

A VETERAN OF THE PENINSULAR WAR Barbara King

Samuel Jeffcoat was born in Swannington on May 2nd 1782, the son of William and Elizabeth Jeffcoat; he was baptised, much later, along with his brother Richard, and two sisters at Whitwick Parish Church. As my original interest was in Richard, my great great grandfather, I did little more about Samuel than note his name and date of birth (obligingly supplied by the Whitwick Parish Register). However, searching the 1851 Census, I came across Samuel, now aged 69 and living in Talbot Lane with his wife Mary, occupation "Farm lab. Artillery Pensioner" - the latter "job description" brought me up short and when I read that Mary was born in Christchurch, Hants, my curiosity was really aroused. I traced him back to Hampshire in 1805, probably to Woolwich in 1811 and back again to Swannington/Whitwick in 1818 but the intervening years remained a mystery until his obituary notice in the Loughborough Monitor came to light enabling me to fill in more detail of his career.

It would seem that at the age of 16, Samuel joined a regiment of dragoons, which was at that time forming in Leicester to counter the threat posed by the support in Ireland for the French revolutionary forces, commanded by General Humbert, who actually landed in Co. Mayo and campaigned for two weeks until defeated. Having served through the Irish troubles, Samuel was disbanded with his regiment and returned home to Swannington. However, his experiences in Ireland must have given him a taste for Army life for after about two years, he re-enlisted, this time in the Royal Horse Artillery.



He is next heard of in Christchurch, where he married Mary Martin at the Priory Church on January 10th, 1805. In the Priory Marriage Register Samuel is described as "a sojourner of Christchurch" but he is most likely to have been stationed at Christchurch Barracks, built at the end of the Eighteenth century, and at this time occupied by the R.H.A., doubtless on permanent alert in expectation of an invasion from across the Channel. Only when Nelson defeated the French fleet at Trafalgar

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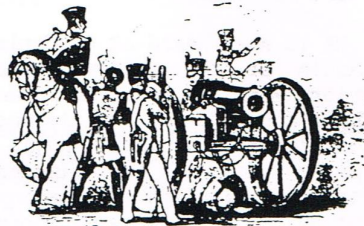
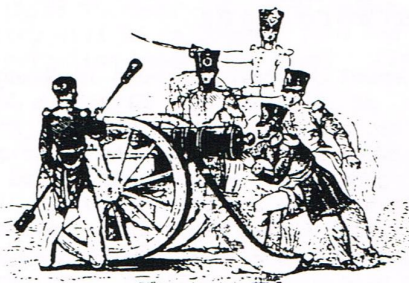
in November 1805 was this threat removed. But the War with France was far from over and Napoleon now turned his attention to the Spanish Peninsula,

capturing Madrid with a large army of veterans and forcing the British, under the command of Sir John Moore, to retreat. Among the ranks of this small British Army was Samuel Jeffcoat, now promoted to Bombardier (N.C.O.) and in January 1809 he was present at the battle of Corunna in the course of which Sir John was killed. Was Samuel, one wonders, present at the burial of the Commander-in-Chief, celebrated in Charles Wolfe's poem?

"We buried him darkly at dead of night,
The sods with our bayonets turning."

In any event Samuel must have been one of those who embarked with the remnants of the British force, leaving Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington, to continue the struggle. By October 1811, Samuel was stationed at Woolwich where the baptism of his son, William Samuel took place on 17th October in that year at the church of St. Mary Magdalene.

So Samuel missed Waterloo - according to his obituary notice, he left the army in 1815, just before that battle took place, rewarded for his services with a pension. By 1818, his name begins to appear once more in the Whitwick records. - Whitwick because, as it will be remembered, Swannington had as yet no church of its own. A daughter, Ann was baptised in April 1818, a son, Samuel in 1820. On January 2nd 1820, Samuel Jeffcoat (signing his own name and spelling it correctly) was a witness at the marriage of his brother Joseph to Elizabeth Ward. For the rest of his life he appears never to have strayed far from home. There were plenty of Jeffcoats around, all related to each other, to keep him company. He must have had some tales to tell of far-off places but he seems to have been happy enough to settle back on the land and live with his memories.



Apart from his two appearances in the Census returns of 1841 and 1851, little more is heard of Samuel in Swannington though the Tithe Map of 1844 shows him, together with one Joseph Grimley, paying tithes for two houses, with gardens and orchards. These two cottages still stand on Talbot Lane opposite the bottom of Whitwick Moor.

Samuel died in January 1861 at the age of 79. He seems by then to have been living in Coalville, perhaps with son William, since the obituary notice in the Loughborough Monitor originated from that town.

One wonders whether Jeffcoats Lane could have been named after Samuel - I should love to know.

ENJOYING THE INCLINE George Brooks

Moving to Swannington less than four years ago and knowing the area only vaguely it was a delight to find and explore the endless footpaths and byways around the village. It was also a great pleasure to discover the incline with its free access. Not only could I enjoy its associations with the railways and mineral mining of the past, but also its rich haven for local wild life.

Next time you decide to walk down the incline, before leaving Spring Lane, spend a little time in the amenity area opposite the entrance. By all means consider its history, but also look around at the trees recently planted. The alders, in years to come, could attract wintering siskins and redpolls, small finches that each spring return deep into the arctic circle to breed. There are also newly planted oaks, chestnuts, hazels, willows and guelder-roses that will give nesting sites and food to finches blackbirds, thrushes and one day maybe to a tawny owl or woodpecker. I am sure that this area, that was once a thriving pit-head site, will become a restful copse for future generations to enjoy.



Green Woodpecker