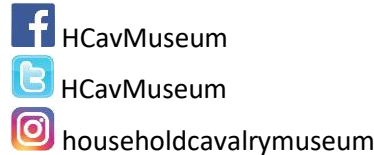




THE
HOUSEHOLD
Cavalry
MUSEUM

Horse Guards, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AX



TALES OF THE HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY

No: 2

THE PERILS OF PAGEANTRY

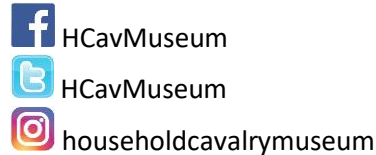
Hello, and welcome back to Tales of the Household Cavalry, the second in a new series of Household Cavalry Museum video podcasts that will continue until the museum re-opens, and I can once again access the museum's collection. In this video, I'm going to tell you about the Household Cavalry Pageant, which I wrote and directed in 2007 to mark the opening by The Queen of the Household Cavalry Museum. You can still buy a DVD of the event on the Museum's website, but it doesn't include any of the stories I'm now going to relate. So, what was the Household Cavalry Pageant?

Well, the idea was to create an event that would start with the ceremonial opening of the Museum by The Queen. This would be followed by a pageant on Horse Guards Parade that would illustrate in words, pictures, re-enactments and ceremonial the history of the Household Cavalry from 1660 to the present day. As far as possible, my guiding principle in producing the Pageant was to keep the event a Household Cavalry affair; as far as possible my guiding principle of



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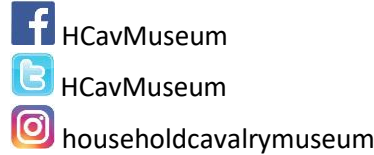
producing the pageant was resourcing the event from within the Household Cavalry family – both serving and retired. However, it was always clear that we would need some outside help, preferably on a free-of-charge basis.

My first call was to the ex-Defence Secretary turned television personality, Michael Portillo. Without any hesitation he agreed to be our commentator. I then wrote to Dame Judi Dench, my reason for contacting her was to ask if she would ‘voice’ Queen Victoria. To my surprise, I got a very prompt reply saying that she would. Full of confidence, and following some further networking, I then called Stephen Fry. I asked him if he would be willing to play the part of Samuel Pepys, King George III and some other parts that I needed voicing – and he too agreed. Historical re-enactor, Alan Larsen, said he would help with the re-enactments and also persuaded Angel’s Costumier to lend us the costumes we needed. The Colonel of The Life Guards, Lord Guthrie, then persuaded the glamorous Countess of Chichester to lend us her camel, Therese, which we needed for the story of the Household Cavalry’s involvement with the expedition to save General Gordon.



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My next job was to record voice overs I needed for which Judi Dench and Stephen Fry had been willing to give their services. It had been relatively easy to get them to agree to perform, but I then found myself faced with the challenge of directing them. Judi Dench had asked if we could record her voice-over at her house near Gatwick airport so, on a sunny day in February, I made my way down to her house with the recording crew. I didn't know exactly what to expect, but it was certainly not to be greeted by Dame Judi at the front door as though we had known one another for years.

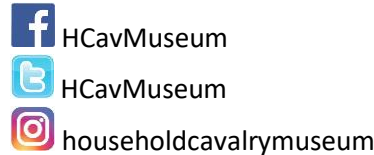
The recording itself could not have been easier, but on the way back to London in the car, the sound recordist said to me: "Do you realise what you have just done?" I asked him what he meant. "You have just given extensive direction to an Oscar-winning actress. There are hundreds of directors out there who would have killed to have had that experience." This really brought me up short. And when, some two weeks later, I was scheduled to direct Stephen Fry in a north London studio, I approached the event in a far from confident mood.

I needn't have worried, for during the recording Stephen could not have been easier, both asking for and taking my directions. Of the seven voices he had agreed to record, we only had trouble with one.



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This was a speech made by the ageing Field Marshal the Lord Birdwood, then Colonel of the Blues, to the officers of 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment before their departure to France towards the end of the Second World War. After several takes Stephen who is famous for ‘doing it in one’ had still not got the tone of the voice I wanted and he looked to me for help. Rather bravely I suggested a cross-over between two of his better-known characters, General Melchett and Professor Trefusis. Fortunately that did the trick.

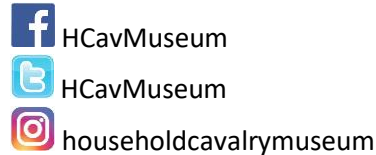
Meanwhile, rehearsals for the Pageant also began in earnest and it was decided that the Major General’s Inspection would be used to try out some rather complex ceremonial drills that hadn’t been used for 100 years.

For the Coronation Procession of King Charles II, which would start the historical part of the pageant, Colonel Ralph Griffin, the Mounted Regiment’s CO, decided that the procession would not conform to twenty-first-century drill standards and that the participants would ‘engage’ with the crowd by waving at them. To my surprise, it took very little time for the horses, under the firm guidance of the Riding Master Major Dicky Waygood, to become accustomed to the



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thunderous gunfire required for the Waterloo sequence and even less time for the soldiers to learn how to fake hand-to-hand combat without killing each other, yell in French, and die realistically.

One of the last rehearsals in Hyde Park for the Waterloo vignette was witnessed by The Princess Royal. At the time she remarked to me that it 'all looked most exciting'. Privately, after the Pageant was over, she admitted that she thought it would 'end in carnage'.

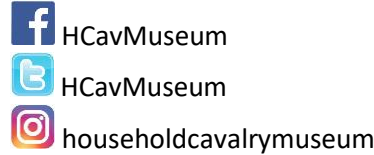
One major problem was finding seventeen period bicycles for the World War I Life Guard Cycle Company vignette. In the end we bought them, confident that they could be resold on eBay, which indeed they were.

And so the day of the Pageant loomed. On Sunday 9th June the infrastructure build-up commenced, and by the Monday morning it was virtually complete and sound testing started. This involved playing very raucous pop music extremely loudly and was swiftly followed by messengers from the Treasury, No 10, the Foreign Office and the Major General's office all of whom descended on me en-mass demanding its immediate cessation.



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Then, before I knew it, the actual day dawned... with a weather forecast of thunder and lightning. However for once the weather forecasters got it wrong and at 5pm the gates opened in blazing sunshine and people started filing into their seats.

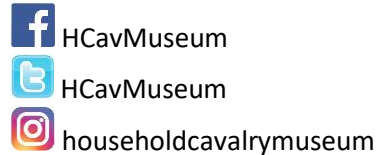
Then, at 5.15 pm, a building collapsed in Westminster, half the police assigned to security were redeployed and Birdcage Walk had to be kept open to ease the traffic chaos. I began to fear that not everyone would be in their seats by the time The Queen arrived. In the end they were, but only just.

On the dot of 7pm the royal Bentley swept into the Front Yard, The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were greeted by The Princess Royal, Lord Guthrie and Colonel Paddy Tabor. But then the royal party practically sprinted to the Museum, arriving there two minutes ahead of schedule – thereby leaving us two minutes short of music for the tour of the Museum. In a hurried debate in the commentary box we decided that if we ran out of music we could always revert to the start of the Overture, which most people had not heard anyway. However, there was no way of informing the music co-ordinator, Philip Evans, who was sitting in the stands and nearly had a seizure as



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the music programme careered off schedule. But his anxiety was about to be repeated in the commentary box.

The script provided for the pre-recorded music to stop as The Queen started to mount the steps into the royal box, to be followed – once she'd taken her seat - by a live trumpet fanfare by four mounted State Trumpeters this would be followed by the start of the audio-visual programme. To my horror, as The Queen's foot hit the first step, the show caller sitting next to me launched the audio-visual programme – leaving the State Trumpeters 'high and dry' and us with no means of communicating with them.

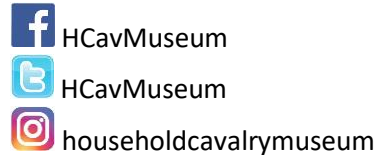
Fortunately, they held their nerve, and Michael Portillo, displaying very considerable coolness under fire, ordered that the audio-visual programme be paused after twenty seconds on the image of King Charles II. The trumpeters, taking their cue from the temporary silence (they had their backs to the AV screen and so could not see what was happening) duly sounded their fanfare as though that was what had been intended all along. And no one in the audience noticed.

The Coronation Procession of Charles II followed and the waving to the crowd duly broke the ice. But there were still rocks ahead.



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The Waterloo re-enactment started with a quite spectacular fall by a trick horse, which cart wheeled right over its rider, drawing gasps from the crowd and fears on the part of The Queen that he had broken his neck. And an unscheduled fight between a Royal and a Frenchman left me fearing that the Waterloo vignette would end in an unseemly brawl having to be broken up by the police.

Remarkably, the rest of the Pageant went off without a hitch, including the ceremonial Rank Past in Line of Regiment which hadn't been done by the Household Cavalry for more than 100 years... until that is we got to the departure of The Queen.

Unfortunately, the Royal car failed to roll-up to the box at the appointed time, the Director of Music lost his nerve and played the National Anthem and Colonel Tabor, who as the parade commander had just given a short speech to The Queen and was hooked up to a live mic, was heard clear across Horse Guards Parade saying: "Where's the bloody car?"

In the next video, in two weeks' time, I 'm going to be telling you about the restoration of a monument to Field Marshal Haig, who was



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Colonel of the Blues after the First World War, which is being organised by his grandson, Lord Astor who I served with in The Life Guards.

In the meantime, stay safe and stay well.