

Guernsey Surnames

By " St Sauverais "

I have been looking through an immediate pre-war copy of the Almanack of the Department of La Manche, i.e., that part of Normandy nearest to these Islands, and without by any means exhausting the list of fonctionnaires contained therein, I have counted between 70 and 80 surnames common to both that Department and Guernsey.

It is obviously impossible to list them all here, but I can give some examples taken at random - Corbin, Simon, Langlois, Collas, Tardif, Naftel, Ozanne, Mauger, Carré, Le Page, Le Patourel, Thoumine and Le Pelley. These occur in the Arrondissements of Coutances, St. Lo, Cherbourg and Avranches, our nearest neighbours on the Continent.

It may be of interest to the Bichards to know that their ancestors hailed from Jersey. It was about 1575 that, Germain and Brandeyn Bichard, sons of John, came to Guernsey and settled, the one at St. Sampson's and the other at St. Saviour's. Another brother, John, seems to have followed them to Guernsey a few years later. Later on, Brandeyn's younger son Pierre, left St. Saviour's to join his uncle Germain at St. Sampson's. Since then their descendants have spread far and wide.

The Tostevins must not be confused with the much older Toustains, who had died out long before the Tostevins ever came to Guernsey. An old deed of the middle of the 16th century describes the Tostevins as natives of Brittany, and masons by trade.

The Naftels were likewise 16th century settlers here. Up to about the year 1700, the name was generally spelt Navetel by the Guernsey folk. The Naftels came from near Mortain, in Normandy, and according to tradition they went to Scotland before making their way to Guernsey.

This is quite possible, as Scotland and France were closely allied in those days. The introduction of the potato into Guernsey is, whether true or not, the Naftel's claim to local fame.

There are a few curious instances of descendants adopting the maternal surname, in preference to the paternal. when the mother was an heiress. This custom was not known in Normandy and England in the middle ages. This occurred in the case of the Des Ysles family who, flourishing in the 14th and 15th centuries, either gave their name to or took it from the Contrée des Islets, just beyond Le Longfrie at St. Peter's.

In this case a Des Ysles married a Brehaut heiress - the Brehauts were a leading country family in those days. The eldest son, no doubt inheriting his father's house, retained the surname, but the son who inherited the mother's house took, or became known by, his mother's name. In fact, he seems to have been known by both names during his lifetime. But his children dropped Des Ysles and called themselves Brehaut..

A similar thing happened in the case of a De Vic - De L'Erée heiress marriage. There seem. to have been two lots of De L'Erées, one at St. Peter's and Torteval, and the other at St. Saviour's, all no doubt from a common source. The St. Saviour's family dwindled in numbers until one only was left - a girl. A De Vic married her and established himself on her property at St. Saviour's. This was in the latter part of the 15th or early part of the 16th century.

For some time the name of De Vic, De Vic de L'Erée and De L'Erée were used indiscriminately until the early part of the 17th century, when De Vic was dropped altogether. The De L'Erée's of St. Saviour's. died out in the 19th century. They had intermarried in the 16th and 17th centuries with the Genemyies, whose name is perpetuated to this day in Les Jenemies, near Le Mont Saint, and with the Lohiers, who gave their name to Les Lohiers, also at St. Saviour's.

These Lohiers were eventually reduced to one girl; she married a De Garis and had one daughter, Collenette de Garis, wife of Jurat John Blondel (circa 1623). The Blondels retained the estate of Les Lohiers until rather more than 200 years ago, when it passed by marriage to the De Garis family, in whose possession it remains to this day.

The name Renouf is derived from the name Rauf (Ralph). A family of that name-lived at St. Peter's in the 15th Century.

Probably the Vidamours can claim to have been in Guernsey as long as anybody else, and longer than most. They can justly be described as some of the very few original inhabitants.