

# An Archaeological Evaluation at 51 Knock, Aignish Isle of Lewis



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## **1.0 Summary**

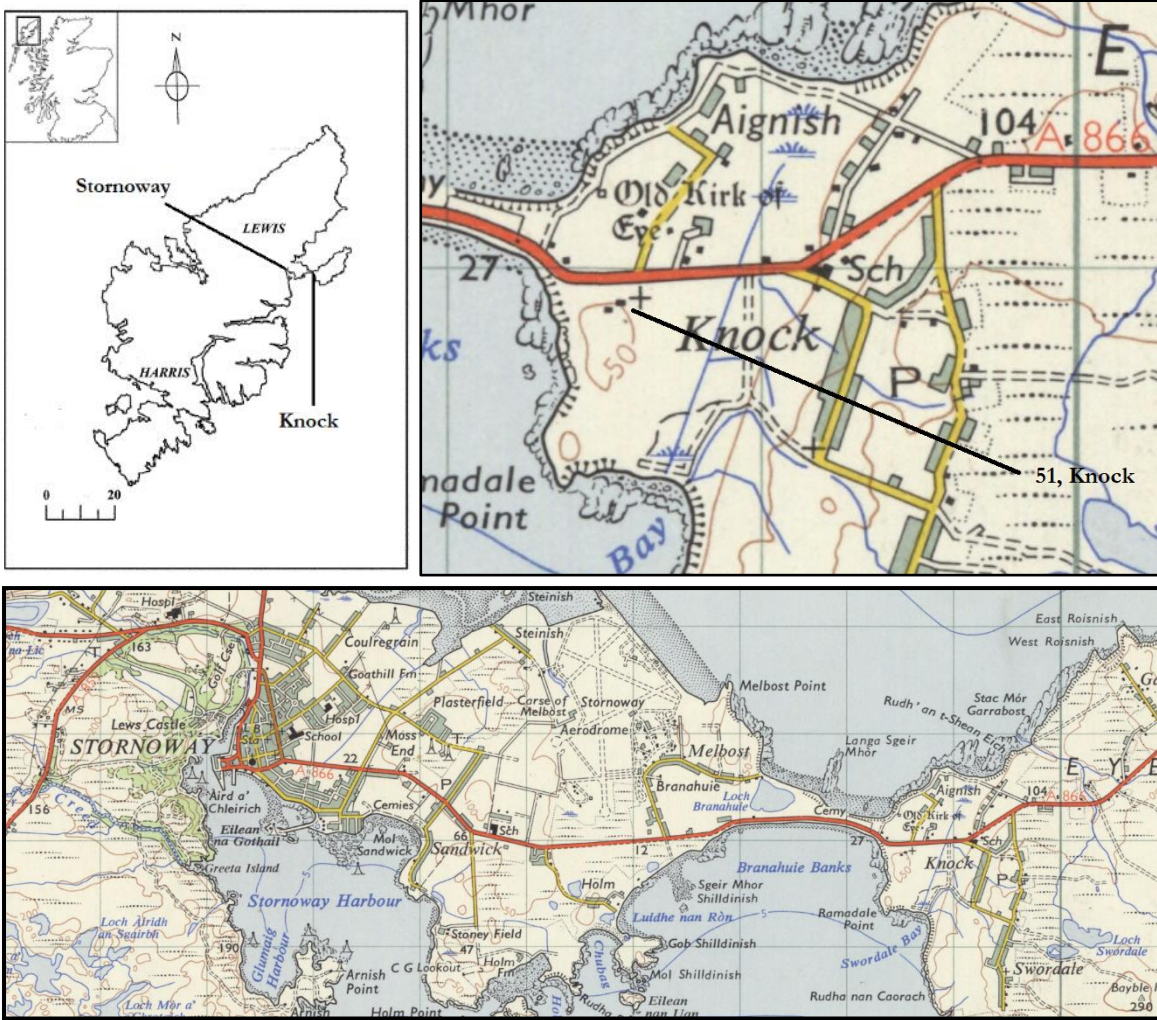
The following report details the findings of an archaeological evaluation of a proposed house site on croft land at No 51 Knock, Aignish, Isle of Lewis, which took place between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2017. The evaluation was requested by the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's planning department in response to the proposed creation of a new house on this land as it had formerly been the location of a Thomas Telford designed Church - see Comhairle nan Eilean Siar planning application Archaeological Response: - 17/00189/PPD.

The foundations of the Church were uncovered together with various deposits from the construction and use of the Church. These will be fully described, and their significance discussed.

## **2.0 Location of House site**

The proposed development site is located approximately 40 metres to the east of the (former) Manse at Cnoc, at NB 48602 31916. It is between 15m above sea level. The area sits upon an area of "Permian to Triassic Sedimentary Rocks", which are around 200 million years old (<http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/geology/outerhebrides.pdf>). These conglomerated rocks were originally deposited by rivers flowing from high mountains into a huge valley which is the present day Minch. Therefore it is unlikely that we will come across bedrock in the course of the evaluation, and also the natural sub soils will likely be full of rounded stone and shingle.

The area of the site is around 50m<sup>2</sup> and its boundaries comprise a dry stone wall on three sides and a wire stock fence along the roadside. Within these same boundary walls stood the former site of the 'New Church' as annotated on the 6" 1<sup>st</sup> edition map of 1851 (figure 3, below). It is now accompanied by new houses to the North and East. The site is covered in long, ungrazed grass.



*Figure 1: Location of House site in Knock, location of Knock relative to Stornoway, location of Stornoway*



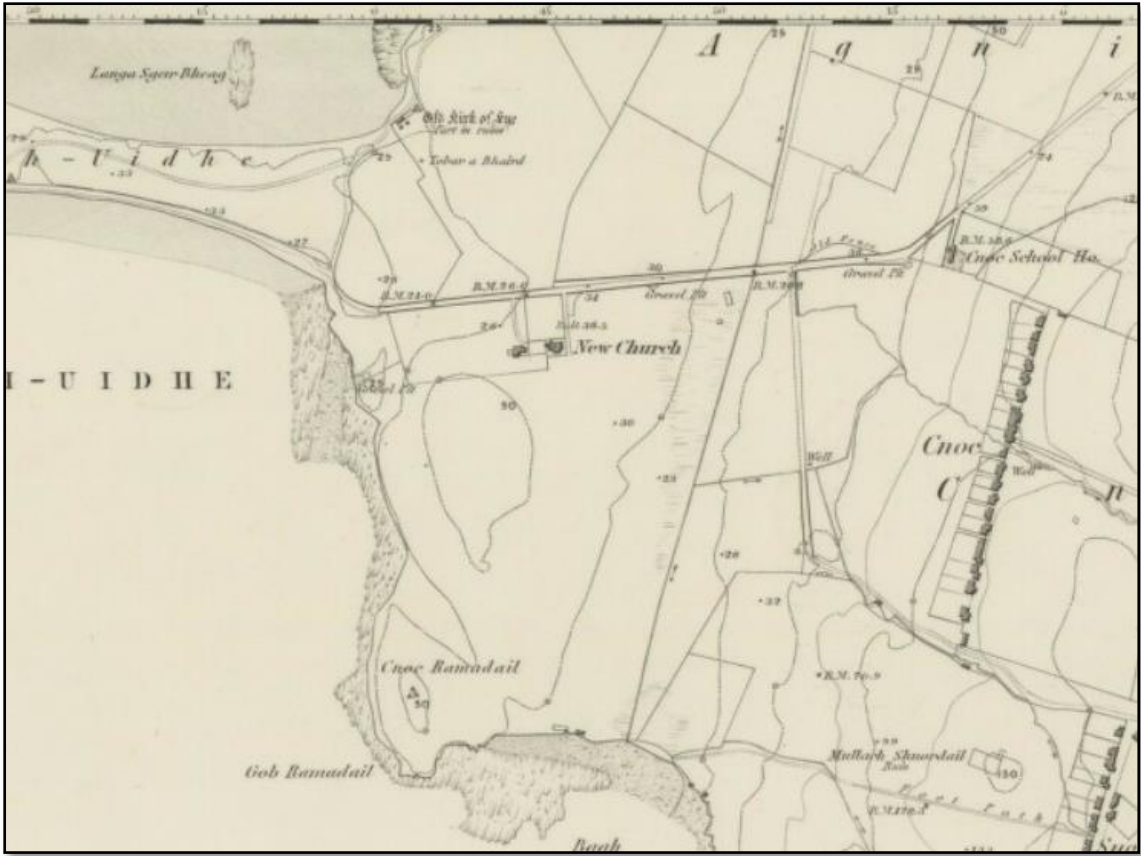


Figure 2: 1<sup>st</sup> edition (1853) OS map of the area



*Figure 3: Modern Satellite image of the area, with site of former Church outlined in red*

### 3.0 Archaeological Background

The Manse was designed by Thomas Telford and is a grade B Listed Building: Canmore ID 238258, Site number NB43SE 22; SMR 13426. It was associated with a Church, now demolished, located directly under the proposed house site.

The church and manse were built as part of a program of development initiated by the Government and the Church of Scotland to improve the delivery of religious guidance throughout the Highlands in the mid to late 1820's, and are therefore sometimes referred to as "Parliamentary Kirks". This program was overseen by the architect and engineer Thomas Telford who had previously been employed by the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges to improve communications across Scotland. A total of 32 Churches were built over the Highland area in this initiative, 13 of which were in the Islands.

*"The layout of each church was a simple T-plan. There were two doors and windows in the front wall, which if the terrain allowed, faced south. This was the longest wall of the building being 52' 6". On the left-hand gable there was a small belfry consisting of four plain pillars supporting a pyramidal top. At each side of the building there were two windows, one in the end and one on each side of the rear wing. The exterior was plain and undecorated while the interior was equally austere with the pulpit against the front wall between the front windows and hexagonal in shape."*

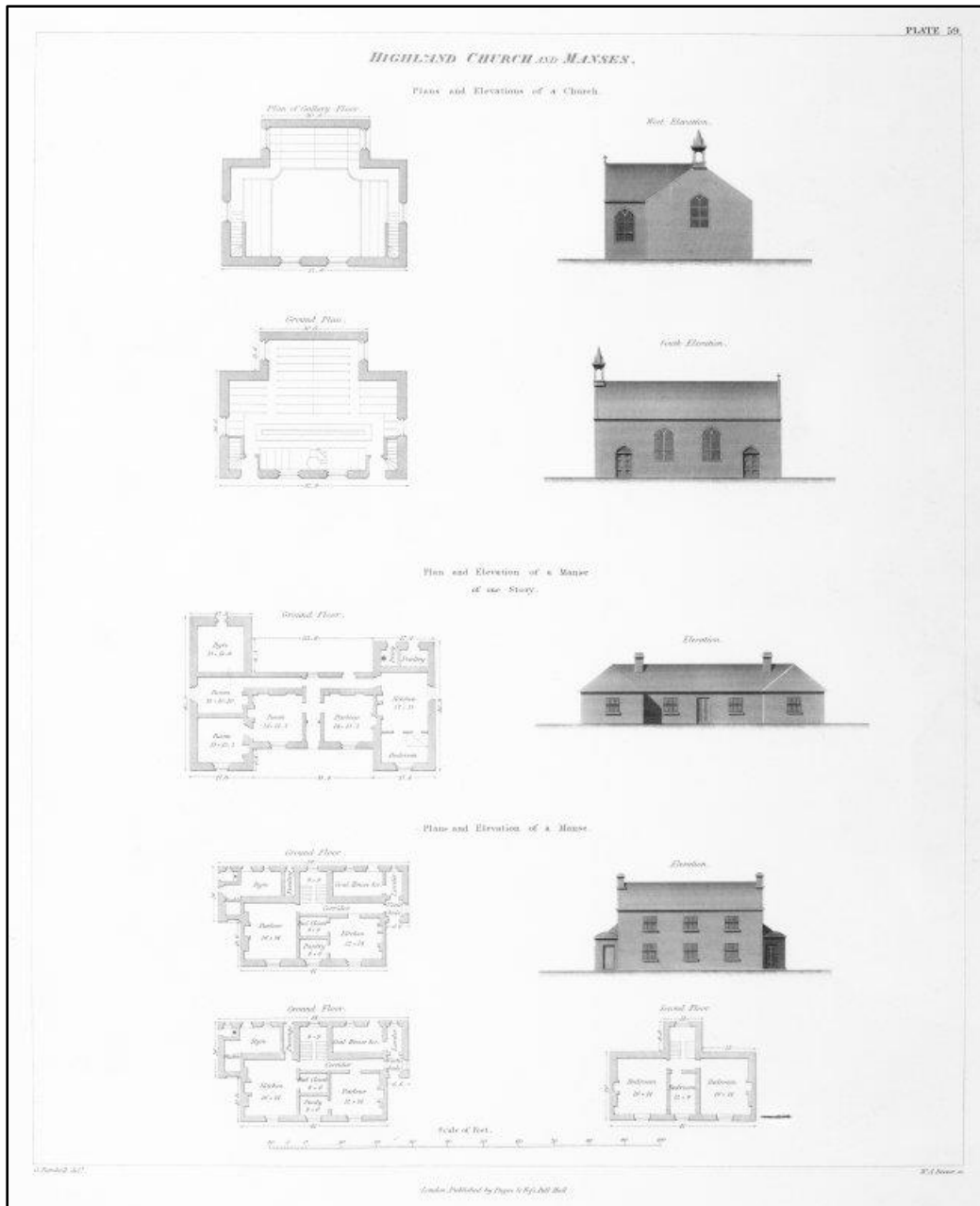
[http://www.caithness.org/caithnessfieldclub/bulletins/1980/october/thomas\\_telfords\\_parliamentary\\_churches.htm](http://www.caithness.org/caithnessfieldclub/bulletins/1980/october/thomas_telfords_parliamentary_churches.htm)

*Though the kirks are generally ascribed to Telford in person, this is not strictly true, though he was closely involved with the project. Telford asked each of his three surveyors, James Smith, Joseph Mitchell and William Thomson, to prepare specimen designs for a kirk and manse within budget and 'particularly calculated to resist a stormy climate'. Some amendments were made to the designs, and eventually Thomson's plan, with some alterations, was adopted; a simple basic rectangle, with various options for adaptation of detail to suit local circumstances; landowners could add internal lofts or galleries at their own expense. The windows were standardised so that they could be supplied, ready to fit, by James Abernethy in Aberdeen. Smith's design for a single-storey manse was adopted, as was Mitchell's for a two-storey manse.*

*The features common to all the "Telford Kirks" are the basic rectangular plan, the shape and positioning of doors and windows, and the small belfry. Most also have an extension to the rear making the plan T-shaped. The one at Kinlochbervie is the classic version, with two windows flanked by two doors of the same shape, and the belfry to the left as you view the main elevation. There are also windows in both side walls, and in the side walls of the extension where one exists.*

<http://www.geograph.org.uk/article/Thomas-Telfords-Parliamentary-Kirks>

Knock Church and manse was built between 1827 - 1829, the church was still extant in the late 1890's however it is unclear when it was finally demolished. It is also uncertain to what extent the site was cleared after demolition – there is potential for archaeological remains such as foundations or even burials to be preserved on the site.



**Figure 4: Plans of Telford's Church and Manse designs. The Knock Manse is of the 2 story variety (<http://canmore.org.uk/collection/1041424#>)**

The WSI also highlighted many other archaeological finds and sites in the area and so it is possible that there are remains of older structures underneath the Telford Church.



## 4.0 Methodology

The methodology used was laid out in the WSI document and approved by the Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar planning department on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011. It is in accordance with the Scottish Governments Planning Advice Note 2/11 and Scottish Planning Policy, 2014, as well as the following standards and guidance produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA):

- *Code of conduct* (2014);
- *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (2014);
- *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (2014).

“Trenches will be laid out with stakes and paint, measuring around 10% of the footprint of the house site. Trenches will be excavated using a back acting machine, equipped with a toothless bucket, under the constant supervision of the Archaeologist. The topsoil will be removed in spits to the first archaeological horizon or, where none was found, to the natural subsoil. Any archaeological features encountered will be cleaned by hand by the on-site Archaeologist to determine their character and extent. Should negative-cut features be encountered, a representative sample of 50% will be excavated to determine their significance, date and function. A full record of excavated features will be made using a single context recording system, drawings and scaled photographs. All archaeological features will be drawn at an appropriate scale - sections will be drawn at 1:10, and plans at 1:20. Finds, environmental evidence and animal bone will be collected as bulk samples by context. Significant small finds will be three dimensionally located prior to collection. All finds will be subject to appropriate specialist assessment if deemed necessary. Conservation of important finds will be considered before lifting from the ground. All excavated feature fills and horizons will also be sampled as appropriate, using bulk soil samples, for palaeo-environmental evidence. A representative section will be recorded denoting depth of topsoil, any stratigraphy present and the nature of the soil. Both pre- and post- excavation plans will be drawn, as well as any other intermediary plans required to adequately record the features”

## 5.0 Results

A T- shaped trench was laid out, with the E-W axis (right to left in the picture below) running along the side where both Church entrances were located. I had wanted this to be closer to the wall but unfortunately BT had laid a service cable somewhere down that side so we had to leave a strip along the wall. The N-S axis was designed to cover both the centre of the building and any deposits located outside to the South. The trench was larger than 10% but only targeted areas within this were excavated down to Natural subsoil.



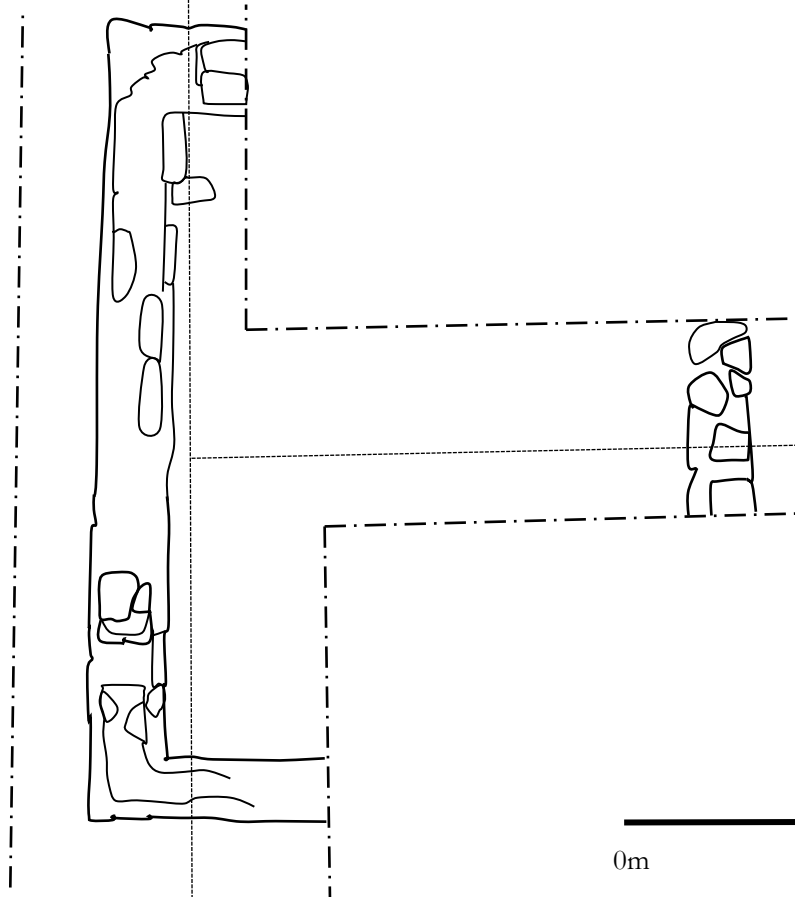
*Figure 5: Satellite image showing the site at 51 Knock and the trench location in red*

The solid foundations of substantial walls were uncovered in both areas of trench, thought to be the last remains of the Telford Church

ROAD

Drystane Wall  
(4.7m from Church  
wall)

6.10m from Church wall to road



0m

5m

N

Ministers gate; now blocked. 4.6m from Church wall to West dyke

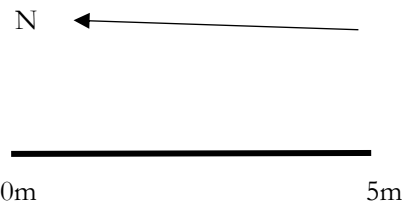
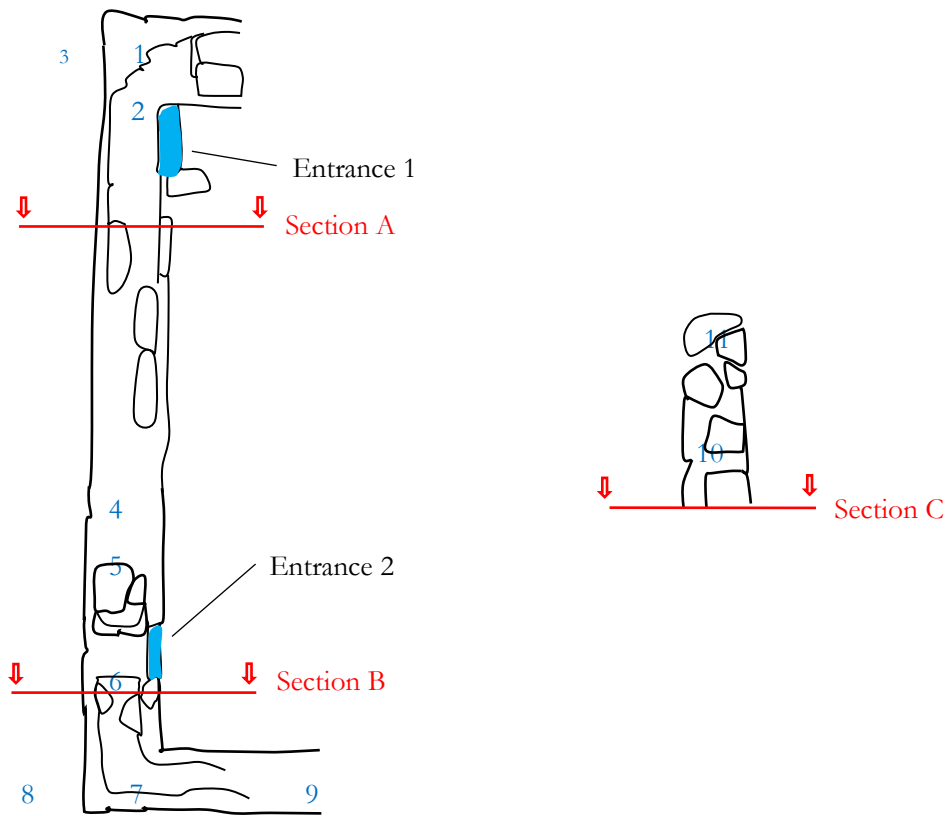
*Figure 6: Plan of trench*

## 5.1 North Wall

This was the larger length of wall on the North side with corners visible at the East and West extents, termed (003). It was constructed of large blocks of Lewisian Gneiss, many of which were roughly hewn beach boulders, mortared together with lime mortar made from beach shell. It measured 16.50m long and 1m -1.1m wide. The lower, larger stones formed a single course which was absolutely solid and stable throughout its length, but they had clearly once supported a thinner 700mm wide wall (004) of which only some stones and patches of mortar remained – see Figure 7, below. To the Eastern end there was clearly an even lower course supporting the wall, making it level along its length in contrast to the shallowly sloping ground which fell toward the East. Two lengths of concrete slab (005, 006) marked each entrance way (coloured blue in Figure 7) and must have been internal thresholds – although probably not original features. The Entrance 2 retained some of its sides which can be seen on the plan.

Two cross sections were made perpendicular to the wall, one at each entrance way – shown in red on the plan. Slots were cut through the soils each side of the wall in order to investigate the sequence of deposition. The wall was not removed to gain a full cross section as it was too strong and substantial to do by hand.





*Figure 7: Plan showing placement of cross sections in red, concrete thresholds in light blue and levels in dark blue*

### 5.1.1 Section A

The position of Section A can be seen on the Figure 7 above. It was situated over an area where a lower course of stone was visible under the main course that ran the length of the trench. The following reconstructed sequence was observed:

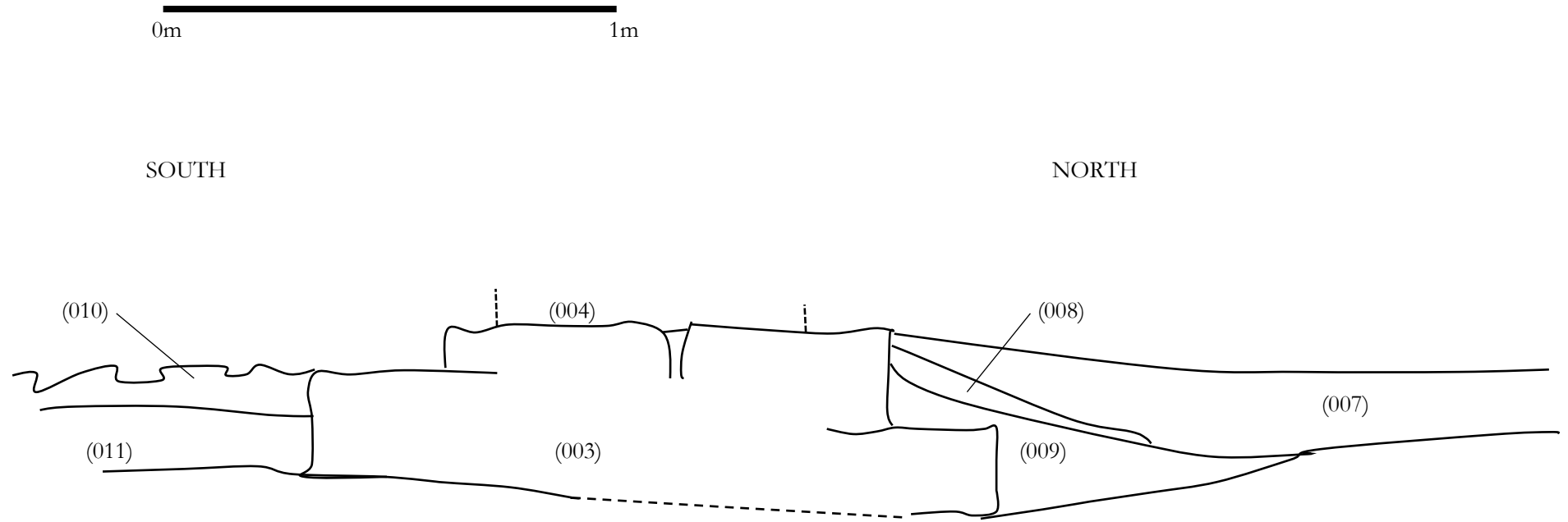
There was no obvious cut into the natural subsoil, although the area had been cleaned down to this level so the cut was probably out with the trench. Then, a layer of c500mm large flat stones of c200mm thick was laid, with mortar. Then another course of stone, this time around 300mm/12" thick – both of these are the foundation wall (003). This then formed the base for the upper wall (004), of which just a trace of its base was visible. The concrete slab (005) was made after the walls and surrounding deposits i.e later than everything else.

To the North side of the wall the Natural was overlain by a deep layer of mixed material characteristic of "Trample" – a deposit made by the feet of the tradesmen who made the building, called (009). It had different coloured clays, both yellow and red, patches of dark brown soil, sand, clumps of mortar, all mixed with rounded shingle stones 30-50mm big. Over this lay a deposit of mortar (008) containing little else, which looked to continue along the length of the wall. As this is over the trample it would seem sensible to suggest that it derived from the pointing process after the Church walls had been built. Finally over this was a deep layer of small beach shingle (007), with grains no bigger than 300mm. This extended out beyond the edges of the trench. It was interpreted as the actual path material laid around the building. Over this all was 300-400mm of topsoil and turf (002, 001).

(NAT)-(CUT?)-(003)-(004)-(009)-(008)-(007)-(005)-(002)-(001)

To the south side of the wall, again the foundation stones were lain upon the Natural subsoil. Then a 150mm deep layer of dark brown top soil (011) abutted the stone ie had been deposited against them. On top of that was a compact layer of stone and mortar (010), too uneven to be a floor surface and again interpreted as the mess made when building the structure and plastering the insides. This would imply that the Church had a suspended wooden floor over the top of such deposits.

(NAT)-(CUT?)-(003)-(004)-(011)-(010)-(005)-(002)-(001)



*Figure 8: Section A across North wall near roadside entrance*

### 5.1.2 Section B

The next section was cut across Entrance 2. The reconstructed sequence was as follows:

A cut (015) was made into the natural subsoil of compressed shingle and rounded stone. Large blocks c300mm tall were laid into this and mortared in place (003). The tops of these were level with the rest of the length of the wall. The upper, main part of the Church wall (004), discussed above, was then visible in this section. It was 700mm wide, but only remained to a height of 100mm. Lastly the concrete slab (006) had been created over everything.

Outside the wall to the North, the cut was filled by a Trample type deposit (013) similar to that seen in Section A, and then over that the small shingle (012), also just as in Section A.

(NAT)-(015)-(003)-(004)-(013)-(012)

Inside the wall, the natural seemed to be a little higher and no cut could be seen, although the block lay directly upon it. The natural was overlain by another trample type deposit (014), this one containing a lot of lumps of plaster but little mortar. Again this presumably relates to the activities of the tradesmen as the made and then finished of the Church with plaster (probably Lath-and-Plaster) on the inside walls.

(NAT)-(CUT?)-(003)-(004)-(014)





## 5.2 South Wall

In the southern trench extension there were the remains of another, similar wall (016) – see Figure 7 above. This had been damaged by the machine somewhat and a couple of large boulders dislodged from their original position. It was constructed of the same materials as the North wall, consisting of large 300mm tall stones in a foundation course supporting slightly smaller stones which were probably the base of the upper wall (017) – which was again 700mm wide. Another section was cut across to demonstrate the stratigraphy – see Figure 11, below.

### 5.2.1 Section C

There was no cut visible here again, but the area had to have been cleared down to the natural subsoil before any work commenced as the stonework sits directly on top of it. The edge of the cut must be further out from the building, indicating a large footprint was cleared in advance of any building.

Over this lay a trample type deposit just as in the other sections, with mortar, soil, shingle and clay all mixed up, again very similar on both sides. On the outside (South) it was called (020) and on the inside (021). Over this, outside we have a layer of concentrated mortar containing shells and sand (018), and inside there is a similar looking white deposit which is fine grained such as the consistency of plaster (019).

There was then a layer of top soil (002) and turf (001) over all of this.

(NAT)-(CUT?)-(016)-(017)-(020/021)-(018/019)-(002)-(001)

A small piece of the blonde sandstone found elsewhere on the site was uncovered from (019), indicating that this stone was used in the actual construction of the Church.



### 5.3 Further Investigations

A further area of around 3m<sup>2</sup> at the centre of the building was cleaned to see what may be there or underlying. A deposit which was very similar to those already described from the interior (ie 014, 021) was found and termed (022). It too was a construction trample containing remains of the raw materials used to build the Church, only 100mm thick at most and covering the whole area. Here was also found many shattered orange clay roof tiles, which were also plentiful in the top soil. These artefacts may have come from activities after the Church was sold to a local business man – see below. Directly under this was the natural subsoil.

### 5.4 Subsequent Evidence.

Quite a lot of evidence relating to the Church has come to light since the excavations began. The following comes courtesy of John Cunningham, Clerk to Lewis Presbytery of the Church of Scotland:

*“As at Cross Ness, the Telford Church was built in a small enclosure, near to but not in, the local cemetery. I wrote an (unpublished) booklet on the Ecclesiastical History of the Eye Peninsula years ago when I had access to Deacons’ Court records from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards for that Church. There was no mention anywhere of burials and I’m sure that would have come up when the derelict Church became a block making factory immediately before its demolition by Bullar (Jimmy Bullar, local tradesman and business man) to go into the foundations of the Acres Hotel. Unfortunately, I no longer have access to these records but did quote extensively from them in my booklet.*

*In terms of ecclesiology, the Church was not well regarded in the area from 1843 onwards. The fiercely evangelical Rev Duncan Matheson was inducted there in 1831 and enjoyed a large following but left with most of his congregation to become Knock Free Church (Garrabost) at the Disruption of 1843. The tiny surviving Established Church of Scotland congregation in the Telford Church was regarded as theologically liberal and struggled on as a poor relation until 1929 when it merged with the United Free Church (itself a merger of the Free Church and United Presbyterian Church) and worship moved to the 1909 United Free Church in Garrabost (present Church of Scotland). According to the Deacons’ Court Minutes I saw, the Telford Church then became a satellite Meeting House until the congregation could no longer afford to maintain it and it was sold around the 1950’s. I suppose my point is that, in some areas, building on the site of a former Church might be frowned upon but nobody will care in this case. Congregational records make no mention of any burials and the Presbytery Clerk has told you that he is unaware of any burials there. Ultimately, the thick walls of the Church were blown up with explosives and the brace was so great that a dog jumped over the cliffs in Swordale. I don’t think they would have got away with that sort of thing in a cemetery setting.”*

*Other pieces of information regarding the Knock Church from John Cunningham:*

*- The interior of the Parliamentary Church at Croick, Caithness show a later suspended timber floor around the Pulpit area but stone slabs over the main body of the Church – but I have read that Caithness Slab was used at Knock*



- *It was difficult to find contractors in the islands so, unusually, Stewart-Mackenzie was appointed contractor. The Heritor, who made the land available, was Mary Frederica Elizabeth Stewart-Mackenzie of Seaforth, and the contractor is listed as James Alexander Stewart-Mackenzie of Glasserton and Seaforth, her husband. Mrs Stewart-Mackenzie was the real Seaforth, her husband was James Alexander Stewart and he only assumed the surname Stewart-Mackenzie when he married her.*
- *This contractor arrangement was reluctantly accepted by John Mitchell, Chief Inspector at the Office for Roads and Bridges in Inverness, who was acting as Surveyor for the Commissioners for Building Highland Roads and Bridges, on condition that Thomas Macfarlane of Davidson & Macfarlane (contractor on 13 of the mainland Telford Churches) be appointed as visiting Clerk of Works.*
- *Macfarlane personally oversaw the laying of the foundations at Knock, completed in June 1827.*
- *Church and Manse at Knock cost £1,470 and were completed on 9 March 1829.*
- *Stone for the Lewis Churches was quarried and dressed in Seaforth's Brahan Quarry near Inverness, then shipped to Lewis.*
- *Rothiemurchus Fir was specified but, in the end according to Dr G H Baird (Principal of Edinburgh University who visited the island in 1827), the Lewis Churches were built using Baltic Wood recovered from a local shipwreck.*
- *Windows came from James Abernethy & Co of Aberdeen, shipped via Greenock.*
- *The Church Bell, rung by an external chain by the Church Officer to warn the congregation inside that the Minister was approaching from the Manse, was supplied by James Milne, Edinburgh for £8.1.0. There was no Vestry in these Churches because the Manse was so close - the Minister prepared in the Manse and, as they waited, the congregation listened to the Precentor reading the Scriptures.*
- *The roof was covered in natural slate and Telford said "there can be no objection to using copper nails for the slating instead of iron nails".*
- *It is likely that the Knock Church, in common with all the Telford Churches except Iona and Ardgour which have a polished granite front, was harled with a mix of lime, rough sand (stone no larger than one third of a pea) and water.*

It is interesting that John recalls reading that these Hebridean Telford Churches had Caithness flagstone floors. The physical evidence so far would suggest a suspended timber floor, as the central area was not totally level, but as he says there may have been both types of floor. The flagstones were valuable stones and would have been re-used before the Church was demolished – so probably during the ownership of said Jimmy Bullar. It is therefore not surprising that the only deposits found inside the Church during the current investigation were from the construction phase, and why the “block making factory” was not in much evidence - although we could speculate that the concrete slab thresholds belong to this period.

It is also not surprising that so little remains of the walls if they were blown up with explosive! Presumably he also then had a machine to clear the rubble and any remaining sections of wall. It seems from the above that we could suggest that the blonde sandstone found all over the site may be that imported from Seaforth's Brahan quarry. Also, I am not surprised to find out that it was a slate roof given the amount of small pieces of slate throughout the top soil and trample layers, but it still leaves the question of where the orange roof tiles come from.

John has furnished me with some photos of the Church from the 1950's, two of which are courtesy of the Church of Scotland and one from the Commun Eachdraidh Nis.



*Figure 11: Knock Church and Manse from the East, 1950's. Courtesy of John Cunningham.*



*Figure 12: Knock Church and Manse from the West, 1950's. Bottom right. Note lack of headstones around the Church. Courtesy of John Cunningham.*



*Figure 13: Telford Church in Cross, Ness. Also now demolished. Photograph courtesy of the Commun Eachdraidh Nis.*

Malcolm Macleod of No 5 Knock (just across the road) added a few extra details, such as that he attended a once monthly service in the Church when he was younger. The only entrance used was the one to the west of the north wall, Entrance 2 on the plans. He moved away to New Zealand in 1968 and came back in 1972, by which time the Church had been demolished. His brother also mentioned that he thought there had been some sort of stone sculpture outside and to the south of the Church. This was in the form of a slab with writing upon it. No one seems to know anything about their fate.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

This evaluation has uncovered the substantial remains of a Telford Church. It has investigated the architectural features observed and understood how the foundations of the building were constructed. No other archaeological features were encountered and there is no evidence of any other archaeology in the area. There remains a small possibility that further features will come to light during the full topsoil strip, however the other evidence which has come to light during the course of the evaluation – Historical, anecdotal and photographic - would appear to support the notion that there were never burials here and that nothing else remains in the area.

## Appendix 1: Context Register

Context No.	Description
001	Turf
002	Topsoil
003	Main foundation wall
004	Upper wall
005	Concrete slab, Entrance 1
006	Concrete slab, Entrance 2
007	Beach Shingle, outside, Section A
008	Mortar deposit, outside, Section A
009	Trample type deposit, outside, Section A
010	Stone and Mortar, inside, Section A
011	Soil, inside, Section A
012	Beach shingle, outside, Section B
013	Trample, outside, Section B
014	Trample, inside, Section B
015	Cut, outside, Section B
016	Lower wall, Section C
017	Upper wall, Section C
018	Mortar deposit, outside, Section C
019	Plaster deposit, inside, Section C
020	Trample deposit, outside, Section C
021	Trample deposit, inside, Section C
022	Trample deposit, centre of building

## Appendix 2: Photographic log

ID	Description
001	Pre-excavation
002	-
003	-
004	-
005	Machining
006	-
007	-
008	-
009	-
010	Working shots, wall appearing
011	-
012	-
013	-
014	-
015	-
016	-
017	-
018	-
019	Section A
020	-
021	-
022	-
023	-
024	-
025	-
026	-
027	-
028	-
029	-
030	-
031	General, position of Section A
032	North East corner and Shingle 007
033	Section B, south/ inside
034	Section B both sides
035	Section B both sides
036	Section B South/ Inside looking North
037	Section B, North/ Outside looking South
038	Section B, North/ Outside looking South
039	Section B South/ Inside looking North
040	Section B Inside
041	-
042	-
043	Section B, Outside
044	-
045	-



046	-
047	Section A, Inside
048	-
049	General with position of Section A
050	-
051	-
052	Close up Section A Inside
053	-
054	Wall (016)/(017)
055	-
056	Section C, North side / Inside
057	-
058	-
059	Section C, South side / Outside
060	-
061	-
062	Minister's gate, blocked up
063	Central area
064	-
065	-
066	-
067	General, post ex
068	-
069	
070	-
071	-
072	
073	Sandstone block

### Appendix 3: Levels

Levels were taken on the one day I had a volunteer to help out. The TBM was taken at the side of the tarmac road, roughly in the centre of where the future drive will be. The position of each level is marked upon Figure 7 in a dark blue number. I did not manage to ascertain an absolute level for the TBM, therefore all levels are reduced to show their height relative to the TBM only.

Level No.	Foresight	Back sight-TBM	Reduced level
1	169	152	-0.17
2	161	152	-0.09
3	169	152	-0.17
4	161	152	-0.09
5	137	152	0.15
6	163	152	-0.11
7	163	152	-0.11
8	163	152	-0.11
9	163	152	-0.11
10	156	152	-0.04
11	165	152	-0.13
12	176	152	-0.24
13	186	152	-0.34