

PERSONALITIES OF THE PAST IN ARDINGLY

JAMES BACKSHALL

JAMES BACKSHALL born in 1835, died March 1872.

James Backshall was born in Ardingly, West Sussex. He was employed as a labourer prior to his enlistment with the 4th Light Dragoons in Brighton. Backshall served with the Regiment during the Crimean War, and rode in the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, 25.10.1854. '*INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH / RODE THE SIX HUNDRED*'. Backshall, then a lad of 19, was one of the few who came through, '*THE JAWS OF DEATH, BACK FROM THE MOUTH OF HELL*'. He was taken prisoner by the Russians, and repatriated in Autumn 1855, having been conveyed from Odessa by the steam ship Columbo. Whilst still serving with the regiment in Newbridge, Ireland, Backshall became involved with the 'Cardigan vs Calthorpe' libel suit.

Earl Cardigan filed for libel against Colonel Calthorpe for an imputation of cowardice on behalf of the Earl when leading the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava. Cardigan believed that Calthorpe insinuated this in his book 'Letters from a Staff Officer in the Crimea', and in it, the author, when describing the Charge, observed that Lord Cardigan was not present when most needed, owing to his horse taking fright, swerving and galloping to the rear. As the excellence of Lord Cardigan's horsemanship was unquestionable the idea that his horse ran away with him was no doubt erroneous.

A new work on the Crimean war by Kinglate being partly published. Colonel Calthorpe directed that the remaining 1,000 copies of the remaining publication be suppressed.

As part of the process Backshall swore his affidavit, 29.5.1863, 'I have been in the regiment nine years. I remember the Charge of the Light Cavalry at Balaklava on the 29th October 1854. I was on the right of the right squadron in the rear rank. When within about 40 yards of the guns my horse was killed and I was taken prisoner by the Russian Lancers. A Russian officer then came up and asked me in English "Who was that that English Officer who rode back on the chestnut horse with white heels?" I said, "I did not know." At that time I was not aware what colour horse Lord Cardigan rode that day, but I afterwards heard from several of the other English prisoners taken that his Lordship did ride a chestnut horse with white heels during the charge. I never saw his Lordship after we started.'

At the time of his death James Backshall was living at Pearcelands Cottage and is buried near the Vestry door in Ardingly Churchyard. His medals were [sold in 2016](#) for approximately £9,000.

[Photograph of medals on page 15](#)