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### **THE SACK OF THE MASONIC TEMPLE IN JERSEY BY THE NAZIS IN 1941**

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#### INTRODUCTION

Jersey is the largest of the Channel Islands. roughly rectangular In shape and covering an area of about 45 square miles - Or about one third of the size of the Isle of Wight. It now has a population of between 70,000 and 75.000. which is virtually saturation point If the various social and public services are not to collapse; hence immigration is strictly controlled. It is the most southerly of the British Isles. being situated about 160 kilometers to the south west of England. within sight of the French coast of Normandy, more specifically to the west of the Cherbourg peninsula and at the nearest point, only twelve miles from France.

In the year 933 A.D. Jersey was annexed. with the other neighbouring Channel Islands, to the Duchy of Normandy. In 1066 A.D. when William, Duke of Normandy. became King of England. the Island became British and has remained proudly so ever since. The Island government. Les Etats de Jersey or the States of Jersey. is responsible for, and dictates, all matters of purely domestic concern to the Island which has its own taxation laws and system. Nevertheless, it has retained certain Norman customs and laws, and much of the language

The States Assembly is composed of 52 members, divided into Senators, Deputies, and Constables, who are elected on an independent basis as there are no political parties in the Island. The Assembly is presided over by the Bailiff of Jersey, the highest civil and judicial office in the Island. As well as acting as the Speaker of the local legislative Assembly. the Bailiff is also head of the judiciary and his appointment, together with those of his Deputy and the local Attorney and Solicitor Generals. are Crown appointments..

The common language in Jersey is English and its currency is £1 Sterling. The laws of Jersey are founded on the ancient common law of Normandy. which today still remains the basis of the Island's legislation, one which differs in many aspects from English law. In the 18th century the population never exceeded 20.000 and there was much poverty. The chief industry was the knitting of woolen jerseys and stockings for export. Farming and fishing were subsidiary industries, eked out by a little smuggling and privateering.

The Channel Islands, and particularly Jersey, being so close to Continental Europe, have always been exposed to raids and invasion, therefore, from the early days there were usually small garrisons of the British Army stationed there. During the Napoleonic Wars the garrisons were increased and the fortifications strengthened. Over the years the economic situation improved steadily and the steamship

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in particular proved a great boon to the Islanders, making it possible to export agricultural products to the English Markets and by the time of the

outbreak World War 2 a thriving tourist industry was being developed. Whereas World War 1 treated the Islands comparatively lightly, disaster came with the Second World War. From 1940 to 1945 the Channel Islands were occupied by German Forces and many adults, not Jersey-born, were deported to internment camps in Europe. For those who remained it was a long period of hardship, isolation, and frustration.

At the end of the war however, there was a remarkable recovery. Tourism very quickly picked up again and eventually, because of its fiscal independence, the Channel Islands were able to pursue a very strong and profitable financial policy which has drawn great wealth to Jersey and thereby to Britain. Agriculture also remains a source of substantial revenue, hence Jersey is now economically sound and prosperous, and in such favourable conditions there is no reason why Freemasonry should not flourish, as indeed it does.

#### FREEMASONRY IN JERSEY

Speculative Freemasonry came to Jersey through the military garrisons stationed there who happened to be in possession of traveling Warrants enabling them to meet together. But they made no real impact as military lodges were not permitted to initiate local inhabitants and it was not until 1765 that the first lodge in Jersey was formed. By the time of the Union in 1813 there were traces of at least 16 military lodges in Jersey and three local lodges. Two of those, Yarborough Lodge (formerly Farmers Lodge) No.244 and the Duke of Normandy Lodge (formerly the Mechanics Lodge or Mechanical Lodge) No.245 still survive.

Before the building of the present Masonic Hall the local lodges met in a variety of hostelrys, inns, and church halls, whereas the military lodges met in the castles and barracks in which the garrisons were stationed. Following the appointment of James John Hammond as Provincial Grand Master in 1848, who was a Jerseyman, moves began to be made to carry out his expressed wish that "a central home" as he termed it, should be found, or built, preferably in St. Helier, the Island's capital, where all the local lodges could meet. on premises to be used for masonic purposes only. Eventually a suitable site was found and the foundation stone was laid with great public procession and much pomp and ceremony on 17 December 1862. A copy of that programme is still extant and is printed on silk.

Within fourteen months of the laying of the foundation stone, the building, comprising the Temple which is large enough to seat 150 in comfort, together with an equally large dining room, a Chapter room and several smaller rooms, plus a library and museum and committee rooms, was ready for consecration. Because the total membership of all the local masonic bodies in 1862 did not number more than 120, it showed great courage foresight on the part of the brethren concerned to build a masonic hall so far in excess of the needs of their day.

During the period from the consecration in 1864 to the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939, the interior of the Temple and the library and museum had been furnished to a very high standard. The museum housed a splendid collection of old Seals; the famous Vonberg collection of silver and gold masonic jewels, some made by Thomas Harper, a prominent jeweller and medallist, Deputy G.M. of the Antients; the Vatcher masonic collection; a large number of valuable masonic books, pre-Union Certificates, Warrants, and masonic memorabilia, portraits in oils, some by Bro. John St. Helier Lander, R.A. a member of Yarborough Lodge, and silken embroidered banners of the various lodges and Orders operating in the Province, decorated the walls. It was to this beautifully appointed building that, soon after the German Occupation of the Channel Islands in 1940, disaster

struck.

#### WRECKING AND LOOTING

The visit of the SA troops from France was preparatory to the arrival of a special squad of professional wreckers who had been sent from Berlin. At 8 a.m. on the morning of Monday the 27 January 1941, 30 Germans in military uniforms marched up Stopford Road, entered the building and

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commenced their operation of destruction. Because the building was heavily guarded by armed military police it was not possible to know exactly how they set about their fiendish business but the removal of the loot to the waiting lorries was discreetly observed and checked as far as possible by the then, in effect, redundant Librarian and Curator of the Jersey Masonic Library and Museum, W.Bro. George Stodart Knocker.

Later in the day the original 30 were joined by another detachment so that there were as many as 65 men on the premises; during the operation they were visited by many of the higher officers of the German Headquarters staff, but it was noted that the Commandant of the German Forces in Jersey, Colonel Schumacher, was not among them; his Adjutant, Major Dimmler apparently being in charge. Books and smaller articles were stowed into large packing cases and three 3-ton lorry loads were seen to be despatched, after which the furniture was loaded loosely on other lorries. They included the magnificent Master's Chair, two Warden's Chairs and other State Chairs, the Pedestals, the columns B and J, kneeling stools, Tracing Boards, Banners, carpets, curtains, etc. etc.

Even the 1914-18 War Memorial, commemorating brethren who had made the supreme sacrifice in that war, and which had been erected on the southwest wall of the Temple, was ripped out and has never been recovered. The senseless savagery of the wrecking squad is, however, better exemplified by their work of wanton destruction in the Library and Museum. There, not only were the whole of the contents of the dozens of show cases taken away, but most of the mahogany cases themselves were smashed, together with picture frames from which portraits in oils and other pictures had been ripped out and thrown on to a rubbish heap in the caretaker's garden. During the time the ransacking of the building was in progress a huge bonfire was kept alight in the garden and fed with papers and other items, but it is quite impossible to know what documents and records were destroyed in that way. The work of destruction took two days and the items loaded on the lorries taken to St. Helier harbour shipped to France on the S.S. Holland, and thence to Berlin. On the 12 March 1941, in Issue No.71 of the Volkischer Beobachter, published in Berlin, and on 15 March 1941 in Issue No.74 of the Brusseler Zeifung published in Brussels, articles were printed describing an anti-Masonic exhibition staged in Berlin under the direct orders of the notorious Jew-baiter, Reich leader Alfred Rosenberg using the items looted from Jersey and Guernsey earlier that year; he was eventually tried at Nuremberg and executed for his war crimes.

After the sack had been completed the Gestapo closed and locked all the doors in the building, with the exception of the caretaker's living quarters, and replaced their seals. For the next few months frequent visits were made to make certain that the seals remained intact as some of the rooms had not been stripped entirely of some of the domestic furniture, tables, chairs, and cutlery, glass, linen, etc. Eventually Lieutenant Foringher arrived with a party of uniformed men and took away many of those domestic items. The final clearance was made by Lieutenant Zastre with another party of military personnel.

Seemingly in an act of spite or vindictiveness, on Tuesday 9 December

1941, the seals were removed by an officer of the Gestapo Section FK515 from German HQ in France, one Underfichter Miehle, who ordered that the devastation be viewed by the Provincial Grand Master, the Attorney General, and the Crown Solicitor, W.Bro. Vivian J. Ballhache; the latter was a prominent freemason at that time and, after the War became Deputy Prov. G.M., and Grand Superintendent of Provincial Grand Chapter.

Soon afterwards the order came for the compulsory liquidation and proscription of all those clubs, associations, and societies which the Germans classified as being secret and subversive. They included with the Freemasons, the Salvation Army, the Girl Guides, the Boy Scouts, the Rotarians, and others, but the Ancient Order of Foresters were exempt presumably because the occupying authorities thought they were engaged in conservation and hence were rendering an essential service at a time when the Island was desperate for all forms of fuel.

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For the remainder of the Occupation the Germans used the Temple as a liquor store and at the liberation it was found to contain thousands of empty bottles and much broken glass, as well as the pieces of smashed furniture which the wreckers of 1941 had not even bothered to burn.

The looting of the Masonic Halls in Jersey and Guernsey was an integral part of the machinery of Nazi antiMasonic propaganda as the articles in the newspapers referred to show quite clearly. The articles were aimed to prove that freemasons in close alliance with International Jewry were fostering and deliberately expanding British world power; they contained such statements as:

"The mystic darkness of Freemasonry has ceased to be a darkness long since. These secrets have been brought to light; since 1933 the intrigues of the lodges have come to an end. It is all the more instructive when the world, and especially we Germans, are now being shown that the entire Freemasonry is an organization created and expanded deliberately by England, fostering the ultimate aim of promoting and strengthening British world power. The close alliance with international Jewry was the safest way to obtain this. The instructive show which has now been opened in Berlin, by order of Reich Leader Alfred Rosenberg, is based on the comprehensive Masonic material originating from the lodges of the British Island of Jersey...." And now we stand in the Holy of Holies, the great Temple of the Lodge of Jersey, created here in the original, showing the seat of the Master of the Lodge, his Deputy and of his Assistant. In front of the altar with the bible and master(s) hammer (gavel) and before it the ark of the covenant (kneeling stool) . .

#### LIBERATION

The long-awaited liberation of the Channel Islands took place on 9 May 1945 amid the greatest rejoicing the Islands have ever known. One of the officers of the relieving British Force brought a letter from the Most Worshipful the Grand Master, the Earl of Harewood, which was dated some days previously. Addressed to the Brethren of the Province of Jersey it welcomed their liberation. That prompt fraternal greeting must have given great pleasure and was to act as a stimulus to all those on whose shoulders would fall the massive burden of rehabilitation, refurbishment, and re-establishment Freemasonry in the province. The provincial Grand Master as well as his Deputy, both of whom had remained in the Island during the Occupation, and many senior freemasons with them, had died. The main burden of restoration and reorganization fell to five Grand Officers, all well past middle age and whose health had not exactly benefited from the rigours of the Occupation. However, in less than a month of the Liberation they were able to report to the Grand

Secretary at Freemasons' Hall in London and one paragraph in that report gives examples of their problems:

You will note from our brief report that our position is without precedent; we are without a provincial Grand Master or a Deputy Provincial Grand Master and without any lodge Warrants, these having been taken away by the Germans; also we have failed to pay any dues for five years.

They had some difficulty in gaining access to the Masonic Hall which, owing to the laws forced through the Jersey States by the Occupying power, was no longer masonic property. However, in due course the red tape was cut and on 19 July 1945 W.Bro. George Knocker who was in charge of the rehabilitation and restoration was able to report:

I gained access to the building and was able to take stock of the conditions; empty and broken picture frames littered every part of every room, broken glass, waste paper, splintered wood, torn and shredded regalia, broken and smashed wands, empty bottles, smashed and battered showcases, broken and damaged lockers and desks, etc. etc.

For record purposes it was decided to photograph the Temple in the state in which it was found, but flashlights were not then available so the photographs were not good quality, nevertheless they give some indication of the wanton damage and destruction. The United Grand Lodge of England made a handsome financial donation towards restoration, as indeed did many Provinces, lodges, and individual

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brethren. All materials were in such short supply, there was clothes rationing in the United Kingdom and that, of course, included Jersey. Most of what was needed was improvised and even that was not easy as the shortage of material either for furniture or regalia was worse in the Island than in England. Proper furniture took a long time to provide and makeshifts had to be found; regalia was more difficult as most the brethren had kept theirs in lockers in an anti-room and they were looted and destroyed by the wreckers in 1941. Nearly all the aprons had to be improvised by painting on any suitable material and they were used for several months. Specimens of Craft, Royal Arch, and Provincial aprons and collars were subsequently presented to the museum at Freemasons' Hall in London and are still on display.

In spite of all difficulties the first meeting of the Provincial Grand Lodge was held on 16 August 1945 just one month after the building had been returned to the masonic authorities in Jersey. The first item was to announce that the Minutes of the last Annual Communication, held on 12 October 1939, were missing, believed looted. The brethren then stood to honour those brethren who had passed away or given their lives during the war and it is of interest to note that the collection taken at the end of that meeting was for the Samaritan fund of the Royal Masonic hospital and not for the restoration of the Temple as one might well have expected. By September all the lodges had commenced their regular meetings by virtue of a Dispensation from the M.W. the Grand Master empowering them to work in the absence of their Warrants, all of which were missing and none have ever been recovered.

In April 1946, the Lieutenant Governor of Jersey received a letter from the office of the Military Government of Germany to the effect that 25 cases containing masonic property looted from Jersey and Guernsey had been found by the United States Army, in the Offenbach Archival Depot. Through the good offices of Grand Lodge and a W.Bro. Major Kitchingman of the Intelligence Corps

of the British Army the cases were eventually returned to Jersey, minus three which were stolen in transit. Those cases contained mainly documents and books which the Nazis had acquired from several sources, including 240 volumes from the Jersey masonic library, plus a large number of Minute books and records of Provincial Grand Lodge as well as other masonic Orders in the Islands. Unfortunately there was no china, glass, regalia, or jewels. In each case, including those containing much rubbish, was a printed card recording that the contents had been seized by Order of Reichleader Alfred Rosenberg. Efforts have continued to try to discover what happened to all the other material which was looted but without success and the hope that any of it will ever be recovered has faded.

By dint of sustained hard work and the tremendous support and loyalty of so many masonic friends, the Temple in Jersey has been restored to a style and beauty even greater than its splendour of 1939, and freemasonry continues to flourish. The Province now has 11 Craft lodges whereas pre-war the total was 9; R.A. Chapters have doubled from 3 to 6; two Mark lodges against the previous one; Rose Croix chapters have trebled from one to three and the same K.T. Preceptory remains in existence; as recently as 1985 a Royal Ark Mariner lodge, moored to the senior of the two Mark lodges, was consecrated.

Long may Freemasonry flourish in the Channel Islands is the earnest wish and aim of all members of the Craft wherever they may be, for their support has created this strengthened revival following those very dark days between 1939 and 1945.

The author wishes to place on record his appreciation of the material made available by his colleagues in the following; The Sack of the Temple by W.Bro. George Stodart Knocker, PDep.Gsupt.Wks, first published in The Masonic Record in 1947, and Freemasonry In Jersey by W.Bro. A.C.F. Jackson, PDep.GSwd.B, In AQC Vol.56 also The Masonic Square 1973 and 1974.

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