

THE SARK GROUP (1933–1935)

Mervyn Peake's relationship with Sark first started in 1932 when he was invited to the island by Eric Drake, his former English teacher, who was setting up an artist's colony. The following year Peake moved to Sark to become one of the founder members of the 'Sark Group'.

After two successful years exhibiting both in Sark and London, Peake left the Group and returned to London. Once in England, Sark continued to shape Mervyn Peake's life. Kirkland Jamieson, principal of the Westminster School of Art had seen Peake's work while on the island and offered him a position at the School. It was at the Westminster that Peake first met Maeve Gilmore (1917-1983), who was to become his wife.



SARK; EVENING

*From the sunset I turn away
To the sweep of a steel bay*

*The lonely waters are grander far
Than the red and gold are*

Mervyn Peake, 1946

SPECIAL EXHIBITION
GUERNSEY MUSEUM & ART GALLERY
MAY 5 - SEPTEMBER 11 / 2011
www.museums.gov.gg All images are © Peake Estate



Mervyn Peake

MERVYN PEAKE (1911-1968)

This exhibition commemorates the centenary of Mervyn Peake's birth. Peake is probably best known as a writer, particularly for his Gormenghast novels, but his creative achievements also extended to painting and illustration. During his lifetime Peake carried out illustrations for classics such as Alice in Wonderland.

The island of Sark, part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, was Mervyn Peake's home on two separate occasions, firstly as a young man, just after he left the Royal Academy Schools and then again with his family. However throughout Peake's life Sark served as a sanctuary as well as being the inspiration for many of his creative works.



MERVYN PEAKE'S SARK
to the sweep of a steel bay

FREE GUIDE

supported by

CREDIT SUISSE

THE FAMILY AND SARK (1946-1949)

Mervyn Peake served in the Second World War and after the War had ended was sent to Germany by the Leader magazine to record the aftermath. This experience and the sights he saw must have made memories of his carefree days in Sark seem a world away. These memories proved powerful enough to draw Peake back to the island's shores. This time he was not alone, but had Maeve and his two boys, Sebastian and Fabian with him.

During these years on Sark, Peake wrote the second of the Gormenghast novels. He also wrote poetry and carried out a number of major commissions for book illustrations, including Treasure Island and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

"Illustrating, writing, walking, climbing up trees and down to remote bays, watching schools of dolphins, hearing the screech of seagulls, puffins landing, all of this world entered everything upon which Mervyn embarked."

Maeve Gilmore



THE SUNDAY BOOKS

While on Sark, Peake filled several notebooks for Sebastian and Fabian with drawings which he would produce each Sunday. These would usually consist of wonderfully caricatured figures, depicting either pirates or 'fantastic' animals.

Fabian describes how he and Sebastian would sit in silence at their father's work table and, **"watch him invent pictures."**



AFTER SARK

In 1949, not long after the birth of their daughter Clare, the family left the isolation of Sark in order for Peake to take advantage of the opportunities awaiting him in England. They were not yet aware of an unwelcome element which was to enter their lives. It was to cause isolation far greater than that of Sark.

Peake continued to write and illustrate but it was clear shortly after the family had returned to England that his health was declining. Peake noticed tremors in his hands and found it increasingly difficult to sleep and relax. Eventually Parkinson's disease was diagnosed and the inevitable mental and physical decline ensued. In the early stages of the disease Sark acted as a temporary antidote, Peake returning to the island by himself to work on Titus Alone, the third of the Gormenghast novels. A year later he also took the family to Sark for a summer holiday.

Maeve recounts that:

"The island always seemed to have the effect of a magic wand."

However, the rejuvenating effects of the Island were short-lived and the disease eventually won.

Mervyn Peake died on November 17th 1968 at a care-home near Oxford.



THE SARK FÊTE SKETCHES (1948)

These quickly executed sketches show Peake's assurance and gift for bringing what he saw to life in just a few drawn lines.

"The Fête was held in a large field in the very centre of the island, which apart from the usual cattle competitions also included a fancy dress parade, demonstrating the Islander's sense of fun and 'joie de vivre'. A feature my father was able to capture in the prancing young people, while a gloriously hot sun shone down on the proceedings." Sebastian Peake

