JERSEY ENCORE 2011

Saturday 10th September

As 2011 marked our 40th wedding anniversary and our daughter Rachel's 30th birthday, we decided to use these events as a thin excuse for a return visit to Jersey. This seemed a brilliant strategic place to visit, as Rachel's fiancé Antoine is French and whereas Jersey is a British Crown Dependency 100 miles away, it's only 14 miles off the French coast of Normandy. Sorted.

It made sense for us to fly from our local airports, so Alan and I were booked from Plymouth Airport, while Rachel and Antoine were booked from Bristol Airport. There was a kerfuffle when Plymouth Airport closed to commercial flights about six weeks before we were due to leave, but we were able to be rescheduled from Exeter Airport easily enough. A further kerfuffle took place when according to paperwork in our possession, all four of us were supposed to be flying from both Exeter Airport and Bristol Airport. Thankfully, this was rectified without any need for doppelgangers.

Hurricane Katia was knocking at the door in the UK when we were due to leave, but although the wind was definitely up (yes, I still hate flying) it didn't really affect us and the 35-minute flight was smoother than I'd anticipated. Not only that, but Rachel and Antoine appeared as if by magic at Jersey Airport's Luggage Reclaim area a mere five minutes or so after we did.

The only downer on the situation was that as we'd flown in over the rocky coastline of Jersey that I didn't really recognise after 28 years (along with some high-rise buildings), it was raining. I don't think I've ever disembarked in fairly heavy rain before and it hadn't stopped by the time we'd collected our cases and headed towards the Hertz car rental area. It was even still raining when we all piled into the Ford Focus with our suitcases, whereupon Antoine plus the Sat Nav drove us to our self-catering accommodation at Panama Apartments.

However, after we'd more or less unpacked and realised we'd have to head to the shops before we could even make a cup of tea, we set out on foot for the local Co-op (I should say Co-op Locale) in very welcome dry, warm air. As we approached the main centre of St Helier, the long, straight pedestrianised street seemed vaguely familiar, but that's as far as it went – and that was also as far as we went, into the small supermarket to buy supplies.

On returning to the apartment, we discovered to our surprise that there was no freezer in which to place the Viennetta we'd bought for dessert, so Antoine suggested we put it in the fridge turned up to maximum and hope for the best. In the meantime, we ate some birthday cake that Rachel and Antoine had bought for me, belated by just a day. The cooker was then turned on ready for pizzas and the wine bottle opened – the holiday had begun!

Apart from some cheese falling off the pizzas and on to the cooker inside, everything went according to plan. The Viennetta accompanied with some Jersey strawberries was soft, but still recognisable as ice cream and we then relaxed for the rest of the evening with some Saturday night television. Alan and I went to bed at 22:15, when I could hardly keep my eyes open.

Sunday 11th September

Apart from waking a couple of times feeling a bit too warm, I actually slept until 08:05 without getting up. The weather looked overcast and it was still windy, but by the time everyone had breakfasted and were ready for the off (in the car to a supermarket where we could buy enough food to keep us going for a while) the cloud had lifted and it looked like a good day.

Alan managed to locate a Waitrose and a larger Co-op, but unfortunately they were both closed, so we drove back to the apartment and walked once again into the centre of St Helier. We paid a visit to Tourist Information, which was open, where we availed ourselves of several interesting leaflets and brochures before buying some more food in Co-op Locale.

After lunch at the apartment, we decided to visit Elizabeth Castle. A few more clouds were gathering, but the weather still looked promising. Alan drove us the short distance to the sea front and we walked along the beach and on to the causeway, as the tide was safely out. This was important, as Jersey has some of the largest tidal ranges in the world of up to 39 feet/12 metres.

Rachel and Antoine walk the causeway

When we arrived at the castle to pay the entrance fee, we were informed that due to expected high winds, closing time had been brought forward from 17:30 to 15:30. That is, the last ferry ride back in an amphibious vehicle would be at 15:30 and the last safe causeway walk would be at 15:10.

This was an unexpected setback, as it was already just gone 14:00. It seemed a wasted journey not to continue, though, so we paid up and went inside to have a look around. Although some of the battlements and turrets looked familiar and I remembered the parade ground, my memory of the place was decidedly limited.

Construction of the castle had started in the late 16th century and continued into the early 17th century, when Sir Walter Raleigh was governor of Jersey. It had been built when the existing Mont Orgueil Castle became insufficient to defend the port of St Helier from the power of the more modern cannons.

During the Civil War, King Charles II visited and was proclaimed king by the governor, Sir George Cartaret, even though the monarchy had been abolished in England. In 1651, parliamentary forces landed in Jersey and attacked the castle with mortars. Cartaret surrendered and Jersey was held for a total of nine years by Parliamentarians. In the late 18th century, French troops landed in St Helier, but they were eventually defeated at the Battle of Jersey in January 1781.

During the Occupation of Jersey in World War II, Germans modernised the castle with bunkers, guns and battlements. Many of the German fortifications were built by Organisation Todt (OT) and had walls and ceilings made from reinforced concrete 6.5 feet/2 metres thick. Organisation Todt was an engineering group named after its founder, Fritz Todt, and was notorious during the war for using forced labour. About 1% of the work force were Germans rejected from military service, 1.5% were concentration camp prisoners and the rest were prisoners of war and compulsory labourers from occupied countries. All of them were effectively treated as slaves and many failed to survive the terrible conditions.

View from Elizabeth Castle

After a necessarily rather swift look around the castle, we decided to visit the hermitage on nearby Hermitage Rock, but were thwarted again because the gate leading out to it was due to be closed in around ten minutes, which gave us insufficient time to see hardly anything. I mainly felt disappointed for Rachel and Antoine, as Alan and I had already visited the hermitage in 1983.

It seemed to be a less than good introduction to Jersey's sites of interest, but we refused to let it dampen our spirits and continued to wander around the castle until it was time to catch the ferry back to St Helier. As we queued for Charming Nancy (the other ferry was Charming Betty) we saw people attempting to walk across a now unsafe causeway, as well as slightly wiser people turning back.

It felt a little strange sloshing along in the watery part of our ride back beside the causeway to St Helier, but when we stepped ashore, we could tell that the wind had become stronger. The tide was coming in quickly as we strolled along the sea front and it wasn't long before the causeway completely disappeared.

We happened to pass by an ice cream kiosk, so in the spirit of the holiday, we decided to indulge – and very good it was too. As we continued to stroll along in the force 6 or so wind, we came across the Freedom Tree, a very striking sculpture by Richard Perry, marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Channel Islands on 9th May 1945. This 20 feet/6 metres high bronze oak tree sprouts 30 oak leaves and 12 acorns (one for each parish of Jersey).

The Freedom Tree

It was standing in a granite paved area called La Pièche de L'Av'nîn, which is the Jèrriais form of The Place of the Future or La Place de L'Avenir in French. Jèrriais is the form of the Norman language spoken in Jersey (otherwise referred to as Jersey Norman French), although it has been in decline over the past century.

Around the base of the tree, carved tastefully in the granite, there was a short but evocative poem about the loss of trees. I very much liked the Freedom Tree and its symbolism as an emblem of fresh growth and continuity, still rooted in the present but moving on from the past into a hopeful future.

In the meantime, we decided to move on from the wind into the warmth of the car and drove back to the apartment. I then proceeded to become too hot sitting at the table with the sun streaming in, as it was proving difficult knowing what to wear with such changeable weather. Rachel very kindly made us a tasty pasta bake for the evening meal, which was followed by tiramisu and a restful evening watching a bit of television. Our second night already…

Monday 12th September

The light looked dull on awaking at 07:00 and when we got up to make some tea at 08:00, it was raining. However, somewhere between getting ready and going out in the car to the large Co-op to buy food for the week, the sky cleared.

We decided to have an early lunch and then set out for the Jersey War Tunnels, or Hohlgangsanlage 8 (abbreviated to Ho8). We had visited in 1983 when the same place had been known as the German Underground Hospital and had been very moved with its chilling atmosphere and history. A whole 28 years later, shivers once more ran up and down my spine as I walked inside the partially completed underground complex, which had been intended as a vast network of tunnels that would have allowed German personnel to withstand invasion.

Rachel, Antoine and Alan enter the tunnels

As well as paid labourers and skilled workers, forced labourers from Organisation Todt were shipped in to dig out the tunnels – many were Polish, French, Russian or Republican Spaniards. While the voluntary workers had a better time of it, conditions for the others were appalling, with malnutrition, death by exhaustion and disease being common. The Russian and Ukrainian prisoners of war were treated worst of all, due to the Nazi ideology of race hierarchy. While the so-called master race of Aryan Germans usually treated other European races with contempt, they referred to the Slav races as 'untermenschen' – subhuman.

With the threat of an Allied invasion in late 1943, Ho8 was converted into a casualty clearing station and emergency hospital, with the unfinished tunnels being sealed off by Italian auxiliary workers. The hospital was intended only for German military casualties, with 500 beds and a fully equipped operating theatre. I clearly remembered the operating theatre from 1983 with a lot more equipment on show. Today, though, there were just the basics.

As we had entered the tunnels, there was a time line telling the story of Jersey's Occupation in pictures, wall plaques, exhibits and displays. It was clear that the people of the Channel Islands felt abandoned by the British Government when the islands were demilitarised in June 1940 and left to their own devices. It must have been a difficult situation all round, as it's very likely the islands would have incurred severe bomb damage if they had been defended militarily. The fact remains, though, that it was a traumatic, appalling time for so many and the time line showed how Jersey people had only one day to decide either to stay on Jersey, or be taken to Weymouth in boats provided by the British Government.

It was an extremely well thought out and sometimes very personal account of evacuation, deportation, captivity, resistance, hardship, adaptability and finally liberation. The various quotes from people who had experienced the Occupation were compelling and thought provoking, bringing it all vividly to life.

The operating theatre

After the chill of the tunnels, we thought it would be beneficial to have a drink upstairs in a modern, comfortable café, but were troubled slightly by a couple of wasps. We also somehow failed to visit The Garden of Reflection, which I would have liked to wander around. Maybe a future visit is a good idea, although it's probably not a good idea to leave it for another 28 years.

I left Ho8 with the feeling that since our first 1983 visit, the place has been modernised and somehow sanitised into a viable visitor attraction. There's no doubt there was much more to look at this time, though, so I can understand that a compromise was necessary and it remains a very meaningful and sobering place that I personally think every visitor to Jersey should see.

There was still some afternoon time left, so Alan offered to drive us around the north coast of Jersey. I really enjoyed seeing all the French names of roads and houses, but I was somewhat useless in the map reading department. However, we successfully stopped at a couple of places en route where there were Martello towers that were easily accessible to photograph.

In order to protect Jersey from possible French invasion during the Napoleonic wars, a decision was made to surround the entire island with 32 watchtowers and consequently this ambitious task began in 1778. Although they are generally known as Martello towers, only the towers built from about 1810 onwards are true Martello towers, inspired by a round fortress at Martella in Corsica.

Interestingly, Jersey Martello towers differ from UK Martello towers, in that they are constructed from local granite rather than brick and they have taller walls. Altogether, 31 towers were built on Jersey and 24 still remain. Some of them are now painted red and white, to serve as navigational aids.

The first tower we stopped at was L'Archirondel, where we walked along the top of the beach and saw a wasps' nest. It was quite windy there, but good to enjoy some fresh air. Driving further along, we stopped at Le Hocq, where the wind seemed to have stepped up a bit, making it slightly chilly. I could remember Le Hocq from our first visit, because it was so rocky that it resembled a moonscape. The tide was in further this time, but it was still rocky and interesting.

Alan in front of a Martello tower

Due to the wind, we were all glad to return to the apartment for a drink and birthday cake. Later on, Rachel cooked salmon and boiled potatoes, which was followed by an Aero mousse. A couple of hours of holiday escapism was then enjoyed by watching *Pirates of the Caribbean – On Stranger Tides*. It was fun!

Tuesday 13th September

Sleep deserted me last night for a strange variety of reasons, none of which are particularly interesting. It was another grey, overcast morning when Alan and I wandered into the living room to make tea at 08:00, but it began to clear hesitantly into a reasonably blue sky. We'd decided to split up for the day (but only in the holiday sightseeing sense) so that Alan and I would have the car, while Rachel and Antoine would explore St Helier on foot.

It was around 09:45 when Alan and I left for a re-visit to La Mare Wine Estate, known as La Mare Vineyards when we'd visited in 1983. I really enjoyed driving along the deliciously French named leafy lanes interspersed with small roads.

The experience was rendered even more enjoyable by the fact that the speed limit on Jersey is 40 miles per hour. Alan said he likes driving on Jersey – I think it reminds us both of what driving used to be like in England decades ago, when drivers were generally polite and respectful towards each other.

The weather had become pleasantly dry and bright by the time we turned into the large car park at La Mare, where there were already a few other visitors. It seemed to have gone upmarket quite a lot since the more cottage industry feel of our first visit and I noticed that wine tasting tours were advertised.

Bearing in mind that it was only 10:25, I was tired and didn't especially feel like going on a tour and being sociable to strangers whilst tasting alcohol, I'm uncertain how we managed to book ourselves on the first wine tasting tour at 10:40. Maybe it had something to do with the enthusiastic lady at the entrance?

As we made our way to the shop where the tour would be starting, I sincerely hoped we wouldn't be the only mad people for the mid-morning wine tasting. I was relieved there were other people in the shop, but when the pleasant, well-spoken guide of about our age turned up, we discovered it was just us and two more ladies of about our age for the tour. Oh well! I can remember smiling a lot as we stood outside the farmhouse while the guide began his spiel, pretending to be comfortable with the strange way Tuesday morning was turning out.

The grapes of La Mare

To be honest, it turned out very well indeed and I enjoyed it a great deal. The guide told us that the central farmhouse had been built in 1797 and the site had originally been devoted only to apple trees. During the Occupation, however, the ability to maintain the farm in good condition had been severely compromised and the land was let, thereupon gradually sinking into disrepair.

In 1968, the Blayney family had bought the dilapidated farm and enthusiastically set about restoring the farmhouse, as well as planting Jersey's first commercial vineyards in 1972. By 1976, La Mare Vineyards was able to open to the public – and had been visited (and enjoyed) a mere seven years afterwards by us!

In 1997, the Blayneys sold La Mare to the current owner, which then led to the introduction of wine tasting tours, upon which we were now embarked. We were shown indoors to a seating area and given a wine glass each. So far so good.

There was a short video (probably about wine, but I was already wondering how the wine tasting would go – should I swirl? Sniff? Sip? Spit?) I was trying to remember the procedure from *Oz and James's Big Wine Adventure* when the video stopped and the guide approached me with a bottle of white. I instinctively held out my glass, into which he poured a few mouthfuls of the liquid gold (well, it was pale gold). Alan asked for a small sample and swirled, so I followed suit.

It felt decidedly decadent to be sipping wine so early in the day, but it also felt good. I'm not normally keen on white wine, but it was smooth, fruity and warming. Another short video followed and then the guide came walking towards me first with a bottle of rosé. The same procedure followed, but I'd noticed the video had mentioned sniffing, so I duly sniffed before sipping. Thankfully, no spitting was involved. A further short video ensued, then the guide dispensed the red sample, which had a heady blackcurrant undertone (or undercurrent!)

We were then asked to leave our used glasses on a tray as we left the seating area and were led towards a gleaming red still that was used in the process of making apple brandy. It looked very impressive as far as machines go and had been literally unearthed from Calvados in 1994. The guide explained how it worked and then passed around some 90% apple brandy to sniff, which was heady and strong to say the very least. Alan asked if he would be permitted to take a photo of the sexy red machine and the guide obligingly switched on some lights for him – at which point one of the other women said jokingly to me that only a man would want such a photo. I agreed, but on further reflection I suppose that still photography remains a moving art form.

Part of the gleaming red still

After that, we were shown a machine that freezes the wine fermenting in bottles just enough to easily remove the sediment that collects in the neck of these bottles, which are stored at a downward angle for that purpose. There was also another clever machine that inserts champagne-type corks into the bottles.

As we wandered through a room containing quite a few tall metal vats, I was inordinately pleased with myself that I was almost understanding what the guide was explaining, at which point he showed us a large machine that was being fed apples and somehow producing pulp and juice and wasps and things…

Later on during the tour, which seems to have become slightly hazy in my mind, we were each given a small chocolate 'cup' containing some apple brandy cream. If I liked creamy things I'm sure I would have loved it, but I didn't like to refuse and downed it anyway. I also took a sample of chocolate that was the final offering after we'd peered through a window to see the chocolatier at work. It happened to be chilli chocolate and as the tour came to an end and we found ourselves once again in the shop, I became prone to a sudden bout of coughing.

We purchased a few items, including a jar of famous Jersey Black Butter, noticing that a lot more people were gathering for the second tour of the day. I was still feeling a glow from our foursome tour, though, which led me to write some garbled words in the visitor book about while I'd enjoyed our 1983 visit, I'd enjoyed this visit even more. Oh dear – it therefore seemed time to visit the tasteful Vineyard Restaurant to sink a cappuccino, which is exactly what we did.

Before we left La Mare, we went for a peaceful meander amongst the green and pleasant vineyards with their 17,000 vines producing four white and three red grape varieties, with the majority being Pinot Noir. The yield from these grapes is a most impressive 40,000+ bottles of wine a year.

Vines that produce wines

Alongside the vineyards were apple orchards planted with six cider apple varieties, as Jersey apparently has a history of drinking rather a lot of cider in days gone by. We really enjoyed walking along in the windy, but still warm morning, reading strategic information boards and stopping now and again to take photos. It had been an excellent visit and I couldn't help wishing that Rachel and Antoine had been with us, as I'm certain they would have enjoyed it too. There were even two miniature ponies called Bubble and Fizz.

Apples!

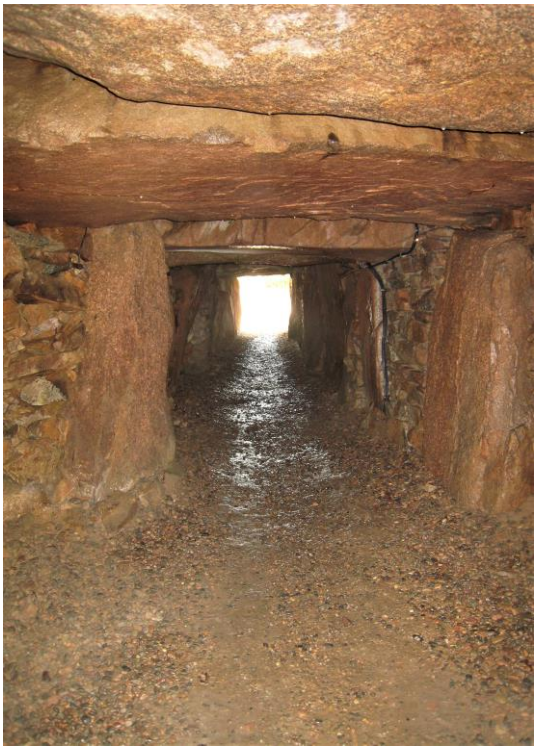
Before we left La Mare, we sat in the car park, with grass underneath the car's wheels instead of concrete, to eat the cheese rolls we'd brought with us for lunch. Our afternoon visit was to be La Hougue Bie, a rather unusual site described as a museum. The Sat Nav directed us down lots of green leafy lanes with so many right and left turns that I wondered if it was developing directional dementia, but we arrived safely at La Hougue Bie in Grouville. Hougue is either a Jèrriais or Norse word meaning mound, while the origin of Bie is uncertain, perhaps from the Jèrriais word bié meaning leat, or Norse for homestead.

We first watched a short video of the site's history, which puzzled me a little because the narrative was in German, with English subtitles. We then walked outside to the entrance of the Neolithic ritual passage grave that had been in use around 3500 BC (when there were an estimated 3,000 people on Jersey) and is one of the best-preserved passage graves in Western Europe, covered by an earth mound of 39 feet/12 metres, on which currently sits a chapel.

It was possible to enter only by crouching over a lot. I'm sure some people must have bumped their heads in the past because it was quite dark inside. We had to walk along in the dim, damp passage for almost 33 feet/10 metres while still in a crouching position, until it opened out into a main chamber that opened into three smaller chambers, resulting in a cruciform shape.

La Hougue Bie

The site had been excavated in 1925 by the Société Jersiaise. Pottery fragments and remains of at least eight people were found, indicating the site had already been ransacked. During sunrise at spring and autumn equinox, the sun's rays shine through the passage deep into the back chamber, possibly symbolising rebirth and contact with the dead. For us, contact with the living was minimal, as we stayed inside for 15 minutes or so, allowing our eyes to adjust to the dark.



Looking inside from outside ... and looking outside from inside

After emerging into the bright daylight, where it was still windy, we climbed up the steps to the top of the mound to see the chapel that had been altered over the years and appeared to have rather a complicated history. In the latter half of the 12th century, the originally pagan site had been Christianised by building a chapel that was divided into two unequal parts consisting of a nave and a chancel, with the chancel end being remodelled in about 1520.

The building today is divided into two separate chapels, one named Notre Dame in the west and Jerusalem in the east. There had once apparently been a quirky Neo-Gothic tower straddling the two chapels, although that's not of particular importance right now, because it was demolished in 1924.

In the 16th century, Dean Richard Mabon had built a crypt in the Jerusalem chapel in imitation of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and proceeded to fake miracles there. One can only imagine. Personally, it had seemed a small miracle to me that Alan had failed to fall off the mound altogether while stepping ever backwards to take a good photo of the chapel from the outside.

I was therefore reasonably happy to descend to ground level, where an old German command bunker housed an exhibition that in due course turned out to be quite harrowing. In 1942, work had started on digging out the bunker in the western side of the Neolithic mound and during the following two years, 70 trenches were dug for the headquarters of Abschnitt Ost (East Sector).

This had unfortunately resulted in a great deal of archaeological damage, but today the bunker is thoughtfully dedicated to the thousands of people brought to the Channel Islands as forced workers. I found it to be an incredibly moving exhibition, especially because of the quotes from people who had lived through the Occupation. Some of them were enough to make you weep:

I was called number 146, no one ever used my name - Alexei Ikonnikov.

I've never forgotten the sound that came out of the huts there. When people are starving the pitch of their voice rises. The sound was like lots of birds in an aviary - Mike Le Cornu.

Others were found dead when the cell doors were open the next morning. A young Frenchman, almost a boy, died standing next to me. His last words were "Maman! Maman!" - John Dalmau.

Such heart-rending memories hit home forcefully and demonstrated the utter waste of human life that sadly results from all such wars. It was a smaller, but a more distressing display than the War Tunnels (and not at all sanitised), but I believe people *need* to remember past human atrocities and honour the death and suffering of those involved, by having such memorials.

On top of the mound covering the bunker, there was an incredibly powerful sculpture of a man who appeared to be breaking free from the horrors below, dedicated to those transported to the Channel Islands as slave workers and to the ultimate freedom and dignity of the human spirit. The sculpture was created by Maurice Blik, a survivor of the Belsen concentration camp.

Free

The next exhibition we viewed was far less emotive, but still very enjoyable, as it was devoted to geology and archaeology and we were the only ones there the whole time. There were so many interesting exhibits that it was impossible to take everything in, but we spent a fascinating hour or so inside. I particularly remember the impressive display of arrow heads and the disturbing fact that where Fort Regent now stands on top of Le Mont de la Ville, a Neolithic passage grave had once graced the strategic granite outcrop.

Fort Regent had started life as a Napoleonic fortress completed in 1814, but by our first Jersey visit in 1983 it had become a place of entertainment, complete with a cable car (opened in 1970 and closed in 1991). It now seems to be described as a leisure centre. As for the Neolithic passage grave, this had been moved to Wargrave near Henley-on-Thames at the end of the 18th century and remains there now in the grounds of a private house. Sacrilege.

The wind had sprung up even more when we finally emerged and after looking at a reconstruction Neolithic house (4850-2850 BC) we realised we were really tired, so decided to return to the apartment for some lifesaving tea.

Rachel and Antoine had enjoyed their St Helier walkabout day, but had walked for about three hours, so were also very tired. Alan and I had previously wondered if they would like a drive around the western part of the island, so after a drink we all went out in the car to the Military Museum at St Ouen, which was located right next to the beach in a former German bunker that had once formed part of Hitler's Atlantic Wall defences.

It was jam-packed with British and German artefacts, including uniforms, equipment, newspaper articles and paperwork, as well as memorabilia of purely human interest, such as a board game closely resembling *Monopoly* that was called simply *Occupation* – 'collect double cheese ration' and the like. I liked that a lot, as it spoke of an unbroken Jersey spirit. There were also many photos of German and Channel Island people. It was fascinating and a real insight into what life must have been like during those uncertain, turbulent times.

At about 16:30, we walked out of the bunker into a bright, exceptionally windy afternoon and strolled along sandy, grassy ground to look out at the beach and sea. After gazing at the coastline and being thoroughly blown around, we returned to the warm car and drove back to St Helier along the coast road.

The lighthouse at La Corbière was visible in the misty distance, located at the most south-westerly point of Jersey, but we headed back to the apartment to rest awhile and taste the red wine that Alan had bought from La Mare in the morning. It proved excellent with its undertone of black cherry to the discerning (rather than the blackcurrant I had perceived in the morning's sampling).

During their day's walking, Rachel and Antoine had sussed out likely takeaway places, so it was decided that they would walk to a Chinese food takeaway, while Alan and I would walk to a fish and chip takeaway. This was accomplished, with only a slight fiasco when the Chinese takeaway was closed, but resourceful Rachel and Antoine managed to locate a second choice Chinese takeaway. We convened back at the apartment to eat our instant evening meal and a restful evening followed, after a very full, interesting and pleasing day.

Wednesday 14th September

Our fourth morning and it was a sunny one, with a few white puffy clouds and unsurprisingly, some wind. Alan and I were ready before Rachel and Antoine, so we had a quick walk into St Helier to buy some food, making an unplanned stop in Coffee Republic for a sneaky cappuccino on the way to Co-op Locale.

After preparing rolls for lunch, we all set off for Durrell Wildlife Preservation Trust, formerly known as Jersey Zoo and soon arrived at Les Augrès Manor with its iconic stone dodos on the gateposts. I was sure I recognised the stone dodos from our first visit, as the dodo was the symbol of the fight against extinction.

After we paid and each of us were given a blue band to put around our wrists (not unlike a hospital ID band), we began our tour of the animal enclosures, firstly stopping at a statue of the man himself, Gerald Durrell:

Gerald Durrell

Jersey Zoological Park had been founded by Gerald Durrell in 1958, to house his growing collection of animals from wildlife expeditions begun in 1947, during which he'd become passionate about wildlife conservation. To finance his ventures, he wrote several successful autobiographical books about his various expeditions. He believed zoos should be reserves where endangered species could regenerate and he founded the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust in 1963.

The first animals we came across were the Andean bears that had once been named spectacled bears. After that, we strolled around at leisure, spending quite a while with the gorillas and then in the amphibian and reptile house. There were some cute little frogs there, very colourful and also very poisonous. I was interested to see a Komodo dragon peering out of a hollow branch:

Komodo dragon

"What's occurring?"

Outside again, I was intrigued with the Galapagos tortoises that seemed able to move surprisingly quickly, before being even more intrigued with the meerkats that adopt such humorous poses and also most definitely have the cute factor.

After a while, we bought a cold drink from the café and walked to the picnic area to eat lunch. A marauding seagull threatened to spoil the experience, but a small boy came to the rescue by running around chasing after it. A wasp then landed on my roll when I'd almost finished it, so I discarded it (although not in the seagull's direction.) We continued to walk around and spent quite a bit of time looking at the orang-utans, who looked astonishingly orange:

Orange!

Gorilla on the grass

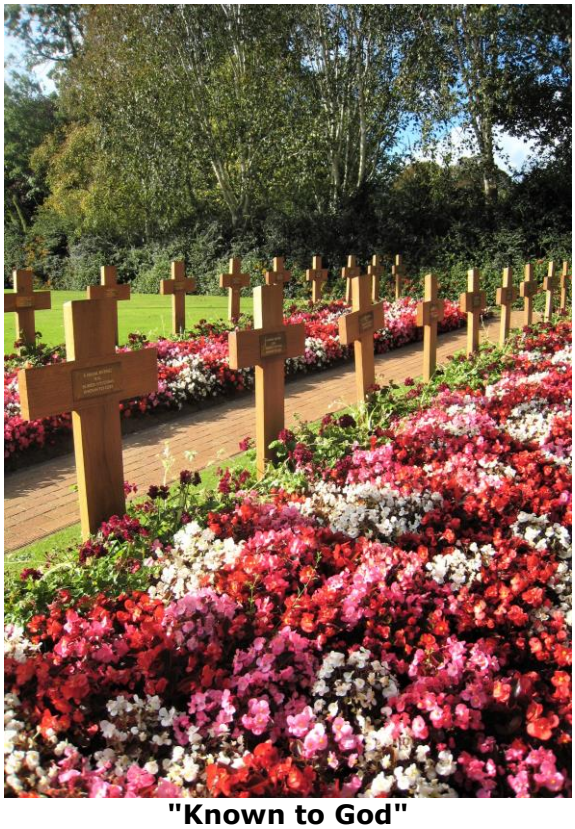
The gorillas were due to be fed at 14:00, so we retraced our steps to their enclosure and along with a number of other people, listened to an informative talk by a keeper. A male gorilla had recently arrived from France and one of the Jersey female gorillas was apparently spending her time trying to be alluring. "Who wouldn't appreciate a young French male?" asked the keeper humorously. I purposely refrained from looking at Antoine, so as not to embarrass him…

As well as some Chilean flamingos, spooky fruit bats, shy tamarins, beguiling gentle lemurs and striking red-ruffed and ring-tailed lemurs to name but a few, there was a whole section devoted to Madagascar, which I must confess I hadn't realised was in such a dire state. I was particularly pleased that it was turning out to be an educative visit, as well as a very enjoyable one.

Gerald Durrell died in 1995, so I was very glad that throughout the whole area, the Gerald Durrell ethos is still prevalent, with information boards stating the level of extinction threat for every animal, sadly some of them critical. It was therefore very encouraging to see that the breeding record there is excellent.

By mid-afternoon, we realised we were rather tired, so drove back to the apartment for a rest and a drink. Rachel and Antoine then decided to walk into St Helier to buy cheese, whereas Alan and I made a reminiscent 20-minute walk to Howard Davis Park, scene of many a summer evening visit during 1983.

We went in by a different entrance, but there were several parts of the park I remembered, namely the fountain, the rose garden and the Allied War Cemetery with its rows of graves of unknown bodies washed ashore but "Known to God", planted with colourful begonias. During the war, US servicemen were buried in the cemetery, but were later transferred to a central cemetery in France.



"Known to God"

As I was on my last legs (a good but true excuse), we bought an ice cream and wandered around in the late afternoon sun. Strolling through a large, open grassy area, I was strangely happy to see there was still a bandstand, although sadly without a band. On leaving the park, we walked back along the sea front, where I was still surprised to find the coastline so rocky.

The evening meal was a simple but enjoyable repast of filled pasta with a sauce and cheese, followed by an Aero mousse. We then relaxed by watching television, although I was having a great deal of trouble keeping my eyes open until 22:00, when Alan and I made our rapidly ageing way to bed.

Thursday 15th September

We awoke to blue sky! It had been prearranged that Rachel and Antoine would have use of the car, so shortly before 10:00 we said au revoir and stepped out into the warm Jersey morning. We decided to walk into the centre through the tunnel for the first time, as it's a quicker route (and although the tunnel's air quality is sometimes poor during rush hour, it was fine).

There were lots of people enjoying the sunny morning as we walked around for a while to suss out a good eating place for the following evening. I finally managed to take a photo of a sculpture that had intrigued me every time I'd seen it from a distance, of what looked like some people flapping a sheet in the air.

Commemorating 50 years of peace

The Liberation sculpture was designed by Philip Jackson and came into being with a £150,000 price tag and a certain amount of controversy. The original design had been a line of people releasing some doves of peace, but it was realistically pointed out that at the time of liberation, the people had been so hungry that the doves would have been caught and eaten.

After further dissension, the sculpture ended up as various representations of the people waving a large Union Jack flag – this final design worked for me. It had been unveiled by the Prince of Wales on 9th May 1995, 40 years after Jersey was liberated by an advance party from the Royal Navy and British Army.

Once we'd located a likely looking restaurant for our farewell Jersey meal, we were free for our planned walk around the long sweep of St Aubin's Bay, from St Helier to the harbour village of St Aubin. Named after Saint Aubin of Angers, the former fishing village is now the centre of the parish of St Brelade. As we started our three-mile trek, the tide was mostly in and we had a good view of one of Elizabeth Castle's ferries ploughing through the water on to the beach. The sea was very blue and the beach mostly sandy down below us.

We soon found ourselves on a walkway for pedestrians, with lots of lovely planting that must have looked very colourful in high summer, with agapanthus, palms, cannas, pampas grass and tamarisk. There was also a cycle path alongside for most of the way and very conveniently, a number of toilets and cafés. We noticed designated areas for skateboarders and places where people could do specific exercises – how exhilarating to exercise there while looking out at the sea view! I also appreciated the notices prohibiting dog fouling and the feeding of seagulls, as this is an ongoing problem at home.

As the morning progressed, so did we on our way around the curve of the bay, noticing the tide had receded quickly and lots of rocks were showing. St Aubin's Fort was silhouetted against the shimmering water, currently on its own little island opposite Elizabeth Castle across the sea on the St Helier side of the bay.

St Aubin's Fort

After one and a half hours, we arrived at St Aubin, apparently preferred by some to St Helier for being smaller and prettier, with lots of quay and seaside walks. Many al fresco eating places were doing a brisk lunchtime trade with tempting seafood dishes on offer, but we weren't especially hungry and chose a deal in a local shop for a takeaway hot drink plus a muffin or piece of flapjack for £1! The cappuccino was decent enough, as we sat on a bench to eat our cheap lunch.

The sun was still shining in a clear blue sky as we walked around the harbour, noticing the yacht club and a close-up view of St Aubin's Fort. As it was low tide, it looked as if the fort was accessible, but we were happy to take a photo and stroll around the small shopping area before starting our walk back to St Helier.

As we'd walked along in the morning, we'd noticed a little white train (Le Petit Train) filled with tourists that trundled along the route around St Aubin's Bay fairly frequently, so joked that if we were tired, we could always take Le Petit Train back. However, we were happy to walk and after a while, descended on to the beach below to walk barefoot on the sand. It felt mostly good and far more carefree than on the path, but we did have to jump across some storm water outlets as we traversed the golden grains (more a sort of sandy colour), with St Aubin's Fort gradually becoming smaller and Elizabeth Castle becoming bigger.

Carefree on the sand

The tide had receded an exceedingly long way as I picked up a few strawberry top shells, began to tread gingerly over some very gritty sand and realised my neck felt a little too warm for comfort. The sun had been shining across the south-facing bay all the time and I had foolishly left the sun screen behind at the apartment because it was mid-September and probably safe. This slight late-season sunburn wasn't terrible, but I did feel a bit too hot and therefore it seemed a good move to buy an ice cream to cool down.

We failed to locate one on the sea front, so walked into the centre of St Helier, where I also wanted to look for a few small souvenirs for people. For a while we found neither, but just as exhaustion was beginning to creep in, we came across a van selling real Jersey ice cream (although I'd never noticed anyone selling fake Jersey ice cream). I chose strawberry flavour, while Alan chose apple and cinnamon flavour and we gratefully sat down on the nearest seat to enjoy them.

After this, we did manage to find one shop selling souvenirs, but it seemed a bit tacky, so we decided to persuade our weary legs back to the apartment – my legs were definitely weary, so it was a somewhat slow walk. I was grateful to drink two mugs of reviving tea in quick succession while having a much-needed rest, as we'd been out for five and a half hours, walking between 7 to 8 miles.

Rachel and Antoine returned later, having visited the steam museum and St Aubin – it would have been amusing if we'd bumped into them at St Aubin. We spent another relaxed evening watching television, although we were 'forced' to eat pizza again, due to a lack of choice at Co-op Locale.

Friday 16th September

Our last full Jersey day dawned with more cloud than yesterday, but it was quite bright and soon cleared away into definite blueness. I therefore made sure I applied sun screen before we left for a foray into Gorey – or Mont Orgueil Castle, to be precise (if only I was sure how to pronounce it). Mont Orgueil, meaning Mount Pride in French and Lé Vièr Châté in Jèrriais, meaning The Old Castle, is also apparently referred to as Gorey Castle by local people.

It was beautifully warm as we left and Alan plus the Sat Nav drove us to our destination, managing to park quite close to the sea front. We walked along towards the distant castle overlooking the harbour, although I didn't remember such bold and colourful planting along the sea front on our first visit in 1983. It must have looked fantastic only a few weeks previously.

Photo man

As we crossed the road and approached the castle, I was expecting a lot of steep steps as in our 1983 visit, but instead there was a user-friendly slope. It was still very steep towards the top, but definitely easier on the old calf muscles that were feeling slightly compromised after yesterday's walking. After paying our entrance fee to a very friendly and informative man, we went inside the castle and came across another friendly and informative man, but this one was dressed in some strange historic garb and giving a historic spiel to an audience of around 20 about historic Jersey happenings. Mmm – history!

We'd unfortunately missed the very beginning and had come in somewhere around the shenanigans of King Charles I, who was basically a bit mad and made lots of ridiculous laws that eventually led to civil war.

The site of the castle is known to have been fortified in prehistoric times, but Mont Orgueil had been built in the 13th century, first mentioned in documents as early as 1212. It played an important role as the primary defence of Jersey until the advent of gunpowder, when it became strategically at risk and Elizabeth Castle was built at the end of the 16th century as its replacement.

In 1600, Sir Walter Raleigh in his position as the governor of Jersey, rejected a plan to demolish Mont Orgueil in order to recycle its stone for building Elizabeth Castle, because he thought it would be a pity to lose the old castle. Hooray for Sir Walter Raleigh, I think he was right and it would have been a huge pity.

It turned out to be a useful decision as it happened, because Mont Orgueil was then utilised as the island's sole prison until a purpose-built prison could be constructed in St Helier at the end of the 17th century. Repairs were made to Mont Orgueil from between 1730 to 1734 and for the remainder of the century, parts of the castle were adapted for use as garrison accommodation.

However, in June 1907, in what seems suspiciously like a move to get it off their hands, the Crown handed Mont Orgueil over to the people of Jersey in a sadly dilapidated condition and from 1929 it was managed as a museum.

During the Occupation, however, the castle proved useful once again, albeit for all the wrong reasons. The German army garrisoned it and added some modern fortifications, which fortunately blended in with the existing structures.

Since 1994, the castle has been managed by the Jersey Heritage Trust and after a long programme of restoration thanks to a £3 million grant in the early 21st century, was reopened to the public in April 2006. Therefore in 1983, we must have visited it when it was at an in-between stage. I'm a bit annoyed that my memory of that visit isn't better, but I know I enjoyed it and I know that some of the castle was open, with quite a few historical exhibitions and displays.

As it was, we started our exploration of the castle after the strange and informative man had finished talking. He told us he was from Jersey and although his family returned to England while Jersey was occupied, he implied strongly that Jersey people had felt abandoned by Britain during World War II.

We first had to ascend a lot of steps, the plus side of which meant that every now and again we were presented with wonderful views of the harbour way down below. I generally became quite lost going up and down further steps and in and out of so many different areas and rooms. There was such a lot to see that I know I didn't see it all – I know this because Alan saw some things that I didn't. Oh well, we shall just have to make a third visit one day.

One of the very first sights we came across was a small, enclosed 17th-century garden. It was so neat, green and peaceful in its ideally situated sheltered position, from a wind that appeared to have sprung up with some force again:

The 17th-century garden

Another memorable sight in the castle grounds was a large metal sculpture named The Perfect Knight by Owen Cunningham. This imposing figure depicted Sir Hugh Calverly, as for reasons unknown (to me at least, unused as I am to perfect knights/nights) he was considered an ideal knight:

What a knight!

It was a fascinating visit, as we never knew what we'd come across next, be it a brilliant view (Antoine was able to glimpse France), a carved wooden figure, a wheel of urine, prayer nuts, colourful paintings of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Wheel of Fortune and so many innovative sculptures – we really do need to go again.

Gorey Harbour below

By 13:00 it was time to seek sustenance, so we left fascinating Mont Orgueil and walked along to the harbour front with its many eating places, although it felt slightly frenetic and we were unsure where to go. We only really wanted a sandwich, but everywhere seemed so busy that we found ourselves lured inside one place by an importunate man at a door (whose obvious job was to lure). It was cool and comfortable inside and only then did I realise how hot I'd become. We ordered soft drinks that were deliciously cold and some sandwiches that were served with salad and chips, so it revived the wilting parts well.

The plan for the afternoon was to go to a place called Living Legend for a game of crazy golf, which is exactly what we did. It had been a number of years since Alan and I had played, but it was just as much fun as I remembered. There were two courses (the mountain or the cave, if my memory serves me correctly) so we opted for the mountain course and armed with balls, putting sticks, score cards and a pencil, approached hole number one. There were 18 holes altogether and I can safely say that we were over par for most of them.

Like most crazy golf courses, it incorporated all sorts of obstacles in the form of bridges, bends, tubes, slopes, tricky angles and a multi-level hole. It was just as well that the rules of the game stated 6 as the maximum number of strokes for each hole, as our balls sometimes came to rest in very compromised positions.

There was one hilarious moment when Alan, who was standing by a low wall, moved one foot to avoid Antoine's incoming ball and then quickly moved the other foot as the ball veered, without actually putting his other foot down, which resulted in him sitting down suddenly on top of the wall's shrubbery. I think it's fair to say that we all just about laughed until we cried…

In fact, we enjoyed the game so much that we decided to play the other course, perhaps encouraged by the fact that there was a discount for the second course. It ended up being just as much fun and Alan even obliged us by somehow managing to fall back against a wall to avoid another ball. However, he won both games, so the last laugh was on him.

Before we left Living Legend altogether, we looked around a shop there, as souvenir buying was becoming critical. There was nothing much at all, though, so I'm sure they're missing a trick. September may be approaching the end of season, but there are still a large number of tourists about.

We returned to the apartment for a drink, a short rest and to prepare for the forthcoming evening meal at our chosen restaurant, the intriguingly-named Aromas. At 18:45, we set off for a 20- to 25-minute walk through St Helier centre to near the sea front. Once inside the restaurant, which had pleasantly subdued lighting and lived up to its name by exuding aromas (fortunately pleasant ones), we were shown to a table for four by the window.

There was quite a variety of dishes on the menu and we all took a little while to choose, but in the end Alan and I chose plaice with prawn and lemon sauce, while Rachel chose monkfish and Antoine chose tagliatelle. When it arrived, we could see it was well cooked and beautifully presented, with portions that were by no means overwhelmingly huge. There were two side dishes of potatoes and vegetables, as well as the wine Alan had ordered and the water Rachel had requested. It all looked just right and we knew we had chosen well.

As it turned out, I was glad Rachel had requested water, because somehow (and I don't know how) I bit my tongue quite badly and although I tried to ignore the subsequent numbness and probable bleeding, I started to feel faint with the shock. I sipped water and did all I could to appear as if nothing had happened, but in the end I was afraid I might actually faint and had to tell the others.

They were very kind as I sat there sipping water as if my life depended on it, with the conversation veering to stories of other people's mishaps. Rachel asked if I'd like to go outside with her, but I was gradually recovering and knew the crisis was over. I felt so stupid, though, as well as annoyed that I didn't get chance to finish my excellent food, because everyone else had finished and the waitress took all the plates away!

However, we all ordered ice cream for dessert, as Jersey ice cream is decidedly scrumptious. There were several flavours to choose from and it was as delicious as ever. Later, as we stepped outside into the cool, now dark evening, Alan was saying how we'd go there again on a further visit to Jersey. NB: We didn't!

It was quite breezy as we wandered back to the apartment. To be honest, we actually wandered quite quickly, because we were in danger of becoming cold and decided to take the shorter route through the tunnel. Once back at the apartment, we relaxed by watching an hour or so of television, before going to bed on what was sadly the last night of our holiday together.

Saturday 17th September

I slept quite well considering the looming flight and the ensuing breakfasting, packing and getting ready to leave by 10:00 went smoothly. My heart had sunk, though, to see that it was far windier than previous days and was probably just as bad as the day we'd flown in. I tried to be rational about this – I really tried! We put our cases in the car, as the lady looking after the apartments had said it was fine to leave the car there for the morning, and walked into St Helier. We had to be at the airport by 13:00, so we had a few Jersey hours left.

As we reached the town centre, it began to rain – horrors! It wasn't too bad, though, so we continued on our mission for me to buy the elusive souvenirs and for Rachel and Antoine to show us the large and lovely M & S Home store they'd come across. I did find a good choice of fridge magnets in a small shop, so chose several, which were carefully packed in individual small paper bags to avoid scratching. We also enjoyed an interesting browse around M & S Home, a very clean, bright and good quality store with great cushions.

There seemed nothing much else to do then but go into Co-op Locale for the last time to buy lunchtime sandwiches, crisps and drinks, before walking back to the car. It stopped raining and was warm again as Alan drove us to St Brelade's Bay, where there was an interesting reminder of history that I was fascinated to find. Basically, anything to take my mind off the forthcoming flight.

Before the Reformation, the ancient law of perquage allowed someone who had committed a crime to take refuge in the church for eight days, when their family were permitted to bring them food. On the ninth day, though, they either had to give themselves up, or walk along a perquage path down to the sea, where a waiting boat would take them away to remain forever afterwards in exile.

It was said that if they stepped off the path, they would lose sanctuary status and could be captured. Each of the 12 Jersey parishes was linked to the coast by a 24 feet/7.3 metres wide strip of land and hence each parish has at least a short section of coastline. After the Reformation, the perquages became Crown property and now only parts of these fascinating perquage routes survive. As for us, we found the church, we found a slope and we found some steps, but we didn't explore thoroughly and I'm not entirely convinced.

Possibly perquage – definitely Alan

I remembered St Brelade's Bay from 1983, although I actually only remembered the sandy beach and not the bold and beautiful planting along the road above the beach. I obviously had different priorities 28 years ago, which isn't really surprising with two young children. We returned to the car park and ate our sandwiches in the car, looking out at the scenery blowing in the wind.

We had about half an hour to spare after we'd finished lunch, so Alan drove us to see La Corbière Lighthouse, its name meaning the place where crows (les corbeaux) congregate. It was blowing an absolute hoolie, so Rachel and Antoine wisely stayed in the car while Alan and I stepped outside at our peril. I may be exaggerating slightly, but it was extremely windy, as the photograph shows:

Windy

The 62 feet/19 metres high lighthouse was completed in 1874 and was the first lighthouse in the British Isles to be built completely from concrete rather than traditional stone blocks. It has a range of 18 miles and was fully automated in 1976. There is access by a causeway, but this is potentially dangerous and so a klaxon warns when it becomes necessary to return after the tide has turned. There is also a powerful foghorn situated at the foot of the tower, which apparently older Jersey people once referred to as 'la vache de Corbière' (the Jersey cow) because of its low, mournful tones.

There was no possible further avoidance of the inevitable then and so we drove onwards to the airport, where the Hertz rental car park was bursting at the seams and Alan was forced to park the car somewhat haphazardly before running into the office to explain the problem. He was told it was OK just to leave it there and go, so we did. We were slightly surprised that nobody even came to check the car for damage – not that we had damaged it, of course!

We took ourselves and our cases into the airport building and checked in easily. However, there was a long queue snaking around the approach to the area where everyone plus their hand luggage is checked. There was nothing to do but wait, of course, while wondering where everyone was flying. Finally, Alan and I placed our bags to be x-rayed and walked through the metal detector scanner.

No metal was detected, but a travel-weary sigh escaped from me as I saw that my bag had been detained for further investigation. I stood there feeling tired, anxious and not at all in the mood for any trouble when a necessarily officious woman placed my bag on the table between us and asked if it was mine. When I answered in the affirmative, she asked me firstly if I'd kept the bag with me all the time at the airport (yes) and secondly if anyone had approached me and asked if I would carry something in my bag for them (no – would I really be that stupid? I've watched *Airport* for heaven's sake!)

She then peremptorily asked me to open up the bag for her (in case it contained a bomb, I presume) and take out some of the contents. When I took out my camera, she asked me to switch it on for her (in case it was a detonator perhaps?) I began to feel like an extremely suspicious character, even though I knew for certain that I'd done absolutely nothing wrong.

She then decided it was safe to start taking out the contents herself. I felt really embarrassed when she looked through the compartment containing my comb, lipstick, paracetamol and other paraphernalia of life. She extricated the novel Rachel had lent me (*At Home* by Bill Bryson) and checked its pages, before taking out my notebook and doing the same to that, glancing at the crazy golf score cards, spare postcards, stamps and other paper memorabilia that were being kept flat in its pages. I realised that rather than being jumpy about what she might find, I was becoming a bit jumpy that she would bend stuff!

Finally, she gingerly took out the fridge magnets that had been purchased only a few hours previously and individually wrapped. "What are these?" she asked suspiciously, as if they may have been packets containing marijuana or cocaine.

"Fridge magnets," I replied with a certain amount of delight (the ridiculousness of the situation was getting to me). She then took them away to put them through the x-ray machine, before returning to the table with them and repacking my bag for me. I think she may have apologised, but I'm not sure because I was passing beyond normal conscious thought. I then turned around to leave the wretched place (with my damn bag) and saw Rachel and Antoine waiting very patiently and more than a little bemusedly.

After that we were faced with the usual horrible waiting around. We had a hot drink with Rachel and Antoine and said our goodbyes, hoping they had enjoyed their holiday with us. We then looked around the shops for a while, before sitting in the departure lounge. Alan and I saw our flight was delayed for half an hour again, which meant that we left not long before Rachel and Antoine. In fact, while we were sitting in our plane, we could see them boarding theirs.

The flight took only 30 minutes and the wind wasn't a problem, thank heavens, so I found the flying experience relatively bearable for once. In fact, Jersey is so close to us that it's almost definite we'll return one day. I really enjoyed trying to recognise places we'd visited 28 years ago, but much more than that, I enjoyed the pace of life in such a picturesque, interestingly varied landscape. It feels as if the people of Jersey have kept the right balance of remembering and honouring their past, while living in the present and looking towards the future. Perhaps next time, though, we might try the ferry crossing?

Antoine gazes towards the motherland

Rachel must have been very naughty…

Antoine too!