



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Albert Poggio interviewed by Mary Ingoldby and Jerry Robinson on 19th September 2013 (Serial 036)

Track 1

Introduction

MI: Parents and grandparents?

AP has traced Poggio side of his family to 1736 first ancestors who arrived in Gibraltar from Savona in Italy – 30 miles outside Genoa; most of Italian Gibraltarians come from that part of Italy.

Mother's side Jewish, from Moroccan extraction;

MI: Family evacuated during the war?

Evacuation of Gibraltar; whole of AP's family evacuated except for his father who was a Special Policeman; first of all to Tangier and then because of situation with Vichy French returned to Gibraltar, not allowed to disembark whilst London decided what was to be done; eventually most of them came to London; Flying bombs; evacuated again to camps in Northern Ireland, AP was born in camp in NI. Repatriation; AP's family returned to Gibraltar in 1953; accommodation issues in Gibraltar.

One of my first images of Gibraltar is moving into a brand new block of flats which had been constructed immediately after the war...in Scud Hill...

AP speaks about theory of deal between Spanish and Churchill during the war

MI: Life in Ballymena?

Life was very tough, a number of camps in Antrim and Londonderry, rationing, The Gibraltarians were wily people trying to get extra for the camps; inter marriages (Irish and Gibraltarians)

MI: Earliest recollections of Gibraltar?

Military Garrison; walking to school; fight between the American Fleet and the British Home Fleet; watching the fleets come in from his window;

At 9 o'clock on the dot the first frigate would be coming through and ships would be coming into Gibraltar the whole morning and they would moor in the docks, destroyers four abreast, cruisers, aircraft carriers and it was an amazing sight ..you used to get the Mediterranean and the Home Fleet coming in at the same time, hundreds and hundreds of ships the whole bay... and the inside harbour would be full of naval ships – that is an impression that I have in my mind that will always stay with me.

Fight between the Americans/Brits and Australians:

I remember going to school the next morning walking along from Scud Hill to town and it was like a battle ground of broken chairs, broken timber everywhere, tables had been broken.....the fight had apparently started in a bar opposite the law courts and had extended out to the street and all the way back to the dockyard

The night before... where we lived was opposite a police barracks there were so many fights going on in my local area that quite a few of the local men stood on the tables with sticks to stop them coming in to our block of flats.

Track 2

The Bedenham Explosion

My father worked for the military in Glen Rocky which is a water treatment plant underneath the rock at Europa Point, my uncle was a policeman and he was on duty next to the dockyard. When the explosion happened I was at school, the teacher was standing by my desk and the whole window just fell on top of us....my concern was for my sister who was in the same school as me, I just wanted to find her...which eventually I did....we were taken home by my mother who had run to the school all the way from home, she then ran all the way to Glen Rocky to Europa Point to check that my father was alright, he hadn't heard the explosion because he had been in the tunnels...she then ran to the dockyard to see about my uncle and he was alright.. they were able to jump

under one of the iron working tables which saved their lives. ...and then she ran from there to Georges Lane to see that her parents were alright and then she came back to us and at that time she collapsed...

Our neighbour kept saying you must stay indoors there's going to be another explosion...but that never happened... there was total devastation, parts of this ship blew over the rock to the Catalan Bay side...a huge incident...there was no home that would have got away without suffering some kind of damage...

People thinking it was an attack on Gibraltar; finding parts of explosives on the way to school the next morning.

Garrison town; American and military everywhere; Grandmother's house and finding a drunk American sailor asleep in the lavatory.

MI: Evacuation changing dynamics of family of life?

If it changed it was for the better it bought the community closer together and Gibraltar politics emerged from this period;

Formation of AACR (Association for Advancement of Civil Liberties Party) grew from the long repatriation of Gibraltarians after the war - the idea was to pressurise the British Government to bring the Gibraltarians back to their families in Gibraltar.

JR: also the time of end of Empire

Gibraltarians wanted to get back home and build their lives; Gibraltar as model for community spirit and respecting each other; Mixture of cultures and religions; mutual respect.

I remember the Jewish boys coming out of the synagogue and they would go to the bars to have a drink, they would never pay because they were not allowed to handle money on a Saturday and that was OK they would come back and pay the next day

I remember seeing this Spanish maid running down Main Street with saucepans because the Jewish families were not allowed to cook on a Saturday. They would prepare their meal on the Friday before the Sabbath and they would take it to the local baker and on lunchtime Saturday when they came out of the synagogue the maid would pick, up the food and run back to the house.

Jewish bakeries in Gibraltar

AP half catholic and half Jewish – which do you think you are?

AP a confirmed catholic with affinity to Jewish faith; went to a Jewish school, the Hebrew School in Gibraltar; has this affinity because of mother's family; grandparents retired to Jewish Home in North London; AP has memories of being there for Jewish Festivals, excluded for the prayers – then asked to come and join for the feasts.

Track 3

Father and Uncle during the WWII

AP tells the story of when his uncle Albert was killed by a bomb in Tangiers during WWII.

On the day AP's father was due to accompany a diplomatic bag to Morocco he had finally got a date with Albert's sister; he asked Albert to swap duties and accompany the bag in his place. The bag was booby trapped and exploded killing Albert.

Forty years later AP was taking a group of staff from his travel firm on a tour of Morocco and the guide turned out to have been with Albert when the bomb exploded and was only saved by hiding behind the door of the diplomatic car. The guide had a huge respect for Albert and showed AP his grave.

AP's father subsequently married Albert's sister:

if my uncle had not changed shifts with my father I would not have been here

AP's parents cared for Albert's son Robert who became a brother to AP.

AP discovered a plaque dedicated to the people who died in the bombing and had it placed in The Kings Chapel; he also unveiled another plaque below the Gibraltarian Parliament.

MI: How your life progressed?

When AP was 12 years old his mother brought the children on holiday to London to see their grandparents; AP's father came over to London and the family stayed.

Political life

At 17 years old AP formed a voluntary association of Gibraltarians to assist Gibraltarians to come to London when the frontier between Spain and Gibraltar was closed; this brought AP into public prominence, continued through teens/twenties, started business early; very successful;

MI: Was there something in your family that led you into public life?

Passion – it is a passion that a Gibraltarian has.....

AP speaks about current problems with Spain; an article in the Spanish press about the importance of his work in London; The Spanish aware of his work.

The reality is so long as they haven't got the passion that a Gibraltarian has for his homeland.. then they will never succeed because my skills are driven by the passion I have for the job that I do and for my home in keeping what we believe in... and that is what drives me and that is what drives to most Gibraltarians is passion...we are 30 thousand it is not the quantity it is the quality... we have to succeed in whatever we do because we have to prove to the outside world that we are as good as they are

Track 4

Career

University, electrical engineer; success in business; always linked to Gibraltar; grabbing opportunity; his opportunity finding spare part for the Rock Hotel in Gibraltar and turning this into a purchasing business between Gibraltar and the UK.

At 38 years old AP was asked by Chief Minister of Gibraltar to take over the tourist office in London; AP reluctant at first; the work was extremely interesting and AP continued to work for the Gibraltarian Government and established what is now Gibraltar House.

What was a tourist office dishing out brochures is what this building is now an embassy for Gibraltar six floors and a very important place for Gibraltar.

AP speaks about the struggle to establish Gibraltarian identity in the UK; mounting a campaign to fly the Gibraltar Flag.

It is a very political job, I've been very successful; I have served every Chief Minister of Gibraltar; I think I am here because of who I know – I walk into Westminster with more ease than ministers of the government do – spend a lot of time in House Of Lords, MPs personal friends.

AP speaks about attitude of Spanish Government; recognising importance of his work in London. Working with the Falkland Islands and all the UK Overseas Territories.

We are small but collectively become a group of people that can be heard – they value work that Gibraltar has done over the years.

The struggle is recognition that we are equal to the High Commissioner for Australia – we are doing exactly the same role so why can we not have the title.

JR – where do you see Gibraltar going in the future?

The economy is varied and strong, growing at rate of 6% per annum year on year. Our difficulties with Spain whilst alarming are nothing new, there will be a solution to the current problems the economy is strong and does not depend on the border; the border delays will hurt but will not hurt the underlying strength of the economy

In terms of sovereignty that is never going to change – I see Gibraltar in a very good place 10 20 years time.