

# Tracing ancestors from Jersey

## Sir Mark Boleat

*The people of New Zealand are descended from a wide range of people from many different territories. In the greater scheme of things Jersey is among the smaller of such territories, but the people of Jersey, would always argue that their importance cannot be measured by numbers alone. For New Zealanders of Jersey origin, the last few years have opened new sources of information enabling a clear picture of family history to be established. This is particularly true of descendants of immigrants from Jersey who were themselves immigrants from France. Research by me and others also enables this information to be put in the context of economic history. It is always interesting to know who migrated and when, but equally interesting to answer the question – why? This article draws on research I have done for a short book Emigration from Jersey to New Zealand in the 1870s, which has recently been published.*

### Who are the immigrants from Jersey?

The starting point for research on ancestors from Jersey is the excellent work by Keith VAUTIER in establishing a database of immigrants from Jersey to New Zealand in the 19th century, based on passenger lists. Keith estimated that between 1871 and 1875 nearly 600 people emigrated from Jersey to New Zealand. Given that Jersey's population was around 50,000 this number is significant – about six times as high as a proportion of the population compared with England. Prior to that time there had been perhaps 100 emigrants in the 1850s.

The statistics do of course need to be qualified. The passenger lists are incomplete. Even assuming that they are complete the data suffers from the following problems:

Some of those who travelled from Jersey to New Zealand were themselves recent immigrants to Jersey and would not meet any normal test of being “Jersey people”.

Some of those recorded as travelling from England were in fact Jersey people who may have spent only a very short time in England.

A significant proportion of immigrants to New Zealand came via Australia and quite likely there would

be no mention of Jersey in any of the records.

However, the records are the best that are available and certainly are reliable in aggregate terms if not in respect of individuals.

### Jersey names

There are no specific Jersey names, but there are many names that are particularly common in Jersey. In 1696 all men over the age of 20 were required to sign an ‘oath of association’, in practice an oath of allegiance to the English crown. Among the names in this list are AMY, AHIER, BISSON, BLAMPIED, DE CARTERET, DE QUETTEVILLE, DE STE CROIX, DUMARESQ, GALLICHAN, LE BROCC, LE BRUN, CABOT, GAUDIN, LE GRESLEY, LE SUEUR, RENOUF and VAUTIER. A full list of the signatories is available on the website Jerripedia. These names remain very common in Jersey today.

In the second half of the 19th century there was a steady flow of migrant workers from Normandy and Brittany to Jersey, mainly to work in the agricultural industry. There were 6,000 French nationals in Jersey, over 11 percent of the total population, in the 1901 census. However, the total number of French workers coming to Jersey was much greater than this. Many were seasonal workers, sometimes returning year after year, but others made Jersey their home, so much so that there was concern about their impact on the Island. Names include AUBERT, DERRIEN, GUYOMARD, JOUALT, HUET, LE MAITRE, LE MARCHAND, LE ROUX and LHERMITTE.

### Relevant Jersey family history information

As any Jersey person will forcefully tell anyone else, Jersey is not and never has been part of the United Kingdom. Rather it is a British Crown Dependency and can date its links with the Crown back to 1205. Jersey people have long memories, so in the Island the loyal toast is to The Queen, Le Duc – the Duke of Normandy. Jersey also has long-standing relations with France, not surprising as it and the other Channel Islands are geographically part of France.

But for many practical purposes Jersey is part of the UK. A visitor to the island would be hard pressed to

identify many differences from parts of the UK, except perhaps the distinctive banknotes, including £1 notes which have long since disappeared from the UK. For census purposes Jersey was included in UK censuses from 1841 until 1931, figures initially being published by the UK for the “Islands of the British Seas”. Since 1951 Jersey has conducted its own censuses, but at the same time and in much the same format as UK censuses.

The Channel Islands Family History Society did much pioneering work in transcribing the individual entries. Full reports are available in hard copy and CD format. However, the data is now readily available on the major websites, particularly Ancestry and FindMyPast, although they are categorised as being English rather than Jersey.

Aggregate information from the censuses is not readily available, but my publication *Jersey's population – a history* attempts to pull the information together, and my website includes a page with access to all available census information.

Until recently, birth, marriage and death records were not easily accessible. The early records belong to the 12 parishes of the island and were fairly basic. Jerripedia provides access to these records, as well as many family trees. More recently, Jersey Heritage, which is responsible for the island's major historic sites, museums and public archives, has partnered with Ancestry to make available all birth, marriage and death records. The records are basic. For example, the birth record of my third great-grandfather gives the date and place at which he was baptised and records his parents as being Charles DU FEU and Marie ALEXANDRE. These are common Jersey names, so there is a risk of not being able correctly to identify ancestors.

Where ancestors have come from France the records are more complete. The census data normally just give the place of birth as ‘France’. In practice most Jersey immigrants from France came from Brittany – and the Brittany records give detailed information, although the extent varies between communes. The marriage records, for example, can give even the dates of birth of both set of parents.

The key date for French records is 1792. In that year detailed civil registers

replaced the previous parish registers. The problem is that for Brittany the detailed records for the Côtes-d'Armor can only be searched if the name of the commune is known.

Sometimes more recent data can help people trace their Jersey relatives. Jersey Heritage has digitised and made available on its website two important data sets.

In 1920 a law came into effect requiring all aliens over the age of 16 to register. Over 3,500 cards have been registered. They give detailed information including name, address, date of birth, place of birth, and date of arrival in Jersey as well as a photograph.

Jersey was occupied by Germany in the Second World War. Under a 1940 order all Jersey residents had to register. The registration cards give personal details and a photograph.

Jersey Heritage has also digitised other data sets including funeral director, prison and hospital records, and wills and testaments. The Jersey Heritage data sets can be accessed by paying a modest subscription.

### The economic context

Having details of ancestors is interesting, but it is equally important to understand why people chose to migrate. Economic migration from one territory to another depends on a combination of three factors:

- Conditions in the home country – push factors
- Conditions in the host country – pull factors
- Ease of movement from the home country to the host country.

The large scale (for Jersey) emigration from Jersey to New Zealand in the early 1870s can be explained by adverse economic conditions in Jersey, seemingly attractive conditions in New Zealand and the difficult journey to New Zealand being compensated by heavy subsidisation.

Jersey had enjoyed a massive economic boom in the first half of the 19th century, reflecting a favourable economic climate, including tax advantages. At various times cod fishing in Canadian waters, shipping, shipbuilding, construction, oyster farming, cider, cattle, wealthy immigrants and privateering flourished. Jersey's population doubled, largely as a result of immigration, from 28,600 in 1821 and 57,020 in 1851. The economic boom ended abruptly in the 1850s. The primary reason was the collapse of world trade and the cod fishing industry, but other factors

### Case Study – The Samson Brothers

Two brothers were among the immigrants to New Zealand from Jersey in the early 1870s. Their story is perhaps typical.

In 1780 Jacob Dominique SAMSON, my third great-grandfather, was born in the town that is now called Trier in the Rhineland Palatinate. By 1816 Jacob was living in the French port of St Malo near to Jersey. Why he went there is not known, but it was shortly after the death of his father. In 1816 he married Marie Jeanne Laurence COLLAS in St Malo. Marie came from the commune of St Alban in Brittany and her family can be traced back there to the 17th century. Their son, Auguste Constant Samson was born in 1823. Sometime between then and 1838 the family travelled to Jersey. Within two years Jacob and Jeanne died, leaving 16-year-old Auguste with no family. Two years later he married Jane Elizabeth Du Feu and in doing so married into long-established Jersey families including Le Breton, Le Sueur and Amy. Auguste and Jane had 14 children between 1842 and 1865.

Auguste's and Jane's second son, Augustus Philip Samson, born in 1842, married a 'Jersey girl', Mary Anne Laurens, ran away to sea, became a ship's captain and emigrated to Napier in New Zealand in 1875. He wrote a log of his journey to New Zealand, which serves as a valuable contemporary description of the arduous sea journey. He failed to find work at sea, became a plumber, but was crippled in an accident and died in 1888.

Augustus was not the first of his family to emigrate to New Zealand. He was preceded, possibly unknown to him, by Charles Thomas Samson, the 10th of the 15 children of Auguste Constant Samson and Jane Elizabeth Du Feu. Charles was born in 1858, nearly 15 years after Augustus Philip. Before his 16th birthday, in 1874, Charles, on his own, emigrated to New Zealand. By 1881, Charles was living in Napier. He later became a storekeeper at 174 Hastings Street, Napier. Hastings Street runs directly into Shakespeare Road where his brother Augustus lived with his family. It is not known if the families ever met or even knew of each other's existence.

played a part including the collapse of the oyster and cider industries, the inability of the shipbuilding industry to make the change from sails and wooden hulls to steam and iron, and a decline in the support Britain was prepared to give to the island.

The population fell from 57,020 in 1851 to 52,455 in 1881. The economic decline, particularly in the maritime industry, contributed to three bank failures between 1873 and 1886, which had the effect of further accelerating the decline. Poor economic prospects led many Jersey people to consider emigration, and a considerable number chose to leave the Island. In very round terms it is possible that in 1881 one third of Jersey-born people no longer lived there, although many of these were first-generation children, born to migrant workers who had lived in Jersey for a comparatively short time.

It is clear why people wanted to leave Jersey, and indeed parts of Britain. Why New Zealand was attractive is well known – a new country actively seeking immigrants through subsidised or free travel and an extensive marketing campaign. There was also something of

a 'herd effect'. After the initial flow of emigrants others who wanted to leave Jersey were attracted by the knowledge that friends and relatives had already made the move.

### The impact of immigrants from Jersey to New Zealand

The relatively few migrants from Jersey to New Zealand prior to the 1870s largely came under their own steam. They were entrepreneurial and many became successful business and public service people in New Zealand. The most prominent was John Helier Vautier who settled in Napier in 1857. Vautier quickly became a successful coal and general merchant and then shipowner. He sold his vessels in 1885 to concentrate on property interests and public life. He became a councillor in 1884 and was Mayor of Napier from December 1878 to May 1882. He was instrumental in building the first hospital in Napier and was on the Napier Harbour Board from 1875 to 1901, where he promoted the construction of a deep-water port. John Vautier died in 1907, leaving substantial

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wealth to his four surviving children. One of his grandsons was Maxwell Helier Vautier CBE, a former Justice of the High Court of New Zealand. There is a Vautier Street in Napier.

The immigrants in the early 1870s were different in nature. They had responded to marketing aimed at labourers and housemaids and few would have made the move without the heavy subsidisation. However, they quickly settled in New Zealand and have helped to make the country what it is today.

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### Migration from Jersey to New Zealand in the 1870s

Over 500 people emigrated from Jersey to New Zealand between 1871 and 1874. From Jersey's point of view this was mass migration, proportionately five times as high as migration from England.

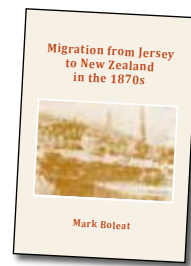
Today, many thousands of New Zealanders are descended from those immigrants.

Sir Mark Boleat's book, *Migration from Jersey to New Zealand in the 1870s*, analyses and explains this migration. It draws on a comprehensive database of migrants

compiled by Keith Vautier and other data to explain why and how the migration happened and the characteristics of the migrants.

The book concludes with a complete listing of migrants between 1872 and 1875.

A soft copy of the book is available on Mark Boleat's website [www.boleat.com](http://www.boleat.com). Hard copies can be obtained directly from the author at [mark.boleat@btinternet.com](mailto:mark.boleat@btinternet.com).



### Sources

Mark Boleat 'Augustus Philip Samson – From Jersey to New Zealand' [https://www.boleat.com/materials/augustus\\_philip\\_samson.pdf](https://www.boleat.com/materials/augustus_philip_samson.pdf)

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Jersey Heritage [www.jerseyheritage.org](http://www.jerseyheritage.org)  
The Channel Islands Family History

Society [www.jerseyfamilyhistory.org](http://www.jerseyfamilyhistory.org)

Keith Vautier [www.keithspages.com](http://www.keithspages.com)

Noel Vautier *The Breakwater Man*, 2007

Jerripedia <https://www.theislandwiki.org>

↪ Only a genealogist views a step backwards as progress. ↪

## Help Wanted!

We have a number of roles that we need to fill for the proper running of the NZSG and a few more we would like have to help us going forward.

### Returning Officers

Heather Maloney, Returning Officer and Mary Mercer, Deputy Returning Officer stepped down after the AGM. We need replacements very soon for the election of next year's Board – this process starts about now with the notice for nominations going in the December issue of *The New Zealand Genealogist* magazine. The full job description is available in the *Policies and Procedures Manual* on page 82.

Qualities that make a good Returning Officer include common sense and a pragmatic view of how to get things done within the rules. You will need to be available at key times in the NZSG Calendar. Being tech savvy with ideas of how to undertake the NZSG's democratic processes without paper would be very desirable. You will also need to be "above the fray" and maintain impartiality. It is a role that can be undertaken from anywhere in New Zealand.

Expressions of interest can be sent to Julian Pinfold, National Manager at [NZSGmanager@genealogy.org.nz](mailto:NZSGmanager@genealogy.org.nz).

### Privacy Officer

The Privacy Act 2020 came into force on 1 December 2020, replacing the Privacy Act 1993. While the Manager must have a good understanding of the principles involved,

the NZSG has traditionally had an Appointed Officer responsible for this role and is now looking for a suitable person to fill that role in the immediate future.

Duties include:

- Familiarity with the privacy principles in the Privacy Act
- Ensure that the organisation is in compliance of the Privacy Act
- Deal with any Privacy complaints
- Deal with requests for access to personal information, or correction of personal information
- Liaise with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner has online privacy training modules to help in understanding the Act itself, and the requirements for organisations.

If you are interested in taking on this role, please contact Julian Pinfold, National Manager at [NZSGManager@genealogy.org.nz](mailto:NZSGManager@genealogy.org.nz).

**Appointed Officer: Advertising Sales Co-ordinator** – your experience in advertising sales will help us place advertising in other magazines as well as find advertisers for *The New Zealand Genealogist*.

If you're interested in any of these roles, please get in touch with Sarah Hewitt at [NZSG.chair@genealogy.org.nz](mailto:NZSG.chair@genealogy.org.nz) by the end of November.