

BRANDING JÈRRI

Art, Image, and Identity in Contexts that Celebrate Jersey's Norman Heritage

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Abstract

Jersey has a distinct Norman heritage that has much to offer in terms of how and what the island brands to represent itself. Through content and visual analysis, several key contexts that represent the island are identified, and the ways some aspects of Norman heritage are presented to a contemporary viewer are examined. The paper focuses on visual emblems of modern-day design, language, and festivals. It is argued that icons of Jersey's real and sometimes imagined past as represented in art and image offers islanders a means by which to celebrate a unique sense of islandness and help construct an identity that serves as a means of self-preservation within the British Isles and an increasingly influential European Union. The discussion presents examples of self-representation as a way of contributing more broadly to island studies where islands often provide unique ways of celebrating and portraying local identity as a result of their geographic, social, and cultural difference.

Keywords

Art, branding, heritage, Jèrriais, Jersey

Introduction

Art and image can often act as powerful signifiers of identity. When used in contexts that celebrate aspects of the heritage of a small island, iconographic emblems of local identity can do much to help in the interpretation of how islanders wish to represent themselves. In this context, and in an era in which islands, cultures, and nations are discovering or re-discovering individuality and identity, the place of art and image is often negotiated as part of a process of cultural presentation and representation.

The island of Jersey – a self-governed British Crown territory – occupies a complex political, geographic, and cultural place in the contemporary British and European milieu (fig 1). The island, along with the other Channel Islands, has been substantially anglicized as a result of British migration and other influences over the past century or so, and the decades following its five-year occupation by Nazi Germany during the Second World War witnessed unprecedented development and change, first within the tourist industry and, particularly from the 1960s, as a result of a flourishing financial sector.

The annexation of the island by the Duchy of Normandy in the tenth century resulted in a Norman heritage, including the development of a local language known as Jèrriais that is currently experiencing renewed interest after many decades of gradual decline. This heritage has much to offer Jersey in terms of how and what it brands to represent itself (*cf.* Clark, 2008 and States of Jersey, 2007).

The methods employed in this paper draw from cultural studies, iconography, and my own knowledge of Jersey as an islander. The discussion has been influenced by theories and approaches to art, heritage branding, and assemblage that are pertinent in the case of

Jersey and other similar small island cultures, particularly when there may be different perceptions of that identity by insiders and outsiders alike (e.g., Adams, 2006: 8; Buzinde, 2007; Ford, 2008; Graham and Howard, 2008; Hoffman, 2006; Klein, 2000; Kornberger, 2010; Lury, 2009; Rees Leahy, 2009; Russell, 2006; and Zolfagharian and Jordan, 2007). Through content and visual analysis, I identify several key contexts that represent the island and examine how Norman heritage is presented and represented to a contemporary viewer. I have opted for a broad definition of art, one that inherently includes many spheres of artistic creation, including pictures, photographs, design motives, and wearable art and design. While outlining several emblems of Jersey's heritage, the main focus of the paper is on the contexts of the island's past as portrayed in the present. These include visual emblems of modern-day design, which might be found in touristic sectors, costumes and iconography used during public events such as La Fête Nouormande (celebrating Norman culture), and pictorial representation used to accompany other examples of Jersey identity. I argue that icons of this real and sometimes imagined past as represented in art and image offer islanders a means by which to celebrate for themselves and others a unique sense of islandness and help construct an identity that serves as a means of self-preservation within the British Isles and an increasingly influential European Union. The discussion presents examples of self-representation as a way of contributing more broadly to island studies where islands often provide unique ways of celebrating and portraying local identity as a result of their geographic, social, and cultural difference.

This paper has three main sections. The first of these, "Branding Jersey", offers a succinct overview of some of the contexts in which Jersey is branded as a place of local celebration. The second part focuses on language in connection with several site-specific contexts in which Jersey portrays its Norman heritage visually with written symbols of Norman identity. The last main part of the discussion looks at festivals, particularly the visual emblems that accompany such events in texts and costume.



Figure 1. Map of Jersey. Courtesy of Jersey Tourism – <http://www.jersey.com/business/media/Pages/ChannellIslandsMap.aspx>

Branding Jersey

The expansion of the global tourist industry in the twentieth century is one example of how islands have been transformed in local and distant imaginations (Apostolopoulos and Gayle, 2002). An island might be able to capitalize on its geographical existence by marketing itself to short-term visitors who might gaze at its natural features, heritage, or even recently invented aspects of its island identity. At this juncture, islands might be viewed as products of their own creation, at least within the branding industry (Grydehøj, 2008; 2010). While islands such as Jersey have long existed with a unique identity that has also been one of the main attractions for increasing numbers of long-term residents, migrants, and tourists, that self-identity can move to a new sphere of branding that simultaneously serves as a celebration of self and as an attraction for others.

There are many features about Jersey that help to show a unique island identity and support its place, or displacement, in the broader British Isles and European setting. The island has its own political system, laws, and taxes, and it boasts natural beauty, cultural heritage, and tourist attractions. On a cultural level, the island has recently been through a process of choosing a new anthem as a further process of identity construction and consolidation in an era that has seen many islands catapulted into the world of global flows and commercialization (Johnson, 2008b). The recent Jersey brand for tourism, finance, agriculture, and community released in 2007 centres around the “Brand Identity Guides”, which are intended to provide “creative stimulus” (States of Jersey, 2007.; see also Corporate Edge Branding, 2008 and Grydehøj, 2008) and offer some of the visual representations that are recommended by Jersey Tourism (part of the Department of Economic Development). The link with art in this context is particularly noticeable, blending text, photographs, art, and design. The rationale behind such a branding exercise was to posit questions about the island and to offer a visual and textual way for islanders to represent themselves to the wider world:

*How can we position Jersey as a sophisticated and contemporary place to visit?
How can we reinforce perceptions of strength, solidity and integrity within the financial market?
How can we help grow the agriculture sector recognising (and marketing) the unique qualities that make Jersey produce worth trying and buying?
How can we reawaken a sense of pride amongst the whole community in Jersey? (States of Jersey, 2007)*

As part of the branding exercise, Jersey was provided with a logo. Possibly unfairly referred to in several spheres as the “yellow banana” (e.g., Lewis, 2007), the logo officially combines the word “Jersey” with a yellow symbol and represented “Jersey’s sense of independent spirit and freedom, the richness of its culture and all its produce, and its fresh outlook for the future” (States of Jersey, 2007). Seven pages of the branding guidelines provide detailed instruction on how to use the logo and what not to do. Officially described as a “golden bird” (States of Jersey 2007), such was the public and commercial criticism of the logo that many businesses joined together to hold a public display of possible alternatives to the nearly £250,000 exercise (Quéree, 2007). The other outputs in this exercise are primarily photographic images that serve to represent an island and its unique features.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of this particular branding exercise is the absence of any distinct celebration of Jersey’s Norman heritage. By “Norman heritage”, I refer to aspects of island life such as Jersey’s unique minority language (Jèrriais), archaeology, architecture, and legal administration that point to Norman influences on the island. Moreover, as one review for the Jersey government points out, “the Norman French legacy in Jersey includes the influence of the feudal system, both in terms of landscape artefacts and systems of land tenure, the high hedges and cider varieties and the rounded arch”

(States of Jersey Planning and Environment Committee, 1999: 28). While it might be argued that Jersey itself is part of the Norman brand and that any reference to the island automatically connotes images of a Norman past, the very absence of anything to do with Norman heritage in the branding points to a marketing exercise that placed value elsewhere. As I will show later in this discussion, Norman heritage is very much alive and a part of how many islanders celebrate their cultural identity, and it is included in artistic ways in contexts that serve to represent Jersey to islanders and visitors alike.

Language

It is possible to isolate Jersey's Norman heritage as an important aspect of contemporary island identity (Clark, 2008). Not only does Jersey celebrate locally its Norman past, but it simultaneously brands that heritage to the wider world in a context that advocates Britishness in the British Isles and political independence from the European Union (*cf.* Morley and Robins, 2001). In the next two parts of the discussion, I argue that Jersey's Norman past has renewed meaning today as an aspect of island heritage in a broader political context. It is here that Jersey is able to identify simultaneously across different cultural spheres: it is British yet self-governing, and it maintains 'others' that can also be more closely linked to or perceived in contradistinction from spheres of island identity (*e.g.*, other Channel Islands, particularly Guernsey; the British Isles; Britain; Normandy; France; Europe; and the European Union). For Jersey, there is a sense of unique belonging within the island community, one that can be simultaneously 'self' and 'other'.

In connection with island policy making with regard to culture, in 2005, the Education, Sport and Culture Committee (now a Department of the States of Jersey – the island's government), published the document *Development of a Cultural Strategy for the Island*. It recommended seven main aims, the first of which was "to foster, develop and strengthen the Island's identity" (States of Jersey, 2005; see further Le Rendu, 2004; Riddell, 2005 and 2007). Jersey's language, Jèrriais, provides a fundamental building block for helping to nurture island identity. Even though a recognized minority language, such is its importance in Jersey's heritage that the States of Jersey emphasized its place in a document that aimed to re-think island cultural policy. As noted in Objective 1.9, the policy proposed:

To investigate the feasibility of adopting Jèrriais as the Island's official minority language and to work with the Société Jersiaise, Le Don Balleine and L'Assemblée d'Jèrriais to revive the language of Jèrriais.

...

Language brings distinctiveness, a sense of localness and a whole new set of skills all of which are important qualities in attracting the creative economy. It is fundamental to the Island's identity. (States of Jersey, 2005)

The importance of this document and its inclusion of Jèrriais related to more global cultural policy as outlined by the United Nations, which notes that languages:

Are rooted in the life of a community, their survival may well depend on the value that the community attaches to their vitality and transmission. . . . A language policy which favours the practice and transmission even of little-spoken languages helps to preserve the world's linguistic wealth and contributes to safeguarding cultural diversity. (UNESCO, 2002)

Referring back to the main theme of the conference where this paper was first presented, one might ask, "Is there language in art?" An answer to this question is found in the various ways in which Jèrriais is used in contexts that portray the island or parts of the island by visual and textual means. From a signpost to a postage stamp, and from a one pound note to a billboard, each context offers a combination of signifiers that does much to

interconnect language, arts, and design in ways that show some aspects of island identity, display, and construction on Jersey.

For example, in 2010, Jersey issued new banknotes for its unique currency. Of particular relevance for this discussion is the link between language and art as depicted on the notes. Each of the £1, £5, £10, £20, and £50 notes includes a mix of text, design motives, and pictorial illustrations. The text on each note is trilingual: English on the front and Jèrriais and French on the reverse. The £50 note, for instance, shows on the front pictorial images of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (the British monarch was historically the former Norman monarch); Mont Orgueil (Gorey) Castle, which was built during a long period of military stand-offs, incursions, and wars between the British and the French; the three leopards for the island crest; a map of Jersey; and English words (fig 2). Indeed, in connection with identity markers such as these, as argued by Buzinde, “heritage sites are key markers of how societies imagine themselves and those around them” (Buzinde, 2007: 240 and see also Russell, 2006). On the reverse of the note are pictures of houses on Les Écréhous (islets/rocks), the round tower at Ouaisné (bay), the twelve parish crests of the island, the words *États de Jersey* (States of Jersey), and the denominational value written in both French and Jèrriais.



Figure 2. Fifty pound note, States of Jersey –
<http://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Tax%20and%20your%20money/ID%20OnDemandJersey%2020100219%20JMB.pdf>

These images show the island’s eclectic mix of cultural heritage: Norman history, French influence, and British loyalty. What is usually seen as island identity is shown through art and design to be a hybrid form of heritage that stands out in the present day as a way of asserting a unique island identity. Jersey’s own currency is very much part of the island’s

identity. Not only in terms of the figurative, textual, and pictorial symbols represented on notes and coins but also in terms of, for example, the unique one pound note. As noted in a report on a sitting of the States of Jersey in December 2009, Senator Ozouf remarked:

I have no consideration of withdrawing the £1 note, indeed the new £1 note will form an important part of the new family of Jersey currency that will be launched early next year and released into circulation. I believe that the £1 note is popular with the public, it is part of our culture and it differentiates us from the United Kingdom together with the other Crown Dependencies. (States of Jersey, 2009)

Placing the discussion in discourse on heritage tourism and identity construction, visual emblems of island identity such as these are examples of how “heritage commodities shape the expectations of their consumers because nation is rendered intelligible for everyone as a symbol” (Buzinde, 2007: 241). Nevertheless, such a branding exercise, which includes a process of re-naming or labelling, can be used as “a way of managing identity” (Kornberger, 2010: 113) or “can be used as a tool of control, a means of inscribing and reifying certain cultural and political ideologies” (Alderman, 2008: 204).

Festivals

Jersey has several festivals in which art, image, and identity are presented as distinct ways of visualizing the island’s Norman heritage. Through the rendition and public performance of short texts, poetry, and song in Jèrriais, Jersey’s language represents an important part of the island’s cultural heritage. For example, La Fête Nouormande (hereafter referred to as the Fête) is one such festival and probably the most visible public display and celebration of Norman heritage (Johnson, 2008a; b; c). Held annually and rotating amongst the region’s different Norman centres (e.g., Jersey, Guernsey, and the Norman part of France), the festival includes many visual and artistic signifiers of cultural identity (music, poetry, short stories, displays, and dancing). Since its founding in 1998, Jersey has hosted four such Fêtes (a fifth will be held there in 2011). In this context, art is found in two main spheres: costume and iconography.

One of the characteristic forms of visual display at the Fête is the wearing of what is often termed ‘period costume’. Many participants dress up for the occasion, but in this context dressing up means wearing attire that is deemed historical. The process of wearing period costume relates primarily to a sense of representing the past. La Fête Nouormande celebrates the region’s Norman heritage, so period costume indicates a sense of historical connection with Norman culture, although the actual costumes worn are often simply historical without any distinct visual Norman connection. However, the act of dressing up for the occasion offers spectators and participants alike a means to infer the past – a way of signifying Norman heritage through historical inference.

Another visually and artistically important aspect of the Fête is the use of imagery on its annual anthologies, which include texts for performers and audience. While the anthology for the 1999 Fête was entirely textual, in terms of visual imagery of the 2002, 2005, and 2008 Fêtes that were held on Jersey, there are several visual ways in which those promoting the festival wished to portray the event. For example, in 2002, the front cover emphasized a montage of pictures that included signage in Jèrriais, emblems of island identity, an old musical instrument (bachîn: pan), and people dressed in period costume (fig 3). In 2005, various emblems were placed on a colour front cover (fig 4). The main photographic image

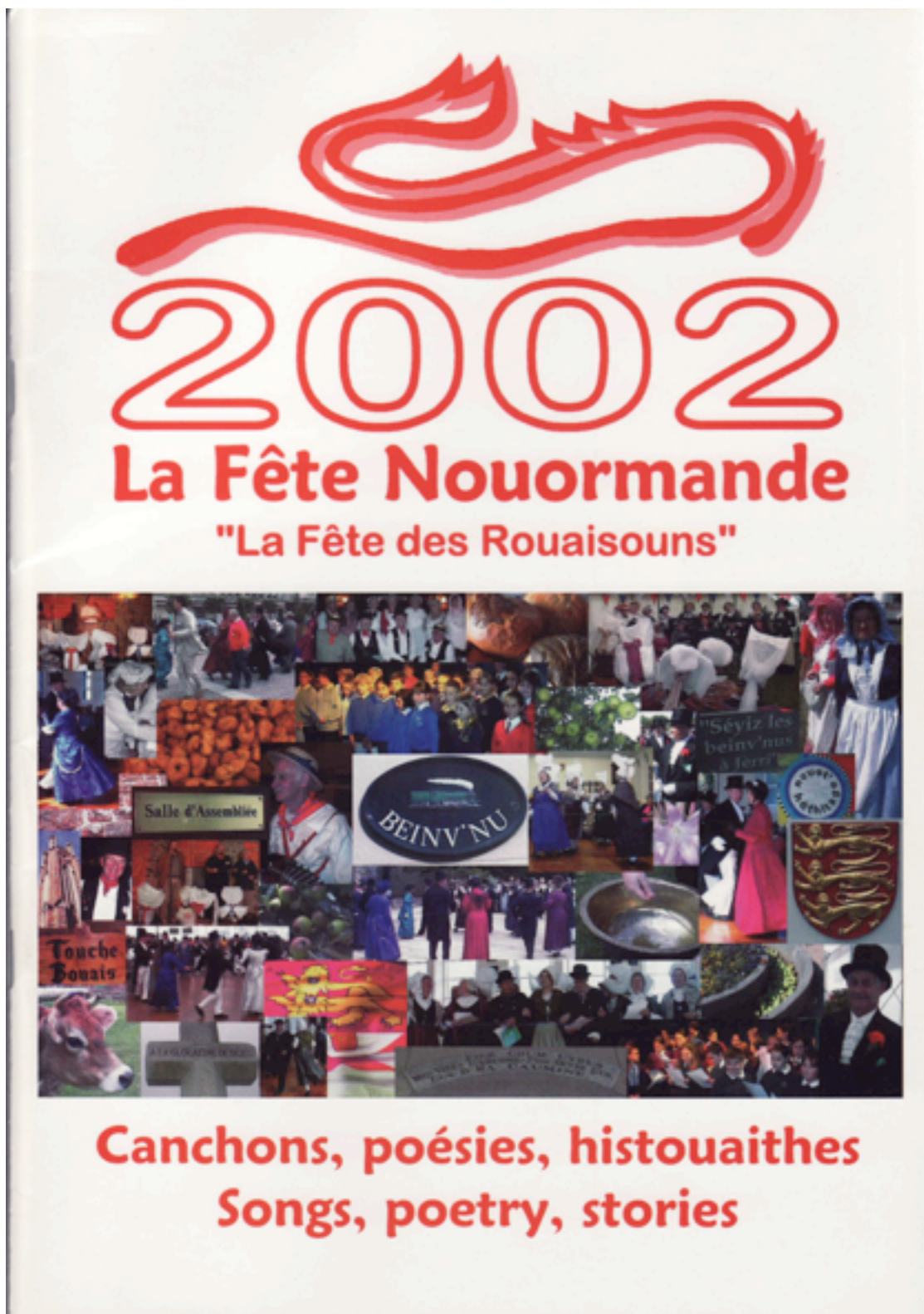


Figure 3. Front cover of 2002 anthology of La Fête Nouormande. Jersey: Le Congrès des Parlers Normands et Jèrriais

in the centre of the page shows a group of children and adults dressed in period attire, there are three emblematic logos in the top left corner that portray different acknowledgements and spheres of affiliation, there is a Jersey tourism logo in the bottom right, and there is bilingual text that outlines the main events. In 2008, as well as the obligatory stylized lion (leopard) on the top of the front cover, the side includes six photographs of previous events (fig 5). Perhaps the most striking aspect of the photographs is that while they show

performers in action, they also reveal attire that is predominantly seeking to dress up for the part. The period costume acts as a visual signifier of heritage, a wearable artwork that embodies island identity and links to a real and imagined Norman past.

Jèrri Jersey

La Maison de la Normandie | Le Comité des Connaissables | www.societe-jersiaise.org/festec/fete2005

La Fête Nouormande

Enjoy a unique, week long, celebration of the Norman culture of the Channel Islands and mainland Normandy.
Ch'est eune s'maine dé fête pour célébrer la tchultuthe Nouormande d's Îles d'la Manche et d'la Grand-Terre.

May 23rd – May 27th
St. Helier
St. Helier comes alive with events and the sounds of Jèrriais.

- Street entertainment with music, poetry and singing.
- Guided walks around town.
- A lunch time concert.
- Friday - the highlight of the week in St. Helier - a musical parade in traditional Norman costume.

May 28th – May 30th
The Royal Jersey Showground – Trinity
Three days of La Fête Nouormande as part of the RJA & HS Foire de Jersey.

- A church service in Jèrriais.
- Traditional Norman and Channel Island games.
- A Norman market.
- Displays and talks on the Channel Islands' links with Normandy.

l'23 d'Mai – l'27 d'Mai
St. Hélyi
D'uilz du Jèrriais par les c'mîns à St. Hélyi.

- D'la beuquétie, d'la son'nie, d'la poésie et d'la chant'ie.
- Des prom'nades d'pées en ville.
- Un concert d'La Sagesse Nouormande.
- Vendredi, eune pathade musicale en costumes traditionnels – le cliou d'la s'maine à St. Hélyi.

l'28 d'Mai – l'30 d'Mai
à La Société Rouoyale à La Trinneté
Trais journées d'La Fête Nouormande duthant la Foire de Jersey d'La Société Rouoyale.

- Un service en Jèrriais.
- Des gammes traditionnelles des Îles et d'la Grand-Terre.
- Un marché Nouormand.
- Des mouontréthies et leclutthes entour nos liens Nouormands.

Detailed programme of events available from Jersey Tourism Visitor Services Centre, Liberation Square and the Arts Centre, Phillips Street, St. Helier
Pannez un feillet d'siez Tourisme ou l'Centre des Arts

www.jersey.com 

Figure 4. Front cover of 2005 anthology of La Fête Nouormande. Jersey: Le Congrès des Parlers Normands et Jèrriais

La Fête Nouormande

Enjoy Jersey's week-long celebration of Norman heritage!

Lundi l'19 d'Mai - Vèndrédi l'23 d'Mai
Monday 19th May - Friday 23rd May

Beusquéthie
Street entertainment

Chant'tie
Singing

Dans'sie
Dancing

Costeunmes
Costumes

Poésies
Poetry

Musique
Music

Pathade en Ville
Town Parade

Gammes
Games

Sanm'di l'24 d'Mai - Lundi l'26 d'Mai
Saturday 24th May - Monday 26th May

Les Rouaisouns à la
Société Rouoyale, La Trinneté
Fête at RJA&HS, Trinity

Fanne
Fun

Mangi et baithe
Food and drink

Sèrvice en Jèrriais

Stâles
Stalls

Produits Nouormands
Norman produce

**Toute la s'maine,
du Jèrriais à la Nouormande!**

<http://www.societe-jersiaise.org/langsec/fete2008>

Figure 5. Front cover of 2008 anthology of La Fête Nouormande. Jersey: Le Congrès des Parlers Normands et Jèrriais

Conclusion

Jersey is branded in many ways with numerous accompanying uses of art and design. Many aspects of Jersey are celebrated and branded in connection with the island's heritage. The island's Norman culture, whether real or imagined, is often embedded in the island's identity and is sometimes utilized in visual culture, design, and attire. Jersey's Norman heritage and its branding in various settings and types of presentation and representation, therefore, feature many types of art and design that celebrate island identity. In doing this, Jersey helps construct an island brand in an increasingly diverse and often contested twenty-first century context of political, cultural, and linguistic identities.

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