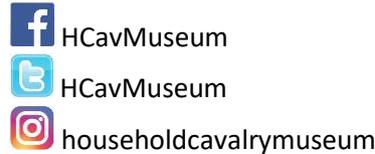




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HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY MUSEUM COLLECTION

No: 8

AN IMPERIAL CIGARETTE CASE

In last week's video, I mounted a robust defence of the reputation of Earl Mountbatten of Burma, known to all Life Guards as Colonel Dickie.

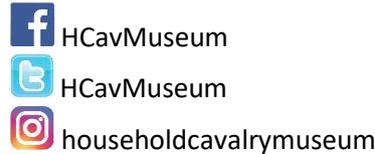
This week, I am going to be looking at a man whose reputation was the subject of much adverse comment long before he died in 1941, and who continues to be a controversial figure eighty years later.

So controversial is his reputation that there was recently considerable opposition by members of the Cavalry & Guards Club in London to his portrait being hung in the club. Quite why this should have been the case is a mystery, given that there has been a full-length painting of the subject hanging in the Officers Mess of the Royal Dragoons on-and-off since 1894. Indeed, since 1969, when Her Majesty The Queen loaned her copy of the portrait to the newly amalgamated Blues and Royals, there have been two such portraits in the care of The Blues



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and Royals, one with the armoured regiment and the other with the mounted regiment in London.

The subject of these portraits is Colonel Dickie's second cousin once removed, His Imperial Majesty Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, King of Prussia, and Knight of the Garter, who was appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the Royals by his grandmother, Queen Victoria, in the same year that, presumably in the interests of maintaining the balance of power in Europe, His Imperial Majesty Nicholas II, Tsar of All the Russias, was appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Scots Greys.

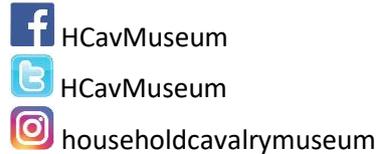
Both monarchs, shown here in Frock Coat Order, were in due course to lose their British military appointments. The Kaiser was stripped of his in 1914, when the United Kingdom declared war on Germany, and the Tsar lost his by default when, in 1918, he and his immediate family were murdered on the orders of the Bolshevik government.

My own memories of the Kaiser's portrait, which in the 1970s hung in the dining room of the Officers Mess in Germany, are coloured by two events. The first was the look of shock-mixed-with-envy on the faces of a party of German Army officers who had been invited to



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lunch only to be confronted as they entered the dining room with a huge painting of the Kaiser; and the second was a full-dress dinner party which we gave for an elderly German princess who lived nearby. ‘Hmm,’ she said glancing briefly at the picture as she swept into dinner in a blaze of diamonds, ‘not a bad likeness of Oncle Villy.’

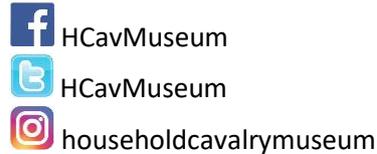
Despite the two portraits of the Kaiser held by The Blues and Royals, arguably the Tsar left a greater legacy with the Scots Greys, now the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, in the form of a portrait by Valentin Serov, one of the greatest Russian artists of that era, and the unique white bearskin worn by the regiment’s kettledrummer. However, to be fair to the Kaiser, his regimental legacy extends beyond his portrait – in the form of a small, enamelled silver cigarette case bearing his Imperial cypher, which he presented to the Officers Mess for use in the dining room and which is now, in a slightly damaged condition, in the Household Cavalry Museum in London.

Without exactly looking a gift horse in the mouth, this imperial gift can hardly be considered generous, particularly when it is understood that such presents were at the time carried in bulk by all European sovereigns, to be handed out on appropriate occasions. Such gifts



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ranged from framed photographs all the way up to jewelled gold boxes: the more important the recipient, the more lavish the gift, was the rule. In the case of the Russians, such gifts would usually be supplied by the Court jeweller, the renowned firm of Fabergé, and are now of considerable value.

The chain-smoking Kaiser's cigarette case is not of the same quality or value compared to the Imperial Russian presentation items, but it was made by the Court jeweller, J H Werner of Berlin and is an interesting historical curio - and well worth a look the next time you are in the museum.

I am now going to take a break and will return in the New Year with more stories about some of the unusual items in the collection of the Household Cavalry Museum. In the meantime, stay well and stay safe... and have a very Merry Christmas.