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# The Archaeology of Finlaggan, Islay

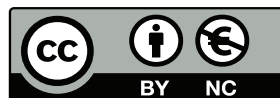
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ISBN: 978-1-908332-36-3 (hardback) • 978-1-908332-35-6 (PDF)

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Caldwell, D H 2025 *The Archaeology of Finlaggan, Islay: Excavations at the centre of the Lordship of the Isles, 1989–1998*. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.  
<https://doi.org/10.9750/978190833256>

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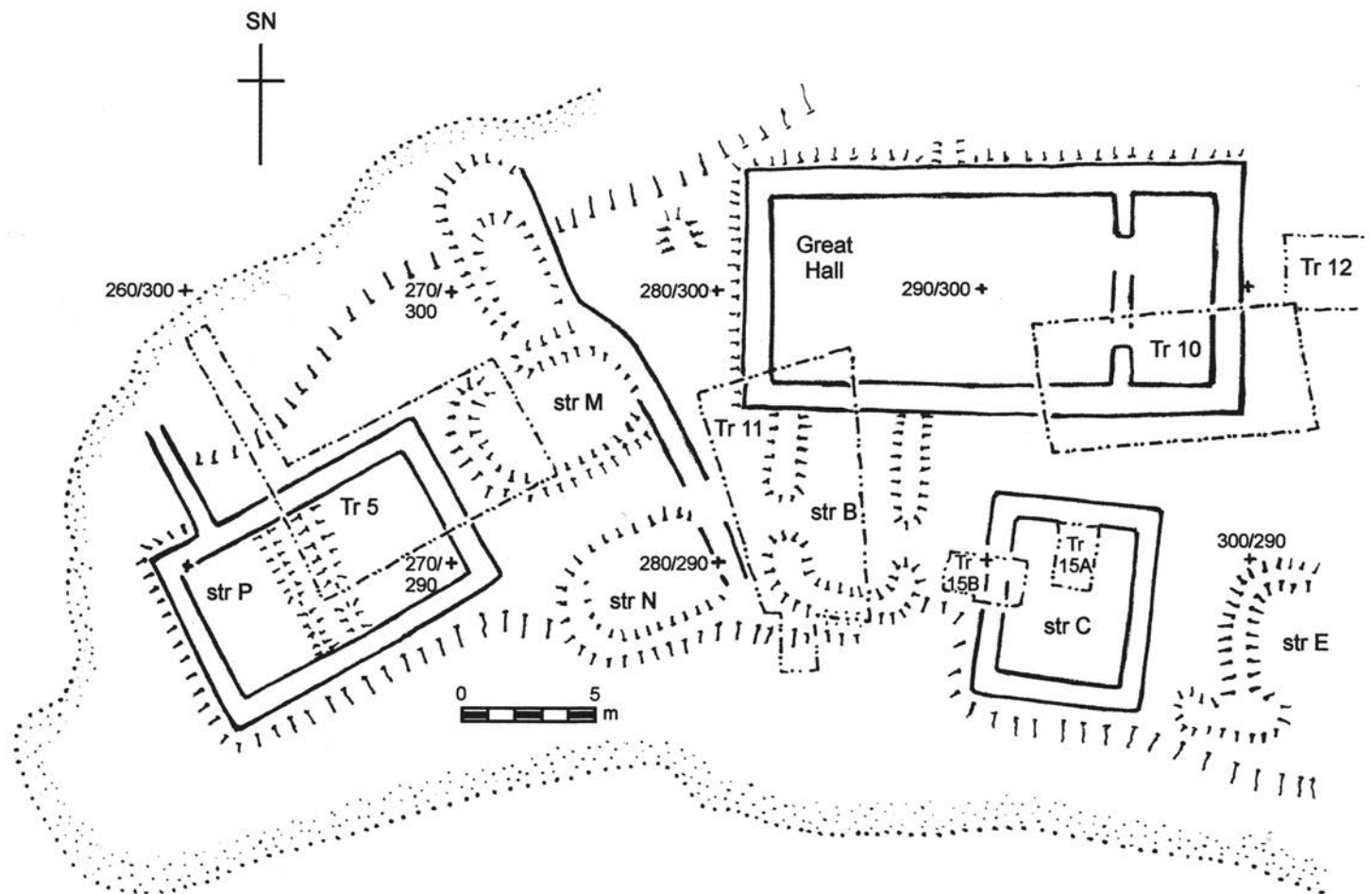


Illustration 11.1  
Location map for trenches 15, 10, 11 and 5



Illustration 11.2  
Building C from north-west in 1993



Illustration 11.3  
Building C from south-west in 1993

## Chapter 11

# EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE GREAT HALL AND ADJACENT BUILDINGS

### Building C, survey of upstanding walls (Illus 6.11, 11.1–9)

Building C is one of the main, or most obvious, artificial features on Eilean Mór today. It was a small rectangular structure, 7.3 by 6.4m, with walls about 0.8m thick. It was positioned to the south of the great hall, from which it was separated by a cobbled road 3m wide, the main artery on Eilean Mór connecting the chapel, the great hall and access to Eilean na Comhairle. It was immediately to the west of buildings J to E, extending along the ridge of the island, separated from building E by an alley labelled D by RCAHMS. Its south wall abutted the shore, about 1m lower than the cobbling to its north. It appeared to be a medieval structure, remodelled for continuing use in post-medieval times. The north and south gables stand almost complete, its side walls less so. The steepness of the gables, with stones set in the copings at right angles to the rake, suggests that it was roofed with thatch. It had a ground-floor chamber and an upper storey contained in the roof space.

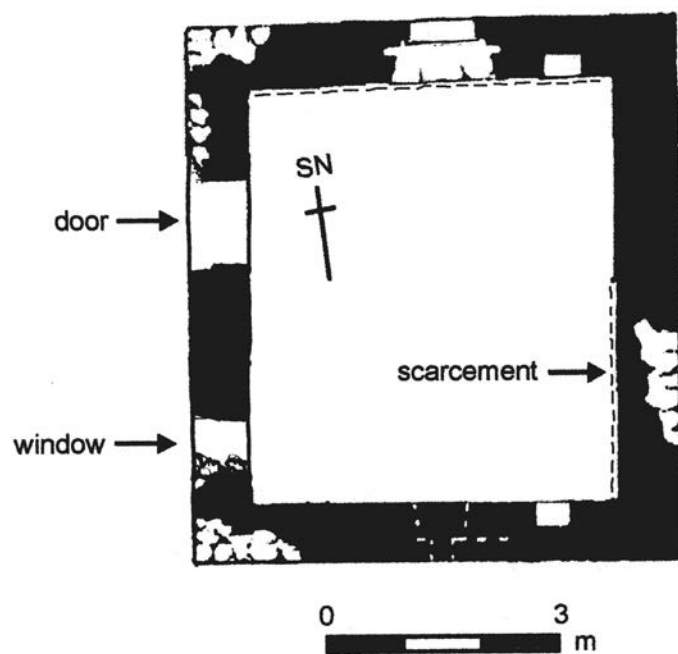


Illustration 11.4  
Building C, plan of ground floor

Conservation of the upstanding walls of building C was undertaken by Mathew White of Conservation Specialists Ltd in 1997 on behalf of the Finlaggan Trust and Historic Scotland, and to some extent this now obscures details of their structure. We made detailed measured drawings of both faces of both gable walls prior to conservation and a study made of the geology of the stones by our geologist, Nigel Ruckley.

The walls are of coursed random rubble in lime mortar and have been coated externally with a lime mortar rendering. It was noted that the mortar is very quartz rich, much more so than the mortar used in the chapel. There is also evidence for mortar with seashells, perhaps representing relatively recent consolidation of the ruin. Most of the rock types are of local origin. In the lower portions of the gables, roughly dressed blocks and boulders of quartzite, dolerite and Port Askaig tillite predominated, with some limestone. There are occasional pieces of sandstone, including Permo-Triassic red sandstone and buff sandstone, possibly both from Kintyre. There is marked use of fillers and packers, including phyllite, but especially type A roof slates. All this suggests that much of the stone for erecting building C came from a previous structure at Finlaggan. There is a narrow ledge or scarcement on the inner face of the north gable, probably corresponding in height to the level of the original earth floor, marking the transition from foundation to upstanding wall. The stonework below it lacks lime mortar. A similar scarcement was noticed in clearance work in 1997 along part of the east wall at the same level.

The upper portions of the gables are almost exclusively composed of blocks of limestone (Illus 11.5). This is interpreted as an indication that they represent a separate phase of construction, a remodelling of an earlier building. This earlier building had a ground-floor chamber with a rectangular window in its north wall, opening on to the paved passageway opposite to the entrance of the great hall. It is set in an embrasure with splayed jambs and segmental relieving arch, and has been fitted with a sliding bar to fix an internal shutter in place (Illus 11.4, 11.6). Adjacent to it is a small aumbry, and there is a similar aumbry in the south wall. It was evident prior to excavation that the entrance had been in the west wall.

The splayed jamb of a window could also be traced in the west wall. In the wall core adjacent to it is a small piece of Permo-Triassic red sandstone. A sample of this was removed for study purposes. Horizontal beam (?) slots, 13cm wide by 10cm high, were found in the gables at the level of the wall heads, extending

N gable exterior

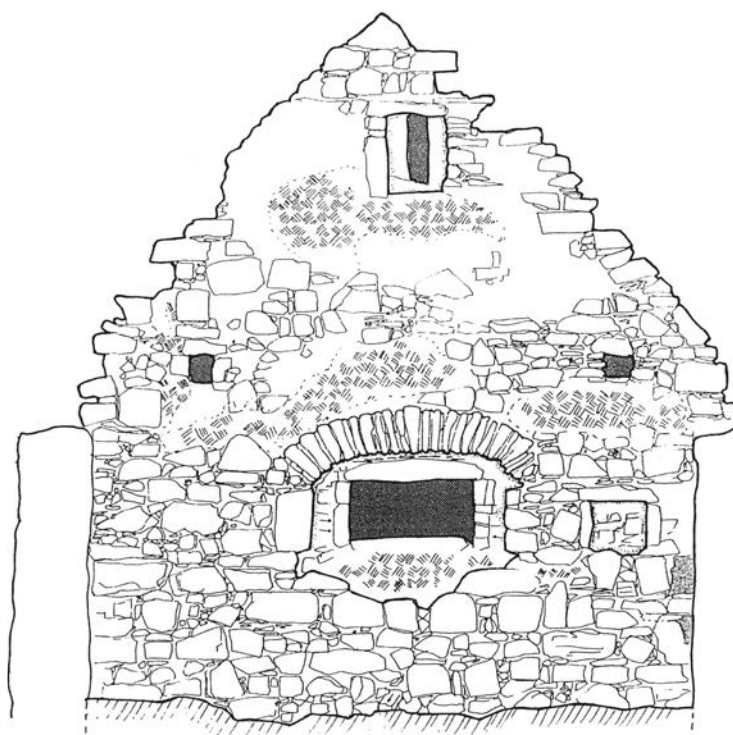


 Limestone	 Dolerite
 Quartzite, Port Askaig tillite	 Sandstone

0 3 m

Illustration 11.5  
Building C, exterior of north gable

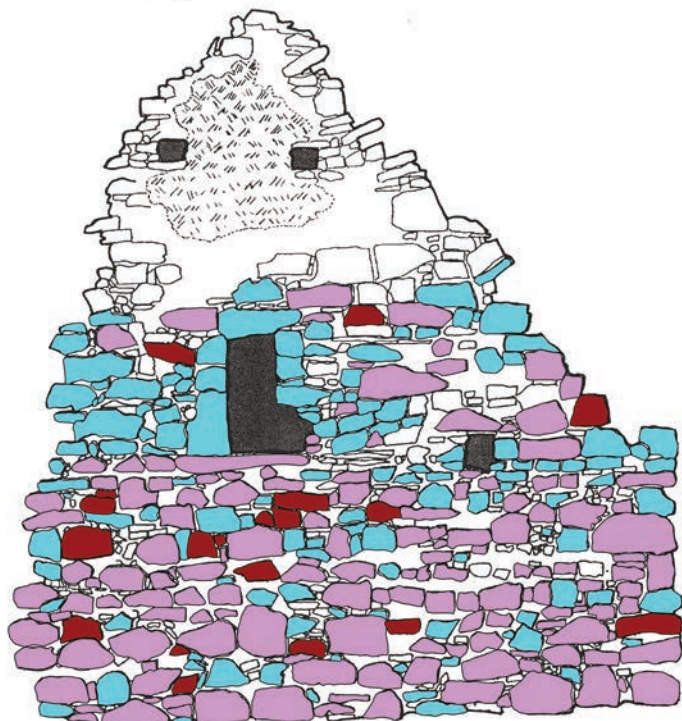
N gable interior



0 3 m

Illustration 11.6  
Building C, interior of north gable

S gable exterior

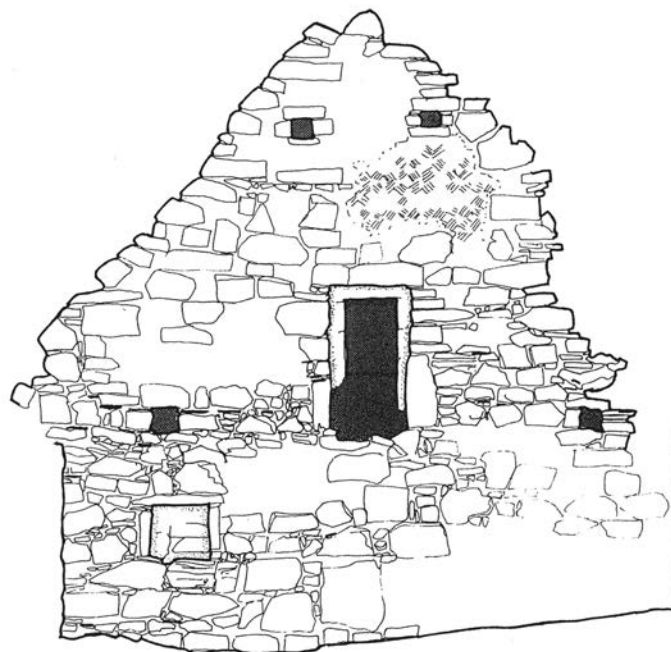


 Limestone	 Dolerite
 Quartzite, Port Askaig tillite	

0 3 m

Illustration 11.7  
Building C, exterior of south gable

S gable interior



0 3 m

Illustration 11.8  
Building C, interior of south gable

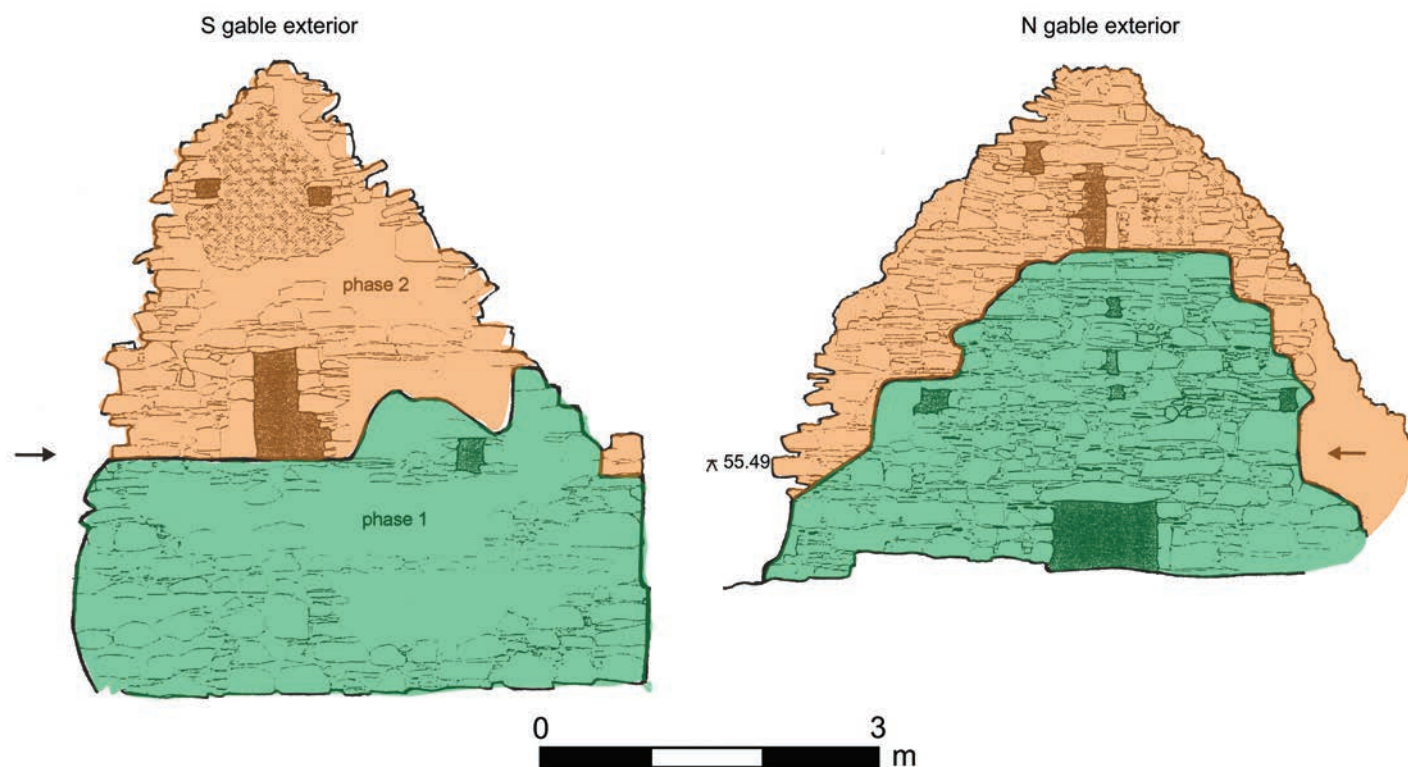


Illustration 11.9  
Building C, gable elevations showing phases 1 and 2. The arrows mark the level of the beam-slots

inwards for an unknown distance. Along with putlog holes in the lower gable walls, these belong to the building's earlier phase. There are also further putlog holes in the upper parts of the gables, two in the south gable and one in the north gable. The putlog holes in one gable did not match up in height with the similar features in the other gable (Illus 11.9). The slots are, however, at the same height.

The upper storey of building C is essentially of the later phase. Both gables have intake courses near their apices but not level with each other. There is no evidence for a stair. A timber floor could have been supported on joists lodged in slots or on corbels in the west and east walls, but there are no traces of these now. There is a tall narrow window in the north gable at first-floor level, about 0.7 by 0.2m. Another, about 1m high and 0.4m wide, is positioned in the south gable, with its sill level with the (missing) floor. It has been fitted with an internal shutter with a sliding draw-bar (Illus 11.4, 11.8).

#### Trench 15, building C (Illus 11.1, 11.10–15, Table 11.1)

Trench 15 was excavated in 1993 at building C. The Finlaggan Trust's intention to have its remains conserved suggested the desirability of limited excavation about the structure. The main aims of this work were to find a floor level within the building and a relevant ground surface outside. It was considered necessary to have the north gable of building C supported by scaffolding while excavation took place, and this to some extent limited our scope for laying out a trench. The consequence was two small

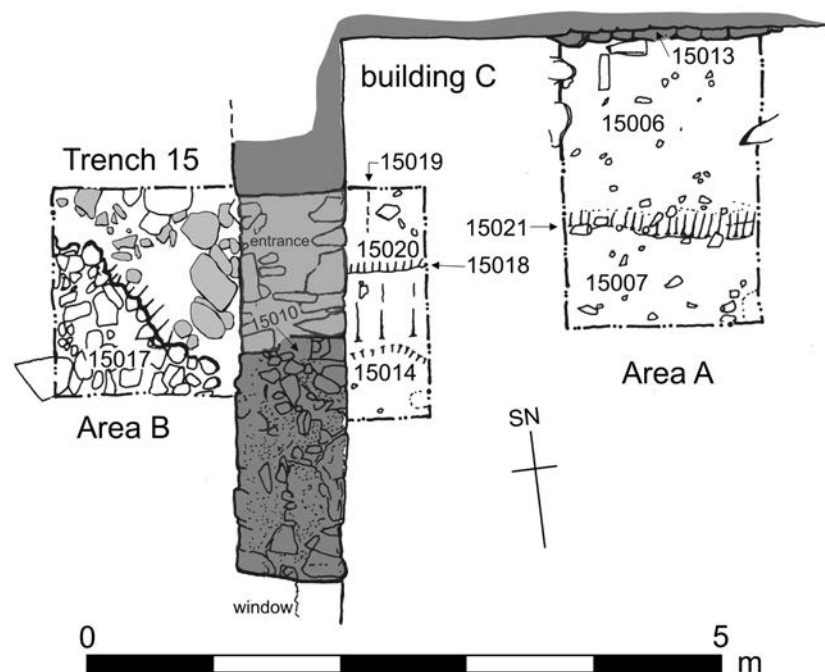


Illustration 11.10  
Trench 15, plan



Illustration 11.11

Trench 15A, showing the surface of 15007 to the left and 15005 to the right

trenches, together counted as trench 15 though they were not physically linked. Area A, 1.5 by 2.2m, was in the interior of building C with its north edge against the north gable, immediately below a window embrasure. It thus sectioned what appeared to be an earlier trench along the interior of the north gable, almost 2m in width, with a maximum depth against the wall of about 50cm below the ground surface within the building. Area B, 1.6 by 3.0m, straddled building C's west wall and took in its doorway. It was anticipated that the interior of the building would be filled with tumble and debris to a depth of about 0.5m and that the apparent trench along the north gable wall would have been dug to the original floor level.

Both excavated areas had a spread of gravelly material [15003/15008] – decomposed lime mortar – underneath a thin topsoil. In area A adjacent to the gable wall it included quarry-dressed stones [15002] which had evidently fallen from the wall, presumably when the building lacked its roof. Underneath this gravelly layer there was only a little trace of an original floor deposit, represented by a skim of crumbly dark grey clay in area

A [15004]. From it came a penny of Edward I minted 1299–1301 (N13). It can be assumed to have been lost prior to the end of the 14th century.

This floor surface lay over a deposit of mixed stony soil and clay containing fragments of animal bone [15007/15014] at least 60cm thick. It was cut by a trench [15021/15018] about 1.5m wide along the inner edge of the gable wall, partially backfilled with mixed soil and clay [15005] similar to 15007. It was this episode, the digging of 15021/15014 and the backfilling of it with some of the material removed, that was reflected in the appearance of a trench on the ground surface. Underlying 15007/15014 and 15005 was natural sandy, silty clay [15006/15020], from the surface of which came an iron tanged arrowhead (F35). The narrow foundation trench [15019] for the west wall of building C was detected in it but not excavated.

The doorway to building C was found to be 1.15m wide. The door-sill itself had been robbed out, but there were dressings of buff sandstone remaining in both jambs. One sandstone block in the south jamb [15010] had its upper surface cut for an iron Y-shaped fixing, partially still in situ (Illus 11.14). This was the remains of a hinge arrangement for supporting a sturdy door. It might reasonably be supposed that the door in question would have been a yett, an iron door made of crossed bars, known to have been favoured as a protection for castles and towers in Scotland (Christison 1883 and 1888). They were normally hung on massive hinges projecting sideways which needed to be securely anchored. The exterior of the entrance of building C appears to have been rebated, presumably to house a wooden door shielding the yett behind. It should be noted, however, that the Y-shaped fixing was positioned back to front, suggesting either secondary use or inexperienced restoration.

Outside the entrance of building C there was an area of cobbling, probably a path leading from the main road running along the south side of the great hall (Illus 11.10, 11.15). Partially covering it was an area of tumbled stonework [15017], possibly tumble from the adjacent structure, house B (see trench 11 below).

Prior to the conservation of the walls in 1997, the rubble accumulated in the interior of building C and against the exterior



Illustration 11.12

Trench 15B, looking south, after removal of the turf



Illustration 11.13

Trench 15B, doorway from inside building C

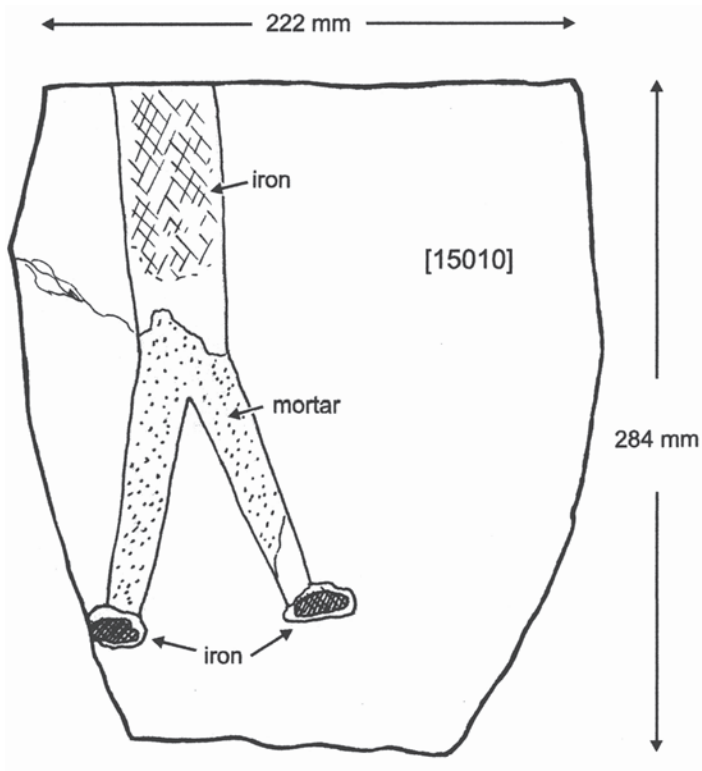


Illustration 11.14  
Trench 15B, jamb stone from doorway with traces of iron mount

base of its walls was removed as part of our archaeological programme. This was managed so that a reasonably level surface was created inside the building about 0.4m above the surface of 15006/15020, with the dip by the north gable caused by trench 15021/15018 being filled in. A narrow ledge or scarcement was noticed along part of the east wall at a level of about 53.50m, corresponding to the scarcement [15013] found in excavating against the north gable.



Illustration 11.15  
Trench 15B, showing cobbled surface outside entrance and tumble 15017

Area/context	Description	Interpretation
A 15002	Rubble	Stones fallen from north gable
A 15003	Gravel spread	Dilapidation
A 15004	Crumbly grey clay	Floor
A 15005	Mixed soil, clay etc	Fill of trench 15021
A 15006	Sandy silty clay	Natural
A 15007	Mixed stony soil, clay	Make-up for floor
B 15008	Gravel spread	Dilapidation
A 15010	Stone block	Jamb stone cut with a Y
A 15013	Masonry	North gable, scarcement
B 15014	Mixed stony soil, clay	Make-up for floor
B 15017	Stones	Tumble
B 15018	Cut	Trench along north gable
B 15019	Cut	Foundation trench
B 15020	Sandy silty clay	Natural
A 15021	Cut	Trench along north gable

Table 11.1  
Trench 15 contexts

The humic soil removed with the tumble was checked with a metal detector (operator Roger McWee), leading to the recovery of N23, a groat of Robert II (1371–90). There were also some fragments of type A roof slates. This was not regarded as evidence for how the building was roofed, since such pieces can be found in the upstanding walls reused as pinnings.

In the course of cleaning the walls, a 1949 florin was recovered from mortar near the window in the west wall. This may have been deposited deliberately to date restoration work, characterised by the use of mortar with seashells.

Interpretation

The coin evidence indicated that building C was originally erected in the 14th century. RCAHMS identified the window in the ground floor of the north gable as a service hatch, but for what is not clear. Building C was separate from the kitchens and there was no evidence of fireplaces or ovens within it for the preparation of food. It might, nevertheless, have served for the storage of wine for consumption in the hall. The sill of this window was only about 50cm above the surface of the adjacent cobbled roadway, but prior to the road being laid down and a remodelling of the great hall (see trench 10 below), the surface between the two buildings would have been at a significantly lower level and this window more convenient as a hatch. The provision for a shutter secured by a stout bar suggested that security was a concern, as did the metal fixing for a door, suggested to have been a yett, in the west wall. The substantial foundations for building C suggest that it was always of more than one storey. The excavations did not throw any further light on the supposed adaption and continuing use of the building in the post-medieval period.



Illustration 11.16

Photograph taken from a drone showing the great hall with buildings C and B (Alan Miller)

#### **Trenches 10 and 11 (Illus 6.13, 11.1, 11.16 – 19)**

Building A, clearly traceable as the ruins of a large rectangular building 18.6 by 8.8m overall, was identified by the Royal Commission as a hall. It was recognised that if that was right, and the building dated to the medieval period, it was the most important structure on the island. Trench 10, 5 by 10m, positioned at the south-east corner of building A, was designed to test this hypothesis. Trench 11 also aimed to examine building A but was more concerned with building B, an apparent extension or wing



Illustration 11.17  
The great hall

running at right angles from the west end of its south wall. Trench 11 was 10m north–south and decreased in width from 6m at the north to 4m at its south end. Both excavations, undertaken in 1992, offered the hope of demonstrating relationships between roads, the hall and other neighbouring structures.

Before excavation it was possible to trace the complete outline of building A. Its interior was remarkably level and there appeared to be little tumbled stonework or other debris up against the walls. They were about 1m thick and stood to a maximum height of 0.7m above the ground surface of the interior. For the most part they were reduced to no more than a course or two in height. There was no sign of an external doorway prior to excavation, but a cross-wall, incorporating two doorways, was evident traversing the building near its east end. It separated a smaller eastern room, about 3 by 7m, from a larger western one, about 12.75 by 7m.

Clearly the bulk of the stonework from the walls of building A had been removed, perhaps for local recycling in the 16th century or else as a result of 19th-century clearance and landscaping.

#### ***Building A.1 and a midden (Illus 11.20–24, 11.33, Tables 11.2, 11.3)***

Any 19th-century tidying-up process was not so severe as to remove all traces of the history of building A after its collapse or demolition. The level interior, under the turf, was covered with spreads of rubble [10012, 10023], some resulting from ongoing degradation of the main structure, some from the collapse of at least one secondary structure (A.1), represented by a curved segment of drystone wall [10015], about 0.8m wide, on a north-west



Illustration 11.18  
House B



Illustration 11.19  
The cross-wall dividing off the west end of Eilean Mór during excavation of trench 11, the wall and entrance of house B in foreground

to south-east alignment. No further excavation was undertaken in this area of trench 10 to establish its relationship with other features. The rubble spreads covered a large midden [10031] packed with shells, predominantly limpets, and butchered animal bones extending from within building A through its entrance over the road to the south. It may have been dumped by the occupants of structure A.1.

The smaller eastern chamber in building A was spread with a deposit of debris including broken roof slates of types A and C [10020]. This spread overlay a mortar wash [10022] caused by weathering of the structure after it was already in ruins. Into this

was dug an oval pit [10055] 1.83 by 1.16 by 2.80m deep, backfilled with midden material [10021] similar to 10031.

It seemed clear that after building A finally fell out of use as a roofed structure it was massively robbed of stonework. This was no gradual process resulting from decay and structural instability after abandonment, but an organised dismantling of the complete structure. In trench 11 slates too broken for reuse were found stacked in the south-west corner [11017] (Illus 11.33). These and other tipped deposits of broken slate, mortar and rubble in trenches 10 and 11 could only have accumulated after the removal of the floor of building A. Under the stack of broken slates in the south-west corner was

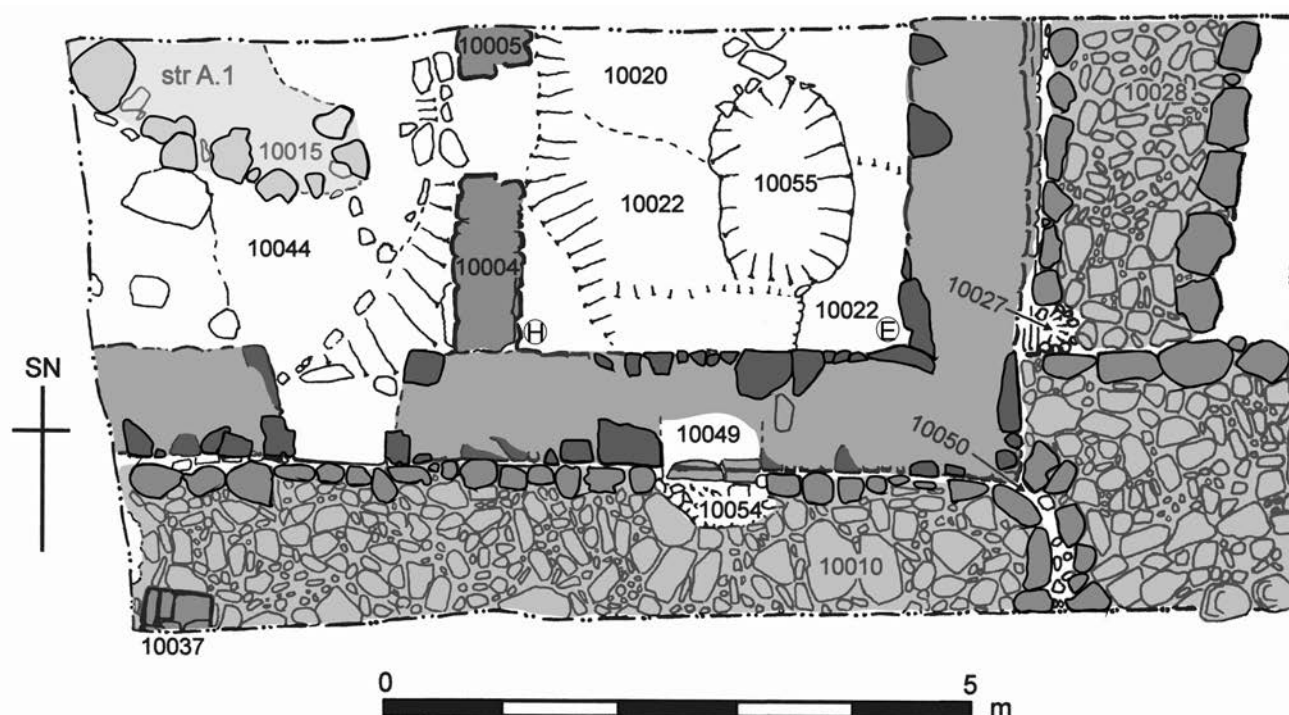


Illustration 11.20  
Trench 10, plan



Illustration 11.21  
Trench 10, looking west, after removal of turf



Illustration 11.22  
Trench 10, showing, top left, the wall of structure A.1, demolition deposits and pit 10055 in the service area

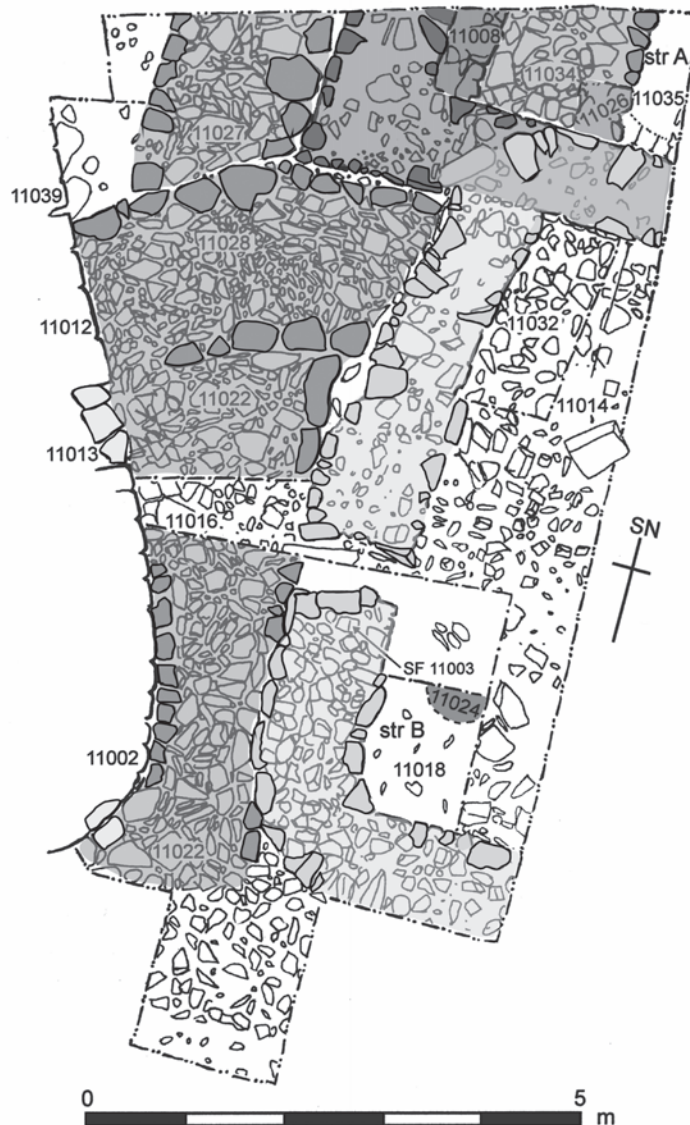


Illustration 11.23  
Trench 11, plan

a compressed layer of burnt material [11020] containing cereal fragments. Since this also extended over the mortar patch 11026 where it is thought a fireplace jamb had been ripped out, the burning must have been contemporary with the demolition of the building.

#### ***Building B (Illus 6.11, 11.18, 11.23, 11.26, 11.27)***

Before excavation began in trench 11, the outline of building B, the east half of which was included in the excavated area, could be clearly traced under the vegetation. Building B measured about 7.6 by 5.5m overall, with opposed entrances in its two long sides. There was no sign of any connecting doorway between it and the hall, although their shared wall stood several courses high. Its south end lay adjacent to the loch and had rounded corners.

Excavation demonstrated that house B's walls were about a metre wide and stood over half a metre, or at least two courses, above the occupation deposits inside. They were bonded with poor-quality mortar containing lime, rough gravel and sand, and



Illustration 11.24  
Trench 11, after the removal of the turf, looking from the cross-wall towards house B. Note the large slab – a lintel? – in the entrance to house B



Illustration 11.25

The sandstone head (SF 11003) from the wall of house B (photo: Raymond Lafferty)

built of roughly dressed blocks of quartzite, limestone and dolerite. Some of the facing stones were naturally rounded boulders of quartzite and Port Askaig tillite, while limestone rubble formed the majority of the wall core. Blocks and boulders averaged about 380 by 470 by 230mm. Some stones had evidently been reused from earlier structures. These included some with a plastered face. Although the plastered sides faced the interior of B, it is not thought this is evidence for the wall finish in B itself. There was also a fragment of red sandstone (R21) carved with a band of nail-head decoration and a corbel in the form of a human head (R32). The latter is in white sandstone and was positioned in the core of the wall immediately to the south of the entrance in the west wall (Illus 11.25). Both are likely to be of 13th-century date. The doorway through the west wall was a simple opening 0.58m wide, its jambs and probable lintel lying in the rubble inside it.

The interior of house B was choked with stones and rubble [11014] which had collapsed in from the walls, and there was more [11016] tipping over the paved passage between house B and structure N. This tumble included pieces of type A and C roof slate in a ratio of about 2:1, but it is not certain that they should be taken as evidence for building B's roof. They may simply represent the recycling of material from building A or further collapse of that structure after building B fell out of use. The occupation of B was represented by a deposit [11018], 180mm thick, of dark brown soil rich in animal bone and shell. It also contained a copper alloy mount (C94), possibly from a casket. Possibly also associated with the occupation of building B, but recovered from topsoil within it, were a large iron hook (F101), perhaps for suspending vessels over a fire, and a hinged iron pot handle (F102). There was a circular patch of burning [11024], 750mm across, near the south end of the building, representing the remains of a hearth. Underneath these deposits was mixed sand and gravel [11025] containing some pieces of animal bone.



Illustration 11.26

Trench 11, the interior of house B excavated to the surface of 11032



Illustration 11.27

Trench 11, the wall of house B riding over the foundation of the great hall, bottom left, and sitting on a layer of mortar debris [11015] over the surface of the medieval road

The north wall of building B was an upstanding piece of the south wall of building A. The immediately adjacent corner of that structure was reduced to its bottom course. The north end of the west wall of building B was laid on top of a deposit of decomposed mortar and small fragments of stone [11011], 210mm deep, against the wall of building A, tailing off southwards. This had accumulated over the surface of the paved road [11028] running along the south side of building A (Illus 11.27). In the north end of B the road had been dug out, leaving some rubble [11032] to act as levelling for the floor. The south end of the west wall of B was laid straight on top of the east kerb of the road [11022] in the passageway between buildings N and B. The road surface was otherwise covered with a thin deposit [11029] of dark brown soil mixed with ash and bone, a continuation of the occupation deposits [11018] inside building B. This, and the way B overlay the roads, suggests that the roads here were not maintained, or had little relevance as route-ways to the occupants of house B.

Building B was clearly only erected after the demolition of building A, but precise dating for this and its period of use was lacking. It may be assumed to belong to the 16th century.

#### ***Building A, the great hall (Illus 11.17, 11.28–32, 11.34)***

The walls of building A were constructed of long low blocks of quartzite and dolerite with lesser quantities of limestone, well dressed to give smooth wall surfaces and held together by lime mortar (Illus 11.21, 11.34). Excavation in trench 10 revealed that the cross-wall in the interior [10004, 10005] was secondary. It was not bonded into the south exterior wall and its foundation trench [10056] cut the underpinning [10047] of the exterior wall (Illus 11.28, 11.29). It was lime mortared, set on a basal course of dolerite blocks, included other blocks of epidiorite and quartzite, and had string courses of type A and type C slates. Its rubble infill was mostly of phyllite and to a lesser extent limestone. The southern of its two doorways was within the area of trench 10. It was rebated for a door opening into the east chamber. The remaining two jamb stones facing the hall were of sandstone, one a fine-grained red sandstone, the opposite one a high-quality dressed sandstone of pale reddish-white colour with prominent parallel bedding. It was cut with a horizontal slot, possibly from previous use rather than relating to the hanging for a door. Just to the east of this doorway a white sandstone voussoir (R31) was recovered from rubble [10020]. It was checked for a door.

The base of the walls of building A had a deliberate batter on the exterior, and the two corners exposed in trenches 10 and 11, at the south-east and south-west, were noticeably stretched into points (Illus 11.35). In the thickness of the south wall near the south-east corner was the outline of a rectangular recess [10049], 0.95m wide, opening to the exterior, interpreted as the remains of a chute from a latrine on an upper floor (Illus 11.30). There was a hollow patch [10038] in the adjacent road surface, possibly created for a receptacle for gathering ordure dropped from above. This patch was excavated, revealing just below the level of the road surface a deposit [10039] of fine silty clay mixed with sand, containing pieces of animal bone and a sherd (SF 10052) of oxidised gritty ware. It is possible that this deposit was the result of percolation of waste from the latrine. At this location

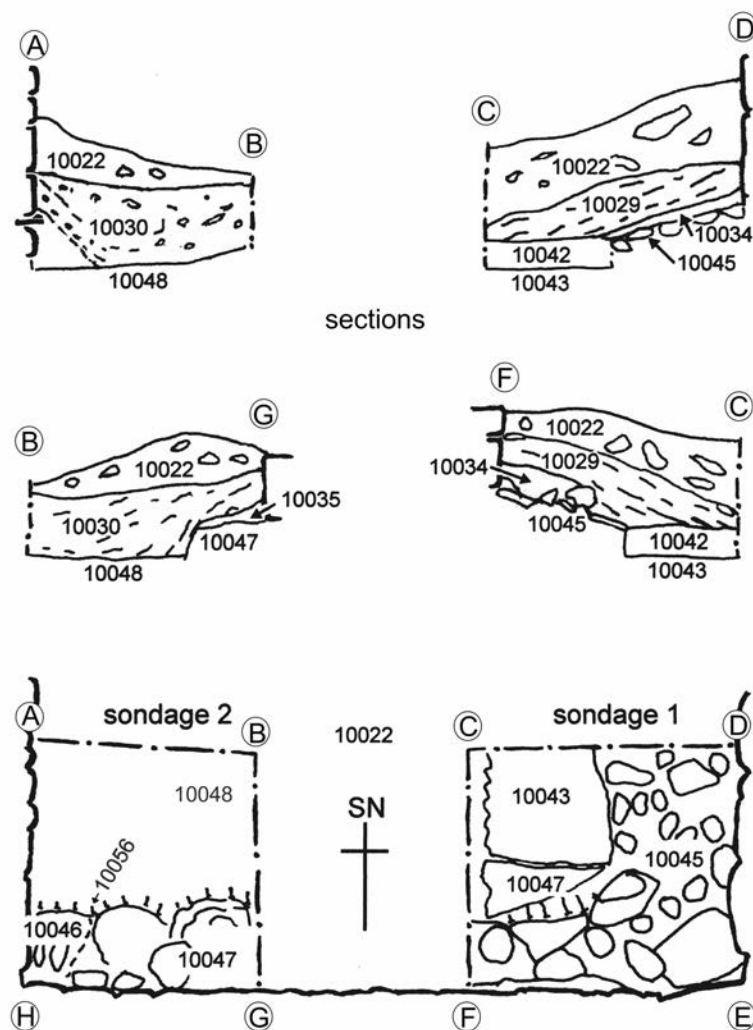


Illustration 11.28

Trench 10, plan and sections of two sondages excavated in the service area of the great hall



Illustration 11.29

Trench 10, the east-facing side of wall 10004 in sondage 2. The finds trays are positioned in the south doorway in 10004



Illustration 11.30

Trench 10, the latrine chute 10049 with the patch in the road in front of it (immediately to the right of the vertical ranging rod) excavated to the surface of 10054; sondages 2 and 1 in background



Illustration 11.31

Trench 10, entrance to the great hall, blocked with midden material [10031]

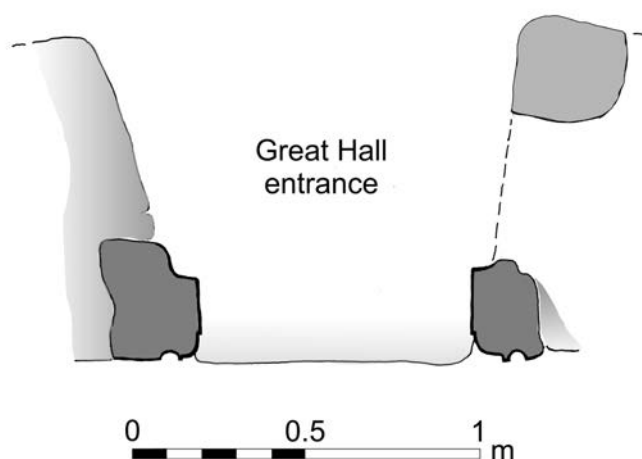


Illustration 11.32

Trench 10, plan of the great hall entrance

the hall wall had no batter. Under 10039 was a level surface [10054] defined by broken type A and B slates. This was not excavated.

Further along the south wall was the entrance to the building, a doorway 0.76m wide, rebated with splayed jambs internally, giving access to the south-east corner of the main chamber (Illus 11.31, 11.32). The doorstep consisted of a single slab of well-polished green epidiorite with occasional cubes of iron pyrites and pea-sized creamy spots. Only two jamb stones survived on each side of the opening, those on the west being a fine-grained greyish-white sandstone carved with a recessed shallow curve, and one or two hollow mouldings. They were both rather weathered but may originally have had nail-head decoration like the fragment of red sandstone found in the wall of building B (R21). The upper of the two jamb stones to the east of the opening was only an approximate match for those opposite it. It was of red sandstone and appears to have served originally as the mullion of a window. It also had a recessed shallow curve and a relatively narrow and deep hollow moulding, identifiable as a glazing groove. It sat on top of a roughly shaped block of dolerite. Both jambs had clearly been inserted into an existing wall. The position of the original doorway is not known.

A small portion of the south-west corner of building A was exposed in trench 11 (Illus 11.33). The west wall had been thickened internally with a masonry skin 0.5m thick [11008] of lime-mortared quartzite and limestone blocks. In front of this was a cobbled surface [11034] 1.45m wide, and on top of its front edge, hard against the south wall, was a square patch of mortar [11026]. All of this was interpreted as evidence for the insertion of a large fireplace, probably stretching the full width of the room. The thickening of the rear wall would have been necessary to support a chimney stack. The cobbled surface acted as a hearth, while the mortar patch marked the position of one of a series of jambs supporting the front of the chimney piece, either carried on a series of arches or lintels (Illus 11.34).

There was no interior floor level to correspond with the level of the hearth and the doorstep, and we are left to conclude that



Illustration 11.33

Trench 11, looking from the interior of the great hall southwards to house B. In foreground note the dump of slates [11017], including a piece of roof ridge (SF 11017), and to the right of that the wall thickening [11008]



Illustration 11.34

Trench 11, the interior south-west corner of the great hall showing the cobbled surface of the fireplace and the mortar patch left by the fireplace jamb

the building (both rooms) had sprung wooden floors. There was also considerable evidence that the building had a slate roof. The slates recovered from the debris which had accumulated in the interior of the building in trench 10 were of type C. There was a dump of slate fragments in the south-west corner [11017] which was about two thirds type A to one third type C. Only one of the type A slates (R40) was complete enough to indicate it had a width of 510mm and two peg-holes. From the debris inside the building in trench 11 (Illus 11.33) was recovered a piece of roof ridge (SF 11017) carved in white sandstone. As will be described further below, many pieces of type A slates were also recovered from trench 12, overlying the surface of the cobbled road along the east wall of the great hall, and in the adjacent topsoil and garden soil. It is most likely that these were also from the roof of this building.

In the south-west corner an internal plastered surface [11037] on the south wall survived in part and extended behind the cobbled hearth of the fireplace as a horizon of debris left by the plasterers. This was interpreted as a clue that the floor level of the building was originally at a lower level.

Two sondages, both approximately 1m square, were dug within building A in trench 10 in order to locate possible floor surfaces and evidence for the building's construction (Illus 11.28, 11.29). Sondage 1 was positioned in the south-east corner and sondage 2 in the corner formed by the south wall and the east face of the internal cross-wall. They were excavated from the mortar wash [10022] caused by weathering of the structure after it was already in ruins. This sealed tipped deposits [10029, 10030] of soil and broken roof slates relating to the collapse or dismantling of the roof. They covered a layer [10034, 10035, 10048] of slightly gravelly, mid-brown silty clay, deposited against and over a plinth of blocks of dolerite and other local stones [10045, 10047] which supported the exterior walls. This was taken to be all that was left of the make-up for an original floor, shovelled out while the building was still in use. The equivalent deposit in trench 11 was labelled 11035 and was wedged stratigraphically over 11037 and under 11034. The surface of 11035 was about 0.2m lower than the adjacent cobbled hearth. A likely explanation for the partial

removal of this deposit was the creation of an air gap for a timber floor. The rubble plinth [10045, 10047] underpinning the exterior walls was put down on top of natural deposits of clay, sand and gravel [10041–43], here at a level of about 53.33m. It was also encountered in trench 12 as 12191.

Dating evidence for building A was limited but indicated different phases of work. The door jambs may have belonged to the 13th century but they have been reset and therefore merely provide a *terminus post quem* for the building as described above. The masonry of the main walls is an example of type I as defined by Caldwell and Ruckley (2005, 100–01) and broadly dated by them in the Lordship of the Isles to the 12th and 13th centuries (Illus 11.34). The cross-wall is of their type 2 construction, which might suggest a date no later than the early 14th century (Caldwell & Ruckley 2005: 111). From the surface of 10048 was recovered a sherd (P78) of Dutch redware, no earlier in date than the 14th century.

### ***The later medieval road system (Illus 11.20, 11.23, 11.35–38)***

An extension [10010] of the paved road from the chapel to the jetty continued along the south front of building A (Illus 11.35), here mainly of pieces of quartzite and limestone, but further west in trench 11 [11028] of quartzite and dolerite with some pieces of worn sandstone. There was a drain [10050] to take rainwater away from the south-east corner of building A. Past its entrance, heading westwards, the end of a mortar-bonded wall [10037], standing only two courses high above the road surface, was encountered jutting from the south section of the trench, apparently forming the side to a gateway across the road at this point. It consisted of blocks of dolerite with a thin course of limestone above (Illus 11.36). A post-hole [10027] in the side of the road adjacent to the exterior of the east wall of building A may mark another gateway, perhaps screening or controlling access to the kitchens.

Road 10010/11028 continued past building A, heading in the direction of Eilean na Comhairle between structures M and N. Here it had a width of 1.8m, with well-formed kerbs on both sides. It was clear that this road was laid after the construction of building A. Other paved roads [10028, 11027] of similar character, largely composed of pieces of quartzite and dolerite with



Illustration 11.35

Trench 10, the roads at the south-east corner of the great hall, looking west



Illustration 11.36  
Trench 10, the jamb of a gate (?) [10037], looking west

fewer pieces of limestone, were found to run along the east and west sides of the hall (Illus 11.20, 11.37, 11.38). The joint between the east and south roads curiously did not correspond with the hall corner. Another paved road with kerbs [11022] ran south from the junction at the south-west corner of building A towards the loch's edge. It had no clearly defined edge here and it is possible that it originally turned south-west and/or north-east along an island edge which has since been eroded away.

In general the surfaces of this road system not obscured by building B were covered with spreads of rubble and mortar debris, mostly from building A. The substantial midden [10031] spilling out the doorway of the ruinous building A accumulated directly on the surface of the road at this point.

## *The cross-wall and building N? (Illus 6.15, 11.19, 11.39)*

To the west of building B and road 11022 was a wall running approximately north-west to south-east, then forming a rounded corner by the shore before continuing in a south-westerly



Illustration 11.37  
Trench 11, the paved road between structure N and house B, looking north



Illustration 11.38  
Trench 11, the paved road between structure N and house B, looking south



Illustration 11.39  
Trench 11, blocked doorway 11013

Context	Description	Interpretation
10004	Lime-mortared wall	Internal wall in hall
10005	Lime-mortared wall	Internal wall in hall
10010	Laid boulders, blocks	Paved road, east/west, to south of hall
10012	Rubble, slate fragments	Demolition, levelling
10013	Small angular rubble	Demolition from hall
10015	Boulders, blocks	Wall of A.1
10020	Rubble, slate fragments	Demolition, levelling
10021	Soil, shells, bones	Midden, fill of 10055
10022	Humic sandy gravel	Mortar wash from demolition
10023	Rubble, slate fragments	Demolition deposit in hall
10027	Cut	Post-hole in road 10028
10028	Laid boulders, blocks	Paved road, north/south, to east of hall
10029	Soil and roof slates	Collapse from hall roof
10030	Soil and roof slates	Collapse from hall roof
10031	Soil, shells, bones	Midden deposit
10034	Silty clay, gravel	Make-up, hall phase 1 floor
10035	Silty clay, gravel	Make-up, hall phase 1 floor
10037	Lime-mortared wall	Side of gate across road 10010
10038	Rubble	Patch in road 10010
10039	Silty clay, sand	Soil build-up beneath road 10010
10041	Green silty clay	Natural
10042	Stiff silty clay	Natural
10043	Gravel, silty sand	Natural
10044	Pitched rubble	Collapse of A.1
10045	Voided, rubble bank	Underpinning for hall walls
10046	Sand, mortar etc	Fill of 10056
10047	Basalt blocks	Underpinning for hall walls
10048	Silty clay, gravel	Make-up, hall phase 1 floor
10049	Mural feature	Latrine chute in south wall of hall
10050	Edge-set stones	Drain/gutter in road 10010
10054	Surface with A and B slates	Removal of hall phase 1 roof
10055	Cut	Pit containing midden 10021
10056	Cut	Foundation trench for 10004

Table 11.2  
Trench 10 contexts

direction and then returning north-westward again, thus forming three sides of building N. It remained standing almost 2m high at one point but was mostly reduced to grass-covered foundations. It was 0.65m thick and was built of roughly cut local stones, well pinned and lime mortared. Its medieval date was confirmed by its relationship to road 11022. Some blocks of rubble looked as if they had been arranged in recent times at the south-east corner to form steps over the ruins. RCAHMS saw this wall as both part of a cross-wall cutting off the tip of the island and as the east wall of a medieval structure, building N. The evidence for N as a building was tenuous. The edge identified in the RCAHMS site plan as defining the structure's north wall seems actually to have been the kerb of a cobbled road, the extension of 11028 heading towards Eilean na Comhairle.

The line of wall 11002 continued north-westward as wall 11012 and wall 11039, forming a barrier across the whole width of the island at this point. Wall 11039, surviving only to a height of two or three grass-covered courses, was the end wall of building M (see trench 5 below). It had a red sandstone quoin at its south-east corner. Wall 11012, between 11002 and 11039, was built across the surface of road 11028 and was clearly of later construction. It was separated from 11002 by a doorway [11013], 0.8m wide, with roughly cut jamb stones, probably created when 11012 was built (Illus 11.39). There was a hollow in road 11022 in front of this entrance, probably the result of wear, and it was blocked by three large boulders, perhaps a recent addition to form a step.

Context	Description	Interpretation
11002	Stone wall	East end of str N
11008	Stonework	Internal thickening of hall wall
11011	Mortar debris	Outwash from hall wall
11012	Stonework	Cross-wall to south-west of hall
11013	Gap	Gate between 11002 & 11012
11014	Soil, stone, mortar	Debris in building B
11016	Soil, stone, mortar	Debris between buildings B and N
11017	Broken roof-slates	Dump in corner of hall
11018	Dark brown soil	Floor in building B
11020	Burnt deposit	In south-west corner of hall
11022	Laid blocks and boulders	Paved road between str B and N
11024	Burnt deposit	Hearth in building B
11025	Sand and gravel	Deposit below floor of B
11026	Mortar patch	Bedding for fireplace jamb
11027	Laid blocks and boulders	Paved road to west of hall
11028	Laid blocks and boulders	Paved east/west road
11029	Soil with ash	Soil horizon over roads
11032	Blocks and boulders	Disturbed remains of 11028
11034	Laid blocks and boulders	Hearth of hall fireplace
11035	Black soil, bone, charcoal	Remains of phase 1 hall floor
11037	Plaster	Wall finish of phase 1 hall
11039	Stonework	East end of str M

Table 11.3  
Trench 11 contexts

## Interpretation (Illus 11.20, 11.23, 11.40)

Work in trenches 10 and 11 confirmed the identity of building A as a large hall of medieval date, extensively remodelled during its active life. Our excavations were too limited to trace whether there might have been any structures or evidence for human activity in this area of Eilean Mór before the hall's erection.

No dating evidence was recovered for the abandonment of the hall as a roofed structure, but this is likely to have been about 1500 when so much else on Eilean Mór changed or came to an end. Much of its structure was recycled, perhaps in a controlled programme of demolition, and its reduced walls may have functioned for some time in the 16th century as an enclosure containing a lesser building (A.1). The accumulation of the large midden deposit of bones and shells [10031] spilling through the old doorway of the hall cannot be directly related to structure A.1. It lay directly on the door-sill and the paving outside, and was buried by debris from the hall walls. It may represent the feeding of a large group, for instance a military force, for some time or on more than one occasion in the 16th or 17th century. Building B, a unicameral structure with opposed doorways and a central hearth, may have been fairly typical in terms of plan and size for a post-medieval domestic dwelling (Illus 11.40). The reduced walls of the great hall may have served as its yard.

## Trench 5 (Illus 11.1, 11.41–43, Table 11.4)

Trench 5 was excavated in 1991 in the hope of discovering whether building P dated to the time of the lords of the Isles and to establish its relationship to building M. The trench as initially laid out was 5 by 10m, with its long axis approximately on a

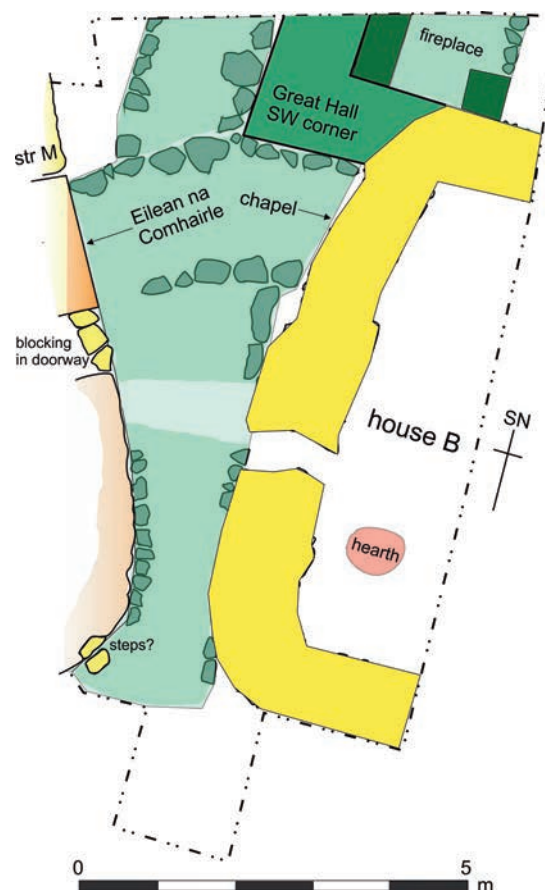


Illustration 11.40  
Trench 11, interpretative plan of main features



Illustration 11.41  
Photograph taken from a drone of building P and adjacent structures (Alan Miller)

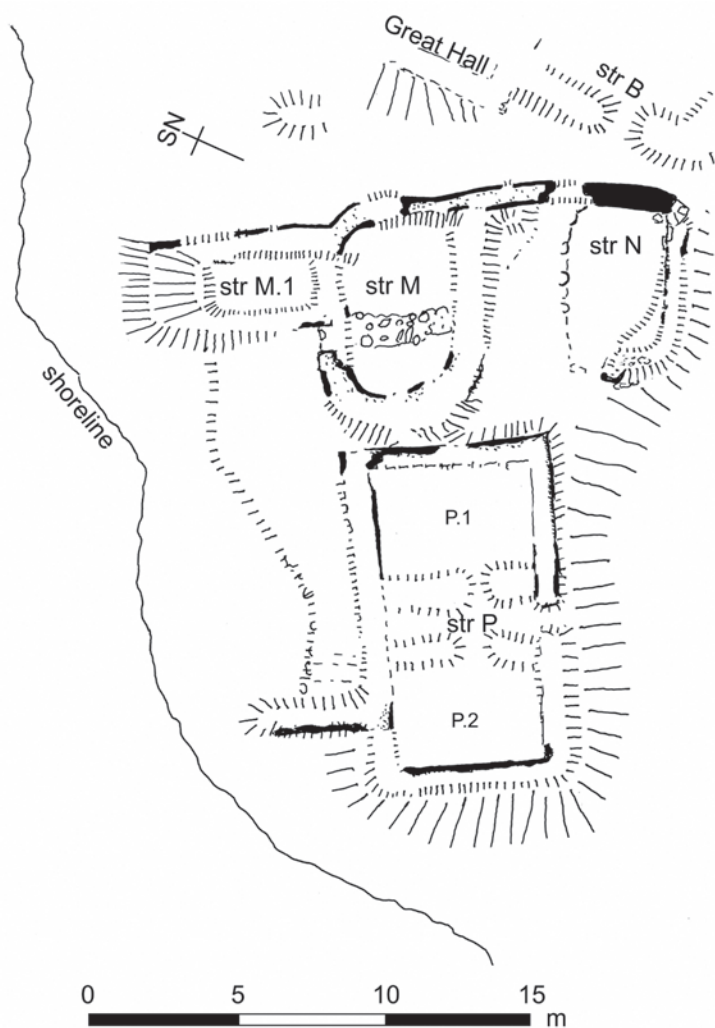


Illustration 11.42  
Plan of building P and related structures, redrawn from the original survey made by RCAHMS



Illustration 11.43  
Building P from south-east



Illustration 11.44  
Trench 5, looking south, after the removal of the turf. Structure M is in the foreground; the ranging rod is in front of the south-west wall of building P

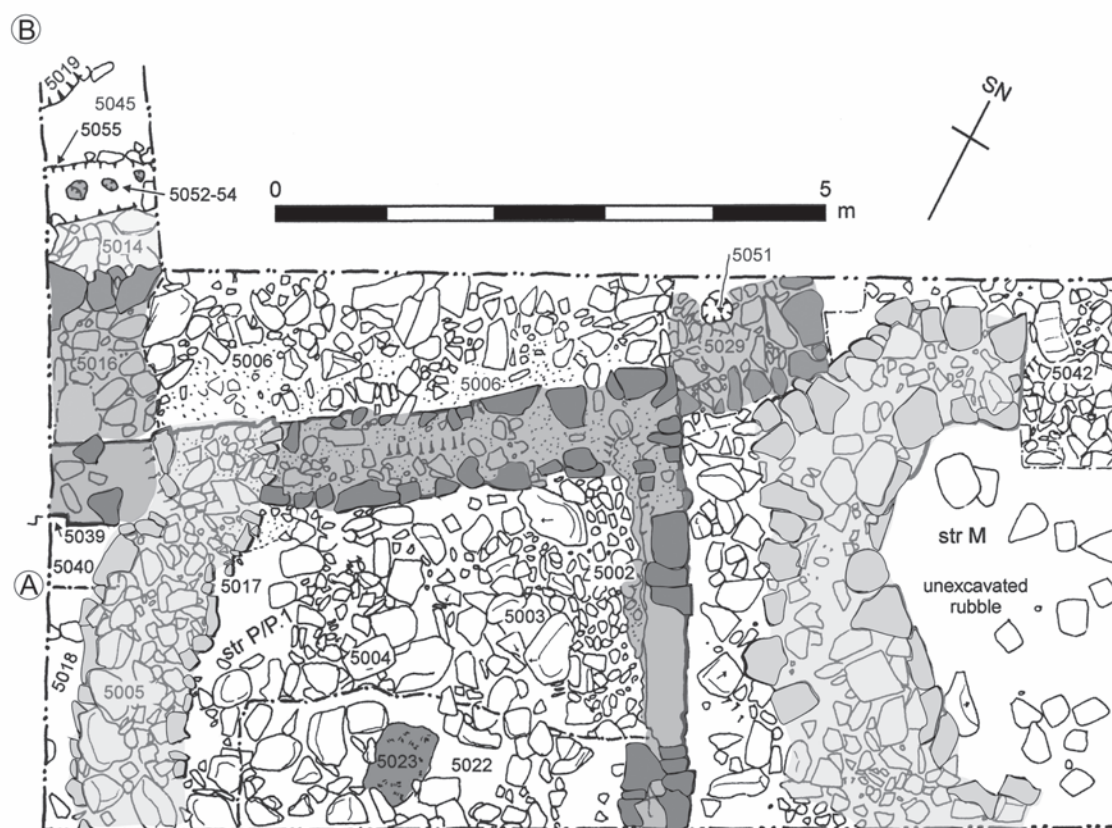


Illustration 11.45  
Trench 5, plan



Illustration 11.46

Trench 5, the wall of structure M overlying the surface of cobbled path 5029. The surface of the tumble [5006] is exposed in front of the wall of building P

south-west to north-east alignment. An extension 1m wide was excavated from its west corner north-westwards to the edge of the loch.

#### ***Buildings M and M.1 (Illus 11.41–46)***

Building M as described and planned by RCAHMS appeared as a rectangular structure up to 9.5m long by 5.5m wide, its north-east end wall forming part of the wall crossing the island at this point. It was noted as having markedly rounded internal corners and a wing or an annexe on its north-west side. This wing, which was not included in any of our excavations, has been labelled by us as structure M.1. The original RCAHMS on-site survey drawing suggested that M.1 was erected over the side wall of structure M and was, therefore, of more recent date (Illus 11.42). On the basis of our own observations we were happy to agree with that provisional conclusion.

The south-west portion of building M was within trench 5 (Illus 11.44–46). It was of drystone construction, its stones massive and rounded, mostly basalt and quartzite, over 400 by 350 by 250mm in size. Part of the entrance through the north-west wall was discovered, blocked by tumble [5042]. Neither it nor the interior of the structure was excavated down to occupation levels. Its south-west end is built close to the lime-mortared wall of building P and over a cobbled path [5029].

#### ***Buildings P, P.1 and P.2 (Illus 8.17, 11.41–48)***

Building P was 11.5 by 6.8m over walls about 0.7m in thickness, still standing up to 1m high. The stones forming them were laid in lime mortar and appeared all to be of local origin, mostly quartzite and Port Askaig tillite, and to a lesser extent igneous, limestone and phyllite. They had been split to create flat wall surfaces, with many of the blocks greater in size than 350 by 250mm. The mortar was made with coarse sand and pea gravel

without shell fragments. RCAHMS supposed that building P comprised two rooms of similar size entered from a central passage with a doorway in the south-east wall. From its position and the quality of its construction the Commission made the not unreasonable suggestion that it (together with its neighbours M and N) was the residential quarters of the lords of the Isles.

Only the north quarter of the building was included in trench 5. The interior of P was choked with debris forming a complex series of dumps (Illus 11.47). The most recent was 5002 against the north-east wall, which had almost entirely lost its face. The dump was dated by fragments of bottle glass and a pen knife to the 19th or 20th century, and appeared to be a backfilled hole dug through earlier tumble [5004]. The latter seemed to be derived not so much from the collapse of P but from a secondary structure (P.1) inserted in its ruins, possibly contemporary with building M. It utilised the ruins of P's walls for three of its sides, and was enclosed on its south-west by a drystone wall [5005], slightly bowed, interpreted by the Commission as part of the original structure of P. Its stones included quartzite and limestone with rare blocks of Port Askaig tillite. In a small sondage adjacent to 5005 it could be seen to be founded on a deposit of clay impregnated with peat ash [5040], the floor of building P (Illus 11.45, 11.48). Inspection of the other cross-wall in P to the south-west of the trench showed it also was of drystone construction and presumably formed one side of another secondary building (P.2) within the south-west half of P. Each was apparently accessed by doorways opposite each other in their adjacent walls.

A sondage 1m wide was excavated through the tumbled deposits within P, but no traces were discovered of occupation levels to go with these secondary structures, probably because they had been removed by the 19th/20th-century excavators. Underneath the tumble was a surface of silty clay [5022], equivalent to 5040, inset in which was a patch of peat ash [5023], about 500 by 600mm (Illus 11.45). It may represent the position of an open hearth or fire, at least in the final stages of the occupation of P.



Illustration 11.47

Trench 5, the interior of building P with the south-west wall of structure P.1 in the foreground

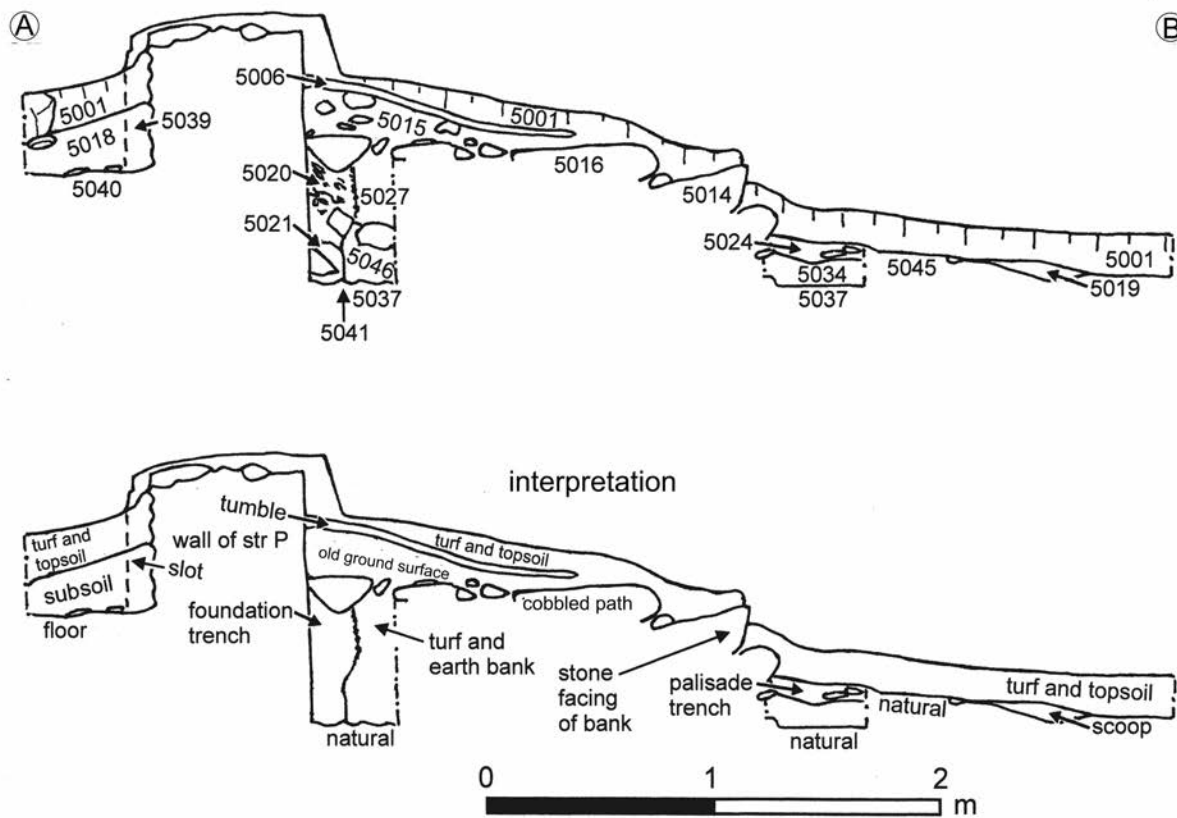


Illustration 11.48

Trench 5, section A-B, north-east facing across the wall of building P, the cobbled path and palisade bank

For such a large structure the walls of building P, only about 0.7m thick, seemed remarkably thin. The north-west and north-east walls as exposed by excavation formed an angle of about 85° rather than 90°. A vertical slot [5039], 260mm wide, midway along the interior face of the north-west wall probably marked the position of an internal dividing wall rather than a cruck for supporting the roof. Roof slates from the floor and tumble within P, and the shore to the north-west, may indicate how the building was roofed. They included two of type C and four of type A. One of the type A slates (SF 5038) was recovered from the surface of the floor of building P [5040].

The north-west wall of P was cut into the back of a bank of an earlier timberwork fortification. The building P foundation trench [5041] was backfilled with builders' debris [5020/5021] and included a sherd (SF 5030) of reduced gritty pottery.

Along the exterior of the north-west wall of P was a cobbled stone path [5029, 5016], 1.5m wide with a well-defined kerb (Illus 11.49). It extended north-eastwards beyond and round the north corner of P. In that it overlay the foundation trench for P's north-west wall it was obviously constructed after it, but it had every appearance of having been designed to be an integral part of P. A post-hole [5051], 330mm in diameter, cut into terrace 5029, was positioned at the north corner of building P, perhaps to inhibit, in some way, access to the narrow space between buildings P and M. Sherds of organic-tempered handmade pot were recovered from a horizon of dark soil [5015] lying over the path and representing its abandonment as a roadway.



Illustration 11.49

Trench 5, the cobbled path [5016] overlying the stone facing [5014] of the palisade bank



Illustration 11.50  
Trench 5, the palisade trench with truncated post-holes

Context	Description	Interpretation
5001	Turf and peaty soil	Turf and topsoil
5002	Rubble, peaty soil	Backfill of hole in tumble
5003	Rubble, peaty soil	Tumble
5004	Rubble, peaty soil	Tumble
5005	Coursed boulders	Wall of P.1
5006	Rubble, mortar wash	Tumble
5014	Rubble	Packing for palisade
5015	Dark soil	Old ground surface
5016	Laid blocks and boulders	Cobbled path
5017	Peaty soil, gravel	Subsoil
5018	Peaty soil, gravel	Subsoil
5019	Sandy silt, bone fragments	Fill of 5050
5020	Silty sand, stone tips	Fill of foundation trench
5021	Mortar wash	Fill of foundation trench
5022	Silty clay, stones	Floor of P
5023	Peat ash	Hearth in P
5024	Small angular rubble	Fill of 5055
5027	Sandy soil, pebbles	Bank of timberwork
5029	Laid blocks and boulders	Cobbled path
5034	Sandy clay, pebbles	Bank of timberwork
5036	Clay and gravel	Debris, natural
5037	Blue-grey clay	Natural
5039	Slot	For cruck
5040	Silty clay, ash	Floor of P
5041	Cut	Foundation trench
5042	Small angular rubble	Tumble
5045	Lochside gravels	Natural
5046	Silty clay, pebbles	Bank of timberwork
5050	Cut	Scoop
5051	Cut	Post-hole
5052	Cut	Palisade post-hole
5053	Cut	Palisade post-hole
5054	Cut	Palisade post-hole
5055	Cut	Palisade trench

Table 11.4  
Trench 5 contexts

A timberwork fortification (Illus 11.48–50)

Cobbled path 5016 was set on top of, and the wall of P was cut into the back of, a bank which represented a timberwork fortification. It had a turf and earth core [5027] and was fronted by stonework [5014] supporting a series of stake-holes (Illus 11.50). The outer face of this stonework has been swept away by wind and water, leaving only the truncated bottoms of three of the stake-holes [5052, 5053, 5054] within the confines of our trench. They were cut into the shore deposits, aligned in a shallow trench about 0.3m apart. Outside this defensive work was a gravelly fore-shore [5045], cut by shallow scoops of unknown date. They hint at the possibility that erosion of this part of the island in the time it was occupied was quite severe.

Interpretation (Illus 11.51)

Trench 5 provided further evidence that the whole of Eilean Mór was enclosed by a timberwork fortification, but excavation was not extensive enough to demonstrate whether there were any other structures at this end of the island prior to the construction of building P.

Although there is no definite dating evidence for building P, it seems significant that the foundations for its north wall were cut into a cobbled road or path, one of those that define the later medieval occupation of Eilean Mór. For that reason we believe it is likely to date to the post-medieval period, perhaps not long after 1500. The evidence from trench 5 suggests that it was a small, high-status building with a slate roof, divided internally into two rooms. It had an open fireplace in the centre of the floor, towards its north-east end. Its entrance door was probably placed centrally in its south-east wall. Building M and the two houses, P.1 and P.2, erected within the ruins of P are all likely to be later in date.

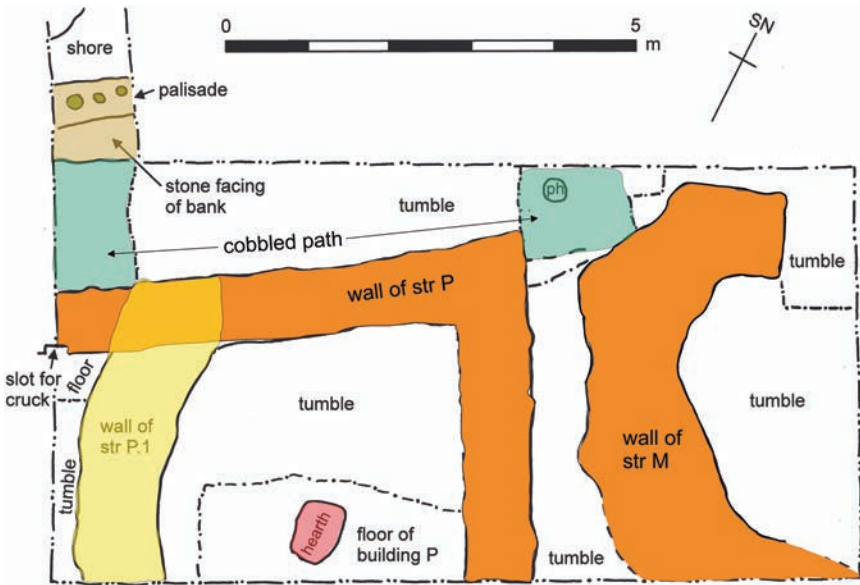


Illustration 11.51  
Trench 5, interpretative plan of main features