

Site St Blane's Chapel

N.G.R NS 095 534

Project Description Watching Brief

Report

Two days were spent at St Blane's Chapel, Bute, over the 27th and 28th August 1997. The project involved the monitoring of masons as they made minor repairs to the wall of a small Early Christian chapel situated 25m to the SW of the main chapel of St Blane's.

The chapel as it presently stands is in a ruinous state, with the walls standing to no more than 1m in height, and covered by turf.

Previous clearance operations to remove tumble from the chapel interior had stripped the narrow support for the walls, resulting in a steady collapse of the now unprotected rubble walls. The walls themselves comprised large blocks of local dolerite and sandstone set in a clay matrix, mortared in places, but with much of the mortar having been washed out. The N and W walls displayed signs of bowing inwards due to subsidence, and had collapsed entirely in places.

The main aim of the present work was to replace fallen blocks where their positions could be determined, and to attempt to clear the wall-lines where possible without endangering or removing in-situ stonework.

Description

The Chapel in question is a rectangular structure with external dimensions of 6.9m E-W x 5.3m N-S, and is located in the lower graveyard some 9.75m E of the perimeter wall. An entrance in the S wall led to an irregular levelled interior with 7 large set grave slabs. The N wall was 1.35m wide at the point where the bowing is most extreme, with an original width of closer to 0.98m. The wall stood 0.75m high on the interior face and 0.5m on the exterior elevation. The S wall was 0.95m in width, and showed no signs of bowing or further collapse, standing to a height of 0.5m and 0.6m internally and externally respectively. The E wall had a width of 1.05m, and also showed no signs of bowing or further collapse, standing to 0.8m and 0.3m internally and externally respectively. The W wall was the most affected by collapse and uncleared tumble. The original width was estimated at around 1m, but due to the effects of bowing and collapse the wall is presently up to 2m in width. Externally the wall was up to 0.59m high, and internally it was entirely obscured by turf.

The wall line and structures of the S wall required no attention. The E wall required a single large block to be replaced on the inside face. The N wall required a single stone to be replaced externally, and required the interior face to be re-established with a succession of large blocks which had fallen over. The latter involved the complete rebuilding of the N wall, in effect. The W wall interior had been stripped to turf level, and the aim here was to remove turf to expose the remaining wall-line. No attempt was made to re-establish the fallen W wall, however. The walls and general area were photographed, and plans were made at scales of 1:100 (site plan) and 1:20 (W wall plan).

No finds were removed from the site.