

Teaching the Age of Revolutions

HA Teacher Fellowship Programme 2018 (Secondary)

Ben Walsh

Week 4: What were the wider consequences of the Napoleonic Wars?

For Week 4 the focus was on the impact of the Napoleonic wars. In recent times, scholars have been emphasising the far reaching effects of these wars. The Fellows were asked to consider some points set out by Dr Ben Marsh of the University of Kent about the wars:

- Confrontation of larger armies than have taken the field for centuries
- Regime change, bloodshed, and economic malaise feed off one another
- Mass conscription and participation brings new styles to global warfare
- Advances made in technology, recruitment, training, and organisation
- French pioneer artillery and new infantry formations to great effect
- British and allies struggle to contain Napoleon but avoid knockout until 1812
- Von Clausewitz constructs new theory of war on basis of experiences

The Fellows were then asked to suggest how they might use the Battle of Waterloo as a hook to help students to think more widely about the context and impact of the Napoleonic Wars:

You can do this by focussing on the domestic impact in Britain or look more widely at the European context. Begin by using the knowledge of Waterloo you gained on the residential and broaden your thinking using the suggested resources below. Your plan should focus on the consequences of the Napoleonic Wars.

Some of the Fellows considered ways of giving the Battle a wider and deeper context than they might normally consider, drawing on up to date scholarship to support this:

- As Mather's article notes, Napoleon had threatened to invade Britain, but this was not the only reason for the British to become involved in a war against the French. The longer historical context of wars with France could be explored, as well as consideration of the Peninsular Wars. At this point, two different options are available: to explore the Napoleonic Wars' impacts on Britain further or to widen out the scope of the war to the Peninsular and the role of the Portuguese and Spanish. Novels such as *Shirley* and other primary and secondary sources could show the impact of the wars on taxation, Luddism, farming, trade and ideas. Students could explore one aspect and teach one another what they discover. The Peninsular Wars are also interesting in highlighting that this was not the main theatre of war for Napoleon as Wellington faces Junot and Massena but not Napoleon

himself (who invades Russia in 1812 and withdraws experienced troops from Spain to support this). This leads onto a clip like <https://youtu.be/7tCUYMIUNA8>. This gives a useful map which shows the extent of Napoleon's wars and the changing coalitions involved in those wars from 1802 to 1815. A visual like this really helps to give students a sense of the impact that is being studied. A discussion of the reaction of the different peoples of these various countries could follow the ideas set out by Alan Forrest in his discussion of nationalism.

Others chose to look in greater depth at one issue and see how the wider context might develop as a result:

- I found an interesting aspect of the Napoleonic Wars was the recruitment of soldiers. Britain needed to equal the mass armies formulated at first in the *levee en masse* and then *La Grande Armée*. Britain chose not to use the route of conscription and I think it opens for debate a discussion why. It highlights both the strengths of Britain who were able to depend on their population and cement the link between revolution, the people and the army as Marsh indicates. It also suggests core weakness and the long standing fear of a permanent army. This leads onto how Britain did recruit enough soldiers, a no mean feat given that with the exception of one year the army never managed to recruit enough soldiers as it lost through death, discharge or desertion. Why men enlisted provides a fertile ground for engagement. I have taught this at A Level and I show the students a poem entitled *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar and ask them for all the reasons listed why men may have chosen to enlist. This poem is ideal because it has the local aspect. I also show them a picture of the Raven which is now Marks and Spencers in Shrewsbury. Next year I intend to use it alongside the one of the *Songs of the Waterloo Era (the Awkward Recruit 1811)* to add a different dimension.

'If any gentlemen soldiers, or others, have a mind to serve Her Majesty, and pull down the French king; if any prentices have severe masters, any children have unnatural parents; if any servants have too little wages, or any husband too much wife; let them repair to the noble Sergeant Kite, at the Sign of the Raven, in this good town of Shrewsbury, and they shall receive present relief and entertainment.

One Fellow came up with an interesting and ambitious plan to look at the ways in which the Battle of Waterloo and the Napoleonic Wars were memorialised and what lessons could be learned about their legacies:

- I recalled the *Butte de Lion* at Waterloo and then remembered the Prussian monument to the victory at Leipzig (1813) which dominates the landscape in a suburb of Berlin. I began to visualise a map of key memorial sites associated with the Napoleonic Wars. The memorialised landscape was a very visual and conceptual image that might hook students on to the European historical consciousness (presently) and take them back to how it developed and what it was in 1790-1815.

Monument 1: The *Butte de Lion* - British and built shortly after Battle of Waterloo. (I need not say too much here!). ***PS. Warmer clothes needed in February!

Monument 2: Blucher – the Prussian general played a key part during the battle...once he arrived...monuments of him stand in:

- **Berlin** (1826) – depicts Blucher stood on a cannon. A story board depicts the German people responding to the king's call (very nationalistic rather than sectionalist as Germany was in 1826). 1813, 1814, and 1815 are all listed on the monument as memorialised dates. Roman gods and other ancient elements litter the story boards at the base.
- **Breslau**, Blucher's hometown.
- **Rostock** (1819) – the money and idea to erect the statue had been gathered by 1814. I think students will have questions about this especially as the Waterloo was not finished. Blucher has been depicted with a lion fur cape draped over him with the lion's head on his shoulder. This is an obvious visual similarity for students to the Waterloo monument. I have also found some evidence that the metal railings at the base of the monument were taken during the 1940s and melted down to put towards the Nazi war effort.
- Also in Rostock is a modernist 'representation' of Blucher's 3 virtues (continuity, accuracy and integrity) which was erected in 1992.
- **Kaub** (1894) – the site of Blucher's Rhine crossing on New Years Eve, 1813/14. A basic statue, with arm and finger directing people towards the battlefield. The word 'Blucher' is all that appears.
- **Walhalla memorial, Regensburg** - "the hall of fame" – Blucher was one of the original busts added before 1847. Blucher's bust sits in the 'memory palace' of Germany. Still today Germany makes additions to Walhalla memorial.
- **Wellington College, Berkshire** – one of the houses at this UK public school is named after Blucher.
- **Krobielowice** – the mausoleum of Blucher stands in this town. Renamed by the Nazi's as 'Blucherruh' or Blucher's resting place. Soviet troops desecrated the site and reported played football with his skull – an odd way to honour the man who defeated a Russian enemy!

Monument 3: Prussian National Monument for the Liberation Wars

This iron monument sits high above Berlin and was built in 1821. It stands to remember the 1813 Battle of Leipzig, so whilst not a consequence of Waterloo, it does sit perfectly within the map of memory for the 'German Napoleonic Wars'. It is neo-gothic in design. Made on iron, painted green using paints and chemicals invented during Prussia's industrialisation. On top sits the Iron Cross (later used on WW1 and WW2 as the highest military honour). The Iron Cross was invented in 1813 to honour the victory of Leipzig.

Smaller monuments to the German Liberation wars can be found at:

- Dennewitz
- Grossbeeren
- Grossgorschen
- Krefeld
- Drachenfels
- Wolfhagen

Monument 4: Monument to the Battle of the Nations (1913), Leipzig

This is the largest monument as part of the German memory of the Napoleonic Wars. It is 91 metres tall, contains 500 steps, a viewing platform and contains levels and catacombs within it. Imposing busts and 4 figures 9.5m tall sit inside. It looks like something out of Lord of the Rings!

This monument will engage learning. A site to remember Leipzig (1813) built in 1913 on the eve of war! In contrast to the 1821 Prussian National Monument, The Monument to the Battle of Nations is built after German unification and built in granite and concrete, not iron.

Interestingly, the monument survives the Nazi period, frequently being used by Hitler when in Leipzig. During the war, it was one of the final positions defended by SS troops against the US invasion.

During the GDR the monument was supported by the communist government as a symbol of Russo-German brotherhood. It was re-memorialised as a joint people's monument against the French. This is a wonderful part of the story, in stark contrast to the USSR troops playing football with Blucher's skull in 1945. This creates some of the oppositional difficulties that Alan Forrest discusses in the article, when he refers to encouraging students to be challenged to see different definitions of nationalism at the time and across times.

The final monument is also highly engaging because of the name. "Monument to the Battle of the Nations"! It stinks of Tolkein!

But practically, the title informs us that the 'state' was gone in 1913. The 'nation' had grown. Alan Forest discusses this concept also in his article. The Napoleonic Wars did not create a new German state, but the story of the Napoleonic Wars was used to create a German state.

References

Core resources

- Marsh, B. and Rapport, M. (Eds.), *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions* (2017). Especially the chapter by Alan Forrest.
- Marsh, Ben, *Age of Revolution - Theme Summaries and Key Messages* (2018)
- Mather, R. *The Impact of the Napoleonic Wars in Britain* (2014) British Library article: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-impact-of-the-napoleonic-wars-in-britain>

Secondary sources:

- Colley, L., *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (2005)
- Forrest, A., *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (2002)