

## **BRETON EMIGRANTS TO JERSEY**

The Channel Islands are geographically part of France, but politically have been English – or British – since 1205. In French they are called Les Iles Anglo Normandes, reflecting their historical links to Normandy that date back to the first Millennium. But the French influence in the islands is more Breton than Norman, as a result of large scale immigration of agricultural workers from Brittany, which began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and continued until the 1950s. Jersey is the largest of the islands, but even allowing for this had a disproportionate share of the immigration, reflecting its proximity to Brittany and the different nature of the islands, Jersey enjoying more favourable conditions for agriculture. Today, many Jersey families have Breton names or can trace their ancestors back to Brittany.

This article explains the nature of that emigration and how those with an interest in family history can trace their Jersey cousins. It uses my own family, the Boleats, as a good example.

### **The causes of Breton emigration**

Jersey enjoyed economic prosperity in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, to a large extent reflecting its special status as a British possession close to France. With France and Britain being a state of permanent tension, occasionally escalating into war, the Channel Islands were treated as a “fortress towns”, benefitting from military expenditure and tax concessions designed to keep them strong.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jersey had a massive economic boom, largely based on the Atlantic cod fishing business, and aided by Jersey’s favourable tax status. The boom required more labour than Jersey could supply and there was large-scale immigration, predominantly from within the British Isles. The population increased by 150% from 22,855 in 1806 to 57,020 in 1851. Booms are generally followed by busts. Between 1851 and 1901 Jersey suffered a significant economic downturn following the collapse of the cod fishing and related shipping industries. The population fell by 4,500. However, over the same period the number of people recorded in the censuses who were born in France increased by over 4,000, from 2,017 to 6,011, and the proportion of the population born in France rose from 3.5% to 11.4%. Almost certainly, the census figures understate the true position, in particular by excluding most seasonal workers. In addition, as the 1891 and 1901 censuses show, many of the French immigrants settled in Jersey and had children who, although Jersey-born, were part of the French community. In 1901, 31% of children born in Jersey had fathers who were French.

The French migrants were predominantly agricultural workers working in the rapidly growing agricultural sector; they were not replacing British migrants, who had largely been working in construction, shipping and oyster farming. Also, unlike previous immigrants they lived in the country parishes rather than the town of St Helier.

French migration to Jersey between 1850 and 1950 has been the subject of a detailed study by a French academic Michel Monteil (*L’émigration française vers Jersey, 1850-1950*, l’Université de Provence, 2005). The book has recently been translated into English (*French emigration to Jersey 1850-1950*, Société Jersiaise, 2015) and will help some people in Jersey better understand their roots and some people in Brittany better understand why some of their family emigrated to Jersey.

Monteil analyses both the economy of Jersey and its need for migrant labour, and the economic situation in Brittany and Normandy that led to emigration in search of work. Monteil contrasts the economic or voluntary migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the previous migration of refugees.

Monteil noted the growth of the new potato industry, exports increasing from 1,400 tonnes in 1810 to 17,670 tonnes in 1840, and in particular being able to get to the British market before competitors therefore commanding a premium price. The new potato season lasted just six weeks. Monteil commented –

“Jersey ne possédant pas de reserve de mains-d’ouvre suffiscante pour l’arracharg des pommes det terres primeurs, la seule regulation de la population existant depuis toujours sure l’ile étant l’émigration il etait donc necessaire de faire appel a une force temporaire de travail venue de l’extérieur. Ce que firnt en effet les agriculteurs de Jersey en faisant venir des travailleurs agricoles francais.”

In short, Jersey did not have a supply of workers able to harvest the new potato crop so French agricultural workers had to be imported. And Brittany, and to a lesser extent Normandy, had a plentiful supply of labour looking for employment.

So this was the demand factor, but why was the supply met from France?

Monteil explains the severe economic conditions in Brittany in particular in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1866 and 1946 more than 115,000 people left the Department of Côtes du Nord (now the Côtes d’Armor), emigration being particularly strong in 1872 and between 1911 and 1921. Economic migrants from the Côtes du Nord went either to Jersey, the French colonies, Canada or Paris.

Monteil notes that agriculture was backward in the Côtes du Nord, and he mentions the famine in 1847 when 20,000 people died. Pay rates in the Côtes du Nord on average were half those in France generally.

The Department of Manche, including the Cotentin Peninsular, was in a similar position. Manche lost 155,000 inhabitants through emigration between the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The push and pull factors were both there. Jersey farmers needed farm workers, and French farm workers were willing to be recruited. Recruitment extended to Jersey farmers physically going to France to recruit the workers they needed, and no doubt family and other networks played a part in this process.

### **Tracing Breton immigrants to Jersey.**

Unfortunately there are no comprehensive records of all the Breton workers who spent time in Jersey, either for one short season, for a number of seasons or permanently. However, there are three sources that can be used to trace families.

Jersey has conducted decennial censuses as part of the British census programme. Records for all the years are available online though Ancestry and Findmypast. But these records are not ideal as they generally give a place of birth only as “France”, and give age at last birthday but without any precision and probably not always accurately.

The best source of comprehensive information, but only for those living in the Island after 1920, is the Alien Registration Cards <http://catalogue.jerseyheritage.org/features/aliens-registration-cards/> available on the Jersey Heritage Website.

The website usefully summarises what these records contain –

“The 3,500 cards have been available to view at Jersey Archive for many years but

can now be downloaded on a pay per view basis or as part of an annual subscription to the Archives and Collections Online resource.

They were introduced as a result of the Aliens Restriction Act passed on 17 February 1920, when the States of Jersey enacted the principles of the 1914 English Aliens Restrictions Act. Under the law, all aliens over the age of sixteen resident in Jersey had to register with the Immigration Officer, no matter how old they were or how long they had been living in the Island. From this process, a set of cards were created with personal details such as name, address, date of birth and occupation, and each card had a photograph attached which unusually was provided by the individual.

The Alien cards were issued up until the 1960s and, initially, any woman who married a foreign national was also required to register for a card, as well as anyone of foreign parentage. The cards are closed for 100 years from the date of the individual's birth.

These records are a tremendous resource for anyone wanting to trace their ancestors who were born outside of Jersey and Great Britain but resided in Jersey in the 19th and 20th centuries. Other details on the cards include the date of arrival in the UK or Jersey, the place of last residence, date of marriage, date of naturalisation, if applicable, and often a date of death. Anyone registered as an alien had to report any change of address to the Aliens' Office, as well as any travel to or from Jersey, and this information was recorded on the back of the card providing a very useful record of their movements.

The collection has helped to record Jersey's history of immigration from the 1840s to the 1960s. The majority of the Alien cards are of French agricultural workers who came to Jersey for employment; however, there are also cards for Italian and Spanish nationals who came to the Island later to work in the hospitality industry, as well as small numbers of many different nationalities including Russians, Japanese and an Iranian."

There is a further source of information from the Jersey records. Jersey was occupied by Germany in the Second World War and the German authorities required all residents to be registered. The registration cards include name, maiden name, address, date and place of birth, occupation, any militia experience and distinguishing features. Children under the age of fourteen were recorded on the back of their father's card. They were updated with details added if people moved or had more children and as soon as children reached the age of fourteen they were issued with their own card. These records are also available on the Jersey Heritage website. For those people for whom Alien Registration Cards were completed, the information on place and date of birth is the generally the same.

The combination of these three sources can provide a great deal of information about the Bretons who emigrated to Jersey and their descendants.

### **The origin of the French agricultural workers in Jersey**

An analysis of the registration cards of people born after 1908 and living in Jersey after 1920 show 1,067 immigrants from 305 communes in the then Côtes du Nord, and 403 from 155 communes in Manche.

The table below shows the communes most often recorded as places of birth in the Côtes du Nord.

## Birthplace of French-born people from the Côtes du Nord registered as alien in Jersey by commune

Commune	Births recorded	Distance from St Brieuc km
Ploeuc-sur-Lie	218	19
Plaintel	56	13
St Brieuc	55	-
Plouec-de-Trieux	49	37
Pommerit Le Vicomte	38	17
Plehedel	34	27
Plouagat	30	18
St Carreuc	26	13
Langueux	25	4
Quintin	18	26
Begard	17	42
Guincamp	17	29
Lantic	16	13
Loaurgat	15	45
Uzel	13	26
Ivias	13	32
Lannion	12	58
Corlay	11	30
Henon	11	15
Plouha	11	22
Gommenec'h	10	26
Le Foeil	10	14
Merzer	10	24
Plourivo	10	35
Peder nec	10	40

Most of the migrants from Brittany travelled to Jersey from the port of St Brieuc. One commune stands out – Ploeuc-sur-Lie. This commune now has a little under 3,000 inhabitants. It is about 20km south of St Brieuc. Its neighbouring communes - Plaintel, St Carreuc, Henon and Plemy - are also in the table. Ploeuc-sur-Lie can be easily confused with Plouec, which was renamed Plouec-de-Trieux in 1980, which is nearly 40km north west of St Brieuc, and which also features in the table.

With the exception of the large town of Lannion, all the communes listed are within 45km of St Brieuc. With a few exceptions they are also all inland. Generally, the agricultural workers did not come from the coastal towns such as St Quay Portrieux and Etables. St Brieuc, including its suburb of Langueux, is the exception to this. However, it owes its place in the table to the fact that it was by far the largest town in the area, and much of the town is in fact inland.

The communes in Manche are, for the most part, in a 15km strip between Carteret and Lessay, Carteret probably being the port of embarkation. There are a few exceptions – Granville and Muneville-sur-Mer, 60 km to the south, and Bricquebec, which is north east of Carteret, some distance away from the other communes listed. As in the Côtes du Nord most of the communes are inland.

## Birthplace of French-born people from Manche registered as alien in Jersey by commune

Commune	Births recorded	Distance from Carteret km
St-Remy-des-Landes	33	13
Haye du Puits	29	20
St Lo d'Ourville	22	9
Barneville	18	-
Denneville	11	11
Granville	11	62
Bricquebec	10	14
Creances	10	25
Surville	10	15
St Nicolas de Pierrepont	8	15
Glatigny	7	16
Besneville	6	11
Bretteville	6	18

### The Boleat family

The Boleat family is typical of the many Bretons who emigrated to Jersey. In the 1870s, two brothers, Yves Marie Boleat and Joseph Marie Boleat, were among the Breton workers who made their way to Jersey and decided to stay. Their earliest known ancestor is Yvon Boleat, born in 1656 in Plufur, who is the direct ancestor of all today's Boleats. He was the son of Yvon Boleat and his wife Marie Bellec.

Yvon married Jeanne Gueuziec in 1685 in Plouégat-Moysan, to the south of Plufur. Jeanne was born in 1657, the daughter of Maurice Gueuziec and Vincente Le Ler. Their second child, François (1691), was born in Plufur in 1691. He married Louise Thos in about 1727 and died in Plufur in 1742. Thos was a common name and the marriage record cannot be traced. However, it is probable that Louise was born on 20 May 1708 in Lanvellec, the daughter of Olivier Thos and Julienne Lechat.

François and Louise had eight children between 1729 and 1741, all born in Plufur. François, their third child, born in 1732, married Vincente Tudoret in Lanvellec in 1758. Vincente was born in 1739 in Lanvellec, the daughter of Yves Tudoret and Michelle Le Roux. Her ancestors came from Plufur and Lanvellec. Lanvellec is only a few kilometres from Plufur and is quite possible that at that time the Boleat family lived between the two communes.

Between 1759 and 1781 François and Vincente had ten children, all born in Lanvellec. Their eighth child, Jean, born in 1774, is the ancestor of the Jersey Boleats. His younger brother, Allain-Marie, born 1777, married Jeanne Felou. Allain-Marie and Jeanne had four sons all of whom have descendants alive today. They include the now large number of Boleats living in and around Brest.

On 21 January 1805 in Lanvellec Jean Boleat married Marie Louise Le Piolot, the daughter of Guillaume Le Piolot and Mathurine Le Garz, who was born in the neighbouring commune of Plufur in 1783. Marie Louise's ancestors mainly came from Plufur.

The marriage record shows that Jean was a "cultivateur" (agricultural worker) and that his deceased father was also an agricultural worker. Marie Louise was a "filandiere" (spinner) while both her parents were agricultural workers. The witnesses were all agricultural

workers and neighbours: Jean Marie Calvez, Jean Marie Jacob, Yves Le Guerson and Allain Le Gourvil.

Jean and Marie Louise had seven children between 1806 and 1818, all born in Lanvellec. Their youngest child, Yves Marie, born in 1818, was the father of the two brothers who moved to Jersey. His birth record shows an exact address, St Goulven. The same address was given for the birth of Yves Marie's elder sister, Marie Jeanne, in 1815, but the records for the other children do not give an exact location, so it is not known how long he lived there.

On 2 October 1844, Yves Marie married Jeanne Auffret. Jeanne was born in Ploumilliau in 1824, the daughter of Francois Auffret and Francoise Le Morellec. Her family can be traced back in Plouaret to the 1650s. At the time of the marriage, Yves Marie was a labourer, age 26, living in Plounerin. Jeanne Auffret, just 19 years old, was an "aide-ménagère" (domestic assistant) living in Plouaret. The marriage was in Plouaret.

Between 1845 and 1864 Yves Marie and Jeanne had nine children, born at regular intervals of between two and three years, in four different communes -

- François Marie, born in 1845 in Plouaret.
- Jean, born in 1848 in Ploumilliau.
- Guillaume Marie, born in 1851 in Ploumilliau.
- Yves Marie, born in 1853 in Trégrom, who moved to Jersey.
- Jeanne Marie, born in 1855 in Trégrom.
- Yves Marie, born in 1857 in Trégrom.
- Marie Françoise, born in 1860 in Ploubezre.
- Anne Marie, born in 1862 in Ploubezre.
- Joseph Marie, born in 1864 in Ploubezre, who like his brother Yves Marie moved to Jersey.



**Yves Marie Boleat, born 1853**

In April 1875 Yves Marie, aged 21, moved to Jersey. He was recorded in the 1881 Jersey census as a farm servant. In 1883 Yves married Augustine L'Hermitte, born in 1862 in Jersey shortly after her parents arrived in the Island from St Sauveur le Vicomte in Normandy. However, Yves was also upwardly mobile. By 1891 he was a farmer with three children and two servants. By 1901 Yves and Augustine had five children and two general servants. In 1904 Yves Marie Boleat obtained British citizenship. One of Yves Marie's and Augustine's children, Yves Charles Boleat, emigrated to Australia. The other four – Marie Augustine, Charles Emile François, Emile Joseph Louis and John Ernest – have remained in Jersey and with the exception of Charles have descendants in the Island and England today.


Joseph Marie Boleat was the ninth and youngest child of Yves Marie Boleat and Jeanne Auffret. Joseph Marie's mother died when he was just six years old. Between 1876 and 1881, when he was just 16, Joseph Marie followed his brother to Jersey. On 3 April 1887, at St Clement's Parish Church, Joseph was married. Unfortunately the ancestors of his wife, and even her name, are not clear –

- The marriage record clearly records the name as Josephine Guilhomer, aged 20, so born in 1866 or 1867, living in St Saviour, born Plouézec, daughter of Francois Guilhomer, a sailor
- In the 1881 census the name is Josephine Guillaumaure
- In the 1891 census Joseph's wife is recorded as "Marie J"
- In the 1901 census she is Josephine Guillaumare
- In the 1911 census she is Josephine Marie

There are no Guilhomers, Guillemaures or Guillemards in the Plouézec birth records between 1865 and 1869. However, there is a Marie Joseph Guyomard, born on 17 June 1868 in Plouézec, the daughter of Francois Guyomard (1841), a sailor, and Marie Claudine Le Fevre (1844), both born in Plouézec, who were married on 3 January 1867. Francois's father, Guillaume (1806), was also a sailor and like his mother Marie Jacob (1806) was born in Plouézec. Their marriage record records the surname as Guiomard. Marie's parents were Pierre Le Fevre and Marie Le Bocher. Guillaume's parents were another Guillaume and Marguerite Richard but there is no further information about them or their ancestors. Marie Jacob's parents were Francois Jacob and Renee Le Calvez.

This is where the Alien Registration cards should help. In her 1920 alien registration card and her 1941 registration card the name is Guillemard, born on 16 June 1867 in Plouézec

It seems probable that Joseph's wife was indeed Marie Joseph Guyomard, as the birth date is similar (although a year different) to that on the alien registration card and the fact that as on the marriage record her father was Francois, a sailor.

FEMALE.		REGISTRATION CARD.	
(1) NAME (Surname first in Roman capitals) <b>BOLEAT Josephine, nee GUILLEMARD.</b>		(2) IDENTITY BOOK OR REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE No. <b>J. 1983</b> Date <b>20/12/20.</b> Issued at <b>Jersey.</b>	
ALIAS			
(3) NATIONALITY <b>French.</b>		Born on <b>16/6/1867</b> in <b>Plouezec C. du N. France.</b>	
(4) PREVIOUS NATIONALITY (if any)			
(5) PROFESSION or OCCUPATION <b>Housework. (widow).</b>		(6) Arrived in U.K. on - / - /1881.	
(7) Address of last residence outside U.K. <b>Plouezec C. du N. France.</b>			
(8) GOVERNMENT SERVICE.		(11) SIGNATURE OR LEFT THUMB PRINT. <i>Josephine Boleat</i> <i>mark.</i>	
(9) PASSPORT or other papers as to nationality and identity. <b>Marriage certificate issued at St. Clements No. 81.</b>			

The Jersey Alien Registration Card of Josephine Boleat

## Conclusion

Jersey is today a cosmopolitan society. Over half of the population were not born in the Island and now very few people can claim to have only Jersey ancestors. Each wave of immigrants has made their mark in the Island – from French religious refugees, particularly at the time of the Edict of Nantes, to English and Scottish building workers in the 1830s and 1840s through to Portuguese and more recently Polish immigrants who have provided the labour for the tourism and catering industries. The immigrants from Brittany and Normandy

had a huge beneficial impact, through facilitating the growth of the new potato industry. While integration with the local community was slow initially many of the Breton immigrants quickly moved on from being agricultural workers to farmers and to other occupations, and today their descendants, many easily identifiable by Breton names, occupy senior positions in government and the finance industry, now the dominant part of the Island's economy.

Genealogy is of growing interest in Jersey as it is in Brittany. Jersey people are keen to trace where their ancestors came from, and to also to trace their distant relatives in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, as immigration into Jersey was matched by emigration, particularly of young men. The records now available in Jersey do not quite match those in Brittany in terms of detail (and cost of accessing!) but are now sufficient to enable people in Brittany to trace relatives in Jersey that perhaps they did not even know existed.