

# MILITARY

Trace Winchester's military past from  
the Iron Age to the Nuclear Age

Winchester has a rich and varied military history. From Iron Age forts, to Civil War sites, through two World Wars to the completion of a Nuclear bunker sited at Twyford - the district's military stories span centuries of history.

If you are interested in finding out more about the military history of Winchester, ancient and modern, then follow these two informative trails – one based in the city and one taking you further afield.



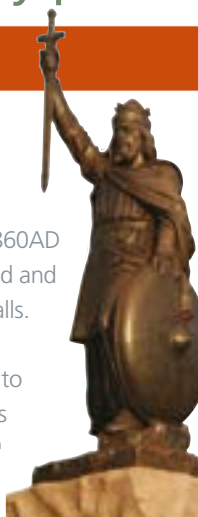
VISIT  
WINCHESTER

[visitwinchester.co.uk](http://visitwinchester.co.uk)

# City centre guide to Winchester's military past

## Winchester

One of King Alfred's defensive 'burhs', Winchester was established as refuge and strong point to resist the Danish invaders. A raiding army had destroyed the settlement in 860AD but the old Roman town walls were refurbished and a new street system was laid out inside the walls. These intramural streets (such as North Walls) were laid with the intention of rushing troops to threatened parts of the walls. The town's walls were largely dismantled by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



1

### Winchester's Roman walls



Venta Belgarum was founded around AD70 with earth and timber defences. In the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century the defences were rebuilt with a new earthen bank and ditch that, for the first time, fully enclosed the urban area. The ramparts were strengthened in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century with a masonry wall about 3m thick.

The succession of defences can be seen in the model in the **City Museum**. The same line of the walls continued to be followed up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when great lengths of the walls were demolished. The short lengths that survive are mainly post-Roman though the fragment behind the grill in the weirs is part of the core of the Roman wall.



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**Winchester**  
City Council

Produced by Winchester City Council  
April 2019

## 2 Winchester Cathedral



Winchester Cathedral enshrines a long history of military service and sacrifice. It contains major memorials (including the Rifle Brigade Centenary Window), monuments to illustrious military leaders, and many inscriptions recording the deaths of individual soldiers in both famous and lesser-known campaigns. It houses the laid up colours of several local regiments, and also Books of Remembrance for units including The Royal Hampshire Regiment, The Rifle Brigade and the Merchant Navy. The cathedral

itself is no stranger to conflict – the West Window testifies to a violent incursion by Parliamentary troops during the Civil War and Bishop Peter Mews, a Royalist spy

identified by the number 757, was Winchester's equivalent of James Bond. Special military-themed tours can be booked through the website.

[www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk](http://www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk)

## 3 Winchester Castle

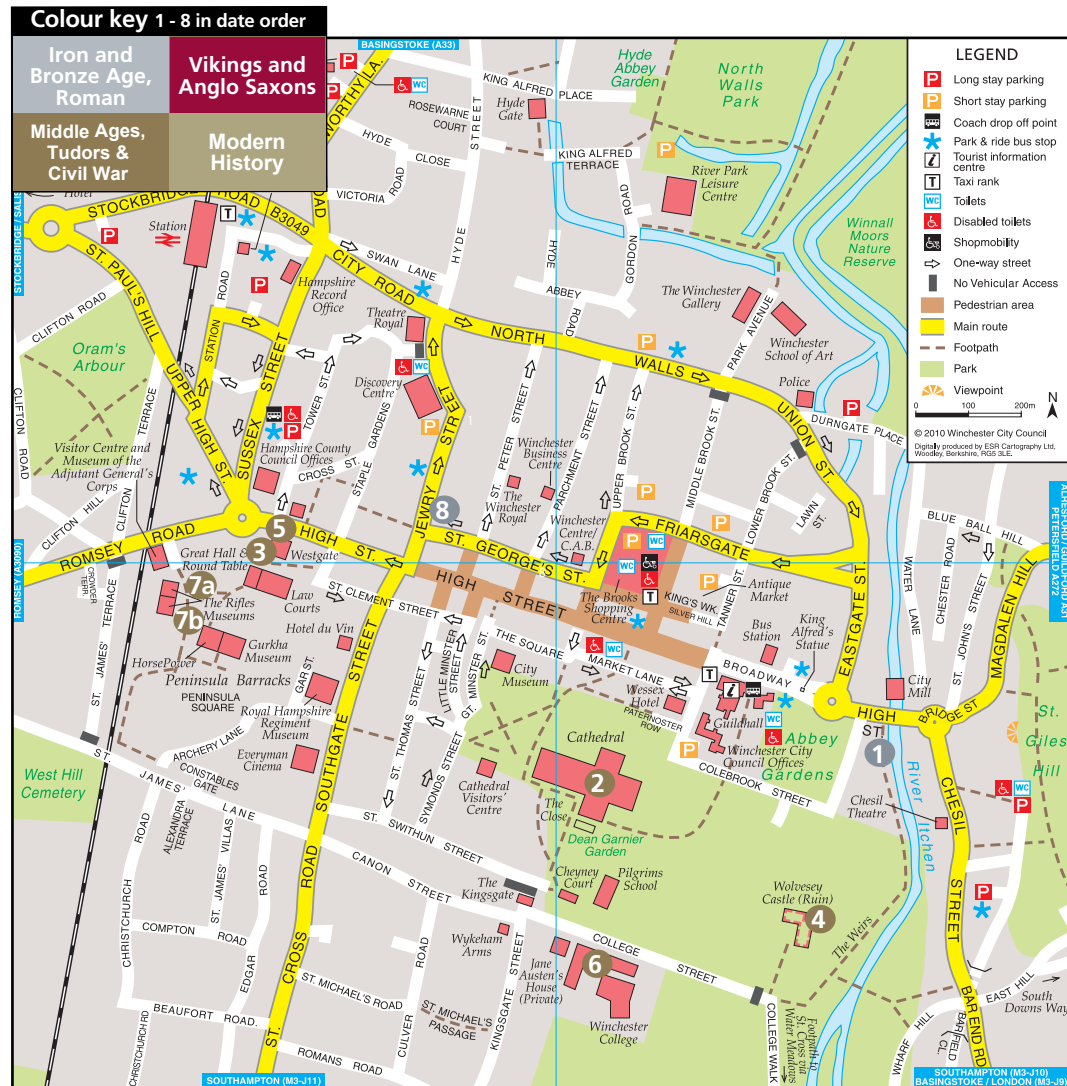


Just months after 1066 and Winchester's surrender, William the Conqueror ordered the construction of a castle within the city walls. Winchester Castle became one of the great fortresses of medieval England. It was maintained and enhanced until 1645 when it was besieged, captured by Cromwell, and eventually demolished. The Great Hall, built between 1222 and 1235, is the only substantial surviving part of the medieval castle. A drawing of Winchester made by Willem Schellinks in 1662 shows the slighted castle as a still imposing ruin overlooking the city. On-site interpretation panels and displays tell the story of the castle.

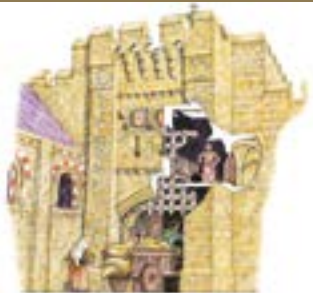
## 4 Wolvesey Castle (Old Bishop's Palace)



An important residence of the wealthy and powerful Bishops of Winchester since Anglo-Saxon times, the surviving ruins date largely from the 12<sup>th</sup> century work of Bishop Henry of Blois (1129–71). In September 1141, during the Civil War between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda, the besieged defenders of Wolvesey set fire to and destroyed most of Winchester whilst holding off Matilda's force.



## 5 The Westgate



Now a museum, the Westgate was built to be one of the defensible gateways in Winchester's city walls, first established by the Romans in the first century AD. The line of the walls remained unaltered throughout later times and, though the Westgate's present structure is medieval and dates mainly from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is thought to stand on the site of the earlier Roman gate. The west wall was entirely rebuilt in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when a whole series of new defences was added in view of a possible invasion from France. The works included a portcullis, machicolations, gun ports and possibly a drawbridge. The two inverted keyhole gunports, intended for primitive hand cannons, are amongst the earliest pieces of architectural evidence for the use of artillery in this country. The Westgate is open weekends in the afternoon between February and October.

## Did you know?

15 Victoria Cross medals are currently on display in Winchester Military Museums. Further medals of Wintonians who have been awarded this honour are also on display in the Imperial War Museum.

## Did you know?

Hampshire Record Office offers help to people looking to trace their ancestry via army records. Go to [www3.hants.gov.uk/archives/hals-collections/army-records.htm](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/archives/hals-collections/army-records.htm) to find out more.

## 6 Winchester College



Founded in 1382, Winchester College has the longest unbroken history of any English school. Whilst WWI claimed the lives of over 500 old Wykehamists, a further 275 died in World War II. Officially opened in 1924, the War Cloister was designed by Sir Herbert Baker to commemorate those who had lost their lives. Notable Old Wykehamists with a military career who were all awarded the Victoria Cross include Dennis George Wyldbore Hewitt (1897-1917); Charles Doughty-Wylie (1868-1915); Daniel Burges (1873-1946); Arthur Forbes Gordon Kilby (1885-1915); and Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding (1882-1970). Please see [www.winchestercollege.org/guided-tours](http://www.winchestercollege.org/guided-tours) for details of regular guided tours around the College and for tours of War Cloister.

## 7a Peninsula Barracks 'The King's House'



The city offered the site of the castle to Charles II who paid his first known visit in 1682. A scheme was developed for a park and a 'noble Palace, sufficient like Windsor, for a summer residence for the whole Court'. Construction of the palace, designed by Sir Christopher Wren and influenced by Versailles, began in 1683 but ended on the death of Charles in 1685. 'The King's House', little more than a carcass of a house, served as a prison for 5,000 French soldiers during the Seven Years' War from 1757 to 1764 and from 1778 to 1785 during the American War of Independence. From 1792 to 1796 it was home to refugee clergy from revolutionary France before becoming an army barrack in the same year. The King's House was eventually destroyed by fire on the night of 19<sup>th</sup> December 1894. Some parts of Wren's palace were reused in the replacement building which was ready for the army by 1904 and later renamed Peninsula Barracks, see 7b. The army remained in occupation up to 1983.

## Did you know?

Winchester city centre is spectacularly transformed by Homecoming Parades that assemble at The Guildhall for a reception by the Mayor of Winchester.

## 7b Peninsula Barracks in WWII



Located directly opposite Normandy, was the springboard for 'Operation Overlord', the code name for the Allied Invasion of Europe in World War II. The county became a vast armed camp full of allied troops encamped in towns, villages and woods. Winchester's newly-built by-pass became a giant tank park and camp for British and American troops. Even Peninsula Barracks in the city was taken over by the Ninth US Infantry Division see 12 overleaf for more information on their stay. It was here that American troops were reviewed by Churchill and Eisenhower. (See 13 and overleaf for more details)

## 8 Boer War horse trough



Erected in 1905, located near the junction of Jewry Street and St George's Street in Winchester,

this landmark commemorates the 450,000 horses killed in the South African War of 1899-1902.



# Around Winchester guide to military past

## 1 St Catherine's Hill SU 484 276



In the early Iron Age an unfortified settlement, dated at 550-450 BC, was established on this hilltop. The defences, formed by the building of a ditch-and-bank earthwork enclosing nine hectares, were constructed around 250-200 BC. The original wide entrance was reconstructed with timber and included guard houses set in bays in the ramparts on either side. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the entrance was narrowed and strengthened with chalk blocks. The site was abandoned on or shortly after 50BC.

## 2 Old Winchester Hill SU 642 205



The enclosure consists of a simple defensive bank and ditch built in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC but there are a number of earlier Bronze Age burial mounds within the interior. Outside the western entrance to the hillfort there are further barrows of Bronze Age date grouped around an even earlier Neolithic long barrow.

## 3 Norsebury Ring SU 4909 4008



A Scheduled Ancient Monument on private land, and just visible from the adjoining footpath, this is a single ditch Iron Age enclosure of 7.9 acres (3.2 hectares). Sub-circular in shape, the enclosure was badly damaged by ploughing with only the north and west ramparts surviving. The original entrances lie at the south east and south west corners of the site.

## 4 Merton Castle



The Bishop of Winchester, Henry de Blois, built this castle in 1138. It continued in the ownership of the Bishops of Winchester until 1552 when it was surrendered to Edward VI. The castle is on private land but some overgrown remains can be seen from the road. The castle is sited within an earthwork whose form is suggestive of a much earlier Iron Age hillfort.

## Did you know?

The Royal Armouries at Fort Nelson benefitted from a £3.5m Heritage Lottery Fund redevelopment in 2011 that launched a new 'Voice of the Guns' gallery showcasing two sections of the Iraqi Super Gun.



## 5 Cheriton battlefield site SU 642 205



Between 1642 and 1649 the English Civil War raged. By 1644 parliament controlled the south coast ports of Portsmouth, Southampton and Fareham, the Royalists held Winchester and Andover. On 27 March 1644 the pikemen, musketeers and cavalry of the two armies met at Cheriton, the Royalists led by Ralph Hopton, the Parliamentarians by Sir William Waller. By late afternoon Hopton's army was in retreat – setting Alresford ablaze for cover – and Royalist military influence south of the Thames had ceased. A leaflet is available to download from [www.visitwinchester.co.uk](http://www.visitwinchester.co.uk) and re-enactments happens annually. Interpretation panels exist on site.

## 6 Nelson Monument, Portsdown Hill SU 607 072



120ft (37m) tall on a granite base, this monument stands on Portsdown Hill, two miles north of Portsmouth Harbour. Designed by John Thomas Groves, it was paid for by the Navy. Construction began in 1807 when it was dedicated to Nelson. It is situated at a very specific point on Portsdown Hill where it could act as a sea mark for vessels coming into Portsmouth Harbour. Of unusual design - not being in the classical styles of Greece or Rome but modelled on a style of architecture from Ethiopia - it is surmounted by a funerary bust of Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson.

## 7 Fort Nelson SU 607 072



Built by Lord Palmerston to prevent a French land attack on the Portsmouth dockyard only six miles away, this is one of five defensive forts built on the summit of Portsdown Hill in the 1860s. A garrison of 200 volunteers accompanied by regular army officers were to man the fort in times of war. It was not fully armed until the 1890s; disarmed in 1907 and used for military accommodation. In 1938 it was converted to an area anti-aircraft ammunition store. It was abandoned in the 1950s. Since 1995 it has been home to the Royal Armouries national artillery collection and is open to the public as a state-of-the-art museum.

## 8 Shawford Down wayside cross SU 468 245



This cross commemorates the troops who marched en-route to Flanders in 1914.

## 9 Hursley Park war memorial seat SU 4276 2483



A seat listing the regiments and their commanding officers who marched from Hursley Park to Southampton to embark for France in 1914.

## 10 The Hazeley Down memorial SU 5008 2550

This memorial commemorates the troops stationed at Hazeley Down Camp in World War I. It was inaugurated at a service held in August 1916.



© Peter Fahey

## 11 Morn Hill camps SU 511 295 - SU 735 265



During World War I, Winchester became a major transit location for troops destined for the Western Front. Vast numbers of barrack huts and recreation buildings were built, covering large tracts of Magdalen Hill, Winnall Down and Avington Park. It is claimed the Morn Hill Camps could accommodate more than 50,000 troops when Winchester at the time only had a population of about 20,000. By late 1917, after America joined the War, Morn Hill was transferred to the US Army and 700-800,000 American troops passed through the camps. New information panels mark the history of the site.

## 12 Alresford – 50 Broad Street

In late November of 1943 the U.S. 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry were stationed at various sites around Winchester



(Alresford, Titchborne, Cheriton, Armsworth, Bighton, Bishop Sutton and Northington Grange). The HQ at 50 Broad Street, in Alresford is marked by a plaque. The men named the local public houses the 'eight stars to victory'. When Hambone Jr, the regiment's faithful canine mascot, was run over he was buried at The Dean, Alresford. A burial stone erected in 1962 with these words, 'Here lies Hambone Jr. faithful friend of the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regt. Ninth Division U.S. Army May 1944'.

## 13 Southwick House SU 63218 08805

Fort Southwick became the operational headquarters of General Eisenhower who co-ordinated all the planning for 'Operation Overlord'. The Golden Lion pub became the unofficial officer's mess where Eisenhower enjoyed half pints of the pub's own-brewed bitter. Visit by appointment only.



© Imperial War Museums

## 14 Cheesefoot Head. SU 530 279



General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces, addressed American troops here just prior to the invasion of Normandy in the early hours of 6 June 1944 that heralded the end of World War II.

© Imperial War Museums

## 15 Marwell Airfield



Between September 1941 and March 1944, Cunliffe-Owen Aircraft used an area within the Marwell Estate as an airfield to support the manufacture of military aircraft at its nearby factory at the site now home to Southampton Airport. After the end of the war the airfield was returned to agricultural use. Some of the hangars remain.

© Imperial War Museums

## 17 Hursley House



This house was requisitioned by the Ministry of Aircraft Production to re-house the Design and Production department of Vickers Supermarine which had been bombed out of its original premises in Woolston, Southampton. During this time, Vickers worked on the development of many aircraft - the Spitfire, and also the early jet fighters like the Attacker, Swift and Scimitar. The house is now the executive briefing centre for IBM.

## 16 Droxford railway station



On 2 June 1944, Churchill and members of his Cabinet: General Eisenhower; Charles de Gaulle; Canadian William Lyon McKenzie King and South African leader Jan Smuts all met on the royal train in the siding at Droxford. A plaque marks the event. Droxford was chosen because of the protection against enemy aircraft afforded by a deep cutting. The old Meon Valley line closed in 1955 and the station is now a private residence.

*Picture: Droxford siding with Churchill, Eisenhower, and Smuts on the platform*

© Imperial War Museums

## 18 Bushfield Camp



An army training camp functioning during WWII, national servicemen and recruits to the Green Jackets Brigade trained here in the 1950s and 1961-64 respectively. The parade ground and derelict buildings remain. During the late 1940s the camp was jointly run by the Rifle Brigade and the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

*Picture: King George VI inspecting troops*

© Hampshire Chronicle

## 19 Worthy Down airfield



This key Royal Flying Corps base was established on the site of the old Winchester racecourse on Worthy Down in 1917. In 1918, when the RAF was formed, it became an RAF base, home to squadrons of bombers. Air-Marshal Portal and 'Bomber' Harris both passed through. The airfield, infamous for its uphill landing, became unsuitable for larger and modern aircraft and was transferred to the Royal Navy as HMS Kestrel in 1939. The station played host to a variety of Fleet Air Arm squadrons and aircraft types including the Swordfish, Skua and Fulmar during WWII. Bombed by the Luftwaffe in August 1940, the station was heavily defended with a ring of 32 pill boxes and trenches. Sir Ralph Richardson and Sir Laurence Olivier both served at Worthy Down with the Fleet Air Arm. In 1952 the Naval Air Electrical School moved here when the base became HMS Ariel. In 1960 the Fleet Air Arm handed the base over to the army and it remains an army base.

## 20 Twyford nuclear bunker SU 492 241



Just visible from the adjoining road, this bunker was created out of an old reservoir and was designed to act as a communications base for Southern Water staff to restore a safe water supply in the event of a nuclear attack on the UK. In the 1980s, water was considered a priority to maintain, especially the deep underground wells which would have been uncontaminated by fall-out. Twyford was chosen as a location as it was considered far enough away from Southampton, which would have been a major nuclear target. Sixty workers were to have access to food, clear air and water for up to two weeks. The Twyford bunker was completed in 1990 when the Berlin Wall had already fallen. As the engineering contract had already been committed to, it remained fully operational until 1997 but, of course, was thankfully never used.

## Freedom of Entry

The freedom honour is an ancient privilege which gives the right of entry and to bear arms in a city. Historically, this right has been given to regiments that the host city can rely on for protection. It also signifies a special relationship between the civil and military authorities. The following regiments have been granted this honour:

- 1945 The Hampshire Regiment (later The Royal Hampshire Regiment)
- 1946 The King's Royal Rifle Corps  
The Rifle Brigade / Prince Consort's Own
- 1970 The Royal Army Pay Corps
- 1978 The Royal Green Jackets (includes the former King's Royal Rifle Corps and The Rifle Brigade/Prince Consort's Own)
- 1992 The Princess Of Wales's Royal Regiment (which includes the former Royal Hampshire Regiment)
- 1995 HMS Dryad
- 1996 The Adjutant General's Corps (which includes the former Royal Army Pay Corps)
- 2004 The Army Training Regiment
- 2006 The King's Royal Hussars
- 2007 The Rifles (includes the former Royal Green Jackets)

© Imperial War Museums

## Did you know?

Every June Winchester holds a week long celebration to mark Armed Forces Day. Tourist attractions, restaurants and shops offer special 'thank yous' to military families for their contribution to protecting the nation.