

JUSTICE DONE?

IT BECAME CLEAR to disillusioned islanders in the first few weeks after the Liberation of the islands in May 1945 that the long-cherished hopes of finally seeing justice done were not coming to fruition.

For five years islanders had nursed bitter grievances against neighbours, against government officials and against the Germans. They wanted those who had made money out of feeding the German army taxed; they wanted informers put on trial; they wanted to know if island officials had abused their positions to get extra supplies of food and fuel; and they wanted the Germans who had beaten their sons or nephews to get their come-uppance. A mountain of complaints accumulated on the desks of the legal advisors in the Civil Affairs Unit attached to the Liberation Force, who were assigned the delicate task of sifting hearsay and spite from fact. Their job was complicated still further by the intensity of feeling on the islands, and the sensitivity of the British newspaper-reading public to allegations that Britishers had collaborated with Nazism.

Within a few days of the Liberation another complicated dimension had been added to the investigation, as allegations appeared in the British press of atrocities committed in slave labour camps on the islands.

The British investigators had four lines of enquiry to pursue. Firstly, they had to collect evidence of cruelty against slave labourers on the islands, in particular on Alderney, which could be used to try German war criminals. Secondly, there was the delicate question of whether the island governments had at any point behaved improperly. Thirdly, they had to investigate whether there was evidence of collaboration on the part of islanders serious enough to warrant prosecution. Fourthly, there were allegations of war crimes committed against islanders by members of the German military government on the Channel Islands.

The story of these investigations is like a jigsaw puzzle from which a number of pieces are missing. Many of the relevant British government sub-files were destroyed several decades ago. There are no records relating to the post-war period available to the public in the islands' archives, but in the last few years, some of the missing pieces have emerged; most of the surviving British government documents were finally released in December 1992, and Russian documents relating to the islands' slave labour army were declassified in 1993. Adding this new material to what was already known, it has become possible to trace the outlines of the post-war British investigations.

The surviving files, full of statements and detailed correspondence, indicate the commitment with which the British investigators set about their task in 1945. Thousands of people – German prisoners of war, islanders and former slave workers – were questioned, notes were taken and reports drawn up. There was a flurry of correspondence between the islands and London, and then between London and Moscow. But despite all the work of the police, military intelligence, military legal staff and diplomats on the islands, no cases ever came to trial. No German was tried by the British, on the islands or in Germany, for wartime activities on the Channel Islands. No islanders were tried. No criticism was voiced of any of the island governments' actions during the Occupation. Instead, the Bailiffs, Victor Carey and Alexander

Coutanche, were knighted, and other senior members of the Occupation governments were also awarded honours.

This was an outcome unique among the countries which had been occupied in Europe. In France, Denmark and Belgium the trials of collaborators dragged on into the late forties; in 1945 fifty thousand people were in prison awaiting trial in Belgium alone.

The ending to the story of Britain's failed investigation on Alderney can be told in the stories of two old men, both German. One was a victim, the other his former tormentor.

Otto Spehr, now in his eighties, lives in an old house in the hills outside Cologne. He spent nine years in Hitler's concentration camps after being arrested as a socialist in 1934, and was on Alderney for eighteen months. He is the last known survivor of SS Baubrigade I, the building brigade run by the SS on Alderney from March to August 1943. He had to give up work in 1955 because of injuries sustained during his imprisonment.

A widower, he prides himself on his hospitality, and proffers strong coffee and sweet cakes. After our long interview, he insisted on treating me to dinner in his local restaurant. As he paid the bill, his fingers fumbled with the clasp of his wallet, and with a gentle smile he apologetically explained that the guards in Sachsenhausen used to stamp on the prisoners' hands, and his have never fully recovered.

Otto Spehr is registered as a victim of Nazism, and over the years he has been interviewed many times by German government agencies responsible for prosecuting war criminals. He has proved a valuable witness in trials against former camp guards from Sachsenhausen and Oranienburg, but no one has ever asked him about what happened on Alderney. He tried to tell the British authorities about the Channel Islands after his dramatic escape to Britain in 1944,[fn1](#) but he says they were not interested. He later worked for the BBC's German service, and remembers being reprimanded for mentioning the Alderney camps on air. 'The British did not want to know that there had been a concentration camp on British soil,' he concludes.

Five hours' train ride away, in Hamburg, another old man is living out his last days in comfort. He is Kurt Klebeck, formerly SS Obersturmführer Klebeck, deputy commandant of SS Baubrigade I on Alderney. He lives in a prosperous, quiet residential area of Hamburg, in a flat which looks onto the local football ground; he became president of the club in the 1960s, a position of influence and respect in the local community. Otto Spehr has known for many years that Klebeck was living in Hamburg. Another former prisoner of SS Baubrigade I told him once that he would bump into Klebeck and a former SS guard, Otto Högelow, in the streets of Hamburg, and that they would laugh at him.

In the 1960s, Klebeck was the subject of a five-year investigation by the Hamburg prosecutor's office. They questioned Otto Spehr, but the case was eventually closed for lack of evidence. Spehr was told that his evidence was only hearsay; he had not actually witnessed any of the events he described. Spehr protested that prisoners were rarely allowed to witness the deaths of other prisoners, and that he certainly would not have been present when an officer gave an order to kill a prisoner.

He also presented the prosecutor's office with a 'confession' he had found in the course of some enquiries he made in the archives of Neuengamme, the parent camp of SS Baubrigade I. The closely typed two-page document, now mottled with age, claims to be the confession of Otto Högelow, made to the Austrian police on his arrest after Germany's defeat in May 1945. The name of SS Hauptscharführer Högelow also appears in the documents of British postwar investigations on Alderney.

The document is a catalogue of atrocities committed on the island. Prisoners were ordered to put splintered glass in the food of other prisoners; prisoners attempting to escape were shot; prisoners who fell ill were also shot, because there was not enough medicine, or were ordered to 'commit suicide'.

Högelow admitted: ‘As a sergeant, I gave the following speech: “Men, I remind you once again of the rules laid down in the sentries’ orders, and I personally will give any SS man who shoots a prisoner attempting to escape three days’ special leave and twenty-five cigarettes.” These conditions were condoned by both the heads of division, List and Klebeck, and met with their full approval.’

Otto Spehr was told that the confession did not constitute evidence because it was undated and bore no signature. His quest for justice was in vain. Of Klebeck, he now says:

Let him die in peace. It’s not fair that he has never been tried, but that’s life. Life is unfair. Some men like the guards get caught, but not the ones who gave the orders. The officers defend themselves, saying, ‘We just gave the orders, we didn’t actually kill anyone.’ If they had prosecuted all the ‘big’ Nazis there would have been no one left in Germany to govern. He should be left to die in peace now. He is like me, old and crumbling.

The day after the liberation of Alderney on 17 May 1945, two men landed on the island charged with the task of an initial inquiry into allegations of cruelty towards slave labourers. One of them, Major Sidney Cotton, was on secondment from the Sheffield police, and the other, Major F. Haddock, was a member of the legal staff attached to the Liberation Force. No records of their inquiry have yet come to light in the British government archives. Nothing would be known about what they found had someone not secretly kept copies of the statements they collected and the letters they wrote; these copies survived in private hands until 1992, when they were sent anonymously to a national newspaper.

Amongst the papers is a letter from Major Haddock to the Judge Advocate-General’s office in London (JAG),[fn2](#) informing a Brigadier Shapcott that charges of maladministration could be made against eleven German prisoners of war being held on Alderney ‘who permitted or exercised a policy of systematic cruelty and starvation’ during the island’s Occupation. This flatly contradicts what British governments have consistently maintained for fifty years – that none of the suspected German war criminals was in British hands after the war.

Alderney in May 1945 must have been an unnerving place. The bleak island was littered with the detritus of war – abandoned vehicles, weapons, bunkers and rolls of barbed wire – and populated by an emaciated, forgotten German garrison and the remnants of a slave labour army, all of whom had horrific stories to tell. Haddock’s letters convey a sense of urgency that the officials in London should know the extent of the tragedy which had occurred and recognise the importance of his mission by sending more staff to help him. In one of his earliest letters to the Judge Advocate General’s office, written only a few days after arriving, he reported:

A Pole, formerly of Helgoland Camp, talks of frequently seeing prisoners beaten to death, and other witnesses, mostly Islanders, speak of seeing prisoners beaten and savaged by dogs kept by the SS guards and in some cases shot while working in gangs on the island.

Quite apart from brutal treatment there is plenty of evidence that prisoners in these camps, particularly Russians, were systematically starved, and one witness speaks of two or three Russians being brought every day into a hospital and forty-one dying during a period of seven weeks while he was there.

Over the course of the next few weeks, Haddock took dozens of statements from the people on Alderney: islanders from Guernsey and Jersey who had been working there, German prisoners of war, and former slave labourers. There is a chilling repetition in these typed pages of terse statements, on paper now torn and yellowing with age. Again and again interviewees describe how prisoners were beaten and shot, their bodies left to rot beside the roads and about the camps. All but a tiny handful of islanders who had kept their eyes carefully averted had stories to tell of the cruelty and murders they had unwillingly witnessed.

Initially, the German PoWs were reluctant to tell Haddock what they knew. The navy and the Wehrmacht claimed that the camps were nothing to do with them, and had been run by the Organisation Todt and the SS, whose personnel had all been evacuated to the Continent long before Liberation. One German PoW stubbornly lied that although he had been on Alderney since July 1942 he had not seen any

Russians, and ‘thinks they left before he came’. He said he had briefly seen the SS Sylt prisoners, but that they left a month after he arrived – in fact they arrived eight months after him and stayed seventeen months – and he resolutely stated that he saw no acts of brutality.

But the Germans’ wariness soon wore off and the PoWs, particularly those from the navy, became one of Haddock’s most detailed sources of information. They may have been motivated by the hope of clemency as prisoners of war, but there is also a discernible sense of horror at the actions of their compatriots. The PoWs were probably telling the truth when they said they had had little to do with the camps, but they saw the slave labourers marching to and from their worksites, and men from the German navy stationed at the harbour had witnessed numerous instances of cruelty when slave labourers arrived or left, and when they were unloading stores. Three naval PoWs witnessed the shipwreck disaster of the *Xaver Dorsch* and the *Franka* in January 1943 in which about a thousand Russian prisoners, including Albert Pothugine, were trapped.

Naval PoW Josef Welkerling said he saw about eight hundred Russians loaded onto the *Franka*, which then remained in the harbour for two days. The slave labourers were locked up in the hold with no ventilation, light, food or water. When they were unloaded, Welkerling said, ‘The SS beat the Russians. Some were too weak to climb the ladder. At least twenty were dead and were taken to the cemetery.’

A second PoW, Werner Hohne, was ‘ordered to have nothing to do with Russians, who were not human but only beasts’. Hohne said four to five hundred Russians were packed into the *Xaver Dorsch*. Haddock noted, ‘Battened down in hold, no seats, no sanitation. Took soup and bread to ship and brought back fifteen bodies.’

A third PoW, Josef Kaiser, helped Hohne carry the dead off the shipwrecks. Haddock recorded, ‘Thinks one of the bodies removed from ships was eaten by rats or Russians.’

Another incident was described by army Obergefreiter (Corporal) Karl Janetzko, who had been used as a Russian interpreter. A seventeen-year-old Russian boy had been accused of stealing food: ‘He protested his innocence. The next day his face was badly swollen. They [the German guards] gave him a cigarette to mock him, but he could not put it into his mouth. They made him sit on a stove which they had stoked. Heat unbearable seven feet away. Kept there half an hour – he was crying. Three members of the Feldgendarmerie were there and are still on the island . . . the Russian boy disappeared after that.’

According to the German PoWs, the SS were the worst; one PoW saw a Russian prisoner shot by an SS man for wanting to urinate. Another said that ‘SS men in canteen spoke of keeping prisoners in Sylt Camp outside their huts all night standing naked’. Otto Högelow is singled out as the man of whose cruelty the SS boasted.

Haddock also took statements from the islanders who had been working on Alderney. Their access to the camps was restricted, but they too saw the brutality around the harbour, and because some worked alongside the slave labourers at the same worksites, they saw the working conditions. Several islanders worked on a farm run by the OT where slave labourers were so hungry that they picked up food left by dogs. One islander saw them digging up the rotten carcass of a calf which had been buried under manure.

On a few occasions, islanders were so moved to anger that they attempted to intervene: one hit an OT man for abusing the slave labourers, another begged a Russian-speaking woman to intervene to stop a beating. For the most part, though, they felt themselves to be helpless observers.

Haddock noted after interviewing islander Frank Bullock that punishments could leave victims incapacitated for days:

If the prisoners went to relieve themselves without permission they would be beaten with sticks and informed that on return to camp they would be given ten to fifteen strokes with a rubber truncheon. This had to be administered by the prisoners’ friends.

In about July 1943, [Bullock] saw two Russians lying on the airport with their heads bashed in and was prevented from helping them by Hubert Rigner, the German OT Frontführer . . . one died, the other went mad. Remembers that OT chauffeur Robert — used to amuse himself shooting Russians who picked up potatoes on farm. Saw two or three dead removed who were killed in this way.

Haddock wrote of islander William Upson's statement: 'In the summer of 1942 he saw two Russians taking cabbages [cabbages] in the fields. An assistant Lagerführer ran from his office and punched the prisoners until they fell to the ground. Then he kicked them on the head. They died and were left on the ground for a day and a half until some other prisoners carried them off in a wheelbarrow.'

Guernseyman Marshall George Johns was working for the Guernsey States on Alderney and lived at one of the OT camps. He went into hospital in July 1943 for three months, and during that period he kept a tally of the slave labourers who died by notching marks on the side of his bed. He counted the deaths of seventy-three Russians, two Frenchmen and one woman: 'In his opinion most of them died of starvation and cold.'

There were a handful of slave labourers still on Alderney when the British arrived in 1945; they included Poles, Spaniards and Russians, and they gave detailed statements to Haddock. Emile Sulikowski, a Pole, said that of the thirty men of his brigade in Helgoland Camp in May 1942, only six survived to the end of the year – the rest had died of beatings and hunger. Ivan Amelin, a Russian, saw a man die after being beaten unconscious and put into a truck filled with water. Another Russian saw a compatriot beaten until he bled to death after stealing some potato peelings. A Spaniard, Julio Comin, who worked as a barber at Norderney Camp, saw a German beat a fellow Spaniard nearly blind for giving food to a Russian. Haddock's record of Comin's statement continues: 'An unskilled man called Jakobi conducted the sick parades in a brutal fashion [by] kicking patients in the kidneys. Karl Theiss, Commandant of Norderney, carried out beatings in his office which was next door to Comin's barber's shop. Walls of Theiss's office painted four times to remove bloodstains. Hitler portrait washed clean of blood every day . . . Russians too ill to work being thrown over cliff.'

Haddock's preliminary questioning had substantiated the allegations of appalling atrocities on Alderney. Amongst the PoWs on Alderney, he reported to London, were men who should be tried as well as the witnesses needed for their trials. Channel Islanders and former slave labourers could also stand as witnesses. JAG decided that the matter was serious enough to warrant calling in MI19, and a young captain, Theodore Pantcheff, was charged with the investigation. Pantcheff was a surprising choice because of his lack of experience, but he had a long-standing connection with the island through an uncle who had been a resident before the war, and could therefore be trusted to be conscientious and discreet. As it had been established that a large number of the victims of possible war crimes were Russians, Pantcheff was accompanied by Major Gruzdev, from the London-based Soviet Military Mission.

Anglo-Soviet co-operation did not get off to a successful start. It was not long before Haddock peevishly complained to JAG that Pantcheff was being 'unco-operative with Gruzdev'. Islanders remember Gruzdev as lazy and hard-drinking, and claim that he spent most of his time on the islands either drunk or asleep. But by the time of his departure Gruzdev declared himself 'delighted with the progress already made', and announced that a Russian Military Mission was due to arrive to continue the investigation.

Pantcheff and Gruzdev's task was to investigate the treatment of slave labour on all the islands, but in particular Alderney. Over eleven days in June 1945, Pantcheff 'checked' 1500 PoWs on Guernsey, 1200 on Jersey and 500 on Alderney. Some evidence of ill-treatment was reported to have been found on Jersey, but no documents of this have survived. Robert Le Sueur, who spoke Spanish, was brought in as an interpreter when Spanish prisoners were being interviewed on Jersey by Gruzdev. He remembers: 'Each

Spanish worker was questioned about war crimes. It went on for days. We could not get any evidence that would have stood up in court. There were stories of a mass grave, but when it was dug up we found it was a cesspit.'

No copy of Pantcheff's report of his investigation on Alderney has survived in Britain; it was officially stated that it had been destroyed to make 'shelf space'. But a copy was sent to the Soviet government in October 1945, and it is to a poky attic room, full of dusty potted plants, in the Moscow archives that one has to go to find what he discovered. Stamped 'Top Secret', the report was only declassified in May 1993.

'Wicked and merciless crimes were carried out on British soil in the last three years,' Pantcheff wrote in the preface to his report in September 1945. He listed five German officers guilty of war crimes who were being held on the Channel Islands as prisoners of war. Another ten Germans suspected of war crimes had already been evacuated to PoW camps in Britain. Pantcheff listed thirty-one other Germans suspected of war crimes whose whereabouts were unknown. But, he added, they could be easily found in the American, British and French zones of occupied Germany; on this list appeared Maximilian List, Kurt Klebeck and Otto Högelow.

The five guilty men still on the Channel Islands were either in Jersey prison or in a PoW camp on Guernsey, said Pantcheff. They were: Major Carl Hoffmann, whom Pantcheff described as 'a senior HQ officer on Alderney during the time of mass deaths 1942-43'; Lieutenant Colonel Schwalm, alleged to have been responsible for the whole island from November 1943 to 1945; Captain Massmann, whom Pantcheff accused of 'dealing wickedly with prisoners'; a soldier referred to only as Muller (no rank was given), who was responsible for the work conditions of foreign labourers in 1945; and Dr Hodage, who was considered responsible for the unsanitary conditions of the camp and the death of a workman.

When Pantcheff questioned him about the conditions of the slave labourers, Major Hoffmann claimed that 'the meals in the OT camps were tasty and richly prepared', and that Sylt camp was 'from the technical point of view the best of all the working camps I have seen during the war; clean, good blankets, sheets, flowers, military order'. Hoffmann had changed his story since replying to questions from Major Haddock, his first interlocutor, in late May that it was not surprising that so many Russians had died, and 'stated glibly that it was only to be expected when prisoners were underfed and overworked'.

Other German officers claimed that they had complained about the plight of slave labourers. Johann Hoffmann, the OT Lagerführer of Helgoland from January 1943, told Pantcheff that he had complained about the meagre rations: 'Possibly not so many of them would have died if they had been accommodated better. In the first place the huts were set too low in the ground and there were walls of earth almost up to the roof . . . so they were dark and not properly ventilated.'

Leo Ackermann, island Bauleiter from September 1943 until Liberation, claimed he was only allowed to discuss technical matters with the SS. But he added that he had complained about the conditions in the SS camp to more senior authorities: 'A letter was sent to the head of the SS Baubrigade but nothing was done. I only managed to make myself SS enemies and they began to threaten me with a military tribunal because I had stood up for prisoners.' Ackermann said he was told that the prisoners were so thin because they exchanged their food for cigarettes. He admitted that 'several' of the 250 Jews and 150 'criminals' who arrived during his administration in October 1943 had died, but claimed that these deaths were due to 'incurable diseases they had brought with them'.

Pantcheff listed twenty-two Germans who were still on the islands and could act as witnesses against the men suspected of war crimes, and another eighteen who had been moved to British PoW camps. His report gives a detailed summary of the camps' regime: the food rations had been meagre, the hours of back-breaking work had been long, accommodation was damp and unsanitary, and there was little or no

medical care. The report included a summary of statements made by hundreds of Germans, Channel Islanders and former slave labourers.

The British copy of Pantcheff's report may have perished, but the transcripts of the statements he took, and on which his report was based, have survived in British archives. They run to hundreds of pages.

German PoW Franz Doctor worked at Sylt camp from October to December 1943. He told Pantcheff that he knew of ten cases when bloodhounds had driven prisoners over the camp boundary, and the prisoners had then been shot by sentries for 'escaping'. He said that one of the worst SS men was Otto Högelow, who used to give a bonus of fourteen days' leave, and extra food and drink, to SS guards for every five dead prisoners they produced. Guards at Sylt 'competed in getting leave by shooting prisoners for the smallest offences, e.g. they threw away cigarette ends and as soon as inmates bent down to pick them up, they shot them'.

Otto Taubert, a German driver, told Pantcheff that he went to Sylt in May 1943 to buy some cognac. Entry to the camp was usually forbidden, but on this occasion he was allowed in. He recounted the punishment meted out to four Russians for stealing a lamb:

While I was in the outer compound, I saw four men from the inner compound being escorted to the gate between the two compounds. One of them was weeping bitterly and was kicked and pushed around accordingly by the escort who called the sentry . . . the Uscharführer [SS sergeant] called for two SS men from the guardroom and went into the guardroom himself for a moment to get a whip. The handle of this whip was made of woven leather thongs, the whole whip was made of leather . . . From the canteen, I could see the Uscharf indicating to the SS men that they were to fasten the four prisoners to the barbed wire with handcuffs, their hands above their head. Their feet remained unfettered. After the prisoners had been handcuffed at the gate, they were whipped by the Uscharf . . . One man was bent double with pain . . . From where I was I could hear their cry of anguish somewhat dulled . . . The prisoner who had cried on his arrival could not walk properly when they were let free. As he staggered, he was pushed after the others towards the middle of the compound.

Another German soldier told Pantcheff:

As people starved, they became more like criminals, fighting for scraps . . . Prisoners appointed as supervisors beat them with sticks and fists. I asked them why they beat their own people, and they told me that if they didn't beat them, they would be beaten themselves in camp. One of them told me that the guards would find out who his friend was and they would beat him up and force him to stand in the camp yard completely naked.

Annie Le Cheminant, a Channel Islander who had been working as a translator for a German officer, told Pantcheff: 'The first time I saw Russians, they were clothed in rags, seemed only half alive, always starving . . . the "striped" were even worse. We often gave them bread when they passed our house. Once I had just bought some biscuits and the SS prisoners tore at me and snatched them. The prisoners were beaten so badly, they fell to the ground.'

Several Germans accused a fellow PoW, named Freipond, of beating prisoners. Freipond confessed that the statements were true, and apologised 'to all the people I ill-treated or who were ill-treated in my presence'.

When I relayed the details of Pantcheff's report in the Russian archives to Georgi Kondakov in 1993, he was astounded. Like all the former slave labourers of Alderney, he had believed all his life that the Soviet government had not known of the atrocities committed on the island, and that hundreds of Soviet citizens had died there.

The question which remains unanswered in Pantcheff's report to the British government is how many slave labourers died in the Channel Islands during the Occupation. On Alderney, he concluded that while 337 graves had been found, 'it is impossible to say with any exactitude that the general figure of 337 could represent the full number of deaths on the island'. The final death toll has become one of the most controversial and haunting questions about Alderney's occupation. When Pantcheff published a book^{[fn3](#)} on the post-war investigation in 1981, he wrote that there had been 389 burials of slave labourers, but

admitted that this was only a 'minimum conclusion'. Survivors say it is a gross underestimate, and that the true death toll ran into thousands. No one denies that between 1942 and 1945 Alderney saw the greatest mass murder which has ever occurred on British soil.

All the survivors agree that the number of burials discovered is no indication of the number who died on Alderney. Their accounts may vary in other respects, but their descriptions of the different ways in which bodies were disposed of bear remarkable similarities. Kirill Nevrov and Ivan Sholomitsky live hundreds of miles apart, one in Russia, one in Ukraine, and they have never met; both claim to have seen bodies regularly being buried on the seashore. The claim of another Russian survivor, Georgi Kondakov, of seeing bodies tipped into the harbour is echoed in a pamphlet published in 1947 and written by a Spanish slave labourer who remained in the Channel Islands, John Dalmau; Dalmau and Kondakov have never met. Dalmau was once ordered to dive down to rescue an entangled anti-submarine boom in Braye Harbour, Alderney. What he saw gave him nightmares for many years: 'a fantastic picture presented itself. Among the rocks and seaweed there were skeletons all over the place. Crabs and lobsters were having a feast on the bodies which remained intact.'

Dalmau also claimed that 'throwing men over the cliff became the standard way of getting rid of exhausted workers', and that on occasions large numbers of slave workers were shot and thrown over the cliffs. Doubt has been cast on these accounts because it is claimed that no human bones have ever been washed up on Alderney's shores. The argument cannot be conclusively resolved: all we have is the word of the survivors.

One of the most controversial claims, which islanders angrily dismiss as sensationalist, is that slave workers were pushed into the setting concrete of the fortifications. Survivors have never claimed that this happened on a systematic basis; clearly, a large number of decomposing bodies would weaken the fortifications. But the accounts of three survivors who have never met each other correlate. Otto Spehr in Germany, Kirill Nevrov in Russia, and the memoirs of a French resistance agent, 'Glaize', published in France in 1945, all describe how an accident became an atrocity. Glaize:

One day we were working filling in liquid concrete. Suddenly there was a lot of shouting and the SS men came rushing up with their dogs; they ordered us to carry on working and said any attempt to talk would be very seriously punished. Not until we got back to the barracks did we hear that an Italian called Patalacci had slipped and fallen inside the wooden planks which were being filled with concrete. He seemed to have fractured his leg and his comrades wanted to help him out, but the Germans refused to stop work and the liquid concrete was poured on him. He was buried alive in the west wall of the casement.

It is hard to believe that survivors who are geographically scattered, and who have never met since the war, could be fabricating or exaggerating when their accounts match so closely.

Survivors do, however, differ dramatically in their estimates of the total number of slave labourers who came to Alderney. This figure has to be the starting point for the calculation of how many died. Pantcheff's post-war research, based on surviving German records, differs from survivors' accounts. He states that three ships in the summer of 1942 brought a total of 2800 Poles, Ukrainians and Russians to the island, that in March 1943 a thousand SS prisoners arrived, and later in the same year 550 French Jews. Another thousand (mainly German) OT workers and French prostitutes on the island were much better treated than the other labourers, and their death rate would have been minimal. Excluding the last-named, Pantcheff's figures make a total of 4350 slave labourers.

Georgi Kondakov has calculated from the accounts of more than sixty Russian survivors that about six thousand Poles, Ukrainians and Russians came to Alderney: 1100 to Helgoland, two thousand to Sylt (before it was handed over to the SS) and three thousand to Norderney. Another survivor, Ted Misiewicz, says this is an over-estimate, and concurs with Pantcheff that there were about three thousand slave labourers at any one time in Sylt, Norderney and Helgoland.

The true total was probably slightly more than Pantcheff's figure; at least five thousand slave labourers were on Alderney between 1941 and 1944. Belgian survivor Norbert Beermart points out that there were already significant numbers of forced labourers on Alderney before the Eastern Europeans arrived in 1942. At the peak, in May 1943, OT records reveal that there were four thousand OT workers on Alderney, and this figure would not have included the SS prisoners. Pantcheff also slightly underestimates the number of French Jews: French historian Serge Klarsfeld said that seven hundred French Jews were sent to Alderney – this figure is based on exhaustive research into the fate of Jewry in Vichy France.

The survival rates varied for different nationalities of workers; only a small number of Dutch and Belgians died, and only a handful of French Jews perished (fewer than ten, according to survivor Albert Eblagon). The nationalities who suffered the worst were the Russians, Poles, Ukrainians and French North Africans. The rough consensus is that between twenty and twenty-five per cent of the OT slave workers and SS prisoners on Alderney died, making a final death toll of between 1000 and 1250 on this one island.

Deaths were at their peak in the last months of 1942. The arrival of winter and the first few months of the Alderney camp regime combined to kill off the most vulnerable, and former slave labourers remember October, November and December as the worst time, with sometimes as many as ten deaths a day. Forty-four death certificates (twenty-seven Russians, eight Poles, one Frenchman, two Belgians, four Dutch and two others) have survived in the Guernsey archives out of a file which originally contained 'several hundred', according to a note scribbled on its cover by the official historian of the Occupation, Charles Cruikshank. Twelve of the Russians who died were teenagers. The worst month was October, when fourteen died, including seven on one day, the twelfth.

Brian O'Hurley, a British man who worked on Alderney for four years, told Haddock that between December 1942 and January 1943 he believed that about seven hundred slave labourers died of starvation. This was the period of the worst management on Alderney, and a commission was sent from Berlin to investigate the large number of deaths. Allegedly, the Bauleiter, Buthmann, was taken to France and court-martialled, and the change of personnel led to an improvement in conditions. The death rate remained high, however, even in the warmer summer weather. Guernseyman Marshall Johns noted that seventy-three Russian and two French corpses were brought to the hospital on Alderney in May, June and July 1943, and there is no reason to believe that all the dead were taken to the hospital.

Documents have survived relating to the number of deaths in SS Baubrigade I at SS Sylt camp on Alderney. The SS Neuengamme camp death registers record 126 deaths in Sylt between April 1943 and July 1944. These registers are highly inaccurate – only fifteen thousand of the estimated fifty-five thousand deaths at Neuengamme are recorded. The sick of Baubrigade I were returned from Alderney to Neuengamme, where they were probably killed. This is made clear in the SS records of the trial of the Baubrigade Kommandant Maximilian List and his deputy Kurt Klebeck after a breakout on a transport of two hundred sick prisoners in 1943. List had decided to return the prisoners because they 'were too much of a burden' on the island. At the trial, Klebeck admitted that 'Alderney was especially bad for Eastern [European] workers.' Otto Spehr, the only known living survivor of SS Baubrigade I, claims that at least 350 of the thousand-strong brigade had died before it was evacuated in July 1944. The rest probably perished in Buchenwald, where the brigade was sent after working on V2 sites at Kortemark in Belgium.

Added to the death toll on Alderney must be those who died on the transport ships between the islands and France. The conditions of the voyage were sufficient to kill a number of those who were already ill, and the poorly equipped ships were vulnerable to storms, Allied bombing and torpedo attacks. German PoWs told Pantcheff that the slave labourers were 'crowded together in holds like herrings, without straw, beds, blankets or benches. They were terribly emaciated . . . When opening the hatches to the

holds, a terrible stench would meet us.’ The worst disaster was the wreck of the *Xaver Dorsch* and the *Franka* in January 1943, and more lives were probably lost in October of the same year when the *Dorothea Weber* sat in Alderney harbour with hundreds of men under the battened hatches for thirty-six hours without food or water before setting sail. Another disaster was when the *Minotaure* was torpedoed in July 1944, and about two hundred OT workers and French prostitutes drowned. The total lost at sea travelling to and from Alderney must have run into several hundred.

The number of deaths on Guernsey and Jersey is believed to be considerably lower than on Alderney. The camp staff were not as corrupt on these islands, so the slave labourers received more of their rations. In addition, they were sometimes given – or could steal – food and clothing by islanders. On neither island do accurate German records survive. One list for Guernsey reports that 109 OT workers died in 1942. The bodies were exhumed in 1961 from the Foulon cemetery by the Volksbund Deutscher Kriegsgräberfürsorge, the West German government’s organisation dealing with German war graves, and reburied in France. Of those whose nationalities were identified, sixty were French (mostly Algerians), fifteen Belgian, seven Spanish and five Dutch, as well as one Chinese and one Portuguese.

On Jersey, the burial register of the Westmount Strangers’ Cemetery from February 1942 to February 1943 records 124 deaths: seventy-six Russians, seventeen French, nine Spaniards, six North Africans, four Poles, two Dutch, two Belgians and eight unknown. This would not have been the total number of deaths for that year; there were numerous accidents at work, such as slave labourers being buried in rock falls. In 1943, when the OT was at its full strength, there were 6700 labourers on Guernsey and 5300 on Jersey, and the death rate would probably have been slightly higher than in 1942. It is impossible to come to a precise figure for the number of slave labourers who died on Jersey and Guernsey, but it must have run into several hundred. The total number who died in the Channel Islands, including travelling to or from them, probably lies between two and three thousand.

Only four men are known to have been prosecuted for war crimes committed on Alderney. Konopelko, a Soviet slave labourer who became a kapo (guard), was tried in Glukow in southern Russia in 1949 and sentenced to twenty-five years’ hard labour. A German member of the SS, Lagerführer Puhr, was tried and executed in East Germany in 1963. Two Organisation Todt staff, OT Haupttruppführer Adam Adler and OT Meister Heinrich Evers, commandant and deputy commandant of Norderney camp, were tried in France at the Tribunal Militaire Permanent de Paris at Caserne de Reuilly in September 1949. They were accused of subjecting French Jews to ‘superhuman work’ and ‘systematic ill-treatment’, and of having deprived them of medical care and parcels sent by their families. Forty-seven-year-old Adler admitted he had been a Nazi since 1930 and was a member of the SS; they were both found guilty and sentenced, Adler to ten years and Evers to seven years.

The British tried no one.

The British officers – Major Haddock, Major Cotton and Captain Pantcheff – sent to investigate atrocities on the Channel Islands thought they were collecting information for future war crime trials. Pantcheff in his report to the Soviet government urged further work to bring the guilty to trial. But all the evidence they collected and the interviews they conducted led to nothing. This is one of the most puzzling aspects of the history of the Channel Islands Occupation.

It quickly became apparent that there was a confusion about which country would be responsible for trying Alderney’s suspected war criminals. There were two conflicting principles under the Moscow Declaration signed on 30 October 1943 by America, Britain and Russia on the prosecution of war criminals. One principle was that the ‘most aggrieved nation’ should be the one to prosecute, but another

was that trials should be held in, or as near as possible to, the place where the crimes occurred, so that local witnesses could give evidence.

In the case of Alderney these principles clearly clashed; the Soviet Union was the most aggrieved nation, but a large number of witnesses were either on the Channel Islands or in British PoW camps.

On 14 June 1945, the Office of the Treasury Solicitor wrote to the Foreign Office, asking for advice on the Alderney case: ‘We suppose that the principle recently decided in dealing with concentration camps in the area of British occupation would apply in the case of British territory recovered from the enemy. It seems to us, however, that we could not act in relation to these cases unless we have some authority for doing so and without presumably some reference to the Russians.’

The Judge Advocate General’s office replied: ‘the position here [Alderney] is somewhat similar to Belsen,^{fn4} stronger perhaps because the offences were committed on British territory’. The Foreign Office agreed that the British should try the Alderney cases, but added the caveat that if it was found that all the victims were Russian, ‘then under our interpretation of the Moscow Declaration, these Germans should be handed over to the Soviet government . . . it would be interesting to see whether the Soviet authorities would take this view of the Moscow Declaration despite its literal text to the effect that they should be sent back to the “scene of their atrocious deeds”’.

On 30 June 1945 the Office of the Treasury Solicitor wrote to the Foreign Office that the large number of statements taken on Alderney ‘almost wholly refer to offences against Russians’, but went on to cite Belsen as a reason for the British conducting the Alderney trials, and added, ‘I suppose we ought either to get the consent of the Russians or to notify them of what we are doing.’

Trials in British Special Military Courts under Royal Warrant on Alderney seemed the best option, agreed the Foreign Office in reply to JAG, adding that there was the further advantage of local witnesses being available. But the Foreign Office had one question: were all the crimes committed against Russians, or had any other nationalities (apart from Germans) suffered?

Brigadier Shapcott from JAG replied five days later that *all* the inmates of the Alderney camps were Russian, and that ‘There is no evidence that the concentration camp held other non-German nationals while the Russians were there. When, however, the Russians were removed a number of French Jews took over the duty of completing the fortifications.’ The Foreign Office noted that ‘for practical purposes Russians may be considered to have been the only occupants of these camps’. To make absolutely sure, the Foreign Office wrote to ask JAG if any atrocities had been committed against French Jews, because ‘if there were any serious ones this may make a difference’. JAG assured the Foreign Office that ‘no atrocities were committed against the French Jews. On balance they were treated better than others working for the Germans.’

But French Jews *were* mistreated, and there were many nationalities apart from Russians who suffered on Alderney. Why had Brigadier Shapcott misled the Foreign Office? It could have been a genuine error; Pantcheff had not yet completed his report, and the letters of Major Haddock to Brigadier Shapcott had indicated that most of the slave labourers had been Russian. On the other hand, Pantcheff would have been keeping Shapcott informed about the progress of the investigation; a simple enquiry would quickly have established that Belgians, Dutch, Czechs, Poles and others had suffered on Alderney. Neither did JAG make any enquiries to the French authorities, who had compiled considerable evidence of ill-treatment of French citizens on Alderney by 1945.

JAG had the gigantic task of tracing thousands of the Third Reich’s personnel and preparing for their trials with a hopelessly inadequate staff. Under the pressure of such a volume of work, civil servants might have decided to simplify the matter of the Channel Islands and disregard the minority of non-Soviet victims. Or Brigadier Shapcott’s mistake could have been the result of a decision that trials on Alderney

would bring unwelcome attention to the humiliating fact that there had been an SS camp on British soil, and that some islanders had voluntarily worked for the Germans on Alderney.

On receiving JAG's assurance that only Soviets had suffered on Alderney, the Foreign Office decided that the best course of action would be to hand over to the Soviet authorities the Germans suspected of war crimes on Alderney, and all the evidence that had been collected, and leave it to them to try them. 'In this way we might hope to gain a certain kudos for the gesture and we should also be spared the possible embarrassment of the Russians criticising in good or bad faith the leniency of any sentences passed by our Special Military Courts.'

Captain Pantcheff's report sent to the Soviet government in October 1945 was part of the British offer to provide evidence for the Soviet authorities' prosecutions. But what the Soviets needed were the guilty men and the Germans who could act as witnesses, and they were all in British prisoner of war camps in the Channel Islands, Britain and Germany. Without them, there could be no trials. By early 1946 the wartime co-operation between Britain and Russia was breaking down, and any chances of the former allies joining forces to ensure that Alderney's war criminals were put on trial fast receded.

There are only three brief references to Alderney war criminals after 1946 in British archives. A German called Danner was found in a Norwegian prisoner of war camp and accused of war crimes in Alderney. JAG were notified, and their reply was to recommend the man's release because 'the case of Alderney had been handed over to the Russians'. This was a mark of the complete breakdown of relations between Britain and the Soviet Union; the British had washed their hands of the whole matter.

The second reference was in 1947, when JAG wrote to the Officer Commanding British Forces in France with what was to become the standard line for half a century: 'The completed reports were handed over to the Russian authorities for such action as they might think fit. I regret therefore, that no list of the men responsible is in the possession of this office . . . the only information that we can give you is . . . that the Russians were treated with great cruelty.'

The third reference was to the Kommandant of SS Baubrigade I, Hauptsturmführer Maximilian List, who had been on every list of suspected Alderney war criminals drawn up by MI19. In the late 1940s JAG received a letter saying that List had been found in a PoW camp called Harsseld; pencilled in the margin is a note that List had been handed over to the Russians in 1947, 'so no further action need be taken'. This was not the case; Maximilian List lived in West Germany after the war, appearing in a Hamburg court in 1974 (for a minor offence unrelated to the war), where he admitted to having been the Kommandant of SS Baubrigade I. The former SS prisoner Otto Spehr claims that List lived near Hamburg until his death in the 1980s.

Rumours have flourished about the fate of Alderney war criminals. The man best placed to know what happened to them was Pantcheff. His extremely detailed book *Alderney, Fortress Island* was clearly based on personal copies he had kept of his 1945 investigation. But over the fate of Alderney's suspected war criminals Pantcheff is unreliable. He writes that Maximilian List and Kurt Klebeck did not survive the war, and that the former Alderney Kommandant Major Carl Hoffmann was 'said to have been hung in 1945 in Kiev'. He added, 'It has recently been suggested that he died in West Germany in the mid-1970s, but resolving this apparent discrepancy lies outside the scope of this wartime record.' In 1983 the British government was forced to admit that in 1948 Hoffmann had been released from the London District Prisoner of War cage (to which he had been taken from the Channel Islands), because no request had been received from the Soviet authorities for him to stand trial. Hoffmann returned to Germany and lived in Hamburg until he died of old age in 1974.

Pantcheff fails to mention in his book what the Russian copy of his report in Moscow makes clear: namely, that fifteen of the suspected German war criminals had been in British PoW camps, along with the

witnesses needed to convict them. All of them were probably, like Hoffmann, released in 1948–49 without being tried. Pantcheff's book was checked by the Ministry of Defence and it is probable that parts of it were censored. It is unlikely to be an accident that Pantcheff's report, with its reference to the presence of fifteen Alderney war criminals in British camps, is missing from the British archives. When Pantcheff was interviewed for a television documentary in 1990 he stated that no Germans were prosecuted because 'they had all left before we got here. They were evacuated in the spring of 1944.'

In 1992, it took the Home Office more than three months to collate an answer to my enquiry as to why there had been no trials:

As the majority of the forced labour victims were Russian prisoners, the case concerning the ill-treatment of the forced labourers was passed with the evidence to the Soviet authorities for their action. In other cases, the individuals considered by the war crimes investigators as possible accused did not fall into Western Allied hands before the cessation of war crimes trials in 1948. Claims that relevant documents were destroyed were unfounded.

This is patently untrue: the accused had been in British PoW camps. Either the officials were lying, or the relevant documents have indeed been destroyed, and the Home Office does not know what the Pantcheff report contained.

The causes of the failure to try the Alderney war criminals must lie in part in the disintegrating relationship between Britain and the Soviet Union in 1946. In addition, neither government was probably enthusiastic to try them. The British did not relish the prospect of the Soviet Union exploiting British trials for its own political advantage, as the Foreign Office documents indicate. Trials on British soil would have been an acutely embarrassing reminder to the British public of several painful facts about the war which the government wanted quickly forgotten: that British territory had been occupied for five years; that British subjects had collaborated and worked for the Germans on Alderney; and that Nazi atrocities, including the establishment of an SS concentration camp, had occurred on British soil. Besides, the British public was already losing interest in war crime trials, and with much bigger fish to fry in Germany, the matter was allowed to drop.

It is conceivable that, as the British government has maintained, the Soviet Union did not request that Hoffmann and the other accused be handed over to them for trial. Such a trial would have revealed that there were innocent 'repatriates', thus muddying the waters of the Stalinist distinction between them and war participants.

The trials had been bungled and neglected. The cover-up began after 1946, when the failure to try the Alderney war criminals became an embarrassment to the British government. It was an omission which would not have put Britain in a good light in the eyes of wartime allies such as France. Whenever the issue has been raised over the past fifty years British governments have been economical with the truth. Pressure on former agents such as Pantcheff, and the disappearance of crucial papers, has meant that piecing together a full story can never be more than intelligent guesswork.

Contrary to Pantcheff's supposition, Kurt Klebeck, the SS deputy commandant, did survive the war, and by an extraordinary stroke of fate he was tried by the British in occupied Germany in 1947. The transcripts of his trial have even survived in British archives. But Klebeck was not tried for crimes he committed on Alderney, but for atrocities perpetrated in camps after his return to Germany in 1944.

After Alderney, Klebeck had been promoted to district commandant of Ahlem-Stoecken, a camp outside Hamburg for Polish Jews who were diverted from the gas chambers to build an underground factory. He was captured by the British in June 1945, and spent two years in a British prisoner of war camp awaiting trial. During his trial he revealed that he had been on Alderney, but the reference was ignored: no one in the British military court asked what this career SS officer had been doing there.

The chief prosecution witness, prisoner-doctor Leon Fajwlowicz, described a regime in which ten to fifteen men died every day from beatings, exhaustion and tuberculosis. On one of Klebeck's visits of inspection, Fajwlowicz complained about the unsanitary condition of the toilets, and overheard Klebeck say to the camp commandant, 'They will die in any case, and if they don't, we'll take good care to see to it that they do.' Fajwlowicz said that Klebeck had used the slang expression 'kick the bucket'. Klebeck denied this, insisting that he would never use such an expression for a human being, only for an animal.

Two other men who were tried alongside him were hanged for their part in the horrific regime of Ahlem, yet Klebeck received only a ten-year prison sentence. The British military judge, P.G.B. Six Smith, pointed out that as district commandant, Klebeck did not have direct responsibility for the running of the camp, and concluded that there was 'no evidence that he himself directly killed or ill-treated a prisoner or that he gave orders to anyone to do so'. Klebeck served a total of seven years, and was released early for good behaviour in 1952.

The British court ignored Klebeck's crimes on Alderney – a camp for which he did have direct responsibility – and they also apparently failed to realise that he had played a key role in one of the most tragic events of the chaotic last days before Germany's defeat. The *Cap Arcona* disaster is well known in Germany; it has struck a chord with the German people because in this atrocity both Britain and Germany were complicit. Documents relating to the British investigation into the disaster in 1945 have survived, and the name of Hauptsturmführer Kurt Klebeck (he had probably been promoted on his return to Germany from Alderney) figures prominently.

At the end of April 1945, Hitler ordered the evacuation of 2353 prisoners from Neuengamme concentration camp outside Hamburg to a ship, the SS *Cap Arcona*, which was anchored in Neustadt Bay off the north German coast. The ship had no defences against Allied submarines or bombers at a time when the German coast was under heavy attack, and its captain refused to board the prisoners. Klebeck himself threatened to arrest him unless he obeyed the order. A total of 6500 prisoners from Neuengamme and other camps were loaded onto the *Cap Arcona* and another ship, the *Thielbeck*. The prisoners were in an appalling condition, and 182 died while waiting to be transferred onto the ships.

On 2 May 1945, the British reached the nearby port of Lübeck, and were told that there were eight thousand prisoners on board three anchored ships in Neustadt Bay. But the following day the RAF bombed the ships. Both the *Cap Arcona* and the *Thielbeck* were sunk, drowning most of the prisoners trapped in the holds. Prisoners struggling in the water or who managed to reach the shore were shot at by SS officers who had escaped in the lifeboats, shocked German residents told the British investigators. The death toll was put at five thousand.

The British investigators concluded that 'primary responsibility must fall on the British RAF personnel' for failing to relay intelligence to the pilots, but added that, at a time when the RAF were constantly bombing that part of the German coast, the Germans must have intended the RAF to kill the prisoners, in an 'act of manslaughter almost akin to murder'. Amongst those listed as guilty was Kurt Klebeck, then in custody at Neuengamme.

In 1992, Kurt Klebeck was a well-preserved elderly man. He closely resembled his younger self: the same clean-shaven, fleshy face and sleeked-back hair. He and his wife had learned to live with the fear that one day his past might catch up with him. When we called, the door was opened a few inches on a chain by his small, worried wife, who relayed questions to Klebeck. He did not deny that he had been on Alderney, but insisted he had only been an ordinary soldier. Then the door slammed shut. Klebeck was nervous, and could not resist stepping onto the balcony of his flat to inspect through binoculars the people who had come asking questions about a history which he had hidden for nearly fifty years. It was a mistake which led to his photograph appearing in newspapers in Britain, Germany, Holland and France.

Klebeck's claims to be an ordinary soldier are belied by the SS records in the Berlin Documentation Centre. His file, although a little burnt around the edges from when it was salvaged from the flames in the fall of Berlin, provides a biography of the man. His background was typical of those who flocked to join the Nazis in the early thirties. He came from an educated middle-class background in Berlin – his father had been an engineer – but had failed to get into a good school. By the age of twenty-seven he had had several jobs, none of which had lasted more than six months. A shotgun marriage had produced a son who died after a month, and a divorce. In May 1933 Klebeck joined the Nazi Party and the SS, cashing in on the party's rise to power. He was married again in 1939, to his present wife; the SS gave permission for the marriage only after her ethnic purity had been verified. Klebeck worked at Sachsenhausen concentration camp as well as Neuengamme, Alderney and Ahlem-Stoecken.

In 1992, after Klebeck's wartime record was first revealed in the press, the German government launched a new investigation, drawing on British wartime records of his SS career for the first time. But as the German Embassy in London admitted eighteen months later, in November 1993, it was very unlikely that Klebeck would ever be put on trial at his age (then eighty-seven), even if witnesses could be found. Like many other Nazi officials, Klebeck will die in his own bed, never having faced full justice.

Meanwhile, in Russia, ageing Alderney survivors pore over recent photos of Klebeck and his SS identity photo, and search in their memories for the faces which terrorised them as boys. Ivan Kalganov and Georgi Kondakov recognise Klebeck's face, although they never knew his name – he was a figure only occasionally glimpsed, giving orders to underlings.

Alexander Kanatnikov, who was in Sylt when Klebeck was deputy commandant, wrote from Gornyak, Ukraine: 'Over the last fifty years, I could never have imagined that somebody might ever take an interest in the sad story of Alderney prisoners. The law which reigned in Alderney during the war was the strict law of the struggle for life. I don't remember the man in the photo, but I look at it very closely every day.'

The second part of the Liberation Force's task was to investigate allegations of collaboration, on the part of individual islanders and of the island governments.

The British government's priorities became clear immediately. Despite stiff opposition from the military, Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, insisted on visiting the Channel Islands on 15 May 1945, only a few days after Liberation. He had Churchill's blessing, and his task was to patch up the islands' relationship with Britain. That meant explaining why Britain had abandoned them in 1940 and had not liberated them until the war in Europe was over. At the same time, he wanted to reassure the island governments of Britain's whole-hearted support in the event of questions being raised over their wartime conduct. Forgive and forget, he offered; it was an arrangement which suited both sides. The slate was wiped clean, the islands and Britain could return to where they had left off in 1940. Morrison was reported in the *Jersey Evening Post* as having told the Jersey States: 'I am not sure that everything . . . was always within the law . . . but if anything has been done that needs white-washing at the other end, I will take care of it.'

Jersey clerk Norman Le Brocq remembered Morrison's visit: 'He made a public statement in the square which horrified me . . . he said that he considered that while there had been some minor collaboration and blemishes by people during the German Occupation, he thought the majority of the islanders had shown great loyalty, and certainly any misdemeanours that had happened would not be followed up. When Morrison finished talking, he expected everyone to applaud him but there was just an angry silence.'

On Morrison's return to Britain, he gave a statement to the House of Commons publicly exonerating the islands: 'I am sure the House will join me in expressing our admiration for the fortitude and the loyalty

which, with creditably few exceptions, our kinsfolk in the Channel Islands have shown [and] for the courage and devotion to duty with which the Bailiffs and other Crown officers have discharged their arduous and sometimes dangerous responsibilities during every phase of Nazi occupation.'

Norman Le Brocq was not the only one on Jersey to be shocked by the British government's position, and many letters of protest were written to the Home Office. One Jerseywoman wrote that the Home Secretary was only on the islands for a few hours, and had only talked to States officials. She hoped that the King and Queen would express sympathy but refrain from 'praising or blaming any of us until the commission [of inquiry] had returned its report'. A Colonel West did not mince his words, writing to Churchill that the walls of St Helier were plastered with graffiti saying, 'The States must go'. He added, 'Were you to know the truth Jersey could not be included amongst the "dear Channel Islands" . . . a more unworthy Bailiff never held office in Jersey, nor is the Attorney-General any better.' Another Jerseyman wrote to Morrison, 'this civil government was pro-Nazi from the day the Germans came to the day they surrendered'.

On Guernsey, John Leale, President of the Controlling Committee, decided to head off criticism, and gave a long and detailed defence of his government's record during the Occupation to the States on 23 May: 'We were not at liberty to explain many of our actions. Disquieting things kept on happening and it was not perhaps altogether unnatural that a public, tired, fearful and irritated, should at times take a somewhat jaundiced view of some of our activities.' His speech was printed in full in the local papers.

Whitehall was impressed by Leale's speech, and attributed Guernsey's lack of public unrest to his prompt and effective oratory. The Jersey government was slower to defend its island's record. When the States met for the first time after the war, it was declared that 'The great body of real Jersey people, whose families had been associated with this island for centuries, were neither collaborators nor fraternisers . . . the great majority of our real people had never had even the slightest association with the enemy and could look back with feelings of pride in their loyalty.'

That did not satisfy everyone; as one passionate letter to the *Jersey Evening Post* put it: 'When a malignant growth takes root in a body the surgeon uses his knife to eliminate it so that the healthy flesh around it may have a chance of survival. In Denmark, Norway and other countries they operated swiftly; only an anaesthetic has so far been administered here.'

In a private memo to the Home Office, Alexander Coutanche, the Bailiff of Jersey, defended his government's role as a 'buffer'. He detailed how the island's authorities had refused to co-operate with the Germans in the recruitment of labour, but admitted that large numbers of islanders had voluntarily worked for the Germans, and that some of this work had been of 'a military character'. He defended the Royal Court's registration of anti-Jewish orders by saying they had 'no option': 'The number of persons affected was extremely small and moderation was shown in the execution of the Order. It could be shown that other oppressive measures against the Jews were entirely avoided by proper intervention of the Insular Authorities.'

The Home Office reassured the governments of both islands that such explanations satisfied them, but pointed out that allegations had to be investigated in case the government was called on to make a statement. It was to be a secret, and extremely tactful, inquiry. The Home Office turned to Lord Justice du Parcq, the most prominent Channel Islander in the British legal establishment, to consider the island governments' record.

Du Parcq drew up a memo in which he listed several causes for concern. The most important was the fact that the island governments had helped the Germans deport 2200 islanders to internment camps in Germany in 1942 and 1943: 'I think that a strong case can be made for the view that the local authorities

should have refused to give any assistance in the performance of this violation of international law . . . I should feel happier if I thought a strong line had been taken.'

Du Parcq was also concerned by the behaviour of the Bailiff of Guernsey, Victor Carey, who had referred to Allied soldiers in an order published in the local press as 'enemy forces', and had offered a reward of £25 to anyone who informed on a person writing V-signs. Du Parcq commented acidly: 'I would assume, however, that these orders, with any explanation which Mr Carey has to offer, would be brought to the attention of the Prime Minister, if not of His Majesty before any honour was conferred.'

Du Parcq visited the islands, and then met Sir Frank Newsam at the Home Office on 6 June to discuss the unrest on Jersey. Newsam said the government was reluctant to embark on a 'witch-hunting inquiry' into the island governments' record. Du Parcq agreed, and assured him that the resentment on the islands was mainly directed not against the administration but against individuals who had worked for the Germans, farmers who supplied them with food, and informers.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Theobald Mathew, visited the islands in July, spending two days each on Guernsey and Jersey, talking mainly to officials. He praised Coutanche, the Bailiff of Jersey, for his 'exceptional ability and skill.' Of Carey, the Bailiff of Guernsey, he was critical: 'It is perhaps unfortunate that the Bailiff, elderly, charming, but not of strong character, who was due to retire when the Occupation started, appears on one or two occasions to have given way to strong German pressure and the three public notices (including one about a reward for information leading to the arrest of anyone doing "V" signs) which resulted were extremely unfortunate.' But Mathew's conclusion was: 'No doubt the administration made mistakes, but . . . they are entitled to praise rather than censure.' He warned: 'I sensed the beginnings of some resentment of the critical attitude which it is thought that this country has been adopting towards the administration.'

Mathew's warning was heeded. The discreet inquiry into the conduct of island governments was wrapped up and its findings were relayed to Parliament by James Chuter-Ede, the Home Secretary in Attlee's newly elected Labour Government, on 20 August 1945: 'The islands have every reason to be proud of themselves and we have every reason to be proud of them. That, after a period of great suffering, there should have been a tendency in certain quarters, not fully informed of all the facts, to indulge in recriminations, is not surprising, but I hope, in the interests of the future of the Islands, nothing will be said in this House to encourage any such tendency.'

Chuter-Ede admitted that mistakes had been made by the island governments, but emphasised 'the immense importance of keeping executive functions in the hands of the civil administrations'. He added that the conduct of the islanders towards the Germans 'was generally speaking of a frigid and correct character'.

Both Bailiffs were immediately told about Chuter-Ede's statement in Parliament by phone. 'It is a relief to have that over,' wrote Alexander Coutanche in handwritten letters to both Newsam and Charles Markbreiter at the Home Office thanking them warmly for all their help.

In a further gesture of endorsement, in December 1945 the Crown showered honours on the prominent members of the islands' governments. Victor Carey, John Leale and Alexander Coutanche got their knighthoods, the first-named notwithstanding Lord Justice du Parcq's misgivings. Ambrose Sherwill was made a CBE (he became Bailiff of Guernsey in 1946, and was knighted in 1949). A CBE was also given to Edgar Dorey, a member of the Jersey Superior Council. Three OBEs were awarded, including one to Richard Johns, the head of Guernsey's Labour Department who had ensured that the Germans had enough workmen to expand the island's airport.

The British government had backed off from bringing island officials to account, but the question of what to do about individual islanders accused of collaboration was not to be so easily resolved. At the

beginning of June 1945, Home Office official James Boag Howard warned Herbert Morrison: ‘The position in Jersey is rather acute because certain sections of the population are showing a determination not to let the matter rest.’

Alexander Coutanche was also concerned that if those islanders who had been ‘unduly friendly’ with the Germans were not brought to book, a precedent would be established throughout the Commonwealth that such behaviour towards an occupying power was acceptable. The Bailiff suggested a Committee of Inquiry which ‘would allow of some ventilation of public feeling for the time being’. But Boag Howard was concerned about the impact of such an inquiry on ‘less responsible’ newspapers in Britain, which might ‘make capital out of the small number of British subjects in Jersey who had collaborated with the enemy’.

On his visit to the islands in July 1945, Theobald Mathew investigated allegations against individual collaborators, and concluded stiffly that the worst that could be said about islanders was that ‘They may have merited the description of one German officer that they were “obsequious peasants”, but even this in my opinion is probably unfair having regard to the fact that where opportunity offered, such as the “V” sign incident, hostility to the occupation was shown.’

Mathew made no reference to the fact that the Guernsey police had handed islanders who had written ‘V’ signs – including children – over to the Germans. Nor that Victor Carey himself had offered rewards to islanders to inform on those writing ‘V’ signs. Mathew concluded his report: ‘There is no *prima facie* case for suggesting the population as a whole behaved in a disloyal manner during this difficult and unprecedented period.’

There was one question with which both the British government and the island governments were wrestling throughout the summer of 1945: what exactly constituted collaboration, and was it a crime under island law?

Jersey’s Attorney-General, Duret Aubin, told the States that ‘to collaborate with the enemy is to give assistance which the occupying power could not obtain except by the co-operation of the individual concerned’. Under that definition a considerable number of islanders would have been guilty of collaboration. In June the Channel Islands’ most senior lawyers flew to London to discuss the matter at a meeting with Sir Alexander Maxwell, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. Attention focused on two laws which could be used to try islanders for collaboration. Article 2a of the 1939 Defence Regulations Act made ‘aiding and abetting the enemy’ a crime. That would have covered most forms of collaboration, but there was a fine constitutional issue of whether the law was still in force on the islands during the Occupation. In August 1941 the Defence Regulations Act’s application to the Channel Islands had been revoked by an Order in Council.^{fn5} The question arose as to whether the 1941 Order in Council had been valid on the islands between 1941 and 1945, as Orders normally have to be registered in the islands’ Royal Courts before they take effect. The 1941 Order had not been registered because the islands were occupied. So, had the 1939 Defence Regulations Act been revoked, or had it legally held force throughout the Occupation?

In August 1945 Duret Aubin sent a memo on the question to the Home Office. He concluded that the Defence Regulations Act had remained in force, and that islanders could therefore be prosecuted under article 2a for ‘aiding and abetting the enemy’. Aubin recommended that Jersey law officers should begin preparing evidence in two or three ‘serious cases they know where persons are thought to have been in the pay of Germans as informers’.

There was another law under which collaborators could also be prosecuted, according to Theobald Mathew. They could be tried under the English common law of ‘misdemeanours of effecting a public mischief’, because collaboration could be counted as ‘offences of a public nature . . . as tend to the

prejudice of the community'. Mathew and the Home Office agreed that any such trials should be held in the islands. Mathew added that it would not be possible to prosecute cases of black marketeering and fraternising, and advised that they be dealt with by 'financial sanctions and by social ostracism'.

During June and July 1945 twenty officers of the Civil Affairs Unit (CAU) of the Liberation Force gathered evidence against alleged collaborators, although 'evidence which has any value is extremely difficult to obtain'. On several occasions Norman Le Brocq was questioned at length on the activities of collaborators by Captain Kent. When Le Brocq asked what was going to happen to the thick dossier of statements, Kent told him that it would all be recorded and forgotten. This prediction was to prove accurate.

On 9 August the CAU sent a report to the Home Office. It concluded:

These statements proved beyond doubt that a number of people behaved in an unseemly, undesirable and even disgraceful way, but none of the statements so far produced makes any allegation which, if true, could prove a charge of treachery or treason and the sooner we face this fact and put an end to the present atmosphere of suspense the better. There might be some violent recriminations from certain elements of the public when this statement is published and it would be advisable for the 'show-down' to take place before the bulk of the Force is withdrawn.

On 2 November 1945 the new Lieutenant Governor of Jersey, Sir Edward Grasset, sent Mathew the names of thirteen people whom the Jersey authorities considered could be successfully prosecuted. But by November an extraordinary decision had been made. It was decided to ignore both Mathew's and Aubin's legal opinions; only cases of treason would now be prosecuted. No documents have survived which explain this *volte-face*, and it appears that, once again, a large number of sub-files have been destroyed. It is clear that when Mathew sent his report to the Home Office on the completion of his investigation in January 1946, he considered only the crime of treason suitable for prosecution. He announced that he had investigated a total of twenty cases, and concluded that while 'a few of those cases disclose some *prima facie* evidence of conduct of a highly reprehensible and even disloyal nature, none amount either to high treason or treachery'.

The only clue as to why the Director of Public Prosecutions changed his position so radically is found in a letter he wrote to Sir Frank Newsam at the Home Office early in 1946, in which he noted happily that the demand for collaboration trials on Jersey was abating. The British government had successfully managed to wriggle out of its difficult position. As soon as it was decided that only cases of treason could be prosecuted, the whole question of trials evaporated. Mathew had established within a few weeks of the islands' Liberation that there were no *prima facie* treason cases. It was not trials for treason that Jersey wanted, but for collaboration. A Home Office briefing memo for James Chuter-Ede claimed that the legal machinery to try collaborators did not exist. This was patently untrue, as both Aubin's and Mathew's legal opinions demonstrated. That did not bother Home Office officials. What did bother them was that such an explanation for the collapse of collaboration trials would not clear the air in Westminster, where there had been persistent interest in the issue, nor on Jersey. So they devised a deft sidestepping of the issue for Chuter-Ede. In reply to a question in the House of Commons on 30 November 1946, the Home Secretary announced that the Director of Public Prosecutions had decided earlier in the year that 'there were not sufficient grounds to warrant the institution of criminal proceedings'. Chuter-Ede was not lying – there were not sufficient grounds to prosecute anyone for treason – but what he omitted to mention was that the Home Office had concluded that there were no laws under which to prosecute crimes for which there *was* sufficient evidence. Even more damaging was the real story, that British and Jersey lawyers had found there were laws under which collaborators could have been prosecuted, but their advice had been ignored. The British government had decided it did not want any such trials.

The truth was that, as the investigations on the islands got under way, three factors became clear which made the prospect of trials a political minefield. Firstly, evidence which would stand up in court was

genuinely hard to come by in an atmosphere of extreme tension and resentment – on Jersey in particular. Secondly, it would be a breach of constitutional traditions for an islander to be tried in Britain, but given the strength of popular feeling on Jersey, British officials were concerned that there would be no chance of a fair trial there. Thirdly, there was the embarrassing fact that the demand for trials was far stronger on Jersey than on Guernsey and Sark. Britain had to be even-handed without generating bad feeling between the islands and towards itself, but it could not impose trials on Guernsey. The advantage of trying the twenty cases considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions had to be set against these disadvantages. If the trials collapsed, or the sentences were perceived as too light, it would damage Britain's prestige on the islands and abroad. In addition, the trials might reveal details of collaboration which all the governments concerned were hoping would not come to light for many more years.

Collaborators were left to be punished by social ostracism. Either voluntarily or under duress, a number left the islands for England, New Zealand or South Africa. On 2 November 1945 Sir Edward Grasset, Jersey's Lieutenant Governor, wrote to the Home Office:

Feeling in Jersey against those who collaborated with the Germans . . . and were guilty of scandalous conduct shows no sign of abatement and the feeling is in fact increasing. There have been no breaches of the peace caused by unlawful action against those considered to be guilty but this is due to your investigation. I have urged [that] the fullest measures of persuasion that can be exercised without a breach of peace should be exerted on those miserable people [who had fraternised with the Germans and informed on fellow islanders] to induce them to leave the island.

A number of islanders did leave in 1945, probably under inducement of some kind. 'Inducing them to leave' was the method used against the nationals of two countries who came in for considerable abuse on Jersey at the end of the war. The sudden arrival of the Germans in 1940 had stranded many Irish seasonal labourers who had come over for the potato harvest. Ireland was neutral during the war, and many islanders accused them of collaborating; they probably had little choice but to work for the Germans after being stranded without family or financial support. The Civil Affairs Unit reported that this 'undesirable element' was being closely watched in the summer of 1945. The other group were Italians on Jersey, many of whom had run cafés and restaurants before and during the Occupation. After Liberation, some Italians were told by the Jersey government to leave the islands, but they had friends amongst the people. Bernard Hassall was one of those who collected names for a petition to allow them to stay; he argues that the Italians were used as scapegoats, and that many of them had been very anti-German.

Financial penalties were devised to deprive islanders of ill-gotten Occupation gains. As the civil servants had recognised, tracing illegitimate profits was always going to be immensely complex. Both Jersey and Guernsey enacted steep War Profits Levies of 60–100 per cent, but records of how much this tax raised remain secret. An Inland Revenue tax inspector seconded to Jersey in 1953 to assist in the assessment and collection of the levy remembers being told to leave the financial affairs of certain islanders alone. He is sceptical as to whether the tax really affected the worst cases of black marketeering profits:

Some retail shops stuck out more than others, and it was not difficult to start a few cases for investigation. I was well aware of the closely-knit political set-up in Jersey, and leaning on the Comptroller of Income Tax was not unheard of. The investigators were all on secondment [from the UK] for short periods. This had the effect of trying to achieve negotiated settlements quickly, with trimming of corners as appropriate. I don't think anyone could say that the whole truth emerged. We did our best in the circumstances. A Jersey resident would possibly have done a better job but taken much longer, and would still have been up against the system which closed ranks at any sign of treading on the ruling class's ground.

One case dragged on until 1949. A Guernsey vegetable grower found that the allegations levelled at him for making huge profits out of growing vegetables for the Germans would not go away. Sir Abraham Lainé had conducted an inquiry into this man immediately after the war. Details reached the British newspaper

the *Daily Sketch*, which alleged that he had taken over glasshouses from their owners and grown vegetables and flowers for the Germans while islanders were starving. He denied the charge, claiming that ‘what I did was done to save the complete pillage of the islanders’ food by the occupiers’. In 1949 he was still trying to clear his name, and sent a petition to the King asking for an investigation. The request was refused. The Home Office noted that in 1947 the man had been investigated by MI5, who found that his bank account had had a debit balance of £340 at the beginning of the war and £70,000 credit at the end.

One final aspect remains to Britain’s investigations after Liberation. The Bailiffs of both Guernsey and Jersey were anxious that a small number of German officers in the islands’ military governments should be brought to trial for war crimes committed against islanders. They claimed there had been two war crimes: the deportation of islanders to German internment camps and the cutting back of civilian rations during the last year of the Occupation. Evidence was collected, detailed physical descriptions of the alleged culprits were taken, and a list of about half a dozen names, including Baron von Aufsess and Oberst Knackfuss, was drawn up and registered with CROWCASS – the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects which had been set up by the Allies. All of these men were in PoW camps in Britain, yet once again there were no trials, and the men were returned to Germany. No documents survive as to why the prosecutions were abandoned.

Baron von Aufsess returned in 1948 to the castle in Bavaria where his family have lived since the tenth century. He had always prided himself on his good relations with prominent – and/or attractive – islanders, and as a cultured, educated aristocrat he had made many friends during the Occupation. In due course he was to host a string of distinguished guests from the Channel Islands, including Ambrose and May Sherwill in 1948, and the Dame of Sark, Sybil Hathaway, in 1954.

[fn1](#) See page 190.

[fn2](#) The army legal department charged with the task of prosecuting war criminals.

[fn3](#) *Alderney, Fortress Island: The Germans in Alderney*.

[fn4](#) At the time, the British were collecting evidence for the trials of the Belsen camp staff, for which they were responsible because the site of the former camp fell within the British occupation zone of Germany.

[fn5](#) All British laws must be specifically extended to the Channel Islands by an Order in Council. Likewise, if they are to be withdrawn from the islands, another Order in Council is necessary.