

BILLETING IN SURREY  
IN THE  
SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES.

BY

MISS D. L. POWELL.

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ANY one who has read the preparations made by those responsible for military organisation in Surrey in the 16th century, as set out in certain Instructions printed in the Introduction to the recently published volume of *Surrey Musters*, must be struck by the similarity of the tasks which faced the local authorities then and now. It is of course these local or domestic problems directly caused by the war, though far removed from the seat of it, which strike our attention most readily. They really resolve themselves into the effects of what we may call official contact between the civil population and the army; as shown in such matters as billeting, temporary camps and the like.<sup>1</sup> In this connection it may be useful to call attention to certain Records which enable us to compare our own time with one or two other occasions when emergencies of the same nature had to be dealt with.

The billeting of troops appears to have been treated systematically in the 18th and early-19th centuries,

<sup>1</sup> Another subject which suggests itself as apt for illustration is that of the treatment of enemy aliens—a matter which has cropped up in every English war from mediæval times downwards. The various aspects of this, legal and social, still await treatment, for which there is abundant material.

while as early as 1686<sup>1</sup> there was made an 'Abstract of a particular account of all the Inns, Alehouses, etc. in England, with their stable room and bedding,'<sup>2</sup> for the use of the military authorities. In this the parishes are grouped under their respective counties, with notes as to the number of 'guest beds' and 'stabling for horses' to be found in each. Many villages in Surrey had only one guest bed to offer, with stabling for perhaps two horses. The four parishes in this county which provided most accommodation were Kingston, Farnham, Guildford and Croydon, supplying respectively 182, 157, 124 and 117 beds, and 355, 264, 129 and 359 stablings.

A later abstract,<sup>3</sup> belonging to the early-18th century, gives the number of beds available at Guildford as 90 only, although the 'standings for horses' numbered 180. The other parishes show less alteration. In 1756<sup>4</sup> a similar table was made—the services of the Excise Commissioners, as is expressly stated, being invoked for the occasion. At this date Guildford had 210 beds and 315 stablings, with an additional 54 beds and 67 stablings in the 'outrides,' *i. e.*, the adjacent villages of Albury, Shere, etc. Kingston, in this year, including Richmond, Putney, etc., in its total, had 463 and 783.

After this glimpse of the official arrangements and statistics, one may turn to the individual point of view to note the way in which such matters affected the civil population. There are a few passages in the notes of Lawrence Lee,<sup>5</sup> made at about the same time as the first 'abstract' referred to above, which suggest the train of public feeling towards billeting and its results. They are partly an expression of the dislike then felt by many people to the very idea of a standing army. But, in addition to these purely personal comments, and at

<sup>1</sup> The War Office did not come into existence until late in the 18th century, but long before that the war side of the Secretary of State's activities had been very much specialised.

<sup>2</sup> P. R. O., War Office Records 30/49.

<sup>3</sup> W. O. 30/50.

<sup>4</sup> W. O. 30/49.

<sup>5</sup> See a previous article in this volume.

a later date, when the standing army had become an accepted idea, it is not surprising to find that, as the Government arrangements did not work altogether smoothly, petitions on the subject were frequently made, either by the inhabitants or, more usually, the innkeepers of some particular parish which claimed to be suffering in some special way from the presence of troops.

Thus in 1759<sup>1</sup> the innkeepers of Croydon stated that there were three troops or upwards of Lord Ancram's Dragoons quartered in the town. Croydon only possessed thirty inns, about half of which had no stabling, so that the burden came very heavily on the remaining ones. They also asked that all the troops might be removed into the neighbouring towns 'during the time of our annual fair, on which we have great dependance, . . . for the better accommodation of Persons resorting thereto.' A note fixed to this petition gives an order for the removal of troops as requested, during the fair.

As a result of this petition, barracks were built at Croydon, as is stated in a 'memorial'<sup>2</sup> presented by the innkeepers and victuallers in 1800. The barracks they then declared to the Secretary at War, had not 'eased the hardships of your memorialists,' since they had, ever since, had horses continually quartered on them—at one time, twenty seven to a house. They prayed for redress on this head, as hay and straw had become very dear, and so scarce that they had had to buy the former commodity at the London markets.

About the year 1779<sup>3</sup> the inhabitants of Guildford made a representation to their two members of Parliament, which is perhaps worth giving in full, since it is typical of the majority of these petitions both in the moderate and reasonable tone of the complaints, and in the clear and concise way in which not only the threatened losses but also the most desirable methods of relief are pointed out.

<sup>1</sup> W. O. 40/3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The document is undated.

The Representation of the Inhabitants of the Town and Borough  
of Guildford in the County of Surrey.

To the R<sup>t</sup> Hon Geo Lord Onslow High Steward of the s<sup>d</sup> Borough  
and to the R<sup>t</sup> Hon. Sir Fletcher Norton K<sup>t</sup> and Geo Onslow Esq.  
Representatives of the same Borough in Parliament.

WE the Inhabitants of the said Town of Guildford Humbly beg  
Leave to recommend to your consideration the particular Situation of  
the said Town and the Burthens which are daily brought upon the  
same by the Numbers of Soldiers Marines and Sailors which are con-  
tinually quartered therein owing to the Necessity of the Present times  
and which are become so Exceedingly heavy that if some Relief is not  
found out the Publicans must Inevitably fail or discontinue their present  
occupations to the Great Loss of the Publick Revenue as well as other  
Publick convenience and which will Inevitably destroy the Markets  
and of course the Business and Trade of the Town.

We desire to Represent to you that Guildford is a situation which  
must necessarily be filled with Troops in time of War and Invasion.  
The Erection of Publick Ovens for Troops contiguous to the said  
Town and Established for three years Proves the above Assertion  
and shows the Opinion of the Commander in Chief on that  
head.

Guildford is the central or halfway Quarters between the Metropolis  
and Portsmouth and also between Chatham and Portsmouth and is a  
Position which covers and Protects those Places and is one of the most  
necessary Parts of Defence of this Part of the Island and consequently  
can Seldom if ever be free from being the settled Quarters of Some  
Troops; At the same time it is the constant Halting Place of all  
Troops going to and returning from Foreign Parts, It is also the  
constant Halting Place of all sick and Wounded Soldiers and Seamen  
their wives and children where they find relief And it is also the con-  
stant Halting Place of at least Nine out of Ten of the Recruiting  
Parties going out of or coming into this Island which from the vast  
Increase of the Army and Navy has made the Burthen almost Ten-  
fold upon this Town in particular, As we conceive this to be the  
Single Town in Great Britain so critically affected.

We therefore make this Representation to you relying on your  
Protection and desire you will give it your best consideration  
whether Application should not be made to the Commander in Chief  
of His Majestys Forces and the Secretary at War as Steps Neces-  
sary to obtain Relief by means of the Legislature which at the same  
time that it gives ease to our Burthens will prove of great Publick  
utility.

The Relief we mean to point out is to apply to the Legislature for  
the fitting up of Proper Barracks for the reception of Troops Destined  
for settled Quarters in this Place.

Barracks<sup>1</sup> are conveniences known to many parts of this Island and we trust that we have already sufficiently shown that no Situation in Great Britain requires them more than Guildford for they certainly would prove of great Publick Service and convenience as well as Alleviate the Distresses of the Town of Guildford, and enable the said Town to bear the constant Burthens of the Itinerant Soldiers and Sailors with Cheerfullness and without regret.

In all well regulated Countries Individuals are not permitted to suffer on the Publick Account and as the Particular Situation of the Town of Guildford brings upon itself such heavy Burthens for the Publick service so we hope that that Publick will Remove the Calamities of the said Town, so justly complained of, by establishing the Relief above pointed out, the completion of which may be accomplished at a Trifling and Inconsiderable Expence.

We now beg leave to Represent to you that the Vast Number of Troops that have been Quartered in Guildford within three years last Past has produced such Fatal Effects that more Publicans have failed within that small Period of Time than for Thirty years before. The Number of Publik houses greatly reduced and the Burthens consequently on the remaining ones heavier in Proportion.

If it should be asked why the Burthens now complained of are heavier than heretofore:—The Reasons are obvious, Formerly the Army was confined from 12 to 16 or 18,000 Men, which is a very Inconsiderable number and a mere Trifle to its present Extent.

These Representations we submit to your Consideration, and Doubt not of your best advice and Assistance, where the Interests and Welfare of the Town and Borough of Guildford are so essentially concerned.

The list of signatories (here arranged alphabetically) is as follows:—

W<sup>m</sup> Arnop Jn Arundell Thos Atfield  
 Geo Batchelour Anthony Beauchamp W<sup>m</sup> Bennett Jn Betts  
 W<sup>m</sup> Bevel Chas Booker Rob<sup>t</sup> Boughton Geo Bowyer Benj. Braly  
 Th Brass Edmund Brewer W<sup>m</sup> Brickwood Jn Buckoll  
 Ric Chance Jn Chandler Jos. Chandler Jas Christmas Jas Clarke  
 Jn Clements Jas Coleman Jacob Coles Rob<sup>t</sup> Cooke David Cranston  
 Jn Croker Jn Cunningham  
 Jn Dare Frances Douglas  
 Edw. Ede Geo Edwards Edm. Elkins Ric. Elkins H<sup>v</sup> Elsley  
 Chas Field Th Freaques

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<sup>1</sup> There was a good deal of talk of 'Barraques' at this time: *cp.* the passages from the *London Gazette* (1686 and 1697) quoted in the *New Oxford Dictionary* under this word.

W<sup>m</sup> Gardner Baptist Garrett W<sup>m</sup> Geale Geo Gumm W<sup>m</sup> Gumm  
 Jn Hale Rob<sup>t</sup> Harrison Jas Hill  
 Thos Jackman H<sup>y</sup> Jeffreys  
 B. Keene Jn Kemp H<sup>y</sup> Kifford W<sup>m</sup> Killick  
 Jn Martyr Geo Mellersh H<sup>y</sup> Merman Sam<sup>l</sup> Milleachamp Peter  
 Mitchell  
 Jn Nealds W<sup>m</sup> Newlands Peter Norris H<sup>y</sup> Nye  
 Jas Ogbourn Jn Oliver  
 Jn Page jun<sup>r</sup> Jn Peche Francis Piggott Jn Piggott Jn Piggott  
 jun<sup>r</sup> Tho Pullen  
 Jn Randall Gabriel Ride H<sup>y</sup> Ride Sam<sup>l</sup> Robinson Jn Russell,  
 MAYOR. W<sup>m</sup> Russell  
 Edw Searle Geo Shephard Jn Shrubbs Thos Sibthorpe F. Skurray  
 Jas Sly Jas Smith Chas Snelling Jas South Job Spratley Edw Stares  
 Jn Stephens Mary Stockall  
 Jn Talbot Jn Terry Jn Tidy  
 Clement Upperton  
 W<sup>m</sup> Wakeford Ric Walford Edw. Wastell Jas. Weller Jas Weller  
 jun<sup>r</sup> Chas Willes Benj. Willply Matt. Wise Ste<sup>n</sup> Wise Thos Wood

The Petition concludes with a table of 'People who have fail'd in Publick Business in the 3 or 4 years last past,' with their dividends etc. :—

[Name]		[Dividend]
John Young	at the White Horse	6 <sup>s</sup> 8 <sup>d</sup>
John Thornton	The Ram	15 9
Widow Coper	The Bell	3
Sam <sup>l</sup> Butler	The White Hart	Not yet settled
William Hall	The Tunns	9
William Crow	The Bull Head	Nothing
Clement Upperton	The Angel	The creditors kept on the House on his paying 10/- in the £ & promising to pay the rem <sup>r</sup> when he sh <sup>d</sup> be able
Thos Johnson	The Jolley Butcher	Not yet settled
William Buckland	} The Star	Neither of them settled
John Wright		
Joseph Lewis		
M <sup>rs</sup> Gibbs	White Lyon	Left it for the same Reason
Chris <sup>r</sup> Everett	The Anchor	10 <sup>s</sup>
L Whittaker	The Row Barge	17
Michael Nixon	The Red Lyon at Stoke	Not yet settled

The number of Publick Houses in Guildford and Stoke are  
 Twenty Seven.

As was the case at Croydon, barracks were soon afterwards built at Guildford, and in 1803<sup>1</sup> there was much correspondence between the Barrack Master General and the Barrack Master of Guildford concerning the allotment and inclosure of part of the barrack premises, bounded by the River Wey on the one side, as a cemetery. This was the result of complaints alleged to have been made as to the number of soldiers who had died in the barracks and been buried in the parish ground of St. Mary and St. Nicholas. The number was returned as 47 for the years 1794—1803, and the Barrack Master General pointed out that the inconvenience, if any, was not a matter of complaint on the part of the rector.

The building of the barracks does not appear to have altogether ended the troubles of the town, as in 1806<sup>2</sup> the innkeepers complained that guards marching with deserters always brought them into Guildford, usually on Saturdays and Sundays, and billeted them there, never going on to Godalming as they had been accustomed to do. It was further stated that at the last General Quarter Sessions, the inns had to turn away very many guests owing to the troops in their houses.

Two other Surrey parishes figuring in these petitions are Carshalton and Haslemere. At the former place, in 1797,<sup>3</sup> the innkeepers of the 83 'assessed houses' declared their inability to perform their billeting obligations: their statement, before being sent up, being approved and signed by the two churchwardens, two overseers of the poor, and ten other inhabitants. The innkeepers of Haslemere made a fairly detailed petition in 1806.<sup>4</sup> They declared that they received a 'burden of soldiers' surpassing their just proportion, not only those on the march to and from London, Guildford, Godalming, Midhurst and Chichester, but, also, all coming from and going to Portsmouth, this last being 'the particular grievance against which your Petitioners crave relief.' The reason given was that the Portsmouth road had

<sup>1</sup> W. O. 40/18.

<sup>3</sup> W. O. 40/3.

<sup>2</sup> W. O. 40/3.

<sup>4</sup> W. O. 40/3.

formerly a turnpike here, the profits from which had helped to compensate the town for the cost of the billeting. Further, the proper traffic to Portsmouth had been diverted to the Liphook road, so that the Haslemere inns had far less sources of revenue than formerly, while still having to bear the original numbers of soldiers and deserters—especially the latter ‘because of the conveniency of a public cage for their confinement.’ Moreover, instead of the nine inns formerly in Haslemere, there were now three only which ‘yet have to bear the same burthen of soldiers.’ Finally, as a hint at partial remedy, it was pointed out that the Bluebell Inn, one mile from Haslemere on the Portsmouth road, and the Anchor Alehouse at Shotter Mill on the same road,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles from Haslemere, ‘escape from receiving any soldiers whatsoever.’

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It will be seen that, though the similarity of circumstances is considerable, the tone of the present time does not, fortunately, parallel that of the past too closely.