

# La Société Sercquaise

Founded in 1975 to study, preserve and enhance Sark's natural environment and cultural heritage



## Winter News 2014

*Here is a brief update on the Society's activities, before the festive season overwhelms and disperses us. Sark will be making much of 2015 – the 450th anniversary of Helier De Carteret's Grant from Queen Elizabeth I – and the island is a-buzz with plans. The Society's formal timetable will follow that of previous years: call for Group Reports and AGM items by end of February, AGM with accounts and election of officers and council around the end of March, subscriptions due by end of April.*

### Penny Prevel

Penny's death at home, from cancer, late in November, has been a blow to the community. Penny and Andrew have been at the heart of La Société for more than a decade. On your behalf I would like to record our appreciation as well as our sorrow and heartfelt sympathy with Andrew. A keen horsewoman and knowledgeable ecologist, Penny was one of Sark's first two Visitor Officers; she started the Wildflower walks, then bird walks and bat walks. She developed relations between the Tourism Office and the Society's Heritage Room, researching historical topics and making checklists of Sark birds and

insects. For the past three years she and Andrew recorded Sark's birds for the CI List. When the Astronomy Group spun off into SAstroS, Penny became its enthusiastic and efficient secretary. Andrew's archaeology was of great importance and pride to her and they greatly valued a visit, days before Penny's death, from Barry Cunliffe together with Simon and Philippa from this year's excavation team.

Penny's sunny presence and enthusiasm for Sark will be greatly missed. Fittingly, her memorial will be held during Wildflower Fortnight, on Saturday 2nd May.

### The Heritage Room

Exhibitions on Sark Fishing and World War I have been packed away and the slow work of cataloguing and reorganisation goes forward. Jane Norwich's Digimap skills have been temporarily channelled into preparing historical support for a review by Christopher Young, with the backing of Barry Cunliffe, to advise whether Sark has a plausible case to bid for status as a World Heritage Site. If this does go ahead it will be a slow process, involving work over many years.

Some of the same material from my long-term study of Sark's Elizabethan field system is being used by the schoolchildren to make a giant

map, which will feature in their play 'Helier's Charter 1565'. La Société's contribution to the 2015 celebrations will include exhibitions about Helier's settlement and on the 70th anniversary of Liberation.

The collections continue to grow, as people from all over the world send in photos and memorabilia of Sark. David Synnott has located some more stereoscopic cards for the Victorian scope donated by the Hepburns. Paul Armorgie has offered DVDs of early films of Sark, the first of which was shown recently at a lunchtime event at Stock's Hotel. Another is planned for mid-March.

## Conservation and History on L'Eperquerie

A few fine days in mid-November allowed clearing work around the old guardhouse above the Eperquerie Landing. Over ten years the stonework has disappeared behind brambles and gorse. It is hard to imagine that, before the Occupation and deportations, this granite cell 12 feet square housed Mrs Hamon and eight (?) of her children. (Postcards from the 1890s show it as tidily thatched and habitable). The vigorous Dorothy Perkins rambler rose, logged on our botanical records, is the only remaining sign of domesticity.

A small party of volunteers assembled on Saturday 15th. Armed with saws and sickles, loppers, rakes and brush cutters, the group removed ferocious gorse and bramble to reveal the stonework. The brush was stowed in the adjacent quarry, opened up for the purpose. More work is needed inside the building, particularly on the north wall, where Peter Guille identified traces of an oven showing as a buttress on the outside. The photo shows a well-preserved recess for lamplight to the right of the collapsed chimney.

The date and original purpose of the building have not been known for sure. It now looks almost certain that it was not part of the French fortifications in 1549-52, but was one of four

guardhouses, built in the 1790s. Invasion from France seemed imminent, cannon were sent from Guernsey, the Arsenal was established at the old Granary and the island was heavily militarised. Night watches were kept by Sark militiamen right up to Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815.

The old French defensive wall originally ran across the path. It continues below the cannon and turns down towards the Landing. Around 1793 part of it was demolished to provide stone for the new guardhouse and to allow a new path to the Nez. Wooden gates, now long gone, were made to close off the great gateway. Fear of French invasion kept Sark's militia active on the Eperquerie during the nineteenth century, up to the death of its Lieutenant Colonel, Seigneur W.T. Collings in 1882. Then, when the gardee no longer had a military use, it was lived in. Stone was quarried next door. Fish were brought up the '12-foot road' from the landing. Seaweed was hauled up on a cable. At the cliff edge we uncovered the cable post hole and base of an iron winch. This picturesque area was of key defensive and economic importance through Sark's history and there is much more still to be found out.



## The Cider Barn

The restored barn is proving popular and useful. Its prime use is to house our important collection of prehistoric potsherds and stone tools, so they are accessible for expert study and display, where possible. We have bought 64 storage boxes, which will sit on steel racking (due to be delivered before Christmas). To ensure the safety of the collection, the mezzanine has been underpinned with a reinforced steel joist and a galvanised guardrail has been fitted. The specialist work of sorting and classifying the finds before storage has been postponed to the New Year owing to Emma Durham's illness last month.

Meanwhile, the barn has witnessed a revival of an old Sark custom of the *veillee*: gatherings round the fire for stories and songs, drink and food, and knitting. October's theme was 'Songs of Autumn' and November's, 'Winter Wassail'. There were quite a few original poems and a pre-launch reading by Lena Kaaberbol of her new historical novel 'Doctor Death'. (Congratulations



to her - and also to Jeremy La Trobe-Bateman and Rob Pilsbury for their centennial revision of the *Latrobe Guide to Sark's Coast, Caves and Bays*, which had been out of print for 20 years.) The barn is drier than we dared to hope a year ago, but it benefits from lighting up the log burner once a month.



*Merry Christmas to all our members! Hoping that members who live 'overseas' will make sure to return during Sark's 450th year celebrations.*

*Richard Axton, 12th December 2014*