

LUNDY GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

2012 turned into one of the most challenging years that Lundy has endured in recent years.

As well as competing with the Olympics and the Queens Jubilee, the UK endured the heaviest rainfall since records began and as a result the tourist industry suffered heavily with visitor numbers reportedly down some 40% across the South West. In contrast to the drought of 2011, heavy rainfall saturated the island, challenging the team and the farm in particular. Lundy felt the direct brunt of the lack of tourists to the West Country and we experienced our lowest visitor numbers for many years.

MS Oldenburg suffered a poor year with 13 cancelled sailings, bringing a total of 12,788 visitors during the season, while the helicopter service brought some 1,245 visitors through the winter months. Fog featured more heavily during the winter than ever before, with seven flying days being affected.

The *Waverley* and the *Balmoral* did not feature much during the year, the latter opting to sail to the South Coast to capitalise on the Olympic sailing events. Unfortunately, bad weather and poor spectator numbers resulted in a very poor season for her. The sad news for Lundy and the Bristol Channel resorts is that owners Waverley Excursions Ltd have taken the difficult decision to lay *Balmoral* up for 2013, citing poor long-range weather forecasts. We understand that she will return in 2014 and we sincerely hope that she does. The *Waverley* visited Lundy twice last year and we understand that she will continue to do so in 2013.

Letting property bookings remained healthy with an annual occupancy rate of 79%, which given the weather and wider economic climate is quite remarkable and a reminder that Lundy remains a very popular destination. The Old School, Radio Room, Big and Little St John's, Castle Cottage, Millcombe, Castle East and Government House all notably booked over 85%.

The winter helicopter service had a successful season, with the infrastructure works at Hartland almost complete. Refurbishment of the luggage bay, the last phase of our three-year plan, is scheduled for 2013.

MS Oldenburg continues to serve us well under the charge of Captain Jerry Waller and our regular crew. She dry-docked successfully at Sharpness again in November and completed her five-yearly class renewal survey.

Island staff numbers remained at 27 full-time assisted by summer volunteers. As happens every five years or so, we had several staff changes on the island, sadly saying goodbye to Rob and Tania Cheetham, Penny and Dave Chidgey, Sophie Wheatley, Derren Fox and Donald Malone.

With staff movements and funds tight, the opportunity was taken over the winter to review some roles and restructure in readiness for the 2013 summer season. Grant Sherman did a magnificent job standing in over the winter to deliver the ever popular walks and talks whilst we searched for a new warden.

The team has now been reformed and we have several new faces on the island. Becca Macdonald joined us as Warden along with her partner Jonny Aird, who joins us as a General Assistant. Becca will be supported in her role by a Summer Seasonal Assistant.

Anna Keay became the Director of the Landmark Trust in July 2012 following two years as a Trustee. Anna is a historian and curator, with a specialist interest in 17th century British history. She worked for English Heritage from 2002-2012 where, as Curatorial Director, she was responsible for the presentation of its historic properties, collections and public archive. She made a day trip to the island during the year and is due to come and stay in June 2013.

Despite the rain, there were a number of memorable events. During the spring we restored the lantern room at the top of the old light, thanks to a generous legacy from Mr Peter Williams. To tackle the intricate job, contractors who normally service lighthouses for Trinity House were engaged to complete the work. It took approximately six weeks and luckily the weather was mostly kind!

The Volunteer Lodge opened its doors for business in April. Furnished from the stores of Landmark, the new structure is a huge improvement on our previous volunteer accommodation. So far it has proved to be an instant hit with all who have lodged there and it is booking quickly.

2012 brought our biennial stamp issue, Historic Lundy, which was well received by collectors. Local artist Sarah Lewis was tasked with painting the set in watercolours after winning a competition held on board *Oldenburg*.

After a testing crossing from Bideford in May, those LFS members taking part in the Discover Lundy week enjoyed fine weather and the event was a resounding success. Many thanks to Michael Williams and the members of the Society who helped to organise the week.

The 10th annual Lundy Fly-In went ahead in August but with restricted numbers owing to poor visibility. A great day was had by the hardy pilots who braved the weather and a small ceremony was held to mark the occasion.

The farm had a trying year with the constant rain leading to a poor harvest of silage and making even the the smallest of tasks difficult. However, following the completion of our Conservation Management Plan, we were fortunate to gain acceptance for Higher Level Stewardship, an environmental agreement with Natural England which will provide funding for the island for a ten-year period. The agreement sets the island's conservation strategy which helps maintain the SSSI in favourable condition through ongoing monitoring of the vegetation and adjusting the grazing management to suit. To help in this process, in the autumn we introduced six Highland cattle (below) which will tackle some of the tougher grazing around Pondsbury.



© Nigel Dalby

Unfortunately, bad weather twice saw the well-established underwater photographic competition, as well as the Clovelly to Lundy row, cancelled.

Island staff continued to provide emergency cover for the Fire Service, HM Coastguard and the Ambulance Service, training with colleagues from the mainland.

To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, three members of the island's Coastguard team – Shelley Southon, Julie Welsh and Derek Green – were presented with medals by HM Coastguard Sector Commander Derrick Jones to mark their long service.

Discussions on the restoration of St Helen's Church continued and an initial meeting was held with the Heritage Lottery Fund. Early indications for match-funding from HLF are reportedly positive.

Bell-ringing continues to be a popular pastime on Lundy but unfortunately not every visitor agrees, so the tower has now been sound-proofed thanks to the sterling efforts of the bell-ringing society. The sound-proofing shutters can however be removed when necessary.

On the mainland, the Ilfracombe and Bideford Shore Offices were busy, as was the Lundy exhibition trailer with our team drumming up business at all the local events and shows which did not fall foul of the weather. These included the Royal Cornwall, Oceanfest and Mid-Devon events amongst many others.

I'm delighted that Simon Dell has been helping not only with our exhibition trailer but, in conjunction with the island, also visiting local schools and helping to educate another generation of Lundyites!

The proposed Atlantic Array windfarm is an ongoing concern and the developers are presently considering feedback from the last round of consultation. They are expected to apply for a Development Consent Order in the spring of 2013. Once submitted, interested parties will have 28 days to register an interest and to make representations. We are keeping a watchful eye on the situation.

Looking ahead, the Landmark Trust launches its new website in January 2013, so you will be able to book you holiday accommodation on Lundy online. However, if you wish to speak to one of our team, be assured that we're still at the end of the phone or call in to see us at either of the Shore Offices.

The lower light remains an outstanding project which will require a degree of fundraising and one which I would hope to tackle in the near future. However, after survey last year, our priority in 2013 will be the curtain wall around the Castle which was found to be in poor condition owing to erosion from weather and rabbits. Its fragile condition and location high above the Beach Road make access extremely challenging and we have had to engage specialist help. With financial assistance from the National Trust we're planning to re-point and consolidate over a six-week period in spring at a cost of £35,000.

Despite the poor weather and the challenging financial year Lundy has endured, we have achieved much over the past twelve months. My sincere thanks to all the Lundy team who have worked tirelessly to help turn our fortunes around and to the Lundy Field Society for their continued support.

DEREK GREEN
April 2013