

# **FREEDOM HAS SUMMONED HER SONS! A RURAL CHESHIRE PARISH RESPONDS TO THE REVOLUTIONARY AND NAPOLEONIC WARS: MALPAS 1792-1815**

**David Hayns**

One of the author's interests over the past three decades has been the examination of the effects of major national and international conflicts on the former market town of Malpas, where he has lived for nearly 60 years. His three studies published to date have looked at the town during the English Civil Wars of the seventeenth century and the two twentieth century World Wars.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Background to the French Wars of 1792-1815**

During the twentieth century World Wars France was Britain's ally. Not so from the late seventeenth until the early nineteenth centuries. Following the ousting during the Great Rebellion of 1688 of the Roman Catholic King James II and his replacement by the Protestant King William and Queen Mary, a series of Jacobite risings represented attempts to regain the British throne for the House of Stuart, exiled in France. The two most significant of these risings took place in 1715 and 1745. From 1689 until 1815, Britain and France were involved on opposing sides in a number of major conflicts: 1689-1697 (The Nine Years War); 1702-1713 (The War of the Spanish Succession); 1756-1763 (The Seven Years War); 1778-1783 (The American War of Independence).

Ten years after the end of the American War of Independence, Britain stood in fear of invasion directly from France. The Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) and Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), the two periods often referred to jointly as the 'Napoleonic' Wars, put

the whole of Britain on its guard against the threat posed by France and by Napoleon Bonaparte. He became First Consul of France in 1799 and Emperor in 1804.

Understanding the reasons for, and the progress of, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars can be quite difficult. A useful clear and concise overview is provided by Carole Divall:

On 28<sup>th</sup> April 1792 a French army, nearly 20,000 strong ... crossed the border into the Austrian Netherlands (modern Belgium). Its objective was simple - to export revolution. Although France was officially still a monarchy, the extremists were merely biding their time and the country would soon sink into the chaos of the Reign of Terror. This first campaign of 1792 was brief and ended in ignominious failure but it strengthened the determination of the sovereigns of Europe to deal the revolutionaries a fatal blow before their thrones also began to totter. Austria and Prussia launched a joint invasion of France in August 1792, thus setting in motion a war which lasted until 1815, with only one brief interval of peace.

The first 'Great War' convulsed the whole of Europe, from Britain to the Bosphorus and spread to wherever the major European powers had foreign interests, even drawing in the fledgling United States of America. Its greatest hero, Napoleon Bonaparte, gave his name to both a war and an era. In Britain, victories were won by arguably our greatest admiral and greatest general, Nelson and Wellington.

Britain was initially reluctant to become involved. The Prime Minister, William Pitt, was more concerned with putting right the financial catastrophe of the war with the American colonists, which had come to an end only nine years before. After the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, however, war with France was inevitable. Even then it was the

Convention of Paris that declared war on Britain, Spain and the Netherlands, and launched an attack on the Dutch.<sup>2</sup>

So war was declared only four years after the French Revolution of 1789, which had led to the French monarchy being abolished and the French Republic being established. King Louis XVI of France was guillotined on 21 January 1793. Eleven days later France declared war on Britain.

It might be questioned as to how wars being fought on an international scale could directly affect a rural community such as Malpas. This study seeks to show just how much the wars did indeed affect this small Cheshire town, as they did many other rural communities.

## **Malpas Reacts to News of the War**

Fears that the spirit of revolution might spread across the Channel to Britain were widespread. One notorious ‘hate figure’ for patriotic communities like Malpas was Tom Paine, born in Norfolk in 1736. He was a supporter of the French revolutionaries and author of a widely read book *The Rights of Man*,<sup>3</sup> which put forward arguments for the abolition of the monarchy. By May 1792 an estimated 50,000 copies were in circulation. It was written in defence of the French Revolution of 1789 and in response to Edmund Burke’s book *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)<sup>4</sup> which was very hostile to the Revolution. One important local figure, Reginald Heber (senior), who was Rector of the Upper Moiety of Malpas (Plate VI), wrote to his sister Elizabeth on 12 November 1790: ‘Tell my dear Richard [his eldest son] if he has not read Burke’s book he has a great pleasure to come.’<sup>5</sup>

The upper classes of society were fiercely supportive of the king. On 12 December 1792 Reginald wrote again to his sister:

I rejoice to see the numerous Associations both in the Metropolis and populous Country Towns to protect and defend the lives and properties of the peaceable and most willing members of the Community against the wicked machinations and bold menaces of Levellers and Republicans.

On 5 January 1793 he wrote to his son Richard:

Loyalty triumphs in every corner of the kingdom. Tom Paine was first shot through and then burnt in effigy at Malpas Cross on Wednesday and a Band of Music pervades every street, playing and singing 'God Save Great George Our King'. Tiddy [the young Reginald Heber junior], Tom [his brother] and Missy [his sister Mary] amused themselves in dressing up two figures to represent Tom Paine and Demourrier [a French general] which they carried about stuck on their hunting poles all day long.<sup>6</sup>

Similar demonstrations were taking place both county and country wide. On 15 January 1793 the *Adams's Weekly Courant*, a Chester newspaper, reported:

We continue to receive accounts of the general martyrdom which Paine has suffered, by proxy, in nearly all of the neighbouring towns. On Wednesday, his effigy, with a dagger, smeared with blood, in one hand, and his libel in the other, was paraded thro' the streets of this city [i.e. Chester] and having been rudely treated with stones and mud by the indignant spectators, it was committed to the flames, at the Cross ...<sup>7</sup>

A few days earlier on 11 January 1793 Reginald Heber (senior) wrote to his sister Elizabeth: 'The French National Assembly will fill up the measure of their insanity by rousing the British Lion. A war with France is never disagreeable to this country and would now be popular.'<sup>8</sup>

Just four weeks later, on 12 February 1793, the *Adams's Weekly Courant* published a notice that 'Intelligence has been received that WAR has been declared in FRANCE against GREAT-BRITAIN and HOLLAND'.<sup>9</sup> Across the country preparations began for what, it was hoped, would be a brief but decisive war. Britain and many other countries entered into what actually became 23 years of almost continuous warfare.

Once war had been declared a considerable 'war effort' was required to equip the country to withstand the threat of invasion. In December 1796 Reginald wrote to Elizabeth:

I see in the 'Chester Chronicle' of today that twenty millions, two millions more than were required, were subscribed in the short space of three days after the Books were opened at the Bank, such an instance of promptitude in raising the supplies for the service of government is I believe unparalleled in the Annals of Funding! This proclaims to the world in a voice of thunder how little this Queen of Isles fears any efforts of the combined Powers of France and Spain to disturb her repose!<sup>10</sup>

In 1797 the Bank of England suspended cash payments, owing to the fact that the Bank had run short of gold and only bank-notes were accepted as valid for payments. The run on the banks was partly a panic reaction to the unsuccessful invasion attempt by the French when they landed at Fishguard in Pembrokeshire during February of that year. Following news of the attempt, crowds had rushed to withdraw money from the Bank of England and an order was issued empowering the Bank's directors to refuse cash payments. The county banks were compelled to follow suit and the Bank Restriction Act of May 1797 remained in force until 1821. In a letter written from Malpas in March 1797 Richard Ansdell complained:

I Yesterday offered one [note] of one Pound to a Grocer [in Malpas], who observ'd that as they were refus'd at Wrexham



little as 2d. (about 0.8p) each by a number of less well-off Malpas residents. For comparison, the present-day equivalent of £100 in 1793 is around £12,000.<sup>13</sup> The list was also published in the *Chester Courant* along with an account of the collection's 'launch' in Malpas:

Tuesday a meeting was held at the Vestry,<sup>14</sup> in Malpas ... which, considering only a few hours notice had been given, was most respectably attended ... a subscription list was opened for the defence of the country, the amount of which presently exceeded eight hundred pounds. From the Vestry the party adjourned to the Market Cross, where many loyal toasts were drank, and the day concluded after repeated and fervent expressions of attachment to the constitution, with the utmost festivity and good humour. The inhabitants of the town in general, as well as most of the farmers, concurred in displaying an interest in the cause ... even the labourers actuated by their honest feelings, came from the most distant parts of the parish to offer their mite, and to prove their hearty zeal and determination to defend the country which gave them birth ...

Those present at the Vestry meeting had resolved 'actively to support our COUNTRY, at this very arduous crisis ... a voluntary contribution by all ranks throughout the kingdom tends directly to this patriotic object'.<sup>15</sup>

It was in August of the same year that Nelson defeated Napoleon's sea forces at the Battle of the Nile. In response to this important naval victory Reginald Heber junior, aged fifteen, was inspired to write a poem which he called *The Prophecy of Ishmael*.<sup>16</sup> It contains the following lines, which echo the widespread anti-French feeling:

And now shall Gaul with conqu'ring armies come?  
Gaul! But a province of defeated Rome!  
Shall she expel, though far renown'd in fight,

The Sons of Ishmael from their ancient right?  
No, no; from me, ye robbers, learn your fate,  
Lament and die, return is now too late.  
(Gaul - Latin *Gallia* - included the country of present-day France.)

### **Timber supplies**

As action at sea took its toll of Britain's navy, considerable effort was invested in building new ships as quickly as possible. Timber, particularly oak, was in great demand. Shortly after the Battle of the Nile in 1798 the local newspaper advertised a timber sale at the Red Lion Inn, Malpas. The timber, from the local estate of Higher Barns, 'is mainly coppice timber, of good length, and the greater part of it fit for the navy. It is situate about two miles from Malpas, and eight from Bangor, where the River Dee is navigable'.<sup>17</sup> It is worthwhile remembering that at this time Chester was still an active port and shipbuilding centre, whose fortunes had been revived by the canalising in 1735/6 of the River Dee from Chester to the sea to counteract the effects of centuries of silting of the river bed. Further advertisements appeared<sup>18</sup> for sales of timber, from Higher Barns again, and from Hampton, Overton Hall and Agden (all three locations within Malpas parish). The timber from Agden included elm 'very lengthy and large - there are 3 or 4 keel pieces' and the advertisement for another sale at the Red Lion, in 1806 (the year after the Battle of Trafalgar), stated:

The above timber is well situated, distant from Chester about thirteen miles, part of which lies near the Canal from Whitchurch to Chester, and the other part adjoins the River Dee, which is navigable, and is well worth the attention of shipwrights, millwrights, and carpenters.<sup>19</sup>

The canal link (now part of the Llangollen Canal) from Whitchurch to join the Chester (to Nantwich) Canal at Hurleston had been opened only during the previous year.<sup>20</sup> It provided an important new trading link from the Malpas and Whitchurch areas, giving access to a wide network of canals and rivers.



The owners of the large estates kept a careful eye on the timber on their land. A valuation record of growing timber on the Drake estates in 1806<sup>21</sup> contains lists of all the timber on the estate farms. Each tree is numbered; with its girth, length and thickness of bark; and with its potential value as calculated by the surveyor. A typical farm was that tenanted by Mary Downes at Oldcastle, one of the Malpas townships (Figure 2). The trees on her land are listed as 534 oak, 13 poplar, 17 ash and 23 oak cyphers. The term ‘cypher’ seems to have fallen out of use but possibly referred to self-seeded oak seedlings, or saplings of no great market value.<sup>22</sup> The total value of timber on Mary Downes’s holding was just over £1,096.

*On a Farm in the holding of Mrs. Mary Downes<sup>59</sup> in the Township of Oldcastle in the Parish of Malpas and in the County of Chester, as follows viz*

<i>Oak Timber</i>										
<i>Pair</i>	<i>N.</i>	<i>Len.</i>	<i>Girth</i>	<i>Bark</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Contd.</i>	<i>£</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
24	1	25	14	3	2	3 1/2	3	8	—	
26	2	18	14	2 1/2	2	2 1/2	2	10	—	
24	3	15	17	5	4	30	3	0	0	
24	4	14	14	3	4	10	3	0	0	

**Figure 2: Valuation of timber on estates belonging to T.D. Tyrwhitt Drake 1806 - holding of Mary Downes, Oldcastle. (CALS, DTD/30/4: reproduced by permission of CALS and the owner/depositor to whom copyright is reserved.)**

### The Land Defence Forces

By 1809 the British economy was having to support armed forces comprising 300,000 regular soldiers or embodied militia, 130,000

seamen or marines, 199,000 militiamen and 189,000 volunteers. The total represents about one in every six men of military age.<sup>23</sup>

There were three distinct categories of forces available for home defence during the periods of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The **British Regular Army** was badly neglected from the end of the American War of Independence in 1783 until the onset of the Revolutionary Wars in 1793. The blame for this has been laid at the feet of William Pitt the Younger, who became Prime Minister in 1783. In 1795 command of the Army was taken over by Prince Frederick, Duke of York (the 'Grand Old Duke of York'), who held the post until 1809 and then again from 1811 to 1827, with Sir David Dundas serving from 1809 to 1811. Prince Frederick initiated many reforms to the Regular Army and imposed a vigorous training programme on Britain's chaotic regiments.

While soldiers in the Regular Army were all volunteers, usually enlisted for life, the **Militia**, the second major land defence force, was comprised of conscripts selected by ballot and required to serve for only five years. Soldiers in the Army were enlisted for home and overseas service, Militiamen for home defence only. The Army was administered by the Commander-in-Chief, answerable directly to the Prime Minister, while the Militia was raised by the Home Secretary working through the Lords Lieutenant of the counties.

The third category of land defence forces was the **Volunteers**.<sup>24</sup> They included both Infantry and Cavalry (known also as Yeomanry). Like the Militia, the Volunteers were under the control of the Home Secretary and the Lords Lieutenant. The Volunteers comprised men who had offered their services in locally organised units, with the Yeomanry providing their own horses. In return the Government provided arms, pay, and freedom from Militia service, and required varying periods of serious training. Although the Duke of York had no authority over the internal organisation of volunteer units, which amounted to a vast amateur force of over 300,000 men, he did gain

approval for an advisory body of Inspecting Field Officers for the Volunteers.

For Malpas during the period of the French Wars this article makes little reference to the Regular Army but will examine the local situation regarding the County Militia and the Volunteers.

## **Malpas Men**

### **The Regular Army**

Documents reveal that around 40 Malpas men actually fought against Napoleon during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Among them many current local surnames can be identified.

One such individual was Hugh Parbutt who was part of ‘that astonishing infantry’ (General Napier’s description)<sup>25</sup> which helped to defeat the French at the Battle of Albuera in Spain, in 1811. Albuera, one of the many battles of the Peninsular War, was a victory won at an appalling cost to British forces, with 4,400 out of 6,500 infantrymen killed. In his epic poem ‘Childe Harold’ Lord Byron referred to the battle as ‘... Albuera, glorious field of grief!’<sup>26</sup>

The memory of the terrible slaughter must have haunted Hugh Parbutt (Parbart) for the rest of his life. His gravestone in Malpas churchyard, where he was buried in 1861, records that he was a sergeant in the 59<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot (Figure 3). On his retirement from the army, he set up in business as a shoemaker, in the lane off Church Street which now bears his name.

At least three Malpas men - James Parbutt, William Leach and Joseph Speed - fought at the Battle of Waterloo, which brought the Napoleonic Wars to an end in 1815. Joseph died of his wounds, soon after the battle.



***Figure 3: Hugh Parbutt's gravestone in Malpas churchyard.***

### **The County Militia**

The memory of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion had made Parliament determined to re-establish the Militia as a local defence force. Acts of Parliament from 1757 onwards required parish or township constables to draw up lists of all able-bodied men aged 18 to 50 years, the upper limit being lowered to 45 years in 1757. The lists were submitted to the Lord Lieutenant of the county. Those who were to serve were then selected by ballot, though they could pay for substitutes to serve in their

places. Although the local militias never saw active service they survived as a 'local reserve' until after the end of the French Wars.<sup>27</sup>

An insight into how the system worked is provided by Militia Enrolment Lists<sup>28</sup> which survive for the period 1770-1820. The Broxton Sub-division enrolment list for 1770-84 names fourteen Malpas men eligible for service. Five of them elected to serve in person (two labourers, a cordwainer (shoemaker), a barber and a 'servant') while the others elected substitutes. Most of these substitutes lived away from Malpas, in places as diverse as Chester, Handbridge, Christleton and even Liverpool. Could it be that the substitutes were not known to those in whose place they were to serve but were taken from a list of possible substitutes maintained by the military authorities? Richard Glover wrote of the Militia:

Its members were selected by ballot out of lists of all men of military age ... No man who was balloted was compelled to serve in person if he could induce a 'substitute' to serve for him. The most persuasive inducement with substitutes was money, and the safest way of securing that money was to insure oneself against being balloted. So war brought insurance clubs  
...<sup>29</sup>

There were nine Malpas men (five cordwainers, two blacksmiths, a barber and a weaver) who were nominated as substitutes by men from other places, including the townships surrounding Malpas (Agden, Bickley, Broxton, Clutton, Cuddington, Egerton).

During the period 1810-21 it seems that Malpas and Duckington between them were required to provide a total of four men for military service in the Royal Cheshire Militia but most of them were covered by substitutes, on payment of the required bounty. The system did not always work smoothly. For instance, James Smith, a carpenter of Malpas, in 1810 paid a bounty of £34 15s. 0d. for Thomas Lockard

to serve as his substitute. Unfortunately, Lockard later deserted from the militia. Did James Smith then have to pay for a replacement?

The Supplementary Militia was formed in 1796, partly as a reaction to the increasing threat of invasion. The 1804 Volunteer Consolidation Act created the Permanent Additional Force, which merged the Army of Reserve and the Supplementary Militia, with the ultimate aim of supplying men to the regular army. The Supplementary Militia Enrolment Lists<sup>30</sup> over the period 1809-15 show enrolments of nine Malpas men, probably all by ballot. A list specifically for 1811 shows eight Malpas men, either volunteers or selected by ballot.

### **The Volunteers**

In the 1790s, when the country first started to fear invasion, the government called for self-funding part-time volunteer units to be formed. In 1794 a plan was proposed by the Lords Lieutenant of the counties to raise auxiliary forces by adding Volunteers to the regular Militia. In April of that year an Act was passed ‘for encouraging and disciplining such corps or companies of men as shall voluntarily enrol themselves for the defence of their counties, towns, or coasts, or for the general defence of the Kingdom during the present war’. One attraction for a Volunteer was that the Act gave him exemption from Militia service, if he could produce a certificate of attendance at his corps’ drill for the six weeks prior to the hearing of any appeals against inclusion in the Militia lists.<sup>31</sup> The Volunteers were in many ways a historical precedent for the Local Defence Volunteers (later to be called the Home Guard) formed during the 1939-45 War. It has been said that in 1794 ‘volunteering was a game for the elite. Wealthy merchants, manufacturers and professionals as well as peers and gentry began to raise troops’.<sup>32</sup> A large number of the early corps, founded in 1794/95, were concerned primarily with coastal defence.<sup>33</sup> Many more corps were formed in 1797/98, in response to increased French activity and invasion scares. When in February 1797 the French made their only landing in Britain, on the Welsh coast at Fishguard in Pembrokeshire, the local people reported sightings of the invasion force and 500 militia

men and many volunteers, armed with rakes, old muskets, pikes and spades, hurried to the coast. Very soon the invaders surrendered and were imprisoned at Pembroke.<sup>34</sup>

In May 1797 the *Chester Courant* published a poem<sup>35</sup> encouraging men to step forward as Volunteers, and the aristocracy and gentry to play their part in training them:

To arms, ye Britons!  
Call forth the pride and prowess of the land,  
Your faithful yeomanry, your sturdy swains;  
Summon their rural lords to quit their sports.  
To hound and horn, and mount their mettled steeds,  
And train the rustic bands from grange and fold ...

In the four months after April 1798 the number of Volunteers doubled and by July had reached 116,000. The Treaty of Amiens in March 1802, which marked the ending of the Revolutionary Wars, brought the service of most of the Volunteers to an end.

The peace following the Treaty of Amiens generated false hopes in the country as a whole. It was widely celebrated and Reginald Heber senior wrote to his sister Elizabeth to tell how the family had gone to Sir Richard Hill's gala at Hawkstone Park, in Shropshire, where they climbed the hill amid the flashing of fire squibs and rockets.<sup>36</sup> However, the peace was to prove short-lived. On 10 March 1803 Elizabeth wrote to Reginald:

By His Majesty's message to His Parliament we appear to be  
on the eve of another war. The restless spirit of Bonaparte will  
not long suffer the nations to be at peace until he has subdued  
them all or perished in the attempt ...<sup>37</sup>

On 11 May 1803 France rejected British demands to evacuate Holland. On 17 May an embargo was placed on French and Dutch ships entering

British ports. Hostilities in 1793 had commenced when France declared war on Britain. This time, on 18 May 1803, Britain declared war on France.

Once again Volunteers were called for but, unlike the situation during the Revolutionary Wars of 1793-1802, local volunteer corps changed from being recruited largely from the middle classes to include a far wider range of men. In the rush to volunteer, 380,258 men were enrolled nationwide by mid-1804, far outnumbering the Army, Navy and Militia.<sup>38</sup> The total number of volunteers recorded for Cheshire in the same year was 10,550 (2.8 % of the national total) made up of: fourteen troops of Cavalry comprising 732 men; 58 companies of Infantry comprising 4,341 men; one Artillery company comprising 105 men; and 5,372 'Rank & File'.<sup>39</sup> At least two corps of volunteers were formed in the old parish of Malpas. One corps, formed in September 1803, was the Cholmondeley and Bulkeley Volunteers, based at Cholmondeley Castle. This corps of 100 men was commanded by Captain Charles Clarke, with Richard Sutton as his Lieutenant, and George Viscount Malpas (son of Lord Cholmondeley?) and Joseph Hill as his Ensigns ('ensign' is a junior officer rank below the rank of lieutenant, associated with carrying the flag). Joseph Hill was a surveyor who was contracted to work for Lord Cholmondeley on his Cheshire and Norfolk estates, although he was not an estate employee.

In his cash book<sup>40</sup> covering 1800 to 1813 Joseph Hill recorded payments made on behalf of the Cholmondeley and Bulkeley Volunteers. In August 1803 he paid Mr Fletcher (probably the John Fletcher who had been the proprietor of the *Chester Chronicle* since 1783)<sup>41</sup> 'for printing Letters to Lord Cholmondeley's Tenants'. As this is the first entry in the accounts the letters were almost certainly invitations to tenants of the Cholmondeley estate to volunteer for the newly-formed corps. The next payment, on 31 October, is £17 13s. 0d. (£17.65) 'for Ale and Spirits had by the Volunteers'. Perhaps this is not too exorbitant a bill for drink to reward around 100 thirsty men who had volunteered to defend their country! In November James Parbutt (who



later joined the army in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Foot Guards), Thomas Shenton and James Lee were each hired for twelve days each, at 2s. 6d. (12.5p) a day, to instruct and drill the volunteers (Figure 4).

Volunteers				
Aug. 22	paid Mr. Fletcher for printing Letters to			
1803	Lord Nelson's Friends			
Oct. 31	paid Mr. Painter for Hall and Spirits house			
	by the Volunteers as per Bill		17	13
Nov. 13	James Parbutt for instructing the			
	Volunteers 12 Days at 2/6		1	10
	Shenton 12 " 2/6		1	10
	James Lee 12 " 2/6		1	10
Nov. 8	Thomas Shenton & his Son for drapery			
	for 2 Handles as per Bill		5	

**Figure 4: Payments in 1803 relating to the Cholmondeley & Bulkeley Volunteers as recorded in Joseph Hill's cash book. (CALS, DCH.RR.6: reproduced by permission of CALS and the owner/depositor to whom copyright is reserved.)**

In December, Parbutt, Shenton and Lee were hired for a further six days each, along with a Mr Woodhall, who was hired for eighteen days for the same purposes. The volunteers were provided with some form of uniform. sixteen cockades (hat decorations) were bought for £1 4s. 0d. (£1.20); Mr Cross of Whitchurch was paid £3 13s. 6d. (£3.67) for 'Making 7 Suits of Cloaths'; Mr Downes of Nantwich charged 13s. 2d. (66p) for gaiter straps; and a Mr Brock charged 4s. 0d. (20p) for more of the same. The basic weapon was the pike, a pole fitted with a sharp blade at the top, such as had been used in warfare for many centuries. £1 16s. 0d. (£1.80) was paid for 'falling Trees and Sawing pike

Handles'; Thomas Shenton and his son received £5 'for dressing pike Handles', and 5s. 0d. (75p) for another 7½ days at the same task; a further 8s. 0d. (40p) was paid to Samuel Parsonage for similar work.

The corps had its own musicians, playing drums and fifes to accompany marching, and the accounts show the costs of purchasing drums and spare drumheads, and for instructors for the drummers and fifers. Cashing in on the many volunteer corps being formed at the time, suppliers of musical instruments were not slow to advertise their wares. In the *Chester Courant* in August 1803 there were advertisements by two music shops in Chester's Watergate Street Row.<sup>42</sup> Mr R. Taylor offered to supply drums, fifes, bugles, trumpets, clarinets, bassoons, hautboys (oboes), tambourines, triangles, kettledrums, cymbals and serpents (old bass instruments later superseded by tubas or euphoniums). Mr W. Clegg Dod offered a similar array of instruments, all of which, or their modern equivalents, can be heard playing in military bands of the present day. In April 1803 a letter had been sent to the Lords Lieutenant of all the counties outlining conditions of service for Volunteer Corps and including a schedule of approved expenses to be reimbursed.<sup>43</sup> Names of individual volunteers who appear in the Cholmondeley accounts after payment of expenses, many of them still recognisable nowadays as local names, include John and Arthur Harding, James and John Twiss, Thomas Brown, William Barlow, Samuel Parsonage, and Messrs Platt, Jones, Dunn and Churches.

The other volunteer corps in Malpas parish, formed in August 1803, was based at Bolesworth Castle.<sup>44</sup> It comprised 100 men in two companies of infantry, commanded by Thomas Tarleton, who was the current tenant and later became owner of the castle. The Captain was John Tarleton; Lieutenants were Thomas Briscoe and John Bailey; Ensigns were Thomas Davenport and Thomas Capper; the Chaplain was Hugh Cholmondeley; and the Surgeon was Ralph Jackson.

With his talent for writing verse, Reginald Heber wrote for Squire Dod of Edge Hall a ‘battle hymn’ for a local volunteer corps. This may have been a means of currying favour with the squire since Reginald was rather ‘sweet’ on his daughter Charlotte! Many years later, in 1817 and long after he had married Amelia Shipley in 1805, he wrote from Hodnet Rectory to a friend that ‘Charlotte Dod has been staying here the last fortnight, and goes to Edge tomorrow, leaving me more than three-quarters in love with her’.<sup>45</sup> There is no record of a volunteer corps specifically attached to Edge Hall and it may be that the song was actually for the volunteer corps at nearby Bolesworth Castle, home of the Tarleton family with whom the Hebers and Dods were friendly. The song, which boasts of the volunteers’ pride in fighting for no pay, was ‘*Honour its own Reward*’, written in 1803:

Swell, swell the shrill trumpet, clear sounding afar,  
Our sabres flash splendour around,  
For Freedom has summoned her sons to the war,  
Nor Britain has shrunk from the sound...

... free be our aid, independent our might,  
Proud honour our guerdon\* alone;  
Unhired be the hand we raise in the fight,  
The sword that we brandish our own...  
[\*guerdon = reward]

Reginald Heber’s widow Amelia published the song in 1830 in her biography<sup>46</sup> of her late husband, although it had already appeared in the *Chester Courant* in 1803,<sup>47</sup> with no author credited, where it was described as ‘A song for the Cavalry Association formed at Chester’. So, it has to be questioned whether Reginald Heber actually was the author.

Reginald Heber junior’s half-brother Richard was a captain in the Shropshire Volunteers. By 1804 Reginald had moved to Hodnet Hall, part of the Heber family’s estates, with his mother, brother and

sister, following the death of his father in Malpas at the beginning of the year. When Richard was summoned to Yorkshire where the family had other estates, as Colonel of the Craven Legion, Reginald took over his duties with the Shropshire Volunteers. He wrote frequently to his half-brother about his difficulties with the Volunteers. He had trouble with the men drinking and going to Market Drayton: 'Drayton is such a perfect brothel every night, that the men will lose, I fear, their morals and civility as well as their discipline.'<sup>48</sup>

However, by 1808 the Volunteers were considered to have outlived their usefulness. 13,000 small volunteer corps were replaced by 270 units of local militia, which included many of the former members of the volunteer corps.

## Peace At Last

With communities right across the country, Malpas played its part in celebrating the final victory at Waterloo. Among the records of neighbouring Tilston church is a copy of the printed *Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God*<sup>49</sup> which was circulated to be read in parish churches throughout the country. It includes the passage:

Grant O merciful God, that the result of this mighty battle, terrible in conflict, but glorious beyond example in success, may put an end to the miseries of Europe ...

Rector Egerton of Whitchurch, who was born in 1811 in the room at Malpas Higher Rectory in which Reginald Heber junior had been born 28 years previously, later wrote:

The first event of note which my memory can recall with distinctness was the celebration of peace after Wellington's great victory at Waterloo over Napoleon, the enemy and oppressor of the nations of Europe. The famous battle was fought on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1815. The peace was celebrated about

a year afterwards. There was universal rejoicing and feasting throughout the land. At Malpas the tables were laid the full length of the noble avenue of lime trees<sup>50</sup> which extend from the Rectory to the church gate. Possibly my vivid remembrance of the event is due more to the good things which were given to the small boy as he was led around the table, than to the feelings of exultation and gratitude which echoed throughout the nation.<sup>51</sup>

It is a sobering reflection on the increasing savagery and sophistication of military weaponry and strategy during the century that followed to read that the total of around 20,000 men of the British army killed, captured, wounded or missing during the period of the French Wars (1792-1815)<sup>52</sup> was approximately one-third of the number of British soldiers (around 57,000)<sup>53</sup> who died on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, on 1 July 1916.

## **Conclusions**

Researching this article has reinforced the author's impression that major national and international conflicts really did have significant effects upon the inhabitants and institutions of some rural communities. The rapid growth of local newspapers from the late eighteenth century and their increasing availability today for study, both in local record offices and online, provides a unique resource for research into such subjects. It is hoped that others may be encouraged to investigate similar subjects for their own geographical localities and areas of interest.

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<sup>5</sup> R.H. Cholmondeley, *The Heber Letters 1783-1832* (London, 1950), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Cholmondeley, *Heber Letters*, pp. 76, 78.

<sup>7</sup> *Adams's Weekly Courant*, 15 Jan. 1793 (available: CALS, Mf. 228/4).

<sup>8</sup> Cholmondeley, *Heber Letters*, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> *Adams's Weekly Courant*, 12 Feb. 1783.

<sup>10</sup> Cholmondeley, *Heber Letters*, p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> CALS, D 7690: Ansdell letters.

<sup>12</sup> CALS, DDX 551: *Malpas Voluntary Contributions for the Defence of the Country, 1798*. The document was discovered on a rubbish tip in Threapwood in 1981 by Mr J. Ainsworth, who donated it to Cheshire Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Monetary conversions: <<<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>>>.

<sup>14</sup> The Vestry was the forerunner of Malpas Parish Council (formed under the 1894 Local Government Act). It was held originally in the vestry room of the church, hence its name.

<sup>15</sup> *Chester Courant*, 27 Feb. 1798 (available: CALS, Mf. 227/2).

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- <sup>51</sup> This quotation was provided to me many years ago by the late Dennis Earnshaw of Whitchurch. Unfortunately, I am unable to identify its original source.
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