

Topic: The Jews in the Channel Islands during the German Occupation (brief overview of facts & discussion questions for the classroom)

Between October 1940 and August 1942, nine consecutive antisemitic Orders were registered in the Royal Courts of Jersey and Guernsey at the request of the German occupiers. Orders were also registered in Sark. Jurat Abraham Lainé in Guernsey and Bailiff Alexander Coutanche in Jersey are alleged to have been the only people who spoke up against just one of these Orders: that of wearing the yellow star.

The Orders against the Jews included:

- Being registered with registration card stamped with a red J;
- Declaring economic undertakings (including those belonging to gentile spouses);
- Aryanization of Jewish businesses (forced liquidization of Jewish businesses);
- Curfew for Jews & prohibition on moving house without permission;
- Ban on Jews from places of entertainment; restriction of shopping hours;
- Wearing a yellow star (not enforced).

The exact number of people affected by the antisemitic is difficult to calculate; we do not know what the wartime Jewish population was in Jersey or Guernsey, but we think at least 30 people were affected. Not everyone who was Jewish came forward to be registered, but the registration cards of those who did were stamped with a red letter J. Jersey Aliens Officer, Clifford Orange, was particularly diligent in encouraging Jews to register, especially if they were in doubt about whether they should.

Two of those known to be Jewish who did not come forwards to be registered were Miriam Jacobs in Guernsey and Lucy Schwob in Jersey. Lucy was a surrealist artist who became part of a two-woman resistance group with her partner, Suzanne Malherbe. The two were caught and imprisoned in Jersey Prison. They were sentenced to death but the Bailiff Alexander Coutanche appealed and this was commuted.

Three Jewish women (Therese Steiner, Marianne Grunfeld and Auguste Spitz) in Guernsey were deported to France in April 1942. From here they were rounded up in July 1942 and sent to Auschwitz where they died. Jewish woman Julia Barry née Brichta was deported in March 1944 from Guernsey to Ravensbrück concentration camp for black market offences. She denied being Jewish and survived the experience. Jewish man John Finkelstein was deported from Jersey to Buchenwald concentration camp in February 1943 and survived. British Jews Elisabet Duquemin, her daughter Janet, and Elda Brouard were deported from Guernsey to Compiègne Transit and Internment Camp and then Biberach internment camp in February 1943; British Jews Esther Lloyd and Ruby Still were sent from Jersey to the same camps. All survived.

Those who were not deported were still harassed and had to abide by the antisemitic legislation. This created great fear in those affected. In Jersey, Victor Emmanuel committed suicide in April 1944, and Nathan Davidson ended up in the Island's asylum during this period where he died in February 1944 of '*maniacal exhaustion and insanity*'.

Two Jews went into hiding in St Helier: Romanian Jew Hedwig Bercu was hidden by Dorothea Weber née Le Brocq, and British Jew, Mary Richardson, was hidden by Albert Bedane. Both Bedane and Weber have been honoured as *Righteous Among the Nations* by Yad Vashem.

Things to discuss in class:

- Why didn't the local civilian authorities in Jersey and Guernsey do more to prevent the legislation against Jews being enacted in the Royal Court? What do you think would have happened to them if they protested?
- By allowing the antisemitic legislation to be registered in the Royal Court, did this make the Islands' authorities complicit in any way in the persecution of the Jews in the Channel Islands? Clifford Orange, the Aliens Officer, was particularly efficient at registering Jews. How complicit was he?
- Why didn't the civilian authorities do more to act behind the backs of the Germans to protect Jews? How might they have done this?
- Did it make a difference to the responses of the local authorities that there were only a small number of Jews in the Channel Islands? Was this an ethical response?
- Why did it make a difference to the civilian authorities that some of the Jews resident in the Channel Islands were not British by birth or by marriage?
- Why was it made difficult for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism from elsewhere in Europe to enter the UK and the Channel Islands?
- The Holocaust is defined by Yad Vashem, the world Holocaust remembrance centre in Israel as '*the sum total of all anti-Jewish actions carried out by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945: from stripping the German Jews of their legal and economic status in the 1930s; segregating and starvation in the various occupied countries; the murder of close to six million Jews in Europe.*' With this in mind, discuss the extent to which the Channel Islands were part of the Holocaust. Discuss why persecution from the early 1930s, before people were deported to camps, might be included within this definition.
- There are various roles to which we might categorize people during the Holocaust: victim, perpetrator, bystander, upstander, rescuer, facilitator. You might be able to add some to this list. In what roles would you place the following people: Jews, gentile spouses of Jews, friends of Jews, ordinary islanders who didn't know any Jews but saw the notices in the newspaper about antisemitic legislation, the local authorities (Bailiffs, Jurats, other political élites), Aliens Officers? You might wish to add names or titles to this list. Is it easy to categorise everyone? Do some people belong to more than one role? What choice did people have about how they chose to act / react? What kinds of intolerances are ongoing in the world / the UK / the Channel Islands today? What role will we choose? How can we become upstanders (people who take a stand to help victims) rather than bystanders?
- When learning about the Jewish experience, why is it important to learn about pre-war and post-war Jewish life in the Islands?

Further reading

Cohen, F. 2000. *The Jews in the Channel Islands during the German Occupation, 1940-1945*. Jersey: Jersey Heritage Trust.