

# WOLVERTON AND THE BOER WAR 1899-1902

On 10 October 1899 the Second Boer War broke out in South Africa.

As a result of the military reverses at Magersfontein, Stormberg and Colenso in the 'Black Week' of 9-15 December 1899 an appeal was made for extra troops from all quarters including the Volunteer Force which had until then been only liable for Home Service and only then on the occasion of danger to the United Kingdom.

On 2 January 1900 the War Office sanctioned the raising of 66 Active Service Companies from the volunteers, to be attached to regular battalions in South Africa on a year's engagement.

The 1st Bucks Rifle Volunteers had to find approximately 60 men for the composite active service company to be attached to the 1st Battalion, Oxfordshire Light Infantry (the 43rd).

When the call for volunteers reached the Wolverton Detachment a meeting was held in the Science and Art Institute. Seventy-two members of No6 Wolverton Company immediately volunteered for active service this soon increased to eighty-six, and the remainder for garrison duty. Twenty-five men of the Wolverton detachment were chosen for service in South Africa.

Five weeks later, on 6 February, a farewell dinner was given.

A newspaper report of the time said:- "On no previous occasion has the large hall of the Science and Art Institute presented such a display of loyalty, such a scene of enthusiasm, or such an array of volunteer lights, as was witnessed at the dinner given on Tuesday evening, 6 February 1900, to recognise the departure of those selected to serve with the Oxfordshire Light Infantry in South Africa. The hall had been decorated with flags, bunting, mottoes, ....., festoons of artificial flowers, etc. At the back of the platform was the encouraging and appropriate motto, "Good-bye and good luck to the gentlemen in khaki ordered south."

The Wolverton detachment and draft paraded on the Market Square at 12.45 on the following morning under the command of Major Williams and Lieutenant Hawkins. Prior to leaving the square each member was presented with a packet of tobacco. Without ceremony the company, headed by the band playing the regimental quick march "Ninety Five", marched via Radcliffe Street, and Stratford, Road to the station, their fellow workmen cheering them en route.

They embarked for South Africa on 10 March 1900.

LIEUTENANT	LCH	HAWKINS	PRIVATE	TJ	GODFREY
COLOUR SERJEANT	W	CROFT	PRIVATE	JM	GOULD
CORPORAL	C	KIRBY	PRIVATE	JH	HARDING
CORPORAL	AJ	HARTELL	PRIVATE	JS	HARTELL
LANCE CORPORAL	JR	DORMER	PRIVATE	F	HUMPHRIES
LANCE CORPORAL	RB	JACKSON	PRIVATE	B	LITTLE
BUGLER	CS	TEAGLE	PRIVATE	FW	POWELL
BUGLER	E	NORTH	PRIVATE	AH	SPONG
PRIVATE	HR	BEARD	PRIVATE	E	WEBB
PRIVATE	WFH	CARROLL	PRIVATE	WT	SHACKLEFORD
PRIVATE	J	CARVELL	PRIVATE	W	WOODFORD
PRIVATE	AJ	DOLLING	PRIVATE	S	WOOTTON
PRIVATE	A	GIBBON			



By the time the volunteers arrived in South Africa on 31st March 1900, the main Boer field army had been defeated, and the British garrisons at Kimberley and Ladysmith, though not Mafeking, relieved. Despite the British successes, however, the war was to drag on for another two years, as a bitter guerrilla conflict was waged by Boer commandos. The Active Service Company was mostly employed in columns, sweeping the veldt clear of livestock, crops and Boer civilians, although there was one relatively static period spent around Heilbron from October to December 1900. There were many skirmishes, but few casualties other than those to disease.

On 18 May 1901, the men of the Wolverton Volunteers returned from South Africa.

Previously they had been met at High Wycombe by the Mayor and Corporation and Officers of the 1st Buckinghamshire Rifle Volunteers.

The arrival of the special train at Wolverton was heralded by fog signals and deafening cheers. A procession was then formed and marched to the Market Square. Here C.A. Park, Superintendent of the Wolverton Carriage Works, addressed Lieutenant Hawkins and the men.

To commemorate this part of Wolverton history, public donations were made, and from the sum collected, a tablet was made in the Works and hung in the Wolverton Science and Art Institute until its closure. From there it went back to the Wolverton carriage Works where it remained until the demolition of the works.

The Memorial along with the Wolverton Companies first world war Memorial were both rescued from a skip by a local Territorial Soldier and taken to and hung in the John Howard Barracks at Blakelands TA Centre in Milton Keynes. Both plaques are now in the care of the Buckinghamshire Military Museums Trust (BMMT).

The names of thirty four men of the Wolverton Detachment who served in South Africa are engraved on the tablet.



SOUTH AFRICAN WAR  
THIS TABLET WAS ERECTED BY  
PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION TO COMMEMORATE  
THE ACTION OF THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS  
OF THE WOLVERTON DETACHMENT OF THE  
1ST BUCKS RVC WHO VOLUNTEERED FOR  
ACTIVE SERVICE IN THE ABOVE WAR.

LIEUT LC HAWKINS  
C SERJT W CROFT, CORP C KIRBY, CORP AJ HARTELL, L CORP JR DORMER,  
L CORP RB JACKSON, BGR CS TEAGLE, BGR E NORTH, PTE HR BEARD,  
PTE WFH CARROLL, PTE J CARVELL, PTE AJ DOLLING, PTE AGW FELTS,  
PTE A FLINT, PTE FA GALTRESS, PTE A GIBBON, PTE TJ GODFREY,  
PTE JM GOULD, PTE HP GRANT, PTE CW HARDING, PTE JH HARDING,  
PTE JS HARTELL, PTE F HUMPHRIES, PTE B LITTLE, PTE CA MOULD,  
PTE RM OGDEN, PTE FW POWELL, PTE AH SPONG, PTE E WEBB,  
PTE AG SHACKLEFORD, PTE WT SHACKLEFORD  
PTE W WOODFORD, PTE S WOOTTON  
PTE EP WHITMEE,  
1899  
1902

Two Wolvertonians did not return from South Africa, and in the Wolverton cemetery there is a simple obelisk to the memory of Private J.M. Gould, 'the first Bucks Volunteer to die on Active Service in the South Africa Campaign', and to Trooper G. Ruddleden, formerly of Wolverton, who was killed in action at Krugersdorp in September 1900.





#### Sources

Oliver Ratcliff - History and Antiquities of the Newport Pagnell Hundreds  
Bill West - The Trainmakers: the Story of Wolverton Works.