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# Waterloo: the battle that changed the world

In this bicentenary week of a battle which brought an end to Napoleon and marked a new era for 19th century Europe, we attempt to discover Wellington the man and Waterloo's place in our nation's history. MIKE CHURCHER tells the story.

F A LINE is drawn between Windsor Castle and Stratfield Save, it would cross near to Sandhurst, Aldershot, Arborfield and Crowthorne, all of which are lands connected either with the military or the name of Wellington himself

The Stratfield Saye Estate, a gift to Wellington from a grateful nation, is only a half hour drive from Wokingham and his memorial, Wellington College is only 15 minutes away too.

John Walter III who owned the land around Wellingtonia Avenue, lined it with sequoia trees (the world's largest living organisms) as a homage to the memory of the Iron Duke.

Pubs, streets, schools and hotels, keen on the connection with glory and victory were given the names of Waterloo, Wellington and his supporters.

He was an avid equestrian and hunter and a regular traveller between Stratfield Saye and Windsor Forest; even after 200 years, his name and that of his greatest battle is still all around us.

#### The early years

1769 was a year for inventions and travel; James Watt and Richard Arkwright were developing new ways of harnessing the steam and water power which was to spark the Industrial Revolution; James Cook was on a sojourn around the new worlds on the opposite side of the globe.

Also in 1769, two babies were born, one



John Walter III owned the land around Wellingtonia Avenue.

the future Napoleon Bonaparte and the other, his nemesis the future Duke of Wellington.

#### The Battle

On the evening of June 18, 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte's 16-year grasp on Europe was finally prised from him at Waterloo; a wet and forested village situated just outside Brussels in Belgium.

As with many wars across Europe, countries formed alliances and it was Britain and Prussia who came together to do battle with Napoleon's enormous army of 75,000 soldiers.

Napoleon's plan was to take Brussels to prevent the armies of Wellington and Blucher coming together and forming a united front. Wellington, his skills honed in the earlier successful Peninsular War, was fully aware of this objective and chose Waterloo for its strategic advantages in battle

Napoleon must not take Brussels! Wellington described Blucher's decision to move his army closer to the British rather than fall back to Namur or Liege as 'the decisive moment of the century' and later described the battle as "the nearest run thing you've ever seen in your life".

At 9pm that evening, Wellington and Blucher finally met to agree victory had been achieved and also to cast their eyes upon the 50,000 men who were killed or wounded as a result.

#### After the Battle

Whilst a battle had been won at Waterloo and peace was to rule across Europe for decades to come, the cost to a war weary Europe was about to be counted.

With countries on their knees, poverty once again cast its dark shadow and reform became a growing call from many *auarters* 

Treaty of Versailles which fuelled the support of Hitler and ultimately led to a second world war.

#### The End of Napoleon and Wellington

St Helena, an island under British control and over 1000 miles from the coast of West Africa

years, it was an ignominious end for a man of humble origins who developed France as the dominant force in Europe.

become a national statesman and receive the description from Queen Victoria as "The greatest man this country had ever produced"

on the cusp of changing the world with its Industrial Revolution and died a year after The Great Exhibition of 1851: a festival which came to express Britain's international domination. He became the embodiment and probably even the model

### Don't forget Father's Dav!

On Sunday, it's Father's Day, but what do we buy for Dad? Here's an idea: call into the Information Centre at the Town Hall this week, lay out £3.50 and buy one of the superb local history books which are on sale.

If you want to read up about Waterloo then there is a whole selection of books on the subject on sale at Bookends in Peach Street. Chapter One in Woodley also sells a great range of history books.

of Victorian values; on the one hand 'strong, bold, honest, enterprising and predictable' (quote John Severn) and on the other 'proud, opinionated, inflexible and profoundly, selflessly devoted to queen and country' (quote Sean Grass)

As a final post script, we should remember the loss of life during this battle. In one day, over 50,000 men

were killed and wounded and located in one highly concentrated area. We often consider the carnage of the Great War, but whilst there were 234 losses per square mile at the Somme, at Waterloo it was nearly 10 times that number at 2,291 per square mile. As in the two great wars of the 20th century, victory was clear, but so too was the loss.





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It was the reparations clause in the

In 1821 Napoleon died as a prisoner on

Probably poisoned and aged just 53

Wellington however went on to

The Duke was born when Britain was



