PORTCHESTER CASTLE’S BLACK FRENCH PRISONERS OF WAR
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
LOCATION
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
LOCATION
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
THE RESEARCH

- Long history - Researchers have focussed on Roman & Saxon periods
- Prison history seen as niche, of little interest
  - Antiquarian & local histories, excavation reports
  - Provided the initial direction towards the Black prisoners
- Prison period – 17th - 19th centuries – global and colonial period of history
- Mass movements of people
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
PRISON HISTORY

• Prison for PoWs
  • Second Anglo-Dutch War 1665-67
  • War of the Spanish Succession 1701-12
  • War of the Austrian Succession 1740-49
  • Seven Years War 1756-63
  • French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars 1793-1815

Multi-national communities of soldiers, sailors, civilians
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
THE PRIMARY SOURCES

• The National Archives, Kew:
  • British state documents: Admiralty and War Office Letters, reports, prison registers
• Other sources:
  • Admiralty files held at the Royal Museums Greenwich, Caird Library
  • Local records offices
  • French archival sources
  • Duplication
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
THE RECORDS

- Other sources - excavation archives
  - 1960s - 1980s excavations, Professor Barry Cunliffe
  - Prison material culture
  - Prison graffiti
  - Archival research
  - Objects from excavations on Google Arts & Culture
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
BLACK FRENCH PRISONERS OF WAR

- October 1796 2,500 French prisoners arrive at Portchester
- Majority Black/mixed-race
- Captured fighting on St Lucia, St Vincent and Grenada May-June 1796
  - Bataillon des Antilles
  - Bataillon des Sans Culottes
  - Garde National
- Officers, lower ranks, ordinary soldiers
- All recorded by the prison
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
BLACK FRENCH PRISONERS OF WAR

• Others in the group
  • Civilian administrators of the French State
  • French medical staff – French hospitals on the islands cleared
  • Civilians thought to be a threat – political exiles?
  • Merchants
  • Business owners
  • Wives, relations, children
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry No.</th>
<th>Name Given</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Date of Arrival</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Time of Arrival</th>
<th>Date of Discharge</th>
<th>Reason of Discharge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>1820-03-20</td>
<td>Arrived</td>
<td>12:00 AM</td>
<td>1820-04-20</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>456</td>
<td>Jane Doe</td>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
<td>1820-04-20</td>
<td>Arrived</td>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>1820-05-20</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>789</td>
<td>Mike Brown</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>1820-05-20</td>
<td>Arrived</td>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>1820-06-20</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1010</td>
<td>Lisa Jones</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
<td>1820-06-20</td>
<td>Arrived</td>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>1820-07-20</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
THE JOURNEY TO BRITAIN

- Put on British transport ships
- Left St Kitts July 1796
- Re-provisioned in Ireland, September 1796
- Arrived Portchester 11th October 1796
- 200+ French and British soldiers died on voyage
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
BLACK PRISONERS

• The numbers:
  • 333 white French men
  • 2080 Black/mixed-race French men
  • 99 white, Black and mixed-race French women & children
  • 5 children born after arrival
  • Free French men, women and children, not slaves
  • Race not always recorded
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
OUTSIDE THE PRISON

- Hampshire Parole towns 1795-1799
  - Bishops Waltham
  - Alresford
  - Petersfield
- 100 sent to live in the community
- Communities of French colonial life
- Bishops Waltham – hotbed of French Republicanism
PORTCHESTER CASTLE OUTCOMES

- What happened to them?
  - Released and sent to France
  - Enlisted in the British army and navy
  - Returned to the Caribbean
  - Other outcomes?
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Portchester Castle only PoW prison in Britain at the time with a large population of Black and mixed-race men, women and children.
- Estimated 10,000-15,000 Black and Mixed-race people in Britain, + smaller numbers of other races.
- Important addition to the history of race in Britain and elsewhere.
- Rare – recorded in the archives & includes women and children.
- The potential – link to overseas archives, biographies
- Allows us to re-think other archival sources to go looking for other groups.
- Lascars, native Americans, muslims, Jews, people from India etc - numerous
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
INTERPRETATION AND OUTREACH

• Permanent exhibition at the castle
• Castle guidebook and online articles
• Arts projects: Sound installation, National Youth Theatre play ‘The Ancestors’.
• Outreach work: Caribbean and British communities
• All achieved through the documents and archives at Kew.
Portchester Castle’s remarkable history begins in the 3rd century AD when the Romans built a vast fort here. In the 5th century this waterside fortress was transformed into a Saxon settlement, and after the Conquest of 1066 it became a Norman castle. For medieval kings it
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING
PORTCHESTER PRISON
PORTCHESTER CASTLE
THE PRISON
PORTCHESTER’S PRISONERS IN FRANCE

- Gradually sent to France between 1797-1800
- Large group arrive in France August - November 1797
- Sent to Île-d’Aix
- Demoted, living in tents on a ‘freezing sandbank’
PORTCHESTER
NEW RESEARCH NEW PROJECTS