



▲ Paul Gyurgyak and James Williams below the Oldenburg in Sharpness Dry Dock (photo: Derek Green).

ISLAND REPORT 2023

Derek Green (General Manager, The Lundy Company)

The beginning of the year was overshadowed by the ongoing repair works to M.S. Oldenburg following the flooding incident at Sharpness Dry Dock in November 2022. A combination of extending the helicopter service for staying passengers, finding, and chartering in vessels for supplies, along with a range of other challenges, were handled with good spirit and determination by the shore office and wider Lundy team and kept the operation running smoothly during the ship's absence.

Following the flooding and subsequent extended dry dock, and with the impending season beckoning, we began the search for a temporary replacement vessel. Any vessel had to be capable of carrying passengers, freight, and fuel whilst also being able to negotiate the shallow berths at Lundy and sit on the mud in the river Torridge and Ilfracombe. The search was a poignant reminder of how challenging it is to find a ship to 'fit' Lundy, and how well John Puddy and Barty Smith had chosen when opting for the Oldenburg back in 1985. The search for a vessel stretched from Norway to the Orkney Isles, the South Coast of England, and around the UK. The tight criteria required led us to only one potential vessel: the MV Pentalina, which was currently in the dry dock in Belfast awaiting return to service. However, a discussion with Pentland Ferries, who own and manage the Pentalina, quickly discounted her since Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries in Scotland had just contracted her to assist them with their own shortage of vessels. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise as two weeks into the contract, the Pentalina suffered engine failure and ran aground on Orkney, which resulted in over 60 passengers having to be rescued by the RNLI.

It became quickly apparent that there were no suitable passenger/freight vessels available at short notice and so we took the decision to extend the winter helicopter service until the Oldenburg might return to Lundy. Local work boats, the "Severn Scimitar" and laterally, the "Grima," were contracted to keep the supply chain open to the island and began a regular weekly service. The Helicopter service continued until June, with all staying visitors flying to and from Hartland, with Helicopter ticket supplements subsidised by The Lundy Company to avoid passing the burden of the extra cost onto our already displaced visitors.

The ship finally returned with a nearly newly fitted engine room, large areas of the afterdeck replaced, and having completed our class renewal with DNV GL. This leaves just both gearboxes as the only major components to be replaced in the engine room, having survived the flooding. Plans are in place for their replacement in February 2024. Due to the complexity of events and subsequent damage, it will take some time to conclude the settlement with insurers. The 'Oldie' is now in much better condition than when she entered the dock, so every cloud has a silver lining. Once back in service, Oldenburg had a relatively good summer with average cancellations or delays. Of 70 scheduled sailings, seven were cancelled altogether, and two were delayed due to inclement weather. The helicopter scheme was used on one occasion. The ship additionally hosted three private river cruises. Day trip numbers for the year were low (7225) compared to 2022 (11417) because of the delay in the start of sailings and bad weather. Staying visitor numbers remained high due to strong property bookings; 5624 against 5889 for 2022. The overall footfall was 13774 (2022– 18244). At the beginning of 2023, most indicators were expecting the UK to fall back into recession, and we firmly expected Lundy to be affected. However contrary to an expected downturn in property bookings, occupancy for the year remained excellent at 91%. (2022 -91.2%).

Staff retention in 2023 was high but Assistant Warden Stuart Cossey and partner Megan Hollywood-Harry left early in the year, followed by the departure of Warden Rosie Ellis in the autumn. Joe Parker joined us early in the year as Assistant Warden and was the natural fit for Warden after Rosie's departure. Joe will soon be joined by Assistant Warden Tara McEvoy-Wilding in April 2024. On the mainland, there was little change with Vicky Reynolds joining the Ilfracombe booking office as a summer seasonal assistant. On board Oldenburg, James Williams took up the challenge of the Information Officer role after Rob Connor left the ship to pursue a career ashore.

On Lundy, we tackled several projects to continue a programme of improvements, notably the installation of a new pair of water tanks adjacent to the existing reservoir. The two new tanks will hold an additional 300,000 litres of water and help alleviate the summer droughts that we have suffered over the past few years. The General Store had a makeover with a new roof and repointing works to the stone wall



▲ Joe Parker, the newly appointed Lundy Warden in front of the Marisco Tavern, (photo: Derek Green).



▲ The new Bird Observatory Hub, located behind The Lodge (photo: Derek Green).



▲ Scaffolding enshrouding the General Store during renovation work (photo: Derek Green).



▲ Lars Liwendahl at the launch of the John Dyke 100th Anniversary issue of stamps in May (photo: Derek Green)..

in the campsite. The Bird Observatory found a permanent home in the newly constructed wooden building behind The Lodge, thanks to generous donations from several funders including the LFS. The Bird Observatory “Hub” will be used as a base for all bird-related work as well as housing the island’s bio security security measures. It also offers bench facilities for visiting field workers. Our sincere thanks go out to everyone who helped bring the Bird Observatory back to life.

To help improve communication we were pleased to have bid and be accepted for the DCMS broadband for remote communities’ project. As a result, the island has a new ‘One Web’ satellite system on trial for two years which so far has proved successful. The system has been installed specifically for the business side of the island and is not openly available to the public. The public Wi-Fi in the St. Helen’s Centre continues to prove popular and available to anyone visiting the island.

Several properties had internal work completed over the year, including Castle Keep South, which had extensive work to the lounge along with a new kitchen. Old House North had remedial work completed in the kitchen. Both Millcombe, The Vestry, and Old Light Cottage had an internal makeover in the lounge. Several properties also had the benefit of new windows, including Castle Cottage, Bramble Villas East and West, Paradise Row, and the Lodge. On the island, the bridge down to the Lundy North Light was refurbished. Work began in St. John’s Valley underneath Brambles to shore up the bank, and the island clean-up operation continued with the removal of the old rock crusher from Helicopter Field.

2023 would have been the 100th birthday of Lundy’s well-known illustrator, John Dyke. To mark the anniversary, the Lundy Postal Service re-issued a new set of definitive stamps featuring his iconic ‘Puffin on a rock’. The island also took the opportunity to issue a new edition of the ‘Illustrated Lundy News’ to mark the occasion. The colour edition was produced in partnership with John’s granddaughter Lucy Lo-Vel, along with his son-in-law

Reg Lovel, Lundy librarian Michael Williams, and Andre’ Coutanche from the LFS. In addition to the Island stamp issue, Lundy also marked the coronation of King Charles and Queen Camilla with a special cover featuring one of John Dykes iconic stamps.

The Shore office team had a busy year dealing with the delay to the return of the Oldenburg early in the season but were also out and about at the local county shores and events around the region. With the decline of many of our regular ticket agents (mostly tourist information centres), we took the opportunity to develop and launch a new online ticketing application in September. Initially, the application just allows trip tickets to be booked online, but we are expecting to expand the facility to include period return tickets in 2024, making it easier to book your trip on the Oldenburg or Helicopter.

Behind the scenes, we continued to develop and improve the power system on the island with the renewal of engines and alternators for the existing generator sets along with the recently installed “Blue Thunder” backup generator. The next phase of the power project is to replace the aged PLC logic control system, which currently looks after the power phase balancing and heating across the island. Installed in 1999, we have plans to upgrade the logic controller in 2024 allowing remote access and diagnosis of any fault. It will allow us to add renewable power sources to the existing system in due course.

To explore future possibilities, I took a trip to Fair Isle on a fact-finding mission, as they have a well-tested and proven renewable power system that may work well on Lundy. They have a mixture of wind and solar generators, which charge a large bank of batteries, all backed up by diesel generators in the event of little wind or sunshine. The Fair Isle is very similar to Lundy in many respects and the island faces similar challenges, so it has provided a good model upon which we might be able to base a future renewable system for Lundy. Work continues in partnership with the National Trust to develop possibilities and improve the existing system.

In summary, 2023 was a challenging year, and I would like to pay tribute to the Lundy team for handling every challenge with good spirit and dogged determination, particularly the ship’s crew, who spent so much time away from families to bring the ship home. However, we have persevered, and there have been many improvements across the island, the ship, and the shore offices. We can look forward to 2024 with renewed confidence now that the ship is in much better shape, and hopefully we will have a good season.

Thank you very much for your continued support and I wish the Field Society a successful year ahead.



▲ Andre’ Coutanche, Lucy Lo-Vel, Derek Green and Michael Williams with the 2023 Edition of the ‘Illustrated Lundy News’ in May (photo: Lars Liwendahl).