

## LUNDY: THE OWNERSHIP BY A. L. CHRISTIE, 1918-1925

By

MYRTLE TERNSTROM  
6 Queensholme, Cheltenham GL52 2QE

### ABSTRACT

Christie's part in the story of Lundy has barely been touched upon in the histories. The following describes the course of his ownership that restored the island from a state of destitution to a flourishing community.

Keywords: Heaven, Christie, May.

In the later years of the Revd Heaven's administration Lundy had suffered very considerable deterioration because of the long term severe shortage of funds, and the decline in his health in advanced age. Attempts had been made to sell the island in 1906 and in subsequent years (Figure 1), but as the price asked reflected the needs of the vendor for capital (£25,000) rather than a realistic valuation of the island (£16,000), no sale had been made.

A report made to the agents in 1915 on behalf of a potential buyer stated that:

'He was much disappointed at the state... of all the buildings and houses. The Villa is in a deplorable state, over-run with rats and with a roof badly letting in the water. The gardens and grounds have also been sadly neglected, so these are practically non-existent... it would require a very considerable sum to put the whole island in proper order...we do not gather that Mr Walter Heaven has been resident on the island any length of time...(It) would not justify much more than a price of £10,000. The maximum the buyer would offer would be £16,000, the highest bid at the auction in 1906, since when there has been further deterioration.' (National Trust, 1915).

The agents urged acceptance of £16,000 as the only offer made in nine years and the island was deteriorating all the time, but the Revd Heaven's rock-bottom price was £19,500, and the sale was lost.

By the will of William Hudson Heaven (d.1883), Lundy and the benefit of a family trust (the Hort Trust) were entailed for his son, the Revd Hudson Heaven, and then Walter Hudson Heaven, his grandson, and after that in the male line. This entail was barred in 1914 and converted to a fee simple, presumably to facilitate an eventual sale as there was no male heir after Walter Heaven. Walter Heaven was the manager of the island after the Revd Hudson Heaven retired to Torrington in 1911, but he had no capital or income with which to remedy matters.

Another exhaustive report made for a potential buyer in 1916 described the lamentable state of the island. John Ackland of Bideford testified that he had lived on Lundy for the best part of seven years, but he had left when Walter Heaven sold off all the stock and it was his opinion that it would take three years work to restore the farm.

The surveyor had a rough passage to the island, where Heaven, in the Manor House, had little food, no oil for lamps, and no coal to counteract the chill of the bitter east wind. He considered Heaven to be 'truthful, but devoid of initiative, self-reliance or commercial knowledge and certainly no fighter against adversity, or a worker.' (Harman Archive, 1916).

The buildings were listed:

Three cottages in the castle: one in ruins, one semi-ruined and the third 'poor'.

Lloyd's Station: two cottages and a small post office (the two coastguard cottages were inadvertently omitted).

Bungalow (Brambles) in fair condition: sitting room, kitchen, four bedrooms, outbuildings and loft.

Villa: the state of repair and decoration was bad, the grounds in semi-ruins.

School: one room (for 40 people) in very bad condition.

Iron church: poor condition in need of painting and repairs.

Refreshment Room: seating for 80, moderate condition, in need of painting and repairs.

Manor House: (the farmhouse with the south wing) five reception rooms, study, two staircases, two large kitchens, large washroom, store room, inner and outer dairies, two cellars, coal house, lumber store, washhouse, ten bedrooms, one dressing room, one box room, bath and W.C., H & C water, two outside W.C.s, outbuildings. In a bad state internally and externally, filthy, and with obsolete fittings. North Wing: shop with boarded office, counter and shelves, store room, beer and wine store and bake house with oven. Above: loft and carpenter's shop. Attached cottage: sitting room, two bedrooms, kitchen, scullery and outhouse with washhouse, coal store and W.C. Yard: five pig sties (two in ruins), slaughterhouse, smithy, carpenter's shop, fowl house, cart sheds with granary over (Linhay). 'All above buildings...of a poor and unsanitary class...obsolete.'

Five cottages and outhouses (Barton Cottages), very poor, bad repair, undrained. (originally 8, but 3 had been doubled).

Rocket House with life-saving apparatus.

Old Light, plus a lean-to building with three bedrooms, larder, coal house (Old Light West). Outbuilding with two earth closets and donkey stable (Old Light East). Good building in good repair.

War Signal Station (Tibbets): living room, bunk room, coal cellar, W.C.

Quarter Wall Cottages: one inhabited, two semi-ruinous.

Church: 'A well-balanced architectural work, nicely appointed and kept'. 'The curate in charge is very unpopular (Revd Swatridge) and seldom more than two people attend worship...at other times none'.

Farm: 50 acres under plough, wheat, oats, potatoes, mangolds, turnips, swedes, forage crops. The land and ground exhausted, 'the worst I have ever seen'.

It was a truly dismal picture. The island was valued at this time at £13,305. 'Rats infest the place and do much damage to crops and poultry... the sheep are neglected.' The total population was about 32, including 6 lighthouse men and four coastguard families 'who run mostly together' and whose supplies would have had to be augmented by their own employers (Harman archive, 1916).

When the Revd Heaven died in Torrington in 1916, at the age of 89, Walter entered into possession of Lundy. He was penniless and he had borrowed recklessly against his inheritance. He did not have the capacity to manage the island effectively, as the above report shows, and much less to restore it to a good condition. Indeed, he was unable to pay even the interest on his debts, to employ an adequate labour force, or to continue the contract for the *Gannet* (Figure 2). His creditors foreclosed and the island was again put up for sale in 1917.

A further problem was that the Heaven family firm of solicitors in Bristol had disintegrated: Nicholas Heaven died insolvent in December 1917, before the sale was completed, and his brother, John, had gone to Kenya. It was found that moneys had been lost, and an employee had been dishonest, which added to Walter Heaven's financial problems. It also meant he was without adequate professional advice and representation.

Augustus Langham Christie (Figure 3), of Tapeley, near Instow, was reputed to have wanted to own all the land that he could see from his windows (Blunt, 1968), and for this reason wished to buy Lundy. His own surveyor was equally discouraging:

'No cropping of any sort has been done since 1914 and the corn and roots of that year were not gathered and the land...is now very foul indeed...there is no labour of any sort being employed...the whole of the (buildings) are very much out of repair and fast falling into decay...(and) will need a considerable outlay to put them in tenantable condition.'

It was estimated that once £1,500 had been spent to restore the island, both the buildings and the farm, the yearly value of rents would be £398.10s, but there was the disadvantage of the lack of shipping facilities (Harman archive, 1916).

Christie was not discouraged. Notwithstanding the lack of response from Heaven's solicitors, which meant that he had had to employ contacts to retrieve whatever documents could be found at the abandoned office in Bristol, the purchase was completed at the end of 1917. The purchase money of £15,000 was not sufficient to cover all of Heaven's debts, and he was declared bankrupt in the sum of £531 at Barnstaple court in March of 1918, after which he went to Australia with his family.

His ashes were buried on Lundy in 1929 after another unlucky episode of unemployment and bad luck (aggravated, it was said, by 'drowning his troubles').

Plans were made of all the buildings (North Devon Record Office, 1918). A consulting engineer was sent to Lundy to report for Christie on landing facilities, the quarries, and the water supply. The engineer, A. W. Lewis, sent a series of very thorough and interesting reports with his initial recommendations and subsequently on the progress of the works (National Trust, 1918-21). A bailiff/manager, S. T. Dennis, was appointed, and a builder with a team of workmen for the repair of the buildings. It was necessary to provide everything needed for the workmen's accommodation, down to the smallest egg cup, and for their everyday needs, as well as for Miss May, who was housekeeper at the Manor House and who received visitors.

Christie had no interest in the often exaggerated claims to Lundy's independence, and the management of Lundy affairs was put into the professional hands of his solicitors in Barnstaple. One result of this was that for the first, and only, time a polling station was set up on Lundy for the 1918 election. The late Judge Tudor Rees was one of the candidates, and he visited Lundy during his election campaign. There was a polling booth in the extension to Marisco Castle, and Mr W. Lee was the presiding officer. 'My father had been sworn in as a special constable by the Bideford Magistrates, and was on duty at 8 a.m. when the polling station opened. By 8.10 a.m. the eight voters had all recorded their vote.' (Dennis, 1959).

The outlay on setting up an island polling station was subsequently considered to be unjustified, and for the 1922 election the electors were required to travel to vote at Instow.

The engineer's proposals to improve landing facilities were extensive:

Pier: A 300 ft pier to be built seaward to the east from the Trinity House landing place, and thence extended by 250 ft. to the south-east. It was to have a tramline for a flat trolley to transport animals and heavy goods. The work could not be carried out while wartime regulations prevailed, but the estimated cost at prevailing prices was £62,000.

Slipway: A slipway to be built at the Cove, "which is the most sheltered landing place available," with a store shed. A 4 ft. wide track to be cleared of rocks to give access across to the beach at low tide. Estimated cost: £1,800.

Quay: The Trinity House quay to be extended.

Wire gantry: Similar to those installed by Trinity House at the north and south lighthouses, to be operated from the Battlements. Estimated cost £1,500.

Harbour: A longer-term plan was made for a harbour that was to encompass the whole of the landing bay between the Battlements and Rat Island. This never came into serious contemplation as the cost would have been huge even before the more than doubling of costs after the end of the 1914-18 war.

After consultation, these were modified in 1919: the gantry proposal was to be abandoned and the path from the Cove to the beach was to be 8 ft wide to allow for carts. The construction of steps at Montagu Path was approved at an estimated cost of £250 to provide for steps and handrails etc for a West Side landing place (Figure 4), as there had been landslips at Pilot's Quay. At the same time Dennis was replaced as bailiff by Charles Hill.

Between 1919 and 1920 work on the Cove slipway, the Montagu Steps, and the repair of the buildings was continuous, and Lewis made regular visits to supervise and report on the works, as well as render accounts for the expenditure. It was necessary to hire boats for the transport of personnel, tools, construction materials, and supplies: either the *Gannet* or the *Devonia* (which had taken over the GPO mail contract in 1911). During the war, vessels were also supplied by the Admiralty (which was responsible for the coastguards) from Milford Haven. Lewis considered the provision of an island boat to be essential. Accordingly the *Lerina* was bought (Figure 5), and entered into Lundy service in June 1920, with Capt. Dark as skipper (Figure 6), and having the GPO contract for the mails (Tedstone, 2001).

The engineer was at the same time concerned to improve the quantity and the quality of the water supply. The tenant, Thomas Wright, had constructed the reservoir to the west of the farmhouse complex about 1885, but by this time it was too dirty for the water to be used, it was leaking, and the outlet was choked. The reservoir was cleaned out, a cover built, the piping overhauled and replaced as necessary. The spring that fed it was supplemented by a pump to supply water from St John's Well, Golden Well, and the Rocket Pole Pool, at a cost of approximately £650. The most reliable supply of water was found at the Rocket Pole Pond (excavated for stone when the south light was built 1896-7), which could yield 250 gallons per day, even during time of general drought.

By September 1919 £1,185 had been spent. There was a hiatus in the work on the Cove over the winter and spring of 1919-20, but by March 1920 sufficient progress had been made for the farm to be leased. On Lady Day 1920 (25 March) Mr H. May (Figure 6) took the lease of the farm and the bungalow (Brambles) at £275 for the first year, and then £ 365 *per annum*, plus £52 for the use of the *Lerina* with £5 for each separately chartered trip. Millcombe was reserved for the Christie family or their guests, or for paying visitors.

Mr May was a North Devon farmer. He did not live on Lundy, but visited frequently. He placed his own farming personnel there, and exercised close supervision. In May of that year the surveyor visited Lundy to value the live and dead stock, which he put at £1,832. He recorded the 99 cattle, 56 sheep, 42 lambs, 5 horses, 18 pigs, and 35 poultry that Mr May took over.

The impetus for the change to a lessee may have arisen from the Christie family circumstances. Christie had long suffered from a severe personality disorder, and there were acute conflicts with his wife and sons. In 1919-20 he suffered heart attacks, of which the third, in 1920, was so severe as to enact the Power of Attorney to his wife (Blunt, 1968). In November 1920, after another £1,270 had been spent, Lewis was instructed that no further funds would be provided. The work had exceeded the estimates made in 1918, but Lewis could not be blamed for this since prices and wage costs had risen so much. In the event sufficient money was provided to complete the works that were in progress: the Cove, the Montagu Steps,

the extension to the Quay, and the rectification of the water supply. By the end of 1921, a total of £6,483 had been spent on these works.

In addition to this, there was the purchase of the *Lerina* (cost not recorded), the deficit in administrative expenses over income of £1,614, and a deficit on running the *Lerina* of £1,035. The income per year derived from :

Lease payment by May	£365
<i>Lerina</i> payment by May	52
Trinity House wayleave	3
Rocket Shed rent	3
Signal and cable station	20
Allday rent for bungalow (Hammers)	10
Admiralty rent	6
GPO contract	208
	<hr/>
	£667

There were variable amounts from landing fees from the steamer passengers, which were divided between Christie and May (£63 each in 1921). There were also variable receipts for *Lerina* passenger fares (£100 in 1921), and from fishing (£188 in 1921).

With the farm under the firm management of May and the administration in the hands of Messrs Pitts Tucker in Barnstaple, all was well. Unfortunately no records of May's holding of Lundy have been found to date, but descriptions from that period suggest that he was prosperous. The islanders and the ships' crews were all supplied with farm produce, and considerable amounts of butter and farm produce were sold on the mainland, while Miss Sage baked all the bread. The improvement in the farm by Christie and May is reflected in the valuations; on Christie's takeover the livestock had been valued at £1, 832, and when May left in 1925 the value was £7,239. In addition there were nine small boats, which would indicate a revival of fishing.

Miss Nancy Sage (Figure 7) was appointed manageress of the Hotel, in which position she excelled. She was a churchwoman, and so concerned herself with the care of St Helen's church. The *Hartland Chronicle* (1920) records that Miss Sage regularly organised concerts, card parties, dances and various social gatherings for which she and her helpers provided refreshments, and in which all the islanders joined. There was an island band, and a football team (the Pirates of Lundy) who played against the workmen and the crews of visiting ships, and who also formed a team of bellringers. The size of the island population in January 1921 was 21, plus the crews of visiting ships and a family called Smith living at the Villa. The wife of one of the coastguards, Mrs Willibond, conducted lessons for the children (Figure 8), another of the coastguards was an artist, and one, Henry Jukes (Figure 9), wrote an account of the island, which he illustrated with his own photographs. (Jukes, 1920). In the various reports there is a sense of a harmonious community, including the Plunkett-Greene family, who rented the Old Light for holidays, and presented plays and films for general enjoyment (Holman, 1982). The Christies are not recorded as visiting, but Lady Christie was reviled for causing the removal of the Victorian decorated handbasins from the Villa which, 50 years later, were seen among rubble at Tapeley.

The Revd Henry Hezekiah Lane was appointed Rector, and inducted in the church of St Helen by the Bishop of Crediton on 9 August 1922 (Ilfracombe Chronicle, 1922). This was the first appointment since the unstable Revd Swatridge left in 1913. His salary was only £60 a year, with the church itself meant to provide another £60. He held services and gave lessons to the children, but not much more is recorded of him than that. He was rumoured to have been alcoholic, as was his predecessor. He left in April 1924. After this the Revd Muller, of Appledore, was appointed priest-in-charge of Lundy, an appointment that he held for many years. The postmaster, Frederick Allday (Figure 10), who was licensed as lay reader, conducted regular services, although congregations were sometimes small or nil as he was not at all popular.

A visitor to Lundy who recorded his stay in 1922 was Mr A. E. Blackwell (Figure 11), a London policeman and true Lundy devotee. Some years later, on his retirement to a house in Instow, Mr Blackwell was the Lundy shore agent. He was also curator of the Barnstaple Museum (Blackwell, 1922, 1925, 1960).

Advertisements and articles were published to increase the number of visitors. One of these describes 'the luxuriance of the flowering shrubs in the delightful ornamental walks between the hotel and the villa is almost tropical' (Ilfracombe Chronicle, 1922). The *Lerina* made regular weekly crossings from Instow, or could be chartered, and the Bristol Channel steamers usually called twice a week during the summer season. The passengers resorted either to the Refreshment Room (where the Black Shed now is), or the Canteen (now the Tavern), and longer-staying visitors to the Hotel. There was a Post Office in the Cable Hut, administered by F. W. Allday, and a public telephone for outgoing, but not incoming, calls. There were also internal telephone connections between the lighthouses (including the Old Light), the Hotel, the Villa, the Admiralty Lookout at Tibbets, and the Post Office. The telegraph poles to the North Light marked a West Side footpath to the North End.

Another event unique in Lundy's history took place in August 1925 when the Bideford Coroner, a clerk, a police officer, and a doctor arrived on the island to conduct an inquest on a visitor, a Capt. Griffiths, who had drowned the day before (Blackwell, 1925). This took place immediately before the island passed to M. C. Harman, who immediately protested at what he saw as the breach of Lundy's independence.

Although Christie's managers of the island were not concerned to claim independence from mainland laws, they were careful to ascertain the correct island position concerning taxes. It was established that if the beneficial owner lived on Lundy, he would be exempt from tax, but if he lived on the mainland his profits would be subject to normal taxation that would be applied to any 'overseas' property. Christie's agents did establish his right to wreck (National Trust, 1920). The accounts show the cost of employees' National Health and Insurance stamps, following the National Insurance Act of 1911, which is another interesting aspect of the regular administration that appears not to have been applied previously. It would, indeed, have been grossly unfair to employees to exclude them from the benefits involved, and it raises an interesting point with regard to the continuation of Lundy's independence.

Amongst bitter disputes, in 1925 Christie was declared by the Master in Lunacy to be unfit to manage his affairs and Lady Rosamonde was successful in being appointed receiver. She put Lundy up for sale, and Mr May's tenancy was ended on 29 September 1925. In that September Mr Martin Coles Harman became the new

owner of Lundy. He paid £16,000 for the island and a further £9,000 for the *Lerina* and the ingoing valuation.

## CONCLUSION

Although Christie had no particular interest or involvement with Lundy, he was of a family that was used to the proper management of property. It was important that he had been in a position to provide capital for the restoration of the island buildings and the farm, and to bring it to a working economy. He was wise or fortunate in the appointment of his tenant, May, who was an experienced farmer and well versed in business-like management, and in his choice of managers (Messrs Pitts Tucker) who were efficient and conscientious in supervising island matters. What is perhaps most remarkable is that he broke the dismal history of losses of those who had previously invested in Lundy.

The one sad feature of this period is that despite the benefits he brought to Lundy, he took little pleasure as the owner in his possession of the island. Walter Heaven also wrote rather sadly in a letter to his sister in 1921 'not a single night passes that I do not return to Lundy in my dreams.'

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to:

Sir George Christie for his kind permission to reproduce the photograph of his father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

The Heaven family for access to the Lundy archives.

Diana Keast for giving me access to the Harman archive.

Peter Thomas for access to the Allday collection.

Alan Rowland for his help in providing extracts from the *Hartland Chronicle*.

Tony Cutler for helpful reading of the original text.

## REFERENCES

Blackwell, A. E. 1922. MS Account of a visit to Lundy, M. Ternstrom collection.

Blackwell, A. E. 1925. MS Account of a visit to Lundy, M. Ternstrom collection.

Blackwell, A. E. 1960. Lundy's Ecclesiastical History, *Transactions of the Devonshire Assn*, 92, 88-100.

Blunt, W. 1968. *John Christie of Glyndebourne*.

Dennis, A. J. 1959. *The Lundy Review*, No 5.

Harman Archive (private collection). 1916. Surveyor's Report.

Hartland and West Country Chronicle. 1920. No 271. (and passim 1920-26).

Holman, J. 1982. Waugh on Lundy. *The Puffin Journal* (privately printed) 25, 26 - 27.

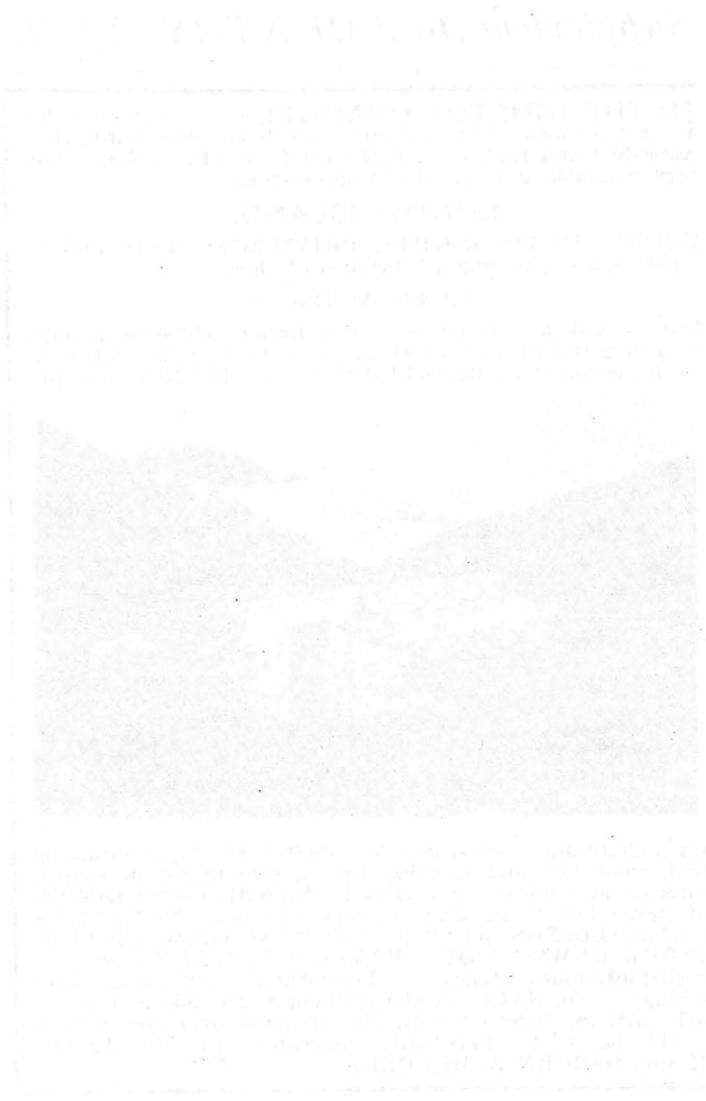
Ilfracombe Chronicle & N. Devon News. 12 August 1922

Jukes, H. 1920. MS Description of Lundy, illustrated with photographs. Property of the Lundy Field Society deposited on loan to the West Country Studies Library.

The National Trust. 1915. Lundy archive, Ref: 1287.

The National Trust. 1918 - 1921. Idem, Ibid.

The National Trust. 1920. Idem, Ibid.



Nov. 30th, 1912.

*Supplement to COUNTRY LIFE.*

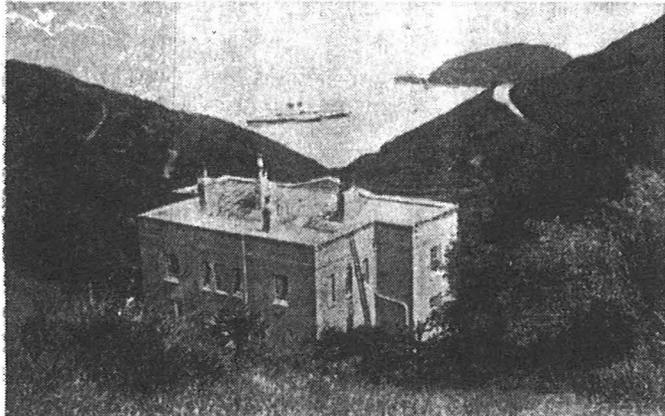
**I**N THE BRISTOL CHANNEL (about fifteen miles north-west from Clovelly, 20 from Westward Ho! Appledore and Instow, and 24 west from Ilfracombe).—The very romantic and historically interesting

**LUNDY ISLAND.**

**UNIQUE IN ITS RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES, and covering a total area of about**

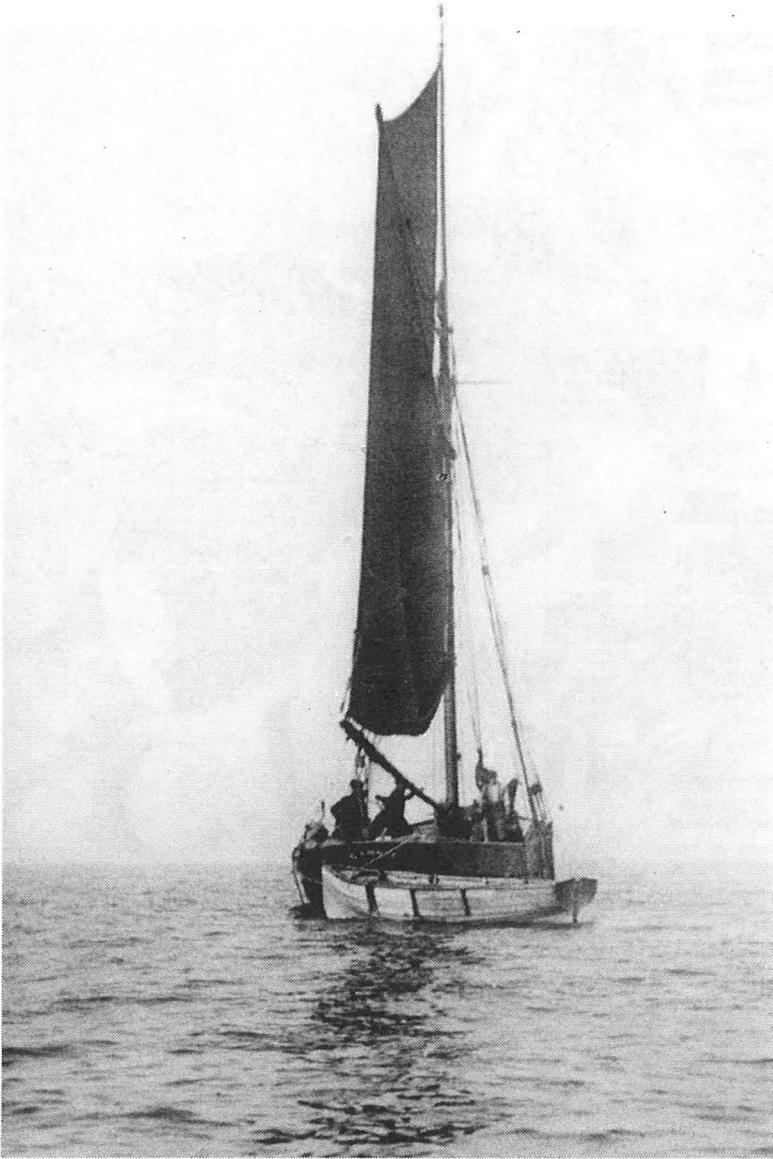
**1,047 ACRES,**

being roughly about three miles long from north to south, with a varying but average width of about half-a-mile. There is upon the island a **GRANITE-BUILT RESIDENCE**, occupy-



ing a charming position in a well-sheltered valley, containing hall, eight bed and dressing rooms, two reception rooms, kitchens and offices; A CAPITAL MANOR FARM-HOUSE of eleven bedrooms, three reception rooms; NUMEROUS OUTBUILDINGS, ATTRACTIVE BUNGALOW, PICTURESQUE REMAINS OF "MARISCO CASTLE," now converted into four cottages, the old lighthouse, and several other cottages. For SALE, or the Residence, grounds and about 40 ACRES, together with the sporting over the Island, would be LEP.—Personally inspected by the Agents, Messrs. OSBORN & MERCER.

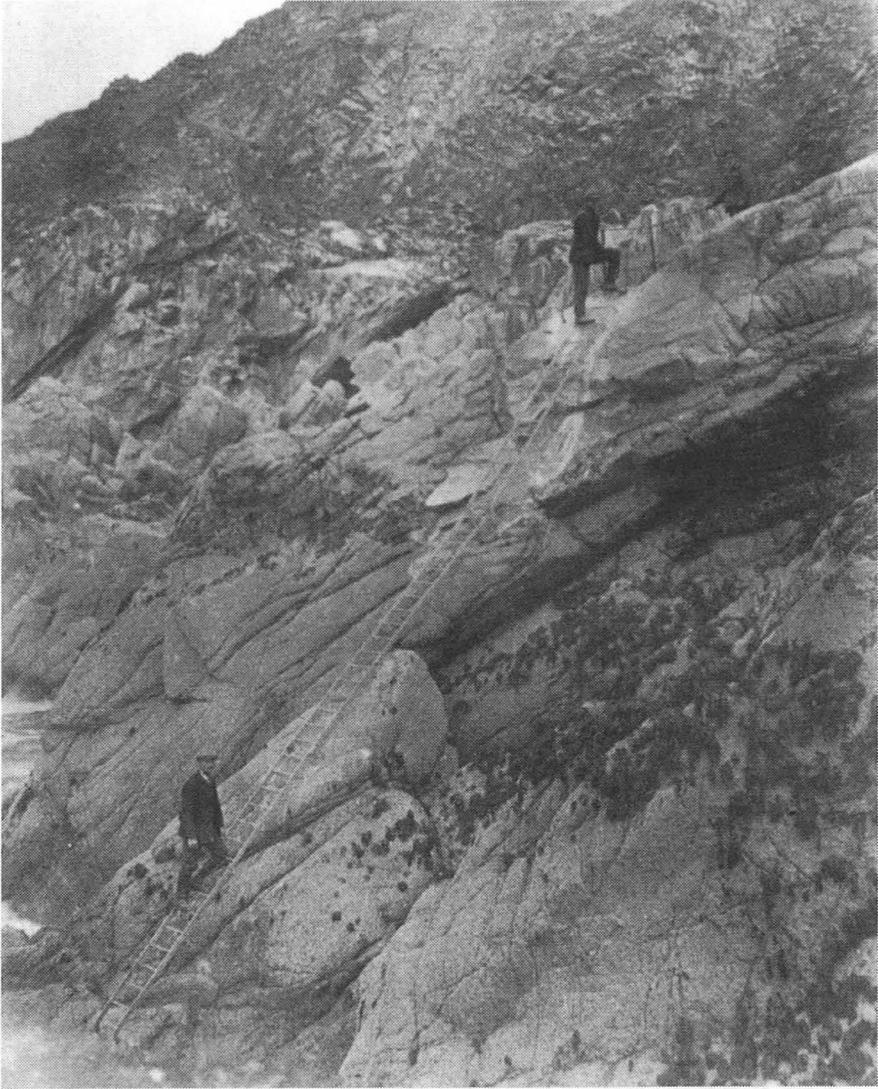
**Figure 1.** Advertisement for the sale of Lundy published in *Country Life* 30 November 1912.



**Figure 2.** *The Gannet.*



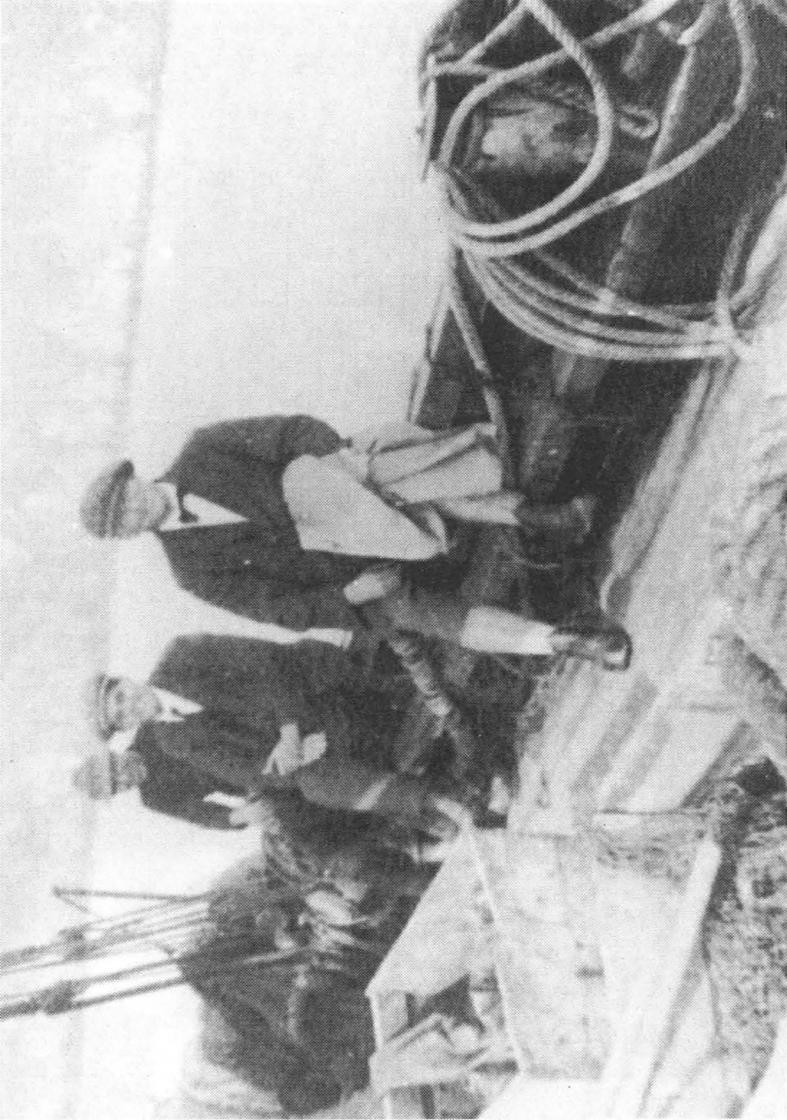
**Figure 3.** A. L. Christie (right), his father (seated), and his son John (founder of the Glyndebourne Opera).



**Figure 4.** The Montagu Steps (1920) (no connection with the salvage of H. M. S. Montagu).



Figure 5. The *Lerina*.



**Figure 6.** Mr H. May aboard *Lerina*, behind him his secretary and Capt. Dark.



**Figure 7.** The original 'Black Shed' refreshment room (first called 'The Tent', hence the name 'Tent Field'). Miss Sage second left, on her right Mrs Marion Heaven. Dr John Heaven standing far right.

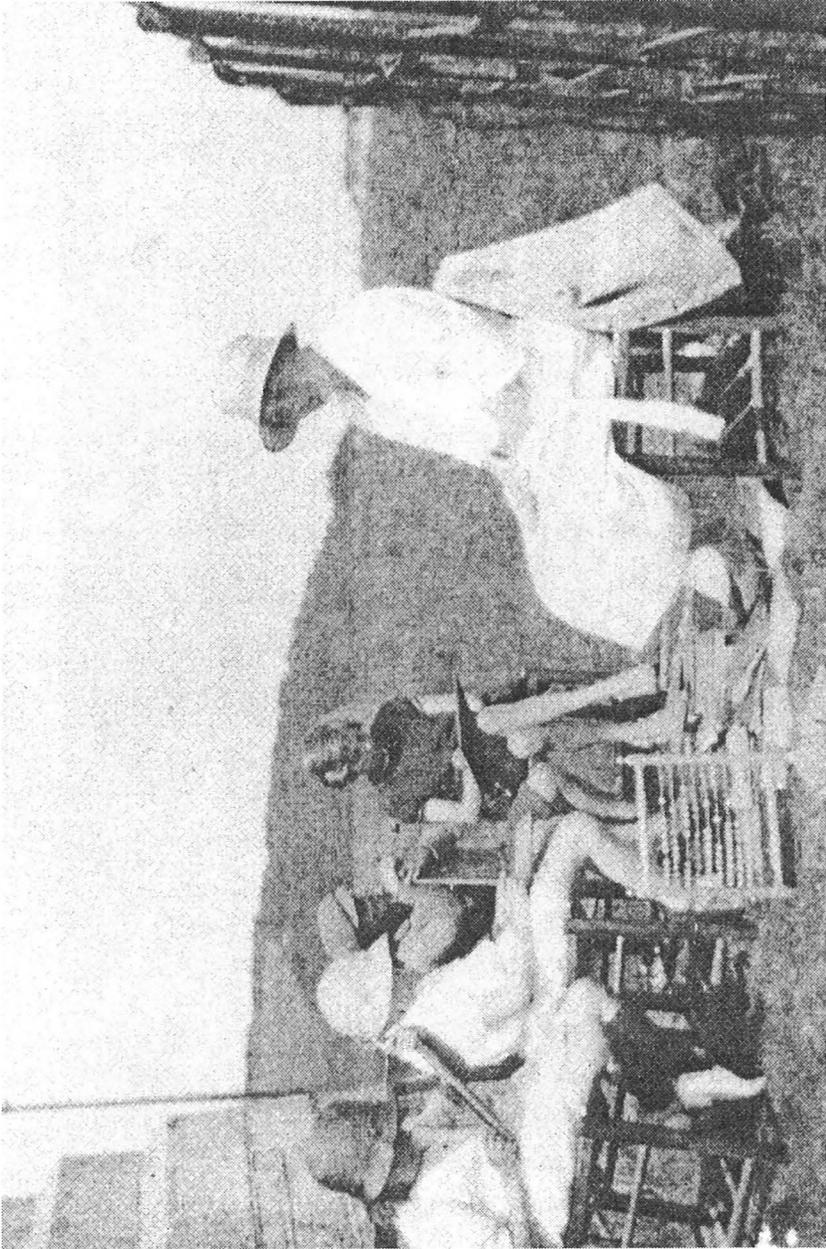
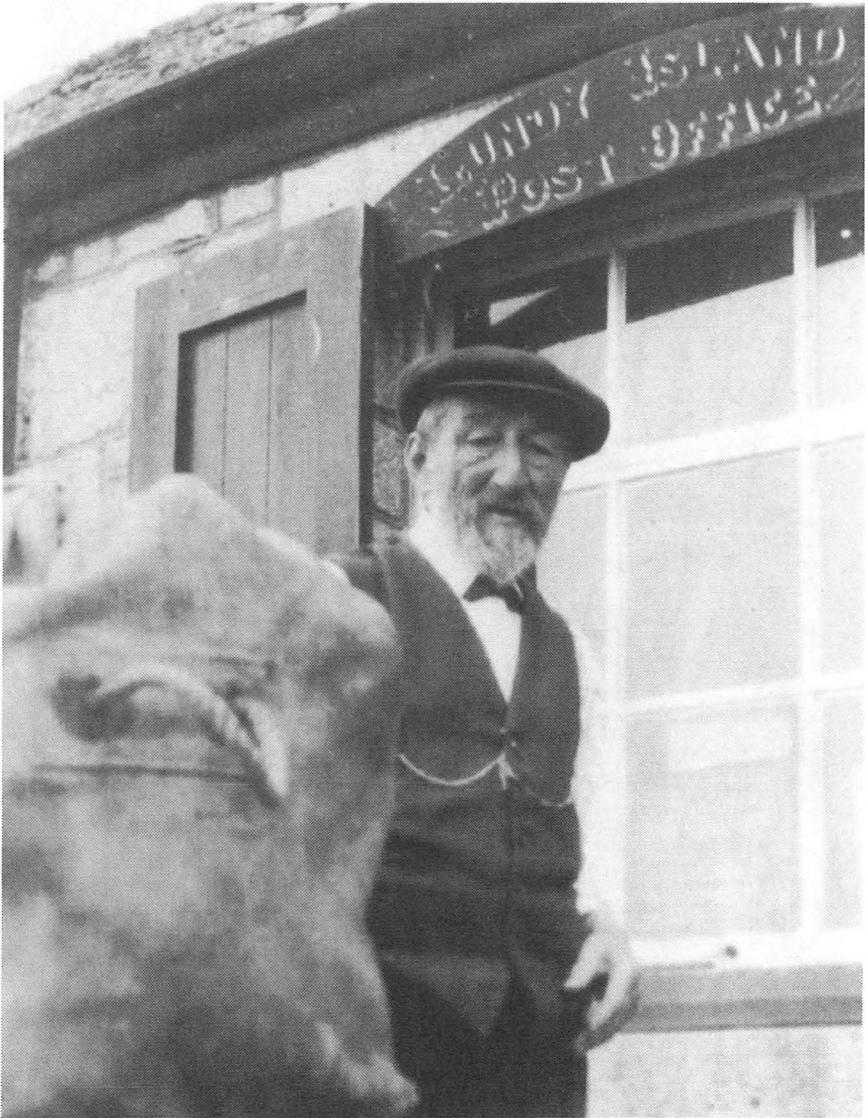


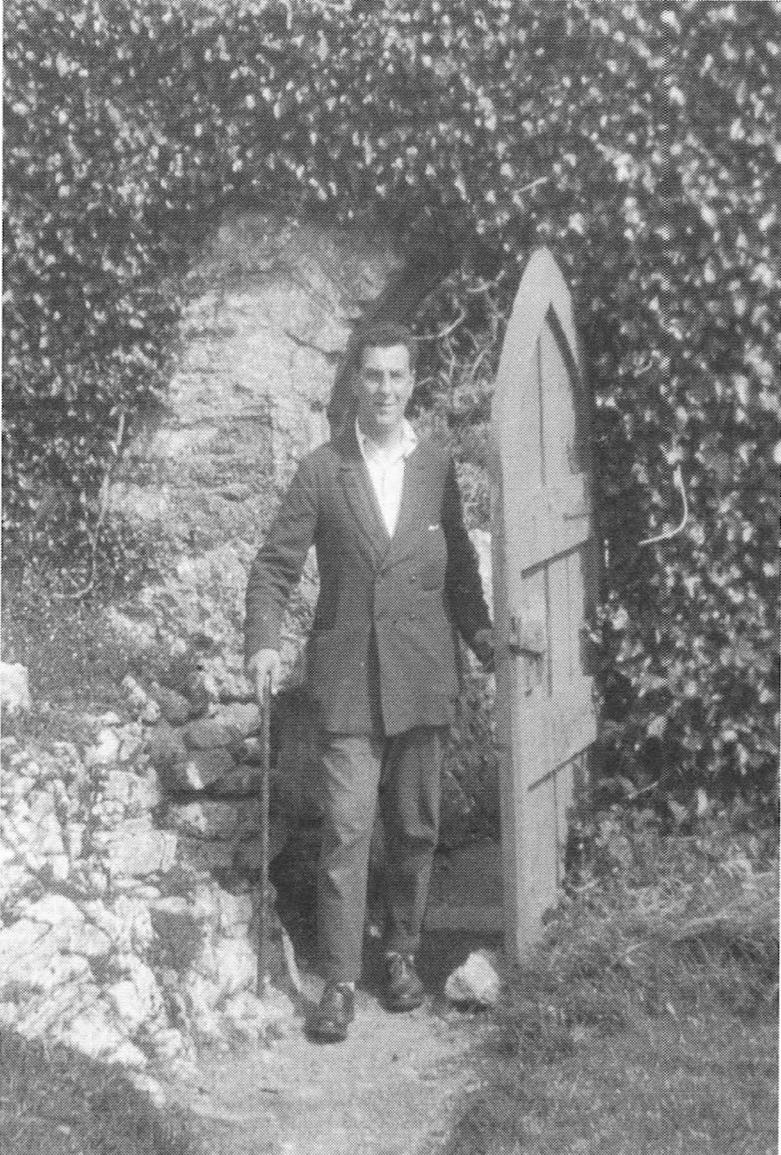
Figure 8. Mrs Willibond giving lessons in the open air.



Figure 9. Coastguard H. Jukes.



**Figure 10.** F. W. Allday outside the Post Office (now Castle Cottage).



**Figure 11.** A. E. Blackwell at the 'Monastery Gate' (c 1922). This gate allowed access to the 'Iron Church' on the land that was the private reserve of the Heaven family near the present Government House.