



# Napoleonic Prisoners of War

## **Note to readers:**

Our research files have been compiled by a committed and diligent team of volunteer researchers.

Please be aware that while our volunteers have received training in basic research skills, they are not professional historians.

We welcome further use of our research-files (with due credit). However, we encourage you to perform your own fact-checking / research processes before relying on any of the information contained here.



Prisoners taken during the Napoleonic wars were mostly French but there were also Danish and Dutch prisoners.

### **Okehampton Castle**

Words can be seen cut into a stone tablet in the Pascina of the Castle. Not all clear but read 'HIC V...T FUIT CAPTIVUS BELLI ( Here V...T was a prisoner of war). According to local historian (the late Dr E.H. Young) V...T believed to be Gilles Vincent, surgeon on the French ship 'La Rejoirie' who was capture on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1809.

Between May 1809 and February 1812 336 prisoners were sent to Okehampton – 162 French Navy, 131 Army, 31 ships' passengers, 3 ships' boys, 6 wives, 3 children.

### **Okehampton was a parole town**

Officer class prisoners were allowed to live and work in the town if they signed a document giving their word (parole) that they would not attempt to escape. They were required to report to a local official weekly (when they were paid a small allowance) and promise not to travel more than one mile from the parish boundary.

### **Marriages**

Marriage registers show details of parole prisoners to local women:

3<sup>rd</sup> May 1810 – Nicolai Leonard to Julia Hamden Brock

24<sup>th</sup> December 1810 – Charles Pie to Elizabeth Middlewich

27<sup>th</sup> December 1810 – Louis de Lettres to Emma Jowe

11<sup>th</sup> January 1811 – Felix Jean Ricard to Mary Quick

8<sup>th</sup> December 1811 – Louis Alexandre Huet to Jane Seldon

All of the French men whose marriages were recorded were described as 'a prisoner of war' except Louis Huet. Huet was a merchant, a passenger on the French ship 'La Marche' when it was captured. At the end of the war he stayed in Okehampton with his wife and three children (Francis William, Caroline Jane, Theodore Felix) working as a tailor and living in Fore Street under the name Hewet (1817 census).

### **Baptisms**

There were two prisoners with the name de Lettres. Louis (above) and Joseph, a merchant passenger on 'Le Furet' captured with his wife and daughter Eugenie. Church records show that Eugenie was baptised in Okehampton on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1809.

Other baptisms shown in church records:



21<sup>st</sup> April 1811 – Louis, son of Louis & Emma de Lettres

22<sup>nd</sup> December 1811 – Jean Baptis, son of Charles & Elizabeth Pie

7<sup>th</sup> August 1812 – Claudius Phillip Peter, son of Claudius & Elizabeth Gujon

### **Illegitimate offspring**

In 1815, out of 21 children receiving Parish Relief, 4 had French fathers.

### **Graves**

Somewhere in the churchyard (exact location unknown) are the graves of:

Pierre Gast died 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1810

Abisene Coniare died 20<sup>th</sup> November 1810

Adelaine Barrin de Puyleaune died 18<sup>th</sup> February 1811

Armand Bernard died 26<sup>th</sup> October 1815.

Local tradition (though no hard evidence) that French POWs (probably lower ranks) laid the cobbled paths in the parish churchyard.

### **North Tawton**

North Tawton was also a parole town. At the top of the High Street there are some older houses where French officers were accommodated. Nearby there was once a group of houses known locally as 'the Barracks' (now demolished) where several French officers lived. Pebbled patterns in paths around the church are believed to have been done by the French.