



# CULTURE AND LEISURE

A STATES OF GUERNSEY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

## MEDIA RELEASE



14 January 2010

## Local Museums Join the BBC's 'A History of the World'

A bronze neck-ring, a home-made radio from the occupation and Victor Hugo's writing table – objects that tell a history of Guernsey and its place in the world.

BBC Guernsey and museums across the island have today (Monday 18 January) revealed the list of 10 objects they have chosen to tell a history of Guernsey and its place in the world. The list of 10 objects can be seen on the BBC Local site for Guernsey, [www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey)

The list of 10 objects for Guernsey is part of the wider A History of the World project formed out of a unique partnership between the BBC, the British Museum and 350 museums and institutions across the UK.

Helen Conlon, the Fine Art Curator at the Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery, said:

*'We are delighted to be taking part in this project and welcome the opportunity to highlight some of the objects held in the Island's museums. Not only to Islanders and visitors but also globally, through the BBC's 'A History of the World' website'.*



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With expert help and advice, the final list of ten objects was whittled down by BBC Guernsey from a large and varied selection identified by the museums.

Robert Wallace, Managing Editor of BBC Guernsey, said: *'It has been a really interesting exercise to identify ten objects which help encapsulate Guernsey's rich and varied history. I'm extremely grateful to local historians in the Bailiwick who have helped compile the list.'*

Listeners and viewers will be asked to suggest further objects and can actively participate by uploading photographs of their own objects that have a local or global appeal. At the end of March 2010 it is hoped that each BBC Local website will have an additional 'People's 10 Objects' telling the history of their region and its global connections.

BBC project manager for the Nations and English Regions, Seamus Boyd, said: *'A truly fascinating range of objects has been chosen for each list across English regions. Some of them may have great monetary value, others little or none, but they are priceless in how they bring to life moments from history. This initial collection is just the blueprint to which we hope viewers and listeners will add their own objects and help to create a truly unique and vibrant tapestry of the past.'*

Museums in Guernsey will be holding events in February half-term to celebrate *A History of the World*. In the Guernsey Museum at Candie there will be a week of activities for children, with an opportunity to contribute to a special, free museum exhibition on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February. At this event, help will be on hand for members of the public, who may not have internet access at home, to add their own objects to what is set to become the biggest digital museum ever created.

Also as part of *A History of the World*, tonight's BBC Inside Out South West (Monday 18 January, BBC One, 7.30pm) will be telling the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs - a group of 19th century agricultural labourers who were arrested for and convicted of swearing a secret oath as members of the *Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers*.



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The list of Guernsey's 10 objects can be found at [www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey) and is as follows:

### 1 – Bronze age arrowhead

(Held by Guernsey Museum in Candie Gardens)

This honey-coloured flint arrowhead is one of a group of eight - four of this colour, and four in a darker flint - found at Les Fouaillages megalithic tomb, at L'Ancrese. All eight are of the same 'barbed and tanged' design, dating to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. They were deposited as a group between about 2700 and 2400 BC. There is no evidence that they were ever used, and they are best regarded as an offering placed with a burial, of which no other traces remain. The flint used in these arrowheads is not local. The dark flint is probably from the plain of Caen, in Normandy. The honey-coloured flint came from the region of Grand Pressigny, in west central France. Flint from this location was highly prized in prehistoric Europe, and exported widely - even fetching up in Guernsey.

### 2 - Bronze neck-ring

(Held by Guernsey Museum in Candie Gardens)

This bronze neck-ring is one of a number of high-status items found during excavation of the Iron Age settlement and cemetery at King's Road, on the western outskirts of St Peter Port. It comes probably from a female burial, dating perhaps to the fourth or third century BC, and may have been imported from the Champagne area of France. Alongside the female burials there are at least three warrior graves, containing iron swords and other fighting equipment. This was a wealthy community, but the source of their wealth remains something of a mystery. One possibility is that they controlled an excellent supply of salt, vital for the preservation of foodstuffs at this time. The presence of the best natural harbour in the Channel Islands, just a few minutes down the hill from King's Road, may also have been a key factor in their success.

### 3 - Bilge pump from Roman wreck

(Held at the Maritime Museum in Castle Cornet)

The Roman ship caught fire and sank in St Peter Port harbour around AD280. It is the largest and most intact Roman vessel surviving from Britain. With some 18 metres surviving (of an original 22 metres plus) it is one of the oldest sea-going ships found in northern European waters. It was a merchant vessel engaged in coastal trade, with objects from as far apart as Algeria and Germany on board. It is constructed in a Celtic tradition using heavy oak timbers fastened by massive iron nails. Vessels which sound remarkably similar were described by Julius Caesar as operating in these waters almost



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four centuries earlier. The frame timbers within the ship had semi-circular limber holes cut in them to allow bilge water to flow towards the pump. Pitch being carried in the aft hold of the ship melted during the fire, sealing the bearings and many other objects, effectively preserving them.

### 4 - Cannon-ball from the English Civil War

(Held by Guernsey Museum in Candie Gardens)

This cannon-ball was found in the Town Church in St Peter Port. Being made of limestone indicates that it originated either in England or France. It was probably fired into the Church from a cannon at Castle Cornet in the harbour of St Peter Port. The Castle was the home of Guernsey's Governor who was appointed by the King. As a result, during the English Civil War the Castle became a Royalist stronghold. Guernsey itself, however, supported the Parliamentarians. The island and the Castle exchanged cannon and musket fire for the best part of 10 years causing much damage to the Castle and the St. Peter Port waterfront. The Castle relied heavily on supplies from the neighbouring island of Jersey, which was also a Royalist stronghold. However, Jersey's royalists were eventually subdued and Castle Cornet was forced to surrender. The fortification was the last point of Royalist resistance in the British Isles.

### 5 - Presentation sword

(Held at the Maritime Museum in Castle Cornet)

During the Napoleonic wars, James de Saumarez, then a Rear Admiral in the Royal Navy, fought alongside and ultimately under the command of Nelson. After the Battle of Trafalgar he was given command of HMS Victory and patrolled the Baltic seas each winter between 1808 and 1813. Crucially Britain was obtaining turpentine, tar, pitch, timber and sailcloth from Sweden and this was literally keeping the Royal Navy afloat. Against its will, but with the might of Napoleon's army at its throat, Sweden was forced to declare war on Britain and fire on British ships. Admiral de Saumarez worked with the Swedish forces to perpetuate the appearance that the two countries were at war - without actually firing a shot. Napoleon was fooled, Sweden was saved from being attacked by the British Navy and the supplies that Britain needed to win the war continued to flow. The sword was an expression of the nation's gratitude.

### 6 - Victor Hugo's writing table

(At Hauteville House, St Peter Port - owned by the Museum of the City of Paris)

This humble piece of wood was where the exiled genius Victor Hugo completed '*Les Miserables*' and subsequently wrote his Guernsey-based



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novel '*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*', as well as hundreds of essays, letters and poems. Hugo stood to write, rather than sitting. He installed it in his airy, well-lit Cristal-Room built on the top of Hauteville House in St Peter Port so that he could see across the other Channel Islands to his beloved France as he wrote. He was exiled from his country after opposing Napoleon III and went initially to Belgium, to Jersey and then to Guernsey where he was welcomed with open arms. He stayed for 15 years from 1856 to 1870, influencing writers and artists. His house – just as he left it – is today internationally considered as a significant part of his work and a unique piece of cultural heritage.

### 7 - Tree fern figure

(Held by Guernsey Museum in Candie Gardens)

William Maule Carey joined the Royal Navy in 1859 and retired as Captain in 1896. During his time in the Navy he served and fought in the seas around Japan, Australia, New Zealand and China. His position brought him into contact with many native peoples amongst the Islands of the South Pacific Ocean. The tree-fern figure was carved by the indigenous peoples of the Island of Mallicollo (Malekula) in the Republic of Vanuatu. Statues of this type are sometimes made to represent ancestral figures or act as an '*abode*' for the spirit of an ancestor to inhabit. They are an integral part of the Nimangki ceremony in which men pass through a number of ritual grades or levels within the society and are directly related to their status and power. This carving was given to Commander Carey in exchange for a yard of red calico.

### 8 - Spring Jumper (aka Spring Jack Hammer)

(Held by the Guernsey Folk & Costume Museum at Saumarez Park)

The Spring Jumper was a hand tool used to cut into Guernsey's extremely dense rock. As the nineteenth century progressed, the expanding stone trade became known as the '*granite industry*'. The influence of the industry on Guernsey was physical and social. More than 250 quarries were dug in every available part of the island and at its peak in 1910 the industry saw almost half a million tons of stone being exported to the UK. It was used to macadamise the roads all over the country but the best stone was used for specific projects such as the steps of St Paul's Cathedral. The sudden surge of activity brought huge numbers of labourers to the island, transforming the sleepy fishing village of St Sampson's into the industrial harbour it remains today and bringing large numbers of Irish and Bretons and their families to the island.

### 9 - 'Guernsey'

(Held by the Guernsey Folk & Costume Museum at Saumarez Park)

The '*guernsey*' was knitted on the island of the same name for fishermen and farmers. Originally thought to be parish patterns, research showed that each



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family had its own pattern which was knitted on the upper part of the chest and the top of the arms. This may have been because the knitters wanted to show off their skills but there was also a more gruesome purpose. Should a drowned fisherman be washed ashore with his face decayed or eaten away, the pattern would help with the identification of the body. The 'guernsey' was knitted as part of a local medieval knitting industry which produced high quality clothing including stockings. Queen Elizabeth I wore them embroidered with silk, and Mary Queen of Scots wouldn't be seen dead in anything else - she insisted on a pair of guernsey stockings with which to go to her execution.

### 10 – Home-made Radio

(Held at the German Occupation Museum)

This home-made radio is one of many to have been constructed by Guernsey residents during the Occupation of the Bailiwick by German forces from 1940 to 1945. Anyone caught using one risked deportation to a prison in German-occupied Europe. Notwithstanding this threat, telephones and other equipment were cannibalised to make the devices, so that the population could tune in to the BBC and stay informed of progress against the enemy. They were then cunningly hidden. This one was disguised as a chip basket, used for exporting tomatoes. Others were hidden in beds or disguised as light switches. There are still people around today who easily recall the fear associated with using these sets. However they also remember the elation of hearing Winston Churchill at 3pm on May 8th 1945 saying '*our dear Channel Islands are also to be freed today*'. Guernsey was liberated the following day and Sark the day after.