoted to Major. He was further promoted to Colonel in 1904 and took command first of the 89th and later the 92nd Punjabis. He retired in 1913 but re-enlisted on the outbreak of World War 1 as a Draft Conducting Officer with the 3rd Royal Scots. He received the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal 1914-18 and the Victory Medal.

**Retirement**

After World War 1 he and his wife Mary lived in Knightsbridge, London, before moving to Sidmouth in 1928. They built a large house near the sea (*Western Field* on Manor Road), next to the home of Sir John Ambrose Fleming, the prominent physicist and electrical engineer. Colonel Grant was active in various clubs and societies around Sidmouth and became Vice President of the Sidmouth Branch of the Royal British Legion

**Other Burials Close to Colonel Grant’s Grave**

Charles Grant is in familiar company in Sidmouth Cemetery. His grave is flanked on both sides by other Colonels, one from the British Indian Army, born in India. Two graves along is another Colonel Grant from the Royal Scots Regiment. Also near are a Brigadier General from the Devonshire Regiment, a Colonel from the Wiltshire Regiment and a Colonel from the Royal Artillery. Opposite is a Colonel from the Gurka Rifles, born in India.

**Whereabouts of Colonel Grant’s Victoria Cross?**

Unknown. Sold at auction by Spink of London in April 2011, along with his other medals and memorabilia, for £230,000. Seller and buyer undisclosed.

**Restoration of Colonel Grant’s Grave**

The grave has been restored and a memorial stone added with support from a local benefactor. The restoration works were carried out by A.G. Real & Son, Monumental Masons of Honiton.

Wreaths of flowers and foliage from the garden of Colonel and Mrs Grant’s home in Sidmouth were placed on the grave to mark the completion of the restoration.

**Location of Sidmouth Cemetery**

Sidmouth cemetery is at Temple Street, EX10 9BN. Charles Grant’s grave is on the left, up near the Chapel (Section O plot 40).

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