

War in olden times

Little is known of the effect of war on Norton in previous centuries, though doubtless the village experienced a great deal of skirmishing. In the 6th century it lay on the borderline between the native Britons in the west and the Angles who had sailed up the Humber and Trent and settled in the east. In the 9th century it lay close to another border, the east-west boundary between Mercia and Northumbria. The neighbouring parish of Dore was the place where the whole of England was united in 829 A.D., when the nobles of Northumbria acknowledged King Egbert of Wessex as their overlord.

The centuries passed, Saxons giving way to Normans, but little history was recorded until the 16th century, when names of all Norton men who were able to bear arms were recorded in Queen Elizabeth's survey. Since that time a military title can be found in the history of almost every land-owning family. The 17th century found a member of the Kirke family of Greenhill Hall away in Canada, receiving the surrender of Quebec.

During the Civil War the Kirkes at Greenhill were Cavaliers, fighting for King Charles. The King's men took Sheffield and its castle in 1643 but it was won back the next year by Parliamentary forces. William Blythe, whose tombstone is now in the porch of Norton Church, was a commander on the side of Parliament. In 1647 he received instructions from Westminster to issue a notice to order the demolition of the castle. The Gills of Norton House were also Roundheads. Leonard Gill owned a shot manufactory at Greenhill and his son, Captain Edward Gill, followed Colonel Bright as Governor of Sheffield in 1655.

In the early 19th century Lt Col Bohun Shore lived with his brother Samuel and family at Norton Hall. Sir Francis Chantrey, the famous sculptor who was born at Norton in 1781, painted at least one portrait of a local army officer and his statue of the Duke of Wellington, the great victor of the Battle of Waterloo, still stands in London.

The lot of the common soldier in the mid 1850s was miserable indeed. Norton is proud of its connection with Florence Nightingale, cousin to the Shores at Norton Hall. Her father was of the Tipton branch, changing his name by deed poll in order to inherit money from his uncle Peter Nightingale. As a result of seeing the Army in the Crimea, dying before her eyes of wounds, disease, cold and hunger, she spent the rest of her life altering the organisation of military hospitals.

The Rifle Volunteers

The weakened Army fought in India from 1856 to 1858, winning a victory there but returning home to trouble with France. "Violent words" concerning a suspected plot against Napoleon the Third caused much alarm in Britain and in 1859 thousands of men enlisted in a Rifle Volunteer Force.



*Lieut.-Col B.A. Firth.
The new Commander of the
Hallamshire Rifles, 1913*

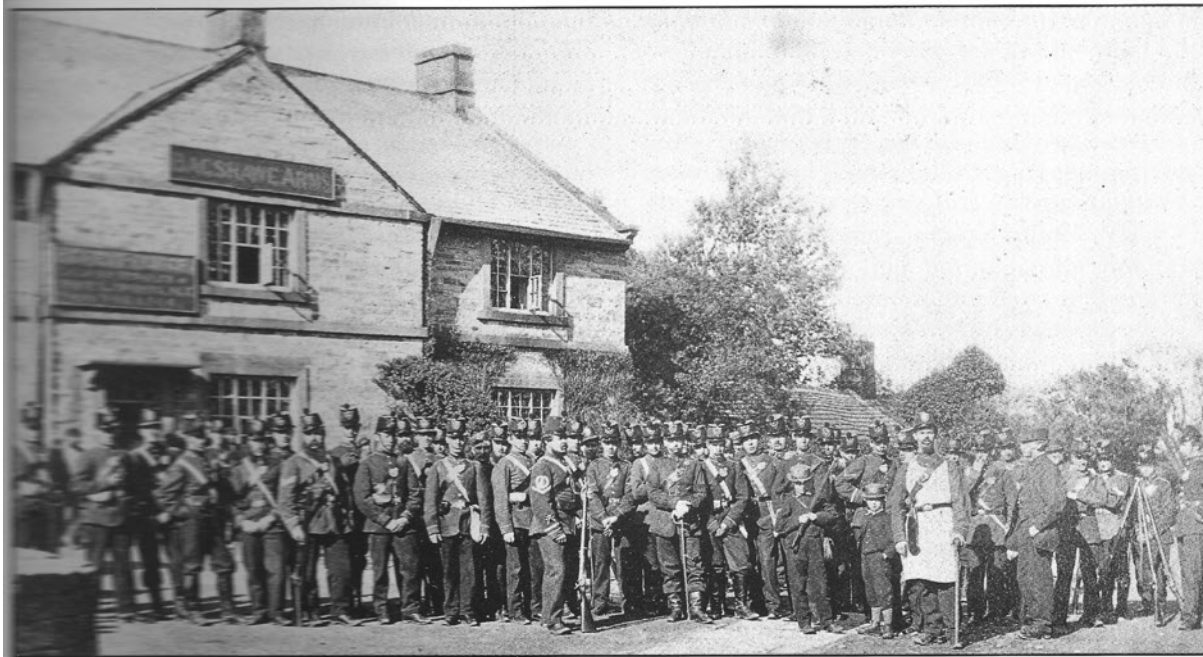
The whole story of the Volunteers from 1859 to 1989 is told in an excellent book *The Hallamshire Rifle Volunteers* compiled by Major A.J.Podmore TD in 1991.

In 1859 the 1st Hallamshire Volunteer Battalion (York and Lancaster Regiment) was raised. An 1861 picture shows men at rest during a field day, outside the Bagshawe Arms at Norton. In 1862, two members of the Creswick family resigned and formed the Sheffield Artillery Volunteers. Colonel Nathaniel C.B. Creswick lived in the former Bowling Green House in School Lane. This had been re-named Chantrey Grange by the previous owner, Mr Addy, but the name was changed again by Colonel Creswick to Norton Green.

A public notice in the Dronfield Parish magazine for March 1880 advertising lessons on the organ, pianoforte and harmonium by Joseph L.Rawlins, organist and choirmaster of Norton Parish Church, also states that he is a member of the West Yorkshire Yeomanry Cavalry Band.

From the mid 19th century onwards, Sheffield iron and steel manufacturers played an immense part in the development of armaments. Cammell's and the firm of John Brown were noted for the production of armour plating. Charles Cammell, who had bought Norton Hall and other property from the Shore Estate, lived in Norton for over 30 years.

Another great manufacturer was Mark Firth whose son, Bernard Alexander Firth, came to live at Norton Hall in 1902. He allowed officers of the Royal Flying Corps to use his home during the first World War and his own name, Col B.A.Firth, heads the Norton Roll of Honour for World War One.



Hallamshire Rifle Volunteer Corps. circa 1860. Bagshawe Arms, Norton. By permission of the York and Lancaster Regimental Museum