

The Volunteer Movement

Chapter 24 of Sydney Gardner Jarman. *History of Bridgwater, 1889*

1

**THE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT. —
FORMATION OF TWO COMPANIES — THE
QUEEN'S PRIZE BROUGHT TO THE TOWN ;
GREAT REJOICINGS — BRIGADE REVIEW AT
BRIDGWATER — THE MOVEMENT TO-DAY.**

BRIDGWATER is noted for the vigorous manner in which the Volunteer movement is carried forward, and for a number of years the town has been able to boast of two good companies. The 5th Somerset was formed in 1860, at which time it may be mentioned that Mr. W. J. Ford was made an ensign, and five years later was gazetted to the captaincy. The movement spread and in a few years' time a second company was formed, known as the 26th Somerset, the ranks of which were soon filled with a smart body of men. In 1865 the two corps numbered exactly 300 men — an exceedingly good record, considering the population. The popularity of the movement was probably due to the great energy of Lieut., afterwards Captain Eord, who was not only a most efficient officer, but a thoroughly good shot, and more than once headed the prize-list at Dunball, where the corps for a great number of years have held their shooting. It was a matter of very general regret when Captain Ford announced his intention of resigning, in December, 1871.

In 1868 Bridgwater was mentioned in an official paper as being third in England for the number of efficient as compared with the total strength.

Monday, July 27th, 1868, was a proud day for Bridgwater Volunteers, and indeed for all the inhabitants, as it witnessed the bringing of that much-coveted Wimbledon trophy, the Queen's Prize, to the town. The highest score in the competition was made by Corporal Peake, of Manchester ; Liet J. B. Carslake, of the 5th Somerset (Bridgwater) being second with 65. An independent protest was lodged

against Peake with regard to the cartridges he had used, and the objection being upheld by the Council, Lieut. Carslake was declared the Queen's Prizeman. The good news was soon wired to Bridgwater, and the bells were at once set ringing, and cannon fired on the river banks. The same evening (Wednesday) a meeting of the townspeople was called, and it was unanimously decided to accord the victor an enthusiastic public reception when he returned to the town. Accordingly on Monday evening the town presented a most ornate appearance, the streets and houses being beautifully decorated, and a very large number of flags being suspended. Upon the gallant Lieutenant stepping on to the platform he was warmly cheered, and a procession was formed to the Cornhill, headed by the two Volunteer bands amalgamated for the occasion. The procession included all the Volunteers of the town, the Naval Reserve, the Oddfellows, Foresters, and Shepherds. A halt was made on the Cornhill, when Captain W. J. Ford presented Mr. Carslake with an illuminated address of congratulation. It was signed by Mr. Ford as Captain of the Company to which Lieut. Carslake belonged, by Captain Bridges, of the 26th, and by Mr. J. B. Smith, as Mayor. All business was suspended in the town, and the inhabitants turned out in full force to honour their young townsman. In the evening a complimentary banquet was held in a large tent at Blacklands, when between 600 and 700 dined, under the genial presidency of Captain Ford. The health of Lieut. Carslake was warmly drunk.

The winning score in the final stage was as follows :—

800 yards	2	3	4	3	3	3	4	...	22
900 yards	2	3	3	4	3	3	3	...	21
1000 yards	4	3	2	4	3	3	3	...	22
									Total 65

On Tuesday, August 3, 1869, a Brigade Review of Somersetshire Volunteers was held near Bridgwater. The total strength was 1941, the following being the Second Battalion:—

The Volunteer Movement
Chapter 24 of Sydney Gardner Jarman. *History of Bridgwater, 1889*

2

	Rank and File.	Officers.	Sergts.	Band.	Total.
5th Somerset (Bridgwater) .	146	3	12	15	176
26th Somerset (Bridgwater)	166	8	12	15	201
Taunton	83	2	9	—	94
Wellington	—	—	4	—	40
Williton	—	2	3	—	60
Stowey and Stogursey	54	2	4	—	60
Wiveliscombe	—	2	4	—	70
Yeovil	—	5	7	—	86
Crewkerne	—	4	7	—	71
Langport	—	3	5	—	<u>58</u>
					916

Captain W. John Ford was Acting Major for the day, the Earl of Cork was the reviewing officer, and Colonel Bruce had the command of the Brigade. After a variety of manoeuvres, in some fields at Dunball, the various companies returned to the town, and were located for the purposes of dinner at the various hostelries, the officers being entertained at a banquet at the Town Hall by the Earl of Cork. The town was well decorated in honour of the numerous visitors, and a triumphal arch at the Bath Bridge Inn bore the motto, "*Be merry and wise.*" The weather was unfortunately very wet. The event caused great excitement, and occasioned a general holiday.

Bridgwater to-day continues as energetic as ever with regard to the movement. The numbers are exceedingly good and the two Companies (now designated the I and K Companies, Prince Albert's [Somersetshire] Light Infantry), are always noted for their smartness at drill. At Wimbleton, too, Bridgwater volunteers generally render a good account of themselves, and it is not an unusual thing to find a representative in "*The Queen's Hundred,*" or as it was known until recent years, "*The Queen's Sixty.*" It may be noted that Sergt. James Barnes has obtained that coveted distinction the last three years in succession (1886-7-8). The numbers at present are: —*I Company*, Major T. F. Barham, Sergt-Instructor J. Turner, 146 rank and file; *K Company*, Captain W. H. Robinson, Lieut. E. Trevor, Dr. H. M. Kemmis, 141 rank and file.