The Yeomanry Cavalry and Military Identities in Rural Britain, 1815-1914

George Hay

War, Culture and Society, 1750-1850

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Series Editors' Preface

The century from 1750 to 1850 was a seminal period of change, not just in Europe but across the globe. The political landscape was transformed by a series of revolutions fought in the name of liberty—most notably in the Americas and France, of course, but elsewhere, too: in Holland and Geneva during the eighteenth century and across much of mainland Europe by 1848. Nor was change confined to the European world. New ideas of freedom, equality and human rights were carried to the furthest outposts of empire, to Egypt, India and the Caribbean, which saw the creation in 1801 of the first black republic in Haiti, the former French colony of Saint-Domingue. And in the early part of the nineteenth century they continued to inspire anti-colonial and liberation movements throughout Central and Latin America.

If political and social institutions were transformed by revolution in these years, so, too, was warfare. During the quarter-century of the French Revolutionary Wars, in particular, Europe was faced with the prospect of `total' war, on a scale unprecedented before the twentieth century. Military hardware, it is true, evolved only gradually, and battles were not necessarily any bloodier than they had been during the Seven Years War. But in other ways these can legitimately be described as the first modern wars, fought by mass armies mobilized by national and patriotic propaganda, leading to the displacement of millions of people throughout Europe and beyond, as soldiers, prisoners of war, civilians and refugees. For those who lived through the period these wars would be a formative experience that shaped the ambitions and the identities of a generation.

The aims of the series are necessarily ambitious. In its various volumes, whether single-authored monographs or themed collections, it seeks to extend the scope of more traditional historiography. It will study warfare during this formative century not just in Europe, but in the Americas, in colonial societies, and across the world. It will analyse the construction of identities and power relations by integrating the principal categories of difference, most notably class and religion, generation and gender, race and ethnicity. It will adopt a multi-faceted approach to the period, and turn to methods of political, cultural, social, military, and gender history, in order to develop a challenging and multidisciplinary analysis. Finally, it will examine elements of comparison and transfer and so tease out the complexities of regional, national and global history.

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I am particularly grateful for the continued help and advice offered by my one-time Ph.D. supervisors, Dr. Timothy Bowman and Prof. Mark Connelly, who have—willingly or otherwise—been consulted frequently in the writing of this book. I also owe Dr. Jim Beach a debt of gratitude for his thoughts, suggestions and contributions. I have been helped immeasurably by staff at all the county record offices and museums mentioned throughout the work, as well as by those at The National Archives (before I was among them), The National Archives of Scotland (since the National Records of Scotland) and the National Army Museum. My thanks go to them, the readers of this manuscript and those in the academic community who have critiqued elements of this work and helped to develop the themes and ideas within it. Naturally, none of them, nor anyone else who has helped me along the way, bears responsibility for any mistaken interpretation on my part found within these pages.

More personally, I must thank my family and friends, and most of all Abi, primarily for their unending patience. Finally, my thanks go to the WTs.

To everyone not mentioned who should be, I extend my apologies along with my heartfelt appreciation.

Greenwich George Murray Hay

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Introduction

The Yeomanry Cavalry remains something of a forgotten army within the panoply of British amateur military movements. A mounted volunteer force raised in 1794 with a dual role to fight invasion and domestic insurrection, it continues in name today as part of the Territorial Army—recently rebranded the 'Army Reserve'. The institution has been credited with helping defeat the limited French landing at Fishguard in 1797, while the Irish Yeomanry—a related if separate force–helped put down the 1798 Rebellion. Although held largely responsible for the 'Peterloo' Massacre of 1819, the Yeomanry remained busy in its constabulary role into the 1880s. It provided a model for voluntary forces across the English-speaking Empire and at the turn of the century led the way in providing volunteers for the South African War. At its peacetime peaks in the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its strength exceeded 30,000 men—more than the current 2020 target for all branches of the Army Reserve. Despite this apparently conspicuous presence in British history, the institution has been largely ignored by historians. While other amateur military institutions have received considerable academic attention, our understanding of the nineteenth-century Yeomanry remains, as Ian Beckett once noted, 'obscured by the absence of detailed research'.[1]

[1]Beckett, I.F.W. *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (MUP, 1991), p. 133.

A combination of internal and external threats during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw various organisations raised in defence of personal and national interests. The importance of these movements to British history is substantial, not only from the perspective of those who served, but as a result of the distinct bond formed between them and the state. As a sibling institution to the Napoleonic (and later Rifle) Volunteers and Militia, the Yeomanry has typically been seen as just another example of the commitment of Britons to the defence of the nation through voluntary service on their own terms. Those terms were, however, broad and considerably varied—not only between the different arms of the auxiliaries, but within the Yeomanry itself. Although there were periods when these forces might be considered an analogous movement—by their objectives if nothing else—in reality, dates and events shaped their individual structures, motivations and histories. Despite this fact, the Yeomanry Cavalry has only ever been analysed as part of a wider movement. This approach relies on generalisation and assumptions based on expected similarities between the forces, which in turn strips away the idiosyncrasies that made each one separate and distinct. This generalisation denies us not only a better understanding of the whole amateur military movement, but also valuable and fascinating socio-political insights into nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain.

Just as the Yeomanry fits within a rich historical tradition of British amateur military movements, this text fits within a rich historiography touching on those movements. It is a body of literature that continues to generate interest, most recently expanded by Ian Beckett's work on the centenary of the Territorial Army and edited volume on the amateur military forces of the British empire, Beal Garnham's book on the eighteenth-century Irish Militia, William Butler's volume on the Irish amateur military tradition and K.W. Mitchinson's third volume on the Territorial Force.[2] Beyond this recent interest there is also a lengthy academic pedigree. The best of this work has bracketed the nineteenth century; on the one hand exploring civilian-state relations before and during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, and on the other asking similar questions of the reform period between the Second Boer War and First World War.

[2]Beckett, I.F.W. *Territorials: A Century of Service* (DRA Publishing, 2008); Beckett, I.F.W. (ed) *Citizen Soldiers and the British Empire, 1837–1902* (Pickering & Chatto, 2012); Garnham, B. *The Militia in Eighteenth Century Ireland: In Defence of the Protestant Interest* (Boydell Press, 2012); Butler, W. *The Irish Amateur Military Tradition, 1854–1992* (MUP, 2016); at the time of writing, Mitchinson's is due to be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

The social histories of this earlier period have attempted to explain participation in defence and the experience of conflict in the eighteenth century by looking at the relationship between warfare, British society and statehood in an effort to comprehend nationalism, loyalism and defensive movements. Interesting analysis of this kind can be found in work by John Brewer and Linda Colley, and more recently Stephen Conway, all of whom chart the changing position of the British state and the reasons behind its success in expanding its powers internally and externally.[3] Volunteering throughout the Napoleonic Wars has also been addressed in detail by J.E. Cookson and Austin Gee, while Clive Emsley, D.J.V. Jones, and J.R. Western have all considered the role and purpose of these forces and their relationship with the state.[4]

These texts have left a legacy of conflicting explanations for civilian involvement in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century warfare. Brewer argued that the power of central government to work the fiscal-military state model allowed it to extract the necessary resources from the people for the conduct of war. Linda Colley added social analysis to this argument running from the Act of Union in 1707 through to Victoria's ascendancy to the throne in 1837, suggesting instead that the forging of 'Britishness' through shared national beliefs helped transcend class or political barriers within the state. Both, however, fell short of fully interacting with the expansion of British arms in the 1790s. Here Cookson found the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars provided little opportunity to advance the central authority's ability to make demands upon the population and that patriotism was often subject to conditions. Gee's analysis, narrowed to the volunteering experience, largely confirmed this thesis, painting it as more spontaneous and independent than subject to central direction.

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[3]Brewer, J. *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (HUP, 1990); Colley, L. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, (YUP, 1994); Conway, S. *War, State and Society in Mid Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland* (OUP, 2006); and Conway, S. *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (OUP, 2002).

[4]Cookson, J.E. *The British Armed Nation, 1793–1815* (OUP, 1997); Gee, A. *The British Volunteer Movement, 1794–1814* (OUP, 2003); Emsley, C. *Policing and its Context 1750–1870* (Macmillan, 1983); Emsley, C. 'The Military and Popular Disorder in England, 1790–1801' *JSAHR*. Vol. 61, No. 245, 1983, pp. 10–21, 96–112; Emsley, C. 'Repression, "Terror" and the Rule of Law in England during the Decade of the French Revolution' *The English Historical Review*. Vol. 100, No. 397, 1985, pp. 801–825; Jones, D.J.V. 'Law Enforcement and Popular Disturbances in Wales, 1793–1835' *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 42, No. 4, 1970, pp. 496–523; and Western, J.R. 'The Volunteer Movement as an Anti-Revolutionary Force, 1793–1801', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 281, 1956, pp. 603–614.

These works are influential in forming an understanding of the relationship between the British state and people through the internal and external pressures of war at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, they are not without their issues, chief among them being the already noted problem of generalisation. This issue is particularly pronounced beyond the Napoleonic period because the Yeomanry became the sole expression of the volunteering tradition (until the rebirth of the Rifle Volunteers in 1859) in a very different economic, social and political environment. It is here that we find the first significant void in the literature, inviting the assumption that the institution remained unchanged.

Looking to the twenty-first century, Peter Dennis and Keith Mitchinson have written methodologically comparable texts concerning the development of the Territorial Force. The strength of Dennis's work is its coverage of the years between the Boer War and Great War, and the Territorial Army's place in defence policy.[5] Unfortunately, the text stops short of providing a detailed study of the reform period and the First World War and lacks engagement with the human questions concerning the Territorials. As a result, this critical period of Yeomanry history is buried in the wider arguments concerning the application, governance and funding of the Territorial Force. Following this, Mitchinson's work has dealt with two important topics in respect to the Territorials and the wartime Volunteer Force: the first dealing with the political and military response to the threat of invasion and the ways to defeat a raid and potential march on London; the second dealing with the Territorial Force from the point of view of its administration under the County Territorial Associations introduced in 1908.[6] Again adopting a broad view, he has analysed the Territorial experience through the lens of the Associations and the top-down direction of the military and political authorities. Forming an important part of the Territorial historiography, the focus is predominantly from outside the institutions.

[5]Dennis, P. *The Territorial Army, 1907–1940* (Boydell, Suffolk, 1987).

[6]Mitchinson, K.W. *Defending Albion: Britain's Home Army, 1908–1919* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Mitchinson, K.W. *England's Last Hope: The Territorial Force, 1908–1914* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

The only significant published text to give space to the British Yeomanry during the nineteenth century is Ian Beckett's *The Amateur Military Tradition*. It was this text that cemented this descriptive phrase in the historian's vernacular, but it also developed a methodology that has guided this and many other modern studies of the auxiliary forces. It is also the only academic study to attempt to draw together all manifestations of this tradition from the mid-sixteenth century through to the end of the Second World War, something that has positive and negative ramifications. With fewer than 300 pages of prose, it is dedicated to identifying a wider amateur military movement and deliberately eschews greater focus on individual institutions. Though notable for its inclusion of the nineteenth-century Yeomanry, it naturally leaves much unexplored and underdeveloped.

These texts have searched for broad trends and explanations for civilian involvement in the armed forces rather than closely engaging with the institutions that allowed for that involvement. Although a number of historians have narrowed their analysis to certain aspects of the volunteering experience, Gee noted that any attempt to characterise a movement would be to neglect the intrinsic variations that will always be found between the individual institutions that provide its basis.[7] The nature of these texts means these idiosyncrasies have been downplayed in favour of consensus.

The body of literature dealing with specific elements of the amateur military tradition help to put the Yeomanry's history into context, but do not always contribute to our understanding of the institution itself. The auxiliary cavalry more broadly defined has received some limited academic attention. Although Andrew Gilks' unpublished Ph.D. thesis on the volunteer cavalry explores some interesting themes around the relationship between this institution and the Yeomanry, it lacks wider context and fails to engage with questions relating to social issues, compositions, peacetime applications and relationships with the authorities.[8] In another example, the Irish Yeomanry described by Alan Blackstock's comprehensive book covering the dates 1796–1834 was a very different creature compared to its British counterpart. Becoming a predominantly

[7]Gee, *The British Volunteer Movement*, p. 262.

[8]Gilks, A.D. 'A History of Britain's Volunteer Cavalry, 1776–1908.' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham. 2005).

Protestant auxiliary army that embraced Orangeism and worked in the interest of the Ascendancy, it naturally had a very different history and was wound up completely before the middle of the nineteenth century.[9] Blackstock's findings will provide valuable comparative material, but as the study ends in 1834 it falls to this volume to engage with the rebirth of the Irish Yeomanry during the Second Boer War, covering this and its conversion to Special Reserve in 1908.

The recent body of literature exploring the place and experience of British and Commonwealth cavalry in the nineteenth and early twenty-first century further demonstrates the general interest in this topic, though it again sheds little light directly on the Yeomanry. Stephen Badsey's, David Kenyon's and Jean Bou's work on the training and application of these forces before and during wartime, and David French's work on the inter-war cavalry have all made valuable contributions to our understanding of the professional force.[10] Similarly, Graham Winton's work on horsing the British army from the late nineteenth century draws parallels with and contextualises the Yeomanry experience.[11]

Perhaps most significant to this volume are those texts dedicated to the history of other amateur military forces. Much like Beckett's *The Amateur Military Tradition*, J.R. Western's important 1965 work on the eighteenth-century Militia provided a framework for later studies by examining the force in terms of its military effectiveness and economic impact, while also raising important arguments regarding the symbolic purpose of the Militia in place of a large standing army.[12] Eliga Gould has since built on this by looking towards the motives

[9]Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army—The Irish Yeomanry, 1796–1834 (Four Courts, Dublin., 1998),* pp. 296–301.

[10]Badsey, S. *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880–1918* (Ashgate, 2008); Kenyon, D. *Horsemen in No Man's Land: British Cavalry and Trench Warfare 1914–1918* (Pen & Sword, 2011); Bou, J. *Light Horse: A History of Australia's Mounted Arm* (CUP, 2010); and French, D. 'The Mechanization of the British Cavalry between the World Wars' *War in History*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2003, pp. 303–304.

[11]Winton, G. *Theirs Not to Reason Why: Horsing the British Army, 1875–1925* (Helion, 2013).

[12]Western, J.R. *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: The Story of a Political Issue, 1660–1802* (UTP, 1965), pp. 104–125, 245, 255–264, 345–346.

that drove reform in the Militia between 1745 and 1760, while work on the Irish Militia includes Sir Henry McAnnally's, Thomas Bartlett's and Ivan Nelson's contributions.[13]

The Rifle Volunteers, reconstituted in 1859, have also formed the basis of two separate texts, one written by Ian Beckett and the other by Hugh Cunningham. Both add focused scrutiny to the content found in *The Amateur Military Tradition*, providing detailed analysis of social compositions, central and public relations, and the impact of changes through the latter half of the nineteenth century to the Haldane reforms of 1908. As a sibling institution to the mid- to late-nineteenth-century Yeomanry, there are many parallels to be drawn here; naturally, there are also considerable contrasts.[14] Similar texts also exist: looking at the Home Guard in the Second World War by S.P. McKenzie, and Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird.[15]

Finally, the operational aspects of the force's use call for an understanding of two separate historiographical themes: policing and law enforcement, and auxiliary contributions to the Second Boer War. In the first instance, little has been said about the reasons for the Yeomanry's continued survival into the nineteenth century and how this fitted with official policies for the maintenance of law and order. Again, Beckett has perhaps provided the most purposeful analysis of this subject, but the discussion remains limited. Although the rise of professional policing has been well charted by Clive Emsley and Stanley Palmer, the use of the Yeomanry in this capacity is often seen as part of a generalised military

[13]Gould, E.H. 'To Strengthen the King's Hands: Dynastic Legitimacy, Militia Reform and Ideas of National Unity in England 1745–1760' *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 34, No. 2, 1991, pp. 346–348; McAnnally, Sir. H. *The Irish Militia, 1793–1816: A Social and Military Study* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1949); Bartlett, T. 'An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793' *Past & Present*, No. 99, 1983, pp. 41–64; Bartlett, T. 'Defence, Counter-Insurgency and Rebellion: Ireland, 1793–1803' in Bartlett, T. and Jeffery, K. (eds) *A Military History of Ireland* (CUP, 1996), pp. 247–293; and Nelson, I.F. *The Irish Militia, 1793–1802* (Four Courts, Dublin, 2007).

[14]Beckett, I.F.W. *Riflemen Form: A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement 1859–1908* (Pen & Sword, 2007); and Cunningham, H. *The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History* (Croom Helm, London, 1975).

[15]Mackenzie, S.P. *The Home Guard: A Military and Political History* (OUP, 1995); and Summerfield, P. and Bird, C. Peniston. *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (MUP, 2007).

response and the extent of its employment is often underestimated and its methods not properly analysed.[16] The force's substantial contribution to controlling the tumultuous events that plagued the first half of the nineteenth century says a good deal more about British law enforcement than the single iconic disaster at 'Peterloo', as does its continued involvement in constabulary work into the 1880s.

Coverage of the second theme can be found woven into Beckett's *The Amateur Military Tradition*, though as hinted above, it leaves aspects of the Yeomanry's involvement obscured or undeveloped, particularly the war's impact on the home force.[17] Contentious studies, such as Richard Price's analysis of working-class involvement, have since been challenged by the likes of Edward Spiers, but there has been no conclusive attempt to understand recruitment trends in the Imperial Yeomanry.[18] Though operational coverage of the war has been better served by historians such as William Bennett, Thomas Pakenham and the Marquis of Anglesey, there are distinct weaknesses in the analysis of participation in the Imperial Yeomanry.[19] Elaine McFarland's article regarding the Scottish Imperial Yeomanry, for example, fell wide of the mark in search of a shifting membership due to a misunderstanding of the force's early history.[20]

This text sits within this well-established framework, developing arguments that have tentatively engaged with the Yeomanry Cavalry as an institution and complementing those that have built our understanding

[16]For example: Palmer, S.H. *Police and Protest in England and Ireland 1780–1850.* (CUP, 1988); and Emsley, C. *Crime, Police and Penal Policy: European Experiences 1750–1940* (OUP, 2007).

[17]Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition,* pp. 199–222.

[18]Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899–1902 (Routledge, London, 1972)*; Spiers, E.M. *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854–1902* (EUP, 2006); and Spiers, E.M. *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (Longman, 1980).

[19]Bennett, W. *Absent-Minded Beggars—Yeomanry and Volunteers in the Boer War* (Leo Cooper, Barnsley, 1999); Pakenham, T. *The Boer War* (Abacus, London, 1992); and Anglesey, A. *History of the British Cavalry, 1899 to 1913—Vol. IV* (Secker & Warburg, London, 1986).

[20]McFarland, E.W. '"Empire-Enlarging Genius": Scottish Imperial Yeomanry Volunteers in the Boer War', *War in History*, Vol. 13, No. 7, 2006, pp. 299–328.

of the wider amateur military movement. Naturally there are intersecting themes that will not be examined in detail here—higher defence policy and the root causes of nineteenth-century civil unrest, for example—but the text will link into and build upon these relevant historiographies. The intention is to provide a conclusive social history of this little understood period of the Yeomanry's history by examining the force's relationship with local and central government; its membership and their motivations; its interaction with society; its ability to do its job; and its place within the wider amateur military tradition.

The Yeomanry and the State, 1815–1899

Any organisation designed for defence will naturally experience more official and popular support when national security is threatened from within or without. The nineteenth-century amateur military forces of the United Kingdom were no different, but the way in which that support was sought, given and maintained was in many ways unique. A cheaper alternative to a standing army, auxiliary forces have historically had the added benefit of rallying people behind a cause while fostering and controlling loyalty. In peacetime, however, the arguments for maintaining such preventative measures could become strained, especially if efficiency was deemed questionable. The politics of nineteenth-century Britain complicated these issues further, thanks in the most part to the balance of power between the centre and the provinces, and the involvement of local elites in leading auxiliary organisations. When peace came in 1815 after more than 20 years of war with France, practically all manifestations of the amateur soldiering spirit encouraged during the war were allowed to dissipate; the one exception was the Yeomanry. The first section of this chapter deals with the raising of the Yeomanry Cavalry following the successes of the French in the War of the First Coalition and explores the reasons why it alone continued into the peace. The analysis then shifts to explore the significance and political persuasion of the Yeomanry's parliamentary presence through the second half of the century, and the ways in which this coloured its interactions with government regarding its funding, efficiency and role.

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The explosion of British voluntarism at the close of the eighteenth century was inextricably linked to events on the continent. Cross-channel revolutionary fear grew with the death of Louis XVI and the 'reign of terror,' and the 1793 *levée en masse* added the possibility of raids or invasion. At the outset, these fears manifested themselves in loyalist associations—essentially publishers of anti-revolutionary materials and talking shops against radical societies—but many would soon make significant contributions to more active movements through subscriptions taken in their name.[1] One such organisation was the Yeomanry Cavalry, yet its *raison d'être* was to be twofold. Its composition, socially and geographically, was unusual from the start. Although the earliest corps were distinguished by their coastal character, it did not take long for the movement to develop national coverage and stretch inland. Within the first two years of the force's existence, approximately one third of its strength was found in Yorkshire, the Midlands and Gloucestershire, while only 40% was found in the coastal counties of the south as well as along the eastern seaboard. This strength was reflected in the number of corps that expanded from 32 in 1794 to 60 in 1810, and 65 by 1820. By this time there was clearly no particular adhesion to the coast.[2] The simple explanation for this rapid and broad development can be found in a government circular of March 1794, which stated the Yeomanry was 'liable to be called out…for the suppression of riot or tumult…[or] in case of invasion.'[3] If the two were not to be directly linked—as they were in Ireland in 1798—then the government was prepared to control them as separate and individual developments, factoring in the threat of unaided domestic revolution.

At least in part, the Yeomanry was seen by the state as an anti-revolutionary institution. Even the use of the term 'yeomanry' came loaded with meaning. In its medieval context, the word could be used broadly for various kinds of freeholder, though it usually meant an owner-occupier of land and property, and probably a farmer. More significantly for this context, however, was the legal definition: a freeholder

[1] Gee, A. *The British Volunteer Movement, 1794–1814* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 18.

[2] Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793–1815* (OUP, 1997), pp. 27–28; Beckett, I.F.W. *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (MUP, 1991), p. 75; *BPP:* 182, 1810: Yeomanry Cavalry Return, 1809; and *BPP:* 189, 1821: Yeomanry Cavalry Return, 1820.

[3] 'Q.L.' *The Yeomanry Cavalry of Worcestershire, 1794–1913* (Simpson, Devizes, 1914), p. 3.

who could meet the qualification for voting in parliamentary elections.[4] The image conjured by the term's use in the nineteenth century was one of a sizeable, largely independent group with a position in society somewhere short of the minor gentry. In other words, to be a yeoman was to enjoy a position in society of some privilege and possibly to aspire to further elevation; who better to mobilise in defence of the status quo? Although this simplistic construction and its relevance to the movement will be challenged elsewhere in this text by exploring the motivations of those who served, it was at least in part because of this image that the Yeomanry's services were not deemed redundant after the war with France came to an end.

The Yeomanry's anti-revolutionary credentials developed out of a more unified national defence movement. Initial suggestions to raise men through voluntary contribution created concern within parliament by appearing to be an unsanctioned levy of men and money. Nonetheless, by March 1794 hasty legislation was passed that accepted the voluntary augmentation of the militia as well as the raising of voluntary forces through public conscription; as a result, an additional 5000 militia and 6000 fencibles were raised across the country.[5] In addition, substantial sums were bequeathed to local defence by loyalist associations, which began two waves of volunteering between 1794 and 1795, and then 1797 and 1798.[6] Instead of being solely 'police' forces, the Yeomanry raised at this time planned to operate within the full remit of their statute, concerning themselves with preparing for invasion, developing in some cases elaborate plans for driving livestock and clearing the land.[7] Indeed, it has been suggested by Cookson that the Yeomanry was rapidly incorporated into existing defence plans because of its ready ability to do this.[8] For the most part, however, their enthusiasm on this front was unnecessary, with a determined invasion never coming to fruition. Apart from the limited French landing in Ireland and their combined victory with the United Irishmen at Castlebar, there were few

[4] Beckett, J.V. 'the peasant in England: a Case of Terminological Confusion?' Agricultural History Review, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1984, p. 113.

[5] Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition*, p. 73.

[6] Ibid., p. 74; and Gee, *The British Volunteer Movement*, p. 20.

[7] NAS, GD150/2366/81. 'Instructions to corps in event of invasion in the Firth of Forth', C. 1803; and Thompson, C.W. *Records of the Dorset Yeomanry (Queen's Own)* ('Dorset County Chronicle', Dorset, 1894), pp. 18–23.

[8] Cookson, *The British Armed Nation*, pp. 27–28.

Table 1 Total number of Yeomanry Cavalry, 1820–1900

Year	*Establishment*	*Effective strength*
1820	36,294	30,791
1835	No data	19,365
1840	No data	14,285
1845	No data	15,249
1850	16,566	13,911
1855	No data	15,444
1860	17,196	15,002
1875	14,672	11,907
1880	14,511	11,505
1885	14,324	11,509
1890	14,036	10,697
1895	11,179	9745
1900	12,013	10,147

comparable episodes when British defences were stretched.[9] The abortive attempt at a landing by the French 'Black Legion' at Fishguard a year earlier had met with even less success, despite the haphazard response. On that occasion, a small French force of mainly convicts and royalist prisoners disembarked on the Welsh coast only to surrender a few days later because of a failure of morale and a taste for pillage.[10] Nonetheless, as will be shown in the chapter "*Aid to the civil power*", it was its other statutory role that kept the Yeomanry occupied during these wars—from dispersing enclosure protesters to breaking up food riots. Beyond 1815 it was the continuation of this domestic instability that meant the Yeomanry remained relevant, at least until the introduction of the County and Borough Police Act of 1856. That alone, however, cannot answer for the force's sustained existence or its unusually long standing governing Act, which remained unchanged for nearly 90 years.

Quantifying the level of central support afforded to the Yeomanry is a predictably difficult task and one that raises more questions than it answers, but plotting the strength of the institution does offer a crude insight into government backing and public engagement. Though returns of strength have only survived with gaps, it is still easy to spot within Table 1 the significant events that directly

[9] Blackstock, A. *An Ascendancy Army—The Irish Yeomanry, 1796–1834 (Four Courts, Dublin., 1998)*, pp. 147–158.

[10] *The Times*, 31 December 1859; and Stuart Jones, E.H. *The Last Invasion of Britain* (Cardiff, 1950), Chap. 2–4.

impacted government and public interest, with both positive and negative outcomes for the Yeomanry.

The invasion scares that plagued the 1840s and 1850s helped to bolster numbers—just as they were responsible for resuscitating the Rifle Volunteers—but the Yeomanry also responded to an imagined (and sometimes real) domestic menace and, for the first half of the century, was of greater importance as a constabulary. As a trend, however, the course plotted by the figures could be best described as a gradual decline, especially after 1830. Closer inspection shows that the undulations of this line are dictated by some of the most significant socio-political events of the 1800s. A decline immediately after the end of the war was hastily reversed after the disaster of Peterloo. The slashing of regiments in 1827 after 10 years of relative stability was rectified after the Swing Riots of 1830. Following further, less dramatic reductions in 1838, the force aided the fledgling police forces in tackling Chartist aggression. And, finally, the fresh invasion scares resulting from French naval development and Napoleon III's hostility also register from the late 1840s. Put simply, the demand for its use and the flow of money and support were clearly connected. Although many assumed insurrection would follow closely behind invasion, the nineteenth century time and again convinced contemporary policy makers that public disorder did not need this encouragement.[11]

Despite the support the institution found in fear of domestic revolt, having passed through the turbulence of the wars with France and the most extreme political violence of the early 1830s, it is hard to see how the Yeomanry would not have begun to look like an anachronism in comparison to the emerging police movement. As the "*Aid to the civil power*" chapter will show, despite filling gaps during the Chartist disturbances, the chances of their being called out in this capacity after the late 1850s was ever decreasing. The prolonged existence of the Yeomanry between this date and the turn of the century must then have been driven and influenced by different pressures. Although some considered it to have inherited the mantle of constitutional force from the militia, neither this nor defence planning played a large part in its preservation.[12] One factor that did was the social and parliamentary presence of its officer corps.

[11] Gee, *The British Volunteer Movement*, p. 61.

[12] *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 27 April 1838. Vol. 42, Para. 636–664.

In 1843 it can be shown that the force as a whole had at least 14 members serving in both Houses of Parliament, rising to 22 by 1847.[13] The 1850 *Royal Militia and Yeomanry Cavalry Army List* names a parliamentary lobby of 65 men in the House of Commons and the *Dod's* record for two years later speaks of at least 52 across both houses.[14] At such a date it is difficult to provide anything in the way of direct comparisons as the Volunteers were not reformed until the end of the decade. Using the Militia as an example, however, Beckett has shown that the decline in its parliamentary presence between 1832 and 1835 increased the difficulty of its lobby in resisting change to the force.[15] Although the 1850 list shows 58 Militia MPs, as a proportion of the total number of Militia officers, this figure is little more than 2%. In the Yeomanry this proportion amounted to practically 8% of the force's officer corps.[16]

Between 1862 and 1895 Ian Beckett's figures for the Rifle Volunteers provide an equally interesting contrast. Between 1862 and 1874 he shows a total of 24 Volunteers serving within the House of Commons, another 11 MPs being considered as de facto Volunteers due to their voting patterns and interests.[17] In the case of the Yeomanry, the *Dod's* list for 1870 still recorded 55 members in the House of Commons and a further 11 in the Lords.[18] Beckett's second Volunteer bracket between 1886 and 1895 shows a total of 18 members of parliament with a further three with interests in the force.[19] By way of further contrast, in 1882 the Yeomanry boasted 39 MPs and 35 Lords, and in 1897 returned a respective 31 and 35 serving in the force. By this later date it is also worth noting that a further 18 men equally split between both houses

[13] *Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 1843*; and *Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 1847.*

[14] Sleigh, A. *The Royal Militia and Yeomanry Cavalry Army List, April 1850* (Reprinted: Naval & Military Press); and *Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 1852.*

[15] Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition*, p. 129.

[16] There are 2639 officers in the 1850 Militia list. A little over 2% were MPs. The Yeomanry returned 828 officers. Just fewer than 8% were MPs.

[17] Beckett, I.F.W. *Riflemen Form: A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement 1859–1908* (Pen & Sword, 2007), p. 269.

[18] *Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 1870.*

[19] Beckett, *Riflemen Form*, p. 271.

had previously served with the Yeomanry.[20] Although some of these numbers were made up of honorary colonels, the bond to their regiments and their interests was strong, something consistently shown in voting habits and speeches in both houses.

In some regiments the officer corps exhibited particularly strong political links. In Leicestershire this amounted to three MPs in 1849; in West Kent there were six MPs and two peers in the 1880s; and in Wiltshire it would seem that representation in parliament led invariably to a Yeomanry commission, or perhaps vice versa.[21] For all of the force's history, parliamentary representation remained strong and this, it would seem, was clearly connected to the landed interest of the Yeomanry. As will be shown in "*The officer corps*" chapter, the domination of the squirearchy, aristocracy and gentry before the First World War meant that political interaction was likely given the responsibilities that came with rural positions of authority. It is perhaps surprising that in relative terms the Yeomanry outweighed the Militia in parliamentary representation mid-century, and it might even seem logical to connect its reliability with the defence of the parliamentary system and the existing distribution of authority. On the other hand, as other chapters will show, the pageantry and free expenditure that became synonymous with the force simply restricted candidates, while not bowing to revolution did not necessarily allude to repressive conservative ideals. Both Militia and Yeomanry maintained substantial rural participation, but it is undeniable that the elevated average social position of the yeoman coupled to the cavalry attraction and the force's visibility in society was popular among those wishing to build or maintain a public profile. Rural Britain remained the bastion of Toryism because of the landed interest and the demand for agricultural protectionism; the Yeomanry appeared a bastion of Toryism because it lent so heavily on its officers' wallets and so fell predominantly to the same interest group. Above all else, however, it is easy to say with some authority that the Yeomanry had an influence in parliament out of proportion to its actual strength and, as with the

[20] See Appendix A.

[21] From the 1840s the Wiltshire corps boasted 17 MPs or Lords: Walter Long and son, Lord E. and C. Bruce, Ambrose L. Goddard, William Wyndham, Edmund Antrobus, Visct. Barrington, Thomas F. Grove, Lord Thynne, Baron Estcourt, Charles N.P. Phipps, Marq. of Bath, Edward H. Hulse, Sir John Poynder, Baron Ludlow, John M.F. Fuller. *Dod's Parliamentary Companion*s; and Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition*, p. 189.

Militia, this made reductions and adjustments difficult for the government of the day—partly because of numbers, but also thanks to positions of authority held within those governments.

Seeming to have its political composition forced upon it raises a number of questions regarding the driving force behind the Yeomanry's membership. From his cell at Ilchester in the wake of the Peterloo Massacre, Henry Hunt painted a particularly disparaging picture of the Yeomanry as a force concerned with 'keeping up the price of corn, keeping down the price of wages, and at the same time keeping in subjugation the labourers, and silencing their disaffection'.[22] In the case of much of the landed elite this might have seemed an attractive package, but whether such concerns actually motivated Yeomanry membership is difficult to conclude; it is clear, for example, that the Dorset Yeomanry disbanded itself twice—once in 1802 and again in 1814—on the belief that they were a wartime emergency force and did not wish to appear as though they were protecting their economic interests.[23] Whether the Yeomanry was actually a Tory concern in parliament, however, can to some extent be deduced from the *Dod's* records. Events such as Peterloo fuelled what has become an enduring cliché regarding the institution's Conservatism. *The Satirist* became greatly excited by the prospect of the Yeomanry's total dissolution in 1838, arguing that they were 'ultra Tories to a man, prepared on every occasion to pounce upon the people'.[24] Five years after this comment it can be shown that, of the eleven Members of Parliament serving in the Yeomanry, a little over 80% were of a Conservative persuasion, one other claiming to be a Whig and another a Reformer.[25] In the aftermath of a particularly politically charged decade these latter examples are rather surprising. A further four years later the Tory figure was more or less the same, but there was a doubling of the Whig representation alongside the same lone Reformer.[26] By 1852 the Conservative figure had fallen to 68%—the remaining 32% being Whigs and Liberals—and by 1870 the

[22] Hunt, H. *Memoirs of Henry Hunt, Esq. Vol. I.* (Dolby, London, 1820), p. 205.

[23] Thompson, *Records of the Dorset Yeomanry*, pp. 50–51 and 101.

[24] *The Satirist*, 18 March 1838.

[25] Charles Shaw Lefevre was the Whig, Edward Royd Rice the Reformer. *Dod's Parliamentary Companion*, *1843.*

[26] *Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 1847* and Appendix A.

Conservative and Liberal interests were effectively evenly split. Although the presence in the House of Lords remained mostly politically conservative—ranging from 50 to 73% between 1870 and 1908—by this latter date the Liberal-Conservative split in the Commons leaned only slightly towards the Tories.[27]

Whereas the Rifle Volunteers' parliamentary interest swung from Liberal to Conservative through the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Yeomanry seems to have travelled in the opposite direction.[28] There are, of course, anomalies: some notable Yeomanry politicians, such as Winston Churchill and J.E.B. Seely, served time in both political parties. However, while it will be shown that a Conservative political interest did not necessarily dictate the actions of the force, it is still patently obvious that its political representation was closer to the right, and more so earlier in the century. Nonetheless, even then, it cannot be said to have been ultra Tory. What it perhaps does confirm is the conservative outlook of a significant portion of the force's officership during the years of political crisis when, as many would claim, it presented an opportunity for class to come up against class.[29] As will be shown in later chapters, however, any clashes between yeomen and the public were less likely to have been acts of class oppression and more in defence of property, life and personal interest. What is more, these were not simply fears projected downwards by the state but were largely local in origin. It will also be shown that yeomen were not unquestionably loyal. With at least one commanding officer claiming to be a reformer, it would at the very least be unfair to document the whole force as an instrument of subjugation and repression; at the same time, it would be naïve to suggest that they were not a tool for defending the political system as it stood. Although Britain upheld freedoms in press, in speech and in religion, it remained far from a democracy during the nineteenth century. The point might also be made that even the Yeomanry's growing Liberal contingent was unlikely to tolerate violent extra-parliamentary pressure for enfranchisement. For the most part, though, it was not a political tool directly wielded from the centre, but those who ultimately shaped it from there were evidently also often bound up with it on a local level.

[27] See Appendix A.

[28] Beckett, *Riflemen Form*, p. 153.

[29] *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 10 June 1869. Vol. 196, Para. 1575.

Until 1871 local military administration and all correspondence with central government (via the Home Office and, after 1852, the War Office) went through the lord lieutenant. Unsurprisingly, the intensity of this workload on top of a lord lieutenant's other duties meant that there was a propensity for delays. The result was significant freedom invested—directly or indirectly—in the counties and in regiments. This had its benefits: freedom of action was important for law enforcement when communications were slow, for example. However, it could also lead to uncertainty and inconsistency. In Uxbridge, confusion over how to raise and arm a corps in 1831 descended into a protracted correspondence between the lord lieutenant, the Board of Ordnance and the Home Office before anything got underway. Worse still, once formed, their commandant—who had assumed the rank of major—was demoted to a captaincy when the lord lieutenant discovered that the size of the corps was not sufficient to allow for field ranks.[30] Although feathers were rarely ruffled in the counties in this way, this security and authority was a long way from the policymakers who could influence the institution at a distance. As a result, just as important to the Yeomanry's stability was the way in which its sizable parliamentary lobby behaved. Essentially it remained in existence because successive central governments approved of its continuation. These sentiments stretched as far as Whig and Liberal administrations that, despite reducing the force at various times, failed to—or did not wish to—extinguish it fully. Although on many occasions it was necessity that forced the hand of government, the success of the Yeomanry's parliamentary lobby also played a part in their maintenance. Earlier in the century the Yeomanry's place within national defence was well cemented. Although reduced at times, retrenchment often coincided with an upsurge of domestic discontent, which would encourage the government to augment the force. Negative voices were far from unknown, but their arguments were largely weakened by a failure to provide a viable alternative to control civil disobedience. William Cobbett had once quoted the political reformer Major John Cartwright, who believed 'the yeomanry corps [to be] the body guard of the borough mongers,' and went on to state that, 'now, the body being gone,

[30]LMA, ACC/1085/F/P/022; 025; 026; and 029. Yeomanry correspondence between Charles Newdegate and the Duke of Portland, 1831; and Stonham, C. and Freeman, B. *Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry, 1797–1927* (Privately printed, 1930), pp. 13–16.