

The Origins and First Fifty Years of the Lundy Field Society

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Origins

The Lundy Field Society was founded on 29th May 1946 but its origins can be traced to a meeting held the previous year on 8th December by the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society (DBW&PS). This meeting heard an interesting report of the development of the Pembrokeshire islands of Skomer and Skokholm as bird ringing stations. The speaker hoped that the study of bird migration undertaken before the war would be greatly extended and the DBW&PS was invited to support this work. In discussion of this proposal Leslie Harvey (Fig. 1), a lecturer in the Zoology Department of the University College of the South West (now Exeter University), "made a suggestion that consideration might be given to linking Lundy Island and the Scillies with the activities on the Pembrokeshire islands. ...the meeting decided later to explore its possibilities" (DBW&PS 1945). It is evident from subsequent events that they asked Harvey to investigate the situation on Lundy.

Harvey wrote to Martin Coles Harman (see Harfield, this vol. Fig. 2), the owner of Lundy, on 14th December

1945. Harman was a keen naturalist, who had published brief notes on ornithological topics (Harman 1943a, 1943b), but he was also extremely keen to preserve the independence of Lundy from the mainland authorities. His reply expressed interest in the project but...

"I have had some experience of the lengths to which Government Departments will go in trying to deprive one of one's birthright. I have had it said in Court by the Attorney General, (which the Court did not accept) that by virtue of the Wild Birds' Protection Act and its supposed application to Lundy, that Lundy had lost its independence; and I am very nervous of giving the mainland any handle."

(Harman 1946a)

Harvey responded:

"Thank you very much indeed for your reply to my enquiry about the possibility of establishing a bird station on Lundy. I am delighted to know that you are prepared to discuss the idea. I can readily understand your anxiety to preserve the integrity and independence of the island, and am quite sure that no member of the Devon Bird Watching Society or of the group associated with the Welsh project would wish to do anything to infringe this."

...

We shall be completely dependant on your goodwill, and it follows that you have the power to impose any terms you think fit."

(Harvey 1946a)

Harvey wrote again in March 1946 saying that he would like to put proposals to the DBW&PS meeting of 6th April which included: the erection of a Heligoland trap, the presence of biologists to operate the trap, ringing of nesting cliff-breeding birds, and periodic publication of progress reports and results. Harvey also expressed a personal interest in the study of other forms of wild life.

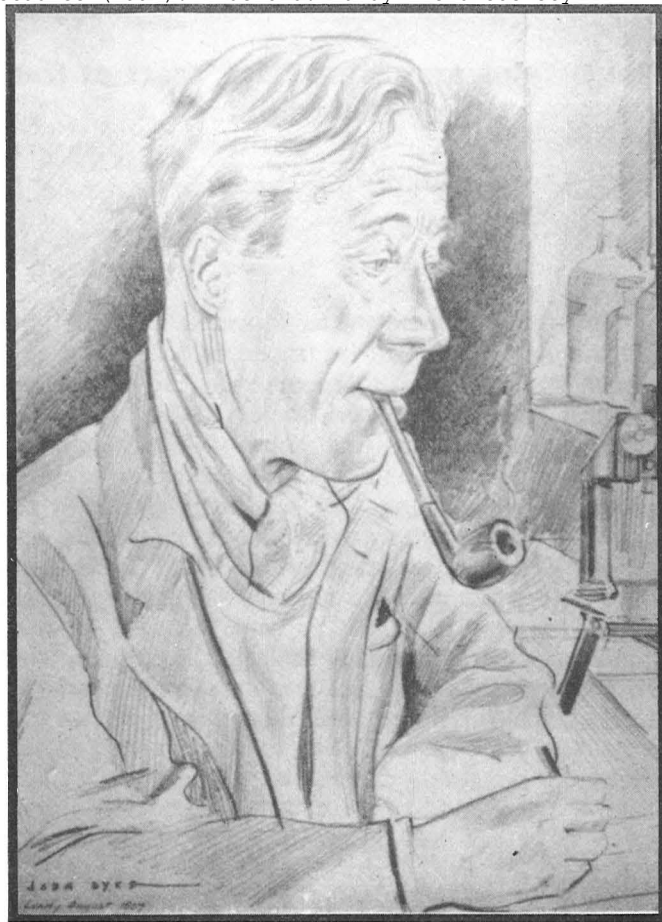
Harman replied, apologising that pressure of work had prevented him from replying to the previous letter, and continuing:

"What you desire to be done can be done provided your Society is prepared to agree to the following conditions:

(a) *A Lundy Bird-watching Committee to be formed which will have no other object but the Birds on Lundy [original underlined].*

(b) *The said Committee to be formed at my suggestion herein made: I to be the first subscriber to its funds in the sum of £50 hereby promised.*

(c) *The Committee men and those employed by them or associated with them to tell you that they will respect the Island's peculiar rights and privileges and see to it as far as they can that anyone they bring along does the same.*



Leslie Harvey, drawn by John Dyke in August 1957.

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(d) *I or my successors to issue annually written invitations to the people whose names and addresses the Secretary of the Lundy Committee gives me, to visit the island and to land without fee. Anyone not able to produce such an invitation will be charged the usual 1/- [5p] landing fee and will be subject to the usual Black Listing if his or her presence is not desired.*

The other aspects of the Island's wild life can, of course, be taken in the Committee's stride, but I want to avoid the Committee being a branch of anything else..."

(Harman 1946b)

Harvey was able to reply to this on the 29th thanking Harman for "your proposals [which] are so generous that I hesitate to demur from them" (Harvey 1946b). This was understandable as the £50 donation was a considerable sum at that time and, for instance, would provide half the annual salary for a warden (see below). Harvey did, however, ask for clarification of point (a) which appeared to preclude working with the Welsh group.

Harman responded that this was not his intention...

"All that I want to avoid is that, the Lundy Committee can be dictated to from 'on high' ...

It was for this reason and not because I want to interfere at all, that I suggested the matter might take the form of initiation, or at least, invitation by

me and that I might be the first subscriber.

All I ask for is some protection against the sort of thing that nearly always happens when we have connections with the mainland. We give some concession to some very nice people, they bring along some less nice people, and the less nice people introduce some nasty ones who start ordering us about on our own Island and telling us where to get off."

(Harman 1946c)

The DBW&PS minutes of the meeting of 6th April record:

"...the most important business of the day came under consideration. This concerned further developments towards the possible achievement of Lundy Island as a base for a station devoted to the intensive study of bird migration in co-operation with the West Wales Field Society..."

Mr L A Harvey who initiated the proposal at the previous meeting gave a report of his preliminary negotiations with Mr Martin C Harman, the owner of Lundy. On the whole these were reassuring.

...the scheme was to be commended, and many expressed their willingness to take an active part in the project. Accordingly a Lundy Field Committee to consist of the officers of our Society with Mr L A Harvey as convenor further to explore the possibilities of the scheme."

(DBW&PS 1946a)

After the meeting Harvey wrote to Harman:

"I am delighted to be able to report that the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society agreed on Saturday to the formation of a Lundy Field Committee on the terms of your generous offer. They have asked me to act as Convenor, and I am going to set about collecting together a group of likely workers and members as soon as I have polished off one or two jobs which I must finish. I shall be very glad to have your views on the form of the Committee if you have a spare moment, and I hope very much that you will agree to my proposing you as the first President."

(Harvey 1946c)

Harman replied to this "welcome letter" and warned of transport problems as the Admiralty had withdrawn its detachment on April 6th. He concluded:

"I will keep in touch with you if necessary by telephone."

With every good wish to you and to the embryo Lundy Field Committee."

(Harman 1946d)

It seems likely that Harman and Harvey did speak, as by the end of May, Harvey refers, without explanation, to a Lundy Field Society. This probably reflects Harman's desire for an independent organisation of similar standing to the DBW&PS whose own minutes at their next meeting simply record "that the Lundy

Field Society has been successfully launched."

(DBW&PS 1946b)

Harvey reported to Harman:

"I called an informal meeting together yesterday [29 May 1946] at which we drew up the enclosed constitution for a Lundy Field Society, and inaugurated the society. We agreed unanimously to ask you to be President and in view of your last letter of April 9th, I am sure that you will accept this office. I may say that we shall, as soon as we call our next meeting, appoint among the other officers, a chairman who will take on all the work on conducting committee and other meetings, we shall not therefore call on you to do any more than you wish to do"

(Harvey 1946d)

Harvey also indicated that he had never been to Lundy and that a reconnaissance party would be needed to identify the site for the trap.

Harman approved "a good job of work" which "interpreted my wishes in the constitution" and sent the promised £50 (Harman 1946e). Harvey also sent a copy of the minutes (presumably at the suggestion of Harman) to Felix Gade, then at the Hartland Quay Hotel, who responded positively and asked to join the LFS.

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The early years

Correspondence continued between Harman, Harvey and Gade about the proposed visit that the LFS hoped to make on the 28th of June. Gade was asked to advise on the site for the trap. A position on the dam in Millcombe had been suggested but Gade recommended a site on the side of Hangman's Hill. Harman also offered accommodation: "pending the restarting of the normal life of the Island, you will be welcome to use the hotel and the furniture" but he warned, "You will find everything in an unbelievable dreadful mess" (Harman 1946f). For the future he suggested "The Old Lighthouse with its noble house adjoining would be ideal but for the distance from the trap" (*ibid*). This was another example of Harman's generosity for, after its occupation by the Navy, the Old Light was one of the best repaired buildings on the island.

Harman had been having difficulty obtaining reliable transport but the LFS had fewer problems than he predicted. Accordingly, on the 28th the first LFS party of 5 went to the island.

"[We left] Bideford at 6 am and arrived at the landing beach by nine after a wet crossing in the face of a stiffish westerly breeze. Capt. Pile's boat was the first to call at Lundy for a month, and we carried mail and stores in addition to our party and half a dozen visitors. We were met on the shore by Mr Heaysman, Mr Harman's agent, who gave us directions to the various places we wished to see

and carte blanche to examine whatever we needed there."

(LFS 1946a)

On the island the party split into two, one going to the North End and the other looking at the trap site, and hotel...

"very generously offered with all its contents by Mr Harman as a temporary home until the end of the year. Having been warned, we were not surprised to find it somewhat forlorn, with many ceilings and walls badly damaged by rain through the unrepaired roof."

(LFS 1946a)

Hangman's Hill was rejected as a site for the trap but a promising site was located "between Hotel and House".

"Then over to the Old Light - our permanent quarters. It is good - plenty of room and "built like a battleship". No leaks here and all in good order after occupation by the Navy.

Lastly a visit to the Marisco Tavern to sample the beer we had ourselves brought over and down to the shore for the return. Just before three we weighed anchor and left the island, shining grey and green in the sunlight, with its lonely inhabitants waving us from the shingle. A quick passage with following wind and tide brought us to Bideford Quay by 5.30, our minds full of what has to be done, and how to do it."

(LFS 1946a)

The summer was spent organising the construction of the trap, not an easy task when many war-time restrictions on materials were still in force, and a second expedition was planned to leave on Friday 20 September. In the event they were delayed until the following Monday when they had a bad four-hour crossing. On the island they split, the three women cleaning up the hotel and the three men surveying the trap site and starting to dig holes for the posts. By Wednesday the posts had been erected and a small pond dug, fed by a convenient stream. Conditions were unpleasant as "the weather this day was foul ... no sign of sun since leaving Ilfracombe" (LFS 1946b). The condition of the Old Light had also deteriorated since June with a broken window and loose slates allowing the rain in. On the following day the sun came out and the skeleton of the trap was finished by lunch time, after which the whole party wandered up the west side and had tea with the keepers at the North Light. They returned to Ilfracombe on Friday and the work on the trap had to wait until October when another week's work saw the netting added and it could be described as virtually complete.

Sadly, much of this work was in vain as, at the first AGM on January 24, 1947, the trap was reported to have been "severely" damaged by the autumn gales. The meeting, however, was a success with membership reported at about 100 and a healthy bank balance. The meeting decided to appoint the first warden, Rowland Barker, who was later offered £100 per year

and 10/- (50p) per visitor per week. He was the first of a number of wardens employed by the LFS to run the observatory and hostel accommodation in the Old Light.

The trap was destroyed twice during the first half of 1947 without having been used and, by June, other locations were being considered. It was decided to relocate the trap to "St John's Valley below the mission hut" (LFS 1947) with a second trap to be built in the quarries.

Harvey was also concerned with an issue that continues to this day and asked Harman whether he would permit some rat eradication using an experimental method. Harman agreed but warned "in my first year [ie 1926] I employed experts who at a cost of £350 nearly but not quite, cleared out all the rats" (Harman 1947a). The idea came to nothing as Harvey discovered that the supposed new method of rat control was only a rumour. Harman also suggested ideas to the LFS and suggested that a long-term project should be undertaken to repoint Marisco Castle. The AGM of the following year agreed to this after obtaining expert advice on whether this was appropriate for an ancient monument. This broadening of the LFS's interests is also reflected in the first Annual Report which, as well as birds, contained preliminary reports on terrestrial and freshwater habitats and marine ecology.

The traps continued to be a problem in 1948 and, in November, it was decided to build two new traps, one in the south quarry and one in the garden of the

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Old Light. The Garden Trap was constructed in 1949 and a photograph of it appears in the third Annual Report. The year also saw the unveiling of the memorial to John Harman, VC, at which members of the LFS assisted with the 800 guests; the first suggestion that the LFS might assist with the Rhododendron problem; and the first suggestion that the LFS might undertake archaeological investigations "although such jobs ... must be done very carefully" (Harman 1949).

The Quarry Trap was built in 1950 but did not prove to be a success. It was replaced by the Terrace Trap in 1951 and a Quarter Wall trap followed sometime during the wardenship of Peter Davies (1951-4). The finances of the LFS were also causing great concern, particularly in 1952 when the University College at Exeter withdrew its grant, which had previously been of £200-300 per year.

Troubled times

Martin Coles Harman died suddenly at the end of 1954 and Leslie Harvey paid warm tribute to Harman's "advice, encouragement and help", reflecting that "The debt which the Society owes to M. C. Harman is beyond telling" (Harvey 1954). He was succeeded as President of the LFS by his son Albion and the Society decided to honour his father by founding and equipping a laboratory on the island named after him.

The later 1950s were a period of continual financial

worries for the Society, brought about by reduced income and by the need for substantial repairs to the Old Light. Scientific work continued, however, with an archaeological survey begun in 1955 and the first mist-netting of birds in 1958. The gales of 1959 destroyed the Garden Trap and badly damaged the Terrace Trap, whilst the roof of the Old Light continued to cause concern.

These problems continued into the 1960s with, at one stage, Albion Harman concerned at the low number of visitors to the hostel and being reported as "agreeable to the Society continuing providing it can be made to work more efficiently" (LFS 1961). There were severe delays in the appearance of Annual Reports, caused in part by the lack of reports from the warden who was asked to resign. He was not replaced over the summer of 1961. The financial position of the Society worsened until 1967 when the treasurer reported a balance of £4/11/10 (£4.59). Some Annual Reports had had to be combined to save money, the last two years' had yet to be produced and the Old Light was reported to need at least £300 worth of repairs. Albion Harman had suggested that the LFS move out of the Old Light in 1965 and he repeated the suggestion with the offer of Tibbetts in 1967.

Drastic measures were called for. A prize draw produced £214 and an archaeological course run on the island made a profit of £100. These covered the backlog of Annual Reports. The committee decided not to fund a warden in 1968 and to relinquish the Old Light.

requesting storage space for LFS property until better times would allow the re-establishment of a base on the island. These suggestions were endorsed at the AGM of March 1968.

Albion Harman, who had been ill for some time, died in June 1968 after 14 years as owner of Lundy and president of the LFS. Leslie Harvey recalled his interest and concern for the Society's welfare during these difficult years, despite his own financial problems in running the island (Harvey 1968). The LFS later placed a plaque on a seat in Millcombe and planted trees in the surrounding valley in his memory.

Agreement was reached with the Harman family that the Old Light hostel would be run by the island and a room above the bar would be made available for storage. John Harman became president of the LFS.

The Landmark Trust years

The following year, 1969, was a year of fundamental changes for both the Society and the Island. Professor Leslie Harvey, whose initial idea had resulted in the foundation of the LFS and who had served it as Secretary (1946-60) and Chairman (1960-69), retired from Exeter University and the chair of the LFS to live on the Isles of Scilly. Harvey's role in the foundation of the society, in obtaining grants from the University, and being involved in the running of the LFS for over twenty years had been pivotal in its development.

Three weeks after Harvey's retirement at the AGM,

Lundy was put up for sale by the Harman family. The National Trust expressed interest in the island but had insufficient funds. An appeal was started to which the LFS made an immediate donation of £248, and hoped to raise £1000, but the fund-raising activities were overtaken by the donation of £150,000 to the National Trust by Jack Hayward (now Sir Jack). This, together with the agreement of the Landmark Trust to take a full repairing lease of the island for 60 years, enabled the National Trust to buy the island.

Discussions with John Smith (now Sir John), the chairman of the Landmark Trust, were fruitful with the Landmark Trust agreeing to the LFS choosing a warden, who would be funded by the Landmark Trust and run the Old Light as a hostel. The money donated by the LFS was to be used to assist with the repairs to the buildings.

The new era also brought the suggestion that the LFS should change its name to simply "The Lundy Society" but this was rejected by the members at the AGM in 1970. At the same time John Smith became the President in succession to John Harman who, together with Jack Hayward, became Vice Presidents. The Society also became registered as a charity which allowed it freedom from taxation but necessitated some constitutional changes.

In 1971 the LFS ran its first day excursion to the island offering guided walks for particular interest groups and this made a profit of £699. It was agreed that this money should be used to fund grants for

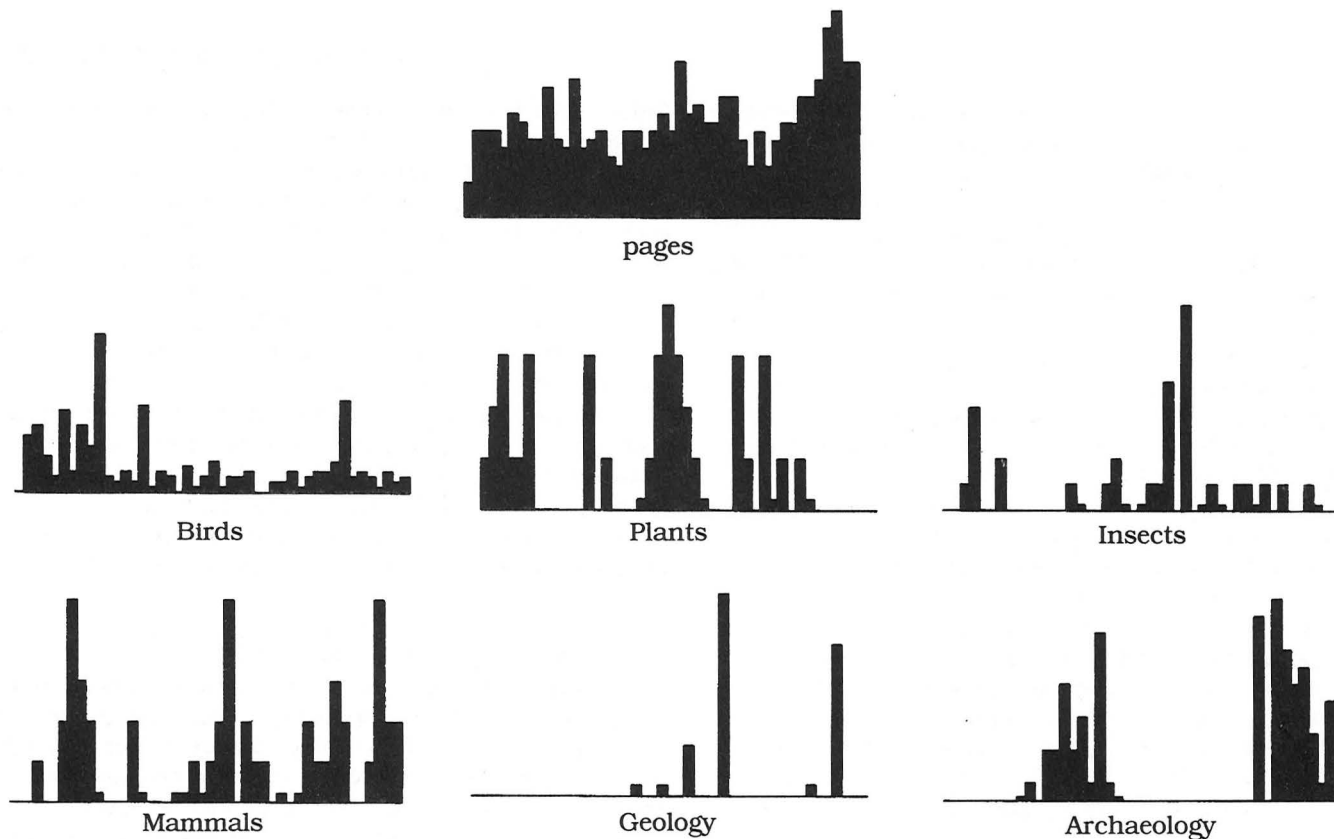


Fig. 2 Graphs showing total number of pages, and pages devoted to selected subjects, in the Annual Report of the Lundy Field Society. The graphs run from 1947 (left-hand side) to 1990 (right-hand side). All the figures are based on the index (Webster 1991) and are illustrative only as some papers may cover more than one subject and each has been rounded up to the next whole page.

fieldwork. Nick Dymond was appointed warden and Keith Hiscock produced plans for a marine nature reserve around Lundy.

The next year the excursion made £828. Despite this there was still concern that the Society's finances were not on a firm footing and stable, regular income was needed from the membership fees. The Terrace Trap was rebuilt and, the following spring, a Quarter Wall Trap was constructed before the warden left following his marriage. He was not replaced as it had been decided that the islanders should be subject to income tax and this had led to a sudden financial strain on the Landmark Trust.

The excursion continued to produce the bulk of the Society's income throughout the 1970s and early 1980s and much of the expenditure went to running courses on the island. This period saw a concentration on marine research organised around the promotion of Lundy as a marine nature reserve. This culminated in 1986 when the voluntary scheme was replaced by England's first (and so far only) Statutory Marine Nature Reserve (see Irving and Gilliland, this vol). The designation also led to the appointment of a warden by the Nature Conservancy Council and the Landmark Trust with some help from the LFS.

A sadder report during 1986 was that of the death of Leslie Harvey whose idea had led to the founding of the LFS exactly forty years before. He had run the society from then until his retirement in 1969 and without his energy, enthusiasm and commitment it is likely

that the LFS would have foundered during those early years.

Bad weather on an excursion early in 1986 reduced the profits and there was also increased competition from other trips and the regular sailings of the MV Oldenburg which came into service that year. Profits recovered the following year but in 1988 the paddle steamer Waverley could not be filled and the trip only just covered its costs. Following this the excursion transferred to the smaller Oldenburg and profits returned but were not to last. Recently the excursion has broken even and is no longer used to provide funding for the society's work. Despite this, better financial control and realistic membership fees have allowed the LFS to expand research as can be seen from the increased size of the Annual Report during the 1990s (Fig. 2).

The changing role of the LFS

The origins of the LFS lay in the desire to establish a bird observatory on Lundy and Martin Coles Harman's insistence that this should be run independently of the mainland. These early years saw the employment by the LFS of a warden to run the bird observatory and a hostel for visiting members. However, increasing wealth and new leisure opportunities during the 1960s led to a contraction of interest in bird watching and similar pursuits. The costs of the warden and repairs to the hostel building were increasing at the same time as the income from the hostel was going down. The

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LFS responded by enlarging its interests in fields such as archaeology and underwater research which were expanding.

It is clear that, from the start, the LFS was intended to have wider interests than ornithology. This may, in part, reflect the interests of Leslie Harvey whose own work on Lundy covered the ecology of the seashore. Work was concentrated during the early years on wildlife and the first foray outside this area was the proposal by Martin Coles Harman that the LFS should undertake some building conservation by repointing the walls of the castle. The first report of archaeological work was made in 1956, that on wrecks in 1967, and geology in 1968. The most recent addition to the fields of study has been animal psychology, which after a single paper in 1974 has been prominent in the past few years (Randle, this vol). There has also been an increase in the study of underwater archaeology (Robertson & Heath, this vol).

Throughout the range of subjects there have been noticeable peaks and troughs in interest as the graphs show (Fig. 2). Birds, as might be expected, form a constant theme throughout the years with a systematic list of species published in each Annual Report (These have not been included in the page counts). Peaks are visible, for example in the late 1980s when the warden, Neil Wilcox, published several surveys. The high figures during the early years are, in part, due to the length and number of rarity descriptions at that time.

Plants show peaks covering a few years, reflecting a

continual interest with bursts of activity on particular topics. Insects and mammals show a similar pattern whilst geology has seen sparse but important contributions.

Archaeology shows a very different pattern with two peaks corresponding to the activities of Keith Gardner in the 1960s and, more recently, by work led by John Schofield and the National Trust. A new branch of archaeology has contributed to the totals since 1990, underwater archaeology, and it will be interesting to see if the growing popularity of sport diving leads to a long-term interest in this.

Today, bodies such as the National Trust, English Nature and English Heritage have taken over the formal protection of the island and surrounding sea. The LFS acts to promote research and conservation rather than organise them. This is carried out by means of grants, to the warden and others; a supply of volunteers to assist the warden; and by the members who provide a pool of expertise on all aspects of Lundy. The Annual Report which the LFS has produced since its first year provides an essential resource for documenting change and reporting new results. The Society continues to act in favour of Lundy's wildlife and antiquities, making representations where changes would affect these.

Fifty years' work by the Lundy Field Society have seen the island and its sea recognised for their national and international importance. The LFS has weathered many storms but has remained true to its

objectives and this has led to Lundy becoming one of the most studied places on earth.

Acknowledgements

The first part of this paper (Origins) is based, largely, on a draft prepared by Tony Langham shortly before his death. The remainder has had to be compiled from the LFS archives without the benefit of his encyclopaedic knowledge of the island. I am very grateful to Myrtle Ternstrom for sorting out the LFS material from among Tony's papers and for her extremely valuable comments on an earlier version. John Woodland very kindly gave access to the DBW&PS minutes.



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