

Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots



Consequences of War

Throughout history, conflict has always been a significant and necessary cause for the movement of people. Over the centuries, Tiverton has housed a great many prisoners of war, ranging from Napoleonic soldiers and their families in the 18th century to German POWs during the First World War.

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of 1797 - 1815, French prisoner of war officers were sent to live with households in provincial parole towns such as Tiverton – providing they swore not to attempt escape. The government made a payment of 10/6 a week for their lodgings, and the prisoners seem to have been made quite welcome, often joining in with the social life of the town. There were some restrictions on their correspondence and movements (prisoners were not allowed more than a mile from the town, for example), but most lived a fairly comfortable life. Some had complaints however - Lieutenant Gicquel des Touches wrote:

***'A pleasant little town, but which struck me as particularly monotonous after the exciting life to which I was accustomed.'*¹**

When peace came, some prisoners decided to remain in the town. John Rivron, a captain's servant on the French ship Le Rhin, married a local, Mary Marshall, in 1815.

They went on to have 7 children. Rivron was still working in Tiverton in 1844, when he was recorded in Pigot and Co's Directory of Devonshire as being a 'Boot and Shoe Maker', living in Gold Street. Their youngest son, Dominique, gave 21 years of 'exemplary service' to the British army, his father's old enemy (Abell, F., 1914).

Whilst the Napoleonic French prisoners of war seem to have lived a life of leisure, this wasn't the case for all POW's. During World War One, German prisoners were set to work on the farms surrounding Tiverton. They were described as:

'strong lusty fellows.... doing useful work.'

(Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 1918)



1. Abell, F., Prisoners of War in Britain 1756 to 1815, Oxford, Humphrey Milbert Oxford University Press, 1914