**Migration to Britain From 1000 to 1500**

Between 1000 and 1500 the centuries-old tradition of movement and trade continued. People migrated for the same reasons they always had: escaping danger, doing business or seeking a better life. Several other factors, too, affected immigration.

**The Norman Conquest.** Although the immigrant Norman invaders in 1066 were relatively few in number, they successfully seized control of the country and permanently changed institutions and systems of government. The Normans themselves, although they came from the south were originally Norse-men, from the north, who had already colonised areas of what is now France. Perhaps their greatest legacy is the language we speak: the English we use now has its roots in both Anglo-Saxon and Norman French. The first Norman king, William I, invited European Jewish migrants to settle in England, both to help administer the kingdom and as  moneylenders to finance his building projects and wars. Over two centuries Jewish communities grew in several towns, in a wide range of occupations.

**Religion.** During this period nearly all the inhabitants of England were Roman Catholic Christians. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the only exception was the Jewish minority who survived and – in some cases – flourished under royal protection. At the time of the [Crusades](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/crusades?s=t), however, the increase in [bigotry](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/bigotry?s=t) against non-Christians was exploited and stirred up by some in the Church and in government. Fabricated stories such as the ‘[Blood Libels](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/blood-libel?s=t)’ in Norwich and Lincoln led to Jewish people being falsely accused of murdering Christian children. The massacre of Jewish people in York in 1190 was stirred up by Crusader knights who did not want to repay the money lent by local Jews.

**Rulers and laws.** At times of prosperity and strong government, immigrants lived peacefully within communities and were encouraged and welcomed by the Crown. Weak kings, however, gave in to demands (often from the trade [guilds](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/guilds?s=t)) for control of foreigners. At times in the Middle Ages, ‘aliens’ were heavily taxed or subject to controls over where they lived and how they worked. Immigrants were most vulnerable when they were no longer seen as useful: the most extreme example of this was the systematic and violent harassment, isolation, terrorising and, finally, expulsion of England’s Jews in 1290. On the other hand, wealthier foreigners could gain a citizen’s rights by obtaining a letter of denization from the king (see:['Becoming English'](http://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/becoming-english-letters-of-denization)), and by the end of this period all foreigners had the right to be judged in court by a jury that included people who shared their language and origins.

**English expansion into Wales and Ireland.** All of Wales and parts of Ireland were invaded and came under English control. Were the Welsh and Irish seen as foreigners or as citizens to those in England? Their status was not clear: they were sometimes integrated, sometimes discriminated against. Scottish immigrants, however, were ‘aliens’ from a foreign land.

**Social unrest.** The divide between the wealthy, French-speaking few and the many poor was huge, and when resentment exploded violently, immigrants could be the targets. At times Flemish weavers were accused of taking English jobs, Italian bankers and German merchants of putting up the price of property, and all foreigners were accused of enjoying favoured treatment by the authorities. During the Great (‘Peasants’) Revolt of 1381, Flemish artisans in London were massacred.

**European conflicts and the Hundred Years War.** War in mainland Europe forced some to flee and arrive here as refugees, especially from the Low Countries (now Belgium and the Netherlands). The long conflict between the English and French monarchies over control of French lands meant that at different times, immigrants from places such as Bordeaux and Calais were and were not seen as foreign.

**Economic development and the growth of towns.** In the early Middle Ages, England’s was a mainly primary economy, which means it produced and sold raw materials – especially wool – that were used in manufacture elsewhere. Strong, far-sighted monarchs such as Edward III encouraged foreign artisans by offering them incentives to come and share their skills. These artisans included Flemish weavers and Dutch women brewers who helped transform the economy to a secondary one, which means it produced and sold manufactured goods. England’s growing economy and comparative peace attracted more and more craftspeople from Europe until, by the mid-fifteenth century, there were immigrants in nearly every village and town. England’s prosperity also attracted foreign merchants and bankers to its growing towns. These included German merchants from the cities in the Hanseatic trading league who set up commercial centres called ‘Steelyards’ in London and King’s Lynn. There were also wealthy bankers from the powerful families in Florence and Milan: when the Pope allowed them to charge interest on loans, monarchs turned to them and the Jewish community was abandoned. At the other end of the scale, England’s relative wealth brought immigrants who came because of poverty. The majority of foreign-born residents in the fifteenth century were servants and they even included victims of people trafficking, Icelandic children whose status was essentially one of enslavement.

**Integration and living together**

We know from tax records that foreign-born people lived in every part of the country in the fifteenth century. The fact that there are so few recorded cases of anti-immigrant violence suggests that, in most cases, they lived peacefully with their neighbours. Because someone’s status as an ‘alien’ was defined by where they were born, the children of immigrants born here were, by definition, not aliens, and they became part of the wider, very mixed population.