

## La Bellieuse and Le Douit - History and Historical information.

### LA BELLIEUSE COTTAGES

The meaning of the name LA BELLIEUSE is not known. Probably pre dating the Roman and Norman occupation of Guernsey. Its name lost in the Neolithic nomenclature of this area. The meaning has had many ideas postulated. The earliest documented written mention is in a Latin 1267 document. It is written as BELLOSA which could mean an area of Sloe Bushes or possibly the female form of a name. There is a fountain called FONTAINE BELLE at Le Maindonaux. So it could be the FEMALE FOUNTAIN or FOUNTAIN OF THE WOMEN. Another suggestion has been the place of Bail, the pagan god?

Just one field away stands the church, circa 1225 it was built on top of a circular mound. There was a substantial Neolithic structure here before the church. The massive corner stones of the Church are parts of that structure, thrown down to give a solid foundation. This pattern of Christian Churches being built on these old pagan sites is well known in the Channel Islands. The Neolithic use of the site is well known as an ancient Statue Menhir, La Gran'mere du chimquire, has always stood in the Church area. See it at the Church gate. (Fifty yards from the cottages) This old Mother Goddess, circa 2500 BC, is similar to one at the Castel Church and others are found in Brittany. A fertility idol, it still has offerings of flowers placed on her head. The face and shoulders have been recarved in the Celtic/Roman period. Sulis Minerva is the Celtic and joint Roman goddess of the Bath hot water springs. That goddess had similar hair or coronet and bodice, possibly this was the purpose for the rebranding?

The key to early settlements in Guernsey is based on three factors. The availability of springs and fountains that never dry. The provision of shelter at the head of valleys and having a location that gave close access to flat areas of land. Where trees and shrubs could be cleared to create cultivated strips of land. All three are present here, the holy or healing fountain in front of Le Douit main house. The sheltered valley site and the flat fields are here. The large agricultural area to the east is called Les Camps. ( Latin, ' campester' meaning flat land area. And in Norman French, an area of strip system agriculture)

The spring and fountain are of great age, built of a polished type of granite found around the church. Some of which probably formed a Neolithic alignment or circle in association with the Church megaliths. A Number of these polished granite stones still exist by Le Douit. One cut in two forms the gate posts of Le Vallee House. The house situated alongside the north gate of the Church. Another laying down forms the threshold step of La Bellieuse Farm. Others are scattered around the area reused and built into walls and buildings. The fountains were important because they flowed towards the east, an important holy indicator. The Douit ones were known to cure Erysipelas, the red swellings.

Alongside of La Bellieuse cottages is La Bellieuse Farm. Originally the Priests house for the Church. The Norman Fief of the Abbot of Blanchelande took over the Martinvast Fief in 1199. La Bellieuse Farm sits on a strip of this Fiefs land. It is one of the oldest houses in Guernsey. Feudal records that go back to the 1400's mention it and the design of the internal layout indicate a date of 1400. Within the hallway was linen fold panelling carbon dated to 1320. The earliest panelling in the Channel Islands. The mediaeval fear of witchcraft is obvious here. The panelling had scribed circles inscribed to ward off evil. By the front doorstep was a buried Bellarmine jug, circa 1500. These would be buried by the doorstep to stop witches squeezing under the door and cursing the house. Guernsey

people were convinced that witches could change form and shape. Even reduce their height to quarter of an inch and slide under their front door. The process was to put hair and finger nail clippings of the family into the jug and bury it close to the front door. This would act as a witch repellent. During restoration work on the house two large silver Pillar Dollars (Spanish pieces of eight) were found hidden behind panelling. Although they were over two hundred years old it is known where these coins came from. During the American Revolution an American ship called The Merrimac was captured by Privateers and anchored outside St Peter Port harbour. A severe gale sprung up and the ship was driven ashore. Some of the locals started pillaging the wreck, including Pillar dollars! Most were arrested including one who said he had none until his trousers fell down around his ankles with the weight of coins in his pockets. These two coins were obviously ones that got away but had to be hidden as they were incriminating evidence. They were rare until the Americans started to find thousands in sunken ships off the Florida coast.

Guernsey was part of the Duchy of Normandy and its people were part of the nation that conquered Britain in 1066. Wace, a Channel Islander wrote in his history soon after 'My father saw the invasion fleet leaving St Valery (for Hastings) Six hundred and ninety six ships. William the Conqueror gave certain areas of Guernsey to his supporters. Including giving St Peter Port church to Marmoutier in 1048.

La Bellieuse cottages have always been part of this ancient property. The cottages have been altered and rebuilt several times. The east gable and the south walls are built in large stones indicating an age similar to the house. They have had many uses over the years. The western end was for three hundred years the apple crushing centre for the area. The 1787 military survey of Guernsey shows most of the fields here as cider apple orchards. Apples were crushed in massive circular troughs by a four foot high wheel. The crushing wheel being dragged around by horse or by several men. Parts of this 'tour' as it is known in Guernsey French, were found in the floor when the cottages were being refurbished. You can see an original tour across the road in the front garden of Le Douit Farm.

Odd finds keep appearing here. There is always early mediaeval pottery to be found when digging. Last year while digging a new drain, several feet down a dark black bottle appeared. Not laying down but planted perfectly upside down. Its neck down and the bottom at the top! The cork, in good condition was still in place, preserved by the damp soil. A local bottle expert dated it as a handmade type only made during the period 1800 to 1820. The liquid inside, full to the top still, was fairly clear but difficult to see because of the thick dark glass. Guernsey was well known for its import/export trade of wines in the 1700 and 1800's so it could be anything. We have never tried it.

The lane that goes east up the side of the cottages is called Les Blanches Pierres lane. (The white stones) An ancient thoroughfare, at least Neolithic. It had large white standing stones at the top end. Clearly connected to the Neolithic monument on which the church was later built. These standing stones survived until three or four hundred years ago. Like many other megaliths in Guernsey, these got broken up to be used in the houses being built in the area. It is thought that much of the stone used to rebuild Le Douit Farm (circa 1700) on the other side of the road is from this robbed stone. The megaliths were again of the very pale grey/whitish, polished, square shouldered stone. Therefore Blanche Pierres lane, White Stones lane. This type of granite is not local, it occurs only in the very north of Guernsey and Herm. A minimum of nine miles away!

FLORA and FAUNA. The lanes and coastal paths are a riot of colour from March onwards. Hedges are covered in primroses, violets, wild garlic, blue bells, Campions etc. There are several unique species, including the Guernsey elm which were nearly wiped out in the Dutch elm disease epidemic. A fungus spread by a moth and its juvenile grubs. There is an oak tree gall found nowhere else in the

world. On the south coast there is a hybrid fern unique to Guernsey. Rare and in a secret location. The Guernsey Lilly has a most beautiful multi headed flower - scarlet with flecks of gold at its centre with a chocolate scent. First recorded as growing in the sand dunes at Vazon bay on the wild west coast several hundred years ago. It is an oddity because this type of Lilly is more like ones found in South Africa. It has been suggested that it may have washed ashore from a shipwreck. There are specially preserved Orchid fields on the west coast. In Guernsey there are no foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels, or moles. No toads or snakes. Guernsey was separated from Europe while the ice sheets were still in place.

#### LE DOUIT FARM COTTAGES.

The name Le Douit is well known, in Guernsey. A Douit is an open culverted stream or an underground culverted stream. This one carries the stream from the ancient healing well in front of the property.

It is not known at what date dwellings were built at Le Douit. In front of the main house is the ancient fountain. The fountain is associated with the Neolithic structure on the mound where the church got built circa 1225, this is an indication of its antiquity. What is certain is that when the first military map of Guernsey was produced in 1787 (as part of the plans to fortify the Island against the feared French invasion.) the house Le Douit Farm existed, shown nestled down in the valley surrounded by orchards and part of the cider producing business. See the massive circular stone trough for crushing the apples in the front garden of the main house. Like most old Guernsey houses Le Douit has seen many alterations and modernisations over the centuries. As with many Guernsey houses in the 1700's the whole front of the house has been removed and rebuilt with larger windows built in a more regular pattern. During World War II it was used for a carting business. All carried out by horses as all the lorries had been seized by the Germans to assist in carting material for their massive Atlantic Wall defence constructions.

In the 1960's small farms were not viable and most of the barns here were converted into Self Catering holiday accommodation. Some of the original tourists still visit the cottages after fifty years. Guernsey had a shortage of oak trees when the barns were built but the enterprising locals used instead oak washed up from shipwrecks. See the upstairs lintels and door frame of No 4, made of this and the door of No 4 made from ships decking.

Walks and excursions - To get onto the beautiful coastal paths you can either go east up Blanche Pierres lane to Fermain bay and the coastal path that goes north to St Peter Port (an hours walk) or south to Pleinmont (eight hours walk). Alternatively you can go south up Saints road to Saints bay and the same coastal path. By going up Blanche Pierre lane you come to Sausmarez road where Sausmarez Manor and its fief has been established for eight hundred years. The manor house is open and has a fine farmers market including antique stalls there on Saturdays. Just one field away from the cottages is the old church of St Martin (1225) and its Mother Goddess statue, standing at the church gate.

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