

# The Pier, St Kilda

## A Conservation Statement



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## 1. ABSTRACT

This document is intended to support and inform the future management of the Pier at Village Bay, St Kilda. It describes some of the background to the construction of the Pier and the two major phases of work.

The history of the pier is described in detail using a combination of primary archival material and secondary sources. An assessment of significance is presented to clarify what is important and valuable about the features, and a short section is included describing potential vulnerabilities and issues with the management of the features, followed by a summary of the vision for pier.

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### 3. INTRODUCTION

The pier is situated below the Manse and Church at the eastern side of Village Bay (NF 1025 9909). It was originally constructed in 1899-1901 by the Scottish Office Works Department funded by the Congested Districts Board. A major extension was undertaken by Costains for the Ministry of Defence in 1968 which radically altered the length, width and fittings of the pier. The original pier was described by senior members of St Kilda's community in 1901 as *'the greatest benefit that has been conferred upon us'*<sup>1</sup>

In its current form, the pier consists of an L-plan concrete jetty which juts into the sea at right angles protecting a small cleared basin to its west. Behind, a steep slipway allows boats to be pulled from the basin up the slope behind to the flat ground by the manse and church, originally by the use of a capstan mounted at the top of the slope. It is protected by a high stepped parapet wall along its seaward edge. The pier is recorded in the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) as NF19NW 65; a pier.

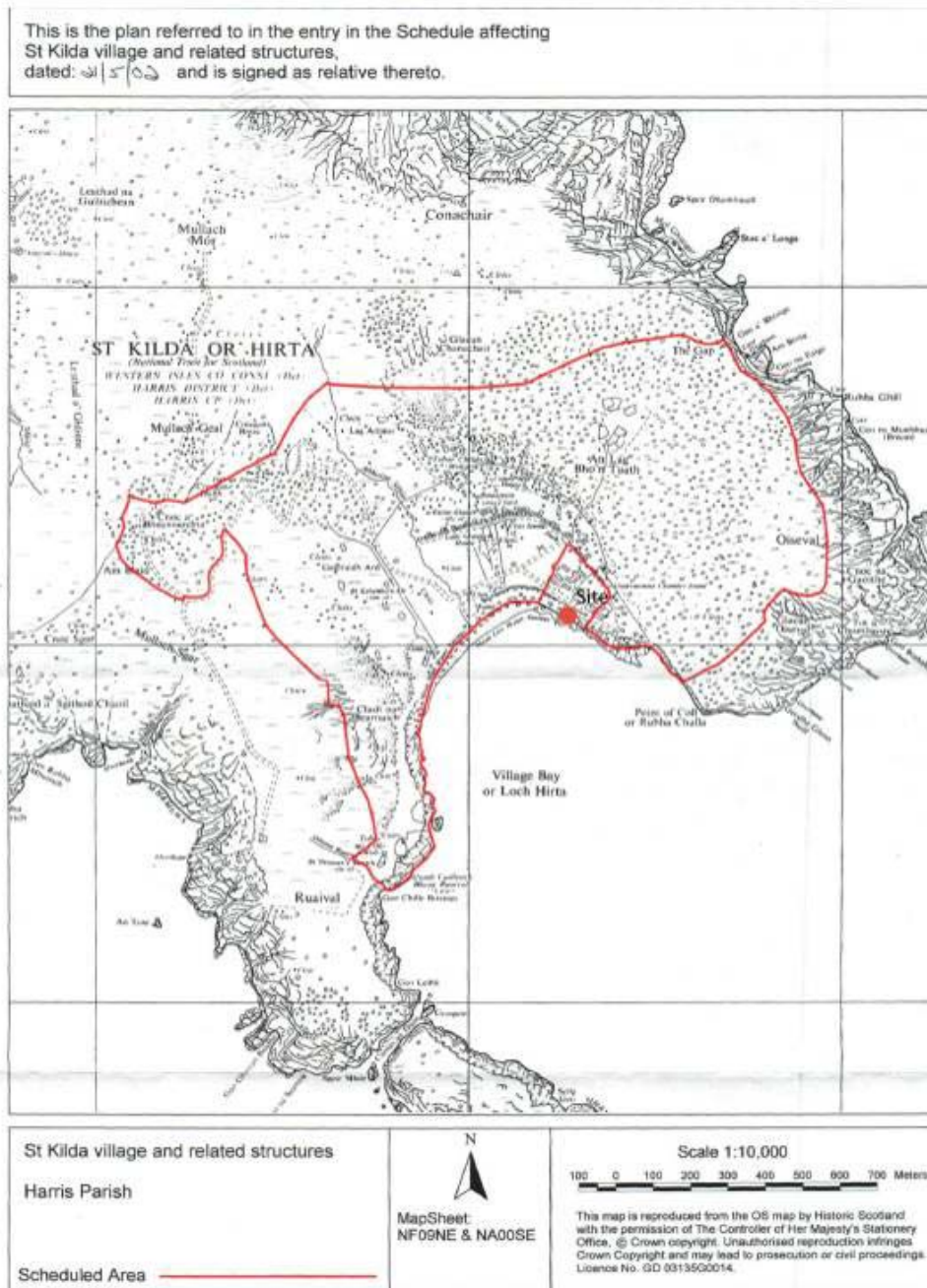
The pier does not lie within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Village Bay which encompasses much of the historic landscape below the skyline from Oiseval in the north to Ruaival in the south. However, it is sited within a National Nature Reserve (NNR), a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Geological Conservation Review Site, a National Scenic Area, a Special Area of Conservation and a Special Protection Area - St Kilda's natural heritage designations applying to the whole archipelago. St Kilda received the accolade of dual World Heritage Site status for its cultural and natural heritage in 2005, one of only 25 in the world. It is worth noting that this accolade was awarded with reference to the completeness of the fossilised 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement and agricultural remains, the spectacular landscape setting adapted by people through millennia, the perceived remoteness of the islands, the vivid human story, and the wealth of documentary evidence (UK 2003, 12).



*The Village Bay of St Kilda looking west with the military base in the middle ground and the crescent shaped street of the 1830s behind. The pier is at the left in the middle ground. Photo © David Geddes*

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<sup>1</sup> NAS: AF42/933, letter from St Kildans to Col. Gore Booth of the Scottish Office



*The main scheduled area on Hirta with the position of the pier highlighted as 'Site'*

The archipelago was gifted by the Marquis of Bute to the National Trust for Scotland in 1957. Immediately thereafter a lease was agreed with the Ministry of Defence for the establishment of a military radar station on Hirta as part of the Hebrides Missile Test Range. Between 1957 and 2003 the NNR was managed by the Nature Conservancy Council and its successor body while the Trust, advised by the Ministry of Works and its successor bodies, managed the upstanding structures in Village Bay. Since 2003 the National Trust for Scotland has managed all aspects of the care of St Kilda, in partnership with the MoD, Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and Western Isles Council. St Kilda is an inalienable property of the Trust, the largest conservation charity caring for the natural and cultural heritage in Scotland.

The pier was not officially included in the 1957 lease agreement with the Ministry of Defence but it continued to be used in the military occupation and a major redevelopment of the pier was undertaken in 1969-70. The



pier has now been drawn into the more formal programme of conservation works undertaken by the NTS each year and, in part due to concerns over health and safety, it is now undergoing a programme of repair and upgrading under the auspices of the NTS and led by John Peden Associates, engineers based in Oban.

This Conservation Statement has been prepared as a response to the fact that our understanding of the pier is in need of improvement which will then feed into the management of the pier and any related conservation works. Scheduled Monument Consent will not be required for any work on the pier.

This statement was produced by George Geddes, formerly St Kilda Archaeologist for the NTS and now with the RCAHMS. It was edited by NTS staff Jill Harden, Archaeologist (North), and Susan Bain, Western Isles Manager.



*The pier from the north-east in March 1956, ADM326/3 (NAK)*

#### 4. UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

##### 4.1 Previous discussions

The most extensive description of the history of the pier at St Kilda is in Michael Robson's book *St Kilda: Church, Visitors and 'Natives'* (2005, 673-685). He describes the in and outs of discussions about landing places through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in some detail, the specific events of the turn of the century which saw the construction take place. His research was extensive and meticulous and many of the primary documents are referred to here by location and name. Mary Harman also includes a short section on the landing place (1997, 274-275) with more quotations from earlier sources and a short description of the construction of c.1900.

The main texts describing the military occupation of St Kilda (Spackman 1982 and Mackay 2002) only mention the pier in passing, relating some of the maintenance and construction that went on in the late 1950s and 1960s. Detailed drawings of the 1960s pier (as built) do exist, and are held by both the Ministry of Defence and the NTS.

There is a host of documentary evidence describing the pier and its extension, as well as earlier reports on works and surveys of the site. Robson uses a number of these sources in his discussion and most of the relevant paperwork held at the National Archive in Scotland was consulted during research for this Statement. A great deal of additional information about the extension is held at the UK National Archive in Kew and a small proportion of these documents were also looked at during this research.

It is important to note that the pier, particularly in its post-1960s reincarnation, has not been considered a heritage asset until relatively recently, probably due to its date, the fact that it is still in use and that it is not within the Scheduled Area. However, as will be demonstrated below, it is an important historic feature within the St Kildan group, not only functionally, but as a symbol of the relationship of St Kilda with the outside world, whether the sea or the forces that wrought so much change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is the conduit through which all the major events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have passed.



*A historic photograph from 1912 showing a busy day on the pier, probably just after the arrival of a steamer. The 15 tonne crane and mooring rings are visible and the steps have already been damaged by boulders thrown by the sea. © Museum nan Eilean, Western Isles Council*

## 4.2 Landing Places

The pier cannot easily be placed within a national context due to variety of the form and the huge number extant throughout the country. There are around 35 piers, 10 harbours and 8 jetties recorded in the NMRS for the Western Isles, and 285, 81 and 65 respectively in the area administered by Highland Council. Suffice it to say that, in the Western Isles at least, formal landing structures were extremely unusual until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even then they were largely a product of external funding and, in particular, attempts to stimulate the fishing industry. Islands like St Kilda were reliant on difficult natural landing places, usually on the rocks with beaches being used only on rare and very calm occasions. The nearest substantial rubble piers are probably Rodel in Harris and of course Stornoway itself. Further comparison can be drawn with other 'remote' islands such as Mingulay and Foula, both of which suffered from the lack of a decent landing until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even now, the Foula ferry is bodily lifted from the sea and secured on land due to the inclement conditions.

The Congested Districts Board was set up by the Conservative government in 1897 and for the next fifteen years acted as a primary conduit for capital into the Highlands & Islands, supporting many improvement schemes. The CDB was the main driver for the eventual construction of a pier on St Kilda and a further research strain could look at comparable CDB projects in the wider area as well as the CDB's work on St Kilda.

The numbers quoted above belie confusion with nomenclature. The original documents discussing the St Kilda pier project use a variety of terms including landing stage, pier, parapet, ramp and dock but the most commonly used is pier and this has continued into the present day. After the recent upgrading of the thesaurus used for the National Monument Record of Scotland by the RCAHMS, the following definitions are used, with relevant ones highlighted in bold type:

Harbour	A sheltered port for ships
Landing Stage	A platform, sometimes floating, for the landing of passengers and goods from vessels.
Quay	<b>An artificial paved bank or solid landing place built parallel to, or projecting out from, a shoreline or riverbank to serve in the loading and unloading of vessels.</b>
Wharf	A large wooden structure built alongside the water's edge, where ships may lie for unloading.
Breakwater	A structure which protects a beach or harbour by breaking the force of the waves.
Jetty	<b>A mole or pier-like structure situated at the entrance of a harbour, or running out into a lake of the sea, so as to defend the harbour or coast.</b>
Slipway	<b>An inclined platform down which a ship or other vessel may be lowered into the water.</b>
Dock	An artificial area of open water, enclosed by masonry and fitted with dock gates in which ships can be repaired, loaded/unloaded or berthed.
Pier	A structure, often of iron or wood, open below, running out into the sea and used as a promenade and landing stage.



*Bringing goods up from the pier in 1912. © Museum nan Eilean, Western Isles Council*



### 4.3 Historical development

#### 4.3.1 Introduction

St Kilda is infamous, even now, for the lack of safety of the anchorage and the difficulty of landing; for instance, although the summer of 2008 was relatively benign, it still witnessed great reluctance and wariness on the part of those responsible for small cruise ships and the large supply ship when entering and anchoring in Village Bay. Martin Martin's description in the 1690s of the landing place and the method of landing would be alarming to a modern traveller. The 'saddle' he describes was used to launch and recover the boat for centuries, apart from on very calm days when the beach would be used. He also mentions a 'hollow', referred to as the galley's dock, which might have been some form of boat noust.



*St Kildans landing stores immediately SE of the current pier (Kearton 1899, p7). See the photograph on p13 for a comparison – the same triangular rock in the background is possible.*

#### 4.3.2 Captain Otter's attempt in 1860

The first serious attempt to improve the situation was by the Admiralty Hydrographic Survey officer Captain (later Admiral) Henry C Otter in 1860. In his official capacity, Otter and his ship *Porcupine* had visited St Kilda as early as 1859 and Otter had developed a strong concern for, and interest in, the community, requesting permission for regular visits from the Admiralty. He provided transport for many important visitors during the next few years, including the owner, the Duke of Atholl (President of the HASS), the surveyor Sharbau, Captain Thomas and John H Maxwell (Secretary of the Kelsall Fund).

In a letter describing his trip of June 1860, Otter described how *'the only landing place is at the edge of a sloping rock on the NE side of the bay which is steep so at low water, and whenever the boats bow touches the shore, the inhabitants lay hold and pull her up above the reach of the sea...the only means of improving the landing would be to clear out an indentation amongst the rocks, which at present is filled with large stones, and erect a crane on the cliff above which is only 30 feet high, and so hoist the boats up above the reach of the sea. I believe this, if found to answer would be one of the greatest benefits that could be conferred upon the people'* (Robson 2005, 437).



Agreement between Otter, Macleod the proprietor, Maxwell and Atholl seems to have led to works on a landing place beginning in the summer of 1860. One of Otter's Lieutenant's, Hawes, wrote how the Porcupine anchored on 27<sup>th</sup> September to see what progress some masons employed by the HASS had been making on the landing place (ibid, 442). Robson describes elsewhere that Otter engaged three 'first rate Inverness men' and, with the help of St Kildan labourers, they blasted and cleared a small bay and installed a crane (Robson 2005, 674).

The Admiralty men perhaps gave a hand in these works but on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the ship and island were hit by a severe hurricane which caused extensive damage, un-roofing the majority of the houses. Otter described how *'the harbour had just been finished the previous evening, the crane was erected and large stones moved and a strong breakwater formed to protect the boats from the waves, but the wind lifted their large boat and dashed her upon the very place formed for her protection'* (ibid, 445).

Robson implies that further work was undertaken after the hurricane of October 1860: *'The landing place, on which work had already been carried out, and a new boat seemed suitable objects for the allocation of sums from the Kelsall fund, and Captain Otter was put in charge of both undertakings'*. The position was reviewed by John Hall Maxwell in 1863: *'an attempt, by means of blasting and building, to form something like a rude breakwater'* (ibid, 446).

On re-visiting the island in June 1863, Maxwell's group *"spied a ring attached to a rock – which was followed by the discovery of some broken iron work and a mass of quarried stones heaped in confusion over each other. This was all that was left of Captain Otter's 'harbour-making', of the work I had paid for"* (Robson 2005, 450).

The location of this 'bay' is shown on Factor MacDonald's plan of June 1898 which shows it in the same position as the modern basin, i.e. immediately adjacent to the current pier<sup>2</sup>. It seems likely that the position of the pier and basin constructed in 1900 was strongly influenced by Otter's earlier work. Later, in 1878, the Admiralty wrote to the Board of Trade that *a very fair landing place was made at the north edge of this ledge of rock which is nearly vertical; the large boulders when blasted were cleared away to some distance and a small breast work put up but two years after the drawback of the winter swells rolled back the stones and destroyed it.*<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, without fully revisiting the primary archival material the events of the early 1860s are only partly clear. Certainly an attempt was made to clear a 'basin' by blasting, a crane was erected, and some form of breakwater was built. This may have been undertaken in two phases, possibly funded by the Kelsall Fund or the HASS directly and partly undertaken by workmen under the direction of Captain Otter.

#### **4.3.3 Digby and the Napier Commission**

Seventeen years later, in 1877, John MacDiarmid of the HASS visited and commented on Otter's scheme, suggesting that he had intended to clear a basin and make a cutting 40 or 50 yards into the bank forming a sheltered dock. In July 1878, Lieutenant Commander Digby, commander of HMS *Jackal*, wrote to the Secretary of the Admiralty with his opinion, based on a short visit. Digby felt that a cheaper and more sensible option would be a modest slip, in the same position as the historical landing, perhaps at a cost of around £6000. This would at least give them a smoother surface to haul the boats over and launch them, and the provision of a capstan would make this much easier. At the same time Macleod of Macleod had written describing his own thoughts on the matter after discussion with his factor<sup>4</sup>, with an estimate of costs for his suggestion at around £2000. However, efforts to move things forward by the Home Office and the Board of Trade seem to have lost momentum, in part due lack of clarity over a proposed scheme and its cost. The Board of Trade was interested in supporting fishing in the area, but it was not clear to what extent this would be encouraged by the construction of a pier. They also indicated that £6000 would be too much, as they only had a sum of £3000 per annum available for piers and harbours (*idem*).

When the Napier Commission into crofting visited in 1883, the Rev. John MacKay and a community spokesman were questioned on the specific issue and clarified that an improved landing would be of great value to the community. The owner, again with information supplied by his factor, had put forward a more detailed proposal in 1882 detailing the construction of a dock 40 yards long by 6 yards wide by 6 yards deep costing £288. After the visit of the Napier Commission, and instigated by Napier himself, a further scheme was proposed by Captain Pricket of the *Jackal* and Malcolm McNeill, former secretary of the Crofter's Commission,

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<sup>2</sup> NAS: DD17/118

<sup>3</sup> NAS: AD57/5

<sup>4</sup> NAS: AD57/5

in 1884. Due to disagreement over the proposals and funding the scheme got no further, since Macleod would not agree to either the designs or the source of funding (Robson 2005, 677).

#### **4.3.4 The Congested Districts Board**

The creation of the Congested Districts Board in 1897 provided the impetus and funding to support the poorer areas of Scotland and a renewed vigour was applied to the problem of an improved landing for St Kilda, perhaps in response to the letters of Rev. Fiddes and Macleod. Fiddes sent a letter to Norman Macleod of Macleod on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1897 signed by the community clarifying the need for a pier and their awareness of the fact that other schemes were beginning in other parts of the country<sup>5</sup>.

In June 1898, Macleod's factor and a foreman working on the island had undertaken a simple measured plan of the proposed site which Macleod forwarded to the Congested Districts Board with the St Kildans 1897 petition on July 26<sup>th</sup> 1898. The plan shows a proposed dog-legged quay in between a basin or dock which is annotated as 'cleared by Otter in 1860'. It also shows, to the east, a 'present slipway' running directly perpendicular to the shore with a capstan at its head<sup>6</sup>. Macleod also mentioned the alternative proposal of evacuation but suggested that the islanders would not support this and that they would not be able to make a living elsewhere. He suggested that they would provide free labour to the project and that he would provide one fifth of the cost; *'it is of great importance to make the landing easier, safer and less destructive to boats than it is at present'*<sup>7</sup>

In November of 1898, the Scottish Office Chief Surveyor Colonel Gore Booth wrote to the CDB with his opinion on the proposal. He noted his preference of Pricket's scheme which was to remove the boulders from the present 'creek', probably Otter's basin, and then construct a ramp in the bank at the shore and mount a capstan. In June 1899, the CDB sent its surveyor Captain FW Andrews to prepare plans, specifications and quantities<sup>8</sup>. The basin was to be 51' by 30', dock 43' by 20', and the ramp was to be a 1:4 slope and 15ft wide. There should be a concrete landing stage and parapet; the landing stage should to be 4ft above high water and the parapet to be 23ft above LW and 11ft above HW.

According to Robson, Andrews had the opportunity to discuss the problems in detail with Macleod of MacLeod and thereby attain his agreement. As soon as 11<sup>th</sup> August, Andrews was back on the island briefing the supervisor Wookey and unloading the materials for the job, including 20 tons of cement and the plant. There was considerable discussion about an eventual pay rise for Wookey since the post would involve *'considerable hardship, absolute severance from the mainland for a number of months, he was married and he would have to lay up provisions for several months'*. His pay was raised from £1 15d to £3, agreed by the Board of Trade and the Treasury on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1899<sup>9</sup>.

The main work of constructing a pier, slipway and basin was undertaken between August 1899 and September 1901. The work was undertaken by three Scottish Office supervisors; WE Wookey assisted by Matthews and Cooke and reporting to Colonel Gore-Booth. Able-bodied St Kildan men provided paid labour when they were free from their normal work load.

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<sup>5</sup> NAS: DD17/118

<sup>6</sup> NAS: DD17/118

<sup>7</sup> NAS: AF42/408

<sup>8</sup> NAS: AF42/545

<sup>9</sup> NAS:AF42/5



*The pier during construction in 1900, NTS: SKA202*

WE Wookey<sup>10</sup>, E Matthews and Mrs Matthews landed on St Kilda on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1899 and didn't leave until 1<sup>st</sup> June 1900. By February, Wookey reported that they had completed the ramp pitching and the north bank, half of the excavation was complete and two thirds of the dock excavation complete<sup>11</sup>. In addition, it was noted that Wookey's funds for paying workmen were almost exhausted and it was suggested that £120 was sent via Mr Frith, fish merchant from Fleetwood. FW Andrews prepared a plan of progress in March 1900 at 1:192, presumably after a visit to the works<sup>12</sup>.

In August of 1900, Col Gore-Booth reported that the work had been largely completely and he intended to remove his supervisors by the last steamer. He proposed leaving the two huts, the boat and the tools to the local community, since they would be of use to them and were not worth the carriage back. He also suggested giving Fiddes a gift of £25 to thank him for his help during the project. These recommendations were carried out but Gore-Booth's optimism was not borne out; in September 1900 he noted that works were still continuing with almost 30ft of the pier itself still to be completed (around one third). He noted that the works would have been completed but the locals kept excusing themselves to 'collect bird's eggs and fulmar petrel etc for food'<sup>13</sup>. He reported that the dock was completed, and the crane and capstan were in place, and proposed sending out a supervisor when navigation re-opened to report on works and complete them. The costs to date were £1280, roughly £75,000 today<sup>14</sup>.

Wookey prepared a detailed report and drawings in Thurso on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1901, presumably after returning to finish works during the summer. He had left the island on August 29<sup>th</sup> 1901, effectively marking the end of the official construction period though a few things were left to the locals to finish. In his final report, Wookey described how 'as soon as they saw what the pier and basin were to be like, they ordered some new boats so that instead of doing as they used to do, all crowd into one large boat, they now have a boat between each five or six men. There are four

<sup>10</sup> WE Wookey was the main supervisor of the pier works. In the census taken in March 1901, Wookey was a boarder with a Gardener Mr. McIntosh and his wife at the Gardener's House, Scourie House, Eddrachillis. He is described as the manager of the harbour works, and is a 36 year old Englishman. This is probably the pier visible at Scourie House.

<sup>11</sup> NAS: AF42/545

<sup>12</sup> NAS: AF42/545

<sup>13</sup> NAS: AF42/646

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>



*small boats, one large boat for working their stock to and from the outlying islands, and the cutter (from the CDB) which is to be reserved for a sort of lifeboat and for landing from vessels...By giving the people the people the management of the tools etc, under proper rules, a feeling has been created among them that they are not looked upon as being unfit for any responsibility.*<sup>15</sup>

A summary of the final accounts included the following:

Cement, timber framing and jute lining £316  
Tools £90  
Explosives £44  
Boat and appliances £35  
Two huts £36  
Crane £27  
Freight £119  
Wages: Sups £330, St Kildans £417  
Honorarium to Fiddes £25  
Miscellaneous £37  
Total £1476

Explanatory notes told how the supervisors' wages included travel by steamer. There was for the most part of the time a second supervisor as assistant to Wookey (Supervisors Matthews and Cooke) but they may be regarded as workmen, as they, as well as Wookey, had to do a considerable amount of manual labour themselves. All the carpentry work was done by Wookey. The final drawing shows that the pier was built with a 5:1 concrete mix and 40% stone. It shows the position of the original six iron mooring rings and the 1.5 tonne crane. The only detail seems to have been a moulding along the edge of the concrete platform visible in some of the photographs. A committee was set up to manage the huts, flagstaff and boat that had been left to the community.



*The pier from the north-west in the late 1950s. The derrick and the tender are MoD. (NAK: ADM362/2)*

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<sup>15</sup> NAS: AF42/970

#### 4.3.5 *Later use and repairs*

##### *1902 and 1903*

A letter dated April 20<sup>th</sup> 1902 from the pier committee (W Macdonald, N Ferguson and N McQueen) to the CDB detailed the damage of the preceding winter and the remedial actions that had been taken. A large amount of rocks had been washed into the basin and had taken three days to remove<sup>16</sup>. They commented that the crane had been oiled several times and that the sheds, boat and flagstaff were all 'doing well'.

The following year, the damage was beyond the locals to repair. The basin had been filled again but with stone too large to move without explosives. In addition parts of the bank to the shore had collapsed. The community turned to the old landing place and William MacDonald wrote to the board in slightly convoluted language:

*I see it is my duty to do so being one of the Pier maintenance committee and it is my duty to do so. Now we thank you for what you did for us and what you are able to do for us yet. Excuse such writing. Now I hope this will find you well, which is my sincere wish.*<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately there was £1500 left from the original budget and Gore-Booth, noting that he always suspected the bank's strength, instructed Supervisors Wookey and Cooke to revisit the island. Wookey landed on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1903 and immediately reported that '*a great deal of rock has been brought down on the north bank. The whole bank needs to be cut back which is too large a job to carry out in less than two months. The three committee men could be trusted to do this. I shall repair the ramp and wait for instruction on the bank. I do not think that anything will be done this week as I see a minister has come out for the sacrament. If I have any time between the ramp repairs and the next steamer, I will do what I can do to the clearing of the dock. In the event of the clearing work being finished before the next Steamer and if you decide to do anything to the bank, supervisor Cooke could easily carry this out.*'<sup>18</sup>

Wookey sent a further telegram to Gore-Booth on the 18<sup>th</sup> June. He and Cooke had left the island on the 16<sup>th</sup> on the Dunara Castle. They had repaired the ramp and then cleared stone from the lower end of the ramp and blasted and removed the largest boulders from the inner end of the basin and dock. Wookey had pointed out what should be done with the bank but he thought it unlikely they would do more than deal with any rocks that came down. He noted that marks on the pier from thrown boulders showed that it had sustained a severe test. He left the remainder of the blasting equipment with Norman McQueen after warning him '*and the remainder of the local committee as to the grave responsibility they were being entrusted with*'. Norman McQueen was the only one to touch gelatine, detonators or fuse.

##### *1911 and 1912*

A later undated report noted that the ironwork of the crane needed painting and that the band brake was broken. It also mentioned that the locals wanted some ragged rocks at the mouth of the dock blasted as they had damaged a boat. In August 1911, a letter from the St Kildans to the CDB noted the erection of new capstan by a Mr Monk and complained again about rocks sticking out of the landing stage<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> NAS: AF42/1226

<sup>17</sup> NAS: AF42/1623

<sup>18</sup> NAS: AF42/1623

<sup>19</sup> NAS: AF42/6495



*An image of c.1910 showing the pier, crane and boats (NTS: SKA465)*



*An image taken between 1901 and 1911 showing the original capstan in position (NTS: SKA165)*





*The pier from the south east in the late 1950s or early 1960s showing the new winch installed by Mr Monk c.1911 (SKA315)*

In 1912, a more detailed plea came to the CDB after a damaging winter. A hand written letter from W Macdonald and N Ferguson arrived, via an Aberdeen trawler, in February 1912<sup>20</sup>:

*Dear Sir. We, the pier maintenance committee beg to inform the congested district board of Scotland of the heavy damage done to the pier over a week ago by heavy seas striking over it from a south east gale. The dock nearly filled up with big stones and a lot of the slip is taken away which makes it quite useless to us in good or bad weather. Also a lot of the bank at your right hand came down blocking the passage in our way for going out or coming in at any time. Also terrible damage done to the concrete work by big stones striking it over and over again. Such a sea, we never imagined since the pier was built. Before it is of any use again, a lot of work is to be done to clear this away and we are sure till the matter is considered over by the board, we have the use of the old landing rocks for our boats, very inconvenient it will be for us in every respect. We write you this note, as we know it is our duty to do so in such a case. Trusting the board will look in to the matter again and see their way quite clear in giving us their help once again.*

The CDB forwarded this directly to Macleod suggesting that this was a matter for the estate. The factor noted receipt in April and promised to look into the matter during his visit in June. He wondered whether it was more a matter of rebuilding than repair. Not long after this, the Congested Districts Board was dissolved and matters were transferred to the Board of Agriculture. The Daily Mirror photographs of 1912 show the pier in use and suggest that either the damage was not as bad as reported or that the St Kildans themselves had cleared it that winter.

#### *The First World War*

St Kilda was occupied by the Admiralty as a War Signal Station during the First World War and the pier would have been regularly used by the detachment both for the landing of their initial equipment and stores and provisioning. The initial group brought generators, huts and radios with them, all of which were landed on the pier. It was of great and particular importance on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1918 when the defensive naval gun was landed by a group under Lieutenant Allman. The gun was lifted from a lighter alongside the pier using a derrick fixed and rigged to the pier and surrounding rocks by 1.5" steel bars set in. When reporting the success of landing to the Admiralty, Admiral Boyle included two basic sketches showing the layout of the system that they had used, the position of additional bolts, and the temporary derrick<sup>21</sup>. It is not clear whether any other alterations or repairs were undertaken by the Admiralty during the First War.

#### *1920 and 1922*

A St Kildan minister again led the way when the pier was damaged on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1920. This time Reverend D Cameron wrote a letter from the manse and sent it via a Fleetwood trawler to the Secretary of the

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<sup>20</sup> NAS: AF42/9640

<sup>21</sup> NAK: ADM137/1446, p228

Board of Agriculture<sup>22</sup>. Some discussion between the Board of Agriculture and the Scottish Office followed and advice was sought from a Fishery Board launch, the Minna. The crew had spotted some cracks in the pier during a visit and the Fishery Board supported the funding of repair work given the special circumstances of St Kilda. Cameron repeated his request for help in a letter of 5<sup>th</sup> April 1922. Enquiries were made with the skipper and purser of the SS Hebrides who noted damage to the ramp and walls and that the crane had been damaged during the war by the Navy staff using it to lift heavy boats. By August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1922, the works had been undertaken. WG Coles, the Scottish Office engineer, had sent a William McLean to supervise works.

*On my arrival, I found D Cameron away and natives unwilling to do any free labour. I was going to return on same boat but warned them they would never receive the same chance again. Getting free materials and nothing wanted but a few days labour. There was a big patch of the paving of the land slip gone, and I made it up with strong concrete. The rubble walling at the shore end of the parapet had to be built with cement as the winch with which they haul their boats was resting on it and would not stand the strain if it was built dry. All other defects were made good with cement. After I received blasting material by the Hebrides a week before I left, we made a start at drilling, but it was of no use. The drills were not tempered to suit the hard rock of St Kilda, so we had to give it up as there was no Smithy on the island or anything to sharpen them up again. As the Dunara was going straight to Glasgow, not calling at North Uist, I did not put the tools etc on board, but left them tied up and labelled for the Hebrides which is leaving Glasgow on the 13<sup>th</sup> to be landed at Locheport North Uist, the Dunara does not call there.*

A Mr Ingham from the Board of Agriculture noted that they should not do more for the people, since they had refused to help at the start and had obstructed the supervisor<sup>23</sup>.

As late as 1927, the Treasury sanctioned repairs to the crane at a small cost of £6<sup>24</sup>. The broken parts, which had lain at Orme's yard in Glasgow for many years were repaired and taken out by a Fleetwood trawler owned by Mason's, *Robert Murray* on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1927. There was some argument over the cost of carriage as they had only been agreed informally between a Captain and Neil Ferguson.

Images of the evacuation of St Kilda in 1930 show that the crane was not in position by that time and that the concrete of the steps and platform had been heavily battered by storm-thrown boulders.

#### **4.3.6 The pier extension**

In March 1956 the island was visited and notes were taken for a 'detailed report on village bay' produced in the following February. This described the existing jetty thus: *There is a concrete and stone pier on the north side of the bay below the manse; this has a difficult approach because of rocks and should only be used for 1.5 hours on either side of high water by craft drawing 4 ft. Considerable surge is nearly always present and the worn state of step and mooring facilities give additional hazards.*<sup>25</sup> It also included some photographs and basic drawings.

In July 1956, a note was sent from the Air Ministry to the Department of Agriculture requesting information about the pier and proposals to improve it in recent years. It was noted that the Air Ministry had considered lengthening the pier but that this would not abate the heavy swell<sup>26</sup>.

The staff of the military base that was constructed during 1957 and 1958 used the pier and beach for landing materials and supplies throughout the period. The main addition to the pier was a new crane fixed at the seaward end. A few years later, probably in 1962, what is referred to as a concrete gabion wall was constructed to the west of the basin in order to prevent boulders being washed back in over the winter. Nevertheless, the basin was periodically blasted clear by explosives.

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<sup>22</sup> NAS: DD17/118

<sup>23</sup> NAS: DD17/118

<sup>24</sup> NAS: E824/380

<sup>25</sup> NAK: ADM326/3

<sup>26</sup> NAS: DD17/118



*The pier from the east during blasting to clear boulders in the late 1950s (Mackay 2002)*

Detailed drawings of the existing pier were produced by Royal Engineers Captain RA Bagnell in 1963 including a sketch of the newly built 'gabion wall' or groyne. At the same time, improved soundings were taken of Village Bay and Glen Bay by Lieutenant Commander Whitehead, replacing those of Captain Somerville in 1909<sup>27</sup>.



*The newly constructed groyne or 'gabion wall' in the early 1960s (ADM326/2)*

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<sup>27</sup> NAK: ADM326/3

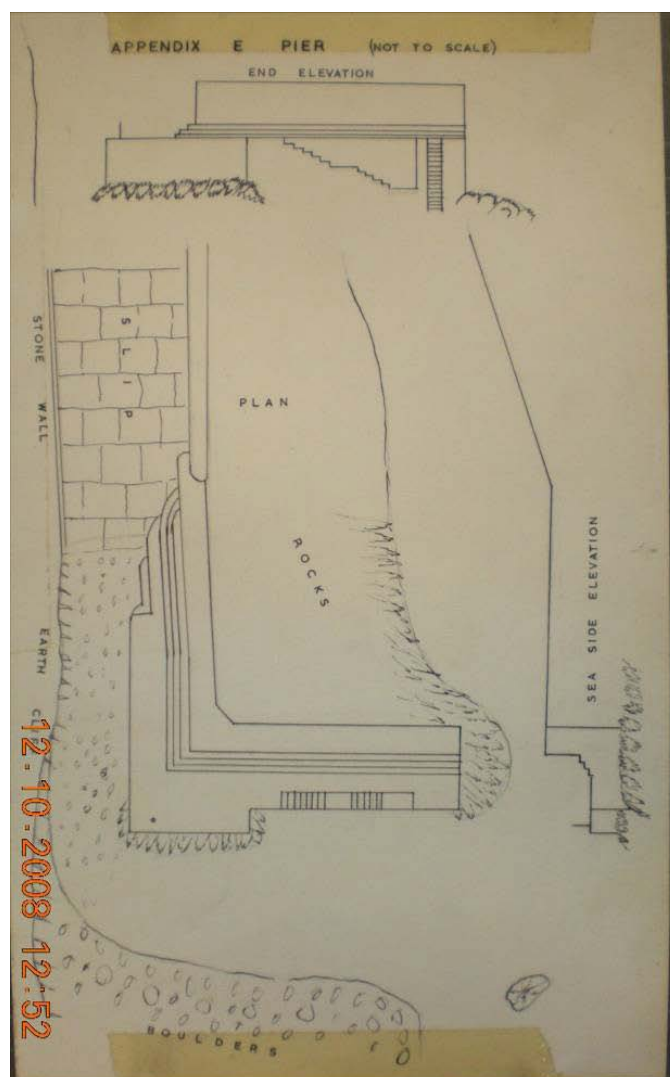




*Goods being taken up from the pier in 1912. This shows the paving and moulded edge on the parapet wall clearly (Museum Nan Eilean collection)*



*A similar view from c1960, NTS: SKA163. Note the additional mooring post in the parapet wall.*



*Drawing of the pier from the February 1957 RAF report <sup>28</sup>*

Building on the first decade of military activity and the surveys undertaken during the mid 1960s, a large contract for improvements was put out to tender during October 1968 after discussion through the preceding months. The main elements of this contract were a) domestic and technical accommodation, b) pier extension, c) bulk fuel installation and d) mechanical and electrical installation (including a new boiler house and generator station). The basic proposal for the pier was to extend it by 80ft using pre-cast concrete blocks as an outer shell, filled with a hearding of 'Colcrete' and topping it with in situ concrete slab, and to increase the approach ramp on the seaward side in mass concrete<sup>29</sup>. In addition, an electrically-driven sea-water fire-pump was to be installed at the end of the new pier in a weather-proof housing.

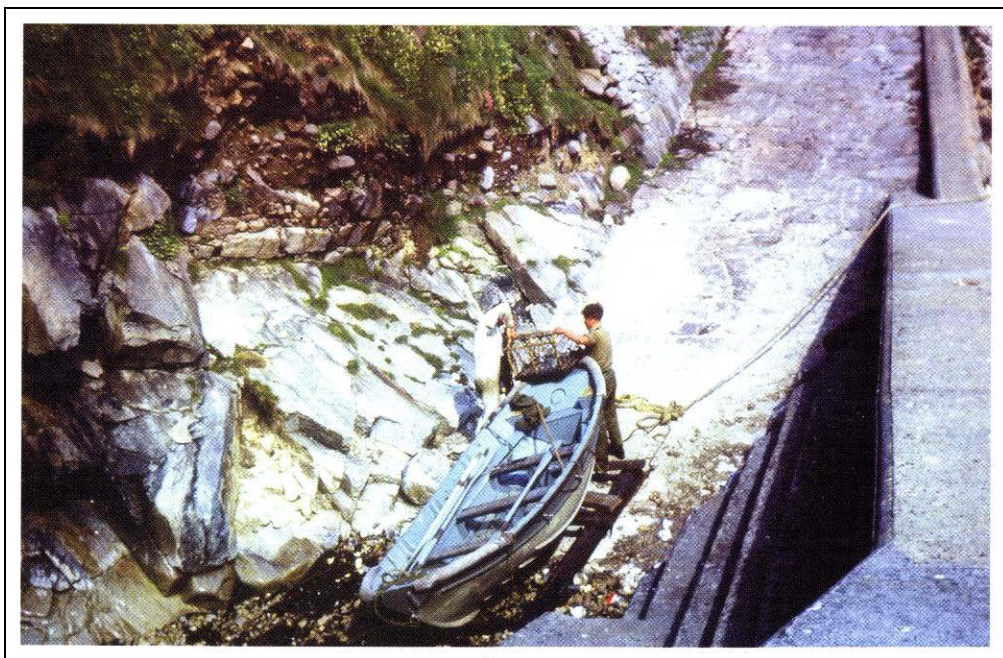
<sup>28</sup> NAK: ADM326/3

<sup>29</sup> NAK: CM25/27





*Visitors leaving from the pier during the late 1950s (Mackay 2002)*



*The landward edge of the pier and the slipway, with the MoD dory, during the late 1950s (Mackay 2002)*

The chosen main contractor for the whole project was Costain Civil Engineering Ltd, whose tender was accepted in February 1969. Costain contracted out the boiler and diesel installations to Blackstone & Co., Gloucestershire. A completion certificate was issued by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works in October 1970. The original estimated cost was £540,000 but by completion this had increased to over £926,497.18!<sup>30</sup> As well as lengthening the pier and building the pump house, the works included the widening of the pier, obscuring the original moulded edge – the original line of the pier is still visible in the concrete surface.

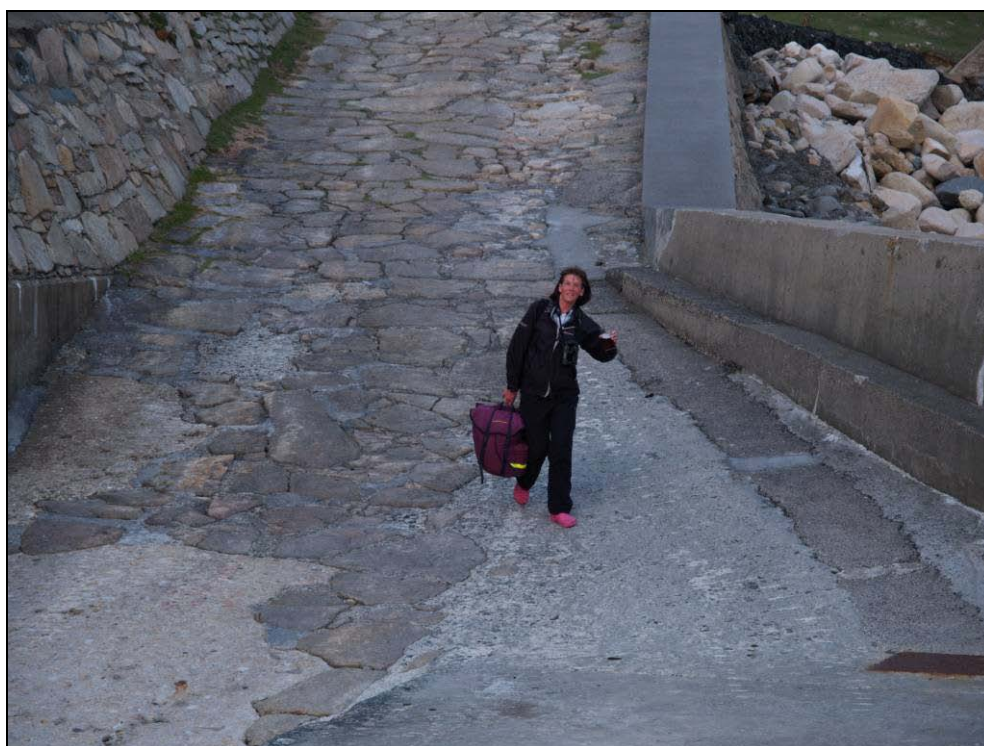
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<sup>30</sup> NAK: CM25/26





*Visitors approaching the modern pier during the summer of 2008. The building at the end of the pier is the pump house.*



*A volunteer leaving St Kilda in the summer of 2008. Note the line of the original pier and the rubble paving and revetment.*





*The modern pier from the north east during 2008. The wheel loader is used to launch the rigid inflatable used by the radar base. The position of the original pier is visible in the parapet wall and as a faint line in the main concrete platform.*



*The slipway, revetment and parapet wall from the south east in summer 2008. The 1960s 'gabion wall' or groyne is visible in the background with the modern gabion-basket revetment to the bank at the right.*

## 5. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### 5.1 Introduction

This assessment is founded on an analysis of the pier and its historical development as well as a current understanding of the Dual World Heritage Site that is St Kilda and consideration of the assessment in earlier documents (Bain 2003, UK 2003, 2004 & Turner 2006). The hierarchical assessment system used follows that developed by Kerr (1996, 19) and adopted by the Heritage Lottery Fund (2004) and Historic Scotland (2000). Although a model developed specifically for Australia, where the monuments and interest groups are markedly different, this approach has been widely accepted in the UK as a starting point. As with any cultural heritage resource, the significance of the features usually increases during the writing of a Conservation Plan due to a better understanding.

The definitions of the categories of significance used are as follows:

**Exceptional** – irreplaceable features that are not replicated anywhere else  
**Considerable** – features that are unlikely to be replicated elsewhere  
**Some** – noteworthy features that should be considered for conservation / interpretation  
**Little** – features that are of little importance in this context

Best practice, as defined by the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (1999, 1.2) requires that various values are addressed which, for cultural significance in this instance, are grouped under the following broad headings.

**Aesthetic** – including its place in the landscape, its immediate setting and the architecture of the building itself  
**Historic** – including its associations with people and events, its place in St Kildan history and culture  
**Social** – its place in the eyes of the various communities who have lived on St Kilda  
**Intangible/spiritual** – emotional and belief related values

### 5.2 General statement of significance

Evacuated by its community in 1930, St Kilda presents an outstandingly complete fossilised 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural landscape with a tangible sense of the depth of time informed by a remarkable quantity of documentary evidence. St Kilda has long been viewed as a place apart, a place in thrall to nature, with an isolated people adrift on ‘the islands at the edge of the world’. Today it is of universal value equally for its natural riches (which are dynamic and changing), for its long cultural heritage, and for its iconic position as a poignant and powerful reminder of a past way of life.

The pier group is an important symbol of the relationship between St Kilda, its community and the sea and the defining relationship between the community and the ‘wider world’. It is the only significant feature to attempt to mitigate the explosive power of the sea and one of the most striking examples of the ostensibly positive impact of external groups; it was funded and built for and to support the local populace by the Government. Since 1901, the pier has been the landing and setting off point for almost all the visitors to St Kilda, and the focus of the St Kildans departure in 1930. It is the conduit through which the most important visits, actions and events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have flowed whether it is the abandonment of the island, the visits of royalty, or the arrival of numerous work parties. The extension of the pier between 1969 and 1970 was one of the largest parts of the MoD Costains project, the most financial significant investment in the island at any time.

Although not scheduled, the group are an important part of the World Heritage Site which is of exceptional significance in an international context. They are a rare example of a relatively early and successful attempt by the British government (in the form of the Congested Districts Board) to provide an improved landing place to a rural community, set in a stunning location and with an excellent surviving historical record.

### 5.3 Key elements of value of the pier

The aesthetic values of the group are **considerable**



The pier group are a striking element in the landscape, jutting out into the sea and composed of smooth concrete and angular lines, in contrast to the rounded rubble of the historic vernacular. They are a clear symbol of a strong 'civilising influence', a recognisable and almost brutalist modern feature amongst a group of mostly vernacular structures, which, for most visitors, have been and are indicative of an unknown way of life.

The pier itself is probably of a standardised design adapted to a specific scenario. Having said that, it is particularly interesting in that it uses a combination of local materials (sand, water, stone) and imported materials (cement, timber, nails etc) and was built by a combination of local and foreign workers; it is not an entirely alien building to the St Kildan context; it is a synthesis of two strands, a point it shares with many of the more recognisable 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings on the island. Many later buildings such as 1969-70 military buildings were built in materials that were all imported and did not involve the contribution of any members of a permanent St Kildan community.

The group is also unusual in that it has very little negative direct or visual impact on the surrounding landscape or structures, including for example the Manse. This is in contrast to some other 20<sup>th</sup> century structures which clearly, according to current understandings of visual impact, have a negative impact on key elements of the World Heritage Site. In contrast, the gabion wall behind, the eventual solution to problems with the bank throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, does have a drastic visual impact on the pier, the manse and the main visitor approach to St Kilda.

The historic values of the group are **exceptional**

The pier group is of exceptional historic value. They are a most striking indicator of the attempt to modernise and civilise St Kilda through external intervention and are powerful reminders of the influence of the Admiralty, the Congested Districts Board, the HASS and the Kelsall Fund. They have a direct link to nearly all the important visits and events of post 1899 St Kilda. The pier that survives in its extended form is a crucial part of the 1969-70 MoD Costains project; the project as a whole was probably the largest financial investment in the island of any period and is unlikely to be eclipsed as such in the near future.

The associated documentary record is extremely good, allowing a real insight into the period and the attitudes within the community as well as the Congested Districts Board and other groups that were involved.

The social values of the group are **exceptional**

The pier was built due to the impetus and funds of specific individuals and organisations. It gives a clear indication of the efforts of Rev Fiddes, the proprietor and the Congested Districts Board as well as providing a memorial to the professionalism and tireless efforts of Gore-Booth, Wookey, and Matthews. It is also the only manifestation of strenuous efforts by Captain Otter, the HASS and the Kelsall Fund forty years earlier to bring a better landing to the community. Most other donations from the CDB, the Kelsall fund and the HASS are ephemeral and have been removed or decayed long ago.

Members of the St Kildan community, writing in May 1901, clearly put great value upon their new pier:

*"We had always been told no Pier could be put on St Kilda and we have given up hopes of ever having any landing place but the rocks. The danger we always stood in the launching or landing is now past and everyone in the island joins in thanking you for that and for all the other kindness you showed them and received from you and they will be gratefully remembered as long as our descendants are on this island. We also feel proud to be able to point out to our children such a result of their father's labour. It is the greatest benefit that has been conferred upon us."*<sup>31</sup>

The Intangible / Spiritual values of the group are **considerable**

The pier group is considered to have very little spiritual value in that it has no formal or informal relationship to any form of recognised group or activity. However, personal memories and reflections of events on the island in the last 108 years can be powerful and many people will have said final goodbyes at the pier over the years. For some, the evacuation played out on the pier and recorded by Alasdair Alpin Macgregor, is the most important event in St Kilda's history

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<sup>31</sup> This letter from W MacDonald, N McQueen and N Ferguson was written on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1901 and sent to Col. Gore-Booth, Consulting Engineer at the Scottish Office. NAS: AF42/933



*The community awaits evacuation with the Dunara Castle in the background. One of Alasdair Alpin Macgregor's photos of 1930 (NTS: SKA309)*



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*St Kildans preparing to leave in 1930, note the condition of the steps battered by thirty years of severe winter weather and the nature of the bank behind, now revetted by gabion baskets.*



*Another Macgregor image from 1930 showing the community evacuating the island. Note the battered condition of the steps.*



## 6. ISSUES AND VULNERABILITIES

### 6.1 Introduction

As indicated by available guidance documents (HLF 2004), after laying out our current understanding of the heritage asset and attempting to describe the significances of that asset, it is important to address the primary issues and vulnerabilities that affect it.

The pier is on an island owned by Scotland's largest conservation charity, the NTS, and is managed by the NTS in partnership with Historic Scotland, The Ministry of Defence, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, QinetiQ and Scottish Natural Heritage. The features are part of a dual World Heritage Site, the most highly designated landscape within NTS ownership. The partners have demonstrated a commitment to manage the island according to the best principals of conservation and so, in theory at least, the site is in a very protective environment. Coupled to this, the site is protected by virtue of its extreme remoteness from many of the more normal threats to military heritage such as vandalism and abandonment, sometimes euphemistically referred to as benign decay.

However, given this positive background, it is clear that the pier is subject to threats by direct physical forces and also lack of clarity on decision making due to philosophical and methodological complexity. Given the NTS acceptance that conservation usually requires minimum intervention, we can reconsider what are the primary concerns given our present knowledge, and propose potential solutions

### 6.2 Physical Issues

The physical issues may have a large impact on the significance of the structure; mitigation attempts should be assessed carefully by their impact on significance

Direct impact of rocks thrown onto the pier by the sea, damaging fixtures, fittings and concrete surfaces

- Monitor the stability of the structure
- Make sure fixtures and fittings are not overtly damage prone
- Be aware of the severe damage to the concrete and fixtures of the original pier in the first thirty years

Fabric loss since c.1930 has included the derrick and the capstan/winch

- Halt any removal of existing fabric

Corrosion of reinforcement in the walling of the extended pier

### 6.3 Broader concerns

- The pier is not described fully in much of the written material concerning St Kilda and there is no on-site interpretation of the feature:
  - Consider a NTS booklet themed on the pier, sold for £5 in the shop
  - Consider a museum display or a short video display in the pump house itself; although it is small, a well designed display in the tiny exposed spot could be dramatic, interesting, unusual and fun!
- Aesthetic impact on the area surrounding the landing in the last 100 years has been massive
  - Make sure that changes and improvements to the pier don't have a negative visual impact on the main access to the island, the manse and views of the bay
  - Try to avoid massive gabion revetments
- The loss of direct involvement by government or the military in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. The pier has gone from a direct charitable project funded by government (through the CDB) to a massive investment project funded by the government (through the MoD) to a large asset solely the responsibility of a cash-strapped charity.
  - Consider ways of involving UK or European funding for the pier or of re-linking the pier works of the 1960s with the MoD.
- Finding an appropriate use for the pump house
  - Its condition reflects badly on the NTS
  - Consider other uses

- A display on the history of the pier
- A store for life jackets etc
- A store for leaflets and information for visitors
  
- Getting appropriate advice from experts in concrete and metal
  - Find effective ways of getting advice, through HS, through commercial companies, through university courses
  
- Lack of appreciation of significance
  - Have a detailed museum piece on the construction of the pier and on the 1969-70 Costains project
  - Promote research into the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of St Kilda
  
- Not part of a regular and formal condition survey
  - Bring the pier into a regular (quinquennial) programme of condition surveying
  
- Relative costs of professional services due to remoteness
  - Consider ways to reduce costs
  - Minimise works
  - Tie works to other projects
  
- Long term funding for sustainable conservation
  - A policy of minimum intervention should minimise costs but
  - Consider specific funding projects, since the pier is vital to the island community and will continue to be so in the future
  - Consider a web-based sponsorship scheme
  
- Consider the pier and slip as the principal landing place and access to a World Heritage Site for most visitors; at the moment there is confusion of the main information point for visitors.
  - There are information boards both on the pier and at the top of the slipway, leading to some confusion
  - The information boards on the faux display at the top of the slipway could easily be housed on the pier (though it would be more exposed). Instead, the display is a large and intrusive structure, which, though intended to relate to the vernacular, actually looks quite out of place and prominent in an area already impacted upon by the boulder and the massive gabion wall
  - There is a large incongruous boulder at the top of the slipway, now damaged by the removal of its plaque (though this is to be repaired). The boulder seems to have no link to the features that surround it, are than geological, and has no historical precedent.
  - There is very little information on the pier for visitors who come 'out of hours', i.e. plans of the island and village
    - Remove the boulder and information point, they are completely incongruous
    - Have up to date leaflets, information and maps available at one point i.e. the pier/the info point, the manse or the factor's house, not all of them.

## 7. VISION

### 7.1 Introduction

St Kilda is the most highly designated property in the ownership of the National Trust for Scotland and is one of only twenty-five dual World Heritage Sites around the globe. The overarching vision for the property includes the following objectives:

- to establish St Kilda as an internationally renowned site for integrated conservation of cultural and natural features and for sensitive public access and interpretation;
- to maintain the highest conservation standards, by actions that proceed on the basis of adopting *minimum intervention techniques* to retain the significance of the site;
- any (new) development on the islands will only proceed if its effect upon all aspects of heritage significance are evaluated and judged to have only minimal detrimental effect upon the heritage features, landscape or wild land quality of the place, if the developments are essential, temporary and reversible, and if there is no conflict with statutory obligations;
- to ensure the experience for the visitor is unrivalled, with St Kilda established as a model for environmental education and informed interpretation;
- to manage with a structure with appropriate resources that supports on-site staffing needs.

### 7.2 The pier

In addition to these broad aspirations, there are a small number of specific elements to a vision for the pier. Most importantly, and the focus of a current project, the pier must remain a safe landing place for visitors and goods that do not come on the helicopter or the Elektron. Both the latter forms of transport, although critical to the operation of the QinetiQ establishment, are highly likely to reduce in frequency over the next decades and so the pier will become increasingly important as a functional point of access and egress. With this in mind, our vision is for a safe facility, with adequate furniture for the security of vessels tying up and for passengers. Some form of derrick or crane maybe needed for heavier items if helicopter flights become rare. This should, if practicable, be as similar to the crane of 1900 as possible.

Ongoing repair work should deal with the deteriorating condition of the pier surfaces, handrails and the fire pump house.

A more sustainable, informative and welcoming system of information boards could be introduced making an 'entrance' to the island clearer and more informative; the present confusion of signage, information points and personal greetings could be improved.

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Documents of the Congested Districts Board

National Archive, Kew, London

Admiralty documents, Air Ministry documents

## 8.3 Plans

Year	What of	Who by	Where	Reference
June 1898	Site and proposal (sketch)	Factor and foreman, Macleod Estate	NAS, Edinburgh	DD17/118
March 1900	Plan	Andrews, Scottish Office Supervisor	NAS, Edinburgh	AF52/545
Sep 1900	Plan and 15 sections	Wookey, Scottish Office Supervisor	NAS, Edinburgh	AF42/646
Sep 1901	As built plans and two sections	Wookey, Scottish Office Supervisor	NAS, Edinburgh	AF42/970
February 1957	Plan (sketch)	NID? RAF?	NA, Kew	ADM326/3
August 1963	Plan, sections (2), soundings for ext.	Bagnall, Royal Engineers	NA, Kew	ADM326/2
1968?	Drawings of extension	MOD	NTS and MOD	Not seen