

MINUTES OF THE PARK ESTATES AND BUILDINGS COMMITTEE 1880-1894

by BETTY MAY

A sign by the Park House commemorates the use by war-time troops of the Park but makes no reference to the fact that more than a hundred years ago the 1st Warwickshire Volunteer Corps and the 1st Staffordshire Volunteers each spent a week camping in the Park every year. It would seem they took over the Park as they were charged a sum equal to that taken during the corresponding week in the previous year and were, apparently, given authority over the gate although the keepers remained on hand. Inflation is not confined to our time - over a period of ten years the charge rose from £10 to £50.



In the course of indexing the minutes, the following were of interest in this respect.

In April 1881 the 1st Staffordshires asked permission to construct a Rifle Range for the Sutton Coldfield Corps., to extend along the Southern side of the Race Course towards Banners Gate. This was agreed, but the Government Inspector considered it undesirable and said a safer one would have the firing point near Banners Gate and the Butts in a line running into Streetly Wood. The Committee agreed and made a charge of 1/-s to be paid from "Lady-Day last". Regulations to include "posting of a look-out man with a red flag (or danger signal) on the Hill adjacent to the Keepers cottage and the hoisting danger signals at other necessary points when firing is going on".

Unfortunately in May 1893 a Mr. Wm. Stanley complained of a shot having been fired which passed close to himself and some friends. The Sgt. Instructor admitted that "owing to a high wind the look-out Boy's whistle was not heard". The Captain in charge replied most apologetically and proposed to have "a Bell fixed in the Butts with a communication to the Look-Out boy so that when he raises his flag and blows either his whistle or bugle he will at the same time ring the Bell in the Butts as a signal for the Targets to be lowered because when the Targets are dropped it is impossible to shoot at any object". This one-man-band seems to have been satisfactory as it is some years before there is another complaint reported of straying shots.

In September 1892 the Sutton & Smethwick Corps. of the 1st. Volunteer Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment held a "sham fight" and men in uniform were admitted free to the Park.

In December of that year the Sgt. Instructor of Volunteers was given permission to "place the Recruiting Notice for the Army on the Town Hall Railings".

THE SUTTON COLDFIELD AND ERDINGTON NEWS

JULY 3, 1889

VOLUNTEERS MARCH FROM THE CAMP. On Sunday afternoon last the Birmingham Battalion of Rifle Volunteers marched back again, after a week spent under canvas at Sutton Park. The route was through Wylde Green, Boldmere, Erdington, Gravelly Hill, &c., and in heavy marching order, on a terribly dusty day, the tramp was no light or over-pleasant duty to perform, as many of the men who left the encampment on Saturday night evidently thought. Near Erdington the companies halted for a few moments rest and here a pleasing incident occurred. Weary and footsore, hot, dry and dusty, hampered their thick uniforms and heavy rifles, our citizen soldiers were only too pleased to snatch a short breathing space. The men were not allowed to leave the ranks, strict military discipline being preserved, so that the kind attention of the good people near whose cottages the halt occurred was fully appreciated. The kindness referred to consisted in supplying an unlimited quantity of clear, cold water to the parched and thirsty militaires. "Bah!", some will say, "water's cheap!" So it is but we all of us know the scripture passage about the "cup of cold water" offered in a proper spirit, as this certainly was; and if hearty thanks are any satisfaction for a service conferred, then the donors in this case were assuredly paid in full by the grateful recipients. Having refreshed, the force pushed on to complete their march, and many in the ranks will no doubt not soon forget this simple, but disinterested and spontaneous display of thought and goodwill from some of the humbler of the Erdington people.

(photo by Robert Pritchard)