

Bodenghien's inn at Waterloo.

History ¹

Wellington established his headquarters in a building in the centre of Waterloo opposite the church, at the east side of the road which leads to Brussels. At that time it was called the Bodenghien inn.

The building must have been constructed in 1705 by Hubert Olivet, a master-paer. It was sold by his grandchildren on 29th July 1782 to J. Bodenghien and his wife C. Ghignet. Through heritance it came to Antoine Bodenghien in 1798 and in 1815 his widow, Marie Catherine Wilmet, was the owner. Since 1777 it served as a halting-place for horses, and in 1815 it also served as an inn.

Sometimes the building is confused with another construction at the other side of the road further to the north, in possession of Theys, and which was called *à l'ancien Jean de Nivelles*.²

In June 1815 the inn was a solid, large building with a floor and seven dormer-windows. The windows in the front of the building were surrounded by sober, but elegant frames. In the middle there was a door, which could be entered by climbing the three steps in front of it; the door gave access to a hall of which the floor was covered by black tiles.

In the hall were stairs which was laid out in style Louis XIV. Before entering the first floor one entered a room with a low door through a landing. It was in this room that the aide de camp Gordon died. Two steps led to another room with a door of which the post was decorated with carvings. The floor of the room was covered with red tiles. It was in this room that Wellington had settled.

The building contained other rooms which are now part of the houses next door (on both sides) and on the north side there was a large porch.

In 1815 the inn itself must have been quite small, with a relatively large space which served as stables, barn and storage.

In 1832 the widow Bodenghien died. Then, the building was handed over to her five daughters.

³ In the same year they sold the property as two premises, each consisting of the half of the house; at that time there was a brewery on the north side. In 1833 it was acquired by Casimir Anoul and in 1836 by Emmanuel de Becquevort.

In 1859 count Th. Ferd. de Meeus became the new owner, in 1864 Charles De Roeck. Later the premises came in the possession of the family of Deschamps, who sold it in public in July 1889 as three premises of three houses. The part in which Wellington had had his headquarters was described as: *“Maison avec porte cochère comprenant deux places au rez-de-chaussée avec vestibule et escalier, deux chambres à l'étage, deux caves avec sous-cave, deux greniers, grange, écurie, trou à charbon, cour et jardin. 13 a. 70 ca.”*⁴

This part, the most southern, was aquired by Justinien Pieterhoens.

He took off the dormer-windows and changed the northern part of the building by the establishment of a shop in the old inn. What remained were the facade, the doors, the stairs, the black flagstones in the hall and the two rooms on the first floor.

Pieterhoens had opened a very small museum in the room in which Wellington had slept, but it would take till 15th June 1955 that the building became an official museum. In this, the historian count Jacques-Henri Pirenne played a prominent role.⁵

On January 1958 the building was bought by the municipality of Waterloo; on 9th november 1961 the area in rear of the annexes of the building came into her hands as well and on 17th August 1971 it bought the adjoining house 149 chaussée de Bruxelles.

On 6th July 1973 this same municipality handed over the administration of the museum to the

a.s.b.l. Les Amis du Musée Wellington, an association which had been founded by Pirenne on 29th October 1954. In 1975 the museum was completely modernised.

The museum shows some furniture which would have been used by the Duke of Wellington on the nights of the 17th and 18th of June 1815.

In the courtyard a few gravestones of British officers who fell in the great battle can be found.

One of them is the white marble tablet which comes from the tomb of lieutenant colonel Edward Stables (1st regiment Foot Guards). This tomb, of blue stone, once stood in the courtyard behind a house at Joli-Bois, west of the Brussels road and 300 meters north of Mont Saint Jean. Stables died on the night of the 20th of June and now lies at Evere (since 1890).⁶

Another stone is the one of major Arthur Rowley Heyland (40th regiment infantry), who died 34 at years of age. This cubic and blue stone was in former times in the garden of the inn called Cheval Blanc (demolished by now), at Mont Saint Jean.⁷ The third stone is the one of lieutenant colonel Henry Walton Ellis (23rd regiment infantry).⁸

The fourth tablet is the one of lieutenant colonel Richard Fitzgerald (2nd regiment Life Guards).

⁹ It is fixed on a wall in the courtyard of the museum.

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1. Aerts, W. - Etudes (manuscript) p.169

Logie, J. – Waterloo, l'événement défectueux p.156-157

Fleischman, Th. Le quartier général de Wellington à Waterloo

2. The inn of Jean de Nivelles is indicated on the opposite side of the street by maps of A.D. Debruyne (1733), Deryckx (year VII) and of G. de Wauthier de Beren (1820).

3. One of them married Pierre-Vital Langendries and another one Jean-Baptiste Degreve. It is asserted that the son of Langendries was in the possession of the bed in which would have slept (that was in 1884). The bed can still be seen in the building (see below). Cf. Fleischman, Th. – Le quartier général de Wellington à Waterloo p.42

4. Cf. Fleischman, Th. – Le quartier général de Wellington à Waterloo p.42

5. According to Libert it was on 18th April 1965 that the museum opened. Cf. Libert, F. Waterloo. Verhaal van het verloop van de beroemde dag van 18 Juni 1815 p.45

6. On one of the tablets the following text is written:

“Beneath this stone lies the body of lieutenant-colonel Edward Stables, of Great Hormeadbury in the county of Herts. He served in the Continental Wars under Sir John Moore and the Duke of Wellington, and was killed on the 18th of June 1815 whilst commanding a Battalion of Grenadier Guards in the battle of Waterloo, at the close of that memorable Day. He fell distinguished. By his soldiers blest in his comrades' tears. MDCCCXV.”

Cf. Tarliers, J. et Wauters, A. Le Belgique ancienne et moderne. Bruxelles. 1860

In Latin is written:

“Hic jacet / Edvardus Stables / Olim de hormeadbury in comitatu Hertfordiensi / in exercitu Britannico satellitum regionum Tribunus / In Hispania militiam iniit, sub insigni duce Joan Moore, Equit. Baln / Mox, per eandem, per varios triumphos gloriosissime liberatam, / Sub insignissimo principe, Arthuro Duce de Wellington, / Galliam feliciter intravit: / Tandem in praelie Waterloviensi, / Agmini quadrato imperans, / Dum monitu et exemplo militum animos in hostem accendebat / Egrogia morte peremptus est. / Abreptum lugent amici, commilitones, Patria / Obiit anno aetatis suae XXXIII.”

For illustrations of the tomb:

Navez, L. Le champ de bataille et le pays de Waterloo en 1815 et actuellement p.192.

Cf. handwritten note of a British tourist dated summer 1820 about the presence of the tomb at Joli-Bois. In personal copy of: Smithers, H. - Observations made during etc. Brussels. 1817.

According to Libert the house was the former inn called Blocry Cf. Libert, F. Waterloo. Verhaal van het verloop van de beroemde dag van 18 Juni 1815 p.44

Nowadays it would be the Chaussée de Bruxelles nr.484. Cf. Gerke, L. Another look at historic Waterloo. In: The Waterloo Journal. Vol.19 nr.1 p.24

7. On the stone is written: Sacred to the memory of Major Arthur Rowley Heyland of his Britannick Majesty's Fortieth Regiment of Foot, who was buried on this spot. He fell gloriously in the battle of Waterloo on the 18th of June 1815 at the moment of victory and in command of the regiment. Age 34 years. Cf. Tarliers, J. et Wauters, G. La Belgique ancienne et moderne. Bruxelles. 1860.

Speeckaert, Les 135 vestiges etc. p.72.

Copin shows a picture of the stone in its original place, but in a very dilapidated state. Cf. Copin, Waterloo. Le folklore de la bataille. In: Le folklore Brabancon. Nr.148

According to the British historian Parry the body of Heyland would not have been buried under the stone itself, as his remains as well of his uniform were found elsewhere in the garden. These remains would have formed part of the museum of sergeant-major Cotton at Mont Saint. In: NAM

Nr.7905/5

The same archive contains a picture of around 1900 which shows the monument in a perfect state.

Also see:

Collection de 12 vues de Waterloo nr.4

Litho of Jobard after a drawing of A.de Peellaert. In: Waterloo 1815 une exceptionnelle collection etc. 1998 p.35

8. This officer was severely wounded in his chest by a shot of a carbine. He went to the rear on horseback, but just at the moment his horse leapt a ditch he was thrown of his horse. He was brought to the rear and taken care of. On the night of the 19th of June, however, a fire broke out in the cabin where he lay and it was assistant-surgeon Munro of the 23rd regiment who was just able to bring him into safety. The day after, Ellis died and was buried at Braine l'Alleud. Cf. Dalton, Ch. The Waterloo roll call 128.

The text on the tablet of his grave reads in French: "A la mémoire du chevalier H.W.Ellis, K.C.B. colonel du 23e régt des fusiliers royaux de Galles, tué à la bataille de Waterloo le 18 juin 1815". And in English: "To the memory of Colonel Sir H.W.Ellis K.C.B. 23rd Reg.R.Welsh Fusiliers / Killed in action at Waterloo / 18 June 1815." Cf. Tarliers, J. et Wauters, G. - Le Belgique ancienne et moderne. Bruxelles.1860
Speeckaert, G.P. Les 135 vestiges etc.p.34

9. Both these last two stones have come from the old churchyard of the village of Waterloo which was located at about 250 meters west of the church. Since long, this churchyard has been removed. Here was the tomb of colonel Von Langrehr (Fieldbattalion Bremen) too; it remains unclear what happened to this stone, which had a simple epitaph. Cf. Account of J.Scheltema about his visit to the battlefield in September 1815. In: Gijsberti Hodenpijl, C.F. Waterloo 1815-1905. In: Elsevier p.422

The text on the stone of Fitzgerald reads:

"D.O.M. Sacred to the memory of lieutenant colonel Richard Fitzgerald of the 2nd regiment Life Guards of his Britannic Majesty's, who fell gloriously at the Battle of La Belle Alliance near this town on the 18th June 1815 in the 41st year of his life, deeply and deservedly regretted by his family and friends. To a manly loftiness of soul he united all the virtues that could render him an ornament to his profession and to private and social life. Aux manes du plus vertueux des hommes généralement estimé et regretté de sa famille et de ses amis, le lieutenant colonel Fitzgerald de la garde du corps de Sa Majesté Britannique, tué glorieusement à la bataille de la Belle Alliance le 18 juin 1815.R.I.P." Cf. Speeckaert, G.P. Les 135 vestiges etc. p.34

The stone is severely damaged and the text itself has erased. Both stones are mentioned as being in a secluded place at Waterloo by the traveler John Scott, who visited Waterloo and the

battlefield in 1815. In: Paris revisited etc. p.134