

The Pyramid of Austerlitz



PHOTO The Pyramid of Austerlitz in December 2008, shortly before the end of its restoration (Wikimedia Commons)

While reading a novel set in the First World War recently, I heard for the first time about the pyramid of Austerlitz (which is visited by characters in the novel). You may have heard of the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805, in which Napoleon defeated the Russians and Austrians. Or you may know of the Paris metro/railway station named after it. Austerlitz is situated near Utrecht in the Netherlands, and during the Napoleonic Wars, it was the site of a French army camp. In 1804, General Marmont got his soldiers to build the pyramid. It is a 36-metre-high mound of earth and turf and was topped by a 13-metre wooden obelisk. It took 27 days to build. Marmont was inspired by the Great Pyramid of Giza, which he had seen in 1798 during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign (see Engel 2018).

The wooden obelisk rotted away and was replaced by a stone one in 1894. The pyramid was restored in the early 2000s but has required further stabilisation since.

The Utrecht tourism website 'Discover Utrecht' describes it as 'the only pyramid on European soil'... I guess the 12 BCE pyramid of Cestius in Rome, the 1989 Louvre pyramid in Paris (see Engel 2019) and Plantasia in Swansea (1990) do not count as they are built on concrete?

Written by Dulcie Engel

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