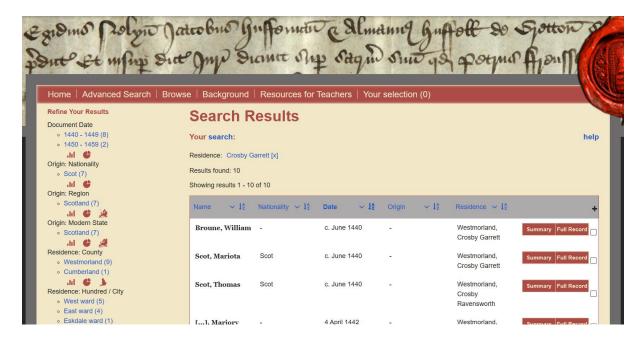**Medieval Immigrants**

Joe Saunders

The British population is descended from immigrants. From prehistory to the Vikings to the present day. Such influxes have ranged in type from conquest to economic migration to refugees. In London and other towns immigrants have historically formed a substantial part of the population with incomers drawn to these places.

In the medieval period immigrants came to England from within the British Isles, especially Scots and Welsh coming across land borders. People also came in relatively small numbers from the Continent. This was chiefly from France and the Low Countries but also from the Mediterranean. Jewish people formed their own communities in some large towns before their expulsion. Flemish weavers came after being welcomed by Edward III (1327-77) and their legacies can still be seen in towns today, especially in the south and east of England. In the sixteenth century immigration began on a larger scale. French Huguenots came to escape religious persecution. Dutch, Flemish, and Walloons fled from Spanish oppression. Between 1540 and 1600 over 50,000 people crossed the Channel and North Seas to settle across Britain, mostly in the south-east.

David Hawgood, *Dutch quarter of Colchester* ([CC BY-SA 2.0](#))

The [England's Immigrants](#) project works to document the estimated one person in every hundred who originated outside England the country in the medieval period. Their nationalities included people from other parts of the British Isles and mainland Europeans. One of the surprises revealed by this research into England's medieval immigrant population is the number of resident immigrants who lived and worked across the country, in rural areas as well as in towns and cities. In many cases it is possible to discover the occupation of individual migrants, from traders to artisans to labourers. Aristocratic households also brought back foreign servants from English-occupied France at the end of the Hundred Years War.

Search results for 'Crosby Garrett' in the 'Residence' search [England's Immigrants 1330 - 1550](#)

Much of this information comes from Alien Subsidy returns. During the 1430s, a string of military and diplomatic setbacks in the Hundred Years War with France had seen a growth in tensions between the native population and 'foreigners' and 'aliens' living and working in England. In 1440 Parliament agreed that a tax should be paid by all non-native born people residing in England over twelve years of age. This was the first time this kind of tax had ever been levied. The tax was an important gesture by the government to show that they were dealing with popular feeling against the perceived alien threat. The new tax was payable every six months at two different rates: 'householders', generally artisans, tradesmen, and other relatively wealthy people, were to pay 16d each per year. 'Non-householders', mainly servants, apprentices, agricultural and general labourers, or other migrant workers, were to pay 6d. The records from alien subsidies, letters patent and records of denization provide us with a fascinating snapshot of the make-up of England's immigrants in this period.

References and Resources:

Information for this post was taken from the excellent David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (1996), 228-30 and the [England's Immigrants 1330 - 1550](#) webpage.

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