

FOOT GUARDS BADGES ON THE SCARLET HOME SERVICE TUNIC

by David Langley

A chance recent remark by a retired Lance-Sergeant of the Grenadier Guards set me thinking. "Of course", he said, trade badges on Other Ranks' dark blue Number 1 Dress were on dark blue, but they were on scarlet for the scarlet Home Service tunic". "Yes", I said, and went away with a question mark over my head.

This article seeks to lay the matter to rest regarding all the rank, appointment, skill-at-arms, instructor and trade badges that are and have been worn on the tunic, but I also hope it provokes informed comment, especially if my conclusions turn out to be wrong. So, where is the evidence to come from? Actual tunics with genuine badges need impeccable provenance to be acceptable. The Guards Museum have conducted some investigations on my behalf, including asking the regimental Master Tailors, and have



Figure 1

been told that currently all other ranks wear dark navy blue backings to their badges (except the Sergeant-Majors' large Royal Coat of Arms) and that the badges on the officers tunics have scarlet backings. This they have confirmed by looking through coloured photos in the collection.

There are certainly colour illustrations around in abundance, and, so far as other ranks are concerned, the backings are indeed blue, very dark indeed. In 1991 *Military Modelling* magazine produced a splendid long-running series by Gary Gibbs, copiously illustrated with Foot Guards badges, and, whereas it made the point that very few 'trades' were being worn on the tunic at that time, all the badges illustrated except the Sergeant-Majors' Large Badge were indeed on blue, worked in gold bullion (and coloured silks where appropriate).



Figure 2



Figure 3

Black and white photographs are a very difficult medium for this sort of quest. The more modern the photograph, the more subtle and revealing in tone, as at Figure 1, whereas the older ones, particularly those on orthochromatic film before about 1925, fail to distinguish even between the cuffs (known to be blue) and the tunic (known to be scarlet), so there is little chance of finding a smaller distinction between a blue or a scarlet backing, as at Figure 2.

The official printed word gives a little assistance. Neither *Clothing Regulations* stretching back beyond 1881 are any help, nor are various Brigade of Guards *Standing Orders*, but *Priced Vocabularies of Clothing (PVCN)*, and their predecessors and successors, are more informative, sometimes by inference. Other valuable sources are my private correspondence with the late Major Nicholas Dawnay, the Fosten Brothers' *Thin Red Line*, Colonel Peter Walton's *Simpkin's Soldiers Volume II* and my notebooks, scribbled in a multitude of military museums these past forty years.

In the period from 1800 to 1868 both the Infantry of the Line (I exclude Rifles) and the Foot Guards wore scarlet top garments for sergeants and above, and a duller red for the rank and file (all ranks went into scarlet in 1872). There is good evidence from existing examples that all badges of rank and appointment, primarily chevrons, were sewn separately on to a regimental facing colour backing, so as to show a 'light' of this colour between, and all round, the chevrons. Facing colour is the colour of the collars, cuffs, turn-backs etc, and is, for example, dark blue for 'Royal' regiments such as the Foot Guards. In, or very close to, 1868, the Line ceased to use facing colour behind badge items: badges were either made up on scarlet, or sewn separately on to the sleeve. Dawnay deduced this from the Royal Army Clothing Department (RACD) *Lists of Changes*, and the Fostens confirm this regarding sergeants, giving March 1868 as the date. My own delvings into the RACD ledgers at the National Archive reveal that between 1864, when blue-uniformed cavalry were required to adopt a universal scheme of badges and chevrons on blue rather than facing cloth, and 1872, there was a steady progression towards standardisation. This included reducing the width of rank

chevrons, both gold and white worsted, to ½", and the abolition of facing colour behind badges and chevrons across the army. The Foot Guards were specifically excluded from this rationalisation, both regarding the use of the blue facing for all badges, and the reduction of chevron size.

A small family of the early 'trade' badges had sprung up by 1880, the early ones including crossed hatchets, spur, horse shoe and wheel, and there is irrefutable evidence that these, and rank badges, were worn where relevant by the Line on scarlet backings, right up to the time of the virtual death of the scarlet tunic for the Line on 4th August 1914. Peter Walton wrote of the 1890s that the Line used scarlet backings, and that the Guards used blue. A very early Coldstream Guards Colour Sergeant's colour badge c1820 shown in '*Military Illustrated*' number 14 is indeed on a blue backing, and these backings have continued to this day (I have in my collection a Queen Victoria and a George VI example, as well as Queen Elizabeth II). The Foot Guards have always been a much-illustrated brigade, and all the rank badges (save one) that I have seen depicted, of whatever era, show blue around each badge component. The exception is the Large Badge, which I shall come to later. Illustrated (Figure 3) is a Colour Sergeant's badge ("Pay Sergeant") of Grenadiers, clearly showing the dark blue on paler scarlet.

My collection of photographs of the various regiments includes examples of the 'B in wreath' trade badge (Figure 4), crossed signallers' flags, 'LG (Lewis or Light Machine Gun 1st class shot) in wreath' as at Figure 5, crossed hatchets with regimental badge (both varieties, gold for the sergeant, white worsted for the rank and file) and a few others too indistinct to identify, all dark on pale, and therefore blue on scarlet. The wearing of the various badges other than rank badges has decreased in recent years to virtually zero, the one notable exception being the pioneer sergeant's fine badge. This decrease was noted in the *Military Modelling* of 1991, which said that the only other badges to be worn on the tunic were the three variations on the parachute badges (SAS wings, parachute wings, and the parachute on its own), and the commando fighting knife. The parachute wings on blue are worn at the top of the right sleeve to this day.

No date or order has yet been traced for the recent marked decrease of badge wearing, and even the Garrison Sergeant-Major London District was unable to pin this down for me. Turning now to the evidence of *PVCN*. Before 1914, full dress garments of the British army were either scarlet, blue, or green (very dark green). These latter were for Rifles, and are here excluded. According to the ledgers of the RACD almost every relevant badge was made up in each of these three colours and, for the Line, it was a case of scarlet on scarlet, as indeed it was for the Royal Engineers and such cavalry as were in scarlet. The blue backings were used on full dress by the Royal Artillery, most of the support Corps, and most light cavalry. For example, whereas crossed rifles on blue were not issued to the Artillery, they certainly were to the cavalry. There are two badges which might inform the discussion on the backings used by the Guards: the crossed hatchets of the Pioneer, and the Lewis Gunner 1st Class badge, which became the Light Machine Gun badge.

Firstly the Pioneer. Other arms of service had pioneering functions, but whereas there might have been rare exceptions, the appointment badge of the Pioneer was essentially an infantry one, and included the Guards. The crossed hatchets in all three colour backings are in the successive catalogues of 1881 up to 1915 inclusive, but they appear after the war in 1923 on blue only. If they were not being made for the Guards,



Figure 4



Figure 5

it is difficult to imagine for whom. The last *PVCN* with crossed hatchets on blue was 1929, after that, no mention other than made in drab worsted or gilding metal for Service Dress. Perhaps thereafter the items on blue for the Guards were sourced other than through the standard *PVCN* procedures.

Secondly the 'LG in wreath' of the Lewis (later Light Machine gun) Gunner. Born in war (officially 1917) in drab worsted, it was for infantry, in that the cavalry were armed with the Hotchkiss gun, and received 'HG in wreath' (same date). In war there was no need for a full dress badge, but from 1919 there was, as the Foot Guards reverted to peacetime duties and dress. An entry in the RACD ledger of 1920 says "badges LG wreath Foot Guards white on scarlet for tunic". This may have been an aberration, and may never have been carried out. The 1923 *PVCN*, the last one that could possibly be used as evidence, does not describe the colour for Foot Guards although it was clearly on scarlet or blue because it was more expensive than that for Service Dress. However, in 1921 the HG badge was made officially obsolete and the badge for light machine gunners of all arms was to be the LG version. Sure enough, *PVCNs* 1929 to 1936 have both colour backings, worked in gold, presumably an alternative being needed either for the Life Guards or the Royal Horse Guards according to one's belief or not in the short-lived scarlet backing for the Foot Guards.

Finally, of the large Royal Arms of the Sergeant-major, Dawnay concluded that the 'King's Arm Badge' mentioned in a Pattern Book (of earlier than 1837) was indeed the large Royal Arms, and says that no later than 1855 it was depicted as being made on scarlet, superimposed on four gold lace chevrons each edged separately in blue. However, the Guards Museum have pointed out that there is a drawing of the badge in the manuscripts in the Victoria and Albert Museum by P W Reynolds which states in January 1891 that 'the blue backing to the Royal Arms was removed'. Of the known badges of the Victorian era in private hands, none have a blue backing. One supposes that, resistant to change as the Foot Guards habitually are, when the four chevrons were discontinued, they saw no reason to change the backing of the Sergeant-major's badge to the otherwise standard blue. The badge has not been worn continuously: the Guards Museum believes that from pictorial evidence around 1885 until 1894 the Sergeant Majors wore only a crown, and that the large Arms was reintroduced in 1894 and for around six months was worn on the lower right arm until removed to the upper arm. This is in substantial agreement with Dawnay.

In conclusion, there appears no evidence except the recollection of my ex-Guards NCO (and what may be an error in *PVCN c1920*), that badge backings of the Foot Guards other ranks, except for that of the Sergeant-major, have ever been other than on dark navy blue. I acknowledge with grateful thanks the help of Captain JJJ Roberts (Irish Guards), Warrant Officer 1 W Mott (Welsh Guards, Garrison Sergeant-Major), Gary Gibbs, Assistant Curator Guards Museum, and Mr Leigh Kitchen.

References:

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