Sherwood Rangers Long Service Medal - a Medallic Mystery by Simon Wilson

Yeomanry units were originally formed during the wars with France at the end of the 18th Century, when they were intended to form a defence force in case of invasion, which was seen as a serious threat. After the war they were retained to help in preserving law and order, as there were very few organised police forces at the time. Probably the most famous Yeomanry action of the time was the Peterloo Massacre, though it also involved regular army units, which resulted in around 18 deaths and 4-600 injuries. Two notable yeomanry actions of the time were the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, and the Nottingham Reform Bill Riots of 1831, when the castle was burned down and the yeomanry called in to disperse rioters, fortunately without killing anyone.

In 1827 units which had not been called upon to maintain order in the previous 10 years were disbanded to save money. Nottinghamshire, having a history of unrest, continued with two regiments – the Sherwood Rangers and the South Notts Hussars.





Above: This is a nice high-relief medal with a lively design, even if the production quality leaves a little to be desired. It was sold by Dix, Noonan, Webb in their sale of 20 July 2017 as Lot 1359. It is listed with a date of 1821 and described as having a pawnbroker's mark in the exergue. There are definitely some scratches in the exergue, but I'd hesitate to say they were pawnbroker's marks, even though it would add a dimension to the story of the medal. It was sold again by Mellors and Kirk in Nottingham – Lot 413 – on 13 May 2025.

It is the only silver example I have seen, though there are a few examples around in bronze. It is also the only named example I have seen, as the bronze ones do not appear to be named. It is 38mm in diameter with a 30mm wide swivelling scroll suspender. This is around 2mm narrower than what we think of as the standard British ribbon, and the piece of Imperial Yeomanry Long Service Medal Ribbon which has been used, does not fit well. However, it is a clue to the possible date of the medal – the

“standard” ribbon began to gain ground around the middle of the 19th century. Before that they were often wider and sometimes, as in this case, narrower.

The upper part of the obverse is a scroll with the motto “LOYAL UNTIL DEATH”, the family motto of Sir Thomas White of Tuxford and Wallingwells, who raised the regiment at his own expense in 1794. The central design is a dynamic portrait of a mounted cavalryman brandishing a sabre, though I have to be honest and question if that is a natural pose for a horse. The design is high relief and stands higher than the rim of the medal. The motto was later changed by the regiment – *Loyal Unto Death* – though I can't find a date for the change.

The reverse has the wording FOR/ LONG SERVICE/ AND/ GOOD CONDUCT/ IN THE/ SHERWOOD RANGERS/ YEOMANRY/ CAVALRY. As with the bronze specimen I also have, the inscription is slightly rotated compared to the obverse.

The edge is engraved in block capitals with the details SERGEANT WILLIAM BRADLEY 48 YEARS SERVICE.





A bronze version of the medal (above), appears in the *Transactions of the Thoroton Society Vol 34 pp 85-91 (1930)* which Alan Cope, a member of the Numismatic Society of Nottinghamshire, found for me after much work in pre-digital days. It is in an article titled *Nottinghamshire Volunteer Medals of the Napoleonic Period*. However, the uniform and facial hair of the soldier do not seem to be Georgian.

The Hussar-style tunic was adopted in 1848 which is consistent with the heavy moustache. It is also reminiscent of the suspender style being used on Victorian campaign medals of the late 1840s.

It's a shame that they didn't put dates on the edge of the medal, but the engraving does provide a clue. William Bradley appears twice in the newspapers, linked both times to the Sherwood Rangers.

The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* of Thursday June 2, 1853 lists the officers and NCOs of the unit on the retirement of Sir Thomas White as Colonel (he was the son of the founder, and clearly as well-liked as his father). Bradley is shown as a Sergeant in the Clumber Troop.

The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* of Thursday September 13, 1855 carries an article with the title “Death of Veteran Sherwood Ranger”. On hearing the news of Bradley's death the regiment swung into action

and gave him a funeral worthy of his 52 years of service to King and Country. The Commanding Officer sent the RSM to Cromwell to ascertain the wishes of the family, and with their agreement organised a funeral with full military honours, including a firing party of twelve men who fired three volleys over the coffin as he was laid to rest.



Both silver and bronze medals

This helps fix a date for the award of the medal – 1851 at the latest, assuming he was still serving at the time of his death (it isn't clear from the report). And a design date of 1848 at the earliest, based on the style of tunic.

Unfortunately, there is no other information in the newspapers, which report no awards of Long Service medals until the Volunteer Long Service Medal was instituted in 1894. For the moment, it is a mystery, but with luck and more research, who can tell what may turn up.