

Jersey during the German Occupation 1940-1945

A boy's story of his time on Jersey
during those five years.



Irene Schaffer

Also by the author

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Cover: The Royal and Ancient Castle of Mount Orguil. (Google images)

Dedicated to Dennis's grandmother and his grandfather, who looked after him on Jersey during the Occupation.

Foreword

I met Dennis when I moved to Edmonton Gardens in Cairns in 2019. I found him a very quiet man who did not waste words and after many silent meals we finally started up a conversation. I found him very interesting to talk to and soon we were discussing many different subjects. As he got used to me I asked him what part of England he came from. Very indigantly he replied that he was born in Jersey, not England. He then started to talk about his early life there during the German occupation from 1940 to 1945.

I was interested in Jersey as I had been in touch with Diane Moore during the time I was writing about Lt. James Grant (of the Lady Nelson) and she had sent me information where James's wife and granddaughter were buried in Britianany.¹ Diane also sent me one of her books she had written about Jersey². This proved to be very interesting as when I showed Dennis he pointed out that he had gone to De La Salle College (The Beeches) and there was a photo of it in Diane's book on page 136. Dennis's memory of his time on Jersey is very vivid. He can recall the names of places and the dates extremely well. He was only 11 years old when the war started and he is now 92 years old and from what he has told me I think he deserves to have his story recorded.

¹ Diane, Moore. Doe Gratias.

² Diane, Moore. Doe Gratias - A History of the French Catholic Church in Jersey: 1790-2007.

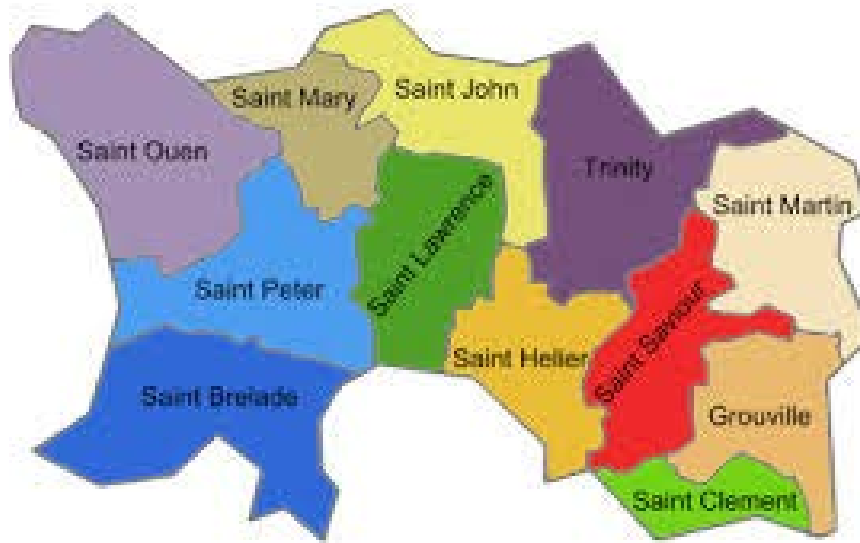
A Brief History of Jersey

Jersey is the largest of the captivating group of islands which is called the Channel Islands. The name is undoubtedly of Norman origin and most probably means “Island of Grass” when we consider the famous strain of Jersey cattle which is reared there. The island has been continuously inhabited for nearly 4000 years. Even before the earliest civilised races built their stone tombs, a few of which can still be seen, there were cavemen on the island. Celts, Gauls and Romans have left traces of their presence there, and in Christian times Britons from Cornwall settled on the island when they fled from the mainland to escape the Anglo-Saxon invasion. It was, however, the Normans who became the most firmly established race in Jersey, and their stalwart qualities materially strengthened the prosperity of the island. Indeed, until quite recent times Norman French was still the language of the ordinary people, and even today its influence has not entirely disappeared, although one is more likely to hear “Franglais”, an amusing mixture of English and the local French dialect.

The system of government is quite unlike Britain. Basically, the system is founded on the old Frankish institution of the parish representatives, called Constables, who, with the Senators Deputies and the Bailiff make up the “States” or Parliament. The Sovereign is represented by a Lieutenant-Governor, who may speak in the States, but who has no vote.

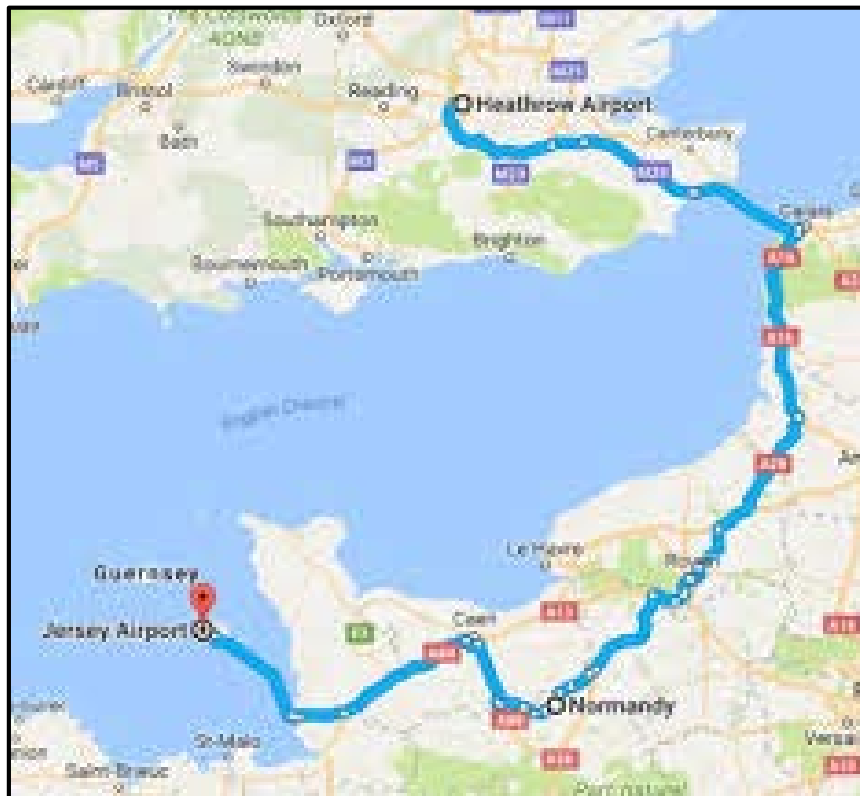


South West Jersey



Parishes of Jersey

St. Helier, Grouville, St. Brelade, St. Clement, St. John, St. Larence, St. Martin, St. Mary,
St. Ouen, St. Peter, St. Saviour, Trinity.



Jersey and Guernsey Channel Islands

Geographically Jersey is linked to her neighbour France, and at several distant periods of history has actually formed part of the mainland of that country. The island is only 45 square miles in area and its greatest length is a bare 11 miles, but it is comparatively densely populated. Farming has always been the principal occupation of Jersey folk. Every available patch of grass feeds the familiar Jersey cow. Unsurpassed as a milk-and cream producer, but it is the arable crop which is the mainstay of Jersey's agriculture. Potatoes are by far the most important crop, although tomatoes grown largely in the open form a considerable export to British markets.³

Immigration

Jersey men were known as seafarers and as early as the 16th century the Jersey fleet was involved in the Newfoundland cod fishing trade, and there were permanent bases in the area in the 1670s, particularly in Conception Bay, Trinity Bay, and Jersey Bay. The business developed strongly in the late 18th century there was a significant Jersey presence, especially in the Gaspé Peninsula. At its peak in the 1830s and 40s, it is estimated that as many as 2,500 Jersey men were working on a fleet of over 100 vessels.

Jersey people also took advantage of trade opportunities in America with Jersey communities in Boston and Salem as early as the 17th century. The California Gold Rush also attracted people from the island.

A small number of Jersey convicts were transported to Australia, however, the vast majority of those who emigrated were looking for opportunities to settle and own their own land as a result of an economic downturn in the islands in the 1870s and 1880s. This was also the case with New Zealand and during the 1870s and 1880s the islanders were given free passage to New Zealand and it is estimated that around 400 people left Jersey to make the long trip across the world.⁴

³ A.C. Cotman. Jersey in Colour.

⁴ Ancestry – Jersey, Channel Island: A brief history of immigration.

Battle of Jersey

The Battle of Jersey (6 January 1781) was an attempt by the French to invade Jersey and remove the threat the island posed to French and American shipping in the Anglo-French War. Jersey provided a base for British privateers, and France, engaged in the war as an ally of the United States, sent an expedition to gain control of the island.

The French expedition ultimately failed, Its commander, Baron Philippe de Rullecourt, died of wounds sustained in the fighting. The battle is also remembered for the death of the British officer Major Pierson.⁵

Many battles were fought over Jersey, the Battle of Jersey was only one of them.

One of Dennis's favourite paintings.



The death of Major Pierson. by John Singleton Copley

⁵ WikipediA. Battle of Jersey.

Early Jersey



The German's Occupation of Jersey

'The German occupation of the Channel Islands lasted for most of the Second World War, from 30 June 1940 until their liberation on 9 May 1945. The Bailiwick of Jersey and Bailiwick of Guernsey are two British Crown dependencies in the British Channel, near the coast of Normandy. The Channel Islands were the only part of British Isles to be occupied by the Wehrmacht (German Armed forces) during the war.

Anticipating a swift victory over Britain, the occupiers experimented by using a very gentle approach that set the theme for the next five years. The island authorities adopted a similar attitude, giving rise to accusations of collaboration. However, as time progressed the situation grew gradually worse, ending in near starvation for both occupied and occupiers during the winter of 1944-45.'⁶

'The outbreak of World War 11 on September 1st 1939 affected all Islanders. Rumours of war in the summer had already lead to hotels being vacated and crops abandoned; even the discovery of the Colorado Beetle faded into insignificance along with the reality of imminent war. Gas masks were distributed to Islanders and blackouts were the order of the day. In June 1940 with the demilitarisation of Jersey, 23,000 people left in two days, as a consequence, many of the Island's schools found themselves very low in numbers. A large number of Jersey's buildings were taken over by the German Military, food became scarce, Islander's were deported and interned, hardship was affecting everyone and the inhabitants of the Island found themselves in a position whereby solidarity became the *leitmotiv* for the duration of the Occupation irrespective of religious denomination. In many respects Catholics and Protestants came closer to each other. Hitler ordered the conversion of Jersey into an impregnable fortress. Thousands of slave workers from countries like Russia, Spain, France, Poland and Algeria built hundreds of bunkers, anti-tank walls, railway systems, as well as many tunnel complexes. In late 1943 the Tunnels Complex Ho8 (now known as the Jersey War Tunnels) in St. Lawrence was converted from an artillery workshop and barracks to an emergency casualty clearing station able to cope with up to 500 patients.

⁶ WikiedIA - German occupation of the Channel Islands.

All the fortifications built around the island were part of Hitler's "Atlantic Wall".

Under the occupying forces, one of the greatest hardships was the lack of news from the mainland after the Germans had outlawed the use of crystal radio sets. A number of individuals risked imprisonment by making their own sets and spreading frontline news, some were caught and deported to Germany.

Horse-drawn traffic became an increasingly regular sight as petrol shortages became severe, and many vehicles were converted to gas.

The price of bicycles rose, and their use was restricted to those connected to essential services. The Germans ordered all traffic to drive on the wrong side of the road. The island was moved to Central European time. In the months following D-Day, as the Allies regained control of France, the source of supplies fueling the islands was no longer available. Shopping hours were reduced as goods became scarce. Substitutes were used to replace everyday food, with seawater replacing salt, for instance, and a mixture of parsnip and sugar beet replaces tea. During the autumn of 1944, fuel supplies were almost gone, leaving no gas, occasional electricity, and very little road fuel. Medical supplies were almost non-existent. A Red Cross relief ship s. s. Vega arrived in Jersey on 30 December 1944 with food parcels, and cases of salt, soap and medical supplies. The visits of the Red Cross ship proved a lifeline to the starving islanders'.⁷

⁷ Moore. Diane, Deo Gratias p167



Jersey during the occupation 1940-1945





German soldiers during the occupation 1940-1945



British soldiers arrive on Jersey 1945

Jersey Boy



St. Saviours Church Jersey

Dennis was born on Jersey, an island in the English Channel on 19 August 1928. Father - Gilbert George Halls, mother Lillian Hatch. Dennis was the only child. His grandmother and grandfather were buried there after the war.

Dennis's father, Gilbert, was only 16 years when he enlisted in the First World War. He was a strapper and was buried alive by the German soldiers during one of the battles, luckily he was rescued when the allies arrived. After spending some time in hospital in England he returned to the fighting in France and was later gassed and spent more time in hospital. On being discharged from hospital Gilbert was informed that he could either be sent back to France or go to Ireland. He chose Ireland and served as a dispatch driver there until he was discharged.

On returning to his home in England Gilbert worked for Cole Exchange as an electrician. He was sent to Jersey by his firm and worked there.

Lillian visited Jersey with her sister on a holiday trip and met Gilbert there. Gilbert and Lillian married in 1923, and later they decided to move to Jersey,

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taking Gilbert's mother and father with them, where they rented a cottage 29 Trees Lindon in the Parish of Saint Saviour, on the south-west side of the island. Dennis's grandfather George Halls owned a two-cylinder taxi in England and he shipped it over to Jersey when he moved there with Gilbert about 1924-5. His grandmother opened a boarding house and family lived there until just before the occupation.



The rugged shore of Jersey

In 1938 Gilbert, Lillian and Dennis moved back to England, leaving Gilbert's parents and his brother and sister-in-law behind on Jersey. Dennis was 10 years old. As the war came closer and children were being sent to safer places away from the London area, it was decided to send Dennis back to Jersey to his grandparents by plane, where his parents thought he would be safer. Little did they realize that the war was to come to Jersey before it came to England and that they would not see Dennis for over five years. Dennis was aged eleven at the time.

His mother was to encounter the Blitz in many places during the war. With her husband away at the war in France and her son held on Jersey it must have been very hard on her.

There was only one attempt to use the Channel Islands in defence of the war and it was in June 1940 when as part of the British war effort in the Battle of France, a long-range RAF aerial sortie was carried out by 36 Whitley bombers against the Italian cities of Turin and Genoa departed from small airfields in Jersey and Guernsey, as part of Operation Haddock. Weather conditions resulted in only 10 Whitleys reaching their intended target. Two were lost in the action.⁸

Dennis's first memory of the Occupation was seeing planes flying overhead all that first day. At first, it was not known whose planes they were, but it soon became obvious that they were Germans and not British. Potato vans were lined up under the trees so as to be out of sight. It had been known for some time that the Germans had swept all over France. With the defeat of France in June 1940 the British government decided that the Channel Islands were of no strategic importance and would not be defended, but they did not give Germany this information. Despite the reluctance of Prime Minister Wilson Churchill the British government gave up the oldest possession of the Crown "without firing a single shot". The Channel Islands served no purpose to the Germans other than the propaganda value of having occupied British territory. The "Channel Islands had been demilitarised and declared an Open Town".⁹

What wasn't known by those on Jersey was if the war would come to them. As the islanders were sitting down to tea two Luftwaffe planes flew over and dropped the first bombs, some on the Fort and some on the Harbour. The woodpiles were also destroyed. Several people were killed and injured on the Piers. The raid was over in less than a half an hour.

The next night more planes came over but this time to drop leaflets demanding surrender or else!! The next morning there were five more warnings but no raids. The Germans expecting a swift victory over Britain and had decided on a very gentle approach that set the theme for the next five years.

⁸ Wikipedia German occupation of the Channel Islands.

⁹ Wikipedia German occupation of the Channel Islands.

White flags were to be hung from buildings and windows, but because of a shortage of white material, all sorts of clothing were hung out.

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Because the island had been demilitarized there was no fighting or resistance. It was even a bit of a laugh at first and the kids of St. James School linked themselves across St. Saviour Road and sang – “Hitler bought a shirt – Musso wore it, Churchill tore it – whistle while you work!”. Luckily there were no English speaking Germans amongst the marching soldiers. Some of the boys even goose-stepped along with the soldiers as they marched through the town.

The first German troops arrived on the island in early July 1940 and at first, the people were very frightened especially the women. Even though Dennis was only eleven years old and would not have understood why this was, but in telling me his story he remarked that his grandmother was frightened of being raped. It must have been very frightening for her, she was in her mid-seventies and had a young boy in her care. She remained very calm and her health remained good even though medicine was very hard to come by.

Dennis remembered his grandmother kept sending him and his grandfather out to the bakers for bread on that first day. From her experiences in the First World War, she knew the bread would be scarce and would go off after a few days so she sliced the loaves and toasted it, that way it kept much longer.

As food became scarce Dennis's grandmother found she had to hide the rations. She would place it in a big bowl and take it upstairs and hide it between the bedrooms. One night as the German planes flew over, there was a big crash, the ceiling collapsed and covered the rations with dust. Dennis said it took ages to cleanup. This had to be done as quietly as possible as the German's were always on the lookout for any unusual noise, and would have accused them of hiding things that they suspected may have been bought on the Black Market.

At first, they were allowed to listen to the radio but soon this was forbidden. Cars were taken over and some were taken off the streets. Curfews were imposed. German time was introduced and Pounds were replaced by Marks. All this of course, would have not been of much interest to Dennis, His main interest was the change of school. He had been going to the public school, but

now they were charging pupils to attend, his grandmother decided to send him to a Catholic school called De La Salle College where it was free.

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De La Salle College, where Dennis went to school.

De La Salle College school song.

In Jersey fair on Wellington Heights

I know a school without a par

Stately trees and flowers it stands

DeLalle its badge, its star

So sing boys sing your hearts aglow

Sing your alma mater glory

DeLelle your alma mater glory

The Germans immediately began to erect fortifications throughout the island, bringing in prisoners from many countries, Russians and Jews amongst them, as well as some women and children. They were escorted by Germans in khaki uniforms with black swastikas on their shirts. They had cruel-looking whips which they used freely. These poor souls were treated as slaves and were in very poor condition after being marched across Europe. Dennis remembers seeing them and wondering who they were and why they were being treated so badly.

I asked Dennis what he thought of the German soldiers, he said he mainly kept out of their way and they did not bother him. Except for two occasions, once when he had to deliver a message to their headquarters. On arrival, he was stopped by a soldier who lifted him bodily off his bike under his arms and carried him into the building. Dennis said he made a hurried escape as soon as he could. The second when he was taking some potatoes and nearly got caught. I think his grandmother kept a strict eye on him, she must have felt it a great responsibility under such terrible times.

During the next year many young men were rounded up and sent places occupied by the Germans. Dennis was too young, also he had been born on Jersey and because of this was not one of many to be sent away. Mrs Alice Bonney, a nurse who had offered her services when the occupation began, had two sons and a daughter, all born in England. I think Nurse Bonney was born on Jersey and possibly her husband in England (where he was at that the beginning of the war). All those who had been born on Jersey were exempt from deportation. In her secret diary Nurse Bonney tells of the her's and her family life on Jersey from the 28 June 1940 until the 12 May 1945.

Both the Bonney boys had trades and were aged about 16 and 17 years (their sister was 14). Their mother had worried about the boys as they being boys took risks and did not obey the cerfew times and often clashed with the German soldiers.

Nurse Bonney fills in a few gaps that Dennis, because of his age did not encounter the things that her son's did. Her stories deal mainly with her elderly patients, something Dennis would not have been aware of.

The elderly suffered greatly, short of food, medicine, coal for their fires etc. etc. and she was to watch many of them die one by one as they gradually ran out of Morphine and Insulin.

September 1942 saw a notice come for the two Bonney boys to be sent to Germany, 16 and 17 year old, and their only crimes were that they were born in London. No word had been heard of them and Christmas came and went. Both the boys were sent to the Laufen camp in Bavaria. Both survived and returned to Jersey and their family.

Leather on the island during the occupation was nearly impossible to obtain. The Summerland Factory employed 250 people to make clothes and shoes. The shoes were known as Summerland Clods, were made from shaped wooden soles, with knitted fabric uppers nailed on. Although they were better than nothing, for lively children they were not ideal. The soles were inflexible causing pain and injury to feet, lightweight material made them unsuitable for winter.

One mother told a story about her small son playing in the front yard barefoot because he had no shoes when a German soldier went past and asked the mother why the child wasn't wearing shoes. She told him he had grown out of the only ones he had and she could not get another pair. The soldier asked her if she had anything suitable to make another pair. She gave him an old leather handbag and he took it away with him and brought back a pair of shoes.



Summerland Clogs

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Dennis said he had a pair of boots with hobnail soles, they were a bit big for him but he soon grew into them. Most of the soldiers were family men and often stopped the islanders to show them photos of their families.

Food was short but it seems that Dennis's grandmother, Annie Halls, was able to keep food on the table, maybe it was because she had run a boarding house and knew the few suppliers. Dennis said they lived on potatoes, turnips and carrots and to this day he still does not eat mashed potatoes or turnips. Christmas 1942 she managed to get two chickens which she shared with other members of her family and some poor old folk.

She loved her tea, and as long as it lasted she was content. Coffee was substituted with barley and acorns. By the end of 1943 even her tea had run out, as well as her sea salt.

Other substitutes were used as the real things gave out: Beet sugar, potato flour, seaweed jelly, beetroot tea. When things got better and Red Cross ship s.s. Vega arrived in 1945, they were given a parcel each week. Dennis remembers this very well, for the first time in five years they had meat, biscuits, dried milk, tea and chocolate, rasins, coffee and spam. One of Nurse Bonney's patients died before she could open her parcel.



German soldiers



Red Cross Postal Scheme

The one thing that Dennis was thankful for was the German's allowed letters to be sent from Jersey to England and Dennis was able to send letters throughout the occupation to his mother in England.


For all the sad times there was still days where they could have a good laugh.

Nurse Bonney was attending a patient in Saviour's Road. A German was painting out the word – "Menstone". Two kids about nine years old was watching him. One said to the other: What is he doing?", "I don't know". Then he wrote the word "Ausfart", meaning "out". Then the kid says: "I know – I fart, you fart, we all fart!". The Jerry pats him on the head and says: "Ja, Ja"! He wondered what they were laughing at.

After the war ended Dennis went back to his parents in England and later joined the Police Force and was sent Palestine where he stayed for two years. Back in England he soon found work and later married Val and they had three children before leaving for Australia, where the family settled in Adelaide.


IDENTITY CARD No. 40742

Surname: **HALLS**
 Christian Name: **Annie**
 Maiden Name: **Fuller**
 Place of Birth: **St. Helier, Jersey**
 Date of Birth: **14. 8. 1861**
 Residential Address: **100, St. Helier, Jersey, Reg. Road.**
St. Helier
 State: **Jersey**
 Occupation: **Retired**




IDENTITY CARD No. 40743

Surname: **HALLS**
 Christian Name: **KATHERINE**
 Maiden Name: **Fuller**
 Place of Birth: **St. Helier, Jersey**
 Date of Birth: **28. 1. 1861**
 Residential Address: **100, St. Helier, Jersey, Reg. Road.**
St. Helier
 State: **Jersey**
 Occupation: **Retired**



IDENTITY CARD No. 40744

Surname: **HALLS**
 Christian Name: **GEORGE**
 Maiden Name: **Fuller**
 Place of Birth: **St. Helier, Jersey**
 Date of Birth: **28. 1. 1861**
 Residential Address: **100, St. Helier, Jersey, Reg. Road.**
St. Helier
 State: **Jersey**
 Occupation: **Retired**



Registration Cards kept by the German's during the occupation 1940-1945

Dennis Gilbert Halls; Annie Halls; George Halls. (Dennis's grandparents)

It is not known by the present family how far back the Halls family goes on Jersey or when they arrived. I have found the following names that were there from 1865. (Registration Cards 1941-1942)

George Halls	born 1871	4 Belgrave Terrace Dicq Road St. Saviour		
Annie Halls	born 1871
Winnifred Halls	born 1899
Florence A Halls	born 1900
Kathleen B Halls	born 1905
Marjorie M Halls	born 1911

Edith Annie Halls	born 1865.	22 Dumaresq Street St. Helier		
Katherine M Halls	born 1881	
Elsie Frances Halls	born 1885	



Island off Jersey



Jersey

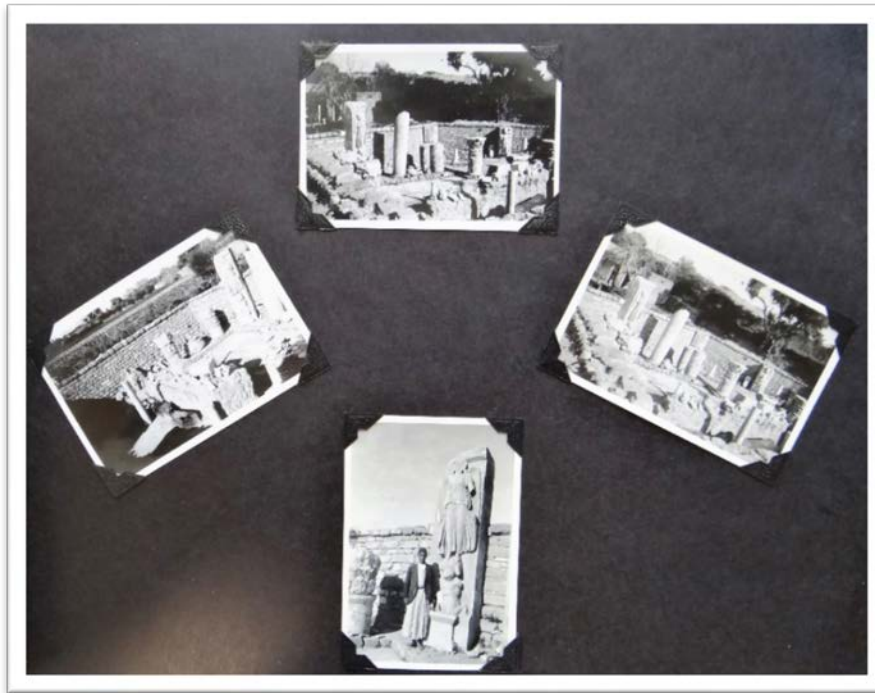
Dennis's time in the Palestine Police Force after the war.

When the war ended and Denis returned to his parents in England, he was expected to still do his National Service. He could have avoided this by staying on Jersey but he did not wish to do so. By then Denis was almost 18 years old and one day saw that there a notice in the newspaper stating that there were vacienties for men in the police force in Palestine. He applied and was accepted.

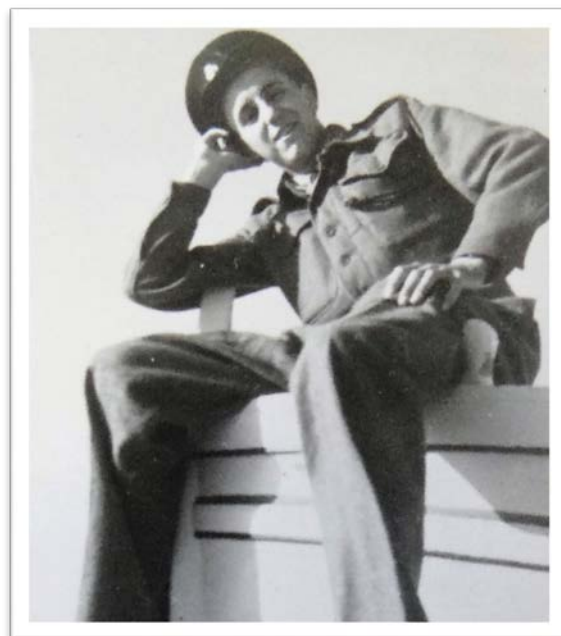
This was quite a change for him and by the photos in the album he kept he seemed to enjoy it. He stayed ther for two years.

Album kept by Dennis while in Palestine November 1946 – March 1948





Palestine



A more relaxed Dennis

PALESTINE POLICE

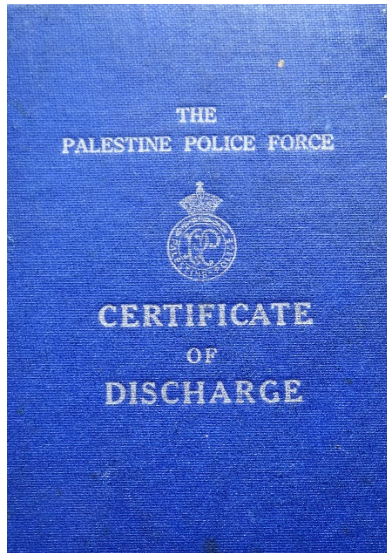


3L
2642



Dennis, back row 3rd from left.





P. 70. THE PALESTINE POLICE FORCE. Serial No. 444/48.

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE—BRITISH SECTION.

Number 2642 Rank Constable. Conduct Exemplary.

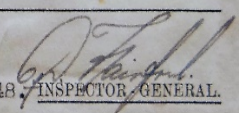
Name (in full) Dennis Gilbert

HALLS.

Branch of service Foot and Mounted. General efficiency Carried out his
duties in a satisfactory
manner.

Period of service 16.11.46 28 MAR 1948
(and leave)

Reason for discharge Disbandment of the Force. General remarks Of good character.
Honest and trustworthy.

Jerusalem. 

Date 17.3.48. INSPECTOR GENERAL.

GPP. 8089-1000-10-1-38 775/5.



Dennis's paintings



Painting by Dennis of where he lived on Jersey when he was 8 years old



Jersey painting by Dennis



Dennis's dog Bob, painting by Dennis



Broome painting by Dennis



South Australia painting by Dennis



Dennis at Edmonton Gardens Cairns 2019