

JERSEY CONNECTIONS

By Thierry Wersinger

On October 25th, we were at long last able to reconnect our family's legacy with Jersey by dedicating a memorial stone on the ruins of Elves Rest the house where my mother Pauline Wersinger, née Taylor, grew up near l'Etacq Hill.

Considering my many travels across the world, it is astonishing that I had never once visited Jersey. My mother, would tell us stories of her childhood in Jersey and I managed to catch an occasional surreal glimpse of the beautiful island in the early morning sun at the end of a transatlantic flight to Europe.

Planning a trip to Brittany in 2022, to visit my mother, my daughters Theresa and Maria decided to join my wife and me with their families. They figured a way to fly from the USA to Jersey via London and then to hop over on the ferry to St Malo and on to Carantec.

This was a very clear sign that the time had come for me to visit Jersey, the land of my mother's ancestors so we all made plans to stay in Jersey from October 22nd to 26th.

This was a very timely trip since I had finished researching my mother's family history and genealogy and was able to identify our family's history most important landmarks.

Jersey family roots

Pauline's Scottish surname comes from her great, great, great grandfather William Taylor, believed to have been born in the Isle of Skye. His son Charles Taylor born in 1808 married in 1831 in St Helier, Ann Roberts of Cornwall. One of their many children, Peter Francis Taylor was born in 1844 and died in 1920. A glazier, he married Elizabeth Hamon of an old Jersey family with roots dating back to a half-brother of William the Conqueror. Elizabeth's father, was known as Hamon Le Noir having distinguished himself by his smuggling activities between Jersey and France during the Franco-Prussian war. Elizabeth Hamon inherited a substantial real estate patrimony so her sons each received two houses as inheritance.

One of their sons, Pauline's grandfather, Frederick Charles Taylor, born in 1872, had a successful painter-decorator business. He married Ellen Sanders from Devon. The family lived on 24 Vauxhall Street in St Helier but moved to a more modest residence on 55 New Street some time before WWI. Frederick Charles and Ellen had four children.

Fred, born in 1897 worked in the De Gruchy's Emporium. He was killed at age 19, near the Somme on December 29th 1916. He is buried in Grove Town Cemetery, Meaulte, near Albert in France. His name is on the World War I monument in St Helier.

Clyde, the second son was born in 1900. He wanted to become a motor mechanic. Like so many youths of his generation he fell victim to the Spanish flu in 1919.

Wilfred, Pauline's father was born 1902. At age 13, he became an apprentice as a joiner and carpenter. He went to England to try his luck and at 23 engaged as a soldier in India. After this Indian adventure, he returned to Jersey. He was 27 when he met May Parsons who was there on holiday from England. After their marriage, the couple settled in Jersey. After Pauline's birth in 1929, Wilfred built Elves Rest, a charming bungalow on the Carteret estate on the west coast of Jersey. Pauline's mother ended up feeling nostalgia for London. The family left Jersey in 1936 to Harrow, England. In 1939, they had a final stay in Jersey. During the war, contacts with Jersey were impossible. As soon as the island reopened in 1946, Pauline and her parents visited. Pauline's

grandmother Ellen had died in 1943. Other family members were in poor health. Ann Sanders, Pauline's grandmother's elder sister died in 1949. Her grandfather survived until 1956 but his health had become critical.

Elves Rest had been destroyed by the occupying forces. No compensation was ever received. Attempts to rebuild were unsuccessful because of new Island legislation resulting in a lot of time and money wasted. Plans to settle in Jersey never materialized.

A younger sister, Edith Adele Taylor born in 1908 remained unmarried. She worked as a shop assistant in De Gruchy. She had looked after her aunt, mother and father during their illnesses and had a weak heart herself. She had to be placed in assisted living so the family house 55 New Street was sold to cover her living expenses under the care of the family solicitor. Edith died at age 61 in 1968, thus ending our family's living presence on the island.

Pauline Taylor was born in St Helier on 16 July 1929. Before the war she went to school at Westwood High. She moved with her parents to England first in Harrow then in Lancaster where she attended the Lancaster Girls Grammar School for seven years. She graduated from Balls Park Teachers Training College, Hertford Hertfordshire in July 1950 and worked for one year at the Niebank Elementary School in central London until she left for France to get married to Pierre Wersinger. After a few years in Thionville, Pauline, Pierre and Gabrielle, their first daughter, born in 1952 settled in Strasbourg. Thierry was born in 1958, Patricia in 1960 and Marie-Pascale in 1962.

Pierre died in 2017. Pauline followed her children's advice to move to the milder climate of Carantec, in Brittany right on the Channel, so close and similar to Jersey.

She eventually moved to the local Assisted Living facility. After the death of Gabrielle in January 2024, she continues to receive regular visits from Sylvie, Gabrielle's partner. Pauline's children and grand-children visit whenever possible.

Reconnecting with Jersey.

During our first trip to Jersey in October 2022, we were able to locate 55 New Street. We were also able to visit Vauxhall Street but it is not clear if 24 Vauxhall is still there or replaced by a newer house. We also walked down Havre des Pas, a pleasant neighbourhood near the sea, onto Roseville Street but were unable to identify Simon Place another Taylor property mentioned in the family archives.

Exploring the graveyard around St Saviour's Church, we providently met Rev. Martin Evans, the newly appointed rector. He was able to confirm that our great-grand father Frederick Charles was buried there. Unfortunately the grave marker was no longer standing so we could not confirm the presence of the other members of the family buried in the plot.

Visiting the WW1 memorial we found mention of grand uncle Frederick, killed in action and buried in Flandres.

The high point was visiting the ruins of Elves Rest, in St Ouen, opposite Jersey Pearl.

This first visit convinced us that we had a duty to secure our family's legacy with the island. A letter to the Chief Minister before our trip with the hope of setting up meetings with the authorities was not acknowledged. Various ad-hoc meetings during our stay with a real-estate broker and a planning consultant resulted in a letter to Jersey planning. Peter Le Gresley, Head of Development and Land kindly reviewed the matter and discussed it with the Minister for the Environment but not surprisingly the result was negative.

Contacts with history societies to explore setting a marker were inconclusive.

Assessing the situation, we decided on two specific actions

- Restore our relatives grave at St Saviour
- Erect a memorial on the ruins of Elves Rest

Rev Evans suggested , we contacted Heritage Memorials who were so helpful with both projects.

Our first course of action was to determine all the occupants of the grave. Georgie Bois, Archives Officer was very helpful in finding missing funeral records so we were able to order the grave restoration, beautifully executed by Heritage Memorials.

During a second visit to Jersey, on Wednesday 15 November 2023, Reverend Evans conducted a simple but moving ceremony of rededication of the grave.

We also visited Jersey Planning to submit a request to set up a historical marker at Elves Rest. This was finally approved in March 2024 so we were able to confirm our order with Heritage Memorials. The historical marker was finally installed early August.

During a third trip to Jersey, last October we were finally able to dedicate the Elves Rest memorial. Once again Reverend Martin Evans performed a very moving ceremony for the members of the family who were able to be present.

Honouring Uncle Frederick.

But this is not the end.

In Paris on November 11th with no set plan. I determined that the time had come after 108 years, for my great-uncle Fred Taylor to be visited by a family member. I hopped on a train and thankfully was able to find a poppy for my buttonhole. The weather was great with a quasi-miraculous spell of sunshine in the Somme area.

Fred was killed at age 19, near the Somme on 29th December 1916. He was a radio transmitter and was badly wounded by shell blast when on duty in a tree near enemy lines. According to Pauline, Fred's parents received a first telegram on Christmas Eve announcing that their son had been wounded. A friend who stayed by his side until the end visited them and told them the sad circumstances of his death. The shrapnel from the bomb had blown away part of his face so he couldn't eat. He lived for about a week. He is buried in Grove Town Cemetery, Meaulte, near Albert in France.

Jerripedia gives details about his death from local papers. His name is on the World War I monument in St Helier.

Jerripedia <http://www.greatwarci.net/honour/jersey/database/taylor-fj-grovetown.htm>



Patricia and Thierry in front of their great-grandparents home at 55 New Street



Visiting restored Taylor grave



Plaque listing Taylor family members



Family members with Rev Martin at the dedication of the Elves Rest memorial





Patricia pointing Frederick Taylor's name and Thierry at the Jersey WW1 memorial



Grove Town British Cemetery



FJ Taylor Grave II.J.15