

# Ornsay Lighthouse

## Light Established

1857

## Engineer

David & Thomas Stevenson

## Character

Occulting White every 8 secs

## Elevation

18 metres

## Nominal Range

15 miles

## Structure

White tower 19 metres high.

## History

In 1853 the Commissioners' Engineer David Stevenson, who had succeeded his brother Alan in February, prepared a list of 45 possible sites thought desirable to complete a system of lights for the coasts of Scotland. The board named eight which ought to be given priority - Sound of Islay (at or near Port Askaig), Sound of Mull (at or near Tobermory), the north and south entrances to the sounds between Skye and the mainland (Rona and Ornsay), the coast of Sutherland (at or near Stoer Head or Rubh' Re), Holburn Head near Thurso, Cantick Head or Switha in Orkney, and Bressay at the south entrance to Lerwick harbour. Rubha na Gall (Sound of Mull), Ornsay, Kyleakin, Rona and Ushenish were all lighted on 10 November 1857. For the first three, in the narrow sounds of the west coast, Thomas Stevenson devised a new "condensing" apparatus by which the light shown in different directions varied in strength according to the distance from which it was required to be seen. This was in fact one of a series of improvements in the dioptric system introduced by Thomas, some of which were shown in the Great Exhibition of 1851. (Source "Scottish Lighthouses")

Ornsay light was automated in 1962 and in 1966 Gavin Maxwell Enterprises Ltd, of "Ring of Bright Water" fame, bought the cottages at Ornsay and those at Kyleakin. He was drawn to them as he enjoyed planning and converting houses and he thought they had commercial possibilities. The Ornsay cottage had four bedrooms and a 27-foot sitting room which looked up the Sound of Sleat to the north-east. Conversion and furnishing costs were in excess of £5,000 each. With good fishing and sailing each cottage was to rent at 50 guineas a week.

The Optic System is a 300mm Acrylic lens with a 250 watt tungsten lamp controlled by an electronic flasher. The lamp is mounted on a lamp changer with standby lamp available to rotate into position in event of a lamp failure.

In event of a Main Optic failure, a single Emergency Lantern, mounted within the lightroom, is automatically selected. This is also a 300mm lantern but with only a 60 watt lamp and multi place lampchanger, giving a range of 10 miles. As the main optic is only available when mains power is present, any supply outage also causes selection of the emergency light.

This site has battery backup for fourteen days operation of the emergency light.

The light is currently unmonitored and relies on the observer to report any problems to Northern Lighthouse Boards headquarters in Edinburgh.

The light was modernised in 1988 when mains power was installed to replace the gas system.