



COMMUNIQUÉ

The Newsletter of **LA SOCIÉTÉ GUERNESIAISE**

Spring Issue 2012 No.77

Guernsey's Local Research, Natural History and Conservation Society

AGM

The AGM will be held at La Trelade Hotel, St Martin, on Wednesday 21 March, beginning at 7.30pm for the purpose of transacting the following business:

- (a) To hear the report of the President, Mr Rodney Collenette;
- (b) To receive the annual statement of accounts.
- (c) To elect the officers and members of the Council. Ms. Judith Keen will be retiring as Ordinary Council Member and is willing to stand again. There are five vacancies for Ordinary Council members. Nominations for the five vacancies, supported by a seconder, should be sent to the Secretary to reach her by Tuesday 6 March.
- (d) To appoint auditors.
- (e) To consider any other matters or propositions affecting La Société. Any member who wishes to make a proposal at the GM should submit it in writing, supported by a seconder, to the Secretary to reach her by Thursday 1 March.
- (f) To receive the annual report and accounts from Guernsey Environmental Services Limited.

A full agenda together with the minutes of the last meeting and a copy of the 2010 accounts will be available to all members who attend the AGM. Details of nominations for members of Council and all proposals for discussion will be displayed on the noticeboard at Candie from Tuesday 6 March.

After a short break Council member Mike Deane will show a selection from the extensive archive of magic lantern slides.

Diary Dates

Thursday 9 February at 8.00pm at Candie: Richard Hocart will speak about "The Open Fields of St Martin's and their disappearance, 1100 – 1800".

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2012 will be held at the same rate, that is:

- Local single - £22
- Local double/family - £30
- Overseas (single, double or family) - £20
- Students - £5
- Corporate - £200
- Single Life - £300
- Double Life - £400

Thank you to so many members who have switched to Direct Debit. There should be fewer problems in the future. **Those who pay by cheque should please note that subscriptions were due on 1 January.**

French Trip 2012

Charles David will organise a trip to the Cotentin in June. The proposed dates are from Wednesday evening 6th or Thursday morning 7th returning on Sunday 10th June. We will stay in Portbail, Carteret, or somewhere closer to Cap de la Hague. The cost will probably be between £300-£400 depending on the number of people going. We will look at natural history, habitats, antiquities, landscape and other features of interest. Numbers will be limited so if you want to come please contact Charles David by mid-February c david@guernsey.net. Tel: 238978.

Chouet Tearoom

The loss of Les Sablons as our information centre was a great disappointment, but we have been very fortunate in that the proprietor of the Tearoom has allowed us to hang our information boards in the premises, and also the manageress has agreed to sell our publications. The Tearoom is closed at the moment but we would encourage members to support them in order to show our appreciation of the service they are providing at no cost to ourselves.

Rodney Collenette

Archaeology

During the summer and autumn of last year there were archaeological excavations throughout the Guernsey Bailiwick and there are descriptions of these in the autumn Communiqué. The University of Durham's Herm Project finished this year and we await the published report with interest. One of Professor Chris Scarre's aims for the final season was to expose and investigate a prehistoric tomb which has been covered in thick vegetation for many years. This is known as Tomb 13 in TD Kendrick's 'The Archaeology of the Channel Islands' and is located just a few metres to the west of the well-known Robert's Cross dolmen. It was excavated by Lukis in 1842 who made a plan showing that it was a small passage grave, very similar to its neighbour. He recovered human bones, marine shells and pottery, including a fine Neolithic bowl now on display at the Guernsey Museum. Professor Scarre identified the backfill from Lukis excavations and was able to see that, although the tomb has collapsed, the entire structure has survived. As a consequence of the 2011 project the remains of this tomb are once again exposed and can be visited. Several of the monuments excavated during the Project have been left more visible than before and the Herm management team intend to keep them clear of vegetation so a visit is well worth while.



The two Neolithic tombs at Robert's Cross on Herm Common. The plans were made by Lukis in 1842 while the photos are of the recent excavations. The upper images are of the recently exposed tomb 13 and the lower ones of the more complete tomb 12.

We continued to excavate in the fields west of the airport well into December when we were finally halted by the rising water table. Towards the end of the year there was a geophysical survey of this area and the inside of the airport perimeter, this was funded by the Airport authorities and carried out by Southampton University. Three techniques were employed: magnetometry (which detects variations in the magnetic orientation of the soil, this is particularly good for locating buried areas of burned, ditches and pits); electrical resistivity (which measures the electrical conductivity of buried soils, this will alter according to moisture levels and so can detect walls, tracks, ditches etc); ground penetrating radar (which uses radar pulses to image the subsurface and can detect similar archaeological features to the other techniques, but has the advantage of working to a greater depth). The combination of the different techniques will hopefully build a picture of the areas of the site with greatest archaeological potential and the hope is that we will have the opportunity to investigate some of these.

The Archaeology Section meets most Wednesday mornings and early Thursday evenings when we carry out fieldwork and processing of finds. If you would like to come along please contact the Section Secretary for further details.

Tanya Walls

Astronomy

2011 was an eventful year for the Astronomy Section. We started the year knowing that maintenance work was necessary on both our telescope building's sliding roof, and the supports that supported the roof once it had been removed. Both have now arrived at a successful conclusion. The roof was repaired by our own members, who are carpenters in their own right. They did this in their own valuable time.

The wooden supports were replaced with steel by Guernsey Metals. This was excellent work under the direction of the Managing Director Geoff Van Katwyk. It was paid for by La Société Guernesiaise who used their own funds, made available by a generous donation from Colin Le Conte, the Managing Director of Digimap.

We are always looking for improvements and equipment which will keep us up to date, both for ourselves and our visitors who exceeded 800 last year. Thanks to the generosity shown to us in 2011, we can look forward with confidence to 2012.

Frank Dowding

Botany

You will receive a monthly newsletter, either by post or email.

Please send a cheque to Soc. Guernesiaise Botany Section with your details to Jean and Gavin Sampson, The Ferrers, 1 Milton Gardens, Rue Cauchée, St Martin, Guernsey GY4 6NU, tel: 234430, email: gavsampson@cwgsy.net. Send your name, address, postcode and telephone number, and your email address if you wish to receive your newsletter that way.

Entomology

The Entomology Section will meet with the Botany and Nature Conservation Sections for their monthly outings in 2012. Please see these Sections for times and places.

Guernsey Conservation Volunteers

Although we are very pleased with the number of members in GCV we would always welcome more! If you would like to come along to a work party, or just find out more about the group, please contact Angela Salmon on 721163 or through the GCV website www.gcv.org.uk.

Juniors

The Junior Section will be more inter-disciplinary in 2012 with emphasis on the importance of recording.

La Société was founded for the study and recording of the natural history of the island. This developed to include all the other disciplines and the Transactions have proved over and over again to be a vital resource for anyone researching all aspects of life within the Bailiwick.

As well as a look at what we have at our headquarters, I am arranging visits to the States Archives, the Greffe and the Biological Records Centre. The first two will have to be in school holidays as neither opens at weekends.

Then, in order to get everyone out and about and looking, I'm going to concentrate on abreuvoirs. I know these have all been recorded already but the idea will be to explore the island and become familiar with bits you may not have seen before. There are at least 140 and I intend that members photograph any they find and say where they are. I am negotiating with Phil Atkinson, our webmaster, to allow us to put the pictures on the website. A sort of Abreuvor I-Spy.

Charles David has a section on the abreuvoirs on the website and Richard Hocart writes about them in his book on the Guernsey countryside. Each member (or family where there is more than one family member) will be given a copy of Richard's book as a sort of text book.

We'll still be having sessions with some of the Sections – Astronomy want to show us the sun through some device they have for example – and in early July we shall be emptying moth traps at my house.

Members will be notified shortly of a preliminary meeting at Headquarters to look at what we have there, to receive copies of the book, and to discuss other meetings. Dates will also appear on the website.

New members are always welcome.

patcosten@cwgsy.net or tel. 264500.

Pat Costen

Nature Conservation

Dr John Wilkinson, the Research and Monitoring Officer for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, is coming over for the first weekend in March to train interested individuals in surveying techniques for local amphibians and reptiles. We will be concentrating on slow worms, common frogs and newts.

The training will take place on Saturday 3 March both at Candie and in the field.

If you are interested in being involved please contact Jane Gilmour on 700024.

Ornithology

At our recent AGM thanks were recorded to, among others, Rod Ferbrache, who for nine years wrote for this newsletter. Thank you again Rod. Thanks went also to Rich and Margaret Austin who continue to co-ordinate our ringing records which are in the hundreds of thousands; Mike Bairds, who for eight years, produced a superb monthly Bird News leaflet was thanked for his work. This has been replaced by our new on-line Grapevine system which was masterminded by Guernsey-born Phil Atkinson who works for the British Trust for Ornithology, ably assisted by Mark Lawlor, Paul Hillion, Rod Ferbrache and Phil Alexander. This means that when a rare, scarce or vagrant bird is sighted, those of us who have a mobile phone are informed within minutes what the bird is and where it was seen. Many thanks go to Phil and the team for their excellent work which is encouraging our members and the general public to log on to our website.

Two highlights of our 'birding year' were the Subalpine warbler, the second record for Guernsey, which arrived in June, and the Olive-backed Pipit which was seen in October - a first for Guernsey and the Channel Islands. The former breeds in Southern Europe and winters south of the Sahara, and the latter breeds in Siberia and far North-eastern Europe and winters in South Asia. We never know what will turn up, especially after a strong weather system.

However it is important that we count not only rare species but our own native and migrant species too. Work on the B.T.O. Bird Atlas of the British Isles 2007-2011 has just been completed and we thank Phil Alexander for his work as our B.T.O. representative and those who gave their time to count all birds seen or heard in a designated area at certain times of each year.

This is a taste of what happens in our Section. If you wish to learn more please join us on the first Thursday of each month in the Frossard Lecture Theatre at Candie HQ at 8pm. We look forward to seeing you.

Nancy Ogier

Sub-alpine warbler.



Olive-backed pipit.



Family History

There will be four new faces on the Committee this year. Three members, Bryan van der Tang, Joan van der Tang and David Wylie, did not seek re-election at the recent AGM. Bryan has been co-opted back onto the Committee for just one year to enable a replacement to be found to produce the newsletter. All three were thanked for what they had done for the Section.

The fourth member not seeking re-election was the Treasurer, Marie Sillars, who had decided that having been in the post since the formation of the Section nearly 25 years ago, it was time to call it a day. Marie had also been the Editor of the Journal since taking over the role from her daughter in 2001.

Marie was thanked for all she had done for the Section over the years.

The remaining members of the Committee, Sheila Greenough, Juliette Hargetion, Maria van der Tang and myself, are continuing.

The new members are:-

Treasurer: Chris Sackett

Membership Secretary: Graeme Cox

Journal Editor: Celia Nicolle

Assistant Secretary: Mary Fuller

The Section will have been running for 25 years this April. They are celebrating this anniversary over the weekend of 30 June / 1 July.

Any family history queries should be addressed to The Family History Section, PO Box 314, St Peter Port, Guernsey GY1 3TG. All are welcome to our meetings.

Edith Le Patourel

WEA Guernsey

Full details of all courses may also be listed on the Association's web site: www.wea.org.gg.

Old mobile telephones

La Société is now able to recycle mobile phones. This initiative helps protect the environment and reduces the use of limited resources. Any money raised will be used for local conservation purposes. If you have an old phone you no longer use, you can pop it through the letterbox at Candie.

The Guernsey Botanical Trust

We hope to start the next exciting stage in our restoration soon. This will be the building of "The Orchard House", a traditional term coined by Thomas Rivers in 1850.

These types of glasshouses were generally unheated, and were filled with fruit trees in pots - dwarf vines, apricots, plums, gooseberries, peaches, cherries and figs. The roots of the trees were allowed to grow through enlarged holes into the soil of raised beds and were pruned back at the end of the season so the trees could remain in the same pots for many years.

"The Orchard House; or, The Cultivation of Fruit Trees in Pots Under Glass" by Thomas Rivers, 5th Edition, 1858.

Volunteers meet at the garden on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings throughout the year, all welcome.

NCCPG

Sat 14 April 9.00am - 12 noon NCCPG Plant Stall at Sausmarez Manor Farmers Market. There will be lots of tempting & unusual plants for sale.

Wed 18 April at 7.00 for 7.30pm at Les Cotils: Joy Larckom will give a talk on 'Oriental Vegetables & Travels in China'. Joy is responsible for introducing many oriental vegetables to our tables. Drinks beforehand. Tickets £7.50 from the Guernsey Information Centre, tel 723552.

Legacies and donations in lieu of flowers

Members are reminded that it is relatively simple to leave money to La Société in a will. All that is required is a codicil to a member's will which can be arranged by an Advocate or Solicitor. Money or property can be left for general use, or if desired for a specific purpose.

They are also reminded that donations in lieu of flowers can be made in memory of members who have died.



Environment Guernsey is the wholly owned company of La Société Guernesaise. • We manage La Société's nature reserves and undertake numerous land management contracts for various States of Guernsey Departments, the National Trust and private individuals. • We also run the Guernsey Biological Records Centre and provide an environmental consultancy service.

For all aspects of conservation advice and contracting, please contact us.

Guernsey Tobacco Factory, La Ramée, St Peter Port, Guernsey GY1 2ET
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The Dark Ages

If the Guernsey Museum were to put on one of its excellent exhibitions on the theme of 'The Dark Ages', I wonder what we should get? Perhaps Philip de Jersey could find us a coin or two, and we might even be able to have an opportunity of seeing reproductions of the few references to the Channel Islands at that time in documents. But the period between the end of the Roman Empire, whenever that actually happened in Guernsey, and the settling of Normandy by the Vikings is unnaturally blank, and such has been the impact of the name invented for the period that it has often, in the past, actually deterred us from looking for any evidence, on the assumption that, rather as night was not, until recently, illuminated by much more than candles, so it is natural that The Dark Ages should remain dark

What illumination there was has, as far as I know, been largely in the realm of religion, and by dredging meticulously through the minutiae of débris that has sunk to the seabed of history, I was able to salvage enough material to concoct a 25-page chapter in 'Channel Island Churches'. This was dominated by evidence of Celtic missionaries and occasional stones, such as that now standing outside the Vale Church, reused for a Dark Age inscription and which, like another at St. Saviours', might actually have been carved with a cross by St. Sampson himself, since his 'Vita' tells us that this was one of his favourite hobbies (rather in the nature of Murray Millard building coracles). And it is natural that any semblance of civilisation that outlived the Romans should manifest itself, one way and another, in church organisation, for it was the Church that actually maintained Roman provinces and their subdivisions or civitates as working units, bishops taking on the rôles of provincial governors.

However, for all the scrabbling around of the Historic Buildings Section of La Société, not a single piece of secular architecture from that period has been recognised, and our earliest standing buildings, like the ruined house at La Grande Maison de la Pomare in St. Pierre-du-Bois or the initial phase of La Maison de Haut at Pleinheume, which was drastically upgraded round about 1300, can hardly date from further back than the twelfth century. Yet, strangely enough, it is sometimes later buildings that can give us a few more clues as to what life was like in Mérovingian and Carolingian times. The Mérovingian kings, in various combinations, ruled France and adjoining territories roughly from the period 550 until the eighth century, and from them power passed, by 800, to Charlemagne and his descendants, the Carolingians. They, in due course, ceded Normandy to Rollo and the Norman dukes. To all of these realms, the Channel Islands were appendages, ruled, as far as we can tell, as part of the neighbouring coast of what is now France. It is natural, therefore, to assume that life carried on very much as it had always done, and the inscription on the Vale stone is in well-executed Roman script. It implies an educated man to order it, a skilled craftsman to carve it,

and enough people able to grasp its meaning to make it worthwhile doing in the first place.

In the Côtentin and Avranchin, during the Mérovingian period, it was customary to bury notables in fine coffins or sarcophagi, and later extensions to church buildings often disturbed earlier burials. Markers of one kind and another from early graves can be seen reused as material for walling in almost every Jersey church, and we have a slab engraved with a stepped cross recycled in this way close to the base of the tower at St. Saviour's in Guernsey. Another cross is built into the tower of St. Martin's. In those days one did not have to wait for protracted procedures to give you permission to disturb the faithful of previous generations and to mutilate their monuments. And amongst the disturbed burials were sometimes really early ones, from the seventh or eighth centuries. If they were of important or rich people, they were often interred in stone sarcophagi. What happened to their bones we cannot tell, but their sarcophagi were just broken up and the stone recycled as usual in the new fabric. We have known for a long time that the shelf in the north aisle of the Vale and the window sill in the west side of the tower at St. Sampson's are reused coffin lids upside-down, but we have been unable to tell their age. We can only see that they were not made of local stone.

But there is one type of stone so distinctive that, once pointed out, is easy to spot. It is known from intact examples in Normandy that it originated in the region of Carentan, on the borders of the Côtentin and Bessin, and was only used in Mérovingian times. It is a limestone consisting entirely of tiny shells, so little compacted that each shell is perfectly distinguishable. Perhaps a geological colleague will give us a scientific description of it and tell us the age of the stone. It is soft and weak and entirely useless for building, but easy and quick to use for stone coffins. In the Côtentin, it is frequently encountered in small pieces in the rubble walling of churches, but until recently had not been recognised in Guernsey. However, there is one small piece in the eastwards extension of the north aisle of St. Pierre-du-Bois church, and from this little piece of stone one can therefore demonstrate that there must already have been a cemetery on this site before the ninth century. Recently, I found, to my considerable astonishment, much larger pieces of the same stone opposite another church, but this time St. Joseph's, in La Couperderie, in the walling of a ruined building whose primary phase is constructed almost entirely of Alderney sandstone. Three large pieces of thin, shelly limestone are used as a window-sill, and other smaller pieces are incorporated in the masonry elsewhere. In this case, though the pieces are unusually large, they unfortunately tell us less, for St. Joseph's is not on an historical cemetery and there are no known early Christian sites in the locality, though one may perhaps posit a Roman 'villa' or estate with a private chapel still functioning in post-Roman times. For if these pieces came from far away, it is remarkable that they should survive in such quantity and of such size.

What this limestone does tell us, at any rate,

is the extent of shipping in the Dark Ages. Rather like the indents of fifteenth-century monumental brasses at the Vale, St. Saviour's and the Town Church, which are in Purbeck marble, taken from the Swanage area to London for the brasses to be set in, and then sent in the opposite direction to Guernsey, these sarcophagi, cut from their quarries at Carentan, must have been transported by sea to the islands. How quickly could they be brought? Presumably if death were unexpected, bodies must have been 'translated' into them from temporary burial elsewhere. Or did one order one's coffin in one's lifetime and keep it handy, just as the more lugubrious amongst us did with wooden ones in Victorian times? At all events, these fragments of stone represent a complex society capable of trading far afield, wealthy enough to purchase relatively high-status objects and probably worshipping in a church well-established enough to have become a local centre with a cemetery.

From a slightly later period, the Carolingian, there does, however, come a piece of real walling - again in a totally unexpected place. The north aisle of St. Andrew's church is clearly a fifteenth-century extension, with all the characteristics, inside and out, that one would expect of c.1460. Yet all is not as it seems. For the eastern two bays of its north wall are set on several courses of small square stones, which, for a long time I thought represented an underpinning, where the surrounding cemetery had been cut out in the nineteenth century. But visiting specialists from France disabused me. Here is genuine Carolingian stonework, the little square blocks absolutely typical of such churches as St. Jean-le-Thomas, between Avranches and Granville, which many of us in the Historic Buildings Section were privileged to see in June this year. And no-one builds any wall with the smallest stones at the bottom and much larger ones above. So the sequence here seems to be a small building, not much larger than the church recently found on Jethou, against which was built the nave and chancel of the present church at the end of the twelfth century. If the Carolingian structure was at first allowed to remain, it was at some stage mostly taken down, just the bottom of its north wall left to form a retaining wall against the slope of the cemetery, only to be reused as foundations for the new aisle we see today. Other small square blocks are to be seen scattered in the twelfth-century fabric, perhaps becoming available where the south wall of the early church had been broken through to join with the later chancel.

One is reminded of the splayed angle at the east end of Trinity Church in Jersey: what building did this have to avoid? Where are the churches for which we have documentary references before any of our existing fabric can have been built? Is the Fishermen's Chapel alongside St. Brelade's a thirteenth-century rebuild of one such structure, as St. Helier's Hermitage is of St. Helier's actual hermitage? Why have we got 500 years and more of lost buildings? Or is there much the archaeologists could already tell me that at present I know not?

John McCormack

Officers and Council Members

Officers:

President	Rodney Collenette	249021	president@societe.org.gg
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Volunteer Co ordinator Reserves	Anthony Stagg	722351	
Librarians	Jean & Gavin Sampson	234430	

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Associated Groups:

The Alderney Society & Museum	The Secretary	823222	
Alderney Wildlife Trust	Roland Gauvain	822935	
Bat Group	Pat Costen	264500	
Guernsey Conservation Volunteers	Angela Salmon	721163	
Friends of the Priaux Library	Gavin Lanoe	246715	
La Société Serquaise	Jo Birch	832788	
National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (Guernsey Group)	Tattie Thompson	239444	
Lé Coumité d'la Culture Guernesiaisie	Hazel Tomlinson	255891	
Guernsey Meteorological Observatory	Martin Crozier	237766	
WEA	David Le Conte	264847	
The Guernsey Botanical Trust	Linda Marsh	07781 121076	

In addition to the Section Secretaries being Council members, other Council members are:

J. Hooper (co-opted), Miss J. Gilmour (co-opted), Mrs S. Brouard, Ms J. Keen, R.B. de la Rue, M. Deane and R. Lord.

Any member of La Société who is interested in joining one of the Sections or groups should contact the relevant Section Secretary.

Office Hours: The office at Candie is normally open between 10.00 and 11.30am on Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays.

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