

Grateful Remembrance

This year the Society has lost two generous supporters of long standing. Dennis Hurden's death early in the year was commemorated at St Peter's and family scattered his ashes on l'Eperquerie. Among the many good things Dennis did for Sark's education, shipping, music and theatre, was his work with Malcolm Robson in creating the first Cadastre – an achievement that is daily useful and which forms the basis of our Digimap projects. Dennis's gifts to La Société include his model cider

press and his collection of rare Lloyd Levy postcards. As tenant of La Tour he had a special interest in the Eperquerie and its military history. A magnanimous donation by Antony Hurden in his father's memory enabled us to complete repairs to the granite half tower ('mantlet') and, in addition, to commissioning the bronze sundial-topograph that was installed on the target wall on Midsummer Eve in Dennis's memory.

Jenny Allen, who died in Guernsey in June, lived many years in Sark. Older members will recall her vegetarian restaurant at L'Ecluse, before she and Pat Webb moved La Petite Douaire. In Guernsey she maintained a lively interest in all aspects of Sark life. Two years ago, before she moved into a retirement home, she gave us her Sark memorabilia - including books, pictures and cartoons, and her father, Seneschal Basil Allen's copy of The Book of Sark. Jenny's cousins – four sisters –

were reunited recently in Sark. After scattering her ashes at Tintageu they spent two mornings at our Room, absorbed in the two giant scrap books begun by her father and also bequeathed to the Society by Jenny.

We remember these old friends sadly, but with much gratitude.



The Heritage Room

The room has never looked better or more crowded with interest. Many people loaned tools, vessels and photographs for the exhibition on Sark Farming. It is beautifully put together, largely by Jenny Baker, to coincide with the meeting in Guernsey of the World Association of Guernsey Dairy Farmers, fifty of whom visited on 2nd July. Since the fine weather we have had record numbers of visitors. This is thanks to the enthusiasm of the guardians in opening 11-1 every week day.

In addition to the Weather and Archaeology displays, there are Conservation projects and an outdoor pinboard fixed on the barn scaffolding. The various maps on display have been joined recently by a unique donation: a relief map of Sark, of beaten copper in the form of an oval shield. It has been given by Mr and Mrs Ron Hudspeth and was made by Charles Tebbutt in 1978.

A Victorian stereoscope made in wood was donated by John and Sheila Hepburn. The Society already had a small collection of stereo cards by the photographer Thomas Singleton, donated by David Synnott. The scope enables 3-D viewing of Sark scenes from the 1860s – one shows sailboats unloading at Creux Harbour the year before it was rebuilt. The Hepburns have a collection of glass lantern slides of Sark which John has enhanced digitally for the Society. They returned to Sark in June specially to attend the Lantern Show arranged by Amanda Petrie and presented by Sue Daly at the Hall on 10th July. The show was enthusiastically attended and a collection for restoration projects raised over £200. Using Digimap, Jane Norwich has prepared the new official Sark road map and a footpath map for the next print run of the 'ordnance survey' map due out this winter. Many thanks to Ray Smith for generously upgrading our Wi-fi facility.

Archaeology

Sir Barry's archaeology team from the Oxford Institute visited from 8th to 22nd June. It was their tenth summer in Sark and a very productive one. They were joined on a daily basis by visiting experts and by Andrew Prevel. By fielding an average team of eight they were able to move 60 cubic metres (tons) of soil - an astonishing figure if you consider how much of that dirt is scraped with tiny trowels.

Excavation was made at two sites. Two large trenches were opened on the Bronze and Iron Age site in Edric Baker's Tanquerel fields near the mill (this is the where the Sark Hoard was found in 1719). Since 2005 the team has been revealing an area occupied from around BC 1400 for a 1000 years or so. Additionally, at the Seigneurie, a trial trench

2x2m was dug at the south end of the great wall ('Peronnerie'), generally supposed to be medieval but certainly reshaped in the 18th or 19th centuries.

Before the final packing up, Sir Barry spoke on the prehistoric site to a rapt audience of over 60 people. He explained how Sark's post-glacial soil (head and loess) had formed and how the activities of the people occupying the land are printed in their pits and rubbish. This year's excavations have revealed the extent of occupation, bounded to the north by an impressive, curving double ditch, evidence of a fence, and in the south by an area trampled by domestic animals. Among the small finds are five more Iron Age coins and, from the Middle Bronze period, three amber beads. These are chunky, dark in colour and probably of Jutland amber. They are high status ornaments and it is apparently very rare to find them where people lived, rather in a burial site. Hundreds of potsherds were collected from both trenches and Société members helped to scrub them in the yard at the Visitor Centre. Every surface of the Room seemed to be covered with plastic bags of prehistoric earthenware. Somehow, in a way we have come to expect from Emma Durham, all was meticulously labelled and boxed by the evening before departure. It's a good thing we shall quite soon be able to house all these imperishables in the cider barn Annexe.

The metal and amber finds have been taken to Oxford for X-ray and stabilization and will be returned to our display in the autumn. Your Council agreed to pay for cost of lab treatment and also for radio carbon dating of two charcoal samples.

The finds, together with artefacts found in Victorian times and sent to Guernsey Museum, are enabling Sir Barry to piece together a narrative of Sark's prehistory. In his talk he sketched out a scene of a grain-growing, animal-keeping, copper-casting people, living peaceably on Sark's highest land for a couple of millennia. Habitation then moved down to the valley head around the Manoir, where Roman pottery has been found. The abandoned upland site became a place to visit and make offerings, a place of ancestors and ritual.

A crudely cast copper axe, found in Little Sark in the 19th century and now in Guernsey Museum, raises again the possibility that Sark copper was extracted in prehistoric times. The axe has been taken to Oxford for analysis of its copper profile, together with some ore, collected at Le Pot by Jeremy, for reduction to metal. Results are awaited with keen interest!

This year's archaeology has been sponsored by generous residents. La Société owes warm thanks to them as well as to the distinguished professionals who are surely and steadily putting Sark onto the map of European archaeology. We had some good coverage in the local press and TV. The story has a long way to run.

Conservation work on l'Eperquerie

Work of restoring the half-round tower was completed by the beginning of June. Volunteers hauled away the scaffold poles and boards and tidied the site. The heather (and gorse!) are rejuvenated in the area. A brief interlude of sunshine at the solstice allowed Jeremy to cement the bronze dial on the target wall, in preparation for the gathering on 24th June (old Midsummer Night). Just before 6pm, figures appeared on the horizon, making their way along the old paths, some following the new path round the foot of the Great Wall. Our mason, Dick Wilson, carried a half-round tower cake, made and iced by Helen Plummer and exactly 'pointed' by Dick.

Champagne was provided by Antony and Karen Hurden. Sweet music floated by from Peter Byrne, perched on a rock with his guitar. Richard thanked Jeremy as the driving force, Phil Godwin and his crew, especially Dick, for the repair work, the many people who contributed financially or by hard labour, and the Hurden family for their decisive support. He read Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 ('Not marble nor the gilded monuments of princes'). We drank to Dennis's memory and cut the cake. A few misty clouds cleared and the sun cast a sharp shadow on the dial.

Restoration of the Cider Barn

The tops of the stone walls have been rebuilt using lime mortar and newly-framed roof timbers, pitched on re-used telegraph pole beams, are ready to receive grey corrugated steel sheeting. Progress has been steady since May, when the scaffolding and shrouding - delayed by foul weather - were completed. Enclosing the building has kept down dust and disturbance and has allowed us to work in all weathers. As it turned out there has been little rain, but the cover has been useful in preventing direct sun from drying the lime mortar too quickly. Andrew Prevel



has rebuilt the walls and gables, with me as his apprentice and general labourer. Jeremy LaTrobe-Bateman made the roof trusses and he and Andrew put up the frame in two days. Jeremy is now turning his attention to hardwood doors and windows. There is still a lot to do, of course, both inside and out. Forming a dry and level floor will be a challenge, but the sheer slog of digging out concrete and dung is enlivened by discoveries of archaeological interest, notably, cobbles and a wooden barrel drainage sump: these are being excavated and photographed.

We have had tremendous help from the community: Phil Godwin has given us free use of his scaffolding, so that we pay Formula of Guernsey only for the work of erection and shrouding. Dave Melling has carted away rubbish and has found us unused greenheart timber for lintels. Sark Electricity Co salvaged two telephone poles long enough for cross beams. Simon Couldridge gave us some fine building stone.



The Way Ahead

Looking ahead, we have been promised a log-burning stove and also state-of-the-art electrical light fittings. A volunteer has offered to install the electrical wiring and another to connect up a water supply. Members are already planning a landscaped herb garden.

We have had some good publicity in Sark Life and Sark Scribe, on Channel TV - thanks to Sue Daly - and in the Le Gris Ventre (St Ouen's parish magazine) - thanks to Jan Guy and Ken Syvret, the Editor.

Since the AGM, when it was reported that the Restoration Fund had reached £22,000, contributions have continued in cash and kind. We have had generous donations from the Hathaway Trust and from friends in Jersey. Gifts have ranged from thousands to coins in the can from day trippers intrigued by the poster board on site. Over £27,000 has been raised towards the target of £30,000, which I am confident of reaching - as I am of keeping the barn restoration within budget.

There is no doubt the project has been a major attraction for visitors and has raised the Society's profile. The use we propose for the barn seems to meet with widespread approval. Though we will have a weather-proof shell within a few weeks of writing this, there is much to do before we can use the barn as a museum store and workshop. We plan a storage platform (mezzanine) at the west end and a heavy workbench built over the old grain bin by the south window. Otherwise plans are fluid. It will be helpful if members would think about future use and internal fittings when they next visit the site. We want to ensure that the whole community benefits from our restoration and care of the old cider barn.

Richard Axton 20/8/13