



Pictures above:

1. Distributing the South Africa War Medal to the Norfolk Regiment in 1903,
2. 16th Lancers changing guard at the

Cavalry Barracks, 3. Le Cateau Barracks, 24th Field Regiment in 1937, 4. 8th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment in tents at Colchester, 5. The Camp Church, church parade, 6. SW view of the Artillery Barracks in the 1880s. These buildings still stand today! 7. The Military Hospital, demolished in the 1980s.

(There are many more pictures like this at Camulos.)

This led to no little trouble in 1857 when discharged men of the British-German Legion, who had volunteered to go to South Africa under a scheme of military colonisation, hastily sought wives in Colchester to accompany them, without, in many cases, having their banns called.

Nearly 150 marriages took place in the new Church in a fortnight and later no less than 64 were wedded one Sunday by the Lutheran chaplain, only to find on their arrival at the Cape the legality of their unions questioned. Happily an Act of the Colony's Parliament was passed to overcome the difficulty.

### RECENT TIMES

In 2004, the old garrison land and buildings were made redundant by the building of the new Merville Barracks and was sold off to a property developer. Since then, several of the old buildings have been demolished, others have been converted for civilian use and others are still awaiting work to be done on them. A remarkable discovery was made by archaeologists of the only known Roman circus in Britain; its eight starting gates resting neatly within the confines of the gardens of one of the sergeant's messes. Amazingly too, some of the 1862 built Cavalry Barracks buildings have survived and now stand as the only surviving buildings of this type in the country.

It is recommended that, if you are able, you visit the area to see what has survived of our military heritage. Why not start with a visit to the Roman circus, where, during normal hours, the nearby Roman Circus House (previously a 1930s built NAAFI and Education Centre) has a museum area.

### A MUSEUM

A group of people are working to create a Colchester Military Heritage Museum and they need your help. They are looking for your stories of military service at Colchester, memorabilia, display material, etc. Many regiments have come to and gone from Colchester and it is not the intention of this leaflet to look at these regiments. But what is wanted is information about what regiments were here and when and those who served here, many of whom made Colchester their home after leaving the army, etc. Please help if you can.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Please visit the Camulos website for more detailed information.

Map reproduced from the Victoria County History. Some of the text based on a 1960s article by the late Mr Gerald Rickword. Illustrations by Mr Don Goodman, Mr Steve Wisdom and the Camulos collection.



Produced and published by [www.camulos.com](http://www.camulos.com)

©2014



### A City Guide

This leaflet will attempt to give you an appreciation of just how important Colchester was (and still is today) in the defence of our realm and the history of the British Army in general.

### FIRST GARRISON

In the year AD 43, the Emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (commonly known as Claudius) and his Roman army, invaded Britannia and made an immediate path to a place called Camulodunum, the location of the most powerful tribe in Britain. There he took the surrender of eleven British kings and began his attempt to conquer these isles. In so doing, he built forts and barracks here, giving Colchester the oldest known garrison. As we all know, the Romans left town around AD 410 and it wasn't until many centuries later that Colchester developed its garrison once again.

Although the restoration of the Stuart kings over 300 years ago gave birth to the standing army, it was not until the outbreak of the Great French War in 1793 that barracks were built in Colchester, and other towns up and down the country.

### BILLETING

Previously, except for quarters in the Tower of London, at Windsor Castle, Dover and other seaport towns, regiments were billeted in small parties over a wide area in towns and villages, being assembled as complete units for the official musters, and on other special occasions as they arose.

The system pressed heavily on, and was a source of grievance to, publicans; only inns and alehouses being liable under the Mutiny Act to receive billets. At Colchester a better spirit prevailed. An entry in the corporation records in July, 1685, reads "His Majestie's commission officers now quartering within the town be entertained with a bottle of wyne, for ye joyfull news of ye

Colchester Camp in 1856, looking south. Note the Camp Church and Cambridge Arms Pub. New Town was to be built many years later.



defeat of ye rebels in the west”; and during the following year mine host of the Red Lion was paid “the sum of five pounds for the quartering of several troopers more than his proportion he ought to have done.”

A return of the “Inns and Alehouses and their Stable Room and Bedding” sent to the War Office at this time shows there were in Colchester 207 “Beds for Guests,” and stabling for 460 horses, out of which civilian requirements would have to be met.

Not all innkeepers were so obliging and complaints were general. A writer in the “Gentlemen’s Magazine” of 1743 summing up their attitude in the words “the Landlord looks upon the Soldier as an Intruder forced into his House, and Rioting in the Sloth at his Expence.”

### FIRST HUTMENTS

During the American War, the “Ipswich Journal” of November 21, 1778, wrote “the burden of the soldiery in Essex is found insupportable, particularly in Colchester, where the principal inns have 150 men each; a petition has been sent up to the war office praying relief.”

The outbreak of hostilities with Republican France in 1793, and the prospect of a long war, led to a “Humble Petition of the Innholders and Alehouse Keepers” of Colchester begging the Corporation “to give all possible Encouragement to Government building Barracks in the Town.”

The pressing needs of the day made for prompt action and, by the time of the Peace of Amiens being signed in March 1802, wooden hutments for 5,840 men had been erected; in 1805 after the renewal of the war accommodation had been increased to provide for 478 cavalry with stabling for 450 horses, 6,787 infantry, and beds for 414 in the military hospital; at a total cost of £177,353 13s 1/2d.

Additions were made from time to time but, following Waterloo, the garrison at Colchester was speedily reduced, hutments and other buildings were sold and removed, and by 1827 the establishment was closed, with, for some years, serious effect on the prosperity of the town.

### CRIMEAN WAR (1853 to 1856)

The Crimean War revived the military traditions of Colchester, a “new camp” being opened in February, 1856, wooden huts on brick foundations occupying the “Ordnance Field” of the Napoleonic period. They were, in the opinion of an officer, “far superior to those at Aldershot.”

These were replaced by brick buildings in 1898, and named Mecanee and Hyderabad, being rebuilt during the 1950s.

In 1866, Colchester became the headquarters of the Army's newly-formed Eastern District, and it was one of the Army's four 'great camps' in Britain (with Aldershot, Shorncliffe, and the Curragh near Dublin). In 1872, the Military Localisation Bill provided the

blueprint for the reorganisation of the British Army, with 66 districts for infantry regiments, twelve for artillery and two for cavalry. Infantry, artillery and cavalry regiments were stationed at Colchester Camp.

The Cavalry Barracks, the first to be built of brick, were opened in 1864, the Artillery in 1875, the married quarters blocks a year earlier. To the south and west of Abbey or Camp field, stood Sobraon and Goojerat Barracks, and the Military Hospital, built at the time of the South African War.

During the 1914 war, Kirkee and McMunn hutments on Reed Hall estate were erected; and Roman Hill camp on the Mersea Road during the 1939 to 45 war.

### THE CAMP CHURCH

The Camp Church of timber on an iron frame, standing on part of the “Old Military Burial Ground” opened in 1807, military interments having previously taken place in parish churchyards, was first used for worship in March 1856, but not licensed for marriages until 1932.

