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The Regulation of the Forces Act 1871 divided the United Kingdom into localized recruiting regions for the army. Under this reform infantry regiments were to consist of two regular battalions, a militia battalion, and a shared depot within a designated geographical recruiting area. Prior to this Shropshire had no permanent regular army presence, but as a result was to gain a regimental depot in Shrewsbury, to be shared by the 43rd (Monmouthshire) and 53rd (Shropshire) regiments, with its recruiting area set as Shropshire and Monmouthshire. This facility quickly became known as Copthorne Barracks. In 1881 a further reform amalgamated the 53rd and 85th regiments to create the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI), which was subsequently based in Shrewsbury until 1968 when it merged into The Light Infantry regiment.¹ In 1878 a 7a. site in Copthorne was purchased by the army for £1968 15s. 0d. from R. and M. Keate.² Construction on the depot and barracks commenced in 1876 by the Shrewsbury-based company Treasure and Son Ltd and, whilst completed in late 1878 at an estimated cost of £65,000, it was only occupied by the army in December 1880.³

When originally constructed the main entrance, on the barrack's southern perimeter fronting the Copthorne Road, consisted of a guard-house, a cell-block, and a building that housed a fire-engine. Behind this was a substantial stone three floor rectangular building with square towers at each end that contained the armoury. Reinforced with steel, the top floor was sufficiently strong to hold a 7,500-gallon water tank that supplied the needs of the barracks. The armoury is now the only part of the original barracks to survive and has now converted into apartments. In 2016 the armoury was referred to as Cardwell Keep.⁴ Behind the armoury and fronting a quadrangle that served as the parade ground, were two double-story barrack blocks (initially referred to as McLeod and Sutbridge blocks) for the enlisted soldiers, each of four rooms that could house 28 privates and eight sergeants and boasting modern furnishings

¹ John Mouldsdales (ed.), *The History of the Corps of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry: The King's (Shropshire Light Infantry) 1881-1962* (4 vols., duplicated ts, c.1968), III, 1-2.

² BPP, *Return of Lands and Tenements purchased or rented in United Kingdom and Channel Islands by War Dept.*, (Commons Parliamentary Papers, 402, (1878), 106-07.

³ *Eddowes's J.*, 11 Dec. 1878; 9 Dec. 1880.

⁴ Shropshire County Council Planning Application 16/04228/OUT: Former Copthorne Barracks, Copthorne Road, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 8LZ. "Heritage Appraisal 362A01: Copthorne Barracks, Shrewsbury, Shropshire" (Malcolm Payne Group Ltd., 2016), 5.

and indoor toilets.⁵ Attached were store-houses and ablution blocks. Along the western side of the parade ground was accommodation for ten officers, including a mess, kitchen, and anterooms. At the north-west corner of the barracks was a hospital for up to eight patients and two officers in separate wards, as well as a vestibule, waiting-room, surgery, and various store and orderly rooms. Detached from the main hospital was an isolation ward (accommodating two patients) and another toilet block. On the northern edge of the parade ground were separate married-quarters for up to 21 families along with laundry facilities and a small schoolroom. The eastern aspect of the barracks contained a canteen, shop, quarter-master stores, a bar, and cellar.⁶ There was also a telegraph office situated here which was later referred to as the Post Office.⁷ The Sergeants' Mess was here also, along with a library.⁸ The original parade ground was extended in the 20th century before being converted into a carpark.⁹ The buildings were constructed from approximately four-million bricks, made at a nearby Copthorne site, the dressings were of local Grinshill stone whilst the stone-steps and staircases were made with Yorkshire stone.¹⁰

As the barracks was only designed to accommodate 248 soldiers considerable temporary accommodation in the form of wooden huts were added in 1914 to house the influx of new recruits that passed through the barracks during World War One, increasing its capacity to 3000 men at a time.¹¹ By 1926 a gymnasium and recreation ground had been added, in 1929 a regimental museum was opened, and in 1941 a regimental chapel was established on the grounds made out of an existing cottage.¹² A later modernization programme of the barrack buildings was completed in 1963, which included a new Sargeants' Mess, dining rooms, and landscaping of the grounds as well as the addition of tennis courts. At the same time the former allotments to the east of the original barracks were acquired by the army and an additional building was constructed there to increase capacity. The hospital building may have demolished as a part of this programme. It is likely that the 1963 renovation also saw the building of an annex along the western perimeter of the barracks which is still used by an Army Reserve detachment. At this time it was also renamed Sir John Moore Barracks.¹³ In

⁵ *Eddowes's J.* 11 Dec. 1878; 16 Jan. 1886; 20 Jan. 1886.

⁶ *Eddowes's J.*, 11 Dec. 1878.

⁷ 'Heritage Appraisal 362A01'.

⁸ *Eddowes's J.* 11 Dec. 1878.

⁹ 'Heritage Appraisal 362A01', 6.

¹⁰ *Eddowes's J.* 11 Dec. 1878.

¹¹ Mouldsdale (ed.), *History KSLI*, III, 161.

¹² Mouldsdale (ed.), *History KSLI*, III, 191, 192, 273.

¹³ Mouldsdale (ed.), *History KSLI*, III, 351; 'Heritage Appraisal 362A01', 3.

1968 the KSLI was amalgamated into The Light Infantry and Copthorne became the reception centre for recruits for this expanded regiment. However, by 1975 it had become apparent that it was too small to effectively serve this purpose and gradually the depot role it had fulfilled for a century was transferred to larger facilities in Winchester. On 3 October 1986, the regimental flag was lowered at the barracks for the last time and its role as a regimental depot ended. With the departure of The Light Infantry the barracks were once again referred to as Copthorne Barracks.¹⁴ In 2014 the barracks, which had been home to an assortment of ancillary units for the preceding three decades, was deemed surplus to the army's requirements and the land was sold to a property developer with permission to construct 228 residential dwellings.¹⁵ All but the armoury was demolished in 2019 and construction of the development, known as Copthorne Keep, was completed in 2023.¹⁶ With the sale came an end to almost 150 years of Copthorne's role as a barracks within the British Army.

The army barrack's primary role was, naturally enough, a military one. Whilst it was the headquarters of the KSLI, the battalions of the regular regiment were never based there, it being too small for such a large force. It was, however, home a militia battalion who mustered there for regular training. At no time did it have a permanent garrison quartered there, except for the small cadre required to service the administrative and training needs of the regimental depot. Its role was purely administrative and served as a receiving depot for recruits prior to their undertaking training elsewhere. But it did serve as the spiritual heart of the KSLI. When the regiment was despatched to fight in Egypt in 1882 its precious regimental colours were ceremonially placed within its walls for safe-keeping.¹⁷ The barracks was also home to the regimental silverware, a collection of cups, trophies, gifts, and other mementos that represented the regiments prowess in sport, until they, along with the regimental museum, was transferred to Shrewsbury Castle in 1985, although a small selection has been retained and remain in the Army Reserve building.¹⁸ In 1948, when the regiment's two battalions were merged into one, this solemn occasion took place in the physical heart of

¹⁴ Antony Makepeace-Warne, *'Exceedingly Lucky': A History of the Light Infantry 1968-1993* (1994), 15, 109, 220.

¹⁵ Shropshire County Council Planning Application 16/04228/OUT: Former Copthorne Barracks, Copthorne Road, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 8LZ.

¹⁶ *Shrop. Star*, 26 Nov. 2014; 21 Jan. 2019.

¹⁷ *Eddowes's J.* 18 Aug. 1882.

¹⁸ Soldiers of Shropshire Museum. Available from <<https://www.soldiersofshropshire.co.uk/regimental-museum/>> [Accessed 18 Dec. 2023].

the barracks, on its parade ground.¹⁹ And finally, when the KSLI was reduced into the new Light Regiment in 1968 the formal vesting ceremony took place within the barrack's walls.²⁰ Less solemn military ceremonies were also set within the barrack complex. The barracks were the venue for great celebration in 1897 during Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and then with great ceremony a contingent of the regiment departed the barracks in 1900 and marched into Shrewsbury, before embarking for active service during the Second Anglo-Boer War.²¹ The barracks also hosted various Old Comrades Reunions as ex-members of the KSLI were able to meet, reminisce, and remember their fallen comrades.²² Royalty also visited the barracks when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was greeted with a bugle fanfare in 1974, whilst Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra toured the barracks that same year.²³ Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was also present in June 1986 when she took the salute of the final recruit passing-out parade to be held at Copthorne prior to the depot's transfer to Winchester.²⁴

The barracks also played an important social role within the Shrewsbury community. It was a home for many individuals and their families who were stationed there for varying periods of time. That it had been envisioned as a home from its inception is clear with the inclusion of school room for the married soldiers' children to attend. In the 1881 census 111 civilians were enumerated as residing at the barracks, including 80 children under 6 years, whilst in 1911 there were 20 adult civilians plus 37 children resident, nearly all of whom were dependents of soldiers stationed there. Clearly, during the first three decades of its existence, the barracks' community included a substantial civilian population and so it was more than just a military facility. During the 1880s and 1890s sporting teams from the barracks participated in football, cricket, tennis, and other sports with their civilian neighbours.²⁵

¹⁹ Mouldsdale (ed.), *History KSLI*, III, 345-6.

²⁰ Mouldsdale (ed.), *History KSLI*, III, 353; Makepeace-Warne, 'Exceedingly Lucky', 21-2.

²¹ *Eddowes's J.*, 25 June 1897; *Shrews. Chron.*, 20 Oct. 1899.

²² For example *Eddowes's J.*, 25 June 1897; Makepeace-Warne, 'Exceedingly Lucky', 82.

²³ Makepeace-Warne, 'Exceedingly Lucky', 108-09.

²⁴ Makepeace-Warne, 'Exceedingly Lucky', 219.

²⁵ *Shrews. Chron.*, 12 Dec. 1884; *Eddowes's J.* 1 July 1885.

Other Shrewsbury buildings with a military connection

The Armoury

Designed by James Wyatt, the Armoury was constructed in 1806 for Henry Grey Bennet at a cost of £10,000. Bennet intended it as an armoury for the weaponry of the local volunteers raised during the Napoleonic Wars, although it was widely believed he built it for personal political gain.²⁶ It was however built without government approval and was unwanted by the army and so it was never used by the volunteers and quickly became an encumbrance to its owner. Constructed over two acres of land near St Giles Church on the Wenlock Road, it consisted of a two-story building measuring 135ft. by 39ft. which comprised two individual rooms designed to be the magazine, large enough, it was believed, to hold 25,000 stands of arms. Attached to the main building were twelve separate out-houses for the store-keeper, the armourer, and guards.²⁷ Of no military utility, the building was sold in 1835 to William Noel-Hill, 3rd Baron Berwick, who intended to convert it into a hotel as he sought to attract visitors to the nearby Sutton Spa, which he also owned. This venture also failed and the building was subsequently sold by Richard, 5th Baron Berwick, to the borough of Shrewsbury in 1854 for £5,000 for the use of the local militia, at which time an enclosed exercise area and staff accommodation was added at the cost of a further £1,000.²⁸ The militia used the Armoury until the construction of Copthorne barracks in 1880. It was again sold, this time for just £4,150 in 1881 to Mr T. Middleton Howels of High Field, who used it as an entertainment venue.²⁹ In 1914 it was temporarily converted into a refugee centre for displaced Belgians.³⁰ After the First World War it was sold to Morris & Co who moved it piece by piece to Victoria Quay in Shrewsbury and, after many decades as a bakery, it was converted into a public house in 1995 which is called, appropriately enough, *The Armoury*.³¹

Coleham Drill Hall and Riding School

Fears of a French invasion in 1859 led to the establishment of local defence volunteer rifle companies across the country. By early 1860 both the 1st Shropshire Rifle Volunteers and the

²⁶ *Shrews. Chron.*, 4 Sept 1840.

²⁷ Joseph Nightingale, *Shropshire; or, Original Delinations, Topographical, Historical, and Descriptive* (1818), pp. 164-5; Henry Pidgeon, *An Historical and Illustrated Handbook for the Town of Shrewsbury* (1860), p. 19; *Eddowes's J.*, 7 May 1881.

²⁸ Pidgeon, *Illustrated Handbook*, p. 119; *Eddowes's J.*, 7 May 1881.

²⁹ *Eddowes's J.*, 7 May 1881; *Shrews. Chron.*, 29 Apr. 1887.

³⁰ SA, PH/S/13/L/1/2.

³¹ Nigel Watson, *Morris & Company: A Family Business 1869-1994* (1995), Available from <<https://www.morrisandco.com/heritage/history/>> [Accessed 21 Jan. 2024], p. 58; for the conversion of The Armoury into

1st Shropshire Artillery Volunteers had been formed in Shrewsbury, but without a permanent base they were forced to train in The Quarry.³² Despite the threat of attack rescinding after 1860 the Volunteers were retained, creating both a cadre of proficient riflemen but also an informal high-status social group.³³ To provide a drill-hall for the Volunteers a block of riverside land along Longden Coleman Road was purchased for £400 in 1878 from the former cotton mill in Coleham.³⁴ Funds for the construction, estimated to cost £1400, were raised by a combination of public subscription, fund-raising events, and loans. The hall was opened with much fanfare by Orlando Bridgeman, 3rd Earl of Bradford and Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, on 10 May 1881.³⁵ Built by Messrs. Darlington & Co of Shrewsbury, from architectural plans prepared by Mr A. H. Taylor of Dogpole, the brick-built hall measured 116ft by 57ft 6ins, with a height of 36ft in some parts. The slate roof was supported by a wrought-iron frame and contained a central sky-light. The floor was constructed of concrete and asphalt. On the riverside of the hall a 9ft high platform was constructed, beneath which was located the armoury and two smaller rooms. To protect the site from flooding a substantial boundary wall was erected along the riverbank. Fronting the Longden Coleman Road was adequate space for outdoor drill.³⁶

In 1908 the Shrewsbury Rifle Volunteers were absorbed into the newly-formed Territorial Army, becoming 4th Battalion, KSLI and which retained its headquarters at the Coleham Drill Hall.³⁷ In 1911 a nearby plot of land was acquired by the army and a riding school was built at a cost of £524. When opened in 1913 it was utilized by both the Shropshire Yeomanry and the Shropshire Royal Horse Artillery, the descendants of the volunteer artillery raised in 1860.³⁸ The Drill Hall was used throughout the 20th century and remained the home depot of the 4th Battalion, KSLI during both world wars. The hall and the riding school both served as command centres for local Home Guard detachments between 1940 and 1945.³⁹ By 1995 both hall and riding school were surplus to the requirements of the army and were sold. The hall was purchased by the Barnabas Christian Fellowship and is now a place of worship. The riding school was demolished, and the site is now a residential

pub/restaurant.

³² Andrew Pattison, *On Severn Shore: The story of the Drill Hall, Coleham, Shrewsbury* (2004), pp. 26-7.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁵ *Eddowes's J.*, 11 May 1881.

³⁶ *Eddowes's J.*, 11 May 1881.

³⁷ Pattison, *On Severn Shore*, p. 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

³⁹ Bernard Lowry, *The Shropshire Home Guard* (2010), pp. 25-6,107-08.

and commercial complex.⁴⁰

Kingston House

Originally constructed in c.1679, Kingston House, St Alkmond's Square, served as the headquarters for numerous military units from at least the summer of 1908.⁴¹ With the formation of the Territorial Army that year the Shropshire Territorial Force Association was also established, and whilst initially based at 15 High Street, it was by August 1908 situated at Kingston House.⁴² During the First World War the association maintained administrative command over the soldiers of the Shropshire Yeomanry, the Shropshire Royal Horse Artillery, and the 4th Battalion, KSLI (all nominally based at Coleham Drill Hall). Also under its command were the Welsh Border Mounted Brigade (headquartered at 15 High Street, Shrewsbury), the Welsh Border Mounted Brigade Ammunition Column (based at Coleham Drill Hall), the Welsh Division (headquartered at 3 Belmont, Shrewsbury), and the Welsh Border Infantry Brigade (headquartered at 15 High Street, Shrewsbury). Also under orders of the association were the Officer Training Corps cadets located in Shrewsbury School, Kingsland.⁴³ During 1919 the association vacated Kingston House for premises in St Marys Court, by 1929 it had moved to Morfe House, Belle Vue Road but in 1939, and for the duration of the Second World War, it was based at 2 Claremont Buildings, Claremont Bank.⁴⁴

Army Pay Offices

Following the creation of territorial associations for the British Army in 1881, the North-West of England and North Wales were designated Number 4 District, which was subsequently headquartered at Copthorne Barracks. Within this regional association were also established localised Regimental Districts, of which the 53rd was based in Shrewsbury and which formed part of the home depot of the KSLI. Attached to each Regimental District was a Record/Pay Office which managed the soldier's administrative needs for that regiment. Prior to World War One this record office would likely have been based at Copthorne

⁴⁰ Pattison, *On Severn Shore*, 50-57.

⁴¹ J.T. Smith, 'Shrewsbury: Topography and Domestic Architecture, to the middle of the seventeenth century' (University of Birmingham, 1953), p. 385; *Army List Jul. 1908*, p. 1639.

⁴² *Army List Jul.1908*; *Army List Aug.1908*.

⁴³ *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire*. (1913), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴ *Army List Aug. 1908*, 2466; *Army List Aug. 1908*, 51; *Army List Aug. 1908*, 1826.

Barracks but by 1915 it had relocated to The Priory House, Priory Road, Shrewsbury.⁴⁵ With the massive expansion of the KSLI during the First World War an additional Records/Pay Office was established which, in 1918, was based at the Riding School, Longden Coleman.⁴⁶ The Territorial Association had a separate Record/Pay Office at the Riding School as well as an annex in Kenneth Chambers, Dogpole in 1915.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire* 1915, pp. 222.

⁴⁶ The Great War Forum. Available from <<https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/274862-shrewsbury-records-office/>> [Accessed 23 Jan. 2024].

⁴⁷ Official correspondence following a death in the Great War – Private Cornelius Hayes, Cheshire Regiment. Available from <<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/official-correspondence-following-a-death-in-the-great-war-private-cornelius-hayes-cheshire-regiment/>> [Accessed 23 Jan. 2024].