



Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC076

Designations: Scheduled (SM 12968) Listed Building (LB12310 Category A)

Taken into State care: 1999 (Leased)

Last reviewed: 2018

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

IONA ABBEY



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



© Historic Environment Scotland 2018

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit

<http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email:

psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House

Salisbury Place

Edinburgh

EH9 1SH

+44 (0) 131 668 8600

www.historicenvironment.scot

You can download this publication from our website at

www.historicenvironment.scot

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

IONA ABBEY

CONTENTS

1	Summary	2
1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Statement of significance	3
2	Assessment of values	5
2.1	Background	5
2.2	Evidential values	11
2.3	Historical values	14
2.4	Architectural and artistic values	17
2.5	Landscape and aesthetic values	23
2.6	Natural heritage values	25
2.7	Contemporary/use values	25
3	Major gaps in understanding	26
4	Associated properties	27
5	Keywords	27
	Bibliography	28
	APPENDICES	
	Appendix 1: Timeline	28

1 Summary

1.1 Introduction

Iona Abbey is one of the oldest and most important religious centres in Western Europe. The abbey was a focal point for the spread of Christianity throughout Scotland, with a monastic community first founded here by St. Columba (Colum Cille) around 563, when Iona was part of the Kingdom of Dal Riata. The abbey is located on a small island in the Southern Hebrides, a short distance off the south-west tip of Mull.

The Property in Care (PIC) consists of the Benedictine Abbey, which was rebuilt in the 19th century from its medieval ruins, and the wider site around it, which contains the early Christian monastery associated with Columba. In addition, a very significant number of carved stones, principally High Crosses and West Highland Grave slabs, are collected within the site museum or remain outside in their original locations.

Contemporary with the Benedictine Abbey's foundation, an Augustinian Nunnery was founded on Iona. It is also in the care of HES and there are significant physical remains to be seen; it was not comprehensively rebuilt, as was the abbey, and so, while ruinous, gives a good idea of the original architecture of both early 13th century foundations. While it is of course an integral part of the islands medieval religious identity, the Nunnery is currently assessed in a separate Statement of Significance, along with St Ronan's Church and MacLean's Cross. These two Statements will be more fully integrated at a future date, but in the meantime they should be read together to obtain a fuller picture of HES-managed sites on Iona.

After the Reformation the abbey became increasingly ruinous and in time became an attraction for early tourists. Conservation of the site began in the late 19th century with the foundation of the Iona Cathedral Trust whose mission was to restore the abbey for worship. During the mid-20th century The Iona Community¹ (IC), an ecumenical group, spearheaded a major rebuilding project which saw the complete rebuilding and conversion of the claustral range for use as a residential ecumenical centre.

A large part of the island came into the ownership of the National Trust for Scotland in 1979. Their aim is to preserve of the peace and tranquillity of the island, enable access, and to work with the crofting and farming community to retain the traditional agricultural nature of the island.

¹ The Iona Community (IC) refers to the ecumenical group founded in Glasgow and Iona in 1938, as oppose to the local people of Iona.

The abbey, and the area of the earlier Columban monastery, came into the care of Historic Environment Scotland's predecessor body in 1999. HES has a lease of the abbey from the Iona Cathedral Trust and in turn lets the abbey to the IC. HES is responsible for upkeep, conservation, and visitor-facing matters. In 2013 the museum was upgraded and a major re-display undertaken; this was informed by the work of the Iona Research Group <http://ionaresearchgroup.arts.gla.ac.uk/index.php/about/> who continue to make very significant contributions towards the understanding of the site.

1.2 Statement of significance

Iona and its abbey, inextricably linked to St Columba, are recognised by people around the world as a special, sacred place. It has a universally acknowledged spiritual presence, which together with the heritage of sanctity contribute to a numinous and sublime quality perceived by most visitors. This sets it apart from other properties in care. The following bullet points outline the most important aspects which contribute to Iona's cultural significance:

- Iona Abbey has had an important spiritual, cultural and political influence on Scotland (and sometimes further afield) for many centuries, most significantly from the time of Columba to the era of the Lords of the Isles.
- The legacy of St Columba can still be tangibly felt when visiting the site. The tiny shrine chapel (though extensively rebuilt) holds the greatest cultural significance of any of the buildings on Iona. It was created to contain Columba's relics which were the richest treasure of the monastery. It is probably the oldest surviving stone church building in Scotland. Radiocarbon dating has confirmed that a structure atop Tòrr an Aba dates from Columba's time and thus is likely to be his writing hut.
- Iona contains the largest and most important collection of early sacred sculpture of any British monastery. This includes the spectacular high crosses such as St Martin's which has stood in its original position outside the monastery for 1250 years. The *Lapis Echodi* inscribed stone may be the oldest surviving memorial to a king in Britain. Eochaid Buide, king of Dal Riata died c 629.
- Iona was a major centre of literacy, the introduction of which revolutionised life in Scotland, especially in relation to governance. The Iona chronicles dating from 630-720 are amongst the oldest post-Roman chronicles in Europe and it is now widely accepted that the Book of Kells, the finest

Gospel book of the western European church, was produced on Iona around 800.

- Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, written on Iona c 690, is a prime evidential resource which provides unique insights into the reality of the monastery and the island during his own lifetime and places associated with Columba. Another Adomnán work, *De Locis Sanctis*, is an account of Christianity's sacred places, including Jerusalem. It provides a framework for understanding how the planning and development of Iona and its liturgical landscape was conceived as a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem.
- The site exhibits the best preserved and most complex physical remains of an early monastery in Britain; it is therefore of immense research value. The vallum, the shrine chapel, Sràid nam Marbh, Torr an Aba and the high crosses represent extraordinary, in-situ evidence of the reality of the Columban monastery.
- The Benedictine Abbey is the largest and most elaborate ecclesiastical foundation in the West Highlands and Islands. Its design features express particularly the importance of pilgrimage in the planning of the site. Contemporary with the abbey, the Nunnery is one of only two Augustinian nunneries in Scotland and is one of the best-preserved medieval convents in Britain. Its presence evidences the importance of women's participation in religious life and especially pilgrimage. For further details see *HES Statement of Significance, Iona Nunnery, St Ronan's Church and MacLean's Cross*.
- Reilig Odhrain is of considerable importance as the burial place of the monastic communities, and of some kings. In later medieval times it was the popular burial place of the best men of the clans, their graves covered by more than 100 beautifully carved slabs. Today it retains significance as the last resting place of people of national and local importance such as the burial here of John Smith, leader of the Labour Party, in 1994.
- The patronage of the Gaelic-Norse lords and then the Lords of the Isles has led to the presence of a large and important collection of carved stones at the abbey, although it is difficult to know for certain which of the later graveslabs were produced here. The later medieval graveslabs can illuminate many aspects of life and society amongst the clergy and warrior elites of the West Highlands.

- Iona is also significant as a place of pilgrimage. Since the time of Columba's death people have come from afar and walked along Sràid nam Marbh, following in the footsteps of saints and hoping their prayers would be answered. Pilgrimage is a continuing tradition in the life of the island.
- The various phases of conservation and restoration at the abbey, particularly in the 19th and early 20th century, are testament to the continuing significance of Iona. In particular the circumstances around the creation of the Iona Cathedral Trust and the rebuilding work by Rev. George Macleod are of considerable social significance, particularly in regard to the development of so-called Celtic spirituality.

2 Assessment of values

2.1 Background

Iona Abbey is located on the north-east side of the small island of Iona in the Inner Hebrides, 1 mile west of Fionnphort on the south-west coast of Mull; the majority of visitors access the island by way of the Cal Mac ferry which plies across the Sound of Iona between Fionnphort and the landing at Iona village. The island is only 3 miles long and 1 mile east-west, with the highest hill (100m) at Dun I to the west of the abbey, and with Dun Bhuirg and its Iron Age hillfort overlooking the good natural harbours near Port Ban on the west side. Iona is a relatively modern name for the island, based on a misreading of its Latin name.

Iona may have had a reputation as a place of spiritual significance before Columba arrived there, and this may have been part of the attraction. The Greek historian Plutarch (c. 46–120) wrote of an expedition by the Roman fleet to the west coast of Scotland, during which they visited an island which was the retreat of holy men. This is likely to be the circumnavigation of Scotland which the Roman general Agricola ordered after the defeat of the Caledonian tribes at the battle of Mons Graupius in AD 84.

The abbey site can be characterised in four main phases:

500s – 1100s The early Christian monastery

Iona was powerfully associated with St Columba during his lifetime and posthumously as a saint with an international reputation. The key features comprise:

Vallum bank and ditch - the impressive upstanding remains of the west circuit of the early monastic enclosure, which has a long and multi-phase history going back at least 2000 years in places. At least two concentric enclosures existed which would have delineated different zones of sanctity within the monastery. Archaeological survey indicates the inner and outer vallum

developed during the 7th and 8th centuries. The full extent enclosed exceeds 20 hectares, one of the largest Christian sites in Scotland. It appears that at least part of the vallum pre-dates the Columban settlement: part of its west side has been radio carbon dated to 0AD indicating a pre-existing Iron Age site; other pre-historic and later enclosures/structures are indicated within the vallum.

Shrine Chapel – only the lowest courses of this tiny building survive from the original reliquary chapel probably constructed in the mid-700s and likely to be the earliest surviving fragment of a Scottish church. During the mid-1400s it was incorporated into the fabric of the cloister; the chapel was rebuilt to the present pattern in 1954/5². Its original function was probably to house the relics of St Columba, and as such was by far the most important structure at the abbey, harking back to the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem. Its west front contains a key surviving diagnostic feature, being projecting stone ‘antae’ located at both corners of the west façade. The building was exposed in 1874 during R Rowand Anderson’s restoration programme, and found to contain a pair of above-ground stone cists. A new raised floor was built over these in 1962.

Sràid nam Marbh, the ‘Street of the Dead’ processional way – only the south part of this is early medieval, the north part being a later medieval deviation bringing the road to the Benedictine bakehouse. It originally linked the landings close to the modern village, to the monastery, with many crosses marking its route. Only the 70m length through Reilig Odhrain towards St Martin’s Cross is original, dating back to the 600s. It originally terminated at the forecourt in front of the early church and latterly the shrine chapel.

Tòrr an Aba – ‘hill of the abbot’ facing the likely west end of the early church, is traditionally associated with the elevated place where Columba had a writing hut and from where he could see what was going on in his monastery, as well as ships crossing the Sound. The hilltop was excavated in the 1960s, when evidence of a timber and wattle structure was found. Recent re-examination of excavated material and radio-carbon dating (540 – 650) has confirmed this structure dates to Columba’s time and thus the traditional attribution of his writing hut to this location may well be correct.

Reilig Odhrain cemetery – the name alluding both to Odhran who was traditionally a cousin and contemporary of Columba, as well as the Reilig component which refers to a place of burial. This was the original burial ground for the early monastery which grew up outside the inner sanctum, separated from the abbey core by the

² The date for the rebuilding is given as 1962 in the RCAHMS Inventory, but this is an error: pers comm, Dr Sally Foster.

inner vallum ditch. Most of the early cross marked stones and grave markers come from here, along with St Oran's cross which probably stood beside the Street in the now-empty cross base still visible. The later chapel here was probably built on the site of an early Christian funerary chapel.

Several important traditions pertain to Reilig Odhrain. Dean Donald Munro writing in 1549 described seeing three tombs like small chapels in the Reilig Odhrain cemetery, possibly in a row north – S, each inscribed on the gable front - The Tombs of the Scottish Kings, The Tombs of the Irish Kings, and The Tombs of the Norwegian Kings. No trace of these survives, and indeed they were no longer visible when Pennant visited in 1772, by which time he could only see some indeterminate remains of a possible structure labelled 'the ridge of the kings', along with many West Highland slabs. It seems unlikely that Munro simply invented this description, although exactly what he saw remains a puzzle. There may have been a group of early Irish-style gabled tombs. Although some early medieval kings from home and abroad were buried here, along with numerous local kings (clan chiefs), the oft-repeated statement that many kings of Scots were buried here is considered to be a fiction, promoted by later medieval chroniclers and by the likes of William Shakespeare (Macbeth). It may be that the later Benedictines of Iona added the Latin inscriptions to a group of older tombs to 'sex-up' their offer. The popularity of Iona as a burial place for the great families declined following the forfeiture of the Macdonald Lords in 1493.

Pennant (1772) records the top of a box-like early Christian cross base (RCAHMS Argyll 4 no 99) as being in Reilig Odhrain just north-west of St Oran's chapel. This has an important folk tradition, attached to it, possibly lasting over 1000 years, for the practice of divination whereby visitors would turn 'noble globes of white marble' in a sunwise direction a prescribed number of rotations. This base was known as the *clach-bràth* in Gaelic, and was in situ until the 19th century. The socket in this base is 0.6m wide, which is wide enough to have supported St Oran's Cross.

High crosses and other features in the forecourt of the later church and in the site museum; and the substantial body of other crosses, cross slabs and grave markers in the site museum and in local Collections storage. Above all the early Christian period is represented by the (now rebuilt) shrine chapel at the west front – the single most important building, which from its creation around 750 became the central focus of the place. The well, the bullaun (prayer) stones, and the trough known as 'the cradle of the north wind' (losaid na gaoithe tuath), are all likely to have early Christian origins, specific to this location. The well is likely to pre-date the Columban monastery and may have been a predetermining feature

in the choice of site of this monastery. It may have played a role in baptism. The high crosses are key markers of the complex and sophisticated theological and liturgical activities at Iona.

1200 – 1600s – The Benedictine monastery

Somerled, in seeking to re-establish the power of Iona made an unsuccessful attempt to get the abbot of Derry, then Columba's successor, to take over the abbacy of Iona. Somerled's son Ranald, persisted in reinvigorating religious life on Iona with the foundation of a new Benedictine house, confirmed in a papal bull of 1203 placing the new monastery under the direct protection of the Pope. Derry and its allies took exception to this usurping of their spiritual power, and invaded the island in 1204 destroying construction work on the new church. But the Benedictines held their ground, building the new monastery in and around the high crosses, ancient vallum and historic buildings already imbued with centuries of sanctity. This probably involved little change of personnel, but rather the instructing of the existing brethren in the ways of the Benedictine rule.

The Benedictine monastery was endowed with lands and churches chiefly on Mull and neighbouring islands, but also stretching from North Uist in the North to Kintyre and Galloway in the South.

The first church that was built for the new order was narrower and about two-thirds the length of the later church, as revealed in the restoration works of P Macgregor Chalmers of the early 1900s. It had central transepts located to the west of the later transepts. The church went through two significant redesigns within the 13th century, and by 1250 the choir had been extended to accommodate an increased number of monks, and raised up over a timber-ceilinged crypt as a focus for the liturgy of the cult of St Columba. A greatly enlarged south transept was begun before the end of that century, although never finished, possibly intended to have been articulated with the crypt and occupying two storeys, similar to that planned for Glasgow Cathedral around the same time. The oldest surviving fabric is in the north side of the church. It was documented in the early 1400s that the buildings were in a poor state, and a major programme of repairs was led by Abbot Dominic (abb 1421-1465). The fine effigies of Dominic and of his successor Abbot John MacKinnon can be seen one each against the north and south walls of the choir. The entire south side was rebuilt in a wider form, the crypt done away with, and a large south choir aisle added. The Shrine Chapel was physically attached to the north-west corner of the west front at this time. The north transept contains a pair of shallow chapels set into the east wall, with a niche in between which contained an important almost life-sized statue, only the feet of which survive in situ. A modern

imagining of this statue was commissioned for the niche by HES in 2015 and created by Tim Chalk.

The rebuilding of the abbey church in the mid-15th century shows strong Irish architectural influences, and one Irish master mason – Donald Ó Brolchán - signed his name on a crossing pier. All this was taking place in parallel with the flowering of the Iona and West Highland schools of monumental sculpture, and so there are many similarities between the two. There are numerous design features in the rebuilding which hark back to earlier period, including the round columns in the south choir arcade, but with much excellent quality work including that of the tracery. The influence of central and east Scotland, not only Irish architectural influence, can be seen in the use of spiralled tracery. The removal of the two level east end produced a lofty and impressive choir and presbytery space. The massive central tower, now with its caphouse restored, was also added at this time, one of the most impressive and visible features of the church.

A fascinating frieze of religious and genre scenes are carved into the richly decorated capitals of the south choir arcade. These include a Crucifixion and a Garden of Eden, warlike scenes with figures in dressed like the West Highland warriors, as well as scenes of everyday life, such as the cow-slaughter scene. The love of foliate decoration as well as cusped ogee arches, can be seen across the artistic output of Iona at this time, in the sedilia in the presbytery, in the canopied tomb in St Oran's, and also on the grave slabs.

The Benedictine cloister - the claustral ranges conform to a standard lay-out, excepting the fact that the cloister is located on the north rather than the usual preferred south side of the church. This may have been necessary due to the location of water courses required for the kitchen and latrine, absent to the south, plus the ground to the south may have been too boggy. It is also possible that there were important pre-existing buildings to the south which had to be avoided, now lost. These ranges survived pre-restoration reasonably well at least at ground floor level, documented in prints and early photos. The east range contained the chapter house with the monk's dormitory above. There was a night stair down into the north transept, while the latrines were located in a north extension of the dormitory, shared with the abbot's lodging to the north of the north range. The latter housed the refectory. As usual there was a covered walkway around all four sides, the pent roof supported on pairs of coupled octagonal columns.

There are two external buildings to the north-east of the monastery core, now known as the Michael Chapel and the Infirmary Museum. These are on a significantly different alignment, more

true east-west, than the core which they may predate in their origins. The remains of the monastic bakehouse are located west of the west range.

St Oran's Chapel – immediately to the south of the abbey is likely to be on the site of a much older mortuary chapel serving the early monastic community and their burial ground. With the rise of the MacSorley dynasty in the 12th century, and the creation of the first Lord of the Isles, John in 1336, the chapel was rebuilt as the dynastic sepulchre of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles and their chief followers.

The chapel is a plain building except for the late 12th century Irish influenced Romanesque west door with dressing of yellow Carsaig sandstone. Each of the 16 voussoirs of the second order of the stonework of the doorway possibly bears a human or animal head, now unrecognisable due to erosion. The interior features the most highly decorated tomb architecture on Iona, a pair of recessed wall tombs in the south wall. The surviving west tomb has an elaborate hood mould, the ornament similar to that on the MacKinnon cross shaft of 1489, now in the site museum. This grandiose tomb is likely to have been created for a Lord of the Isles, although it could have been appropriated by another family following the Macdonald forfeiture of the Lordship in 1493. The altar at the east end is modern but is built on a medieval footing, with the remains of a piscina east of the south window. It was roofless for 300 years until restored by Ian G Lindsay in 1957.

It is documented that a number of the Lords and family members were buried here. John, 1st Lord of the Isles was buried here in 1387, amid services over eight days and nights led by the abbot and the clergy. Key burials would have taken place nearest the high altar, now represented by heavily worn grave slabs. One of these nearer the west door is of considerable importance, as it exhibits the rod of office of one of the lords. The West Highland slabs now displayed here upright against the walls have been gathered in from the burial ground.

1600s – 1800s – Decline and abandonment

During this period the Benedictine monastery was finally abandoned, entering a new life as a highly evocative ruin, a place of antiquarian curiosity and an inspiration for writers and artists. Greater interest was beginning to be taken in the West Highland grave slabs concentrated in Reilig Odhrain, and in 1858 the finest of these was gathered together in two rows and enclosed by iron railings. Any idea of their original disposition within the burial ground was lost at this time. In the late 1870s the Duke of Argyll was put under pressure to conserve fragile parts of the abbey buildings, the works led by the architect R Rowand Anderson.

Late 1900s to present – restoration and conservation

The degree of ruination of the abbey buildings is reasonably well documented in artists' images, and then photography, from the late 1700s onwards. The restoration work undertaken during the 19th and 20th centuries strongly evokes the feel of the medieval abbey and ancillary ranges and many original or early features have been incorporated into the new work.

The reconstructed external ranges – abbot's house, the so-called infirmary, and the Michael Chapel – give a good impression of the original scale of the Benedictine monastery, as not only being the church and cloister, and highlighting the fact to visitors that there were many satellite places of veneration on the island, not only the abbey.

In 1899 ownership of the abbey passed from the Duke of Argyll to the newly established Iona Cathedral Trust, which was committed to the restoration of the abbey for public worship. The various phases of conservation and restoration were aided by some leading Scottish conservation architects of the time, firstly Thomas Ross and John Honeyman, and then P MacGregor Chalmers. The partially restored church opened for worship in 1905, work on the nave was completed in 1910.

From the late 1930s, reconstruction of the cloister ranges was led by architect Ian Lindsay for the Reverend George MacLeod and the Iona Community. Reroofing and conservation of St Oran's chapel followed in 1957.

During the mid-20th century the abbey became an international centre of ecumenical faith, whilst also developing as a major tourism destination. In 1979 much of the island of Iona was given over to the care of the National Trust for Scotland. In 1999 Historic Environment Scotland's predecessor body, under a lease agreement, took over responsibility for conservation, maintenance and all visitor-facing operations at the abbey and in 2013 completed a major re-display of the very important carved stone collection.

2.1 Evidential values

Thanks to the survival of primary texts produced on Iona, along with an unparalleled survival of archaeological remains, carved stones and Gaelic place-names, the entire island is a rich resource for archaeologists and historians.

The HES sites on Iona offer a truly exceptional evidential resource in their combination of physical (both on and off-site), documentary and intangible resources such as place-name evidence and oral tradition. Most importantly, this is true of the early Christian phases where the survival of primary texts and rare artefacts can be linked with archaeological results to enable a detailed picture of the philosophical, symbolic and design intentions which Columba and his successors had for the place, together with the actuality of the site they constructed and the more workaday aspects of everyday life on the island. This strand of significance is also linked to Iona's importance and influence as a leading religious site which, through its scriptorium, craft and sculpture workshops, was a hugely important cultural centre.

The medieval and post medieval operation of the abbey, and the later phases of restoration and re-presentation as a cultural heritage attraction are also evidenced from a wide variety of sources. Added to this, extensive research over two centuries of many aspects of the island's past enables a much better appraisal of its importance in wider contexts of Scotland, the British Isles and beyond. That said, there is potential for much more research over the whole site and its related artefacts and sources. For instance, the recent (2017) Glasgow University project which revisited excavations undertaken in 1956 - 1963 has applied modern techniques to recover very valuable evidence such as dating of timber from Torr an Aba to Columba's time.

Field evidence and surveys

The work of Sir Henry Dryden (1818–99) assisted by the architect William Galloway in recording the abbey in the 1870s has contributed a unique pre-restoration survey, containing much of archaeological importance. Another valuable early publication is John Drummond's 1881 record of the Sculptured Monuments.

In terms of excavation, archaeology has obscured much as well as contributing much. Sporadic, piecemeal campaigns of excavation took place though the 1950s into the 1970s, although these lacked a coherent research strategy, with no real synthesis of results. Between 1956 and 1963 Charles Thomas then of Edinburgh University excavated 98 small trenches, the most extensive investigations ever at the abbey, but the results were never published.

By contrast, Barber's 1979 excavations carried out in advance of the enlargement of the Reilig Odhrain cemetery, produced significant results regarding the nature of the early monastery. This included excavation of a terminal of the inner ditch of the vallum, its construction radiocarbon dated to around AD600, adjacent to the Sràid nam Marbh -Street of the Dead. A large 18m diameter

roundhouse was found just inside the ditch (John Smith is now buried inside it), which may have been the communal *magna domus* mentioned by Adomnán. A high number of important artefactual finds were recovered (see below).

Our understanding of the archaeology of the abbey has been significantly advanced by the recent (2016) study of the data from Thomas' excavations, carried out by Glasgow University. This has retrieved data on individual structures, as well as allowing a broad characterisation of the archaeological deposits across the site, which will inform future investigations. The study estimates 58% of the abbey site is undisturbed.

Recovered Artefacts

Evidence from recovered artefacts and ecofacts give a good impression of life on Iona and also demonstrate the craft skills and artistry which made the island a leading cultural centre. Some of the most important recovered collections include evidence of craft activity on a large scale including:

- Fine metalworking – bronze, silver, crucibles and moulds; debris widespread across the site in early deposits, many found in inner ditch terminal near Reilig Odhrain. Finished objects found include shrine fittings and personal ornaments. Recent re-evaluation by Glasgow University of investigations have brought new light to bear on a small cast bronze human head found by Thomas, which was probably made here in the 11th century as a component part of a large decorated reliquary. This allows us to understand that the Céili Dé brethren who occupied Iona immediately before the creation of the Benedictine house, were in the business of manufacturing major liturgical objects
- Glass working - studs with metal inlays, reticella rods for decoration of glassware, and beads; some architectural glass from early Christian buildings.
- Leather working – a purse and decorated shoes. Many well preserved from vallum ditch; shoes particularly valuable as the only closely dated group (c700) from early medieval Ireland and Scotland; they can be related to shoes illustrated in the book of Kells.
- Carpentry and Woodworking – turned bowls and architectural carpentry. The evidence for carpentry found in the vallum is the only such evidence to have survived from a monastic site at this period, some of which can be identified as elements of rectangular timber buildings. It is possible that some of the flat pieces of wood found here could represent shingles, such as those illustrated in the Temptation scene in the Book of Kells.

- Pottery – local and imported, African red slipware c 600, earthenware jar from west Gaul.

The archaeological and early documentary evidence together allows a picture of the economy of the early monastery to emerge – the entire island formed a precinct, with arable production centred on the Machair on the west side. A mill lade still exists which bisected the monastic enclosure to the north of the monastery. A number of millstones from horizontal water mills, used to process cereals, have been found, some re-used as the bases for high crosses. Although significant food production took place on Iona, the early monastery was not self-sufficient, and is likely to have received food rents from abbey lands on Mull and elsewhere. There is evidence of a mixed livestock economy on the island, predominant dairying (butter and cheese). Deer, cattle, pigs, sheep, seals and fish (inc deep sea) well represented on the menu.

2.3 Historical values

The historical value of Iona Abbey lies primarily in its strong connection to Columba and in its role as a key religious and cultural power centre in the British Isles. After the post-Reformation abandonment and gradual ruination of the Abbey, it retained a strong religious and emotional pull becoming a key “heritage” site for Scotland; reverence for its spiritual power growing stronger through the 19th and 20th centuries.

The quantity, quality and variety of evidence available (and the exceptional potential to learn more by further research) accounts for Iona’s exceptional ability to demonstrate these themes, coupled with the emotional strength of its ongoing spiritual role. The following paragraphs detail some of these themes, with more detail in a chronological appendix (forthcoming).

Columba and the early foundation

Columba is the first real historical figure in Scotland for whose life we have reliable documentation. He was a member of the kindred of the northern Ui-Neill and therefore of royal blood. He was a priest, poet, musician, scribe and scholar. Before arriving on Iona he had a successful career as a senior churchman in Ireland. He lived in a culture of the written word and there was a strong Gaelic political, cultural and linguistic commonality between Argyll and his home in the north of Ireland.

Columba was granted the island of Iona in 563 by his kinsman King Conall mac-Cognall of Dunadd, to establish what became one of the most important early medieval monasteries in western Europe. Christianity was only established in parts of Scotland at this time, unlike Ireland. His intention was to create the perfect monastic community. Iona would come to be the head of a monastic *familia*

that spread across much of the mainland, with the abbot of Iona at its head.

Columba represented the pinnacle of Christian virtues – an example for others to imitate. He died aged around 75 on 9 June 597 in his church at Iona in the early hours of Whit Sunday, blessing the whole island. Buried in a simple grave, body wrapped in white linen, near his church on Iona. One of the most important surviving relics of St Columba is a Psalm book known as the Cathach, traditionally scribed by Columba himself. Depending on its provenance, this may be the earliest surviving Scottish or Irish book.

After Columba's death Iona became a place of pilgrimage with the relics as its focus. The core of the monastery grew around the grave of the founder. Iona became an internationally renowned centre of learning, where kings were sent for their education, including the Saxon King Aldfrith of Northumbria.

A major school and scriptorium existed at Iona, with access to an extensive library. Literacy was essential to monastic life and quickly became essential to secular government. The earliest census of households produced in Dal Riata was in the 700s, possibly with Iona monks seconded as clerks.

In 635, King Oswald of Northumbria, who had been exiled on Iona, gifted the tidal island of Lindisfarne, off the coast of north-east England, as the location for a monastery founded by Iona monk Aidan as a daughter house of Iona. This was a new dawn for Iona, with strengthened royal support in Dal Riata and in Northumbria.

Iona under Adomnán

Adomnán (c 627 - 704) was the ninth abbot of Iona, he was a kinsman of Columba, and like him a native of Donegal. He was influential in contemporary secular and ecclesiastical politics on both sides of the North Channel and wrote the Life of Columba, on which much of our information is based. Church dedications in Pictland in east Scotland and Hebrides show that Adomnán travelled widely for religious and diplomatic purposes; his other writings include Law of the Innocents (advocating protection of non-combatants in time of war); and *De Locis Sanctis* an account of the Holy Places in the life of Christ.

Adomnán describes the buildings of the monastery as including the church, huts of the monks, Columba's hut and his other hut for writing (Tòrr an Abba), scriptorium (and presumably library) guest houses, communal building (kitchen and refectory), some of these clustered around an open space. Outlying buildings included barns and sheds, and a smithy. He also describes that places associated

with events in Columba's life were marked with crosses, including one with a millstone base. Coupled with the archaeological evidence detailed above, Iona provides some of the best evidence anywhere for life in an early monastery in Britain.

Religion, Culture and politics

As introduced under Evidential values, the combination of surviving artefacts such as the magnificent sculptured Crosses and surviving contemporary manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, together with the recovered materials of many craft processes mean that Iona can tell a uniquely rich story of monastic life, industry and artistry. The Crosses and other artworks are discussed in the context of the physical and symbolic architecture of Iona in section 2.4. Less tangible aspects of the sites historical importance are its role in religious practice, politics and power brokering in early medieval Britain.

Iona's abbots wielded considerable political influence with important diplomatic roles. The monastery produced a major collection of Canon Law, used throughout Britain and Ireland as well as in France. Relics, of both Columba and Adomnán were taken on ritual journeys to consecrate churches or sanctify laws. In 753 relics of Columba were taken on circuit around Ireland during enactment of Law of Colum Cille (contents unknown) by Domnall, King of Tara. Relics taken to Ireland again in 757 and 778 for similar purpose. To allow this Columba's grave must have been opened and his remains placed within a reliquary chest possibly along with other associated relics. This gives an indicative date for the building of the first Shrine Chapel to house the exhumed relics.

In 807, in response to repeated Viking raids abbot Cellach and some Iona monks moved to found the new abbey at Kells, Co Meath in Ireland. A reduced community was left behind at Iona where Viking raids continued, perhaps prompting the burial of a hoard of 350 silver coins discovered in the vicinity of the later abbot's house. The primacy of the Columban federation was held by the abbot of Kells for next 350 years; it is not known when the Book of Kells left Iona.

In the 11th and 12th centuries a community of Céili Dé, ascetic Irish monks with a strongly eremitical tradition, was resident at the abbey. The chapel site of Cladh an Dìsert (burial ground of the hermitage) 400m north-east of the abbey may be associated with this phase of the monastery.

Pilgrimage

After Columba's death Iona became a prime Scottish site for pilgrimage. The assemblage of crosses, the layout and development of the site (see architectural values below) and the

quantities of recovered artefacts contribute to Iona's particular ability to demonstrate this theme. The ongoing and powerful tradition of pilgrimage underlines this aspect.

Later antiquarians and picturesque tourists

Into the 18th and 19th centuries the islanders made use of the ruins of the abbey as quarries and pasture, contributing to an air of neglect which eventually began to be reversed by a growing interest in antiquity and conservation through the 1800s. The islanders had a complex relationship with the site however, as they worshipped in the ruined church, until provided with their new parish church in 1828.

From 1874 to 1875, the 8th Duke of Argyll instructed the consolidation of the church, then in imminent danger of collapse. The project was led by architect Rowand Anderson, and commissioned by the eminent historian and antiquary west F Skene acting on behalf of the Duke of Argyll. The ongoing story of the restoration of the Abbey and the presentation of its grounds demonstrates both antiquarian and religiously-motivated respect for the site and its history, see Contemporary values.

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

Architecture and site-planning

The architecture of Iona is important for its surviving medieval structures and their later rebuilding and restoration. Primarily though, the whole site is important for our understanding of the Early Christian conception of how the layout and design of the various elements of the site symbolised and represented spiritual and devotional themes and moments, set out in a deliberate and structured manner. Similarly, the carved crosses are understood on several levels as aids to devotion and prayer, conveying particular messages as well as highly sophisticated works of art.

The community's mission was to create nothing less than a new Jerusalem, as a precursor to the (as they believed) imminent Last Judgement, whereby they could prepare themselves for their new life in Heaven. The fact that the community saw themselves as a last bastion against the demons who threatened the world from the great unknown tracts of ocean to the west, made this even more pressing. Recent scholarship suggests that Adomnán's book *On the Holy Places* (690s) was no real attempt at a guidebook to the places associated with the Passion, but rather was a handbook through which they could create, inhabit and explore these places re-created in their own landscape. And this is the key to understanding the physical remains of the early Christian monastery. Understanding for example the Street of the Dead

representing the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, Columba's shrine as the Tomb of Christ, the church forecourt area as a Paradiso where you prepared yourself for the entry to heaven, and their church as the Temple/Heaven. This allows an imagining of processional activity with carefully structured movement through the ritual landscape, the chanting of psalms and prayers, and the devotional and exegetical role played by the complex iconographic programmes carved on the high crosses.

High Crosses and other carved stones

The most tangible surviving evidence of the rich cultural and political standing of Iona are its High Crosses. Apart from the challenge of winning and transporting the stone, these are some of the earliest and most ambitious carvings in Scotland. Added to this are the fine early medieval metalwork and illuminated manuscripts produced on Iona. Much of this was ground-breaking, experimental and innovative. Another important aspect of Iona's sculpture collection is the collection of West Highland grave slabs. These date from the 1300s to the 1500s.

The High Crosses, and specifically the ring-headed cross are particularly associated with Iona and with the practice of early Christianity. They are significant on many counts: for their role in technical innovation; for our growing understanding of their symbolic and functional roles within the liturgical landscape of the Abbey; for their individual "biographies"; and for their artistic achievement and iconographic content.

Technicalities of the design: The ring-headed cross has become the universally recognised symbol of the early church in Ireland and Pictland, and there is considerable debate concerning the origin of this, with Iona being a leading contender. St Oran's without a ring but with a unique component structure, is considered to be first of the Iona crosses, exhibiting an innovative and experimental design, with arms too heavy ultimately to be supported. A similar problem and collapse of St John's Cross was tackled early on by the addition of mortice and tenon jointed ring components, clearly borrowed from carpentry. This design was then developed into the familiar monolithic ring design, seen on St Martin's Cross and in the freestanding crosses of Ireland and Pictland. The replica of the St John Cross, cast in concrete in 1970 is a considerable technical achievement in its own right.

Functional and symbolic understanding: The function of the high crosses was threefold: to commemorate individuals; to mark boundaries, or places and their associations; and as aids to prayer and ascetic meditation. Their placing within the symbolic and physical setting of the abbey was clearly important. By our current understanding, interplay with natural phenomena such as sunlight,

and the casting of shadows onto other structures or locations, may have been deliberately planned allowing the crosses to appear active and not static.

Recent research has demonstrated how the symbolism and multi-valent figurative sacred scenes on the high crosses were intended to be read with the movement of the sun, varying with the time of day and the liturgical seasons. The east facing sides of the crosses at Iona being seen by the monks as they left their church after morning worship. The west facing sides being observed during prayer and contemplation of the Passion and Life of Christ when facing east in the accepted direction of veneration.

Understanding the symbolic and physical placing of the Crosses within the evolving Iona landscape is something which deserves further research. However, it seems clear that important messages were conveyed by location and setting. For instance, with the high crosses the west face was the “front”, as Christians pray facing east in expectation of the risen Christ. The east and west faces cast various shadows when in sun, throughout the day. The monks would be aware of the gradual unfolding of the theological programme of each face, allowing them to respond to this through prayer and contemplation. Moreover, the shadow of St John’s Cross is almost burnt onto the west front of the shrine chapel late in the day, while on a summer’s evening the disc with the Virgin and Child at the centre of the St Martin’s cross head is brightly illuminated. In a more general sense, the shadow positions would have figured prominently in the daily lives of the monks, as a constant reminder of the canonical hours of worship.

Individual biographies: The sculpted stones in general and the high crosses in particular have a long and complex history. These histories began with the point of their original commissioning, design, creation and erection, but they have subsequent “lives” and “meanings” which developed and changed over a period of more than 1200 years. This is exemplified in the universal symbol of Iona, the St John’s Cross, the ring-headed cross, a concrete replica of which now stands in its original position facing Columba’s shrine chapel. The original cross was probably created around the mid 700s, and due to unfamiliarity of its carvers with the form the arms quickly collapsed, necessitating a redesign to incorporate the rings. This collapsed one or more times in antiquity, and only the shaft was standing when first recorded in 1699. It suffered a number of attempted reconstructions *in situ*, ending in collapse and damage to the original fragments. It was cast in concrete in 1970, and the original parts re-erected (1990) in an aesthetically pleasing reconstruction with modern glass components replacing missing parts, within the stone museum within the reconstructed Infirmary

building. Impossible to move again, it forms the fixed point in the new (2013) museum, around which everything else was designed.

Within the body of early carved stones, there are pieces of what may be architectural stonework from a screen or altar rail in an early church, some pieces hitherto having been identified as posts for one or more box shrines (RCAHMS 104). There is also an ex-situ fragment of anta probably from the front of St Columba's shrine (RCAHMS 108). It is possible that more early architectural fragments await discovery and/or identification.

Artistic achievement: The artistry of the high crosses tends to be glossed over, with the focus instead being on interpretation of the symbols, patterns and biblical narrative scenes. Figurative scenes were carefully laid out with hierarchies and relationships, usually framed like pictures or icons. The carving is done in high relief, giving solidity and movement to the figures, and more so when freshly carved around 1250 years ago. Tremendous care was taken in the laying out and design of the non-figurative patterns which were executed with an extraordinary degree of symmetry and precision. The use of bosses and elaborate Celtic spiral work, also characterises the Iona school. It is believed that colour was extensively applied, presumably in a similar palette to that used in the Book of Kells, many surprisingly vivid colours being derived from local plants. The impact of these in colour would have been astonishing.

In general terms the narrative scenes on the more heavily illustrated St Martin's Cross were intended to provide Old Testaments parallels prefiguring the Life and Passion of Christ. The extensive use of 'snake-and-boss' decorative and symbolic patterning on the three surviving early high crosses – St Oran's, St John's, and St Martin's – may be symbolic of healing, rebirth and Resurrection, and is one example of multivalency in the symbolic schemes, whereby in Christianity the serpent is often associated with the Devil and clearly in this case the opposite is true. The Maria Angelorum, Virgin and Child scene which features prominently on St Oran's and St Martin's Cross, is a precocious example of Marian devotion in the western church, and is closely paralleled with the same scene in the Book of Kells. The latter might suggest the original colour scheme applied to this scene on the crosses.

In creating the decoration and scenes on the crosses the carvers were borrowing from Irish, Pictish and Anglo-Saxon art, as well as creating and contributing something entirely new and revolutionary to the art of the period in the Insular world.

Significance of the production and artistry of the West

Highland grave slabs – for the MacDonalds and their supporters Finlaggan was the centre of lordly authority, while Iona was their spiritual centre. As the most important place of burial, Iona Abbey still has the largest collection of West Highland Sculpture (WHS), dating from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. This consists of grave-slabs, effigies and commemorative crosses. About 100 slabs survive complete or in fragments. Most were created as grave covers laid flat in the main cemeteries of Reilig Odhrain and the Nunnery. Some covered above-ground stone coffins/sarcophagi, positioned in the open air or else inside churches. Not all were carved here, but some certainly were, as part of an ongoing tradition of specialist stone carving.

Some works can be identified as typologically early, perhaps dating from the 1200s into the 1300s. These include: slabs carved with crosses with 4-circle heads and long shafts; other grave slabs with long shafted crosses (eg 116 and 117); slabs with plant-scrolls the full width of the slab (inc 165, 166, 167 and 185); slabs with narrow panels of plant-scrolls and 13th century looking swords, plus an abbot effigy (200) which could be from the 1200s. Later slabs, especially of the 1400s into the 1500s, may be represented by those featuring ships and swords, without crosses. Some are not simply of one phase, occasionally inscriptions and/or new decoration added (eg 123 and 130) – at time of reuse, or other generations added to grave.

A small number of slabs were identified as the memorials to great ancestral heroes, specifically Ranald (191) and Angus Og d1318 (Aonghas Óg MacDomhnaill 150), and these may have been attributed, adapted or newly created, some time after the event. Although some are undoubtedly memorials to ‘the best me of all the Iles’ – chiefs of the MacDonalds, MacLeods, MacLeans, Macallisters, and MacKinnons - some may be memorials to rich mercenaries, maybe landless and unmarried younger sons, who had the cash to invest in this form of immortality. To be buried close together here reinforced their bonds of loyalty and kinship – in life and in death. There are only 5 surviving warrior effigies, one MacKinnon, and the rest MacLeans of Mull. These were the most expensive so belong to the upper echelons. Earlier military effigies depict warriors holding upright spears, presumably shortened to fit neatly on the slabs. About half of the slabs feature a sword, which seems to have replaced the earlier long-shafted crosses which had foliate decoration and interlace – continuing a much older decorative tradition.

In 1859 the 8th Duke of Argyll arranged for many of the best stones to be enclosed in two sets of protective railings, known as the ‘ridge of the kings’ and ‘the ridge of the chiefs’.

The restoration of the church should be seen in the context of an early 20th century aesthetic, with bare stone walls and relatively little ornamentation, and this is of course contrary to the aesthetic of the medieval church in its Benedictine heyday, the decoration and detailing of which was intended to assault the senses as a reflection of the glory of God. There are some thoughtful details in the restoration works in the church of MacGregor Chalmers, for example where he found medieval burials under the floor of the nave, these are marked with simple crosses and groups of white quartz pebbles the only objects found with the deceased.

Numerous individuals and groups are commemorated in the church, in recognition of donations to fund various components of the work, for example the Highlanders of Nova Scotia who paid for the large south window of the nave. The modern timber work in the church is of high quality, such as the screen of 1956 and the adjacent minister's seat in the cross at the north transept. The modern stained glass in the church is of high quality, for example the Columba window in the north transept designed by William Wilson in 1965.

A few of the original paired shafts from the cloister arcade have been reconstructed on the west side, a process begun during the Ministry of Works conservation programme in 1921. New columns for the arcade openings were carved from 1959 on, decorated with flowers, birds, and plants. The grassy cloister garth is now dominated by a large bronze sculpture by Jacob Lipchitz entitled 'The Descent of the Spirit' installed in 1959.

Alexander and Euphemia Ritchie re-invented Celtic inspired silversmith and craft work, often based on designs inspired by Iona sculpture and the Book of Kells. Alexander was appointed the official custodian of the abbey in 1900. Their designs are highly sought after, and this silversmithing tradition is alive on Iona today.

The permanent exhibition *Iona Through Time* featuring the redisplay of the early and later medieval carved stone collections, completed in 2013, allows the artistry and sophisticated thinking behind these objects to be appreciated for the first time in centuries. This is located in the Infirmary, where the collection has been displayed since the 1960s, and which had the reconstructed St John's Cross from 1990 still at its core. Indeed this cross literally acted as a fixed point around which the new exhibition was designed. Clever use of space, coupled with jewel-like lighting, allows visitors to engage with and gain an appreciation of the creation and purpose of this sculpture. The stars are the early medieval high crosses, with St Oran's and St Matthew's crosses re-erected with high quality mounting technology, standing

alongside St John's in an echo of how these originally stood outside the Columban monastery. Almost of equal importance are the selection of later medieval West Highland graveslabs and crosses, featuring the effigies of Maclean and Mackinnon chiefs in full armour.

Because of its natural beauty and its importance as a religious and historical site, Iona attracted many famous visitors as a key stop on the highland itinerary of early tourists; e.g. Boswell and Johnson; Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Keats and Mendelsson. Queen Victoria arrived on Iona on 19th August 1847 aboard the Royal Yacht. Prince Albert landed while the Queen sketched the abbey from the boat.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

In venturing to Iona, almost all visitors have made an arduous journey, and few are disappointed in what they find. Intuitive, imaginative values, the numinous quality of the landscape.

The sublime is further defined as having the quality of such greatness, magnitude or intensity, whether physical, metaphysical, moral, aesthetic or spiritual, that our ability to perceive or comprehend it is temporarily overwhelmed. This is a common experience when viewing the abbey within its wider landscape setting.

The view east across the Sound from the front of the abbey is of great significance. This was where the monks expected to see the risen Christ appear on the last day. The view is spectacular, and entirely natural and unchanged since Columban times, with progressive bands of green field, shoreline, water, the blood red Mull granite, with a band of higher dark hills behind, then the sky.

Although largely rebuilt and restored, the abbey sits comfortably within the landscape backed by a strip of water then a strip of land on Mull, accurate reconstruction in terms of massing and simplicity of form, use of the same grey and pink stones throughout have created a pleasing uniformity.

The abbey and misinterpreted perceptions of Columba's faith provided the focus for the Celtic Christian Revival which took place between 1870 and 1900, which featured romantic evocations of Iona and its spiritual power. This movement coupled with the nascent conservation movement provides the context and indeed the necessary precursor to the restoration of the abbey. This created a new myth of Columba as romantic Gael, mystical rebel and national cultural icon, which persists to this day. This was to deny the historical reality of the Roman orthodoxy of the early

church. This was place concurrent with a more general idealisation of the Highlands and islands and their inhabitants.

Visitors approach the site from the village passing the evocative ruins of the Nunnery, then the medieval parish church of St Ronan's, before arriving at MacLeans's Cross³, passing the attractive gardens of the hotels, all the while drawn irrevocably to St Oran's with the mass of the abbey behind. This creates a strong impression of a pilgrimage journey, consciously or otherwise, following a prescribed ancient route with numerous satellites along the way. In so doing they are replicating and participating in centuries old ritual action. St Oran's stands within the ancient burial ground, conveying a powerful sense of antiquity. It sits low and natural within the burial ground; some visitors are automatically drawn inside, before reaching the ultimate goal of the abbey church, and usually respond with awe and reverence appropriate to the gloom of this sacred space.

Reilig Odhrain continued to be popular for burial in post-Reformation times, with a weight of Gaelic tradition for the deceased being transported to Iona for burial, landing at Martyr's Bay, before being carried along Sràid nam Marbh to their final rest. The old cemetery contains many important and poignant memorials, for example mass graves of shipwrecks, monuments to unknown sailors washed up during WWI, the attractive memorial to Alexander and Euphemia Ritchie the Celtic silversmiths, as well as memorials to some of the four young men of the island drowned in the Sound at Christmas 1998. Burials occasionally still take place here, as well as in the modern cemetery extension where Labour leader John Smith was buried in 1994. His grave is a place of pilgrimage, often with stones and flowers laid on top.

From the later 1700s the abbey became a popular subject for topographic artists making prints of scenes of the windswept ruins, inspired by visits by writers such as Walter Scott. Many of these contain valuable evidence of the contemporary appearance of the site and its surroundings. These featured in themed books, such as Daniell's *Voyage around Great Britain* vol 3 produced in 1818, helping drive a growing interest in the picturesque qualities of the Highlands and Islands. Also became the inspiration for painters, including the notable David Roberts who painted the ruined chapterhouse in 1829. Highest quality of antiquarian recording by Billings for the *Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities* 1845-52. The culmination of early antiquarian interest came with Drummond's exceptional recording of the carved stones in *Sculpted Monuments of Iona* 1881. Queen Victoria rendered a sketch of the abbey from

³ The Nunnery, St Ronan's Chapel and MacLean's Cross are all in the care of HES, for more details see *HES Statement of Significance: Iona Nunnery, St Ronan's Church and Maclean's Cross*

here boat in 1847, around which time steamers had started to make day trips to Iona from Oban.

Iona has provided tremendous inspiration for artists, acting as a muse to creativity. The abbey was the subject of numerous prints and watercolours from the 1700s on, with draughtsmen accompanying the antiquarian visitors. Numerous artists have sketched and painted the abbey including Scottish seascape artist William McTaggart, with Scottish Colourists F.C.B. Cadell (1883-1937) making almost annual painting visits starting in 1912, along with S.J. Peploe (1871-1935) and others. Iona continues to inspire leading contemporary artists such as Sean Scully.

2.6 Natural heritage values

The abbey sits on a mid-level raised beach, in an area of mixed maritime grassland/wet maritime grassland, and semi-improved calcareous grassland. A boundary line in the underlying geology runs approximately N-S through the site, with sandstone underlying to the east and gneiss to the west of this line. The hard-packed ground on this boundary line was purposely selected as the solid and reasonably well-drained base for Sràid nam Marbh, as revealed in the 1979 excavations of the inner vallum area.

A number of the plants found here may have had historical uses. Many have well documented medicinal uses and are not naturally found here, suggesting deliberate introduction or else seed dispersal due to introduced livestock or feed.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Social and community Values

There are two permanent communities on Iona, the island community of about 120 permanent residents, together with the Iona Community (IC) resident in the abbey and at the Macleod Centre nearby, who maintain a small staff all year round, welcoming 100 guests every week from Easter – October. The IC is a world-wide dispersed ecumenical Christian organisation which was founded in 1938 by George MacLeod, then a Church of Scotland parish minister in Glasgow. While the IC is responsible for leading worship in the abbey church and in the Michael Chapel, HES has responsibility for visitor-facing functions, maintenance, and conservation of the buildings.

The island's residents have free access to the HES-managed site, and the abbey is regularly used for concerts and performances.

Gaelic was the principal language spoken on Iona until the end of the 19th century. The HES re-presentation of the abbey features significant Gaelic language content, and with Gaelic training being

offered to staff. Gaelic choirs regularly perform in the abbey church.

Spiritual values:

For many, Iona is not just another stop in the tourist agenda, but is a very special destination with a strongly spiritual element. It has a justifiably high profile as a world class spiritual place. Many visitors, not only Christian, feel a pull to Iona, and are rarely disappointed. Rev George MacLeod described Iona as a *thin place - only a tissue paper separating the material from the spiritual*, echoing sentiments expressed 1250 years before by Adomnán in his *Life of Columba*.

The IC provide a continuity of religious community and worship at the abbey, as inheritors of the 1000 year span of medieval religious community. This adds a unique and vital dimension to the life of the abbey, which is appreciated by many visitors and contributes greatly to the special sense of place.

The IC lead services in the abbey church, twice daily from March to October. And this is the venue for a weekly ecumenical Sunday service shared by Bishops House (Episcopal) and the RC House of Prayer establishments on the island.

Reilig Odhrain, the ancient but also modern burial ground, contains many more recent burials of islanders and notable individuals from the 19th century until the present day.

Use Values

Economic: The island is considered to be thriving, with the economy (excepting crofting) being largely driven by tourism, for which the abbey and the natural beauty of the island are principal draws. Visitor numbers to the island are estimated at around 130,000. Around 64,000 visitors are counted to the abbey annually, though more may visit outwith official opening times.

There have been recent national initiatives to promote long-distance pilgrimage, walking and cycling routes including St Columba's Way, from Iona to St Andrews.

Access & Education:

The abbey plays a role in the formal educational life of the small primary school on Iona, as the focus for history projects and outdoor learning. School concerts and church services take place at the abbey. HES has online resources related to the abbey available to visiting school groups, who come from Mull and further afield.

3 Major gaps in understanding

- As well as working on the publication of the results of the Charles Thomas excavations, staff in Glasgow University Archaeology Department are also working towards the production of a new interdisciplinary Research Framework for Iona. They have created the Iona Research Group, and have instigated a field project, aimed at re-excavation of some of Thomas' trenches where possible important features were revealed.
- Was there a prehistoric settlement on the abbey site, related to part of the west vallum bank, and the south-east enclosure identified by remote sensing?
- Were there multiple early churches and chapels here?
- What was the original extent of the early monastic burial ground of Reilig Odhrain?
- What were the 'Tombs of the Kings' in Reilig Odhrain, and could they have any relationship to the shrine posts found here?
- Do parts of Columba/Iona metalwork reliquaries survive in museum collections at home and abroad?
- Can more data be recovered from other unpublished excavations eg Cruden's work especially around the shrine chapel c. 1949?
- What was the impact on the buildings of the early monastery as a result of the repeated Viking raids?
- What was the relationship between the creation of the Iona high crosses and the Anglo Saxon examples at Bewcastle and Ruthwell?
- The assemblage of skeletal remains needs to be assessed for potential for study.
- What was the appearance of the monastery immediately before the shift to the Benedictine rule?
- To what extent was it a popular place of pilgrimage in the Benedictine period?
- What were Iona's relations with other religious houses in Argyll?
- How many of the West Highland graveslabs were carved on Iona?

4 Associated properties

St Ronan's church Iona, Iona Nunnery, Kildalton Cross, Maclean's Cross, Columba Centre collections store Fionnphort, Saddell Abbey, Oronsay Priory, Ardchattan Abbey (the 4 other religious houses in Argyll all supported by the clan chiefs like Iona Abbey), Finlaggan; Clonmacnois, Co Offaly, Ireland; Glendalough Co Wicklow; Bewcastle and Ruthwell crosses; Nigg cross slab.

5 Keywords

Columba, Adomnán, monastery, vallum, Insular, Book of Kells, shrine chapel, pilgrimage, high crosses, Benedictine, clan MacDonald, Iona Community.

Bibliography

- Campbell, E & Maldonado, A 2016** Russell Trust Excavations on Iona led by Charles Thomas, 1956-63. Glasgow University.
- Fowler, E & Fowler, PJ 1988**, 'Excavations on Tòrr an Aba, Iona, Argyll', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 118: 181-201.
- MacArthur, E 2001** Columba's Island. Polygon: Edinburgh
- RCAHMS 1982** Argyll vol 4: Iona. HMSO.
- Ritchie, A 1997** Iona. Batsford: London.
- Yeoman, P & Scott, N 2013** Iona Abbey and Nunnery Official Souvenir Guide. HS.

Appendix 1 – Timeline

- Mesolithic hunter-gatherers - Iona settled in early prehistoric times, flint tools and debris are routinely found in excavations, some dating back more than 5000 yrs.
- c 1000 BC - burial under cairn at Blàr Buidhe, just south-west of St Columba Hotel, the oldest upstanding remains on the island.
- c 100 BC – hill fort constructed by Iron Age community at Dùn Bhuirg, near the island's west coast.
- 40 BC – AD 220 – radiocarbon date from beneath west vallum bank at Cnoc nan Carnan, shows that at least part of the vallum enclosure is prehistoric in origin.
- c AD 500 – ruling dynasties of the Dal Riata Co Antrim and Argyll kindreds, closely related across the North Channel, Gaelic society developing in parallel.
- 521 – birth of Columba (Latin for dove) Gartan, Co Donegal, member of the kindred of the northern Ui-Neill and therefore of royal blood.
- 563 - Columba arrived in Dal Riata (Argyll) with 12 companions from Ireland, having already had 20 year career as controversial churchman in Ireland.
- Mid to later 6th cent – confederation of dependent monasteries founded nearby and eventually further afield.
- 574 – Columba is said to have participated in enkingment of Áedán mac Gabráin as king of Dalriada, probably at Dunaad, one of the earliest such ceremonies in Europe. The historicity of this event is debated.
- 585-89 – Columba founds and stays at monastery at Durrow, Ireland.
- 9 June 597 - St Columba dies aged 75 in his church at Iona.
- 600s - Iona became a place of pilgrimage with the relics of St Columba as its focus.
- 635 – King Oswald of Northumbria gifts the tidal island of Lindisfarne as the location for a monastery founded by Iona monk Aidan as a daughter house of Iona.
- 635-51 – Aidan rules Northumbrian church from Lindisfarne.
- 679–704 – Adomnán (b. c 627/8) rules as 9th abbot of Iona.
- c692 - Adomnán completes the life of St Columba.

- 700s - Iona became a leading centre of Insular Art, the most tangible surviving evidence of the rich cultural and political standing of Iona are its High Crosses created by a school of carvers on Iona.
- 715 -17 – removal of Iona control of Iona-founded monasteries from Pictish eastern heartland by King Nechtan.
- By c740 - under Abbot Cú Chuimne the monastery produced a large, influential and widely-used collection of canon law ***Collectio canonum Hibernensis***
- 731 – Bede writes in his *History* inferring that C's body still buried
- 736 – Brutal assault on Argyll by Pictish king Óengus son of Fergus (d761) of Fortrui. Devastation of Dunaad.
- 741 – 'Good the day when Óengus took Alba..' a turning point in Scottish history. Óengus returned to Argyll in force. Crushes the Dal Riata and establishes direct rule of the territory, including Iona, under Pictish yoke.
- c750 – Columba's grave opened to provide access to relics. First shrine chapel built
- 753 – relics taken on circuit around Ireland during enactment of Law of Colum Cille (contents unknown) by Domnall, King of Tara. Relics taken to Ireland again in 757 and 778.
- c795 – Book of Kells completed in Iona scriptorium. First Viking raid.
- 802 – Viking raid, Iona burnt.
- 806 – Viking raid, 68 of the community killed.
- 807 – abbot Cellach and some Iona monks move to found the new abbey at Kells, Co Meath in Ireland, which remained the political head of the Columban monastic federation for next 350 years.
- 814/5 – Dunkeld founded taking power from Iona as centre of the Church. Some of Columba's relics moved there.
- 825 – Viking raid, murder of abbot Blathmac.
- 847 – Dal Riata dynasty takes political control of Pictland under king Cináed mac Alpín (Kenneth MacAlpin). Creating single kingdom of Alba, king of Scots and Picts, built a new church at Dunkeld honouring the relics.
- 878 – further and final division of relics between Kells and Dunkeld, with a shrine going to Ireland. Shift of patronage also to Irish kings, eventually resulting in decline of Iona's importance from which it did not recover until the Benedictine re-founding.
- 986 Christmas night – Viking raid, Danes from Dublin, abbot and 15 monks killed, at White Strand of the monks (Tra' Bàn nam Manach) at north end.
- By 10th cent – Norse living in Scotland & Ireland converting to Christianity
- 10th and 11th centuries - Columban abbots continued to be appointed until the end of the 12th century, although few details are known about the form and development of the community at this time.
- 1098 - Magnus Barelegs, King of Norway, visited Iona while establishing his royal authority over the Western Isles, causes the door

of the shrine chapel to be sealed up allegedly due to dread of the power contained therein.

- 1164 – Somerled, king of the Isles invites an Irish reforming abbot to Iona, but dies the same year at battle of Renfrew. He is buried on Iona and establishes the abbey as the spiritual home of his mighty MacDonald dynasty.
- c1200 – Benedictine Abbey and Augustinian nunnery founded by Ranald, king of the Isles, son of Somerled. Established with extensive lands chiefly in Mull, Colonsay, Canna, and Coll, from which rents usually paid to the monks in kind – oatmeal, cheese and salt beef.
- 1204 - building site attacked and badly damaged by two NI Bishops along with abbots of Derry and Armagh, seeking to retain primacy over Columban *familia*. Newly strained relations between Iona and the Columban church in Ireland. The Columban familia in Ireland and their political allies, the Cenél nEógain, strongly resented that Iona Abbey became Benedictine. The Columban familia in Ireland would not accept the loss of its connections with and influence over Columba's own foundation.
- c1247 – abbot of Iona acknowledged Bishop of Dunkeld as his superior, before ecclesiastical authority formally transferred from Diocese of the Isles.
- 1266 – Treaty of Perth cedes the Western Isles, including Iona, to the realm of the Scottish king, Alexander III. Although under the control of the church in Trondheim until later 15th cent (diocese of Sodor, Norway). Scottish kings were able to influence the appointment of abbots and a special relationship developed with the bishops of Dunkeld.
- c1420 – Donald, Lord of the Isles donated gold and silver to make a new reliquary for the hand of St Columba, presumed to be the principle relic owned by the abbey by this time.
- 1430s -70s – rebuilding takes a number of decades. South side of the church widened along its length, and removal of the rotting floor above the crypt thus gaining impressive height for the east end. New aisle built on south side of choir with an arcade of 3 pointed arches, capitals decorated, and one inscribed with the name of the Irish master mason c 1460. Effigies of Abbot Dominic (d. c 1465) and Abbot John MacKinnon in choir. South choir aisle capitals, angels weighing souls with devil depressing one side of scales.
- 1493 - the end of the Lordship of the Isles came when John Macdonald II forfeited his estates and titles to James IV of Scotland, and thus the end of the Macdonald patronage of the abbey.
- 1499 – became seat of the bishopric of the Isles.
- 16th century - Bishop John Campbell appointed Commendator in 1499 when the abbacy and the bishopric of the isles were brought together by Papal decree. Monastic life continued albeit in a reduced form. The Reformation of 1560 had limited impact; two of the recent bishop-Commendators had been Protestant sympathisers, and by this time the number of monks was small. Some of them were allowed to carry on

living in the secularised abbey buildings. The monastery was much reduced by this time and so the Reformation probably had little impact.

- 1587 – island, monastery and its estates bestowed on Hector Maclean of Duart (held from the Marquis of Argyll).
- 1609 - At a court held on Iona, Highland chiefs put their signature to the nine 'Statutes of Iona', for James VI/I requiring, amongst other measures, that Highland chiefs send their heirs to Lowland Scotland to be taught in English-speaking Protestant schools. The statutes are often considered to be the first in a series of government measures aimed at the break-up of traditional Gaelic culture and tradition.
- 1635 - repairs carried out to the church, under a scheme supported by Charles I, when it was made Cathedral of the Isles for a few years.
- 1690s – Iona and old abbey and nunnery lands in the Hebrides and west coast passed to Campbell Earl of Argyll. Visited by author Martin Martin.
- 1773 – visited by Boswell and Johnson
- 1810 – visited by Walter Scott
- 1829 – On August 7, visited by composer Felix Mendelssohn, whose trip to Staffa and Fingal's Cave helped inspire Hebrides Overture.
- 1833 – visited by Wordsworth, composed four sonnets.
- 1854 – Society of Antiquaries of Scotland urge 8th Duke of Argyll to take steps to preserve the abbey, nunnery and Reilig Odhrain, due to damage caused by digging up the graveslabs, and the poor state of preservation.
- 1859 – 8th Duke has finest slabs in Reilig Odhrain placed in railed enclosures, 'Ridge of the Kings' and 'Ridge of the Chiefs'.
- 1860s – opening of the two hotels
- 1874 – Sir Henry Dryden carrying out measured surveys at the abbey.
- 1874-76 consolidation of ruins by R Rowand Anderson
- 1899 – 8th Duke of Argyll, under pressure to preserve the church, gifts abbey ruins to newly formed Iona Cathedral Trust, so 'that the Cathedral shall be re-roofed and restored'.
- 1902-05 church restoration for Iona Cathedral Trustees by T Ross and J Honeyman – choir, transepts and crossing.
- 1908-10 nave restoration by P MacGregor Chalmers, funded by Woman's Guilds in the Church of Scotland, mobilised by Helen Campbell of Blythswood.
- 1921-26 – repairs by HM Office of Works on behalf of Iona Cathedral Trust, chiefly in the cloister and in St Oran's chapel, where the masonry was consolidated and the floor relaid.
- 1938 - George MacLeod, then a parish minister in Govan, Glasgow, recognised the widening gap between the Church and the real lives of his parishioners. MacLeod founded the Iona Community and using designs by Ian G Lindsay rebuilt the cloister and constructed a new west range. Not without controversy in the wider Church of Scotland and on the island, where the parish minister and the local population had no involvement in the project. Puts unemployed men from Govan

together with trainee ministers to work on rebuilding the abbey, although soon broadened to include others.

- 1938-65 – restoration of the monastic buildings for the Iona Community by I G Lindsay. Despite shortages, some voluntary work carried on through WWII.
- 1952 –the Queen visits Iona with the Duke of Edinburgh, just six months after ascending to the throne.
- 1954/5 – shrine chapel rebuilt
- 1970 – Replica of St John’s Cross cast in concrete
- 1979 – after three centuries of ownership, island sold by the Argyll Estates for death duties. Bought for the nation by the Hugh Fraser Foundation and placed in the care of NTS. Ownership of the abbey retained by Iona Cathedral Trust.
- 1982 – publication of RCAHMS Argyll 4 Iona volume.
- May 1994 - Labour Party leader John Smith was buried in the modern extension to the burial ground of Reilig Odhrain.
- 1990 – Fragments of the original St John’s Cross returned and re-erected.
- 1999 - Iona Abbey into care of HS, with repair and conservation of the church and claustral ranges still housing the Iona Community.
- 2013 – major HS redisplay project and opening of refurbished site museum.