

# **Eilean Glas Lighthouse**

## **Light Established**

1789

## **Engineer**

Thomas Smith

## **Position**

Latitude 57° 51.4'N

Longitude 06° 38.5'W

Situated on the Island of Scalpay in the Outer Hebrides

## **Character**

Flashing (3) White every 20 secs

## **Elevation**

43 metres

## **Candlepower**

400,000

## **Nominal Range**

23 miles

## **Structure**

White tower 30 metres high with red bands

## **History**

Captain Alex McLeod of Harris, the owner of Scalpay, on being approached by the original Northern Lighthouse Trustees in 1787, engaged the services of his local Tacksman, a Mr Campbell to provide the necessary building material and to engage the services of local workmen. He also recommended Mr Campbell as a suitable person for the supervision of the work. The Trustees indicated that they did not require Mr Campbell's services other than for the procurement of building materials and made arrangements to send their own masons to erect the Lighthouse. However, Captain McLeod did in fact engage Mr Campbell and his local workmen to lay the foundations and raise the Tower Wall to a height of seven feet in the summer of 1787. It appears that the Trustees' masons had still been engaged in the building of Mull of Kintyre Lighthouse and to avoid a further year's delay McLeod had taken it upon himself to start work on the Scalpay Lighthouse.

However, the Trustees' masons, all of whom hailed from the Edinburgh area (George Shiells who received 4/2d and John William Purdie who received 3/- per

working day) arrived at Scalpay in the summer of 1788 to carry on the building work, finally completing it in October of that year.

The Trustees' engineer, Thomas Smith, had found, on preliminary inspection visit, that McLeod's men had made the circumference of the tower four feet greater than as shown on the plans but to save time and expense, authorised Shiells to proceed on this larger scale.

The work on the interior of the building was entrusted to one Archie McVicar, Joiner, of North Uist.

In April 1789 the "Kelly and Nelly" a vessel from Wick was chartered to convey to Smith and his workmen to both North Ronaldsay to fit their respective lighting equipment. Alex Reid, a sailor from Fraserburgh who had been chosen to be the first keeper at Scalpay, was picked up with his family on the way.

The lantern and lighting equipment were finally installed that summer and the light on Scalpay first exhibited on 10 October 1789.

The present tower was erected in 1824 when Robert Stevenson was sole engineer to the Board.

Eilean Glas was one of the first 4 lighthouses built in Scotland. The lightroom had to be raised 25 feet above ground level to bring it to 73 feet above the sea.

When Alexander Reid, the first lightkeeper at Eilean Glas, was pensioned off with an annuity of forty guineas in 1823, the engineer reported him as "weatherbeaten and stiff by long exposure on the Point of Glas".

In 1852 the light was changed to a revolving system lens.

The tower is painted with two broad red bands to distinguish it as a day mark.

The fog signal was installed in 1907, its character at the time being 1 blast of 7 seconds every 1½ minutes. The character of the light was also changed to flashing. The fog signal was eventually discontinued in 1987.

Eilean Glas Lighthouse takes its name from Glas Island, Scalpay.

In 1978 the Lighthouse was converted to automatic operation at a cost of £83,565.

The old lens and machine have been handed over to the Royal Scottish Museum for public exhibition.

The Lighthouse is now fitted with an Electric Dynamic Logic Alarm and in the event of failure it automatically telephones the office and reports the fault.

The light source is catoptric sealed beam lamps, similar to car head lights with the lamp arrays mounted on a gearless pedestal.

It should be noted that at some sites the Northern Lighthouse Board have sold some redundant buildings within the lighthouse complex and are not responsible for the maintenance of these building.