

George Frederick Bowers and Crimean War Commemorative wares



G F Bowers transfer printed Alliance Large Jug C1856

Mention the Crimean War, and matters which might come to the minds of many could well be the Battle of the Alma, the Charge of the Light Brigade or, maybe, Florence Nightingale – but fewer give thought to it's cause.

The spark to the conflict between Russia and the Alliance (comprised of France, the Ottoman Empire, Sardinia and the United Kingdom), was over the rights of Christians (other than members of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Holy Land, which was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time), and ignited as a result of an argument over possession of the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Similar disputes have existed in our own times in regard to the same Church, often involving fisticuffs but, thankfully, without the need for political interference.

Although the Churches resolved their differences, neither Napoleon III of France nor Czar Nicholas I of Russia would back down. The United Kingdom mediated and arranged a compromise which Russia agreed to.

However, the Ottomans required changes which were refused by the Czar. So, with the support of France and the United Kingdom, the Ottomans declared war in October 1853, the Russians already having made an incursion in July 1853 into Ottoman held territory in the Balkans. The War was to continue until February 1856.

In Britain, the War, initially, was enthusiastically supported by the people and George Frederick Bowers, amongst several others in the trade, quickly recognised a sales opportunity for Commemorative wares – which was just as well as the mood in the country changed dramatically. There were 40,432 British Casualties - 2,755 were Killed; 1,847 Died of Wounds; 17,580 Died of Disease and 18,250 were Wounded.

My interest has been taken by the Dedications on wares produced by George F Bowers. And, the question raised is whether the names give sufficient information to provide links to casualties of the War, making the items true Commemoratives rather than simply mementoes.

By way of background, illustrated below are two Jugs and a Teapot produced by G F Bowers as Commemoratives in the decade of the Crimean War.

The first items are two transfer printed Alliance Jugs, one small, one large, with polychrome decoration. The same transfer is applied to both sides of each. Frustratingly, it is not possible to see fully the gilt dated Dedication to the front on either Jug - although the date to the smaller Jug appears to conclude with a figure 5. A full date of 1855 would make sense.



The Crimea War Teapot provides no help at all as the Dedication, to “D & A Hall Macclesfield”, although providing a location, is undated and may be simply a memento. Nevertheless, the Teapot itself is rather rare and worthy of illustration.



With no factory records to reveal who placed the various orders, the little detail provided by the various Dedications has meant widely searching to see if the names relate to casualties of the War. This has been exhaustive, and has involved searching the Casualty Roll for the entire War, which has been compiled from entries in the London Gazette. Unfortunately, I have found neither the D or A Hall, nor the J or C Andrew mentioned in this Paper among the casualties. However, this alone would not preclude involvement by those named in the Dedications as participants in the War.

My attention then switched to Genealogy databases for family information.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a possible location for the family, the search for J & C Andrew has proved to be a needle in a haystack. Finding helpful information is now a matter of happenstance



G F Bowers transfer printed Crimea War Large Jug with the Dedication J & C Andrew 1858

Reverting to D & A Hall of Macclesfield, the likely recipients were any one of three couples identified as David and Ann Hall, who resided in Macclesfield, Cheshire. The Censuses of 1851 and 1861 give a first family in Watercotes, a second family in Mardsen Street, and a third family in 7 Peacocks Building, Macclesfield. There does not appear to be any member of their respective families who could have participated in the Crimea conflict, so the Teapot would be simply a memento rather than a family commemorative.

However, it has transpired that a Dedication from the factory proprietor has yielded the more interesting information.

This Crimean War Jug bears the Dedication “From G F Bowers to Mrs Lees” and is dated 1855.



G F Bowers Crimea War Large Jug with the Dedication From G F Bowers to Mrs Lees 1855

In the London Gazette of 5th November 1854 there is an entry relating to an Ordinary Seaman, James Lees from HMS Albion who was Killed during the Bombardment of Sebastopol on 17th October 1854, and a further entry on 16th December 1854 relating to a Private, John Lees of the 17th Lancers, who was Killed during the Action at Balaclava on 25th October 1854, involving the Light Brigade.

Was the Mrs Lees in the Dedication the Mother or the Wife of the deceased and, if so, of which of the two? With no Service Numbers for either man, will military sources help? Or is the military information a red herring?

I believe that this dedication is more than likely to be a gift of appreciation or friendship, rather than being a Crimea War commemorative. The Recipient was, as certain as one may be, Mrs Mary Lees (née Crewe) – by 1855 a widow, who was the proprietor of The Leopard in Market Place, Burslem, a Coaching Inn with stabling for 50 horses. She and her husband Thomas married on 2nd May 1824 and had taken the Inn by the 1830s. At that time, George F Bowers was also a publican at the Blue Ball in Nile Street, Burslem, and in view of its proximity to The Leopard, surely would have known the couple.

In the Census of 30th March 1851, Mary is shown as resident with her husband Thomas; son Frederick Crewe – an Attorney and Solicitor; together with one married daughter, Emily, and an unmarried daughter, Ann, who were both employed as Waitresses. Unfortunately, Thomas died on 2nd August 1851.

Mary continued operating The Leopard, which at the time was known as the “Savoy of the Midlands”. An article in the Staffordshire Advertiser of Saturday 31st January 1857 details the very successful Banquet which was provided by Mrs Lees for 220 people to celebrate the inauguration of Burslem Town Hall on Wednesday 28th January 1857.

In the 1861 Census, Mary is shown as a “Farmer and Inn Keeper”, while a Trade Directory in the same year gives her address as “Leopard Hotel and Commercial Inn and Inland Revenue Office”.

At the time of the 1871 Census, Mary’s occupation was shown as “Hotel Keeper”. By 1881 she had moved to Southport, Lancashire together with her married daughter Emily, two granddaughters, and her unmarried daughter Ann. None of those listed showed any Occupation, just “Income from House Property”. Mary Lees died in Southport on 14th November 1884.

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