

A chance inquiry about an old cavalry sabre leads Museum historians on a detective trail to piece together the story of its owner and uncover a Western Australian's chilling firsthand account of the Crimean War's Charge of the Light Brigade.

## Transcript

Well, welcome everyone. Welcome to another of the series of the In the Wild West lectures. My name's Stephen Anstey. I'm a Curator of History in the History Department at the Western Australian Museum.

Researching items in the State's collection often uncovers some surprising secrets. A chance public inquiry into an old British cavalry sabre led us in the History Department on a detective trail that uncovered the remarkable story of the sword's owner, but also a chilling first-hand account of the Crimean War's Charge of the Light Brigade. The 1854 Charge of the Light Brigade was an unmitigated British military disaster. Six hundred and seventy-three men of the Light Brigade comprised of five regiments of British Light Cavalry, due to a miscommunication, attacked the main Russian position at Balaclava, down an approximately two kilometre long treeless valley. They endured overwhelming fire and attack from all sides by 20 battalions of Russian infantry, artillery and Cossack Cavalry.

Incredibly, even though they were vastly outnumbered Light Cavalry, they carried the position, but were forced to retreat back up the valley through the same withering fire, due to a lack of support. Nearly half were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. It was a crowning military blunder in a war noted for inept leadership, inefficiency, death and disease.

Yet due to the extreme bravery of the Light Brigade cavalymen themselves, their conduct was lauded in the world press of the day. They were held up as exemplars of the bravery and valour of the British soldier. They were immortalised in histories, art and literature, typified by Lord Tennyson's famous poem; The Charge of the Light Brigade:

*“Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward.  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
'Forward, the Light Brigade!*

*Charge for the guns!’ he said:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
'Forward, the Light Brigade!’*

*Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
Someone had blunder'd:  
Their's not to make reply,*

*Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.*

*Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;*

*"Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward.  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
'Forward, the Light Brigade!*

*Charge for the guns!' he said:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.*

- Alfred Lord Tennyson.

We will talk more of the Crimean War and the Charge later, but back to how this story started.

We receive many public inquiries in the History Department. We got a phone call from Beth Gillam and she phoned up and asked our Collections Manager whether or not we had a sword belonging to her great grandfather Henry Dyson Naylor. Rene was fairly new to the position and didn't know the collection well, so she came and saw me and asked me the same question. I think I replied something along the lines of, "Um, ah, do we? I don't know if we do," because I hadn't heard of a sword in the collection ..

What she did provide us with though was the information as to the donor's name. That allowed us to look up our collections database, which in turn allowed us to confirm that we did have that sword and we were able to retrieve it. Now this was a very good start.

This is the sword. It's an 1821 pattern British Light Cavalry sabre and looking at it, on first glance, the first thing that appeared to us about it was that it was in relatively poor condition. Its leather grip was perishing and flaking off. The sword itself was somewhat corroded, and as you can see here, the hilt on the sword is compressed or bent, the scabbard was broken in half and along the blade are some pretty ugly hack marks as well as some corrosion.

We looked up the collections record data sheet which, from the early '70s was a handwritten data sheet completed as you can see here, with not a lot of detail. Now, not uncommon to museums around the world and the History Department in the early '70s, it would be fair to say that collections documentation is not what it is today, and the record is rather sparse. Now most importantly today, we record the history or what we call the 'provenance' of all items that are coming into the collection. The provenance of an item is almost as important to us as the item itself.

Now the provenance on this particular item is fairly brief. I think it says something along the lines of it "Belonged to the donor's Great Grandfather, Henry Dyson Naylor who fought in the Battle of Balaclava [in the] (Crimean War)..." It doesn't for example expressly say anything about the Charge of the Light Brigade, although it alludes to it with, "...and was one of the 600 who survived." Most importantly for us though, if you look at this record here, there's no obvious Western Australian connection, which is a key criteria for the acceptance of items today into the State collection.

So on the face of it, we have a sword that has no obvious Western Australian connection, it's in really poor condition, it is in much poorer condition than most of the other similar types of swords that we have in the collection, and it doesn't have a lot of background information about the owner. It would be something that were we looking to deaccession items out of the Arms collection, it would be something that we would possibly, at this point in time, have looked to even dispose of from the collection because of all those factors I've mentioned. But, we did some research and looked into it.

The first thing we did was some cutting-edge historic research - well not really. What we did was simply put the name 'Henry Dyson Naylor' into Google and see what happened. Now amongst the hundreds of hits that came up around that name was one single, absolute gem, and this is it here. There was a reference to a book by Roy Dutton called *Forgotten Heroes – The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

Now this book really appears to be almost someone's life work. It records every single member of the Charge of the Light Brigade, and most importantly provides a lot of detail, extensive detail on the members of the Charge of the Light Brigade. But importantly for us, what it did, was it actually confirmed to us that Henry Dyson Naylor was in fact in the Charge of the Light Brigade. He's listed there under the 13th Light Dragoons in this reference.

It confirmed for the first time that indeed our man was at the Charge. Amongst other things it stated that he was a trooper in the 13th Light Dragoons, one of the Light Cavalry units in the Charge. He was born at Mildenhall, Suffolk around 1836. He enlisted in the Dragoons as a 16-year-old in November 1851 and was 19 years old at the time of the Charge. It also mentioned that he'd been severely wounded at the Charge. But we still didn't have a Western Australian connection.

Now fortunately we have at our disposal in the History Department and indeed in Western Australia, a remarkable set of volumes, *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, that lists all the people who came to Western Australia in the 19th Century, and this is almost like a bible to us. So we straight away went to this reference and we were absolutely delighted to find that he was

listed there. So he had come to Western Australia. He'd come aboard the Norwood, a ship in 1862, escorting convicts as an Enrolled Pensioner Guard.

Now, we hadn't forgotten the original request from the family asking whether or not we had the sword or not. It was with great delight at this point that we were able to get back to Beth and to tell her that indeed we had the sword, but not only had the sword, but we had a bit of extra information as well.

So we invited Beth and her family in to come and visit, and they took huge delight of course in actually picking up and gently handling their great grandfather's sword, wearing cotton gloves as you can see. But also, remarkably and fantastically for us, they brought in a photo of the man himself, Henry Dyson Naylor. Now, I must say that when we first saw the photo, it was almost like meeting Henry Dyson Naylor because we, for the first time, could place a picture of a face to his name, and here he is in later life, probably in Western Australia, dressed in his military uniform of the time, looking very distinguished, the true hero of the Charge of the Light Brigade.

She also brought in a family history which was also great because contained in the family history were not only some further details of his life, but very importantly, the first first-hand account by Henry of his experience in the Charge of the Light Brigade. Recorded in the family history was a copy of a handwritten excerpt from the fly leaf of Henry Naylor's pay book, his Army pay book, and in the fly leaf he had recorded a little brief account of his experience at the Charge of the Light Brigade. Now why this was important is because we also know from the Dutton book that his pay book, a photograph and some original receipts and other things from Henry's time in the Crimean War, plus his medal miniatures awarded to him for his service in the Crimean War, that these were sold at Sotheby's Auction by a member of the family back in the early '90s.

Now this branch, Beth Gillam's branch of the family of course, they were saddened by that event in the past and would dearly love to have seen those things, but importantly, the family history written before that sale, had recorded the excerpt, and this is what it said:

“Soon after the order to charge was given, my horse drew level with that of Captain Nolan who shouted ‘Get back to your ranks.’ I replied ‘I can't Sir, my reins have been shot away.’”

This was to be the first of three personal accounts of the Charge by Henry that we discovered. We were thrilled to find this and what following on from the further accounts that we gathered, we were able to put them together into a composite first hand account of Henry Dyson Naylor's experience at the Charge of the Light Brigade.

The family also provided us with a newspaper article cutting from the time of the item's donation where a member of the family confirmed that this was the sword that had been carried by Henry at the Charge of the Light Brigade that had been passed down through the years. This fact was also confirmed later in some 1890s correspondence that we uncovered.

Now at this point my head of Department, Anne Delroy, made a brilliant suggestion. She said “Well, why don’t you look him up on Trove?” Now at this point in time I hadn’t heard of Trove. Trove is a remarkable resource put together and available by the National Library of Australia where they have scanned - amongst other things and other resources - most major Australian newspapers and many of the provincial newspapers up until 1950. But these aren’t just traditional read-only scans. What they’ve been able to do with the software available, is to scan them in such a way that you can actually word search every single word scanned from those newspaper scans. I wasn’t aware of this at the time, but soon, I put his name into the search field, ‘Henry Dyson Naylor’, and up came hundreds of hits.

There were lots and lots of Naylor’s from across history who were charged with a light offence, or things like this, in other words, total red herrings. But buried in amongst these was an absolute gem and probably one of the most important finds of our research into this story.

Western Australia throughout the 19th Century had many newspapers. Many of them, only survived for, in some cases, up to a month only. One of these, blink-and-you’d-miss-it, there-for-only-one-month newspapers, was a newspaper called the WA Times. But in its pages was contained a remarkable first-hand account of the Charge of the Light Brigade by Henry Dyson Naylor. The reporter of the time in 1876 recorded;

“The last mail from England brought news of a banquet given to the survivors of the 600 engaged in the Balaclava Charge. Knowing that a Private named Henry Naylor, now in Fremantle, was one of the 600, I drew his attention to the general invitation offered to the gallant few remaining and induced him to write an account of what he witnessed during the Charge.”

Now we will hear that account very shortly, but in amongst the other hits in Trove on the name ‘Henry Dyson Naylor’ were some other gems as well. There was a further account that had been written in the 1890s, as part of a eulogy that was read at his funeral and it contained a further account that Henry had written, and that was recorded there as well.

However, firstly to better understand Henry’s account, we need to know a little more about the Crimean War and the fatal events leading up to the Charge. Now we don’t profess to be Crimean War or Charge of the Light Brigade experts and we don’t want to bore you with a long history of both, so this necessarily is a brief summary.

The Crimean War from 1853 to 1856 was fought between Russia on the one side and an alliance of the Ottoman Empire - Britain, France and the Kingdom of Sardinia - on the other. The dispute was a tussle over who should gain territorial influence over the declining Ottoman Empire. The allies aimed to prevent the Russians from controlling the Black Sea that you see here, and encroaching on the eastern Mediterranean. To this end, in 1854, British and French forces landed on the Black Sea’s Crimean Peninsular which you can see in the centre of this slide, with the objective of capturing the key Russian Naval Base at Sevastopol to which they laid siege. The main British supply base was the small port of Balaclava to the south that you can see on the map.

The Russians attacked Balaclava with a large army. The Charge of the Light Brigade became the iconic event of the Battle of Balaclava. But who were the key figures in the lead up to the fatal Charge?

This is Lord Raglan who was British Commander of the overall forces and who was the Battlefield Commander at the Battle of Balaclava.

This is Lord Lucan who was the Commander of the Cavalry Division which included the Light Cavalry and the Heavy Cavalry. He was rather disparagingly called "Lord Look-on," by many of the soldiers under his command and beyond, for what they perceived to be a rather timid use of the Cavalry to that point.

And then there was Lord Cardigan who was the Commanding Officer of the Light Brigade or the Light Cavalry; some 673 men under his command, five regiments of British Light Cavalry.

Then there was the messenger. This is Louis Edward Nolan who was a bright, up-and-coming young officer who rather fancied himself as an authority on the use of cavalry. He'd written a text on the matter that was well read amongst cavalry circles in the British Army, and had served on the staff of several European cavalry divisions. He also shared the rather poor view of Lord Lucan in how he had used the Cavalry to that point.

Then we have our own man, Henry Dyson Naylor, who's a Trooper in the 13th Light Dragoons, and what was their role?

The 13th Light Dragoons, as the name implies, was a British Cavalry division, like the others, that comprised light men on light horses with light weaponry, and as you can see from the slide here, probably out of all of the light cavalry that featured in the Charge of the Light Brigade, the 13th Light Dragoons were not one of the more flamboyantly dressed units. Their uniform was predominantly dark grey and therefore, they don't often feature in some of the heroic paintings, patriotic illustrations that occur after the Charge, but this is an illustration of what they look like.

The role of all of the Light Cavalry divisions was one of reconnaissance, scouting, foraging, protecting the main army's rear and flanks, and counteracting any other cavalry attacking the main army. Their role traditionally wasn't one of frontal assault on a main strategic position. That was not the role of the Light Cavalry. That was traditionally the role of the Heavy Cavalry or the Infantry.

So here in a slide - a really rare photograph taken by Crimean War photographer Roger Fenton - we actually see a photograph of a mounted member of the 13th Light Dragoons. Now I'd like to be able to say that this was the trooper kitting up just before the Charge, but in fact Fenton arrived after the Charge. So this photograph is taken after the Charge, but it allows us to imagine members of the 13th Light Dragoons that morning gearing up - 1821 pattern sabre at their sides - gearing up for a task that really should never have been given them, that is an attack on the main Russian position.

Here is a simple map of the opposing forces at the Battle of Balaclava. The Russians are the forces in green and the British of course, are in red. On the 25th of October, 1851 in their bid to capture Balaclava at the foot of the map, over 23,000 Russian troops attacked the British across the Tchernaya River to the north east of the town. The British were vastly outnumbered as most of the Army was to the north, laying siege to Sevastopol. Raglan had few troops at his disposal.

The Light Brigade and French Light Colonial Cavalry, the Chasseurs d'Afrique, were situated at the mouth of the North Valley. The Heavy Brigade was at the mouth of the South Valley, and the 93rd Highland Infantry and a small force of Naval marines were immediately to the north of Balaclava. The Turks also had a small number of troops trying to prepare artillery redoubts on the Causeway Heights that separated the two valleys to the north of Balaclava. The Russian attack on Balaclava was repelled by a charge of the vastly outnumbered Heavy Brigade and a heroic stand by the Highlanders' thin line. Now that occurred in the morning.

The main Russian force retreated back to their heavily defended positions at the head of the North Valley. Nevertheless, in the encounter, the Russians captured the artillery redoubts on the Causeway Heights that you can see in the centre of the map, and prepared to carry off the guns, something that would have disgraced the British.

Wishing to prevent this, Lord Raglan, situated high above the battlefield that you can see right on the extreme left of the map, with a clear view down both valleys, gave an order to be delivered to Lord Lucan, the Commander of the Cavalry for the detachment of Light Cavalry to prevent the Russians from removing the guns. So in other words he's detaching or wanting to detach an element of the Light Cavalry to ride up to the Causeway Heights that you can see in the middle of the map, to prevent the Russians taking away the few guns that the Turks had abandoned. The order, scribbled by one of Lucan's senior aides, was vague at best. It read;

“Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front, and try to prevent the enemy cavalry carrying away the guns. Troop of horse-artillery may accompany. French Cavalry is on your left. Immediate.”

Captain Nolan delivered the message to Lucan who understandably queried the rather obtuse order, asking what guns Raglan referred to. Lucan, situated on the valley floor, could not see the captured redoubts on the Causeway Heights, or the Russian attempts to remove the guns. Nolan is said to have replied in a contemptuous tone, “There are your guns My Lord,” gesticulating with a wide sweep of his arms towards the heavy concentration of guns in the main Russian position at the head of the North Valley, rather than those in the redoubts on the Causeway Heights. What Nolan's intention was is unknown. As we shall hear, he was the first killed in the Charge.

Lucan, understandably, also took the order to mean that the whole of the Light Brigade, rather than an attachment, should advance. He was perturbed by the order, but dutifully responded by ordering Lord Cardigan to lead the entire Light Brigade down the heavily-defended North Valley. The Russians are said to have had 73 guns and 20 battalions of infantry and Cossack Cavalry defending the opposite end and both sides of the nearly two kilometre long valley, not a task for the Light Cavalry. So the stage was set for Henry Dyson Naylor to ride with his sword into the Valley of Death in one of history's greatest, yet bravest military blunders.

We now hear from Henry himself;

*"I was a private in His Majesty's 13th Light Dragoons. I belonged to D Troop in charge of Captain Goad. Captain Oldham commanded the regiment the morning of the 25th October, 1854, and well I remember it as I have occasion. It is as fresh in my memory as if it occurred but yesterday.*

*We had been dismounted about half an hour when we saw an aide-de-camp coming towards us at a gallop, which turned out to be Captain Nolan. When he gave his last order, we had not long to wait. We soon knew what it was. We were ordered to mount and form into two lines: the 17th, 13th and 11th in the first line; the 4th and 8th in the second line,"*

and you might note here that Henry is in the front rank of the front row of the Charge, which would have been an extremely vulnerable position to be in.

*"We then got the order to trot, then gallop. That was all the orders I heard. Poor Captain Nolan dashed to the front of our second squadron and was in the left troops of the first squadron, and away we went. We had rode about half way down when the enemy opened fire on us. The first shell burst and killed poor Captain Nolan. I shall never forget the shriek he gave. It rung in my ears above the roaring of the cannon, when his horse turned and passed through the interval of squadrons and fell. That was the last I saw of Captain Nolan.*

*The men on the right and left of me were old Indian soldiers. They had seen many a hard-fought field in India and took part in them. They did not believe that we were going to attack the enemy in front of us, but they soon found out that we were. Poor fellows, for that was their last field. Both were killed. The shot and shell flew like hail about us. Our line began to get terribly thin by this time. My horse began to limp and I could not manage him.*

*A minute afterwards, my bridal reins were cut by a shot and my horse tore away with me. I found myself near to Lord Cardigan who said 'What are you doing here? Get back to your ranks.' I replied, 'I can't Sir. My off reins are cut.' I managed to tie them; my curb was gone likewise. I received a stinging sensation about my left shoulder.*

*The slaughter in front of the Russian guns was the only time I felt in peril of my life in combat as I found myself in a hand-to-hand sword contest with a Russian Officer. He struck me across the jaw with his sabre before I finally cut him down. I got to the guns and passed through and got a tremendous and painful blow in the loins with a cannon sponge staff. This still causes me pain.*



*Then it was our turn. We drove the enemy into the River Tchernaya. At this time we had lost all formation. It was everyone for himself. I was very nearly making a mistake in joining the enemy's lancers, but I saw my mistake in time. We were completely hemmed in by them. I was bleeding from two wounds myself and some men of the brigade dashed back again. I got back to the guns when my horse was shot down under me and galloped nearly 100 yards before he fell down dead, giving me a nice toss over his head.*

*How I got from the guns, it must have been a miracle as the Cossacks were lancing our poor fellows all around. I lay among the heap around me 'til I was helped up. Four or five of us hobbled away out of the fire. The agony of my wounds by this time began to tell on me. My lower jaw shattered and wounded in my broken left shoulder. I saw the surgeon of my regiment half way up the valley. He got off his horse and put me on and took me to the ambulance cart. The gallant Chasseurs d'Afrique did gallant service for us. They took and spiked the battery that was on our left. They lost 79 men in that affair.*

*My regiment went in 125 men and only 39 answered to the roll call. Captain Oldham and Cornet Montgomery were killed."*

- Henry Dyson Naylor, former Trooper, 13th Light Dragoons, Pensioner Guard, Corporal, Fremantle Infantry.

So having heard Henry's chilling account of his own experiences in the said Valley of Death, we can now retrospectively look at his experience.

This is a photograph, again taken by Roger Fenton in 1855 after the Charge down the valley, and it's a remarkable photograph, because if you have a close look at it, this valley floor here – and this is just a part of the valley – is completely littered with Russian cannonballs. Now what that doesn't reveal is the canister, grapeshot and musket fire that must have been launched at the Light Brigade as it charged down the valley. There is a huge amount of Russian ordinance in evidence in this photograph.

Casualty figures from the Charge differ slightly from source to source. Most quote somewhere around 245 killed or wounded and 60 taken prisoner. Nearly half the number that rode into the valley, lost. Yet, it was worse than that, as only 195 men were with horses and of those only a handful were riding the mounts they went in with, many of them capturing Cossack horses, or in fact anything that would walk, to get out of the valley. One of the contemporary accounts maintains that 335 horses were killed or destroyed later and I have read accounts that point to more. The Light Brigade was not destroyed, but the British had effectively lost their Light Cavalry as an effective fighting force.

We can now look again at Henry's sabre and what strikes one about the sabre in light of the research and the findings of our research, is that what started off in our mind as a sabre in really, really poor condition, is actually a key part of its story. The damage is really important, and whilst we've got no written account that actually links the damage to this sabre, with his experience in the Charge, the damage is entirely consistent with the experiences described by Henry at the Charge.

The hack marks along the blade are entirely consistent with powerfully met sabres in a cavalry sword fight. The imploded hilt and guard and the broken scabbard are entirely consistent with being blown up and thrown over the front of your horse and having the horse and other wounded men fall on top of you, and being pinned under that pile, or indeed with being struck by some of the ordinance that we've described. The other thing about the sabre of course is that we now know the story of the man who used it and his experience.

Following the Charge, Henry, seriously wounded, was as we heard, put on the ambulance cart and then incredibly, as his Army record states, 'he was sent on board ship without seeing the surgeon'. He was lucky to survive the medical neglect and unsanitary conditions infinitely prevalent in the Crimean War. He was invalided to England on the 16th of December, 1854 and nearly a year later, was discharged from Chatham Invalid Depot on the 23rd of October, 1855. His military record states that he was, "Unfit for further service from disfigurement of the face by fracture of the lower jaw at Balaclava. Also from gun-shot wound of shoulder." Dutton then states that he was "Employed as second coachman by Maharajah Duleep Singh," apparently then studying in England, and there are accounts of a handsome young Dragoon parading around the village, and one wonders whether this in fact was our man.

In 1862 as we heard, he enlisted as an Enrolled Pensioner Guard who's main task was to guard convicts on board ship out to Western Australia. When he arrived in Western Australia, he would be given the option of serving in the Volunteer Defence Force and mustering regularly to receive a pension as an Enrolled Pensioner Guard, and this is what Henry did. He enlisted in the Fremantle Volunteers. There were many, many different name changes for that particular unit - so we'll just use the term 'Fremantle Volunteers' at this point - and the slides that you see here are the main barracks building that were built by convicts to house many of the pensioner guards, and you can see them paraded out in the front of that building. But Henry himself was based with the detachment in Fremantle, and lived for most of his life in Fremantle.

Events surrounding his employment are a little vague. What we do know, is that there are some accounts that he served as a butler, but who to, we don't know. But he also served, we know, as a warder at Fremantle Prison, another building itself, built by convicts which today is a world heritage site, and you can see photographs of that building here. So, he served living in Fremantle as a warder in his later years, at Fremantle Prison.

Also courtesy of Trove, we were able to find his death notice. So Henry died on the 26th of April, 1894. The accounts of his death say that he died from exhaustion, from wounds that he had suffered at the Charge of the Light Brigade, and we know from family accounts and indeed some of the ones we've heard, that particularly the injury caused by being hit hard by a cannon ramrod in his back, caused him great discomfort to the point where he died and indeed could have contributed to his early death. So he died at the age of 59.

Also courtesy of Trove, in 1894 is a report of his funeral. The West Australian reported that his coffin was draped in the Union Jack and that the Fremantle Artillery Corps and the Fremantle Companies of the 1st Infantry Regiment, plus officers from other Perth based militia, gave him a military funeral. Dutton states that most of the shops in Fremantle closed as a sign of respect.

Research was prompted by a simple public inquiry about a poorly documented old sword in poor condition of no apparent significance or relevance to Western Australia. It has revealed an astonishing Western Australian story and elevated the sword from an item that would have been a serious contender for de-accession, to an item of State significance with immense interpretative potential. This is not only a gripping personal story of a Western Australian's bravery and remarkable survival, but one that reveals Western Australia's colonial links to the iconic events of Empire and world history.

**Stephen Anstey, Curator, Perth Museum (History).**