

Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots: Okehampton



A History of Diversity Okehampton Through Time

Diversity in Okehampton's history can be traced back to Anglo Saxon England. As early as 1440, 1 Irish and 6 Norman men were recorded as living in the town.

During the Napoleonic Wars, 336 prisoners were sent to Okehampton. This included 162 French Navy, 131 Army, 31 ships' passengers, 3 ships' boys, 6 wives, 3 children.

In the later 18th and 19th century, Dutch and German workers were recruited by the factory at Meldon quarry to share their glasswork skills.

There is an abundance of evidence for newcomers making their way to the town across the 20th century. The 1970s and 80s in particular saw a boom in local businesses begun by people from across the globe. In 1976, Spaniard Jose Gala-Huertas took over the Seven Stars in North Tawton.

In 1978 Arab sheikh R.A.A. Rahman was given permission to open a craft warehouse. 1981 saw a Belgian national start a riding school in South Zeal, and in June 1983, an Italian family took over the Tally Ho, Hatherleigh (Okehampton Times).

Larger émigré communities have included Polish people who arrived after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004. However, this 21st century migration was not the first time Poles had been welcomed to the town - visit our Polish Camp banner at The White Hart (Wetherspoons) to find out more about how Okehampton hosted the Polish Navy in exile during the Second World War.

Nowadays, Okehampton is home to a small but strong multicultural community; members of which participated in our oral history interviews. Visit our website to hear their stories.

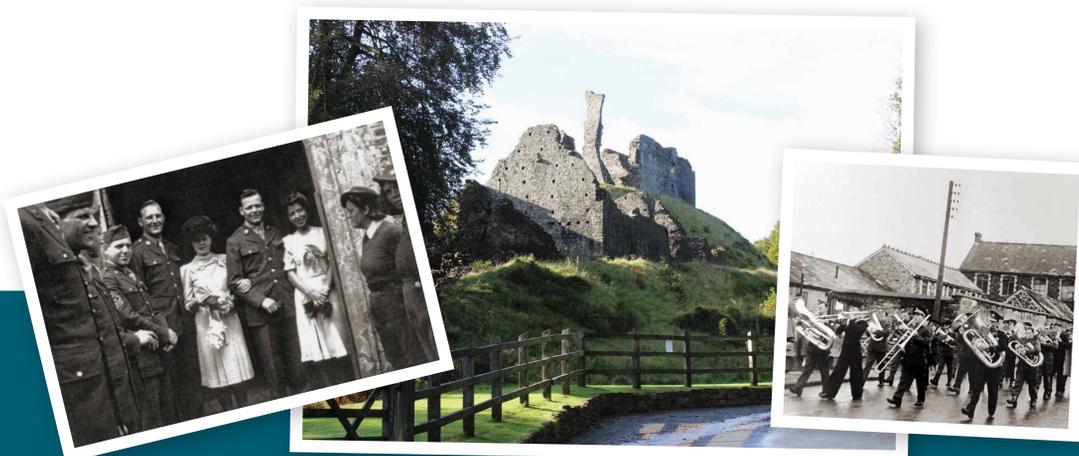
"My interaction with people from Okehampton is that they really like the place where they live and they make you feel welcome. You've got the initial, 'Where are you from?'. But it's not a reason not to be integrated and I never felt an outsider. If you have a good heart and you are a good person, you are welcome."

Daniel Leite, Portuguese national, Okehampton resident

Top photos: Left: Okehampton town. Right top: West Street c.1905. Right bottom: The Seven Stars pub.

Bottom photos, left to right: Marriage of a Land Girl to an American soldier (1944); Okehampton Castle; US troops on parade during WW2.

Exploring the rich multicultural history of Devon



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