

ISLAND REPORT

Derek Green (General Manager, The Lundy Co Ltd)

The year 2020 will undoubtedly be remembered for the global pandemic which affected everyone around the world, but Lundy's year began with MS *Oldenburg* remaining stranded in dry dock awaiting outstanding repairs to her damaged rudder stock. The damage had seemingly occurred in April 2019 after a stray rope disabled the ship at Lundy and she had to be towed home. The damage only came to light after the ship entered the dry dock in November 2019.

What should have been a relatively straightforward repair turned into a European saga, with a new stock eventually being newly forged from approved steel in Germany. During the extended dry docking, extreme weather hampered the possibility of other supply runs to Lundy from charter vessels, and as a result island fuel levels were perilously low. With the situation becoming increasingly concerning, we were finally given dispensation to refit the original damaged rudder stock in order to resupply the island with fuel. Fortunately, a short weather window appeared, and so with just two days of fuel remaining, *Oldenburg* with her precious cargo of diesel and other supplies was a very welcome sight in the Landing Bay. It wasn't quite the start to 2020 we had expected but as things turned out it wasn't the biggest crisis of the year. The new rudder stock was finally delivered from Germany and *Oldenburg* returned to Sharpness for refitting, eventually leaving Sharpness on 27th April.

The island opened after its annual maintenance closure in January with the helicopter service beginning as usual. There was news of a virus in China and concern for the UK, but who could have known how quickly it would have affected us. Despite growing concern, things on the island were kept as normal as possible and in March we welcomed a visit from the Lundy Collectors Club. The Club's members had travelled from far and wide and enjoyed a full week of activities, but as the threat of lockdown loomed, they turned out to be our last visitors for some time.

The R.I.B. being loaded at Appledore (photo: James Wright).



Lundy finally closed the door of the Marisco Tavern on 27th March and the island remained locked down until 4th July. During what became the first lockdown, typically the weather was exceptional and the island's wildlife and vegetation flourished without interruption and disturbance from people. All but a few key workers on the Island were furloughed, with *Oldenburg* providing a monthly supply run bringing fuel and groceries to the islanders. On the mainland the *Oldenburg* crew worked one in every four weeks, while shore office staff were redeployed to work safely from home. Islanders and shore-based staff quickly adapted to the 'new normal' and routines established.

During lockdown Lundy's maintenance project programme was curtailed considerably, with all but critical work postponed. The island's finances immediately became a concern and the focus from Bideford and Shottesbrooke was firmly assigned to applying for grants and other assistance to keep the Lundy Company financially buoyant.

During lasting periods of good weather, I made a few socially distanced but memorable trips to the island with fresh stores and mail in the R.I.B. between *Oldenburg* sailings. On most occasions I was accompanied by pods of Common Dolphins, curious as to the lone boat in an otherwise empty Bristol Channel. I sometimes wondered who was entertaining who as I made my way to and from Lundy. In any other year this would have been the greatest of pleasures, but the pandemic overshadowed most things. It did however provide a small respite from day-to-day challenges, and to be at one, alone with the sea.

Leading up to the planned re-opening in July, an immense amount of work was put into ensuring that the entire operation was 'Covid secure', which entailed the fitting of screens, sanitising stations and social distancing measures throughout, as well as enhanced cleaning measures for the island properties.

We finally reopened for staying visitors only, gradually introducing a small number of day-trippers. The ship, Tavern and General Stores took on a completely different feel and, like the rest of the country, we firmly hoped this would be a short-term measure before returning to normal.

Repainting Old Light (photo: Derek Green).



However, in the fullness of time the situation on the mainland deteriorated and so, like the rest of the UK, Lundy entered Lockdown 2 in November.

During the summer months however, when we were open, we endeavoured to keep things as normal as possible, and were pleased to be able to host our annual Fly-In in early August.

The company's financial position was bolstered by several grants from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Cultural Emergency fund. However, it was clear that more funds would have to be found to ensure the company remained viable. A public appeal launched in August turned out to be the most successful of all Landmark's appeals, bringing in over £200,000 in a very short space of time.

During the second lockdown we took the decision to keep everyone working and brought forward the annual 'Deep Clean' closure programme for properties (which otherwise would have taken place in January 2021) in anticipation of re-opening before or shortly after Christmas. *Oldenburg* entered dry dock in mid-November which kept the crew occupied for the winter. The island re-opened on 30th November with students from Imperial College London able to visit ahead of members of the public, who followed soon after on 4th December. Christmas and New year were inevitably a much-subdued affair, with guests departing on 2nd January 2021 and Lockdown 3 following in mid-January.

One benefit to the Island to come out of the pandemic however was grant funding from Historic England to keep heritage workers employed. As a result we have been able to progress works to the castellated wall behind Government House, repointing works to the gable end of the Old Light accommodation block and, pleasingly, further works to finally complete the replacement spindles in the stairwell of the Old Light tower. This involved (at very short notice) shipping and erection of scaffolding along with the awarding of contracts to Old Light Building Conservation, Charlie Smith and Rachel Thompson. Somerset Forge were engaged to carry out specialist welding and the sourcing of marine-grade stainless steel for the spindles, especially laser cut to size and delivered before *Oldenburg* entered dry dock. One of the challenging conditions applied to the grant was that the work had to be arranged, completed and invoiced before 31st March 2021, so it was a tight deadline but (at the time of writing) we look to be on track.

When news of the lockdown first broke, many visitors will have been disappointed not to have enjoyed their Lundy holiday in 2020, but Landmark and the Lundy Company quickly established an automated online system to enable guests to defer their holidays. This proved very easy to use, ensuring that 2021 is going to be extremely busy once we re-open. It's testament to the popularity of the island and support from visitors that over 80% of bookings were deferred rather than cancelled completely.





Jack Bater (left) receiving his retirement memento – a propellor nut – from Derek Green (photo: Lyndsey Green) and (right) Richard Goodman and Rachel Sylvia bade farewell to life on Lundy during 2020, here taking a 'selfie' from the top of Old Light.

To supplement island accommodation we have been working closely with St Helen's PCC to make the Vestry more available to the public as a distinct and unique place to stay. Whilst it's not considered part of the Landmark Handbook island portfolio, I'm delighted that from 2021 we will be able to offer bookings for the Vestry directly through the Lundy Shore Office. I am sure it will soon become a popular property with regular Lundyites.

During the topsy-turvy year that was 2020 we had inevitable staff changes, notably with the retirement of Jack Bater, Ship's Superintendent, MS *Oldenburg*, after 30 years. Jack first served as chief engineer before taking over the superintendent role in 2005. Jack will remain as engineering consultant for the near future. We welcomed Paul Gyurgyak who, having served as relief Master on *Oldenburg* for many years and thus is very familiar with the operation, took over Jack's role. In the shore offices we welcomed back seasonal regular Kate Bennett in Ilfracombe, while Jo Lake joined us for the short summer season in Bideford. On Lundy we said *bon voyage* to Pete and Simone Lambden, respectively Carpenter and Head Housekeeper, who set sail for a Greek retirement after spending eight productive years on Lundy. Richard Goodman and Rachel Sylvia also left to take up positions on the mainland. During the year we welcomed Matt and Sam Scantlebury to work with our Cargo and Housekeeping teams, and Matt Stritch and Jo Farrow joined us from Ascension Island as Ranger and General Assistant respectively.

Clearly the pandemic has had a major impact on the operation, the business, our staff and visitors, with just 2,674 staying visitors and 1,634 day-trippers (compared to 5,515 stayers and 9,979 day-trippers in 2019). However, it has been very reassuring, with both government and public support, that we were able to keep a full complement of permanent staff as well as recruit some key positions during the year. It's also a pleasant reminder of how importantly Lundy is viewed, and valued.

At the time of writing we remain in lockdown, but there is light on the horizon and we wait anxiously to re-open once more. We sincerely hope that the coming year will be safe, and in the Lundy Field Society's 75th year, a successful one for all.

With many thanks for your ongoing support.