

## **Volunteer Drill Halls**

Volunteer unit members and the local community financed construction or acquisition of facilities. Large facilities were known as drill halls; small ones as drill stations. There was no standard design for drill halls. At a minimum they would have office space, store rooms, and a drill area or outdoor parade ground that could accommodate the entire unit to which the facility belonged.

### Drill Stations

These were typically located in small towns and villages for use by local volunteers. They consisted of a large open space that could provide practical training for 30 men and have a storage area. Frequently it was leased space in an industrial building or warehouse.

### Company Drill Halls

A volunteer infantry company of the late-19<sup>th</sup> Century had an authorized strength of 115, all ranks. The administrative space of a company drill hall would contain an office for the commander and an orderly room with file cabinets, bookcases, and desks for use by the company sergeant-major, company clerk, and the sergeant-instructor. (The instructor was a regular of the permanent staff.) It would have storage facilities for uniforms not in the possession of unit members, personal equipment (canteens, mess kits, etc.), rifles, and ammunition. In the company drill hall, there would be a large, interior area where the entire company could engage in practical training and receive lectures. As a substitute for a large, enclosed space, drill halls could have outdoor parade grounds. Finally, there would be a lounge for the company's officers and their guests.

As drill halls held weapons and other valuable items, the facility would either have an apartment for a civilian watchman or be adjacent to a cottage or multi-family building in which the watchman resided.

Guildford's drill hall on The Bars was of company-size as its first military occupant was the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, a company of the Surrey Rifle Volunteers. When it housed two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen's Volunteer Battalion it must have been utilized at over-capacity.

### Battalion Drill Halls

These were large, ornate structures that exhibited the community's pride in its volunteers. Typically, they housed the battalion headquarters and one or two rifle companies. In large cities, an entire battalion used such drill halls. A battalion HQ consisted of the commanding officer, the second-in-command, a staff officer, adjutant, quartermaster, one or two medical officers, an acting chaplain and four staff sergeants. The full-time regulars of the permanent staff were the adjutant (administrative officer with the rank of captain) and the regimental sergeant-major. Such drill halls had most or all of the following components:

**Office Space:** This consisted of offices for the commissioned officers, a surgery for the medical officer, and the battalion orderly room.

**Storage Space:** Space for company stores and the battalion stores, including weapons and ammunition. Battalion stores included large items such as 20-man tents. There would also be a shed for any wagons assigned to the battalion.

**Officers' Mess** with dining room, kitchen, pantry, and lounge.

**Sergeants' Mess** with dining room, kitchen, pantry, and lounge.

Recreation Area: This included a billiard room, library, lounge, and wet canteen (bar) for the rank-and-file.

Miniature Rifle Range: Used for rifles fitted with Morris Tubes that allowed firing small caliber bullets.

Drill Area: A large, high-ceilinged space in which from two companies to the entire battalion could engage in practical training.

Living Quarters: These were the watchman's apartment, apartments for the permanent staff and their families, and a barrack-room for recruits awaiting posting to the regimental depot.

## Old Street Drill Hall, Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester



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*The Drill Hall Project*. [www.drillhalls.org](http://www.drillhalls.org).