

1892 The First Season of THE MILITARY CAMP AT CHIPPING

By early 1892 the Government had secured a 21 year lease from Lord Derby of 1,300 acres of his land in Chipping; parts of Wolfen Hall and Saddle Farms. This ground was to be developed initially as a summer training camp for the army. The hope was that eventually the site would become the great "Northern Camp" of England and develop along the lines of Aldershot in the south.

Chippiners seem to have accepted this remarkable situation quite cheerfully, perhaps because they hoped it would increase trade and also would help their campaign for a railway extension from Longridge. At a national level there was mounting concern about British military capability in overseas campaigns in South Africa, Egypt and India. Losses incurred in the First Boer War had been a serious blow to British morale. Part-time Volunteer and Militia forces (the forerunners of the "Territorials") were being recruited to take over duties at home, as the regular troops were increasingly dispatched abroad.

The Government hoped that this upland area would be ideal for land firing ranges and for artillery practice combined with tactical training, with an area for the camp. Up till then all the summer firing ranges for troops in the north had been along the coasts. The amphitheatre shape of the terrain would help to ensure public safety, and a flag would be flown on Parlick to indicate the start of firing practice.

In March a Preston building contractor was engaged to drain and prepare the site, install piped running water and construct the firing ranges. Up to 100 navvies at a time were employed in this work. The camp was just about ready for the opening at the end of May.

The intention was to have regular troops stationed there to give instruction to a succession of volunteer units. In the first year, the first regulars at the camp were about 500 men of the 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own). They arrived on May 26th and were replaced after July 19th by men of the East Yorkshire Regiment. Volunteer groups on holiday from their normal jobs included, among many others, the Bury Fusiliers and the 3rd Manchester Militia. Thousands of men stayed at the camp that summer. The maximum at any one time was 1,700, but the site was considered to have the potential to accommodate far more.

The first soldiers to come, the West Yorkshire Regiment, caused a stir when they marched to the Chipping Camp from Fulwood Barracks on May 26th. There was great excitement in Longridge where mill-hands left their work to watch the soldiers passing. As it happened, Chipping village was already in "high festival" since it was Ascension Day, the Odd Fellows Club Day. But the arrival of 500 troops marching into the district with their band playing the regimental march was sufficient to tempt Chippiners to desert their fairground to go to watch the soldiers setting up camp.



A constant concern of the military authorities was the absence of "rational and healthy amusement" for the troops. After all, most of the volunteers were on their annual holiday.

In mid June the Vicar gave a genteel garden party on the vicarage lawn for half a dozen officers plus the churchwardens, choir and bellringers, with music provided by the regimental band.

For the rest of the troops and the general public there were occasional entertainments at the camp: bonfires, military tattoos, sports, band concerts, dancing and singing. Such events attracted people from several miles around.

OFFICER (LEFT) & PRIVATE (RIGHT) OF THE WEST YORKSHIRE REGIMENT (PRINCE OF WALES'S OWN) IN REGIMENTAL UNIFORMS (RED & WHITE) AS WOULD BE WORN AT CHIPPING IN 1892, THOUGH COVERED WITH A FORM OF OVERALL FOR FATIGUE WORK.

