

The Past in Pictures

19 JUNE 1815: THE MORNING AFTER WATERLOO



THE ARTIST WHO CAUGHT THE HORROR OF WATERLOO

THE BOGGY FIELDS of Mont St Jean, near Waterloo, which so hindered Napoleon's army in June 1815, are trodden today by tourists visiting Belgium's most popular attraction. It encompasses a waxwork museum, a film of the battle, a huge panoramic painting, and 'Lion Hill', a mound marking the spot where the Prince of Orange was wounded. A cafe, coach park, a statue of Napoleon and a gift shop now stand on the spot where cannon balls once whizzed by.

Picturing the scene is not difficult. Look to the Forest of Soignes and imagine the 11th-hour arrival of the Prussians to snatch victory from the Grande Armée. Wellington's position on the opposite side of the field offers another view, and the farmsteads of La Haie Sainte and Hougomont are remarkably unchanged.

But has history censored the grislier aspects of Waterloo? Many contemporary pictures of the battle create a sense of tumult, but mostly emphasise epic grandeur – any sense of the extent of the carnage is missing. A letter in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* expressed the feeling: 'Representations of battles are mere combats of armed men, disposed in the most picturesque attitudes.'

There is, though, at least one exception. *Schlacht von Waterloo* (left), a picture currently residing in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. It is also a picture with a mystery of its own. It has been attributed to William Heath, though the discrepancies in scale make it unlikely to belong to his body of work. New research suggests it may be the original work of the Scottish artist, John Heaviside Clark, which led to the lithograph, *The Field of Waterloo*, as it appeared after the memorable battle of 18 June 1815.

The morning after the battle, Clark arrived on the field to find an apocalyptic scene. For a picture full of death, there is much activity. British

and French soldiers lie dead or suffering together. Some corpses are being dragged toward fires, others to pits where contorted bodies already lie. A lone horse gallops wildly as women and children search for loved ones. An even more disturbing aspect is the background of colourless corpses. Desperate women strip bodies of clothes and dignity.

An anonymous eyewitness confirms the accuracy of Clark's picture. 'I saw thousands of slain and found my pity for individuals merge in the general mass. One poor fellow had a ghastly wound across his lower lip, which gaped wide and showed his teeth as though a second and unnatural mouth had opened above the first. Russian Jews were assisting in the spoliation of the dead by chiselling out their teeth, an operation which they performed with the most brutal indifference.' Such teeth became primitive dentures known as 'Waterloos'. Clark's picture suggests that many of the 40,000 dead were buried in the field, and for years local farmers were warned not to dig too deep. Even today ploughing farmers find musket balls.

Wars should disgust, and Waterloo certainly did that for Wellington, who famously said: 'Next to a battle lost there is no sadder sight than a battle won.'

The horror made Wellington wish it his last battle, which it was. Heaviside Clark became known as 'Waterloo' Clark, the artist who captured the horrors of Waterloo. Mark Callaghan ■ Mark Callaghan writes on history and the arts. The National Army Museum, Chelsea Tel: 020 7730 0717 features 'The Road to Waterloo' including a huge model of the battle with 75,000 soldiers. It also contains the lithograph, *The Field of Waterloo*. Musée Wellington is in Waterloo on the outskirts of Brussels. The Duke used the house as his HQ; it is now full of fascinating memorabilia.

The Spoils of a Battle Won and Lost