

## DERBY'S FORGOTTEN BUILDINGS

### No. 37, Rowditch Barracks

In 1796, the wars against revolutionary France caused panic at government level. One of the results of this was the passing of an Act allowing a mounted militia to be called the Provisional Cavalry. Lord Vernon (Sudbury Hall) was appointed Colonel in 1797, but the unit was probably never embodied. Eventually, the local units which had actually come into being, the 95th (Derbyshire) regiment and the Yeomanry Cavalry were gradually stood down.

In the 1850s, with Napoleon III reigning in France as Emperor, further panic set in and a second volunteer movement arose. This led to the formation in 1855 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Derbyshire Militia (Chatsworth Rifles) and in 1859 by the foundation of the Derbyshire Volunteer Rifle Corps. The North Midland Volunteers were established a little later with the Drill Hall, Becket Street as their HQ.

The Derbyshire Volunteer Rifle Corps (DVRC) were provided, at government expense, with a barracks built in a compact enclave at the Rowditch formed from a worked out brick pit, immediately NW of the alignment of Rykneild Street which is aligned with the garden end plots of the houses on Uttoxeter Road at Rowditch. The buildings were designed by Derby architect George Thompson, and were built in 1859, consisting of gatehouses, drill hall, stores and 8 warrant officers' cottages. The entire ensemble, which was listed through the Civic Society's efforts in 1998 is described by Historic England as 'A very rare and well preserved example of a local volunteer barracks.'

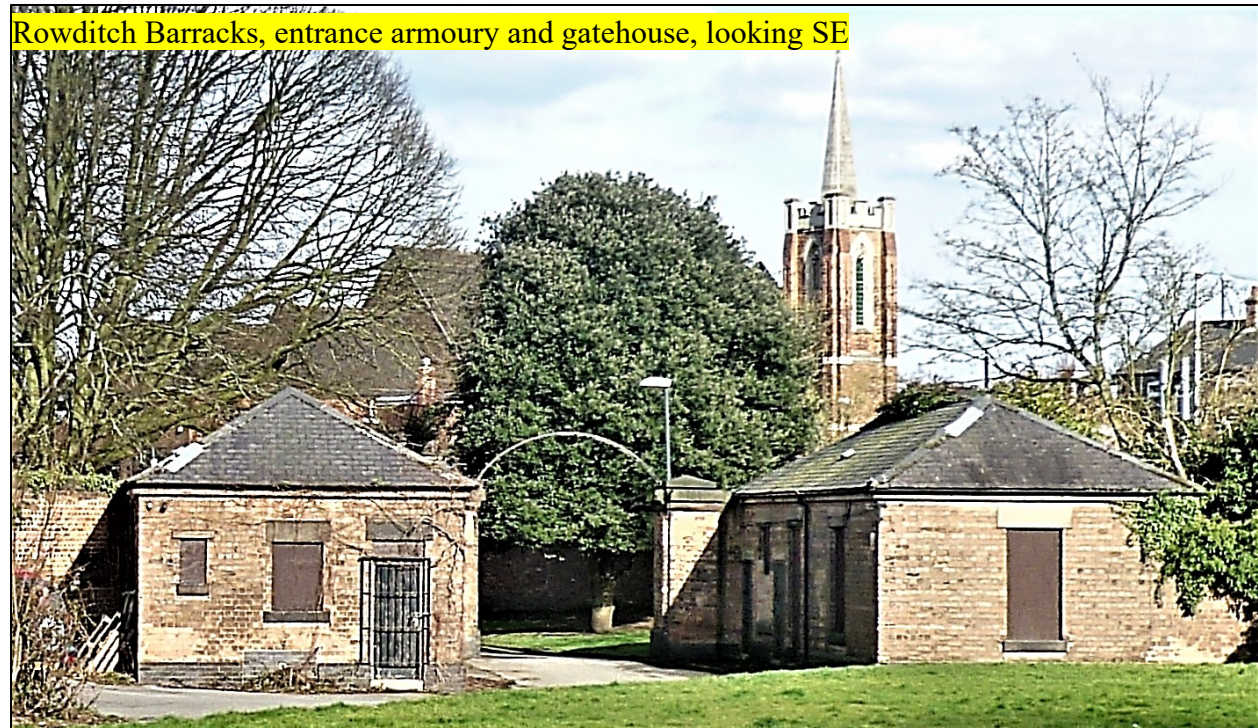
One enters from Barracks Yard, a tree lined avenue from Rowditch leading off the Uttoxeter Old Road beside the former Baptist Chapel. An iron overthrow (all that remains of the original iron gates) leads between a guard house and armoury, both three bays wide single storey buildings. In front of one opens out what was the drill square, all surrounded by a ten foot brick wall. At the far end the drill hall and store itself two storeys, seven bays under a hipped roof with central entrance and sack hoist aperture (for loading ammunition) above. To the left was a rifle range with privies and stores, which later became changing rooms and to the right a terrace of eight rather well proportioned houses for warrant officers. The architect was Edwin Thompson.

The DVRC became affiliated to the 95th Regiment in 1872, becoming the 3rd Battalion Sherwood Foresters from 1881. After the formation of the Sherwood Foresters, a large new barracks had been built on Sinfen Lane in 1874-77 and from 1881 the Rifle Volunteers therefore transferred to Sinfen Lane barracks. Miraculously, although decommissioned in 1881, Rowditch Barracks survived as a laundry, the drill square as a tennis club's courts and the cottages, suitably adapted as four reasonably spacious units instead of eight miniscule ones were for a long time let to Council employees.

The whole makes a splendid ensemble, latterly home to a tennis club with courts on the drill square but now all is piteously deserted, overgrown and only one cottage occupies, the others deserted boarded up and punctuated by abandoned rusting motor vehicles. The trouble is, if the Council allow their own buildings to get into this shocking state, then they have no moral basis for chasing

up the owners of other listed buildings in equally shameful state, like Wilderslow (NHS) or the ex-GNR Bonded warehouse (Clowes). If they were to take any such backsliders to court under current legislation the plaintiffs would have a watertight defence. The Council needs to put its own house in order very quickly and the easiest way to do this is to sell the affected sites asap.

PS The above was written for the Newsletter of the Civic Society in 2016. Ten years later absolutely nothing has changed except the entire complex is drowning in growth and being battered by vandalism highlighted in the local paper for 28<sup>th</sup> April 2026.



Rowditch Barracks: drill hall, looking NW with parade ground in front



**Note that all these photographs were taken in 2016. All the buildings are now virtually invisible behind growth.**