

## 18<sup>th</sup> Century

French Revolution (1789-1799) and the start of the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815). Letter from Maria Josepha Holroyd, daughter of John Baker Holroyd, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Sheffield (1735-1821) to Miss Ann Firth. Refers to 6000-7000 men camped on Chailey Commons en route for the coast.

*Sheffield Place August 14, 1793*

*'On Monday morning between nine and ten the whole Army, between six and seven thousand men, passed by the Lodge. We were placed under Lady Cecilia's Fir Tree with the Duke and his suite, and saw them march by to great advantage. . . . The Line of March was a mile and three quarters in length .... and though there were so many men, and they had been three hours on their march, there was no Tail, alias, no stragglers. You may imagine what a beautiful sight it was to see the whole Road from the Common to the Lodge covered entirely*

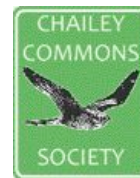


*with Soldiers, and the Bands of Musick playing. When they had all passed, we rode in a jolly Party; Duke, Aides-de-Camps, Secretary, Lewis and William Way, Louisa and I, through the Park to see them take their ground at Chailey Common, and there again we had a most lively scene. It is*

*astonishing how quick the Tents were pitched, and the whole Common, covered with white Tents and red coats, had the most chearful effect I ever saw or could have imagined.'*

*(original spellings used)*

Adeane, J H (Ed) (1896) *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd (Lady Stanley of Alderley)*. Recorded in *Letters of a Hundred Years Ago: From 1776 to 1796*. Longmans, Green and Co., London New York and Bombay. Pages 230-231. Contemporary print – Chichester District Council, courtesy of Tony Turk.



### **19<sup>th</sup> century**

During the period of the Boer War (1889-1902) the following was recorded in Newick Parish Records.

Turk T (1999) *A Victorian Diary of Newick, Sussex 1875-1899*, published by Turk T, 42 Church Lane, Mill End, Rickmansworth. Source Newick Parish records.

July 1894

*'A huge gathering of the Sussex volunteer forces assembled for a military review at Sheffield Park, all by courtesy of the noble and patriotic Earl of Sheffield. 1154 soldiers arrived at Newick and Chailey station as the 'southern' army and 1165 at Sheffield Park station as the 'northern' army. There was great interest shown when the troops arrived at Newick and Chailey station with bands playing and the countryside then resounding to the marching troops heading towards Rotherfield Wood. An amusing incident occurred when one group of 35 (Lewes Company of the 1st Cinque Ports Rifle Volunteers) arrived at Newick and Chailey station, only to find that their train mistakenly continued on past the station towards Sheffield Park station, where the 'enemy' was due to be! A train came back to Newick and the soldiers disembarked and then double marched to catch up with the rest of the battalion. The two armies approached each other and engaged in mock battles with booming guns on Fletching Common, fighting in Rotherfield Wood, rifles blazing, cavalry charging, defending a bridge built temporarily over the river etc. In the evening when hundreds of spectators were present a march past was arranged in Sheffield Park with soldiers, guns, bands, artillery, horses, etc. - a wonderful spectacle, with a great ovation for the Earl.'* p.134-5

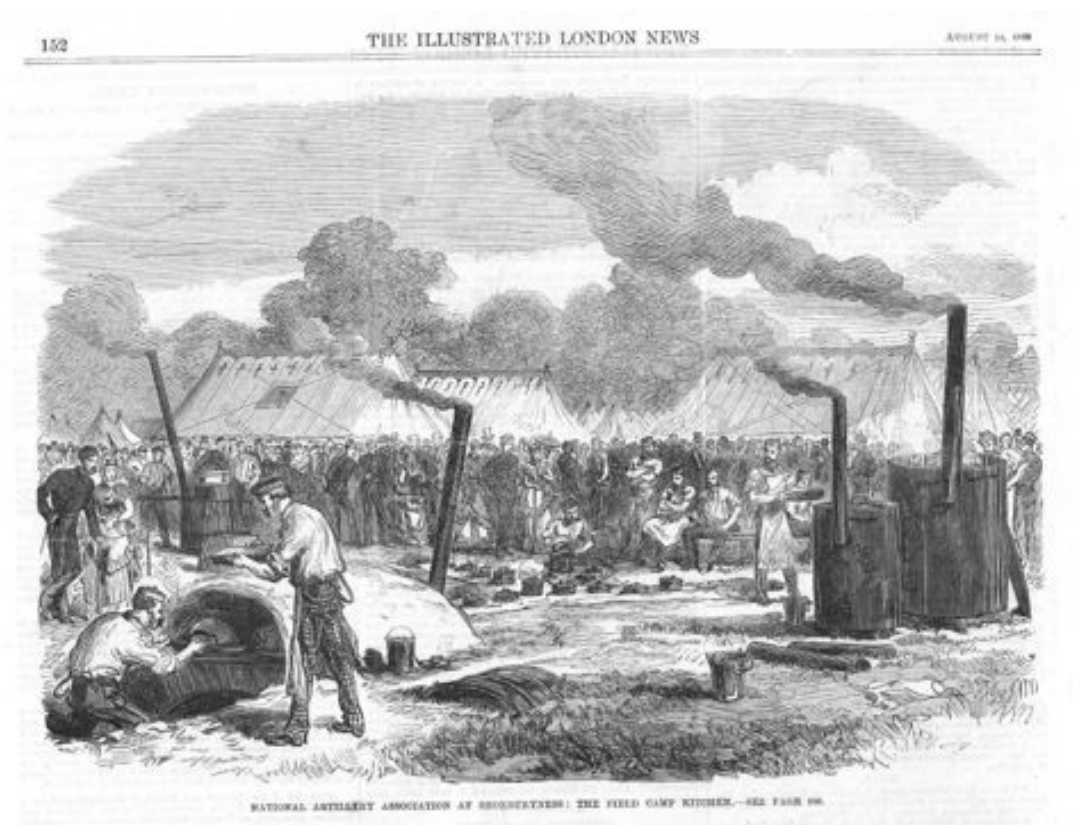
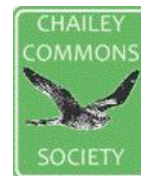


Illustration courtesy of Tony Turk – The Field Camp Kitchen, 1869

July 1895

*'Another review of volunteers was held at Sheffield Park with 2500 officers and men and a mock battle on Chailey commons. Four special trains brought some of the participants to Newick and Chailey station with their artillery, ammunition wagons and baggage. Others went to Sheffield Park station. The event finished with a march past, tea and cheers for Lord Sheffield.'* p.144

Turk T (1999) *A Victorian Diary of Newick, Sussex 1875-1899*, published by Turk T, 42 Church Lane, Mill End, Rickmansworth. Source Newick Parish records.



### **20th century World War I and World War II**

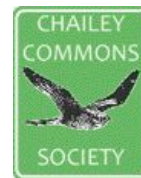
During both the First and Second World Wars Chailey Commons were used for military training purposes. Peter Longstaff-Tyrell identifies the extensive trench system on Romany Ridge as dating from WWI while Chris Butler recently identified evidence of WW2 training trenches on both Red House and Pound Common.



Detail of Aerial Photograph, north west corner of Romany Ridge 2007 showing WWI and WW2 Practice Trenches

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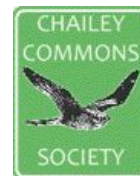


As part of our archaeological survey we have tried to record both physical and documentary evidence of similar military features on Memorial (St Mary's) Common.

An examination of air raid incident report cards (SPA 2/2/1) compiled by Sussex Police between August 1940 and June 1944, and held by the East Sussex Records Office (ESRO - now at The Keep, Brighton) reveals 14 air raid incidents in the parish of Chailey. At least two of the air raid incident report cards are relevant to our inquiries on Memorial Common:

Shortly before 1am on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> August 1940 PC Herbert Cornford reported that one high explosive bomb had fallen in the garden of the King's Head. Six properties were damaged and some GPO lines were brought down. A second high explosive bomb fell some 30 yards from north side of Haywards Heath Road and 200 yards west of Chailey crossroads. Four properties were damaged and the wall of the old rifle range was destroyed.

On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October 1940, PC Charles Stevens records a raid just after 10pm in which nine high explosive bombs and an incendiary bomb were dropped in a run from Roeheath to the North Common Stores with one high explosive falling near St Mary's Church just "north of the searchlight post".



Stanley Bentall, who served with the Searchlight Battalion on the Common also mentions the 26<sup>th</sup> August raid. His description suggests that the searchlight position was being targeted.

([http://www.anti-aircraft.co.uk/human\\_interest\\_SB.html](http://www.anti-aircraft.co.uk/human_interest_SB.html)).

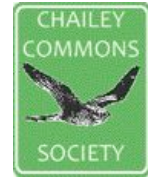
This documentary and eye-witness evidence confirms that there was a search light position to the south of St Mary's Church. Other documentary evidence held at ESRO also mentions the searchlight position.

Initial walkover surveys were carried out in the NE corner of Memorial Common, SE of the playing fields and to the W of the A275, in January and May 2008. A more detailed walkover survey was undertaken in June 2008 and some additional material was added following further examination of the area in January 2009. These surveys have identified a number of military earthworks dating from this period including trenches, accommodation site, cesspits and a variety of metal sheeting, stakes and barbed wire.

In August we walked over the sites with George Freeman, a local resident, who had served with the Royal Artillery during the war and was, at one point, stationed near the Commons. Mr Freeman identified one of the earthworks as a possible anti-aircraft gun emplacement site and another as the site of gunners tented accommodation within a large earthwork enclosure.

Extract from Ian Seccombe's report, 2008. Note: ESRO – records from the East Sussex Record Office are now archived at The Keep, Brighton.

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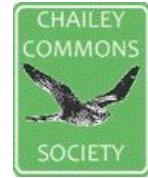


Memorial Common – 4 slit trenches, WW2



Memorial Common – drainage system, WW2

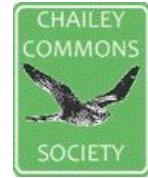




Memorial Common WWII, foundations of possible military hut



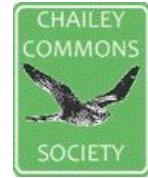




Romany Ridge WWI / WWII practice trenches, NW

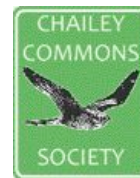






Romany Ridge WWI or WWII practice trenches, NW





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## Post World War II

Two aerial photos taken in 1946 and 1947 show a desolate landscape criss-crossed by tracks and devoid of trees. The Commons continued to be used for training by Cadets and the Territorial Army into the 1950s. There were other users associated with defence. Local resident Cyril G MacG Williams provides a print of the Royal Observer Corps Lookout Post Alpha 4 situated 200 m NE of Chailey Windmill near the Trig point at GR TQ 388215... *'known as an Elevated Orbit Post, WW2. It was originally the 2/A4 Newick Post and was re-sited near the Trig point when the Aircraft reporting network was overhauled in the 1950s. The wartime Post at Newick had disappeared or its site had become unavailable so this new site on Red House Common was chosen. The new post was constructed in August 1954. When the aircraft-reporting role was superseded by the nuclear role the underground monitoring Post was re-sited yet again. This was when the Cold War was at its height.'* The windmill can be seen in the background.



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Compiled by Linda Ball, Chailey Commons Society 2014

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