

La Société Sercquaise

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



Winter News 2019-20

A Happy New Year to members on and off Island!

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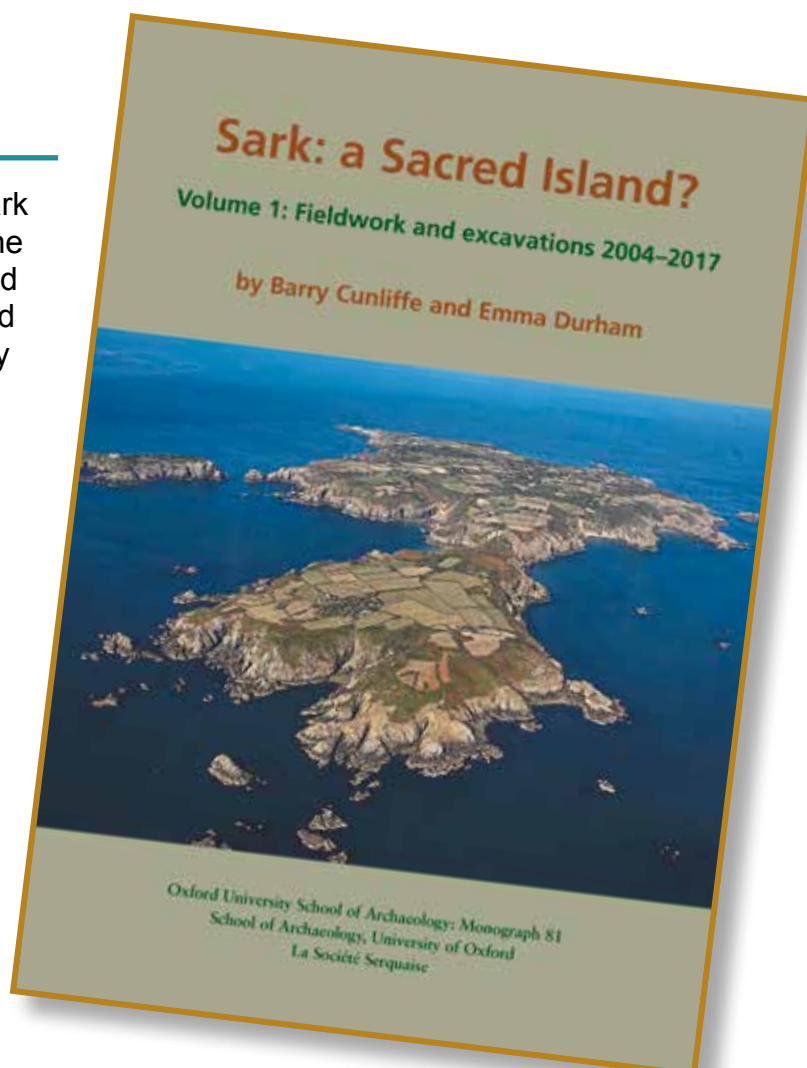
Wet and windy weather this winter mean that Sark has been unusually quiet, with little to report. The Council's decision to circulate minutes of its meetings as soon as they have been confirmed means that you will have had some news of recent events, including publication of the long-awaited monograph on Sark's archaeology in December, and of plans for 2020 (Mins 13th December 2019).

For your diaries: the AGM will be held on Friday 27th March 2020 at 5.15 pm. By popular request this will be in the Cider Barn, if the weather allows. This means that Reports for 2019 by Group Leaders and items for inclusion in the Agenda should reach the Hon Secretary (as Word files) by **28th February**. Email jo.birch@cwgsy.net

Archaeology

In September a grant of £5000 from the Mark Fitch Foundation made up funding of the publication. Printing and binding went ahead and 100 copies arrived in Sark before the end of November. A third of these have already been bought.

Congratulations to Sir Barry, to Emma Durham and to all the team on the appearance of Sark – a Sacred Island? It is truly ground-breaking; the quality of production is superb: a handsome, hard-bound volume in A4 format, 345 pages double column, with 236 drawings, colour photographs and maps. While there is plenty more to be discovered of Sark's prehistory, the book is not going to be superseded (this is just Volume 1!). £40 is a snip for such a big and important publication. Copies can be obtained from www.oxbowbooks.co.uk or on Sark at the Heritage Room or the Gallery Stores.



On 30th November at the Island Hall Dr Wendy Morrison, a member of Barry's Oxford team for a decade now, spoke about her project to survey the Channel Islands for archaeological evidence using Lidar technology. It was a brilliant and engaging explanation of the laser science, with illustrations from her work on Iron Age hill forts in the Chilterns, that made the audience gasp. It takes several months of computer processing before the raw data of the aerial 'photographs'

reveal the stunning images of they often contain. With luck the data for Sark will yield sites and detail in time to shape plans for excavations in May-June this year.

Following an appreciative discussion, copies of the new publication were admired and bought. An enjoyable supper at the Hall was our thank-you to Wendy for finding time for Sark in her busy schedule, and to Simon Pressey, the book's chief illustrator, who made a brief holiday visit.

Environmental conservation

The Inter-Island Environmental Meeting 2019 in Alderney was attended by our president, Christopher Beaumont and his wife Sarah, and by Shakira Christodoulou, Conservation Group leader.

In late September, Alderney Wildlife Trust hosted the superb Inter-Island Environment Meeting 2019. Speakers pulled no punches regarding the challenges faced by Britain's islands and the UK Overseas Territories: Climate Change and invasive species loomed largest. Inspirational reports included eco-tourism and sponsorship to support conservation in Alderney, Rewilding (Europe's vision to transform exhausted and redundant land into wildlife havens) and Anguilla's bold work relocating endemic species away from rising sea-levels. Conservation projects worldwide reported on eradication of common, human-introduced predators such as black rats, which are driving vulnerable seabirds and endemic rarities to extinction. Seabird, land-bird, reptile and vegetation recovery showed real success, with resultant tourism boosts reported.

Another exciting good news story came from Jersey's Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust: Jersey's reintroduced choughs are increasing their numbers and birders on Sark could catch a glimpse as young birds explore suitable areas such as Little Sark. Combatting bracken and

overbearing plants could raise suitability on the Eperquerie - something to feed into La Société Sercquaise's conservation plans. Elizabeth Corry has offered to speak on Sark about the project and how to report chough sightings, so look out for news of a possible date in the spring.

Other connections at the IIEM have raised hopes for a small mammal and bat survey of Sark this year, and collaborations are also afoot for sharing of environmental data within the Channel Islands.

A summit on day three brought a sense of global momentum when islands across the world joined together to sign the Blue Islands Charter. This important statement of shared intentions roots conservation in our outlook for our islands' future. Goals include working together to share expertise and reduce human impact on our land and seas, aspiring towards freedom from single-use plastics, and conserving islands as bastions of biodiversity. Sark joined every other Channel Island, and fellow communities globally from Gibraltar to Monserrat, to make this commitment to our precious island ecosystems.

Many thanks are due to Roland Gauvain and his AWF team for making the IIEM 2019 happen, and for kindly supporting me to attend.

Shakira Christodoulou
Conservation Group Leader

Consequences

The Blue Islands Charter provides an opportunity to re-examine our own Charter of Community values, now 10 years old. It has received over 1200 signatures. The Council thought it could be recast to take account of developments in

the last decade, and proposes to present an updated draft for approval at the AGM. The Society's Charter for Community values is printed from our website for your consideration (www.socsercq.sark.gg)

Help us to protect Sark's uniqueness

La Société Sercquaise was founded in 1975 to study, preserve and enhance Sark's natural environment and cultural heritage. The society's Council has identified areas of great importance to our way of life, hoping to find widespread community support.

- 1 Support and maintain traditional freedom of access to all bays and footpaths.
- 2 Support Sark's ban on cars and other motorised vehicles and support Sark's horse-friendly policies on roads.
- 3 Support the ban and control on helicopters and other aircraft overflying Sark.
- 4 Support protection of the coast and natural landscape from intrusive 'suburban' features (such as street lighting, kerbs, surveillance cameras, communication masts).
- 5 Support sensible building control laws, encouraging energy-saving, rain-water catchment and solar energy collection, design and planting that suit the environment.
- 6 Support a basic code to protect historic buildings and archaeological sites.
- 7 Support basic codes to protect coastal waters and foreshores, and to conserve agricultural and unspoiled land, pasture and cliff-top habitats, fresh water sources, and sites of special geological or botanical interest.
- 8 Support reduction of all forms of waste and pollution (including noise and light pollution) to land, air, and water.
- 9 Support the use of renewable energy sources and environmentally-friendly, sustainable economic activities.
- 10 Support policies to strengthen Sark's self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency.



Holly Blue butterfly on Bell Heather

Environmental work

Some useful field work by our 'Conservation Commandos' is going on during the winter months, in collaboration with the 'Sark Bloomers' and the school-based junior wildlife Watch Group. Priority is being given to keeping part of Harbour Hill clear for bluebells and half the target area was cleared before Christmas. The heather patch below Pilcher monument has been tended by Susan Synnott. Various small but key areas of the Eperquerie are being cleared of gorse where it is smothering the heather. A session to cull the caterpillar tents of Brown-tailed moths is planned for February. The Society's environmental work is in part a contribution to the community's Sark in Bloom efforts. In September the RHS awards for 2019 were finally announced: Sark is a 'small coastal community' and was awarded Silver Gilt over all (Gold for Community Participation, Silver Gilt for Environmental Responsibility and for Horticultural Achievement).

History

The new headteacher Dr Nicholas Roberts has been keen to foster links between the Society and the School. As a linguist he particularly appreciated Martin Neudorff's interest in keeping Sarkese alive. Some of our studies and community projects fit well with the school's Enrichment programme. Class 3 visited the Mill for Sark history lesson. Nick and Catherine Roberts brought Class 2, dressed as Roman legionaries to the Heritage Room to learn about the Sark Hoard and Caesar's conquest of Gaul.

Sark language

Martin returned from the Czech Republic for a fortnight in December to continue his study of Sarkese. He divided his time between field research – talking with our remaining patois speakers and identifying small differences in idiom and pronunciation – and working with the children in school. His efforts culminated in a most enjoyable public event: 'Sark's Norman Language'. An audience of about 30 were taught in teams - and individually by the children – to use some basic greetings: Buon jur! Cume ci k't'ê? It was striking how confident the youngsters were and how much pleasure the exchanges gave to the oldies. It ended with a spirited performance of 'Mon mari e ben malade'; the grownups provided the chorus while the children took turns singing the wife's macabre

narrative. The event, filmed by ITV and shown on Channel News that evening, stirred interest – even some envious comment - in the larger islands. Martin plans to keep in contact with the school via Skype.



Exhibitions 2020

Sark's landscape and art are perennially popular. Combining the two, Christopher Beaumont is planning to display a set of remarkable pencil sketches made by his great, great grandfather the Revd. W.T.Collings. These were drawn from the roof of St Peter's during building work in September 1874 and form a complete panorama.

May will mark the 75th anniversary of liberation of the Channel Islands from enemy occupation. As Tourism will highlight Occupation and Liberation, the Council suggests that we focus our main efforts on the post-war period 1945-1955, with a working title '**Post-war – Sark gets back on its feet**'. This would make best use of the materials in our collection, e.g. completion of Maseline Jetty, its royal opening, La Coupée, the Power Station, housing, mine-clearing, the Friends of Sark reparations, Reform. If you have photos or documents relating to this period that you can lend or donate to the Heritage Room, please get in touch with Richard or Jo. Likewise, old photos particularly of Sark houses and residents from any period would be welcome by an active group led by Amanda Petrie. Offers of help with sorting, cleaning and labelling museum and archival objects will always be appreciated.

Richard Axton, Editor and Director of the Heritage Room. Email raxton@guernsey.net

Entomology - Protecting our pollinators from Asian hornets

2020 saw a busy year for volunteers working to control the Asian Hornet invasion. The Guernsey Asian Hornet team helped Peter Cunneen and Jo Birch and their group of volunteers by sending over 20 traps and bait for the spring queen trapping programme. This started in mid-March and lasted until early June; we found ten queens which were sent to Guernsey for verification. This prevented ten nests being established in Sark.

Traps were then removed to prevent high bycatch (wasps, moths etc) and set up again in September by which time we were trying to locate any nests. Again, Guernsey advised and also came over to help with this. Three weeks pretty constant effort on our part to find any nests at last had a result – Pat Cunneen found one at ground level in some bramble bushes.



This was near La Forge just inland from Derrible headland.

Damian Harris and Francis Russel from Guernsey came on 30 October to deal with the nest and took it back to Guernsey for analysis together with about 300 hornets that we had trapped in September. The nest was about 45 cms in diameter with a theoretical population of 5,000 hornets. Guernsey had also trapped 10 queens in the spring and found two nests during the summer. Jersey had about 500 nests and destroyed some 80 of them.

We shall be running the spring queen trapping programme again this year and will be looking for volunteers – they are hugely important in the fight to save our island pollinators.

Jo Birch

