

IMK99

**The Archaeology of Inchmarnock: Report 4
Summary & Interpretative Overview
of the May 2000 Fieldwork**

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the fieldwork undertaken to date and offers an interpretative overview of the results of the May 2000 survey and evaluation. Some implications arising from this work are also considered.

Three main phases of fieldwork, together with their respective reporting, have been undertaken to date:

- Preliminary site visit (June 1999)
- Walk-over survey & marking-out, prior to clearance of undergrowth (January / March 2000)
- Detail survey & evaluation (May 2000)

The current status of sites identified and works undertaken are summarised in Table 1.

Site	Revised classification	Area marked by posts	Vegetation cleared	Photographic survey	EDM survey onto OS base	Detail survey	Intrusive evaluation
1	cairn	-	-	*	*	*	*
2	cists	-	-	*	-	-	-
3	cup-and-ring marked stone	*	-	*	*	-	*
4	medieval chapel	*	*	*	*	*	*
5	medieval / later building	*	*	*	*	*	-
6	quarry	-	-	*	-	-	-
7	upright stones	-	-	*	*	*	-
8	kiln	*	*	*	*	*	*
9	<not an antiquity>	*	*	*	-	-	*
10	promontory, possible	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	cairns & dykes	-	-	*	*	-	-
12	enclosure, possible	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	[find spot]	-	-	-	-	-	-
14	quarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
15	Dysart & cave	-	-	-	-	-	-
16A	cave	-	-	*	-	-	*
16B	cave	-	-	*	-	-	*
17	kiln	-	-	*	*	*	-
18	cists, possible	-	-	-	-	-	-
19	boat nousts, possible	-	-	-	-	-	-
20	standing stone	-	-	-	-	-	-
21	cairn	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1: Fieldwork summary (January – May 2000)

The results so far are encouraging, casting further light both on prehistoric and later, possibly medieval, aspects of the island's past.

PREHISTORIC INCHMARNOCK

The original corpus of identified prehistoric sites or features on the island (*Inchmarnock Report 1*) comprised the excavated cists (Site 2), the cup-and-ring marked stone (Site 3) and possibly the cairn (Site 1). Meanwhile, the caves (Sites 16A & 16B) at the south end of the island were highlighted as places where evidence of late Mesolithic occupation might be preserved. The 'two standing stones' at Site 7, reported then but not located until the current phase of fieldwork, were left unclassified.

It was noticeable that all the identified sites which were either demonstrably (Sites 2 & 3) or probably (Site 1) of prehistoric date are located at the north end of the island. Subsequent work has tended to confirm and reinforce this picture. No prehistoric deposits, for example, have yet been identified in the caves.

It is now clear that the large cairn (Site 1: *Inchmarnock Report 3*, Figures 1-4) is almost certainly a funerary monument. This is indicated by the presence of the stone kerb on its north-west side. Survey also shows that it has been much disturbed, presumably as a result of antiquarian activity on the site. The deep pit near the centre of the cairn has all the hall-marks of an attempt to locate a central chamber or burial within the cairn.

The internal structure and layout of the cairn could only be determined by large-scale excavation. As a monument, it probably belongs to the later Neolithic or Bronze Age, within the period 2500 – 1500 BC although the chronology of kerb-cairns is poorly defined. Its use at this time and the nature of any secondary or subsequent reuse of the monument (possibly for late burials around its margins) can only be guessed at.

The setting of the cairn is interesting. Clearly, it would have been a special place of some significance to its builders and the community who used it. Yet, as a monumental structure its impact on the landscape (as opposed to the seascape) is slight. If it was meant to be viewed at all (and it presumably was), then it would seem that it was meant to be seen from the sea and the surrounding shore. Perhaps it was as a 'sea-mark' that the ancestors were remembered or commemorated in the day-to-day experiences of their descendants.

Excavation at the site of the cup-and-ring marked stone (Site 3: *Inchmarnock Report 3*, Plate 1), meanwhile, has clearly shown that the stone is a discrete slab, rather than having been carved on a rock outcrop. It may once have stood upright, or alternatively, might conceivably have formed the cover stone of a short-cist. Several examples are known for the reuse in later Bronze Age funerary structures of what is called 'Passage Grave Art'. Presumably the cist, if present, will not lie far away, possibly upslope from the stone.

Sites 1 and 3, together with the previously excavated cists (Site 2), are prehistoric in date. They are also demonstrably of a funerary or ritual nature. It is of some interest therefore that the report of a further five cists on the island should also be attributed to the Northpark area (Site 18).

No prehistoric settlements have yet been identified on the island. They most likely occupied the better drained, sheltered and less stony soils on the east-facing slope of the ridge, the very areas which have remained in cultivation to the present day.

The upright stones at Site 7, in the woodland south of Southpark, could represent part of this prehistoric landscape, although their identification and chronology are by no means certain. They might represent the vestigial remains of old field dykes, long since robbed of their stone. The depth to which at least some of these stones appear to have been buried would imply that they are of some antiquity (*Inchmarnock Report 3*, Figure 8; Plate 4). They could, however, equally be much later in date.

MEDIEVAL AND LATER INCHMARNOCK

Some encouraging results have also been made in connection with medieval aspects of the island's past. The medieval archaeology of Inchmarnock seems to be firmly located in the southern half of the island, centred according to eighteenth-century map evidence (Foulis' map of 1758/59: RHP 14107) on Midpark / Southpark and the unnamed settlement above the quarry to the south.

The core medieval site on the island is and remains the site of St Marnock's chapel (Site 4: *Inchmarnock Report 3*, Figures 5 & 6; Plate 2), by Midpark. A detailed survey of the chapel and its immediate environs was undertaken. This shows for the first time the form and extent of the chapel and its local setting. The visible remains of the chapel are clearly those of a medieval building, possibly late twelfth or thirteenth century in date. The line of the so-called 'Monks causeway', if it is a contemporary structure, would imply that the chapel was approached directly from the east. Of particular interest is the wide plinth at the east end of the chancel. It could form a contemporary part of the extant building or represent the levelled remains of an earlier structure.

The possible curvilinear enclosure and the spring are also of some potential significance. There is a general consensus among archaeologists that curvilinear-enclosed ecclesiastical sites are 'early', by which an eighth or ninth century date might be inferred. Clearly the present stackyard wall is not of any great antiquity itself; it may, however, preserve the line of a much older feature. The realisation that field-patterns, enclosures and such-like can become fossilised in this way can be important for appreciating how the landscape has developed over time. That said, however, it is equally possible to suggest that the line of the yard wall is simply a reflection of the local topography.

The identification of a natural spring on the site, near the edge of the enclosure, might also be significant. The association of church sites and holy wells is a well-known

phenomenon, particularly along the western seaboard of Britain. An association with pre-Christian, pagan water cults has also been suggested for some holy wells.

Excavations in the field to the west of the chapel were disappointing in some respects, intriguing in others. No trace of the cemetery mentioned in the documentary records could be identified in this area. A wide, plough-truncated ditch, however, was located. Its extent, function and chronology are all uncertain, although the absence of clearly modern material indicates that it is of some antiquity. It is noticeable that it is not aligned with any upstanding elements of the contemporary landscape. The provisional interpretation is that it may represent part of the ecclesiastical enclosure at the site or part of its subdivision.

Potential medieval activity was also identified elsewhere on the island. The burnt grain assemblage which was recovered from the robbed structures next to the recorded kiln at Site 8 (*Inchmarnock Report 3*, Figures 9 & 10) is of some interest. It was dominated by oats. Economy of hypothesis, given the extant kiln nearby, would suggest that the excavated stone settings on the mound are the robbed remains of earlier corn-drying kilns. The presence of oats would suggest a medieval or later date for these features. The Site 8 complex is interpreted as a dedicated crop-drying area. Its location, on the higher ground above but adjacent to the fields, would have been both convenient and practical.

Site 8, together with the clearance cairns and old dyke at Site 11, is assumed to represent an outlying element of the small medieval or later settlement at Site 5 / 17, surveyed here for the first time (*Inchmarnock Report 3*, Figures 7a & 7b). The possible boat nousts at Site 19 could also be of medieval or later date. Their location, however, is curious in terms of the settlement structure implied by the Foulis map of 1758/59. Their identification may be erroneous.

Finally, there are the caves (Sites 16A & 16B: *Inchmarnock Report 3*, Figures 11 & 12) at the south end of the island. No evidence for early prehistoric occupation has yet been identified there. The ecofactual assemblage, particularly that from Cave 16B, is clearly indicative of domestic occupation. As elsewhere, the absence of obviously modern finds would suggest that there is some potential that the deposits were laid down in the medieval period. The occupation could, conceivably, relate to occupation of the caves by hermits. This would also be the natural interpretation of the recorded 'Dysart' place-name and cave at Site 15. This would be an exciting development and it is one that can be tested by radiocarbon-dating. Alternatively, of course, a more prosaic explanation might suggest that these deposits are associated with the temporary occupation of the caves by fishermen in perhaps the late-medieval or post-medieval period. This, however, seems unlikely given that the deposits are dominated by a terrestrial bone assemblage, with fish bones only rarely or occasionally present.

CONCLUSION

The small-scale survey and evaluation work undertaken to date has made valuable contributions to our understanding of the island's archaeology and a more rounded

appreciation of its past. Additional sites have come to light with every visit and it is likely that improved access around the island will facilitate new discoveries.

All aspects of the island's archaeology are important. In terms of developing a programme of further investigations, however, it seems clear that the greatest potential on the island lies with its medieval assemblage: obviously the chapel and its environs (Site 4), but perhaps of most interest is the small settlement at Site 5, and, if contemporary, the corn-drying complex at Site 8 and the enigmatic deposits from the caves (Sites 16A & 16B) at the south end of the island.

PREVIOUS REPORTS (THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF INCHMARNOCK)

- 1 Carter, S 1999 *An Introduction to the Archaeology & History of Inchmarnock*. (July 1999)
- 2 Halliday, S 2000 *Gazetteer of Archaeological Sites* (April 2000)
- 2.1 Halliday, S & Lowe, C 2000 *Gazetteer of Archaeological Sites* (Revised: May 2000)
- 3 Halliday, S & Lowe, C 2000 *Results of the May 2000 Survey & Evaluation* (June 2000)