

## **The battle of Ligny.**

The battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

The battlefield of Ligny is situated between the village of Fleurus and the paved road leading from Nivelles to Namur.

A stream called the Ligne ran through this area in a west-east direction. Arising in a small lake, called Etang de Wagnée, at one and a half kilometer southwest of Les Trois Burettes, at the Roman road (<sup>2</sup>), it ran in southeast direction along the villages of Wagnelée and Saint Amand (to the right), to turn suddenly in a northeast direction just east of this last village.<sup>3</sup> It then ran right through the heart of the village of Ligny and then bent between Ligny and Sombreffe to the right, in an eastern direction. At the point where the stream ran under the road leading from Fleurus to Gembloux, a stone bridge was constructed.

The width of the Ligne varied depending on the field; in general in its western direction the Ligne ran through a relatively flat area and was rather small, but getting further east (particularly east of Ligny) it became more important, being fed by smaller streams and by running through more narrow areas. At some places it could be just one meter (or less) to a maximum of five meters (<sup>4</sup>) wide; its banks were generally steep and overgrown with willows, alders and bushes (<sup>5</sup>); its depth was very variable as well.<sup>6</sup>

In its turn, several tiny stream ran into the Ligne at several places. At Saint Amand la Haye for example a stream coming from Brye fell into the Ligne.

And east of Saint Amand two tiny streams, coming from Wangenies and Lambusart fell in.<sup>7</sup> Near Sombreffe (east and west of it) two minor streams rolled into the Ligne. The first one came from behind Sombreffe and the second one from Humrée.<sup>8</sup> Very close to the point where the second one fell into the Ligne, was the Cense de Pottriaux, of which the watermill formed the main building.<sup>9</sup>

At the line Wagnelée, Saint Amand-la-Haye, Saint Amand and Ligny, the Ligne formed a barrier along the heights which formed the “plateau” around the village of Brye. In height these heights were here and there slightly higher as those around Fleurus, but this difference was very small.

Further east, at the east side of the paved road which connects Fleurus to the Namur-road, the stream became extremely winding , passing in more steep low ground along villages like Tongrinelle (to the right), Tongrinnes (to the left), Boignée (to the right), Balâtre (to the right) and Saint Martin (to the right). Just about one kilometer south of Mazy, the Ligne fell into the Orneau.

Near the junction of the road coming from Fleurus and the one running from Nivelles to Namur was an inn called Le Point du Jour (it stood in the northeast corner of the crossroads).

Part of the building is still in existence. Opposite the inn were in 1815 two houses, one of which, called Hermitage, still can be found.<sup>10</sup> On the northern side of the road Nivelles – Namur, the road from Fleurus continued to Gembloux as a mere track.<sup>11</sup> In 1815, there must have been a windmill immediately west of this road (north of the Namur-road).<sup>12</sup>

On the western side the battlefield was bounded by the Roman road, the Chaussée Brunehaut,

which ran in an almost straight line from Tongres to Maastricht. This road was a sandy road (<sup>13</sup>) and was for a part lined by trees. <sup>14</sup> The distance between Fleurus and this road (near Villers Peruin) is six kilometers. At the crossroads of the old Roman road and the road of Nivelles to Namur was (in the southwest corner) the inn called Les Trois Burettes. The interval between this inn and the one of Point du Jour is five and a half kilometers.

The village of Saint Martin is found at the extreme east-side of the battlefield, at two kilometers southwest of Mazy. The distance between Saint Martin and the Roman road is nine kilometers.

In a defensive position, the villages formed powerful bastions. By the presence of orchards, trees, gardens and hedges a lot of buildings could hardly be seen, also because of the high corn and the undulating fields. For this reason Saint Amand in particular seemed to be a small wood by the presence of numerous trees. From a distance, only the church-tower and some houses towards Ligny could distinctly be seen. <sup>15</sup>

The church of Wagnelée (<sup>16</sup>) is post 1815; the old church was located 125 further north. Few old farms survived, one of which is called de Colombier. <sup>17</sup>

Saint Amand and Wagnelée (on a distance of two kilometers) were connected with each other by two hamlets,. The first one was Saint Amand le Hameau, also called Beurre. <sup>18</sup> This hamlet was formed by a few outbuildings, one of which was the inn of Le Major. <sup>19</sup> This inn has since long been demolished, but the point where it stood (where the Ligne is flowing right under the road) is still called Pont du Major.

The second hamlet was Saint Amand la Haye, also called Longpré. <sup>20</sup> In 1815 here the domains of La Haye could be found, as well as those of l'Escaille. Apart from a few farms, one of the main buildings here is the Chateau de la Haye , at the extreme eastern side of the hamlet. <sup>21</sup> In 1815 the chateau was flanked by a few towers, but in the course of time they fell down, and the last one was taken away in 1879.

In 1815, it was surrounded by a few swampy fields and a small grave-yard which dated from 1794, after the battle of Fleurus. <sup>22</sup>

The old Chateau de l'Escaille, at the north side of the village, has been replaced by a newer one but the old farm is still there.

The actual Saint Amand was situated 500 meters further to the east, along a central road. Its houses were separated from each other by orchards and gardens. Nowadays two farms can be found which were there in 1815, one just behind the church. This church now in existence is the authentic one of 1815 and it is situated at the far east side of the village. In 1815 the church was surrounded by the churchyard, now gone.

In 1815, between Fleurus and Saint Amand, there was a small chapel called " Bon Dieu de Pitié ". Nowadays, the old chapel has gone but at the same spot some houses can be found, of which one contains a tiny chapel in its facade.

Ligny village had in 1815 about 900 inhabitants, most of whom were stone-cutters and agricultural labourers. It was cut in two by the Ligne-stream. Parallel there were two streets, at both banks of the stream. Between and on the other sides of these streets the ground was undulating and here were in total about 175 houses; these were strongly built of blue stones and had thatched roofs. Between these houses there were walled gardens, orchards etc. <sup>23</sup>

In the centre of the village was the old church (1753), and which was surrounded by the

churchyard.<sup>24</sup> Near the church was a place planted with trees.<sup>25</sup> North of the church was the farm of d'en Bas and south of it the one of d'en Haut (or de la Tour). Both farms, which are no longer in use as such, are partly destroyed.<sup>26</sup>

The only stone bridge over the Ligne could be found at the extreme northeast side of the village; all other bridges were constructed of wood.<sup>27</sup>

At 700 meters southwest of the church was the chateau of De la Tour. In 1815 it belonged to the countess De Lannoy-Clervaux, born princess De Looz-Corswarem.

The chateau itself was a massive construction, complete with moat and bridge. The chateau was centered around a courtyard, with large towers at each corner. In 1815 the chateau was partly ruined. A century before it had still been transformed, i.e. then the avenue was constructed which led to a courtyard which was transformed to one for a solid built farm in front of the chateau.

The avenue was flanked by large orchards and at the entrance of the complex a small building was situated.<sup>28</sup> The whole complex has been rased and nowadays nothing remains.<sup>29</sup>

At 1600 meters north west of Le Bon Dieu de Pitié and one kilometer southwest of the chateau of Ligny was the Tombe de Ligny, a Gallo-Roman tumulus, which can still be seen in the fields as a low elevation.

In 1815 there was a straight road running from Ligny towards Saint Amand. This road ran along the Arbre de Brochechat (to the left) arriving at Saint Amand along a small chapel. The Arbre de Brochechat has gone, but at the spot of the old chapel nowadays the Chapelle Notre Dame de Bon Secours can be found.

At 800 meters northwest of the extreme eastern edge of Ligny was in 1815 the Chapelle le Battij St.Croix. In the near surroundings also the inn of Sart Malet could be found. Nowadays only the name of Sart Malet remains.<sup>30</sup>

The Bois du Loup, a small wood of about two hectares, was situated at about 700 meters east.<sup>31</sup>

Behind Wagnelée, Saint Amand and Ligny was the " plateau " of Brye, consisting of several heights. Brye itself was about one and a half kilometers east of Wagnelée and two kilometers northwest of Ligny.

The old centre of Brye is formed by the old church and the huge farm behind it.<sup>32</sup>

500 meters away from this point was at the northwest side of the village, to the right of the road, a chapel called the Chapelle St.Joseph. This chapel is no longer in existence.<sup>33</sup>

At 500 meters southeast of the village was the highest point of the plateau, where the mill of Bussy could be found, as well as the adjoining farm.<sup>34</sup> The mill of Bussy was completely constructed of wood, established on four strong beams. It was surrounded by a balustrade. The mill was the point where the general prussian staff could be found during the battle. It was also here that Blucher and Wellington met around 1 p.m.

Though the mill was rased in 1895, the adjoining farm called du Moulin is still present.<sup>35</sup>

From the mill, the horizon was blocked on the north-east side by the buildings and trees of Sombreffe. To the south and south-west, the valley of the Ligne could be observed, as could the far banks and the flat land immediately beyond them. The villages on the far side were also visible, though Saint Amand itself must have looked like a wood. Fleurus and the Charleroi-Namur road marked the limits of vision in that direction.<sup>36</sup>

The church of Sombreffe dates from 1860; the one existing in 1815 had a position further west.

The rectory in which Blücher had his headquarters can still be seen today. It dates from 1770-1780.

It remains unclear what role the 13th century chateau has played which can be found north of Sombreffe.<sup>37</sup>

Tongrines has its 14th century chateau à Bassialle.<sup>38</sup>

Tongrinelle, a hamlet at one kilometer west of Tongrines, was situated at the right bank of the Ligne, but her most eminent building, the chateau-farm de la haute Tour (1633) lay on the left bank. Like the chateau de Ligny, it was surrounded by water. Nowadays, the chateau has since long disappeared, but the farm is still there.<sup>39</sup>

At Boignée the ferme Philippe dates from before 1815. South of Boignée were the Arbre de Charlemagne, the Arbre de la Croix de Bois and te Chapelle Sainte Barbe: these have all disappeared.<sup>40</sup> At Balatre there is also an old chateau to be found as well as the adjoining farm, the ferme du Chateau. The church here is probably not pre-1815.

It was on the same battlefield that the french army had won former battles.

There also has been a fight on 30th of August 1662 between the members of the catholic league under general Gonzalves de Cordova and the troops of the protestant union under Mansfeld, Brunswick and Saxen Weimar.

On July the 1st 1690 marshall Luxembourg gained a victory over the Dutch-German troops of the prince of Waldeck. On June 26th 1794 general Jourdan beat the Austrian army under the prince of Saksen-Coburg.

To the three victories of 1690, 1794 and 1815, the monument refers which can now be found at the road to Gembloux, near the mill of Naveau.<sup>41</sup>

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1.For the description of the battlefield I have mainly used the maps of Ferraris (1777), Capitaine (1796), map issued by the Ecole d'application (1860), the one of colonel Charras (1857) and the map of the IGN of 1982. Cf. Charras. La campagne de 1815. Vol.II Plan nr.2

2.This small lake had disappeared by 1860.

3. Around 1900 the Ligne between Wagnelée and Saint Amand was also called the Grand-Ry. Cf.Aerts, W. Les études relatives etc. p.361  
Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo. p.158

4.Houssaye claims the Ligne was on the average 4-5 meters wide. Southey on the other hand states that the stream was very small. Cf.

Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo p.158

R.Southey. In: Hélin, E. Le journal de voyage de Robert Southey (1815). In: La vie Wallone (1949) p.171

L.von Reiche, chief of staff of the 1st prussian corps, says the Ligne was between six and eight feet wide (1.80 to 2.40 meter). Cf. Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.176

5.Cf. Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo p.158

Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: GSA, HA-VI,nr.III.3.p.42 He states the banks varied in height between 100 and 180 cm.

6.According to Quinet the stream was 3 feet deep. Cf. Quinet, E. Histoire de la campagne de 1815 p.116

Von Pflugk Harttung states it was about 45 cm deep. In: GSA, HA-VI,nr.III.3.p.42

According to Charras its depth was about 30 centimeters.

Charras. La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.147

7.Nowadays, these streams are called the Ruisseau de Berlaimont and the Ruisseau de Plomco.

8.Nowadays, they are called the stream of Trois Viviers and the ruisseau de Linwé.

9.Also the name of “moulin de Potriaux” can be found. Nowadays the site is called Potria. The mill has been demolished in the beginning of the century.

10.In reading the stone tablet the house would date from 1661.

11.Maps of Ferraris and Capitaine.

<sup>12</sup> Major Von Holleben (commander of the 3rd battalion of the 8th Leib-regiment, brigade Von Borcke). In: Aus den hinterlassenen Papiere etc. p.140

Map of Vandermaelen. The mill must therefore have been in existence around the middle of the 19th century, but what type of mill it must have been is unknown.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum dated 6th of april 1815 of lieutenant B.Jackson. In: GSA, Berlin nr.VI,HA NL Gneisenau kt.19 p.24

14. Maps of Ferraris and Capitaine. The name of Brunehaut dates from the 6th century.

15. Mauduit, H.de Les derniers jours etc. Vol.II p.45

Gerbet, Ph. Souvenirs etc. p.10-11

Cf. Drouot in his speech for the Chambre des pairs, 24th june 1815. In: Additional particulars etc. Vol.II p.109

Most of these trees were cut down in the years 1818 and 1819. In: Mauduit, H.de Les derniers jours etc. Vol.II p.45

16. Ferraris calls both Wagnelée and Wangenies "Wagnée".

17. Charras calls this farm the ferme Stainier. La campagne de 1815 Vol.II Plan nr.2

18. One also finds "Beurre-sans-Croute" and "Bur".

19. Cf. Maps of Ferraris and Capitaine.

20. Ferraris mentions St.Amand Longprez.

21. A part of it dates from 1615. One of its buildings dates from 1786. It was sold in 1842 to a family called Godfrin and in 1904 it was sold to M.Frère-Buxin and the family Dumont of Chassart. The chapel which belonged to the castle was destroyed during the battle.

<sup>22</sup> Wellmann, R. Geschichte etc. p.82,637. Wellmann based these details on the information of the priest of Saint Amand in the late 19th century. In some accounts, a churchyard is being mentioned as being of Saint Amand, but in fact this one is meant. Cf. Wellmann, R. Geschichte etc. p.618-637

See for example: Report of colonel Von Stack (commander ad interim 2nd brigade). In: KA, VI.E.7.I.80 in GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.5.p.64 and Tagebuch des Königlich Preussischen I.Armeekorps etc. In: Hafner, D. p.253-257

<sup>23</sup> Ruquoy, L. La vie à Ligny en 1815 p.1

24. The old church has been broken down and replaced by a new one in 1894. After the closing of the churchyard in 1870, a part of it was removed for the new church, while another part was

removed in 1905 for the construction of the village-square; finally, the last part was removed in 1915. Cf. [www.ligny1815.com](http://www.ligny1815.com)

<sup>25</sup> Not far from the church was also an inn called Du Cerf. It has since long gone, but its stone-tablet (dated 1777) has been preserved in the front wall of the adjoining house. Cf. [www.ligny1815.com](http://www.ligny1815.com)

26. In memory of the battle a plaquette has been fixed to the wall of the farm d'en Bas (also called farm of de la Percherie) stating:

" Ferme d'en Bas. Dernier bastion de la résistance prussienne à Ligny, cette ferme, soutint, le 16 juin 1815, les furieux assauts des troupes impériales françaises du général Gérard. Prise et perdue plusieurs fois, elle fut finalement enlevée par Napoleon à la tête de sa garde. "

For old photographs of the farm:

La bataille de Ligny etc. p.43

Aerts, W. Etudes relatives etc. p.112

Old postcards. In: collection of the author

Since 1909 the farm has been converted into a parish-centre, and the only remains dating back to 1815 are the house and the outer wall of what used to be the barn. The main gate was rased after the second world war. Cf. [www.ligny1815.com](http://www.ligny1815.com)

A similar plaquette can be found at the farm d'en Haut (also called Dumont farm) stating:

" 1815 - 1965. Ferme d'en Haut. Défendue par les prussiens de Blücher, cette ferme fut enlevée, le 16 juin 1815, par la garde impériale épaulant deux divisions du 4e corps d'armée du général Gérard. Napoleon y pénétra le soir de cette glorieuse journée. "

For old photos of the farm:

Aerts, W. Waterloo, opérations etc. p.144

Lachouque, H. Waterloo, p.89

Old postcards. In: collection of the author

The farm dates back to the 14th century; its gate dates from 1733.

27. Lachouque, H. Waterloo p.90

Wagnelée, St.Amand le Hameau and St.Amand all had one stone bridge each too; St.Amand la Haye had two.

28. Aerts, W. Waterloo. Opérations etc. p.106

R.Southey. In: Hélin, E. Le journal de voyage de Robert Southey (1815). In: La vie Wallonne (1949) p.171

Mudford, W. An historical account etc. Prints U and W.

Vasse, A. La province de Namur Vol. II p.47

29. It is still indicated at Siborne's map of 1844, but not on the one of 1860.

30.Ferraris just shows the chapel; Capitaine both. The map of 1860 still indicates the inn, under the name of Sart Molé and not the chapel.

31.Ferraris and the map of 1860. Capitaine situates it around the chapel of Battij St.Croix ! Also the modern map places the name (the wood has been cut down) further to the east.

32.Now, this farm is called the ferme de la Jouerie ". Another name is " ferme de Vallery ". The church itself dates from 1671, its spire from the late middle-ages. Its transept is from 1904.

33.It is still shown at the map of Capitaine and the one of 1860.

34.Also the names moulin de Brye can be found.

On the map of 1860, however, another mill can be found, with the name moulin de Winter, at 700 meters north east of the mill of Bussy. Houssaye uses this name as the other name of the one of Bussy. In: 1815.Waterloo p.156  
Ferraris does not show the Bussy mill.

35.Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo p.156

According to the British historian Parry, who lived in Belgium in 1894, the mill had collapsed on 9th July 1894. Notes in the archive of the NAM, nr.PH 7905/4 box 118

Houssaye's 1895 can be assumed to be the year that the ruins have been taken away. For a picture of the farm, in: Aerts, W. Waterloo, opérations etc. p.144

<sup>36</sup> Hofschroer, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.249

37. The chateau had eight round towers, of which still five are visible. In the centre was a square donjon with an arched gate, which could be closed with a portcullis. Next to the entrance building was a second donjon.

Cf. Vasse, A. La province de Namur pittoresque Vol.I p.52

38.Nowadays, the chateau is anonymous on the map; the same on those of Ferraris and of 1860. Capitaine doesn't show it at all.

<sup>39</sup> In the early nineteenth century, the ruins of the chateau must still have been there. Cf. Vasse, A. La province de Namur pittoresque Vol.I p.60

40.All are still being mentioned on the map of 1860.

41.The monument was inaugurated on September the 13th 1936; the initiative to its erection had been taken by a committee chaired by the writer Maurice Desombiaux. Its inscription reads:

" Aux trois victoires francaises de Fleurus. Luxembourg 1690 -Jourdan 1794 - Napoleon 1815. "