

## Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots



## Tiverton's Diversifying Workforce

Over the years, Tiverton's working population has diversified in many different ways, through both war and economic necessity, in addition to the schooling of children at Blundell's and other smaller schools in the town. We also know of numerous families coming to Tiverton to start businesses, including restaurants.

Although most pupils coming to Blundell's School from overseas have simply been in the area for their schooldays, a few have made Tiverton their home. Charles Edward Liesching who lived initially in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) with his family, was sent to Blundell's. Charles qualified as a doctor, practicing in Tiverton for most of his professional life. With wife Annie, he had ten children, all born in the town. Charles played a very active role in the life of Tiverton. He was a medical officer at the Tiverton Infirmary, a member of the Town Council, and a lay reader amongst other positions.

The period during and after World War Two also saw significant shifts in Tiverton's cultural and ethnic profile. During WW2 it is estimated that 400,000 prisoners of war were placed in Britain, most of whom were put to work. In Tiverton, Working Camp 92 was set up on Bolham Road. The camp was initially intended for Italian POWs, but was later also occupied by German POWs.

When the war ended, workers were desperately needed to fulfil the labour demands of farming and wider industry. A programme of recruitment of workers from POW camps around the globe began. Those coming from European camps were known as European Voluntary Workers (EVWs). In the immediate post war period, Tiverton received many EVWs. They were registered with the police but were paid and housed in hostels, or with local landladies.

In Tiverton there was a hostel for agricultural workers, mostly Yugoslavians, at Waterlooville Cross, whilst Heathcoat Textiles recruited workers from the hostel in Bolham Road. Records also indicate that seven Polish-Ukrainian ladies arrived to work at Heathcoat factory in Tiverton in December 1947 and were housed in Tiverton.

Other workers to have come to the town for business purposes have included Mr Li Fang Sang and Mr Tony Lee, who opened the first Chinese restaurant in 1969, called the Mui Kong. The two men were from Hong Kong and the restaurant opened to great fanfare, as reported in the Devon and Somerset News.

