



Somerset Archive and Record Service

Information Leaflet

Somerset Light Infantry

The Somerset Light Infantry

The Somerset Heritage Centre holds the archive of the Somerset Light Infantry as collected by the Light Infantry Office. It is a rich and rewarding collection detailing the three-hundred year history of the regiment and has been catalogued and conserved through a Heritage Lottery Funded Project.

Raised in 1685 by James II to suppress the Protestant rebellions led by the Duke of Monmouth and the Earl of Argyll, the regiment has gone through several incarnations - from the 13th Regiment of Foot to the 13th Somersetshire Light Infantry, before being awarded the honour in 1842 of being re-titled the 13th or Prince Albert's Light Infantry. In 1959 the regiment amalgamated with the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, before defence cuts saw the amalgamation of all the Light Infantry regiments in 1968.

Over the course of its 300-year history the regiment gained a total of 112 battle honours its first being awarded in 1704 after the siege of Gibraltar. The nineteenth century proved particularly rewarding for the regiment, with honours being awarded for action in Burma in 1824 and 1885, for participation in the 1839 war in Afghanistan and the Boer War. In the twentieth century, the regiment participated in both world wars; undertook peacekeeping duties in China, Cyprus and Germany; played a leading role in the Malayan Emergency of the early 1950s and had the honour of being the last British regiment to march out of India after independence was granted.

A guide to the Collection

The archive of the Somerset Light Infantry is a rich and diverse collection charting the history of the Regiment, Somerset's militia battalions and the Somerset Yeomanry from the late 18th century to the present day. Containing many varied sources from diaries, to correspondence, to published works, to photographs, the archive provides a unique view of the history of the 'illustrious garrison', but also of the changing attitudes to war and life on the 'home front'.

The collection has been catalogued under the archival reference DD/SLI. The catalogue has been split into two sections. The first fourteen series relate to the official side of the regiment, they contain:

- DD/SLI/1 - digest of service and historical records
- DD/SLI/2 - war diaries
- DD/SLI/3 - company, muster and battalion rolls and pay lists
- DD/SLI/4 - commission parchments
- DD/SLI/5 - medal rolls
- DD/SLI/6 - orders books, battalion and operation orders
- DD/SLI/7 - court martial and punishment books
- DD/SLI/8 - Officers mess and other regimental volumes
- DD/SLI/9 - casualty lists
- DD/SLI/10 - minute books
- DD/SLI/11 - account books
- DD/SLI/12 - official reports and correspondence
- DD/SLI/13 - other army forms, logs and official returns
- DD/SLI/14 - army issue maps and plans

The remaining nine series contain non-official documents, consisting of:

- DD/SLI/15 - photographs and photo albums
- DD/SLI/16 - postcards and illustrations
- DD/SLI/17 - private papers of individual soldiers
- DD/SLI/18 - published material
- DD/SLI/19 - printed material
- DD/SLI/20 - historical studies, research notes, lectures and research correspondence
- DD/SLI/21 - captured enemy documents
- DD/SLI/22 - indexes
- DD/SLI/23 - miscellaneous documents

Most of the series are self-explanatory, for example DD/SLI/2 contains the regimental war diaries for the second Burmese war, the Boer war, the two World Wars and post-war conflicts. Other series, such as series 3 and 16 are split into sub-series which represent a group within a group, for example, DD/SLI/3 contains four sub-series of, battalion, company and section rolls; militia rolls; pay lists; and other muster rolls and rolls of membership, whilst series 16 is split into six series, postcards; scrapbooks; illustrations of personalities; illustrations of uniforms, weapons and regimental ephemera; cartoon drawings; and miscellaneous illustrations. [\[back to top\]](#)

What can the collection be used for?

The collection provides a unique view of the regiments history, however, it does not contain the service records of the men who served with the regiment. Service records, from 1660-1920, are held by the [National Archives](#) (formerly the Public Record Office) and post 1920 service records are held by the Army Personnel Centre, Glasgow. Once personal details about an ancestor or an individual have been discovered then the collection can provide background information on the duties they performed and to any conflicts in which they were involved.

Some series of records may contain personal details. The most likely is series 17 which contains diaries and personal papers of soldiers, however, this series is quite small and it may be pot luck finding the papers of an ancestor. This series of papers mainly relate to the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The other series which is likely to contain personal details is series 5 which contains the medal rolls; these contain name, rank and number at the time of the award of the medal and may prove whether an ancestor fought in a particular conflict. Records on long service medals may provide details on the length of service and period of enlistment.

For tracing militia members series 3 may contain relevant information, the militia rolls contain lists of those serving in the local militia and in which division, although they relate mainly to the early 19th century. Also worth consulting are the regimental journals (series 18, sub-series 1) as they provide quarterly reports on each battalion and mention notable events such as promotions. There is also a large collection of photographs (series 15), including many company and sporting groups.

For research into a specific conflict and the regiments role in it the best place to start is the historical records (series 1) and the war diaries (series 2), these detail the day to day action of specific battalions during both war and peacetime. For some conflicts such as

the 1st Afghan War or the Zulu War there are many written histories so it is worth consulting series 18-20.

A History

1685 Raised by Theophilus, Earl of Huntingdon, at the request of James II to help squash the rebellions led by the Earl of Argyll and Duke of Monmouth. At this time the regiment was known as the Earl of Huntingdon's Regiment.

1688 Switched its allegiance to the Protestant William of Orange, Lieutenant Colonel Ferdinando Hastings becomes Colonel of the Regiment, thus it became Hastings' Regiment of Foot.

1689 Sent to Scotland to help smooth the accession of William of Orange. Took part in a battle against the Scots at Killecrankie.

1695 Colonel Hastings proved guilty of extortion and relieved of his commission. Replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir John Jacob, thus becoming Jacob's Foot.

1701-3 Sent to Holland to take part in the War of Spanish Succession. The Colonel again changed, the regiment changed to the Earl of Barrymore's Foot. In 1702 the regiment took part in the sieges of Venloo, Reuremonde and the Fort of Chartreuse.

1704 To Lisbon, Portugal then onto Gibraltar, to protect 'The Rock' from a combined French and Spanish force. Gibraltar was taken by Britain for the first time and the Regiment gained its first battle honour.

1705-6 Joined the Earl of Peterborough's Expeditionary Force to Spain, taking part in the capture of Barcelona and of San Mateo.

1706 Barrymore's Foot was summoned to a meeting with the Earl of Peterborough, where it was mounted and became Pearce's Dragoons. Lord Barrymore, along with five Officers, ten Sergeants and ten Corporals returned to England and formed a new infantry regiment.

1709 The Regiment's first major defeat on the banks of the River Caya against the French and Spanish. Over three hundred men are captured and remain prisoners for the next year.

1711-28 Garrison duty at Gibraltar.

1743 War of the Austrian Succession where they took part in the battle of Dettingen as Pulteney's Foot. Awarded Dettingen as a battle honour.

1745 Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite rebellion, Pulteney's Foot recalled from Flanders to Scotland, where it took part in the relief of Stirling Castle, before following the retreat of the Jacobite army. They took part in the battles of Fontenoy and Culloden. The Officers and Sergeants were awarded the honour of wearing their sash knotted on the right side, whilst the rest of the army were to wear theirs on the left.

1747 The Battle of Val, in Flanders, part of the War of the Austrian Succession.

1751 A Royal warrant, dated 1 July 1751, ensured consistency in uniforms, standards and colours. It also brought in the system of numbering the regiments of Foot according to their precedence in a complex hierarchy, thus Pulteney's Regiment of Foot became the 13th Regiment of Foot.

1782 All army regiments are linked to a county in order to aid the recruitment process. The 13th becomes the 13th (Somersetshire) Regiment of Foot.

1790-94 During the French revolutionary wars the regiment was sent to the Caribbean to increase the British presence in the Windward and Leeward Islands, before moving to Jamaica and then on to St. Domingo to help the French against the rebel slaves. Due to illness the regiment was reduced to just sixty men.

1801 The Defeat of Napoleon's army at Aboukir, allowing for a British advance to Alexandria. 'Egypt' and 'The Sphinx' added to the colours.

1808 Sent to the West Indies, Martinique captured from France in just three weeks. Martinique added to battle honours.

1809 Guadeloupe captured from the French in only ten days.

1813-15 The American War, with the 13th on the side of Canada versus the United States of America. Used Light Infantry tactics for the first time.

1822 The 13th (Somersetshire Light Infantry) Regiment formed as a Corps of Light Infantry.

1823 Sail for India for the first time, the beginning of a relationship which would last until Indian independence in 1948.

1824-26 [First Burmese War](#). Awarded the battle honour Ava.

1838-42 [First Afghan War](#) and siege of Jellalabad. Awarded the battle honours Ghuznee 1839, Afghanistan 1939 and Cabool [Kabul] 1842. The regiment is also awarded the honour of being named the 13th or Prince Albert's Light Infantry and is nicknamed the 'Illustrious Garrison'

1855 [The Crimean War](#). Briefly based at Sevastopol. Awarded the battle honour Sevastopol and the Crimean medal.

1857 Indian Mutiny. The regiment only took a sideline role, so no battle honour was awarded.

1858 Second battalion raised.

1877-78 The 9th Kaffir War, in South Africa, fought by the 1st battalion.

1878-79 [Zulu War](#). The 1st battalion become involved in the conflict, although takes no part in the famous massacre at Isandhlwana, nor the attack on Rorke's Drift. The Regiment's first Victoria Cross is awarded to Major William Knox-Leet and another battle honour is awarded.

1881 The Territorial system is introduced, the regiment becomes definitely linked with Somerset, and is renamed Prince Albert's (Somersetshire) Light Infantry.

1885-7 [Third Burmese War](#). The first action fought by the 2nd battalion.

1899-1902 [Boer War](#), the 2nd battalion fought in the Relief of Ladysmith and received the battle honour South Africa 1899-1902. The 4th battalion was also awarded the battle honour, South Africa 1900-1901.

1908 'The Territorial and Reserves Forces Act' comes into force, which means the disbandment of Somerset's 4th militia battalion and the 3rd militia battalion becoming a reserve battalion.

1911 March 1st battalion sent to South Wales to keep order during the great coal strike. September 2nd battalion sent to Tientsin, China, to play a role in an international peacekeeping force.

1912 The Regiment's title again changes, this time to Prince Albert's (Somerset Light Infantry).

1914-1918 [The Great War](#). The 1st battalion fights on the Western Front for the duration of the conflict, whilst the 2nd battalion serves in India. In total nineteen battalions were raised seeing service in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Burma and at home. In total seventy-one battle honours were awarded, including the retreat from Mons, Le Cateau, Somme 1916 and 1918, Ypres, 1915, 1917 and 1918 and Cambrai, 1917 and 1918.

1919 Third Afghan war.

1920 Another name change to The Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's).

1939-45 [World War II](#). The 1st battalion spends the majority of the war in India but fights the Japanese in the Arakan, Burma during 1943 and 1944. The 2nd battalion fights alongside the Americans in Italy and helps end the civil war in Greece. Ten battalions were raised seeing action across North-Western Europe and at home. In total twenty-eight battle honours were awarded, including Hill 112, Rhineland, North-West Europe 1944-1945, Cassino II and Burma 1943-44.

1947 2nd battalion in Austria performing peace keeping duties.

1948 28 February The 1st battalion are the last British troops to leave a newly independent India, aboard the Empress of Australia. June Amalgamation of the 1st and 2nd battalions. The Somerset Light Infantry took over the training of the other Light Infantry divisions at Bordon in Hampshire.

1951 Involved in peace keeping duties along the Rhine.

1952-5 [The Malayan Emergency.](#)

1956 The Suez Crises, only the anti-tank platoon become involved, whilst the rest of the regiment remained in Malta before moving to Cyprus, to fulfil another peace keeping role.

1959 6 October: The Somerset Light Infantry was amalgamated with the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry to form the Somerset and Cornwall Light Infantry. The county's Territorial Army alone keeps the name of the Somerset Light Infantry.

1968 The Light Infantry was formed on Vesting Day, 10 July 1968. All the Light Infantry regiments were amalgamated to form one. The 6th battalion the (Somerset and Cornwall) Light Infantry, a territorial battalion, maintains its Headquarters in Taunton.