

Sir Eyre Coote was the commander, and he and Sir Sidney Smith joined the officers of the 24th Foot in their mess tent. Here hundreds of people gathered 'to see the hero who first taught the Corsican Usurper that he was not invincible'. In 1799 Sir Sidney, commanding HMS Tigre and HMS Theseus, had successfully assisted the Turks in defending Acre against the French. Soon afterwards Napoleon had abandoned his army in Egypt and sailed back to France.

In August 1803 the Dukes of York and Cambridge inspected the regular infantry and Woodbridge Volunteers, the latter numbering upwards of 250, at Bromeswell. In Melton a corps of volunteers, up to 100 rank and file, was established. The Woodbridge and Melton Volunteers assembled at Hollesley Bay and went through 'different movements' to the satisfaction of the Brigade Major at the newly constructed Woodbridge Barracks. They assembled again on Sutton Walks in November but torrential rain meant the General stopped the inspection. In April 1804 they were reviewed on Bromeswell Heath and went through 19 manoeuvres with precision. Back at Hollesley Bay in 1808 they fought a sham engagement and had target practice before partaking of an 'excellent collation' at Bawdsey Star Inn.

Fear of invasion by the French was at its height from May 1803 until the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805. A tar barrel was fixed upon the tower of St. Mary's church so that an alarm could be given should the enemy land in the night on the coast near the town. Signal stations had been set up along the Suffolk coast from 1798, one being beside Orford castle. They used a system of balls and flags to relay messages along the coast intended for the Admiralty in London. Decommissioned after the Peace of Amiens, the one at Orford was re-erected on the top of the Castle at the outbreak of the new war.

During the ten years from 1794, there were at least 65 marriages in Woodbridge of local women to soldiers, 47 of them being men from the RHA. Some of these marriages took place during the winter months, which suggests the RHA was present in the town, billeted at inns with their horses.

Meanwhile 400 carpenters from London were working building new barracks in St. Peter's, Ipswich and in Woodbridge. By the beginning of October 1803, 1400 workmen were thus employed. Three of the regiments at Bromeswell had been dispersed around the country in September, and now the remaining one, the 24th, marched to Norwich. With them probably went three Woodbridge women, married during the summer. Two others, married to men from 7th Light Dragoons, stayed for a while in the town with their husbands. Two companies of Sharp Shooters and the 47th and 30th Foot, along with the Dragoons, were the first soldiers to be housed in Woodbridge Barracks.

### **Celebrations**

In January 1804 the garrisons from Ipswich and Woodbridge assembled on Martlesham Heath to celebrate Queen Charlotte's birthday. Nearly 10,000 men presented a front of two miles. The RHA, three regiments of Light Dragoons, part of the Rifle Corps and Militiamen from six counties, including East Suffolk, paraded. The artillery fired the Royal Salute and the cavalry and infantry fired a *feu de joye*.

The following January the Ipswich Journal reported that a 'magnificent ball' was given by the Hon. Mrs. Macdonald at Woodbridge Barracks, attended by 'all the fashionables' for many miles around. Twelfth Night was celebrated with general mirth and 80 sat down to dinner, after which there was dancing. The ball and supper rooms were ornamented with wreaths of laurel and evergreens interspersed with oranges. For the Queen's birthday the 24th Foot and Woodbridge Volunteers fired 3 volleys at the Barracks and a garrison ball was given by officers of the 21st Regiment of Light Dragoons. Regular events to mark the Queen's birthday did not take place; perhaps it depended upon who was the commanding officer.