

## **ILEX LODGE** - History and historical information - Excursions.

Ilex Lodge is named after the Evergreen oaks that abounded in the fields here in the past. Evergreen Oaks, Latin name *Quercus Ilex*. The last evergreen oak fell in the hurricane of the winter of 2012 but the English oaks all survived on the southern side of the property. Some Guernsey oaks are unique as they have a gall that occurs nowhere else in the world. Formerly used for making ink and dye.

On this south west boundary runs the mediaeval mill stream built by the Crown to drive the Royal mill. Circa 1200. Grain farmers were obliged by Feudal law to take their grain to the Crown mills to be made into flour. The crown of course took a percentage of this flour! The owners of Ilex Lodge are still obliged to cut and clean this stream twice a year on behalf of the Crown. Followed by an inspection by the Crown's 'Vrangue Stream Committee'.

This is an ancient settlement area, part of the Duchy of Normandy from 900 to 1200 AD. The islanders were part of Duke William the Conquerors nation that conquered Britain in 1066. An Islander wrote soon after; 'My father saw the battle fleet leaving for Hastings'. One of the mediaeval Feudal chapels, St Jacques was sited just up the road from Ilex Lodge. Built close to ancient burial mounds. Farming was the main occupation on land and by the time the first accurate military map of Guernsey was printed in 1787 the Ilex Lodge fields were part of a cider producing orchard and Guernsey cow pasture. Later the land was used to produce early sweet grapes that were shipped to England in large quantities. During the 1900's this changed to tomato growing under glass. At the height of this horticultural business Guernsey was exporting over 10 million twelve pound boxes of tomatoes a year to the UK. The warm climate and high light levels enabled growers to get their fruit on to British markets earlier than others. In the second half of the 1900's tomatoes started to disappear and Tourist accommodation was built here.

In the Second World War Guernsey was occupied by The German forces in June 1940, under the personal direction of Hitler it was turned into part of the Atlantic Wall defences. Up to 36000 men were drafted into the Channel Islands. The end result was an Island with more bunkers and armament than anywhere else in the Atlantic Wall. One twelfth of all cement and building material for the whole Atlantic Wall was used in the Channel Islands. This was followed in 1944/5 with great hardship as the allies cut off supplies after the Normandy landings. With food, fuel and medical supply shortages for Islanders, soldiers and slave workers alike. One of the main command bunkers was built deep underground just up the road from Ilex Lodge. This Naval Command Bunker is open to the public and is situated in the grounds of La Collenette Hotel, St Jacques. St Peter Port. Liberation came on May the 9<sup>th</sup> 1945. This is a huge fete day each year. Expect to see cavalcades, military vehicle displays and special events each year on the 9<sup>th</sup> May.

Ilex Lodge is situated on the edge of the Islands main town where the harbour has ferries to Herm, Sark, Alderney and Jersey. Also the fast ferries go to Poole and St Malo. This was an ancient port on the Roman trade route. Asterix the roman trade vessel was found off shore here and raised. It had sunk in the 400's carrying a cargo of grain and resin. It appears that the vessel caught fire as the resin melted down over the grain, preserving it. The timbers are displayed at a site on the west coast opposite the Cup and Saucer fort (Fort Grey).

On the south of the Harbour is Castle Cornet a defensive fort that has a very good museum. Go and watch the firing of the noon day canon. It changed hands in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the French tried continuously to capture the island. They did occupy Guernsey and the fort on several occasions but never permanently. Our Duke was also the King of England, so the French were our enemies! Great prosperity came with Guernsey being made a neutral port in 1480 under the Papal Bull of Pope

Sixtus VI. This meant that all nations could trade through Guernsey, even when they were at war. As the British and French always were! it allowed the fine wines of France to still flow into Britain and the high quality woollen goods etc to be traded into France.

The ancient church of St Peter Port sat originally at the top of the beach. It was donated to Marmoutier by William the Conqueror circa 1048. It got pretty well knocked about in the French raids but there are still parts that are clearly early 1200's.

Victor Hugo's house is just two hundred yards up the hill from the town church. He moved to Guernsey after upsetting the Jersey authorities in 1855. He lived here until 1875. The Great, Great Aunts of the owners of Ilex Lodge lived close to him and often gave shelter and support to Madame Hugo when marital problems arose! He wrote Les Miserables and Toilers of the sea, when living there.

On the walk back from Hugo's house it is worth seeing the site of one of the Islands worse witch burning episodes. In Tower Hill Steps, just off Cornet Street. There in 1556 Catherine Cauches and her two daughters Guillemine and Perrotine were burnt at the stake. There is a dedication plaque fixed to the wall half way down the steps. The last witchcraft trial took place in Guernsey in 1914. The witch was jailed for five days for selling magic powders. It turned out to be Baking Powder.

A ferry trip to HERM is a must, do not miss a walk on shell beach. Herm was a centre for Neolithic Dolmans and there are many burial chambers scattered around. There is a 12<sup>th</sup> century church and pretty granite cottages. Herm had a large granite quarrying industry in the 1800's exporting large quantities of the pretty light grey granite to England. SARK is also accessible on the day trip ferries. Just a short sail away to this Island that does not allow cars you can get around this charming Island by horse and trap, bicycle, get on the tractor bus. Or just walk!

There are hundreds of eating places in St Peter Port, some in old converted buildings. Nellos in the Pollet is an old 14<sup>th</sup> century property with a high reputation for good food. La Nautique is another, overlooking the harbour opposite the visitor marina. Go up the steps into this old 1700's shipping storehouse. Full of old beams, granite walls and photos of sailing ships moored alongside the adjacent quay.

FLORA and FAUNA. Guernsey is unusual because it lacks many of the animals normally found in Europe. The reason is that the Island was cut off from the mainland at an early glacial date and received no European mammals, unless introduced. There are no foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels, moles. No toads, snakes etc. Amongst the 1340 plant species and hybrids. There are a number of unusual and unique ones here. The Guernsey elm, nearly wiped out in the recent Dutch elm disease epidemic. There is a distinct Guernsey hybrid fern very rare and only found in a few locations. The Guernsey Lilly, a beautiful multi headed scarlet flower with a chocolate smell and gold sparkles in the centre. This flower was found growing in the sand dunes at Vazon several hundred years ago. It is unusual because its type is more like those found in South Africa. It has been suggested that it may have washed ashore from a wreck. Flowers abound in Guernsey. Early spring is a blaze of colour. From March through summer. Starting with Primroses, wild garlic, Campion's and bluebells the cliff walks and hedges are a riot of colour. There are specially preserved orchid fields, flowering April to June. In season the hedges in rural lanes and cliff walks look better than any planted garden.

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