

Alcoholics Anonymous in Guernsey

The Early Years

by Frank R

The Guernsey Group opened early in 1961 and I joined it the same year in June. We used to meet in of all places the study of the headmaster of St Joseph's Roman Catholic School. Half a dozen sufferers were the most we had most Mondays unless we had some visitors. The Group was started by Pru, a loner who did a grand job in getting things going. We put small ads in the *Guernsey Evening Press*. They were small because we had few funds to spare.

Moore's Restaurant

After less than a year we were offered the upstairs room in a café in Market Street. This was admirably sited and numbers increased, rising to about twelve, sometimes more. We made steady progress and eventually made Friday night another regular meeting time at the same place. As we were in a café, coffee etc. was readily available.

In the meantime Al-Anon was formed and made good progress. Diana was the active one in this section. Unfortunately it broke down when she left and was not revived until we moved to the Hospital.

We were at the café for about seven years and eventually had to find new quarters. The Friday meeting ceased because of poor attendance.

Mental Hospital

We eventually found a meeting place at the Mental Hospital. We thought it would help our cause as many alcohol cases are sent there to be dried out. Some of these drunks came to meetings but few of them of their own volition, and we had few who joined our ranks for any length of time. We had not been there very long when it became evident that we were no longer wanted and we sought a new "home".

Club Room

Finally we moved to the Police Club and had quarters in the bar, which was not very helpful, particularly to new members. However, we persevered and had about three years there. Numbers seldom rose above twelve and were often much lower. Eventually the Police moved to new club premises and we had to leave again.

More Moves

We found ourselves back at the St Joseph's School, although not in the headmaster's study this time. Actually the Catholic priests had always been very helpful to us and when we met in 1961 Father Targett* helped us greatly and sometimes attended meetings. Attendances were now very low and the future was bleak when Peter, who had returned to live in Guernsey, provided the lifeline. Through a contact with an important civil servant, he obtained the use of the room at the Princess Elizabeth Hospital where we now [in 1981] meet so comfortably and happily.

Since this move we have never looked back.

Inter-Island

In the earlier days, for some four or five years, we had inter-island mini conventions in each island each year. We met in Jersey in the spring and in Guernsey in the autumn. As I was secretary in those years the organization of the Guernsey convention was my concern. These

were very enjoyable and, because we advertised in the magazine, we had several English visitors.

An inter-island district group was started, but had little support and closed down.

Big Meetings

Two important publicity meetings were held. The first, at La Trelade Hotel, attracted a large number of States members and people in services interested in alcoholism.

The second meeting, at St James Church Hall, was a much bigger affair. Everybody interested in the war on alcoholism was invited and there was an attendance of over 200, including the Magistrate, Jurats, States members, civil servants, hoteliers, doctors, the Salvation Army, and a host of others. AA and Al-Anon officials from London addressed the meeting and answered questions.

While meetings were held at the café an open meeting was held on one Monday each month. Amongst those who attended were doctors, clergy, policemen, Council on Alcoholism members and people who were in any way interested in alcoholism.

Now we are having the biggest attendances ever. Possibly the time will come when new groups will be formed in various parts of the island.

Frank R 1981
(Frank died in sobriety in 1990)

* In 2016, the son of one of the Guernsey AA founding members made contact. He remembered Fr Targett making visits to his father's home in the early 1960s. The son visited Fr Lionel "Leo" Targett, now 98, at his residential home near Abingdon in March 2016, and found him "in good health, very pleasant and delightful". —Chris

Recent Times

by Chris

Frank's prediction of more meetings was indeed to come true. From one or two meetings a week in his day, the Fellowship in Guernsey now offers ten meetings each week to its membership of about seventy and to visitors to the island who are always made most welcome.

Disharmony

However, it has not all been plain sailing and the saying "no gain without pain" proved only too true when some members of the thriving Monday Group formed a separate Step Meeting on Thursdays. Both meetings prospered but there developed resentments and distrust between the "senior" and "junior" groups which was to last for several years. It took the holding of several special joint conscience meetings in the late 1980s eventually to resolve the problems and to establish harmonious relations.

Intergroup & service

At about this time Guernsey Intergroup was established and was registered with GSO in 1991. The Guernsey Fellowship fairly quickly took on its present appearance with a fully functioning range of services and activities, including a telephone answering service, public information, liaison with hospitals, the prison, probation service, the Samaritans, local

government agencies, and employers' organisations. More recently it has established an internet presence with its own website.

Other islands

More meetings were added over the years to meet demand. At various times during the 1990s groups have operated in Alderney and Sark but the small size of those islands has made it impossible to maintain a permanent presence there. The difficulty of providing for the occasional would-be newcomer in the smaller islands is a continuing concern.

Convention

A Guernsey mini-Convention was held in 1995 and attracted 47 delegates, drawn from Guernsey and Jersey. Encouraged by this success, members organised the first Guernsey Convention in 1996 when exactly 100 AAs and friends attended, more than thirty travelling from mainland UK for the event. The Convention has since become an annual fixture with many visitors making the pilgrimage to share in fellowship with Guernsey AAs who have become firm friends.

Chris 2004