

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND THE GREAT PEACE:
REFLECTIONS ON THE END OF THE NAPOLEONIC WARS, 1814-1815***

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This article explores Nottingham's ambivalent attitude to the battle of Waterloo, which concluded hostilities between England and France in June 1815. It poses a contrast between Nottingham's muted reaction to Waterloo and the town's exuberant commemoration of the general peace between England and France the year before. The article considers different reasons for this, including Nottingham's response to earlier set-piece battles on the continent and its reaction to domestic political events. The article explores Nottingham's commitment to radical politics before 1815, as symbolised in its continued petitioning of parliament, and its patriotic commitment to the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. The article argues that it was the disappointment of the town's hopes for economic relief, following the end of hostilities in 1814, combined with fears of a further prolonged period of conflict and delays to parliamentary reform, which helps to explain the town's attitude during Napoleon's 'Hundred Days' (March-June 1815) and after Waterloo.

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One of the most striking consequences of the bicentenary commemorations of the battle of Waterloo has been the rise of interest in its domestic ramifications. Waterloo has always attracted its fair share of military strategists, diplomatic historians and biographers inspired by the courage, heroism, carnage and brutality of events south of Brussels on Sunday 18 June 1815. But the battle was immediately significant, on a

domestic level, in bringing to an end a conflict which had been waged, against various shades of French government, over the course of an entire generation (1793-1802, 1803-15).¹

Most of the recent work on domestic reactions to Waterloo has, perhaps understandably, stressed the unanimity of feeling going into the battle and the unprecedented levels of celebration following news of the victory. However, local examples often provide telling qualifications to the general picture.² In this article, I will be exploring the ambivalent reaction registered in Nottingham after Waterloo, drawing a contrast with the widespread festivities in the town after the conclusion of the general peace between Britain and France in 1814. The article seeks to explain this difference in light of wider attitudes towards the war in Nottingham, which enjoyed a well-established reputation for radicalism in this period. In doing so, the article demonstrates how far the battle's military significance was already coming to be obscured, at a local level, by the legacy of a hard-fought and long-continued war, as well as the desire for swift and immediate reforms once it had reached its conclusion.

I

Wellington's despatch, containing a full account of his victory over Napoleon Bonaparte, on a battlefield approximately ten miles south of Brussels, reached London on Wednesday 21 June 1815, three days after it had been fought. It was carried by Major Henry Percy (1785-1825), one of Wellington's aide-de-camps, who travelled non-stop from Brussels to Ostend via Ghent before crossing to England. Securing a post-chaise-and-four, bedecked with the blue and white flags of victory,

and displaying two captured imperial French eagles from its windows, he took seven hours to reach London; he found the prime minister Lord Liverpool at a cabinet dinner and was sent on to St James' Square where, in his blood-stained uniform, he delivered the news to the prince regent.³

With the official publication of the despatch in the *London Gazette Extraordinary* the next day, authentic news of the victory had arrived.⁴ However, reports of Wellington's success had already reached England by other means. The financier Nathan Rothschild had received the news the day after Waterloo but, fearing a revival of speculation on the financial markets, the government had doubted the reports. Most accounts identify Rothschild's source as his agent John Roworth, whose brother William subsequently served as mayor of Nottingham in 1839-40 at the height of the Chartist disturbances.⁵

London was reported to be 'one continual scene of uproar and joy', following receipt of the news, with the firing of guns at the Tower of London and two days of public illuminations.⁶ Comparable scenes were reported across the country over the course of the next few months with the ringing of church bells, illuminations, rejoicings and, in August, 'a bonfire blazed on the summit of Skiddaw, and on the mountaintop local residents, including Wordsworth and Southey, feasted on roast beef, plum pudding and punch'. Southey told a correspondent that it was 'the first time that any public rejoicings had ever been held on so elevated a spot; & the effect was sublime to a degree which none can imagine but those who witnessed it'.⁷ The commemorations culminated in November, after the signing of the peace treaty with France, when London was illuminated on a scale not seen since the peace of Amiens in 1802-3.⁸

Nottingham formed a conspicuous exception to the commemoration of Waterloo, after news of the victory broke in the local press on Saturday 24 June. Apart from the discharge of a *feu de joie* (or celebratory musket salute) in the market place by the Cambridgeshire militia, who were quartered in the town, no public celebration of any kind was instituted. However, in common with many other towns across the country, a public subscription was instituted for the relief of the families of those killed and wounded in the battle.⁹

What might explain Nottingham's silence? Are we to infer a seditious undertone to the town's uncharacteristic reticence on the occasion? Since the resumption of hostilities with France, in May 1803, Nottingham had shown its willingness to commemorate significant military victories, when the occasion demanded. The town had exercised restraint, after news of the battle of Trafalgar reached home in November 1805, but this was out of respect for Lord Nelson, who had perished on the *Victory*. Nottingham had subscribed to the Patriotic Fund, launched after the battle, but had confined official commemoration to the ringing of church bells at the start of Nelson's lying-in-state, prior to his state funeral in January 1806.¹⁰ Similarly, after Wellington's defeat of the French at the battle of Vittoria, in June 1813, a hundred 'respectable inhabitants' of Nottingham had dined in the town at Thurland Hall, although some dissent was registered when the mail coach delivering the news was hissed. By contrast, a month after the allied victory at the battle of Leipzig, an effigy of Napoleon Bonaparte was horse-whipped and shot at in the town; it was later 'tried' before an assembly of eighty diners and, after being sentenced to death, was ritually paraded through Nottingham before being burned.¹¹

There was little openly-expressed support for Bonaparte in Nottingham before the spring of 1815. Radicals sympathetic to the principles of the French revolution of

1789 had become progressively more disillusioned at Napoleon's rise to power and his accumulation of offices and territories, most particularly, his assumption of the title 'Emperor of the French' in 1804. His invasion of Spain and Portugal, which heralded the start of the Peninsular Wars in 1808, was a particular outrage to liberal sentiment. In February 1793, the Nottingham banker John Wright had been one of twenty six signatories who petitioned in support of peace with France. By 1812, he was arguing:

Is there a man, worthy of the name and the honour of a Briton, who would not blush to give up Spain to the inexorable tyrant that had invaded her; and you know, that is now the only point in dispute.¹²

II

We cannot adequately explain Nottingham's muted reaction to Waterloo through comparing its response with other military successes during the Napoleonic wars, but we can do so by noting the widespread celebrations attending the declaration of peace in 1814. Faced by an invasion from the armies of Austria, Prussia, Russia and Britain, and deserted by many of his leading marshals, Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated as emperor on 6 April 1814. Under the terms of the treaty of Fontainebleau, he was exiled to the island of Elba, together with 1000 men, his sister and his mother. To all intents and purposes, a war which had been waged almost continuously for twenty years was over. 'Surely [the Reverend John Stonard exclaimed] there will never be any more news as long as we live. The papers will be as dull as a ledger and politics insipid as the white of an egg'.¹³

The watchwords of victory, adorned on flags and bunting across the land, were 'Peace and Plenty' – though quite what this meant varied according to artistic interpretation and political prejudice.¹⁴ 'It is impossible to speculate coolly and collectedly upon the wonderful intelligence of the last few days', the tory *Nottingham Journal* observed:

It brings us PEACE. It is the harbinger of the good old times. It will increase tenfold the happiness of us all... We are upon the point of entering a long and smooth course of national prosperity. Our flag will visit every port of the ocean; the produce of our industry will be received in every market; and before the termination of a few months, every description of manufactory in the country (that of arms alone excepted) will be fully employed.¹⁵

In Nottingham, crowds had welcomed the mail coach bearing the news, decorated with laurels and carrying blue and white flags, the bells at the churches of St Mary's, St Nicholas' and St Peter's had rung for two days and Monday, the traditional day-off reserved for public events, saw the erection of a gigantic bonfire in the market place, the firing of guns and the liberal distribution of squibs or fireworks.¹⁶ A meeting at the Guildhall on Thursday 14 April determined that Nottingham would commemorate 'the GREAT and GLORIOUS EVENTS' with fireworks subsidised by the corporation and an illumination of the Exchange building, with any surplus devoted to a relief fund for wounded servicemen and the widows and orphans of the deceased.¹⁷

The timing of Nottingham's official celebrations and the corporation's sensitivity to correct procedure is significant. Mindful that the peace might prove premature, the corporation determined that no illumination should take place in the

town until the first Monday after the signature of the ‘General Preliminaries of Peace’ – an event which was still six weeks away.¹⁸ However, a partial illumination took place on Monday 18 April, the first Monday after the Guildhall meeting. The town’s radical newspaper, the *Nottingham Review*, condemned this as an act of political spite by local tories unwilling to be restrained by the corporation and reported that the properties of George Hopkinson, a fifty-five year old attorney living at 30 Long Row and Mr White in Stoney Street were attacked for failing to illuminate. A correspondent complained that women could not move through the town for fear of assault or were injured by fire-crackers thrust in their face: ‘the fear of being thought a *Jacobin*, ought not to be a *sufficient* excuse with men in power, to deter them from doing their duty’.¹⁹ By contrast, the tory *Nottingham Journal*, which contributed to the illuminations by displaying a transparency of Britannia under a palm tree adorned with the names of famous military victories, stated that there were ‘no unpleasant circumstance[s]...to cloud the general joy’ of the occasion.²⁰

However, the full force of celebration only really began with the signature of the treaty of Paris on 30 May 1814. News arrived in Nottingham on Friday 3 June, the mail coach once more bedecked for the occasion and drawn into town by a crowd of enthusiastic well-wishers. The news coincided perfectly with King George III’s birthday the next day, which gave added resonance to the festivities. On Saturday, the Leicestershire militia and Inniskilling dragoons fired three vollies each in the market place, there was an evening entertainment at the Exchange and official notification for the illumination of the town was issued by the deputy mayor, Wright Coldham. Given the weeks of preparation which had preceded it, it was perhaps to be expected that this event, on Monday 6 June, would be remarkable. The *Journal* expressed rhapsodies at the ‘superior excellence’ of the transparencies, which ‘exceeded all

calculation [-] in the multiplicity and variety of devices exhibited, human ingenuity seemed almost to have been exhausted'.²¹

The centre-piece of Nottingham's illuminations were fifteen transparencies, displayed at the Exchange, the work of Richard Bonington Senior (father of the artist Richard Parkes Bonington), commissioned by the town surveyor and architect Edward Staveley. Transparencies were a popular form of decorative illustration in this period, comprising pictures, prints or inscriptions which were lit from behind by candle-light. The majority were produced on linen paper which was strong and absorbent. The paper was coated on both sides with a varnish of mastic and turpentine, which would compress the linen fibres and make the paper translucent. Pre-made transparencies, available to purchase from shops, and featuring popular subjects, including members of the royal family, national celebrities or figure-heads such as Britannia, helped speed-up the production process. Simple, bold designs with plenty of space for the light to shine through were the most effective. Transparencies could be fixed to the glass by means of wax or glue, or else by insertion into a wooden frame, especially made for the purpose. Nottingham's transparencies featured a variety of personalities both military and royal, including the Prussian general Blücher and the restored Bourbon king of France, Louis XVIII. There were lions, crowns, Russian eagles and emblems representing 'peace and plenty and commerce'.²²

Nottingham presented a carnival appearance, with Smith's bank displaying a Cossack on horseback pursuing Napoleon into the jaws of a monster, the police office appropriately exhibiting a transparency of justice, the Guildhall raising portraits of eminent lawyers and Nottingham castle lit with torches on the parapet walls. To prevent a recurrence of earlier problems, there was an official ban on firing guns and

throwing crackers or squibs. The only incident of note involved ‘a man who calls himself Richard Sharpe’ - no relation of the famous fictional creation by Bernard Cornwell - who was committed to the town gaol for assaulting two constables ‘whilst in the due execution of their office’. However, the overwhelming impression was of decorum and good order. ‘No illumination in Nottingham, either before or since’, *The Nottingham Date-Book* observed, ‘[has] been anything like so general or magnificent’.²³

III

The festivities following the peace treaty with France in 1814 help cast new light on the corresponding lack of celebration in Nottingham following Waterloo. Those festivities were far from confined to the town. In London, two days after Nottingham’s illumination, the prince regent lit Carlton House with transparencies, and major public buildings and shops followed suit. Likewise, at Derby, a programme of ‘Public Rejoicings’ took place, including the expenditure of at least £60 on transparencies.²⁴

In Nottinghamshire more generally, a pattern of feasts, festivals and thanksgivings ensued, in the six to eight weeks after the treaty of Paris was signed.²⁵ At Oxtun, William Sherbrooke provided roast beef and enough ale to refresh up to 5000 diners, as well as hosting a series of horse races.²⁶ Events at Sutton-in-Ashfield, we are told, ‘began most happily, went on most charmingly, and finished most delightfully’, with 1000 children receiving a present to mark the occasion. Newark’s town hall was decorated with 100 dozen ‘variegated lamps’; there was a ball for 300 people and a dinner of beef and mutton inside the town hall whilst four hogsheads of

ale was distributed in the market place. £200 was disbursed amongst the labouring classes in order that they might celebrate the occasion in any way they saw fit – which probably entailed many of them getting drunk.

‘Had a stranger to English rejoicings passed through [Mansfield Woodhouse] at this moment’, one newspaper report observed:

he would naturally have supposed that the rustic villagers were verily and merrily running mad; in fact, it was a scene of rural felicity and jocund good humour not to be delineated, but by the pencil of Hogarth.

For all their bucolic excess, the celebrations were highly stratified by social rank and characterised by a paternalism which was demonstrated in ways appropriate to the situation. At Mansfield, the lace manufacturers paraded the town with music and a lace flag before providing tea, cake and dancing. Meanwhile, at Southwell, a beef and plum pudding dinner was held on Burgage Green, after which an effigy of Bonaparte on an ass was conducted around, ‘which, after enduring the execrations of the surrounding crowd, was precipitated into a large bonfire, as a suitable reward for tyranny and usurpation’.

There are numerous examples of roast lamb dinners for the respectable classes, teas and dances for the women, plum pudding feasts for the children, illuminations for the masses and alms or dole distributed to the poor. Patronage played a leading part in the provision of food and drink, with the local squire, magistrate or landlord, or the moving force behind the subscription which funded dinners and feasts, ceremonially paraded around the community (in imitation of

election rituals) as a public expression of thanks. In this respect, events at Mansfield Woodhouse were the most obviously hierarchical and denominational. Food and entertainment was provided for 120 Sunday school scholars in three denominations and the labouring classes were arranged in seven groups. The founder of the feast, Colonel Need, was cheered at his mansion as ‘that excellent, firm, and upright Magistrate’. Every child under-fourteen was given a two-penny spiced bun with the word ‘peace’ stamped on it whilst everyone over fourteen had a shilling given them for tea.

These were public events designed to demonstrate a collective sense of the blessings of victory, a community’s rite of passage after the long endurance of war. They were held in communal spaces such as town halls, assembly rooms and village greens. The advantages of open space were recognised in hosting sports, races and ‘jumping in sacks’ or for mounting firework displays and illuminations. At Bleasby, it was thought worthy of remark that the dancing on the green took place with ‘rich and poor mixing together’:

Each morning was ushered in by a peal of the village bells, to arouse every inhabitant to commence the hilarity of the day. A commodious place was affixed upon, near the wheelwright’s shop, and at 2 o’clock a plentiful dinner was served up...Two neat flags with the words ‘Peace’ ‘G[eorge].R[ex].’ etc were tastefully ornamented by the villagers. After the cloth was drawn, several appropriate toasts were given by the chairman and drank with much harmony by the company. The charring of the principal inhabitants, led by the village band, of music, and a dance on the green, concluded the first day.²⁷

Meanwhile, at Bingham, the market cross was decorated with laurel and flags, a large bonfire was held in the market place and, following a dinner for 700 people ‘of all classes’, a succession of toasts were acclaimed with steadily increasing enthusiasm to the sound of beating drums. The loudest and most enthusiastic reception was reserved for the resplendent toast ‘All the WORLD and BINGHAM!!!’²⁸

I V

The war was over – or at least so everybody thought - and so, after a long-continued succession of festivities, were the celebrations of the peace. As one reporter observed at the time, ‘Never was a scene of festivity supported so long with so much cordiality’. In a significant act of finality, the county militia was disembodied on the day that peace was signed and, a month later, the 4th duke of Newcastle, as lord lieutenant of the county, received parliament’s thanks for Nottinghamshire’s contribution to home defence.²⁹ But the war was not over and the peace had left a bad taste in the mouth of some of the more advanced radicals. The radical political journalist William Cobbett condemned ‘One boundless scene of extravagance and waste...idleness and dissipation pervaded the whole Kingdom, and the people appeared to be all raving drunk, all raving mad’.³⁰

If it meant anything to the people of Nottingham, ‘Peace and Plenty’ meant hopes for a speedy renewal of trade and economic prosperity. As the *Journal* had noted in April 1814, the celebrations not only commemorated ‘the downfall of tyranny [and] the Emancipation of Nations’ but ‘the revived expansion of Commerce, and the prospect of happiness and Peace’.³¹ The words were deliberate and important. Throughout the revolutionary wars of the 1790s and the Napoleonic wars which

followed them, Nottingham had consistently exercised its constitutional right to petition – whether the house of commons, the crown or both. The usual procedure was for a signed requisition to be presented to the mayor to call a public meeting at which the issues could be aired, followed by the moving of a petition which lay for signature in a publicly accessible place and was afterwards presented by a representative of the town. The corporation could respond by instituting its own petition, or else leave the demonstration of public feeling to have its own effect.³²

In 1797, a 5000-signature petition from the town, reinforced by one from the corporation, urged George III to change his ministers. It was a year in which the war was particularly hard-felt; cash payments were suspended because gold bullion was being exported from Britain and new financial measures were introduced to fund the war effort, including a property tax, the forerunner of modern income tax. This pattern resumed during the Napoleonic wars, especially after trade embargoes were instituted by France in 1807 and Britain responded through the ‘Orders-in-Council’. Nevertheless, Napoleon continued to be opposed by men of advanced radical opinions like Charles Sutton, who founded the *Nottingham Review* in June 1808 on a platform of radicalism at home and patriotism abroad. Four years later, as a result of continuing trade embargoes, war broke out between Britain and America. This had particularly severe consequences for manufacturing trade and added to the economic difficulties being suffered in the town.³³

Nottingham’s principal form of employment in this period was the hosiery trade, which was not particularly depressed before the start of the nineteenth century. In the early stages of the wars with France, demand kept wages buoyant - on average from thirteen to fifteen shillings - until the impact of trade embargoes and the emergence of cheap and sub-standard goods (the ‘cut-ups’) began to hit home after

1809. Over the course of the next three years, knitters' wages fell by up to one-third; on the eve of the Luddite disturbances in 1811-12, the general average wage for framework knitters was 7s 3d.³⁴

The return of peace in 1814 led, in the opinion of one contemporary observer, to 'ruinously extensive' speculations in the hosiery trade. Fuelled by the expectation that British manufactures would enjoy the same level of demand that they experienced during the peace of 1802-3, manufacturers soon found themselves suffering under the rigours of international competition and depressed trade. This provided the backdrop for a general decline in the fortunes of the hosiery industry in the town, over the next few years, and a continuing reduction in wages.³⁵

It is for this reason that we should detect no lack of patriotism in Nottingham's petitions for peace and parliamentary reform during the later stages of the Napoleonic wars. As historians like John Beckett and Mark Pottle have recognised, Nottingham could retain its political radicalism and desire for social change whilst remaining patriotically opposed to Bonaparte's ambitions and the threat of a potential invasion.³⁶ Though that threat had lessened after the battle of Trafalgar, it was still enough for the *Review* to note, in August 1813:

There are great numbers in England, and we believe a great majority of the people, who loathe the present ministers...but are we to infer from hence, that the people, thus discontented, would remain tame spectators while an enemy ravaged their country? Not a man is there among them, capable of wielding a sword, but would rush upon the enemy, rather than see the land of his nativity subjected to a foreign yoke.³⁷

It was distaste for government ministers and reaction to their wartime economic policies which stimulated Nottingham protest in this period, rather than the desire for a republican system of government. Significantly, Sutton's mast-head to the *Review* was a line from William Cowper's poem *The Task* (1785) - 'England, with all thy faults I love thee still'. Petitions voiced the desire for a thoroughgoing reform of parliament, which would bring with it a change of ministers and, hopefully, a different course in foreign and economic policy. This was the reason why a 4,500-signature petition was presented to the house of commons in May 1810 and why sheep and lambs were roasted in the town a month later, after the release of the leading radical Sir Francis Burdett from the Tower of London.³⁸

The corporation explicitly supported these calls through their own petitions and by appointing Lord Holland, a dedicated whig supporter of religious and political liberty, as the town's recorder in October 1809. The appointment, which followed the death of the 3rd duke of Portland, was a symbolic reminder of the town's independence from aristocratic domination. Portland had not only been lord lieutenant of the county but was prime minister from 1807-9. When his successor, Spencer Perceval, was assassinated in the lobby of the house of commons, in May 1812, the event was celebrated with a band and music in Fisher Gate before the riot act was read. A similar event was held at Newark.³⁹

This was rough politics but not republicanism. Not only had Nottingham commemorated George III's jubilee on 25 October 1809, with a service at St Mary's Church followed by a mayoral breakfast, but frequently petitioned the king for direct relief from his ministers. In June 1812, Nottingham theatre had to be closed for the season after a disturbance arose when some of the audience refused to remove their hats during the singing of 'God Save the King'. Executive authority had, by this time,

passed to the prince regent. In addressing him the year before, the corporation had expressed their ‘sympathy...on the great and many misfortunes of the nation, which they attributed to the war, the progress of taxation, and an obstructed commerce’.⁴⁰

The prince regent’s distaste for his father’s tory ministers was well-known but hopes of their speedy replacement by the whigs never came to pass. By 1812, politics in Nottingham had been polarised by the outbreak of Luddism, which began as a protest at the reduced prices paid to framework knitters but soon assumed violent proportions. Luddites targeted the frames on which the inferior ‘cut-ups’ which threatened their wages and craft traditions were manufactured. The government responded by reinforcing the town’s military barracks, which had been established in 1792 as a means of ensuring security in Nottingham, with some 4,000 regular infantry. Concern at the prospect of unrest was heightened by the fact that, during the year, at least half the town’s inhabitants were registered for poor relief. In September 1812, there were food riots, the first to have taken place in the town since 1800.⁴¹

It was in this context that, on 28 December 1812, a meeting of whigs and radicals at the Guildhall petitioned for a ‘speedy stop...to the ravages of war’. This led to a counter-petition which, according to Malcolm Thomis, secured eight times as many signatures. It was subsequently presented to the prince regent by the duke of Newcastle, as lord lieutenant, in April 1813.⁴²

Consequently, there is a good deal of truth in Norman Gash’s wry comment that ‘the first present which peace made to the British people was disillusionment’.⁴³ Insofar as Nottingham was concerned, the year between the festivities of 1814 and the successful outcome of Waterloo was sufficient to exhaust any hopes of a peace dividend. ‘It is with pain we turn our attention to the daring outrages carrying on at

home', the *Nottingham Journal* observed in April 1814, in the same edition which brought news of peace with France:

We allude to the re-appearance of that diabolical system, which under the name of Luddism....spread such terror and devastation throughout the manufacturing districts of this county two years ago.⁴⁴

Later that year, the *Review* struck an equally discordant note:

We want that which reform alone can ensure to us; we want an extensive [reduction] of the taxes, and...of the national debt...which blessings would be as certain as the coming day, if the voice of the people were heard in the great council of the nation in the manner it ought to be.⁴⁵

The implication was clear. Now that victory had been achieved, nothing could stand in the way of securing the parliamentary reform which had been so-long delayed by the war. When John Blackner published his *History of Nottingham* in 1815, he observed that it would 'require a very great share of prudence to prevent the spirit of party from disfiguring the fair page of the historian', in discussing events since the outbreak of the war.⁴⁶

These attitudes had also affected celebrations of the general peace. During the grand illumination of Nottingham, in June 1814, John Wright displayed a transparency of John Bull burning the income tax; a telling rebuke for a tax which continued to operate until the new year. Meanwhile, at Mansfield, the 'festivities of the day' were 'considerably heightened [by] the welcome intelligence' that the corn

bill had been ‘thrown out of the House of Commons’. This was a reference to the government’s proposal to prevent the importation of foreign corn until domestic prices had achieved eighty shillings per quarter – a measure of economic protection thought essential to defend the interests of agriculture. The bill’s re-introduction, in January 1815, produced an 18,000-signature petition from Nottingham, supported by one from the corporation, condemning the measure.⁴⁷

V

Encouraged by accounts of growing discontent at home, Napoleon left Elba at the end of February 1815. After landing in the south of France, he made a daring march towards Paris over the course of the next three weeks, gathering troops and popular support along the way. By the middle of March, he was re-installed as emperor. Though he made overtures of peace to the allied powers, who were convened together at the congress of Vienna, they were rejected. Military preparations were immediately put in hand for the invasion of France and the removal of Bonaparte from the throne. The scene was set for the battle of Waterloo.⁴⁸

When news of these events reached Nottingham, an interesting change of tone was registered in some quarters. Whilst the *Review* continued to oppose Bonaparte personally, it resisted any interference in the internal affairs of France. On 18 April, over fifty householders (including Blackner) requisitioned the mayor for a meeting to consider petitions to the prince regent and parliament, against ‘involving this country, unnecessarily, in a war with France’. The petitioners argued that the French were only exercising the same right as the British had secured at the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688; that of choosing ‘a government consistent with its own will’. The mayor

refused the request, ostensibly because it coincided with a state of heightened feeling in the town at the passage of the corn law. There had been attacks on Nottingham bakers who refused to give away bread and a call for the non-payment of taxes. A proposed meeting on the forest was banned but about 200 inhabitants gathered in the park on 24 April, where they condemned the continuance of ‘a long and unjust war’, as well as the passage of the corn law. Having been denied the active support and compliance of the mayor and the magistracy, petitions to the prince regent and the commons expressing these views were left for signature at Mr Darby’s shop in Smithy Row; reputedly, some 4,500 people signed them.⁴⁹

Local opposition to the war was also registered in the house of commons. John Smith, one of Nottingham’s two MPs, was one of twenty one members who voted against further British involvement in the war on no less than three separate occasions. Nottingham’s other MP, George Parkyns, was often associated with opposition to the government but was not involved in any of the four divisions on the subject between 7 April and 25 May 1815. By contrast, both county MPs supported the government.⁵⁰

Smith’s actions, and the local opposition to the war spearheaded by the *Review*, found vigorous opposition in the *Nottingham Gazette, and Political, Literary, Agricultural and Commercial Register*. The newspaper had been launched by William Tupman in January 1813 as an alternative to the *Review*. Tupman was incensed at what he regarded as the encouragement given to Luddism by the *Review* and the equally apathetic reaction of the *Journal*.⁵¹ In the spring of 1815, the *Gazette* devoted far more space to international affairs than most provincial papers. Through extensive editorials, typically spreading over two columns, it maintained its strenuous support for British involvement in the war against Napoleon and vigorously attacked MPs like

Smith who opposed the war, as well as the petitioners who campaigned against it. However, the narrowness of support for the *Gazette*, and its inability to break the stranglehold of its two established competitors, is evidenced by the fact that it ceased publication a fortnight before the battle of Waterloo. The newspaper explained its failure by citing a lack of advertising revenue as well as the effects of a rise in the government's newspaper duty. The *Review* and the *Journal*, who were, on this occasion, united in mutual loathing, published mock obituaries to mark the passing of their competitor.⁵²

V I

'It may well be', as Mark Pottle argued in 1988, 'that the extensive festivities of 1814 had exhausted the town's desire for a celebration in connection with this war'.⁵³ But there is more to the explanation of Nottingham's quiescent reaction after Waterloo than simple fatigue. It was not that the people of Nottingham wanted to deny the importance of Waterloo or because of any evident lack of patriotism on their part but because pressing domestic considerations had now overtaken the euphoria which the initial expectations of peace had raised.⁵⁴ Even in London, the tone of Waterloo celebrations seemed different. According to one diarist:

No sooner was the dreadful slaughter of the battle...known than half a dozen advertisements appeared in the newspapers offering mourning to the relatives of the deceased, and one person offered to contract with them to remove the dead bodies to England, he having (as he states) formed a connection in Brussels for that purpose.⁵⁵

Similarly, when William Cobbett was informed of the victory at Waterloo by a ‘villainous-looking crowd of gypsies’, he was informed by one of their number that “it is glorious news, and we may now hope to see the gallon loaf a *grate* [groat] again, as ‘twas in my old father’s time”⁵⁶

The contrast was perhaps most marked in respect of the *Nottingham Review*. Having abandoned the battlefield after Waterloo, Napoleon passed the next few weeks trying to shore up his support in France before finally surrendering to Captain Maitland of the *Bellerophon* at Rochefort on 15 July. In the same issue which announced this news, the *Review* carried the verdict of the jury in the trial of its editor, Charles Sutton, for an alleged libel.⁵⁷ The case arose from an edition of the *Review* in October 1814 in which a letter to the editor was published. Ostensibly written by ‘General Ludd’, the letter contrasted his son Ned’s activities as a Luddite, which were proscribed by the authorities, with his actions as an enlisted soldier in the war with America, which were encouraged and acclaimed. The letter was written in the aftermath of the British burning of Washington, including the assault on the ‘White House’, on 27 September 1814:

He has a license to set fire to places and property which he deems obnoxious and now and then a little *private pillage* is winked at...all which I and my son have done in Nottingham and the neighbourhood is not half so bad as what my son has done in America; but then, you know, he has supreme orders from indisputable authority for his operations in America, and that makes all the difference.

The letter was prosecuted by the government, which argued that it ‘stigmatised and degraded the British army, who had by their heroic achievements so nobly upheld the honour and fame of their country’. Sutton was found guilty and imprisoned in Northampton gaol for a year.⁵⁸

The trial and its outcome came too late to influence Nottingham’s reactions to Waterloo but probably increased the sense of disillusionment at what had been achieved in the battle. Modern estimates suggest that the Napoleonic wars cost Britain something in the region of £1.6 billion whilst the national debt quadrupled over the course of the wars to reach £902 million by 1816. 300,000 people also perished in the wars. The number of those killed and wounded at Waterloo (taken as an aggregate of French, Anglo-Dutch, Prussian and British casualties) was almost equivalent to the 60,000 British casualties who died on the first day of the battle of the Somme in 1916. For those soldiers lucky enough to survive, peace brought demobilisation – releasing about a third of a million men into the labour market. They could not expect to survive on their half-pay, which was still fixed at the level it was at in 1714, whilst the appropriate recognition of their service, through the institution of an appropriate medal, remained an unexpectedly contentious issue for veterans of the Peninsular Wars (1808-14).⁵⁹

Any exultation which had been felt at the victory at Waterloo was soon overtaken by the disappointments of peace and the demands for reform. In February 1816, Nottingham petitioned against the government’s proposal to continue the income tax in peacetime and protested against the new levels for the army establishment. The following September, 5000 people met at the Weekday Cross to move an address to the prince regent urging further reductions in government expenditure and supporting parliamentary reform. Nine months later, on 9-10 June

1817, Jeremiah Brandreth ('the Nottingham Captain'), led a party of unemployed artisans and framework knitters from Pentrich, in Derbyshire, towards Nottingham, as part of an abortive attempt to mount a nationwide rebellion.⁶⁰ A week later, the radical journalist William Hone published his sober description of 'Waterloo Man', timed to coincide with the second anniversary of the battle:

The voice of content from our shores now is banish'd,
 Distress and fell want hover baleful around;
 Together has patience with industry vanish'd,
 And palsied's the arm that should culture the ground,
 Humanity sickens to hear of the glory
 Achiev'd on the day the dread slaughter began,
 That gave to each soldier to figure in story,
 His countrymens' shield; a brave Waterloo man.⁶¹

VII

In the decades which followed Waterloo, there was a discernible lack of references to the battle in Nottingham.⁶² The most obvious sign of neglect was the lack of street names devoted to its commemoration. Waterloo Terrace, Waterloo Promenade and Waterloo Crescent were only laid out in the 1870s, as part of the development of open space between Mount Hooton Road and Southey Street. The local press reported on their naming without giving an indication of why, over six decades after the battle had been fought, any impetus should have been provided towards commemorating Waterloo in this way.⁶³ The duke of Wellington was a different matter. Wellington

Circus, dating from the 1840s, showed a different sort of architectural sensibility, in a different part of the town, but Wellington had gone on to political prominence in the decades after Waterloo and had attained something of the status of a national institution.⁶⁴ By contrast, when the Crimean war ended in 1856, there were extensive public celebrations in Nottingham and Newark.⁶⁵

Events at the centenary of Waterloo, in 1915, were equally unhelpful in eliciting a positive response in Nottingham. The day of the centenary, Friday 18 June, was a day of unrelenting bad news in Nottingham. The city's principal newspaper, the *Evening Post*, offered a chronicle of defeats, drawbacks and disasters in the European theatres of conflict which made for depressing reading. The low-point was the news that lieutenant Arthur Montague Williams of the 7th battalion Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derby regiment) had died in action. Consequently, the paper might be forgiven the relatively insignificant paragraph, inserted at the bottom of page five, with which it marked the hundredth anniversary of Waterloo.⁶⁶

It is hardly surprising why the centenary of Waterloo made little impact on the public consciousness. Had the First World War truly been 'over by Christmas', as the result of a swift and decisive victory in Flanders fields, the contemporary resonance of commemorating Waterloo would undoubtedly have been different. Any peace agreement concluded between the European powers in 1915 would have called to mind the Congress of Vienna a century before. One can easily imagine the confident prophecy of a new 'Pax Britannica' or 'British peace' to fit the twentieth century in succession to that established after Waterloo. *The Times*, conscious of the fact that France was Britain's enemy in 1815 and its ally in 1915, rejected the idea that 'the best way to celebrate the centenary' was to pass over it 'in silence'. Noting that the Netherlands was once again the 'scene of a [mighty] struggle, and once more the fate

of the world hangs upon the issue', it used the example of Waterloo to stiffen Britain's resolve and give 'the death-blow' to those who sought to establish 'the military hegemony of a single State throughout the Continent'. Rather pointedly, it reminded readers that, after Waterloo, Prussia and Austria (who were now Britain's enemies) had sought a vengeful peace from France, whilst Russia (its current ally) had helped Britain to oppose them.⁶⁷

However, more telling than any of this was the absence of popular commemoration in Nottingham at the time of Waterloo itself. As this article has argued, this was in marked contrast with the prolonged scenes of jubilation which followed the conclusion of the general peace the year before. This silence is largely to be explained, in Nottingham's case, by the deep economic and social consequences which had attended the war – an issue which had generated successive petitions from the town throughout the conflict. Minds were particularly focused by the tensions epitomised by the Luddite movement. Throughout the Napoleonic wars, Nottingham was notable for demonstrating its underlying loyalty to the monarchy whilst seeking to hold the government to account for policies which were impacting upon the town's trade and prosperity. The recurrence of hostilities, in the spring of 1815, led many people to fear the prolongation of the conflict, with consequent deleterious effects on the town's social and economic conditions. This would serve to delay still further the long-sought after political reforms which many people saw as the only cure for these ills. So it was that Nottingham reacted to the events of 18 June 1815 with the sound of silence. Though the battle of Waterloo turned out to be one of the defining moments in our national history, in terms of its popular reception in Nottingham, it came one year too late.

* This article began life as the Myles Thoroton Hildyard lecture to the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire in March 2015. It was subsequently presented to the Interdisciplinary Eighteenth Century Research Seminar at the University of Nottingham and at the ‘Waterloo: Memory and Representation, 1815-2015’ conference at the University of York in June 2015. I am grateful to all those who commented on the article for me, particularly John Beckett, Richard Cust and the anonymous reviewer for the journal.

¹ For domestic reactions, see David Crane, *Went the Day Well? Witnessing Waterloo* (2015); amongst recent international and military accounts, see Tim Clayton, *Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe's Destiny* (2015) and Robert Kershaw, *24 Hours at Waterloo: 18 June 1815* (2015).

² For an excellent set of studies at the regional level, see Andrew Watts and Emma Tyler, eds., *Fortunes of War. The West Midlands at the Time of Waterloo* (Alcester, 2015).

³ See Brian Cathcart, *The News from Waterloo. The Race to Tell Britain of Wellington's Victory* (2015); Colin Kidd, ‘How they brought the Good News’, *London Review of Books*, 20 November 2014; Crane, *Went the Day Well?*, pp. 243-6.

⁴ *The London Gazette Extraordinary*, 22 June 1815: available at <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/17028/page/1213/> [accessed 07/08/15].

⁵ Jenny Uglow, *In These Times. Living in Britain through Napoleon's Wars, 1793-1815* (2014), p. 618; Crane, *Went the Day Well?*, pp. 258-61. On Roworth's connection, see University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections [UNMASC], MS 59/1/5/4, ‘Waterloensis’ to the editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, 11 April 1903. The details of how the news reached England, and by what means, caused a minor furore at this time: UMMASC, MS 59/1/5/1-11.

⁶ *England in 1815. A Critical Edition of the Journal of Joseph Ballard*, ed. Alan Rauch (2009), pp. 79-80; also see, *The Morning Chronicle*, 24 June 1815; *The Morning Post*, 26 June 1815. *The Morning Chronicle*, 28 November 1815; *The Morning Post*, 28 November 1815.

⁷ Uglow, *In These Times*, p. 622; Robert Southey to Grosvenor Charles Bedford, 22 August 1815, https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_Four/HTML/letterEEd.26.2648.html [accessed 12/12/15]; Crane, *Went the Day Well?*, p. 267.

⁸ *The Morning Chronicle*, 28 November 1815; *The Morning Post*, 28 November 1815. The artist Thomas Rowlandson produced a major transparency to celebrate the general peace, which was exhibited at Ackermann's print shop in The Strand; http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1656015&partId=1&people=131963&peoA=131963-1-9&page=1 [accessed 12/12/15].

⁹ The fund raised £1200: Henry Field, *The Date-Book of remarkable and memorable events connected with Nottingham and its neighbourhood, from authentic records. Part 2, 1750-1884* (Nottingham, 1884), pp. 301-2. For other examples, see Crane, *Went the Day Well?*, p. 296 and *The Caledonian Mercury*, 29 June 1815.

¹⁰ Mark Christopher Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism in Nottingham, 1792-1816*, unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1988, pp. 72-74. For reactions elsewhere see, for example, *The Drennan Letters* edited by D.A. Chart (Belfast, 1931), p. 350.

¹¹ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, pp. 96-98.

¹² *Nottingham Review*, 7 February 1812; *Nottingham Journal*, 8 February 1812.

¹³ Uglow, *In These Times*, p. 599. A year earlier, Mrs Josiah Wedgwood had informed her sister that ‘a post is quite flat now if it does not bring news of a revolution’: *Emma Darwin, A Century of Family Letters, 1792-1896*, ed. H.E. Litchfield (1915), p. 43.

¹⁴ For Thomas Rowlandson’s comic representation of the phrase (8 May 1814), see <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/810933/peace-and-plenty> [accessed 07/08/15].

¹⁵ *Nottingham Journal*, 16 April 1814.

¹⁶ *Date Book*, p. 295.

¹⁷ *Nottingham Journal*, 16 April 1814; *Nottingham Review*, 15 April 1814.

¹⁸ *Records of the Borough of Nottingham, being a series of extracts from the archives of the Corporation of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1882-1954), VIII, p. 182.

¹⁹ *Nottingham Review*, 22 April 1814, 6 May 1814.

²⁰ *Nottingham Journal*, 23 April 1814.

²¹ *Nottingham Journal*, 11 June 1814.

²² See ‘Transparencies for celebratory illuminations’ at <https://regencyredingote.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/transparencies-for-celebratory-illuminations/> [accessed 07/08/15].

²³ *Date-Book*, p. 196; Terry Fry, ‘Nottingham Celebrates Napoleon’s Defeat in 1814’, available at: <http://www.thorotonsociety.org.uk/publications/articles/fryarticles.htm> [accessed 07/08/15]; *Nottingham Review*, 10 June 1814.

²⁴ Joan D’Arcy, ‘An Early 19th Century light Show. How Derby Celebrated the Surrender of Napoleon, June 1814’, *Derbyshire Miscellany*, 20/5 (2015), 111-12.

²⁵ Unless otherwise stated, the following account draws upon *The Nottingham Review*, 17 and 24 June 1814 and *The Nottingham Journal*, 18 and 25 June 1814.

²⁶ After Waterloo, the Sherbrooke family planted the ‘Hundred Acre Field’ at Oxtun with blocks of trees designed to represent the position of English units on the Battlefield:

<http://myoxton.org/about-oxton/oxton-now-and-then/mrs-juliet-mortensen/> [accessed 08/08/15].

²⁷ John Holmes' Diary of Happenings in Bleasby, entry for 24-25 June 1814, available at: <http://bleasbyvillage.org.uk/glebe-field/> [accessed 08/08/15]. I am grateful to Barbara Cast for providing me with this reference.

²⁸ Although this is now the first recorded use of the phrase 'All the World and Bingham', the context suggests it was already well-known in the locality at this time: *Discovering Bingham, Newsletter of the Bingham Heritage Trails Association*, 48 (June 2015), p. 2; *Victorian Bingham*, ed. Valerie Henstock (Bingham, 2006), p. 76.

²⁹ UNMASC, Ne C 4756, Warrant for disembodying the County Militia of Nottinghamshire, 3 June 1814; Ne C 4760, Speaker Charles Abbot, sending the thanks of the house of commons to the duke of Newcastle, 7 July 1814.

³⁰ Uglow, *In These Times*, p. 606.

³¹ *Nottingham Journal*, 23 April 1814.

³² On petitioning in this period, see Henry Miller, 'Popular Petitioning and the Corn Laws, 1833-46', *English Historical Review*, 127 (2012), 886-90.

³³ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, chapters 1-2.

³⁴ Malcolm Thomis, *Nottingham Radicalism, 1785-1835*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1966, pp. 45-47.

³⁵ For a contemporary view, see *Henson's History of the Framework Knitters*, ed. Stanley Chapman (Newton Abbot, 1970), p. 432. The section relating to the French wars and their aftermath first appeared in the *Nottingham Review*, 3 June 1831.

³⁶ In addition to Pottle, see J.V. Beckett, 'Responses to War: Nottingham in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793-1815', *Midland History*, 22/1 (1997), 71-84; J.V. Beckett, 'Nottinghamshire in the 1790s', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 99 (1995), 47-61.

³⁷ *Nottingham Review*, 20 August 1813.

³⁸ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, pp. 81-85.

³⁹ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, pp. 88-91. For wider reactions to Perceval's assassination, see Gordon Pentland, "'Now the great Man in the Parliament House is dead, we shall have a big Loaf!'" Responses to the Assassination of Spencer Perceval', *Journal of British Studies*, 51/2 (2012), 340-63.

⁴⁰ Pottle, *Loyalism and Patriotism*, pp. 80, 91-2.

⁴¹ For contemporary accounts, see *Luddism in Nottinghamshire*, ed. Malcolm Thomis, *Thoroton Society Record Series*, 26 (Chichester, 1972); *Writings of the Luddites*, ed. Kevin Binfield (Baltimore and London, 2004).

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- ⁴² Pottle, *Loyalism and Patriotism*, pp. 93-96; Malcolm Thomis, *Politics and Society in Nottingham* (1969), p. 193.
- ⁴³ Norman Gash, 'After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 28 (1978), p. 146.
- ⁴⁴ *Nottingham Journal*, 16 April 1814.
- ⁴⁵ *Nottingham Review*, 17 June 1814.
- ⁴⁶ John Blackner, *The History of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1815), p. 386.
- ⁴⁷ *Nottingham Journal*, 11 June 1814, 18 June 1814; Blackner, *Nottingham*, p. 405.
- ⁴⁸ In addition to the works already cited, see Gareth Glover, *Waterloo: Myth and Reality* (2014).
- ⁴⁹ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, pp. 100-03.
- ⁵⁰ For the relevant MPs, see the History of Parliament entries online at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/smith-john-ii-1767-1842>; <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/parkyns-george-augustus-henry-anne-1785-1850>; <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/frank-%28formerly-and-afterwards-sotheron-%29-frank-1765-1839> [accessed 08/08/15].
- ⁵¹ *Prospectus of a New Weekly Paper, to be Called the Nottingham Gazette; Or, Political, Literary, Agricultural, and Commercial Register, for the Midland Counties ...: The Nottingham Gazette Will be Published on the First Day of January, 1813, and on Every Friday Throughout the Year, by Mr. Tupman* (Nottingham, 1812).
- ⁵² Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, pp. 103-08. I am very grateful to Ken Jones, for sharing the results of his research on provincial newspaper responses to the 'Hundred Days' with me.
- ⁵³ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, p. 103.
- ⁵⁴ For the involvement of Nottinghamshire men at Waterloo, see Richard A. Gaunt, 'The battle of Waterloo and Nottinghamshire's "chosen men"', *The Nottinghamshire Historian*, 95 (2015), 16-18.
- ⁵⁵ *Joseph Ballard*, pp. 81-2.
- ⁵⁶ Crane, *Went the Day Well?*, p. 303.
- ⁵⁷ *Nottingham Review*, 21 July 1815.
- ⁵⁸ *Nottingham Review*, 28 July, 4 August 1815; on Luddism in the county, see Carolyn Steedman, *An Everyday Life of the English Working Class: Work, Self and Sociability in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013). Perhaps tellingly, Joseph Woolley, the subject of Steedman's work, did not record the battle of Waterloo in his diary: Nottinghamshire Archives [NA], DD 311/6.
- ⁵⁹ For a full survey of the consequences of Waterloo, see Gash, 'After Waterloo', pp. 145-57.

⁶⁰ Pottle, *Loyalty and Patriotism*, pp. 108-09; Thomis, *Nottingham Radicalism*, chapter 10. I am currently working on Nottingham's connection with the Pentrich Rebellion of 1817.

⁶¹ William Hone, 'The Waterloo Man', *The Black Dwarf*, 21 (18 June 1817), 330. Veterans of the battle of Waterloo, of all ranks, received a 'Waterloo Medal' in the period 1816-17; they were universally known as 'Waterloo Men'.

⁶² For a reference to the lack of commemoration at the time of the half-centenary, see *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 16 June 1865, p. 5.

⁶³ Marriott Ogle Tarbotton [borough engineer], *Plan of building land on the Forest, the property of the Corporation of Nottingham, proposed to be leased for a term of 99 years, with a general view shewing the capabilities of the locality* (Nottingham, April 1876); *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 8 December 1876; Roger Smith and David Shaw, *The Changing Character of Inner Nottingham 1800-1983. Waterloo Promenade and its Environs* (Nottingham, 1983).

⁶⁴ See John Beckett and Ken Brand, 'Enclosure, Improvement and the Rise of "New Nottingham" 1845-67' at: <http://www.ng-spaces.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Enclosure-1845-67.pdf> [accessed 08/08/15]. For Wellington's post-Waterloo legacy, see R.E. Foster, *Wellington and Waterloo. The Duke, the Battle and Posterity, 1815-2015* (Stroud, 2014).

⁶⁵ NA, M5588, Diary of Ichabod Wright, p. 18, 14 May 1856; DD/NM/15/4/1, printed notice of peace commemorations, 29 May 1856.

⁶⁶ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 June 1915; on Williams, see <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/People/Details/23699> [accessed 06/12/15].

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 18 June 1915.