

La Société Sercquaise

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



Winter News 2018/19

Editor: Richard Axton

A Happy New Year to all members - though it is past Groundhog Day (variously interpreted as mid-winter or the first day of agricultural spring.)

Sark Language

Two years after his first visit, Martin Neudorfl returned for a fortnight in December, having completed with distinction his Master's thesis at the University of Prague on Sark's Norman Language. Martin made two visits to the school, introducing the children to the 'secret language' of their grandparents and conducting a walkabout the island, naming places in Serchiais/Sarkese. He also delivered a compelling lunchtime talk at the Island Hall, with a masterly overview of the place of Sarkese in the tree of Norman languages and finely-tuned details for our ears to pick up. The pre-Christmas midday venue ensured that the event was unusually well attended and received, and a good number of older people stayed on to chat with Martin over lunch.



The Linguist and the Editor

Exhibitions & Events for 2019

The Council meeting on 13th Nov 2018 discussed suggestions and agreed a provisional outline for an arts-themed season. Following Spring Wildflowers (always in great demand from visitors), the Barn will be used for an Archaeology Fortnight (25th May to 8th June), immediately followed by tapestry weaving and the craft activities of Creative Sark, led by Amanda Petrie. Accompanying exhibitions will feature historical artists and writers, including Mervyn Peake and Seigneur WT Collings. His panoramic pencil sketches of Sark's landscape, drawn from the church roof during building work

in September 1874, will be a major attraction. Many thanks to Christopher Beaumont for proposing to make them available. Jane Norwich proposes an exhibition 'Peake in the Barn' in June, reassembled later in August for the anniversary of the Sark Group on 30th August. Research on the Group promises to be far-reaching. Jane and others are working with our Tourism officers to ensure that a blue plaque for Mervyn Peake will be installed at the Chalet. Sark in Bloom, led by Jan Guy, will put on an exhibition in the Heritage Room from 27th July, around the time of the RHS judges' visit Sark.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held on **5.15pm Friday 29th March**. This means that Reports for 2018 by Group Leaders and items for inclusion in the Agenda or

for the events calendar should be sent to the Hon Secretary Jo Birch (as Word files) by 1st March. Email jo.birch@cwgsy.net

Environmental Conservation

The Inter-Island Environmental Meeting 2018 was held in September in Jersey. No-one from Sark was able to attend. It is gratifying to read in Transactions 'SG 2017' the President Dr Casebow's report on ILEM 2017 held in Sark: 'The organisers really excelled themselves and it must rank as one of the best meetings I have attended' (p.213). But there can be no place for complacency where the environment is concerned. The CI Ramsar Group, set up in 2017 on Alderney's initiative, has resulted in a second draft of a comprehensive Code of Conduct. At a SocSercq Council meeting on 13th November it was agreed to add the exclusion of dogs and drones to the paragraphs concerning the Gouliot Caves and Headland.

Some useful field work by our 'Conservation Commandos' is going on during the winter months, in collaboration with the 'Sark Bloomers' and the junior wildlife Watch Group. Priority is being given to keeping part of Harbour Hill

clear for bluebells. A patch of cōtil below Pilcher monument and various small areas of the Eperquerie are being cleared of gorse where it is smothering the heather. These are the breeding sites of our precious Silver-studded Blue butterflies. The Brown-tailed moths seem to have let up on us this year; finding their caterpillar 'tents' has been something of a rarity. Now that the island path cutters have widened the old road to Eperquerie landing, Jeremy is organising repairs to the children's tidal pool and has been talking about eventually restoring the old granite slipway.

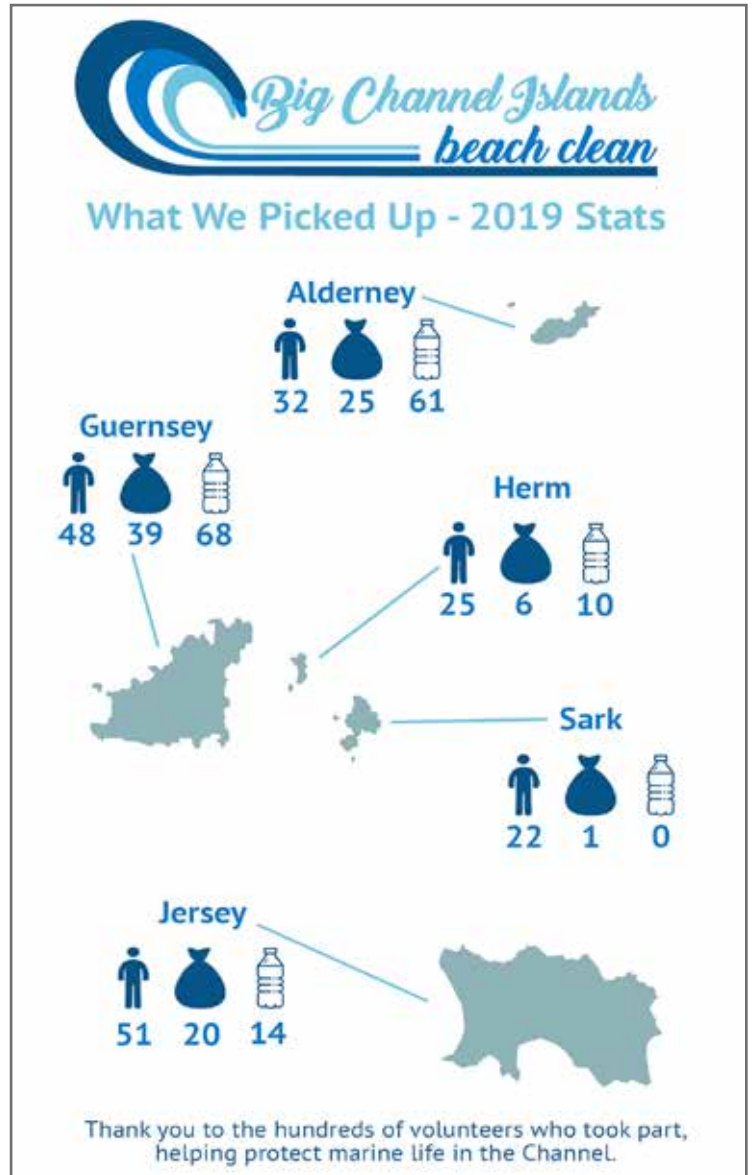
The junior Watch Group, now supported by head teacher Crispin Heartford and Class 2 teacher Nick Wolfe, is planning a series of beach litter clean-ups. Some of them joined in the recent Channel Island Beach Clean (13th January). Dixcart Bay was left pristine, apart from some footprints and half a dozen beach sculptures made of sand and shells and seaweed.

The Conservation Commandos on the Eperquerie





Creating art in the sand on Dixcart beach



Results of the Big Channel Island Beach Clean

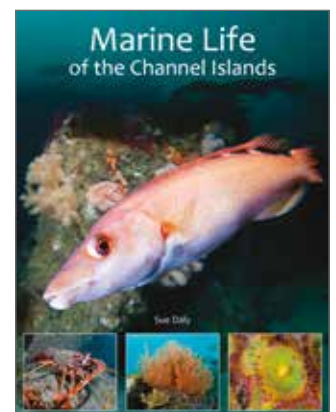
Publications

Sark – a Sacred Isle

To be published jointly by La Société Sercquaise and the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford University. Detailed costings of this prestigious scholarly volume come to almost £14,000. On 13th November 2018 your Council proposed that the Society advance £5000, in return receiving 200 copies to sell on, expecting to recover the investment in time. Members were asked to approve the expense and we got 21 enthusiastic endorsements and no negative replies. The total promised so far is £7000 - just over halfway to our target - and this has enabled the printer to go ahead and produce proof copy. Barry has applied to various funds for support and we await responses. Please get in touch if you can help (raxton@guernsey.net)

Marine Life of the Channel Islands

Together with the Jersey and Guernsey Sociétés and Alderney Wildlife Trust, the Société Sercquaise helped with publication of Sue Daly's latest superbly illustrated book. Our aid takes the form of bulk-buying copies that we can sell to members and visitors. The book got a good launching at the Island Hall on 5th December and is available in our Heritage Room at a price of £20.



History

Martin Remphry is researching the pirate wrecking of an American vessel *Sapor* off Little Sark in February 1817. The event doesn't feature in the books on Sark's history. Sark Court Records show that men of Little Sark salvaged 12 barrels of flour at Rouge Terrier and that the Seigneur claimed a log of Mahogany.

On 8th December I gave a talk on 'Sark's Fortifications' to the Historic Buildings Section of La Société Guernesaise. It focused on the French forts built between 1549 and 1552 and the additional defences constructed in the 1620s and during Napoleonic times.

New Release

Chansons & Musiques Traditionnelles des Îles Anglo-Normandes: Traditional Music & Songs of the Channel Islands (Association La Loure, 2018)

Publication of this book-and-CD was flagged up in Summer News (September 2018) in reporting the recital by Eva Guillourel and Robert Boutillier from the University of Caen. It is an attractive publication that wears its learning lightly. The text of 128 pages is fully bilingual, with lots of fascinating photos of the music scene over the past century, texts and music for the 40 songs on the CD. There are details of twenty Sark singers

and 12 of the 40 tracks are from the sound archive of La Société Sercquaise. Yet another instance of Sark punching above its weight!

Guernsey Museum at Candie is sole English distributor at £15.99 per copy, but they have given us a discount, so that we can sell a limited number to our members at £15 including packing and postage. To order a copy, please send a cheque (to 'La Société Sercquaise') or cash, together with your full address – clearly written on a sticky label – to: Dr Richard Axton, Editor, La Société Sercquaise, Visitor Centre, Sark GY10 1SA

Archaeology

A CI Archaeological Conference, organised by Rob Waterhouse, was held in Jersey at La Société Jersiaise 7th-9th September. A morning was devoted to Sark, with a keynote presentation by Sir Barry Cunliffe, talks by Emma Durham and by Philip De Jersey. Other highlights for me were talks on the recently discovered Jersey coin hoard, and some impressive French research to identify the pottery produced by individual kilns in medieval Normandy.

Three members of the Oxford team returned to Sark in November: Simon Pressey, who brought his dog on holiday, Ian Cartwright, who brought his camera and Emma Durham, who checked some of the finds for the forthcoming publication. Emma was scheduled to talk about the pottery from excavations in Sark on 16th November but was foiled by fog at the last hour. An audience of two dozen had gathered, so I gave a short talk on the history of Tanquerel's field and why the Sark Hoard was found when it was. We had fish and chips and resolved to meet a week later. On 23rd Emma gave a splendid illustrated talk on the great range and quantity of Sark's pottery finds, and there was another genial fish and chip supper.

The Victorian household rubbish lifted from the large trench in the Manoir garden can be inspected in the Cider Barn. Dozens of everyday stories are waiting there to be told. Two of them will appear in the summer issue of Sark Life. Jane Norwich has traced a shoemaker living at the Manoir Cottage in 1891, whose leather strips and wooden clog soles got dumped a few years later. I unravelled the story of the glass photographic plate, the photographer, the subjects, and the circumstances of its being discarded at the Manoir in 1896.



*The Victorian rubbish visible in the trench.
Photo by Ian Cartwright*