

Marshall Thomas Doran aka Jack Marshall Fenn

Hotelier, merchant marine officer, mediaeval antiquities expert & restorer, master stonemason & timber hewer, designer, architect, raconteur, charmer, husband and father – died peacefully at 90 in Ballina, Co. Mayo, Ireland on June 28.



By Paul Marshall Doran (son) and Paul Marshall Fenn (nephew)

Marshall Thomas Doran (born Jack Marshall Fenn) – Hotelier, merchant marine officer, mediaeval antiquities expert & restorer, master stonemason & timber hewer, designer, architect, raconteur, charmer, husband and father – died peacefully at 90 in Ballina, Co. Mayo, Ireland on June 28.

Well-known in Jersey as founder of the Revere Hotel and Candlelight Grill in St. Helier, Marshall was born in London and raised in Bournemouth by his parents, Gladys and Harry Marshall Fenn.

Water and women always found him dashing

Tall, handsome, barrel-chested and powerful, young Marshall was an accomplished athlete and earned under-18 championship medals in boxing and swimming – one of his times quicker than Johnny Weissmuller's.

At 16, Marshall already radiated charm and was most enthusiastic about girls. He fancied a gypsy dancer from the circus and so signed on – as a trapeze artist (with no experience). After falling a few times, he instead opened a shooting gallery at the fair.

To supplement his earnings he called door-to-door, buying gold and silver. This triggered a life-long passion for things old – antiques to fossils, and everything in between.

Still 16, in Liverpool, Marshall stowed away on a ship bound for America, the first of countless ocean passages.

Marshall's motto was 'Eat life before it eats you,' perhaps because as a young sailor travelling the world, he felt the occasional nibble. On shore leave in Cuba in the 1930s, mid-hot-date, he was clobbered from behind and knocked out cold. He awoke stripped of 3 months' wages and his clothes, returning to his ship stark naked.

Monkeys, sharks & torpedoes

Conditions were better on American merchant ships, so Marshall purchased American seaman's papers from one Thomas Doran, a sailor met at a bar. With better ships and better pay, the world was now Marshall's oyster... until Adolph Hitler got much the same idea.

American shipping was now targeted and Marshall worked US-flagged ships carrying bombs to support the Soviet war effort. His was ordered to Murmansk, but everything going there was being sunk by U-boats. Orders were changed; the ordinance would now go to Karachi (then part of India). There, the explosives were unloaded and monkeys loaded.

The unfortunate animals, kept in open cages on deck, were headed to the US for use in scientific research. En route many of the primates died from exposure and were thus thrown overboard. An animal lover, Marshall was highly distressed at this.

The ship was now continuously followed by large sharks.

Some 200 nautical miles south of the Cape of Good Hope, Marshall woke to a German torpedo detonating against the hull. The ship quickly caught fire and was abandoned. Marshall got to a lifeboat, but many others did not and were taken by sharks, along with the remaining monkeys, still trapped in their cages, many being burnt alive. The U-boat then surfaced and sank the merchant ship.

After five desperate days floating helplessly in the Roaring 40s, the survivors were rescued and taken to Port Elizabeth.

Meanwhile, Marshall's younger brother, Victor Fenn (now 83), was flying Spitfires, Mustangs and Hurricanes with the RAF over Europe and later the Far East.

After the war, Marshall made over 100 New York-Southampton crossings as Second Officer on the SS America. He began importing antiques from the UK and selling them in a shop he'd opened in New York.

Stocking up London

He would return with nylon stockings, a treasured item unavailable in war-ravaged England, with at least 25 mailbags' worth stashed between the ship's double-skinned hulls. After Southampton customs had checked the ship, he'd drop the bags at sea, off Hailing Island, on the way back to New York, with his on-shore team, in rubber dinghies, plucking them up to sell in London.

Marshall settled in Jersey in 1952, bringing with him a Buick convertible, two Invicta sports cars, which he'd raced at Silverstone and £500 in his back pocket.

The cash was his deposit on a mortgage for a run-down guesthouse, which he set about converting into the Hotel Revere and Candlelight Grill.

He then met Joyce, a beautiful, confident woman who knew her own mind and possessed an entrepreneurial flair, and had no choice but to make her his wife. Two years later they had a son, Paul, their only child.

Marshall's passion for antiques required that he find a place to store them. He attempted to buy Rozel Fort, a beautiful property dominating the cliffs at Rozel in Jersey, but was gazumped. So he decided to build his own castle.

Building legacies, a stone at a time

He started work on Flicquet Castle in the mid 1950s, which like many worthwhile projects remains unfinished to this day, but is nonetheless a superb landmark. Regular floods through the flat roofs often forced Joyce and Paul to take meals accompanied by umbrellas and buckets. Since Flicquet did not have mains water, Marshall collected rainwater for shaving, and then to flush the loos, his water conservation discipline remaining from his sailing days.

Marshall's family and business thrived, along with a selection of dogs and a loquacious sulphur-crested cockatoo named Cocky, who welcomed guests to the hotel lobby.

In 1961, Marshall bought Belleek Castle in Ballina and commenced the monumental task of converting the former manor house into a fine hotel and mediaeval museum. Visitors would find him swinging hammer and chisel on immense blocks of granite, a red bandanna tied around his head against the perspiration, holes in his trousers and worn shoes with toes protruding. He worked alongside other stonemasons, and taught his tradesmen proper adze technique, and how to use a drawknife to age and fashion wood in the mediaeval style.

On his time off, he combed Europe's auctions and shops, amassing what is thought to be the finest collection of armour, weaponry and fossils in Ireland.

The restored Belleek Castle stands as Marshall's greatest masterpiece.

Powered by animal instincts

From Marshall's love for all creatures great and small springs forth many a story.

In the late 1970s, a blaze broke out in the Revere lobby in the early hours. Cocky was the fire alarm. Alerted, Marshall rushed past the arriving firemen, risking his own life to save Cocky from the blaze, badly burning himself.

On another occasion, an 8 lb. crayfish disappeared from the Candlelight Grill's lobster tank. Police were called and all staff, including Marshall, were interviewed, without resolution. Months later, Marshall admitted that he had 'rescued' the crayfish and returned it to the sea.

The chef would regularly find his boss elbow-deep in pig swill, fishing out the best leftovers for his dogs.

Once, after the death of his wife Joyce, he was caught by a girlfriend feeding a rat while sitting on his lounge carpet, at Flicquet. She christened him 'King Rat' and fled rapidly. He just couldn't poison the rodents, preferring to trap them and 'relocate' them at Grosnez, something he probably didn't mention to residents there.

In the late 1950s Marshall bought Rockmount Farm, above Bouley Bay, Jersey, for his parents, and opened an Italian fashion boutique and a strawberry farm there. In the nearby Martello tower he kept Simba, a 600lb. lion, for a time.

Raiding galleons

Around 1990, a couple of years after Joyce passed away, Marshall met Jacqueline, a fetching Jersey girl, in the Revere. She proved yet another powerful woman who'd try to whip him into shape. They immediately clicked, and with her love of horses and dogs, had much in common.

They eventually married, working together nearly running Belleek Castle, transforming it into one of Ireland's most sought-after wedding venues. Its countless authentic medieval artefacts and atmosphere attracted many a learned and celebrity guest.

Marshall never lost his love for the sea, at one stage owning 11 boats. Many of his architectural works carried a nautical theme, frequently blended with a Spanish influence, particularly at Belleek, where he built a bar modelled on the typical captain's quarters in a Spanish Armada galleon.

The timbers were salvaged from a Spanish galleon wrecked at Sligo in 1589. Marshall kept his young son, Paul, on the beach for weeks, cutting and collecting huge timbers from the galleon for integration into the Armada Bar. Marshall stained them,

so as to match one another, using a combination of Guinness, cow dung and milk – his own concoction.

He also befriended the Cistercian Monks, who helped him with many unusual artefacts to incorporate at Belleek.

Going in peace

A few years ago Marshall renewed his passport, in the process altering his birth date from 1916 to 1926. Son Paul remarked on the 10-year reduction, to which Marshall muttered an explanation. Paul complimented him on his sporting prowess. For Marshall had now become the under-18 Southern Area boxing champion and a 100 meter freestyle swimmer, faster than Tarzan, by age 7. (The sports medals he'd won were all dated.) Caught out, Marshall merely laughed, saying that 65 sounded a helluva lot better than 75.

Nevertheless, he still had the energy of a fit 40-year-old.

To his final days, Marshall never went into hospital or a rest home. His second wife, Jacqueline, looked after him to the very end.

Marshall's family had planned to bury a sword with him, but felt that St. Peter might prefer a mandolin, as Marshall would be, as always, coming in peace. It's hoped he's now charming the angels, as he did to all who met him here on earth.

Gone is a creative, artistic, eccentric genius of a type rarely found in the modern era.

He was buried July 11, 2007 at St. Martin's Church Cemetery, Jersey.

His extended family wishes Marshall fair winds and bon voyage in his next chapters.