

**Report of Archaeological Evaluation
Preacher's Wall, Sheildaig, Highland
NG 8158 / 5443**

**By
Stuart Farrell
B.A A.I.F.A F.S.A.Scot.
October 2002**

Introduction

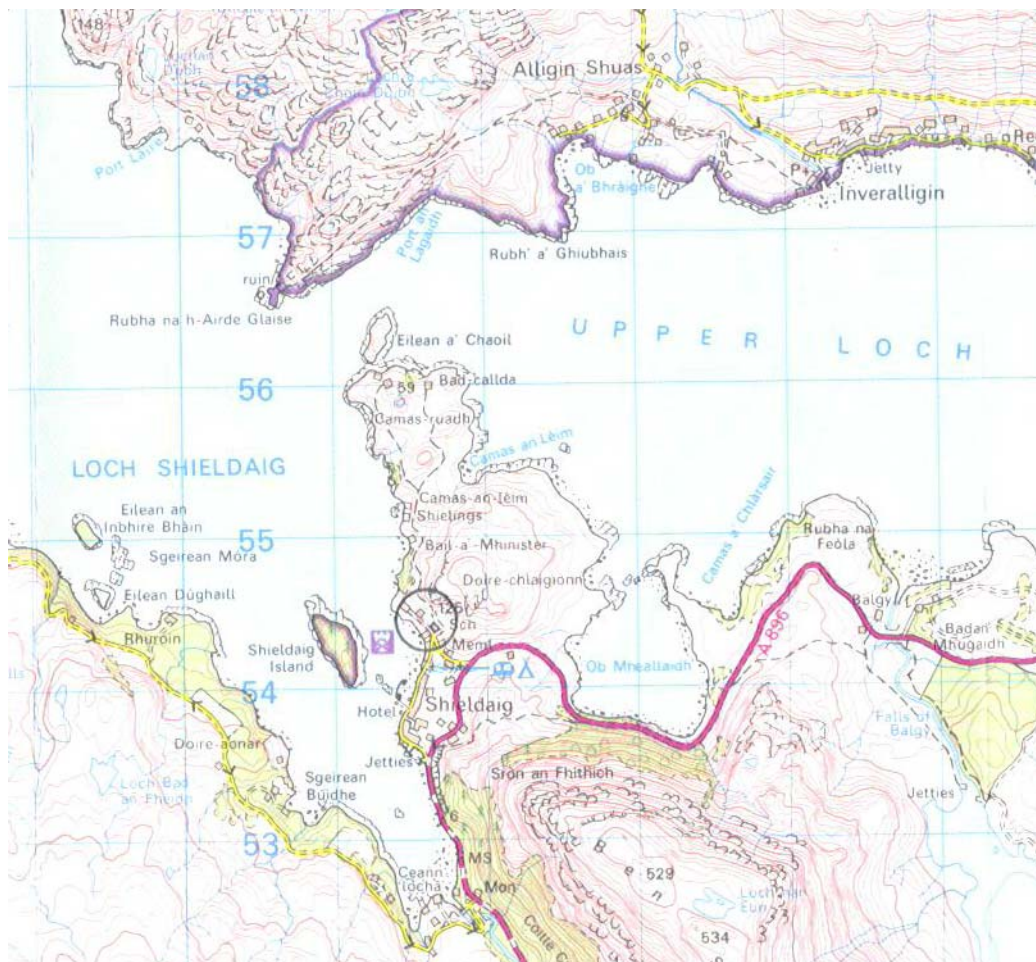
This report is for an archaeological evaluation conducted on behalf of Mr. R Smith by the author for a house plot at the open-air preaching site at Sheildaig.

Acknowledgements

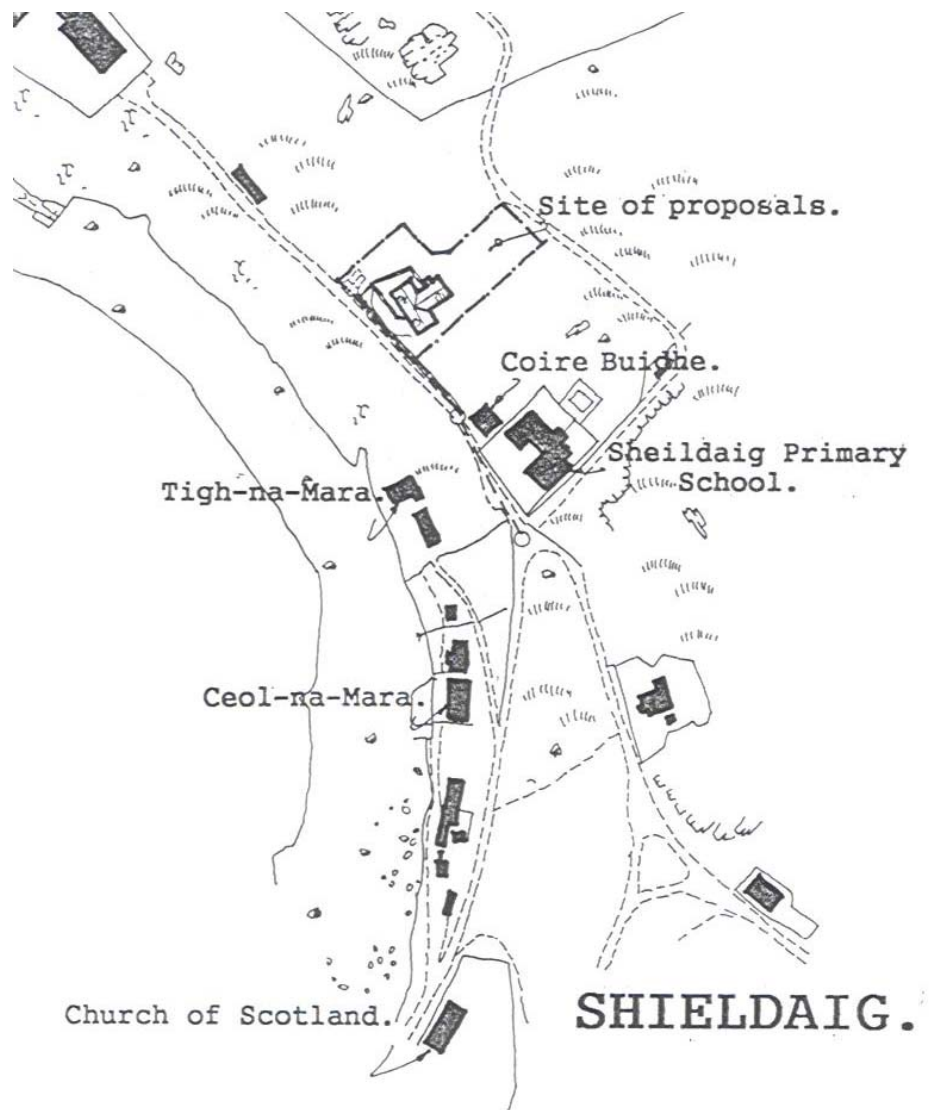
I would like to thank the following for their help during the work :

- Mr. R Smith;
- Mr. R Morrison, architect;
- Mr. J Stevenson, of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland for a copy of their plan of the site;
- Mr. N Fojut, of Historic Scotland;
- Mr. J Wood, Highland Council Archaeology Unit;
- Miss J Hooper, for references to the site;
- Staff of K W Builders for onsite works;
- Staff of Highland Council Archives;
- Staff of Inverness Library.

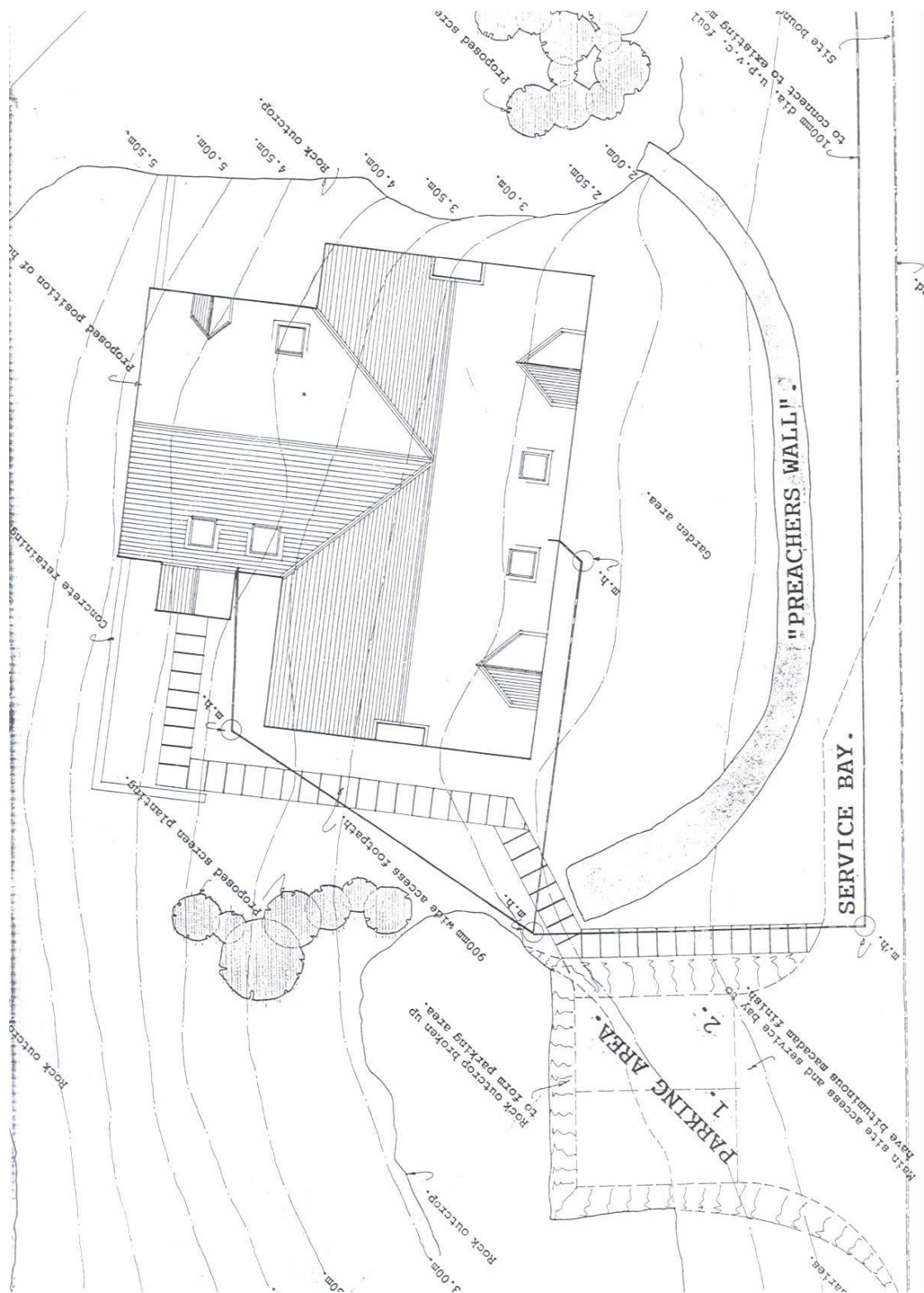
Location

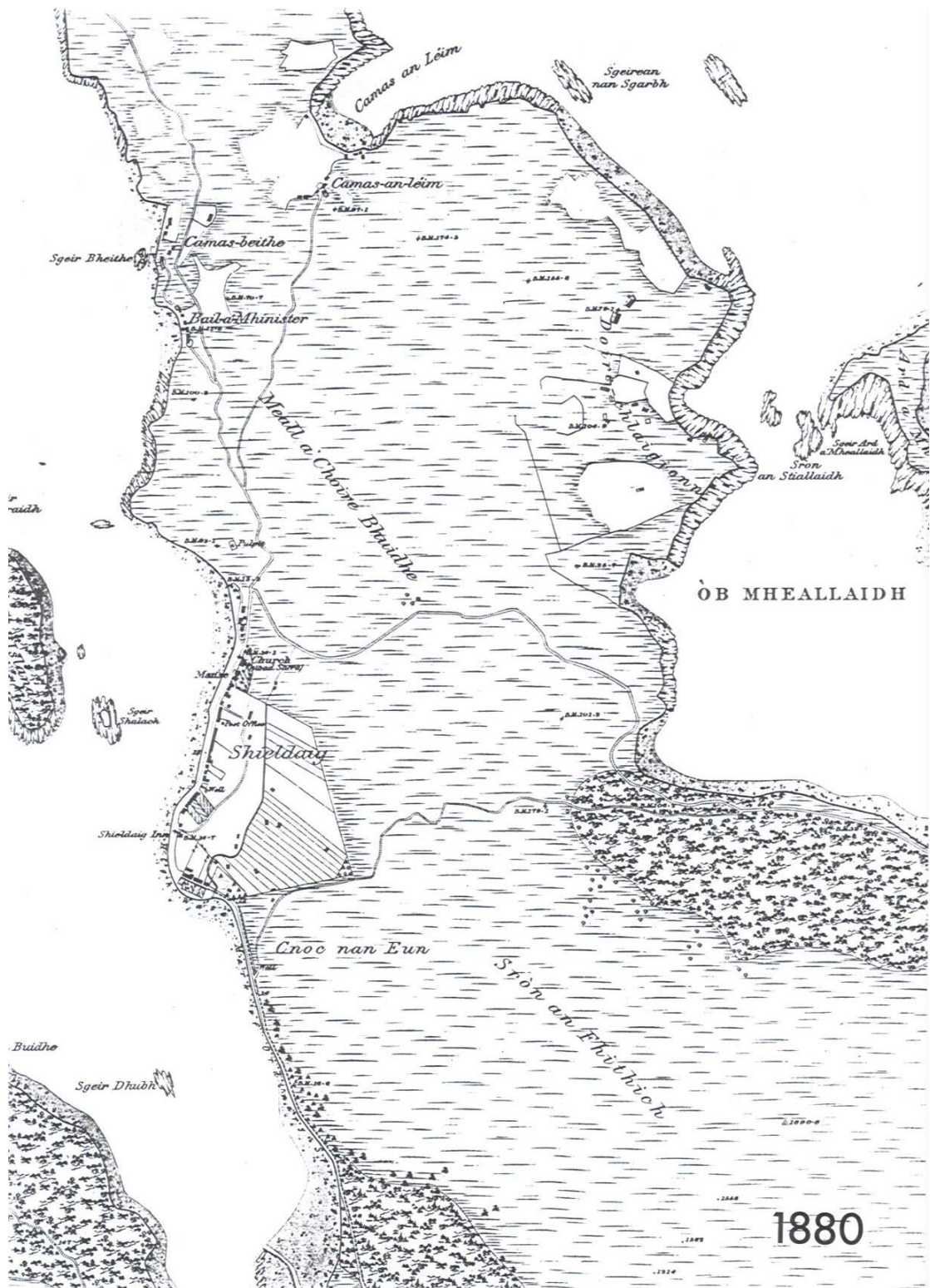


Location



LOCATION PLAN. scale : 1 to 2 500.









Plan by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of
Scotland

Background

The site is historically associated as being an open-air preaching site relating to the disruption of the church in 1843 and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. Sheildaig derives its name from the Norse 'sild-vik' or herring bay.

Desktop Survey

A desktop survey was conducted for the site using the following sources:

- Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record;
- National Monuments Record of Scotland, Edinburgh;
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland Aerial Photograph Collection;
- National Map Library, Edinburgh;
- National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh;
- Highland Council Archives;
- Inverness Library.

The site is currently not recorded in the Highland Sites and Monuments Record or the National Monuments Record of Scotland, Edinburgh. No records for the Free Church at Sheildaig exist in the National Archives of Scotland, or the National Register of Archives for Scotland or Free Church House, Edinburgh.

The site is marked on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1880 (sheet 92 surveyed 1875) (See over) and is marked as a rectangular enclosure and named pulpit. By the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1906 (Sheet 92 revised 1902) (See over) the site is not named but now has a stretch of curved wall. Unfortunately no larger scale maps of the area were produced.

There is very limited aerial photograph coverage of the site. The stretch of walling is visible on aerial photographs of 1946 and subsequent dates but there is no evidence of any features within due to large scale.

The Ordnance Survey Name Book of 1875 records the site as:

"Applies to a wooden erection covered in. Situated a short distance north of the N end of the village of Sheildaig. In front of the pulpit is an enclosure seated with rough wooden forms or seats not covered in. In this enclosure assemble during fine weather the Free Churchmen & C of the neighbourhood where divine service is held. During inclement weather the congregation adjourns to the F C Meeting House (described below here) having no church in this district. Pulpit and enclosure on the property of the Right Hon Sir John Stuart".

The Free Church Meeting House is recorded as:

"Applies to a plain stone building situated E of and adjacent to Camlueh used by the members of the F C body as a meeting house during wet weather. The services of the church having at other times held in the open air as this body have no church in this locality. The above building was erected by subscription about 1848 is one storey high slates and in fair repair. The property of the F C of Scotland on the ground of the Right Hon Sir John Stuart".

Unfortunately little study has been undertaken on open-air preaching sites. One reference to the site is mentioned in a history of the Free Church (Brown, 1893, 661) of:

"Here was another scene like that at Applecross. The tent (pulpit) was placed amid naked rocks on the sea-shore, the sound of the Psalms literally mingled with the roar of the

waves of the Atlantic. The tent was fastened down with strong ropes to prevent it being upset, and there were grey-headed men sitting uncovered in the cold, - several of them with tears streaming down their cheeks, whilst Mr. Glass preached to them the blessed gospel on their native tongue”.

It is likely that Mr. Glass mentioned above was the local catechist and not a minister within the Free Church. Like many parishes in 1843 the Local minister the Rev Colin Mackenzie joined the Free Church in 1843 along with most of the congregation. The open-air site was started as the local proprietor, Sir John Stuart, refused for many years to give the Free Church a site to build a church.

When Mr. Mackenzie was translated to Arrochar in 1844 a catechist was placed here and in 1864 the Free Church Assembly recognised Sheildaig as a disruption charge. The Rev Donald MacDonald was appointed here in 1872, after Sheildaig was without a minister for 29 years, and a site for the Free Church obtained in 1874 with church and Manse being built in 1876-77. It was noted in 1866 that the membership of the church was 600 including adherents. (Ewing, 1904)

In 1893 most of the congregation along with the Rev Donald MacDonald left the Free Church to join the Free Presbyterian Church, and in 1900 membership of the church was noted to be only 34 in number. (Ewing, 1904) The Free Church is now currently disused. (Gifford, 1992)

There is no reference to the site being used for service in recent times, though local tradition records that up to 1000 people used the site for 30 years with some arriving by sea and that the wall was built to provide shelter. Though not recorded as being in use after the Free Church was built, the site may have been used for communion services, as the church may not have been big enough.

The wooden ark used here and later in the Free Presbyterian Church between 1892 and 1920 is now housed in the Gairloch Heritage Museum.

The site was surveyed in May 2000 by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (see over) but no other archaeological work has been undertaken. Photographs taken of the site in 1998, by the Mr. R Smith, show the site before any development work was undertaken. (See over)

Top : View of site facing East © R. Smith 1998.
Bottom : View of site facing South-east © R. Smith 1998.



View of site and previous excavation facing W



Objectives

To conduct an evaluation and recording project prior to the development being undertaken to record those features that would be affected by the development project. A copy of the specification provided by Highland Council Archaeology Unit is enclosed.

It should be noted that most of the site had already seen some development work undertaken under a previous planning application RC/1978/437 and a building warrant 01/00408/ERCRC.

Methodology

Work carried out included:

- A detailed photographic study both in black & white and colour slide of the walling and the site. (Carried out 1st June 2002)
- Supervised excavation of the house plot, with a clean of the existing excavation. (Carried out September 28th - 30th 2002)

Results

The surrounding wall is rubble built of medium to large stones utilising large boulders and up to 1.8m in height topped with large stones and tapered with base 1.9m wide and top up to 1.3m wide. In the centre the wall has partly collapsed and only stands to about 1.3m high. Entrance to SW.

Due to previous excavations carried out (see photograph and plan of area highlighted over – area of roughly 12.5m x 7.5m) it was deemed impossible to conduct the 5% trial trenching as requested by the Highland Council Archaeology Unit Specification. Discussions with the Highland Council Archaeologist, Mr. John Wood, led to the overall house site being cleared under the direct supervision of the author.

A back-acting machine with a straight edged bucket made machining of the site revealed natural ground of sand underlying turf and topsoil to an average depth of 200mm to an overall area of 15m x 12m or 180m². Overall the ground was very stony with large numbers of medium to large stones being revealed.

Two small features in the form of 2 rubble drains were revealed under the topsoil that was removed, both aligned to the inverted v depression as depicted on the RCAHMS plan. The 1st running to the entrance was 0.4m wide and 10m in length whilst the 2nd of the same width was 7m in length but could be traced partly for a further 5m until the south corner. Both were of small to medium irregular shaped stones. (See photograph over). No datable material was found associated with the drains, and only some white glazed pottery was recovered from the topsoil (not retained). It is likely that the drains date between 1843 and 1876 when the open-air preaching site was in use.

**Recommendations**

No recommendations with regards to this project are to be proposed.

Archive

Notebook of results and a set of black & white photographs and negatives to be deposited in the National Monuments Record in Edinburgh. A set of black & white photographs and colour slides has been deposited with Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record.

References

Brown, T (1893) Annals of the Disruption with Extracts from the Narratives of Ministers who left the Scottish Establishment in 1843. MacNiven and Wallace. Edinburgh.

Ewing, W ed (1914) Annals of the Free Church of Scotland. 2 Volumes. T & T Clark. Edinburgh.

Gifford, J (1992) The Buildings of Scotland : Highlands & Islands. Penguin. London.

IFA (1999) By-laws, Standards and Policy Statements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Reading.

MacFarlane, D (1957) memoir and Remains of the Rev Donald MacDonald, Sheildaig, Ross-shire. N Adstead & Son Ltd. Glasgow.

Ordnance Survey Name Book 1879 volume 46, page 43.

Watson, W J (1904) Place Names of Ross & Cromarty. Northern Counties Printing and Publishing Ltd. Inverness.

OS Maps Consulted

Edition of 1880 sheet 92 Ross-shire 6" to the mile.

Edition of 1906 sheet 92 Ross-shire 6" to the mile.

Edition of 1968 1:10,560.

Aerial Photographs Consulted

RAF 1946 – CPE/Scot/UK 192	1:10,000	1025-1027	11-10-1946
RAF 1954 – 542/RAF/5	1:10,000	136-134	17-8-1954
OS 1964 – OS/65/092	1:10,000	187, 190, 193	29-5-1965
OS 1988 – 64088	1:24,000	86-85	14-10-1988

Stuart Farrell
39a Park Street
Fishertown
Nairn
IV12 4PP

Appendix 1 : Film Register				
Film 1 - Black & white and Colour slide				
Shot	Facing	Scale	Date	Description
1	E		01/06/2002	General view of site
2	E		01/06/2002	„
3	S		01/06/2002	„
4	S		01/06/2002	„
5	W		01/06/2002	„
6	W		01/06/2002	„
7	W	1m x 1m	01/06/2002	View of excavation
8	W	"	01/06/2002	„
9	W	1m x 1m	01/06/2002	Detail of excavation
10	E	1m x 1m	01/06/2002	„
11	N	1m x 1m	01/06/2002	„
12	N	1m x 1m	01/06/2002	„
13		2m	01/06/2002	Internal view of wall shot 1
14		2m	01/06/2002	Internal view of wall shot 2
15		2m	01/06/2002	Internal view of wall shot 3
16		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 4
17		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 5
18		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 6
19		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 7
20		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 8
21		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 9
22		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 10
23		2m	01/06/2002	Section of wall at entrance shot 11
24		2m	01/06/2002	External view of wall shot 12
25		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 13
26		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 14
27		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 15
28		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 16
29		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 17
30		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 18
31		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 19
32		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 20
33		2m	01/06/2002	„ shot 21
34	N		01/06/2002	Entrance to Preaching site
35	N	1m x 1m	01/06/2002	„
36	E		01/06/2002	General view of site
Film 2 - Colour slide				
1				No photo
2	NE		28/09/2002	View of electricity trench
3	E		28/09/2002	„
4	SW		28/09/2002	„
5	E		28/09/2002	View of site prior to excavation
6	E	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	View of field drains
7	W	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	„
8	SW	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	„
9	S	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	„
10	S	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	„
11	W	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	„
12	W	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	„
13	SW	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	Detail of field drain
14	NE	2m	30/09/2002	„
15	NE	2m	30/09/2002	„
16	SE	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	Gully and drain to SE
17	N	1m x 1m	30/09/2002	Detail of drain