



Lot 154

Date of Auction: 19th July 2017

Sold for £12,000

Estimate: £12,000 - £15,000

A remarkable family group:

'The 11th Hussars were returning at a hand-gallop under a galling rifle fire from the Fedioukine Hills on their right, when Sergeant Bentley's worn-out mount refused to keep up with the rest, and his comrades saw the fair-haired Lieutenant [Dunn], six foot two in height, turn his charger, one of the most notorious kickers in the regiment, and ride back towards the Sergeant, who was trying to defend himself against three Russian Dragoons. He sabred the first Dragoon out of his saddle, allowing Bentley time to get to his feet, and although his horse became almost unmanageable, he and the remaining Russians closed and hacked and circled round and round, until he had killed them both.'

Lieutenant Alexander Dunn's biographical entry in *The V.C. and D.S.O.*, refers.

An important Light Brigade charger's group of three awarded to Troop Sergeant-Major W. Bentley, 11th Hussars, who, pursued by several Russian dragoons, managed to cut one of them - an officer - across the face before himself being wounded by a lance prod in the back of the neck which dismounted him: his spectacular rescue by the giant Lieutenant Alexander Dunn, whose swordsmanship 'proved terrible to the enemy's of the country', resulted in the only V.C. awarded to an officer for the charge and the first V.C. to be awarded to a Canadian

CRIMEA 1854-56, 4 clasps, Alma, Balaklava, Inkermann, Sebastopol (Tp-Sjt.-Mjr. W. Bentley, 11th Hussars), officially impressed naming; ARMY L.S. & G.C., V.R. (Troop Serjt. Major William Bentley, XIth Hussars, 1857), depot impressed naming; TURKISH CRIMEA 1855, Sardinian issue (863 T.S.M. W. Bentley, XI P.A.O. Hussars), regimentally impressed naming, *the second with slack suspension claw, contact marks and edge bruising, good fine or better*

The India General Service Medal awarded to Private T. Bentley, 3rd Foot

INDIA GENERAL SERVICE 1854-95, 1 clasp, Perak (2099 Pte. T. Bentley, 1/3rd Foot), *edge bruise, somewhat polished, nearly very fine*

The Ashantee Medal awarded to Bandsman G. Bentley, Royal Navy

ASHANTEE 1873-74, no clasp (G. Bentley, Bandsn., H.M.S. Rattlesnake, 73-74), *edge nicks, very fine*

The Egypt campaign pair awarded to Private F. Bentley, Commissariat and Transport Corps

EGYPT AND SOUDAN 1882-89, 1 clasp, Tel-el-Kebir, dated reverse (29 Pte. F. Bentley, 15th Co. C. & T.C.); KHEDIVE'S STAR 1882, *one or two edge bruises and minor contact wear, otherwise very fine (7)*
£12000-15000

Footnote

Provenance: Glendining's, 18 November 1968; Sotheby's, 21 March 1988.

William Bentley was born at Kilnwick-on-Wolds, Yorkshire in October 1816 and enlisted in the 11th Hussars at Beverley in July 1835; his enlistment papers describe him as 5'9" tall with a fresh complexion, hazel eyes and brown hair.

In April 1842, the regiment was sent to York owing to the threat of civil unrest by the Chartists. Detachments were also sent to Halifax, Rochdale and Glossop, and duties included the escorting of Chartist prisoners from jail to court.

Bentley, who was advanced to Corporal in June 1851 and to Sergeant in November 1853, was embarked for the Crimea in February 1854.

Admitted to Scutari Hospital on 22 September 1854, he rejoined his regiment on 11 October and participated in the charge of the Light Brigade, being wounded by a lance prod in the back of his neck and by a bullet graze to his leg; his life, as stated, was saved by Lieutenant Alexander Dunn, 11th Hussars, who cut down three Russians who were attacking Bentley from the rear, an incident to which the citation for Dunn's subsequent award of the V.C. refers:

'For having, in the Light Cavalry Charge of 25 October 1854, saved the life of Sergeant Bentley, 11th Hussars, by cutting down three Russian Lancers who were attacking him from the rear, and afterwards cutting down a Russian Hussar, who was attacking Private Levett, 11th Hussars' (*London Gazette* 24 February 1857).

Bentley was also present at Inkermann and in operations before Sebastopol, but his name does not appear on the regimental roll for Alma. He was advanced to Troop Sergeant-Major in November 1855 and was awarded the L.S. & G.C. Medal in May 1857.

He was discharged at Birmingham in July 1860 'to serve with the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry' as a Drill Instructor; he remained similarly employed until 1872, thereby completing 37 years with the Colours. He was never entered in the regimental defaulter's book or tried by Court-martial.

Bentley attended the first Balaklava Banquet in 1875 and was elected a member of the Balaklava Commemoration Society in 1879.

The 1881 census reveals that he was living with his first wife, Mary, at 63 Lowther Street, York; she died in January 1883, and his second wife, Elizabeth, in June 1888.

Having signed the Light Brigade's Loyal Address of 1887, Bentley died at his residence, No. 2 St. John's Crescent, Penley's Grove Street, York, in March 1891, aged 74. He was buried in the old section of York Cemetery.

The following report of his death and funeral appeared in the *Yorkshire Chronicle* on 7 March 1891:

'One of the few remaining British heroes who came back "from the jaws of death" after the famous charge of the Light Brigade, has been summoned by the grim sentinel, Death, to the fate he averted under Lord Cardigan. Troop Serjt. Major William Bentley, late of the 11th (Prince Albert's Own) Hussars, was born in Kilnwick-on-the-Wolds, Yorkshire, in 1816, and at the age of 19 years enlisted at Beverley, serving 25 years in the regiment. With the 11th he took an active part in the Crimean War, being engaged at the Alma, Inkermann and Sebastopol. In the Balaclava Charge he would most assuredly have lost his life if it had not been for the timely intervention of the brave Lieutenant Dunn, who cut down three Russians who were attacking the Sergeant from the rear. He did however, receive a lance prod in the neck and a bullet graze in the calf of his leg. His gallant rescuer was publicly decorated with the Victoria Cross for his bravery and subsequently became Colonel of the West Riding (Duke of Wellington's) regiment, now stationed at York. Deceased was on escort duty when her Majesty was married to the Prince Consort. On his leaving the 11th Hussars he was appointed Drill-Instructor of the Wiltshire Yeomanry and having held that appointment for twelve years, retired into civil life, with a record of 37 years under the colours. He took up his abode at York and died after a lingering illness at his residence, No.2 St. John's Crescent, Penley's Grove Street, in the 74th year of his age. He leaves four sons and three daughters. The obsequies took place on Thursday morning with every manifestation of respect, and with full military honours. The band and a full squadron of the 10th Hussars under the command of Captain B. B. Hervey, met the cortege at the deceased's residence and escorted it through the city direct to the cemetery. The coffin, of plain oak, rested on the gun-carriage drawn by powerful black steeds in funeral trappings. The Union Jack over spread the bier and a black velvet pall was laid on the colours. The band headed the funeral procession, playing Chopin's "Funeral March"; after which came the coffin itself, flanked by six corporals who acted as bearers. The relatives and friends came next, followed by fourteen sergeants and sergeant-majors who composed the mourning party and wore black sashes, the firing party and a number of men from the 10th bringing up the rear. The streets en-route to the cemetery were lined with spectators, whilst a considerable number had gathered at the graveside. The service was conducted by the Revd. F.C. Sandford, rector of St. Maurice and the funeral arrangements conducted by Mr. D. T. L. Fletcher. Amongst those who assembled to pay a last respect to their "old-comrade-in-arms" were Mr. Duckitt, who served in the 11th Hussars, Mr. John Hogan (8th Hussars) and Mr. William Pearson, who were with the deceased in the famous charge; Inspector Duke and Sgt. Major Wintersgill, who were with the 1st Royal Dragoons in the Crimea; Mr. Smith, 5th Dragoon Guards, Sgt. Major Dalby, 16th Lancers, Sgt. Major Whittaker, 5th Lancers and Sgts. Smith, Roberts, Yeomans and Leonard, all veteran Infantry men ...'

A silver tea service which was presented to him by his comrades in the 11th Hussars - on the occasion that he took up his new appointment as a Drill Instructor in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry in July 1860 - is held by the Museum of the Royal Hussars.

Note:

The dashing Alexander Dunn - Canada's first V.C. - clearly caught the eye of his Colonel's wife, for on resigning his commission in the 11th Hussars after the Crimean War, he returned to his estates in Canada with Mrs. Rosa Maria Douglas, the wife of Colonel John Douglas; the latter refused to divorce his philandering wife and she became Dunn's mistress for many years.

Having helped raise the 100th Regiment in Canada in 1858, Dunn purchased its Lieutenant-Colonelcy for £10,000, but - on account of a serious gambling habit - exchanged into the 33rd (The Duke of Wellington's) Regiment in December 1864. He took the 33rd to Abyssinia in 1867, where he died in mysterious circumstances - some say as a result of a hunting accident, others of murder. Certainly his relationship with his mistress, Mrs. Rosa Douglas, appears to have soured for, on departing for Abyssinia, he changed his Will, his sister becoming the main beneficiary in Rosa's stead. Rosa contested the second Will and won a small fortune but she died in obscurity after re-marrying on Colonel Douglas's death in 1871.

Thomas Bentley was born in Norwich in 1850 and enlisted in the 3rd Foot at Reading in February 1872, aged 23 years. He joined the 1st Battalion in India in March 1873 and was actively employed in the Perak operations of 1875-76 (Medal & clasp). In September 1878, he transferred to the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Foot at Meerut, following which, in April 1881, he was embarked for England.

George Bentley was born in Canterbury in December 1839 and joined the Royal Navy in October 1866, when he stated his trade as that of a musician. Duly appointed a Bandsman, he served in H.M.S. *Rattlesnake* from July 1869 until March 1874, including active employment during the Ashantee operations of 1873-74 (Medal). He was discharged ashore in the latter year, when his conduct was described as 'very good'.

Frederick Bentley transferred from the 1st Company to the 15th Company of the Commissariat and Transport Corps on 1 August 1882 and was embarked for Egypt on the following day. He was subsequently present at Tel-el-Kebir (Medal & clasp; Khedive's Star).

Sold with original copies of the *The Dorset County Chronicle / Somersetshire Gazette*, 16 November 1854 and *The Illustrated London News*, 11 November 1854, with a feature on Sebastopol, together with a quantity of copied research.