

OCCUPIED ISLANDS AND LIBERATION 1940-2025



A short while ago I was privileged to attend the celebrations for the 80th. anniversary of the liberation of Jersey from German rule (July 1940 - May 1945). Each of the Channel Islands was occupied. They were the only part of the British Isles occupied by the Germans during the Second World War.

1940 wasn't the first time that Jersey had been attacked. Its proximity to France made it vulnerable to incursions from Northern France and this was especially so during the time of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Defence towers were built to deter the enemy, some of which are in evidence today and one of which is shown below.



The islanders suffered considerable during the occupation. Food was often in short supply and the occupiers frequently took advantage of the citizens by seizing farm produce and other foodstuffs. Supplies were brought from Northern France but this ended after D Day when the French links were severed. By December 1944, the inhabitants were close to starvation and only a rescue mission by the International Red Cross and its ship the SS Vega saved the day.



There was some resistance to the German occupation of Jersey. The island's communist party formed a resistance cell. With little access to weapons, their main activity was leafletting, encouraging passive resistance and feeding residents, especially from 1943 onwards, with war news which at that time was becoming increasingly optimistic. Verbal communication between the islanders was often in jerriais, a native language now very little used which the Germans didn't understand. Today English and French are the spoken languages.

Jersey's Jews were, as in other occupied territories, persecuted and some were transported to concentration camps, including Auschwitz where most were murdered. The worst treated inhabitants during the war were prisoners of war who were used as slave labour to build the coastal defences (see below) and the underground tunnels, used predominantly to house German troops brought from the battlefields of Northern France. Especially those from the USSR were extremely harshly treated.

The Germans left, under guard, by landing craft on May 9th 1945. Their legacy is shown below.





Collaborators were severely dealt with including women who had engaged in sexual relationships with the occupiers (Jersey bags) whose hair was shaved off.

The 80th. anniversary celebrations packed the streets of Jersey's capital, St Helier. There were organised walks, parades, concerts and even a cricket tournament. I had a delightful trip on Le Petit Train. It may look like a children's ride and indeed youngsters would enjoy the journey. It ran along the southern coast of the island from Liberation Square in St Helier to St Aubin, following part of the original Jersey railway which operated from 1870 to 1936. The steam version was briefly resurrected during the war when the Germans used it to transport materials associated with the building of defence emplacements and the underground hospital. There was an excellent commentary throughout and much to see. We even passed an old station now a cafe. In St Aubin my fellow passengers and I were told of locations of the legendary television series Bergerac which ran from 1981 to 1991. These included the hotel/restaurant of Diamante Lil. A fascinating journey.

I haven't read a great deal about Jersey preferring over seven visits to see this beautiful island for myself. I would, however, recommend *Jewels and Jackboots* by John Nettles (the original Jim Bergerac) . Nettles is a history graduate from Southampton University and knows what he is doing and this is an excellent read.