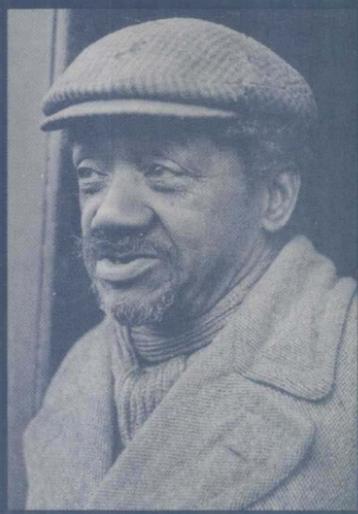
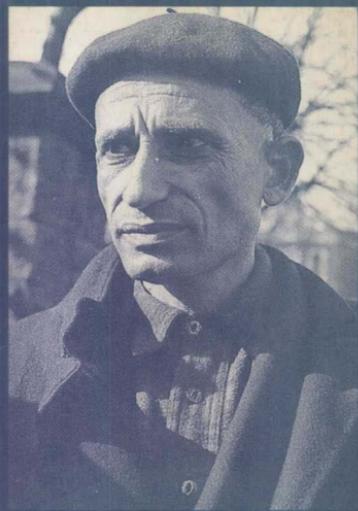


JOHN BULL'S ISLAND

Immigration &
British Society,
1871-1971

COLIN HOLMES



JOHN BULL'S ISLAND
Immigration and British
Society,
1871-1971

Colin Holmes

M
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EDUCATION

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Preface

THIS book is a survey of immigration into Britain between 1871 and 1971, or rather a consideration of a number of salient developments during the hundred years which culminated in the important Immigration Act of 1971. The three main themes which come under discussion are: which immigrant and refugee groups came to Britain during these years and why did they come? What were the major distinguishing features of the economic and social history of such groups? How were these newcomers received by British society? These themes are separated for the purpose of analysis and discussion. However, interlinkages are recognised and ideally chapters need to be read in whole rather than in part. My emphasis throughout is upon the first generation: a history of the descendants of immigrants and refugees would require another and different book.

Soon after I began the research it became clear that there were significant gaps in existing information and knowledge. I have tried to fill some of these and indicated other areas where additional work is still required. In doing so, I concluded my collection of material in February 1986. In a wide-ranging survey of this kind a clear cut-off point is particularly essential. Some unpublished work which I saw, or knew of, has been printed subsequently and this point is recognised in the notes. It is also worth emphasising at this point that my focus is that of the historian, albeit one who is prepared to search beyond conventional sources for information and illumination. No attempt is made to compete with the specialised work of migration theorists or the models of sociologists.

In producing the book I have benefited from the help and advice of a number of friends and colleagues, several of whom deserve special mention. David Mayall, whose forthcoming monograph on gypsies in Britain is awaited with interest, read some of my work. So did Kenny Lunn, who provided me with particular guidance on labour and immigration. I am also grateful to Panikos Panayi who is currently extending our knowledge of Germans in Britain during the Great War. Tony Kushner, now the Parkes Fellow at Southampton

University, who is a rich source of information on recent anti-Semitism in Britain, was particularly helpful and generous in pointing me in the direction of sources which related to the Second World War. Tom Gallagher was kind enough to loan material from his collection. Vic Gilbert, vigilant as ever, kept his eyes open for useful source material and I am also grateful to him for compiling the index. Alan Booth commented on recent aspects of British economic history. I benefited also from Michael Banton's reading of 'the post-war years' and the conclusion and from Vaughan Bevan's 'tutorials' on immigration law. Finally, I am particularly indebted to Victor Kiernan, who read the whole of the typescript and, drawing upon his wide knowledge, made a number of valuable suggestions. The full responsibility for the book, however, is mine alone.

I incurred a number of additional debts in the course of my research. In particular, I need to thank members of staff in the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, the British Library, the British Library of Political and Economic Science, Colindale Newspaper Library, the County Library in Nottingham, Hull University Library, the Imperial War Museum, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, the Manchester Jewish Museum, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, the Public Record Office, Sheffield City Library, Sheffield University Library and the Wiener Library. It is also a pleasure to recall a particularly memorable visit to Southall with Manjit Dhesi and her father Sohan Dhesi. Pam Smith, who typed the whole of the manuscript, quickly and efficiently, deserves special thanks. Macmillan waited with great patience for the typescript, and I am grateful to Vanessa Couchman's understanding in this respect. The Nuffield Foundation provided the funds, without which the research could not have been completed.

Finally, my deep personal thanks go to Joyce Holmes and Rachel Holmes who lived with this book for far too long and did so with understanding, good humour and patience.

Colin Holmes

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PART ONE

Introduction

'England with all the follies of feudalism and toryism which are peculiar to it is the only country to live in', Alexander Herzen to Karl Vogt, quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles* (London, 1933), p. 135.

"Have you ever heard", said Jonah, "of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Alien Enemies?"

Adèle shook her head.

"I think you must have", said Jonah, "some people call it the British nation.", Dornford Yates, *Berry and Co* (London, 1920), p. 226.

1.

'WHEREVER homo sapiens made his first and on the whole regrettable appearance, it was not in Britain: all our ancestral stocks came from somewhere else'.¹ Indeed, 'The British are clearly among the most ethnically composite of the Europeans'.² Even so, there has been some reluctance to recognise this fact. The English, particularly, have long taken a deluded pride in their valorous ancestry, whose virtues were far more pleasing than those of the mongrel breed satirised in 1701 by Daniel Defoe in *The True-Born Englishman*.³ However, it would be difficult to locate an epoch when some immigration did not take place.

But who needs to be considered when examining this process of inward movement? At the moment the term 'immigrant' has been given a precise definition in official statistics. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in its calculations of movement into the United Kingdom, has adopted the international statistical definition which categorises an immigrant as any person who, having resided abroad for a year, has declared an intention on entry of staying for a

minimum period of one year. However, the OPCS has stressed that this categorisation does not correspond with any current legal definition.⁴ Outside official sources the term has been used in a variety of ways, and, with a frightening elasticity, it has even been stretched to include those children born in Britain to immigrant parents.⁵

Viewed from an historical perspective, immigration between 1871 and 1971 involved some groups which arrived in Britain in order to find work on a temporary basis. The Irish minority contained many such sojourners into the twentieth century. Student sojourners of various nationalities also arrived. Other groups, such as the West Indians who came after the Second World War, intended a lengthier if not in every case permanent period in Britain in their search for work and subsequent self-improvement. Both groups, the sojourners of varying duration and those newcomers who settled permanently, are deserving of attention. Indeed, a wide range of people who for economic, social or cultural reasons, or a combination of these, took a decision to leave their native countries with the intention of staying temporarily or permanently in Britain require consideration. In addition, Britain witnessed over many years the arrival of refugees such as those who came in the 1930s from Nazi Germany in search of a base, temporary or permanent, from political, religious or racial persecution, or a mixture of such pressures.⁶

It should not be assumed, however, that groups were always susceptible to an easy categorisation or that a predictable future awaited them. At times, for example, governments were faced with dilemmas over what constituted a refugee.⁷ Moreover, a mixture of personal and impersonal forces meant that over the course of time some sojourners became reconciled to a longer stay. Furthermore, the hopes of refugees were often dashed; there was seldom a quick return home.⁸ In a neat reversal of the poet's strain it has been remarked that 'Many corners of English graveyards are for ever Poland, Italy or Spain'.⁹ The graves contained in such spots are the cold, sombre reminders of a continual complex historical movement with its special mixture of human hopes, aspirations and disappointments.

2.

WHAT evidence is there of the presence of immigrants and refugees before 1871? Which groups were involved in the process of

immigration? The movement of population into what is now called Britain stretched back towards the beginnings of recorded history, after the area became physically separated from the rest of Europe. In the ancient world, after this separation had occurred, the Roman invasion resulted in an army of occupation, visible signs of whose presence continue to attract interest in remote Northumbria around Hadrian's Wall, in Bath and elsewhere. But the invasion also brought in other Roman citizens even if numbers were not large. These 'heterogeneous outsiders' included traders and other colonists 'and, probably most numerous, soldiers from anywhere in the empire who settled after their years of service, with citizen status'.¹⁰ As the wheel of history continued to turn, the later Saxon and Viking invasions introduced other cultural influences and, later still, the population which survived the Norman invasion in 1066 was soon to encounter a motley band of military and trading groups who came in the wake of the Conqueror.

Invasion was evidently a major influence in bringing about a mixture of peoples. After the Conquest in 1066, however, invaders became essentially a feature of the past. 'Immigration from now on was a matter of peaceful entry' by individuals or groups who had to find ways of fitting into a more or less orderly society under unified control.¹¹ In the medieval epoch newcomers arrived in the shape of Flemish clerks, Jewish financiers and traders and Lombards from Northern Italy, who also engaged in finance. Hanseatic merchants from north Germany, whose activities centred on their London depot, the so-called Steelyard near Blackfriars, constituted another powerful group of newcomers. In addition, craftsmen came from Flanders to work in the woollen industry, particularly in East Anglia; Germans, who had a reputation for mining expertise, could be found working in the silver and lead mines in the Lake District; Frenchmen worked in the early iron industry; Hollanders came to make salt, brew beer and develop the linen industry.¹²

The success of some of these groups, or individuals within their ranks, at times generated forms of xenophobia and resentment within the settled population. In 1290, for example, at a time when he was short of funds, Edward I exploited resentment against the Jewish community and proceeded to order the expulsion of Jews from his kingdom, once he had confiscated their bonds and personal possessions.¹³ Much later, the Hanseatic merchants also came under attack. The association lost its special advantages in 1576 and 1579,

and finally in 1589 the Steelyard came to an end.¹⁴ The likes of George Gisze, from Danzig, captured for posterity by Hans Holbein in 'The Merchant of the Steelyard', were to be no more. Such hostility, directed against Jews and the Hanseatic merchants, constituted the tip of a more persistent friction.¹⁵

From the sixteenth century to the demonic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution newcomers with diverse origins continued to arrive. Gypsies, who told enquirers that they had originated in Egypt, appeared in increasing numbers throughout the land, and although they did not pose an economic threat to the settled population they were persistently regarded with great suspicion if they showed signs of transcending their function as entertainers.¹⁶ In addition, in the following century, there were increasing references to the presence of Africans, whose history in Britain can be traced back at least as far as the Roman occupation.¹⁷ Although in the sixteenth century the Black population – the term is used throughout to denote only those of African or Afro-Caribbean origin – was numbered only in the hundreds, it did give rise to some official concern, which was reflected in 1596 when the government wrote to the local officials in London and other towns indicating that there were too many 'blackamoors' being introduced into the kingdom.¹⁸ Following this, in 1601 a proclamation ordered their expulsion, although like the earlier attempt to expel the Jews in 1290, it could not be enforced absolutely.¹⁹

Apart from the arrival of gypsies and Africans, other groups of newcomers arrived in the early modern epoch. Italians 'first came to prominence (in Scotland) in the wake of the Renaissance in the sixteenth century' and were employed by James IV and VI to entertain the court at Holyrood House.²⁰ Among other groups to arrive were the Huguenots, Protestants from France, who were driven abroad after the death of Henry II in 1559 plunged France into more than 30 years of disruption and civil war. Protestants in the Spanish Netherlands also suffered at the hands of Catholic oppression and the repressive rule introduced by the Duke of Alva in 1567 produced its own flow of refugees. But the event most commonly associated with the tribulations of the Protestant minority, was the massacre in Paris on St Bartholomew's Day, on 24 August 1572, which caused a large number of refugees to scurry for shelter, some of whom fled to the eastern counties of England where their impact became particularly marked in towns such as Colchester.²¹

Many newcomers in the early modern epoch settled in the urban centres. But not all were to be found there. Germans engaged in the mining industry could still be spotted in remote parts of England. Furthermore, the influence of newcomers from the Netherlands was especially evident in the English countryside in the early years of the seventeenth century. On account of the experience they had gained in their native environment they were particularly adept in the management of water and one of their most distinctive contributions to the countryside was made by Cornelius Vermuyden who drained the Isle of Axholme in the 1620s.²²

The seventeenth century witnessed other important developments. In 1656, after many years in exile, it was proposed that Jews should be readmitted for settlement in England and they were officially recognised as a community in 1664.²³ Shortly afterwards, Louis XIV's 'atavistic proscription of the Huguenots', through the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, resulted in an addition to the French Protestant families who had arrived in the previous century.²⁴ Many of these later arrivals came from northern France, from Normandy and Brittany, and a fair proportion of the gentry among them settled down in Ireland after taking their revenge on the Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. But others stayed in England and for them London was the great attraction, as it was for a large number of other newcomers. Once they were settled, the Huguenots developed the silk industry in Spitalfields, where names such as Fournier Street and houses on Princelet Street still bear testimony to a French presence. Apart from their skill in the silk trade they displayed a particular expertise in a number of crafts such as the making of clocks and instruments. On the whole, in fact, they were an important influence on the increasing commercialisation of society. 'Numbers of Huguenots from the middling ranks', we have been told, 'worked their way to solid professional or commercial positions and founded middle class families of good standing; in addition, not a few of them shone as merchants or financiers among the luminaries of the City'.²⁵ But their contribution to society went beyond the fundamental level of getting and spending. They also set up their own schools and made a distinctive impact on the world of scholarship. Within a Protestant country, in the course of building new lives, they were also able to pursue their religion without fear of reprisal.²⁶ A striking reminder that they did, can be found in the quiet of Winchester Cathedral in the memorial to Jean Serres, formerly of