

## **Editorial** *Clash of Empires* London July 2023.

Earlier this year many members of the AZWHS and the AZWRS (Anglo-Zulu War Research Society) were taken by surprise when they first heard of the proposed *Clash of Empires* show to be held at the Royal Philatelic Society in London. I first learned, out of the blue, of the event and of the totally unexpected surprise appointment of our AZWHS Vice President, Ian Knight, as event co-curator in a routine e-mail from Ian himself on the 15<sup>th</sup> March this year:

*I must also tell you about an exhibition I am working on which will be held at the Royal Philatelic Society in London across July.*

Although taken by surprise, the AZWHS willingly offered our many years' exhibition experience and outstanding collection of exhibits, paintings and medals, all cost free. This offer was not acknowledged. Of course we fully respect and understand exhibitors might prefer to work independently and we totally accepted this. To assist the organisers we advertised their show in the editorial of the AZWHS Journal – and stood back.

Towards the end of their widely advertised month-long event, we were alerted to the plea on **Face book** from the American organiser, Alexander Haimann, as they were low on visitor numbers. His **Facebook** entry reads;

*This Monday (31 July) is our final day. If you have not been yet, please make the journey and join us. We are just 29 attendees away from hitting the 2,000 mark for overall attendance! Thank you to everyone who has already attended and contributed to this exciting milestone.*

Their low visitor attendance numbers, less than 2,000 for a month-long 'free entry' media-hyped event, appeared odd as, by comparison, our very first AZWHS afternoon exhibition, held at the Chelsea Pensioners Royal Hospital for just five hours, attracted over 700 visitors. Records of our two longest exhibitions, held at Woolwich and Kent, show that each received twice the total number of visitors in just ten-days than the whole month-long *Empires*.

We sympathetically presumed their low visitor numbers were possibly due to four overlapping factors which we always considered and included in our advice to exhibitors;

1. **Location:** In their case, their advertising stated '*Executing a public museum exhibition requires significant funding*'. Ouch! Of course it does. Why hire an expensive public museum in, of all places, central London - with significant set-up and running costs? Worse, a month-long central London exhibition is also a costly venue for enthusiastic visitors travelling from outside London, visitors who might need to consider accommodation, rail fares or car travel and parking - these all overlap and present one or more formidable 'negatives' to deter anyone contemplating attending.
2. **Venue:** This is vital. Comments made by our members generally suggested a philately museum in London was a puzzling venue for both the public and Zulu War

enthusiasts. One AZWHS member's comment was typical. '*but I'm not interested in stamps*'. In our experience military premises and museums have traditionally been the most appropriate venues for Zulu War exhibitions, even in London. We have always found military venues 'cost-free', very accommodating and have come with adequate parking. For example, in advance of our major Woolwich exhibition our military hosts generously volunteered artefact security, parking and visitor assistance.

3. **Avoid presentations of unfamiliar subjects:** we understand that 30 worldwide guest speakers presenting widely assorted topics on different days proved challenging for the organizers and confusing for speakers and visitors alike. Our regular AZWHS and AZWRS public speakers, with many years experience of such presentations, know full well that the topics that create the most interest are the subjects of *Rorke's Drift* and *Isandlwana*. For example, one of our standard *Rorke's Drift* presentations in South London attracted an audience of over 1,000. For us, a *Rorke's Drift* or *Isandlwana* presentation typically meant a 'full house' and our popular 'after dinner' and numerous convention presentations of these two main subjects ran to some 400 highly successful events over 25 years.
4. **Free Entry:** In central London .... a definite 'No No! For a public event, free entry smacks of uncertainty and the gesture tends to be psychologically interpreted by intending visitors as 'Probably not worth it'. Modern event visitors expect to pay an entrance fee for value, especially for quality military attractions such as those run by The Imperial War Museum, The Mary Rose, HMS Belfast, HMS Victory, The Churchill War Rooms, The RE Museum, Chatham Dockyard - as do visitors to the vast network of National Trust and English Heritage sites - and most UK cathedrals.

As a friendly gesture, when their *Empires* show closed, I invited the curator and Ian Knight to submit a review for this journal. I regret no reply or communication as been received.

To the way ahead, for organizations or enthusiasts considering running a Zulu War event, the AZWHS will continue to offer free friendly support and impartial advice along with, if requested, guest speakers and an array of unique artefacts and medals to help organizers achieve a truly successful and rewarding exhibition. Over the years we have successfully assisted a number of non AZWHS exhibitions, corporate events and conferences - such as for Rotary, the Conservative Party SE Region, the Women's Institute, the International Guild of Battlefield Guides, the Royal British Legion and various regimental events. I am delighted other events are already booked for next year.

*Adrian Greaves*

Dr Adrian Greaves

Journal Editor