

LA SOCIÉTÉ SERCQUAISE

SUMMER 2010 NEWSLETTER

It is hoped that news of the Society's expanding activities will compensate for the autumnal lateness of the newsletter. Members can follow some of the events on our website, www.socsercq.sark.gg, announced at the March AGM. For this we owe thanks to Sue Daly, who also handles News for the Sark Tourism website. This is very much work in progress: some sections are quite sophisticated, others need filling out. Suggestions and contributions can be sent to Sue (sue@suedalyproductions.com.)

The **Barn Dance** planned for 17 April was postponed because of the volcanic ash cloud. The event is re-scheduled for **Friday 1 October 7pm** in the Island Hall. The musicians are Ken Lees, who produced our Sark Voices CD, keyboard and banjo, folk-singer Susan Lees, Jim Bainbridge, three times Scottish accordion champion, and Steve Roud, caller. There will be a mix of Sark, other CI and British songs/dances.

'Sark Voices' is selling steadily. It was featured on BBC's Late Night Junction and was used (with generous credits) on a Jersey National Trust DVD about making 'nièr beurre' (apple butter).

Exhibitions in our HQ

The main summer exhibition has been of objects and documents (1940-1945) relating to the Occupation and Liberation. Smaller displays include Sark's Serpentine Balls, Miners at the Barracks in 1840 (a narrative painting commissioned by David Synnott), Meteorology records and graphs, and the Dark Skies Island project (more below).

Coastal biology

This year we have helped to fund identification rings used by Paul and Catherine Veron on Sark seabirds. Catherine's Report of Seabird Ringing in Sark, dated 7 June, is posted on the website.

From 19 June to 3 July Sark's sponges were the subject of intensive study by a diving group from Ulster Museum, joined by Sue Daly. This is a neglected area of marine life where fundamental discoveries are still being made, as Professor Bernard Picton explained in his talk. We now have a list of Sark sponges, which may include some new species.

21 June Jean-Luc Solandt of the Marine Conservation Society spoke on Your Seas Your Voice campaign for marine protection areas and how

they might work in Sark. Next day he met the Fisheries Committee and a number of local fishermen.

Archaeology

10-24 July. Excavation on the 'Gaudinerie fields' (north of the Methodist Chapel) was the sixth by Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe. His familiar team this year included Eugene Baker and Andrew Prevel. The dig continued exploration of the curious 'terrace' uncovered last year. On the last day, about thirty of us visited the site to hear Barry talk about this puzzling, 'constructed place' dotted with standing stones. People did not live there; they might have been buried there, but Sark's acidic soil has dissolved any remains. Use of the place came to an end suddenly, around 2000 BC, when rubble was mounded over the area, to the top of the standing stones, and hundreds of large, head-sized boulders worn by the sea were carried up from the beach and used to seal the site. Excavation through the field bank showed, on top of all that, the soil formed subsequently, and the *fossee* constructed in the 1560s ...up to the modern vegetation.

Some earthenware found in the excavation is apparently of a Jersey type associated with the spread of copper technology. There are also beads of soft green Sark serpentine, carefully drilled through. Best of all is this perfect specimen of a stone axe, made of the dark dolerite found only on the Eperquerie, where Barry is sure there was an 'axe factory'.

Dark Skies

In April Glasgow astronomer Steve Owen stayed for a week, carefully calibrating the darkness of Sark's skies and talking to people about the Dark Skies Project. Members have been enthused by the idea that Sark should become the world's first Dark Skies Island. Thanks largely to hard work by Jo Birch in pursuing and publicising the matter, the procedure to achieve this prestigious recognition is well under way. In May lighting engineer Jim Patterson stayed for 5 days to make a meticulous survey of external lighting fixtures. His comprehensive Lighting Plan for the Island together with the Application itself, together with supporting evidence and letters, have been completed and will be presented in Hungary on 3rd September. Further support has come with the revival of a broadly-based Astronomy Group. There are several good telescopes on the island and an inaugural meeting at the Hall, called by Jeremy LaTrobe-Bateman, was attended by over 30. We are exploring the feasibility of adapting the top of the Mill as an observatory. Finally, from 10-13 September three independent scientists from the project will verify Steve's audit and give a talk to the public.

There is widespread enthusiasm for the status, which is likely to benefit Sark in many ways. The professional work costs money – roughly £5250. To date, over £2000 has been raised. Please send contributions to the

Natwest Bank, sort code 60-09-20, account number 74012363 or by cheque to us.

Publications by La Société Sercquaise

St Magloire, Patron Saint of Sark, a pamphlet written and illustrated by Martin Remphry. £2.00

The following are also in print:

The Gouliot Caves, (in conjunction with La Société Guernesiaise) £2.00

The Ferns of Sark, by Susan Synnott £3.00

Sark Prisons £2.00

Sark's Windmill 1571, by Richard Axton £1.00

CD *Sark Voices*, (traditional songs from BBC Archive, produced by Ken Lees) £10.00 inc. postage

You can order any of these by sending a cheque to La Société Sercquaise, Visitor Centre, Sark GY9 0SA, adding £1.00 for postage in the case of pamphlets.

Richard Axton & Jo Birch