

421 20 Balau...
22 " Boxen (4)
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" Salzf...
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Anyone who has travelled the East Midlands of England, to the regions say of Cambridge or Peterborough, will have a good idea of the countryside around Kroppenstedt in German Saxony where Johann Georg Ferdinand Muller was born on 27 September 1805 – and the villages of Heimersleben, Halberstadt and Shoenebeck where he grew up. Those who haven't, just to need to think of it as flat.

The Leipsig Plain is a long-limbed, occasionally undulating countryside where the sky falls all the way to the far horizon, unbroken and unobscured by hills or mountains. The feeling of endless space and distance is overwhelming. It is like being out on the open ocean, with the land far behind and only a low swell on the sea surface. Except of course that the 'sea' is green or cropped yellow in this, the bread basket of Germany, and from time to time a line of trees, precisely planted, indicates a road striking arrow-straight, across a hedgeless heathland.

This, the southern part of the great North German Plain, makes islands out of the small villages and market communities scattered across it, as it rolls two hundred miles north to the Baltic and North Sea coast and perhaps fifty south across Saxony where the rising Hartz mountains halt its progress. From one village you can usually see the next, or at least the linked twin spires and domed steeples of the two or three churches even the smallest village seems to have spawned, peeping over a low rise or set in the shallowest of valleys.

Georg, as he liked to be called (the 'e' was added when he came to England), was born to a loving, even doting, father – he mentions he was favoured over his elder brother, born in 1803, which he thought was bad for both of them, he gaining an inflated opinion of himself and his brother learning to dislike both his father and Georg. His mother, Sophie Eleonore, was possibly prone to sickness which eventually claimed her when Georg was just fourteen. He did not seem close to his mother and scarcely mentions her in his diaries, recalling her passing with little emotion. But his father, Johann Friedrich Muller, features heavily in his early life and memories.

At the time of Georg's birth, Johann was still serving, or had just left service, as a trumpeter in the 4th Squadron of General