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THE BRITISH COLONY IN MARSEILLE: MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF MIGRANT LIFE, 1850-1915

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Abstract

The busy French seaport of Marseille has long been an important trading post, and the demands of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrialisation and colonisation created new opportunities for many. Among those who came to Marseille were British merchants, engineers, shipping agents and bankers, but also telegraph boys, nannies and governesses. Some came willingly, while others had little choice, but all were strangers in a new country. Although the British regarded themselves as “ex-pats” [ex-patriates] rather than immigrants, they faced the same challenges as other migrants: cultural differences, the language barrier, loss of personal support networks, loneliness and depression. The emergence of a ‘British Colony’ led to the establishment of an Anglican chaplaincy in 1849, which aimed to minister to the local ‘Colony,’ and, importantly, to British seafarers who found themselves in very real physical and moral danger when putting into the port. The chaplaincy became known as ‘The English Church’ and provided a valuable cultural reference point, a ‘home from home’ in a shifting and ultimately foreign world, drawing hundreds of worshippers to its regular services of the ‘Established Episcopal Church of England.

Using information gleaned from church registers, consular correspondence, and local municipal archives, this paper draws on the emerging literature on migration studies and identity studies to examine the role of the English Church in the lives of the British Colony and to explore issues such as social mobility within this microcosm of British society; the symbiosis between church and congregation; and the reinforcing of group national identity while integrating into French society. I further hold that these challenges, and the role of the English Church in meeting them, still holds true today.

Keywords: *Ex-pat, expatriate, migrant, Anglican, Marseille, cultural identity, personal identity*

INTRODUCTION

If I may begin with a personal note, this is a story of migration, through choice rather than forced exile, and although it concerns nineteenth century migrants, it resonates with my own experience of finding myself transplanted into a foreign country as a “trailing spouse”, with all the challenges that entails.

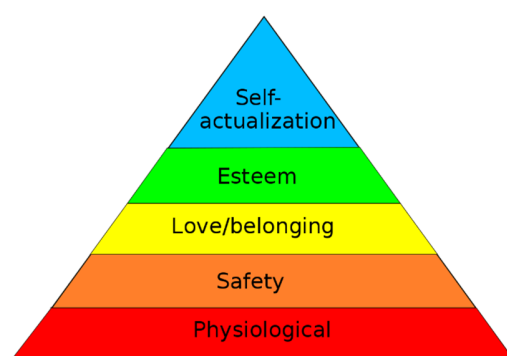
As with many voluntary migrants, popularly known as “ex-patriates” or “ex-pats,” when my husband’s work took us to the south of France we gravitated to the local Anglican church in Marseille, reassured by the familiar ritual, in English, of the Established Church of our home country, and the opportunity to meet up with others from our own culture. Needless to say, I soon started researching the history of the church, and quickly realised that not only were the challenges I was facing mirrored in the nineteenth-century experience, but that it was the needs of that ex-pat community which had led to the creation of this church, which serves a far wider purpose than that of religious worship. In this paper I will first briefly outline



the political background to economic immigration to France, and the various transnational communities which emerged in Marseille. I will then describe the demographic of the British Colony, followed by a more detailed discussion of the ways in which the English Church addressed the challenges faced by these nineteenth-century economic migrants, and which are still faced by the present-day British Colony in Marseille.

Among the challenges facing ex-pats are social isolation, often due to language issues; a sense of rootlessness; and, underpinning everything, the loss of personal and cultural identity. For the nineteenth-century Colony, being transplanted from the class-ridden expectations of British society to the egalitarian French ideal must also have been a destabilising experience. As Janssen says, “Our societal background is altered by transitioning to another country/culture. Not only must our lower-level needs be met anew within that host environment, our sense of identity is affected too”.¹

Figure 2. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



Janssen’s reference to “lower-level needs” refers to the human ‘hierarchy of needs’ Abraham Maslow expressed as a pyramid, whose bottom layer contains basic physiological needs (e.g. food, shelter and warmth), moving up to the need for safety (including love and belonging) and then esteem (confidence, self-respect and respect from others). Maslow considered that one’s needs must be met on one level before one becomes concerned with the next, so it is only once one has satisfied the first four levels that one is capable of ‘self-actualisation,’ or “realizing the innate need to meet [ones] fullest potential,” for instance through “creativity, problem-solving [and] behaving morally.”² As Janssen points out, “our individualism exists within the broader society, country and culture in which we find ourselves”³ and, for the “global nomads,” of the British Colony, the English Church provided a “clearly bounded horizon”⁴ to their immediate environment, thus protecting them from the “jarring nature of culture shock”⁵ in the wider French society and culture.

This research is situated within the wide Anglo-centric literature on Anglicanism as an imperial force by scholars such as Rowan Strong (2007), Stewart J. Brown (2008) and Hilary M. Carey (2011),⁶ and also draws on the finely detailed work of scholars such as Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan on Britons abroad,⁷ Marie-Francoise Berneron-Couvenhes on mail contracts,⁸

¹ Linda Janssen, *Emotionally Resilient ExPat* (Kindle), Ch.2: Identity Issues in Expat Life : Identity and why it matters, para 4.

² *Emotionally Resilient ExPat* (Kindle), Ch.2: Identity Issues in Expat Life : Identity and why it matters, para 3.

³ *Emotionally Resilient ExPat* (Kindle), Ch.2: Identity Issues in Expat Life : Identity and why it matters, para 6.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. [1983]. Rev. ed. London ; New York : Verso, 2006. p30.

⁵ *Emotionally Resilient ExPat* (Kindle), Ch.2: Identity Issues in Expat Life : Culture Shock, para 10.

⁶ Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire, c. 1700-1850* (Oxford, 2007); Stewart J. Brown, *Providence and Empire 1815-1914* (Abingdon; New York, 2008); and Hilary M. Carey, *God’s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge, 2011).

⁷ Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan, eds., *The British Abroad Since the Eighteenth Century, Volume 1: Travellers and Tourists* (Basingstoke, 2013).

⁸ Marie-Françoise Berneron-Couvenhes, “French Mail Contracts with Private Steamship Companies, 1835-1914,” *Business and Economic History On-Line*, Vol. 2 (2004).



and Jean-Yves Carlier of Brest University on bethels (sailors' homes)⁹ which together serve to flesh out Marseille's crucial role on the touristic, commercial and maritime circuits between the British and French Empires. Brown has noted that, while "the nineteenth-century United Kingdom was highly religious" with "the overwhelming majority" of its inhabitants regarding themselves as Christians,¹⁰ by 1851 only half of English churchgoers, a third of Scottish and a fifth of Welsh churchgoers were attending the established churches, with the rest being Dissenters.¹¹ While scholars such as Strong have claimed that ex-pat Anglican churches attract primarily the Anglican faithful,¹² I argue that the English Church in Marseille played a pivotal and proactive role in constructing professional and social networks for Anglicans and Dissenters alike, and that it provided a means of reflecting and reinforcing common British cultural values through an anglophone environment. I further hold that these challenges, and the role of the English Church in meeting them, still hold true today.

Using information gleaned from church registers, consular correspondence, and local municipal archives,¹³ this paper draws on the emerging literature on migrant/ex-pat studies and identity construction (e.g. Benedict Anderson on imagined communities, Janet Bennett on cultural marginality, Barbara F. Schaetti on cultural identity, and Nancy L. Green and Roger Waldinger on transnationalism)¹⁴ to examine the role of the English Church in the lives of the British Colony and to focus on the issues of social mobility within this microcosm of British society; the symbiosis between church and congregation as both supported and supporters; and the reinforcing of group national identity while integrating into French society¹⁵

THE BRITISH IN MARSEILLE

The busy French Mediterranean seaport of Marseille was the gateway to the colonies of both the French Empire and the British Empire, and the demands of nineteenth-century industrialisation and colonisation created new opportunities for many.¹⁶ The British Colony was only one of several transnational communities which emerged in Marseille, as a result of political situations and conflict and the mass recruitment of foreign workers for the burgeoning industries which often involved the processing of colonial imports such as sugar and tobacco. As Wiseman tells us, the economic boom that began in the 1830s led to the recruitment of thousands of unskilled foreign workers, in particular Italians, whose numbers increased from 50,000 in 1876 to 100,000 by 1914 (Temime 1985:45): by the latter half of the century "the majority of industrial and unskilled workers on whom many industries relied were foreign; and by 1896 only 43% of Marseille's residents were originally from Marseille (Temime 1985:40-42; Hayot 1985:5)."¹⁷ There were thus substantial communities of Italian, Spanish, Greek and Algerians, many of which established their own centers of worship. The

⁹ This research is published online on <le-blog-de-jean-yves-carlier.fr> and is to be integrated into a book on seamen's clubs around the French coast.

¹⁰ Brown, *Providence and Empire*, 2.

¹¹ Brown, *Providence and Empire*, 4.

¹² Rowan Strong, "Anglican Emigrant Chaplaincy and the British Empire, c.1840-90", communication given at the 2016 Ecclesiastical History Society's Summer Conference, 26 July, 2016.

¹³ I am grateful to the staff of the London Metropolitan Archives, the National Archives, and the Office of the Diocese in Europe, all in London, England, as well as the Archives municipales in Marseille, France, for their unfailing patience and helpfulness. A style guide for the entries pertaining to thèse, and to on-line archives can be found at the end of this paper.

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. [1983]. Rev. ed. (London ; New York : Verso, 2006) ; Janet Bennett, "Cultural Marginality: Identity Issues in Intercultural Training," *Education for the Intercultural Experience* ed. E. Michael Paige (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1993); Barbara F. Schaetti, "Phoenix Rising: A Question of Cultural Identity," online <https://www.worldweave.com/BSidentity.html>; and Nancy L. Green and Roger Waldinger, eds., *A Century of Transnationalism: Immigrants and Their Homeland Connections* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

¹⁵ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who brought to my attention the work of Nancy L. Green and A. Whitney Walton.

¹⁶ The founding of the English Church in 1849 came the year after the revolutionary events in France which led to the overthrow of King Louis Philippe and the start of the French Second Republic with Louis Napoleon Bonaparte as its President. In 1851 Louis Napoleon organised a *coup d'état*, establishing the Second Empire in 1852 and taking the throne as Napoleon III; the French Second Colonial Empire lasted until 1870, during which time it doubled in size. Meanwhile, the British Empire was also expanding rapidly, and the twin colonial powers of France and Britain formed an alliance to send an army to China to fight the Second Opium War, and combined forces against Russia, notably in the Crimea. Marseille was also the site of industrial innovations and manufacturing growth, with maritime opportunities increasing with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.

¹⁷ Nicole Wiseman, *The Construction of Marseille and the Racialized Immigrant*, 3. https://www.academia.edu/11575136/The_Construction_of_Marseille_and_the_Racialized_Immigrant.



Indicateur marseillais directory of 1852 states that, according to the census returns for this city of 195,138 inhabitants, 189,218 self-identified as Roman Catholic, 4,247 Protestant, and 1,488 "Israelites", with 185 belonging to *autres cultes ou communions* [other religions or denominations]¹⁸ and while many Italians and Spanish would no doubt have worshipped (in Latin) in the many local Roman Catholic churches before establishing their own, the British Church rubbed shoulders not only with the French Reformed Church and the Evangelical Church, but also the Jewish synagogue and the Greek Orthodox Church.

Historically, the relationship between England and France has been complex, and at the time that the trickle of British economic immigrants to France became a steady flow towards the mid-nineteenth century, the last major conflict between the two countries had been the Napoleonic Wars, a series of wars against the First French Empire which lasted two decades and culminated in the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. However, despite later tensions, such as over the Suez Canal and rivalry over African colonies, a peaceful and tolerant atmosphere prevailed, especially in the interests of industrial growth. The skills of British engineers were highly sought after, and others came to seek their fortune, and even to escape sticky situations back home following failed businesses and even lawsuits. These included such captains of industry as Philip Meadows Taylor, son of Philip Taylor from Norwich, who left England to escape bankruptcy following an expensive patent dispute, and who ended up running large engineering projects, and owning one of the largest steam engine factories in France. There were also high-ranking officials of French companies, such as Arthur Scott, managing director of the railway company. But they were by no means all well-to-do. There were also small shopkeepers like the confectioner Charles Henry, and hotelkeepers, who often specialised in catering to an English clientele, and of course the many British employees working in factories, small businesses and private houses. The need for reliable communications led to the setting up of mail routes and telegraph systems, for which English-language skills were in demand. We find the British working for the French postal service, and for the Peninsular and Oriental Line (P & O), which held the British government mail contracts for Alexandria, Calcutta and China.¹⁹ While some were transient, enough settled in France with a view to the long-term that, by the 1840s, a stable core community had emerged.

The Colony thus comprised all social classes, and included merchants, shipping agents, bankers, and their entourage of maids, nannies and governesses, as well as telegraph boys, translators and language teachers. And there were of course many British ships putting into this major port. So the British Colony can be divided into three main groups: the residents; the seamen; and those transient visitors such as tourists, missionaries and colonial officials passing through the port.

SOCIAL ISOLATION & PRECARIETY

But where should they go for help and support? There was no focal point to the Colony, but both the British residents – and those putting into port – sought to continue the Sunday worship which was so much a part of their social fabric. Some frequented the Protestant "temple," with the liturgy of the French Reformed Church, in French. But this didn't always satisfy the needs of the Colony's members, especially if they did not speak French well, and if a visiting priest were available Anglican services were occasionally held in the Protestant temple. So in 1849 an Episcopal Anglican church was established as a consular chaplaincy. Services were held in a rented upper room in a spacious building within walking distance of the port; a chaplain was appointed, and the room was fitted out with benches, a lectern, pulpit, and a *séraphine* (a type of harmonium). Like most ex-pat Anglican churches, it soon became known as "The English Church".

As Catherine Transler says in *Turning International*, "we humans are genetically wired to be tribal, connected individuals" and the English Church offered this connection to the homeland, through a common language, and through reinforcing social norms. The chaplaincy also offered a strong connection to Great Britain through the British Consulate in Marseille, which was responsible for supporting British nationals in the city; it was established as a consular chaplaincy, closely overseen by the British Consul who chaired meetings and approved the annual allowance from the Foreign Office.²⁰ Chaplains were

¹⁸ Source: *Indicateur marseillais*, 1850. p. 735. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9687007j>.

¹⁹ There is evidence of British economic immigration to Marseille from the mid-eighteenth century, although regrettably there are no reliable statistics. However, their increasing presence on the Marseille industrial and commercial landscape, and the social scene, and the annual subscription lists kept by the Anglican chaplaincy, provide evidence of a considerable presence from 1850 onwards.

²⁰ This allowance did not cover all the overheads involved in running the Church, and the trustees relied on subscriptions from the resident Colony, donations from visiting tourists, and a levy from British ships putting into port.



also recruited through the British Foreign Office, and only British nationals could be appointed as church officials,²¹ all of which reinforced the colonial nature of the expat situation.

Importantly, attendance at the church also centred on the time-honoured ritual of the Church of England. As Linda Janssen reminds us in *The Emotionally Resilient Ex-Pat*, "Rituals not only remind us where we came from, they also reflect where we've been along the way, resulting in who we are today. They are a form of shared memories and help to create and maintain bonds."²²

Given that the Anglican Church had for three centuries been the Established Church of England, one might assume that the Anglican ritual was the norm, and that all those attending the English Church were practising Anglicans. However, what we find is that the bonds which connected the British Colony were often more cultural and linguistic than religious. For example, the leading lights in establishing the Marseille chaplaincy were the industrialist Philip Taylor and his son (also Philip), whose family back in England were staunch nonconformists; and Henry and Frederick King, two of the first church officials, also came from nonconformist families.

It would seem that the initiative to create an English Church in the city was borne out of a need for a cultural centre, which would serve as a focus of British life and culture, and provide a social service and pastoral as well as spiritual care to British residents and visitors.

FOR THOSE IN PERIL ON THE SEA.....AND ON LAND

Probably the most important social care provided by the English Church was that given to the many sailors who put into the port. Life at sea and ashore was dangerous: quite apart from the moral dangers of drink and 'loose women', there were very real physical risks for British sailors abroad, as illustrated in this vivid snapshot later written by a locum priest in the chaplaincy:²³

Marseilles has acquired] a reputation for peril and adventure which still holds, and not without cause. [...] The sounds of struggle, stifled screams, and the sudden report of firearms, followed by as ominous a silence, are no infrequent occurrences in the night there [...] Some, not infrequently, are waylaid thus even now, robbed, mishandled, even murdered, their bodies being found later in the water, 'cause of death unknown'.

Sailors had no trades union support, and could be put ashore, abandoned, or stranded if their ship sailed without them. The British Consul could repatriate a stranded sailor by requiring a British captain to provide passage and board back to Britain, but this generally meant finding someone to liaise between sailor and consulate and it was not unusual for sailors to find themselves in hospital or prison with no hope of reprieve.

Marseille's first chaplain, the Revd. Michael John Mayers (1850-64), therefore lost no time in establishing a Sailors' Home, or bethel. The traditional Bethel, or 'House of God' was a chapel, and sometimes a hostel, for sailors, and Mayers' Marseille bethel provided everything the British sailor could need: food at cost price, and drink – but only tea, or an infusion of eucalyptus, because the bethels were strictly teetotal. The Sailors' Home had rooms for conversation, for meetings, and for worship, as well as a library. Importantly, sailors could also rent accommodation at a very reasonable rate, thereby saving them from the bars and brothels.

Using money drummed up during a fundraising trip to the United States, the Revd. Mayers was able to open his Sailors' Home in 1854. This was just in time, because over the following two years (1854-6) France and her British allies went to war with Russia, notably on the Crimean Peninsula. Hundreds of thousands of sailors and soldiers flooded through the port, and Mayers was soon able to report that:²⁴

The Home is going on very satisfactorily, and is fully answering my expectation. The house has been full for the last three weeks. It is quite evident, even to the worldly minded, that our undertaking is, through

²¹ This remained the case until well into the twentieth century.

²² Linda Janssen, *The Emotionally Resilient Ex-Pat: Engage, Adapt and Thrive Across Cultures* (Summertime Publishing, 2013), Kindle ed., chap. 14: Factors in Emotional Resilience, Kindle loc. 5911.

²³ *Gibraltar Diocesan Gazette* (Dec. 1925), 34-6.

²⁴ *Sailors Magazine*, 1855, n.p.



God's blessing, productive of great good; in the first place, to keep men away from those dens of iniquity and destruction, the gin-shops, and to bring them within reach of the means and ordinances of grace. All those seamen who are lodged in the Home, attend on the Sabbath the ordinance of public worship."

Over the rest of the century, successive chaplains would count the British sailors' welfare as an important part of their duties, celebrating a service at the Sailors' Home at least once a week, and visiting those unfortunate enough to find themselves in hospital, in the asylum or in prison.

Residents and visitors also came to depend on this Anglican – and anglophone – presence, as can be seen in a plea for support in 1858. The chaplain was away, and the chaplain from neighbouring Nice, Mr Horwood, should have been covering:²⁵

The Committee of the English Church present their compliments to the Revd. Mr Horwood and request he will inform them what probability there is of his returning to Marseilles or of procuring a successor [...] the immediate presence at Marseilles of an English Clergyman is absolutely necessary. An English Lady died this morning, and there are many English Sailors in hospital requiring Spiritual Assistance.

For some, the English Church could do nothing, but at least the English clergyman was there to give them a decent burial. For others it had an important role to play in providing spiritual and social care, especially for those who found themselves stranded in a foreign land, often knowing nobody and unable to speak the language.

For example, Elizabeth Severn, the wife of the newly appointed British Consul in Rome, was taken ill at Marseille in December 1861, while en route to join her husband in Italy. Too ill to continue her journey, she languished in a Marseille hotel for several months, accompanied only by her nineteen-year-old daughter Eleanor who dared not leave her dying mother's bedside in a strange city where "the doctor, the English clergyman, and the wife of the British Consul were her only friends in Marseille."²⁶

The English Church also provided a support network for those whose lives could be precarious. There was considerable insecurity in terms of jobs, and accommodation; even those teachers of English who practised in Marseille over several decades are usually listed at a different address every year or so. Women were especially vulnerable, and many of those who frequented the church were servants, who, if they lost their jobs for any reason, would soon (if not immediately) be out on the street. The English Church provided them with a network through which they find other work and a roof over their heads. In other words, as long as there was an Anglican presence in Marseille, they were never abandoned and alone. Or were they?

At the end of the century, the Colony succeeded in raising their own church building, All Saints' Church, which was consecrated in 1903. Not long after, in March 1911, a tragic event took place in that very church, of which a report appeared in newspapers across the world.²⁷

Grand émoi, ce matin, pendant l'office divin, à l'église anglicane de Marseille, rue de Belloi : tandis que les fidèles, recueillis, étaient prosternés, un coup de feu retentit. On s'empresse et au pied d'une des colonnes de l'édifice on aperçut, baignant dans son sang, le corps d'une femme mise avec élégance. C'était Mme Eugène Priou, femme d'un négociant anglais, qui, dans un accès de neurasthénie, venait de se faire sauter la cervelle. La malheureuse fut transportée expirante au domicile de sa famille explorée. Cet événement a provoqué une grande émotion dans la colonie anglaise.

[Great commotion this morning during the Divine Office, at the Anglican church of Marseille, rue de Belloi: while the faithful were gathered together, their heads bowed in prayer, a gunshot rang out. We hurried to see what had happened, and at the foot of one of the columns of the church we saw, bathed in her own blood, the body of a woman lying gracefully. It was Mme Priou, the wife of an English

²⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, Letter to the Revd. E. R. Horwood, Anglican chaplain at Nice, Marseilles, 31 May 1858, MS, FO 698/16.

²⁶ Sheila Birkenhead, *Illustrious Friends: The Story of Joseph Severn and his Son Arthur* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), 139.

²⁷ Leicester Daily Post, 13 March 2011. Accessed 21 August 2019.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002148/19110313/160/0008>



merchant, who, in a fit of neurasthenia, had just blown her brains out. The unfortunate woman was transported, dying, to the home of her grieving family. This event has been the cause of great emotion among the British Colony.]²⁸

This account in French was reproduced in papers across France and beyond, while similar accounts appeared in numerous newspapers across England. Details varied, the unfortunate lady having been reported to have either shot herself in the left temple, or having pointed the revolver into her mouth, and having been taken home or to the nearest hospital to expire. However, several do mention that she had been in bad health for some time, with the most specific report stating that she had been “suffering from melancholia induced by neurasthenia”.

In fact the report cited above is factually incorrect in one important detail: Mme Priou was the English wife of a French merchant, and as such I find her dramatic gesture very telling, in that she chose to carry out this dreadful act in full view of the very community of her compatriots: people who could have been expected to supported her, as an Englishwoman. This seems to me to have been a very powerful symbolic gesture, publicly to the British Colony – her people – in the building that represented their spiritual “home” in so many respects.

SYMBIOSIS

There was a deep symbiotic relationship between the Church and its congregation. Not surprisingly, local British business owners gave generously to the church, which depended on subscriptions from those who attended. In return, the Church provided a valuable means of endorsing British-owned businesses: an advertisement for the Hotel de Genève stated comfortingly that it was “under English management”; and in the case of the Grand Hotel it was spelt out that “the wife of the proprietor is English” and that the establishment was “recommended by the English chaplain.”²⁹ Such endorsements not only advertised the comforting news of an Anglican – and thus English – presence, but reinforced its pivotal role in British society in Marseille.

To support the Church’s ministry to seamen, a levy was also raised from all British ships putting into port, which raised a small but steady income, and there were some generous private benefactors. However, the Church was mainly dependent on subscriptions from those attending the church. Money was a constant problem, as evidenced by the not infrequent pleading letters between chaplains, consuls, and the Foreign Office ‘back home’. Unlike the Riviera churches, who could reckon on support from a rich congregation, the British Colony in Marseille was essentially poor, and the effect on the chaplaincy’s finances is clearly seen in this letter from the British consul:³⁰

Marseilles is a port where a great many British subjects are glad to find a church [...] on their way abroad to the Far East, Egypt, the Riviera etc. The post of the Chaplain is no sinecure. The visiting areas are enormous [,] living is by no means cheap [...] and we are entirely dependent on voluntary subscriptions. To sum up, therefore, the services of a Chaplain are needed:

- 1) By the resident British Colony, which is poor.
- 2) By seamen, who can contribute nothing or little.
- 3) By a category of persons who are in the city for a very limited time, and from whom it is impossible to obtain more than the trifle they may choose to put in the offertory.

We may add that during the summer months the Marseilles Chaplaincy is the only permanent one in the South of France as far as Nice.

²⁸ Author’s translation

²⁹ *Gibraltar Diocesan Gazette* (1912), n.p.

³⁰ National Archives, Letter from the British Consul in Marseille to the Foreign Office, MS FO 698/18.



SOCIAL MOBILITY

The British Colony in Marseille comprised a vibrant, shifting ex-pat community, which made a valuable contribution to the cosmopolitan life of the city.³¹ As one chaplain reported wryly, “the British community is very important – nearly as important as it thinks it is; [...] the Britishers are not numerically the largest colony, but in influence they are not the least considerable; the *Maire* delights to honor the colony with his presence at all public functions”.³²

Being seen at social events was important, and the local press provided gushing descriptions of social occasions at which all the women were beautiful and charming, and all the men eminent and well-respected, as can be seen in these accounts of a charity sale and a charity concert, both from the social columns of *La Vedette: Politique, sociale, et littéraire*.³³

Dans les luxueux salons Pain a eu lieu jeudi dernier la vente de charité, organisée, comme toutes les années par les dames et jeunes filles des colonies anglaises et américaines. Parmi les jolies vendeuses Mmes et Mlles Mirzayantz, Skeggs, Morton, Damiano, Carr, Bendit, Earce, Fritsch-Estrangin, Couve, Velten, Musgrave, Hamling, Kelsey, Dubourg-Bell, Nepbeu, etc. Fête charmante dont le resultat a été très productif pour les malheureuses familles, que secourent ces charitables dames.

[On Thursday last, in the luxurious Pain salons, the charity sale took place. The sale was organised, as it is every year, by the ladies and girls of the British and American colonies. Among the pretty sellers were Mesdames and Mesdemoiselles Mirzayantz, Skeggs, Morton, Damiano, Carr, Bendit, Earce, Fritsch-Estrangin, Couve, Velten, Musgrave, Hamling, Kelsey, Dubourg-Bell, Nepbeu, etc. It was a charming occasion which raised a great sum for the unfortunate families whom these charitable ladies support.]³⁴

Une assistance très élégante s'était donné rendez-vous mercredi à la salle Pain, où avait lieu le concert organisé au bénéfice du Sailor-Home. [...] Un des attraits principaux de ce concert était aussi d'entendre Mme Marie Laure, l'éminente artiste, qui préside à la satisfaction de tous la classe de déclamation du Conservatoire. Mme Marie Laure a joué, en anglais, langue qu'elle parle aussi bien que le français, c'est dire dans la perfection, une des plus belles scènes de Macbeth. Elle avait comme partenaire Mme Biddlecombe et M. Vernon [...] Cette soirée a été terminée par une comédie : Un mari dans du coton, jouée en anglais par Mme Biddlecombe et M. Vernon, qui y ont obtenu un succès de fou-rire.

[A most elegant audience turned out to the Pain Room on Wednesday, to attend the concert organised in aid of the Sailors' Home [...] One of the concert's principal attractions was also the chance to hear Mme Marie Laure, the eminent artiste who, to everyone's satisfaction, directs the declamation class at the Conservatoire. Madame Marie Laure played one of the finest scenes of *Macbeth*, which she delivered in English, a language she speaks as well as she does French, that is to say perfectly. She was partnered by Madame Biddlecombe and Monsieur Vernon [...] The evening was brought to a close by a comedy, “A Husband in a Fix,” played in English by Madame Biddlecombe and Monsieur Vernon, a great success which had everyone in fits of laughter.]³⁵

Such networking provided social opportunities which inevitably led to marriage, and the resulting family ties often led to social and professional advancement. Attendance at the English Church provided a local network, and the attendant social opportunities inevitably led to marriage between members of the Colony. For example, in 1877 Jane Lockwood, daughter of Richard Lockwood, a foreman at the new gasworks, married a mechanic, Thomas Carlyle Bell, and all their children were baptised by the English chaplain. Other marriages at the English Church seem to have given people a step up the social ladder: Charles Grant, who was earning his living teaching English, married the daughter of the

³¹ Arthur Taylor, brother of founding trustee Philip Meadows Taylor and a regular subscriber to the Church, served on the committees of several cultural associations, notably in music and in photography, rising to become vice-chairman of the latter for several years.

³² *Gibraltar Diocesan Gazette* (March 1929) 8.

³³ *La Vedette: Politique, social et littéraire*. (12 March 1898) 179.

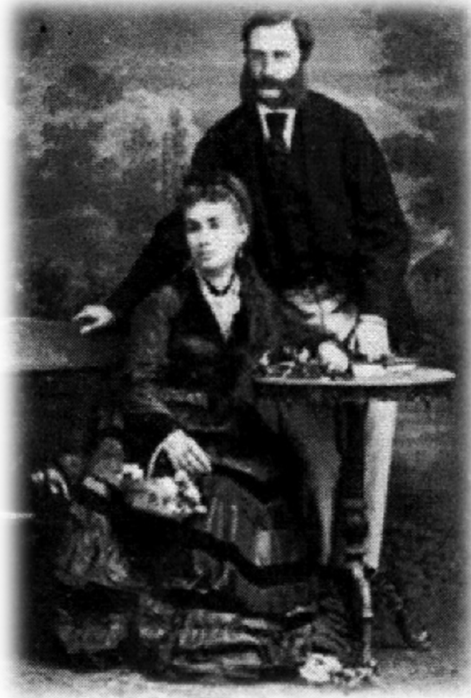
³⁴ Author's translation.

³⁵ Author's translation.



industrialist Philip Taylor Snr., a move which certainly did not harm his prospects. Grant succeeded his brother-in-law Philip Meadows Taylor as a trustee of the church, and later made his fortune in property.³⁶ But if one could climb the social ladder – and many did, in the egalitarian republican ethos of France – there were also others who fell out of favour.

Figure 1. Wallner Hawthorn (1843-1915) and his French wife Josephine née Audin (1844-1908)



The young industrialist Wallner Hawthorn arrived in Marseille in his twenties, and quickly became a trustee of the English Church in 1865, aged only 23. He held this post for ten years, was clearly a man of substance within the Colony, and even served as deputy British Vice Consul in 1867. Over the next twenty years Wallner built up a successful company, married a French girl, Josephine, had three sons. But then, in 1884, he disappears from Marseille.

An announcement posted by his son Edouard in the *Journal officiel de la République Française* of 9 March 1909 reveals that Wallner had indeed abandoned his French wife and young family (and that Wallner's eldest son had also disappeared some years later). After some 20-odd years, Wallner's wife had started describing herself as a widow, and at Edouard's wedding in 1905 his father was described as "the late" Wallner Hawthorn. This notice was placed after Josephine's death in 1908, and the question of succession and inheritance would have become a serious issue.

Par jugement en date du 17 February 1909, le tribunal de premier instance de Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhone) a ordonné une enquête à l'effet de constater l'absence des nommés Wallner Hawthorn et Henri Hawthorn, père et frère du sieur Edouard Hawthorn, docteur en médecine, domicilié en dernier instance à Marseille, disparus : Wallner Hawthorn depuis l'année 1884, et Henri Hawthorn depuis l'année 1893.

[By judgement of 17 February 1909, the Court of First Instance of Marseille (Bouches-du-Rhone) has ordered an inquest in order to establish the absence of Wallner Hawthorn and Henry Hawthorn, father and brother of Monsieur Edward Hawthorn, medical doctor, last domiciled in Marseille, disappeared: Wallner Hawthorn since 1884, and Henry Hawthorn since 1893.]³⁷

³⁶ Such networking also occurred on a wider imperial level, with the busy chaplaincy and its mission to seamen becoming known far beyond the shores of England or indeed France. International trade across the Empire resulted in meetings, friendships and kinship networks, and may have led to at least one clerical appointment, that of the high churchman Thomas Skeggs (1852-1927; chaplain 1885-1900). His father, Charles Skeggs, was based in Shanghai for over twenty years between 1861 and 1885, where he had his own company and operated as a public silk inspector and assessor for Western silk merchants. Charles Skeggs knew all the British consular staff in Shanghai and Peking (who were helping to develop trade with China), and probably introduced his son (Tom) to William Frederick Mayers (1831-1878, son of the Revd. Mayers, first consular chaplain at Marseille) in about 1872. William Mayers was a renowned sinologist before dying young after contracting typhus fever in Shanghai, and it may well be that Skeggs' initial contact with William Mayers occurred when Tom was living in Shanghai before he left in 1874 to study theology at Oxford.

³⁷ Author's translation.



In fact, not long after his disappearance, and unbeknownst to the Marseille Colony, Wallner reappeared in England with a new English 'wife,' Alice. They are listed in the 1891 British census, and twenty years later, and still together, Wallner and Alice report in the 1911 census that the date of their 'marriage' is 1878, when Wallner was most certainly still living with Josephine and their sons in Marseille.

Despite belonging to a well-off medical family in North East England, Wallner spent the rest of his life elsewhere in England with Alice, frequently moving from job to job and eking out a modest living as an estate manager, then a bookshop manager, and later as a 'teacher of French' until his death in 1915. Maybe he did not contact his English family, or maybe they wanted nothing to do with him. Certainly, he would no longer have been welcome in Marseille society, where his French wife and eldest son – an eminent doctor who supported his abandoned widowed mother – were still prominent members of the British Colony.

Hawthorn's disappearance must surely have put a strain on the British community, exposing the ways it depended on the good faith of its members to counteract its precariousness. For Hawthorn himself, his change of circumstances between leaving England from a position of some economic and social security, and his return there "post-Marseille" to a reduced, and somewhat isolated situation, provides a piquant counterpoint to this account of community building but, rather than unravel, the Colony closed ranks.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the effort expended by the British ex-pats to build a strong community, and despite the structures, systems and relationships they forged, this community was still vulnerable. The considerable political turbulence in France, along with social unrest, cultural biases, and economic upheaval, were all forces which would affect the expat community more profoundly than they would people with a stronger legal or cultural "claim" to their place in the country. There is also a vulnerability inherent in a group of people brought together by common nationality living in a nation not their own—particularly in an era where concepts of "rootedness" when it comes to national identity and national culture were becoming more and more significant.

That said, the British seem to have been accepted into French society *en masse* in a way that other migrant populations such as the Italians and Algerians were not; these latter communities consisted mainly of poor workers who were exploited, and therefore prone to striking and rioting in an effort to fight for their rights and indeed their survival. That is not to say that the British Colony consisted only of the rich, successful and influential businessman, merchants and engineers, or that all Italians and Algerians were poor and disenfranchised, but I have yet to find evidence of any widespread unrest by British workers in France. The most successful individuals will always be more visible than those in the lower échelons of society, whose presence often only comes to light through census returns, marriages, and the birth of their children (if solemnised and recorded), and the occasional press reports of criminal behaviour (often born of desperation) or grisly deaths. Otherwise, those in the lower social strata remain to all intents and purposes invisible. It may be that, by plugging into the British community in Marseille they were protected, and were found jobs and lodging, or helped to repatriate, and this – and the phlegmatic British temperament – probably meant the British did not mean trouble for the authorities.

Another relevant aspect is that communities such as the Italians tended to congregate in the port areas, where the work was, in close proximity with each other, resulting in the fostering of a strong sense of community and of shared cultural values, but also fomenting unrest. The British Colony, on the other hand, does not seem to have had a well-defined urban center, but rather extended over a wide area from the port into many *quartiers* of the city. As Paul van De Laar says, "Migrants are looked upon either as members of a hard working community, or as distrusted people experiencing intense social exclusion,³⁸ and it would appear that, as far as French society was concerned, the British Colony belonged firmly in the the former category. Also of note is the fact that the British were less numerous than the large migrant worker populations which flourished in the port areas, and were thus better able to integrate into the life of the city. This lack of an urban center of British culture, also feeds into the need for a worship/social hub in the form of an English Church.

³⁸ Paul van de Laar, "Bremen, Liverpool, Marseille and Rotterdam: Port Cities, migration and the transformation of Urban space in the long Nineteenth century," *Journal of Migration History* 2 (2016): 278.



The history of the English Church in Marseille demonstrates the imperial momentum which created communities of British ex-patriates, and the significance of this study lies in its close reading of one particular chaplaincy, whose mission was supporting a consciously British presence within the very centre of another colonial power. Micro-histories such as this can afford valuable insights, identifying underlying trends, and suggesting future directions for research into British colonies abroad, through their expression of faith, their commercial activities and means of cultural exchange. Comparative studies of other Anglican chaplaincies founded in busy port cities such as Trieste (Italy), Rotterdam (Holland) and Tangiers (Morocco) may prove particularly useful, because some, such as Rotterdam, enjoyed a favourable religious climate, while others in traditionally Catholic countries such as Italy faced substantial difficulties because Anglicanism was considered a “cult,” and “Anglicans could only worship on British soil [within] the confines of the British Consulate”.³⁹ Studying chaplaincies operating in these very different circumstances of religious acceptance may well produce interesting data on the relative composition of these British Colonies, their level of integration into local commercial and social life, and the effect on their sense of British – and Anglican – identity.

In terms of this current study, France is an interesting case because she offered a solid Christian basis through a nationwide network of Catholicism and reformed churches – and tolerance of other religions – in a climate of secularism which did not impose any particular belief system. It is clear that the ‘English Church,’ bereft of any legal authority in France (the Anglican wedding ceremony having no meaning under French law) provided not only a religious centre but a very valuable cultural reference point, a ‘home from home’ in a shifting and ultimately foreign world. In this instance, being British seems to have overridden the requirement to be Anglican.⁴⁰ In providing a strong sense of British identity, and a sense of purpose through charitable works, as well as providing pastoral care, the Church enabled individual members of the Colony to satisfy their own higher-level needs (approbation, respect, usefulness) and thus to construct for themselves a personal identity anchored within this visible manifestation of the British presence in Marseille. The Church thus provided stability in otherwise unstable lives, through the medium of a common language and the upholding of social mores, and provided social and professional networking opportunities for Anglicans and Dissenters alike through a common national identity. As it still does today.

ARCHIVAL RESOURCES & STYLE GUIDE

- Archives municipales (AM), Marseille. Physical repository of the city’s administrative records. Includes census returns, BMD records, local press, books on local history.
- British Newspaper Archives (BNA). On-line database of British press.
Press articles referenced by: Date of issue.
- Bibliothèque nationale française, Paris (BNF). Gallica on-line resource of digitized records: BMD, press, books, photos.
Digitized records referenced by Gallica URL.
- Diocesan Office, Diocese of Europe (DO). Repository of diocesan magazine, formerly the *Gibraltar Diocesan Gazette*, now the *European Anglican*.
Magazine articles referenced by: Date of issue, page no. (no cataloguing system in place).
- London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). Repository of London-centric records; includes church records for the Diocese of Europe, including partial records for the Marseille chaplaincy.
Referenced by: Date, Type of resource, e.g. MS; LMA folder and file no.
- National Archives, Kew (NA). National repository, includes foreign office correspondence, and consular correspondence including chaplaincy AGMs and annual reports 1850-1902 when Marseille was a consular chaplaincy.
Referenced by date, NA folder no.

³⁹ The present Christ Church in Naples was dedicated in 1865, and is still one of the very few non-Roman Catholic churches in Naples. <http://www.napoliunplugged.com/Christ-Church-Naples.html>.

⁴⁰ Indeed, the deed by which the English Church was established stipulated that only British subjects were entitled to subscribe or hold office, and even regular worshippers from French families were listed as ‘foreign’ residents, which could only reinforce the sense of the Church as a little piece of England to which all else was foreign.



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