

GUERNSEY GALLIVANTING 2014

Saturday 7th June

Since visiting Jersey twice, it seemed only fair to visit Guernsey one day and today was the day. I did have a distant memory from 1983, though, when the small plane in which we were travelling home from Jersey had landed briefly on Guernsey to pick up a few passengers and I distinctly remember looking out at row upon row of greenhouses, no doubt for those lovely Guernsey tomatoes.

As we left Cornwall at 08:30, we looked out at a dull and rainy morning that was following a previous day of strong gales and localised thunder, which had instilled a certain amount of anxiety in me about our forthcoming channel hop in a high-speed catamaran. However, as we progressed through Devon and into Dorset, the sun came out. Since the Sat Nav had directed us along the scenic Jurassic Coast route, we were soon able to look out at the extensive shingle magnificence of Chesil Bank as we undulated along the B3157. I *like* Dorset.

On arrival at Weymouth, Alan drove straight to the ferry port and joined the Condor Ferries queue. We nipped out to the nearby conveniences as it was only 11:00 and the queue was stationary, but the inevitable happened and when we returned, our car was in splendid isolation because the other cars had moved on.

What I dislike about travelling is all the queuing and in the case of car ferry queuing, the fact that you are stuck with cars all around you, which seems like a strange vehicular form of claustrophobia. Perhaps not, but it's amazing what you find yourself thinking about in car ferry queues. Since it was approaching midday, we decided to eat our packed lunch, although vehicular claustrophobia had resulted in me only being able to manage a packet of crisps.

When we drove on to the high-speed catamaran, it soon became apparent that the cars were being parked extremely close together. I was therefore asked to leave the car before Alan had parked it and was directed up some stairs to the left, but when I looked back to see how Alan was doing, I saw him being directed up some stairs to the right. I was in danger of succumbing to fear of being lost on a car ferry, until I remembered I had our seat tickets in my bag!

To be honest, there was still a quietly contained frantic five minutes while I tried to locate the designated area, but then I spotted Alan trying to locate me, so we were thankfully able to locate our seats together. In a long row of two seats facing forward one way, we were at the front of the row, but facing the other way with a table in between us and two strangers opposite. I confess I wasn't feeling very sociable and took the opportunity to read most of the excellent 'Insight Guide to Guernsey', while trying not to notice that this fast ferry felt somewhat bumpier than the slower conventional cross-channel ferries.

About halfway through the 2½ hour journey, we got up for a short walk around to stretch the legs, but the legs experienced difficulty walking in anything near a straight line and I even began to feel ever so slightly nauseous (which was alarming, as I'd taken a Kwell, although good old-fashioned nervousness may have kicked in.) In my next life, I shall be an extremely relaxed traveller who feels at ease in huge queues and for days on end before coach, train, ferry and plane journeys across half the world and back in perfect storms.

Back in this life, though, the time passed fairly quickly and in due course an announcement was heard advising Guernsey passengers to leave the Jersey passengers to it and head down to the car decks, where it was thinly disguised mayhem. As I squeezed my way through rows of cars, I felt sure that the previous day's sailing had been cancelled – but it shortly didn't matter, as we drove off the crazy catamaran and on to Guernsey roads.

Guernsey roads were an immediate surprise, as St Peter Port in mid-afternoon was heaving with traffic. However, Alan had primed the Sat Nav and we were soon heading in a stream of cars towards our accommodation, in an upward direction to Grange Lodge Hotel, where the self-catering apartments were accessible through a narrow passage at the side of the hotel. It was so narrow that Alan had to retract the car's wing mirrors to avoid adding to the obvious scrapes down the hotel wall where it jutted out.

There was soon ample compensation for this difficulty, though, when we took possession of the key and started the process of carrying our luggage from the car to the apartment. The compensation was in the form of a lovely garden, with mature palm trees, grassed areas and plants and flowers of many kinds, including tall flowering rose bushes in front of the windows. It was a very well-tended garden and the cares of the journey immediately began to fall away.



Welcomed by a lovely garden

The apartment also had my approval, as it was spacious and comfortably furnished, as well as welcoming us with milk, eggs, bread and sachets of tea, coffee, butter, jam and marmalade. We were thus able to make that important first mug of tea in the small but adequate kitchen and sit drinking it in the large lounge/diner, while wondering what the coming two weeks would bring. The year so far had been challenging, so we were due some rest and relaxation.

It didn't take all that long for the urge to explore our new surroundings to propel us outside again for a walk to St Peter Port harbour. It reminded me a little of Malta, walking down streets filled with housing and shops, until eventually arriving at a lively town front full of people, with a busy harbour filled with boats.

We were hungry and travel weary, so tried to find somewhere selling fish and chips. We failed, but succeeded in buying a baguette and some local cheese, like we'd recently enjoyed in Brittany. We'd brought some random food from home, including grapes and tomatoes, so were more or less sorted.

As we trailed our way slowly back up the streets, we realised we had no wine and exhaustion was beginning to set in quickly. We were obviously in a good area, with large attractive buildings that were once wealthy merchant's houses when Guernsey commerce was in its heyday, during the 18th century. Many were still decorated with ornate railings and ironwork, unlike mainland Britain where decorative iron was taken for warfare munitions.

When we reached Grange Lodge and crossed the busy road opposite the hotel (necessary as there was no pavement on the other side) Alan kindly remedied the wine deficit by driving to the local Waitrose – although it was a surprise and a slight nuisance that we'd left our Waitrose card in Cornwall.

While he was gone, I prepared the bread and cheese until he returned with cut-price bananas and blueberries, plus some other delights. He forgot to buy any dessert, but we simply made do with a packet of Revels we'd brought from home. We then sat in front of the small television on the wall and relaxed quite mindlessly and happily until bedtime. So far so good!

Thought for the day: *If there are holidays, there should be holidights...*

Sunday 8th June

We both slept quite well in the large, comfortable bed that was actually two single beds pushed together. There was even a digital bedside alarm clock provided with nice big green figures that I could read without my glasses and since the apartment has two double bedrooms, we could have the luxury of a wardrobe each. In fact, I was so comfortable that after waking at around 06:00, I dozed off again and didn't meander out towards the kitchen to make morning tea until 07:45. Relaxation was already beginning to work.

The weather seemed a little cloudy, but with some sunshine. By 09:45 we were walking along the surprisingly busy Sunday morning road down to the harbour front, this time finding some shortcut steps. We headed straight for Tourist Information, where we found a clean, spacious room with plenty to browse, including information on places to visit, books, postcards and souvenirs. The place had my approval until I noticed later we'd been given 10 postage stamps when we'd requested and paid for 12, but on the whole, this was nothing to become unstuck about.

Upon emerging once again into now bright sunlight along the harbour front, it was apparent that some sort of open air fair or festival was taking place, as the smell of frying doughnuts began to pervade the air in amongst various stalls selling numerous items. My best guess was that it was an art and craft fair, with even a stage being set up. There were already large numbers of people wandering around, so we decided to walk beyond the front and out past the side of the marina and the harbour to Castle Cornet on Castle Rock, a former tidal island connected to mainland Guernsey by a breakwater in 1859.



St Peter Port marina

We didn't know what to expect from this castle and didn't even know if it would be open, but it was and it was brilliant! We arrived at 10:50 and didn't leave until 15:15, so the £10 admission price gave good value for money. As well as life-sized models displaying scenes from various times during the castle's history (which I love because my visual imagination is pitiful), there were information boards throughout and no less than five separate museums.

We first visited the Story of Castle Cornet Museum, which was time well spent, as it traced 700 years of historic turbulence. The weather when we finished was anything but turbulent, so we walked around looking at the view from the castle in the calm air until we realised the noonday gun was due to be fired. I'm not into guns, but the ceremony of a man in Guernsey Militia uniform of scarlet tunic and blue trousers loading the muzzle of the 32-pounder cast in 1799 and holding the rope until pulling it at 12 noon, was an interesting spectacle even to me



Boom?

The resulting boom definitely released some turbulence if that doesn't sound too odd. Since we were close to the Refectory, we went inside for some lunch, choosing soup of the day (tomato) with bread and Guernsey butter. It was home-made and delicious, but also creamy and surprisingly filling, so I felt I needed to walk it down a bit afterwards. Maybe I shouldn't have had a cappuccino made with Guernsey milk as well...

Our next visit was to the Maritime Museum in the Upper Barracks, telling the story of St Peter Port's relationship with the sea from Roman times to the current high-speed catamarans. There were many exhibits from wrecks (of the marine variety) and a gallery of paintings (of the oil variety). It was cool there, after which we were comfortably warm during a stroll around the outside areas.

These included the Prisoners' Walk, the site of the medieval castle, the sally port steps and the gunners' tower, along with some great views of St Peter Port and the sea. There were also four small gardens planted according to various styles from the 16th century to the 19th century. However, what really caught my imagination was a concrete bunker from World War Two.

During the German Occupation of Guernsey, Castle Cornet was known as Stutzpunkt Hafenschloss (Strongpoint Harbour Castle) and housed Luftwaffe anti-aircraft units, forming part of the air defence cover for St Peter Port. In order for the castle to be ready for 20th-century warfare, reinforced concrete bunkers, gun emplacements and shelters were built throughout. German personnel would often carve the name of a girl back home above the entrance and this particular bunker still had the name Ursel for all to see.



Ursel

The next museum we investigated was the 201 Squadron RAF Museum, the 201 Squadron having begun as No 1 Squadron in the Royal Naval Air Service until the formation of the Royal Air Force in 1918 (when it was renumbered as 201). From the late 1920s to modern times, 201 Squadron specialised in maritime reconnaissance and during World War Two, pilots flew Sunderland flying boats to attack German U-boats.

This squadron became known as 'Guernsey's Own', with the ancient military honour of The Privilege of Guernsey being granted in 1994. Sadly, 201 Squadron was disbanded in 2011, as a consequence of the UK tackling its debt problems by questionable and regrettable cutbacks.

We were the only people in the museum and ensconced in the exhibits, when a man in a costume came in and said there was about to be a talk – so we thought we would go outside to see what it was all about. We found a handful of people seated facing the Hospital Building with a large open space in between, where two men re-enacted scenes from Civil War times. One man played the part of a gardener and the other man played Major-General Sir John Lambert.



17th-century drama

When England's civil wars began in 1642, Guernsey sided with parliament, while Guernsey's governor sided with the king and fled to Castle Cornet. Meanwhile, John Lambert from Yorkshire was a Parliamentarian and did very well for himself, being promoted to Major-General and considered by many to be Cromwell's successor. However, following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, he was considered to be a threat and in 1661 ended up as a prisoner in Castle Cornet, although he was allowed a great deal of liberty.

Amongst other occupations, he was a keen gardener, unlike his co-actor in the re-enactment, who played the part of a reluctant gardener at Castle Cornet. This man had volunteered for the army during the wars to escape his unfavoured occupation, but discovered that life in the army wasn't as glamorous as imagined. He returned to Castle Cornet and although he didn't dig gardening, he ended up digging for John Lambert, who he came to respect.

John Lambert probably introduced the South African bulbous perennial *nerine sarniensis* to Guernsey, now known as the Guernsey Lily. In 1667, he was removed to St Nicholas Island in Plymouth Sound and died there still as a prisoner in 1684. The Guernsey gardener was presumably left digging the dirt.

After a brave attempt at audience participation singing had semi-succeeded, the dramatic interlude was over and people dispersed. I headed back towards the nearby 201 Squadron RAF Museum that we hadn't finished viewing, but looked back to see happily garrulous Alan chatting with the gardener actor. I discovered afterwards that he'd asked permission to put a photo of the actors online (in this amateur travelogue no less!) and for that, thank you for your permission David Richards as Caleb Colsterdale and Andy McCutcheon as John Lambert ☺

Once we had finally done justice to the 201 Squadron RAF Museum, we went in the Hospital Building upstairs to do similar justice to the Royal Guernsey Militia Museum, featuring its development (first mentioned in 1331, although an armed body probably existed for Guernsey's defence before this date) and its history through to 1939, when the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry was formed.

In the same building downstairs was the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry Museum with many displays of uniforms, medals, weapons and much more, including an excellent diorama of the part played by the regiment in the Battle of Cambrai in 1917, augmented to good effect with audio recordings of soldiers' diaries.

It was all great stuff! After a final walk around outside for half an hour or so, we felt we'd seen most of what was on offer at this splendid castle and so we reluctantly exited through the shop (where I wrote a positive comment in the visitors' book, not only because Alan had politely declined, but also because it really was *that* good) and we emerged once again into the 21st century.

There was immediately an unusual sound and looking out to sea, we saw one of the Condor high-speed catamarans making its way into harbour. It was a perfect photo opportunity and so we added to the many photos we'd already taken:



A boat-eating ferry?

Kay Santillo, 2014.

Back on the harbour front, the presumed art and craft festival was still in full swing, thronging with people (or possibly thronging with swinging people, I was a bit too tired to care). Suddenly as we passed by the stage, though, my attention was fully taken by a choir who had started to sing *Old Man River* – a song I hadn't heard for a great many years and associated very strongly with childhood memories of my lovely dad, who used to sing it. A special moment ☺

As we made our way back, we stopped at a shop to buy a mini-tub of Guernsey ice cream complete with a very mini plastic spoon each, which took our minds off the trudge up the hill just a little. Finally we made it back to Grange Lodge and really enjoyed a mug of tea. The rest of the day was very relaxing, with a 'bits and pieces' tea, reading and television. In fact, I was so relaxed that I didn't even wash the dishes!

Thought for the day: *How can any war be civil?*

Monday 9th June

It had been such a full and fascinating day at Castle Cornet that I seemed to keep myself awake until sometime past 01:00 this morning by mulling over everything. I may have managed about six hours' sleep, though, which is plenty enough to be raring to go for another day. OK, possibly not raring, but at least ready for another day of Guernsey-type delights.

It was rather an overcast morning, although at breakfast there were some sunny intervals. The forecast had mentioned thundery showers, so we thought it would be best to go somewhere under cover (rather than undercover, as that would have been silly). Actually, it did turn out to be on the surreptitiously concealed side in the end, as Alan braved the Monday morning traffic to drive to La Vallette Underground Military Museum.

The museum was opened in 1988, housed in a complex of tunnels built by the Germans during their occupation of Guernsey as a place to store fuel for U-boats. There were thousands of exhibits covering Guernsey's military history, including World War One, the Occupation and the island's own militia. We were inside for almost 1½ hours, gazing at cabinet upon cabinet full of medals, weapons, books, maps, letters, posters and so much more.

I have to confess that I found many of the German artefacts macabre, particularly the helmets, daggers, bayonets, guns and all types of weapons, although there were Allied weapons too, of course. The German posters directed at the Guernsey populace were very emotive, including a notice of someone who had been shot for espionage by being caught releasing a pigeon with a message for England, as well as a local woman who had been imprisoned for saying "Heil Churchill!" These details brought the people's suffering to life.

There was a small selection of wartime vehicles, a section showing souvenirs and letters from prisoners held in German camps, an unfinished tunnel with models of prisoners of war and slave labourers digging it out – and close by that, one of the 'uniforms' they were all issued with, resembling some heavy-duty blue and white striped pyjamas. The personal items were what I found most touching, although the displays were evocative too.



Scene from a World War One trench

There were so many exhibits that I began to feel a bit exhibit-blind and slightly overwhelmed, but it was a really good museum for an insight into life in occupied Guernsey. There was even a photo of a German officer outside Grange Lodge, which had been used as headquarters for the German Feldkommandant during the Occupation. The amount of memorabilia was amazing and there were even military collectibles for sale. A rare place, if not a little disorganised.

It was warm and sunny when we returned outside to present-day Guernsey and since we had half an hour left on our parking ticket, we went for a wander along the road that took us to 50 steps or so upwards leading to Clarence Battery. I began to feel hotter! Dating from 1780, this battery formed part of Fort George (named after King George III) built during the French Revolution as a replacement for Castle Cornet, in view of possible French invasion, protecting the seaward approaches – and there were indeed some excellent sea views.



A living green roof?

After some alterations during the German Occupation, the battery became the ideally situated headquarters of the German Luftwaffe radar early warning service. Originally named Terres Point Battery, it was renamed Clarence Battery in 1815 in honour of King George III's son Clarence.

Within the grounds of the battery were many wildflowers and a number of butterflies, which led to a certain amount of wildlife photography on Alan's part. After enjoying the amazing sea view, which included the islands of Herm and Jethou (and possibly Sark) in the distance, it was unfortunately time to return to the car. The slightly annoying thing was that we could actually have walked to the military museum at La Vallette – but at least we could drive back up the taxing hill to Grange Lodge for lunch!

We decided to use our 'welcome' eggs by having them scrambled on toast. This proved a slight challenge due to a power cut. Fortunately the eggs were cooked enough, but I thought for a while that the toaster had broken. Alan thought the meter had run out of £1 coins and fed it a few to no avail, until the electricity made a sudden comeback. It meant we missed a mug of tea, but we survived.

Our afternoon excursion was about nine miles away at Pleinmont Head, on the west coast. The roads were rather narrow (to be diplomatic) and it often seemed hit or miss, which resulted in Alan expostulating several times. It was therefore a relief when we reached a much wider coastal road, with pretty yellow flowers that I think must be wild mustard dominating the roadside.

The roadside car park we settled in overlooked the sea on a calm high tide, with rocky peaks poking through the water and a few small moored boats a little way out from the beach. It reminded me very much of the Isles of Scilly and when we left the car and breathed the salty, seaweedy air, that added to the effect.

Our route took us away from the coast, up a one-way narrow road and on to the headland – a very green area awash with pink campions, sea thrift and so many other flowers, including wild roses. We were at the northern tip of L'Erée Bay and it was hardly any distance to Guernsey's third largest megalithic tomb, Le Creux ès Faïes, or Entrance to Fairyland, built during the Neolithic period circa 4000 to 2500 BC and in use until the Late Bronze Age circa 1000 BC.

It may not have been awash with any little people (although I'm not at all tall) but someone had placed a small clay-type figure holding a feather on one of the stones inside. He wasn't completely armless, though, as only one of them had apparently broken off. It was actually a very decent passage grave and we were the only ones there, so could investigate in peace.

Folklore claims that fairies would come out at midnight on moonlit nights to dance, but that's a bit too fanciful. On a more mundane level, soldiers who were barracked at L'Erée long ago used the tomb as a den and in order to put a stop to this, their officers filled it with rubble. This must have annoyed F C Lukis in 1840, when he set about excavation, but he discovered flint arrowheads, Beaker pottery and stone tools for his trouble. In fact, it turned out that successive cremations and burials had been deposited inside the chambers. However, it wasn't especially photogenic, or else I was just having a bad afternoon.

We continued our walk along the headland within constant sight of Fort Saumarez, named after Lord James Saumarez who defeated five attacking French frigates in 1794 with his ship *HMS Crescent*. Fort Saumarez had started life in 1804 as a Martello tower on the site of an existing battery (no longer there) after the Napoleonic wars had begun. During the Occupation, Germans built a four-storey reinforced concrete observation tower on top of the existing Martello tower, which remains in excellent condition because it was never battle tested. Excellent condition maybe, but still a concrete reminder in more ways than one of an incredibly difficult time.



Reinforced concrete amid wildflowers

Reminders of the German Occupation were also found in notices along the way, advising that the headland was crossed by German field defences, including trenches, which is not the sort of notice you read every day.

It became quite hot as we wandered along, looking out towards Lihou Island, a nature reserve renowned for its seabirds and wildflowers. This island is only accessible via a causeway at low tide and it was most definitely high tide – but it added to the general romantic seascape view.

Not as romantic but sadly more modern was a memorial to 18 crew members who had drowned when *MV Prosperity* sank in stormy seas on 16th January 1974. This cargo transport ship had been built in 1943 and was heading for a breaker's yard after delivering a final cargo of timber, but struck La Conchée Reef and sank. All 18 crew members aged between 20 and 48 had died, but only 16 bodies were washed ashore and buried.

After taking a detour on a beach to investigate a large rock that resembled a frog (especially since someone with a sense of humour had decorated it with a face), we decided it was time to head to Waitrose. Walking down the narrow road to the car park, we were admiring a house in large grounds, when two yappy, manic little dogs came running out aggressively to chase us away. It's a good job I'm not cynophobic, although I did feel a little scared for a moment.

It was school-run time and frenetically busy as Alan manoeuvred along the narrow roads to Waitrose, which may or may not have unnerved him enough to attempt to drive in via the one-way exit. However, he managed to redeem the situation without any supermarket-rage and we took our time to wander around the large, cool and not at all crowded store.

Back at Grange Lodge, we first of all revived with a mug of tea, before another laid-back teatime and a beautifully relaxing evening. There were perhaps one or two minor exceptions, though, when Alan was trying to sort out our next day's destination from a map with exceedingly small print...

Thought for the day: *If you live on Herm, are you a Hermit?*

Tuesday 10th June

I slept better than the previous night and we were both awake for morning tea at 07:00 on a lovely sunny morning. By 09:15 we had left Grange Lodge and were driving towards St Martin's Village in the south east of Guernsey.

About 15 minutes later, Alan had found a parking space and we'd walked the short distance to the village church, where we met La Gran'mère du Chimquière, or Grandmother of the Cemetery, who was standing outside the church to greet us. Well maybe not, but we immediately recognised the ancient 4½ thousand-year-old granite statue menhir, with her face and her ... other attributes.



La Gran'mère du Chimquière

Standing at an impressive 1.65 metres/5ft 5ins tall, she had been carved in two stages, firstly at around 2500 BC as a fertility goddess with her attributes and then during Gallo-Roman times at around 100 BC to 100 AD, when she had been given a definite face and a cape.

Records indicate that she originally stood closer to the church, but in 1860 a churchwarden took exception to her and she was broken in two, which to me seems like sacrilege. However, some other parishioners protested vehemently, whereupon she was cemented back together and replaced just outside the church. Parishioner power, I love it!

She looked quite benign to me, standing patiently there in dappled sunlight beside a tree and I could understand how local people still honour her by placing coins or a garland of flowers on her head for good luck before weddings.

We even went touristy and posed beside her for a photograph, before taking a quick look inside the church. Dating from about 1225, it deserved a longer visit, but we had some walking to accomplish. I did notice an unusual collecting box set in the wall, though, marked 'Pauvres' – a poor box, presumably.

We said goodbye (but not literally) and drove west to Pleinmont Peninsula along some rather narrow roads, but past some very tasteful houses, interesting gardens and hedges with colourful flowers, until we arrived at the wilder, natural area of the peninsula. Alan parked the car easily enough in a secluded space among the grassland, ferns and brambles that had obviously been cleared to make a parking area, but as it happened, we were the only ones there not only when we arrived, but also when we left.

Nearby was the Pleinmont Observation Tower, a rather prominent five-storey concrete feature pierced by viewing slots that had been built by the Germans and used between 1942 and 1945. From there, German observers controlled Guernsey's coastal artillery, communicating with them by radio. It was only open to the public on Sundays and I was becoming slightly disturbed at so much evidence of the Occupation anyway, so after Alan had walked closer to it to take a photo, we set off on a scenic, coastal walk that felt much more uplifting.

We were quite high up, so firstly needed to head downwards along one of the many small paths criss-crossing through vegetation. It was significantly windy as we set out, although the wind died down reasonably quickly. The view out to sea was picturesque, with a lighthouse, rocks, reefs, beaches and to the right, Pleinmont Headland and Lihou Island, where we had been the day before. The sound of seabirds and inland birds was constant and varied amongst the sound of waves breaking and the intermittent droning of bees and other insects.

At one point on our way towards the lower level, Alan found some steps down through a kind of ancient pine copse. There were masses of pine needles covering the ground, which was soft underfoot with many years' worth of decay. The trees looked old and worn and it seemed as if a lot of clearing had taken place, as the area is owned by Guernsey National Trust. The heat of the day, combined with the pine trees and all the pine needles, created a heady and evocative piney smell, reminding me of the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

The wind had mostly dropped as we arrived at Fort Pezeries, where a fort had stood since at least 1680 to protect part of Rocquaine Bay below. During the 18th century it had been extended and with the threat of French invasion in the 19th century, more changes and strengthening had taken place.

However, by 1842 the fort had already fallen into disrepair, although during the Occupation, the Germans had built an earthwork machine gun position on the western wall. There seemed absolutely no getting away from the German Occupation, but the fort's more distant affiliation to earlier conflict somehow felt marginally better – or perhaps the blue sky and expansive sea view were helping to dispel the more recent wartime associations.



Magazine and cannons at Fort Pezeries

I'd been noticing a great many different wildflowers almost all the time we'd been walking and surmised that the area must surely be a botanist's paradise – and possibly an entomologist's too. Having said that, I jumped so ridiculously when a butterfly landed on my arm that I don't feel qualified to say. Wildflowers and insects simply abounded at the fort, so while Alan was taking his time photographing guns and things, I was able to wander happily around inside the open walls, discovering how many wildflowers I couldn't identify.



La Table des Pions

Hardly any distance away was a modern stone circle, if you consider the late 18th or 19th century not to be ancient. Its construction was linked to the Guernsey tradition of the Chevauchée, a procession that traversed the island every three years, checking the condition of the roads. La Table des Pions was one of the many stopping points along the way, named because of the 'pions' (footmen of the officials on horseback) who sat there for refreshment.

It consisted of a grassy mound with a circular ditch that was itself surrounded by a circle of individual stones around the outside. We took photos and I walked around the circle, as you do (but only because we were more or less alone at that point) Beyond the circle, a lighthouse that had been visible most of the morning could still be seen not too far out at sea.

It was the Hanois Lighthouse, built between 1860 and 1862 to warn shipping of the Hanois reef, as between 1807 and 1848, over 40 ships had been wrecked with the loss of hundreds of lives. Cornishmen were employed to build it with blocks of Cornish stone, its finished height reaching 33 metres/108 feet. It was manned by two 3-men crews on a 4-week shift, with German forces operating it during the Occupation (of course). It was fully automated in 1996.

After that, we decided to walk to Fort Grey at the southern end of Rocquaine Bay. At first there were rural lanes and pleasant places, but then we came to a main road that ran around the bay. There was a fair bit of traffic and no pavement, which I hate. Whenever trucks or buses passed, we stopped and kept into the side of the road. I was very happy to reach Fort Grey.



Fort Grey looking a little white

To be honest, we were a little 'forted out' at that point and decided it was time to find a spot where we could eat lunch. There was a place in the shade just above the beach, so we perched there and ate our sandwiches (with no sand) and some crisps. A couple of seagulls were flying around, but they were no trouble at all, unlike the aggressive tyrant seagulls of Cornwall. We had an excellent view of Fort Grey during lunch, noticing that several people came along and went inside to peruse its shipwreck museum.

It had started life as a Martello tower that had been built in 1804 by the British during the Napoleonic wars, named after Charles Grey (the 1st Earl Grey), governor of Guernsey at that time. It stood on a large rock named Château de Rocquaine and legend has it that in previous years it had been the site of witches' sabbaths, or sabbats. Frankly, I wouldn't be surprised.

After lunch we were fortified (!) enough to begin our return along the same stretch of road with no pavement, but fortunately the phenomenon of a return journey seeming shorter than an outward journey helped to make it less of a trial. It didn't seem long at all before we arrived at a kiosk cum café with outdoor seating (and a toilet) that we'd passed en route and this time rewarded ourselves with a Guernsey ice cream.

It felt very holiday-like strolling along with a strawberry cornet to encourage us on our way and soon we were climbing up the steps into the pine copse. It was hot and hard-going, so I had a strategic break to stop and admire the view. Looking back down to see how far up we'd come showed that it was quite a significant climb – that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Soon we made it back to the car, where I was glad to change from walking shoes to sandals. Surprisingly it was only 13:30, although it felt at least two hours later. I was so tired that when we drove past Torteval Church with its round tower and Alan stopped to get out and take a photo, I stayed in the car and took a photo through the wound-down window!



Torteval Church

We'd decided to go back to Grange Lodge for a much-desired mug of tea, which certainly revived the wilting parts. However, since it was still earlyish we strolled down to the waterfront and walked along in the direction we hadn't yet taken.

After that, we walked back to the harbour and looked around the Liberation Monument, a tall granite 'needle' standing proudly erect. Nearby there were several commemorative plaques relating to the Occupation, which were a fitting tribute to what various groups of Guernsey people had endured.

Wandering back across the road, Alan suggested we investigate the old town area, but I began to realise I was becoming way too tired and beginning to lose the will to walk. Alan consulted a map and led us up some steps – about 100 of the damn things and really steep, too. Having survived the steps, we came across a red Victorian pillar box still in use for today's mail, but although Alan photographed it enthusiastically, by then I was also losing the will to talk.

Finally we made it back to Grange Lodge and another mug of tea, followed later by quiche, baguette slices, salad and fruit. A quiet evening ensued, wherein we decided that tomorrow we'd do something less strenuous.

Thought for the day: *Is there a difference between weeds and wildflowers?*

Wednesday 11th June

Since Alan woke this morning with "a raging sore throat", we knew we would definitely be doing something less strenuous. He therefore dosed himself with paracetamol and we left on a much cooler and overcast morning for a 15–20 minute walk to Guernsey Museum, where we firstly enjoyed a cappuccino in the comfortable little café overlooking the sea.

After that, we spent about 1¾ hours looking around the exceptionally clean and well-presented museum. We came across the art section first, where I realised I'm not particularly into art. I don't mind a bit of Romanticism or Realism, but you can forget Gothicism, Classicism, Impressionism and a few other art-isms.

There was a photography exhibition called *Inhabiting Exile* by Klavdij Sluban. I'm sure he's brilliant in his genre, but it all seemed so depressing. He was inspired by Victor Hugo of *Les Miserables* fame, who finally settled in Guernsey after being exiled from France and then booted out of Jersey. The photographs were black and white, very dark in both senses of the word and quite strange, but I admit I find it impossible to appreciate black and white images.

There was another arty exhibition about music that I found more interesting, but the history and archaeology sections were far more my scene. It was all displayed very well and to optimum effect, because there wasn't too much of it to overwhelm the brain, which can only take in so much at any one time. There were hardly any other people there, although while we were gazing at some Hitler memorabilia in the Occupation display, some German visitors came along, which felt slightly on the awkward side, even after all these years.

After viewing more or less everything inside, we went for a wander around the grounds. There was a large statue of Victor Hugo and also one of Queen Victoria, who had visited Guernsey. So had the Beatles, apparently, but there was no statue of them. There were also some gardens with flower beds that looked to have been newly planted with summer annuals, but since it was 12:00 (we knew this because we heard the noonday gun at Castle Cornet) we decided to meander back to Grange Lodge for lunch.

On the way, we passed the Victoria Tower that resembled a structure in between a lighthouse and a church tower, built in honour of Queen Victoria's visit with Prince Albert in 1846, as this had been the first time a reigning monarch had ever visited the island (do non-reigning monarchs exist?) Next to the tower in a small garden area with seating were two German field guns from World War One. They had been buried in 1940, as it was thought the Germans might bomb them from the air, but they'd been re-excavated in 1978.



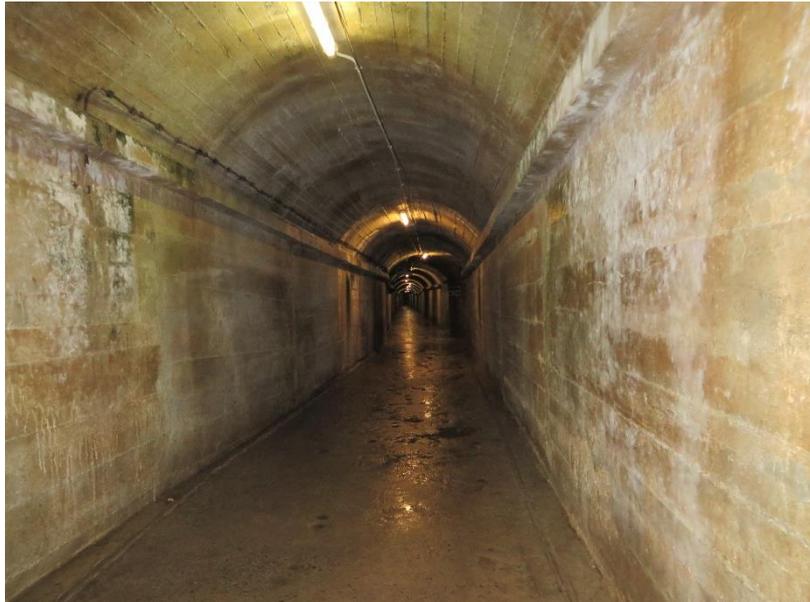
Another war trophy (the gun, not Alan)

We continued back to the apartment along some different streets. I was still finding the amount of traffic for a relatively small island disturbing, including the dicing with death every time we had to leave or return to Grange Lodge by crossing the busy road with pavement on only one side. Having said that, Guernsey drivers are generally much more considerate than UK drivers.

Alan was tired, but more drugs, a mug of hot tea and some toast with peanut butter helped him to perk up somewhat – enough for an afternoon outing, anyway. We chose the German Underground Hospital, located down a leafy rural road and described in the Insight Guide as more chilling than its Jersey counterpart due to its dark, dank emptiness.

The Insight Guide wasn't wrong. The idea was the same and the dark, dank tunnels were the same, but it somehow felt more extreme in its desperate attempt to win the war at the expense of human suffering. There were few exhibits in the individual tunnelled-out wards, corridors and rooms, but mostly it was a dark, dripping underground labyrinth of despair. The mortuary conveyed it all with its tangible shadowy gloom of death.

Begun in the winter of 1940, the tunnels were dug out by hundreds of slave workers from France, Spain, Belgium, Algeria, Morocco, Holland, Poland, Russia and Guernsey (although the Guernsey men refused to work after a rock fall killed six French men and were sent elsewhere). The slave labourers were given a straightforward choice, either to work or starve, while any too weak to work were sent to a detention camp in Alderney.



One of the lighter corridors

The sound of dripping water was constant, with hundreds of straw stalactites forming on the ceiling and stumps of stalagmites forming on the ground. We wandered along the corridors, looking with a sense of horror into various rooms, including wards with original metal beds and replica wooden beds.

All the wards had been occupied by German soldiers wounded in D-Day battles and transported by ship from France, to be transferred above ground after a few weeks (if they survived the awfulness below). Some original German signs were still visible where they'd been painted on the walls:

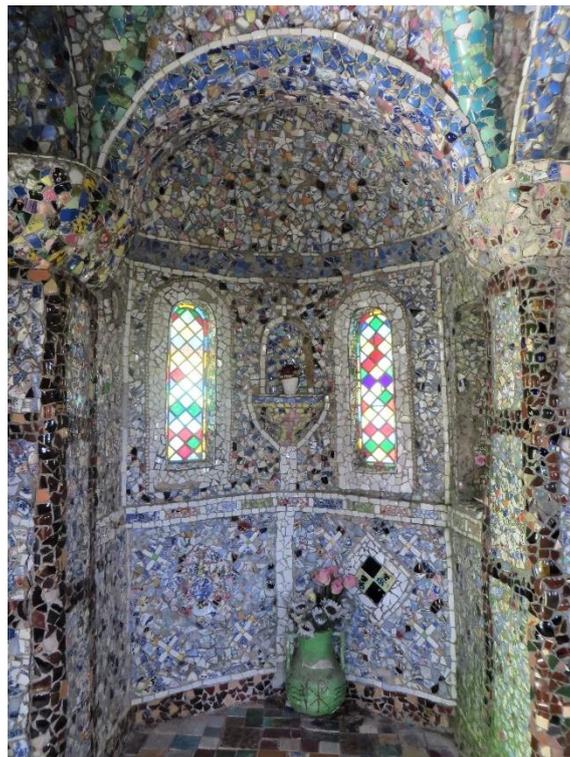


Wine storage – no unauthorised entry

It was utterly chilling and I was relieved to re-emerge into daylight and sunlight, after an hour inside a place of such purgatory. I couldn't imagine what it must have felt like to be in there working as a hunger-weakened slave labourer, or after being wounded, or operated on – or just to be in there for any time at all.

Outside in the real world again, I realised how cold my hands had become, so it was lovely to sit in the car park for a while and thaw, both physically and emotionally. I'm really not sure I could bear to visit such places as Belsen or Auschwitz. However, it so happened that just down the road was another place to visit that could hardly have been more different.

The Little Chapel was a miniature church, possibly the smallest in the world. It was begun in 1923 by Brother Déodat of the De la Salle Brothers, owners of the adjoining school and estate. In 1939, Déodat returned to France, but the care of the chapel passed to Brother Cephias until he retired in 1965. The chapel is totally encrusted in shells, coloured pebbles and fragments of china.



Inside the chapel

It was incredibly ornate, which is not normally my preference, but it was surprisingly beautiful and an obvious work of dedication. We went inside and climbed the few steps to the higher level, where a handful of other visitors were admiring the small, but perfectly formed building.

It spoke to me of the positive side of human nature, directly in opposition to the negative side conveyed in the German Underground Hospital. I was glad we'd made the afternoon's visits in the order we had, to maintain emotional balance.

By the time we ambled back to the car and had driven back to Grange Lodge, it was around 16:00 and time for a mug of tea. The remaining hours of the day were spent quietly, with the rest of the quiche, salad, strawberries and a Magnum for tea that filled me up a little too much.

Thought for the day: "One can resist the invasion of an army, but one cannot resist the invasion of ideas." Victor Hugo.

Thursday 12th June

We awoke to another sunny morning after a slightly restless night for both of us. Alan said his throat felt different, although still sore, so he thought a gentle walk in the fresh air would do him a lot of good. I immediately felt better because *he* felt better rather than worse, his throat hadn't closed over and he hadn't died in the night. It's called catastrophising!

We were ready to leave at 09:20, firstly calling in at Waitrose to buy sandwiches for lunch. Alan then drove to the north coast and parked at Ladies Bay (men allowed), which looked very picturesque as we set off along a sandy path above the bay, with a golf course the other side of the path.

It was such an inspiring morning that quite a few golfers were already out on the course enjoying themselves. We were definitely enjoying ourselves too, as the view was beautiful, even idyllic, with pale golden sands, a cyan blue sea, an azure blue sky, intriguingly fortified headlands in the distance and masses of wildflowers. I was waxing poetical and it was only mid-morning.



Ladies Bay

In fact, we were so preoccupied with the marvellous view that we almost forgot we were searching for three prehistoric sites. However, before I realised exactly what he was doing, Alan had boldly marched purposefully onto the golf course to ask some golfers if they could give him directions. They could (and not merely directions to stop trespassing on the golf course), because the brother of one of them happened to belong to Guernsey's archaeological group and had helped in excavations. I believe the word is serendipity.

We were heading in completely the wrong direction, however, so had to retrace our steps back to the car park and take a different direction along a path on the roadside edge of the golf course. This gave us no choice but to traverse the actual golf course for a short distance, which I personally found slightly scary. The goal of discovering the extremely ancient long mound of Les Fouillages, though, was worth a small amount of reluctant skulking.



Les Fouillages nearly buried again

This complex passage grave first began to be built around 6500 years ago and is one of the earliest monuments in Europe. It was discovered in 1977 when the furze/gorse died back after a very dry summer – 'les fouillages' means 'furze break' in Guernsey French. Excavation work took place between 1979 and 1981.

As it is now, the site shows the monument much as it would have been in its second phase around 4500 BC. It's thought that four separate stone structures would have been used for burial and served as special places in Neolithic rituals concerning death, burial and the afterlife. No bones had been found in the excavations, but this could have been because they wouldn't have survived in the acidic soil, while pottery suggested funerary offerings in the larger chamber. There's no doubt I was an archaeologist in a previous life.

The site was overgrown and it was hard to find a good angle for photos that would adequately show the whole of it, but we did our best. Golfers were never very far away, but we didn't bother them, or they us. No doubt they were used to prehistoric site interlopers, although to be fair we're only in our sixties.

Moving on, literally just around the corner, we almost stumbled on the next site. Called La Platte Mare, it was labelled as a "cist-in-circle" and was more or less a circular grave consisting of seven upright stones and a displaced capstone. Compared to the long mound, this burial cist was a bit of a youngster at a mere 2500 to 1800 BC, having been excavated between 1837 and 1840. Finds included Beaker pottery, Late Neolithic pottery and two polished stone axes. Again, it was overgrown, mostly by ferns, but interesting nevertheless.

The third site was a little harder to find and involved walking across the scrub grassland of the golf course (where no golfer wants to find his balls). Alan fearlessly walked across the course, while I crept nervously around the edges whenever possible. When we finally did come across La Varde tomb, though, what a cracker! It was a passage grave and hailed as Guernsey's largest and most impressive surviving megalithic structure, built during the Neolithic period circa 4000 to 2500 BC and in use until the Late Bronze Age circa 1000 BC.



La Varde passage grave

A short path in amongst the grass and wildflowers led to a fairly narrow entrance that we had to stoop to enter, but which widened out inside to a large chamber with one small side chamber, or recess, in the north-west corner. The site had been discovered in 1811 during some military exercises, when human skulls and bones had been unearthed.

It had been excavated in 1837, from when it appeared that successive burials or cremations had been deposited in the chambers. Pottery, flint and stone tools were found in the grave, as well as complete pots and fragments of about 150 vessels dating from the Middle Neolithic period (around 3500 BC) to the early Bronze Age (around 2000 BC). Wow! We were the only ones there the whole time, so we could take our time with our cameras and investigate to our heart's content – double wow and all for free 😊

Nearby was a very tall standing stone of a much later date, called the Millennium Stone, but I confess it didn't interest me nearly as much. Problematical to erect, it had apparently led to much wondering as to how the huge prehistoric stones had been manoeuvred without modern cranes and machinery. From there we continued walking to Pembroke Bay and still the golf course was very much in evidence. I came to the conclusion it was a huge golf course and Alan confirmed that it stretched right across the headland (and left too, I should think).

Arriving at Pembroke Bay, Alan spotted a roadside kiosk selling coffee amongst other things. The weather was hot by then and so was I, so I didn't fancy one, but Alan felt it would help his throat. The only trouble was that the black coffee was so hot, it nearly burnt his insides and he quickly grabbed the water bottle from his rucksack to pour some coldness down his poor, beleaguered throat.

We continued our walk up a little hill to Fort Pembroke, where we sat down against a large rock in the only bit of shade we could find, overlooking a small area of sea. Waitrose's salmon and cucumber sandwiches hit the spot, followed by Sunbites crisps and some water, after which we walked back along Pembroke Bay along the edge of the golf course.

All around this area were many fortifications of different shapes, sizes and ages, but as we walked, we came up close to L'Ancrese Tower number 7, a pre-Martello Loophole Tower (I only know this because there was an information sign on it saying so). Fifteen Loophole Towers had been built around the coast of Guernsey between August 1778 and March 1779, in case of French invasion.

It was a lovely walk along the bay, with the blue sea and pale golden sand on one side and the green of the golf course, edged with grassland and wildflowers, on the other side. We stopped to take a photo of L'Ancrese Tower number 6 on the green and Alan also stopped to photograph a wildflower – until he noticed we were being waved at by a golfer, who wasn't just saying hello. Oops!

We continued onwards and upwards at that point to another tower that had a chimney, a green painted door and a flag flying gaily from its roof. It was privately owned and called "Nid de l'Herbe" – L'Ancrese Tower number 5. It must have had an excellent view of the bay and unlike towers 6 and 7, it wasn't acting as a dovecote for pigeons, or maybe I mean a pigeoncote?



"Nid de l'Herbe" – nest of grass?

There was what seemed to be a German bunker system further up another hill, with gun positions and heaven knows what else. All the German fortifications were such a concrete blight on a beautiful landscape, but as Alan said, they had been built so solidly that it would cause too much damage to demolish them.

I realised I was becoming tired at that point and Alan realised he'd lost his watch. He'd been having trouble with the strap and thought it must have come off when he'd removed his rucksack somewhere. We retraced our steps as much as possible and Alan particularly checked the places where he knew he'd taken off his rucksack, but to no avail. It was a bit of a setback to an otherwise great day, but although it was a pity, it seemed absolutely pointless to fret.

We kept ourselves going on the way back with a mint choc chip Guernsey ice cream that was *so* good. It was cold, refreshing and simply delicious on a very hot afternoon, with rapidly tiring legs and other bodily parts in sympathy. I was somewhat amused that Alan had made the cardinal mistake of asking for a Jersey ice cream, but the girl who served him only corrected him, rather than shoving the ice cream in his face when she gave it to him, for having the audacity to mention Guernsey's arch rivals!

The last part of the walk, still alongside the ubiquitous golf course, felt like a real slog and I was incredibly glad to see our car (and almost ecstatic to arrive at it, where I could relieve my hot feet by changing from walking shoes into sandals). I could tell Alan was also very tired on the drive back to the apartment, because he made a wrong turn amid some heavy-duty traffic and became caught up in a one-way system detour.

However, we made it back to Grange Lodge after popping in at Waitrose and prepared to relax for the evening. A holiday rep called by for five minutes to check everything was OK, which was a slight surprise. She asked Alan how he was coping with Guernsey roads and he replied he was used to Cornish roads!

We were able to relax then and after Waitrose fishcakes and salad, indulged in some very chocolatey profiteroles – definitely naughty but we must surely have used up a load of calories, which didn't feel so bad. Sixth night here already.

Thought for the day: *No-one expected the Spanish Inquisition, but they definitely expected a French invasion!*

Friday 13th June

Alan was very restless in the night and we both woke feeling tired, but it was another sunny day and our duty to make the best of it, so off we set at about 09:30 for another leisurely coastal walk to find two menhirs/standing stones. Maybe today the walk would actually *be* leisurely...

Alan braved the challengingly narrow inland roads until we came out onto the wider coastal road of northern Guernsey, which felt like breathing a sigh of traffic-related relief. The Sat Nav guided us to a car parking area next to a small beach that was rather rocky and seaweedy, from where we started the walk.

It seemed somewhat hotter than the previous day, but it turned out we were heading in the wrong direction again and so this time Alan asked for directions from a handy handyman who was sitting in his work van as we passed by.

The right directions involved walking for a short while along a pavement-less stretch of road (groan), but we made it safely on to what was presumably the right path and found a standing stone just inside some private land.

To be honest, we weren't entirely sure it was the standing stone we were looking for, but it seemed photo-worthy and it could well have been the one for all we knew. After the trouble we'd taken to find it anyway, I actually dared myself to walk onto the private land to take a photo. Alan, of course, had just walked right up to it without a qualm. In my next life, I too shall be completely qualmless.



A standing stone, but is it a menhir?

We completely failed to find the second menhir, which was rather disappointing, but decided it must be in somebody's garden. I'd love to have a menhir in my garden! We walked along a short lane to look out at the sea and came across more great swathes of pretty, yellow wild mustard. There were also quite a few butterflies, this time small whites instead of common blues.

However, there was a pervading and rather unpleasant aroma of seaweed and it was also becoming quite uncomfortably hot and sticky, so we thought we may as well drive on to Saumarez Park, since it was still only 10-something.



Wild mustard

The French-style Saumarez House and its park and gardens had been created in the 18th century by William Le Marchant. They subsequently came into the de Saumarez family by marriage and were purchased in 1938 by the States of Guernsey. The house is now a residential home for the elderly, but the extensive grounds are open to the public. It does seem an excellent idea to find a dual-use for the estate. We weren't sure what to expect, but the Insight Guide mentioned formal gardens, a Japanese walk and excellent tea-rooms.

Alan parked with a little difficulty in a mostly full car park and we escaped from the full heat of the sun into the dappled shade of a path amongst trees. We strolled for a while until we came to the Japanese walk, but apart from a bamboo pavilion beside a lake, summer is the wrong season for Japanese plants such as camellias and azaleas. I admit I was underwhelmed, so we decided to visit the tea-rooms for coffee (rather than the coffee-rooms for tea.)

It was quite big and airy and obviously geared for children, but the cappuccino was fine and eased Alan's throat – he said it was no longer sore, but "funny" and he felt tired. Since it was approaching midday, we decided to walk across a large area of grass to a wooden bench under a tree to eat our packed lunch, while deciding how to spend the afternoon.

The German Occupation Museum was the chosen candidate and we arrived there at 12:30 to wander around the many exhibits. The Insight Guide had given it a well-deserved write-up and since there were very few other people there, we settled down to a couple of hours quietly perusing all manner of items, after firstly watching a short video of actual Occupation scenes.

We'd been there for about half an hour when an invasion of schoolchildren occurred – and invasion isn't just wartime-speak. I'm really glad children visit these places and I'm in no doubt that they're interested and they benefit from such hands-on history, but I maintain that it was an invasion! The noise level was quite intense at times, so our ploy was simply to stay put in one area and read everything while they chattered, shouted and exclaimed, until they finally all made their way to the next area and peace reigned once again.

There was a general mass of the more usual items such as weapons, uniforms and medals, but also many photographs and some very interesting, original signs. A section on the Jewish aspect of World War Two included a harrowing account from a Jewish prisoner of his journey from Angers in France to Auschwitz, which was particularly distressing to read and imagine.

On a more domestic front, a reconstruction kitchen showed how little food both the population and the German troops had to live on after the Allied landings in Normandy had cut off vital supply lines and how they survived on innovative items such as bramble leaf tea, acorn coffee and potato bread. There was also a very good reconstruction of a Guernsey street in 1940.

For some undefined reason, one of the exhibits I found most memorable was a stone presumably taken from a building somewhere that had been painted with a red V (for victory) by a defiant Guernsey person, but then a green laurel wreath had later been painted underneath it by someone in the occupying troops to represent German victory:



V for victory?

We emerged again into the still bright sunlight at 14:30, but since Alan was flagging, we simply drove back to Grange Lodge for some rest and relaxation – and a mug of tea, obviously. Pizza was enjoyed as an easy meal (they've all been easy) and a spot of Gardeners' World on television was relaxing too. It's hard to believe we've been here almost a week.

Thought for the day: *If standing stones have fallen over, are they still standing stones?*

Saturday 14th June

It was yet another sunny morning on which to awaken to the pleasant sound of birdsong, as opposed to the ghastly raucous screeching of seagulls. To be clear, I have nothing against seagulls, as long as they're at sea where they belong.

The plan for the day was to follow a designated route for a walk that would last from 1 to 1½ hours, taking in some points of interest along the way, including the passage grave of Le Déhus that we really wanted to see. The walk began with a drive, though, in the opposite direction from which we normally left Grange Lodge. A change is as good as a rest, except possibly in Guernsey traffic on a Saturday morning in summer.

This direction led to St Sampson, known as the second town in Guernsey and the former industrial hub of the island. It definitely looked very built-up and despite being fronted by a harbour and shops, it seemed to have an emphasis on commercialism and business, with some tall, glass-fronted office blocks that looked newly built. Further along the busy road were gigantic fuel containers, necessary for a working commercial harbour, but looking very ugly.

I was feeling a little shocked by the amount of urbanisation in Guernsey and it was therefore a relief when we drove on a little way from the centre of St Sampson and arrived at a small coastal car park opposite a rocky cove that naturally looked out to sea. A cruise ship was anchored off St Peter Port, the second one we'd seen since we had arrived.

As we started out, there was a bit of a breeze, but it still felt very warm. We proceeded along the route that took us along the coast a little way, past Bordeaux Harbour that used to be a fishing harbour but is now more commonly used as a beach. At low tide, two islets can be seen, but the tide appeared to be fairly high as we passed, so no visible islets.

The route took us inland then, up country lanes and past people's dwellings. There were some very large houses and some smaller but still good-sized ones. What I found really quite distressing, though, was the sight of enormous greenhouses that had no doubt once been alive and well with Guernsey tomatoes, but were now standing forlornly dilapidated and derelict with broken glass panes and generally falling into complete disuse.

To be fair, we did see one huge greenhouse growing strawberries, which felt a bit hopeful, but it was obvious the Guernsey tomato industry is dead. I later discovered this is because of competition from heavily subsidised produce of European Union countries and that is in no way OK.

I was depressing myself with thoughts such as these while we walked along and very soon another thought assailed me with a certain amount of horror – where were all the Guernsey cows? Had they also been sacrificed on the altar of EU tyranny? However, I then remembered that we'd been drinking Guernsey milk and eating Guernsey cheese, butter and ice cream, so presumably cows have fared somewhat better than tomatoes, which is some small consolation. I still couldn't equate my 1983 memory of greenhouses full of tomatoes with those forsaken, discarded greenhouses, though...

Still, it was no good dwelling on the negative and after only a minor amount of stopping and starting when Alan thought we were going the wrong way, we arrived at Le Déhus Neolithic passage grave. It was right by the roadside and gated off, therefore difficult to take an exterior photo, but we were able to go inside, aided by a few lights that we could turn on and off as required.



Le Déhus, but where is the guardian?

It was in good condition, having been excavated between 1837 and 1847, then re-excavated in 1932, with large quantities of finds dating from 3500 BC to 2000 BC. It owes its preservation to Sir John de Havilland, who purchased it for £4-10s-0d in 1775 to save it from destruction by local quarrymen. Well done, Sir John! It had the typical narrow entrance leading into a broad chamber with side chambers – four of them, although apparently one had been re-created in error.

Its major claim to fame was the carving on the underside of a capstone of Le Gardien du Tombeau – the guardian of Le Déhus – with a clearly defined bearded face, arms, hands and a strung bow with arrows and a series of symbolic designs. It had almost certainly once been a single menhir/standing stone before being re-utilised as a capstone. Carved menhirs usually depicted female figures, so this had either been a bearded lady menhir or a true menhir.

That was all well and good, but despite trying hard we couldn't find him/her. Another couple entered the scene and curtailed our searching a little, although I felt slightly appeased when they couldn't find the guardian either. Outside, we found we could walk all the way around to view the reconstructed circular mound, which felt quite satisfying (but again, difficult to take a photo). Still, that was another prehistoric site ticked off the list. We didn't really have a list...

After that, the walk went downhill a little and not in the topographical sense. It just wasn't very interesting and so we gave it up in order to walk back to the car park by the coast, where we could eat our packed lunch. We could find no shade in which to hide away from the full-on midday sun, though, so drove back to Grange Lodge, where we could be comfortably cool.

In the afternoon we were uncertain what to do, as we weren't feeling very energetic. A stroll down to the waterfront seemed an easy option (discounting the uphill slog on the way back). We went along a different road and passed a "Pro Patria" memorial to the men of Guernsey and Alderney who'd lost their lives in the Boer War. Further along, we came across an old sign for the hospital that had once been the House of Charity (a workhouse) before it became Town Hospital until closure in 1990. The building now houses a police station complete with an old blue lamp outside on the wall. Evening all!



The old House of Charity

Down among the shops in the town, so many people were thronging the streets that we left the madding crowd for the harbour, stopping to take photos of an old 'barrière' or boundary stone (one of several that mark out the extent of the medieval town), a blue post box and a stone marking the place where the British liberating forces had landed on 9th May 1945.

We found ourselves walking to the breakwater that jutted out into the sea – except the tide was out, so it didn't feel too scary until the very end. It was also cooler there with a small sea breeze. Once we were on the breakwater arm, down on the beach below us a boy gave a yell of delight as he discovered what looked like a massive crayfish in a rock pool. To be honest, I'm not sure what constitutes a massive crayfish but it definitely looked unusually big to me.

We stopped to buy a Guernsey ice cream on the way back to the town, chocolate for me this time and most excellent. Once we'd reached the waterfront proper, we managed to find a shop where we could buy some bread and desserts, before toiling up the hill. Alan had also briefly looked in the window of a shop that sold watches, but decided it wasn't the right time to stop, because the mid-afternoon mug of tea was beckoning and we still had the hill back to deal with.

Once again we spent the rest of the day relaxing, with Alan sounding tired and croaky and me feeling just plain tired. Throughout the afternoon and early evening, new arrivals could be seen with their baggage and it seemed a little strange to think how we'd been new arrivals a mere week before. How quickly one can feel like an old timer, not only in Guernsey, but in life.

Thought for the day: *If you perspire on this island, you must be a Guernsey sweater!*

Sunday 15th June

I didn't get a great deal of sleep last night, as Alan started to snore on quite a grand scale. I tried sleeping on a settee in the main room, but I could still hear him along with the kitchen clock and the fridge. I returned to the marital bed (well, the Grange Lodge bed) after an hour or so when he was quieter, but sleep was fitful. I discovered that the first note of the first bird to start the dawn chorus was sung at exactly 04:00. Tidy!

It was yet another sunny morning, although when we left the apartment at 10:10 to walk down to the waterfront, it was breezy and cool enough for me to briefly wonder if I'd been wise to take no jacket or umbrella. On arrival at the front, though, it was obvious that another special event was in progress, with the road closed to traffic, some purposeful people and a large overhead sign saying "Finish". It turned out to be the Guernsey half-marathon and I bet the runners were glad it wasn't another boiling hot day.

We first of all went into Tourist Information to buy some souvenirs, as tourists do. While we were loitering around outside again a little aimlessly, the winner of the half-marathon ran in underneath the finish line, which was mildly exciting. However, we decided to have a proper look at the old part of town and en route whiled away a half hour or so in Costa Coffee, people-watching over a jolly fine cappuccino (Alan) and a mocha (me).



Not half quiet in the old quarter

It was quieter in the old part of town, otherwise known as The Old Quarter. In between looking in shop windows, we noticed some fine old buildings that seemed as if they could tell quite a story of Guernsey's history. The time passed quickly until midday, when we had to decide what to do for lunch. Since Alan was at the coughing and nose blowing stage, it wasn't a good idea to go in anywhere to eat, so we moseyed along to *Pasty Presto* to buy ... a pasty! There were no vegetable ones, so we chose cheese and onion, which was no hardship.

There were some 'sunken gardens' not far up the road, so we took ourselves and our pasties there and ate them in their paper bags while they were still deliciously warm. We were the only ones in the garden, but the sun had come out fully and there was hardly any shade at that time of day, so we didn't linger.

Our afternoon plan was to walk out to Fort George and past Clarence Battery, to see where the coastal path took us. There was a refreshing sea breeze as we approached the battery, stopping halfway up the steps for a breather and to look out towards the harbour, where two cruise ships were anchored not far outside.

At the battery, the grass had been cut and along with it most of the wildflowers we'd seen before. We sat for a while, looking seaward towards the other islands and also in the Insight Guide, to find where the coastal path would continue.

The route was slightly uphill, in amongst the dappled shade of some trees as we headed on towards Soldiers Bay that was down at sea level obviously and once reserved for the soldiers of Fort George to use for swimming. The path to it was impassable anyway, so we continued until we came out into a more built-up area and walked in the sun for a while on a tarmac road, past large balconied houses on the hill above that spoke of conspicuous wealth.

Further on we rejoined the cliff path, resting briefly on a wooden bench that gave us an occluded view of Soldiers Bay, its water looking green and clear. The next part of the walk was away from the cliff and up through some woodland said to be a haze of bluebells in spring, which wasn't really helpful. We passed lots of fortification-type walls and concluded Fort George must have been huge.

It had, in fact, been an enormous Georgian fortification housing Guernsey's main garrison, built to take over from Castle Cornet as the island's main stronghold. It served this purpose well in the 19th century and then in World War Two (as an obvious target for Allied air raids), it became headquarters for German Luftwaffe radar defences. In the 1960s it was sold to a private developer and now the historical granite walls protect an upmarket housing estate. Uphill and upmarket!

After taking some steps leading down to the coastal path again, we carried on for a while until we could look out over Fermain Bay and the 88 Ozanne Steps. These steps had been built by a former governor of Guernsey to give access to a rock platform so he and his wife could bathe in privacy, which seems quite a step (or 88) to take, unless they were closet skinny dippers.



Fermain Bay was far enough

Meanwhile, the hoi polloi (us) decided we were in danger of going a step too far, so we ambled back into the wooded area, where Alan decided to take a different path upwards that would gain us access to the higher parts of Guernsey and thence to Grange Lodge in its elevated position, rather than a footslog down to the waterfront and back up the hill again.

It was a good plan. It worked well at first as we came out on top and walked along the road where the rich people live in their beautiful houses with their wonderful sea views. We then chanced upon Fort George Military Cemetery, where soldiers, sailors and airmen from both World Wars and from both sides lie in a soothingly peaceful place. One inscription read in both German and English: *Leben lebt jenseits des Grabes*, translated as *Life lives beyond the grave*. I couldn't help wondering why that saying by Edward Young had been chosen.

Meanwhile, our lives continued onwards to the entrance of Fort George with its still impressive gatehouse proclaiming the date of 1812 and through it to ... I'm not sure where. I *am* sure, though, that this was where the doubts started, as we stood facing roads leading in several different directions. It was also where Alan started his map wondering and wandering in earnest, stopping every now and then to say: "This way ... no wait, that way..." as on and on we tramped.

I suppose it gave us a feet-on experience of Guernsey roads, streets, avenues, industrial areas, building sites and backyards, although I began to wonder if we were anywhere near Grange Lodge. All I can say is that it was a good job the sky had clouded over and it was warm rather than hot. An irony occurred at one point as we were faced by a huge number of downward steps that meant the inevitability of a significant climb in due course – and this was indeed so.

Still, respect to Alan eventually, because when he stopped to ask someone which was the way to Grange Lodge, we were actually quite close. I think he was as tired as I was on that last dragging, leg-weary walk to the apartment, where we opened the door at 15:20 and stopped only to fling off hot shoes and sweaty socks before heading towards the kettle.

Needless to say, we mostly sat around for the rest of the afternoon and evening. Alan was coughing quite a bit and I was amazed I'd lasted so well considering the little sleep I'd managed the night before. We could only rouse ourselves enough to eat toast for tea, plus other bits and pieces. It had been a different sort of day spent quite a lot on our feet, so bedtime was very welcome – zzzzz!

Thought for the day: *If fortifications included forts, did bunkers include bunks?*

Monday 16th June

I slept well, but Alan was coughing and attempted to sleep semi-successfully on the settee in the early hours for a while. It was another sunny morning, though, we were being utterly fortunate with the weather. We therefore carried out the usual morning tasks and were ready to leave at 09:40 for a drive to a few places of interest that Alan had found via the internet.

Our first destination was on the western coast, where there were some prettily named 'orchid fields', described as 13 small meadows managed, owned or leased by La Société Guernesiaise. The orchids were said to be at their best between mid-May to mid-June, so we were pushing it and really should have visited a week previously. Still, better late than never ... or not.

Alan and the Sat Nav did well locating the fields along a road/lane named Rue des Vicheries and fortunately there was a place where we could park. The first thing I noticed was that it may have been sunny, but there was a serious breeze that was making the morning quite a lot cooler than it looked.

We only investigated two of the fields, as it was clear the orchids were past their best and in garden-speak, had just about 'gone over' – over their floral prime and blown over in the wind. In fact, we only came across a few hardy stragglers of the common spotted variety, but at least we could imagine what the splendour of a field full of them, plus heath spotted orchids, common marsh orchids and loose-flowered orchids would have looked like.

After that short foray into the fields, we drove on towards a dolmen and a defence battery in close proximity to each other. On our way to the nearest car park, we noticed a line of about 25 schoolchildren and some teachers and class assistants striding out along a path near the side of the road, no doubt on their way to visit a place of interest. I must admit, Guernsey is an ideal place for educational outings, the children must all look forward to them.

It was very windy at the car park by the coast, but only a short walk to the historical site. However, who should we see approaching from the other direction but the school outing, heading towards the same place and about to arrive there just ahead of us. The site was up a hill, with the defence battery down below the dolmen. The school group headed straight up to the dolmen, so we decided to wait it out by loitering below at the defence battery.

It was working well, until one of the adults with the group came down to tell us they had a guide with them up at the dolmen, a lady who specialised in the island's history and whose tours and talks were well acclaimed. If we wanted to listen in at the edge of the group, we would be welcome. It would have seemed very rude not to accept, so we went up and joined them.



Le Trépied dolmen

Le Trépied dolmen or passage grave had been built during the Neolithic period circa 4000 BC to 2500 BC and was known to have been in use until the Late Bronze Age circa 1000 BC. The talk was geared to children, of course, but the speaker was indeed very good and she clearly would have made an excellent teacher herself, holding the children's attention all the time.

She held our attention well too, particularly when she suddenly drew us into the conversation by asking where we were from. Horrors! I was really glad Alan was standing closer to her than I was, as he is not nearly as daunted at such spontaneous encounters. He naturally replied that we were from Cornwall, so the next question was if there are any dolmens in Cornwall. When he replied in the affirmative, she made a joke about Cornish rock not being quite as hard as Guernsey rock. Such cheek – although I have no idea if this is actually true...

Her talk then moved on to folklore of how the devil (or likely some power-crazy nasty individual) would convene with 'witches' at Friday night 'sabbats' at Le Trépied. She was careful to say that the devil or witches don't exist and explained how the people who convened there were ordinary people who in the 17th century would have used plants and herbs to make people well. The devil-man, though, would give them a potion made of mushrooms to drink in a ceremony and they would then use the plants and herbs to make people ill.

This dastardly practice ended in some famous witch trials, when a number of men and women were put to death. She then talked about how it was proved someone was a witch and drew us into the conversation again by asking if they'd used ducking stools in Cornwall. When Alan answered yes, she said they hadn't used ducking stools in Guernsey, they'd used the pricking method. This involved finding a mole or birthmark on someone's body and then pricking it. If it didn't bleed, the person was a witch and would be despatched accordingly.

I'd had enough lesson-time and was unashamedly relieved when they eventually left the dolmen and moved on down to the defence battery. It took a while for them all to filter away, but they were very friendly and their teacher and an assistant both stopped to talk to us generally about prehistoric sites.

After we'd taken photos with the sun in a tricky position, we went back down to the Mont Chinchon Battery, also known as Druids Altar Battery because of its nearness to Le Trépied. It had the usual history of being built near the end of the 18th century due to the threat of French invasion and then of gradual demise until its recent restoration. It wasn't that it was a boring battery, more that I was running out of energy (and therefore should have stayed there?)

We had to find lunch and en route to our next destination, stopped at a shop and bought its last two packets of sandwiches. On arriving at Fort Hommet, we saw there was a large car park and a decent-looking café where we could have gone in for lunch, but no worries, egg and cress in the car park it was! It was close by the mostly sandy beach of Vazon Bay, where there was a surf school.



Fort Hommet amid the wild mustard

Afterwards, we walked from the car park along to Vazon headland, described as having rich habitats, including stabilised sand dune, wet meadow and heathland. Unsurprisingly, it was an area where rare species of plants, butterflies and birds thrive. We did see an unusual pinkish ground-hugging flower that we couldn't identify, as well as the newly identified tree mallow and common mallow, but apart from that the headland was awash with the usual wild mustard.

The indigenous rock in the area was rather optimistically called red granite, although to me it looked more pink than red, including pebbles on the beach – but whatever the colour, it was warm and attractive. It had formed 570 million years ago and was named Cobo granite after nearby Cobo Bay. Our walk to the fortification at the top of the headland took us past all this scenery that was so pleasing to the eye, until before us like a sudden hideous blemish built into the hillside, was a German bunker gun emplacement made of concrete, which had been preserved and painted in camouflage colours.

That was bad enough, but further ahead there was worse to come. Although the headland was obviously a defence-strategic place and known to have been fortified as early as 1680, at least the Martello tower built in 1804 had been constructed from local red/pink granite and looked as if care for the landscape had been taken. The later Victorian additions of batteries and barracks seemed to blend in too – they must have done, as I didn't take much notice of them.

Like a cancerous carbuncle, though, attached to the Martello tower was a most hideous concrete construction that the occupying forces of World War Two had seen fit to desecrate the area with, as if they had just come along with no respect whatsoever for the land and its history. Before I begin to sound racist, I should mention a most heart-warming account in the German Occupation Museum of a German doctor based in Guernsey who was punished severely for his humanitarian acts of supplying medical supplies to the civilian hospital.

We walked around the whole headland area, but I must confess that I was feeling sad at how much Guernsey had been spoiled by World War Two, at which time Fort Hommet had been known as Stützpunkt Rotenstein (Strongpoint Redstone). After Guernsey's liberation, islanders and the British Army had proceeded to strip the fortifications, so that by the late 1940s all metal fittings had been taken away for scrap. Many of the bunkers were buried in an attempt to return the coastal landscape to its pre-war condition, but to my mind far too much of the concrete horror remains.

However, it was still a lovely afternoon as we walked back to the car, so we decided to visit one more place around the coast at Cobo Bay. This was a watch-house and battery, which according to the Insight Guide would give us a great view of three bays. All we had to do was find it.

After a very short drive, we set off to find some steps to the top of a wooded quarry, but realised we must have missed the steps when we found ourselves walking up a residential road. Alan fortunately had his wits and his sense of direction about him and after noticing a narrow country lane up through some houses that we investigated, he spotted the watch-house and battery high on a wooded hill. To reach it meant scrabbling up a steep slope into the wood, but it was a pine wood and pine needles made the ground easier and more pleasant.



Roque du Guet watch-house and battery

We were the only ones there, so were able to climb up to the watch-house and investigate the whole area in peace. It was quite windy, especially at the very top, but the view was worth it as we gazed out upon the bays of Vazon, Cobo and Grandes Rocques. What was most noticeable from that height, rather than being below at ground level, was the sea's different shades of blue, including some beautiful bands of turquoise water.

On the way back down through the pine wood, we had some fun taking photos of foxgloves, before attending to the more mundane task of another trip to Waitrose. We made it back to Grange Lodge at just after 15:00 and proceeded to chill out for the rest of the day, after that all important mug of afternoon tea. Alan's cough was still rather troublesome, but the simple pleasures of a glass of red wine, some relaxing TV, a pizza and a coffee Magnum helped to make a pleasurable end to what had been an interesting day.

Thought for the day: *A battery seems a good place for a watch-house – or is it vice versa?*

Tuesday 17th June

We both managed to sleep reasonably well and had morning tea at around 07:40, looking out at a white, cloudy sky with a weather forecast of afternoon improvement. It was therefore a comfortably slow start to the day and two hours or so later, we left for our first destination of the church of St Marie du Castel, the home of the sister menhir to La Gran'mère de Chimquière, the grandmother of the cemetery (with the boobies).

It wasn't a very long drive, as nowhere is a very long drive on Guernsey, thank heavens. Alan was able to park right outside the entrance to the church and graveyard and as soon as we entered through the gate, we could espy 'her' (and her boobies, to be honest, as her head and face were quite worn compared to her two-dumpling chest). Unfortunately, her right dumpling had been knocked away, possibly another Christian act against pagan idols.



Castel's grandmother of the cemetery

This standing stone had been discovered underneath the chancel steps of the church in 1878, apparently with the head formed into shoulders and a crown, also with a necklace and those darling dumplings. To be honest, I found it disappointingly hard to distinguish any crown or necklace, but despite my ignorance, such personalised menhirs are associated with the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, circa 2500 BC to 1800 BC.

She stood there boldly and benignly among the graves on a large stone plinth like some kind of earth grandmother looking over the deceased – battered, but still with a presence (like so many grandmothers) and so much so that someone had placed a small bouquet of flowers at her feet. It was a peaceful scene.

As we left her to her now serene existence, Alan decided to take a look inside the church and I thought I may as well tag along after him into the fairly large interior. Here I read that its earliest part dated way back to the 11th century, so while Alan was taking photos at the back of the church, I wandered over to a side altar at the front to find the earliest parts and came across some 13th-century frescos painted on a wall.

I'd actually stumbled across the Chapel of the Holy Nativity, used for weekdays and other services, but in earlier centuries the site had been the original sanctuary and high altar of the church. The frescos on the upper north wall had been discovered in 1839 when lightning had struck the church and brought down some plaster. It's also possible that more painting may exist underneath the current plaster and whitewash. Amazing!

There were two panoramic scenes either side of a smaller-sized unknown figure, possibly a saint or a martyr. It was a bit tricky taking photos, but I did my best. Also of interest was a hagioscope, which was basically a hole through a pillar thought to be used in medieval times by a priest saying mass at a side altar, looking to see the progress of mass at the high altar. Or else, of course, there could have been a creepy spying situation going on.



Part of the 13th-century fresco

As we went to leave via the opposite side to where we'd entered, there was a glass-covered circular hole in the ground, which was the excavation of a bell casting pit dating to the late 17th or early 18th century. On the whole, it had turned out to be quite an unusual church and I was glad I'd followed Alan.

Our next destination, which as ever on Guernsey wasn't all that far away, was Rousse Tower, one of the 15 towers built in the 18th century for defence against possible French invasion. Quelle surprise! This one had been fully restored and was open to the public, entrance free. Situated on one of Guernsey's many headlands, this tower to the west of Le Grand Havre was clearly visible from quite a long way off, on land that was rich with vegetation, including wildflowers and grasses left to grow as nature intended.

The yellow wild mustard was prevalent again, creating a pretty foreground for photos of the tower, but the sky was still quite overcast and the wind was a little on the cold side when we got out of the car. Undeterred though, we found a path through the vegetation up to where the tower sat on the highest point in the area and found there were some displays and several explanation boards both in the tower and outside in a separate building.

There were quite a few people strolling around the area, but not too many to be a nuisance or to cause photographic inconvenience. I wasn't especially keen on the tower itself, because a lot of pigeons had made the top part of the three-level tower their home and the sudden noises of pigeon-flappy wings amid the constant loud cooing put me on edge somewhat. I know pigeons have been extremely useful as military messengers in wartime and I respect them for that, but basically, try as hard as I can, I simply cannot abide them.



Rousse Tower

After a good look inside and a walk around outside, Alan decided to indulge in a spot of macro-photography with a few wildflowers, including common mallow. We then took ourselves on a windy stroll along the coastal path, although there were some more sheltered pockets where the air felt appreciably warmer.

We hadn't gone far when we saw an archaeological dig on the beach that had been featured on the Channel Island news the previous evening, concerning a prehistoric burial cist or barrow grave that had been discovered. Closer up, we could see ten or so people scraping away in a fenced-off pit among some large stones, although it was hard to see properly without peering inquisitively.

I managed to sneak a few photos while Alan stood gazing down at them. There were buckets, gloved people with hand tools, a finds tray and one man wheeling away the spoil in a wheelbarrow. It was like a Guernsey episode of Time Team!



I really dug the beach dig

After that heady excitement, we continued along the path with its interesting vegetation, which is a very useful word to describe all manner of plant life. At one point we noticed hundreds of snails clustered on ferns and up the stems of other plants, including some alliums that were flowering later than our Cornish garden ones. Several other people were enjoying a Tuesday morning coastal walk, while below us we came across another beach that had off-white sand but was surprisingly devoid of people – perhaps the wind was a deterrent.

It was approaching midday, so we decided to walk back to the car for lunch, rather than have an al fresco windblown sandwich experience. However, it was a bit too warm for comfort in the car to stay for long. Since we were unsure of where to go next, we drove back to Grange Lodge for a mug of tea and then set off on foot for the town, hopefully where Alan could buy a watch as an early birthday present a little cheaper than it would be on the mainland.

It was still fairly cool down among the shops, although the sun was making a decent effort to shine. After some initial walking around and deliberating, Alan took the plunge and decided to buy the kinetic Seiko he really liked. It turned out to be rather a long, drawn-out procedure, with three attempts to make the metal strap fit properly, but the Irish sales lady was very friendly and after the uncomfortable (to me) transaction had been completed, we nipped across the road to Costa Coffee for a cooling drink of green tea, lime and mint that was very refreshing and prepared us well for the uphill walk back to the apartment.

We relaxed for the rest of the day, but heard a lot of wailing sirens around teatime. We then found out from the early evening news that a light aircraft had crashed on take-off at Guernsey airport, happily with no injuries, but with obvious danger of fire from fuel spillage. Talking of fire, there was also a news item about a small fire in the laundry at Grange Lodge Hotel in the early hours of this morning with fire crew in attendance, although we'd heard nothing...

Thought for the day: *If 'fresco' means 'fresh', surely a 13th-century fresco is a misnomer?*

Wednesday 18th June

The sunny weather was back this morning and Alan was feeling better than he'd been feeling all week, which was an encouraging improvement. He'd discovered yesterday that he'd been given completely the wrong instruction booklet for his watch, though, so for once he drove to the waterfront and parked at the harbour for a quick walk into town to collect the correct booklet.

After that small bit of business was completed, we set off to Sausmarez Manor in southern Guernsey, first of all up a dreadful bendy road reminiscent of a vertical snake, if such a creature exists. More crazy Guernsey roads followed until we soon arrived at the abode of the de Sausmarez family, who have lived at the same location since 1254 (although only a fragment of the ancient building remains and the original people don't still live there).

Currently the manor has a Queen Anne façade that was erected between 1714 and 1718, replacing an earlier Tudor building. This is a shame, as I love Tudor buildings. The occupying Germans had intended to use the manor as a hospital in 1940, until they discovered that there was no electric lighting.

As we left the car and strolled towards the manor, one of the first sights to catch Alan's eye was a small spread of white western marsh orchids that were nowhere near a marsh and apparently hadn't reacted well to being transplanted near one. Alan seemed to bond with the white western marsh orchid and spent quite some time photographing one or two.

On reaching the manor, we saw there were several guided tours throughout the day, but the 'seigneur' still lives there and we really just wanted to walk around the garden. Entrance to the grounds was free, with a charge for individual items such as pitch and putt, a children's train ride and a sculpture exhibition in subtropical woodland. We passed on the first two options, but the last one sounded promising, so after a cappuccino in a tea room that had once served as a large greenhouse, we took ourselves off on the 'sculpture walk'.

We enjoyed a relaxing time wandering through the subtropical woodland, hardly meeting any other people while perusing the many and varied plants and sculptures. I maintain that art is very subjective and while I admired and connected with some of the sculptures, I found that others seemed plain dodgy and unattractive. In fact, looking at sculptures feels a bit like looking inside someone else's mind and to my mind, some people frankly seem disturbed!



Drift by Carole Andrews

Despite the sunny start to the day and at least until mid-morning, the sky had clouded over and it was a little too cool without a jacket. We therefore returned to the warm car to eat our sandwiches, while consulting the Insight Guide for both insight and guidance about an afternoon visit.

Moulin Huet Bay seemed a good destination and after only ten minutes or so of driving, partly down an extremely narrow road that seemed unsuitable for cars at all, we arrived at a small but adequate car park right by one of Guernsey's old water lanes. These had traditionally run alongside steep mossy banks and according to folklore were the abode of fairies. I'm not sure about that, but I'm sure any fairies weren't enchanted when the Germans filled in many of the water lanes during the Occupation, presumably to make access for their large vehicles.

There was a short but decidedly steep path down to the bay and we soon felt that we were either in a warmer place altogether, or that the temperature had risen, so presumably there was a micro-climate effect happening. En route we passed by a quirky, but closed, café and an information board describing how the artist Pierre-August Renoir (1841-1919) had spent some weeks in Guernsey in 1883 and had painted about 15 pictures of Moulin Huet Bay.

When we arrived down at the shore, we could see that it was indeed a very picturesque place, with clear green water at the beach and further out where the sea was bluer, several rocks and reefs. In the distance were Les Tas de Pois d'Am, otherwise known as the Pea Stacks, rising like bold boulders from the sea. From seaward, one of the rocks is said to resemble a hooded monk and until recent times, fishermen would doff their hats (religiously or otherwise, I know not) to Le Petit Bon-Homme Andriou.



Pea stacks

The tide was quite a way in all the time we were there with the place completely to ourselves, while the sky gradually changed most obligingly from overcast to white with increasing bands of blue. Alan could hear a waterfall to our right, so we ventured onto the pebbly beach and walked along with a certain amount of difficulty until we located it at the edge of the cliff, whereupon yet another photography session for Alan ensued. Personally, I'd been more fascinated by the pea stacks and the sky. There are going to be so many photos.

It wasn't long after 14:00, but we were happy enough to drive back to the apartment for a mug of tea and some languishing relaxation for the remainder of the day. One of the benefits of a two-week holiday is feeling you have enough time to rest and unwind, which is surely what a holiday is for? That is, as well as dashing around seeing all the historical sites and beautiful scenery you can manage to fit in, which is what we seem to feel drawn to do!

Thought for the day: *If the effect of a sculpture has been to affect, then it's worked?*

Thursday 19th June

I woke after a rather restless night with the knowledge that I was fighting a viral invader, but it was another lovely sunny morning and I did my best to gird my loins and all other relevant parts for a day of Guernsey exploration.

Once again we were ready to leave at around 09:30 and headed for St Apolline's Chapel on the west coast, which had been built in 1392 and was the only other place in Guernsey with fragments of frescos, like the church of St Marie du Castel. The roads were as challenging as ever, but we soon arrived at the pretty little chapel that looked to have been partly built with Cobo granite.

Parking was unfortunately a problem, as the chapel was by a narrow road and the single allotted parking space was filled, with a few people milling around outside. Alan drove on down a nearby small road that happened to be one of the 'Ruelle Tranquille' roads on Guernsey recommending a speed limit of 15 mph with priority to pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders (and presumably horses as well), but he was still unsure where to park.

While he was deliberating, a man came along and kindly asked if he could help, so Alan explained his parking problem. The man told him there was a service held at the chapel every Thursday at 10:00, so we'd effectively chosen the one time in the week to visit when the chapel would be occupied. Alan said we'd return later and the man advised him just to park along the top of the road, whereupon we thanked him and drove on to find ... somewhere else.

The Insight Guide mentioned a two-mile walk around the not too far away St Saviour's Reservoir, but as we approached the area, Alan and the Sat Nav managed to find the reservoir but not the car park – he discovered later that its entrance had been so narrow and partially obscured that we'd driven right past it. However, another small car parking space was found after Alan asked a likely looking loitering local and we were finally ready for our walk.

I wasn't sure how my virally compromised body would last out, but we planned to stroll gently through what was more or less a nature reserve circuiting the reservoir, which was looked after by La Société Guernesiaise. It turned out to be a pleasant walk, with quite a lot of it through wooded areas that were shaded and cool in the growing morning heat. It was clearly a haven for birds, with the constant accompaniment of bird song and sightings of ducks and a heron.

There were a few other walkers, but mostly we were on our own to enjoy the trees and flowers, including rather a lot of foxgloves. At one point we had to walk across the pumping station part, which I never particularly enjoy with its feeling of crossing over deep water rather than walking along the shallow edges, but although it looked quite full, it was fine.

After that, there was a section where we had to walk along the road, although I was happy to see there was some pavement. We realised it had become rather hot, so it was a relief to reach the wooded area again and take refuge in the shade for a while, even though the heat was rising up through the wood's undergrowth. I was quite astonished to walk past a field partly obscured by trees and bushes and notice two cows lazily chewing the cud. Guernsey cows – at last!

In due course we arrived back at the car and saw it was time to return to St Apolline's Chapel, where we were happy to see the single allotted parking space was free. The single-cell building thought to be the only remaining medieval chantry chapel in Guernsey was also free and as we entered to the lingering smell of the candle used in the service, a sense of calm pervaded.



The simply beautiful chapel

The interior was clean, simple and beautiful, with bench seating for about 15 and a most handsome altar table made of polished stone (possibly granite). There were two small stained-glass windows, one of St Apolline, the patron saint of dentists, being watched by an angel proffering a tooth. This is not as strange as it sounds when you take into account the back story.

In Alexandria circa 249 AD, Apolline refused to renounce her Christian faith and was punished by having her teeth knocked out. She was also threatened with death by burning, but in an act of martyrdom, leapt into the flames herself. It was a pity the poor soul had to endure the dental savagery first.

The frescos were naturally rather faded and indistinct in places, but still very remarkable for their pre-Reformation age. Most of the south wall was taken up by a depiction of the fabled Last Supper, while a second scene just above the south door was most probably a representation of Christ washing the feet of the Apostles. Such frescos must have been incredible when newly painted.

There was also a faint border – but to be honest, I didn't really mind what the medieval frescos depicted at all, as I was feeling strangely and inexplicably at home in the exceptionally peaceful little 14th-century chapel that was filled with light in more than one sense of the word, despite having once been used as a stable (no, not *that* stable, although the link is pleasing).

The chapel had started its life as La Chapelle de Notre Dame de la Perelle, but by 1452 was known as St Apolline's Chapel, which is quite a lot easier to say. It fell into disrepair after being used as a stable for many years – I expect the horses were disappointed – and was eventually purchased by the States of Guernsey in 1873, thus becoming the island's first publicly owned ancient monument. Major repairs needed to be undertaken during the 1920s and it was then restored in the 1970s as a Chapel of Unity.

I very reluctantly left the small but sympathetically restored haven and joined Alan outside to take some photos of the exterior – where we were both nearly mown down by a lorry that suddenly turned the corner and drove down the narrow road where we were standing. It was a significant shock after the chapel's interior tranquillity, as well as my slightly compromised viral state, but after breathing in hard and attempting to melt into the wall behind, we lived to expostulate about lorry drivers and Guernsey narrow roads.



Nearly mown down outside St Apolline's Chapel!

A short drive took us to Vazon Bay, where Alan parked the car in a well-situated car park alongside a kiosk, where we sat and ate lunch looking out at a truly delightful view. There have been some wonderful lunchtime vistas this holiday – like others, this one offered a near azure blue sky, a beach of fine white sand and a sea of turquoise merging into deeper blue further out.

I was strongly reminded again of the Isles of Scilly, another heavenly place. Here, on the distant headland, yet another sandy beach was visible, as well as one of the Guernsey trademark fortification towers and the distinctive yellow of masses of wild mustard that always complement the blue sea and sky so well.

There were a few seagulls and crows that seemed to be hanging around with hungry intent, but we ate our sandwiches peacefully inside the car with the doors open and they basically didn't get a look-in. Since the nearby kiosk sold Guernsey ice cream, it seemed only fitting to take advantage and enjoy the favoured flavour of mint choc chip. The queue at the kiosk took ages to move along, but we were on holiday and it was worth the wait 😊



Beautiful lunchtime view at Vazon Bay

There was still time in the afternoon to visit somewhere else, so we consulted the much-used Insight Guide and picked the Talbot Valley, which was on the way back to St Peter Port anyway. It was meant to be a steep-sided valley where sandy-brown Guernsey cows grazed, where Guernsey's only working water mill could be found and then further along, a walk upward that would give a view over a peaceful and green part of undeveloped Guernsey.

Tosh! Firstly we had great trouble finding where to park, we saw no water mill working or otherwise and the walk was a nonentity of a short climb up, along and down an unremarkable wooded area, with no views or cows. Either we were in the wrong place, or the Insight Guide was exaggerating! To be fair, we could hear cows making a racket somewhere in the distance, but we never saw them.

It was about 14:20 and we were hot, tired and disgruntled, so decided to call in at Waitrose for a few items and then retreat to the cool and the relaxation of the apartment – and sink a mug of tea, obviously. We both felt incredibly tired, whether because of Alan being post-viral or me being onset-viral, who can say? However, pizza, tiramisu, puzzle-booking and television definitely helped.

Thought for the day: *Why do viruses exist?*

Friday 20th June

I spent rather a viral night, but it passed as viral nights do. It was yet another sunny morning, but we were uncertain where to go and eventually set off at 09:50 on foot for the waterfront. Our feet took us towards Costa Coffee, where it wasn't at all crowded and where we enjoyed a pleasant coffee time.

After that with map in hand (Alan's hand), he led us along some streets in an upward direction. At one point we climbed 57 steps, which I know because I counted them, to find where Victor Hugo had lived. It was a reasonably decent area that had begun to be developed in the 1780s and the street itself was appropriately named Hauteville, meaning high town. Victor Hugo's old abode was at number 38, imaginatively named Hauteville House.

We could have made an appointment for a guided tour around the eccentrically decorated home, described in the Insight Guide as "...a physical manifestation of his quirky ideas about monarchy, history and patriarchy." As I understand it, Victor Hugo had been exiled from France as a dangerous radical after opposing a coup d'état staged by Napoleon in 1851 and chose to live in Jersey. While there, he angered the people by criticising Queen Victoria's state visit to Paris in 1855 and was banished from there too, next choosing Guernsey.

I do love a rebel for a good cause and although the tour would no doubt have been extremely interesting, I didn't especially feel like being confined indoors while feeling 'under the weather'. In fact, the weather was another reason why the better option seemed to stay outdoors and feel the flower power.

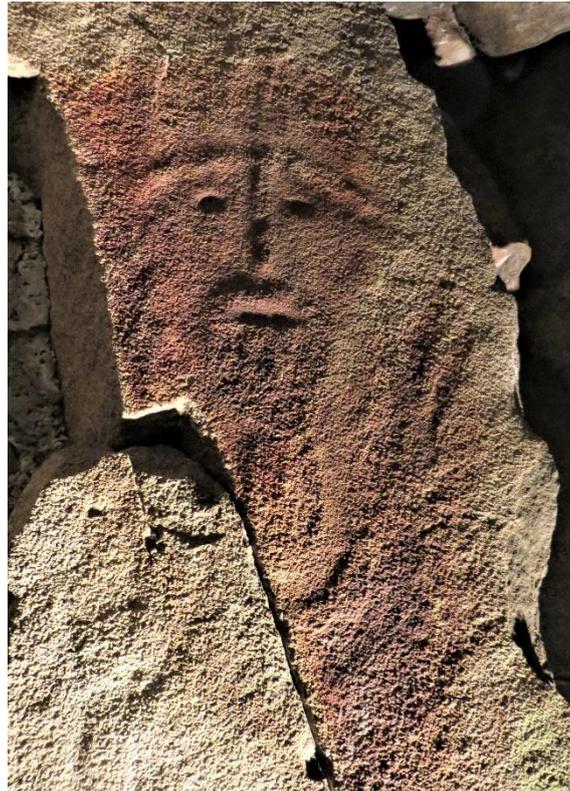
The sun was fairly hot, but we were content to wander around the garden of this famous French rebel, lingering with relief whenever we could in the shaded areas. The garden had been carefully and successfully restored to its original design, but although there were some very decent mature plants and flowering shrubs, it didn't take us much longer than 20 minutes to see it all. Several other people were strolling around and it was undeniably a good way of passing some time, especially for garden lovers.



Rebellious red delight in the sun

We then made our way back to Grange Lodge along the hot streets and I can't deny I was tiring rapidly towards the end. It only took us about 15-20 minutes, though, with a cold refreshing drink as soon as we arrived. A simple lunch of cheese sandwiches and crisps hit the spot and helped energy levels.

By 13:00, we were ready to leave in the car for a second trip to Le Déhus passage grave and a further attempt to find the carving of Le Gardien du Tombeau. I had come across a much better picture of the carving in a book and felt reasonably confident that this time, especially if unrushed, we could discern him in his age-old hideout. We therefore drove to St Sampson and eventually found a parking place next to the coast for a short walk inland to the tomb.



Spotted!

This time we were alone for the whole visit and soon spotted the elusive defender loftily looking down from the underside of a capstone. The face was clearly visible and also the beard, with what looked like some sort of headgear, but lower down was slightly harder to distinguish (and because of the limited positioning, my camera couldn't take the whole of him).

No matter, it was great to finally meet the old guy as we took our time in the ancient coolness, feeling so pleased that this time we'd succeeded. We retraced our steps happily along the rural Guernsey lanes, passing a group of four people who were obviously on their way to the tomb. It had been a timely visit!

Once we were back at the coast, we decided to investigate Vale Castle on a nearby hilltop, dating originally from the Iron Age. It looked quite handsome in its elevated position, where there would no doubt be a brilliant view of the other Channel Islands. Alan drove on to a closer car park and found a space that looked out over the sea by one of the handy coastal kiosks.

We set off along a short footpath that was rather overgrown, where to our surprise we saw at the other end a small tree that had been recently cut down and left right across the exit/entrance to cause an obvious obstacle. There were several notices of 'Private' and 'Keep Out' along the fence of an adjacent field, so I suspect the owner of the field objected to people using the public footpath.

The overgrown grasses, foliage and brambly vegetation were causing an allergic rash on Alan's exposed lower legs and when we emerged by climbing over the small tree and walking on to one of the castle's entrances, we found it was closed because of a private function. Thwarted and twice thwarted...

We had no other choice than to walk back along the overgrown 'public footpath' to the car park, before deciding to take another coastal path that seemed to lead only into one of St Sampson's industrial areas. Being positive, however, at least there was a pretty good sea view of Herm, Jethou and Sark, plus some ferns and colourful flowers along the edges of the path.

We then enjoyed a tranquil 15 minutes sitting on a wooden bench looking out to sea, until the Condor high-speed catamaran caused excitement by heralding its approach with its unmistakable noise and appearing with its massive wake. It passed in front of Herm opposite us, perfectly placed for quick snap photos:



El Condor pasa...

Unfortunately I was beginning to feel the viralness knocking at the door again, so we moseyed on back to Grange Lodge at not long after 15:00 for that all important mug of afternoon tea. We then had to pack, but took it slowly and just had a Waitrose bake-in-the-oven fish dish followed by ice cream at about 18:00. This then was it – our final evening and night after two whole weeks.

Thought for the day: *Are residents of Sark prone to sarcasm, or sometimes just plain sarky?*

Saturday 21st June

Our son's 38th birthday – happy birthday, Dan! It felt rather weird that it was his birthday on our travelling home day, but it wasn't the first time. It had been a weird night for me too, mainly because of the virus and another unsuccessful attempt at sleeping on the settee. I slept fitfully and woke feeling pretty grim (that is, less of the pretty and much more of the grim).

There was nothing else to do but carry on with going-home day, though, which is precisely what we did. We had to leave the apartment by 09:30 and just made it in time on yet another sunny morning, which left us with ten whole hours to pass before we could board the ferry home. The first place we went to was Waitrose to buy sandwiches for later in the day, plus paracetamol for me, as I knew I wouldn't survive the day without more drugs.

At that point I wasn't sure I could face doing anything other than driving to a secluded place and reclining in as prostrate a position as possible in the car. Gradually, though, the drugs must have kicked in, as when Alan drove to Guernsey Candles, I felt able to go in with him. I was glad I did, as apart from making and selling their own candles, there was a brilliant gift shop that sold so much more. I was even able to forget myself for a while, which was really good.

The next place we drove to was Le Friquet Garden Centre – two weeks without visiting a garden centre and we were suffering withdrawal symptoms. Maybe not, but it was an excellent place, spacious and with half as many people as our local garden centres. We stayed for two hours, but this was because we had lunch there. That is, I forced a plain scone down, but it was a struggle and I took ages. Alan had a very tasty baked potato with cheese and vegetables, while we sat in a lovely secluded and comfortable area, so thumbs up for Le Friquet!

We still wanted to find a couple of souvenirs to take home for people if we could, so Alan thought the shops at St Sampson might yield success. It was about a 15-minute drive away and he quite easily found a parking space, but despite walking around the main shopping area, we couldn't find anything appropriate. We therefore gave up and went to the car park where we'd pleasantly whiled away some time the day before, at Banque Imbert Bay.



Banque Imbert Bay

We sat there peacefully co-puzzling over a giant crossword while looking out occasionally at the seaside view, when an old lady came along with a carrier bag full of bread and emptied it on the grass nearby us. Immediately a large colony of raucously screeching seagulls beating their huge flapping wings descended like a rampant swarm of bread-seeking missiles and caused my heart to flap around almost as much as the voracious birds themselves.

OK, so I have chronic ornithophobia and don't deal with birds and even feathers very well at all, but there were young children there and a kiosk selling food not far away. She went to fetch another bagful of bread to empty and then a third bag, so that for a while I felt I was in an Alfred Hitchcock induced nightmare.

We'd had our car doors open and shut them quickly, but possibly not before she'd overheard Alan's somewhat less than complimentary comments – either that or our aghast expressions were enough to have given her the impression we weren't liking what we were seeing. Whatever the case, when she was finished, she came across to our car and spoke to Alan through the car window (cue for me to suddenly become mega-engrossed in my puzzle book).

She said how Guernsey people have been told to feed the seagulls, as they're starving and eating baby birds as well as the fish from the fisherman's nets. It sounded suspiciously mixed-up to me and no doubt to Alan as well, as he attempted to explain that where we lived, people were asked *not* to feed seagulls. This low-key altercation went back and forth a few times before she walked away and left us feeling both taken aback and bemused.

We decided it was time to drive back into St Peter Port! Alan parked the car at the harbour again and there it stayed for the remainder of our time on Guernsey, while we walked slowly into the centre and paid a last visit to Tourist Information, where we managed to buy the final souvenirs.

We still had a few hours to go, so went to Costa Coffee to while away some time over an iced drink, before strolling back to the car and collaborating over some puzzles before eating our Waitrose sandwiches that hadn't retained their freshness very well in the heat of the day.

We sat there watching the world go by, until not long before 19:00 a few cars started to turn up and drive through to the check-in point for our ferry. At last! Of course, there was more waiting around after we'd joined them in the queue, mainly waiting for the actual high-speed catamaran with its important sounding engine noise and its impressive looking wake to arrive from Jersey.

It arrived just after 20:00 and this time when we drove on board, conditions were much less cramped. By the time we left, there were still only about half the passengers there'd been on our way to Guernsey. We appeared to have been allocated the same two seats as before, but this time there was nobody opposite us and I finally felt I could relax, after topping up with paracetamol for the still stupidly troublesome throat. We ventured outside as the ferry left and took a few photos of the setting sun, but scuttled back inside again rather quickly, as it was very windy and uncomfortably chilly.

The sunset turned out to be quite a spectacular one from what I could see from inside, with various ever-changing shades of pink and lilac, until gradually there was darkness outside. It seemed not too long then before we were disembarking and driving off into the Weymouth night, for a tiring but quiet drive out of Dorset, through the whole of Devon and just inside Cornwall. Home!

It had been a most insightful visit to Guernsey, leaving a strong impression of a scenic island that endured a great deal during the Occupation. Victor Hugo's affectionate description of Guernsey people seems very apt: "Le noble petit peuple de la mer" (the noble little nation of the sea). Also, looking past the remains of the concrete desecration and taking in the heart-rending stories and artefacts from the museums (particularly the stark underground hospital), the island's geology, archaeology, history, entomology and flora are pretty amazing.

Although we hardly ate out for various reasons, Guernsey ice cream in my estimation is second only to Italy's finest. In fact, the island has much to offer for all tastes and all ages, from uncrowded sandy beaches and coastal walks to thriving shops and eating places, while offering plenty of activities, particularly involving the sea. If you decide to make a visit, though, you might need to prepare yourself for some extreme driving of the impossibly narrow road kind...



Au revoir Guernsey!

Thought for the day: *Why do holidays have to end?!*