

REFUGEES

In September 1620 some REFUGEES from religious and political persecution set sail across a dangerous stretch of water. They were supposed to be in two ships, but only one was available. When they arrived at their destination they found that some locals were hostile. They did meet, and try to get along with, some who were helpful, but continued to live the life they knew and did not accept advice from the locals — this was the cause of many of their problems. Although some locals continued to help them, these locals were eventually almost wiped out because these 'illegal immigrants' had brought new diseases and better weapons, and were, later, reinforced by others of their race who came only for greed.

Does our English involvement in this short history of the beginnings of the USA make us frightened of, and unwelcoming to, immigrants and refugees here, today?

Between 1700 and 1900 many men left their homes as REFUGEES from economic deprivation, and sailed to lands which they had heard about but never known. These were the younger sons of landed gentry who were debarred by their national customs from inheriting a living in the family business. These men had to go to lands where they thought they would be free to make their own way, and their own fortunes. Some did succeed. Some did not. Some treated the locals as equals and gained their trust: others enslaved them,

During that same period many were REFUGEES from the gallows. "Go to the Colonies for XX years or be hanged" was their sentence for stealing a loaf of bread to feed their family. After their time was up, they could not afford the price to sail home, so they stayed in the Colonies. Some became rich there by enslaving the locals.

Is our own (not altogether glorious) history making us afraid of refugees and immigrants here today?

In the 1940s, Italian prisoners of war were brought to the UK, some to the Orkney Islands where they were put to work building barriers between the islands to keep

Scapa Flow as a harbour safe from marauding German warships – this was illegal under International Law, so our government renamed these barriers “Causeways between the islands for the benefit of the islanders”. After Italy withdrew from their alliance with Nazi Germany, these prisoners were released but could not be sent home. When WW2 was over, many stayed here as immigrants and later married and settled in the UK, some creating successful businesses. Some altered their names so they could not be identified, on paper, as immigrants.

The British people are descendants of many invaders — Vikings, Irish, French, Saxons, Germans, to name just a few.

Are we so uncertain about our heritage that we must limit other nationalities trying to come here?

Three quotes to sum-up my argument:

- Tim Mackintosh-Smith (historian): "History does not repeat itself; it is men who repeat history." (BBC R4 *The World Tonight*, 23/12/2021)
- Desmond Tutu: "Whenever we meet another person we should doff our cap, as we are meeting the image of God." (quoted on BBC R4 *Today*, 27/12/2021)
- When Jesus was asked: "But who is my neighbour?" he replied with a story in which the hero was a hated enemy of those listening to him. (Luke 10:29-37 — *The story of the Good Samaritan*)

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