

WOLVERTON AND THE 1st BUCKS RIFLE VOLUNTEERS 1877-1908

1859. The Buckinghamshire Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry traces its history back to 1859 and the threat of invasion by the French. The British Army was still heavily involved abroad after the Indian Mutiny and there were very few regular army units left at home. As a result the "Rifle Volunteers" (the Home Guard of its day) was formed for home defence to repel the possible invasion. In Buckinghamshire the Rifle Volunteer Corps formed would eventually, when consolidated as a battalion become the **1st Buckinghamshire Rifle Volunteers**.

1877. It was not until 1877 that Wolverton became actively involved in the Volunteer movement, a previous attempt to form a Volunteer Company in 1872 had failed owing to the difficulty of obtaining a captain and a drill ground. In August 1877 a gentleman in the neighbourhood offered his services as captain, promising to contribute £50 towards expenses. Other gentlemen came forward to act as officers. The LNWR Company, through their representative at the Carriage Works, Mr R. Bore, took the matter up and issued notices inviting men to join. As a result a public meeting was held on 22nd October 1877 in the Wolverton Science and Art Institute, presided over by G.M. Fitzsimmons, and supported by Colonel Wethered, Captain Rev F.W. Short of St Paul's School, Stony Stratford, Rev C.P. Cotter, Vicar of Stantonbury, and J.G.V.F. Johnson of Wolverton Mills.

Colonel Wethered referred to the abortive attempt of 1872 and offered a donation of £20. Captain Short undertook to act as Captain. A committee was then appointed: R. Bore, Captain Rev F.W. Short, Rev C.P. Cotter, and J.G.V.F. Johnson, W. Wilkinson, John Parrott from the Carriage Works, George Fitzsimmons (the L&NWR's accountant), Aldermen Young, Scotton, Polhill, Hayman, Clewitt, Smith, Fry, Goodyer, Mudon and Williams. (Mr H.M. Williams the 'Outdoor Assistant' in the Works was later to become Major H.M. Williams and Commanding Officer of the Wolverton Companies.)

On 26 November 1877 another meeting was held in the Carriage Works New Dining Room on the Stratford Road, attended by 49 and 50 others had applied to join. It was recognised that, as the company would be 'principally formed by men who from their circumstance will be unable to defray the whole cost', the committee would have to raise additional funds by subscription.

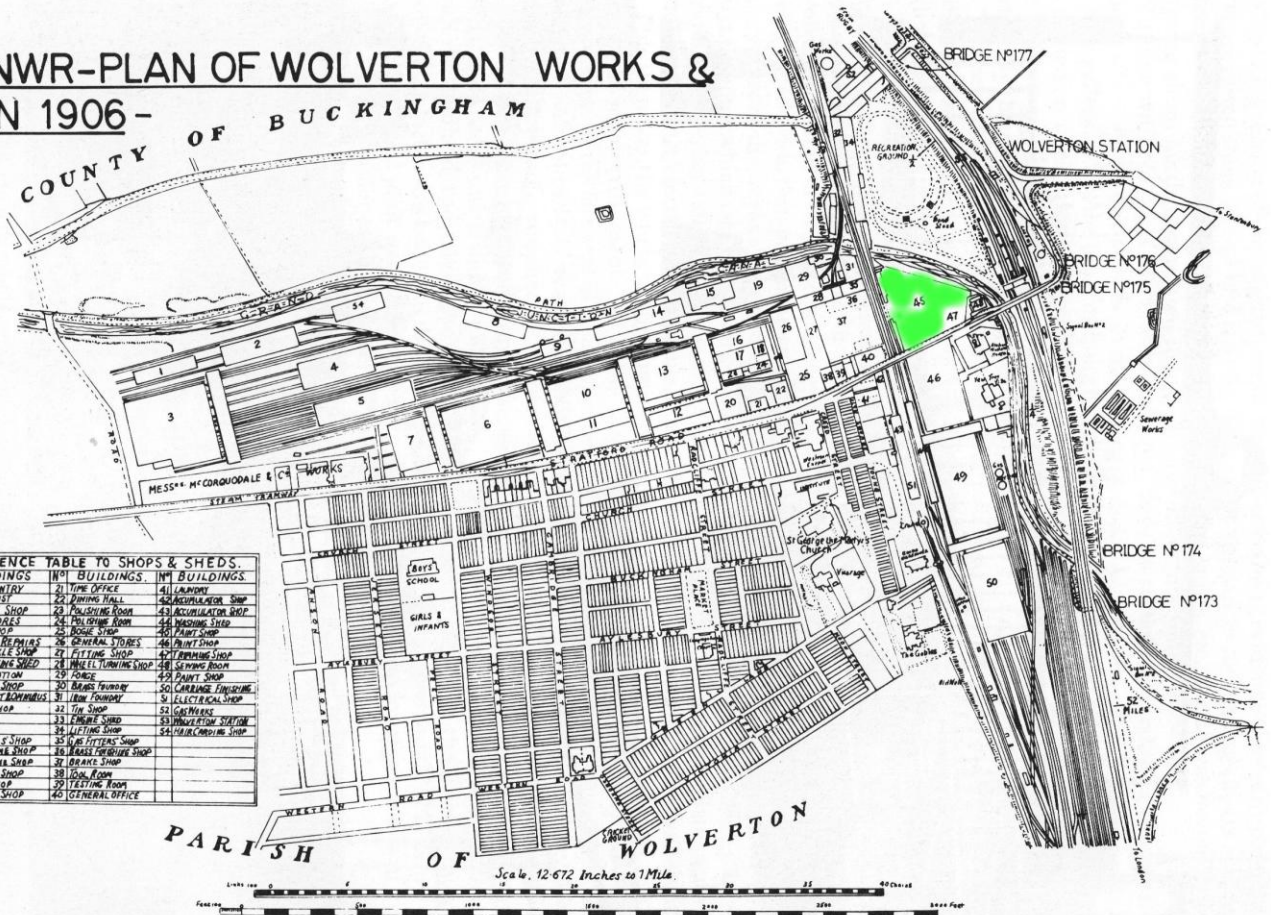
The first drill for recruits took place in the Large Paint Shop (*No 45 marked in Green on the map*) on the Thursday evening following this meeting. The paint shop was used for the volunteers to drill and as the Headquarters for the Wolverton Companies until 1914, when the Drill Hall was built.

1878. The Wolverton company was duly approved in January 1878 and became Number 6 (Wolverton) Company of the battalion it consisted almost exclusively of men employed in the Works. The company was at first commanded by Captain Short, and later by Major H.M. Williams, who was also on the staff of the LNWR Carriage Department.

L&NWR-PLAN OF WOLVERTON WORKS & TOWN 1906 -

COUNTY OF BUCKINGHAM

REFERENCE TABLE TO SHOPS & SHEDS.		
Nº BUILDINGS	Nº BUILDINGS	Nº BUILDINGS
1 TIMBER GALLERY	21 TIME OFFICE	41 LAUNDRY
2 YAMBER DOLES	22 FISHING HALL	42 REPAIRING SHOP
3 NEW PAINT SHOP	23 POLISHING ROOM	43 REPAIRING SHOP
4 TIMBER STORES	24 POLISHING ROOM	44 WASHING SHED
5 LIFTING SHOP	25 BOKE SHOP	45 PAINT SHOP
6 CARTRIDGE REPAIRS	26 GENERAL STORES	46 PAINT SHOP
7 WHEEL & AXLE SHOP	27 FITTING SHOP	47 BURNING SHOP
8 UNDERFRAME SHED	28 METAL TURNING SHOP	48 SERRING ROOM
9 POWER STATION	29 FENCE	49 PAINT SHOP
10 HORSE BOX SHOP	30 BARRACKS	50 CARTRIDGE FINISHING
11 PAINT & OIL ROOMS	31 NEW FOUNDRY	51 ELECTRICAL SHOP
12 FINISHING SHOP	32 TIN SHOP	52 CARTRIDGE
13 BODY SHOP	33 LIME SHED	53 WOLVERTON STATION
14 SAW MILL	34 LIFTING SHOP	54 HAIR CARTRIDGE SHOP
15 CARPENTER SHOP	35 FIVE LIFTING SHOP	
16 UNDERFRAME SHOP	36 BRASS FOUNDRY SHOP	
17 UNDERFRAME SHOP	37 BRASS SHOP	
18 ELECTRICAL SHOP	38 GUN ROOM	
19 SMITHS SHOP	39 TIEING ROOM	
20 FINISHING SHOP	40 GENERAL OFFICE	



Works Plan, 1906.

1879. On 23 August 1879, the LNWR Company contributed £100 towards 'the cost of the practice butts that were built adjacent to the Stanton Low Church, St Peter.



1881. The 1st BUCKS RIFLE VOLUNTEERS became a Volunteer Battalion of the OXFORDSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY in 1881. They retained their own title instead of becoming the 3rd Volunteer Battalion and resisted all official attempts to trade their distinctive dark grey riflemen's uniform for the scarlet of the regulars. They also kept their own regimental march "Ninety Five".

1897. In May 1897 the battalion was redistributed to take account of the concentration of recruits in Wolverton and Wycombe with two companies at Wycombe and a Wolverton Detachment equivalent to one and a half companies in strength: Marlow, Aylesbury and Slough all provided one company each and Buckingham half a company. The well-known local doctor, W. H. Bull, had also raised a Bearer Company at Stony Stratford in 1880 and this completed the eight-company establishment.



A Group of Wolverton Volunteers c1898.

The Wolverton Company repeatedly won the Battalion cups for smartness, drill and marksmanship.

The regimental signallers belonged to the Wolverton company and always obtained a high position among the home district signallers at the annual official examinations.

There was a strong and efficient band, all Wolverton men under the leadership of Bandmaster Brooks.

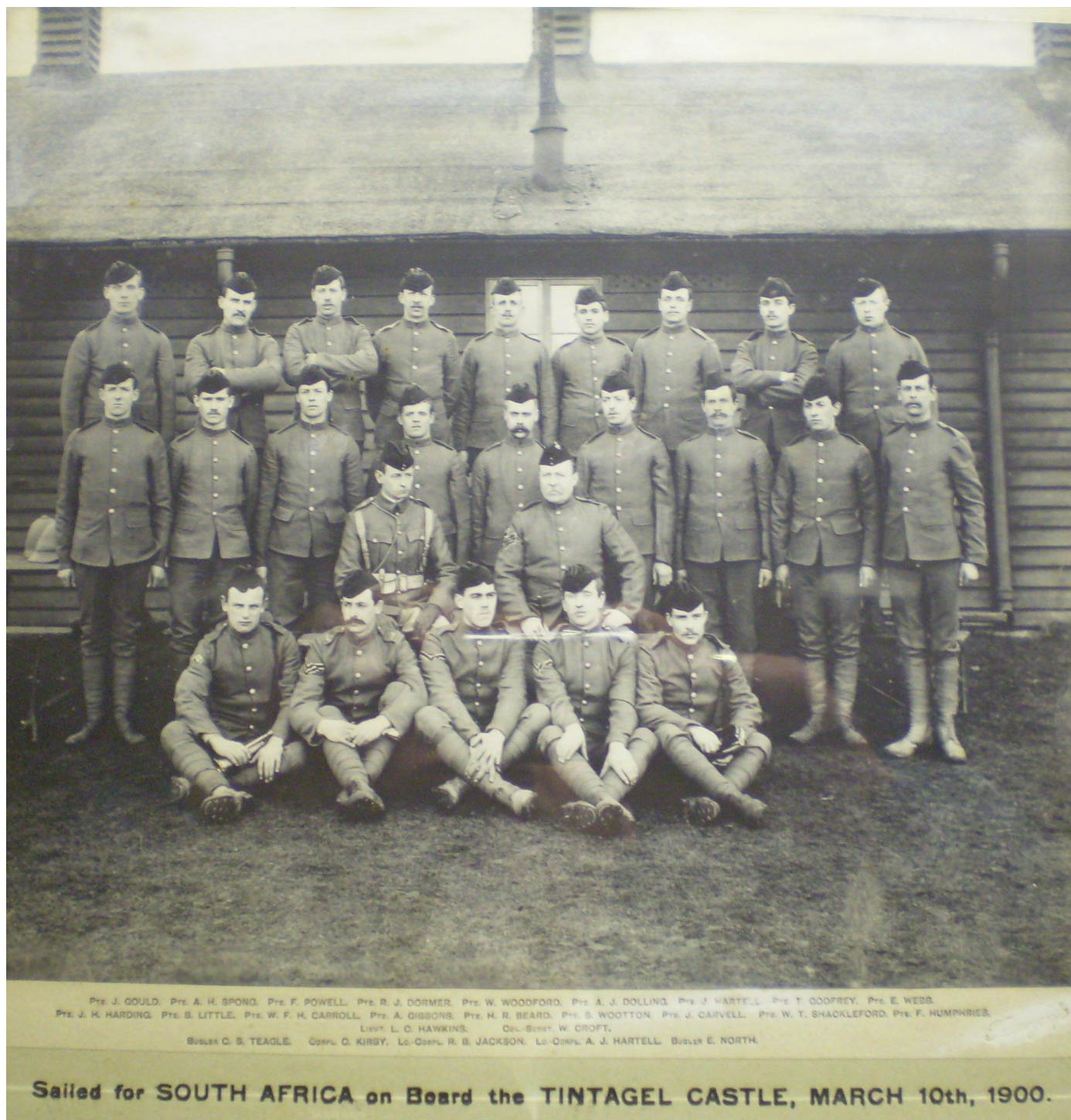


The willingness of the L&NWR to contemplate additional volunteer duties on the part of its employees reflected its own recognition of the perceived social value of drill and discipline. Indeed, if a man was dismissed from the Wolverton company for indiscipline, he was automatically dismissed from his employment.

When the Battalion was offered a place in Brodrick's Field Army in 1901/03, Lieut-Col Alfred Gilbey, who also refused to admit agricultural labourers, was careful to approach Lord Stalbridge, Chairman of the L.N.W.R., before he accepted.

1899-1901 BOER WAR - On 10 October 1899 the Boer War broke out. The 1st Bucks Rifles Volunteers were asked to raise a sixty man Volunteer Company to be attached to the 1st Battalion, The Oxfordshire Light Infantry on active service in South Africa. On 1 January 1900 a meeting was held in the Science and Art Institute when it was announced that no less than 86 members of the Wolverton Company (No 6) had volunteered for service in South Africa. Five weeks later, on 6 February, a farewell dinner was given. The following morning they paraded on the Market Square under the Command of Major Williams and Lieutenant Hawkins and marched off to the Railway Station headed by the band playing the regimental quick-step *Ninety Five*.

The Company departed Aylesbury on 10th March 1900 and returned home in May 1901.



The Wolverton men who served with the Volunteer Company of the 1st Battalion, The Oxfordshire Light Infantry in South Africa.

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. Where Mr C.A. Park, Superintendent of the Works, addressed Lieutenant Hawkins and the men.

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

Donations were made by the public to commemorate the 34 men of the No6 Wolverton Company who served in South Africa and from the sum collected a tablet was made in the Wolverton Carriage Works that was to hang in the Wolverton Science and Art Institute until its closure when it returned to the Works and hung in the Foreman's Room.

The tablet now hangs in Blakelands T A Centre:-



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, LCORP 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

In **1904**, the Stony Stratford Company (No 7) which itself was formed in 1881, and whose headquarters were at the old St Paul's College, was transferred to Wolverton resulting with the Wolverton Detachment consisting of two companies- No6. (WOLVERTON) COMPANY & No.7 (WOLVERTON) COMPANY.

1908 saw the disbandment of the 3rd (Militia) Battalion of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry (ROYAL BUCKS KINGS OWN MILITIA (RBKOM)) and also the threat of the 1st Bucks Rifle Volunteers becoming the 5th Battalion of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry on the introduction of the Territorial Force.

But as a result of much public pressure in Buckinghamshire, not only did Buckinghamshire's territorial infantry become: - "**THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BATTALION**" but the regular regiment changed its title to **THE OXFORDSHIRE AND BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY**. The Bucks Battalion found its self in the new "South Midland Division".

1st Bucks Volunteer Rifles,

(Buckinghamshire Territorial Infantry.)

Wolverton Detachment.

In order that the conditions of transfer to, and service in, the new Territorial Army, may be fully understood by all concerned, the Detachment will Parade in Drill Order in the Large Hall of the Science and Art Institute, on Tuesday, 28th January, at 7.30 p.m., when the War Office Memo. on the subject, will be read and explained by the Commanding Officer, Lieut.-Colonel the Hon. T. F. Fremantle.

All N.C. Officers and Riflemen of the Detachment are requested to attend.

Men who have served in this, or other Corps, and all young men of Wolverton, Stony Stratford, Stantonbury, and the district generally, are specially invited to be present.

It is hoped that in the New Buckinghamshire Territorial Infantry, the Wolverton Detachment may fully maintain its numbers and the reputation it has so long held in the 1st Bucks Volunteer Rifle Battalion, for smartness and efficiency.

H. M. WILLIAMS,
Major.

January 22nd, 1908.

On 31 March 1908 the 1st Buckinghamshire Rifle Volunteer Corps became the 1st Buckinghamshire Battalion, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Numbers six and seven Companies at Wolverton became F and G Companies with Captain L. C. Hawkins taking on the dual command. Every volunteer of suitable age was invited to join the new Territorials and about seventy per cent signed on for a four year term. The final parade of 250 of the old Volunteers was held in the old Drill Shed in Wolverton Works, where Major Williams said farewell. Major Williams was the only officer on parade, but Captain Hawkins was present in civilian clothes as a spectator. After the parade, the companies formed up in the Stratford Road, and after the Last Post and the Reveille were finally dismissed.

Sources:-

Bill West – The Trainmakers

Bill West – The Railwaymen

Ian Beckett – Call To Arms

Ian Becket – The Amateur Military Tradition In Bucks