

La Société Sercquaise

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



Winter News 2020-21

A Happy New Year to all our members and a warm welcome to those who have recently joined the Society

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Sark has so far been a safe haven during the pandemic and, although the Heritage Room remained largely closed during the summer and autumn, there is plenty of activity to report. The AGM postponed in March was finally held on 5th October and was well attended. Members should have received the Minutes.

Heritage Room and Cider Barn



The Room was open by request and occasionally. Through most of the autumn Jane Norwich's elegant tribute to Sark's Deportees during WWII complemented the exhibitions of the Occupation of Sark at the Tourism office and in the old Island Hall. Additions to our collections include substantial quantities of newspaper cuttings from the Priaux Library, and books, photos and Sark memorabilia from Jennifer Cochrane, formerly Editor and Hon Secretary of the Society, and from the late Pam Cocksedge. Susan Synnott and Jane Norwich have begun sorting this material. It's a big task and will

stretch our storage facilities. If you would like to help please get in touch with the Secretary.

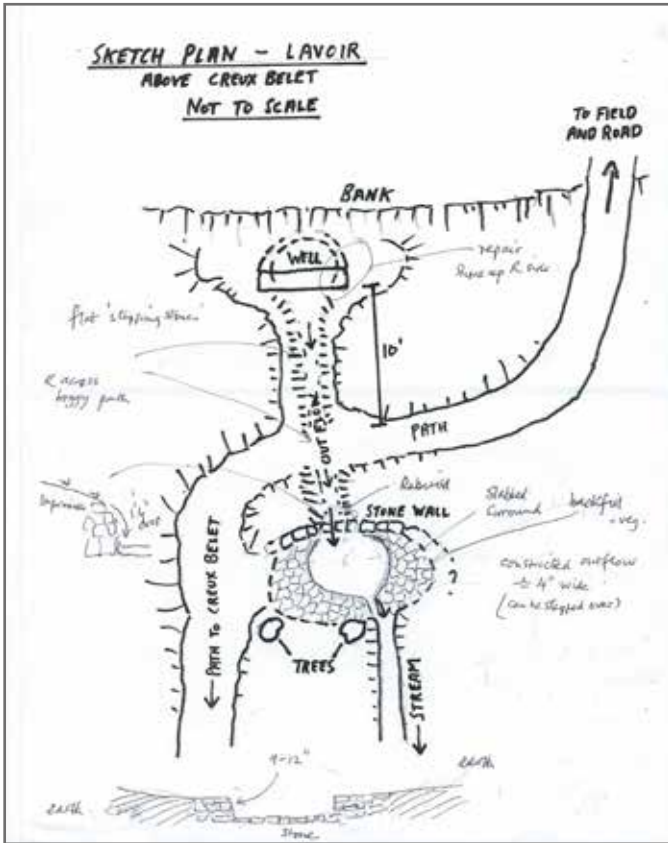
The Cider Barn remained open all year and is increasingly appreciated by the wider community. Following an autumn-clean it hosted a wreath-making workshop and pre-Christmas markets for Creative Sark, organised by Amanda Petrie and Shakira Christodoulou. The log-burner and some simple lights and foliage made for a festive atmosphere. For St Nicolas's Day there was an early evening of carols and chat round the fire, with mulled wine and cider; it was open to drop-ins, many of whom contributed wine and Christmas nibbles.



Heather Protection

A number of assaults by the Conservation Commandos were made on the gorse below Pilcher Monument, to improve the outlook for heather and Sand Crocuses.

Restoration Project



Our conservation work in the Wet Valley has led to an interesting project of historical restoration. The stone-capped *fontaine*, occasional home to eels, is the spring source of the stream that runs into the sea below Creux Belet. The well itself was inaccessible for years after horses stopped grazing the valley because poisonous Hemlock Water Dropwort colonised the stream. The path down to Creux Belet is now maintained by Adrian and Olivia Guille on behalf of the Society, thanks to Sébastien Moerman, tenant of La Tour. There will eventually be a signpost by the field gate at the back of La Tour, pointing north to a small blue gate in the hedge. Where the footpath crosses the stream flowing from the spring between raised earth banks, the vegetation is so dense that you could miss the opening to the enclosure. The narrow cut in the bank can easily be blocked with

a log to keep cattle and horses from dirtying the well water. Provision for the cattle to drink is made on the lower side of the path, where the stream trickles into a shallow muddy pool before disappearing into a dense tangle of roots and bog plants.

Many of the surviving springs in both Jersey and Guernsey served a triple purpose: a *fontaine* for drinking, water; a shallow pool provided with flat stones for washing clothes (*lavoir* or *douet à laver*); and controlled access for cattle to drink (*abreuvoir*). Sark has the remains of at least two such arrangements of fontaine-with-lavoir: one below Le Manoir and this one at the top of Wet Valley. The latter almost certainly pre-dates Helier's 1565 settlement, because the whole valley is scarred by ditches and banks, made for shelter, drainage, and sewage, by the French troops who occupied the Fort area from 1549 to 1552. This interpretation is supported by the evidence of a Jersey *fontaine-lavoir* above Giffard Bay, which has been dated to the 16th century and 'was used to wash the clothes of the troops from Fort Regent'. The photo in *Jersey Lavoirs* (Burch & Tilling, *Lavoirs*, 2015, p.23) shows its similarity to ours in Sark and suggests how ours might once have looked.

The landowner was keen for La Société to undertake recovery and restoration. Back in the dry summer, a party of conservation commandos

Clearing the channel into the lavoir



Looking upstream to the entrance through the bank to the well



(Andreas, Jeremy, Richard, Shakira) cleared scrubby vegetation and cut back dead limbs of the elder tree, to reveal the amazing view down the valley to the Fairy Arch and Eperquerie Landing. Above the lower pool the stone wall supporting the path collapsed some years ago and the pool itself was full of mud and debris. The collapsed part has now been carefully cleared and the extent of the stone-packed pool explored by trowelling the stream bed. In our excavations Shakira and I found two very rusted iron pipes running into the pool from the west. These were apparently put in to bring more water into the abreuvoir when horses were kept in the valley and the stream ran low. The recent copious rain has helped scour out the stream bed, so that it is easier to see where new stones will have to be placed, to retain water in a shallow pool. The Council has agreed a plan for reconstruction and has asked Andrew Prevel to carry out the stonework. The resulting restoration should be of historical interest and landscape beauty. A peaceful spot to linger on a warm day.

Elder tree beside the hidden stream



Ornithology by Lynda Higgins



Cetti's Warbler

The Autumn Migration Bird Watching Week held last October was a great success, considering the inclement weather. A team from Nature Guernsey came over to help record the birds ringed and also those seen on the bird-watching walks. The programme included daily bird-ringing demonstrations which were well supported by Soc Sercq members who were able to see the network of mist nets and the ringing process and data recording. A number of our young members took the opportunity to join us and were rewarded by seeing birds at very close quarters. Moths trapped overnight were also identified during the morning demonstrations.

A number of walks were also arranged. The Barn Owl and bat detecting walks were particularly popular. The weather was against us for the Dartford Warbler walks to Derrible

and Eperquerie and none were sighted. A total of 119 birds were ringed and 62 species recorded during the week. The records have been uploaded to the European Ringing website (Euring) and added to the Bailiwick Records as well as to the Society's records. Highlights were a Yellow-browed Warbler, seen and heard on the last day, and a Black Kite. A Great Spotted Woodpecker kept us company all week as well as a number of Cetti's Warblers. Goldcrest and firecrest were known to be common but I hadn't realised that they were quite so abundant. Migrants included the usual swallows and martins, redwing, fieldfare, thrush, redstart, linnets, stone chat, chiff-chaff, blackcaps and blackbirds.

A Spring Nature Week is planned for 26th April to 3rd May 2021. It is hoped that an event held twice a year will enable us to better understand both the birds that reside in Sark and our passage migrants.

Members of Sark Watch learning to identify moths



Family History by Jane Norwich

Following on from the work on the Birth Marriage and Death records pre 1900 we now have the cemetery records for the 'New Cemetery' and those graves north of the Church. Naturally, there are graves without headstones that have been difficult to name. A printed list of those graves we are certain about will be available in the Heritage Room. If you notice any errors please let us know. Also, if you know who has been laid to rest in an unmarked grave and has not been included in the current list please let us

know the details so that the list can be updated. At all times where there is no certainty as to the identity of a grave we have erred on the side of caution and they have not been included. It is amazing how quickly the memory fades on the specific location of a grave, even in the last 10 years.

Work will continue south of the church and, when time permits, on updating the project led forty years ago by Jinny Grant at the old cemetery beside the Chapel.

Asian Hornets in Sark 2020

The expansion of Asian hornets into the Channel Islands from the Continent is widely regarded as occurring each spring (and possibly autumn) by natural dispersal of fertile queens flying over from the French coast. Clearly, the threats from this major invasive pest remain ever present. Information from the Cotentin peninsular gives a nest density there of as many as 6 nests per square km – that equates to about 50 nests in Sark.

Following advice from the Guernsey Team, Sark again implemented spring queen trapping in 2020 and caught 4 queens. Directed by Peter Cunneen and Jo Birch, we had about 20 volunteers engaged in the programme. We feel that this is having a positive effect as we found no hornet nests throughout the autumn and none were spotted after May.

However, the annual fluctuation in numbers of emergent queens arriving on our island is not fully understood and a combination of biological and environmental factors are involved. The 4 queens trapped were all on the east of Sark following a period of easterly winds. It is thought likely that Asian hornets are generally under-reported and it is clear that maintaining the vigilance and cooperation of the general public, in noting and reporting potential sightings, is arguably the most vital aspect of our Asian hornet control effort.

Chief Pleas have budgeted for a similar spring queen trapping programme in Sark next year and we shall again be relying on our volunteers; we would like to thank them for all their efforts this year which have resulted in a lower incidence

of Asian hornets. We would also like to thank Francis Russell of the Guernsey Asian Hornet Strategy Team for including Sark in the Bailiwick programme and for helpfully sharing information clearly of benefit to us all.

Crawfish Ban

Sue Daly pursued the status of the current ban on taking crawfish in Sark, due for review after 3 years. She was reassured by the Fisheries Committee that the relevant ordinance is reviewed every 3 years and is automatically extended unless the review prompted a change, which it did not. Sark is the only place in the British Isles to protect this species. Sue reports that the ban is having a positive effect as she has seen plenty of adolescent crawfish in the course of her dives this summer.



Threat to Raptors

Following the disturbing evidence in Guernsey that some raptors are being poisoned, Sue contacted the States Veterinary Officer, who confirmed that all pigeons owners had agreed not to release homing pigeons for the present anywhere in the Bailiwick. Latterly some were being released, though not kept, in Sark.

Subscriptions

Reminders will be sent out with Reports and AGM papers, as usual. Subscriptions remain unchanged: single £15, household £20. For simplicity, the subscription year coincides with our accounting year, at the end of February. Subscriptions are technically due on 1st March and before 30th April.

Notice of AGM

This year's AGM is planned for Thursday 8th April at 5.15 in the Heritage Room. Section Reports (as Word documents) and items for the Agenda should be sent to the Hon Secretary by 12th March so that papers can go out in good time. Elections of the officers and council and section leaders take place at the AGM. If you are interested in serving, please get in touch at any time up the day of the meeting (jo.birch@cwgsy.net)