

French workers and the Jersey population

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The links between Jersey and France are strong and many. Geographically Jersey is closer to France than it is to the UK, until the 13th Century Jersey was more part of France than of Britain, trade links between Jersey and France have always been strong, and Jersey has experienced several waves of immigration from France.

From the 16th century to the early 19th century Jersey became the home for French religious refugees. There is no way of knowing how many French refugees there were in Jersey at any one time. One estimate spoke of between 3,000 and 4,000 which would be a significant number when compared with a population of around 20,000.

From the early 19th Century to the middle of the 20th Century there was a different type of migration, agricultural workers from Brittany and Normandy. Most probably intended to be short term migrants, planning to return to France. But some decided to settle in Jersey, with many of today Jersey's population being descended from them.

This article analyses the available information on the nature of that migration - who were the migrants, where did they come from and why did they come. In doing so the article draws heavily on a recent and important study of Jersey by a French academic Michel Monteil (*L'émigration française vers Jersey, 1850-1950*, l'Université de Provence, 2005).

How many

Between 1851 and 1921 the population of Jersey fell by nearly 13%, the decrease being particularly marked in the 1870s and between 1911 and 1921, in this latter period largely a consequence of the Great War. Immigration from France occurred largely during this time of falling population. Between 1851 and 1891 the population of Jersey fell by 2,500 while the number of people recorded in the Census who were born in France increased by over 3,000. These trends are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 French-born population of Jersey

| Year | Total Population | French Born Population | French Born/ Total % |
|------|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1841 | 47,544 | [2,800] | [5.9] |
| 1851 | 57,020 | 2,017 | 3.5 |
| 1961 | 55,613 | 2,790 | 5.0 |
| 1871 | 56,627 | 4,092 | 7.2 |
| 1881 | 52,445 | 3,972 | 7.6 |
| 1891 | 54,518 | 5,576 | 10.2 |
| 1901 | 52,576 | 6,011 | 11.4 |
| 1911 | 51,898 | 5,610 | 10.8 |
| 1921 | 49,701 | 4,373 | 8.8 |
| 1931 | 50,462 | 3,209 | 6.4 |
| 1939 | 51,080 | | |
| 1951 | 57,310 | 2,811 | 4.9 |
| 1961 | 59,489 | 2,459 | 4.1 |
| 1971 | 69,329 | | |
| 1981 | 76,050 | 1,233 | 1.6 |
| 1991 | 84,082 | 1,061 | 1.3 |
| 2001 | 87,186 | 1,093 | 1.3 |

Source: Census Reports and author's estimate for 1841.

Unfortunately the 1841 Census does not give a figure for the French born population. However, it does give a figure for total "non-British" of 3,032. In 1851 just 204 people non-British people were recorded as having a place of Birth other than France, suggesting that most of 3,032 "non-British" in 1841 were French born. In turn this suggests that the French-born population may have declined between 1841 and 1851.

The earliest French economic migrants probably worked in constructing the harbour in St Helier and in the quarry at Ronez. However, they were heavily outnumbered, particularly in the construction industry, by the Scots and Irish, and most of them probably returned to France when construction work was completed in the 1840s.

The migration of agricultural workers began in the 1840s and accelerated throughout the remainder of the Century. There was a fairly steady increase in the French-born population of almost 4,000 between 1851 and 1901, a period when the total population fell by 4,500. As a consequence the proportion of the population born in France rose from 3.5% to 11.4%. 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 30% of all children born in Jersey had French-born fathers.)

The experience of the second half of the 19th Century in Jersey is that a high level of immigration to serve a sector of the economy is compatible with net emigration. In the second half of the 19th Century the number of Irish-born people recorded in the Censuses fell from a peak of 2,704 to just 623, while in the same period the number of people born in Scotland and England and Wales more than halved. There was also significant emigration of young Jersey-born people.

Monteil reviews the available evidence on the number of French workers in Jersey. Censuses are not reliable, particularly in capturing foreign workers, so the Census

figures probably understate the true numbers quite considerably. This is even more significant in respect of French agricultural workers, many of whom were seasonal and therefore would not have been recorded on Census night which generally was in April just as the potato season was beginning. Monteil quotes the French Consul in 1871 that there were 5,000 French people in Jersey. His successor in 1873 suggested the figure was 8,000. In 1882 the Consul said that there were not less than 10,000 French people in Jersey of whom 2,000 had become naturalised Jersey people. The following year the Consul quoted a figure of 8,000 French citizens. Monteil notes that these figures are some two to three times the Census estimates. He suggests that the Consul's estimates may well be exaggerated, perhaps to emphasise the importance of their own positions. Having said this, it is probably the case that the Census figures underestimate the number of French workers and certainly do not capture the full extent of short term seasonal workers.

Why there were French migrant workers in Jersey

Monteil analyses both the economy of Jersey and its need for migrant labour, and the economic situation in Brittany and Normandy which led to emigration in search of work. He notes Jersey's fiscal advantages which contributed significantly to its economic prosperity in the 19th Century, also the key decision in 1786 to ban the import of cows which proved to be the stimulus for the cattle industry.

French migrant workers are closely tied the growth of the new potato industry. Jersey established a market niche through the breeding of the Jersey Royal and the favourable climate meant that Jersey new potatoes were first into the market each year, and could command a premium price. Exports increased from 1,400 tonnes in 1810 to 17,670 tonnes in 1840. However, the new potato season lasted just six weeks and required substantial labour. Monteil commented –

“Jersey ne possédant pas de reserve de mains-d'œuvre suffisante pour l'arrachage des pommes de terres primeurs, la seule regulation de la population existant depuis toujours sur l'île étant l'émigration il était donc nécessaire de faire appel à une force temporaire de travail venue de l'étranger. Ce que firent en effet les agriculteurs de Jersey en faisant venir des travailleurs agricoles français.

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.

Monteil analyses why workers were sought from France rather than England. The answer was that French workers were cheaper and also the new potato season coincided with the time of year in Brittany and Normandy of least agricultural activity.

Migration depends on conditions in both the host and the home country. Monteil explains the severe economic conditions in Brittany in particular in the second half of the 19th century. Between 1866 and 1946 more than 115,000 people left the Department of Côtes du Nord (now called 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. By working for just a few months in Jersey French workers could earn far more than would in a year in Brittany.

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 19th Century and the middle of the 20th Century.

Monteil describes what happened in the 1930s when Jersey responded to a request from the British Government to employ workers from England rather than France. In short, the English workers were found to be unsatisfactory compared with the traditional workers from France

Monteil's important study deals in detail with how workers were recruited, their living conditions and their impact on society in Jersey.

The origin of the French agricultural workers

This section seeks to provide a more accurate analysis of the origin of the French immigrants. It is based on an analysis of alien registration cards of people born in France. Under the Alien Restrictions Act 1920 all aliens over the age of 16, no matter how old they were or how long they had been living in Jersey, were required to register with the Immigration Officer. Around 2,000 individual records of aliens born prior to 1908 are available.

The registration documents are held in the Jersey Archive and can be accessed from <http://www.jerseyheritagetrust.jeron.je>.

Some words of caution are necessary. Interpreting the wording of the records is not always easy. The place of birth is recorded, but this not necessarily where the migrants were when they decided to move to Jersey. There is also a risk of some double counting.

Table 2 Birthplace of French-born people registered as alien in Jersey by department

| Department | No of communes | Number of people |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Côtes du Nord | 305 | 1,067 |
| Manche | 155 | 403 |
| Ille et Vilaine | 32 | 93 |
| Morbihan | 36 | 59 |
| Finistère | 19 | 30 |
| Others (estimated) | 180 | 350 |
| Total (estimated) | 727 | 2,000 |

The table shows that just over half the migrants were from the Côtes du Nord, 20% from Manche and the remainder from other departments. But perhaps what is most striking about the table is the very large number of communes recorded. 169 communes in the Côtes du Nord and 94 in Manche appear just once in the records.

Most of the migrants from Brittany travelled to Jersey from the port of St Brieuc. Table 3 shows the communes most often recorded as places of birth in the Côtes du Nord. Again, this must be qualified, as there some communes may be little more than suburbs of larger towns. This is particularly true of Langueux which is a suburb of St Brieuc. The approach has been to analyse the place of birth as named on the alien registration certificate and not to seek to make any corrections.

Table 3 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 | 218 | 19 |
| Plaintel | 56 | 13 |
| St Brieuc | 55 | - |
| Plouec | 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 |
| Loargat | 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 |

One commune stands out – Ploeuc, or more fully Ploeuc-sur-Lie. This is a commune now with a little under 3,000 inhabitants. It is about 20km south of St Brieuc. Its neighbouring communes - Plaintel, St Carreuc, Henon and Plemly - are also in the table.

Ploeuc 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. Table 4 shows the position.

Table 4 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 |

Today, Jersey's links with France are predominantly through St Malo. However, the registration cards record just 19 people born in St Malo and 17 in neighbouring St Servan. Other communes with more than a few records are Cleguerec (7), Berne, Guern and Silfiac (4 each) in Morbihan and Quimperlé (5) and Brest (4) in Finistère.

Comparison with Monteil's analysis

Monteil analysed passport applications by Bretons wishing to travel to Jersey in the 1920s and observed that the following communes were most frequently mentioned (in alphabetical order): Gomenech, Langeaux, Plaintel, Pledran, Plerin, Ploec-sur-Lie, Plouha, Quintin, Saint Brieuc, Trimerven, Vieux-Bourg and Yffiniac. There is a reasonable correspondence between this list and Table 2.

Monteil also analysed the geographical origin of French people married in the Parish Church of St Martin between 1850 and 1940. 25% were recorded as coming from Brittany, 37% from Manche, 1% from Paris and for 38% the region was not stated. The communes most frequently mentioned were St Brieuc (11 times), Portbail (9) and Saint Lo (5).

Longer term issues

The size of the French-born population fell steadily during the 20th Century from 6,011 (11.4% of the population) in 1901 to 1,093 (1.3% of the population) in 2001. This reflects the gradual decline in the importance of the new potato industry and its replacement by tourism and then finance, and more importantly by the growing prosperity of Brittany and Normandy such that working for a season in Jersey became increasingly less attractive. Jersey's need for manual workers was gradually met by the Portuguese, mainly from Madeira, and more recently by the Poles.

However, the French migrants have left their mark in the island – thousands of people who would describe themselves as being “true Jerseymen” being descended from an army of Breton and Norman agricultural labours whose wish to increase their earnings coincided with Jersey's need for migrant labour to sustain its economy.

Appendix

French nationals born in Ploec, registered in Jersey as aliens, under the Alien Restrictions Act 1920

Under the Alien Restrictions Act 1920 all aliens over the age of 16 had to register with the Immigration Officer no matter how long they had been living in Jersey. The largest commune recorded as a place of birth for those who registered was Ploec, 20km south of St Brieuc, which was the port of embarkation for Bretagne workers travelling to Jersey. Following is a list of all those who registered together with their dates of birth. The information is taken from the Registration Records in the Jersey Archive, which only record those born prior to 1908.

Jean Francois Marie Allo 04/06/1894
Jean Marie Allo 12/09/1863
Pierre Francois Marie Allo 19/07/1876
Pierre Marie Allo 26/07/1883
Rosalie Allo 28/05/1870
Leon Busson ?/07/1862
Perene Cabaret 22/05/1874
Anne Marie Ballay 01/05/1889
Louis Marie Bannier 10/02/1879
Marie Baudet 06/06/1844
Josephine Belloeil 13/10/1852
Jeanne Bainard née Besnard 20/07/1872
Auguste Françoise Marie Bichard 17/08/1888
Victoire Françoise Bienvenu 04/02/1881
Victorine François Bienvenu 09/07/1851
Rosalie Le Blanc 06/06/1852
Louis François Blanchet 03/07/1870
Marie Rose Blanchet 22/03/1869
Yves Marie François Blanchet 20/07/1867
Anne Marie Boqueho née Nourry 20/11/1877
Anne Marie Buard 10/09/1897
Auguste Rene Buard 27/09/1867
Jeanne Marie Caurel née Blevet 28/03/1877
Jeanne Champion née Dominique 09/05/1897
Marguerite Chaperon née Lemeur ?/04/1921
Marie Louise Le Claire née Poisson 07/04/1867
Rosalie Le Cocq née Plevin 22/06/1872
Rosalie Collegny 16/12/1857
Rose Françoise Connan née Guillaume 26/06/1874
Anne Marie Cotard née Le Pape 19/11/1886
Victorine Coyen 07/08/1859
Melanie Marie David née Rault 07/07/1878
Pierre Marie David 08/05/1871
Anne Marie Davy 03/10/1853
Cecile Marie Rose Deffin 22/11/1878
Françoise Le Druillenec 11/05/1842
Jean Baptiste Marie Ecobichon 10/05/1875
Jean Marie Ecobichon 09/08/1870
Mathurin François Marie Ecobichon 30/06/1874
Victorine Ecobichon née Allo 23/07/1881
Josephine Françoise Etienne 01/01/1856

Jean Marie Eveillard 20/09/1860
Jean Marie Eveillard 20/09/1869
Rose Marie Eveillard 20/01/1861
Euphrosine Marie Le Feuvre 01/04/1864
Pierre Victor Marie Le Feuvre 20/01/1873
Yves Marie Le Gall 26/10/1842
Marie Françoise Gallais 08/09/1857
Honoré Garnier 14/07/1861
Jean Baptiste Marie Garnier 13/11/1875
Honoré Marie Georgelin 31/08/1869
Jean Baptiste Georgelin 09/03/1870
Jean Marie Georgelin 01/03/1894
Jean Marie Georgelin 23/02/1862
Joseph Marie Georgelin 25/04/1861
Rosalie Georgelin née Rimeur 09/05/1854
Jean Baptiste Gicquel 27/11/1883
Jeanne Gicquel 01/11/1848
Jeanne Marie Gorin 10/05/1874
Marie Anne Gorin 20/05/1837
Félix Marie François Gorvel 12/06/1879
Joseph Marie Gorvel 29/03/1871
Noël François Marie Gorvel 28/11/1859
Jeanne Marie Gouedard 03/10/1857
Pelagie Françoise Gouyet 18/07/1872
Anne Marie Guedard 19/05/1853
Victorine Guegon 24/06/1861
Jean Marie Guigo 19/10/1870
Pelagie Françoise Guivarch, née Le Pavoux 01/04/1872
Anne Marie Hamon 31/08/1855
François Marie Hamon 17/05/1873
Pierre Louis Marie Hamon 19/01/1854
Pierre Marie Hamon 10/06/1861
Yves Marie Hamon 15/05/1895
Yves Marie Guillaume Hamon 18/07/1885
François Marie Pierre Harzo 02/01/1871
Jean Baptiste Harzo 05/08/1889
Mathurin Victor Harzo born 14/08/1859
Emillie Marie Le Hegaret 22/02/1851
Francine Hennequin, née Gullierm 16/09/1878
Jeanne Marie Herve born 15/02/1851
Julien Herve born 01/07/1865
Marie Louise Herve 23/01/1850
Pierre Herve 03/03/1850
Josephine Marie Hidrio, née Bouvries 18/10/1883
Cécile Hillard, widow Quesnel, née Hello born 26/04/1895
Victor Hirel 05/07/1879
Marie Françoise Houssin born 18/04/1864
Louise Huet, née Darcel born on 12/06/1857
Marie Jacob, née Hamon born on 18/07/1885
Marie Louise de la Lande, née Le Borgne 06/07/1895
Marie François Marsoin 20/02/1860
Marie Françoise Martin 16/06/1851
Anne Marie Mauger, née Melette 04/07/1900
Victoire Marie Meheux, née Ruellan 02/09/1874
Jean Marie Mercier 10/05/1872

Joseph Marie Stanislast Mercier 07/05/1867
Josephine Marie Mercier 12/05/1866
Louis Marie Mercier 27/11/1867
Yves Marie Mirabel 23/06/1878
Marie Françoise Moisan, née Therin 31/07/1874
Victor Moisan 16/04/1858
Victor Marie Moisan 19/07/1872
François Marie Morel 11/09/1873
Pierre Marie Morel 19/09/1875
Aimée Marie Morin, née Gorvel 19/09/1876
Louis Marie François Morin 03/01/1885
Pierre Marie Morin 02/06/1862
Rose Morin 14/02/1855
Jean Baptiste François Moulin 11/07/1861
Marie Rose Pasturel 01/11/1875
Julien Marie Mathurine Le Pavoux 16/12/1869
Jeanne Marie Periot 06/07/1860
Joseph Marie Periot 14/03/1856
Marie Françoise Perrio née Allo 28/06/1880
Jeanne Marie Petra née Cadin 15/12/1881
Pelagie Pettiquin 01/04/1849
Jean Baptiste Peuch 26/11/1864
Jeanne Marie Peutequain 08/09/1855
Jean Marie Pleven/Plevin [?] 22/04/1864
Josephine Marie Plevin née Rault 15/02/1870
Mathurine Françoise Plevin 08/08/1874
Sainte Marie Françoise Plevin née Bienvenue 28/09/1868 /1920
Anne Marie Poisson née Riou or Heriot 11/02/1870
Rosalie Françoise Poisson 17/04/1857
Pierre François Marie Quemard 15/12/1868
Yves Marie Quentric 29/11/1869
François Marie Rabet 17/12/1852
Guillaume Rabet 04/1855
Jeanne Marie Rabet 04/09/1864
Marie Françoise Rabet 07/01/1867
Yves Marie Rabet 04/08/1854
James Roe alias Jacques Rault 1864
Louis Joseph Marie Rault 20/12/1863
Louis Marie Rault 31/10/1868
Louis Marie François Rault 10/12/1894
Mathurine Rault 14/06/1859
Sainte Rault née Rault 09/01/1870
Victoire Marie Françoise Rault née Hesry 08/01/1847
Yves Marie Augustin Rault 27/08/1883
François Mathurin Rebindaine 07/04/1859
Jean Marie Rebindaine 05/02/1859
Jeanne Marie Rebindaine 01/10/1867
Marie Louise Rebindaine née Plevin 27/03/1868
Marie Rose Rebindaine 24/03/1873
Pierre Marie Rebindaine 03/03/1863
Cécile Rebours née Beloeil 26/07/1856
Jean François Rebours 10/12/1859
Marie Louise Rebours 05/05/1857
Auguste Renault 12/05/1879
Euphrasie Marie Renouf née Jegoux 16/05/1897

Victorine Françoise Le Ribault 07/07/1867
Pelagie Françoise Richomme 03/09/1854
Jeanne Marie Rigoleur 13/10/1864
François Joseph Marie Rimeur 25/10/1866
François Marie Rimeur 29/05/1885
Marie Françoise Rimeur 30/05/1878
Jacques Marie Rimeur 18/03/1876
Jean Marie Rimeur 23/11/1864
Marie Françoise Rimeur 11/07/1867
Mathurin Rimeur 19/03/1872
Pierre Marie Casimir Rimeur 04/03/1864
Rose Françoise Rimeur née Ecobichon 06/03/1865
Rosalie Marie Françoise Rio née Therin 09/05/1887
Jean Joseph Riou 18/11/1881
Jeanne Marie Robert 20/05/1852
Yves Marie Rogon 23/05/1858
Euphrasia Marie Rolland née Rogon 06/06/1882
Julien Marie Rolland 01/03/1866
Victor Marie Rolland 16/03/1868
Rose Marie Rondel née Allo 10/09/1881
Jeanne Marie Ropert née Sangan 03/10/1866
Anne Marie Roscouet 28/07/1869
Victorine Marie Rouault 15/05/1880
Victoire Françoise Ruelland 01/06/1853
Anne Marie Saintilan née Milon widow Giard 25/08/1876
Isidore Marie Sangan 08/10/1875
A Marie Louise Sangan 25/04/1856
Marie Renne Sangan 09/10/1879
Pierre Marie François Sangan 01/02/1864
Anne Marie Soudet 13/11/1849
Euphrasie Tadier née Le Breton 29/09/1884
Pierre François Marie Talibard 04/04/1859
Jean Pierre Tanguy 03/02/1874
Jeanne Marie Tanguy 12/04/1874
Jeanne Marie Louise Teren 27/08/1849
Cyprien François Therin 20/09/1849
Eleonore Catherine Therin 06/06/1852
Jeanne Marie Therin 13/06/1870
Louise Marie Therin 11/07/1864
Pierre Therin 20/07/1887
Pierre Marie François Therin 04/06/1870
Jeanne Marie Thomas 02/05/1874
Anne Marie Jeanne Tirel née Herve 23/09/1859
Jeanne Marie Touzel 04/06/1851
Marie Treussard 18/05/1850
Anne Marie Françoise Turmel née Clairet 03/04/1872
François Marie Turmel 16/07/1865
Victor Marie Turmel 06/01/1885
Marie Thérèse Urvoy 16/10/1866
Catherine Françoise Le Vannais 18/09/1873
Pierre Marie Le Vannais 05/06/1875
Isabelle Françoise Vasselin 26/03/1855
Mathurine Marie Vauvert 24/12/1872
Pierre François Marie Videloup 15/03/1864