

The field and the position of Quatre Bras.

The field of Quatre Bras stretches between the crossroads of the high-roads of Brussels [¹] and Nivelles in the north, the Bois de Bossu in the west, Sart à Mavelines in the east and the Bois Delhütte [²] and Frasnes to the south.

The west-side of the battle-field was formed by the Bois de Bossu. The wood was a remnant of an ancient forest of beeches with a few oaks, largely clear within because of the mature trees not allowing much undergrowth. At some places however, at the fringes in particular, it was intricate. ³ The wood had a southwest-northeast orientation, between the farm of Grand Pierrepont and the road to Namur. Its total length was 2500 metres, its width varied between 500 to 1000 metres. ⁴ In its east-side, very close to its edge, was a hollow way. ⁵

For about 400 metres the Bois de Bossu stretched along the south-side of the road to Namur, and at about 200 metres west of the crossroads of Quatre Bras. From there, the wood ran parallel to the Brussels road for about 1600 metres, and about 400 metres away from it. From there, the edge of the wood bent further west, as to extend near the farm of Grand Pierrepont, about 2000 metres west of the Brussels road. The Bois de Bossu no longer exists: it has been completely cut since the 30's of the 19th century so that the fields could be used for agricultural purposes.

South-east of the extreme southern-part of the Bois de Bossu, at about 1300 and 1600 metres west of the high-road of Brussels respectively, were the farms of Grand and Petit Pierrepont. Both these farms are in the low ground of the stream of Odomont, which comes up near the farm of Grand Pierrepont and which flows towards Rêves. In 1815, both farms were surrounded by gardens, orchards and hedges. ⁶

At 2900 metres south of Quatre Bras was in 1815 the inn of Le Balcan; it has been rased around 1930. ⁷ At about 500 metres north of Le Balcan, on the point where the road of the farm of Grand Pierrepont crosses the Brussels road, was a small chapel. ⁸

1100 metres south of Quatre Bras and 100 metres east of the Brussels-road, in the low ground of the stream of Gémioncourt, was (and still is) the farm of Gémioncourt. The oldest parts of this farm date back to 1146, when the first monks of the abbey of Villers la Ville lived there. ⁹

At about 300 metres north of this farm, south of Quatre Bras, was on the same side of the Brussels road a small building which is usually referred to as the La Bergerie.

The building itself had two floors and to its rear was an area which was enclosed by a hedge; on the opposite side of the road was a garden which was also enclosed in a similar way. From the road, a small gate led into this garden onto a small gravel-road which led to the far end of it, ending in a similar access. ¹⁰ From La Bergerie a small field-road led into the fields to the east.

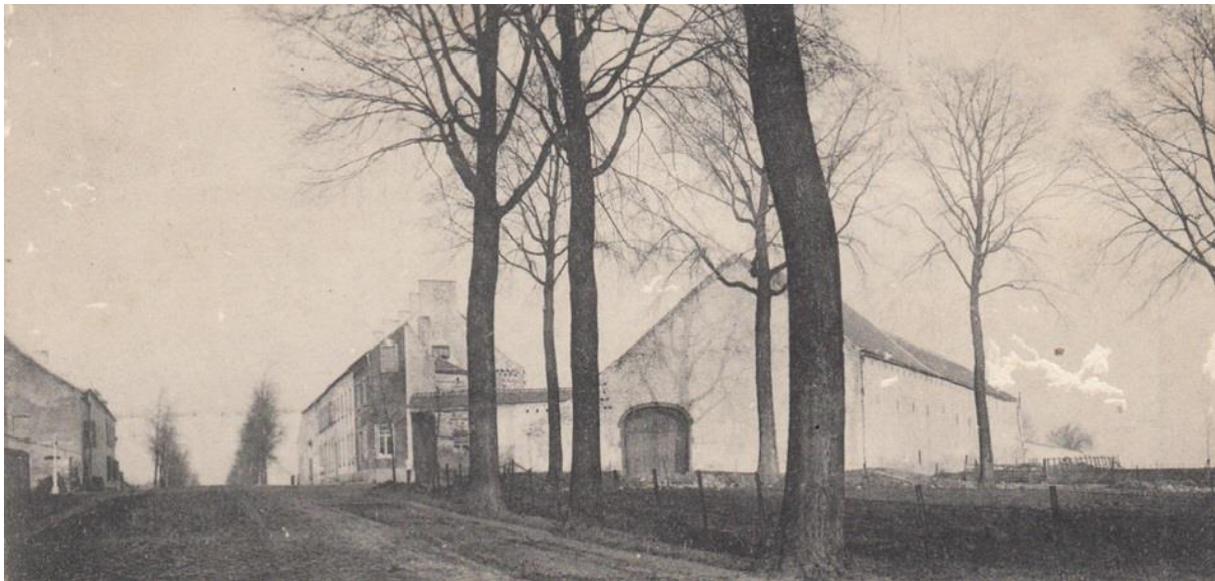


Quatre Bras to the left and la Bergerie to the right. Watercolour by Thomas Stoney, June 1815.

In 1815, at the crossroads of Quatre Bras itself stood several buildings.¹² By far the largest one was the impressive farm in its north-east corner; it is still there, albeit in a very dilapidated state.^{13_14}

Opposite farm, in the south-east corner of the crossroads, there were no constructions. In front of these fields, in the south-west corner of the crossroad and along the Brussels road stood - with a few outbuildings - an inn called Les Trois Bras.^{15_16}

In the north-west side of Quatre Bras stood a few smaller buildings along the Brussels road.



Quatre Bras, seen from the south.

Halfway the road leading from Frasnés to Sart à Mavelines was (and still is), in a low ground the farm of Lairalle.¹⁷ 750 metres towards Frasnés, at the same road, on a crossing, was the Chapelle de Frasnés.¹⁸ 600 metres north-east of the farm of Lairalle was the hamlet of Piraumont.¹⁹



The farm of Piraumont.

About half a kilometre north of Piraumont was (and still is) a small lake, the Étang Materne. In 1953 the lake fell dry, but after the construction of a small dam it returned in 1957; in 1815 it was smaller as it is now.²⁰

Both high-roads were not lined with trees in 1815.²¹ The high-road leading from Nivelles to Namur was, from Quatre Bras stretching south-east, hollow for a length of about 800 metres.²² On the whole, the field of action was an undulating area which was dominated by the heights of the Quatre Bras and Le Balcan in the north and south respectively. Yet, the slopes of these heights were nowhere an impediment for manoeuvres.²³ Between the farm of Grand Pierrepont and the Brussels road was a height (162,5), which extended towards Frasnés and Piraumont. Along the north-side of this extension was the low ground of the stream of "Pré des Queues". This stream, which comes up near the Brussels road, joins (near Piraumont) the stream "Pré des Saules". It is this stream which arises at about 400 metres distance from the Chapelle de Frasnés and passes along the farm of Lairalle towards Piraumont. One of them, the one of "Pré des Saules", passes under the Nivelles-road via the mill of Buchet (still in existence) to the village of Sart-à-Mavelines. Before doing so, however, it is being fed by a third stream which is further north, coming from the farm of Gémioncourt.

North of the Étang Materne was the low ground of the "Ruisseau de Gémioncourt". This stream started very near the eastern edge of the Bois de Bossu, from there to the east, passing under the Brussels-road, along the farm of Gémioncourt,³ to the Étang Materne. Small streams, marshy

areas and the presence of hedges made access in this area difficult. The ground here stretches out towards the higher ground of Quatre Bras, after passing two low grounds. The area north-east of Quatre Bras was cut up by numerous hedges.²⁴

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¹ The high-road from Brussels was constructed between 1713 and 1719. Cf. Delaet, J - Libre sur Sambre p.22

2. This forest was cut down for the most part in 1839. Cf. Navez, L. - La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.55

3. Lord Saltoun (Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.431-434

Lieutenant colonel W.M.Gomm. He speaks of a wood "in some parts intricate, but passable everywhere for light infantry." In: BL, Add.ms. 34.706 p.179-184

Captain Powell (1st Foot Guards) yet speaks of "the thickness of the underwood [which] soon upset all order." In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.143-148

Cf. Marco Bijl. In:

http://www.napoleon-series.org/military/organization/Dutch/8thMilitia/c_8thMilitia3.html

4. On 29th of September 1815, the duke of Wellington were given, through an Order in council, domains one of them which was the Bois de Bossu (122 hectares).

By that time, the most southern part of the wood (south of the road Hautain le Mont - Grand Pierrepont) no longer carried the name of Bois de Bossu, but was divided in two: the Bois de Petit Bossu (20 hectares) and the Bois de Pierpont (39 hectares). Cf. Siborne, W. - History of the war etc. Atlas.

⁵ Captain Powell (1st Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.143-148

6. In 1815, the farm of Grand Pierrepont was inhabited by a family called Duviensart (information of the inhabitants).

7. Cf. maps of Ferraris and Capitaine. In 1815, it would have been owned by a woman called Marianne Bilon. An annex of the inn would still have existed around 1970 (local information).

8. Cf. Ferraris-map. It is not mentioned on the one of Capitaine.

9. On the 4th of June 1988, a tablet was erected on one of its walls by the Association pour la conservation des monuments Napoléoniens, stating: "A la mémoire des soldats de la Grande Armée tombés devant ces murs, le 16 Juin 1815."

10. Lieutenant Hope (92nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.143-148

Private Kay depicts the building in his sketch on the other side of the road. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.216-223

The building itself has been completely transformed into a house. The old construction is not to be found on the maps of Ferraris and Capitaine.

For illustrations, cf. sketches of the British historian A.H.Kennedy-Herbert. In: NAM.

Nr.7303-73 Store 185.Views of the battlefield of Waterloo. FA 7303-73-2 to 21.Store 185

¹¹ Corporal Külbel (Brunswick leibbattalion). In: Die letzten Augenblicke etc. p.5 and plan

12. For illustrations, cf.

Van Neck, L. - Waterloo, met afbeeldingen p.46

R.Bowyer. In: Waterloo 1815, l'Europe face à Napoleon p.48

Hoynck van Papendrecht (1899). In: De Bas, W.G. - Quatre Bras en Waterloo, p.56

Chalfont, lord - Waterloo, battle of three armies p.44-45

Waterloo 1815 (catalogue) Pl.XXII

Lachouque, H. - Waterloo p.95, 100

Siborne, W. - History of the war etc. Atlas.

Mudford, W. - An historical account Plate V.

Thomas Stoney, dated June 1815. In: Clayton, T. - Waterloo

Sketch of the farm dated April 1816 in the list of objects of the former Cotton Museum at Mont Saint Jean. In: NAM. Nr.7905-4

13. Through time, this farm has undergone some major changes. The main gate in the front of the large barn has been converted into a large window; other than that, several annexes have been erected in rear of the farm.

14. On the south wall of the farm a tablet can be found bearing the text:

"Aan de Nederlanders en hun medestrijders, verdedigers van Quatre Bras 15-16-VI-1815. A la mémoire des Néerlandais et leurs alliés, défenseurs de Quatre Bras."

¹⁵ Ferraris (1777) shows this inn in the north-west corner of the crossroads, but the features of the building itself as shown in contemporary drawings make it more probable that it stood further south.

Cf. Drawings of Thomas Stoney, dated June 1815. In: Clayton, T. – Waterloo

Siborne, W. - History of the war etc. Atlas.

According to Scheltema, who visited the battlefield in September 1815, the inn also had a forge. In: Verhaal van een reisje langs de slagvelden van Belle Alliance etc. In: Vad.Letteroefeningen, 1815 II p.591

16. Not far from Quatre Bras, to the west, on the south side of the Namur-road is a Belgian monument, stating: "1815 - 16 Juin. A la mémoire des Belges tués à la bataille de Quatre Bras pour la défense du drapeau et l'honneur des armes."

And: "Ter nagedachtenis der Belgen te Quatre Bras voor de verdediging van het vaandel en de eer der wapens gesneuveld. "Zij streden als leeuwen tegen troepen sterker in getal."

It was inaugurated on the 22nd of June 1926 by lieutenant general Selliers de Moranville. The area was in former possession of the duke of Wellington.

¹⁷ Cf. Capitaine (1796). It was "Cense de le Rat" according to the Ferraris-map.

¹⁸ Nowadays, called the Chapelle Notre Dame de Basse Wavre.

19. Ferraris calls it Piermont and Capitaine, Pireaumont. In 1777 it counted ten houses, in 1857 twenty-two.

The hamlet is centred around a farm, which has been transformed through time. For illustration, cf. Chalfont, Lord - Waterloo, battle of three armies p.40

²⁰ According to Tarliers and Wauters the lake was absent in the middle of 19th century as well. In: Tarliers, J. & A.Wauters - Géographie et histoire des communes Belges. Province de Brabant. Canton de Genappe p.34

²¹ Capitaine indicates them, as well photographs of the early 20th century, but no witness mentions their presence.

22. Lieutenant Hope (92nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.18-21 He confirms the presence of a slope of almost three metres in height.

²³ 1st lieutenant Backer Seest. In: Ophelderingen etc. (dated 1815). In: NA, 2.13.13.09 nr.185

24. Captain Cleeves (battery Cleeves). In: VPH-LBA, nr.15