

Monach Lighthouse

Light Established

1864, light decommissioned 1948

Re established 25 July 2008

Engineer

David & Thomas Stevenson

Position

Latitude 57° 31.5'N

Longitude 07° 41.5'W

Structure

41m Red Brick Tower

Character

Flashing (2) White every 15 seconds

Nominal Range

18 miles

History

In January 1859 the Board of Trade wrote to the Commissioners enclosing a letter from Captain Otter, Admiralty Surveyor, as to the provision of a Lighthouse in the Monach group of Islands in the Hebrides. After a joint inspection by the Commissioners, the elder Brethern of Trinity House and Captain Otter, the opinion was that a light might be advantageous in guiding vessels clear of the dangerous rock sand shoals. Messrs David and Thomas Stevenson, in their report, endorsed this view stating".... We have no hesitation, however in reporting on the assumption that the list of shipwrecks which have been laid before this Board is correct, that a light on the west coast of the Hebrides would be useful to shipping.....". The approval of the Board of Trade and Trinity House to the establishment of a Lighthouse was given in 1859.

The island of Shillay, on which the Monach Lighthouse stands, was bought by the Commissioners from Sir John Orde and his son in 1862 together with a site measuring 0.0282 of an acre on adjoining island of Ceaniar on which a store house was erected. The cost of purchasing the island was £400.

The light was first exhibited from 133ft high tower on 1 February 1864. The Lighthouse was built, at a cost of £14,673, by Messrs David and Thomas Stevenson.

A tragedy occurred there on 15 November 1936 when two lightkeepers were drowned. They had taken a rowing boat across the half mile stretch of water, as usual, to collect the mail from the post box, a journey which involved a walk of approximately two and three quarter miles and the crossing of two fords.

The weather deteriorated badly - sleet and gale force winds blew up - by the time they came to make the return journey and their rowing boat was driven off course. They disappeared from view and it was not until 7 and 8 December that their bodies were washed on Heisker Isle across the Sound.

The light, the only one on the west coast of the Hebrides, was closed down in 1942 during the war. At the end of hostilities in 1945 the light was not relit and in 1948, after extensive enquiries had been made from shipping, it was found that the light had ceased to be a value of general navigation. On 22 November 1948 the Monach Light was therefore discontinued permanently.

On 28 March 1966 an agreement was made between the Commissioners and the Natural Environment Research Council. That granted the Research Council the right to form a nature reserve on the island of Shillay where the study of, research into and preservation of various species of flora and fauna is carried out.

New Minor Lighthouse at Monach

In July 1996 the Northern Lighthouse Board received approval and financial backing from the Department of Transport for the construction of three new lighthouses to mark the Deep Water Route, West of the Hebrides. This route had been recommended to laden tankers in the Report by Lord Donaldson "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", which followed the Braer disaster in the Shetlands in 1993.

The three new lights were established in 1997 and are located at Haskeir, off North Uist, Gasker, off North Harris and Monach Isles off Benbecula. All three lights operate automatically and are monitored using a combination of UHF, VHF radio and BT landline direct to the Northern Lighthouse Board's Headquarters in Edinburgh.

This light was decommissioned on 25 July 2008.

Decision to reinstate the original Monachs light

In 2005 following a review of marine aids to navigation carried out by the General Lighthouse Authorities it was decided to increase the range of the Monach Isles light from 10 miles to 18 miles. To achieve an 18 mile range it would be necessary to raise the focal plane of the existing light and increase its output. The modular design of the existing aluminium and GRP lighthouse did not lend itself to the increase in focal plane height required. Additionally, it would be necessary to utilise a rotating light, with a larger array of solar panels and increased battery capacity. The best engineering solution for increasing the range of the aid to navigation was to house a new optic in the original 1864 lighthouse tower. In July 2008 the Northern Lighthouse Board issued a Notice to Mariners stating "the existing light will be discontinued and a new light will be established in the FORMER LIGHTHOUSE TOWER with the undernoted characteristics:-

Character: Group Flashing (2) White every 15 seconds (as before)

Elevation: 47 metres

Nominal Range: 18 Miles

Description

of Structure: Red Brick Tower (height 41 metres)

Chief Executive of the Northern Lighthouse Board, Roger Lockwood said "We are delighted to have moved back into the original tower at the Monachs, which was built by David & Thomas Stevenson in 1864. The tower has essentially been left for the last 60 years, since the light was extinguished during the Second World War, and the limited amount of remedial work we have had to carry out pays tribute to the great work of the Stevensons. The decision to reinstate the light in the original tower came as a direct result of our Aids to Marine Navigation Review carried out in 2005, where our users, the mariner, requested an increased visual range of light. The re-establishment of Monachs light will provide a vital marker for shipping passing through the Deep Water Route, west of the Hebrides."

The Monachs light was exhibited for the first time on the evening of 25 July 2008.