

Author reveals how she renovated her Nazi bunker in Guernsey and featured it as a romantic rendezvous in her novel

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In 1995, Anne Allen, with her two sons moved into her partner's recently purchased rugged farmhouse on the beautiful west coast of Guernsey. As soon as she set eyes upon the house and the garden, she knew she wanted to live there. However, the big surprise was the discovery of the German bunker. Its presence was a haunting reminder of the Channel Island's horrific Nazi occupation during WWII.

"The Occupation has played a significant part in the island's psyche. The German bunkers and fortifications are constant reminders," says Anne Allen.

"My children were fascinated by the bunker and I was intrigued by its history.

"It had been neglected for a long time, however, we could still faintly see some of the stenciled warnings which, said 'Achtung Feind Hort Mit! Watch out, the enemy listens!"

During World War II, the Channel Islands were the only British territories to be occupied by the Germans. Guernsey's main harbor was bombed and then the troops began its occupation. Islanders were left shocked as they tragically watched their beautiful island become controlled by the Nazis.

The Germans viewed the occupation of the Channel Islands as good propaganda and tried to display their military strength by building bunkers along the island's beautiful coastlines. The military fortifications were built by prisoners of war who worked under atrocious conditions.

"I have talked to many islanders who lived during the occupation and read a lot of books about it," says Anne Allen.

"It was a very dark time for the island. I have tried to imagine what it would have been like for the Islanders."

The island was liberated on 9 May 1945 and after the war, the islanders wanted to eradicate the Nazi fortifications. They stripped as many German sites as they could to find anything they could use to rebuild their lives. Then, many bunkers and other fortification were filled in.

"The bunker was prone to flooding and required a significant amount of restoration work.

"We felt that it was important to accurately restore the bunker as it formed part of the island's history. So, a professional company with experience of undertaking WWII restorations was hired.

"They even re-painted the original German signs!"

“After the renovation was completed, the bunker felt quite surreal. It was almost like I had stepped back in time.

“Sometimes, I would sit there and contemplate the stories of both the Islanders and the German soldiers during WWII.

“I read stories about local women falling in love with German officers and I wondered whether our bunker had ever been used as a secret romantic rendezvous for such illicit love.”

The bunker was used as an extension to their house. However, Anne’s teenage sons found a new use for the bunker.

“My sons had an illicit party in it while we were away one weekend and we only found out because a neighbor complained about finding some beer bottles thrown into the adjoining lane.”

Although Anne was not born in Guernsey, she had become an honouree islander and is very respectful of its history and its way of life. She was born in landlocked Rugby finally migrating to Guernsey in 1988 after visiting the island during a holiday the previous year.

“I fell in love with the island immediately. It was a combination of the beautiful scenery - incorporating big sandy beaches, cliff top walks, and sheltered coves and friendly people”

“The Islanders are wonderful and I love the strong community spirit. It provided me with a real sense of belonging.”

When Anne migrated to the island, she was a widow with three young children. A psychotherapist by profession, Anne set up her own practice on the island, and it provided her with a great insight into the psyche of the Islanders. Her loyal clients helped her get a housing license, and eventually, she fell in love with an islander, moving into his farmhouse a while later.

“I lived in Guernsey for fourteen years, however, sadly my relationship broke down and I moved back to England.

“However, the island, the occupation, and the bunker haunted me and I always felt that I had to tell the islanders’ stories.”

Anne, who is an avid reader was delighted to discover the novel, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, by the American author Mary Anne Shaffer. The bestselling novel has been turned into a movie starring Lily James of *Downton Abbey* fame. It will be in cinemas nationwide from 20 April.

“The movie looks fantastic and I think it will really help to boost tourism to the beautiful island,” says Anne.

Inspired by the success of the bestselling novel *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, Anne put pen to paper and began to draft her very own Guernsey novel and featured her own German bunker as a backdrop of a romantic but tragic liaison between an islander and a German soldier.

“My head was filled with stories about Guernsey and I wanted to provide people with an authentic view of the island.”

Whilst writing her first draft, Anne entered a true-life writing competition with Prima and was surprised when she won.

“Winning the writing competition boosted my confidence and spurred me on to get my novel published.”

Her debut novel *Dangerous Waters* centered around a young islander called Jeanne returning to Guernsey and renovating her deceased grandma’s cottage. But the house holds a secret, dating back to World War II and the German Occupation, and Jeanne becomes drawn into discovering more.

Her novel won an award, and it spurred her onto to write *The Guernsey Novels*, a series of six books to date. All the stories take place predominantly on the island and are linked by characters popping up from one book to another. They provide an ongoing story of a ‘village’ spread, so far, over six years. Each book is standalone with fresh new lead characters with their own links to the German Occupation during World War II, having an impact on the present. Anne says,

“Bearing in mind the importance of research I have tried to ensure that I give the names of real restaurants, hotels, roads, and landmarks.

“I also try to check they were in existence in the time period of each novel.

"I've been told that tourists use my work as guidebooks to places they have read about.

The *Guernsey Novels* by Anne Allen have been very well received by islanders, who have applauded her for accurately portraying the island and its history.

“As I live in Guernsey I was able to identify with all the place names etc. It was a gripping story,” says Amazon reviewer Gina, about *Dangerous Waters*.

“Fabulous story. As I live in Guernsey I could really relate to the story. Read it twice.” (<https://goo.gl/7RQQjy>)

“I really enjoyed this book, having lived in Guernsey myself, it was very informative about the island and helped me visualise where Jeanne (the protagonist) was throughout the story.”

Anne is currently working on her seventh book in *The Guernsey Novel* series, *The Inheritance*. It will be a dual-time novel, set in Victorian times in Guernsey when Victor Hugo lived there in exile and finished off his masterpiece, *Les Miserables*.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1) Photographs of the German Bunker are available upon request.
- 2) Anne Allen is available for telephone interviews and is happy to provide any further information that you may require.
- 3) HD images are available upon request via email
- 5) The *Guernsey Novels* are available from Amazon, Waterstones, and other bookstores.

6) The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society movie will be screened in cinemas from 20 April.

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