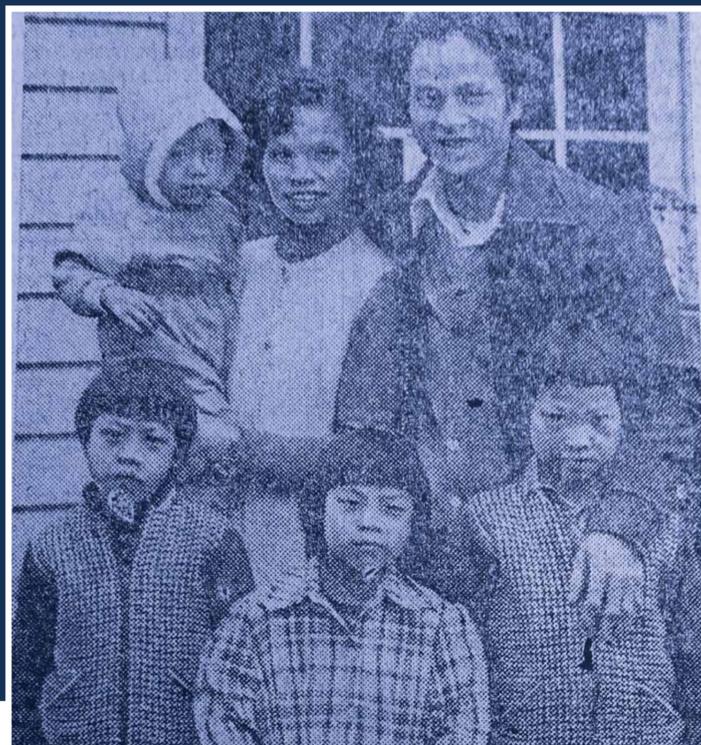


Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots



Fleeing to Safety

Throughout Tiverton's history there have been many who have sought safety from religious and cultural persecution, finding a temporary or permanent home in the town. Early records of people fleeing to Tiverton are often vague, making reference to people's identity through names such as 'Frenchman'. More information is known about those fleeing the French Revolution, as well as those searching for a home after both world wars. More recently, Tiverton has provided a refuge for those seeking to escape from oppressive regimes, such as the Vietnamese Communist government of the 1980s.

In the years following the French Revolution of 1789, nearly 1% of the French population, including many members of the aristocracy, left the country and took refuge abroad. Comte Alexander de La Motte (later Lamotte, 1767-1836), a page to Louis XVI in his youth, was one such man, who lived much of his life in Tiverton. Settling in the South West, he was engaged as a tutor to Sir Thomas Acland of Killerton, and accompanied him on a tour of Scandinavia in 1807. In 1813 he married Mary Leach from Somerset and they went on to have seven children, living mainly in a house in Bampton Street and owning property elsewhere in the town. Alexander and Mary's four sons were educated at Blundell's School, where Alexander himself taught French.

During the First World War, Tiverton was home to a number of Belgian refugees, with records indicating that 5 Belgian children were sent to Blundell's School. During World War Two, at least two Jewish children were also placed at Blundell's.

Later in the 20th century people continued to come to the town seeking a safe place to work and a home for their families. In 1980, two Vietnamese families arrived in Tiverton after spending 3 months at the Thorney Island reception centre. Mr and Mrs Nguyen Van Fu arrived with their three children, whilst the other family of six included Mr Lam Trung Dieu, his wife Binh, and their two sons and two daughters. Local newspaper reports suggest that the families were given the essentials needed for living in their new homes, but still needed a sewing machine (as none had been donated).



Top left photo: Alexandre de la Motte taught at Blundells and his children were educated there. Image courtesy of Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life. Top right and bottom photos: Several Vietnamese refugee families came to Tiverton. Image courtesy of Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life.