

The Sunderland Barracks!

A historic fortification in Hendon



Barrack Street, Sunderland

By kind permission of Port of Sunderland

Sunderland Male Voice Choir evolved from the former Shiney Row Male Voice Choir in July 2022.

The Choir has recorded and performed some great material over the years. Recently, it has embarked on a programme of creating new musical material. Some of this material incorporates new arrangements of traditional numbers.

An exciting new initiative is the creation of brand-new songs based upon the region's rich local heritage and its people.

The Choir has been working with Sunderland City Council and members of the community to expand their outreach in Hendon, Sunderland.

One of the oldest parts of the City of Sunderland is steeped in a rich heritage which is being captured by the Choir in song.

This information sheet looks at the former Sunderland Barracks in Hendon.

The Hendon Music Project

Sunderland Male Voice Choir is creating a series about the rich heritage of the Hendon Ward of the City of Sunderland and its people.

The Early History of the Sunderland Fortifications

The site of the former battery and barracks are still recognised in Hendon by Barrack Street.

Defensive guns were originally installed in the 1740's during the War of Jenkins' Ear, before barracks were added in 1795. They were located right on the shoreline at the mouth of the River Wear until the building of the first Hendon Docks in the 1850's. Being so close to the shore, they were subject to erosion and there was a need to relocate.

The Sunderland Barracks

In early 1794, the Corporation of Sunderland petitioned for the Barracks to be built in the town to protect the colliery trade from French attack. Several infantry regiments were already billeted in local pubs and houses. In April, following industrial unrest, the Duke of York ordered the Barracks to be built for 1,000 men.

The Barracks, which were built of timber, were designed by Thomas Neill and were ready for occupation by July.

The new fortifications provided accommodation for 1,528 infantry troops, who were housed in 19 large barrack rooms each sleeping 36 men in double berths. There were 20 sergeants' rooms, each with bunks for 4 men.

In 1803, an 80-bed hospital was added. Between 1826 and 1828, the soldiers' quarters were rebuilt in brick.

The 18th-century church of St. John, which was located next to the Barracks' gate, acted as the garrison church between 1823 and 1919.

Sunderland Male Voice Choir

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The Site of the former Sunderland Barracks

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The Regiments based in Sunderland

In 1873, a system of recruitment was introduced based upon county boundaries under the Cardwell Reforms.

The Sunderland Barracks became the base for the 68th (Durham) Regiment of Foot and the 106th Regiment of Foot (Bombay Light Infantry).

After the Childers Reforms and the formation of the Durham Light Infantry from an amalgamation of the 68th and 106th Regiments of Foot in 1881, the Durham Light Infantry moved out of the Sunderland Barracks.

The Light Infantry established a new base at Fenham Barracks in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1884.

The Sunderland Barracks were mainly used as a base for Royal Artillery units until the early 20th-century.

Cholera and Sunderland

The Port of Sunderland is famous, for the wrong reasons, as it was from a ship berthed from the Baltic that resulted in the spread of cholera during the 19th century.

In November 1831, James Butler Kell, the army doctor with the 82nd Regiment stationed at the Barracks, placed the soldiers under strict quarantine. Not one fell ill.

Remembering our past heritage through music!

The End of a Historic Era

By the turn of the century, many barracks built in the late 18th century were in poor condition.

In May 1909, the War Office started to consider the disposal of the Sunderland Barracks and land.

The Sunderland Barracks was decommissioned shortly afterwards. They were demolished in the early 1930's to make way for Corporation Quay.

The Sunderland Barracks Reel

A reel was written about 'The Sunderland Barracks'. It appeared in the John Rook music manuscript (Cumbria, 1840). The melody was set in the key of 'D'.

The reel was published in the 'Northumbrian Pipers Pocket Green Book', 1993.

The Male Voice Choir Song

It is hoped that the new song created by Sunderland Male Voice Choir will provide a musical legacy about an important regional fortification in the original heartland of Sunderland – Hendon at the mouth of the River Wear.



Insurance Plan of Sunderland

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Sunderland Male Voice Choir Information Sheets

Sunderland Male Voice Choir is producing a range of information sheets on its new music creation and project work. These sheets will be published within the 'Project' page of the Choir website.