

The Archaeology of Lundy

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In terms of the history of human settlement, Lundy is quite remarkable. Its very remoteness has resulted in an archaeological survival rarely to be found in such rich concentration on the neighbouring mainland. Mesolithic flints, Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement and field systems, medieval enclosures and farmsteads survive as earthwork remains on the plateau (Plate 4), while the Early Christian burial ground at Beacon Hill containing its mysterious inscribed memorial stones, lies in the shadow of Daniel Alexander's granite lighthouse. Above the landing beach stands Marisco Castle, its stark outline dominating the skyline. The thirteenth-century keep was extensively repaired and garrisoned for the king by Governor Bushell from 1645 until 1648, when he was finally forced to relinquish the island to Parliamentary forces. The gun platform and breastwork at Brazen Ward, on the east coast, is the best survival of a number of coastal defences, possibly built to counter the threat from Spain during Queen Elizabeth's reign, but almost certainly re-used during the Civil War and perhaps in later wars against France. Of more recent interest are the industrial remains of the workings of the Lundy Granite Company, a short-lived enterprise which was estab-

lished on the island from 1863, but foundered into bankruptcy and was dissolved by 1868; the archaeological survival is remarkably good, but (ironically for something so recent), the supporting documentary evidence is almost non-existent, the books having been lost when the company was liquidated.

The Antiquaries

Antiquarian interest in Lundy has pointed to the indications of former settlement and land-use in terms of a number of ruined buildings and the degraded and abandoned remains of what were once extensive field systems. Westcote, writing in 1620, observes:

"...that it hath been tilled in former times the furrows testify yet plainly..."

(quoted in Oliver and Pitman-Jones 1845, 343-6)

While Grose (1776) describes:

"...many ruins of old walls...which were fences to inclosures, and plainly prove a great part of the island to have been cultivated..."

Chanter (1877) alludes to signs of past cultivation and to the settlements which accompanied them:

"There are traces of no less than seven or eight groups of cottages or villages in various parts of the Island, some of which have traditional names attached to them, but no records remain as to when they were abandoned and fell into ruin"

The most notable early archaeological finds must be those of the "kistvaen" or "ancient stone burial-place", whose discovery in 1851 is described by Gosse (Loyd 1925), and the "Giants Graves", which were uncovered by Mr Heaven's workmen in 1856 whilst digging for the foundation of a wall at the north of the cattle sheds (Chanter 1877 and Loyd 1925). Much study and speculation has been given to these burials – to the outlandish stature of the skeletons, to the intriguing glass beads (variously attributed to Early Iron Age, Roman or Viking period by the British Museum in 1925, and to ninth-century Danish origin by Bristol Museum in 1960) and the fragments of gilt-bronze and sherds of red pottery said to have been found with them. The words of William Hudson Heaven in a letter to John G Heaven (May 7, 1856, quoted in Langham 1986):

"...I shall not be surprised if in clearing away the turf and mould under it, which it is intended to do, in order that the walls may afford more protection to the rick barton, which they are to enclose, more bones will be found..."

were to find a fitting response in the subsequent twentieth-century archaeological exploration of Bulls Paradise by Bristowe in 1928, by Dollar and Lethbridge in 1933, and by members of the Lundy Field Society under the direction of Keith Gardner in 1962. All of these excavations were to find more skeletal remains, grave slabs, and midden material, ranging in date from approximately the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and lying close by what Gardner has

suggested may be the foundations of a former chapel site (Gardner 1962).

A further chance discovery with profound archaeological implications was made on the island in 1905 during the digging of a grave for Miss Amelia Heaven. This was the uncovering of an inscribed memorial stone (TIGERNUS), since dated to the late sixth century (Thomas 1994, 288). It was excavated from within the ruined chapel inside the old burial ground on Beacon Hill (Loyd 1925).

The Lundy Field Society

It is somehow historically satisfying that exactly one hundred years after the discovery of the Giants Graves, the first archaeological paper should be published by the LFS. Keith Gardner's "Prehistoric Settlement – Gannets Combe, Lundy" appeared in the 10th Annual Report in 1956 and it was to be the first of many. Early work by Gardner concentrated on a review and analysis of existing archaeological evidence, which was to form a basis for future research. This first article made comparisons between the Lundy settlement remains and similar sites on Dartmoor, attributed by Raleigh Radford to the Middle Bronze Age. The following year he reviewed Dollar's findings of flint scatters in 1932, and the 1957 collection of over 1,000 flint pieces from Brick Field, pointing to the existence here of a Mesolithic settlement (Gardner 1957). A further preliminary discussion was presented by Gardner (1959a), concerning "Dark Age Remains on Lundy".

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Using evidence derived from Chanter (1877) and Loyd (1925), Gardner re-examined the Giants Graves and the Early Christian "Tigernus" stone, raising questions for the archaeologist and historian about post Roman occupation of Lundy and the origins of the Early Christian burial ground and chapel site.

This and similar questions arising from these early papers led Gardner, under the aegis of the Lundy Field Society, to embark on a series of research investigations over the next decade which were to extend Lundy's archaeological record, and in the nature of much research, to both enlighten and mystify.

Brief reference has already been made to the discovery of further burials and a likely chapel site in Bulls Paradise, but Gardner's 1962 excavations there also established this as the likely site of the twelfth-century de Marisco stronghold, pre-dating the royal castle of AD1243. During the ensuing years, survey and excavation work concentrated on a number of different sites. A rectangular earthwork in Widow's Tenement was examined and planned, yielding flints and both Early Iron Age and thirteenth-century pottery. These together with its form suggested a long-house-type dwelling, which may have developed from a former prehistoric site (Gardner 1964). Excavations of hut circles in Middle Park, and within the North End settlement system, produced Iron Age and Late Bronze Age pottery respectively (Gardner 1963-4, 1965-6, 1968). Surveys were carried out of the field systems in Middle Park, Ackland's Moor, and west and south-east

of the Old Light (Gardner 1965-6 and 1968). Plans were also produced for a number of batteries at North End, including Brazen Ward (from which trial excavations had produced sixteenth-century pottery) and for John O'Groats house (Gardner 1968). A platform structure above Jenny's Cove was examined, and the discovery of thirteenth-century pottery, combined with its form and structure and documentary reference, led to the proposal that this was the site of a mangonel platform – part of Lundy's medieval defence (Gardner 1965– 6).

Of prime importance among Gardner's archaeological achievements on Lundy was his collaboration with Charles Thomas and Peter Fowler, supported by both students and Lundy Field Society members, in the excavation and analysis of the burial site at Beacon Hill in 1969 (Plate 5). This had been prompted by the discovery within the burial ground of three more inscribed stones: one in 1961 by Gardner and Langham (POTITI) and two others by Douglas Hague in 1962 (RESTEUTAE and OPTIMI). Thomas now attributes dates of late fifth to early sixth centuries AD to these latter, whilst a mid to late sixth-century origin is thought more appropriate for TIGERNUS and POTITI (Thomas 1994).

The excavation attempted to discover why these stones were placed here and to see if they could be related to graves of this early date within the graveyard. In summary (Thomas, Fowler and Gardner 1969) the main finding was a central feature marked by large

slabs, which showed a complex process of use and re-use. They also showed that the likely date for the foundations of the small chapel was the twelfth or thirteenth century. The excavations revealed that the central feature was built over, and partly from, the remains of an earlier circular house. This adjoined the traces of a lynchet (a low bank caused by ploughing) running underneath the centre of the burial ground, which formed part of a system of earlier fieldbanks and hut circles, south and west of Beacon Hill, surveyed by Peter Fowler at the same time as the 1969 excavation.

A recent re-analysis of the excavation evidence by Professor Charles Thomas (1990), has resulted in some intriguing observations, expanded on more recently (Thomas 1994) when Lundy is identified as "Enys Brachan", and the empty central grave on Beacon Hill as that of the Welsh king Brychan, himself.

The culmination of Gardner's archaeological research was the publication of his *Archaeological Field Guide* in 1972. This provided an inventory of sites for the island and is accompanied by a commentary describing these and their state of research and suggesting an interpretation and likely chronology.

The recording and explanatory work by Gardner had two-fold importance. In the first instance it provided a sound basis for further research, revealing for the first time the remarkable breadth and range of archaeological survival on Lundy. It also alerted the profession to the need to maintain and conserve this special survival, and accordingly in 1970, a number of sites on

the island were scheduled, giving them legal protection and special status in terms of their management.

The National Trust Survey

The acquisition of Lundy by the National Trust in 1968, and its lease to the Landmark Trust with consequent restoration and building, led to a different focus on the island's archaeology, with an increased concern for the management and conservation of sites – an emphasis which has continued into the 1990s. Work has been undertaken by both Trusts as part of the management process, and has also been extended by the Field Society, close cooperation being sought by all parties.

Excavation and survey by the Central Excavation Unit of English Heritage (Dunmore 1982) in 1978 preceded the Landmark Trust's renovation of three derelict cottages within the castle keep. Similar work was undertaken on the parade ground by the National Trust (Thackray, D 1985) prior to consolidation of the curtain wall and Benson's "Old House" in 1984-5, but the main thrust of National Trust archaeological work on Lundy in recent years has been field survey.

Concern that lack of knowledge was leading to damage to important sites led to a National Trust archaeological report for the island (Thackray, C 1989), which inventoried existing sites, stated their location and condition, and gave recommendations for their management. It was accompanied by an account of Lundy's land-use history. The objective of the ensuing

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project was to compile over a 4-year period a topographic survey of the island which would identify and document in detail all visible traces of past land-use, ranging from evidence of prehistoric and medieval occupation to the industrial remains and other survivals of the more recent past. Existing records were incorporated where appropriate, but the majority of the survey was the product of new measurement by electronic theodolite survey, and large-scale, detailed drawings. All sites were described and photographed. Further contour information, aerial photographic and other existing mapped detail will ultimately be combined with the 1:1000 metrical survey to produce a final plan of the island as a whole. By examining the archaeological landscape in this way, it is hoped to achieve two things: an improved understanding of Lundy's historic evolution; and the creation of an up-to-date and consistent record for management and conservation.

This historic landscape survey was undertaken by National Trust staff, and volunteers (among them LFS members) over four years, in 2-week periods during late April/May from 1990-1994. The raw material of the survey is currently (1996) being written up; annotated plots of the island's archaeology have been produced, and details of every site (amounting to almost 2,000) are being entered onto the Trust's computerised database. Interpretation is ongoing, but the suspicions mooted by Gardner in the 1960s that almost the entire island plateau shows evidence of previous farming and

settlement, are being borne out, with field systems clearly continuing to the south of Halfway and Quarter Walls, and into and below the village. It is only through seeing these patterns emerging in plan that informed analysis and interpretation of these remains and their relationships to each other may be deduced. An especially high degree of detail has been employed for recording Beacon Hill Cemetery, with both a contour survey and a feature survey of its interior. Detailed drawings of central features (the excavated graves and thirteenth-century chapel remains) together with written descriptions and photographs were completed. The Quarries were also treated in great detail, and it is hoped that the resulting plan will give a better understanding of the operations there.

Part of the work of the survey was to record the architectural detail of those ruined buildings which have survived in more substantial form, and some fine plans, elevations, and suggested reconstructions have been drawn for Belle Vue Cottages and the Quarry Hospital, the Battery Cottages and associated buildings (Fig. 1); similar detailed recording has been given to the recording of John O'Groats House, Widow's Tenement long-house and enclosure, Bull's Paradise, and some of the more complete earlier ruins.

As with the results of Gardner's work in the 1960s, it is intended that this research will give rise to publication, both at an academic level, and to provide the interested visitor to the island with an updated archaeological field guide and other information. It will also,

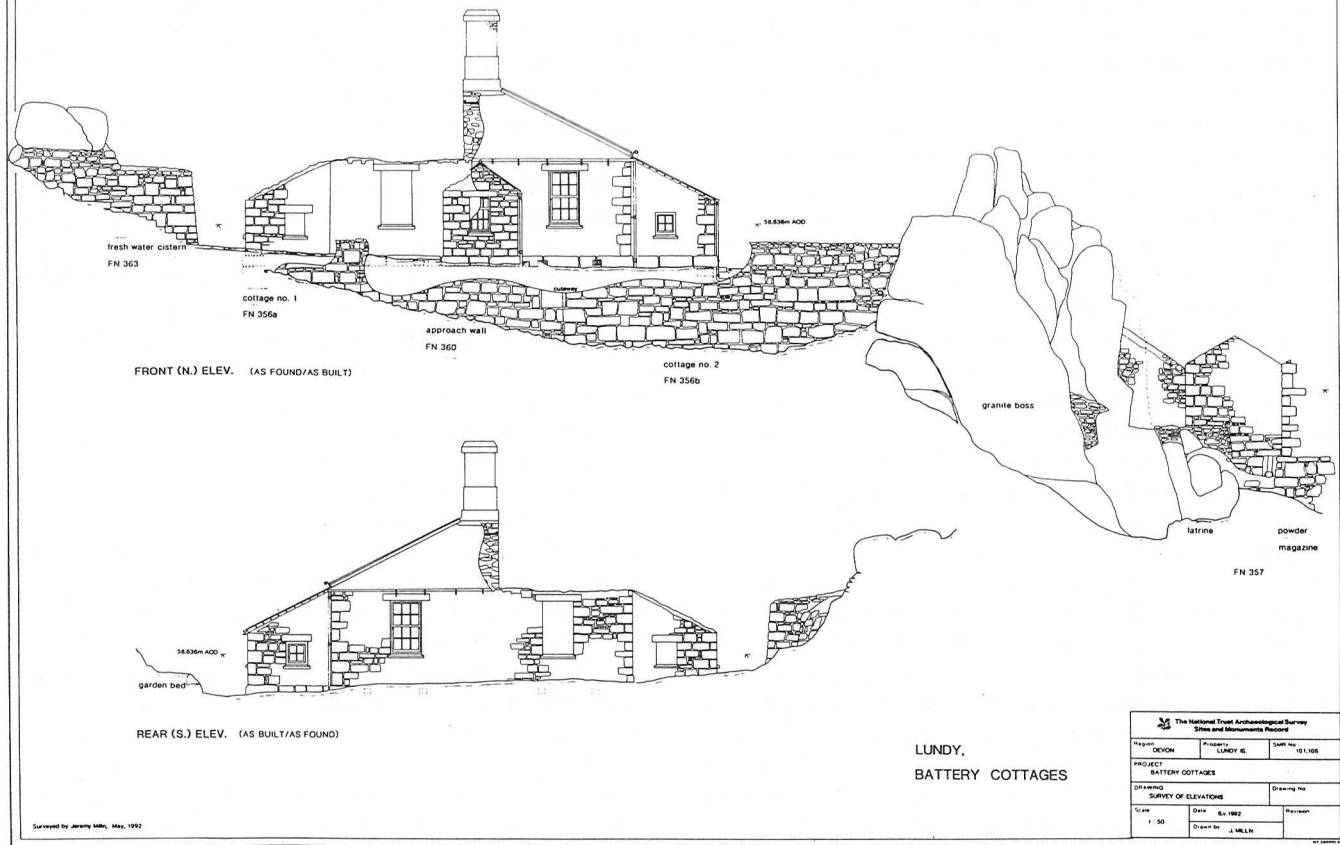


Fig. 1 Battery Cottages

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through its reinforced statement of the overall archaeological importance of the island, lead to a revision of existing Scheduled Monuments and a likely increase in their number under English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme.

Running concurrently with the NT survey has been the research undertaken in recent years by John Schofield and Chris Webster with the support of the Lundy Field Society. This has focused on the areas where earthworks have, for the most part, been ploughed away: the fields to the south of Quarter Wall. Techniques employed have been geophysical prospection and test-pit excavation. Existing collections of flint artefacts have been examined (Schofield 1991) and comparisons made with other flint finds and those arising from test-pits, particularly in Brickfield, Tillage Field and St Helen's (Schofield 1988). Artefact concentrations in Airfield and Lighthouse Field have also been examined (Schofield & Webster 1989, 1990), the evidence reinforcing the impression that this area was fairly intensively used in both the Mesolithic and Post-Medieval periods. A geophysical survey of Bull's Paradise (Webster 1991) both supports Gardner's previous evidence and also indicates new features. It will be interesting to compare the geophysical findings with the NT survey plan of the area.

Now that the National Trust survey is substantially complete, the resulting Sites and Monuments record for Lundy and the research undertaken by Schofield and Webster may be studied together, along with the

extant documentary record and current historical research being undertaken by Caroline Thackray and Myrtle Ternstrom. In addition, it is hoped that the opportunity will arise for a programme of environmental analysis, including a reassessment of pollen analysis results from Gardner's 1960s investigations. Further geophysical research may also be considered.

A further important observation of the 1989 National Trust report had been the existence of a large archive arising from past archaeological work on Lundy, chance finds, or personal observations which was scattered and largely anonymous. The recommendation that an attempt should be made to embrace this problem has led to the collaboration of Myrtle Ternstrom (for the Field Society) and Caroline Thackray (for the National Trust), and work is already well-advanced in locating, cataloguing and indexing this dispersed archive.

Finally, articles in the two most recent Field Society reports (Heath 1993, Robertson 1994, and Heyes 1994) have given an indication of a new direction in archaeological research to be closely followed in the future – that of underwater exploration. There already exist two wreck sites off the island (*Iona II* & Gull Rock) which are afforded statutory protection under The Protection of Wrecks Act of 1973, and there is a growing awareness of the importance of underwater archaeology – both as a possible aid to understanding the people who occupied the island and because of Lundy's position in the path of national and

international trade.

Inevitably, in such a brief review, much will have been omitted from the catalogue of archaeological progress made during the fifty years of the Field Society's existence, but it is hoped that the serious enquirer will be able to use the bibliography below, and the Index to the LFS Annual Report, to pursue a deeper interest. Space has not allowed a discussion of the challenging and lively articles on the archaeo-astronomy of Lundy, by Bob Farrah (1991), or his thoughts on the symbolic orientation of St Helen's Church (Farrah 1992, 1994). Nor has direct reference been made to the invaluable historic research of Tony and Myrtle Langham (now Ternstrom), and many other LFS members, whose curiosity and love for Lundy have set them poring through documents and extending our knowledge and understanding of the island's history by publishing their results. For all this is archaeology, too, and the interplay of research into material remains and related documents is vitally important wherever it can be called into effect.

And what of the future?... The archaeological record for Lundy is looking good. A very great deal has been done to establish its position as ranking high in management considerations for the island, holding its rightful place beside the nature conservation considerations of an SSSI, and the special concerns of a Marine Nature Reserve; the need to maintain satisfactory levels of stocking and grazing of a working farm, and its special provision as a refuge for those who seek and

delight in remote island seclusion, however temporarily. The balance is delicate, and maintaining it requires cooperation and understanding. It is not just the archaeology of Lundy which is special, any more than its ecology or its ornithology. Balance is all, and our challenge for the next fifty years must be to hold on to this concept – advancing our scientific knowledge and understanding of the island, whilst not allowing its special magic to slip away in the process.

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Plate 4 One of the best preserved prehistoric hut circles at North End. (National Trust)

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Plate 5

Keith Gardner, standing by the early Christian stones, explaining the 1969 excavations at Beacon Hill to LFS members. (CJ Webster, 1996)

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