

LETTERS CONCERNING THE APPOINTMENT OF REGISTER KEEPER ON LUNDY ISLAND 1869 - 1870

By

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BACKGROUND

My first report on the Birth Register of Lundy (Rowland 1996) was based on a discovery I made at a local Mormon Genealogical Library. Such libraries have collections of genealogical information together with their international catalogue. It was while looking through this that I found and ordered the reference previously reported upon. What is supplied for research is a microfilm of original records. However, these are limited to purely genealogical information and I was fortunate that the film covered the letter between Frederick Wilkins and the Registrar General.

I have since been able to view the original Register at the Public Record Office (PRO) which contains further letters concerning Registration on Lundy.

I was prompted to extend the search to the PRO by the remark following the final (eleventh) birth entry, made by John Shoveller, that: "The correspondence relating to Mr Wilkins undertaking the office of Register Keeper will be found in the Letter Book 1869-1870."

Whilst waiting for my order for RG33/36¹ (the original Register of Births), with the help of the PRO staff, I looked in all the likely places for this Letter Book. It was not to be found in RG21 – "Register General Letter Books", HO39/4 – "Home Office re General Register Office", or MH19 – "Ministry of Health re General Register Office". I searched all indexes to these records but nothing relevant to Lundy or letters 1869-70 was found.

I conclude from this that the only letters to have survived concerning the appointment of Register Keeper on Lundy are those that are bound into RG33/36.

THE REGISTER

RG33/36 is a red, leather bound book of 100 pages titled on its cover, in gold lettering:

LUNDY ISLAND
REGISTER
OF
BIRTHS

In addition to the births recorded previously, the book contains three original and two copies of letters. These are listed and numbered below. It is possible to infer additional letters which have either not survived or which have not yet been discovered. (The letter copied in Rowland 1996 is again reproduced for completeness.)

1 PRO RG.33/36 Register of Births

Letter 1 - Wilkins to GRO - inserted between pages 4 and 5 written on blue notepaper

Frederick Wilkins
Manager
(letterhead)

Western Granite Co
Quarries
Lundy Island
Clovelly
Via North Devon
Oct 6 1869

To the Registrar General
of Births and Deaths &c
Somerset House

Sir

May I beg of you to inform me in what district is the Birth of a Child to be registered born on Lundy Island = Lundy Island is situated between Wales + Devonshire but it belongs to neither county + no Ecclesiastical Diocese. Hitherto no registration has taken place with children born here.

I am Sir
Yours respecty
(signed) Fredk Wilkins

(appended in pencil – “Recv W D D Carter Hartland Bideford?”)

(On the reverse are various annotations -

Bideford 6 Oct 1869 Wilkins Fred

Asks in which district Lundy Island is situated 5057

Official stamp of GRO “Received Oct 11 1869”

See Lee 6079 (illegible) 12/11/69

Ans? 11 Oct 69 JTH wrote again 21 Dec/69 JTH)

Letter 2 – Dan^l D Carter to GRO inserted between pages 6 and 7 written on white notepaper

Hartland
Bideford Union
Decr 13th 1869

The Registrar General of Births
Deaths and Marriages

Sir,

With reference to your letter of Novr 12. I have communicated with a person (name Thomas Lee) on Lundy Island and he is willing to act as Registrar there if appointed. The population at present is about 70 but when the Granite Quarries are again worked which is expected soon from 300 to 400 will be added to the present numbers.

I beg to point out one difficulty. The Registrar as it appears to me will not be able to take the Registration Books to the Superintendent Registrars Office at Bideford Quarterly as required

by law for at the present time a small vessel goes to and from Clovelly to the Island once only in two weeks, consequently if he came over with his Books he would not be able to return again for a fortnight.

Could he not be ~~required~~ permitted to to (sic) come over with his books once only in the Year (in summer) instead of Quarterly.

I am
Your Ob^{dt} Servant
(signed) Dan^l D Carter
Registrar

(There are various notations in different hands: -

13 Dec 1869
Bideford
Carter D Reg
States that person in Lundy Island is willing to act as Reqr + points out certain difficulties in the way
6797 Official stamp of GRO "Received Dec 15 1869"
12/11/69 refer
Ltr to W J Wilkins by W Hammick 21/12/69)

Letter 3— Fredk Wilkins to GRO inserted between pages 8 and 9 written on blue notepaper

Frederick Wilkins
Manager
(letterhead)

Western Granite Co
Quarries
Lundy Island
Clovelly

Via North Devon
Decr 18th 1869

To the Secretary
General Register Office

Sir

On the 8th Novr I addressed a letter concerning a Birth and requiring instructions respecting same, and at the same time enclosed a letter from Mr Carter of Hartland, which letter I requested to be returned. But up to this period, have received no reply, I have now to report another Birth and to enquire what course to pursue respecting the registration.

I am Sir
Yours Respect
(signed) Fredk Wilkins

(On the reverse, there are various notations in different hands: -

373 Bideford
18th Decr 1869
Wilkins F Mr

Further (illegible) non-registr of a birth in Lundy Island
Official stamp of GRO "Received Dec 23 1869"
21/12/69
23 Dec/69 JTH)

Letter 4 – GRO to F Wilkins inserted between pages 8 and 9 written on white lined paper

Copy

General Register Office
21st December 1869

Sir,

Referring to your letter of the 8th November, in which you state that you would have no objection to undertake the registration of Births and Deaths which occur in Lundy Island, I am directed by the Registrar General to thank you for your offer, and at the same time to state that as any arrangements for registering those events in the island must be of an exceptional nature – not provided for by the Act of Parliament regulating civil registration in England, the Registrar General has no funds at his disposal out of which he could offer you remuneration for your trouble. – If however, you would, under these circumstances, still be willing to undertake the task of recording the Births and Deaths, the Registrar General will be glad to hear from you again.

(Signed) E Edwards
Secretary

Mr F Wilkins
Western Granite C^o
Lundy Island

Letter 5 – GRO to F Wilkins inserted between pages 10 and 11 written on white lined paper

Copy

General Register Office
25th January 1870

Sir,

As the registration of the Births and Deaths which happen in Lundy Island, by the Registrar at Hartland in accordance with the provisions of the Act 6 + 7 Will IV cap 86, appears to be attended with insurmountable difficulties, I am glad to avail myself of your offer to keep a Register of these events, and herewith transmit to you two Books for the purpose, together with a copy of the Regulations for the duties of Registrars of Births and Deaths in England, and other printed papers which may prove useful for your information or guidance. It will be seen that in England Births cannot be registered after the expiration of six months from their occurrence, but as regards Lundy Island, I am of opinion that it will not be necessary for you to observe this limitation. Although it is no doubt desirable that every Birth and Death should be recorded as soon after the event as conveniently may be done, yet I see no objection to your entering in the Register any Birth or Death which has occurred in the Island – providing that no more than seven years shall have elapsed since its occurrence. I think that the Births and Deaths should be recorded, whenever practicable, upon information of one of the persons described in the "Memorandum" herewith sent – who should sign the Register in

the appropriate column as shown in the Examples – but where, in the absence of such persons, the information is given by others, it should nevertheless be recorded, and the signature, description + c of the Informant should be inserted in the Register. At the end of each year, I shall be glad if you will have the goodness to forward to me by post (leaving the postage unpaid) copies of every Entry made by you during the year – such copies being prepared on the Forms herewith sent, and certified at the foot thereof. From these copies Certificates (not under Seal) will at any future time be furnished at this office on payment of a small fee.

(Signed) George Graham
Registrar General

F Wilkins Esq
Manager of Western Granite C^o's Quarries
Lundy Island

CHRONOLOGY

Letter 1 – 6 Oct 1869

Wilkins to GRO enquiring about registration of births and probably prompted by the imminent birth, on 10th October, of Kathleen Hellen Cowler. The annotations refer to Lee 12th November 1869 (Letter 2) and a further letter of 21st December 1869 (Letter 4).

Inferred Letter a

Carter to F Wilkins – from letter 3 which refers to a letter received by Wilkins from Carter.

Inferred Letter b – 8 Nov 1869

Wilkins to GRO enclosing a letter from Carter (inferred letter a). Letter 3 refers, apparently Wilkins received a letter concerning his original letter (Letter 1) which he forwarded to the GRO.

Inferred Letter c – 12 Nov 1869

GRO to Carter inferred from annotations on letter 1 and the text of letter 2. GRO wrote to DD Carter, Registrar at Hartland to enquire if he knew of anyone who will perform the duties of Register Keeper on Lundy with an estimate of the probable number of events. Prompted by Wilkins' letter of 6th October.

Letter 2 – 13 Dec 1869

Dan^l D Carter to GRO. Carter recommends Thomas Lee (then Principal Gunner at the Battery, Lundy) for the post of Register Keeper and estimates the current and foreseen population. He also deals with the difficulties of fulfilling the statutory quarterly submission, as the sailings from Clovelly are fortnightly but not guaranteed during the Winter months.

Letter 3 - 18 Dec 1869

Fredk Wilkins to GRO. On the 18th November, John Chavener was born stimulating FW to inform the GRO they have still not resolved the problem and requesting return of the Carter letter (a).

Letter 4 – 21 Dec 1869

GRO to F Wilkins. At last, GRO reply to FW offering him the job but with no payment. As in my previous paper (Rowland 1996), Harman would have been delighted to use the words of E Edwards on behalf of the Registrar General, “*any arrangements for registering those events in the island must be of an exceptional nature – not provided for by the Act of Parliament...*”.

Inferred Letter d –

Wilkins to GRO agreeing to act as honorary Registrar.

Letter 5 – 25 Jan 1870

GRO to F Wilkins. FW receives two books, one each for the registration of Births and Deaths with instructions exempting him from the statutory conditions. He is permitted to extend the time for registration from 6 months to 7 years and forward copies annually without postage.

The oldest child registered was Annie Withicombe Lee, born on 15th November 1865, incidentally, the daughter of Carter’s preferred candidate, Thomas Lee. Given that the leeway for registration was seven years, we can infer that there were no births on Lundy between early 1863 and November 1865. Similarly, it can be suggested that there were no deaths from 1863 to at least April 1871 when we can confirm Wilkins’ presence on the island from the census returns. Apparently, there is no Death register surviving.

Inferred Letter e

Wilkins to GRO Resigning his post on quitting the island. This is difficult to date as his last act as Register Keeper was on 31st December 1870 but he remained until at least April the following year (see above).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Although the letters reproduced here are not Crown copyright, they are in the custody of the Public Record Office at reference PRO RG.33/36 and no objection was made to their reproduction.

REFERENCE

Rowland, A. 1996. Births on Lundy – An Official Registrar. *Annual Report of the Lundy Field Society* 47, 72-76