

MILITARY HISTORY

In 1327 the borough had to provide three armed footmen¹ and a Taunton man was in the Calais garrison before c. 1350.² A man 'going south in the kings wars' made his will in 1544.³ In 1588 Taunton men who served in the royal fleet were owed £82 for six weeks service implying that a large number were involved.⁴

In 1569 Taunton could muster 35 archers, 32 billmen, 13 pikemen, 10 gunners, a light horseman with a gelding, 13 pair of almain rivets, four skull caps and 19 corslets. The stock of weapons included 12 firearms, 13 bills, 12 swords and daggers and a halberd. Although men were drawn from each tithing, presumably according to population most coming from the borough, St James' Extra Portam tithing had by far the largest stock of weapons.⁵ It is not clear where the arms were stored but in 1629 St James parish maintained armour for the muster.⁶ In 1625 Francis Kerton of St James parish was responsible for 200 soldiers raised in Devon and a rate was raised in 1628 to pay for billeting.⁷ In 1642 there were arms for 100 men and two barrels of gunpowder in the castle.⁸

The borough or Pauls butts, recorded in 1441—2, were in a lane leading from St John's cross, either Mary or Mount streets but were decayed by 1616 and in 1620 the constable was to repair and set them up again.⁹ The order to set up butts was repeated in 1621 when it was said Taunton had not had any for many years.¹⁰ In 1690 they were remembered

¹ *Cal. Pat*, 1321—4, 130.

² TNA, SC 8/188/9379.

³ Siraut, *Som. Wills*, 254.

⁴ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1581—90, p. 548.

⁵ E. Green, *Certificate .of Musters, 1569*, 285—8, 291—2.

⁶ SHC, D/D/Cd/65.

⁷ *Cal. SP. Dom.* 1623—5, p. 436; SHC, D/P/tru/23/14.

⁸ D. Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973), 40.

⁹ SHC, T/PH/win 1441—2; DD/SP/22/2, 34; 50 (15 Apr. 1616); DD/SAS/C112/18/1.

¹⁰ SHC, Q/SR/39/130.

as Poole Butts.¹¹ Greenway Butts was a place name in 1566 possibly indicating former butts.¹² In 1608 St James parish was ordered to set up butts but did not until 1628.¹³

Civil War

In 1642 Taunton Castle was taken and garrisoned by supporters of Parliament and 400 men from the town were at the battle of Marshalls Elm, near Street. Payment of £300 was ordered for fortifying the town and castle. In addition to the barricaded gates, the town was defended with trenches, earthen ramparts and forts in places like the market area and by St Mary's church. When the Royalist army arrived at Orchard Portman south of the town the parliamentary force moved to Bridgwater. Unfortunately the behaviour of the royal cavalry reinforced the town's support for Parliament.¹⁴ Prominent local tradesmen and merchants like Philip Lissant and Thomas Trowbridge became parliamentary captains under Robert Blake although Trowbridge's brother-in-law Aldred Seaman who had run the family business was expelled from the town for refusing to fight for Parliament.¹⁵ Trained bands and volunteers were mustered and a watch was ordered but the castle was surrendered on 5 June 1643.¹⁶

In 1644 with the castle again held by parliamentary forces, three troop of horse were sent to 'prevent mischief'. A royalist force arrived under Prince Maurice but left almost immediately for Bridgwater. Soldiers appear to have been billeted in surrounding parishes and lodgings and provisions paid for.¹⁷ However, royal forces laid siege to the castle, having overcome most of the new defences and reached the town centre but Blake, who had brought his men to Taunton after defending Lyme and Chard, held the castle until relieved on 11 May

¹¹ SHC, D/N/tau.mst/2/1/1.

¹² SHC, DD/SP/71, f. 19.

¹³ E. H. Bates, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—25*, 23.

¹⁴ Chadwyck Healey, *Bellum Civile* (1902), 7, 17, 47—8, 85; BL, Add. MS 30277, no. 4; HL/PO/JO/10/1/137; below, local govt., politics.

¹⁵ SHC, Q/SPet/1/117, 125; Q/SR/84/4—5; Bush, 'The Tudor Tavern', *PSANHS CXIX*, 1975, 18—19.

¹⁶ HL/PO/JO/10/1/145; Underdown, *Som.t in the Civil War and Interregnum*, 41, 50—1.

¹⁷ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1644, pp. 335, 355, 530; SHC, DD/SF/14/1/14.

1645 although relief had been asked for in November. Divisions between the royalist commanders Ralph Hopton and George Goring and the parliamentary sympathies of most of the townspeople had enabled Blake to hold out until a parliamentary relieving force under Colonel Ralph Weldon arrived. There was a considerable loss of life including Robert More shot through the head on 8 May. Robert Moggeridge of Taunton made his will on 10 May 1645 leaving money to the garrison 'where I shall die' and speaking of the 'cause for king and parliament' wishing as long as the parliament lasted to 'unite them in love'.¹⁸ It was said 1,200 Royalists had been killed and c. 200 townspeople, two long suburban streets had been burnt and houses in the town, thatch had been taken to feed horses, people were starving and homeless and there was no commerce or society. A collection was ordered to relieve the poor and in 1646 three former royalist estates were bought with part of £7,000 granted to the town.¹⁹ Some people buried their money and never retrieved it.²⁰ Collections were taken for 'poor Taunton' among sympathisers²¹ and in 1645 a brief was circulated nationally for the distressed inhabitants of Taunton.²²

During the sieges much damage was done to buildings adjacent to the castle, in North Town and the area to the north of East Street and East Reach. A lawyer from Greylake lost £300 of property burnt during the last siege and the Bournes of Gothelney had a mansion worth £600 demolished to benefit the garrison.²³ Homeless people were housed out at Hestercombe and Orchard Portman where they remained in 1649, probably unable to make a living easily so far from the town.²⁴ Livelihoods were destroyed and criminals took advantage

¹⁸ Underdown, *Som.t in the Civil War and Interregnum*, 80—2, 93—5; J. Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 152; SHC, DD/AH/21/16/3; TNA, PROB 11/195/290.

¹⁹ HL/PO/JO/10/1/188; SHC, PAM 1655; *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1429; E. Green, 'The Siege and Defence of Taunton, 1644—5', *PSANHS*, XXV, 33—48; D. Stevens, *War and Peace in West Somerset 1620—1670* (Minehead, 1988), 30—46.

²⁰ *PSANHS* CXXV (1981), 121—3.

²¹ A. MacFarlane, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616—83* (Oxford, 1991), 47.

²² West Sussex R. O., PAR/21/11/3.

²³ *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1004, 1210.

²⁴ SHC, Q/SPET/1/129.

of the chaos. People were still suffering more than 10 years later including men disabled by their war injuries and widows.²⁵ Royalists faced difficulty compounding for their property, which often took many years to settle especially when their tenants had been dispossessed by men like John Mallack who resisted all orders to give up possession.²⁶ Some men acted as informers against royalists including Lawrence Chislett who obtained £500 in 1646 and went on to lay information against three men in 1647.²⁷ Despite the damage and chaos the townspeople endeavoured to carry on daily life and the parish clerk of St Mary's kept a fairly careful record of baptisms or births, marriages and deaths in the parish but documents like wills were lost.²⁸ Taunton was occupied by parliamentary forces until 1651 and there were complaints of their behaviour.²⁹ They appear to have taken over Lambrook destroying property and using the site for several years.³⁰ Sir Edward Rodney and Sir Edmund Berkeley were imprisoned in Taunton on suspicion of planning a Royalist rising.³¹ After the restoration men wounded fighting for the king requested pensions.³²

Aftermath of the Monmouth rebellion

The defeat of the rebellion led to the Tangier regiment of Col. Kirke taking charge of the town and there were at least nine executions, most on the 9th July, probably by hanging as the victims, who may not have been local men, were buried. At least 30 rebels and soldiers, strangers to the town, were also buried. The subsequent Bloody Assize resulted in barbarous executions by hanging, drawing and quartering.³³ The Somerset Light Infantry dates its

²⁵ SHC, Q/SR/84/4—5; 93/226; 94/100—1; Q/SPet/1/117, 125—8, 159.

²⁶ *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1573—4.

²⁷ *Cal Cttee Compounding*, I. 54; III, 1746.

²⁸ SHC,D/P/tau.m/2/1/1; DD/SP/438, no. 4.

²⁹ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1650, 60, 193, 281, 504; 1651, 100, 211, 220, 306, 329, 467, 474; HL/PO/JO/10/1/231.

³⁰ *Cal Cttee Compounding*, II. 1313.

³¹ Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum*, 191—2; below, local govt., politics.

³² *Som. QS 1666—77*, p. 70.

³³ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/8; D/P/tau.m/2/1/32; below, local. govt., politics.

origins from the 13th regiment raised in 1685 but was not affiliated to the county until 1782.³⁴ Soldiers were quartered in the town were a burden. In 1694 the mayor secured the assistance of Edward Clarke, M.P. to remove three companies of soldiers and to recover over £142 they owed for lodgings and other provision. The problem recurred in 1695 and 1696.³⁵

Most farmers and even some town dwellers had birding pieces but many townsmen had other weapons and as late as 1725 a saddler had two swords and a musket.³⁶ In 1742 a retired maltster had a brace of pistols perhaps reflecting ongoing fear of disorder.³⁷ William and Christian Corfield lost three sons on military service including a son killed in America in 1776 and many local families had sons in the army or navy.³⁸

Military service

The Taunton regiment of foot, part of the militia, was led by members of the Warre family in the later 17th and early 18th century.³⁹ Military units were a familiar sight billeted or camped around the town. In 1757—8 nine soldiers were buried at St Mary's over several months.⁴⁰ In 1779 a large number of French prisoners of war were escorted to Taunton.⁴¹ The 1st Somerset Regiment was first quartered at Taunton in 1783. In 1784 the 40th Regiment was stationed in the town and was sent to Tiverton because of unrest among weavers there.⁴² War with France led local men to join the services and recruiting officers worked in the town. In 1793 the innkeeper at the Castle was prosecuted for refusing to receive one.⁴³ A sergeant in a foot regiment at the Saracen's Head in 1796 may have been on a similar mission and by the late

³⁴ *VCH Som.* II, 239; E. Grant, *The Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's), 1685—1959* (Tiverton, 2004), 15; below, this section.

³⁵ SHC, DD/SF/1/21; 13/2/51.

³⁶ SHC, DD/SP/1725/22.

³⁷ SHC, DD/SP/1742/15.

³⁸ Monumental inscriptions in St James church, Taunton.

³⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/FA/129, 136.

⁴⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/2/1/32.

⁴¹ Bedfordshire R.O., L 30/14/62e.

⁴² J. Bourne, *Georgian Tiverton* (Devon and Cornwall Rec. Soc. 1986), 80.

⁴³ SHC, DD/HC/2/17/2.

1790s Taunton had raised yeomanry and infantry troops.⁴⁴ Older men served as volunteers and there were volunteer Taunton Rifles and a Taunton Loyal Volunteers corps. The latter, formed in 1794, had three companies with six officers and 197 men.⁴⁵ The Taunton Rifle Company had large stocks of balls and powder for practice in 1807.⁴⁶ In 1803 a Taunton Volunteer Cavalry unit was established to raise 62 men if clothing and arms could be found.⁴⁷ Local militias drilled in Taunton, which sometimes resulted in violence as in 1812.⁴⁸ Men entered military service to escape poverty, some were clothworkers who joined up during slumps in the industry.⁴⁹ Their wives received small payments of 2s. or more a week from the parish and during the Napoleonic wars St Mary's often paid out over £4 a week to c. 30 families. Wives and children of non-parishioners were removed from the parish when the men were posted overseas.⁵⁰

During peace numbers of service men fell and in 1829 only 22 men were in the army but 960 men were liable to serve in the militia and a further 517 were exempt, mostly through infirmity.⁵¹ A Taunton Corps of Yeomanry Cavalry enrolled 158 men in 1832.⁵² Local soldiers were involved in the Afghan campaigns and the 1st Somerset Regiment was allowed to bear the name Jellalabad, the name later given to Mount Street barracks.⁵³ In 1854 Richard Carver designed a depot and parade ground for the West Somerset Militia in the grounds of the proposed Shire Hall but the scheme was abandoned and stores were kept at Yarde Place.⁵⁴

⁴⁴ SHC, Q/SR/364/3/24.

⁴⁵ TNA, WO12/134539; SHC, DD/SLI/10/1.

⁴⁶ SHC, DD/S/BS/5.

⁴⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/SY/18

⁴⁸ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/FA/185, p. 164; DD/SAS/C2548/12.

⁴⁹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/3.

⁵⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/21/2/1.

⁵¹ SHC, DD/CN/5/7.

⁵² SHC, DD/SLI/3/2/16.

⁵³ Below, this section.

⁵⁴ SHC, Q/AC/7; DD/L/1/10/35A; D/DC/tau.d/24/1/2/54.

A captured gun, known as the Sebastapol trophy was for many years located in the grounds of Shire Hall.⁵⁵

The 3rd Somerset or Taunton Volunteer Rifle Corps, later the 2nd Volunteer battalion, was raised in 1859 and 24 men volunteered immediately. They paid for their ammunition, had a salaried sergeant and servant and practised at Orchard Portman. By 1860 they had 73 members rising to 96 although 14 were Wellington men waiting for their own corps.⁵⁶ A squadron of the West Somerset Yeomanry Cavalry was also based in the town by 1864.⁵⁷ Billeting remained a problem and in 1872 1,129 men and 509 horses from the militia, Scots Greys, Dragoons, Hussars and Royal Engineers had to be accommodated on their way to Dartmoor for manoeuvres.⁵⁸ That probably led to the construction from 1873 of a campsite on the Blackdown hills which relieved the town of billeting and disorder. In 1896 the camp was removed to Orchard Portman.⁵⁹

In 1881 the militia and Light Infantry units were united as the Prince Albert's Light Infantry (Somersetshire) Regiment and Taunton became their military depot.⁶⁰ In 1882 recruits left Taunton for service in Egypt.⁶¹ Men from the Somerset Light Infantry were killed in the Burmese Campaign of 1885—7 and in 1889 a Celtic cross with 144 names was erected east of the Market House in their memory.⁶² In 1896 the regiment comprised two line battalions, two former militia battalions and three volunteer battalions of which the second was based in Taunton.⁶³ In 1901 275 soldiers and their families resided in the barracks.⁶⁴ In

⁵⁵ SHC, T/PH/rea/3/107.

⁵⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/SY/2, 9; DD/SF/14/4/15.

⁵⁷ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 54—6.

⁵⁸ SHC, DD/SP/453 (1872—3).

⁵⁹ T. James, *Along the Wild Edge*, (2011), 94—9; SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/3 (*Taunton Mail*, 6 May 1896, p. 4).

⁶⁰ *VCH Som. II*, 240—1; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 35; Grant, *Som. Light Infantry*, 44, 152—4.

⁶¹ SHC, DD/SAS/C/1193/11.

⁶² Above, intro; SHC, DD/SLI/3/4/2.

⁶³ *Taunton of Today* (1896), 54—6.

⁶⁴ TNA, RG13/2278.

the late 1890s c. 2,000 men trained in Taunton for war in South Africa.⁶⁵ The Somerset Light Infantry suffered severely in the Boer War with only c. 250 out of 450 returning. A militia battalion, the West Somerset yeomanry and a number of reservists also took part and by November 1899 John White's horse repository had sent 168 horses and been asked to supply 100 more. In 1902 thousands thronged the streets when the survivors marched back from the station.⁶⁶ In 1906 in addition to the Somerset Light Infantry in the Mount Street barracks, the voluntary 5th Battalion, later Territorial Army, was based in the former Wilton gaol and the West Somerset Yeomanry had a depot in Middle Street.⁶⁷

Although not a port Taunton supplied many men for the navy and four survived Trafalgar including an armourer's mate and a cook.⁶⁸ Between 1853 and 1872 at least 291 Taunton men served in the sea services and c. 800 after 1873.⁶⁹ In addition at least 150 men were in the merchant navy in the late 19th and early 20th century many of whom served in the First World War.⁷⁰

Mount Street Barracks

The 1st Somerset Regiment, later the Somerset Light Infantry was first quartered at Taunton in 1783, possibly in tents and billets. In 1796 a cavalry barracks with officers' apartments was erected, said to have cost over £5,000.⁷¹ That was probably the barracks or depot recorded in 1811—12.⁷² In 1826 William Kinglake enfranchised and sold the 3-a. site to His

⁶⁵ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/7 (*Taunton Mail*, 2 Jan. 1901, p.6).

⁶⁶ SHC, DD/TBL/42/9/6 (*Taunton Mail*, 15 Nov., 27 Dec. 1899); A/DIF/95/35, 101/6/113; DD/FIV/4/66; 14/62.

⁶⁷ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1906).

⁶⁸ TNA, ADM27/5/423; ADM27/10/22; ADM27/13/112; ADM27/18/220; ADM27/19/132.

⁶⁹ TNA, ADM139, 188.

⁷⁰ TNA, BT99/1310/22; BT380—1.

⁷¹ B.L., *An Account of money...for the erection of barracks* (1790—5); Toulmin, *Hist. Taunton*, rev. Savage, 596.

⁷² TNA, WO 12/13068.

Majesty's Ordnance.⁷³ In 1861 the War Department leased the barracks, which could accommodate four officers and 61 men with their horses, to the First Somerset militia for 21 years. The site was mostly open with buildings around the perimeter apart from the barrack building of two storeys with attics comprising a central range of five bays flanked by two cross wings, three bays deep and two wide.⁷⁴ The militia converted the stables into a canteen and schoolroom for training in 1863 and spent nearly £1,000 improving the barracks but before the end of the term the government wanted the site returned. The militia appear to have vacated in 1874 before being united with the Light Infantry.⁷⁵ In 1877—8 the Ministry of War bought adjoining coachhouses and stableyards to extend the site, which was redeveloped in 1879—80 as Jellalabad Barracks, with a number of distinctive red brick blocks approached from the Mount and a large gatehouse or keep in Mount Street. The designers were architect Major Henry Crozier and surveyor Thomas Berry of the Royal Engineers.⁷⁶ In 1881 officers of the 2nd Somerset Light Infantry moved from Bath to the new barracks.⁷⁷ A fire in March 1889 destroyed offices and workshops, which were rebuilt that year.⁷⁸

In 1914 six timber barrack buildings with cook house, latrines and bath house were added to accommodate recruits. By August a site designed for 350 had 1,300 soldiers.⁷⁹ The barracks was the home of the Somerset Light Infantry until 1959 when it was occupied by the regimental headquarters and a museum, later moved to the castle. Some buildings on The Mount including the military hospital were sold to the county council in 1963 but later formed part of the 1990s redevelopment. In 1964 the officers' mess became the headquarters

⁷³ SHC, DD/CH/138/1; A/ASW/1.

⁷⁴ *PO Dir. Som.* (1861); SHC, Q/AM/4; A/DIF/44.

⁷⁵ SHC, Q/AM/4.

⁷⁶ SHC, A/APN/2/6; D/B/ta/24/1/10/323; D/B/ta/24/1/11/379.; TNA, RG 11/2366, no. 156, 2367, no. 134.

⁷⁷ SHC, DD/SLI/20/6/1.

⁷⁸ SHC, A/ADR, vol. 1 (1886).

⁷⁹ SHC, A/ADR, box 4; A/DIF/95/32.

of the Royal Army Pay Corps who had been in various sites in Taunton since 1944 and remained at the barracks until 1987 when they moved to Exeter. The Admiralty Hydrographic office used the barracks from 1989—92.⁸⁰ In 1993 the Secretary of State for Defence sold the barracks to New Property Frontiers Ltd and the site was redeveloped for housing with most smaller blocks demolished.⁸¹ The officers' mess and some other blocks survived as apartments and the c. 1880 red brick gatehouse continues to tower over the houses of Mount Street and Vivary Park.

First World War

After a few years respite Taunton men were at war again. Lorryloads of ammunition arrived, a Taunton Reserve with 450 recruits marched through the town in August 1914, 1,300 recruits were housed at the Jellalabad barracks and a 'pals' battalion of shop assistants and clerks and a reserve unit were planned. Bagpipe and bugle bands led a recruiting drive that was so successful accommodation became a problem and various reading rooms and the soldiers home were thrown open for recruits' use while existing units and reserves were moved out of the town. By October Belgian refugees were arriving, part of the 130 allotted to the town and a Taunton Volunteer Training Corps formed for those unable to enlist in the army. Early in 1915 400 soldiers with 135 motor waggons were camped near French Weir and troops and their equipment were a frequent sight on the streets.⁸² Australian soldiers were billeted and their band played regularly to full houses at the Lyceum. The Mayor provided cars to take local men on leave to visit their families on Sundays. In 1916 over 800 soldiers were given a Christmas dinner at the Victoria rooms.⁸³ Conscientious and other objectors

⁸⁰ SHC, A/APN/2/6; DD/SLI/19/2/10, 20/6/1, 25/2—6.

⁸¹ SHC, A/ASW/1; DD/SLI/20/6/1.

⁸² SHC, A/DIF/95/32—3; C/EW/8/49.

⁸³ SHC, DD/TBL/59 (1915—16); C/EW/8/49.

appeared before tribunals, which determined their fate. One man was fined for trying to bribe the National Service Medical Board.⁸⁴

The fire siren was to give warning of enemy aircraft and initially street lighting was reduced. Allotments were established and a national kitchen set up.⁸⁵ Locally rising prices were blamed on panic buying and a food committee was established. At least one Sunday school cancelled treats so as not to increase bread and cake consumption.⁸⁶ Some older boy scouts were sent to Cornwall to assist the coastguard and an evening club was opened in Bath Place Conservative club to boost morale among girls.⁸⁷ Later the Red Cross set up a hospital at Priory school.⁸⁸ Few families were unaffected and many men never came home. The 1919 absent voters list records 880 men from the two Taunton parishes still in service.⁸⁹ The 1922 war memorial, a granite cenotaph under a domed Portland stone canopy in Vivary Park designed by the borough surveyor Ivor Shellard commemorates 456 dead.⁹⁰ Local man, Hugh Trenchard (1873—1956) learnt to fly and became commander of the fledgling Royal Flying Corps and then chief of the new Royal Air Force and 1st Viscount Trenchard.⁹¹

In 1913 the War Department leased the Target Field⁹² by the sewage works at Lambrook and it remained a rifle range until the end of the Second World War although by 1933 it was regarded as a nuisance and the council wanted the land.⁹³ A souvenir tank was placed at French Weir although its motor was sold in 1920 when a donated howitzer, turned down by the archaeological society, was sited with it. Both went for scrap in the Second

⁸⁴ TNA, NATS1/983.

⁸⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (1915—16); C/EW/8/49.

⁸⁶ SHC, A/DIF/95/33; D/N/tau.pm/5/3/1, p. 27.

⁸⁷ SHC, A/DIF/95/33; A/DBL/133/21.

⁸⁸ SHC, A/DIF/95/32.

⁸⁹ SHC, Q/REr/15/5.

⁹⁰ SHC, DD/SLI/19/3/14; Som. HER 46217; J. Orbach, *S. & W. Som.* 622.

⁹¹ *ODNB*, Hugh M. Trenchard: accessed 12 Apr. 2018.

⁹² In West Monkton parish and so named by 1868 implying early militia use: SHC, D/B/ta/3/1/1 (1868).

⁹³ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 19 (1939—40, 50; A/DVY 1.

World War.⁹⁴ Between the wars the town continued to be the headquarters of the Somerset Light Infantry and the Territorial Army's voluntary 5th Battalion and 373rd Battery, formerly the West Somerset Yeomanry.⁹⁵

Second World War

In the build-up to the war Taunton formed a squadron of air defence cadets, a group of air raid wardens, with c. 20 posts by 1940, and an auxiliary fire brigade.⁹⁶ The Taunton stop line with anti-tank positions was created across the county east of the town in 1940 and continued to the English Channel. The Taunton Starfish, using flares to simulate a burning town, was built on Castleman's Hill in Trull to decoy enemy aircraft away from Taunton and protect the Hydrographic Office and the military depots at Norton Fitzwarren.⁹⁷ Taunton was spared bombing although other enemy action such as incendiaries and machine gunning from aircraft saw damage to buildings including the workhouse. Air Raid wardens and Home Guard were active in the town, 20 communal air raid shelters were provided and Anderson shelters were supplied to people near main roads.⁹⁸ Large stores and other workplaces had shelters on their premises some of which were retained as stores and offices after the war such as the large block built by Pearsalls.⁹⁹ By the end of 1939 800 people were engaged in civil defence, increased to 5,825, mostly women, by 1942. The Home Guard formed the 2nd Somerset (Taunton) Battalion including companies for south and north Taunton, comprising several platoons each responsible for a road block. Some platoons were recruited from particular workplaces such as the gasworks, Avimo who raised 153 men, or Van Heusen's

⁹⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/6/3 (Dec, 1919, Jan. 1920); A/DIF/95/32; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 19 (1939—40, 71).

⁹⁵ *Taunton Official Handbook and Guide* (1931), 39.

⁹⁶ SHC, D/DC/tau.d, unlisted box 19 (1938—9), 94, 98—9; DD/S/BS/6 (6).

⁹⁷ Dawson, Hunt and Webster, *Som. and the defence of the Bristol Channel*, 22, 74

⁹⁸ SHC, C/CD/1/1/2, 2/20/3; C/WS/1/3.

⁹⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/105/2888; 24/1/106/3179, 3189; 24/1/113/4183; 24/1/178/10657.

shirt factory. The railway and post office had their own local companies and staff from the Hydrographic Office formed the Admiralty Home Guard.¹⁰⁰ There were air crashes and in 1940 a serious derailment of a train from Paddington carrying naval personnel many of whom were killed and wounded.¹⁰¹ Many local people joined the services including the Somerset Light Infantry. The 5th battalion (Taunton) took part in preparations for the Battle of Britain and the D Day landings after which they crossed the Rhine and were quartered in Celle in Hanover. One man brought home a portrait of Adolf Hitler by W. Kruke as a souvenir.¹⁰² A 30th battalion was raised in Taunton for home defence but was posted to Tunisia and Italy before being disbanded.¹⁰³

Large areas around the town were used as allotments. A committee was set up to feed the population especially schoolchildren and evacuees. There were emergency feeding stations at four schools. On 26 August 1941 a British restaurant opened in the Victoria Rooms serving 560 meals a day and two more opened later at Leycroft at the bottom of East Reach and at a former evacuee centre in Priory Bridge Road, although the latter closed in 1943 as it was not well-used. Vegetables were supplied from Council nurseries. The Victoria restaurant provided a takeaway lunchtime service in customer's basins and drinks and light meals during the afternoon and early evening. Ration coupons were not required and meal prices were fixed. By March 1943 over 600,000 meals had been served and the two restaurants averaged 1,200 a day.¹⁰⁴ In 1944 the Victoria restaurant also opened in the evening staffed by volunteers and held dancing and games for service personnel until June 1945. Although Leycroft closed in September 1945 the Victoria restaurant continued to serve

¹⁰⁰ SHC, A/CWH/1; C/CD/2/20/3; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 19 (1939—40, 1; D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Oct. 1942); D/R/ta/10/7; DD/S/BS/5, 8; J. Wilson, *The Somerset Home Guard*, 180—212.

¹⁰¹ TNA, AVIA 5/19/W891; ADM 358/3775; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 19 (1939—40, 139).

¹⁰² SHC, DD/TBL/75; SWHT art colln.

¹⁰³ SHC, DD/TBL/75.

¹⁰⁴ SHC, C/CD/2/20/3; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3, 18—19, 52.

up to 40,500 meals a month. From 1949 usage declined, teas were only served on Saturdays and the venture began to make a loss so the restaurant closed in June 1953.¹⁰⁵

Morale boosting entertainment was provided by groups such as the Taunton (War-Time) Choral and Orchestral Society and a Holiday At Home Week was held every August providing free events mainly in Vivary Park.¹⁰⁶ Fund raising activities included Wings for Victory Week with air displays to buy Spitfires, events to raise money for tanks and the adoption of *HMS Dauntless*. Sylvia Pankhurst came in 1943 to raise funds for a hospital in Abyssinia [Ethiopia].¹⁰⁷ An information service provided emergency information through the police, library and rest shelters.¹⁰⁸ By 1943 there were 128 shelters, which could accommodate 5,800, reduced from 141 as some had been found to be dangerous, and large numbers of Anderson and Morrison shelters on private premises.¹⁰⁹ Taunton, Massachusetts, donated two mobile canteens in 1941, which were sent to Holland after the war.¹¹⁰

A new camp was built at Nunsfield across The Mount from the Jellalabad Barracks and remained until the 1950s. Some British military were stationed around the town notably the 8th Corps command at Hestercombe House in Cheddon Fitzpaine 1940—3, but the major army presence was the American army, which arrived in 1942. They had camps in Norton Fitzwarren, Musgrove Park and Hestercombe but were also billeted in civilian homes when additional troops arrived in 1944. A service club was opened in the grounds of Flook House, Station Road.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/4/20/1 (1943—5, 1947—9, 1951—3).

¹⁰⁶ SHC, A/EFC/1; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3 (Aug. 1943), 1943—5 (Aug 1944, Aug 1945).

¹⁰⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C2548/12; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3, 66, 83.

¹⁰⁸ SHC, C/CD/2/20/3.

¹⁰⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/3/29/3, p. 8; D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Dec. 1940, Jan. 1942); D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3, pp. 38, 52.

¹¹⁰ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (Oct. 1945).

¹¹¹ T. Mayberry, *The Vale of Taunton Past* (Chichester, 1998), 114—16; SHC, DD/S/BS/5; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3, loose notice 1944.

Many evacuees were billeted in the town, c. 1,200 arrived between 1 and 4 September 1940 and bombed-out refugees from London travelling west stayed overnight at Albemarle school.¹¹² By August 1941 there were 5,564 evacuees excluding unaccompanied children.¹¹³ Most returned home leaving only 800 by 1943 but in 1944 further evacuees came to escape flying bombs, mainly children and mothers c. 1,000 by July.¹¹⁴ By September firewatching had been given up although the council sent 700 shelters to areas regarded as still in danger of bombing.¹¹⁵ In December the Home Guard was stood down but they took part in victory celebrations and parades in 1945. Services, street parties and children's entertainments marked both victory in Europe and over Japan and there were further celebrations in 1946.¹¹⁶ It was not until 1950 that the names of 156 war dead were added to the war memorial.¹¹⁷

Shortage of accommodation especially for ex-service families led to widespread squatting in former military sites in 1946.¹¹⁸ Military units remained in the Taunton area including Norton Fitzwarren¹¹⁹ and Sherford in Trull. Depots in Norton and Staplegrave provided civilian jobs and access to sports facilities. In 1978 the closure of such depots and the pay office at Jellalabad was planned.¹²⁰ Attempts at rebuilding relations with Germany included a visit from 20 poor German children from the Konigslutter area and their teacher in 1949. They stayed for three months and were fed and clothed by local families. Continuing contact resulted in a twinning arrangement in 1977.¹²¹

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¹¹² SHC, C/PHH/169; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 19 (1939—40, 117).

¹¹³ SHC, D/CD/1/1/29.

¹¹⁴ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1942—3, 52; 1943—5 (July 1944).

¹¹⁵ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (Sep 1944).

¹¹⁶ SHC, D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (Dec 1944, May 1945); DD/TBL/75.

¹¹⁷ SHC, A/DIF/114/12.

¹¹⁸ SHC, D/R/ta/10/7.

¹¹⁹ Norton Fitzwarren, soc. hist.

¹²⁰ SHC, D/P/stapg/7/3, pp. 12, 21, 23, 94.

¹²¹ Friends of Durham County Record office, *No Longer the Enemy (The children never were)*, 76, 86—7.

The local Territorial Army had its origin in the old volunteer associations including the Taunton Riflemen who served during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1860 such units were united as the 1st Bath and Taunton Volunteers. With the formation of the Territorial Army volunteer units were brought together as the 8th District of Southern Command including the former volunteer battalions of the Somerset Light Infantry.¹²² They had their headquarters and drill hall in Burton Place, part of the former Wilton Gaol site, before moving to new premises in Bishops Hull in 1951 where they remained as the Rifles and Army Reserve¹²³

The borough established a Civil Defence headquarters at Canon House in 1955. Civil defence was taken over by the county council and transferred to the Jellalabad barracks c. 1962.¹²⁴ A protective fall-out shelter was built at Lambrook in 1964.¹²⁵

¹²² *VCH Som.* II, 242—3.

¹²³ SHC D/B/ta/24/1/115/4502; Bishops Hull, soc. hist.; Wilton.

¹²⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/4/5/1 (Aug. 1955); D/B/ta/24/1/146/8723.

¹²⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/156/9548.