

Village Echoes

As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the British victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, it is intriguing to note a connection close to Goudhurst. In the 1935 Coronation Book Alfred Tiffin wrote of his conversation with a Mr J Rofe who was a woodreeve (wood steward) at Glassenbury Farm, bordering on Goudhurst along the B2085 from The Peacock Inn.

John Rofe submitted a photo of his father standing beside the “Jaffa stone” in Glassenbury Park. This marked the supposed burial site of a horse of that name which had been owned by Napoleon and ridden by him at the famous battle of Waterloo. The horse was named after Napoleon’s victory at Jaffa, Palestine in 1799. The burial site had been confirmed by the then owners, Baron and Baroness Nettelblatt, who said that one of Napoleon’s friends had rented Glassenbury at the time. Although the inscription was by then deteriorating it had read:

To Jaffa, the favourite charger of Napoleon, aged 37 – 1829

More was revealed in a series of letters to a newspaper (date unknown) involving our late Secretary Len Pierce. He suggested that the horse had been the ‘spoils of war’ for Marshal Beresford of Bedgebury who had been in charge of Wellington’s quarter-master arrangements, although why Jaffa was interred at Bedgebury wasn’t explained. At this time another connection was revealed, that of William Field (see June Village Echo) of Goudhurst village forge. He had apparently been farrier major to the Iron Duke and responsible for his horse called Copenhagen, named in honour of a previous battle at Copenhagen.

A newspaper article in the Goudhurst & Kilndown Local History Society archives moves the story on to the late 1960s. The owners at this time were the Roberts family and Mrs Elizabeth Roberts was featured in the story. She stated that, according to the family record book, the horse was owned by a Mr Green, the tenant of Glassenbury until 1827, and that he instructed his gamekeeper to shoot Jaffa in 1826 because of his age, slightly earlier than reported by Tiffin. This the reluctant man did early one morning after blindfolding the horse with a silk handkerchief. In addition it was recorded that Jaffa was buried with an iron trunk full of coins.

Mrs Roberts arranged for a team from the Buffs’ Territorial Army unit to excavate the site in order to prove the story and find the treasure. After six hours digging with the aid of metal detectors all that came up was two horseshoes, no bones and no treasure!

Local History Society

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