



## **Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity**

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

### **Interview of Dilys Hallibone by Mary Ingoldby and Jerry Robinson on 23 April 2013**

#### **Track 1**

Dilys Hallibone was born and brought in Pembrokeshire. Her father was a seafarer from Gibraltar. He came from a large family, whose grandfather, Franciso Pizzarello had come over from Italy in the mid Victorian period and settled in Catalan Bay. His father's name was XXX, who also came from a big family – one of the reasons why there are so many Pizzarellos in Gibraltar.

*What year was your father born:*

In 1890. He was 17 when his father died suddenly and grandmother was left with 5 sons to bring up on her own. The eldest son had gone to be a priest and was already in a seminary in Spain. My father was destined to the law. My father didn't think too much of that so went to the dockyard and got himself an apprenticeship. The next son, Earnest, became a lawyer, that's Felix's father.

*Who was Felix?*

He became a High Court Judge in Gibraltar. There was also an Uncle Albert. Uncle John, who went into oil in South American

My father went to work in the dockyard and went to sea eventually – he hated the sea and didn't like being a sailor. He thought at trying his luck at sheep and jump ship in Serra Delthago, where he set up a sheep shearing plant then along came the First World War - so he came to Britain - as a very good British Subject from Gibraltar – they were all really keen on Gibraltar – they all had British passports – Uncle John waved his British passport during the Falklands war - he was in South America.

*Let's stick with you father:*

By the time he served his apprenticeship he was about 24 in the Dockyard in Gib, then went back to sea – so must have been in his 20s during the First World War – he was at sea all through that having all sort of adventures. When he was in Cardiff my other grandfather was in a shipping office in the docks and my grandmother always had young men from the ships in at Christmas and that was how he (my father) met my mother. So they were married in 1918 just at the

end of the WW1 in Cardiff – and my mother (being Welsh) wouldn't marry anyone with a name his, obviously, so had to change his name to: Purcell from Pizzarello – there are several spells in Gibraltar due to many people being illiterate when they came from Italy

*So your father agreed to change his name: he didn't mind:*

My mother wasn't going to marry him if he didn't – it didn't change him at all but he had a great row with his mother and didn't speak to his mother for about 10 years or more – she (his mother) was very matriarchal – and the awful thing was that Felix's father did exactly the same thing but at least my father escaped over here whereas that family stayed in Gibraltar – she never met her grandfather whilst he lived in Gibraltar and she lived in Gibraltar but she was pointed out to her once in the street to her – (all) because they went to the Protestant cathedral - (a religious issue)

*So what about when they decided to get married was there any question of the grandmother or family coming over?*

Absolutely not – and it wasn't easy to come over – it was quite a performance with ships in those days. They got married in St Mary's in Cardiff.

*How you were brought up: as a Catholic?*

No, no there was no mention (of dispute, Catholicism) – I was 15 before I even heard of the change of name – mother was so against it – they (mother and father) absolutely doted in each other all their lives – absolutely – (my father's parents believed that) children had to be brought up as Catholics (not Protestants) – absolutely - it was terrible really but that's what happened

*When did you find out:*

As a teenager I thought it funny we got these parcels from Gibraltar from someone with a strange name but they were always taken right away - I never saw what was in the parcels but then clothes, sweets, all sorts of things appeared. My father, in the 30s, was in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary stationed in Malta. He was once very badly scaled because he was an engineer and was put into Gibraltar in the Naval Hospital and so felt he couldn't be there and not see her (his mother) – so it was smoothed over.

*Was it his mother sending the parcels?*

Yes. I was sent beautiful little embroidered dresses and I was a lumping 12 (lots of laughter). There was just my brother and I – and I think it a pity as he's got four sons all the same and all the grandchildren called Poreso. The grandmother, who I met eventually, – because I met her eventually as she was evacuated over here (in the UK).

*Where did your father come in the family?*

He was the second son, but he had to take charge as Pepe had gone to a seminary – when the war came he was in the English College in Rome.

From her point of view – her boy going off to Wales - It must have been heart breaking for her: the next son who went in for law - that Felix's father – that family lived in Gibraltar under her nose – because he married a Protestant, he was an outcast. They went to the English cathedral – I can't think that they were very religious – Pepe in the seminary must have been upset with half his family becoming Protestant – yes – but he died young – about before the war years, before I realised that he existed

*So in the 1930(s) your father just gone back to Gib and was in hospital and met up with the family again and was the beginning of some sort of reprehension?*

Yes – it was difficult travelling and my mother didn't have the faintest intention of having anything to do with them – my father used to be on a boat going from Malta and Shanghai, Aberdare, Australia – he only used to come home every two years and I didn't know him really

*Did your mother come from a large family?*

Yes – very big and close family so I had load of uncles and aunts – I wasn't short of family - and my brother also – my little brother is now 87 – a saw him a couple of years ago and he's got four sons: two in America and two in England – - they know about their Gibraltar heritage

*How did you find about the contents of the parcels?*

I think I did a bit of detective work – it was fun – I can't remember it was so long ago I was a young teenager

*Identity – how did you think about being half Gibraltarian?*

Yes. I didn't know who I was – and at school I remember the teacher saying ' come on Miss Gibraltar' and I thought that's funny why are they calling me that – because it was a very close community, near the national park

My father eventually – well my mother got fed up with him being away at sea – and so he had to come home – it wasn't easy to get jobs – so he had to go on the cross channel ferries which was a frightful come down from the Fleet Auxiliary – but that's what happened – we went down to Fishguard, but as it happened that was where my mother was brought up and she knew half the town – just a little place and her parents and grandparents went back there and so it was a small close community.

## Track 2

When war came my father was on the cross channel ferry, on a trip to Ireland when the ship was bombed and sunk – and our friends on the Bridge were killed instantly and my father went down through the hatches to and got his men out of the engine room and was (consequently) decorated for bravery at Buckingham Palace – he was missing for a bit and then was rescued by the XXX life boat and the nearby light house has got a plaque remember this famous occasion when so many people were killed on this cross channel – they weren't torpedoed but bombed

*Do you remember the event – were you at home at the time?*

I spent four years in the RAF – where was I think I went at Eastbourne to do the weather, I was a meteorologist for the Dieppe raid – so it must have been about that time – and of course we had the Canadians there and they all went over (on the raid) and we were heavily bombed these hotels on the seafront – and the poor Canadians went over on the raid and whole lot were killed or captured – it was awful. And then I went down to Pembroke Dock. My mother by then was on my own because my brother had gone to the Fleet Air Arm. My father (following the loss of the ferry) went on hospital ships and he was in every single landing in the Mediterranean and then he came back to work on the Melburry Harbour in time for the invasion (D-Day). I was by then on anti-submarine warfare - on the Sunderlands flying out from Milford Havens. And, the next room was the photography department and there I saw (my father's) hospital ship coming up through the Mediterranean in the sunshine – gosh it was wonderful sight. Because I couldn't tell my mother – but I knew he was coming back.

*What was it like for him to go back to the Mediterranean?*

Well, his languages came in handy and he'd been at sea on ships and spoke various languages. But at home he wasn't allowed to speak Spanish. No. No No. My mother was very anti. And then of course the people from Gibraltar were evacuated. Felix's mother took her three children to Madeira. They were fine in Madeira. But my grandmother didn't want to leave and that how she was left till the last because just dug her heels in – and in fact would have been better staying there (in Gibraltar). So she came here to the UK with Maria - that was her daughter in law, Uncles Albert's wife and Francis – they came over then with my grandmother to look after her, as she was in her 70s by then. And, they were put into a hotel in Oxford Street – there was an incendiary bomb (which hit the hotel) and burnt it down. My grandmother was out in the street and she realised that she hadn't got her reading glasses and insisted to go back into the hotel to get them. But of course they lost most of the stuff they brought from Gib. So they were put into a block of flats in Prince Albert's Road - it's now one of those very desirable and expensive block of flats above Primrose Hill. So there was

nothing in there it was bare, absolutely bare and they were just given basic army beds and wooden chairs – no degree of comfort at all. Francis, was quite young then – younger than I am – about 16 –because they wouldn't let her go out or anything. But fortunately for me I was married young – another extraordinary story.

*Tell us a little glimpse about that?*

When war broke out, I was in the Bank of England. My mother didn't want me to go to art school. Or do anything. My father thought it shocking that women did anything other than look after the home. And, we were evacuated down to Hampshire which is where Portals paper mills were which the paper was made for the bank notes – and it was bombed – must be in 1941 – and the Sapper came to defuse the bombs which dropped on the paper mills and that's how I came to meet my husband. I was 17 or about that age. He was about 21.

*Did you have any idea of that your Gibraltar relatives were in London?*

Yes, of course, I went to see them. I think that the authorities thought that my mother would have them down in down in Pembrokeshire. But of course she wouldn't dream of that. I can't see how that would have worked, because she was firmly wasn't going to speak anything other than English or Welsh at a pinch, suppose. But she certainly wasn't going to learn Spanish and my grandmother was equally determined not to learn one single word of English.

*What happened during the first time you met them?*

They were in this block of flats and they didn't think much of it and would have been better back home (in Gibraltar). They came over on a boat which picked up a lot of people from Malta because they had had a terrible time in Malta and I suppose really that they thought that Gibraltar might suffer the same fate. Nobody knew which way Spain would going – anything could have happened. So, any way my mother went to meet them and I went with her. Francis had to go the translating – she was about 16 then. My grandmother very disapproving of me, but you know it was nice to meet her, sitting there dressed in black with gold earring as you would expect a descent lady from Gibraltar. I was shocked to the core as I hadn't had my ears pierced and I had them done immediately afterwards.

*Did you become friends with Francis?*

Oh yes, I became very friendly with Francis – her husband (to be) was in Gibraltar – her husband in Gibraltar – the men stayed there. Because I was married she could come out with me as a chaperone. Which was killingly funny and we would go to all sorts of jolly places like the Lyons Corner shop – very wicked. We never asked her (grandmother). When she was 18 poor old Francis had to go to work in munitions – there were no chaperones there. So, that must have been a bit of a shock – in London

*Were Gibraltarians made to work?*

Oh yes - they were - in order to get ration books and things. And the rations - oh dear - you can imagine the idea of food over here [there was no rationing in Gibraltar] - it was awful and I always remember how my grandmother was absolutely furious because they said that they weren't well with no fruit no nothing etc - it was war time and pretty grim etc - they were told that they had to eat plenty of turnips. I remember that there was a very nice Maltese doctor who kept a close eye of them - but they were (also) nice people in the blocks and everyone looked after every body else - that was good - but then I didn't see much of them for a time. After the Dieppe raid, I went to Abingdon - doing drops to Spain and France and then I went down to Pembroke Docks to anti-submarine warfare so we had three squadrons of Sunderlands flown by Aussies and one American Navy flying Catalinas and one there were BOAC with the gun turrets taken off doing civilian flights down to Lisbon and Rabat etc.

*When did they (grandmother) leave / return home to Gibraltar?*

They didn't go to Ireland but remained in London throughout the whole war - I didn't see them off - I was away when the time came - but I've always kept in touch with Francis - but the other girls came back from Madeira, Pat, and with Felix went back (Gibraltar) to finish their schooling, and then they all came over here to go to college - there were no cheap flights then, they came by boat and they only had one paid for trip and year so they came to stay with us for weeks, months.

*Were you married then and where were you living?*

Well, at first we were living in Northwick, in Cheshire, but then moved to Middlesbrough, as my husband was working with ICI. They (her Gibraltarian relations) came over during the years - and as things (relations) improved - in fact the first time I met Felix's parents was in 1930 when they came over on their honeymoon and they flew over from Paris - we had never met anyone who had flown before so thought this terrific (laughter)

*Were you able to go to art school after the war?*

Yes, I went to the Ruskin School, in Oxford. During the war the Slade School had been evacuated and combined with the Ruskin School - so the tutors were all share and did have the week at the Slade and half the week at the Ruskin, so we were accommodated in the Ashmolean Museum - which was rather nice as they would say to upstairs and looked at the Michelangelo and others

I was married in 1941 and I saw my husband twice and then he went abroad for four years and I never saw him all this time, during which I had done my four years in the RAF so afterwards started at the Ruskin School - I thought that when the war ended he would come back - but a bit of it - by then he was a Major with the Bengal Sappers and Miners, an Indian Regiment, and he went

right up through Italy with them, Monte Casino and all that – they were up somewhere near the Po when the war ended – but he had to take his men back to India. I had done a term at the Ruskin School when he came back. I was in a bit of a dilemma – it was so long (he had been away) – and I was so young – I thought I can't meet him at the station - (like meeting a stranger), I had grown up in between – I didn't get much sympathy at home, with my mother – as she was in the same boat with my father away a lot at sea – I had been brought up with the system with the men away for years. Most of the students at the Ruskin were ex-servicemen – some had been there before the war, others had degrees from other colleges – when they came back after the war they went to the Ruskin School (to do art).

*So when did you start painting – as a professional artist?*

I've always painted – since I was in a pram. It was an amazing time to be at the Ruskin – Last year I went back to the Ashmolean and it's very grand now – it was much smaller then – they've still got all these red velvet settees – I remember them well – as I gave birth to my first some whilst still there (and needed to rest when pregnant). I knew that my husband was due to go back to finish his degree – he had only done two years of his degree before the war – so, I thought it would go there (Oxford) too - so I went to the college to see if they could get him back from India – the tutor there was very good to us and the tutor asked what are you going to do – at the time I didn't have anywhere to live or anything – I just went to Oxford just like that – I got off the train and thought I would go to the YMCA – I'd done that before while in the RAF – I was still in uniform and had just been demobbed – and when I went there the people at the YMCA asked if I had a bed – I hadn't got any money – so they asked if I wanted to be a the night warden – so I got a bed and job. So I went to the College – and they were really shocked – 'that won't do at all - what would Major Hallibone say' – you know what these stuffy old people are like (laughter) They found me a part in a most gorgeous house in Old Marston and I stayed there until I got back – and then we lived there until he finished his degree – in Natural Sciences

*When did you first go to Gibraltar?*

Francis had grown up here in UK – when she went back we wondered whether she would marry – she did and married a Jew – she's a Catholic – he was Orthodox – he ran the Lottery –they had two children. They have one of the houses up the hill. I used to go back when Felix's father was still alive. He was the Registrar to the Supreme Court and he knew everyone and everything – he used to take me to see my grandparent's grave and to meet the people in Catalan Bay – one day, I was painting down there near a lovely little chapel – it used to be originally used for drowned sailors – a man came out of a little shop and came up to me and said that he knew exactly who I are –my mother's your father's first cousin – everyone knows who everyone is in Catalan Bay

*What did you feel about going to Gibraltar?*

Yes, it was so like home – Felix’s mother and father - I was very fond of them and they all had been over here (UK) so much – Felix and his sisters had spent all there holidays here – Felix was at Oxford – he stayed with us and Eva came over for teachers training and Pat similar.

*Did your mother ever accept the Gibraltarian connections?*

No, but she did become friendly with Felix’s mother, who I called Aunty Mary – they stayed with us in Pembrokeshire – my mother was from a very closed country area – now it seems more and more absurd the older I become.

When we went to Gibraltar the frontier was shut – that was a complication - so you just couldn’t go down there through Spain and walk across – there was no fruit in Gibraltar – a little boat used to come and a motor boat would go out to meet it and that’s how people could get in The airport was there but there wasn’t much commercial flying. It was about 1970 when my father went to visit his sick mother – we persuaded him to fly - back came back on a cruise ship.

*What do you children feel about Gibraltar?*

Nothing at all – they are real Hallibones and my brother is the same– Eva has mixed feeling but she goes back to stay with an aunt whose 102 who lives in Main Street. I feel that it’s very much it like going home and went once with my grand-daughter when she was 12 – we were in Francis’s house – there was a maid who was Muslim from French Morocco – the conversation was in French, Spanish, English and Arabic – what with the strange food - my granddaughter’s eyes were on stalks (laughter). The whole mix of cultural is very international. It’s absolutely fascinating. Because the family is essentially Italian – from Genoa – in 1850 my great grandfather came over and married someone in Catalan Bay and stayed. Eva’s husband is the senior maths master of St Paul’s school, in London – I don’t think that the extended family the Gibraltar connections are very welcome there – but she sometimes go back. When my children were really small we went to Paris for a few days and we were walking along and someone came up to us – they were our cousins from Switzerland and been told by the family in Gibraltar that we were going to be in Paris – extraordinary. The family goes back to Naples in 1750.