

'People Left at Home': Families of British Prisoners of War (Napoleonic)

A talk on the history of the families of British Prisoners of War on parole in Napoleonic France and Mauritius, with Elodie Duche.

What happened to the families of prisoners of war during the Napoleonic era? While much attention has been paid to the experiences of captives themselves, their wives, parents, siblings, children, servants, and creditors who remained at home also faced the profound consequences of wartime detention. Using personal letters uncovered in French and British archives, this talk brings to life the experiences of the families who supported British prisoners from afar. From community fundraising and religious assistance to long-distance letter-writing and even illicit journeys across the Channel to reunite with captive relatives, it explores the many ways ordinary people responded to the challenges of war. By recovering these often-overlooked stories, the talk offers a fresh perspective on the human consequences of the Napoleonic Wars and highlights the central role of family networks in helping prisoners and their loved ones navigate the hardships of conflict.

Last updated: September 18, 2026