

La Société Sercquaise

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



Summer News 2024

Shirley Carré Remembered by Jo Birch

We were sad to hear that Shirley Carré died a few weeks ago, just 5 months short of her 100th. She was a founder member of the Société and became a very enthusiastic ornithologist and entomologist and really loved Sark. There is one of her poems in the 2024 Sark Visitor brochure inside the front page.

A couple of personal memories from her friends: "Shirley was very Independent in all things whether it be garden or house maintenance. She was interested in everything particularly pertaining to nature. She eschewed having a television but loved company and would come down to watch Attenborough programmes and enjoyed talking with the summer visitors, making up a table of knickknacks to sell for charity outside her gate, mainly to be able to chat with passers by"

Sue Guille

"Shirley Carré became a friend of mine when both our daughters were at the Ladies' College in the 80's. We often had swims together and I thoroughly enjoyed her enthusiastic company. I remember one time we went right to the end of the Eperquerie at dusk with a picnic and, of course, sloe gin. We were waiting to hear the

Manx Shearwaters in the grassy burrows. The fog rolled in and Shirley's hearing wasn't very good but the sloe gin was delicious."

José Day

And from her daughter, Deborah who sent us this photograph:

"I've attached a photo from one of her favourite trips (to the Galapagos Islands) which sums her up - curious, adventurous, intrepid and with an unsurpassed love for the natural world."



Room Update by Jane Norwich

The new layout seems to be working well and the general refurbishment has received many compliments from residents and visitors alike.

We still have a few outstanding tasks to finish the transformation. Storage units and a new display top will go along the north wall and the central map storage drawers will be put on wheels to make the area more multi-functional.

At the close of the visitor season work on the

general catalogue will continue and the exciting work on our photograph and slide collection led by Sue Daly should lead to some entertaining evenings.

We are already looking for suggestions for exhibitions/displays/talks/events for next year, our 50th year. Ideas, no matter how small, will be gratefully received to truly celebrate this significant milestone.

Intensive course, map of Sark in Sarkese and a new discovery

With Martin back in Sark, we organized a short walk and an intensive course of the Sark Norman language, including a presentation of the SNGO map, the interactive map of Sark and its waters in Sarkese.

The map, powered by Google Earth, contains more than 700 authentic Sarkese names of various places, from fields, roads and houses to bays, cliffs, sand banks and numerous underwater rocks or features once used as fishing marks. These were collected over the past several years thanks to the last four remaining Sark Norman speakers, who joined our project in 2016, a number of semi-speakers and local fishermen, as well as via a rigorous research of ancient maps, charts and other archivalia, curated not only in Sark, but also in British and French archives.

The presentation of the map was framed as another call to interested people who would be willing to help fill remaining blanks, localize more places and clarify uncertainties. Who would

have thought that this would result in a fantastic discovery only a few days later?

One of the participants of the walk and course, Edd Stone, a local professional kayaker, offered to check and photograph places inaccessible without a boat. During the first brainstorming online session, Martin and Edd looked at one section of the eastern coast of Big Sark. We knew that near the Cathedral Cave, for which we thought we lacked a Norman name, there should be a cave, hole or a bay known in Sarkese as “l’Creû Malzár”, a name recorded at the very end of the 19th century, but not recalled in the 21st century.

Even though the word “malzár”, of unknown origin, is no longer part of the vocabulary of today’s Sarkese, in Jersey Norman it has been kept in three known uses as “malzard”, for a) cider making pot, b) family surname and c) term for the concept of the morning sun and the after-shower sun and its rays, employed among Jersey fishermen.

Having never seen the cave himself, Martin couldn’t determine either the reason for the naming, nor the place itself with absolute certainty. Edd Stone however cracked the problem as indeed the most notable sight in the cave is a ray of the sun’s light which enters the cave from a window in its ceiling, seen below.

This means that the authentic Sarkese name of the Cathedral Cave has been finally recovered and confirmed as “l’Creû Malzár”, which translates into English either as “the Cave of the Morning Sun” or “the After-Shower Sun’s Ray Cave”.

We hope that more interesting confirmations and discoveries will be found with the help of volunteers, so the SNGO map may be finally made accessible to all. Anyone interested, in helping is most welcome to join our group and anyone interested in learning the Sark Norman language, be it for simple phrases, proper pronunciation of local place names, or deeper understanding of the grammar, there are online Sarkese classes, for beginners every Tuesday at 7pm (Sark time) via Teams. Learn more at www.bonjhur.net or contact Martin directly.



Sarkese spoken in front of Their Majesties the King and the Queen



On Tuesday 16th July, during the official visit of Their Majesties the King and the Queen to Guernsey, Sarkese, the ancient Norman tongue of the Island of Sark was spoken (or actually sung) to Her Majesty Queen Camilla, perhaps for the very first time in front of a member of the Royal Family, Following the ceremony during which the Seigneur pledged fealty to the hands of His Majesty King Charles III, the children of the Sark School sang Her Majesty the Sarkese version of "Happy Birthday", translated into Sark Norman by Martin for the occasion, seen to the right, as

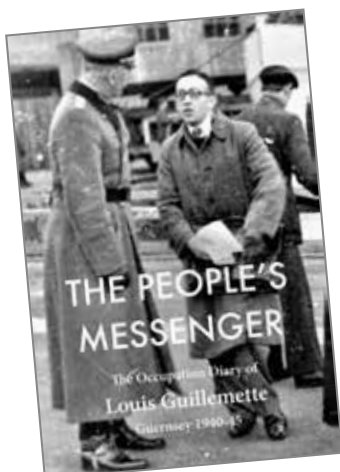
the following day was Her Majesty's birthday. The children did very well and we hope Her Majesty, who personally thanked the children, had enjoyed this little present.

After the children's performance, Martin was introduced by the Seigneur to His Majesty the King, seen to the left. They spoke briefly about Sarkese, its history and the differences between Sarkese, Modern Jèrriais and French. His Majesty requested a simple demonstration, which was given in the form of a sentence "Vùtře Majésté, ch'ê un grân plézi". Let it be recorded for posterity that His Majesty effortlessly detected several characteristic features of Sark Norman, as compared with French, in the given example.



Book Launches by Jo Birch

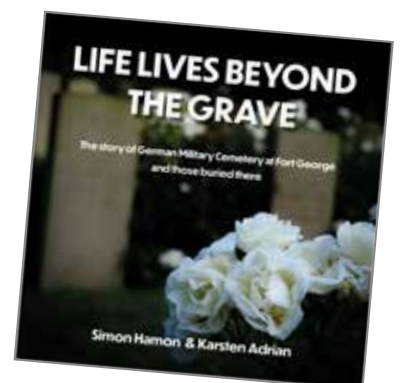
La Société Sercquaise supported two book launches this spring, the first of which was on March 29th in the evening and was attended by 30 or so people. José Day, a long time member from Guernsey, had published the Occupation diaries of her father, Louis Guillemette. He was the secretary of the Controlling Committee of the Guernsey leaders and was also the main interlocutor between them and the German Civil Administration. This involved often tense negotiations regarding all aspects of civilian life – food, housing, fuel, deportations etc. Louis' diary is a fascinating and meticulous account



of those years and is entitled *The People's Messenger*.

The second event was on May 11th and took the form of a talk by Simon Hamon who, together with Karsten Adrian, had written a book entitled *Life Lives Beyond the Grave*. This tells the story of the 111 German servicemen who were buried in Fort George Military Cemetery on Guernsey between 1940 and 1943. Simon's talk was extremely interesting and shed new light on some of the events relating to Sark.

Both books are available in the Gallery Stores and are published by Blue Ormer publishers in Guernsey.



Creative Sark in the Cider Barn

by Louise Smit-Hill, Wendy Falla & Amanda Petrie

During recent years, the Cider Barn has been an invaluable and delightful space for Creative Sark to hold various events, including their markets, workshops and veilles. It is a perfect size, and cosy too in winter with the wood burner. It's a treat to imbibe mince pies and mulled wine at the Creative Sark Christmas Markets, next to the warm wood stove. The next one is the last Saturday in November as usual.

During the recent Creative Sark event week, from 7th to 15th June, various events were held there. The Sark Tapestry weaving had an outing – rare in summer as most of the work is done during the winter months when there is more time. We also invited anyone who wanted to learn to have a free beginners' workshop in the Barn.

Wendy Falla and other creative artists have contributed to an account of the veille on Friday 14th June:

It seemed that just as most people arrived at the Cider Barn, the deluge started. It was a friendly crush of greetings, eating, drinking and finding seats near friends. The poetry reading began with Linda Williams reading Pam Ayres' 'I wish

I'd looked after my Teeth'.

Inspired by Amanda knitting, Louise sketching and Betty crocheting, Juliette Hart shared her poem about Jersey during the Occupation 'Make do and Mend', followed by her sonnet 'The Footling Path' and ended with a poem about living with chronic disease 'Diagnosis Diabetes Type 1'. Joan McGavin read her recently written poem, 'First Arrival on Sark', the drama of the rocks, the cliffs and the 'toast rack bus'. Wendy Falla read 'The Homecoming' inspired by visits to her late great-aunt who lived on Sark, and also 'Definition of the Species', an amusing poem on how to identify a poet. Julian Stannard read 'The Octopus', inspired by his previous visits to Sark and with reference to Victor Hugo, and also 'Cicadas' - reflections on holidays in Umbria.

Viviane and her husband, who attended with their children sang love songs for each other, one in Chinese and one in German, both were very beautiful and highlights the wonderful diversity of Sark's population and culture.

A splendid evening was had by all. We are most grateful to Société Sercquaise for the use of the Barn.



Nature Protection *by Carol Cragoe*

La Société prepared a report for the Environment Committee of Chief Pleas, submitted at the Midsummer meeting in July, on an initial review of nature protection on Sark. Sark has an extraordinarily diverse range of natural habitats, but despite this richness, there is only one officially protected area: the Ramsar site, which includes the Gouliot cave system and the lower parts of the Gouliot headland. The natural beauty of Sark is greatly appreciated by residents, and its landscapes and seascapes are some of the main drivers of tourism to the island.

Protecting the natural environment is also important in the defence against climate change, and La Société has been undertaking some preliminary studies to see if there is an opportunity for Sark to be part of the global “30 x 30” initiative which aims to protect and effectively manage 30% of land and marine areas for nature by 2030.

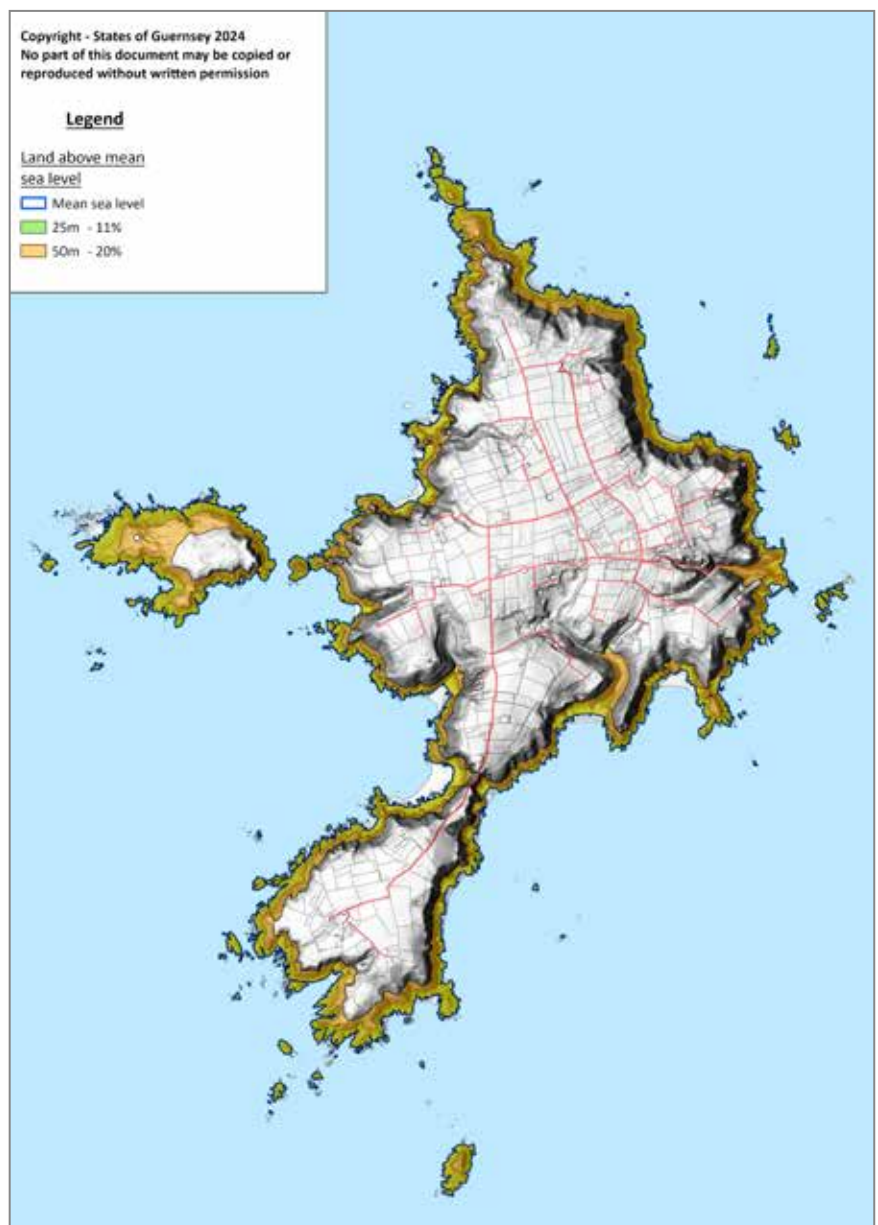
Julia Henney from Guernsey has been updating the habitat survey of Sark first undertaken in 2013, and this will form an important baseline for understanding key areas on the island. We also had a visit from Catherine Wensink from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, of which Société Sercquaise is an associate organisation, who has been involved in 30 x 30 initiatives elsewhere.

La Société is now proposing to undertake further study and consultation to understand the key areas that might be suitable for nature protection. It aims to do this by collating its data-sets and collective knowledge about the island to underpin any future decisions or conversations on Sark.

Jane Norwich, working with States Digimap in Guernsey, produced a map showing that 11% of Sark’s landmass lies below 25m, and

20% is at or below 50m. This is also where many of the most sensitive habitats are located, and with a few notable exceptions such as the harbour, these areas are also generally outside of the developed – or indeed developable – parts of the island because the gradients are too steep. There are also areas above 50m that are too steep to be useable by humans, but which are good habitats. This suggests that it would be possible to reach or exceed the 30% target for nature conservation on land simply by looking at the most sensitive habitats around the cliffs and coasts. La Société is now proposing to undertake further study and consultation to understand the key areas that might be suitable for nature protection.

Map produced by Digimap as prepared for Chief Pleas



Sark Archaeology 2024 by Sir Barry Cunliffe

This year, in the second two weeks of May, we excavated at two sites, the mound at L'Ecluse and the field south of La Vaurocque.

Last year, at L'Ecluse, we established that the prominent mound, visible in a patch of woodland just north of the path to Port du Moulin, was a natural outcrop, which had been carefully 'sculpted' from a linear dyke of intruded dolerite to create a regular oval mound rising to a height of 2 m above the surrounding land. The 'sculpting' had been done by cutting away the country rock (gneiss) to expose the upstanding black dolerite. This year we examined the north end of the mound (seen below and to the right) and were able to show that here the dolerite had been dug away to a depth of 1.3 m to form the curved northern end of the structure. Presumably the southern end was formed in the same way. This we hope to test next year. The overall effect of the 'sculpting' must have been dramatic – creating a sombre black mass rising above the yellowish soil of the surroundings. Another intriguing find this year was that a quantity of broken up white quartz had been thrown on the mound quite possibly with the intention of giving a sparkling appearance in the sun! The use of quartzite to enhance the appearance of ritual is often found in the Atlantic zone.

In a second trench, excavated on the east side of the structure, we were able to add to last year's evidence. Here a trench had been cut into the solid dolerite and a timber structure built nearby. Scraps of prehistoric pottery and worked flints have been recovered, suggesting a prehistoric date for all this activity, but we are awaiting a radiocarbon date to give us a more precise chronology. There is clearly much more to learn of this fascinating structure not least the function and date of a pit, the edge of which we found last year, cut into the centre. We look forward to what next year's excavation will produce.

The second site we examined was in the north end of the field to the south of La Vaurocque.



In the early seventeenth century very large blocks of stone were found here and moved, some for use in nearby buildings and some for incorporation into the field bank on the south side of Mill Lane where they can still be seen. Local antiquaries believed that the stones came from a megalithic tomb, and this is, indeed, the most likely explanation, but where was it? The LiDAR survey of Sark, which allows contours to be plotted at very close intervals, hinted that there may have been a long mound predating the construction of the northern field bank. To test this three trenches were dug but no trace of a long mound was found. What was discovered, close to the gate, was an intrusion of igneous rock (of a type to be identified) some part of which had been quarried, seen to the left. All three trenches produced evidence of activity in the prehistoric period in the form of gullies and a pit. The pottery from these features suggests a late Iron Age date, a period not previously identified on Sark. So the question of the position of the supposed destroyed megalith still remains but the prehistory of Sark



has gained another chapter. We hope to return again next year.

The excavation team is very grateful to William and Annabel Raymond (L'Ecluse) and John Donnelly (La Vaurocque) for giving permission to excavate on their land and for their kind hospitality, and to the Société Sercquaise. for all the support and generosity we have received from their members.

Asian Hornet Update *by Jo Birch*

Following an island-wide letter in March to all households appealing for trappers to sign up to the Spring Queening trapping programme, we managed to recruit about 50 volunteers. About 70 traps were set up in early spring and a total of 30 queens were caught. This means 30 fewer nests to be dealt with later this summer.

Fourteen wicking stations acting as an early warning system are being managed by volunteers in strategic locations around Sark. With that in mind, the Guernsey Asian Hornet Team gave a training session in Sark to about 10 volunteers to learn the rudiments of nest tracking. With the first alarm being raised only days later, on a wicking station down at la Forge, the Sark trackers are already searching for nests. After feeding, the hornets will commonly return to their nests in a straight line, so the bait station will be moved along in that direction.

We are now asking the public to "Track, not Trap" in an effort to find any nests that have been established. So again, reporting a hornet sighting is really important. So far excellent sight lines have been established up on Derrible headland and there is clearly a nest somewhere up above Creux Derrible, obviously not the easiest of environments to search. Other nests lie possibly towards les Laches and also in the centre of the Island in the area of the Old Island Hall.

It is still early for large nests to have been built up, but later they should be easier to locate because of their increased hornet numbers. Any hornets that are seen and tracked now will help with their eventual removal. We are very grateful for keen-eyed trackers and spotters and ask that any hornets seen are reported to Peter Cunneen, 07781 121714 or Jo Birch, 07781 467920.

Photographic archive donations by Sue Daly

Our photographic archives received a wonderful boost this spring when Mrs Nellie Le Feuvre very generously gifted us a wonderful collection of over 170 Victorian photographic prints. Most were taken by the Guernsey photographer Thomas Singleton and others are likely to have been taken by the Jersey photographer Philip Godfray. The images are albumen prints, also called albumen silver prints, the first commercial method of creating photographic prints on a paper base using egg whites. While a few of the images are duplicates which we have been selling on Nellie's behalf, 151 of them are new to our collection. They feature buildings, Creux Harbour and Sark's lanes, caves and coast and offer a wonderful glimpse into life on Sark at the end of the 19th century.



Creux Harbour pre 1893 by Thomas Singleton

We have also had a kind donation from David Synnott of some more LL postcards. These were produced at the end of 19th century and have become highly collectable. Of the 62 images in the series featuring Sark we have 55 in our collection. (Do let us know if you see any of these numbers for sale; 26,45,52,56,57,61 and 62. It would be lovely to have a complete set.) We're storing our Victorian photographic prints and LL postcards very carefully which means they are out of sight, but I have photographed them all and we will be working on a method of having copies of these fascinating images accessible next year.



Above - A rural scene on an LL postcard

Below - The Bel Air Hotel that once stood at the top of Harbour Hill



Water Resources, a work in progress by Jane Norwich

In the first few months of La Société, almost 50 years ago, the Geology Group started to study the fresh water supply on Sark and they also looked at the weather patterns. Members had concerns about the water levels and the rapidly increasing number of boreholes being put in across the island.

Some 30 years on, in 2004, Ray Smith, with the British Geological Survey, prepared a very detailed report looking at water quantity and the potential for contamination of water by natural elements, such as copper and manganese, emanating from the rocks in Sark. Man-made contamination was also considered and it was recommended that close monitoring over the long term could detect challenges to the quality and quantity of water available on the island. The report stated clearly that, although groundwater replenishment (recharge) through rainfall seemed adequate, there were areas where borehole water supplies were stressed, particularly in the most densely populated areas of the island.

The majority of water which is used on Sark for all purposes such as drinking, cooking, personal hygiene, effluent, agriculture etc is derived from boreholes. The water in boreholes is replaced by part of the annual rainfall which permeates the soil mainly during the winter months. Other sources of water are roof run-off, wells and springs, also replenished by rainfall.

The visit of the Prince's Foundation in May 2023 promoted discussion regarding the future economic development of Sark in terms of increasing the population and proposals include the suggestion of a significant increase in numbers of houses and residents.

Whilst the potential positive and negative social and economic changes which might occur as a result of relatively large-scale changes versus the status quo have been the subject of discussion, it would appear that consideration of sufficient and

clean water supplies with which to support such development has been lacking.

In response to the report by the Princes Foundation the Policy and Performance Committee asked La Société for advice on how much water we have and what size population can be supported with the supply that we have. Work resulted in a report with propositions to Easter Chief Pleas. In May Dr Derek Clarke visited Sark and consulted the significant records we hold on geology, wells, weather, population etc, as well as meeting several residents with local knowledge.

The resulting report is now available on the Chief Pleas website. (It can be found on the home page at www.sarkgov.co.uk under the heading 'Latest News General'.) It gives a list of key findings and recommendations for Chief Pleas and the residents of Sark. This includes La Société starting up the well dipping measurements again.

A report to Michaelmas Chief Pleas on Dr Clarke's work is expected.

"When the well is dry, we know the worth of water." Benjamin Franklin

Below - The 'Monks' Well' by the Seigneurie pond photographed in the mid 1930s.



Pollinator Project Update by Lynda Higgins

Société Sercquaise has been taking part in the research for the Pollinator Project again this year. This will be the fifth year of this exciting seven-year project. Insect data has been gathered from Charles Maitland's garden and also from the meadow site at Le Vallon d'Or. The research is being carried out in conjunction with Bristol University.

Dr Miranda Bane visited Sark last week to carry out a bee survey with Alex Hayward and research assistants Taliesin Valencia and Lauren to check on the malaise traps. They returned this week to complete the bee study for this year. By taking DNA samples from female buff-tailed bumble bees around the Island, they are able to ascertain whether they are closely related (sisters or cousins) or not related. This enables them to estimate the number of colonies and hence the population of buff-tailed bumble bees in Sark.

Bat data has also been collected with the help of the British Trust for Ornithology, to provide another layer of data and provide information concerning the health of our insect life in Sark. This year a full data set from 9th July to 6th August was collected. Bearing in mind that each common pipistrelle will eat an average of 3,000 insects each night, there is a direct



correlation between the number of insects and bat populations.

Sad News

La Société Sercquaise was sad to learn that Barry Wells who co-founded the Pollinator Project sadly passed away on 29th July 2024. The late Barry Wells visited Sark on many occasions and gave a talk to the Sark Watch Group 15th October 2021, followed by an evening talk to Société Sercquaise members. Barry's slow-motion photography mesmerised the children and inspired them to create their own Pollinator Patch at Sark School. Barry was an inspiration to us all and will be sadly missed. Our condolences go to his wife Jayne and all his family and friends.

Marine Biology by Sue Daly

One of the wonderful things about watching wildlife is that every now and then something unusual catches your eye among the familiar species. This is exactly what happened to me in October last year when I was diving at one of my favourite spots off the west coast. There, among the common Cuckoo Wrasse, Rock Cooks and Goldsinny Wrasse was a Comber *Serranus cabrilla*, a fish normally seen in the eastern Atlantic and south-western Indian Ocean that appears to be moving north. Divers and fishermen have been seeing them in the Channel Islands for the last three years. When I saw one, very unusually

for me, I didn't have a camera with me so I was delighted to see one at Pavlaison this August when I did have the means to photograph it. A reminder of the changes taking place in the natural world but lovely to see something new.



Ornithology - Return of the Kittiwake? by Lynda Higgins

After a break of almost 80 years, are kittiwakes about to make a comeback in Sark? The Black-legged Kittiwake formerly bred in Sark, but the last record was 30/40 pairs on the west face of Moie du Mouton, in Spring 1946.

At least five adult pairs displaying courtship behaviour and carrying nesting materials were seen on rocks at Les Burons on Friday 24th May, following a round the Island bird survey with Andy Cook and Sue Daly.



1958). All eggs are usually laid by 10th June. Incubation takes 27 days suggesting that any young would have hatched by 6th July. A further survey carried out on Sunday 30th June showed that the four pairs of Kittiwakes were still in place and a photograph, seen above and taken by Pierre Ehmann, showed what looked like one egg with the pair on the furthest left of the ledge.

Furthermore, behaviour changes once an egg is laid and the adults set up a shift routine where one adult stays on the nest and the other goes off to find food. The fact that there is only one adult on the second nest suggested that a second egg may also have been laid. However, reports from Sue Daly a week later were that the Kittiwakes had left the site which means that the eggs failed to hatch, or were predated.

We await the return of the Kittiwakes next year, because this would be a very good news story for Sark, after almost 80 years. It would also make us the most southerly breeding site for Kittiwakes in the British Isles.

In terms of timing their arrival was very late, indicating that this may have been their first breeding attempt. Over the next week at least four pairs made attempts to build nests. At least two substantial nests were built, but two pairs had very poor nests. The four pairs were accompanied by at least ten non-breeding adults and juveniles, seen to the right.

Research confirms that Kittiwakes that arrive at their breeding grounds late are only likely to lay one egg and nests with only one egg have only a 21% chance of success (Coulson & White,

