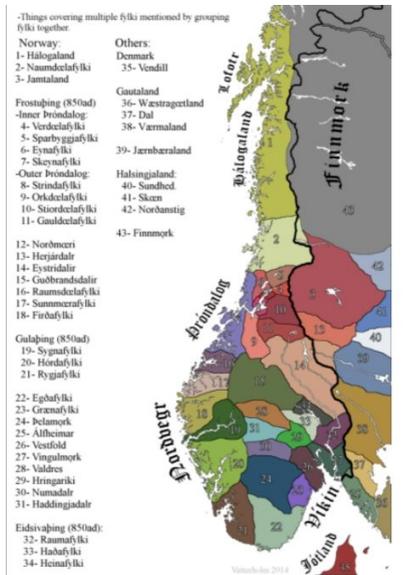


An in-depth look at the de Lacy origins



The Viking-age Fylki (Petty kingdoms) in Norway before the unification.

Ninth Century Norway comprised many small kingdoms crowded upon the Western and Southern Coast with constant feuds and bitter fighting between Clans (Tribes) for fishing or farming land. The primary source of food was fish from the Fiord inlets or the open sea. The Norse people became adept fisherman tackling the stormy Norwegian Seas. From their mastery of the waters, came a whole new era. The development of the Longboat.

King Harald Fairhair (Haraldr Hálfðanarson)

Born 850 Died 933. First King of Norway from 875 to 930

Following bitter fighting over land, safe harbours and best fishing areas. War-torn Norway in 872AD found peace following the crowning of King Harald Fairhead as the first high King to rule over all of Norway. Over the next two years, he developed his plan for the betterment of Norway. Then in 875AD, he called together his chief Jarl's.

A Jarl was an aristocrat of Norweigan society, a title gained from power some were even past kings. If there was wealth, the Jarls held most of it. They soon realised that the longboat could be a weapon of war. To them, wealth came not only from Norweigan land but from trading Silver and Slaves their Longboats took them to find both. A single foray to a European coast could be worth more to the Jarl and his men than all the farming and fishing for a whole year. A Jarl within the region he controlled offered protection and security to the smaller clans who had sworn allegiance to him.

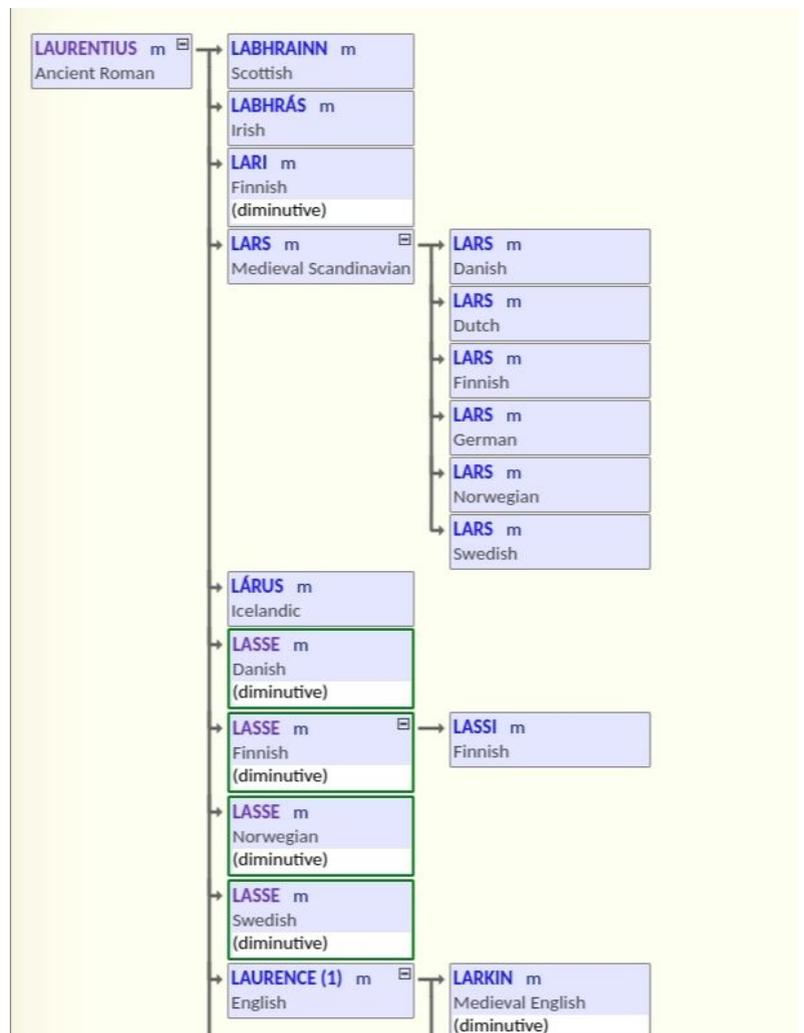
The next level of Norwegian medieval society was made up by the many Norsemen who belonged to the middle class, known as Karls. These people were freemen and landowners. Farmers, fishermen and artisans. Extended Karl families banded

together, forming a local clan living in clusters of two or more longhouses supplemented by barns and workshops. Karl clans were not necessarily rooted in one area like the Scottish clans that followed them four hundred years later. Like the Jarls but still, under their patronage, there were larger Karl clans.

The lowest level of Norway's society was the þræll (Thrall) made up of slaves and bondsmen. If a Norseman of any class, could not pay his debts, he had to become a bondsman and work for the lender until they paid the debt. However, the three social levels were not as rigid as in other parts of Europe. Mechanisms existed so that a person could move from one class to another. There was poorer Jarls and richer Karls. I know of no history where Karl Lasse was placed between the first two classes other than he owed allegiance to Rollo.

Lasse

A medieval Scandinavian name reaching back to the 2nd-century known right across Scandinavia including Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and the far northern coastal Germanic people of Europe. Together with the name Lars, it derives from Laurentius a Latin given name or surname meaning 'From Laurentum (a city near Rome), or "Laurelled" derived from the Old Greek word Lavrenti meaning "bright one, shining one". The modern-day derivative of Laurentius is Laurence.



Rollo The Ganger. Jarl Gaange Rolf. c. 860–c. 930 AD

In 875 AD Harald Fairhair, the first King of Norway called upon his leading Jarls “we grow too many for our sparse resources to support our population. There are lands far more fertile than our own, and I ask which Jarls will gather his men and move to settle these lands”. Rollo so-called ‘the Ganger’ he was a giant of a man. Too tall to ride the small mountain horses. Rollo walked or ran into battle. He could see sense in the King’s argument. Having led his warrior soldiers upon such Viking raids. He too gathered together his Clan chiefs. Among them was Lasse, Karl of Clan Lasse. Once the Clan leaders who had answered Rollo’s call assembled, Rollo, outlined their mission:

“We grow too many for our sparse land. The King wants my Clan Chiefs to decide. Do you wish to stay here fighting fellow Norsemen for the limited land available? Or seek new lands, with richer pickings. Let me tell you, I have seen these other places on my travels and I know we can enrich ourselves”. Lasse and other Clan Chiefs were prepared to follow Rollo. With a mighty roar, they replied: “We follow you, Lord for greater riches and greener lands”. In 879 AD, a combined fleet of 700 longboats, embarked from the shores of Norway on their voyage of discovery. With a collective chant that echoed around the fiord, came their new battle cry. “Glory or the great feasting halls of Valhalla is our destiny.”

Days later the fleet of longboats divided with many heading beyond Scotland to settle and Anax the Orkney Islands to King Harald Fairhair Norway. According to the Orkney Saga, Sigurd Eysteinnsson (Eyestineson) - or Earl Sigurd the Powerful - became the first Jarl of Orkney. Rollo had seen the Orkneys which he considered too similar to the sparse Norwegian countryside. “We go south to find richer lands”.

The River Seine, France 886 AD.

Their travels led Rollo’s remaining fleet, to Northern France and the mouth of the river Seine. Their longboats carried them silently upstream pillaging small settlements along the way. They sacked the town of Rouen, then moved further upstream retracing the steps taken by earlier Vikings in the 855AD siege of Paris. Rollo knowing he could not take Paris and retraced their path downstream. On a suitable bend of the river Seine with high slopes either side, they pulled up their longboats and in 891 AD set up an encampment.

For the next twenty years, Rollo and his Norse chieftains settled and prospered by stopping the many passing boats and demanding taxes or goods for safe passage. Unable to move them the Franks suffered their presence till 911AD. King Charles, the Simple, ruler of the Western Franks, offered a treaty to Rollo to normalise the presence of his Viking raiders along the River Seine. Rollo approved, and the treaty of Saint-Clair-Sur-Epte (911) was agreed and signed.

The agreement called for the Norsemen together with the Franks to act as guardians against further Viking raids. Cease their taxing of boats on the River Seine and live at peace with the Franks. Rollo was to be baptised, and he and all his men must also convert to Christianity. Rollo agreed to marry the King's daughter, Gisla.

For, agreeing to the Charter King Charles awarded Rollo the north-western corner of France (from the River Epte to the sea) Including the city of Reims. An area covering 11,825 sq miles. Rollo took to himself the baptismal name of Robert followed by his induction as the first Duke of Normandy (the land of the Norse). For past loyalty, and for embracing the spirit of the treaty, he awarded areas of the new Normandy to his chieftains. Lasse for Clan Lasse was granted two hundred square miles within the South East of the Calvados region.

The name Lasse gave way first to the Latin name Lassi and following the example set by Robert Duke of Normandy Lassi and other family members found themselves Christian Frankish brides. This was expected by the Catholic church who ignored the fact that the first generation ex-Norsemen already had pagan (sometimes even Christian) wives who were seen by the Franks hierarchy as little more than camp followers. Robert (Rollo) was no exception as his first wife or mistress was a noble Frank lady Poppa of Bayeux (born circa 880). Poppa was the mother of Duke Robert's heir William I Longsword the 2nd Duke of Normandy and not his Treaty bride Gisla. This practice was not uncommon through the anglo-Norse and an acceptance that occasionally the paternal side of the family would produce an illegitimate heir. Right down to William The bastard 4th Duke of Normandy. With their continued assimilation by the Catholic church and Frankish marriages brought a higher level of sophistication. Like other anglo-Norse families over the next three or four generations, the Lassi family became true Normans. Their rich land brought growing prosperity and further land grants as the profile of the Lord of Lassi grew.

The Lacy family had been granted 200 sq miles of land (128,000 acres) to be held by the Norman law of Parage the area to be known as Lassy also known as the Laciou Latius estates in the county of Calvados. It also linked Vire with Lassy being only 20kms away, well within the land grant. On receiving their lands the descendants and extended family of Karl Lasse also followed the pattern of taking Frankish brides, adapting to the rules of the Catholic church to become prosperous Norman landowners. Their prosperity gained them further estates in and around Normandy. By, the fourth generation we arrive at Hugh de Laci now Lord of Lassy. Father of our two de Lacy brothers. The Elder Ilbert de Lacy and younger (half brother?) Gauthier or anglicised as Walter. Under Norman feudal laws the de Lacy family were under-lords to the Bishop of Beaux. However, Walter became an under lord to William FitzOsbern cousin to Duke William. Two explanations are Walter was managing new distant de Lacy estates or by marriage into the FitzOsbern family either could bring about a change of tutelage.

The de Lacy part in the preparation and the 1066 invasion I show elsewhere. There are however still contested opinions about these early origins. My writings here follow the more recognised history in more detailed than I have written before. but I will also try to address my thoughts and they are only thoughts to some alternative de Lacy History.

My personal assumptions based on my de Lacy research

The army of Rollo now known as Robert 1st Duke of Normandy comprised minor Jarls and many small Norwegian Karl clans. The Name Lasse since the 3rd century was used and known throughout the whole of Scandinavia and the northern shores of Europe. It is feasible to recognise a Karl Lasse and his family men as being a part of Rollo's expedition.

Did the de Lacy family come from Lassy in Calvados?

The name Lassy may have been there in Calvados long before the land was created as Normandy. The Lacy family may have come from elsewhere.

With no evidence available either way, I offer you two assumptions.

Once Duke Robert had decided on the lands, he would keep for himself from the 11,825 sq miles of the new Normandy. His scribes were given the task of dividing up

the rest between his chieftains. The first explanation: the scribes saw the name Lassy on the rough map of the day and granted Lassy his 200 sq miles there. My second explanation is that having drawn up the map they wrote Lasse on the position that his land would be thus creating the place where modern-day Lassy is situated today.

The name Lassy occurs in other parts of modern-day France even as far south as the Pyrenees. Did the name derive from the Gaulish name Lascius?

I consider the evidence shown as a more probable origin in Norway. With the name Lassy in use across Scandinavia plus a 2nd century Roman or Greek origin. That we find the name Lassy in several locations may reflect the existence of the name on routes or trade sites of Scandinavian - Rome merchants?

There appears to be no evidence at Lassy commune that proves the de Lacy family wherever there.

Along with most researchers, I too believed this to be the original seat of the de Lacy family. It wasn't till I undertook this deeper 'origins' research that I realised this was not right. I now believe we have misinterpreted the Commune of Lassy with the granting of 200 sq miles of land situated in an area which includes the commune of Lassy. Karl (or by now Jarl) Lassy would have followed the example of his over Lord Duke Robert and decided which part of the 128,000 acres he wanted his immediate family to farm and then divided the larger remaining acres to the rest of his clan according to merit. Anything from several thousand acres down to others receiving less than a hundred acres. On the land Lassy had chosen for himself he would have ordered the building of the family homestead. Probably based upon a Norwegian longhouse.



Later a timber-framed Manor house. Only the Duke of Normandy and one or two of his leading Lords would have been able to afford to build in stone. So the seat of the de Lacy family could have been anywhere within the 200 sq miles. The de Lacy family held this land until the death of Henry de Lacy Earl of Lincoln in 1311 when it was probably broken up by the crown. Once unoccupied the original timber buildings would not take long to rot away leaving any trace. The growth of the French chateau building had still not begun. The start of most early versions was built from the 1400's. After the de Lacy Baronial family had died out.

Why is there not more Normandy history about the rise of the de Lacy family prior to 1066?

Over four hereditary generations, Karl Lassy and his family had accumulated their holdings with the acquisition of other estates making the family richer. Their stock in society will also have risen by stronger maternal inclusion within each generation. Reflected because by the early eleventh century the family head was Lord Hugh de Laci and they were known at the court of the Duke of Normandy. They were however still minor Lords. Hugh was still an under lord to Bishop Odo of Bayeux, who was an under lord to his half brother Duke William. Walter de Laci had either by marriage or by the family gaining estates away from Calvados become a vassal to William FitzOsbern cousin and confidant to his overlord Duke William. **The powerful de Lacy family was not to be created until they arrived in England.**

With thanks for the three pictures shown.

The Name Lasse

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The Viking-age Fylki (Petty kingdoms) in Norway before the unification.

by jkvatterholm: **For the Longhouse** Malene Thyssen, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Malene>