

## TEN YEARS WITH THE ANNUAL REPORT: A RETROSPECTIVE

By

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I remember it like it was yesterday. I was just completing my postgraduate work at university and had attended my first LFS AGM to describe the results of my first season's archaeological fieldwork on Lundy. I was on the Field Society committee but still didn't know people. Peter Cole had announced that Tony and Anne Taylor were to stand down, and that a new editor was needed for the Annual Report. No-one seemed keen, and I didn't feel I had the experience. But after a few weeks I 'phoned Peter to discuss the vacancy. 'What took you so long?' He said. 'I expected you to call weeks ago'!

Ten years with any journal is enough, and my ten years have been at once interesting and challenging, and have broadened my horizons more than I could have imagined. There have been some changes, including to the cover design, but I hope my main achievement has been to keep the Report going, to maintain the standards set by my predecessors, and to keep it interesting and varied. Of course to a degree journals are only as good as the material offered for publication, but as my successor - Dr Hayley Randle - will find out, there is more to it. Some research isn't well publicised, and simply keeping ears close to the ground has contributed to some papers over the last few years that otherwise wouldn't have been brought to the attention of Members. There is also a need for tenacity, and to grind down those contributors who keep putting off the evil day. There are also those individuals with the capability of undertaking useful research, and who just need pushing in the right direction. I have done my fair share of pushing in ten years and my successor is well placed to do the same, being within a university department with a history of relevant research. And there is sometimes the need to make subjects more accessible to readers by ensuring they are written and presented in a way that isn't off-putting: shorter contributions for example, and the avoidance of jargon. Readers may have noticed some improvement in the clarity of text over the last few years, and an increase in the number of shorter papers. This is the result of an informal system of refereeing all contributions, brought in over the last 3-4 years, a role which officers and committee members with relevant expertise have willingly undertaken with diligence and commitment.

I like the journal as it is now. It not only represents the formal record of the Society's activities, as well as documenting the research of some non-Members on the island, but it contains a diversity of material which in my experience is unparalleled. It reflects the fact that Lundy has to be one of the most intensively studied places in Britain, something for which the Field Society is at least partly responsible.

I don't believe a bad paper has appeared in my time as editor, but everyone has favourites and I make no apologies for taking this opportunity to give some of my own. These reflect the diversity of material, but also lean more towards the contributions of amateur researchers and enthusiasts which together have proved so significant in furthering our understanding of

Lundy's history and ecology: Tony Langham's report on the engravings of convict slaves in Benson's Cave (1989) - the first paper I was offered as editor; Charles Thomas's Beacon Hill report (my biggest scoop), and Bob Farrah's evidence for a solar calendar (both 1991); Bob's timely description of the Trinity House archive - to coincide with the departure of lighthouse keepers from the island in 1993; the lichen reports of 1995-6; and Clive Harfield's piracy paper (1996). I would also mention three other types of contribution which are notable for different reasons: First, Simon Griffith's work on sexual selection amongst House sparrows was documented first in our Annual Report (1994, 1997). This will also no doubt feature in a major scientific journal, as befitting a project of international significance. The same is true of Hayley Randle's research into animal psychology and behaviour, aspects of which appeared in 1992 (cattle), 1993 (lambs) and 1994 (ponies). If nothing else this seems to have set a new trend: animal behaviour has featured in every annual report since 1994. Some authors of such significant research papers might have chosen (indeed been required) to give major journals the 'scoop', or to ignore us altogether, and it is especially rewarding to capture such contributions for a small journal like ours. Second, are those projects which provoke controversy. Bob Farrah's work on the church (1992) was one such example, and memorable in that it presented the context for an event (the blaze of light), the interpretation of which was both interesting and compelling. It was as I recall the only contribution during my time as editor to provoke a written response, and a rejoinder to the original article appeared in 1993, and a 'further thoughts' paper by Bob Farrah in 1994. All good journals should provoke debate and discussion, and I hope the publication of *The Debate* - held at the 1999 AGM - about rats and nesting sea birds - will exemplify this. The third type of contribution which should continue to appear is that relating to the management of Lundy's terrestrial and marine resources. Numerous such reports have appeared over the last few years: for example regular accounts of the MNR Working Group; my report on the review of scheduled monuments (this volume); and that describing the possible effects of run-off fertiliser nitrates (1997) are examples of this. The membership of the Field Society embraces many of those who care about the island and want to see its character preserved for future generations to enjoy. How the island is to be managed is therefore relevant, and statements in the Annual Report can contribute significantly to educating visitors about the vulnerability and fragility of both Lundy's natural environment and its archaeological remains.

The island *is* a special place, both for its tranquillity and the contrast it provides to our normal lives on the mainland. But it is also a hugely significant place for many fields of research, and the extent to which this has been exploited in the Field Society's first fifty years was the subject of a recent book (*Island Studies: fifty years of the Lundy Field Society*, 1997). The *Annual Report of the Lundy Field Society* has a central role to play in documenting this research and publishing records of birds, insects and so on. My hope is that the Annual Report will run for many more years, continuing to develop, to diversify as far as academic standards and credibility allows, and to reach all of those who may benefit from the material it contains. I wish Hayley Randle well and am confident that the Report will thrive in her hands. My only advice at this stage, to her and to the officers and committee, is that the Report needs more publicity (for example at University libraries), and that all visits to the island by committee members and officers should include an element of fact finding (who's doing what) and - where appropriate - a gentle push in the direction of the editor.

I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the Annual Report over the years, and to

staff on the island for regularly providing names and contact numbers for researchers who might otherwise have got away without us ever knowing about them. I am also grateful to the committee and officers for their support and advice in refereeing contributions. I now retire from this post, looking forward to reading a Report when it drops through the letter box, and not before, and to only having to read each contribution once. I am glad I said yes to Peter in 1988, but as I said at the start, ten years is enough for anyone.

#### COMMENT FROM LFS CHAIRMAN

On behalf of the members of the LFS, I would like to thank John for his expertise and unstinting enthusiasm during the ten years he has edited the LFS Annual Report. It was a very good journal when he took it over and now it is an excellent publication, second to none in its diversity of material and academic standard. The Editor can only work with the material that he/she is given and I would also like to thank the contributors over the past ten years, and ask that the new Editor, Dr. Hayley Randle, receives the same support. We hope that you will keep contributing to the Annual Report, John, and again our sincere thanks.

JENNIFER GEORGE  
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