

INTERNEES

Gerhard Bersu (1889–1964)

Gerhard Bersu became fascinated by archaeology when he was a teenager.

In 1924, he joined the German Archaeological Institute in Frankfurt and by 1931 he was the Director of the Institute, which, under his leadership, went on to become one of the world's leading archaeological organisations.

However, because his parents were Jewish, he was forced to retire in 1937, so he and his wife, Maria (pictured below), emigrated to Britain. At Little Woodbury in Wiltshire, he worked on several excavations, where he introduced new continental methods.



When war broke out in 1939, Bersu was arrested because he was a German national and he was interned in the Isle of Man. Unknown to him, his wife was sent to Rushen Camp in the south of the Island. In 1941, when the married camp opened in Port St Mary, they were reunited and moved to 'Southlands' boarding house on the

Promenade and later to Primrose Cottage.

The Temporary Director of The Manx Museum, Eleanor Megaw, became aware that the Bersus were on the Island and arranged for them to have permission to excavate various sites, with help from supervised internees. As a 'reward' for his work, on her visits to the



*Aerial view of the Viking ship burial – Balladoole
(Courtesy of Manx National Heritage)*

sites she would drop a small box of his beloved snuff into his wellington boot. The Bersus were responsible for discovering the Viking ship burial at Balladoole and the Celtic discoveries at Ronaldsway,

Ballanorris and Ballacagan. They remained on the Island after the war, when peace had been declared, in order to complete the digs.

In 1947, Bersu was invited to be the Professor of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. He stayed there until 1950, when he returned to his former position at the German Archaeological Institute, then known as the Romano Germanic Commission. It was his goal to establish the organisation in the 'new' Germany and rebuild the devastated building. He achieved this, with the new Institute being opened before his retirement in 1956.