

Dundee forensic experts uncovering battle history

ANDREW LIDDLE

Dundee's world-leading forensic experts are at the forefront of a project to uncover the history of one Europe's most significant battlefields.

A team from Dundee University is working alongside international specialists who are breathing new life into the Battle of Waterloo ahead of its 200th anniversary.

They are delving into the site on the outskirts of Brussels in the hope of shedding new light on the clash that ended Napoleon's Hundred Days and plans for European hegemony.

Forensic analysis from the Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification (CAHID) are working to uncover some of the graves of the thousands of soldiers who died during the battle in 1815.

The Dundee scientists form part of the Waterloo Uncovered archaeological project, which recently broke ground in Belgium.

The key focus of the explorations has

“The full team has only been working on site for two days and we have made some very interesting discoveries.”
DR TONY POLLARD



been around the Hougoumont farmhouse, which formed a central part of the battle.

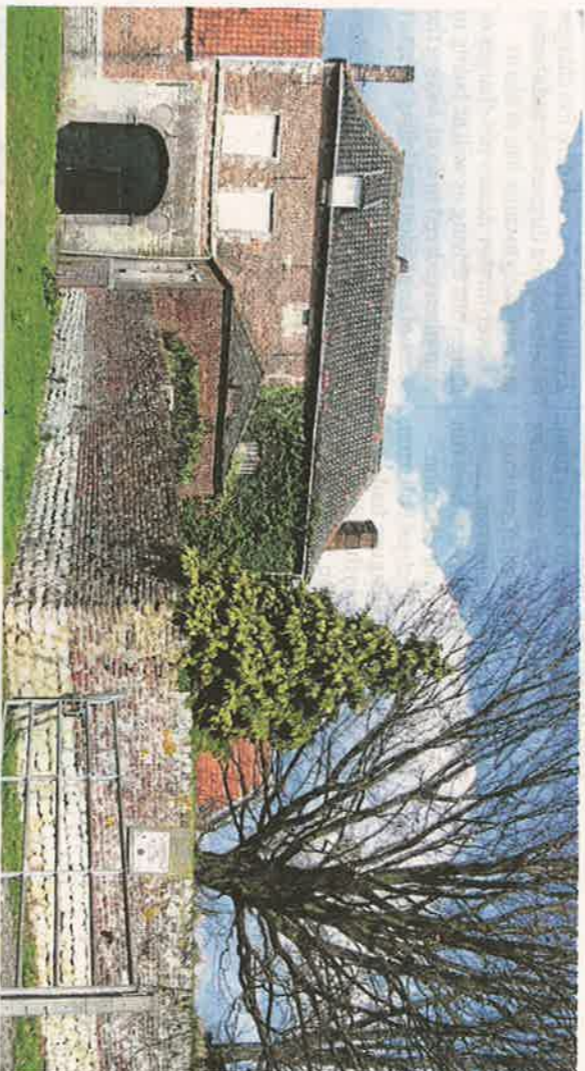
Defended by the Coldstream Guards in 1815, veterans and current soldiers from the regiment are also assisting with the investigations.

Veteran Mark Evans, project coordinator of Waterloo Uncovered, said: “Our team of soldiers, veterans and top archaeologists has worked so well together and achieved so much.

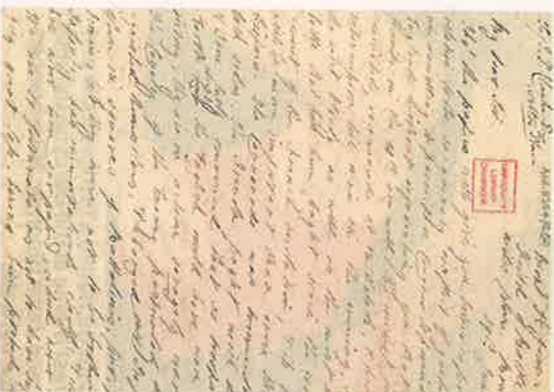
“Understanding what happened in the woods is key to understanding what happened at Hougoumont.”

A number of spent musket balls fired by both British and French troops, thought to be among the first shots fired in the battle, have already been found.

Dr Tony Pollard, director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at Glasgow University, leading the archaeology, said: “The full team has only been working on site for two days and we have made some very interesting discoveries.”



Above: Hougoumont farmhouse, at the site of the Battle of Waterloo. Below left: a newly published letter written by Captain William Turner the day after the battle. Below right: Dr Tony Pollard, director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at Glasgow University, shows bullets found during the opening days of digging. Pictures: PA/Reuters.



Waterloo site primed to reveal secrets in 'once in a lifetime' dig

MARTYN MCLAUGHLIN

IT IS a humble farmstead where one of the most extraordinary stand-offs in military history was played out.

Now, a team of Scottish archaeological experts has started a major excavation of the Waterloo battlefield in Belgium.

The site at Hougomont Farm south of Brussels is where the Duke of Wellington's army repelled wave after wave of attacks by Napoleonic forces at a pivotal moment in the conflict.

It is estimated that tens of thousands of troops lost their lives during the bloody encounter but little is known about how the battle played out.

The international team of researchers, led by Dr Tony Pollard from the University of Glasgow, hope their work will shed light

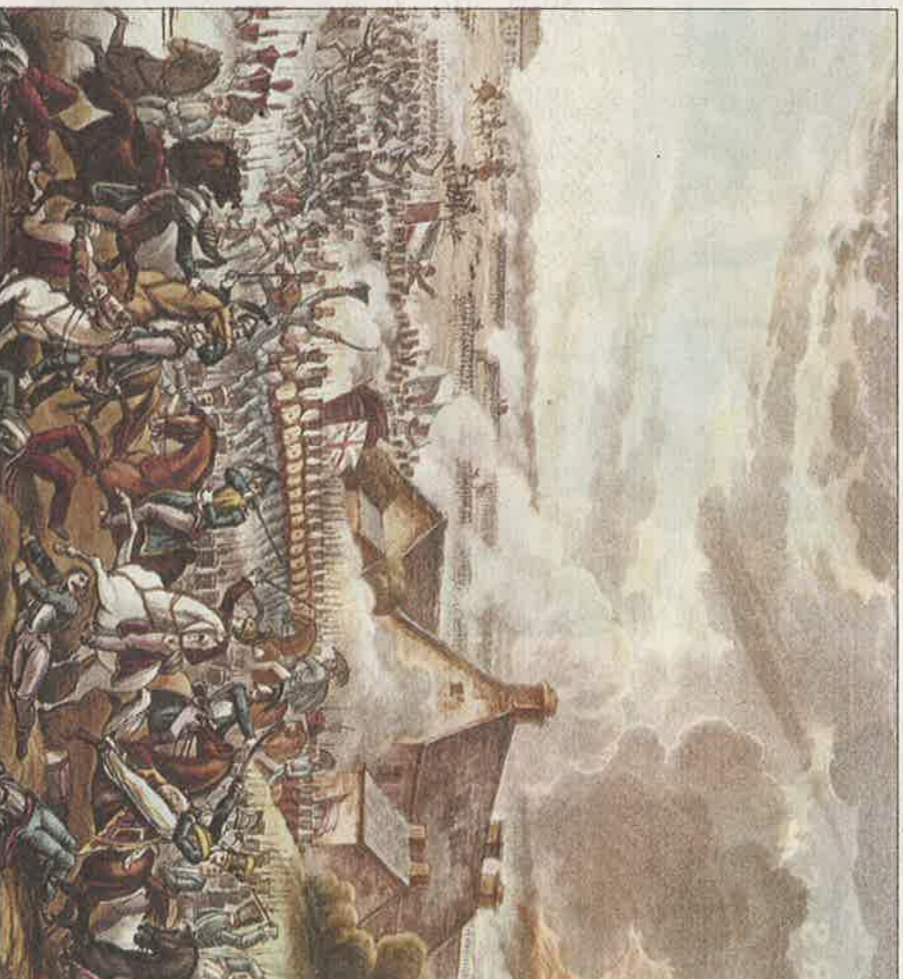
on the historic event and possibly even uncover a mass grave of soldiers.

The project, known as Operation Nightingale, aims to transform the public's understanding of a the battle on 18 June 1815 which created modern Europe and brought the Napoleonic era to an end.

Dr Pollard and his team are carrying out the first large-scale archaeological survey of the site and believe their work could end centuries of speculation.

The director of the university's Centre of Battlefield Archaeology said that the chance to study the battlefield represented a "once in a lifetime opportunity".

He explained: "The full team has only been working on site for two days and we have made some very interesting discover-



The Battle of Waterloo where the Duke of Wellington, below, defeated Napoleon

ies. History tells us who won the battle but understanding what happened has until now relied on first-hand accounts and reports of the battle that in some cases are either confusing or biased.

"We hope archaeology can provide answers to many of the questions about Waterloo that remain unanswered."

The team has already started to explore the area of a former wood that dominated the French army's approach to the farm buildings.

A number of spent and unfired musket shots fired by British and French troops have been found at the southern extremity of the wood, a discovery Dr Pollard believes is important.

"We know that shots were exchanged between the French and Allied armies in these woods during the night before the battle, as the French probed the allied position and the first real fighting took place in the same spot," he added.

"I am confident these shots were fired very early in the battle, probably in the first exchanges."

Some of the team taking part in Operation Nightingale are members of the armed forces and

veterans who have experienced trauma during service.

The scheme, part of the Waterloo Uncovered initiative, aims to partner current and former armed forces personnel with experienced conflict archaeologists.

Another member, Gailie Mackinnon, from the Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification (CAHI) at Dundee University, will oversee the investigation of any graves discovered.

Mark Evans, project co-ordinator of Waterloo Uncovered, said: "It's been amazing. Our team of soldiers, veterans and top archaeologists has worked so well together

and achieved so much. Understanding what happened in the woods is key to understanding what happened at Hougomont. "Having soldiers - with real experience of battle - offers a unique perspective."

