

Eaglaisean an Eilein Building on Faith

In 1841, during an investigation into the 'spiritual state' of the island, the Presbytery of Mull reported that "from [the 1770s onwards] the Incumbent Ministers of Tyree have severally officiated at a Preaching House provided at Scarinish and at one of the Schoolhouses situated at the West of the Island". It was this report which eventually led to the building of two new churches, one at Heylipol and the other at Kirkapol.

The building to which the Presbytery took exception is known in local tradition as *Eaglais Sgairinis* and was situated at Scarinish pier.



Scarinish Harbour around 1900 - the building on the left is Scarinish Church, *Eaglais Sgairinis*. The extension at the rear can just be seen.

In 1885 a substantial extension was added to the rear on the instructions of the 5th Duke of Argyll "to make it answer for a church". After this building was abandoned by the Church of Scotland in the 1840s it was used as a store house.

A plan was adopted to build two churches on Tyree, one to serve the east of the island, the other to serve the west. In April 1842 the contract to build a church capable of seating 600 (on the same site as today's Heylipol Church) was won by McNab and McInnes of Oban. The Heritors of Tyree and Coll - the 7th Duke of Argyll with Hugh MacLean, John Campbell and Alexander Campbell of Coll - were liable for the costs in terms of their title deeds which included, among other things, a responsibility to maintain the churches on their lands. Less than a year later the church was completed at a total cost to the Heritors of six hundred and ninety pounds, ten shillings and one penny.

Original Heylipol Church in black - arrow indicates datum line - note the porch to the west and the modern church outline in grey.

By overlaying the Ordnance Survey map of 1878 with a modern Google Earth satellite image we see that the church, which had an upper gallery, was a rectangular building and occupied roughly half the area occupied by the cruciform Gothic-style church of today.



The first Heylipol Church did not enjoy the longevity of its smaller counterpart at Kirkapol. In the 1860s new wooden flooring had to be installed. By 1890 the roof and gallery were found to be unsafe as the ends of the joists which rested on the walls had decayed through damp. New joists and heavy iron brackets were installed and new windows were also deemed necessary. By 1899 the situation was no better. In 1900 it was decided that nothing could be done to save the building and subsequently it was demolished, replaced by the present-day church in 1902.

Kirkapol Church in the early 20th century

With the completion of the church at Heylipol in 1843 the next step was to build a church for the east of the island to accommodate 450. The cost (this time) to the Heritors was, in total, seven hundred and twenty two pounds. Kirkapol Church is rectangular. The dressed stone is recorded as being sandstone but looks more like gneiss. The granite in the cornerstones came from



the Ross of Mull and was procured by the Commissioners for Northern Lights who were then using this type of stone in the construction of Skerryvore Lighthouse as well as the shore station at Hynish. The walls are topped by a hipped roof.