

# From Liberation

Islanders who were in Jersey at the end of the occupation have contributed their memories and photographs to a peoples' history project as part of the Liberation 60 celebrations. Co-ordinators



At the end of June 1945 hundreds of people gathered at the harbour to welcome the Isle of Guernsey - the first mailboat to arrive in the island for five years. (Jersey Evening Post)



Among the thousands of islanders who gathered to meet Field Marshall Montgomery were this group from the Young farmers Club.



In August 1947 over 500 Welsh women arrive to help with the harvest. (Jersey Evening Post)

THE JERSEY HERITAGE TRUST WANTED TO create a project for Liberation 60 that would “strike a different note” to previous commemorations and be forward looking, focussing on peace and prosperity. So the peoples' history project concentrated on the period from the last week of the occupation in 1945 to the accession of the new Queen in 1953.

After five years of hardship and occupation, the people of Jersey celebrated their liberation and then got on with the job of rebuilding their island home. These were very strange times. Some Jersey men enlisted in national service went to Germany, so the occupied became the occupiers; deportees came back to the island; rationing eventually ended and life started getting back to “normal”. People began moving to Jersey, which began to move forward itself with the start of mass tourism, changes in agriculture and government to name a few. There were long-term ramifications of the occupation: some families were shattered as sons and fathers were killed and long-term relationships were broken by the war. This created memories that were more sharp or angry for some people.

Many of the stories associated with the occupation and Liberation are well known, but the JHT Liberation 60 project drew on the stories and memories of ordinary people who had not contributed to recorded history before. The project is a people's history and, in Jersey, the easiest way to collect this type of material is by using the parish system. To this end, there were a number of parish meetings to which

parishioners were invited, either just to listen or to share their memories or photographs. Doug Ford, Head of Community Learning at the JHT, gave a short talk at each parish gathering, followed by a short film from the Jersey Film Archive. JHT staff also had a selection of photographs from the Société Jersiaise Photographic Archive and a few objects from the time to stimulate conversation.

The photographs were copied and parishioners' memories were recorded. Primary schools were also invited to participate in the project and their work will be copied and included in the resource.

At the beginning of May the JHT launched a display based on the information that was gathered. On one side, the display told the general story of the island during the post-War period, with the other side devoted to parish-specific material. It was a free-standing system that could be used in any parish hall, community centre, church or school. The JHT display could be used to complement displays put on by the parishes or as a starting point for people to add their own stories.

The project highlighted the following significant milestones, which took place in Jersey between the occupation and coronation:

## FIRST STEPS

- ◆ In the immediate post-war years, a certain amount of ‘tidying-up’ that had to be done after the last Liberation troops had gone home. A call was made for an official

# to Coronation

Doug Ford and Mel Warrs describe how the project focused on the aftermath of the war and the beginning of recovery.



1952 - The finale of the Battle of Flowers really was a battle. (Jersey Evening Post).



The International Road Race at West Park proved to be a popular event with islanders. (Jersey Evening Post)



The Princess Elizabeth talks to members of the Lifeboat crew. (Jersey Evening Post)

inquiry into how the island government had conducted itself under German rule but was rejected.

- ◆ Britain donated more than £4 million to clear Jersey's occupation debt, as well as sending immediate gifts of food, soap, cigarettes and matches; Islanders who had evacuated or been deported returned and the States voted £2,000 to help their resettlement.
- ◆ There were more than 50,000 German mines to be exploded.

## GOVERNMENT

- ◆ Various groups of Islanders had made plans for a better future and this meant the reform of the Island's States Assembly to reflect a more modern and less paternal society.
- ◆ The right to vote no longer depended upon ownership of property and tax-paying status and political parties such as the Jersey Democratic Movement, Jersey Labour Party, Jersey Progressive Party and United Jersey Party emerged.
- ◆ The unelected Jurats and Rectors were replaced by Senators who were elected on an island-wide basis, and more Deputies including, for the first time, women politicians. By 1948 States decisions were taken entirely by elected representatives although one of their first decisions was to reject the idea of allowing islanders to

have their own say through referendums.

- ◆ The Royal Court was also reformed and now that the Jurats were no longer members of the States the qualifications became less restrictive and women were allowed to sit on juries.
- ◆ The Jersey Militia was about to be disbanded and a decision needed to be made on whether men in the Island should do National Service. The States voted a £150,000 contribution towards the cost of the British defence bill.
- ◆ King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited, as did the future Elizabeth II, along with Prince Philip, and two Home Secretaries, Herbert Morrison and Chuter Ede Society.
- ◆ Free secondary school education for all became established, with Hautlieu School one of the new institutions. Further education for adults began.
- ◆ The island adopted a social security system, funded by work contributions, to provide retirement pensions and benefits for those in need. It ran into heated opposition from the farming fraternity.
- ◆ The States set about a slum clearance programme in order to reduce the level of infant mortality. Funding was passed which, on one hand, allowed families to be rehoused in government-built homes and, on the other,

allowed Islanders to buy their own properties with mortgages given by the States. The States also gave themselves the right to build homes for sale. They introduced building controls and measures to curb property speculators.

- ◆ Divorce was enshrined in local law, the needs and welfare of young people started to be addressed. It was the end of the unlamented Poor Law era.
- ◆ Street lighting began to spread to country parishes, and the Parish of St Helier sold a site at Bellozanne to the States for £22,500 for use as a sewage farm. New telephone exchanges were opened in the north, south and west, with one planned for the east, but proposals for a uniform Island rate were rejected.

### POPULATION

- ◆ In 1951, Census results showed more than 57,000 people lived in Jersey – the highest recorded population and that the ratio of locals to permanent non-natives had narrowed.
- ◆ Along with the wealthy immigrants who came to Jersey to avoid higher income tax and death duties on the mainland, essential workers for the growing tourist industry joined those who came to work in agriculture, including seasonal contingents from France and hundreds of Welsh girls who helped with tomato-packing.

### FOOD

- ◆ As elsewhere in Britain and Europe, some rationing continued, especially of milk, and fuel restrictions often had to be imposed, with curbs on shop lighting and neon signs. Petrol coupons were issued, and for a time there was a thriving black market in pork - but the duty on tea was abolished.
- ◆ Milk was a controversial issue after the war, with arguments flaring over whether the States should subsidise or the public should have to pay. Subsidies were eventually introduced, as they were, briefly, for eggs.
- ◆ Daily supplies of milk were rationed and at times reduced, the supply to adults being cut altogether for a time. In protest, dockers refused to handle cattle exports. But bananas and tinned fruit made a welcome return to local shops after a long gap.

### TOURISM

- ◆ Travel links changed with the nationalisation of the British rail and air industries: Southern Railways and Great Western Railways, as well as Channel Island Airways, took their leave. BEA took over Jersey Airways and British Rail mailboats became the main sea carriers. Air links were established with Manchester, Birmingham and Exeter, and a flying-boat service to Southampton



The winter of 1947. (Jersey Evening Post)

began. The Airport expanded, with £105,000 allocated by the States and a new tarmac runway opened.

- ◆ Greater numbers of UK holidaymakers wanting a break from home meant that tourism began to become the dominant industry, with new hotels and guesthouses opening their doors, although initially, the introduction of the type of holiday camp becoming popular in the UK was rejected. A summer ban on horses and cars on the beaches was introduced.
- ◆ Entertainment and sport were revived. The Battle of Flowers was watched by 40,000 when it returned to Victoria Avenue in 1951 for the first time since just before the First World War (with a teenage Petula Clark as the guest celebrity), the New Era and Odeon cinemas opened, and the International Road Race became a popular and spectacular favourite. Both Elizabeth and Gorey castles were floodlit for the first time.
- ◆ Television pictures, though, both to and from Jersey, were still some way off.

### HEALTH

- ◆ On a gloomier note, the scourge of polio was felt, with a small number of deaths, and tuberculosis was common.
- ◆ The Jersey Maternity hospital was 'born' out of the Dispensary and Infirmary, and the St John Ambulance headquarters in Midvale Road were opened, as was the new parish hall in St Brelade (formerly the Terminus Hotel).

### AGRICULTURE

- ◆ The farming industry was hit by a series of foot-and-mouth outbreaks and plagues of Colorado beetle, with on one occasion the potato export crop being saved by a bulk purchase by the British Government to send to troops stationed in Germany. Also in agriculture, the



St Helier decorated for Coronation Day. (Jersey Evening Post)

popular cattle shows resumed after Liberation and Jersey hosted a world breeders' conference, and the Farmers Union opened up the potato market by abandoning price controls.

#### PEOPLE

- ◆ A new lifeboat, the Elizabeth Rippon, arrived, and the rare honour of an RNLI gold medal was bestowed on St Helier cox Tommy King for the rescue of the yacht Maurice Georges.
- ◆ Islanders were honoured, including the Bailiff, Alexander Coutanche, and William Haley, locally born Director-General of the BBC, who received knighthoods.
- ◆ Famous names from the entertainment world visited, among them film stars Rock Hudson, Yvonne de Carlo, Margaret Lockwood and John Mills.

#### CRIME

- ◆ The long tradition of honorary service continued, especially in parish affairs, but this was now the 'age of the professional', particularly in the important role of policing, and a paid force to cover the whole island was established, working alongside the ancient honorary police.
- ◆ Not such good news was a spate of suspected arson incidents at commercial premises, which led to investigations by Home Office and Scotland Yard experts. The worst was at the Le Gallais' depositories, in St Helier, where valuable art and furniture was lost and several firemen were injured.

#### EVENTS

- ◆ Jersey was embroiled in a dispute between Britain and France over sovereignty of the nearby Minquiers and Ecréhous reefs, both of which fall within Jersey parish

boundaries, and which was finally resolved in Britain's favour by the International Court of Justice.

- ◆ In religious developments, non-Jersey men were allowed to become parish rectors, while new Roman Catholic churches were opened at St Aubin (Sacred Heart) and Samarès (St Patrick's).
- ◆ Production of the daily paper the Morning News stopped when the national papers began appearing in Jersey on the day of publication. Jersey's first coin-operated laundrette appeared in on the corner of Halkett Place and Burrard Street.
- ◆ Victoria College celebrated its centenary, as did St Mark's Church, and new organisations such as the Jersey Bowling Club, St Aubin's Yacht Club, Sea Cadet Corps, and Film Society were formed, although some, including Corinthians Football Club, bowed out of local life.
- ◆ Football was as popular as ever in the post-war years and large crowds gathered at Springfield, which became the game's headquarters.
- ◆ The States decided to buy land at Noirmont for a war memorial and an occupation museum was opened at La Hougue Bie. Approval was given for the development of St Ouen's Bay.
- ◆ The period brought extremes of weather, such as the long, bitter winter of 1947 and the drought summer of 1949, when water was sometimes cut off for ten hours but which was followed by the wettest October for 50 years.
- ◆ To illustrate how the car was gaining in popularity, 10,450 were officially registered in 1948, but a disturbing number of serious road accidents led to a law compelling third-party insurance.
- ◆ Inevitably, there were headline-making tragedies, including the death of a lighthouse keeper trying to save a holidaymaker at Corbière, of two small boys in a house fire at Gorey and of a driver and two officials at the 1949 Road Race.
- ◆ But when King George VI died in February 1952, it seemed like one era had ended and another was about to begin. Islanders were imbued with the spirit of optimism that seemed to typify the dawn of a new Elizabethan age.

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