

The Couer Chouan – the symbol of the 'loyalist' clergy

# ‘Le séjour le plus charmant qu’on puisse désirer.’

Jean-Pierre Fleury’s account of his exile in Jersey 1792-7

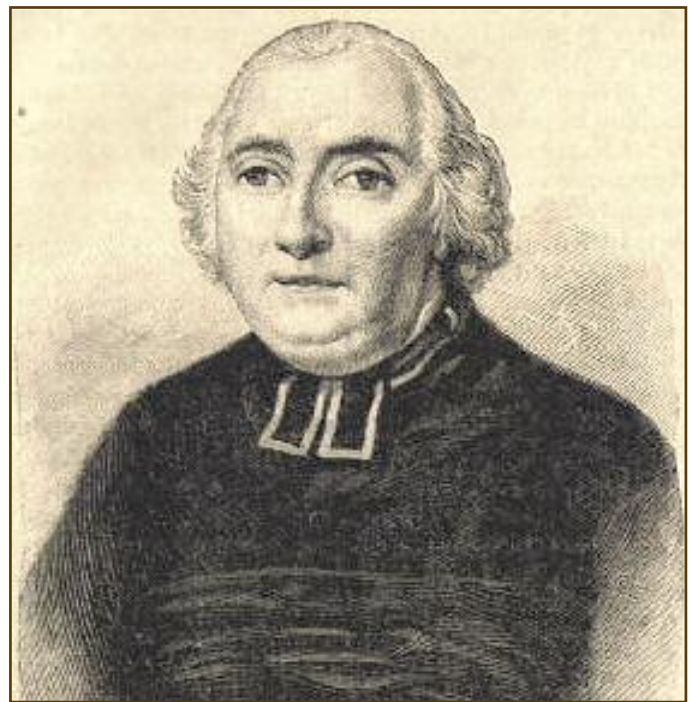
While researching her new biography of the spy-master, Philippe d’Auvergne, **Jane Edwards** came across a fascinating account of life in the island in the 1790s written by a refugee French émigré priest. Here she tells his story.

The violent turmoil that accompanied the French Revolution culminated in 1793 in the year long Reign of Terror when between 18,000 and 40,000 people were arrested, tried and executed throughout France. In 1792 over a thousand families from the noblesse of Brittany, Normandy and Poitou, sought refuge in Jersey. By the beginning of 1793 they had been joined by 2,200 priests and three bishops. The reason for their flight was the decision taken by the National Assembly to subject the Roman Catholic Church to the same radical re-organisation and democratisation as the civil government. Church lands were taken over by the State, which was then given sole responsibility for the payment of the clergy’s stipends; bishops had to be elected by their diocese and priests by their parishes.

When many clergy expressed their deep unhappiness with this attempt to strip the Church of its power, the National Assembly retaliated by insisting that all clergy must take an oath of loyalty to the new Constitution. When half refused to comply they were immediately relieved of their churches and ‘loyal’ priests were installed in their place. However the unrest continued as the rebellious, excluded priests conducted open-air Masses for their faithful congregations. In August 1792 the Assembly stated that anyone who refused to take the oath would be expelled from France. Compulsory deportation meant that the clergy became ‘Victims of every kind of violence, they had as their sole possessions the garments in which they stood up in and their breviaries. At the final moment of departure they were searched, the few remaining coins they had with them confiscated and derisively replaced with worthless assignats’.<sup>1</sup>

For the staunchly Protestant island of Jersey (the population at this time was approximately 36,000) this sudden influx of émigrés was an alarming development. The British Government granted substantial amounts of money for ‘the relief of the suffering clergy and laity’ who had fled to England and a similar scheme, called the *Comité de Secours* was set up in Jersey. Over a period of eight years a total of £122,031 was distributed to the laity by Philip d’Auvergne from a room he rented in St Helier.<sup>2</sup> The Bishop of Bayeux and the Bishop of Tréguier were in charge of distributing the monthly sum of seventy-two livres to each priest. Providing adequate accommodation for so many people and taking responsibility for their welfare placed a very heavy burden on the island’s resources as well as posing a substantial risk to security. The very visible presence of the French priests in their distinctive broad-brimmed hats and black cassocks ‘symbolised French power which could disturb the political security

and religious orthodoxy of the island’.<sup>3</sup> A curfew was imposed on all émigrés who had to remain in their houses between nine o’clock in the evening and five in the morning unless they had a special licence from the Lieutenant-Governor. Although the clergy could not hold services in public or actively seek to convert Islanders to Roman Catholicism they were allowed to conduct services in four private chapels in St Helier - the oratories of Saint-Malo, Saint-Louis, Saints-Anges and Sacré-Coeur<sup>4</sup>.



Abbé Carron de la Carrière (1760-1821)

<sup>1</sup> *The French Exiles 1789-1815* Margery Weiner, John Murray, 1960, p.16

<sup>2</sup> *The Letter Book of the Philip d’Auvergne, Duc de Bouillon*, Société Jersiaise Library, a letter written in 1802

<sup>3</sup> *The French exiled clergy in the British Isles after 1789*, Dominic Aidan Bellenger, Downside Abbey, 1986, p.9

<sup>4</sup> *Les familles Françaises à Jersey pendant la Révolution*, Comte de l’Estourbeillon, Nantes 1886, p.8

For the existence of other oratories in the island see *Deo Gratias. The French Catholic Church in Jersey 1790-2007*, Dianne Moore, Les Amities Franco-Britanniques, 2007

By March 1797 the number of priests in Jersey had reduced to 268, of which 22 were from the diocese of Le Mans in Northern France. Jean-Pierre Fleury (1758-1832) was a member of this group, he was a parish priest who wrote a remarkable account of his experience of the French Revolution and his years in exile, *Memoirs sur la Révolution, le Premier Empire et les premières années de la Restauration*. It was edited by Dom Piolin and published in Le Mans in 1871.

Fleury's group had made the journey from Brittany to Jersey in 1792, a violent storm had meant that the crossing had taken three days and when they finally arrived in St Helier they were starving and exhausted. A priest who had been on the Island for a week explained that the best accommodation would be found not in the overcrowded town but in the country, where they would be amazed by the quality of the lifestyle of the inhabitants. Unlike France where the peasants live in mean huts and shacks, *'les paysans de ce pays sont de riches bourgeois qui occupent des maisons plus belles que le plupart de nos châteaux'*. He suggested they put their belongings in a cart and try a house he had heard of in Grouville.

Setting off in the rain Fleury was immediately struck by the quality of the roads with pavements on either side for pedestrians and a path in the middle for horsemen and carriages. After an hour's walk they arrived in what is now La Rue Mathurin and saw *'Une maison magnifique de plus de cent pieds de long, nouvellement bâtie en pierres de taille, environnée de jardins, de vergers, prairies, et de terres labourables dont le fonds étoit excellent; ils étoient tous remplis de pomiers. Il y avoit, à l'entrée, une belle cour ou passoit un courant d'eau*

*considérable, et une fontaine séparée'* - a magnificent house more than a hundred feet long, recently built in dressed stone, surrounded by gardens, orchards, fields and cultivable land of excellent quality; they were full of apple trees. At the entrance was a fine courtyard through which a sizeable stream flowed, and a separate well.

The house, now called Springvale, is a late 18th century 2-storey, 5-bay granite building with an adjoining dower wing of pink granite; the initials on the date stones JP MV V<sup>5</sup> are those of Jean and Marie Vivian Payn. The Payns farmed a total of 46 vergées of land and were married in 1775; a daughter Marie was born the next year. Fleury had immediately assumed that Marie, in her dirty working clothes, was a servant and her husband, who was sitting by the fireplace wiping his nose on his sleeve, was the stable boy. When he asked his companions who they were he was amused to hear that they were the 'maîtres de maison'. Marie explained that she had to milk the cows before the light faded, but when she returned she would give them something to eat. When she asked them what they would like, one of the group replied that they would make some soup if she could provide them with onions and butter. 'Une grande casserole' full of water, salt, pepper, onions and butter then appeared, and when it was ready Marie placed it on a table in the middle of the kitchen. Although there was no table linen, they were given small spoons and some rather crude forks made from two bits of sharpened iron hammered into a piece of wood. When the soup was finished they were served with an omelette made from eighteen eggs, it was accompanied by plenty of butter, bread made from wheat and barley, and undiluted cider.

<sup>5</sup>For description of the date stones see *Register of Historic Buildings, States of Jersey* also *The Jersey Date stones Register, Société Jersiaise*

#### Springvale





One of the datestones

Fleury's description of the decoration and furnishings of the house is typical of a Jersey farmhouse of this date. The main room was *'une belle salle appelée le grand parloir, plafonnée et boisée partout'*. *'Plafonnée'* suggests that it had a plaster ceiling rather than a wooden beamed one, *'boisée partout'* means that pine paneling covered the walls; it was usual to have fielded panels with more elaborate pilasters and moulding round the fireplace. The kitchen was *'très propre'* and was furnished with a *'dresseoir'* (a wooden dresser), its shelves, *'garni de faïence'* (filled with glazed earthenware). A distinction is made in Jersey inventories between plates and other items made from expensive china described as porcelain and the faïence which would have been for everyday use. China was often displayed in a corner cupboard in the parlour. The open fireplace in the kitchen would have been dominated by an iron swinging bracket with adjustable hangers for supporting the cooking-pot and the kettle over the fire.

The family ate in *'un petit refectoire'* (a small dining room), Fleury tells us that they usually ate *'soupe au lard'* or meat with cabbage, potatoes, parsnips and carrots. On one side of this room there was *'un petit salon garni d'un buffet'* (a type of sideboard) and a fireplace for *'charbon de terre'*. Beyond this room there was *'un chais spacieux qui contenoit le pressoir et tous les tonneaux'*, a spacious storeroom with a cider press and all the barrels.

The interior of this house remained largely unchanged until 1973 when extensive repairs were undertaken. In her book *Jersey Houses* Joan Stevens<sup>6</sup> describes *'how some stone fireplaces were found, of the simple undecorated style which were perhaps never meant to be uncovered. Some nice 18th-century panelling in the west ground floor room was removed in order to expose the stonework. There was a dado rail all round the room, and the window surrounds, shutters and sashes were all contemporary, as indeed were two other windows on the first floor. The partitions in the hall were of clapboarding and it is surprising that they are not of stone in such a superior house'. The design of partitions in Jersey houses followed 'one general style known to carpenters as 'chachais Chanseau', that is to*

*say, panelled with one thick plank and one thin plank, usually one inch and half inch thick respectively'*.<sup>7</sup> The surface of the partitioning and the panelling was usually painted, pale green was a popular colour.

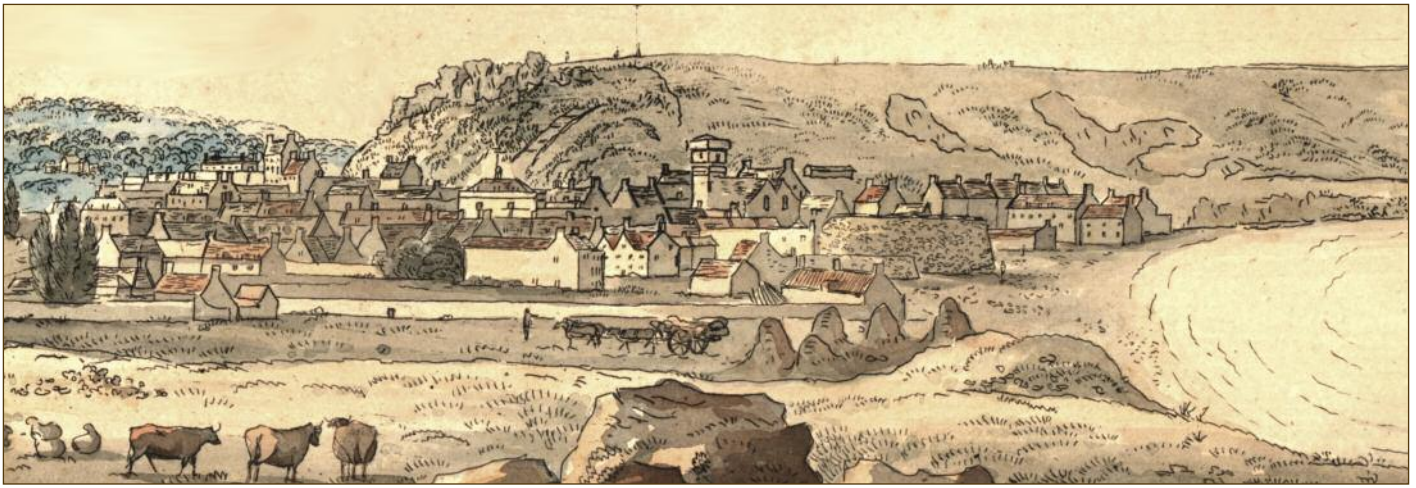
The front door is described by Joan Stevens as having *'some bottle glass in the lights above it, has six panels and is exceptionally wide, measuring 49in.....The addition to the east, perhaps a dower wing, has casement windows....The stairs, later removed, had stick balusters and a heavy newel post, but a flat-topped handrail'*. On the first floor Fleury was shown four large bedrooms and *'deux cabinets; aeres par dix croisees'* which suggests that there were older style casement windows as well as sash windows on the first floor. According to the *Register Of Historic Buildings*: *'The window openings to the first and second floor are of the proportions for 12-pane sash windows. Much of the joinery work for the windows survives although it appears that the glazing bars have been (historically) removed, and all glass was lost during the 2005 fire.'* A *'superbe grenier'* ran across the entire length of the main house and the dower wing.

In the morning Fleury and his companions went down to the *'petit parloir'* where they found the table was set with bread, fresh butter, fruit and cider. Keen to come to an agreement with Madame Payn over the terms of their stay in the house Fleury went to speak to her and was surprised to see that she was drinking tea, *'on le boit régulièrement, le matin et le soir, dans toute l'Angleterre; elle m'en présenta une tasse.'*<sup>8</sup> Marie told him that they could have two large bedrooms and one smaller one, they could eat in the *'le petit parloir'* and store their provisions there and she would provide them with all the necessary utensils and equipment for cooking.

<sup>6</sup> *Jersey Houses Vol.2*, Joan Stevens, Phillimore, 1977, p.195

<sup>7</sup> *The Jersey Kitchen. La Tchuisinne Jersiaise*, George Knocker, *Bulletin Société Jersiaise* Vol.XII, 1932, p.21

<sup>8</sup> Tea would have been the most expensive item in the household budget costing between 7s.6d and 16s. per pound.



St Helier from the West about 1790 by George Heriot.

Each week she would provide them with two pounds of fresh butter for thirty sous (the sous was a copper coin, two were the equivalent of the British penny), a pot of milk for four sous, three sous for cider (the same price as the newspaper *Gazette de Jersey*) and they could take any vegetables they wanted from the garden. In addition they could borrow the Payn's horse so they could go to the market in St Helier on Saturday and buy any extra provisions they needed. Marie also offered to do their washing for them when she did her own. The charge for the accommodation and these extras was six livres a month, payable in advance, making a total for the group of 36 livres (24 livres were the equivalent of the British pound). Fleury immediately accepted these 'très-avantageuses' terms on behalf of his companions.

The trip into town on market-day must have been the highlight of the week for the priests, as it gave them the opportunity to exchange news and information with other émigrés, Fleury describes the Market Place as '*une superbe place au milieu de laquelle est la statue de Georges III*', according to an eye-witness account it was full of 'émigrants of every degree bargaining for such provisions as their allowance would permit them to buy...The laity of all ranks wear a white cockade in their hats, and the clergy a white ribbon through the two button holes'.<sup>9</sup> As well as buying provisions they could purchase luxuries like tobacco and wine. Fleury was impressed by the stock held by the local wine merchants, despite the war with France, he found that Bordeaux wines were available for 12 sous a bottle, le vin de Porto, blanc for 13, red for 18 and Malaga twenty-four sols. There was also plenty of meat, imported Irish beef cost 18 sols a pound, veal was 20 sols, lamb and chicken were about three livres.

The clergy were closely involved with the provision of education for the children of the émigrés. One of the most outstanding priests involved in this area was the Abbé Carron de la Carrière from Rennes who was imprisoned and deported from France at the same time as Fleury, he immediately resumed the work in Jersey for which he had become distinguished in France, establishing a school for orphan children, a pharmacy and a public library which would give the clergy the means '*de s'occuper des devoirs de leur état*'. In 1796 he left Jersey for London and continued with his work there creating many innovative educational and social institutions including a *Chambre de la Providence*, a repository to which people could bring unwanted articles of linen and clothing which could then be re-distributed, a hospice for aged and infirm clergy, and a maternity hospital.

Fleury had immediately felt a rapport with Marie Payn, and as he got to know her better he appreciated her honesty, integrity and capacity for hard work. He was also very impressed by Jersey, whether it be the climate, the organisation of the Militia, or the

democratic and efficient way the Island was governed. The method of voting members into the States, and the way in which the Constables kept '*la paix et la tranquillite*' in their parishes are singled out for particular praise. Many pages are devoted to his conversations about theology and the relative values of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism with Jean Hooper, the Constable of Grouville whose son, Thomas, was the Payn's son-in-law (he had married their daughter in 1794). Despite the fact that '*le seul commerce est le cidre*' Fleury saw very little drunkenness in the Island and found that '*les moeurs de la jeunesse étoient pures*' with the consequence that there were fewer illegitimate children born in Jersey than in France. The strong work ethic that motivated the Payn family could be found throughout the island, '*Tout le monde travaille*' but on Sunday, Marie and her daughter exchanged their old work clothes for ones made from silk.

The convivial atmosphere and enjoyable lifestyle of the Payn's house came to an abrupt end at the end of August 1797 when the clergy were told they had to leave Jersey immediately. The order came from Major General Andrew Gordon, the new Lieutenant Governor; Fleury believed it was made because Gordon had an all-consuming hatred of the French, '*une haine inveterée contre les François*'. He does not mention in his account, perhaps he did not know, that their removal was a direct consequence of the renewal of the Aliens Act in the UK in 1796. With the ever-present threat of a French invasion it was decided to move clergy who were living in English coastal areas further inland and transfer those in the Channel Islands to London, the north of England and Winchester.

Fleury and his group were given a guinea each for the journey to Southampton and arrived in London on 11 September. Good fortune continued to come Fleury's way as he soon met a young priest from his old diocese who spoke excellent English and helped him find accommodation. In 1801 a Concordat between the Pope and Napoleon re-established the Roman Catholic Church in France and some clergy felt that they were able to return, but a sizeable number remained in England until Napoleon abdicated in 1814 and Louis XVIII was proclaimed King. Fleury was one of them, he could not forgive his country for executing '*le meilleur des monarques*' and replacing him with '*un Robespierre, un Directoire enfin un Corse*'.

<sup>9</sup> Account of visit of Sir William Taylor Money to Jersey, Bulletin Société Jersiaise, Vol.XII.

Jane Edwards, a freelance writer and researcher, was commissioned by Jersey Heritage to write a new biography of Philippe d'Auvergne, Prince de Bouillon to be published later this year. Her previous publications, written under her maiden name of Ashelford, include *The Art of Dress, Clothes and Society 1500-1914*, *The National Trust and Royal Journeys, Victoria and Albert in the Channel Islands*, JAB Publishing.