

GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (December 2002)

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THE ORIGIN AND NAMING OF SANDHURST

In 1853 the 'British Authorities' decided that Bendigo was not a very appropriate name for the gold diggings that, at the time, seemed to have significant potential as a developing area. The name was changed to Sandhurst and in 1855 the diggings were proclaimed as the Sandhurst Municipal District, although the name Bendigo continued to be used locally.

In 1861 Sandhurst became a town and ten years later was proclaimed a city with a population of 32,000. By 1891, local pride and perhaps some anti British feeling, caused the City of Sandhurst to be renamed the City of Bendigo. The name Sandhurst is still prominent today, eg. Sandhurst Trustees, Sandhurst Football Club, Sandhurst Club, Sandhurst Enterprises.

What was the origin of the name Sandhurst? In the early days of the diggings there were a number of different regiments stationed here to help keep law and order. Some of their Officers had been trained at The Royal Military College at Sandhurst, Berkshire in England, so someone must have decided that this was an appropriate name.

The history of military officer training in England goes back to 1741 when the Royal Military Academy (RMA) was established at Woolwich to educate the military branch of the Board of Ordnance and to produce officers for the artillery and engineers. It wasn't until after the outbreak of war with France in 1793 that it was recognised there was no military school for the officer corps and staff officers other than those produced at Woolwich. The Royal Military College (RMC) then came into being in 1800, first of all at High Wycombe and Great Marlow and then Farnham.

In 1800, the Prime Minister, William Pitt bought an area of land called Sandhurst Park on the Exeter coaching road. The area is wooded – a *hurst* – and situated on light soil – *sand*. He in turn sold it to the government a few months later and the RMC moved there in 1812. (*sounds like a case of insider trading, conflict of interest, etc.*)

When the Crimean War broke out in 1853 there were 195 cadets at Woolwich and 178 at Sandhurst. During the early stages of WW1 the numbers had increased to 500 and 1,000 respectively. The casualty rate for officers (as well as soldiers) in the Great War was enormous. Britain lost a complete generation. In the aftermath there were discussions about combining the RMA and the RMC but this did not occur until after WW2. By 1947 the establishment at Woolwich had closed and officer training was consolidated at the newly named Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. (RMAS)

The Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) began in 1917 as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. They were disbanded in 1919 and reformed in 1938 as the Auxiliary Territorial Service. They became the WRAC in 1949 and women officer cadets were trained at an establishment in Bagshot. In 1981 their training was moved to the RMAS and integrated into the standard training of the Academy.

On a personal note, my father's brother attended the RMA at Woolwich (1911-1912) and was commissioned into the Royal Garrison Artillery. At the age of 22, as Captain of a Siege Battery, he lost his life during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. My father went to the RMC at Sandhurst (1921-1923) and was commissioned into the 2nd Punjab Regiment of the Indian Army. He spent most of his army life in India until the British Raj came to an end in 1947 when India gained its Independence.
