



Devon Family History Society
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BILLETING ARRANGEMENTS IN EXETER

1882 & 1884

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Exeter had two barracks for the army: the Higher Barracks built in 1794 in Howell Road for the cavalry and the Lower Barracks built in 1806 in Topsham Road for the artillery. These served as lodgings for regiments of the regular army quartered in Exeter, but could accommodate only a small number of men and by the end of the 19th century were insufficient to cope with hundreds of soldiers passing through the city every year.

By law, soldiers on the march were to be given billets in the towns where they stopped on route. Exeter was one day's march away from the artillery camp in Okehampton Park, established in 1876, and soldiers on their way there would spend the night in Exeter. This meant that often two batteries of artillery would be quartered in the city at the same time. Billets had to be found for them in the inns and public houses in the city, but this put pressure on the publicans and made it difficult for the officers to maintain discipline over their men. Also, although the allowance paid to innkeepers for quartering the men was increased in 1873, it soon became insufficient to cover the costs. This was a national problem, found in all the towns which were on a marching route; in 1876 the Licensed Victuallers National Defence League petitioned the Secretary of State for War about the hardships suffered by innkeepers through having the men billeted on them. The matter was discussed in the House of Commons in 1879, when the Army Discipline Bill was being debated, and it was acknowledged that licensed victuallers were paying a heavy price for billeting both soldiers and horses. In 1891, a deputation from the Exeter and District Licensed Victuallers Society went to London to ask Edward Stanhope, the Secretary of State for War, for an increase in the allowance, and he also promised to consider the provision of temporary camps for soldiers to relieve the pressure on the innkeepers. However, the problems were unresolved and in 1894 the Mayor and Council of Exeter and the Licenced Victuallers Defence League petitioned the then Secretary of State for War, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, to establish a temporary camp for troops passing through the city.

These two returns list the victuallers in Exeter in 1892 and 1894, and may have been kept as evidence for the petition to the Secretary of State. The name of the victualler is given, the name of his hotel or inn and its street

address and the number of men, officers or horses which he could accommodate. The two returns form a complete survey of public houses, inns and hotels in Exeter in the 1890s. For family historians, they are useful in creating a picture of what areas of the city was like at that time, as well as giving invaluable information about ancestors involved in running licensed premises.