

Bailiff's speech on Liberation Day

Friday 9th May 2014

1. Many of the stories about the occupation and the liberation are very well known; others are a little less familiar. I would like to re-tell the story of one event which took place very near here, in the Royal Square, in 1944 while war in Europe was raging.
2. But, before I come to that, we should recall that this year marks not only the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War (which we shall be marking on 4th August), but also the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings in 1944 when so many brave allied troops – including men from Jersey who had left the Island to serve in Her Majesty's forces and some of whom are here today as Normandy veterans – recaptured a foothold in continental Europe and effectively marked the beginning of the end for the Nazi regime.
3. But of course D-Day did not bring the relief which Islanders so desperately hoped for. On D-Day itself, some English newspapers reported German propaganda that allied paratroopers were fighting in the Channel Islands and meeting stiff resistance. There was of course no truth in this rumour, although Islanders had awoken on the morning of 6th June to the deafening sound of anti-aircraft guns. Later that day the Evening Post carried a stern warning from the Island Commander General Heine:-

“Germany's enemy is on the point of attacking French soil... at the first signs of unrest or trouble, I will close the streets to every [sic] traffic and will secure hostages. All attacks against the German forces will be punished by death.”

4. The fighting of course did not spread to Jersey; although, in the weeks and months that followed, the sounds of battle could be heard clearly across the water in France. But while the course of the war in Europe was changing, there was no sign that the Channel Islands themselves would be liberated. Indeed, as those who were here know only too well, the situation became much worse. German supply lines were cut and food and other essential supplies became increasingly scarce. There was a real risk of starvation.
5. I want to speak of one Islander at this time, Joseph Le Guyader. His story illustrates the dilemma of an occupied people. He was a stonemason working for the building firm Charles Le Quesne. The sound of the conflict in France would have been particularly worrying for him as his son Maurice had joined the paratroops and was fighting for the Allies. Happily, Maurice was to return from the conflict unscathed but, like so many fathers in the same position, Joseph must have worried endlessly about his son and, simultaneously, felt completely powerless here in occupied Jersey.
6. But he found his own way of expressing support for the allied war effort and at the same time making a gesture of defiance against the occupying forces. It remains visible in the Royal Square today. While carrying out repair work to the paving stones with a young apprentice, he re-cut the granite and set it in the pattern of the famous V for victory sign. The V now also serves to remind us of the Red Cross ship the Vega which played such an important part of the final months of the occupation.
7. As we know today, when we walk across the Royal Square, his handiwork was masterly. The V is almost invisible to those not looking for it; yet it is several feet in size and very obvious if one knows where to find it. As an act

of defiance, it may have been a small gesture but it was one which would have carried the certainty of punishment, if detected. It was all the more daring because it was carried out literally under the eyes of the occupying forces; he had to cover the incomplete design with sand at night to try to ensure that it remained undiscovered. His story is an example of how the spirit of Islanders was not broken by occupation and how acts of defiance and resistance took place. Other examples were those who, at risk to their own lives, sheltered escaped slave workers; those who escaped to France – or of course in one famous case to England - in small boats; and those who defied orders about retaining and listening to wirelasses, so that they could keep people informed as to how the war was really going.

8. There is another element to the story. I've spoken of Joseph Le Guyader as an Islander, which of course he was. But he was not a Jerseyman by birth. In fact, he was not even a British national; he was a Frenchman, born across the water in St Briec. He came to the Island with his wife to work some years before the occupation. He brought up his family in Jersey and two of his sons were themselves to become stonemasons here; happily, his grandchildren continue that tradition today.
9. Joseph's background reminds us of Jersey's centuries old link with France going back of course to before the Norman conquest and being reinvigorated and refreshed by French immigrants over the centuries. I am therefore delighted and honoured today to welcome a number of distinguished visitors from France. Je suis ravi d'accueillir des visiteurs distingués français: Monsieur Olivier Chambard, Consul General at the French Embassy in London and his deputy, Monsieur Olivier Tulliez; Madame Danièle Polvé-Montmasson, Préfète de la Manche; Monsieur Laurent Beauvais, Président

du Conseil Régional de Basse-Normandie; and Monsieur Jean-François Le Grand, Président du Conseil Général de la Manche.

10. But the fact that Joseph Le Guyader was not a Jerseyman by birth highlights another important point to which I shall return in a moment. A few weeks ago, when driving into work, I was listening to the BBC Jersey radio breakfast show. Those of you who listen to it will know that the presenter often asks for people to email or telephone with their views on a particular topic for the day. On that day the question posed by the presenter was “should Jersey have its own national day?”. I have to say that I felt like ringing him up immediately to say “*we already have our national day – it’s Liberation Day*”.

11. Because Liberation Day is not only to recall the courage and suffering of those who were affected by the war, whether they were those who were here during the Occupation, whether they were deportees who were removed to internment in Germany on 24 hours’ notice, whether they were evacuees who were separated from their home for the duration of the war or whether they were those who volunteered to serve in the forces and play their part in fighting the Nazi threat; and it is important that we continue to remember stories of those who suffered in this way and we must retell those stories for younger generations so that the memory is not lost.

12. But Liberation Day is more than that. It is a day when, as well as honouring the past, we celebrate the present and look to the future. And that takes me back to Joseph Le Guyader’s story. He was a Frenchman who came to the Island and made an significant contribution. Since then, many others have, like him, come from many different countries to make their lives in Jersey and have made a positive contribution to our Island community, so as to make the Island what it is today. Liberation Day is a day for all Islanders to

celebrate, regardless of their age, their background, or their origin and whether their family has been here for generations or just for a short time.

13. In recent times there has been substantial immigration by Polish nationals, who have made a significant contribution to Island life. I am delighted therefore to welcome His Excellency Mr Witold Sobków, the Polish Ambassador to the United Kingdom. He has come particularly to lay a wreath at the slave workers' memorial this afternoon to recall the suffering and indeed death of so many from Eastern Europe who were brought forcibly to the Island and made to work here during the Occupation.

14. This will be the last occasion on which I shall have the honour of addressing you as Bailiff on Liberation Day. I could not be more proud of our Island and its people. Like all communities, we face our challenges and the last few years in particular have not been easy given the dire world economic situation. Many have suffered hardship as a result. But, in my view, we are a peaceful, tolerant, caring and hardworking community that has much to be proud of. So let us today, on our Liberation Day, join together to remember the hardship endured by those who were alive in the war, to rejoice in our restored freedom on 9th May 1945 and to celebrate what the Island has become and what it can be in the future.