

# La Société Sercquaise

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



## Winter News 2018

*A Happy New Year to all members on island and in the great world beyond Sark! 2017 was a good one for the Society, if not for the world, as we begin to prepare annual Reports and to plan for the summer season.*

*Richard Axton (editor)*

### Plastic

The world is beginning to wake up to the toxic effects of plastic on land and sea. For some years Société members have done seasonal beach clean-ups, together with the junior Watch wildlife group. The nature and scale of the threat was brought home to us by the visit to Sark in August of the Dutch-based charity *By the Ocean We Unite*. A dozen young scientists and volunteers spent two days on Sark, centred on a compelling Power-point presentation at the Hall by Dr Nanne van Hoytema. The group welcomed Sark visitors on board their sailing ship *Fantastiko* at Maseline and in Havre Gosselin; in return they visited the Sastros observatory. Many thanks to Annie Dachinger for securing their interest in Sark. The group's giant whale, made entirely from plastic flotsam, has since received international publicity and has stimulated discussion about what can be achieved in Sark. In December the Council of La Société agreed to commission two large pallet-bins to collect – and publicise – marine plastic rubbish: one close to La Coupée and one at the Harbour.



*Fantastiko arriving in Maseline Harbour*

### Annual General Meeting

Council have set Friday 6 April at 5pm in the Heritage Room. This is the end of Easter week and it is hoped that some overseas members on holiday may be able to make it. Election or re-election of officers and council will take place then,

so you have time to think about standing. Reports from Section leaders and matters you would like to be on the Agenda should be sent to the Secretary to arrive by 28 February. Documents in Word format, please to [jo.birch@cwgsy.net](mailto:jo.birch@cwgsy.net).

The biggest event in our history has been the hosting of an Inter-Island Environmental Meeting in Sark on 21st and 22nd September. Annual meetings began in 2000 in Guernsey and were strongly encouraged by the late Charles David and supported by all the Channel Islands. Their purpose has been to share knowledge and experience: Sark has benefitted greatly from the scientific and practical expertise in the larger islands. Our theme was Habitat Management. Many of us were involved and I think we would all agree that the success and smooth running of the conference very largely due to Jane Norwich's meticulous and energetic organisation. What follows is based on Jane's verbal report to Chief Pleas at Michaelmas:

'The meeting was a first for Sark and celebrated the 10th anniversary of our precious Ramsar site at the Gouliot Caves and Headland. For those on Sark who could not come, you missed something special. It was fully booked with 70, the largest the meeting has ever been.

Delegates came not just from the Channel Islands, but from the Isle of Wight, the Isle of Man and the UK. I think the environment departments of Guernsey and Jersey were on skeleton staff with over 15 attending. The RSPB was represented at director level along with the UK Overseas Territories Environment Forum Chairman.

### *The Gouliot Caves expedition*



Presentations covered topics from the seabed to the skies above. All related in some way to habitat management and taking care of the environment on behalf of the next generation. Particularly relevant to Sark were presentations on invasive marine species, some 45 of which are sadly already here. Also, how we need to maintain a diverse flora to support all pollinators not just the honey bee, which is a tropical import – 85% of our pollinating bees are not honey bees and need pollen and nectar at specific times of year. The need for increasing variety in our garden plants too was raised.

The possibility of a bird observatory on Sark was discussed. An observatory has not only raised Alderney's ornithological profile, but has attracted significant numbers of visitors in shoulder and off-season months.

Roland Gouvain of Alderney Wildlife chaired an inaugural meeting of a Channel Islands Ramsar Support Group, to share knowledge and experience of monitoring habitats in the diverse CI sites and help each other develop appropriate management practices. It is hoped to meet annually as well as to share information on-line.

Another first for this important meeting was the presentation to the entire meeting by Katie Knight, aged 11, and assisted by Georgia Bateson. The clarity and content of her passionate talk, which she wrote herself, about the work of Sark Watch, was inspiring and very warmly received. Katie also led the rock pool site walk.

Most of the delegates took part in one of the three field trips (the Gouliot Caves, the Eperquerie Pool, Creux Belet wet valley). There was further opportunity for valuable informal exchange at the excellent dinners provided at Sunflower Café. The Hall staff also packed lunches for the Gouliot Caves party. Many thanks to them for great support.

We are very grateful for sponsorship from the Insurance Corporation and the Noble Trust (Guernsey); Adventure Sark provided their equipment and guiding services free. This generosity ensured that the conference actually made a profit!

We have been inundated with thanks and compliments on the content and arrangements of the meeting: "Thank you for all the hard work that went into making it a success and an event that Sark can be proud of"; "Sark was so welcoming"; "Enjoyed every minute and learnt a lot too"; "Congratulations on hosting a very successful event. It is our turn next year and you will be a very hard act to follow!" ' [JN]

## The Heritage Room and Cider Barn

Exhibitions through the autumn were geared to the IEM conference: Sark's landscape and the tenth anniversary of Sark's Ramsar site. A portfolio of Sue Day's photographs of the Gouliot site, printed on museum boards, made a fine focus and can be used again in future. The Room also hosted a full and informative exhibition, put together by Jan Guy, of the work done by the Sark in Bloom volunteers. Across the road in the Barn, recycled display panels carrying the story of Sark's changing land use had been prepared as Digimaps by Jane Norwich. Erosion at La Coupée was the subject of panels prepared by Richard Axton, using Susan Synnott's photographs of species that sprang up beside the new path following landslides

On September 26th David Synnott's book *Silver Mining on Sark* was launched with a drinks party in the Barn and more than 70 signed copies were sold. Another notable event in the Barn was making black (apple) butter on the wood stove according to a traditional Jersey recipe



*Shakira helping a visitor get to grips with tapestry weaving*

adapted by Shakira. After much patient stirring, with songs and poems in several languages, the butter was pronounced ready and served hot on a bed of home-made yoghurt. The Barn's roof lighting has proved to be just right for craft work and on four occasions during the year Amanda Petrie's Tapestry Weaving group have set up their looms to interest all-comers.

## Archaeology

Results of analysis of the human remains from June's excavations are eagerly awaited. Jane Norwich has processed large volumes of soil from the trenches, in search of plant seeds. Sir Barry reports that the Oxford monograph on *Prehistoric Archaeology of Sark* (vol.1) is close to completion. We shall be looking for funding

*Part of team at work at the Manoir site*



publication and to support further excavations this year (9th-23rd June, 2018). You will remember from Barry's account in *Summer News 2017* that the discovery that the Cider Barn is flanked by graves on both south and north sides makes the location and date of this building - and its relation to earlier ecclesiastical buildings on the same site - critical.

As ever, we continue to receive support and encouragement from archaeologists in the neighbouring islands. A big landscaping project begun at La Seigneurie in December revealed virtually nothing of archaeological interest when checked by RA and by Tanya Walls from Guernsey. The new Assistant Archaeologist in Jersey, Rosalind le Quesne, has suggested that members of our Society might like to visit the great prehistoric sites in Jersey. This would involve a day-trip in the summer, by charter limited to 12 and would of course depend on weather. Cost would be about £90 per person (cheaper than all the alternative means). If you are interested, please let me know ([raxton@guernsey.net](mailto:raxton@guernsey.net)).

## Conservation Projects

In the wake of the conference buzz it is good to report that the path to Creux Belet and L'Eperquerie through the Wet Valley will be maintained by La Société. Sébastien Moerman, tenant of La Tour, has granted permissive access. New gates and signs are proposed. In the interest of preserving the orchids and encouraging other rare bog plants we shall pay for seasonal cutting. Volunteer help to pull Hemlock Water-dropwort from the stream bed will always be welcome – around the beginning of June.

Many members have joined the 'Bloomers' in planting and clearing public spaces, work that resulted in Sark's award of Silver Gilt in the RHS Britain in Bloom Competition. November planting of crocus bulbs in roadside banks should add welcome colour early in the spring. To bring back the bluebells that flourished so spectacularly a dozen years ago beside the footpath on Harbour Hill, Project Bluebell was launched by Sue Daly and Shakira Cristodoulou, who organised two major clearing parties in November. Either side of a 80-metre stretch of path, the brambles and blackthorns were cut to recover sunlight and restore views. Some clearing was also done on the less-used path up to Les Laches and around the Wakleys' fruit cage, to a neglected look-out point beyond the pines. The bench there overlooks a stunning view north into Creux Harbour.

Work has now begun on the wall of blackthorn at the end of the road to l'Eperquerie, with the aim of opening up the view towards Herm shell beach. Initially some heavy machinery will be used to pull out the roots and haul away brush; work parties can then tidy and, possibly, sow ground cover (as on the French Fort area) to

stabilise the soil. February is the best time to cut out Brown-tailed moth 'tents' from the blackthorn, which is their preferred host. There is great scope for recovering the shrinking heathland habitat of l'Eperquerie, with the Society working alongside the island's Public Works and path cutters. In the longer view, recovery of the 12-foot road to the Landing has been mooted, so that it will be easier to repair the slipway and children's tidal pool. In this context it is gratifying to note that the island path cutters have adopted maintenance of the guardhouse area that was so strenuously recovered by our volunteers five years ago.

*Volunteers hard at work this winter*



*How Harbour Hill looked in the 1980s*

