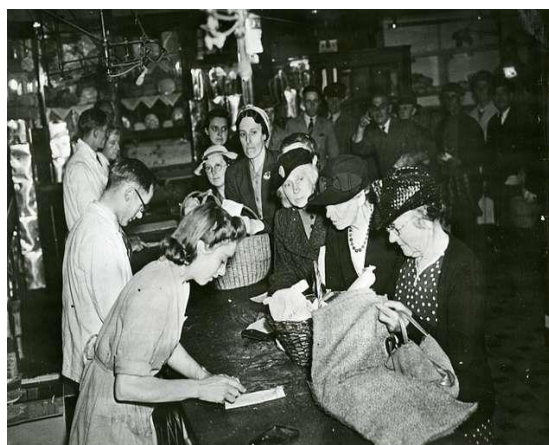


u3a monthly meeting - The Channel Islands Under Occupation

Local speaker, John Chester, spoke about Guernsey under occupation during WW2 to a packed hall of u3a members at their February monthly meeting. As the Channel Islands were closer to France than England there was no realistic possibility that they could be defended, and the Germans occupied the islands from June 30th 1940. Many islanders had already fled – probably as many as 17,000 of the Channel Islands population of 40,000 left by sea including most of the children who were billeted with families in England for the duration of the war.

To check that the islands were really surrendering, the islanders were asked to fly white sheets or towels ensuring the islands were taken without force. Initially the occupying forces were friendly as Hitler hoped for a rapprochement with the rest of the UK. There were lots of parades and entertainment. In fact, organising any resistance would have been difficult as the islands were so small. However small acts of resistance included ‘doctoring’ the corners of stamps with anti-German sentiment.

Rationing was inevitable and the locals were encouraged to eat whatever was available – anyone for parsnip tea? There was a shortage of coinage and money had to be printed. Eventually a Red Cross ship was allowed to land much needed food and other supplies in December 1944. These were distributed by Scouts and the Salvation Army although both organisations had been banned. Interestingly the Germans made no attempt to steal the food though their own supplies were meagre at this point.



First food supplies since 1940

Hitler was always concerned that the English would attack so the existing Napoleonic fortifications were repurposed and enlarged. More bunkers and tunnels were built across the island to protect stores and ammunition. An underground hospital was built to treat many of the Germans injured in Normandy in 1944. The sea around was also mined.

At the end of the war in Europe, HMS Beagle was instructed to take the surrender of the Channel Islands – however the German commanding officer expected his officers to fight. It took a further two days after the rest of Europe had surrendered for the islands to be freed.

British task Force liberates Guernsey

