

## LUNDY IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY : THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM WORCESTRE

By

C.J.WEBSTER

Architectural and Historic Heritage Group, The Department for the Environment,  
Somerset County Council, County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY.

William Worcestre (sometimes called William of Worcester) was the secretary of Sir John Fastolf in the middle of the fifteenth century. After the latter's death Worcestre, then in his sixties, made several journeys to the West Country, the main purpose of which was visiting his home town of Bristol and making a pilgrimage to St Michael's Mount. However Worcestre also took the opportunity to make notes for a book of topographical and antiquarian interest which, had it been completed, would have predated Camden's *Britannia* (published in 1586) by more than a century. A modern edition and translation of the surviving notes has been provided by Harvey (1969), comprising a mixture of details of his itinerary, first-hand observations, information from other people, passages copied from books in libraries that he visited and miscellaneous memoranda, many relating to financial matters.

Among the wealth of material for the study of the West Country there are three references which have been thought to refer to Lundy. One of these can probably now be seen as a mistaken identification by Harvey but the others throw some light on the condition of the island at the time.

The first possible mention of Lundy comes in a list of castles, presumably supplied by an informant as most were not on Worcestre's route. This follows on from a list of the 'Bridges of Cornwall' from Exeter to the Mount, and the list of castles seems also to relate mostly to that county. The list is in no obvious order but the castles seem to fall into small groups near to each other, much as one would expect from a list being created from memory. Most of the castles can be identified and there are obvious mistakes, such as the location of Tregoney Castle "near Mousehole, 7 miles beyond St Michael's Mount" (Harvey 1969,21). Tregoney Castle is later repeated with the correct location. The same sort of error seems to have occurred to the entry which, it has been suggested, may refer to Marisco Castle. It follows those for Truro and Treglistian (both in Cornwall) and reads:

*"C. Morisk vbi comes Cornubie Edmundus manebat*  
(Morisco Castle [Lundy Island], where Edmund Earl of Cornwall used to live)"  
(Harvey 1969,21).

Harvey has added the identification of this as Morisco (*sic*) Castle. The next castle in the list is another Cornish one, Castle Fust (near St Columb Major).

Near the end of the list there is another reference which reads:

*"C. Morysk iuxta Truro dirutum* (Castle Morysk by Truro, ruined)"  
(Harvey 1969,23).

This certainly refers to a castle in the Manor of Moresk just to the south-east of Truro and it seems likely that the first reference is also to this castle. There seems no reason why a castle on Lundy should be recorded in the middle of this list of Cornish castles nor is there any record that Marisco Castle was the residence of the Earl of Cornwall. Previous authors have also accepted that the two Morisk Castles are one:

"William of Worcester in his Itinerary, temp. Edward IV, speaks of the castle of Moresk, then in ruins, as having been the residence of Edmund, Earl of Cornwall. There are now no remains of this castle" (Polsue 1867,214).

Thus, unfortunately, it seems that Worcestre does not refer to Marisco Castle at all.

The other two references certainly refer to Lundy and appear in sections of the work devoted to lists of off-shore islands and other features of the Bristol Channel. One is simply a distance from the two islands of Steep Holm and Flat Holm:

*“De jnsulis Holmys vsque jnsulam Lunday. 40 miliaria due kennyngs jd est twey syghts continet quelibet kemynng .20. miliaria. .40. miliaria (from the Holms to Lundy Island, 2 kennings or sights, each of 20 miles, 40 miles)”* (Harvey 1969,303).

In fact the true distance is closer to seventy miles but there are errors in several of the distances supplied to Worcestre, as this one was, by a ferry-man at Bristol.

The final reference to Lundy is the most informative but has been overlooked on at least one occasion (Thomas 1978, note 34) as it is missing from the index to Harvey's edition. This occurs in a list of the islands in the Severn Estuary:

*“Insula Londey in Severn in le seabord iacet in le south parte de Caldey per XXV. 21. miliaria in mari et continet in longitudine .3. miliaria et in latitudine .3. miliaria non est populata (Lundy Island on the seaboard of the Severn lies in the sea 21 miles south of Caldy and is 3 miles long and 3 miles wide. It is uninhabited”.* (Harvey 1969,139).

Presumably the three miles wide is a mistaken repetition of the length as Worcestre's informant, if he knew Lundy well enough to get its length correct, would know that was very much narrower. That the distance is given from Caldy Island may indicate that this list was obtained from an informant who knew the Welsh coast, rather than the English. The comment, “it is uninhabited” is similar to the level of detail provided for other islands in the Bristol Channel and off the Welsh coast and is probably a true reflection of the state of affairs at the time (1478). This agrees with other references to Lundy in this period which indicate its use by pirates as a refuge. Thomas (1978-81) suggests, on the basis of documentary evidence, that Lundy had not been permanently settled since some time in the later fourteenth century. Archaeological evidence is available for the preceding centuries (Gardner 1961, 1968) and the following (Schofield 1988, Schofield and Webster 1989) but little material of fifteenth century date has been recovered. All evidence therefore suggests a period of impermanent settlement on the island brought about by the unsettled situation in the Bristol Channel at the time.

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