

## Old Cicestrians Jersey Tour 2020

**Participants: Geoff Wills (Jersey resident), Bill & Jennifer Allen, John & Maggie Child, Alan Green, Mike Thomas**



*The Jersey idyll – blue sky and blue sea: a view across Portelet Bay (photo Alan)*

### Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Lunchtime - John, Maggie & Alan arrive at Jersey Airport from Heathrow. After undergoing swab tests for Covid 19 they were collected by Geoff (resident O.C's member and President living on Jersey) and driven down to the *Gunsite Café* on St.Aubin's Bay for an excellent lunch. The café is housed in a former German concrete gun battery located on a rocky outcrop with views across the bay.

They then drove east around the bay to the 'tour hotel', the *Ambassadeur*, located south of St Helier with a splendid sea view. Here Alan then took a walk to the nearby very attractive peninsula of Green Island with its very rocky outcrop that is hidden at high tide (it has been the ruin of many ships in the past). The schools had gone back and the holiday season ended so the sandy beaches were deserted. Jersey was the hottest place in Great Britain that day – 31 degrees! (photo John)



That evening the new arrivals enjoyed the first excellent meal in the hotel restaurant.

### Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September

Following a very early start (0330) for Bill his wife Jennifer and final O.C tour member Mike, John collected them from the airport at 0900 and took them to the *Gunsite Café* to meet Geoff and Maggie for a 'tour breakfast'. This was followed by a short trip to the *Hotel Ambassadeur* to drop off bags and pick up Alan who had spent the morning walking along the coast to Le Hocq Point and back.



After that two cars were used to go on to visit La Hougue Bie Museum, located to the east of the island. A fascinating site containing one of the largest and best-preserved Neolithic passage graves in Europe, (a very large man-made 'mound' with a precisely aimed tunnel that allows sunlight to shine in at dawn on the equinox). The tunnel (see left) was of very low headroom which deterred the less agile from attempting entry for fear of remaining permanently doubled-up. (photo Alan)

The museum also contains the Jersey/Grouville Hoard, a remarkable mass of 70,000 late Iron Age & Roman coins discovered by two locals with metal detectors in June 2012. It was discovered in an adjacent field, believed to be hidden to stop the French invaders from finding the treasure.

The museum also has a collection of old chimney pots much to the delight of Alan who amongst his didactic interests in all things 'old' was able to instantly recognise a 'Fareham chimney pot' when he sees one. This led to a great discussion between Alan and the museum staff who exchanged their personal knowledge on these rare items. Later, on the advice of the museum staff, Alan was able to photograph more of these rare items on some of the older properties in St Helier.



*A feast of Fareham chimney pots in Jersey: (left) in the collection at La Hougue Bie and (right) on a bungalow near Green Island. These distinctive hand-thrown pots are made in Hampshire and large numbers were exported to Guernsey. Alan was delighted to find that Jersey had a few too. (photos Alan)*

It was at this stage that the 'early risers' who had been up for hours returned to the hotel for a nap whilst John & Maggie took Alan to view St Helier. He was very impressed by the very ornate and well cared for Market Hall and some of the other old buildings, including the French style Town Hall. He did though 'tut' very negatively at the many old buildings that had succumbed to the convenience of 'plastic double glazed windows' rather than the original timber framed fenestration. Then, like a bloodhound following the scent, he tracked down the other two remaining buildings with his beloved 'Fareham chimney pots'. At this point you may not be surprised to know that Alan has two such chimney pots in his own back garden in Chichester! (He really should get out more)



*John skirts around Jersey's biggest display of 'Five-a-Day' options in St Helier's magnificent Victorian Market Hall. The lofty and airy building, which houses a thriving market and specialist shops, was bedecked with bunting, alternating the Jersey and Union flags. (photo Alan)*

*Most of Jersey's buildings are very much British in their architecture, but occasionally you come across something with a decidedly French flavour. One such is St Helier Town Hall with deeply-recessed first-floor windows having inward-opening casements, and characteristic arched dormers in the mansard roof. Most of St Helier's buildings were in good repair but the incidence of plastic windows in listed buildings was worrying. (photo Alan)*



The evening concluded with all dining in at 'the tour hotel' and enjoying an excellent meal served by very attentive staff and at a very reasonable cost.

### **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September**

All met up for a splendid breakfast at the hotel in readiness for the forthcoming coach tour of the island. The coach came to the hotel to pick us up, driven by 'Alex', a Scot who had been living in Jersey for over 40 years but still retaining his distinctive Glaswegian accent and wit. The tour followed a clockwise route around the island mostly staying close to the shore to showcase the very many charming coastal villages that nestle in the small bays that give Jersey its character. With a number of short stops to view the beautiful coastline, charming villages and numerous stark German fortifications that were constructed during the Second World War to protect the Island from the Allied Forces assault that never came.



*Alex with his coach at Noirmont Point, (photo John)*

It is hard to describe the many skills driver Alex possessed without experiencing him first hand. Most of the coastal roads are very narrow, very windy with steep inclines and very unforgiving granite walls on both sides. Alex would manoeuvre his 30 seat coach with one hand on the steering wheel, the other holding the microphone to his mouth whilst recounting interesting information about the buildings, animals, plants and 'gossip' pertaining to the scene around us. All the time there would be sharp bends or vehicles coming in the other direction with just inches to spare as we passed.

At no point in the whole day tour did he express any alarm or concern in his voice as he threaded us through the back roads of Jersey!

There was a brief stop near the Jersey Racecourse, located on the north west corner of the island. A lovely location on a high plateau but it must be very challenging for horses and riders if there is a strong wind blowing! The bet might not be on who will win but rather who will get all the way around!

*The romantic ruins of Grosnez Castle adjacent to Jersey Racecourse, set against a clear blue sky and a temperature of 24 degrees – not bad for mid September! (photo Alan)*

Things of interest pointed out by Alex included the house where Billy Butlin had lived and his very large and rather 'over the top' gravestone, Nigel Mansell's former house and the very modest gravestone for long time Jersey resident Alan Whicker. Alex frequently revealed how much certain passing houses had sold for (highest price £19 million!).



For lunch a stop was made at a very pleasant old pub/restaurant, *Les Fontaines Tavern* situated at the top of the island approximately in the centre. It was very busy at the pub but savvy driver Alex had the orders 'fast tracked' to ensure his charges were not held up by the other diners! During the tour Bill and Geoff shared their knowledge of the Island's two railways – St Helier to Corbiere and St Helier to Gorey - that had closed in the 1930s but which still manifest themselves here and there if you know where to look – which they did!

Upon eventually returning back to the hotel all were very appreciative of the tour conducted by Alex. Even Geoff, who has lived on the island for very many years, commented on the places he had never seen before!

The evening meal took place at the *Seascale Restaurant* in the most picturesque harbour village of Gorey on the eastern coast. The hotel party made their way thence by bus. This was the first time that any of them had been unable to use their bus passes, but at only £2 they couldn't grumble!.



Adjacent to the bus stop was a large red buoy converted into a collecting box for the Shipwrecked Mariners Society. A plate attached gave the Society's address as – 1 North Pallant, Chichester, Sussex. A little bit of home far away! (photo Alan)

The food, wine and service at the *Seascale Restaurant* (a frequent haunt of Geoff's) were excellent, tinged slightly by the noise volume from another table which highlights the problem of rooms with no soft furnishings to absorb their boisterous banter. The bus party also suffered the 'Jersey Loud Voice Society' for part of their journey back to the hotel (photo taken by the *Maitre D* on Mike's camera)



*Gorey, with Mont Orgueil Castle spectacularly floodlit on its skyline. The Seascale Restaurant is on the left. The photograph was taken by Alan whilst awaiting the spirited dash of the rest of the hotel party to the bus which was about to depart. Back at the hotel the day ended - as always - with a snifter or two from the excellent range of whiskies on offer at the bar.*

### **Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September**

Once again a most enjoyable group breakfast at the hotel set everyone up for the day. John had organised a hire car that could seat seven adults in comfort for the day and it awaited us outside the hotel.

The first destination was the Jersey War Tunnels (formerly known as the German Underground Hospital) situated towards the centre of the Island. They are a stark reminder of the oppression and brutality inflicted on the forced labourers (Todt) shipped to Jersey from all over Europe by the German occupiers. In particular, the Russian and Polish prisoners-of-war who experienced dreadful hardship digging the tunnels that formed the bomb-proof German barracks to house the

12,000 soldiers in the garrison. They form a huge underground network of rooms and passages dug deep into the rock found in this area, chosen for its resistance to bombing. Some tunnels were never fully completed, those that were now contain photos and information explaining how life was for both the labourers and the Jersey residents who stayed on the island throughout the period of occupation. Even in September the tunnels are cold and unwelcoming, it is hard to imagine life down there in winter with very assertive guards requiring you to work harder on an empty stomach.

Over two hours were spent walking through the tunnels, taking in the description of life on Jersey during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. It was most informative and highlighted just how harsh life had become in the final couple of years on the Island. A most interesting museum to visit. Who should turn up during the visit but Alex with another coach party!



Once again the *Gunsite Café* was patronized for lunch where Bill is seen catching up with his electronic messaging. It is now a very welcoming, attractive coastal feature with splendid views over St.Aubin's Bay; so different from its original function as a defence stronghold against any coastal attacks. The headroom is rather low in places as witnessed by the rubber padding on the ceiling. (photo Alan)

After lunch the car headed into the heart of the island to visit the *Hamptonne Country Life Museum*, Jersey's answer to our *Weald & Downland Museum*. Here, though, all the buildings – originally a farm – are still in their original positions and have been restored to reflect country/farming life through the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The museum has been brought to life with the inclusion of pigs, cows, ducks, donkeys, chickens etc. - all breeds that would have been found there during that period.



*Hamptonne Country Life Museum: (left) the 17<sup>th</sup> Century farmhouse and (right) an emblematic Jersey cow. (photos Alan)*

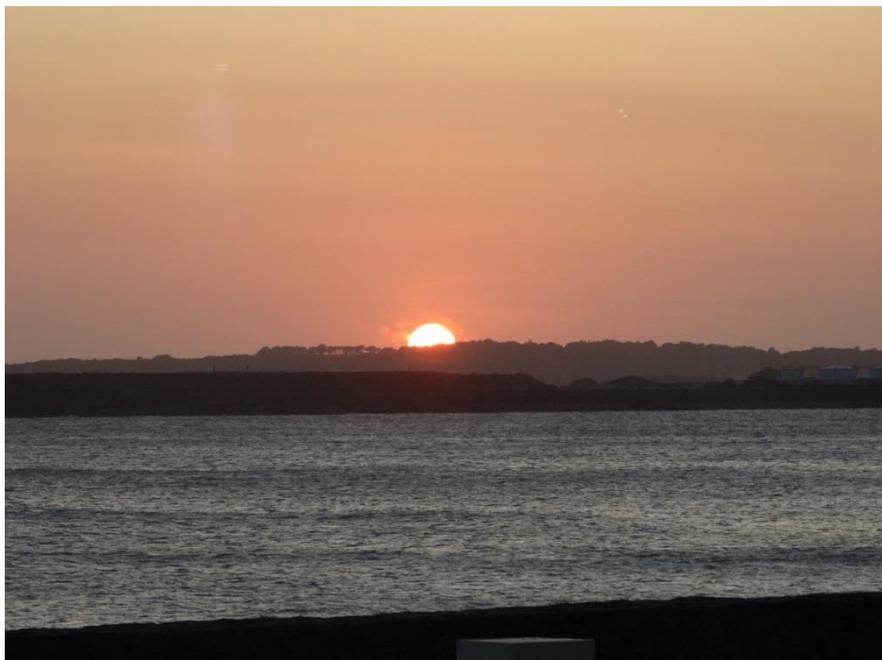
From there it was east to *Boulivot Farm*, the home of *Geoff Wills*. A lovely former farm house and outbuildings that *Geoff* and *Molly* (who sadly passed away in 2015) had lovingly restored into a splendid family home. *Geoff* treated guests to tea and cakes in his beautiful garden whilst also showing interested visitors some of the lovely artefacts and pictures he and *Molly* had collected over the years. Thank you *Geoff*, a perfect conclusion to the tour of Jersey.



*Boulivot Farm: the house, garden and the inviting swimming pool. (photos John)*



The final evening meal was, once again, enjoyed back at the hotel who continued to impress us all with the excellent food, wine and service they provided. Here the party is seen assembling in the hotel restaurant after having gathered for pre-prandial drinks in the bar. At the same time the diners were treated to a magnificent sunset across the sea. (photos Alan)



## Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September

The conclusion of the trip saw Bill and Jennifer relocate to visit friends who also live on Jersey, Alan and Mike flew back to the UK and John and Maggie stayed with long time good friend Geoff at Boulivot Farm for the weekend.



Prior to flying back to the UK on Friday afternoon, Mike had arranged a technical visit to the Island's power station whilst Alan went to explore the elegant Art Deco lido at Greve D'Azette.

At Jersey Airport Mike - that doyen of the 1960s CHSB Aero Club - had time to seek out this preserved De Havilland Heron of the former Jersey Airlines fleet. How much more civilized it looks than today's Airbus (photo Mike)

In conclusion, a splendid few days enjoying the delights of Jersey in great company and with excellent weather.

Alan would like to point out that John and Geoff had put much effort into arranging the tour for which all who took part are extremely grateful. Geoff had used his local knowledge to seek out and book the excellent hotel and shared with us just a few of his favourite eating places during the week.

Thank you to all who took part, we hope this brief review will remind you of that great trip.

Best wishes,

John & Alan