

# La Société Sercquaise

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



## Winter News 2022-23

### Royal Visits Exhibition

To celebrate the year of the coronation we are mounting an exhibition in the Heritage Room about royal visits to Sark for this summer season. Would you share your memories? Do you have happy, funny, dramatic memories of Royal Visits? Did you get presented? What impression did you get of the special visitor? Were you a school child all dressed up in your best? Could you write just one or two sentences about who you met, what happened and which year it was, and send to [info@socsercq.sark.gg](mailto:info@socsercq.sark.gg) or, if hard copies, drop them in to the Visitor Centre which is open 9 am to 1 pm Monday to Fridays.

Do you have any photographs you might be willing to lend? If so, please can you pencil your name and phone contact on the back.

Please get in touch if you can help before Wednesday 1st March. We are keen to make the exhibition as wide as possible and of great interest to both residents and visitors to the island.



*Michael and Diana Beaumont with the Queen and Prince Philip in the Seigneurie Gardens in 2001.*

### “Blessed are the Cheese-makers!”



We were delighted to host an evening event in the Cider Barn on 8th December to celebrate the launch of Jason and Katharine Salisbury's first cheese made at the Isle of Sark Dairy. The barn was packed with people enjoying a glass of wine and a taste of the delicious cheese which is a tangy, mould ripened, semi-hard cheese, and the first cow's milk cheese to be made commercially on Sark.

Sark cheese is for sale now at Food Stop and Mon Plaisir Stores and will be for sale at the dairy 24 hour shop later this year. The Sailisburys will also be creating a blue and a brie style cheese this autumn.

(With no apologies for the cheesy, Monty Python inspired heading!)

Family history gets lots of enquiries, most are easy to answer. Some take a bit of research in various references in the Heritage Room. Occasionally the questions lead to unexpected answers that change your understanding of part of Sark's history.

Some of you may know that to travel to and from Guernsey during the Occupation years needed not only a ticket, but a permit from either the German administration office at Le Manoir or at Grange Lodge in St Peter Port.

Those residents needing dental or medical treatment or to see sick relatives were not the only travellers on the White Heather, formerly the Brecqhou boat. Between April and September day trippers and holidaymakers seeking 7 to 10 day breaks were the main passengers. They stayed at Stocks, Dixcart and Beauregard alongside the billeted occupying forces. The Bel Air hotel seems to have just been for the troops.

On more than one occasion a concert party came over for a weekend, even bringing a piano. The list of songs, dances and recitations are still in the records at St Barnabas alongside the list of performers.

There are advertisements too in the Guernsey Press, offering day and half day trips. Lengthy reports on the activities, the weather and the baskets of provisions brought back to Guernsey can be found in the following weeks paper.

These prosperous times for Sark, involving hundreds of permits in 1941 and 1942 came to an abrupt end with Operation Basalt in October 1942. Tourism did not really get going again until Spring of 1946.

I had assumed that travel was difficult and required a hard to obtain permit as well as having funds to pay for a ticket. It is quite clear that it was relatively easy for both Guernsey and Sark residents to travel until late October 1942. The commando raids stopped the modest tourism levels and a valued source of income.

La Société Sercquaise not only arranges activities and exhibitions, it also provides support to visiting researchers and experts, such the archaeology team, but is also responsible for the care of the collections it holds on behalf of the island of Sark.

Richard Axton knew where documents, images, and books etc on a huge range of topics could

be found. He held much of this information in his head. Whilst locations of much of the collections are well known and there are many lists, there are part projects and a wealth of information in the cupboards, workboxes and on the open shelves. The archaeologists too have a great amount of information on their finds over many years, these are mainly stored in labelled boxes on the mezzanine level in the cider barn.

To assist the Société going forwards Susan Synnott and I have commenced the huge task of listing contents of shelves, cupboards and work boxes. We have also been able to dust and clean as necessary, as well as put some items in more accessible places. This is something Richard wanted to do, and he did a little each winter, but as our collections have grown, the task just got larger.

We have found lots of things that we knew we had but did not know where they were kept. This has helped us to complete some small past projects.

We have had help. Kirsty Grant, despite not being on Sark as much as she would like this winter, has almost completed the library listings - we had at least three incomplete versions. It will be really good to have one master copy, which will make adding to the collection easier. We do now have several duplicate editions of several less important books, some of which Council may decide to sell in future.

Jon Parry timed a visit to Sark to perfection and made the sorting of three very full history related workboxes so much easier. Two long sessions were needed to complete this significant piece of work, including work done in the early days of La Société by the History Group. We now have a large collection of unlabelled photographs that we could do with members help in the new year. Not all images are 'old'. For example, Royal Visits over the years have many Sark residents in the pictures. Some have left Sark, some have died, but their names need including. So, if you have the odd hour or two let me or Susan know, and we can arrange a warm room to sit in. Willing volunteers for a specific period of time, no matter how short, are very welcome.

Our room support team during the season have long wanted an index of 'where do we find, have we got anything on, who do I ring for help' this cataloguing exercise brings an index for the central table much closer.



I hope to write a full Room Report for Council in the near future, which I will include in the reports for the AGM. The cataloguing raises many questions on how we care for the items we are

responsible for, that access is appropriate – particularly important with fragile items, but is as easy as possible, whilst protecting them for the next generation.

## Asian Hornet Update by Jo Birch

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The spring queen Asian Hornet trapping programme took place as usual with the help of our island-wide volunteers last year. Interestingly, only one queen was caught and that was in a house, rather than in a trap and coincidentally, the same house as last year. 11 queens were caught in Guernsey and 11 were caught in Alderney. Guernsey found and destroyed 2 nests and Alderney, 4. Reports from the Cotentin peninsular continue to show very

large numbers of nests and Jersey reported 174 nests found in autumn and many more suspected. Spring queening is shown to work in smaller islands where an indigenous population has not yet established. Why the migrating hornets should by-pass Sark to reach Guernsey instead is a matter for conjecture. The Guernsey States Asian Hornet Team has been extremely helpful to us and we share data with them as well.



The public are generally much more aware of the Asian hornet problem and several false alarms were reported. With the hornet's foraging radius of more than 500 metres, it is unlikely – but not certain – that any nests were established on Sark in 2022. Although the weather was highly suited to the hornets, it is improbable that the hornets could have not been spotted in such a small island. We anticipate running the same trapping programme next spring and recognise that we cannot be certain we don't have any over-wintering queens. There is a continuing requirement for vigilance, especially bearing in mind the potential for queen migration from both Jersey and France in the springtime.

## Cider Barn

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*Amanda Petrie would like to thank the Société for the use of the Cider Barn for Creative Sark. They have held several events there this autumn; a floral workshop for Christmas wreaths and two Christmas markets. This seems to us to be an excellent use of the Cider Barn and just what it was intended for. We also send our very best wishes to Howard who is not well and receiving treatment in London; thankfully Amanda is with him and family are nearby.*

## The Inter-Island Environment Meeting Returns to Sark by Sue Daly

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I attended the Inter-Island Environment Meeting in Alderney (13th - 14th October 2022) on behalf of the Société Sercquaise. There were around 50 delegates from the other Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Isle of Wight, and some attending remotely, representing a wide variety of government and non-governmental environment agencies. The presentations included talks and reports on wildlife management strategies, the impacts of Avian Flu, acoustic monitoring of bats, birds and marine life and the use of citizen science. I also attended a workshop on invasive and non-native species which has resulted in a plan for the Channel Islands to

work collaboratively to identify and deal with the potential threats.

At the end of the two-day meeting, I formally invited delegates to come to Sark next year on September 28th and 29th when we will be hosting the Inter-Island Environment Meeting. There was much excitement about coming to Sark, both from those who have been before and those who are looking forward to visiting for the first time.

Sark hosted this important conference in 2017 when it was brilliantly organised by Jane Norwich. I feel I have a lot to live up to! I'd really like to make it a community event and have already had a pledge of support from Stocks Hotel (a guided tour of the permaculture garden), Sark Dairy (delicious cream and cheese) and Adventure Sark (a trip to the Gouliot Caves) and will be looking to raise funds to help make the meeting as accessible as possibly financially for delegates. My first fund raising event will be a Sark-themed quiz night at the Island Hall on Friday 27th January.

I will also be looking for offers of accommodation for the speakers as well as home-made cakes for afternoon tea for the delegates on the first afternoon of the conference. Do get in touch with me if you are able to help. My email address is [suedalysark@icloud.com](mailto:suedalysark@icloud.com)



## Invasive Non-native Species

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In October representatives of the environment departments of Jersey and Guernsey met to discuss the threat of invasive non-native species (INNS) in the Channel Islands. Clearly this is an island-wide issue and both Alderney Wildlife Trust and the Environment Committee of Chief Pleas have agreed to be included. A draft document of aims has been drawn up. If any member would like to be the representative for Sark for INNS, please come forward. It is not a commitment to do anything other than be in the collaborative loop to share any information or data we collect about invasive species in Sark. Zoom meetings are hoped to take place every 6 months. Email Jo Birch on [secretary@socsercq.sark.gg](mailto:secretary@socsercq.sark.gg) if you would like to be involved.



*Hottentot Fig, a problem non-native in the CIs*



## Architecture Study Visit to Sark

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In October John McCormack (author of *Channel Island Houses* and the *Guernsey House*) brought a group of interested members of the Société Guernesiaise over for two study days in Sark. Their particular interest was pigsties as several of these lovely little constructions are still to be

found on Sark, though most sadly overgrown. They also had tours of the Mill with Jeremy La Trobe-Bateman, Chief Pleas with the Seneschal and the Manoir with Nik van Zeller and we were pleased for them to use the Cider Barn for their picnic lunch.



*The group exploring a pigsty at La Marguerite*

## Running Our Heritage Room. Can You Help?

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Susan Synnott would like to have a few more volunteers for keeping our Heritage Room open during the season. We have lost Shân and Andrew Bache as well as Howard Petrie for this year so she is asking for members to come forward. Opening hours are from 11 – 1 pm, Monday to Friday and she is happy to show any newcomers just how easy and rewarding minding the Room is. If you cannot commit to once a week, the reserve list is open. Email [info@socsercq.sark.gg](mailto:info@socsercq.sark.gg)



## Notice of AGM

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Our AGM will be held on Thursday 6th April 2023 at 5.15 pm in the Cider Barn if weather permits, if not in the Heritage Room. Please would section leaders send their reports to Jo Birch email [secretary@socsercq.sark.gg](mailto:secretary@socsercq.sark.gg) as a Word document by Monday, 6th March. We also welcome any items for inclusion in the Agenda.



## Unearthing Sark's Past - A Request for Support

The survey of archaeology on Sark began in 2004 and has continued every year since then, revealing a wealth of new information about the island's fascinating ancient past. It has been a collaboration of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, with Guernsey Museum and La Société Sercquaise. This year's dig is scheduled for the first two weeks in May and will once again be led by Sir Barry Cunliffe, emeritus Professor of European Archaeology of Oxford University. La Société Sercquaise has supported this invaluable work by part funding it, and will continue to do so, but we need your help to keep the project going and thought an explanation of how much it all costs might be useful to members who might be able to contribute.

Most of the money goes on travel, accommodation and food; that includes travel for winter trips to come and work on the finds if we have enough money left over. Then there are the fees for Carbon14 dating, several hundred pounds for each date requested, and conservation (several hundred pounds each time, although Emma has saved money by only sending our finds with other projects to get it done with a bulk costing.) Barry does pay for illustrations (Simon and

Allison Wilkins) as they are both freelance, but they charge well below the going rate. There are some costs related to supplies (e.g. finds bags, sample bags, tools, permatrace for drawing) although Philip de Jersey (of Guernsey Museums) has given us some material for free in recent years. Philip and his staff give their time for free, and Philip pays for their boat crossings.

Emma pointed out that no one digging on the project gets paid for their time, and neither do most of the people producing specialist reports. Barry did pay Emma a little for the last pottery report she wrote, but Emma has given the project over £5,000 of free specialist advice on top of not charging for her time on site. Similarly, Philippa, Mark Roberts, Donovan Hawley and Philip de Jersey have not charged for their specialist reports, and our local volunteers are also unpaid. Philip's partner Jenny is now working on the skeletal material from Le Manoir cemetery for free. So, all in all Emma says not far off £30,000 of free reporting over the years! We have only paid a few external specialists for their time over the years - all of whom are freelance.

Barry has already had grants from the bodies

*The team at work at the windmill in summer 2015*







*Sir Barry talking about the team's discoveries at the Manoir in 2017*

that fund this sort of project, for example the Antiquaries, Prehistoric Society, so he can't apply again and as Barry is now emeritus there are many larger grants that he cannot apply for. This project would not run without the goodwill of the professionals involved, as well as the people of Sark. In recent years we have saved money by some of the team staying at Kirsty's house (paying only for electricity) and eating at the Island Hall. The Bakers have not charged us the full going rate for their cottage either. We do all we can to keep costs down, but Barry does feel that after working all day on site the team

shouldn't have to cook at night and should have their own room to sleep and decompress in.

This year Kirsty Grant has loaned the use of her house again. The plan is to excavate the strange mound on path to Port du Moulin behind L'Ecluse, the Bronze Age settlement north of the Mill and a few boggy areas near springs. Archaeology is not cheap, there are lots of costs that most people are unaware of, but the team's findings since they have been coming to Sark are invaluable. Do help if you can with a donation by contacting our treasurer Wendy Kiernan by email at [treasurer@socsercq.sark.gg](mailto:treasurer@socsercq.sark.gg)

## **Do You Have Any Old Pictures of Sark? by Sue Daly**

I'm doing research for a new book on Sark's history based around old photographs of the island. I'm looking for images of interesting places taken before 1960. Pictures that include people, such as this one, would be lovely. I can scan glass lantern slides and large format negatives. If you have images that I could include, preferably originals rather than photocopies, please do email me at [suedalysark@icloud.com](mailto:suedalysark@icloud.com)

