A Day Out on Herm

I wrote this little book whilst living on Sark in 1976, travelling to Saint Sampson in Guernsey to stay for the weekends with Angie McKane, and thus giving me easy ferry access across the strait. Angie was a good friend, and this guide to Herm is especially dedicated to her.

Wes Gibbons April 2020

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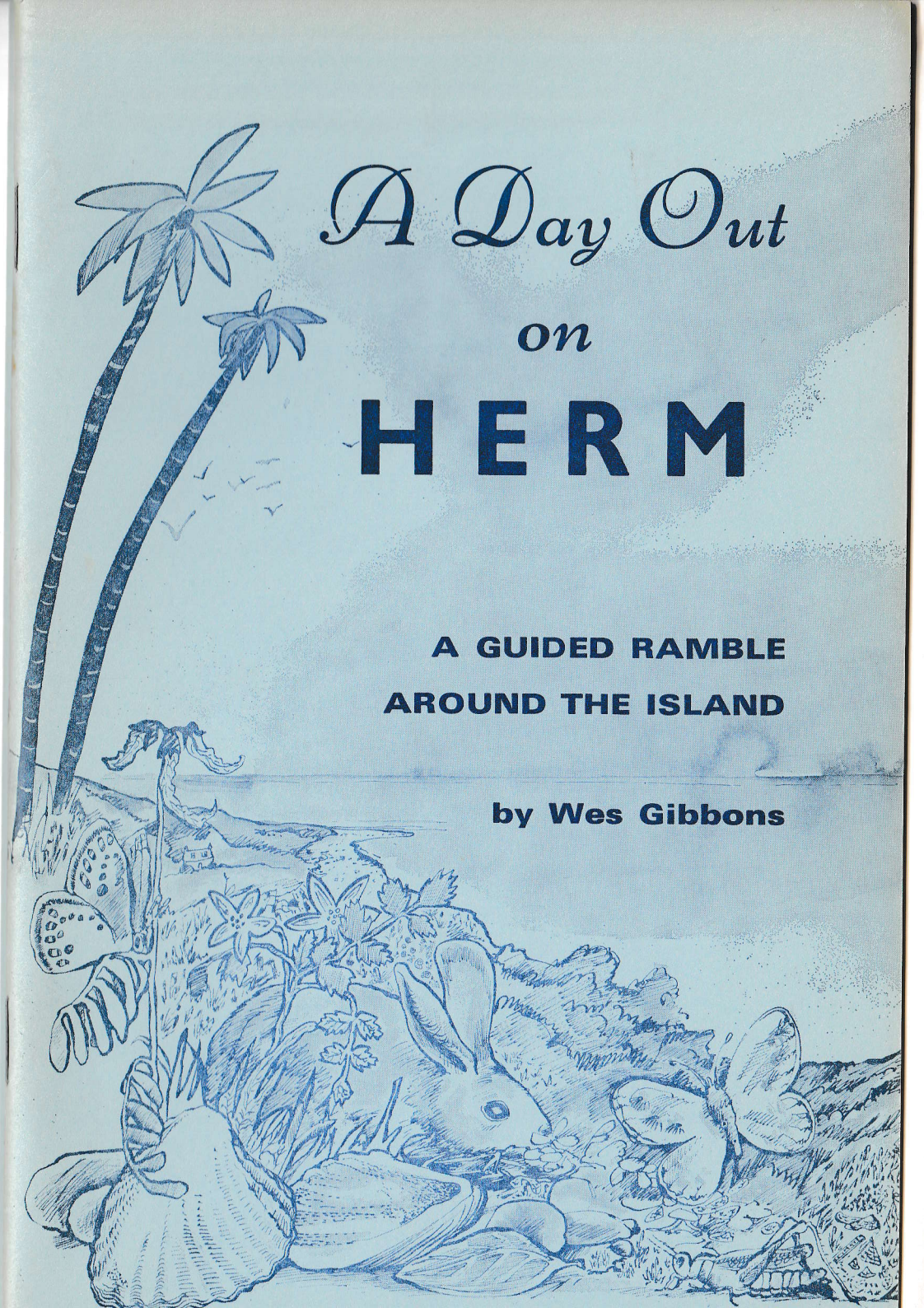


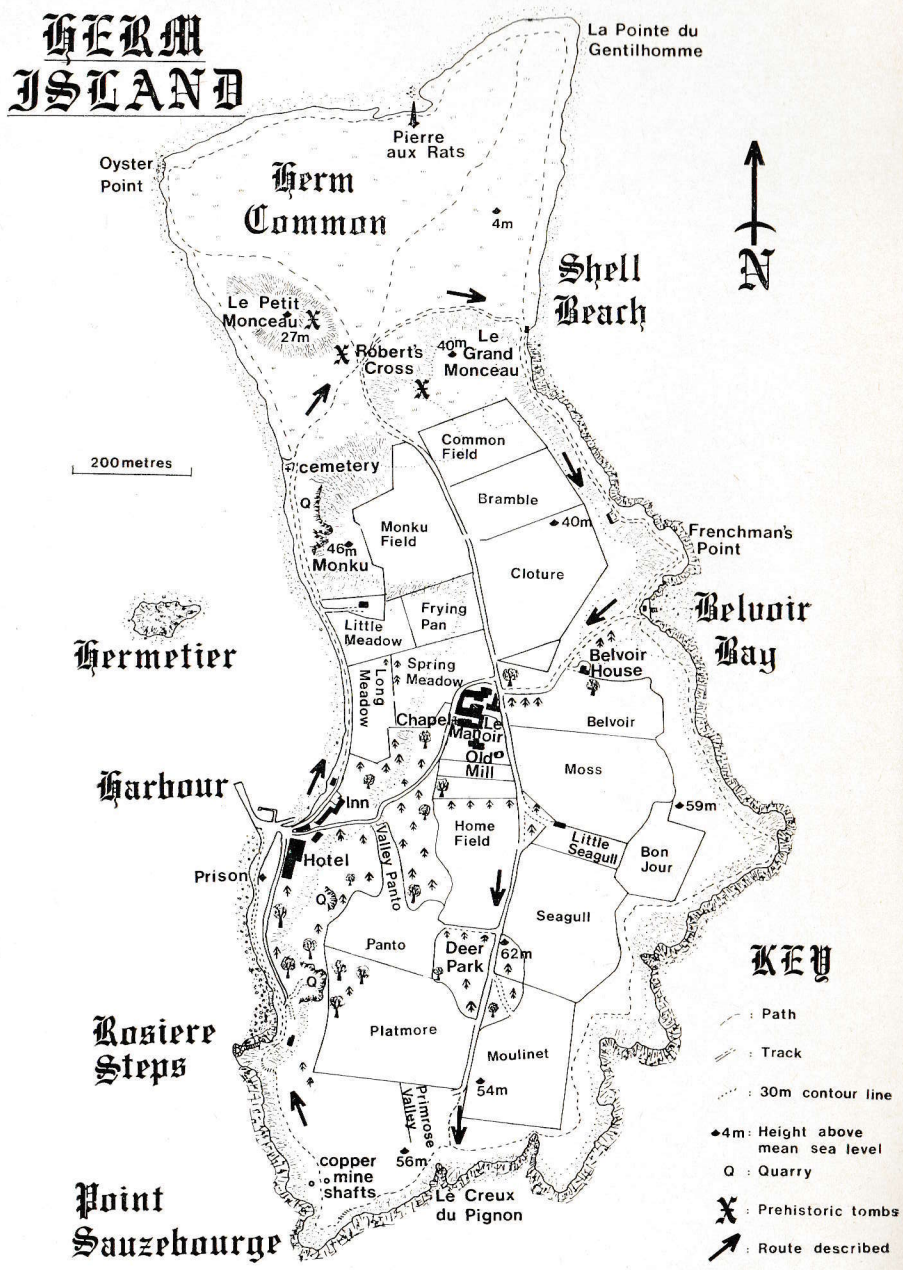
A DAY OUT ON HERM

The Island of Herm, measuring a mere 1½ miles by ½ mile wide, holds a richness of interest and delight unique within the Channel Islands. The mellowed faces of the old quarries and copper mine shafts, the secrecy of ancient prehistoric tombs on Herm Common, the variety of colourful plant life from primroses to palm trees, and the famous Shell Beach which places Herm in the South Seas rather than only 3 miles from Guernsey, are just some of the pleasures in store for the visitor to the Island.

This guide unfolds a story of Herm as it takes the reader on an easy ramble around the Island which can be completed in only a few unhurried hours. It is written for those who wish simply to add to the enjoyment of their visit to Herm by learning something of this attractive and fascinating Island. A map of Herm, a rare old 19th century print and a number of other illustrations including original sketches by local artists are all included in the book which may also be kept as an informative souvenir—a pleasant reminder of your day out on Herm.

Wes Gibbons.

April 1976.



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To my Family and Friends

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ARRIVING ON THE ISLAND

The visitor to Herm will disembark from the ferry at either Herm Harbour (at high water) or Rosière Steps (at low water) which lie about 5 minutes walk south of the Harbour. The walk around the Island begins at the small group of shops and cottages, once known as "Piccadilly", which cluster beneath wooded slopes just east of the Harbour. The gay, Mediterranean style arcade was built here in 1963 by an imported band of Italian workmen headed by one "Uncle" Bruno, and provides a pleasant contrast with the surrounding 19th century cottages.

Passing the Mermaid Tavern, a welcome source of refreshment since the 1830's, the wide track follows the western shoreline of the Island northwards with views (left) over to Guernsey which lies less than 3 miles away across the narrow strip of water known as the Little Russel. The treacherous nature of these waters is well displayed at low tide when innumerable granite reefs provide newly exposed perches for the seabirds, and emphasise the tremendous tidal ranges found in this part of the world. The waters between Herm and Guernsey are less than 8 fathoms deep at low spring tide and there seems little doubt that the two Islands have been connected in the past during times of lower sea level.

The coast along this side of Herm is well protected against destructive wave action by the outlying reefs and the broad, shelving beach of seaweed covered pebbles and muddy sand. The plant community lining the seashore has taken advantage of these relatively benign conditions and has produced a variety of vegetation usually found further inland away from the corrosive salty sprays of more exposed coastlines.

The right side of the track borders two fields, the first to be reached being called 'Little Meadow' and the second 'Long Meadow' or 'Fisherman's Field'. There are about 18 field enclosures on Herm, each possessing its own name which is usually derived from a literal translation of old Norman French. The peculiar nature of some of these names is shown, for example, by the sloping field behind Little Meadow called 'Frying Pan'.

On the far side of Little Meadow is built the pretty Fisherman's Cottage in the gardens of which a number of small palms provide just one example of the large variety of sub-tropical and oriental plants which are able to grow on Herm. The Island has long attracted tenants who thought of the whole place as their garden and who have over the years introduced many unusual and exotic plants to Herm.

THE HERM QUARRIES

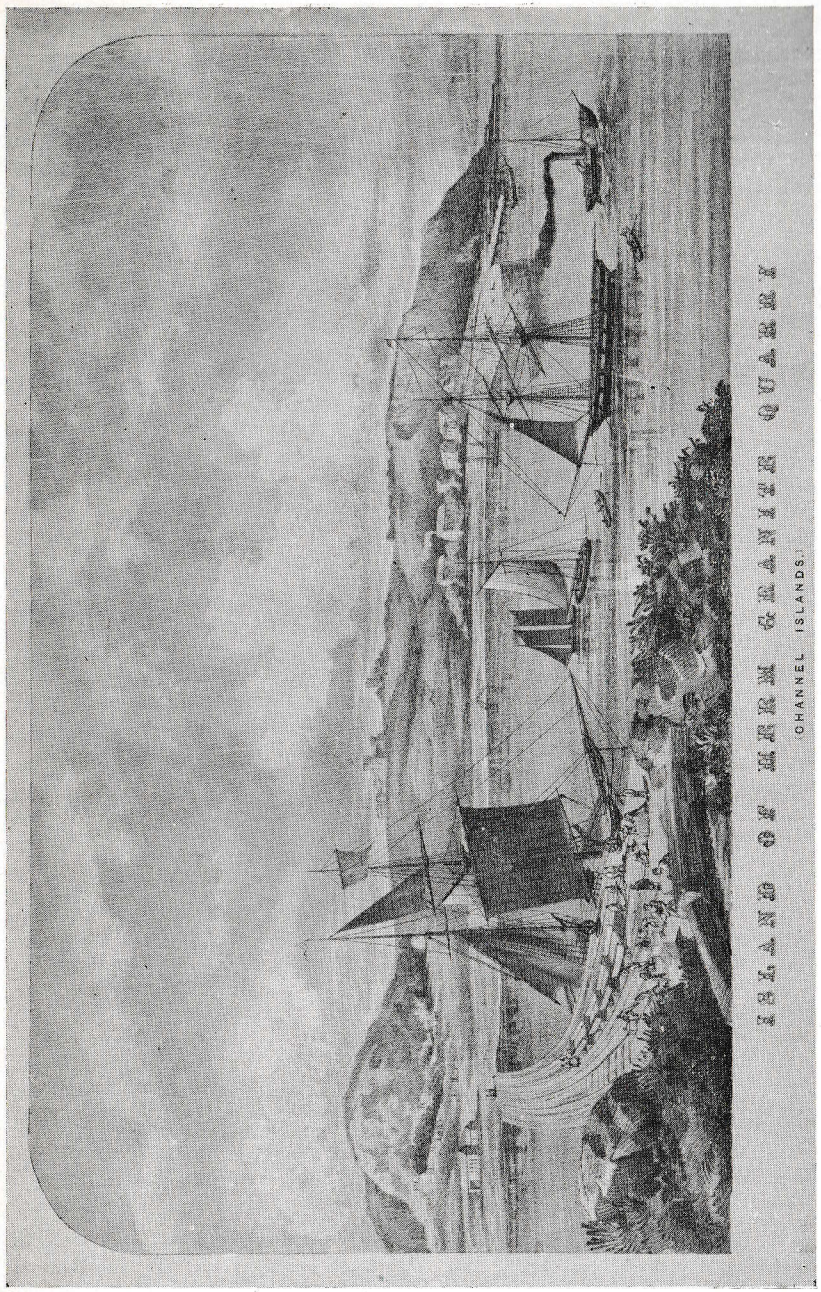
The track carries on northwards through a grove of lime trees with the small islet of Hermetier lying across the beach to the left and the prominent hill known as 'Monku' rising steeply on the right. The west side of Monku once provided a site for the intensive quarrying activities which afflicted Herm in the last century. Herm stone had for many years been used as building material and in 1815 quarrying began as a full scale business when a retired army officer, Lt. Col. the Hon. John Lindsay, bought the lease on Herm for £1,200. Lindsay and his colleague Jonathan Duncan were responsible for the construction of Herm Harbour from which the stone was exported in large shallow draught sailing barges. The stone quarried was the extremely hard and durable Herm Granite which had a high market value and was exported to a number of English cities including London where today, for example, it forms the steps leading from Carlton House Terrace to the Mall.

Lindsay died, bankrupt, in 1826 but Duncan took over and by 1840 the quarrying industry had reached a climax with 400 people working on the Island. After this time the work gradually declined partly as a result of competition from newly opened quarries in Guernsey and the fact that, owing to the treacherous nature of the Little Russel, Lloyds refused to insure any vessels in and out of Herm. Also, the unusual hardness of Herm Granite made it a very difficult stone to quarry (it was apparently estimated that it took one man one day to break up one ton) and most of the demand for stone at that time was for use in railway and road-building which called for quantity rather than quality. The outsize Harbour gradually became redundant and by 1844 operations on Herm were virtually at a standstill.

Walking today around the overgrown slopes of Monku the old quarry faces can still be seen clearly, but they now possess a peaceful, mellowed quality which tells little of Herm's brief encounter with the Industrial Revolution over 125 years ago.

THE CEMETERY

Just before Herm Common is reached, a tiny graveyard lies to the left of the track. The worn out inscription on the single gravestone reads "In memory of K. W. Conden, aged 2 years. R. Mansfield aged 23 years. Died April 18--. (The actual figures are partly erased). Rest in Peace". Folklore tells the story of a ship which arrived in the Channel Islands and introduced an epidemic of cholera into Jersey where 341 people are said to have died. The captain of the ship later tried to harbour in St. Peter Port in order to bury two cholera victims



"The Herm Quarries". A rare 19th century print depicting a much enlarged Herm Harbour during the heyday of quarrying activity. The print is thought to date from around 1843 and probably represents a proposed state of affairs rather than what actually existed. Copy of print kindly loaned by Dr. S. Kellett-Smith.

on board but was refused permission to land. The two bodies were instead sailed to Herm where quarry workers were paid to erect the small graveyard.

Northwest from here across the wide beach lies the low-lying islet of Plat Hommet. All three species of seagull nest here (Herring Gull, Greater and Lesser Blackbacks) foraging a summer living from the food scraps left by the tourists to Shell Beach.

Immediately beyond the cemetery the track passes through a gap in an old granite wall and enters the wide, sandy expanse of Herm Common. Notice the colourful orange, green and grey lichens coating the wall. Most species of lichen are particularly sensitive to air pollution and it is satisfying to note the luxuriance of their growth on Herm.

HERM COMMON

A lowlying, sandy Common forms the north of Herm and adds a new dimension to the great variety of scenery already found elsewhere around the Island. In 1924, during the tenancy of Sir Percival Perry, a golf course was laid down on the Common. However the course was last used in 1949, and the land has since been allowed to revert back to its natural state.

In September 1940, during the Occupation of the Channel Islands, the Germans carried out and filmed a massive seaborne invasion of Herm Common using infantry from Guernsey and a Panzer unit shipped in barges from France. The film was later to be used as war propaganda in Germany and entitled "The Invasion of the Isle of Wight". The German Occupation of Herm had begun formally on 2nd July 1940, although the Island was only actually occupied by troops for 11 weeks in 1942. During this time anti-aircraft equipment was emplaced on Mouissonniere Beach north of the Common where an American fighter plane was later to be shot down, the remains of which were recently removed by Guernsey scrap-metal merchants. The occupying Germans also managed to destroy one of their own planes which crashed into the sea just east of Herm Common.

The way ahead curves round to the right across the grass covered Common between the two hills of Monku (right) and Le Petit Monceau which forms an isolated rocky hump rising 27 metres above sea level to the left. The track soon reaches the signposted Robert's Cross, a junction of pathways. To the right a straight track leads up southwards across the spine of the Island, whereas the path to the left wanders across to Oyster Point on the north-west tip of the Common. Northwards a stone obelisk called Pierre aux Rats rises clearly above the low, hummocky terrain. Originally a tall stone monolith called Longue

"The Old Cemetery"—sketch by Laurence Fleming. The tiny graveyard of two 19th century cholera victims.

Pierre stood overlooking the site but it is said to have been removed by the quarrymen last century, a deed causing so much trouble with the local fishermen (who had always used the stone as a landmark) that the Herm Granite Co. were ordered to erect a similar monument in its place.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The vegetation around here is dominated by two main factors, firstly the alkaline nature of the thin soil cover, and secondly the thousands of rabbits which live on the Common. Burrows with little sandy "doormats" are to be seen everywhere, even though the rabbits have long suffered from rampant myxamatosis—a disease noted here way back in the 1920's by the writer tenant Sir Compton Mackenzie who called it "a foul mycosis".

The alkalinity of the soil is due simply to the underlying lime-rich shell sand of which the Common is built, and has led to domination of the flora by lime-loving plants (collectively called "calcicoles") such as the Burnet Rose, as opposed to the lime-haters ("calciphobes") such as foxgloves which are rarely, if ever, found growing in these shelly soils. The Burnet Rose covers much of the Common and although very prickly is nevertheless palatable to the rabbit population. Incessant nibbling by the rabbits combined with the salty winds which sweep over the area have resulted in the rose having assumed an unusually low, creeping, carpet-like growth neatly trimmed to within a few inches of the ground surface. By contrast, the indigestibly spiny Common Thistle is often seen growing tall around the burrow entrances.

In summer bracken and brambles dominate the flora and tend to mask the many other less prominent members of the plant community such as wild thyme and ladies bedstraw. A recent survey by Dr. Mary Gilham counted no less than 53 different plant species living on the thin sandy soil of the Common.

PREHISTORIC HERM

Herm Common is, however, perhaps most famous for its richness in archaeological remains. It seems that Guernsey and Herm were first colonised permanently by man sometime during the latter part of the Neolithic Period which lasted from 4,000 to 2,400 B.C. These early settlers and later Bronze Age peoples (2,400 to 700 B.C.), arrived via Jersey and the European Mainland and possessed considerable cultural attainments. They were clever potters (without the wheel), could work stone, grow corn and produce flour, and they could build. Their architecture was chiefly concerned with the erection of large stone tombs encased in earthen mounds. The burial chambers were built of enormous granite boulders set on end and roofed by equally

"Pierre aux Rats"—sketch by author. Built by the quarrymen over 100 years ago.

large boulders laid across the walls. The laborious and clumsy architecture that they represent is called "megalithic", a name derived from the Greek (Mega=big; Lithos=stone) and meaning simply building with big stones. No actual dwelling places of these people have yet been discovered although shell "middens" (rubbish tips full of sea shells collected for food by prehistoric man) have been found in a number of places around the Island. It is the tombs, however, which have provided virtually all the information about these ancient people.

At least 16 burial sites have been excavated around the north of Herm, mostly on and between the three hills of Monku, Le Petit Monceau and Le Grand Monceau which overlooks the south-east quadrant of the Common. Most were investigated in the early 1840's by F. D. Lukis who found many pottery fragments, human skulls and other remains, but whose records of the findings leave much to be desired. Even worse, many of the chambers were unfortunately destroyed in the last century by quarrymen who found the nicely shaped granite tombstones very useful.

Today most of the tombs are completely overgrown, although traces of the stone burial chambers (called "cists"), stone circles, and other structures can often be found. There are, for example, a number of single box-like stone cists dotted about the slopes of Le Petit Monceau (see map), the covering capstone usually having been removed to form an empty open grave, now often hidden by brambles.

One can only guess at deep religious beliefs and respect for the dead held by these early peoples. The Common must hold many secrets of who these people were and how they lived, so many thousands of years from our present world.

* * *

The wide, sandy track continues from Roberts Cross in the same easterly direction, curving around the foot of Le Grand Monceau to eventually reach the east coast of Herm at Shell Bay. Cists, stone circles and other ruined megalithic burial remains have also been excavated on the hillside to the right, particularly around the summit. Ahead lies La Pointe du Gentilhomme, the most northerly tip of Herm.

Notice how in many places the underlying soil is exposed, showing the thinness of the soil cover over the Common. This is a result of the dry, lime-rich nature of the area and the high porosity (and therefore good aeration) which allows micro-organisms easy access and enables the breakdown and removal of dead plant material to be extremely rapid. Such conditions are exactly opposite to those of wet, acid moorlands where thick layers of dead peat are able to accumulate.

SHELL BEACH

The track suddenly opens out at Shell Bay to reveal the sandy shores of Shell Beach stretching away to the north and east. During the summer months a café is open here for refreshments.

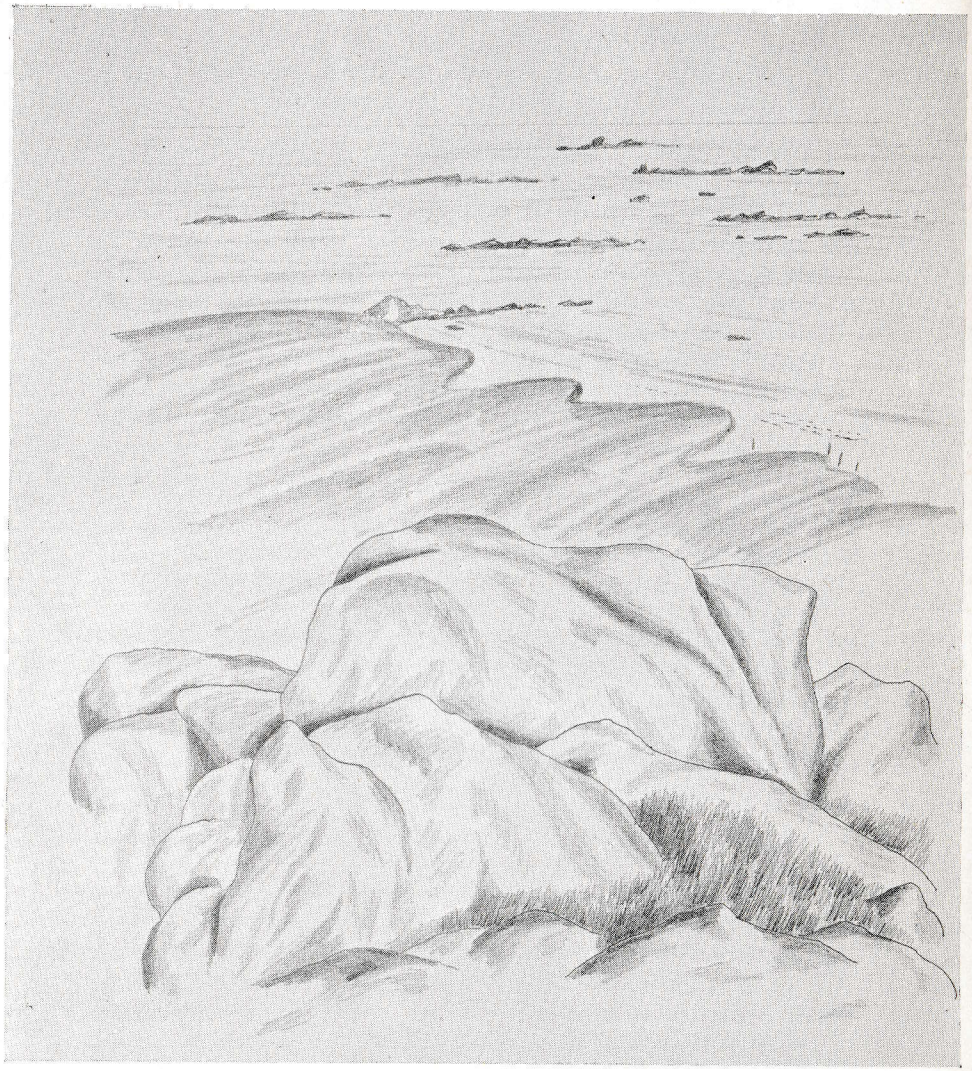
Shell Beach, composed entirely of millions of seashells and shell fragments, is one of the most famous sights within the Channel Islands. The beach, and indeed the whole Common itself, appears to owe its origin to local peculiarities of tide and current which over the years have heaped the shells into the thick deposit seen today. Good specimens of many different shell species may still be found on the beach and it has long been believed by some that certain of the Shells have been carried across the Atlantic by the Gulf Stream. The idea was given support in 1957 when a small, very rare black and white shell belonging to an animal which lives only in the warm waters of the West Indies was found.

Although a good tide will bring in fresh shell specimens, the collective influence of the thousands of beachcombers received by Shell Beach each summer is taking its toll, and the sand is now mostly composed of tiny shell fragments rather than whole shells.

Just across the beach from here lie the low tidal reefs of Les Jacquets. Northwards, a string of small islets marks the line of Les Amfroques reefs (known as "The Humps") which stretch from the north east corner of Herm to beyond La Grande Amfroque, a small islet crowned by a beacon and lying about 3 kms. away.

The path south of Shell Bay continues the route around the island and, after passing some toilets, reaches the small rocky headland known as Frenchman's Point. On a clear day the views from here are unrivalled: About 34 kms. away to the north (left) rises the precipitous granite coastline of S.W. Alderney. Eastwards the distant coastline of western Brittany can often be discerned. 7 kms. across the waters of the Great Russel lies the unique and beautiful island of Sark where horse-drawn carriages, tractors and bicycles replace the haste of metalled roads and motor cars. Unlike the shallow waters off the west side of the island, those between Herm and Sark reach a depth of 45 metres in places. Behind and to the right of Sark lies Jersey, the largest and most southerly of the Channel Islands.

Just down to the right, the path leads into Belvoir Bay—a peacefully sheltered sandy cove nestling within Herm's eastern coastline. Refreshments are also available here in the summer months.



"Shell Beach"—sketch by Graham Leworthy. View looking northwards from Le Grand Monceau with "The Humps" stretching away in the distance.

HERM GRANITE—A BRIEF LOOK AT THE GEOLOGY OF THE ISLAND

Moving leftwards to HWM on the north side of the shelly beach in Belvoir Bay, the surrounding low cliffline of Herm Granite may be examined. From a distance the rock has a generally uniform, greyish appearance, speckled with white crystals (feldspar) and dotted with larger dark patches of a different rock type. Closer up, the rock is seen to be formed of a jumbled mosaic of black-and-white mineral crystals. Like all such rocks, the granite is composed of innumerable mineral grains which in Herm Granite are mostly white feldspar and a blackish mineral called hornblende.

Granite is geologically classified as an "igneous" rock which means it has solidified from a mass of molten rock originally buried deep down within the Earth's Crust. While still molten it once pushed its way up ("intruded") into higher levels of the Earth's Crust to gradually cool and solidify into an interlocking mass of crystallised minerals. Many millions of years later it has become exposed at the Earth's surface by erosion of the rocks once lying above it. The age of Herm Granite (i.e. the time when it solidified deep with the Earth) has been estimated, by comparison with other Channel Island granites of known age, as being around 600 million years—giving some idea of the awesome length of geological time.

The dark patches of rock mentioned above as dotted about the granite are called "xenoliths" (from the Greek meaning foreign stones). These were simply solid pieces of surrounding rock which were dragged up with and fell into the granite as it intruded upwards.

In places the granite is cut by thin veins of white quartz (particularly at the top of the beach in the southern cliffline opposite). As the granite gradually solidified small pockets of quartz-rich liquids were caught within the newly formed rock. These were often under great pressure and tended to squirt upwards along any line of weakness in the surrounding granite and, after they themselves had cooled and gone solid, formed the hard white veins seen today.

All the rocks exposed around Herm, from Jethou in the south to La Grande Amfroque in the north, are composed of this granite which belongs to the same general group of igneous rocks which form the northern half of Guernsey.

Today it is difficult to imagine Herm Granite as being anything but cold, solid and everlasting, but even so it continues to be slowly worn away by wind and water. Providing the sea level remains the same, the island will eventually be reduced to reefs and islets before disappearing completely beneath the sea, its mineral grains broken down and scattered across the sea floor.

LIFE ON THE SEA SHORE

The remarkable tidal ranges found around the coasts of the Channel Islands and the nearby French Mainland are second largest in the world only to those found in the Bay of Fundy in Canada which may reach a height of 14 metres. These tides give the inveterate beachcomber not only a reasonable chance of drowning, but also provide the opportunity to examine the great variety of plants and animals which have made the shore their home. One of the most striking things about these shores is in the sheer number of different species exclusive to such a small area. The brown seaweeds for example, live in clearly defined zones down the beach as shown below:

HWM: Zone 1—Channelled Wrack* (*Pelvetia canaliculata*)

This seaweed forms a belt of olive green tufts growing at HWM. The plants have short, thin stems which often end in swollen "V" shaped tips of a lighter brown colour and with rough, lumpy surfaces. Most of the plants are submerged daily during high spring tides, but during neap tides many may be exposed for days at a time. The seaweed retains water to some extent by inrolling the fronds to form channels running along the underside of the plant.

* locally spelt "Vraic".

Zone 2—Twisted Wrack (*Fucus spiralis*)

This seaweed is found mixed with, and forming a thin zone below, the Channelled Wrack. It is also a short seaweed but has broad, olive brown fronds which are spirally twisted although they rarely make a complete turn. The plant may again end in a paler, swollen, sultana-like tip which contains the reproductive structures

Zone 3—Knotted Wrack (*Ascophyllum nodosum*)

A very distinctive seaweed which grows generally below the zone of Twisted Wrack. It has long, flat, dark olive green branches which are normally attached by a short stalk to a disc-shaped sucker (or "holdfast"). The branches, which contain large, tough air bladders, fork repeatedly to drape the rocks in a thick, glistening carpet. Knotted Wrack grows best on sheltered shores and it cannot survive on beaches which are exposed to severe wave pounding. Notice how the weed grows most luxuriantly on rock surfaces facing away from the sea.

Bladder Wrack (*Fucus vesiculosis*)

This seaweed grows in the same general zone as the Knotted Wrack. It is similar in appearance to the Twisted Wrack growing above, but the branches are not twisted, have wavy margins, and contain air bladders which are usually in pairs—one on either side of the conspicuous line ("midrib") which runs down the centre of the plant. This is the commonest and most adaptable of all the seaweeds and along most coastlines will compete successfully with its zone rival Knotted Wrack. Here the exception proves the rule, however, and the sheltered nature of Belvoir Bay seems to favour the dominance of Knotted Wrack.

Zone 4—Serrated Wrack (*Fucus serratus*)

Growing below the Knotted/Bladder Wrack zone, this is similar to the other species of Fucus, but easily identifiable by its jagged toothed margin.

LWM: Zone 5

At lowest tides a wealth of brown and red seaweeds are briefly exposed. There are far too many to describe here, but two of the most conspicuous types are:

Thong Weed (*Himanthalia elongata*)

Generally found below the Serrated Wrack zone, the young plants look like olive brown buttons which, as they grow larger, produce long, whip-like branches from their hollowed out centres.

Oarweeds (*Laminaria* various species)

The oarweeds are huge, shiny brown plants with broad leaves, thick stems and great clasping holdfasts. They are found forming dense forests of brown weed at LWM on rocky shores all round the Channel Islands. The plants growing around and below LWM can tolerate only short exposure to the air (unlike the seaweeds found higher up the shore) and are therefore adapted to living in deep water which receives relatively little sunlight.

"Seaweeds in Belvoir Bay"—drawings by Sue Leworthy.

1: *Channelled Wrack (or "Vraic") x 1 life size.*
2: *Twisted Wrack x* $\frac{1}{2}$.
3: *Knotted Wrack x* $\frac{1}{2}$.
4: *Bladder Wrack x* $\frac{1}{2}$.
5: *Serrated Wrack x* $\frac{1}{2}$.
6: *Thong Weed x* $\frac{1}{2}$.
7: *Oarweed x* $\frac{1}{4}$.

See above for descriptions.

From the above brief description of the dominant seaweeds some idea is given of the complexities of life on the shore. Each seaweed has become specialised for an extremely narrow zone on the rocks. The zonal position and success of a seaweed on the shore depends on four main factors, namely—its ability to withstand dessication during exposure to air, the speed at which it grows, the strength to withstand wave action, and (low on the shore) its capacity to live in regions of low light intensity. From low tide upwards each new type of seaweed can stand exposure to air for a little longer than the species living below it, and so on up to Channelled Wrack which lives almost out of the sea altogether. Here, therefore, is a practical example of Darwin's "survival of the fittest" theory of evolution—survival of those seaweeds best able to adapt to and dominate a zone on the sea shore.

Sheltered in the rocks beneath the brown seaweeds lie barnacles, limpets, periwinkles and thousands of other tiny animals which also often show a preference for certain zones. Above the level of the seaweeds the rocks are coated with colourful lichens which yet again show a clear zonation. In the "splash" zone just above (and mixed with) the Channelled Wrack, the granite is covered by tar-like lichen. In the "spray" zone above this grow the beautiful orangey-yellow lichens which always form a distinctively bright coloured line at this level around Channel Island coastlines. Green and grey lichens, less tolerant of salty sea spray, grow on the cliff faces above the orange varieties and mix with the larger, flowering plants such as thrift and sea campion: each fighting for their existence amid the turmoil of competitive survival.

BELVOIR VALLEY

From Belvoir Bay a cliff path shoots off to the left, but our track climbs eastwards away from the sea and winds up a valley studded with Monterey Pines to eventually reach the top of the Island at a junction. On the way the path passes Belvoir House standing at the lower end of Belvoir Field and said to have been built around 1870 by Lt. Col. M. J. Fielden who had bought the Herm lease in 1867 after the quarrying and mining industries had declined. The end of the granite industry saw the advent of a different type of tenant typified by retired army officers, wealthy business men and writers. Fielden, who spoke fluent French and owned several large sailing vessels, was eventually caught smuggling brandy from France to Dorset, using Jethou as a storehouse.

A small avenue of pine trees lines the root-riddled pathway just before the spine of the island is reached. The trees owe their origin to the German Prince Blucher von Wahlstatt who was tenant of Herm from 1889 until the outbreak of the 1st World War (when he was interned as an enemy alien), and who planted dozens of pine, eucalyptus and spruce trees, along with many sub-tropical plants.

The Prince also took it upon himself to add to the animal life on Herm and introduced wallabies to the island. At one time 27 of these small kangeroos were counted on Herm before their numbers were drastically reduced in April 1897 when, during Blucher's absence, his butler and cook held a shooting party. On his return the Prince was hopping mad at the wanton slaughter of his wallabies and his two

triggerhappy subjects were tried in Guernsey and sentenced to one month's hard labour. Some idea of Blucher's eccentricity is given in the following passage quoted by his farm bailiff, Mr. Harding, who relates the story of the Prince and the Emules:

". . . . once I went up to his bedroom in the Tower, and he shouted "come in" and when I went in there he was standing in the middle of his bath as naked as an egg. My goodness I wanted to put myself through the floor. And wasn't he ugly. But he didn't mind a bit, and went on telling me about some emules he was expecting (emus). Well they emules come right enough, but one of them was so frightened that he rushed into the sea and drownded himself. His Highness was terrible upset "Oh dear oh dear Harding" he said "I wouldn't have minded so much if that emule had waited until this afternoon because the Governor is coming to lunch and I wanted him to see my emules"."

(*From "The Countryman" Oct.-Dec.* 1942.)

Prince Blucher, a man of reputedly fabulous wealth, introduced many other changes to the island including among them an expansion of the old Manor House into a huge, rambling mansion. To quote Sir Compton Mackenzie, a later tenant (1920-23): "The Prince was less happy as a builder than as a planter, and he made the Manor House what is externally perhaps the ugliest building in Europe" (from "Unconsidered Trifles", 1932).

LE MANOIR

The steep track from Belvoir suddenly drops away to reveal the buildings of Le Manoir which dominate the central plateau of the island. The origins of Le Manoir are lost in the mists of antiquity, but it is known that the site housed a small Mediaeval monkish population. Following expansion into Herm Mansion by Prince Blucher the buildings were occupied until the last war when the population was reduced to a mere handful of people. The subsequent efforts of the present community, headed by the tenants, Major and Mrs. Peter Wood, have done much to restore the buildings.

The walk continues by turning right at the track junction (see map) and then almost immediately left down a road signposted to the Chapel. Skirting farm buildings and a row of cottages, follow the road around to the left and a signposted gap in the buildings on the left leads to the old Chapel of St. Tugual.

ST. TUGUAL'S CHAPEL

Legend tells of a small 6th century chapel of St. Tugual built on Herm during the time of St. Magloire who first established a firm foothold for Christianity in the Channel Islands and founded a religious house on Sark with 62 of his brethren. The ancient chapel may have stood on or near the site of the present building, although folklore places it on the Pierre Percée reef west of the Island where it was

supposedly washed away during a great storm in 709 A.D. The first absolutely unambiguous mention of a Herm Church is in a Bull of Pope Urban 111, dated 1186 and it is not until the 15th century that records exist of a definite monkish population.

In 1440 a band of Franciscan Friars settled on Herm to serve God " magis quiete et pacifice ". Peace and quiet were, however, provided only for 18 years and in 1458 the Friars abandoned the Channel Islands as a result of the " upsurge of intolerant protestantism ". By 1480, we are told, a Friar of Cherbourg named Jean Guyffart was appointed incumbent of Herm. The letter of induction dated 26th February 1481 gives Guyffart " the administration and prioryship (pertaining to) the parochial church of St. Tugual of Herm . . . at present free and vacant through the simple resignation of a discreet man of the Lord John de Jolis, priest, overseer, and of brother Richard de la Place, aforesaid priest nominally manager ". The living of Guyffart was to be " 30 livres p.a. of which 6 livres were payable to the Bishop of Avranches as tithes ".

Herm continued to be inhabited by monks until religion succumbed to the clash of conflicting creeds and the monasteries were dissolved in the mid-16th century under the iron rule of Cromwell. During this time some records report that all Roman Catholics in the Channel Islands fled to Herm and attempted to hold out against the onslaught of the Calvanists. Superior numbers prevailed, however, the Catholics were forced to surrender and, despite promises of fair treatment, were mercilessly slaughtered. Over 400 monks and refugees are said to have died although the whole story is wide open to doubt and probably untrue.

In the centuries that followed the Chapel appears to either have been left to go to ruin or used for purposes other than religion. Used by the Island Chaplain during the quarrying boom of the last century, renovated by Prince Blucher around 1913, and left to decay during the last wars, the Chapel has now been greatly restored by the present tenant Major Peter Wood.

The building today retains a feeling of antiquity with its beautifully pointed stone walls and vaulted granite roof, now slated outside and hidden inside by plaster. The various interior furnishings have been purchased from time to time (by Chapel funds) during the present tenancy and in 1966 a stained glass window depicting Christ Stilling the Waves was presented by the father of Mrs. Peter Wood. All donations to the Chapel fund are gratefully received and are used both for the upkeep of the building and to support various charities, particularly those concerning children.

After visiting the Chapel those weary of foot and dry of mouth may short-cut back to the starting point by descending (left) the thickly wooded Drive down Manor Hill to the Harbour. About another hour should be allowed by those who prefer to continue with the second part of the walk.

ON TOP OF THE ISLAND

To continue, then, return to the junction where the track leads down to Belvoir and carry straight on southwards along the spine of the Island with Le Manoir on the right. The impressive drystone walls which border this ancient roadway are built from huge granite boulders said to have been put in place by the mediaeval monks—one of whom, according to local folklore, survives today as a friendly ghost.

Belvoir Field is followed on the left by Moss Field, lying opposite Le Manoir grounds, within which stand the remains of the Old Tower (or Mill) of Herm. The age of the Tower is unknown, but what is known is that the picturesque, ivy-covered ruin now has a rather less romantic use as a water storage tank.

The track soon skirts the west side of a small pine wood with Home Field on the right. Behind the pine wood lies the modern dairy which deals with Herm's only other main industry besides tourism. Milk is exported daily to Guernsey from Herm which at the time of writing, supports the largest herd of cows in the Channel Islands.

Emergence from the shelter of the wood reveals superb views eastwards across Seagull Field to Sark. Lying just off the Sark coast can be seen the Island of Brechqou which, although privately owned, nevertheless comes under the jurisdiction of Sark law. Between Sark and Brechqou run the dangerous, current-swept waters of the Gouliot Passage which has been the site of many a past boating disaster. Sometime around the end of the last century, for example, a Sark fisherman is said to have caught a conger, in the stomach of which was the ivory umbrella handle belonging to a young lady who had been drowned with her mother in the Gouliot Passage whilst trying to sail back to Guernsey.

The track continues up and through a small coppice known as Deer Park. It is thought that deer were first introduced to Herm by the Governor of Guernsey in 1656 but, like the many other animals imported during the later tenancy of Prince Blucher, none survive today. At 62 metres above sea level, this is the highest point on Herm, as compared with 107 metres at Guernsey Airport and 109 metres at the Old Mill on Sark, which is the highest point in the Channel Islands.

The way ahead runs on down between the quiet farmland of Moulinet (left) and Platmore (right) fields. Beyond Platmore the farm-track bears off to the right, but follow the path running straight ahead down Primrose Valley to a junction with the cliff path which hugs the coastline from Belvoir Bay to the west coast. Like much of Herm in spring and early summer the valley here is ablaze with a colourful display of bluebells, primroses, foxgloves, wild iris and many other flowers.

THE SOUTHERN CLIFFLINE

Turn left along the cliffpath and follow it for a few minutes until a spectacular cleft in the cliffline is reached. The fenced pathway skirts a sheer drop down to the beach over 40 metres below. The steep gully has been preferentially eroded out by the sea along a weak line of shattered rock (called a "fault") which cuts through the granite here. The many caves, gullies, arches and other erosional features of Channel Island coastal scenery are usually a result of the sea attacking the cliffline along other faultlines of a similar nature. Faults are originally formed when layers of rock break under great pressure generated deep within the Earth's Crust. The earthquake zones of the world today are areas where such faults are actively moving within the rocks below. Although a number of small earthquakes have been recorded in the Channel Islands, this is at the moment, geologically, a very stable part of the world and most of the faults around here lie dormant and immobile.

Returning to Primrose Valley notice another fault gully cutting into the cliffs ahead (see map). This once marked the site of a great natural chimney (or "creux") called Creux du Pignon, the bridge of which collapsed during the wet winter of 1964. Creux are particularly famous scenic features around the coastline of Sark, and are formed by the collapse of overhead broken rock debris where two fault-eroded caves intersect. The collapse of Creux du Pignon serves as a reminder of the continental wearing down by wind and water to which the Islands are being subjected.

The path winds on around the remote bracken and bramble covered cliffline, descends a set of steps and curves around rightwards to eventually reach Pointe Sauzebourge, the most southerly tip of Herm. Just across the water lies the granitic hump of Jethou, guarded on either side by the beacon capped islets of Grande Fauconnière to the left and Crevichon to the right.

Covered with the gravel of decomposed granite the path now turns northwards along the west of the Island. The acid, gravelly soil which overlies (and is partly formed from) the Herm Granite is very different from the lime-rich soils on the Common seen earlier. The plants which grow here include the lime-haters such as foxgloves and gorse. Plants like ivy, bracken and brambles are tolerant of both types of soil and so flourish on the Common and granite uplands alike.

HERM COPPER MINES

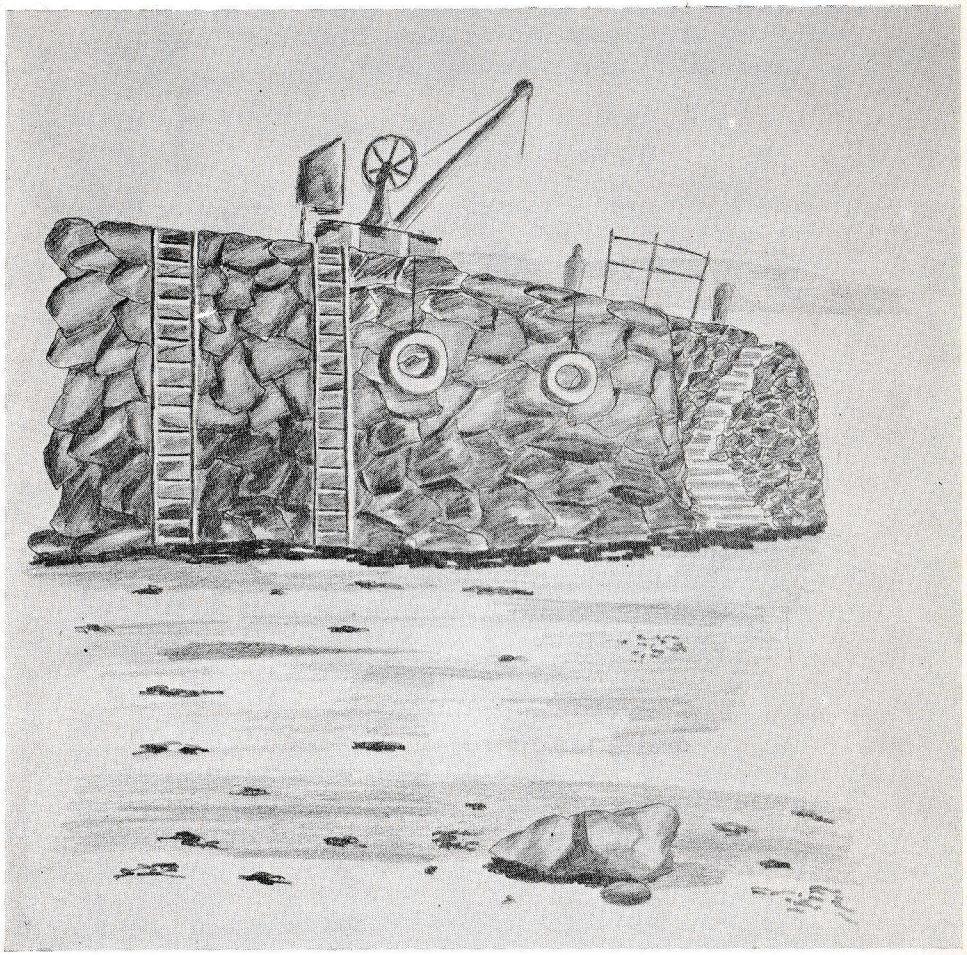
About 100 metres north of the Pointe a heap of tangled barbed wire and an iron post just to the right of the path mark the site of an old, overgrown copper mine shaft.

The Channel Island mining boom of the last century began in 1833 when a certain John Hunt discovered ore and soon afterwards opened silver/lead mines in the granite of Little Sark. Hunt had also unearthed copper in Herm, and in 1837 he founded the Herm Mining Company. Despite much cynicism and bad publicity, exploratory shafts were driven into the granite at various places around Herm and mineral veins containing iron pyrites with small pockets of the copper ore chalcopyrite were excavated. No ore was found in any quantity, however, and the mining attempt was short lived and unprofitable. (The mining of silver on Sark continued until 1845 when all work ceased after a series of disasters had left the Sark Mining Company and the Seigneur of Sark completely bankrupt).

The vertical shaft here was only dug to a depth of 12 metres and is intersected inside by a horizontal shaft (or "adit") which opens out in the cliff below the path. The old mines are unsafe, however, and no attempt should be made to enter them. Exploration of the mines here has shown them to be disappointingly poor in mineral ore and it is all too clear that hope played a large hand in the mining exploit.

BACK TO THE HARBOUR

The cliff path carries on northwards from the old shafts to eventually descend the side of the cliff by a series of steps and join the main track. At low tide the view across the Little Russell to Guernsey is a veritable maze of rocky reefs, seaweed strewn sand and shallow waters. Halfway up the cliff slope to the right sits Rosière Cottage, whereas down to the left lie the Rosière Steps which have been used as a landing place for all tides since time immemorial.



"Herm Harbour"—sketch by Graham Leworthy. The old granite breakwater built by Lindsay around 1820.

The track from Rosière follows the coastline northwards to the Harbour, bearing left at a junction with a private road to White House Hotel, and skirting the overgrown Rosière Quarries which stand over to the right. These old quarry faces were the first to be worked by Lindsay way back in 1815 and the beaches on the left are still littered with angular rocky debris left behind by the quarrymen.

The old Harbour comes back into view as the track rounds a granite bluff. Note how the exposed rock here is deeply weathered and its fresh, natural grey colour has mostly decomposed to a coarse, buff coloured gravel.

A peculiar little circular granite building with a conical roof stands to the right of the track just before the Harbour is reached. This, believe it or not, is a prison which was built around 1838 to sober up intoxicated quarrymen. Once awarded the title of "The Smallest Prison in the World" (it measures only 4 metres in diameter) it was last used for men in the 1930's, but has since been used as a piggery.

Back at the Harbour the stoutly built pier with its railway lines and antiquated (but still workable) crane still remain from the days of 19th century quarrying. More recent additions to the Harbour include a concrete slipway and the small isolated pier built around 1926 during the tenancy of Sir Perry. The Harbour, which dries out at low tide, was extensively damaged by the unlucky explosion of an old 2nd world war sea mine which floated in on the night of the 3rd of January 1952, not long after the lease on Herm had been purchased by Major Wood. The mine exploded a mere 12 metres or so from the end of the jetty and, although fortunately no-one was hurt, great damage was caused to many of the island buildings.

* * *

The walk is ended and the Island recedes into the distance of eye and mind as the boat ploughs slowly back across Little Russell. The actual name of Herm is probably derived from the latin word "herma" meaning deserted territory. Although indeed once treeless and deserted with only the tombs of prehistoric man, the Island has since been colonised, farmed and forested; quarried for granite and mined for copper. The 20th century has brought thousands of summer visitors and renewal of prosperity to the Island which, above it all, lies serene and quietly immune to the changing fortunes of man.

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The following works provided other extremely useful sources of information and may be consulted by the interested specialist:

1. Map of Herm (12″ to 1 mile)—pub. B.K.S. Survey Technical Services.

2. "The Petrography of some Reefs off Herm and Jethou" by A. C. Bishop and A. E. Mourant. Report and Transactions of La Société Guernesiaise Vol. 17 p. 501 1963.

3. "The Silver Mines" in "The Rocks of Sark" by Wes Gibbons pub. Manche Technical Services (Jersey) 1975.

4. "Ecological Notes on the Vegetation of Six Islets near Herm" and "Ecology of a Shell Sand Community in the North of Herm" by Dr. Mary Gilham. Report and Transactions of La Société Guernesiaise Vol. 18 p. 503 and 514 1970.

5. "Quarrying and Mining on Herm and Jethou" by Dr. S. Kellett-Smith. Report and Transactions of La Société Guernesiaise Vol 17 p. 246 1961.

6. "The Archaeology of the Channel Islands" by G. D. Kendrick 1928.

7. "Wild Flowers of Herm" by Frances Le Sueur and David McClintock. Report and Transactions of La Société Guernesiaise Vol. 17 1961.

8. "Herm—its mysteries and charm" by Michael Marshall. Pub. Guernsey Press.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

"The Rocks of Sark—an introduction to the geology of the Island". Published by M.T.S. (Jersey); printed by The Guernsey Press Co. Ltd. 1975. Price: £1.00.

A compact and well illustrated guidebook which introduces the reader, be he layman or expert, to the fascinating rocks and minerals found on Sark. The first part of the book is devoted to a series of geological excursions to different parts of the Island. This provides a background for a more general account of the geological history of Sark which is followed by a comprehensive section dealing with mineral collecting on the beaches. An interesting account is given of the old Silver Mines and the minerals found on the old spoil tips are listed. At the end is a very full and adequate glossary of all the geological terms used.

This book is a necessary guide for the geologist on Sark, but is particularly well designed for the enquiring tourist with little or no geological knowledge, and, of course every Channel Islander should have one on the bookshelf.

Available at most C.I. bookshops or direct from: Manche Technical Services (Jersey), Milano, New St. John's Road, St. Helier, Jersey (plus 25p P. & P.).

"The Little Russel"—sketch by Graham Leworthy. View westwards from the top of Le Grand Monceau with Le Petit Monceau in the foreground, the 19th century Brehon Tower in the centre and Guernsey behind.