

The hamlet and farm of Mont Saint Jean ¹

The hamlet of Mont Saint Jean can be found at about 3.5 kilometers south of the centre of the village of Waterloo.

It was here that the roads coming from Charleroi and Nivelles joined in a sharp angle and that they continued as one road towards Brussels. Strictly speaking however, it was a crossroads as the Nivelles-road continued as a sand-road towards Vert Coucou, at the edge of the forest of Soignes.

In 1815 Mont Saint Jean formed a hamlet of about 30 houses, which were almost all situated at and near the crossing and along the Brussels-road, towards Waterloo. ²

The name Mont Saint Jean has been given by religious people, who lived in the important and very old farm of Du Brabant. This name has probably been taken from Maison Saint Jean (which is taken from the Walloon word "monjonne" or "mohonne" which means "house" (maison). The old name of the crossing is also the one of La Bascule. ³

In the north-west corner of the crossing was in 1815 an inn. During the nineteenth century the Hotel des Colonnes was built immediately next to the inn. ⁴ This building has been rased, as all other buildings of the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean which stood there in 1815. One of them was the old farm and inn du Cheval Blanc (1689) which stood opposite the hotel, east of the road and north of the road which led to La Hulpe. Another inn was located west of the Brussels-road and south of the one of Nivelles. ⁵⁻⁶

At 540 meters north of the bifurcation of the two main roads of Brussels and Nivelles and east of

the first road stood since 1772 a windmill called Minne. ⁷ The mill was of the same type as the one of Bussy, having the front to the north-north-west. ⁸ It was demolished in 1922. In its immediate vicinity stood several constructions along the road. At about 400 meters south of the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean, the farm of the same name can be found.

The name of this farm has probably been taken from the establishment of the order of knights of the hospital of Saint Jean of Jerusalem, which was in existence since the 13th century. The farm was owned by the commanderie of Hainaut-Cambrésis.

The name of Mont Saint Jean occurs in a charter of Henry I, duke of Lothier, which confirms the donation of a piece of land by the family of De Wasseige to the hospital of Jerusalem.

From 1230 onwards the house was led by a commandeur, Arnould. Attached to the order of Piéton, the farm would have been rented from the middle of the 14th century. ⁹

The farm then comprised more than 50 hectares of land, a small wood and a part of the dime of Ophain and Smohain. The vicar of Braine l'Alleud read the mass twice a week in the chapel of the farm. In 1654 the farm was rented to the family Boucquéau. From then on the tenants were Francois, Henri, Sébastien and Maximilien Boucquéau. Under the Direction, the son of this last tenant, Grégoire Boucquéau, bought the farm. He was also the owner in 1815.

The farm as it looks now dates from May 1719. In that year Eustache de Wasegis gave his rights to the piece of land In Monte sancti Johannes to the knights of the hospital, after which the purchase can be found by a commandeur-brother Arnould of the house of Mont Saint Jean near Braine l'Alleud.

Until 1765 the farm wasn't closed on its west side; there was just a hedge and a fence between

“potales”. A few years later, however, the building was transformed: a wall was erected, the well was moved, the large entrance gate was built as was the great barn; the stables were enlarged and on top of the pigsties a poultry-house was constructed. In 1775 the farm consisted of a house, a large number of sheepstables, a pigsty, barns with cattle and a large barn, an oven, a well and a chapel.

From 1776 onwards the buildings were further transformed and enlarged by the order of Maltese (this order had succeeded the one of the knights of Saint Jean in 1530). The activities were finished in 1778 by the knight of Rosset de Fleury, commandeur of Piéton. At that time the adjoining fields of the farm contained 60 *bonniers*, of which four of pasture and four were covered with wood.

Originally, the road to Brussels ran on the east side of the farm, but was laid to the other side in 1765.¹⁰

In 1815 a man called Berger was farmer at Mont Saint Jean. According to the local tradition he fled for the war but his wife would have looked for shelter in the attic of the farm.¹¹

In 1906 the farm was threatened with demolition, but this could be avoided.¹²

In 1926 the main gate collapsed, but was rebuilt.¹³ In 1992 this happened again; so far it has not been rebuilt.

Despite the construction of the highway to Brussels just north of the farm, it has kept its authentic character.¹⁴ All the trees opposite and around the farm have been cut.¹⁵

The farm is formed by a huge rectangular shape, enclosing a courtyard, and which consists of a house, numerous stables, barns and a small chapel. In the courtyard there is a well.

The main gate is covered by a small tower, which has on its front a tablet which commemorates the transformation of the farm in 1778, with a Maltese cross on top of it.¹⁶

To the right of the main gate is another tablet. It was placed there on 5th June 1981 on the initiative of the Waterloo Committee by the Royal Army Medical Corps. It reads:

“In memory of deputy inspector Gunning principal medical officer of the 1st corps the surgeons and other members of the field hospital which was established in this farm to care for the wounded on the battlefield 18th June 1815. This tablet was erected in 1981 by the Royal Army Medical Corps.”

On top of the door of the house there is another cross of the Maltese order dating from 1682.

In 1815, near the farm, to the west of the Brussels road, were a stone cross and a tiny chapel. They reminded to the death of a local farmer called Mathieu Nicaise. He would have died in a landslide at the same place as where they were erected.¹⁷

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¹ The information in this note has mainly been based on the publication of Jaspar, H.P.H. - La ferme de Mont Saint Jean p.1-7

2.Cf. Hills, R. - Sketches in Flanders and Holland with some account of a tour through parts of those countries after the battle of Waterloo, in a series of letters to a friend p.69
Most houses were mere huts, covered with straw and having no floors.

3.Cf. Copin, J. - Waterloo: le folklore de la bataille p.28-29

4. Aerts doesn't exclude it was already there in 1815. In: Etudes (manuscript) p.109-110
For an illustration, cf.

Copin, J. - Waterloo: le folklore de la bataille p.28-29

Villers, M.L. de , Notre cher Waterloo de naguère n.p.

Gerke, L. Waterloo en cartes postales anciennes nr.62

In 1954 it was expropriated and in 1961 demolished. Only the balcony has been preserved. It is now in the Musée du Caillou, Vieux Genappe. Cf. Speeckaert, G.P. – Les 135 vestiges etc. p.74

5. Pictures in the file of the former Cotton-museum. In: NAM, nr. PH 7905/4 box 118

Villers, M.L. de , Notre cher Waterloo de naguère n.p.

Gerke, L. Waterloo en cartes postales anciennes nr.62

6. When most of the inn of Cheval blanc has been demolished is not known; at least at the beginning of the 20th century it must still have existed. Cf. Navez, L. – Le champ de bataille etc.p.34

It was in its garden that the tomb of major A.R.Heyland stood (cf. other chapter).

The most northern part of the building is still there, though partly transformed and in ruins. Cf. Gerke, L. Another look at historic Waterloo. In: The Waterloo Journal. Vol.19 nr.1 p.25

7. Navez, L. Le champ de bataille etc. p.109

Cf. Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc.

Charras, J.B.A. - Histoire de la campagne de 1815 – plan

Cf. Lieutenant Wilson (battery of Sinclair). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703.87

Sketch of Lady Gordon, 1829. In: Waterloo 1815, p.68

For a picture, see:

M.de Villers. Notre chère Waterloo de naguère n.p.

Aerts, W. - Promenades etymologiques etc. p.7

Barral, G. - Itinéraire etc. p.129

NAK, WO 78/768

8.Cf. Mudford, W. - An historical account of the campaign in the Netherlands, print F and G

S.J.Neele. Catalogue "Waterloo 1815" pl.XXIV

Copin, J. - Waterloo: le folklore de la bataille p.43.

In 1910 the mill had no more wings. Cf. Navez, L. La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.243

The house of the miller was rased on 30th Deptember 1992. This house, in former times called ferme Maltournée, stood opposite the current pharmacy of Sotiaux. Cf. Gerke, L. Another look at historic Waterloo. In: The Waterloo Journal. Vol.19 nr.1 p.24

9.According to Navez the farm is mentioned in 1431. Cf. Navez, L. Le cahamp de bataille etc. p.100

According to Jaspas the commanderie of the Piéton possessed the farm already in the beginning of the 16th century. Cf. Jaspas, H.P.H. La ferme de Mont Saint Jean p.3

10. Capitaine (1796) still shows the old situation, while the Carte cabinet des Pays-Bas Autrichiens (1777) shows the new one, though this map is older. Of the old road a tiny bit can still be found just in rear of the farm.

¹¹ Aerts, W. Etudes (manuscript) p.113

12.Cf. the Times of 10th July 1906.

13.Cf. the Times of 11th November 1926. Also see: Aerts, W. Etudes (manuscript) p.112

14.For illustrations of the farm, see:

Mudford,W. An historical account etc. print H.

Howarth, D. Waterloo, day of battle p.251

Logie, J. Waterloo, l'évitable défaite p.149

Collection de 12 vues de Waterloo nr.5

15.See plans in:

Siborne, W. History of the war etc. London.1844

Craan, W.B. Plan du champ de bataille etc. Brussel.1816

Charras, Histoire de la campagne de 1815. Brussel.1863

Bas, F.de & T'Serclaes de Wommersom, J.de La campagne de 1815 aux Pays Bas. Brussel.1900.

16.The text reads: "Haec villa omnimo reedificata ab illustrissimo D.D. De Rosset Defleury commendatore in Pieton ordinis Melitensis anno Domini 1778."

17.Aerts, W. Etudes (manuscript) p.113

Aerts, W. Promenades etymologiques etc. p.7

According to Aerts this was in 1783, but the Carte de cabinet des Pays Bas Autrichiens mentions the cross on his map (1777). In 1861 the foot of the cross still must have been there;

the chapel has been taken away as well, when is not known.