



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

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

**Tito Benady interviewed by Mary Ingoldby Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

### **Track 1**

#### Introduction

Jewish family came to Gibraltar from Morocco in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

TB Born 1930; went to Hebrew school until 1940 when evacuated to Madeira; about 2000 evacuees; opened a school especially for the Gibraltarian children, not many teachers, but didn't do badly.

In 1945 returned to Gibraltar, went to Gibraltar grammar school, did school cert and higher school cert. Seriously interested in religion and got a bursary to train as a minister for Jewish Congregation in London, there for two and a half years; lost his faith, the degree was theology which didn't interest him so dropped out. Then did national service in Gibraltar, came back to England got married, went into insurance at The Prudential in 1953; eventually moved to the city and became an underwriter for a Dutch company, started own company in 1964 which he sold in 1973 and went back to Gibraltar in 1974. there for 6 years got involved in local politics, ran a newspaper, ran short of money went back to work, returned to England in 1982 worked for a year in Lloyds and then dropped out and have been doing history ever since and it has been the most enjoyable part of his life.

*MI: Family?*

TB: Both my parents were Jewish; We considered it a religious household by Gibraltarian standards at the time.

TB speaks about sections of Jewry – Sephardic and Ashkenazi.

At home we had kosher food, we kept the festivals, didn't work on Saturdays but my parents would eat out in restaurants even if they weren't kosher but we wouldn't have any ham

*MI: How many children in the family?*

TB: I was the eldest

#### Background of Jewish community of Gibraltar

TB: The Gibraltarian Jews were of Moroccan origin, there in spite of the treaty that Britain signed in 1713 agreeing not to have Jews in Gibraltar. A Garrison needed fresh food, the only place they could get it was Morocco, and the trade was in the charge of Jewish merchants. The Jews stayed in Gibraltar in spite of being expelled in 1717 – but then England and Spain were at war again and have been there ever since.

It was a religious community; Moroccan Jewry is influenced to a certain extent by the background of Muslims in Morocco who are Sufis. Generally religious but not aggressively so – since the war the community has changed, there has been an influx of East European Jews and the community has become much stricter in its religious practices. In my day we had mixed schools we had mixed dances. Today the Rabbi will not allow boys dance with girls. Goes against the traditions of Jewish community of Gibraltar, argument is that this would lead to mixed marriages.

*MI: Anti Semitism between British and Jewish community?*

TB: No, no anti Semitism in Gibraltar, not generally. The former minister of Gibraltar was given an award by the state of Israel by promoting communal friendship, the last Roman Catholic bishop of Gibraltar was a school friend and he did a lot to promote inter faith friendship, no anti Semitism today – but present Jewish community has cut itself off from the general community it could arise in the future

*MI: How big was the Jewish Community?*

TB: In 1750 it was 30% of the population about 300; by 1780 it was about 600 during; the 19<sup>th</sup>C it became 2000 about 10%. Today it is about 300/400 which is about 1%. . Small because a lot of people have left, many have gone to Israel, many have settled in England, when there is an inter marriage people are received quite readily by the Roman Catholic Church and Jews against it, mixed families become non Jews – 10 or 20% of the Gibraltar middle class have Jewish parents or grandparents.

*MI: Did Jews come to Gibraltar during Spanish Civil War?*

TB: Not particularly, but I remember German refugees who settled in Gibraltar in the late 1930s. The big Jewish migration to Gibraltar came in 1727 after the border closed completely and there were no more; the number of Spaniards in Gibraltar was reduced and their place was taken by Jews from Morocco. This was similar to what happened when the frontier closed in 1969 except that in 1729 it was Moroccan Jews that came and in 1969 it was Moroccan Muslims

*MI: Gibraltar quite a mixture of cultures?*

TB: Very much so, the basic culture of Gibraltar was determined by the early inhabitants who were mostly Genoese and Moroccan Jews with English overlay because the country was anglicised up to a point. During the course of the Napoleonic and French Revolutionary Wars there was a tremendous economic boost to Gibraltar and all the labourers and petty artisans who had been there in the 18<sup>th</sup>C suddenly became important merchants like my own ancestors. So you had an influx of Spaniards because the frontier opened, there was a difference between the middle class society, a much larger tradition of coming from Genoa, and the Jews and the working class which was basically Spanish.

Discussion on class system in Gibraltar

*MI: English attitude to Spanish heritage?*

TB: At home I used to speak to my mother and grandmother in Spanish and to my grandfather and father in English, we were a mixed culture, we had no anti-British feeling. Whilst a lot of people in Gibraltar have an anti-British feeling, part of it was caused by the attitude of the petty officials and the military in the post-war period. There was a reaction to that, I never felt it because I wasn't living in Gibraltar at the time, I dealt with British people as equals always

*MI: Is this similar to the culture of the British officialdom in the British Empire?*

TB: Oh no, this is officials everywhere, they always feel they are superior to everyone else, I don't think it is a particularly British trait but it is how it affected people in a certain situation

*MI: Spanish Civil War?*

TB: I remember when it started, it was in July and it was the first night of the La Linea Fair. I remember on the Sunday my grandfather took me and my brother, aunt and grandmother down to Eastern Beach and we were there with a big shade umbrella, and all of a sudden rowing boats started coming over from Spain and dropping people on the beach who were trying to escape from what was happening there because that part of Spain was controlled by Franco from the beginning. So all these people started arriving on the beach, about an hour later a single police man turned up and of course these were all people fleeing from the situation on the other side; and I remember the following week going past the House of Assembly and seeing people who were actually camping in the lobby. Later on they had tents prepared by the army in North Front.

*MI: Do you think they stayed?*

TB: Oh yes, and they had a very important effect on Gibraltarian politics, because the ones who stayed were those who were extremely left wing and they played a very important part in Gibraltar trade unions. I have done historical research, the files at the Public Record Office which are normally open after 20 years, the files relating to the Spanish refugees in Gibraltar are closed for 75 years; and not only that but I discovered that in 1958 the Foreign Office sent an official over to burn all the Gibraltar files.

*MI: Why?*

TB: I have my own views on it, but it is only a guess. There was in 1943 an American operation to infiltrate left wing people into Spain to try and bring Franco's regime down. Funnily enough as soon as they landed on the Spanish coast near Torremolinos the police were waiting for them and shot them all, so somebody who didn't want Spain to turn left had obviously informed the Spanish authorities what the Americans were doing.

They were Spaniards from Gibraltar who had taken refuge in Gibraltar – somebody had told the Spanish about it and it must have been the British embassy in Madrid so I assume this was why the files were kept secret. So far I only have suspicions I don't have any proof, the files here are closed and the files in Gibraltar were burnt

The files will be open by next year, if they are open. There was another file which was to do with the airport which was closed for 50 years and when I went back in 1986 I was told that they couldn't

find the file. I later discovered that the file was in the bottom drawer of the desk of the Deputy Governor in Gibraltar but it wasn't accessible to me. When people want to keep things quiet they very easily loose files. That's the way governments work.

A lot of uncovering, if it can ever be uncovered.

## **Track 2**

*MI: do you think that in Gibraltar people were aware of what was happening to the Jewish community in Europe in the 1930s?*

TB: Some people were who received the Jewish Chronicle, some people heard about it, I wasn't aware of it, It was not until after the war, Nuremberg which largely accounted for my loss of faith because the prayers that I read daily and the events that happened were contradictory

*MI Did Jewish people take refuge in Gibraltar?*

TB: I remember one or two German Jews

*MI: You were 9 or 10 when you were evacuated – build up of Garrison?*

TB: I remember the visit of a Commander in Chief of the French forces in Morocco and there was a big parade. The Manchester Regiment arrived in 1940 and they had the new gaiters and boots. I remember the Spaniards building fortifications on the other side of the frontier, on the British side of the frontier there were a pile of sandbags and a Bren gun

*MI: What did you father do?*

TB: He was a merchant, he stayed behind when we went to Morocco, then we returned to Gibraltar and he was working in the British Consulate

We were in Casablanca but we went privately. Then France fell and amongst the many troops that were rescued at Dunkirk were a lot of French so the British Government prepared a convoy of 12 tramp steamers to repatriate the French soldiers to French territory. So they sent them to Casablanca, and when they arrived they were stopped by the Moroccans and they were told you can't leave without taking the Gibraltarian evacuees with you we don't want them here. So we were sent back, the British Government didn't want the evacuees to return to Gibraltar because they thought they

would never leave. The reason why they left was because Gibraltar was not defensible if it had a big civilian population. The City Councillors approached the Governor and promised that the Gibraltarians would leave if they were asked too. These tramp steamers were in terrible condition, one thing to bring women and children overnight from Casablanca but a three week voyage in those days would have been impossible – they were subsequently used but they were fitted up in the dockyard to take people.

We went to Madeira in an old Irish sea cross channel ferry called The Royal Ulsterman.

*MI Can you remember the journey?*

TB: It was about 36 hours on the boat and I remember when we steamed into Funchal Bay

*MI: Did you leave your home?*

TB: My uncle stayed, my father dismantled his rented flat, in my grandfathers house all the stuff was put in the basement, it was requisitioned and became the Polish Officers Mess in Gibraltar

MI: For a small boy this must have been rather an adventure

TB: Yes, I didn't suffer at all, the grown ups must have been very worried – I remember being shown around the ship by the First Mate, steaming into the bay, saw a Sunderland flying boat landing, it was all great fun

MI: How long were you there in Madeira?

TB: 5 years – we went privately so we rented houses, they started a special school - the British school for Gibraltar children it had 150 children, the headmaster was an English man from Madeira who had served as a fighter pilot in the WW1 – he was a Seventh Day Adventist preacher so we had no school on Saturdays.

*MI: A real mixed bunch?*

TB|: Very much so, about half the people went under their own steam, but the whole of the population of Catalan Bay were evacuated to Madeira and they were very working class; Catalan Bay in those days was a very poor village

*MI asks if the refugees to Madeira were mainly or Jewish, and how was the evacuation organised – who went where?*

TB: *By chance. Sir XXX Digby was in charge of the convoy - We were supposed to go to the West Indies. Madeira was a tourist place which was devastated by lack of tourism there was an offer from the Portuguese Government to take 2000 Gibraltarians and the Gibraltar Government accepted that. So a number went under their own steam. Others like Catalan Bay were sent and maintained by the Government right through the war. There was one liner which was fitted out as a troop ship and that went to Jamaica – it was felt that it was in a good enough condition to take people there*

*MI: Quite random?*

TB: Yes very – relatively few went to Jamaica speaks about Morris XXX who went to Jamaica

*MI: Gibraltarian women who went to London who hadn't left Gibraltar do you think there were social problems as a result of this?*

TB: I don't know I wasn't in England. There were some problems but not greatly but there wasn't that kind of problem, some Gibraltarian women did marry Portuguese when I was in Madeira but very few

*MI: Was the sense of Gibraltar being kept alive?*

TB: Oh very much so, we were just waiting to come back it was a temporary displacement, we used to dream about Gibraltar and I am sure the others all over must have felt the same. We weren't moved out permanently we were only moved out for a short while. I dreamt of coming back to Gibraltar, we never settled there, we knew it wasn't a permanent home

*MI: What was it like when you came back?*

TB: It was rather grimy and over built; there were Nissan huts everywhere because Gibraltar had had 35 thousand troops around, so every place where you could see there was a Nissan hut. The return was spaced out over a long period, some people didn't return to Gibraltar until about 1950 because there was no room for them to live.

*MI: People sent to N Ireland?*

TB: That was during the V2s because the rockets were raining on to London it was decided to evacuate the Gibraltarians from London to Northern Ireland, and that was 1944.

*MI: People in Ireland didn't come back until after the war?*

TB speaks about a book he wrote concerning Northern Ireland evacuees.

*Looking at newspaper cutting of Saintfield, a couple of Benadys in the picture, cousins.*

TB: There was a place called North End House where the Jews were sent in London – Fulham in London, a number of them went further out and a number of them stayed in hotels around Tottenham Court road – a question of where they could accommodate people

### **Track 3**

*MI: Infrastructure in Gibraltar?*

TB: I went to the boys secondary school which was run by The Christian Brothers who had just come back to Gibraltar, they were English Christian Brothers they didn't want the Irish because of nationalist problems. In the same school there was a girls class and those were run by RAF teachers, the Christian Brothers didn't deal with the girls. There were also a lot of Italian ex POWS who were doing a lot of work around Gibraltar, labouring, and there was army everywhere

*MI: And what about hospitals?*

TB: There was the old Colonial Hospital which became the St Bernards but some of the doctors there were military.

*MI: Do you remember how you felt about coming back?*

TB: I was very happy to be back, my father didn't stay long because he couldn't get accommodation, we were staying in my grandfather's house. By that time my parents were divorced, my father moved with his second wife to Tangier where he lived from 1946-1958.

TB stayed with his grandfather, his mother was also in Tangier.



I was always with my grandfather we had a particular connection. I stayed with my grandparents because I was at school in Gibraltar. My second brother also stayed but he dropped out of school early so he went to Tangier with my father. None of the children went with his mother.

*MI – asks about Italian mini submarines*

TB refers to a book he has written about this (has given interviewer photocopy of relevant chapter).

TB: When we were in Madeira a convoy of English ships was attacked by U-boats and some were sunk and some of the survivors ended up on some desert islands which belonged to Madeira eventually they were found and brought back to Madeira and some of the Gibraltarian girls acted as nurses. One of the people was Morris Featherstone and he fell in love with a nurse who was looking after him, so when he returned to England he went back to Gibraltar and worked with Crab as a diver and he married this girl when she returned after the war and he became a minister in the Gibraltarian Government.

TB Wrote the book 20 years ago

TB speaks about Paul Baker –  
He was at the Hebrew school, his father was a Methodist and wouldn't send him to the Christian Brothers. The Christian Brothers were the Catholic side, they ran the educational system in Gibraltar at the time. There were a number of protestants who wouldn't go to a catholic school in those days. Very good education with the Christian Brothers; they left Gibraltar because it was felt that their numbers were reduced and they had work to do elsewhere; there were Gibraltarian teachers by this time so they weren't needed there any more.

MI: Mixture of cultures/religions?

TB: *Gibraltar 90% catholic.*

Discussion about size of Gibraltar

TB: Canadian anthropologists have been studying Gibraltar for the last 40 years. Speaks about colleague from Toronto who has been going to Gibraltar for 40 years.

Anecdote about teacher who was working on the apes; work on diseases; marriage in the Jewish community.

Discussion about the Canessa oral history project; The Garrison Library;

#### **Track 4**

*MI: Gibraltarian identity?*

TB: What makes a Gibraltar identity? I have never had any problems but this is something that people feel an inadequacy, they can't say. I know what I am and I have always known what I am. I am a British subject, a child of the empire who was born in Gibraltar who has a Gibraltarian culture and a Jewish background, that's me I don't need to define it any further. People in Gibraltar are trying to define a nationalist idea, the end of it is going to be quite false because things are not that simple. You can describe the influences and the origins, within that there is variety and you have a particular spread of views, ideas and characters - and nationalism I think is a very false god.

*MI: Gibraltar changed because of the Second World War?*

TB: Very much so because people became Anglicised, but on the other hand you had a lot of men in Gibraltar who continued the trend of marrying Spanish girls from across the border because there weren't any Gibraltarians around and when the problems started with Spain the most fervently anti-Spanish were the Spanish women in Gibraltar because they were working class, because they had been oppressed by Franco and the last thing they wanted was to have the Spanish police in Gibraltar

*MI: And they wanted a British passport too?*

TB: Oh yes

*MI: Did the culture of family change as a result of so many Gibraltarian women having been evacuated to the UK?*

TB: Of course, because they had an influx of English culture which they never had before  
speaks about a book by Rodriguez – describes trip from Gibraltar to the UK– and describes having running water for the first time – even after the war.

*MI: asks about the Bedenham explosion in the dockyard.*

TB wasn't there, was in the UK at the time, but was worried about his grandmother who was seriously ill.

*MI What happened next ?*

TB: I came to England, I got this bursary to go to college and I went for two years until I gave up without a degree. It was in Euston, a degree in Semitic languages which wasn't my strong point. From there people went on to study the traditional Jewish literature, I never got that far. Jewish studies, being a rabbi, at the same time I was helping at the synagogue in Lauderdale road

I lost my faith – I was Religious up to a point, not as religious as the people are to day

*MI: What made you come to England to study?*

TB: I applied for a scholarship and didn't get it, and then was offered this. I was interested in religion and God, and I was worried about death and dying, I' m not any more

*MI: How old were you?*

*TB: I was seventeen*

*MI: And do you think what happened to the Jews during in the war a bearing on this?*

TB: Yes because when I was reading and understanding the prayers, I learnt enough Hebrew to understand what I was reading, and what you were thanking God for had no relation to what actually happened in the real world, obviously no connection, prayers are wishful thinking they don't relate to facts

*MI: Did any of your family die in the camps?*

TB: No

*MI: Were you aware of Israel?*

TB: It was encouraging, I remember the uncle of my first cousin, who had been a major in the Middle East and before Israel was declared a state and he knew all the Arab countries were going to pounce on it. He said no chance, I have commanded Egyptian soldiers and they are going to be beaten, which they were.

My first contact with Zionists was when I went as a scout in 1947 to an international jamboree in France and I met some Zionists who sang all the songs. I didn't have much contact with Zionists. The synagogue I was attached to in England was definitely non-Zionist. I felt it was nice to have a Jewish state and proud that they did so well, I never considered myself an Israeli compared to my younger brother who settled and died in Israel; he did that for religious reasons because he didn't want his children to be brought up and meet somebody who wasn't Jewish and marry them. He emigrated from Gibraltar to Israel, left in 1965.

*MI: Quite strong feeling about religion in your family?*

TB speaks about a younger brother who died at 21 – of the other four children two became very religious and two of us are complete atheists.

MI: How do you get on?

TB: Very well, we accept each others point of view, we respect each other, it is a personal matter.

MI: In London at the college and then what?

TB: I didn't know what to do and I came back to England and I wasn't very good at finding a job and I ended up working at Lyons Bakery at Olympia then decided to do military service back in Gibraltar – so for three weeks I had free evenings, went to a dance hall and met a girl and fell in love and said I would come back and marry her, which I did...

*MI: National service in Gibraltar*

TB returned to Gibraltar in 1952 to do National Service

TB: In those days three quarters of Gibraltar was in the hands of the army, the army had plenty of room, the Gibraltarians didn't.

*MI: Relationships between military presence and Gibraltarians?*

TB: I never had any problems, I had friends in the army. When I came back in 1945 I was 15 and there was the Gibraltar Literary and Debating Society – an Army thing. Older friends of mine went, and I started going and mixing with the more intellectual National Service types – they wouldn't take me because I was too young but I still used to go to the meetings.

TB: I never had any anti- British feeling, in fact much of my early life was coloured by the picture of English life I got from comics – Tiger Tims, Christmas celebrations, Guy Fawkes and that sort of thing and that became part of my culture.

Discussion about the Government House, the catholic convent

TB: Yes it was a catholic convent until 1712 – convent in the Spanish sense. A convent in Spain is a religious institution where there are monks and nuns inside the town. A monastery is outside the town. This was a Franciscan convent of Franciscan friars.

TB: When the British took Gibraltar the Spaniards started a blockade and started bombardment so they destroyed the top part of the town; so when the guards arrived in 1704 this became the mess for the junior officers of the guards, in July 1705 the guards left for Barcelona and they were replaced by Col Eliot's Regiment and this Eliot quartered his officers there and he stayed there, pushed the friars to one side, his successor pushed the friars out completely so it has been Government House since 1712.

*MI: Do people still want to go to Government House?*

TB: Oh yes – very much so – leading members of society got invited, my father never, my uncle who was a lawyer was, and that aspirating continues to this day. The Queens Birthday Garden Party

### **Track 5**

Returned to Gibraltar from England after Jewish college

TB speaks about reasons for returning to Gibraltar, had a fractured nerve in his head which he had treated by an American doctor.

TB started a bookshop for his sister who had returned from Tangier. He sold the bookshop three years ago.

TB: I started doing what I am really interested in which is historical research; began writing first in The Chronicle and then in Panorama.

*TB:* Our attitude to Spain wasn't very helpful because we didn't know what the future was going to bring; the Spanish had treated Gibraltar very meanly, there was no point in making too much of a fuss about it because one had to live for the future and not in the past. So I stood for election on the basis that at some stage – I convinced my self because Panorama asked me to write an article about the future – so I wrote an article entitled '1984 the year of

the crunch'. Because of the way things were going in England the dockyard was going to close, and we had to consider how we were going to earn a living after that. In fact it did close in 1984 and this was in 1976 and Sir Joshua XXX was very annoyed about it, he thought I was being dissident and trying to undermine the Gibraltar Government but I was just trying to point people towards the future. I felt at some stage that Gibraltar had to talk to Spain, he also thought at some stage that Gibraltar should talk to Spain, but he didn't dare say it because it would cost him votes.

So I stood for election and Joe Bossano came to me two days before I was standing for election as an Independent and asked me to join him; and I said I'm sorry Joe but I don't agree with your attitude towards Spain; I didn't get many votes but I had made my point. But when it came to the next election Joseph Triay who was one of the Doves asked me to join him and I stood with him; but I ran a newspaper for a couple of years, we ran it for the party. He had an entrée to the Spanish Foreign Office and before the election we had a meeting with them and said, look you are not going to get anywhere unless you are friends with the Gibraltarians, so you've got to stop these restrictions – this was with Bicquer who was the Secretary of State – the Minister of State was XXXX and so we had a meeting. I said ok you've got to open up because otherwise, quite rightly, Gibraltarians don't want anything to do with Spain and he agreed but of course further up it didn't happen so I said there is no point in going to the election because we've lost, we're not going to persuade the Gibraltarians to talk to the Spanish, and the Spanish will keep on the restrictions.

And after that I left, I came to England my finances were a bit dicey at the time so I looked for a job. I went back to my original Dutch company, they sent me out to run their South American branch - the office was in Miami so I lived in Miami for a couple of years, and then my contract finished. I got divorced and came back to England and worked a year in Lloyds and then I got on to historical researched. I married Anne in 1985

*MI: What draws you to Gibraltar Now?*

TB: I have bought from other members of the family the whole of my grandfathers old house which is now divided up and provides an income, I have my flat on top. I have friends, it's a way of life you can get so much done in so little time. If I want something it's next door, I've torn my jacket so I've got a shop downstairs which I rent to a tailor, I took it to him and he has it done in an hour, you try and do that in England it would take you days and you have to go miles. If I go to the dentist I can do the bank at 9 o'clock have an

appointment with the dentist at half past nine and I am free to have coffee with my friends at 10 o'clock. Now that's a way of life you don't have in England, even in London.

*MI: Mediterranean culture?*

TBL: The climate, I particular like it in summer, the hotter the better

*MI: What do you think the future is for Gibraltar?*

TB: The future for Gibraltar, at present the economy is flourishing but it is not an economy that is based on real things. I always felt the economy should be based on tourism which is one thing Gibraltar has to offer. In fact the economy is now based on the finance centre, I am sure it is a lot better run in Gibraltar than it was in Cyprus, but we can see what can happen. Secondly the biggest employers in Gibraltar today are online gaming but if the British Government starts cutting down on that that could be reduced very considerably. In the meantime we have virtually destroyed Gibraltar as a tourist place because of the over-building on the shoreline. If I want to walk along the shore, I walk over to La Linea and walk along the shore, where I can see the sea, I can't in Gibraltar because it's all built up. So it could be dicey

At the moment Gibraltar is making a lot of money and spending a lot of money. How can you tell people they are wrong when they are living so well and the per capita income is higher in Gibraltar than it is in England? But I can see problems in the future, I hope they won't come but I think eventually things will have to change. Today for example the Gibraltar Health Service is a lot better than it is in England because it's had more money thrown at it. All pupils who get their requisite A levels get a free scholarship to university in England, how long will that be able to carry on for, I don't know. But it all depends on the economy, it's a small place and it doesn't need very much but if there are problems with the banking sector and those accumulate with restrictions on the gaming requirements by the British Government...although I don't think the conservatives will get in again, but if they got in and went out of Europe then that would be caput because Spain would be able to restrict Gibraltar as much as they wanted. The present government has not worked on the basis of trying to make Spaniards feel better about a situation they dislike intensely and I hope one day it won't come home to roost but who knows.

*Compiled: December 2013  
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