

# Prisoners of War in Sanquhar

In 1812, the first of around seventy French, Polish, Italian and German officers arrived in Sanquhar. They were Prisoners of War, captured during the lengthy conflict that has become known as The Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815).

As Napoleon would not exchange prisoners, 2000 officers were paroled in Dumfries and Galloway. Sanquhar, as a Royal Burgh, was selected as a place to house these men (some of whom also had servants). They were not rigidly guarded or imprisoned but they unable to venture further than three miles out of town.

## 14<sup>th</sup> January 1812

First prisoners arrived in Sanquhar. Twenty five men (seven had been captured in 1806 and twelve in 1809). Some had been captured in Martinique and some in Guadaloupe. They had previously been quartered in Wincanton, Devon.

## 15<sup>th</sup> January 1812

Second instalment of Prisoner of War arrived. Fourteen army officers who came to Scotland via Portsmouth. They had been made captured in 1811 during the Peninsular War (Spain).

## 15<sup>th</sup> March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1812

The last company of twenty-seven officers arrived in Sanquhar. They were mostly younger naval officers who had been stationed at Peebles.

## 29th June 1814

Probable date when the majority of Prisoners of War left Sanquhar.

## Life in Sanquhar for Prisoners of War

On the whole, the prisoners of war seem to have gotten along well with the people of Sanquhar. They played quoits, formed a Masonic Lodge and were invited to dine with the Provost.



In Sanquhar, Scottish soldiers returning from the Wars objected to the treatment of the Prisoners of War. One person who criticised what he considered to be their lenient treatment was Lieutenant Johnston, who had been wounded at the Battle of Badajoz in Spain (pictured above). Wikimedia Creative Commons Licence.

## Letter from a French soldier, March 1812.

He was based in Dumfries and is describing the experiences of Prisoners of War in ‘...a dirty place called Sanquhar...’

‘...they are extremely uncomfortable...the greater part of the Frenchmen are lodged in barns and kitchens; they can get neither beef nor mutton, nothing but salted meat and eggs. They have applied...to be removed...’



A tombstone in St Bride’s Churchyard, Sanquhar, (photographed above) reads:

*In memory of J B Arnaud, aged 27 years, Lieutenant in the French Navy, prisoner of war on parole at Sanquhar. Erected by his companions in arms and fellow prisoners as a testimony of their esteem and attachment. He expired in the army of friendship, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1812.*

While Lieutenant Arnaud’s obituary gives his cause of death as smallpox, it is widely believed that this was to cover up the fact that he died in a duel. He was one of two soldiers who were said to have been in love with the same young woman.

## Places in Sanquhar connected with Prisoners of War

A pool on the river near Holm House is still called ‘**Sodger’s Pool**’ because it is where the sodgers (or soldiers) used to bathe.

**Holm Woods** was also a favourite place of the Prisoners of War. Surviving graffiti says ‘*Luogo de Dlizia*’ which means Place of Delight in Italian. It is dated 1812.

**Kirk Sykes** (a little to the north of the Parish Church) was reported as a place where Frenchmen caught frogs to eat.

At **Newtown**, one Prisoner of War cultivated hops. In 1931, they were still recorded as flowering each year.

*Poor Arnaud! He must have bled profusely; an old man who remembered the tragedy told me that he...saw the blood marks and traced them all the way from the Washing Green, through the Braheids Park, and the Inns Bog into the town.’ T.Wilson, Memorials of Sanquhar Kirkyard, 1912*