

The Abandoned



In the summer of 1940 the British Isles stood isolated and alone facing the might of a seemingly unstoppable German war machine. Fortunately the English Channel held back Hitler's armies. Not so for the Channel Islands which stand just a few miles from the French coast. Here **Simon Hamon** reveals the fate that befell the island of Alderney.

ABOVE:
The occupation of Alderney underway. German troops march through Marais Square, St Anne's, Alderney, during a victory parade. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM - COLORIZATION BY DAN JARMAN)

FREDERICK GEORGE French, who had been the Judge of Alderney since 1938, was the civilian head of the most northerly of the Channel Islands. With his domain being the closest to the coast of Continental Europe, French was acutely conscious of the predicament he and his people found themselves in as the German juggernaut rolled relentlessly westwards in the late spring, early summer of 1940.

As a result, on Saturday, 22 June 1940, he wrote, and signed, a handwritten notice to Alderney's population: 'I have appealed to Admiralty for a ship to evacuate us. If the ship does not come it means we are considered safe. If the ship comes time will be limited. You are advised to pack one suitcase for each person so as to be ready. If you have invalids in your house make arrangements in consultation with your doctor. All

possible notice will be given.'

Just twenty-four hours later the evacuation of Alderney's population began. The process was recalled by a Mr. Bury, who was appointed as the Island's temporary Sub-Postmaster after the regular one, Captain Marriette, had been recalled to the Army after the outbreak of war. Having arrived on Alderney on 13 May 1940, Bury's employment only lasted a matter of weeks:

omed Island



'Many of the island folk were getting away to Guernsey and to England, my night telegraphist among them, and a girl clerk. The situation was certainly alarming and chaos reigned complete ... Our transmitting set was working at full speed. A young sorting clerk and telegraphist was sent from Guernsey to take the place of our South African [who performed the night shift]. The young man stuck to his post night

after night, and we expected "Jerry" might land at any time.

'Every day I made up a registered bag containing the office stock and cash, locked it in the safe and entrusted the key to him with the instructions that if "Jerry" came he was to drop the bag over the garden wall, into the churchyard, so that I could pick it up if possible.¹

Finally, on the morning of that fateful June Sunday, the long-expected day of departure arrived; Bury's short tenure

as Sub-Postmaster was over. 'The Church bells rang out,' he recalled, 'and the people came into the streets shouting "The ships are here! The ships are here!" Everyone started packing. All dogs were killed by humane killer at the hand of the local butcher, cats were left behind, cattle untethered, and a general exodus was made to the harbour. The bedridden were carried, and the whole pathetic scene was such that I will never forget.'² >>

THE ABANDONED ISLAND

Alderney: 1940

NEAR RIGHT: Workers from Guernsey, sent across to Alderney after the evacuation, wearing the gas masks they took with them to help them undertake some of their more unpleasant tasks - note the bloated carcass of a dead bull, abandoned by its owners during the exodus, lying in the roadway behind them. (GRAHAM BUCKINGHAM VIA JOHN GOODWIN)



FAR RIGHT: **Sonderführer Hans Herzog** discovers the condition that some of the buildings on Alderney had been left in during the islanders often hasty exit during the evacuation. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

BELOW: The *SS Courier* was one of the vessels that was used during the evacuation of Alderney's population prior to the German occupation. It is seen here in Creux Harbour, Sark. (SIMON HAMON)

SAYING GOODBYE

In his official capacity, Bury still had a few last-minute duties to perform before he could join the throng boarding the ships in Braye Bay: 'I attended the office for the last time to gather up the bag of stock and cash ... and called up the Guernsey Head Office, informed them of the evacuation, and that I was about to wreck the wireless set. Back came the query, "On whose authority?" I replied "Judge French", and with the 7lb parcel weight smashed up the set completely.'

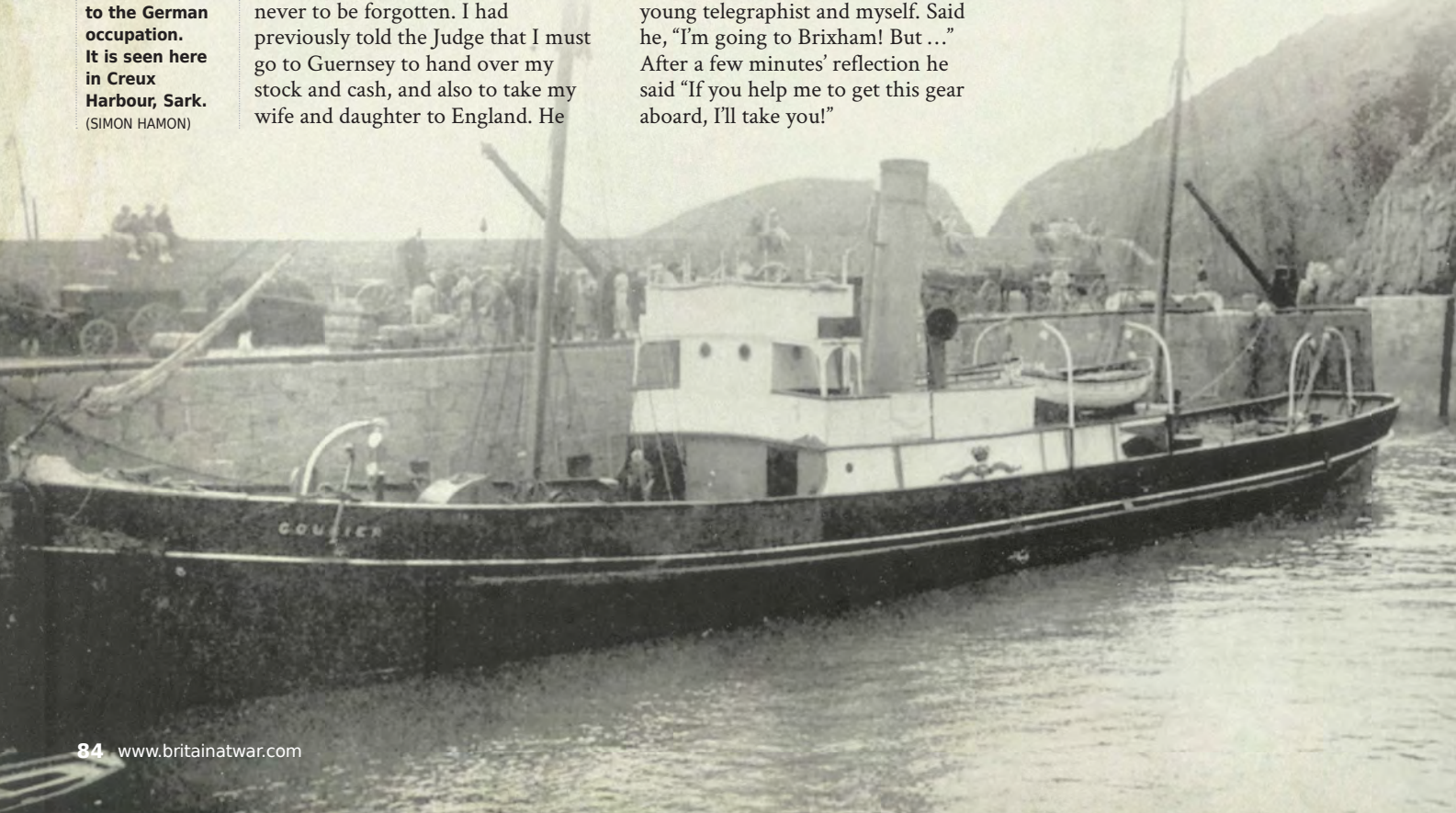
'The scene at the harbour was never to be forgotten. I had previously told the Judge that I must go to Guernsey to hand over my stock and cash, and also to take my wife and daughter to England. He

said "Oh yes, I know you want to go to Guernsey. I had arranged for you to go in the French lifeboat (*Croix de Guerre* which was in the harbour) but we can't find the crew! We believe that they have stowed away on the boats. You must make your own arrangements.'

'I said goodbye to many, including my good friend and chief clerk Miss Audoire, and began to look around for transport to Guernsey. In the inner harbour, I saw a fisherman and his son getting his boat ready for sea, and I asked him if he would take my young telegraphist and myself. Said he, "I'm going to Brixham! But ..." After a few minutes' reflection he said "If you help me to get this gear aboard, I'll take you!"'

'The weather was now hazy, and there was a good sea running, but we made the White Rock, Guernsey, by 6p.m., and handed over the stock and cash to the Assistant Superintendent of the G.P.O., who paid the fisherman for his journey.'

A mail van took Bury to his daughter's house in Havelet. The following day he and his family boarded the mailboat heading for Southampton. 'Only just in time,' he duly noted.





LEFT: Men of the Feldkommand 515 outside Lloyds Bank in Victoria Street. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

BELOW: Items that could be reclaimed or reused, such as the collection of old tyres seen here, was salvaged and taken to Guernsey.

(GRAHAM BUCKINGHAM VIA JOHN GOODWIN)

BOTTOM: Vehicles abandoned at the harbour during the exodus from Alderney.

(GRAHAM BUCKINGHAM VIA JOHN GOODWIN)

LINGERING DESOLATION

After the evacuation was completed on the 23rd, Alderney was left deserted except for a 'handful of seafaring men who had last duties to perform', as the historians Michael St. J. Packe and Maurice Dreyfus noted when writing in 1971: 'Nick Allen [the Alderney Pilot] went to Casquets to destroy stocks of fuel oil; and the Jennings, father and son, carried official documents to Guernsey before continuing to England in their own boats. There remained, in addition, nineteen persons who utterly refused to leave. The Bailiff of Guernsey, who was also acting Lieutenant-Governor, gave orders for them to be brought at once to Guernsey, and that same evening the Guernsey lifeboat put out, but met with little or no success.'

It was not just people who had to be evacuated from Alderney. As Bury mentioned, when the Island's entire population of around 1,500 residents

was evacuated, the livestock was left behind. With no-one to tend to the animals, they too had to be evacuated, rather than being shot or abandoned in the way some had in Guernsey. The party that organised the evacuation of the livestock was led by a Mr P.A. Mahy, who arrived to find the Island gripped by a sense of lingering desolation:

'I was in charge of the party of farmers and farm hands which evacuated the cattle from Alderney from June 25th to 28th, 1940, and was told that the inhabitants had evacuated on the morning of June 23rd. We left Guernsey on the 25th June at about 9 a.m. and travelled by the S.S. "Courier", arriving at Alderney at about 11.30 a.m. On arrival we found a number of cars, lorries, and a motor bus on the quay. All these had been put out of commission in various ways. I went straight to the Grand Hotel, where I had decided to make our >>



THE ABANDONED ISLAND

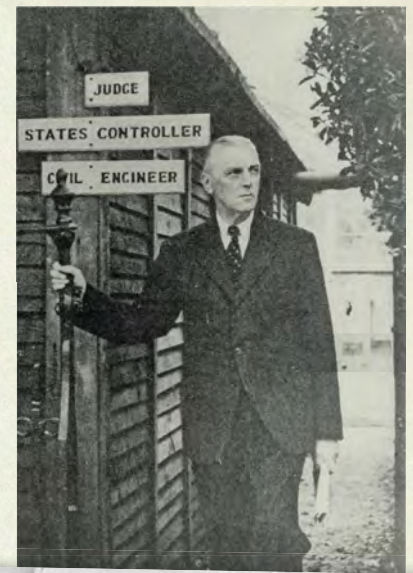
Alderney: 1940

RIGHT: One of the first occupiers, Sergeant Oeser, pictured with his newly-acquired staff car outside Feldkommand 515's headquarters which had been established in what had been Alderney's branch of Lloyds Bank. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

TOP RIGHT: The Judge of Alderney from 1938 to 1946, J.G. French. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

MIDDLE LEFT: As the days passed after the evacuation from Alderney, the stench of death and decay grew across the island. Here the clearing of rotting animal remains is pictured underway at Brickfield Farm. (GRAHAM BUCKINGHAM VIA JOHN GOODWIN)

BELOW: Members of the first German garrison of Alderney enjoy the summer sun in 1940 near Douglas Quay. (SIMON HAMON)



headquarters, and on the way noticed that public houses and shops had been broken into, that there were houses with windows open and a few with doors half open.

'Later, I went into some of these and found handbags and suitcases half packed and garments lying about the floor. On making enquiries of the remaining inhabitants as to what had happened from the time of the evacuation on the morning of the 23rd to the time of my arrival, I found that no one seemed to know. Some stated that boats with French refugees had been seen in the harbour; others thought that a French lifeboat had

called, but no one seemed certain of anything. I had been given a list of eight persons who were said to have remained in the Island, but we actually found 12, including 4 children.³

Having established that Alderney was devoid of almost all of its human inhabitants, Mahy was able to turn his attention to main reason he had been despatched to the Island. 'We found a number of cattle, horses and pigs running about loose, but there were a number of these in closed back yards and styles, without water or food. There were a number of





ABOVE: Some of the first German troops to land on Alderney, captioned as 'Sgt. Maj. Ertel & Forst', outside Lloyds Bank. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

LEFT: A German soldier, one of the first members of the enemy garrison on Alderney, appears to have completed his 'shopping' in the abandoned stores in Victoria Street. (SIMON HAMON)

Guernsey. Mahy's task was far from over, however, and his team continued to rescue the cattle the next morning when the two ships returned.

NOTHING TO BE LEFT BEHIND

Nothing, it seems, was to be left for the enemy. Such was the scope of Mahy's instructions, that, sadly, no animal was to be left alive if it could not be evacuated: 'Besides the calves that I had ordered to be shot as soon as found, I had ordered the shooting of most of the dogs in the Island, a certain number of cats, a few horses that were either too old to be of any use and diseased or vicious, and an old boar. There were left on the Island a few cows and steers, 30/40 sheep, all the poultry, a small number of dogs and quite a number of cats. During our stay in the Island, and more especially on the last days when visits of aeroplanes over the island became more frequent, the greatest care was taken to prevent the cattle being herded in large numbers or the grouping of cars and lorries.'

Amongst Mahy's party was a Sister from Guernsey's Alexandra Hospital and a few men of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. They were to see to the transport of the invalids who were left in the Island and collect goods, stores and medicines from Alderney's Mignot Hospital.

Reginald Blanchford was with the Guernsey St John's Ambulance party that was sent to Alderney to try and persuade the handful of remaining individuals who had refused to be evacuated to leave, as well as salvage stores and equipment from the Mignot Memorial Hospital, as one of the team

recalled: 'It was very traumatic. There were cows roaming the streets with udders bursting and an old gentleman was trying to chloroform them to kill them. Going into the houses, you'd find a sandwich with a bite taken out of it and half a cup of tea drunk. We heard a noise in one house, there was an old lady there dressed in curtains and she thought I was the SS because I was in my uniform. She was demented, she thought the Germans had arrived. We got her back to Guernsey.⁴ >>



AN EVACUEE'S STORY

JOHN GLASGOW was just a young boy when his mother, Edna, pulled shut the front door of their home on Alderney. Having left with all the other evacuees on Sunday, 23 June 1940, Edna would never see her house again. In fact, she would never return to the Island. Seventy years later, John still has some recollection of his departure, as revealed in the *Glasgow Evening Times* on 11 April 2014: 'Six ships came and church bells rang to tell people it was time to go. They were allowed one bag per person - pets were left behind to fend for themselves or be shot. We spent June 24 travelling and my mother was already ill.'

The mother's and son's journey took them to Glasgow, where they arrived at the Holy Cross Church in Knightswood in the city's West End. The evacuees were medically screened, at which point it was discovered that Edna was suffering from advanced tuberculosis. She was immediately admitted to Ruchill Hospital. It was to be the last time that John would ever see his mother.

Alone and without any family member for support, John was taken to Castlemilk Children's Home where he remained for around three months until he was finally reunited with his father Ian who was a serving soldier. Edna passed away on 4 October 1940, and, with her husband away in the forces, was buried in a pauper's grave in Sighthill Cemetery.

It was only in 2014 that John was finally able to locate and visit his mother's final resting place: 'I can only assume that as a serving soldier, my father had little time to make arrangements for her burial and taking me out of Castlemilk Home to bring me to Winchester near where he was posted. My father kept nothing and it took me fifty years to find out what my mother looked like.'



young calves tied up in stables, and sows with litters of young pigs in styes – half dead, presumably from want of water and food.

The cows in full milk were naturally all overstocked and could at first only be milked with difficulty and in small quantities at a time. The cows were gradually eased of their milk, which was thick and sour. All cattle, pigs and poultry were turned loose, and food and water were given to the sows with litters of pigs. The young calves would have needed more attention than we could possibly have given them, and I ordered them to be shot as soon as found.'

A second ship arrived in the shape of S.S. *New Fawn* with a small number of volunteers whom Mahy sent to help the Alderney farmers drive their cattle to the harbour. As soon as they were loaded the boats set off for



ABOVE:
A German Army band outside Lloyds Bank on Alderney. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

TOP MIDDLE:
Two soldiers and a German nurse pictured in the High Street collecting or delivering rations. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

BOTTOM MIDDLE:
A German soldier walks down the High Street. (ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

Another of the St John's Ambulance party later recalled the difficulties encountered in trying to induce the few recalcitrant inhabitants to leave: 'One man refused to leave until he had finished packing some personal property which he valued at several thousand pounds. Another, surprised eating his dinner, saw no reason to leave the home where he had lived for more than ninety years. A woman locked herself and her children in her house, under the impression that it was a German uniform they were wearing. And at another house they were threatened with a shotgun.'⁵

THE KING OF ALDERNEY

In the end, despite all the endeavours of the St John's Ambulance team, there were still seven people who refused to budge. They were left behind, their names being listed in a

file in the Bailiff's office. There was at least one other individual who decided to remain – a man by the name of Alf Martell who went to Alderney with Mahy's party. Martell had seemingly decided to take advantage of the situation on the abandoned Island: 'He was a big man, tall, very strong, daring, and completely fearless. His dark skin was usually unshaven, he had a loud gruff voice and a louder laugh. When the party of men left Alderney for home Alf decided to stay on alone. 'I'll be King of Alderney'. His brothers in Guernsey were anxious when they heard the story, so they boarded one of the boats and went to look for him. They found him fully dressed on a luxurious bed in one of the hotels and surrounded by bottles of whiskey. It was with difficulty that they persuaded him to come home!⁶

Judge French went to London where he continued act as Alderney's representative. He was now sure that they had done the right thing in evacuating and he expressed his gratitude for the swift response of the Admiralty in a letter dated 8 July: 'Now that the Island of Alderney has been completely evacuated and all but a handful of its people safely snatched out of the grip of the Boche, I write to thank you first and foremost on my own personal behalf and secondly in the name of all the people of the Island for your action in forwarding my request to the Ministry of Shipping and to the Admiralty. The present safety of us all is due entirely to your prompt action and to nothing else ... As you may know six vessels arrived in less than twenty hours.'⁷

MACHINE-GUN ATTACK

Having collected its last cargo of livestock from Alderney, the steamer *Courier*, under Captain James Ingrouille Senior, was ordered to head for Plymouth, calling at St Peter Port, Guernsey, en route. The short crossing from Alderney was an eventful one and was described by Ralph Durand, whose account of the Occupation was published in March 1946, shortly after his death on 22 December 1945: 'The raiders also attacked the local steamboat 'Courier'. She was on her way from Alderney, bringing salvaged stores and a few people who had remained in that Island after the bulk of the inhabitants left, and was near the entrance to St. Sampson's Harbour when a plane sprayed her deck with machine-gun bullets and dropped a bomb that fortunately missed her. The captain beached the ship and when she was aground some members of her crew launched her boat, rowed ashore, and ran away, leaving those still on board, eleven of whom were wounded, to get ashore as best they could.

'Two men and two women, one of whom was wounded in the leg, swam ashore and were taken to the First Aid Post for bandages, blankets and hot tea. Fortunately for those who still remained on board a young dock hand had more grit than some members of the crew. He swam ashore and brought back the ship's boat so that all reached the shore. The 'Courier' was refloated next day.'⁸

Courier eventually made it into St Peter Port, at which point P. Girard went to speak to Captain James Ingrouille. 'When we arrived the ship

READERS' OFFER Channel Islands Invaded



THE FULL story of the fate of the Channel Islands in the summer of 1940 is detailed in *Channel Islands Invaded* by Simon Hamon. Part of Frontline Book's 'Voices From the Past' series, this book reveals the events leading up to, during and immediately after the German invasion through newspaper reports, official documents and the accounts of those who were there. To receive an exclusive 20% discount, plus free UK postage, please quote '185117' when ordering by telephone on 01226 734267, or online at: www.pen-and-sword.co.uk



was tied up at the New Jetty and the pigs were loose and crowding the deck of the vessel ... The vessel had actually left the Jetty when several running figures were seen approaching. One was in Air Force uniform, the other wore a military uniform and accompanying them were two or three civilians one of whom I recognised, dishevelled and unshaven he was, as a friend, and a very well known figure in the business life of the Island.

'The Captain drew the bow of his ship back towards the Jetty enabling these men to jump on board and I still retain a mental picture of my friend's flying leap to the deck of the ship. He was probably the last civilian passenger to leave Guernsey by steamer before the Occupation proper began. Apparently he did not remain

a passenger for very long as he and his companions were immediately enrolled as deck hands for the duration of the trip during which three of the wounded animals' died.⁹

Alderney is unique as being the only British dominion to have been fully evacuated of its civilian population and then occupied by German forces for the duration of the Second World War. When the Germans arrived they found the island deserted but they soon began to fortify Alderney and established four concentration camps there. Concrete bunkers and tunnels can still be seen on the island, a forlorn reminder of the German Occupation, as are the graves of the inmates of those concentration camps. ☹

NOTES

1. Quoted in Michael St. J. Packe and Maurice Dreyfus, *The Alderney Story 1939-1949* (The Alderney Society and Museum, Alderney, 1971), pp.26-7.
2. *ibid.*
3. Island Archives: File No.1/3/1. Alderney - Agriculture.
4. Madeleine Bunting, *op. cit.*, p.34.
5. Michael St. J. Packe and Maurice Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.28.
6. Miriam M. Mahy, *There is an Occupation* (*The Guernsey Press*, 1993), quoted in Barry Turner, *op. cit.*, p.19.
7. Brian Aheir Read, *op. cit.*, pp.10-20.
8. 'A Story of Survival', published in the *Guernsey Press*, 7 August 2006. Maria Blatchford points out that, 'the next day, a Saturday, she [*Courier*] sailed for the UK in company with the *Joybell III*, another local passenger vessel. It was in 1947 that the *Courier* returned to local waters, but her owners found her too expensive to run and, in 1951, she was broken up in the Netherlands.'
9. Imperial War Museum, private papers of P. Girard, 10992.

TOP RIGHT:
A German parade marches through Marais Square.
(ALDERNEY MUSEUM)

BELOW:
The Germans soon began to construct numerous defensive structures across Alderney - many of which can still be seen. This concrete casemate is part of the surviving, and often impressive, elements of Strongpoint Türkenburg.
(ANDREE STEPHAN)

