



Jersey's rural heritage

A farming way of life

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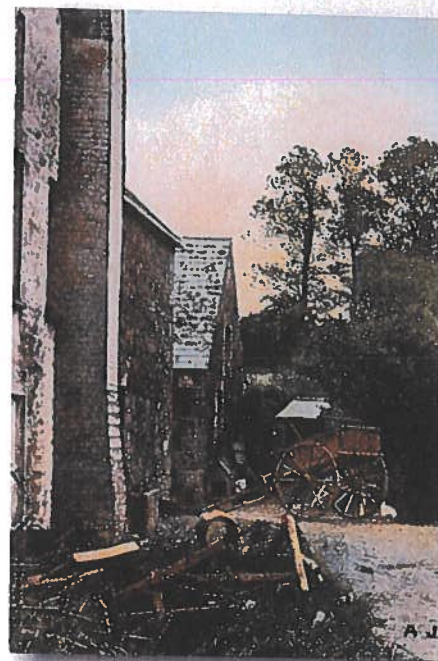
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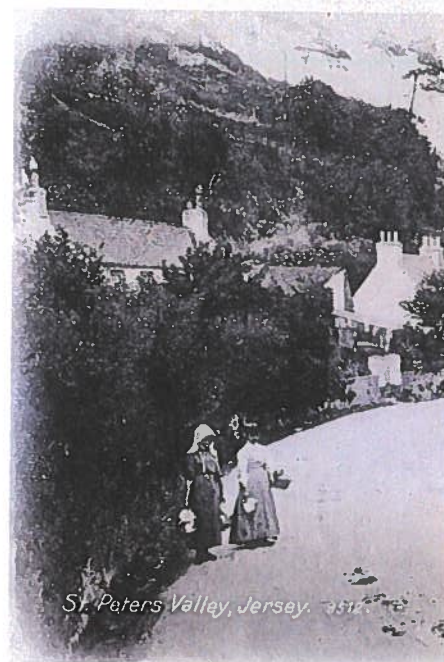
Jersey is favoured for agriculture with its south-facing aspect that warms the soil early in the spring. Its light, loamy texture dries out quickly making it easy to work, and the surrounding sea keeps the island almost frost-free in the wintertime.

The Island's countryside, as we know it today, has been fashioned through centuries of changing agricultural history. Five hundred years ago, the rural view of Jersey was vastly different from today with fields of corn, much common land and few trees or hedges.

Jerseymen have always been an enterprising and ambitious race. As an island, there has always been strong links with the sea, and in the days before steamships, shipbuilding was an important industry in the Island. At one time the Jersey fleet had as many as 500 vessels. Jerseymen were some of the first to fish for cod off the Newfoundland bank and they sailed in their small boats across the Atlantic every spring, returning home in time for the autumn ploughing. Having caught and salted the cod, they moved on to the ports of Spain, the Mediterranean and even to North and South America, trading their cargo that included knitted garments from the Island, for other valuable goods. In times of war, they took on the role of privateers for the English Navy, which, as a form of 'licensed pirate' gave them authority to plunder enemy ships. Reputedly, they were also not averse to smuggling, and these



- A 19th century farmyard.



- St Peter's Valley in the 19th century.

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various enterprises, both legal and illegal, helped to amass great wealth for the Island.

With this strong maritime tradition, the Island was in a good position to export homegrown products. Taking full advantage of the situation, farmers turned from growing corn, mostly wheat that did little to enhance their income, to keeping sheep in great numbers and producing and exporting fine knitted clothing.

At that time, Jersey's native sheep were depicted as being peculiar to the Island. They were a small breed, and were described by Jean Poingdestre, the Jersey historian, in 1682, as "the females had most foure hornes and the rams oft times six, that is three on each side whereof two made a circle towards the nose, two others another circle backwards towards the ears and two stood upright between them". He also reported at that time that these native sheep were almost extinct and were being replaced by a larger breed, "like those in Salisbury plain".

Even though there were many flocks in Jersey - including more than 300 flocks in the parish of St Ouen alone - the knitting industry was so large that additional wool was imported from England. However, an Act of Parliament restricted this in 1660 to 4,000 tods, an old English wool measure equivalent to about



• A 1950s harvest scene.



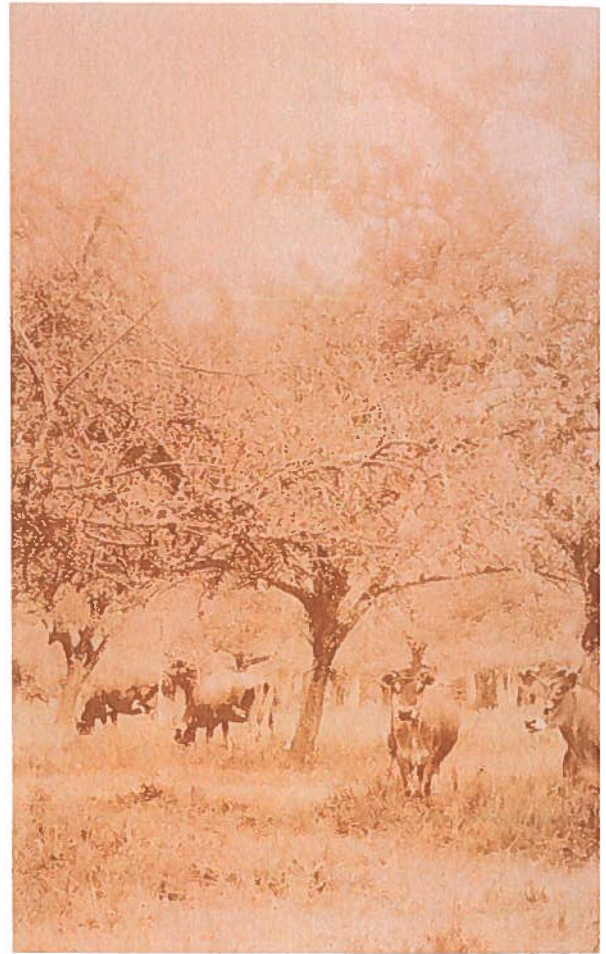
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twenty-eight pounds.

Historical writers have quoted that from 6,000 to 10,000 pairs of stockings were exported weekly, going to England, France and Spain. This trade was lucrative for the Islanders but there was a price to conventional farming. They neglected their crops, and in 1608, a law was passed forbidding every person over the age of 15 from knitting during the vraicing and corn harvesting seasons. The word "jersey" given to a knitted sweater derived its name from the Island's knitting industry that lasted for an astounding 250 years.

With the wealth that the maritime and knitting industries brought to the Island, farmers turned to other more rewarding enterprises. The cider industry became an important venture, complementing the work of knitting. This change of direction in farming, from corn to cider, encouraged the biggest transformation in the appearance of the Island. At one time, one quarter of Jersey was covered in apple orchards with tall hedges built up around them to provide shelter.

Between these high hedges, arches of trees cover winding narrow lanes. Part of the farmers work today stems from the construction of the hedges and byways – the annual branchage



• Cows in the orchard at J G Buesnel at St Saviour (c.

• Overlooking St Ouen's Bay



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which is the cutting of the trees and banks twice each year, in July and September.

The responsibility to oversee that all hedges are cut lies with the parochial authorities, but in August of each year the Royal Court conducts the Visite Royale in two parishes, inspecting the parish books, accounts, and the roads.

Several centuries ago, the farmer grew wheat and rye to make bread, and apples to make cider. Before the days of potatoes and other root crops, he also grew parsnips in abundance, to provide winter vegetables for his family, and for his livestock. The farm was self-sufficient, as, apart from the crops, the farmer had a cow or two for milk and butter, sheep for wool and mutton and pigs for pork and bacon. A few fowls provided eggs. Heating in the winter was generated by gorse, heather and vraic.

Jersey's soil was cared for by enriching it constantly with the manure from the livestock and the vrac from the seashore. The farmer rested his land between seasons, and ploughed in the cereal stubble, now covered with manure or vrac, making excellent use of the natural fertilizers. He also maintained permanent pasture, in the meadows and apple orchards, for his tethered cattle to graze.



- A typical Jersey farm scene in the 19th century.



- Visite de Branchage at St Peter in 1993.

- Branchage



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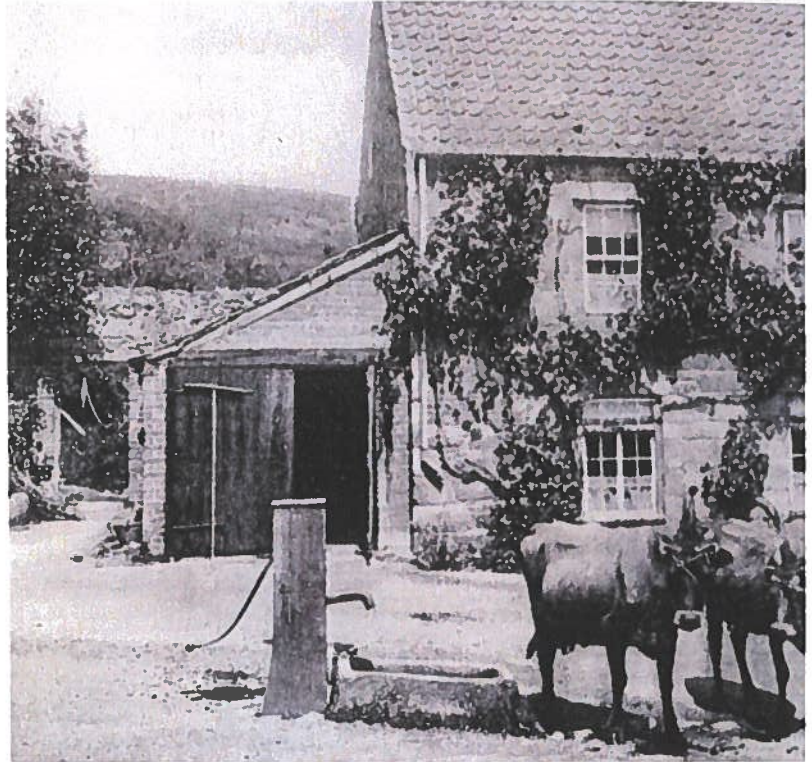
It was probably the deep rooting parsnip that prompted the introduction of Le Grand' Tchéthue, the big plough, to the Island in 1768. The parsnip did indeed have a long root that required a good depth of cultivated soil to grow.

The gradual change from cider apples to potatoes occurred at the end of the 18th century, by which time there was a thriving and profitable cattle export business.

In the mid-19th century it was realised that the demand, and the money, lay in the production of early potatoes. This encouraged the development of Jersey's cõtils; the south facing slopes of land near the island's coasts. Farmers grubbed up the gorse bushes, turning this previously unfarmed soil into the most profitable land in the Island.

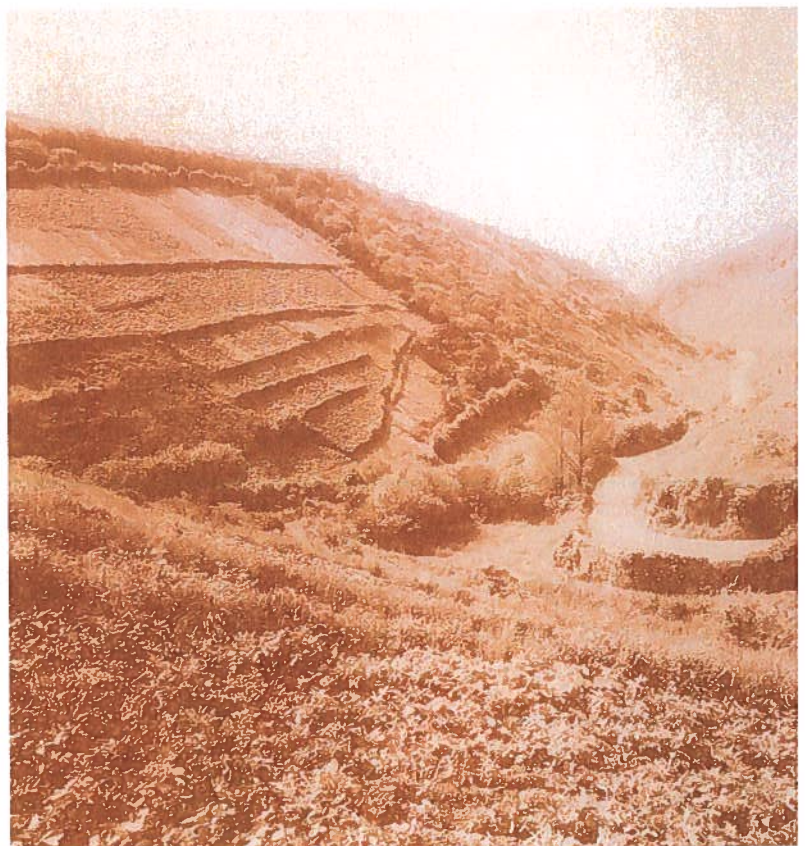
Always searching for crops that would boost farm income, many island farmers started growing outdoor tomatoes on the lighter, sandy soils, in the early 1900s. Later, in the years following the German Occupation, significant fortunes were made from the tomato industry.

In the first half of the 20th century, Jersey's numerous small farms were still less than 50 vergées on average, but were, by and large, profitable small enterprises. With the exceptional periods of two World Wars and the great depression of the 1930s, Jersey's farmers made a



• Anne Port Farm (c.1900)

• Bouley Bay, showing the hillside terraced for potatoes (c.1919)



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good living from the land. Farming progressed from the horse to the tractor and along with the traditional pattern of cattle and early potatoes, sometimes with tomatoes, came a variety of second crops like winter cauliflowers and calabrese, flower bulbs, and at times, varieties of flowers themselves. All had a part to play in the income for the farmer and his family.

The Jersey farmer has, for generations, faced challenges, usually from forces outside his influence, and these have not only affected his ability to farm, but have affected changes in the countryside. In the past it more often than not was a tactical change in crops prompted by competition from another source; today this is still the case, but the influence is far more global, both geographically and industrially.

Many of the granite farmhouses and extensive outbuildings are now fine residential properties. The surrounding fields are still farmed, but by farmers who have embraced the challenge of contemporary growing and marketing by expanding their land base, using modern technology. Still today, 53% of the island is worked and cared for by the farmers who strive, not only to make a living, but also to protect the environment.

- The gradual changeover from horse to tractor power. The plant the potatoes while the tractor, fitted with cage wheel



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Apples

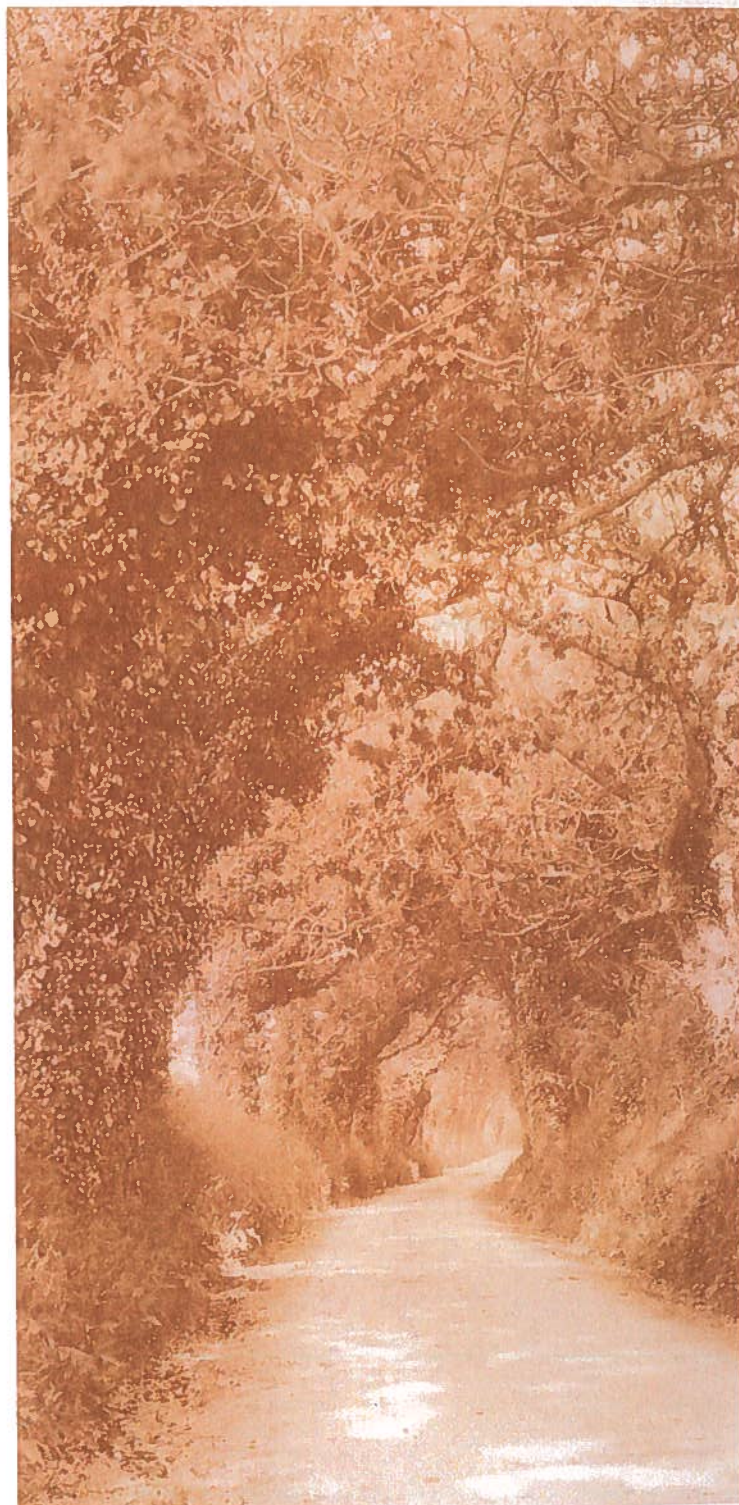
The unique and familiar countryside of Jersey, with its winding lanes, high banks with elm trees or hawthorn hedges planted on top, or perhaps solid granite walls, enclosing the small fields, dates from a change in agricultural practices some four hundred years ago.

Then, probably around the mid 16th century, smallholders started the process of converting their larger open fields of corn into apple orchards. The fruit trees needed shelter from the strong winds that whipped off the sea over the exposed land, and the farmers set about constructing these smaller enclosures to protect the new crop.

The cider industry expanded, with about one quarter of the land covered with apple trees. Like so many other activities that led to overproduction, the extensive planting of orchards had to be restricted by an act of the States in 1673, which forbade the planting of new orchards except to replace old ones.

Jersey, being located between Normandy to the east, where the cider trade was very significant, and the south of England where cider was beginning to become more and more popular, was in a favourable position. Cider produced in Jersey and shipped to England was exempt of duty, while the French had to pay duty on exports to their English neighbours. At that time, delivery by sea was cheaper than transport overland, and it was probably easier and less costly to take the barrels of cider from Jersey to the mainland by ship and continue through England's inland waterways, than to transport Devon or

- "Springtime in Jersey" with tethered was a very typical scene in Jersey c was Highstead Farm, St Savic



- A typical country lane in Jersey. The high banks, planted with tree built to protect the cider apple orchards.

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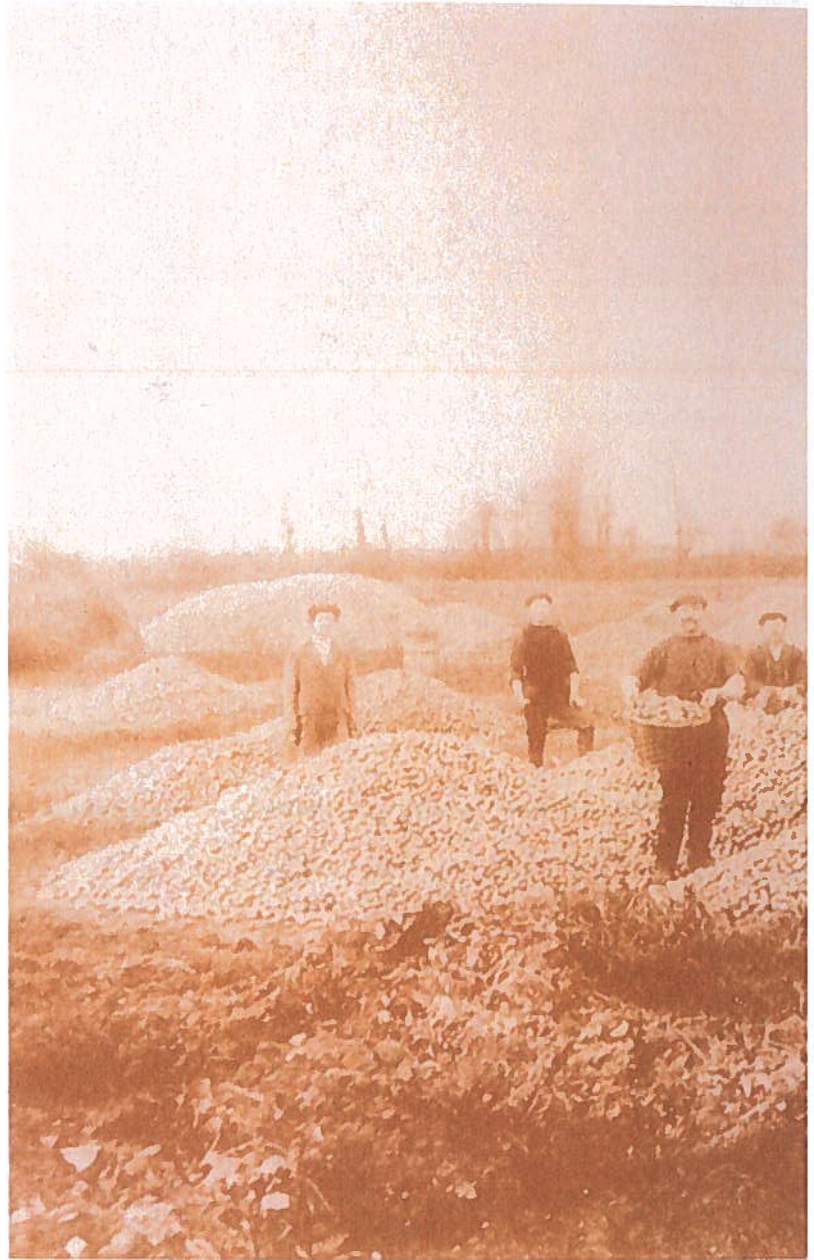
Somerset cider by horse and cart along the rutted tracks, which passed for roads in those days.

Jersey farmers grew the first apples to make cider for home consumption; producing a surplus of the amber liquid to sell to England was, along with knitting and selling of woollen stockings, a very profitable enterprise.

In 1692, the noted local historian, Reverend Phillippe Falle wrote... "I do not think there is any country in the world that, in the same extent of ground, produces so much cider as Jersey does, not even Normandy itself. Nor is there better, larger and more generous fruit that what grows in this Island." Obviously, the Reverend gentleman knew his cider!

Similar to later Acts and Laws of the States controlling the importation from France of cattle (to protect the local Jersey breed), acts prohibiting the importation of cider from Normandy were necessary. For the same reasons, there were always some who sought to profit from evading the payment of English duties on cider shipped from France.

The production of cider in Jersey reached considerable proportions in the halcyon days of the industry in the late 1700s and early 1800s when between one and a half and two million gallons were produced each year. About a million gallons was consumed locally, and the balance exported to England.



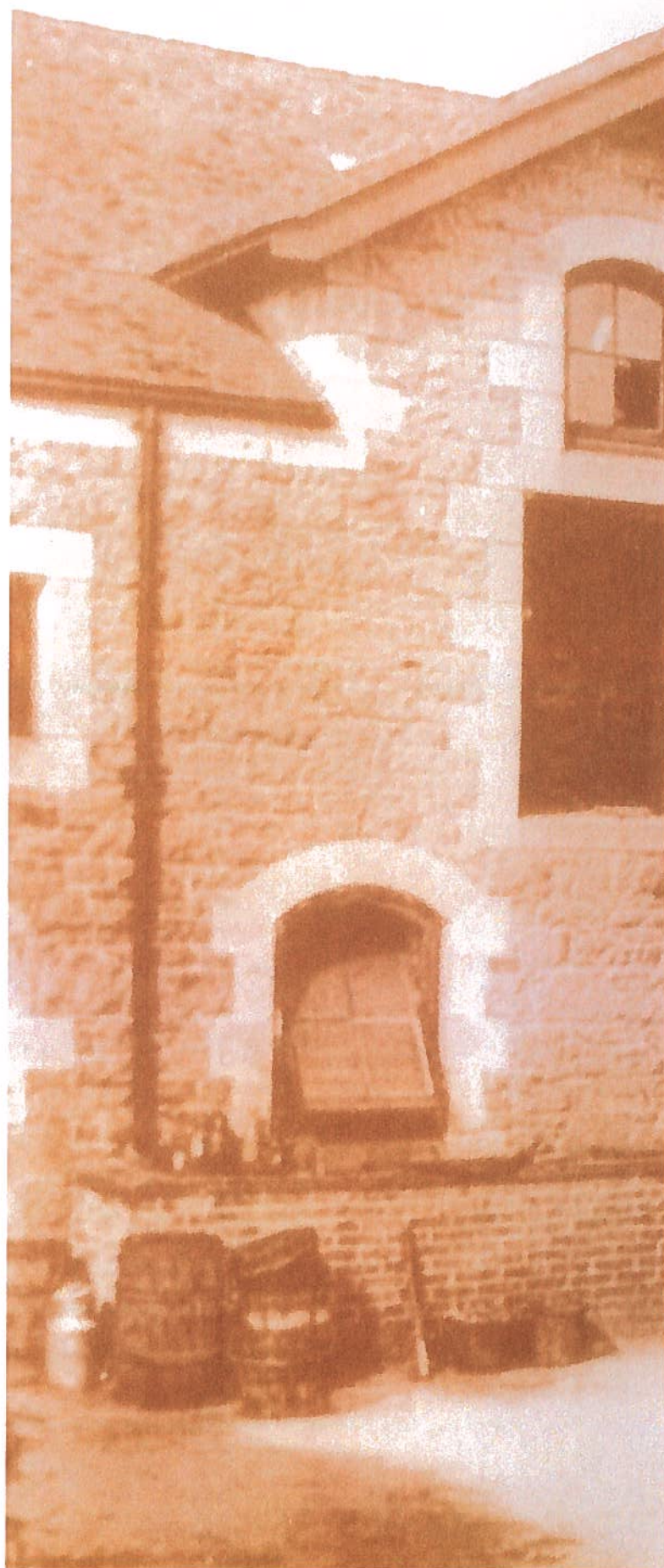
- "At peace" – Jersey's idyllic countryside.

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But by the 1850s the export of Jersey cattle was more profitable to the farmer and cider exports dwindled, eventually dying out by the end of the century. When the sale of cider to England ceased, the orchards in Jersey were still producing their annual drop of fruit and for a while, large quantities of apples were sent to the new cider factories in England. For a time in the 1880s, vinegar, made from the cider, provided an additional export income for the Island.

Cider making not only changed the natural contours of Jersey's countryside, but also contributed to the style of granite farms, as we know them today. The profit from cider helped many farmers to invest considerable sums of money in the circular granite apple crushers with large granite wheels to crush the apples into pulp. They also installed cider presses and built granite outbuildings to house them. Much of the stone used for the crushers came from the French Channel Island of Chausey as it was softer and easier to work than the harder Jersey granite. The combination of apple orchards, crushers and cider press houses, led to the Island's countryside taking the shape we see today. Granite farmsteads, surrounded by small fields, set in a maze of lanes, Jersey's unique natural rural scene.

- Manor Farm,
Vinchalez,
St Ouen

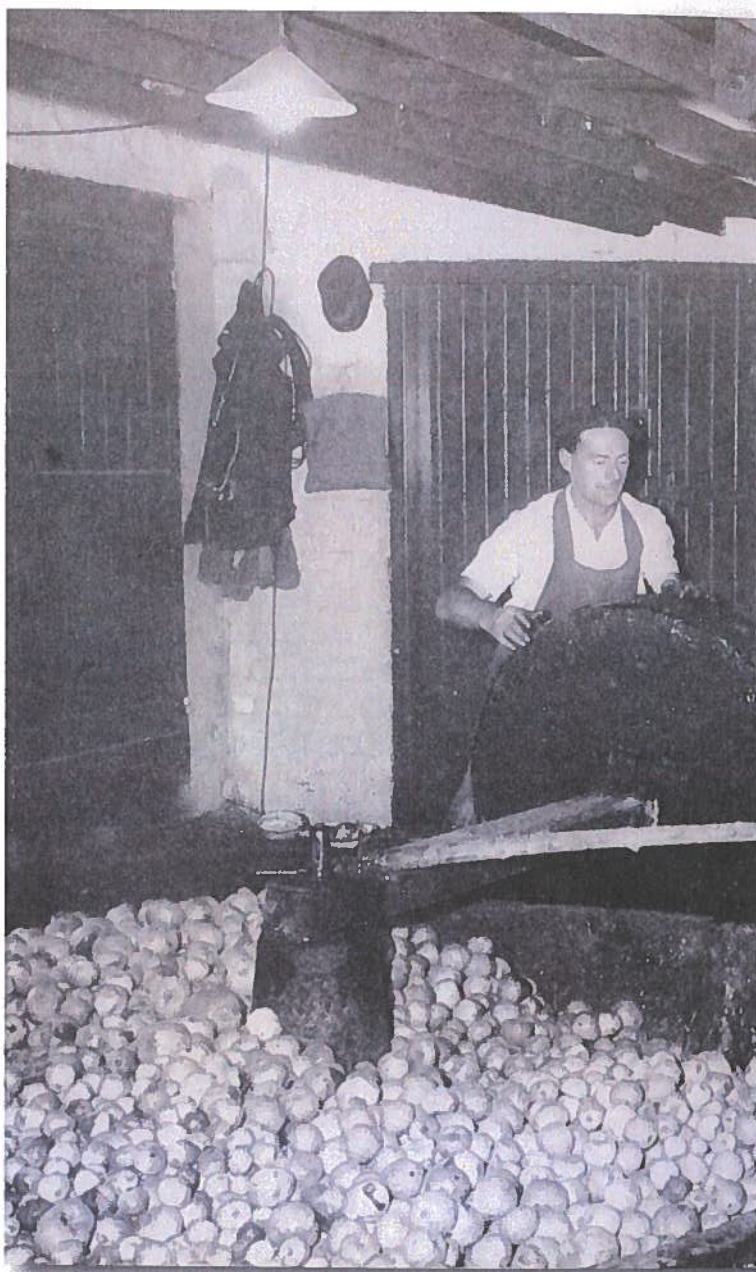


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Today, few Jersey cider makers still practise their craft, but in earlier times, most farmers processed the apples grown on their farms. Each year, from September to January, depending on the season, on crisp winter mornings, the farmer harnessed his horse to the big wheel, filled the circular trough with apples and began the process of crushing them into pulp.

The gigantic oak wooden press with its massive screwed shaft running through it was already prepared. The pulp was scooped out of the crusher and tipped onto large hessian sacks, or sheets – in earlier days straw was used – which were then folded over, on the press, "envelope style" ready for the next layer. This was known as "bagging up". When the layers of pulped apples filled the press, boards were placed on top for protection and the pressure began. The screw was turned gradually so that the juice was squeezed through the bottom into a large underground vat. The unfermented brew was ready for barrelling.

The juice was baled from the vat into barrels where it was left to stand and "boil" until ready for consumption. By the middle of the 20th century, cider production had declined considerably but was still a part of farm life. The amber liquid, the staple drink of all country folk for many generations, was, for the Breton workers who came to work for "the season" on the farms, a necessary part of life!



- The process of cider-making at George Boleat, the last commercial cider-maker in Jersey.

Crushing the apples into pulp, (above).



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Autumn brings the apples down from the trees, and this is the time when families and friends get together for the annual making of black butter. The occasions for "sethée d'nier beurre" – the black butter night.

The recipe for a batch of black butter resembles a shopping list to feed an army ... 20 gallons of rough, unfermented cider, 22 hundredweight of sweet apples, one hundredweight of cooking apples (Bramleys or similar) 22 lemons, eight sticks of liquorice, 28 pounds of white sugar, 1 pound of cinnamon, half a pound of nutmeg and one pound of mixed spices.

The first task is to set the fire, making sure there is plenty of wood in reserve for the hours ahead. Over the open fire a "trivet" or tripod is placed on which sits the "bachîn" or brass basin. The bachîn is greased with lard; the cider is poured in and left to simmer for a few hours. During this time, the womenfolk are busy peeling the apples and 28 pounds at a time are added to the bachîn. With the addition of the first lot of apples, the process of stirring starts, using a "rabort", a long-handle implement shaped like a large hoe.

The stirring, which must be continued throughout the long cooking time, gradually gets more and more difficult, as the mix thickens. It is important to keep stirring to prevent the butter from sticking to the sides of the bachîn and burning.

As each batch of apples dissolves into the mixture more sweet apples are added, then the liquorice goes in to give the rich deep colour, and of course,



- All pictures: Scenes at annual Black Butter events. Peeling apples requires all hands on deck. Black Butter nights were full of banter and fun.



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that spicy taste. The Bramleys are the last of the fruit to go into the bachin and then sugar is added. This thickens the mixture that by now takes two men to draw the rabot backwards and forwards in that regular motion.

The different spices are mixed in and with about an hour of the cooking time left, the grated rind and juices of the lemons are finally added to the recipe. Cooking the black butter over some twenty-four hours gives lots of time for the increasing group of helpers to indulge in what they have traditionally done since the ritual began; eat - usually a bean crock, drink and get merry on cider, with an accordionist to encourage singing and dancing through the night.

Next official task is the tasting of the mixture and when pronounced ready by the experts, four men, using hessian sacking as webbing, lift the heavy bachin off the trivet and place it on the floor.

Hundreds of jam jars have been washed and the women start filling them with the hot butter. This is a noisy operation as each jar is banged down on the table to expel any trapped air; it would do no good to offer anyone less than a full jar of black butter! Finally, the cooling jars are covered with a paper seal, held on by an elastic band.

There is just one more thing to be done. The thick, dark brown butter is now ready to be spread on a piece of bread. Now that really is the delicious taste of old Jersey.



• The cooking is complete