

**Archaeological Monitoring**

**of**

**Annual pre-Season Sweep**

**on**

***Sceilg Mhichíl, Co. Kerry***

**2024.**

***Ministerial Consent C001189***

***Works No. W00530***

***Licence No. E005547***



**Archaeological Projects Ltd.**  
archaeological consultants & contractors - since 1989

*Alan R. Hayden -  
April 2024*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This report describes the results of the first archaeological monitoring of the annual pre-season sweep on Sceilg Michíl, Co. Kerry, which was undertaken over four days from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024.*

*Health and safety restrictions imposed limitations on the scope of the archaeological monitoring. The archaeological features that might survive in some of the areas impacted are not known and have not yet been surveyed or recorded. As a result, the impact the sweep had upon them is not known. However, nothing definitely identifiable as of archaeological or historical interest was disturbed or impacted by the works.*

### **THE SITE**

#### ***Introduction***

The island of *Sceilg Mhichíl* lies 11.6km off Bolus Head, the westernmost tip of the Iveragh Peninsula, Co. Kerry (SMR: KE 104A-001; National Grid Reference 024812 060654). The island, which is approximately 21.9 hectares in area, is owned by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage on behalf of the Irish people, with the exception of the lower lighthouse station, the helipad and its adjacent store, which are owned by the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL). *Sceilg Mhichíl* is a National Monument in state ownership, the preservation of which is a matter of national importance by reason of its historical, architectural, artistic or archaeological interest.

The entire island was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1996 in recognition of the outstanding universal significance of its cultural landscape and the importance of its protection to the highest international standards.

On present evidence the monastery on *Sceilg Mhichíl* was founded in the seventh century and was occupied at least seasonably up to the twelfth or thirteenth century. After this permanent or semi-permanent occupation was abandoned, the monastery remained an important, largely summer, pilgrimage site until the end of the eighteenth century. (Bourke, Hayden & Lynch 2011).

The monastery also remained in the hands of the Augustinian monks based on the mainland at Ballinskelligs until 1578, when as a result of the Desmond Rebellion, Queen Elizabeth I dissolved certain monasteries that were under the protection of the earl of Desmond and the *Sceilg* islands thus passed into secular hands and eventually to the Butler family (*ibid.*).

In the 1820 the Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port of Dublin (also known as the Ballast Board, who were the predecessors of the Commissioners of Irish Lights) purchased *Sceilg Mhichíl* from James Butler of Waterville for the purpose of erecting two lighthouses and their associated domestic quarters etc. The two lighthouses came into operation in 1826, the Upper Lighthouse was closed down in 1870 but the Lower Station was continuously manned until it was automated in 1987.

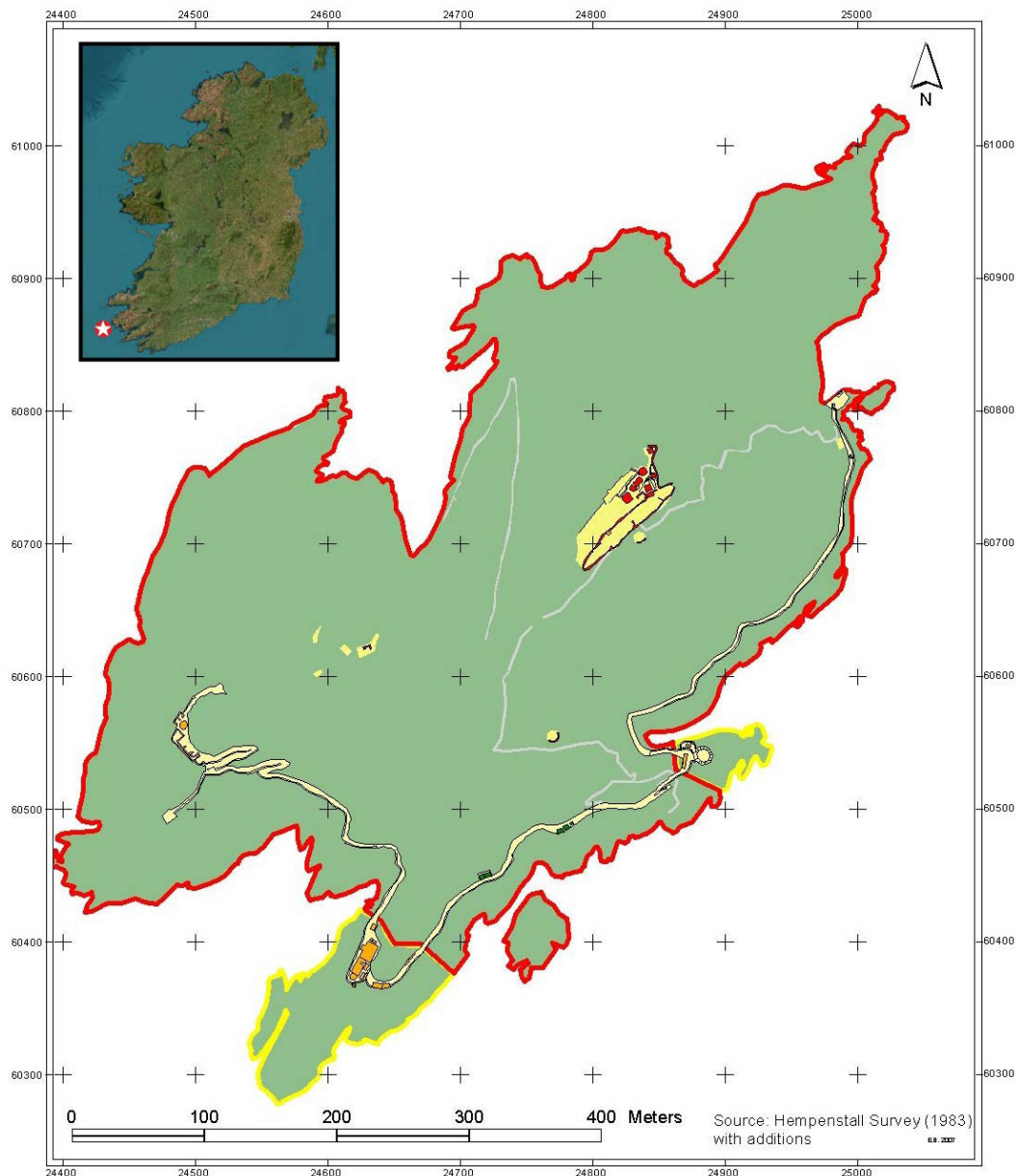


Fig. 1. Location and layout of Sceilg Mhichíl (after UNESCO).

### ***The Archaeology and History of the Monastic-Period Structures on Sceilg Mhichíl***

The archaeological and conservation works undertaken by the Dúchas / Office of Public Works (OPW) / the National Monuments Service (NMS) on *Sceilg Mhichíl* between 1986 and 2010 were described in Bourke, Hayden & Lynch (2011). Works were undertaken in the monastery, on the North, East and South Steps to the monastery and on the South Peak. Exploratory visits and surveys of other areas, such as the Northeast Steps and Southeast landing, were also described. The finds uncovered, the environmental and other samples taken and the early history of the site were also described and discussed.

The SMR / RMP maintained by the NMS for *Sceilg Mhichíl* is hopelessly out of date; for the monastic-period structures and does not appear to have been updated since 1996. For example, it fails to list any of the new material uncovered by the works in the monastery or on the South Peak from the mid 1990s to 2010

### ***The Archaeology of the Lighthouse Occupation of the Island***

Between 1821 and 1826 the builders of the lighthouses on the rock lived in and used the monastery for storage and religious services and altered it and the access steps to it to suit their purposes. The keepers and their families also continued to use the monastery for religious services after the lighthouses came into operation in 1826 (Bourke, Hayden & Lynch 2011). Our research (see below) has also revealed that the OPW initially appointed each successive Principal Keeper (PK) of the Lower Lighthouse Station as guardian of the monastery after it took over responsibility for the monastic remains in the 1880s. CIL masons, workmen and the keepers themselves several times undertook repairs or rebuilds in the monastery for the OPW.

Some of the OPW / NMS archaeological excavations in the monastery from 1986 to 2003, on South Peak from 2004 to 2010 and surveying and recording elsewhere on the island during this time, uncovered or identified other lighthouse-era built structures and deposits - see the various reports in Bourke, Hayden & Lynch (2011).

After the completion of archaeological works on the South Peak in 2010 the NMS / OPW began work on conservation of the lighthouse-period structures on the island from 2011 to 2015 under the supervision of archaeologists from the NMS. Unfortunately, no archaeological reports were compiled and submitted for the works undertaken during these years. However, we do have some information on some of the works undertaken. In 2011 the NMS undertook the excavation of the large lighthouse-era terrace beside the Wailing Woman ledge, which was in urgent need of conservation. The work, directed by Martin Reid, uncovered a building and nineteenth-century finds but unfortunately, thirteen years later, apart from a brief description on *excavations.ie* no proper report has yet been compiled on these excavations. A brief report by the architect on works undertaken three years later in 2014 mentions that a large part of the wall of the lower lighthouse roadway between the Lower Lighthouse and Cross Cove was scaffolded, repaired and conserved and a drain beneath the roadway north of Cross Cove was excavated and repaired (Rourke 2015). These works were reportedly monitored by an archaeologist, presumably from the NMS, but again no archaeological report appears to have been compiled on them.

From 2016 we again have reports on the archaeological works undertaken on the rock in this and subsequent years.

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken of minor repairs after rockfalls and to facilitate the construction of additional lengths of protective canopy on the Lower Lighthouse Roadway below Cross Cove (Hayden 2016 & 2106a). Larger-scale excavation and conservation work was also undertaken from 2017 to 2020 on the Upper Lighthouse Roadway (Hayden 2017; 2018; 2019 & 2020) and in subsequent years extensive excavation works were undertaken in the Upper Lighthouse station itself (Hayden 2021; 2022; 2023 & 2023a).

In 2022 the writer also undertook assessment and monitoring of work associated with the construction of an 80-metre long extension of the canopy on the Lower Lighthouse Roadway, the construction of three, all-metal crash decks on the Lower and Upper Lighthouse roadways and to facilitate other minor interventions on the lighthouse roadway and in the Lower Lighthouse Station (Hayden 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2022d; 2022e & 2022f).

The SMR / RMP maintained by the NMS for *Sceilg Mhichíl* fails entirely to list or describe any of the lighthouse-era structures or features on the island. For some unknown reason, the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) also did not include *Sceilg Mhichíl* within its remit. However, the writer has privately fully recorded and compiled a description of all the lighthouse structures and features on *Sceilg Mhichíl* and in addition has

undertaken extensive research on the lighthouse occupation of the island. However, as noted below, none of the results of this work are yet in the public domain.

### ***The History of the Lighthouse Occupation of the Island***

Following from and in conjunction with the archaeological excavations of the lighthouse structures on *Sceilg Mhichíl*, the writer, assisted by Megan Willingham since 2021, has undertaken extensive and in-depth research on the structures, features and history of the lighthouses on *Sceilg Mhichíl*. This has included the recording of all the lighthouse-era structures on *Sceilg Mhichíl* and the recording and analyses of the 470 items (so far uncovered) of lighthouse-era graffiti surviving there - many of the CIL individuals evidenced by it are not recorded elsewhere as having been on *Sceilg Mhichíl*. We have also conducted interviews with former Skelligs Rock lighthouse keepers, painters, tradesmen, masons, carpenters, labourers and boatmen and with locals, lifeboatmen, keepers' relatives, lighthouse enthusiasts and researchers who had contact with, or knowledge of the lighthouses on *Sceilg Mhichíl*. In addition we have thoroughly researched the material surviving in the NLI, PRO, NMM, IAA and have worked with the previous and current archivists of the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) on the material contained in their archives. We have also consulted all published and online material- including census data, births, deaths and marriages, the very extensive newspaper archives and British and World lighthouse archives, which has yielded a most significant quantity of information.

Our researches in Kerry also led to the discovery of over 20 volumes of original Skelligs Rock lighthouse documentation, all of which were previously unknown and several of which are now in our possession. Apart from this material, all the once extensive records dating from the 1820s onwards maintained in the Skellig lighthouse were sadly all burnt on *Sceilg Mhichíl* in the late 1960s (Richard Foran *pers. comm.*). And, aside from the three volumes we found from the CIL shore dwellings in Knightstown, the rest of the records from there have also disappeared too. Most, if not all, of the duplicates of all these records, which would have been sent quarterly by the PK from the lighthouses and Shore Dwellings to Dublin, also appear to have been burnt at the Baily Lighthouse in the late 1990s (Shay O'Farrell *pers. comm.*), along with those from all the other Irish lighthouses. This means that the surviving Kerry documents we have found or which are in our possession are of considerable importance. They are unique survivors and they include much detail and information which simply does not survive anywhere else.

The volumes we have in our possession include the very last, and only, surviving daily logbook from the Skelligs Rock Lighthouses. It contains the sign off by the final keeper on watch on the day the keepers left the rock for the last time, when the lighthouse was automated in 1987.

Our research has also shed a great deal of light on the history and development of the Skelligs Rock lighthouses and their associated structures and is vital to any interpretation or understanding of the surviving lighthouse structures on *Sceilg Mhichíl*, including those which we have excavated. It also have much to tell us about incidents and accidents and the lives and deaths of the keepers, their families, children and relatives who lived with them on the rock until 1901 and in the shore dwellings in Valentia from 1901 to 1963, and about the visitors to the rock and the keepers, workmen, masons, carpenters, fitters, electricians, painters, seamen, inspectors, boatmen etc. who worked on *Sceilg Mhichíl* until the lighthouse was automated in 1987. We also have developed an ever-expanding referenced list of over 600 persons whom we know worked or lived on the rock in connection with the lighthouses and

in addition we have built an extensive bibliography for the lighthouse-period occupation of *Sceilg*.

However, our research has not to date received any state funding or assistance and so remains outside the public domain. As a result, the best history of the lighthouse occupation of the rock can be given here is that which appears on the CIL website (<https://www.irishlights.ie/tourism/our-lighthouses/skelligs-rock.aspx>)(M. Costello undated). Although brief, it contains the most detailed account of the history of the site that is currently publicly accessible<sup>1</sup>. It appears largely to have been composed by Michael Costello, a former CIL inspector. His account was only ever meant to be a short summary and he never intended it to be definitive. Unfortunately, like Wilson's and Long's earlier accounts, it is also unreferenced, sometimes inconsistent, and is missing of lot of the surviving evidence, including much relating to important episodes and occurrences in the history of the site. It also contains little information about the large number of men, women and children who worked, lived or died on the on the rock and in the shore station on Valentia Island.

### ***A brief history of the lighthouse occupation of the island, abridged from CIL website***

Early in 1818 Maurice Fitzgerald, Knight of Kerry, wrote to the Board of the Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port of Dublin reminding them that over twenty years previously the Grand Jury of the County of Kerry had looked for a lighthouse to be built on Bray Head, Valentia Island, which had been agreed but work was suspended until the opinion of Trinity House was sought. Fitzgerald also informed the Board of the loss of two merchant ships in Dingle and Ballinskelligs Bays both for the want of a light between Loop Head and Cape Clear Island. The Corporation informed Fitzgerald that the subject would be looked into.

Eighteen months later, the Inspector of Works and Inspector of Lighthouses, George Halpin (senior), made a report to the Board, in which he recommended Great Skellig rock instead of Bray Head as the best position for two lighthouses<sup>2</sup>. His reason for two lights was to avoid confusion with the fixed light at Loop Head to the north and the flashing light on Cape Clear Island to the south. The Board agreed and Trinity House was informed. They queried the size of Great Skellig but sanctioned the project in November 1820. The Board then approached Mr. J. Butler of Waterville, Co. Kerry seeking the terms on which he would lease Great Skellig Rock forever. He replied the following month stating that he would require a rent of £30 per annum for the 986 years left on his own lease. He hoped that it was not too extravagant as theretofore both he and his fathers had been paid a rent of 16 to 18 stone of puffin feathers, which would rear 100 sheep in summer and 50 in winter. He also mentioned he was prepared to leave the valuation to any fair person. By March the Board agreed to pay £30 per annum but would prefer the purchase of the rock. The Law Agent meanwhile had been checking up on Butler and was not satisfied with his powers to sell or lease the island and in May recommended an inquisition, which was held in Tralee in July where a value of £780 was placed on the rock. This amount was paid into the Butler estate in November 1821.

Construction work on the rock appears to have started in August 1821. The buildings, rock cutting and roadways were designed by George Halpin who was inspector of Lighthouses from 1810 until his death in 1854. The works were carried out under his direction by workmen of the Board, probably also using local contractors. Unfortunately, few details survive of the construction of the lighthouse and approach road

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson (1968) and Long (1993) gave shorter published versions of the history of the Skelligs Rock lighthouses.

<sup>2</sup> Halpin's reports survive in the Public Record office.

During the five and a half years of construction, Inspector Halpin made three brief reports and in each he emphasised the difficulties with which he had to contend. By April 1823, the roads were being cut and prepared. By March 1824 work had not yet started on building the stations but by late January 1826 the Lower Lighthouse was built and ready to receive its lantern but work had not commenced on the Upper Station. Halpin expressed hope that the conditions in the spring to autumn would be favourable so that the lights could be exhibited before winter set in. By August the lights were almost complete and the Ballast Board ordered the Inspector to issue a Notice to Mariners stating the lights would be exhibited on Monday 4th December 1826. The cost of the whole operation was £45,721:5s 10d and finishing work went on for the best part of another year.

Two incidences are recorded in the Board's minutes from the period. The first occurred in December 1821 when Mr. Hill's sloop John Francis was burnt off Portmagee whilst conveying materials to the rock. Hill looked for compensation but the Board declined to pay. The other was more serious and happened on the 16th November 1825 when one of the labourers Peter Cane<sup>3</sup> was killed during a rock blasting operation. His wife submitted a petition the following February pointing out her distress, so the Board awarded her a pension of £6 per annum and £3 for each of her children by her husband under the age of sixteen.

The lights were fixed, first order catoptric, each using Argand oil lamps and parabolic reflectors. The upper light was 372 feet (121.3m) above high water and could be seen at a distance of 25 miles (40.2km) in clear weather, the lower light was 175 feet (53.3m) above high water and could be seen for 18 miles (29km). Each tower was approximately 48 feet (14.6m) overall height and they were 745 feet (227m) apart. The tower and dwellings were painted white.

During the winter of 1845-46 rape seed oil was tried by the Service and found to be better than sperm oil. It was generally introduced and by 1849 the two Skellig lights benefited from the change.

Wooden divisions were added to one or two bedrooms in 1862 to give more privacy for the younger members of the families. The website does not specify to which Station this refers.

In April 1865, the Principal Keeper (PK) of the upper station complained that he had been cruelly beaten up by the PK of the lower station. They were summoned by the Board and the 'lower' PK, who had a drink problem, was dismissed.

When Inishtearaght, the most westerly island of the Blaskets, 22 miles (35.4km) north of Skellig rocks, was established on 1st May 1870, the upper light of Skellig was discontinued.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of 1889, the parish priest of Caherciveen claimed, in the interest of the Roman Catholic Church, that the Keepers who since 1880 had been appointed caretakers by the Board of Works of the national monuments on Great Skellig, should be of faith and desired that the present Protestant keepers should be replaced. The Board ordered that the reverend gentleman be informed that they cannot accede to his request but assured him every care is being taken of the monuments.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In fact his name was Peter Keane (which would be pronounced "Cane" in Kerry). His widow Mary was still receiving a pension until at least 1859. We have interviewed Chris Keane, the great, great, great, grandson of Peter who lives in Caherciveen and who works on the tourist boats to *Sceilg Mhichil* during the summer!

<sup>4</sup> There is clear evidence that there were also other reasons why the Upper Lighthouse went out of use.

<sup>5</sup> We have found evidence of the Skelligs Rock PKs being made 'Curators' of the monastery and of works undertaken by CIL in the monastery on behalf of the OPW.

A minute was read to the Board on 3rd April 1869 from W. Callaghan, PK of the lower station requesting removal to another station stating he had buried two of his children on the rock and another was lying ill. It was noted by the Inspector but the request was not immediately carried out. St Michael's Church holds the graves of the two children, Patrick, aged 2 who died in December 1868 and William, aged 4 who died in March 1869.

A block of eight shore dwellings for the Keepers and families of Skellig and Inishtearaght were built at Knightstown, Valentia Island, at the turn of the century by Mr W.H. Jones of Dunmanway for £7,570. The Keepers took up residence in 1901 and both Skellig and Inishtearaght became relieving from Valentia Harbour.<sup>6</sup> Times change, Keepers preferred, quite naturally, to live in their own homes and the Knightstown dwellings were sold in 1964.

A proposal by the Engineer, Mr C.W. Scott in 1904 to build a new and more powerful light on the projecting spur of rock below and to the west of the disused Upper Station (where the fog signal stands today) got as far as a detailed survey being made during the summer of 1905. It was discussed with new lighthouse works (1906-07) at conference level in London but the end result, after Captains Brederic (Board of Trade), Clare, and Blake (Trinity House) had visited Great Skellig in July 1906, was a decision to improve the light in the existing tower and establish an explosive fog signal on the western spur.

In April 1907 Trinity House and the Board of Trade sanctioned a triple flashing third order light and an explosive fog signal 3 quick reports every 10 minutes. Chance Brothers of Birmingham supplied the optic and pedestal and David Brown of Leeds the rotation machine. The new 120,000 candelas light, using a vapourised paraffin incandescent burner was established on 22nd December 1909 with a character of 3 quick flashes every 10 seconds.

The pitched roof of the lower house was replaced with a flat concrete roof in c.1910.<sup>7</sup>

An automatic fog signal was established on 13th June 1914, but difficulties were experienced so it was temporarily discontinued in July, checked both on the rock and at sea and was re-established by 9th December. On the Inspecting Committee's recommendation in 1919, the automatic fog signal machinery was removed and the signal operated manually. The character was altered to one report every six minutes from 1st June 1934 and from 1940 until 1948 the signal was discontinued.<sup>8</sup>

Two severe rock slides, between the lower station and the fog signal, occurred in November 1953 and were sufficient to cause a Notice to Mariners to be issued stating the signal would be out of action until further notice. Consideration was given and the sanction obtained for a fog signal firing house on the balcony of the tower but the Inspecting Committee on Tour in 1959, realising that there had been no requests from mariners for the re-establishment of the fog signal, recommended that it should be discontinued. By August 1960 a Notice to Mariners stated that the fog signal was permanently discontinued.

For their help in rescuing two boatloads of survivors from the SS Marina early in November 1916, the three keepers were awarded £1 each from the Board of Trade and one guinea each from the owners of the Marina. During the 1939-45 war, an aircraft crashed,

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<sup>6</sup> We have found part of the log of the Skelligs Rock section of these dwellings and letter books and demands for stores which shed a lot of light on what the keepers did in the dwellings. The log also contains details of the date and timing of reliefs and who came and went to and from the lighthouse.

<sup>7</sup> The date of this alteration remains unproved. There is also no mention here of the extensive alterations made to the Lower Lighthouse station in 1924 for which detailed accounts survive. These alterations were required due to the damage done by two storms in early 1923.

<sup>8</sup> There is clear evidence of a quite different history of the use and eventual ending of operation of the fog signal on *Sceilg Mhichil*. There is also no mention here of the devastating storms in 1942 and of 27<sup>th</sup> November 1951 which had a profound influence on the lighthouse.



exploded and fell in flames into the sea off the north side of the rock on 27th February 1944. A search by Keepers and a British aircraft found neither survivors nor wreckage.<sup>9</sup>

The 1962 Inspecting Committee on Tour recommended the modernisation of Skellig lower lighthouse. This also entailed replacing the hand operated derrick crane at Cross Cove by a diesel driven derrick; a complete overhaul of the dwellings for both tradesmen and Keepers including electric light, central heating, bathroom and WC and an office for the Principal Keeper, increased storage capacity for diesel fuel oil and fresh water; demolishing the 1826 tower and the 1924 connecting corridor to the dwelling and building a new tower and adjoining engine room. The 1909 Chance Brothers optic and pedestal was retained and converted to electric with a 3KW 100V lamp replacing the vapourised paraffin mantles and driven by a ¼ h.p. (185W) electric motor. A temporary light was mounted and exhibited from the spur of rock close to the old tower from 24th May 1966 until the 1,800,000 candelas light came into operation on the 25th May 1967. The 40-foot (12.2m) tower and dwellings are painted white. The whole operation took just over two years and the cost almost £49,000. The Engineer-in-Chief, Mr A.D.H. Martin, was responsible for the design of the tower and engine room and also for the modernisation of the dwellings.

Fortnightly reliefs by helicopter took over from the Service Steamer out of Castletownbere in November 1969 and a reinforced concrete landing pad was built on the rock near the diesel derrick at Cross Cove.<sup>10</sup>

One of the recommendations of the 1978 Inspecting Committee on Tour was that the Development Committee gave consideration to the unmanning and automating of Fastnet and Skelligs after 1982. This they did in March 1981 and both the Engineer-in-Chief, Mr N.D. Clotworthy, and the Inspector and Marine Superintendent, Captain H.N. Greenlee, in their reports agreed that automation was possible but were conscious of security and vandalism. Work went ahead from 1985 with new generating sets, 1 kW metal arc lamps for the optic, remote control and monitoring link via Knockgour to Castletownbere Helicopter Base and Irish Lights Office and of course, security fencing and gates strategically placed to prevent trespassing. Keepers were withdrawn and the station became automated on 22nd April 1987.

Two Keepers lost their lives on Great Skellig<sup>11</sup>. The first was Michael Wishart who was one of the Keepers removed from Tuskar in 1821 for his indirect involvement in a smuggling episode; he fell to his death at Skelligs whilst, according to Commissioner Robert Callwell but not in the Board's minutes, cutting grass for his cow. The second was more recent when Seamus Rohu was reported missing on 22nd August 1956; his comrades and others searched the rock and the Valentia lifeboat and the Service Steamer Valonia searched the sea in vain.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the advent of the radio telephone the Keepers relied on semaphore signalling, with a pair of long handled bats, to Bull Rock 16 miles (25.5km) away. The signaller positioned himself in front of a large whitewashed patch of vertical rock or wall and a keeper on Bull Rock

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<sup>9</sup> Again there is more evidence of ships being torpedoed in World Wars I and II off *Sceilg Mhichil* and of persons rescued by the keepers and of plane crashes on and round *Sceilg Mhichil* during World WAR II

<sup>10</sup> Our research has uncovered evidence of much earlier experiments with using helicopters to relive Skelligs Rock lighthouse. We also have the full set of the actual blueprints used on *Sceilg Mhichil* for the construction of the helipad.

<sup>11</sup> We have found evidence of another half dozen children who also died on *Sceilg Mhichil* and of a Skellig Principal Keeper who was allegedly murdered on Valentia Island in the 1940s!

<sup>12</sup> We have found Seamus Rohu's name carved on the rock but we also have uncovered documents containing his last signature while he was in the shore dwellings and his final ever signature survives in one of the logs from the Rock, which is in our possession, from the very day he died.

read the message through a telescope and he in turn would semaphore to shore via Durseys Island.<sup>13</sup>

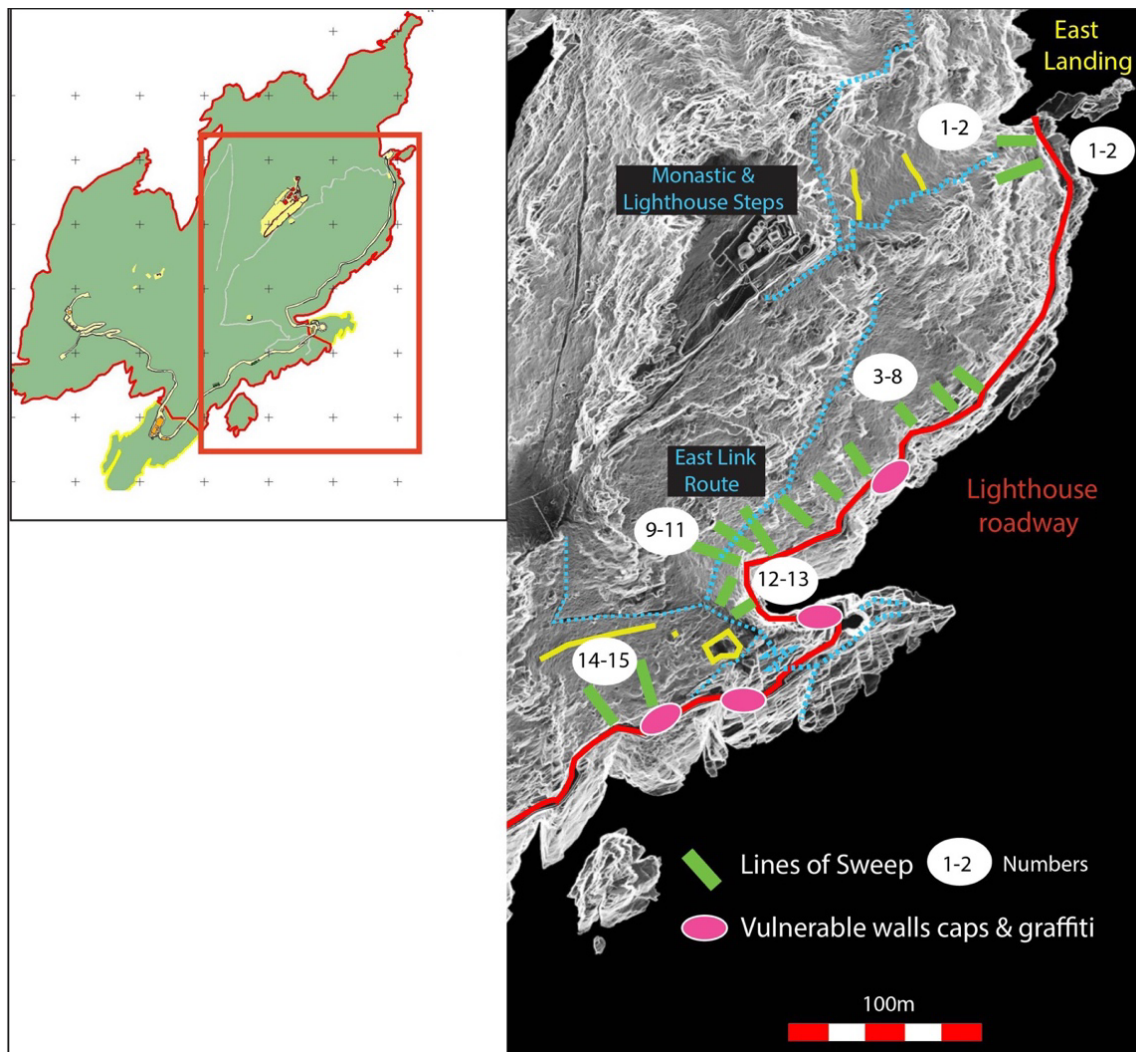


Fig. 2. The lines of the sweep undertaken and the known archaeological features in the vicinity.

## THE SWEEP

Each year before the OPW guides and visitors come out to Skellig a sweep is made of the ground above the Lower Lighthouse Roadway and sometimes also of that above the Upper Lighthouse Roadway. The sweep is designed to identify and remove any loose material which could potentially fall and injure persons using the roadways which in the case of the Lower Lighthouse Roadway is part of the route tourists use to reach the monastery. The 2024 sweep consisted of fifteen transects above the East Landing and the Lower Lighthouse Roadway (fig. 2). Each was examined for loose material, which was either secured or pushed downhill over the cliff. The work was undertaken over a four-day period from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024. The persons undertaking the sweep were rope access experts who undertook the work by rope on the steep slopes above the lower lighthouse roadway.

<sup>13</sup> We actually have evidence of several locations used on *Sceilg Mhichil* for semaphore communication with Bull Rock and also of locations used for Morse communications with Inishtearaght lighthouse.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF THE SWEEP

### ***Introduction***

This appears to be the first time that any of the sweeps on *Sceilg Mhichíl* have been archaeologically monitored and so its undertaking was something of an experiment. The archaeologist was present on the site throughout the period of the sweep, and closely liaised with the persons undertaking the works. However, it was not possible for health and safety reasons for the archaeologist (nor for the ecologist) to closely accompany the persons undertaking the sweep whilst they were doing the work. The archaeologist had to observe the works from a distance utilising a monocular telescope (see fig. 3). This of course meant that it was impossible to determine in any detail what might have been or was disturbed and whether or not any of it was of archaeological significance. However, the majority of the lines of the sweep were undertaken in areas where there are either no known or recorded archaeological features or structures or the known archaeological structures were clearly visible and so could be readily avoided. As a result most of the work had no impact on the surviving archaeological remains. However the area above Cross Cove across which the early-medieval East Link route extends was impacted by the sweep.

### ***Detailed results***

Sweep lines 1 and 2 were undertaken in the vicinity of the East Steps to the monastery. The East Steps and the features associated with them are clearly visible and none were impacted in any way by the sweep.

Lines 3-7 lay in areas where there are no known archaeological features on the steep cliffs above the lighthouse roadway.

In the area above Cross Cove (sweep lines 8-11) the sweep crossed the line of the western part of the East Link pilgrimage route. Part of the west end of the East Link pilgrimage route was identified by the writer many years ago from a distance. A number of features on its eastern end (a beehive hut and several rock-cut crosses) were also explored and publicised by Michael Gibbons. Subsequently the LiDar survey of the island was also used to identify part of the route. However, despite its clearly early date and importance, the route has never been surveyed or inspected archaeologically by the NMS. So it remains unknown exactly what features might survive on it, where they might lie and in what condition they might be. As a result, any surviving features on the routeway are extremely vulnerable, and they also might not in any case be clearly visible as features today. Therefore in reality it cannot be determined whether or not this year's sweep (and of course previous year's sweeps) did or did not have an impact on the features of this early route.

Lines 9-11 and 12-13 impacted on the canopy in Cross Cove. The sweep also included cleaning the canopy (fig. 4). The earliest section of canopy here is one of the features of the Lighthouse period of the occupation of the rock. The volumes we discovered in Kerry include details of the construction of the canopy, the date it was erected, how long it took to complete, the names of the three men who did the work and how much each of them was paid. We also have several references to the keepers cleaning and repairing the timber top of the canopy. No damage was done to the canopy by the sweep.

There are also a number of areas of the lighthouse roadway that potentially could have been impacted by stones falling from the sweep. The original sandstone and other capping slabs of the parapet wall of the lighthouse roadway survive in a few places (most notably close

to the toilet at Cross Cove, just before the start of the South Steps and at the west side of the Lower Lighthouse station) where they have not been previously disturbed by storms and rockfalls. They carry inscribed names and initials of the lighthouse keepers and others who worked in the lighthouses in the nineteenth and twentieth century. However in all cases the material from the sweep either went directly over the cliff outside the roadway due to the steepness of the cliffs behind the roadway or landed on the canopies sheltering the roadway and no sweeps were undertaken in several areas where the vulnerable capstones survived. No falling material impacted on any of the surviving original wall cap stones.

The large sloping rockface opposite the workmens' huts contains many inscribed names and initials of lighthouse keepers and personnel. It lay below sweep line no. 14 but no damage was done to it by the sweep (fig. 5.).

## CONCLUSIONS

Nothing of certain archaeological interest was impacted by the sweep.

Sweep lines 8-11 clearly crossed the line of the East Link route, an early-medieval pilgrimage route that includes drystone-walled terraces, steps, a beehive hut and crosses (fig. 3). As this part of the route have never even been visited by an archaeologist, let alone surveyed in any way, we do not know what features may survive on it, where they lie and in what condition they might now be. Therefore we do not know whether or not, this and previous sweeps may have had any impact on any of the potential archaeological features on this route.



*Fig. 3. Sweep lines 9-11 crossing the line of the East Link route (dotted red line)with ecologist monitoring work through telescope in foreground. The contrasting roofs distinguish the newer sections from the original lighthouse-era canopy over the lighthouse roadway.*





*Fig. 4. Cleaning the original lighthouse-era canopy at Cross Cove.*



*Fig. 5. Sweep line 14 and the sloping rockface that contains much lighthouse-era graffiti.*

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