

**PERSONAL STATEMENT BY THE CONNÉTABLE OF ST. CLEMENT ON 9th
MAY 2015**

Thank you for inviting me to give this address. It is an honour and a privilege, and especially this year to give it in the presence of Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex. I imagine that members who have given this address in the past have asked themselves “why me?” – and I am no different. I wondered, Sir, why I have been asked to give it. Then it occurred to me. For the first time since 1945 there is no one in this Assembly, elected or appointed, who was born before May 9th 1945. I should point out, rather hurriedly, that I am not the member closest to having been alive on Liberation Day - I missed it by over 2 years. I understand that one of our colleagues only missed it by 4 months and another two by less than a year! Perhaps one of them will make this statement next year! For those of us not old enough to remember the Occupation it is difficult even to imagine what Islanders must have gone through. Those who spent those 5 years here endured much deprivation, loss of liberty and uncertainty of how the war and the Occupation was to end – and not even, in many cases, knowing how the war was progressing. Although many, at great risk to themselves, maintained contact with the outside world with that wonderful thing called a crystal set. There was much heroism in those dark days but, as I said, in circumstances that we too young to have had the experience can only wonder at. I am fortunate that I am able to speak with my mother who spent the Occupation here, and who is with us this afternoon, who was only 22 when the war ended - sorry mother, I have given your age away. But I was pleased to be able to speak to her about her experiences, and with many others who live in God’s own Parish, St Clement, about theirs. For each of them their experiences were different, but in many ways similar. At the beginning of the Occupation there was curiosity mixed with apprehension. In some quarters there was fear of raping, pillaging and stealing at gunpoint. That did not happen. The German forces were, on the whole well-disciplined. They did not steal at gunpoint. They had no need to. They took what they needed through legal channels under the terms of the Hague Convention for the conduct of occupying armies, not with revolvers, but with sheets of printed forms signed in duplicate, triplicate or quadruplicate. A system of administration generations of civil servants have learnt from. Not the stealing, of course, - just the form filling! The presence of the German forces was heavy. In France as a whole, there was one German soldier to every one hundred civilians. In Jersey, at times, the ratio was one to three. Clearly, they were everywhere. Every third bus passenger was a German, as was every third man in the queue at the barbers. There existed in the Island a mute acceptance of what could not be changed, and life adapted. In 1942 the atmosphere changed. Initially with the arrival of the foreign workers. Firstly the forced workers, including hundreds of republican Spaniards who had taken refuge in France after the collapse of the Republic in 1939. Then the shiploads of slave workers, mostly civilians, from the occupied Soviet Union. This gave Islanders a glimpse of what life under the Nazis could be like. And of course we remembered the slave workers formally earlier today. Apprehension returned and at the end of that summer came the deportation of local civilians, those not born in the Island, to internment camps in Germany. The acceptance of a difficult and sad state of affairs turned to fear and even, in some quarters, hatred, as tighter rationing was imposed and shortages increased. Those who were deported, either because of their birthplace, or because of minor misdemeanours, some no more than children, of course suffered more than most and their relief as their camps were liberated in Germany and other places in mainland Europe can only be imagined – and those who did not return are remembered with affection and pride. After the battle of El Alemein late in 1942 and the fall of Stalingrad in January 1943, Allied victory seemed the most likely outcome of the war. Hope was sustained and increased by the steady advance of the Allies up the Italian peninsula and the eventual defeat of

Mussolini. Finally came D-Day, June 6th 1944. While this marked the beginning of the end of the war, it also marked further months of increased hardship and deprivation for Islanders and their occupiers, relieved, eventually, by the Red Cross ship Vega. It was a time when parents starved themselves to ensure that their children had what little was available. It was a time when the German forces themselves scavenged for swedes and other vegetables left behind in the fields to sustain themselves. It was a time when, if you had a slice of bread, you had to decide to eat it before you go to bed when you were hungry, or try to sleep and enjoy it in the morning. How can we understand these emotions and these choices that had to be made? Of course many Islanders were able to leave Jersey before the occupying forces arrived. They played their part in many different ways in securing the final victory. But they did this in circumstances of extra difficulty because they knew not of the conditions back at home in Jersey or the fate of their families and friends. They were heroes every one. Today we celebrate Liberation Day. Yesterday, we celebrated Victory in Europe Day when Winston Churchill uttered those immortal words "And our dear Channel Islands are also to be freed today". 70 years later those words still send a shiver down my spine. For those who heard them in 1945, what wonderful emotions they must have experienced.