

# Recovery of human remains at St Taran's and St Keith's Chapel, Taransay, Western Isles

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## Overview

A PROGRAMME of archaeological works was undertaken on Taransay, Harris, Western Isles (Figure 1), involving the removal of loose artefacts and a survey of the surrounding area. Artefacts including human bone were recovered from areas of erosion in the vicinity of cemeteries traditionally associated with St Taran's and St Keith's Chapels.<sup>1</sup>

Following particularly bad storms in January 2005, human remains were found to be eroding from a standing section below a cemetery traditionally associated with St Taran's Chapel, Taransay, Harris, Western Isles (NGR: NG 0310 9914; Figure 1). Dr Mary MacLeod of the Western Isles Council collected loose material, and further identified five sites of interest which were under threat of coastal erosion.<sup>2</sup> Although bones had previously been recorded in the area, the volume of eroded material led Dr MacLeod to contact Historic Scotland, and request assistance.

AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned under the terms of the Historic Scotland Human Remains Call-Off Contract to undertake the

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1 AOC Archaeology Group is most grateful to the landowner, Mr Angus MacKay for permission to excavate, for the use of accommodation and for ferrying facilities. Alan Hunter-Blair worked through horrendous conditions to complete the survey and excavation. John Gooder managed the project fieldwork while Ciara Clarke managed post-excavation works. John Barber provided helpful comments to the draft text. Advice was kindly provided by Dr Mary MacLeod of the Western Isles Council and Mr Patrick Ashmore, Head of Archaeology, Historic Scotland. Information regarding archaeological works on Taransay was supplied by Kevin Murdoch, Western Isles Archaeologist. The project was funded by Historic Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland). The external referees provided helpful comments and useful insights.

2 Cook 2006.

emergency excavation of the human remains. St Taran's Chapel and the associated cemetery were found to have been significantly damaged by coastal erosion. Excavation involved the removal of the poorly preserved remains of 31 individuals. A topographic survey was also undertaken, which identified three separate middens containing bone, shell and ceramics (NGR: NG 03062 99133; NG 03163 99610 and NG 3229 99193). An upstanding stone enclosure (NGR: NG 03048 99165) was identified within the cemetery and may represent a private burial plot. An eroded stone cist, from which came two sherds of pottery, was also identified (NGR: NG 03245 99293).

The remains uncovered are significant in adding to the corpus of Early Historic and medieval chapel sites excavated in the Hebrides. The radiocarbon dating of the human remains provides evidence for the utilisation of this ancient ecclesiastical site for burial in the later medieval and early post-medieval periods, while the graves aligned north/south recorded in the northern edge of the cemetery suggest the presence of relatively early Christian burial, in a cemetery associated with the *papar* settlement of Paible. These latter burials may indicate the earliest part of the burial ground. Together with evidence from underlying midden deposits for earlier, later prehistoric occupation, these remains indicate the longevity of activity, domestic and ritual, in this area, which since the 20th century has been largely abandoned. Although the recovered human remains were very fragmentary, they provide significant demographic information, apparently refuting the traditional belief that men and women were interred in separate cemeteries.

## **Background to the excavation**

The remains were visible in a vertical section downslope of a cemetery traditionally associated with St Taran's Chapel. Dr Mary MacLeod of the Western Isles Council identified five sites of interest that were under particular threat from coastal erosion.<sup>3</sup> AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned to undertake the emergency excavation of those human remains that had been identified as under threat. This report is primarily focused on the results of these works, but also refers to material identified from areas of erosion in previous years, comprising information received from Kevin Murdoch, Western Isles Archaeologist.

The chapels of St Taran's<sup>4</sup> and St Keith's<sup>5</sup> are located to the immediate south-west of the uninhabited township of Paible,<sup>6</sup> the largest settlement on

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3 These are referred to as MacLeod Sites 1 to 5

4 NRHE Reference NG09NW 1.

5 NRHE Reference NG09NW 7; RCAHMS 1928, 31-2, No. 110.

6 NRHE Reference NG09NW 13.

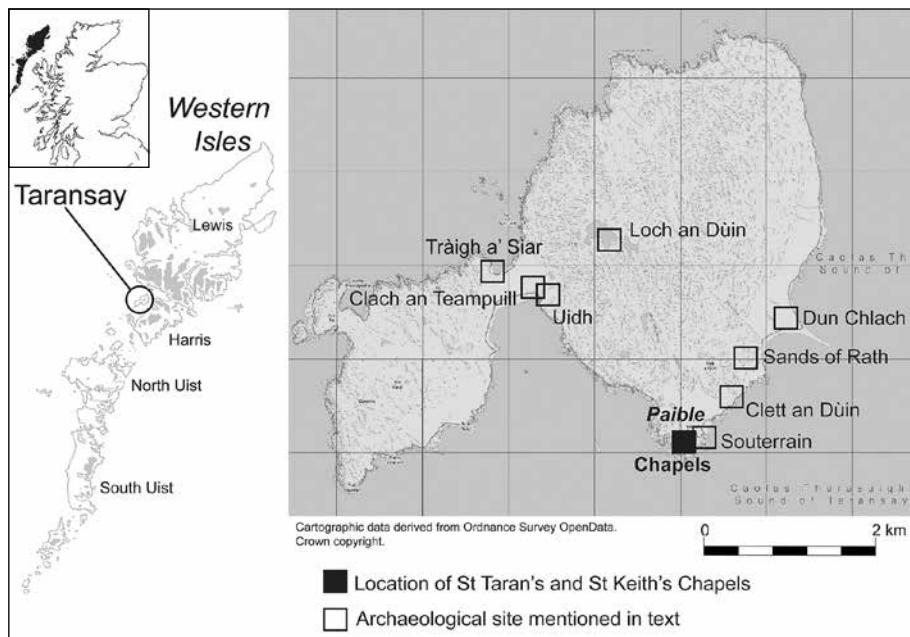


Figure 1: Locations of St Taran's and St Keith's Chapels, Taransay, Western Isles.

the island. Paible is located above a partially sheltered beach, at the southern point of the eastern part of the island of Taransay (centred at NGR: NG 0315 9920; Figures 1 and 2). The limited land available on Taransay has restricted where settlement has formed, a common occurrence in the Western Isles, in part due to peat formation in the later prehistoric period.<sup>7</sup> Paible is one of seven recorded post-medieval villages or townships on the island, and appears to have been the most heavily occupied, due to the relative abundance of cultivable land and its sheltered landing point. A survey of the eroding sections in the area has produced material ranging from Bronze Age Beaker pottery to Norse ceramics, as well as post-medieval material.<sup>8</sup>

The recorded presence of three Atlantic roundhouses<sup>9</sup> and a souterrain<sup>10</sup> on the island (Figure 1) is indicative of a resident population in the early Iron Age and the early medieval period. The Scheduled Monument of Loch an Dùin consists of the remains of a stone-built roundhouse and causeway, built

7 Barber 2003, 21-22.

8 Dr Mary Macleod pers comm.

9 Armit 2005, 133.

10 RCAHMS 1928, 46, No. 153.

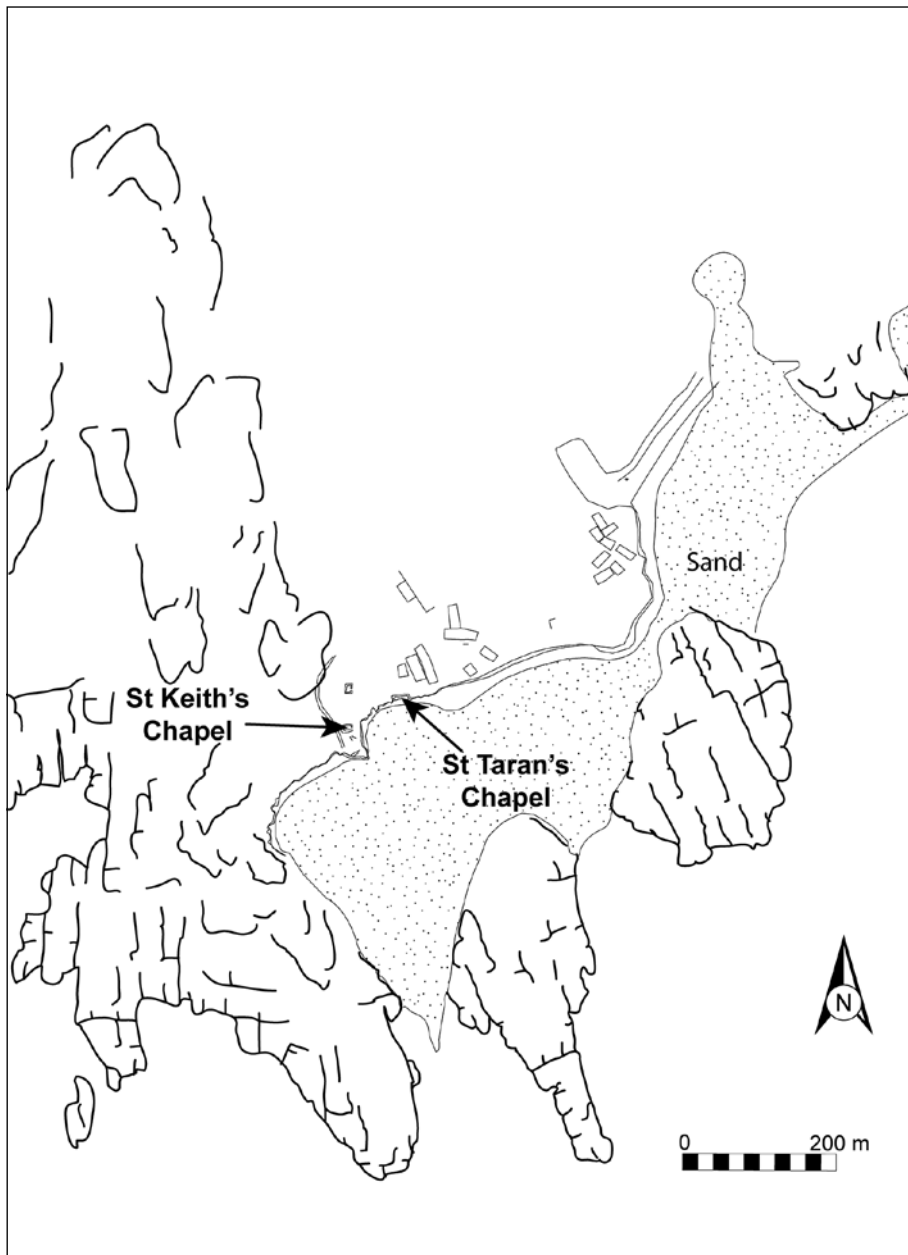


Figure 2: Site plan showing study area on Taransay.

on a possible crannog structure.<sup>11</sup> Clett an Dùin<sup>12</sup> is a drystone dun structure, while Dun Chlach,<sup>13</sup> of which no trace now remains, may have been a fort or cairn. Remnants of a possible Late Iron Age/Viking settlement site<sup>14</sup> were found in 2000 at Tràigh a' Siar (Taransay's west beach) in close proximity to an early cross-incised stone and possible chapel at Clach an Teampuill,<sup>15</sup> and the post-medieval township of Uidh.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1860s, a bone pin and a small bronze buckle were found at Paible; and these were interpreted as potential funerary objects.<sup>17</sup> To the north-west of the chapels, two fragments of stone dishes and a double-pointed bone pin were found in a sand-heap associated with a small ruin at Sands of Rath.<sup>18</sup>

A watching brief was undertaken in 2000, adjacent to the sites of St Taran's and St Keith's Chapels and graveyards, in an area of eroding settlement mound containing substantial structures and midden deposits, to ensure that scheduled works had minimal archaeological impact.<sup>19</sup>

The area under study in the present article was under threat from coastal erosion and included the locations of the chapels of St Taran's and St Keith's, their associated cemetery grounds and structures relating to the township of Paible (Figure 3). Both of these chapels appear to have been dependent chapels, or chapels-of-ease, of the parish of Kilbride on Harris, later known as the parish of Harris.<sup>20</sup>

The chapels were formerly known as 'Teampull Ché and...Eaghluis Tarain' and were among at least 12 churches and chapels present on Harris prior to the Reformation.<sup>21</sup> The chapel of St Taran is dedicated to the saint (also St Tarannan or Torannan<sup>22</sup>) traditionally said to have been a disciple of St Palladius, who in 431, was sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine. St Taran is usually associated with Kincardineshire and Aberdeen, although he was said to have travelled widely.<sup>23</sup> The Norse place-name Taransay signifies 'Taran's Isle'.<sup>24</sup> St Keith of the second chapel (Teampall Ché) was originally known as Ché. Ché is referenced in several place-names, most often as Keith, in eastern

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11 NRHE Reference NB00SW 6; RCAHMS 1928, 38, No. 117.

12 NRHE Reference NG09NW 3; RCAHMS 1928, 38-39, No. 118

13 NRHE Reference NB00SW 2; RCAHMS 1928, 44, No. 142.

14 Fitzpatrick 2000.

15 NRHE Reference NB00SW 4.

16 Fisher 2002, 44.

17 Thomas 1863, 118.

18 Thomas 1863, 117.

19 Knott 2000.

20 Macleod 1792, 342.

21 *ibid.*, 376.

22 Jennings 1998, 49.

23 Mackinlay 1914. 105-107.

24 Jennings 1998, 49.

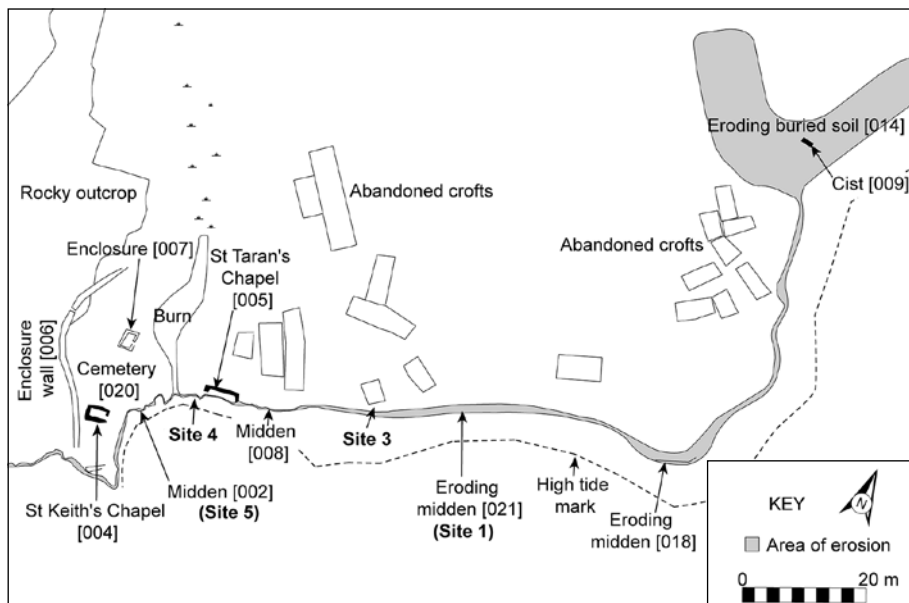


Figure 3: Detailed site plan of St Taran's and St Keith's Chapels.

Scotland.<sup>25</sup> Although tradition records that two separate cemeteries existed, one for men (St Keith's) and the other for women (St Taran's),<sup>26</sup> it is not now possible to identify two discrete burial areas presumably due to the loss of land to coastal erosion.

There is a large number of burials interred within the immediate area of the two chapels (at least 213 grave markers were observed), perhaps reflecting the lack of other cemeteries on the island and an extended period of use. The cemetery of St Taran's Chapel is recorded to have been used until at least 1878,<sup>27</sup> though its origins are unclear. A cross-incised stone, dating to between the 7th and 9th centuries, was recovered from the tacksman's house at Paibeil in the mid 19th century.<sup>28</sup> This building was possibly built using stone from the ruins of St Taran's.<sup>29</sup>

The visible remains indicate that St Keith's Chapel is likely the better surviving of the chapels, as the other (St Taran's) has been almost completely eroded away (Figures 4 and 5).

25 Carmichael 1928, 82.

26 Martin 2003, 48-9.

27 Ordnance Survey Name Book 1878, 231-2.

28 Thomas 1863, 115; Fisher 2001, 113.

29 <http://www.paparproject.org.uk/hebrides7.html>.

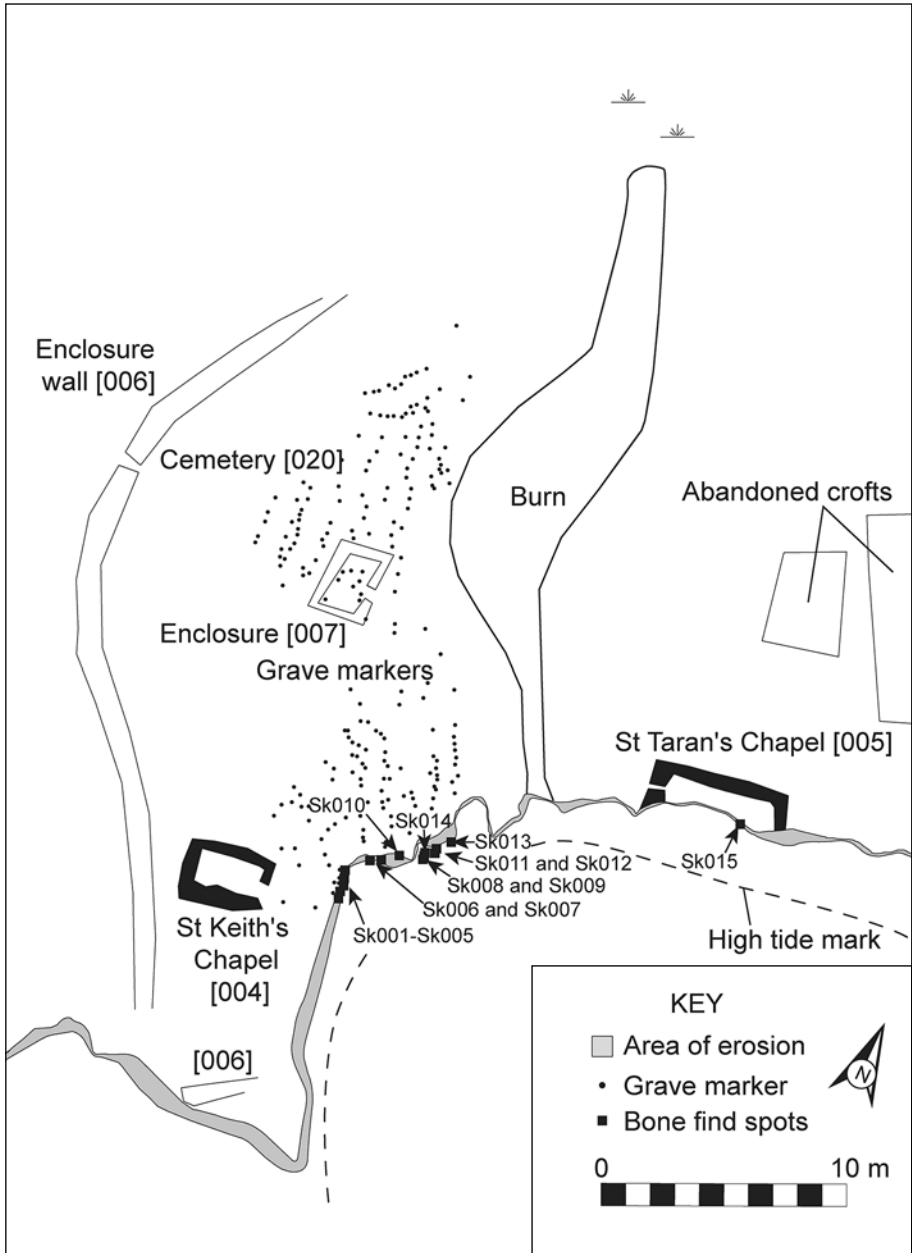


Figure 4: Detail of chapel site and burial ground.



**Figure 5: View of St Taran's Chapel under threat of coastal erosion.**

An early date of origin for the chapels, perhaps as early as the 7th to 9th centuries, may be supported by evidence revealed by studies into the name 'Paible' and its *papar* associations. *Papar* (from the Old Norse for priest or monk, a term likely borrowed from the Irish *pápa* and ultimately the Latin *papa*)<sup>30</sup> place-names are variously thought to have been attributed by early Norse settlers to areas which they associated with Celtic priests, or; by later Norse settlers in the 9th and 10th centuries to abandoned settlement, or by the 12th century Church trying to associate with an older tradition.<sup>31</sup> The *papar* are referred to in documents such as the late 12th/early 13th century chronicle, *Historia Norwegiae*, in both Orkney and Iceland, while there is also widespread toponymic evidence for Norse-named *papar* sites across the North Atlantic in the Faroes, Shetland, the north of the Scottish mainland, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, Cumberland and potentially Kirkcudbright.<sup>32</sup> MacDonald suggests that 'all or most of the existing place-names ... formed already a noticeable element of the toponymy of Orkney, as also of Shetland and the northern Hebrides, before the late twelfth or early thirteenth century'.<sup>33</sup> Gibbon, citing

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30 MacDonald 2002, 15; Simpson et al. 2005, 1.

31 Simpson et al. 2005, 2.

32 MacDonald 2002, 13-14, 26-9.

33 *ibid*, 18.



William Thomson, suggests it is possible that sites believed formerly to have been Christian ‘were given *papar* names and dedicated to early Saints in an attempt to legitimise and provide a history for a newly created church system in the high medieval period’.<sup>34</sup> The difficulty in identifying the nature and date of *papar* sites is accentuated by the limited number of place-name forms that have been identified securely as *papar* in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland and the north Scottish mainland, which ‘offer little or no specific information beyond the apparent fact of ownership or occupation of a locality by *papar* – or their reputed presence there – in the past or in the present (relative to the coining of the name) or both’.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, while *papar* names are often found in association with real church sites, ‘there is no indication of the presence of churches in the place-names themselves’ and many of the *papar* place-names in the Western Isles ‘denote natural rather than man-made features’.<sup>36</sup>

The ‘Paible’ or ‘Paibeil’ on Taransay ‘is the only one of the three Paible names to be located on a small island in the Outer Hebrides’;<sup>37</sup> another Paible is to be found on North Uist while ‘Bayble’ is located at Stornoway on Lewis, with both an ‘Upper Bayble (Pabail Uarach)’ and a ‘Lower Bayble (Pabail Iarach)’.<sup>38</sup> The ‘problematical habitative name Papi(e)l, Pape(a)y (N. Isles), Paible (Bayble) (W. Isles) ... appears to refer to a specific settlement rather than a generalised geographical area in some ways associated with the *papar*’.<sup>39</sup> MacDonald suggests that it is a ‘district name embracing other named places’ and notes that it is considered ‘to be the same as the Icelandic Papýli, which has been derived from an original \*Papa-býli, or Papa-bœli, “? settlement of *papar*”’.<sup>40</sup>

*Papar* sites have been linked with areas of relatively high quality agricultural land, which under controlled agricultural management had the potential to produce high yields.<sup>41</sup> The St Keith’s Chapel site, however, lacked evidence for early anthropogenic arable soils, though these may be buried under sand or lost to coastal erosion.<sup>42</sup> The presence under and adjacent to St Keith’s Chapel of midden deposits up to a metre in depth, has been interpreted as potentially indicating that the *papar* chapel was constructed over an area of already existing settlement.<sup>43</sup>

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34 Gibbon 2006, 105.

35 MacDonald 2002, 20.

36 *ibid.*, 20.

37 <http://www.paparproject.org.uk/hebrides7.html>.

38 MacDonald 2002, 28.

39 <http://www.paparproject.org.uk/introduction.html>.

40 MacDonald 2002, 20.

41 Simpson et al. 2005, 1, 13.

42 Simpson et al. 2005, 11.

43 *ibid.*

## **Fieldwork methodology**

The archaeological works at St Taran's and St Keith's involved an initial topographic survey in the immediate vicinity of the areas of erosion, which sought to recover all previously eroded-out artefacts still present and to identify any features, structures or deposits. A walkover survey was undertaken of an area, measuring 150 m north/south by 150 m east/west, surrounding the burial ground. The aim of this survey was to identify any material recently eroded from the section, and to retrieve any artefacts that had been carried further afield by the movement of the wind, tide or animals. Fieldwork was limited to the removal of loose artefacts, and specifically human bone. The area surrounding the township of Paible is of value to the landowners for its potential for grazing, and more importantly due to the protection it offers the buildings located to the north. For this reason, the landowner, Mr Angus MacKay requested that the erosion was not exacerbated by any further removal of turf.

The skeletal remains identified during the survey were excavated, this involved the removal of the remains of approximately 31 individuals in a poor state of preservation.

## **Survey and excavation results**

The topographic survey of archaeological features in the immediate vicinity of the eroding section recorded previously known features, including the chapels and cemeteries, and the structures of the settlement of Paible, as well as identifying three middens containing bone, shell and ceramics, a stone enclosure within the cemetery (possibly a private burial plot) and an eroded stone cist, in the vicinity of which were sherds of pottery.

## **Survey results**

The archaeological features identified within the immediate vicinity of the eroding section were surveyed, revealing both known and previously unrecorded structures and sites. These are described below:

### *St Taran's Chapel [005]*

The remains of St Taran's Chapel (Figure 5) were located above an eroding standing section containing human remains. In 1914 the remains of the chapel were recorded, measuring ca.10.5 m east to west by ca.5.5 m north to south.



**Figure 6: View of St Keith's Chapel.**

They comprise a rectangular hollow, with remains of turf-covered stone and earth walls.<sup>44</sup> The south of the chapel and the surrounding burial ground had already by 1969 undergone erosion. In 2005 the chapel was found to have been much reduced. Along its main axis, only the northern wall survives for its entire length, while the southern wall has been completely lost. The southwards wall returns at the eastern and western ends of the northern wall have been reduced to just 1.5 m in length (Figure 4). The chapel was found to overlie an earlier midden deposit, from which animal bone was recovered.<sup>45</sup>

#### *St Keith's Chapel [004]*

The remains of St Keith's Chapel,<sup>46</sup> located within a large area of gravestones, were documented in 1969 as low turf-covered stone and earth wall footings measuring 6.3 m by 4.5 m, surviving to up to 0.3 m in height (Figure 6). In 2005 a few loose stones were visible, exposed on the northern and

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44 NRHE Reference NG09NW 1.

45 McSweeney, below.

46 NRHE Reference NG09NW 7.

eastern walls, but the feature was not obvious. The chapel, which appeared, as previously described, as very denuded walls (Figure 4), was found to overlie an earlier midden deposit from which ceramics, bone and shell have been recovered in the past.<sup>47</sup>

### *The cemetery [020]*

The cemetery area associated with St Keith's and St Taran's Chapels was recorded as having been severely eroded by the sea as early as 1969, with only the south-western arc of its boundary wall traceable.<sup>48</sup> Further evidence of the continual erosion of the site was reported in both the *Guardian* and the *Scotsman* in 2001, when journalists described the visible remains of a child's burial within the eroding cemetery.<sup>49</sup> In 2005 the only observable evidence for the cemetery comprised eroding human remains immediately to the west of the chapel.<sup>50</sup>

The western cemetery area, associated with St Keith's Chapel, appears to have survived in better condition than the eastern area, due to its less exposed location. However, the survey identified several cists in the intertidal zone that had suffered erosion; fragments of bone and cist slabs were recorded on the beach.<sup>51</sup> The visible cemetery, around St Keith's Chapel, measured roughly 40 m north/south by 30 m east/west and comprised at least 213 individual graves, each marked by a small, plain stone slab or boulder. The majority of the burials appeared to be aligned east/west although a group of graves in the north of the cemetery were aligned north/south. Neither the chapels nor the cemeteries had discernible enclosure ditches or banks.

An enclosure wall identified immediately to the west of the cemeteries probably represents the remnants of the settlement boundary rather than a specific precinct wall (see Paible and associated enclosure wall below), although they may have been partly coterminous.

### *Midden [002]*

On the shore below the foundations of St Keith's Chapel, erosion had exposed several stones and a shell midden (Figure 3) that contained bones (both animal and human) and pottery sherds, underlying topsoil [001]. This may indicate that the chapel occupied the site of an earlier domestic structure. Again, both animal and human bone had previously been recorded below the chapel by Dr MacLeod.<sup>52</sup>

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47 Dr Mary MacLeod pers comm.

48 NRHE Reference NG09NW 1.

49 *The Guardian* 2001; *The Scotsman* 2001.

50 Dr Mary MacLeod 2005, Site 4 of Walkover Survey.

51 Dr Mary MacLeod 2005, Site 5 of Walkover Survey.

52 Dr Mary MacLeod 2005, Site 5 of Walkover Survey.

*Enclosure [007]*

An enclosure, visible on the 1988 Ordnance Survey mapping, was recorded at NGR: 03048 99165. This feature comprised four upstanding walls, surrounding an area measuring 6 m by 4 m, with a maximum wall height of 1.0 m and width of 0.50 m (Figures 3 and 4). An entrance was located on the east side of the enclosure, and graveslabs were present within the enclosed area, suggesting that it may represent a private burial plot.

*Middens [008], [018] and [021]*

The remains of a midden were recorded 15 m to the east of St Taran's Chapel. This midden area [008] was found to have been severely affected by erosion, and the owner, Mr MacKay, noted that up to 40 m of that part of the coast was lost in the storms of January 2005 (Figure 3). A second area of midden [021], located between the old schoolhouse and the cemetery, was recorded; this was probably also identified (as Site 1) by Dr. MacLeod prior to the works of 2005.<sup>53</sup>

To the east, a further area of midden [018] was surveyed (Figure 3); it was located in close proximity to the site of a previously excavated souterrain.<sup>54</sup> Ceramic and iron were recovered from this midden feature, and a possible hearth was observed.

*Structure [009] and Buried Soil [014]*

During the survey of the coastline, a stone setting, representing the fragmented remains of a cist [009], was identified and recorded at NGR: NG 03245 99293 (Figure 3). A small amount of animal bone and pottery were recovered from the area of the cist; its fill appeared to comprise windblown sand which post-dated the burial (Figure 7). The surrounding area of eroding buried soil [014] contained artefacts ranging from a Bronze Age Beaker and quartz stone tools to Norse ceramic material.<sup>55</sup>

*Paible and associated Enclosure Wall [006]*

A brief survey was also made of the derelict buildings located around the township of Paible (Figure 3).<sup>56</sup> Included within this survey was a site recorded by Dr MacLeod comprising probable 18th to 19th century buildings around NGR: NG 03117 99154.<sup>57</sup> Two individual sections of an enclosing wall [006] were recorded to the immediate west of St Keith's Chapel, surviving to

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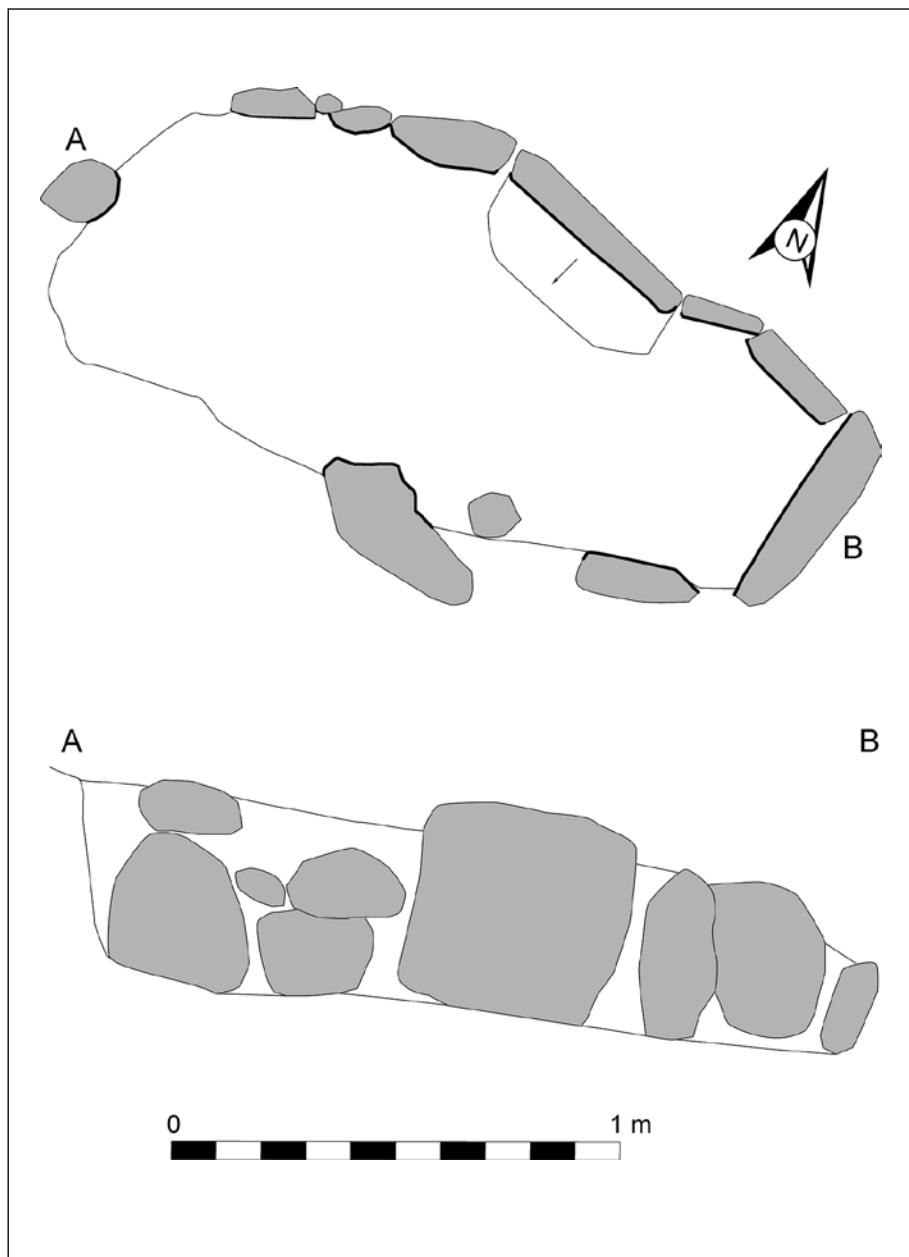
53 Dr Mary MacLeod 2005, Site 1 of Walkover Survey.

54 RCAHMS 1928, 46, No. 153.

55 Dr Mary MacLeod pers comm.

56 NRHE Reference NG09NW 13.

57 Dr Mary Macleod 2005, Site 3 of Walkover Survey.



**Figure 7: Plan and South-facing section of Cist [009].**

a maximum height of 1.0 m, with an entrance identified at its westernmost point (Figures 3 and 4). These walls, recorded on the Bald map of Harris of 1805, represent the remnants of the settlement boundary.<sup>58</sup>

### **Excavation of human skeletal remains**

Archaeological works recovered 194 bones, the majority of which were found at the base of an eroding section downslope of the chapels. A minimum of 31 individuals were represented, the majority by a few bones each.<sup>59</sup>

Due to the effects of erosion on the burials and the limited nature of the archaeological works, it was not usually possible to determine from the material recovered the position and treatment of the bodies. Generally, the graves identified during the topographic survey indicated that the majority of the bodies would have been positioned on an east / west alignment, as were Skeletons 008 and 010 of the recovered remains. The best preserved skeleton (Skeleton 008) was positioned on its back, with the head at the west, and the arms and hands to the side of the body; no grave goods were identified with this inhumation. Although no grave cut or stone setting was identified in situ, due to the poor preservation of the eroding graves, the occurrence of stone markers within the burial ground and the presence of other stone slabs on the foreshore suggest that burials may have been placed within stone settings.

Although it was not possible to determine the stratigraphic relationship of the various inhumations, it was observed that remains of individuals appeared to overlie each other in section. This implies a significant period of continued use of the cemetery.

#### *Presentation of artefactual and ecofactual evidence*

Small assemblages of human bone, metalwork and pottery were recovered during the archaeological works of 2005.

### **Human Bone**

by Kath McSweeney

A full report which includes details of methodology and a full description of the examined remains can be found within the site archive.

Methods of recording and assessing, age, sex and pathology are based on recommended standards;<sup>60</sup> the identification and ageing of dental remains is based on Van Beek<sup>61</sup> while estimations of stature are calculated using

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58 Bald 1805.

59 McSweeney, below.

60 Brothwell 1981; Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994; White and Folkens 2000; Bass 2005.

61 Van Beek 1983.

formulae devised by Trotter and Gleser.<sup>62</sup> Stature assessment estimates based on the length of bones carry a fairly large margin of error, at least 3 cm and as much as 5 cm.

## **The Human Bone Assemblage**

Remains were examined both from groups of skeletal remains (identified as 'Skeletons' but sometimes actually containing remains of several individuals or animal bones) recorded by AOC during their works, and from find-spots of Sites 4 and 5 located by Dr MacLeod during her initial inspection of the site.

A total of 194 bones and fragments of bone were examined. In general, the remains were in fairly good condition, although some had been exposed to the elements and many were incomplete. In some cases the bones were tinged green, possibly an indication that they had been lying in damp conditions.

The results of the osteological examination of the most significant groups of skeletal remains are discussed below, according to the context in which they were found.

### *MacLeod Site 4: loose bone Skeleton 021*

This area contained several bones that are unlikely to belong to the same individual. A right temporal bone appeared to be from a female, as did a complete left pelvic bone. However, a complete sacrum had male characteristics. The only other fragments – sections of limb bone shafts – were undiagnostic. Where it could be established, age at death was adult.

### *MacLeod Site 5: Eroding beach Skeleton 022*

The following bones were identified: a fragment of skull, a right radius, two right humeri, a complete and two partial right radii, right and left femurs, a left tibia and a left fibula. There is no indication that any of these bones belonged together. The fragments of radius were clearly from three individuals. The two upper arms belonged to two females, while the two pieces of femur were probably from two males. All of the bones were from adults. It would appear that there were at least four people represented by these remains.

### *MacLeod Site 5: Below cemetery Skeleton 023*

In this area an almost complete cranium was uncovered containing interesting dental anomalies. The skull was from an adult male, who was probably middle-aged. His left canine and left first premolar had rotated. His canine had also erupted out of alignment into the adjacent palate, and his left

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62 cf. Bass 2005.



lateral incisor, which is now missing post-mortem, has been pushed out of alignment by the canine and must have protruded slightly above the tooth line on the external surface. In addition, he had only two molars on each side, instead of the normal three, and from the morphology and position of the remaining teeth, it was the second molars that were missing rather than the third. It is quite common for third molars to be congenitally absent, but rarer for the second molars.

A mandible, probably from the same individual, had a partially impacted and rotated left canine, which was only partially erupted. This mandible had a number of teeth missing during life. Dental hygiene was extremely poor, as could be seen from the very advanced degree of dental calculus adhering to most of the teeth. There was also a marked degree of recession of the alveolar bones, exposing part of the tooth roots. The upper and lower teeth were also unusually worn. The left first upper molar had angled wear, with no enamel remaining on the medial side of the tooth and about half of the crown remaining on the distal side. Both right incisors had been reduced to stumps; the wear on the stumps angled distally and palatally, as also on the lower lateral incisor and canine. It is possible that this was the result of cultural modification from using the teeth as a tool, or from habitually holding a pipe.

Two lines of hypoplasia could be seen on the rotated left canine and on the neighbouring first premolar (most of the surfaces of all the other teeth were obscured by calculus and so any lesions on these teeth could not be visible). This interruption in the development of dental enamel can occur if a person is subjected to periods of malnutrition or illness during childhood. It appears that this individual suffered two such periods between the ages of 5 and 6 years.

This male also had some unusual traits on his skull. He had double facets on his occipital condyles (the areas for articulation with the spine). He also had some additional sutural bones, associated with a slightly unusual skull shape known as bathrocephaly. In this condition the back of the skull forms a shelf-like projection. While this has been observed among other ancient Scottish populations, the cause and relevance of the condition are unclear.<sup>63</sup>

Other bones found in the same area included a fragment of scapula, and an almost complete right femur from a female. The height of this female was ca.1.50 m.

#### *MacLeod Site 5: Loose bone Skeleton 024*

An almost complete right pelvic bone came from an adult female. Also present were the shaft of a right femur and the distal end of a left ulna.

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63 Miles 1989, 44.

Although both are likely to be adult, sex cannot be established. Marked lipping and pitting at the sternal end of the ulna indicated the presence of a moderate degree of arthritis of the wrist. A worked antler was found with the bones.

*MacLeod Site 5: Loose bone Skeleton 025*

In this area two fragments of cranium, two pieces of the distal end of the left humerus from different individuals, and a complete right femur and almost complete right tibia from the same individual, were found. These latter two bones match the left tibia found in Skeleton 026. The most complete of the humeral fragments and the femur and tibia were female. The second piece of humerus was too small to determine sex, although, as it appeared much larger than the others, may have been male. The female represented by the femur and tibia was of short stature; ca.1.52 m.

The tibia (as well as the left tibia from Skeleton 026), had a marked anterior crest and periostitis covering the shaft. It is not possible to determine the precise aetiology of the periostitis, but such changes are probably indicative of either a localised or a generalised infection. However, the right tibia, which is probably from the same individual, also has periosteal reaction on the shaft. This suggests that the cause was a generalised condition and may be part of a disease process.

*MacLeod Site 5: Loose bone Skeleton 026*

This group of material contained an almost complete skull, two fragments of foetal/neonate skull, an additional fragment of maxilla with teeth in situ, a sacrum, the distal end of a left femur, and right and left tibiae from different individuals. The skull was from a young adult, aged at least 21, the piece of maxilla was also from a young adult, aged between 21 and 25 years. The age based on the sacrum was at least 25, and the long bones were all from adults. There were therefore at least two adults, and possibly three, as well as a small child, represented among the remains. The skull belonged to a female, as did the sacrum and the long bones. The adults, therefore, were all female. The left tibia had a very marked anterior crest and periostitis (evidence of infection) on the surface of the shaft.

*Context 002: Skeleton 001*

This skeleton consisted of a piece of the lower arm, part of a second metacarpal, six hand phalanges, an almost complete right pelvic bone, and the proximal end of a left femur. Age at death was probably in old adulthood. The pelvic bone was clearly from a male, although the dimensions of the femoral head were within the female range. It is possible that these two bones did not come from the same individual.

*Context 002: Skeleton 005*

There were only three fragments of bone from this context: a pair of complete tibiae and a complete left fibula. The bones belonged to an adult female who was ca.1.57-1.59 m tall.

*Context 002: Skeleton 006*

These remains consisted of two right and five left foot bones. At least the left bones were from the same individual, who was over 14 years of age.

*Context 002: Skeleton 007*

Several matching bones from a right foot are all that was present from this skeleton. They appeared to belong to a very small adult; it is not possible to assess a precise height.

*Context 002: Skeleton 008*

This was the most complete of all the examined skeletons, comprised of an almost complete but fragmentary skull and mandible, about two-thirds of the spinal column, the left rib cage, part of the sternum, the left shoulder and upper arm, part of the right lower arm, the left femur and a single metatarsal.

Although the skull had conflicting characteristics, some more typical of males and some more female-like, most of the rest of the remains were clearly female. Sex for this individual is therefore difficult to assess, although given their small stature, it is more likely that this was a female. Age at death, based on dental attrition, was about 35 to 45 years.

This person had suffered from poor dental health. In the upper dentition, three teeth had been lost during life. There was a large dental abscess associated with the right third molar; this tooth was also carious, and there was a further carious lesion on a lower second molar. A slight degree of calculus was present on most of the teeth and many were chipped on their occlusal surfaces, indicating the possible use of the teeth as a tool.

A single line of dental hypoplasia on several teeth indicated a period of illness or malnutrition at about 1 year of age. Stature was ca.1.54 m.

A single bone from a child of about 7 years of age (a second metatarsal) was found with these remains.

*Context 002: Skeleton 009*

Parts of the rib cage, shoulders, left humerus, a hand phalanx, part of the right pelvic bone, most of the left femur, a pair of almost complete tibiae and two metatarsals were present. Several bones indicated that this was an adult female.

*Context 002: Skeleton 010*

This partial skeleton was from a juvenile. An almost complete mandible, four vertebrae (three of which articulated), a few pieces of ribs and a left femur were present. Unfused epiphyses indicated that this was a sub-adult and the mandible with erupted second molars but unerupted third molars suggests that age was between 12 and 17. The mandible had a healed fracture of the left side. The fracture site was quite unambiguous and although there was slight malalignment of the broken ends, healing had taken place apparently without complication.

*Context 002: Skeleton 011*

Three small, undiagnostic fragments of rib, a piece of right scapula, a pelvic bone in several pieces, and the distal end of a left femur, which probably belonged to an adult female, were present.

*Context 002: Skeleton 012*

Only four fragments of bone were present: part of a left clavicle, the proximal end of a right tibia, a small piece of shaft of tibia and a complete metatarsal. The proximal tibia was from an adult female.

*Context 002: Skeleton 013*

A piece of right fibula and six right foot bones came from the same individual. Also present was a left metatarsal in three pieces. It is not clear whether these belonged with the other foot bones. Age at death, from the fibula, was over 16 years. There was no indication of sex.

*Context 002: Skeleton 014*

Only two bones were present, a piece of rib and a fragmentary sacrum that probably belonged to a female, aged over 25.

*Context 002: Skeleton 015*

Eleven fragments of bone were identified, although not all were from the same individual. Present were part of a cranium – the parietal, a single complete rib, a pair of incomplete humeri, a further piece of radius from a different individual, and another section of humeral shaft from a third individual. Part of a tibia and a fibula were also identified and there were two 1st left metatarsals.

With the exception of the small piece of humeral shaft, all of the bones belonged to adults. One of the humeral fragments was from a female, while the pair of humeri was from an individual of indeterminate sex.

The cranial fragments showed signs of a condition known as porotic hyperostosis (pitting accompanied by thickening of the cranial surface), thought to be indicative of iron deficiency anaemia occurring during childhood. It is clear that the lesions had healed and that the disease was no longer active.

### Summary

Table 1, below, summarises the information established from the analysis of the human skeletal remains.

Context	Age at Death	Sex	No. of Individuals	Stature	Pathology
Site 4: Loose bones SK021	Adult	M + F ?	2?	-	-
Site 5: beach SK022	Adult	F + M	4	-	-
Site 5: area below cemetery SK023	Adult	M + F	2	150/59	several anomalous teeth; tooth loss; abnormal wear on teeth; hypoplasia; bathrocephalic skull
Site 5: Loose bone SK024	Adult	F + ?	2?	-	arthritis of the wrist
Site 5: Loose bone SK025	Adult	F + ?	2	152/59	periostitis shaft tibia
Site 5: Loose bone SK026	Adult/ infant	2 or 3 F	¾	-	periostitis shaft tibia
SK001	Old adult	M + F?	2?	-	-
SK005	Adult	F	1	157/61 -159/62	
SK006	Adult	?	1	-	-
SK007	Adult	?	1	-	-
SK008	35-45 + 7 year old	F?	2	154/60	tooth loss; dental abscess; chipped teeth; hypoplasia
SK009	Adult	F	1	-	-
SK010	12-17	?	1	-	healed fracture of the jaw
SK011	Adult	F	1	-	-
SK012	Adult	F	1	-	-
SK013	Adult	?	1	-	-
SK014	Adult	F	1	-	-
SK015	2 adult, 1 sub-adult	F + ?	3	-	porotic hyperostosis

**Table 1: Summary of human skeletal remains.**

### *Description of the remains*

The collected remains from Taransay represented approximately 31 individuals, but none of these comprised a complete skeleton. The most complete remains formed Skeleton 008, which consisted of the skull and mandible, most of the spine, and some of the bones from the left side of the postcranial skeleton. In most cases, skeletons were represented by only a few bones, in some cases by a single bone.

### *Age at Death*

With the exceptions of part of a cranium from a very young child; a single bone from a child aged about 7 years, and an adolescent who was between 12 and 17, all of the remains were from adults. In most cases, it was not possible to arrive at a more precise age.

### *Sex*

The majority of the examined adults were female.

### *Stature*

Height was estimated for four individuals, all females, who were of small stature at 1.52-1.59 m, but these estimates lack certainty due to the incomplete nature of the remains.

### *Disease*

Pathological lesions noted included two people with tooth loss and dental abscesses, one with arthritis of the wrist, one case of non-specific periostitis of the lower legs, an individual with a history of iron deficiency anaemia during childhood, and one fractured jaw. Two people showed signs of having undergone periods of illness or malnutrition during childhood.

### *Additional information*

In many cases, animal bones were found with the human remains, and four groups of skeletal remains (not tabulated above) contained only animal bones.

A worked antler was found with the remains from MacLeod's Site 5. The antler is a piece of undiagnostic antler-working debris, comprising part of the beam and one tine, with all ends broken and thus unidentifiable in detail. However, the knife-cut facet below the tine is enough to identify it as working debris. It is chronologically undiagnostic, apart from the fact that an iron blade was used.<sup>64</sup>

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64 Dr Fraser Hunter pers comm.

## **Ceramic Assemblage**

by Ann MacSween

A full report, which includes details of the methodology, can be found in the site archive. Nine sherds were recovered from the recording of cist burials at Taransay, and sherds were collected from the midden. The sherds from the cist [009] (SF14 and SF17) are undecorated and from a flat-based vessel. None of the sherds are morphologically diagnostic.

The sherds from the midden [018] are of fine to coarse sandy clay. There are very few inclusions in the fabric and it is probable that they are natural to the clay. An Iron Age or later date is suggested by the fabrics. One of the sherds (SF J) has an applied zig-zag, a form of decoration common in the Iron Age of the west coast islands of Scotland.<sup>65</sup>

## **Iron Nails**

by Dawn McLaren

A full report, which includes details of the methodology, can be found in the site archive.

### *Catalogue*

SF5 Incomplete small nail with sub-rectangular, slightly rounded head and sub-rectangular-sectioned shank, missing the tip. The shank is slightly curved with fragments of wood preserved in the corrosion. L 50, head W 15, head T 4, shank D 5.5 mm. Found close to Skeleton 005.

SF19a Small nail with square-sectioned, slightly curved shank and rounded head. L 46.5, head L 13, head T 3, shank D 4, tip D 3 mm. Unstratified, found close to midden deposit.

SF19b Large, heavy nail with sub-rectangular head and robust square-sectioned shank which is bent and slightly twisted. Conforms to Clark type 1 (1997, 159, *illus* 132:1), a type used for large structural timbers. L 148, head L 21.5, head T 6, shank D 11, tip D 2 mm. Unstratified, found close to midden deposit.

### *Discussion*

Of the three nails, only one (SF5) comes from a stratified context in association with skeletal remains. The adhering traces of wood suggest this was a fitting from a coffin, the remainder of which was presumably lost. Alternatively, as coffins are rare in medieval cemeteries, the nail may

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65 cf. Parker Pearson and Sharples 1999, 69-87.

have had a structural function, for example in a building. The condition of the remaining two nails indicates that they are likely to be post-medieval or relatively modern.

### *Radiocarbon dating*

Two individual pieces of bone were radiocarbon dated (Table 2). Calibration was according to the OxCal programme (v.4.3) and the IntCal13 calibration curve. The two samples were chosen from the most complete in situ bodies. A single piece of humerus produced a date of  $455\pm35$  BP, which calibrates to 1409-1486 AD (2 sigma). A second piece of humerus from a separate body yielded a date of  $350\pm35$  BP, which calibrated to 1456-1636 AD (2 sigma). The dates indicate that at the time of the last known burial in 1878, the cemetery had been in use for over 350 years.

Site	Sample	Material	Context	Uncal	Calibrated 1 – sigma	Calibrated 2 – sigma	Delta- <sup>13</sup> C ‰
St Taran's and St Keith's Chapels, Taransay	SUERC-(GU-14155)	Unburnt Human Bone	002: SK008	$455\pm35$	1422–1454 AD	1409–1486 AD	19.5‰
St Taran's and St Keith's Chapels, Taransay	SUERC-(GU-14159)	Unburnt Human Bone	002: SK009	$350\pm35$	1478–1523 AD; 1559–1563 AD; 1570–1630 AD	1456–1636AD	20.0‰

**Table 2: Radiocarbon dating.**

## **Conclusions**

The close proximity of the recovered skeletal remains to the chapels of St Taran's and St Keith's at Paible, Taransay, indicates that the bodies probably originated from the associated burial grounds, likely having been interred under Christian practices. From the fragmentary evidence recovered, each body appears to have been buried in an extended supine position, on an east/west alignment, with the head at the west, and the hands and arms to the side. It has been argued that at least some of the bodies were interred within stone cists. Graves aligned north/south were recorded in the (unexcavated) northern edge of the cemetery (Figure 4) – this may be indicative of a relatively early Christian burial site, since in such early cemeteries it is not uncommon to find graves aligned in this way. These burials might represent the earliest part



of the consecrated ground.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, the widespread occurrence of early churches located on sites of pre-Christian burials has led to the suggestion that this may be a result of continuity of burial places.<sup>67</sup>

The dated skeletal remains relate to the medieval and post-medieval occupation of Paible (before and perhaps slightly after the Reformation) and confirm the long-lived presence of burial grounds associated with these chapels-of-ease in the parish of Kilbride. Thomas, citing the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), has estimated that there are over 200 potential chapel sites throughout the Hebrides, a varied corpus with 'a whole host of different types of buildings with very different functions, founders and users' with, based on analogy with English studies, four main chapel types, 'dependent, cult, private and locational'.<sup>68</sup> As Thomas notes, 'the identification of these different types of chapel is challenging' in the medieval period in this part of Scotland, in particular in part due to a paucity of documentary references to chapels in late medieval Hebridean sources.<sup>69</sup> The archaeological remains uncovered on Taransay are, therefore, of considerable interest. It is likely that the chapels on Taransay are examples of 'dependent' chapels, as such chapels were commonly associated with burial grounds,<sup>70</sup> at least from the 14th century onwards when 'papal mandates granting permission for burial at chapels became increasingly common'.<sup>71</sup> Such dependent chapels or chapels-of-ease were 'incorporated into the parochial structure' and were 'primarily meant to serve communities distant from the parish church or communities that faced particular difficulties in accessing the parish church'.<sup>72</sup> Given the location of these chapels on an island off the coast of Harris, in the large parish of Kilbride, the need for at least one chapel-of-ease is comprehensible. Even in the late 18th century, Macleod described only seven places of public worship within the 'enormous' parish of Kilbride, with the two in closest proximity being separated by a distance of nine miles<sup>73</sup> while Thomas notes that on Lewis 'the two closest medieval parish churches were twelve miles apart'.<sup>74</sup>

The Taransay remains represent a relatively rare example of an excavated chapel and burial site of such a late date. There have been relatively few excavations of such chapel sites in the Hebrides, and for later medieval

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66 Halsall 1997, 6.

67 O'Sullivan 1994, 354.

68 Thomas 2015, 67.

69 *ibid.*

70 *ibid.*, 68, 70.

71 *ibid.*, 69.

72 *ibid.*

73 Macleod 1792, 379.

74 Thomas 2015, 69.

chapel sites, the right of burial is more commonly evidenced by the presence of late medieval graveslabs or reports of finds of human bones.<sup>75</sup> Barrowman, discussing the area of Norse settlement, notes that 'excavations of chapel sites are rare due to the fact that there are often graveyards present at the site, and burials within and around the chapel buildings and excavation is not therefore appropriate'<sup>76</sup> – her excavations at St Ninian's Isle, Shetland being a notable exception, although previous archaeological works there in the 1950s had done much to disturb the medieval and post-medieval remains when 'thousands of medieval and later burials were removed to reveal the church walls'.<sup>77</sup>

While, in general, the skeletal remains on Taransay showed little out of the ordinary, with both sexes and all ages having been interred, there were only three children and juveniles present. Additionally, the recorded skeletal remains provide significant evidence of dietary stresses in several inhabitants of the island – an individual had a history of iron deficiency anaemia during childhood while two people showed signs of periods of illness or malnutrition during childhood.

Fortunately, in the Western Isles an informative study of a late medieval and post-medieval burial ground was undertaken by Albert Miles who was able to excavate a chapel and burial site on the nearby island of Ensay, again off the coast of Harris, over a number of seasons in the 1960s and early 1970s, with the 'remains of 416 individuals...rescued from the wind-eroded burial ground in relation to four strata ranging from about 1500 to 1850 AD'.<sup>78</sup> This provides a useful study for comparison with the Taransay remains.

Unlike on Taransay, the burials on Ensay, with the exception of the last inhumation of 1888, were unmarked, though Miles suggests that they would originally have been marked by 'upright slabs and boulders' as on other islands such as Pabbay and Taransay.<sup>79</sup> Within the burial ground, erosion of accumulated sand revealed a drystone building 'with external dimensions about 7.2 m x 4.6 m', identified as a chapel with door and window openings and an internal platform or altar, and with evidence that the walls were faced with a locally-produced shell lime mortar.<sup>80</sup> The surrounding boundary wall of the burial ground had foundations 'at about the level of the eaves of the chapel' and all the excavated skeletons on Ensay post-dated the covering of

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75 Sarah Thomas pers comm.

76 Barrowman 2008, 40.

77 Barrowman 2003, 53.

78 Miles 1989, 192.

79 *ibid.*, 8.

80 *ibid.*, 9-11.

the chapel with sand, estimated by Miles to have occurred around 1500.<sup>81</sup> Miles suggests that the Ensay (or Manish) chapel was of 13th or 14th century date, based on its size and other features, such as the presence of lime mortar render, and in spite of the absence of excavated human remains pre-dating its sealing by sand in the 16th century, believed that such burials, associated with the functioning medieval chapel were likely to exist in deeper, unexcavated deposits; earlier, Bronze Age occupation and burial remains having been found in the area.<sup>82</sup>

The excavated Ensay skeletal remains, therefore, dated to the late medieval and post-medieval period also evidenced by the radiocarbon-dated remains at Taransay, though, as noted above, it is possible that north/south-aligned graves on Taransay may represent a significantly earlier phase of burial. On Ensay all but one of the interments was 'supine with head to the west with hands over the pelvis or occasionally at the sides'.<sup>83</sup> This accords with most of the burials on Taransay where the individuals were laid in an extended supine position and on an east/west alignment, with the head at the west, and the hands and arms to the side. However, while evidence was found for the use of stone cists on Taransay, on Ensay no such evidence was found, though coffin remains and green stains identified as shroud pins were recorded.<sup>84</sup>

Although Miles notes that 'early descriptions of the Western Isles refer to Ensay in terms that suggest it was an exceptionally fertile land',<sup>85</sup> on Ensay the skeletal remains provide evidence that it required 'hard toil to extract a livelihood from such an ungentle environment' with examples of fractured vertebrae, chronic skeletal injury and compression fractures of the vertebral bones indicative of the labours of the island population.<sup>86</sup> While the Taransay remains provided examples of arthritis of the wrist and a fractured jaw, there was not such a clear picture of work-related injury. However, one adult male (Skeleton 023) on Taransay had unusually worn upper and lower teeth, the left first upper molar having angled wear, and with both right incisors reduced to stumps, perhaps the result of using the teeth as a tool or alternatively from habitually holding a pipe.

The Ensay remains also differed from those from Taransay in the mortality profile of the excavated population. At Ensay, 'the infant and child mortality rates, 281 and 418 per thousand births respectively, are so remarkably high that their validity deserves to be questioned...However, they are similar to

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81 *ibid*, 15, 26.

82 *ibid*, 162-9.

83 *ibid*, 21.

84 *ibid*.

85 *ibid*, 2.

86 *ibid*, 184-5.

those recorded for other societies where life was hard, infant disease rampant, and little or no medical treatment available'.<sup>87</sup> On Ensay 'over one-half were juvenile and about one-quarter were below the age of five years',<sup>88</sup> while only three of the 31 individuals from whom skeletal remains were recovered at Taransay were aged less than 17. It is likely, however, that Miles was able to recover a more representative (as well as larger) sample of the interred population of late medieval and post-medieval Ensay during several seasons of fieldwork than was possible at Taransay, where the skeletal remains were recovered under rescue conditions. The Taransay skeletal groups were derived from incomplete burials eroding out of exposed coastal sections. It is unsurprising that the generally more robust and substantial skeletal remains of adults were more commonly recoverable under these circumstances than those of infants and juveniles, and thus the results of the analyses of human remains at Taransay, while significant, cannot provide a full and accurate picture of the island population and its demographics.

Of the two cemeteries on Taransay recorded by Martin around 1700,<sup>89</sup> it would appear that the majority of one has almost completely disappeared. The topographic survey carried out by AOC identified 213 upstanding graveslabs, and a small enclosure, but all were positioned to the west of the burn in close proximity to St Keith's. Only a few fragments of human bone (MacLeod's Site 4) were identified to the east of the burn, and this may be explained by almost total loss of grave remains in this area to coastal erosion; such erosion was reported by surveyors from the Royal Commission when they visited the site in 1969.<sup>90</sup> The existing evidence suggests that the area to the west of the burn contained St Keith's cemetery while the area to the east contained St Taran's. However, the apparent tradition of interring men and women in separate cemeteries was not substantiated by the results of the archaeological works and subsequent post-excavation analyses. Although the evidence fails to support Martin's suggestion, it is not a wholly unrealistic one as such practices have been recorded at St Ronan's at Iona and may have been reasonably common in early medieval Irish sites.<sup>91</sup> It may be that segregation was only practised for a short period, a suggestion supported by an amendment to Martin's description which reported a male burial within the female graveyard.<sup>92</sup> The lack of any surviving defining ditch or bank for the consecrated ground is uncommon and may be the result of later erosion of the original boundary.

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87 *ibid*, 180.

88 *ibid*, 192.

89 Martin 1934, 123-4; Martin 2003, 48-9.

90 NRHE Reference NG09NW 1.

91 O'Sullivan 1994, 358-9.

92 Lawson 1997, 15.

Both St Keith's and St Taran's Chapels were found to overlie earlier midden deposits, indicating the occupation of the site prior to the construction of the chapels. The recovered human bone was found to be intermixed with a quantity of animal bone, suggesting that the underlying midden deposits may have been dug through to insert the burials. The discovery in 2000 of pottery dated to between the 4th and 10th centuries AD in midden deposits at Tràigh a' Siar, to the north-west of the chapels is further evidence for Late Iron Age or early medieval occupation of the island.<sup>93</sup>

The Bronze Age and Iron Age material recovered from the three recorded midden deposits demonstrate the longevity, whether continuous or intermittent, of the settlement in which the chapels were founded, with the likelihood being that they were located within an existing, working landscape.<sup>94</sup> An early cross-incised stone, recovered from a house at Paibeil, and believed to have come from St Taran's Chapel, indicates that the site had religious importance as early as the 7th-8th centuries,<sup>95</sup> a possibility that may be supported by various studies into the history of *papar* names such as Paible.<sup>96</sup> Though debate remains as to who actually named the *papar* sites, these place-names could have been applied to an existing ecclesiastical group encountered during the initial period of raiding,<sup>97</sup> or retrospectively, in the late 9th-10th centuries, to church sites (or places believed to have an ecclesiastical association) abandoned during those 'early phases of raiding and land-taking'.<sup>98</sup> However, the *papar* names have a Norse origin and therefore 'reflect directly the interests, and possibly, activities of Norsemen'.<sup>99</sup> They therefore provide limited evidence for the inhabitants of the sites prior to the arrival of the Norse. While the chapels on Taransay could have been in use between the 7th and 9th centuries, without further fieldwork this conclusion is uncertain. With the exception of the north/south-aligned graves identified in the north of the cemetery, there is no clear evidence to refute the possibility that the two chapels evident as low stone and earth footings today were constructed at a later date, perhaps in the 12th century when sites believed formerly to have been Christian were dedicated to early saints as a means of legitimising the evolution of the parochial system in the Isles.<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, the cist [009] recorded during the topographic survey

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93 Fitzpatrick 2000.

94 Simpson et al. 2005, 11.

95 Fisher 2002, 44.

96 Crawford et al. 2002; Simpson et al. 2005.

97 Crawford et al. 2002, 8; Simpson et al. 2005, 2.

98 MacDonald 2002, 22.

99 *ibid.*, 21.

100 Gibbon 2006, 105.

of the eastern beach did not contain diagnostic artefacts or bone and as such remains undated. Though the structure bore similarities to examples excavated throughout the Western Isles, for example a Bronze Age cist<sup>101</sup> and a Norse cemetery,<sup>102</sup> both at Cnip, such stone-built settings are diagnostic to neither period nor area.

Since the departure of Taransay's resident population in the 20th century, the majority of the island's buildings have fallen into disrepair, with only those currently being used by the non-resident owners still in a habitable condition. As with the structures identified within the midden, ongoing erosion is having a dramatic effect on the remains on the island, and undoubtedly this deterioration will only worsen over time.

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101 Armit 1996, 16-99, Fig 6.4.

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