

Feature

Festival celebrates Norman links

A festival aimed at celebrating the Norman language recently took place in France. **Jean Treleven** was among those who took part...

A 20-STRONG group from Jersey recently took part in the Fête des Rouaisons.

Held from Friday 13 to Sunday 15 June, the Norman language festival - which took place in the town of Briquebec on the Norman mainland, between Carteret and Valognes - has been operating for many years and alternates between Jersey, Guernsey and Normandy.

The Covid pandemic disrupted the annual cycle and for many of us this was our first experience of the fete, there having been a gap of several years.

It was extra special to once again experience the tastes and sounds of our shared Norman culture, through storytelling, poetry, music, dancing and, of course, food and cider. It is a rare opportunity to experience the range and richness of the varieties of Norman language from the islands in the west to the Pays de Caux region in the east.

This year's fete was well organised by Nicolas Abraham and the rest of the team from La FALÉ (the Federation of Norman Language Associations), so our Norman languages featured strongly in the form of stories, poems and songs.

On the first evening, stories were shared in Norman and Jèrriais around the atmospheric grounds of the town's chateau. Charlie Le Maistre's wonderfully dramatic account of the legend of La Hougue Bie was enjoyed and understood by all.

Several of us shared favourite poems and members of the Société Language Section performed poetry and songs as a group. Local dance group Les Chaboteurs entertained with a selection of their Norman dances accompanied by our musicians, much enjoyed by the locals, probably for their informality and a contrast to the large, traditionally costumed, very impressive Norman folkdance group, Le P'tit Capé d'Érik, who inspired us all. We are thrilled that they are hoping to come to Jersey next year.

The music was exceptional, including a group of three "hurdy gurdies" and other more conventional bands with wonderful singers. A highlight was certainly the group Labosa, performing a concert



Charlie Le Maistre storytelling
Picture: KAREN LE ROY HARRIS



The Jersey singing group in full voice
Picture: DAVID BISH



Ben Spink (left) and Charlie Le Maistre performing
Picture: DAPHNE PETT

of Channel Island songs on the Saturday evening and leading a walk around Briquebec on Sunday morning, with a guide pointing out the historical features of the town from the medieval period to the Second World War, sharing similar experiences to ours in the Channel Islands.

It had been hoped to include a youth day on the Friday but with transport and avail-

ability difficulties, this was not possible. A student group from Briquebec took part on Saturday but we are hoping that at next year's event in Jersey, it will be easier for our young Jèrriais speakers to perform and hopefully encourage others to join from Guernsey and mainland Normandy.

Briquebec has Viking origins, settled in the 10th century, but the venue for the

fete was a 12th century chateau. The Norman Dukes might have designed it as a fortification - for keeping people out - but its town centre location could not have been a more appropriate site for welcoming us all with its hotel, a large open area for performances and craft stalls, as well as a free car park just outside the walls.

We certainly enjoyed the weekend and



The Briquebec story walk
Picture: JEAN TRELEVEN