

## Introduction

The Congress excursion takes in many of the spectacular sites and landscapes of Lorn and Mid Argyll, the central districts of the former county of Argyllshire. We will be travelling in two coaches, one taking a clockwise circuit, the other going anti-clockwise, though both tours will visit the same places. The guide has been written to follow the clockwise tour (*deiseal!*). There will be four main stops, each of about an hour, at Inveraray, Auchindrain, Dunadd and Kilmartin, but notes are included on various other points of interest along the way. Depending on progress, it may be possible to make brief 'photo stops' at one or two of these.

This guide has been compiled by S D Boyle and G L Brown (both RCAHMS). The notes are largely derived from articles in three volumes of the Royal Commission's *Inventory of Argyll: Volume 2 Lorn* (1975), *Volume 6 Mid Argyll & Cowal, Prehistoric & Early Historic Monuments* (1988) and *Volume 7 Mid Argyll & Cowal, Medieval and Later Monuments* (1992). Biographical sketches are by Christine MacKay. All illustrations are © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

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## Landscape and historical background

The rocks of Lorn and Mid Argyll are predominately of the Dalradian period, originally formed over 600 million years ago as sandstones, shales and limestones on an ocean bed, but later folded, heated and squeezed by immense pressures that left them metamorphosed into schists, quartzites and phyllites. These pressures (caused by the collision of two continents) raised the rocks into great mountain ranges, an event known as the Caledonian Orogeny, or mountain-building. The Caledonian mountains have long since been eroded down to their roots, but today's Highlands retain the distinctive north-east to south-west 'grain' of folds and faults established at that time. During the Ice Age of the last two million years, glaciers flowed down existing valleys, deepening them by scouring out softer rocks and leaving the great trenches now filled by Lochs Linnhe, Etive, Melfort, Craignish, Awe and Fyne.

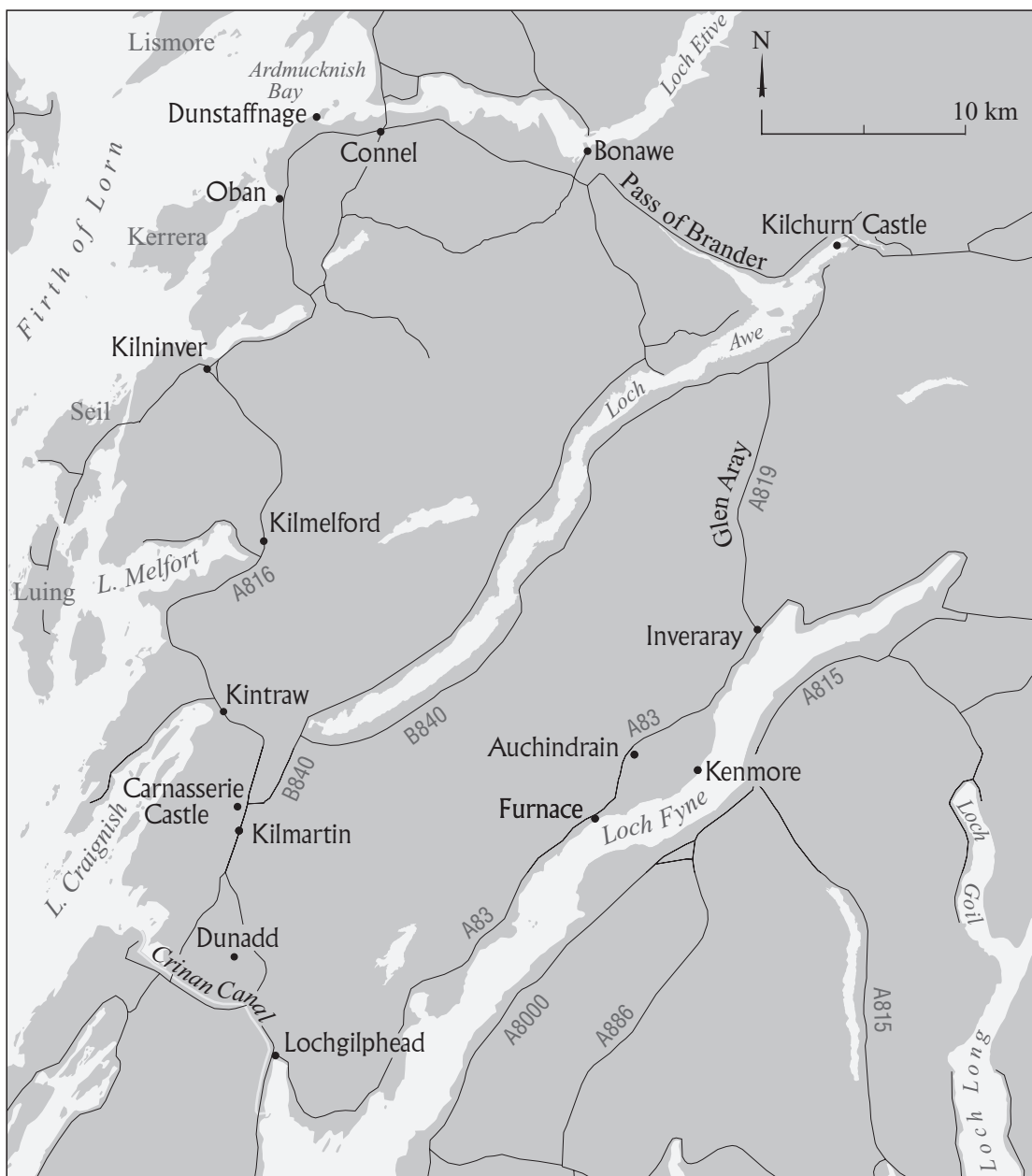
The area attracted settlement at an early stage. Mesolithic activity has been identified in several places, but the earliest visible monuments are the burial cairns, standing stones and cup-and-ring rock art left by Neolithic and Bronze Age inhabitants, best seen around Kilmartin, which boasts the finest concentration of such monuments in Scotland. The later prehistoric period is most visibly represented in the area by large numbers of hillforts and duns (small thick-walled forts) and by crannogs (artificial islands) found in the shallow waters of many lochs, particularly Loch Awe. These types of monument also persisted into the early historic period, including, of course, the fort of Dunadd, once the chief seat of the Scots of Dalriada.

The influence of the early church is to be found throughout Lorn and Mid Argyll. The remains of several chapels survive from this period, and other religious establishments are known from place-name evidence, particularly those with the 'cil-' prefix. Many early crosses remain at these sites, including Kilmartin, where the collection includes a fine cross now standing in the church. Kilmartin also boasts an important collection of late medieval sculpture, examples of an art that flourished in the West Highlands under the patronage of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles.

In the 13th century the most powerful secular force in the area was Clan Dougall, whose chiefs, from their seat at Dunstaffnage Castle, held most of the area around Loch Awe and perhaps reached as far as Loch Fyne. MacDougall opposition to Robert Bruce led to their forfeiture after the battle of the Pass of Brander in 1309, and they never recovered their power. Instead, two clans, the MacDonalds and the Campbells, both prominent supporters of Bruce, emerged to dominate the politics of Argyll into modern times.

From their power base in Islay and Kintyre, the chiefs of Clan Donald, who by the 1350s held the title Lord of the Isles, grew to become the predominant force in the West Highlands, their authority extending over the lesser clans of Mid Argyll. Under them there was a flowering of Gaelic culture, of which the most enduring manifestation was a distinctive tradition of sculpture; several hundred examples of this survive. For much of the time the Lords of the Isles operated beyond the effective control of the Scottish Crown, and their tendency to treat independently with England led to their forfeiture in the 1490s, though they made persistent unsuccessful attempts to re-establish their authority into the 16th century. The Campbells were granted the lordship of Loch Awe after the defeat of the MacDougalls, and from there they expanded inexorably. A cadet branch built Kilchurn Castle and acquired estates stretching from the islands of Seil, Luing and Lismore in the west to Strathtay in the east, becoming earls of Breadalbane in the 1680s. The senior branch of the family, however, moved from Loch Awe to Inveraray about 1450, and were created earls of Argyll shortly thereafter. Later they became the crown's principal agent against the MacDonald lordship, acquiring most of their lands in the process. The rivalry between these two clans persisted into early modern times, colouring the civil wars of the 17th century and the Jacobite risings of the 18th.

The more settled political atmosphere of the 18th century is reflected in the confident new castle and burgh of Inveraray built from the 1740s by the Dukes (as they now were) of Argyll. The town of Lochgilphead developed rather later, while Oban developed from the 1790s to service the growing tourist industry. Apart from these three urban developments, Mid Argyll and Lorn have remained firmly rural, but the landscape has changed completely over the last 250 years. Until about 1750 the characteristic highland farm was held jointly by groups of tenants living in loosely clustered townships at the centre of a group of irregular fields. A mixture of arable and pastoral farming was practiced, though during the late 1600s and early 1700s the cattle trade boomed to feed growing urban populations in the lowlands and across the border in England. This landscape was swept away during the ‘Age of Improvement’ – a century of change which saw the abolition of the old joint farms and their replacement either by single-tenant holdings or (especially in more remote parts) by large-scale sheep ranches. Auchindrain is thought to be unique in that it remained a joint farm until the 1930s, and its layout, probably unchanged significantly since the 19th century, gives a flavour of the atmosphere of a pre-improvement settlement. Ironically, many of the ‘improved’ farms were relatively short lived and, since the early 20th century, vast areas have disappeared beneath the commercial forests that now cloak the hillsides above Lochs Awe and Fyne.



Location map

## **Dunstaffnage Castle**

Dunstaffnage Castle, enclosed by a massive curtain wall, occupies a rocky promontory on the southern shore of Loch Etive at its junction with Loch Linnhe. It was built in the mid-13th century by the MacDougall lords of Lorn, but was captured by Robert Bruce after the defeat of the MacDougalls at the Pass of Brander in 1309. Bruce subsequently granted the castle to a kinsman of the Campbells of Lochawe and, although the MacDougalls were later restored to part of their lordship, the castle was again in Campbell hands by 1470, remaining with the earls of Argyll into the 20th century.

## **Connel Bridge and Loch Etive**

Connel Bridge, completed in 1903, was built by the Arrol Bridge and Roof Company of Glasgow to carry the Oban to Ballachulish railway across Loch Etive. At the time it had the second longest single span in Europe (after the Forth Bridge). From 1913 until 1966 it carried both road and rail traffic, but it now serves only as a road bridge.

Beneath the bridge flow the dramatic tidal rapids of the Falls of Lora, which at spring tides become a mass of 2m-high waves and shifting whirlpools. Above the falls, Loch Etive stretches for 20 miles back into the mountains. In Irish legend it was here that Deirdre ('Deirdre of the Sorrows') settled after eloping with Naoise MacUisneach and fleeing King Connobhar of Ulster, to whom she had been betrothed.



*Connel Bridge*



## **Oak and iron: The Lorn Furnace, Bonawe**

Although most of the woodlands of Mid Argyll are commercial plantations of closely-packed non-native conifers, there are some extensive areas of ancient oak woodland. These woodlands should not be seen as wholly 'natural' forests, as for several centuries they were intensively managed and harvested for their bark (used to tan hides) and their timber, but most importantly they provided an important source of charcoal for iron manufacture.

Up to the 17th century iron production in the Highlands was a small-scale business. In the early 18th century, however, several companies were set up to produce iron on a larger scale. Most of these were short-lived enterprises, but two of the most successful were at Bonawe on Loch Etive and at Furnace on Loch Fyne (see below). At Bonawe the Lorn Furnace operated from 1753 to 1874, using locally produced charcoal to smelt ore shipped in from northern England. Long leases (of up to 100 years) were negotiated with local landowners for extensive tracts of oak woodland, which were carefully managed to produce a regular crop of timber. As a legacy of this management, these woods are now among the best preserved on the west coast. The furnace buildings themselves are also well preserved and are now managed by Historic Scotland.

## **Loch Awe and the Pass of Brander**

Loch Awe is the longest freshwater loch in Scotland. Originally, it extended south-west past Kilmartin to join the sea at Crinan, but it was blocked by glacial debris at the tail end of the last glaciation (about 10,000 years ago) and now discharges into Loch Etive via the River Awe. The narrow western arm of the loch is dominated by the huge bulk of Ben Cruachan (1125m/3695ft), and at its foot the road is squeezed between loch and mountain. This is the Pass of Brander, the site of an important victory of Robert Bruce during the Wars of Independence. In the late summer of 1309 Bruce led his forces against John MacDougall of Lorn, who backed the English Crown. MacDougall's army hid in ambush, but Bruce, warned of the trap, surprised the MacDougalls by sending a force up the mountainside to attack them from the rear. John of Lorn fled in his galley, leaving the way clear for Bruce to advance on Dunstaffnage Castle. The battle broke MacDougall power in Lorn and Mid Argyll, and one of the principal beneficiaries of their fall was Sir Neil Campbell, who was granted the lordship of Lochawe.

Around the shores of the loch there are about two dozen crannogs, artificial islands of stone held together with timber piles. Most of these appear to have been inhabited in late prehistoric times, though at least some remained in use into the medieval period.

## **Duncan Bàn MacIntyre (1724-1812)**

Above the village of Dalmally there is a monument to Duncan Bàn MacIntyre. Donnchadh Bàn was born at Drum Liaghart near the shore of Loch Tulla, Argyll, and was later to marry Mary MacNicol, his *Màiri Bhàn Òg*, the daughter of the innkeeper at nearby Inveroran. He served as a soldier in the Argyll militia and was employed as a keeper in Glen Lochay, on Ben Dòbhrain and in Glen Etive. In 1766 he went to Edinburgh and had a post in the City Guard. He also served for a time in the Breadalbane Fencibles and, although not a member of the Fencibles who went to Ireland in 1798, composed the poem, *Òran A' Champ* (1798). *Cead Deireannach nam Beann* (*Final Farewell to the Bens*) was composed in September 1802 when, as an old man, he paid his final visit to the area of his birth.

Donnchadh Bàn composed about 6000 lines of poetry but could neither read nor write Gaelic and others noted his verses at his dictation. He is buried in Old Greyfriars churchyard in Edinburgh.

## Kilchurn Castle

Kilchurn Castle is dramatically sited on a peninsula at the north-east end of Loch Awe, against the backdrop of the Glenorchy mountains. It was built in the mid-15th century as the principal seat of the Campbells of Glenorchy, a cadet branch of the Campbells of Lochawe. From the mid-16th century the Glenorchy family (later to become earls of Breadalbane) concentrated increasingly on their estates around Loch Tay in Perthshire, and Kilchurn declined in importance, though major (and expensive) additions in the 1690s included an extensive new barrack block, and the castle was garrisoned by government troops during the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745-6.



*Kilchurn Castle*

### **Neil Munro (1863-1930)**

At the head of Glen Aray there is a monument to Neil Munro, erected in 1935 by An Comunn Gaidhealach, which bears the Gaelic inscription ‘*Sàr Litreachas*’.

Munro was born in Inveraray on 3rd June 1863, in a little tenement called Crombie’s Land. He also spent many holidays in the House of the Brass Man’s Hand in the town’s Main Street. Gaelic was his first language.

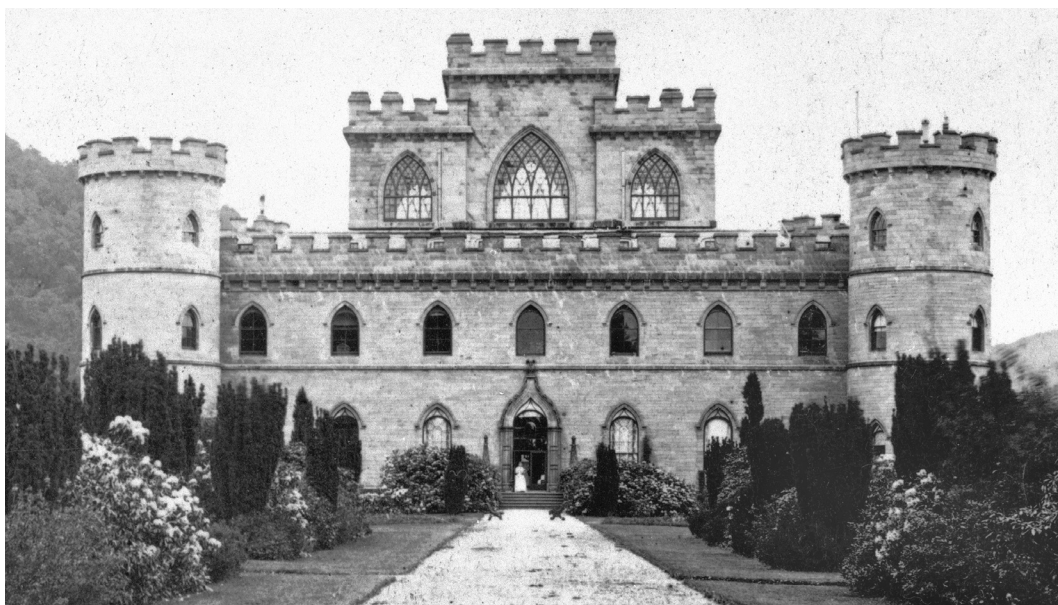
Munro did not attend university but he became one of the outstanding literary figures of his time as a journalist, critic, novelist and poet. After leaving school he worked in the office of a local lawyer before going to Glasgow where he soon moved into journalism and worked for several newspapers. At the age of only 23 he was made chief reporter of the Glasgow Evening News.

Although most widely known for his humorous Para Handy tales, the first of which appeared in 1905, Munro produced a number of accomplished novels and collections of short stories. *The Lost Pibroch and other Shielsing Stories* was published in 1896 and his first novel, *John Splendid*, in 1898. *Gilian the Dreamer*, *Ayrshire Idylls* and *The New Road* were to follow. In 1918 *Jaunty Jock and Other Stories* was published. In 1908 he was honoured with an LLD from Glasgow University, and in 1930 with a second LLD from Edinburgh University.



## Inveraray Castle and Estate

The Campbells of Loch Awe moved their chief seat to the shores of Loch Fyne about 1450. The original castle was closely contemporary with Kilchurn, and surviving illustrations show the two were of similar appearance. Suggestions to replace it with a new building were made as early as the 1660s, but not until 1744 was a design by Roger Morris accepted by the 3rd Duke, and building commenced the following year. The works were supervised by William Adam and his son John, and continued until the 1780s, when the elaborate decoration of the state rooms (by Robert Mylne) was completed. The result is one of the most significant monuments of the early Gothic Revival in Britain, and the castellated design probably reflected the 3rd Duke's sense of his own status and responsibilities as clan chief and tenant-in-chief of the crown. The only major change to the facade of the castle since the 18th century came after a fire in 1877, when an attic storey was added, and the corner turrets were provided with conical roofs.



*Inveraray Castle c.1870*

The development of the parkland around the castle began in the 17th century; the great Beech Avenue, for example, which forms the western boundary of the town (and now forms the main town carpark), was planted around 1650. Most estate developments, however, were roughly contemporary with the new castle. These works involved enclosing parklands, canalising the Rivers Aray and Shira, and providing new, often highly ornamented, farm buildings and bridges.



*Inveraray Castle*

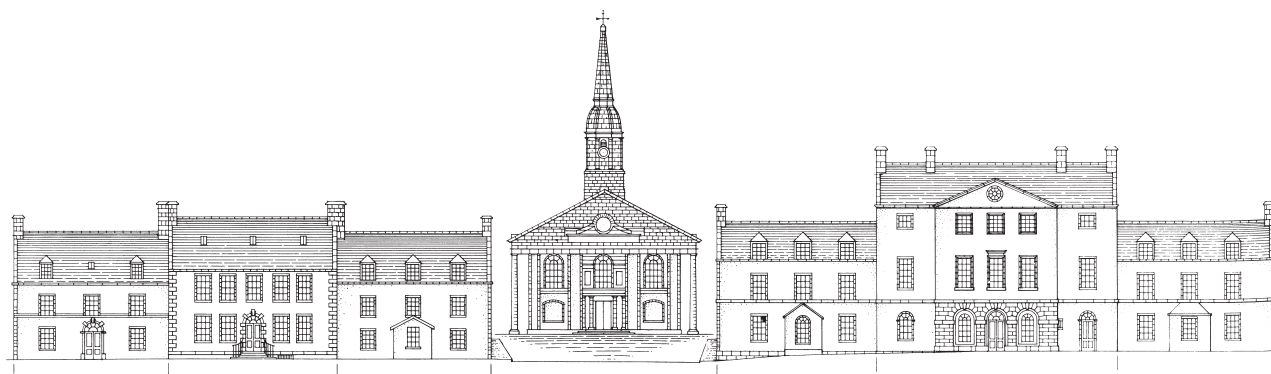
## Inveraray Town

The burgh of Inveraray, established in 1474 and elevated to a royal burgh in 1648, lay to the west of the mouth of the River Aray, between the castle and the present town, a site now mostly hidden by shrubbery. In the mid-18th century the 3rd Duke of Argyll took the decision to move the entire town to a new site in order to make way for his new castle. The chosen position was a low headland, formerly known as Gallows Foreland, bounded on the west by an avenue of beech trees planted in the 17th century and on the other sides by Loch Fyne. The duke worked on the design with William Adam and his son John but, although the layout of the town was established in the 1750s, building progress was slow, and few buildings had been completed by the duke's death in 1761. Works picked up again after the accession in 1770 of the 5th Duke, who employed the architect Robert Mylne to finish the scheme, and by the end of the century the town was largely complete, James Gillespie Graham's courthouse and jail, completed in 1821, being the last major construction. Since then the landscape of the town has changed little, though the balance of the north front has been altered, first by the construction of a tall bell tower next to All Saints' Episcopal Church in 1922-3, and second by the dismantling in 1941 of the parish church spire, originally the focal point of the town. Many of the town's buildings were renovated in an extensive programme of repairs between 1958 and 1963.

The most impressive view of the town is to be had from across the bay to the north, the view that greeted travellers approaching from the lowlands via the military road, completed in 1750. Front Street, which faces across the bay, includes two of the earliest buildings, the 'Great Inn' (now the Argyll Arms Hotel) and the Town House (now the tourist office). These buildings, and most others in the street, were designed by John Adam; the facade, however, owes its unity to Mylne's arched screen built across the end of the beech avenue and to his archway spanning the Dalmailly road, both constructed in 1787. A planned ornamental gateway to Main Street was never constructed.

On the seafront, facing the end of Main Street, there is a fine late medieval cross. This may originally have stood at the medieval church of Kilmalieu, across the bay, but by the 17th century it served as the market cross of Old Inveraray. It was re-erected on its present site in 1829. The cross is a product of the Iona School of West Highland sculpture (see Kilmartin Church, below) and probably dates from the late 14th or early 15th centuries.

Most of the buildings in Main Street North were constructed in the 1770s. They were constructed for merchants and landowners from the country, though the ground floor of what is now the George Hotel originally housed the town's two churches, the Gaelic-speaking Highland church and the English-speaking Lowland church. The present parish church, which dominates Main Street, was only completed in 1802. In the 1740s William Adam had produced a design for a circular church on this site, but no building took place until 1795, and the rectangular design we have today is the work of Mylne. The building is double fronted, with two identical facades, the English church facing north, the Gaelic church facing south. A steeple rose from the centre of the building until 1941, when it was 'temporarily' dismantled for safety reasons. The two congregations were united in 1930, and the former Gaelic church is now used as a hall.





The line of Main Street resumes to the south of the church, but here, instead of individual houses built for the wealthy, we find Relief Land and Arkland, two austere tenement blocks with almost identical front elevations, designed by Mylne to house the lower classes, and built in 1774-6. Behind these tenements, and to either side of the courthouse, there are a number of other houses, mostly built for tradesmen and estate workers, and also mostly dating to the 1770s. One property on the lochside, Crombie's Land, is rather later, dating to the 1820s. Named after its first tenant, a plasterer, it is now best known as the birthplace of the writer Neil Munro. Crombie's Land is reached by following an alley past the south side of the courthouse.



*Inveraray from Dun na Cuaiche*

*Elevation of Front Street, Inveraray (partially reconstructed)*



## Auchindrain



*Auchindrain Township*

Auchindrain (*Achadh an Droighinn*, 'Field of the thorn tree') presents us with a unique picture of a typical Argyll township of the 19th century. It has been open as a museum since the 1960s. The interpretation of the buildings and their uses, as well as an understanding of life at Auchindrain were greatly helped by the testimony of Eddie MacCallum, the last tenant of the township, whose family lived there from 1829 until 1963.

Until the late 18th century, most highland farms were held as joint tenancies; that is, several tenants were each responsible for a proportion of the rent, while the arable land and grazings were held in common with his or her neighbours. The arable was periodically (perhaps annually) re-allocated amongst tenants in order to ensure each had an opportunity to farm the better ground, a system known as runrig, and each tenant had a right to graze a certain number of beasts. Houses, barns, corn-drying kilns and kailyards were usually clustered together into small townships amidst the cultivated ground. Above this were the hill grazings, or shielings, to which cattle, sheep and horses were taken for the summer months. They were accompanied there by most of the community who herded the animals and busied themselves in the manufacture of butter and cheese, the traditional products of the shieling season.

As new farming ideas spread through Scotland in the 18th century, many landlords and their agents came to see joint townships as restrictive barriers to improvement and to increased production and profits. In some parts of the Highlands, from the 1750s onwards, joint farms were abolished and the tenants cleared out to make way for large-scale sheep farming. In other places, however, there were no systematic clearances; instead, the land was divided into single-tenant farms, their new boundaries fixed by lines ruled on maps in estate offices. In 1788 a proposal was made to divide Auchindrain in this way, but the plan was never implemented, perhaps because the poor quality of its ground made it an unattractive prospect for investment. So it remained in joint tenancy, becoming ever more of an anachronism through the 19th century, and it was not until 1935 that Eddie McCallum acquired all the shares in the farm. He worked it alone until his retirement in 1962, when the Auchindrain Trust was set up to preserve and display the buildings of the township.



The buildings that survive today probably date from the period 1780 to 1820, though at least some of them probably stand on the footings of earlier structures built largely of turf. Their walls are of stone bonded with clay (though most have been repointed with lime mortar), and the roofs were originally supported on crucks – pairs of massive timbers set into the walls and joined at the roofline. The roofs themselves were of turf, covered with thatch (either heather, straw or bracken). Early in the 20th century the crucks in most buildings were replaced with modern frames, and the thatch was replaced with corrugated iron, but the original structure survives in one building (Building D) beneath the iron covering.

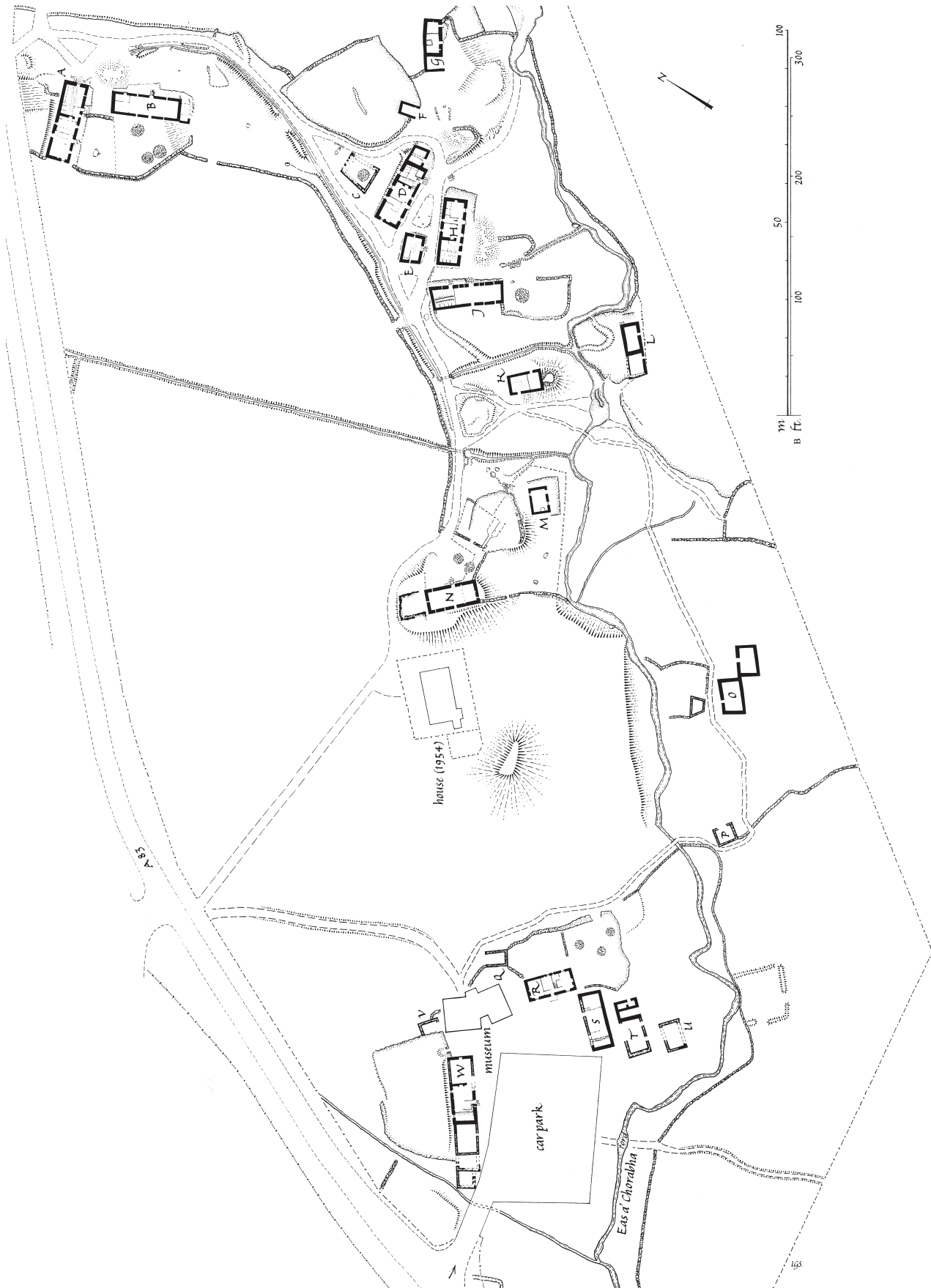
The tenants' houses are typical 'byre-dwellings', comprising a 'room', closet, kitchen and byre, and some also had an attic. The 'rooms' or parlours, where visitors were received, have stone fireplaces set into the gable ends, but the kitchens originally had open central hearths, presumably with canopied chimneys. Initially the kitchens were probably separated from the byres by wooden partitions, but these have all been replaced by stone walls with built-in fireplaces and chimney flues. Sleeping accommodation was provided by box-beds in the rooms or kitchens. The closets, located between these two compartments, may have been used as dairies. The byres, always at the opposite end of the house to the room, are furnished with stone drains. One byre (in house A) still has timber stalls with poles used to lock the cattle in position. Each byre-dwelling now has separate entrances to house and byre, but one (H) appears to retain evidence of an older arrangement, in which a single entrance, placed at the lower end of the kitchen, provided the only access. This entrance was later partially blocked and converted into a window.

The barns stand at right angles to the houses, facing roughly east and west to catch the prevailing wind. They are furnished with opposed doorways in their side walls, to provide a through draught for winnowing. Two barns (B and J) incorporate stables at one end, while the byre in house D was also latterly used as a stable, and remains furnished as such. Other buildings include cart sheds, additional byres, stables and pigsties. There are also several small cottages, one of which (building M) was built to house a retired widow, one Bell Poll, and because of this the tenants were exempt from the parish poor rates.

Amongst the buildings there are several small enclosures, including stackyards attached to the barns (those attached to barns B, J and N contain circular stack bases), and kailyards, in which vegetables, fruit and herbs were grown. In front of each house there was also a midden, where domestic refuse and the sweepings from the byre were collected for use as manure.



*Auchindrain: the byre in house A in 1963*



*Auchindrain township; plan*



## **Kenmore and Evan MacColl (1808-1898)**

On the shore of Loch Fyne about 3km to the south-east of Auchindrain stands the small village of Kenmore, founded in 1771 on the instructions of the Duke of Argyll as a herring-fishing settlement. This was the birthplace of Evan MacColl, 'the bard of Loch Fyne'. MacColl was educated to read and write Gaelic at a time when there were efforts, at his own school, to extirpate the language. In 1831, when his family emigrated to Canada he remained in Scotland until he had published his first volume of Gaelic poems, *Clàrsach nam Beann (The Harp of the Hills)*. *The Mountain Minstrel*, his volume of English poems, followed this.

MacColl wrote a long series of love poems, poems of the landscape, and, outraged by the Clearances, poems with a political dimension. One of his most famous works is *Suaicheantas na h-Alba (Thistle of Scotland)*, which was translated by Calum MacPharlain of Loch Awe side and Paisley.

Due to deteriorating health, MacColl visited his family in Canada in 1850, remaining there until his death.

## **Furnace**

Like the Lorn Furnace at Bonawe (see above), the Argyll Furnace was founded by ironmasters from the Lake District. It operated from 1754 until 1812, when its 57-year lease from the Argyll estate expired. The furnace stack is well preserved, retaining its hearth, and possibly its final charge, giving it a unique interest for students of metallurgical history. The village is also the site of a gunpowder works, which operated for about forty years until 1883, when it was abandoned after a disastrous explosion. Powdermills Cottages, a row of brick-built houses immediately east of the modern road, were built before 1866 to house employees of the works.

## **Lochgilphead**

In about 1750 William Roy's *Military Survey of Scotland* showed a small settlement, perhaps only one building, at the head of Loch Gilp, but improvements to the road network later in the century made this location a convenient meeting point, standing at the junction of the roads from Inveraray to Campbeltown and Oban. The development of the town during the 19th century was controlled and regulated by local landowners, resulting in the rectangular grid of the street pattern. Lochgilphead now houses the headquarters of Argyll and Bute Council.

## **Crinan Canal**

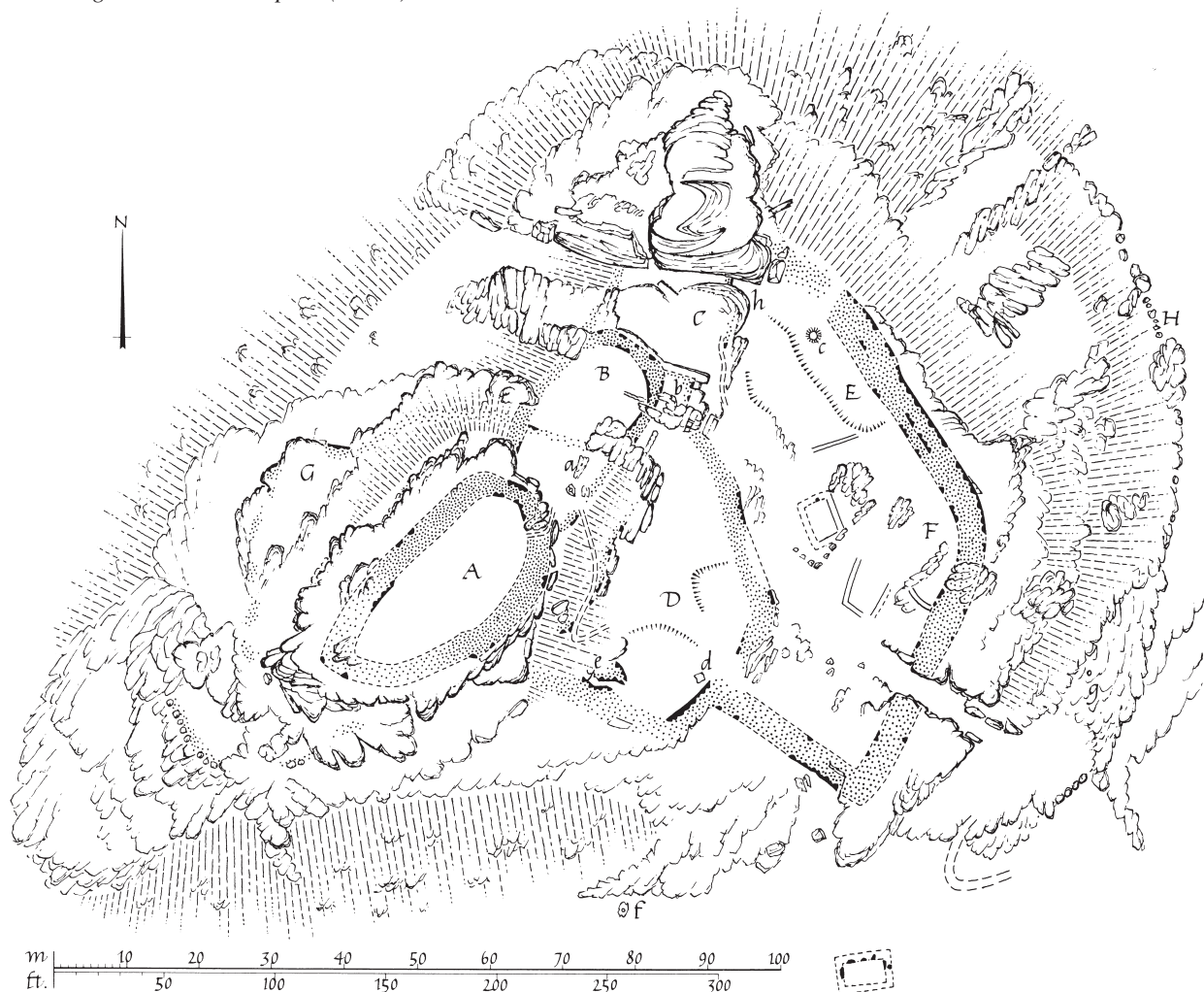
As the road turns inland at Lochgilphead it runs briefly alongside the Crinan Canal. The route was first surveyed by James Watt in 1771, but the canal was not constructed until 1794-1801. It is 14.5km long and retains its fifteen original locks. A primary purpose of the canal was to provide a shortcut to the west coast for the Loch Fyne herring fleet, but it soon became an important tourist route and is still heavily used by yachts.

## Dunadd

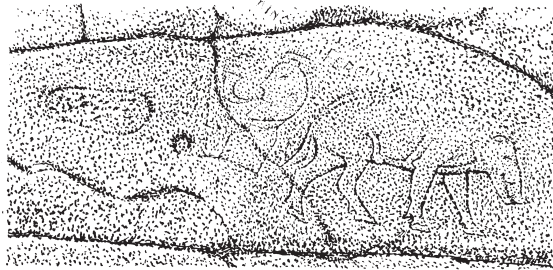
The prominent rock outcrop of Dunadd rises abruptly from the flat marshy valley of the River Add, at the south end of Kilmartin Glen. Its impressive natural defences have been supplemented by stone walls (now mostly grass-grown) enclosing the west summit and a series of terraces below it. There were several excavations during the 20th century, the most recent of which suggest that the site was fortified during the late prehistoric period, though the visible defences appear to have been built from the 4th or 5th centuries AD onwards. All excavations have produced a rich assemblage of material, particularly from the 6th to 9th centuries.



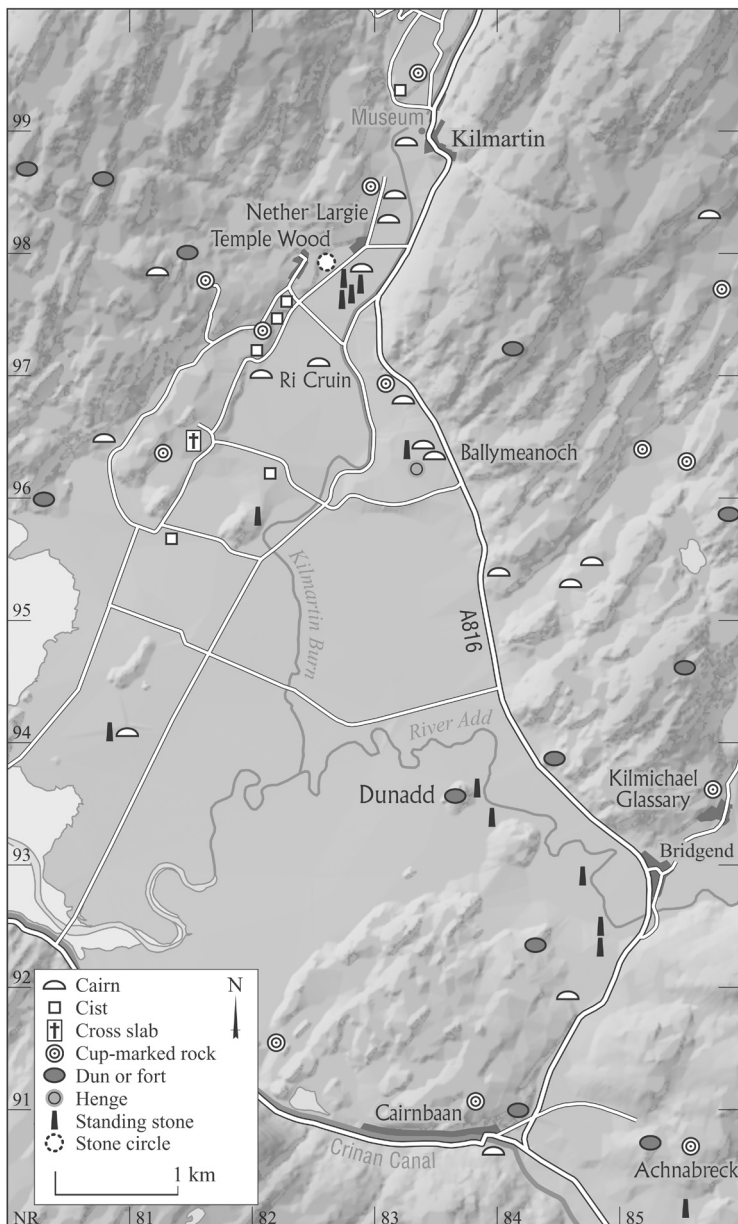
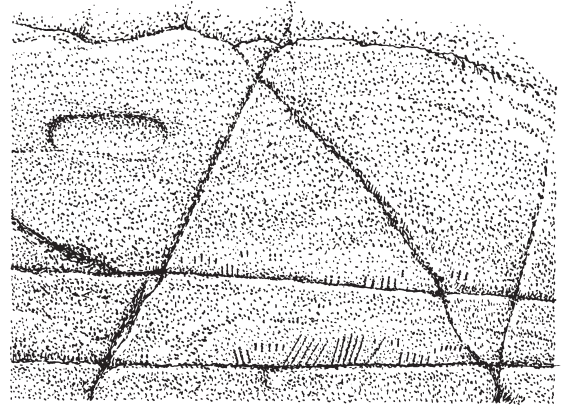
*Dunadd: general view and plan (below)*



There are references in the Irish Annals to a siege at 'Dun At' in 683, and to its seizure in 736 by Aengus son of Fergus, king of the Picts. In 1876 the Celtic scholar W F Skene identified the site as the capital of the early Scottish kingdom Dál Riata, and this identification is now firmly lodged in popular imagination. Support for the idea comes from a remarkable group of rock carvings outside the entrance to the summit fort. They comprise a rock-cut basin and two footprints, interpreted as being used in royal inauguration ceremonies, a Pictish-style boar, possibly graffito dating from the fort's capture in 736, and two lines of unintelligible ogam script. An incised figure of a man smoking a pipe, accompanied by an inscription 'King Fergus', was probably added early in the 20th century!



*Dunadd: rock carvings*



*Prehistoric monuments in Kilmartin Glen*



## Kilmartin

### *Gleann Chill' A' Mhàrtain* le Eobhan Mac Gill' Iosa

*Gleann Chill' a' Mhàrtain far an d'fhuair mi m'arach,  
'S e 'n gleann is àillidh leam tha fo'n ghrèin,  
Le thulaich neòinein s' le shliosaidh bòidheach  
'S a shraithean chòmhnard tha math gu feum.*

The village of Kilmartin stands on a gravel terrace on the edge of the broad valley to which it gives its name. The church and churchyard, positioned prominently on the edge of the terrace, house one of the most important collections of late medieval West Highland sculpture, but the area is better known for its rich collection of early prehistoric ritual and burial monuments. The archaeological and historical heritage of the area is elegantly explained in the Kilmartin House Museum, one of the finest independent museums in Scotland.



*The Glebe Cairn, Kilmartin*

#### **a) Prehistoric monuments**

Kilmartin Glen contains one of the most extensive concentrations of prehistoric monuments in Scotland – dozens of burial cairns, cists, standing stones, henge monuments, cup-and-ring marked rocks and stone circles litter the flat valley floor from Kilmartin south towards Dunadd. The most remarkable feature of the complex is a ‘linear cemetery’ of at least five burial cairns extending south from the ‘Glebe Cairn’ immediately below the museum. The monuments were constructed over a 2000-year period during the Neolithic and Bronze Ages and, although the relationship between individual elements must remain a matter of conjecture, they have been recognised as forming a ‘ritual landscape’, an area set aside for ceremonial purposes and serving, perhaps, a much wider catchment. Together, they appear to imply a social stability and degree of wealth not found elsewhere in Argyll at this period.

#### **b) The church and churchyard**

The church at Kilmartin is on record from the early 14th century, but the ‘*cil-*’ place-name and the presence of several early Christian cross slabs points to a much earlier origin. The present building, however, was constructed in 1833-5. Within it there are two important crosses, one a free-standing cross of 9th- or 10th-century date, the other an elaborate cross of ‘West Highland’ type, dating from the 16th century. In the churchyard there are three early Christian cross slabs and almost one hundred richly-decorated medieval graveslabs, most of them ascribed to the ‘Loch Awe School’ of carving and dating to the 14th or 15th centuries. The graveslabs feature interlaced ornament, a variety of beasts, swords and miniature effigies of armed knights. Many of the finer slabs are preserved in a re-roofed burial enclosure, and above its doorway there is a panel (probably a reused graveslab) bearing an inscription to Neil Campbell, Bishop of Argyll 1580-1608, and his wife Christian, daughter of Bishop John Carswell.





*Late medieval graveslabs, Kilmartin*



*16th-century cross, Kilmartin*



9th- or 10th-century cross, Kilmartin

### Carnasserie Castle and Bishop Carswell

Carnasserie Castle stands prominently on a rock commanding the approach to Kilmartin Glen from the north. There are traces of a possible prehistoric fortification on the site, and a mention in 15th-century records indicates that it was a place of some significance in the medieval period. The present castle, however, was built between 1565 and 1572 by John Carswell, Bishop of the Isles. It was occupied until 1685, when it was badly damaged during its capture by royalist forces at the time of the 9th Earl of Argyll's abortive rebellion.

The castle is notable for its decorative architectural details. One of these, a panel above the doorway, bears the arms of the 5th Earl of Argyll along with a motto in Gaelic manuscript script:

DIA LE UA NDUIBH[N]E  
 'God be with Ó Duibhne'

The designation *Ó Duibhne* for the head of the Campbell family was also used by Bishop Carswell in 1567 in the dedication to Earl Archibald of his translation into Gaelic of the *Book of Common Order*.

Bishop John Carswell was a native of Kilmartin. He graduated Master of Arts at the University of St Andrews in 1544. By 1551 he had been ordained a Catholic priest and became treasurer of the Cathedral of Lismore. He became rector of Kilmartin in 1553 and rector of Southwick and Kingarth on Bute in 1558. He was also chaplain to the 5th Earl of Argyll, and switched to Protestantism at the Reformation, becoming one of the superintendents of the Reformed Church in 1560. He died in 1572 and is buried in Ardchattan Priory, Argyll.

Bishop Carswell's outstanding contribution to religion and to Gaelic culture was his book *Fòirm na n-Urrnuidheadh* (1567). This was a translation of John Knox's *Book of Common Order*, which was a manual for the conduct of worship in the Reformed Church. The first printed book in Gaelic, it appeared 90 years after Caxton's first printed book in England. It used the classical Gaelic of the Middle Ages and laid down rules of spelling that would be adopted from then on.





*Carnassarie Castle*



*Carnassarie Castle; armorial panel above doorway*

### **Kintraw and Loch Craignish**

On a terrace overlooking Loch Craignish there is an important group of prehistoric ritual monuments, comprising a standing stone, two cairns and what may be a prehistoric enclosure. The stone, which was blown down in a storm in the winter of 1978-9 and re-erected the following year, is remarkable for its height (4m). The monuments were drawn by the antiquarian Edward Lhuyd in 1699, and in more recent times have attracted attention for their possible astronomical significance.

On the low-lying ground at the head of the loch stands Barbreck House, built about 1790. Loch Craignish now provides shelter for large numbers of yachts at Ardfern; its most significant monument, though, is probably the ruined medieval parish church, which houses a collection of West Highland sculpture comparable to that at Kilmartin. In woodland beside the main road, and

to the north of the head of the loch, there is a covered well, 'Barbreck's Well', with an inscribed headstone, dated 1714 and probably erected by Archibald Campbell of Barbreck. It is illustrated at the foot of the page.

## Kilmelford and Kilninver

Farther north, the road passes through the villages of Kilmelford and Kilninver, both the sites of medieval parish churches. Just north of Kilmelford are the remains of a 19th-century gunpowder works; as with the works at Furnace on Loch Fyne, production was discontinued after a serious explosion in 1867.

This part of Argyll is rich in tales and traditions of Alasdair MacColla, who fought with the Marquis of Montrose against the Covenanters in 1644-5, and spent the following two years plundering Campbell lands in Argyllshire in an attempt to restore the fortunes of Clan Donald. His exploits earned him heroic status in Gaelic poetry and traditions. One of the best-known tales is set in Glen Euchar, close to Kilninver, where MacColla defeated a force of Campbells and proceeded to massacre the inhabitants by burning them alive in a barn (*Sabhal nan Cnaimh*, the Barn of the Bones). The leader of the Campbells, Ian Beag Campbell of Bragleen, escaped by throwing his sword into the air and breaking through the MacDonalds surrounding him as they tried to avoid the falling weapon.

North of Kilninver a rock jutting from the shore of Loch Feochan is known as *Carraig nam Marbh* (Rock of the Dead), where the bodies of Scottish kings are said to have been embarked on their way to Iona for burial. Close by, a cairn rising from the loch is said to mark the spot where Alpin, father of Kenneth MacAlpin who united the kingdoms of the Picts and the Scots in AD 843, was killed. This 'cairn' may, however, be the remains of a crannog.



*The Watchman's Stone, Barbreck's Well.*

MY NAME IS WATCHMAN / HEIR AM I  
STILL WATCH / ING DAY AND NIGHT /  
WELCOMING AL PERS / ONS THAT COMES HEIR /  
TO DRINK FOR UHICH / END HEIR YOU SIE /  
A DRINKING CUPE / [WAITING FOR THE(E)]