

# The Landmark Trust

## AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF LUNDY

Lundy is three and a half miles long and half a mile wide, a granite outcrop set far out in the Bristol Channel. The earliest evidence of human occupation are flints from the Later Mesolithic period (between 8500 BC and 5000 BC) and there is an early Bronze Age settlement (between 2500 BC and 800 BC) at Gannets Combe.

The de Marisco family, first mentioned on Lundy in 1154 when Henry II granted Lundy to the Knights Templar from Robert de Marisco, held the island for many tempestuous years. In the reign of King John, William de Marisco used the island as a pirate base for raids on the North Devon coast. In 1243-4, anxious to secure control of Lundy, Henry III built a fort or castle and installed a permanent garrison. Nearly a century later, in 1332, Edward III granted the island to the Earl of Salisbury and his heirs, and Lundy passed by inheritance or marriage for over 400 years from one noble family to another. These owners all had estates and houses elsewhere, and most never visited the island, regarding it simply as a source of revenue.

In Elizabeth I's reign, Lundy's then owner, Mary St Leger, married Sir Richard Grenville, the famous sea captain who transformed Bideford into a major port specialising in tobacco imports. The castle was no longer garrisoned, and as shipping increased, piracy flourished. Brazen Ward was fortified in response, probably by Sir Bernard Grenville. In 1619, Lundy passed to his son, Sir Bevil Grenville. Sir Bevil died for the Royalist cause in 1643, and Charles I appointed Thomas Bushell Governor of the island. Bushell had opened a mint at Aberystwyth Castle from which he supplied the king with coins during the Civil War. As Cromwell's men surged into the west, Bushell retired to Lundy, supporting the king long after the mainland had surrendered to Parliament. Bushell rebuilt the castle to house his lieutenant and a garrison of twenty men.

In about 1744, Thomas Benson, a ship owner of Appledore, and MP for Barnstaple, leased Lundy and transported convicts bound for America to the island, where he set them to work, farming and building. Benson maintained that, '... they were transported from England, no matter where it was so long as they were out of the kingdom.' In 1775, Lundy was sold to a 21-year-old baronet, Sir John Borlase Warren, already the MP for Marlow in Buckinghamshire. The island was in a poor state and he built a new farmhouse (now Old House North & South) but soon joined the Navy, later rising to the rank of Admiral. He eventually sold Lundy in 1781 to pay off his huge gambling debts.

John Cleveland, the owner of Tapeley Park at Instow, bought Lundy next because it was 'an object always in his eye and what he much wished to have.' During his ownership, particularly famous shipwreck occurred on the west side of Lundy, one of many such. The *Jenny* was returning from Africa to Bristol with a cargo of ivory and gold dust but lost her bearings in fog and was smashed to pieces. Of the crew of thirty and a few passengers, only the mate survived. The wreck gave its name to Jenny's Cove. In 1802, Sir Vere Hunt bought the island on impulse at an auction knowing nothing whatsoever about it. Another gambler, Sir Vere died in 1818 leaving large debts to his son, Sir Aubrey de Vere Hunt, who set about selling the island. During this interim period, in 1819, Trinity House built the first lighthouse on Beacon Hill, now the Old Light, in an attempt to reduce the number of shipwrecks around the island. Meanwhile, several sales fell through, until finally in 1836 William Hudson Heaven bought Lundy for £9,870. Heaven inherited his wealth from his godfather William Hudson's sugar plantations in Jamaica, worked by enslaved black people. Slave ownership was finally prohibited in Britain in 1833, and in 1834 Heaven who received £11,711 in government compensation for the emancipation of 636 slaves on four plantations.

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With Heaven's ownership, the island at last entered a settled period. The Villa (later Millcombe House) was built as the family's summer home. After his wife died in 1851, Mr Heaven and his family lived permanently on Lundy, running the island like a small kingdom. Short of funds himself, he sought other investors, and in 1863 the Lundy Granite Company was set up. For five years it flourished, working the quarries on the east side and employing 200 workers, but then collapsed amid accusations of financial malpractice, leaving the island with several new buildings. After the death of his father in 1883, Revd Hudson Grosett Heaven became the Squire of Lundy and achieved his dearest wish when the church of St Helen was built in 1895-6. He was succeeded in 1916 by his nephew, Walter, but the family's finances, for long in a troubled state, now collapsed altogether. In 1917, the Kingdom of Heaven was put up for sale.

Like John Cleveland in 1781, Augustus Langham Christie of Tapeley Park, Instow wished to buy Lundy because he wanted to own all the land he could see from his windows. He completed his purchase in 1918, but in 1925 sold Lundy to Martin Coles Harman, who was to make notable contributions to Lundy's history, both natural and otherwise. Mr Harman introduced the Sika deer, Soay sheep and ponies and helped found the still thriving Lundy Field Society, to study the island and its flora and fauna in a scientific manner. He also introduced the puffin stamps and short-lived Lundy coins, seeking to keep Lundy as independent as possible from government departments.

Martin Harman also saw that paying visitors could make a great contribution to the future of Lundy, and he enlarged and improved the Manor Farm Hotel (founded by a tenant of the Heavens in about 1900). After the Second World War, the island became a regular port of call in summer for the Campbell steamers, offloading up to 700 day-visitors at a time. The Harmans they were ably supported in everything by the agent, Felix Gade, who came to Lundy in 1926 and remained there until his death in 1978.

The Harman family owned Lundy until 1969. When its sale was announced in 1968, there was great public concern about the island's future. An obvious guardian was the National Trust, but it had no funds to buy it, let alone manage it thereafter. Thankfully, in response to a national appeal, Sir Jack Hayward donated the purchase price of £150,000. The National Trust then leased the island to the newly founded Landmark Trust for an initial lease of 60 years, to put the island on its feet. When Landmark arrived on Lundy, in the words of its founder, John Smith, 'most things on the island were wearing out, and, although it was exceedingly agreeable in that state, if the island was to remain inhabited and receive visitors, a great deal of expensive, unromantic and disruptive work had to be done'. Most of the buildings were in need of repair. The Manor Farm Hotel had serious dry rot and a leaking roof and Millcombe House had similar problems. The Barn and the Castle were ruinous and the Old Light was in poor shape. Services such as gas (the main source of light and heat), electricity and water badly needed rethinking. It was a challenging task: extra manpower had to be housed; water was limited, and materials had to be shipped from the mainland, doubling their cost. It took Landmark more than 20 years to restore the buildings and establish an efficient infrastructure, much of it invisible. Now those who live on Lundy, and those who visit it, can enjoy what are now the normal and accepted luxuries of piped hot and cold water, heating and electricity. But Tibbetts is still there for those who prefer a hardier way of life. Twenty-three self-catering houses and cottages, including the castle and the lighthouse, welcome visitors year round, with the Marisco Tavern providing a welcoming hub for island life.

## **LAND by Antony Gormley**

In 2015, the SW point on Lundy was one of five Landmark sites chosen by artist Antony Gormley for an installation called LAND, a collaboration with Landmark in its 50th anniversary year. From May 2015 to May 2016, five different, lifesize representations of a human figure in cast iron are placed for one year at representing the four compass points - Saddle Bay, Martello Tower, Clavell Tower and on Lundy, with Lengthsman's Cottage in Warwickshire anchoring the whole installation near the centre of Britain, on a manmade waterway.

As Antony Gormley said, LAND in combination with the Landmark Trust's 50th anniversary was 'an occasion to think and feel the nature of our species, its history and future, and its relationship to the huge biodiversity of living beings that exist on the surface of this extraordinary blue planet.'

## **MILLCOMBE HOUSE**

When William Hudson Heaven bought Lundy in 1836, the only inhabited buildings were the Lighthouse (now Old Light), the Farmhouse (now Old House) and a couple of cottages. Mr Heaven was rich from his godfather William Hudson's sugar estates in Jamaica, and compensation after the emancipation of the slaves. He intended to make Lundy his summer estate and quickly set about building a house suitable for his wife and family. He chose Millcombe Valley, a perfectly sheltered position. The house was originally known as The Villa, for its symmetry Classical style. It has a shallow and bogus pediment, which was not meant to fool anybody as the footpath leading up to the village behind the house, allows an excellent view of its flat roof.

The completion of the house was a considerable achievement, as Mr Heaven had to import all the materials for building, as well as his furniture, onto the island and have them dragged up the steep track from the beach by sleds pulled by donkeys and oxen.' Only later was the Beach Road built.

In 1840, financial considerations led William Heaven to offer the island for sale. An journalist described the Villa thus: 'the mansion is of recent creation and combines within it all the accommodation a patriotic little monarch can desire, with corresponding offices of every description'. But Lundy did not sell.

Millcombe is a sociable house planned as it is on the ground floor round a central hall, and on the first floor round a top-lit central staircase. The dining room and drawing room (both heated by unusual convector grates) and the kitchen were in the same places as now. The large room next to the kitchen was the butler's pantry. Where there is now a cloakroom and two bathrooms, there was a scullery, larder and a cloakroom.

Upstairs the plan has not changed. William Heaven slept in the bedroom now named Benson. In the stairwell is the portrait by Monanteuil of the Heaven children in 1832: Hudson Grosett, Maria, William Walter and Cecilia. It used to hang in the hall and was presented to the Landmark Trust by Eileen Heaven.

Mrs Heaven, whose love of Lundy did not always match her husband's, died in 1851 and after this the family moved to the island on a permanent basis. William Heaven lived at the Villa with his two unmarried daughters, Cecilia and Amelia Anne. His son, the Revd Hudson Grosett Heaven, joined them in 1863, followed in 1866 by Mrs Marion Heaven, widow of the second son, William Walter, with their two children, and in 1873 by a niece, Ann Mary Heaven.

In 1875, William Heaven had a stroke which left him severely incapacitated and the Revd Hudson took over the running of the island. He was licensed as curate during his father's lifetime and used to hold Sunday services in the dining room or hall at Millcombe when the congregation was small. In 1885, he built the corrugated iron church of St Helen's on a site directly to the north of Government House, described by Bishop Bickersteth of Exeter during its dedication as 'a corrugated irony'.

In 1897, however, the Bishop consecrated an altogether grander church, the one so clearly silhouetted against the sky as we approach Lundy by sea. With its 65-foot tower holding a peal of eight bells, it was designed by the London architect John Norton. This perhaps explains its urban scale though its size was not so remarkable at a time when Lundy boasted a population of 60. The Revd Hudson Heaven died on the mainland in 1916, 'having accomplished the dream of his life by erecting this church to the glory of God', as the plaque in the church reads.

In 1918 Lundy was sold to the Christies and then in 1925 to Mr Martin Coles Harman. The Villa was by then known as the House, but when the Harmans moved in, they renamed it Millcombe after the watermill that gave the valley its name. They did not live on the island permanently but stayed there for holidays. One of Mr Harman's special Lundy pleasures was the possibility of shooting rabbits from his bedroom window.

After the Landmark Trust took Lundy on for the National Trust in 1969, it soon began a complete refurbishment of Millcombe. The range of buildings at the back was also restored and is now inhabited by islanders. From 1973 until 1988 Millcombe was run as a small hotel.

The Lundy environment means constant maintenance is required on the buildings and every so often more substantial works are needed. In 2004 significant renovation work took place on Millcombe House with the repair or replacement of all of the windows, redecoration of the exterior and significant decoration of the interior. A high-efficiency condensing boiler for the central heating was also installed, and as part of the island's commitment to sustainability policy, draught-proofing was installed in the box sash windows and has proved a great success.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. To book a building on Lundy or any other Landmark for a holiday, please visit [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)*