

# A Battlefield Amputation at Waterloo – June 1815

Michael Crumplin and Bryan Rhodes

The front cover of this edition features an imaginary image of a battlefield amputation by the surgeon Francis Burton, Surgeon to 4th Regt Foot, an experienced and accomplished man who had Peninsular war service and was one of the five surgeons present at Napoleon's post mortem.

There were a few examples of field amputation at Waterloo, but it was a fairly rare event and obviously dangerous for the surgeon. Mr Crumplin commissioned the picture to be painted by the artist Jason Askew for the front cover of his latest book: *The Bloody Fields of Waterloo – Medical Support for Wellington's Greatest Victory* published in 2013. The painting now hangs in the regimental museum of the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment in Lancaster.

Michael Crumplin is a retired consultant surgeon who was educated at Wellington College and the Middlesex Hospital. As a curator and archivist at the Royal College of Surgeons, he has been closely involved in the development of the Hunterian Museum. Mr Crumplin has a particular interest in surgical history and his principle purpose with surgical history is to promote interest in the human cost of war and the oft-forgotten efforts of military medical men. He is currently treasurer/trustee of the Waterloo Committee and member of the Waterloo 200 Committee – heading up the educational group for the Bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo. Mr Crumplin's first book (co-authored with Peter Starling): *'A Surgical Artist at War'* – the paintings of Sir Charles Bell, illustrating wounds received at the Battles of Corunna and Waterloo was published in 2005. The book describes how Bell travelled to Waterloo just after the battle to treat injured soldiers and to sketch and take notes about battlefield injuries. After returning to England, Bell produced a series of remarkable paintings which feature in the book and which he used to teach students.

In 1961 the Royal College of Surgeons purchased the Diary of Thomas Howitt junior from Howes bookshop. Howitt became a prominent surgeon and Mayor of Lancaster in the 1840s but in the early 1830s he was a medical student at the University of London and became Charles Bell's dresser. The first lecture notes recorded in Howitt's diary are those of a lecture on amputation by Bell. It is possible that the lecture was illustrated by Bell's own paintings. In 1847 Howitt performed the first operation with general anaesthesia at the original Lancaster Infirmary in Thurnham Street. The operation was an above knee amputation for 'white swelling'.

Also by Mr Crumplin:

**Men of Steel** – a comprehensive illustrated account of wounds, and surgical care in the armed forces during the Republican and Napoleonic Wars. 2007

**Guthrie's War** – the story of Britain's most prestigious military surgeon, focussing on his experiences in the Peninsular War. 2010



*Mr Crumplin as battlefield surgeon, with tools of the trade.*  
Photo – Paul Cooper