



A life in the day of Les Cotils

HISTORY OF LES COTILS



FOREWORD

The property was once a convent, and it may be that echoes of the prayers of the nuns who lived in it have woven into the ancient walls an invisible tapestry of love, healing and Christian fellowship.

Today, Les Cotils doubles as both a house for guests and as an ecumenical centre, catering for visitors from all over the world; guests who enjoy spacious, well-appointed reception rooms, comfortable bedrooms and simple, well-cooked, healthy meals.

Les Cotils is the ideal place for short breaks, holidays or just to enjoy Christian fellowship, peace and quiet. The devoted team at Les Cotils studies the personal needs of their guests and helps those wishing for the silence and privacy of a retreat.

The purpose of Les Cotils is to operate commercially in order to provide charitable income to the community of Guernsey. The lifeblood of the organisation, its values and ethos, are all based on a shared belief that we are a resource for the community.



THE HISTORY & THE HOME OF THE TUPPER FAMILY

The history of Les Cotils as a house and estate, spans the 19th and 20th centuries, during which it had two distinct periods of ownership, roughly corresponding to each century. In the 19th century, Les Cotils was developed as the residence of the Tupper family while for most of the 20th century it belonged to a French order of nuns for whom it was a convent, and successively, a school and a hospital-home.

The Home of the Tupper Family

The Tuppers of Guernsey were descended from an ancient Saxon family. Driven by religious persecutors and suffering heavy loss of property and estates, they first moved from Cassel, Hesse Cassel, Upper Saxony in the year 1522. From there the Tuppers moved to the Low Countries, whence they took refuge in England. Two brothers, Robert and Henry Tupper, settled in Chichester, Sussex, while other members of the family re-established their roots in London, Sandwich and 16th century America.

John Touper or Tupper, the son of Henry of Chichester was the first of his family to come to Guernsey, a merchant and a man of some means, he settled here and married an island woman in 1592.

John's descendant, John Elisha Tupper, bought the family estate of Les Cotils from William Bell in 1803. Les Cotils has on loan a contemporary painting of the original house as it must have appeared in the early part of the 19th century. It is the work of John Elisha's cousin, Lt. General Gaspard Le Marchant Tupper and dates from around 1830. The old house appears to have been built on a mound nearer the cliff edge.



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John Elisha Tupper married Elizabeth Brock, whose brothers, Isaac and Daniel, brought considerable honour to their family and Guernsey in their different ways. Major-General Isaac Brock is one of Canada's national heroes hailed to this day as the man who 'saved' Canada from the forces of the United States at Queenstown Heights. Sadly, he died in the hour of his victory. His achievements are commemorated by a column at Queenstown Heights and by Brock University in Ontario, with which the island of Guernsey has established close links. Daniel de Lisle Brock was Bailiff of Guernsey from 1821 until his death in 1842 and was renowned for his powerful and outspoken defence of the island's ancient privileges.

Both these brothers must have influenced the growing family of nephews and nieces living at Les Cotils with their public-spirited ideas. Tragically, only three of the family of thirteen children lived beyond young adulthood owing to a series of sad fatalities, three drowned and three more died while serving their country in the armed forces.

The three surviving siblings, Ferdinand, Caroline (later Mrs de Beauvoir de Lisle) and Henry also distinguished themselves by their contributions to public life. Ferdinand, the eldest, is remembered particularly as an historian of the island. His "History of Guernsey and its Bailiwick" is praised to this day for its scholarship and literary style. Ferdinand inherited Les Cotils in 1847 but, unable to afford the upkeep of the estate, sold it to his brother Henry.

Henry had married Mary Ann Collings in 1832. They had nine children, only the youngest, Ethel Gertrude, born after the family moved to Les Cotils in 1848. She became wife of Major Robert Walter Mellish, OBE, whose grandson, the late Captain Michael Mellish was the last descendant of the family to live in Guernsey. Henry Tupper immediately set about improving the estate. He pulled down his



THE HISTORY & THE HOME OF THE TUPPER FAMILY

father's house and built the mansion which, with later additions, is still substantially recognisable today. C.E. Brett in his book "Building in the Town and Parish of St Peter Port" (1975) gives the following description: "An expansive late-Victorian stucco mansion ... garden front, three-storey, five bay, with a three bay central rounded bow, all windows Georgian glazed".

Henry had the family crest carved into the chimney breast. This remains an interesting feature of the house. The design of the coat of arms incorporates the famous "Tupper medal" granted to his ancestor John Tupper by William and Mary for information rendered leading to the great naval victory over the French at La Hogue in 1692. This may be seen displayed in the Maritime Museum at Castle Cornet. The coat of arms itself with the motto "L'espoir est ma force" (hope is my strength) was granted by George IV to Henry's father in 1826.

The estate, with its stables, outbuildings and extensive grounds, was regarded as a show place. Henry and his wife Mary Ann would have entertained many important visitors to the island. One of the proudest moments in their lives came in 1854 when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited Les Cotils. The initials VR on the stone gate pillars of what is now the exit drive commemorate this memorable visit.

Henry's services to the island were legion. He held many public offices. He was a keen officer in the Second Regiment of the Royal Guernsey Militia, becoming Lieutenant Colonel in 1840. He was Vice-Consul for France and President of the Guernsey Chamber of Commerce for many years. He was also President of the Royal Guernsey Agricultural and Horticultural Society and



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encourage the introduction of modernised harvesting and mowing machines. As a member of the States and Jurat of the Royal Court, he is remembered for his drive and enthusiasm to bring about improvements to island life. Rekindling the vision of his uncle, Daniel de Lisle Brock, it was largely through his efforts that a new deep-water harbour was built at St Peter Port and St Sampson's Harbour completed.

Of his main public accomplishments, Henry's campaign for a lighthouse to be erected on the treacherous Hanois rocks was of particular benefit to posterity. After it began to function in 1862 there was a dramatic reduction in the number of wrecks recorded in these waters. For this particular accomplishment, Henry was presented with a granite and bronze model of the Hanois lighthouse specially commissioned by the French authorities and also awarded a posthumous medal by the French Government for his services to the French marine. The model lighthouse is now kept on display at Fort Grey Museum.

This enterprise was also immortalised by the great French writer Victor Hugo in his novel 'Toilers of the Sea'. Hugo, who lived in political exile in Guernsey from 1855 – 1870 made a number of references to Henry Tupper in his diaries. It would seem the two men enjoyed each other's company and conversation and exchanged hospitality. Although there is no direct mention of Les Cotils in his diaries there is a probability Hugo may have come on consular business and an entry on 6th November 1862 mentions a dinner to which he was invited by Henry Tupper, apparently to celebrate Guy Fawkes.

Henry died at Les Cotils at the age of sixty-seven and was given a public funeral attended by the Lieutenant-Governor, the States and parochial officials with a large crowd of people who mourned the



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passing of a great Guernseyman. He was buried in the Tupper vault in the old Candie Cemetery just a short walk from Les Cotils and is commemorated by the Caen stone pulpit in the Town church of St Peter Port.

After Henry's death in 1875, Les Cotils entered uncertain times, its future clouded by an inheritance dispute between Henry's eldest son, de Vic, and his grandson Henry Bingham de Vic whom Henry wished to inherit the estate.

During the period of 1894 – 1899, Les Cotils became the residence of the Lieutenant Governor, General Nathaniel Stevenson. There was no permanent official residence from the mid-nineteenth century until 1925 when the present Government House was purchased. The system was to lease a suitable property when it became available and Les Cotils was surely eminently suitable. However, the lease was not renewed in 1899 and at the turn of the century uncertainty again overshadowed the future of Les Cotils. The early death of their brother from heart disease in January 1903 forced his three sisters to make a decision. They decided to place Les Cotils on the market.

CONVENT OF SISTERS OF MARY OF THE PRESENTATION



It was at this juncture that the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation enter the story. The order had been founded at Broons in Brittany in the early part of the 19th century as a response to the needs of the poor for teachers and nurses. The nineteenth century in France ended as it had begun – in turmoil. Church and State were at odds with one another. Anti-religious laws were passed and religious orders were forced to seek refuge. A number of these orders came to the Channel Islands – a safe haven and not too far from France. At least six different groups of priests, nuns and brothers came to Guernsey.

The Sisters first arrived in the island from Broons in February 1903. Father Pourveer of the Salesian Order had the task of helping the Sisters locate a suitable property. When he saw Les Cotils in November 1903, he knew it was perfect.

For the nuns it was a time of rejoicing as they moved into their new and permanent home. The first Mass at Les Cotils was celebrated by Canon Foran, parish priest of St Joseph's on 17th February 1904. Preparations to open the boarding school began immediately as the situation in France was deteriorating fast.

Work began on the extension to the left of the main entrance, almost immediately in 1905, and this was completed in 1907. In response to request from Guernsey families, a day school was also opened. These pupils were younger, starting at kindergarten age and many had French connections like Bertile and Viviane Feuillerat, the first Guernsey pupils.

The school was staffed by French, American and French-Canadian teaching nuns and offered a bilingual education. Not surprisingly, numbers of pupils increased as the school's reputation or an excellent education grew. We know that in 1925 there were 66 boarders. By 1939 more than five hundred pupils had passed through the school, 68 of whom became nuns.



THE LIFE AFTER WORD WAR II

The Second World War broke up families and communities throughout the Channel Islands and Les Cotils was no exception. Before the occupation by German forces began at the end of June 1940 the school had scattered. The French boarders remained in France and at least twelve Guernsey pupils were evacuated to Cheshire with Sister Peter and Sister Francoise – an American and a French national.

In 1940, Sister Mary Edith took the remaining pupils to join those left at La Chaumiere but this school, too, was soon disbanded when the property was occupied by German soldiers so she returned once more to Les Cotils.

After the war Sister Mary Edith wrote a description of the privations of that time which gives some insight into the degree of hardship and the level of dedication the sisters brought to their work.

“At Les Cotils the Mother Superior allowed us to have six hens and one rooster. As the Blancheneurs had killed all their hens I used their hen houses for mine, putting a double wall in the back as a place for the hens to sleep but the rooster was in my room every night for he would have served as an alarm clock in the chicken coop. When the Germans began to break up the coop for wood, I enfenced an area near the kitchen for the hens. We made a hole in the kitchen door so the hens came in and perched under the stairs. By doing that we had fresh eggs for the breakfast of those who could not eat vegetables. For coffee we would peel the carrots and roast the peelings in tins on hot ashes.”



THE LIFE AFTER WORD WAR II

Immediately after the Liberation in May 1945 the patients moved back to Les Cotils; this memoir records the fact that “some of the Germans had to go ahead to clean up the wards before they left so it was soon ready for us”.

The house has recovered and the buildings in the grounds have been gradually restored and developed.

Only the grounds themselves still provide some clues as to those Occupation emplacements and bunkers which the German forces built as part of their air defence system covering the harbour approaches.



CARING FOR THE EDERLY

Les Cotils continued to be run as a hospital home for almost 40 years. The school never reopened after the war. Numbers of patients cared for seldom fell below 60 to 70 men and women until the late 1970s. The nuns also provided a home for some very disabled children, so wards were full and space was at a premium.

In spite of these improvements, the old building proved a stumbling block to progress. Though the Sisters did all they could to make up for the frustrations by providing a warm and loving atmosphere, strain on the community was beginning to show. Numbers of vocations to the religious life were falling. In 1980 the hospital was staffed by 6 nuns, only 2 of whom were nursing sisters, with 52 trained and untrained lay staff. At the end of September that year came the announcement that the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation Order intended to withdraw their nursing service from the hospital within 2 years.

The remaining patients left Les Cotils for the King Edward VII on 16th May 1984. On 20th May, nuns from Les Cotils were present at a special ceremony graced by Her Majesty the Queen Mother held at the King Edward VII Hospital to mark the amalgamation of the three hospitals.

It was the end of an era at Les Cotils, though not an end of the tradition for providing a caring welcome to elderly people. As part of their plan of reorganisation the nuns offered to lease the old chapel building to the Board of Health as a day care centre – a much needed facility.



CARING FOR THE ELDERLY

Nursing Sister Renee Lynch was in charge of initiating an organisational structure making maximum use of volunteers which she did with great expertise and sensitivity. Sister Annette Le Beau, Superior General of the Order, officiated in the opening of The Russels Day Centre on 25th November 1986. For more than 20 years, the Day Centre provided a valuable service giving elderly, housebound and lonely people an enjoyable day of activities and care.

The history of Les Cotils has been notable for the talent, shown by its key “players” to discern and respond positively to the needs of the times – often, indeed, blazing a trail for the future. Such talent has shaped the use of buildings as well as the lives of people who benefited.



THE FOUNDATION OF ECUMENICAL CENTRE

The period of transition and closure of the hospital home was a time for the nuns to give deep consideration to their future at Les Cotils. The nuns prepared a report highlighting areas of need in the community. Following the completion of the report, it was decided to convert the main house into an ecumenical centre “for retreats, conferences, counselling and hospitality for groups and individuals” – (Guernsey Press, 10th January 1984)

The centre opened in a limited way soon after the patients left in May 1984 but it required enormous reorganisation of the building before it was ready for the official opening by Bishop Emery of Portsmouth and Sister Le Beau on 15th September 1987. Backed by the international community, funding was provided to convert the old wards into 16 en-suite bedrooms. There were new kitchens and dining rooms and the whole building was reroofed, redecorated and equipped.

During the next 6 years the Sisters made strenuous efforts to advertise the resources of the house and develop understanding of the ideals of an ecumenical retreat centre. The centre was used by a number of parish and school groups.



THE FOUNDATION OF ECUMENICAL CENTRE

Unfortunately, the income from such events, together with the programme of retreats and restful holidays was insufficient to balance the expenditure necessary for the upkeep of the house. To increase the level of activity would require more nuns and these were not available. The Order had already been more than generous in their financial support for Les Cotils, now other areas of their world-wide apostolate were sorely in need both of funds and Sisters. With no signs of an upturn, a decision had to be made.

The announcement that Les Cotils was to be sold appeared in the Guernsey Press of 23rd April 1993. The news was received with dismay by people all over the island whose lives had been touched by the nuns in some way. At meetings and retreats, the seeds had been sown and Christian groups had become increasingly aware of a wonderful treasure in their midst. With the fear of losing it, the community was galvanised into action.

FAREWELL TO THE SISTERS OF MARY OF THE PRESENTATION



The ecumenical work which had slowly been building up over those past 10 years was also a source of healing in the community with wider implications for Guernsey society and beyond as Christians were released from interdenominational fear and ignorance of each other.

The would-be purchasers of Les Cotils, saw Guernsey's unique political and geographical position in relation to Europe as a strength and wanted to ensure the continuity of intercontinental links already well-established both by the nuns and the Tupper family before them. The phrase 'A Galilee for Europe' seemed to encapsulate the potential role for Les Cotils. It was with this concept in mind that Les Cotils Project Trust was formed, a broadly based interdenominational partnership of clergy and Christian business people, with the aim of buying Les Cotils.

Support from influential Christians was sought. Supporters included the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, the Lieutenant Governor of Guernsey, Sir Michael Wilkins and his wife, Lady Wilkins, Viscount Tonypany and the former Prime Minister, Sir Edward Heath. However, after a year of fund-raising it was clear that the total sum raised by donations was nowhere near the asking price of £3.5 million. Even with the support of the benefactor whose generosity eventually brought the matter to a satisfactory conclusion, this target was too high. With this benefactor as a guarantor, the Trust made the Sisters their final offer. To the tremendous joy and relief of all friends and supporters, the Sisters accepted the offer of a little over half the commercial asking price. It was an indication of the depth of their faith in Les Cotils and their conviction of its potential role in fostering understanding between Christians, that they were prepared to accept this relatively low offer from the group whom they trusted as sharing their ideals. With gratitude for their generous legacy to the island and sadness at their leave-taking, islanders bade farewell to the three remaining nuns, on 22nd September 1994. Sister Madeleine Delabrosse spoke for them all when she said, "It is a sad day but we are happy to have left Les Cotils in good hands" – (Guernsey Press, 22/9/94)



A NEW ERA: LES COTILS ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN CENTER

The Trust now took over the Centre with its financial implications of running costs as well as a degree of refurbishment, reflecting the new owners' interpretation of their vision of the house. People of talent were appointed in management roles so salaries had to be found before there was a clear source of income. As expenses rose, concern grew. It was indeed a very difficult beginning and a time for steadfast prayer. During this worrying period, a new structure of ownership was formulated.

The signing of the lease, ensuring the continuity of Les Cotils, took place on the 5th of November 1997.

Backed by the Trustees and a specially formed advisory management group, the downward trend was halted and the centre gradually turned around. Providence also played a part in the form of Le Platon Nursing Home who rented rooms while their own refurbishment took place, providing vital income and, more importantly, hope at this lean time.

A new management structure evolved for Les Cotils, giving Guernsey business people confidence to come through the doors and so build the vital platform of regular income, through use of the meeting and conference rooms.

The first decade of the new management and beginning of the 21st century have already witnessed the development of a number of new and significant developments and projects. The 1998 extension, the Sir Michael Wilkins Wing, provided a much-needed conference facility and extra bedrooms. This enabled the Centre to attract meetings and conferences, both national and international. The official opening on 6th March 1998 coincided with the Conference of

A NEW ERA: LES COTILS ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN CENTER



European Churches and Council of European Bishops' Conferences and took place in their presence, marking a time of significant progress for Les Cotils.

The other project completed at that time, the conversion of the old farm buildings to residential apartments for the over 55s, tremendously enriched Les Cotils, creating a community who care for the house and grounds.

Recognition of the need to reach out to the wider community of Guernsey led to two other developments, the conversion of the Victorian conservatory into a coffee shop and the establishment of a Library.



A SYMBOLIC ENTRY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

On 1st June 2000, the feast of Our Lord's Ascension, a very significant event took place. This was the dedication of 'The Millennium Cross', with its foundations in a wartime bunker, a powerful symbol of reconciliation. It was the culmination of a hard fought fight to overcome opposition and obtain the permission to build; raising the necessary funds, though not easy, was less difficult than convincing the planners the Cross would not be "incongruous". Eventually the design, 10 metres shorter than the architect's original intention, was accepted. The assembled gathering, representing all the island churches spoke the words of dedication:

"To be a permanent witness to God's eternal love, As a constant reminder of the power of sacrifice, As a symbol of reconciliation between God and all people And that all who consider it may respond to Christ our Saviour."

The Conference of the inter-faith dialogue held in May 2005 made a vital distinction in the role of ecumenism; that Les Cotils' vision embraces and reaches beyond interdenominationalism. That not only should dialogue be nurtured between mainstream churches, but also with those of other faiths and those of no stated faith.

To be ecumenical is, of course, to embrace the whole inhabited earth and to reach into those difficult conversations and relationships where faiths often clash but where God's clarity can be found.



RECENT YEARS

Over recent years, Les Cotils has become an integral part of the local community. Operating commercially, offering facilities for meetings and events, accommodation and weddings, any profit made is invested back into the Guernsey community.

With comfortable 4 star guest accommodation, Les Cotils welcomes business travellers, holidaymakers and group bookings over the course of the year. As a result of this business, accommodation is often given to charities and churches at discounted rates. Modernising the bedrooms and keeping the prices competitive has led to Les Cotils retaining many loyal customers.

The Coffee Shop continues to be a popular venue for residents and non-residents alike, providing a comfortable, informal space for customers to meet.

During the refurbishment in 2014, the Swiffen Restaurant opened to the public. The addition of the Swiffen Restaurant led to Les Cotils expanding its customer base and appealing to a new market of casual diners for breakfast, lunch and dinner. A bar was also created which saw a rise in bookings across the board, providing extra income to enable Les Cotils to increase its charitable activity. Notable activities include the Food for Families project, supporting vulnerable families during the Corona virus pandemic in both 2020 and 2021, as well as the continued support of local charities, Guernsey Mind, Safer and St John Training Services.

In addition to the bar and restaurant, Les Cotils now has 7 meeting rooms appealing to a wide range of corporate and private clients, with diverse facilities able to accommodate anything from board meetings to wedding receptions. This income means that charities and churches can be offered discounted rates meeting rooms and reductions on prices for catering.



RECENT YEARS

As well as the changes made to the House, significant additions have been made to the grounds. In 2016, Les Cotils was awarded the Chelsea Garden which was sponsored by the Royal Bank of Canada. The garden, designed by Hugo Bugg, was transported directly from the Chelsea Flower Show to Les Cotils and remains a feature in the grounds.

In partnership with the Probation Service, a woodland walk was established around the perimeter of the grounds in 2017, which is very much enjoyed by the public.

With significant sponsorship from the Swallow 2018 Charitable Trust, a Peace Garden was designed and built for the grounds of Les Cotils. The design and planning were given pro bono, and the result is a beautiful, peaceful space for the people of Guernsey. The garden is open to the general public and going forward it is planned to offer a space in the garden to enable people to undertake gardening to support their mental health. Advice was taken from the Guernsey Alzheimer's Association and Autism Guernsey to ensure that the space was accessible and able to support the needs of their vulnerable service users.



FOOD FOR FAMILIES

We continue with fruit for schools, 1250 pieces delivered every week

Four family fun days each year

Summer holidays coffee shop opened once a week for meal for families who are struggling

Provide weekly food boxes during the summer

Liberation day party

Boxing day lunch

Subsidise and deliver meals for bright beginnings



WORKING WITH CHARITIES

From time to time, we offer financial support for those who may need white goods or short-term rental support etc.

We also offer support with meals and other things for families who have had a particularly difficult time

Working with St Peter Port Douzaine to provide family days



HELPING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



The purpose of Les Cotils is to operate commercially in order to provide charitable support to the community of Guernsey.

The lifeblood of the organisation and its values and ethos are based on shared belief that we are a resource for the community.

This is enabled by our commercial activity and crucially our corporate and individual donors.

The breadth of work that Les Cotils is involved with. As an example over 2600 events took place in 2024.

Charity	Christian Community
Guest House	Grounds
Restuarant	Peace Garden
Bar	Building
Meetings	de Hubie
Weddings	Conferences
Funerals	

SUPPORTED WORK PROGRAMME

Offer job opportunities to people who for a variety of reasons cannot get jobs anywhere else.

It is outside our normal complement of staff.

Give support through mentoring, training etc.

Build CVs, and Confidence to go back into the world of work.

Five people currently employed through this scheme.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS TO

The historian, writer and friend of Les Cotils, Dr Madeleine Masson Rayner, who gave generously of her time and talent to this project and without whose contribution this history would never have been completed.

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