

GREEKS IN GREAT BRITAIN

The first known Greek to come to Britain was Pytheas (Greek: Πυθέας). He reported its name as *Pretannia*, which became *Britannia*; it is assumed that its Hellenised version was under Diodorus. It may have been used by some of the local peoples where Pytheas landed to themselves -*Pretani*. Many Greeks later arrived with the Roman legions as soldiers and traders, and their presence is attested by inscriptions on curse tablets, gravestones and dedicatory tablets in both Greek and Latin displayed in the Museum of London and elsewhere:

Including:

A ALFID POMP OLVSSA EX TESTAMENTO HER POS ANNOR LXX NA
ATHENVI H S EST

"Aulus Alfidius Pompolussa, as stated in his will, his heirs placed this. Seventy years old, a native of Athens, he lies here."

I O M TEMPLVM VETVSTATE CONLABSVM AQVILINVS AVG LIB ET
MERCATOR ET AVDAX ET GRAEC RESTITVER

"For Jupiter Best and Greatest, this temple, collapsed through old age, was restored by Aquilinus, freedman of the emperor, a trader, a man of courage, a Greek."

Two dedicatory plaques found in York beneath what is now the railway station stating that:

ΩΚΕΑΝΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΘΗΪ ΔΕΜΗΤΡΙΟΣ

"To Oceanus and Tethys, Demetrius [dedicates this]."

and

ΘΕΟΙΣ ΤΟΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΗΓΕΜΟΝΙΚΟΥ ΠΡΑΙΤΟΡΙΟΝ ΣΚΡΙΒΟΝΙΟΣ ΔΕΜΗΤΡΙΟΣ

"To the gods of the governor's headquarters, Scribonius Demetrius [dedicates this]."

As far north as Cumbria, we find the tomb of Hermes of Commagene:

"Let some traveller, on seeing Hermes of Commagene, aged 16 years, sheltered in the tomb by fate, call out: I give you my greetings, lad, though mortal the path of life you slowly tread, for swiftly have you winged your way to the land of the Cimmerian folk. Nor will your words be false, for the lad is good, and you will do him a good service."

Indeed, the Roman city of Carlisle, judging by surviving inscriptions, seems to have been home to a thriving Greek community. It is a matter of historical record then that Greek was being spoken in England hundreds of years before the English language or Anglo-Saxon peoples ever reached its shores.

In the 7th Century AD, following the death of the previous holder of the post, the Greek Theodore of Tarsus was appointed Head of the Anglican Church as Archbishop of Canterbury (669 AD); he played an important part in the early history of England, building churches and monasteries and establishing theological studies. According to the Venerable Bede, Theodore contributed to the bringing of a greater unity to English Christianity, and in 672 presided over the first council of the entire English Church, at Hertford. The structure of dioceses and parishes he put in place is still substantially in place today.

An early Greek presence in London can be attributed to the two brothers, Andronikos and Alexios Effomatos - described in contemporary records as "Grekes"- who were known to have been resident in London in 1440. They were from Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

In 1445, the king of England, Henry VI (1421-1471), granted the brothers permission to remain in London and to practise their trade of gold wire drawing. They made a costly type of thread in which thin strands of gold were intertwined with silk, and which was then used in expensive luxury fabrics and in sacerdotal vestments, a craft for which Constantinople had been famous in its heyday. Thanks to this royal grant, the brothers remained in London for many years. They lived first in the area of Cripplegate, much of which is now covered by the Barbican Centre, and later they moved to Broad Street, in what was then the Italian quarter of London. Andronikos, the elder, died in about 1472, but Alexios was still there in 1484, over forty years after his first arrival.

That set the pattern for Greek settlement over the next two hundred years. Some Greco-Albanian immigrants came as soldiers during the reign of Henry VIII, led by the officers Theodore Luchisi, Antonios Stesinos, and Colonel Thomas Buas, responsible for the garrisoning of the then-English possession of Calais. Some came as visitors for a short period. In about 1545, Nikandros Noukios of Corfu spent time in London and left an interesting account of his impressions. Indeed, he followed as a non-combatant an English invasion of Scotland where the English forces included Greeks from Argos under the leadership of Thomas of Argos whose 'Courage, and prudence, and experience of wars' was lauded by the Corfiot traveller. Even the descendants of the imperial Palaeologus dynasty carved out a niche as mercenary officers in Britain, with tombs to notable Palaeologi still visible in locations as far apart- both geographically and in terms of social standing- as Westminster Abbey and Landulph parish church, Cornwall. A number of Palaeologi fought against each other as high-ranking officers for both sides in the English Civil War.

Early Modern Greco-Britons were not solely soldiers. Nikodemos Metaxas, a printer by trade, worked in London for a time in the 1620s. Some came as refugees, seeking asylum or financial help as a result of misfortunes suffered under Ottoman rule. One of them was Gregorios Argyropoulos, the owner of an estate near Thessaloniki. When a Turkish soldier was accidentally killed on Argyropoulos' land, the Ottoman authorities held him responsible and forced him to flee overseas and eventually to London in 1633. A charitable collection was made for him in London churches, and he was presented with £48 before he departed the following year. A few individuals settled permanently, such as a native of Rhodes called Konstantinos Benetos, who was recorded as living in Clerkenwell between 1530 and 1578. These visitors, refugees and occasional long-term residents did not, as yet, constitute a community. They were too few, too obscure and too transitory, and above all they lacked the one thing that would have given them cohesion and a common identity: a church where they could practise their Orthodox faith.

Many Greeks that found themselves in the UK in the 1600's were seafarers who had been used as crew on various vessels and then unceremoniously left on the quay side after the journey's end. Many were able to find work ashore; one a Pasqua Rosee opened the very first Coffee House in London near St. Michael's, Cornhill in 1652. There is a plaque on the wall to commemorate this.

By the late seventeenth century, matters had changed. A number of Greeks now occupied prominent positions in London life. Constantinos Rodocanachi of Chios had become one of the physicians to King Charles II (1631 -1685) (PI. 1). Georgios Constantinos of Skopelos had established "The Grecian" a coffeehouse in Devereux court, just off the Strand, and he could count Sir Isaac Newton and other members of the Royal Society among his clientele. Numbers had also increased.

The expansion of Britain's overseas trade with the Levant brought many more merchant ships to the port of London, some of them crewed by Greeks. The time was therefore ripe to press for the establishment of a Greek Church.

The first documented organised Greek Orthodox Community was established in London in the 1670s, with the first Greek Orthodox Church in London being erected in 1677, in Soho, on the corner of Charing Cross Road and Greek Street . The church was dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin and was consecrated by the Metropolitan of Samos, Joseph Georgerinis. Oxford also became home to a Greek community centred on what is now Worcester College, which was known as 'Greek College' for much of the 17th century. The Greek College was founded by Lord Paget, then ambassador to Constantinople, though recruitment of Greek students was halted in 1705 because " 'the irregular life of some priests and laymen of the Greek Church living in London has greatly disturbed the Greek Orthodox Church. Therefore the Church has also prevented those who wish to go and study at Oxford.'"

In the 19th century, Greeks settled mostly in the port cities of London, Liverpool, Glasgow and Cardiff. Britain gained control over Cyprus on 4 June 1878 as a result of the Cyprus Convention and formally annexed it in 1913. Whereas prosperous Greek merchants began to settle in London's Bayswater, still home to the Greek Cathedral of Aghia Sophia, in the early 1800s, Greek Cypriots began to settle in London only from the 1930s. The earliest migrants came to the area around Soho, and many more arrived at the end of the Second World War. As rents in the West End increased, Camden and Fulham became popular areas for Greek-Cypriot migrants. Women initially worked from home in industries such as dressmaking. By the 1960s, a Greek language school and Greek Orthodox Church, St Nicholas, had been established in Fulham.

Population

It is estimated that the Greek population of London numbered several thousand by 1870 AD, whereas in 1850 AD it numbered just a few hundred.

The 2001 UK Census recorded 35,169 British residents born in Greece and 77,673 born in Cyprus, although the latter includes Turkish as well as Greek Cypriots. Recent estimates suggest that up to 400,000 ethnic Greeks may reside in the UK. The Office for National Statistics estimates that, as of 2009, the Greek-born population of the UK was 29,000.

Distribution

The 2001 Census recorded 12,360 Greek-born people living in London, with particular concentrations in the Hyde Park, Regent's Park, Chelsea and Kensington Census tracts. There are also large Greek communities in Sunderland, Moss Side in Manchester, Birmingham and Colchester. Generally, clusters of Cypriot-born people are found in the same locations as Turkish-born people, with 60 per cent living in areas of London with notable Turkish communities. The Census tracts with the highest number of Cypriot-born people in 2001 were Palmers Green, Upper Edmonton, Cockfosters, Lower Edmonton, Tottenham North and Tottenham South. Many Greek-Cypriots reside in Wood Green, Green Lanes and Palmers Green, the latter harbouring the largest community of Greek-Cypriots outside Cyprus, resulting in these areas bearing local nicknames whereby the *Green* is replaced by *Greek* - as in *Greek Lanes* and *Palmers Greek*.

According to a City of London Corporation sponsored report, there are between 28,600 and 31,000 Greek speakers in Greater London.

Students

There is a considerable number of Greek students studying in the UK. According to the official UK Higher Education Statistics Agency statistics, 16,050 Greek students attended UK universities in 2006/07, making Greece the fourth most common country of origin amongst overseas students in 2006/07, after China, India and the Republic of Ireland.