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WIFI PROVISION TO FACTOR'S HOUSE ST KILDA 2017 Assessment

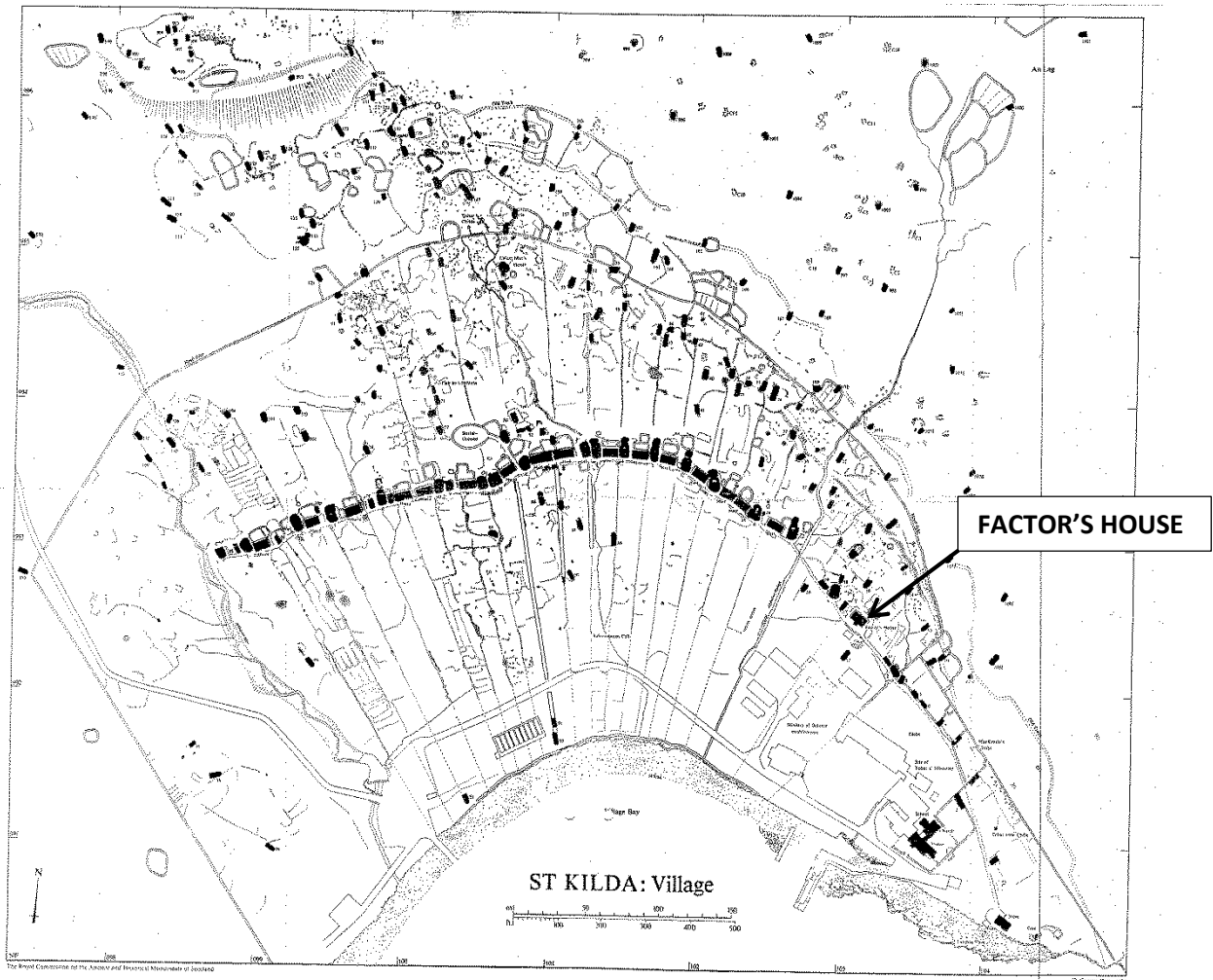
Heritage Impact



Background

The Factor's House on Hirta, St Kilda is regularly used as accommodation and office space for National Trust for Scotland (NTS) staff and project workers stationed on the island, in particular the long-running Soay Sheep research programme co-ordinated by Edinburgh University. Given the increasing emphasis on internet access required in the modern era, the work of these researchers and NTS staff has been handicapped by the lack Wi-Fi connection from this building.

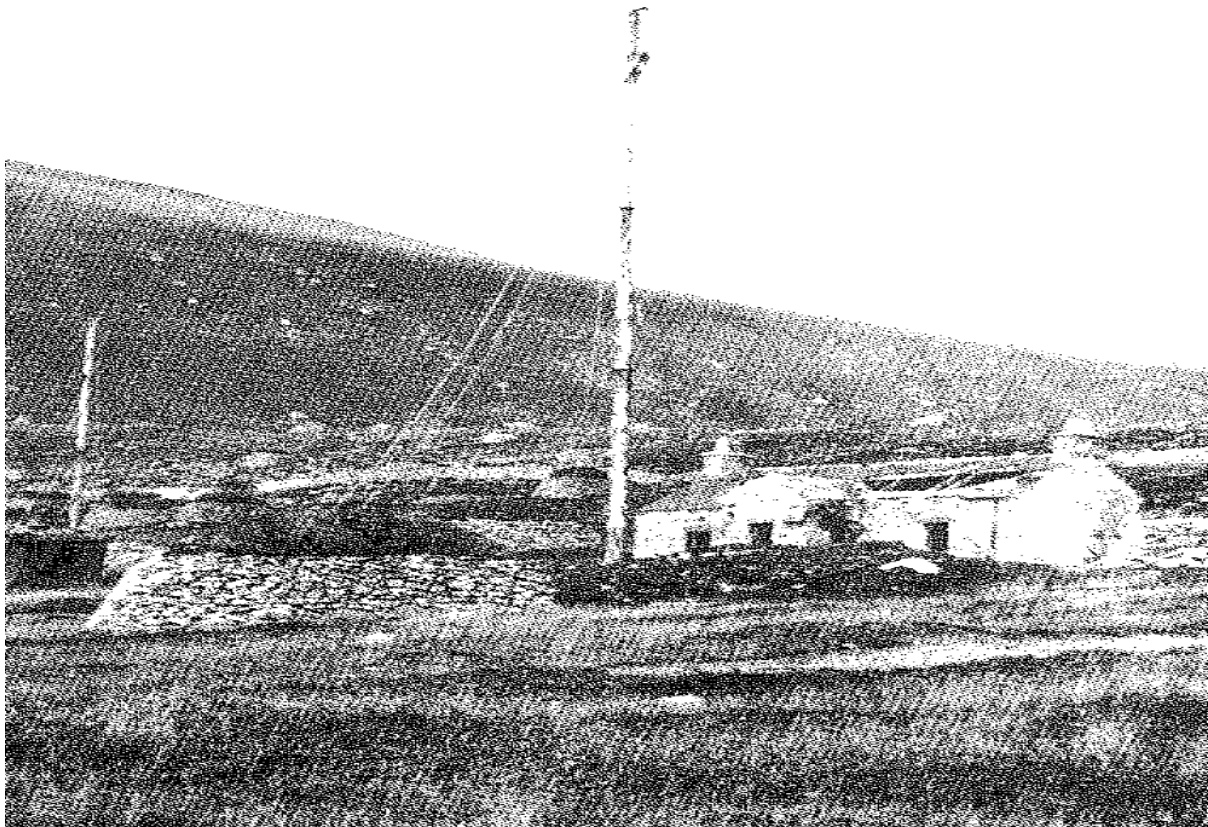
Initial work had suggested fixing a 1.5 metre satellite receiver dish with booster on the existing MoD building, but issues with line of sight and the proposals for the demolition of the existing MoD base meant that alternative solutions are now being sought. QinetiQ who are the operators of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) base on the island have now offered the facility to access their internet connection via a small transceiver (c12cm diameter) mounted externally above the porch leading to the ground floor entry to this building and focused on the MoD base.



Historical development of building

The Factor's House was built after 1861, not being shown on annotated Sharbau map of that date and was extant by 1873 (*St Kilda Mail* 37, April 2013 *The Factor's House* Walsh A & Bain S). Its unusual structure with an external stair on its north side creating two separate dwellings reflects the form of the earlier 18th century storehouse lying by the shore.

It was hit by a mortar fired from a German submarine in 1918, partially destroying the porch and eastern rooms, but the damage was eventually repaired. The building was little used after the island was evacuated in 1930, not maintained, and fell into an increasingly dilapidated state. Following acquisition of St Kilda by the NTS the Factor's House was leased to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for use as the officers' base between 1957 and 1960. The MoD repaired the slate roof, replaced all external doors and windows, and undertook some refurbishment works internally. The building became home to the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) wardens from the early 1960s and was eventually returned for use by the NTS in 2003.



Damage to Factor's House after U-boat shelling in May 1918

In the mid-1970s, during the NCC/SNH use of the building, the internal spaces were extensively refurbished: a bathroom was inserted centrally downstairs with its new pipe work internally and externally, the door from the western room into this space was blocked and timber linings added as necessary, the rotten floor in the kitchen was removed and replaced with concrete, and most of the kitchen lining boards were also removed and the walls plastered. Upstairs, a toilet was added in the central space. Since then internal works have included the renewal of all electric wiring (last replaced in 1994), refurbishment of the kitchen in 1999 and various works to address the damp ingress in the west gable (successfully completed 2010) and along the north-east rear wall. ...The only original fitting is the cast-iron fireplace in bedroom east room.' (*Report on works at the Factors' House St Kilda, June-July 2012*, Walsh A & Harden J, Nov 1912 unpublished NTS report). Further stripping-out and refurbishment work, described in the above report, was carried out in 2012. This included replacing rotting joists in the living room, failing electrics and an unreliable heating system, as well as conservation repairs to the wood linings.

Scheduled Monument protection

In 1963 'the monument known as St Kilda Village and related structures compris[ing] the core area of human settlement on St Kilda, centred on Village Bay' was scheduled as a monument of national importance. This schedule was re-affirmed in 2002 under the Ancient Monument and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (SM2279). Though the Factor's House is not itself specifically mentioned in this document, its protection is covered in the statement of National Importance - 'the monument is of national importance because it comprises diverse and well preserved multi-period remains of settlement on St. Kilda, structures that date from prehistory through to the early 20th century. These remains, the core of human occupation on the island, have the potential to provide

important information about life on St. Kilda through the millennia, an extreme existence that was of enormous interest to Scottish and international observers who documented the life of its inhabitants from early times.'

Significance

The Factor's House with its distinctive design of mortared stone and slate reflects the relationship between the traditional vernacular buildings occupied by the residents of St Kilda and the transition to more conventional mainland designed buildings, as shown in the development of the Hirta Village from blackhouse construction in the 1830s to the 1860s zinc and later tarred roofed 1860s buildings built by a Skye mason. The Factor's House with its split level and external back stair creating two separate apartments reflects the layout of the earlier Storehouse, erected between 1779 and 1799 (*St Kilda Storehouse A conservation statement 2016 Geddes GF*), and with the Manse and Kirk represent different building styles to that used by the St Kildans. It is therefore a significant element in defining the history and use of the island.

Outstanding Universal Value

The St Kildan archipelago forms part of the only dual natural and cultural world heritage site in the British Isles. 'St Kilda is of **outstanding value** in this context because of:

- the **time-depth, preservation** and completeness of the physical remains of a whole human system that reflects a distinctive geo-cultural census;
- the remarkable **documentary evidence** of society and traditions that puts flesh on the bones of the archaeological ruins; and
- the **dramatic landscape** to which this cultural wealth integrally contributes, and which has helped give St Kilda its iconic status.'

(*World Heritage Site St Kilda a comparative analysis of the cultural landscape 2005 NTS & Scottish Executive*).

The Factor's House, the church and the Manse building are not explicitly referenced in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) listed below with its reference to a 'fossilised landscape of abandoned houses, large enclosures and the abandoned dry-stone structures known as cleits'. It is not considered by the NTS that the proposed works will impact on the OUV of the St Kilda World Heritage site.

St Kilda's outstanding universal cultural heritage value

Overlaying this spectacular natural landscape is a cultural landscape of outstanding value. The time-depth, preservation and completeness of the physical remains is remarkable, bearing exceptional testimony to more than two millennia of human occupation. St Kilda provides an exceptionally well-preserved and documented example of how, even in the most extreme conditions of storm-swept isolated island living, people were able to live for thousands of years from farming and exploiting the natural resources. The St Kildans led a distinctive way of life, in response to the peculiar physical and geographic setting of the islands.

The islands bear physical witness to a cultural tradition that has now disappeared, namely the extreme reliance on seabird products as the main source of livelihood and sustenance, alongside subsistence farming. The fossilized landscape of

abandoned houses, large enclosures and the unique dry-stone structures, known as cleits, which are surprisingly numerous around the islands and stacs, provide exceptional tangible evidence of this traditional way of life. A living testament to the longevity of the human occupation of St Kilda are the Soay sheep, descendants of the most primitive domestic form in Europe, which resemble the original sheep first brought to Britain in Neolithic times, c. 7,000 years ago.

The cultural landscape of St Kilda is an outstanding example of the impact of land use resulting from a type of subsistence economy based on the products of seabirds harvested from cliffs, cultivating land and keeping stock. The age-old traditions and land uses unquestionably contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the landscape. St Kilda represents successful subsistence economies everywhere – living in harmony with nature until external pressures led to decline, and, in 1930, the evacuation of the islands.

Proposed methodology

- A circular transceiver 12cm diameter will be mounted on a bracket , fixed with the screws on the exterior of the porch above the door
- A cable will then run vertically above this to the roof before running under the guttering along the top of the wall to the south east corner
- This cable will then be inserted above the wall head and then run down the interior surface to a socket mounted in the south east corner of the living room
- Cabling will be surface mounted with clips or in 1” trunking



Similar 12cm diameter transceiver to that proposed, as currently in use on the MoD base at St Kilda.

Potential impacts and mitigation

Visual

The insertion of the transceiver could be seen as potentially intrusive into the external form of the building. However the small size of this transceiver means that it will not intrude to the level of the gutter and roof and the white plastic cover of the dish suggests it should blend readily with the white mortar of the harling. In landscape terms it is considered by the NTS that this will have minimal intrusion into the landscape of the wider cultural landscape.

If possible white cabling will be used from the transceiver to the roof before it runs next to the guttering before entering the building. If not the cable will be either sleeved in white piping as the electric light below or concealed when the Factor's House is re-painted next summer, as part of the routine whitewashing render of this building.



Porch as currently used to enter the ground floor of the Factor's House. The proposed transceiver will be sited above the doorway facing towards the MoD base to the south.

Interior fabric

The cable, once brought into the house, will be run unobtrusively down the south east corner of the living room before being fitted to a Wi-Fi socket above the skirting board. As described above, this side of the Factor's House was badly damaged when the building was shelled by a U-boat in 1918 and it is probable that most of the panelling in this area has been replaced either after the war ended or when the building was refurbished by the army. Every care will be taken to minimise the impact on the interior fabric.



Interior of Factor's House looking into the south east corner beside the window.

Conclusions

Though there will be a slight visual impact from the installation of the new transceiver and its cabling, it is the view of the National Trust for Scotland that this will have a marginal impact on the heritage integrity of the building. Expediting wifi access to NTS staff and researchers using this building will significantly enhance the world-class research being carried out on this property, to the benefit of its world heritage status.

J Wordsworth
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10th January 2017