

La Société Sercquaise

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



SUMMER NEWS 2014

Felicity Belfield

Many members will have learned with great sadness of Felicity's death on 28th June. Her funeral service and burial in Sark graveyard took place on 8th July.

As a founder member of La Société in 1975, Felicity retained to the end her keen intelligence and her lively curiosity about the natural world, and an enthusiasm for all the Society's activities. She was a talented artist and knowledgeable geologist and wrote vividly and with grace about this difficult science. As a keen star-gazer she was the first to urge Sark to bid for Dark Skies recognition. It was a source of amusement to her to have published her first and only book at the age of 90.

Rocks of Sark, beautifully illustrated with photos by Sue Daly, is still in print. As a tribute to Felicity, members have the opportunity to buy copies of the book at half price (£5) for the rest of the season. Details at the end of this letter.

Cider barn

The Manoir barn was formally handed over to the Society on 28th May. Sally Ward-Jones's daughter Emma and her husband Nick van Zeller hosted a splendid garden party to celebrate the commencement of our 20-year peppercorn lease and to thank the many who have helped in the restoration. The seventy-three guests included contributors of funds, materials and equipment, as well as the labour force led by the triumvirate of Andrew, Jeremy and Richard.

Since that date, the barn has been generously and skilfully wired by Simon De Carteret and Dave Nigbur, using low voltage LED spot lighting donated by Jane and Roger Norris. Switches and fuses are housed in a handsome oak wall cupboard made by Jeremy. At the time of writing the stove flue needs sealing and the outside west corner lacks a couple more stone steps and a small gate. Despite very dry weather for two months, the new-sown grass to the south and east is slowly establishing itself.

The barn will be used as a museum annexe to store our imperishable archaeological finds, some of them on display, and for Society meetings and workshops. The quantity and quality of our archaeological collection demand high standards of conservation, so that stored materials will be accessible for study by future generations. Sark's prehistory has definitely established a presence on Europe's archaeological map and we can look forward to increasing professional interest in coming years. The Council is discussing the financial and practical implications of this responsibility. We have the best possible professional advice from Sir Barry's team; Philip De Jersey 'our' coin expert is handily States Archaeologist at the Guernsey Museum. Emma Durham, 'our' small finds expert, will be returning in November to complete classification of the pottery and to supervise its conservation and storage. At the same time we plan to expand and improve the display of items worthy of exhibition.



The floor of the cider barn

Heritage Room

Spring exhibitions included Wildflowers and Photos of Old Sark. Interest in photos is growing and was stimulated by a day of Old Films of Sark arranged by the Visitor Centre. If you have old photos or films of Sark that you would like to donate to the Archive please get in touch with Amanda Petrie (info@socsercq.sark.gg). Items can be copied and returned if you prefer. Currently there is a fine exhibition of Fishing Around Sark, largely the work of Jenny Baker, showing some spectacular traditional gear, lent by Sark fishermen, as well as many fascinating photos. A display on World War I supports a much larger exhibition at the Hall is currently in its last days of preparation by Jane Norwich. We have had about 1000 visitors already this season.

Art and Archaeology in Sark. To launch the tenth annual archaeological excavation Rosanne Byrne collaborated with two of the Oxford team, photographer Ian Cartwright and artist Simon Bishop to put together an intriguing exhibition next door at the Visitor Centre (6th June). Rosie has donated her archaeological drawings and paintings to the Society and it is hoped that Ian's brilliant photos of the prehistoric finds will be the focus of our renovated Archaeology wall.

Archaeology. Tenth year of excavations

From 7th to 21st June Andrew Prevel and Richard Axton joined Sir Barry Cunliffe's Oxford team in their tenth dig. Major excavation to map the Bronze Age settlement north of the Mill continued with two large trenches in the northern Tanquerel field. Andrew prepared the site superbly, with a tent (thanks to Gavin Nicolle) and a loo (thanks to Ray Lowe). On the 19th Barry interpreted the excavations to about fifty enthusiasts gathered round the sun-baked trenches. The settlement, whose north boundary was located last year, extends to the east further than was previously thought. Radio carbon dating in Oxford of seven charcoal samples should establish how long this site was occupied. The Tanquerel site will now be closed for future generations of archaeologists. Additionally, three separate small trenches were dug beside walls at the Seigneurie, to locate medieval foundations.

This year's finds include copper ingots, many fragments of large earthenware pots (one of them a likely candidate for reconstruction) and carvings in local Serpentine. A mysterious small stone sculpture variously named 'oak leaf', 'cockroach' and 'Sark Venus' has been painted by Rosie and is circulating in cyberspace.

At the end of the fortnight David and Susan Synnott gave a splendid supper party to thank the team and our generous local sponsors.



Natural history Marine

The long spring and plenty of sunshine have warmed the sea early (now about 17 degrees). Bluefire, Common and one Compass jelly fish have been seen on beaches round the island. A pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins has been frequently seen on the east and south, sometimes about 40 and including juveniles, alongside small boats and kayaks as well as ferries.

Fine weather has also encouraged numbers and variety of butterflies; large numbers of the common Browns, Skippers and Hairstreaks, but also migrant Dark Green Fritillaries (on Golden Samphire at Rouge Terrier). A few Large Tortoiseshells have been seen on the sucker elms by La Rue, their presence confirmed by David Wedd, visiting recently from Alderney. David also found that our two colonies of the rare Silver-studded Blue are thriving on a heather patch of the Eperquerie where we have cleared off encroaching gorse. He and Rosie Byrne led a party of children from Sark's Watch Group (junior wildlife club) there and they watched Burnet moths hatching. Last month Rosie was able to show Roger Long, on a visit from Jersey, how the junior members were using the Actinic moth trap that he donated to the Society four years ago. This year's report on Sark Entomology will make interesting reading!

Thanks to the wet winter, the spring flowers have been profuse and long-lasting. Susan Synnott counted a dozen Heath Spotted Orchids in the shrinking patch of bog above Creux Belet, after Richard Axton had re-opened the path. Together they pulled up many Water Dropworts from the stream bed, but this precious habitat is shrinking annually. Susan spent some days with Anne Haden, botanist from Jersey, comparing species and logging them with GPS for the Digimap record.

Our raptors have bred successfully, also seabirds, except for Shags, which may have been too storm-battered to breed this year. Paul Veron ringed juvenile auks and gulls on l'Etac, assisted by Sue Daly, and we look forward to his assessment of the populations. Passage migrants included Pied Flycatcher and Curlew, and Cuckoo (for a week). Visitors ask, What happened to the Swallows?

Members can send messages for forwarding to the Secretary or to Group Leaders via the Society's e-mail: info@socsercq.sark.gg

Plans are afoot to add more material to the website in the autumn.

SARK ROCKS, by FELICITY BELFIELD

To order copies of Felicity's book at the special price (£5 plus, if appropriate, £2 for packaging and postage) please send your mailing address and CHEQUE, CASH OR POSTAL ORDER to:

Hon Secretary, La Société Sercquaise, Visitor Centre, Sark GY10 1SA

RA 23/7/14

Views of the fort on L'Eperquerie

