

MAPPING THE ROBIN HOOD RIFLES IN MID-NINETEENTH-

CENTURY NOTTINGHAM

DR. LUCIE SUTHERLAND

INTRODUCTION

When, in the spring of 1859, the spirit of alarm or resentment, caused by the addresses of the Colonels of the French Army to the late Napoleon, spreading rapidly through the country, resulted in the formation of a volunteer corps throughout England and Scotland, I, seeing nothing officially being done in that way in Nottingham, and having some knowledge of drill and military organisation, suggested to a few friends that we should form a rifle club, so that in the event of a corps being formed we might be in a sufficient state of efficiency to form a nucleus, and for this purpose I took down the names of those who coincided with this idea, and at once communicated with the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Lieutenant, on the subject.¹

Stationer J.G. Simpkins wrote this account of the foundation of Nottingham's Robin Hood Rifles in 1876, and in doing so he revealed the abstract concerns that encouraged the formation of a nationwide volunteer corps. He is unsure, after seventeen years, whether 'alarm or resentment' motivated the introduction of the Rifle Volunteer Movement as an adjunct to the regular army, and his own efforts with friends are representative of the fact that there was no systematic procedure endorsed by the military to ensure that corps were established throughout the United Kingdom. What is certain, is that his efforts resulted in an initial drill, on 28 May 1859, in the grounds of Nottingham Castle, and by August almost 400 male residents of the town were members of the Robin Hood Rifles. This article will examine the role of the Rifles in the public

life of Nottingham, in the years immediately after the Volunteer Movement was formed in 1859. My interest is in how we might trace the relationship between this group of citizen-soldiers and their various local audiences, as the Rifles moved through and occupied the public spaces of the town, and in what this relationship indicates about the role and influence of such a collective within the mid-nineteenth-century Nottingham environment.

The role of the Movement in the (then) town from the middle of the nineteenth century until the corps was absorbed into the Territorial Force, in 1908, was pronounced. As well as moving through Nottingham during training exercises and on more formal parades, watched by sizeable audiences, the Rifles also endorsed conventional civic events, for example through their attendance at church services and as patrons for gala evenings at the Theatre Royal.² A historian can attempt to assess the presence and influence of this collective by examining accounts such as the one written by Simpkins to commemorate his role in founding the Rifles, as well as diary entries representing the attitude of volunteers to their activities with the corps, and newspaper reports. We can also turn to pictorial records, early photographs and commemorative prints portraying this group of men in sites throughout Nottingham and further afield. However, rather than relying solely upon a reading of accumulated data to examine the presence and significance of the Rifles in a given location, I will argue here that there is a particular way of working with material implicitly or explicitly present in all of these sources, that can assist in the interrogation of how volunteer soldiers interacted with their audiences in Nottingham. It is possible to map the presence of the Rifles in the town, to reconstruct a spatial representation of the movement and activities of the Rifles and of those who witnessed their role in public events. This focus upon the spatial, an attempt to analyse presence, can help with an examination of the actions, motivations and influence of a collective such as the Robin Hood Rifles.³

THE EMERGENCE OF THE RIFLE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT

The Volunteer Movement of which the Robin Hood Rifles were a part, was founded, ostensibly, because of the threat of invasion by French naval forces. Since the Napoleonic conflicts that took place in the early part of the nineteenth century there had been, in the words of political historian J. P. Parry, 'latent psychological fear of French aggression' throughout the United Kingdom.⁴ Published propaganda from the 1803-1815 conflicts, in part an effort to encourage conscripts to join the regular army, insisted that Napoleon Bonaparte's invading forces would threaten private property, individual liberty and Protestant worship. By the late 1840s, public life in Britain was dominated by men raised in this climate of panic and paranoia, and renewed political turmoil in France encouraged fear of invasion. Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III), nephew to Bonaparte, was elected President of the French Republic in December 1848, and mounted a *coup d'état* in December 1851, implementing a new constitution restoring universal suffrage. This sparked a pronounced invasion panic throughout the United Kingdom early in the 1850s, but a graver crisis came at the end of the decade. In 1858-9 there was an attempted assassination of Louis Napoleon by Italian patriots who, prior to the attack, were living in England, and members of the French military advised action be taken against other alleged conspirators resident in the United Kingdom. This apparent threat of French military activity, coupled with completion of a large naval base at Cherbourg in 1858, exacerbated invasion fears. In February 1859 the Conservative government announced a small increase in spending on the military, which also seemed to support rumours of imminent invasion.

However, it is important to note a discrepancy between such latent anxiety and the actual threat from France. Although many people did recall the Napoleonic Wars, which informed their instinctive fear of invasion, practical priorities related to the expansion of Empire and trade

relationships made actual conflict less probable. For example, the likelihood of invasion was mediated during the mid-nineteenth century by the fact that the United Kingdom and France were allies in military campaigns of the period, such as the Spanish Civil War of the 1830s and the Crimean War. In February 1858, according to *Hansard*, Disraeli spoke of Anglo-French relations as ‘the key and cornerstone of modern civilization’.⁵ In addition to the military collaborations identified above, the incoming Liberal government of June 1859 drew up a Commercial Treaty with France designed to promote improved relations, further tempering any drive towards armed conflict by prioritising the interests of financiers and merchants.

Nevertheless, the drive to establish a volunteer force was sustained by an enduring if vastly exaggerated mistrust of the French, and then perpetuated by many sections of the national press, most particularly the *Times*. In his history of the Rifle Volunteer Movement, Ian Beckett notes that the newspaper had a policy of focusing upon perceived threats of invasion to sustain the paper duties that would be cut if peacetime rates of expenditure were introduced, and the overt support given by the paper to the formation of a volunteer corps is evident; most obviously in their publication of Tennyson’s poem ‘The War’, that first appeared in the paper on 9 May 1859.⁶ In addition, that section of the population who had felt most threatened by radical political and social reformers active in the United Kingdom during the 1830 and 1840s, were surely concerned at Napoleon III introducing universal suffrage in 1851, and saw in the implementation of a nationwide Volunteer Force a means by which adult males in the United Kingdom could be made to focus upon foreign affairs and national defence, rather than internal discord over which citizens had the vote. The way in which alleged European despotism and previous campaigns for electoral reform are conjoined in Tennyson’s work - ‘Let your reforms for a moment go!/Look to

your butts, and take good aims!’ - suggests that domestic social cohesion was as pervasive a concern as any potential threat from Europe.

The *Times* thus called for a force that would make use of ‘of all classes and conditions of its people [...] We must popularize the army and martialise the population. The gulf must be narrowed between the soldier and the citizen.’⁷ Tellingly, after the establishment of the Volunteer Force, the *Volunteer Service Gazette* of 15 September 1860 carried an article by William Mathews, a Captain in Somerset, who wrote about the timely domestic value of a volunteer movement doubting ‘[i]f the political demagogue, the Chartist, the dissenter will not be shorn of his pernicious authority through the agency of a really sensible development of the good which exists in this upmoving of patriotic sympathy.’⁸ That the Volunteer Force was founded, at least in part, to undermine internal political discord is an important factor when considering the kinds of control groups of citizen-soldiers such as the Robin Hood Rifles exercised over their local communities.

However, senior military personnel who believed the disparity in training between professional soldiers and volunteers would be too great in time of conflict did not support the movement; government reluctance to finance volunteer soldiers is also apparent. General Peel, the Secretary of State for War who formalised government authorisation for the Volunteer Movement, is quoted in *Hansard* as admitting that the Movement ‘did not arise from any fear of invasion on their [the Government’s] part, but solely in consequence of the numerous and urgent applications which were being made to them for permission to form rifle corps, on the express understanding that they were to be of no expense to the country.’⁹ Repeated applications from particular communities to form a corps of riflemen throughout the 1850s resulted in a government circular of 12 May 1859, permitting Lords Lieutenant to raise a corps under the

Yeomanry and Volunteer Consolidation Act of 1804. Reliance upon existing legislation and the lack of initial financial support from Westminster re-inforces the impression that impetus for formation of the first corps came from small groups of men in local communities and indeed Beckett, in his exhaustive study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement, cites multiple examples of this.¹⁰ During the summer of 1859 individuals like Simpkins who had hoped for a formalised volunteer corps took advantage of the circular, and although in June the incoming Liberal government provided some financial support for volunteer corps, signaling the origins of centralised administration for a nationwide adjunct to the regular army, the beginning to a Nottingham corps emphasises that local citizens were key to the existence of the Robin Hood Rifles.

THE ROBIN HOOD RIFLES IN NOTTINGHAM

The foundation of a corps was the responsibility of local, private citizens, with Simpkins compiling a list of men willing to volunteer in the early months of 1859. This list was housed in his stationers shop, and provided physical evidence of local commitment that was presented to the Duke of Newcastle, who as Lord Lieutenant was required to authorise the establishment of a volunteer corps. Simpkins' role as a tradesman in the town was integral to the formation of the Rifles, providing both the financial resources to fund his participation and a network of associates who could support the project. Like Freemasonry or membership of the Oddfellows, volunteering made male citizens members of a particular fraternal network, although initially the amateur riflemen had no formal regulations to dictate their activities, as this extract from Simpkins' recollections makes clear:

Saturday evening, Mr. Mundella, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Evans, Mr. Perry, Mr. G.T. Hine and myself, accompanied by Mr. White, went [...] to the Castle Grounds, and whilst there, at

the suggestion of Mr. Mundella, we “fell in” as a squad on the terrace overlooking the meadows and received our first drill.¹¹

The casual nature of this meeting, with this group choosing to perform as soldiers might - Mundella suggesting they fall in - is only made to seem a serious effort to establish the Nottingham corps because of the presence of White, a former professional soldier, formerly Sergeant Major in the 2nd Queen’s Royals. However by August, there were six companies making up the Robin Hood Rifles, and almost 400 volunteers. The rapid increase in numbers indicates the appeal of volunteering to a large number of male citizens, but the fiscal demands of this pastime excluded particular social and economic groups. A column in the *Illustrated London News* of January 1860, detailing the sums necessary for purchasing uniforms and weapons, emphasises that although the corps was still expanding rapidly, men would need a certain level of disposable income to join:

The Nottingham Battalion, or Robin Hood Rifles, is decidedly one of the crack corps. It consists of eight companies, all stationed at Nottingham. The Uniform is Lincoln Green, with a black braid and facings: the mountings are of bronze. The arms used by all the companies are the short Enfield, the Lancaster, and the five grooved naval rifle. The entrance fee and subscriptions vary in each company. The yearly subscription in the 1st is £1 1s per year, with an entrance fee of £2 12s 6d. In the 2nd no entrance fee, and an annual subscription of £1 1s. In the third, and all the others, nearly the same. The Rifle Range is Mapperley Plains, and the drill ground for the 1st and 2nd Companies, the Castle. The 3rd Company drills in the Park in the summer and at the Police Station in the winter. The collective strength of the battalion is about six hundred.¹²

It is useful to compare the subscription fee to that required by the Nottingham Mechanics' Institute, of one shilling per quarter. Additional fees were charged for attending courses and entertainments, but lectures and the resources of the library were available to all members free of charge. George Birkbeck's concept of venues where adult males could enhance their education and pursue improving recreational activities was adhered to, and a low quarterly membership rate was integral to the project. The fees for membership requested by the volunteers corps were far greater and although, nationwide, there was some variation in the amount charged - in Huddersfield volunteers were charged over four pounds during the latter half of 1859, and in some London companies the cost of joining exceeded ten pounds - the need to purchase uniforms and equipment barred potential volunteers who could not pay, with the national average calculated at eighteen shillings per volunteer.¹³ This would exclude, to cite an obvious example, the many factory workers who had gained employment in the textile industry in Nottingham during the 1850s, a decade when the population of the town grew by almost one third.

Initially therefore, the Volunteer Force was envisaged as a middle class fraternal organisation, but individual corps almost immediately became more inclusive. In an early history of the Volunteer Force, a member of the Surrey Rifles notes:

At first, in consequence of the cost of uniforms and accoutrements, heavy entrance fees and subscriptions, only those who had means at their command could enrol themselves as Citizen Soldiers, and it soon became evident that, if the force was to increase and become a permanent one, it would have to be encouraged and supported by the public, and access to its ranks brought within the reach of all classes of society. Accordingly, public subscriptions were opened in most of the cities and towns in England, Scotland and Wales, and those who felt disposed subscribed liberally towards raising and supporting

local corps. By this means the committee of any corps were enabled to assist those who were inclined to join, by providing them with uniforms, to be paid for by instalments in accordance with a fixed scale, but it was not till 1863 that the Government recognized the necessity of introducing and passing a measure, which placed the Force upon a more certain and permanent footing, and strengthened it more materially by authorising an annual grant to every regiment.¹⁴

This account notes that prior to the Volunteer Act of 1863, when a twenty shilling grant was available to all volunteers, men who could not afford to pay the set fee could be supported by public subscription. However, in Nottingham there is evidence of public subscriptions for additional equipment, rather than additional volunteers. When the Robin Hood Rifles Band was established in December 1859, a direct request for funds was made to the town via local newspapers:

As the formation of a good infantry band will be a great acquisition to the town, it is confidently hoped that the necessary funds (about £160) will be at once obtained. Donations may be forwarded to the Nottingham Banks on account of the Band Fund, or to Dr. Robertson, Wheeler Gate, Honorary Secretary to the Band Committee.¹⁵

During the first four years, therefore, the Robin Hood Rifles was a collective dominated by business owners and those employed in the recognised professions.

The exclusive nature of the volunteer movement during the first four years that it was in existence is an important consideration when analysing their influence within a specific community. Once more, Simpkins' account is useful, as his acknowledgement that the Rifles were originally made up of 'a few friends' evokes an informal pastime rather than a quasi-

military organisation.¹⁶ Certainly, once established, the Volunteer Movement was a recreational pursuit as well as a program of formal training.

NATIONAL DEFENCE OF RATIONAL RECREATION?

The concern during the mid-nineteenth century with acceptable recreational activities is a subject that has been considered elsewhere. For example Peter Bailey notes, 'leisure constituted a problem whose solution required the building of a new social conformity – a play discipline to complement the work discipline that was the principal means of social control in an industrial capitalist society.'¹⁷ The volunteer movement had obvious health benefits but it did not, strictly speaking, conform to the concept of 'rational recreation', nor was it reacting against leisure pursuits perceived to be harmful, most particularly those connected with licensed premises. However, it did offer the opportunity for male citizens to partake in a form of disciplined playing, the sport of rifle shooting, which became popular at precisely the time when the Volunteer Force was formed. The design for a magazine-fed infantry rifle had been in development and had been used, in armed conflict, by British armed forces throughout the 1850s. This was the type of weapon given to each volunteer, the *Times* continuing its effusive support of the Force by suggesting that '[w]hat the bow was once, the rifle should become now, a national weapon, natural to our eyes and familiar to our hand'.¹⁸

This comparison of the rifle with the bow is particularly salient when considering the Robin Hood Rifles, for in Nottingham, the riflemen were almost immediately compared with that town's most celebrated combatant. In September 1859, three months after the Rifles were established, the local gallery Shaw and Sons placed an advertisement in the *Nottingham Journal*, informing residents that 'Robin Hood and his Merrie Men', a watercolour by E.G. Warren, Esq., was on display in their showroom:

This latter picture, we should think, will be a great favourite with the members of the new regiment of the “Robin Hood Rifles.” It is to be hoped the men in this corps will rival the renowned Robin and his merrie men in the unerring correctness of their aim, though with a different weapon. They may be excused, however, from being so free-and-easy as their great predecessor, though we hope they will always be ready to defend the right. Each of the riflemen should subscribe for a chromo-lithographic facsimile of “Robin Hood and his Merrie Men.”¹⁹

Shaw and Sons’ desire to profit from the prominence of the Rifles in Nottingham just months after their formation aside, the appeal here for riflemen to both hone their skills and prove their patriotism speaks to a convergence of a popular recreational pursuit and national defence.

Further examples of this convergence were large-scale events, where the distinctly local corps came together to advertise the sustained presence of the Volunteer Movement throughout the United Kingdom. Selected volunteers attended rifle contests organised by the National Rifle Association, military reviews, and also Sham Fights, which, according to one volunteer, Captain W.G. Hummel, gave volunteers ‘some idea what real campaigning was like’.²⁰ It seems unlikely that these events did parallel the experiences of the regular army, that a Sham Fight on the Brighton Downs could parallel combat in the Crimea. However, these gatherings seemed to foster a type of patriotic unity, while recreational pursuits including shooting were pursued. These events also provided some opportunity for travel, as attendance was funded by each corps rather than each volunteer.

A blend of personal recreational entertainment with a collective display of national power is apparent in these meetings, but as well as the particular appeal of such public events for the volunteers, it is evident that large audiences were attracted to the activities of these citizen

soldiers. One example, of a Review in Hyde Park on 23 June 1860, provides evidence of this. 'Timon' was a Nottingham rifleman who attended the Review and wrote an account six years later. This subjective recollection suggests that enthusiasm for the voluntary movement was sustained by the collective occasion:

[...] the guns sound again, to inform us that the review [...] was over; and then by a union of feeling, which sometimes, but not often, moves large numbers, a tremendous shout rose from the Volunteers, and was re-echoed back from the masses of spectators. Cheer after cheer rung through the park, the scene of the first Volunteer Review, since Volunteers had become an Institution; hats were thrown aloft and upheld on bayonets, regardless of the injury to our head-gear in the exuberance of our feelings, and it is said that as responsive shouts came from the distance, all testifying to the loyalty of civilians and civilian-soldiers, that our Queen was not unmoved [...]²¹

Timon's impressionistic account cannot be verified in every detail, but if it is compared to a column in the *Nottingham Journal*, which appeared just days after the Review, some common points seem significant:

The surface of Hyde Park is, in fact, an elevated plateau, sinking at the extremities into low wood and water. The spectators being arranged along one side of the plateau and the troops on the other, the latter showed only their front rank, the rest of the mass receding down the slope. Accordingly, the great force in the field was only perceptible when, as it were, it melted into motion, and flowed round the field past the spectators and the royal stand.²²

What unites these descriptions, both coloured by an obvious desire to promote the efficacy of the Volunteer Force, is the insistence on an almost incomprehensible mass of participants and

spectators. 'Timon' focuses on evocative sounds that communicated a successful conclusion to the Review, and the *Journal* columnist notes general movement, rather than particular manoeuvres, to evoke the numbers present. Although there are no specific figures for the event, by 1 October 1860 enrolled volunteers numbered 119,146, so this was certain to be a large gathering of citizens. The annual event became a vast performance of national pride and national unity: both accounts conclude by insisting that the Review united participants, spectators and the monarch, who were all here engaged with the volunteer force as a recreational pursuit.²³

PLACES OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE ROBIN HOOD RIFLES

The collective experience at Hyde Park was an exercise in nationalism, a large scale version of the advertisement of ideal social order that could be found in the public appearances by volunteers in their local communities. It is at this point that the concept of space, of the ways in which these volunteers were present and interacted with their audience, becomes significant. Focusing upon the activities of the Rifles in Nottingham, the rest of this article will explore that subject.

Supervised by the Duke of Newcastle, as Lord Lieutenant, and based in premises on his land in the grounds of Nottingham Castle, the Rifles became integral to the civic life of Nottingham from May 1859 onwards. The use of the Castle is significant; the building itself was derelict, burnt out during protests against the previous Duke's opposition to the 1832 Reform Bill. The use made of the area by a group of citizen soldiers recalls the argument of William Mathews, cited above, that political dissent might be overcome by the presence of the volunteers. Built on a hill overlooking the town, the castle remained a strategic and a focal point, characteristics that could be co-opted by any individual or group associated with the site. This had been the case when supporters of electoral reform set fire to the property in 1831, and was so

when the first two Rifle companies developed land to the east of the building as their parade ground, a space where orthodox patriotic behaviour could be enacted and also witnessed by citizens of Nottingham. For as has been established, although the Volunteer Force was an advertisement of the nation's defensive capabilities, its activities were witnessed, primarily, by a domestic rather than an overseas audience. Public events featuring the Rifles were influenced by aspects of military behavior, including choreographed movement and formal dress, that carried connotations of control and order. Anthropologist Don Handelman notes the relationship between many forms of public event and social order:

Public events are locations of communication that convey participants into versions of social order in relatively coherent ways. As the flow of living so often is not, public events are put together to communicate comparatively well-honed messages. If the flow of mundane living may be quite uncertain in terms of direction and outcome, the converse is true of public events. In the extreme case, they are operators of, and on, social order.²⁴

This idea of a consciously structured event conveying a favoured version of social order seems applicable to the activities of the volunteers in their local communities, and in Nottingham the presence of a military collective would not have been novel for spectators. Certainly, at the time when a volunteer force was formed, the presence of the professional military in Nottingham was advertised and used to encourage spectators to attend a wide range of events. For example, when a company of the Royal Artillery was stationed in Nottingham during April 1858, they not only conducted manoeuvres at sites throughout the town, but also acted as patrons for particular programmes at the Theatre Royal. Reporting on a benefit night, the 9 April 1858, the *Nottingham Journal* notes:

Mr. C Goodall's benefit last Friday evening was well attended, and the performances passed off satisfactorily. The patronage of Captain Leslie and his other officers of the Royal Artillery, now stationed in Nottingham, was obtained for the occasion, and they, with many of the men of that corps, including some who arrived in the town on Friday en route for Woolwich, were present.²⁵

As well as moving through the town of Nottingham during training exercises and formal parades, watched by sizeable audiences, the Rifles replicated the behaviour of the professional military who visited the town, for example acting as patrons for gala evenings at the theatre and conducting 'church parades', which involved marching in uniform to attend religious services. For example, on 11 November 1859, a musical entertainment at the Mechanics' Institute, Miss Clara Seyton's *The Omnibus*, was advertised as 'Under the Patronage of the Nottingham Robin Hood Rifles'.²⁶ The patronage of civic leaders and local gentry was often sought by productions at the Theatre Royal and the Mechanics'; that the production would seek the patronage of the Rifles indicates the status of the corps in the town. This collective performed a version of national unity in the streets and performance venues of Nottingham, and it is apparent that the behaviour of these men as volunteers aimed to influence the conduct of spectators.

MAPPING THE ROBIN HOOD RIFLES

The Robin Hood Rifles worked to advertise a form of national unity, whether as performers in drills and parades or while ostensibly acting as spectators to theatrical and civic performances. In doing so, they played an integral role in the social and performance culture of the town, their behaviour as volunteers influencing, in turn, the behaviour of both spectators and society as the Rifles moved through and occupied key sites in Nottingham. However, this influence on behaviour was not consistent. Personal accounts portray a particular kind of tension

that was prompted by the presence of the Rifles on the streets of Nottingham, between enforced order and potential dissent. To return, once more, to Simpkins, and to his account of the first formal inspection by the Duke of Newcastle, on 20 August 1859, the stationer notes the relative inexperience of volunteers, and the consequent reactions of young spectators:

The company gathered in the Market Place on the morning of 20th August and, headed by a hastily assembled band, marched briskly away 'en route' for Patchitt's park and the first taste of military glory. Unfortunately the ensuing spectacle failed to reach the dizzy heights predicted for it; the band were far from inspiring, the men were without uniforms or rifles, and the parade was dogged by a relentless mob of scruffy urchins, who kept up a constant barrage of derisive remarks until the last of the gallant 400 disappeared through the gates of the big house. A repeat performance was inflicted upon the self-conscious marchers during their progress back to town.²⁷

This memoir is in contrast to the precise description of manoeuvres in the press; the *Nottingham Journal* described this event as a 'military display' where 'the spectator may well fancy somewhat of the realities of actual warfare, as the mimic bands of gallant volunteers take up their assigned positions, turn themselves into tiny squares, or advance in skirmishing order', recalling Handelman's description of public events portraying versions of social order in 'relatively coherent' ways.²⁸ It is apparent that in practice, interaction with the audience compromised the authority of the volunteers as a collective, and indeed, even when the Rifles became more skilled, the influence of spectators upon the conduct of the volunteers remained significant. Samuel Collinson joined the Rifles on 21 June 1859, and as Secretary to the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce he typified the earliest entrants to the Volunteer Force. Collinson's diary provides information on the interaction between volunteers and spectators:

Thursday May 24th 1860

Queen's Birthday. Evening the Robin Hood Rifles assembled at the Castle, 500 strong. From there they marched to the Park, headed by the Colonel. Grand Parade. Fired a 'feu de joie', formed square for Cavalry, free firing from right faces, volley from kneeling ranks. Reform column, deploy into line, fire a volley, charge in line [...] Oh! the excitement of the soldiers, and the rushing about amongst the crowd, such squeezing and tumbling about head over heels among the 'gamins'. The charge was too rapid and the word halt could not be heard, the line charged right up to the crowd, it was very dangerous. It is calculated that at least 20,000 spectators were on the ground and the whole affair was very well got through. The Battalion afterwards marched to the Market Place and was dismissed.²⁹

As in Simpkins' account, the contrast between well-choreographed manoeuvres and physical contact with the crowd emphasises that this was a group of men enacting social order within their own communities, a company of soldiers made up of friends, neighbours, husbands, brothers; local citizen-soldiers who were known to many spectators. Such familiarity between the volunteers and their audience, a particular and intimate performer-spectator relationship, was one reason why the Rifles became integral to civic life in Nottingham, but rather than imposing absolute authority upon crowds or confronting serious opposition when on manoeuvres, these accounts both suggest that the volunteers were challenged to maintain discipline and to demonstrate martial skill as a local volunteer force, encountering a local audience.

Mapping the information provided by Simpkins or Collinson, and displaying the presence of both volunteers and spectators in a certain space at a particular time, allows for further analysis of how the volunteers moved through Nottingham, and of their relationship to

spectators, enabling a more thoroughgoing reading of this tension between integration - as brothers, husbands, sons and townspeople - and separation as a uniformed and trained militia engaged in displays of authority within the town. To take the example from Collinson:

Figure 1 here: Movement of the Robin Hood Rifles through the town of Nottingham during Queen's birthday celebration, 24 May 1860. [All images are sections from a map of Nottingham drawn up by Edward Salmon in 1861, reproduced by permission of Nottingham City Libraries Local Studies Library]

When the route of the march is charted on a map of the town, it is apparent that the volunteers had room for a large scale parade in the Castle grounds and the Park area. Although Collinson's estimate of 20,000 spectators can not be confirmed, it is clear that this was one section of the town with space for large gatherings, but the march by 500 volunteers in to the Market Place highlights the fact that the Rifles also moved through the smaller streets of the town, and needed to negotiate both the restricted areas and the individuals sharing these spaces. Mapping events like this enables the researcher to chart the presence of the Robin Hood Rifles and the challenges to the discipline and authority this collective sought to convey, as presented by the physical layout of the town, and by the actions of spectators.

Mapping the activity and presence of the Rifles at events within the town also highlights their sustained engagement with the civic culture of Nottingham, showing how they became integral to that culture during the mid-nineteenth century. Frequent reports in local newspapers show that the Rifles managed to retain a distinctive presence in the community, for example by initiating fundraising events for charitable causes. On 17 February 1865, the No. 1 Company gave a public reading in the town's Exchange Hall, on behalf of a public soup kitchen, with entrance charged at 1s. or 6d. Throughout the evening, individual volunteers undertook piano

recitals and readings, including two extracts from Dickens and a reading of Tennyson's 'Ode to the Death of the Duke of Wellington' by Rifles founder J.G. Simpkins. While raising money for a Nottingham charity, he could not resist the temptation to remind his audience of the Napoleonic Wars, and by association a subsequent threat of invasion that justified the presence of volunteer riflemen in the town. This is one more example of how volunteers were involved in multiple aspects of civic life in addition to public drills and manoeuvres, another prime example being their role in the opening ceremony for the Nottingham and Midland Counties Working Classes Industrial Exhibition in September 1865.³⁰

This Exhibition was intrinsically linked to the evolving civic identity of Nottingham during the period, including the growing range of leisure activities that were characteristic of the town. By the mid-1860s two new sites of performance had appeared in the town, characterised by their position to the north of the Market Place, an area which was undergoing significant regeneration. During September 1865 these new sites were opened: a newly constructed hall housing the Industrial Exhibition on Shakespeare Street, and a new Theatre Royal at the top of Market Street, where the Rifles acted as patrons for specific performances, such as a Grand Fashionable Night on 1 November 1865, when a programme of comedies was staged.³¹ These buildings were in close proximity to the Mechanics' Institute, where the Rifles were frequently involved in entertainments to raise money for charitable causes, such as a 'Grand Military Concert' in April 1865 by the Robin Hood Rifles Band. It is possible to analyse the presence and influence of the volunteers in the town by 1865 through working with such precise examples:

Figure 2 here: Selection of locations for public events involving the Robin Hood Rifles in the town of Nottingham, 1865. 1 - Nottingham and Midland Counties Working Classes

Industrial Exhibition building, 2 - New Theatre Royal, 3 – Mechanics’ Institute, 4 – Exchange Hall within the Market Place.

Charting these few activities, it becomes apparent that, rather than being restricted to the Castle and Park areas, the Rifles were present at sites throughout the town, and at key events - civic, charitable, and theatrical - which were integral to the ongoing public life of Nottingham during the 1860s. As with the earlier map, it becomes clear that the volunteers would be present not only in the venues but on the streets, a regular focus for spectators and a frequent characteristic of public events in the town. Some opposition to their presence can be charted in personal accounts, yet this kind of analysis of their presence at prominent sites over time further establishes their role as the characteristic representation of social order in this mid-nineteenth-century urban environment. Although the actual order imposed was compromised by their proximity to a dynamic audience within Nottingham, the mapping of the Rifles can assist in determining the extent of their presence, and of the role they performed, within the life of the town.

CONCLUSION

On 3 October 1861, during the annual Goose Fair, there was an inspection of the Robin Hood Rifles:

The site chosen for the review was the cricket-ground on the Forest [...] The number of all ranks on the round was nearly 700, and about half-past two they slowly wheeled out of the Castle lodge, the band marching ahead [...] The line of route was up the Hollows, Pastern-street, Wellington-circus, North Circus-street, Vernon-street, Clarendon-street, and Waverley-street. Their progress was somewhat impeded by the immense mass of

spectators that accompanied them on their march. The volunteers arrived at the place of review a few minutes after three.³²

Reading this account from a local newspaper, it is possible to conjecture that such an extravagant event, requiring the Rifles to move through many areas in the town of Nottingham, was arranged for this week so that visitors to Goose Fair could witness the proficiency of the volunteers; special trains from surrounding counties brought a tourist audience that increased the number of potential spectators. However, the amateur soldiers had no overt relationship with the main attractions of Goose Fair, which took place annually in the Market Place, unlike for example Manders' Menagerie and also Edwards' Panorama, in the Exchange Hall on the Eastern side of the site. Yet when we map the movements of the Rifles in relation to the Fair, we can begin to precisely examine the relationship between two distinct events, and the audiences that were present for them:

Figure 3 here: Route taken by the Robin Hood Rifles for inspection on 3 October 1861.

In combining evidence relating to these two public events, Goose Fair and the Rifles inspection, and representing the sites for these events on a map, the issue of proximity is highlighted. It becomes apparent that the large audience for Fair events shared the centre of Nottingham with the volunteer soldiers, and the process of charting not just these events, but also their audiences, is initiated. The choice of route offered the Rifles a chance to display their skills and presence to a larger audience than was usual, but also perhaps provided the civic authorities with a display of military presence which was welcome in the context of an influx of strangers and fair-goers to the town.

Focus here upon the activities of the Rifles in and beyond Nottingham over the first years of their existence is not meant, primarily, as an extension to existing work on the nineteenth

century Rifle Volunteer Movement. Rather, I have dealt with the first years of the Robin Hood Rifles to establish how an investigation of event and context might be aided and enriched by the literal mapping of the surviving evidence of their presence within Nottingham. As researchers, the particular moment of an event, such as a parade by the Robin Hood Rifles, must be investigated in relationship to its wider context, the factors that create an environment where the event will occur. In this case such factors include Britain's altering relationship with France, a desire to promote internal accord in the aftermath of protests over electoral reform, the increasing popularity of rifle shooting, the desire of independent businessmen like Simpkins to form a civilian adjunct to the regular army, and increased diversity in nineteenth-century leisure pursuits. By considering both event and context via a resource, a map, that emphasises the physical presence of all event participants in a particular space at a given time, it becomes possible to begin to examine the relationship between social performers - here the volunteers - and their audiences, and to chart that interaction alongside broader contextual issues relating to the developing civic identity of Nottingham. Moving beyond abstract consideration of how control was exercised by these volunteer soldiers, or any simple acceptance of the few personal accounts of volunteers and the reception they received from spectators, it is an approach that allows for consideration of a particular environment shared by the Robin Hood Rifles and witnesses to their activity at a particular historical moment.

[6828 words; 7248 with endnotes]

Endnotes:

¹ Account reproduced in R. Iliffe and W. Bagueley, *Victorian Nottingham: Volume 15* (1975), 5.

² Both the original building at St. Mary's Gate and then the 'new' Theatre Royal at the top of Market Street, opened in September 1865.

³ Initial research for this article was undertaken as part of an AHRC-funded project, 'Mapping Performance Culture: Nottingham 1857-1867', running from 2006-2009 at the University of Nottingham (www.nottingham.ac.uk/mapmoment). Led by Dr. Jo Robinson in collaboration with Dr. Gary Priestnall (School of Geography), and in partnership with the Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire County Archives, Nottingham City Local Studies Library, Brewhouse Yard Museum Nottingham and the East Midlands Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, this project investigated performance and entertainment in Nottingham through development of an intuitive interactive map and research database which layered social, cultural and economic data onto a spatial representation of the town.

⁴ J. P. Parry, 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Ser., 11 (2001), 147-175, 149.

⁵ Quoted in Parry, 149.

⁶ I. Beckett, *Riflemen Form: A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement 1859-1908* (1982), 15.

⁷ *Times* (23 Sep. 1857).

⁸ Quoted in H. Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force, a social and political history, 1859-1908* (1975), 28.

⁹ Quoted in Cunningham, 13.

¹⁰ It is not the purpose of this article to consider the social demographic of the movement, but close analysis of archive material can be found in Beckett, 39-89.

¹¹ Iliffe and Bagueley, 5.

¹² *Illustrated London News* (January 1860).

¹³ Beckett, 55.

¹⁴ D. Capern, *A Short History of the Principal Events in Connexion with the Volunteer Force, From its Origin in 1859 to the Present Time* (1871), 2.

¹⁵ *Nottingham Journal* (30 December 1859).

¹⁶ Iliffe and Bagueley, 5.

¹⁷ P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (1978), 5.

¹⁸ *Times* (29 June 1860).

¹⁹ *Nottingham Journal* (2 September 1859).

²⁰ H. W. Hummel, *The Discipline of the Volunteer Force* (1877), 9.

²¹ Quoted in Iliffe and Bagueley, 20.

²² *Nottingham Journal* (29 June 1860).

²³ Statistic taken from Cunningham, 47.

²⁴ D. Handelman, *Models and mirrors: towards an anthropology of public events* (1990), 15.

²⁵ *Nottingham Journal* (9 April 1858).

²⁶ *Nottingham Journal* (11 November 1859).

²⁷ Iliffe and Bagueley, 6.

²⁸ *Nottingham Journal* (26 August 1859); Handelman, 15.

²⁹ Samuel Collinson Diary, Volume 2, 1858-1870, Nottinghamshire Archives, M383.30

³⁰ Coverage of these events were printed in two local newspapers: the *Nottingham Journal* and the *Nottingham and Midland Counties Daily Express*.

³¹ *Don Cæsar de Bazan*, *An Object of Interest*, and *Steeple Chase* were performed by the Theatre Royal company.

³² *Nottingham Journal* (4 October 1861).