

July 2009



Loch Croispol Schoolhouse NC391 677

As reported in January funding for the historical research into the old schoolhouse at loch Croispol was secured from the Heritage Lotteries, Historic Scotland and Highland Legacy fund. The structure was built in 1766 by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, set up in 1709 and aimed to establish schools in the Highlands and Islands in order to promote Christian learning the little known history gives a fascinating insight into education and society in the Highlands in the 18th Century and early part of the 19th Century.

Glasgow University Archaeology research division (GUARD) propose to carry out a programme of trial trenching and limited survey at Loch Croispol Schoolhouse, Durness, in order to provide information on the nature and duration of the use of the schoolhouse and its immediate environs. As part of this project, they also plan to review the archaeological sites identified in our 2001 survey of the Borralie headland to assess how best to interpret them for the public.

GUARD propose to record the schoolhouse and its immediate environs by EDM survey. They will excavate up to two trial trenches inside the schoolhouse, in order to answer questions about how the schoolhouse was organised internally, what different parts of it were used for and if possible the longevity of that use. They also plan to open up to three small trial trenches outside the schoolhouse and in the possible garden to establish how these areas were used. The trenches will be excavated and the survey carried out by a team of experienced archaeologists over a period of two weeks. All archaeological features and deposits will be recorded using

standard techniques of recording, including written, drawn and photographic records. The positions of all artefacts will be recorded in three dimensions, and samples may be taken as appropriate for radiocarbon dating. Following excavation, all trenches will be backfilled and the turf replaced by hand. As an adjunct, we also plan to revisit some of the archaeological sites identified in the 2001 survey with a view to constructing a more over-arching interpretation of the landscape's occupation over time.



The results of the work, as well as advancing research into the prehistoric to post-Medieval occupation of northern Scotland in general and Mackay Country in particular, could be used for various forms of public education and outreach, including the contents of interpretation boards. The Archaeology is scheduled to commence in mid August.

The site was also visited by Andrew PK Wright OBE Chartered Architect and Heritage Consultant who said *"This is without question an important site of which a surprising amount remains which is a testament to the high standards of construction employed by the masons. There is sufficient surviving here to confirm the original use and the likely date of the structure. It is important at this early stage to stress that the importance of the site should not just relate to the architectural significance of the structure, but should take in the surrounding cultural landscape which appears to be of unusual richness. I am minded to suggest that, on the basis of what I have seen so far, it should be scheduled as an ancient monument for which there would have to be agreement that the site is of national importance as set out in the recent Scottish Historic Environment Policy document (SHEP) published by Historic Scotland in October 2008. In order to achieve this it may be necessary to make a case for rarity, if not actually uniqueness. An appropriate designation may hold the key to securing funding, and funding*

should be available for the preparation of a conservation plan.” Mr. Knight supported the Development Groups actions to proceed first with the building recording exercise, in parallel with undertaking the archival research to be led by Dr. Issie McPhail of Assynt Research & Consultancy

A risk assessment to establish the safety of the site revealed one area over which could cause some concern is at the northeast corner of the east gable where already much of the walling has collapsed. However it is the case that it would be easy to dislodge masonry at any level of the structure and so care would need to be taken when entering the site to record it. Apart from the area identified above, the walls in general seem remarkably sound for the age of the building and considering the time for which it has been exposed. The local masons have been approached to carry out some remedial work as recommended to stabilise the schoolhouse to prevent further deterioration.



A local artist is to be appointed to produce work relevant and coordinated with the research producing impressions, illustrations and creative interpretations related to the periods in appropriate media. Visual and audio material in the form of video and photograph of the ongoing and conclusions of the project will also be undertaken. The final videos are expected to take 3 forms- an explanation and recording of the project and all its aspects, an edited documentary of the historical and heritage of the area with particular reference to the history, the story of the school and its role in Scottish Education and a reconstruction of the school in action. Volunteers will be offered opportunities to participate in workshops/ group sessions to gain technical and creative skills and anyone wishing to be involved in aspects of the project should contact Ronnie Lansley 511346

Project supported by



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