

GREAT STAUGHTON AND ITS PEOPLE

**HOW A HUNTINGDONSHIRE VILLAGE MADE ITS MARK ON ENGLAND'S
HISTORY**

by

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Call of duty

It was James Duberly, born on 9 September 1788 of the ill-fated union of James and Rebecca, who began the Duberly family's two centuries of service to the Crown. The young James's schooling followed what was to become the traditional path of the rural gentry; on 15 September 1801, at the age of thirteen, he entered the hallowed halls of Eton. In the summer of 1805, he enrolled at the Military Institution at Chatham in Kent. James Duberly received an Ensign's Commission in the 35th Foot on 19 September 1806 and transferred as a Lieutenant to the 11th Light Dragoons on 8 January 1807. Events in Europe were causing alarm in British government circles: Napoleon Bonaparte's territorial ambitions on the Iberian Peninsula threatened to drag England into a European conflict. Anxious to support its oldest ally, Portugal, England despatched 15,000 troops to the country in 1808 under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Wellesley to confront Napoleon's army.

Three years later, on 4 May 1811, Lieutenant James Duberly embarked for Spain with his 725-strong regiment to join Wellington's British and Portuguese forces. If James Duberly had hoped for a gentle introduction into this bloody conflict, he was to be swiftly disabused of the notion, for he was immediately thrown into one of the most ferocious and bloody battles of the entire war. James Duberly's baptism of fire came early on, when his regiment was attacked at dawn by French combatants in woods between Elvas and Guadiana, 125 miles east of Lisbon, on the Portuguese-Spanish border. Making a tactical retreat into what they thought were friendly Portuguese lines, the Dragoons found themselves confronting massive French forces. Only quick thinking by the battalion commander Captain Lutyens saved the day but a terrible price was to be paid for his desperate decision. He ordered his regiment to charge and the 11th Dragoons succeeded in breaking through the French lines only to be immediately confronted by a second line of enemy troops. The regiment lost eight killed, twenty-two wounded and seventy-seven taken prisoner. Lieutenant Duberly was fortunate to escape unscathed from the debacle.

A more successful encounter took place at El Bodon near Salamanca Rodrigo on 25 September 1811. Threatened by a large French cavalry, the 11th again bravely charged the French lines, twenty times in all it was said, although vastly outnumbered. Lieutenant Duberly was in the thick of these brutally fought engagements.

In early 1812, Wellington's army advanced into Spain from Portugal and from there he moved south to capture Badajoz. Two months later on 17 June, British forces arrived on the outskirts of Salamanca, and on 22 July 1812, French and British forces met on the battlefield in what would prove to be a crushing defeat for the French and their commander Marshal Marmont. For James Duberly, the battle was an honourable one and for his valour he was awarded a medal with clasp (regimental honour) for gallantry. Any thoughts that this might mark the end of the conflict were quickly dispelled. The French regrouped and Wellington's forces were driven from central Spain, hotly pursued by a French army bent on revenge. In the horrific skirmishes that followed, 1,000 allied troops were killed or wounded and more than 3,000 taken prisoner. It was fortunate for the British that in 1812 Napoleon's attention was fatally distracted by Russia. On 3 April 1813, the 11th was recalled to England, leaving behind their horses. In the gruelling two years of their service in Spain, they had lost 417 men, more than half of their total strength, and 555 horses.

The last act of Napoleon's attempt to dominate Europe began at Quatre Bras on 16 June 1815. Earlier that year, Napoleon had famously escaped from his prison on Elba and quickly

mustered his forces for a last engagement with his old enemy, Wellington. James Duberly came back to his regiment on full pay and immediately embarked at Ramsgate for Flanders on 30 March 1815, disembarking in Ostend on 2 April. His regiment was soon in action. On 16 June 1815, two days before the decisive battle of Waterloo, the French army under Marshal Michel Ney clashed with Wellington's army at the strategic crossroads of Quatre Bras. The newly promoted Captain James Duberly, of the 11th Light Dragoons cavalry regiment, was one of 419 soldiers under Lieutenant Colonel James Wallace Sleigh. They joined forces with the 12th and 16th under the command of Sir John Ormsby Vandeleur, with a strength of 947 men. They were quickly in action, and despite coming under heavy attack, they suffered few casualties. The battle was bitterly contested on both sides, with the advantage swinging from the allies to the French and back again during the course of the day. Wellington's army lost 4,800 men against 4,000 French dead. The battle of Quatre Bras was notable for the controversy surrounding Wellington's ambiguous promise to send troops in support of Field Marshal Gebhard von Blücher, a promise which he allegedly failed to keep.

Two days later on the fields of Waterloo came the decisive battle. The Anglo-allied Army Cavalry Corps, with a total strength of 15,395 men, was commanded by Lieutenant General Henry William Paget, 1st Marquess of Anglesey. It was a frustrating day for the cavalry; torrential rain had made the battlefield a quagmire. Nonetheless, Captain James Duberly and his 11th Dragoons made a successful charge on the French lines, breaking up a line of French infantry and going on in the relentless pursuit of the fleeing French over the sodden terrain. The battle was won by Wellington and the allies but only by the thinnest of margins, prompting the Duke's famous remark: 'the nearest-run thing you ever saw in your life'.

For Captain Duberly, it must have been a historic moment, the final defeat of Britain's most feared adversary. The valour of those who took part in the Napoleonic campaigns was to be officially recognised. In its issue of 23 April 1816, the *London Gazette* announced that the Prince Regent, acting upon a suggestion by the Duke of Wellington, was 'graciously pleased, in the name and on the behalf of His Majesty, to confer The Waterloo Medal upon every officer, non-commissioned officer and soldier of the British Army (including members of the King's German Legion) who took part in one or more of the following battles: Ligny (16 June 1815), Quatre Bras (16 June 1815) and Waterloo (18 June 1815)'. It must have been a moment of personal triumph for Captain James Duberly to be awarded the medal with clasp. The Waterloo Medal is made of silver and is 1 ½ inches in diameter. The obverse carries an effigy of the Prince Regent, the reverse a figure of Victory with the words WELLINGTON and the date, 18 June 1815. The clasp, affixed to the ribbon, signifies the name of the recipient and the number of battles in which he was involved.

Captain Duberly went on half pay on 25 March 1816. In the nineteenth century, commissions in the army could be purchased and later resold upon retirement from the army. To get back his purchase money upon his retirement, James Duberly was brought into the 98th Foot on 25 November 1831 and sold out on 2 December 1831.

On 25 May 1832, upon the death of his father, James Duberly succeeded to the manor of Gaynes Hall. 1832 was a year of great political turbulence in the country. The iniquities of the British electoral system had been provoking civil unrest since the Peterloo massacre of 1819 and Parliament decided that something must be done to quell popular discontent. The result was the Representation of the People Act 1832, rather better known as the 1832 Great Reform Act, proposed by the Whig Prime Minister Charles Grey, 2nd Earl Grey, and subsequently passed into law by Parliament. The Act corrected many of the abuses of the existing electoral system, widened

the franchise, abolished the so-called Rotten Boroughs and gave a political voice to the massive conurbations that had grown up as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

In 1831 James Duberly stood for Parliament in Huntingdon under the Whig banner but was not elected. Nonetheless, his subsequent career in the village and the wider county bears witness to his Whiggish credentials. He took an active interest in the reforms being proposed, including the abolition of church rates, which would come into law in 1832. He served as a Justice of the Peace for Huntingdon and was a member of the Athenaeum. Serious politics gave way to country squire japes in 1832, when he was called upon to act as second in a duel provoked by Grantley Berkley, sportsman, master of the Oakley Hunt, Member of Parliament, author of several volumes of reminiscences, following a quarrel with Samuel Charles Whitbread, of the brewing dynasty. The dispute was eventually settled without any swordplay, which must have been a pleasant outcome for one who had witnessed so much slaughter on the battlefield.

On 21 September 1837, at the age of forty-nine, James Duberly married Emily Hannah, third daughter of Colonel the Honourable William Grey, son of the first Earl Grey (of tea fame), thus linking inextricably the two families. The remainder of his life was spent with his wife in Staughton, where he died on 3 March 1864, after a career that had seen him take part in the historic defeat of Napoleon in Spain and on the fields of Waterloo. He was buried in St Andrew's Church. His wife survived him by almost twenty years, dying on 30 March 1883. James and Emily Duberly had eight children. His son William was a captain in the Grenadier Guards and High Sheriff in 1884. He died in 1888 and was succeeded by his son Grey William Duberly.