

Feature

Home at last: Final stage of the Frank Le Villio journey

Last week the remains of an Islander who died 72 years ago from a disease contracted while he was in a German concentration camp were at last laid to rest in Jersey. The University of Cambridge's **Dr Gilly Carr** recalls the end of Frank Le Villio's journey



■ The wooden cross and bouquet of red and white roses at Surville Cemetery (22471578)

THE Rector of St Saviour, the Rev Peter Dyson, led Frank Le Villio's coffin into the parish church, watched by the congregation, which included the Lieutenant-Governor Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton and Lady Dalton, the Constables of St Helier and St Saviour, his relatives, members of the Occupation generation, and families of wartime political prisoners.

A memorial on the wall of the church, dedicated to one of the Rector's predecessors, Canon Clifford Cohu, who died in Zöschen labour camp in Germany, reminded us that we – and Mr Villio – were in good company.

Thirty years ago, when the memory of Jersey's political prisoners and victims of Nazism first emerged on the public stage of the Island's heritage, it would have been unthinkable that a 'troublemaker' like Mr Le Villio would have been repatriated to Jersey and reburied as a hero of the Occupation.

For someone buried in a pauper's grave with no headstone to be given a memorial service in the presence of the Island's Lieu-

tenant-Governor, and paid for by two parish Constables, is quite remarkable. It is a sign of how far the Island has come in its reconsideration of the past that such a welcome seemed entirely natural, right and fitting.

In 1995, when the late Occupation historian Joe Mière fought to have a memorial to the political prisoners erected outside the site of the old Newgate Street Prison, he encountered opposition among the Island's authorities. They believed that many of those incarcerated were deemed to have committed offences against the Germans (such as, for example, theft) that would have been considered crimes in peace time.

As a result the memorial unveiling was advertised only one day in advance and did not take place on Liberation Day or even during that week in May, as Mr Mière wanted.

However, that was the year in which Sir Philip Bailhache became Bailiff of Jersey [and when Jersey celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Liberation].

Memorials were unveiled and he made speeches in memory of the Island's victims of Nazism. Coupled with the work of Jersey

Heritage, led then by Michael Day, and working with other Islanders who wished to see a reconsideration of the Occupation years, Jersey has subsequently seen many changes in its attitude towards victims of Nazism.

The repatriation and reburial of Frank Le Villio is not the first of a Channel Islander victim of Nazism.

Many Islanders will remember the repatriation and burial in Howard Davis Park of Maurice Gould in 1997, like Canon Cohu and Mr Le Villio, another of the Jersey 21, [the men and women who died in camps and prisons in occupied Europe and who are commemorated on the Lighthouse Memorial on the New North Quay].

The first repatriation was that of Guernseyman John Ingrouille who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment after he was falsely accused of threatening the Germans with an army of 800 men. He was also charged with theft. Mr Ingrouille was deported in March 1941 and spent two years in Caen Prison in Normandy (reputed to be extremely squalid and primitive) followed by two years in German prisons.

When the Russians liberated his prison – Brandenburg-Görden in Germany – at the end of April 1945, Mr Ingrouille was suffering from advanced tuberculosis. He began his journey home but within a fortnight was in a British hospital in the Belgian



■ The burial of Frank Le Villio at Surville cemetery

Pictures: JON GUEGAN (22471597)

capital, Brussels, where he died on 13 June.

In October 1946, Mr Ingrouille's remains were repatriated to Guernsey by his parents and buried in Vale parish churchyard. As he was an only son, there was nobody to tend his grave after his parents died. It became neglected and in recent years its condition has deteriorated further.

This comparison between the graves of one of the Jersey 21 and one of the eight Guernsey islanders who died in the German prison and camp system, gives us an insight into the difference between the way that the two islands today perceive those who committed offences against the Germans.

Therefore it was heartening to see the way Mr Le Villio was welcomed back to Jersey with a moving service. Stanley Keiller, who located his remains in an unmarked cemetery plot in Nottingham, gave a tribute, saying that he felt 'quietly and emotionally satisfied' to have found the grave. Through his research, Mr Keiller said he felt that he had got to know Mr Le Villio, even though they had never met. Afterwards he told me that because the two of them had been teenagers at the same time during the Occupation, Mr Le Villio was, as far as he was concerned, 'one of us.'

During Mr Dyson's address, he encouraged us to pay our respects to Mr Le Villio and to remember those who lived during the Occupation with compassion and understanding. He ended with the words: 'Now Frank is at rest in his island home. Welcome home,

Frank, and may you now rest in peace. God bless.'

The service concluded with the National Anthem, which while banned by the Germans, was allowed to be sung at the end of church services during the Occupation. As we were led out of the church, the organist played 'Beautiful Jersey', the Island's unofficial anthem.

On Thursday morning, a smaller group gathered at Surville Cemetery, his parents' resting place, for Mr Le Villio's reburial. His coffin was lowered into the ground and Mr Dyson used the older forms of prayers that would have been read out at the original funeral in Nottingham in 1946. We were each invited to scatter soil on the coffin. To one side of the grave, lay a wooden cross and large bouquet of red and white roses – Jersey colours.

Speaking to Mr Keiller again afterwards, he quoted a couple of lines from a poem he composed for the 50th anniversary of Liberation, which for him summed up how he felt about Mr Le Villio and those teenage years: 'Would that I could once more feel the warmth of that companionship, when so little we had, yet so much we shared.'

● Dr Gilly Carr runs the Frank Falla Archive website, www.frankfallaarchive.org, which is hosted by Jersey Heritage and tells the story of every Channel Islander deported to Nazi prisons, labour and concentration camps. She also runs the associated Facebook group The Frank Falla Archive.



■ The grave of Guernseyman John Ingrouille (pictured left)

IDENTITY CARD No. 6421	
Surname	LE VILLIO
Christian Names	François René Julien
Maiden Name	
Place of Birth	St Helier, Jersey
Date of Birth	13-9-25
Residential Address	10, Marshall ^{Midvale} Road, St Helier
Status	Single
Occupation	Mechanic's Apprentice
<p>20/4/42 to France - 1st Oct. 1942</p> <p>Duplicate 9/6 issued on 20/6/42. Original mutilated 20/6/42.</p> <p>17/6/43 34, Midvale ^{Midvale} Road, St Helier.</p> <p>Reported returned to the Island from Alderney 25/4/44.</p>	

■ Frank Le Villio's Occupation Registration Card held by the Jersey Archive



■ The Rev Peter Dyson led the service at St Saviour's Church to mark the return to Jersey of the remains of Frank Le Villio (22471592)

LAST CALL...

FlyDirect
Holidays & Flights direct from Jersey

3 NIGHT INCLUSIVE PACKAGE

FLY DIRECT TO BARCELONA

BOOK NOW

Packages from **£499** per person

Includes DIRECT flights with checked luggage, hotel, breakfast and transfers. Departing 30th Sept & 3rd Oct.

Call 496677 visit flydirect.je or come and see us at Heron House, next to Gama Aviation. FREE PARKING.

ABTA FlyDirect is part of C. I. Travel Group

Price based on 2 people sharing at the Tres Torres Aciram and is correct at the time of going to print (August 2018). Subject to availability. Alternative hotels available at a supplement.