

IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION

- The Flemish colonists in Wales -

The below is the property of the BBC and has as such the copyright © for it.

The article can also be viewed at:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig_emig/wales/w_sw/article_4.shtml

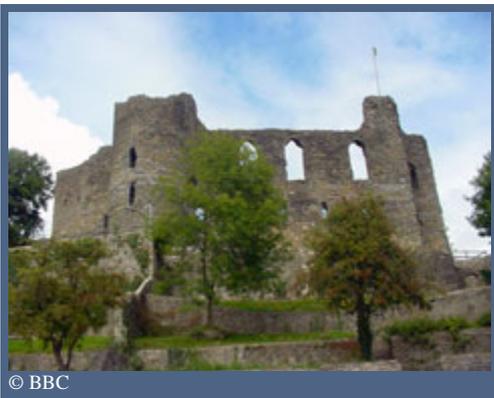
Asylum Seekers

Flanders suffered greatly after a series of storms, in 1106. Samuel Lewis wrote, "During a tremendous storm on the coast of Flanders, the sand hills and embankments were in many places carried away, and the sea inundated a large tract of country."

This led a large number of Flemings to seek asylum in England, where they were welcomed by Henry I. They settled in various colonies across England, but soon, Samuel Lewis wrote, they "became odious to the native population", and Henry I moved the Flemings to the remote farming settlement in the cantref, a district of Rhôs, in south Pembrokeshire.

This systematic planting of Flemish settlers by Henry I, and later Henry II, had significant consequences for the people of south Pembrokeshire. Geography Professor, Harold Carter looks at the effects, "If you look at the 'Brut y Tywysogyon' - the Chronicle of the Welsh Princes - it records 'a certain folk of strange origins and customs occupy the whole cantref of Rhôs the estuary of the river Cleddau, and drove away all the inhabitants of the land'. In a way you could almost call it a process of ethnic cleansing."

Fortification



A line of over 50 castles and strongholds was built by the Normans and Flemish to protect south Pembrokeshire from the indigenous Welsh, who had been forced to move to the hilly country in the north of the county. The frontier of castles, known as the Landsker line - from the Norse word for divide - stretched from Newgale on the west coast to Amroth on the south east coast.

Two thirds of the fortifications were earthworks, with stone castles on or near navigable waters. The

castle at Haverfordwest was built by the Flemish leader Tancred, soon after the Flemish arrived in 1108. Under its protection a settlement developed and the foundations were laid for a modern market town and commercial centre. The village of Wiston, five miles north-east of Haverfordwest, derived its name from another Fleming, Lord Wizo, who established a castle there, while Letterston was the settlement of the suitably nicknamed Letard Litelking ('Little King').

Tenby, on the south east coast of Pembrokeshire, grew in the 12th Century, when surrounding walls, a castle and a church were erected for the convenience of the Flemish colonists. The Flemish were experts in the woollen trade, and soon flourished in the area.

The Flemish occupied the more productive farming land in Pembrokeshire, south of the Landsker line, in the lowland areas. Here the land was fertile and warmed by the Gulf Stream, enjoying Indian

Flemish Chimney

The Flemings lend their name to a local architectural feature - the Flemish chimney, examples of which can be found in and around south Pembrokeshire. The chimneys were usually made of local limestone, and built into the front wall of the cottage close to the door. They are tall and conical, with a large round stack - sometimes big enough to fit a chair and table inside. Many chimneys remained long after the original building had been demolished. This chimney in St Florence was once part of a tiny cottage, and the line of the gable end of the original building can still be seen above the fireplace. Although these chimneys bare the name of the Flemish, there is no proof they built them, and no examples have ever been found in the Lowlands, however many examples have been found in Devon and Cornwall, so their origin remains a mystery

summers, mild winters and early springs. Crops were ready two weeks before those in the north of the county, where the terrain was more mountainous.

The Landsker line

Before the Norman Conquest, the majority of what is now Pembrokeshire would have been Welsh speaking. The Landsker line became a cultural and linguistic boundary which divided Pembrokeshire into two.

The influx of Flemings into south Pembrokeshire was so great that the Welsh language was eradicated and Flemish gradually gave way to English as the dominant language. However, it was a dialect spoken with a strong and distinctive accent and with a large vocabulary of words not commonly found elsewhere.



In 1930, P.V.Harris wrote that, "in many ways the dialect of South Pembrokeshire is the most fascinating in Britain, and owing to the country's remoteness, perhaps the least adulterated in recent years. Many of the words are pre-Chaucerian which have fallen into disuse elsewhere and some of the more familiar words still have the earlier pronunciation." Some examples of dialect words recorded by Harris in 1930 are: 'Budger' , A butcher, 'Catamouse' , the bat, 'Catchypawl' , the tadpole, 'Frost Candles' ,Icicles, and 'Sea-parrot' , the puffin.

The South Pembrokeshire Accent
The distinctive qualities of the English spoken in south Pembrokeshire was noted by George Owen in 1603 "... the most parte of the countrey speacketh Englishe and in yt noe use of the Welshe. The names of the people are mere Englishe eche familye followinge the Englishe fashion in surnames. Their buildings are Englishe like in town reddes and villages and not in severall and lone houses. Their dyett is as the Englishe people uses as the common foode is beefe ... These reasons and alsoe for that most of the anciente gentlemen came thither out of England ... might verye fittlye procure it the name of Little England beyonde Wales."



Whether it was George Owen who coined the phrase, or he was merely repeating a common term, "Little England beyond Wales" came to refer to the country south of the Landsker Line.

The divide in language and custom in Pembrokeshire that the Landsker line represented has remained until this day. Previously, intermarriage between the two cultures had been discouraged, as language wasn't the only difference. Roy Lewis, a writer from the area, comments on the religious factors, "Early in my life time there

was no intermingling of north and south. This was mainly due to religion, as those from the north were Non-conformist, and those from the south, mainly Catholic and Anglican. You didn't get involved with a 'down below'."

South Pembrokeshire has become a popular place to relocate to, from other parts of the UK. This fresh wave of people has softened the cultural divide. "They are not aware of the factions", says Roy, and

therefore have no loyalties to either side of the line, which remains an identifiable boundary between the two separate, but complementary cultures.