

“What we did on our Holidays”

Channel Islands, July 2006.

This will hopefully be a shorter-than-usual report as the beer scene we encountered on Jersey wasn't, let me put it, thriving. With one brewery on the whole Island and only one more on neighbouring Guernsey it's a bit of a backwater for lovers of decent beer; the Jersey brewery, or Ann Street as it likes to be known, has bought up and closed the Topsy Toad brewpubs as well as the Guernsey brewery within the last ten years, although Randalls Vautier, the other major brewer on the island, did the job for them in 1992 when they gave up brewing to concentrate on running their pubs.

The trip was therefore booked as a voyage of exploration, as both of us had wanted to visit the islands for quite some time but never really got around to doing anything about it until it became obvious just how many airlines flew there and from where; Coventry is probably our closest airport to Worcester and, when we found [Thomsonfly](#) doing cheap offers to the islands we jumped at the chance and booked it, even given we'd be travelling in July, a month we normally religiously avoid due to the amount of other normals travelling, but we figured that at least it wouldn't be too hot there...

So started a month of research into the relatively unknown beer culture of the islands which, predictably, didn't turn up a fat lot of interest; basically, there were around ten pubs which did any decent real ales, a few more which only had Jersey brewery beers, and it was looking extremely unlikely that we'd get any winners whatsoever although, as I hadn't had a Jersey brewery beer since 1994 and they now produced Topsy Toad beers, there was a chance of a scoop somewhere. I then found out that the brewery had just released a new beer, Jersey Special Ale, so that made one more winner to find – things were looking slightly better than they had a month ago!

As I've already said, the trip was more about exploring the islands and having a relaxing time gawping at the scenery and walking around the cliffs so the relative lack of beer didn't bother me that much – after all, we'd known the pathetic beer situation when we booked the flights – so I concentrated on gathering as much information as I could regarding megalithic remains and suchlike on the islands and anything else we might find remotely interesting; we had to plan for 3 days of rain as well as 3 days of sunshine, just in case the weather turned against us!

Finding a reasonably-priced hotel also proved a slight problem as it seems the hoteliers make all their money in the three months of summer, as prices were way above what we'd usually pay (our budget is usually around £40-£50 a night) although eventually, after much searching, I found us a decent deal at the [Norfolk Lodge hotel](#) for £64 a night – I couldn't do any better than this unless we wanted to sleep in a fleapit! The hotel itself turned out to be adequate if a little geared towards the “beige generation” (old people, not chavs) and wasn't really worth what we paid for it considering the hike out of the centre to get there.

We had been debating whether to do a day-trip to Guernsey or not, so when I saw the ferry company [Condor](#) did a day return for £30 then that was it! However, I then saw that the local airlines [Aurigny](#) and [Blue Islands](#) also flew between the islands and one look at the planes involved – tiny 16-seater Britten-Norman [Trislanders](#) dating from the 1970's – convinced me that they just had to be done! So, Monday was selected as Guernsey day and I quickly booked an outwards flight on the plane and a return on the ferry for a slightly expensive £65 each; OK, it was a bit pricey, but doing the little plane was simply irresistible to me, bored as I am with 737's, and I love ferries anyway so the big “fastcat” back was just as inviting – and anyhow, there's no pockets in shrouds, or so they tell me...

Saturday 15th July 2006.

The quirky airport.

With the flight out at 07:20 from Coventry we had the relative luxury of a lie-in until 03:00; considering that if we were flying from Stansted we'd be somewhere on the A14 by this time gives some indication of what a bonus this was! Despite the on-airport parking being very sociable the last time we'd flown from Coventry (see the Venice report – is it really that long ago? Cripes!) I'd located some cheaper at a garage just a mile away and, with the daredevil attitude we have to such things, had booked it at £5 a day; now all we had to do was to find the place!

The journey along deserted motorways and trunk roads took less than an hour and we were soon pulling into the forecourt of a small garage stuffed with cars at just before 05:00. Another car had just pulled up and the sociable chap on duty went through the formalities within a few minutes and then we were off, just us two and another couple in the minibus, and within five minutes we were being dropped off outside the main gates to the airport; it's always a good feeling when you get to save money on airport parking as it's one of the worst things about travelling nowadays that the parking will sometimes cost as much as the flight does! We'd only saved £7 but it still felt good and supporting the little guy rather than the multinational mega-corporation always gives me a warm feeling inside...

I was pleased to see the airport hadn't been ruined in the 18 months since we'd visited when we'd been shocked to see it was basically a load of portakabins pretending to be a terminal building; the good thing now was that they'd added a café outside the departures area and this acted as a waiting room of sorts - when we'd checked in, obtaining numbers one and two (although this didn't matter with the allocated seats) we were asked to wait in the café and only come through to departures an hour before the flight was called. As we sat and waited, minibuses arrived in a steady stream and disgorged their cargo of council tenants wearing assorted "Ing-er-land" clothing and dragging mammoth suitcases outside the departures area and we feverishly hoped they wouldn't be on our flight...

We remembered the rancidity of the coffee we'd had the last time at Coventry vividly and it wasn't a lot better in the new café (in keeping with the prevalent architecture of the airport this was yet another portakabin) although there was a lot more space there to sit around and relax. I must admit that I like Coventry airport as it's a tiny, quirky little place and long may it be so – better than the huge sprawling faceless monstrosities such as Birmingham – and let me just say now to the locals who campaign against it so fervently; whose house do you fly over when you jet off on holiday then, you fucking NIMBY tossers? See my point now?

The weather was giving me cause for concern, as the whole of the UK had been in the grip of a very unseasonal heatwave for the preceding week and it showed no signs of loosening it's grip; we'd therefore come prepared with lots of suncream and we were even wearing shorts, having decided that in a 30-degree heat they were the position of strength! Even at this early hour of the morning the sun was up and ferociously showering us with rays and I secretly hoped that it wouldn't be too hot on the islands and prevent us actually doing anything!

We went through security and into the lounge endured the last time we'd flown from Coventry and found it still too small and crowded, although the café certainly helped to ease things, but wouldn't it be a lot easier to not have two flights leaving within 30 minutes of each other... surely that's just common sense? We boarded the plane – which, guttingly, was dud – and left 20 minutes late due to the miserable bastards at ATC Birmingham imposing slot restrictions on Coventry; I mean, how many flights leave Coventry compared to how many depart from Birmingham in the same time period? Tossers.

A first impression.

Our flightpath took us over Portsmouth and before long we were descending over the Cherbourg peninsula towards the islands. I was confused at this point, as the peninsula closely follows the outline of Jersey and it looked very large to me; I'd been led to believe that Jersey fitted in the window of a plane comfortably! As we passed over the coast and back out to sea it soon became apparent that this wasn't Jersey and, as we did a low-level turn over Guernsey and set course for Jersey, everything suddenly made geographical sense – and Jersey did, indeed, fit in the window of our plane as we approached the airport from the west!

I studied the golden sands of the five-mile bay and the rocky cliffs jutting into the sea and saw the similarities with Cornwall immediately; everything was a patchwork of little fields and snaking lanes but we weren't expecting to see standing stones in a field as we made our final approach to the runway; this was a welcome with a Neolithic edge to it! The view must have distracted the pilot too as we hit the runway with a massive bang before bouncing and weaving to a stop, causing some of our fellow passengers to look extremely concerned, before taxiing to the terminal building past all manner of tiny aircraft – including a Trislander which, next to our 737, looked utterly minuscule and made me even more pleased I'd booked us a flight on one! As we pulled onto stand a FlyBE Dash-8 from Birmingham arrived alongside; this must be rush-hour on Jersey, I thought to myself!

Once outside the unexpectedly large airport (it's recently been rebuilt) we located the bus stop and waited for the 09:10 service into St Helier. We knew, through our web research, that day tickets were very expensive on Jersey (£6) but, as we'd be doing quite a few bus moves that day it would probably work out to be a good investment: just! As we waited in the baking sun the queue grew considerably before the bus arrived – and, when it did appear, it wasn't very big! We shelled out for our expensive rover tickets, getting our first sight of the pound notes which are still used on the islands, before bagging seats for the 20-minute run into town along with what seemed to be most of the other passengers from the arrivals lounge; we could tell there were a lot of people as the driver was moved to quip "Something wrong with the taxis?" as he counted the passengers onto his bus.

Eventually we were full up and under way, and we got our first sight of the island's amazing scenery as we traversed the hills by the shell garden with their dense cover of verdant trees and then the long descent into St Aubin and along the bay; I couldn't believe the sea could be so greeny-blue in this country! The hillsides alongside the road were liberally inhabited by a succession of large houses and vegetable plots which gave a distinctly continental feel. As the bus arrived in St Helier service returned to normal with a dual carriageway, underpass, leisure development and a multi-storey carpark but, despite these modern icons, the place wasn't too hideous and it felt as if we might have made a very good choice in coming to Jersey after all – apart from the heat, which was already getting uncomfortable and it was only 10:00!

The bus passed through the town centre on a strange one-way loop and gave us a look at some very nice buildings as it did so and, more importantly, our first glimpse of the beer scene on the island as we spotted the Lamplighter just before arriving in the bus station. After getting detailed OS-like map from the flower-covered tourist office right next to the bus station, we obtained a timetable from the bus office and then discovered that all our best-laid plans to visit everywhere by bus may have been a little presumptuous; most routes had an hourly service as well as finishing ridiculously early at around 19:00, whilst only the airport and route 1 had anything like a frequent service – cheers then! I knew I should have checked the timetables at home before we came but I'd assumed there would be more than one bus an hour to most places, especially as it was slap in the middle of the summer tourist season! Never assume anything...

Into the unknown.

Despite this setback we resolved to make the best of the situation and, as we couldn't check into the hotel yet, we took the next bus out to start our exploration of the island. This happened to be the No.3 to Rozel bay which we took there and then back out to the top of a very steep hill before alighting and trudging off in the blazing sun to find some [Neolithic monuments](#).

We spent the whole morning clambering along dodgy-looking coastal paths, up precipitous hills, through ferocious gorse and braving killer ants, all under the merciless blazing sun, but we were very happy that we'd seen so much of the hidden parts of the island and some of its rich ancient history. We ended up at the remote breakwater of St Catherine at the far northeast of the island before taking the very irregular bus to Gorey to view yet another ancient monument and taking in the amazing views of the castle and harbour from the hills above the town. After a quick wander around the town, however, we discovered there was actually nothing there of any interest, being almost totally a tourist honeypot, so we caught the next No.1 bus back along the coast road to admire the rocky beaches – it really does look like the surface of some strange planet in places!

As we got off the bus more or less in the centre of St Helier we saw a good-looking wine shop and, as if we subconsciously knew just how crap the beer in town would be, we popped in to acquire some bottles for our room later on. Inside was a very decent range of wine and we bought a couple of scoops to last us through the evening as well as, bargain of the year, a ten pence corkscrew! I never, for one minute, thought that this contraption would ever prise the cork out of our bottles, but it was either that or £5.99 for the next cheapest and as we were hand-luggage only and couldn't take it home anyway it seemed worth 10p! We also took note of a chippy next door which seemed to be serving some pretty good fish, so resolved to check it out later on in the evening.

We then discovered just how far our hotel was from the centre as we walked up to it; it took a good fifteen minutes although we were going the long way around! Once checked in, we collapsed in the room utterly exhausted from all the walking we'd done thus far which, I wildly guessed, must have been around five miles (it probably was!) before preparing for an evening's wander around the pubs in the centre of St Helier. First, however, we caught a bus back into town as we'd decided to use one of the only frequent bus routes (No.1) for a trip out to the Seymour Inn we'd passed during the afternoon as, according to my research, it sold three real ales and this seemed like too good an opportunity to turn down on an island with so few real ale pubs!

We crossed the bus station to the stop for bus 1, but the crowd of people waiting for it was already far bigger than would feasibly fit on one of the tiny buses and we weren't waiting 45 minutes for the next one! We watched the bus pull up, fill up and then deny about half the queue access before departing with Connex's usual customer service standards adhered to – wait for the next one! With our move now scuppered we decided to do the Seymour on the Sunday and cover the pubs around the centre instead starting, as it was only 25 metres away, with the best real ale bar on the island – the Lamplighter on Mulcaster Street.

A night on the town.

Within a couple of minutes we had arrived at the very grand-looking Lamplighter and were scanning the beers available to see what the situation was. After this initial inspection I was very impressed with the offerings; one scoop (Skinner's Game of two halves) and some decent ales too (Ringwood Boondoggle) so we obtained our beers and settled down at a table for our first experience of Jersey drinking – albeit with beers from the UK!

As was to be expected the Skinners was a pale, dry, fruity and gentle beer with grassy hops and a mellow maltiness all through, whilst the Ringwood has a lovely nuttiness to its hoppy and quite bitter flavour and was quite a surprise for us that beers from larger, older micros could still be as good as this. As we drank the beers we thought about the rest of the evening – wasn't it Inspector Morse who said "when I drink, I think"? Well, neither of us look anything like him so that quote is a

bit irrelevant really - and, the more we thought about it, the shorter an evening it seemed we'd have! I'd calculated that there were only around five pubs worth a look, the one we were in included, so we didn't have to rush our beer...

Our beers finished we headed off to our next call, the Townhouse, which is an ex-brewpub of the Topsy Toad chain. It was further up New Street than anticipated and, when we arrived, there were bouncers on the door; not a good sign, and we almost turned around and returned the way we'd come, but decided to give the place a chance. The bouncers seemed sociable enough and we were inside without a word being exchanged although I honestly expected to take one look at the bar and walk straight out again as surely somewhere this "yoof" wouldn't do real ale? Erm... yes, it did! Jimmy's bitter was on the sole handpump so, this being a scoop (it's stronger than when Topsy Toad brewed it) we ordered a swift half each and sank into some squishy sofas to see what Jersey beer was all about – after all, this was the first beer I'd drunk from the brewery (which has also moved during this time) in over ten years!

I suppose I'd expected too much of the beer but, when I sipped it, I knew right away that this wasn't a good example of the brewer's art – sweet, toffee-ish, sickly and with no interesting flavours at all. I wanted to like it, honestly I did, but my methodical beer taster's hat resolutely refused to be dislodged and I reluctantly admitted that the Jersey version of Jimmy's was a right crock of shite. We finished the toffee-sweet dross as quickly as we could force it down, noticing an area at the back of the pub which looked as if, at some point in the past, it may have held a brewery before heading back into town to find some beer with – hopefully – a tad more character.

We soon reached our target, the intriguingly-named Cock and Bottle on the Main Square, but decent beer? Alas, it was not to be. The pub itself was very impressive with a relaxing bar area which actually felt very "pubby" as well as a bustling patio (confusingly called the Alfresco) but the beer? Jimmy's bitter again, with the "bonus" – if it could be termed thus – of Jersey Special Ale (4.4%) which, so I'd learned from the internet, was a new beer this year and had allegedly won "beer of the festival" at the Jersey event so, thinks I, it must be worth a try...

Okay, it was better than the Jimmy's, that's all I'm giving it as a complement! Jersey Special ale was a copper colour, fairly fruity in aroma, but the syrupy boiled sweet toffeeishness soon overtook the nicer flavours and made me feel a tad nauseous as if I'd just eaten a 5-kilo jar of chewy toffee; this wasn't the kind of beer I'd hoped we would find! Sue had, sensibly, flagged the beer totally and went for an espresso as soon as we'd clocked the proper machine inside and, as I grimaced my way through the fluid in my glass, I wished I'd done the same.

The Pierson, situated opposite the Cock, was also on my list as doing cask ales but after seeing it was a Jersey pub (dunno what else it would be and do cask, thinking about it, as the free houses were already known to us) we rejected it and went in search of our next pub on the list, the Original wine bar. By this time, however, we'd become bored with Jersey beers and gave up on our walk along Bath Street before we reached the pub and, after drawing a blank finding the Dog and Sausage (Finbarr Saunders would have a field day with some of these pub names) by unanimous decision it was time for some food and then back to the hotel.

First, however, we visited the chippy we'd seen earlier and, in the tradition of our UK trips, bought two "fish suppers" to gauge the local fast food's quality. The fish, as we'd seen earlier, were pretty good with thick, crispy batter and juicy fresh cod inside and, although the chips needed a bit of work, we were overall satisfied with the food and so made our way back to the hotel via the 20:50 No.5 bus which got us out of having to walk back and, therefore, gave us more time to consume the wine... I suppose the closer to France you go then wine becomes the beverage of choice!

Sunday 16th July 2006.

Mad dogs and Englishmen...

After a decent night's sleep, disturbed only by the herd of wildebeest inhabiting the room above, we set off for the bus station with the aim of catching the 10:15 12a L'Etacq bus to the west coast of the island for some more Neolithic stone spotting but, when we arrived at the bus station, a scene by now too familiar unfolded; the queue for the bus was well over what would fit on one of the tiny blue contraptions, and we weren't pleased; not only were Connex severely pissing us off now with their incompetence, but the Sunday service (in summer, when loads of tourists are around) was once every two hours – no way were we waiting that long! We half-heartedly joined the queue as we tried to work out an alternative move which would enable us to make something of the day which Connex were trying to cock up.

The bus soon arrived and the queue degenerated into a shambolic free-for-all as everyone pushed for the door. We didn't bother as there was no way we'd get on but watched with some amusement the anguish on the faces of those in the queue when the driver waved his hands to signal "full up" – denied normals are always good for a laugh but these seemed particularly distraught; we could empathise with them though as we were desperately trying to find another bus to do...

With the bus gone the queue began to disperse somewhat, some towards the green "easylink" buses which make a circuit of the island's sights, and some just dispersed. Just as if seemed we'd be joining the green bus ourselves, however, another bus pulled up to the stand with 12a on the front; bloody hell, Connex had only gone and run a relief service to cater for the overloading! Amazed at this piece of fortune we climbed aboard along with the remnants of the queue and, as we caught up the first bus, decided we'd got a much better deal out of this as the first bus was full and standing whilst ours still had the odd seat free!

The trip to the "five-mile beach" as it's called on the island's west coast is a very attractive one and we were almost loath to get off but we had some more stones to see! We spent the next couple of hours climbing up steep paths to reach a burial chamber before plodding along the main road alongside the beach in the blazing sun; the time was now around midday and, with a perfect blue sky, the sun rained down it's rays upon us with a ferocious intensity. Yes we had high-UV suncream on, but I could still feel my baldspot sizzling uncomfortably under this solar onslaught; maybe a hat would be a good move next time! Some cooling sea breezes relieved our discomfort somewhat, but I still had the impression we were baking in a very large oven as we slogged along the dead-straight road towards a café at Le Brave slipway.

As we approached the café it seemed as if every map and his dog had decided to take a trip out there; the car park (and road) were stuffed with cars, whilst normals licking ice creams or glugging water milled around outside. We were here as there were some *menhirs* (standing stones) we wanted to see on the sand dunes opposite, but we hadn't been prepared for a melee of this magnitude! We were, however, thirsty, tired and hot from our trudge along the road and needed some cold water to cool us down, as well as a short break from the merciless sun, so in we went and bought some drinks – which weren't too expensive given the honeypot-nature of the location.

... Get too hot and catch a bus.

After some very welcome drinks we struck off over the sand dunes in search of the stones I'd seen on the internet before we came, but the only problem was that we weren't quite sure where they were! After some stumbling around in the tussocky grass, apparently a nightingale reserve, we eventually found our targets lurking in a lumpy area and so, after the obligatory photos, marched back over the sand to the café as we had, by now, finally surrendered to the sun and decided we'd absorbed enough UV radiation for one day!

We scanned the bus timetables, both the connex and the green “easylink” ones, and a plan began to form; we could do the next 12a, due in ten minutes, to the end of the line at L’Etacq then back to St Aubin where we could pick up the easylink bus round past the Corbiere lighthouse (which otherwise we’d never get to see close-up) and up the same road we’d walked all morning before it cut inland and terminated at Greve de Lecq beach – which is where one of the only free-houses on the island was situated! Congratulating Sue on this move (as she’d done most of the planning, as usual) we had time for another quick bottle of cold water from the café’s fridge before we had to locate the bus stop. This, by the way, isn’t as easy as you’d expect as on Jersey as stops aren’t marked by poles and signs but by the word “Bus” painted on the road – this isn’t easy to spot from a distance, although buses are supposed to stop anywhere that’s safe if you signal to the driver, but we didn’t trust this as the next bus would be 2 hours behind!

Our bus soon lumbered into view, thankfully relatively empty, and we enjoyed the shade and billowing wind as we stormed along the five-mile road (the front doors were kept open) until watersplash, a large water park, where everyone else alighted and we had the free run of the vehicle until we arrived at the remote headland of L’Etacq. After a few photos we were back on and enjoying the coast road and then the lovely forested switchbacks down into St Aubin. We only had ten minutes to wait here before the easylink bus arrived for our scenic trip along the whole western coastline; as these buses aren’t included in the £6 day rover ticket we would have to pay £2 single each to Greve de Lecq but it was worth it as, otherwise, we’d probably not manage to reach the pub such was the appalling service on a Sunday!

The bus soon arrived and treated us to a glorious 40-minute trip around the lighthouse and west coast before we arrived at Greve de Lecq. There was only one reason we had come here, the Moulin de Lecq pub, although the beach looked very nice if it hadn’t been for the hordes of normals roasting on it. There was also a pretty tacky refreshment complex and tourist tat shop which actually sold something useful; real Jersey ice cream when I’d assumed all they would sell would be some repulsive multinational junk such as Walls. One thing we found though is that almost all the fudge sold on Jersey isn’t made there; most is made in Blackpool or somewhere else on the mainland and only one of the commercial types we found actually contained anything from Jersey – some cream (allegedly)! As far as we could tell the only “proper” Jersey fudge is made by [La Mare vineyards](#) and is fairly expensive and rare, but I suppose you get what you pay for!

“Replenishment of bodily fluids lost to evaporation is essential in hot climates”.

Right, it was time for a beer! As we walked uphill to the pub I was picturing a delicious, cool pint of Skinners or, at the very least, Ringwood... I was literally salivating at the prospect of downing my imaginary pint whilst photographing the pub and stumbled through the door with mounting expectations to see – “Oh, for fuck’s sake, is nowhere sacred?” I groaned... Wells Bombardier, Greede King IPA and Summer Ale were the only real ales on the bar and, had we not been parading around all day in the blazing sun and had 40 minutes before the bus I think my highly-developed ethics would have seized control of my feet in a swift coup and walked me back out of the door in disgust... as it was, a half of Bombardier it was (syrupy with hop oils – yeuch!) which tasted even worse when I spied the multitude of pumpclips from micros scattered around the place... I think we were just very unlucky, but that didn’t make the regional crap taste any better!

With no desire to drink any more dross we had no option but to take the bus back into St Helier via St Peter’s village where the Star pub is still located, albeit without the brewery which gave it the “and Topsy Toad” ending – this has been extracted and installed into Jersey Brewery’s brand-new production site at St Saviour where it’s used to produce their cask ales. I’d have thought that leaving it in-situ would have been a far better use of the brewery from a promotional point of view as customers could still see the beer being made but, obviously, this isn’t their priority and so into a faceless industrial estate it went leaving the Star high and dry with no obvious attractions.

Looking at the timetables, we had a choice; if we alighted and sampled the delights of the Star (almost certainly only Jimmy's bitter) then we'd have a 90-minute wait whilst forcing down said beer until the next bus arrived, or we could try and walk the mile to the Living Legend attraction (I dunno what it is either!) and catch an easylink from there; you won't be surprised to learn that the bus arrived at St Helier's bus terminus with us still aboard! We then decided, with a No.1 due in ten minutes, that we'd attempt once more to get to the Seymour inn down in the far southeast at St Clement and, as a bonus, get to photograph the very strange rocks as the tide was almost out. We had no issues with boarding this bus as we'd experienced the night before so, ten minutes later, we were away en-route to a pub with – hopefully – something better than UK regionals on offer!

The Seymour Inn is very handily placed with regards to bus stops; there's one right outside it! It looked like a classic English country pub on the outside whilst the inside was more 1960's crossed with "Cornish rustic" but at least it was out of the sun and cool! There were three beers available, all Jersey brewery, namely Jimmy's, Jersey Special and "Guernsey" Sunbeam so my choice was basically made for me – Sunbeam it was, which came direct from the cask in the cellar as the handpump was broken! The landlord was a sociable bloke and happily provided a mug of coffee for Sue as she didn't fancy any of the Jersey beers which, on past experiences, I must say was a very fair point! This one, however, was by far the best I'd had so far with none of the syrupy toffee taste the others possessed but more of a mellow, malty flavour with hints of honey and hop; not bad at all. Foolishly, I then risked a half of Jersey Special but that was, as expected, more like drinking liquefied barley sugars and not the sort of thing I like!

After our fortifying beers we wandered back along the coast, looking at the strange rock formations out at sea, and walking along the Le Bourg breakwater for a great view of the south coast of Jersey. After a while we began to feel very drained so took the next bus back into St Helier where we decided to have a look in Chambers on Mulcaster street – a very dark bar with, as far as we could see in the gloom, no real ale – so, with the bus back to the hotel beckoning, we bypassed the Lamplighter as the same beers were still on as the previous evening and, after grabbing some more fish and chips, did the bus back to our hotel and finished the evening with a bottle of wine! How very continental of us... although, given Jersey's beer situation, it was about the best outcome I could have wished for!

Monday 17th July 2006.

Back at the airport.

We were up and into breakfast early; we had to be at the airport by 09:50 to check in for what I hoped would be a momentous occasion in my flying career, the trip across to Guernsey in a hellfire little Britten-Norman Trislander 16-seater plane. Originally we were going to simply take the ferry across on a day return, £30, bish-bosh, sorted – that was until I saw a photo of a Trislander and I just knew it was worth the extra £35 to take one of these little beasts on the more convenient outward leg! We walked into St Helier in beautiful sunshine and, as I'd been hoping, there wasn't a cloud in the sky to spoil the views I was hoping for on the way across.

One cloud, metaphorically speaking, on the horizon was my incompetence in packing the camera case; I'd taken the spare set of batteries out to use on my trip to Argentina and had, somehow, forgotten to put them back and now we'd discovered that the ones in the small camera were almost flat! Sue bought a pack of batteries from a shop on the way and we thought that was that sorted although, in the manner of "what can go wrong will go wrong" it would all come back to bite us in the arse at the most inconvenient moment...

The 09:15 bus transported us to Jersey's surprisingly big airport with a minimum of fuss and we approached the Aurigny ticket desk to claim our tickets – what, no e-tix? I thought every airline

used those now, but it seemed Aurigny were in the process of phasing them in so I had the honour of printed tickets for only the fourth time in my life! We were told that our tickets were on the desk and we could check in now so, with a strange feeling of excitement that I don't usually get with flying these days, we went to check in. (Don't get me wrong, I still enjoy the taking off, flying and landing bits, but I think I'm getting a bit bored of all the waiting around beforehand! This would be my 112th flight to give you a feel for my experience and boredom levels!)

We checked in with numbers one and two and I put away my ticket carefully lest anything should happen to it and deprive me of this extraordinary flight before having a look in the "tat shops" which infest all airports, just in case we should see anything to buy when we flew back the next day. Predictably, all the fudge was the UK version and there was absolutely nothing else even remotely interesting so we decided to go through security – just as a massive crowd of brats decided to do the same thing! We did the best we could in pushing through them but we still ended up fairly near the back of the queue for security which seemed to be moving very slowly indeed; once we were inside the hall the reason became clear as there was only one x-ray machine open and the whole place was crawling with brats!

Over the water.

Eventually we got through the machine, only to have our bag searched for no apparent reason, before making our way to gate 12. This cosy little room had a large TV blaring away at one side, approximately 20 seats, an oscillating fan, and that was it so, for something to do, we swapped the batteries in our small camera for the new ones and settled down by the TV to await developments. The Aurigny staff were very sociable and we boarded a good 15 minutes early; when we walked out of the door (even though it was classed as a gate, the exit was simply a door to the tarmac!) there was our plane waiting – a Trislander, G-BDTO, in the new livery and looking very small indeed.

We were boarded first and squeezed into the tiny seats with fold-forwards backrests which reminded me of a Mini Metro... hardly a compliment, but soon all eight passengers were onboard and I began to take some photos of the inside of the little plane. The pilot soon climbed aboard and, after his little speech which went something like "Good morning – as it's so hot today I won't do the trolley service" he started the engines and we were away! The little plane bumped and bobbed along the taxiway as the propellers roared away loudly; the noise was deafening and we hadn't left the ground yet! We trundled to the end of the runway and could see over the Five-mile bay where we'd walked the previous day before turning onto the runway proper as we waited for permission to take off.

Suddenly, the roaring of the little engines grew to a crescendo as the pilot pushed the throttles right forwards and we stormed down the runway with a surprising turn of speed; within ten seconds we were airborne and looking out at the ground disappearing beneath us. All of a sudden, however, the problem with our camera batteries resurfaced; Sue was taking photos out of the window when the camera abruptly froze! I had a try but it froze on me too; these batteries must be dead, I cursed, as Sue retrieved the almost-flat rechargeable from the bag which were quickly reunited with the camera. After that shambolic episode we managed to bag some decent shots as we thrashed over the sea between the two islands which, surprisingly, were so close we could see both at once, despite flying very low!

We turned in over the south coast of Guernsey, giving some great views, and we could soon see the airstrip; thinking about it, this should quite a scary event being in a tiny plane heading nose-first for the runway, but I suppose we've flown enough now that we just enjoyed the view as, only 14 minutes after we'd taken off, we touched down at Guernsey's little airport and came to a stand next to an assortment of other Aurigny aircraft including their famous "Joey" Trislander, complete with painted-on face! That flight, despite being the most expensive I've ever done at around £2.80 a minute, had been incalculably worth more than the £40 we'd paid for it and we'd both enjoyed it

tremendously; I was a bit disappointed that we weren't flying back on one of these little beasts but as I enjoy travelling on boats almost as much I suppose the trip had a bit of everything!

We resolved to do as many Trislanders as we could the next time we came to the Channel Islands – if they are still flying then as some of them are getting on a bit (they ceased making them in 1982!) and we could also scoop in Alderney's famous grass runway too! As we disembarked from the little plane and walked into the terminal, chatting to a Guernsey Ada who had been sitting behind us, it seemed as if we'd gone back a generation to a time when other passengers spoke to you, the pilot wasn't encased behind a bullet-proof door (he just sits at the front with nothing behind him on a Trislander) and everyone was friendly – such is the way of life you sometimes find in the Channel Islands which, I suppose, is one of their endearing attributes.

Another day, another Island.

We obtained a bus timetable and detailed map from the Ada at the tourist desk and indulged in a bottle of freshly squeezed orange juice (complete with pips) before deciding on our move for the day; as this was a touristy trip not a beer one we'd decided to try and see as much as the islands as we could via the buses and experience some of their history too so, armed with a list of more Neolithic sights to see, we took the summer-only No.7 bus around to L'Eree bay to see some remains there. After quite a bit of research I'd found out that the bus fares on Guernsey were a flat 50p a trip but, unsurprisingly, the fares had recently risen to 60p a trip; that's a 20% rise and, funnily enough, had taken place just before the tourist season kicked in... call me an old cynic, but there you go! At least it was cheaper than Jersey but it's the principle of the thing...

The weather, although still very hot, was noticeably cooler than it had been in Jersey which made walking around overgrown footpaths a lot more bearable! We soon found our two sites, one of which gave superb views out to sea, before catching the next bus all the way to the north of the island and the gold course at L'Ancrese where, on alighting, we came face to face with two Guernsey cows grazing at the side of the road! Now before anyone wonders why we were at a golf course, let me explain – nothing to do with golf, obviously, as that's a waste of a good walk and utterly pointless; no, there were more ancient sites here including one, Les Fouaillages L'Ancrese, is one of the oldest such structures in Europe dating back to 4,500BC.

Our only problem now was to actually find the things; I wasn't sure about asking a golfer in case we got the "get off my land" type response you'd expect back home, but the ones we asked were almost too helpful, directing us along the side of a gorse-hedge and, as they played alongside, shouting over that it "wasn't far" or "just over there!". After seeing the two ancient sites we retraced our steps and then headed across another part of the golf course to find La Varde Passage Tomb, situated by the 17th green according to my notes!

This site is the largest Neolithic structure on Guernsey and you can actually stand inside the chamber under the 10-ton capstone which, hopefully, is still safe after all those years! We then took a 6A bus from Pembroke bay to another tomb at Les Marais where, before we could enter the mound, a Dutchman emerged, blinking, into the sun's glare and informed us the lights were still on... we soon found out what he meant as the site had been rather clumsily illuminated (cables draped all over the floor) including a little side chamber where I sat for a while, just relaxing in the cool, still atmosphere of this ancient place.

It was now time for us to have a look at St Peter Port, the capital of Guernsey, so we took the next bus into town and began some aimless wanderings. We saw the Randalls brewery at the far end of the Esplanade although we didn't go for a look as I'd heard that tours are almost impossible to get and, anyhow, we've both seen enough breweries along the years to know what they look like, what the bits do and what comes out at the end of it all! After a short walk along the breakwater we decided it was time for a beer; after all, here we were about as close to Randalls as we could get and a recommended pub was nearby – so, the Yacht inn it was then!

The Yacht transpired to be a very traditional pub and the real ale was heavily advertised inside through posters and signs. The only handpump on the bar was dispensing Patois ale (4.8%) so a pint of that it was and we settled down in a small snug in the window to watch St Peter Port happen outside whilst I tried the beer. Anyone remember what “regional” real ale used to taste like in the 1980’s? I do, and it was very like this – thick, malty, and with hardly any hop character at all! I’m not saying it was a bad beer, far from it especially compared to the Jersey rubbish, but it wasn’t what was required on a hot summer’s day when a pale, citrusy, hoppy beer is needed and, more importantly, can be sold as an alternative to lager and suchlike.

The beer, despite it’s shortcomings, was soon disposed of as we’d worked up quite a thirst during the day although we didn’t fancy another so continued on our exploration of the town. We bought a few half-bottles of wine from a shop to drink that night back in the hotel before stopping for a remarkably good espresso and cake at a little café right in the centre of town and a most agreeable chance for a sit down! Looking at our gen, we still had a wine merchant to visit which was a good mile away along the seafront but, apart from that, nothing else planned and we still had three hours until the boat departed!

We trudged along the quayside to visit the other wine merchant Sue had located on the internet, the Sommelier Wine Company, which despite being a sole-hammering distance along the front was a superb, atmospheric place with a great choice of wines (we couldn’t resist and got some more, including some massive port to take home!) although the slightly dodgy draught “port” from casks – actually South African, apparently, so not technically port – was a tad misleading in our eyes. We walked slowly back towards the port in order to not arrive way too early, although when we finally arrived at the condor ferries terminal a note on the check-in desk was a bit concerning; the online confirmation had stated we had to be there at least an hour before the boat left, but it was that time now and there were no staff to be seen and the said note saying check-in would open 30 minutes before the departure! Cheers then, we could have gone for another pint first...

All aboard the fastcat.

Suddenly I spied a be-uniformed young lass strolling towards the desk and so, leaving Sue to guard our seats in the rather busy lounge, I joined the small queue to see what would come about next. Happily, my intuition had been correct and we were soon checked in for the sailing and wandered through the security gate where, as we were going to Jersey, we were simply waved by the x-ray machine by the very uninterested-looking security guard on station there. We looked out of the window for a while before my sixth sense once told me we should wait by gate one as I’d seen preparations for arrival going on there and, just as I mentioned this to Sue, the futuristic form of a huge fastcat nosed it’s way through the narrow entrance to the harbour.

Once the vessel was moored and the passengers disembarked we slyly manoeuvred towards the gate but, as usual, everyone else had simply been waiting for someone to make the first move and, almost as one, the whole room rose and began gathering their belongings together and following us! As the ferry had performed it’s amazingly nimble rotation in the dock I’d noticed that it had a large open rear deck which would be perfect for taking in the atmosphere so, as soon as the gate opened, we were racing up the wobbly gangplank and searching for the outer deck.

Sue found it first so we climbed the steep stairs and emerged into a superb open area with excellent views – apart from forwards, although we could live with that – and, more importantly, where we could feel the wind in our hair like some shampoo advert! As Condor express slipped silently out of Guernsey harbour we were very pleased with our daytrip and had done everything we wanted to do on the Island; obviously the next time we visited there would be more exploration of St Peter Port as we’d hardly scratched the surface, but we both felt it was a really good day out, more so due to the superb plane and boat combination I’d booked!

Once clear of the harbour area, the ship applied full power and everything astern vanished in a huge cloud of spray and foam; these fastcats really move and soon we were speeding along with the islands of Herm and Sark receding into the distance and a strong wind whipping over the deck which forced most of the less hardy individuals below for shelter, but I was loving it and leant on the rail and watched the sea speed along. One amusing incident occurred when a bunch of annoying brats thought it ever so funny to tip bottles of water into the wind; hilarious, except some of it landed on Sue! She stormed over and gave the brats a good ranting to, at which they looked a bit stunned and slunk off to find someone less ranty to annoy!

We hadn't been going long when Jersey hove into view along our port side (the left!) and gradually came closer until we we'd turned to follow the Five-mile beach along the western coastline. We rounded the Corbiere lighthouse before approaching St Helier and stopping just outside the harbour where the wind, which had been blowing hard all the way back, now turned into a massive hairdryer as a hot current of air blasted across the deck! When we were stationary opposite the castle, the captain informed us we couldn't dock for 15 minutes due to "tidal conditions" but, as soon as Condor10 had left for St Malo, we slipped untroubled into the dock which says to me we were simply waiting for the berth – but what do I know, I'm just a cynical passenger...

Back on dry land, right on time it must be said, we trudged along the surprisingly long access road to St Helier and caught the bus back to our hotel, where we cracked open a couple of bottles of excellent French Jurançon and Sainte-Croix-du-Mont wines before relaxing for a good night's sleep ahead of the journey back – it was hard to believe we'd finished the trip so soon, although it seemed a long time since we'd arrived as we'd covered so much of both islands.

Tuesday 18th July 2006.

Out of the fryer.

Tuesday dawned, as usual, very hot and sunny; we could tell it was going to be a very hot one as our room, up until now fairly cool, was feeling the heat even at 09:00 so I punctiliously (see, I can use the thesaurus in word!) applied suncream to every part of my body which might conceivably come into contact with UV rays. With our bags packed, we sadly abandoned our trusty 10p corkscrew which had performed admirably for the last three nights then checked out and wandered into St Helier for the last time.

After visiting the impressive indoor market – which looks a lot more European than anything I've seen in the UK before and, as a bonus, I found a bottle of Glenrothes quality single-malt to take home - we decided to take a bus to First tower, halfway to St Aubin, and have a look around there.

(Quick rant here; as the Channel Islands aren't in the EU the "duty free" restrictions are very severe with only a few litres of wine each plus a few other bits and bobs whereas if we'd come from France we could have grounded the plane with the amount of booze we could carry – in this day and age, is there really any need for such draconian and puerile restrictions to what holidaymakers can bring home? It's just ridiculous!)

After seeing the Neolithic burial grave situated in a park, unfortunately surrounded by workmen fixing the wall, we decided that there was no atmosphere to the place and wandered off along the trackbed of the old railway towards St Aubin. The sun was unbelievably hot and we soon decided this wasn't the best of moves but, by now, it was too late to go back and the buses took a more inland route so we were stuck with finishing the walk. Our motive for this seemingly ludicrous move were to see the old trackbed (you'd never guess it used to be a railway apart from the odd café named after stations) and also to visit yet another wine merchants to fill our laughably low alcohol allowance.

Eventually we reached Beaumont where we were delighted to discover the wine merchant was air-conditioned; we spent a good hour in there until we finally decided our purchases, but without the aircon I suppose we'd have taken around ten minutes! Walking out of the door was akin to stepping into a furnace, however, and we decided that, early as we were, we'd be better off getting back to the airport as it was just too hot to do anything else! We caught the next bus to the airport, meeting the couple we'd shared the minibus with on the outward trip from the car park, then lazed around until our flight and were back in Coventry a smidge early.

Once through security in the green corrugated iron shed I rang the garage where our car was located, to be told there were eleven people to collect and the van would be along shortly! The van soon appeared and we were back at the garage in ten minutes and, although it was the rush hour and we opted to drive home via the A-roads, we were back in Worcester within 90 minutes.

Conclusions.

Let's not beat about the bush, shall we? The [Channel Islands](#) aren't the place to go if you're after shedloads of scoops and even if you've never had a beer from the islands you aren't going to score many, as there aren't many different beers around! That said, it's always better to scoop beers where they're made so, with the cheapness of visiting the islands out of season, you may as well have a long weekend between Jersey and Guernsey and try a few of the local brews.

The other problem, to me at least, is that the Jersey beers are almost universally awful; only the "Guernsey" Sunbeam had a flavour which might suggest you'd want to try and consume another one. RW Randalls' future is in doubt following the recent takeover and as they don't supply that many pubs with cask beer anyway there's not a great amount of their ale to sample; the solid but old-fashioned Patois (4.8%) seems to be the mainstay of their range, although the newer beers apparently do get out now and again.

The islands are also a huge bastion of keg beer; I'd say 75% of pubs are keg-only and of the rest most will only have one beer, usually Jersey Special or something rubbish like Bass. Praise the UK micros, that's all I can say – Skinner's beer is quite widespread on Jersey (he used to run the Topsy Toad chain, after all) and Ringwood also seems to get about a bit. Other guests are rare; free houses are about as common as rocking horse faeces so the chance of finding rare beers is, unfortunately, extremely low unless you try the Moulin de Lecq and are lucky!

However, if you're after an interesting destination which, sometimes, feels like it's coasting 25 years behind the times then give the Islands a go; with the advent of cheap airlines the islands are easier to reach than ever before, although I'd recommend you visit slightly out of season (try spring or autumn) as prices for accommodation in summer can be silly; we paid £64 a night for a room barely worth £50 and this deal took me a week to find!

Jersey

A brief introduction.

Jersey is where most visitors to the Channel Islands start, being the biggest Island and with the most connections to the mainland, as well as most of the hotels and attractions. It's easy enough

to reach nowadays with a choice of flying or ferry although some of these services reduce or cease altogether during the slower winter months.

Jersey is, arguably, the most scenic of the two major Islands with a gloriously rugged coast in the North, very reminiscent of Cornwall, and a more rocky, sandy south coast which looks like either the moon or Devon - honest. St Helier, the capital, is a surprisingly large town with all the things we take for granted over on the mainland, such as traffic jams, dual carriageways and multi-storey car parks although it does have some attractive bits such as the harbour and the main square. The much-vaunted "steam clock" by the bus station doesn't seem to do very much, or at least didn't when we were there!

Getting to Jersey.

You have a massive choice of flights to Jersey's surprisingly large airport;

- FlyBE go from a dazzling array of airports including Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Exeter, Gatwick, Manchester and Southampton.
- Air Southwest fly from Bristol and Plymouth.
- Thomsonfly fly from Cardiff, Coventry and Doncaster.
- BMIbaby go from Cardiff, Manchester, East Midlands and Teeside.
- Atlantic Express fly from Stansted (ATR-42 aircraft, quite rare they are too!)
- Aurigny go from Bristol, Stansted, Gatwick, Manchester and Southampton (all flights to Guernsey with connections to Jersey on hellfire little Trislanders!)
- Blue Islands fly from Bournemouth and the Isle of Man, or how about from Brighton (Shoreham) to Alderney on a Trislander?!

If you like boats (and I do!) then you can take Condor ferries' sleek fastcats from either Portsmouth, Poole or Weymouth to Jersey via Guernsey and a very nice trip the last leg is too around Jersey's coastline. There may be other companies offering sailings but you'll have to look for yourself, I'm afraid! You can get day returns from the UK for as little as £25 and, realistically, you could clear the beers on an island in less than a day!

Getting around Jersey.

The bus network on Jersey is run by Connex - now what does that tell you? Yep, it's a total shambles. Buses run every hour or so on most routes (the airport has a good service, approximately every 20 minutes) and the buses themselves are tiny things totally undersized for the amount of passengers they have. The Sunday service is woeful - seriously, it doesn't take a professor in urban transport planning (if, indeed, such a bloke exists in the UK) to realise that hundreds of tourists are going to want to visit different parts of the Island, does it? Well, Connex don't seem to have realised this and the service is a farce with jam-packed buses which you sometimes can't get on! The fares are also a bit on the steep side with the day rovers being especially expensive at £6.

There are also other buses which do circuits of the popular attractions for £2 single or £7.50 a day and, although these finish very early, they do plug some gaps Connex can't fill; be aware these green "easylink" buses don't run on Saturdays for some obscure reason. The island is small enough to bike around, which may be a better option, or you could even hire a car which, whilst killing your scooping potential, will at least enable you to get around the place! Walking is also an option with the Island only measuring 9 by 5 miles and the maximum speed limit being

(theoretically) 40mph although some of the roads are very twisty and steep so watch out for oncoming Merchant Bankers in flash cars!

Beer in St Helier, Jersey's capital.

St Helier is the biggest haven for cask ale anywhere in the Channel Islands with around 25% of pubs stocking it - this may seem very low but, believe me, it's a much higher percentage than everywhere else around there! There used to be three breweries in the town, though not all at once; Randalls Vautier (don't confuse with RW Randalls on Guernsey) still have an impressive brewery-looking edifice on Clare St but they ceased brewing there in 1992 and all their pubs now sell keg only from an unknown source. The other large concern, The Jersey brewery aka Mary Ann or Ann Street (as that was their address), has now upped sticks from the centre and settled in St Saviour Industrial estate where they brew on their original 40-BBL plant plus the 8-BBL one ripped out of the Star & Topsy toad brewpub in St Peter's village. The other short-lived brewpub was the Topsy Toad Townhouse on New St which is now a very trendy "yoof" bar albeit still serving real ale.

Some bars sell guest beers from the UK Mainland in addition to the local offerings but the choice seems to be mainly Skinners of Cornwall (not surprising as he was the original owner of the Topsy Toad empire) and Ringwood alongside some other mundane stuff like 6X, Bass and... I can hardly say it... Greene King. Ugh, I need a bath now.

(All scores are in brackets, and are out of a maximum 5)

The Jersey and Topsy Toad Brewery, Tregear House, Longueville, St Saviour, Jersey.

- Jersey Special Ale (4.4%) (1) - Sweet, toffee-ish, bland liquid, a little like liquefied barley sugars; how this could win any prize except "worst cask beer" is totally beyond me.
- Jimmy's Bitter (4.2%) (1) - Paler than the special but very similar in character - i.e; it doesn't have much at all.
- "Guernsey" Sunbeam (3) - Malty, slightly bitter, honeyed beer with a decent flavour and, more importantly, no toffee-ish sickness! Jersey's best beer?

Recommended pubs in St Helier include -

- **The Lamplighter**, 9 Mulcaster Street (4). The best real ale pub on any of the Islands; this top little pub, very close to the Weighbridge bus station, has around 6 cask ales on at any time with Skinners of Cornwall being regulars as well as Ringwood.
- **The Cock and Bottle**, Royal Square (3). Despite the dodgy name this is a very "pubby" place despite the initial appearance of being a dreaded "gastropub" with two real ales from Jersey available being Jimmy's and Special on our visit. Also serves proper coffee and the food looked very good too.
- **Peirson**, Royal Square. Apparently does cask sometimes; it's 10 metres from the Cock & Bottle so you may as well have a look - although we couldn't be arsed!
- **Prince of Wales**, Hilgrove Street. We didn't visit but apparently they do cask.
- **Townhouse**, 57 New Street (3). The old Topsy Toad brewpub, this has morphed into a trendy "yoof" venue complete with bouncers lurking at the door, although they still have real Jimmy's as a slight compensation.
- **Dog & Sausage**, Hilary Street. We couldn't find this place (although we didn't look that hard, it must be said) but apparently it does a couple of real ales.
- **Original Wine Bar**, 86 Bath Street. Didn't visit but does real ale, allegedly.

A few other bars have cask Jersey Special, but to be honest I'd not bother as it's not exactly a world-class product, know what I mean? If you think this is bad, read on...

Beer outside St Helier.

Outside St Helier things start to get grim. Most pubs are owned by Randalls (so no real ale) or Jersey (so usually no real ale) with the very occasional free house bringing up the rear. Some Jersey Brewery owned pubs sell their new "Jersey Special Bitter" (4.6%) which appeared in 2005 at the Jersey beer festival and was so popular (allegedly) that they decided to produce it full-time. I tried it twice and thought it was rubbish twice - all sweet toffee, no hops, and some sickly fruitiness. You may also see Jimmy's Bitter (4.2%), a remnant of the Topsy Toad brewery, which is very similar albeit a paler colour, and apparently other ex-Toad beers make an appearance occasionally although we didn't see any. Jersey brewery also took over the Guernsey brewery in 2004, kindly closed it down, and now produces "Guernsey" Sunbeam for the pubs.

Recommended pubs include -

- **Star & Topsy Toad**, St Peter's Village. Bus 9 (or 15). The original brewpub, now shorn of it's plant, wasn't visited as we couldn't be arsed to get off for a look as it would have resulted in a 90-minute wait for the next bus! Apparently does cask.
- **Rozel Bay Hotel**, La Vallee De Rozel, St Martin (bus 3). We didn't get to this place but it does apparently do cask ale. Rozel is a very attractive bay to the NE of the Island.
- **Tenby Bar**, The Bulwarks, St. Aubin's Village. Again, a no-visit but my research before we went said it does real!
- **Moulin de Lecq**, Grève de Lecq (4). (Bus 9 terminates 25 metres away). With the bus stop so close you may as well visit this free house which, as the name should suggest to anyone with a vague grasp of *Français*, is a converted watermill. Serves up four real ales but we were really unlucky and found Greene King and Bombardier...! The display of pumpclips suggests it's usually a lot better, however.
- **Old Smuggler's Inn** - Quaisnè, St. Brelade (bus 12a to Portelet corner and then walk it!). Another pub we couldn't be arsed to find, mainly due to the appalling bus service, but it serves real ales and is close to the beach. Sister pub of the Moulin de Lecq.
- **Seymour Inn**, Grouville (3). (Bus 1 stops outside). Situated on the coast in the remote (or as remote as Jersey gets) far southeast corner of the island, this very English-looking pub serves three Jersey beers; Special, Jimmy's and "Guernsey" Sunbeam on our visit; very sociable landlord too. Bus 1 has a decent timetable so you can actually get here and back in the evening! Amazing...

There are other places which serve cask ales but these were the ones I trawled up as being the most likely to actually have the stuff on sale and/or keep it right. The GBG may be useful for finding others although by the time it's published the gen is so far out of date you may as well just get on the internet and do some searching instead.

Guernsey

We didn't get the chance to do a lot of drinking in [Guernsey](#) as we were only actually on the Island for 7 hours and most of that was spent wandering around looking at Neolithic monuments or waiting for buses/ferries, so I won't claim to be anything of an authority on the place at all.

There is now only one brewery on the Island, but for how long is anyone's guess as the Randall family recently sold it to a consortium who have stated they want to close the existing brewery on St Peter Port's esplanade and move to a smaller location (read cheaper) elsewhere on the Island. Whether this will actually happen is a matter of conjecture and my guess is that, after a period of procrastination, they will decide that brewing just isn't worth it anymore and become a "pub group" leaving the smelly, dirty business of actually making beer to someone else - time will tell. Currently their cask ale is available in most of their pubs around the Island and some others have guest beers from the mainland, although Spitfire and Directors aren't my idea of a good night out. As I said, we didn't look in many pubs so the situation may be better than it seemed to us!

The other brewery, Guernsey, was bought and closed by Mary Ann in 2004 and their only remaining cask ale, Sunbeam, is now brewed in St Helier although it tastes a lot better than the beers badged as "Jersey" for some reason!

As Guernsey is a much smaller Island than Jersey it's easier to get around and the bus service seems to be better (probably as Connex have nothing to do with it) and is certainly a lot cheaper - a flat-fare of 60p is all you'll pay for a trip of any distance on the Island. We spent the majority of our time on the circular route 7 (7A runs anticlockwise, 7 clockwise) which runs only in summer but does a complete circuit of the Island, enabling you to visit most of the tourist sites (such as the many Neolithic tombs) or even pubs if you so wish; go explore!

RW Randall's Vauxlarens Brewery, PO Box 154, St Peter Port, Guernsey.

- Patios (4.8%) (3) - Decent enough beer although it tastes like I remember ale tasting when I started drinking in the 80's; very malty with little hop character.

Getting between the Islands.

If you're on Jersey for a few days then you may want to visit Guernsey or, indeed, Sark, Herm or Alderney and if so, you're in for a right treat if you like flying, especially on tiny 16-seater aircraft which aren't quite the same as the universal 737. The Islands' own airline, Aurigny, fly from their base on Guernsey to all the Islands using little Trislanders (ATP's to Manchester and London etc) and they now have competition in the form of Blue Islands, formerly RockHopper, who replicate Aurigny's routes and even have some of their own and also use mainly Trislanders. Single tickets, including tax, average out at £40 single on most inter-island routes with Blue Islands usually being slightly cheaper. Fares to the mainland are usually higher with those to Bristol from Jersey being around £60.

The other option is via Condor ferries who run between Jersey and Guernsey as part of their services to the UK mainland; you can get a special "day return" for £30 giving you a full day in Guernsey which is a big saving on their single fares of £24.75, although doing the plane across for the ferry back is recommended for the complete set of experiences.

Gazza's beers and pubs of the trip.

Hmmmm, a difficult one, this. The local beers we had were, almost without exception, disappointing; in fact the best beer we drank was from Cornwall! I'll list a top three out of all the beers we drank as it seems churlish to exclude "foreign" brews from the list and, well, the locals brewers just need to do better in my opinion!

1. Skinner's Game of two Halves (3) in the Lamplighter, St Helier.
2. Randall's Patios (3) in the Yacht, St Peter Port.
3. Jersey "Guernsey" Sunbeam (3) in the Seymour Inn, St Clement.

The best pubs we found were as follows;

1. Lamplighter, Mulcaster St, St Helier (4)
2. Moulin de Lecq, Grève de Lecq (4)
3. Seymour Inn, Grouville (3)

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