

Lesson 1

Welcome to this series of videos where we're going to introduce you to the Guernsey French language in a pragmatic way as possible, starting from the very basics, and moving on gradually to more advanced topics. But first, we'll introduce ourselves:

Alan: I'm Alan. Guernsey French was my first language and I learnt English to go to School. I stopped speaking it a short while later, but started again two or three years ago.

Alex: I'm Alexandra, from Guernsey. English is my first language, French is my second. Guernsey-French became extinct in my family when I was a small child, and just a couple of years ago, I would not have been able to identify the language. In the past year, I have begun speaking the language, and I have discovered just how fascinating it is.

Julie: I'm Julie. I'm from England, but I've lived in Guernsey for a number of years. My first language is English, but I can also speak French. Recently, I've started to learn Guernsey French.

So now let's go on to the first lesson, which, traditionally in language teaching is "Greetings".

In Guernsey French the standard greeting for someone who you haven't seen for a while is:

"Coum-tchi qu'll'affaire va?" (How go things?, or, How are things going?)

In English we might say this in other ways, like "How's it going?". An alternative form is Guernsey French is

"L'Affaire va t'alle?" (Literally: Things, Do they go?)

If someone says this to you, an answer is expected --- just as it is in English. If someone said "How's it going?" to you, you might respond "Very well, thank you", "Not too bad" or "Mustn't grumble". Almost exactly the same replies occur in Guernsey French:

"Énn amas bian" (very well) or you could add "mercie" (thank you)

"Pas trop mal" (not too bad)

"Faut-pas-s'ploidre" (mustn't grumble).

Obviously, there are others (as there are in English). Two that one hears quite often are

"d-mi a d-mi" (so-so; middling)

"coum aen viaer" (like an old man) or "coum enne vielle" (like an old woman)

If you said "Pas enn amas bian" (not very well) people would get concerned and would expect some explanation of what was wrong (as would be the case in English).

These greetings are semi-formal, in the sense that you'd only use them to someone who you hadn't seen for a while. In many cases, in both English and Guernsey French you might just open the conversation with an observation. For example, you might comment on the weather: "I fait bal ogniet" (It's a nice day today) or, if you've just noticed them, "te v'la" (there you are!). We'll come across these terms in later videos.

On leaving, many people now say "A la perchoine!" --- and these may be the only words of Guernsey French that they know. It's become a kind of catchphrase, but before that happened it was used very rarely. It means "Till the next one", and if it was used at all it would be on special occasions like Christmas or Birthday celebrations to people that you might not see for another year or more. Ironically there's an expression which was used much more, and which can be used when you don't know when you'll be seeing each other again: "Es aoutes jours!" --- which means literally "To other days". Both it and "A la perchoine" can be translated as "To our next meeting".

If you're going to be seeing each other again soon, then you would normally include information about when that will be. So you might say "A jeudi" --- "To Thursday", if you were going to see them on Thursday, or perhaps "A d'moin", "To tomorrow", or as we might say in English "Till tomorrow", for someone you were expecting to see the next day.

Another way of saying goodbye, which isn't so formal, is the equivalent of the English "Be seeing you", "See you around", or just "See you". In Guernsey French we might say "Nous s'verra" --- literally "We'll see each other" or "J'te verra" --- "I'll see you". If you saying this last one to a number of people you would have to use the plural form, whereas "Nous s'verra" can be said to any number of people, so I would recommend this for beginners.

CULTURAL CHIT-CHAT

At the end of every lesson, we'll have a chat about what are hopefully interesting aspects of the language. It could be about general ways in which Guernsey French and English differ, about the history of various aspects of the language, sayings --- basically anything that's not about learning the language itself.

We'll start in this lesson by talking about Guernsey French surnames. They are often pronounced quite differently in Guernsey French as compared to how they are said in English.

First we have to talk about the "Le" as in "Le Tessier". If there is a "Le", it is not used, unless there is only one syllable in the name itself. so "Le Page" is "Le Page", but "Le Tessier" is "Tissier". This means that a "Mr Le Tessier" would be "Mess Tissier".

We've seen that the main form of the name may also be pronounced differently. Here are some more examples (some with an initial "Le" and some without):

Gallienne (Gallogne); Langlois (Langlais); Le Pelley (Pelai); Queripel (Tcheripe); Tostevin (Totevin); Jehan (Cent); Le Cheminant (Ch'minant); Blondel (Bllande)

and there are many others.

Some are not changed much from the English, for example "Ferbrache", and some which are obviously not from Guernsey may be given a Guernsey French form. For example, my own name, McKane, is of Scottish origin, but the family has been in Guernsey for so long that the surname has acquired the Guernsey French form "Metchene".

One can go on, for example "de la Mare" is usually pronounced "d'la Mar", but hopefully this has given an idea of how the people who had these names actually said them.