

La Société Sercquaise

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



Winter News 2016/17

Upcoming AGM

The AGM is set for Friday 7th April, a bit later than usual. It falls within the Easter holiday period, so we hope some overseas members will be able to attend.

Group leaders should get their Reports for 2016 to the Secretary by 28th February, preferably as Word files (jo.birch@cwgsy.net). Items for the Agenda should be sent by the same date. Nominations to serve as an officer or group leader or on the Council can be sent to the Secretary at any time up to the meeting.

Round up of news

Fine weather in September and October brought plenty of visitors to the **Heritage Room**. The exhibition of **Sark Mines** was taken down at the end of November and work is in hand to prepare the materials for publication as a pamphlet. Susan Synnott hosted a delightful tea party for the Room minders, resulting in some useful suggestions for improvements next season. Sifting and reorganisation at the Room has made space for David Synnott's archive of the Mines and for Roger Veall's **Botany Records**. The Library holdings are being sorted and the Archaeology display re-jigged with a new map to identify sites excavated since 2005.

Following the archaeological excavations in June, laboratory work in Oxford, funded by the Society, analysed some of our new-found neolithic potsherds. Thin ceramic sections will form a reference kit and join our collection of geological slides, viewable with the polarising microscope. Sir Barry's monograph on **Sark's Archaeology** is well advanced and we are looking at ways to fund its publication. Philip De Jersey has finalised a list of the Celtic and Roman coins found since 2005, mostly in the Tanquerel fields. A second list, the **Henry Collection**, identifies thirty coins found in Sark in the 19th century by John Hocart Henry now in the possession of Ros Henry at l'Ancrese. The coins, mostly late Roman from the second, third and fourth centuries AD, probably come from the east-central part of the island around

Rue Lucas. Not much is known about Roman Sark and it is hoped to explore that region of the island next year, with a survey by magnetometry of the fields by the Telephone Exchange that have now passed to Anthony Beaumont.

Mild autumnal weather has lasted well into December and produced some good passages of **migrant birds**. On 15th October – swallows and house martins shared the skies with fieldfares and redwings in scores. Marsh Harriers (?a pair) have frequented the island, while on 11th December 100+ guillemots were counted resting on their breeding ledges on Les Autelets (below).

No new **conservation projects** have been started, though the Council has discussed plans to address a sizable area of blackthorn that



obstructs the northerly view over l'Eperquerie. Meanwhile, some gorse overlying the heather has been removed on l'Eperquerie and west of Pilcher monument, to encourage the colony of Silver-studded Blues. The wet valley path to Creux Belet with its secret fontaine has been cut and the new tenant of La Tour, Sebastian Moerman, is keen to make better access to this rare environment. An onslaught on **Brown-tailed moth** tents on l'Eperquerie is planned for January or February. Alderney Watch Group have discovered that children love it and are adept at cutting out the nests!

La Société Jersiaise hosted a conference on **Medieval History** in September. I spoke about the puzzling lack of archaeological evidence for the thriving medieval community in Sark (a problem that next year's excavation at Le Manoir may illuminate). John McCormack gave a vivid account of a Jersey Brewhouse in the mid-15th century. Rob Waterhouse showed how anomalous building stone in Channel Island churches could be evidence of more archaic religious foundations.

We are extremely grateful to Dr Mel Broadhurst, Marine Ecologist with Alderney Wildlife, for reviewing the **Marine Habitat Biotope Survey of the Gouliot Caves**, begun in 2013.

The annual **Inter-Island Environment Meeting** was held in Guernsey in September and was attended by Rosanne Guille and Jane Norwich. Jane spoke to the assembly about the work that we have been doing in Sark, drew attention to the fact that April 2017 is the **tenth anniversary**

of Ramsar status for the Gouliot Caves and Headland, and proposed that La Société host next year's meeting. This was agreed with enthusiasm, as Jane reported to Michaelmas Chief Pleas. The dates are set for **20-22nd September**, around an equinoctial low tide, and preliminary planning has begun. So far, we have agreed that the major theme will be **Habitat Management**, that we would like there to be a high proportion of site visits, and that we would like to involve the community widely – the island work force, the fishermen, farmers, gardeners, children.

A **Winter veillie** was held on 12th December round the log fire in the Cider Barn. Despite coinciding with rehearsals for the pantomime, it was well attended. The provision of 1565 Settlers Ale by the Isle of Sark Brewing Company may have had some bearing, but more notable were the voices and guitars of Peter Byrne and Dave Scott. We had songs and poems in English, French and Scots. Martin from Bohemia stunned the assembly with his reading of a Silesian (not Czech!) folk ballad of a gypsy child taken by a witch.

Much hard work lies ahead but it is a great triumph to have secured the venue for so prestigious a gathering of scientists. We have a lot to be proud of and a great deal to learn from our supportive neighbours. So, that will be the major focus of much of our activity in the New Year. Let's make it a happy and fruitful one for all of us! With best wishes,

Richard Axton

Sark Language

Martin Neudörfel from the Czech Republic is spending two weeks to further his study of Sarkese. He is staying with Suzette and Bas Adams (right) and dividing his time between the native speakers, particularly the Hamon sisters and Esther Perrée, and is working his way through our audio archive at the Heritage Room, to pinpoint the features that distinguish Sark patois from Jersiaise. Martin has ambitious plans to keep up and extend the network through Skype links with the Czech Republic and to come back in the summer.

