

## ***"I have been Eighteen times since that awful day."* the Ker papers, relic collecting, and the origins of battlefield tourism at Waterloo**

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# “I have been Eighteen times since that awful day.” the Ker papers, relic collecting, and the origins of battlefield tourism at Waterloo

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers a previously unpublished collection of writings relating to the aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo, fought in Belgium on 18 June 1815.<sup>1</sup> The author of these documents, Thomas Ker, was a Scottish merchant living in Brussels at the time of the battle, and this discussion places his observations on the battlefield in the days following the famous encounter between Napoleon and Wellington in the context of accounts by civilian visitors published soon after the event (mostly between 1816 and 1817). These include works by Sir Walter Scott, Robert Hills, James Simpson, and, importantly also, women, with Charlotte Eaton, Georgiana Capel, and Anne Laura Thorold among them. These writings are used here to provide insight into the transformation of Waterloo from a scene of carnage to a popular tourist attraction, with a particular focus on the role of relic collection in this process.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Battlefield Tourism; Relic Collecting; Visitor Accounts; Guidebooks; Battlefield Clearance

## Introduction

The present author’s interest in writings relating to the aftermath of Waterloo stems from his role as a field director and academic lead with *Waterloo Uncovered*, which since 2015 has carried out archaeological investigations of the battlefield in Belgium.<sup>2</sup> The project, which engages military veterans as participants in field archaeology, has a number of key partners, including *Agence Wallonne du Patrimoine* (AWaP), the state heritage body in Wallonia, Vanderbelt University, The University of Ghent and the author’s own institution, the University of Glasgow.<sup>3</sup> It is in the library special collections department of the latter in which the documents providing the basis for this paper were deposited in 2018. These are a collection of personal papers penned by Thomas Ker, a Scottish merchant in his mid-fifties resident in Brussels at the time of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.<sup>4</sup> This collection was generously donated to the University of Glasgow by the Ker family following its assessment by archivist Moira Rankin, who then accessioned the papers on behalf of the university.

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Ker's writings include letters to his brother, William Ker, and his nephew, John Ker, in Scotland, in which he describes the scene when visiting the battlefield, itemises artefacts he is forwarding as souvenirs, and gives instructions for a book he has collated to be published. The book is in part a collection of previously published accounts of the battle by notable combatants, namely, Wellington (his famous Waterloo Dispatch), Field Marshal Blücher (Prussian) and Marshal Ney (French). The important parts of the work are Ker's own writings, which include his descriptions of the battlefield once the fighting was over and the burial of the dead, a process accompanied by the looting of relics and their sale.

It was obvious, on first reading the Ker papers, that they represented an insightful collection of accounts related to the aftermath of Waterloo, with the added importance that Ker appears to have been among the very first civilian visitors on the scene to have written about their experience. Over the last two decades, a number of scholars have turned their attentions to traveller's accounts of Waterloo and the aftermath of the battle. Seaton put them centre stage in his pioneering work on thanatourism, which has since flowered into the study of what is more popularly known as dark tourism (2000).<sup>5</sup> A growing interest in the history of travel writing prompted a very useful overview by François (2012), who commented on the relationship between Belgian travel accounts and travel guides in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the resulting model of an evolving form has been useful in framing the discussion that follows. In considering more artistic forms of literature, Shaw (2002) explored the influence of visiting poets, including Sir Walter Scott, Robert Southey and Lord Byron, and their Waterloo works on the Romantic imagination. More recently, the role of traveller's accounts in creating narratives that tied the military and civilian realms of society to notions of British national identity was considered by Kennedy (2013).

The present study perhaps has most in common with Seaton, in that it is concerned with the attraction of the battlefield to early tourists, but also shares key interests with the work of Semmel (1999), who considered the ways in which both objects and landscape connected British tourists and collectors to their recent past, with similar themes explored by Gijbels, but with a focus on artefacts in Dutch museum collections (2015). Another work relevant here is *Waterloo: The Aftermath*, one of several history books for a wide audience that appeared during the battle's bicentenary, and in which O'Keeffe devotes a section to the plundering and burial of the dead (2015).

This work differs from its predecessors in that it considers the context of previously unpublished papers, and in doing so sheds a fresh light on aspects of these early writings, including their relationship to the battlefield guidebook, which today is almost a sub-genre of military history. Another focus, which in part grows out of the author's engagement with the archaeology of Waterloo, is the role of relic collecting and its contribution to the touristification of the site, and is an activity which Ker refers to on a number of occasions in his writings. This is an obvious topic for an archaeologist as an understanding of battlefield clearance will provide insight into the nature of the archaeological record. It should be stated early on that the disposal of the dead, which was a vital part of this clearance, is not discussed in depth here, as this has been the focus of a separate study and the subject of another paper (Pollard 2022).

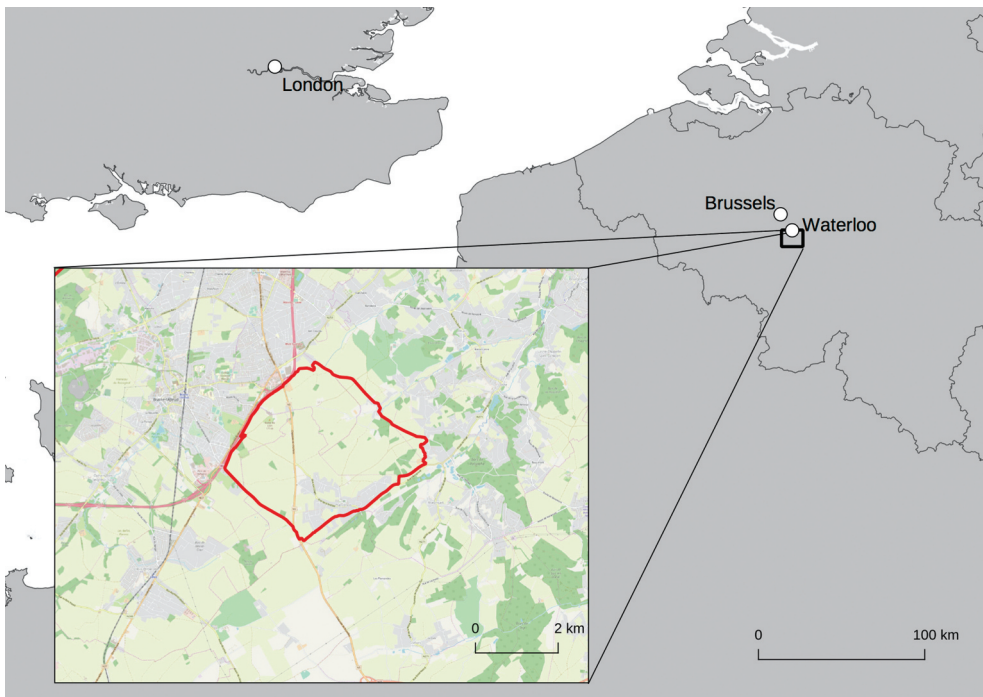


Figure 1. Location of Waterloo to south of Brussels.

### Early visitors write the battlefield

Sir Walter Scott, who was at the time among the world's most famous writers, visited the field of Waterloo in August 1815, two months after the battle (Figure 1). He did not visit just out of a sense of inquisitiveness, as he was determined to write a poem, the sale of which had been advertised before his trip (Scott 2016, 6). Reasonable sales of *The Field of Waterloo* benefited soldier's widows, to whom a share of the profits went, but the poem was not a critical success. Although dabbling himself, Ker was among those who felt that poetry was not up to the job of encapsulating the horror and detail of the battle, and as far as Catherine Stanley, referred to as Mrs. E. Stanley in her published letters, and who visited the field on the first anniversary of the event, was concerned, no artistic representation could stand up to comparison with the real thing:

After all that John Scott or Walter Scott or anybody can describe or even draw, how much more clear and satisfactory is the conception which one single glance over the reality gives you in an instant, than any you can form from the best and most elaborated description that can be given (Adeane and Grenfell 1907, 262).

There is no denying that a visit to the battlefield can give rise to insights not available in written descriptions, but perhaps they can provide an impression of how the site has changed over time. Catherine Stanley's criticism notwithstanding, Scott also wrote a prose work based on his visit - *Paul's Letters to his Kinfolk* (1816), and one might expect more expanded insights here.<sup>6</sup> However, it has been pointed out that Sir Walter, being the

creator of historical fiction he was, exaggerated the scarified appearance of a landscape that was already beginning to recover from the trauma visited upon it by the time of his arrival, even at one point describing bodies removed weeks before (Shaw 2002, 45).

Of course, Sir Walter Scott was not the only civilian to visit Waterloo in the following weeks and months to write about the experience, and some of these authors were quicker off the mark than him when it came to visiting the battlefield.<sup>7</sup> Among them was Robert Hills, who arrived in late July 1815, and went on to publish his impressions of the battlefield and a variety of other locations in 1816 as, *Sketches in Flanders and Holland with some account of a tour through parts of those countries shortly after the Battle of Waterloo*. Hills' work is notable not just for its written descriptions, but also the sketches, the drawings of various locations across the battlefield, and for which the written sections, again in the form of letters, provide annotation (a closer examination of illustrative material is made in Pollard 2022).

James Simpson, an advocate from Edinburgh and an acquaintance of Sir Walter Scott, was another visitor, who also took in Antwerp and Brussels, both of which were touched by the campaign (the Allied army set out from Brussels and both had hospitals that treated the wounded). He visited the battlefield in July 1815, and 1816 saw the publication of *A Visit to Flanders In July 1815, Being Chiefly An Account of the Field of Waterloo With a Short Sketch of Antwerp and Brussels At That Time Occupied by the Wounded of Both Armies* (in this case the sketch was the written form). The book, which also enjoyed a US publication in New York, contains the author's account of the battle, which is enhanced by the incorporation of anecdotes and insights from veterans he interviewed, but as with other authors he also includes the previously published accounts of the commanders – Wellington, Blücher, Ney etc.

Simpson weaves a summary of the battle into his progress around the field, which takes in Mont St Jean, La Haye Sainte,<sup>8</sup> Hougomont and La Belle Alliance – a conveniently walkable circuit, which includes key locations at which British and allied troops were heavily engaged, and representing a route, which for the most part included carriage passable tracks and roads, some two and a half to three miles long (Figure 2). The battle, according to Simpson, saw the French attack all along the allied line, in an almost continuous onslaught. To the modern reader this might jar, as military historians break down the battle into a neat sequence of events. However, this demarcated timeline is a construct resulting from much hindsight and repeated retellings in the library of books devoted to Waterloo. The reality would have been more confused, and here Simpson has perhaps captured something truer to the impression that soldiers on the field would have had of a constant and brutal attack. As Wellington wrote in August 1815, 'The history of battle is not like the history of a ball', meaning that no man knew what was happening on the battlefield outside of his own immediate surroundings.<sup>9</sup>

Among the female visitors to write of their experiences, Charlotte Eaton (then Waldie) is the best known. She was one of the earliest published visitors to the battlefield, and her memoir, *The Days of Battle, or Quatre Bras and Waterloo; by an Englishwoman resident in Brussels in June 1815* was the result. This was published in 1817 as an expanded version of earlier writings, and unlike many of the other accounts, which were based on letters, was written for publication (Kennedy 2009, 149). The key part of her anonymous memoir, as far as this paper is concerned, was based on a few hours walking the ground on 15 July 1815, just under a month after the battle. She had, however, arrived in Brussels

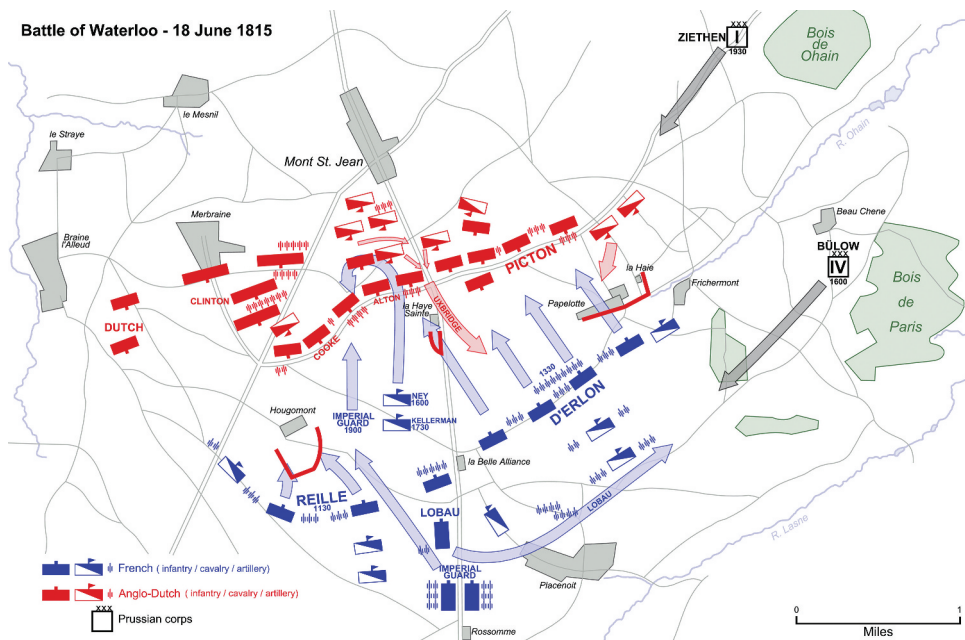


Figure 2. Much simplified map of battle – note places mentioned in text (Wiki Commons).

a few days before the Waterloo campaign, and there witnessed the excitement of the civilian population and the mobilization of the thousands of allied troops billeted in the city and its environs.<sup>10</sup> Brussels should not be regarded as a comfortable billet during the campaign, and many civilians evacuated to Antwerp. As the battle was raging at Waterloo, just ten miles to the south, rumours of a French victory instilled fear and at times panic among those remaining in the city (Eaton 1817, 78). Along with her brother and two sisters, she had come on holiday from Scotland. The timing of her visit, which was followed by trips to France and Italy, does appear to have been stimulated by the knowledge that Wellington's army was there and ready to give Napoleon battle when the opportunity arose. Prior to visiting the battlefield, an excursion was made to Antwerp, where hospitals for the French wounded were on the itinerary. From her memoir it seems that Charlotte was unconsciously putting off the trip to Waterloo, but like a moth to a flame there was no way she could avoid the encounter.

### From travelogue to guidebook

In the first part of the nineteenth century, journals and memoirs inspired others to follow in the writer's footsteps. The guidebook, commonly termed a handbook, was specifically intended to promote the locations described in its pages and to aid the traveller while there. *Murray's Handbook for Belgium and the Rhine* first appeared in 1836, after its author, John Murray III, was frustrated by the lack of any such work to assist with his first trip to the continent in 1829 (Goodwin and Johnston 2012, 44). The form was to prove popular, and similar works followed, including *Coghlan's Handbook for European Tourists* (first edition 1845, second edition, consulted for this paper, 1847), *Bogue's Guide for Travellers: Belgium*

and the Rhine (Bogue 1853) and later, *Cook's Tourist Handbook for Holland, Belgium and the Rhine* (1874). It was a competitive market, and in 1852 Bogue's guides were singled out as a potential threat to Murray's sales in correspondence between Murray and Robert Cooke, his cousin and business associate, and not related to Cook's Tours (Goodwin and Johnston 2012, 45).

It is not difficult to see how these guides and handbooks found a market with the British traveller on the continent, with all of them including detail on essentials such as transport, hotels, distance conversions and optimal routes, though they are less exhaustive on Waterloo, which was just one stop in numerous possible itineraries, than the traveller's accounts, which are more specifically concerned with the battlefield.<sup>11</sup> While using these more general guides for planning a holiday in Europe, the informed tourist was encouraged to consult a traveller's account for more detail (François 2012, 78), just as today a *Lonely Planet* volume might be augmented by a battlefield guide, such as those in the *Battleground Europe* series (electronic reading devices and smart phone apps are, however, reducing the need to travel with physical books).

Some of these mid-century guidebooks reflected changes to the battlefield over the years, including the erection of monuments to the dead, such as the monolith raised in 1818 to the King's German Legion, across the road from La Haye Sainte, where many of them died (Coghlan 1847, 51). Most striking, though, was the Lion Mound, or Butte de Lion, the massive cone of earth which surrounded a tall brick plinth on which a bronze lion cast from captured French guns was placed. The great monument was built on the orders of the Dutch royal family in honour of the Prince of Orange, who had suffered a wound while somewhere in that location in the later stages of the battle. The project took several years to complete in the 1820s and the scouring up of many tons of earth resulted in drastic remodelling of the ridge on which Wellington's centre-right was positioned. It did not receive a rapturous welcome, particularly from British visitors, including the Duke of Wellington, who on seeing the monument in 1825 supposedly exclaimed, 'They have spoilt my battlefield!'<sup>12</sup> Mary Boddington, was just as damning in her journal of a continental tour in around 1828: 'The great mass of earth too, obstructing the view, and changing the face of the field, is an ill-imagined excrescence' (Boddington 1834, 30). However, most of the guidebooks mention that the remains of friend and foe were interred in the mound, though possibly as an accidental result of being uplifted from their graves during the construction process. Phrases such as, '... beneath which lie indiscriminately heaped together the bones of the slain, friends and foes' (Coghlan 1847, 51), promoted the classification of the mound as a mausoleum, which along with the spectacular view it afforded, eventually brought it grudging acceptance.<sup>13</sup> It will become apparent elsewhere in this paper how other attitudes are reflected differently across the 1836 and 1852 editions of Murray's handbook, with these applying not just to place, but also to people.

Although fully commercial tourism, in the form of the package holiday, would not be formalized by companies such as Thomas Cook until the 1840s and 1850s, with Murray's guide appearing in 1836, guidebooks were available as early as 1815. It was then that British tourists began to visit the continent in larger numbers, with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo bringing an end to long years of war, and the field itself drawing visitors to it (Demoor 2015, 454). Belgium, then part of the Netherlands, therefore was a very popular destination for these new middle class tourists, and Waterloo soon became incorporated

into these volumes. A good example of these early guidebooks was Charles Campbell's *Traveller's Complete Guide through Belgium and Holland* which first appeared in 1815, and too soon for an entry on Waterloo (Campbell 1815). A walk over the battlefield was, however, added to the second edition in 1817, and this included extracts from Eaton and others.

Better timed, as far as the events of June 1815 were concerned, was J.B. Romberg's *Brussels and its Environs; or An Accurate Account Of Every Object That Can Be Of Interest To Strangers Both In The City And Its Vicinity* (Romberg 1816). That Waterloo and the increasing number of tourists it was attracting had no small influence in the preparation of the guide is suggested by its equally exhaustive sub-title: *With Minute Description Of Those Places Which Have Become Celebrated In Consequence Of The Memorable Victory Of Waterloo*. That influence had certainly not abated by 1820, when the volume went to a second edition, which this time included a fulsome description of the battle in addition to the sections on places associated with it. But it is those early descriptions by visitors to the battlefield that are of most interest here, and among these we must now include the writings of Thomas Ker.

### Thomas Ker's papers

The Ker collection is made up of two main elements, a series of letters and a hand-written book. In describing the characteristics of the book, there is no one better placed than Ker himself, who provides the following in a letter to his nephew, John Ker, in Scotland, written in Brussels on 7 February 1817.

*I have also sent my description of the Battle of Waterloo, in all 139 pages, with an addition of 11 being the brigading of the troops etc. making an all 150 pages. I could wish it to turn out to some profit, as it has cost me trouble and some expenses to collect and compose it, but do not bring me in debt through printing it. If you cannot sell the copyright, to some advantage; If you think that it would not have a deal when printed you may take a copy of it and send it to my friend W. Matheson, number 52 Great Queen Street Lincoln's Inn Fields London, by some friend, not to put him to the expense of it by the post. You will see that it is entirely in another style from that of Paul's letters to his kinsfolk, or of the poet's pilgrimage to Waterloo, and I presume more descriptive to the public in general of battle, than any poetry can well be. This may be merely my opinion, or as the old story goes, every crow thinks their own bird the whitest. But as the Cock said to the Horse don't let us trade upon one another, or as Uncle Toby said to the fly; there is room enough in the World for us all. Which to the point; should you think proper to have it printed it would be well to have a small descriptive plan of the battle bound in it. Such as one published by J. Booth, Duke Street, Portland Place. 25<sup>th</sup>, Oct. 1815. Coloured, if they can be bought for about a penny or three half pence each perhaps by the quantity, it would be cheaper than engraving a plate; and I should think that to print it a pocket size would be best. I have not put my name to it, or as I am not known as a writer, my name could not advance the sale of it.<sup>14</sup>*

It is obvious, that despite wishing to remain anonymous, Ker had literary aspirations, and indeed is well read, citing Sir Walter Scott and quoting Uncle Toby from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Anonymity notwithstanding, he is confident enough with his own talents to instruct his nephew to sell his work to a publisher, or at least get it printed with the hope of making a profit. He is also of the opinion that what he has produced is different enough from *Paul's letters to his Kinfolk* by Scott. Ker's work, however, is not really the one hundred and fifty-page book he mentions in this letter, but something



more akin to a scrapbook, albeit one where all of the content is written out in his own hand. In light of this, and Ker's own awareness of the market, it will be useful to place his manuscript in the context of those works by early civilian visitors which were published. Here, early visitors are taken to be those who found themselves on the battlefield within around twelve months of the event, with the majority of works discussed here published in 1816 and 1817.

The number of visitors to Waterloo was of course not limited to those who chose to put pen to paper to record their experiences. By 1815, continental travel was somewhat less grand than the Grand Tours popular with the aristocracy in the eighteenth century. More middle class tourists, many of whom had benefited from the commercial opportunities provided by the long period of war with France, were making shorter hops across the channel, taking in destinations such as France and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> Even with the straightened economic circumstances brought about by a post-war economic slump, spending even just a few days on the other side of the channel was a fashionable thing to do (François 2012).<sup>16</sup>

Following Charlotte Eaton's visit on 15 July 1815, Robert Hills arrived on 22 July, John Wilson Croker on 27 July, and James Simpson rounded off the month on 31 July. Sir Walter Scott didn't arrive until 9 August, and later still was the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, who put in an appearance on 3 October. It is these dates that cast Ker's visit into interesting relief. Working out the date of his first visit requires a close reading of his papers, but he was on the field early enough to give wounded soldiers water (see below). Additionally, he mentions talking to a wounded officer the day after the battle – the man told him about finding his more badly wounded brother, who died on the field soon after. The meeting inspired Ker to write some rather weak lines of verse, to which he made changes after copying them into the book (Simpson 1817, 18). Ker isn't specific about where this conversation took place, but given it was the day after, and the officer had not long before found his brother who then expired, it is probable that they were on or close to the field, which might put Ker there within a day or two of the battle.

There were other visitors during those first few days after the battle, and Newman Smith wrote about his day trip to the battlefield on 22 June. Smith's account was not published until 1852, many years later than those who visited after him, while Ker has had to wait more than two centuries for his words to see the printed page. Other early visitors will no doubt have written about their experiences without being published, and whether these writings have survived, possibly as letters, unknown to this author, or remain entirely unidentified in archives or attics, is another issue.

Both Ker and Smith were there soon enough to witness a battlefield still covered with wounded, and Ker claims to have had several men die in his arms. The battle was fought on a Sunday and it is reported that the wounded were not entirely removed for several days. Simpson thought it was Wednesday (Simpson 1816, 97), while Eaton was told by a local, who described the scene to her, that it was Thursday (Simpson 1817, 154). It might have been longer, as Smith, visiting on the Thursday, described the wounded still being evacuated in numerous waggons, with many still suffering on the field (Smith 1852, 34). Ker comments on the movement of the wounded quite early on in his book (Ker 1817, 19), and it is worth quoting him here prior to referring to his section on visiting the battlefield, which appears much later (Ibid, 131–134):

*The 19<sup>th</sup> orders were given to bury the dead; but first to remove the Wounded as quick as possible, into farm houses; and Villages; and on to Brussels, Antwerp etc. As fast as Waggons, Coaches Carts etc. could be procured to convey them, and all the Countrey people that could be found were put in requisition, this great work lasted more than ten days, as most of the people had abandoned their native homes, and sought shelter in the Forest, and other distant places, with what cattle etc. that they could take with them.*

From the writings of other visitors, there seems little doubt that Ker is referring to the removal of the wounded and the dead taking around ten days, and not for the last time a lack of specificity about time is one of the more frustrating aspects of Ker's writings. Unlike the published early visitors, Ker did not just make one appearance on the field; by 17 July 1816, when he wrote a letter to his brother, he claims to have visited the battlefield 18 times.<sup>17</sup> Ker spent much more time than the few hours most visitors gave themselves to experience the battlefield, and as will be suggested below, his exposure to so much misery and death appears to have taken a toll on him, indeed it might have had an impact somewhat akin to what today is referred to as PTSD (Crocq and Crocq 2000).

In addition to his own account of the battle and other original writings (see below), Ker's book includes sections transcribed from a number of printed sources. Among them is Wellington's famous *Waterloo Dispatch*, which appeared in newspapers, including *The Times*, on 22 June 1815 (a cutting of the original is included in the collection of papers) - news of Wellington's victory first appeared in the second edition of the *Morning Post* on June 20. Other famous personalities from the battle also make contributions, with Blücher's official report and the account by Marshal Ney, in which he justifies his actions to the Count of Otranto, both included. Troop numbers and returns on the wounded and dead of the various nations are tabulated, and these again must have been copied from other sources (though Ker does suggest that these differ from the official figures). There is also a version of the poem *The Young Hussar* by fellow Scot, Thomas Campbell, to which Ker has made some small but telling changes, the first being to relocate it from a battlefield on the banks of the Danube to Waterloo (the poem was first published around 1800). Transcriptions of the memorials dedicated to the dead in the church at Waterloo add to the overall impression of a Waterloo scrapbook, but in this it does not differ markedly from some of the published works, which also include notes and fragments from other sources.

The template on which Ker appears to be basing the format and content of his book originates from what is probably the earliest guide to the battle, and one that was certainly very popular at the time (it went through at least five editions before the end of 1815). This was John Booth's, *The Battle of Waterloo: containing accounts published by authority, British and foreign, and other relative documents, with circumstantial details previous and after the battle, from a variety of authentic and original sources: to which is added the alphabetical list of the officers killed* (Booth 1815). This fashionable, though verbose style of title serves to present a summary of all the major contents, and in so doing gives away its rather cut and paste construction. If this is true of Booth's title, then it is even more so of Ker's, who seems determined to follow what was already an old fashion and turn it into a table of contents:

*A Description of the Battle of Waterloo.*

*Also Called The Battle of Mont-St-Jean,*

*or the Belle Alliance.*

*With a Cursory Survey of France,*

*And a glance into Belgium,*

*in the Short Campagne of Napoleon Buonaparte in 1815,*

*With many Circumstantial details,*

*And other important matters, of the Allied army etc. etc.*

*By A Britain.*

*Containing official documents, and accounts,*

*Published by Authority, British and Foreign.*

*With the Number of Killed and Wounded*

*And the total loss of the Allied Army,*

*With the names of the monuments at Waterloo etc.*

At the bottom of the page, again in his own hand (Figure 3), Ker makes clear his intent: *Brussels, Printed for the Publisher 1817.*

Within the covers of Booth's volume are to be found those same accounts by the commanders which Ker later included in his own work, with letters from combatants and various other documents adding to the appearance of a miscellany.<sup>18</sup> The author of the detailed description of the battle, by an anonymous 'close observer', was later identified when Charlotte Eaton, writing as an 'Englishwoman', as opposed to Ker's 'Britain', admitted that she was the author in the preface to her 1817 volume (by which time Booth's book was in its tenth edition). There, she describes it as a 'brief and imperfect account composed at short notice, for the sole purpose of illustrating the panoramic sketch of the field which accompanies it' (1817, iii). Imperfect or not, what should be acknowledged is that by producing this account Eaton qualifies as a military historian, and as such stands as a pioneer in a field still to this day dominated by men. The panoramic sketch in question is a worthy topic of discussion in itself but will not be considered further here. It is also noteworthy that the plan of the battle included in the volume, which was also available as a stand-alone, is the same map that Ker suggests his nephew procures to accompany his own effort.

It would appear that Ker did not have confidence in his own attempt at creating a map of the battlefield and its environs (Figure 4), though from his letters he seems to have produced several of them. One of these is included in the collection of his papers, though as a separate document rather than an addition to the book. The map covers a wide area, expanding as far north as Brussels, and east as far as Wavre, and as far south as the River Sambre, which Napoleon crossed to enter Belgium. As the map covers the area of the entire campaign, the battlefield occupies only a small proportion of the sheet. Beyond the dotted lines denoting the Prussian advance from the east, Ker made no attempt to show the disposition of the troops on the field, which might be why he thought the Booth map would be a better addition to his volume, especially if one planned to carry it to the

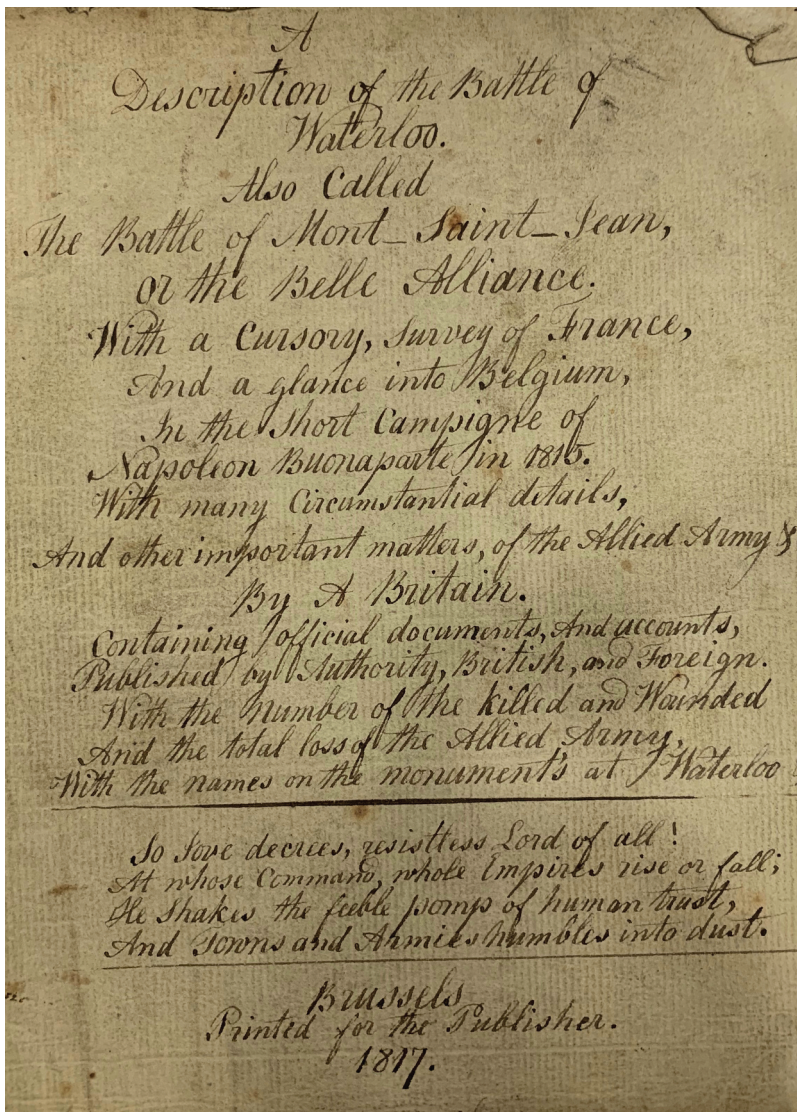
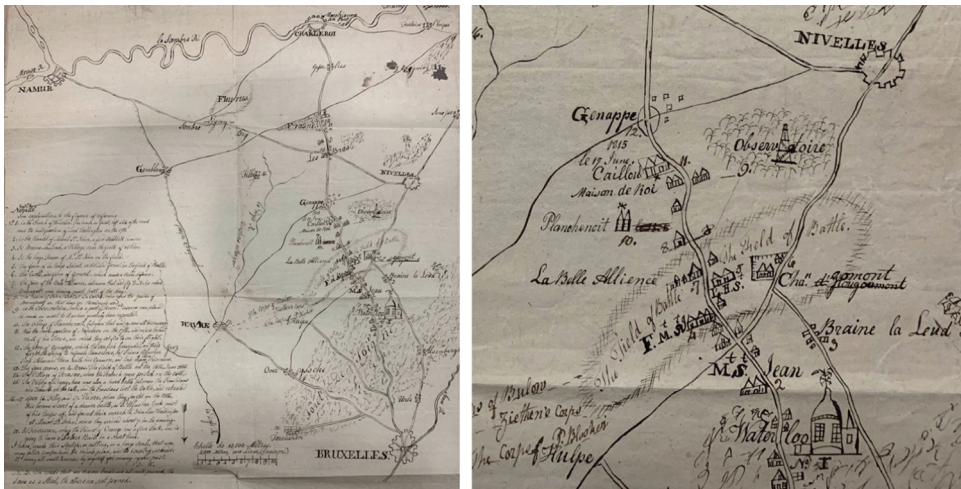


Figure 3. Title page of Ker's book manuscript.

battlefield. There is, however, an extensive legend in the left hand corner, which includes a number of details on the campaign, the battle and explains some of the features shown, including the observatory to the south of the battlefield.<sup>19</sup>

Returning to the book, among the other elements written by Ker, as opposed to those borrowed from elsewhere, are a couple of poems that are original compositions, though he makes no great claims to his skills in that area. Of more interest to the modern reader, are comments on the behaviour of Prussian troops whilst billeted in Belgian homes – as will become obvious below, they did not have a good reputation (1817, 98–100). Most important, however, for the purposes of this paper, is an account of a visit to the battlefield, which as suggested in this paper might have been as early as the following day. As



**Figure 4.** Ker's map of the battlefield and the wider area of the campaign. Sheet in its entirety on left, and detail with battlefield on right (north to bottom). Note the ornate church at Waterloo on the southern edge of the Forest of Soignes (University of Glasgow Special Collections).

this sheds light on important aspects of the battle's aftermath the most relevant section (1,418 words) is reproduced here in its entirety. The latter part of the account (a further 808 words) is a collection of Ker's thoughts on the terrible realities of warfare for nations and people. There is not the space to include these emotionally charged outpourings, but the following sentence gives some idea of the tone: 'Mothers expiring through fear, not for themselves only, but for their infants; the inhabitants flying with their helpless babes in all directions, miserable fugitives on their native soil!'

In the sections that follow, Ker's words appear in italics, while extended quotes from published accounts by other early Waterloo visitors are simply indented. The temptation to paraphrase what writers have said or merely providing a citation to the original text has been avoided here in favour of direct and reasonably extended quotes (original spellings have for the most part been retained).

#### VISIT TO THE BATTLEFIELD OF WATERLOO AFTER THE BATTLE

Thomas Ker

*By going from Brussels to Waterloo, you have almost nine miles of Forest of Soigne to pass, before you come to Waterloo. This road which in general is in good repair was there after the battle almost impassible by the quantity of broken down wagons, cassoons, carts, dead men and horses, and the pavement sunk by the vast rapid passage, rendered this a journey of reflection, and many were the hats, shoes knapsacs, papers etc. that had lost their owners.*

*On arriving at Waterloo, the Church was full of wounded, and also many houses, of the troops of different nations, and death hard at work amongst them. But few of the native inhabitants was as yet returned to their homes. I got some water (which was not easily obtained) to give to some of them to drink, and several of them died in my arms while holding of them up. Arrived at Mont St John, or rather La Haye Sainte which is about two miles to the south of Waterloo, this opened towards the field of tragedy, and which I cannot but faintly attempt to give reader a description of the scene of slaughter which the fields presented, or what any person possessed of the least*

*spark of humanity must have felt, while he viewed the dreadful situation. No one who has not seen it can imagine how touching it was to see the dying, the wounded, and the dead, of the thousands around you, and all that were able to articulate calling for water to drink, and but little or none to be had for them. Allies and French were dying by the side of each other. The cries of all now demanded the compassion of the bystander without exception (Ker 1817, 131).*

Here, Ker writes himself into history, not by being a very early visitor to the battlefield, for there were others, but quite literally in putting pen to paper to record the experience. The present author has read nothing as powerful in other visitor accounts, and it is proposed here that this vivid description of the dead and dying marks his experience out as very different to that recorded by those who came after him. As previously noted, most of the earliest civilian accounts to enjoy publication described visits to the battlefield which took place three weeks to a month after the battle. By this time the wounded had been removed and the dead disposed of. Local guides were already taking people around the field, while those selling relics harvested like a crop found a ready market in the regular groups of visitors. Sir Walter Scott, when writing about his visit, on 9 August 1815, noted that there were half a dozen other tour parties doing the rounds of the battlefield at the same time (2015, 139), and the artist John Scott, visiting in early September, mentions four or five parties of Britons and two of foreigners (1817, 216). It has been suggested that early tours were self-guided (Semmel 2000, 26), but the more likely reality is that local people were offering this service as soon as visitors who could be described as tourists began to arrive, probably not long after the dead had been disposed of, a task which, as previously noted, took around ten days to accomplish, with Finlayson, a hospital assistant, writing on 26 June, '... the field of battle will be clean of the dead today' (Glover 2011, 222).

### The first battlefield guides

It was not just the presence of corpses that might have kept the casual visitor at bay; Charlotte Eaton notes (1817, 246) that the road from Brussels, where it passed through the Forest of Soignes, was for a time not regarded as safe, as the woods had become the domain of deserters who practiced highway robbery.<sup>20</sup> This perceived danger must have passed by 25 July 1815, when Eaton made her visit to the battlefield, at which time her party was accompanied by 'an officer who was our conductor' (Eaton 1817, 263).

In some cases, coach drivers doubled up as guides, and Hills mentions his 'cocher' stopping the carriage at various spots to point out landmarks (1816, 82), while Simpson notes that his postilion indicated grave mounds in the forest before arrival at the battlefield (1816, 62).<sup>21</sup> The most popular guides, however, were military veterans of the battle. Irish MP John Wilson Croker notes that the Duke of Richmond, who along with the Duchess, was a member of his party on 27 July, was on the field during the battle until 3pm, and accordingly they 'could not have had a better guide' (Jennings 1885, 72).<sup>22</sup> These visits could also be voyages of rediscovery for the veteran, as Catherine Stanley writes to Lady Maria J. Stanley following a visit on the first anniversary of the battle in the company of her husband, her brother, and their friend, Donald Crawford, who was an artillery officer in the battle: 'He had never been on the field since the day of the battle, and his interest in seeing it again and discovering every spot under altered circumstances was fully as great as ours' (Adeane and Grenfell 1907, 262).

The most established of the soldier guides was Waterloo veteran Sergeant Major Edward Cotton of the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars, who in the 1830s ran a hotel on the battlefield that housed his impressive collection of relics, and who wrote a popular book on the battle (Cotton 1849). Others, like Crawford, were visitors themselves, sharing their experiences when they accompanied parties of civilians, most of whom travelled by coach. A hackney, complete with driver, and capable of carrying six could be hired in Brussels, and according to Ann Laura Thorold (published as Mrs. Arthur Thorold in her 1835 travel memoir, again taking the form of letters), twenty francs would suffice for a round trip and three hours on the battlefield (1835, 276). Newman Smith recalled taking breakfast in Brussels at seven and departing soon after, to arrive at Waterloo by midday (1852, 34). His carriage went from La Haye Sainte, then on to La Belle Alliance, then halting at Genappe for half hour before turning around to return before dark. By the time Bogue's guide appeared in 1852, just three francs was enough to cover a return trip in a diligence (stagecoach), which departed each morning from Brussels and terminated at Mont St Jean, with the added appeal that the day tripper would be back in time for the theatre (Bogue 1852, 157). By 1874, page 60 of Cook's guide was recommending the railway over the coach, not just for reasons of 'cost and time', but because 'the coach road is not remarkably interesting' – how things had changed since Eaton's day.

Unlike most British visitors, Smith did not visit Hougoumont, possibly because the return trip was interrupted by a detour to the east, presumably down the eastward running road at La Belle Alliance, in the direction of smoke that, at a quarter of a mile distance, was thought to originate from burning corpses. This inquisitiveness resulted in near disaster when one of the party, who ran on ahead of the carriage, was waylaid and robbed by a Prussian Hussar (Smith 1816, 44–45).

Local guides are mentioned in many of the early accounts, for instance, Robert Southey writing of his visit on Tuesday 3 October 1815, reported that when he and his party reached the village of Mont St Jean, a group of local men entered into a roadside argument over which of them would be their guide for the day (1816, 86). Somewhat earlier, in August, Sir Walter Scott had a conversation with the Flemish peasant (as he is described) John Lacoste, who earned fame thanks to his role as Napoleon's guide, a service he was reputed to have fulfilled from the back of a horse with his hands tied. Lacoste survived his experience to be sought out by early visitors, and he is name-checked in various published accounts. By the time Scott met him at Belle Alliance in August 1815 he felt put upon enough to complain about being distracted from his daily routine by tourists (2015, 139).

In advising him to insist on a fee for providing guiding services, a case could be made for Scott being a founding-father of battlefield tourism, which today is a thriving service industry. However, it seems unlikely that Lacoste had not received payment or tips from grateful visitors prior to their meeting. Waterloo was to become one of Europe's popular tourist attractions and for some a means of earning a living. Ann Laura Thorold pointed out that by the late 1820s, many villagers from Waterloo earned considerable sums from guiding, and that by then most of them spoke good English as a result of their experience in the task (1835, 272).

## Relic collecting

Battles are a messy business, resulting in dead bodies and debris scattered over wide expanses of real estate. Much of that debris is directly related to the practice of war, while a good proportion might also speak of a more peaceful existence. On a battlefield such as Waterloo, which took place on rich agricultural land, returning the fields to a productive state was a priority, and had as much to do with clearing away the dead as did any sense of humanity. At the time, dead soldiers usually left the world as naked as they entered it, not because of spiritual propriety, but because every stitch of clothing held a value for someone.<sup>23</sup> The same held for virtually every other piece of debris, with battlefields providing rich pickings for those in place to profit from them. Although this paper is largely concerned with the role of local people in this activity, it is recognized that soldiers and camp followers were also avid practitioners, removing items from fallen friend and foe alike, at times even while the battle raged.<sup>24</sup>

Almost everything could be recycled, but importantly most of it could be sold, and Waterloo was not just any battle; Wellington's victory over Napoleon at Waterloo garnered the battle instant fame, and this brought tourists keen to take home a memento of the event. Thus it was that in the days and weeks following the battle, the field became a place of industry, and foreshadowing the rise of chimney topped factories, threw up palls of smoke, though here they rose from mortuary pyres. Ker tried to capture the scene in his writing:

*Here were the fields covered with Fragments of what those victims and brave men wore, or carried when they fell, such as caps, hats, shoes, Cockads, Bonnats, feathers, tufts, helmets, Brushes, sponges, pieces of uniforms and shirts, Legs and Arms some with broken swords still held fast in the hand, heads here, and body's there, quantities of letters, books, and pocket-books, broken muskets, swords, sabers, pistols, trumpats, beugels, saddles, bridals, holsters, knapsacs, the Plaids and Plumes of Scotland, with all sorts of military stors. Much more might be described by which the reader might be more shock'd then than entertained. It need not be wondered that the Duke of Wellington had often prayed in agony, during the dreadfull conflict, for the Prussians, or the night. And marshal Ney, in his letter to the Duke of Otranto, calls it a terrible battle, and the most frightful carnage ever he had witnessed (Ker 1817, 132).*

Ker's description reads something like a shopping list, and the comparison is fitting as some of these artefacts would go on to be sold to visitors. Such lists are common to most, if not all, of the early published accounts, and just a few examples will suffice to demonstrate the spectacular variety of the debris:

The ground was ploughed up in several places with the charge of the cavalry, and the whole field was literally covered with soldier's caps, shoes, gloves, belts, and scabbards; broken feathers battered into the mud, remnants of tattered scarlet or blue cloth, bits of fur and leather, black stocks and havresacs, belonging to the French soldiers, buckles, packs of cards, books, and innumerable papers of every description. I picked up a volume of *Candide*; a few sheets of sentimental love-letters, evidently belonging to some French novel; and many other pages of the same publication were flying over the field in much too muddy a state to be touched ... The quantities of letters and a blank sheets of dirty writing paper were so great that they literally whitened the surface of the earth.<sup>25</sup>

Charlotte Eaton, 15 July 1815 (1817, 280–281)



This plain or succession of little hills is all under tillage, and was covered at the day of the battle with high corn and clover; in many places the oats and clover had grown up again; in some places the farmers had already ploughed the ground, but in others where the action had been hottest, the marks of trampling, etc, were still visible. The whole of the extent when you came to ride over it was strewn with the cartridges and waddings of the cannon; letters which have been thrown out of the pockets of the killed and wounded, and the torn remains of hats, caps, and helmets.

John Wilson Croker, 27 July 1815 (Jennings 1885, 72–73)

No one who has not seen it, can imagine how touching it is to see, strewn over the ground, fragments of what the brave men wore or carried when they fell. Among the straw of the trodden down corn which still covered the field, lay caps, shoes, pieces of uniforms, and shirts, tufts, cockades, feathers, ornamental horse-hair red and black, and what most struck us, great quantities of letters and leaves of books. The latter were too far defaced by rain and mud to make it worth our while to lift any of them.

James Simpson, 31 July 1815. (1816, 90)

It is clear though that these descriptions amount to much more than shopping lists, and here is the benefit of quoting rather than simply paraphrasing. These descriptions place the objects within the blasted and trampled landscape of the battlefield, with the elements and the passing of time making their influence felt. Simpson notes that the rain had defaced the letters and books, turning what was a desirable object on the occasion of Eaton's visit on 15 July, into just so much litter by the end of the month. The most obvious absence in these accounts is the dead, and it is here that Ker again demonstrates he visited very soon after the battle. It is not however just bodies he describes, but the fragments of bodies, severed heads, legs and arms, with the latter sometimes still clutching the weapon the soldier carried.

The scene he witnessed was one of abject horror, and one wonders whether not going into too much detail, lest he shock the reader, was just as much down to him not wanting to revisit these scenes in his head, though of course once seen they could not be unseen. Distress is not, however, unique to Ker's experience of the battlefield; it is expressed by others, with Hills above giving a sense of it by essentially saying you had to see it to believe it (which Ker also does). Eaton also writes of her heightened emotions while walking the battlefield and seeing human remains protruding from hastily dug graves:

The effluvia which arose from them (graves), even beneath the open canopy of heaven, was horrible; and the pure west wind of summer, as it passed as, seemed pestiferous, so deadly was the smell that in many places pervaded the field, the fresh-turned clay which covered those pits betrayed how recent have been their formation. From one of them the scanty clods of earth which had covered it had in one place fallen, and the skeleton of a human face was visible. I turned from the spot in indescribable horror, and with a sensation of deadly faintness which I could scarcely overcome (1817, 270).

We do the people of the past little justice if we fail to credit them with the full spectrum of human emotions, and there has perhaps been a tendency to paint those who lived at the time of Waterloo with stiff upper lips fixed in place by greater exposure to death and suffering than the average westerner today.<sup>26</sup> On 22 June, one visitor, Major W.E. Frye, a retired soldier, was so horrified at what he

saw that he barely wrote a word about it, other than mentioning the wounded everywhere (on the Thursday after the battle), the trees in the orchard at Hougoumont pierced with bullets, and his speedy return to Brussels (Frye 1908, Loc. 539) Even the granite-carved personality that was the Duke of Wellington is known to have wept at the losses suffered as the long day of the battle closed (Barbero 2008, 308). There is, however, something different about Ker's experience when compared to the other visitors, with a suggestion in his actions and writings of a deeper disturbance. Some of that certainly comes across in a letter to his brother from 17 July 1816:

*I was on the field as far as the Quatre Bras, with a captain MacDonald of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Highlanders, to whom I give your address. He was wounded at Mont Jean on the 18<sup>th</sup>, if he goes to Glasgow he will call on you. Mr Gordon of Clounes was also with us, he lives number 4 St Andrews Square Edinburgh, a very fine man who took part of a skull, and a Grenadiers cap with him off the field of battle. I have a tartan coat that carnal (colonel) Miller fought in that day it is bloody so a bonnet of the 42<sup>nd</sup>, a pair of hose and garters, a Riffle gun, a Curraise, a Grenadiers cap of Buonaparte's guard, and sundry things. Should you find a captain of a vessel coming from Glasgow to Antwerp he could write me a few lines, and I would send you some Relics by him.*

*Many is the tears they have cost me, to see their scattered brains and limbs on the gore field of battle, where I have been 18 times since that awful day. In short taking the whole horse armour and artillery, the whole army, never did men March to Battle, that would destined to perform such singular services to their country. It is impossible to witness such a scene unmoved, return victorious – and we proudly indulged the hope of theirs triumph, but they were going to meet an enemy formidable by their numbers and the discipline; commanded by a leader whose military Talents had made him The Terror, and the tyrant of Europe.*

Ker admits to paying an emotional price for his visits to the battlefield, where, 'Many is the tears they have cost me, to see their scattered brains and limbs on the gore of the field'. Nonetheless, he returned again and again, and this attraction comes across as something of a painful obsession. This might make his motivation different to the morbid inquisitiveness tinged with a sense of national pride that drew the later, once-in-a-lifetime, visitors, although he suggests some of this. The belief that a visit to Waterloo was an act of patriotism was expressed by a number of writers, including Hills (1816, 60) and Eaton (1817, 350), but it was nowhere more robustly stated than in the letters of Mrs Thorold:

*If you love your country, you will go from national pride; if any one belonging to you fought there, you will go for the sake of glory, because his fame pleasingly reflects also on you; if, alas! a friend fell on that memorable day, glorious as was his death, your bereavement is the same, and you will go to embalm his memory with a tear of affection (Thorold 1835, 271)*

More importantly for Ker perhaps, each return was rewarded with less of the horror to be seen, and it might in part be a desire to see the carnage gradually erased and the landscape healed that drew him back on so many occasions – it is just a shame he did not reflect these changes in his writings. Robert Southey, following a visit to the field on 3 October 1815, noted the speed at which the scars of war around Hougoumont were healing, and was not sure whether this was soothing or disturbing: 'I know not whether it were more melancholy or consolatory to observe how soon these lower creatures of nature (poppies and pansies) recovered from the havoc which had been committed here' (Southey 1816, 88). There is not the space here to explore Ker's state of mind further, but

there are enough mentions of gore, widows and orphans scattered throughout his writings to read trauma into them.<sup>27</sup>

During his visit on 31 July, James Simpson explored the precincts of La Haye Sainte and was particularly taken by the barn, which he describes as being piled high with the dead by the end of the battle. He was delighted to find a French bayonet lying among the straw, and described the scene as he walked out through the door at the western end, which he notes was riddled by musket balls (1816, 86).<sup>28</sup>

Having succeeded in opening the shattered door which leads out to the fields to the west, we saw several women still engaged in the lately most lucrative occupation of cleaning up anything which they could sell to strangers the same persons had very probably been active in stripping and plundering the slain (1816, 87).

The view that the 'plundering', as it was commonly termed, was women's work is a popular one, and Ker describes '... the field all covered with men at work, burning, and burying the dead, and women and children gathering the spoiles, from the battle' (1817, 133). There can be little doubt, however, that civilian men also took part in the practice – it would after all be in a household's best interest to collect up as much material as possible before others swept the field clean. There is also some suggestion that it was not a pursuit without risk, and William Clarke, a Royal Scots Dragoon Guard, recalled bodies of women being present among the naked dead in the field close to Hougoumont, surmising that they had been shot by wounded soldiers while rifling their pockets (Glover 2017, 221). However, Ker offers an alternative explanation:

*And on Monday the 19<sup>th</sup> June the bodys of the dead men and horses lay mangled and thick all over the field, also many women, fell the victims of that day, who by their imprudence advanced too near the front of the line to be near their husbands. All afforded a view that was shocking to behold, and impossible to describe (1817, 18).*

Ker's interpretation seems just as likely as Clarke's, and perhaps more so, as we know that women were on the field with their men during the battle (Kennedy 2009, 140). Given this was a view Ker claims to have seen, and if he is to be believed, this recollection provides clear indication he was on the field as early as the day after the battle. Cotton also reported 'many females among the slain', and tells of a dead French Hussar officer near La Haye Sainte, who when stripped of clothing was found to be a 'beautiful young lady' (1849, 184).

As Robert Hills noted, during his visit just over a month after the battle, the harvest of relics took a while to bring in:

One would have imagined that by this period (July 22<sup>nd</sup>) every spot, every orchard, barn, and outhouse must have been ransacked; yet did we see peasants about every part of the field of battle searching, in spite of their enemy, the plough, for the miserable booty of brass eagles, shells, and bullets (1816, 81).

It was not only the ground that yielded relics, as Eaton, on arriving at the woods to the south of Hougoumont, observed:

The trunks of the trees have been pierced in every direction with cannon-balls. In some of them I counted the holes, where upwards of thirty had lodged: yet they still lived, they still bore verdant foliage, and the birds still sang amidst their boughs (1817, 286).



**Figure 5.** View of woods to south of Hougoumont by Robert Hills. Note group removing musket balls from stumps and trunks (Hills 1817).

By the time Hills visited, the trees were being targeted by the relic hunters:

... in that part of the wood nearest to the house, nearly half the trees had been utterly destroyed by cannon shot, shells, and grenades, which had swept the upper parts from the stands, and those which remained standing, or scathed around their branches, and so closely covered on every side with marks of musket shot from their roots upwards, that the survival of a single individual and gauge there, would seem almost a miracle\*

\*The country people had picked out nearly all their honours, which must have been a profitable harvest (1817, 316).

Again with Hills, the written description accompanies a drawing (Figure 5), and in this case it is a rare impression of the wood to the south of Hougoumont. Many of the trees in the drawing have been badly damaged by shot and shell, and in the distance a group of people are shown poking away at the trunks, presumably prising out musket balls. The wood was so badly damaged that it was almost entirely cleared within two or three years following the battle and the land given over to arable agriculture (Stanley, page 96, notes that many trees had already gone by the time of the first anniversary). Ker was also to procure musket balls from these trees, including in the manifest contained in the 7 February 1817 letter (returned to later): 'A *fusée* ball taken out of a tree in the wood at Goumont, the 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1815'.

Today, only two original trees are still standing; these being the venerable chestnut trees located towards the southern gate of Hougoumont Farm. Alas, only one of these is still living, the other having suffered from a lightning strike (a third blew over in 2021 and musket balls were removed by *Waterloo Uncovered*). To this day, the wide, lower trunks bear the scars of musket ball impacts – on the northern side so presumably fire from

defenders. Some of these have been widened by musket ball removal, but passing a metal detector over the trunks produces signals, which indicates that musket balls are still lodged inside.

That there was a growing market for the detritus of battle picked from the battlefield or stripped from the dead by local people there could be no doubt. Visitors provided a willing customer base, and as John Scott, Sir Walter Scott's companion put it:

The extraordinary love of relics shown by the English was a subject of no less satisfaction to the cottages who dwelt near the field, than of ridicule to our military friends. One enthusiast had carried off a brick, another one of the doors of the house. Our own party did not pass over the field without following the example of our countrymen; each other, I believe, making his own little collection of curiosities. (Scott 1842, 46).

Eaton provides her own take on this burgeoning cottage industry:

Numbers of country-people are employed in what might be called the gleanings of the harvest of spoil. The muskets, the swords, the helmets, the cuirasses - all the large and unbroken arms had been immediately carried off; and now the eagles that had emblazoned the caps of the French Infantry, the fragments of broken swords, etc, were rarely to be found, though there was great abundance upon sale. But there was still plenty of rubbish to be picked up on the field, for those who had a taste for it like me - though the greatest part of it was in a most horrible state (1817, 316).

No sooner had Simpson arrived on the field than he and his party were:

... immediately surrounded by the people offering for sale, with great importunity, relics of the field; particularly Eagles which the French soldiers wore as cap plates. A few cuirasses, both the back and the breast pieces, were likewise held up to us; as well as sabres, bayonets, and other spoil (1817, 64).

Relics from the battlefield were obviously highly desirable as collectables, and to the locals the sale of these various artefacts represented an unexpected windfall, that for some might have made up for the inconvenience and possibly financial loss incurred through the battle. Not everyone saw it that way though, and Newman Smith, who visited on 22 June, believed there was a moral difference between himself picking up items as 'a sad memorial of Waterloo', and those who removed them from the dead, and perhaps even hastened death for 'more sordid motives' (1852, 38–39). Smith, like Ker, had the opportunity to pick up items such as cuirasses as he was there soon enough after the battle, but this did not stop him buying relics, in his case from Prussian soldiers, whom Georgiana Capel described as 'the greatest Plunderers that ever existed' (Anglesey 1955, 124).

Most visitors to have written about their time on the battlefield note that they procured relics of some sort, and La Belle Alliance seems to have become a veritable gift shop. Sir Walter Scott had a benign attitude to the trade:

A more innocent source of profit (other than the theft of baggage) has opened to many of the poor people about Waterloo, by the sale of such trinkets and arms as they collect daily from the field of battle: things of no intrinsic value, but upon which curiosity sets a daily increasing estimate. These memorials like the books of the Sybils, rise in value as they decrease in number. Almost every hamlet opens a mart of them as soon as English visitors appear. Men, women, and children rushed out upon us, holding up swords, pistols, carbines, and holsters,

all of which were sold when I was there *a prix juste*, at least those who knew how to drive a bargain' (2015, 145).

Charlotte Eaton, in addition to picking up items from the field, including a bible and a copy of *Candide*, recorded the results of her visit to La Belle Alliance:

I bought from the people of the house the feather of a French officer, and a cuirass which had belonged to a French Cuirassier, who, they said, had died here the day after the battle. Loaded with my spoils, I traversed the whole extent of the field, thinking, as I toiled along beneath the burning sun, under the weight of the heavy cuirass, that the poor man to whom it had belonged, when he brought it into the field, in all the pride of martial armour, and all confidence of victory, little dreamed who would carry it off. If he had known that it was to be an English lady, he would have been more surprised than pleased (1817, 313).

Sir Walter Scott itemises the objects he bought: a cross of the Legion of Honour, for 40 francs, a brass eagle from a cap, and the cuirass of a common soldier for about six francs, and a fancy inlaid one from an officer, purchased in Brussels, set him back 40 francs. A taste for French material is apparent here, but what were the French buying? It is known that French visitors were among the foreign groups identified by Scott and others, but Gijbels has suggested, on the absence of references to relics in their journals, that they did not partake of this trade, possibly as it was seen to benefit the victors (2015, 242).

Ker also procured a number of relics, though given he was on the battlefield so soon after he may have picked these up himself rather than paid for them. His taste seems to have been broader than Scott's, with both British and French pieces noted in a letter to his nephew in Glasgow. Here he provides a manifest of the objects he has shipped for distribution among his relatives, which in itself indicates that you did not need to be a visitor to desire a piece of the Battle of Waterloo.

*Dear nephew Brussels 7th February 1817*

*As it is your wish to have a cuirasse as a relic of the Battle of Waterloo, I have sent you a box on the 29th instant, to the care of Mrs JG book and Co of Antwerp, with advice to forward the same to you by way of Greenock, Leith, or Carron, as may be most convenient to them; is directed To You thus J KER. Broomielaw, Glasgow Mark. #. K. No. 1. Captain d MacDonald. the case contains as follows canvas lining and straps (it is for you). A Cuirassier's pistol, and a pair of Hussar's boots and Spurs, for your father; Polish Lancers cap, with a three coloured Cocad for my nephew, John McCubbin, with three feathers for my sister your aunt. boxes of blacking of my making for Boots and shoes for your father and your aunts and for you. Sundry letters and papers that I found on the field of battle (for you). A letter from the Masons Lodge at Novell to the master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, to be put in the post office for Edinburgh.*

Further detail on the cuirass is provided later in the same letter, and it is clear that the desire to possess these objects, which were seen as potential heirlooms even without a direct association with a member of the family, was strong enough to outweigh the realities of their post-battle condition:

*The cuirasse I brought [possibly bought] from the Field of Waterloo, that is to say from the door of the Belle Alliance, some days after the battle, All over Blood, which is ... [letter torn here] it, and forms a varnish, and keeps it from rust, it stunk for a month after I had it. I hope that you will never part with it ... [letter torn here] it to remain in our own family as a Memento.*

## Market forces

As time went on so the number of objects decreased, and just over one year later, Edward Stanley gives some idea of the appearance of the ground (24 June 1815):

... some labourers who were ploughing on the spot brought us some iron shot and fragments of shell which they had just turned up (of interest to one of the party who had served in the artillery during the battle). The hedges were still tolerably sprinkled with bits of cartridge paper, and remnants of hats, caps, straps and shoes were discernable all over the field (Adeane and Grenfell 1907, 265).

It is the presence of so much material, which surprisingly includes cartridge paper, over twelve months later, that is the most striking point. However, there is a difference showing, with the plough now responsible for bringing up buried artefacts and the material still on the surface not showing the same variety it once did. It is apparent, however, that market forces began to take effect long before then, with John Wilson Croker identifying an impact as early 27 July 1815:

All the peasants of Mnt. St. Jean and Waterloo have collected great quantities of spoil - clothes, swords, helmets, cuirasses, crosses of the Legion of Honor, etc., which they offer to you for sale. At first these things were bought by the curious cheap enough, now the purchasers are more numerous and the commodity rarer, and therefore the prices are much enhanced. The Duke has bought a dozen of cuirasses taken from the bodies of the French ... (Jennings 1885, 74).

Today, a metal detector is required to recover battlefield artefacts, with the majority of objects remaining buried in the soil being the smaller items such as musket balls and buttons – perhaps lowly classes of artefact, but regarded as worthy of mention by the time of Murray's handbook (1836, 148). One problem that the archaeologists of *Waterloo Uncovered* have encountered during the investigations of the battlefield is the large number of replica buttons left behind by re-enactors, after the many large scale recreations of the battle – 5000 'troops' and 1000 horses refought the battle for a huge audience during the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle.<sup>29</sup> These are now so accurately rendered that it is difficult, at least at first sight, to distinguish the fake from the real thing, and the reality is that the former far outnumber the latter.

This situation might not be as recent a phenomenon as one might assume, and there were rumours in the years following Waterloo that, as the real artefacts dried up, so fakes were produced to keep the market alive. The most popular of these beliefs was that by the 1830s a factory in Liege was producing fake buttons by the thousands (Thorold 1835, 279). There is also a suggestion, from none other than the US showman PT Barnum who had Waterloo relics in his museum, that fake artefacts were imported from as far afield as Birmingham in England and were then buried for a while on the battlefield before being dug up and sold (Gijbels 2015, 242). Cotton, the veteran guide who lived on the battlefield, was at pains to stress that the moderately priced artefacts he was selling out of his hotel/museum were 'not so cheap as the spurious articles with which the neighbourhood abounds' (1849, np). He also offered a money back guarantee if any item was found to be a fake within three months of purchase.

It was one thing purchasing items or picking them up from the battlefield, and those early visitors could be confident that their souvenirs were authentic, it was however another to successfully return them home, for as Hills writes:

That the claims of government to the spoils of Waterloo were preferable to those of individuals, cannot be questioned; but it was notorious, that hundreds of sabres, helmets cuirasses, etc. have been picked up by the peasantry, and naturally to be expected that travellers would purchase these trophies: it therefore would have been but commonly fair, if those who station sentinels to see them, had, at the same barriers, cautioned persons against such forbidden bargains. A friend of mine was unlucky enough to buy three pair of cuirasses, which were all seized by the officers at Ostend.

A similar seizure was made by gendarmes on the road to Brussels of a ‘tolerably good’ cuirass collected by Newman Smith near La Belle Alliance on 22 June. According to the two men who stopped Smith’s carriage they had been commissioned by the government to prevent relics being taken from the field (Smith 1852, 49). Whether these officials were genuine is impossible to say, however, a prohibition on the removal of battlefield artefacts does appear to have been in place, as Ker himself states with reference to the cuirass he posted to his nephew: *‘They are in the first place not allowed to be sent out of this country, And in England the Cuirasse would pay 75% duty, but being directed to an officer I suppose that will be got over’* (letter: 7 February 1817). He had sent the cuirass intended for his nephew to Captain MacDonald in the hope that, he being a veteran of the battle, might provide a way around any duty; as ever Ker had an eye to the balance sheet, but from a comment in a letter from 6 March 1818, this ploy seems to have failed, as he bemoans being out of pocket over it. For a state to adopt such an attitude over battlefield relics, which here appears to have been enacted into policy, at least in a small part, was certainly ahead of its time, and even now the status of relics from sites such as battlefields is a thorny issue. Today, artefacts illegally removed from protected battlefields such as those from the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 in South Africa will fetch high prices in the US and UK, and only recently did the government of the Falkland Islands government pass a law which makes it illegal to remove battlefield artefacts from their place in the landscape. Metal detecting at Waterloo, which is a conservation area, is illegal unless part of an authorised archaeological project such as *Waterloo Uncovered*.

As time progressed there still remained a market for souvenirs among the large numbers of tourists visiting the battlefield – which by 1839, according to Henry R. Addison, a veteran of the Dragoon Guards turned battlefield guide, included between four to five thousand English (British) visitors a year (Semmel 2000, 26). However, some visitors expressed discomfort at being hassled by guides touting for business and relic vendors pressing their wares. Mary Boddington remarked on the vivid picture that the guides paint of the battle, before continuing with:

But then the guides destroy the illusion “Achetez des boutons, Madame; Button of the English guard. - Voilà - l’aigle de Napoléon – buy one bullet, grape-shot, French trompette; Achetez Madame. – Quelque chose de plus Monsieur, pour les guides, nous sommes si pauvres”. We found that there was no possibility of shaking off our tormentors, whom we had already paid three times over, but by pushing vigorously on (1830, 29–30).



By mid-century, guidebooks were providing advice on how to deal with the crowds of locals touting for business on arrival at Waterloo village. John Murray's volume had the following suggestion to make:

The moment a traveler comes in sight of Waterloo he will be assailed by guides and relic-vendors, claiming the honour of serving him in the capacity of guide. The only mode of appeasing the clamours, and rescuing himself from the annoyance, is to fix upon one or other, informing him at the same time what will be his remuneration, 3 or 4 francs will be enough for his services over the whole field, but if this not be settled beforehand, he will not hesitate to demand at least double (Murray 1852, 74).

The foregoing is perhaps useful information, and it is delivered in reasonably neutral language, but it represents a dramatic change of tone from the 1836 edition. In that first edition, the attitude displayed towards local people was as pejorative as that used by any of the early visitors, even in their descriptions of Prussians, who seem to have been universally disliked. The same advice above was also provided in 1836, but back then the relic vendors were described as 'harpies', and Murray goes on to complain that:

The great concourse of strangers who repair year after year to visit the scene of this memorable battle, this had the effect of raising up in this neighbourhood a number of persons whose profession may be said to vary between that of extortioners, cheats and beggars: The stranger is their game upon which they prey . . . guides . . . are at least useful . . . He has no sooner escaped them than he falls into the hands of relic hunters, a numerous hoard who infest the spot, persecuting and bothering him to buy bullets and buttons (1836, 148).

While demonstrating a sense of almost colonial superiority, Murray places the responsibility for the presence of aggressive vendors, both guides and relic sellers, on the shoulders of the visitors for providing the market. The relationship between local and visitor could be mutually beneficial, but it could also be problematic, and as early as 1836 the pros and cons of tourism are already evident. Even the image of the rowdy 'Brit abroad', represented today by groups of young men and women on 'stag' or 'hen' weekends in cities such as Prague or coastal resorts in Spain, was recognizable long before Murray's guide appeared. The 'Brentford lads' were a self-styled bunch of young clerks and shopkeepers from London who visited the battlefield in August (possibly in 1815) after engaging a local guide. Like their modern equivalents, they got drunk, complained about the food, and harassed local girls, but in a reflection of the time and place took home the fingers of fallen soldier removed from a hand protruding from a grave (O'Keeffe 2015, 101).<sup>30</sup>

The removal of the human remains sits ill at ease with the idea of hallowed ground and respect for the fallen, but the fact that the 'lads' believed the hand to belong to a Frenchman might place it in the category of a trophy (see below), and even Ker makes mention of his friend Mr. Gordon of Clunes removing a fragment of skull from the field of Quatre Bras.<sup>31</sup>

## Dealing with the dead

The recovery of artefacts, be they weapons, clothing, or any of the countless other items scattered about the field and attached to the body, represented just one aspect of

battlefield clearance, the other was obviously the burial of the dead. Not surprisingly, Ker included descriptions of this operation, which given the presence of anywhere between ten and twenty thousand human corpses, along with between five and eight thousand horses (Pattison 2001), can only be regarded as a serious undertaking.<sup>32</sup>

*The French had considerably more killed and wounded than both the British and Belge, I may say almost two to one. The field was so much covered with blood, that it appeared as if it had been flooded with it; and the dead horses seemed to be innumerable, and after they were dead a few days they smelt so much, that by the extension of bulk, they seemed at a distance those along the heights, like a rampart, or a breastwork defence and the smell of the Dead, in a few days we came so offensive from miles, that it became necessarie, and urgent, to burn them in large piles, both men and horses, to prevent farther bad consequences that it might have occasioned to the living. The forest of Soigne, contains, 100,000 Bonniers of Wood-land, about 200,000 acres. The battle being fought in its vicinity, the woods attracted the obnoxious air, which in the space of 6 or eight days got so contaminated, that it rendered the passage through the forest extremely disagreeable. During the First 8 or ten days it was the order, to stop all waggons, and in short, all wheel-carriages that come neigh the field, for to transport the sick and wounded to Brussels, and its vicinity.*

*I was again on the field the Sunday after the Battle, and went into the Farm called the Belle Alliance, in morning, where I found the farmer, his wife, and a woman servant, who had only returned that morning to their shattered home, it was with hard labour they were at, in washing and scraping the blood of the tile floors of the house, which was hard and more than inch deep. The house was surrounded with dead horses, and Cuirasse's etc. and the smell in every part extremely offensive and the field all covered with men at work, Burning, and burying the dead, and women and children gathering the spoiles, from the battle (Ker 1817, 132–133).<sup>33</sup>*

As noted above, exactly a week after the battle, Ker was back on the field. It is known from other sources that by then the wounded had been removed and those that had not been recovered were presumably dead (regrettably, he does not provide an insight into how the scene has changed since his first visit). Ker does not go into great detail about the disposal of the dead, but does note that both burials and burnings were underway, and this in itself is an important observation (see Pollard 2022).

## Conclusion

The writings of Thomas Ker provide a valuable addition to the already rich body of works devoted to the aftermath of Waterloo, many of them in the form of travel accounts. His narrative includes descriptions of the battlefield, the clearance of battle debris, and the disposal of the dead. These are of added importance because he seems to have been on the field as early as the day after the battle, which might make him the first of these early visitors known to have recorded their experiences by putting pen to paper. Additionally, he is unusual in that he visited the battlefield on numerous occasions. Between that first visit in June 1815 (possibly 19<sup>th</sup>) and 7 February 1817, he made eighteen trips to the battlefield, with his writings specific about excursions on 25 June 1815, and 31 October 1815. These were just a few occasions out of eighteen, but it is of course possible he exaggerated the number of visits. This also marks him out as different, as most writers of travel accounts based their observations on no more a few hours on the field as part of a day trip (an exception was Georgina Capel who visited on several occasions – she was related by marriage to Lord Uxbridge and

lived just outside of Brussels). It has been demonstrated that Ker was aware of the body of literature which was informed and shaped by experiences such as his, and he drew on the templates provided by early guides, such as that by Booth from 1815, to create his own book.

Like others, Ker was somewhat awed by the vast amount of debris scattered across the battlefield, which he lists very much in the same way other observers did. His early presence on the field allowed him to collect his own relics, a pursuit that some British visitors regarded as an almost patriotic act, while locals who participated in the same activity 'plundered'. Here, it is worth considering the meaning of the various terms used to describe the many objects removed from field, both by these early visitors and modern scholars. *Relic* tends to be used as a catch-all term, as it is here, but is there a difference between a *relic*, a *trophy*, and a *souvenir*? Some writers have regarded these terms as interchangeable, with Semmel at one point using all three, in addition to memorabilia, in the same sentence, without seeing the need to define them (2000, 26). It is, however, possible to see some differentiation when reading the early accounts.

On a basic level, objects obviously associated with British or allied troops were generally accorded the status of relics, while French items were more likely to be regarded as trophies. The connection between artefacts from 1815 and religious relics is made explicit by Stanley upon viewing, on the first anniversary of the battle, the chair which seated Lord Uxbridge during the removal of his leg: '... he shows as a relic almost as precious as a Catholic bit of bone or blood, the blood upon a chair in the room when the leg was cut off' (Adeane and Grenfell 1907, 261). In 1818, the chopping up of the Elm tree at which Wellington spent time during the battle, and the use of the timber to create various objects, including three chairs, also has obvious parallels with the creation of religious relics. Wellington might not have been Jesus Christ, but these artefacts, some of which have been lost, do have a whiff of the true cross about them (see de Bellaigue 1978, 16).

As far as trophies were concerned, the most sought after was the cuirass, with Sir Walter Scott writing that acquiring one was a 'great object of ambition' (2015, 146).<sup>34</sup> More generally, items picked up or purchased by visitors were also regarded as souvenirs, being objects which serve as an *aide-memoire* of the visit, connecting person with place and event within what has been called the 'realm of memory' (Demoor 2015). However, Ker's letter to his nephew, in which he lists the items he was shipping to Scotland for distribution among members of his family, indicates that objects associated with Waterloo had an appeal that transcended the need for what some regarded as a pilgrimage to the battlefield (e.g. Eaton 1817, iv; Smithers 1820, 242). The appeal of the cuirass is restated here by Ker, who informs his nephew he is sending him one as requested, and in which he makes known his hope that the item will always remain in the family.

The growing number of visitors provided a market for objects removed from the battlefield, and also the need for guides to accompany those with limited knowledge of the events of 18 June 1815. Opportunities for financial gain through the provision of guiding services were recognized almost immediately following the battle. Guiding and the provision of battlefield relics were certainly not exclusive pursuits, with both sharing a perfectly symbiotic relationship – and one which perhaps sees its apogee in the form of Sergeant Major Cotton, who provided accommodation in his hotel, which also served as a museum, albeit one where authenticated artefacts could be purchased, while he offered

his clients with the type of tours that only veterans of the battle were equipped to provide.

The challenge of finding one's way around the battlefield, and making sense of the terrain, with or without a guide, was aided by the appearance of travel accounts and guidebooks. Ker had aspirations for his own book assembled from various sources, to which he added his own observations and musings. It is apparent that he was following a rapidly established format, with the earliest guides taking the form of what could be described as a miscellany, with elements such as the writings of personalities from the battle, descriptions of memorials, casualty lists, maps, and of course a narrative of the battle, common to those that moved beyond personal memoir and progressed to providing a navigational tool for other visitors to the hallowed ground of Waterloo. Although writings by women have previously been identified as making an important contribution to the canon of early descriptions of the battlefield, the role of Charlotte Eaton in particular, as a pioneer female military historian deserves more recognition.

As each new account appeared, so the route followed by British visitors became etched into the landscape, creating what could almost be called the 'British triangle' of Mont St. Jean – La Haye Sainte – La Belle Alliance – Hougoumont – Mont St. Jean. This was created not just through the actions of travellers, favouring this route for its convenience or historical interest – with Hougoumont undoubtedly regarded as the most important location (e.g Murray 1852, 79), but because like other itineraries, it was repeated in accounts and guides, and became what a writer quoted in François, but talking of elsewhere, described as a 'classic and familiar route' (2012, 87). Entering into this triangle, the Lion Mound, dedicated to the Prince of Orange, represented a foreign, and indeed damaging, interloper, which drew criticism, but was ultimately accepted, in part through the influence of guidebooks, as a mausoleum and convenient viewing point.

The recovery (pillaging according to some) of artefacts, which from their connection with the battle and the hallowed ground it bequeathed were accorded the status of relics, removed a physical connection with the realities of the conflict.<sup>35</sup> In one respect, this clearance represented a cleansing of the field, and it might have been a perhaps unconscious need to continually check on this process of recovery, which included the evacuation of the wounded, and the burial and burning of the dead, which drove Ker to repeatedly visit the field. While the collection of these objects removed visible residues of the battle from the landscape, their sale served to provide visitors with a visceral link to the drama and *aide memoire* to their time on the stage over which it had played out. In turn, these transactions, which resulted in ownership that could be contested (through confiscation), provided a source of income, which in conjunction with guiding, made battlefield tourism a pillar of the local economy for the first half of the nineteenth century and beyond.

What is clear is that early visitor accounts, which span the days, weeks, months and years after the battle, have much to tell us about what happened on the battlefield once the fighting was over. The production of these works has much to do with the appeal of the battlefield to visitors, particularly those from Britain, and this is what might make Waterloo atypical. The interest that resulted in so many travellers' accounts also promoted the collection of items by local people for sale to tourists, a mechanism that might mean

the post-depositional processes impacting on Waterloo were different to battlefields that did not have the same draw so soon after. Could it be that Waterloo was cleared of its debris much faster and more completely than was the case with more inaccessible (to tourists) and less celebrated battlefields?

It is gratifying to see Thomas Ker's ambition to see his work published at least in part fulfilled, but hopefully this paper has achieved more than that. Contextualizing his writings, through an examination of the works published by early visitors, has hopefully produced a useful analysis of the post-battle activities which resulted in the clearance of the field.

## Notes

1. The papers are referred to in a newspaper article by Anne Johnstone from 2015, which is primarily concerned with a later member of the Kerr family who fought at Gallipoli during the First World War. That article, in the Glasgow Herald, quotes eight sentences from Thomas Ker's writings, but this paper is the first detailed discussion of them, and the first time that extended extracts have been published. [https://www.heraldsotland.com/arts\\_ents/13212030.from-waterloo-to-gallipoli-one-scots-family-story/](https://www.heraldsotland.com/arts_ents/13212030.from-waterloo-to-gallipoli-one-scots-family-story/).
2. The other field directors on the project are Domonique Bosquet, Stu Eve and Veronique Moolaert.
3. The therapeutic benefits of archaeology are now well known, particularly for serving personnel and veterans suffering physical injury and/or PTSD. (Evans et al. 2020).
4. Ker traded in textiles but possibly also other commodities. On his age, he opines in a letter to his brother on 6 March, 1818, that he is only five years in age behind him, his brother being 64 that year. This means that Thomas Ker was around 56 at the time of Waterloo. He recalls there, how he had previous need to write to his family to ask them how old he was, as he required the detail for a passport in Belgium.
5. Duncan Light (2017, 277) has provided a useful review of these phenomena, pointing out that while the terms *Thanatourism* and *Dark Tourism* have increasingly been used interchangeably, they have different meanings, with the former referring to tourism specifically motivated by the desire to encounter death, while the latter is more of a catch-all or umbrella term which accommodates the wider interest in sites of death, disaster, suffering, tragedy and crime (which need not have a direct association with death). There is a parallel here with *Battlefield Archaeology*, which refers specifically to the archaeology of battles and the landscapes in which they were fought, and *Conflict Archaeology*, which is the wider field of which *Battlefield Archaeology* is a part, and includes the study of a wide variety of conflict related sites and material remains including fortifications, POW camps, airfields, supply depots etc.
6. The epistolary form was popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, and some of the sources here were ultimately published in the form of letters. Robert Hills, the artist who made a number of important drawings of the battlefield, published these in a volume along with a series of letters to a fictional relative in which the visit is described and the sketches annotated. Many of the accounts, particularly those by women, were also published much later from collections of letters written close to the time of the battle – as noted in text they were not written for publication.
7. According to O'Keeffe, the British Library catalogue lists more than 40 songs, musical scores, poems and 'authentic accounts' of the battle published between the event and the end of 1815, and these exclude newspaper articles. (Scott 2015, 324).
8. The popular spelling *La Haye Sainte*, which was current in the nineteenth century is used here in preference to the more accurate *La Haie Sainte*, now favoured by some historians.
9. This quote or versions of it regularly appears in works on Waterloo, but its source is rarely cited (and the present author is no doubt among the guilty here). John Croker planned to write a history of Waterloo and had written to Wellington on 2 August 1815

signalling his intent. This clipping from the Duke's rapid reply, dated 8 August 1815, might be taken as an indication of the low regard in which he held historians, but he does go on to offer his co-operation if Croker proceeds. A fuller quote is: 'The object which you propose to yourself is very difficult of attainment, and, if really attained, is not a little invidious. The history of a battle is not unlike the history of a ball. Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost; but no individual can recollect the order in which, or the exact moment at which, they occurred, which makes all the difference as to their value or importance. The full letter can be viewed at: <https://pastnow.wordpress.com/2015/08/08/10264/> (Last consulted 29/3/23).

10. She was travelling with her siblings, and her sister Jane contributed to the original work.
11. Murray (1836) stretches to seven pages plus map, and six plus map in 1852 (much of the excised material is poetry by Byron and Southey). The entries include travel tips from Brussels, some historical facts and information on the key locations – Mont St Jean, Le Haye Sainte, La Belle Alliance, Hougoumont and the Lion Mound. Murray's is also notable for including a battle map, which is closely based on Booth's. Bogue's guide (Bogue 1853) includes a page and a half on travel instructions from Brussels and then on the attractions, namely the Lion Mound and Hougoumont, but this is followed by a detailed, twenty six page long account of the battle. Coghlan (1847) is limited to a page and a half on the battlefield and places to see. La Haye Sainte, La Belle Alliance and the Lion Mound get a mention in the brief section in the first edition of *Cook's* (1874, 60–63), but this is even shorter in the second edition (Cook 1877, 156), with only the Lion Mound and Hougoumont included. Both these editions of *Cook's* additionally include Victor Hugo's less than reliable description of Hougoumont.
12. This quote, which is perhaps not entirely reliable, comes in various versions and has often been cited with little effort to source it. According to Rory Muir in the commentary to his detailed work on Wellington this version appears to come from the journal of Mrs Arbuthnot and relates to what Muir thinks must have been the Duke's last visit to the battlefield in 1825. The year would certainly correspond to the period of mound construction of 1820–26. <https://lifeofwellington.co.uk/> (Last consulted 29/3/23).
13. It is interesting to speculate whether this framing of the monument as a mausoleum, containing the bones of the dead from several nationalities, might have been an attempt to subvert its focus on the Prince of Orange, for whom it was constructed. Certainly today, the average visitor is unlikely to make the association with prince unprompted, with the feature being better known, at least to British visitors, as the Lion Mound.
14. There are more than 50 distinct sections (not all of which could be described as chapters) in Ker's book, which is fortunately written for the most part in a clearly legible hand, no doubt with an eye to transcription for publication.
15. Forrest makes the point that for those with lower incomes, who could not afford trips abroad, the Panorama, which created an immersive experience based on painted recreations of the battle and sometimes gave the illusion of movement, stood in for a visit to the actual battlefield (Forrest 2015, 113). The present author is struck here by the similar circumstances which motivated him and others to construct a replica trench system in a park in Glasgow during the centenary of the First World War, thus giving children from families that could not afford to send them to Belgium and France on school trips the opportunity to gain some impression of the experience.
16. In a letter to his brother dated 17 July 1816 (the earliest in the collection), Thomas Kerr refers to an initial post-war boom in Brussels followed by a rapid down-turn as Brussels receives an influx of English merchants flooding the market with cheap goods, while on top of this there was a 10% duty on imported cotton goods and a high rate of exchange. There seems little doubt from the tone of the letter that Ker was feeling the pinch at this time. He did however note that commerce was improving both in Scotland and Belgium in a letter to his nephew written on 9 March 1818.

17. As with the date of his first visit (which is suggested to be 19 June), Ker is pretty non-specific about these trips, an exception being 31 October 1815, when he visited Hougoumont in the company of a Captain MacDonald of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Highlanders and Mr Gordon of Cluny (in letter to his nephew, dated 7 February, 1817).
18. Whether these were directly copied from Booth or other sources is unknown, but as François has noted, worse happened and the practice of plagiarism was not unusual. At one point Murray accused Baedeker of lifting multiple paragraphs from his guide (François 2012, 89). Murray also took Cooke to court accusing him of plagiarising his guide book.
19. The tower features in various accounts and images, with speculation about whether Napoleon himself used it to observe the battle. Glover confirms that it was constructed as an observatory to be used in the creation of maps by Craan – who would go on to draw some of the earlier maps of the battle – on the orders of the king, who had recently acquired these lands (Glover 2017, 223).
20. Edward Stanely, who visited on the first anniversary of the battle and again a week or so later, described the place thus: 'The forest (of Soignies) is, without exception, one of the most cut-throat-looking spots ever beheld, and for some days after the battle deserters and stragglers, chiefly Prussians, took up their abode in this appropriate place, and sallying forth, robbed, plundered and often shot those were unfortunate enough to travel alone or in small defenceless parties' (1908, 264).
21. The Forest of Soigne, exists only in part today, being the woodland that extends from the eastern side of the Brussels to Waterloo road (N5, the same route that runs through the centre of the battlefield). In the 1852 edition of Murray it is reported that the forest was 'much curtailed and partly converted into cornfields' (1852, 74). The eight-mile passage through it is described by most of the early visitors, and it is here that those travelling soonest after the battle first encountered an inkling of what lay ahead, in the form of the bodies of men and horses lying beside the road, abandoned waggons and equipment, then, later on, grave mounds. It has been noted that Eaton was warned it was unsafe for a while prior to her trip on 25 July 1815, by which time there were still horse bones and abandoned accoutrements scattered about, and the smell is described by her as 'extremely offensive' (1817, 256). The atmosphere and outlook changed as time went on though, and John Scott, travelling on 9 August 1815, in the company of Walter Scott, is at ease describing the carriage drive through the forest as 'delightful' (1842, 44).
22. It is obvious that female visitors to Waterloo have provided valuable insights into the nature of the battlefield. However, Croker's party appears to have adhered firmly to traditional gender roles, with the women only going as far as Mont St Jean before they were sent back to Waterloo village by carriage, while the men went on to explore the battlefield on horseback (Jennings 1885, 72).
23. An exception appears to have been the socks or stockings of the Highlanders, which Croker reports as remaining on the otherwise naked bodies (Jennings 1885, 74).
24. This point deserves more discussion, but the field was cleared of soldiers from Wellington's and Blücher's armies very soon after the battle, with large numbers departing in pursuit of Napoleon's routed troops. Camp followers might have stayed on to benefit from the windfall but their natural place was with the army. According to visitor accounts, when soldiers lingering on the battlefield are encountered, some of them weeks after, they tend to be Prussian, and some of these would appear to have been deserters (the bad feeling directed at the Prussians is again a topic worthy of further study).
25. Multiple types of paper matter are recorded by visitors, and it is here that there is some judgement of character of the fallen is demonstrated by British visitors, as more than one writer notes that bibles and scriptures had been in the possession of Allied troops, whereas playing cards littered French positions. The implication here, even if not made explicit, was that Allied troops were righteous and god fearing, while the French were sinful gamblers. An example is an account of a visit to the field submitted by a J.H. to the *Baptist Magazine* in August 1815 with reference to a visit on 17 July. Here the correspondent states that at La Haye Sainte: 'I perceived great

numbers of small books of devotion, in the German language; while along the French line, little, I am informed was to be seen but scattered packs of playing cards'. James Simpson also draws attention to the contrast, but only in a later edition of his memoir (1817, Loc 850). Walter Scott also commented on fragments of German prayer books, but rather than reading piety into their presence he surmised that they had been pressed into military service for use as cartridge paper (Scott, 141).

26. Just as the author was looking for a reference to support this point, he heard a comment from a historian on a Radio 4 programme which did just that. As part of an anecdote about Lord Uxbridge losing his leg at Waterloo in the history quiz show, *The Rest is History*, Dr Kate Williams said, 'they were pretty sanguine in those days'. Series 1, episode 2.
27. If there is a lost opportunity with Ker's writings, it is that he did not leave a record of each of his many visits, which would have provided a unique impression of how the battlefield changed in appearance over that time.
28. Simpson's description of the shot-peppered doors at the western end of the barn gives rise to an interesting conundrum, as it is generally regarded that these were removed by the garrison the night before and used as firewood, with eyewitness testimony e.g. Major Graeme of the King's German Legion (Siborne 1891, 404); leading to the incident's appearance in numerous secondary works (e.g. Barbero 2006, 115; Fremont-Barnes 2014, 117; White-Spunner 2015, 230). This, it is widely recorded, created a weak point which had to be defended from behind a barricade (e.g. Adkin 2001, 367). Does this mean that Simpson is wrong in his observation, perhaps describing doors elsewhere on the farm, or is the account of door removal a false one which has overtime been reinforced in virtually every book on the battle?
29. During the research for this paper the author was surprised to read that re-enactments, referred to as a 'sham-fights' had been suggested for the first anniversary of the battle, but for whatever reason they didn't take place (Adeane and Grenfell 1907, 263).
30. Locating primary sources for the 'Brentford Lads' has proven tricky for previous writers. They were first referred to in Elizabeth Longford's *Wellington: Pillar of State* (Longford 1972, 9), with her words later paraphrased by Shaw (2002, 67). Most recently, O'Keefe tried to track down the original source quoted by Longford, which was a MS titled: *Tour of Waterloo*, lodged in the archives of the Naval and Military Club. However, he notes that efforts by the archivist to track down the manuscript failed (2015, 343). The present author has not attempted to take up the trail.
31. More modern examples of this type of disrespect might include the taking of jokey 'selfies' at Holocaust memorials.
32. Establishing the exact number of dead on the field is near an impossible task, with proposed figures ranging from as few as 5,000 up to more than 20,000. Simpson describes the battlefield as a 'vast sepulchre of 20,000 men (1816, 66–67). More recently, Adkin cites 18,000 as a reasonable figure (2001, 324). Paul Lyndsey Dawson (2018) has, perhaps controversially, suggested that the lower figure is the more likely, with many of the French missing being taken as PoWs or deserting rather than being killed. The same applies to horses, with O'Keefe referring to one source giving the total for Wellington's army and the Prussians being 2,610, and suggesting that French losses must have been close to double that (2015, 51).
33. Almost exactly a year after the battle, in a letter to his brother dated 17 July 1816, Ker provided a further description of the disposal of the dead, which again emphasizes burning as well as burial being used to clear the field of dead men and horses. He also provides a snapshot of the bad weather - low temperatures and rain - typical of the 'year without a summer' which blighted Europe in the wake of the eruption of the volcano Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) in 1815. Interestingly, these poor conditions don't appear to be having a negative impact on the harvest. Further to this, the idea that rain can inhibit the spread of disease by dampening down the air-borne miasma is indicative of the limited understanding of disease and its spread at the time (for instance, it was not until 1854 that John Snow identified contaminated water as the cause of the spread of cholera in London).

*Our harvest is advancing fast, we have barley & hay ready to cut altho' it is cold, and rains every day in torrents, as it did last year. But by the abundant rain last year it certainly prevented the epidemic effects that the men and horses slain of the field would have produced, before we got them burnt, and put*



*under ground, which took about ten days. Men, and horses were all burned on the same pile, 6 or 8 horses and 30–40-or 50 men thrown on pell-mell, the smell was shocking for miles.*

34. The appeal of the cuirass was probably three-fold. i) An effective trophy as it was recognizably French ii) Worn by members of an elite arm – heavy cavalry; ii) A piece of armour so a throw-back to the age of knights and chivalry. Walter Scott did much to promote the image of the knight in armour in his novels, and he also seems to be the only source for Highlanders frying their mutton on a cuirass after the battle (Scott 2015, 146). Perhaps only a writer with Scott's imagination could come up with such a perfect image of triumph and defeat, and of course they had to be Highlanders.
35. Pillaging seems an appropriate term when related to the removal of objects from the persons of the wounded and the bodies of the dead, but it tends to be used as a catch all for all acts of artefact recovery.

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