

SOME FRENCH PRISONERS OF WAR ON PAROLE IN HAMPSHIRE

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ABSTRACT

At various times from the mid-eighteenth century until 1814, thousands of prisoners of war, mainly French, were held in custody or on parole in Great Britain, mainly in Hampshire. The present study concentrates on the Napoleonic period (1803-14), particularly in relation to (New) Alresford about 1810, as one of the parole towns in the county, with notes on some of the prisoners. What is known about the general working of the parole system, set out in the first part of the paper, can be substantiated by some of the Hampshire evidence - e.g. detailed interventions of the Transport Board, to be seen in its correspondence with the Alresford agent.

GENERAL (see Tables 1-3)

Between 1803 and 1814, 122,440 prisoners were brought to Britain: 10,341 died in captivity, and 17,607 were exchanged or sent home sick or on parole (Abell 1914, 450). The greatest number at any one time was about 72,000 in 1814, held mainly in southern and midland counties of England, but also in Scotland (*op cit* 118). Prisoners of war were the responsibility of the Transport Board, established under the Admiralty in 1799, in succession to the Sick and Hurt Board (itself the successor to the Commissary of Prisoners). Officers were placed on parole and billeted either with families or in groups, while 'other ranks' were imprisoned in depots such as Norman Cross, near Peterborough, and Dartmoor prison (both specially built), Portchester, or (on a smaller scale) Forton barracks, Gosport. In the later years of the war, negotiations for cartels (group exchanges) completely broke down, and with the increasing number of prisoners additional depots had to be opened (Bennett 1964, 31).

Table 1. French Parole Prisoners (from ADM 103 registers) to nearest 10's (adapted from Bennett 1964, 38 & 213).

Hampshire (all at 31 December)	Great Britain
1803	450
1804	800
1805	1,200
1806	1,600
1807	1,650
1808	1,850
1809	2,650
1810	2,700 April
	3,250 December
1811	3,200 June
1812	3,300 July
1813	3,450 March
	3,200 September
1814	3,600 April

Note. *Parliamentary Papers* give the following numbers for the dates indicated:

	In Custody	On Parole	Total
1810	41,873	2,710	44,583
1811	45,939	3,193	49,132
1812	49,418	3,231	52,649

Table 2. Prisoners of War in Great Britain, based on Return issued by Transport Office 26 June 1812 (quoted by Walker 1913, 203 from *Parl. Papers* 1812, ix, 225).

Parole (French)

Officers (Army)	1,651*
Officers (Navy)	718
(Masters and mates of merchant vessels	211
** (Captains etc. of Privateers	176
(Passengers and other Persons of	
Respectability	211
Servants to Officers	149
Women and children	115
	3,231

*misprinted in Walker as 1,615

** see Table 3

At the same date the following were in confinement:

Soldiers	22,916
Seamen, taken in Men-of-War	11,198
Seamen, taken in merchant vessels	4,076
Seamen, taken in privateers	10,146
All others	1,045
Women and children	37
	49,418

THE PAROLE SYSTEM

This system had a long history, but was found to work less well with a revolutionary army than with those of the *ancien régime* with their strict code of honour. Officers were required to give their word not to try to escape; and in many cases individual exchanges with British officers of similar rank were arranged. Officers could also be allowed to return home on giving an undertaking not to serve again until exchanged: if that had not occurred within a stated time, they must return to captivity. The conditions of parole varied slightly from place to place, but in general required them to live in or near one of the parole towns or villages, limited their walks to one mile along the turnpike road from the boundary of the place, forbade absence from their lodgings during the hours of darkness and required them to report twice weekly to the local Agent of the Transport Board (ADM 105/61).

The Agent was responsible for the regular muster and for paying each prisoner his subsistence allowance (see below). He had also to arrange billets for prisoners on arrival, to deal with complaints, advise on difficulties and ensure that correspondence, in both directions, was transmitted through the Transport Board. Inevitably there were attempts at evasion: some of the letters intercepted are referred to below. He had further to ensure that the prisoners obeyed the conditions of parole. (Each was given a copy of this document, which was printed in English and French – the former version with a physical description. Unfortunately it has not been possible to trace any of the completed forms.) The householders receiving prisoners were each given a printed reminder of their responsibility to see that the prisoners complied with the regulations, and in particular that they were indoors between the evening and morning bells. Notices were displayed in the town drawing attention to the rules and enjoining any resident to report infringements: rewards were offered, differing in amount from time to time.

In addition, the Agent had to report any untoward incidents: reporting to the Board and answering its questions must have taken much of his time. Monthly accounts had to be submitted, and the surgeon's reports (duly certified and supported by affidavits), which had to be approved by the Board before he could be paid. Authority had to be obtained

Table 3. *French Commissioned Officers on Parole in Great Britain, based on Transport Office Return 25 June 1812 (quoted by Walker 1913, 212 from Parl. Papers 1812, ix, 223).*

	Total	Broke Parole	Retaken	Escaped
Year ending 5 June 1810	1,685	104	47	57
Year ending 5 June 1811	2,087	118	47	71
Year ending 5 June 1812	2,142	242	63	179
	5,914	464 (462 stated)	157	307
From categories ** (Tab. 2) in the three years	598	218	85	133
Totals less **	5,316	682	242	440

from the Board for the payment of allowances to every prisoner, by name, and for drawing the total amount of cash needed each month.

The Board immediately wrote stiff letters to the Agents if accounts were not submitted promptly and in correct form, if the necessary documents were not sent with prisoners transferred from one town to another, if the proper scale of payments to a surgeon had been exceeded (in that event the excess had to be deducted from the next payment), or even if a report was not on paper of correct size with the required width of margin (ADM 98/201-205). The Board generally replied to Agents' letters with admirable promptness – often on the day of receipt – but in its devotion to minutiae it tended to overlook matters of greater importance.

Officers who were caught trying to escape, or who committed other offences, were likely to be transferred to one of the depots, or to one of the hulks moored at naval bases such as Portsmouth, where there were fourteen in 1813. Conditions in the hulks were deplorable, and prisoners were much given to gambling, to fighting, and more serious crimes – murder, or forgery of coins and banknotes (see below).

ALLOWANCES

The payment of subsistence allowances was necessary because the revolutionary governments of France held that they had no obligation to support their nationals in captivity. The British government had proposed in 1797 that all prisoners should be fed and clothed at the expense of their own governments (in the earlier part of the war each nation had been expected to provide for its own men) but this was disregarded by the French until the British threatened to halve the rations of prisoners in custody. Such agreement as existed was terminated by the Consulate in 1799, and the previous arrangement revived. Britain then supplied clothing for prisoners in French hands, but the French refused to reciprocate. Later the British authorities supplied minimal clothing to men in custody, but the whole

subject of allowances (parole) and provisions (custody) caused lasting bitterness on both sides (Walker 1913, 74-5).

There were many complaints from parole prisoners about the inadequacy of the allowance, which even after being increased in 1809 was small enough: 1s 6d a day for second-lieutenants, naval '*aspirants*' and above; 1s 3d for others, such as officers of merchant ships, and 1s each for wives and children. Each man had to pay for his room, sometimes providing furniture as well, and to buy his food, often joining with a few others to form a small mess in order to make the money go further. In some cases officers were accommodated in groups: one at Bishops Waltham complained that he had to pay ten shillings a week to live in a garret with five others (Abell 1914, 310). In December 1810 prisoners at Okehampton (Devon) and elsewhere protested that it was impossible to live on less than 2s 3d a day: and a prisoner at Alresford complained that his room, for which he had to provide furniture, cost sixteen shillings a month (ADM 105/61).

In March 1808 Napoleon, now Emperor, had granted half-pay to army officers in captivity – payable at the end of the war, leaving them meanwhile dependent on any help they could get from family or friends to supplement the bare allowance. There was considerable hardship among those who were without that resource.

The remuneration to Agents was 5% on all payments to prisoners, plus allowances for stationery and affidavits (Abell 1914, 293). But there were also other possibilities: they acted for the prisoners in connection with remittances from France, which were made through M. Perregaud (one of the founders of the Bank of France) and the English firm of Coutts, at the rate of £20,000 to £30,000 per annum in 1811, for example (Bennett 1964, 47). There may have been other occasions when presents could have been given: some of the prisoners had been able to bring personal possessions, and those who could afford it could arrange for their wives to join them, in private lodgings.

Since the prisoners were almost always short of money they found ingenious ways of adding to their resources. In the depots permission

was given for regular markets to which the public were admitted to buy articles made by the prisoners – from paper sculpture, straw marquetry (more accurately, laid work, made by sticking tiny strips of straw on paper backing, to decorate boxes, screens and other wooden objects), to scale models of ships, cannon, guillotines and musical instruments built from the bones of their meat rations, and, at Portchester only, thread lace (Abell 1914, 176). Officers, having more freedom, often gave lessons in French, drawing or fencing. In some depots, notably Portchester, theatrical performances – apparently of surprisingly high standard – were organised: a ban was imposed at one time, but was withdrawn after representations both by and on behalf of the prisoners, provided that the performances were not open to the public (HO 28/39; see below). Money raised in these ways was used not only for ordinary living expenses but sometimes also for attempts at escape (see below). Many of these were assisted by English ‘conductors’, some of whom operated on an extensive scale (Abell 1914, 366 et seq.).

In all the parole towns the prisoners had considerable attractions for the local girls; marriages were discouraged, but there were a few, and inevitably there were some illegitimate children, for whom the Transport Board refused to accept any financial responsibility.

HAMPSHIRE

The parole towns in Hampshire from 1803 to 1813 were Alresford, Andover, Bishops Waltham, Hambledon, Odiham and Whitchurch. At other times during the revolutionary wars Basingstoke, Fareham, Petersfield and Winchester were also used (Abell 1914, 298).

Portchester Castle, whose walls bear names and dates scratched by prisoners from at least 1743, also served as a transit camp for those intended for detention in other places. In 1784 it was thoroughly prepared for use as a war prison: the moat was cleared and filled with

water, the keep divided into five storeys connected by a wooden stairway, and wooden hutments erected in the Outer Bailey, enabling some eight thousand men to be accommodated (Abell 1914, 168). In 1810 its Commanding Officer was Captain C W Paterson RN (1758–1841).

Every prisoner was registered, in order of arrival, with his rank, name of regiment or ship, place and date of capture, whence received (e.g. transports), date and place of birth, physical description (except for senior officers or wives) date of arrival, articles supplied (e.g. hammock and blanket), date and destination of discharge (ADM 103/333). Some of the French names obviously gave the clerks trouble: spelling tends to be (approximately) phonetic. The system was remarkably efficient: parole prisoners were discharged on the day of or the day after arrival, after giving their parole to Captain Paterson. As an example of the numbers handled, the register for 1–18 June 1810 records the arrival of 1,912 prisoners of all kinds (ADM 103/333). For comparison, the total received at Portsmouth, according to informal notes inside the cover of the register, between 5 April and 12 July 1810 was 1,267 (as against 1,203 from 17 March to 11 April 1810) (ADM 103/358).

The official estimates for 1814 show the staff employed at Portchester, in addition to the Agent (the Commanding Officer), as five clerks at salaries from £118 p.a. to 30s 6d a week and an interpreter (£30 p.a.). The prison hospital was staffed by a surgeon (£435 p.a.) with seven subordinates, including a dispenser, a matron and a sempstress (Parl. Papers 1813–14, xi, 131).

As in all the depots, gambling was rife and sometimes led to violent quarrels – even duels with home-made weapons. In August 1813 one such ended in the survivor being sentenced to death at Winchester Assizes. Forgery, of coins and of bank-notes, occurred, it seems, in all the prisons: in March 1812 two Portchester prisoners were sentenced to death for forging a bank-note (Cooper 1973, 13). In 1810 two men were hanged at Winchester for forging seven-shilling pieces (Abell 1914, 263).

In 1812 a plot was discovered which had been intended to raise all the prisoners in England: they were to engage in guerilla warfare, after disarming their guards. The 7,000 men at Portchester were to march to Forton and join the 3,000 prisoners there (Abell 1914, 182). However, the dispersal of the units stationed in the Boulogne Camp and of the invasion fleet, consequent on Napoleon's plan to invade Russia, put an end to this threat.

ALRESFORD 1810-11

Alresford has been taken as an example of a parole town, to demonstrate the amount of information that can be traced: similar studies would of course be possible for other places. The register indicates that from 1 September 1809 to 18 June 1812, 375 parole prisoners, plus some wives, children and servants, were received. Of these, about 160 came each from army and navy, leaving about 50 'others'. Fewer details are given than in the Portchester lists: name, rank, place and date of capture, name of ship (man of war, privateer or merchant), date and time of arrival, discharge and authority for it (including repatriation, transfer, or – rarely – death). Places of capture included Spain, Portugal, India, West Indies, the Low Countries and actions at sea (ADM 103/552).

In 1810 the Agent was John Dunn, an attorney, who continued to work in Alresford until 1862, when he died at the age of seventy-nine (Sanderson 1975, I, 68; and personal information). The surgeon was John Holden, owner and occupier of 7 East Street (still existing), which was later sold to Dunn and used as offices (ADM 98/201: Sanderson *loc cit*). By 1812, after the closure of Bishops Waltham and Odiham, Alresford was upgraded to depot status. About the same time John Dunn was succeeded by Mr Beckett, and in 1813 Dr Baird took over from Surgeon Holden (Bennett 1964, 238; ADM 98/162 and 164).

Some intercepted (i.e. surreptitious) letters

give an idea of life at Alresford at the time: an example is one signed by 'Henriette' (not by Capitaine Quinquet as stated by Abell 1914, 306-7), daughter of one of the prisoners (ADM 105/61). She wrote at length to a friend recently repatriated to Avranches, with detailed news of French families and social events among English and French friends, including a ball which her parents were planning in celebration of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Other letters are more sombre, referring to financial and other problems.

As at other places, prisoners made objects for sale, and though it is understood that some of these survive, it is difficult to trace with certainty any made at Alresford and still held there. They attempted to present public theatrical performances, as at Portchester, but this was forbidden by Transport Board, since 'their Tendency may be dangerous in political or licentious Principles' (ADM 98/203). Apart from a few incidents, relations with local people were good – as illustrated by an event in April 1810. A group of officers arranged a dinner at the Swan Inn (the present Swan Hotel), to celebrate the wedding of Napoleon and Marie Louise of Austria. They were just assembling, with Dunn, Holden and local magistrates, when a letter arrived from the Transport Board (apparently informed by a local minister of religion) forbidding the function (ADM 98/201).

SOME ALRESFORD PRISONERS

The church register records deaths of nine French prisoners and one of a wife; and in the churchyard five graves can still be identified, the headstones having been renewed in December 1959, at the expense of the French authorities (*Hampshire Chronicle* 17/2/1960). One is of Pierre Garnier, Second-lieutenant in the 66th regiment of infantry (Fig 1). A study starting from the brief details on his gravestone illustrates the amount of information (summarised below) that can be obtained about individuals, using British and



Fig 1. Pierre Garnier's grave, Alresford. Photo: Audrey Deacon 1983.

French sources. He was taken prisoner when British forces captured Guadeloupe (Leeward Islands) on 5 February 1810 (ADM 103/333 and 103/552): during the five months ended 31 July 1810, Alresford received from Guadeloupe – via Portchester – in addition to prisoners from other places, 54 officers, a judge and his secretary, 13 dependants (wives and children) and 13 servants, some of whom seem to have been black slaves (ADM 103/552).

Guadeloupe was important at the time both strategically – especially as a base for French privateers – and as a major source of sugar, and changed hands more than once between 1794 and 1810, when it was taken by a British force. It remained in British possession until the end of the war, when it was returned to France. It is still French territory.

Garnier, born at Perrecy-les-Forges (Saône-et-Loire) in 1775, was called up in 1796, and after service in Italy and France, was sent to Guadeloupe in January 1805, sailing from Rochefort in the battleship JEMAPPES. Later he was promoted to provisional Second-lieutenant and transferred from the 26th to the 66th regiment (EE). Captured with the rest of

the garrison on 5 February 1810, he reached Portchester on 18 June and Alresford on the following day, with twenty-four officers, nine dependants and three servants (ADM 103/552). He is described in the Portchester register as follows: height five feet four inches, slender build, olive complexion, black eyes, no marks or wounds (ADM 103/333). By April 1811 he was ill; in June he prepared a power of attorney and a claim for arrears of half-pay, to be submitted to the French authorities after the war, for the benefit of his heirs; and 31 July he died (ADM 103/552 and 98/203). Searches in both British and French archives have unfortunately failed to find either his death certificate or his will.

Garnier's documents were witnessed by other prisoners: Colonel Louis Vatable, Capitaine de Vaisseau le baron César Bourayne and Lieutenant-colonel Pierre Saint-Juery, and authenticated by John Dunn.

Colonel Vatable, who was in temporary command of the 66th regiment, reached Alresford on 29 August 1810, his request for repatriation having been refused (26 July) on the ground that negotiations for a cartel were in progress. He and some other officers with

him at Gravesend were instead given permission to live at Alresford, in view of his 'respectable character' (ADM 98/308 and 103/552).

On 5 July William Wynn deposed (HO 28/39 and ADM 105/61) that on the previous day he had been approached by a gentleman (James Garrett), who over a bottle of wine at the Bell Inn (the present Bell Hotel) and during a subsequent stroll, said he had been promised £50 a head by the Governor of Boulogne if he secured the return to France of Vatable and four other officers. He offered also to take any particular friends of Wynn's and to give him £10 a head, leaving Wynn to get as much more as he could from the prisoners themselves. Garrett said he had a vessel licensed to enter their ports and that he had helped with many other escapes. Wynn took Garrett home with him, saying that he would fetch Vatable – but went immediately to Dunn and 'took Garrett into custody'. (This incident affords the only instance in which the present writer has been able to identify a billeting family – Wynn was perhaps the son of John Laurence Wynn, watchmaker and silversmith, of 38 West Street (Sanderson 1980, vi, 11)).

After the subsequent inquiry Vatable seems to have returned to Alresford, and in 1812 made another attempt to escape, with three others, but was re-captured at Sandgate in Kent (ADM 97/110). Between 1811 and 1814 there were thirty successful and nine unsuccessful attempts at escape from Alresford (Bennett 1964, 263).

Capitaine Bourayne (1768–1817) was a distinguished naval officer well known for his exploits in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans (*Naval Chronicle* 1806–09 *passim*). As a lieutenant he was wounded and captured in 1794, spending nineteen months in England. After returning to France he became famous while in command of the frigate *LA CANNONIERE*, in which he made many attacks on British ships. Originally French, the frigate had been taken by the British and used under the name of *LA MINERVE* until re-captured in 1803 (many British ships at that time had French names). Later *LA CANNONIERE* was partly disarmed

and lent, as *LA CONFIANCE*, to the merchants of Mauritius to carry a cargo of colonial produce to France. On 3 February 1810 she was captured off the French coast: Bourayne was sent to Alresford and on 14 January 1812 obtained permission for his wife, who is mentioned in Henriette's letter quoted above, to join him (ADM 98/205). But she did not stay long: on 28 December 1812 she and another lady were given permission to go back to France at their own expense, it being made clear that they could not return to England (ADM 98/207). It was thought that her husband might try to escape and join her, and the Transport Board enjoined Dunn to keep a strict watch on him (ADM 98/207). Bourayne was later transferred to Bridgnorth, and remained in captivity until 1814. After the restoration of the monarchy he was appointed major-general (sic) at Brest and Préfet Maritime for the surrounding area, where he died.

Only formal references to Saint-Juery have been found – for example, that he had been Chief of Staff on Guadeloupe (*Almanach* 1810, 55) and reached Alresford on 3 April 1810, accompanied by his son (ADM 103/552).

The judge mentioned in the list of Alresford arrivals (see above) was Antoine René Constant Bertolio (1741–1812), who had entered the priesthood before studying law and becoming a supporter of the Revolution. He was sent to Rome in June 1798, first as one of three commissioners and later as ambassador to the short-lived Roman republic, in which capacity he had the extraordinary duty of surrendering the city to the British and Neapolitan forces besieging it. After returning with honour to France, he was sent to Guadeloupe in 1802 as commissioner for justice, being appointed *grand juge* in the following July, and was captured in February 1810, reaching Alresford on 6 April, with his secretary and his servant (ADM 103/552). After repatriation, as a civilian, in May 1810 he was appointed to a judicial post at Amiens, and died in office.

Not all the prisoners from Guadeloupe were held at Alresford. The Préfet Colonial, Général François Marie Perichou (called de) Ker-

versau (1757–1825), as an administrator remained on the island for some months after the military prisoners had been removed. He passed through Portchester in August 1810, on his way to Lichfield and remained in captivity until May 1814 (ADM 103/587).

The Commander in Chief of the Leeward Islands, Capitaine-général Manuel Louis Jean Augustin Ernouf (1777–1827) was at Bishops Waltham from April 1810 to April 1811 (ADM 103/563). With him there, in addition to his domestic staff, was the commander of the troops on Guadeloupe, Colonel Alexandre Aymar Balthazar Faujas de Saint-Fond (1773–date unknown) (ADM 103/563), who had

signed the Articles of Capitulation on behalf of the French. Madame Faujas and a child, who accompanied him, could have returned to France at once, since they were not prisoners, but with another lady stayed on at their own request (ADM 98/201), and were repatriated with the rest of the group in April 1811.

In 1811–12, when French landings were once again expected on the south coast of England, many of the Hampshire prisoners were transferred to Scotland, since it was thought that they might join the invading forces if they remained near the possible landing areas. All who were still in Britain were repatriated at the end of the war in 1814.

REFERENCES

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The files of the *Public Record Office, Kew*, contain a great quantity of information, mainly in the Admiralty series, but not in a readily accessible form. There is an alphabetical list of parole prisoners (ADM 103/611–614), but some names are omitted. Copies of Transport letters to Agents are preserved, but few if any from the latter. Registers for individual parole towns e.g. ADM 103/552 for Alresford, give date of arrival, place of capture and the like, with some personal details (no descriptions).

The *Portchester registers* – ADM 103/333 onward – contain many thousands of names and other details, in order of arrival, but otherwise unclassified and unindexed: it is therefore important to establish dates of arrival in order to trace any individual prisoners.

Parliamentary Papers provide some national statistics for a few of the war years: Abell and Walker both give valuable information, including statistics and descriptions of conditions of life: the former also gives detailed notes on individual prisons, parole towns and notable prisoners. Some local publications record additional (some traditional) details, but it is not easy to verify their accuracy (Whiteman notes, *passim*).

The *French archives* are divided; those for 'Marine et Colonies' (for narrative of events such as the fall of Guadeloupe) are at 60 rue des Francs-Bourgeois, Paris; those for 'L'Armée de la Terre' (for personal documentation) are at the château de Vincennes, outside Paris.

The *libraries* of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, l'Institut Français (Kensington) and the Institute of Historical Research (University of London) contain much valuable background material.

Abbreviations

ADM. Admiralty files, Public Record Office, Kew
 Almanach. Almanach de Guadeloupe
 EE. Archives de la Marine et des Colonies
 HO. Home Office files, Public Record Office

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Public Record Office

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Reference has also been made to material kindly made available by Mr W M Whiteman of Steep.

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