Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

BOWERHAM BARRACKS, LANCASTER

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The first modern army depot in Lancaster was built in 1854 at Springfield, which was the base for the Royal Lancashire Militia (The Duke of Lancaster's Own). The photograph below shows the distinctive Scottish Baronial frontage around 1860. After the army had moved to Bowerham, the site became part of Storey's White Cross works and it is now an employment site run by Lancashire County Council.



Lancaster Barracks, Springfield, South Road, around 1860
(Source: Red Rose Collection, Lancashire County Council)

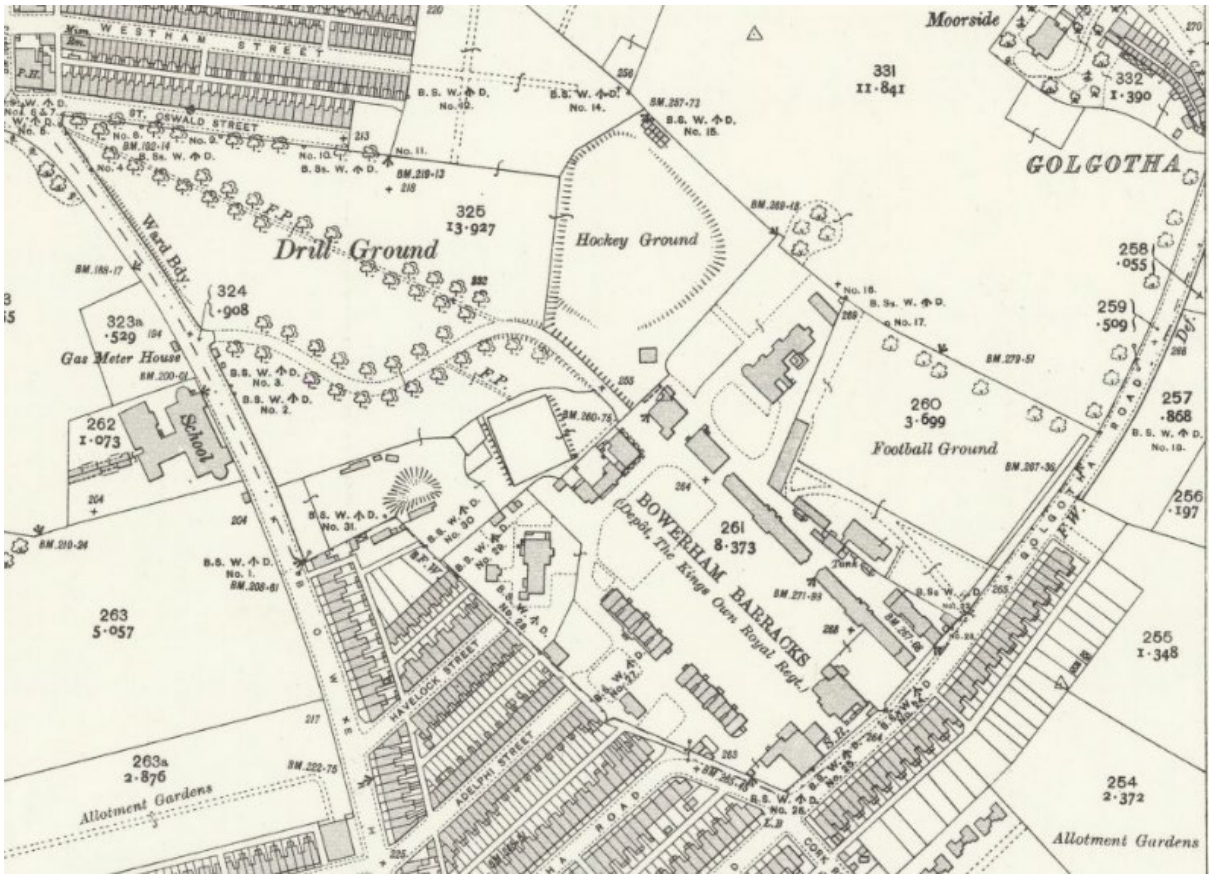
The move to Bowerham was prompted by Cardwell's reform of the structure of the British army in the 1870s. This led to the formation of local army units each with a depot in an area from which

they would recruit men. The 4th (King's Own) Regiment of Foot (later the King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster) was set up in the town in 1873 and they needed a new larger depot than the one at Springfield.

A 36-acre site in Bowerham was bought in 1873, one of 30 additional depots built around the country for the new army structure. Building began in 1876, the design following the general guidelines for these depots. The regiment took occupation of Bowerham Barracks in 1880.

The map below shows the site in 1931.The heart of the Barracks was the parade ground around which lay the key buildings. Going round clockwise, the Keep (by the main entrance off Bowerham Road) housed the armoury and stores and it was followed by the Officers Mess, the Hodgson and Brooke Barrack Blocks, the canteen, cookhouse and Quartermaster's stores, the two married-quarters blocks and the guardhouse next to the Keep.

Further out there was a small firing range, stables and an infirmary. In the grounds there was additional space of drills and pitches for football, hockey and cricket. Around the perimeter of the site were 31 boundary stones linked by a two-metre high wall, parts of which survive on the south-west and south-east edges of the site.



Bowerham Barracks in 1931 (Source: Ordnance Survey 25-inch map)

The end for Bowerham Barracks came in 1959 when the King's Own Royal Regiment was merged with the Border Regiment and their home depot was in Carlisle. Bowerham Barracks closed.

In 1962 the site become the home for Lancaster Training College (for teachers), which by 1964 had became Lancaster College of Education and then St Martin's College. Some of the army buildings were demolished (the Guardroom, for example) and new ones for the College were built on the former parade ground and elsewhere. These included halls of residence for students (including the William Thompson Tower), lecture halls and staff rooms for the widening range of subjects taught at the College.

Other buildings were kept but re-purposed such as the Keep, the Officers Mess to a Senior Common Room and administrative offices, and the indoor drill building into a gymnasium / sports hall. The architecturally best of the new College buildings are the Chapel (its inside and its outside) and the original Library building next to the Keep.

Following the incorporation of St. Martin's College into the new University of Cumbria in 2007, further new buildings have been put up for Radiology, Business Studies and the Library.

In 2021 plans emerged for some demolitions and the re-purposing of parts of this extensive site for housing and a care home, which are nearing completion in 2025.





The Keep



One of the two married quarters blocks



The Officers Mess





One of the two barrack blocks – ‘Hodgson’





A boundary stone (insignia removed) and part of the boundary wall

The Museum of the King's Own Royal Regiment was established in 1929 in part of Lancaster City Museum on Market Square.

Reading

Gedge P S and Louden L M R (1993) *S. Martin's College, Lancaster 1964–89* Lancaster: Lancaster University, Centre for North-West Regional Studies

King's Own Royal Regiment Museum website: http://www.kingsownmuseum.com

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