

CATHERINE ROSS

Creative writing by Abigail Devenny

2022 Hidden Histories Programme Participant

I am from a small village called Adair in Limerick, Ireland.

I married a soldier in the ranks against my families wishes and followed him. Most never leave our village. Never know what lies beyond. I took that chance. Year upon year, travelling to far flung places. Following the drum. China. India. France. Malta. Steadfast and resilient. Wooden shoes that have worn down right to my bare skin. Walking. Walking. Walking. Through the undulating mountains of the Pyrenees. Watching the sun rise and fall. Every day the same path but new experiences to be had.

I am a tolerance like no other.

I am the wife who marched for another 12 miles to discover the fate of my husband on that battlefield. Brussels, June 1815.

The Battle of Waterloo.

I am the roar of a canon, still ringing deep inside ears. Thundering hooves on parched ochre ground. Weapons and bodies clashing and colliding. Piercing.

I am looking out onto the bloodied fields watching women frantically searching through piles of bodies for their loved ones. Screams of desperation. Fingernails bitten to the quick with nerves. Filthied with mud.

Or is it blood. Scrabbling and scrambling, kneeling on the stark earth praying. Feet bare, eyeballs rubbed raw.

Bereft.

Women carrying sleeping babies on their back. A fraught and restless child in each arm. Scenes that should never be witnessed by eyes that young. Etched into their innocent memories forevermore.

I am the horse, head hung low, scarred and scared. Open wounds on the inside that will never be dressed. Led in hand down into a pit and shot. Stay back and just don't get caught. Let fate decide.

I am watching the crowds who turned up to the battlefield to plunder and pilfer. Not helping. Not assisting with the dead and dying. Raiding pockets, stripping bodies.

I am the woman who now resides in a workhouse. Almost all of my dignity taken. I am hanging onto the very last bit of it. Clinging to my memories. My experiences. The remnants of my formidable life. I share my tales of Following The Drum with whoever will listen. It's still like it was yesterday. I can recite a poem on Waterloo, word for word. Let me say it again for you, please. All I have is my memories.

I am 103 years young. I have been strong for too long.

This piece was written based on research conducted by Hidden Histories participants into the life of Catherine Ross, also known as "The Waterloo Woman".