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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KILMORY KNAP CHAPEL



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KILMORY KNAP CHAPEL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Situated on the western coast of Knapdale, the medieval chapel of Kilmory lies about 4km south of Castle Sween and stands within a walled graveyard that overlooks the Sound of Jura. The chapel stands within the Township of Ardnaw.

Like many pre-Reformation churches in the Highlands, the chapel is a simple rectangle without an internal between nave and chancel, and measures roughly 12m east-west by 5m. Structurally, the building is complete to wallhead height, although the east gable is much reduced to the height of the wall-head and much of the dressed stones of the door, windows and quoins are missing. The collection within the chapel is dominated by MacMillan's Cross, an impressive freestanding cross of late medieval craftsmanship which commemorates Alexander MacMillan, keeper of Castle Sween in the late 15th century for the Lords of the Isles. Knapdale is associated with the MacMillan clan, and this may have served as burial ground for the clan.

In 1934, the Ministry of Works added an inverted glass roof to create a display space for various pieces of sculpture at Kilmory. The collection is one of the most significant in Argyll, complementing others collections at Iona, Keills, Kilberry, Kilmartin, Kilmodan and Ardchattan Priory. Within the chapel are nearly 40 carved stones dating from the Early Christian period to the 16th century. Several other pieces of historic sculpture remain within the churchyard and include two cross-bases, one of which is the original for MacMillan's Cross. All but one item in the collection, a cross-shaft transferred to Kilmory in 1979, is believed to have come from Kilmory.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

13th century: present chapel built, possibly on an earlier ecclesiastical site. By the late 13th century, Kilmory Chapel is listed as being a dependency of the parish church at Knapdale at Keills. John of Menteith, lord of Arran and Knapdale, granted revenues from both to Kilwinning Abbey around 1357. The grant was successively confirmed by David II in 1364, by Robert III in the late 14th century, and by Pope Benedict XIII in 1407 or 1408.

1430: Alexander MacMillan flees to MacMillan lands in Knapdale following a massacre of kinsmen by the Macintoshes on Palm Sunday. The charter for their lands, granted by the Lords of the Isles, is said to have been inscribed in the rock at the Point of Knap.

Late 15th century: MacMillan's Cross erected to commemorate Alexander MacMillan, keeper of Castle Sween.

1503: patronage of the chapel, previously held by the crown, was transferred to James, Lord Hamilton, with the Earldom of Arran.

c.1560: Kilmory Knap Chapel passes from use as a place of active worship shortly after the Reformation.

Mid 18th century: John Anstis, Garter King of Arms, visits Kilmory and prepares drawings of the West Highland sculpture.

c.1915: repairs at Kilmory Knap undertaken at the expense of the Marquess of Northampton.

1934: Following the signing of a Guardianship Deed, the Ministry of Works re-roofs the chapel to use the building to exhibit the collection of sculptured stones.

Archaeological Overview

The only known archaeological excavation at Kilmory Knap is the excavation within the chapel in 1981, prior to the re-siting of MacMillan's Cross. Excavation in the northern half of the chapel's east end revealed four adult inhumations and several loose skulls and bones against the footings of the church indicating the presence of burials within the chapel. Given the presence of the seven early Christian crossmarked stones, it is likely that the surrounding churchyard has a long sequence of burials, and the site remains in use as a burial ground. The date of the present boundary wall is unclear, and beyond it has the potential to provide archaeological information on further areas of burials and the location of the priests house and grounds.

The earliest study of Kilmory's sculpture collection dates from the mid 18th century, when the John Anstis, Garter King of Arms, produced two volumes of drawings of the stones (although MacMillan's Cross is wrongly attributed as the 'Cross of Kilavoir'). A discussion of these drawings was published in 1800 in the journal *Archaeologia*. Subsequent studies include those by J S Howson in the 1840s, examining early references to MacMillan's Cross and other sculpture at Kilmory Knap. Two important illustrated studies of the Kilmory stones were published between 1852-67 by John Stuart ('*Sculptured Stones of Scotland*') and in 1881 by James Drummond ('*Sculptured Stones of Iona and The West Highlands*'), while photographs of stones were published in Allen and Anderson's '*Early Christian Monumental Sculpture of Scotland*' (1903). More recently, the collection is discussed in Steer and Bannerman's '*Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*, published in 1977, the RCAHMS Argyll Inventory volume 7 (1984) and the RCAHMS/Society of Antiquaries 2001 monograph 'Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands'.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

Kilmory Chapel

The chapel largely stands to its original height, although the eastern gable has been reduced to wall-head level and is largely constructed of attractive pink and grey rubble. Much of the original sandstone quoins, window- and door dressings have been replaced or removed. Rectangular on plan, the chapel lacks any

internal sub-division between the nave and chancel, as is often found in pre-Reformation church buildings in the Highlands.

The chancel is lit by two windows in the eastern gable with further windows in the north and south walls and originally must have been a well-illuminated space while the nave, was probably largely in shade as there are no windows at the western end of the chapel.

Sculptured Stones

The collection comprises 44 stones of early and late medieval date, the latter group being carved in the distinctive West Highland style of the 14th-16th centuries.

Early Christian

RCAHMS have identified seven early Christian sculptured slabs at Kilmory, with an eighth having been moved to the site from Dunans.

The level of decoration applied to each slab varies. The simplest slab bears only a simple pecked outline cross with expanded top and bottom arms, while the side arms extend all the way to the edges of the slab. The most complex bears a ringed cross covered in close-knit interlace, with what may be the figure of an angel in the top arm, while the shaft is flanked by birds with swan-like bodies; a hooded horseman and another four-legged animal; and two human figures with what appears to be an animal. The slab from Dunans bears a sunken equal-armed cross within a circle on one face, while the other is incised with a Latin cross.

Late Medieval

By far the largest group of carvings in the sculpture collection at Kilmory are West Highland graveslabs, dating from the 14th to the 16th centuries. These monuments are the most tangible examples of the highly distinctive style of art that flowered in late medieval Scotland. Evidence suggests this style was found in tapestry, wood carving and other art forms, although very few of these have survived apart from a few rare artefacts, such as the Queen Mary harp or the Guthrie bell-shrine.

Four of the five major schools that produced work in the West Highland tradition feature in this collection. The highest quality work is generally regarded to be that of the Iona School, although the majority of stones belong to the Loch Sween school. Sculpture from the Kintyre and Loch Awe schools are also represented, as well as the work of local and independent masons. One of the most striking pieces of late medieval sculpture is MacMillan's Cross, a late 15th century freestanding cross erected to commemorate Alexander MacMillan, keeper of Castle Sween in the late 15th century. A second cross, now in fragments, also commemorates members of the MacMillan clan. The majority of the late medieval stones are tapering graveslabs, carved in the West Highland style, bordered with roll-mouldings.

The graveslabs bear a wide range of decorative devices, and several are inscribed naming several individuals believed to belong to hereditary families of craftsmen

(ie Iohannes Carpentarius, and Cristinus Faber) and appears to confirm literary evidence that craftsmen enjoyed high levels of prestige. Decoration on the slabs includes intricate foliated crosses on long shafts, detailed depictions of swords, galleys (one galley is shown with two men on deck), panels of interlace and plant scroll, tri-lobed leaves, animals, grotesque monsters, mirrors, and tools such as combs, cropping-shears, a mason's or carpenter's square, axes, and a hammer and anvil. At least two slabs feature miniature effigies, one depicting spear-wielding figure while the other shows the figure of a priest in prayer standing before a draped altar on which stands a chalice.

One of the most striking features of West Highland style sculpture is its figurative art, particularly effigies. There are five such slabs at Kilmory, and these depict two armoured warriors, two ecclesiastics, and what to be a fashionably dressed nobleman. The warriors are armoured in bascinets, chain mail coifs and aketons (long quilted coats reaching to the knees) belted at the waist and wield spears and broadswords. An third figure is posed in a similar fashion to the warrior effigies, with one hand resting on a belt, although the figure is shown as wearing a knee-length tunic with puffed sleeves and pleated skirts. According to Edward Lhuyd, this effigy was inscribed '+ HI[C I] AC[ET]/ IO[HANN]/ES...' One of the priestly figures is depicted in an attitude of prayer, clad in finely detailed vestments, while the other figure wears a long cassock with a pleated skirt and may represent an individual such as a deacon.

Excellently preserved, MacMillan's Cross was moved to the chapel in 1981, and stands c.2.8m in height. The cross has a disc-head approximately 0.7m in diameter, and is sculptured in relief. Both the western and eastern faces of the shaft have a deeply carved double roll-moulded border. The west face shows an unsheathed sword flanked by interlace, while the head of the cross shows the crucified Christ on an irregularly shaped cross. On either side are the figures of St John and the Virgin Mary, while the arms are filled with interlace. On the east face, the shaft is filled by a stag hunt, with three hounds attacking a stag while an axe-wielding huntsman approaches. The uppermost part of the shaft is filled by interlace, while the head and arms of the cross contain twisted stems interlaced with a ring, at the centre of which is a small leaping animal biting its own tail. Beneath the huntsman is a four line inscription in a Lombardic script reading 'HEC EST CRVX ALE/XANDRI/MACMVLE/N' ('This is the cross of Alexander MacMillan').

The second cross comprises an almost entire shaft and part of the head of a free-standing cross. The RCAHMS note that only the lower part of the shaft was recorded by antiquaries such as Lhuyd, White, and Drummond. This fragment had been re-used prior to 1699 as there is a basin carved at the butt-end. The head was discovered in the nearby stream in 1979. Each face of the shaft has a deeply carved double roll moulding. The east face has a pair of animals, whose tails rise into a tangled panel of interlace that fills the entire shaft. The fragment of cross-head that survives was probably filled by the Crucified Saviour, although it is possible that this has been deliberately mutilated. At the foot of the west face is a mounted horseman armed with a spear, above which Lhuyd recorded the following inscription '+ HEC EST CRVX/ FACTA PER DOND/CANVM SIBI ET P/ATRI SVO COLINO/MAC/MVLEN' ('This is the cross made by Duncan for himself and his

father Colinus (?Malcolm) MacMillan'). The remainder of the shaft is filled with interlace and intertwined stems. The crosshead contains what appears to be a roundel of interlace, as found on MacLean's Cross on Iona, while the surviving cross arm contains interlace incorporating a saltire.

Social Overview

In the absence of any formal studies, it is difficult to make any formal statement about the monument's present social significance. However, Kilmory Knap features in many popular archaeological and historical guide books to the region.

Kilmory has attracted the attention of authors researching the Knights Templar in Scotland by suggesting it was a Templar chapel, used by Templars from France.

Kilmory features on Clan MacMillan websites due to the association of the site with Alexander MacMillan, the Captain of Castle Sween for the Lords of the Isles.

Spiritual Overview

Although no formal studies have been conducted into the site's present spiritual significance, the burial ground contains some recent burials and is therefore a place of some spiritual significance to those with family members interred there.

Many of the monuments contain Christian iconography, three commemorating priests. Almost all of the monuments served as burial markers. There is likely to be a long sequence of burials in the churchyard given the presence of early Christian sculpture.

Aesthetic Overview

The setting of the chapel has been compromised by the recent construction of new buildings within the adjacent township.

Constructed from a mixture of pink and grey rubble, the chapel has an appealing and relatively unspoilt appearance as the glass roof is situated below wall-head level.

The chapel's glass roof creates a bright interior space.

Visitors are able to enjoy views of the Sound of Jura and Loch Sween from the chapel.

The churchyard contains a number of interesting 17th-19th century gravestones.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

Very little is known about the early Christian history of the site. Given that the churchyard remains an active burial ground, and the long sequence of burials, little excavation has been carried out in the past.

Little is known of the buildings associated with the chapel, including the location of the priests house and grounds.

Although there are some documentary records, the chapel's date of construction remains unknown.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- Kilmory Knap houses an important collection of early Christian and late medieval sculpture in Scotland and is closely associated with Castle Sween through Alexander MacMillan.
- Although much of the dressed stonework has been lost or robbed out, that chapel survives to wall-head height and the surviving architectural details suggest the chapel was grander in appearance than might be expected.
- The early Medieval sculpture suggests the site has a long history as a place of Christian burial and perhaps as a place of worship.
- The West Highland style of art is one of the most significant events in Scotland's cultural development in the late medieval period. As this highly distinctive style is almost entirely represented by sculptured stonework the large and relatively well-preserved collection at Kilmory is of considerable importance.
- Several pieces of late medieval sculpture bear inscriptions, which are of interest to genealogists and anyone studying language, names or calligraphy. Many of these individuals appear to be members of families associated with a particular craft, indicating the status and probable wealth of these hereditary artisans in the late 16th century.
- The chapel is associated with the famous antiquarian Edward Lhuyd, who prepared notes and drawings from his visit to the site in the late 17th century. The site was subsequently visited by John Anstis, Garter King of Arms in the early 18th century.

Associated Properties

Keils church (similar collection of stonework and the parish church); **Castle Sween** (Alexander MacMillan was keeper of the castle during the later 15th century); **MacLean's Cross, Iona** (second fragmentary late medieval cross appears to share a number of similarities in its design); **Iona Abbey** (houses a similar collection, and was the production centre for several stones at Kilmory); **Kilmodan Church** (smaller collection of West Highland material); **Kilberry sculptured stones** (collection of early Christian and late medieval sculpture, although now divorced from their original setting).

Keywords early Christian; cross-marked stone; ringed cross; outline cross; Greek cross; chapel; nave; chancel; West Highland tradition; graveslab; foliated cross; effigy; aketon; bascinet; sword; Iona School; Kintyre School; Loch Sween

school; Loch Awe school; freestanding cross; MacMillan's Cross; Alexander MacMillan; Castle Sween