

## THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF LUNDY

by

PROFESSOR NICHOLAS ORME

*Response to the paper 'Questions concerning the Ecclesiastical History of Lundy' by Myrtle Ternstrom, in the Lundy Field Society Journal, Volume 1. 2008.*

It is very useful that the author, Myrtle Ternstrom, has collected so many references to the medieval and sixteenth century church or chapel(s).

I would say, despite the statement in the abstract, that it has been established clearly that Lundy was a parish in its own right by at least the thirteenth century and for some considerable time thereafter. The author's evidence shows that there was a church there by at least 1244 and that this church had all the characteristics of an independent parish church: an advowson with a patron who appointed the incumbent, a series of incumbents known by name, the insistence of the bishops in the fourteenth century that such incumbents should be formally instituted by them like other incumbents (which meant them going to the bishop in person or by proxy and swearing an oath of obedience), and the levying of tithes in the parish to support the incumbent. Lundy does not appear in the standard list of English parishes drawn up in 1291 to enable papal taxation of the clergy, but neither does the Isles of Scilly which also constituted a parish. They were just too remote, difficult to access and probably regarded as too poor to be worth including. The income of the rector must have been very small and he may not actually have resided on Lundy, only going there occasionally.

After the middle of the fourteenth century the population fell, there was more attractive land elsewhere and it is likely that Lundy had fewer dwellers, insufficient to maintain a priest. I am not aware of any institutions of incumbents in the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, though I have been through the bishops' registers, published and unpublished, several times. I do not understand when Cleeve Abbey got the rectory of Lundy - did one of the noble lords of the island give it to them? (Sadly there is no surviving cartulary of the abbey). Certainly by 1533 it looks as if Lundy was 'appropriated' to the abbey, but it is interesting that there was a 'rectory' for legal purposes of collecting tithes and the church is now referred to as a chapel, which implies something smaller and perhaps of only intermittent use.

Dominus was the title of priests. The monastic equivalent by the 1530s was the variant spelling Dompnus. One would have to look at the original document to see which was used and whether Hugh Briest (or Priest more likely) was a 'secular', i.e. a parish priest or monk. I have looked for him but not found him in the Bath and Wells registers of the period; if he was a Cistercian he is very unlikely to be mentioned there as such monks were exempt from the bishops' control.

The author has collected more evidence than I did about the church dedication. Mary has been found for 1254, Helen 1325 and 1353 and Michael and Helen in 1533. I found numerous cases where Mary turns up sometimes and another saint other times, and my conclusion is that it was a double dedication in those cases, so Mary and Helen. Michael looks like a later addition. If as I would suspect, the church on Lundy had a rather

intermittent existence, it would be easy for someone to revive it and then add another saint, though clearly Helen was remembered. Michael would be appropriate for a hilltop church and as he was a patron of sailors there may have been a wish to cater for them.

Anne is typically a post-1350 or even a post-1400 dedication. A second chapel on the island is not impossible, founded say 1400-1530, but the evidence is very late and may not be reliable.

#### **REFERENCES**

Orme, N. (ed.) 1991. *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*.

Exeter Studies in History, No. 29. Exeter University.

Ternstrom, M. 2008. Questions concerning the Ecclesiastical History of Lundy. *Journal of the Lundy Field Society*, 1, 65-86.

*Professor Nicholas Orme, Exeter University (retired), is recognised as a great authority on the religious history of Devon and Cornwall.*