

He flew a plane beneath Tower Bridge, tried to arrest a magistrate and turned up in court dressed as Hitler. Barking mad or simply eccentric? In the final part of this series, we look back on some of 'flying vet' Maurice Kirk's most memorable exploits

'Starship Cessna's' madcap captain



TO SOME he was a bit of a folk hero. To others – and certainly those in authority – more akin to a grade-A pest. The police doctor who inspected him ahead of a 1988 court case, in which he appeared bare-footed and wearing his trousers inside out, suggested to the magistrate that he may even be insane.

Certainly island life was seldom dull when Maurice Kirk was about. A book of Tolstoyan-length could be written about the flying vet's exploits here and everywhere else he laid his hat, so to cram it all in here is mission impossible and we will simply deal with a few highlights from his time living locally.

There was no hint of the misdemeanours to come when Kirk arrived in Guernsey in the 70s to practise as a vet. By most accounts he was a very good one, too. After all, no less a judge than Oliver Reed spoke up for him when years later he faced a disciplinary hearing of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in London. Reed, a friend, said his cat and three dogs were regularly treated by the vet and would 'lavish praise upon the care, skills and attention afforded by this kind, conscientious and wholly-professional veterinary surgeon'.

The actor agreed that the vet might be 'somewhat bizarre' but asked: 'Are we not all in some way eccentric?'

Kirk, after all, had even treated Reed, stitching him up after an accident. 'He was sober when he called me,' said the vet. 'But I must admit we had a swift drink when I finished stitching him up. There's not much difference really between sewing up an animal or a human.'

The fact that he stitched up Reed was by the by, though.

The tribunal was more concerned with the long list of antics that brought his position into disrepute – being drunk in charge of an aeroplane, flying under Tower Bridge and spending several months in jail for trying to make a citizen's arrest on the Guernsey magistrate.

In 1980, Kirk was jailed for six months after singing the French national anthem to Bournemouth air traffic controllers and radioing the message: 'This is the Starship Cessna, do you read?'

Soon after his release, he arrived at an open day for air enthusiasts sporting a handlebar moustache and wearing a leather Biggles outfit. He offered rides in his biplane at a tanner a time.



Maurice Kirk's decision to attend a 1987 court hearing dressed in Nazi uniform was about as popular as he was when he stood for election the following year. (1109921)

And talking of uniforms... In an island always sensitive to recollections of German Occupation, to attend a 1987 court hearing dressed in Nazi uniform proved as popular as he was

at the parish polls when he stood for election – i.e., not very. He was operating his surgery from the Anchor building in Nocq Road – now the site of the Co-op – when, in 1988, he stood for election in St Peter Port and finished 15th of the 16 candidates battling for 10 seats.

Only the bizarrely-named Carlson Bisson-Wellington finished beneath the vet, who picked up 815 votes, a dozen fewer than John Gollop.

He also failed miserably to get elected in the Castel parish.

It was the previous year that he appeared in the Magistrate's Court dressed as someone from the Third Reich, including a swastika armband.

But contempt of court and legal proceedings were matters in which he was well versed.

In 1985 he was given an eight-month jail sentence for walking five paces towards an acting magistrate and saying: 'You are under arrest'.

During that spell inside he went on a hunger strike that all but killed him, as did the fire in his cell that he claimed was an accident. On his release, he told the Press that the experience was terrifying because he was bedridden due to the effects of the hunger strike.

'I am satisfied that the most likely cause was that I had been smoking while bedridden in my cell,' he said at the time. He lost four stone during his hunger strike and on the day of his release was

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walking with the aid of two sticks. Afterwards, he admitted that his refusal to eat was a matter of brinkmanship.

At the last count, three times he raised the Clameur de Haro, including once in the Greffe. He took his protests to the most unlikely of places including, in October 1983, the top of a crane jib on the New Jetty. Showing an impressive head for heights, he fixed a banner emblazoned with the words 'Fair trial' and shouted to onlookers via a megaphone. When held again in 1988, he was removed from the court, where he could be heard for the rest of the proceedings against him singing the Marseillaise.

And his point was? In a nutshell, perceived injustice.

When fighting to save his veterinary career he told the national press: 'The judicial system in Guernsey is based on greed. It does not give a person justice. The whole island is riddled with corruption.'

Much of his political message was sound enough, but it will be argued that he stepped over the boundary from what is to what is not acceptable behaviour. Had the PR been as good as his much-vaunted veterinary skills, he may have been able to get his message over. But it wasn't to be.



Kirk pictured in the 1980s, sporting a handlebar moustache. (1109915)



The vet raising the Clameur de Haro in the Greffe. (1109907)