German Occupation of British Channel Islands
Part 1 – Guernsey

Top cover is a letter sent to Barkleys Bank on Guernsey from an address on Guernsey on 13 April 1943. This has the intra-island letter rate of 2 1/2 pence.

The bottom cover is an example of inter-island mail as it was mailed on the island of Sark to an address on Guernsey on 27 December 1941. It had a letter rate of 3 1/2 pence.

British stamps were considered legal postage during the entire occupation period.
The Cover Story
German Occupation of British Channel Islands
Part 1 – Guernsey  By Robert Fisher

The British Channel Islands are a scattered group of islands off the coast of France. The larger islands are Guernsey, Jersey, Sark, Herm and Aldernay. Most of the other islands are uninhabited rocks.

In June 1940 the British government decided to demilitarize the islands and offered residents the opportunity to evacuate to England. About 30,000 islanders did so, but others, reluctant to leave their homes and property, remained. The Germans carried out bombing raids on June 28, 1940, but ceased after broadcasts on the BBC announced that the islands were not defended. The German military began occupying the islands on June 30, 1940.

Until the occupation, the British postal system was responsible for the island mails. German authorities permitted the continued use of British postage stamps for inter-island mail, but since the source of stamps was cut off, there was soon a shortage of British postage stamps. On Guernsey, the Guernsey Press Co Ltd was contracted to design and print new Guernsey stamps. There were several printings of the ½d, 1d and 2½d stamps (thus creating many color varieties). In early 1942, French banknote paper was used to print the stamps. When gum was applied, a chemical reaction turned the paper blue. Guernsey occupation stamps were first issued on February 18, 1941 and were valid until April 13, 1946.

On May 9, 1945, the day AFTER victory in Europe had been declared, the islands were liberated when the 26,000 German troops surrendered unconditionally to British forces.
German Occupation of the British Channel Islands  
Part 2 - Jersey  by Robert Fisher

Jersey is the largest and most populated island of the Channel Isles. German forces began their occupation of Jersey on July 1, 1940. As in Guernsey, the German authorities permitted the continued use of British postage for local island mail and did so throughout the occupation period. However, the local German authorities overprinted a few sets of George VI stamps with a swastika on a trial basis (figure 1). The Bailiff of Jersey protested against the defacing of the King’s head and the matter was referred to Berlin. Berlin rejected the stamps and ordered all copies destroyed, however a few sets found their way to a German stamp auction in 1941.

Figure 1

Figure 2

The Germans then commissioned a Jersey firm to produce an essay for a 1d postage stamp (figure 2). These were generally imperforate and some were overprinted with swastikas. These were also rejected and never placed in use.

As supplies of British stamps dwindled, the Bailiff asked Major Rybot, a local artist, to create a design for a 1d postage stamp. He selected a design similar to that of Guernsey (figure 3), modified the three leopards on the shield to resemble a more correct midiaeval appearance and made a few other minor changes (figure 4). The Germans, as well as many islanders, believed that the leopards were the Arms of the Bailiwicks. However, they had been the part of the Arms of England for centuries. They were printed locally by the Jersey Evening Post. As with Guernsey, there were several printings resulting in color variations.

Figure 3

Figure 4

(Scott Nos N1 and N2)
In 1943, the German Field Commandant, Colonel Knackfuss, suggested a set of six stamps depicting local scenes. The new stamps, designed by local artist Edmund Blampied, was approved by the Bailiff and the German Field Commandant. Due to the shortage of materials, the designs were sent to Paris for printing and were prepared for printing by Henri Cortot in Paris. The original proofs were made the same size as the current French definitives, but were deemed too small for the level of detail on the stamps. The names of Blampied and Cortot were inserted into the designs of all six stamps.

The new stamps were indeed quite colorful and attractively done as shown below with their Scott catalog numbers.

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The Jersey Occupation stamps were released for issue on the following dates:

N1: 29 January 1942
N2: 1 April 1941
N3: 1 June 1943
N4: 1 June 1943 Reprinted on newsprint 28 February 1944
N5: 8 June 1943
N6: 8 June 1943
N7: 29 June 1943 Reprinted on newsprint 25 February 1944
N8: 29 June 1943

As in Guernsey, all of these stamps were postally valid until 13 April 1946.

In Part 3 - Odds and Ends, I will reveal how the artists of the Guernsey and Jersey stamps flaunted the German authorities and played dangerous games with the stamp designs.

[Editor’s Note: The first part of this three part series appeared in the February CFSC Newsletter which is available on-line at www.CentralFloridaStampClub.org. The third and final installment will be printed in the April CFSC Newsletter.]
German Occupation of the British Channel Islands
Part 3 - Odds and Ends  By Robert Fisher

When German military forces occupied the Channel Islands in July of 1940, they immediately began to issue rules to control the civilian population. This was followed by severe restrictions on travel, issuance of identity papers, curfews, and rationing of food and other necessities.

The islanders had no weapons or means of forming an armed resistance against the Germans, so they resisted by flaunting the restrictions, painting the letter V on fences, buildings and other public places. The Germans took this passive resistance seriously and issued new edicts such as shown to the right. Well over 1,000 islanders (men, women and children) were deported to prison camps in France and Germany for offences, real and imagined. Very few ever returned.

One employee of the Royal Hotel in Guernsey replied to each "Heil Hitler" with "Heil Churchill". On one occasion the pro-German chef of the hotel told her to say "Heil Hitler" before receiving a helping of rice pudding. Her response was "to hell with Hitler for the sake of a rice pudding - and one made with skimmed milk at that". She was denounced by the chef and sentenced to be deported to a prison camp in Caen France, where she died of starvation and ill treatment.

Into this environment of German over-reaction to insults on their sensitive natures, came the Guernsey and Jersey occupation stamps that were described in the prior two parts of this article. I have already mentioned that the three lions or leopards that were prominent on the shields of both Guernsey and Jersey stamps (figures 1 and 2) were actually from the Arms of England. They had been since Richard the Lion Hearted in 1198 (figure 3), and indeed they are still on the current Arms of England which has not changed since 1837 during the reign of Queen Victoria (figure 4).

Closer inspection of the two stamps reveal additional slights to German sensitivities. On the Guernsey stamp, each of the four corners contains a barely disguised letter V as shown in figures 5, 6 and 7.
Major Rybot, who designed the Jersey shield stamps took even more liberty with his stamp designs. He hid masked insults to the Germans in the red 1d stamp, which was the first of the Jersey stamps issued. He inserted a small letter A into each of the four corners of the stamp (figures 8 and 9). He later explained that they stood for 'AD AVERNUM, ADOLPHE ATROX', which means "To hell with you, atrocious Adolph".

In the green 1/2 d stamp which appeared later he inserted "A" into the upper corners (figure 10) and "B" in the lower corners (figure 11). The meaning of the letters were "Atrocious Adolf" and "Bloody Benito".

In 1943, when the set of local scenes were commissioned, the artist (Edmund Blampied) went to even greater lengths to embed subtle insults to the German authorities. A cursory glance at the triangles containing the denominations reveals that they are all inverted Vs (figures 12 - 18). The final insult is shown in figure 19. The scrollwork in the denomination triangle is really a representation of the Royal Cipher "GR".

The Channel Islands were the last occupied territory liberated by the Allies. They were liberated on the 9th of May, 1945 which was the day AFTER Victory in Europe had been declared. Thus ends an interesting and tragic yet little known era of British and German postal history. That is a lot of history for a baker’s dozen of short lived stamps.

[Editor’s Note: The previous two parts of this series appeared in the February and March editions of this newsletter.]