

**DENDY
WALTER
COOPER**

THE ISLETS OF THE
CHANNEL

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Walter Cooper Dendy

The Islets of the Channel

ALDERNEY:

AURENÊ – AURIGMA – AURIMA – ARENO –
ABRENO – AURNE – ORIGNI – AURINÆ INSULA –
ISLE OF THE CAPE – ISLAND OF ST. ANNE.

This lies nearest to the shore of Albion, within its belt of shoals, and difficult of access in stormy weather, even in its new haven of Braye la Ville, or Brayer. The access was still more perilous in Crab Bay, or in the more ancient port of Longy. We are landed. How quiet the people, how social and primitive, how wedded to old customs. It is probable, however, that in a few years the harbour of Braye will display a busier scene, much of the sterile land of the Giffoine be fertilized, the petty farms multiplied, and the treasures of its fisheries realized: but Alderney will never be admired, for dulness reigns around, and the sea spray seems to excite cutaneous maladies, and the salt and fish diet to induce dyspepsia. There is, however, with its sterile aspect and its dearth of foliage, a prominent and novel character in Alderney. About its elevated centre is the quaint old ville of St. Anne, possessing a new church (the ancient fane being despoiled), a new court house, the Government house, the gaol,

the female school, and chapels of dissent.

Of the ancient town on the south-eastern coast, of which the oblong granite blocks of Les Rochers, near the cemetery, are believed to be the debris, very solemn legends are recorded. Its destruction is referred to the judgment of the Deity on the crimes of a gang of wreckers, who plundered and murdered the crew of a Spanish vessel wrecked on the coast. This infliction, according to the record, had its parallel in Jersey.

The *Court* consists of judge, jurats, attorney and solicitor-general, greffier, sheriff, and his depute and serjeant.

The ecclesiastical history is not without interest, and there are seriously romantic legends of the mission of Geunal, Vignalor, or St. Vignalis, the patron saint of Aurigny. He was a scion of a noble family in Bretagne, a proselyte of St. Magloire, and he resigned his abbacy of Landenec, and became a missionary to Sark. From thence he wended to Alderney, and converted the catchers of fish and the tillers of ground, before this the most desperate *wreckers* in the Channel.

From the outlying rocks on the eastern height stands the ruined castle (*La Chatte*) of Essex, built, it is said, by Robert Devereux, for the detention of his queen. Below it, on the lower shore of Longis is a Roman *cist*, noted by Holinshed; and *Castrum Longini*. *Les murs des bas*, or the *Nunnery*, is a very antique square, with corner towers, constructed with the Roman tiles of the dilapidated ville. Here and also at *Corbelets* were discovered antique vessels and coins and relics, and monumental stones of

porphyry and sienite.

On the coast heights there are batteries and watchtowers and beacons, and a telegraph for Guernsey, all dismantled in time of peace.

The coast is one of the wildest belts of cliffs and rocklets, those eastward of a line from *Braye* to *L'Etat* are of ruddy grit, those westward of porphyry or hornstone. The eastern group, more exposed to disintegrating forces, assumes the columnar form, or that of hanging blocks, as at *Pendente*; but the porphyry of the west is of the wildest fashion. Between these strata is a narrow black belt of hornblende and quartz, running north and south across the islet. On the south-west point is *La Nashe Fourchie*, the cones of *Les Rochers des Sœurs*, and the secluded *Chaise de l'Emauve*, the *Lovers Chair*, a record of the passion of *Jacquine Le Mesurier* for one far lower than herself in rank. Of this romance the story and catastrophe are just as interesting as the common run of these love tales. Below the ridge of the *Giffoine* there is the bold *Tête de Jugemaine*, and the fine bays of *La Platte Saline* and *La Clanque*. On its outlying rock is still celebrated on the first Sunday in Lent, by youths and maidens, the ancient festa of *Les Brandons*, the wild gambols being peculiar to the islet. After dancing in the ring and kisses round, the corps de ballet return to *Braye* in procession, waving aloft their blazing firebrands, displaying all the wild gambols of *Comus*. The islet is most exposed; it is therefore *bracing*, yet the Cape *Alctris* and other exotics thrive in the open air. About

Longis and La Clanque a profusion of *fuci* and *algæ* is thrown on the shore. The *Haliotis* and *Trochus shells* lie on the beach, and myriads of the *strombiformis* on the sterile ground.

In her course from England, whether in the open channel or in the Ortac, the boat closes on the *Caskets*. From the Weymouth course these lie off eastward. The water is twenty and thirty fathoms deep around these white sand rocks, which are about a mile in circuit, and have two landing-places, with steps in the rock, accessible in calm weather. The approach is perilous in a storm; and it was off the Caskets that in 1120 Prince William, the only son of Henry I., was drowned. The platform is walled and surrounded by three light-towers at triangular points. The sea block of *Ortac* and the rocklet of *Berhou* lie between the Caskets and Alderney, the latter rock being the resort of the Stormy Petrel, the Barbalot, and the burrowing bee, one of the most interesting little things in entomology. From this rock the peep at Alderney is picturesque.

We are nearing the little Russell Channel, and surrounded by blocklets: another of the sister islets is looming in the distance.

GUERNSEY:

CÆSAREA – SARNIA.

Passing between the point of *Vale* and Herm, we are directly off the harbour of *St. Peters Port*, its fort of *Castle Cornet* crowning an isolated granite rock, southward of the pier, which now connects it with the shore, and forms the harbour of refuge. The coup d'œil assumes a perfect Norman aspect, and the costume, dialect, and manners are in just harmony with the scene. The marine quarter of the "town," as it is *par excellence* termed (and indeed there is no other in Guernsey), especially the old church, the hotels, and wineshops, of dark grey stone, with which the quay is lined, is perfectly *continental*. The shops and offices, of more modern aspect, compose the streets; the dwellings of the opulent, among which *Castle Carey* is conspicuous, are chiefly on terraces along the abrupt escarpment; *Elizabeth College*, the modern church, and the *Victoria Tower*, by the cemetery, on the new ground, being the most prominent public objects. The old church on the quay, dating about 1120, is crucial, the interior being darkened by its massive columns and heavy galleries.

The marble slabs of the fish-market are profusely supplied with choice fish – turbot, dorey, and very fine crustacea; and the stalls teem in the season with the treasures of Pomona.

The education at the College is economical, about £12 per annum; the cost for living with the Principal not exceeding £60.

The influence of this facility of learning will enlighten the minds even of the unlettered islanders, among whom there is a prevalent superstition. The belief in witchcraft may still be discerned, although it is now two centuries since women were tortured, hung, and burned under this demoniac creed.

The scenic quality both of the interior and of the eastern and northern coasts of Guernsey is mere prettiness. On the south, however, from Fermains Bay to Rocquaine it is buttressed by some of the most magnificent rocks in the Channel, the land gradually descending from them northward. The coast rocks on the east, south-east, south, and south-west, from Saline to Rocquaine, are of *gneiss*, those of Rocquaine are of *schist*, and thence they are *granitic*.

A line from Vagon Bay on the west through Catel to Amherst cuts the islet into two unequal parts, differing in geological character. Much of the bed of the northern portion is alluvial; some, indeed, embanked from the sea by General Doyle. The southern is a more elevated platform, and consists of a series of undulating hills, and sloping bosky lanes, and little glens with rippling runnels, until the highest downs dip at once into the waves their magnificent gneiss cliffs, rounding into beautiful bays, embossed with outlying rocks, and worn into clefts and fissures, or running up into exquisite little dingles. This magnificence is confined to the south; the sea and coast views,

however, to the east, are finely backed by the islets of Herm and Jedthou, and the more distant ridge of Serque.

Guernsey is an easy study; it may be *coasted* and *threaded*, and its objects of natural and archæological interest analysed, in four or five days. In calm weather, however, the cliff beauty of the islet may be contemplated more perfectly from a boat, surveyed from Fermain's Bay to Les Hanois.

The coast from Port St. Pierre to St. Sampson is flat, and studded with rocklets, on which loads of *vraich* and *laminaria* and *asperococcus* are profusely strewn. These algæ are gathered and dried for fuel, at the legal harvest time, in March and July, the harvest home being profusely supplied with *vraich cakes* and bread. The digging and blasting of the quarries of black stone, and the tiny windmills that drain these excavations, give life to the scene as we approach St. Sampson's.

Martello towers crown several of the brows, and there is within very old walls to the left a little remnant now styled *Ivy Castle*. It is not worth the visit, although it is a bit of a castle, built by Robert of Normandy, contemporary with that of Jerbourg.

We are close to the archæological gems of the islet, – the churches of *St. Sampson* and *Braye la Ville*, or *du Val*, within a mile of each other, at each end of a flat alluvial isthmus. The first is dated 1111, its name being derived from Sampson, Bishop of St. David's, consecrated Bishop of Dol under the Duke of Brittany, and endowed with these islets by Childebert of France. He came to Guernsey, and built a chapel here. There are three

aisles, with massive pillars and Norman arches; the old gallery-loft and the tower are in exquisite antique. It is profusely covered by most luxuriant ivy with enormous stems.

The steeple of Braye du Val, dated 1117, is very eccentric, immense granitic blocks lying before the belfry-door.

At low water we cross the harbour of St. Sampson's, Vale, or Du Val, on stepping-stones. The Castle on the mound was erected as a defence against the incursion of the Danes, and then called St. Michael's, or the Castle of the Archangel. There is a legend imputing its erection chiefly to a band of military monks, who, in a sort of holy pilgrimage, made a descent on the islet.

A Druidical *carn* lies on the hill, half a mile northward on the left of the road. There are twelve upright and three immense horizontal stones. The largest of these, fifteen feet long and a yard thick, rests on four uprights, the second only on two, the third on the second and the edge of the pit, so that six uprights are unoccupied. From this brow there is a perspective view of the chief objects in the islet, Alderney lying on the horizon to the north-east.

Forts *Doyle* and *Pembroke* are on the northern point on either side of *Lanresse Bay*, the bay of "*Anchorage*," in which the Duke of Normandy landed in a storm, as he was sailing over to England to Edward the Confessor.

The shores and bays are here flat and dull; as we leave the Race Course and pass *Portinger* and *Long Port*, the upheaved blocks of gneiss increase in number and proportion. In *Cobo Bay*

stands *Le Grande Roche*; its veins of rose-coloured feldspar are unique. Here and there we have picturesque glimpses – one of the flat islet of *Lihou*, once hallowed by a priory built in the reign of Henry I., the grouping of cots and walls still in bold relief. The outlying rocklets are profuse between *Le Grand Havre* on the north and the bold blocks of *Les Hanois* or *Hanoreaux* off *Pleinmont Point*, the west corner of the islet; they completely stud the bays of *Port du Fer*, *Saline*, *Long Point*, *Great Cobo*, *Vazon*, *Perelle*, *Le Rie*, *Rocquaine*, the widest bay in Guernsey. It was in Vazon Bay that the Spaniard Yvon de Galles descended and fought the battle in which the islander Jean de Lesoc performed feats of great valour. The site of this conflict is still named *La Bataille*.

In contrast to this record of history is a fairy legend. In this bay of Vazon was “*Les Creux des Fées*,” a cavern haunted by the little people. Why and when and how we know not, but they conquered Guernsey!

A sterile sameness reigns around *Pleinmont Point* and *Mount Herault* and *Creux Marie*, a cavern 200 feet deep, and *Le Corbière*, until we reach *Point la Maye*. In the vicinity are the old village churches of *St. Peter* in the Wood, of the æra of Henry II., 1167, and *Torteval*, still more ancient, of the æra of Henry I., 1130, which was erected by Philip de Carteret and dedicated to his Saint, Philip, after a vow during a storm in *Rocquaine Bay*. There is the menhir stone in a meadow by one of the lanes.

The highest peak of the islet is the perpendicular cliff eastward

of Maye Point, rising to 300 feet – with offset rocklets and caverns or slits in perfection. After the steep descent to the north-east into the little cove of *Petit-bôt*, we mount abruptly to a very fine brow, *Mount Hubert*, the name associated with the chase, and as we are now in the district of *Le Forêt*, we may believe that we are on the site of sylvan sport in the olden time. The dingle over which we look to the elevated church of *Le Forêt*, on the opposite brow, reminds us of the ravines of Devon or Man, the road winding in zigzag down a very deep valley with a rippling streamlet at its side. We are now on the brow over Icart Bay, the wildness and breadth of its waters spread out far below us. The sienite rocks are finely chaotic, exactly grouped for the pencil, and among the best studies in the islets; and around us we may discover very luxuriant patches of lichen – among them the *Roccella Tinctoria*, or *Orchel*, to which we owe many a bright olive dye and the litmus paper so essential as a test. Another descent to eastward brings us to the most exquisite little cove, *Saint's Bay*; the huts and nets and grouping of fishermen are on a ledge of the rock, adding life to the otherwise solitary scene. The martello tower that was to guard the descent of the gorge, like a Border peel in Scotland, is properly perched to carry off the cliffs. Crossing Bon Point, the most fantastic outlying rocks of Muel Huet at once arrest the eye; disintegration has left them at present almost as caricatures. Leaving St. Martin's on our left, the high brow of *Jerbourg* rises eastward, on which there is a lofty column to the memory of General Doyle. It is the finest

point for a panorama of the isles; Herm and Jedthou beneath us, Serque and Jersey extending their long grey ridges in the distance. The lines at *Fort George* commanding the road and the port are dismantled; from the eastern bastion we gain a very fine bold view of the harbour and Castle Cornet, with the eastern coast to the Castle of du Val, Alderney, lying on the horizon. And so we accomplish the coast route of Guernsey.

It is early evening in summer: wandering in the interior of this floral islet, we are directly surrounded by pretty quiet hamlets and homesteads: the abrupt lanes are lined and feathered by underwood of very luxuriant yet dwarfish growth. The little gardens are glowing with flowers, and they, as if to shame the forest by a contrast, attain a gigantic height, their colours being exquisitely deepened into perfect beauty. The tree *verbena* rises twenty feet; *camellia*, *oleander*, *myrtle*, *aloe*, *cystus*, blue *hydrangea*, *fuchsia*, *geranium*, *magnolia*, all blooming profusely in the open air; *amaryllis*, the Guernsey lily, being here unparalleled. The *heliotrope* overruns its bed in the wildest luxuriance – a carpet of the richest dyes more beautiful by far than the cloth of gold of Hindustan, and on which Flora might well hold her Court of Blossoms – and the *canna indica* is now a denizen in the islet. And here on the brow is the village of *Catel*, looking down and across the flats to Braye. The antique church of the twelfth century, frowning in dark stone, adds subject of high interest to the bright landscape around us. And look at that eccentric daub within it – three knights on horseback with

falcons, and three skeletons lying on the ground. It is somewhat tempting to hatch a legend, but we refrain in pity, especially as the ovum is *addle*. There are, however, real records of the ceremonial magnificence with which these islet churches were consecrated, that are truly entitled to a remembrance. Bishops and abbots and feudal lords, with their trains of vassals and servitors, were wont in days of old to take, we hope, a holy pride in assembling to grace the consecration with their state. Still more fanciful is the romance of the Well of St. George, near Catel, which is fraught with a very potent charm. St. George beats St. Valentine hollow; for a maiden has merely to make a votive offering to this Saint at his well nine days in succession, and lo! if she looks then into the well, she not only sees her lover, but may *claim*

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