

= Sibyl Hathaway =

Dame Sibyl Mary Hathaway , DBE ( née Collings ; 13 January 1884 ? 14 July 1974 ) was Dame of Sark from 1927 until her death . Her 47 @-@ year tenure spanned the reigns of four overlords : George V , Edward VIII , George VI and Elizabeth II .

Hathaway was a financially troubled widow with six children when she succeeded her eccentric father , William Frederick Collings , as feudal lord of Sark , one of the small Channel Islands . She immediately set about reinforcing her feudal rights and promoting tourism on the island , which she affectionately called " the last bastion of feudalism " . When she remarried in 1929 , her second husband , Robert Hathaway , legally became her senior co @-@ ruler , but she kept control of the government .

Hathaway 's tenure as dame saw the German occupation of the Channel Islands in the Second World War , during which she refused to evacuate and convinced the islanders to stay as well . Her eldest son and heir apparent , Francis William Beaumont , was killed in 1941 , while her husband was deported to a Nazi concentration camp in 1943 . Hathaway remains best known for her indomitable conduct during the occupation . After the war , she continued her publicity campaign , strengthening the island 's tourism industry .

Having been widowed again in 1954 , she went on to rule alone , and was made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1965 . She was described by a British government official as a " lady of unusual personality " , and is often referred to as a benevolent dictator . Dame Sibyl died at the age of 90 , and was succeeded by her grandson , Michael Beaumont .

= = Early life = =

Sibyl Mary Hathway was born in Guernsey in a house that once belonged to John Allaire , her privateering great @-@ great @-@ grandfather , whose business dealings brought the fief of Sark to his daughter , Marie Collings . Her parents were William Frederick Collings and his Montreal @-@ born wife Sophie ( née Moffatt ) . Sibyl was born two years after her notoriously intemperant father inherited the fief from his father , William Thomas Collings . Sibyl had one sibling , a sister named Doris .

Collings treated Hathaway , his heir presumptive , as if she were a boy . She was lame due to unequal leg length , but that did not prevent her father from insisting on teaching her to shoot , sail , and climb cliffs . Collings never allowed his daughters to complain of pain or sadness ; Hathaway was later grateful for " being able to live a life free of the inconvenience of self @-@ pity " . As the future ruler of an island situated between France and the United Kingdom , she learned standard French and the local Sercquiais dialect of the Norman language .

= = First marriage = =

At the age of 15 , Hathaway fell in love with Dudley Beaumont , a British painter who could neither shoot nor climb cliffs and whom her father thus considered a " weakling " . In 1901 , Collings made it clear to Hathaway that he was adamantly opposed to the relationship . When she continued seeing Beaumont , her enraged father dragged her out of her bedroom at midnight and threw her out of the seigneurial residence barefoot and in a nightgown . Hathaway remained in a hedge until Beaumont , alerted by her mother , found her predawn . She boarded a boat for the neighbouring island of Guernsey . When the Seigneur stormed aboard looking for Hathaway , she was hidden by the captain . She then travelled to the house of a relative in London . Beaumont soon married her at St James 's Church , Piccadilly .

Hathaway had no contact with her father until the birth of her first child , Bridget ( 1902 ? 1948 ) , when he sent her a telegram of condolence because the child was female , saying : " Sorry it was a vixen " . Hathaway , who found children boring , went on to have two more daughters ? Douce Alianore Daphne and Jehanne Rosemary Ernestine ( born after her father 's death ) ? and four sons ? Francis William Lionel , Cyril John Astley , Basil Ian ( died in infancy ) and Richard Vyvyan Dudley

. The family moved to Sark in 1912 , a few years after her mother 's death .

Hathaway wrote extensively about her relationship with Beaumont in her 1961 autobiography . Beaumont , who served in the British army as an officer during the First World War , died on 24 November 1918 during the Spanish flu pandemic . Beaumont 's death left her a pregnant widow deprived of most of her income . Neither her father nor her father @-@ in @-@ law , the army officer William Spencer Beaumont , were willing to give financial support to Hathaway and her six surviving children . She learned German and started working for the YMCA in Cologne . She also worked for the British Army of the Rhine and raised prize cattle .

= = Accession and remarriage = =

Collings died on 20 June 1927 , and was succeeded by his widowed daughter . Towards the end of his life , he stopped requesting from the inhabitants the payment of tithes , wheat and poulage ( a feudal tax of two chickens ) . Upon her accession , Hathaway immediately reasserted her feudal rights , and even noted : " They always give me the skinniest and oldest [ chickens ] " .

Some islanders complained about Sark being the last remnant of feudalism in Europe , but Hathaway maintained that agriculture had to be encouraged to make the island more self @-@ sufficient . She used the island 's unique feudal system to draw tourists , and refused to allow anything to deter them by ruining its peacefulness . She thus banned motor vehicles and holiday camps , but the Chief Pleas refused to pass an ordinance that would forbid selling alcohol to anyone known to get drunk . Like her eldest son Francis , heir apparent to the seigneurship , Hathaway was fascinated by film production . While Appointment with Venus was being shot on Sark in 1951 , the Dame even deigned to allow a car ashore , ostensibly believing that " a Land Rover was some sort of senior Boy Scout " .

In autumn 1929 , the Dame was on her way to a holiday in the United States when she met Robert Hathaway , an American @-@ born former army aviator . On 5 November , following her return from the United States and a twelve @-@ day @-@ long courtship , they married at St Marylebone Parish Church . Robert was not aware that the marriage made him jure uxoris seigneur of Sark , his wife 's co @-@ ruler , until they set foot on the island . Hathaway 's strong personality , however , ensured that she had the final say in the matters of government ; while her husband attended government meetings as seigneur , she accompanied him to " give advice " . Lecture tours in the United States , aided by her second husband 's connections , were part of her efforts to promote tourism and bring more revenue to the island .

= = Second World War = =

Hathaway 's tenure as seigneur was interrupted by the German occupation of the Channel Islands in the Second World War from 3 July 1940 until 8 May 1945 . While some inhabitants of other Channel Islands were evacuated , Hathaway declared that she would not leave her island , and prevailed upon all native @-@ born islanders to remain as well . Hathaway appears to have believed that Germans would either never come to the island or that their stay would be brief .

Most of her tenants bitterly resented her for the decision to remain on Sark during the ensuing five years of occupation , but thanked her after the war when they saw how total evacuation destroyed the neighbouring island of Alderney . The Dame had her senior official meet German officers at the harbour and escort them to her residence , where her maid announced them as if they were guests .

Hathaway was much respected by the islanders as well as the Germans , whose language she spoke perfectly , for the leadership she gave during this period , and the British Home Secretary Herbert Morrison observed that she remained " almost wholly mistress of the situation " throughout the occupation . Hathaway was on friendly terms with Eugen Fürst zu Oettingen @-@ Wallerstein , the German commander stationed in Guernsey , as indicated by their warm correspondence . She wrote of him as a " charming man " and noted " that they had many friends in common " .

Many other German officers in charge of the Channel Islands were also of noble extraction , and

Hathaway exploited their " stiff German formality " by making it clear that she " expected to be treated ... with the rigid etiquette to which they were accustomed in their own country . " She insisted that officers come to her rather than the other way around , and expected them to bow , kiss her hand , and bow again before she allowed them to take a seat . Using her influence with the Prince of Oettingen @-@ Wallerstein , she was able to get the German army physician stationed in Sark to treat her sick tenants . When Germans ordered that all the Sarkese be instructed in German , the Dame offered a room in her residence as a classroom for the children of the island .

Hathaway 's eldest son Francis and his wife Mary were killed during the Liverpool Blitz ; his son Michael became first in line to inherit the island . Her husband was deported to Ilag VII in Laufen in Bavaria in February 1943 , where he remained for the rest of the war . He did not sign any document delegating his seigneurial authority , which meant that legality of ordinances issued by Hathaway during this period was , at best , questionable . She refused to sign orders issued by Germans , arguing that they were simply not hers to sign . She was insulted by an order that prohibited sexual relations between her tenants and German troops on the grounds of venereal disease outbreak , since the order implied that Sarkese women consorted with Germans .

On the other hand , it appears that she did not voice objection to a series of antisemitic orders that had been previously issued , and which concerned her Czech Jewish friend Annie Wranowsky .

Islanders struggled with food shortage in the last months of the occupation . Hathaway organised a raid on German grain stocks and saved many families from starvation with her secret potato hoard . Sark was liberated on 10 May 1945 . Three British officers arrived and , explaining that no British troops were available , asked the Dame to take command of 275 men belonging to the defeated German garrison . She made sure the garrison cleared up the island of land mines . She was , however , so concerned about the legal status of the decisions she had issued during the war that she sailed to Guernsey to validate them as soon as the island was liberated . Her experience of the German occupation inspired William Douglas @-@ Home 's play *The Dame of Sark* . Hathaway 's manner of receiving Germans has been described as both impressive and overly cordial .

= = Postwar years = =

Following the war , Hathaway continued to promote Sark 's tourist trade and advocated building a new harbour . In 1949 , she and her husband welcomed Princess Elizabeth , Duchess of Edinburgh ( later Queen Elizabeth II ) and the Duke of Edinburgh , who opened the new harbour . The same year , Hathaway became Officer of the Order of the British Empire .

Sibyl and Robert Hathaway 's happy marriage ended with his death in 1954 , six years after the death of her eldest child , Bridget . Hathaway , a widow once again , regained her complete authority over the island . In 1957 , Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh returned to Sark ; this was the first time a reigning monarch had ever come to the island .

Hathaway rendered homage to the Queen on that occasion ? the first time that ceremony was performed on Sark itself . Her autobiography , *Dame of Sark* , was published in 1961 .

On the 400th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth I 's grant of charter signed in 1565 to Sark 's first seigneur , Hellier de Carteret , Hathaway was made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire at Buckingham Palace . She then jokingly referred to herself as a " double dame " . However , soon after her quatercentenary , her daughter , Douce Briscoe , died in 1967 , having struggled with alcoholism for a long time .

In 1969 , Hathaway became increasingly worried by the Royal Commission on the Constitution 's intrusion into her affairs . At the same time , she had a sharp dispute with the Chief Pleas , claiming that its members violated the laws they themselves had passed and that their misconduct threatened to make her tourism campaign futile . She shocked the islanders by announcing her intention to resign the charter of the island back to the Crown " in somewhat the same way as the Hereditary le Mesurier Family did in Alderney " and to recommend that the government be taken over by Guernsey . The threat was effective ; regulations were suddenly enforced much more strictly . By the beginning of the next year , Hathaway retracted her announcement , having been persuaded " by an enormous number of letters and requests " .

= = Death = =

Cyril Beaumont died in 1973 , becoming the fifth child Dame Sibyl outlived . Early next year , the 90 @-@ year @-@ old gave her approval for the stage presentation of William Douglas @-@ Home 's play The Dame of Sark , inspired by her experiences in the Second World War . She looked forward to meeting Celia Johnson , who was to play the title role , but died suddenly at the Seigneurie of a heart attack on 14 July 1974 .

The seigneurship passed from the benevolent dictator , referred to as a " lady of unusual personality " by a British government official , to her grandson Michael Beaumont . Sark remained " the last bastion of feudalism " , as she proudly put it , until 2008 , when universal suffrage and a democratic leadership were established .