

RCAHMS

St. Blane's, Bute

A description of the remains of the monastic
and medieval parish church complex

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(with a contribution on the parish church by George Geddes)

The early monastic and medieval church complex at St Blane's, Bute – a Guardianship site under State care, was surveyed by RCAHMS in March 2012 at the request of and in partnership with the Blane's Bute Project, a project funded by the Discover Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme which hoped to undertake excavation there in the summer of 2012. This document describes the remains recorded within the scheduled monument area.

St Blane's

Introduction

St Blane's old parish church and its associated burial-grounds, located close to the southern end of the Isle of Bute, are Guardianship monuments under the care of Historic Scotland. These monuments sit within a larger area that is protected under Ancient Monument legislation and together represent a palimpsest of development that stretches from possibly as early as the 6th or 7th century AD to recent times. All of the buildings, other structures, enclosures, walls and cultivation remains within the scheduled area, plus a bit beyond, were surveyed by RCAHMS in March 2012 as part of the 'Blane's Bute' project. The survey revealed numerous previously unrecorded features that allow a greater understanding of the site to be gained.

The early medieval monastery

The monastery of Kingarth is alleged to have been founded by St Cattán, uncle of Blane, in the late 6th century (see Laing, Laing & Longley 1998 for a succinct note of the early references to the monastery), but the first direct reference to a religious house here is a mention of the death of Daniel, bishop of Kingarth, recorded about AD 659. Other documentary references confirm the existence of some form of religious house here throughout most of the second half of the 1st millennium AD and finds of artefacts testify to a range of activities, including metalworking and the manufacture of lignite artefacts. However, there is no solid dating evidence for any of this activity since, so far, none of the early medieval artefacts recovered have been recorded as being found in secure, datable, contexts, and none of buildings or structures has been demonstrated as being of such early date.

Modern visitors to the monument are presented with an interpretation of the site that includes a thick stone wall, the 'vallum', which is said to have enclosed the monastery, and a small rectangular structure within the southerly of the two burial-grounds, which is purported to be the possible remains of an early chapel (see below). As far as the 'vallum' is concerned, there are actually two enclosures – the southern one, which is the larger and contains the church and the two burial-grounds, and another that conjoins it on the NW. Each is partly enclosed by a wall, measuring about 1.2m thick and generally no more than about 0.6m in height. However, the enclosure walls that are visible today were largely constructed in the late-19th century on the instructions of the 3rd Marquis of Bute, although they are thought to have been built on or close to the line of earlier walls of indeterminate date. The fragmentary remains of the earlier wall around the larger enclosure were recorded on a plan by the Marquis' architect Schultz in the 1890s and where these original portions of wall can be identified they can be seen to be very slightly thicker than the later sections and usually constructed with larger boulders.

It is traditionally assumed that the western edge of the monastery precinct was defined by the top of a steep natural slope that stands up to 17m high and includes sections of bare rock-face and a scree of large boulders. A drystone field wall of probably late-18th or early-19th century date runs along the top of this slope, but there is no evidence here of any earlier man-made boundary. It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that unless the fragments of revetment wall at the foot of the slope (described below) are actually the remains of the western boundary of the precinct, then the slope itself (or perhaps just the top of it) provided a suitably distinct demarcation between the secular land to the W and the spiritual to the E.

The southern enclosure

It has generally been accepted that the boundary wall of the southern enclosure sprung off the western cliff-face immediately N of the structure known as 'The Cauldron', thereafter describing a segmented arc before returning to the foot of the cliff in the vicinity of the rectangular building known as 'The Manse'. As currently presented, the 'vallum' encloses a roughly egg-shaped area

measuring some 203m from NW to SE by up to 150m transversely at the wider SE end and little more than 30m at the NW end, measured to the foot of the scree. Modern visitors to the site are informed that a short, detached, length of wall (NS 09467 53360) immediately SE of 'The Manse' is part of this 'vallum'. However, recent RCAHMS survey has cast some doubt on this explanation and suggests an alternative line for the wall at the southern end of the enclosure.

At the NW end of the enclosure (NS 09425 53537) the use of large boulders in the boundary wall differentiates it from those sections of the wall that were renovated or built anew in the 1890s. It also thickens slightly as it merges into the very large boulders at the foot of the scree, and a further row of outcrop boulders possibly extends the line of the inner face some 9m up the slope.

Potentially of very early date, the character of the wall here is similar to other stretches of wall thought to be genuinely early in date. However, this stretch of probably early wall is short and between it and an entrance gap some 80m to the SE, the present wall appears to be almost entirely rebuilt. The spread of rubble immediately NE of and parallel to the wall represents the robbed remains of a drystone dyke and bears witness to where the Marquis' workers sourced at least some of their building stone.

That there was an original entrance gap through the NE side of the enclosure at this point is probably supported by the presence of the socketed base of a carved stone (NS05SE 10) just a few metres outside it. And, whilst the present width of the gap (3.3m wide) strongly suggests that it may have been rebuilt wide enough in the 19th century to facilitate farm traffic (see below), the character of the stonework on its NW side looks genuinely early, contrasting with the clearly later build of the SE side.

The line of the wall to the SE of the entrance has crossed the SW flank of a low but prominent ridge and here its inner face has been set up to 1.2m below the outer, which has been almost entirely robbed. The inner face, however, has survived because it has acted as a revetment to the slope and other than losing its uppermost courses through robbing, it appears not to have been significantly altered or enhanced in recent times along its 39m length. The outer face, however, was probably robbed to construct the now ruinous drystone dyke that is situated immediately to the NE and all that is now visible of it are two probable facing-stones at its mid-point, the upper edge of a robber trench to the SE, and a spread of rubble to the NW, running down to the entrance.

At the SE end of this stretch of early wall the builders faced an interesting problem in how to carry it over a 2m high near-vertical rock outcrop (NS 09527 53484). Exactly how that problem was solved has been confused by robbing for the later field wall which also climbed up onto the rise. However, there is an important clue – a rock-cut ledge, about 0.3m wide, on the shoulder of the outcrop, which clearly has nothing to do with the later stone dyke and which was probably intended to offer a stable platform for a basal stone of the outer face of the early wall. This ledge probably provides enough evidence that the earlier wall here took a very short but significant dog-leg to the NE before returning to continue its path SE.

Before continuing with the description of the wall to the SE, mention should be made here of what is effectively a rock-cut ditch, which lies immediately outwith the line of both the earlier wall and the later stone dyke and cuts through, from NW to SE, the low but prominent ridge previously mentioned. Measuring approximately 30m in length by 6.6m in maximum breadth and about 3m in depth on the NE side, this feature appears to have carried a later track, but its original purpose is not known. Elsewhere on the perimeter of the precinct there is ample evidence to show that a comparatively slight wall, probably originally little more than 2m in height, (or, as is most likely on the W, natural features) provided sufficient demarcation, therefore it can hardly be argued that the ditch was excavated to form part of the formal boundary.

The dating of the feature is also problematic. It could be earlier than the precinct wall, but this suggestion relies on the short section of drystone masonry, which fills a void in the SW face of the ditch, having been constructed not to support the outer face of the 18th/early 19th century stone dyke, which it underlies, but the earlier precinct wall. In support of this premise, it can be noted that

similar uses of such masonry (ie to fill voids within living rock) in the northern enclosure wall (see below) can be shown to have no relationship at all with the late 18th/early 19th century stone dyke, even when their respective paths run close to one another. Indeed, it is a feature of the dyke (and others in the vicinity) that the builders, presumably fully aware of the potential of subsequent collapse, generally shied away from constructing too close to precipitous edges.

And if the builders of the precinct wall found it necessary to support it by filling in a void in the ditch-edge, this clearly shows that the latter was a pre-existing feature, though for how long it had already been in existence is not known. What it does illustrate, however, is that the history of the monastery and church precinct was probably a long and complex one, and one that cannot be unravelled through simple observation alone.

Immediately to the SE of the outcrop, where the early wall would have probably followed the inner edge of the rock-cut ditch, there is a 32m gap in which there are now no visible traces of the wall, the presumption being that it has been entirely robbed to build the adjacent dyke. Thereafter, there is a stretch of walling some 124m in length which was substantially rebuilt in the 1890s but which incorporates several surviving short lengths of the earlier wall. One of these stretches (NS 09550 53375), some 9m in length, is characterised by being slightly thicker than the newer stretches to either side and by the use of much larger blocks in its construction. Another indication that this is an original section of wall is the absence along its inner face of the 1890s construction trench, a feature that is visible along much of the rest of the wall on this side of the site. This long length of wall ends abruptly at a neatly finished terminal (NS 09525 53357) and gives every impression that the late 19th century builders had little intention of continuing it towards its logical end-point, somewhere close the southern end of the western cliff-face, some 90m to the SW.

Rather than accepting the current view that the boundary wall terminated on the western cliff somewhere close to 'The Manse', the RCAHMS survey suggests that a more likely line for the wall to have followed would have seen it end at the southern end of the cliff (c.NS 09465 53289), some 70m to the S of that building. The main reason for dismissing the short length of wall close to 'The Manse' is that it cuts across an outward-facing slope like no other part of the precinct wall, its outer face (as rebuilt) is slightly concave, and it appears to disregard the topography of the site. Further, there is enough cumulative evidence from excavation and early maps to suggest that this wall is more likely to have once formed part of a building or associated other structure. A much more logical path for the wall to have followed would have seen it run from its present neatly-finished terminal on the SE and along the edge of a terrace to the southern end of the western cliff. Although the remains of ridged cultivation now obscures much of the presumed path of this boundary, fragments of a thick wall, 15m in length and incorporating a large earth-fast erratic boulder, are still visible close to the modern gateway into the field at the SW corner of the scheduled area. This is also the logical place for there to have been an entrance into the precinct for those approaching from the S and SW (e.g. Dunagoil), but a quarry (see below) has been driven into the southern end of the western cliff-face here and any visible evidence for an entrance appears to have been lost.

The northern enclosure

This enclosure adjoins the NNW end of the southern enclosure and it, too, utilises the steep natural slopes on the SW to form that side. Roughly triangular on plan, it measures about 185m from NW to SE by up to 42m in breadth at the broader NW end, where there is an entrance (3.4m wide).

Although the relationship between the two enclosures is unknown, the likelihood is that in their present form the northern one will be of later date. However, it should be remembered that the present lines of the respective enclosure walls are essentially a late 19th century fabrication, albeit largely on the footings of earlier walls. But those earlier walls are undated and it may be the case that the footprint of the two enclosures actually reflects a relatively late phase of activity and that a very early phase of the monastic settlement might have comprised one large enclosure, measuring 400m from NW to SE, later modified to what can be seen today.

The NW end of the northern enclosure was renovated in the 1890s and from the entrance, which has splayed terminals, the thick, turf-capped, wall runs SW for a distance of 32m before ending on a large outcrop that protrudes from the steep natural face. From the NE side of the entrance, the wall extends 27m to the ENE before turning SE onto the crest of a low ridge, where, after a distance of about 28m, it becomes very fragmentary until both wall-faces are lost. Further along the crest, the outer face is again visible, set down low into the craggy NE face of the rise. Where best preserved, this face measures some 1.2m in height, but nowhere does it rise to the height of the crest. The inner face has either been completely robbed or else is obscured by the ruins of the later stone dyke that was set back a metre or so from the steep edge.

The early wall appears to have followed the crest of the ridge to its SSE end (c.NS 09393 53615), but there is some doubt about its path thereafter. Most likely, it turned to the E to cross a dip before climbing up onto a second ridge, but that dip has been heavily disturbed, not least by the creation of a hollow trackway and the building of the later stone dyke which probably used the older boundary as a source of stone. The remains of a wall run along the spine of the second ridge. It has largely been reduced to a thick grass-grown bank and the only facing-stones that are visible are towards the NNW end where there is a fragment of drystone masonry filling a void in the exposed vertical rock-face (NS 09423 53611). The SE end of the ridge has been quarried and the ground around its foot cultivated, therefore there is now no visible evidence of how the wall may have related to the southern enclosure. Presumably they must have joined, probably a little to the N of 'The Cauldron', but, logically, there must also have been an entrance about here.

The Church

The ruinous early parish church of Kingarth dominates the surrounding graveyards and the remnants of St Blane's monastic settlement and has traditionally been ascribed, as has nearby Inchmarnock, to the 12th century. Although on stylistic grounds the fine chancel arch could be dated to the second half of the 12th century, Denys Pringle (2000) has outlined the case for considering the fabric of the nave, including the arch, as belonging to the early decades of the 13th century, when Bute came under Stewart control. After this there was a sequence of alterations to the building which, as currently understood, can be summarised as: (a) an extension or reconstruction of the W end of the nave; (b) an extension of the E part of the chancel in the 14th century, including the re-use of the original E gable; (c) further alterations to the chancel in the 15th or 16th century; and (d) a rebuild and conservation in the 1890s.

Recent survey suggests that the true picture is even more complicated. For instance, the upper part of the mid-gable, which was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century, appears to offer some evidence that the chancel has been narrowed (at least on its S side). However, such is the degree of reconstruction that has taken place that it is now extremely difficult to work out from the visible evidence alone any of the relationships between the different parts of the structure. More clarity exists for the final phases of use of the building: the roof was blown from the nave in 1675 and the chancel was subsequently used for services until 1677, by which date a new church (NS05NE 42) had been constructed 2.8km to the N (Pringle 2000, 138). It is not clear how long after this the chancel roof remained in place.

The church lay disused for about 180 years, its fabric slowly falling into ruin and its stone and other useable parts gradually being robbed. However, by the mid-19th century there was renewed interest in the site. The church was surveyed in detail by Charles Hutcheson (possibly the well-known Glasgow merchant, hymnist and acquaintance of the architect John Baird) and notes from his manuscript were detailed in Reid's History of Bute (1864, 28-9). Further measured surveys were undertaken by Baird in 1852 (Baird 1853; Galloway 1880, 318) and another architect, William Galloway, in 1872 (Galloway 1880; Hewison 1896).

A photograph published in 1864 (Reid 1864, opp. 28; RCAHMS DP092313) shows the church and its associated burial-grounds, which, at that time, were unkempt and enclosed by ruinous and

overgrown walls. The condition of the chancel, in particular the consolidated character of the mid-gable, suggests that there had already been a phase of restoration by this date. Works 'clearing the church' in 1874 (Hewison 1893, 201) uncovered grave slabs in the interior, although a comparison of the drawings from 1872 and 1896 suggests little work was undertaken on the church itself. Further survey work on the church and surrounding complex was undertaken during the 1890s by a team under the direction of the renowned architect, Robert Weir Schultz, driven by the interest of the 3rd Marquis of Bute (1847-1900), who also funded work by William Galloway at Craggleton Church (NX44SE 9) and Whithorn Priory (NX44SW 5) in the same decade. Drawings and photographs (e.g. RCAHMS SC1161667) give an indication of the condition of the church, in particular the nave, before the 1896 conservation works. Repairs involved parts of the walls of the nave being taken down 'stone by stone', and rebuilt with slate pinnings marking the new work. Medieval stonework was reinstated where possible, although at least some new stone was cut. The building passed into State care in the 20th century and has since undergone a series of repairs, including partial re-pointing.

The northern (upper) burial-ground

The church stands on the highest point within and at about the midpoint of an irregularly-shaped burial-ground that measures 60m from NNW to SSE by 35m transversely within a stone wall that is known to have been extensively rebuilt in 1896, though largely on the line of an existing ruinous wall. It is clear from the relationship of the wall around the burial-ground to the natural topography that there has been considerable modification to the ground-levels both inside and out. The present topography provides little or no clue as to the disposition of any early medieval structures, monastic or otherwise, but indicates that the medieval church was built on an E and W orientation across the midpoint of what was probably a comparatively narrow knoll the long axis of which was N and S, and which stood something like 4m above the surrounding land. The narrowness of the knoll probably accounts for the rather pointed N end of the northern burial-ground.

Within this burial-ground and immediately N of the chancel, the recent RCAHMS survey has noted what appears to be the top of a wall running roughly NNW and SSE. This aligns it with both the N and S ends of the present E boundary wall and therefore probably represents an earlier line of this wall before the burial-ground was extended outwards to accommodate the extension to the chancel in the 14th century. The remainder of the N part of the burial-ground is remarkably free of tangible features: there is one small upright grave-slab, several depressions that may represent lairs or tree-throws, and a low mound immediately N of the nave is what remains of a pile of modern building debris, visible on aerial photographs taken by John Dewar in 1973 (BU600-1, 603, 606-7). There is an entrance into this part of the burial-ground on the NW, which appears to have been rebuilt or at least extensively repaired in recent years. On the outside, it is furnished with a set of stone steps, but adjacent to them are older steps which indicate that the original gap was either wider than the present one or that it was formerly offset to the S.

In contrast to the northern part of the upper burial-ground, the southern portion is crammed with grave-stones, both small upright and long horizontal slabs. These are concentrated towards the top of the knoll, but the present disposition of the graves is undoubtedly a misleading one as a good number of slabs will have been repositioned in the 19th century as a result of the rebuilding of the burial-ground wall and the driving through of the trench for the set of steps that now link the upper and lower graveyards.

Indeed, it is difficult to know just how much shifting and moving about of gravestones there has been. Part of this difficulty is judging how much of the original W side of the knoll has been removed. Viewing the knoll from the S clearly shows that the natural profile of the W side must have once been less steep and this would have taken the foot of the slope out beyond the line of the present wall, which is effectively just a tall, 2m high, revetment. The original fabric of the S face of the W end of the nave shows that the church has suffered from subsidence and it appears that the

late 19th century rebuild of the W end involved the laying of a new concrete foundation, the top of which is still visible where is not obscured by turf. It is tempting, though probably very difficult to prove, that this subsidence was, at least in part, caused by the cutting back of the W flank of the knoll (too close to the church) to accommodate the new revetment wall.

One of the remarkable features of the two burial-grounds is the height difference (not less than about 1.5m) between them. Evidence of old photographs and plans indicates that the present revetment wall separating the two is probably built on medieval foundations, but the present profile cannot reflect the original form of the knoll, which must have had a gentler incline on both its S and W flanks. And the differentiation cannot simply be attributed to the work of the 19th century landscapers. It is most likely that this was a medieval wall against which soil had accumulated though the constant use of the upper enclosure for burials. Indeed, the depth of accumulated soil within the southern part of the upper burial-ground strongly suggests that supplementary deposits of earth have been imported to facilitate additional burials.

The upper and lower burial-grounds are linked by a sunken stone-lined passage that measures 15m in length by 2m in breadth and 1.5m in depth, and contains a flight of stone steps at its N end. Built sometime before 1874, probably to facilitate access between the upper burial-ground and the lower, which does not have a separate entrance, the excavation of the construction trench for the passage must have wreaked considerable destruction on numerous burials. The top of this construction trench, which measures 3m in width, is still visible in the turf and the present disposition of gravestones to either side of it provides a very good idea of the number of stones that would have had to have been moved, a conservative estimate being about fifty. The reason why this method of linking the two burial-grounds was used instead of constructing a simple set of steps against the S face of the wall boundary wall is not known.

The southern (lower) burial-ground

The southern, or lower, burial-ground, by tradition associated with the burial of the women of the parish, is irregular on plan, measuring 43.5m from E to W by 23.5m transversely within a wall largely of modern build. The 1874 plan reproduced in Hewison (1893) depicts the shape of the northern part of this burial-ground much as it is today, but the southern part is very different, the square SE and SW corners having since been rounded, effectively reducing the area of the enclosure. None of the previous plans of the church and its burial-grounds give any indication of the low oval mound in the centre of the lower enclosure. Measuring approximately 24m from E to W by 18m transversely and 0.4m in height, the origin of the mound is unknown but not only is it the focus for the majority of the burials in this enclosure, but a socket-stone (NS05SE 5.13), presumably once housing a carved stone cross, sits upon it.

Building (NS05SE 5.27: NS 09484 53414), traditionally ascribed as a possible chapel, this rectangular building stands in the NW part of the lower graveyard. It measures 4.6m from E to W by 3.35m transversely within low walls that are of varying thickness up to 1.7m. These walls are very poorly built, but the doorway in the S side, which is offset towards the W end, has high-quality jambs that are probably medieval but which are almost certainly in re-use. The W jamb contains a socket for a possible hinge and both have rebates for a wooden door. The grave-slabs within the interior have been moved there from elsewhere within one of the two burial-grounds.

Burial Enclosure (NS05SE 5.26: NS 09510 53421). This enclosure has been built into the NE corner of the lower graveyard. It measures up to 6.8m from E to W by 5.7m transversely within the high wall of the upper burial-ground on the N, the equally high wall of the lower-burial ground on the E, and elsewhere by a wall that stands barely 1m high and incorporates several reused moulded blocks, probably from the church. There is an entrance in middle of the S side equipped with a wrought iron gate on which there is a plaque stating 'In loving memory of Sir William and Lady MacEwan of

Garrochty. John A C MacEwan, Margaret D B MacEwan, Hugh A MacEwan, William MacEwan, William MacEwan R MacDonald'. The single grave stone within the interior is set against the centre of the N wall and is dated 1958.

The Cauldron (NS05SE 8: NS 09428 53524) This enigmatic structure, also known as 'The Devil's Cauldron', stands in the NW corner of the southern enclosure, at the foot of the western cliff. Largely rebuilt in the 1890s, small sheets of lead, some of which are visible, were placed within the masonry by the Marquis of Bute's staff to differentiate between the old and new build. Oval on plan it measures 10.6m from NNE to SSW by 9.3m transversely within a crudely-constructed wall generally about 2.5m in thickness (but thickening to 3.1m at the entrance on the SE) and now up to about 1.8m in internal height on the W, where the structure has been set into the slope. The entrance is splayed, widening from 1.6m in width internally to 2.8m externally. Although this structure was cleared out when it was renovated in the 1890s, it appears never to have been subject to any archaeological excavation. Consequently, there is little or no evidence of its date; indeed, presently it is not possible to state whether the structure is some form of building or simply a massive-walled enclosure.

Cross Base (NS05SE 5.10: NS 09499 53521) This cross-base or socket stone, which is situated just outside the entrance gap in the NE side of the southern monastic enclosure, is as previously described in Canmore.

Cross Base (NS05SE 5.13: NS 09498 53405) This cross-base or socket stone, which is situated within the southern burial-ground, is as previously described in Canmore.

Font (NS05SE 5.00: NS 09458 53427) This font is situated at the N end of a reconstructed wall 26m SW of the church. Crudely formed from a block of red sandstone, it measures 0.83m by 0.76m and at least 0.3m in thickness overall. The basin is 0.5m in diameter and 0.2m in depth; a shallow, U-shaped depression on its lip probably indicates a secondary use of the stone.

The Manse (NS05SE 5.40; NS 09435 53375) The remains of this building are tucked below the western cliff towards the southern end of the site. It is accompanied by another structure which lies immediately S, the two forming an L-shaped range, its open side facing W. The 'Manse' has traditionally been ascribed as being the dwelling of the last ministers of the parish church in the 17th century, a suggestion supported by documentary evidence.

Rectangular on plan, the NE wing of the range measures 16.85m from NW to SE by 4.5m transversely within a wall up to 1.1m thick at the SE end and surviving up to 1m in height at the NW end, where the interior has been set into the foot of the slope. The interior was cleared out in the 1890s, revealing three compartments or rooms, the two smaller ones in the SE half of the building probably having entrances on the SW, but the large NW compartment apparently entered only by way of a gap through the partition wall at its SE end. The large mound immediately N of building, which measures up to 13m across, is the spoil-tip from the 1890s excavation, a 'barrow run' still distinct on its top. The building forming the SE wing of the range is now visible only as fragmentary footings.

Other structures

That there are several buildings set along the foot of the western cliff has long been recognised.

The most northerly (NS05SE 5.28: NS 09410 53559) is situated within the SE end of the northern enclosure and was first identified by RCAHMS during its Emergency Survey in May 1943. Though described at that time as circular, the structure appears to be subrectangular or subsquare, measuring about 7.7m from NNE to SSW by 6.9m transversely over a wall reduced to a grass-grown

bank about 1.8m in thickness but no more than 0.2m in height. There is a possible entrance at the centre of the ESE side. Probing with a survey-pin revealed the bank to contain very little stone, and it is likely that the structure overlies the adjacent rig-and-furrow.

A second structure (NS05SE 5.29; NS 09434 53508) is situated immediately S of 'The Cauldron'. Rectangular on plan, with an entrance in its SE end, it measures up to 5.55m by 3.7m within wall-footings of varying thickness up to 1.9m on the NE and SE. The interior, which has been cleared out, has been set into the slope on the NW and SW, where the walls act as revetments to the scree slope. **A third structure** (NS05SE 5.30; NS 09440 53487) is situated a further 13m to the S and it, too, has been cleared out. Subsquare on plan, it measures 7.25m from ENE to WSW by up to 6.9m transversely within the footings of a boulder wall up to 1.8m in thickness. There is an entrance in the SSE side which is far better defined on its W side than on its E side.

Two additional structures were recognised during the recent RCAHMS survey.

One (NS05SE 5.31; NS 09454 53589) stands on a narrow terrace on the NE face of the low ridge along which a section of the boundary wall of the northern enclosure runs. The structure, probably a rectangular building, has been very heavily robbed and is now partly obscured by spreads of field-cleared stone from the adjacent formerly cultivated ground. All that is now visible of it is its SE end, a 5m length of the adjoining SW wall and a rickle of stones that might represent the line of the front of the building on the NE. The SE end-wall measures 1.3m in thickness over inner and outer facing-stones and the building was at least 4.2m broad overall.

The other structure (NS05SE 5.32; NS 09531 53354) is situated immediately SE of the southern enclosure, on the NE side of a low grass-grown bank that separates two areas of rig-and-furrow immediately to the SE. Apparently sitting within an old quarry, the structure is now little more than a subrectangular hollow measuring 6m from NE to SW by 4m transversely and 0.2m in depth, which is fringed on the NW, NE and SE by a low spread of stones, possibly the remains of a wall.

The Well (NS05SE 9: NS 09442 53442)

'The Well' at St Blane's, sometimes referred to as 'The Fairy Well', is not a well as such but a small pool that is fed from a spring which emanates from the foot of the western cliff 35m W of the church. The shallow pool, 1.6m in diameter and presently covered by an iron grill, is edged on the NW by a short length of drystone walling and elsewhere by small, crudely-set boulders. The walling on the NW is situated underneath a large block of stone measuring almost 2m in length, but it is not clear whether this boulder has been deliberately placed here or whether the walling was built into the void below a stone that was already in place. The pool is enclosed on the NE, NW and SW by a low arc of boulders that runs behind the large block. The purpose of this arc was probably to formally define the 'area' of the pool, especially if there were any sacred connotations, rather than act, perhaps, as a barrier to scree falling down the slope into the pool. Situated immediately W of the pool is a revetment wall measuring about 9m in length from N to S by up to 2m in height and supporting a rather uneven platform on which there appears not to be any visible structure. The purpose of this revetment is not known but it may once have formed part of a longer feature which ran along the foot of the scree slope, fragments of which may still be visible between 'The Cauldron' and the building immediately to the S, and between that building and the next one S.

The later cultivation

It appears that almost every bit of ground within and in the immediate vicinity of the scheduled area that could be cultivated has been at some time. This is evident by the remains of rig-and-furrow, lazy-beds or ground that has been ploughed featureless in more recent times, the scarring around the edges of which being the most obvious sign of this activity. No estimate of the earliest date for any of this cultivation is made here, but the presumption is that the rig outside the boundary wall could easily be of medieval origin - some of it is slightly curvilinear and quite broad (up to 6m), but

that it carried on probably into the late 18th or early 19th century. Evidence for this late date is provided by the rig to the SE of the boundary wall, which is straight and relatively narrow (4.5 – 5m). This and the fact that the SW portion of that surveyed runs up to a narrow headland on the NE almost certainly indicates the use of a light plough, something that was not in common use until around the end of the 18th century.

Within the southern (main) monastic enclosure the picture is one of cultivation being squeezed into any available location. The aforementioned rig to the SE actually continues up the slope over the presumed line of the robbed monastic boundary wall and it may have originally reached as far as the southern of the two burial-grounds. To the E of the church, the rig is again straight and narrow (2.6-3.6m), running NNW and SSE, but to the NNW of the church, whilst also straight, the rig is much broader, measuring up to 7.2m across and orientated NW and SE. Where evident, the rig to the W of the church is again narrow, aligned NNE and SSW, and making use of the relatively narrow gap between the burial-grounds and the foot of the boulder-strewn western slope.

Later cultivation has generally rendered the ground within the northern monastic enclosure even and rather featureless, but the few clues that are present suggest that rig-and-furrow probably once filled the interior. Relatively broad rig, measuring up to 5.5m across, survives within the SE end and about half way along its NE side the cultivation has cut into the natural slope creating three roughly parallel plough-scars 4.2m to 5m apart. Elsewhere in the interior the scars of much more recent cultivation are visible along both the foot of the steep slope that forms the SW side of the enclosure and the low ridge on the NE, along the top of which the boundary wall runs. On the NE, this later cultivation has truncated four lazy-beds, 2.5m in breadth, which extend 9m up the face of the slope.

Corn-drying kiln (NS05SE 50; NS 09502 53512)

This kiln, which was excavated about fifty years ago (Milligan 1962), has been set into the foot of a WNW-facing slope immediately N of the boundary wall of the monastic settlement and just to the E of a gateway into the southern enclosure. It is as previously described in Canmore, but its presence amidst ample evidence of rig-and-furrow cultivation ought to indicate a nearby farmstead – certainly nearer than either the now ruinous Kingavin (NS05SE 17), some 280m to the N and where there is a corn-drying kiln anyway, or the still inhabited Plan (NS 09631 53055), some 470m to the SSE. The date of the kiln is unknown – the medieval pottery found during the excavation does not have a secure context and it could easily have been incorporated into the fabric of a much later structure. Probably no later, however, than the 1750s. Whilst the absence on any map of a depiction for a farmstead here cannot be used as conclusive proof that one did not exist, the likelihood is that if one did exist here after that date it would have been mentioned in some form of documentation.

Farmstead (NS05SE 5.40; NS 09435 53369)

The most likely location for a farmstead (that the kiln would have been associated with) is where **'The Manse'** is situated towards the SW side of the complex. Whilst there is good reason to suppose that one of the two structures visible today was the building that the Minister inhabited until the late 17th century, there is no reason to suppose that it could not have also formed, at some time, part of a working steading. The disposition of the buildings – in an L-plan with a yard to the W, and set within a landscape of rigged cultivation and enclosure walls, would, in most other circumstances in Scotland immediately suggest a farmstead, and the juxtaposition of farmstead and manse is known from elsewhere, for instance at Northmavine in Shetland (HU27NE 22).

Quarries

Small stone quarries are ubiquitous in the landscape around St Blane's, most having probably been opened in the past 250 years to construct stone walls and farm buildings and to provide hardcore for roads and tracks. There is no evidence that any of the quarries are contemporary with the monastic complex or are associated with the later church, but two could be relatively early.

The first (NS05SE 5.32; NS 09536 53358) appears to underlie the reconstructed boundary wall on the SE side of the southern enclosure, a subrectangular structure (see above) built on its floor. Dug to a depth of at least 2.5m into the SW-facing slope, it measures some 13m from NE to SW by 9m transversely. Its rear slope gives every appearance of running under the boundary wall, but the ground to the NW of the wall has been disturbed by its builders and the exact relationship between the two is not clear.

The second quarry (NS05SE 5.34; NS 09530 53454) lies 20m ENE of the church, having been dug into the SSW face of a low ridge. It is not large (c10m from NW to SE by at least 6m transversely and 2m deep on the NE), but some evidence of its relative antiquity may be provided by the field-cleared stones heaped onto its floor from the adjacent cultivated ground and the fact that its front appears to have been cut by an equally old track (see below).

Another quarry (NS05SE 5.33; NS 09454 53296) is situated at the SW corner of the site, having been dug into the S end of the steep slope that defines the western limit of the monastic complex. Grass-grown, it measures about 17m from NE to SW by 14m transversely and at least 4m in depth on the NW. The quarry probably dates to before the 1860s because it is respected by a field wall that is depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Argyllshire 1869, Sheet CCXXVII). Its significance is that its excavation would have destroyed any evidence of a gateway on this side of the complex.

A further quarry (NS05SE 5.35; NS 09453 53561) is situated at the SSE end of the ridge along which the NE side of the northern enclosure partly runs. It comprises one largish pit (14m from NW to SE by 6.5m and 3m deep on the NE) and a conglomeration of smaller delvings immediately to the SE, which have effectively removed the end of the ridge and therefore any trace of the boundary wall where it would have descended. The quarries were most likely opened to provide stone for the field wall that ran along the foot of the ridge to the SW.

This may also have provided a reason for opening a row of relatively shallow pits, 31m in length, which have been dug into the SW face of the ridge (NS05SE 5.36; NS 09433 53587 to 09414 53612), though the possibility that they may have been dug to provide stone for the track that runs parallel to them immediately to the SW, should not be discounted.

A quarry (NS05SE 5.37; NS 09524 53558) has removed the present NNE end of the low bank that runs NNE from the entrance gap through the NE side of the southern monastic enclosure. It has been dug into the foot of the slope at the N end of a ridge, probably to provide stone for the track that lies adjacent to the E, and it measures at least 15m in length from NW to SE. It is crossed by the fence that defines the edge of the scheduled area.

Two small quarries are situated N of the last mentioned. The first (NS05SE 5.38; NS 09518 53574), which measures up to about 6.6m across and 1.5m in depth, has been cut into the S end of a N to S orientated ridge. Field-cleared stones, probably from the once cultivated ground immediately to the W, have been dumped into its interior. The second quarry (NS05SE 5.39; NS 09513 53610) lies about 29m to the N and is larger, the excavation having effectively removed the entire N end of the ridge. It measures at least 17m from NW to SE by 8m transversely and up to 2m in depth on the SW.

Tracks

There are several tracks, or sections of track, within the surveyed area, none of which can be shown to be of particularly early date. Indeed, most appear to be associated with the servicing of the cultivated, or once cultivated, ground within the area, probably after the church went out of use. Both of the well-defined gateways in the monastic enclosure walls are wide enough (at least 3.3m) to suggest that they were constructed (or reconstructed in the 19th century) to allow for the passage of wheeled vehicles. The cross-base (NS05SE 10) adjacent to the gateway in the NE side of the southern enclosure lends weight to the suggestion that it may have a medieval origin, and, indeed, the NW side of the entrance appears to be of early date. Hewison's plan of the churchyard in 1874 (1893) shows this entrance, though it is not at all clear exactly what his depiction represents. He depicts either side of the entrance as an open square, but without explanation, though this could

simply be his way of denoting the thickness of the wall. Given the evidence for extensive cultivation both inside and outside the southern enclosure, it seems likely that the gap that is visible today was created in its present form some time in the 19th century to facilitate the movement of farm traffic between areas of cultivation. The gap in the NE side of the southernmost monastic enclosure is linked to a track some 60m to the NE by a length of low bank that appears to have defined the SE side of a field of rig-and-furrow. That track was only constructed in the late 19th century, but the bank is probably contemporary with at least the latest phase of the rigged cultivation. At its SSW end it appears to run below the ruinous late 18th/early 19th century drystone dyke and it also seems to have been cut by the hollow leading into the mouth of the corn-drying kiln. The bank probably originally adjoined the boundary wall of the southern monastic enclosure immediately E of the entrance gap, but that relationship is no longer visible. The NNE end of the bank has been truncated by a quarry (NS05SE 5.37, see above) but it may have originally linked through onto another bank, 29m in length, that runs N and S along the spine of a low ridge (NS 09516 53578 to 09510 53606). Both ends of this bank have been truncated by quarries (NS05SE 5.38 & 39, see above). The ground immediately to the NE of the southern enclosure must have been originally been quite boggy with very broken land beyond, so anyone exiting this side of the enclosure in the medieval period would likely have had to immediately turn NW and follow a path or track across higher, drier, ground by skirting the NE side of the northern enclosure.

A track that only partly crosses the scheduled area is that which links Plan farmsteading with the farm's fields to the NW of the monastic enclosures. It runs out of the back of the steading, straight up the hill and skirts the NE side of the southern enclosure, passing down the rock-cut feature. The path of the track is then lost until it is picked up again after 80m at the N end of the southern enclosure. From here it follows a line that takes it through a cleft between two low ridges and across the presumed line of the wall of the northern enclosure enclosure. It takes the form of a well developed hollow way (NS 09412 53607) as it descends through the cleft and a row of small quarry-pits that lie parallel to it on the NE (NS05SE 5.36, see above) may have been opened to provide hardcore for its construction or maintenance. At the bottom of the slope at the NW end of the cleft the track assumes the form of a terrace for a distance of at least 35m after which it runs into improved ground and is lost. Logically, it could only have continued in a north-westerly direction, following a route along the foot of the steep slope and along the edge of ground that bears evidence of rig-and-furrow cultivation but which has been heavily improved in more recent times. Part of this supposed route is followed by a modern tractor track which skirts the fence-line defining the N end of the scheduled area.

Two short lengths of track within the southern enclosure are of interest because they link two patches of cultivated ground immediately E of the burial-grounds which are separated by a low band of rock outcrop. The northerly of the two (NS 09534 53447) runs across the front of a quarry (NS05SE 5.34, see above) the activity associated with which would have otherwise destroyed or damaged it, and it appears to continue to the NW, cutting across an area where most of the early cultivation remains have been rendered featureless. The southerly track (NS 09551 53417) appears to have made little or no impression on the rig immediately to its NW and is therefore likely to be earlier in date (or at least earlier than the latest phase of ridged cultivation).

In addition to linking the two patches of cultivated ground, both tracks give the impression that they once extended further to the SE (towards Plan farmsteading) and to the NW. If so, then this was before the boundary wall of the southern enclosure was rebuilt in the 1890s.

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