

Paper Proposal: Veteran Participation in Nineteenth-Century Battlefield Tourism at Waterloo

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This paper will explore the impact of military service on the lives of British veterans who stayed behind at Waterloo. The involvement of veterans was a key component in the creation and success of Waterloo's local tourism industry in the nineteenth century. British visitors began to arrive in Belgium within a few weeks of the battle, and tourist narratives describe interactions with British soldiers who remained in the area in order to capitalise on their wartime experiences. This initial flurry of visitors encouraged more people to travel to Waterloo, establishing a tourist site that still flourishes today.

A visitor in the early nineteenth century would take a guided tour of the battlefield, purchase relics, and view monuments to the combatants. The most popular guides of the field were veterans of the battle as they could enhance their tours with personal recollections from the day. Visitors would cross the field, following each stage of the battle, and stop at locations significant to the action. These included Wellington's tree, which indicated the Duke's battle position, the shrine to Lord Uxbridge's leg, amputated after the battle, and the buildings of La Belle Alliance and the Château d'Hougoumont, where relic sellers gathered to tempt tourists.

I will consider one particular military family in order to illustrate how British veterans of the Battle of Waterloo established themselves in the area in order to participate in the local industry of battlefield tourism. Sergeant Cotton and Sergeant Munday were brothers-in-law. Cotton published an account of his service at Waterloo and acted as a guide of the field. Sergeant Munday was a guide as well as the proprietor of a hotel where he catered to British and American visitors. Finally, Munday's daughter ran a museum of relics in Mont St. Jean, which her father included in his tour.

Biography

I grew up in New York and completed my BA in English Literature and Psychology at the George Washington University in Washington DC. I then went on to do my MA in History and Literature at Columbia University, based in Paris. Now I'm starting the final year of my PhD in History at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Professor Gordon Pentland. My research examines the cultural memory of war and commemoration of the Napoleonic Wars in Britain from Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 until the Duke of Wellington's death in 1852. I utilised my interdisciplinary experiences and interests to select my primary sources, which include personal narratives, relic collections, monuments, and paintings. This range of material enhanced my understanding of how these commemorative practices influenced the British cultural memory of the Napoleonic period and Anglo-French relations in the nineteenth century.