

**Commemoration of the Battle of the Somme**  
**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016**

Your Excellency, Assistant Chief Minister, ladies and gentlemen

1. I found it interesting that in the three or four months leading up to the Brexit referendum last week there appeared to be very few thoughtful discussions about what sort of country the United Kingdom wanted to be – the public debate seemed to be fixed on practical, perhaps prosaic, issues such as the economy or immigration, with international security raising its head occasionally. If people remembered that the European Union grew out of a determination amongst European leaders in 1945 that the events of the previous six years must never happen again, it was not obvious.
  
2. The commonality of that European opinion was rooted not just in the Holocaust and the wanton destruction of cities across Europe – London, Coventry, Hamburg, Berlin, Warsaw and many others, with enormous loss of life – but also, in 1945, in what was still a clear memory of the huge losses sustained on both sides in the Great War of 1914- 18. Today marks one hundred years from the commencement of the Battle of the Somme when, at 7.30 in the morning on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 the whistle blew and the Allied Forces went over the top to attack the German line. The loss of life in the British Army – 19,240 – and the total number of casualties at 57,470 was and remains the highest ever suffered by the British

Army in a single day and military scholars and historians are still not agreed on whether that loss of life served any useful purpose.

3. It is a cold evening tonight, but here in the quiet and serenity of Howard Davis Park it is hard to imagine how European nations could have got themselves into that position; and as a consequence how much suffering was endured by soldiers and their families on both sides.
  
4. It is very appropriate we should be in Howard Davis Park. This land was acquired by TB Davis just before the Second World War and given to the States and people of Jersey in memory of his son Howard, who died in August 1916 of injuries sustained on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. TB Davis – Thomas – grew up at Havre des Pas and as a schoolboy he was in the choir at St Luke's Church just behind us. He went to sea as a young man and settled in South Africa where he made his fortune in stevedoring. Howard Davis was his second son and while it is said that Thomas was angered that this son had chosen to join the army as a private soldier rather than capitalise on his nautical training by joining the Royal Navy as an officer, he never really got over Howard's death and after the Great War was over, he gave the portion of his fortune which Howard would have inherited – in today's money probably about £100 million – to good works in his son's memory. In Jersey we have Howard Davis Farm, the States experimental centre for agricultural studies, the Howard Davis Scholarship Trust

set up at Victoria College, this park, the Howard Davis Hall and a full length portrait of George V given to Victoria College; and much was done in South Africa as well.

5. The Davis family was not the only one to have suffered. On your programmes you will see the photographs of some of the Jersey contingent who set off in March 1915, all volunteers, Islanders who willingly came forward from the ranks of the Jersey Militia for service in the British Army. They did not have to go – one of the Island’s historic privileges granted by the Kings of England in the Middle Ages had been exemption against military duty, except in the personal defence of the King. But they had answered a request from the British Government and an exhortation from the Bailiff of the Day, Sir William Venables Vernon who said “*The call has come and it should be the duty and privilege as loyal Jerseymen to respond to it*”. More than 100 men from Jersey lost their lives in the Battle of the Somme – either fighting in the British army across many regiments and corps, or fighting for France, committed through their nationality to serve in the French armed forces. The remnants of the Jersey Contingent joined the Royal Irish Rifles and I am very pleased that the Royal Ulster Rifles Association and the Jersey Field Squadron will be laying wreaths later tonight.
6. This evening the Dean will also be asked to bless this splendid memorial stone present before us here in the Park tonight, a

memorial to those Jerseymen who lost their lives at the Somme. Tomorrow the stone will start its journey to Guillemont in north-eastern France where the Jersey Contingent fought its last Battle in September 1916 and it will be erected there in a special ceremony on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. You will see that the core has been removed and placed on the table to one side. The piece removed is level with where the heart of a person would be and that heart will remain in Jersey. It is doubly symbolic; reflecting that they died abroad in the service of their country but their hearts remain here; and reflecting also that a part of them remains in our hearts forever.

7. Let's put that Jersey contribution in a population context. Over 6000 Jerseymen served between 1914 and 1918, fighting in every campaign and battle on land, at sea and in the air, and survived. 1500 men from Jersey families gave their lives during that war. With a population of some 49,000, of which you might think approximately half would have been women, 1 in 3 Jerseymen went to war and some 6% of the male population died – and a much higher proportion of the Jersey male population in their 20s and 30s. The lives of their families and loved ones were changed forever – in my own family for example, my great-aunt died in the 1970s, still a spinster, having lost her fiancé during the Great War. Things were never the same.
8. At Remembrance Sunday Laurence Binyon's poem *For the Fallen* reminds us that "*We will remember them*". We will remember

them. I am pleased that earlier today I was able to unveil at the Weighbridge, in the presence of His Excellency, the Assistant Chief Minister and 50 or 60 others who turned out in the drizzle and rain, the plaque describing what the Great War Arch represents - it stands as a tribute to all those from Jersey who left the Island to serve their country in the Great War - and to witness the commemoration of the Jersey Contingent Memorial. While it is good the weather is better tonight, the rain this morning was insignificant when one considers the harshness of war and of the life the armed forces had in the trenches. Some of those who left never returned and others who did return were physically or mentally scarred by battle. It was a moving ceremony during which the Arch and Memorial were blessed by the Dean and wreaths were laid. Their location between the Royal Square and the harbour is a proper reminder of the passage of the men of the Jersey Contingent as they left their Island to go to war.

9. They are fitting tributes to them and as we sit in the quietness of this park tonight, we shall indeed remember them; and particularly this 1<sup>st</sup> July, we remember those who fought at the Battle of the Somme one hundred years ago.

**William Bailhache, Bailiff.**