

# The staircase

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Before the visitor to the Town Hall reaches the Assembly Rooms on the first floor, which contains the bulk of the Parish's art collection, there is a series of portraits of the 19th and 20th century Constables hanging on the main staircase.

These portraits of the elected head of the Island's largest Parish span the period from 1830 to 2001 and have recently been expanded by the addition of several portraits, chiefly of the Victorian subjects that had previously been consigned to a back stairwell. When the decision was taken to put the entire group together it was discovered that five constables were unrepresented. Research by the photographic section of the Societe Jersiaise led to the recovery of these 'missing constables', in photographs that are among the earliest examples of the form.

Being bilingual, he was chosen as the commandant's interpreter and used the freedom this gave him to escape in 1811. He reached the coast, put to sea in a small boat and was rescued by an English Frigate.

Perrot became the founder of the Chronique de Jersey in 1814 and in 1833 was elected Constable of St Helier after a previous defeat by Francois Godfrey in 1830. On taking his seat in the States he handed over La Chronique to Philippe Huelin. Perrot was said to be one of the most influential members of the States. He had five children one of whom, George Perrot, who became a Centenier and editor of La Chronique as well as a writer.

Perrot had been accustomed in France to papers which led public opinion and he aimed at providing one of this type in Jersey. But he took some time to get into his stride. The opening numbers were extremely dull and the circulation stuck at about 300. Then he grasped the fact that the way to attract notice was to start a crusade.

He launched a series of campaigns, first a much needed one against the Jersey paper money, for in those days almost anyone could call himself a banker and print an unlimited number of his own banknotes. He followed this with an attack on the Militia Drill-Sergeants, then one on the method of appointing officers in the Militia, then one on the permits which had to be bought before anyone could buy coal. In this way he made everyone buy his paper.

Many rival sheets were started but none was able to oust the Chronique from its leading place. You might buy one of the others as an extra, but you had to subscribe to the Chronique to see what Perrot was saying.

But this fighting policy kept him constantly in a hornets' nest. Life became one long libel suit after another. The DrillSergeants sued him for libel; so did the Denonciateur; so did the roadcontractors; so did Dean Dupre. Nor was this the worst penalty. Many who were annoyed at his leading articles preferred a horsewhip to a lawsuit.

He was also a little man so rival papers disparagingly called him "Le Petit Perrot" and the Chronique often reported that he had been waylaid and assaulted in the street.

But he seems to have accepted this philosophically as one of the risks of his trade.

The Chronique supported the Rose Party (it always headed its local news with a spray of roses), and in 1830 this party chose him as its candidate for the Constableness of St Helier. At his first attempt he was beaten by Francois Godfray in a fiercely fought election in which a record number of votes was polled but in 1833 he defeated Godfray by 45 votes.

In 1837 he was re-elected unanimously. Before becoming Constable, he had been for 17 years Constable's Officer and as an active member of the Parish Assembly had secured the paving of many streets and the removal of the slaughterhouses from the centre of the town to the quay.

As Constable his first problem was finance. His predecessor had left the parish burdened with debt. Perrot succeeded in paying off a large part of this and built the Arsenal and carried out many street improvements.

When a vacancy occurred on the bench of Jurats in 1839 he was unanimously elected. On becoming a Judge he entirely withdrew from party politics and handed over the Chronique to Philippe Huelin. In the States he became one of the most influential members. Twice he was chosen to represent them before the Privy Council and the New Harbour was largely due to his energetic advocacy.

As one paper said at his death, 'The plans for the Harbour would probably still be slumbering peacefully in the Greffe, had it not been for the perseverance of Judge Perrot'.

He died on 3rd January 1843 at the age of only 54 and after a long illness, during which States committees met in his bedroom, so that they might still have his advice. At the time of his death a public subscription had just raised £200 to present him with a service of silver plate in recognition of his services but sadly he did not live to receive it.

He had married Charlotte Waters and left five young children. Of these George Frebout Perrot became later a Centenier and editor of the Chronique and a writer in the dialect under the pseudonym Hibou. Pierre Perrot's portrait was published in the Chronique on 14th January 1914.