

Freedom of the City bestowed upon The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry

The highest honour that Edinburgh can bestow was awarded to the Edinburgh Squadron of the Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry (SNIY) on Saturday morning.

The Freedom of the City is Edinburgh's most prestigious honour and is "bestowed upon those who are held in the highest esteem." It is a tradition that dates back over 560 years to 1459.

The Yeomanry is the Army's newest combat regiment and is based at Redford Barracks.

The Depute Lord Provost, Joan Griffiths MBE made the award. She said: "

"My Lords, Major General Graham, Officers and Men of the Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry, Sirs, Ladies and Gentlemen...."

"Today, it is my privilege to present the Award of the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh to The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry, Reserve Light Cavalry Regiment."

"This is of course a very rare and special civic occasion and I am delighted to see so many people gathered here at the Mercat Cross in the Old Town for such a spectacle."

“As Depute Lord Provost of this great city of ours, I am more than pleased to take the opportunity to recognise the contributions and sacrifices made by all those connected with the Regiment and its Edinburgh-based Squadron E, the Lothians and Border Yeomanry.

“And how appropriate that we mark the history and achievements of the Regiment, and E Squadron in particular, at this point in time.

“Only last year in 2021 did the city commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott, the most famous founding member of The Royal Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons.

“This was the ancestor Regiment that stopped the then Lord Provost Sir James Stirling from being thrown over North Bridge – not far from here – during the King’s Birthday Riot in 1792.

“To my/our great relief, the attempt of such a heinous act would be less likely today – especially as North Bridge is closed at present!

“But back then, a timely intervention on the part of the Regiment saved the skin of my/an eminent predecessor! We are most grateful.

“More recently the Regiment has been at the forefront of the military contribution both at home and abroad.

“Its great legacy includes the formation of the Reconnaissance Unit for the 51st Highland Division at St Valery in 1940 when some 10,000 troops became prisoners of war.

“Overseas operations in the 21st Century have included the deployment of members of the Regiment to Iraq and Afghanistan and – poignantly in the light of what is now happening in Eastern Europe – the Baltic States and Poland.

“Coming right up to date, the Regiment has had several personnel deployed on Operation RESCRIPT, the military support to help tackle the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the UK.

“This has been described by the Ministry of Defence as the “biggest ever homeland military operation in peacetime”, involving up to 23,000 personnel.

“These exceptional contributions of the Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry, Reserve Light Cavalry Regiment to Defence and the community is deserving of the highest award that Edinburgh can bestow.

“The Freedom of the City is a tradition that dates back over 500 years to 1459.

“In times long past, Freemen were exempted from the payment of tolls and charges in the city. Sadly, this no longer applies. Nor can you graze your sheep today on common land in the city.

“But, for Members of the Regiment, you are granted the Privilege of Marching through the Streets with Bayonets Fixed and Colours Flying and we await this spectacle with great anticipation!

“In just a few minutes, The Regiment will parade via the Mound, East Market Street and New Street to the Royal Mile and Holyrood Park.

“Rightfully, the Lothians and Border Yeomanry Squadron will be at the forefront of the Parade.

“We ask that all who can take the direct route to Holyrood, down the Royal Mile, for the Regiment’s arrival there.

“Later this afternoon Major General, and on behalf of the Regiment, you will be invited to sign the Honorary Burgess Register, the Freedom Book.

“In doing so, the Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry, Reserve

Light Cavalry Regiment becomes an integral part of this city's long and proud history.

"The Freedom of the City of Edinburgh is the most prestigious honour bestowed upon those who are held in the highest esteem by the citizens.

"This accolade is given to you Major General, on behalf of the Regiment, by the City of Edinburgh in recognition of the outstanding role taken in defending the realm throughout a long and distinguished history.

"As your motto says 'Pervigilans' (Ever Vigilant') and how apt that is in these troubled times in which we are all living.

"I now have the absolute pleasure of presenting the 'Freedom Scroll' and conferring on The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry, Reserve Light Cavalry – the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh."

Major General Simon Graham, VR, replied on behalf of the regiment before they marched off down The Mound led by the Band of the Royal Regiment of Scotland.



Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com











Entering the Army's order of battle in 2014, the regiment's predecessors have a proud history that stretches back hundreds of years. It is formed of four Squadrons: Earl of Carrick's Own Squadron based in Ayr, North Irish Horse Squadron in Belfast, Fife & Forfar/Scottish Horse based in Cupar Squadron and in Edinburgh the Lothians & Border Yeomanry Squadron.

The latter's ancestor regiments were formed by Sir Walter Scott and the move to honour the squadron in 2021 marks a further commemoration of the 250th anniversary of his birth. The regiments also protected the Lord Provost on North Bridge, formed the Reconnaissance Unit for the 51st Highland Division at St Valery in 1940 and more recently supported the NHS.



















Although the regiment brought their beautiful white horses to the pageant for Sir Walter Scott last November they were not part of the parade today.

There are now five living Freemen of the City – HM The Queen (bestowed in 1947), Sir Chris Hoy (bestowed in 2012), Professor Peter Higgs (January 2014) and Squadron 603 of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force granted in July 2018, along with the Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry. The honour is granted rarely to those who have distinguished themselves through work or other pursuits.



The Governor of Edinburgh Castle Major General Sir Alastair Bruce with his husband Stephen Knott who attended the ceremony
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Photo from the November pageant courtesy of the SNIY