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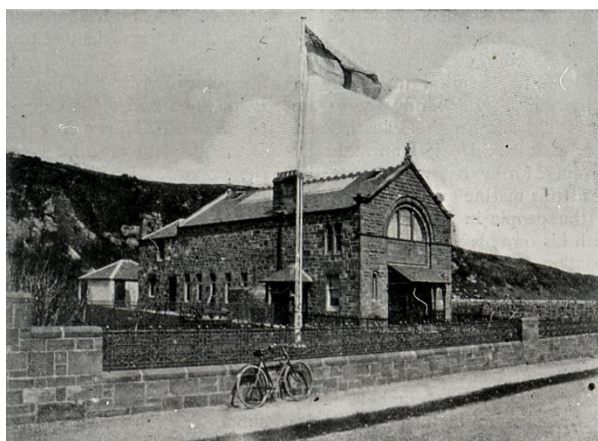
## The Millport connection

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The notably high biodiversity of the Clyde Sea Area and its sheltered surroundings had been recognised by Victorian naturalists who had sensibly opted to develop a research base at Millport, Isle of Cumbrae in 1884 (Figs. 1 and 2). The First Annual Report of the University Marine Biological Station Millport (UMBSM), covering the period from 1st June 1970 to 31st July 1971, began by acknowledging the long and distinguished history of the Marine Station under the auspices of the Scottish Marine Biological Association (SMBA) and its forebears, noting the transference of control of the Marine Station to the Universities of London and Glasgow.



**Fig. 1.** The new Millport Marine Station, soon after construction, about 1900.



**Fig. 2.** The Ark, the original Millport marine station, towed to the west coast via the Forth and Clyde canal, and moored at Port Loy Isle of Cumbrae. It was later destroyed in a storm.

By the late 1960s, London University suffered from a lack of marine station facilities. Its existing small-scale facility at Whitstable in Kent was wholly inadequate for its needs at a time when the Heads of Zoology Departments in London University's Colleges were mostly marine biologists (Moore, 2009). London's biologists, in common with those of many other universities were finding difficulty in obtaining direct access to the kind of facilities they required by the sea. At the same time the increasing demand for marine material for research, teaching and examinations had generated acute shortages. The defined objectives of UMBSM then were to provide facilities for the study of marine biology, primarily, though not exclusively, for its two parent universities, together with other Scottish universities, and to provide supplies of marine biological material.

In 1968, a University Grants Committee (UGC) Working Party had been formed to investigate the matter. The University of London made its case and was offered the Millport Station, the greater part of which was then being vacated by the SMBA in its move to a new site at Dunstaffnage Bay, near Oban, chiefly to facilitate their emerging interest in deep-sea research, the need to be able to berth their new research ship, the RRS *Challenger* which arrived in 1973, and, according to C.M. Yonge (pers. comm. to PGM) the difficulty of recruiting high-quality younger technical staff to Millport due to it being on an island that, at the time, necessitated unpopular secondary schooling requiring weekly boarding in Rothesay on the adjacent island of Bute: because Millport was administratively part of Buteshire, not Ayrshire, the children had to go to Rothesay, rather than the much nearer Largs; this changed after local government re-organisation in 1975. Scientists, apparently, would always go anywhere! Yonge (1973) had referred to Millport as “a most unsuitable site for a research institute” and had lobbied for years for a move to Oban, although the fundamental reasons for this opinion were never made clear.

It was realised in Millport that the needs of other universities, especially those in Scotland and notably that of Glasgow, which had such a long history of involvement with SMBA, must be safeguarded and, as a result, the Universities of London and Glasgow entered into partnership to administer the Station in its new role. The partnership was never a 50:50 arrangement but more like 70:30, with London taking the lead role (Moore, 2009). As the University of London in those days had long-standing experience of administering far-flung college outposts overseas, e.g. in Africa and the Caribbean, a Scottish outpost was seen as no bureaucratic obstacle. Indeed, the first Director at UMBSM - Professor Norman Millott - had been Professor of Zoology in the University College of the West Indies, Jamaica, before returning to London's Bedford College. The staff at UMBSM were employed by the University of London but the academics taught Glasgow University students alongside London students

at Millport and, in contributing teaching to the Zoology Department in Glasgow, were accorded Honorary Lecturer status in Glasgow. In addition to its educational role, the station provided research opportunities for a wide range of Glasgow staff, notably zoologists such as Alan Taylor, Douglas Neil and Peter Meadows, botanists such as Don Boney and Trevor Norton, and microbiologists like Alastair Wardlaw and Harry Birkbeck. Postgraduate students based at Millport could register either with the University of London or Glasgow. A separate article in this volume provides details of marine science at the University of Glasgow (Meadows, 2024).

The Universities of London and Glasgow accepted financial responsibility for the Station from 1st June 1970 and full administrative responsibility with effect from 1st August 1970, with some of the older technical staff transferred from SMBA by 1st August. The University of Glasgow eventually, in reappraising its academic priorities but failing to exploit its unique freshwater and marine field station facilities, withdrew from UMBSM in 2011 and in the summer of 2013, the Field Studies Council (FSC) and the University of London reached a Memorandum of Understanding and the Millport facilities were finally transferred to FSC ownership. The University of London's withdrawal was associated with the fragmentation of the University as its colleges became independent universities. For a time, it appeared that the station would have to close altogether, but although this has not happened, the ending of Millport as a research facility is a serious blow to marine research in Scotland, as recognised by the international copepod expert David Damkaer who wrote of UMBSM "a nation's poor judgment closed it in October 2013" (Damkaer, 2017).

The earlier history of the Millport marine station is extensively covered by Kerr (1949) and in his *Gallery of Memories* (this volume).

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