

From Langlois to De Sousa – A history of immigration into Jersey

Doug Ford, Education Office, Jersey Museum Service

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The dictionary definition of an immigrant is someone who comes as a settler into a foreign country. However, this idea of “a foreign country” is a very modern concept because what happened before international boundaries were fixed, surely people who moved around in the past were no less immigrants than people today who cross imaginary lines. It is with this movement of peoples that I shall be concerning myself for the purpose of this topic.

Before looking at these trends it is necessary to define why people emigrate. Usually people emigrate in search of a better life or standard of living, not necessarily for themselves but for their children. However, this is not the only reason for the question of one’s safety and freedom of conscience can also come into it. If we use the parallel of the 19th century immigrants to the American West as an example one couldn’t say that they went there for their safety but for many of them it was the lure of cheap land and the prospects for their children’s advancement. For some the gamble paid off and for others it didn’t. The Mormons, on the other hand, migrated to Utah looking for a refuge from persecution and for liberty of conscience.

The type of person who made this move were obviously the more enterprising members of their communities, the ones who were not content with the status quo but who at times were willing to do the more menial jobs in society in order to get their foot on the first rung of the ladder of advancement. A new land with a blossoming economy is the ideal place for a “rags to riches” story to come true.

The advance Westwards in search of new areas to settle continued throughout the 19th century with new settlers arriving all the time. Some had been brought over by advertisements placed by railway and land companies but many came as a result of letters sent home by friends and relations who had successfully made the journey. Obviously this decision to emigrate was a big one but the move could be softened by emigrating to an area in which one’s friends or relations lived. This resulted in concentrations of ethnic communities who named their farms, villages and towns after familiar places back home. This can be paralleled with a pattern of post-war Commonwealth immigration into Britain.

Obviously for immigration to occur a sedentary lifestyle must exist and this precludes pre-Neolithic societies. The first people to immigrate to Jersey were the Neolithic farmers about 7,000 years ago. Because of the nature of farming during this period once a community grew too large it had to split with either family groups or some of the younger members setting out to colonise a new area yet still retaining some links with the parent community. In this way tribal areas were built up and Jersey was obviously part of such a scheme. The settlers most probably came over from the adjacent coast of France bringing with them their breeding stock. Through the generations the blood ties although strengthened from time to time by marriage obviously became weaker. Communities diverge and so by the end of the Neolithic period we begin to see a growing insular tradition in pottery represented by

the Jersey bowls and even in burial rites within the context of a wider megalithic culture. There may even have been a decline on the Island population with, according to Renouf and Urry, a drop from about 2,000 in the high Neolithic to about 500 in the middle Bronze Age. What is certain is that there has been no rich chieftain or warrior burial found from this period which may indicate that as the population declined the Island became absorbed by the tribal grouping of the adjacent coast of France and was ruled by a chieftain from there.

Further small scale migrations into the Island brought with them new innovations such as the use of metals, first of all bronze and then iron. Some historians argue the case for fairly large-scale “invasions”, however, it may have simply been the spread of ideas backed up by a relatively small population movement. The latter wave of settlers were more important in their effect for the Iron Age saw the emergence of the Celtic peoples and Jersey was part of this culture. Whether it was simply an aristocratic take-over as opposed to a popular movement remains uncertain but by the time of the first “historic” immigrants to the Island Jersey was totally Celtic in outlook.

As an island on the periphery of the Celtic world life in Jersey must have pottered along with no great upheavals until Caesar’s conquest of Gaul in the 50s BC. In 57BC Roman legions under Crassus attacked the Armorican tribes including the Coriosolites who controlled the trade-routes down the Rance and by influence the Islands (as they were on the natural extension of this trade-route to Britain). In 56 BC while Ceasar dealt with the Veneti in the south, Sabinus defeated a coalition of tribes, including the Coriosolites and the Unelli of the Cotentin, in a battle near Avranches. It would appear that some of these defeated Gauls took refuge in Jersey because a number of coin hoards from this period have been found on the Island. These total approximately 16,000 coins in which the largest single tribe represented is the Coriosolites. Coin hoards are put into the ground in times of trouble in the hope of retrieving them when normal conditions resume; these hoards were left which would indicate that their owners died. The Coriosolites are known to have been involved in the final defeat of the Gauls under Vercingetorix in 52 BC. Were the owners of these hoards among the dead?

Similar coin evidence paints a picture of troubled times during the early fourth century AD and again towards the end of the century. The Roman world was under attack by Germanic raiders who eventually moved into the area and settled by the middle of the fifth century AD. The Britons were also under pressure from attack with Germanic settlers seeking land and large numbers of them fled southwards over the Channel to Amorica via the Islands where undoubtedly some settled.

By combining hypothesis and archaeological evidence we can paint a good picture of these trends in population movement but what was the Island called that provided these immigrants within new home.

Although the island is often referred to as Caesarea, this is in fact a misinterpretation of the late 3rd century Antonine Itinerary in which three islands, Riduna, Sarnia and Ceasarea are mentioned as landmarks after Vectis (the Isle of Wight). Land based writers since the time of Camden in the 16th century had taken them to mean Alderney, Guernsey and Jersey. However, Andium is also on the list and as we know from other documents that Jersey was

referred to as Andium, Agna or Augia it is highly unlikely that the Island would have been given two names on the same list. It would seem most likely, therefore, that the Channel Islands in the Roman period would have had the following names:

Riduna	Alderney
Sarnia	Sark
Lesia	Guernsey
Augia or Andium	Jersey
Ceasarea	Minquiers

If one looks at the list through the eyes of the sailor then it would seem to make sense, especially as the Minquiers at this time would have been the largest land area in the group and would, therefore, be named after the emperor.

It is with the development of the eremitical monastic movement that we get our first literary evidence of immigration to the Island in the lives of the Saints. With Helier, or Helibert as he is sometimes referred to, we get the information that the population of Jersey was less than 100 souls although this probably refers to the number of Christians on the Island. Gregory of Tours in his History of the Franks states that in 577 AD Praetextus, the Archbishop of Rouen, was banished to Jersey for seven years by the King of France as punishment for his part in a plot.

The first islander to be named would appear to be a man called Anquetil who was cured of his lameness by St Helier in the 540s. However, this may be apocryphal as Anquetil may be the Norse personal name Ketil. But having said that we can read of an Island chief called Anouvarith or Andwarith living in 802. This name could mean "guardian of Andium" and, therefore, be a title as opposed to personal name which would indicate that the prefix "An" refers to the Island.

The name in Jersey was only given to the Island after the Viking settlement of the area in the ninth and tenth centuries. But after this period we get a variety of spellings, such as Gersei, Jersei, Gersi or Jereseye, but as there was no standardised spelling until comparatively recently all of these names were acceptable and are recognised as being of the same name. Jersey probably means the "jarl's or earl's island"; on the Western side of the Oslo Fjord there is an island called Jersey and I feel that both names have the same origin. This theory can be backed up if one looks at the extent of the Ducal Fiefs on the Island during the 11th century in comparison to our sister island of Guernsey. Although another theory is that it comes from the Norse personal name Geirr or even the Frisian word "gers" meaning grass. I would discount the last theory as the Frisians were only really active as colonists during the 5th and 6th centuries when the Island was still generally referred to as Angia.

There was obviously a large Norse immigration into this area during the 9th and 10th centuries as can be seen from the Norse colonisation of the Cotentin, Bessin and Avranchin areas of Normandy. They came from both Scandinavia and as a secondary wave of settlers from the Norse colonies in Ireland. In Brittany there was Norse activity in St Malo and Aleth, Doll, St Briac, St Brieuc, Tregeiur resulting in the Norse occupation of Brittany between 914

and 939 when Alan Barbetorte aided by King Athelstan of England manage to reassert his control. With all the successful Norse activity in the adjacent regions of France backed up by the place-name evidence in the Islands themselves it would be a foolhardy man that could put hand on heart and say that the Vikings were not present on the Islands.

The transference of the Islands to the Duchy of Normandy from the Breton sphere of influence came in 933 when Duke William "Longsword" of Normandy formally annexed the Cotentin, Avranchin and the Islands and fixed the Norman/Breton border on the banks of the River Couesnon. Because these areas were essentially Norse speaking, at the time when the original Normandy was fast becoming Christianised and French speaking, we can postulate that this was a different style of immigration in which the settlers brought their Norse speaking womenfolk with the result that personal names, customs, religion and language remained Norse in character for much longer.

The similarities between the Norman dialects spoken in the Islands and on the Cotentin are too strong for it to have been imposed on a large Breton speaking population. Therefore, I would argue that the local population must have been outnumbered by the new Norse speaking settlers and the comparative scarcity of Breton place names would seem to back this theory up. The French influence which produced the Norman dialect/language, I would argue indicates a larger secondary wave of immigration from the adjacent areas of France where the native French gradually assimilated the Norse speaking settlers. This was a gradual movement which is indicated by the fact that the Bishop of Coutances did not feel safe enough to return to his episcopal seat until 1025, that is nearly 90 years after the area had been annexed by the nominally Christian Dukes of Normandy. The fact that William the Conqueror's mother was described as Duke Robert's wife "in more Danico - in the Danish fashion" again supports this theory.

It is only with the formalisation of the Norman feudal system in the 11th century that surnames begin to appear, largely for the sake of the growing bureaucracy which was required to run the system and to collect dues. While patronyms, occupations, descriptive nicknames and addresses of all formed these new surnames it is the fifth group, the geographical names that helps us with the identification of the mediaeval immigrants.

When people arrived from outside the community then then it was an obvious thing to do to call him by his place of origin. In this way the villages of the Cotentin provided the de Carterets, Coutanches, de la Hayes, de ste Croix, Siouvilles, Perriers, Pinels, Pirouets and de Gruchys. Other parts of Normandy provided the Baals, Billots, de Quettevilles, Daubignys, du Heumes and Houillebecqs. Village names are really only of use if the resident population know where they are, so immigrants from further afield were named after their region or even their country of origin. In this way the Le Poidevins, D'Auvergnés and Perchards were introduced to the island along with Langlois (the Englishman), Le Gallais (the Welshman), Gallichan (the Spaniard). The origin of names such as Le Breton and Norman are obvious but the original bearers of the name must have come to or lived in an area of the Island where they stood out because of the general geographical nature of the name.

Undoubtedly, most of these medieval immigrants moved to Jersey in search of a better standard of living. It was not until the turmoil of the Reformation that the first of "refugees

de religion” immigrate seeking freedom from persecution and liberty of conscience. These Huguenots were to have a lasting effect upon their new home for it was they who influenced the Jersey Protestants towards Calvinism as opposed to the more moderate form of English Protestantism. This was due to the fact that they could speak with the Islanders whereas exponents of Anglicanism tended to come up against a language barrier. Many immigrant Huguenot ministers were appointed rectors in the Island churches.

Economically speaking, these Huguenot refugees or immigrants were a great loss to France. As Protestantism was based upon the interpretation of the Bible which was made available in the relevant language as opposed to Latin, this meant that many of these immigrants could read and write and when this was combined with the Protestant work ethic the result was that France lost many educated and skilled craftsmen to the host countries. It is supposed that it was these early Huguenot immigrants that introduced the fine art of stocking knitting to the Islands and organised the trade. This steady stream of Huguenot immigrants carried on throughout the 16th and 17th centuries until 1685 when it turned into a deluge with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV. It has been estimated that over 400,000 French Protestants, nearly all skilled artisans, left the country. This loss of revenue and skills virtually wrecked the French economy and the wealth smuggled out of the country was used as capital in the host countries and combined with the skills of the Huguenots to set up new industries. Some of the Huguenot families who settled in Jersey were Gosselin, de Faye, du Parq, Gosset, Voisin, Hemery and Amiraux. Many of these families played an important role in the later history of the island.

The French Revolution in the 1790s brought about a further influx of French immigrants seeking refuge from persecution. However, this time they brought a problem with them for they were Roman Catholic. This was resolved when they were allowed to hold services as long as they made no attempt to make conversion. By 1795 when all able-bodied Frenchman of military age were enlisted for the Quiberon expedition they numbered 3,500. In addition there was an estimated 3,000 French priests plus all the women, children and old men. Obviously this large influx of immigrants had to be housed and so there was a building boom in the 1790s which saw the beginning of the expansion of St Helier. The demand for food and supplies was met by increased commerce with England paid for by the wealth the emigrees had brought with them. When the States suggested the emigrees should be expelled the Chamber of Commerce pointed out that they employed a large number of the poorer classes and that, as a result, salaries and wages had risen faster than prices.

Of course not all of these emigrees remained, many moved on to England and the disastrous Quiberon expedition meant that many failed to return but as the French Wars lasted for 22 years many did settle permanently. Apart from on matters of religion they were easily assimilated into the Jersey way of life. The next wave of immigrants would not be so easily handled because they were English.

After the Napoleonic Wars ended many army officers were retired on half pay and Jersey with its low cost of living seemed an ideal place to retire to where their money went further. By 1841 there were an estimated 5,000 English residents out of the population of 47,500 mostly living in St Helier. This influx of the English middle classes resulted in a new trend of

architecture emerging in the island reminiscent of the late Georgian and Regency styles that was to be found in English county towns. English-language newspapers were started which by implication means that there was an economic market for the product reflecting that the English language was becoming more common. In 1834 the States adopted an English-style currency although coins were not issued until 1840.

Already by the 1830s English residents were planning an attack on the Jersey Constitution and the honorary system trying to bring it into line with England. In 1840 led by Abraham Le Cras they challenged the right of the States to naturalise aliens and won. For the next 20 years this “English grouping” pushed the British authorities to abolish the Royal Court and to annexe the islands. While they failed with their objectives the States actually tried to reform themselves in November 1856 by introducing 14 Deputies who were to be democratically elected.

Of course it was not only the English middle classes who immigrated here in the 19th century. The various capital building projects resulted in many English and Irish migrant labourers coming to live as well as Cornish quarrymen. It was amongst this class of people that the cholera epidemic of 1832 and 1849 spread so rapidly, living as they did in the overcrowded squalor of the poorest part of St Helier.

As Jersey’s prosperity grew during the 19th century more and more English-speaking immigrants arrived and replaced the emigrating Jerseymen. The result of this was that although the Island’s population remained fairly static at about 55,000 the proportion of Islanders whose first tongue was English was growing.

With the growth of agricultural exports in the 19th century, especially potatoes, the demand for seasonal workers was met by an influx of French farmworkers, mainly from Brittany, and like previous groups of workers whether it was soldiers, seamen, labourers or quarrymen some settled here permanently. It is this aspect of immigration which has carried on right up to the present with groups coming to work the season in the agricultural industry and more recently the tourism industry and some settling on a permanent basis.

The population of the Island only grew by about 10,000 in the first 60 years of this century so immigration was on a very small scale. The major feature of this period was the increasing use of English. Jerriais was regarded as a peasant language and actively discouraged in schools. Radio and, later, television use the medium of English: unfortunately, there is no place for dialect or an uneconomic language in the 20th century. As a result the number of people speaking Jerriais has declined fairly rapidly until today with less than 50% of Islanders being Jersey born and less than a quarter of them being able to speak it, then with the best will in the world, I fear that Jerriais will be a dead language within the next generation. If despite the amount of government support Irish has been given since the 1920s the number of Irish speakers is falling, what hope is there for Jerriais?

The last 25 years have seen the population of Jersey jump about 60,000 to over 86,000. While there was an upsurge in the birth rate over the death rate in the 1960s most of this rise is accounted for by general immigration brought about by the Island’s post-War prosperity and growth of the tourism and finance industries. A larger population requires

more services and the expertise to man them has had to be imported as there were not enough trained Islanders. This prosperity has meant that there has always been more jobs than Islanders to fill them, as a result some jobs have become associated with foreign seasonal workers and, therefore, low in status.

Since the War the seasonal jobs have been filled by workers from countries poorer than Jersey and a feature of this trend has been the change in nationality of the groups coming to do the work. In the 1950s, it was the French; in the 1960s, it was the Italians; in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was the Spaniards and since then the Portuguese. As each country's agricultural and tourist economy has developed especially since the advent of the European Community, the workers have stopped coming to work the season in Jersey. This begs the question, " what will happen after the Portuguese?" - because until now we have been dealing with Christian based communities with basically the same lifestyle and values. Will the new immigrants be European Christians or perhaps North Africa Arabs, how would Jersey cope with a culture and different concepts and lifestyles.

In the immigration debate there are many factors which have to be taken into account. I have merely tried to show that there has always been a tradition of immigration into the Island from the earliest times. The immigrants of all been eventually assimilated, even the English. They have brought many changes to Island life, perhaps the most radical to date has been the change in language over the last century. Many have been subjected to discrimination yet they have stayed. The problems we have today do not stem from immigration as a concept but from the scale of the concept in practice.