

GLIMPSES OF HOLT JAMES OLLEY (1833-1920)

Last Norfolk survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade



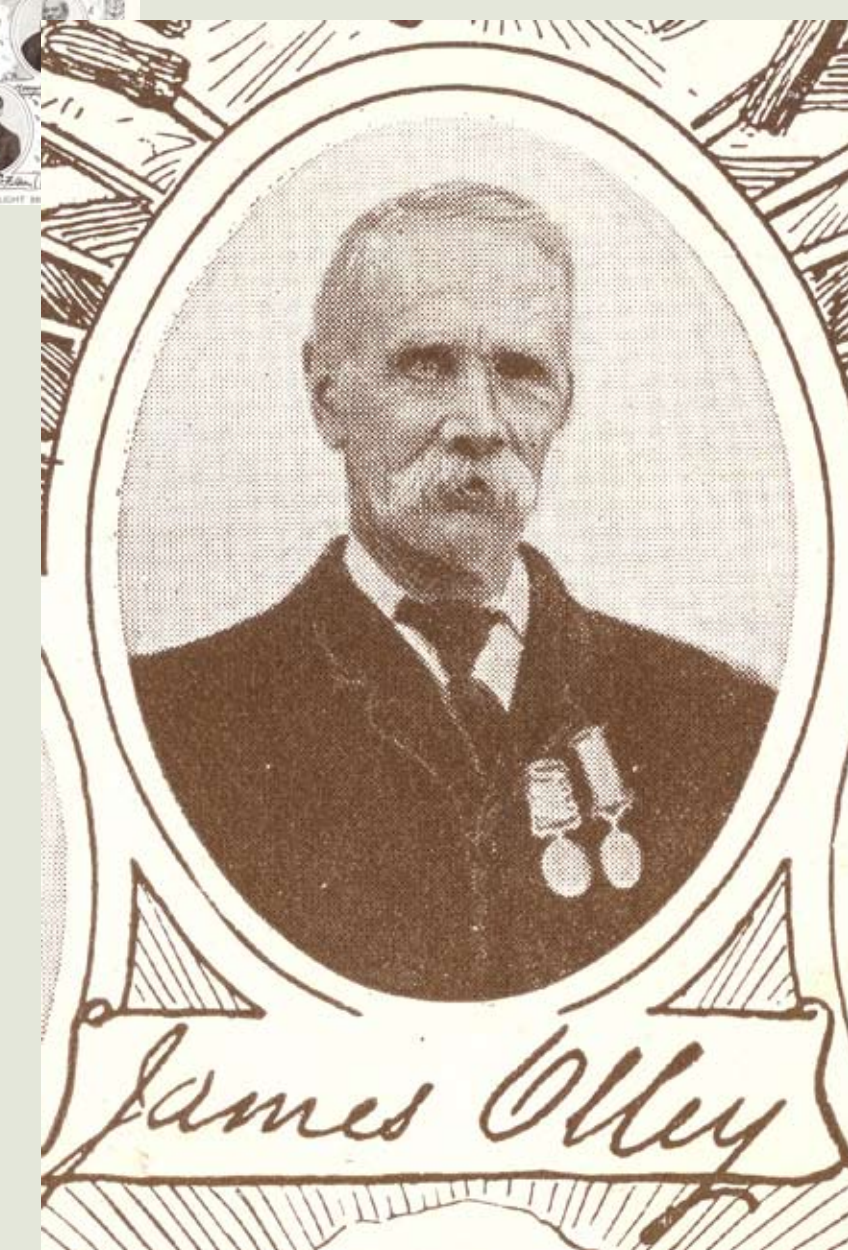
James Olley, second from right, with the four remiing Norfolk Veterans of the Charge of the Light Brigade

Born at Hanworth on 16th May 1833, the son of an agricultural labourer, James Olley enlisted in 4th Light Dragoons in 1852.

He landed in the Crimea in September 1854. Present at the Battle of Alma and siege of Sebastopol, he rode in the Charge of the Light Brigade on October 25th. His horse having been shot, he remounted a stray, and was wounded five times including losing his left eye. He was sent to Scutari Hospital immediately after the battle and invalided back to England.



Survivors of the Charge of the Light Brigade.
Suppement to *Answers* October 26 1912.



In 1888 the shadow of the workhouse loomed as Olley, with a wife and four young children, found himself in dire straits. Through the good offices of a Mr Robinson of Knapton Hall, the publicity surrounding his interview in the local press and his recognition as a survivor of the Charge, money was raised to set him up in business in Holt as a horse trainer



A group of survivors attending Mr. T. H. Robert's Diamond Jubilee Reunion, October 22 June 1897.

James Olley's account of the Charge of the Light Brigade

“It was very queer going down the valley, a good deal worse than it was when I got to the guns. The first man I happened with was a Russian gunner who attacked me with a ramrod. I felled him at the muzzle of the gun with two strokes of my sword.

Whilst fighting at the guns I received two lance wounds, one in the ribs and one in the neck from behind. In this cavalry encounter, I was wounded with a sabre across the forehead by a Russian dragoon. I gave him point and stabbed him. The sword fell from his hand and the point penetrated my foot.

“When we were retiring, I got a ball from the Russian infantry on my left. It went through my left eye, passed through my nostrils and the roof of my mouth and came out against my right eye. I kept the saddle though blood was pouring from my mouth and nostrils as well as running from my forehead.”

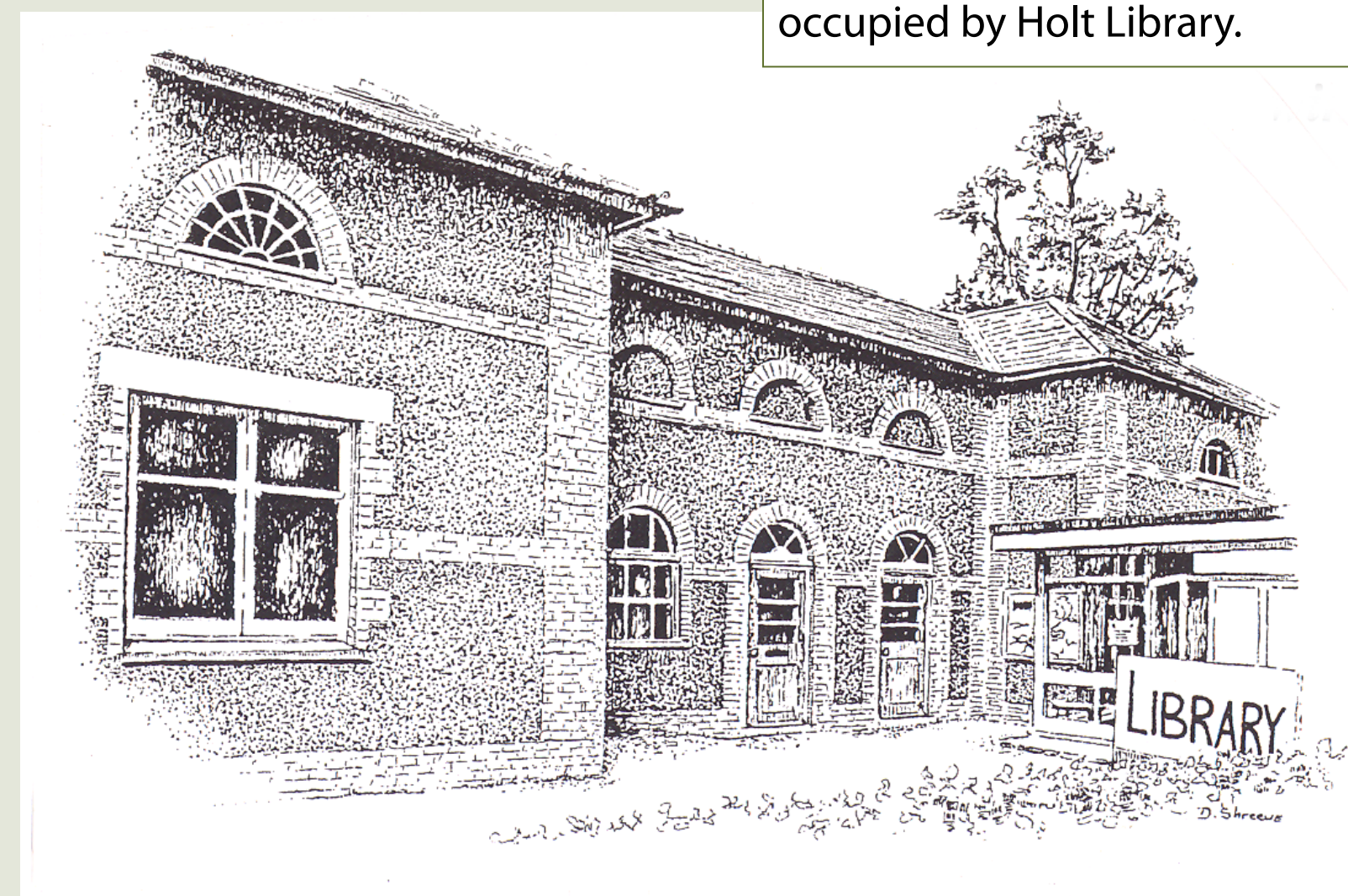
Fakenham and Dereham Times 14th January 1888

CHARGE OF THE SIX HUNDRED

‘When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder’d,
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble Six Hundred.’

Tennyson

He kept his horses in stables now occupied by Holt Library.



A feisty personality, Olley was known to have engaged in occasional bouts of fisticuffs behind the tents at horse fairs on Aldborough Green.

He lived with his family in Bull Street above a pub called The Stores, now Morston Sports (*below*). In those days there was a large number of pubs in the town; four in Bull Street alone. Olley enjoyed his pint and used to show off with his party trick throwing a ringed 56 pound weight 13 feet over his shoulder in the yard behind The Bull opposite The Stores (*right*).



After several further moves, including a spell in Salthouse where he became a somewhat unlikely church warden, Olley died in the village of Elsing in 1920 aged 87, and by now something of a legend. He continued to tell his story to the end over pints at ‘The Mermaid’, and he was buried in the nearby churchyard with full military honours – the last Norfolk survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade.