

## The Buildings of Lundy

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### Introduction

For a small and remote island, Lundy has a fine and unusual collection of buildings. In 1969 when the Landmark Trust took over the management of the island, it was clear that for the foreseeable future the island should depend mainly on holiday revenue for its survival. Its buildings, which for Landmark had been one of the island's selling points, were immediately recognised as a valuable resource: places where holiday-makers might enjoy a holiday in a beautiful and unspoilt place.

The Landmark Trust is a charity which was set up in 1965 to rescue buildings in distress and bring them back to useful life. Each restoration is undertaken with great care and much thought is given to the way the building was used in the past. For those who stay in our buildings, there is an album of historical notes, plans and photographs, showing how the place was when we found it and what we have done to it. Thus, research on each of our buildings is an integral part of our work. We believe that by knowing about the building in which you are staying you can gain more from your holiday. In the words of our Handbook:

*A stay in a Landmark is meant to offer not just a holiday but an experience, of a mildly elevating kind, a fresh window on life, to be looked through, or not, as you please.*

In 1989 when we came to write the Lundy history albums, it became clear that there had been very little research done on the buildings themselves. There was a great deal to be found on bird or marine life and archaeology but nothing specific on the built environment. The only properly researched building was the Castle. In 1928 Martin Harman had commissioned Charles Winmill of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings to do a report on its condition, but due to the high cost of the proposed works, the report was ignored.

Three of the buildings; the Castle, Old House and the Old Light were listed Grade II and had cursory entries in the Statutory List. Beyond this, research on the buildings meant talking to people who used to live on the island, those who had built up collections of memorabilia, and of course our builders.

We came to rely on the publications of Tony Langham and Myrtle Ternstrom about the island generally, and Tony Langham's extensive collection of photographs of Lundy past and present, generously placed at our disposal, was invaluable. We also had Felix Gade's *My Life on Lundy* covering the years when he was agent, from 1926 until his retirement in 1971.

This was a useful source of information on what day to day life was like in those sometimes difficult years. *The Illustrated Lundy News* which ran from 1970-1975 was also helpful.

The scale of our project on Lundy was different from those on the mainland. Here we were faced with the problems of restoring more than twenty buildings of differing styles, materials and age. One factor however, unites them all: the weather. Lundy has very little natural shelter and at times is cruelly exposed to the wind and the wet. For a building to last on the island, it must be built in a more robust manner than those on the mainland and builders and restorers must be ever-mindful of Lundy's special conditions in their selection of materials and techniques. The original builders had mainly used Lundy granite: it was on site and it was durable. Like those before them, the Landmark work-force had to import every other material such as timber and slate – an operation which immediately raised costs.

With the notable exceptions of the Castle and the Old House (just), most island buildings date from the nineteenth century when Lundy enjoyed the fruits of Victorian public and private spending. The buildings fall loosely into groups, those built at the instigation of the Heaven family and their tenants, those erected by Trinity House, and those of the Lundy Granite Company. In this century, the Harmans began to use some of the buildings to let for holidays. In its turn,

the Landmark Trust has overseen the restoration and repair of every building (except Signal Cottages) and the new building of Government House and Square Cottage.

## **The Buildings**

### *The Castle*

The oldest building on Lundy is the Castle built in 1244 by Henry III to prevent Lundy's use as a base by rebels and fugitives. On a commanding site overlooking the harbour, it seems to have been Lundy's principal building until the end of the 18th century when the island entered a period of calm and the focus of affairs moved to the present village centre. With its cottage on the north side, the Castle now provides four holiday cottages. The history of the castle has been recently published (Ternstrom 1994) and will not be repeated here.

### *The Old House*

The Landmark Trust has restored the Old House to something like its original appearance. It is very likely that this is the house referred to in 1787 in a description printed in the North Devon Magazine of 1824, as "lately built by Sir John Borlase Warren" the MP for Marlow and future Admiral, who owned Lundy from 1775 – 1781. Mary Ann Heaven's drawing of it dated August 1838 shows a single storey central section

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flanked by two storey twin towers. It was here that the late Georgian owners and their agents or stewards lived.

When Mr Heaven bought Lundy he removed the tower roofs, built up the single storey and covered the whole with a shallow pitched roof. As the Heaven family lived at their new house in Millcombe, Sir John's house became the Farm House. Further details and plans of the development of the house are given by Langham (1994).

### *The Old Light*

The Corporation of Trinity House is the General Lighthouse Authority for England, Wales and the Channel Islands. In the 19th century, it played an important part in the life of the island for it was responsible for the Old Light complex, the Battery, the cottage at Stonecroft, and at the end of the century, the North and South Lights.

Lundy has always been a danger to shipping in the Bristol Channel. At the end of the 18th century, a group of Bristol merchants, mindful of possible business losses, decided to build a lighthouse on the island's highest point at Beacon Hill. This choice of site, 470 feet above sea level, was in fact an unsuitable one. Although foundations were laid, nothing happened until Trinity House acquired the site on a 999 year lease and asked Daniel Asher Alexander, their Surveyor, to design his exceptionally fine lighthouse of 1819.

It was built of Lundy granite – an entirely suitable material for the monumental style he chose. During its restoration, Landmark's builders discovered that the Old Light tower (96 feet high) has a cavity wall, and unusually, both skins are of granite. The cavity wall was a brick technique whereby the regular thickness of the two walls made it possible to separate the outer and inner skin with a uniform cavity. Such a technique was obviously easier when bricks, fashioned from identical moulds, were used. Alexander used this method for masonry on his Heligoland lighthouse tower in 1811 but Lundy was exceptional in having two granite skins. The challenge for his masons was to cut perfectly even blocks and in this they succeeded because the cavity is consistent, measuring 3" all the way up.

The lighthouse – the highest light in Britain – was first brought into use on 21st February, 1820. It had cost £36,000, a very considerable outlay on the part of Trinity House. The upper beam revolved by clockwork every 16 minutes and there was a flash every two minutes. The light could be seen from a point 18 foot above sea level from some 32 miles. There were commodious quarters for two keepers and their families at the side of the tower and later a house for the Principal Keeper was built in the south-east corner of the walled compound. This was demolished when the South Light was being built in 1897.

After the 1939-45 War when the Old Light was requisitioned by the Admiralty and housed a naval

detachment, Mr Harman gave it rent-free to the Lundy Field Society. The Society used it for many years as their headquarters with a hostel in the care of a resident warden.

Also within the compound is the little building known as Old Light East which originally housed the compulsory pigs, advocated by Trinity House, and the latrines. After the closure of the lighthouse, it became a store and later a ringing room for the Lundy Field Society before it was turned into an extra bedroom.

### *The Battery*

The choice of Beacon Hill by the Bristol merchants and later by Trinity House, for the lighthouse site was an unhappy one. It was always too high to be seen by ships in fog. The light was therefore supplemented by a fog battery halfway down the west side, a site chosen in 1863 and equipped with two 18 pounder guns. When it was foggy, one gun was fired every ten minutes. Two families lived in the tiny, and now roofless, cottages uphill from the little powder house. By 1897 it was clear that both the Battery and Lighthouse were not reliable safeguards and Lundy North and South Lights were built.

### *Stoneycroft*

The pleasant little one storey cottage to the east of the Old Light is Stoneycroft. It appears in a drawing of Mary Ann Heaven of 1838 and may have been built about that time for Mr Grant, the Collector of Customs

at Barnstaple, who was also a Trinity House Agent. In 1988 Landmark converted it into a holiday cottage for four people.

### *Millcombe House*

In 1836 William Heaven – a gentleman from Somerset educated at Harrow and Oxford – bought Lundy for £9,870. At first it was a place to spend summer holidays but after Mrs Heaven died in 1851, Mr Heaven became the first owner to live there permanently. It was at this time that the island became much more civilised in a most Victorian way.

Mr Heaven's first job was to build himself a house suitable for him and his young and growing family. Arriving at Lundy, the view of Millcombe is obscured until right at the last minute. Then as the boat moves towards its anchorage, the valley where Millcombe has been sheltering, reveals this unexpectedly attractive classical house of cream stucco. It is an antidote to the ruggedness which surrounds it and as, Nikolaus Pevsner says in the *Buildings of England* series, the only place where Lundy can be seen in so gentle a mood.

Building Millcombe was not easy. The majority of the materials, apart from granite, and all the Heavens' furniture and effects had to be hauled up the beach path on carts by donkeys and oxen. Soon after this Mr Heaven set about building the present beach road which Trinity House would not help with and told him was impossible.

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Mr Heaven's resident agent, William Malbon, supervised the works which clearly did not run smoothly, as before completion and account settling a survey and report was carried out detailing the shortcomings: shoddy joinery, plumbing and decoration as well as a poorly designed roof. Whatever the truth of such a damning document, Millcombe is a very pleasing and sociable house to stay in. It is compactly designed on the ground floor round a central hall and upstairs round a top-lit central staircase with well-proportioned rooms making the best of the views towards the Landing Bay.

The Rev. Hudson Heaven, son of William Heaven, died on the mainland in 1916 and, two years later, the island was sold to Mr Christie and then in 1925 to Martin Coles Harman. The Heavens had called their house The Villa but by then it was known as The House. The Harmans renamed it Millcombe after the mill at the bottom of the valley or combe which had stood near the little pond to the right of the gates.

In 1961 it had been necessary to replace the roof with a cheaper flat roof after dry rot eradication. When Landmark began its refurbishment, we replaced the copper-lined inward sloping roof. We also removed the front and back porches which had been added at a later date as well as making a north window in the kitchen, facing the site of a demolished latrine. The walls around the terrace were erected in 1989 to give those staying at Millcombe some privacy.

### *The Old School (Blue Bungalow)*

Rev. Heaven, known by the family as "Phi" short for philosopher due to his bookishness, was headmaster at Taunton College until 1863 when he moved to Lundy. In 1886 he erected the School Bungalow primarily as a Sunday school. It is built of timber and corrugated iron and was originally one room inside. Internal partitions were added in 1918 when it became a dwelling and has been used to house staff, or let for holidays as it is now, ever since.

### *Bramble Villa*

The original bungalow here was built by Rev. Heaven in 1893, partly as an overflow for Millcombe and partly to house Mr and Mrs Ward, the coachman/gardener and cook. It was built in a colonial style with an east-facing verandah. Rev Heaven used the sitting room as his study, no doubt something of a refuge for writing sermons.

By 1970 this building was derelict and Landmark decided to replace it with a similar building which was designed by our architect, Philip Jebb, and made by a firm called Timbaform in sections to be erected on the island.

### *The Church*

William Heaven suffered a stroke in 1875 and his son, the Rev. Hudson Grosett Heaven, took over the running of the island. At first when congregations were

small, Sunday services had been held in the hall or dining room at The Villa but something larger was soon required. In 1885 Mr Heaven built a modest church immediately to the north of the present Government House where its site may be still seen (photo in Langham 1994, 124). It was described by the Bishop of Exeter as a "corrugated irony". Undaunted, Rev. Heaven then achieved his long-held ambition and erected a much grander church consecrated by the Bishop in 1897.

### *The Lundy Granite Quarry Company's buildings*

Often short of funds themselves, the Heavens sought other investors to bring prosperity to Lundy. The Lundy Granite Company was inaugurated in 1863 working the quarries on the east side. It flourished for five years but then closed down amid rumours of inefficiency and malpractice. The cottages built for the managers and the hospital are now picturesque ruins at the top of the cliffs but the Company also developed what is now the kernel of the island, the village itself.

When it was set up, the Lundy Granite Company took over a lease of most of the island including the Farm. To the north of the Farmhouse (Old House) they built a Store which is now the outer bar of the Marisco Tavern with a store-keeper's cottage, now the main Tavern. At the other end was a bakehouse with the baker's quarters above – in the present office.

Behind the south end of the Farmhouse they built a wing, later known as the Big House, which was still

unfinished when the Company went out of business. It seems to have been used occasionally by the Heavens for Sunday services. In 1885 the farm was let to Mr Wright, gentleman farmer, who furnished the Big House for himself and laid out the tennis court in front of the Farm House which then became more of a farm cottage. In 1890 Mr Wright built the Linhay, premises of the present shop. (The Barn may well have been built in 1839 as it does not appear in the right place in Mary Ann Heaven's drawing of the village in 1838 and Mr Heaven's agent, Mr Malbon, mentions a new barn in 1839.)

After 1899 Mr Taylor – a tenant of the Heavens – made the Big House into a hotel and only in 1926 did Mr Harman run the Farm House and the hotel behind into one, making the Manor Farm Hotel. When the Landmark Trust took over Lundy, it realised that it would be impossibly expensive to restore the Hotel as it was, and for some years Millcombe was the island hotel.

### *The Admiralty Lookout (Tibbetts)*

Lundy's most famous wreck, that of HMS *Montagu*, happened close to Shutter Rock in 1906. Three years later the Admiralty built this isolated signal and watch station which was in use until 1926 and originally had a lookout room on its roof which was removed in 1971 being beyond repair.

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### Recent years

The Harmans realised that Lundy made an excellent place for holidays. Admiralty Lookout, known for many years as Tibbetts, was the first building they made available for holidays and in 1960 Albion Harman and his two sisters opened Castle Cottage. In 1964 a battle-mented and flat-roofed farm shed set against the wall dividing St. John's Valley and 'The Common' was made into the much-loved holiday cottages known as St. John's.

The aim of the Landmark Trust on Lundy has been to retain its special atmosphere. This has meant restoring and improving what was already there but, in addition, the Trust has erected three new buildings.

### *The Quarters*

One of the main problems at the outset was accommodation for the work force. This was overcome by putting up in 1972 the prefabricated Quarters. They now serve a useful life housing staff and larger visiting parties.

### *Square Cottage*

As it was too expensive to repair, the "Big House" wing of The Manor Farm Hotel was demolished and Square Cottage built in its place. Its pyramidal roof is deliberately reminiscent of those on the Borlase-Warren house.

### *Government House*

Philip Jebb designed Government House which was built in 1981 mainly of dressed granite reused from the demolition of the Manor Farm Hotel. It was originally proposed that the island's agent should live there but now it provides one of the most comfortable places for visitors to stay on Lundy.

### Conclusion

Lundy is not known for its buildings. It is famous for its bird and marine life, flora and fauna, and for the fact that it is an island. However, the buildings on Lundy are a bonus and in such a small place, the variety is remarkable. There is the castle with its origins in the middle ages, there is the highest lighthouse in Britain, a church of truly Victorian proportion and a classical small country house. On Lundy, every building is accessible and in the great majority, you can spend a very special holiday.



## References

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