

A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON THE IMPACT OF A MILITARY CAMP IN SUTTON COLDFIELD

Author: Paul Harrison, September 2026 ©

According to Roger Lea, when the Commissioner for Enclosure of the Commons of Sutton Coldfield surveyed the municipal boundary in 1824, "The part of the common jutting out towards Little Hay was called Hawkeshurst Field, but the Commissioner described the main part of the common as Bradnocks Hayes "now called Camp Field. In 1811 this part of the commons had been the site of an army camp consisting of the Seventh Dragoon Guards, a brigade of artillery, and the Edinburgh and Sussex Regiments of militia".¹



Ordnance Survey, One-inch, 2nd edition map surveyed 1815 - 1832. Camp Field, in the centre of the image, was still part of Hill Common at that time. (Image from NLS website²). The historic boundary of Sutton Coldfield is shown by the dashed line, jutting north towards Little Hay. The northern and eastern boundary followed Little Hay Brook and most of the land south of that watercourse was part of Hill Common.



Sutton Coldfield Valuation Map (1857) showing; 1. The Camp Ground/Field, 2. Camp Hill, 3. Camp Farm & 4. Camp Road. The names Camp Hill and Camp Field have since fallen out of use. (Image from SCLHRG website³)

Bill Dargue wrote that, "In 1811 during the Napoleonic Wars, a camp was set up at Hill Wood to house the Edinburgh Militia, the Sussex Militia, the 7th Dragoon Guards and a brigade of artillery". He also wrote that several nearby features were named after the camp, "Camp Field, Camp Farm and Camp Road in the north of Sutton Coldfield near Watford Gap commemorate the military camp which was set up in response to the threat of a French invasion".⁴ Kerry Osbourne stated in the book *The Street Names of Sutton Coldfield*, that Camp Road was named after the military camp.⁵

Douglas V Jones⁶ described further effects of the presence of numerous troops in the parish, "In Sutton Coldfield that momentous year (1811) it is said was marked by many baptisms from its military camp and unfamiliar names in the parish register". The common soldier of the day had a low standing in society and any local women who married soldiers likely found married life to be very harsh, especially if she shared barrack life with her husband.

¹ <https://sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/104-articles-121-160/2011-little-hay-perambulation-3-143.html?highlight=WYJsaXR0bGUlLCJoYXkiXQ==>

² <https://maps.nls.uk/explore/side-by-side/#zoom=15.1&lat=52.61240&lon=-1.82689&layers=270&right=MapTilerSat>

³ <https://sclhr.org.uk/research/original-research/3362-sutton-coldfield-valuation-map-1857-photographs-and-spreadsheet.html?start=1>

⁴ <https://billdargue.jimdofree.com/placenames-gazetteer-a-to-y/places-c/camp-field/>

⁵ The Street Names of Sutton Coldfield by Kerry Osbourne (2007). Page 41.

⁶ The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield - A Commemorative History by Douglas. V. Jones (1994). Pages 66 & 67.

The large camp population apparently caused extra work for the incumbent Rector of Sutton Coldfield, Reverend John Riland. In 1889 his grandson Riland Bedford⁷ wrote that, "During the year 1815 the duties devolving on Mr. Riland were much increased by the formation on the northern slope of Sutton Coldfield, called Hill Common, of a (military) camp" and that, "The register books of the Church at Sutton contain numerous records of baptisms, and occasional burials, from the "camp ground"."

Differing dates of 1811 and 1815 have been given for the camp but which is correct? I was unable to establish which Brigade of Artillery used the camp, nor could I find contemporary records for the Sussex Militia. However, records for the Edinburgh Militia and the Seventh Dragoon Guards were found which are shown below.

The regiment was inspected on the race-course near Mansfield by Major-General Hawkes on the 29th May, when he was highly pleased in every respect. On the 8th June the regiment is marched into camp at Lichfield, where they arrived on the 10th, Major-General Dyatt being then in command of the station.

*Edinburgh Militia in 1812. In May 1812 the Regiment was in Mansfield. They marched into camp at Lichfield, arriving on June 10th. This was almost certainly Camp Field as the area was on the border with Shenstone Parish in the district of Lichfield. In October 1812, the regiment marched to Manchester.*⁸

In the summer of 1812 the regiment was encamped near Sutton Coldfield. In this year the cocked hats were replaced by helmets, and the breeches and long boots by cloth pantaloons and short boots.
1813 In 1813 the regiment marched to Scotland, where it remained twelve months.

*Seventh Dragoon Guards in 1812. In the summer of 1810, the Regiment moved to Birmingham. The Regiment was encamped near Sutton Coldfield in the summer of 1812 and marched to Scotland in 1813.*⁹

Contemporary newspapers corroborated the date of camp being in use as 1812. It may be that the camp was established in 1811 and closed in 1815, being no longer required after the British victory over the French at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815.

⁷ Three hundred years of a family living, being a history of the Rilands of Sutton Coldfield by W. K. Riland Bedford (1889). Page 144

⁸ History of the Edinburgh, or Queen's Regiment Light Infantry Militia by Major R C Dudgeon. (1882). Pages 63 & 64

⁹ Historical record of the Seventh, or, Princess Royal's Regiment of Dragoon Guards by Richard Cannon (1839). Pages 61 & 62..

Eleanor Lemmon, the wife of a serjeant in the Sussex Militia, now encamped on Hill Common, near Sutton Coldfield, remembers the prisoner and deceased coming to the camp on the Saturday, about a month ago; it was between 11 and 12 o'clock;

Extract from the Star (London), August 7th, 1812 (FMP)

The troops which were encamped on Hill Common near Sutton Coldfield, broke up on Thursday last. The first division (five troops) of the 7th Dragoon Guards, marched into this town on Friday, and next morning proceeded on their route to Nottingham, (the head quarters,) except one troop which is to be stationed here. The Sussex Militia also arrived in this town from Hill Camp, in two divisions, on Saturday and Monday, on their way to Nottingham. The Edinburgh Militia proceeded to Manchester, and the artillery for Weedon depot,

Extract from the Derby Mercury, October 29th, 1812 (FMP)

The 15th Light Dragoons or Hussars, arrived at Manchester last week from the Yorkshire district, to take the place of the Scots Greys, now on their route to embark for the Peninsula.

The Edinburgh Militia, being part of the troops that have broken up from the encampment on Hill Common, near Sutton Coldfield, are likewise quartered in Manchester, and succeed the regiments of Militia which have been there through the summer.

Extract from the Sun (London), November 3rd, 1812 (FMP)



A Private in the 7th Dragoon Guards, 1812¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyuniforms/britishcavalry/7dg1812.htm>

General Internet References

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/> - Historic newspaper articles, abbreviated to FMP for brevity

<https://maps.nls.uk/> - Historic Ordnance Survey mapping

<https://sclhrg.org.uk/> - Sutton Coldfield Valuation Map and History Spot Article 143

Published Information

History of the Edinburgh, or Queen's Regiment Light Infantry Militia by Major R C Dudgeon. (1882). Published by William Blackwood & Sons. Pages 63 & 64. Accessed by the below link.

<https://archive.org/details/histedinburghmilitia/page/63/mode/1up>

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The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield - A Commemorative History by Douglas. V. Jones. (3rd Edition, 1994). Published by Westwood Press. Pages 66 & 67.

The Street Names of Sutton Coldfield by Kerry Osbourne. (2007). Published by Sadler House. Page 41.

Three hundred years of a family living, being a history of the Rilands of Sutton Coldfield by W. K. Riland Bedford, 1826-1905. (1889). Published by Cornish Brothers, Birmingham. Page 144. Accessed by the below link. <https://archive.org/details/threehundredyea00bedfgoog/page/n167/mode/2up>

Acknowledgments

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All information is provided in good faith but, on occasions errors may occur. Should this be the case, if new information can be verified, please supply it to the author and corrections will then be made.

This document was written for the 500 for SC500 event which imposed a 500 word limit necessitating its brevity.