

In August 1811, Major Frazer, later to be knighted, carried out experiments on Bromeswell Heath to ascertain the range of mortars 'those destructive engines'. Not long before Napoleon abdicated in 1814, 70 pieces of cannon were tested on 'the extensive range' on Sutton Heath before being returned to Colchester depot.

Offences

In my first article about the effect on Woodbridge residents of having a large barracks nearby, I wrote that the anticipated crime wave did not materialise. However some offences occurred that do not appear in my first article. On St. Patrick's Day 1805 there was a fracas in a public house in the town between men of the 95th or Rifle Corps and the 21st Light Dragoons. One of the latter was severely wounded in the head, resulting in a court martial and three men of the 95th being punished. In June there was 'a rencountre' between two military gentlemen at the Barracks, in which one was wounded in the foot and the other was unhurt. It is likely they were both poor shots! Honour was satisfied.

The most serious case during the years soldiers were in Woodbridge or its vicinity took place at the end of August 1813. This was the murder at the Barracks of Thomas MacMahon, a private in the 69th Regiment of Foot. The jury at the inquest carefully questioned ten witnesses, and after eight hours returned a verdict of wilful murder against Maurice Griffin of the same regiment. Witnesses said that the men were together in a hut, drinking, and Griffin abused a brother of the deceased. They fought and the deceased got the advantage of Griffin. However they made peace, it appeared, and everyone left the hut. Half an hour later there were more words between them and Griffin returned with a drawn bayonet. MacMahon ran across the barrack square, and Griffin pursuing him and the cry of 'murder' was heard. A soldier standing by said to Griffin, 'Sure you have not killed him', and Griffin replied that he would kill him too 'if you have any prate'. The guard and an officer were summoned and his bayonet was found to be bloody from fresh blood. Surgeons treated MacMahon, but he died the following afternoon, having signed a deposition that Griffin was the one who had stabbed him. The body of Thomas MacMahon was buried in the Barracks' burial ground, the interment attended by Lieutenant Colonel Morrice and half the regiment. The officers and 600 soldiers contributed to a benefit fund for the widow and child, the men giving 1s 6d each.

Taken to Ipswich Gaol, it was reported that Griffin was about 19 years of age, and had volunteered into the 69th from the Tipperary Militia. The deceased was aged about 21, and had been in the regiment for only three weeks. Found guilty of murder at Bury Assizes the following March, Maurice Griffin was executed 'on the Drop over the Turnkey's Lodge' at the county gaol. On the scaffold he said he hoped his fate would be a warning to spectators to avoid bad company and giving way to passion. Being a Catholic he was attended by a priest from Ipswich.

Actually Woodbridge residents were in greater danger from dogs than they were from soldiers. In November 1809 two 'mad dogs' from Martlesham bit several dogs within the Barracks. Officers were urged to confine their dogs, although the streets of the town were thronged with dogs causing 'dread and nuisance'. A week later a stray dog bit a child in the Thoroughfare. The animal was pursued to Chillesford where it bit another child before it was destroyed.

Richard Crosfield arrived in Woodbridge in July 1810, one of about 800 men of the Dumfries Militia. They had come on transports from Leith, landing at Landguard Fort. A few months later he was charged with having 20 counterfeit coins, which he had purchased from William Stafford. The coins were seven-shilling pieces (one-third of a guinea), for which he had paid one pound sterling. Crosfield was sentenced at the Ipswich Sessions to a year's imprisonment, but there was no mention of Stafford.