



St Finan's Isle Archaeological Survey

Dr George Geddes 2019



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Cover image: Oblique aerial view of St Finan's Isle looking to the

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Introduction

This report was generated in August 2019 to bring together the results of the HES survey of St Finan's Isle, Loch Shiel, undertaken in 2016 and 2017. It represents the individual site descriptions that are published through Canmore, with the addition of illustrative material gathered through the course of this and previous surveys. With the exception of the description of two early medieval crosses which is drawn directly from the RCAHMS volume on Early Medieval Sculpture authored by Mr Ian Fisher (Fisher 2001), the entries were written by Dr George Geddes and Mr Adam Welfare, and edited by Mr John Sherriff.

The report includes as an Appendix a description of the medieval church and funerary monuments at Arisaig (Canmore 22520) that were recorded during the same project. The medieval church at Kichoan (22130) was also visited during the project, and the description provided in 1972 deemed adequate (RCAHMS 1980, Nos. 293).

Previous survey work at St Finan's Isle by RCAHMS included aerial photography captured in 1991 as well as a photographic and drawn survey that recorded the principal medieval funerary monuments for inclusion in *Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands* (Fisher 2001). Another visit was made to the island in September 2012 in order to photograph the newly discovered early medieval cross slab (3), and in February the following year new drawings were produced of the three early medieval stones.

The survey of the island in 2016 and 2017 was completed by Dr George Geddes and Mr Adam Welfare with the assistance of members of the Moidart Historical Society. The photographs of funerary monuments were taken by the author and Mr Steve Wallace.

Summary

An archaeological survey of St Finnan's Isle (Gaelic *Eilean Fhianain*) was undertaken by HES Survey and Recording in 2016 and 2017 as part of the Special Survey programme. The island was surveyed by George Geddes and Adam Welfare in partnership with members of Moidart Historical Group and with the logistical support of Forestry Commission Scotland. In advance of fieldwork, existing Canmore records were revised and enhanced, and the relevant HES Collection material was catalogued and digitised. Eilean Fhianain was the site of the medieval parish church and burial ground of Sunart, used at one time by the chiefs of the Clanranald Macdonalds, whose residence at Castle Tioram (Canmore [22511](#)) is situated 10km to the WNW. The later use of the island has included settlement, cultivation and a little industry, while burial continues to the present day.

Following a reconnaissance, fieldwork took place in 2016 and 2017 with the principal aim of surveying each of the archaeological features on the island in order to provide a much-enhanced record for Canmore. The survey was undertaken with dGPS equipment, supplemented by information taken from aerial photographs, an image-based 3D model, and more traditional techniques – the final result being a plan of the whole island at a scale of 1:500. The island was also recorded with UAV, aerial and ground photography, and professional flash-lit images of particular funerary monuments were captured. A plan of the church was prepared at 1:100 by alidade and plane-table survey. The survey recorded more than 700 individual features, ranging from large burial enclosures and standing buildings, to simple grave markers. These have been recorded in Canmore under 22 individual site records, which range from single features to larger groups of gravestones or platforms. A site-area polygon was created for each record.

The earliest features on the island include the bell (Canmore ID [355516](#)) and a small corpus of sculpture, including two stones bearing incised crosses ([319525](#); [319526](#)) and another — a cross ([350810](#)) in relief — all of early medieval type (see Fisher 2001 for comparanda). The origins of the church ([22686](#)) are obscure but the earliest historical reference dates to the 14th century, a period that seems appropriate for the surviving medieval fabric and a small collection of architectural fragments ([356105](#)). To this can be added three West Highland late medieval gravestones — one depicting a female figure ([355419](#)), another a sword ([355509](#)) and the third (also recorded under [355509](#)), which is fragmentary, a simple edge carving (See Steer and Bannerman 1977 for comparanda). A range of different types of gravemarker attributable to a later date (some 650 in total) cover the upper part of the island. These include simple uncarved stones, small cairns, table tombs, flat slabs, burial enclosures, crosses, headstones and a burial aisle. The mound ([108579](#)) on the high point in the NW part of the island may have formed an initial focus for burial, while those nearer the church include some of 18th century date. By contrast those burials in the NE ([355511](#)) and SE ([356229](#)) enclosures, for Catholics and Protestants respectively, are presumed to be of later date.

Apart from burial there are distinct indications of settlement in the form of building platforms and the vestiges of buildings at the NE edge of the island ([356244](#)). The size and shape of these buildings, and the relatively good preservation of the platforms, combines with documentary evidence to suggest that they are

probably late-medieval or post-medieval in date. A blacksmith, a sexton and a minister lived and worked here at various times. The remaining platforms elsewhere around the fringes of the island ([356245](#), [356246](#), [356247](#)) bring the total to 41, providing evidence for a variety of activities. In contrast to those constructed as building platforms, some are simply small quarry scoops dug to provide additional soil for burials. Others, including a very large terrace immediately E of the church and a small number around the island fringe, seem to have been constructed to allow burials to be made on relatively level ground. Finally, there is little doubt that some were used for industrial activity, especially metalworking. Documentary references record the activities of the blacksmith in the early 18th century and large quantities of slag are a notable feature of the SW shoreline ([356246](#)) — an area that is as distant from the settlement as possible. To this can be added the discovery of a crucible ([351583](#)) in 2014 and finds of iron fragments and charcoal.

Other features on the island include a small plot of lazy beds partly overlying the SE burial enclosure, a bait hole ([356269](#)) and two jetties. The early jetty ([356104](#)) now submerged on the E side of the island may have provided access to the NE and SE burial enclosures and is likely to be of post-medieval date. The N jetty ([355594](#)) was constructed in the 19th century and forms a pair with another ([118462](#)) on the N shore of the loch.

Information from HES Survey and Recording (GFG, ATW) December 2017

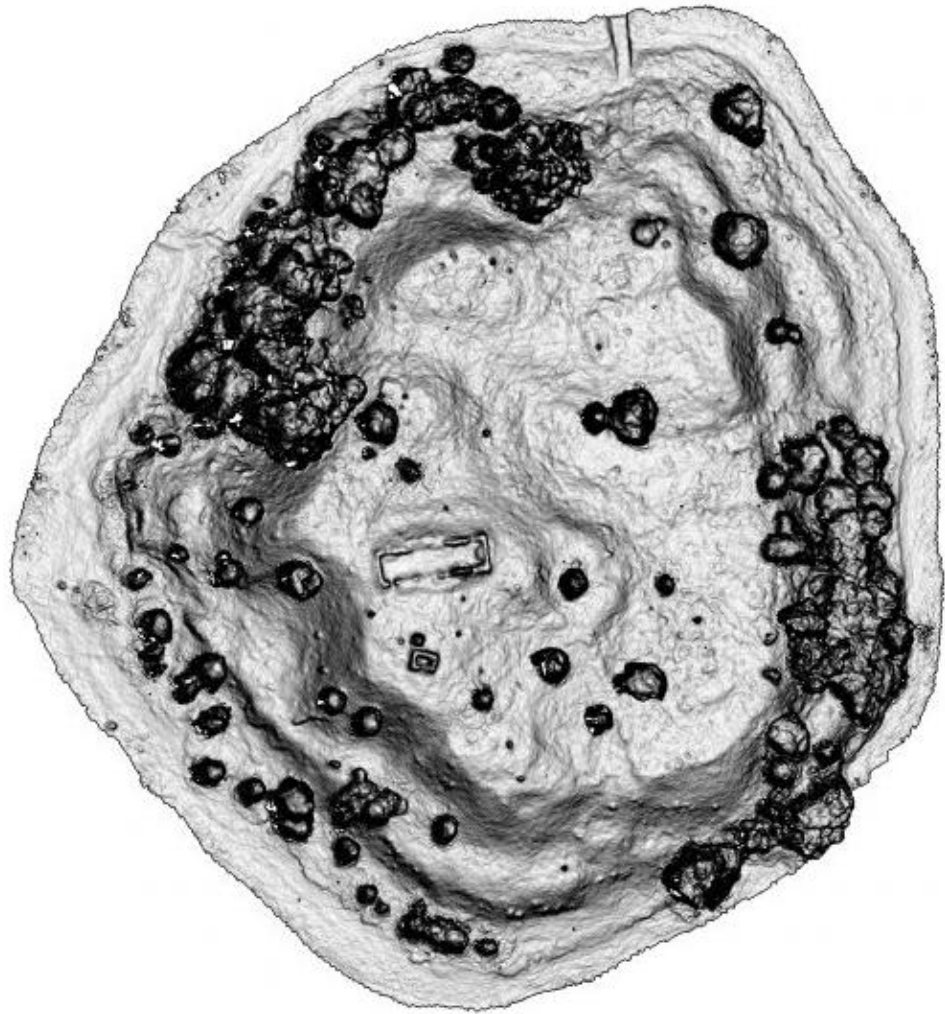
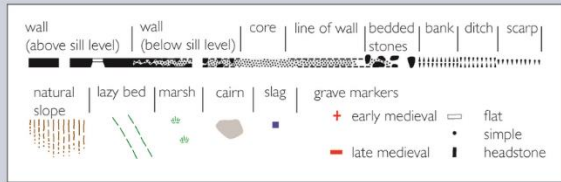


Figure 1 A visualisation of the 3D model of the island, generated using aerial photographs.

NM 75140 68400

NM 75300 68400



Loch Shiel

old jetty

bait hole



NM 75140 68180

NS 75300 68180

Figure 2 St Finan's Isle; site plan.

Early Medieval

Summary (after Fisher 2001)

This island, which takes its name from one of the saints bearing the Irish name Finan (a), is situated about 200m from both the N and S banks of Loch Shiel. It measures about 200m from N to S by 180m and has steep sides rising to an undulating summit-area which has been extensively used for burials by the adjacent Protestant and Roman Catholic communities of Sunart and Moidart respectively (b). The ruined medieval church near the W edge of the summit contains a cast bronze bell of Early Christian type (c), as well as a graveslab and cross-head, both of late medieval date. A female effigy of the same period lies near the N end of the summit, close to a group of large simple cruciform stones which are probably of 18th-century date (d). A cross-marked gravemarker (no.1) stands in the same area, and a small cruciform stone of uncertain period (no.2) was recorded in 1974 but has since disappeared (e).



Figure 3 Cross (1)

(1) [NM76NE 1.02] Tapered slab of local flagstone, 0.7m in visible height by 0.35m at the head and 55mm thick. On the E face there is incised a Latin cross, 0.17m high and 0.14m across the arms, set on a pedestal formed by a slightly curved horizontal bar 100mm long and two vertical bars 70mm high.

(2) [NM76NE 1.03] Cruciform stone with tapered shaft and side-arms, about 0.52m high by 0.22m across the arms. At the centre of one face there is an incised Latin cross, 48mm high and 20mm in span.

I Fisher (RCAHMS) 2001.

Footnotes:

(a) W J Watson 1926, 285-6.

(b) The monuments in the S part include an early 18th-century slab with skeleton, bearing the initials D MD. These cast doubt on its traditional identification as the grave of the Rev Alexander MacDonald ('Maighstir Alasdair', d.1724), father of the celebrated Gaelic poet of the same name (C Macdonald 1997, 123).



(c) C Bourke 1984, 464-8, citing Irish parallels of c.900. See idem 1997, Columba, 175-6, for the drop of a 12th-century crosier, found on the N shore of Loch Shiel near the island and now displayed in the Museum of Scotland (H.1993.634).

(d) For the tradition that the crosses were quarried by Donald Mor MacVarish, see A Cameron 1957. One of these is illustrated in T S Muir 1885, 77.

(e) The Commissioners are indebted to Mr I Thornber for depositing photographs, on which the drawing is based, in the NMRS (IN/1802-3).

Figure 4 Cross (2)

Carved stone 3

Currently located against the inner face of the W gable of the church, this tapered slab measures 0.93m in length by up to 0.43m in breadth and 0.1m in thickness. It bears an Early Medieval outline cross carved in relief and set out to follow the curved profile of the slab. The cross measures 0.66m in height by 0.41m in breadth and has expanded terminals, rounded armpits and is open at the foot, suggesting that it was designed to stand upright.

Visited by HES Survey and Recording (ATW, GG) 23 March 2017.

cf. Fisher 2001: 13-14, 34-5



Figure 5 Cross (3)

Bell

This bronze hand bell, which is of Early Medieval form, is attached by a modern chain to the N pedestal of the altar at the ENE end of the parish church (NM76NE 1). It measures 158mm by 126mm across its roughly rectangular splayed mouth by 164mm in height to the crown where there is a loop handle measuring 67mm across and 37mm high. The body of the bell varies from 7mm to 12mm in thickness and is undecorated but the handle is engraved with a simple skeuomorph of a rope (short diagonal lines confined between two vertical lines). The iron clapper, which is not original, is hooked on to a loop suspended from two perforations in the crown.

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GG)
23 March 2017.



Figure 6 Bell.

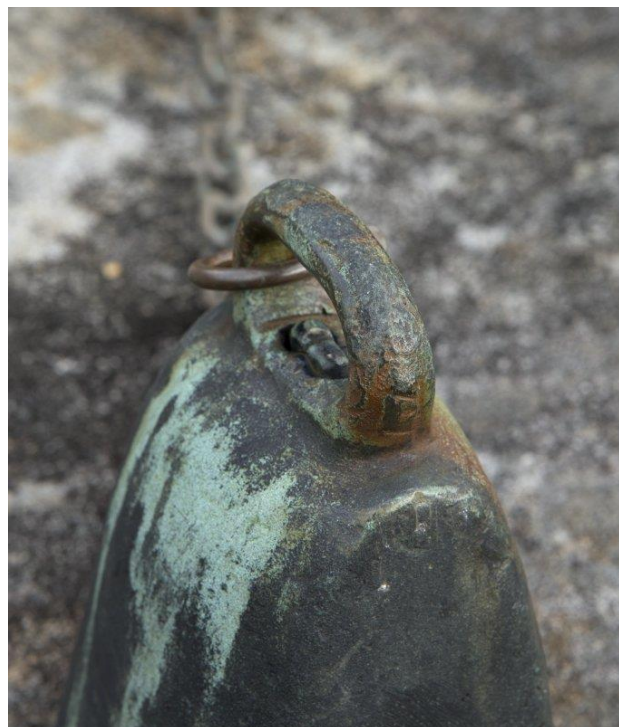


Figure 7 Detail of skeuomorph

Late Medieval

Church

The roofless shell of the old parish church at Eilean Fhianain stands in a commanding position a little to the SW of the centre of the island. The building is mainly a reconstruction of 19th century date but evidently incorporates within its ENE end an earlier church dating to the medieval period, formerly the parish church of Sunart.

The church now measures 21m from ENE to WSW by 4.8m transversely within walls that average 0.6m in thickness and only 1.2m in height. The late masonry is of a poor quality, roughly coursed and mortared and capped with cement, but it has evidently re-used stone from the earlier church. The doorway is located towards the WSW end of the SSE wall, and there are three window openings in both side-walls, all of which appears to be modern work that was never intended to hold a window. A further opening is provided in the WSW gable, while the ENE gable contains a niche and is abutted by a large altar, both relatively recent features. The altar, a thin slab supported on rough masonry, is mentioned in Muir's account from 1857 (1885, 76).

The surviving medieval fabric is limited to sections of the side-walls which indicate that the earlier church has measured at least 9.7m in length and 4.8m in breadth within a wall 0.8m in thickness which survives up to 2.7m in height. The masonry is of good quality incorporating split boulders bonded with an abundance of small pinnings, and a small socket hole in the SSE wall probably reflects the position of an earlier timber screen separating the chancel and nave, similar to features seen in the church at Kilvickeon, Mull (RCAHMS 1980, No. 308; [21972](#)).

A talus of rubble that surrounds the church, particularly on the NNW and SSE sides, appears to be a product of the collapse of the original church and its subsequent clearance, but supplemented by the gathering of stone from the shore for burial markers. This talus has been disturbed along the SSE wall in an attempt to reveal the line of the medieval building.

The evidence that the building has been heavily restored is not limited to the character of the stonework and openings but is also suggested by the fact that this church appears to have been lengthened. In its current form it is longer than any other in the area (c.f. RCAHMS 1980, Fig. 6). In 1838, the church at Arisaig ([22520](#)) was described as being of 'larger size' but now measures only 14.2m in length (New. Stat. Acc. v7, 148). That said, the church on Eilean Fhianain seems to have reached its current length before 1857 (Muir 1885, 77; White 1874).

The altar is the location for the early medieval bell, as well as a collection of architectural fragments (including a fragment of a late medieval slab) which support an interpretation of the building as a

medieval parish church (356105). An early medieval cross stone (350810) is situated at the W end of the church, and an earthfast late medieval graveslab at its E end (355509).

The church at 'Swynort' (Sunart) first comes on record in 1392 and a succession of rectors to the island are recorded in the 16th century (OPS 1854, 198). The graveslab of one such, Roderick McAlestir, survives at Ardchattan Priory (RCAHMS 1975, No. 217 (12)). The parish of Sunart was combined with Arisaig and Kilchoan to form Ardnamurchan sometime after the Reformation and possibly after 1630 (Stat. Acct. v20, 287), but the church may have been used for services as late as the 1730s (J Kirkby pers. comm.).

Visited by HES Survey and Recording (GFG, ATW) September 2017.

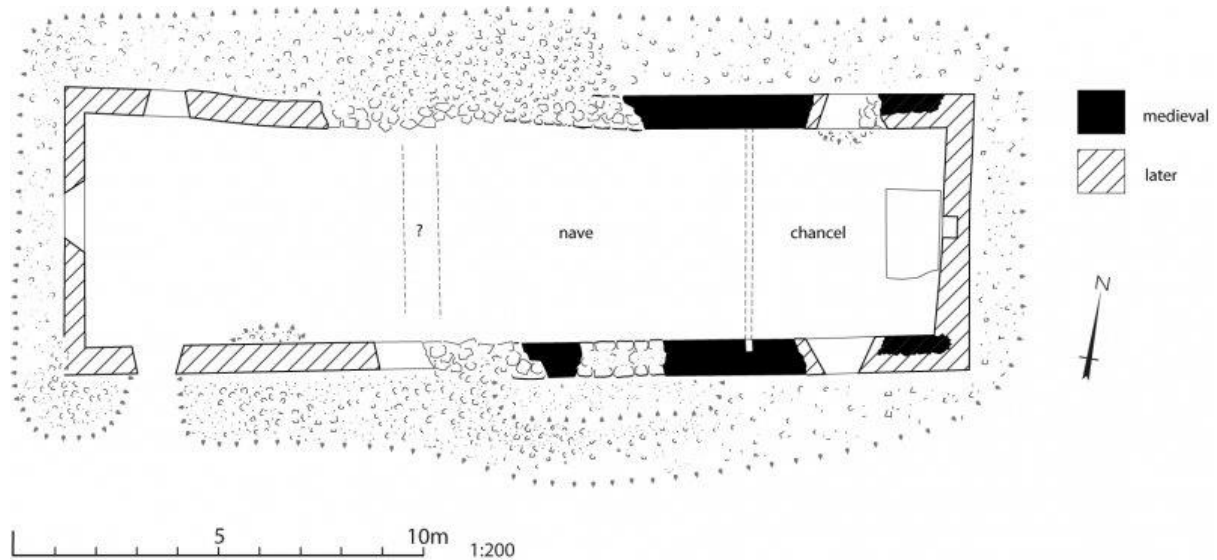


Figure 8 Church; plan (not to scale).



Figure 9 Church. Medieval fabric in the S wall. The hole may reflect the position of a screen between the nave and chancel.



Figure 10 The 'altar' and niche at the E end of the church appear to be modern features, perhaps constructed as a backdrop for the bell, and the late-medieval cross-head set into the niche. Much of the gable behind has been reconstructed.

Burial ground (main)

This record describes the burials arranged on the summit area of Eilean Fhianain but excludes both the NE and SW burial enclosures, for which see Canmore ID 355511 and 356229 respectively. Other individual records (below) describe the early and late medieval gravestones, the burial aisle and the cross to Charles Macdonald. The most recent burials date to 2017.

On the NW part of the upper area there is a marked concentration of about 100 grave markers set into a burial mound that measures about 30m from E to W by 15m transversely and at least 1m in height, and apparently forms the earliest visible part of the cemetery. The summit of this mound is marked by seven recumbent gravestones, two of which have large cruciform headstones which, with another two standing nearby, have been tentatively attributed to the 18th century (Fisher 2001; MacDonald 2011 edn. 104; Muir 1885, 77). One recumbent stone has an Early Medieval stone bearing an incised cross at its W end, almost certainly in re-use ([319525](#)), while a late medieval graveslab with a female effigy is situated at the S edge of the mound ([355419](#)). Other memorials include headstones of 19th and 20th date, and the grave of Private Mary Macdonald (W 156179) who died 26 April 1944. The E end of this burial mound has been mutilated by the insertion of a platform (NM 7521 6833) that measures about 8m in diameter into which are set at least 10 modern burials. To the E and S of this mound there are a series of simple grave markers, small cairns and headstones.

A second burial mound, perhaps occupying a natural knoll, lies about 20m to the SW and measures about 18m in diameter. It is surmounted by a small railed burial enclosure containing two 19th monuments, one a cross decorated with an angel, dedicated to John C Matheson d.1904. Among the cairns and simple grave markers there is a headstone about 1m SE of this enclosure which reads:

D. Grant I Deck Hand, RNR 4060 / H.M.S. Vernon / 23rd May 1916 Age 26

A further 3m to the SW is a table tomb which records the burial place of the notable tacksman of the area Archibald MacDonald of Rhu and Dalilea (Macdonald 2011 edn. 215-8). It is inscribed:

Sacred / To The Memory Of / Archibald Macdonald Eqr Of Dalili / Who Died At Rhue 1[0] Of May 1829 /
This Stone Was Placed Here By His Widow Ann MacGregor

At the foot of the second burial mound, on its E side, there are a group of four headstones set on a small terrace, commemorating members of the Cameron family. The largest monument is inscribed:

Erected by / Captain Dugald Cameron / In Loving Memory Of / His Father / Donald Cameron / Free Church
Elder / Kentra, Acharacle / Died 4th June 1898, Aged 70 / And / His Mother / Isabella Cameron / Died 1st
Jan 1915, Aged 76 / Also the said / Captain Cameron / Died 5th June 1926, Aged 65

The remaining burials N of the church are concentrated in a well-ordered group to its NW. These are mostly simple grave markers arranged in rows but they include a fine slate headstone to Anne Chisholm d.1887.

The grave markers to the S of the church are found in two concentrations, the first to the S of the church and within about 20m, the second further to the SE. The first group is dominated by the cross and aisle of the MacDonalds of Kinlochmoidart (see [355619](#)) but also includes a prominent cross to a Macpherson d.1866, and two slate headstones, for Duncan McMaster d.1879 and Christina Cameron d. c1892

The SE group stands to the E of the well-known Clach an Aoig group (see [355510](#)) and to the west of the Protestant burial enclosure (see [356229](#)). Arranged in ordered rows on modified terraces, this group includes small cairns and

more than 20 uninscribed stones but is dominated by the headstone erected by Duncan Cameron in 1878 to his son Duncan, died 1 July 1871 aged 3.

Visited by HES Survey and Recording (GG, ATW) September 2017



Figure 11 Simple cross markers, perhaps of post-medieval date, surmount the earliest part of the graveyard. (image taken c.1990)

Carved stone 4

This rectangular grave-slab, which lies prone on the northern burial mound 50m N of the church, measures 2.1m from E to W by 0.64m. The upper surface is worn, but contains within a beaded and line-engraved frame a rectangular panel for an inscription that is now largely illegible. Below this and in low relief is an ornamented gothic arch enclosing a figure of a laywoman who appears to be dressed in a hat and a high-collared, pendant-sleeved cloak over a tightly belted gown. To the left, a small dog rears up at her feet. Beneath this is a large foliate rosette surmounting two smaller examples and what may possibly be three human figures with an ox or a donkey. Comparison can be made between this stone and examples of the Iona School dated to the 14th and 15th centuries (cf Steer and Bannerman 1977; RCAHMS 1980; RCAHMS 1982).
Visited by HES Survey and Recording (ATW, GFG) March 2017.



Carved stone 5

This badly eroded tapered slab, which measures 1.75m in length by 0.47m in breadth at the wider head end, is set in the ground adjacent to the inner face of the S wall of the chapel. Within a border of three roll mouldings, the upper part comprises a panel of four foliaceous scrolls. Beneath this there is a sword with angled quillons flanked by at least one animal and further foliaceous scrolls.

This sword slab, and another not identified, were briefly mentioned by White in his description of Eilean Fhianain (1874, 638-9), and by Charles Macdonald in his late 19th century local history (2011 edn. 48). Macdonald suggested that it marked the burial place of John of Moidart (d.1584), 8th Chief of Clanranald, although another source suggests John was buried at Howmore in South Uist (Macdonald and Macdonald 1900, 288). Other candidates include Allan, 9th of Clanranald (d.1593), who is recorded as having been buried at Eilean Fhianain (Macdonald and Macdonald 1904, 231).

A smaller fragment of late medieval grave slab bearing a beaded ornament along its edge is now located under the altar.

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GG) 23 March 2017.



Figure 12 A flash-lit image of the sword slab within the church.

Architectural fragments

At least seventeen architectural fragments in and around the church indicate the former presence of a medieval building of a status similar to other parish churches in the area, for example at Kiel (RCAHMS 1980, No. 267; [22431](#)) and Kilchoan (Ibid, No. 293; [22130](#)). In addition to several fragments which have been reused within the fabric of the present church, for example in the doorway, in the N window of the burial aisle ([355511](#)), and the E face of the Robertson Macdonald cross, there are large, loose fragments that have recently been gathered together within the ENE end of the church. These are described below. The majority of the sandstone used in these architectural pieces appears to have been quarried from Inninmore Bay (NM74SW 1), 26km to the S, but some are of sandstone that is more reminiscent of that quarried at Carsaig Bay on Mull (NM 533 219), 51km to the SSW.



Figure 13 Architectural fragment 1.

(1) A carved fragment of Inninmore Bay sandstone belonging to a window opening. It measures 0.39m in height, 0.19m in breadth and 0.17m in depth. Slightly curved in profile, the stone bears a simple chamfer along its edge and three bar holes in the inner surface.

(2) A carved fragment of Inninmore Bay sandstone belonging to a window opening. It measures 0.25m in height, 0.16m in breadth and 0.2m in depth. The outer corner is dressed with two shallow rolls and there is a glazing check on the inner surface.

(3) A carved fragment, possibly of Carsaig sandstone, which has evidently been a jamb for a splayed window. It measures 0.20m in height, 0.45m in breadth and 0.34m in depth. It bears a filleted roll flanked by two possible chamfers on one side and a shallow roll and hollow on the other. It compares well with similar late medieval examples found within the burial ground at Kiel, Lochaline (RCAHMS 1980, Fig. 162 E).

(4) A small fragment of sandstone measuring 0.75m in height, 0.27m in breadth and 0.21m in depth. Possibly part of the same window as (3).

(5) A small fragment of sandstone measuring 0.7m in height, 0.15m in breadth and 0.14m in depth. Possibly part of the same window as (3).

(6) A right-angled fragment of sandstone, possibly from Carsaig. It measures 0.26m in height, 0.37m in breadth and 0.37m in depth, and bears a roll moulding flanked by hollows.

(7) A cruciform block of Inninmore Bay sandstone, possibly reused from a late-medieval cross-head or architectural fragment (Fisher 2001). The stone measures 0.51m in height, 0.28m in breadth across the arms and 0.2m in thickness. On one side there is a relief cross and on the other a figure of Christ on the crucifix with details of loincloth, ribcage and head. The top of the cross bears a cup 0.12m in diameter and 0.03m in depth. The stone is set in a modern alcove in the E gable and currently used for offerings of coinage.

Visited by HES Survey and Recording (GFG, ATW) September 2017.



Figure 14 Architectural fragments 3,4 and 5.

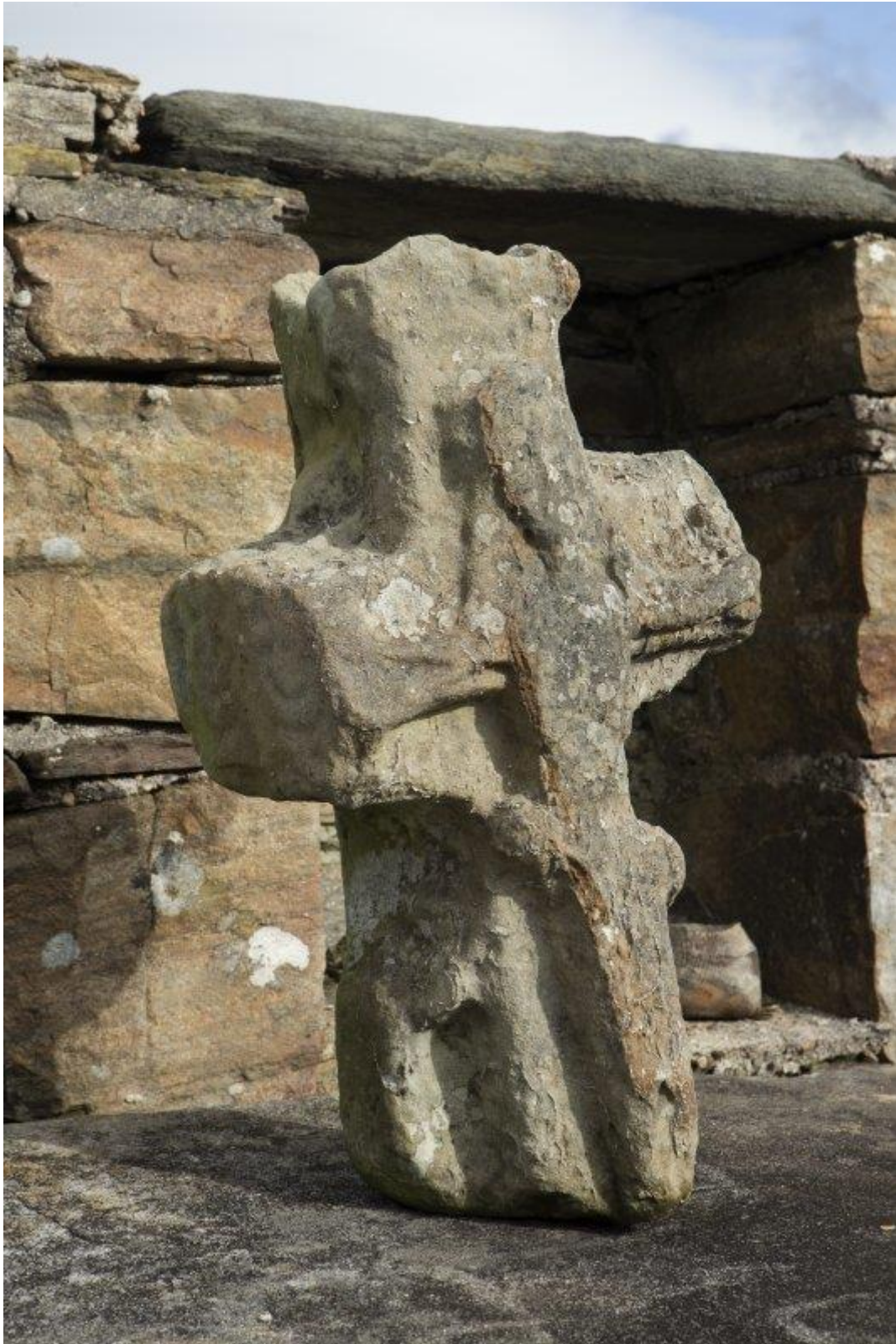


Figure 15 A re-used late-medieval cross head or architectural fragment (7).

Post-Reformation

Burial aisle

A burial aisle, commemorative cross and grave slabs of the Kinlochmoidart Macdonalds stand about 14m SE of the church. Although the walls of the burial aisle have been poorly capped and pointed in cement, and the S wall is now collapsing, the aisle was presumably roofed in the late 19th century, and there are some indications that it had an earlier late medieval phase (cf. Muir 1885, 77).

Now an irregular rectangle on plan, it measures up to 4.85m from ENE to WSW by up to 3.72m transversely within walls that vary in thickness from 0.55m (WSW) to 0.75m (SSW). The ESE gable stands to an internal height of 2.25m but the remaining three walls have been capped at an internal height of 1.6m. The masonry is of rough dressed blocks, cement pointed and capped but there is some indication of an earlier phase in the lower 0.9m of the SSW and WNW internal walls which are in a neater style with pinnings.

The entrance is set close to the N end of the ESE gable. Now closed with an iron gate, a check on the SSW jamb and a pivot in the lintel indicates that it once had a timber door or iron gate, now lost. The NNE and SSW side-walls each contain a single window, the former containing a reused fragment of Inninmore Bay sandstone in its WNW jamb.

The interior of the burial aisle is paved and at the WNW end there are four plinths, three of which bear a simple cross. The second of these (from the N) bears the initials 'W.J.R.' and the date '1869', and can be identified as William James Robertson (b.1829 d.1869) of Kinloch Moidart. Immediately N of the burial aisle, and attached to it, is a fenced enclosure containing a Celtic cross on a massive rubble base bearing a memorial to William Frederick Robertson-Macdonald (1802-1883) and his family, and in front of it there are four grave slabs.

The memorial reads:

‘ERECTED BY FRIENDS / TO RECORD THEIR ESTEEM / FOR / WILLIAM ROBERTSON
MACDONALD / OF KINLOCH MOIDART / B 1802 D 1883 / REPRESENTATIVE BY HIS FATHER OF
/ PRINCIPAL ROBERTSON THE HISTORIAN / BY HIS MOTHER OF THE / MACDONALDS OF
KINLOCH MOIDART / HE LIES BURIED HERE / WITH HIS WIFE / SARAH ADAMS BECK B 1802
D 1877 / AND FOUR SONS / WILLIAM JAMES B 1829 D 1869 / W. DAVID A. B 1834 D 1883 / W.
COKER A. B 1837 D 1841 / W. ANSTRUTHER B 1839 D 1859’

The Macdonalds of Kinlochmoidart are descended from John, son of Allan 9th of Clanranald, who died about 1644. William Robertson Macdonald arranged for the sale of the estate just prior to his death (Macdonald and Macdonald 1896, 298—308).

Visited by HES Survey and Recording (GFG) 6 September 2017.



Figure 16 The burial aisle of the 19th century Kinlochmoidart Macdonalds may have been reconstructed from a late medieval building.

Grave slabs (18th century)

A group of three 18th century grave markers is situated on a small patch of level ground close to the cliff-edge, about 12m SE of the mortuary aisle.

(1) The largest is a table monument and measures 2.11m from WSW to ENE by 1.22m transversely and 0.05m thick. It bears a much weathered armorial in relief at its WSW end, flanked by the letters DM (Dignus Memoria?) also in relief. If there was a helm this has been lost through damage, but part of a scroll bearing a motto in a gothic script survives to the right. This appears to have read 'Per Mare P[er] Terras' – By Sea By Land, the motto of the Clan MacDonald. The escutcheon, which is ornamented with a mantling of swirling festoons and a garland, is divided into four quarters: the first charge is a lion rampant, the second an open hand, the third a salmon naiant (swimming) and the fourth a lymphad (one-masted galley). Below are nine lines of an illegible inscription, beneath which is a decorative panel containing two rows of symbols in relief. The upper row depicts a star, a heart, a trident or a harp, an hourglass and a second star, while the lower line depicts two doves supporting what may be a resurrection scene. A roundel below contains a third star. The right side of the panel has fractured on account of damage occasioned to the NNW edge of the table top, which has resulted in the detachment of two large, conjoining fragments close to the N corner. A drainage hole has been drilled through the centre of the penultimate line of the inscription.

The table top originally rested on six ornamental pillars fitted into shallow recesses. What appears to be the letter V is engraved upon the abacus (uppermost part) of one. The armorial strongly suggests that the grave is that of a MacDonald, while the doves suggest this may be the memorial to a husband and his wife. It is presumably of 18th century date.



Figure 17 One of the supporting pillars of the Macdonald table monument, a sculpture of high quality.

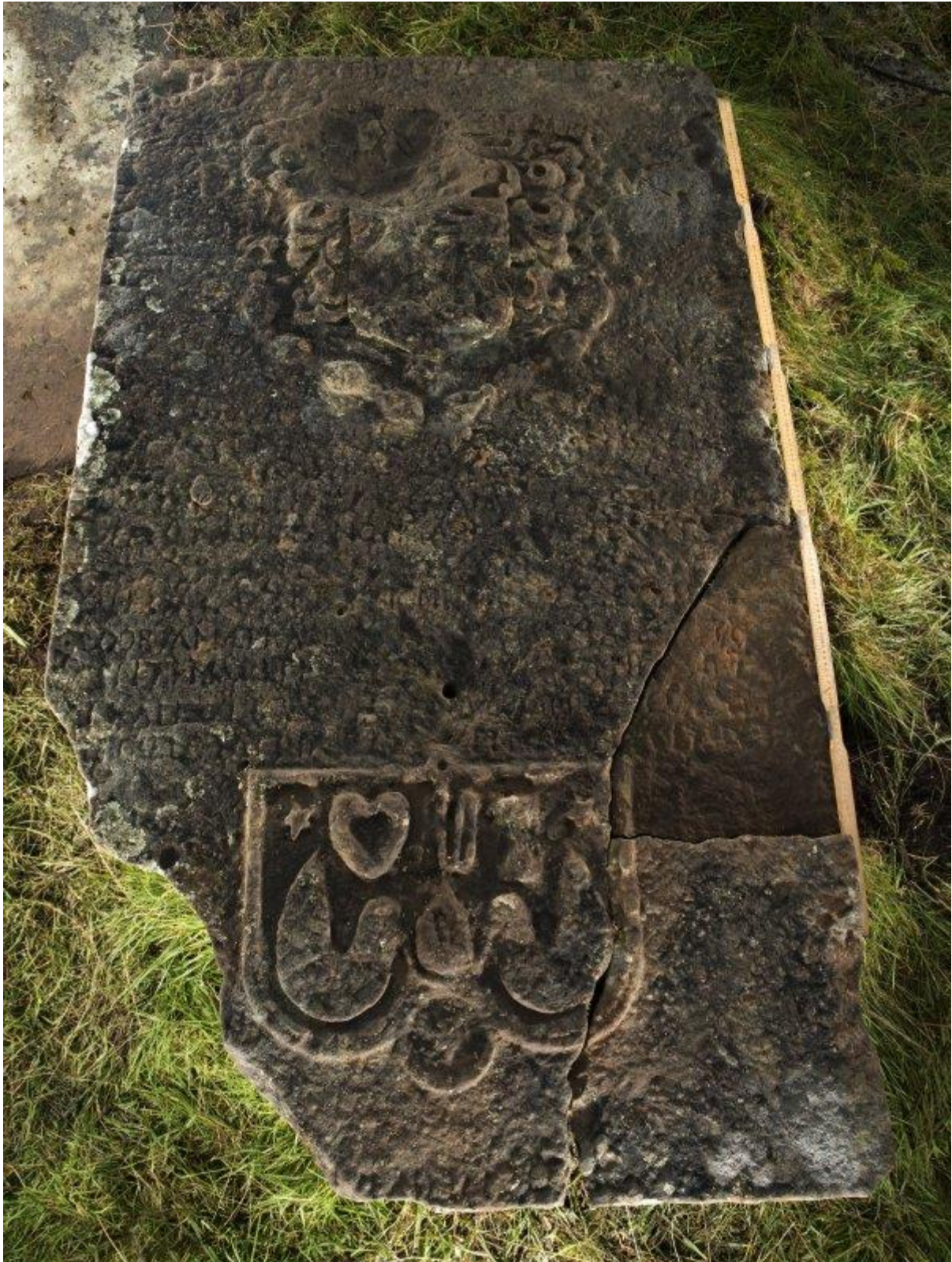


Figure 18 Though in poor condition, enough of this table monument survives to indicate that it marked the grave of a senior member of the Macdonald family. It is presumably of early 18th century date.

(2) Immediately to the NW of this table tomb there is a second 18th century graveslab. Earthfast, it measures 1.88m from WSW to ENE by 0.65m transversely. The upper surface is worn, but exhibits an inscription in Roman capitals located above and below a relief carving of a skeleton (with its head lying to the WSW) contained within a recess measuring 1.02m by 0.42m transversely and 0.02m deep, recalling the outline of a coffin. Two drainage channels, located at right angles midway along each side, permits surface water to disperse from the recess. The principal inscription (which includes ligatures) is thought to reference the initials of the deceased in the first line, before continuing with a quotation from Revelations 14.13, which is derived from the King James version of the Bible. This, however, is divided into two parts positioned above and below the recess:

D MD I Revs . XIII . V . [XIII] I And [I] .
 [H]eard . A . Voyce I Fr[o]m . Heaven .
 Saying I Unt[o .] Me [.] Write I Ble[ss]ed [.]
 Ar[e . Th]e [.] Dead I W[hich .] D[ie .] In [.]
 The [.] Lord Fr[o]m . H[ence]f[orth] I
 [Yea . Sa]yeth [.] The . Spirit I Th[at . The]y .
 May . Rest I Fr[om . Th]eir . Labours I And .
 Their . Workes I Doe . Follow . Them

The following appears immediately below the first part of the quotation and although the first word to the left of the recess is illegible, the 'Y' following with the date presumably represents a contraction of 'year'. [. . .] [1]701 Y. In addition, two words either side of the skeleton's head and shoulders have been split to allow them to follow the steeply curved outline of the recess: 'M[emento] Mori'.

Charles Macdonald (2011 edn, 23) recorded the tradition that this slab was thought to mark the last resting place of the Rev. Alexander MacDonald

(d.c1720-24), the father of the renowned Gaelic poet of the same name, but the date denoted on the stone make this attribution very unlikely. It is possible that the latter refers to the date when the stone was made, rather than when someone died, but such speculation can no more be confirmed than that the ligatured initials in the first line refer to a Donald Macdonald.



(3) Immediately to the SW of the table tomb, there is a third grave slab of 18th century date. This grass-grown rectangular grave slab measures 1.79m from NE to SW by 0.56m transversely. The surface is weathered, but exhibits an inscription in Roman capitals comprised of nine lines:

1 70 1 / D ML / JOB C.XIX
V 26 / AND THO[U]GH /
AFTER MY [SK]INE /
WORMES D[ES]TROY /
THIS BO[DY] YET IN /
MY FLESH [SH]ALL / I
SIE [G]OD

The date, 1701, is spaced across the top of the stone, with the first and last numerals close to the corners, while the inner pair are closed up and positioned centrally. ML in the second line is ligatured. Although the quotation has been taken from the King James version of the Bible, variations in spelling are exemplified in the words 'Skine', 'Wormes' and 'Sie'. There may have been dots between each word, but this is by no means clear. Below the last line of the inscription is what may be a natural dint measuring 0.17m from NE to SW by 0.13m transversely and 20mm deep.

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GFG) September 2017.



Burial ground (north-east area)

This relatively modern burial enclosure is situated in the NE of the island and is traditionally known as the burial ground of the Catholics of Moidart (J Kirkby pers comm). It measures about 25m square within a grass-grown earth and stone bank up to 2m thick and 0.4m high which has been reduced to its foundations on the ENE and NNW sides. There is an entrance gap about 3m wide roughly midway along the WSW side and another about 3.5m wide at the SE corner. The latter now faces on to the marshy ground around the springhead of the small burn flowing E, but would formerly have led to the old pier (NM76NE 47).

The enclosure contains at least 110 simple stone grave-markers (both head- and foot-stones), 14 small cairns and 3 headstones, some of which appear to be roughly arranged in rows. Amongst them is a fine horizontal early 19th century slate grave slab which is situated near the crest of the scarp overlooking the stream (NM 75251 68313). It is dedicated to the memory of Susan Macintyre and bears the following inscription:

Here lyes the / Remains of / Susan
Mcintyre / Who Departed / This Life the
12 / Day of August / 1812 Aged 21 ye /
ars and nine / weeks this is / Done by the
/ order of her / Husband Charles /
Cameron at / Aorin

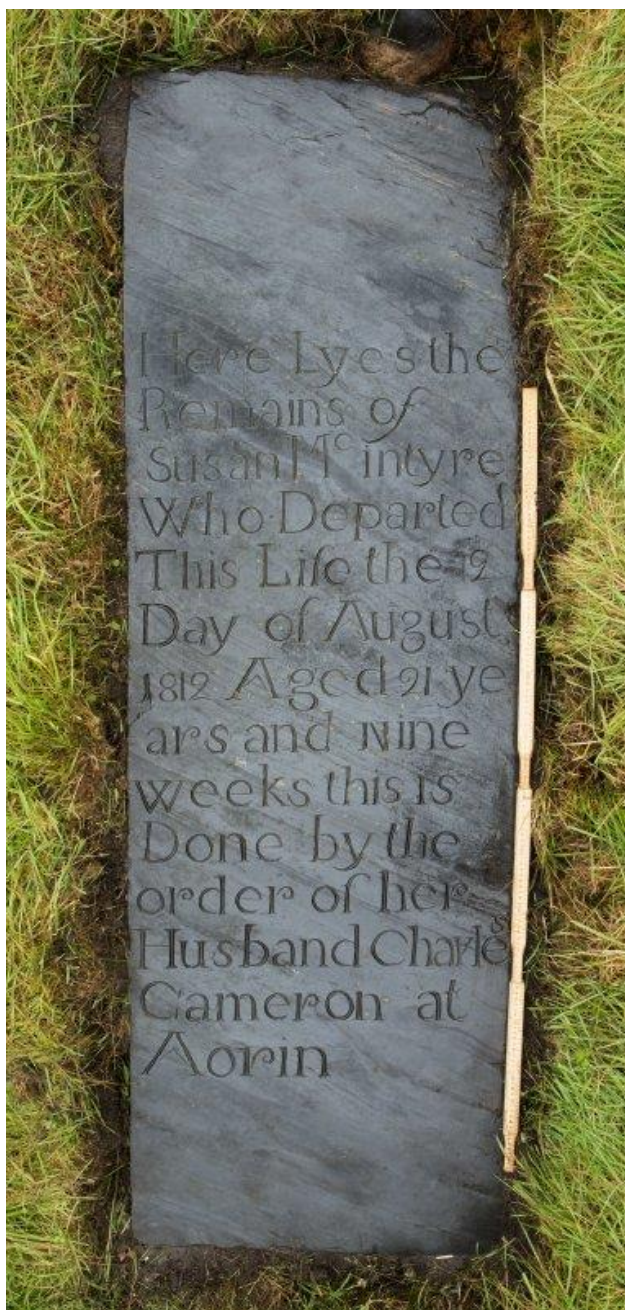


Figure 19 Mcintyre graveslab 1812. She may have come from Aoran, Eilean Shona.

A railed enclosure in the NW corner of the enclosure contains the most prominent headstone (NM 75237 68320), erected by Flora Corbett (d.1943) in memory of her parents Allan and Anne, brothers, and their children. In 1851, Allan was resident at Ardtoe and was occupied as a cattle dealer (NRS Census 505/31/10). The inscription reads:

Erected By / Flora Corbett / In Memory of Her Parents / Allan Corbett / Died 15th Dec 1859, Aged 43 Years
/ Anne Corbett / Died 23rd July 1890, Aged 65 Years / And Her Brother / Charles / Died 12th October 1875,
Aged 24 Years / Also Her Husband / Engelbert E Angler / Died 25th Sep 1915, Aged 74 Years. / And Their
Children / Duncan, Died 30th May 1885 / Aged 1 Year and 8 Months. / Allanina Anne / Died 22nd March
1918, Aged 39 Years / Charles / Died 24th Dec 1939 / The Above / Flora [F] Corbett / Died 27th Feb 1943 /
Their Son / Capt. Engelbert F. Angler M.R.C.V.S. / Died 2nd March 1950

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GG) 5 April 2016.

Burial ground (south east area)

This burial enclosure is situated in the SE part of the island and is traditionally said to have been the burial place of the Protestant community of Sunart and Ardmurchan (J Kirkby pers. Comm.). It is roughly trapezoidal on plan, measuring about 45m from NNW to SSE by 36m



Figure 20 Macnaughton Cross.

transversely, within a grass-grown earth and stone bank 2.9m thick and 0.6m high. The latter is heavily robbed and eroded on the E, where it is separated from the cliff-edge by a narrow berm. There is an entrance about 2m wide roughly midway along the NNW end, which now faces on to the marshy ground around the source of the small, E-flowing burn. The NW corner of the enclosure has been destroyed by the construction of the large artificial terrace immediately E of the church, subsequently used for burials (NM 7524 6827).

In its SW corner the enclosure contains what may have been once a rectangular fenced area, measuring 9m from WSW to ENE by 8m transversely. It is marked by slight external scarps on the NNW and ENE immediately N of a roughly rectangular plot of eleven grass- and rush-grown lazy beds measuring 24m from WSW to ENE by 7m transversely. The individual beds measure between 1.9m and 2.5m in breadth and up to 0.2m in height. There is a marked scarp on the NNW where the ground drops down 0.4m to the general level of the enclosure, while one of the furrows on the SSE cuts into the crest of the enclosure bank, suggesting that they are late in the sequence.

The enclosure also contains at least 21 simple boulder grave-markers and nine small cairns concentrated on the E and NW. There is, in addition, a striking uninscribed slab (now leaning at a slight angle to the E), measuring 1.4m high, 0.37m wide and 0.01m thick, situated near the SE corner of the enclosure. However, these are all overshadowed by a railed area containing (amongst other grave-markers) a substantial Late Victorian stone cross on a pedestal bearing the following inscription:

Erected By / Samu[e]l Macnaughtan, Maclean, Australia / In Affectionate Memory Of His Father / Ewen Macnaughton, / Died At Salen, Loch Sunart, 3rd June 1850 Aged 53 Years / Mary Cameron, His Mother / Widow Of Ewen Macnaughtan / Died 12th June 1874, Aged 55 Years / Janet, His Sister / Died At Logierait Manse, 23rd Jan. 1855 Aged 13 Years / Mary, His Sister / Widow Of Dr John Cameron / Died at Onich, 3rd May 1887, Aged 37 Years / John, His Brother / Died At Maclean, Australia, 16th May 1909 Aged 58 Years / The Above Samuel Macnaughtan, Died At Maclean, Australia, 5th July 1906 Aged 62 Years / And The Revd. Duncan Macnaughtan, His Brother / Died At Campbeltown, 21st Oct. 1916, Aged 72 Years.

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GG) 5 April 2016.

Cross (Charles Macdonald)

The tallest monument on Eilean Fhianain is the Celtic cross dedicated to Father Charles Macdonald, author of Moidart, Among the Clanranalds. The cross stands on the W side of the island about 20m NW of the church and has an expansive view down Loch Shiel towards Acharacle. It is unusual in that the dedication faces W and not E as is the case with the majority on the island.

The dedication reads:

Erected to the Memory / Of
/ Charles Macdonald / for
thirty years / Priest of
Moidart / by his
parishioners and / friends.
Born 30 June 1835 / Died
17 Oct 1894 Buried on / St
Finnan's Isle Oct 22 1894. /
R.I.P.

Visited by HES Survey and
Recording (GG, ATW) September
2017.



Figure 21 Charles MacDonald cross c.1894

Jetty

This stone-built jetty, which gently descends into the waters of Loch Shiel from the N side of the island, measures 14.5m in length by up to 3m in width and is constructed of large dressed stones (two of which have been removed) with an infilling of smaller edge-set slabs. It is not depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map of either Argyllshire (1875, Sheet XVII) or Inverness-shire (1876, Sheet CLVIII), but is shown on the 2nd editions, published in 1900 and 1902 respectively. It is probably contemporary with a similar jetty (NM76NE 41), situated on the N edge of Loch Shiel at Aird an Eilean, and built to replace an earlier stone jetty (NM76NE 47), now submerged, on the E side of the island.

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GG) 23 March 2017

Bait hole

A single cup-shaped depression in the centre of a low rock outcrop immediately above the water's edge on the SE side of the island is probably a bait hole. It measures 130mm in diameter and 30mm in depth.

Visited by HES, Survey and Recording (ATW, GG) 23 March 2017.

Platforms

North west platforms (Nos. 1-12, 37-41)

This group of at least 15 platforms is located along the NW and N coast of Eilean Fhianain. The majority appear to be related to the use of the island as a burial place, and in particular to the need for soil from borrow pits, and a need to create discrete areas for burials in a relatively recent period. That said, the presence of slag, charcoal and a fragment of iron indicate the possibility that some were also used for the purposes of small industry.

1. NM 75213 68349: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 13.7 from E to W by 6m transversely, with a rear scarp up to 2.5m high and a frontal apron up to 0.7m high. A small fragment of iron slag was noted in a disturbed area at the W end.
2. NM 75204 68342: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 8.3m from NE to SW by 7.1m transversely, with a rear scarp up to 0.6m high and a frontal apron up to 0.3m high.
3. NM 75210 68340: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 4.8m from E to W by 5.3m transversely, with a rear scarp up to 0.5m high. It is occupied by what appears to be a grave orientated from N to S, in addition to a scatter of rubble.
4. NM 75221 68340: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 7.4m square, with a rear scarp up to 2m high. It is occupied by at least three small stone grave-markers. Charcoal occurs on the N facing scarp below.
5. NM 75231 68337: This grass and reed grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 7m from E to W by 6m transversely, with a rear scarp up to 1.2m high. It is occupied by at least four small stone grave-markers and a scatter of stone derived from a small cairn. Charcoal occurs on the N facing scarp below.
6. NM 75234 68342: This grass-grown hollow, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 4.3m from E to W by 5m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high. Two tall European Larch stand on its N and another on its SW edge.
7. NM 75227 68348: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 8m from E to W by 6.8m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.7m high. Six tall European Larch stand on its N scarp, while a fragment of iron was noted on the scarp below.
8. NM 75240 68344: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 7.4m from E to W by 6m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.4m high and a frontal apron up to 0.5m high. It is occupied by a small scatter of stones marking a possible grave and a small stone grave-marker. In addition, there are traces of what may be a hut measuring 2.1m from N to S by 1.3m transversely, within spread turf walls 0.8m thick and up to 0.15m high.
11. NM 75245 68350: This grass and reed-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 6.5m from E to W by 5.2m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.6m high.
12. NM 75230 68373: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the N side of the island, measures 8m from E to W by 4m transversely, with a rear scarp 1.5m high.

37. NM 75169 68286: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the WNW side of the island, measures 5.5m from NE to SW by 4.8m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high.

38. NM 75167 68296: This grass, reed, fern and alder-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the WNW side of the island, measures 7.5m from NNE to SSW by 4.6m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high.

39. NM 75176 68304: This grass, fern and larch-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the NW side of the island, measures 17.5m from NE to SW by 8.7m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.8m high. It is occupied by a small cairn at its leading edge.

40. NM 75173 68312: This waterlogged, grass, reed, fern and alder-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the NW side of the island, measures 11m from NE to SW by 4m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.6m high.

41. NM 75189 68329: This waterlogged, grass and reed-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the NW side of the island, measures 8m from NNE to SSW by 7m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high.

Visited by HES, Archaeological Survey (ATW, GFG) 5 September 2017



Figure 22 Staff and volunteers recording a platform (8) on the N of the island

North east platforms (Nos. 1-21)

The numbers cited in this description refer to a plan of the island.

This group of up to 11 grass- and reed-grown platforms occupies the NE shore of the island between the old and new jetties. At least four of the platforms (Nos. 10, 16, 17 and 20) appear to have been constructed to support buildings of which only vestiges remain, perhaps of secondary date. Platforms 18 and 19 were presumably constructed for burials, and contain two small cairns, a few grave markers and a single gravestone.

This area has clearly been the focus of later settlement on the island, and occupies the most sheltered part. A document from 1707 records that the minister had stayed with a blacksmith resident on the island (NAS CHP/984/2) and local tradition records that the last family left the island in the 18th century (Macdonald 2011 edn., 102-3) suggesting that, on the present evidence, the settlement here is of post-medieval date.

9. NM 75251 68341: This oval platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NNE side of the island, measures 6.5m from NW to SE by 4.8m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.4m high and a front apron up to 0.25m high.

10. NM 75258 68345: This subrectangular platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NE side of the island, measures 11.7m from NW to SE by 7.3m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.3m high and a front apron up to 0.3m high. Fragments of slag have been noted on the below the crest of the apron.

13. NM 75251 68358: This platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NNE side of the island, measures 5.5m square within a rear scarp 0.5m high and a front apron 0.3m high.

14. NM 75255 68357: This oval platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NNE side of the island, measures 6.8m from N to S by 4.2m transversely within a rear scarp 1.2m high and a front apron 0.6m high. Faint traces of a low bank cross the platform at right-angles.

15. NM 75261 68355: This oval platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NNE side of the island, measures 7.8 from NW to SE by 6.6m transversely within a rear scarp 0.4m high and a front apron 0.25m high.

16. NM 75269 68349: This subrectangular platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the NNE side of the island, measures 15.8m from NNW to SSE by 5.2m transversely within a rear scarp 2.3m high and a front apron 0.8m high. What may be the remains of a hut measuring 3.2m from NNW to SSE by 3m transversely within spread turf banks 1m thick and 0.15m high are situated at the SE end. A fragment of slag lies under an alder to the NE of the platform.

17. NH 75281 68326: This subrectangular platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NE side of the island, measures 24.3m from NNW to SSE by 7.6m transversely within a rear scarp 1.3m high and a front apron 1.2m high. The remains of two possible buildings measuring about 11m and 10.5m long respectively lie on the platform. The more northerly is most clearly represented by the curved spread bank at the NNW end of the platform, which measures 1.7m thick and 0.35m high, the more southerly by a disturbed area and what appear to be spread turf walls 1m thick and 0.1m high at the SSE end of the platform.

18. NM 75264 68330: This oval platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the NE side of the island, measures 5.7m from NNW to SSE by 6.1m transversely, with a rear scarp 2.2m high. It is occupied by a Late Victorian headstone marking the grave of Andrew Gillies (d.1881) and Isabella Macdonald, immediately to the ESE of which is a small rubble cairn. In addition, a line of boulders extends 2m S from the foot of the headstone.

19. NM 75268 68325: This oval platform, which is cut back into the steep rising slope on the NE side of the island, measures 6.1m from NNW to SSE by 5.5m transversely within a rear scarp 2.5m high and a front apron 0.2m high. A scatter of stones at the centre originates from a small cairn.

20. NM 75276 68309: This subrectangular platform, which is cut back into the steep slope on the E side of the island, measures 13m from N to S by 6.6m transversely within a rear scarp 1.5m high and a front apron 0.3m high. The remains of a turf building, measuring 2m square within spread turf walls 0.8m thick and 0.1m high, are situated at its N end. What may be an entrance is marked by a faint gap on the E.

21. NM 75288 68306: This oval platform, which is cut back into the steep rising slope on the E side of the island, measures 11.3m from N to S by 6.2m transversely within a rear scarp 0.7m high and a front apron 0.5m high. Fragments of iron slag occur at the NNE corner.

Visited by HES, Archaeological Survey (ATW, GFG) 5 September 2017.



Figure 23 This oblique aerial view taken from the NE of the island highlights the rectangular platforms in that sector of the island, many of which were created to support buildings for which some evidence survives.

East platforms (Nos. 22-26)

This group of at least 5 platforms occupies the E of the island downslope from the summit area, north of the bait hole and south of the old jetty. The area is dominated by a natural terrace that stretches from the S to the N, but it has clearly been modified in places and the building, slag and smaller scoops indicate a mixture of settlement, industry and burial-related activity that may be of post-medieval date.

22. NM 75288 68292: This grass, reed and Hawthorn-grown oval platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the E side of the island, measures 5.7m from N to S by 5.1m transversely, with a rear scarp 1.5m high and a frontal apron 0.2m high.

23. NM 75279 68294: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the E side of the island, measures 6m from N to S by 5.4m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.5m high and a frontal apron 0.2m high.
24. NM 75289 68289: This grass and reed-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the E side of the island, measures 5.5m square, with a rear scarp 1m high.
25. NM 75289 68271: This fern, grass and hazel-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the E side of the island, measures 28.5m from N to S by 5.5m transversely, with a rear scarp 1.8m high and a frontal apron 1m high. There are traces of a rectangular building at the N end measuring 5.8m from E to W by 2.8m transversely, within spread turf walls 1.3m thick and up to 0.2m high.
26. NM 75286 68242: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the ESE side of the island, measures 20.5m from NNE to SSW by 6.1m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high. Jim Kirby believes that this may be the site of a bloomery, as he has noted many fragments of iron slag at the NE edge of the platform and on the shore below.

Visited by HES, Archaeological Survey (ATW, GFG) 5 September 2017

South and south west platforms (Nos. 27-36)

This group of 10 platforms is situated downslope from the summit area at the S and SW of Eilean Fhianain in an area dominated by a large natural terrace. The six platforms at the E end of the group (27-33) were probably constructed as borrow pits or as simple terraces to contain burials, and they contain 36 simple grave markers and one prominent gravestone to Dougald Cameron d.1886 and his daughter Annie d.1901. A short section of path leads from the shore to the burial ground between platforms 28 and 29, and another section survives to the W of platform 36.

The shoreline adjacent to the terrace is dotted with numerous fragments of slag suggesting that this area was also a focus of small industry, presumably in the 17th and 18th century. Hammerscale, charcoal and slag have formerly been recovered from platform 34 (J Kirby pers. comm.) and this may have been a focus of industrial activity, as it is in the area of the island most distant from the settlement.

27. NM 75252 68211: This grass and reed-grown oval platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the SSE side of the island, measures 7.4m from E to W by 5.7m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high.
28. NM 75242 68214: This grass, reed and bramble-grown oval platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the SSE side of the island, measures 7.4m from ENE to WSW by 5.3m transversely. It is occupied by at least three stone grave-markers, in addition to a scatter stones.
29. NM 75232 68205: This grass and reed-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the S side of the island, measures 10.1 from ENE to WSW by 7.8m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.5m. It is occupied by a headstone commemorating Donald Cameron d.1886 and his daughter, Annie. Iron slag was noted just above the foot of the S facing scarp.
30. NM 75228 68218: This grass and reed-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the S side of the island, measures 6.2m from E to W by 3m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high.

31. NM 75219 68207: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the S side of the island, measures 11.4m from WNW to ESE by 7.7m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.4m high. It is occupied by at least four small stone grave-markers at its NW end.

32. NM 75208 68210: This grass-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the SSW side of the island, measures 9m from WNW to ESE by 7.9m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.8m high. It is occupied by at least one small stone grave-marker at the rear of the NW end.

33. NM 75209 68218: This grass, reed and hawthorn-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the SW side of the island, measures 6m from NW to SE by 4.5m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.5m high. It is occupied by at least two small stone grave-markers.

34. NM 75193 68227: This grass reed and hawthorn-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the SW side of the island, measures 10.8m from NW to SE by 9m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high, with a rear scarp 1m high. It is occupied by at least one small cairn.

35. NM 75176 68246: This grass, reed and azalea-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the WSW side of the island, measures 13m from NW to SE by 12.5m transversely, with a rear scarp 1m high. It is occupied by at least one small cairn and a scatter of stones.

36. NM 75165 68251: This grass, reed and fern-grown platform, which is cut back into the steeply rising slope on the WSW side of the island, measures 8.2m from NNW to SSE by 6.8m transversely, with a rear scarp 0.3m high. It is accessed by a ramp from the NW up to 2.3m broad. Fragments of iron slag occur in section on the WSW, where the scarp in front of the platform is being actively eroded and also on the shore below.

Visited by HES, Archaeological Survey (ATW, GFG) 5 September 2017

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Appendix: Arisaig Parish Church

The roofless medieval parish church dedicated to St Maelrubha stands in a burial ground immediately to the SE of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church and manse. The site slopes gently from NE to SW and commands an open view over Loch nan Ceall.

Heavily restored, the church is rectangular on plan and now measures up to 14.2m from ENE to WSW by 5.8m transversely within walls that are 1m thick, except at the ENE end where the thickness is only 0.7m. The WSW gable has been modified and cement-capped, and now stands to an internal height of 6.4m, narrowing above the height of the side-walls. The ENE end is a modern reconstruction standing only up to 1m high. The side-walls, which stand to a maximum height of 2.8m at the WSW end, have been made level and are capped with cement. The masonry is of local, roughly dressed boulders with pinnings bonded with lime, though much of this is obscured by modern cement pointing. Both an external harl and an internal render are visible in places. The doorway is set at the WSW end of the SSE wall. The chancel was lit by two opposing rectangular slit windows with broad splayed jambs, while a larger and square third window, perhaps inserted, is set into the WSW gable. The margins throughout are plain, but two re-used stones have been incorporated into the reconstructed masonry. The first, a dressed stone with a check and socket, is set in the outside of the SW corner close to the wall-head; the second is set into the ENE end of the NNW wall and bears the initials 'AM'. The interior of the church is taken up with burials, some of which are described below. In addition, a neatly carved stone bowl, probably a late-medieval font or stoup, has been set into the window recess in the NNW wall. It measures 0.59m in diameter overall by about 0.14m in thickness, and the bowl measures 0.37m in diameter and 0.11m in depth. There is also evidence that at least one small burial enclosure once stood outside against the NNW side of the church.

Little is known of the history of the site, although a parson of 'Arasech' is recorded as early as AD 1250 (Orig. Paroch. Scot. 2 (1), 200). The present church may be of 16th century date and this coincides with the first documentary records of a church known as 'Kilmoroy in Arisik' in 1517 (ibid). Lying within Clanranald territory, the church is traditionally attributed to John Moidartach, 8th of Clanranald, or his son Allan, but it is possible that the church was already in existence before their supremacy. A competing story that the church was built by Allan nan Creach, 12th of Cameron, seems less likely given that the land was not within his territory (Blundell 1911, 359; Rixon 1982). The parish of Arisaig was combined with Elanfinan, or Sunart, and Kilchoan to form Ardnamurchan sometime after the Reformation, but the precise date of the abandonment of the building is not known. It was certainly a roofless ruin by the late 18th century (Stat. Acct. XX, 287). The dedication of the church is given as Mary in many secondary sources but it is now accepted as Maelrubha (Reeves 1862, 291-2).

The principal restoration of the church seems to have occurred after 1923, since photographs taken by M E M Donaldson before that date (Donaldson 1923; Collection ref. IN 4266, IN 4289) show the WSW gable with a step to take the rafters, a horizontal recess for a roof collar, and a lack of cement pointing.

Macdonald of Morar Burial Aisle

Attached to the WSW end of the church there is a chapel or burial aisle, which, but for the presence of the gable window and misalignment of the plan, might be taken as part of the original design. Set at a slight angle to the main axis of the church, it measures 4m from WSW to ENE by 2.75m transversely, within walls 0.75m in thickness. The SWW gable has been reduced to the height of the side-walls which have been restored and capped at the same height as those of the church. The former roof-line is marked by a series of coping stones set into the church gable. The aisle is entered through a doorway at the WSW end of the SSE wall, above which is an arched recess, possibly for an armorial panel. Both the WSW gable and the SSE wall are pierced by slit windows with broadly splayed jambs, similar to those in the church. In the SSE wall there is also a low recess containing a simple oval bowl or stoup, which is accessible from the exterior through a circular opening. A round-arched burial recess is set into the NNW wall, the external face of which projects 0.2m, with rounded corners and coping. The dressings of the recess are all formed of yellow sandstone, not found elsewhere in the church, providing the only evidence that it is later in date than the aisle.

Within the recess, and presumably inserted at a later date, there is a small panel formed of two freestone elements. The upper bears the date 16[4]1 and initials [M] A R G M. The lower panel contains a Macdonald armorial. Centred in the upper part is an eagle, flanked on the dexter side by a hand grasping a wheel-cross. On the sinister side is a lion rampant. In the lower dexter corner is a galley, and a triple-towered castle fills the sinister corner. Centred in the lower part there is a salmon naiant. The armorial bears close comparison with another at Kildonan, Eigg, also dated 1641 (Digital image SC 1564691), the famous example from Howmore, South Uist (RCAHMS 1928, 106), and with others of the Macdonald family (cf. RCAHMS 1980, 145-6, 259). Within the interior of the room is a large table-tomb borne on carved feet which bears the inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF / SIMON MACDONALD MAJOR IN THE 92 / REG OF FOOT/
HE DEPARTED THIS LIFE / IN HIS HOUSE OF MORAR THE [. . .] OF MARCH 1800/ IN THE
41 YEAR OF HIS AGE / THIS STONE IS PLACED BY / [. . .] EMELIA MCDONALD/ HIS
WIDOW / IN TOKEN OF THE REGARD/ SHE BEARS TO HIS MEMORY

Above the burial recess there is a monument which reads:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY / OF / AMELIA / WIDOW OF SIMON MACDONALD OF MORAR /
OF THEIR DAUGHTER ELIZA, AND SONS / JAMES, SIMON AND JOHN. / THE SORROW OF
A MOTHER / BORNE OF PATIENCE TRULY CHRISTIAN / AND THE SAD FATE OF HER
FAMILY / ARE HERE RECORDED. /R.I.P. / JAM POSUIT 1843

Beneath the inscription there is an armorial shield bearing, quarterly, 1st, a lion rampant; 2nd a hand couped holding a cross-crosslet; 3rd an oak tree; 4th a galley, sail furled, salmon naiant (?) at its base. A castle of three towers surmounts the shield. The Macdonalds of Morar were a branch of the Clanranalds from the 16th until the 19th century, latterly resident at Traigh House (MacDonald and MacDonald 1904,251-8; Miers 2008). Subsequent owners of the estate are also buried in the adjacent cemetery.

Late medieval carved stones

Eight late-medieval carved stones are known from Arisaig, with most of them are now housed in the roofless church. A photograph from the 1920s (IN 4265) shows how one group had been set in a cement panel at the E end of the church, although they have now been removed to the modern church. The numbering used here follows Blundell (1911). Numbers 1, 5 and 6 were not accessible on the date of visit and for these descriptions have been compiled using existing sources.

(1) Two fragments of a slab with a decorative band of roundels and lozenges, within which are two canopied niches separated by a sword. Within the right-hand niche there is an ecclesiastic wearing Eucharistic vestments and holding a chalice with both hands, while the left-hand niche formerly contained a crucifixion scene, now detached and presumably lost (Rixon 1982). The low-pointed mitre worn by the ecclesiastic is of an early type (Steer and Bannerman 1977, 30).

Images: IN 4265; SC 1570282; SC 1570267.

Refs: Lumsden 1884; Blundell 1911 No.1; Donaldson 1923; Rixon 1982.

(2) The fractured remains of a late-medieval grave-slab bordered by a margin with widely spaced roundels and lozenges, measuring 1.78m in length and 0.37m broad at the head. The upper panel has a foliated cross above a panel showing an archer and three deer. Below this are the hilt and pommel of a sword with an angled quillon ending in a quatrefoil ornament and, to the right, another animal, possibly a horse.

Images: SC 1570270, SC1570280-281.

Refs: Lumsden 1884. Blundell 1911 No. 2

(3) A tapered slab, 1.6m in length and 0.37m in breadth at the head. Set within a plain border, the upper panel bears a foliate cross set above a sword flanked by plant-scrolls and at least one animal. The sword has angled quillons ending in quatrefoil ornament. The stone is now the NNE of three carved slabs fixed against the inner face of the WSW gable of the church.

Image: SC 1570279.

Refs: Blundell No. 3

(4) The lower part of a tapered slab, measuring at least 0.5m in length by 0.38m in breadth and 0.07m in thickness. The decoration within two roll mouldings is a simple and poorly executed interlace.

Image: SC 1570286.

Ref: Blundell 1911 No.4

(5) A small fragment decorated with plant scrolls within a border.

Ref: Lumsden 1884, Blundell 1911 No. 5

(6) Two small irregular fragments. The first depicts the waist and arms of an archer wearing a plaid or kilt with a belt end, holding a long bow facing to the left. The second shows an emaciated figure above a panel that features a dog chasing a deer.

Image: IN 4265; SC 1570268.

Ref: Blundell 1911 No. 6

(7) A tapered slab with the right side slightly convex, 1.63m long and 0.43m broad at the head. Set within two roll mouldings, the upper part of the stone shows a much eroded foliate cross above a sword flanked by plant-scrolls. The stone is now the SSE of three carved slabs fixed against the inner face of the WSW gable of the church.

Image: SC 1570278.

(8) A tapered slab, 1.59m long and 0.43m broad at the head. A single roll moulding forms a border around the edge of the slab, whilst another defines an upper and lower panel. The upper panel depicts a foliate cross, the lower a sword behind which are animals and plant-scrolls. The sword has angled quillons ending in quatrefoil ornament. The stone is now the central of three carved slabs fixed against the inner face of the WSW gable of the church.

Image: SC 1570277.

Burial ground

The burial ground, which is enclosed within a 19th century wall, has been expanded to the SE, while its modern replacement stands further downhill to the S. Among the memorials in the burial ground there is a slate headstone dated 1768 which records the death of a Macdonald tacksman of Ardnafuaran. This was also reputed the burial place of Alexander Macdonald (d. c.1770), the Clanranald bard (Macdonald and Macdonald 1904, 579-589), who is commemorated by a bronze plaque erected in 1927. Among a large number of 19th and 20th century monuments, the most notable include those of successive owners of the Arisaig Estate: Francis D P Astley (1825-1863), Francis D Astley (1853-1880, see NM68NE 34), Gertrude Susan Nicholson née Astley (c.1850-1920) and Sir Arthur William Nicholson (d.1832). There are also eight graves commemorating servicemen from World War 2. Six of these were from H.M.S. Curacoa, which was sunk in a collision with R.M.S. Queen Mary on 2nd October 1942.

Visited by HES Survey and Recording (GFG, ATW) 7 September 2017.