

## **Liberation Day speech**

**Monday 9th May 2011**

1. It has become a tradition to begin the annual celebration of Jersey's Liberation with a meeting of the States, addressed by a senior member. I am pleased that today, for the first time, that short ceremony has also been relayed over the loud speakers here in Liberation Square.
2. But it is worth pausing for a moment to think about why a States Meeting should be convened on 9th May – after all, only 1 member speaks and the meeting lasts just a few minutes.
3. The answer is partly that, each year, a different elected member is given the opportunity to pass on the experiences of his or her family or friends; or simply to reflect on what this special day means from a personal point of view.
4. But there is also another significance. A member addressing the Assembly exercises his or her freedom as part of our democratically elected Assembly. They speak openly, expressing an individual view without fear or constraint, having been elected by our citizens to perform that duty.
5. If the question were asked this morning to everyone attending this ceremony “What does the Occupation mean to you?” I suspect one would receive many different answers. Some would recall the food shortages in the final months, and the relief provided by Red Cross supplies; or the

isolation from what was taking place in the outside world; some would think of the ultimate price paid by those Islanders who were sent to concentration camps; some might think of how Jersey's landscape was transformed, as wheat and barley replaced the potato crop as staples of the occupation diet; or perhaps some might remember the unhappy sight of slave workers being moved forcibly around the Island to construct the concrete fortifications which have become part of the permanent landscape. Others will connect the Occupation not with what happened in Jersey, but with experiences elsewhere – whether their families were evacuated or deported, or whether they were serving in the armed forces.

6. But from all these recollections, there is a connecting strand. All were characterised by loss of freedom – people were caught up in events over which they had no control. The human spirit had to adapt.
  
7. And it was that restoration of freedom which made 9th May 1945 such a joyous occasion. The Island was once again free to determine its own future as a self-governing dependency of the Crown. The Island has of course a long history of loyalty to the Crown and I know that I speak for so many when I say how uplifting it was to watch, with millions of others, the marriage of Prince William and Miss Catherine Middleton – now the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge; it was a very special occasion. I am also delighted to welcome His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor and Mrs Ridgway to their last Liberation Day celebrations. There will be other occasions for farewell tributes but they have been very supportive of the Island over the last 5 years and I thank them very much for the contribution which they have made to Island life.

8. So how have we used our freedom since 1945? One of the most important aspects has been to try and ensure that anti-semitism and other forms of racism and discrimination, which fuelled the rise of the Nazi party, are never permitted to flourish. This is particularly important given the changes in the makeup of the Island's population since then, with the arrival of communities from Portugal, Poland and other places, who have contributed so much to our Island life. This aspiration in turn depends upon our young people, who will form the next generation; and I am keen to encourage their participation in the celebration of Liberation Day. Indeed, I would like to thank those many youngsters who already play a part, such as the members of the choir who have just performed, those who will give readings or join in the re-enactment of Liberation to be seen shortly, and those who participate in the parades.
9. I believe we can be very proud of our young people. My wife and I had the good fortune recently to attend the Eisteddfod Gala Evening. The Eisteddfod involves over three thousand young people participating in music, language, drama and other forms of the creative arts. We also attended the Spring Concert of the Jersey Instrumental Music Service. The climax involved some 550 children and young people playing or singing the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's 9th Symphony. It was one of those wonderful moments which made one feel very proud. And our youngsters have of course excelled in so many other areas; for example in the various Cadet forces or in the sporting arena. None of this would be possible without the hours and hours of time given by adult volunteers

as well as the efforts of those who work in our schools, social services and elsewhere. I would like to thank them all for their efforts.

10. Another vital use of our freedom has been to forge a spirit of reconciliation with a view to ensuring that the events of the Second World War are never repeated. In this connection, I would like to welcome Herr Roland Buerkle, the Bürgermeister of Bad Wurzach and his wife Steffi. Although, like me, he was born after the end of Second World War, he has been a strong advocate of reconciliation. It was of course to the castle in Bad Wurzach that 618 men, women and children of Jersey were deported on one day's notice in 1942. There they suffered the hardship of life in a prison camp. But they were nevertheless shown individual acts of kindness by many of the local residents and this led to the forming of friendships after the war. As Mrs Gwen Bisson, one of the two internees who gave very moving addresses to the church service in St Thomas' Church on 28th April to commemorate the 66th anniversary of the liberation of the internees put it, "*We went as a family and we came back as a family*", although of course this was not so for everyone. These friendships in due course led to the twinning between St Helier and Bad Wurzach in 2002. Since then there have been numerous exchanges, particularly involving young people, which is so important as it forges friendships through to the next generation. I would pick out for special mention the participation of bands and dance groups from Bad Wurzach in the Battle of Flowers, the visit of the Youth Theatre from Jersey to Bad Wurzach, the student exchanges between the two communities, and of course the participation of 5 students from Bad Wurzach in the performance in Liberation Square before Her Majesty

The Queen on the 60th Anniversary of Liberation. I am therefore very pleased that the Bürgermeister is here with us today.

11. So I return to the question; what is the significance of Liberation Day?

In my view, it is vital that we continue to celebrate it, because we must not allow the events of the Occupation to be forgotten. We must draw upon the memories of those dark days in order to appreciate what we have today. We must involve the next generation in understanding what gave rise to the events of the Second World War and what we must do to try and avoid any recurrence.

12. We should also use Liberation Day to celebrate what makes Jersey

special. Although, like all countries, we face challenges, particularly in these difficult economic times, we are essentially, I believe, a tolerant and law abiding community which recognises the importance of looking after each other including, in particular, the less fortunate members of our society. Let us renew our determination to make good use of the freedom which was restored to us in 1945, so that we can pass on our beloved Island to the next generation in good heart.