

## V—COQUETDALE NOTES ON THE OLD NORTHUMBERLAND MILITIA.

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[Read on 28th February, 1900.]

By way of introduction leading up to the real subject-matter of the paper in my hands to-night, I shall endeavour to give a sketch of the militia in its earlier days. This will be brief, but as it is a branch of our military service respecting whose history few appear to trouble themselves, the information, however scant and fragmentary, may perhaps be of some use. But, when treating of the old militia movement in Northumberland and Coquetdale, I shall give more minute details, flavoured with a little local colouring, which, I trust, will not be altogether distasteful to the members.

Our constitutional force, the militia, is in principle, if not in name, the oldest military organization England possesses, and represents the train bands of early English history. During the ninth century king Alfred made levies for men in the various hundreds to assist in repelling the incursions of the Danes. He thus established something like a regular army consisting of two divisions—the one half tilling the lands around their homesteads; the other half being with the king in the field. After the Conquest came the long centuries of the feudal age with its military system, of which I shall not attempt to speak. Towards the end of the sixteenth century is found, at least in Northumberland, a large force raised on something like the old lines,—the obligation of all freemen, or probably of all the inhabitants, between certain ages, to arm themselves for the preservation of the peace within their respective counties, and for the protection of the kingdom from invasion. A muster of this force—a kind of militia—took place in Northumberland in 1538, when there assembled on Abberwick moor, near Alnwick, and on Robert's law, near Trehitt, in the parish of Rothbury, all the able men with horse and harness within the four divisions of Coquetdale.

Then came the Act of 1662, when a troop of horse to the number of 105 was raised in Northumberland; 27 troopers were furnished by the peers, levied according to the respective value of their estates.

These were called the 'Lords' Horse,' whilst 78, raised by other lords and gentlemen, were termed the 'Light Horse.' The troopers were paid two shillings a day. The duke of Newcastle was responsible for 2; the earl of Northumberland, 6; the earl of Carlisle, 3; Lord Grey, 10; Lord Widdrington, 2; Lord Derwentwater, 4.<sup>1</sup> The Portland papers contain the following reference to this body of horse:—

Sir Wm. Forster, Daniel Collingwood, and others, to the Duke of Newcastle and the Earl of Ogle; 1670, October 6th, Alnwick.—Sending the names of the former officers of the Northumberland Militia. Of the horse, John Fenwick of Wallington, and Colonel Forster of Etherston. Of the foot, Sir William Forster of Bambrough, John Roddam of Little Houghton, and Tristram Fenwick of Keülver.<sup>2</sup>

In 1689 another militia bill was passed—an amendment of the Act of 1662—for the better ordering of the forces in the several counties in this kingdom. Clause 14 contains an interesting description of their arms and accoutrements:—

And that at a general muster and exercise of regiments, no officer or soldier shall be constrained to stay for above six days together (from their respective habitations). And that at every such muster and exercise, every musketeer shall bring with him half-a-pound of powder, and three yards of match (if a matchlock), and every horseman (a quarter of) a pound of powder, and bullets proportionably, at the charge of such person or persons as provide the said horseman or foot-soldier;—and the arms, offensive and defensive, with the furniture for horse, are to be as followeth: The defensive arms, a Back, Breast and Pot, to be pistol proof; the offensive arms, a sword, a case of pistols, a carbine, with belt and swivel; the barrels of the pistols not to be under twelve inches in length, the furniture for the horse to be a great saddle or pad with burrs, a bit and bridle, with a pectoral and crupper. For the foot, each musqueteer to have musquet, the barrel whereof not under three foot and two inches in length, the gauge of the bore to be twelve bullets to the pound, with a sufficient cartridge-box or bandileer, which may contain twelve bullets at least, with a sword. A pikeman's arms, a pike made of ash not under fifteen foot in length, the head and foot included, and sword; and every horseman to have a cloak, and each footman a coat of such colour as shall be appointed by the Lord Lieutenant or deputy Lieutenant, which colour so appointed shall not be altered by the same or any other Lord Lieutenant or Deputy.<sup>3</sup>

The following proviso was made, and as it includes our own hilly county, I shall quote it;—'Provided always that it shall be lawful in

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from Notices of the Services of the 27th Northumberland Light Infantry Militia, by Wm. Adamson, sen. Capt., and Henry Major, (1877.)

<sup>2</sup> Historical MSS. Commission, Portland Papers, vol. ii., p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Historical MSS. Commission, House of Lords, 1689, 1690, p. 210.

the several counties of North and South Wales, and the counties of Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmorland, and Cornwall, if it be found convenient by the Lord Lieutenants and Deputies thereof, in stead of horsemen to find Dragoons.' <sup>4</sup> At that period there was a firelock called 'The Dragon,' which resembled a small blunderbuss, with the muzzle ornamented with a dragon's head. From this, according to the most probable conjecture, the troops called dragoons and dragoons take their name, but Bailey tells us in his dictionary that 'a dragoon is a soldier who fights sometimes on horseback and sometimes on foot, so called because at first they were 'as destructive as dragons.'

The Redesdale volume of Hodgson's *Northumberland* contains an interesting note on 'Militia or Trained Bands.' In an account of the number of horse, which each large proprietor, and of footmen, which the occupiers of less properties had to raise in the county in 1697, Sir Charles Howard of Redesdale is returned for one horse, with this observation :—

NOTE.—Yt all Reddesdale finds but one horse, but ought to find 5, or 54 foote.' And the same authority says:—'Every £3 2s. 6d. in the book of rates finds, or ought to find, a light horse.' By Stat. 13, Car. 2, c. 6, '500£ a year found a horse, horseman, and arms; and 50£ a foot soldier and arms.'<sup>5</sup>

At this time there were the following armed men in Northumberland :—Horse, 91 (and 11 wanting); foot, 296; effective, 387; Capt. Coulson, Capt. Grey, and Capt. Percy being three of the officers mentioned. <sup>6</sup>

During the Jacobite rising of 1715, the Northumberland Militia appears to have been called out, for we read in a letter from John Johnson, esq., to Henry Liddell, esq., Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Oct. 9th, 1715, that—

A great many Gentlemen and Others, to the number of 300, or thereabouts (most whereof are Papists), are now in Arms, And last Night lay at Warkworth. We are informed they are for seizing the Militia at Killingworth Moor, on Tuesday next, and take from them their Horses and Arms, for my Lord Scarborough giving so long Notice as 14 Days for the Militia and Train-bands to rise, they took this opportunity of rising first. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Historical MSS. Commission, House of Lords, 1689-1690, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> Hodgson's Hist. Northumberland, part II., vol. i., p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Notices of the Services of the Northumberland Militia, by Major Adamson, 1877.

<sup>7</sup> Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, p. 185.

The militia system constructed in 1662 underwent several slight amendments in 1699, 1714, and 1743, but it was not until 1757 that the militia organization on the general lines as we know it, was brought into force. The practical application of the ballot, however, created much discontent and local disturbance, of which in Northumberland we had a tragic example at Hexham. During the next year (1762), the system was much improved, and the ballot grievance appears to have been remedied; therefore, after some other minor alterations made in 1802, the Militia Act stands much the same as it did a century ago. The militia enactment of the present day provides as follows :—‘The Secretary of State is to declare the number of militiamen required, whereupon the Lord Lieutenant is to cause meetings to be held of the lieutenancy of each sub-division. To these meetings the householders of each parish are to send in lists of all male persons between the ages of 18 and 30 dwelling in their respective houses. Before the ballot, however, the parish may supply volunteers to fill up a quota, every volunteer so provided and approved counting as if he were a balloted person. If a deficiency still exists, the persons on the lists shall be balloted for, and double the number of those required to supply the deficiency shall be drawn out. Any balloted man becoming liable to serve may, however, provide a substitute who has the requisite physical qualifications, and is not himself liable to serve.’ The ballot statute is only temporarily suspended, and can at any time be put in force, as it was in the days of our grandfathers. The requisite physical qualification is to be the minimum height of five feet two inches. This may be considered a low standard, but as a matter of fact, out of 92,677 militiamen in 1881, more than half of them were between five feet five inches, and five feet seven inches, only 20 per cent. were under five feet five inches, and about 600 were over six feet.

I shall now speak with special reference to the militia of our own county. It was in 1759 that the Northumberland Militia proper was first embodied, the number being 560 men, under the command of the Earl of Northumberland, lord lieutenant of the county. No. 9 Company (Coquetdale) was commanded by Capt. Alexander Collingwood of Unthank, 1 lieutenant, 1 ensign, 3 sergeants, 2 drummers, 60 rank and file. The uniform then, as now, was red with buff facings.

The militia had pipes on its first establishment, and the pipes are still amongst the old band instruments. The Northumberland Militia was first embodied during the 'Seven Years' War,' from February 25th, 1760, to December, 1762.<sup>8</sup> It was at this time that the enforcing of the ballot caused a serious disturbance throughout Northumberland. On the 9th of March, 1761, a mob of some 5,000 persons assembled in the market place at Hexham, to protest against balloting for the militia. A conflict ensued—an officer was shot—the militia fired on the populace and a large number of people were killed and wounded.

'In the April of 1780, the Northumberland Militia were under orders for London. Marching by way of Hull, they arrived in London late on the evening of June 7th, and proceeded to their quarters in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Scarcely had they halted, after a march of 40 miles, than the order was given by their colonel, Lord Algernon Percy, to proceed at once to Holborn. Here they found the Fleet prison and several mansions in flames, and a huge bonfire of furniture, taken from the pillaged houses, surrounded by an excited mob. On the rioters attacking the militia they delivered a volley of blank cartridge to try and intimidate them. The insurgents, however, continued their attack, and one of the officers being very much hurt, it was found absolutely necessary to fire with ball; yet the fire was very prudently conducted, for the soldiers were not permitted to fire along the street.'<sup>9</sup> Having related the quelling of the Gordon riots, according to the written records of that event, may I be permitted to add another account of it as related by one of the old militiamen:—'The militia was drawn up on the north side of Holborn, where the men were assailed on all sides by the rioters, and amongst other troubles they were much harrassed by bricks being thrown amongst them, from some height overhead, to the injury of several of the men and officers. At last one of our men observed a sweep, sitting astride on the roof of a house, briskly engaged in taking the bricks from off a chimney stalk, and deliberately throwing them down into the street below amongst the soldiers. Quickly raising his 'Brown Bess,'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Notices of the Services of the Northumberland Militia, *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> A flint and steel musket, so called from the brown colour of the barrel and the stock, this weapon was in use from about 1745 to 1845: total length of a fine specimen exhibited when this paper was read, 71 inches, (kindly lent by Mrs. Dand of Heckley House, Alnwick).

the militiaman fired and brought the mischievous sweep down from his lofty perch in a manner best described in the militiaman's own words :— 'Man, he cam' tummellin' doon just like a crow.'

There lived in Rothbury in those days a clockmaker named Thomas Pape, and go where you will throughout the parish, you will find at the present time numerous eight-day clocks bearing the name of 'Thomas Pape of Rothbury.'<sup>11</sup> At that period the population of country places had more time for harmless gossip, and the quizzing of one's neighbours, than we have in this age of hurry. Some of the sayings of the past generation have been preserved, and are handed down to us by local tradition as fragments of folk-lore. Thomas Pape was with the militia when it marched into London during the Gordon Riots, and in after years, owing no doubt to a little boasting on the part of the old clockmaker, the village wags said :— 'directly Lord George Gordon heard that Tommy Pape was coming, he threw down his sword and fled.' James Elliott, an old weaver, who lived at Harbottle, was another of the old militia. He was known as 'Jimmy the Brave,' and often fought his battles over, sitting at his own fireside, so his village friends would sometimes try to rouse the ire of the old ex-militiaman by telling him 'as soon as the news reached London that the Northumberland Militia was on the march to relieve the city, the cry was raised—'stand clear, for here's the crowdie suppers comin' up.'<sup>12</sup> The sweep episode was kept fresh in the memories of the Northumberland Militia for many years by the youth of Alnwick greeting them as follows :—

The Northumberland Militia,  
The owld and the bould,  
Never did nowt  
But shut [shoot] a sweep.

After having quelled the disturbances in London, the regiment went into camp at Ramnor, and afterwards into winter quarters at

<sup>11</sup> Nov. 1st, 1843. — At Rothbury, on the 1st inst., aged 88, Mr. Thomas Pape, a very eminent clock and watchmaker. He was one of the Northumberland Militia, who, under Lord Lovaine, in 1780, put an end to the riots in London. — *Newcastle Journal*.

<sup>12</sup> 'At Harbottle, 7th ult., aged 87, at the house of Mr. G. R. Turnbull, merchant, Mr James Elliott, weaver. Upwards of 50 years ago, deceased served in the Northumberland Militia under the late Col. John Reed, Esq. of Chipchase Castle, and was highly and deservedly respected by all who knew him, for his sterling worth and upright character.' — *Alnwick Mercury*, May 1st, 1856.

Andover. . . . The following is an extract from the *Newcastle Journal*, of Saturday, Dec. 22nd, 1781 :—‘ Nearly seventy fine young fellows, recruits for the Northumberland Militia, came in here on their route to join that Regiment at Southampton.’ At that period the Northumberland Militia was really and truly a territorial regiment, composed of Northumbrians, stalwart sons of the soil, officered by the county gentlemen. Standing shoulder to shoulder on parade, they were said to have covered more ground than any other county militia. This may have been the case, but the wag of the day said that ‘it was owing to the size of their feet.’ The three commissions I now lay on the table are as follows :—

The commission of Lieutenant William Davison of Chatton, signed by Hugh, first Duke of Northumberland, dated from Northumberland House, 3rd April, 1776, Gabriel Selby, Esq., of Paston, Lieut.-Colonel.

The commission of Lieut. Alexander Davison, Esquire, of Lanton, signed by Hugh, first Duke of Northumberland, given at Northumberland House, Oct. 22nd, 1784, Lord Algernon Percy being then Colonel of the regiment.

The commission of Major William Davison, Esquire, of Branxton, signed by Hugh, second Duke of Northumberland, given at Syon House, Sept. 14th, 1798, John Reed, Esquire, of Chipchase Castle, Colonel of the regiment.<sup>12a</sup>

The officers of the militia were not balloted for; they were appointed by the lord lieutenant of the county, and the qualification required at that time was, a colonel to have a rent roll of £1,000 a year, a lieutenant colonel, £600, and the other officers in proportion. During the great French war, the militia, raised entirely by ballot, was embodied for twenty-one years—from 1793 until 1814. In the year 1810; the local militia was spoken of as :—‘ An excellent Regiment, nearly 1,000 strong, and eminently distinguished for its high state of discipline.’<sup>13</sup> At the present time the Northumberland Militia is stationed at Malta. It may be of interest to the members if I briefly explain how the business of balloting for the militia was conducted during the early part of the present century, and of the schemes organized in each parish for the purpose of assisting poor householders who were unfortunate enough to be drawn for the militia, for what with bad times and low wages, the ballot pressed sore on the working classes. The lord lieutenant of the county having first issued his

<sup>12a</sup> Commissions kindly lent by Mrs. Dand, of Heckley House, Alnwick,

<sup>13</sup> Mackenzie's History of Northumberland,

orders, the constables or the schoolmasters in every parish were required to return lists of all males between the ages of eighteen and forty-five within their respective parishes, schedules being left at each dwelling house, which had to be returned, correctly filled up, within fourteen days, under a penalty of £5. Then on a certain day the 'drawing for the militia' (as it was termed) took place, when the men to be enrolled were chosen by ballot, the number required being according to the number returned as liable to serve. At that time the minimum height was as low as four feet six inches. Suppose a man was balloted, but did not wish to serve, he could, by paying a fine of £10, provide a substitute, to whom he would have to pay a bounty for going. Therefore, in country districts, various clubs and societies existed, kept up by weekly payments, besides an arrangement by which, with the consent of the inhabitants, volunteers, remunerated by parish assessments, were substituted for balloted men. The ballot has not been in force since 1829. In the parish vestry books of Rothbury and Alwinton in Coquetdale, there are numerous entries relating to these parish assessments. Out of some twelve or eighteen entries, I shall quote only one or two, which will suffice to show how the funds were raised :—

April 2nd, 1795. *Alwinton*.—This day the vestry met, proper notice being given for that purpose, and after settling the parish accounts, &c.

do order that three whole ancients be immediately collected through the parish and Kidland Lordship, in order to hire a seaman for his Majesty's navy . . . and we, whose names are hereunto subscribed, do agree to take a council's opinion, whether or not the inhabitants of Kidland Lordship are liable to contribute their proportionate share of what the parish may have to pay in hiring substitutes for the Militia, and for maintaining their wives and families . . .

In 1801, £27 18s 3d was expended in payments to the militia-men's wives and families.

September 6th, 1804.—At a Vestry meeting this day of the churchwardens, overseers of the poor, and principal inhabitants, for the purpose of considering of the most eligible method of collecting the money necessary for defraying the expenses attending the (old) Militia, Supplementary Militia, and Army of Reserve in this parish, it was agreed that the money be collected by the Ancient book of rates, and that eleven ancients be collected immediately to discharge the same.



1809.—Collected for Military Concerns, in the parish of Allenton and Kidland Lordship:—

5½ Ancients	... ..	£83 14s. 9d.
Paid to men balloted for the Militia	... ..	£83 3s. 8d. <sup>14</sup>

*Rothbury.*—Vestry, January 1st, 1813.—At a Meeting of the Curate, Churchwardens, and Four and Twenty, holden this day, in pursuance of Notice given, it was unanimously resolved that three half-pence in the pound be collected throughout the whole of the Parish, for the purpose of paying the balloted Men, and towards paying the Militiamen's Wives and Families.

*Rothbury.*—Vestry, January 12th, 1817.—At a Meeting of the Rector, Churchwardens, and Four and Twenty, holden this day, it was resolved that the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish should be directed to hire Men wanted for the Militia, by an equal rate upon all the inhabitants of the said parish, and the sum of five shillings to be paid by all the young Men liable to be Balloted.

L. Vernon, Rector.  
 Jos. Hindhaugh, } Churchwardens.  
 James Armstrong, }

The amount of the premium paid for a substitute appears to have varied according to circumstances, the exigency of the case, or the demand for men at the moment, as well as the social status of the balloted man. I have been told of a man in Coquetdale who received twenty guineas from a well to do farmer. The substitute shortly after absconded to America, leaving the principal to meet the authorities as best he could. Another Coquetdale man bargained for £9, to go instead of a fellow villager. On the two proceeding to Alnwick to arrange matters, and pass the doctor, the principal found he could get a man for £5, so when the disappointed candidate for military honours returned home, he informed his neighbours 'that a dirty shoemaker body that could hardly pull the sark ower his heed had offered for £5.' The following are bona-fide instances of one man going as a substitute three times:—There lived in Rothbury (within the last ten years) an old man, named George Rogerson, who in his 90th year walked from Rothbury to Alnwick a distance of twelve miles. He was born in 1799, and during his early manhood served as a substitute no less than three different times. He had the good fortune never to be drawn for the militia, but being fond of military life, he

<sup>14</sup> Extracts from the Alwinton church books, kindly supplied by the vicar, the Rev. B. Binks.

proffered his services as a volunteer substitute. In 1816, he was enrolled in the Northumberland Militia, instead of a William Appleby, a hind living at Togston Barns, for which he received a bounty of twelve guineas and a crown. In 1821 he went as a substitute for a Thomas Barclay, joiner, of Warkworth, and got nine guineas and a crown. Again in 1826 he joined the ranks of the Northumberland Militia for Thomas Brown, of Spy law, near Alnwick, and was paid the sum of seven guineas and a crown. This old veteran boasted that he had served under three kings of England, George III, George IV, and William IV, and he also told me that as a militiaman he got a shilling to drink the health of George IV. on his coronation day, and the same on the coronation of William IV.

Various are the schemes now being brought forward as to the best means of procuring a sufficient number of men for the purpose of increasing the strength of our army at home and abroad. Our forefathers, at a great crisis in our history, also had this same difficulty, which was much lessened by the number of volunteers from the ranks of the militia. In the county of Northumberland alone, between the years 1803 and 1814, upwards of 100,000 men of the militia were drafted into the army. About this period the militia itself was embodied, and stationed in the south of England for several years. We read in Sykes's *Local Records*,—[1813], November 15, and the following day, the Northumberland militia passed through Newcastle, on its route to Scotland. The van division of the regiment, which was headed by lieutenant-colonel Coulson, was, on its entrance into the town, greeted with a salute of guns from the old castle, the bells of St. Nicholas' church rang a peal, and every demonstration of joy was displayed, in compliment to the '*Lads of the Tyne*.' The crowds of people assembled to meet them were immense; Dean street was completely blocked as they marched up. The regiment had not been in Newcastle for upwards of ten years. June 24th, 1814, this regiment was disembodied at Alnwick; they had been in actual service upwards of eleven years.' How different does the following paragraph read, taken from the columns of one of our daily papers only last month:—

The Militia is a force that is always neglected by the public, and gently snubbed by the officials, and no exception is made to the rule at the present time. The Militia Infantry regiments going out to South Africa are most of them splendid bodies of men, but their departure makes little stir, whereas crowds

shout themselves hoarse for the Regulars and the Volunteers. The Militia has always been the Cinderella of the forces, and seeing how regiment after regiment has in its entirety volunteered for the front, it is rather a reproach to us all that it should go unrecognized.<sup>15</sup>

In conclusion, I shall quote Dryden's satirical lines :—

And raw in fields the rude Militia swarms :  
Mouths without hands : maintained at vast expense ;  
In peace a charge, in war a weak defence :  
Stout once a month they march, a blustering band,  
And ever, but in times of need, at hand.

Whatever may have been the case in Dryden's day, I am sure those of us who witnessed the review on the town moor, last year must have been struck by the excellent physique, martial bearing, and steady marching past of the Durham Militia and of the 3rd Northumberland Fusiliers—our own County Militia.

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 15, 1900.