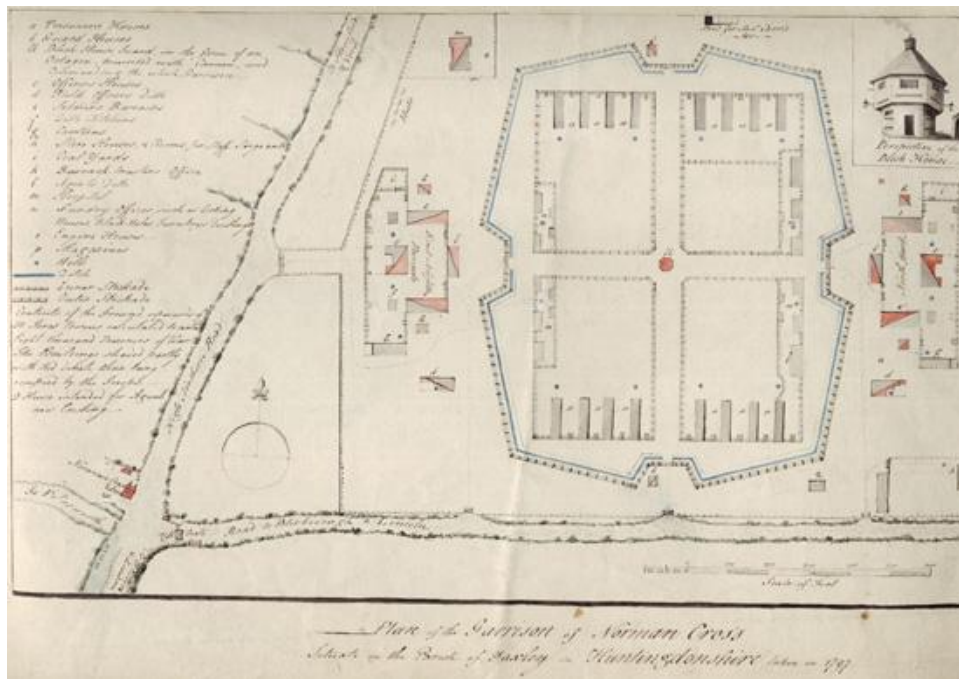


69eme Prisoners at Norman Cross

Norman Cross the first purpose built prisoner of war camp, received a number of 69eme prisoners taken by Duke of Wellington's forces in the Peninsular and France campaigns.



The soldiers were kept in truly wretched conditions. They were clothed in a conspicuous yellow. Other clothes were sold away for money as they spent much time gambling. The English did send money for the French to properly cloth their prisoners. But the French prisoners in Norman Cross were obsessed with gambling. Officially classes were laid on for learning foreign languages, dancing, mathematics and navigation. They tried to supplement their meager lifestyle by making and selling bone and wood boxes, ships, which they were allowed to sell. Yet they also produced illegal things such a pornography, forged banknotes and straw plait. The nearby Peterborough museum has many of the 'legal' objects.

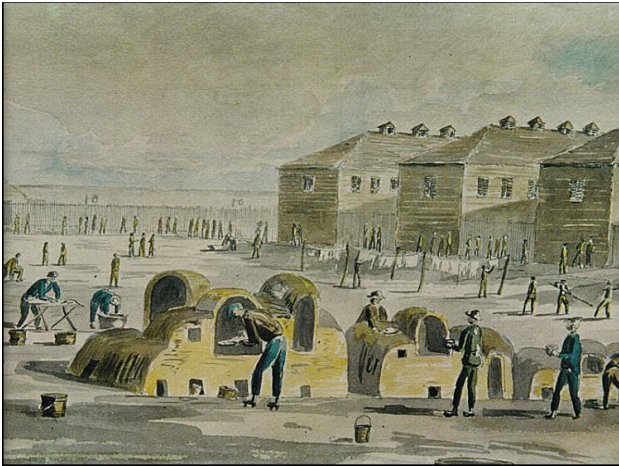


The prison was although better conditions than the ship hulks, was still crowded with up to 7000 Dutch and French inmates,



and rife with disease which killed over a thousand in one typhoid outbreak alone in 1800/1.

With peace with France, the prison was closed down in 1814, and much of it was subsequently dismantled in 1816, except some garrison buildings were converted into large homes. Of the original prison blocks only a few walls and some of the 30 wells exist.



To keep an eye over the here was a blockhouse and a large number of sentry boxes skirting high fences.

500 prison guards were distributed in military barracks close to any potential trouble brewing. The Shropshire Militia were once called in to restore order.



There were many escape attempts including tunneling. Groups of up to sixteen men escaped at a time, many being re-caught at quite some distance, Norfolk and Hampshire. One French officer seems to have escaped for certain.

Visitors to the camp were barred except under escort, after confusion counting people in and out and a couple of prisoners took advantage of this to escape but later caught many miles away.



There were three soldiers of the 69eme held in Norman Cross found in the records:

SOLDIER NAME	RANK	WHERE CAUGHT & WHEN
Michel Felix	Private	Chavez, Portugal, 25 th March 1809, by Portuguese Forces, landed in Portsmouth 12 Jan 1812, brought back to France 12 July 1814
Pierre Meunier	Private	12 th May 1811 in the vicinity of Salamanca, by Spanish Forces, landed 18 January in Portsmouth, brought back to France 12 July 1814.
Casimir Soulier	Lieutenant	11 May Almeida 1811, by British Forces, landed at Chatham 29 th September 1813, brought back to France via Dover 10 th May 1814

With thanks to Keith Matthews for trawling the micro fiche records !

Christopher Edwards

June 2010