



## CAMPAIGNS and Culture

### The Waterloo Pyramid



A paper by Robert Pocock, images from the personal collection of Robert Pocock, published by CampaignsandCulture.com

An air of disbelief erupts amongst British Waterloo visitors on the realisation that it was only on the 200th anniversary of the battle, in 2015, that a battlefield monument to their countrymen who fought on that fateful day was unveiled. Yet our own research unveiled this document - so what is it, where has it hidden and what does it reveal?

Amidst monuments to soldiers of other nations, Belgians, French, Hanoverians and Prussians, to senior officers (Picton, Gordon), to regiments (27th Inniskilling, 1st & 2nd Light and 5th KGL at La Haye Sainte, the 2nd Coldstream, 3rd Scots & the Light companies of the 1st Guards at Hougoumont), to services (Surgeons at Mont St Jean, Royal Wagon Train at Hougoumont), why is there nothing to commemorate the entire British army?

Scotland boasts a 150 foot tower near Ancrum. In Belgium they waited until 1890, at Brussels' Evere cemetery, whilst the battlefield of Quatre Bras had to patiently wait until the year 2000 for the British & Hanoverian monument. In 1858 a monument was erected in the Chapelle Royale Waterloo village, joining the many individual memorials within St Joseph's Church, which, I am delighted to say, includes a fine memorial to the Artillery, but that is still 3 miles away from the battlefield.

Of course one of the most famous Waterloo battlefield monuments is the stone stele to Mercer's G Troop RHA. Over time there have been three versions of the plaque on the stele, and here it is in its latest 2015 incarnation:



And here it is being admired by the then HRH Prince Charles, now King, with the current Duke of Wellington:



In 2015 the Project Hougoumont Vivien Mallock memorial was unveiled, and most impressive is, although the inscription 'Closing the Gates on War' sadly seems at odds with human experience.



Meanwhile, the Charles Vanderstraeten Lion Mound has stood since 1826, although this is primarily seen as commemorating the Prince of Orange who shed his blood for the then newly created United Kingdom of the Netherlands (which included modern day Belgium). But this was rather overtaken by events in 1831 with the Belgian

Revolution, when amidst political demands to take it down the lion was defended by hundreds of local villagers desperate to maintain their battle-tour living. A year later it survived a new French invasion, acts that we cover on our Waterloo tour atop the Lion Mound.

Incidentally, the 50th anniversary of Waterloo was not officially celebrated through fear of upsetting the French, although thousands still gathered on the day!



So did anyone care about the British in the aftermath of the battle? Yes, they did. You may have read our paper on Mercer's visits to the beautiful Kasteel Gaasbeek and his meeting with the quixotic Marquis of Gaasbeek, the one who had an obsessive fondness for all things Turkish.

The Marquis is the man who little more than a decade earlier had built an original stone and brick 'Arc de Triomphe' in his parkland to honour Napoleon, and yet here he was, seeing the shift to a new ruling order, wanting to honour those who fought at Waterloo!



With the kind assistance of the Gaasbeek archivist Boudwijn Goossens, where the pyramid document is held, of Dutch Waterloo historians Erwin Muilwijk and Pierre de Wit and Patrick Nefors, head of the archives and library of the Royal Museum of Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels, we've sought to decipher and translate this most remarkable document. Here is a portion of our discovery:

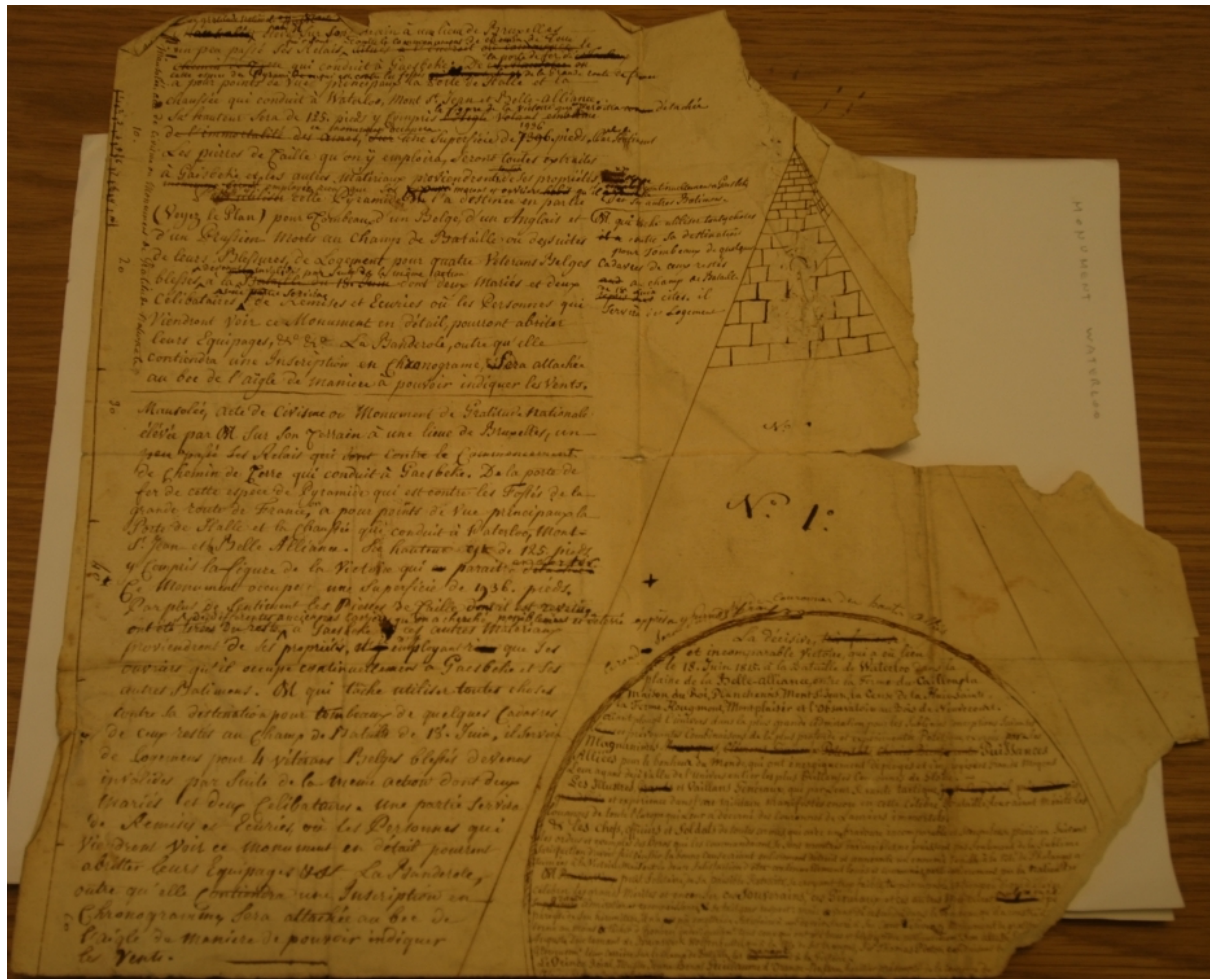
This precious yet previously unknown plan is the Marquis' design for a joint memorial to the Belgians, the English and Prussians (no mention of the Dutch, Scotch, Irish, Welsh, Hanoverians, Nassauers, Brunswickers etc. but perhaps these were all deemed to be part of the 'English' army!) It is the original working document, having a preamble, a more detailed explanation of the plan, many corrections, and this fabulous design for a huge pyramid.

The Marquis' plan was for a huge pyramid 125 foot high (to put that in perspective the enormous lion mound is 141 ft high). It was to be almost 2000 sq ft at the base, constructed from local stone from his estate which originally stretched across 17 villages approaching modern day Anderlecht on the Western edge of Brussels.

Within the battlefield pyramid were to be housed tombs for one Belgian, one Englishman (I'm sure the Welsh, Scots and Irish would have been permissible ... in those days even Napoleon referred to the British as 'the English') and a Prussian who had either died on the field of battle or later from their injuries.

There would also have been housing for four Belgian veterans disabled in action, two married and two un-married, to act as guides and stable-hands for visitors to the Pyramid, with room for stables and carriages. A banner dated 1815 atop the Pyramid would be held in the mouth of an eagle acting as a weather vane. The whole construction would stand proudly beside the main road to Paris, with the inscriptions surmounted with the crowns of the supreme allies.

The description to be carried on the side of the Pyramid refers to the “decisive and incomparable victory” of illustrious generals who have “merited the praise of the whole of Europe and which has assigned them immortal laurels of crowns”, and of the soldiers who “with incomparable valour ... annihilated a terrible enemy at the head of Phalanxes used to victory”. It mentions by name the Duke of Brunswick and Sir Thomas Picton, and the “illustrious young royal hero Prince William of Orange-Nassau.”



So we have a great Pyramid which sadly was never built. Was the Marquis motivated by the visiting British officers including Mercer, or by the need to show common cause with his new rulers who took a very personal interest in the designs submitted?

We know that the Marquis wasn't fond of the Dutch ruling class who banned the use of 6 horsed carriages other than for royalty; in protest the marquis had his own carriage drawn by 5 horses and a mule!

The Marquis died in 1821 perhaps before it could be built, or after the project had been shelved. We may never know, now whether it was submitted to be built at Waterloo, or was originally or later intended to be built on land owned by the Marquis. But when the Marquis was designing his monument he may have been wondering just what had happened to his most interested and observant visitor, Cavalier Mercer!