

Jewels in the Crowns

Admiring the Crown Jewels is a treat that most people can only normally enjoy from afar but one man, who visited the island recently, not only sees them close up, he actually gets to handle them on a regular basis.



David Thomas is Her Majesty's Crown Jeweller and was here at the invitation of Swoffers. He gave a hugely-informative illustrated lecture to an invited audience and, in the process, helped to raise money for the restoration of Sausmarez Manor.

Describing the appeal of his work at Garrard's, Mr Thomas said that he loved the historic element, coupled with the demands of ensuring that this priceless collection was always maintained to the highest degree.

His trip here was fitted into a busy schedule. State visits and functions, including the arrival of the King and Queen of Norway, had placed extra demand on him and other people involved in preparing for use parts of the glittering collection. They all form part of an historic assortment of jewels which is recognised internationally as the most impressive on the globe.

In a light-hearted aside during the evening, Mr Thomas revealed that earlier plans to spend time in Guernsey always seemed to coincide with the sudden unveiling of fairly major royal events. The most recent was a clash with the re-scheduling of Prince Charles' wedding. 'I had to defer my trip, but I made it eventually,' he said, smiling.

His talk fascinated the small audience. They enjoyed a champagne reception in the historic hall at Sausmarez Manor, complete with blazing log fire, before heading upstairs for the illustrated lecture.

Mr Thomas enthralled the gathering, who heard detailed descriptions of the jewel collection which is the envy of the rest of the world.

He disclosed that the age of some of the jewels stretched back many centuries. 'The crowns and other pieces have had to be re-made a few centuries ago but the stones within them date back much, much further. It is an amazing privilege to be able to handle beautiful items with that type of historic link,' he said.

The appointment of the Crown Jeweller comes directly from HM the Queen. Mr Thomas was invited to take up his special post after several years' training. Garrard itself as an impressive pedigree. The jeweller was established in 1735 and now works in New York, Dubai and Tokyo as well as in its beautiful London headquarters.

Mr Thomas' long experience as a jeweller brought him into regular contact with clients such as the Prince and Princess of Wales, who he described as 'very supportive' of his role. 'I have my own royal warrant, which is totally different to a tradesman's one.'



Forward planning is carried out, working several months ahead, to ensure that Her Majesty's chosen jewellery is available for particular occasions.

Many of the beautiful pieces in the collection had to be created after Cromwell destroyed the originals. Jewels were re-worked, to stunning effect.

Some of the precious stones were in pieces dating back more than five centuries, with one sapphire known to have been worn in the 12th century.

Mr Thomas said he has always had an interest in history but it has been fuelled by his current position. 'The care of all of these priceless pieces falls to me. It is a weighty responsibility but I love my job,' he said.