

A personal selection of local, British Isles and world, history.

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THE CELLAR AND THE SHAFT

Following the article on Queen Victoria's children (J&T No.139), one of our regular correspondents kindly lent me her copy of *Hessian Tapestry* by David Duff (Frederick Muller 1967), an extremely detailed and well-researched book on Victoria's children.

The *Cellar and the Shaft* is a Chapter dedicated to the events in Russia in 1918. Princess Marie Louise travelled from Windsor to the Isle of Wight carrying a letter from George V to his cousin Victoria, Marchioness of Milford Haven (mother of Mountbatten), giving the dreadful news that Victoria's sister Alix, her brother-in-law Nicholas and their five children had been shot and bayoneted in a cellar at Ekaterinburg on the eastern foothills of the Urals. Little mentioned is that with the Romanoffs were their faithful doctor, maid, cook and valet. All the bodies were hacked to pieces and destroyed with acid and fire; the ashes being thrown down a mineshaft. When the White Russians arrived some days later they had a full enquiry and search that amongst many artefacts discovered the pitiful metal framework of six corsets.

Now I am sure you knew most of the above but what happened to the rest of the Romanovs? The Grand Duchess Elizabeth (Ella, below¹) became an ascetic and Abbess of the Order of Martha and



Mary. She was regarded as a saint for looking after the sick. She and her companion Sister Barbara were taken by the Red Guards in the April to the Siberian border and thrown into prison where they were joined by other Romanoffs. They were isolated and treated to the bare minimum of food and comfort. In the July they were taken to Sinjatschicha and were shown the mineshaft which they were to be thrown down - alive. Ella forgave her persecutors and went to her death singing *Hail gentle light....*

After they had all been despatch down the shaft two hand-grenades were thrown in. Unbeknown to the guards the whole episode had been watched by a devotee of the Grand Duchess, Father Seraphin. When the White Russians arrived shortly afterwards, the priest with the help of the soldiers climbed down the shaft. He was horrified to find that some of the victims including the Grand Duchess had survived the fall and bandaged wounds and fractures with strips of their clothing before expiring.

Father Seraphin brought up the bodies of Ella and Sister Barbara and took them east towards Mongolia, China and the sea. On the journey people gathered in groups to pray for the saint. The coffins were shipped to Port Said and rested in a Greek church where Lord and Lady Milford Haven came and prayed. The mourning party travelled by train to Jerusalem where the bodies were interred in the Russian Orthodox Church of Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives near Gethsemane. As David Duff points out, Elizabeth was loved and respected despite her Royal connections not because of them - *but perhaps the real saint was Father Seraphin.*

THE OTHER SOHO

The Soho Manufactory with its smaller neighbour, the Soho Mint, was the largest factory in the Birmingham area (Handsworth) in the late 18th century, employing on average between 600 and 700 workers. This scale of operation was unusual at the time, since industry in Birmingham was then otherwise characterised by small workshops. These were led by a master employing a correspondingly small but skilled workforce, producing metal goods or *toys*, as they were called. Most machines were hand and foot- operated, water- power, being used for rolling and slitting metal and sharpening blades, including scythes and swords.

Matthew Boulton, already a manufacturer of *toys*, moved to Soho in 1761 in search of water-power, leasing a small mill which he quickly enlarged to allow increased production. Within a few years he boasted that he had erected *the largest Hardware Manufactory in the World* (Demidowicz, 2022, 9). The water source was the diminutive Hockley Brook, from which water was conducted to a mill pool. This can be seen in the classic view of the Soho Manufactory, but the mill itself is hidden by the majestic Palladian silver and plated works (the *principal building*) which was constructed between 1765 and 1767 (right, around 1798. Courtesy of British Library, King George III collection, 82-n).





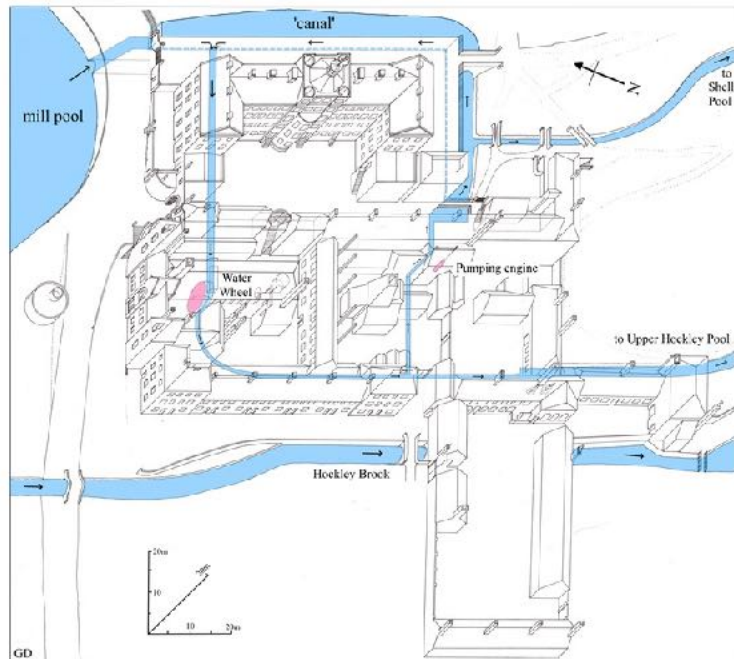
The famous partnership of Boulton & Watt was initially founded in 1775 to sell the rights to erect Watt's improved steam engine, making use of a separate condenser, and then, after 1795, to manufacture the complete engines themselves.

Matthew Boulton's immediate motivation in persuading James Watt to leave Scotland in 1774 and to join him at the Manufactory was to solve the common problems suffered by water mills: floods, drought in the summer and winter freezes. Any of these could stop the mill from operating.

Boulton had Watt's improved steam engine with its separate condenser shipped down from Scotland. It was set to work almost immediately to recycle water after use in the mill by pumping it through a newly constructed intercepting culvert back up to a canal. The Watt engine was, in fact a so-called water-

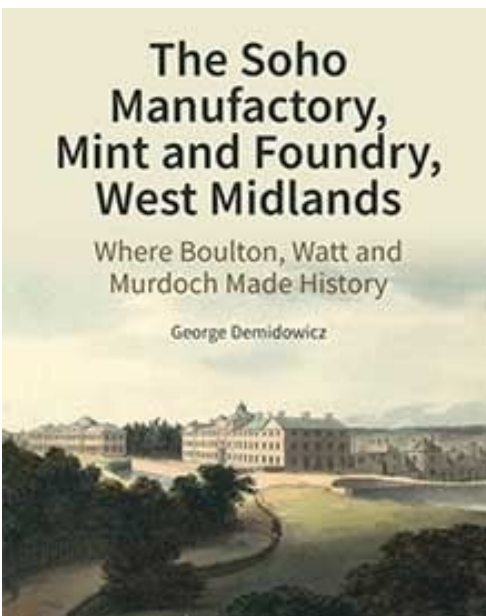
returning engine. Fortunately, in recognition of its significance as the first working Watt engine in the world, it was donated to the Science Museum, London, in 1861 (above).

With no specific documentation available, it was only through examining various maps and plans of the Manufactory, and in particular, the bodies of water which were a significant feature of its layout, that the water circulation system was deduced. This is shown



in the figure above, an axonometric projection of the Soho Manufactory in about 1805 when it had reached its maximum extent.

This is only an introduction, to get the full story go to the Historic England website <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/soho-manufactory-mint-and-foundry/> read the rest of the article and order the hardback (£39.20)





A barber's pole is a type of sign used by barbers to signify the place or shop where they perform their craft. The trade sign is, by a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, a staff or pole with a helix of colored stripes (often red and white in many countries, but usually red, white and blue in Japan and the United States).

During medieval times, barbers performed surgery on customers, as well as tooth extractions. The original pole had a brass wash basin at the top (representing the vessel in which leeches were kept) and bottom (representing the basin that received the blood), all that is left now is the gilt knob. The pole itself represents the staff that the patient gripped during phlebotomy (blood letting) to encourage blood flow and the white bandage that was twisted around the arm. The twined pole motif is also likely related to the staff of the Greek god of speed and commerce Hermes, aka the Caduceus.

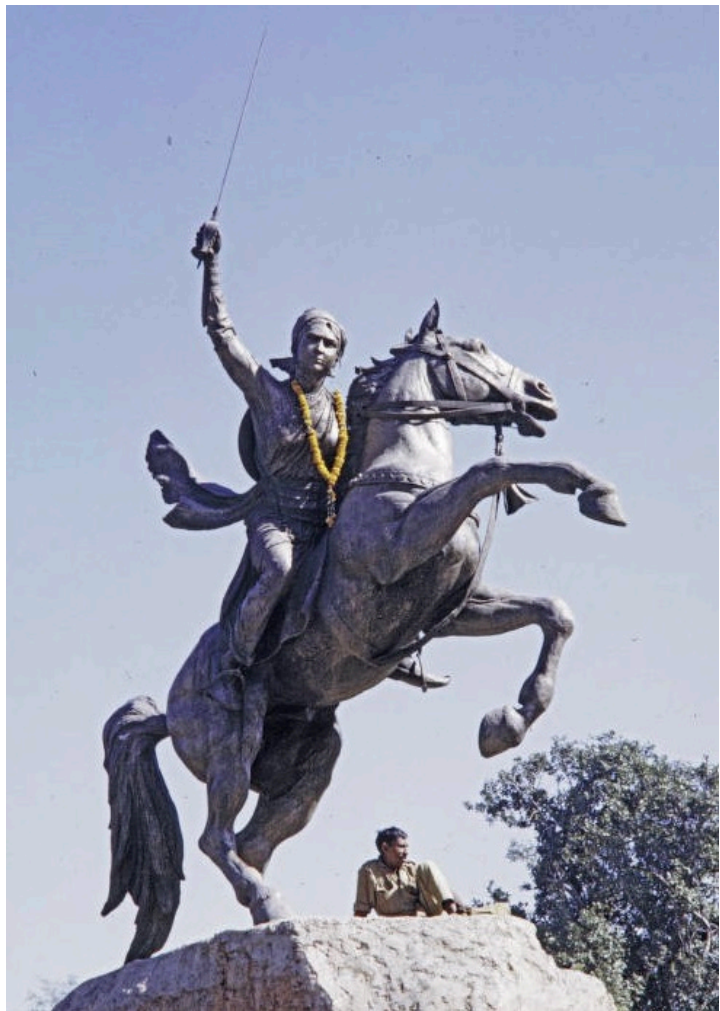
At the Council of Tours in 1163, the clergy was banned from the practice of surgery. From then, physicians were clearly separated from the surgeons and barbers. Later, the role of the barbers was defined by the College de Saint-Côme et Saint-Damien, established by Jean Pitard in Paris circa 1210, as academic surgeons of the long robe and barber surgeons of the short robe. The Company of Barber Surgeons was incorporated in 1461 and in 1540 became The Company of Barbers and Surgeons. In 1745 it was renamed the Barbers Company and is still one of the City of London Livery Companies.



THE INDIAN JOAN OF ARC³

The East India Company recruited largely Indian troops across its military posts, the lowest ranking soldiers being the sepoy who were trained along European lines. The sepoy, largely from the 'peasant' community of agricultural labourers and viewed within Indian society as the lowest caste, numbered around 300,000 in the army compared to around 50,000 British. It was the company's new policy recruiting more higher caste Indians in its forces such as the Bengal unit while restricting the enlistment of sepoy that has been partly blamed for initial mutinies leading to a catastrophic rebellion.

Changes to terms of the sepoy's professional services which included being expected to make do without 'foreign service' remuneration contributed to a growing atmosphere of grievances against the East India company. Earlier serious concerns, not only for the sepoy but also other Indian soldiers of both



Hindu or Muslim origin was controversy over issued rifle cartridges that were greased with animal fat which soldiers were expected to tear open with their teeth. Further ill thought out policies instigated by the company that helped tip the scales from discontentment within the sepoy ranks to violent mutinous action was the lowering of their status which included a reduction of pay while they lived in inhospitable barrack accommodation, compared to higher caste Indians. The addition of making sepoy pay for their new uncomfortable uniforms was another insult contributing to a powder keg of disillusionment and anger with British governors.

On an unbearably hot Sunday morning, loyal sowar servants tried to warn their masters and the garrison's church-going residents that anger was escalating in Meerut city and that mutiny was imminent. As the evening approached enraged sepoy from the 20th battalion's right wing had shot and killed many of the garrison's officers as sporadic rioting turned into a mob which included violent badmashes (hooligans) from the bazaars, Gujar tribesmen and some Indian troops causing civilians to flee towards the safety of European lines. The orgy of violence was merciless, resulting in many wives and children of officers being slain either in their homes or while trying to escape by foot and carriage. A witness described the carnage of *burning bungalows* as *Europeans were flourished by fiends* against cries of *Mohamed, let us kill the Christians*. With signs of mutiny about to take place in Jhansi as rebellious sepoy approached the city, British officials realising that European residents were in danger requested assurance from Lakshmi to grant them safe passage out of the city. The Rani herself signed a letter of oath that no harm would befall the English citizens. Despite this oath where Hindu rebels swore to eat beef and Muslims pork if they broke their word, the fate of the fifty-six men, women and children ended in bloody



massacre when the group was ambushed outside the city gates and hacked to death with swords. Lakshmi vehemently denied responsibility for the attack and blamed the vicious murders on rogue sepoys who she couldn't control. The East India Company was reluctant to believe her.

The allegedly beautiful Lakshmi Bai, was well educated, spoke English and skilled in the martial arts of riding, shooting and fencing. In 1842 she married the elderly Maharaja of Jhansi, a city in the state of Uttar Pradesh in northern India. After her husband's death, Lakshmi (the Rani) may have resisted taking up arms against the British if it hadn't been for her anger at being disinherited from ruling Jhansi due to the *Doctrine of Lapse* law instigated by the East India Company. This power reducing policy removed princely status and rendered Lakshmi little more than a

tenant in a modest two-storey palace with a small pension. But it was the fact that this arbitrary annexation policy also invalidated the Rani's five-year-old son's legitimate claim to his father's throne that incensed and compelled Lakshmi to finally fight British troops rather than relinquish her destiny as Queen.

Despite the tragic event at Jhansi which reached English newspapers causing a furore and a wave of public anger against Indians, the British governors realised it would still be prudent to entrust the Jhansi district to Lakshmi and so help prevent further mutiny. Such a decision was made on a promise that if the Rani collected taxes and policed the state she would be dealt liberally once the rebellion was over and British rule restored. But Lakshmi's fears that she would still be held responsible for the massacre and then forced to relinquish control of Jhansi may have encouraged her to side with the mutinous rebels. Still reeling over her enforced status as mere landlady of her own principality no doubt helped stoke Lakshmi's feelings of vengeance against the East India Company and British rule. Lakshmi didn't immediately make a decision to defend Jhansi against the British. Her predicament was made more complicated by her Indian troops threatening to leave her service if she didn't attack. Once her mind was made the Rani was undaunted by her task to prepare for battle and organise her defences. Lakshmi's adversary in the British army was one Sir Hugh Rose, a general who despite having received honours from the likes of the Sultan was still seen as having a lack of experience. He proved his critics wrong.

The siege lasted several weeks and Lakshmi demonstrated masterful leadership by securing Jhansi fort and making sure there were plentiful supplies of food and provisions for troops and citizens. *She enlisted as many men as volunteered to join and place them in position* observed one visitor. Despite Rose's troops causing devastating damage to the fort's rampart, Lakshmi's rebels, inspired by her fearless determination to fight her enemy, continued to put up fierce resistance. Eventually, with British troops forcing an entry on the south wall and ultimate victory for Captain Rose only a matter of time, Lakshmi took heed of advice for her to save herself. She took flight from the fort wearing a breastplate, a sword and two revolvers.

During the last days of Lakshmi's by now legendary actions as a warrior queen, she fled from British troops to the Gwalior province where she hoped to persuade its pro-British Maharaja Scindia to join her and the rebel forces. Instead, Scindia instructed the rebels to leave and in doing so brought upon himself and his own army the wrath of Lakshmi. The Rani led two

hundred of her cavalymen against the Maharaja's army eventually leading him and his close associates to flee to Agra. Such a victory was to be short-lived for Lakshmi who once again having to face her foe in the form of Captain Rose and his troops fought her last battle clad in military attire in a red jacket, red trousers and wearing jewels she had taken from the banished Scindia. The Rani's fierce determination to defend Gwalior and push back Captain Rose's troops began with promise as her expertise at military manoeuvres and courageous zeal forced the British into retreat. But it wasn't long before the British cavalry made a surprise appearance and caused Lakshmi's escort to scatter in all directions as she herself rode on horseback observing the bombardment. According to an eyewitness Lakshmi 'attacked one of the 8th in their advance, was unhorsed and wounded' while firing at her assailant with her pistol. The soldier in question not realising who she was, nor the fact that there was a bounty on her Royal head, dispatched her with his rifle.

After the Rani's death, there were some in British circles who were prepared to acquit her for her alleged crimes such as allowing the massacre of European citizens at Jhansi. Evidence from a variety of sources suggested it unlikely that Lakshmi would have been able to prevent such killings which were beyond her control. A more likely explanation for the Rani taking up arms against the East Indian Company was that as an intelligent diplomat who understood the benefits of professing her allegiance to the British, it was only when Lakshmi realised she would be blamed for the Jhansi massacre that she cast in her lot with the rebels. What was never in doubt, even in the minds of Lakshmi's enemies was her formidable intelligence and bravery. One John Latimer of the Central India Field Force even praised the Rani's military capabilities when he wrote 'Seeing her army broken and defeated, with rage in her heart and tears in her eyes, she mounted her horse and made her course towards Gwalior. Here the last stand was made, she disdained further flight, and died, with a heroism worthy of a better cause. Her courage shines pre-eminent and can only be equalled but not eclipsed by that of Joan of Arc. Below: Bollywood version of her life.



1. The Holy Royal Martyr photos courtesy of St Elizabeth Convent.
2. Taken from Wikipedia and Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2005). Alresford (Hampshire) Barbers shop with pole taken from Huffington Post and barber-surgeon's tools from the John Moore Museum.
3. Taken from Wikipedia. Etching from Chambers's History of the Revolt in India. London, 1859 (in the Public Domain). Statue in Gwalior, photo by Harrison Forman courtesy of University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Above pic courtesy of Quora.