

The Mr M C Tsen Uniform Collection at Doddington Hall

The entrance to the Mr M C Tsen uniform collection at Doddington Hall is an unassuming drab grey door but open it and you are transported to a world of dazzling brilliance of gold, silver and polished brass, gleaming leather boots and rows of scarlet uniforms. We were very fortunate to be granted a private visit and guided tour as the collection is not generally open to the public.

Our expert guides (all volunteers) told the remarkable story of how it ended up in Doddington. Mr Tsen's father was assassinated just before China fell to the communists, so his mother fled to Paris with his siblings. Whilst attending public school in England he witnessed the pageantry and pomp of Queen Elizabeth II coronation and a passion for military history and craftsmanship was born. A successful career in the US funded his passion during the time when the Saville Row and Edinburgh tailors were clearing out their stock. Many items had languished there from the time of the First World War, their owners no longer alive to collect them having been killed in action. It was Mr Tsen's wish that the collection remain whole upon his death. Mr James Birch heard about it and by chance had just constructed the Waggon Museum and the gallery in the roof had strong beams perfect for supporting 900 uniforms and space for 3000 accessories including hats, helmets, swords, bearskins, sporrans and even a Chaplain Kit to enable services to be held anywhere.

We learnt what a difference a button makes; in a line or a set or on its own, and what a difference a plume makes, if it is green or white. That Highlanders wear kilts and Lowlanders wear tartan trousers. That some uniforms such as the Royal Household one; the Royal Bugler are still in use today on occasions such as the coronation of King Charles III.

If you feel that you missed out on our interesting visit it is possible to book individually through the Doddington Hall website but places are few and snapped up when released so it is no surprise that there are long waiting lists.

Rosey Thompson