

La Société Sercquaise

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



Summer News 2015

Obituary - Peter Hutchins

Members will be saddened to learn of the death of Peter Hutchins, early in August. From a farming background in Guernsey he moved with Sally to Sark, to take on Le Vieux Clos guesthouse. They have been generous and enthusiastic

supporters of the Society. Peter rarely missed any of our events or meetings and, though by June he was severely disabled, he still made it to Sir Barry's talk at the mill excavation. His lively presence will be missed.

The Heritage Room

All season there has been a buzz of activity at the Visitor Centre, with many visitors - more than ever from the Continent - to the Heritage Room and Cider Barn. We have more exhibition material than ever and we have been working closely with the Tourism Office and with the various groups engaged in celebrating the 70th year since Liberation and 450th since Elizabeth I granted Sark to Helier as a fief. The barn temporarily housed Helier's plywood pageant carvel (which the schoolchildren 'sailed' around Le Manoir garden on 6th August). Queen



Elizabeth I herself, resplendent with lace and pearls as Sue Daly's life-sized manikin, startled visitors to the Heritage Room as she awaited her role in the son et lumière on 4th September. The two new museum display cases have sparked more interest in Sark's archaeology and propelled visitors over to explore the barn.

Botany

Digimapping of grid-referenced plant species up to the end of 2014 is now complete, thanks to hard work by Susan Synnott and Jane Norwich, and expert help from Julia Henney in Guernsey. More-than-usual rainfall has brought many fungi to fruit early, including two specimens of Red Cage *Clathrus ruber* (left) at Petit Dixcart and Peigneurie.

Exhibitions

The season began with Spring Flowers, Old Photos from Lantern Slides, and Sark Ferns. We also lent a couple of dozen books and pamphlets to the Tourism Office for a display on the History of Sark Tourism. Our special exhibitions focused on 1945 and 1565. Jane Norwich's tribute to Sark Deportees was opened by Nellie Le Feuvre (the only surviving resident deportee) on 1st May – her birthday. The stark beauty of sixty lives reduced to luggage labels and two suitcases drew many appreciative comment in the Visitors' Book.

For the island's 450th anniversary, Jane compiled a 40-page illustrated timeline (6000 BC to the present) which can be viewed as a looped slide show and as a book. From archives digitised over the past couple of years she generated a genealogical tree of the De Carteret seigneurs and collateral descendants, and a Digimap of the tenement clusters in 1565. Across the road, materials in the Cider Barn are devoted to the De Carteret Manor: the tenements and their first settlers, the architecture and buildings of the

manor itself, featuring the Seigneur's pressoir, windmill and forge. Victorian forge bellows borrowed from the Seigneurie 'Chapel' look well by the Barn fireplace and seem likely to remain a fixture.

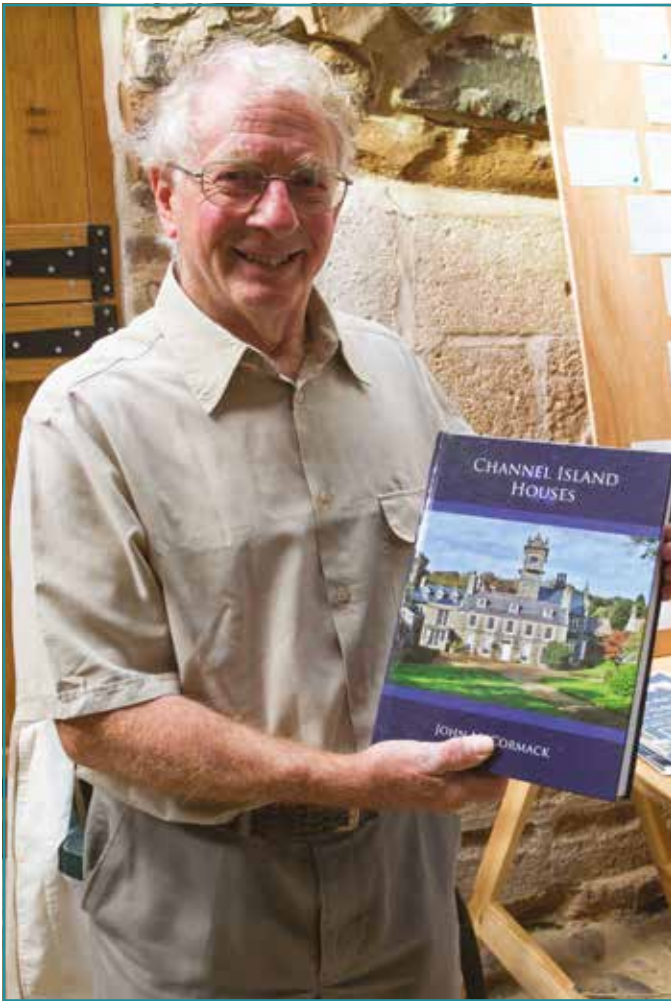
The 450th exhibition was in place in the barn for the well-attended launch on 27th July of John McCormack's *Channel Island Houses*. Both rooms were visited by the bailiffs, lieutenant governors and dignitaries from Guernsey attending Fief Day, 6th August, as guests of the island. The exhibitions will stay up till the end of September.

In other ways the barn is proving its usefulness. Our large collection of prehistoric pottery is now sorted and marked, boxed and stored on the mezzanine – a major chore completed by Emma Durham in May and June, assisted by Jenny Baker and Andrew Prevel. In the evenings three veillies have been held in 2015 with poems and songs for St Valentine's Day, Spring/Easter and War and Peace (Eve of Waterloo).

Nellie Le Feuvre & Jane Norwich at the opening of the Sark Deportees Exhibition



History



The archives have been well used, with searches by – among others - De Carterets, Guilles and Hamons looking for settler-ancestors. The Occupation and Deportation excite steady

Sark Watch Group

Esmée Byrne's Moth Wall in the Heritage Room has attracted lots of interest. The enthusiastic children's group has been working the moth trap with Rosie and they have raised the profile of Sark's moths. David Wedd paid us a visit in July and has devoted two pages of the current *Alderney Watch Out* magazine to Sark. Thanks, David, for great support. (www.alderneywildlife.org). In August, television natural history presenter and President of the RSPB, Miranda Krestovnikoff, led the group on a rockpool ramble to the Eperquerie Pool. Among the finds were several Giant Gobies, a rare species in the British Isles.



interest. The commando raid of October 1942 was the subject of a lively and well-attended talk in February by Eric Lee from London. Eric spent a few days using our archive, scrambling over the terrain of the raid and interviewing some of the war-time residents. His book *Operation Basalt* will be published in 2016 (see www.operationbalsalt.com).

Congratulations to member Geoffroy Kursner on the publication this spring of his very readable study: *L'Île de Sercq, Histoire du dernier état féodal d'Europe* Les Editions du Menhir (available at the Visitor Centre and on Amazon). This fills a need for a comprehensive account in French that discusses Sark up to the present. Special congratulations to John McCormack (left) on his *Channel Island Houses*, launched in Sark on 27th July. It is a monumental achievement, wonderfully rich and detailed and beautifully produced. John has been so regular a pilgrim to Sark, guiding, informing and interrogating us, that his achievement feels very special for the Society. There are thousands of fine historic houses in the Channel Islands and it is no accident that Sark is prominent in this splendid publication. (*The copies John brought to Sark have all been sold. The book costs £65 and is available at the Press Shop, Lexicon and La Société Guernesiaise; in Jersey from La Société Jersiaise. You can also call John on 01481 720303.*)

Meteorology



For three decades Roy Cook has been Sark's weatherman, keeping the instruments, sending records to Guernsey Met Office, writing with humorous charm - rain or shine - in *Sark Scribe/Islander* and *Sark Life*, posting monthly bulletins in the 'Weather Corner' of the Heritage Room, working with Herbert Schill to produce elegant charts, and submitting summaries for the Society's Annual Reports. More than enough, you would think, to keep a chap busy - even a hardy nonagenarian. With characteristic efficiency and lack of fuss Roy has passed over the formal duties and the equipment to Tony Dunks, who is, of course, formidably well qualified. The transfer went without a hiccup in recording and we should set down the Society's gratitude to both of them. Roy continues to delight us by writing about the weather.

Archaeology

For the past decade Sir Barry's summer excavations have prioritised the Bronze Age settlement (c.1400-c.900 BC) in the Tanquerel fields north of the mill. This site has now been intensively mapped and the finds, particularly a mass of locally made prehistoric pottery, have been studied and stored. Leaving further investigation of the site to future generations and future technology, Barry is keen to explore others periods of Sark's prehistory.

A likely Neolithic site east of La Coupée, located when Andrew found flint scatter, is under barley this season and its excavation has been postponed. Between 6th and 20th June five quick, small-scale (merely 5-10 cubic metre!) excavations were made - by splitting the group into two and sometimes three teams: at the Mill, at Clos de la Tour de la Cloche, in Little Sark, at La Seigneurie by the house and by the great wall. All the digs produced positive results, from the Neolithic period down to the Elizabethan re-settlement.

Sherds of a mid-Neolithic pot (c.4000 BC), lying below a metre of building rubble and WWII detritus and beneath a second metre of broken stone and rubble, show that the Mill (1571 AD) was built on top of a man-made mound. The discovery makes it likely that this highest place in Sark was a special site, related in some way to the Bronze Age settlement just 100 metres to the north. The rubble mound appears to belong

to the same period as the terraced area that was excavated in the Gaudinerie field and carbon-dated to c.4200 BC.

Near St Peter's, in the Clos de la Tour de la Cloche, Roman and Iron Age potsherds prove that Andrew Prevel has located an occupation site from a much later period for which we have so far very little evidence.

In Little Sark, a standing stone marking the boundary of a Sablonnerie field was revealed as a megalith re-used as a cist (stone-lined burial chamber) in the Beaker period (c.2000 BC). A solitary item of 'grave goods' survived - but this archer's wrist guard, rectangular and carved out of fine slate, is a beauty. Not being made from any local stone, it's all the more important in suggesting Sark's ancient trade links. There are plans to excavate the south side of the stone next year.

By comparison, two trenches at La Seigneurie explored relatively modern features that have puzzled people for a long time. Excavation beside the 'chapel' revealed evidence of at least one substantial building alongside the buried cobbled road. Burnt grains, limpet shells and a fragment of grey pottery will be analysed for a date. Bets are being placed that this is a medieval building.

The final excavation was at the south end of the Great Wall - most baffling of all Sark's monuments. A deep pit exposed the foundation



Sir Barry & some of the team at work on the mill site

trench and well-made stone work that is likely only a couple of hundred years old. Mortar and clay pipe fragments may help to be more precise. So this part of the wall, at least, is not ancient. Plenty of puzzles remain.

Among the enthusiastic followers of Sark's archaeology are the middle school campers from Cherry Trees School in Suffolk, brought by Lyn and Rob Pilsworth in June. Rob and Lyn returned on holiday in July and were rewarded by discovery of the best Roman sherd yet - a rim piece of a large bowl of red Samian ware. It was in the vine field south of the mill and its fresh condition suggests that it was brought up into the plough soil when the field was spiked in

preparation for planting vines.

To crown all this excitement and activity, a pair of beautiful glass-and-steel display cabinets arrived at the Heritage Room - thanks to some of our most generous members. In the course of the next few months the exhibition of what has been found and learned so far about Sark's prehistory will try to do justice to the expertise of our dedicated team. Heartfelt thanks to all the experts, the helpers and the network of this year's sponsors.

Environmental Conservation

A number of projects have been mooted for the autumn and winter months. These include more brush clearing on l'Eperquerie (to encourage the heather - David Wedd has noted that our Silver-studded Blue butterflies (right) are doing well), recovery of a cliff path between Creux Belet and Banquette, and restoration work at Creux Harbour tunnel arch. Work parties will be weather-dependent and we will try to alert volunteers by email.



Richard Axton
30/8/15