

Jersey cider:

THE PAPER TRAIL - FRAGMENTS OF HISTORY

Author, historian and cider maker James Crowden explores the history of cider-making in Jersey to reveal a thriving industry that ruled the economy for 200 years before the potato became king of the crops.

The midland part of this isle is somewhat high and mountainous; but the valleys under these hills are finely watered with brooks; and very pleasant being planted with fruit trees, but apple trees especially of which they make Cyder. The villages stand thick and make in all twelve parishes, which have the advantages of many fine creeks for ships.

Camden's Britannia 1695 edition

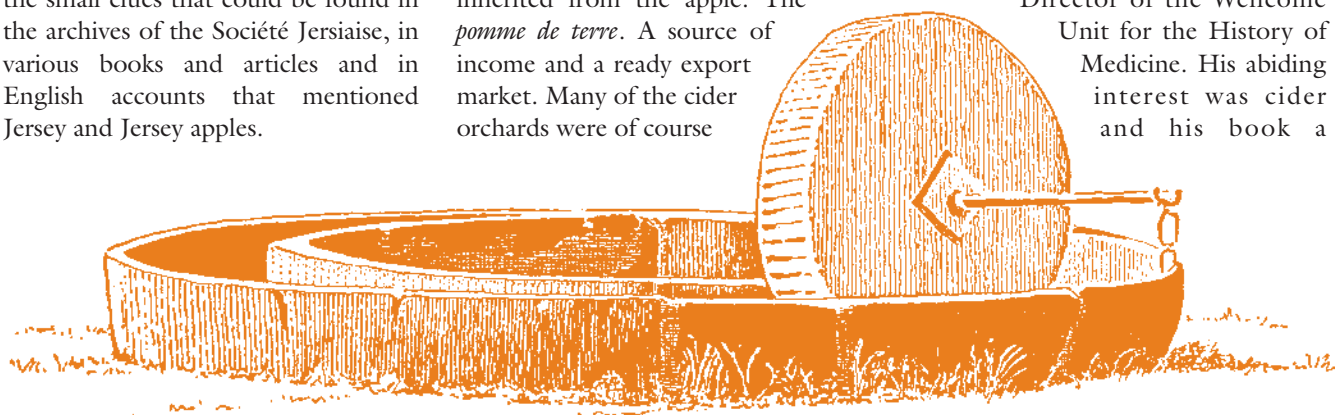
WHEN I FIRST VISITED JERSEY A few years ago I was intrigued by the history of cider in the Island. This history is not as widely known as it should be in England, and the more you delve the more interesting it gets. Today orchards are being replanted in Jersey with native varieties and there is a keen interest in growing apples, making cider again and even distilling it. But what fascinated me most were the small clues that could be found in the archives of the Société Jersiaise, in various books and articles and in English accounts that mentioned Jersey and Jersey apples.

Early records

Historical paper trails are fascinating in themselves and very quickly you can build up a picture of what cider production must have been like in Jersey, an island devoted to apples and pears as if their cultivation was a religion. And this in the days long before the Jersey Royal. Indeed it could be said that the affection for the Jersey Royal was in some measure inherited from the apple. The *pomme de terre*. A source of income and a ready export market. Many of the cider orchards were of course

grubbed up to make way for the potato and those that survived the Occupation or simply keeled over in the various storms.

First port of call for me was the excellent book on the *History and Virtues of Cyder* by Roger French, who sadly died in 2002. He was a university lecturer in the History of Medicine at Cambridge and Director of the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine. His abiding interest was cider and his book a



Drawing of a traditional cider-apple crusher



Four men working on a cider press at John Dorey's Brook Farm at Sion, St John. In his 1970 article *Pommage*, J G Speer refers to John Dorey as 'the King of cider makers and exporters in the early years of this century'.

goldmine of useful historical information. From this book I gleaned one or two references to Jersey and cider. And these come from a much earlier book, a facsimile of which luckily I possess: John Evelyn's *Pomona* published by the Royal Society in 1664.

The first reference comes from John Newburgh, who writes with authority from his residence near Bridport, a port with many connections to Jersey. Indeed Bridport was famous not only for the manufacture of nets and ropes so essential to the Channel Islands fisheries, but also for shipbuilding. Many a privateer and smuggling vessel were built here, funded by Channel Islands and West Country money.

Here in 1664 John Newburgh writes about the cider made from the pure juice that flows naturally from the cheese in the press before pressure is exerted: "In Jersey they value it a crown upon a hogshead dearer then the other".

This information he takes "from a neighbour of mine who lived in that Island which (for Apples and Cider) is one of the most famous of all belonging to his Majestie's Dominions. (His Majestie being of

course Charles II) Yet even unto this, and their choicest ciders they commonly bestow a pail of water to every hogshead, being so far (as it seems) of *Pindar's* mind that they fear not any prejudice to their most excellent *liquors* by a dash of that most excellent *Element*. In so much that it goes for a common saying amongst them, "that if any cider be found in their island which can be prov'd to have no mixture of water tis clearly forfeited." It seems that they are strongly conceited that this addition of the most useful element doth greatly meliorate their cider, both in respect of colour, taste and clarity."

Why the addition of water should be so important is not clear unless of course dilution maketh the cider go further. So adamant is this tradition that it must have a strong social and even quasi-religious function - the addition of water being a connection with the real elements. What cider makers do is add a quantity of apple juice from an already fermenting barrel to help kick-start the fermentation on its way. Water is, however, added to help the pressing of the pomace in the granite troughs, and at the beginning of the season, when apples can be unusually dry and

a bit like cardboard, moistening can certainly help then.

In Herefordshire water was added to apples that were over-ripe to slow down the fermentation. Water of course was always added to cider to bring it down in strength so that workers did not get unduly plastered. This was known as dilution and is a technique not unknown to the large industrial cider makers of today who use water on a large scale to reconstitute foreign apple concentrate in their pursuit of profit. Dilution is also a term used when paying tax to the Inland Revenue... Weak cider was often known in England as *ciderkin*, rather like small beer. Very often there were second and third pressings of apples. The *pomace* was wetted, reconstituted, allowed to rest overnight and then pressed again.

Different methods

The one thing that marks out Jersey cider as different to English cider is the fact that traditionally they leave the pomace to rest overnight for 12 hours or even 24 hours so that it becomes brown and oxidised before being pressed. This method in England, which was used in Devon and the borders with West Somerset, was known as *keeving*. This mellows out the tannins and makes the cider smoother. This process is more closely associated with Normandy techniques than English and gives the cider a lower alcohol rating but leaves a residual sweetness.

Interestingly, one or two English cider makers are starting to experiment with the process again. What happens when the *pomace* is left out in the open is that the cell walls break down, which releases more flavour. Also the juice can be left in open vessels to form the *yeasts* and small particles of *pomace* to form a thick crust before the underlying cider is siphoned off into a cask. Periodically, the juice was *racked* into another cask, that is the juice would be carefully taken off the deposit of yeasts at the bottom, the

lees. This is getting a little technical, but these traditional operations have to be respected and usually there is a good scientific reason for their use.

What is clear, however, from the Newburgh quote is that the apples and cider of Jersey are to be held in the highest esteem. No doubt this was due to climate, location and cider apple varieties. It may seem very obvious but the connections between Jersey and the English mainland were just as important in the Middle Ages as their relationship to the French mainland. The Channel Islands, and Jersey in particular, were important stepping-stones, both culturally and economically.

Medieval cross-channel trade

One or two old quotes show that Jersey was part of the diocese of Winchester by 1204. In AD1212 Jersey cyder was a source of income for Battle Abbey, and large quantities of cyder were shipped from Jersey to Winchelsea around 1270. This is, I

suspect, only the tip of the iceberg and in fact there was by then a healthy cross channel trade in cyder. There was also trade to Southampton and Poole. Wool was another key import for Jersey, for knitting and occasionally cyder went back the other way.

For instance, in the summer 1700-01, 2,905 tods of wool were sent to Jersey (for the knitting industry); In 1719 the *Pelham* of Jersey (John Orange, master) took hides, stockings and apples from Jersey to Chichester; There is also a reference in the 17th century of exports from Jersey “including fish, congers, linen cloth, knitwear & small shipments of wheat, cider and other farm produce...”

Many of the religious houses in England had connections with France, and cider apple varieties and techniques would have been passed from monk to monk, including techniques of distillation. Further research through records on the English mainland might well reveal some idea of the scale of orchard-

growing and cider-making in medieval times. Taxes and port dues are often the only records, though some monasteries kept very accurate ones.

A listing for stores for Mont Orgueil Castle in 1469 includes payments to merchants of Caen for varying amounts of cider (BSJ IX p185), and that in 1529 two-and-a-half pipes of cider were brought from Normandy. A pipe is about 110-120 gallons, i.e. two hogsheads. Cider in wooden barrels was easily transported by sea and would keep quite well if not opened. The cooper's skill was paramount and barrels would have been used many times.

The milder, maritime climate of Jersey also aided the formation of blossom in years when late frosts might have affected orchards in England. Also the greater sunshine would have led to a higher sugar level in the apples and thus a higher alcohol content, which would have meant that it kept better in barrels and could thus be transported more easily. Jersey apples were often used to add quantity and quality to cider in Dorset and Devon.

States intervention

The expansion of the cider trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to the now famous States Act of 1673, which forbade the planting of orchards except in the replacement of old ones. Trade is never in a vacuum and the upsurge in orchard-planting must have been as a direct result of concessions granted in the reign of Charles II. Cider imports were also banned from France. This then secured an effective monopoly, and every available field was planted with apple trees, or to be more precise the small field patterns that we see today in Jersey were formed out of banks and thus gave the narrow lanes their character, i.e. enclosure by any other name. This was thought to be almost complete by 1625.

Two quotes here touch upon this important change to the landscape. The first in an article by Brian J



Image by Percival Dunham taken at La Commune, Rondin, Trinity; from a collection of glass plate negatives in the Société Jersiaise Photographic Archive. Reproduced on the front page of the newspaper *Chronique de Jersey* on Wednesday 26 November 1913, it was captioned “...chez M John E Cabot...qui s'est fait une renommée dans la fabrication du cidre”.

Blench, *Some notes on the agriculture of Jersey in the 17th century*:

“The growth of enclosure in Jersey was the result of a move on the part of the farm-owners themselves – It is certain that this process...was not forced upon the people by any interested class nor was it even authorised by special legislation as in England...”. G F B de Gruchy, *Medieval Land Tenures in Jersey*.

This makes it very different to the Acts of Parliament which sanctioned enclosures on the mainland and which were often driven by the greed and economic dictates of the larger farmers, who saw enclosure as a way of grabbing the common land for themselves. Here in Jersey it appears to have been a more grassroots movement that benefited the small farmers themselves.

“This spontaneous growth makes it virtually impossible to date exactly when the enclosure of any particular field was carried out, but it seems certain that the major part of the Island was enclosed between 1550 and 1625. This is supported by the decline of the custom of “banon” during these years.”

This gradual system of enclosure is backed up by P Falle writing in 1734 in his “Caesarea – an account of Jersey” 2nd edition and he has plenty to say: *“Till the prodigious Augmentation of Enclosures, about 150 years ago, the island lay pretty much open, but when the Humour of planting seized our People they fell to inclosing for shelter and security to their fruit, Fences, Hedgerows and Highways...”*

So in a sense the desire to protect their fruit trees and their incomes was at the bottom of it. Changes in landscape are often linked to changes in agricultural methods and farming income. Hence the Jersey landscape of today reflects changes in agricultural perception and advantage that belong to the 17th century.

But there were also changes to the cider taxation, as this Order in Council shows:

“In the year 1676 there happen’d a difference touching Excise demanded

upon Cyder imported from Jersey. And it was decided by his then Majesty in Council, that the Inhabitants of those islands (being noe foreigners) ought to be as free from paying Excise for Cyder or Perey of the growth of these Islands imported into England or Wales as the Inhabitants of His Majesty’s other British Islands are or have been for Goods and Merchandises of their Growth and Manufacture imported by them into England or Wales. And therefore His Majesty by advice of his Privy Council doth order, and it is hereby ordered that henceforward his Subjects Inhabitants and Merchants of His Islands of Jersey and Guernsey, Sark and Alderney are and shall be free to import and bring into any of the Ports and places, Cities and Towns of His Majestyes Kingdom of England and Dominion of Wales Cyder and Perey of the growth and making of either of those Islands freed and exempted of all Dutyes either of Customs Excise or other impositions and c.”

Ordre du Conseil du 16 Septembre 1676 enregistré par la Cour Royale le 27 Janvier 1676-77

This was a major step forward and gave the Channel Islands a major advantage when it came to trade. Corn gave way to the apple. And at the same time the cod fisheries were starting. Cider could travel far.

In the reign of Charles II, 24,000 hogsheads were produced annually much of which was exported. This figure is probably accurate but the ratio of exports may be closer to one-third. In 1801 figures from the Rev F. Le Couteur give an overall production figure of 30,000 barrels, of which 20,000 were consumed locally and 10,000 were exported. 10,000 barrels is a vast amount of cider, over half a million gallons, or in metric nearly two and a half million litres.

Interestingly, figures for 1809-1813 average out at 24,000 hogsheads per annum but the exports were only 1,800 hogsheads, which is still a fair quantity bearing in mind that a hogshead was 54 gallons. (1,800 hogsheads = 97,200 gallons). As a

gallon of water weighs 10lbs, this equals approximately 450 tons of cider.

In 1853, 142,240 gallons of cider were exported as well as 99,700 bushels of apples. Much of this went to Devon. Figures are always slightly suspect and the production may well have been greater than that which was declared. What is not in dispute is that Jersey had cornered the trade in cider and apples to Southern England and did very well out of it for more than 200 years. Quality was always checked for export, and at times the use of lead acetate for sweetening cider and helping to preserve it was not unknown. In England the use of lead acetate gave way to lead poisoning, a disease known as Devonshire Colic. Sometimes the lead got into the cider by accident through using strips of lead to make the bed of presses and runnels watertight. The cider and cider apple juice, with its tannins, is highly corrosive and the lead got in there by accident rather than design.

The Richmond Map

The pride and joy of Jersey is of course the 1795 Richmond map that was commissioned by the Duke of Richmond and which remained secret until 1845. Jersey was in fact surveyed in 1787, but the four plates were not engraved until 1795. Because of the sensitive nature of the information, which could easily be used by the French for naval and military purposes during wartime, access was limited and the map was not made available to the public for 50 years. The real beauty of the map is not just in its draughtsmanship but also in its extraordinary attention to detail.

The main work of surveying fell to six individuals whose names are barely mentioned today. William Gardner, the chief surveyor, Thomas Cubitt, Henry Lauzan, George Pink, Thomas Yeakall and Thomas Gream. And what an achievement it was. Its real value as an historical document is that we can draw all the information we want about orchards, parish by parish.

The total area of orchard in 1795 was 9,916.5 vergées (source: Dury 1952). This is equivalent to 4,402 acres. At exactly this time the area of orchard in Dorset was 10,000 acres. Dorset is far larger than Jersey, so the density of orcharding in Jersey is second to none.

As a hypothesis, if you allow five tons to the acre of apples, this yields 22,010 tons, and this yields approximately 3,301,500 gallons, which is 61,000 hogsheads. Le Couteur gives 30,000 hogsheads, so the yield may have been only 2.5 tons to the acre, but the orchards have a biennial trait, which means that they crop heavily every other year. The peak export was in 1836, when approximately 320,000 gallons were exported, which equals 6,000 hogsheads. And as well as this about 230,000 bushels of apples were exported. The cities of England must have been dying of thirst. The export trade tailed off as potatoes took over.

The incorporation of Jersey in the names of several English cider apples is also a source of interest, but all the Somerset 'Jersey' apples are bitter sweets. Burrow Hill Jersey, Ashton Brown Jersey, Red Jersey, Broad Leaf Jersey, Early Red Jersey, Coat Jersey, Stembidge Jersey, Harry Master's Jersey, White Jersey, to name a few. But according to Liz Copas, a pomologist who used to work at Long Ashton, these bear no relationship to any apples found in Jersey today.

The apples of Jersey being mainly bitter sharps, if there was a link in cider apples it must have been a long time ago, which fits in with the history.

The word *Jaisy* is sometimes used in the Kingsbury Episcopi area of Somerset, and is an old word that means bitter in Somerset dialect. It may well be that cider apples were grown from gribbles that grew up out of the pomace after Jersey apples were crushed. It may also simply be that the suffix 'Jersey' was added to give the apple variety a degree of credibility and quality.



Part of the 18th century Richmond Map, showing the extent of orchards and enclosures in St Lawrence around what is now Hamptonne Museum.

Some excerpts from English papers show that Jersey cider was often advertised for sale:

Salisbury and Winchester Journal
Monday, June 21st, 1813
CYDER.

For Sale, - A small Quantity of good Cyder, from Jersey. The Owner to be spoke with at **Mr John Waterman's**, Poole.

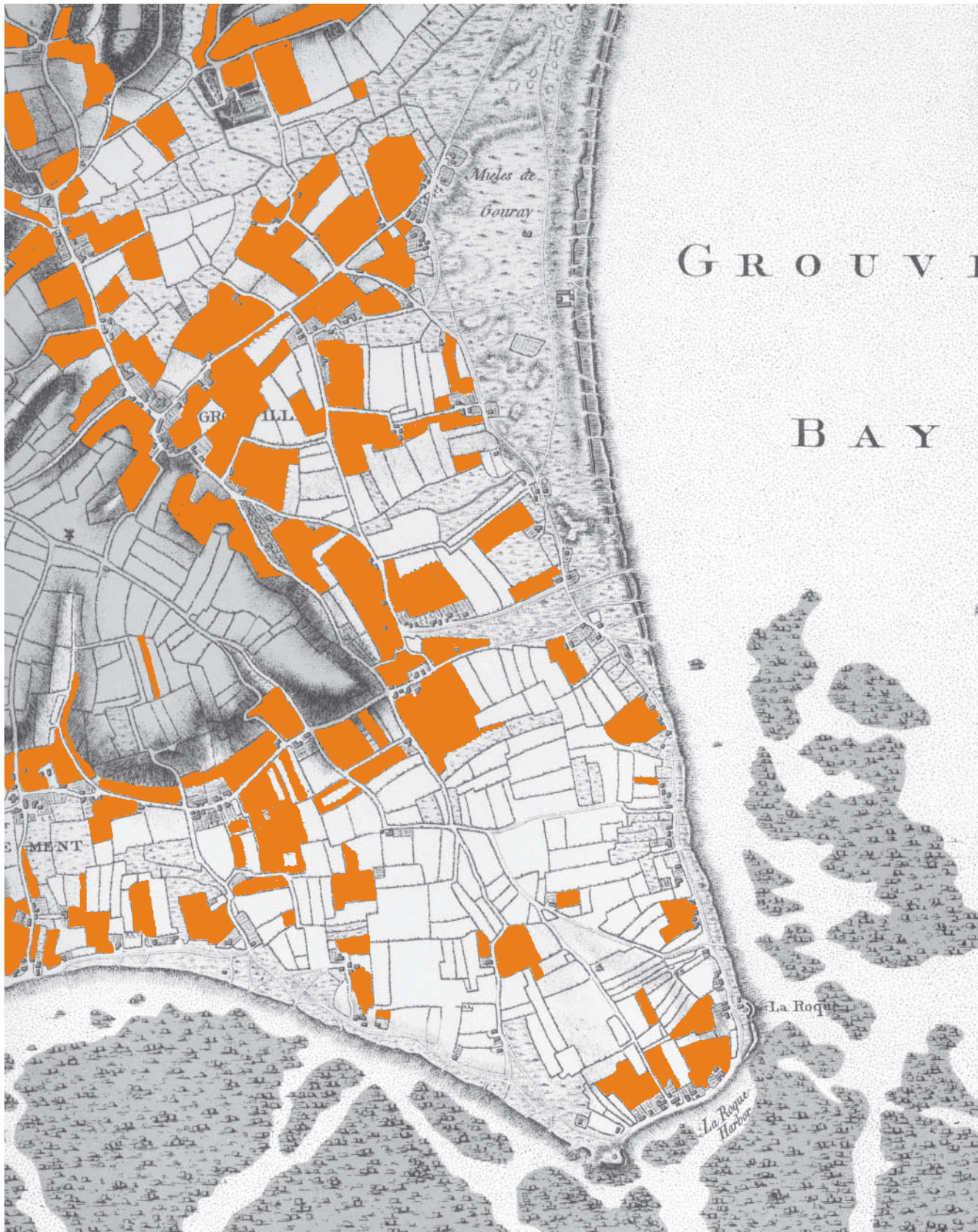
These notes and interpretations are only a brief survey, and the key is being able to unearth more information in port records, monastic records, taxes and dues in England as well as in Jersey. The history of Jersey cider is therefore very rich and worthy of further investigation. If you are curious, delve into the Lord Coutanche Library at the Société Jersiaise, or the Jersey Archive.

James Crowden has led poetry workshops for schools and adults and given talks at **Hamptonne on apples and cider**. His books include *Cider: The Forgotten Miracle* and most recently *Dorset Man*.

See www.james-crowden.co.uk



The Duke of Richmond Map, detail showing that even residents of the town grew apples in the 18th century



The Duke of Richmond Map, detail showing the extent of apple cultivation in the Southeast.