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LORD UXBRIDGE'S LEG

&

LA MAISON TREMBLANT, WATERLOO

Until the advent of counselling for every adverse occasion, there was no characteristic more admired by the British than the preservation of a stiff upper lip in the face of adversity.

Consequently, one of the more memorable historical conversations, cherished by posterity for its very British *sang froid*, took place by La Haye Sainte farmhouse on the battlefield of Waterloo on Sunday 18th June 1815. It was a brief exchange between General Henry Paget, 2nd Earl of Uxbridge (later Field Marshal the 1st Marquess of Anglesey, 1768-1854), who commanded with considerable success the 13,000 strong Allied cavalry at the Battle of Waterloo, and the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington.

At around 8pm, as the battle was drawing to a close, a French canister shot narrowly missed the Iron Duke but struck the right knee of his cavalry commander, who was riding next to him:



Lieutenant General the Earl of Uxbridge
by Peter Stroehling, c.1812 © Royal Collections

'By God, sir, I've lost my leg!' exclaimed Uxbridge.

'By God, sir, so you have!' replied Wellington.

An alternative version, recorded by the diarist J W Croker, a friend of Wellington's from whom he heard the story, states:

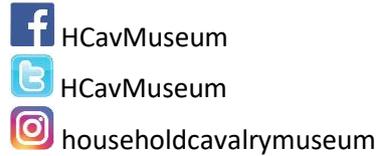
Uxbridge: *'I have got it at last!'*

Wellington: *'No? Have you, by God?'*



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Incident at Waterloo by Robert Hillingford

Either way, Uxbridge was clearly *hors de combat*. Initially supported in the saddle by Wellington, a short while later Uxbridge, still *in situ* on his horse, was led towards the rear by one of his Aides de Camp, Captain Seymour. It wasn't long before the ADC spotted a party of six Hanoverian soldiers, whom he ordered to lift the cavalry commander from off his charger and carry the wounded aristocrat back to his billet at La Maison Tremblant, 214 Chaussée de Bruxelles in the village of Waterloo, diametrically opposite Wellington's own headquarters at No. 147.



La Maison Tremblant, Waterloo



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Once back at the unfortunately named house, the imperturbable Earl was placed on a chair. After a brief discussion with the doctors, his leg was amputated above the knee without anaesthetic by Wellington's personal surgeon, Dr John Hume, who had just removed one of Colonel Gordon's lower limbs; Hume was assisted in the bloody task by Surgeons James Powell and James Callander. Uxbridge, who as well as having nerves of steel was also a notorious philanderer (he had enjoyed a long-running affair with, amongst many other married women, Wellington's sister-in-law; in consequence, Uxbridge and Wellington were not on good terms) retained his calm during the gruesome operation, remarking to another of his Aides de Camp, Captain Thomas Wildman:

'I have had a pretty long run. I have been a beau these forty-seven years, and it would not be fair to cut the young men out any longer.'

Other accounts added that Uxbridge complained that the surgeon's tools appeared to be rather blunt when the amputation saw got stuck midway through the General's thigh bone. Once the operation was over, Uxbridge calmly asked one of his cavalry subordinates, Major General Sir Hussey Vivian (later Lieutenant General the 1st Baron Vivian), if the severed leg had in fact been serviceable. Vivian examined the shattered limb and was able to report back that it was '*completely spoiled for work*' which satisfied its former owner. Serviceable or not, the severed leg soon took on a life of its own whilst its former owner commissioned a series of prosthetic replacements.



One of three patented artificial limbs in fruitwood and kangaroo tendon made for Lord Uxbridge by James Potts of Chelsea ©Household Cavalry Museum

For his leadership at Waterloo (and, possibly, his bravery afterwards) Uxbridge was advanced to the Marquessate of Anglesey, appointed a Knight of the Garter and a full General. Later, in an unpopular move with the public, he supported the divorce proceedings against Queen Caroline. Later still, without public opposition, Anglesey was appointed to the Cabinet as Master General of the Ordnance, the political post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the prestigious, but honorary, Colonelcy of the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues).



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La Maison Temblant (at some point pretentiously re-designated as a ‘chateau’), was a small, plain fronted, stuccoed and white painted village house, adjacent to the church of the Chapelle Royale in the centre of Waterloo. It was owned by the fragrantly-named Monsieur Hyacinthe Paris, who was still in residence at the time of the battle. Once the amputation had been completed, Paris asked Uxbridge if he could bury the severed leg in the front garden of the house and was readily given consent. In due course, the butchered relic was placed in a ‘grave’ next to a willow tree and Monsieur Paris commissioned the local stonemason to carve a tombstone on which were engraved, in English and French, the following words:

HERE LIES THE LEG OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS AND VALIANT

*EARL OF UXBRIDGE, LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY,
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ENGLISH, BELGIAN AND DUTCH CAVALRY,
WOUNDED ON 18 JUNE 1815 AT THE MEMORABLE BATTLE OF WATERLOO, WHO,
BY HIS HEROISM, ASSISTED IN THE TRIUMPH OF THE CAUSE OF MANKIND,
GLORIOUSLY DECIDED BY THE RESOUNDING VICTORY OF THE SAID DAY.*

Doubtless keen to recover his costs, and knowing a good thing when he buried it, the wily Belgian turned his garden into a tourist attraction which was visited – on a paying basis over the next sixty or so years – by Kings, Princes, a fair sprinkling of the *Almanac de Gotha* and *Debrett’s*, and morbidly curious crowds of the great unwashed. In consequence, the buried leg provided a steady income for several generations of the Paris family, as well as occasioning reams of verse (by Prime Minister George Canning and others) and attracting some ribald graffiti that made reference to Uxbridge’s raunchy past:

Here lies the Marquis of Anglesey’s limb;

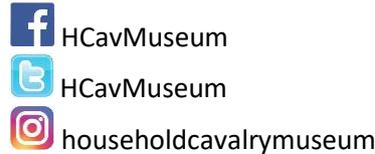
The Devil will have the remainder of him.

However, in time all good things come to an end. In the case of the leg’s burial site in La Maison Tremblant’s garden, Nemesis arrived in 1878 in the shape of the 2nd Marquess of Anglesey. Asking to view the tombstone, he was horrified to discover that his father’s leg had been disinterred and that the shattered bones were on display to the general public in the Paris’ front parlour.



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In the days that followed, the leg bones became the centre of a major diplomatic incident. The British Ambassador to the Belgian Court, who had been tasked by the British government with establishing the facts and recovering the remains, reported that the leg had been exposed when a violent storm had uprooted the willow tree next to the tomb – and that the Paris family would be willing to repatriate the relic in return for a substantial payment. Before a second Battle at Waterloo could develop, the Belgian Minister of Justice intervened and ordered that the Earl's severed appendage be reburied, an arrangement agreed to by the leg's original owner's heir.

That, however, was by no means the end of the story. In 1934, the last Monsieur Paris died in Brussels. Whilst sorting through his effects, the widow Paris discovered in her late husband's desk Uxbridge's leg bones, along with documentation supporting their provenance. Petrified at the prospect of a scandal, she consigned the remains to a fiery end in her central heating furnace. Meanwhile, the leg's tombstone found its way down the main street of Waterloo to Chaussée de Bruxelles 147, now the home of the Wellington Museum, where it leans against a wall in the back yard. Inside the museum is the bloodstained chair on which the leg was amputated and one of its prosthetic replacements. The surgeon's leather glove, still covered in the Earl's gore, and the saw that was used in the operation are to be found in the National Army Museum, London, and the other two surviving artificial limbs are on display at the Angleseys' family home, Plas Newydd, and the Household Cavalry Museum in London.

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'NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THIS...'

**A weekly series of podcasts about the Regiments of the Household Cavalry
written and recorded by
Regimental Historian, Christopher Joll, formerly of The Life Guards**

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