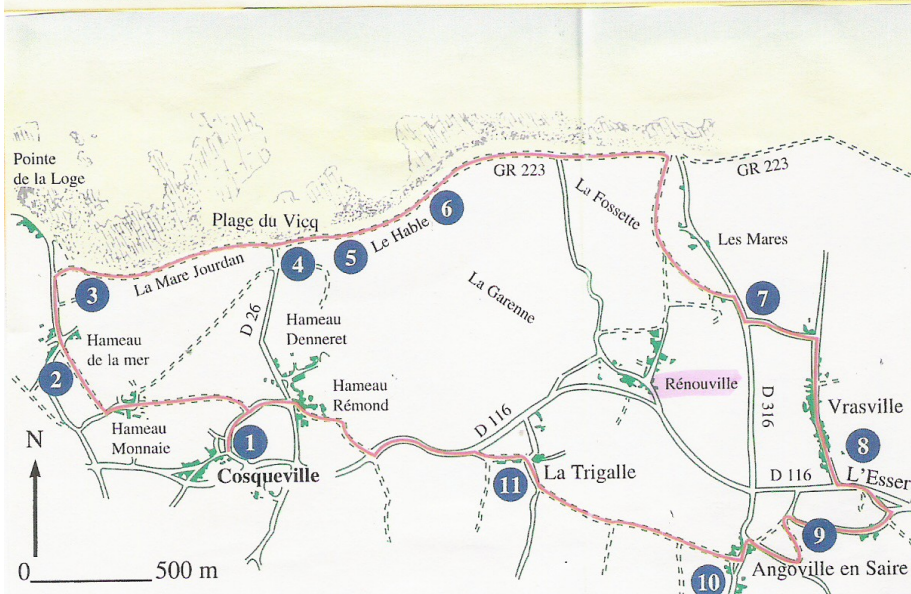
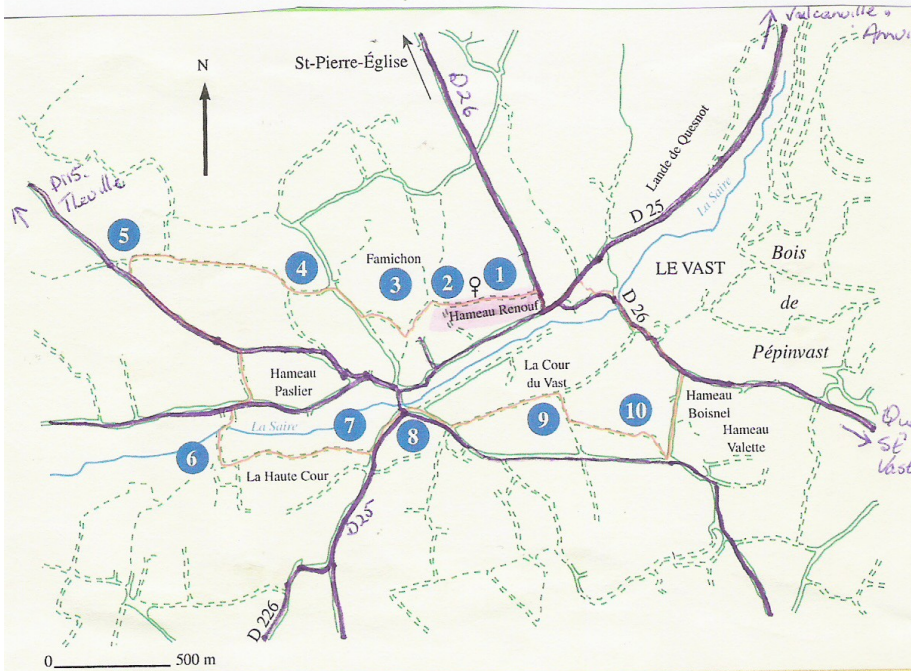
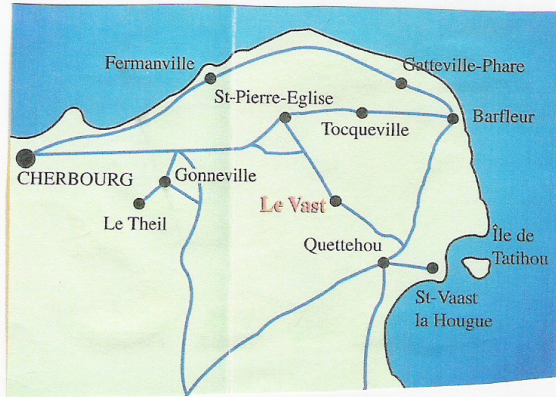


The Normandy Connection

Cotentin Peninsula
of Normandy

Vast - Renouf
Hamlet
squeville - Renouville



RENOUF OF NORMANDY

While there are no cantons or communes in Normandy named for the Renoufs, I came upon a tiny hamlet, with four or five small farms, called Renouville, meaning the lands owned by Renou, on a visit to the Cotentin in September 2007. It was located between Cosqueville and Vrasville, on the coastal fringe of the north east Cotentin, about 5 kilometers from St. Pierre Eglise and 8 kilometers north of the harbour town of Barfleur, from whence the Vikings sailed for England in 1066.

I found, also, another tiny hamlet called Renouf located near Le Vast; a small village in the middle of the north east lobe of the Cotentin, within the wooded valley of the River Saire. Once in a densely forested area, now it is a place where cereals and other crops are grown. This village is some six kilometers south of St. Pierre Eglise and about seven kilometers upstream from Annville en Saire, a coastal village with known feudal ties to Guernsey*1.

Subsequently, I located another hamlet called Renouf near to Orglandes some thirty five kilometers south of St. Pierre Eglise which was the site of a protracted battle between the Americans and Germans in June 1944 at a critical stage in the battle for Cherbourg.

Finding these hamlets aroused my curiosity about the history of the Renoufs in Normandy. A variety of sources including the history of the Renouf name, its current distribution, anthropological genetic data, historical records and a local history of the Cotentin Peninsula all help us to understand something of their tenure in Normandy.

Origins of the surname Renouf

The origins of the name Renouf, or its variants, Renou, Renoul, Renoux, provide us with a starting point. The name is said to have been given to a single Germanic man “raginwulf” [wolf +consul /adviser] and then came into wider usage as a forename*2. By 1000 A.D. it began to be used as a surname. Today, people with these names live primarily in the western reaches of France, and as far as Renouf is concerned, primarily in the Caen area of Normandy and on its Cotentin Peninsula, with approximately 2500 people with the Renouf surname residing in Normandy at the beginning of the 21st century*3.

Given that Raginwulf is a Germanic name, as well as being one of a number of similar names given to various Saxon chieftains *4, it is possible that the Renouf name began to be used only after the time of the Saxon invasion and settlement on the coastal literal of Normandy in the third and fourth century AD. An earlier proposition seems less likely although is the name could have come into use after settlement in Normandy of some of the La Tene Celtic peoples from the Rhine/ Rhone/ Danube headwaters. A Celtic tribe called the Unelli were based near present day Volognes during the first century BC.

Genetic Data

Gentic data from different Renouf families to date reveals that Renoufs are affiliated with at least three separate Haplogroups. Thus the time when Renouf ancestors arrived in Normandy is different and the routes these several ancestors took to reach Normandy are also various. Some may have repopulated Normandy after the Ice Ages, as the Ice Sheet melted. Others will have come with different invading groups including the Celts, the Saxons and the Vikings.

Recent migration studies in England using genetic data confirm that, first the Roman invasion of Britain in the first century BC, and then the Anglo Saxon invaders in the fourth century AD, did not force out people whose ancestors had resided there since the Paleolithic era *6. They found that the descendants of the earliest settlers stayed on alongside the newcomers, leaving their genetic markers which can still be found in the present populations. While there are greater concentrations of Anglo Saxon people in southern and eastern England a large percentage of the population still represent its earliest inhabitants. We can assume that the same findings are true for Normandy as well.

Archeological and historical evidence

There are plenty of archeological remains to be found on the Cotentin Peninsula, in the form of megaliths, bricks, tiles, and stone flints, to show that Neolithic man [4500-1700 BC] lived and worshipped on its north eastern and heavily forested margins. For two millennia nomadic “Celts” hunted, gathered and fished on its coastal fringe. Likewise, in the Channel Islands, there is evidence of Neolithic settlements.

By the second century BC, when “Celtic” France became known as Gaul, the Romans noted that there was a small population on the Cotentin, organized territorially into local tribes and living in small, fortified settlements largely cut off from the rest of Gaul by the great marais [swamps] and forests of the peninsula. In winter the peninsula was almost inaccessible and the Cotentin was described historically as an “island” *7.

The Roman’s major impact on Normandy, after 50BC, was not by adding to the population, but rather by changing its landscape and

accessibility. They drained the marais, set up strategic routes through the area, and introduced new crops, allowing farms to be set up. Grand farms and villas developed in the more accessible Calvados area and a city state was established near the present city of Caen. On the Cotentin itself, small villages and fortresses came to be set up along the major roads across the region, then known as Constantia [the Cotentin], but major agricultural development of the peninsula was delayed a further thousand years.

The Roman Empire began to wane as Germanic Saxons attacked its outposts as far south as the Loire, during the third and fourth century AD. The Cotentin was included in their early piratical raids and by the fifth century there were established Saxon settlements to be found on its coastal fringe. These settlements co-existed with those already established by descendants of the first Paleolithic migrants [the Cromagnons].

While the Saxons were also descendants of Paleolithic migrants and although current genetic studies do not make it explicit it is safe to assume that the Saxon invaders of Normandy had markedly different genetic markers, arising from mutations, to those of their remote cousins who had settled in Normandy many millennia earlier.

Vikings began to pillage the coastal areas of Normandy in 836 where they found a feudal system of economic organization based on the “bocages”, small hedged fields surrounding small farms, as well as tiny settlements with Saxon and Frankish names. The Vikings too left their names on fortifications, settlements and natural features.*9. They also redistributed feudal lands, granting rights to the local Saxon sires who supported them. As well the descendants of Rollo, the Viking leader, adopted the local language and intermarried with the local inhabitants – a mixture of indigenous Gauls, Anglo – Danish and Frankish peoples.

Early Records

Written records afford us information about the Renoufs only from the tenth century when Renouf de Bricasand married Marthe of Avraches. A century later the Falaise Roll of 1066 mentions a number of Renoufs who came from the areas around Caen and Dieppe. They included a Renouf of Colombelles [NE of Caen]; Renouf of Vaubadon [West of Caen] and a Renouf from near Dieppe [St. Valeri] and Renouf Peverel who, it has been suggested, might have been the stepfather to an illegitimate son of Duke William. Another, Renouf Flambard, is also not identified by his place of origin but he may have been the Regnouf [sic] of Clitourps on the Cotentin who was said to have played an important role in the conquest of England, alongside other seigneurs from the cantons around St. Pierre Eglise. Many of these men were rewarded by William for their assistance, with new or extended grants of land. We already know that various sires from the Cotentin were given fiefs in Guernsey.

In addition we know of a Renouf who was living in Hauteville, on the western side of the Contentin, in the late eleventh century who helped in the Norman conquests of southern Italy and Sicily. Thus it is clear that people named Renouf were to be found in many different parts of the Calvados, La Manche and Seine – Maritime Departments of Normandy by the eleventh century. Obviously some of them reached upper ranking military and social positions amongst the feudal societies of both the Saxons and the Normans.

Canton of St. Pierre Eglise and its Immediate Communes

Under Norman rule the original feudal boundaries came to be aligned with new parish boundaries during the wave of church and manor house building that occurred in the tenth and eleventh centuries. A system of administrative departments, arrondissements, cantons and communes were instituted in the nineteenth century [after 1790] with the communes roughly reflecting old parish and village boundaries.

The village of Clitourps [where Regnouf was said to have lived in 1066] was named by either the Saxons or the Vikings. It is located three kilometers south of St.Pierre Eglise and the same distance north of La Vast. The first parish church at Clitourps was built in the eleventh century and two early manor houses were also built there; the first, built for a Norman named Tourgis in 1170 near to Mont Etalan, is one of the oldest manor houses in all the communes around St. Pierre Eglise.

In the south, where Le Vast now stands, only the river tributaries were given Scandinavian names. There appears not to have been any Saxon, French or Viking named settlements in this area, which is consistent with it being a forested area, settled only after the Normans arrived. The church in Le Vast was given to the Abbey du Val Richer by the Bishop of Coutances in 1146.

In the commune where the hamlet of Renouville currently stands we find the Viking lands of Neville [from the family Nial] and Austot. The Cosqueville Church was built by its later feudal lords, the families Beaumont and Cosket, who owned a considerable part of the land around Cosqueville, in the twelfth century.

Agricultural advances began in the Cotentin only in the thirteenth century. These included farming animals [cows, beef and sheep], planting new crops, including apples and pears, and the production of wines and cider. Forested areas began to be cleared and the population of the northern Cotentin expanded. Given this local

history it seems likely that the two current hamlets, given the names of Renouville and Renouf, probably date back to the agricultural revolution of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

When church records commenced in the late 1500's we find that the major concentration of Renoufs were on the northern Cotentin Peninsula and were in St. Pierre Eglise itself with its adjacent communes, most notably Theville, Cosqueville and Tocqueville. However, the name occurs in very many parishes throughout the Cotentin from the seventeenth century. This suggests that the descendants of the Renouf families as they outgrew their original farms were forced to move to new villages and locales.

Given proximity and the marked similarity in their physical environments, it is probable that Cotentin Renoufs migrated to the Channel Islands. We know that Renoufs found their way to Guernsey and Jersey in the period after 1100 and before 1340, taking with them their new found agricultural knowledge and skills. This migration from Normandy to the Channel Islands was not continuous but was, rather, intermittent over an eight hundred year period as social, economic and political factors inhibited or assisted people to relocate to a place where they perceived there to be greater opportunities for their well being.

After 1340, history shows that the Cotentin, was a prime target for English raids during the Hundred Years War which began in Normandy in July 1346, with the invasion of St. Vast by the English. In 1354, with the connivance of Geoffrey de Harcourt of the fief of Saint -Sauveur, the English burned and pilfered Barfleur, St. Pierre Eglise and 37 other nearby villages.

Many local sires in fact fought each other during the 100 years of sporadic conflict, giving their liege to either the King of France or to the King of England. As a consequence the local population

suffered dreadfully and local towns were frequently besieged. This situation of conflict lasted through until 1450. It is therefore unlikely that people from the Cotentin migrated to the Channel Islands [which had been subjected to French raids] during what was a tumultuous period in both places.

With more settled times after 1450 agriculture again flourished in the Val de Saire and the town of St.Pierre became an important market centre by 1550, selling locally grown cereals, fish, meat and spices. Schools were established by the bishop, using vicars and curates as teachers, in the parishes around St. Pierre Eglise. At this time St. Pierre Eglise boasted a lawyer and doctor as well as many clergy.

In 1554 there is a record of an arrest in St. Pierre Eglise of a Gilles de Loutre of Guernsey, who was a notorious local brigand. This confirms that there was trade and traffic between the Channel Islands and the Cotentin at this time. Moreover, there was at least one migrant Renouf from Normandy to Guernsey in about 1530.

Although the area from which “Robin Renouf” “son of “Richard of Normandy” originated can not be identified we know that the first names Richard and Robert were used by Renoufs in communes around St. Pierre Eglise including Theville, Vrasville and Quetthou in the early 1600’s. We believe that Richard was educated and relatively affluent as his descendants were amongst the mercantile elite of Guernsey. Thus it is quite feasible that he originated in a Cotentin town with trading connections to Guernsey.

In the 1560’s another calamity impacted directly on the Cotentin; these were the religious wars. In the Cotentin the heads of many noble families took to Calvinism but the rest of the population remained staunchly Catholic. In 1562 a reform minister was appointed in the Val de Saire and thirty years of local strife ensued.

Churches were burned, people were killed and another economic crisis resulted. The Cotentin was pacified briefly when the traditional religion was reinstated, but violence was to erupt once more after Henry 4 was crowned. All of the parishes then set up armies and, with their sires, fought against the King of France.

It was not until 1658, when a Jesuit priest was inaugurated at St. Pierre Eglise, that peace finally returned and the communes again benefited economically and socially. Trade with the Channel Islands and England again began to flourish interrupted a century or so later by further disruption in France during the Napoleonic Wars. During the 1800's there continued to be emigration of Normans to the Channel Islands where work was more plentiful. Others migrated even further afield to Canada; Renoufs amongst them.

Today Renoufs, who originally hailed from Normandy, and who lived in their greatest numbers on the Cotentin Peninsula, can be found in Australia, Canada, the Channel Islands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Footnotes

*1] In 1331 Rauf Renouf is listed as a head tenant on land in St. Sampsons Guernsey. This is of particular interest as follows. He lived near the Guernsey Fief d'Anneville and Foville which had been given in 1061 to Samson the Sire of Anneville en Saire on the Cotentin Peninsula of Normandy.

*2] French Patronyms@ <http://jeantosti.com/noms>

*3] La France de votre nom de famille@
<http://www.geopatryme.com>

*4] See Raginwald [consul governor]; Renard [hard consul]; Rebaud [bald consul] on jeantosti.com.noms op cit.

*5] National Geographic Genographic report

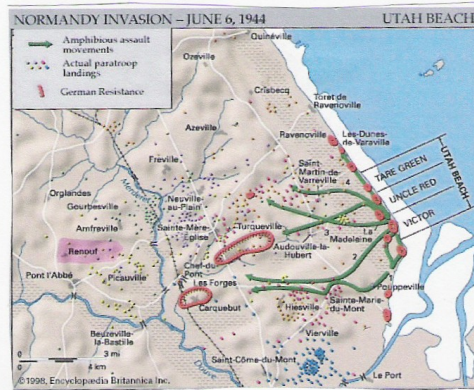
*6] Y chromosome Evidence for AngloSaxon mass migration by Weale et al, Molecular Biology and Evolution Vol 19 Number 7

*7] "Sainte Pierre Eglise et ses alentours" by Paul Corniere 2006. ISBN 2-914541-60-0

*8] page 18 " St.Pierre Eglise etc" op cit

*9] Neel, companion of Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy, became the Vicompte of St Saviour. Other Saxon sires who assisted the Kings of Normandy were also given land; Gouber was given Gouberville and Restout laid claim to Rethoville.

4. Renouf - Battle Site June 6 1944



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