

The following information from the Registry of the International Court of Justice has been communicated to the Press:

At 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, September 17th, 1953, the sittings of the International Court of Justice will begin for the hearing of speeches by representatives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of the French Republic in the Minquiers and Ecrehos case.

This case was brought before the Court by the notification on December 6th, 1951, of a Special Agreement concluded by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France in December, 1950. The number of written pleadings, the order in which they should be presented, as well as the time-limits for their filing, have been fixed by the Court in accordance with the wishes of the Parties and the case is now ready for hearing.

The differences which are the subject of the Special Agreement have arisen between the Parties as a result of claims by each of them to sovereignty over groups of islets and rocks of the Minquiers and Ecrehos. The Court has been requested to determine whether the sovereignty over these islets and rocks (in so far as they are capable of appropriation) belongs to the United Kingdom or the French Republic.

The Ecrehos group is situated North-East of the island of Jersey and is separated from the coast of the Cotentin peninsular by the strait known as La Déroute. It consists of a certain number of islets which are permanently above water. The main one is called Maître Ile or Maîtresse Ile. This contains a house rented by Lord Trent of Nottingham, the ruins of an ancient priory, a slipway and a beacon. A little further to the North, on the islet which is called Marmotière, there is a Custom House as well as a number of granite huts. Another islet, Blanc Ile, contains a house.

The other group, which is called the Minquiers, is widely scattered to the South-East of the island of Jersey, between the latter and the French islands of Chausey. It contains, above-water, drying and sunken rocks and reefs. The only inhabited islet is Maîtresse Ile, which contains a slipway affording a means of landing and a number of buildings, including about a dozen huts belonging to Jerseymen. During the war the Germans maintained an anti-aircraft post on the islet.

All these buildings are used during the Spring and Summer as a shelter for fishermen or for holiday purposes. The Minquiers also contain a wooden hut and a flagstaff erected by parties of Frenchmen in 1939 and 1945.

The importance of these groups of islets and rocks became apparent, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the development of fisheries and the cultivation of oysters. The Parties rely on documents some of which go back to the Middle Ages, and in particular on the Treaty of Abbeville of May 18th, 1258, by which Henry III of England renounced all claims to Continental Normandy, but without expressly mentioning the Channel Islands; on the Treaty of Brétigny of 1360, by which Edward III of England obtained numerous territories in the South-West, West and North of France; on a Monition issued by Pope Sixtus IV on February 26th, 1481, ordering

pirates

pirates to cease their depredations in the Channel Islands under pain of excommunication; and on a Bull issued by Pope Alexander VI on January 20th, 1500, which transferred the Channel Islands from the Diocese of Coutance to that of Winchester, etc.

The Parties will be represented before the Court as follows:

For the United Kingdom:

Agent: Mr. R. S. B. Best, Third Legal Adviser to the Foreign Office.

Counsel: Sir Lionel Heald, Q.C., M.P., Attorney-General;
Mr. C.S. Harrison, O.B.E., Attorney-General for the Island of Jersey;
Mr. G.G. Fitzmaurice, C.M.G., Legal Adviser, Foreign Office;
Professor E.C.S. Wade, Downing Professor of the Laws of England in the University of Cambridge; and
Mr. D.H.N. Johnson, Assistant Legal Adviser, Foreign Office.

Expert Adviser:

Mr. J. D. Lambert, Research Department, Foreign Office.

For the French Republic:

Agent: Professor André Gros, Legal Adviser to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs;

Experts: M. Burnay, Conseiller d'Etat;
Admiral Durand de Saint-Front;
M. Prosper Weil, Professor at the Law Faculty of Grenoble;
M. Pierre Duparc, Assistant Keeper of Archives at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The Hague, September 10th, 1953.
