

## **Name: Miriam Jacobs**

**Born: 30 September 1894, Bethnal Green, London**

### **Miriam's story:**

Miriam Jacobs was a British Jew, born on 30 September 1894. She moved to Guernsey in 1932, aged 38, from her native Southend-on-Sea in Essex.



In 1937 she made a trip back to England to change her surname from Jacobs to Jay, a less Jewish-sounding name; antisemitism was on the rise in Europe. It was a prescient decision.

Despite common knowledge about the Nazi attitude towards Jews, Miriam did not leave Guernsey in June 1940 when many were being advised to evacuate. This is most probably because she was in a relationship with George Ridgway, the Comptroller and Solicitor General of the Royal Court in Guernsey. The couple were living together in St Peter Port.

When the German Orders against the Jews were passed into law in the Royal Court from October 1940, it would have been George Ridgway's responsibility to have drafted the legislation; he would also have had significant responsibility in preparing the legislation against the Jews, and most likely would have attended the sittings in the Royal Court when the laws were approved.

Miriam Jacobs / Jay did not come forward to register as a Jew according to the First, the Third or the Seventh Order against the Jews, which defined and redefined the definition of a Jew. This meant that she did not have to abide by any of the antisemitic legislation. We can only imagine that, given their relationship, Ridgway knew of her Jewish heritage.

Ridgway died in September 1942. Miriam lost any protection he may have given her, but her Jewish heritage was not discovered. She was a newcomer to the Island and it seems likely that nobody knew her background. Miriam stayed in Guernsey until 1962 and died in Essex in 1978.

### **Things to discuss**

- Do you think that George Ridgway knew of Miriam Jacobs' Jewish identity? How do you think he could square in his mind his public duties and his private life, given that they were so at odds?
- Why did Miriam Jacobs change her name to Jay in 1937, when Britain was not occupied by the Germans and nobody could have predicted the occupation of the Channel Islands?
- How did Miriam Jacobs manage to get away without registering as a Jew? Why do you think she was not denounced as Jewish, unlike other Jews in the Islands such as Marianne Grunfeld and Julia Barry?
- Miriam was not subject to antisemitic legislation given that she was not registered as a Jew. Do you think that she felt immune or do you think that she was scared of being discovered?