

Where Did All the Walnut Go? *The Napoleonic War and its* *effect on timber supply* Robert Williams

Coinciding with the Waterloo bicentenary was this fascinating study of the timber stocks held by Norfolk furniture makers in the 18th and 19th centuries, up to 1840. This showed that walnut had been losing popularity for furniture making by the time of the last entry in 1805. It had not reappeared by 1840.

Blackie & Sons *Victorian Cabinet-Makers Assistant* describes walnut, with its lightness, strong lateral adhesion and ability to hold screws, as well suited to the making of gunstocks. The same source quotes France as having needed the timber of 12,000 trees a year in the early 1800s.

Walnut had traditionally been imported to Britain, mainly from America and Southern Europe, because British walnut, which grew more quickly, was of lower quality. The Napoleonic War, lasting from 1803 to 1815, led to naval blockades interrupting supplies. Native walnut had to be substituted, causing the price to rise and many trees to be felled, virtually exhausting the stock. With a war on, gunstocks were a priority.

Robert Williams had found corroborative evidence using the British Newspaper Archive, digitised and online for the past 3 years. He researched the records of six different newspapers published in East Anglia, looking for advertisements for the purchase as well as the sale of walnut trees from 1803. Wood was sold at this period by the load of 50 cu. ft., roughly equivalent to one medium-sized tree, and the price had quadrupled. By 1813 French troops had left Spain and Spanish walnut was arriving again.

East Anglian timber 'convenient for water carriage' was sent to Birmingham, which, along with London, was a chief centre for gun making. He quoted some impressive statistics of the production by the Birmingham gun trade during the War of over six million guns either complete or to be made up in London.

Robert was keen to encourage other members undertaking historical research to use the Archive which had provided him with the answers to the question he had posed himself, and thereby an extremely enjoyable talk.

Neil & Sally MacLennan