

THE LANDSCAPES OF EYNHALLOW



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ABSTRACT

Study of Eynhallow, an uninhabited island in Orkney, has centered on the island's ruined church and one or two other isolated monuments. Previous interpretations have been unduly influenced both by the assumption that the church and surrounding structures are monastic, and by the myth, folklore, literature and art inspired as a result of the island's inaccessibility for the last 150 years. This survey places the monuments in their broader landscape context of both the island of Eynhallow itself and the adjoining landscapes of Mainland and Rousay. Using new evidence from study of the landscape and from other sources, this survey reveals Eynhallow's remoteness is a recent phenomenon. There is evidence of exploitation of the landscape from prehistoric times up until the present day. Eynhallow was never "improved" during the nineteenth century so many of the early landscape features are particularly well preserved. It is argued that the "monastery" is more likely part of a grange of the estate of the Bishop of Orkney. There is strong evidence that the church remains stand on the site of an earlier, possibly Celtic, Christian site. Further research is needed to reveal more of the landscape of Eynhallow and to enable detailed recording and labelling of the evidence of man's activity in this landscape.

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Thanks are also due to Mr and Mrs Robert Cormack of Westness House on Rousay, for wisdom and home made soup on a cold Autumn day, to Elsie Seatter of Melsetter House for her knowledge of Lethaby and the Middlemores' involvement with Eynhallow, and to Mrs Rosemary Jenkins, who married into the family of Eynhallow's last private owner, who reminisced and brought past summers on Eynhallow vividly back to life.

Staff at the National Monuments Record of Scotland and at the Orkney Archive Service could not have been more helpful.

Overshadowed by such a wealth of knowledge and experience, venturing opinions on the landscapes of Eynhallow feels every bit as risky as venturing unaccompanied in a small boat into the roosts of Eynhallow Sound. Nevertheless, the conclusions reached are my own, and I only hope those who know more than me will be forgiving of any errors on my part.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol.

The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

**Matthew Butler
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Figure 1: Eynhallow, looking east from Mainland

Eynhallow lay like a green foundered ship in the middle of The Roost. The walls of the small medieval monastery were still standing. “For God’s sake” said Bill” What way would the monks have passed all their lives in a place like that?”

“They would have fished,” said Sander” the same as we’re doing. And they might have kept a pig or two” ...

“and I expect they prayed a lot”, said Bill.

- from “A Calendar of Love” by George Mackay Brown (Mackay Brown 1967)



Figure 2 Eynhallow, between Mainland (E) and Rousay (W), from OS Landranger 464. Scale 1:25000

1. THE PHYSICAL LANDSCAPES

i) Location and adjoining island landscapes

The uninhabited island of Eynhallow is in the County of Orkney, off the North East coast of the largest island, Mainland, from which it is approximately 1.5km distant at the narrowest part of Eynhallow Sound. To the east lies the island of Rousay, from which Eynhallow is approximately 1km distant from the nearest direct landfall. Eynhallow is in Rousay Parish. Both Mainland and Rousay are particularly rich in archaeological sites. The landscapes facing Eynhallow have been exploited from the Neolithic to the present day and their evolution has a considerable bearing on the development of the Eynhallow landscape.



Figure 3: Eynhallow from Broch of Gurness, Mainland, looking N

On the Mainland coast facing Eynhallow, rich pastureland gently slopes down to low cliffs (typically 2-3m in height) above a rocky shoreline. Key archaeological sites overlooking Eynhallow Sound on Mainland include the chambered cairn at Burgar (Grid Reference HY 348278), the Iron Age Broch of Gurness (GR HY 383268) and the remains of St Peter's Kirk – itself thought to be constructed on the site of a broch (GR HY 337286). Between Gurness in the south and St Peter's in the north there are at least three other Broch sites (Wainwright 1962).

On the Rousay side of the channel, just back from the rocky shore, lies a relatively level, if narrow, belt of pasture. About 100 metres back from the shore, this pasture starts to slope steeply as far as the road which runs round the island, which has the modern designation of the B9064. On the upper side of this road the land shelves even more steeply as it becomes the moorland upland of central Rousay.

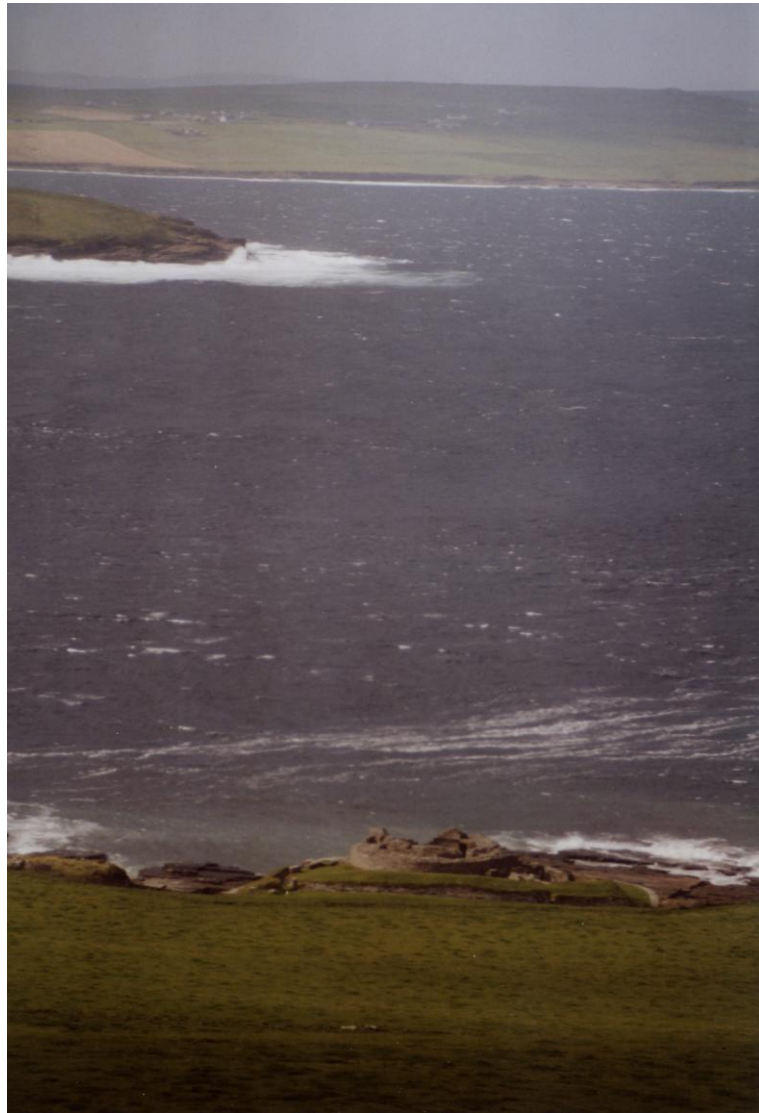


Figure 4 The North end of Eynhallow from Rousay, looking W. Midhowe Iron Age Broch is in foreground.

At the northern end of the belt of land on Rousay facing Eynhallow lies the great Neolithic stalled cairn at Midhowe, the largest of its type in Orkney (GR HY373306). There are at least two other cairns sited along the stretch of coast facing Eynhallow, between Midhowe in the north and Westness House

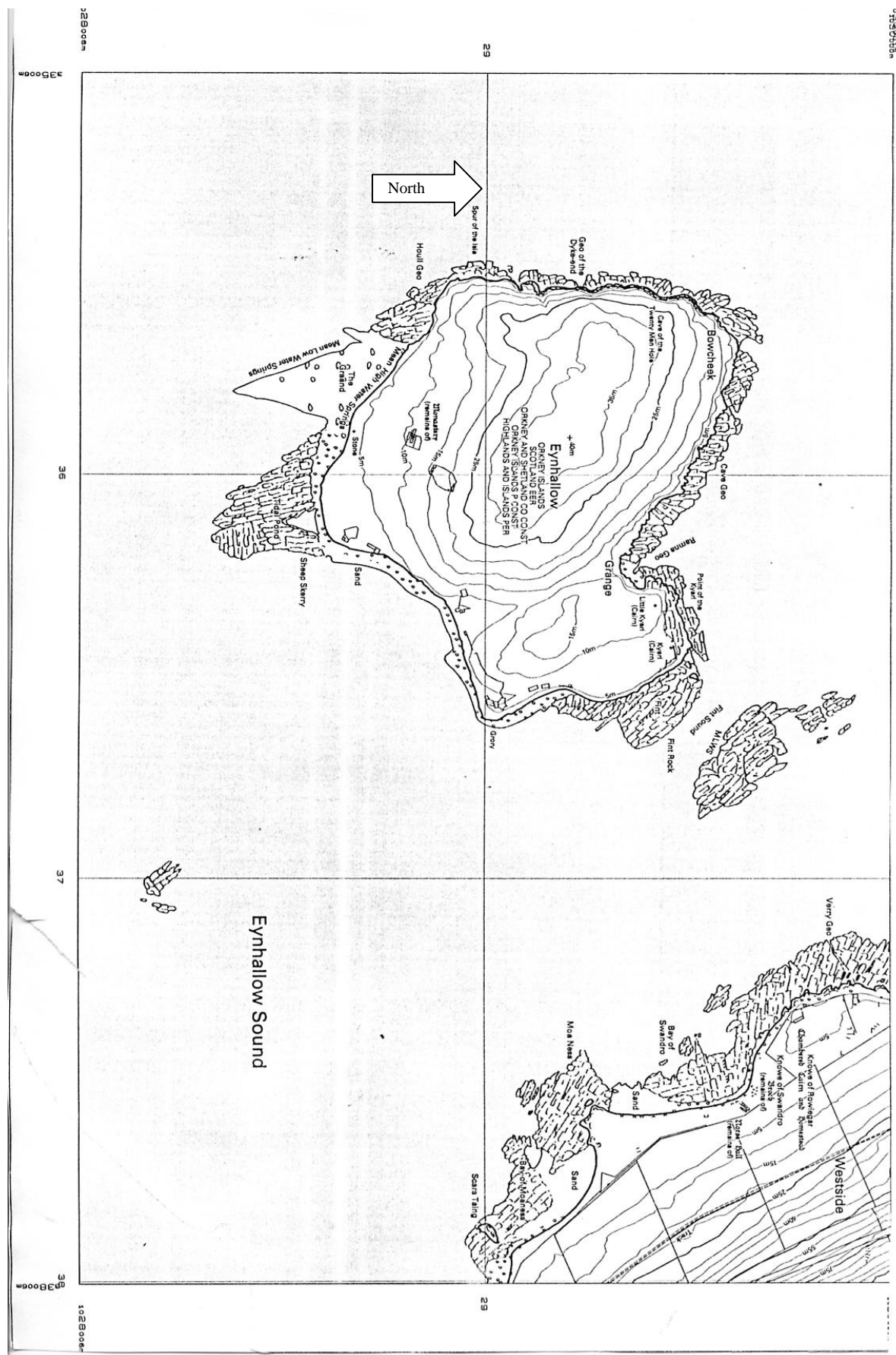
(GR HY383289) in the south. Between North Howe Broch in the north (GR HY371305) and Westness House there are two further Broch sites (Wainwright 1962), including the well conserved site at Midhowe. The Viking Hall at Westness (GR HY375295) also forms part of this landscape as does the ruined medieval church at Skaill (GR HY 374302), which was formerly the Parish Kirk for Rousay. The walls of the surrounding graveyard Kirk adjoin the rectangular stone-built structure to the north west known as “The Wirk” believed to be of the Viking era and usually now interpreted as a very early fortified tower built by Sigurd of Westness in the twelfth century (Orkney Archive Service, No 10). In the area of the church are several abandoned farms and their associated barns and outbuildings, which formed part of the Rousay community of Westside, cleared in the mid-nineteenth century.

ii) The land

Eynhallow is oblong in shape. The island measures roughly 1.5km across at its widest point, to around 500m at its narrowest. The land rises to a maximum height of 40m above sea level.

In discussing the physical landscape in more detail, it will be helpful to make reference to two man-made structures. The first is described on the Ordnance Survey Map as “Eynhallow Monastery – remains of” and is located at GR HY359288. The second is the early twentieth century Lodge, a single storey structure made of corrugated iron at GR HY364289.

Geologically, like much of the rest of Orkney, the island is made up of Old Red Sandstones believed to have been formed some 380 million years ago (Berry 2000). In various places on Orkney, most notably perhaps on the islands of Hoy and Eday, the sandstone actually appears as red. More normally, however, it appears in shades of brown, grey and ochre. This is the case around the shores of Eynhallow. The sandstone often appears in the form of flat narrow belts, a soft stone but excellent as a building material. Elsewhere, particularly on the shoreline, it appears as boulders of a variety of shapes and sizes. The sandstone is covered with a till deposited by the receding ice of the last ice age. On the uplands there is a layer of peat.



The coastline of Eynhallow broadly divides into two parts. Proceeding clockwise, from a point at roughly GR HY 365293 round to the Spur of the Isle at GR HY350289 the coastline is a mixture of low cliffs, 1-2m high, standing above outlying rock outcrops and boulders. There is only one small shingley beach, on the shoreline immediately to the south east of the Lodge referred to above.

Continuing clockwise around the island, the rest of the coastline is comprised of cliffs of various heights, but rising to a maximum of around 15m at the northwest corner. The cliffs are pierced at a number of points by “geos” - rectangular shaped sheer sided square inlets where the sea has eroded the rock away. There are also at least three caves visible, of varying size, in this cliff area, the largest known as “Twenty Man Hole”. At the point on the modern OS Maps called Grange is a small boulder strewn shore. At GR HY364294 are remains of a raised beach.



Figure 6: Cave of the Twenty Man Hole, North Coast of Eynhallow (sea calm)

Away from the coast, the island again broadly divides into two parts, roughly north and south of the line of latitude GR 290. South of this line, the island landscape is rough pastureland. The remains of the “Monastery” sit in the middle

of this area of land. To the north, the pasture quickly degenerates into rough peaty moorland, rising to the high point in the centre of the island.



Figure 7: Eynhallow, Standing Stonenear SW shore looking E to Church and Outbuildings

The land then slopes into the valley to the north east of the centre of the island, running approximately 500m from the beach called Grange on the North through to the shore by the Lodge in the south, climbing to a watershed about half way along its length. The bottom of the valley is marshy along its whole length, and streams trickle through to the sea at each end.



Figure 8: Central Valley, Eynhallow

To the east of the valley the land again rises to a lesser hill, with a maximum height of around 20m, before sloping down to the East coast overlooking the Sound between Eynhallow and Rousay.

iii) The sea and the air

The tides rush through Eynhallow Sound to both the West and the East of the island. John Mooney (Mooney 1949) estimated that, at their strongest, they run at a speed of 7.5 knots. This may be conservative.

Moreover, the adjacent land masses of Mainland and Rousay act as a funnel for the winds, particularly when they are from the North West or the South. In such conditions, particularly with the absence of any man made harbour, landing on the island becomes impossible, even with the aid of modern technology and navigational techniques. The island is inaccessible for days at a time during the autumn and winter and can even be inaccessible at times during the summer months.

This, it will be seen, has had profound consequences, not only for the pattern of human settlement on Eynhallow, and how the landscape has been exploited, but also for the way the island has been perceived by Orcadians over hundreds of years.



Figure 9: Eynhallow's natural resources. Seal colony, east coast

Yet the elements of air and water, and the very remoteness of the island, also bring resources with them. There are good fishing grounds to the south and east of the island, still exploited for lobster and herring. The remote rocky shorelines attract large colonies of seals, which will have provided a source of food, oil and hides for previous inhabitants. The island also has a rich variety of bird life which will have been a source of food, copious quantities of eggs and, at times, feathers from the eider which breed on the island. The shore will also have provided shellfish and driftwood as well as the occasional wreck. Wrecks are not part of this survey, but even as late as the twentieth century Eynhallow Sound was claiming ships – and lives. On New Year's Day 1922, for example, the Grimsby Trawler *Freesia* foundered in Eynhallow Sound, taking nine of her eleven crew with her.

2. RECORDED ARCHAEOLOGY ON EYNHALLOW

The Royal Commission Volumes on Orkney and Shetland (RCAHMS 1946) record five sites on Eynhallow. The Eynhallow entries in the Orkney Sites and Monuments Record (Orkney SMR) were mainly compiled in the 1970s by the then County Archaeologist, Dr Raymond Lamb.



Figure 10: Eynhallow Church from air, looking E. National Monuments Record of Scotland

Both inventories record the church and its domestic buildings (at GR HY359288). The Royal Commission suggests the Church is no later than 1200 and that the outbuildings are of considerably later date. The SMR suggests two building periods, one in the twelfth century, and a later phase in either the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

The SMR does not give a date for the outbuildings, but says they are too complex to be simply domestic.

Both inventories record the circular feature at Monkerness on the east coast (GR HY365292) and the circular feature near Little Kyarl (GR HY 364294). The Royal Commission does not give a date, but records the finding of a “crude axe” at the Monkerness site. The SMR suggests both are prehistoric settlement structures. The Royal Commission suggests another feature lies 13’ north of the Monkerness site (no trace of this could be found during the author’s 2004 survey) and the SMR notes a second mound near the Little Kyarl structure.



Figure 11: "Mooney's Hut", showing upright slabs in centre

In the area of the church and its outbuildings, both Royal Commission and SMR record two cairns (at GRs HY359287 and HY358288) – which the SMR says are clearance heaps or middens – and the standing stone on the shoreline south of the church (GR HY 358286). The SMR says this standing stone is not ancient.

The SMR also records two erect slabs in the slope near the Monkerness feature (no GR), the Cave of the Twenty Men on Eynhallow’s west coast (GR HY355294) and a possible prehistoric settlement visible on the coast at Kyarl (GR HY364294).

3. THE RECORDED HISTORY OF EYNHALLOW

i) Orkneyinga Saga

The first possible historical mentions of Eynhallow occur in the Orkneyinga Saga, now generally agreed to have been completed some time between 1222 (when the last event it records, the burning of Bishop Adam, is known to have taken place) and 1241, the year of the death of Snorri Sturluson in Iceland who made reference to its contents in work written during his lifetime (see Anderson 1873).

The Saga contains three possible Eynhallow references in all. Their possible meanings were intensely debated by scholars through the twentieth century. Study of landscape and topography is key to establishing their veracity.

The first, in Chapter 66 (Anderson 1873 pp102-103) recalls Earl Rognvald composing a rhyme about sixteen monks who join a mass being held on the northerly Orkney island of Westray, coming from “that Isle Elon”. Mooney (Mooney 1949) stands alone in arguing that this is a reference to Eynhallow. Others from Anderson in 1873 to Raymond Lamb in his notes in the Orkney Sites and Monuments Record in the 1970s are agreed the reference is more likely to be to the island of Eller Holm.

The second reference, in Chapter 99, (Anderson 1873 pp 172-175) records Svein Asleifson taking refuge in a cave on the island of Hellisey to escape capture by Earl Harald. Linguists, archaeologists and historians have all joined battle over 150 years to debate the likely location of Hellisey. On the one side are Mooney (Mooney 1949) and the Orkney historian and place name scholar Hugh Marwick, who argue that Hellisey is indeed Eynhallow. On the other side are Anderson (1873), Calder of The Royal Commission (1946), and Lamb (Orkney SMR) – the latter making a claim for Muckle Green Holm.

From a landscape perspective, it has already been stated that there are several caves on the north and west coasts of Eynhallow. One of these is known as Twenty Man Hole. It is, in theory, large enough to accommodate a Viking leader

and his immediate entourage. But the winds and tides around the north coast of Eynhallow make it extremely unlikely that this is the cave where Svein took refuge. Even on a calm summer's day the waves crash into the cliffs around this cave (see Figure 6). For Svein to have hidden there he would have needed extreme good fortune – a calm more or less windless day with favourable tides. Otherwise his boat would have been dashed to pieces. So this author sides with Lamb.

The final reference is more hopeful. In Chapter 101 Svein Asleifson's son Olaf is taken prisoner by John Wing, while on the island of "Eyin Helga" (Anderson, 1873 pp 176-177). For once there seems to be consensus that this is indeed a reference to Eynhallow. It can be seen that the name used by the writer of the saga is very similar in form to the later name of the island. Note that the name given to the island is not the usual Norse construction – where the final "ey" ("island") element comes after the descriptive first part of the name (as in Egilsay, Westray, Eday) and many others rather than in front of it (as with Eynhallow). The incident occurred during the life of Earl Rognvald who died around 1046. Therefore we know that the Norse were referring to Eynhallow as the Holy Isle in the early eleventh century.

Mooney (Mooney 1949) who believed the church on Eynhallow to be a monastery then goes further, and speculates as to why Olaf was on Eynhallow in the first place. He concludes that the boy was probably being educated by the monks. This is stretching the argument too far. There are all sorts of possible reasons why the boy might have been on the island, particularly as Orkneyinga Saga records that he was being looked after by Kolbein Hruga, who lived on the nearby island of Wyre.

ii) Medieval silence

Eynhallow then disappears from the historical record until the sixteenth century. Mooney (1949) made much of an entry, dated 1175, in the Melrose Chronicle which refers to Laurence "our brother from the Orkneys". Indeed, on this slender evidence rests much of his claim discussed below (Appendix A) that Eynhallow was a Cistercian House.

There is also a reference in the Saga of Hakon Hakonson to a meeting dated in 1226 between the King of Norway and a group from Scotland including the Abbot of Eyin Helga. However, Eyin Helga was also the Norse name for Iona, and the consensus now is that it was the Abbot of Iona who was at this meeting (Thomson in Omand 2003).

There are, at the moment, no written sources for the history of Eynhallow between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century.

iii) The early modern period

The next firm reference to Eynhallow comes in Jo Ben's "Descriptio Insularum Orchadiarum", dating from the late sixteenth century (Ben edn. 1922). Jo Ben is believed to have been a cleric, but why he wrote his Description and, indeed, whether or not he ever visited Orkney are both unanswered questions. He wrote: *"Enhallow, or 'The Holy Island'... It is of old times related that here, if the standing corn be cut down after the setting of the sun, there is, unexpectedly, a flowing of blood from the stalks of the grain; also it is said that if a horse is fastened after sun-down it will easily get loose and wander anywhere during the night"*

This record is worth noting for two reasons. Firstly, it is the first time we see Eynhallow associated with folklore and myth. Secondly, because there is no mention of a church (or monastery). Mooney (1949) says the latter can be explained on the grounds that Jo Ben had never visited the island. Much more likely it is because, by the late sixteenth century, the church on the island was no longer in use.

In 1595, "The Rentale of the King and Bishoppis lands of Orkney" (Peterkin, 1820) records that Eynhallow belongs to the Bishop, but is set in feu to Sir Patrick Ballenden.

It is then possible to trace the history of the ownership of the island through a number of Charters and Sassines. This history has been well recorded by Mooney

(1949) and need not concern us – except in so far as the surviving documents held by The Orkney Archive Service and also detailed in Mooney’s notebook (Orkney Archive Service, No 1) very occasionally help us understand the landscape of Eynhallow and how it was being exploited. So, a Charter of 1677 records that *“the said ylle and lands on Enhallow cannot be equally compared in worth and value with lands belonging to the sd parties lying in the sd ylle of Roiusay”*(Orkney Archive Service – No 1).

A more substantive description appears in Barry’s “History of the Orkney Islands”, published in 1805 (Barry 1805):

“The whole island is little more than a mile in circumference; lies rather low; raises a sufficient quantity of grain and other articles to pay its rent in kind and supports two families, its whole population. It is admirably sited for catching plenty of excellent fish, especially those kinds that delight in currents and eddies”

Ten years earlier, between 1795 and 1798, the remarkable “Statistical Account of Scotland” had been compiled by Sir John Sinclair (Sinclair 1927). Sinclair relied on Parish Priests to send in the information. The Rousay minister records 25 inhabitants on Eynhallow, a total of two boats and that “the soil is good but not skilfully managed”. He also records that there are no mice on the island.

Referring to the Parish as a whole which included the islands of Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre he wrote of a “prodigious number” of black cattle, to sheep, swine and geese, to “a great quantity of kelp made annually ...from May to July” and to “a little woollen stuff and linen, but to no great amount”.

In 1842, “A New Statistical Account” (New Statistical Account 1842) was drawn up. The entry for “The Parish of Rousay and Eagleshay” shows the potential weakness in relying on the local ministers for reports. The Reverend George Ritchie on Rousay delegated the task to his Session Clerk, William Smeaton, who sent in the shortest entry for any parish in Orkney, a mere two sides. He also reproduced much of the entry in the first Statistical Account – verbatim. All we learn is that the crofters were producing a number of vegetables on their lands; potatoes, turnips, cabbage and beet are listed. Overall figures are given for the

acreage of the Parish, and for land use, but it is impossible to discern how these relate to Eynhallow.

iv) The Censuses of 1841 and 1851

These two censuses give us our only substantial documentary insight – from any period - into the people who were living in the Eynhallow landscape. Robert C Marwick’s excellent short study (Marwick 1993) further enhances our understanding. In 1841, four houses are inhabited on Eynhallow. By 1851 the number has risen to five. There is a total island population of 26 in 1841, and 25 in 1851. This can be compared to the first Statistical Account’s record of 25 inhabitants in 1795.

1851 is a key date in the history of Eynhallow for another reason. It was in that year the island was abandoned as a permanent settlement. Local tradition said the island was abandoned after a fever. In fact, in conversation with a local antiquary, one former resident of the island later stated that life on the island had become unsustainable – the kelp industry had collapsed in the 1830s (Marwick 1993) – and the clearance was one of a number carried out on the Rousay estate by the factor, Robert Scarth.



Figure 12: Eynhallow Church looking South (liturgical East). Interior shows evidence of multiple later use.

v) Recent history

It is almost certain that, although Eynhallow had been abandoned for human habitation, it continued to be exploited on a seasonal basis – for grazing sheep and collecting eggs, for example. Well within living memory, elderly residents on Mainland recall people from the parish of Evie, overlooking the Eynhallow Sound, crossing to the island to cut peats (Jenkins 2004). Certainly fishermen from Mainland and Rousay continued to fish off its shores.

In his description of Orkney published in 1883 (Tudor 1883), John Tudor talks of vandalism on Eynhallow and the *“remains of a chapel which, a gentlemen informed the writer, have since been wantonly thrown down by a yacht full of gorillas. It is somewhat rough on the gorilla...”*

In 1884 the Balfour family sold the island to a Ewan Cameron of Argyll. Ten years later his Trustees sold it at auction where it was bought by Thomas Middlemore. Middlemore was a bicycle manufacturer from the West Midlands who had fallen in love with Orkney. His wife was a friend of May Morris. Middlemore's favourite architect was WR Lethaby, a disciple of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Reliable tradition (Seatter 2004) says the pillows on the beds in the house of Melsetter on Hoy, designed for the Middlemores by Lethaby, contains eider down collected on Eynhallow. There are several references, in the Orkney Sites and Monuments Record, to a Report which Professor Lethaby delivered to Middlemore on 21 July 1897. This Report, we are told, "Is in the hands of the proprietor". Despite determined attempts to find it, not just by this author, but also by the Arts and Crafts scholar Dr Annette Carruthers of St Andrew's University (Carruthers 2004) and Dr Sally M Foster of Historic Scotland (Foster 2004), it is clear – and hugely frustrating - that this Report has now disappeared¹. However, the Middlemore papers make it clear that, following delivery of his Report, Lethaby was invited by Middlemore to tidy up the church remains.

Aside from Middlemore's interest in the history of the island, it seems the family used the island as a summer retreat, and for hunting birds and rabbits. A lodge was constructed of wood and corrugated and cast iron. It was thought Middlemore's favourite architect, William Lethaby, a disciple of the Arts and Crafts Movement, built the lodge in the closing years of the nineteenth century. However, it now seems more likely that it was built in 1912 by local craftsmen (see note on Orkney Archive Service No 8). The Lodge on Eynhallow still contains items of furniture designed by Lethaby - or under his instruction – and cushions and coverings with Morris fabrics, brought over from either Westness on Rousay or from Melsetter. This author has examined the inside of the lodge and

¹ Calder clearly saw Lethaby's Report when compiling the Royal Commission Survey. The fragments he quotes are tantalising. For example, describing the Church Lethaby says "In the nave we found the remains of a central hearth and I was told that a woman still alive remembered sewing in the loft over the chancel"

seen at first hand that the current owners are not maintaining those furnishings that remain in a satisfactory state. Other contents have been dispersed.

The Middlemores had no children, and, having presented the ruins to The Ministry of Works in 1911, gifted the island to Duncan J Robertson, their factor, and a great lover of the island, and particularly its bird life, which he described in his book “Notes from a Bird Sanctuary” (Robertson 1934). The island was then taken on by one of his daughters, Jean. Duncan J Robertson’s grandson married Rosemary Jenkins. In conversations with the author (Jenkins 2004) she described the family’s involvement with the island. In terms of the landscape, she recalls how Robertson built several of the dry stone walls in the area of the Lodge on the south east part of the island. He also, apparently, built three stone cairns for each of his three grandchildren but not, apparently, the most prominent Cairn of all, at Little Kyarl on the island’s north easterly corner.

The Robertson family sold the island to Orkney Island Council for £90,000 who now lease it to Aberdeen University who use the Lodge as the base for a range of ornithological studies, in particular the habits of the large number of Fulmars who breed on the island.

4. THE COGNITIVE LANDSCAPES OF EYNHALLOW

i) Introductory

AJP Taylor once famously wrote that The First World War was caused by railway timetables (Taylor 1963). To paraphrase Raymond Lamb (in Crawford 1998), much of the archaeology of Orkney has been driven by ferry timetables. And there is no ferry at all to Eynhallow. Visits by archaeologists, therefore, have often been fleeting – sometimes just a day, sometimes less. The annual visit by the Orkney Heritage Society lasts just two hours. The island has remained inaccessible in the twentieth century to all but the most determined. This inaccessibility has inspired a significant fictional literature and much folklore. These are as much part of the island's landscapes as the archaeology – indeed to most people, including Orcadians, they are more real than the actual landscape which, for most, will remain inaccessible. They therefore need to be considered as an important part of any Eynhallow discussion.

ii) The archaeologists' landscapes

Those who have studied Eynhallow over the last 150 years would not be flattered to learn that their work was to be bracketed in a section with literature and folklore. But the reality is that too many of those who have studied Eynhallow have brought their own agenda with them, and tried to force their interpretation of the archaeology of the island to fit that agenda. This whole fascinating process is described at length in Appendix A. However, all the agendas have been more or less exclusively concerned with the church remains, not with the broader landscape which is the basis of this study. Antiquaries and archaeologists alike have been concerned to make the landscape of Eynhallow fit with their interpretation of the Church, rather than seeing whether study of the landscape evidence might better inform that interpretation or even change it altogether.

The most comprehensive study of Eynhallow was published in 1923 by the self-taught Orcadian archaeologist John Mooney and later republished with revisions (Mooney 1949). Yet, for all its considerable value, Mooney's survey is remarkable for how much he missed. Apart from his excavation of the circular structure at Monkerness, there is no mention of the two mounds in the vicinity of

the church, no mention of the possible hut circle at Kyarl and no mention of the remarkable dykes which cross the island.

Features beyond the church had to wait for first the Royal Commission Survey (RCAHMS 1946) and then the work by Dr Raymond Lamb for the Orkney Sites and Monuments Record. But even the knowledgeable Dr Lamb has recently imported his own Pictish agenda.

iii) The landscapes of literature and folklore

The description by Jo Ben, quoted in Chapter 3, began the tradition of writing about Eynhallow as a land of mystery.

Jo Ben's assertions were repeated and embellished by Fea in 1775 (quoted in Llanerch 1994) *"In the island of Eynhallow it is well known that a Cat will not live. The experiment hath often been tried by putting these creatures ashore upon this island but they always died in convulsions in a very short time...Rats and mice it is asserted will not live there"*. One Orkney tradition says inhabitants of the neighbouring islands used to put spoil from Eynhallow under their thresholds to keep away vermin.

Literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has reinforced the view of Eynhallow as an island of mystery.

Perhaps the greatest Orcadian collector of folklore was Walter Traill Dennison. A Sanday farmer, Dennison was a complex character, a man who, for example, set up his own breakaway branch of the Free Church because the established Free Church was not protestant enough and yet who remained fascinated by folklore and myth (Thomson 2004). In one of his contributions to *The Scottish Antiquary* or "Northern Notes and Queries" (*The Scottish Antiquary* 1893) he outlines the story of "How Eynhallow, once Hildaland, was made holy". At the outset he states, *"I am not responsible for the etymology of the intelligent but wholly uneducated (Sanday) peasant who told me the tale"*. According to the story, the vanishing island was reclaimed from the mythical Finn Folk by three men who completed nine circuits of the island while spreading salt on the ground and

cutting nine crosses in the turf. It would be fascinating to think that here we have the survival in folklore of some medieval pilgrim's ritual. More likely Dennison was taken in by an Orkney yarn-spinner.

Recent research on folk stories (Hutton 2004) has shown how they very rarely extend beyond a very few generations, and are often invented to serve the needs of a society at a particular time. Tom Muir (Muir 2004) has suggested that vanishing islands play an important role in the folklore of northern Norway – but if the stories did reach Orkney through this route, it is just as likely to have happened via eighteenth century fishermen as by the survival of a Viking-age legend. GF Black (in Llanerch 2004) and Duncan J Robertson (in Gunn 1909) provide further evidence of the landscape of folklore.

In his children's novel, "Vandrad The Viking or The Feud And The Spell" published in 1898 (Storer Clouston 1898), J.Storer Clouston recounts how Vandrad, a warrior from Norway, becomes separated from his band of followers. In chapters entitled "The Holy Isle", "The Island Spell" and "Andreas the Hermit" he eventually ends up on Eynhallow and falls in love with Osla, daughter of Andreas, the island hermit.



Figure 13: An illustration from Vandrad the Viking. Crossing to Eynhallow

Finn Folk reappeared in 1935 when Eric Linklater published his short story “The Dancers” as part of his anthology “God likes them plain” (Linklater, 1935). In it, he writes *“Eynhallow became a Treasure Island, encircled by northern mists, and the sober citizens who read this strange story...felt creeping into their souls an Arctic fog of doubt, a cold hush of suspense, and a breath of icy wind from the waste seas of mystery”*.

Linklater knew better of course, and earlier in the tale had written, *“It (Eynhallow) is surrounded by unruly tides but to the fishermen who know them it is not difficult to land, provided the weather is calm”*.

George Mackay Brown, who died in 1996 also featured the “oyster gray”(sic) Eynhallow in several of his writings. One is quoted at the opening of this study, other examples are his poems “Eynhallow: Crofter and Monastery” (Mackay Brown 1976), “Runes from a Holy Island” (Mackay Brown 1971) and “The Storm” (Mackay Brown 1996).

More recently still, Thelma Nicol published her “Tales from Eynhallow” (Nicol 1992). Mrs Nicol is a descendant of the Louttits who are recorded as living on Eynhallow in the early censuses.

It is a cause for celebration, not regret, that Eynhallow should continue to inspire writings and folklore. But these writings can become an issue for those wishing to create an accurate popular perception of the physical landscape of the island aside from the cognitive interpretations. This year’s Orkney Science Festival in Kirkwall (Orkney Science Festival, 2004), heard a presentation from Ashley Cowan of the University of the Highlands and Islands in which he expounded the theory that the diamond patterns which decorate the sides of some of the Neolithic pottery from Skara Brae are in fact carefully crafted angles – of 37 degrees – recording Orkney’s latitude. This same angle is formed between the corner of the boundary wall surrounding Eynhallow Church and the probable site of the altar – which he claimed was a quite remarkable survival of folk knowledge.

Remarkable indeed, as the boundary wall was not constructed until the twentieth century, under the guidance of Ministry of Works architects from Edinburgh.



Figure 14 Eynhallow inspires works of art: this is a tapestry design by Orcadian Leila Thomson called “Eynhallow (Land of the Finn Men)”

5. OTHER SOURCES FOR THE LANDSCAPE HISTORIAN

i) Air Photographs

The National Monuments Record of Scotland in Edinburgh holds a small number of aerial photographs of Eynhallow. The series from the 1940s and 1987 show little – they are, for the most part, taken from too high an altitude. The most helpful picture is the vertical photograph taken by the Ordnance Survey on 27 May 1967 at a height of 7,500 feet. It is reproduced here as Figure 15.

On this picture the remains of the church and its associated buildings can be clearly made out. Immediately to the left of the monastery can be seen the start of what appears to be a circular wall, and the whole area appears to sit on an Oval of disturbed ground.

To the left of, and above the church complex can be seen a second oval, with Lower and Upper Barns lying respectively at its bottom and top. Traces of buildings can be seen on the shoreline above the monastery, as can the outlines of the large pond or lake. The quarter of the island which holds the monastery appears to be bounded by a rectangular shape. The marks within this area are consistent with the grass in this area having been taken for hay or silage or simply mown by the then Ministry of Works to enable better access to the church remains at the start of the summer season. Further buildings can be seen at the top right hand corner of the island, and stretching left along that particular piece of coastline.

The other particularly distinct man-made features that can be seen from the air are the great dykes to be found on the island. For ease of viewing, these have been transcribed onto a map of the island, Figure 16. One runs from midway along the coast of the island facing Rousay – at the top of the air photograph - and runs, in straight sections, in a great semicircular sweep, ending on the edge of the sea on the north westerly shore of the island – towards the bottom of the air photograph. The other forms a tighter semi-circle or demi-oval shape with the white dot of the

Edwardian Lodge sitting on its lower (westerly) edge. The dyke frames the westerly end of the valley which bisects the island.



Figure 15 : Ordnance Survey Air Photograph of 27 May 1967. Looking east across Eynhallow

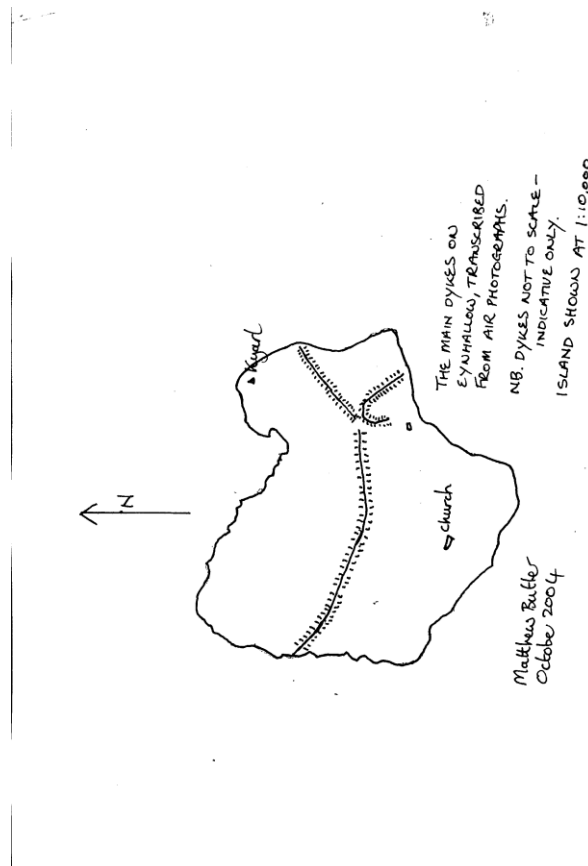


Figure 16: Rough plan of dykes on Eynhallow (rotated through 90 degrees to allow comparison with air photograph)



Figure 17: Wall crossing over Dyke near Grory. Demonstrating the Dykes are earlier in date than early modern walls.

Other marks visible on the air photograph, for example the square which appears to the left of centre, can probably be interpreted as remains of peat cutting.

A particularly clear, but undated oblique aerial photograph taken in 1995 provides a good close up view of the church buildings (Figure 10). In particular the curved wall to the north of the current boundary wall can be clearly seen. This wall is shown as straight on the Ordnance Survey maps which is visibly wrong.

ii) Maps

With a single exception, the maps of Eynhallow are disappointing for the landscape historian. A sketch map of 1845 of Rousay, Egilsay, Wyre and Eynhallow is attributed to GW Traill, the then laird (Orkney Archives Number 7), but only shows Eynhallow in outline with no names or topographical details given.

The early Ordnance Survey Maps reveal little. As the island was uninhabited there was never a 25" map published. The second edition 6" Map of 1903 records the easterly section of the main dyke which bisects the island, showing it as a wall. It also shows the northeasterly corner of the second, semi-circular shaped dyke, again as a wall. An "Old Pier" is marked to the east of the island's most southerly point.

There is, however, one remarkable survival. Mooney (Mooney 1949) records that, on the 26 September 1911 he and a Danish philologist Jakob Jakobsen sat down with David Mainland "an intelligent old mariner" and one of the last inhabitants of Eynhallow. He is recorded in the censuses of 1841 and 1851. Mainland gave Jakobsen and Mooney a verbal list of all the place names he could recall as being in daily use when he was a boy. Jakobsen then transcribed these names onto a map. The original of this map has been lost. However, a copy exists in the Orkney County Archives (Orkney Archives No 8) and an even clearer copy is in the possession of Mrs Jenkins, Duncan J Robertson's granddaughter. This is reproduced as Figure 18. Jakobsen was not as good at the accurate plotting of the names as he was at recording them in the first place. For example, he plots

West House, Mid-House, South House and The Old Monastery as separate buildings. In fact, they were all part of one complex. A strong and credible local tradition says that in 1851 four families were living in the converted church and its associated buildings. Other names, such as Monkerness, he missed off altogether. So the map is more useful for the names it records rather than, by and large, for their location. But more recent maps have not necessarily got every detail right. For example, the latest Ordnance Survey Maps put the area known as “Grange” at the north end of the valley which crosses the island. Jakobsen’s map puts it at the south end which, as will be seen, makes more sense.

The two most interesting features of Jakobsen’s map are, firstly what Mainland called the Old Dyke, shown running across the island, which we have also noted on the air photograph. It is of significant consequence for the landscape history of Eynhallow that even in the time of Mainland’s childhood, the 1820s and 1830s, it was known as “Old Dyke”. Secondly, the area to the south of the church which Mainland called MaKrigar – which sounds almost Gaelic – and which Mainland said was a graveyard. By this he must have meant an old graveyard, for the residents of Eynhallow were buried in the Church in Skail, across the Sound on Rousay. Mainland/Jakobsen also record the Old Pier, just north of the headland of Sheep’s Skerry.



The Eynhallow name itself has already been discussed (page 19). All of the names recorded on Jakobsen's map, and other names recorded by the Ordnance Survey are of course of interest. Several in particular are worth noting.

- Quoys of the Banks is tautology, and perhaps Jakobsen misunderstood Mainland. Quoy is the Orcadian word for a bank. In any event, this equates with the location of the large lake or pond.

- Lower Stackilly and Upper Stackilly presumably is the name of the large area of better quality land around the church and its outbuildings. Stakkr is Old Norse for pillar, and presumably refers to the standing stone on the shoreline south of the Church.
- Bing Well at the southern end of the valley, and Kelda Murray at the North End. Mooney (Mooney 1949) discusses this name – Kelda is the Old Norse for well. Murray may relate to Mary, but is more likely a poor spelling of the Norse word for muddy. This would certainly match with the terrain in that part of the island.
- The name Grange, of course, has close associations with monastic farms. It is most un-Orkadian. The only other Grange names in Orkney are the Grange of Greenwall in Ham Parish on Orkney Mainland which is referred to in the Rental of 1492 by when it belonged to the Earl (Thomson 2004), and the Grange at Skennisgorn on Rousay listed by Marwick (1947). Perhaps, by the fifteenth century, the Grange name had become locally corrupted, simply to mean a large outlying farm.
- The Pittons of Grange name is a mystery. Firstly for its meaning and, secondly, because there is no building anywhere near the house (?) which Jakobsen drew on his map.
- Hyllia Harbour, on the northwest corner of the island could either be from Old Norse hellir, a cave, or hella, a flat rock. It can hardly have been a harbour.
- Monkerness, finally, Moody placed on the east coast of Eynhallow, near the point where Old Dyke reaches the coast. Monk's headland would be a possible meaning.

6. TWO EYNHALLOW LANDSCAPES SURVEYED

Time and tides allowed for detailed landscape survey of two parts of Eynhallow. The east coast of the island, around Mooney's "Monkerness", and the area round the church and its associated buildings.

A) The East Coast



Figure 19: The East Coast of Eynhallow, from Rousay

i) **Scope of survey.** The area surveyed was from the Cairn at Kyarl (GR HY365294) to the southern end of the most northerly of the abandoned buildings north of Grory (GR HY356292). There were three Control Points. The first shown as A on the plan (Figure 19), was located 1m in from the northwest corner of the roofless stone hut shown on the OS Map at GR HY366293, and at a distance of 263m from the Cairn at Kyarl. The second was where the dyke ends and a short stretch of wall runs down to the low cliff above the sea. This was 84m from Control Point A and exactly 200m from the Kyarl Cairn. It is shown as Control Point B on the plan. The third was in the middle of what will be

interpreted below as a hut circle, 97m from the Cairn at Kyarl and 111m from

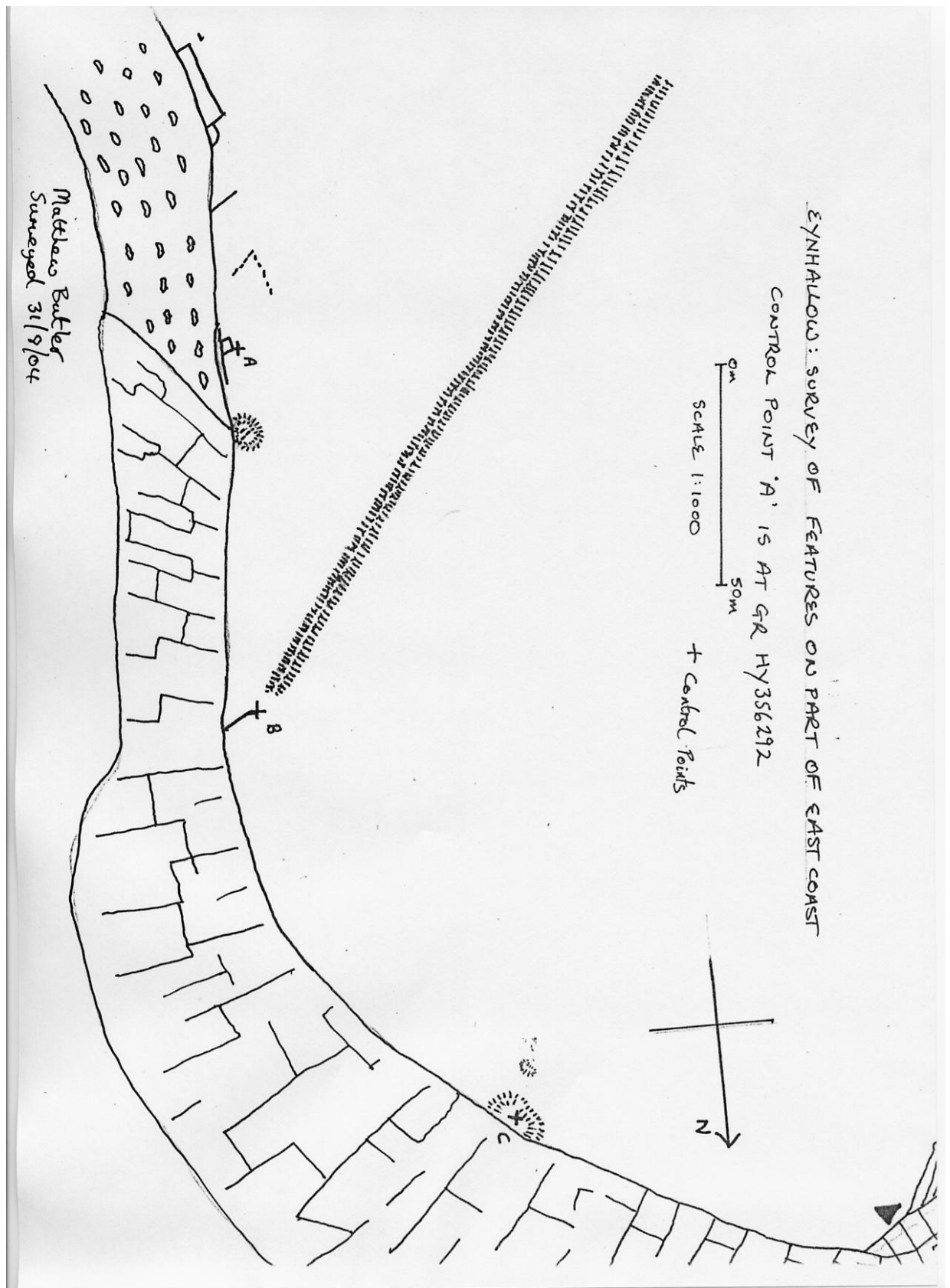


Figure 20: Survey of Earthworks and Standing Remains on part of Eynhallow's East Coast

Control Point B. This is shown as Control Point C on the Plan. A more detailed survey was undertaken of the Hut Circle at Control Point C and a separate plan produced (Appendix B, page 63). The land near the coastline south east of the feature interpreted as a dyke is rough pastureland, but, climbing the hill away from the coast, this quickly degenerates into moorland. Northwest of the dyke is all moorland.

- ii) **Findings.** Proceeding northerly along the coast. The abandoned building is around 18m long and 5m wide. It was, originally, probably slightly wider, but much of the easterly wall has fallen onto the rocks below. There is a semicircular projection along the northerly side of the building, roughly 4m long by 3m across. The whole is built of rough sandstone boulders, presumably collected from the beach below and the walls stand approximately 1m high. A slab of flagstone is visible in the hillside to the south west of the building. 18m along the coast is a short and degraded stretch of wall, of similar construction to the ruined building described above.

Some 20m south of Control Point A traces of a wall can be detected, constructed of upright flagstones, the wall heads away from the coast and then makes a turn at an angle of approximately 75 degrees. It can be followed for a further 12m before it disappears (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Early stone wall of upright slabs on Eynhallow's east coast

The stone hut by Control Point A is 4m square and survives to roof height, approx 2.5m, there is a doorway on the western side, and walls extend from its easterly corners a short distance along the shoreline. Hut and wall are constructed of small pieces of well-worked freestone.

22m further along the shore lies the feature referred to in the SMNR as “Mooney’s Hut”(Figure 11). It is a circular feature, approximately 8m across with the part on the coastline badly eroded. The walls seem to be constructed of boulders covered with a thin layer of turf. The most striking features are three upright flagstones in the centre of the structure.

The Dyke, which begins 2-3m southwest of Point B, has an indistinct starting point. The structure may well continue in a straight line to the edge of the coast. On the plan, the Dyke is shown up to the skyline looking from the coast although, as we have seen, it continues across to the

west coast of Eynhallow and bisects the island. The sides stretch out roughly 2m either side of the apex of the bank which ranges from 0.5 – 1m in height(Figure 22). It seems to have an inner core of stones. At a point 36m from Point B a rectangular piece of worked sandstone was found, roughly 0.6m in length and of a 0.2m square section (Figure 23). One end was tapered. It is assumed this once stood upright and has fallen over.



Figure 22: Part of the Dyke leading up from the East coast of Eynhallow



Figure 23: The stone marker found lying in the Dyke some 36m from the coast

The feature at Control Point C is a circular bank, rising as much as 1m in some places, a more pronounced feature than “Mooney’s Hut” but more degraded, and the eastern part has disappeared over the cliff. A detailed plan of this structure and of its crescent shaped neighbour are in Appendix B (and a photograph at Figure 24). The whole feature is some 14m across at its widest point and rises to 1m high in places. The bank has worn away on the southwest side to give the impression of an entrance. The banks appear to be made of stone, and are covered with a thick layer of turf. Close to the point where the bank has fallen into the sea on the northern side are two upright freestone slabs in the inner wall of the bank. Some 12m to the southwest of this feature lie traces of a mound, about 6m in total length and rising to a maximum height of around 0.5m. The mound now appears crescent shaped, but whether this form is man made or because of erosion is hard to tell. The entrance from the nearby circular earthwork almost faces the crescent mound, but whether this is to enable easy access, or simply because – if it is an entrance – it was placed on the side of the structure furthest from the cliff edge is impossible to say.



Figure 24: The Hut Circle near Kyarl, looking NE. Note upright slabs in side.

Finally, beyond the cairn at Kyarl, Lamb and others have claimed to see evidence of walls emerging from the cliff onto the raised beach which lies beyond the cairn – which is modern. The present author did not survey these as, frankly, doing so would have been beyond his current competence!

iii) Discussion. This landscape shows several periods of human involvement with Eynhallow. The earliest period is likely to be represented by the walls in the cliff to the north of the Kyarl cairn. These lie beneath the present ground level, whereas all the other features are, to a greater or lesser extent, above it. The location on the cliff, position of the remains beneath the current peat, and the proximity to the stalled cairn at Midhowe might even suggest a Neolithic date.

The two circular works, “Mooney’s Hut” and that at Control Point C, seem most likely to be prehistoric hut circles from a later period – possibly the

Iron Age or Pictish periods. Mooney of course argued that his hut excavation had revealed a Celtic Beehive Cell. This is unlikely to be the case: an early Christian Cell, if it was like others to be found in Ireland and Scotland – such as that at Eileach an Naíomh in the Garvellach Islands in Argyll – would show evidence of flat stones corbelled to a dome or point (Foster 1996). These stones would, of course, have very likely been “robbed out” to be used as building material by later exploiters of the Eynhallow landscape, but what is left shows no evidence being constructed in such a manner, nor did Mooney’s excavation reveal anything. Moreover, interpretation as a Beehive Cell does not explain the upright slabs in the middle of the Cairn which may be the remains of some sort of tank for fish or shellfish, or some sort of hearth. The crescent shaped mound is an enigma. It may be part of a further hut circle, but if so two thirds of the circuit of its wall has been thoroughly destroyed. Moreover, the land immediately around it, particularly to the northwest, is very marshy indeed. It may be some sort of midden. The wall of upright stone slabs at the southern end of the area surveyed seems to bear no relation, either in its method of construction or alignment with the buildings around it. It is therefore suggested that this may also be of prehistoric date.

The next structure, in terms of chronology, is probably the great Dyke, starting on the shoreline near Control Point B and striding off up the hillside. This Dyke continues and bisects the island, emerging on the northwesterly cliffs at the point called “Geo of the Dyke End”. As will be seen in the discussion of the second landscape examined, it is very different in size and scale from later dykes to be found on the island. Further evidence for its early date comes from study of the similar Dyke, discussed in Chapter 5 above, which encloses the south end of the valley on Eynhallow. There, a later wall, of similar construction to those associated with the ruined buildings surveyed along the east shore and discussed below, clearly mounts the dyke and goes over the top of it, demonstrating that the dyke is earlier (Figure 17).

Returning to the eastern shore survey, the next phase is probably represented by the ruined building at the southern end of the area. This seems to be a ruined barn or dwelling. A similar building lies further to the south beyond the area of the survey. The semi-circular construction at the north end of this building may be interpreted as half of a kiln used to dry corn. The other half has collapsed onto the shoreline below. A larger, complete, example can be seen across the Sound as part of one of the Skaill farm buildings at Westness on Rousay. The wall to the north of the barn or dwelling is of similar construction (large unworked sandstone boulders, presumably from the shoreline) and so is presumably of the same date. Its wall also follows the same alignment as the north wall of the building. It is impossible to say on present evidence how old these buildings are. We may, however, reasonably speculate that they might have been abandoned as the kelp industry collapsed in the 1830s. The roofless Hut and its associated walls at Control Point A seem to be the latest structures in this area. The building is made of well-worked sandstone and is probably Victorian. The final feature is the slab set in the face of the slope above ruined barn or dwelling and noted by Lamb. It is impossible to say what this may be without further work, but it may be a remaining part of a further early wall constructed of upright slabs.

- iv) **Conclusion.** The landscape on the eastern shore of Eynhallow shows evidence of being exploited by man at several stages, from the prehistoric to the nineteenth century. Two caveats need to be added. The first is that none of the surviving structures is enough, on its own, to argue a case for permanent habitation – all the buildings could just as easily have been used on a seasonal basis, linked, perhaps, to the arrival of particular shoals of fish, or collecting eggs from birds nests, or the production of kelp. In the case of the early structures, the island could have been used as a place of refuge. Secondly, while there is an abundance of building material available just yards away from all these structures on the shoreline, it is highly probable that visible stone would have been removed from earlier structures by incomers and re-used – hence, for example, very little remains of the early field boundary south of Control Point A.

B) The Area of the Church and its associated structures



Figure 25: Looking South across Upper and Lower Barns

- i) **Area of survey.** The second landscape survey was undertaken on the south-west facing slope of Eynhallow from a Control Point 74m from the north easterly corner of the modern wall which encloses the Church, and 222m from the standing stone which stands some 15m from the edge of the stone-strewn shoreline. The approximate grid reference is HY359288. Figure 1 shows a view of this landscape from Mainland. The Church and its associated buildings have been thoroughly surveyed in the past (RCAHMS 1946) and there was little point in surveying them again.
- ii) **Key Findings.** Working up the hill, in a northerly direction from the shoreline, the first feature is the standing stone (Figure 7), a worked piece of sandstone supported by a number of stones wedged around its base. It stands about 1.7m in height and is roughly square in section with a sloping top. Some 53m north of the stone is a mound, approximately 2m in height, roughly circular, and about 5m in diameter. There is no sign of a ditch around its base. It seems to be constructed of stone and is covered by a layer of turf. Due west of the church at a distance of some 70m from the

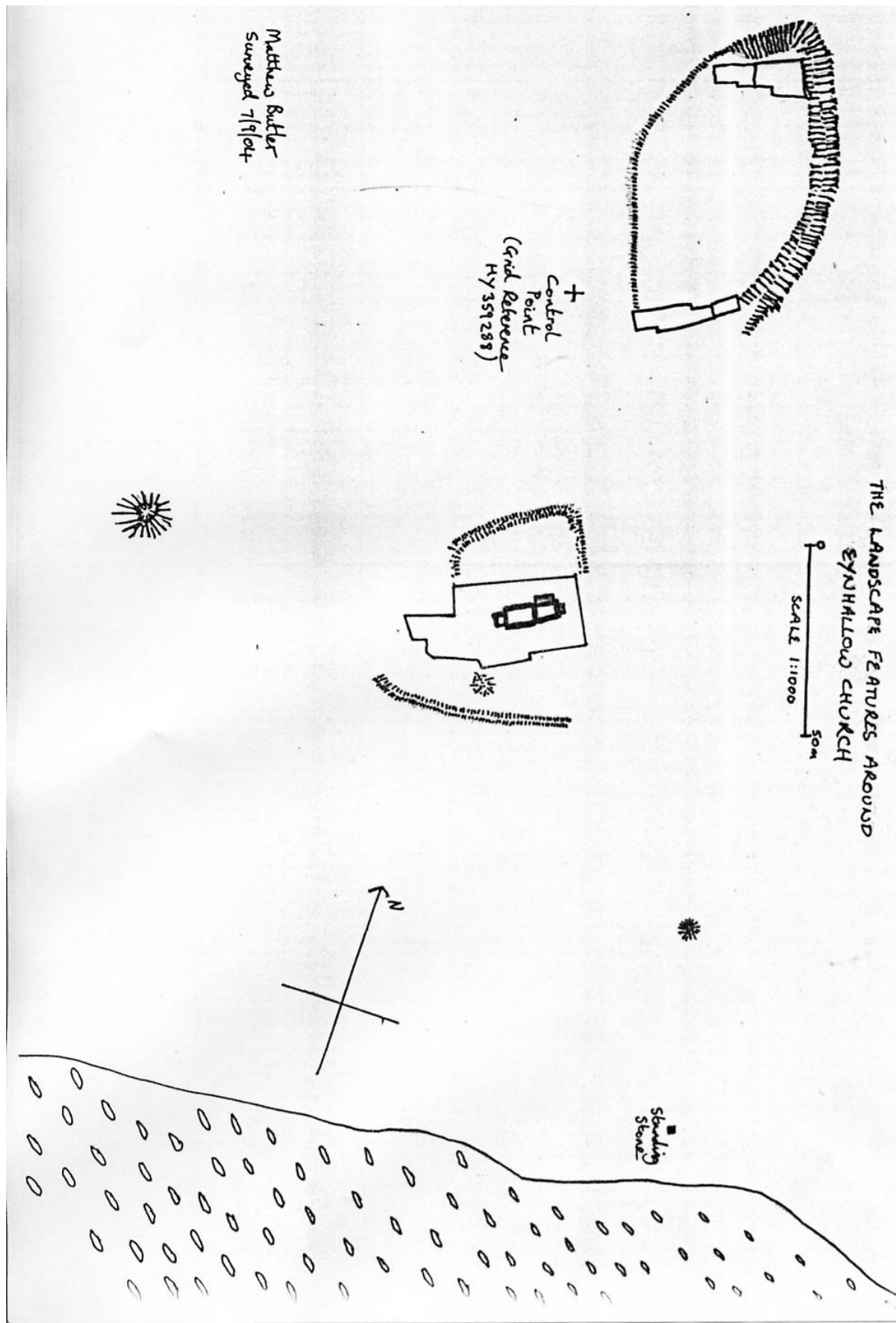


Figure 26: Plan of Landscape features and buildings out with curtilage of Eynhallow Church

wall enclosing the church buildings is a second mound, rising to a height of some 1.5m and some 12m across at its widest point. It is more indistinct in shape but certainly seems to include stony material, now covered by a layer of turf.

In the area south of the church, and immediately outside the boundary wall is a pile of stones. To the south of this are slight traces of an embankment, no more than 0.5m high, gently curving, but turning more sharply at the westerly end. This feature was picked up in the Royal Commission survey of the church (RCAHMS, 1946) where it is wrongly shown as a straight feature. North of the Church, and much overgrown by nettles and long grass is a collapsed wall, standing on a bank, at least on its northerly side. This bank again curves gently. It is suggested that the wall post-dates the bank, that it was built upon it, and that its easterly and westerly extensions were built to form an enclosure against the boundary of the church area. (It is important to stress the curve in the bank as, on the Ordnance Survey Maps, it is shown as an angular feature).

70m north of the church stand the remains of Lower Barns, and 60m further north are Upper Barns. Particularly striking are the way in which the barns stand within an oval enclosure (Figure 27). This enclosure is some 80m long by 50m across at its widest point. On its west side, it is formed by a bank some 0.5m high with very faint traces of an outer ditch in places. The bank starts at the northwesterly corner of Lower Barns, and ends in the area of the northwesterly corner of Upper Barns. To the rear (north) of Upper Barns the ditch becomes particularly pronounced – there is a slope of at least 1.5m leading down to the back of Upper Barns. Then, along the east side, there is an inner bank and a well-defined ditch – the whole about 6-7m across. The bank runs into the corner of Lower Barns, at which point the ditch becomes indistinct



Figure 27: The oval embankment between Lower and Upper Barns, looking E

- iii) Features out with the area of survey.** South east of the church buildings some 220m away, back from the shoreline, are remains of a ruined dwelling next to a large, partly walled off marshy area some 40-50m across – this looks as though it could have been a salt water lake or pond. North and west of the church buildings, and clearly visible on the air photograph of May 1967 (Figure 15) are a series of low embankments, intersecting at times and, to the west, also marked by rows of stone in places. On the ground, these banks are visible but too indistinct to be surveyed at a worthwhile scale. Their overall effect however, is to give the impression of the church and surrounding buildings being enclosed in a large rectangular field.
- iv) Discussion.** This is a fascinating landscape. The southwesterly slope contains the best pastureland on Eynhallow. We also know from the Census material (Marwick 1993) and Mainland's Map (Orkney Archives No 8) that this was the area which contained permanent human habitation up to 1851. It is, therefore, likely to have suffered the most disturbance,

particularly if, as seems likely, the ground was at some stage used for growing crops. The area to the south of the church is where Mainland claimed there had been a graveyard. But no traces now remain.

The standing stone is not like any other prehistoric standing stone in Orkney, and the SMR is therefore correct to say it is not ancient. The SMR may be wrong, however, to say that it is “not old”. The stone could have been placed there to help drag up boats from the shore – although if it is “not old” it seems most likely that boats would have been dragged up in the area of the Old Quay to the east. Perhaps it was a marker for visitors to the church. It is also worth considering its relation to the mound which stands behind it. At Eileach an Naiomh, on the Hebrides, a natural standing stone stands in front of the surviving early Christian Beehive Cell – perhaps as a sign to mariners. The mound which the SMR describes as a clearance heap may be a much earlier structure and will repay further archaeological examination – perhaps full excavation. It would be strange to have a clearance heap in – effectively – the middle of the field. The mound to the west of the church buildings is more indistinct and may indeed, as the SMR suggests, be some sort of midden, related either to the church or to the later settlement.

The mound of stones to the south of the church enclosure wall is entirely consistent with the site having been cleared – either by Lethaby for the Middlemores, or later on by The Ministry of Works.

There is an oval enclosure to the north of the church buildings around Upper and Lower Barns. The two banks north and south of the church buildings, allied to the evidence from all the air photographs of the church area of a large, roughly oval shaped area of disturbed ground enclosing the area of the church and its outbuildings, strongly suggest a second oval enclosure. These enclosures may be all that remains of an early medieval feature predating the present church building, whose earliest standing remains are likely to be of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These sorts of enclosures are closely associated with early Christian sites – they are as

often oval as circular. Other Scottish examples of oval enclosures surrounding pre-Norse Christian sites include Ardwall Island in Dumfries and Galloway, Applecross in Wester Ross and Sgor Nam Ban-Naomha on Canna (all plans in Thomas 1971) and possibly Eileach an-Naiomh, although the enclosure there may be defined more by the layout of the land (Foster 1996).

- v) **Conclusion** The landscape around the Church is unlikely to be fully understood without further landscape survey, principally geophysics, and then the careful use of invasive techniques such as excavation. However, there is enough in the area to strongly suggest that the extant buildings stand on the site of earlier works, and several of the landscape features are consistent with this being an early Christian site. This now needs to be set in its broader landscape context, and the later structures explained.

7. THE EYNHALLOW LANDSCAPE REASSESSED

i) General

Eynhallow shows clear evidence of exploitation by man from prehistoric times to the modern era. The decision to clear the island in 1851 and its subsequent uses for grazing, as a shooting estate, and, more recently, as a bird sanctuary meant it escaped the “improvement” that took place on many Orkney agricultural landscapes in the nineteenth century. As Rendall has demonstrated on Papa Westray (Rendall 2002), agricultural improvement came late to Orkney, not until the nineteenth century, and Eynhallow avoided nearly all its consequences. Landscape features, while not abundant, are therefore well preserved.

ii) Resources and accessibility

Eynhallow has a range of resources that have made it attractive for exploitation: seals, fish, birds (and their eggs and feathers); seaweed and kelp; and agricultural land that, while marginal, has certainly been exploited over the centuries. There are times when weather and tide make the island inaccessible. However, the fact that people only come to the island irregularly in the twenty first century does not mean that this was the case in the past. In the late prehistoric and Pictish eras, for example, Eynhallow was in the middle of a particularly busy landscape on both Mainland and Rousay. More recently, the fact it was worth building a jetty on the island as shown on the early Ordnance Maps and Mainland’s Map indicate frequent contacts with its neighbours. The regular Post-Boat from Mainland used to land at Hullion on Rousay, presumably following an earlier route that would have made Eynhallow a more straightforward stopover.

iii) Seasonal habitation or permanent?

Eynhallow has not been permanently inhabited since 1851. In the past 150 years the times when people have lived on the island have been determined by the weather and the seasons: the weather for those coming to the island to live in the Lodge and enjoy the island for recreation; the seasons for those putting sheep on the island, or coming to study the birdlife. While there was

permanent habitation in the decades leading up to 1851, there is no reason to think this has always been the case. The prehistoric settlements may have been permanent, or they may represent groups coming across – probably from Rousay, given their location – to exploit resources on a seasonal basis. The crude boulder-built houses on the eastern shore may represent later seasonal exploitation, linked to Orkney's kelp industry in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Given the lack of written records for much of the Eynhallow's history, it is likely that for considerable periods in its history, and certainly at certain seasons, it was deserted.

iv) Early remains

The walls emerging from the cliffs at Kyarl, which the SMR identifies as a prehistoric settlement, the two hut circles surveyed as part of the East Shore landscape, and the possible remains of early field walls all demand further investigation. A broader landscape survey should be undertaken over the whole island to determine what more may remain from the earliest periods. Investigations of the Kyarl area, including the more northerly hut circle, are priorities as erosion eats away at Eynhallow's coastline. Given the way in which building materials were constantly re-used over the centuries throughout Orkney, and that a good site for a building in the prehistoric period may also have been a good site in later eras, it is perfectly possible that some later structures, such as the houses at Grory on the Eastern Point of the island lie on top of early dwellings.

v) Was there an Early Christian site on Eynhallow?

Sufficient evidence has now been assembled to strongly suggest the presence of an early Christian site on Eynhallow. This evidence includes: the place name, Eynhallow, indicating a site that was viewed as holy by the Norse when Orkneyinga Saga was composed in the twelfth century, but with a form of name that pre-dates Scandinavian nomenclature; the oval enclosures between Upper and Lower Barns and the traces of both an outer enclosure and an oval shaped area of disturbed ground around the church and its outbuildings which are consistent with other early monastic sites; and the location of Eynhallow which would have offered both the remoteness craved by the early monks, and

the opportunity to evangelise the busy landscapes on either side of Eynhallow Sound*. The life of the sixth century Irish St Ailbe has been interpreted as referring to the Northern Isles (Thomson 1987). Early Christian sites, presumably established by Irish or Scottish monks from religious communities in Ireland or from major Scottish sites such as Iona, extend up to Scotland's west coast and islands, with St Ronan's Oratory at North Rona within striking distance of Orkney (Nisbet, 1960). A spindle whorl from Buckquoy at Birsay carries Irish ogham with a Christian inscription (Ritchie and Downes 2003). At least one – albeit late – Saint's Life (St Findan) shows links between Orkney and Irish Christians (Omand 2003) continued well into the Norse period. Further investigation is needed to test this model. This might include geophysical survey of the area around the church, test pits in the area between the church and shoreline (where Mainland told Jakobsen there had been a cemetery), and excavation of the mound above the shore. If there are early Christian remains near the coast of Eynhallow, this is where they are likely to be found, rather than at Mooney's Hut.

vi) What happened to the Early Christian Site?

It is possible that this early Christian establishment was destroyed by the first Vikings in the eighth or early ninth century, or was abandoned for some other unknown reason. *Historia Norwegie*, written between 1150 and 1200, records that Harald Fairhair, coming to Orkney in the ninth century “totally destroyed” the Pentes and the Papes (*Historie Norwegie*, 2003 edn). Anna Ritchie (Ritchie and Downes, 2003) has suggested the destruction of Orkney by the Pictish King Bridei recorded in *The Annals of Ulster* for 681 may have been a more seismic action than has commonly been allowed. She notes the relative poverty of many of the eighth century sites on Orkney – including the settlement on Birsay.

* Shetland historian Brian Smith has recently argued (Smith, 2004), that the mass of late iron age material on either side of Eynhallow Sound strongly suggests it was the political centre of a late iron age/Pictish community which may have extended over much of Orkney. Eynhallow therefore have been an excellent site for a missionary establishment, perhaps at the invitation of one of the local leaders`

vi) Was there a later monastery on Eynhallow?

It is generally agreed that the church and the surrounding buildings show evidence of at least two periods of building, one in the eleventh or twelfth century, and the other of, perhaps, the early fourteenth century. The latter period involved the use of some worked freestone which must have come from off the island. Present consensus says the buildings are probably monastic – the evidence in support of this theory includes the references in Orkneyinga Saga, the complex of buildings attaching to the church, and the absence of any other theory to explain such a large site on such a small island. In fact, none of these arguments holds up: there is nothing in Orkneyinga Saga to support the view that Eynhallow was a monastery; there are no other medieval or early modern references to a monastery – particularly significant is Jo Ben's failure in the sixteenth century to mention even a church on Eynhallow when he is quite specific about other Orkney churches - and the layout of the buildings bears no relation to any sort of monastic plan. It simply will not do to say that in such a remote location a traditional monastic plan would not have been appropriate. The remarkable thing about the Monastic Orders in the middle ages is how conventional plans *were* followed, even in remote places with Iona, perhaps, as the best example, although the more northerly houses of Ardchattan in Argyll, Beaulieu in Sutherland and Pluscarden in Morayshire also illustrate the point. The Eynhallow Church is not even aligned E-W in a position where the ground would actually allow this. In the absence of a remarkable discovery, the one avenue open to those seeking to prove the medieval monastic theory is to see there is anything in the history or records of Norwegian Monasticism that would support the existence of a daughter house in Orkney. All that remains to be explained is Mooney's Monkerness place-name on the east coast. We only have Mooney's word for it that this was one of the names provided by Mainland to Jakobsen (and Jakobsen did not think it worth jotting down the name on his later map). If the name is genuine, then it may be some sort of reference to the Celtic foundation, or may mean something else altogether, or be a later invention.

vii) Can the Eynhallow landscape help us understand what the church and its buildings were for?

The key to unlocking the secret of the church and surrounding buildings may lie in the Grange place-name, identified by Mainland and still on the modern Ordnance Map. We know that, at the close of the Middle Ages, Eynhallow belonged to the Bishop of Orkney. It is therefore likely that, through the medieval period, the Bishops were using Eynhallow as a working estate – perhaps for commodities such as sealskins, fish, and birds and their eggs – as well as a place of retreat. The large lake or pond at the island’s southern end may, perhaps, stand interpretation as a pool for storing fish until they could be transferred off the island. Visiting clergy and officials would have needed somewhere to stay and to worship; the (presumably) lay officials administering the estate would also have needed accommodation. The scale of building may also be explained that at the time of construction, the Bishop wished to establish his power as at least equal if not superior to some of the Norse Earls on neighbouring islands: when the tower of the Wirk had been erected at Skaill on Rousay, and Kolbein Hruga had built his stone castle on Wyre, with a large chapel nearby, it was clearly time for the Bishop to re-assert his own authority by constructing a striking new church.

It seems likely that the two dykes on the island may also date from the period when the island was part of the Bishop’s Estate. We know that, in the 1820s, the large Dyke bisecting the island was known as “The Old Dyke”, and earlier Charters such as that of 1700 (Orkney Archive Service, No 6) refer to grants of “half the island of Eynhallow” – what other such striking physical boundaries could there have been? It is impossible to determine the exact purpose of these Dykes – the longest was perhaps to divide the cultivated farmland from rough pasture. The other semi-circular enclosure may be an area where Eynhallow’s produce was held before being transported off the island. This enclosure also contains a well (figure 28). It is significant that today, when there are no man-

made quays or harbours on the island, boatmen choose to land the visitor on the small beach surrounded by this embankment – a natural landing place. Only more detailed archaeological research will disclose whether the dykes on Eynhallow might even be examples of Orkney's prehistoric treb-dykes.



Figure 28: Where Eynhallow's Dykes cross the central valley they may also have acted as dams. Perhaps these were for mills or, as Lamb has suggested in a conversation with the author (Lamb 2004) possibly represent workings related to the production of flax.

ix) A landscape needing further research

There are still many questions about Eynhallow. Some may be answered by further archaeological research which has been suggested above. Others will remain: why, for example, are there no brochs on Eynhallow when the landscapes around are crowded with them? Perhaps, even at that time, the island had some sacred purpose, or was a neutral meeting ground between the broch builders across the channels on either side. The Church buildings themselves also need revisiting: how much of what stands is down to the historically correct reconstruction of Lethaby; what of the architectural fragments lying outside the building, with their parallels at Skaill and Westness on Rousay; and what of the architectural features of the church, which stand

comparison with tenth and eleventh century churches on the Scottish Mainland?

It will be argued, no doubt, that the various suggestions made here have simply added another layer of interpretation to those which already exist. But at least these views attempt to be consistent with *all* the various forms of evidence that are available, and take into account the *whole* landscape of Eynhallow, rather than a small part of it, *and* the island's relationship to the landscapes which surround it. While Eynhallow will no doubt remain an inspiration to artists, storytellers – and archaeologists - it is only by taking the broadest objective view that the true history and significance of its landscapes will ever be better understood. Its value is not in doubt.



Figure 29: A well in the valley at approx GR HY364292 is covered with large slabs and is one of many archaeological features on Eynhallow requiring further research

APPENDIX A – “ARCHAEOLOGISTS ON EYNHALLOW” OR “IMPOSING COGNITIVE LANDSCAPES”

It was the unroofing of the cottages following the clearance of 1851 that enabled the church to be identified once again. In 1866 the antiquarian Sir Henry Dryden paid his third visit to Orkney during which he visited Eynhallow. He produced a series of sketches and watercolours of the Church and the buildings which surround it (National Monuments Record of Scotland, Number 8). These drawings are important, not just as the first representations of the structure, but also because they show how little subsequent restorations – by Lethaby and then the consolidation by the Ministry of Works – altered the core structure of the church and its key architectural features.

In 1885 Muir published his “Ecclesiological Notes on some of the Islands of Scotland” (Muir 1885) in which he briefly described Eynhallow. He confirmed the building to be a church, but concluded that the island as a whole “has nothing very worthwhile to exhibit”

In 1906, Dietrichson and Meyer published their “*Monumenta Orcadia Christiana*” (Dietrichson and Meyer 1906). Norway had recently gained its independence from Sweden, and Dietrichson and Meyer were sponsored by the newly crowned King to visit those areas that had been under Norwegian influence before the country had become subordinate to Sweden and publish the examples of historic buildings that demonstrated the scale of Norwegian influence. The King got what he wanted. When they came to Eynhallow, the pair convinced themselves they were looking at the remains of a Cistercian monastery, perhaps a daughter house of the monasteries of Lyse or Hovedoen in Norway. In their book, Dietrichson and Meyer contorted the church and the buildings around it into the plan of a Cistercian Abbey. The bizarre outcome is shown as Figure 29. Meyer later revised his opinion and argued that Eynhallow was a Benedictine house in a private letter (Mooney 1949).

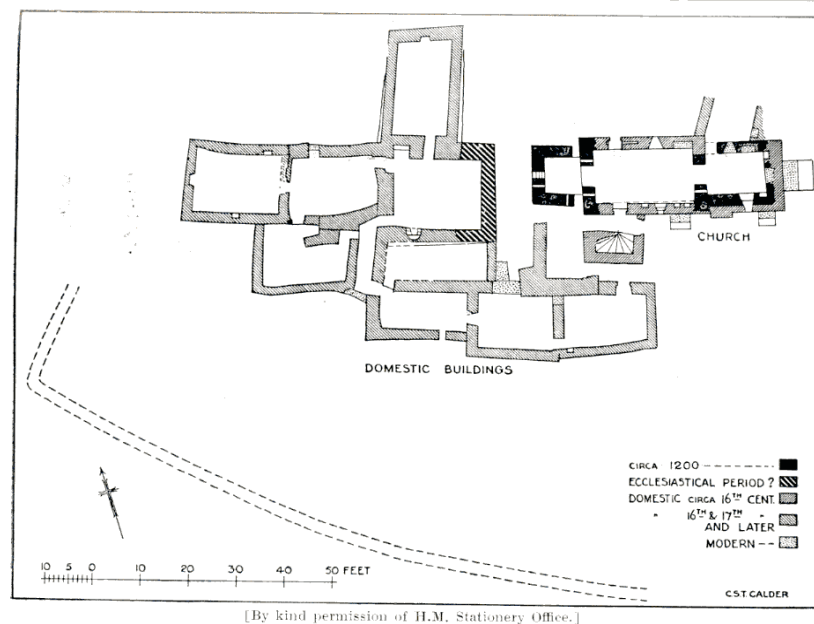
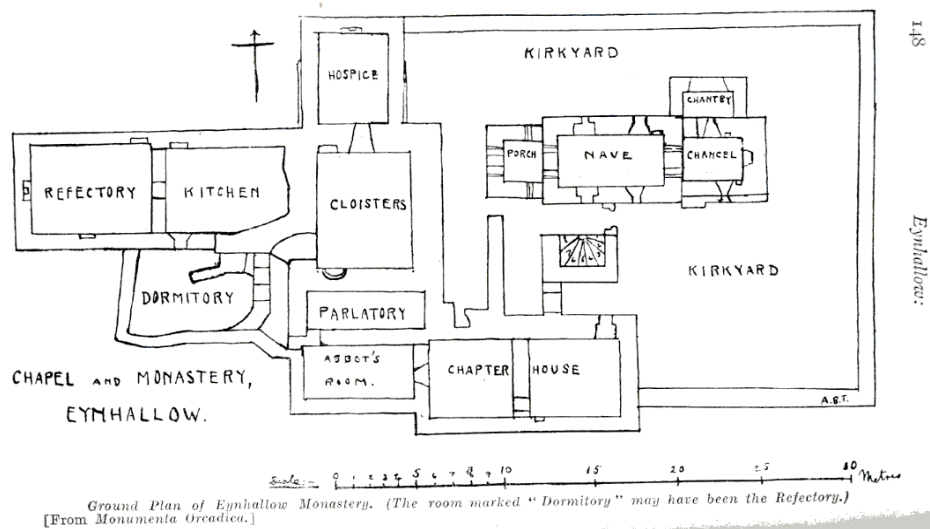


Figure 30: Dietrichson and Meyer's Plan of the Cistercian Abbey on Eynhallow (above). The Royal Commission Plan of 1946 (below). Both taken from Mooney, 1949.

In 1923 the self-taught Orcadian archaeologist John Mooney published his book "Eynhallow: The Holy Isle of the Orkneys". A revised edition appeared in 1949 with new appendices (Mooney 1949). Mooney's 188 pages are a key study for

the student of Eynhallow. Yet today the work is most remarkable for two of its many aspects. The first is how much Mooney missed. There is no mention of the two mounds in the area of the Church; there is no mention of the possible hut circle near the cairn at Kyarl; there is no mention of the remarkable dykes which cross the island.

Secondly, Mooney had made up his mind that he was looking at a monastery, and believed that other archaeological features on the island were, more likely than not, going to be the remains of structures related to the monastery in some way. He also interpreted the documentary sources, such as the 1175 Melrose Chronicle entry, in such a way as to support his theory. Hence the circular building he excavated along the shoreline known as Monkerness became the Cell of a monk from the Celtic monastery which he believed had preceded the medieval foundation. Why? Because Mooney was desperate that Orkney should not be seen as some northerly backwater, but should be able to demonstrate links with the British cultural mainstream.

A lively correspondence followed the publication of Mooney's work. There were private letters to Mooney, letters published in *The Orcadian* (the weekly newspaper of Orkney). Finally, following representations he received after the publication of the second edition in 1949, Mooney was forced to concede that Eynhallow was not, after all Cistercian. In a letter of 1950 to Hugh Marwick (Mooney 1950) he writes as if describing a bereavement concluding that the evidence *"of course deprives Eynhallow...and indeed Orkney of the honour of having had such an order in our Northern islands"*

It is regrettable that the otherwise excellent Orkney section in the new Cambridge History of Scandinavia (Stefannson 2003) should repeat the canard that Eynhallow is a Cistercian monastery.

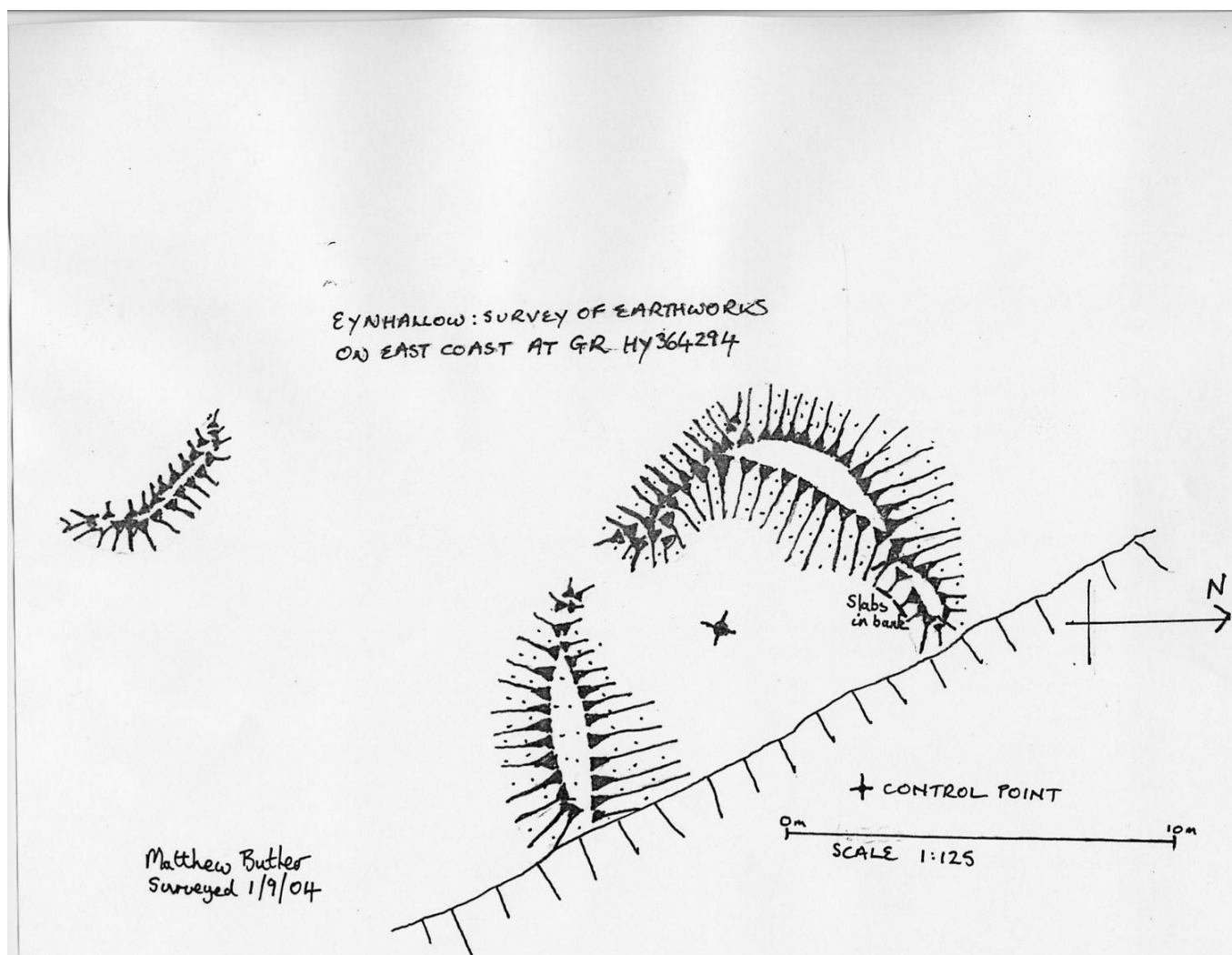
In 1934 Charles ST Calder visited Eynhallow as a member of the Royal Commission's Volumes on Orkney and Shetland, whose publication was to be delayed until after the Second World War (RCAHMS 1946). He described the church, drew the first decent plan of its buildings, noted the views of Dietrichson,

Meyer and Mooney, and then sat on the fence. “The whole question” he wrote “is thus very difficult. The contribution which the literary authorities have to make towards its solution is but small”. However, in addition to “Mooney’s Hut” he did at least note the two mounds in the region of the church, claiming one to be a cairn and the other a kitchen midden.

The most significant post-war work on Eynhallow has been undertaken by Dr Raymond Lamb, during his time as County Archaeologist of Orkney. The entries in the SMR described in Chapter 2 are almost entirely down to him. He sees parallels between the building complex around the church at Eynhallow and the Norse ecclesiastical site at Hvalsey in Greenland. However, his successor as County Archaeologist, Julie Gibson, has visited both sites and believes they are very different in both scale and plan (Gibson 2004).

Lamb’s recent work has focussed on trying to establish Pictish influence in Orkney (see, for example his essay in Crawford 1998). He argues that it may have been a Pictish mission which Christianised Orkney. Such a theory might clearly have implications for our interpretation of Eynhallow. This is not the place to analyse his arguments in detail, save to say that perhaps we are seeing again the emergence of the archaeologist’s cognitive landscape. Just as, in the first half of the last century Scotland was keen to be seen as part of the British mainstream, so in the century’s last decades there was much talk of Scotland’s distinctive cultural identity – and hence a great re-emergence of interest in the Picts. As Carola Hicks has written (Henny 1997) “Perceptions of the Picts from antiquity to the present day have frequently reflected our views about ourselves and contemporary society, just as much as the processes of historical research”. Much the same could have been written about archaeologists’ perceptions of Eynhallow itself.

**APPENDIX B – PLAN OF HUT ON EAST COAST OF
EYNHALLOW AT GR HY 364294**



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