

The Lakenheath and Wangford Volunteers.

During the closing years of the 18thC and the beginning of the 19thC invasion by France was a real possibility. To counter this in 1794 an Act of Parliament encouraged the formation of local defence volunteers. These were established by local landowners such as the Eagle family and were finally disbanded when it was clear that the invasion threat no longer existed.

Landowners and other locally influential people provided the necessary leadership and JP's played a prominent part and, in many cases, contributed money to equip the troops.

The Eagle family played a leading role in the local Volunteer Company. Amongst the officers were Captain Robert Eagle, Lieutenants Francis King Eagle and Robert Eagle (jnr.) and Ensign William Eagle. Quite often officers were chosen by popular vote amongst the men, but perhaps they might have been influenced by the fact that many of them owned their employments to the officers. Some senior officers preferred appointments to be made by Commanding Officers of the Regiment.

A button from the uniform of the Lakenheath Volunteers was found by Ron Morley on the old Cattle Fair on the Undley Road which has been dated between 1799-1813. The Company was described as being an,

"A1 Company affair with a strong family complement".

Volunteer and Militia regiments sometimes acted in support of the Judiciary in the maintenance of public order as can be seen in [The Corn Laws and Littleport Riots](#).



*A button from the uniform of the Lakenheath and Wangford Volunteer
British Military Buttons*



*Photo of the miniature painting of Captain Robert Eagle by English artist Thomas Bishop RA (1753-1853)
By kind permission of Guido Smoglian, Melbourne, Australia*

In the story '[The Last Kitchener](#)' in Timeline 3, I said that ROBERT KITCHENER (3), born in 1773, had apparently left the village and was probably the last Kitchener here. He might be the last male Kitchener in the village **directly** descended from the first Thomas, but as the following extract shows the Kitchener family still had an important position in the village.

Michael Tuffs has supplied evidence of this as follows:

*"In the Overseers' books, under the date 1811, it is stated that one Thomas Kitchener received £1. 18s for marshalling 'the militia'".
Bury Free Press. Dec. 10th 1898*

This could well have been referring to the Lakenheath and Wangford Volunteers.