



Eye-catching and historic Guernsey buildings

In another of our general guides about Guernsey we thought you might like to see a few of our interesting buildings and learn a little about them. Even if you are someone who has lived in the island for a number of years you may be surprised by their history and, if you haven't visited our island yet, perhaps this will whet your appetite to pop over and see us.



St. James Concert & Assembly Hall

St. James is a most attractive building located on one of the main thoroughfares leading out of the Town of St. Peter Port and has become a focal point for concerts and events covering a broad range of tastes for both residents and visitors.

The idea for the building was conceived by Sir James de Saumarez as a thanksgiving for the victory at Waterloo and to provide a place of worship for the British garrison in Guernsey, where services could be held in English (at that time, services in the Town Church were held in French). It was designed by John Wilson, a most prolific architect and builder who spent only fourteen years in the island but in that time left a legacy of perhaps some of the island's most eye-catching buildings.

Completed in 1818, it was in constant use thereafter, including many years usage as a chapel to the nearby Elizabeth College, until it became redundant in 1970 and fell into partial decay.

In 1981 The Friends of St. James Association was formed to achieve its restoration and to administer the building thereafter. Fully restored in 1983 and re-opened in 1985 it has become a popular centre for the arts and music and has a year round diary of events offering everything from Shakespeare to Puccini, brass bands to jazz, charity balls to weddings in its beautiful main hall whilst seminars, wine tastings, meetings etc take place in its new modern extension.



St. John's Residential Home, Saumarez Park

St. John's Residential Home (The Saumarez building) has a beautiful façade which overlooks a formal garden with lawns, flower borders and fountains. The original house was built in 1721 by William Le Marchant, a member of one of Guernsey's leading families of the time, who, with his wife, travelled by canal throughout England to collect materials and furniture for his Guernsey home. In 1783 the house passed by marriage to James, First Baron de Saumarez who served with great distinction in the Royal Navy and was second in command to Nelson at the Battle of the Nile, later becoming Vice Admiral of Great Britain. The house was greatly enlarged by his grandson who also laid out the surrounding parkland with fine gardens, paths, a stream and a lake. In the early twentieth century it was used as the official home of the Governors of the Island but by 1938 it had been bought by the States of Guernsey and was used as offices. During the German occupation it was taken over by the German Labour Corps when reputedly it was damaged and stripped of much of its fine furniture and fittings. Once the island was liberated, the house was used by St. John Ambulance Brigade as a home for the elderly when it became known as 'The Hostel of St. John' a role which it still performs today, albeit under a Board of Management which runs the Home as a charity. A tour of its ground floor rooms (open to the public) still shows much of the magnificence of the original house.



The Priaulx Library & Candie Museum

Here we have two completely different buildings; one being the original Candie House in whose former grounds the modern, award-winning Candie Museum now resides.

The house has been the home of the Priaulx Library since 1889, although at that time it was named Candie Library. The house is on an elevated site overlooking the town of St. Peter Port and the neighbouring islands. The house and most of its contents were the gift of Osmond de Beauvoir Priaulx to the people of Guernsey to enable them to have a free library so that all people, rich or poor, might have access to his books. His original intention was for the Candie Estate to be sold to provide monies to erect a new building with his own books providing the nucleus of the new library but, perhaps fortuitously, this did not happen thus leaving the house still standing and its grounds able to be used as a beautiful public garden. The library is now the local studies centre for Guernsey. It still contains the original Priaulx collection but in recent years large numbers of works dealing with all aspects of life in the Bailiwick have been acquired whilst there is also an important



collection of military works which is still being developed. There is a very large archive of local newspapers stretching back to 1791 and the library has also become a centre of excellence for local family history research.

Candie Gardens still provide a quiet oasis away from the general bustle of St. Peter Port - somewhere to sit and contemplate (perhaps beneath the statue of Victor Hugo) whilst enjoying lovely sea views to the offshore islands. It is the home of Candie Museum which has an ongoing display of life in the islands from Neolithic times to the present day augmented by an interesting array of visiting exhibitions.



Hauteville House

A relentless fight for social justice and reform led to exile from France for Victor Hugo who came to Guernsey, fell in love with it, and spent 15 years here between 1855 and 1870. He took up residence in Hauteville House which he then comprehensively transformed into a highly individual home! The result can still be seen today in the house which is now the property of the City of Paris. Not only a writer but quite a do-it-yourself enthusiast, Hugo put his stamp on every room quite literally by imprinting his initials VH on his improvements! An incredible mix of recycling and extravagance – the fanlight over the front door is made from the bases of soda-water bottles and yet the rooms house everything from priceless Chinese vases to statues from the Venetian Palace of the Doges! The piece de resistance though is his rooftop studio where he wrote standing up at a shelf of black walnut completing 'Les Miserables' and penning amongst other wonderful works, 'The Toilers of the Sea' which he dedicated to '...the rock of hospitality, to this corner of old Norman land where the noble people of the sea reside, to the island of Guernsey, severe and yet gentle'.



Sausmarez Manor

Sausmarez Manor has been the seat of the De Sausmarez family for many centuries and continues to be right up till the present day. The façade we see today was added in 1714 and is regarded as the finest example of Queen Anne Colonial architecture in Britain. Its interior reflects many styles and includes an oak panelled Victorian hall, a portrait lined Edwardian dining room, a tapestry room containing 17th century tapestries and a Country House Gallery housing many beautiful pieces of art that tell the story of the family. One of its most illustrious forbears being James de Sausmarez who has already been mentioned with regard to St. James and St. John's Residential Home although you may have noticed that sometimes the family name is shown as Sausmarez and others Saumarez – in fact, the family name goes back at least 700 years and has also been spelt Sausmarais, Samares and Samaresq! The grounds have winding paths leading between groves of bamboo, palms, the occasional exotic banana tree and over 300 camelias and includes a picturesque lake complete with wild fowl and terrapins. It also incorporates an Art Park containing approximately 250 changing pieces of contemporary sculpture by around 90 different artists. The house and grounds are open to the public and are also used for social events.



The Little Chapel

One of the smallest chapels in the world, The Little Chapel was the brainchild and work of one man, Frere Deodat, a French monk who modelled it and the adjacent grotto on that at Lourdes. The chapel we see today is not the original, that was built in 1914 but once completed it was found to be too small – just 9 feet by 6 feet. Frere Deodat contemplated for almost 10 years about what should be done and in the end it was the fact that the Bishop of Portsmouth could hardly get through the tiny doorway when he visited in 1923 that made him decide that he would have to pull down the chapel and the grotto and start again! The shell of the chapel took two years to complete along with the grotto – then came the problem of how to decorate it. Apparently guided by providence, the Frere thought that broken china and glass could be a ready material – his next problem was to find enough to carry out the work! However, he need not have worried – word soon got around and little parcels started appearing on his doorstep marked 'For the Little Chapel'. His raw materials were being mysteriously supplied for him by the people of Guernsey and more than one islander can point at something on the chapel and attest to it coming from their favourite tea set! Inside there are two small consecrated chapels and a crypt dug into the hillside whilst, of course, the grotto lies at the bottom of the steps which lead up to the chapel itself. It has obviously become one of our major tourist attractions and is also used for candlelit processions on special church days.