Historic England

# Drill Halls

Introductions to Heritage Assets

# Summary

Historic England's Introductions to Heritage Assets (IHAs) are accessible, authoritative, illustrated summaries of what we know about specific types of archaeological site, building, landscape or marine asset. Typically they deal with subjects which lack such a summary. This can either be where the literature is dauntingly voluminous, or alternatively where little has been written. Most often it is the latter, and many IHAs bring understanding of site or building types which are neglected or little understood. Many of these are what might be thought of as 'new heritage', that is they date from after the Second World War.

Drill halls came into existence following the formation of large numbers of rifle and artillery volunteer units in 1859-60, representing a concerted effort by the authorities to create a reserve of men with military training, arranged along the lines of the regular Army. These units required a large, open space within which to practice, secure storage for weapons and a covered area for drilling. Thereby drill halls became a common sight in almost every English town and city and, as 'TA Centres', continue to be built up to the present day. At least 1,863 are documented in England, of which perhaps 1,500 survived in 2015.

This guidance note has been written by Katie Carmichael
and edited by Paul Stamper.

It is one is of several guidance documents that can be accessed
HistoricEngland.org.uk/listing/selection-criteria/listing-selection/ihas-buildings/

Published by Historic England June 2015.


HistoricEngland.org.uk/listing/

**Front cover: Grove, Isle of Portland (Dorset), 1874 and 1901**

Built for the Portland Artillery Volunteers, this fine example of the Gothic Revival/medieval style was constructed from Portland stone with rock-faced rubble, arrow slits, corner turret, machicolations, crenellated parapet and round-headed windows. It also boasted a billiard room.

# Contents

# Introduction

**Note: imperial measurements have largely been used in this document, as it was these which were used in designing the buildings**

Drill halls (or drill sheds) originated as a building type following the formation of the Rifle Volunteer Corps in 1859. They are associated with the armed forces, most specifically the British Army's Reserve Forces, known until recently as the Territorial Army. Whilst this document is concerned with the infrastructure of the Army's Reserve Forces it is important to note that each branch of the services had its own volunteer reserve force, known most recently as the Royal Navy Reserve, the Royal Marines Reserve, and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. Each of these relied upon volunteers and had its own infrastructure to facilitate their training – many with drill halls of their own, often built along similar lines to the Army's but with necessarily different requirements depending upon the particular specialisms and equipment of each force. They became a common sight in almost every English town and city and continue to be built (albeit in limited numbers) up to the present day, commonly identified on modern Ordnance Survey maps as 'TA Centres'. A survey carried out by Mike Osborne in 2006 revealed a total of 1,863 documented English drill halls, of which perhaps 1,500 survived in 2015.

Drill halls receive some consideration in Historic England's listing selection guide, 'Sports and Recreation Buildings' (https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-sports-recreation-buildings/), which emphasises their potential for structurally innovative wide-span roof types. Only 15 purpose-built drill halls that survive in a near original form are included on the National Heritage List for England, all at Grade II, ranging in date from 1864 to 1907. Over the last decade or so a number of studies of drill halls have been undertaken, beginning with a scoping study by David Evans in 2003 and the publication of Mike Osborne's book *Always Ready* in 2006. However, these publications were mainly written from a military history perspective, rather than that of the architectural historian. A recent report by Historic England has examined the architectural development of drill halls as a building type, helping to set regional styles and examples of every period within a national context and highlighting features of potential significance (research.historicengland.org.uk/redirect.aspx?id=6277).

Most drill halls closed following a reduction in the size of the Territorial Army after the Second World War. Subsequently, many were demolished while others were sold and converted to new uses – often resulting in the loss of historic fabric and clarity of design. Three hundred or so drill halls were still in use by the Reserve Forces in 2006 but current (2015) proposals to change the structure of the reserves mean that many more are likely to become surplus to requirement and are expected to be demolished or substantially altered. Of those drill halls still in use by the reserves, many have suffered a loss of character through alterations – particularly to fenestration and access.

# 1 Historical Background

Drill halls came into existence following the formation of large numbers of rifle and artillery volunteer units in 1859-60, representing a concerted effort by the authorities to create a reserve of men with military training, arranged along the lines of the regular Army. The Militia and Yeomanry had existed long before the formation of the Volunteer Rifles, and their barracks and stores are of considerable interest in their own right. When voluntary service, as opposed to enlisting into a paid semi-professional militia, was opened up to the general population in 1859, it proved very popular. By the end of 1860 more than 120,000 men had signed up. This vast new force needed accommodation and local barracks and depots were unable to take the strain. These units required a large, open space within which to practice, as well as secure storage for weapons. They were expected to train for between 21 and 56 days during the summer and, given the often inclement nature of British weather, it was generally felt that a covered area for drilling was preferable to the use of an outdoor space. Although many early volunteer groups adapted existing buildings such as village halls to their needs, a purpose-built drill hall was considered the most desirable option.

Most volunteer units were based in towns and cities where existing public buildings generally lacked spare capacity. Accordingly, drill halls emerged as dedicated facilities for the Volunteer Forces in almost every urban community. They are a distinct building type which, although no two are identical, may be considered to have three essential elements: firstly, an administrative block containing rooms such as offices, stores and an armoury; secondly, a large, open hall (often with an indoor target range to one side and viewing balconies at either end); and thirdly, accommodation for the caretaker or drill instructor which could be included within the administrative block or placed separately to the rear of the hall, as desired.

Most volunteers were working-class labourers (either industrial or agricultural), and the units were, in the early days, private organisations with no access to central funds. As volunteers were responsible for paying for their own accommodation, the construction of purpose-built facilities was initially limited to those few units who benefited from a wealthy patron or membership and were best placed to raise the required funds.

A new version of the Volunteer Regulations was published in 1861, followed by the Volunteer Act of 1863. The Act granted volunteer units the right to acquire their own premises, set efficiency standards for drills and introduced the requirement for annual inspection. Units were also entitled to apply for a grant which could be used towards the cost of new premises, equipment or uniforms. However, land could only be acquired for use as a rifle range, it could be no larger than 4 acres (1.6 hectares), and it could be transferred to the volunteer corps for a period of only 21 years – it was not until the Regulation of the Forces Act was passed in 1871 that these powers were extended to include the acquisition of land for drill halls. The Act of 1871 also saw responsibility for the volunteers transferred from county Lord Lieutenants to the

Secretary of State for War, with units increasingly being administered along the lines of the regular Army. As a result of all this, drill halls of the 1860s were generally built on donated (rather than purchased) land. The acquisition of land specifically for the construction of drill halls in the 1870s, and the availability of grants, enabled far more units to construct purpose-built facilities.

In 1881 new Volunteer Regulations were introduced which brought the reserve forces further in line with the regular infantry and set out stricter specifications, including those governing the storage of arms. Given the increased alignment of the volunteer forces with the regular Army it was inevitable that drill halls for volunteers would increasingly resemble those for the regular forces. Regulations applied only to the basic materials and components of a building and there was still considerable scope to express individuality in the style and composition of a drill hall. Unit badges, for instance, often featured prominently on facades.

In 1908 the Haldane Reforms saw the merger of the various volunteer units – infantry, cavalry, artillery and engineers – to form the Territorial Force. In July 1914 that comprised some 268,000 men, and numbers increased following the outbreak of war. By December 1915, when recruitment ceased, the Territorial Force had swelled to 720,000 men. However, at the outbreak of the First World War concerns about its effectiveness led to the creation of a third element of the Army – Kitchener's 'New Army', which included many of the so-called Pals' Battlalions. These Territorial and New Army units were later affiliated with their local Regular Army units.

Over the 20th century adaptations and extensions to drill halls have largely reflected the shifting demands made on the military and the volunteer forces. Advances in technology and warfare had a significant impact not only on the organisation of the forces but also upon the architecture of their premises, with an increased focus on improved mobility and efficiency. Yeomanry units were rapidly converted into artillery units, vast numbers of riflemen were replaced by fewer, smaller, more highly-skilled units with access to lorries which needed garaging, and anti-aircraft batteries and searchlight units which demanded large spaces with wide doors for ready access. Lessons were learnt during the Second World War when many pre-war drill halls were destroyed by fire because of poor access to the roof and the flammability of their basic materials – thereafter drill halls were designed with smaller windows and rooftop walkways whilst construction materials were increasingly utilitarian.

# 2 Development of the Building Type

The three basic components of a drill hall – administrative block, hall and accommodation – can be combined in almost any way imaginable, but commonly with the administrative block parallel to the street and the hall immediately behind – the domestic element either incorporated within the front block, lying in a separate block to the rear of the hall, or to one side of the front block. Administrative blocks tend to be two storeys high and are often the most elaborately designed element of the building as they were clearly visible to the passing public.

The construction and architectural treatment of drill halls can be divided broadly into four periods: 1859-80, 1880-1914, 1914-45 and 1945 to the present. Around 350 purpose-built drill halls are known to have been constructed prior to 1900 and – whilst it is difficult to know how many early examples have been lost in their entirety, or so substantially altered as to be unrecognisable – perhaps 150 survive. Of those 150, most date from the 1880s or 1890s, the period following the new Volunteer Regulations.

## 2.1 1859-1880

The earliest drill halls, those of 1859-1880, were often private concerns. A lack of central regulation tended to result in small buildings which were somewhat eclectic in design and style. Many were substantially altered or demolished as they became increasingly unfit for purpose and, accordingly, relatively few survive. Drill halls of this period are characterised by the use of the mainstream Gothic Revival style. The majority were fairly modest, almost domestic in appearance, but often included decorative touches such as polychromatic brickwork or lancet windows, whilst the builders of larger drill halls were inspired by medieval castles to create structures which dominated their surroundings. Some early Gothic Revival drill halls could easily be mistaken for chapels – as in Halifax (1868, Grade II, Fig 1) and Falmouth (1874, Grade II), both with dominant rose windows in gabled stone façades.

**Figure 1**
Halifax (West Yorkshire), 1868-70, listed Grade II, designed in the Gothic Revival style. The hall itself (about 140 x 60 feet) is substantial, behind which is a two-storey administrative block. Staff accommodation is provided in the form of a two-storey house to the side. Projecting wings and extensions along the west side of the hall probably housed further stores, changing rooms or classrooms.

Yorkshire retains a number of early drill halls, including the modest example at Castlebergh Lane, Settle, which was built in 1864 by Walter Morrison of Malham, and Keighley's Drill Street /Lawkholme Lane drill hall which was built sometime before November 1867. Built from local stone in a traditional style, Settle's drill hall is not immediately identifiable as such and could easily be mistaken for an adapted agricultural building rather than a purpose-built structure – the lack of regulation at the time of construction, combined with the plain nature of the building, does suggest that it could have been designed with a more general community purpose in mind and that it may not have been used exclusively by the volunteer forces. The hall, which is approximately 60 feet long and 30 feet wide, is highly unusual in being on the first floor and accessed by an external staircase. Another example of a modest design, Keighley's stone front to Drill Street blends in with the two-storey terraced housing beyond. The discreet façade is simply embellished with ashlar dressings but shows little outward sign of the function of the building. The blind, stepped gabled to the east end displays a roundel containing a blank ashlar shield, the only hint at a military association. The complex once housed a gymnasium, billiard room, band room, storage rooms, kitchens and bathrooms.

The drill hall on Armoury Road, Selby, North Yorkshire, built in 1864-5, is the oldest listed (Grade II) drill hall in the country and has an average-sized hall of 80 feet long by 40 feet wide. The main elevation is symmetrical, with polychromatic brickwork and a number of Gothic


Figure 2

Great Yarmouth (Norfolk), 1867, listed Grade II. The hall lies at a right-angle to the road behind an accommodation block, with an administrative block to the rear. The elliptical roof trusses are identical to those used in the 1862 International Exhibition building in South Kensington which was designed by Capt Francis Fowke of the Royal Engineers.

Revival touches such as the lancet windows in the gable above the entrance. When built, the drill hall was rectangular in plan, the hall lying parallel to the street with two-storey cross wings at either end housing the ancillary rooms and staff accommodation. Similarly in the Gothic Revival style is the Grade II-listed York Road drill hall in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, built in 1867 (Fig 2). Although the front block is dominated by the use of knapped flint, the polychromatic brick detailing and the use of two-centred relieving arches above the first-floor windows is not dissimilar to elements seen at Selby.

The entrance block of Chester's Albion Mews drill hall survives and is Grade II-listed, though the hall itself was demolished in 1983. Dating from 1868, the façade is an example of the castellated design that became very popular for drill halls, marking a move away from polychromatic brickwork in favour of medieval castle-inspired features – normally with stone detailing, conveying a sense of power and solidity. The hall was entered through a three-storey tower which contained staff accommodation above the archway and a small magazine and armoury in the basement. The rest of the two-storey block, to the side of the tower, housed offices and leisure spaces including a reading room.

The earliest part of Castle Street drill hall in Bury, Greater Manchester, designed by Henry Styan and James Farrier, dates from 1868 (Fig 3). The Gothic Revival/medieval style front block is listed at Grade II but the hall beyond is not, although at approximately 155 feet long and 125 feet wide it is one of the largest (if not **the** largest in terms of area) to have survived.

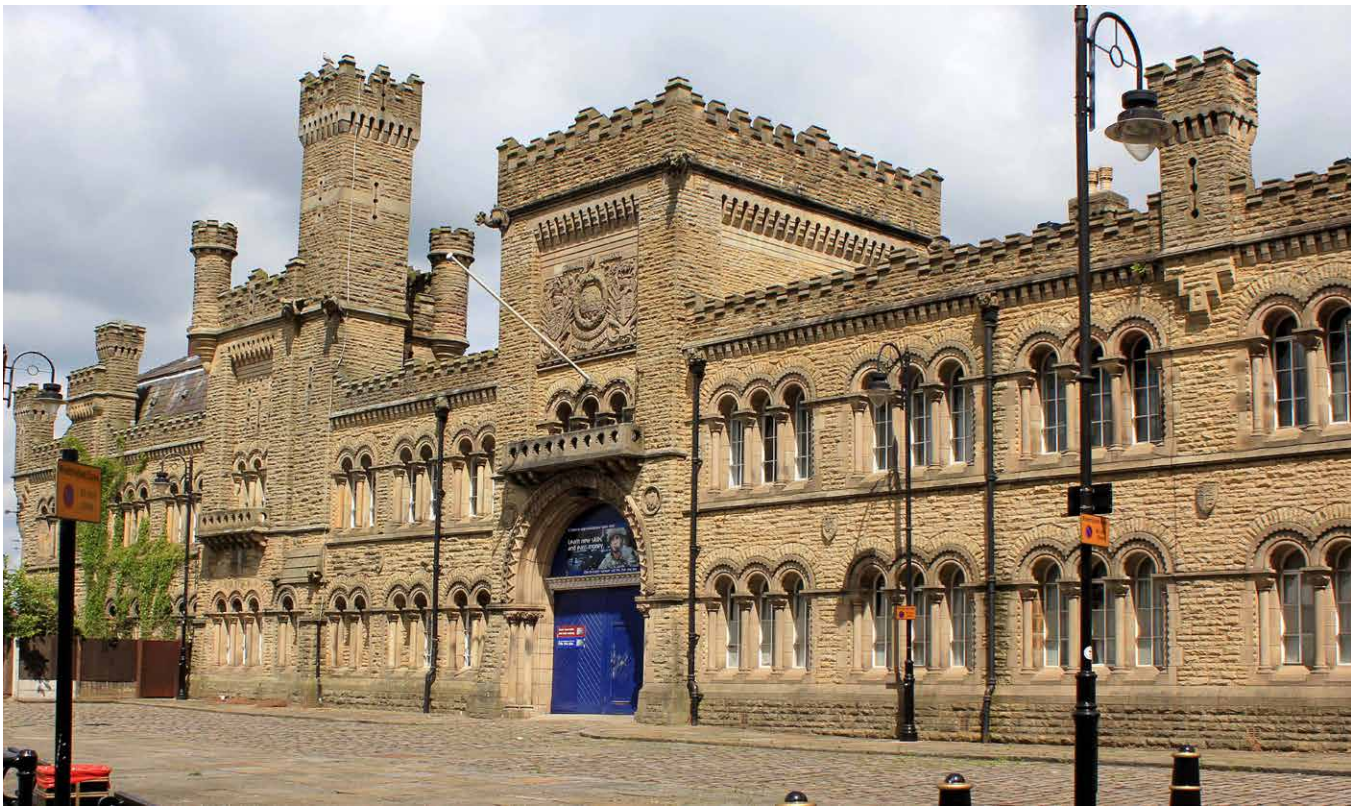

Figure 3

Bury (Greater Manchester), 1868 and 1907, designed by Henry Styan and James Farrier. Built from rock-faced rubble in a Gothic Revival/medieval style complete with crenellated parapet, machicolations, arrow slits, arcaded windows, grotesques, gargoyles, towers and turrets. A fire in 1943 destroyed most of the building, including the officers' mess, and repairs were not completed until 1952.

Figure 4
Edmund Road, Sheffield (South Yorkshire), 1879. The crenellated and machicolated four-storey entrance tower with lancet-shaped relieving arch is reminiscent of Chester's drill hall but the exposed red brick with corner turrets, hood moulds, shaped chimney stacks and four-centred arches are all distinctly Tudor revival in style.

Figure 5
The interior of the Edmund Road drill hall in Sheffield, with shallow arched cast-iron latticed trusses borne on internal brick buttresses designed by Andrew Handyside. The range to the west of the hall may have been an indoor rifle range. The staff accommodation was likely to have been located within the two-storey front block, whilst a two-storey block to the rear of the hall provided further training and store rooms.

The drill hall on Easton Lane, Grove, on the Isle of Portland, Dorset, is another fine example of the Gothic Revival/medieval style. Built in 1874, the site originally consisted of a hall with a two-storey front block containing the armoury and stores. In 1901 the castellated tower entrance was added, along with a two-storey, three-bedroom cottage with crow-stepped gables for the instructor/caretaker. The 1901 improvements also saw the installation a billiard room and a lavatory block.

In South Yorkshire, Sheffield's Grade II-listed Edmund Road drill hall opened in 1879 (Figs 4 and 5) and marks a stylistic turning point away from the Gothic Revival and towards the Tudor Revival. The articulation of the design is distinctly Tudor in influence, but combinations of loosely medieval and Tudor features are not unusual in drill hall design and were often used to great effect. At approximately 160 feet long and 90 feet wide, the hall is one of the largest in the country and has a single-span roof by Andrew Handyside, the Derby iron founder.

Drill halls were closely tied to the needs and means of the local community and the image it wished to project. Some early drill halls are very small and modest, such as those in Settle (North Yorkshire) and Keighley (West Yorkshire) which were built using local materials and blend into the surrounding streetscape. Others, such as Sheffield's Edmund Road drill hall were vast – capable of holding an entire battalion – and designed to draw the eye through the use of materials and styles quite distinct from the local building tradition. Some, although modest in scale, display an investment in design and materials that reflected the pride which local communities had in these buildings – for example Grove's drill hall.

The arrangement of the internal space is of particular interest. Billiard rooms and reading rooms are often referred to and viewing galleries would once have been a common sight but, as at Great Yarmouth and Chester, many such facilities have been lost. Rifle ranges were a basic requirement too, but it is seldom clear whether these were purpose-built indoor ranges (made possible by modifying rifles using a Morris Tube to allow for smaller ammunition over a shorter range) or full-size outdoor ranges in the

surrounding area. The manner in which the roof is supported is also of potential interest: drilling required large, uninterrupted spaces sheltered beneath a clear-span roof and the ways in which this was achieved in the late 19th century could be quite ingenious.

## 2.2 1880-1914

The period 1880-1914 saw the increasing influence of the War Office and a move towards regulation and uniformity in drill hall design. In the late 19th century buildings became larger, and the stylistic development of drill halls up to 1900 was dominated by the influence of Tudor Revival and castellated Gothic designs, often used in combination. The drill hall at Ardwick Green North, Manchester, built in 1886 to a design by Laurence Booth, is a fine example of the continuing use of the medieval castellated style in stone. Influenced by the earlier drill hall in Bury, the Grade II listed, roughly rectangular, building was constructed from coursed sandstone rubble and is three storeys high with a four-storey tower. Another example of the Tudor Revival/ crenellated Gothic style is Lincoln's Grade II-listed Broadgate drill hall, built in 1890, which was paid for by the Lincoln engineer Joseph Ruston and possibly designed by William Watkins. Executed in red brick and stone, the two-storey front block is symmetrical with a three-storey projecting central tower, complete with tourelles, machicolations, a crenellated parapet and square corner turrets to the outer bays. The central entrance contains a four-centred arched doorway with a hood mould, above which is a canted mullion and transom oriel window displaying the royal arms and two

Figure 6

Grimsby (Lincolnshire), 1890-6. Built in the Tudor Revival style with a pointed arched head to the former entrance, an oriel window with mullion and transom windows, a central tower with corner tourelle, and battlemented pediments. The hall, about 100 by 60 feet, lies at a right-angle to the street and lies off-centre, with later infill blocks to its north.

Figure 7

Bilston (West Midlands), about 1902. A Neo-Baroque design with stuccoed details – as seen here, arms within a cartouche flanked by swags – are set immediately above a small window in the central gable. The plain hall to the rear measures approximately 85 feet long and 40 feet wide.



Figure 8

Scunthorpe (Lincolnshire), 1914. One of a group of three drill halls all built from red brick and having a hipped slate roof, four bays with a projecting broken triangular pediment above the entrance bay, bracketed eaves, rusticated brick quoins, segmental-headed windows, stone band and keystones – the entrance bay containing a segmental-arched stone entrance on the ground floor, leading to double doors.

regimental badges in stone panels. The interior of the hall, approximately 120 feet long and 50 feet wide, has piers with chevron capitals, and an arch braced rolled steel roof with traceried spandrels containing the city arms.

The Tudor Revival style was becoming increasingly popular, as seen for example, at the Grade II-listed drill hall of 1891 on Victoria Street North, Grimsby, Lincolnshire (Fig 6). Built for the 1st Lincolnshire Volunteer Position Artillery, the broad, symmetrical two-storey front block is constructed from red brick with stone dressings and combines the characteristic features one would expect.

By the early 20th century the Neo-Baroque (or Edwardian Baroque) style had influenced the design of a small number of drill halls. Unusually, this flamboyant style was used as early as 1889-90 for Edmund Scott's Grade II-listed drill hall on Church Street, Brighton, East Sussex. It has an unusual stuccoed façade with a particularly elaborate central door surround, heavily bracketed eaves with simple paterae in the frieze beneath, and a mansard roof. The hall itself, approximately 160 feet long and 75 feet wide is built from brown brick laid in English bond, with a ridge lantern to the slated roof. The 1898 Goad map of Brighton shows the drill hall as having 'Dressing, Billiard and Concert Rooms' on the first floor of the front block.

The drill hall on Mount Pleasant in Bilston in the West Midlands is an unusual example of the Neo-Baroque style of drill hall. Built about 1902 and constructed from red brick, the three-bay symmetrical front block – whilst small – is enlivened by stucco details (Fig 7). Another example of Neo-Baroque design can be seen in the drill hall on Phoenix Street, Lancaster, which was built prior to 1913. This single-storey stone building has a low pediment and four small shaped gables with volutes and finials, and mullion and transom windows.

Whilst drill halls at the turn of the century still demonstrate a wide variety of styles and influences, they became increasingly uniform in style, size and provision of facilities following the creation of the Territorial Force. A programme of building commenced in 1907 which continued until the outbreak of war in 1914. Buildings of this period typically have a simple two-storey office block in front of the hall, often in the Neo-

Georgian or modified 'Wrenaissance' styles which came to dominate the design of drill halls built in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war. Three drill halls in Lincolnshire – Boston, Spalding and Scunthorpe – were all built in the Neo-Georgian style in 1913 to the same basic form. Boston and Spalding's drill halls were designed by Scorer & Gamble and it seems highly likely that they were also the architects for Scunthorpe (Fig 8).

Of course, not all drill halls can be ascribed to a particular style; some are generally historicist in treatment, with many different influences (for instance Barnsley, South Yorkshire, 1896), and many were simple, utilitarian structures with little or no architectural embellishment (for instance, in Cornwall: Hayle, 1911 [Fig 9]; St Just, 1911; Redruth, 1912), whilst the front blocks of some drill halls are almost domestic in scale or appearance (for instance: Ripon, North Yorkshire, 1912; Wantage, Oxfordshire, 1914). Nonetheless, the overall impression throughout the period 1880-1914 is of a move towards simplification and symmetry, with three- or four–storey castellated towers giving way to two-storey, symmetrical buildings with clean lines.

The spanning of roofs at this date still allowed for structural innovation, notably the use of elliptical cross-braced iron girders at Ware in 1899. The roof of this Grade II-listed drill hall is highly unusual – most hall roofs of the period 1870-1910 were framed using semi-circular trussed ribs, but Ware is an early example of a steel parabolic arch roof, a construction technique more commonly associated with 20th-century concrete. In addition to the structural innovation seen at Ware, it is unusual for a drill hall to be so forward looking: most adopted designs that, stylistically, looked backwards, not forwards. The advanced design of Ware, however, could easily be mistaken for a building of about 1910.

Figure 9

Hayle (Cornwall), 1911. One of a group of three modest drill halls all clearly designed for use within a small community. It could easily be mistaken for a village hall or a school room were it not for the presence of detached rifle ranges approximately 90 feet long and 12 feet wide.

Figure 10

Crewe (Cheshire), 1937, built with a number of *moderne* features, notably steel-framed windows connected by continuous grooved heads and sills which curve at the ends. The hall itself, entered from two doorways with extraordinary brick surrounds, retains its original wooden parquet flooring and an exposed metal steel roof frame with wide-span angle-iron trusses of the 'Belgian' form.

Drill halls, although given increasingly clear military functions, still played an important social role and a number continued to be built with enhanced facilities. These included billiard rooms as, for instance, at the Bloomsbury Rifles' drill hall in Chenies Street, London Borough of Camden, of 1882-3 (listed Grade II), and at Brighton c.1890 and Ware, 1899; public viewing galleries as at Ware, 1899 and Portsmouth (Hampshire), 1901, whilst others were well known for hosting plays and concerts such as Brighton c.1890, Seaford (East Sussex), 1898, and the Artists' Rifles' drill hall in Dukes Road, London Borough of Camden, 1889-90 (listed Grade II). The halls ranges in size from 180 by 96 feet (Portsmouth, 1901) to 50 by 30 feet (Ripon, 1912), but the majority measured around 100 feet or more in length, and perhaps 50 or 60 feet wide. Many would have had integral or detached rifle ranges (the latter increasingly popular), which usually measured around 90 feet long and 20 feet wide.

## 2.3 1914-1945

No new drill halls were built during the course of the First World War, while low numbers of recruits in the immediate years following the cessation of war resulted in a series of improvements to existing drill halls in a bid to make membership of the Territorial Army more appealing. The first drill halls built after 1918 tended to use established designs, generally still historicist in nature, with modified 'Wrenaissance' and Neo-Georgian designs still dominating.

Re-armament in the 1930s led to the creation of over 200 new drill halls, largely in suburban settings. By this time the Neo-Georgian style was entrenched as the favoured style: it was sober, simple and easily adaptable, ensuring no two drill halls were quite identical, whilst being easily recognisable thanks to its adoption by other branches of the armed forces.


**Figure 11**

Truro (Cornwall), about 1930, an unusual *moderne* design. The hall rises above the front block and is lit by three pairs of tall, narrow windows. The front block is wider than the hall with a central entrance flanked by pilasters which curve at the top, hinting at fins, while the windows are connected by a continuous stone head which is curved at the ends.

Examples of drill halls in the *moderne* style are unusual, but a number may be found across the country. Many halls display only restrained and subtle hints of *moderne* styling, but Crewe's Myrtle Street drill hall, Cheshire. built in 1937 with windows connected by continuous grooved heads and sills, curved at the ends in the streamline *moderne* manner, is more clearly and directly influenced by the style (Fig 10). In Cornwall, Truro's Moresk Road drill hall of about 1930 is the only truly *moderne* style drill hall (Fig 11), reminiscent of Odeon cinema designs of the period.

The biggest change in the design and layout of drill halls following the First World War was a result of the changing nature of warfare at the time and the increased adoption of mechanised units. In 1935 the TA was given responsibility for anti-aircraft defence. Anti-aircraft batteries needed a drill hall of 3,000 square feet, and nearly the same again in general training spaces and facilities, whilst the new guns required high roofs and doors. Searchlight units required even more space, with a minimum height in the hall of 15 feet, and outdoor space for several lights – new drill halls were designed to accommodate these requirements and also included specialist training rooms. In Surrey, Ewell's 1938 drill hall for a Searchlight Battalion had, in addition to a dark room and the main hall, dedicated rooms for Spotters, Listeners, Searchlights and Driving & Maintenance crews, whilst the drill hall in Kingston-upon-Thames, also in Surrey, had an additional training room for Sound Locators. In Lincoln the Newport drill hall, also of 1939, had a dark room with a painted mural of the night sky allowing the searchlight operators to undertake simulations. Plans for Peterborough's London Road drill hall, drawn up in 1938 by the office of Sir John Brown and AE Henson architects of

Northampton, clearly show rooms marked as ‘dark room’, ‘sound locator’, ‘spotters’, ‘listeners’ and ‘searchlight operations’ alongside the usual array of lecture rooms, lounges, bars, stores, offices hall and rifle range. As a result of these new requirements the drill hall itself may not have drastically altered in size but the buildings tended to be taller, and the front block tended to be longer or to wrap around the hall in order to accommodate all of the facilities required – messes, changing facilities and offices as well as training rooms – whilst the provision of outdoor space and garaging became increasingly critical.

Volunteer units were becoming ever-more closely aligned with the regular Army, resulting in tighter regulations. The provision of social spaces for the benefit of the community seems to have almost completely disappeared and the spaces became far more clearly militarised. Resources were limited following the First World War so although visible elements such as parquet floors in the hall or panelling and fireplaces in the officers’ mess (for instance, Mather Avenue drill hall, Liverpool, of about 1938 (Fig 12) were still well made and expensive, the more hidden elements, often in the roof or in the outbuildings, tended to be more utilitarian.

Figure 12

Mather Avenue (Liverpool), about 1938. The Officers’ Mess of the drill hall measures approximately 45 feet by 20 feet with a vaulted ceiling, original panelling and parquet flooring. The two-storey front block is built from dark red brick with stone or rendered details and is notable for its two-storey bowed entrance bays with rendered door surrounds below a curved projecting cornice and a curved window.

## 2.4 1945-present

The final period, from 1945 to the present, has largely been one of contraction within the volunteer forces, whilst continued improvements in technology and increasing concern regarding security have had an impact on the design of drill halls. No new drill halls were built during the Second World War or immediately afterwards, and even following the reconstitution of the TA in 1947 construction of new facilities remained a very low priority. Drill hall construction resumed in the 1950s as resources became available for new buildings which were better suited to modern usage. These were often very similar to pre-war halls, but in later decades reflected increased concerns regarding security.

Many post-war drill halls are difficult to distinguish from earlier designs. It remains unclear to what extent pre-war designs had been put on hold and were implemented in the 1950s, and to what degree an established and familiar aesthetic was deemed desirable. Farnham's Guildford Road drill hall in Surrey, built in 1953 for an anti-aircraft unit, is just one example of a design which, at first glance, could be mistaken for a 1930s building. The stone door surround with canopy and a tall window above, steel-framed windows and continuous ground-floor window head are all features one might expect to see on an earlier drill hall. Flat roofs – used here for the front block – are commonly associated with *moderne* or art deco buildings of the late 1920s and 30s but, crucially, do not seem to have been used for drill halls until the 1950s and appear to have resulted from lessons learnt from fire damage to earlier buildings during the war.

The provision of space became increasingly important as the role of the volunteer forces, technology and equipment evolved over time. Garaging and hard-standing were now considered essential elements and were integral to new designs. As such, most new drill halls were built in the suburbs of large towns and cities where space was at less of a premium. As the number of drill halls increased, and as anti-aircraft guns and searchlights were operated outdoors, the relationship between the hall and the ancillary rooms shifted. Previously the rooms in the front and side blocks were almost secondary to the spatial requirements of the main hall. In drill halls of the late 1950s, however, the hall often appears to be dwarfed by the supposedly auxiliary facilities. One such example is on Hallcroft Road, Retford, Nottinghamshire. Built in 1956, the two-storey front block is very plain with the exception of the projecting entrance bay which rises above parapet level, its verticality emphasised by the use of an architrave which surrounds both the door and the window above. The front block is approximately 125 feet long and up to 32 feet deep, the detached garaging and stores measure up to 120 feet long and 60 feet deep at their widest part, whilst the hall is just 45 feet long and 40 feet wide.

The materials used to build drill halls during this period were generally economical. Brick dominates – often laid in stretcher bond – with limited stone, concrete or rendered detailing. The designs themselves became simpler, still using many of the basic shapes and materials popular in the 1930s but simplifying the design, resulting in a number of utilitarian drill halls that resemble contemporary factory buildings – for instance, the stark two-storey front block of Luton's Old Bedford Road drill hall of 1955 is almost completely devoid of any ornamentation or detailing.

Drill halls built in the late 20th century were designed with tighter security concerns in mind, due in part to the threat from terrorists. Drill halls were no longer open to the public as social spaces but were, instead, increasingly considered to be likely targets for terrorist attacks. For this reason they were often built back from the street with high walls or fences restricting access. Drill halls were still provided with social spaces in the form of messes, but these were very much now closed environments. No late 20th-century drill halls are known to have incorporated public viewing galleries.

Many new drill halls of the 1970 and 80s are simple, utilitarian, buildings lacking in

Figure 13

Sarum Road (Liverpool), about 1990. Late 20th-century drill halls increasingly focused on security and tend to be set back from the street behind tall fences or walls. This three-storey buff brick building with red brick detailing is notable for the use of a full-height canted entrance bay and second-floor oriel windows divided into square panels by thick green glazing bars.

architectural finesse. The 1990s saw the arrival of slightly more adventurous drill halls, such as Chavasse House on Sarum Road, Liverpool, built about 1990, but such designs could easily be mistaken for a large office block on an industrial estate (Fig 13). Another form of building popular in the late 1990s was the out-of-town warehouse or motorway service station-style with exposed metal and glass and a curving roof, as seen on Uxbridge Road in Southall, London Borough of Ealing, about 1999. Indeed, the most recent drill halls of the late 20th and early 21st centuries have mirrored wider architectural trends, resulting in structures of the 'shed' or 'warehouse' form so often seen on industrial estates and retail parks. It appears that as new drill halls became ever more tightly regulated, the opportunity for individualism through local materials and styles was long gone.

# 3 Associations

Drill halls will be of interest to people for a variety of different reasons. They can possess different orders of interest on architectural and historic grounds, and will often be of resonant local interest on account of their connection with communities. Most are located within the towns and villages which funded or supported them and early examples, in particular, are frequently expressions of civic pride. Drill halls contain many memories for local residents, those who volunteered within the units as well as those who attended social events.

Whilst unaltered examples of drill halls are clearly of interest, adaptations are also important in telling the story of how society, technology and warfare evolved over time.

# 4 Change and Future

Like all urban architecture, drill halls are subject to development pressure, frequent alteration and general attrition. However, drill halls are more vulnerable than many other building types due to changes in the organisation of the reserve forces, an issue which has affected them since the mid-20th century. In 1955 the TA's anti-aircraft command was disbanded and in 1960 the end of National Service resulted in a huge drop in the number of men. Combined with changing technology and a continued focus on economy, this meant a number of contractions, reductions and reorganisations within the TA which made the majority of drill halls redundant. Consequently, between 1967 and 1968 the Ministry of Defence disposed of around 850 drill halls out of perhaps 1,300 in active use. Many were demolished while others were sold and converted to new uses – some sympathetic (such as community halls or gyms) which entailed little structural change, others, particularly conversion to residential flats, destroying the original layout of the buildings.

Despite the ongoing upheaval in the reserve forces a small number of new drill halls continued to be built right up to the present day, at the same time as older drill halls continued to close across the country. Suitability for the modern demands of warfare, as well as location, remain key issues in determining the future and nature of these buildings. Current proposals to change the structure of the reserve forces mean that many more drill halls are likely to become surplus to requirement and are expected to be relinquished. Of those drill halls still in use by the reserve forces, many have suffered a loss of character through alterations – particularly to fenestration and access.

Perhaps 150 drill halls built prior to 1900 survive and most date from the 1880s or 1890s. Examples of special interest may warrant inclusion on the National Heritage List for England: a number of examples have already been identified but, following the recent national overview, there are likely to be other strong candidates for inclusion. Examples of local interest will often warrant consideration as local heritage assets, and should be brought to the attention of local authority Historic Environment Records.

# 5 Further Reading

There is a limited body of published work relating to the architectural history and development of drill halls as a building type, but the history of the army's reserve forces, and of local regiments in particular, has been more widely covered. The most comprehensive work on drill halls is Mike Osborne, *Always Ready, The Drill Halls of Britain's Volunteer Forces* (2006) which combined with the information on www.drillhalls.org provides the starting point for anyone interesting in a particular drill hall, often providing details regarding location, date and style as well as information relating to the units based there. Historic England's recent report, Katie Carmichael, *Research Report Series no.6 -2015, Drill Halls: A National Overview* (2015) examines drill halls as a building type using a selection of national examples, exploring their context and identifying features of potential significance. A number of useful guides to the history of the reserve forces have been published, including G. Steppler, *Britons, To Arms! The Story of the British Volunteer Soldier* (1992) and a government publication, *A History of Our Reserves* (2014) which is available as an e-book at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-history-of-our-reserves. Detailed histories of local regiments are numerous and contain much information of local significance.

# 6 Acknowledgements

**Author**
Katie Carmichael

**Editor**
Paul Stamper

**Design and layout**
Vincent Griffin

**Images**
Cover, Figures 10, 12, 13: (DP166093/DP166578/ DP166565/ DP166574) © Historic England, James O. Davies

Figure 1: © Tim Greatouch. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Licence

Figures 2, 3, 9, 11 : © Historic England

Figures 4, 5: (DP168797/DP168795) © Historic England, Alun Bull

Figures 6, 8: (DP172155/DP172164) © Historic England, Patricia Payne

Figure 7: ©John M. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Licence

To view a copy of the Creative Commons licence agreements visit: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/

## Contact Historic England


East Midlands
2nd Floor, Windsor House
Cliftonville
Northampton NN1 5BE
Tel: 01604 735400
Email: eastmidlands@HistoricEngland.org.uk

East of England
Brooklands
24 Brooklands Avenue
Cambridge CB2 2BU
Tel: 01223 582700
Email: eastofengland@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Fort Cumberland
Fort Cumberland Road
Eastney
Portsmouth PO4 9LD
Tel: 023 9285 6704
Email: fort.cumberland@HistoricEngland.org.uk

London
1 Waterhouse Square
138-142 Holborn
London EC1N 2ST
Tel: 020 7973 3000
Email: london@HistoricEngland.org.uk

North East
Bessie Surtees House
41–44 Sandhill
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 3JF
Tel: 0191 269 1200
Email: northeast@HistoricEngland.org.uk

North West
Suites 3.3 and 3.4
Canada House
3 Chepstow Street
Manchester M1 5FW
Tel: 0161 242 1400
Email: northwest@HistoricEngland.org.uk

South East
Eastgate Court
195-205 High Street
Guildford GU1 3EH
Tel: 01483-252000
Email: southeast@HistoricEngland.org.uk

South West
29 Queen Square
Bristol BS1 4ND
Tel: 0117 975 0700
Email: southwest@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Swindon
The Engine House
Fire Fly Avenue
Swindon SN2 2EH
Tel: 01793 414700
Email: swindon@HistoricEngland.org.uk

West Midlands
The Axis
10 Holliday Street
Birmingham B1 1TG
Tel: 0121 625 6820
Email: westmidlands@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Yorkshire
37 Tanner Row
York YO1 6WP
Tel: 01904 601901
Email: yorkshire@HistoricEngland.org.uk

Historic England

We are the public body that looks after England's historic environment. We champion historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.

Please contact
guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk
with any questions about this document.

HistoricEngland.org.uk

If you would like this document in a different format, please contact our customer services department on:

Tel: 0370 333 0607
Fax: 01793 414926
Textphone: 0800 015 0174
Email: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk

HEAG055
Publication date: June 2015 © Historic England
Design: Historic England

Please consider the environment before printing this document