

Historic document shows the origin of the Bridport Volunteers

Taken from an article on the Western Gazette September 1963

Hidden away in a closed file in a Bridport office for over 50 years, and unusual document of historic interest is come to light.

It is the original printed resolution sent only to residents of quality in the Borough space inviting them to form a Bridport core of the Dorset volunteer rifle Corps -the forerunner of the 1st/4th Battalion, Dorset Regiment. Britain was then in the throes of the Crimean main crisis. On 1 June 1859, the then Mayor (Henry Templer) presided at the meeting which passed the resolution to form the Bridport volunteers, as they were afterwards known. The purpose of that meeting in is eloquently explained in these phraseology of the resolution:

“That pursuant to the letters under the respective dates of 12th and 28th May last (1858), issued from the War Department, it is most desirable that a Volunteer Corps to be armed with rifles should be enrolled for the town and neighbourhood of Bridport.... That the Corps shall be formed by the landed proprietors, professional men, Yeoman, tradesmen, and other respectable inhabitants of the district.”

£5 fee for the equipment

The minutes recalls that the proposal was moved by the Rev Melville Lee and seconded by Col Bragge. A second resolution was moved by Mr Joseph Gundry and seconded by Mr John Pope. This stated that each volunteer should be required to pay £5 towards the cost of his equipment and the annual subscription should be not more than 10 shillings, except in the case of officers who would be required to pay £5, £3, or £2 according to their rank. Space there was even a select committee appointed to vet suitable applicants before they were accepted.

Among other speakers at the meeting were Mr T(homas). C. Hounsell also a former Mayor of Bridport. Mr B. P. Gundry, Mr S. W. Whetham, another well-known name in Bridport and Mr Thomas Hounsell.

First officers

The resolution adopted records the names of those gentlemen of quality who were subsequently commissioned as the first officers of the core. They were Mr H. A. Templer, appointed captain by the Lord-Lieutenant, Mr W Hounsell (ensign) and Mr H.E. Edwards (lieutenant), four others in the shortlist for commissions were Messrs. F(rederick).W(alter). Gundry, H.E. Hounsell, W Pope, and Nicholas Loggin.

To support the campaign the mayor issued a press appeal for funds.

Capt Templer, founder of the volunteers has descendants in Bridport and one descendant is a former Chief of the Imperial General Staff Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer. Most of the original officers, too, have descendants still living in the town among them is Mr E. A. Whetham, of West Bay Road whose uncle was one of the supporters of the resolution at the inaugural meeting and who later served as an officer



Bridport Volunteers – 1st Rifle Corp c1859. Notice the lack of uniforms.



Picture taken outside Mountfield House. Henry August Templer is shown on his charger, middle left.



Captain Templer and niece Hebe
Bridport 1860

Hebe dressed as a vivandière (Vivandière or Cantinière is a French name for women attached to military regiments as sutlers or canteen keepers.), notice her barrel. Her uniform and barrel were donated to the Dorset Regiment Museum, as was the sword belonging to Henry Augustus Templer.

John Charles Templer

Born 31st August 1814

Baptised Bradpole, died 11th June 1874, buried Harrow

Married 15th March 1842 Hannah Francis, daughter of Admiral Sir James Gordon, Governor of Greenwich Hospital.

Educated Westminster 1828.

Trinity College Cambridge BA 1836.

Called to the bar, Inner Temple 1853.

Master of the Court of the Exchequer 1854 to 1874

With his brother Henry Augustus Templer started Bridport Rifle Volunteers, the first volunteer corps in the west. Founder and editor of 'Volunteer Service Gazette' 1859.

1855 lived at Greenwich and Dudley Lodge, Harrow.

1860 Captain, 18th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers.

Friend of James (later Rajah) Brooke and helped to found Borneo Company of which he was a director. Published three volumes of his letters to James Brooke from 1839 to 1853.

