

BIRTHS ON LUNDY - AN OFFICIAL REGISTRAR

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BACKGROUND

When I decided to copy and index the Parish Registers of Lundy, I never dared hope that I would be fortunate enough to discover any new and unreported Lundy information. I developed the original project to include the Memorial Inscriptions and all other inscriptions on the Island. Reverend W G Blakey asked that I include burials that predated the 1901 inception of the Parish Registers. Tony Langham and Myrtle Ternstrom had undertaken work on this subject previously, and their results were included in my study (Langham 1988; Ternstrom 1990).

As the research came together, I realised how little information existed of a genealogical nature and that what did exist was scattered widely. I decided that it would be of use to collect together all such information into one place and further, that Census information was another source which should be included¹.

Whilst searching genealogical indexes for the Census references, I found an intriguing, and to me, new source. This was amongst the Foreign Office documents stored in the Public Records Office at Kew. This class of documents relates to the registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths of Britons abroad².

THE REGISTER

The reference that I found was to "Foreign Registers and Returns 1627 onwards"³. Hidden between "*Marriages at Copenhagen*" and "*Protestant Baptism Register - Boulogne sur Mer France MDCCXVII*" is a rare find - "*Register of Births in Lundy Island*".

Not only does this unique source detail eleven births on Lundy (Table 1), but it also contains letters and annotations which may help explain how the appointment of a registrar on Lundy came about and ended.

The Lundy Register is a standard Register of Births as issued by the Registrar General. It is dated 1868 and is "*Pursuant to Act 6 & 7 Gulielmi IV., Cap 86*". However, in being adapted to the special situation of the island, this last is crossed out and replaced by hand with "*in Lundy Island*". This suggests that the act quoted was not regarded as binding on the Register Keeper or the island.

The normal procedure used by registrars was, and is, to copy the details of the event that are required by law given to them by those qualified so to do, by law into a register such as this. A certificate is then issued to the informant and periodic copies of the register are communicated to the General Register Office in London. If anything, Frederick Wilkins has recorded more information than is required by law but otherwise has made an exemplary work of registration.

There is some doubt that the normal procedures were followed after recording. It seems unlikely that copies were either sent to the General Register Office or that certificates were issued as neither has as yet come to light. No doubt, this is due to the special situation that Frederick Wilkins and Lundy were in.

¹ Lundy Genealogical Sources - to be privately published.

² Myrtle Ternstrom has confirmed that this is also a new source to those - including herself - who had studied the subject previously.

³ PRO RG.33/36

Table 1 11 births representing three pages containing spaces for 5 registrations per page.

1870 births in the District of Lundy Island in the county of _____									
No	When and Where Born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and Surname of Father	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother	Rank or Profession of Father	Signature, Description and Residence of Informant	When Registered	Signature of Registrar or Keeper
1	10:50pm Friday 10th September 1869 Farm House Lundy Island	Katheleen (sic) Bellen	Girl	George Cowler	Martha Cowler formerly Gaydon	Farm Labourer	M Cowler Mother Lundy Island	Eighteenth February 1869 1870	Frederick Wilkins
2	86:M30 Fifteenth November 1865 Gun Station Lundy Island	Annie Withicombe	Girl	Thomas Sharp Lee	Mary Ann Lee formerly Withicombe	Gunner	M A Lee Mother Lundy Island	Twentyfirst March 1870	Frederick Wilkins
3	83:30 Ninth May 1867 Gun Station Lundy Island	Elizabeth Lucy	Girl	Thomas Sharp Lee	Mary Ann Lee formerly Withicombe	Gunner	M A Lee Mother Lundy Island	Twentyfirst March 1870	Frederick Wilkins
4	88:30 Eleventh July 1869 Gun Station Lundy Island	William Thomas	Boy	Thomas Sharp Lee	Mary Ann Lee formerly Withicombe	Gunner	M A Lee Mother Lundy Island	Twentyfirst March 1870	Frederick Wilkins
5	Twentieth January 1865 Gun Station Lundy Island	Caroline Rosezetia	Girl	John Blackmore	Mary Ann Blackmore formerly Kempster	Gunner	M A Blackmore Mother Lundy Island	Twentyfirst March 1870	Frederick Wilkins
6	Fourth May 1867 Gun Station Lundy Island	Walter John	Boy	John Blackmore	Mary Ann Blackmore formerly Kempster	Gunner	M A Blackmore Mother Lundy Island	Twentyfirst March 1870	Frederick Wilkins
7	Tenth November 1868 Gun Station Lundy Island	Francis Benery (sic)	boy	John Blackmore	Mary Ann Blackmore formerly Kempster	Gunner	M A Blackmore Mother Lundy Island	Twentyfirst March 1870	Frederick Wilkins
8	Eighteenth November 1869 Light House Lundy Island	John Joseph	boy	John Joseph Chavener	Phebe Chavener formerly Thomas	Light House Keeper	Phebe Chavner Mother Lundy Island	Fifth April 1870	Frederick Wilkins
9	First June 1867 Quarter Wall Lundy Island	William	boy	George Cruck Cruckshank	Isabela Cruckshank formerly M ^c Grigor	Stonemason	George Cruckshank Father Lundy Island	Eight April 1870	Frederick Wilkins
10	Twentieth August 1868 Quarter Wall Lundy Island	James	boy	George Cruckshank	Isabela Cruckshank formerly M ^c Grigor	Stonemason	George Cruckshank Father Lundy Island	Eight April 1870	Frederick Wilkins
11	Twenty ninth May 1867 Lundy Island	Charles Stuart	Male	Nicholas Goodfellow	Emma Goodfellow formerly Peniman	Stonemason	Nicholas Goodfellow father Lundy Island	Thirtyfirst December 1870	Frederick Wilkins

The table lists eleven children born on Lundy. Seven of these children (numbers 2 to 8 in Table 1) also appear on the 1871 Census return. Two further children are present in the Census return, Henry E Howgego born in 1865 may have been registered elsewhere. Mary E Blackmore born in 1862 was not registered when her family was. Subsequent censuses of 1881 and 1891 add a further four children of the Tidball, Thomas and Davis families who were born on Lundy. Emily Margaret and Fred Tidball, 1 year and 9 weeks old respectively, and an unnamed (at that time) son of Alfred and Fanny Davis born 7 days previously, are all recorded in 1881. Harriet E., daughter of the Storekeeper George Thomas, was born 4 months earlier. She appears in the 1881 census and is still present in 1891.

This record is of significant interest for four reasons:

1. These are the only known records of births on Lundy prior to the keeping of Parish Registers begun in 1901.
2. There is an insight into the role of Frederick Wilkins.
3. It portrays the population during this period.
4. It throws new light on the relationship between Lundy and the mainland.

1. THESE ARE THE ONLY KNOWN RECORDS OF BIRTHS ON LUNDY PRIOR TO THE KEEPING OF PARISH REGISTERS BEGUN IN 1901

Parish Records were ordered to be kept by Thomas Cromwell in a Mandate of 5th September 1538. This instructed the parson to register each marriage, christening and burial weekly. In 1598, Elizabeth I signed an Order of 25th October 1597 requiring that these previously loose leaf registers be transcribed into parchment books. However, Extra Parochial locations were not covered by this order, as they were deemed to be outside the jurisdiction of adjoining parishes and dated from land uninhabited in Saxon times. No poor or Church rates were paid and tithes belonged to the crown and residents would be baptised, married or buried at their nearest convenient church. In 1894, all Extra-Parochial areas were made into parishes or incorporated into existing ones. This incidentally may have at least partly explained the date of the founding of the present church on Lundy. It was not until 1901, when Rev Heaven consecrated his newly built church, that births and deaths were recorded and after licensing on 13th August 1912, marriages. Indeed, in the case of *Bolt v Harman* 5th March 1930 when M C Harman was found guilty of issuing coins, his solicitor, Mr Bazeley stated, "There is no register of marriages, no register is ever kept or no notification is sent anywhere with regards to deaths or births or marriages". However, there is evidence that events were being sanctified, if not registered, earlier than this:

a birth certificate

Lundy Island May 26th 1867

I hereby certify that I this day baptised, according to the rules of the Church of England, Joseph the Infant son of Joseph and Jessie Bennett.

*Henry Grossett Heaven MA
Clerk in Orders
and Resident Minister in
Lundy Island*

*Lundy Island
Bristol Channel*

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that Jessie, the wife of Joseph Bennett, resident on the Island was on the 11th day of May, 1867 professionally attended and delivered by me of a male child (living) at a quarter past four o'clock of the morning of Saturday.

*Given under my hand
this 26th day of May 1867*

(Transcription of birth certificate from *Illustrated Lundy News* 1973)

2. THERE IS AN INSIGHT INTO THE ROLE OF FREDERICK WILKINS

Tony Langham refers to Wilkins:

"Frederick Wilkins was appointed agent of the liquidators of the Lundy Granite Company in September 1868 and on 21 May 1869 made an arrangement with a Mr Henry Benthall to purchase. Three days later Wilkins was appointed manager of the new company, the Western Granite Company Ltd....." (Langham 1994, 182).

The one complete letter that it has been possible to find at this stage was written under the letterhead of "Frederick Wilkins Manger" (as follows):

*Western Granite Co.
Quarries
Lundy Island
via Clovelly
North Devon
Oct 6 1869*

*To the Registrar General
of Birth + Deaths + c
Somerset House*

Sir

May I beg of you to inform me in what district is the Birth of a Child to be registered born on Lundy Island = Lundy Island is situated between Wales + Devonshire but it belongs to neither County + no Ecclesiastical Diocese. hitherto no registration has taken place with children born here.

*I am Sir
yours respect(fully)
Fredk Wilkins*

The date of this letter suggests that Frederick Wilkins was prompted by Victorian civic duty. After the births, on 11th July, of William Thomas, son of Thomas and Mary Ann Lee and, on 10th September, of Kathelleen (sic) Helen daughter of George and Martha Cowler, together with the imminent birth of the Chavener child (18th November), he penned his request to the Registrar General.

Annotations in the register refer to subsequent letters on the 12th and 13th November. These suggest that the first choice for the post was Thomas Lee - then Principal Gunner on Lundy, a Clovelly man and no doubt known to his sponsor the Bideford Registrar D Carter. John Shoveller (presumably a civil servant in the Foreign Office) added a note after the final registration on 31st December 1870:

This Register was returned to the General Register office by Mr Wilkins on his quitting the Island and relinquishing his engagement as Manager at the Stone Quarries.

The correspondence relating to Mr Wilkins undertaking the office of Register Keeper will be found in the Letter Book 1869 - 1870.

John Shoveller

Perhaps Mr Wilkins was reluctant to take on the role and gave it up as soon as he felt able. Although there were no further registrations after the end of 1870, he is recorded as resident on the island at the census of 2nd/3rd April 1871. In fact, his occupation recorded by the Census enumerator was, *"Manager of Quarries & Farmer of 294 acres employing 5 men and 1 woman. Registrar of Births & Deaths"*. We know that he registered eleven births but have no knowledge at this time of deaths neither from records nor from any actual burials on the island.

3. IT PORTRAYS THE POPULATION DURING HIS PERIOD

The census returns give a snapshot of the population (34 in 1851, 35 in 1861, 65 in

1871, 61 in 1881 and 53 in 1891) but this record gives an idea of the demography detailing eleven births on the island to six families in the five years between 1865 and 1869.

At this time in the nineteenth century, the lighthouse and fog signal station at the battery were home to keepers and their families. This was augmented by the farm labourers and staff of the quarries. This register records births to six families - a farm labourer, two gunners, a lighthouse keeper and two stonemasons. The 1871 census lists three lightkeepers and gunners as well as various labourers and tradesmen all with wives of child-bearing age. Obviously there are many potential births on Lundy which remain to be discovered. It is a great pity that the quarries failed to develop and retain Frederick Wilkins as Register keeper and so lost further records of births. Births and marriage records could well have developed much sooner with him as custodian.

4. IT THROWS NEW LIGHT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LUNDY AND THE MAINLAND

On 5th March 1930, through his solicitor Mr Bazeley, Martin Coles Harman unsuccessfully argued that "*Lundy Island is a Vest Pocket, self-governing Dominion*", and later, quoting a letter by Harman in reply to an enquiry from the Deputy Master of the Royal Mint. "... *Lundy is a little Kingdom in the British Empire but out of England*" (Boundy 1961).

The fact that births were registered during 1870 in registers administered by the Foreign Office would surely have added significant weight to Harman's argument. It must be emphasised that the document referred to is listed as "*Foreign Registers and Returns*". Military, Consular and Protectorate records are listed separately. I believe it would have been persuasive to the Barnstaple and Appeal Courts that as Great Britain would not have claimed jurisdiction over neither Copenhagen nor Boulogne then by projection no such jurisdiction could have been claimed over Lundy.

This is very much work in progress and I hope to be able to add to our knowledge of this subject in future.

REFERENCES

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