

Object in Focus 1: The Higginson Drum



During The Crimean War (1853 – 1856) British, French and Turkish troops fought together to prevent Russia from invading Turkish territory in what is now Romania. The fighting was mainly around the Russian naval base of Sebastopol on the Crimean peninsula (now in the Ukraine). The war is chiefly remembered in the UK for Florence Nightingale and the Charge of the Light Brigade.

On September 9th 1855 during the 11-month siege of Sebastopol, Captain (later General Sir George) Higginson (1826 – 1927) captured a side drum from the Russians. He brought the drum home with him and presented it to the 1st (Marlow) Company of the Bucks Rifle Volunteers.



General Higginson's family had a long association with the town; he, his parents, grandparents and uncle are all buried in All Saints churchyard. He lived at the family home, Gyldenscroft in the Henley Road, from his retirement in 1893 to his death in 1927.

The side (or snare) drum was the main instrument of a military band marching into battle, and our example is a rope-tension design with wide wooden hoops, a wooden shell and an animal-skin head. The side drum was increasingly decorated throughout the 19th century, until it bore the fully embellished regimental colours of the battalion, including its battle honours. This drum was repaired and repainted after capture by the firm of George Potter in Aldershot.

As the use of musical instruments on the battlefield diminished, it was quite frequent for band instruments to be sold or disposed of after military campaigns, and it is possible that the drum was one of these. How and where the drum spent the 20th century is not known. In the early years of this century Stephen Bosley, owner of the specialist military auctioneers who used to have a shop in Marlow High Street, was touring Scotland looking for items of interest. When the drum was brought to him, he immediately recognised it and the connection to Marlow. The drum was scheduled by Bosleys to be sold at auction in Marlow on September 11th 2002.



A public appeal was launched to secure the drum for the town led by the late Anthony Wethered of Remnantz. An amount of £4,672 was raised to buy the drum and provide a display case for it. The drum was presented to Marlow Town Council and has been on display in Marlow ever since. It is one of our most prized exhibits.