

Feature

Festive greetings at time of hope

CHANNEL Islands Christmas cards sent in 1945 tell the story of relieved Islanders keen to rebuild their lives after the Occupation, a collection held by historian Mark Lamerton reveals.

Mr Lamerton, author of an updated history of the Occupation published earlier this year to mark the 75th anniversary of Liberation Day, acquired the cards to further his passion for all aspects of the Occupation.

'With the book it covers the period of Liberation from 1943 to August 1945, but I've always collected anything to do with Liberation. I don't know why I've done it, really,' he said.

His collection shows that Islanders celebrated Christmas 1945 not just as the traditional time of thanksgiving and celebration, but also as a moment to relate the compliments of the season to their newly acquired freedom and the restoration of normal patterns of Island life.

A printed card from Philip Benest, of 18 Queen Street, bears the simple greeting 'Liberation Xmas 1945', but inside offers the message: 'On this our Liberation Xmas I send you my Good Wishes for Yuletide and Prosperity in the coming years.'

Mr Lamerton explained that it was sent by estate agent Mr Benest to his customers to recognise their support throughout the Occupation and in the first months of Liberation.

'I'm sure it was quite a lucrative business during the Occupation, with auctions, and post-Liberation as an estate

A local historian's collection of post-Occupation Christmas cards offers an insight into Channel Islanders' thoughts about their first yuletide as free citizens for five years. **Rod McLoughlin** reports

agent,' he said. Many of the Islanders evacuated before the Occupation joined Channel Islands societies which organised social events, published news and produced their own Christmas cards to keep in touch with relatives and friends dispersed to different parts of the UK. The Channel Islands Refugee Committee, based in London, was formed and received donations in cash from expatriate Islanders already living in the UK.

A Channel Islands Society card sent in December 1945 contains verse by F.J. Grant expressing the sentiments of Islanders deprived of contact with their native homes for almost five years. It reads:

*'How often we dreamed of our meeting
In the long dreary days that are past,
'When we sighed for a word or a greeting,
'Or a smile, like those we had last,
'Should your dream be one of contentment,
'And embraces all Islanders too,
'May your Christmas be full of enjoyment,
'And your New Year a dream that comes true.'*

That dream had been anticipated a year earlier, when the Occupation still had almost six months to run. A society card from 1944 wished recipients 'a happy and victorious New Year', praying to 'see dear faces in the old familiar places' in 1945.

By Christmas 1945 there was also room for humour, evident from a tongue-in-cheek card designed by Guernseyman Bert Hill, front page artist of Provincial Comics before it folded in the early 1930s. He managed to combine seasonal greetings with a jibe at the defeated occupiers. A couple, represented as Mr and Mrs Guernsey, watch while a British soldier unceremoniously dispatches German prisoners to the 'Jerry Rubbish Dump'.

'Thank you, Tommy. Now we shall have a happy Xmas,' the man says to his wife as his son patriotically waves a Union flag.

Mr Lamerton explained that Mr Hill was best known for his two iconic cartoons produced by the Guernsey Star & Gazette Co. Ltd in 1945 as postcards to commemorate the Liberation of Guernsey.

'However, in December 1945, and not so frequently seen, two more of his cartoons were produced to celebrate Christmas and, more importantly, the role Force 135 played so that Islanders could celebrate their first Christmas in five years free from any restrictions or curfews, and the return of peace and the evacuees,' he said.

Mr Hill's other design is equally vivid, showing Father Christmas delivering presents, including a ship carrying returning evacuees, many of whom were yet to return to the Islands they left so



Historian and collector Mark Lamerton
Picture: DAVID FERGUSON (29793783)

hurriedly before the Occupation.

Other cards testify to the continued presence of the British Army in the Channel Islands at the end of 1945.

Although the garrison troops of Force 135 started to leave the Channel Islands in late August, specialist services – such as Royal Engineers, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, and Civil Affairs – remained to help with a variety of tasks, including the removal and disposal of ordnance and heavy weapons, and repairing damage to properties and other facilities caused by the occupiers.

Mr Lamerton's collection includes cards from Guernsey and Alderney – from the Royal Army Service Corps and the Royal Army Ordnance Corps – and he is still looking for Jersey examples.

The example from Alderney, with a penguin teetering on a cliff edge, bears the legend 'don't fence me in', borrowed from the song of the time popularised in 1944 by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, with Vic Schoen and his orchestra.

Mr Lamerton's book *Liberated by Force 135* tells the story of Liberation and the events in the months immediately after, but the Christmas cards, like other memorabilia marking subsequent Liberation Days, provide a broader insight into how Islanders felt about the



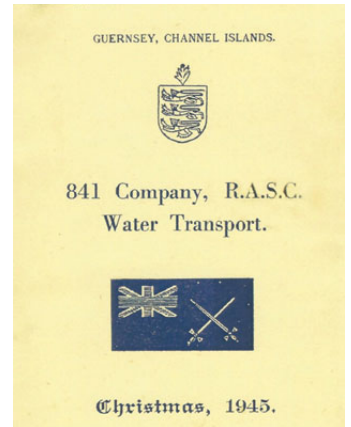
*On this our Liberation Xmas,
I send to you my Good Wishes
for Yuletide and Prosperity
in the coming years.*

PHILIP L. BENEST
18 Queen Street, Jersey





■ A British soldier tosses German occupiers into the 'Jerry Rubbish Dump' in this Guernsey card designed by artist Bert Hill



■ A company from the Royal Army Service Corps features on this card



■ The front of an Alderney card bearing the badge of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps

Occupation after it was over. 'The Christmas cards demonstrate the importance of people keeping in touch and 1945 was the first Christmas for some time that they had enjoyed their freedom. Perhaps they were still coming to terms with it and wondering what things lay in store for them with all the changes that were to follow,' Mr Lamerton said. His two-volume book covering preparations for the Liberation of the Channel Islands through to the post-Occupation celebrations and restoration of government is available in a commemorative slip case costing £48, or in two loose volumes at a cost of £39. It can be obtained by contacting the author on 07797 838041 or by emailing liberationlamerton@gmail.com. Further details are available online at force135.je.

■ Right: A card featuring a poem about Guernsey, describing it as the 'gem of the sea'

■ Below: A Christmas card showing a penguin standing on Alderney features the phrase 'don't fence me in', taken from a song of the time popularised by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters

