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The Archaeology of Finlaggan, Islay

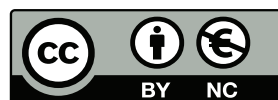
David Caldwell

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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The Archaeology of Finlaggan, Islay



Frontispiece

Loch Finlaggan with the islands of Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle, and the hills of Jura in the background

The Archaeology of Finlaggan, Islay: Excavations at the Centre of the Lordship of the Isles, 1989–1998

By David H Caldwell

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SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND



Edinburgh 2025

Published in 2025 in Great Britain by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
National Museums Scotland
Chambers Street
Edinburgh EH1 1JF
Tel: 0131 247 4115
Email: editor@socantscot.org
Website: www.socantscot.org

The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland is a Registered Scottish Charity No. SC010440.

ISBN 978 1 9083323 6 3

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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The author and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland gratefully acknowledge funding towards the publication of the volume from Historic Environment Scotland, the Hunter Archaeological and Historical Trust, National Museums Scotland, the Marc Fitch Fund and Finlaggan Islay Single Malt Whisky.



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FINLAGGAN
ISLAY SINGLE MALT
SCOTCH WHISKY
DISTILLED, MATURED & BOTTLED IN SCOTLAND
THE VINTAGE MALT WHISKY CO. LTD. GLASGOW
PROUD SPONSORS OF THE FINLAGGAN TRUST

Typeset in Bembo by Biblichor Ltd, Scotland
Cover design by River Design Books, Reston
Printed by Gutenberg Press Ltd, Tarxien, Malta

Dedication

To all past and present members of the Finlaggan Trust and the people of Islay

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SYNOPSIS

This volume reports on a major archaeological project undertaken at Finlaggan in Islay. Two islands, Eilean Mór (the large island) and Eilean na Comhairle (the council island), in Loch Finlaggan were recognised as a historic site, the excavation of which might provide more information on what was happening in the Western Isles, particularly, but not exclusively, in the Middle Ages. The Lordship of the Isles had long been recognised by historians as an important phenomenon, a serious challenger to the Stewart dynasty for control of much of Scotland. The documentation for it was thin and archaeology offered the best way forward to gaining a better understanding. Finlaggan had already been identified as the centre of the Lordship of the Isles, a place where the inauguration ceremonies for the MacDonald Lords of the Isles took place and where the Council of the Isles met.

Parts I and II provide historical background on Finlaggan and an archaeological survey of a wider area around Loch Finlaggan, including an inventory of sites and monuments dating from pre-historic times to the present day. There is considerable evidence for medieval and post-medieval field systems, lead mining and townships deserted in the 19th century. Part III provides detailed information on archaeological research and excavations. At Rudh' a' Chròcuin on the edge of the loch, a medieval or post-medieval turf-walled house was examined, and excavations on top of the nearby mound at Cnoc Seannnda uncovered a Bronze Age kerb cairn and a prehistoric rock-cut chamber lined with slabs. On Eilean Mór a wide range of medieval structures was explored, including fortifications, a great hall, kitchens, dwelling houses and a chapel. The adjacent burial ground dated back at least to the 7th century. On Eilean na Comhairle there was a large masonry tower of about 1200 replaced in later medieval times by houses, one of which can be identified as the council house of the lords of the Isles. There was also evidence for prehistoric activity on the two islands extending back to Mesolithic times. Under the tower

on Eilean na Comhairle were substantial remains of a dun and a crannog. On Eilean Mór post-medieval houses and structures associated with a high-status residence, a timberwork fort and a farming township were also examined.

The assemblage of artefacts, bones and other environmental material is dealt with in Parts I and II of the online catalogue. For the medieval period much of this provides information on the structure and use of different buildings, contacts with the wider world, trade and manufacturing, and the lifestyle and dress of inhabitants and visitors. Of particular importance is waterlogged material from a 13th-century midden at the bottom of the loch adjacent to the tower on Eilean na Comhairle. It represents the consumption of a lordly household.

In Part IV an interpretation and overview is provided of the evidence amassed in the course of the project. Possible origins for Finlaggan as a centre of power and ritual are traced back to pre-historic times and a case made for it being a *thing* (assembly) site in the Viking age. The erection of the tower on Eilean na Comhairle marks a significant development. It is suggested that it was built for Ranald, son of Somerled, King of the Isles.

In the 14th and 15th centuries Finlaggan was developed by King Ranald's MacDonald descendants as a palace and an administrative hub. Finlaggan really was the centre of the Lordship of the Isles and is deserving of being better known and understood, since the lords exercised authority and patronage over considerable swathes of Scotland, and much of what is now recognised as being quintessentially Scottish actually has its origins in the West Highlands and Islands.

Finlaggan appears to have been destroyed or dismantled about 1500, coinciding with the demise of the Lordship of the Isles. Eilean Mór remained a centre of local importance for MacDonald chiefs. Occupation of the two islands only seems to have ceased in the early or mid-17th century.

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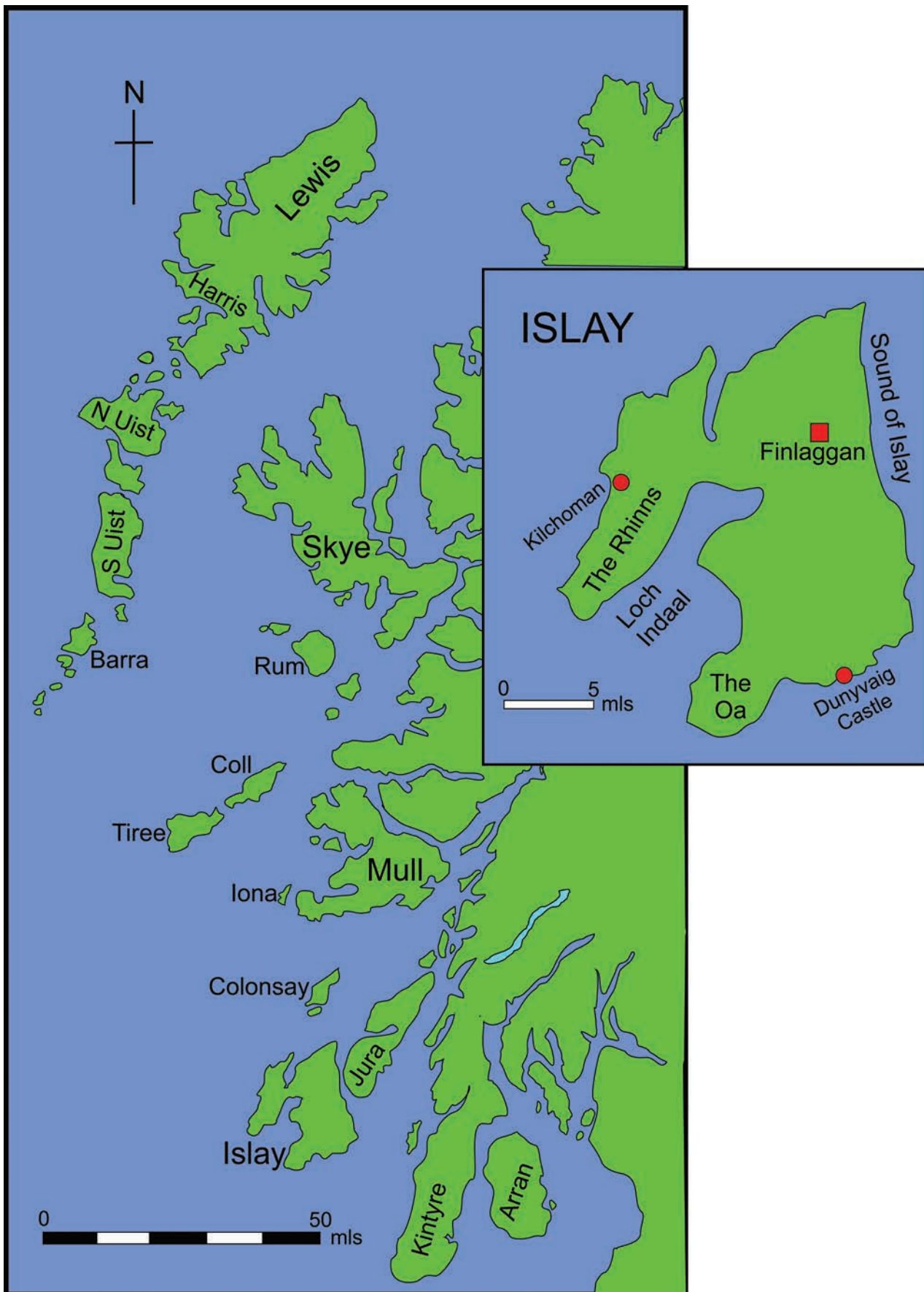


Illustration 0.1
Map of the Western Isles with location of Islay and Finlaggan

INTRODUCTION

In 1988 the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland expressed a desire that the Museums should undertake an archaeological research excavation in Scotland. The Finlaggan Archaeological Project was the result. The initial reason for choosing Finlaggan was that it was an important medieval centre, the study of which might lead to a greater understanding of a region of Scotland, little studied and understood (Illus 0.1). The Museums contained important material from the medieval West Highlands and such a project might help to provide more information on them, and more objects for display.

Two islands in Loch Finlaggan were identified as the historic site and focus of the research project. Both islands, Eilean Mór (Gaelic, ‘the large island’) and Eilean na Comhairle (Gaelic, ‘the council island’), were scheduled ancient monuments, and it was therefore also crucial to convince Historic Scotland (the predecessor of Historic Environment Scotland) of the merits of the project and receive the necessary permission to dig. Excavation commenced in 1990 and remained almost totally confined to the two islands, but we soon realised the desirability of setting this work in a wider context. Our fully developed strategic plan for the project had the following five objectives.

First, we desired a greater understanding of what was happening in the Western Isles, particularly, but not exclusively, in the Middle Ages. The Lordship of the Isles had long been recognised by historians as an important phenomenon, a serious challenger to the Stewart dynasty for control of much of Scotland. The documentation for it was exceedingly thin, and archaeology offered the best way forward to gaining a better understanding. It seemed clear to us when we started the project that Finlaggan was the type of site which would have good archaeological deposits of the medieval period, and this has been amply borne out by our work. Other excavations on medieval sites in the West Highlands had been so few and far between that we did not consider we ran any risk of needlessly duplicating other researchers’ results.

Finlaggan had already been identified as the centre of the Lordship of the Isles by several historians. In particular, a new edition in 1961 by R W Munro of Donald Monro’s 1549 description of the Western Isles brought renewed attention to the early traditions of inauguration ceremonies for the lords of the Isles at Finlaggan (not actually mentioned in the dean’s account), and the meetings there of the Council of the Isles. It was obviously a site of national importance, and a second objective of our work was to throw some light on Finlaggan as a centre. We were encouraged by the recent formation of the Finlaggan Trust, with its committee and much of its membership based on Islay. We

believed – rightly – that the support and collaboration of such a body would help in the development of the project.

The Trust recognised that there was increasing interest in Finlaggan and was intent on encouraging this by making visits to the site easy, enjoyable and informative, while at the same time managing access so that wear and tear to the place was kept to an absolute minimum, the integrity of the remains was not compromised or violated, and the process of decay to the upstanding remains was arrested. Archaeology is a necessary part of such schemes, whether as part of the conservation programme on upstanding structures or as a means of explaining the significance of different features on the site. It was, therefore, an important aspect of our project that we should cooperate with the Trust.

Our third objective was to explain why Finlaggan was a site of such strategic importance in the Lordship of the Isles. We postulated as possible reasons for this the relative quality of the land for agriculture and/or stock-rearing, the exploitation of deposits of lead and silver, and ceremonial traditions extending backwards to earlier times. We further proposed that Finlaggan might have acted as a centre for the redistribution of the surplus food and other commodities produced in the lordship, a place where people gathered, perhaps at set times or seasons, to do business, where law was dispensed and administrative arrangements were made. The programmes of environmental work, fieldwork and excavation initiated by us were designed to evaluate these ideas.

Fourth, our commitment to Finlaggan gave us the opportunity to make a wide-ranging archaeological study of a compact area of land, defined as the area around Loch Finlaggan, in geographical terms taking in the catchment area for the loch, and including the old farms of Portanellan, Mulreesh, Robolls, Kepollsmore and Sean-ghairt as shown on the map (Smith 1895: pl V) derived from the mid-18th-century survey by Stephen MacDougall. While appreciating Finlaggan’s unique importance as a centre in the medieval period, it was also our objective to place this in the wider context of human occupation of this part of Islay from the first arrival of people on the island to the present day. We anticipated that our environmental programme in particular would demonstrate human impact on and use of the land at Finlaggan in prehistoric times. We were impressed by the survival of medieval and more recent buildings, field systems and mining remains in the vicinity of Finlaggan. Documentary evidence for the post-medieval period suggested that Finlaggan had no special status after the collapse of the lordship, and we hoped that a fieldwork survey would not only provide a context for the later history of Finlaggan but be a

suitable paradigm for more recent developments elsewhere in the West Highlands.

Fifth, because Finlaggan was perceived all along as a research project, we wanted to encourage other research initiatives, using Finlaggan material.

The detailed examination of our Finlaggan study area has been set in context with essays on the history of Islay and the West Highlands and Islands in the medieval period. The writer has considerable sympathy with the view of the 17th-century MacDonald historian who complained that previous Scottish historians were ‘partial pickers of Scottish chronology and history [and] never spoke a favourable word of the Highlanders, much less of the Islanders and MacDonalds, whose great power and fortune the rest of the nobility envied’ (MacPhail 1914: 10). A full reassessment of the contribution of Highland culture to the story of Scotland is still a worthy aim and it is hoped that this volume will contribute to that in a positive way.

We do not pretend that we have totally succeeded in dealing with our objectives or that there are not other matters that we could or should have given attention to. I hope, nevertheless, that it will not appear presumptuous to suggest that renewed interest in the historic site of Finlaggan and improved access to it are the most important achievements of the project. Of course, it is primarily the Finlaggan Trust which has been responsible for this, but I believe we have in no small measure helped. Before the excavations commenced Finlaggan was little visited, even by the islanders, and reaching the site involved a pot-holed track barred by three gates, a muddy field and a boat-crossing.

Now the Finlaggan Trust has an excellent visitor centre with ample parking space. The track is asphalted, and the main island can be reached by timber walkways and a bridge. The Trust has a programme in place for the conservation and display of the ruins, and already much has been done. There are discreet display panels which do not detract from the overall appearance of the place. It is also apparent that not only many islanders have now visited and enjoyed Finlaggan but it is also a must for most visitors to Islay.

Acknowledgements

Finlaggan has occupied much of my time from 1989 to the present day, and a considerable amount of my thoughts. I believe the person who first suggested Finlaggan to me as a worthy subject of a research excavation was Jonathan Triscott, and for that I am very grateful. At the time, the summer of 1988, we were both working on an excavation at Auldhill in Ayrshire and I had never even visited Islay. A reconnaissance trip later that year gave me my first view of the site. It would be nice to say that I instantly fell in love with the place, but as with Isabel Grant (1935: 403) ‘one’s first impression is most disappointing – only a few insignificant fangs of masonry . . . in an uninteresting loch, set in a hollow in green, featureless moorland’. I soon, however, came to appreciate the true beauty of the place. I have experienced it at all times of the year in every conceivable weather. I believe the place has a certain magic about it!

My first visit to Islay also gave me the opportunity of introducing myself to the newly formed committee of the Finlaggan Trust, and I have had a close involvement with the Trust ever since, as a committee member and trustee. Without the Trust, our

task would have been much harder and less pleasant, and we would have had difficulty in understanding and enjoying Islay. Happily, the chairman of the Trust for most of the time of the dig was Donald Bell, also the tenant farmer of Finlaggan. From the very beginning Donald has made sure that we take the interests of Islay into account, and only do what can be considered best for Finlaggan. He has been instrumental in the National Museums developing a programme of cooperation with the Trust, particularly for displaying the excavation finds on the island. He is also a good friend who went out of his way to help us in our task.

We are grateful to many other people on Islay for their help and kindness, not least the landowners, Islay Estates, and their factors, and also the late Bruno Schroder of Dunlossit Estate. We were helped out with advice, equipment and services by several local organisations and businesses, including the Museum of Islay Life and Islay and Jura Girl Guides (for the hire of a marquee and toilets); accepted many offers of help on the dig; and were welcomed into many homes and establishments, including the Ballygrant Inn and Harbour Bar.

The two islands, Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle, are a scheduled monument. We are grateful to Historic Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland) for supporting our applications to dig on them and for facilitating our work.

We sought cooperation with other bodies, including the Department of Archaeology in the University of Edinburgh, which provided much of our student workforce. The student Archaeology Society accepted the challenge of surveying the deserted settlement at Sean-ghairt, and Dr Geraint Coles was responsible for setting up a Science and Engineering Research Council grant which enabled Michael Cressey to do environmental archaeological research for the project in the form of a PhD.

Our efforts to get to grips with the visible remains at Finlaggan would have been rather faltering if it had not been for the plan and description of the site published by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS 1984: no. 404). The more work we have done at Finlaggan, the more we have come to appreciate their skill and accuracy. In 1993 the Commission generously responded to our request to map the field systems around Loch Finlaggan. If it had not been for this we would have found it very difficult to gain a clear understanding of the context of the historic site, and we would not have been in a position to create the full project reported on in this volume. We are also grateful to Mathew White of Conservation Specialists Ltd, who conserved the upstanding walls on Eilean Mór in 1997, for advice and information on his work.

In 1994 we persuaded Channel 4’s Time Team to make Finlaggan the subject of their first television programme from Scotland. Apart from being good fun, and providing good publicity, it allowed us access to equipment and expertise that would otherwise have been lacking. The Time Team brought in the underwater archaeologist Dr Nicholas Dixon, who demonstrated that there were extensive midden deposits in the loch adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle.

The material got from sampling the underwater deposits has proved to be of great significance. We did not opt for a conventional approach of using specialist archaeologists equipped with sub-aqua gear. Instead we decided to work ‘dry’ from within a

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coffer dam. We are extremely grateful to Major S Smith RE SO2 Engineers Scotland at Army HQ, Craigiehall, for responding to our request for help and for arranging for the Edinburgh University Officers' Training Corps, ably led by Paul Andrew, to design and build the dam for us. Some of the team, led by Wayne Crossley, also surveyed several of the buildings at Mulreesh, and Finlaggan so worked its charms on our army colleagues that they built a splendid bridge to provide access to Eilean Mór, and undertook other work on behalf of the Finlaggan Trust. We were all extremely impressed by their dedication and enthusiasm.

Most of the finance for the project has been provided by the National Museums of Scotland, but welcome assistance was also received from others. Miller Construction of Edinburgh provided the hut which acted as our equipment store and office throughout the project. Generous grants of money were given by the Russell Trust, the Hunter Trust, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Mid-Argyll Natural History & Antiquarian Society, the Schroder Charitable Trust, Morrison Bowmore Distillers Ltd, the Clan Donald Lands Trust, the Glencoe Foundation and Historic Environment Scotland.

Last, but not least, I would like to record my appreciation of the efforts and dedication of all the staff, specialists and volunteers who have worked on the project (Illus 0.2). At times there were more than 30 people working at the site, in several different trenches or operations. It is only possible to direct such a project adequately if the director has complete confidence in the ability of his staff. This was never in doubt. A good outcome is also heavily dependent on discussing – or arguing – every interpretation as it is advanced and having a good recording system. We all tried our best never to settle for the likely or approved interpretation

until we were sure we had dismissed every other possibility, and I believe we have a recording system that supports our conclusions or will allow others to review them.

A key team member was Gordon Ewart, Deputy Director, with whom I have worked since 1980. Gordon was closely involved in conceiving and planning the project and I was able to rely on his experience and judgement for much of the actual digging. Most of the staff had in fact already worked on other projects with either Gordon or me.

For help and companionship with studying and surveying the sites around Loch Finlaggan and elsewhere on Islay I am particularly indebted to Nigel Ruckley and Roger McWee.

Table 0.1 lists those who took part in the field in the years from 1989 to 1997.

The whole process of 'post-excavation' to achieve this publication has also occasioned debts of gratitude to several other friends, colleagues and specialists. The written contributions of many of them are identified in this volume, and to them can be added many members of staff of the National Museums of Scotland who have conserved and researched finds and samples. I am particularly grateful to Jackie Moran and Alice Blackwell for helping me with a lot of my work and facilitating access to museum facilities after my retirement. Thanks are also due to Dr Jim Tate, Dr Anita Quye and Dr Kathy Eremine for their analytical work on the finds. Trevor Cowie, Dr Alison Sheridan, Fraser Hunter and the late Alan Saville advised on prehistoric finds; Theo Skinner, on the woodwork; and Nigel Ruckley and Simon Howard, on geological matters. Many of the illustrations of small finds were drawn by Marion O'Neil.

Other colleagues and friends provided much help and advice, including Geoffrey Stell and Tom McNeill on architecture; John



Illustration 0.2
The Finlaggan excavation HQ

FINLAGGAN

Raven, Rachel Barrowman, Colin Breen, Stephen Carter and Clare Ellis on archaeology; Tam Ward and Alan Calder in processing finds as part of the post-excavation study; Alan Macniven on Viking Islay and its place-names; and Alan Miller and his colleagues at the University of St Andrews on visual reconstructions of Finlaggan. Thanks are also due to Alan Miller, Robert Hay, John Gater, Raymond Lafferty and the late Mick Ashton for permission to use and reproduce illustrative material.

The other contributors to this volume wish to make their own acknowledgements as follows:

Val Dean – George Haggarty and Sarah Jennings for assistance in identifying sherds of imported pottery.

Jo Dawson – Catriona Gibson for her initial study of some of the handmade pottery, Ann MacSween for advice on pottery and Tim Holden for identification of organics in handmade pottery.

Mark Hall – Prof Thomas Clancy for rescuing him from some Celtic pitfalls and providing some useful references on Irish material.

Judy Holmes – Douglas McKean at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Leonie Paterson, Tracy Collins and Peter Spencer; also Carol and Malcolm Ogilvie for collecting and identifying the plant species presently growing at Finlaggan.

Authorship

This volume has been edited by David Caldwell. Except where otherwise stated, the text is also by David Caldwell, having taken the advice of others directly involved in the project. The photographs of Finlaggan, unless otherwise stated, including those of the excavations, are also all by David Caldwell. The plans, drawings and maps in their published form are also the work of David Caldwell. He would like to acknowledge here the skill and professionalism of the team members, especially David Connolly and Gordon Ewart, who did much of the on-site planning on which these are based. The pottery drawings are the work of Val Dean, and many of the small find illustrations are by Marion O'Neil. Her most important contributions are indicated in the captions in the Catalogue.

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Name	Seasons	Position	Notes
Archer, Harriet	1997	Volunteer	
Askey, Joanna	1994	Volunteer	
Atherton, Chrissie	1992	Volunteer	
Baker, Fiona	1992–94	Supervisor	Trs 7, 14, 17, 18
Beyer, Kathryn	1992	Volunteer	
Boardman, Sheila	1993–94	Environmentalist	
Bonner, Kate	1993–94	Volunteer	
Bornholdt, Katherine	1992–93	Volunteer	
Brind, Anna	1997	Volunteer	
Bryce, Tom	1990–91	Conservator	NMS staff
Brydone, Hamish	1997	Volunteer	
Burgess, Chris	1992–94	Surveyor	
Burke, Andrew	1994	Volunteer	
Burnett, John	1990	Computer manager	NMS staff
Caldwell, David	1989–97	Director	NMS staff
Callander, Sarah	1997	Volunteer	
Cameron, John	1992	Volunteer	
Chesher, John	1990	Geologist/diver	BGS staff
Clark, Jane	1993	Conservator	NMS staff
Cloughley, Cora	1997	Volunteer	
Collins, Guy	1993	Volunteer	
Connolly, David	1990–94	Draughtsman	
Cressey, Mike	1991–97	Environmentalist	University of Edinburgh
Dadds, Jo	1991	Volunteer	
Davis, Mary	1993–94	Conservator	NMS staff
De Smith, Melanie	1994, 1997	Volunteer	
Dean, Val	1991, 1992–97	Supervisor/volunteer	Tr 21
Dunbar, Alison	1994	Volunteer	
Dundas, Alistair	1997	Volunteer	
Esquivias, Chantal	1993	Volunteer	
Ewart, Gordon	1989–94	Deputy director	Trs 3, 6, 7, 18
Falconer, Jim	1992	Site manager	
Fox, Lindsay	1991–92	Volunteer	
Gibson, Catriona CCCatrionaCatriona	1993	Volunteer	
Goldsmith, Jenny	1994	Volunteer	
Haigh, Richard	1997	Volunteer	
Hall, Gordon	1997	Volunteer	
Halley, Aileen	1992–93	Volunteer	

Table 0.1
Staff and volunteers

FINLAGGAN

Name	Seasons	Position	Notes
Harbison, Jeff	1997	Volunteer	
Hawbury, Lucy	1997	Volunteer	
Henderson, Margaret	1992–93	Volunteer	
Herd, David	1992–94	Volunteer	NMS staff
Hill, Jeremy	1994	Volunteer	
Hogg, David	1992–93	Conservator	NMS staff
Hood, Frances	1991–97	Volunteer	
Hutchins, Laura	1997	Volunteer	
Jackson, Adam	1993	Volunteer	
Jenkins, Steve	1997	Volunteer	
Johnston, Dave	1997	Volunteer	
Kane, Joe	1994	Volunteer	
Kelly, Fearghal	1997	Volunteer	
Kerr, Grant	1997	Volunteer	
Kerrigan, Ann	1993–94, 1997	Volunteer	
Laura	1989		
Lee, Jim	1994	Volunteer	
Levack, Hester	1994	Volunteer	
Levy, Andy	1993	Volunteer	
Lutzker, Mark	1992–94	Volunteer	
MacDonald, Isabel	1990		
MacIntyre, Mairi	1991–92, 1994	Volunteer	FN Trust
MacKay, Irene	1989		
MacKenzie, John	1993	Volunteer	
MacKenzie, Rona	1991–92	Volunteer	FN Trust
Marlow, Lisa	1993	Volunteer	
Martin, Ana	1993	Volunteer	
Maury, Laurel	1994, 1997	Volunteer	
McDonald, Hector	1997	Volunteer	
McDonald, Rory	1991	Volunteer	
McLean, Michelle	1994	Volunteer	
McQueen, Bill	1991–92	Volunteer	
McWee, Roger	1992–97	Detectorist	
Melville, Brian	1992–93	Conservator	NMS staff
Miller, Robin	1992	Volunteer	
Monk, Mopsy	1997	Volunteer	
Montador, Duncan	1992–93	Volunteer	
Moran, Jackie	1990–94, 1997	Finds assistant	NMS staff

Table 0.1 (cont.)
Staff and volunteers

INTRODUCTION

Name	Seasons	Position	Notes
Morgan, Stephen	1994	Volunteer	
Morrison, Ian	1990	Software expert	NMS staff
Morrison, Lynne	1994	Volunteer	
Mudie, George	1994	Volunteer	
Newton, Norman	1989–91, 1993–94, 1997	Supervisor/volunteer	Tr 2
O'Neill, Caragh	1993	Volunteer	
Paterson, Leonie	1993–94, 1997	Environmentalist/volunteer	
Peddie, Kenny	1997	Volunteer	
Purdie, James	1993–97	Volunteer	
Quinn, Alex	1994	Conservator	NMS staff
Radley, Alan	1992–95	Supervisor	Trs 9, 12, 19, 21
Reid, Lizzie	1990, 1992–94	Volunteer	
Ritchie, Mathew	1993	Volunteer	
Robertson, Susan	1993	Volunteer	
Rodak, Justyna	1993	Volunteer	
Roy, Colin	1991	Volunteer	FN Trust
Ruck, Andrea	1993, 1997	Volunteer	
Ruckley, Nigel	1989–97	Geologist	BGS
Schaer, Andrea	1994	Volunteer	
Shannon, Rory	1997	Volunteer	
Sharman, Paul	1992–94	Supervisor	Trs 8, 18
Skinner, Theo	1990	Conservator	NMS staff
Smith, Alan	1997	Volunteer	
Stevenson, Maria	1997	Volunteer	
Stewart, David	1989–94, 1997	Supervisor	Trs 1, 4, 11, 16, 23–25
Stinson, Johnny	1997	Volunteer	
Strobridge, Jill	1997	Volunteer	
Swift, Catherine	1994	Volunteer	
Thompson, Billy	1997	Volunteer	
Thorogood, Peter	1997	Volunteer	
Tonner, Susan	1991	Volunteer	
Torrie, Pat	1993	Volunteer	
Triscott, Jonathan JonJonathan	1989–94	Supervisor	Trs 5, 8E, 10, 15, 19
Usher, Paul	1991	Volunteer	
Vesligaj, Nevenka	1994	Volunteer	
Warsop, Clive	1997	Environmentalist	
Weatherup, Moira	1994	Volunteer	
Williams, Grizelda	1997	Volunteer	
Zajac, Tomasz	1993	Volunteer	

Table 0.1 (*cont.*)
Staff and volunteers

Chapter 1

METHODOLOGY

The core concern has always been the excavation of the two islands, Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle. As the project developed so too did a clearer understanding of how to put this in context. Archaeological parallels for any discoveries at Finlaggan obviously had to be sought in a wider area, starting with Islay, then moving to Argyll and Northern Ireland before going further afield.

Documentary research

A programme of searching out and analysing all documents relating to Finlaggan has been a key part of the project from start to finish. The approach has always been to use such written sources as a guide to interpreting the archaeological evidence. Historical information on Finlaggan and the wider world of which it was a part is presented in this volume before the archaeological results and their interpretation. The history is not simply what was known prior to the excavations but has been improved and amplified as the project developed. The last few years have seen several scholars turn their attention to elucidating the history of the West Highlands, perhaps some motivated by renewed interest by archaeologists, and our insights into Finlaggan have benefited enormously as a result.

Archaeological survey

Excavation soon revealed evidence for human activity at Finlaggan spanning the whole of post-glacial times, and it was evident that the site was part of a much larger landscape containing significant traces of past human activities and occupation. In order to understand the local context of the site, we undertook a wider archaeological survey of the area around Finlaggan, identifying and examining all traces of human activity visible in the landscape, and underpinning this with documentary research. It is not argued that this study area is in any way typical, or a good example, but it is hoped that when much more work of this sort has been done in Scotland it will provide valuable comparable data.

The study area consists of the area around Loch Finlaggan, including its catchment and moorland to the north and west. It corresponds to the extent of the farms of Portanellan, Robolls, Kepolls(more) and Sean-ghairt, as shown on the map of Islay surveyed by Stephen McDougall, 1749–51 (Smith 1895: between pp 552 and 553). In 1993 the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) undertook an electronic distance measurement (EDM) survey of much of this area on our behalf, plotting structures and field systems at a scale of 1:1000.

We made detailed plans of most of the archaeological sites and ruined buildings, either by plane-tableing or by taking measurements with a tape. Typically the salient features of an earthwork would be marked with garden canes and the distances between canes recorded on a sketch made in the field. A drawing, normally at a scale of 1:100, would then be produced at base, and adjustments made as necessary on a further visit to the site. In most cases little attempt has been made in these drawings to reproduce the extent of ruination. Other plans which are not based on survey work in the field, but largely derived, for instance, from aerial photographs and early Ordnance Survey maps, are described as sketches.

Detailed surveys of the area between Eilean Mór and the Finlaggan Visitor Centre were made by a survey team from the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments of England in 1994 on behalf of the Channel 4 television show *Time Team* and made available to us. A bathymetric survey of the north end of Loch Finlaggan was undertaken by divers from the British Geological Survey. We lacked the resources to sample the wider study area by excavation. An exception was made for two sites, one a settlement site at Rudh' a' Chròcuin and the other the mound at Cnoc Seannda, identified as potentially the site of inauguration ceremonies for kings or lords of the Isles. Both were suggested by us as worthy of examination and were initially tackled by the Time Team. Otherwise, all excavation was limited to Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle.

Survey work on the two excavated islands was made relatively easy thanks to use of the plan prepared by RCAHMS in 1981, published three years later along with a detailed description (RCAHMS 1984: no. 404, pp 275–81). Some minor alterations have been made to this in the light of new measurements taken with EDM and re-examination of the visible humps and bumps, but we must acknowledge how the Commission's work has underpinned our own and been the basis for our understanding of Finlaggan. We have adopted its lettering to identify structures and buildings.

Most of the survey work done by us on the two islands, apart from the detailed planning within the trenches, depended on the use of EDM. In 1989 we placed some pegs to form the basis of a local grid system used for all recording on the two islands (Illus 8.1): 300N runs through the centre of the great hall. Its orientation from magnetic north = –30 degrees 04 minutes 00 seconds, and all plans and drawings based on the site grid have an arrow pointing to 'site north'. The peg labelled SN. 300E/300N, which is equivalent to NGR NR. 138825.737 668117.190, was adjacent to the exterior of the east wall of the great hall, 3.65m from both

the adjacent internal corners of the building. The temporary site benchmark was on the east wall of the great hall, on a prominent block of stone c 2.7m north of 300E/300N, estimated as 54.80m above sea level.

Overlapping and extending well beyond the survey area was a detailed study of lead mining on Islay, undertaken as part of the Finlaggan Project by Mike Cressey and as part of the requirement for a doctorate awarded by the University of Edinburgh in 1995. It was expected that the availability and exploitation of mineral resources would have a bearing on why Finlaggan was a centre of importance in the medieval period. Turning this area of work into a postgraduate research project was a sound strategy to attract other sources of funding and acquire the support of an experienced environmental archaeologist.

Geophysical prospection

Geophysical prospection was limited to a survey of part of Eilean Mór with a fluxgate gradiometer and the use of a metal detector in the hands of an experienced operator. The metal detector was used experimentally on an area of Eilean Mór, later partially excavated as trench 19, to see if it could provide an effective indication of human activity. 'Hot spots' were plotted, not excavated. The detector, however, was also used from 1992 onwards to locate metal objects from the excavated deposits. It was salutary to observe just how many metal objects were not seen by skilled and experienced archaeologists, even with careful trowelling. Rather than marking 'hot spots' in the trenches for the attention of the excavators, it was found best to detect spoil once it was removed. This, of course, required careful soil management in order not to lose the contexts from which the finds came. Detecting was also extended to a survey of the edges of the loch, the gravelly shores normally covered with water where it was clear there were no stratified archaeological deposits. In 1994 geophysical surveys of areas at Cnoc Seannnda and around the standing stone beside the Finlaggan farm-steading were undertaken on behalf of the Time Team.

Excavation

Excavation was undertaken in the summer of every year from 1990 to 1998, excluding 1996. The period of work was normally four weeks, with at least some activity on-site every day of the week, even in the worst of weather (Illus 1.1). Sometimes, as will be evident from the results reproduced here, the rain failed to abate at the right time to take presentable photographs. Inevitably many trenches were backfilled with some deposits and contexts unexcavated but only in four cases, trenches 2, 8, 12 and 16, was it deemed sound strategy to examine these in a subsequent season.

As an experiment, in 1994 excavation was staggered over a period of 12 weeks with only a small team for most of that time. There did not appear, however, to be any advantages in this approach.

All digging, including de-turfing and backfilling, was done by hand. Excavation of archaeological contexts and features was invariably done with trowels.

The excavation team in all seasons consisted of students and volunteers, many of them local, and a small group of professionals

who acted as site supervisors and provided specialist support as surveyors, draughtsmen, conservators, environmental archaeologists, etc. In 1993 and 1994 the dig was specifically run as a training exercise for archaeology students, mostly from the University of Edinburgh. In 1993 significant extra support and expertise was provided for an intensive period of three days when a *Time Team* television programme was filmed for Channel 4. In 1997 excavation of underwater deposits off Eilean na Comhairle was made possible by the skill and effort of the Edinburgh University Officers' Training Corps in building a coffer dam.

The location and extent of each trench excavated was agreed in advance with Historic Scotland. Apart from the removal of turf, the bulk of the digging was done with trowels, and for the most part only deposits identified as collapse, debris, fills, etc were removed. To a limited extent earthworks were sectioned and sondages excavated through floor surfaces to examine underlying deposits. The desire to leave walls and roads intact effectively curtailed opportunities of exposing any sizeable area of any but the most recently occupied areas and structures on the islands. The



Illustration 1.1
The 1992 season: flood waters

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complete excavation of any building was not considered to be an option.

The area of Eilean Mór is reckoned as 7,100 sq m. The 17 trenches opened on the island amounted to an area of 917 sq m, a bit less than 13% of the island's land surface. Eilean na Comhairle has an area of 700 sq m, of which 133 sq m, or 19%, was dug into in three trenches.

Soil samples were taken from most archaeological deposits. It is regrettable that due to loss in transit and changes in personnel,

many of these were not available for study during the post-excavation process. Soil flotation was undertaken on selected deposits from 1993 onwards. Sediment cores from the loch, the alluvial tail of Eilean Mór and elsewhere in Islay were taken and examined for environmental data by Mike Cressey as part of his PhD research.

In 1997 Helen Smith undertook an elemental analysis of 79 soil samples with the aim of better distinguishing anthropogenically enhanced soils from 'natural' soils, topsoil, construction materials,

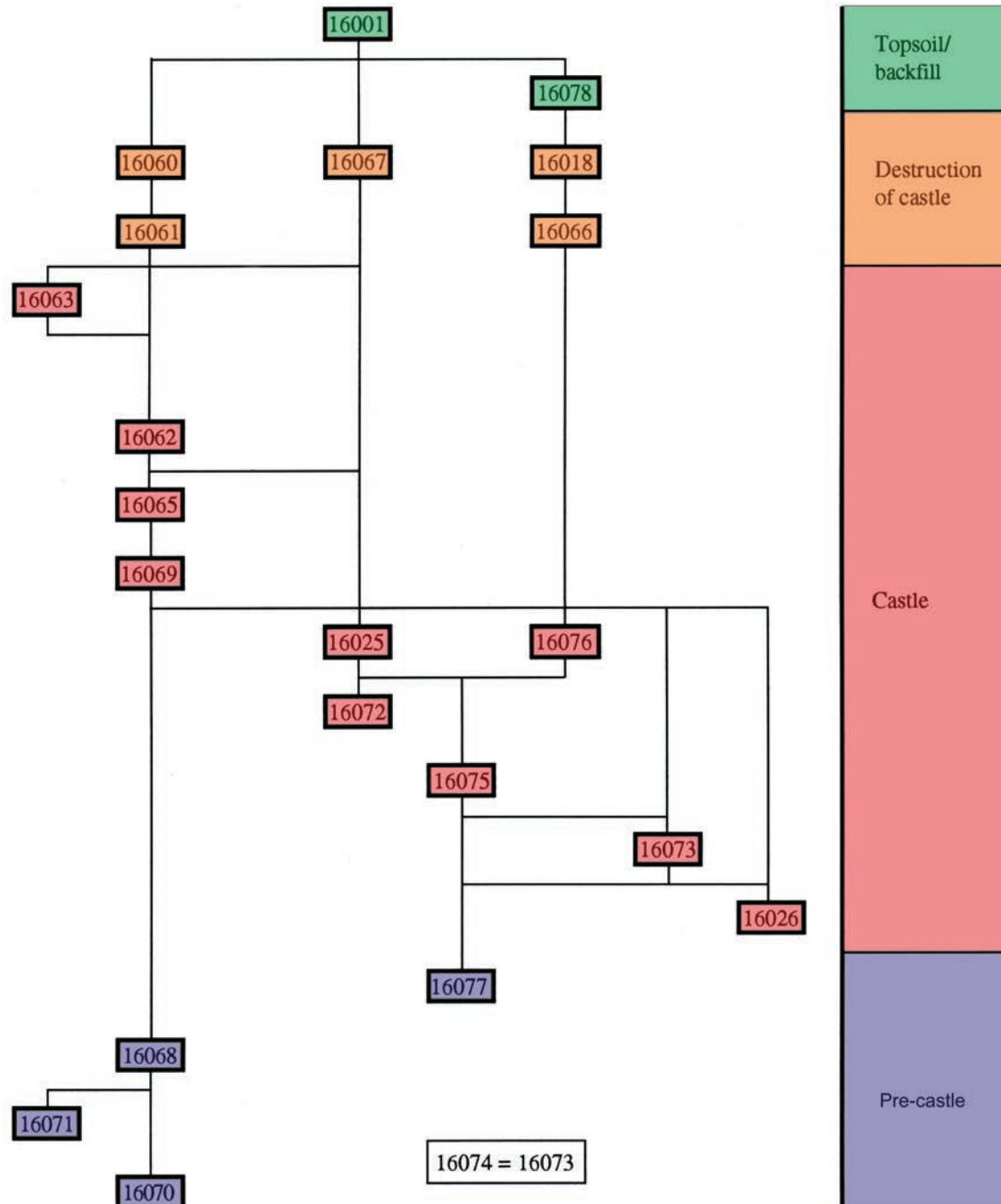


Illustration 1.2
Trench 16 (1994) matrix

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Context	Description	Interpretation
16001	Turf and topsoil	Turf and topsoil
16018	Thick deposit, soil, clay, rocks	Levelling up in courtyard
16025	Lime mortared wall	North/south castle wall, east of courtyard
16026	Lime mortared wall	East/west internal castle wall
16060	Stone fragments and soil	Demolition tip to east of wall 16025
16061	Mortar and sand	Demolition tip from 16025
16062	Clay-bonded stonework	Castle plinth
16063	Silty sand	Old ground surface
16065	Pieces of phyllite, 30% sand, silt	Make-up for 16062
16066	Sand and mortar layers	Castle floor
16067	Soil and mortar fragments	Debris overlying 16025
16068	Soil	Old ground surface
16069	Silt and fine sand	Earliest silt against 16025
16070	50% phyllite frags, 50% sand	Pre-castle medieval
16071	Piece of red sandstone, burnt	Lying on 16070
16072	Massive rounded boulder	Foundation of 16025
16073	Flat stones and black soil	Make-up for floor of castle
16075	Cut	Foundation trench for 16025
16076	Phyllite chips, mortar, silt, soil	Fill of 16075
16077	Rubble, 40% sandy silt	Infill of dun?
16078	Mixed deposit	1993 backfill

Table 1.1
Trench 16 (1994), simplified list of contexts

etc. Although it appeared that valuable information could be derived from this approach, it was not pursued any further. A copy of Dr Smith's report has been lodged in the site archive.

Finds, including sherds of pottery, fragments of metal, etc, were individually plotted using EDM, except in trench 25, where they were located to a square metre and spit within a context. In processing this data we have attempted to extract as much meaning as possible out of the distribution of finds around the site. Initial conservation of many of the finds was provided on-site by conservation staff from National Museums Scotland (NMS), and different techniques of scientific analyses have been explored with varying degrees of success. A programme to recover lipids from pottery sherds did not produce any results, while X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis of copper alloys is of considerable interest. Much finds processing and conservation was carried out in NMS, especially of wet wood and leather. All the ironwork was X-rayed at NMS and this was used as a basis for selecting pieces for conservation.

Plans and sections were drawn on-site at scales of 1:20 or 1:10, the majority by a professional archaeological planner, David Connolly. After a brief experiment with single context recording, it was decided to use a traditional method of planning. Each trench

or area was meticulously planned after the topsoil was removed, and overlays were produced to record changes and additions as work progressed. The upstanding walls were also drawn and the rock types identified by a professional geologist, Nigel Ruckley. Record photography, 35mm colour film (transparencies) and black and white (prints), was backed up in 1993–94 by video (Hi8). Harris-type matrices were prepared for every trench, demonstrating the relationships of all the excavated or exposed contexts, deposits or features, and indicating the preferred phasing. The number of contexts per trench varied from 26 in trench 20 to over 200 in trench 12. Illus 1.2 is an example of the matrix prepared for one of the smaller trenches (16, in 1994), with a simplified list of contexts in Table 1.1.

Trench 25 excavation and recording

In 1997 midden deposits on the bottom of the loch, adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle on the side facing Eilean Mór, were sampled from within the confines of a dam. The excavation methodology and recording were different from systems used previously at Finlaggan. Apart from the constraints imposed by working in a

confined space that had to be constantly pumped dry, the advanced planning process recognised the need to deal with waterlogged material, sieve large quantities of deposits on-site, and efficiently record and remove large quantities of samples and artefacts for post-excavation analyses.

The plan adopted was to grid the whole area into metre squares. The squares in the main working area were in rows from C to G and columns from 4 to 8. Thus each square could be identified by a letter and number, from C6 to G8 (Illus 13.39). Excavation of any depth was confined to one block of five adjacent squares (C8, C7, C6, D8, D7), a sixth separate one (G4) and three small sondages (2, 4 and 5), the latter two of which were actually dug through the fringe of Eilean na Comhairle itself. All of this work in 1997 was labelled as trench 25.

As elsewhere, archaeological contexts were given a five-digit number starting with 25. Since the main midden and crannog deposits [25008, 25019] were of considerable depth, mostly with no obvious structure or layering within them, they were dug in spits each only a few centimetres in depth, labelled alphabetically within each context from A at the top. On-site recording normally took the form D7008F, C8019G, etc. In these examples D7 and C8 are the metre squares, 008 and 019 are the archaeological contexts 25008 and 25019, and the final F and G are spits within the contexts.

Individual artefacts were listed in a running series as SF 25***. Plans and notes produced on-site in 1997 are oriented to magnetic north. In this report, for consistency with the rest of the site data, plans and descriptions have been changed to align with site north.

Dating

The excavations demonstrated that there was a significant depth of archaeological deposits in most areas excavated, and there was little difficulty in showing their associations and relative sequence. In many cases it is possible to equate deposits from one trench to another with little or no cause for doubt. Absolute dating evidence is altogether more uncertain. There are few finds from stratified contexts that can be used to date a deposit to anything more precise than a period, like the Bronze Age or Middle Ages. Remarkably, one or two do in fact seem to confirm historical information, like the halfgroat from the chapel which indicates erection or renovation by John I Lord of the Isles, and a group of late 15th-century coins which appear to relate to destruction or demolition about the time of the final forfeiture of John II Lord of the Isles and the capture at Finlaggan of the leaders of Clan Donald South.

It does appear that our excavations exposed considerable evidence for 16th-century activity on Eilean Mór, possibly extending well after 1600. A challenge in interpreting this is the total lack of artefacts of which it can be said that they date to within that time frame and no other.

The excavation of hearths and ovens in 1993 presented the opportunity of taking samples for archaeomagnetic dating, and convincing dates were provided by GeoQuest Associates for three of the five contexts sampled. In each case two date ranges are suggested. These ambiguities arise from the looping nature of the

geomagnetic secular variation in the 12th–15th centuries. The contexts and dates in question are as follows:

- 16043: hearth or area of burning on the floor of the castle on Eilean na Comhairle. Either 1230–1310 AD or 1420–75 AD. The former is preferred on stratigraphical grounds.
- Hearth in building H.1. Either 1080–1220 AD or 1440–1550 AD. The former is probably to be preferred.
- 12173: fired, compact clay surface in building 12.7. Either 1425–75 AD or an age centred on 1290 AD. The latter date appears more likely on stratigraphic grounds.

The contexts which failed to produce convincing dates are as follows:

- 12142: floor deposit in building 12.2.
- 12165: oven in building 12.6.

It was considered that the archaeomagnetic vectors from these contexts were either too dispersed or too few in number. The GeoQuest Report is lodged in the Finlaggan Archive.

Radiocarbon dating was carried out sparingly through lack of appropriate organic samples and because most of the deposits they came from were manifestly of medieval or more recent date. Other potential samples, like animal bone from the fill of the chamber on Cnoc Seannnda (trench 21), were rejected because there was a significant element of doubt as to whether the original use of the feature was being dated or else some secondary disturbance.

In 1999 eight samples for radiocarbon dating were passed to the Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre. Three of them were from archaeological contexts; the other five were from a sediment core taken in March 1999 in the tip of the alluvial tail of Eilean Mór. The results are as follows:

Sample AA-36530 (GU-8675)

Material	Human bone: left humerus
Context	1050: inhumation in lintel grave in burial ground, Eilean Mór
Radiocarbon age BP	1365±50
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal AD 643–86, cal BP 1307–1264 2σ cal AD 602–771, cal BP 1348–1179

Sample AA-36531 (GU-8676)

Material	Wood: alder (worked)
Context	Tr 25 G4017: upper crannog structure, Eilean na Comhairle
Radiocarbon age BP	1540±45
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal AD 434–598, cal BP 1516–1352 2σ cal AD 419–637, cal BP 1531–1313

Sample AA-36532 (GU-8677)

Material	Wood: hazel branch wood, 7 years old
Context	Tr 25 G4022: lower crannog structure, Eilean na Comhairle
Radiocarbon age BP	2030±45
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal BC 89 – cal AD 46, cal BP 2038–1904 2σ cal BC 168 – cal AD 71, cal BP 2117–1879

Sample AA-36533 (GU-8678)

Material	Marsh sediment: humic acid dated
Sample selection point	Immediately below unit 10
Radiocarbon age BP	11,515±75
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal BC 11,840–11,461, cal BP 13,790–13,411 2σ cal BC 11,874–11,216, cal BP 13,824–13,166

Sample AA-36534 (GU-8679)

Material	Marsh sediment: humic acid dated
Sample selection point	Immediately above unit 10
Radiocarbon age BP	11,305±70
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal BC 11,475–11,201, cal BP 13,425–13,151 2σ cal BC 11,827–11,071, cal BP 13,777–13,021

Sample AA-36535 (GU-8680)

Material	Marsh sediment: humic acid dated
Sample selection point	Unit 7/8 boundary
Radiocarbon age BP	9410±65
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal BC 8781–8608, cal BP 10,731–10,558 2σ cal BC 9108–8479, cal BP 11,058–10,429

Sample AA-36536 (GU-8681)

Material	Marsh sediment: humic acid dated
Sample selection point	Unit 7 middle
Radiocarbon age BP	7320±55
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal BC 6228–6082, cal BP 8178–8032 2σ cal BC 6331–6029, cal BP 8281–7979

Sample AA-36537 (GU-8682)

Material	Marsh sediment: humic acid dated
Sample selection point	Unit 7/6 boundary
Radiocarbon age BP	7795±60
Calibrated age ranges	1σ cal BC 6678–6509, cal BP 8628–8459 2σ cal BC 6797–6467, cal BP 8747–8417

To a limited extent, artefacts also provided opportunities for dating the contexts in which they were discovered, but here it is appropriate to sound a note of caution on this process, most easily demonstrable from sherds of wheel-made pottery. For instance, three sherds of a vessel in a reduced gritty fabric (SF 7096, 7119, 7158) were excavated in trench 7 on Eilean Mór. This is a ceramic type that was imported to Finlaggan from the Scottish mainland, probably in the 13th century. SF 7158 was incorporated in the wall [7039] of house V.1, occupied until the end of the 15th century. The other two sherds were recovered from 16th-century or later contexts.

That there were any sherds of medieval pottery on Eilean Mór was largely an accidental outcome from innumerable tidying-up processes involving rubbish being removed off the island and dumped in the loch. The examples of joining sherds cited above suggest that many of the sherds excavated on the island may not have been recovered from contexts with which they were associated when the vessels were actually in use. The implications of this for the use of ceramics and small finds in characterising and dating phases of activity on a complex site are considerable.

The distribution of roof slates on Eilean Mór is, however, crucial to our understanding of relative chronology. At some date in the medieval period the great hall was roofed or reroofed with

slates of semi-pelitic schist, described by us as ‘type A’. There was archaeological evidence for the hall being dismantled, we think about 1500, in line with other archaeological evidence from our trenches and our understanding of historical events. So, when quantities of these roof slates turned up as drain covers in a neighbouring building (12.5), it seemed a reasonable deduction that building 12.5 was erected after, perhaps not long after, 1500. This inference underpins much of our understanding of Finlaggan in later medieval and post-medieval times.

Another distribution pattern that informed our understanding of relative dating on Eilean Mór was the system of paved or cobbled roads spreading from the jetty to link up the major medieval structures. Their uniformity suggested that they belonged to a scheme which may have been executed over a short period of time. Some stretches may have remained in use into post-medieval times, but we have judged that none are likely to have been ignored or built over prior to about 1500 when, we reasoned, Finlaggan’s function as a major lordly and ceremonial centre came to an end. So the erection of buildings B and P over the line of these roads has been taken as an indication that they must post-date 1500.

Some shortcomings

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy for the author to identify things he would have done differently or improved upon if he were embarking on the project now. A knowledge of Gaelic would undoubtedly have improved his understanding of Islay and its history. He would have preferred to have finished the post-excavation work and writing up much sooner. He accepts responsibility for the delay. The lack of radiocarbon dates was the result of a deliberate decision, influenced by a prevailing notion that such determinations would tell us little we did not know about medieval contexts. It is now clear that that was misguided.

The author was keen while fieldwork was being undertaken not to get bogged down in particular parts of the excavation strategy and lose sight of the overall aim of forming an overview of the use of the whole of the two islands over time. This meant that at the end of each excavation season there were unanswered questions in several of the trenches, excavation options that could have been pursued with more time. Difficult decisions then had to be made as to whether to leave it at that or to reopen trenches in the following year. The author now thinks it would have been better for our understanding of the site if more attention could have been given to the complex of buildings excavated in trenches 2, 4 and 12 and on Eilean na Comhairle.

There is undoubtedly more analyses that could be undertaken of the finds to improve our understanding of Finlaggan. The author hopes that he has provided sufficient information for others to undertake that work in the future.

Perhaps his biggest regret is that, despite there being a strategy in place for sampling for environmental data, it has not been possible to provide a comprehensive picture based on the analysis of data, including seed and insect remains, that were observed to be present. The main reason for this, as alluded to above, was the loss of samples and other data after the completion of the excavations in circumstances beyond the author’s control. He believes it would be relatively simple to construct a new sampling programme sometime in the future that would produce quality

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results and which could be achieved with relatively little new disturbance of the site.

Since commencing fieldwork at Finlaggan the author has referred to the work in many publications and written several papers and interim reports. Many of these are referenced in the texts that follow. He makes no apology, however, for the obvious fact that his interpretations, understanding and knowledge have changed considerably over the years, hopefully always for the

better. He has not deemed it appropriate or practical to correct most of his earlier misapprehensions. The versions in this volume are what he now believes. They supersede anything published earlier under his name.

Finally, readers may notice changes of style and editing from one part to another. This is the result of this report being worked on, on and off, over a very long period of time. The writer hopes that they are not so great or confusing as to inhibit understanding.

PART I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The author provided a detailed outline of the history of Islay in 2017, placing it in a wider context, especially of the Kingdom and the Lordship of the Isles. The brief history given below in Chapter 2 highlights those developments and events which might be perceived to have a particular relevance to Finlaggan. Up to the end of the 16th century, it is essentially derived from a very slender range of documentary sources, some of them dating from well after the events they describe. The restricted

nature of this material, unlikely ever to be significantly augmented, was one of the main reasons for turning to archaeology for new source material. The provision of this basic historical account is also intended to provide opportunities for comparing and measuring historical and archaeological evidence, the one against the other. From the beginning of the 17th century onwards there is much more information, including rentals and other estate papers.

Chapter 2

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Prehistory and early history of Islay

Occupation of Islay by humans from Mesolithic times onwards is attested by archaeological remains (Table 2.1). This is not the place to give a detailed overview of the prehistory of Islay since remains of that vast time span are not well represented in our Finlaggan Project, nor did we actively seek them out. The author has provided a brief overview in his *Islay, Jura and Colonsay: A Historical Guide* (2011), and the work of Steven Mithen (2000) on the Mesolithic should especially be noticed.

While the Lowlands of Scotland were subjected to direct or indirect Roman military control in the years from the late 1st to the 4th century AD, Argyll and the islands remained beyond Roman control and little influenced by Roman culture. There was, however, a Roman coin, present whereabouts unknown, reported from an island in Loch Finlaggan. It was identified by George MacDonald (1918: 250) as a low-value billon piece of the reign of Diocletian, minted in Alexandria in AD 287–88. It has the figure of Athena on its reverse. There is also a Roman

	Periods	Kingdoms and lordships	Kings and lords	Notable events
6500–4000 BC	Mesolithic			
4000–2500 BC	Neolithic			
2500–2200 BC	Chalcolithic			
2200–700 BC	Bronze Age			
700 BC – AD 500	Iron Age			
500–800	Early historic	Dál Riata		563 Arrival of St Columba 794 First Viking raid
800–1100	Viking age	Kingdom of the Isles	King Godred Crovan (1079–95)	1098 Invasion by King Magnus
1100–1300	Medieval (earlier)	Kingdom of the Isles (until 1266)	Somerled (<i>d</i> 1164) Ranald (<i>d</i> 1207) Donald Angus Mor Alexander (<i>d</i> 1299)	1263 Invasion by King Hakon
1300–1500	Medieval (later)	Lordship of the Isles	Angus Og John I Lord of the Isles (<i>d</i> 1387) Donald Lord of the Isles (<i>d</i> 1422) Alexander Lord of the Isles (<i>d</i> 1449) John II Lord of the Isles	1411 Battle of Harlaw 1431 Battle of Inverlochy 1493 Final forfeiture of John II Lord of the Isles
1500–1700	Post-medieval	Cambells of Cawdor		1540 Visit of fleet of James V 1598 Battle of Tràigh Ghruineart
1700–1800	Modern	Cambells of Shawfield		

Table 2.1
Periods, lordships and notable events in relation to Finlaggan

P-shaped brooch of tinned bronze found in a midden at Ard-nave (Ritchie & Welfare 1984: 341, no. 62). It dates to the 3rd century AD.

According to the geographer Ptolemy, working in Alexandria in Egypt in the 2nd century AD, the tribe that occupied Argyll was the Epidii, who might also have held Islay. A pseudo-historical version of Scottish history has Fergus Mor mac Eirc, king of the Dál Riata in Northern Ireland, coming to rule a colony of his people in Argyll about 500 AD. These Scots were responsible for introducing the Gaelic language into Scotland. Until the early 7th century Fergus's descendants continued to hold on to land in Ulster, but their future lay in North Britain.

Certainly by the 7th century Gaelic was the dominant language used in Argyll. It was a language spoken in common with the people of Ireland, while many of the neighbouring parts of the Scottish mainland were inhabited by British (early Welsh) and Pictish speakers. It is also clear that the people of Argyll had many other cultural links with Ireland, which was more accessible to a people used to travelling by boat than much of the rest of Scotland. The most important evidence for this is the activities of Irish Christian missionaries like St Columba, who left his native Ireland in 563 and founded a monastery on the island of Iona. This was his main base until he died there in 597. Almost all the early churches in Islay are dedicated to him or his followers.

By about 700 there is evidence for the kingdom of Dál Riata in Argyll, including several important kindreds. Islay was the territory of the Cenél nÓengusso, who James Fraser suggests may be descended from Óengus Ibdach (*floruit* early 6th century), that is Óengus the Hebridean, of the Dál Fiatach, an important kindred of the Ulaid nation in Northern Ireland. Óengus's grandson Barrfhind had three sons, Lugaid, Conall and Galán, who are said to have divided Islay among them (Fraser 2009: 159–60; Dumville 2002: 206–07).

One of the main issues in this early historic period that might be addressed archaeologically are the doubts expressed, especially by Ewan Campbell (1999: 11–15, 2001), as to whether there really was a significant influx of settlers into Argyll from Ireland, even if not an actual invasion force led by Fergus Mor mac Eirc. There is no spread of Irish-type artefacts, monuments or settlement types in Argyll to give substance to the traditional migration model, and the Gaelic language, far from being a 6th-century imposition, may well have been spoken in Argyll from much earlier times.

Another area where it might be hoped that archaeology could make a useful contribution would be in interpreting a document, *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* (The Explanation of the Genealogy of the Men of Alba), a composite text with 7th-century origins, that apparently includes a listing of the houses (holdings) of the freemen and nobles of Islay (Caldwell 2011: 22–24; Macniven 2015: 81–85).

Viking raids on the Western Isles are first recorded in 794. These pagan pirates from Scandinavia were to return year after year on looting and pillaging missions. Their clinker-built longships were technically of a high standard. They had the skill and confidence to undertake long sea voyages under sail. They also rowed the longships far up rivers or carried them over land from one stretch of water to another. In the mid-9th century 'a large scale and culturally transformative plantation of Norse settlers'

was made in Islay, as in the rest of the Hebrides (Macniven 2015: 117–20). This led to the creation of a hybrid Norse/Gaelic society. Islay became part of a great network of Scandinavian communities on a major sea route stretching from Dublin to Norway and beyond. Much of the evidence for this comes from the thorough examination by Alan Macniven (2015, 2023) of Islay's Norse-derived place-names. There are graves with grave goods at Ballinaby (Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998: 122–25) but actual houses and settlements have still to be found.

The Kingdom of the Isles

The Kingdom of the Isles (sometimes also referred to as the Kingdom of Man, or of Man and the Isles) comprised the Isle of Man and the islands off the west coast of Scotland. It was a small kingdom in terms of land mass, and the population was not large – no more than 50,000 at best might be a reasonable guess. It appears to have developed into a kingdom on a European model in terms of its structure and administration, and its influence and the patronage of its kings, if not direct rule, may at times have extended much further, certainly into Ireland (Caldwell 2014a). It has been the subject of detailed studies, especially by Duffy & Mytum (2015) and McDonald (2019).

The Kingdom of the Isles has a long, albeit shadowy, history extending back to the second quarter of the 10th century, if not earlier (Woolf 2007: 298–300; Downham 2007: 177). About 1079 Godred Crovan, who had fought at the Battle of Stamford Bridge alongside King Harold Hardrada of Norway in 1066, usurped the kingship (Broderick 1996: fols 32v, 33r; cf Hudson 2005: 170–2). Godred Crovan was related to the Scandinavian kings who ruled Dublin. Five generations of kings descended from him ruled in the Isles until 1265.

By the 13th century leading families in the Isles, like the MacDougalls, MacRuaris and MacDonalds, all descended from a 12th-century prince, Somerled, also held most of mainland Argyll in the territory of the kings of Scots (Duncan & Brown 1959: 197–200, 204–5). The Kingdom of the Isles was briefly annexed by King Magnus Barelegs of Norway in 1098, but there was no follow-up after his death in 1103 by his successors as kings of Norway to retain the Kingdom of the Isles or maintain royal overlordship over it. The latter only came about in 1152/53 because Godred, son of King Olaf of the Isles, went to Norway to seek support from King Ingi (Beuermann 2002).

The main base for these kings was the Isle of Man and the extent of their hold on the rest of the islands is not always clear. Historians of Scotland have tended to focus on Somerled and his descendants, known collectively as the MacSorleys, rather than the kings of Godred Crovan's line. Somerled, identified as being based in mainland Argyll rather than the Isles, married a daughter of King Olaf, son of Godred, and usurped the kingdom after it had been offered to his son Dugald (the ancestor of the MacDougalls) by a faction of the Isles' chiefs.

After Somerled's death in 1164 several of his descendants appear as local kings and the *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles*, thought to have been written at Rushen Abbey in the Isle of Man about the middle of the 13th century, has been interpreted to mean that there were two rival dynasties ruling different parts of the kingdom, with the descendants of Godred Crovan holding

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Man and Lewis, and the descendants of Somerled most or all of the other islands (Duncan & Brown 1959; McDonald 1997: 39–67; Woolf 2005).

The sources do not make it clear to what extent Somerled's descendants were over-mighty or rebellious subjects of kings of the Godred Crovan dynasty or kings of a separate kingdom within the Isles and Argyll. The situation is complicated by the fact that Somerled and his descendants owed allegiance to the kings of Scots for mainland territories. The breakup of the Isles into two separate kingdoms may only finally have been achieved in the middle of the 13th century. The crucial date was 1248, when Hakon IV of Norway recognised a Somerled descendant, Ewen (MacDougall), as a king, apparently to reign in the northern part of the Hebrides while King Harold of the Godred Crovan line ruled in Man. Ewen was succeeded almost immediately by his distant kinsman Dugald (MacRuari) and Harold by three other relatives, culminating in his younger brother Magnus. Both Dugald and Magnus were still kings in 1263, when King Hakon sought and got their support for his invasion of Scotland (Caldwell 2017: 40–42).

Somerled met his death in battle at Renfrew in 1164 and his lands were split between his sons Dugald, Ranald and Angus, as was the Gaelic custom. Evidence is lacking as to who got what, but the tripartite division may simply have seen Dugald being gifted a large piece of territory in the centre, including Lorn, with Angus's share to the north and Ranald's to the south (Duncan & Brown 1959: 198). Whatever the extent of the initial holdings of these three brothers, they are likely to have changed with time.

Islay can be supposed to have passed to Ranald. He certainly held lands in Kintyre, some of which he gifted to Saddell Abbey in Kintyre. He also gave this religious house land in Arran. He is credited with the foundation of the Benedictine monastery and the nunnery in Iona (Cowan & Easson 1976: 59, 151), which surely implies that Iona was under his control. Ranald's charter to Saddell Abbey gives him the title 'King of the Isles and Lord of Argyll and Kintyre' (RMS 2: 678, no. 3170). Ranald's son Donald, the eponym of Clan Donald, is believed to have inherited Islay and acquired lands in Kintyre (Duncan & Brown 1959: 198–200). Despite being immortalised through the MacDonald surname, little is known about him.

The image conjured up of Donald's son Angus Mor in a mid-13th-century Irish praise poem is of a chief more Viking than Gaelic. It describes how there was hardly a beach in Ireland where his longships had not been and lifted cattle. For what it is worth, the poem also describes him as Prince of Ireland and King of Lewis (Clancy 1998: 288–91). Of more immediate relevance for us is that Angus was the first of the family to specifically call himself 'de Ile' (of Islay), a designation which appears on his seal appended to a document of 1292 (Stevenson & Wood 1940, 3: 483; Munro & Munro 1986: pp lxxx–lxxxii, 280), when he must have been of considerable age.

The 1260s were a major turning point in the history of Islay. In 1263 King Hakon of Norway led a fleet down through the Western Isles to the Firth of Clyde to re-establish his position against increasing attempts by the Scots to win back the Western Isles. Angus Mor felt forced to submit and join the Norwegian king's invasion fleet. Hakon's expedition failed in its main objectives of establishing his authority in the Western Isles and

protecting them from Alexander III of Scotland. In 1264 the Scots were again on the offensive in the islands, and by the Treaty of Perth in 1266 the Western Isles were ceded to Scotland. Angus Mor and the other island leaders thus became subjects of the king of Scots for all their lands.

Scottish historians, including the most recent biographer of Alexander III (Reid 2019), have seen the gain of the Kingdom of the Isles as a great achievement. The problem is that there is very little documentary or other evidence to demonstrate that the Scots readily and effectively took control of their new acquisition. It is therefore appropriate that archaeological data from Finlaggan should be analysed to see if it provides some clues on changes and developments in the later part of the 13th century.

Commencing in 1296, the Wars of Independence saw the failure of England to annexe Scotland and the eventual success of Robert Bruce in establishing his kingship over the whole country by the time of his death in 1329. In the intervening years of civil war and English invasions the main kindreds in the Isles were heavily involved, now on one side, then on another. In 1297 Alexander (MacDonald) of Islay (Angus Mor's son) complained to Edward I of England that Alexander (MacDougall) of Argyll had devastated and burnt his lands and killed his people (Stevenson 1870, 2: no. 444). Two years later an Irish source records the death of Alexander and many of his people at the hands of Alexander MacDougall (MacCarthy 1893: 393). The MacDonalds were to swing to supporting Robert Bruce, with Angus Òg, Alexander's brother and successor, leading his clan at Bannockburn in 1314. The MacDonalds thus emerged from the wars as real winners, the most powerful kindred in the Isles.

The Lordship of the Isles

The MacDonalds now assumed the status of lords of the Isles. In Gaelic they were called *Rí Innse Gall*, which might more fittingly be rendered as 'King of the Isles'. These lords had not only headship of the great Clan Donald but also feudal superiority over island and mainland territories as extensive as those controlled by Somerled at the height of his power. The Isle of Man alone eluded their grasp, falling firmly under English control from 1333. They came to possess in the 15th century the vast earldom of Ross, and their influence extended throughout the Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland and also into Ireland. One of the main branches of the family, the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig (Islay), the leaders of Clann Iain Mhóir (Clan Donald South), came to possess large territories in Antrim in Northern Ireland. The lords of the Isles played a conspicuous role as leaders and patrons of Gaelic culture. They had their own hereditary doctors, poets and harpers, and sponsored the erection of churches and the work of local sculptors.

Four lords of the Isles, son succeeding father, span the years from the early 14th century to the end of the 15th century. John I Lord of the Isles was succeeded, probably in 1387, by Donald, and Donald by Alexander in 1422. John II Lord of the Isles succeeded in 1449 and was finally forfeited by King James IV in 1493. A much fuller account of the lords and lordship in relation to Islay has been provided elsewhere by the author (Caldwell 2017: 49–75).

Historians have tended to view the Lordship of the Isles as potentially an independent state in the making. Recognition of

royal authority was grudging or not always taken seriously. Central government knew the lordship as a power to be reckoned with, one that could not be discomfited by a royal army at Harlaw in Aberdeenshire in 1411 and which won an outright victory over another at Inverlochy in 1431. The centres of MacDonald power were difficult to reach from the east-coast burghs frequented by the court, and it often seemed better to leave them to their ways. Now many historians feel that a more nuanced interpretation is appropriate, one that still acknowledges the power and cultural distinctiveness of the lords and their lordship but which recognises that their ambitions and the roles they played in the politics of Scotland were not any different from those of other leading magnates (Cameron 2014).

This historical viewpoint was set in the context of an understanding that there was a very considerable divide in Scotland that could be traced back to the 14th century and earlier times. On the one side were the Gaelic-speaking ‘wild’ or ‘savage’ people of the Highlands and Islands, and on the other side were the Scots-speaking ‘civilised’ Lowlanders, many living in towns and burghs. This perception has also recently been re-examined (for example in three papers published side by side in 2009 by Boardman, Broun and MacGregor) and found to be an oversimplification, if not outright misleading. Here again it might be hoped that archaeological evidence will be able to provide data to aid these interpretations.

Lords of Islay

The demise of the Lordship of the Isles did not result in the total collapse of MacDonald power in Islay, despite the efforts of King James IV and then his son King James V. In 1540 the latter sailed his fleet round the north of Scotland in a bid to impress and bring the western clans to heel. A main target was James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens (known in Lowland sources as James Canochson), who was taken into custody while the king set plans in motion to take control of the royal lands of Islay, previously those of the lords of the Isles and no doubt usurped by Sir James and his clansmen. The itinerary of the fleet is not well documented, but one early source (Dalrymple [1596] 1888–95: 2.242) describes it going to islands (*in Hebrides insulas* in the original Latin, translated into Scots as ‘the Iles of Jrland’) where the Highland leaders Maclean and James MacDonald submitted to the king in person. This is most likely to have been in Islay, in which case James V may have been the first Scottish monarch to set foot on the island for over a hundred years.

James Canochson was released from imprisonment after the death of King James V in 1542 and Clann Iain Mhóir was as powerful as ever. As a reward for his support of the Scottish governor, the Earl of Arran, and in recognition of his power, his extensive lands were erected in 1545 into the free barony of Bar (RMS 2: no. 3085). Two things in the later 16th century are key to an understanding of Islay history. One is the bitter feud that was ignited between the MacDonalds and the Macleans of Duart (in Mull), initially over lands in Islay. Murders and raids led in 1598 to a pitched battle at Tràigh Ghruineart in Islay, in which the MacDonald forces led by Sir James MacDonald of Knockrinsay defeated the Macleans, and Lachlan Maclean of Duart was killed.

The other thing to understand about Islay in the 16th century is how it supported a body of 800 fighting men, contracted on occasion by the MacDonalds and Macleans to fight in the wars in Ireland. This was a continuation of a system throughout the Isles that appears to have had its origins in the Kingdom of the Isles. It only came to an end as a result of a combination of factors, not least the increased power that could be brought to bear in suppressing it as a result of King James VI’s succession to the kingship of England and Ireland as well as Scotland (Caldwell 2015).

The Campbell takeover of Islay

Islay was acquired by John Campbell of Cawdor in 1614, and Campbell lairds and tenants were brought in to take over the island. After a rather faltering start, the Campbells were fairly effective in keeping the lid on their new island possession as far as the major political upsets, uprisings and rebellions of the 17th century were concerned. Islay was, nevertheless, wasted and destroyed in 1647, when a Covenanting army under the command of Sir David Leslie came to the island to besiege the royalist garrison in Dunyvaig Castle. There is evidence from Islay in the 1650s for a plantation of Covenanters from the Lowlands, including professional soldiers like Lieutenant Colonel James Wallace, later notorious for commanding the Covenanting uprising in 1666 (Caldwell 2017: 109).

Whereas the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig and the Macleans of Duart were first and foremost clan chiefs, the Campbells of Cawdor were landlords whose economic concerns exercised a much higher priority. The author has already written elsewhere about the extent to which they brought in new methods of farming and new types of houses, and encouraged industries, especially lead mining (Caldwell 2009b, 2017: 231–40).

In 1726 Islay was acquired by a younger son of an Argyllshire laird, Daniel Campbell of Shawfield, who had made a fortune in commerce and who had entered Parliament as MP for Inverary. Islay was on the market again in the mid-19th century and was purchased in 1853 by James Morrison of Basildon Park in Berkshire. Much of the island, including Finlaggan, still belongs to his descendant Lord Margadale.

The name Finlaggan

Finlaggan is a modern place-name coined in the 1860s for the farm at the north end of Loch Finlaggan. The farm was previously known as Portanellan, from the Gaelic for ‘ferry point of the island’, and the loch was known as the Loch of Portanellan or Loch Finlaggan in the 19th century (Balfour 1845: 23). It has consistently been named Loch Finlaggan on maps since the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1878.

Two earlier maps introduce some element of confusion to this picture. First, there is the map of Islay based on a now lost late 16th-century original survey by Timothy Pont, first published by the Amsterdam-based mapmaker Joan Blaeu in the mid-17th century (Stone 1991: 84, pl 40). It does not require much comparison with modern maps to see that Blaeu’s is fatally flawed, among the most inaccurate in his atlas. There is a loch which approximately corresponds with the position of Loch Finlaggan with an island residence labelled ‘Ylen Euldagan’, not improbably a corrupt rendering of

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'Ylane Inlagane' (Finlaggan's Island), as, for instance, in the Islay rental of 1509 (Smith 1895: 484). This loch, however, is depicted with a river flowing from it into the Sound of Islay and what is evidently the castle in Loch Gorm is described as 'Castel of Falinghan or Finlagan'.

The second map is George Langlands's 1801 map of Argyllshire (Callender & Macaulay 1984: 12), some details of which do not inspire much more confidence than Blaeu's work (Illus 2.1). It shows the settlement of 'Portineilan' just to the north-west of the loch. It is represented by two solid blocks to indicate several houses. An unnamed house is depicted in the loch and another to the east of the loch, marked as 'Finlagan'. These two houses are represented by drawings of buildings with windows and chimneys, a symbol normally reserved by Langlands for the more substantial houses belonging to proprietors and tacksmen. He may well have felt that the ruins on Eilean Mór (Gaelic for 'large island'), the name now given to the larger of the two islands, merited this form of identification, but his 'Finlagan' cannot readily be identified from contemporary rentals.

Nowadays Finlaggan is the name used for the historic site located on two islands at the north end of the loch, and this is

what we mean by Finlaggan in this work. Sometimes it is also called by others a castle. As a result of our excavations it is now known that the two islands together did form a substantial castle prior to about 1300. Its contemporary name has not been identified, nor have any documentary references to it.

In the later medieval period the castle was superseded by the undefended hall, houses and other buildings of the lords of the Isles, a complex which can reasonably be labelled a palace. The smaller of the two islands is now known in Gaelic as Eilean na Comhairle, or in English translation as the Council Isle. The earliest record of this name is in the 1549 description of Finlaggan by Donald Monro, dealt with more fully below (Munro 1961: 56–57). Eilean Mór was known in medieval times as 'the Island of St Finlaggan', indicating that the name derives from a companion of St Columba (Findlugán) mentioned by the saint's biographer, Adomnán (Sharpe 1991: 173). At least that is what was believed in medieval times, and this seems a more plausible etymology to us than the suggestion that it is from the Gaelic for 'small white hollow' (Cameron Gillies 1906: 146).

Findlugán interposed himself between Columba and a 'destroyer of churches' intent on murdering him. Findlugán had



Illustration 2.1
Detail of Islay showing location of Finlaggan,
from George Langlands's map of Argyllshire, 1801

donned Columba's cowl which miraculously warded off the assassin's spear-thrust. This took place on the island of Hinba, possibly to be identified as Jura. He is also commemorated in two other Islay church names, Cill Eileagain, the ruins of an early chapel and burial ground to the north of Loch Finlaggan (RCAHMS 1984: no. 334), and at another early chapel also called Cill Eileagain at Craigens at the foot of Loch Gruinart (RCAHMS 1984: no. 333). There was an Islay family which adopted the name MacLinlagan in honour of the saint, including Archibald McLinlagan who was tenant of Stremnishbeg in the Oa in the 1686 rental (Smith 1895: 497). Findlugán is also identified as a disciple and brother of St Fintan of Dumblesque (Doon in Limerick, Ireland), being commemorated in the name of a parish and church, Tamlaght Finlagan, Co Derry, Northern Ireland, and also, under the guise of Felicianus or Finlicanus, at Bordwell in Co Laois (Ó Riain 2011: 338; Hamlin 2008: 281).

Finlaggan in history and tradition

Hardly any trace of Finlaggan is to be found in surviving medieval documents. It has been assumed that it was one of the two dwelling houses (*mansiones*) of the lords of the Isles in Islay mentioned in a brief account of the Scottish islands in a chronicle attributed in its present form to John of Fordun (Skene 1872: 2.39). The other is thought to have been at Kilchoman thanks to Munro's 1549 description of Islay, which states that the lords of the Isles often stayed there (Munro 1961: 57). Fordun also listed Dunyvaig Castle which was to become the chief seat of Clann Iain Mhóir, descended from John (Iain Mór), the younger brother of Donald Lord of the Isles. Fordun was writing in the late 14th century and using a lot of earlier material. There is some doubt as to the extent to which this account of the islands might be earlier in date, perhaps of the late 13th century (Oram 2017: 256).

A MacDonald clan history of the late 17th or early 18th century in the *Red Book of Clanranald* chronicled how it was at the island of Finlaggan that the leaders of Clann Iain Mhóir were treacherously arrested by John MacIain of Ardnamurchan and taken to Edinburgh, where they were executed (Cameron 1894: 2.163). This was in 1499. The context was that Sir John of Dunyvaig was attempting to have himself recognised as a new lord of the Isles and MacIain was acting as a royal agent (Caldwell 2017: 70). The same history recorded that John I Lord of the Isles 'covered' the chapel of *Oilen Fionlagain* (Cameron 1894: 2.159).

Only three of the surviving acts of lords of the Isles were issued at Finlaggan. The earliest was a charter by Alexander, Lord of the Isles and Master of Ross, dated 23 June 1427 at the Isle of Saint Finlagan (Munro & Munro 1986: no. 21). The second charter, of 7 January 1432/33, also by Alexander, is only known from a 17th-century copy, and the place was given as Finlagan (Munro & Munro 1986: no. 22). The third was a notarial instrument dated 14 June 1456 in the chapel of Saint Finlagan, relating to a judgement by John, Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles (Munro & Munro 1986: no. 62).

The earliest royal rental for Islay, drawn up in 1507, indicated that its chaplain had the quarterland of Ballachlaven to the south-west of Loch Finlaggan to support him (*ER* 12: 589). The chapel at Finlaggan had evidently been under the direct patronage of the lords of the Isles, and when chaplains were presented to it in 1503

and 1527, after the forfeiture of the lordship, they were simultaneously given the chaplaincy of the nearby chapel at Keills (*RSS* 1: no. 911; 2: no. 4566). The following chaplains of Finlaggan are recorded:

- *Sir Angus Macbreochane (MacBrayne)*. The appointment of his successor in 1503 to Keills (St Colm) and St Finlaggan was consequent on the death of Sir Angus (*RSS* 1: no. 911).
- *Sir Malcolm MacGillespie*. On 18 February 1503 'sir Malcum Dungalsoun' (identified by Steer & Bannerman 1977: 123 as Sir Malcolm MacGillespie) was appointed to the chaplaincies of both Keills and St Finlaggan (*RSS* 1: no. 911). Malcolm was also rector of Kilchoman, and is known to have been dead by 24 September 1508 (*RSS* 1: no. 1735).
- *Sir Malcolm Donaldson*. On 29 September 1527 Sir Malcolm was presented to the chaplaincy of 'Illaneynlagane', vacant through the death of the previous incumbent, Sir Malcolm MacGillespie (*RSS* 1: no. 3882). Since MacGillespie was dead by 1508 (*RSS* 1: no. 1735), there appears to have been a gap of about 20 years when Finlaggan did not have a chaplain.
- *Sir Archibald MacGillivray*. Sir Malcolm Donaldson was succeeded as chaplain in 1542 by Sir Archibald MacGillivray. He was also a notary public and held other church appointments, including the rectory of Kilchoman, Islay, from 1547 (Maclean-Bristol 1992: 4–5) and the rectory of Kildalton from 1549 (*RSS* 4: no. 28).

It is regrettable that the main written sources for Finlaggan's role and importance as an administrative and ritual centre date to the period after the forfeiture of the lords of the Isles. The earliest and most informative of these occurs in a manuscript listing and describing the Western Isles, compiled by Donald Munro in 1549:

Ellan Finlagan in the middis of Ila ane fair Ile in fresh water Loch. Into this Ile of Finlagan the Lordis of the Iles, quhen thai callit thame sellfis Kings of the Iles, had wont to remain oft in this Ile forsaide to thair counsell: for thai had the Ile well biggit in palace-wark according to thair auld fassoun, quhairin thai had ane fair chapell. Besides this Ile be ane pennystane cast till it thair is ane uther Ile sumquhat les, fair and round, quhairin thai had thair Counselhouse biggit, throw the quhilk the said Ile is callit in Irish Ellan na commharle, and in English is callit the Counsell-Ile. In this Ile thair conveynit 14 of the Iles best Barons, that is to say, four greatest of the Nobles callit Lords; to wit McGillane of Doward, McGillane of Lochbuy, McCloyde of Saray, and McCloyde of Leozus. Thir four Barons forsaide might be callit Lords, and were haldin as Lords at sic time. Four thanes of les living and estate; to wit, McGinnihin, Mcnaie, Mcneill of Gighay and Mcneill of Barray. Uther four great men of living of thair royall blude of Clan-donald lineally descendit; to wit Clan-donald of Kintyre, Mcane of Ardnanmirquhame, Clan-Ronald, and Clan-Alister Carryche in Lochaber; with the Bishop and the Abbot of Iccolmkill. Thir 14 persons sat down into the Counsell-Ile, and decernit, decreitit and gave suits furth upon all debatable matters according to the Laws made be Renald

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

McSomharkle callit in his time King of the Occident Isles, and albeit thair Lord were at his hunting or at ony uther games, zit thair sate every ane at thair Counsell ministring justice. In thair time thair was great peace and welth in the Isles throw the ministration of justice. (Munro 1961: 56–57)

Monro was dean of the Isles and lived close enough to the time of the lordship to have collected genuine information about it. His account is particularly important for its description of the meetings of the Council of the Isles and the list of councillors, including Macleans, MacLeods, MacNeils, MacKinnon, the leaders of Clan Donald (MacDonald of Kintyre, MacIain of Ardnamurchan, Clanranald, Keppoch), and the bishop of the Isles and abbot of Iona. Only the identification of ‘Mcnaie’ poses problems. Macquarrie of Ulva has been suggested (RCAHMS 1984: 281), though perhaps MacKay (of the Rhinns of Islay) is more likely.

Boardman (2013: 156–61) has suggested that Monro’s knowledge of the council and its councillors owed more to its revival or ‘historical re-imagining’ during the uprising of Donald Dubh, grandson of John II, in 1544–45. While Monro would most probably have been well aware of events five years earlier, he may well have had access to documentary sources that do not survive today. Donald Dubh and his supporters were appealing for a return to an earlier order, and may have taken some trouble to recreate a historically accurate council. Monro’s account is also the only actual description of Finlaggan until that of Martin Martin at the end of the 17th century, described below.

The medieval importance of Finlaggan was remembered in a history of the MacDonalds written in the reign of Charles II (1660–85), the so-called ‘Sleat history’ (by Hugh MacDonald of Skye?). It contains the earliest and fullest account of the inauguration ceremonies for new lords of the Isles:

I thought fit to annex the ceremony of proclaiming the Lord of the Isles. At this the Bishop of Argyle, the Bishop of the Isles, and seven priests, were sometimes present; but a Bishop was always present, with the chieftains of all the principal families, and a *Ruler of the Isles*. There was a square stone, seven or eight feet long, and the tract of a man’s foot cut thereon, upon which he stood, denoting that he should walk in the footsteps and uprightness of his predecessors, and that he was installed by right in his possessions. He was clothed in a white habit, to shew his innocence and integrity of heart, that he would be a light to his people, and maintain the true religion. The white apparel did afterwards belong to the poet by right. Then he was to receive a white rod in his hand, intimating that he had power to rule, not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity. Then he received his forefathers’ sword, or some other sword, signifying that his duty was to protect and defend them from the incursions of their enemies in peace or war, as the obligations and customs of his predecessors were. The ceremony being over, mass was said after the blessing of the bishop and seven priests, the people pouring their prayer for the success and prosperity of their new created Lord. When they were dismissed, the Lord of the Isles feasted them for a week thereafter; gave liberally without any exception of persons. The constitution or government of the Isles was

thus: MacDonald had his council at Island Finlaggan, in Isla, to the number of sixteen, viz., four Thanes, four Armins, that is to say, Lords or sub-Thanes, four Bastards (*i.e.*) Squires, or men of competent estates, who could not come up with Armins or Thanes, that is, freeholders, or men that had their lands in factory, as Macgee of the Rinds of Isla, MacNicoll in Portree in Sky, and MacEachern, MacKay, and MacGillivray in Mull, Macillemhaoel or MacMillan, &c. There was a table of stone where this council sat in the Isle of Finlaggan; the which table, with the stone on which Macdonald sat, were carried away by Argyle with the bells that were at Icolumkill [Iona]. (MacPhail 1914: 24)

This ‘Argyle’ who carried away the table, stone and bells can be identified as the Marquess of Argyll (died 1661) (Caldwell 2003: 69).

This account has been read in the past to mean that the inauguration ceremonies for new lords took place at Finlaggan, but as Boardman (2013: 163) has pointed out, it does not specifically say so. Although this author is inclined to take the view that the juxtaposition of the account of inaugurations with the meeting of the council at Finlaggan indicates that Finlaggan was meant for both, the inauguration of Donald, son of John I, as lord of the Isles about 1387 is said to have taken place at Kildonnan in the island of Eigg. The source for this is another MacDonald clan history of the late 17th or early 18th century contained in the *Red Book of Clanranald*, but there were particular political reasons for it to be held in Eigg (Caldwell 2017: 55).

Whereas these MacDonald histories kept the memory of Finlaggan alive, there appears to be no focus on the place itself in MacDonald poetry, even in those poems written in praise of lords who would have known Finlaggan well – Angus Mor MacDonald c 1250 (Bergin 1970: no. 45) and John II Lord of the Isles c 1490 (Ó Mainnín 1999: 15–16; McLeod 2004: 185–87). The surviving corpus of Gaelic poetry from the period of the Lordship of the Isles, or that harks back to it as a golden age, is relatively small and possibly not representative, but a general lack of interest in Scottish matters, in favour of a stress on Irish connections, has been detected (McLeod 2004: 114–15).

Any mention of Finlaggan is missing from the well-informed report on Islay in Walter Macfarlane’s *Geographical Collections* (Mitchell 1907: 2.188–91). It talks of improvements to Dunyvaig Castle but lately done by James MacDonald, suggesting it was composed not long after the siege of 1615. It also mentions the ruined castle in Loch Gorm. It is perhaps dangerous to make too much of negative evidence, but this suggests that by about 1620 Finlaggan was a place of no consequence.

A 17th-century scholar who does specifically mention Finlaggan is Martin Martin in his *Description of the Western Isles* written in the 1690s. Martin was a Skye gentleman with a keen sense of what was interesting and important in his own territory and among his own people. He was probably aware – perhaps just indirectly – of the previous two accounts by Monro and the Sleat history. Martin specifically locates the inauguration ceremonies at Finlaggan and adds information on the lords’ bodyguard:

Loch-Finlagan, about three miles in circumference, affords salmon, trouts, and eels: this lake lies in the centre of the

isle. The isle Finlagan, from which the lake hath its name, is in it. It is famous for being once the court in which the great Macdonald, King of the Isles, had his residence; his houses, chapel, etc. are now ruinous. His guards *de corps*, called Lucht-tach, kept guard on the lake side nearest to the isle; the walls of their houses are still to be seen there.

The High Court of Judicature, consisting of fourteen, sat always here; and there was an appeal to them from all the Courts in the isles: the eleventh share of the sum in debate was due to the principal judge. There was a big stone of seven feet square, in which there was a deep impression made to receive the feet of Macdonald; for he was crowned king of the Isles standing in this stone, and swore that he would continue his vassals in the possession of their lands, and do exact justice to all his subjects: and then his father's sword was put into his hand. The Bishop of Argyll and seven priests anointed him king, in presence of all the heads of the tribes in the isles and continent, and were his vassals; at which time the orator rehearsed a catalogue of his ancestors, etc. (Martin 1703: 240–41)

The Islay rental of 1722 has marginal notes on several of the touns. The one for Portanellan is particularly full and worth giving here as an indication of what was then understood about Finlaggan by local people:

Portnellan is a large good possession both for sowing & stock; adjacent to a large fresh water loch in quhich there is a chapell and a buriall place and the ruines of several other good houses, which was the great M'Donald of Isla his dwelling place and very famous; and adjacent to quhich isle is a little round island quhairin the great M'Donald kept his Cunsell of fifteen seniors, and of quhich the famous Buchanan in his Scots Cronicles gives a large account. And it is alleged that our Scots Councill of 15 Lords was first erected in imitation of the great McDonald his Councill in the said island. (Smith 1895: 533)

George Buchanan does indeed give a large account of Finlaggan in his *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, first published in 1582, but it is derived totally from Donald Monro (Munro 1961: 26–29).

Finlaggan was visited in 1772 by the Welsh travel writer Thomas Pennant. His book draws on previous accounts and traditions, mentioning the meetings of the Council of the Isles, the traces of the houses of the lords' bodyguards on the loch shores, and the stone on which the great MacDonald stood when he was crowned king of the Isles. Hitherto unrecorded information includes the statement that the wives and children of the lords of the Isles were buried on Eilean Mór, while the lords themselves were interred on Iona. By the mid-19th century the tradition that only women and children had been buried at Finlaggan was developed to such an extent that MacDonald (1850: 19) could confidently assert that Princess Margaret, the second wife of John I Lord of the Isles, the Countess of Ross, and Lady Margaret Livingstone (meaning Elizabeth, wife of John II Lord?) were all interred here.

Pennant also describes the remains of a pier on the shore of the loch with a stone cut with 'A.II' for 'Æneas the second, one of the lords of the isles', meaning Angus Òg, the supporter of Robert

Bruce (Pennant 1774: 259; see Chapter 5 below, archaeological monument no. 40). Pennant would have been lucky to find this without help, but does not give any clues as to who might have been his guide.

Accounts of Finlaggan from the 19th and early 20th century conjure up an image of two islands, little visited judging by the difficulty of access and lush, wild vegetation (Balfour 1845: 23; MacLagan 1883: 37–38; Graham 1895: 27–32; Grant 1935: 402–5). Otherwise, they contain little or no worthwhile new information on Finlaggan. MacDonald, writing in 1850 (p 23), may be reporting a tradition of some age, and possible merit, when he identifies the area with rigs at the east end of Eilean Mór as a garden where the magnates joined the people in the 'mazy dance', but it is much harder to give any credence to his statement that a nearby ruin (building C – the structure with upstanding gables) was the house of the Pope's legate when anointing and crowning the kings of the Isles.

The earliest surviving images of Finlaggan appear to be those in one of the sketch books of the artist J M W Turner, in Tate Britain, London (Illus 2.2). It is described as 'Stirling and the West sketch book' (Finberg 1909: no. CCLXX, pp 868–71), used on a trip in 1831 to gather illustrative material for a new edition of Sir Walter Scott's poetical works, including *The Lord of the Isles*. There are at least four pages (39, 70a, 72, 73a) with views of Finlaggan showing the ruins of the chapel and building C on Eilean Mór, little changed from how they appear nowadays. Turner's sketches were not developed into published illustrations.

Sir Walter Scott's *The Lord of the Isles*, first published in 1815, was very popular and influential in encouraging renewed interest in the Lordship of the Isles. It actually contains no mention of Finlaggan, either in the body of the poem or the extensive historical notes that accompany it. Nor is there any mention of Finlaggan in another important early 19th-century work, the *History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland* by Donald Gregory, published in 1836.

The earliest published illustration of Finlaggan is contained between pages 68 and 69 in a travel account by 'Gowrie' printed in 1868. He merely viewed the two islands from the edge of the loch, and his sketch, which is a reasonable representation of the chapel and 'building C', does not offer any additional information to that which can be deduced from these ruins today.

In more recent times two works have been particularly influential in bringing Finlaggan to the attention of scholars. First, there is the edition of Monro's *Western Isles of Scotland* published by R W Munro in 1961, with an appendix (pp 95–110) ostensibly about the Council of the Isles but containing much more detailed information on Finlaggan in history. Second, there is the site description by RCAHMS, published in volume 5 of its *Inventory of Argyll Monuments* in 1984 (RCAHMS 1984: no. 404). It has the first accurate and detailed plan of the remains on the two islands.

The accounts of Finlaggan, from Monro in 1549 to the Royal Commission in 1984, easily allow the conclusion that this was the centre of the Lordship of the Isles – not the only residence of the lords, but the place where key events like inaugurations of new lords and council meetings took place. It also appeared to be significantly different as a centre of power from other lordly residences within the Lordship of the Isles, and noble and royal castles and palaces elsewhere in Scotland.



Illustration 2.2
 Sketches of Finlaggan in 1831 by J M W Turner, from Tate Britain, Turner sketch book
 no. CCLXX, 70a, 72, 73a. © Tate





Illustration 3.1

Loch Finlaggan looking south-westwards from the standing stone (no. 47) to the historic island site of Finlaggan

PART II

THE FINLAGGAN STUDY AREA

DAVID H CALDWELL & MICHAEL CRESSEY

Loch Finlaggan is central to our study area (Illus 3.1, 3.2). It is situated in the north-east of Islay and is the longest loch in the island with a length of approximately 1km, an area of 63.4 ha and a catchment of approximately 610ha.

Islay is one of the main islands of the Inner Hebrides, 19 miles (30.6km) wide and 25 miles (40km) from north to south, with an area just over 600 sq km. It is the furthest south of the group, lying at about the same latitude as Glasgow and Edinburgh, about 15 miles (24km) to the west of the peninsula of Kintyre, and only about 23 miles (37km) from the north-east coast of Ireland, which is often clearly visible. It is separated from the neighbouring island of Jura to the east by the narrow Sound of Islay. The climate is maritime and influenced by predominantly westerly winds. The average rainfall tends to be high, between 1300mm and 1600mm per year.

Islay has a variety of different landscape types, including sand dunes and machair, Lowland bog and moor, rocky moorland, coastal parallel ridges and, predominantly, moorland plateau (Environmental Resources Management 1996: 63ff). It is also, compared with the other Hebrides, a fertile island. In a memorial prepared for the Laird of Islay in 1780 (Ramsay 1991: 180) it was reckoned that the island had 114,000 acres, of which 27,720 (24.3%) were in tillage and 8,507 (7.5%) grass or green pasture. The figure for tilled or arable land is likely to have risen even higher at the time of maximum population density in the early 19th century. There is farmland on the raised beaches around Loch Indaal, and on the machair in the northern half of the Rhinns around lochs Gorm and Gruinart. Some of the best is to be found in areas where the underlying rock is metamorphosed limestone, including the north end of Loch Finlaggan. Very little of this farmland is now cropped with anything but grass, and none of it is rated highly in the land capability map produced by the James Hutton Institute for Soil Research. At best, a little of it is deemed suitable for producing a moderate range of crops, and most of it is only considered appropriate for improved grassland and rough grazings.

However, pre-improvement farmers with limited equipment may not have found that this apparent soil poverty affected them adversely. Many of the soils on the island could readily be dug by spade and were light enough to be cultivated with primitive ploughs. Ready local supplies of limestone for use as a fertiliser

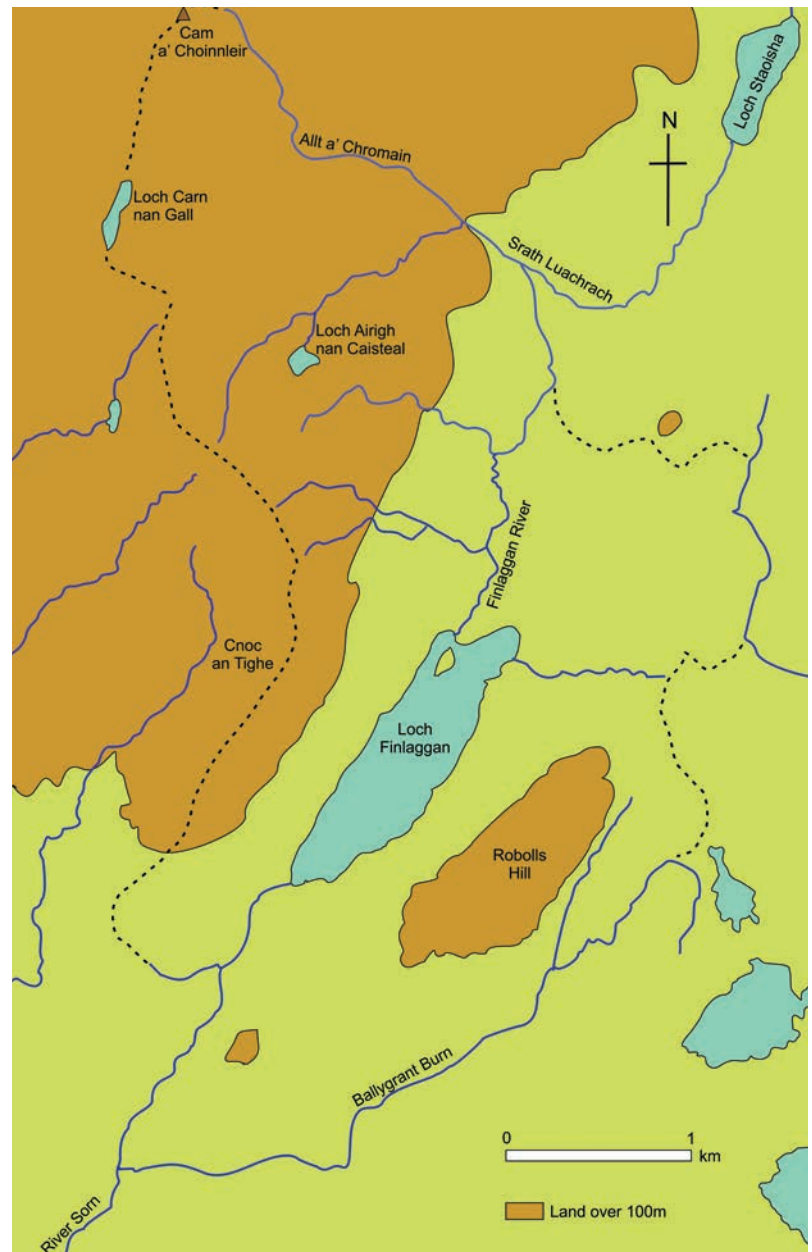


Illustration 3.2
Map of study area with high ground

FINLAGGAN

were also a significant factor. Extensive tracts of peat, covering as much as 25% of the island, are still a valuable source of fuel.

The Finlaggan loch basin is a glacially deepened valley running south-west by north-east along a major fault line (the Bonahaven Fault). The west side of the loch rises from 50m to the summit of Cnoc an Tighe at over 170m above sea level. The east shore rises to 130m at Robolls Hill. In general, the east and west shores are stony with little in the way of established marsh. The catchment area is mostly rough grazing, with 45.7% now planted with conifers.

There are numerous springs and small burns feeding into the loch from both sides of the valley. The major inlet of water into the loch is via a burn, rather grandiloquently named the Finlaggan River on Ordnance Survey maps. It flows along the aforementioned fault line, entering the loch opposite the tip of Eilean Mór in one clearly defined channel. There are two other channels, now silted up, suggesting that the regime of the burn may have changed considerably over the years. There are also

clear signs around the loch edge of a shoreline over a metre higher than the present one. Agricultural drainage of the fields of Finlaggan Farm, mining activity and afforestation may all be causes of this. The burn is 2.5m wide where it enters the loch, but in adverse conditions the discharge can be extreme when the burn bursts its banks and becomes a torrent over 10m wide. The difference in winter and summer water level on Loch Finlaggan is estimated to be in excess of 0.5m, varying between about 52.40 and 51.90m OD (on the basis of the site benchmark on Eilean Mór). Three islands are situated within the loch: Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle at the north end, and Eilean Mhuireill about halfway along the east shore.

Note

Sites and monuments numbered 1 to 75 in the study area are described in Chapter 4 (1 to 21) and in the inventory in Chapter 5 (22 to 75).

Chapter 3

THE GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

DAVID H CALDWELL & MICHAEL CRESSEY

Geology

Nigel A Ruckley

The solid geology of the Finlaggan study area consists of rocks of the Dalradian assemblage, thought to represent a marine rather than an estuarine environment such as that of the Grampian Moines. All the rocks were metamorphosed during the Caledonian period of mountain building about 500 million years ago, when the sandstones, limestones and shales were metamorphosed into quartzite, crystalline limestones and slates respectively. The lower part of the Dalradian sequence – all that is represented on Islay – is probably of shallow water, possibly shelf sea in origin with characteristic rock types of current-bedded quartzites, limestones and pelites. At Finlaggan the rocks are almost vertical in dip or very steeply dipping to the south-east. They form part of the Islay anticline, the crest of which has been eroded away to reveal underlying slates (phyllites), quartzites and limestones.

An easily identifiable rock type is the Port Askaig tillite, covering a large area to the west of Loch Finlaggan. In geological sequence it lies between the younger Islay quartzites and the older underlying limestones. This tillite represents the boulder clay or till of an ice age of late Precambrian times, metamorphosed to produce a rock exhibiting pebbles, including granites and Nordmarkite, that are not derived from local material. They are set in a coarse quartzitic matrix.

The Port Askaig tillite and quartzite to the west of Loch Finlaggan are separated from the limestone around Finlaggan Farm by a north-east/south-west fault, the Bonahaven Fault, not visible above ground (Illus 3.3). There are other areas of limestone to the east, south and around the west of the loch. These limestones, blue-grey in colour when fresh, with prominent thin veins of calcite, often exhibit slight mineralisation in the form of cubes of iron pyrites, less than 2mm across.

The bay at the head of the loch, as well as much of the area to the east, consists of grey-blue dark silty slate or phyllite with cubes of iron pyrites up to 5mm across.

Vulcanism to the north-west of Islay caused a series of north-west/south-east quartz-dolerite dykes to be intruded into the already metamorphosed Dalradian rocks. Several of these are prominent features in the landscape on both sides of Loch Finlaggan.

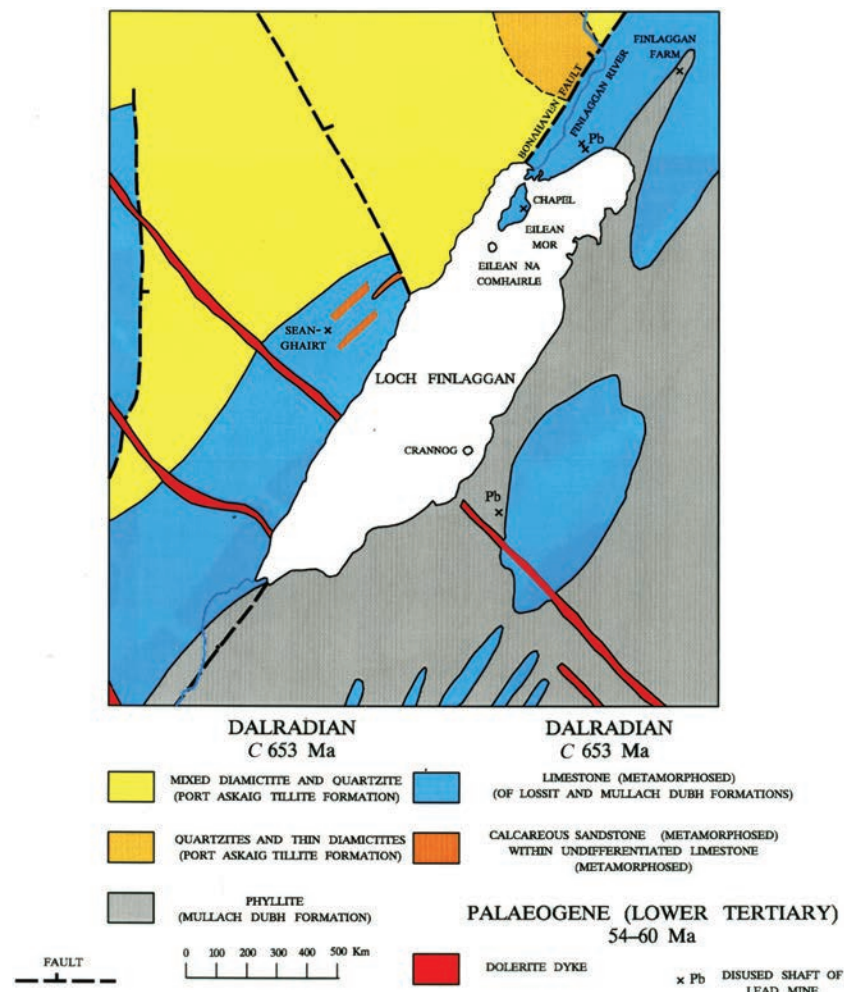


Illustration 3.3

Solid geology of area around Loch Finlaggan based on Ordnance Survey mapping

Islay was heavily glaciated at least three times during the Pleistocene, with the general trend of the ice movements towards the west or south-west. Glacial deposits such as boulder clay, hummocky moraines and eskers can be found on the island – including an area of boulder clay on the west side of the loch.

Soils, vegetation and catchment land use

Within the Finlaggan catchment four soil-types were classified by the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research (now the James Hutton Institute). The soils most useful for arable and grazing are designated as map unit 165 of the Deecastle Association. This type borders the north-east and west regions of the catchment, including Eilean Mór, and is derived from underlying Dalradian limestone and phyllite.

A soil section observed beside the road to the Finlaggan farm-steading appears to be a typical example of a podzolic brown forest soil, as defined by Ragg et al (1978). A thin humic A horizon (topsoil) is separated from a very dark greyish-brown (Munsell soil chart 10YR 3/2) layer of stony silty sand by a band of small stones, representing the maximum depth of intensive earthworm activity. It also indicates that the ground here has not recently been broken up by tillage. The dark greyish-brown layer is the B horizon. Beneath the stone line is an iron pan, which in turn overlies a deposit of yellowish-brown (10YR 5/4) silty clay with some small stones, mostly flakes of phyllite. This is the C horizon. Under it is the phyllite bedrock.

These soils are not rated highly for modern agricultural purposes. The ridges of rock which often break through to the surface inhibit the use of modern farm machinery. The James Hutton Institute has classed them as grade 5, land fit only for improved grassland and rough grazings. As pasture, however, their quality should not be underestimated for stock raising, and crops of oats, barley and potatoes were evidently successfully grown on them in the past by traditional farming means. A series of broad curvilinear rigs, probably the result of intensive ploughing in the modern period, are evident in the field with the standing stone (*Pàirc an Loch*) to the east of the road to the Finlaggan Visitor Centre, stretching southwards to the loch (Illus 4.17).

Much of the region to the south and east of Loch Finlaggan is of the Foudland Series, its soils derived from the same phyllites and metamorphosed limestone as the Deecastle Association. Map unit 242, covering much of the land of Kepollsmore, includes gleys and brown forest soils. Map unit 253, including Robolls Hill, consists of poorly drained acid soils, mostly gleys. Soils of the Foudland Series are now classed (6/2, 6/3) as suitable only for rough grazing, though it is clear from the remains of old rigs and field systems that they have been extensively farmed in the past.

Organic soil, map unit 4, has developed on blanket peat overlying the quartzite bedrock at the north end of the loch. Neighbouring it on the west side of the loch is an area of soils, map unit 188, belonging to the Durnhill Association – peaty gleys and peat formed over glacial drift. These soils are now deemed to be of very limited value (class 6/3), fit only for rough grazing or afforestation. Evidence for these soils having been farmed in the past is restricted to a small area just to the west of the Finlaggan River, before it enters the loch.

In the study area the predominant herbaceous plants are the blanket bog flying-bent communities with a mixture of herb-rich



Illustration 3.4

Mixed oak and hazel coppice to south-west of Loch Finlaggan

fescue grassland. *Calluna vulgaris* is established over most of the acid soils. Marshland communities thrive in the regions susceptible to waterlogging with *Carex sp* and *Juncus conglomeratus*. The shrubs *Salix sp* and *Myrica gale* are well established along the sides of small burns that run down to the shoreline.

Meadow communities on the improved pasture include *Ranunculus repens*, *Cirsium arvense*, *Vicia lutea* and *Rumex acetosa*. To the north-west of Loch Finlaggan on the peat and peaty gley soils of the Durnhill Association (map unit 188), an area of approximately 45.5% of the catchment was afforested with Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine by the Forestry Commission in 1982. At the south end of the loch a tract of abandoned coppice woodland survives with stands of *Corylus avellana* and wind-stunted standards of *Quercus sp* (Illus 3.4). In all probability the coppice may have been formed from secondary woodland. No records survive of when this woodland was managed. Solitary wind-stunted birch and oak trees survive on the eastern side of the loch. At the northern end of the loch a well-established tract of *Phragmites australis* forms a belt around the northern shore of Eilean Mór. At the southern end of the loch a mixture of *Phragmites australis* and *Nymphaea alba* give way to an extensive tract of marshland through which the outflow meanders eventually to form the River Sorn.

Places and people in the study area

Note: there is considerable variation within the documentary sources in regard to the spelling and form of the names of people and places in the study area. In this volume both have been standardised to acceptable modern forms. This has not always been straightforward in the case of some place-names for which more than one spelling remains in use. The author hopes that where spelling variations are encountered in this text and illustrations it will be clear which places are intended.

The main documentary sources of information for the study area are a series of surviving rentals and other documents. To save

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repetitive reference to them in the text, their details are given here in date order:

- 1494 Charter by King James IV to John MacIain of Ardnamurchan of lands in Islay and elsewhere, and the office of bailiary of Islay (*RMS* 2: no. 2216; Smith 1895: 24–26)
- 1499 Charter by King James IV to John MacIain of Ardnamurchan of lands in Islay and elsewhere (Smith 1895: 28–30)
- 1506 Charter by King James IV to John MacIain of Ardnamurchan of lands in Islay and Jura (*RMS* 2: no. 3001; Smith 1895: 32–33)
- 1507 The fermes of Islay (*ER* 12: 587–90)
- 1509 The fermes of Islay (*ER* 13: 219–221; Smith 1895: 484–5)
- 1541 Rental of Islay (*ER* 17: 633–41)
- 1542 Accounts of the receivers of fermes of Islay (*ER* 17: 541–56)
- 1562 Tack by Mary Queen of Scots to James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens of lands in Islay and Kintyre (*RSS* 5/1: no. 1112; Smith 1895: 67–69)
- 1563 Tack by Mary Queen of Scots to James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens of lands in Islay and Kintyre (*RSS* 5/1: no. 1259; Smith 1895: 70)
- 1564 Tack by Mary Queen of Scots to James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens of lands in Islay and Kintyre (*RSS* 5/1: no. 1879; Smith 1895: 73)
- 1614 Charter by James VI & I to Sir John Campbell of Cawdor of the lands and island of Islay (*RMS*, 1609–20: no. 1137; Smith 1895: 199–230)
- 1628 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, bundle 655)
- 1629 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1630 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1631 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1632 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1641 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1642 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1643 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1654 Rental of Islay (Cawdor muniments, 655)
- 1686 Rental of Islay (Smith 1895: 490–520)
- 1694 A list of the hearths within the shires of Argyll and Bute (*NRS* E69/3/1: Islay, pp 55–59)
- 1722 Rental of Islay (Smith 1895: 521–44)
- 1733 Rental of Islay (Smith 1895: 545–54; Ramsay 1991: 9–20)
- 1741 Rental of Islay (Smith 1895: 554–59; Ramsay 1991: 37–44)
- 1780 Rental of Islay (Ramsay 1991: 194–204)
- 1798–99 Rental of Islay (Ramsay 1991: 206–13)
- 1826–27 Rental of Islay (Mitchell Library)
- 1841 Census
- 1851 Census
- 1854–55 Valuation of wood [doors, window frames, joists, etc in houses on Islay farms] (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/2/2/34)
- 1861 Census

Extents and rentals

The study area corresponds to the area of the touns or farms of Sean-ghairt, Portanellan, Mulreesh, Robolls and Kepollsmore (Illus 3.5), as shown on the map of Islay derived from the surveys by Stephen McDougall in 1749–51 (Smith 1895: between pp 552 and 553). This map does not show the lesser units of land like Cùl

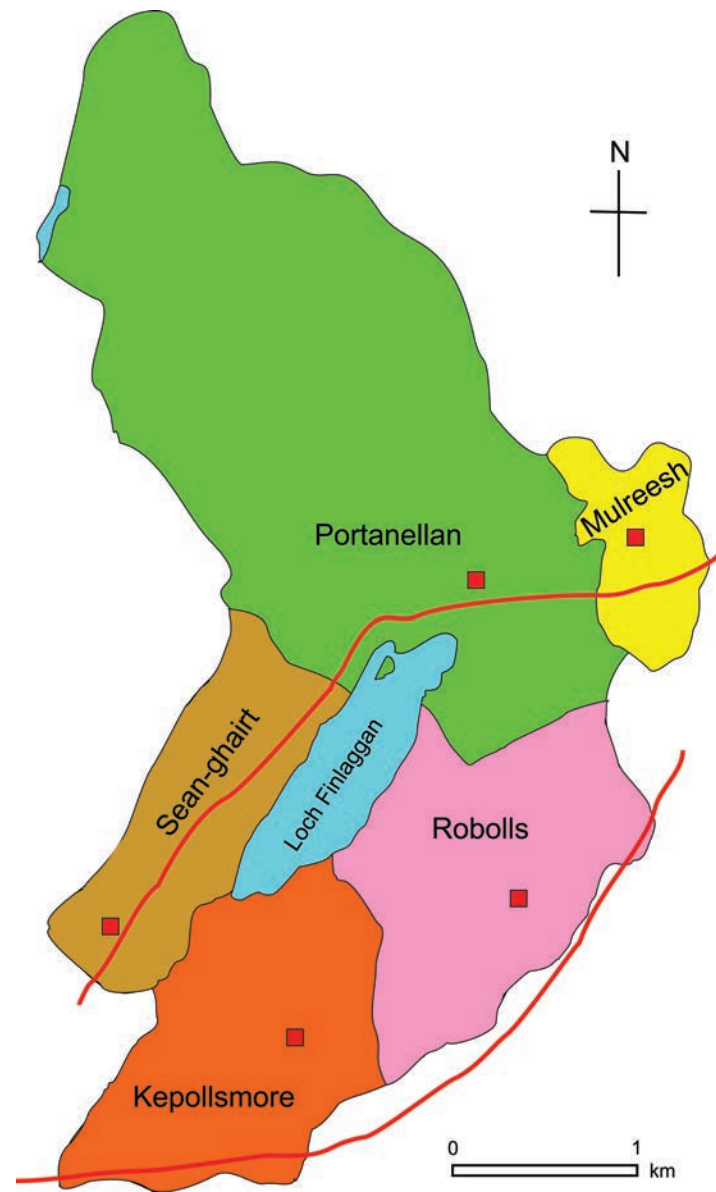


Illustration 3.5
Map of study area showing the main lands

a' Bhaile included in the main farms, and failed farms like Quinskirn, all memory of which has long since disappeared.

Prior to the mid-18th century, Islay farms were measured not in terms of their area but their 'extent', the sum of money the tenants of each were to produce each year for the landholder. These extents or valuations became a convenient way of describing the worth of different lands. Whereas the extent for many holdings remained the same from the 16th to the 18th century, the actual rent paid by the tenants increased with time and inflation. Thus the tenants of Sean-ghairt, a land with an extent of £1 13s 4d, were by 1722 required to pay £120 17s 4d Scots (£10 1s 5d sterling).

The earliest surviving extent of the island dates to 1507, when it was assessed in a crown rental at £212 5s 4d Scots, including both the church lands and those in lay hands. It is possible that this

is an under-valuation, consequent on the difficulties experienced by the crown in taking over the administration of the lands of the Lordship of the Isles. Reckoned as marks, this extent amounts to a bit over 318, whereas another estimate of Islay made at the end of the 16th century assesses it as 360 merks, that is, £240 (Smith 1895: 111). By 1733 the Stent Committee for Islay reckoned the island amounted to 135 quarterlands, equivalent to an assessment of £225 (Ramsay 1890: 1), a figure nearer the extent of 1507.

The variations in these figures should teach some caution in interpreting fluctuations in the extent of individual lands over time. We should accept that individual farms might have their assessment changed because they were deemed more or less profitable, and not just because segments of land had been added or subtracted. It should also be said that rentals do not always include some of the lands for reasons including they were wadset (mortgaged), in different ownership or not currently rented. Nevertheless, as outlined below, it is possible to use the information provided by the rentals to suggest the location of otherwise unknown holdings.

The rental of 1507 was made for the crown by John MacIain of Ardnamurchan, who had been bailie of Islay for the lords of the Isles. Various attempts have been made over the years to interpret the origins of this system of land valuation and how and why MacIain went about updating it (Macniven 2015: 89–93; Caldwell 2017: 143–49). MacIain may have set out with a list of the lands and their ‘old extent’. He also had instructions as to either what the new overall valuation for the island should be, or the rate at which it should be set – neither necessarily much different from what had gone before. In any case, as far as was practical, he listed the lands in ones or twos with a valuation per unit of 2½ marks (£1 13s 4d). It is probable that many of these units only made sense fiscally, and either contained other unnamed lands or were split among more than one tenant. This way of grouping Islay lands is already evident in the charter of lands and office of bailie awarded to MacIain by King James IV in 1494 (RMS 2: no. 2216). Units of land valued at 2½ marks were from then on one of the key features of Islay rentals.

These were the so-called quarterlands. Half a quarterland was an aughtenpart, or 16s 8d land, and quarter of a quarterland was a leorthas, or 8s 4d land (there were even smaller fractions as well). The equation of a 2½ mark land with a quarterland is an underlying principle for understanding Islay extents and rentals. It might be noted that there is no obvious record or understanding of larger types of units of which quarterlands were a quarter. There are also other small units of land called cowlands, which have been thought to be evidence for another, perhaps earlier, system of land assessment. They each had an extent of 3s 4d (Caldwell 2017: 145).

Feudal superiors

All the lands in the study area were part of the Lordship of the Isles until John II Lord was forfeited in 1493, and thereafter passed to the crown. All were included in the charter by King James VI of the lands and island of Islay to Sir John Campbell of Cawdor in 1614 that heralded over 200 years of Campbell control of the island. The Campbell Lairds of Islay retained all these lands, setting them to tacksmen (leaseholders) or tenants. Some were

wadset for long periods but were eventually redeemed. Islay was sold to James Morrison in 1853 and these lands still form part of the Islay Estate held by Morrison’s descendants.

Although no documents relating to these lands survive from the time of the Lordship of the Isles, it is possible, using information from later sources, to piece together how some were granted by the lords to their leading followers. Who legally held these lands, or actually did so, in the 16th century is a difficult problem to unravel.

The land of Sean-ghairt does not figure in any documentary sources between the rental of 1509 and the charter of Islay to Campbell of Cawdor in 1614. The fact that it is not included in the 1541 rental might mean that it had already been feued at that time or was effectively in the hands of James (Canochson) MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens, chief of Clann Iain Mhóir. Perhaps before that it had been demesne land of the lords of the Isles.

The lands of Laichtcarlane, Portanellan, Quinskirn, Kepollsmore and Kepollsbeg were included in tacks of lands extending to 163 marks and 8d given by Mary Queen of Scots to James MacDonald in 1562, 1563 and 1564 (Illus 3.6). These tacks only gave the MacDonalds temporary possession until 1579. They seem to have included all the lands of Islay not already granted to James MacDonald as part of his barony of Bar, created in 1545 (RMS 2: no. 3085; Smith 1895: 50–53), or then belonging to the Macleans and the Church. There is no evidence that James MacDonald sought these lands in 1562 by ancestral right. Indeed, since the Islay lands included in the barony of Bar extended to almost 60 marks’ worth, it would seem reasonable to conclude that they were the same 60 marks’ worth of land granted to his ancestor John by his father, John I Lord of the Isles, in the 14th century (MacPhail 1914: 32). Many of the lands given in tack in the 1560s may, therefore, have been retained prior to 1493 by the lords of the Isles as demesne. By leasing them to James MacDonald, the crown was effectively recognising where power lay on Islay at the time.

Martin Martin’s late 17th-century description of Finlaggan mentions the ruins of the houses of the lord of the Isles’ bodyguard, or *luchd-taighe*, on the side of the loch nearest to Eilean Mór (Martin 1703: 240). The *luchd-taighe* were thus almost certainly housed on Portanellan, and it would follow from this that this land was held in demesne by the lords of the Isles.

The story of who held Kepolls, Little Kepolls, Kepollsmore and Robolls in the period from the late 15th century through to the end of the 16th century is complex and full of uncertainties. Here it is only possible to give the bare bones of a process that involved many other people, lands and events. Little Kepolls (Kepollsbeg), Kepolls and Robolls were among the Islay lands, extending in total to £20, that John MacIain of Ardnamurchan was given in 1494 by King James IV along with the office of bailie of Islay, a re-grant of lands and office already held by him from the lord of the Isles. He was then granted the Two Kepolls in 1499, identifiable as the land of Kepollsmore, along with the Little Kepolls and Kepolls already given him in 1494 (Illus 3.6). Since this charter of 1499 was a reward for the capture of Sir John MacDonald of Dunyvaig and his son, the implication might be that Kepollsmore was land forfeited by the MacDonalds.

MacIain was slaughtered by Alexander MacDonald of Dunyvaig and others about 1518 and the Earl of Argyll was granted ward, nonentries and relief of his possessions, along with the

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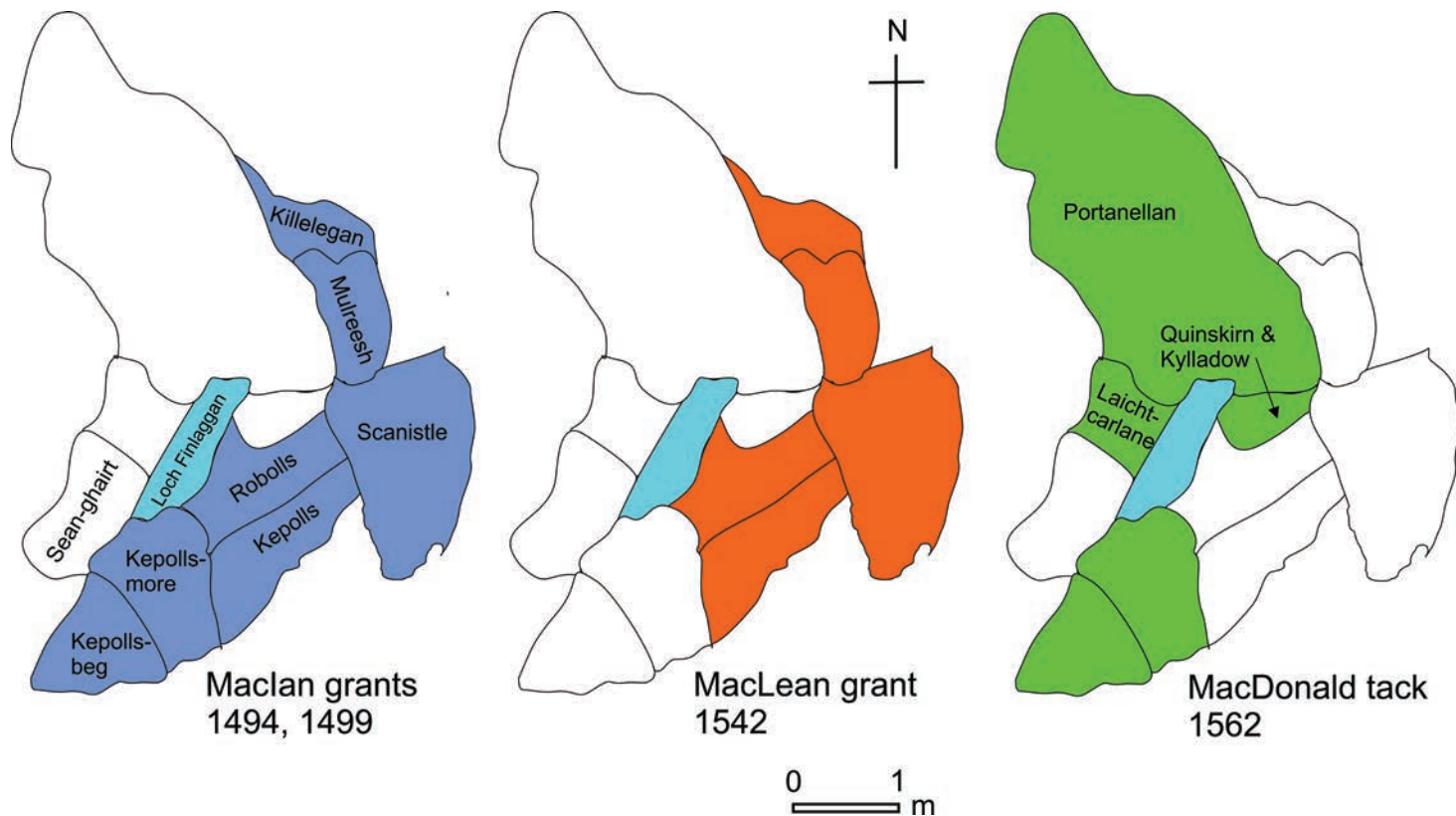


Illustration 3.6
Maps of lands granted to John MacIain, Hector MacLean and James MacDonald

marriage of his son and heir, Alexander – thus allowing Argyll to supervise and enjoy the MacIain inheritance until Alexander MacIain came of age (RSS 1: no. 3048). A bond of gossipry in 1520 between John Campbell of Cawdor and Alexander MacDonald of Dunyvaig indicates that actual control of some of the MacIains' Islay lands was quickly passed to Alexander MacDonald, for he was given a five-year tack of lands, including 45-mark lands in Islay, in return for the support of Clann Iain Mhóir by land and sea (Innes 1859: 133–35). Cawdor, as in many other affairs at this time, was acting on behalf of his uncle the Earl of Argyll.

Alexander MacIain was given sasine of his Islay lands in 1528 (ER 15: 675–76), but it is probable that Alexander MacDonald, his brother-in-law through marriage to Alexander's sister Catherine, remained in actual possession of the Islay 45-mark lands until his death in 1536. There is no evidence as to which lands were among these 45-mark lands, but since Kepollsbeg and Kepollsmore were included in the 1562 tack to James MacDonald, it might be supposed that they were also in the tack of 1520, with actual MacDonald possession from 1520 all the way through to 1562 and beyond.

Alexander MacIain died sometime between 1534 and 1538 (Munro & Munro 1986: 285), and documents dating to 1538 and 1540 in the archives of the Dukes of Argyll (Argyll transcripts: vol 4) chronicle a process by which the MacIains' heritage, including Robolls, Kepolls and Kepollsmore, was granted to another sister, Mariota MacIain, only to be resigned in favour of the Earl of Argyll. It is probable that Argyll was trying to engineer a more

permanent settlement of the MacIain Islay lands on Alexander MacDonald's son and heir, James. His attempts were to come unstuck with the purchase by King James V of the MacIain inheritance in 1541 (TA 7: 470).

In November 1542 Robolls and Kepolls were among the lands, including others in the 1494 MacIain charter, which King James V granted to Hector Maclean of Duart (Illus 3.6), since he had been informed that they had belonged to Hector's grandfather but that the documents to prove this had been burnt and destroyed by Angus Òg, Master of the Isles, at a time of a deadly feud (RMS 3: no. 2835). The feud in question must refer to the struggle between Angus Òg and his father, John II Lord of the Isles, in the early 1480s. At the Battle of Bloody Bay (1481?) off Mull, Maclean of Duart supported John II against Angus Òg (Maclean-Bristol 1995: 70–71). Assuming that the Macleans' claim to these lands was justified, it therefore must date to a period before possession was given to MacIain, and certainly before the murder of Angus Òg in 1490.

The MacIains and Macleans both claimed that Robolls and Kepolls had been granted to them in the time of the lordship. Alexander MacDonald's son James may not have taken kindly to the re-establishment of the Macleans' claim to Robolls and Kepolls in 1542. This must have been a major factor in the feud between the two families that was to occupy the rest of the 16th century. Hector's father, Lachlan, had been in trouble with the government in 1516 and 1517 for uplifting the king's rents in Islay and elsewhere, perhaps an indication that the Macleans were then

trying to establish their rights to these lands by force (*ALC*: 81, 88). They were incorporated into their barony of Duart (*RMS*, 1607–33: no. 1610) and with the neighbouring lands of Scanistle and Killelegan made a tidy estate in this region of Islay. The Macleans would have controlled it from their island dwelling, ‘Ellan Charrin’, according to Monro in 1549, in Loch Ballygrant (Loch a’ Chùirn) (Munro 1961: 56; Caldwell 2017: 83).

Despite the documents stretching beyond 1614 showing that the Macleans held Robolls and Kepolls, the reality may have been that these lands, along with Kepollsmore and Kepollsbeg (held in tack by the MacDonalds from 1562), and most or all of the lands in our survey area, were effectively under the control of the MacDonalds for most of the 16th century. Indeed, there is a petition of c 1600 by Islay tenants to the Privy Council, expressing their continued support for the rule of the MacDonalds. The signatories include ‘Neill Makphetr. [?] of Kepposiche’ (Neil MacPhedran of Kepolls) (Smith 1895: 450–51). The 1614 charter of Islay to Campbell of Cawdor, along with later rentals, demonstrates that any continuing Maclean claim was not realised.

The farms

The study area (Illus 3.5) has already been defined as the area of the farms of Sean-ghairt, Portanellan, Mulreesh, Robolls and Kepollsmore, as shown on the map of Islay surveyed by Stephen McDougall, 1749–51. Of these farms, only Portanellan and Kepollsmore developed into improved single-tenancy farms, the former being renamed Finlaggan from the 1860s. The land of Sean-ghairt is now farmed by the tenant of the neighbouring farm of Ballimartin, and much of Robolls is joined with Kepollsmore. Mulreesh is farmed with Auchnaclach.

A ledger in the Islay Estate papers (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/2/2/34) containing valuations of the wood in houses and barns, byres, etc across the estate covering the years 1854–55 appears to relate to a large-scale clearance of tenants at that time. This was not total and immediate, on the basis of evidence from rentals, but only Kepollsmore seems to have been left as a functioning joint tenancy farm, until the end of the 19th century. Several of its houses are still shown as roofed on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1878. The woodwork listed, including roof timbers, window frames and doors, was considered the property of the tenants who therefore had to be compensated for it. All the lands in our study area, with the exception of Robolls, are included in the ledger under the date February 1855 (Table 14.2). Occupation of Robolls by tenants who farmed the land may have ceased at an earlier day to make way for lead mining.

Sean-ghairt

Sean-ghairt is Gaelic for ‘the old field’, in the sense of one long cultivated (Macniven 2015: 281). Earlier variants include Sengart in 1507 and Shengart in 1722. Five other Islay farms recorded as early as the 16th century also contain this word *gart*, for field. Sean-ghairt appears from 1507 as a 16s 8d land, but by 1722 was assessed as a quarterland because, as we suggest below, it by then included the land of Laichtcarlane.

The marriage contract of Margaret, daughter of George Campbell, wadsetter of Ballachlaven, with Mr John Darroch,

minister of Gigha, was signed at Kilarrow and Sean-ghairt on 29 and 31 October 1632 (Campbell 1926: 283, no. 104). It is clear from contemporary rentals that Sean-ghairt was then rented by this George Campbell, the progenitor of an Islay family that held the lands of Ballachlaven well into the 18th century. The signing of such a document at Sean-ghairt might suggest that he had a residence there. Sean-ghairt continued to be held by Campbell gentlemen into the 18th century, including Donald (1654 x 1676) and John of Ballachlaven from 1698. The hearth tax of 1693 lists three hearths for Sean-ghairt. In 1722 it was divided between Archibald Campbell, brother of Campbell of Elister, and Colin Campbell of Dail. In 1733 it was held by Neil Maclean.

The whole of Sean-ghairt was leased jointly to Duncan, Colin and Archibald MacCallum, John, Archibald and Neil MacLachlan, Finlay MacArthur and Donald MacNeill for 23 years from Whitsunday 1778 (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/2/1/4, no. 56). Then in 1815 half of Sean-ghairt was taken on by the farmer, Donald Campbell, of the neighbouring farm of Ballimartin. It was either he or one of his successors, James McAlpine, who developed Ballimartin as an improved farm. There is a note in the 1834 rental that the latter was repaying a loan for the building of stone dykes, and a plan of Ballimartin of about this time apparently shows some of the drystone dykes on the Ballimartin half of Sean-ghairt already in place. The journalist John Murdoch, born 1818, wrote that in his boyhood Campbell of Ballimartin, with his sister and brother, was reckoned among the small group of gentry in Islay (Murdoch & Hunter 1986: 47).

From 1841 Ballimartin was farmed by Robert Cross. Unlike his predecessors, he may have been an incomer to the island, first of all farming for two or three years at Carrabus. In 1839 he had exhibited Ayrshire cows in a sweepstake organised by the Islay Association (Storrie 1988: 3, 6), suggesting, perhaps, that he was primarily a dairy farmer.

The other half of Sean-ghairt remained as a joint tenancy farm with as many as seven tenants. The 1841 census demonstrates there were then 11 houses occupied, dropping to 8 in 1851 and 2 in 1861. Sean-ghairt must have been abandoned fairly soon afterwards.

The snapshot provided by the 1841 census shows that there was a total of 56 men, women and children in residence. Four of the heads of households are described as farmers, four others as agricultural labourers, another as a tailor and the remaining two as spinning women. In 1851 there were four farmers (two of them widowers), a joiner, two widows and a farm labourer as heads of households. The farmers in 1851 were all different from those in 1841, and the only household to remain the same from 1841 to 1851 was that of the widow Elizabeth Carmichael, a spinning woman with her two daughters Janet and Christina, described as house servants.

The valuation of the wood lists the houses and outbuildings of four tenants. It is not clear whether these were the only occupied houses at that time, the surveyors’ job was incomplete or other houses contained no wood of any value. (The entries below and later in this section from the valuation of wood are not exact transcripts. Place-names and surnames have been standardised.)

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Sean-ghairt: Donald Lamont, February 1855

5 couples [pairs of roof supports] with rubbs [ribs: horizontal roof timbers joining couples] in room and kitchen

3 doors with cases [frames], 2 windows

Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases

Stable: 1 couple with rubbs, 2 doors and cases; cows ravell [rail fixed to the top of the stakes in a byre to which cows were tethered], 1 loft with 2 joists

Stirk house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case

Duncan MacNab, February 1855

3 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen

3 doors and cases, 2 windows, 1 loft with joists

Stable and byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; loft with 2 joists, 1 heck [rack for fodder] and manger

Stable no. 2: 1 couple and 1 joist, 1 heck and 1 door

Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases

Cart house: rubbs for roof with loft and door lintel

Sheep house: 2 couples with rubbs and 1 door

Neil MacCallum, February 1855

5 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen

Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 heck, 1 manger and 2 travishes [partitions]

Sheep house and stirk house: 2 couples, 2 hecks, 1 manger

Son Donald's house: 1 loft with 3 joists, 1 chimney vent of wood

Laichtcarlane

Laichtcarlane makes its earliest appearance in the first crown rental of 1507. Later variations of the name include Leackharlun (1631) and Lekharlum (1651). Alan Macniven (pers comm) has suggested that this might be Gaelic *Leac Fhirléighinn ('lector's stone/learned man').

Laichtcarlane is linked in 1507 with a unit of Portanellan valued as an eighth. Since the two together were assessed at £1 13s 4d, Laichtcarlane must also have been a 16s 8d or eighth land. In the 1628 rental Laichtcarlane is joined with Sean-ghairt, also a 16s 8d land on the basis of the 1507 rental. Sean-ghairt and Laichtcarlane continued to be linked together in rentals at least until 1686. Laichtcarlane then disappears and Sean-ghairt appears in the 1722 rental as a quarterland, presumably because it now included the lands of Laichtcarlane.

On this basis it can be suggested that Laichtcarlane was located between Sean-ghairt and Portanellan. There is a ruined settlement to the south-west of Loch Finlaggan (no. 22) to which the late Mathew MacMillan, the farmer of nearby Ballmartin, gave the name Druim a' Chùirn (Gaelic for 'hill of the cairn'). This name does not appear in any rentals, census or suchlike. It was clearly part of Sean-ghairt as outlined by MacDougall, and, indeed, equates with the house symbol on his map. If this were the original Sean-ghairt settlement, then Laichtcarlane might have been in the region of the later Sean-ghairt settlement (nos 23, 24) overlooking Loch Finlaggan, where there is indeed evidence for a field system (no. 16), potentially of medieval date.

Portanellan/Finlaggan

Portanellan means 'the port of the island' in Gaelic. The earliest version of the name, in the rental of 1507, Portalanylnagane,

shows that it was the 'ferry point of Findlugán's Island'. It appears in the crown rentals of 1541 simply as Ellenynegane or Ellemyn-gane, the 'Island of Findlugán', confirming that Eilean Mór was part of Portanellan.

In the 1507 rental Portanellan is listed as two units: the £1 13s 4d land of Portalanylnagane and the eighth land of Portalanylnagane, which with Laichtcarlane was assessed at £1 13s 4d. The whole land of Portanellan should therefore have extended to £2 10s. This is the value set on the whole of it in the crown rentals of 1541, in the 1562 tack of Islay lands to James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens, and the 1614 charter of Islay to Campbell of Cawdor. Portanellan was of greater value than most other Islay lands.

In rentals from 1628 Portanellan was set with the lands of Mulreesh, Kylladow and Quinskirn. The total extent of these lands is given in 1628 as £3, made up of 3 aughtenparts and an 8s 4d and a 20d (1s 8d) land. Mulreesh, known in later times to have been valued at 16s 8d, was detached from this grouping by 1642. In 1695 there is no mention of Kylladow and Quinskirn, but the extent of Portanellan is given as 5 leorthas and a cowland (£2 1s 8d + 3s 4d = £2 5s?). Kylladow and Quinskirn make a last appearance with Portanellan in the rental of 1722 with an extent of £2 2s 8d defined as a quarterland, a leorthas and half a cowland. Thereafter, Portanellan appears in 1733 as a quarterland and 3 cowlands and in 1741 as 5 leorthas.

Quinskirn, if not Kylladow, was included in the bounds of Portanellan as defined in the mid-18th century. The apparent drop in value of Portanellan by a leorthas from the beginning of the 16th century to the middle of the 18th century may be caused, firstly, by the separate listing of Quinskirn and Kylladow, followed by their drop in value and merger once again with Portanellan. A marginal note on Portanellan in the 1722 rental describes it as a good large possession both for sowing and stock, and the core of it has remained in agricultural use until modern times.

The fate of Portanellan immediately after the 1493 forfeiture of the lords of the Isles is uncertain. In 1541 Donald MacGillespie was recognised as crown tenant of this land along with the nearby quarterlands of Staoisha and Balole (*ER* 17: 636). His grave-slab (R11; Illus 9.18) is still at the ruined chapel on Eilean Mór and gives his father as Patrick, otherwise unrecorded. The family's links with Finlaggan prior to the 1540s are suggested by the fact that one Sir Malcolm MacGillespie was chaplain of Finlaggan from February 1503 until his death sometime before 24 September 1508. His father was Dungal, possibly the same person as Dougald MacGillespie, who witnessed a charter of the lord of the Isles in Islay in 1479 and was one of the temporary sheriffs appointed in 1499 to give sasine of Islay lands to MacIain of Ardnamurchan (Munro & Munro 1986: 185; Argyll transcripts: 2.2.599).

It is tempting to speculate that Malcolm MacGillespie's ancestors might have been keepers of Finlaggan in the days of the lordship. His status as a gentleman of Clann Iain Mhóir is well illustrated by his image as a warrior on his grave-slab, along with a carving of a galley. There were still MacGillespies at Finlaggan in the early 1630s, but then reduced to the rank of joint tenants. In 1631 John MacGillespie had a 16s 8d land and Gillecillum MacGillespie an 8s 4d land. There were then five other tenants in the joint

holding of Portanellan, Mulreesh, Kylladow and Quinskirn. MacGillespies probably continued to live at Portanellan well into the 17th century. Only in 1642 does one reappear as one of six joint tenants – Gillecillum – possibly the same as was there in 1631.

Rentals indicate that this joint holding, along with Staoisha, Mullinmadagan and Margadale, was feued as early as 1628 to George Campbell. He was the younger son of Sir John, the first Campbell laird of Islay. He led the Islay contingent of troops to Ireland to do service with the Covenanting army but had to return late in 1642 to become tutor for his brother, John the Fiar. He wrote an anxious letter from Ballycastle in Ireland on 4 July that year expressing concerns about the reports he had heard of his lands in Islay being wasted by the rebels and his wife threatened. This lady was Janet, a daughter of Campbell of Dunstaffnage, notorious for rounding up MacDonald supporters in the night, binding them hand and foot, and transporting them to deserted rocks and islands where they were left to die (Innes 1859: 286–88; Campbell 1926: 248–9).

Also in 1642, George succeeded his uncle to the estate of Airds in North Argyll, and he seems to have ceased having a direct personal interest in holding Islay property. From then on the evidence points to Portanellan being set to tacksmen. In 1644 and 1645 it was held by Gillecillum MacGillreick. In 1654 Neil Og (MacNeill) and Hector MacNeill had it, and then from 1655 to 1686 Hector alone. This Hector was probably the same as Hector MacNeill of Ardbeg, a farm on the south coast of the island (Cawdor muniments, 590/41). He is also described in the accounts of the Chamberlain of Islay for 1684 to 1687 as a drover, paid for driving Islay cattle to Falkirk (Cawdor muniments, 655/129). Falkirk was one of the main trysts (markets) for cattle from soon after 1707 and well into the 19th century (Haldane 2002: 138–43).

By 1694 Portanellan was set to John Campbell of Ballachlaven, and from sometime after 1722 to Coll MacAlaster, until his death in 1747. Coll may have come from Kintyre to Islay in the service of the new laird, Daniel Campbell of Shawfield, when he acquired the island in 1723. In 1724 Coll was appointed bailie for the north part of Islay (Ramsay 1991: 4) and was later bailie for the whole island. By 1741 along with Portanellan he held Staoin, a leorthas of land in Kildalton parish, Eallabus, the Mill of Kilarrow (also known as Eallabus or Glengeoy) and Knockans, all at the head of Loch Indaal.

Coll's last will and testament (NRS CC12/3/4, fols 62–68, 73–75) gives much useful information on him and his possessions. His main residence was possibly at Glengeoy (Eallabus), where he had 'ane new sclatehouse', that is, a house with a slate roof, an unusual feature on the island at that time. He also had a house at Portanellan and a byre. As tenant, he only claimed in his will the standing timber of this house, as was usual until the 1770s. Substantial pieces of timber for roof couples being of considerable value, tenants normally took them with them when they flitted (Ramsay 1991: 223). The roof covering was presumably of thatch. The only items of value in the byre which were claimed by Coll were the 'byre stakes' – the stakes to which the cattle were tied. The will also makes mention of some of Coll's tenants at Portanellan, including Duncan MacQuilkan, Neil MacQuilkan, Malcolm MacArthur, Donald Campbell, Donald MacEachern and John MacEachern. He also had there over 30 cows and

bullocks, as well as ten horses, some of which were presumably retained for ploughing.

Archibald MacLachlan, first noticed as a merchant in Kilarrow in 1749, was tacksman of Portanellan by 1770 (Ramsay 1890: 36; Mitchell Library: TD 1338/3/4/1, Petition of Comprisement of Damages). He had, however, relinquished this farm by 1780, perhaps because it was a centre of attention by the lead miners. The rental of that year shows he had farming interests elsewhere in the island.

Rentals from 1780 onwards show Portanellan held jointly by several tenants, six in that year rising to as many as ten in 1826–27. The 1828 rental contains a note about the multitude of disorderly cottars and the removal of some to 'the muir', presumably meaning the lots at Glenegedale, Torra and Duich laid out at this time for displaced tenants (Storrie 1997: 130). The 1841 census lists 14 houses, with the occupants including seven farmers, two weavers and a carpenter. Many of the residents were surnamed Bell and Lamont. Unlike many other farms in Islay, Portanellan does not seem to have had a nucleated township in the late 18th or early 19th century. The key to why this was may lie in the preceding period from the mid-17th century, when it was continuously in the hands of a succession of tacksmen who may either not have lived on this toun or who may have had no interest in it apart from collecting the rents. Perhaps a pattern of dispersed settlement developed then was so well established that it could not readily be uprooted.

The census of 1861 gives some clues as to where the occupants of Portanellan were distributed right at the end of the farm's existence as a joint tenancy. Archibald Bell is listed as a farmer of about 100 acres, aged 73, along with his wife Janet, resident at Backton. This has to be the settlement (no. 37) of Cùl a' Bhaile, which means 'back of the toun' in Gaelic. Archibald first appears as a tenant at Portanellan in 1833.

There were three houses at 'Buall-vhic' in 1861, clearly an attempt at Buaille Mhic Iante. These houses must have been swept away a few years later to make way for the cottage, sheepfold and milking parlour (no. 2) that presently occupy the site.

There were also three houses at 'Lechacruath' or 'Leckchua', lived in in 1861 by Archibald Kennedy, a weaver, Archibald McPhail, an agricultural labourer, and Margaret McEachern, a pauper. The identification of this place is difficult, but the name may be a garbled version of Luachrach. The Abhainn an t-Srath Luachrach (Gaelic for 'the river of the valley of the rushes') forms the old boundary between Portanellan and Balulive, and on its tributary the Allt a' Chromain (Gaelic for 'stream of the kite') is a settlement (no. 35), perhaps the one in question. Archibald McPhail was still dwelling there in 1871.

There were two families living at 'Tomb' in 1861, that of Alexander Keith, a ploughman, and Duncan McDougall, a carpenter. This might be identified as the settlement at Cnoc Seannda, at the Finlaggan Visitor Centre. The prominent mound here had been considered by locals to be a burial place, and evidence for prehistoric burials has now been excavated on its summit (no. 46).

Other houses occupied in the 1840s and 1850s were presumably on the site of the present Finlaggan Farm, and it is probable that the houses at Airigh Iain Mhartuin, An Leacann and Goirtean Chailean (nos 31–33) were in use in this period.

The valuation of the wood lists five houses of tenants along with farm buildings and cottars' houses in February 1855:

THE GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Portanellan: John Smith

4 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen
2 windows, 3 doors and cases, 1 loft with 3 joists
Stable: 2 couples and rubbs, 1 door and case; 3 joists with loft above
Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Pig house: rubbs for roof
Cottar's house: 2 couples, 2 doors, 2 windows

Archibald Bell

4 couples in room and kitchen with rubbs
1 loft in room, 4 doors and cases, 4 windows
Stable: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case
Byre: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 loft with joists, cows ravell
Byre no. 2: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravells for 9 cows
Stable no. 2: 2 couples, 1 door and case; 1 heck and 1 manger 13½ft (4.11m) long (new)
Barn: 3 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Cart house: rubbs for roof and door lintel
2 pig houses: containing 2 couples and 1 door
Cottar's house: 1 couple with rubbs
Cottar's house: 3 couples, 2 doors, 2 windows
Cottar's house: 3 couples with rubbs
Cottar's house: 3 couples, 2 windows, 2 doors
Cottar's house: 1 couple with rubbs

Malcolm Bell

4 couples in room and kitchen with rubbs
4 doors and cases, 2 windows, 1 loft with four joists
Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 loft with 5 joists, cows ravell for 5 cows
Byre no. 2: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case; 4 joists with loft and cows ravell for 4 cows
Byre no. 3: 2 couples, 1 door and case, loft with 4 joists; cows ravell for 8 cows
Barn: 3 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Stable: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 heck and manger and 1 travish
Cart house: rubbs for roof and door lintel
Pig house: rubbs for roof and 1 door
Sheep house: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case
Cottar's house: 3 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Cottar's house: 3 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case

Neil Bell

6 couples in room and kitchen with rubbs
3 doors with cases, 2 windows, 1 loft in kitchen
Barn: 5 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 heck and 1 manger
Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravell for 5 cows, 1 heck
Stirk house: rubbs for roof, 1 door, 1 heck
Calf house: rubbs for roof, 1 door, ravell for 4 cows
Cottar's house: 3 couples, 1 window, 1 door and case
Cottar's house: 3 couples, 2 doors and 1 window

Heirs of Gilbert Lamond

6 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen
1 loft with 7 joists, 15ft by 14ft 3in (4.57 by 4.34m)
3 doors and cases, 4 windows, 1 press in room

1 mantle piece, 1 press in room
Milk house: rubbs for roof and 2 doors with cases
Barn: 4 couples, 2 doors and cases
Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravell for 5 cows, 1 loft with 3 joists
Byre no. 2: 4 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravell for 11 cows
Byre no. 3: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravell for 6 cows
Byre no. 4: 4 couples, cows ravell for 5 cows, 1 heck
Byre no. 5: 1 couple, cows ravell for 5 cows
Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; heck, manger and travishes
Potato house: 3 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Turnip house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Cart house: rubbs for a roof and door lintel
Stirk house: 1 couple with rubbs and 1 door
House for young cattle: 1 couple, 1 heck, 1 door and case
Sheep house and pig house: 1 couple in each
Potato house no. 2: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Cottar's house: 3 couples with rubbs
Cottar's house: 3 couples with rubbs
Cottar's house: 3 couples with rubbs

In 1863 most of Portanellan, then all of it from 1865, was let to a single tenant, John Thomson. From 1867 a new name, Finlaggan, was adopted for the farm, and has been retained ever since. Thomson was followed from 1871 to 1885 by the brothers Alexander and James Greenlees, recorded in Islay Estate rentals and valuation rolls as having farmed Finlaggan, Mulreesh and Robolls. The Greenleeses were whisky distillers in Campbeltown, and in 1880 James Greenlees was one of the founders of the Bunnahabhain Distillery on the Sound of Islay (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/1/5/2/1). Perhaps they farmed separately, one using the steading at Finlaggan (no. 1), the other Buaile Mhic Iante (no. 2).

In the time of the Greenleeses, if not Thomson, much of Finlaggan, like much of the rest of Islay, was given over to sheep. The date can be determined by the remarks of John Nicolls, mine manager, Robolls, at an interview by the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands, 1892) at Bridgend in 1894. He reported that he had lived in the island for the previous 18 years and in that time the present system of large sheep farms had proved rather disastrous for the island and the community. He said he had been told by the farmer of Finlaggan and Robolls, at the time he sold up, that after 15 years he had not made a brown penny (Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands 1892): 827).

Mulreesh

Mulreesh makes a first appearance in the rentals in 1628. Early versions of the name include Mulris (1631) and Mulreiss (1674). It has been explained as meaning 'the slope of the exposed hill' in Gaelic (Macniven 2015: 275). Prior to 1628 Mulreesh may have been part of the neighbouring farm of Scanistle. Scanistle, reckoned as a quarterland plus an aughtenpart land, was among the lands granted to MacIain of Ardnamurchan in 1494 and to Maclean of Duart in 1542. In rentals from 1628 to 1633 Mulreesh was set with other lands, including Portanellan. Its extent is first recorded in 1722 as 16s 8d or an aughtenpart. It was probably set to tacksmen, or held by the laird for his own cattle, as in the years from 1674 to 1676, all the way through the 17th and 18th centuries.

FINLAGGAN

In the 19th century Mulreesh was rented to two, three or four tenants jointly before being incorporated in the new farm of Finlaggan rented by Alexander and James Greenlees from 1871 to 1885.

The valuation of the wood lists three houses of tenants along with farm buildings and cottars' houses in February 1855:

Hugh MacDermid

3 couples in dwelling house, 1 window, 2 doors and cases
Son's house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case, 1 window
Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 heck, manger and travish
Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravell for 6 cows
Potato house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case

Duncan MacDermid

4 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen
6 joists of wood in room, 1 mantle piece
6 joists of wood in kitchen, 1 loft in byre with 3 joists
3 doors with cases, 2 windows
cows ravell for 6 cows
Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Potato house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 window
Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Stirk house: 2 couples with rubs; cows ravell in byre for 7 cows
Turnip house: 4 couples with rubbs
Stable: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case, 1 heck
Sheep house: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door
Cart houses: rubbs for roof in 2 cart houses
Cottar's house: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 windows
Cottar's house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Cottar's house: rubbs for roof, 1 door and case

John Campbell

8 couples in room and kitchen with rubbs
3 doors with cases, 2 windows
Cows ravell for 5 cows, loft with 4 joists
Byre: 3 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravell for 12 cows
Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and frame; heck, manger and 2 travishes; 1 loft with joists
Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
Sheep house: 2 hecks
Cottar's house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
Cottar's house: 1 couple with rubs

In 1885 some of Mulreesh was detached and subdivided into eight crofts. In 1894 one of the Mulreesh crofters, Neil MacArthur, gave evidence in Gaelic to a meeting of the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands, 1892). He read the following statement:

I am 54 years of age and reside at Mulrees, in the parish of Kilmeny, Island of Islay, county of Argyll. I know Mulrees and Portnellan well, and have for the past thirty-five years lived on it. When I first knew it, it was in the possession of six small farmers, viz, Mr Gilbert Lamont, Mr Neil Bell, Mr Godfrey Lamont, Mr Malcolm Bell, Mr John Smith, and Mr Archibald Bell. All these lost their farms, but how, I am not in a position to say. The whole of these holdings were

put into one large farm. At the expiration of the lease held by Messrs Greenlees, we applied to Mr Ballingal, factor, for a small park which was at that time overgrown with rushes, heather, and rough grass, with a lot of lime rock jutting through here and there, and all brought about for the want of turning over. I am now in possession of about three acres of aforesaid park, from which I derived a fair return, on account of the way in which I work and manure it. Only part of my time is now taken up with the cultivation of the land I now hold, it being so small: other parts of my time are occupied in working for other people when I can get it. Sometimes I have nothing to do, and would like a little more land to occupy my spare time. I could easily manage twice or thrice the quantity of arable land if I could get it. I find it a very serious drawback in consequence of having no hill pasture on which to graze my beasts. I would be quite satisfied if I could get the matter of a few acres more of arable land along with some hill pasture, which would enable me to keep a sufficient number of cattle to make dung to manure the land and keep up its strength. I have cows already and money to buy more could I get grazing for them. I have to send those I now have away for grazing, which is very expensive and difficult to get. In fact, I consider it a great favour to get it at all, and feel myself more or less under an obligation to the party granting it. I am fully persuaded that the land we ask for might be granted beneficially to me and the like of me without injuring any party.

In the ensuing examination MacArthur indicated that he was one of six crofters then living at Mulreesh. Two other crofts were then empty, and he and one of the other crofters farmed this land along with their own. None of the other five crofters had any hill pasture; only two of them, like him, had one or two cows. Only one of them had a horse and there were no sheep. MacArthur believed that these crofts had been created at least seven years previously (Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands 1892): 835–36).

The Royal Commission which took MacArthur's evidence was charged with inquiring whether any land given over for deer, grouse or grazing could be better used by crofters or other small tenants. Nothing came of this, as far as is known, for MacArthur and his fellow crofters, who were hemmed in by not only large farms but also the Mulreesh lead mine, then probably not being worked (Callender & Macaulay 1984: 13). The creation of small regular crofts like those at Mulreesh, while typical of much of the West Highlands and Islands at this time, was exceptional in Islay (Storrie 1997: 174), where it appears the landowners and the tenants of the new large farms were unprepared to release land that they might have used themselves.

Quinskirn

The name Quinskirn equates with Cuing-sgeir on the Ordnance Survey maps just to the north-east of Loch Finlaggan where there are substantial traces of earlier cultivation (no. 18). There is a rocky outcrop adjacent to a burn that may be the actual 'yoke skerry' (?) (Gaelic *cuing*, 'yoke'; *sgeir*, 'skerry'). As Quhymmsgyrme it is described as a 3/-land in a tack of 1562, that is a small holding,

possibly a cowland. Fluctuating extents for Portanellan and the other lands grouped with it might imply that Quinskirn had risen in value by the early 17th century and then declined prior to its disappearance from the rentals after 1722. By the middle of the 18th century it was clearly within the bounds of Portanellan as depicted on the MacDougall map. Its drop in value and abandonment for arable cultivation are possibly connected with lead mining activity (see no. 4).

Kylladow

The location of Kylladow is uncertain, as is its etymology – possibly Gaelic *cealla dubh(a)*, meaning ‘black cells’. The name seems to have disappeared with the farm, last included in rentals in 1722. It is first recorded in the rental of 1631 as *Kylledo* and is invariably grouped with Quinskirn and Portanellan as a joint holding. It is possible that it was adjacent to Quinskirn, and that some of the rigs and fields (no. 18) identified as belonging to Quinskirn are actually Kylladow. Its extent cannot be deduced from any of the rentals, but it was probably only ever a small unit of land, perhaps the same as Quinskirn. If we are right in seeing Quinskirn and Kylladow as small units detached from Portanellan, the two together might originally have extended to one *leorthas* (8s 4d), since that is the amount that Portanellan dropped from its early 16th-century extent of £2 10s.

Robolls

Robolls on the east side of Loch Finlaggan is one of the Islay farms with a Norse *bólstaðr* name. The specific is Old Norse *ró*, ‘a nook’ or ‘corner’ (Gammeltoft 2001: 143; Macniven 2015: 278). Robolls is grouped together with Kepolls as a quarterland in the MacLan grant of 1494, each presumably being valued as an *aucht-enpart*. The main residence at Robolls was clearly the island dwelling of Eilean Mhuireill (no. 61). That the bailie should have had a residence, if not his main one, within sight and easy reach of Finlaggan makes good sense. Robolls is not included in the rentals of 1541–42 which might, tentatively, be taken as an indication that it was then in the hands of the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig or possibly the Macleans of Duart.

The 1614 charter of Islay to John Campbell of Cawdor includes the 16/8 land of Robolls. In the rental of 1628, Robolls is listed with two other properties, Keapolls Lachlane and Tawnach. In the rentals of 1630 and 1631, Tannach Robolls or Robolls Tannach is clearly a single unit. Tannach is Gaelic for a ‘green or fertile field’, especially in waste or heathery ground (Watson 1993: 148), and is represented on maps by the modern place-name, An Tàmhanachd, referring to the lower slopes of Robolls Hill facing Loch Finlaggan, where there is extensive evidence for earlier field systems (no. 20).

From at least 1628 onwards Robolls seems to have been in the possession of the Campbells of Ballachlaven, for most of the time as a wadset. An inventory of the feus and wadsets of Islay delivered to the new owner of Islay, Daniel Campbell of Shawfield, in 1727 includes two documents of relevance here (Cawdor muniments, 654/d 10–11). The first is a wadset, dated 20 July 1678, arranged between Sir Hugh Campbell of Islay and John Campbell of Ballachlaven of the lands of Ballachlaven and others,

redeemable for 2,200 merks (£1,466 13s 4d). The second is dated 5 September 1695 and is in the same terms as the first, but with the redemption figure upped to 3,000 merks (£2,000).

The rental of 1695 lists Ballachlaven, Keppolls and Robolls together as two quarterlands. The 1722 rental, however, has Ballachlaven and Robolls alone as two quarterlands. It thus appears that Robolls jumped in extent from 16s 8d to £1 13s 4d between 1695 and 1722.

The explanation in this case is that another extensive area of arable was now reckoned as part of Robolls. This would be the land now partially covered by the Ballygrant Plantation, Ballygrant Inn (formerly Robolls House) and the recent fields to the north-east of the inn. They are within the farm of Robolls as defined by the mid-18th-century map of Islay, which apparently locates the settlement of Robolls here rather than at An Tàmhanachd. Here too Andrew McLean probably had his inn. His gravestone in the Kilmeny burial ground records his death in April 1748 at the age of 48 (McWee & Ruckley 2002: 59).

The fact that ‘Tannach’ was early used to distinguish one part of Robolls might suggest that this land was always understood to consist of two parts amounting to £1 13s 4d in extent, but, if so, this other Robolls was not listed as such in any of the rentals. We will show below that it was Kepolls (McKeorie).

Robolls never developed into a joint tenancy farm but passed from the hands of tacksmen in the 19th century to those of new improved farmers. Andrew Campbell may have marked the transition in the 1820s and 1830s. He was one of the founder members of the Islay Association in 1838 and its first secretary (Storrie 1988: 3–4). Census evidence from 1851 shows that the land was still occupied by about 50 people living in 12 houses. None of them were listed as farmers, but they included a blacksmith, a seamstress, a tailor, a shoemaker, a merchant and a farm overseer. The blacksmith, Duncan Campbell, may have had his smiddy overlooking Loch Finlaggan among earlier (?) mine workings (no. 6). The farm overseer was Donald McKenzie, who from 1827 to 1833 had farmed part of Robolls. Now he may have managed all of it for Charles McNeill, the farmer from the 1840s to the 1860s.

Charles McNeill probably did not live at Robolls, at least from the late 1850s, when he also took on Rockside over at Kilchoman. The Greenlees brothers who had Robolls from 1871 lived at Finlaggan. McNeill and the Greenleeses had no modern farm-steading at Robolls and may only have used the land for grazing beasts. Robolls House was probably built soon after 1851, at the same time as the settlement of Robolls (no. 56) was deserted. Robolls House was from 1869 the house of the manager of the Islay Mining Company.

When the Greenleeses gave up Finlaggan, Mulreesh and Robolls in 1885, Robolls was taken on by Edward Fletcher, who also farmed at Kepolls. He purchased a share of the Greenleeses’ sheep for Robolls, amounting to 434 animals at a total cost of £736 3s 6d (Booth 1983: 74–75).

From the mid- to late 19th century the schoolteacher for the parish school of Kilmeny was Hector Maclean, a local man, the tutor and collaborator of the folklorist John Francis Campbell of Islay. The school and schoolhouse lay just within the bounds of Robolls.

Kepolls and Kepollsmore

Kepolls is obviously another Norse *bólstaðr* name with the Gaelic *mór* ('great') added to distinguish Kepollsmore. It has been suggested that Kepolls might mean farm of the gatherings of people (MacEacharna 1976: 119), but another scholar in a specialist study on *bólstaðr* names more recently considered that the specific is too worn to be readily determinable (Gammeltoft 2001: 128). Macniven (2015: 268) suggests that it might be Old Norse *kappi* ('champion'), *kjappi* ('billy goat') or else *keipr* ('rowlock'). It has also been Gaelicised as Ceapasadh, as in the name of the fort, Dùn Ceapasaidh Mór. Early spellings include Capolse (1494), Keipbolse (1499), Capollismoir (1509) and Keapolsaybeg (1562).

At least three different lands of Kepolls are listed in early documents: Kepollsmore, Kepollsbeg and Kepolls Mckeorie, according to the 1614 charter of Islay to Campbell of Cawdor. Kepollsmore is consistently reckoned in documents as a quarterland, and Kepollsbeg and Kepolls Mckeorie both aughtenpart lands, giving a total extent of 5 merks for a greater Kepolls.

Kepollsmore first appears in the 1507 rental. The rental of 1541 gives its tenant, along with Kepollsbeg and the nearby land of Baile Tharbach, as Doule McIlfee, presumably 'Dugalli Roy Makoffee, officiarri et receptoris firmarum Medie Warde de Ilay' (Dugald Roy MacPhie, bailie of the Midward of Islay) (*ER* 17: 545). It is possible that the Archibald McKoffee to whom £5 worth of land in Islay was set in 1506 was an ancestor already in possession of Kepollsmore and Kepollsbeg (*ER* 17: 709), and that the MacPhies remained in these lands, tenants either of the MacIans, the MacDonalds or the crown from the beginning of the 16th century to the 1540s. The main base of the MacPhies (or MacDuffies) was the neighbouring island of Colonsay, but the foothold of one branch of the family here beside Finlaggan may not be unconnected with their traditional role as hereditary keepers of the records of the Lordship of the Isles (MacPhail 1914: 25).

Kepollsbeg, which first appears in the rental of 1541, is clearly the same holding as Little Kepolls, granted to John MacIan of Ardnamurchan in 1494. It had an extent of 16s 8d. Kepolls Mckeorie, also with an extent of 16s 8d, has to be the Kepolls granted to MacIan in 1494 and given to Hector Maclean of Duart in 1542. The 'Mckeorie' does not appear to be a surname, though it did give rise to the form 'Kelpolsmuckean' in 1662 (*Retours* 1: no. 68), an obvious attempt to relate the land to its possession by the MacIans. Mckeorie might possibly be a garbled attempt at the Gaelic (genitive *macharach*) for 'the low-lying parts of a farm'. It could then be identified as the same holding as the 'Keapols Lachlans' (Lachlans = Scots 'lowlands') included in the 1631 rental.

Confusion is caused by the appearance of 'duabus Keipbolse' ('the two Kepolls') with an extent of 5 marks (£3 6s 8d) in the charter of 1499, which rewarded MacIan of Ardnamurchan for capturing John MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens and his son. It appears that the lands of Kepolls and Little Kepolls already granted to MacIan five years earlier are included, mistakenly, along with Kepollsmore. The error is not rectified in later documents concerning the MacIan inheritance, for example in the sasine of the MacIan lands given to Mariota MacIan in 1538 (*ER* 17: 750–51), which continue to list the five-mark lands of the Two Kepolls as well as the two aughtenpart lands of Kepolls and Little Kepolls. Rentals and the 1614 Campbell charter confirm that there is double counting in the MacIan documentation.

Kepolls (Lachlan = Mckeorie) remained linked with Robolls, for most of the 17th century wadset to the Campbells of nearby Ballachlaven, until redeemed by the new Laird of Islay after 1726. This farm of Kepolls ceases to appear as a named entity at the end of the 17th century (there is an exceptional reappearance as 'Robus and Keppolslathan' in the 1780 rental), while Robolls jumped in extent from an aughtenpart to a quarterland. It is clear that Kepolls Mckeorie had been subsumed within the latter. Since the original nucleus of Robolls was probably around Eilean Mhuireill on Loch Finlaggan, Kepolls Mckeorie must have been the land around the Ballygrant Inn (Robolls House).

In 1628 Kepollsbeg and Kepollsmore, along with the neighbouring lands of Ayen, Eorrabus, Balole, Duisker and Ballimartin, and Keirreishlaraich (unidentified) were feued to Mr William Campbell (Smith 1895: 388–90; Ramsay 1991: 57–59). This Mr William was sometimes described as 'of Eorrabus'. His title 'Mr' indicates he had a university degree, and he may also be the same William Campbell who was a servitor of the first Campbell laird of Islay, perhaps retained for his skills with documentation (Smith 1895: 240, 270).

Kepollsbeg and Kepollsmore apparently stayed with this family at least until the 1650s. By 1675 these lands are in the rentals as a joint tenancy called Kepolls, and from 1733 Kepollsmore, with a total extent given either as a quarter and an eighth, or three aughtenparts. The four tenants in 1675 included John and Edmond Beaton and John MacMurchie. There is no evidence that any of these three were anything other than tenant farmers, but it is perhaps worth recalling that others with these surnames practised medicine.

Beaton was the surname adopted by many members of the Islay-based family notable for producing doctors of medicine from the 14th to the 17th century, including the hereditary physicians to the lords of the Isles (Bannerman 1986: *passim*). The 1540–42 account for the fermes of the Mid Ward of Islay show that a medical doctor, Nigel (Neil) McMorquhar, held the land of Mullindry as his fee (*ER* 17: 549, 638). Another medical doctor with the same surname, 'Johne Oig McMurquhie, leiche in Ilay', witnessed a band by Ranald, son of Sir James MacDonald of Dunyvaig, in 1615 (Smith 1895: 239).

Kepollsmore remained a joint tenancy farm to the end of the 19th century. Census returns indicate there were 10 households in 1841, rising to 13 in 1851, but dropping to 2 in 1881. The rental of 1863 reveals that four of the tenants were roused since they were in desperate arrears. The tenants were mostly farmers, agricultural workers and their dependants, but included a tailor, James Currie (1841 census). One family, the Fletchers, remained tenants from the early 19th century all the way through to the 20th century. This was probably quite remarkable for Islay.

This family was probably originally surnamed McInleister or MacLeister ('son of the arrowmaker'), only adopting the name Fletcher in the 18th century since it had a more acceptable English form. Possible McInleister ancestors can be traced in Islay rentals of 1541 and 1686. Alexander Fletcher was a tenant at Kepollsmore from 1817 and one of the founder members of the Islay Association in 1838 (Storrie 1988: 4). He was one of the tenants roused in 1863. His nephew Hugh Fletcher was born in 1790 and was a tenant of Kepollsmore by 1833. In 1881, a year before his death, he is recorded as a farmer of 200 acres. His son Edward also took on the tenancy of Robolls from 1885.

The valuation of the wood lists eight houses of tenants along with farm buildings and cottars' houses in January–March 1855:

THE GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Kepollsmore: Dugald MacNiven

6 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen, 1 press with shelves
 1 mantle piece, 3 doors and cases, 3 windows
 Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
 Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case
 Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
 Stable: 4 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; heck, manger and travishes
 Sheep house: 2 couples, 1 door and case, 1 heck
 Cart house: rubbs for roof and door lintel

John Shaw

6 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen, 1 mantle piece
 3 doors and cases, 2 windows, 1 joist in kitchen
 Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
 Stable: 4 couples with rubbs, heck and manger
 Sheep house: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case

Donald MacKay, junior

4 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen, 1 mantle piece
 1 wooden partition, 15ft by 16ft 8in (4.57 by 5.08m) with a press and shelves
 1 loft 7 by 6½ft (2.13 by 1.98m)
 1 loft 7 by 6½ft (2.13 by 1.98m) in bedroom
 4 doors and cases, 4 windows
 Barn: 3 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
 Stable: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 heck and 1 manger
 Byre: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases; 1 heck, 1 loft with joists
 Stirk house: 2 couples, 1 door, 1 loft and joists
 Sheep house: 4 couples, 1 door and lock
 Potato house: 1 couple, 1 door and case

Donald Shaw

5 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen
 2 doors and cases, 2 windows, 1 mantle piece
 Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
 Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case

Hugh Fletcher

4 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen
 1 mantle piece, standards [uprights] and warpins [struts] of a partition
 4 windows, 4 doors and cases, 1 loft and joisting
 2 fixed beds with lining, etc
 Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
 Byre: 3 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; cows ravells for 12 cows
 Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door and case; 1 heck and manger and 2 joists
 Potato house: 3 couples with rubbs
 Sheep house: 3 couples with rubbs

Donald MacKay

3 couples with rubbs in room and kitchen, 1 press with shelves
 3 doors and cases, 3 windows, 1 loft with joisting
 Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases
 Byre: 2 couples with rubbs

John Smith, successor to Colin MacInnes

5 couples in room and kitchen with rubbs
 5 joists in room and kitchen, 3 doors and cases, 2 windows
 Barn: 4 couples with rubbs, 2 doors and cases

Byre: 1 couple with rubbs, 1 door with case
 Stable: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door, 2 joists
 Pig house: rubbs for roof and 1 door

Donald Currie

1 couple in byre with rubbs, 1 door
 Barn: 2 couples with rubbs, 1 door

Surnames	In rentals from	Notes
Bell	1777	Formerly MacMillan, tenants by 1654
Brown	1686	Formerly Macbrayne, an old Islay kindred
Buie		An old Jura family
Cameron	1722	
Campbell	1541	
Carrick	1799	
Connell(y)		19th-century incomers?
Currie		Formerly MacVurich, an old Islay family
Darroch	1799	An old Jura family
Ferguson	1733	
Fletcher		Formerly Macinleister, an old Islay family
Freeman		18th-century incomers?
Kennedy		18th-century incomers?
Lamont	1686	
Lindsay		19th-century incomers?
MacAlister	1631	
MacArthur	1631	
MacCallum	1686	
MacDermid	1733	
MacDonald	1541	
MacDougall	1654	
MacEachern	1541	
MacGregor		19th-century incomers?
Macindeor	1541	
MacInnes	1741	
MacKay	1506	An old Islay kindred
MacKenzie	1541	
MacNab	1686	
MacNeill	1631	
(Mac)Niven	1686	
MacPhail	1686	
Morrison	1799	
Murdoch	1780	
Norrie		19th-century incomers?
Orr	1733	
Shaw	1733	An old Jura family
Smith	1631	English version of old Islay surname?

Table 3.1
Family surnames in the study area, from the 1851 census

The people, 1851

The census of 1851 provides the best opportunity to form an overall picture of how our survey area was populated, just at the time the tenants of the joint tenancy farms were being replaced by a much smaller group of farmers and farm employees. At that time there were 140 people, excluding visitors, but the true total may have been 10 to 20 more. The permanent population now is fewer than 20.

Census data from 1851 (Table 3.1) suggests that the majority of residents in the study area at that time were locals, descended from families present in Islay for two or more generations, and in some cases with roots extending back to the medieval period. A more detailed study of the rentals demonstrates, however, that there was considerable movement of tenants from farm to farm in Islay as leases expired.

Chapter 4

INDUSTRY AND LAND USE

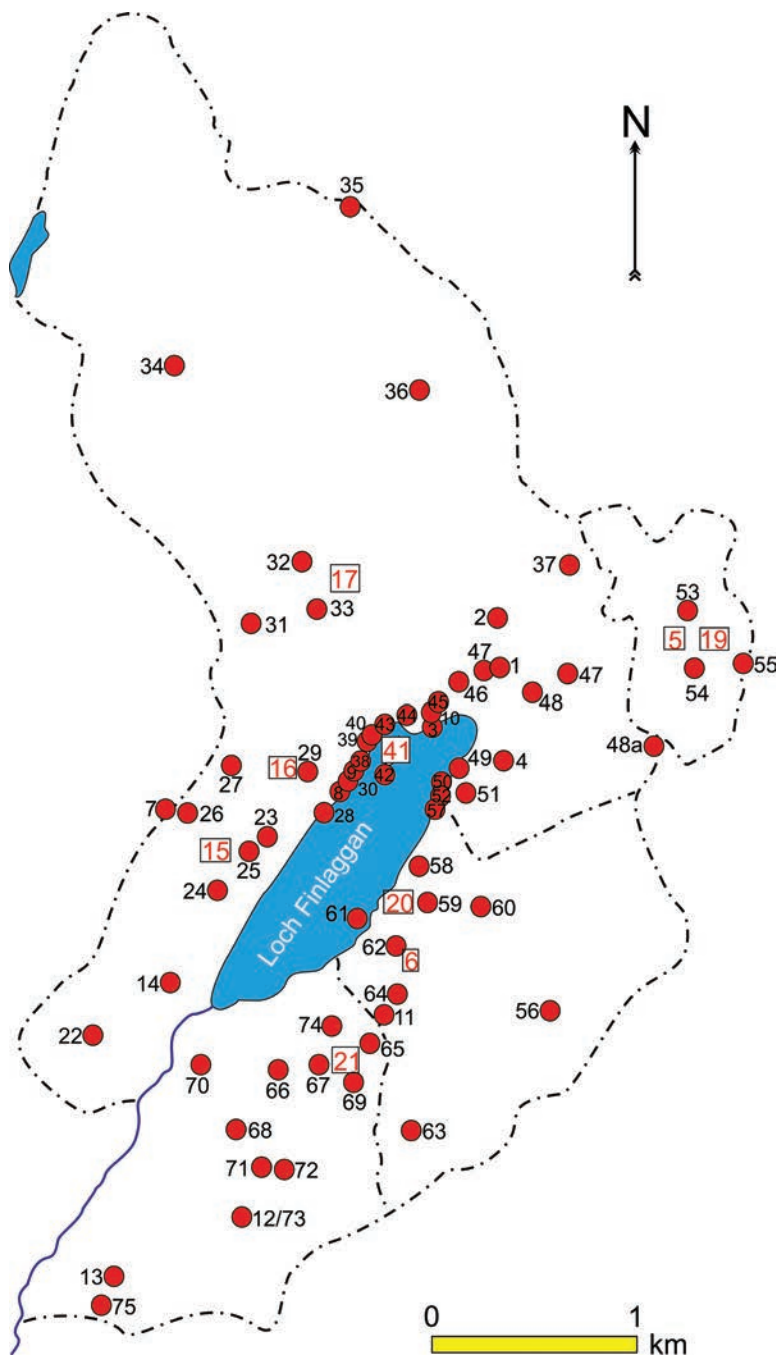


Illustration 4.1

Map showing locations of sites and monuments in the study area

Evidence for human occupation and land use in the area around Loch Finlaggan is relatively good from the medieval period onwards. Prior to that we are dealing with a palimpsest of archaeological shreds, many teased out of our programme of excavations (Illus 4.1).

Roads

Loch Finlaggan is now bypassed by the main road from Bridgend, long the administrative centre of the Islay Estate, to the ferry terminal at Port Askaig on the Sound of Islay. The loch is a back-water not visible from the road, but things were not always thus. The line of the road through Ballygrant and the farm tracks off it are of relatively recent date, clearly cutting across an earlier network of roads. The map of Islay based on the surveys of Stephen McDougall in 1749–51 shows a road from Killarow (Islay House beside Bridgend) to Port Askaig which mostly follows the higher ground to the north and west of the modern road, avoiding the boggy ground down by the River Sorn (Ramsay 1991: 68, illus 8). Its line is now partially represented by a farm road running south-west to north-east between the farm-steadings of Octovullin and Skerrols, and the road from Persabus to Heatherhouse. Between Ballimartin and Persabus much of it can be traced as a track or hollow way going through the ruined settlement at Druim a' Chùirn and up the side of Loch Finlaggan through Sean-ghairt, fording the Finlaggan Burn next to Cnoc Seannda. It can then be traced to the north of the farm road to Finlaggan, heading east through Mulreesh to ford the Allt an Tairbh and continue through the ruined township of Laoigan and up to Persabus.

Another road is shown looping south from this one going from Eorrabus to Persabus via Ballygrant, more or less following the line of the modern road. It may be represented by a hollow way on the higher ground parallel to the present road but to the east of Woodend farm-steading.

A key date in the development of the modern route appears to have been 1753, when the Islay Stent Committee decided that the Killarow–Port Askaig road should go via Ballygrant (Ramsay 1890: 45). The village of Ballygrant is a development of the 19th century but there was a mill from at least 1686, a change house (inn), first recorded in 1741, and lead mining activity from at least the late 17th century (Smith 1895: 515, 557; McKay 1980: 106). All this no doubt helped make this seem a better route than the other via Loch Finlaggan, which only passed through some joint tenancy farms. But we must suppose that the Finlaggan route was at one time the main one since it passed by the historic centre of the Lordship of the Isles.

FINLAGGAN

Another early route traceable as a hollow way runs to the west of the village of Ballygrant through the Ballygrant Plantation to the ruins of the old settlement of Robolls, and then curves around the shoulder of Robolls Hill heading in the direction of Finlaggan. It stops dead where it is cut by a turf dyke at NGR NR 3939 6766, marking the mid-18th-century boundary between Portanellan and Robolls.

Plans of the farm of Mulreesh produced by the surveyor William Gemmill in the 1820s or 1830s (Illus 4.23), along with the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map of 1878, show a winding track running from Mulreesh through the old settlement at Cùl a' Bhaile north-westwards in the direction of Cachlaidh Chreagach. Another heads this way from Finlaggan farm-steading and Buaile Mhic Iante. The farm road from Mulreesh to Balulive appears to follow the line of an earlier road. The present road to the Kepollsmore farmhouse runs to the east of an earlier route.



Illustration 4.2

Finlaggan Farm, with ruined steading in the foreground

Improved farms and recent buildings

Finlaggan not only has a steading (no. 1) next to its farmhouse but another complex with house, sheepfold and milking parlour a few metres away at Buaile Mhic Iante (no. 2). Sean-ghairt, Mulreesh and Robolls never developed into single-tenancy improved farms. A substantial two-storey house was erected at Robolls in the mid-19th century and is now the core of the Ballygrant Inn (see also no. 56). There is a derelict 19th-century farm-steading and house at Kepolls (see also no. 75) and a 19th-century farmhouse, farm buildings and sheepfold at Kepollsmore (no. 72). The Kepollsmore farmhouse is apparently a remodelling of one of the houses occupied by one of the joint tenants before the farm became a single tenancy in the early 20th century.

There are few other modern or occupied buildings in the survey area. They include:

- Sean-ghairt, NGR NR 373 665, ruined farm labourer's cottage
- Finlaggan Visitor Centre, NGR NR 391 684, ruined 19th-century cottage restored in the 1980s; see also no. 46
- Robolls, NGR NR 401 673, 20th-century cottage
- Robolls, NGR NR 401 672, 20th-century cottage
- Robolls, Robolls Croft, NGR NR 398 671, a holiday home built in 2003
- Robolls, Kilmeny School (latterly village hall) and teacher's House of the late 19th century, NGR NR 392 661, both now derelict
- Kepolls, NGR NR 373 653, restored 19th-century cottage; see also no 75.

1. FINLAGGAN FARM-STEADING (NGR NR 393 685)

Portanellan was renamed Finlaggan in 1868, five years after it became a single-tenancy farm. A ledger in the Islay Estate papers records the provision of slates, sills, lintels and flags (including

some for stalls) to William Morris (a builder?) at Portanellan in 1863 and 1864 (Mitchell Library: TD 13338/2/6/10, pp 26–27, 189), indicating that the farm-steading dates to this time. The steading, in ruins, is a surprisingly small rectangular structure with walls of locally quarried stone, about 23.5 by 27.5m overall. The entrance in the middle of the south wall is broad enough to admit carts and wagons, and gives on to a small, cobbled courtyard surrounded on all four sides by ranges of buildings. Attached the length of the north exterior wall are the ruins of a 20th-century concrete milking parlour.

After several years of dereliction, the adjacent farmhouse was substantially remodelled in the 1990s as a holiday home. It is a two-storey house which probably also dates to 1863–64 (Illus 4.2).

2. BUAILE MHIC IANTE, FINLAGGAN FARM (NGR NR 393 688) About 250m to the north of the Finlaggan farm-steading are the ruins of Buaile Mhic Iante, including a milking parlour, sheepfold and cottage (Illus 4.3, 4.4). The rubble walls of the milking parlour stand complete. It is a long rectangular structure 28.4 by 6m overall, with a small wing at one end, still containing several rusty and broken milk churns, trapped under a collapsed slate roof. It may also date to 1863–64. The sheepfold, about 20 by 38m, is subdivided into six pens, the largest consisting of about two thirds of the enclosure. Built out from one end of it in concrete are the remains of a sheep-dip. A mass of collapsed and overgrown rubble at the south-west corner may be the remains of a cottage. It and the sheepfold are both represented on the 1878 Ordnance Survey map, but the sheepfold would appear to have been remodelled since then.

Another, badly dilapidated, cottage, still with a roof of local slates and brick chimneys in place, stands to the north-east. It post-dates the 1897 Ordnance Survey map and was probably built in the early 20th century as a replacement for the earlier cottage by the sheepfold. It was known as Lochview Cottage. It has sash windows and 15 amp electrical sockets. Inside the front door is a small lobby

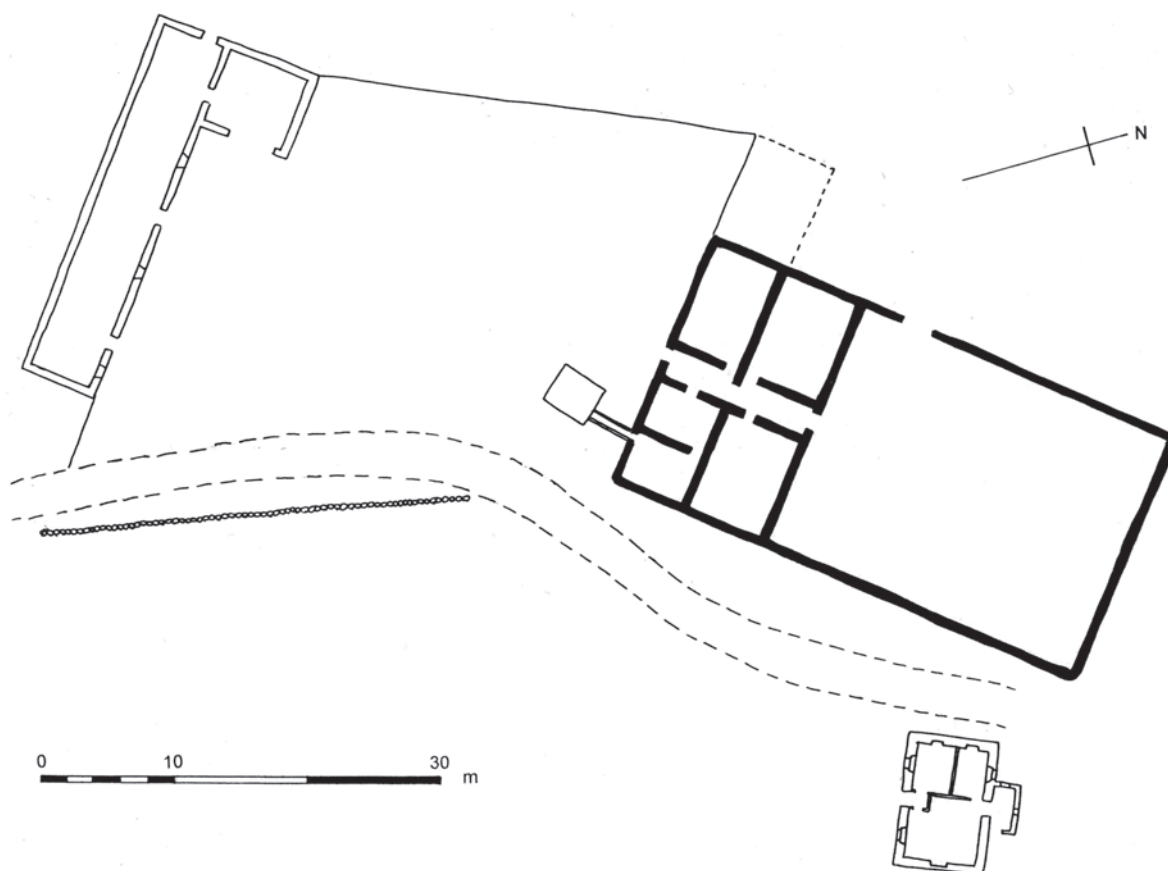


Illustration 4.3
Plan of Buaille Mhic lante



Illustration 4.4
Buaille Mhic lante from south with, left to right, the milking parlour, sheepfold and cottage

giving access to a cement-floored kitchen taking up the east half of the building. It has the remains of an iron range in the fireplace in the gable wall, shelf supports on its north wall, a hook for a lamp and a trapdoor into the roof space in its ceiling. The west half is subdivided into two smaller rooms, both with fireplaces and timber floors. An outshot containing a sink masks the back door.

Behind this cottage is an area of debris, stones and defunct farm equipment overgrown with nettles and gorse. It is possible that this masks the ruins of earlier houses ('Buall-vhic'), recorded as being occupied at the time of the 1861 census.

Lead mining

Michael Cressey

This section concentrates on the results of archaeological field survey of abandoned mine sites in and on the edge of the Finlaggan catchment. In most cases the evidence that survives on the ground is difficult to date, especially since it is clear that we are dealing with multi-period sites. Evidence of early prospecting has been identified, mostly in the region of later activity at four mines identified here as the West Shore, Portanellan, Mulreesh and Robolls Mine. For other early prospecting on the farm of Kepollsmore see no. 66 below.

A fifth mine, represented by a rubbish-filled tunnel or adit, is at NGR NR 371 664. This is presumably the level reported in 1770 to have been started at Sean-ghairt, a mine then proving too difficult to work (Smith 1895: 459; Callender & Macaulay 1984: 31). This level does not drain into Loch Finlaggan, and its entrance is on the farm of Ballimartin, outside our study area.

Mining activity is represented by the following features and structures:

1. Trials, or open-cast works: trenches excavated along surface or shallow veins of ore.
2. Adits, drifts, levels: tunnels driven horizontally. Adits were used to drain off water. Other tunnels were for working ore.
3. Bell-pits, or shafts, sunk vertically. Galleries were dug from the bottom, following the veins of ore. Most shafts have been backfilled and are often recognisable as circular depressions surrounded by heaps of grassed-over waste material.
4. Spoil-heaps of debris, including tailings: crushed rock, the residu left after the ore has been extracted.
5. Industrial buildings and structures.

3. WEST SHORE MINE, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 390 683)

At the head of Loch Finlaggan on the lands of Portanellan Farm are mine workings, christened 'West Shore' in this report to distinguish them from other workings (Illus 4.5; see no. 44 below for key to the illus). Situated on a geological boundary between phyllite and limestone are two shafts with surrounding spoil up to approximately 1.5m high. The more northerly of the two shafts is on the edge of higher ground forming a level area adjacent to the mound of Cnoc Seannnda. The other shaft is close to the loch and has slightly more elongated sides. A trial has been cut into the side of the shore forming a small basin with quite pronounced internal

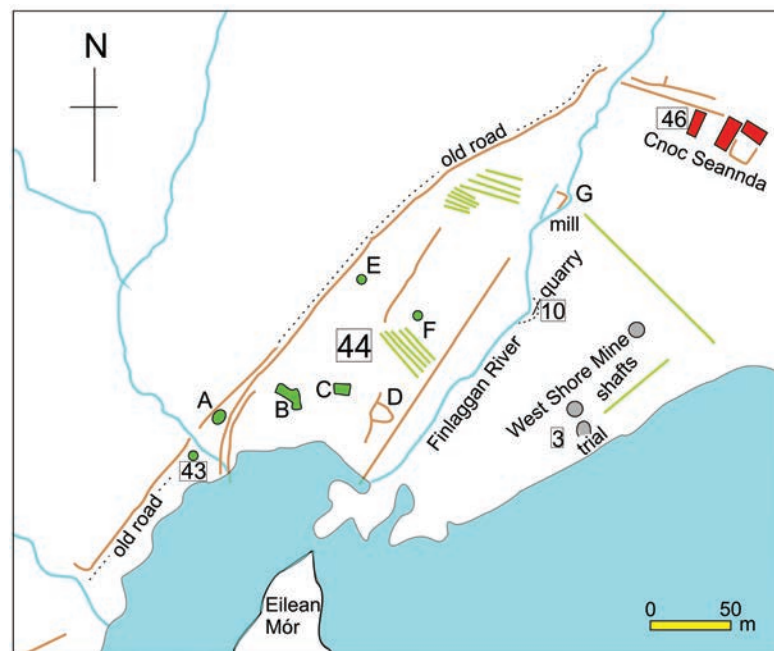


Illustration 4.5

Map of sites and monuments between Eilean Mór and Cnoc Seannnda, based on a survey by the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England on behalf of the Time Team, 1994

slopes. The two shafts were possibly joined by a gallery, allowing the exploitation of a pipe-vein of galena. This mine does not appear to have developed beyond these two shafts and the trial.

An iron hoop (SF 30206), possibly from a kibble (hoisting bucket), was recovered from the loch adjacent to the trial, and the substantial remains of a barrel or kibble (see W34: Illus C6.7 in the Catalogue) was found in 1990 lodged in the sediment in the loch adjacent to the bridge to Eilean Mór. It very probably also came from the West Shore mining activities.

A document of 1770, concerning damage on the farm of Portanellan caused by the mining activities of Charles Freebairn, distinguishes damage in 'the Winterton', that is, in the area of land around the main settlement kept as arable ground. It is possible that these are the workings in question (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/3/4/1, Petition of Comprisement of Damages).

4. PORTANELLAN MINE (NGR NR 391 678)

These mine workings lie on a gentle slope adjacent to the north-east shore of Loch Finlaggan. They are probably the cause of a compensation claim by the tacksman of Portanellan in 1770 for damage within 'the Meadow' (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/3/4/1, Petition of Comprisement of Damages). The vein that was worked here was discovered about 1745 along with another at Ballygrant (Smith 1895: 458). When reporting on the state of the Islay mines in 1770, Mr Alexander Shirriff, considering the possibility of linking the mine with nearby Mulreesh, wrote:

Portnealon vein is discovered at the surface in different places with some ore in it for trying of the vain. A cross cut is driving from Portnealon Loch advanced in open cast 24 fathoms [1 fathom = 6ft, about 1.83m] and close drift 22

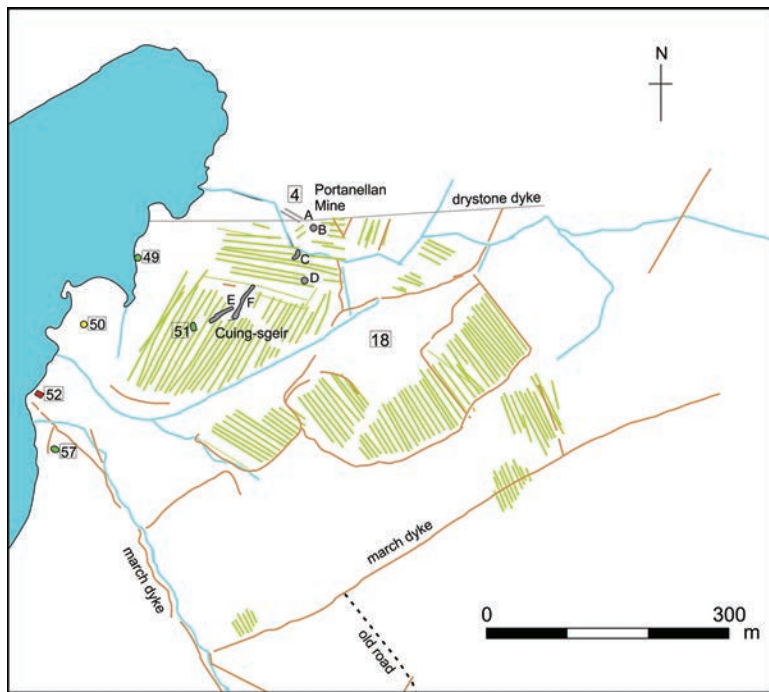


Illustration 4.6

Map of field systems and mine workings at Cuing-sgeir, based on a survey by RCAHMS, 1993

fathoms will cutt the vain in drawing 5 fathoms . . . If on driving north on this vain it be found to carry ore, it will serve as a level to Mulrees works to which it points. The distance may be 400 fathoms and will, when at the Mulrees works, be 12 fathoms under the old soles [old worked-out areas]. (Smith 1895: 459)

The description accords well with the surface evidence obtained from survey of the earthworks. The suggestion that Portanellan might be linked with Mulreesh, given the distance between the mines, appears ambitious, but field survey does hint it was attempted and possibly achieved.

Illus 4.6 shows a water-filled adit (A) with denuded banks up to 1m high, bisected by a drystone wall that forms the boundary between the present-day farms of Finlaggan and Kepollsmore. A shaft (B) with surrounding spoil up to 2.5m is situated 20m to the south-east. A series of trials (C) have a depth of about 1m, and each is surrounded by spoil which is 1 to 2m high in places. To the south of shaft (B), there is a second shaft (D) which has internal banks 2m deep with surrounding spoil to a height of 2m. To the south-west of these workings a natural limestone outcrop is flanked by two deep trials (E-F) that traverse upslope for about 47m. All the features mentioned lie over or cut through the remains of the rig and furrow of the old farm of Quinskirn (no. 18), last listed in a rental of 1722. This land may, of course, have been farmed long after this date as part of the farm of Portanellan.

In the fields to the north-east of these workings, extending for about 400m as far as the Finlaggan Farm road, are patches of mine tailings, and by the side of the road at NGR NR 3955 6844

there is a mine shaft (or quarry?), diameter 11.5m. It might relate to Alexander Shirriff's proposal to connect the Portanellan workings with those at Mulreesh.

5. MULREESH MINE (NGR NR 401 687)

Freebairn was undertaking extensive mining work at Mulreesh by 1770 (Smith 1895: 458–59, 463) and Messrs Hodgson, Smyth and Hawkins were apparently working here in 1786–90 (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/1/6/1). Mulreesh was the centre of operations for the Islay Lead Mining Company from its inception in 1862 until the last year of production in 1896. It was the most mechanised mine, and certainly the last to be worked in the study area (Illus 4.7). The Company had a steam-driven Cornish beam engine shipped to the island in 1873. This was for pumping water

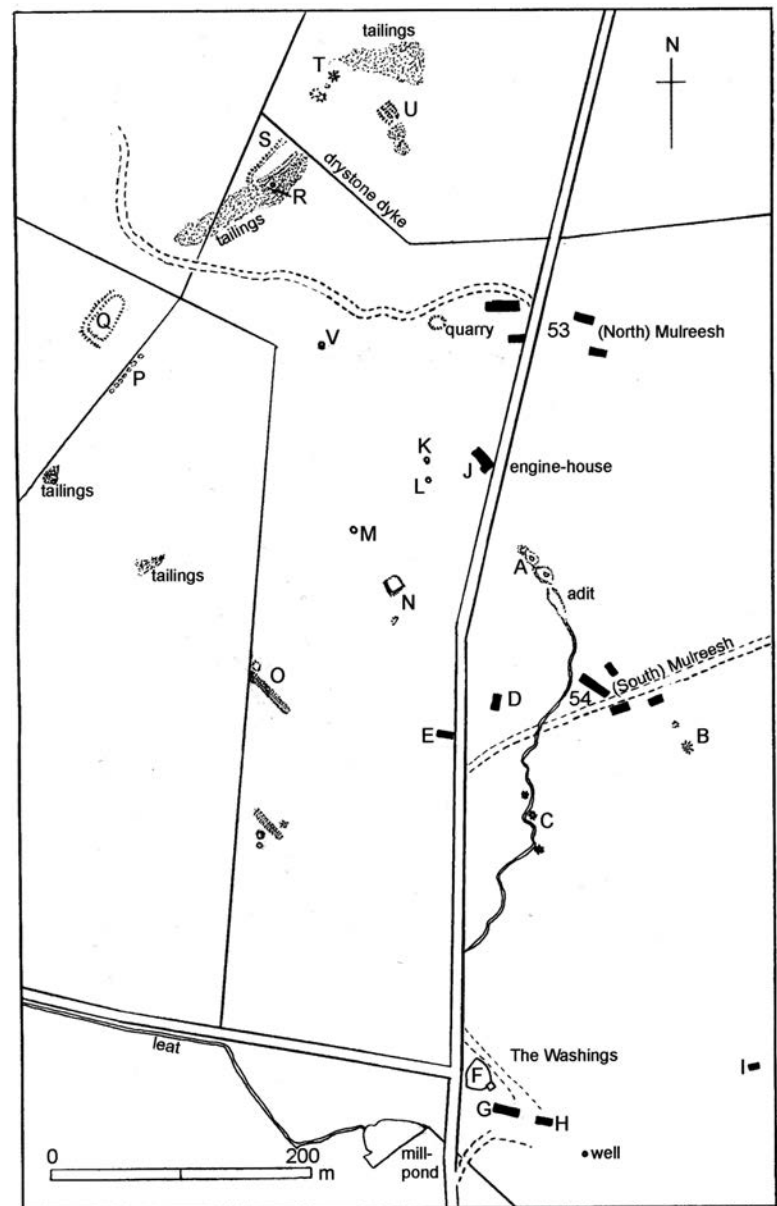


Illustration 4.7

Map of sites and monuments at Mulreesh, based on work by Michael Cressey

from the mine shafts and for raising ore (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/1/6/3, 9, 14).

A north-west-trending vein of calcite and dolomite with galena, sphallerite, pyrite and chalcopryrite was worked in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1770 a 64ft (24m) long shoot had been worked to a depth of 132ft (50m). It ranged up to 4ft (1.52m) wide and the sole of the level was 10 in to 2ft wide (c 25.5–70cm). The mine was later sunk to a depth of 300ft (114m) and worked by four levels which were 60ft (22.8m) apart (Smith 1895: 458–59).

That the search for lead ore at Mulreesh may be of some antiquity is suggested by some trials or open casts. There are two (O) by the fence that replaced the earlier march dyke with Portanellan at this point. One of them is 40m in length, 1.2m in depth and up to 5m wide, following the edge of a Palaeogene dyke. There is a shaft adjacent to it, backfilled with tailings. The other trial runs parallel to the first but about 100m to the south. It is about 30m in length, 1.7m wide and 1m deep. This trial is represented on an early 19th-century plan of Mulreesh, off a proposed new road near the march with Portanellan. Nearby are two backfilled shafts and a small heap of tailings. Further north, between the 'north shaft' (R) and a drystone boundary wall, there is another large open cast (S). A fourth trial at Sloc an Fhamhair (Gaelic, 'the giant's pit'), NGR NR 4034 6826, is just outside the survey area on the farm of Auchnaclach. Perhaps the name is suggestive of mining activity.

The shafts adjacent to the trials (O) may represent a later phase in the mining operations at Mulreesh. There are several others, including a series situated below the 80m contour in an area to the south of the main 19th-century workings. They are depicted on the early 19th-century plan of Mulreesh. There are three adjoining rubbish-filled shafts (A) on high ground just to the north-west of the settlement of South Mulreesh (see below, no. 54). A water-filled adit drains south, eventually to join a nearby burn. There is another small trial pit and shaft (B) on the same alignment as the others, a few metres to the south-east of the houses of South Mulreesh.

Another series of three shafts (C) are positioned along the edge of an outcrop of limestone to the south of South Mulreesh, at NGR NR 40222 68398, NR 40243 68425 and NR 40260 68486. There is a row of seven pits or shafts (P) aligned south-west/north-east to the south-east of the catch basin (Q). They are all filled to the surface with farm refuse, but their original diameter was established as 3m. More mine tailings can be observed to the south and south-east of these pits.

To the north, beyond a drystone wall, running in a south-west/north-east direction, is an escarpment with five small pits and a backfilled shaft. Another large tailings dump can be seen to the north of the pits. Cut into the escarpment is an adit (U) with a rubbish-filled entrance. Two large banks approximately 1.5m high lead away from the adit to an area of large boulders. The course of this adit was established as north by north-east along gently sloping ground littered with mine spoil.

The most recent, late 19th-century, mining activity at Mulreesh is represented by a series of buildings, open or only partially filled-in shafts, and other features.

Many of the names and identifications of buildings in the following account are derived from Callender & Macaulay (1984: 26–28). They had interviewed Alastair MacEachern, a former resident of Mulreesh, who had 'retained a collection of stories relating

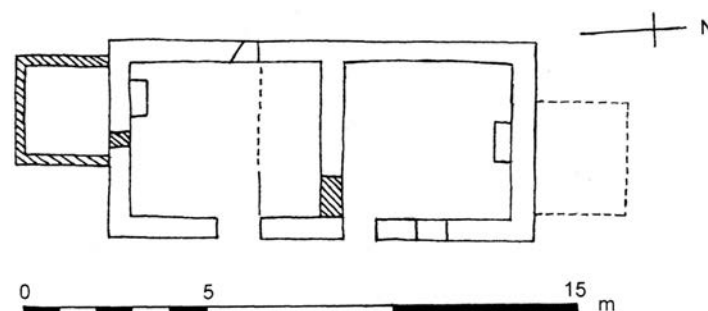


Illustration 4.8
Plan of 'the smiddy', Mulreesh

to mining which had been told to him by a grandmother'. Some information on the shafts is derived from a drawing by H M Vercoe, the mine manager, in 1874, preserved in the Islay Estate Office.

At NGR NR 401 685 stand the ruins of a building marked on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map as a smithy (D). It is assumed to have been directly related to mining activity. Its walls, of lime-mortared quarried stones, are almost complete but roofless, and it is divided into two rooms that originally interconnected (Illus 4.8, 4.9). Both have fireplaces added against the gable walls and the ruins of outshots. In its present form the building appears to be a pair of semi-detached cottages occupied well into the 20th century. A blocked vertical slot in one gable may relate to its previous use as a smiddy. A few metres to the north-east are the circular stone remains of a well.

A few metres to the west of the smiddy, end on to the present-day road to Balulive, are the ruins of a building identified as 'The Miners' Dry' (E), where working clothes and tools were kept (Callender & Macaulay 1984: 27). It is cut into a slope and has two small detached outhouses and a garden enclosed by an earth dyke (Illus 4.10). The house is constructed of quarried stones held in lime mortar. There is limited use of bricks around openings, some at least marked GILCHRIST & GOLDIE / OLD



Illustration 4.9
'The smiddy', Mulreesh, with remains of a well in the foreground

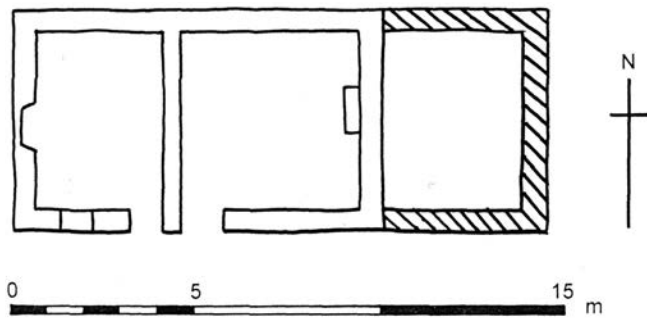


Illustration 4.10
Plan of 'the miners' dry', Mulreesh

LANGSIDE ROAD / 18 GLASGOW 73. The '1873' indicates that they were manufactured in that year. This building, or a predecessor, is, however, represented on the early 19th-century plans of Mulreesh. An aerial photograph of 1947 indicates that some of its roof was still then in place. It has two rooms, both entered separately from adjacent doors in the middle of the south wall. The western room is the smaller of the two, but there is evidence for a window in the south wall and a fireplace in the west gable. There is a low platform against the east gable in the eastern room, presumably for a stove or fire. A substantial extension has been added to the east gable.

On higher ground to the north of the smiddy and miners' dry is a ruined engine-house (J), built of quarried blocks of dolerite, presumably in 1872–73. There are now no traces of the boiler-house and chimney which must have been adjacent to it. It is joined to the gable end of three derelict semi-detached cottages, all shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, along with a saw pit immediately to the south-west (Illus 4.11, 4.12). Each house has an outshot or substantial porch protecting the door giving access to the main room with a cement floor and a fireplace fitted with a cast-iron cooking range. A smaller bedroom with its own fireplace and sprung-timber floor is separated by a wall of timber boards. One of the cottages was occupied as recently as the

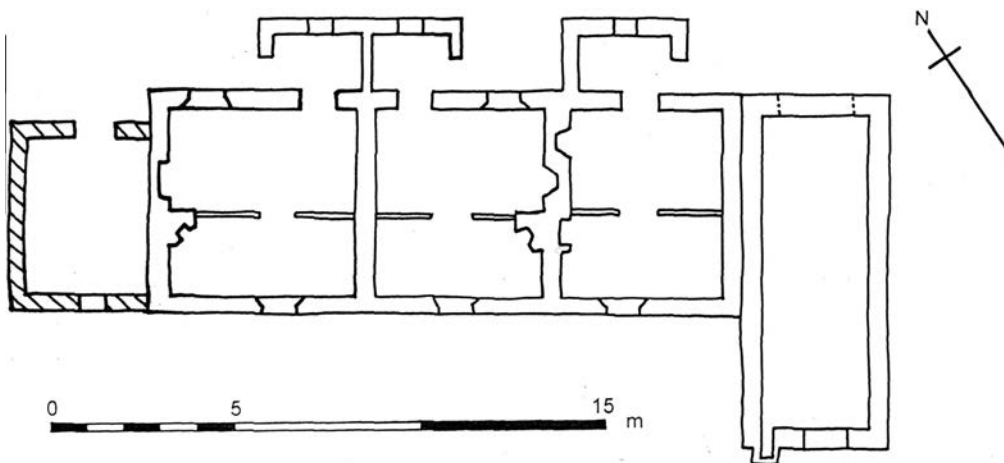


Illustration 4.11
Plan of the engine-house and adjacent houses, Mulreesh



Illustration 4.12
The engine-house and cottages, Mulreesh

early 1970s, and in 2004 there was still much evidence of furniture and fittings, including the ranges, sash windows, wooden shelves, an electricity supply in one, linoleum on a bedroom floor, and the remnants of bedsteads with open-work metal headboards. There is an outhouse against the gable wall of the cottage furthest from the engine-house. The engine-house and attached cottages were demolished in 2021 to make way for a new house.

Beyond the engine-house there is a large tract of land pock-marked with innumerable backfilled mine workings and a few fenced-off shafts, including four (L, K, V and R) identified by Vercoe, the mine manager, in 1874. The 'ladder shaft' (L) close to the engine-house is lined with dressed stone and has a depth of about 40m. The 'engine shaft' (K) and 'drawing shaft' (V) are also fenced off and are too dangerous to investigate. The 'north shaft' (R) is now flooded completely, but the remains of what appears to be winding gear and timbers survive at its head. Around it are large quantities of tailings, only partially grassed over. They mostly consist of an assortment of small, angular, sharply broken rocks. These are fresher looking than those elsewhere at Mulreesh and Portanellan. The largest dump of tailings was adjacent to the engine-house but was removed in the late 20th century for road building.

Situated to the south-west of the north shaft (R) is a large sub-rectangular feature with banks that are in places up to 2m high, containing standing water at its north end (Q). The feature is tentatively identified as a catch basin for holding water and may have been supplied by a series of wooden troughs from the north shaft. The remains of a small wall adjacent to the north shaft may be all that remains of a plinth to support a pump for draining water.

A fenced-off shaft (M) of unknown date lies to the south-west of the open-cast and does not relate to those shown

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on Vercoe's plan. It may be somewhat earlier than 1874. South-east of this shaft is a rectangular feature comprising a shallow scoop with denuded banks (N). It is possible that this is the blocked entrance to the 'day level' shown on Vercoe's plan. A few metres to the south of it is a pit filled with rubbish associated with the last period of occupation of the cottages adjoining the engine-house.

Approximately 250m to the south of the engine-house are 'the washings' where ore was crushed and washed. Water for these operations was supplied by a leat that traversed the moor for a distance of approximately 3km from Loch Airigh nan Caisteal, artificially dammed to control a regular supply of water. The estimate of its length as 6 miles, given at the 1872 share-holders' meeting, was presumably just an exaggeration (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/1/6/9). It, and the mill it fed, may date to the 1860s. The leat can still be traced running along the south verge of the Finlaggan Farm road, and the 1878 Ordnance Survey map shows it crossing under the road to Mulreesh to power a mill. This leat or water course was the cause of much concern to the farmers of Finlaggan and Balulive in the years from 1871 to 1879. Both claimed compensation for damage caused by water leaking from it (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/1/6/8).

Some of the water from the leat could be diverted into a millpond, now largely drained, in the corner to the south-west of the junction of the Finlaggan and Mulreesh roads. It is likely that water was passed back into this pond for recycling once it had passed over the millwheel. Sometime after 1878 a triangular-shaped reservoir (F), with internal sides about 20m long, was constructed opposite the junction with the Finlaggan road. It is partially terraced into the slope and contained by rubble-built walls some 1.5m thick, coated in the interior with a mortar lining (Illus 4.13, 4.14). The walls have been breached quite recently and substantial amounts of stone have been robbed for track repair. At the east end a substantial stone pier houses an iron pipe (Illus 4.13, C) which may have been for feeding water for operating the mill. On the slope below its mouth are two toppled concrete blocks, each about 1 by 2m.

The 1878 Ordnance Survey map shows a substantial building (G) that may be identified as a watermill. There is little

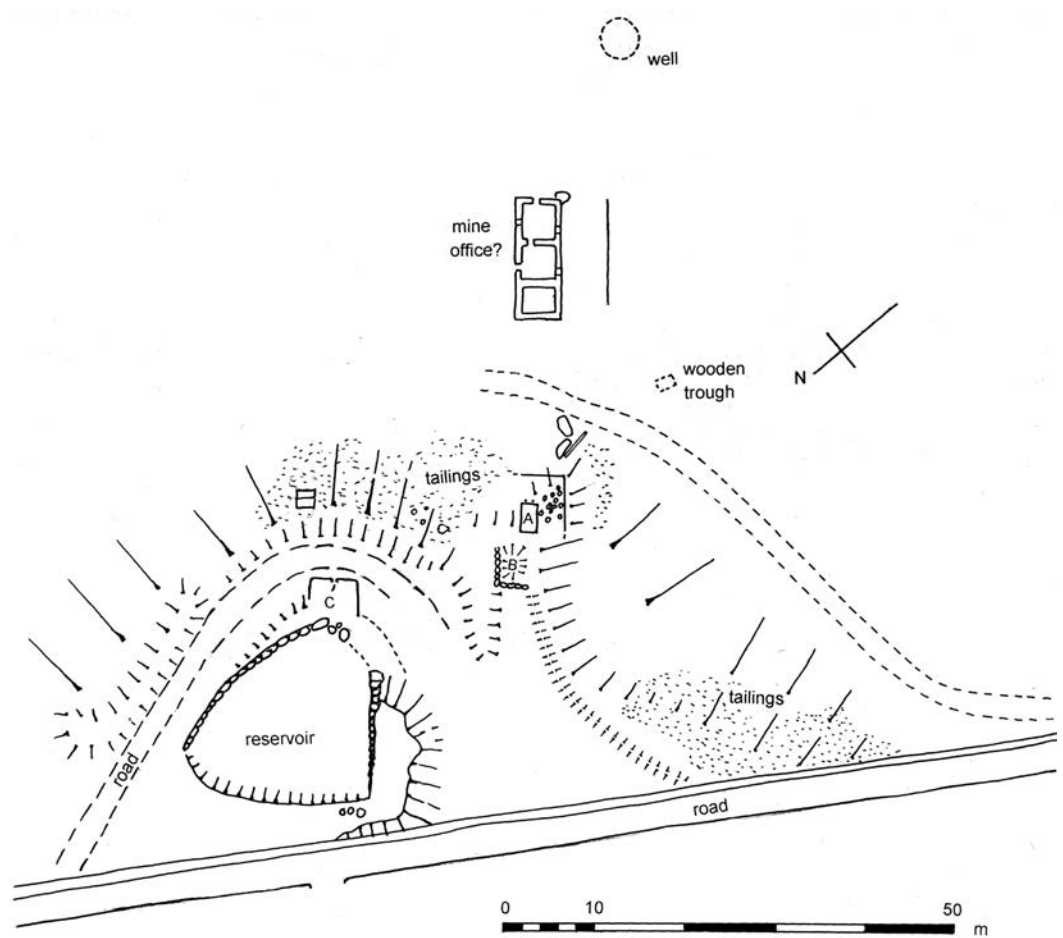


Illustration 4.13
Map of the washings at Mulreesh



Illustration 4.14
The reservoir for storing water, at the washings, Mulreesh

trace of it on the ground today. A wheel-pit (Illus 4.13, B), approximately 2m long and 1m wide, lined with roughly dressed rubble, is situated at the north-west end of a broken and tumbled concrete gangway or bridge (Illus 4.13, A), set with stout metal rods for supporting a water pipe or trough. A wooden beam, some 4.8m long, may have had something to do with the trip hammer or stamp assumed to have been operated by the mill for crushing the ore. The crushed ore would then have been washed to separate the lead from the rock. Nearby are the remains of a wooden trough buried by fine tailings, probably one of the washing troughs. In May 2001 a lump of slag was picked up from the site, evidence that at least some of the lead was smelted here before being shipped off the island.

A ruinous building (H) to the east of the mill is described as the mine office (Callender & Macaulay 1984: 26). It is rectangular, about 14m long by 5m wide, and was subdivided into three rooms. Its walls are of quarried limestone blocks with bricks around the window openings. A large buttress has been applied to its south-east corner to help stabilise it. There is a filled-in well a few metres to the south-east. Building H was occupied as a house into the mid-20th century, being known as Tòn Riabhach (Gaelic, 'brindled bottom').

At NGR NR 4034 68268, well away from the other buildings, is a ruin (I) identified by Callender & Macaulay (1984: 27) as a store for gunpowder. It is rectangular, with a length of 8.42m and a width of 4.04m. It has a rectangular projection at one end, giving it an L-shaped plan. Its walls, mostly of quarried limestone blocks set in lime mortar, stand to a maximum of four courses.

A rock surface on the west side of the road from Ballygrant to Mulreesh, before the turn-off for Finlaggan, should also be noted. It is covered with initials, now mostly much worn, said to be those of the last miners at Mulreesh, and carved by them prior to their departure from the mine. This was pointed out to us by a local, Ara Fletcher, who got the information from his father.

6. ROBOLLS MINE (NGR NR 388 671)

These workings (Illus 4.15) are to the south-east of Loch Finlaggan on sloping ground about 60m from the eastern shoreline in an area covered with the remains of early agricultural activity, identified by us as belonging to the lost farm of Robolls Tannach, of which more below (no. 20). The only documentation for working here appears to be a list of payments, dated 15 May 1878, owed by the Islay Lead Mining Company for damage caused by their activities. It includes an entry for 'surface damage at Robolls to date' (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/1/6/8). It is probable, however, that these workings include some of 18th-century and earlier date, although all mention of them is missing from contemporary records.

The mine workings are all in a strip of land bounded by two parallel turf dykes, about 187m apart, running in a south-easterly direction from the loch shore (Illus 4.24, 4.25). A trial (A in Illus 4.15) trending east-west has within its interior three shafts now full of refuse that masks their true depth. Mine spoil is evident both outside and within these features, and a large spoil tip (B) is situated 5m north of these shafts. Five other open-cast workings (C–G) are in the immediate vicinity. Two (E and F) are dug along the edge of a Palaeogene dyke. A large shaft (H), now backfilled but surrounded by spoil-heaps, has been dug into one of the other trials (D), where it butts on to the Palaeogene dyke.

The ruins of a building (I), on the edge of an escarpment overlooking the loch, are identified on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey

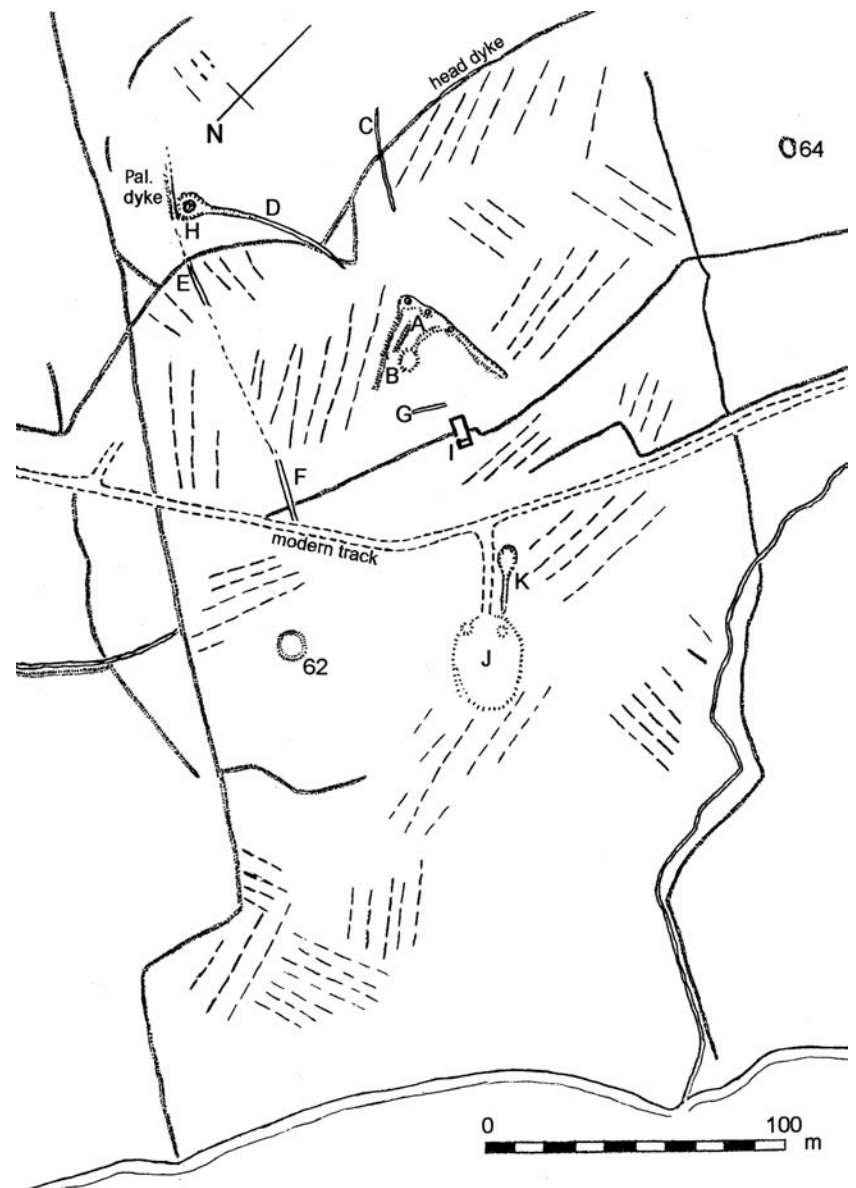


Illustration 4.15
Map of the Robolls mine workings, based on survey by RCAHMS, 1993



Illustration 4.16
Building I (the smithy) at Robolls

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map as a smithy (Illus 4.16). The building is rectangular with two rooms, and is built of quarried stone, mostly limestone with some dolerite, still standing one to two courses high, without any traces of mortar. It may have nothing to do with the mining.

Beyond building (I) to the west is a T-junction formed by recent farm tracks, with one running north-west into a flat area (J) that is poor in surface vegetation, with mine spoil covering an area 30m². A denuded spoil tip consisting of small blocks of phyllite suggests deliberate sorting of mine waste and perhaps points to the area's use as a dressing floor. At the junction of the tracks is the entrance to an adit (K). It is now filled with refuse and flooded to a depth of about 2m, and is drained by a substantial ditch leading from it alongside the track to the dressing floor.

Callender & Macaulay (1984: 30) were able to enter this level and described how about 80m in it opens out into a large chamber with a tunnel going off to the right (south). The photograph they publish of this (their pl X) shows rails and other debris.

An early date appears likely for the open-cast features, as they would generally be expected to precede the technically more advanced mining methods represented by the shafts and adit, the latter possibly all dating to the late 19th century, when it is known that the Islay Lead Mining Company was working at Robolls (see above). Two of the open-cast trials (C, D) are crossed by the head dyke partitioning a complex of rigs from rough grazing. Although it is no more possible to date the head dyke closely than the trials, a 17th-century date might appear likely for the former. Three distinct phases of mining may well be separated by periods of agricultural activity. The first phase is represented by the trials (C, D) crossed by the head dyke; the second phase includes at least some of the other trials, now confined to a mining concession partitioned off by dykes; and the third phase consists of the shafts, adit and smithy.

Quarries and peat cuttings

Throughout the study area there are rock exposures which show signs of having been nibbled away for building stone. None of these quarries are of any significant size.

7. QUARRIES, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 377 678)

A Palaeogene dyke 9m wide running north-west to south-east midway between North and South Sean-ghairt has clearly cut quarried steps and is presumably the main source of dolerite used at Sean-ghairt. Two small quarries, mostly covered with turf, between this dyke and South Sean-ghairt could have been the source for dolomitic sandstone. There is a quarried area above building Q (Illus 5.5) that is less clearly defined than the others and is the likely source for the quartzite used, while dolostone could have been got from the low cliffs on the southern edge of the southern cluster.

8. CLAY PIT, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 385 6800)

To the north-east of North Sean-ghairt there is an area of boulder clay, extensively pitted for clay extraction. The late farmer Mathew MacMillan thought that at least a little of this may have been done 'recently' for road improvements.

9. CLAY PIT, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 386 680)

A rectangular cut in the steep bank of the loch, which may be a clay pit rather than a house platform.

10. QUARRY, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 390 683)

Near the shore of Loch Finlaggan, beside the Finlaggan Burn, is a small limestone quarry that could have been the source of some of the stone used in the medieval buildings on Eilean Mór.

11. PEAT CUTTINGS, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 388 667)

These are in a small valley extending north-eastwards from Dùn Cheapasaidh Mór.

12. QUARRY, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 382 659)

A dyke has also been quarried next to the old road to Kepollsmore at the alleged site of a burial ground (no. 73).

13. QUARRY, KEPOLLS (NGR NR 375 655)

A disused quarry is marked on Ordnance Survey maps to the west of the Kepolls farm-steading. There is evidence here for the quarrying of phyllite and a dyke.

Field systems and fences

The area of the old farms in the study area is listed in Scots acres in a 'View of Contents of the Baroney and Estate of Islay' (Ramsay

Farms	Land Use	Scots acres	Roods	Poles	Acres	Hectares
Sean-ghairt	Arable	122				
	Green pasture	54				
	Heathy pasture	107				
	Total:	283			359.41	145.51
Portanellan	Arable	200	1	12		
	Green pasture	59				
	Heathy pasture	680	2	12		
	Total:	939	3	24	1193.55	483.22
Mulreesh	Arable	65	2	16		
	Green pasture	61	1			
	Heathy pasture	0				
	Total:	126	3	16	161.04	65.2
Robolls	Arable	172	2	16		
	Green pasture	121				
	Heathy pasture	100				
	Total:	393	2	16	499.87	202.38
Kepollsmore	Arable	240	2			
	Green pasture	38				
	Heathy pasture	62				
	Total:	340	2		432.44	175.08

Table 4.1

Areas of the farms in the study area, after Stephen MacDougall, mid-18th century

INDUSTRY AND LAND USE

1991: 63–67), thought to have been drawn up by Stephen MacDougall in the mid-18th century. They are given here in Table 4.1 with approximate equivalents in acres (imperial) and hectares (metric) computed by the writer.

The total area for the whole estate (almost all of Islay) is given as 110,787 Scots acres, and the 171 farms vary in size from 4,695 to 40 Scots acres. The 1741 rental (Ramsay 1991: 37–44) gives the extent (valuation) and rent of two of the farms in our survey area:

- Portanellan: 5 lewres (£2 1s 8d); rent £25 10s 1d
- Kepollsmore: 1 quarter and 1 eighth (£2 10s); rent £19 2s.

The ratio of rent to extent of these two farms seems to compare favourably with others listed in the 1741 rental, suggesting that they were good properties. Sean-ghairt and Robolls were quarter lands, that is, each with an extent of £1 13s 4d. The former was held by a tacksman with two other farms, the overall rental suggesting that it did not provide much of a return. Robolls was wadset to Ronald Campbell of Ballachlaven and it is impossible to gauge its worth.

The threefold division of land into arable, green pasture and heathy pasture in the 18th-century ‘Contents of Islay’ is axiomatic of the system of runrig farming practised in Scotland at the time. The arable consisted of the rigs in regular cultivation. It was still the practice on Islay in the 1830s that the rigs of the different tenants on a farm were intermixed, and reallocated every three years (Teignmouth 1836: 2.308). These rigs, either individually or in groups, were often unenclosed.

Rigs are long, thin, raised beds, separated by furrows. They are normally oriented so that water can drain off down the furrows. It is not clear from fieldwork alone to what extent any rigs in the survey area were created and maintained by ploughing. Many, often called lazy beds, were made by turning over the turf with spades, and mounding it up. Lazy beds were still being dug like this on a small scale on Islay in the first half of the 20th century for growing potatoes.

The heathy pasture was the rough grazing or moorland where the animals were taken in the summer, well away from the growing crops. It was separated from the latter by a ‘head dyke’. Shielings (huts) for the women and children tending the animals are often located just beyond the head dykes. The green pasture was the better-quality pasture within the head dyke, sometimes manured and cropped.

Most of the study area has not been ploughed or cultivated in recent memory, with the notable exception of a large swathe of land to the north-west of Loch Finlaggan which was planted in the 1980s with conifers. Much of the rest of the land that was formally used for agricultural purposes is now merely used for pasture or the occasional crop of silage. The present field system consists of large rectangular areas enclosed by straight stretches of wire fences or drystone walls. Past ploughing has obliterated traces of rigs, and drainage is provided by sub-surface drains and open ditches at field boundaries. Fields like this are concentrated at the north end of Loch Finlaggan and also to the south-west of the loch at Druim a’ Chùirn. Some of the names of fields on Finlaggan Farm have been handed down by the daughter of one of the tenants who lived there in the first half of the 20th century (Illus 4.17).

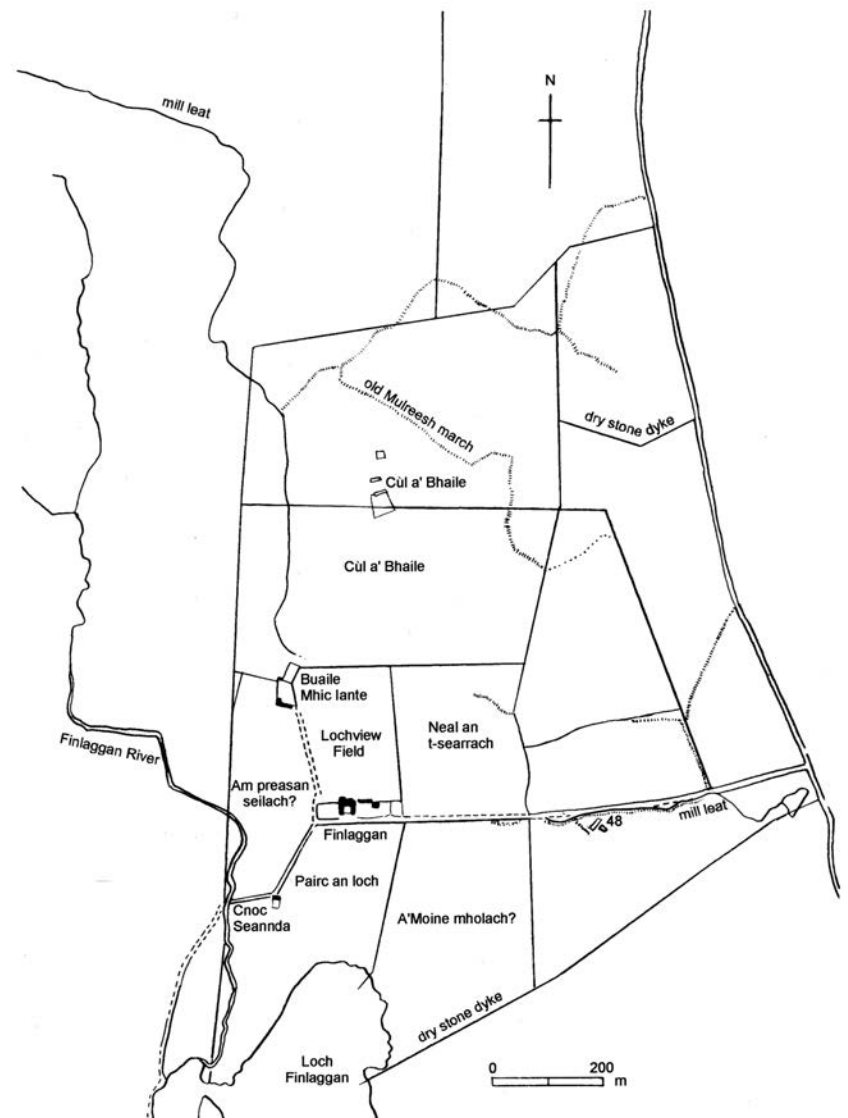


Illustration 4.17

Map of Finlaggan Farm with named fields, based on 1st edition Ordnance Survey mapping

Three earlier systems for arable cultivation can be recognised:

1. Small, irregular fields of rigs enclosed by turf dykes, for instance at Sean-ghairt (no. 16). At least some of these may be of considerable antiquity. The need for dykes implies they were created prior to the construction of head dykes.
2. Unenclosed groups of rigs within a head dyke, for example Sean-ghairt (no. 15).
3. Small, quadrilateral fields containing rigs, for instance at Goirtean Chailean (no. 17). Fields like this imply that the tenants had moved away from a system of intermixed rigs reallocated at regular intervals to a permanent division and consolidation of the arable. They represent a relatively recent development, perhaps only of the late 18th or early 19th century.

Four main types of dykes and fences can be distinguished in the study area:

1. Turf dykes, with or without a significant stone content, sometimes in the form of boulders or large stones placed at regular intervals when the dyke was being set out. Sometimes it is only these ('dog teeth') which remain. Illus 4.18 shows the section of a turf dyke on the old farm of Robolls at NGR NR 3900 6768, near the side of the loch. It has been cut by a small burn and the trampling of cattle. It appears to have been heaped straight on top of the grass. Thin horizons of small pebbles, representing the underside of turfs, suggest at least two heightenings of the original bank.
2. Drystone dykes. There is a considerable variety of these in Islay, but in the study area they are of quarried stone with stone or turf coping. These dykes were professionally built and date to the 19th century, when, it is said, drystone dykers were brought in from Durham, Northumberland and Galloway (Ramsay 1991: 105). The Islay rental of 1833–34 records that the farmer of Ballmartin and half of Sean-ghairt was paying interest on a loan for stone dykes, perhaps including those at the south-west of Loch Finlaggan. Although many drystone dykes are still kept in repair, none have been constructed in the study area in recent times.
3. Wire fences with metal stobs. The stobs are set in concrete and there are often drainage ditches on either side of the fence. None are now in a state of repair. According to a local farmer, they date to the mid- or late 19th century.
4. Wire fences with wooden stobs. These are typically the fences still in use or being erected today.

Although the names of the farms that surround Loch Finlaggan are obviously of considerable antiquity, this does not mean that it should be assumed that the marches between them are equally ancient. Indeed, it can be argued that the exact opposite is true, that the presumption should be that march dykes are relatively recent.

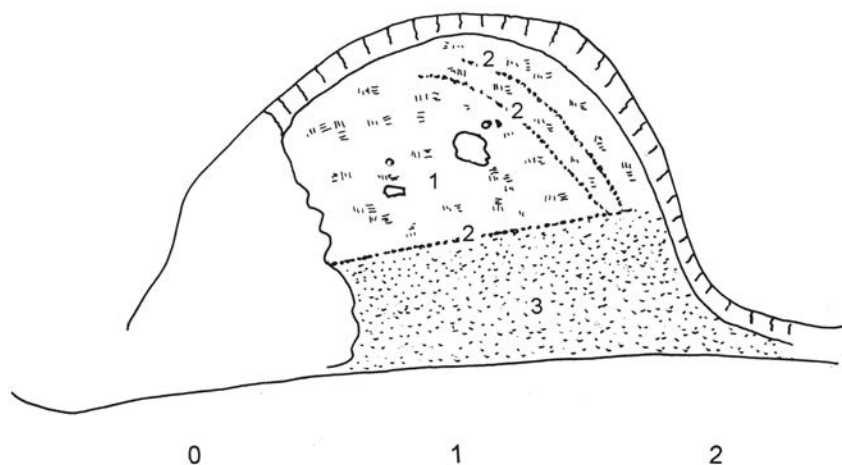


Illustration 4.18

Section of a turf dyke on the old farm of Robolls: (1) yellow/green clayey silt; (2) horizons of small pebbles; (3) brown silty sand full of sharp flakes of limestone

Stephen MacDougall's surveys of Islay dating to 1749–51 did not just lead to an overall map of Islay. They were primarily about establishing the acreage of each farm. Until his work the only way the extent of each farm was measured was by its rent in money and in kind. No doubt the tenants of each farm were well aware of the boundaries of their land, but what must have been of more importance to them were the divisions between their fields or rigs of arable and securing their crops from depredations by cattle. For many Islay farms the shielings were fairly close to the arable land, and the beasts must have been herded to prevent them from straying on to the crops or neighbouring farms where there were no dykes or fences to hold them in. Late 18th-century writers including Pennant (1774: 261) and Walker (1812: 1.103) commented on the lack of dykes.

The standard leases for Islay farms issued by the laird from the 1770s required the tenants to build proper march dykes. They not only had to straighten the marches in the process but also exchange pieces of ground with neighbouring farms, all for the improvement and good order of the country (Ramsay 1991: 97). Since the dykes that the tenants then had the resources to build themselves were traditional style ones of turf and stone, we might expect that many such march dykes, particularly relatively straight and distinct ones, like those separating Portanellan from Sean-ghairt and Robolls, were first laid out in the late 18th century.

The rationalisation of marches required by the laird can be appreciated by comparing the boundaries of farms elsewhere in Islay as depicted on MacDougall's map with those on plans of the 1820s and 1830s attributed to William Gemmill. In many cases the boundaries have not only been straightened out, but large tracts of land have changed hands (Storrie 1997: 122–31). It is also clear that, by the early 19th century, while the traditional farm units still had some meaning, their marches were not yet completely marked out with dykes. The early 19th-century farm plans distinguish between marches defined by 'fences' and those which were merely 'calculated'. All of this should make us wary of expecting any march dykes to be of great age.

The mid-18th-century loch-side boundaries of Sean-ghairt, Portanellan, Robolls and Kepollsmore all appear to have coincided with burns, as also much of the march between Portanellan and Balulive, and the march between Robolls and Kepollsmore, on the one hand, and Ballygrant, Kilmeny, Tiervaagain and Esknish, on the other. Turf dykes were erected along one of the banks of at least some of these burns.

Boundaries of a different sort are represented by those between Sean-ghairt and Ballachlaven, and Ballachlaven and Portanellan. The former, defined by a turf dyke, runs along the summit of Cnoc an Tighe, enclosing a very small area of rough pasture in Sean-ghairt relative to the extent of its arable. It appears likely that Ballachlaven and Portanellan had by the mid-18th century expanded at the expense of Sean-ghairt. MacDougall's map of Islay and his survey of Ballachlaven show the march between Portanellan and Ballachlaven following a watershed via a small loch, Loch Carn nan Gall, to the summit of Càrn a' Choinnleir (Gaelic, 'cairn of the candlestick'), at over 260m above sea level. Looking at Islay as a whole, watersheds more often represent divisions between farms than streams, and lochs are often on the boundary of two or more farms.

The march between Mulreesh and Laoigan to the east is formed by the Allt an Tairbh. Mulreesh's boundary with

Portanellan, however, seems less determined by obvious physical features, perhaps because it was detached from Portanellan or another farm in the distant past.

Long straight lines of fence stretching across the moors indicate that Finlaggan/Portanellan was at one time much larger than indicated by the mid-18th-century survey. They show that Finlaggan had expanded northwards to Loch a' Churragan, taking in land formerly in Ballachlaven, and north-east to include much of the rough pasture of Balulive. It is likely that these fences date to the time that Finlaggan was given over to sheep, during the tenancy of the brothers Alexander and James Greenlees who farmed Finlaggan from 1871 to 1885.

The straight drystone wall that runs from near the top end of Loch Finlaggan eastwards dates rather earlier (Illus 4.6). Rentals from 1815 record that a part of Portanellan had been detached to augment the farm of Robolls, and this dyke may date to that time. It cuts through the Portanellan mine workings and is a rationalisation of an earlier Portanellan–Robolls boundary, represented by a turf dyke further south. It joins up with an unnamed burn flowing into the loch.

Several pre-modern field systems survive in the survey area. It is reasonable to assume that other extensive systems have been destroyed by late 19th- and 20th-century farming practices at Druim a' Chùirn at the south-west end of the loch, around the head of the loch and extending over to the Mulreesh road, at Robolls (around the Ballygrant Inn), and around the present farm-steadings of Kepolls and Kepollsmore.

14. COPPICE, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 378 670)

A wood of mixed oak and hazel, about 200 sq m in extent, just to the south-west of Loch Finlaggan (Illus 3.4). It has been managed in the past to produce thin wands for wattles, roofing, etc. There are still many small patches of coppice in Islay, the residue of 'the spots of Coppice from 5 to 30 Acres, and in one place . . . above 100 Acres' observed in the late 18th century by the Rev Dr John Walker (McKay 1980: 102).

15. FIELD SYSTEM AND HEAD DYKE, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 381 676)

Around the two clusters of ruined houses (nos 23 and 24) forming the 19th-century township of Sean-ghairt are the extensive traces of a system of unenclosed rigs, partially removed by 20th-century ploughing between the two settlements in the area adjacent to the loch (Illus 4.19, 4.20, 4.21). There are also some straight dykes, probably forming a series of quadrilateral fields of more recent date than the unenclosed rigs. These rigs can be identified as the Sean-ghairt infield. There are other more sporadic groups of rigs further out from the settlements, representing the outfield. The rigs are all about 2m wide and aligned with the slope down to the loch.

A sinuous turf and stone dyke, still over a metre high for much of its length, encloses these rigs as well as field system no. 16 (see below). It runs approximately south-west/north-east and its course beyond field system no. 16 is now lost through the creation of the conifer forest in the late 20th century. It apparently progressed eastwards to near the edge of Loch Finlaggan, possibly joining up with other dykes to form part of a continuous system all the way to the coast of the Sound of Islay at Bunnahabhain,

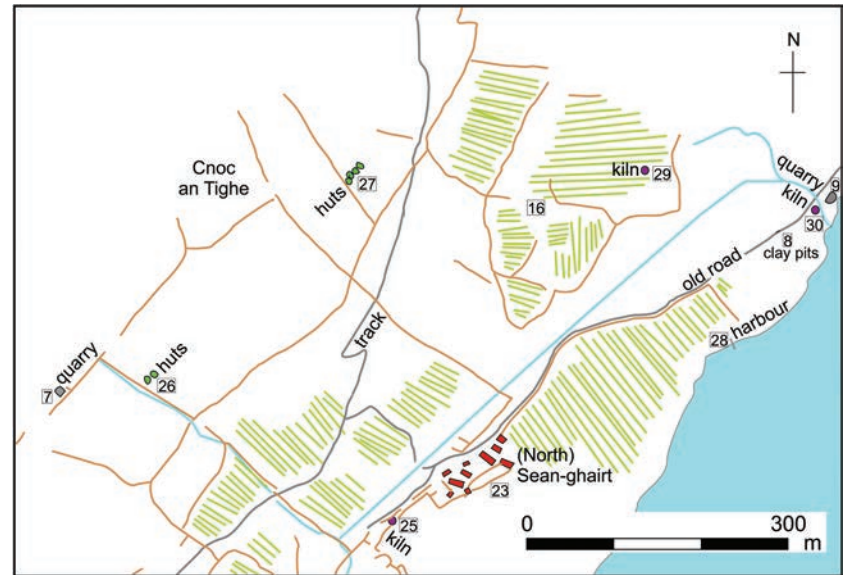


Illustration 4.19

Map of field systems (nos 15 and 16) and head dyke of (North) Sean-ghairt, based on a survey by RCAHMS, 1993

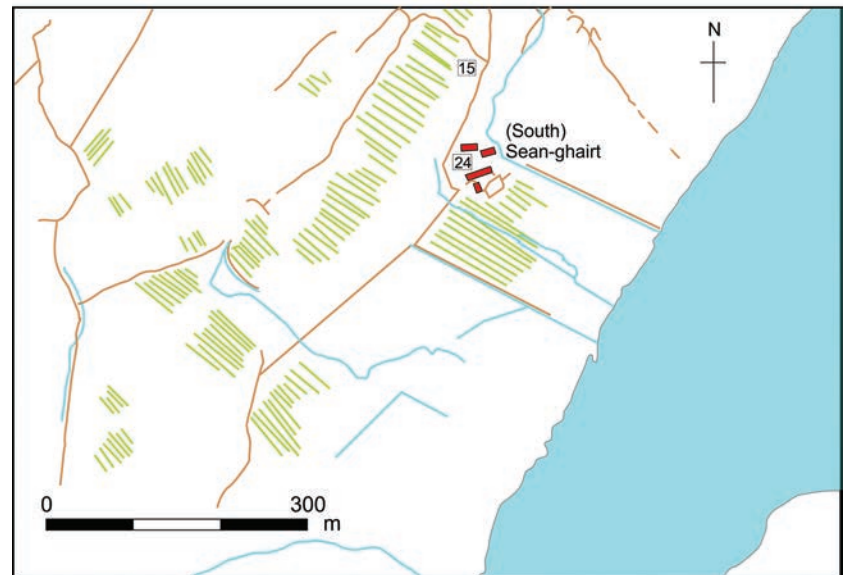


Illustration 4.20

Map of field system (no. 15) of (South) Sean-ghairt, based on a survey by RCAHMS, 1993

protecting the arable land of Balulive, Staoisha, Staoisha Eararach and Ardnahoe.

Heading south-westwards, the Sean-ghairt head dyke bifurcates. One prong separating the supposed infield from the outfield may represent an earlier line. The other further upslope forms the march with Ballachlaven before joining up with the head dyke for Ballachlaven, from whence a continuous head dyke extended through the farms of Baile Tharbhach, Duisker and Balole. It appears that Ballachlaven has cut Sean-ghairt off from access to the moor, with only a relatively small area of rough pasture remaining within the Sean-ghairt march dyke. The march

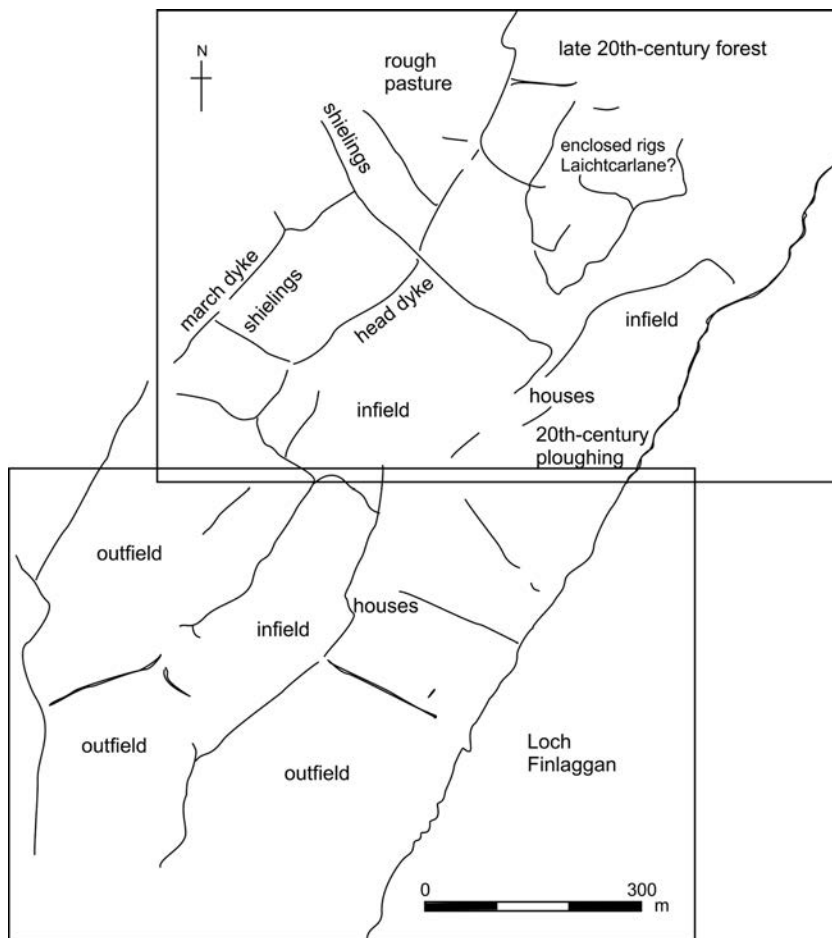


Illustration 4.21
Interpretation of field systems at Sean-ghairt

between the two farms, and the new line for the Sean-ghairt head dyke, may have been created sometime after the Sean-ghairt farmers became sub-tenants of the Campbells of Ballachlaven in the 17th century.

16. FIELD SYSTEM, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 383 681)

Within the Sean-ghairt head dyke and stretching to the march with Portanellan there is a group of five small irregular fields containing rigs (Illus 4.19, 4.21). They vary in size from about 50 by 66m to 120 by 180m and are separate from the field system (no. 15) just described. They are probably of earlier date. They may tentatively be identified as the arable of the lost farm of Laichtcarlane.

17. FIELD SYSTEM, GOIRTEAN CHAILEAN, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 386 690)

This field system is associated with a small ruined settlement (no. 33) and probably also the house, no. 32. The fields are now lost in a recent conifer plantation but were small and quadrilateral, probably dating to the 18th or early 19th century (Illus 4.22). Houses and fields are enclosed to the south-west by a substantial turf dyke, which, with a tributary of the Finlaggan River to the north-west and north-east, possibly defines the extent of this holding. Leacann is Gaelic for 'hillside', especially one where the

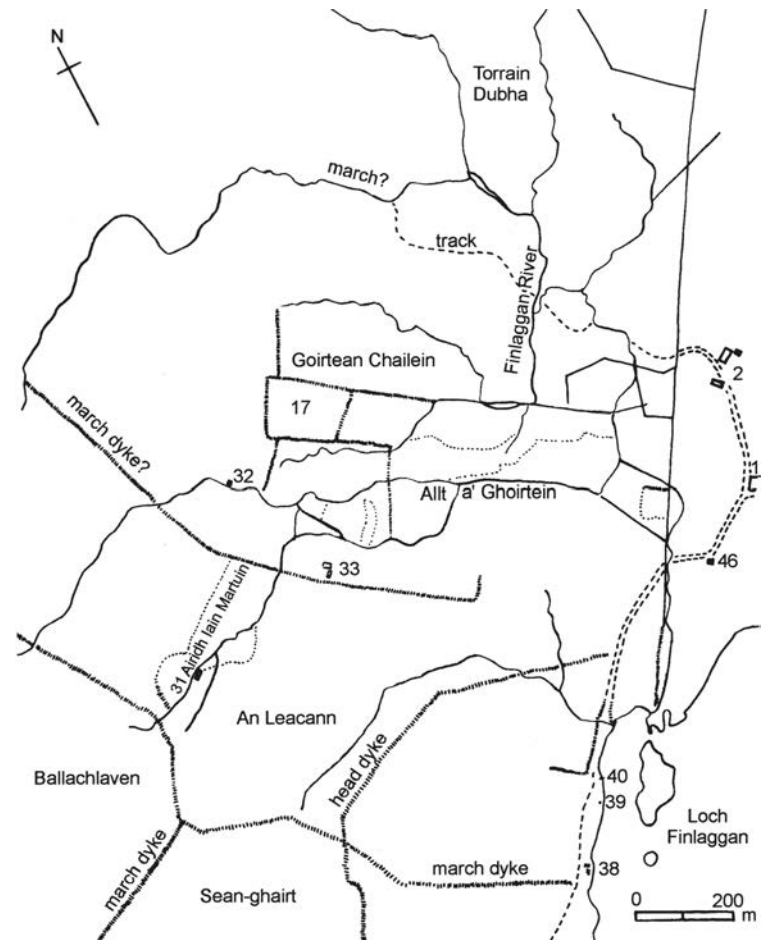


Illustration 4.22
Map of field system at An Leacann, Goirtean Chailean, based on 1st edition Ordnance Survey mapping

topsoil has been washed away to expose a smooth rock surface (Cameron Gillies 1906: 16).

18. FIELD SYSTEMS, CUING-SGEIR, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR392 680)

Cuing-sgeir is the modernised spelling for the old farm of Quinskirn, lying within the mid-18th-century boundary of Portanellan. The lost farm of Kylladow may also be located here and be represented by some of the rigs and fields in this group (Illus 4.6).

There are two unnamed burns flowing into Loch Finlaggan about 300m apart, with rigs and dykes between them and to the north and south of them. The ones to the north are partially truncated by the drystone dyke that now forms the boundary with Kepollsmore. They possibly extended north-eastwards to the unnamed settlements on the Finlaggan Farm road (no. 48) and beside the Mulreesh road (no. 48a). Those between the southern of the two burns and the Robolls march dyke form a tight complex of small fields enclosed by dykes and may be of earlier date than those between the two burns which are unenclosed. The latter are cut by open-cast mine workings which may relate to activity from about 1745 onwards. A claim made in 1770 for compensation for mining damage suggests that the land here was at that time meadow, no longer arable land (see no. 4 above). For huts and houses associated with these field systems, see nos 49–52.

INDUSTRY AND LAND USE

19. FIELD SYSTEM, MULREESH (NGR NR 402 685)

Not much of the pre-improvement field system at Mulreesh can be traced on the ground, and it has been disfigured by lead mining activity. Two plans of the property, apparently produced by the surveyor William Gemmill in the 1820s or 1830s, do, however, provide a considerable amount of detail. They are practically identical, except that one includes some of the mine workings, and compare well with early Ordnance Survey maps in terms of accuracy (Illus 4.23).

The east side of the farm, marching with Ballighillan and Scanistle (Laoigan and Auchnaclach), is defined by the Allt an Tairbh and one of its tributaries. The rest was bounded by turf dykes, some of which can still be traced. The land was traversed east-west by the old road from Loch Finlaggan to Port Askaig, with another road branching off north to Balulive, and there were two clusters of houses (see below: nos 53 and 54). The fields are irregular in shape and size, numbered from 1 to 10 (but including

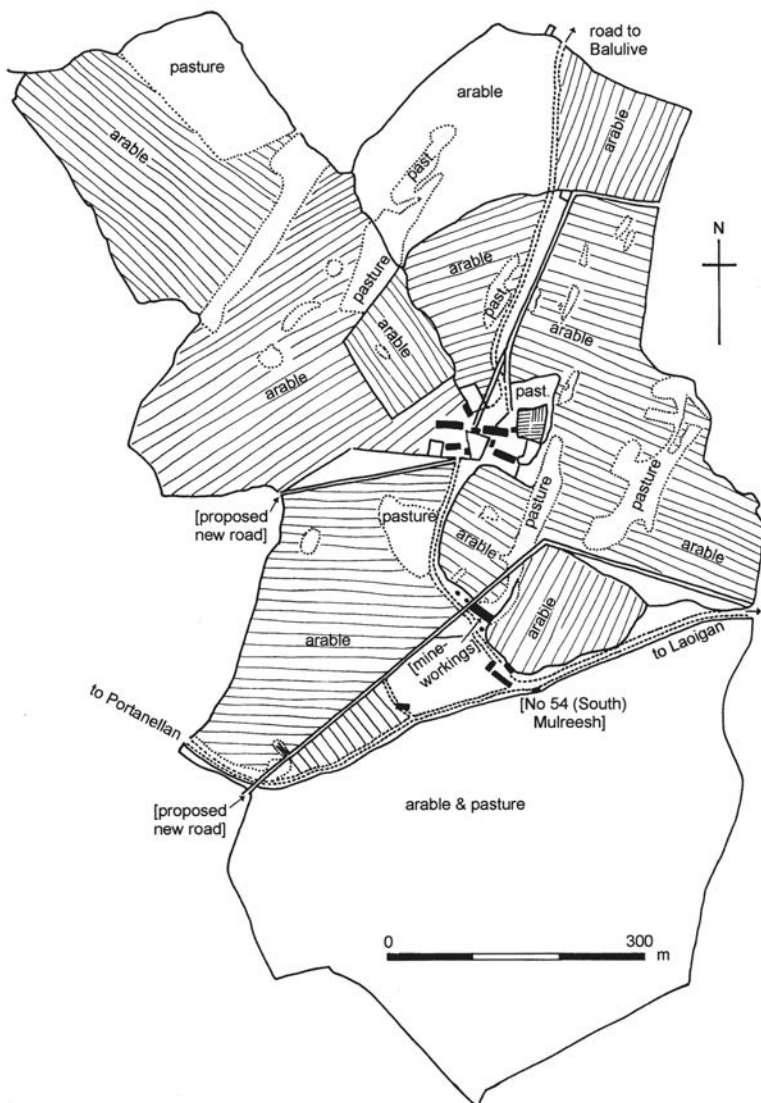


Illustration 4.23

Map of Mulreesh, redrawn from surveys by William Gemmill in the 1820s or 1830s

the houses and yards as one). Two thirds of the land are marked as arable, the rest as pasture. Some of the pasture merely consists of irregular patches in arable fields, evidently rocky outcrops and steep slopes too difficult to cultivate.

20. FIELD SYSTEM, AN TÀMHANACHD, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 388 675)

The name An Tàmhanachd reflects that of an earlier farm known as Robolls Tannach, probably the original Robolls, centred on Eilean Mhuireill (no. 61). We have already noted (see no. 6, Illus 4.15) the Robolls mine workings within this field system spreading along the shore of Loch Finlaggan. Mining activity, particularly the second phase with the smithy, adit and shafts, is confined within a strip of land defined by two parallel turf dykes, about 187m apart, running in a south-easterly direction from the loch shore (Illus 4.24, 4.25). Both may have been constructed to define this particular mining concession.

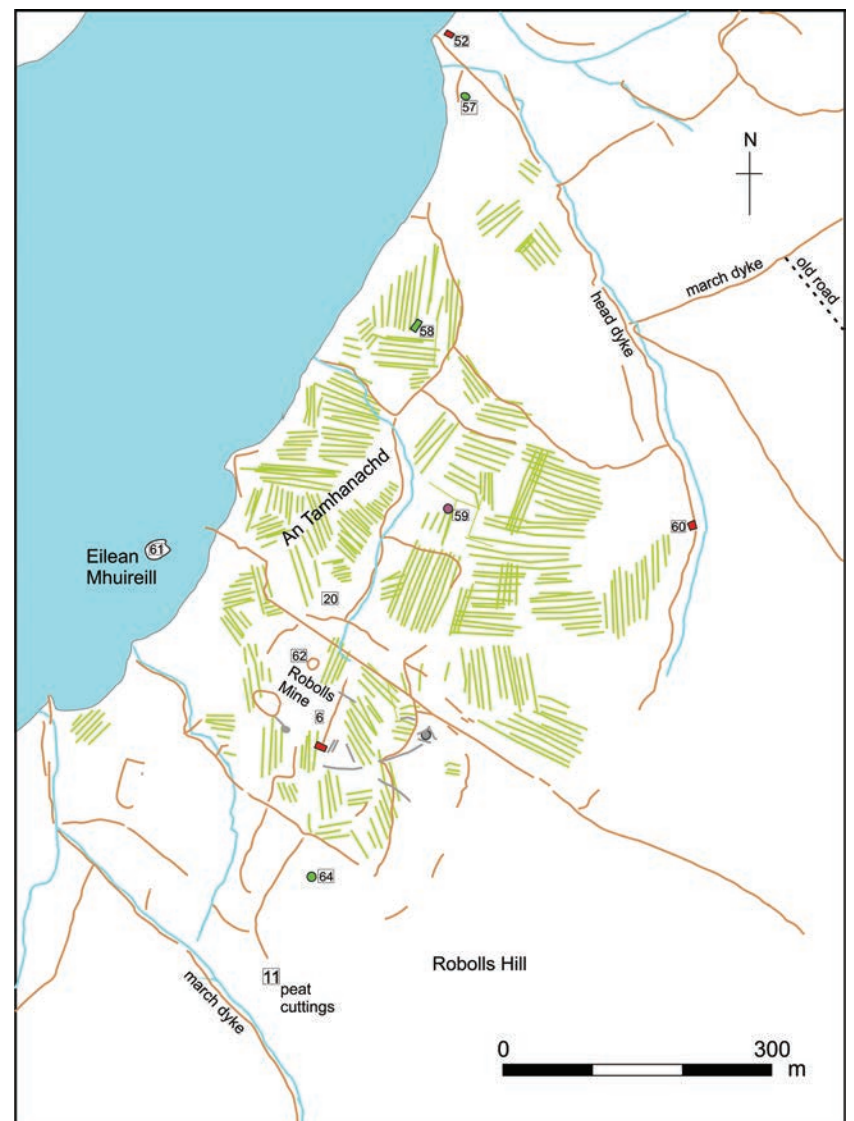


Illustration 4.24

Map of field systems, dykes and mining activity at Robolls Tannach, based on a survey by RCAHMS, 1993

FINLAGGAN

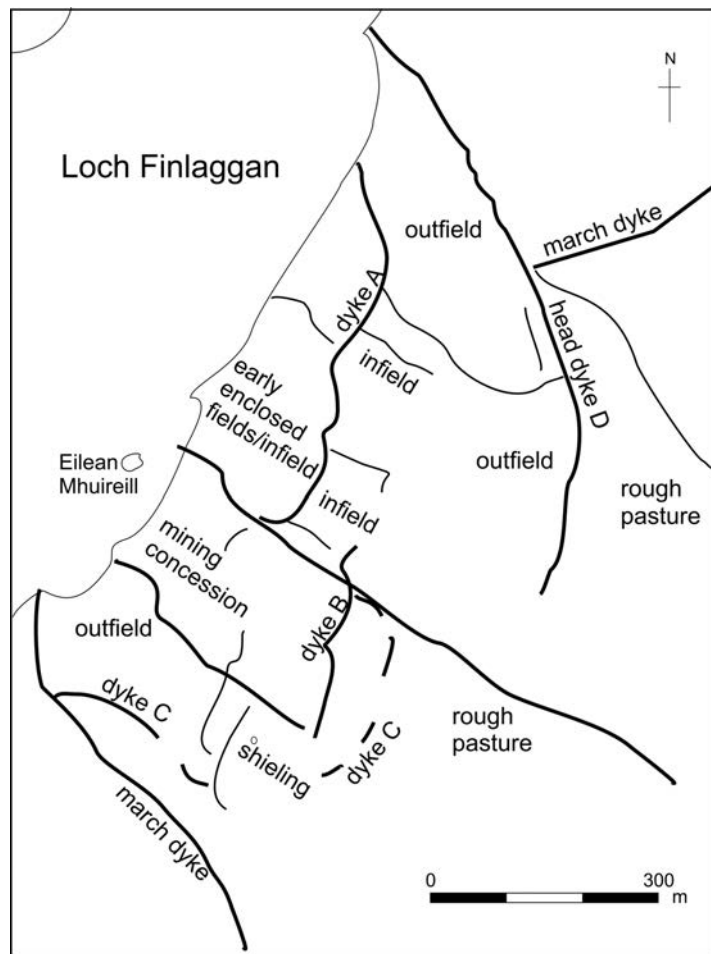


Illustration 4.25
Interpretation of field systems and dykes at Robolls Tannach

Within the mining concession are several groups of unenclosed rigs and stretches of turf dykes, some of which may be associated with the mining activity. One dyke (B), tracing a double-bow and erected across two earlier open-cast mine workings, effectively marks the divide between green and rough pasture. It can also be traced extending into the field systems immediately to the north. There are traces of another dyke (C) about 55m further out, with a small group of rigs between it and dyke B. It probably returned westwards to the south of the mining strip to terminate on the march with the neighbouring farm of Kepollsmore. There is a shieling hut (no. 64) to the south of the mining concession within the line of dykes B and C.

In the larger zone of old arable to the north of the mining concession another sinuous dyke (A) takes off from the loch edge, curves round southwards and is cut by the dyke forming the north edge of the mining concession. There are traces within it and between it and dyke B of other dykes forming enclosed fields, and a considerable density of rigs, some cutting across earlier ones. Another dyke (D), still defining the division between green and rough pasture, forms a quadrant of a circle with ends on the loch-side and the mining concession dyke. For most of its length it follows the bank of an unnamed burn round to where it

enters the loch. Between it and dyke B are several groups of unenclosed rigs. The foundations of a small house (no. 60) on the inner edge of dyke D are clearly of late 18th- or 19th-century date, but a house-site (no. 58) may represent the remains of a long house of earlier date.

All of this suggests a possible chronological sequence for the agricultural and mining remains at Robolls Tannach as follows:

1. Field system on the lower slopes adjacent to Eilean Mhuireill with rigs in small enclosed fields, the outer limits of agriculture defined at first by dyke A, possibly with dyke C serving as a head dyke marking the division of green from rough pasture.
2. Mining activity characterised by open-cast workings. Some, at least, of these workings could be earlier than the system of enclosed fields.
3. System of enclosed fields expanded uphill to the line of dyke B.
4. Creation of mining concession in south zone of cultivated area.
5. Arable area to north of mining concession greatly enlarged by bringing more land upslope into cultivation in unenclosed rigs bounded by dyke D. The shieling hut no. 64 may date to this phase.
6. Mining activity by the Islay Lead Mining Company in the late 19th century, with shafts being sunk in earlier workings.

These remains suggest an infield-outfield system superseding an earlier system with enclosed fields grouped on the lower slopes by the loch-side. In the new scheme the enclosed fields would have become the infield, and the outfield the area between dykes B and D. Dyke D would have been the head dyke for this phase. The possibility remains that there was an even earlier phase of infield-outfield farming with the infield contained by dyke A, and the outfield by dyke C.

21. FIELD SYSTEMS, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 386 666)

The remains of a system of small irregularly shaped fields, with turf dykes enclosing rigs, can be traced around Dùn Cheapsaidh Mór (no. 69). Otherwise there are groups of rigs, including those on the low rise called Torr a' Ghoirtein (Gaelic, 'hill of the small garden') and others beside the loch shore (Illus 4.26). These are not on good soil and may represent relatively recent – 18th- or 19th-century? – efforts to bring more land into cultivation with the application of lime. There are three kilns within this area (nos 65, 67, 68), at least two of which may have been for burning lime. This land would otherwise have been the 'heathy pasture' of Kepollsmore. It appears to have been subdivided into larger enclosures, probably to demarcate the holdings of individual tenants.

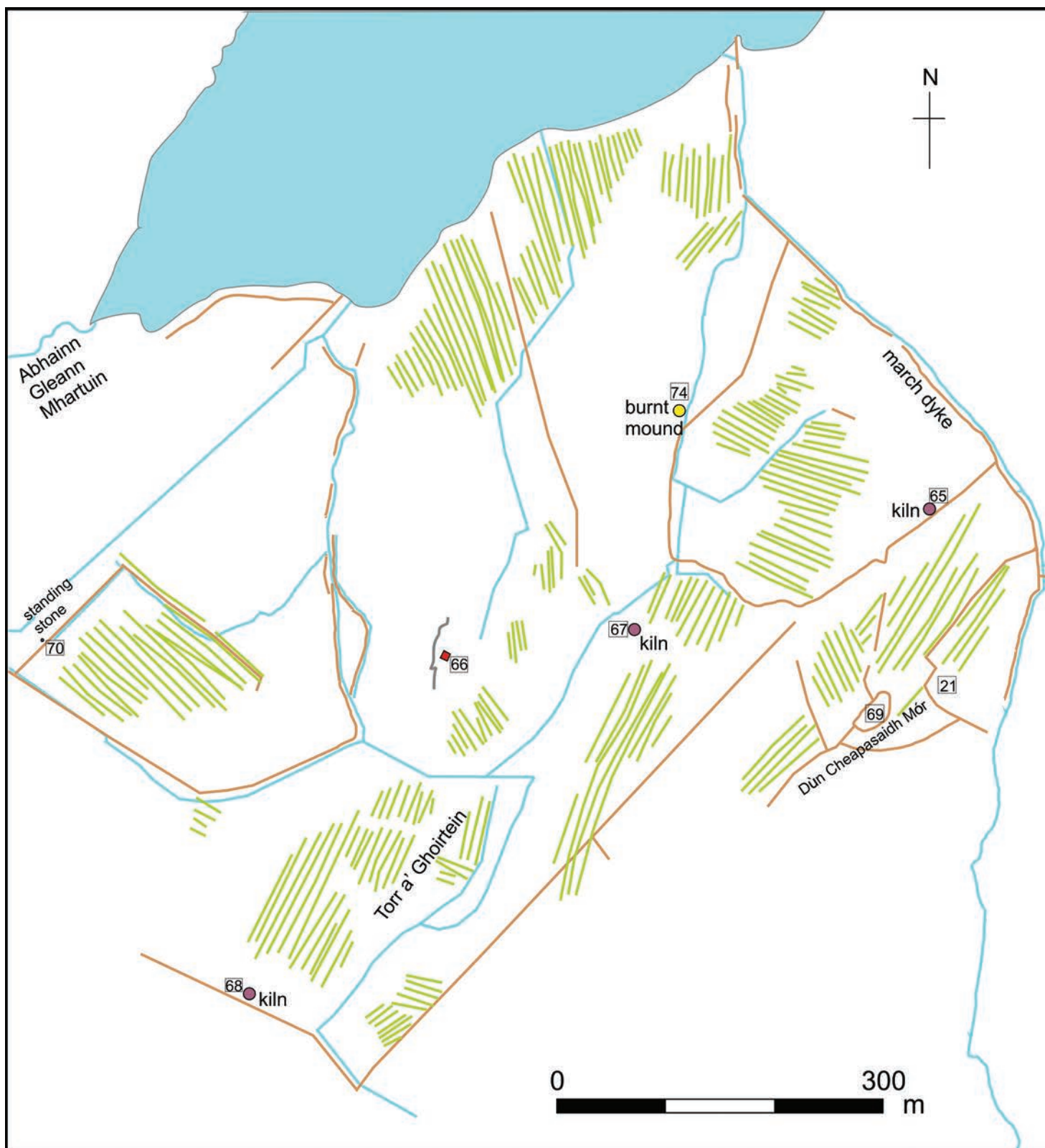


Illustration 4.26
Map of field systems at Kepollsmore, based on a survey by RCAHMS, 1993

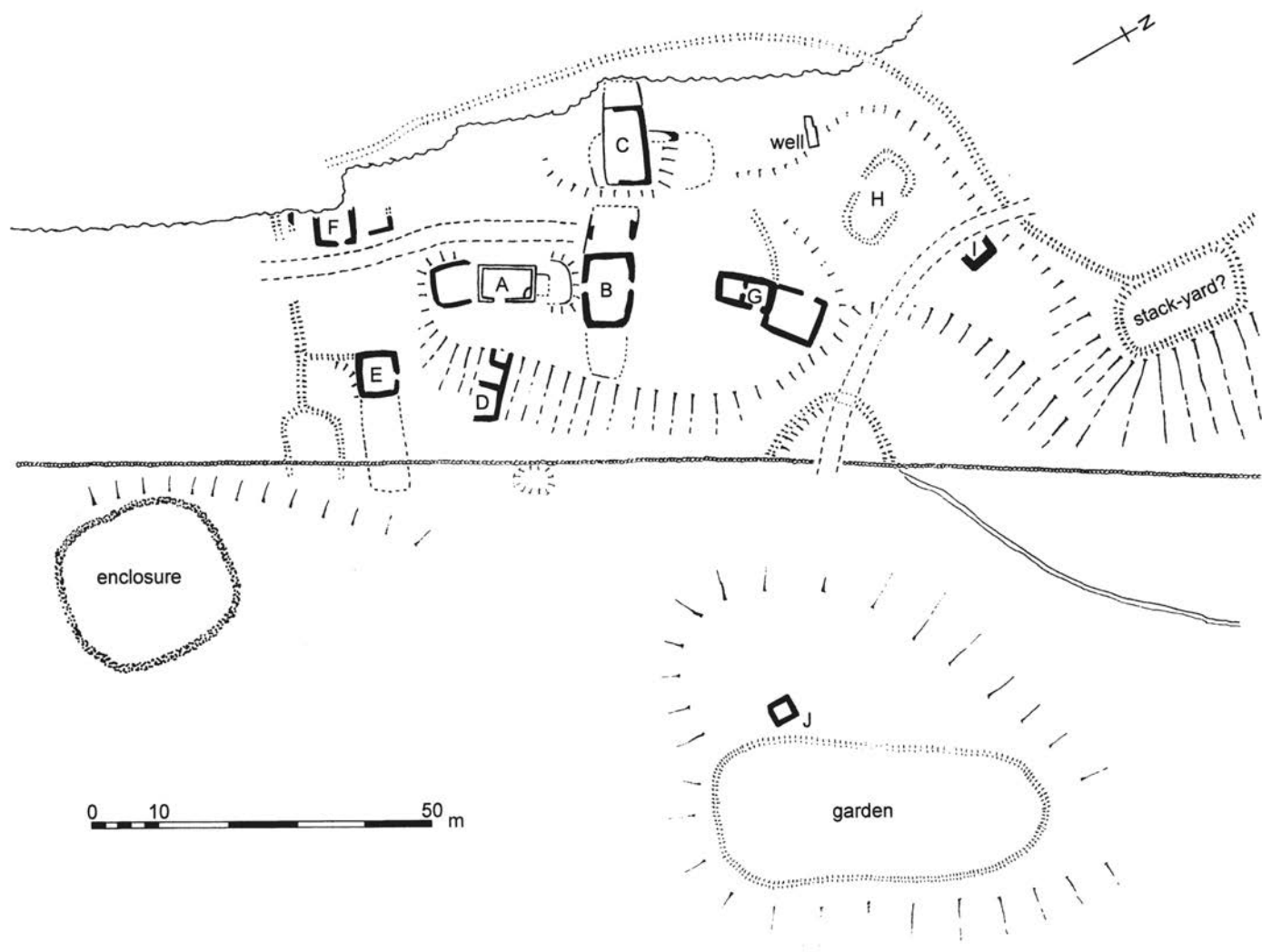


Illustration 5.1
Map of settlement remains at Druim a' Chùirn, Sean-ghairt (no. 22)

Chapter 5

SITES AND MONUMENTS

Introduction

The inventory work by RCAHMS in Argyll in the latter part of the 20th century, especially the volume that includes Islay (RCAHMS 1984), provides a basis for categorising prehistoric sites and monuments in the Finlaggan study area and assigning them to periods. The RCAHMS remit at that time meant that it took little or no interest in the rich array of post-medieval and modern houses, shielings, etc, and only noticed the engine-house at Mulreesh in a brief note on old Islay lead mines (RCAHMS 1984: 322–23).

Most of the homes, settlements and other structures identified in the study area appear to be of medieval or more recent date. They include huts, houses, enclosures and kilns. There was little guidance available before commencing our fieldwork on how to identify and classify them. While many of the huts and houses were clearly for human inhabitation there was no doubt they also included animal houses and stores, including byres and barns. It seemed reasonably clear that most are no earlier than the 18th century, but Colin Sinclair's 1953 essay on Highland houses, in which he distinguished an Argyll type that he labelled 'Dalriadic', did not prove to be an adequate guide. Our own work, first published in 2000 (Caldwell et al 2000: 62–65), suggested a typology of house forms including types A, B, C1, C2 and D. We present this here again in a modified form eliminating type B, which no longer appears to be distinctive, and doing away with the division between C1 and C2 houses. Also excluded here, but dealt with in detail below, are the main medieval structures on Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle.

Type A houses

Type A houses are of turf and/or drystone construction, often with opposed entrances in their long sides. They are oval or barrel-shaped in plan, or rectangular with rounded corners (eg Illus 5.1, str H; Illus 5.48). Our excavations on Eilean Mór have demonstrated that these can date to the medieval period and the 16th century. The difference between huts and type A houses is one of size, not easy to define since it is difficult to take definitive measurements from their slumped remains. Generally, the houses have a length of 8m or more, whereas the huts are rarely more than about 6m long. Many type A houses with turf walls probably had a framework of wattles, and since their walls were not load-bearing, may have relied on crucks planted in the ground for supporting the roof couples. Such houses are often now called creel houses.

Apart from medieval and 16th-century type A houses on Eilean Mór, including structures B, K, H.1, 12.2 and 12.3, one was partially excavated at Rudh' a' Chròcuin on the loch-side (trench 20).

Type C houses

Type C houses are drystone or clay-bonded rectangular houses. In Islay, where their walls survive to a sufficient height, it can be seen that they had gable ends. They are the houses that are found in settlements like Sean-ghairt, occupied in the 18th and early 19th century. Some form the core of larger complexes that have had other dwellings, barns or byres added, forming longer rectangular houses (eg Illus 5.4).

Type D houses

Type D houses are lime-mortared, rectangular houses with fireplaces in the gable walls (eg Illus 4.4, 4.12). In the study area none of these houses are likely to be any earlier in date than the 19th century, unless they are substantial modifications of earlier type C structures.

Enclosures

The enclosures are small, of various shapes and normally defined by earth banks. They may have served a variety of uses as stack-yards, gardens or animal pens.

Kilns

The kilns in the study area are all ruined, the remains of small circular structures built of stone, about 4 to 6m in overall diameter. They are often built into the side of a bank, and probably had corbelled roofs of turf. They might have been used for either drying grain or burning lime for use as a fertiliser. In most cases there is not enough surface evidence to indicate which, and as yet none have been excavated.

Corn-drying kilns did not have to be heated to a particularly high temperature, but there was a need to keep the fire well clear of the grain to avoid any risk of combustion. Kilns of this type, therefore, should be expected to have had flues for conducting hot air from an external hearth. Kilns for burning lime had to be fired to much higher temperatures and this may have been achieved by layering crushed



Illustration 5.2
House A at Druim a' Chùirn

limestone and peat in the kiln chamber. The burnt lime and ash could then be raked out through an opening at the kiln base.

On the basis of observations made by RCAHMS (1995: 19–20) on similar small circular kilns on the Mar Lodge Estate in Grampian, a useful working hypothesis may be that those kilns set into a bank are likely to be for corn-drying, whereas others which are free-standing are more likely to have been used for burning lime. On that basis, most of the 12 kilns identified through field survey were corn-driers.

Inventory

Note: for nos 1 to 21 see Chapter 4.

22. SETTLEMENT, DRUIM A' CHÙIRN, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 373 666)

This ruined settlement is situated about one third of a mile (0.5km) to the north of Ballimartin farm-steading and about the same distance south-west of the bottom end of Loch Finlaggan (Illus 5.1). The name Druim a' Chùirn, Gaelic for 'ridge of the cairn', is taken from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. There is now no trace of a cairn, the existence of which may also be reflected in the name of a ruined house, Carn mhic-fhearguis ('Ferguson's cairn'), nearby at NGR NR 373 674 on the farm of Ballachlaven. Druim a' Chùirn appears to be the place called Shennyart (Sean-ghairt), represented by a house symbol, on Stephen McDougall's mid-18th-century map of Islay. The houses are grouped on a series of terraces between a rocky slope to the west and a drystone dyke to the east forming the boundary of a field of improved ground, formerly cultivated but now under grass. The dyke may date to c 1833/34 because the Islay Estate rental for that year records that the farmer of Ballimartin and half Sean-ghairt was then paying interest on a loan for stone dykes. It has obviously truncated some of the remains of the settlement, and ploughing may have removed traces of other houses. The remains of at least 11 houses have been recognised, including one type D (house A) and one type A (house H). All or most of the rest are type C.

The only structure with upstanding walls is house A (Illus 5.2), a small rectangular cottage, 8.37 by 5.3m overall, occupied into the

20th century (information from Mathew MacMillan, the farmer of Ballimartin). Its walls are a mixture of local quarried material and field stones – limestone and dolerite, with some quartzite and dolostone – held in lime mortar. It has a cement floor, and fragments of corrugated iron in the debris inside are presumably remains of its last roof. In the north-east corner there is a crudely constructed pen made from stones collapsed from the adjacent gable.

The south gable is near complete and appears to incorporate an earlier, narrower one, about 3m wide. Foundations against the north gable may also belong to this earlier structure. To the north and south of structure A are yet more grass-covered foundations, those to the south perhaps being the ruins of a small yard or garden belonging to the earlier house.

Immediately to the north of A and oriented at right angles to it are the grass-covered foundations of house B with an overall size of 16.3 by 6.8m. It had two rooms, one with opposed entrances. Tenuous wall lines to the east are probably remains of an earlier structure. Structure C, about 15 by 7m, lying to the west of B and on the same alignment, also appears to overlie an earlier structure. C consisted of two rooms, a main one and a smaller one, the end of which is cut into the rocky slope.

To the south-east of house A are the remains of houses D and E, both on lower ground. D is partially buried by slope-wash, but at least part of it appears to have been a relatively narrow structure, 3.7m wide with walls including large field stones. E is represented by the foundations of a small squarish structure, but was probably originally a longer house, 17 by 6m. To the south of it are earth dykes forming small yards and a boundary to the settlement. A track from Ballimartin runs past the foundations of structure F, possibly a three-roomed structure, placed just inside the boundary dyke and below the rocky slope.

House G consists of the foundations of a small two-roomed house, 9 by 4.7m, with attached yard, lying on a gentle slope to the north of house B. To the north-west of it is a well, now represented by a concrete structure with a large cast-iron boiler beside it for cattle to drink from. Structure H, beside the well, is represented by low earth banks, forming a sub-rectangular shape, 14 by 8m. It had opposed entrances. House I, only 5m wide, has been truncated by a recent track.

On a higher piece of ground to the north of the houses is a small enclosure which perhaps served as a stack-yard. It is attached to an earth, or earth and stone, dyke which curves round the west of the houses and continues northwards, forming part of the head dyke on the west side of Loch Finlaggan.

The drystone dyke marks the line of the old road around the west side of Loch Finlaggan. On a piece of higher ground in the field to the east of it are traces of at least one small stone-walled house (J), 3.6 by 3.7m, with a nearby garden. On another low, rocky knoll to the south-west is a sub-circular enclosure, about 22 by 25m, defined by a low turf-covered rubble bank. This is clearly not a garden since the interior is rocky with no depth of soil.

It is evident that there is more than one phase of occupation represented in the remains at Druim a' Chùirn. In typological terms the earliest house appears to be structure H. It would have been followed by the small narrow houses represented by G, I, probably D and the earlier version of house A. Structures B, C, E and probably F belong to a third phase, with last of all the remodelled structure A. This latter building, house E and the small

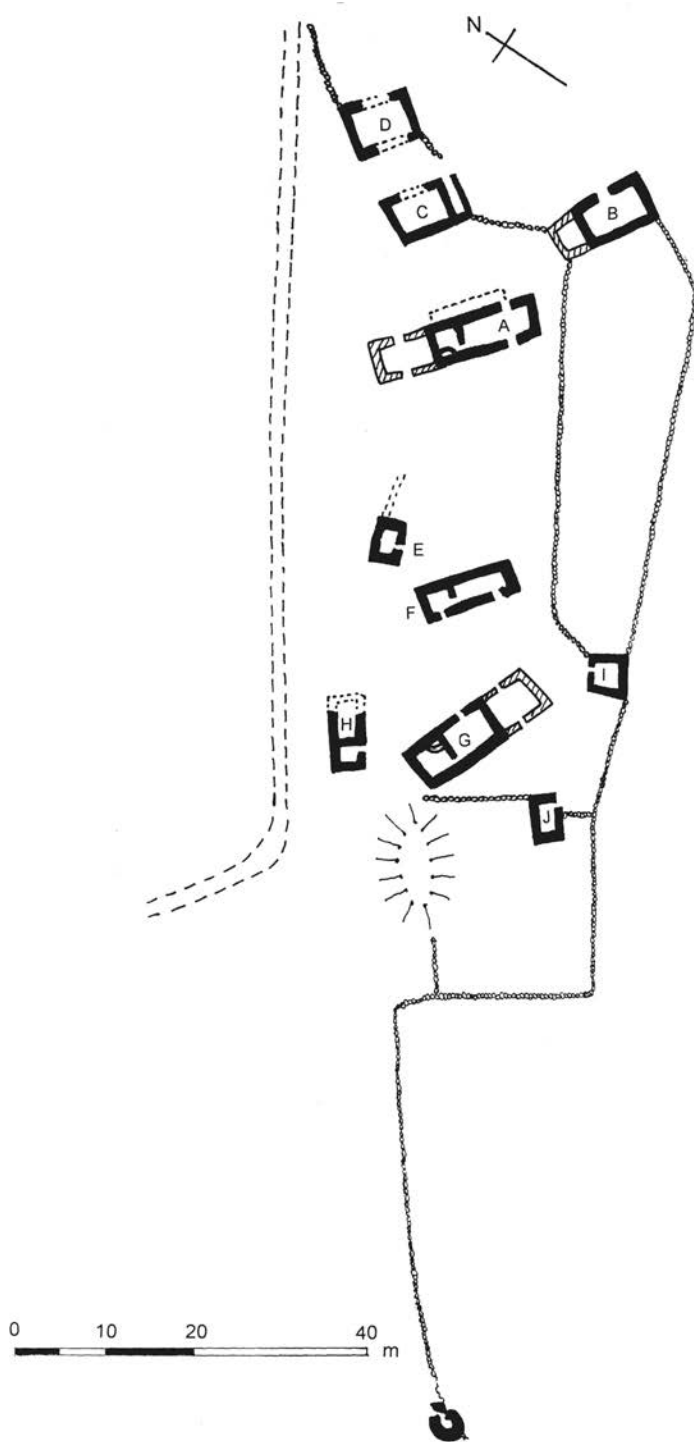


Illustration 5.3

Map of settlement remains at North Sean-ghairt, after a survey by Edinburgh University Archaeology Society, 1994

enclosure to the south of it backed by the drystone wall are the only structures shown on the plan of Ballmartin Farm made in the 1830s.

The enclosure in the field the other side of the drystone dyke may be the earliest structure of all. It is possibly of prehistoric origin, perhaps a palisaded enclosure or fort.



Illustration 5.4
North Sean-ghairt, house A

23. SETTLEMENT, (NORTH) SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 382 677) The substantial remains of this ruined settlement lie on a broad terrace at a height of over 20m above Loch Finlaggan and about 150m to the east of it. The ruins, with a further group to the south, are known collectively as Sean-ghairt, but for ease of reference here the two clusters are distinguished as North and South Sean-ghairt. At North Sean-ghairt 10 houses have been identified, all of type C (Illus 5.3, 5.4).

The houses and yards of the settlement are all built of local stone, including field stones and quarried material, mainly quartzite with lesser proportions of dolerite and limestone. The upstanding walls are of random rubble construction, sometimes with large, roughly rectangular blocks positioned as doorjambs and quoins. In general, the material used is sub-angular, quarried and split into roughly shaped rectangular blocks. Traces of clay mortar survive, especially in buildings A, B, C and I. In the west gable of house A a broken quern stone has been detected. There are no traces of roofing associated with any building. Presumably it was all of turf and thatch.

Associated with the buildings (A-J) are two yards lying adjacent to the old road up the west side of Loch Finlaggan. They are both enclosed by drystone dykes, and the larger of the two may have been kept in repair long after the abandonment of the settlement for use as a stack-yard or for animals. There are the foundations of two small buildings, I and J, attached to these yards, but both entered from outside them. There are also the remains of a more substantial house (B) at the end of the larger enclosure. The house itself is 9.5 by 5.5m and is entered from outside the yard. A smaller extension has been added at one end.

The main surviving house at North Sean-ghairt is structure A, still with walls and gables largely upstanding. It consists of an original unit with opposed entrances to which a larger extension has been added at the downslope end, giving the structure a total length of 19m. The addition is divided into two rooms, a larger one with opposed entrances with a smaller one entered off it. A low platform along the exterior of its north wall might represent the remains of an earlier structure. There is a small secondary pen or shooting butt constructed in an internal corner.

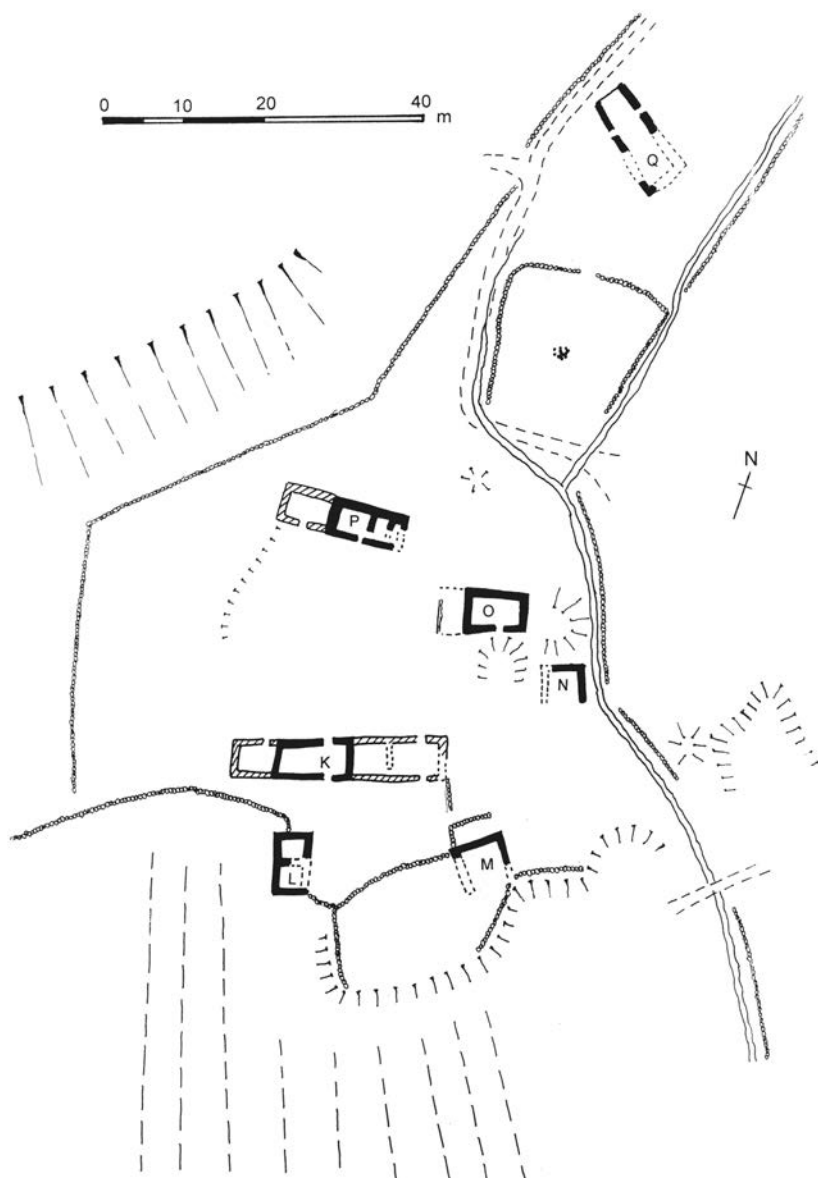


Illustration 5.5

Map of settlement remains at South Sean-ghairt, after a survey by Edinburgh University Archaeology Society, 1994



Illustration 5.6
South Sean-ghairt, house K

The other main house in the cluster is G, with a total length of about 16.5m, not so well preserved as A. It also is composed of three rooms, though here the two-roomed structure is the original element, with a smaller building with opposed entrances joined on at the downslope end. The ruins of G also contain a small pen.

The other buildings at North Sean-ghairt are represented by foundations, some of them covered by turf. C and D are two adjacent cottages, while F is a two-roomed house, perhaps all of one build. H and E are notably narrower than the other houses, 4m as against about 5m or 6m. They also differ in being aligned with the contours and not across them.

24. SETTLEMENT, (SOUTH) SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 380 674)

This ruined settlement lies some 200m to the south-west of North Sean-ghairt on the same broad terrace overlooking Loch Finlaggan (Illus 5.5, 5.6). The walling of structures here is generally similar to North Sean-ghairt, but there is a higher proportion of field stones, mostly quartzites, limestones, dolostone and dolerite, with clay mortar evident in house K. It and structure O have several poorly dressed stones.

South Sean-ghairt consists of the remains of two yards and seven type C houses, mostly built broad side to the slope. One of the yards has a circular patch of small stones in it, which might possibly be the remains of a stack stance. The other yard contains the remains of house M. A small burn flows down beside the houses, and the remains of a small house (N), cut into the slope beside it, might be a clack-mill.

The largest structure is K, with a total length of about 27.5m, and it is the only one with walls surviving to any significant height. One of its gables is still about 1.3m high. The core of K is a house with opposed entrances, with at the west end a smaller addition, and at the east end an extension similar to house A at North Sean-ghairt. It has a larger room with opposed entrances and a smaller room entered off it. The east gable of this structure has a blocked doorway with traces of lime mortar in its stonework. To the south of structure K is a smaller two-roomed house (L).

Smaller in size is structure P, also divided into four rooms, though here the original building has three rooms *en suite*, with a smaller addition at one end. Building O has two rooms, the smaller, presumably a byre, with a drain running through it. It is lined with stone slabs with no trace of any capstones. Building Q has its west gable wall cut out of a rock outcrop.

25. KILN, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 381 676)

Midway between the north and south clusters of houses there is an outcrop of rock with a small circular kiln cut into it (Illus 5.7). There are traces of a sill stone, and a lintel collapsed in situ. It was probably for corn-drying.

26. HUTS, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 378 678)

The slumped turf remains of two shieling huts are positioned on a terrace at a height of about 150m below the summit of Cnoc an Tighe and between the head dyke and the dyke defining the boundary with Ballachlaven. One is about 5m in diameter, the other 5.5 by 8.5m, partially overlying a smaller, earlier hut (Illus 5.8).

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Illustration 5.7
Kiln (no. 25) at Sean-ghairt

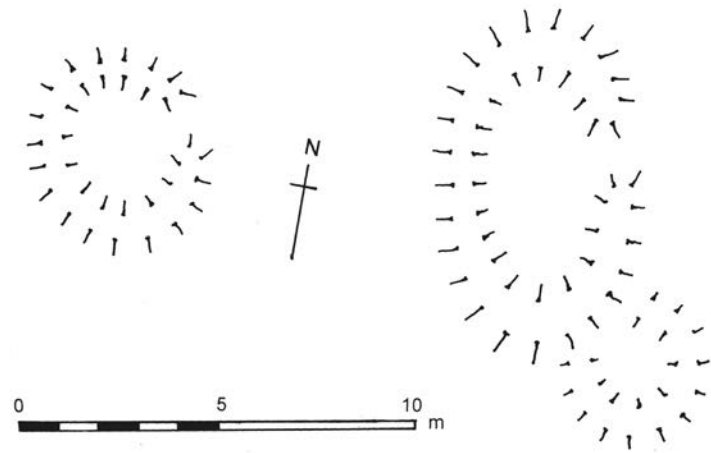


Illustration 5.8
Plan of shieling huts (no. 26), Sean-ghairt

27. HUTS, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 380 680)

A group of four circular or oval turf shieling huts arranged in a line on a sheltered terrace of Cnoc an Tighe above the Sean-ghairt head dyke, at a height of about 150m above sea level. The one furthest to the west partially overlies an earlier hut. The easternmost one is mounded high on the debris of its predecessors (Illus 5.9, 5.10).

28. HARBOUR, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 385 678)

To the north-east of North Sean-ghairt are the remains of a jetty, of boulders, alongside a small, sheltered bay, bounded by another shorter jetty at a distance of about 8.5m. The area between has been cleared of stones, perhaps those in a heap a few metres to the south-west.

29. KILN, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 384 680)

A small circular kiln overgrown with grass, perhaps complete, collapsed in situ. It is about 4.35m in diameter and is sited in a field of rigs (see no. 16 above). There are no signs of a flue.

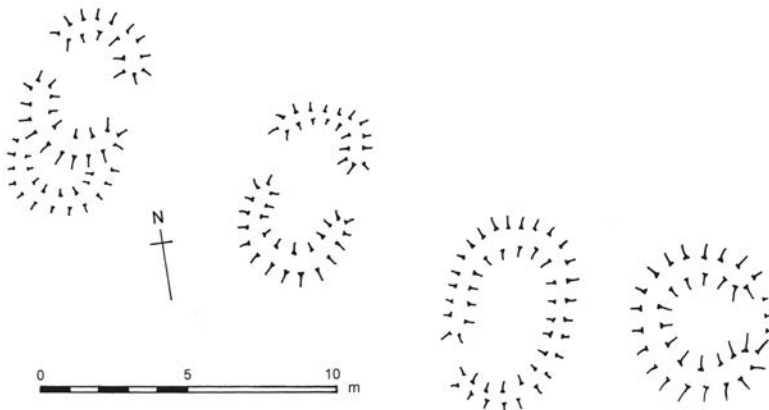


Illustration 5.9
Plan of shieling huts (no. 27), Sean-ghairt

30. KILN, SEAN-GHAIRT (NGR NR 386 680)

The circular stone-foundations of a kiln by the shore of the loch near the boundary dyke with Portanellan. It is 3.8m in overall diameter with an opening for a flue or rake-hole facing east. Its lintel is collapsed in place.

31. HOUSE, AIRIGH IAIN MHARTUIN, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 381 687)

On a level area at the apex where two small tributaries of the Allt a' Ghoirtein join, below the brow of Cnoc na Cubhaig (Gaelic, 'hill of the cuckoo'), but now in a clearing in a conifer plantation (Illus 5.11, 5.12). It is a long type C house, about 23.8 by 6.3m overall, divided into three chambers. The middle, probably the dwelling, has opposed entrances. One end chamber has been subdivided by a secondary wall, and the other has had a little pen or shooting butt built in its corner after the house fell into ruin. It is of drystone construction, using local, mostly quarried, stone. Much of the walling stands almost to full height but there is no evidence for windows. The house was abandoned prior to 1878. The blocking



Illustration 5.10
Group of four shieling huts (no. 27) above Sean-ghairt

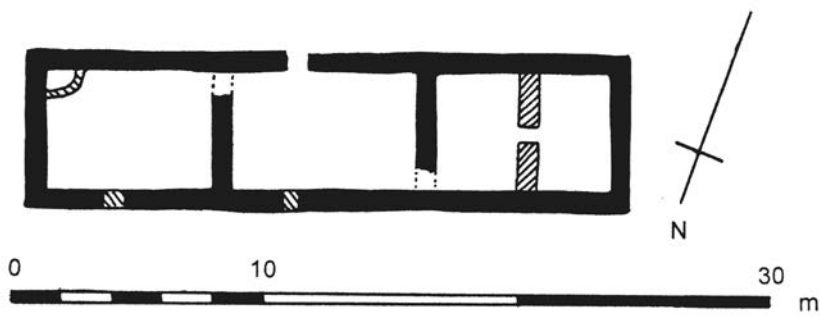


Illustration 5.11
Plan of house at Airigh Iain Mhartuin, Portanellan (no. 31)

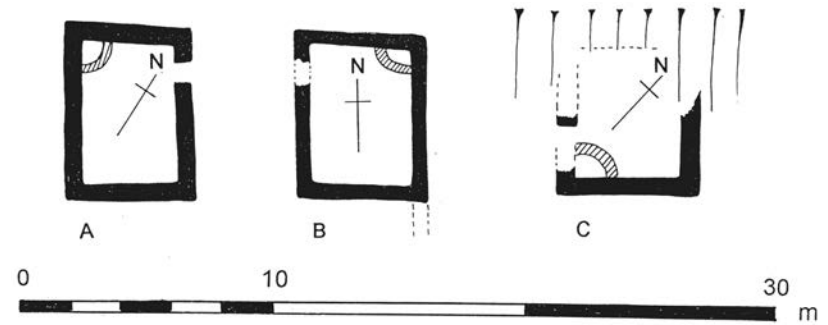


Illustration 5.13
Plans of houses at: (A) Airigh nan Caisteal (no. 34); (B) An Leacann (no. 32); (C) Cachlaidh Chreagach (no. 36)



Illustration 5.12
Airigh Iain Mhartuin, Portanellan (no. 31)



Illustration 5.14
House at An Leacann, Portanellan (no. 32)

of all but one of the external entrances may have been done after it was roofless so it could be used as a sheepfold. The name is Gaelic for the shieling of John or Ian Martin, and the house no doubt replaces earlier shieling huts. The confluence of two streams like this is a typical location for shieling huts in Islay, for example on the Allt na Tri-dail (Avenvogie) at NGR NR 372 560 and on a tributary of the Abhainn Gleann Logain at NGR NR 421 628.

32. HOUSE, AN LEACANN, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 383 690)
On a level piece of ground, now within a conifer plantation, above the Allt a' Ghoirtein, probably part of the holding of Goirtean Chailean (see nos 17 and 33). A small ruined rectangular house of type C, about 5.3 by 6.8m, its walls largely upstanding, except that one gable has been collapsed to provide material for a small pen or butt (Illus 5.13 B, 5.14). The walls are of drystone construction using locally quarried quartzites and Port Askaig tillite. It has had a small attached garden.

33. SETTLEMENT, GOIRTEAN CHAILEAN, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 384 688)

These ruined and overgrown type C houses are now covered with the conifers of a forestry plantation. They lie on a level platform immediately at the bottom of a steep slope crowned with a mature ash tree. The ruins of four houses are traceable,

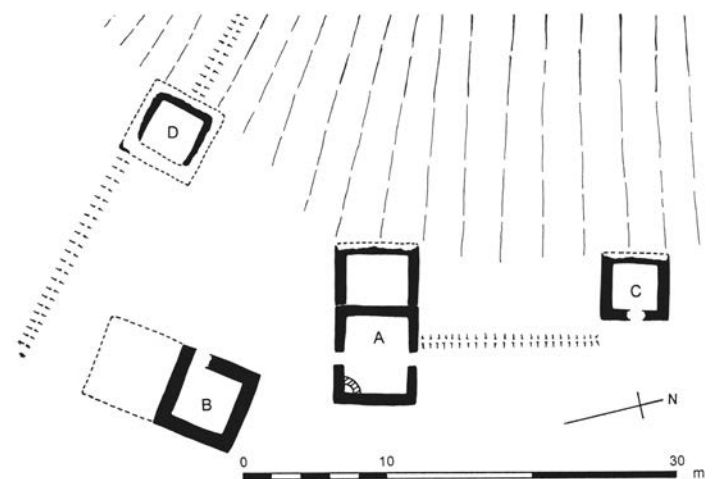


Illustration 5.15
Map of settlement remains at Goirtean Chailean, Portanellan (no. 33)

all of drystone construction, mostly quarried blocks of quartzite, but also including large blocks of dolerite for quoins (Illus 5.15). The most substantial house, labelled A, has opposed entrances in its long sides, and an added chamber at one end.

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House B also appears to have had two chambers. Houses D and C were simple, almost square structures, house D set on the line of a turf boundary dyke, perhaps forming a head dyke for the associated field system (no. 17). See also the house no. 32. Goirtean Chailean is Gaelic for ‘Colin’s garden’ and was already abandoned by 1878.

34. HOUSE, AIRIGH NAN CAISTEAL, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 377 700)

The name is Gaelic for the shieling of the castles, and the name has also been applied to a nearby loch and a small glen with a burn. The type C house, now hemmed in by trees, was built on open moorland at a height of about 170m above sea level. It is a small rectangular drystone structure, built of field stones, mostly quartzite (Illus 5.13 A). It measures 7.0 by 5.0m overall and is now largely ruinous and overgrown. A mound at one end may be the remains of earlier turf huts. Unlike other shieling grounds in the survey area, Airigh nan Caisteal is some distance beyond the head dyke. That, and the name which may relate it to the castle at Finlaggan, suggests that its use may go back to medieval times.

35. SETTLEMENT, AIRIGH NAN CLACH, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 386 708)

In a bend of the Allt a’ Chromain are the ruins of a small type C drystone rectangular house, about 5 by 7m overall. Its walls, mostly of quarried blocks of quartzite, have been largely rebuilt to form an oval enclosure, perhaps for lambing or else as a shooting butt. Nearby are the foundations of another ruined house, about 6 by 5m, and a shieling mound. Round about them, on a level shoulder of ground, is an area of green grass now infested with bracken and dotted with small clearance cairns – obvious signs that the ground here has been cultivated. Neither house appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1878, and the more complete one only on later editions. It is possible that this is the settlement of Lechacruath recorded in the 1861 census.

The Allt a’ Chromain formed the march between Portanellan and Balulive. Airigh nan Clach (Gaelic, ‘shieling of the stones’) is defined in the Ordnance Survey Name Book as a tract of heathy pasture, 480 acres in extent, bounded on the north by the Allt Loch nan Eun, on the west by Carn a’ Choinnleir and Carn Meadhonach, and extending on the east to within a short distance of Crò Earraich, and on the south to a short distance south of the Allt a’ Chromain. It is now sandwiched between two large conifer plantations. Most of Airigh nan Clach fell within the boundaries of Balulive, and there is a shieling mound on the Balulive part at NGR NR 389 713, with the ruins of a small rectangular house nearby. There is also a burnt mound on a tributary of the Allt a’ Chròth Earraich (Gaelic, meaning ‘burn of the spring pen/enclosure’) at NGR NR 389 711.

36. HOUSE, CACHLAIDH CHREAGACH, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 389 700)

The overgrown ruins of a small rectangular type C house on a slope above a tributary of the Finlaggan River (Illus 5.13 C). It is of drystone construction, mostly quarried quartzite blocks. It is now in a clearing in a conifer plantation and contains a small pen. The name is Gaelic for ‘rocky gate’.

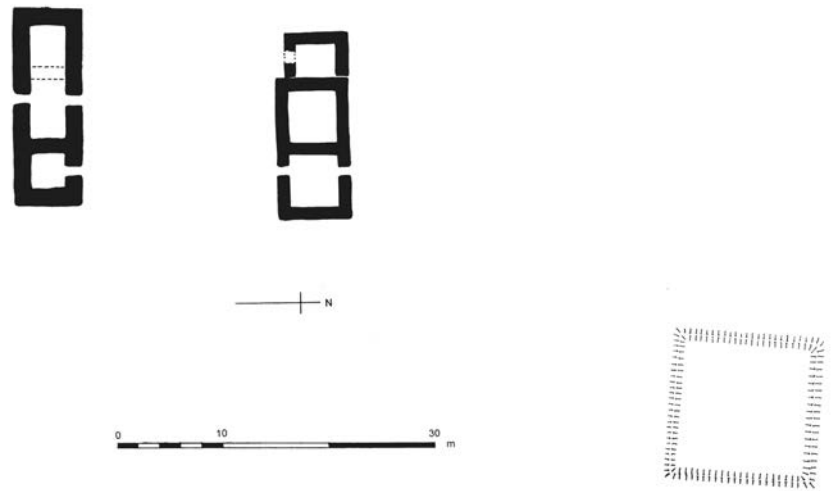


Illustration 5.16
Map of settlement at Cùl a’ Bhaile, Portanellan (no. 37)

37. SETTLEMENT, CÙL A’ BHAILE, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 396 690)

There are the grass-covered foundations of two type C houses on either side of the track from Mulreesh to Cachlaidh Chreagach, and a few metres to the north-east a level enclosure, 14m square overall, defined by an earth bank (Illus 5.16). The house to the south, about 18.3 by 6.3m, appears to have been divided into three chambers. The middle one has opposed entrances and a garden to the south. The house to the north is shorter and broader, about 13.5 by 7m, and has two chambers, one with opposed entrances. At one end is a narrower third chamber, probably an addition. The name Cùl a’ Bhaile does not appear on any maps but was given to us by a previous tenant of Finlaggan Farm. It is Gaelic for ‘the back of the township’ and must be the Backton of the 1861 census.



Illustration 5.17
House A at Rudh’ a’ Chròcuin, Portanellan (no. 38), its walls crowned by heather



Illustration 5.18
The 'AI stone' (no. 39)



Illustration 5.19
The 'AI stone' (no. 39): inscription

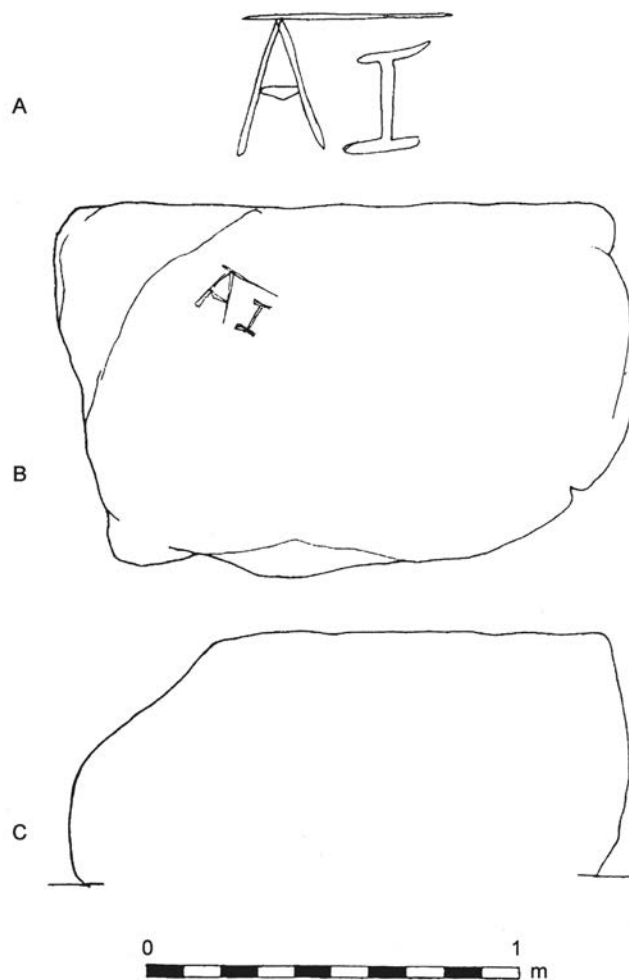


Illustration 5.20
The 'AI stone' (no. 39): (A) detail of inscription; (B) top view; (C) elevation

38. SETTLEMENT, RUDH' A' CHRÒCUIN, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 386 681)

The ruins of two type A turf-walled houses on a terrace adjacent to the remains of a small jetty of boulders on the west shore of Loch Finlaggan. One house (A) is long and rectangular, 14 by 5m, positioned end on to the loch (Illus 5.17). Gaps in its walls may represent the positions of two sets of opposed entrances, but they also coincide with tracks worn by humans and animals. The other house (B) is shorter, with rounded corners, and side-on to the loch. It measures 7.5 by 5.5m overall and appears to have an entrance in the side facing the water, and, less probably, another in its west end. It is possible that these houses relate to use of the nearby field system (no. 16), identified as Laichtcarlane.

In 1994 limited excavation was initiated on the smaller of the houses by the Time Team, and completed by us as trench 20. See Chapter 7 below.

39. INSCRIBED STONE, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 3874 6813)

A large rectangular boulder, a glacial erratic of meta-igneous rock, 1.45 by 0.96m, 0.65m high, sitting on the west loch shore opposite Eilean Mór. Neatly incised on its top surface is 'AI' (Illus 5.18–20). Both letters are Lombardic capitals and are obviously medieval in form. The A has a top- and a cross-bar. The I is smaller than the A, suggesting it should be read as a 'one' rather than a letter. The inscription was only discovered in 1996.

40. JETTY AND INSCRIBED (?) STONE, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 3875 6819)

A small group of large stones opposite Eilean Mór, normally partially submerged in the water of the loch. They can reasonably be interpreted as 'the remains of a pier' reported in 1772 by the travel writer Pennant (1774: 259). He described how one of its stones was cut with 'A.II. or, *Æneas* the second, one of the lords of the isles, in whose reign it was founded'. This was Angus Òg, the supporter of Robert Bruce.

The stone in question had dropped from sight since Pennant's day. Indeed, when the AI inscription (see above, no. 39) was

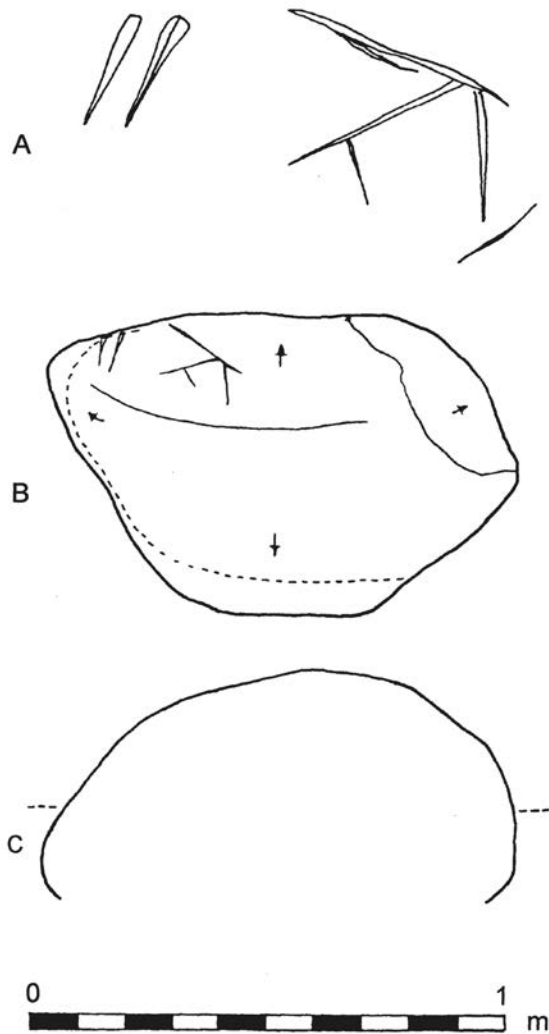


Illustration 5.21

The 'All stone' (no. 40): (A) 'inscription'; (B) top view; (C) elevation (broken lines mark water level in the loch at the time of discovery)



Illustration 5.22

The 'All stone' (no. 40)

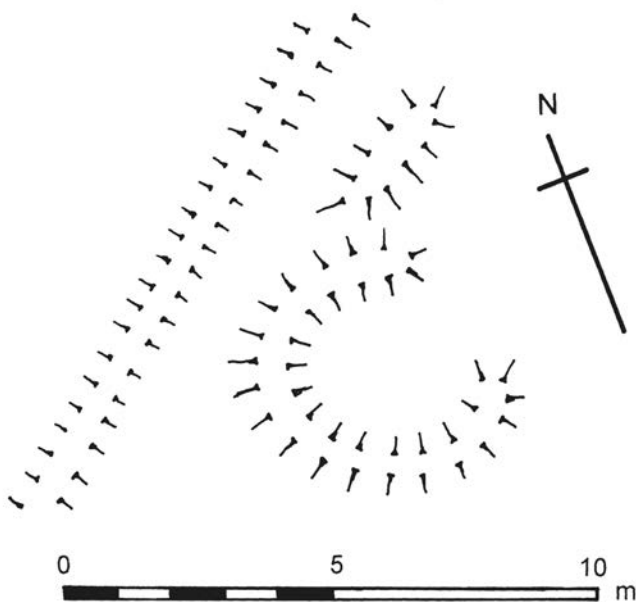


Illustration 5.23
Plan of hut no. 43

discovered in 1996 there seemed a real possibility that that was the stone seen by Pennant, and it had been turned into AII through some error. In the summer of 1997, however, when the water level in the loch was very low, the AII stone was rediscovered. It is a quartzite boulder, 1.02 by 0.67m, with a height of at least 0.48m, which is often totally submerged in the water. The portion rising above the loch sediments is sub-oval in shape, but this may be giving a misleading impression of the size and outline of what could be a much larger stone.

The carving of the 'inscription' is different in character from the AI on stone no. 39. It consists of large, bold incisions. If the intention really was that they should be read as an inscription it says 'IIA' rather than 'AII' (Illus 5.21, 5.22).

41. EILEAN MÓR, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 388 681)

An island settlement with the ruins of a post-medieval township succeeding important medieval and earlier remains. See Chapters 8–12 for a detailed description and account of its excavation.

FINLAGGAN



Illustration 5.24
Circular turf hut (no. 43) by the shore of Loch Finlaggan

42. EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 387 680)
An island, largely artificial, with a sequence of structures extending from prehistoric times to the medieval period. See Chapter 13 for a detailed description and account of its excavation.

43. HUT, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 388 683)
The collapsed turf remains of a small circular hut, about 5m in diameter, squeezed between the old road, bounded by a turf dyke, and the shore of the loch (Illus 5.23, 5.24).

44. SETTLEMENT, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 389 683)

Several structures, including huts and at least one house, are concentrated in a small area at the north end of Loch Finlaggan, bounded by the Finlaggan River, another unnamed stream and the old road up the west side of the loch. It is not clear to what extent any of these structures are contemporary with each other or represent a coherent, permanent settlement. The ground is now rough pasture, some of it very boggy. The thin peaty soil, however, shows signs of having been cultivated in the past in short rigs (Illus 4.5, 5.25).

(A) A substantial turf-covered mound near the loch shore adjacent to the old road from Sean-ghairt (Illus 5.26 A). It is about 10m in diameter and represents the accumulated ruins of a series of small huts. The collapsed walls of the most recent – either two small oval structures or one two-roomed house – are visible on top.

(B) A series of overlapping huts, not all contemporary, rather than a multi-roomed long house (Illus 5.26 B). They stand on a small heather-covered knoll adjacent to the old road near the loch shore. There are two oval huts and two rectangular ones. The most substantial is the rectangular hut at the west end of the group, about 6.5 by 5.5m, with opposed entrances in its longer sides (see account of trench 13 in Chapter 7).

(C) A few metres to the east of A, the collapsed turf remains of a type A rectangular house, about 9.5 by 6m, with its entrance, untypically, in one of its short sides (Illus 5.26 C).

(D) A small D-shaped enclosure defined by a spreading stone and earth bank, enclosing an area about 6.5 by 10m. It was identified in 1878 by the Ordnance Survey as a burial ground and is so



Illustration 5.25

Photograph taken from a drone of the settlement (no. 44) at the head of Loch Finlaggan between the old road and the Finlaggan River. Note the enclosure (D) and the mill (G) (Alan Miller)

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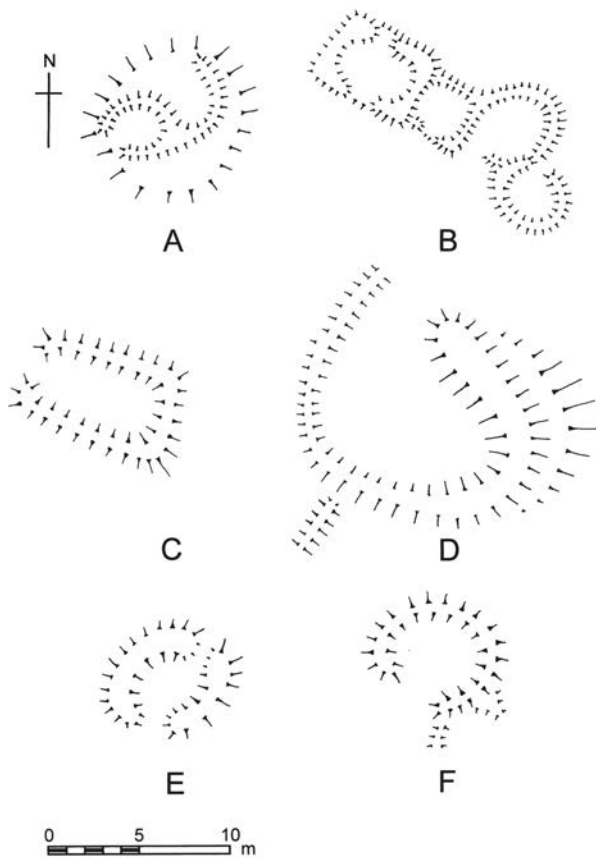


Illustration 5.26
Plans of structures A–F in settlement no. 44

listed by RCAHMS (1984: no. 379). It lies near the edge of the loch on the line of a later earth dyke (Illus 5.26 D).

(E) A linear arrangement of up to eight small circular huts between the old road and a field dyke about 40m to the east. Illus 5.26 E shows a relatively well-defined hut in this group.

(F) The collapsed turf remains of a circular hut with an overall diameter of about 6.5m, partially overlying an earlier circular hut (Illus 5.26 F).

(G) The remains of a mill on the Finlaggan River. These are slight but have been confirmed by the results from a resistivity survey by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford for the Time Team in 1994. The site is a small level platform on the west side of the burn, where it is confined by steep banks and flows quite swiftly towards the loch (Illus 5.27). There are no obvious signs of a building but there are the remains of a stone dam and traces of a leat behind it, now totally silted up. It can be seen in section in the bank of the burn. This supposed mill showed up in the geophysical survey as an area of high resistance, with the leat represented by a linear spread of low resistance adjacent to it (Illus 5.28). It was probably similar to the 'Norse mills' documented in Lewis (MacLeod 2009).

45. HOUSE (?), PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 390 684)

Three sides of this possible rectangular house are traceable in the magnetic susceptibility survey of the flat area to the south-west of the mound at Cnoc Seannda, carried out by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford in 1994 (Illus 5.28). It appears to be about 20 by 12m



Illustration 5.27
Mill (?) on the Finlaggan River (no. 44G)

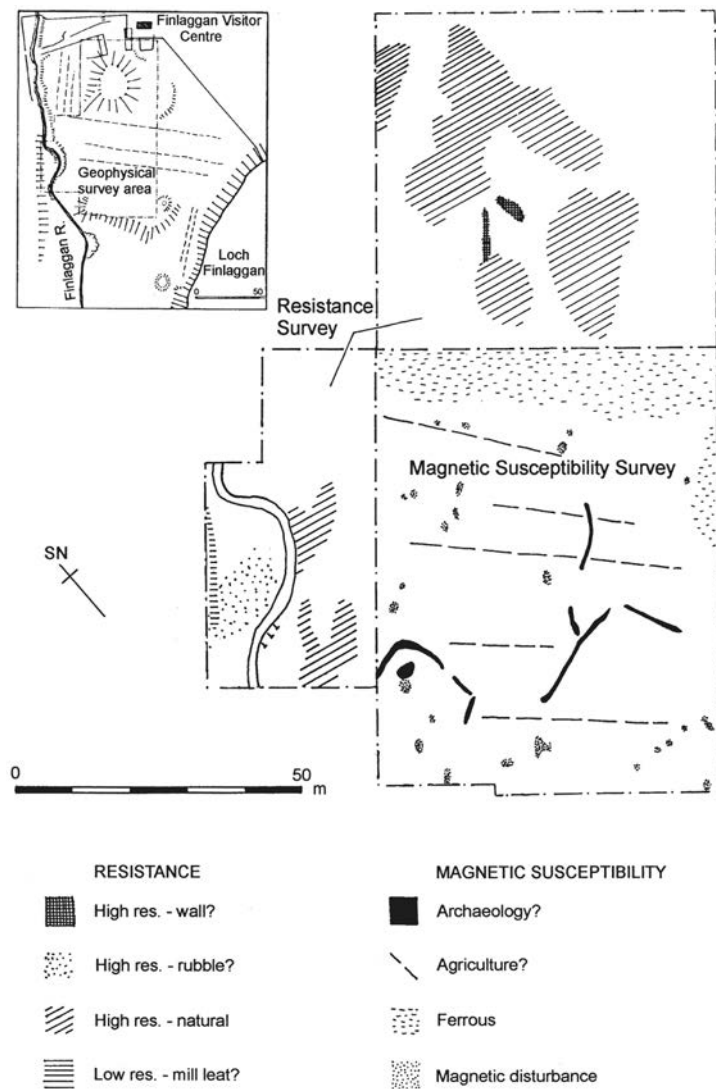


Illustration 5.28
Geophysical surveys around Cnoc Seannda undertaken in 1994 by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford (John Gater)



Illustration 5.29
Cnoc Seannnda mound from west

with a central hearth. The ferrous disturbance nearby is manifestly due to strands of wire from an old fence.

46. SETTLEMENT, CNOC SEANNDA, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 391 684)
The mound at Cnoc Seannda (next to the Finlaggan Visitor Centre) is a prominent local landmark. It appears as a regular hemispherical mount with a base diameter of about 50m and a height of over 6m above the adjacent ground (Illus 5.29, 5.30). Its name means 'oldish knoll' in Gaelic. Excavations on the mound undertaken in 1994 and 1995 (trenches 21 and 22) are described in Chapter 7.

Terraced into the north side of the mound and between it and the old road are the foundations of two type C long houses (A and B), oriented south-west/north-east and parallel to each other. Both appear to have been subdivided into three chambers. House A was about 18m in overall length with a width of 5.25m. House B was almost 20m long and 5.25m wide. The north end walls of

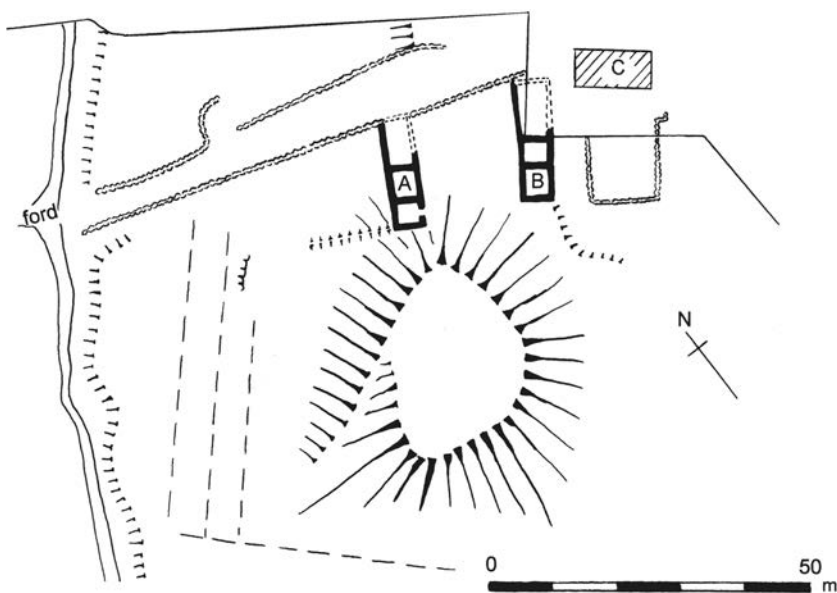


Illustration 5.30
Map of settlement remains at Cnoc Seannda (no. 46)

both houses bounded the old road, here a dirt track bordered by stone dykes, leading to a ford across the Finlaggan Burn and then southwards down the loch-side.

A third house (C), at right angles to B, has been rebuilt to serve as the Finlaggan Visitor Centre. It is shown as a roofed building at a sharp bend in the old road on the Ordnance Survey map of 1878 (there are no indications of houses A and B, presumably by then reduced to their foundations). The Finlaggan Visitor Centre was a derelict cottage until extensively restored and remodelled in the 1980s for use by the Finlaggan Trust. It had lime-mortared walls and a slate roof.

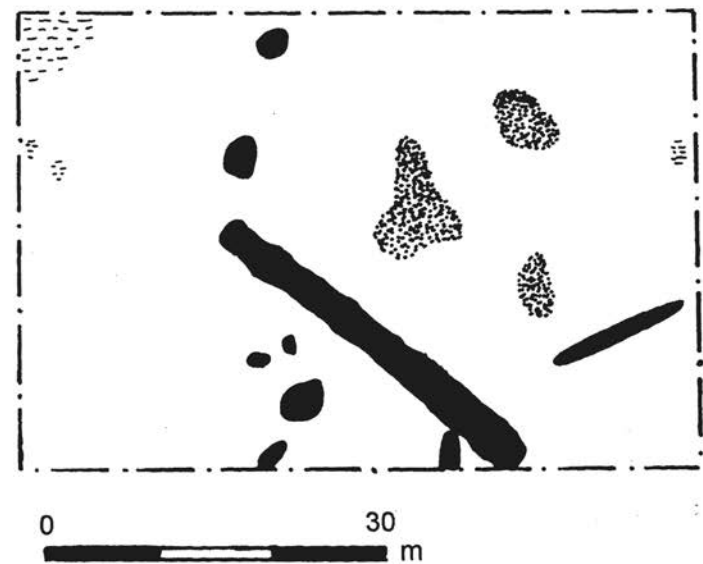
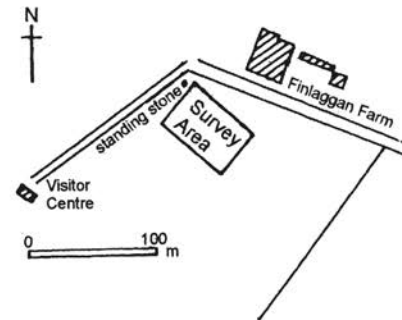


Illustration 5.31
Geophysical survey adjacent to standing stone at Finlaggan farmhouse, undertaken in 1994 by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford (John Gater)

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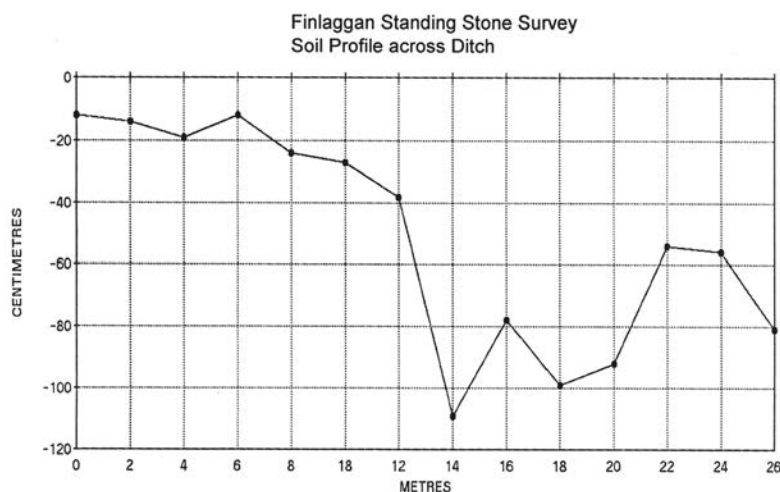


Illustration 5.32

Soil profile, made using an augur, across supposed ditch running NNW-SSE (see Illus 5.31)

47. STANDING STONES, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 392 685, NR 395 685)

The first stone, close to the Finlaggan farm-steading, is still upright, 2m in height and 1.4 by 0.7m at the base, aligned with its long axis north-west and south-east (RCAHMS 1984: no. 97). It has a plump outline and is of a rock type not found in the Finlaggan locality, best described as a metabasite (Illus 3.1). It exhibits signs of a planar fabric but still retains a massive almost knobbly appearance. It is this fabric that has allowed the stone to exhibit two large faces and correspondingly two thinner edge faces. It is probably a glacial erratic. It is presumably one of the 'two stones set up at the east side of Loch-Finlagan . . . six feet high' reported by Martin Martin in the late 17th century (Martin 1703: 243).

In 1994 Geophysical Surveys of Bradford undertook geophysical work around this stone. The survey area covered a rectangular area 40 by 60 sq m to the south and east of the stone (Illus 5.31). Magnetic susceptibility was measured and revealed strong anomalies, tentatively identified as either archaeological or geological. It was thought possible that a prominent linear feature running NNW-SSE might be a Palaeogene dyke. In order to throw more light on this a survey with an augur was undertaken across it, suggesting that this anomaly is in fact a ditch, presumably artificial (Illus 5.32).

The second standing stone reported by Martin Martin may have been one of the two large recumbent boulders lying on a slope at the corner of a field a few metres to the east of the Finlaggan farm-steading (Illus 5.33). These boulders have been scheduled as an ancient monument, apparently being considered to be a broken monolith. They are, however, of two different rock types, one metabasite, the other Port Askaig tillite. The former is 1.85 by 1.09 by 0.6m, the latter 2.0 by 1.0 by 0.6m.

48. SETTLEMENT, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 395 683)

Adjacent to the Finlaggan Road and leat for the Mulreesh mill-pond are the vestigial traces of a settlement of two or more type C houses and a kiln. The houses are represented by grass-covered foundations, but there are several large blocks and boulders strewn



Illustration 5.33

Two large recumbent boulders near Finlaggan farmhouse, supposed to have been standing (no. 47)

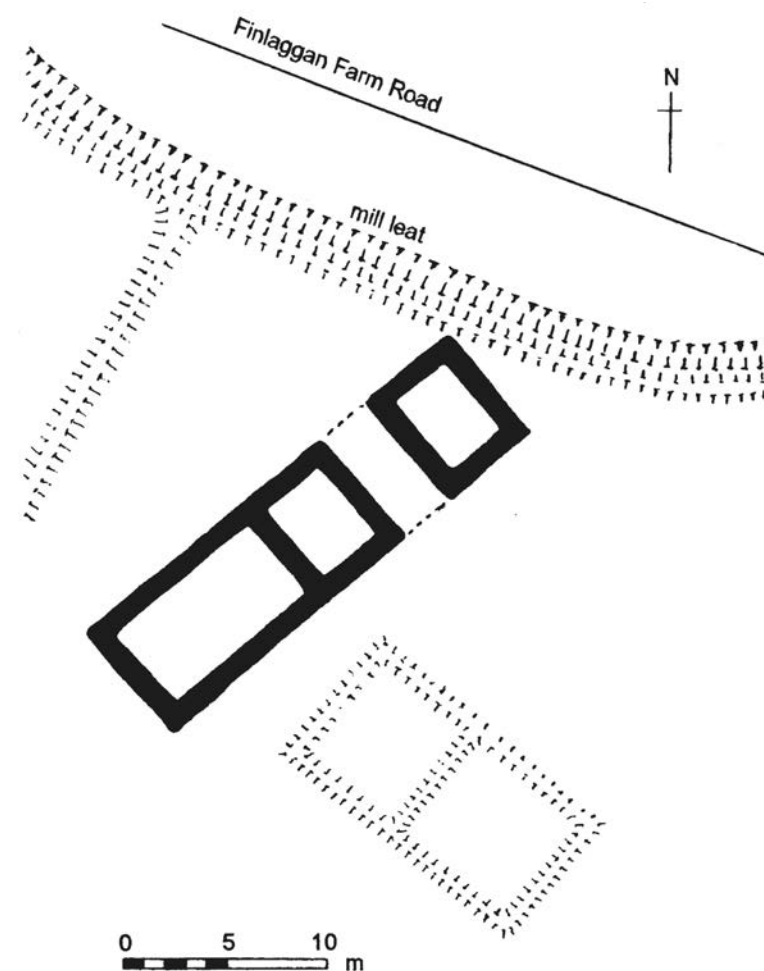


Illustration 5.34

Plan of settlement no. 48, Portanellan

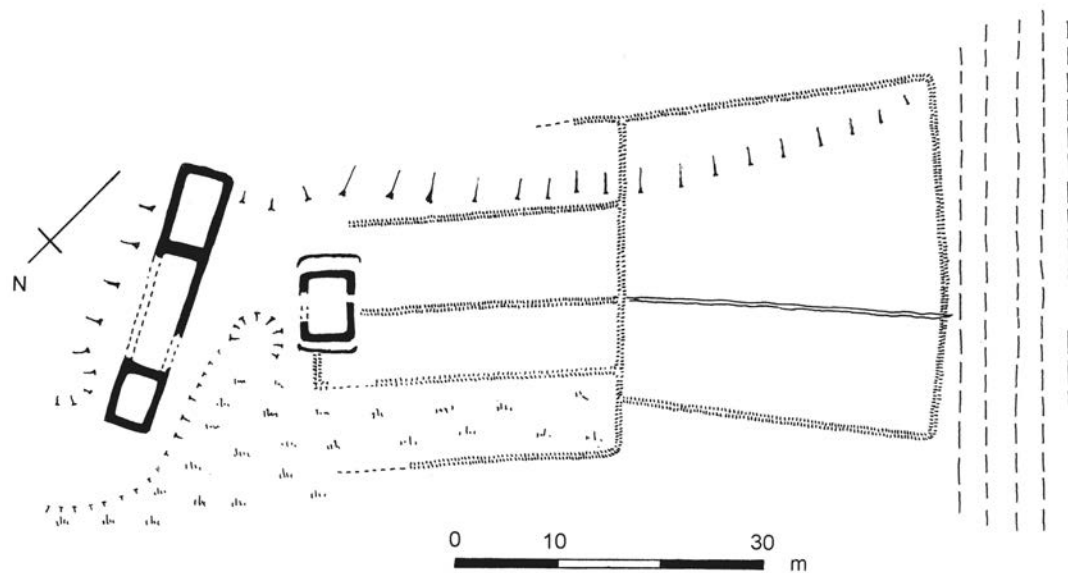


Illustration 5.35
Plan of settlement no. 48a, Portanellan

about that presumably once formed their walls (Illus 5.34). One house of two chambers is 15.6 by 8.7m. At right angles to it is a range, possibly all one house of four rooms, with an overall length of 23.3m and width of 6.4m. The kiln is several metres away, at NGR NR 3967 6828, constructed in the side of a small hillock. There are traces of a flue running southwards. The kiln itself is totally denuded of stonework, and the hole formed by its 2.2m diameter chamber has been backfilled with mine tailings. It was probably for corn-drying.

48A. SETTLEMENT, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 400 681)

Two type C houses and a garden on the west side of the Mulreesh road just to the south of the turn-off for Finlaggan. The houses are reduced to grass-covered foundations of turf and stone (Illus 5.35). One, with three chambers, is 26.4 by 5.4m overall; the

other is about 7 by 5m, with opposed entrances and the end wall of an earlier structure adjacent to one of its end walls. Between the two is a circular cut in the edge of a low bank, possibly the remains of a kiln.

49. HUTS, CUING-SGEIR, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 391 680)
A low occupation mound, about 9.5 by 8.5m, by the loch's edge. At least two small oval huts, side by side, can be traced on its top.

50. BURNT MOUND (?), CUING-SGEIR, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 390 680)

The spreading grass-covered remains of a circular structure, possibly a burnt mound, about 9m in diameter overall, situated on the edge of the loch. There is a hollow in the centre running down towards the water (Illus 5.36).

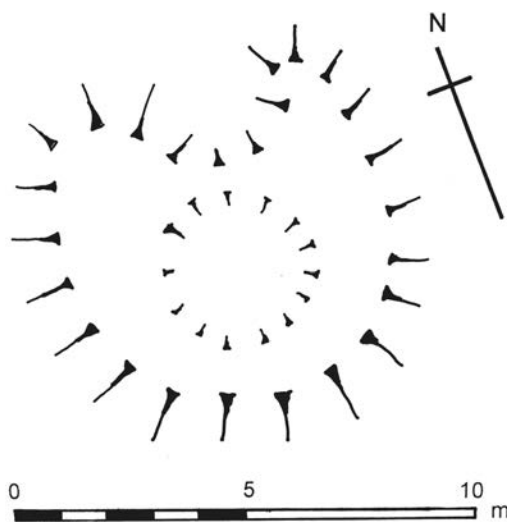


Illustration 5.36
Plan of structure no. 50, Portanellan

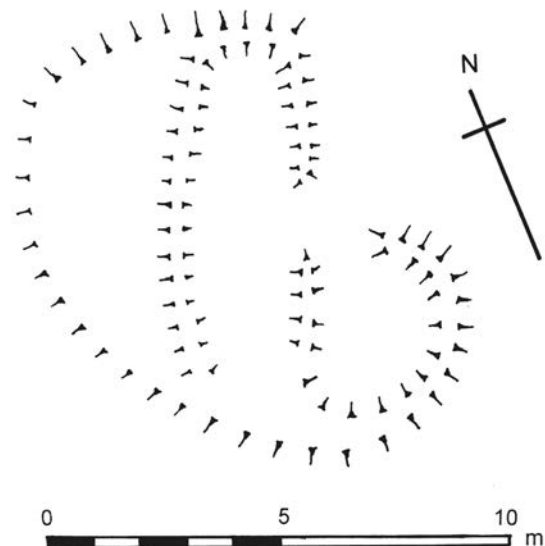


Illustration 5.37
Plan of settlement mound no. 51, Portanellan

SITES AND MONUMENTS

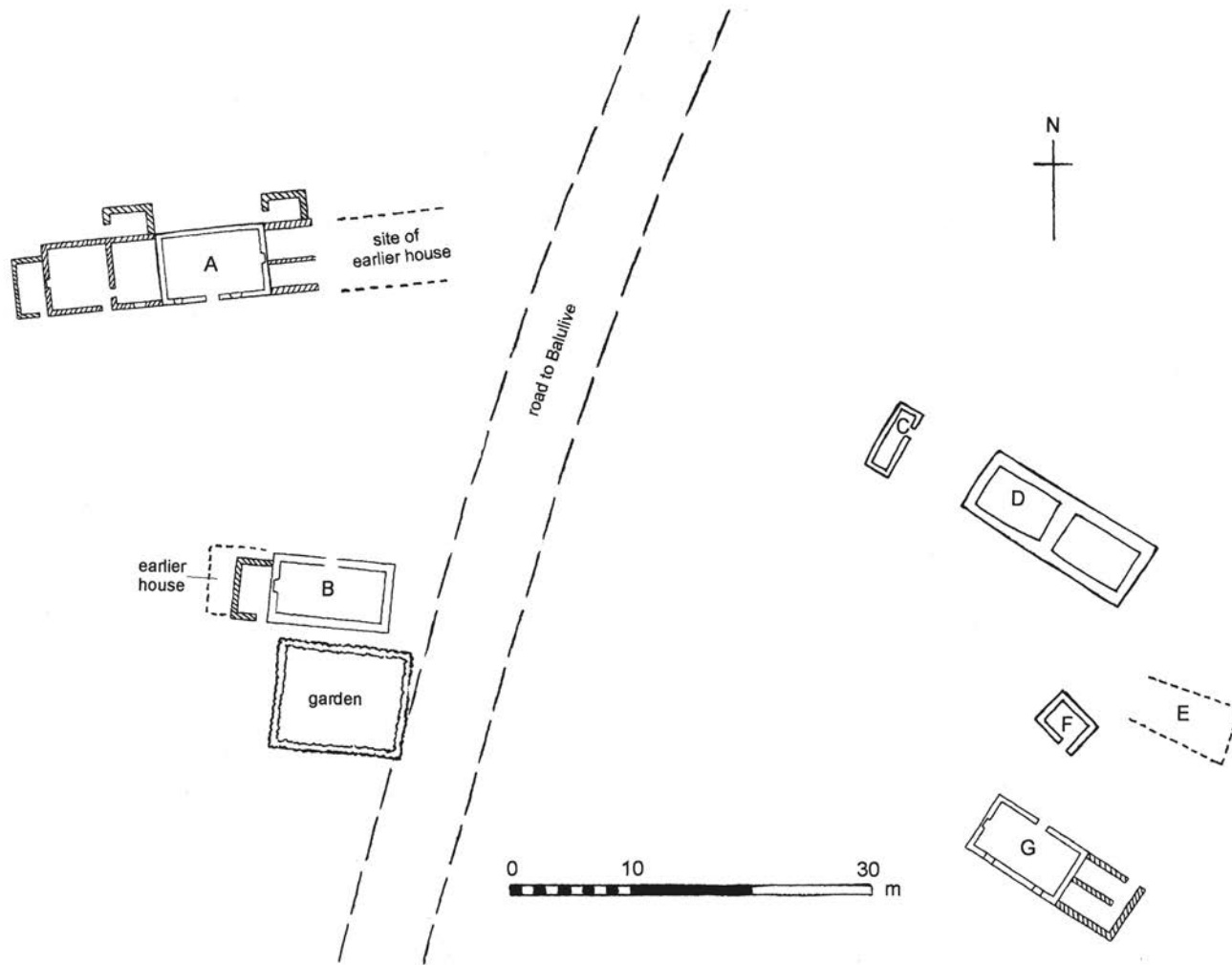


Illustration 5.38
Map of settlement at North Mulreesh (no. 53)

51. HOUSE, CUING-SGEIR, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 392 680)
A low mound, about 10m in diameter within an area of rigs (see no. 18), representing the collapsed remains of more than one superimposed house. On top can be traced the outlines of a type A barrel-shaped house, about 8.5 by 3.5m. A curving stretch of turf bank on the east side of it probably represents the remains of an earlier house (Illus 5.37).

52. HOUSE, CUING-SGEIR, PORTANELLAN (NGR NR 390 679)
The turf-covered boulder foundations of a rectangular type C house on a low headland, about 10 by 5.3m overall, end on to the loch.

53. SETTLEMENT, (NORTH) MULREESH (NGR NR 402 688)
This group of houses is here described as North Mulreesh to distinguish it from another cluster further south. The adjectives north and south do not appear on maps or in documentary sources. For other houses at Mulreesh see the description of the Mulreesh lead mine (no. 5) in Chapter 4.

There are the remains of seven houses at North Mulreesh, of which at least four are substantial type D houses, three with walls largely upstanding. The group is cut by the road to Balulive Farm, houses A and B to the west of it, and houses C–G to the east (Illus 5.38).



Illustration 5.39
North Mulreesh (no. 53), house A



Illustration 5.40
North Mulreesh (no. 53), remains of iron stove in house A

House A is of locally quarried stone set in lime mortar in rough courses, with limited use of bricks around the window openings. The walls of the main part of the house are largely upstanding (Illus 5.39). The core is a small rectangular unit, about 9 by 6m overall with walls about 0.7m thick, with traces of external lime-based render. There are two windows, one on either side of the doorway positioned in the middle of the long south wall. There are the remains of a cast-iron chimneypiece in the east gable (Illus 5.40). An animal house, divided into two stalls, has been added to the east. The use of cement-based mortar and render in it indicates relatively recent construction. It has an outshot against its north wall.

A second cottage of similar size has been added to the west gable. It has a stone partition wall dividing the interior into two rooms, the larger one to the west with a fireplace in its gable wall. It also has an outshot at the back and another outhouse at its west end.

House B is a single cottage, 10 by 5.7m, and of similar construction to house A. No traces of windows survive, but there is a fireplace in the west gable and a scarcement in the wall above at ceiling height. An outhouse has been added to the west, and there is a small garden to the south, contained within a drystone wall.

Across the road, house G is the only other substantial house with its walls partially upstanding (Illus 5.41). The RAF aerial photography survey of 1947 shows that this house was still roofed at that time, with corrugated iron. Its walls are of quarried blocks of stone set in lime mortar. In overall size it is 8.9 by 5.4m, with a fireplace in its west gable wall. The entrance is in the middle of the north wall and there are two windows to the south. An animal house, divided into two stalls, has been added to the east end.

House F is a small outhouse a few metres to the north, with lime-mortared walls of quarried material and field stones. It probably belongs with house G. To the north-east of it stretch the grassed-over foundations of an earlier house (E). House D is also reduced to grass-covered foundations but can be distinguished as a long house, about 15.4 by 5.9m, divided into two chambers. Its walls were lime mortared. To the west of it are the foundations of house C, a small rectangular outhouse.



Illustration 5.41
North Mulreesh (no. 53), house G

Houses A, B, D and G seem to be represented on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1897. Houses D and G appear on the 1st edition map of 1878, but there, instead of house A, is a longer structure extending east to the edge of the road to Balulive. Tenuous traces of it can be detected to the east of house A. House B may also be represented on this map, or perhaps an earlier house on the same site, the west end of which can still be traced adjacent to the outhouse. The four houses on the 1st edition map can be matched by four on the early 19th-century plans by Gemmill, which show North Mulreesh as a tightly grouped settlement of nine houses and outbuildings, with a road running through them and arable fields all around. One of the other houses represented by Gemmill may be house C. House E may already have been flattened by the early 19th century.

54. SETTLEMENT, (SOUTH) MULREESH (NGR NR 402 685)

There are the grass-covered foundations of five type C houses (H, I, J, K, L), all of which, apart from house K, appear to be represented on Gemmill's plans of the early 19th century (Illus 5.42, 5.43); only part of house J was not abandoned by 1878. They are situated at the bottom of a steep slope. House I has all but been removed or buried by the banks of the ditch draining water from an adit further up the slope. The ditch has also removed the track that ascended the hill obliquely, running between houses H and J to join with the old road from Portanellan to Persabus.

The ruins of house H may represent two phases, a smaller rectangular house overlying an earlier longer house. On higher ground nearby to the east are the remains of a small circular kiln. House J is also multi-phase, subdivided into four main rooms. The room second to the west, with a smaller subdivision in it, has walls of small quarried stones, and represents a rebuilding or later house which superseded an earlier one with walls including large blocks and boulders. A large stone at the base of the east end of building J has within it a sectioned shot-hole (3cm in diameter). House L is a simple rectangular ruin. House K may also have two phases, a smaller house perhaps replacing a longer one. There is now no trace of another ruined house shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map beside the old road to the south of house J. All trace of it may have been removed by the digging of a ditch draining from an adit of the lead mine.

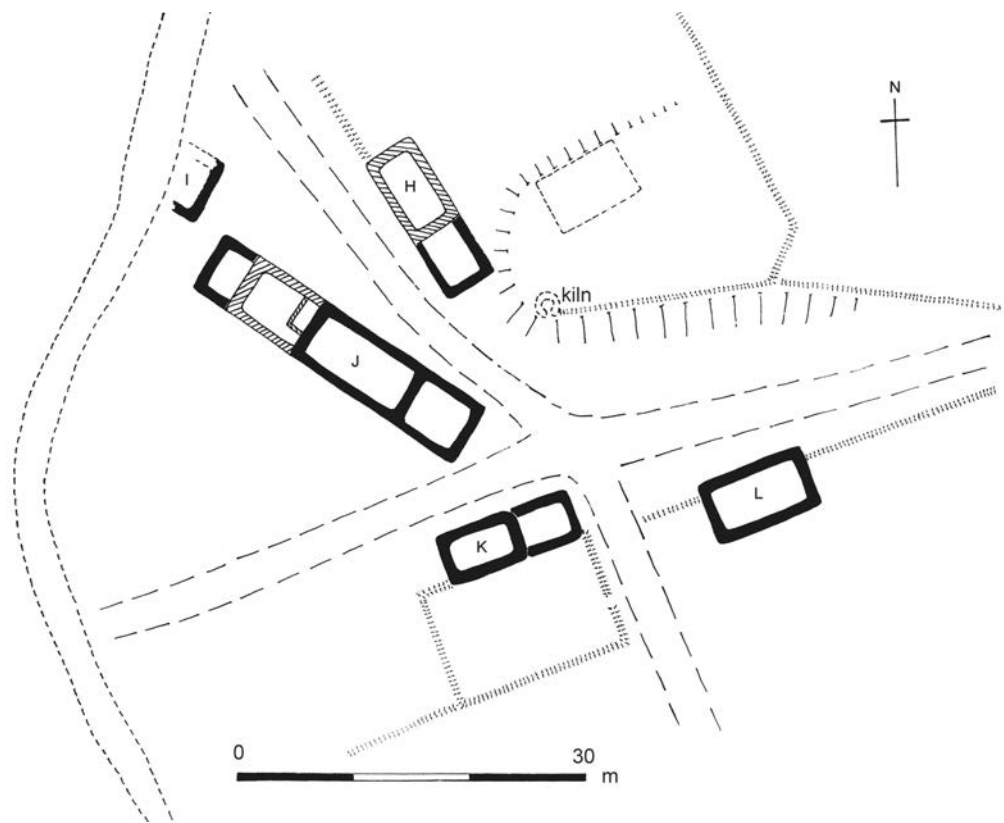


Illustration 5.42
Map of settlement at South Mulreesh (no. 54)



Illustration 5.43
South Mulreesh (no. 54), looking east. The figure is standing between houses H and J

FINLAGGAN

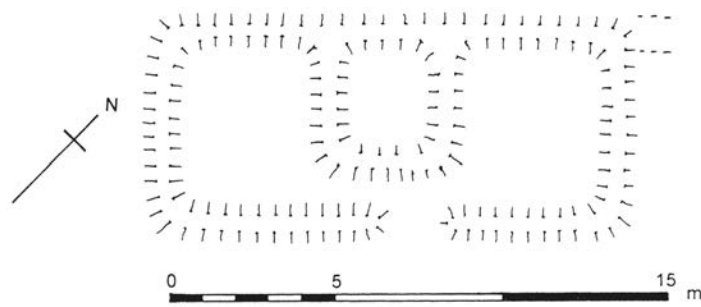


Illustration 5.44
House no. 55 at Mulreesh

55. HOUSE, MULREESH (NGR NR 405 686)

The turf-covered stone foundations of a type C rectangular house beside the old road from Mulreesh to Persabus, just to the west of the ford on the Allt an Tairbh and the settlement of Laoigan (Illus 5.44). The house is almost 15 by 7m, with an entrance in the middle of one long side giving on to a small lobby in front of a mid-chamber. The house is not shown on the early 19th-century farm map or later Ordnance Survey maps.

56. SETTLEMENT, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 396 668)

The ruins of a settlement with evidence for as many as seven houses, adjacent to the grounds of the Ballygrant Inn, formerly known as Robolls House. The three (A, B, F) of which there are any

significant remains are type D structures (Illus 5.45). The best-preserved ruin, house A, is on low boggy ground beside a small stream and the old road which terraces Robolls Hill in the direction of Finlaggan. The other houses are on higher rocky ground, mostly unsuitable for agriculture. House A is shown as complete on the 1878 Ordnance Survey map. House B is depicted as a ruin and none of the other buildings are represented.

House A is reduced to one or two courses of stonework and heaps of rubble. It was constructed of quarried stone held in lime mortar and measures 14.25 by 5.5m overall. It was possibly a pair of semi-detached cottages. House B, of similar construction, and also reduced to its bottom courses, is built with one gable end cut into the adjacent higher ground. It has opposed entrances in its long sides, one blocked up. The adjacent house C is now only represented by a cut in the rock, as is house E on higher ground to the south. The remains of house D with its attached garden are vestigial. House F, a structure with at least two rooms, is partially represented by the trenches dug to rob out its foundations. It was constructed of quarried blocks of stone, mostly limestone, in a lime mortar. There are the tenuous traces of another house to the east, on the other side of a track running through the site.

Robolls House is an unpretentious mid-19th-century house of two stories (Illus 5.46). The main block is of three bays with an extension at the back forming a T-shape overall, much altered and extended through conversion to use as an inn. There is a separate stable, much altered, with space for horses and a carriage, and accommodation for a stable-boy.

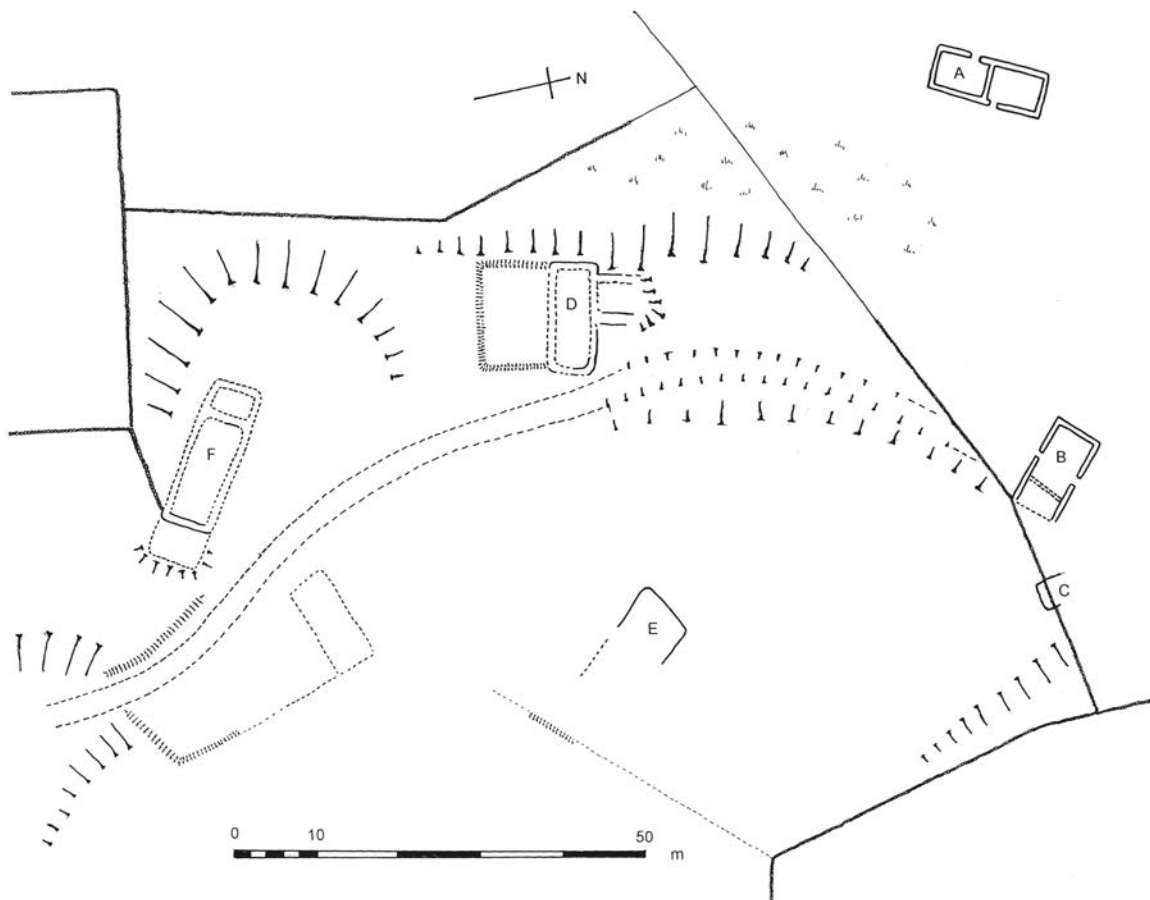


Illustration 5.45
Map of settlement at Robolls (no. 56)

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Illustration 5.46
Robolls House (the Ballygrant Inn)

57. HOUSE, AN TÀMHANACHD, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 390 678)
The slumped turf remains of a type A oval house, about 11 by 8m overall, near the edge of the loch (Illus 5.47).

58. HOUSE, AN TÀMHANACHD, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 389 675)
The slumped turf walls of a type A house, about 12m long, sited just below a bank beside a level area of rigs. Its width, at least 4.5m, is obscured by soil creep from the adjacent bank.

59. KILN, AN TÀMHANACHD, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 390 673)
The ruins of a small circular kiln, cut in the side of a slope, with an overall diameter of about 4m and an internal diameter of about 2.2m. The lintel for its flue or rake-hole is still in place, facing WNW.

60. HOUSE, AN TÀMHANACHD, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 392 673)
The turf-covered stone foundations of a type C rectangular house, 9 by 9.25m overall. It is positioned on the head dyke.

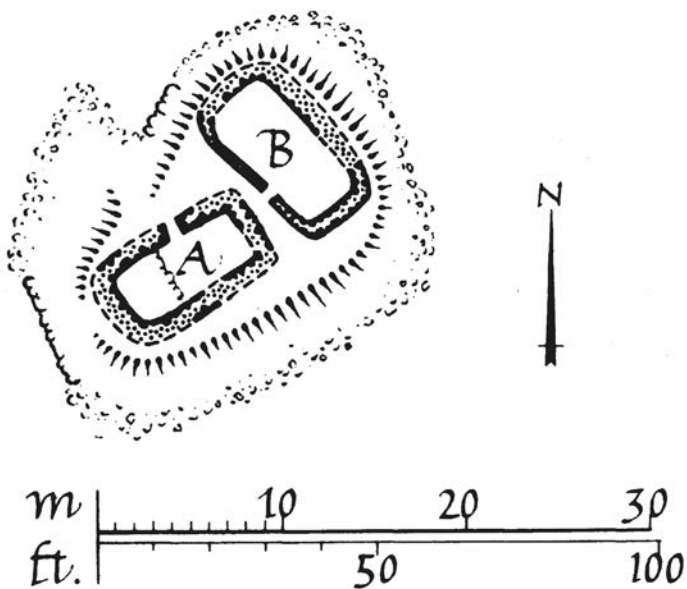


Illustration 5.48
Plan of island settlement no. 61 on Eilean Mhuireill (© Crown Copyright: HES)

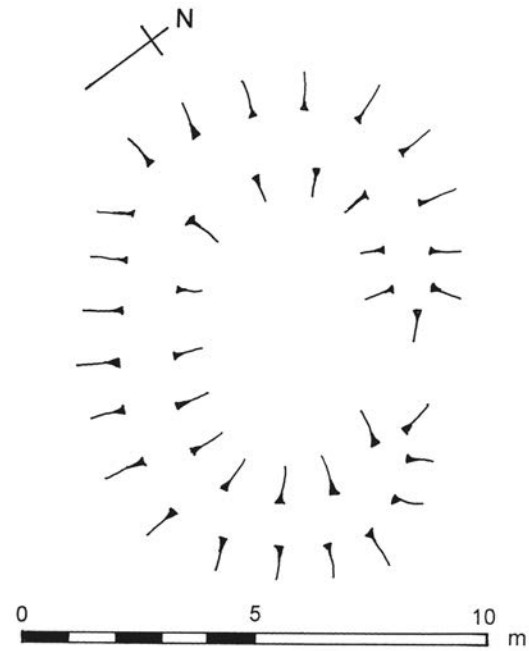


Illustration 5.47
House no. 57 at An Tàmhanachd, Robolls

61. ISLAND DWELLING, EILEAN MHUIREILL, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 386 673)

This is a small, probably artificial, island near the south-east shore of Loch Finlaggan, within sight of Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle (Illus 5.48, 5.49). It measures about 23 by 19m. There are traces of a stone revetment around its edge, and at the north-west a boat inlet, on the side away from the nearer loch-side. The water between the island and the shore is too deep for a causeway. The foundations of two rectangular drystone buildings with rounded corners, placed at right angles to each other, take up most of the summit area. Structure A is almost 10 by 5m overall, and probably had opposed entrances in its long sides. A supposed kerb running across its interior may be the remains of an earlier, underlying, structure. House B is about 10 by 6m overall (RCAHMS 1984: no. 305; Holley 2000: 209–10).



Illustration 5.49
Eilean Mhuireill (no. 61)



Illustration 5.50

Bronze figure of Christ from a medieval crucifix (SF 25128–29), found on the loch bottom near Eilean Mhuireill (© National Museums Scotland)

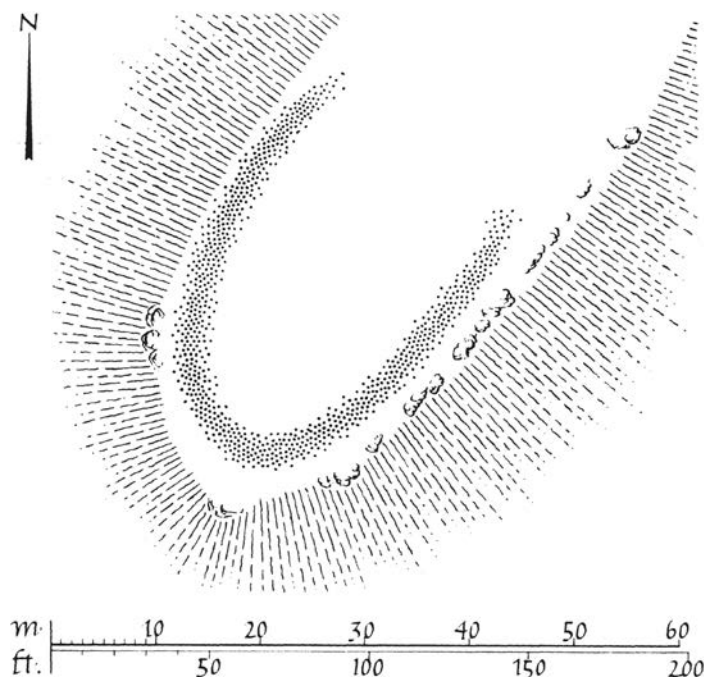


Illustration 5.51

Fort of Dùn Cheapasaidh Mór (no. 69). Survey drawing by RCAHMS in 1976 (© Crown Copyright: HES)

A bronze image of the crucified Christ (Illus 5.50), recovered from near the island, is dealt with in Chapter C4 of the Catalogue.

62. ENCLOSURE, AN TÀMHANACHD, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 388 672)
On a small grassy knoll, a small sub-circular enclosure defined by a low grassy bank, 11.5 by 10m overall.

63. HOUSE, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 389 663)
A 'hut circle' situated on a platform below the crest of a rise, with adjacent system of rigs, probably of much later date. They are about 4.5m wide and run from north-east to south-west. The hut circle is overall 12.9 by 11.9m, with walls from 1.2 to 1.5m thick. These consist of a low bank in which are embedded orthostatic slabs and boulders forming an inner and an outer ring. They are mostly dolerite and limestone with a few phyllites and quartzites, and are typically about 0.5m in length. The entrance faces ESE.

64. HUT, ROBOLLS (NGR NR 388 669)
The collapsed turf remains of an oval hut, about 6.25 by 5.4m. It is sited on a shoulder overlooking the loch.

65. KILN, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 387 667)
The turf-covered ruins of a small circular kiln, probably for drying grain. It is set in the side of a bank, its flue facing west. Its walls are of quarried limestone blocks.

66. HOUSE, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 382 666)
A small square building about 3m across internally is built into the back of a small limestone knoll with its back wall formed by the rock face. Only its foundations survive. This perhaps represents, along with other nearby walls, one end of a long house about 18m long. The hillock is traversed by a mine rake trending north-south.



Illustration 5.52

Recumbent standing stone (no. 70) at south end of Loch Finlaggan

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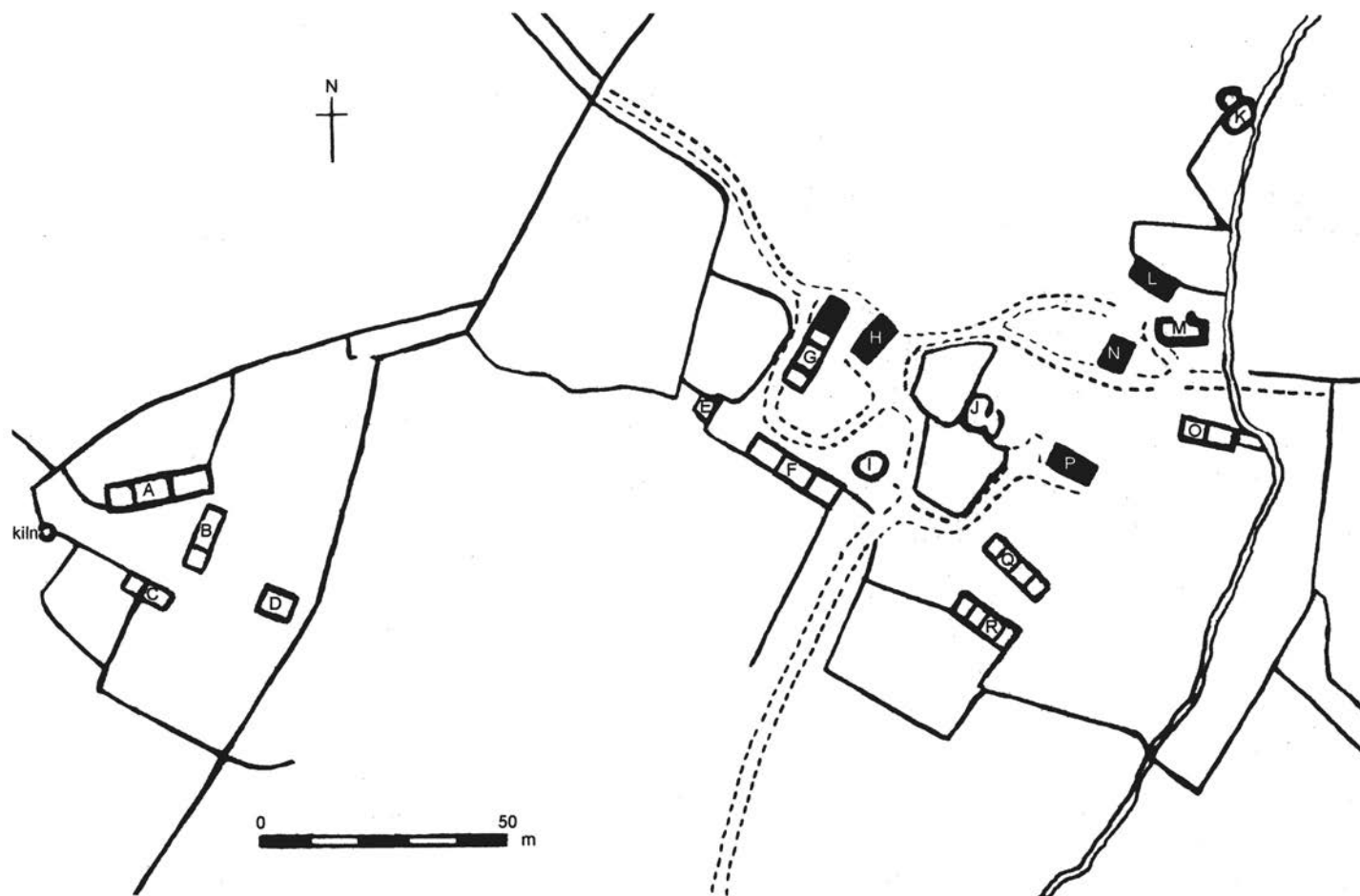


Illustration 5.53

Map of settlement at (East and West) Kepollsmore in 1878, based on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map.
Houses shown solid had roofs on them; the rest were unroofed

67. KILN, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 384 666)

The ruins of a small kiln, diameter 5.9m, set in the side of a bank, its opening facing north-west.

68. KILN, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 381 662)

The well-preserved remains of a small circular kiln, diameter 4.5m. Its walls are of quarried blocks of limestone and boulders, and there are traces of a flue extending southwards. It probably served for drying grain.

69. FORT, DÙN CHEAPASAI DH MÓR, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 386 665)

The site is a flat-topped oval summit on the south-west flank of Robolls Hill (Illus 5.51). The ground falls away steeply on all sides except the north-east. There are tenuous remains of a stone rampart, with no sign of any facing blocks in situ, set back from the summit edge (RCAHMS 1984: no. 146). The probable continuation of this defence across the north-east is obscured by the remains of a later turf-walled structure. The internal area of the fort is about 48 by 44m.

70. STANDING STONE, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 379 666)

The stone (RCAHMS 1984: no. 105) apparently toppled sometime in the earlier part of the 20th century. When erect, it would

have been in sight of the standing stone (no. 47) adjacent to Finlaggan Farm at the other end of the loch. It is 2.4m in length, 1.5m in breadth and 0.5m in average thickness. It originally stood about 1.8m in height. The rock is a metabasite of similar type to the Finlaggan Farm stone (Illus 5.52).

71. SETTLEMENT, (WEST) KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 381 661)

The joint tenancy farm or township of Kepollsmore was typically divided into two clusters, labelled by us as east and west. The west cluster is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1878 as totally abandoned. It consisted of four buildings, possibly all of type C, and yards on a rising piece of ground (Illus 5.53, 5.54). The walls are now all grass covered with no traces of mortar and may largely be of boulders. The largest house (A) is divided into three rooms and has an overall size of 22 by 6.2m. House B, with three rooms, is 14.8 by 5.5m. House D is unicameral, 7.8 by 6m, and is tucked in between a rock face and the edge of the escarpment. House C has two rooms and an overall size of 12.3 by 5.9m. The enclosure beside it is identified as a sheepfold on the Ordnance Survey map. The kiln lies a few metres to the west of house A, at the end of a rock face. It is small and circular, 4.1m in diameter overall, with its entrance facing north-west. The stones forming the walls of the chamber are cracked and reddened by fire, suggesting it was used for burning lime.

72. SETTLEMENT, (EAST) KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 383 681)

The east cluster is separated from West Kepollsmore by about 70m. Most of the houses and yards of the larger east cluster, shown as partially occupied on the Ordnance Survey map of 1878, have now been swept away by the present-day working farm of Kepollsmore (erroneously marked as Kepolls on the OS 1:25000 map). The Kepollsmore farmhouse appears to be an improved and extended development from house P, and portions of other pre-1878 buildings, particularly G, H, N and O, may be incorporated in other structures still in use (Illus 5.53). The 1878 map indicates that four buildings – H, P, N and L – were then roofed, and part of G. Rentals of Islay Estate in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, list the number of tenants at Kepollsmore at this period dropping from five to four. These buildings can be identified as their houses.

Most of the east cluster is strung out to the west of a small burn that flows southwards to join the Ballygrant Burn. House P (the present farmhouse) and Q and R are on an oval flat-topped summit. Along with structures G, H, F, L, N and O, these appear to have been substantial houses. Building F may have been even bigger than indicated, extending to join up with E. It is possible that structure O, at a bend in the burn, could have contained a small mill. It is not clear whether all the structures labelled as I, J, K and M were ruined houses or small enclosures.

73. BURIAL GROUND, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 381 658)

This alleged burial ground is marked on Ordnance Survey maps, but there is no trace of it on the ground.

74. BURNT MOUND, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 385 668)

This is situated beside a burn on a level piece of ground below the crest of a hill overlooking Loch Finlaggan. It appears as a low circular mound with a diameter of about 9m. There is a hollow in the centre running down towards the burn. Where the turf surface has been trampled away by animals it can be seen to be composed of fragments of shattered, fire-reddened stones.

75. SETTLEMENT, KEPOLLS, KEPOLLSMORE (NGR NR 373 653)

Remains of houses that might represent a settlement of Kepolls(beg) of earlier date than the present Kepolls farm-stead at NGR NR 377 655, 300m to the east. About 100m behind a restored occupied 19th-century cottage, the grass-covered foundations of a small house are mostly obscured by dense gorse. The remains of another house and yard, just 50m to the north-east of the occupied house, are presently lost to the gorse.

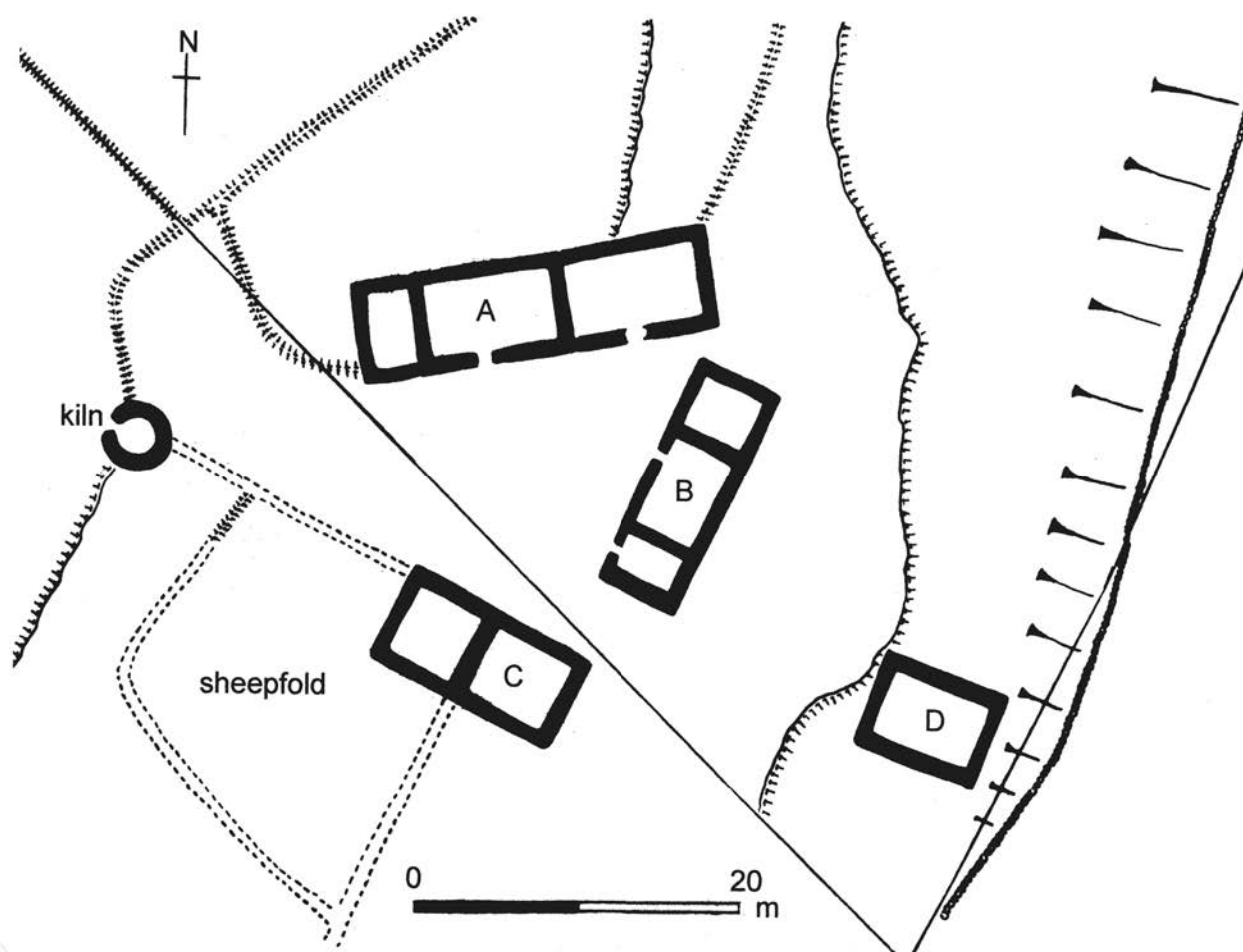


Illustration 5.54
Map of settlement remains of West Kepollsmore (no. 71)

PART III

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

As elsewhere in this report, unless otherwise stated, orientations and heights above sea level are based on the site grid, the layout of which is described in the section on archaeological survey in Chapter 1. Site north (SN) is approximately in the direction of north-west. In the text, for ease of description, walls and other features are usually described as if they conform to the nearest cardinal points,

north, south, east and west. Trench plans have corners and other salient points labelled with capital letters to facilitate matching features from one plan to another. The location of drawn sections is indicated by the use of capital letters contained in circles. Blocks of dot matrix are used on some trench plans to show areas that are of no relevance or a different date to the focus of the plan.



Illustration 6.1
Aerial view of Eilean Mór

Chapter 6

THE LOCH-SIDE, EILEAN MÓR AND EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE

The loch-side

By 'the loch-side' we mean only the top end of Loch Finlaggan, adjacent to Eilean Mór. It was from here that access to that island must normally have been made and, as can be seen from our distribution map (Illus 4.1), there is a considerable density of sites and monuments here, many of which were expected to have some meaningful relationship to historic Finlaggan.

For much of its length there is a narrow rocky shore from which a steep slope rises to a low terrace. At the mouth of the Finlaggan River the ground is marshy. Much of the land now overlooking the shore is poor quality and peaty, but to the east of the river and around the top of the loch the soil is of much better quality and has evidently been ploughed in relatively recent times, perhaps removing many earlier traces of human activity.

The mound at Cnoc Seannnda, adjacent to the Finlaggan Visitor Centre, is a prominent landmark. Between it and the loch-side there is a level area of ground, some 80m square.

Eilean Mór

In shape and outline Eilean Mór approximates to the segment of an orange (Illus 6.1). It is about 180m long by 75m in maximum width, rising to over 3m above the level of the loch. Its total area is 7,100m² including the marsh, or alluvial tail, at its north (site east) end.

Eilean Mór is formed from thin beds of Dalradian limestone, as narrow as 15cm at the south-west tip of the island, where, as along the south shore, they can be seen to be interbedded with grey to



Illustration 6.2

The west shore of Eilean Mór in spring 1988 with beds of limestone and phyllite exposed as a result of erosion

grey-blue phyllites that contain cubes of iron pyrites (Illus 6.2). These phyllites appear to be highly cleaved, while the more massive limestone exhibits tension cracks filled with calcite. The cliff face to the south-east of the chapel represents the largest exposure of phyllite on the island. The dip of these flaggy limestones and shales is almost vertical and the beds are often very contorted.

The alluvial tail (Finlaggan Marsh)

(Based on work by Michael Cressey)

The shape and size of Eilean Mór may have changed significantly over time through human occupation and the build-up of marsh deposits. The eastward-pointing tail of the island consists of alluvium and represents the fine material reworked from the beach gravels that skirt part of the island. The prevailing south-west (site west) winds in winter form waves powerful enough to wash the finer particles out of the beaches and deposit them in the lee of the island. It is possible that the south-west (site west) tip and south (site south-west) shore of the island have suffered considerable erosion from wind and waves since it was first occupied by humans (Illus 6.2). Considerable quantities of sediment are also continuously washed into the loch by the Finlaggan River and have also contributed to the formation of the alluvial tail – ‘the Finlaggan Marsh’ – that is now a significant part of the land mass of the island. It is described in considerable detail by Dr Cressey in his PhD thesis (1995: 139–64). Here we may note the following observations and conclusions that he drew, based on geochemical analyses of a series of cores and pollen analysis.

Dr Cressey was able to trace the effects of relatively recent events in the geochemical record, like the 1982 afforestation adjacent to Eilean Mór, and a mid-19th-century rise in atmospheric pollution as a result of industrialisation. Two earlier events are of particular significance for the archaeology of Finlaggan. The first is a rise about 1586 in traces of lead, zinc, copper, calcium and manganese. Dr Cressey identifies this as a possible chemical response to local lead mining activity. The second relates to a thin band of yellow-brown sand with no organic remains and a decrease in all metals. It has a sharp boundary with the underlying woody peat. Dr Cressey identifies this as a major flood event about 1531. The onset of the formation of the Finlaggan Marsh may have been about AD 1200.

The palynological record allowed Dr Cressey to reconstruct the landscape around Eilean Mór about 1200 to 1000 BP as predominantly tundra-like, with grasses and *Empetrum* (crowberry) alongside stands of mixed pine and birch woodland on the more acidic soils. Sometime after, hazel colonised the more fertile limestone areas, especially around the margins of the island. Some of the trees reached maturity before being inundated by rising loch levels, possibly due to a deteriorating climate and decreasing woodland cover.

Bathymetric survey

The south (site south-west) and south-east (site south) shores of Eilean Mór are made up of cobbles and boulders, with finer gravel and sand occurring in patches close to the shore near the south-west (site west) tip. The gravel beds appear to have been used as

spawning beds by fish. Most of the gravel consists of limestone and phyllite, with the pebbles exhibiting a more rectangular shape when compared with the gravel derived from the Port Askaig tillite and quartzite that form the beach on the opposite side of the tip of the island. Further east, the sheltered north shore is made up of sands and silts.

A bathymetric survey of the loch around Eilean Mór carried out by the British Geological Survey in 1990 (Technical Report WB/90/32: copy in Finlaggan Site Archive) demonstrated that the water adjacent to the island does not reach a great depth. Between the island and the adjacent shores of the loch it is for the most part less than 1.53m (5ft) deep. To the south of the island is a gentle slope from the foreshore to a break of slope at a depth of 2.43m (8ft), which is generally covered with cobbles and small boulders up to 60cm in size. Beyond, to the south-west, the loch attains a depth of 13.41m (44ft).

Soil formation and type

Eilean Mór is part of map unit 165 on the Soil Survey of Scotland's Soil Map of Islay. It is described as a brown forest soil of the Deecastle Association. Illus 6.3 shows the west-facing section of a sondage excavated in 1994 in the north-east corner of trench 19, in an area formerly given over to lazy beds (compare the archaeological section drawing, Illus 8.27). In terms of soil science this is a podsol with three main horizons, from top to bottom: A, B and C. The archaeological information on contexts is added to the following descriptions:

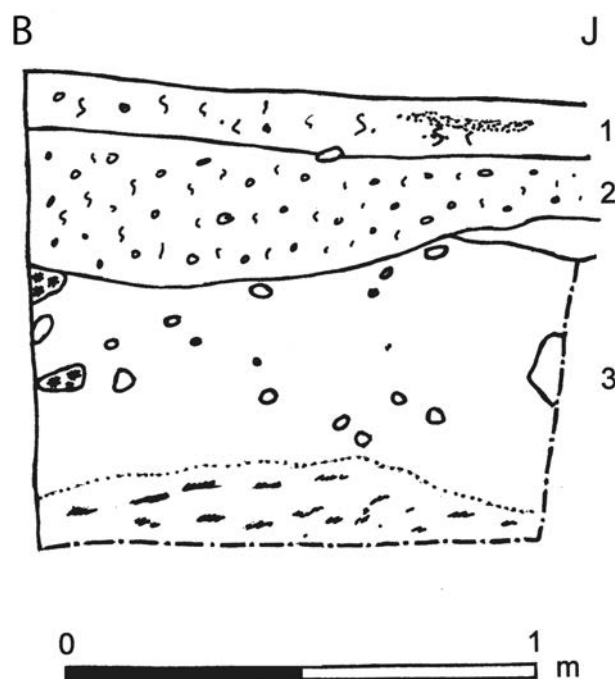


Illustration 6.3

West-facing section in a sondage in the north-east corner of trench 19: (1) silty loam; (2) B horizon; (3) C horizon. The locations of points B and J are shown on Illus 8.26

THE LOCH-SIDE, EILEAN MÓR AND EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE

1. A horizon, dark brown silty loam, Munsell colour 7.5YR 3/2; roots abundant, fairly stone free but a band of small pebbles <2cm in places due to sorting below the roots. In archaeological terms this has been subdivided into two layers, the upper [19001] being turf and topsoil, the lower [19140] representing a lazy bed.
2. B horizon, a compact, very dark grey clay (10YR 3/1), over 70% small angular stones. This is 19146, separated from the overlying lazy bed by a stone line [19003], representing the activity of earthworms.
3. C horizon, dark yellowish-brown (10YR 4/6) in colour, containing patches of red (2.5YR 4/8) mottled soil. Generally, the soil matrix has a sandy, gritty texture. Several large stones are present, as much as 17cm across. The composition is uniform throughout the profile. Towards the base there is a zone of dark brown-black (10YR 2/5) mottled, concreted manganese stones.

For a similar sequence excavated in a sondage under a lazy bed in trench 3, see Illus 8.16.

This information on soil formation and type was augmented by a series of nine cores taken north–south across this area of lazy beds at 5m intervals in 1992, using an augur with a 20cm bit. The soil profiles all approximated to that just described from trench 19. There was no evidence in this area for redeposited soil or deliberate dumping to make or extend the island. Instead, the material appears to be predominantly of glacial derivation. The reduced grey – gleyed – B horizons suggest a fluctuating water table. This reduction, on ground which was apparently prone to saturation, was so intense as to create yellow, grey or blue bands, encountered in several places in our excavations. Phosphate analyses indicate a high level (above 50%) of nutrient input, presumably due to manuring.

Gravel horizons

Gravel horizons (stone lines) were observed in most trenches on Eilean Mór. This size sorting of particles in topsoil is a widespread phenomenon, generally attributed to the behaviour of earthworms. They create burrows in the topsoil by ingesting soil and excreting it to the surface. Worms can only pass particles of 2mm or less through their guts. Over a period of many years their behaviour results in the formation of stone-free topsoils with a distinctly stony layer at their base as particles larger than 2mm accumulate beneath the finer material excreted by the worms. These gravel horizons mark the lowest limit of earthworm activity and are often formed over more compact material that the worms were unable to penetrate.

At Finlaggan it is supposed that much of the gravel incorporated in these stone lines had been imported to the island for use in building activities, especially the manufacture of mortar, with or without a significant admixture of lime. The gravel could mostly have been dug up around the edges of the loch and evidently contained many prehistoric flints – hence the prevalence of these in medieval contexts in the excavations. Apart from the flints, gravel horizons have also been the source for several small artefacts, including coins, metal fittings and sherds of pottery. In using these artefacts as potential dating evidence it has to be understood that the formation of the horizons may have taken place over a long period of time.

Flora and fauna

The island and its ruins are generally covered by grass, and there are reed beds (*Phragmites australis*) along the north (site north–east) shore and in the channel separating the tip from the loch shore. Here also in summer water lilies grow. Table 6.1 lists the plants growing on the island, as noted on a single visit in August 1998 by Carol and Malcolm Ogilvie. The classification and nomenclature of Stace (1997) is used. Further visits spread through the flowering season would probably have greatly increased the number of species identified.

Common name	Latin name	Gaelic name
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>	Garbh lus
Common club-rush	<i>Scirpus lacustris</i>	Cruach luachair
Common knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Cnapan dubh
Common nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Faenntag
Common ragwort	<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Buadhlan buidhe
Common sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	Samh
Common valerian	<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	Carthen arraigh
Compact rush	<i>Juncus conglomeratus</i>	Cuilc chrann
Creeping buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Buigheag
Creeping thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Aigheannach
Curled pondweed	<i>Potamogeton crispus</i>	Luachair bhog
Docks spp	<i>Rumex spp</i>	Copag copagach
Floating bur-reed	<i>Sparganium angustifolium</i>	
Hemlock water-dropwort	<i>Oenanthe crocata</i>	Fealla bog
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Finell sraide
Jointed rush	<i>Juncus articulatus</i>	Bodan aoin
Lady's bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>	Ruin
Marsh cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla palustris</i>	Cuig bhileach
Marsh woundwort	<i>Stachys palustris</i>	Lus nan sgor
Marsh-marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Chorrach shod
Meadow vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	Peasair bhudhe
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Chu chulainn
Purple-loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Lusna sith chainnt
Ragged-robin	<i>Lynchnis flos-cuculi</i>	Plur na cubhaig
Reed canary-grass	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	
Sharp-flowered rush	<i>Juncus acutiflorus</i>	
Smooth hawk's-beard	<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Cluasluich
Soft-rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>	
Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Learnhach
Tufted hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Ciob
Water avens	<i>Geum rivale</i>	Machall coille
White water-lily	<i>Nymphaea alba</i>	Duilleag bhaite bhan
Wild angelica	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	Lus nam buadha
Yellow-rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Modhalan bhudhe

Table 6.1
Flora of Eilean Mór, based on survey made in August 1989 by Carol and Malcolm Ogilvie

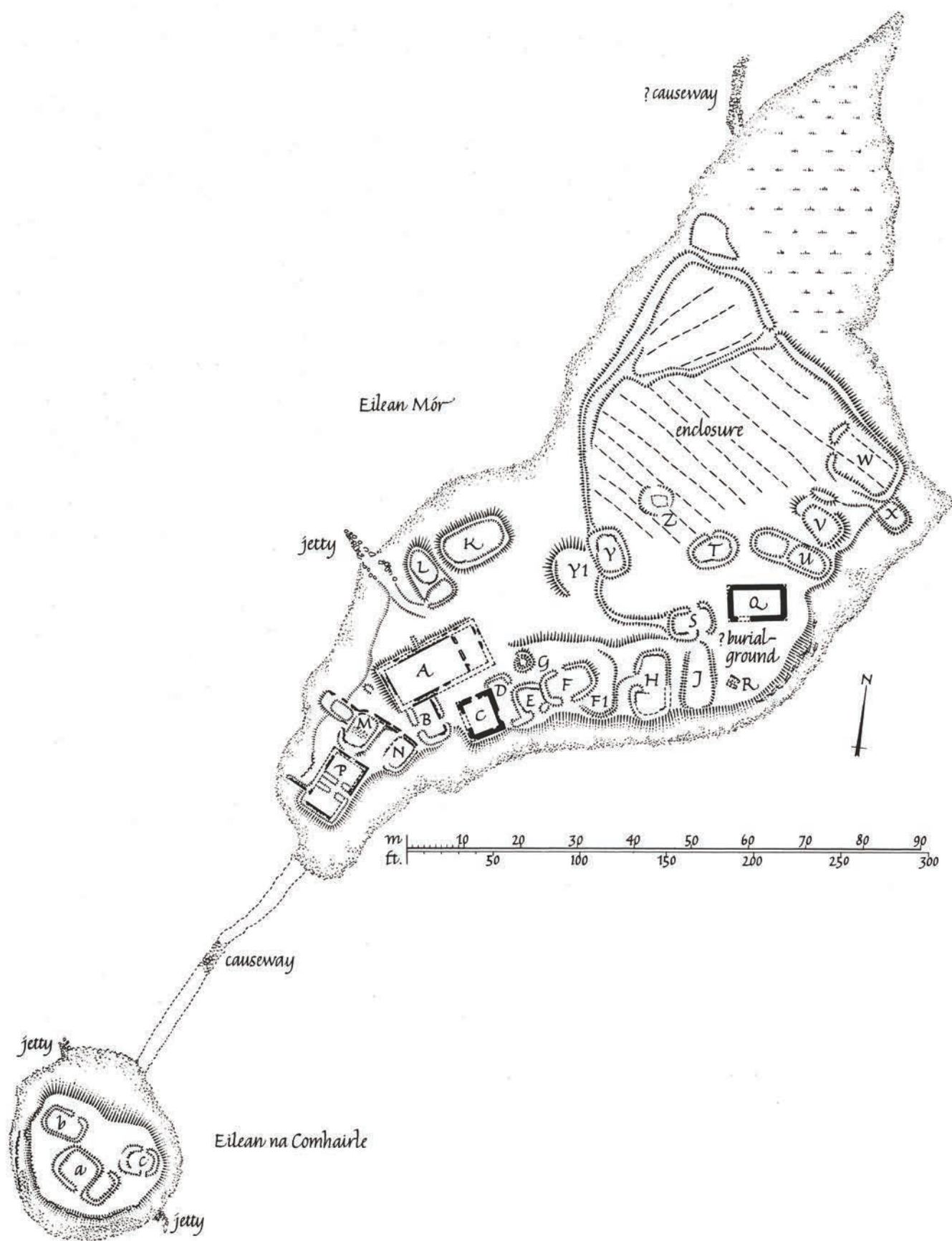


Illustration 6.4
Map of Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle by RCAHMS. Orientation is true north (© Crown Copyright: HES)

THE LOCH-SIDE, EILEAN MÓR AND EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE

Rats, toads and frogs have been observed on Eilean Mór but there are no traces of rabbits, moles or other burrowing mammals. No sheep, cattle or horses have been allowed to graze the island in recent memory.

Description of the remains

Much of the island is covered with the ruins of structures (Illus 6.4, 6.5). Prior to excavation it was thought that they represented a mix of medieval and later houses, many of drystone construction. Written sources did not provide any clear evidence for when occupation of the island ceased. Here we provide an overview of the artificial structures on the island. More detailed information on many of them is contained in the description of the excavations.

The island is now approached by a wooden walkway along the edge of the Finlaggan River and a bridge that crosses the shallow water, no more than a few metres wide, separating the tip of

the alluvial tail from the loch shore. When the historian Isabel Grant visited in the early 1930s she formed the impression, no doubt aware of the similar views of an earlier antiquary (MacLagan 1898: 38), that Eilean Mór had been turned into an island by the cutting of a 'wide, muddy ditch' across the 'partly artificial causeway' or neck of the peninsula extending into the loch (Grant 1935: 403). It is not an improbable suggestion that as this end of the loch silted up, Eilean Mór's status as an island was enhanced in such a way, perhaps in an attempt by the landowner or tenant to preserve its natural beauty and significance. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map clearly shows the stretch of water between the tip of the island and the loch-side, more or less as it is now, and an earlier 19th-century visitor, the botanist Balfour (1845: 23), left a vivid account of how he had to wade through water four feet deep 'at the place where the island can be reached'. If a channel was artificially cut it must have been prior to Balfour's visit in 1844. There is, of course, no reason to doubt Eilean Mór's integrity as a real island in medieval times.

From the tip of the alluvial tail another wooden walkway crosses the marsh to the firmer ground of the island proper, separated by a turf-covered bank, actually the remains of a post-medieval fortification (Illus 6.6). Just outside the turf bank, where it bends from the north-west shore of the island across the base of the alluvial tail, is a low mound which excavation shows is the stub of a gate-tower (Illus 6.7). An earlier means of access is indicated by the remains of a stone causeway visible in the water off the north edge of the alluvial tail. From the end of the wooden walkway a modern path crosses an undulating area of old lazy beds before bifurcating, the left fork climbing to the chapel on the highest part of the island, the right extending down the length of the island to the tip opposite Eilean na Comhairle.

The lazy beds are contained within a triangular enclosure formed by the turf bank on two sides, but only partially on the third where its two ends disappear, one under house S, the other



Illustration 6.5

Map of Eilean Mór with contours (excluding upstanding human remains) at half-metre intervals. The water level is as at November 1989. The value of the contour lines is relative to the temporary site benchmark



Illustration 6.6

The bank defining the edge of Eilean Mór proper. To the left is the alluvial tail; to the right lazy beds and the chapel

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Illustration 6.7

The low mound at the tip of Eilean Mór, representing the remains of a gatehouse; view from within bank across the alluvial tail

within enclosure W, rectangular shaped with an internal area of about 8 by 11m, two sides of which is the perimeter bank (Illus 6.4). The lazy beds are in two groups, three or so aligned east-west with a length of about 18m separated by a drainage ditch from a larger group of 11 or 12 running SSW–NNE. They mostly have a length of about 27m and vary in width from about 3 to 4m from furrow to furrow. The lazy beds cover an area of less than a third of the island (excluding the alluvial tale). Cut through them is a hole (Z) about 2.7 by 2.7m, identified by the Royal Commission as a well.

On the south-east shore just below enclosure W are the foundations of a small rectangular structure (X), formerly reached by a path along the side of enclosure W. It is about 5 by 5m overall.

The ground rises southwards from the lazy beds to a low summit area with a burial ground and the ruins of a chapel (Q)



Illustration 6.8

The ruins of the chapel on Eilean Mór (September 2016, after conservation), looking towards its north wall

oriented approximately true east–west (Illus 6.8). It is rectangular, 10.1 by 6.1m, with lime-mortared walls, and is one of only two upstanding ruined buildings on the island. Adjacent to it on the highest part of the island is a level, clear area, readily identified as a burial ground with a square stone base (R), which excavation in trench 1 has shown to be the plinth for a cross. On the sloping ground between the chapel and the lazy beds are the turf-covered ruins of three buildings (T, U and V). Houses T and U have stone walls. House T is oval, about 9 by 6m overall, with its entrance facing downslope. The remains of house U show as a two-roomed structure about 15 by 5.5m. Structure V appears as an embanked hollow, 11 by 7m (Illus 6.9).

Sitting over the top of the turf bank defining the west side of the enclosure are the turf-covered ruins of a rectangular stone building (Y), 9 by 6.5m (Illus 6.10), and adjacent to it outside the enclosure, Y1, which appeared to RCAHMS to be a small yard with a dyke enclosing it to the west.



Illustration 6.9

House V with an entrance in house U in the foreground



Illustration 6.10

House Y with lazy beds in the background

THE LOCH-SIDE, EILEAN MÓR AND EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE

From the chapel a ridge of relatively high ground extends westwards along the southern edge of the island to the other upstanding ruin, structure C, 7.3 by 6.4m, which appears as two gable ends of lime-mortared masonry (Illus 6.11). Between the chapel and building C is a group of turf-covered ruins, most prominently house F, 10.5 by 7m, with opposed entrances in its long sides (Illus 6.12). Adjacent to F and probably contemporary with it is a small circular stone feature (G), which we now know overlies a medieval cobbled road. It is a kiln, diameter 4m, perhaps for burning lime for building operations rather than for drying corn. Perhaps also of similar date is house S next to the chapel, of similar form to F, 8.5 by 6m.

House F overlies two earlier houses, E and F1. Structures H and J are two rectangular houses, probably belonging with E and F1. Structure H is 12.5 by 7.5m in overall size, and F1 and J presumably had similar dimensions. The Royal Commission labels the space or passageway between C and E as D.



Illustration 6.11

The upstanding gables of house C, with the ruins of house B in the foreground



Illustration 6.13

House A, the great hall, with the screens area at the far end



Illustration 6.12

Houses on the ridge of Eilean Mór. The hollow in the foreground is building E; beyond it is house F, sitting over building E, and behind that can be seen a bank topped by house H



Illustration 6.14

House L with house K behind it

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being built partially over the ruins of an earlier one (L.1). Between the great hall, house K, Y1 and the ridge of higher ground is a relatively low flat area, which we now know is the result of post-medieval agricultural activity.

The end of the island to the west of the great hall is partitioned off by a lime-mortared wall, still partially standing several courses high (Illus 6.15). It shelters a complex of buildings identified by the Royal Commission as the probable residential quarters of the lords of the Isles. The main structure is P, the foundations of a rectangular lime-mortared building with an overall size of 11.5 by 6.8m (Illus 6.15). The construction of two later drystone houses, P.1 and P.2, within its ruins obscured the fact that it was another hall. There are only vestigial remains of structures M and N, two rectangular houses built on to the back of the partition wall. The partition wall extended northwards on to the shore to form a narrow chamber (M.1, Illus 6.16), and another wall also

extended from the north wall of P on to the shore, perhaps the vestigial remains of a building originally extending further to the north-west. Both perhaps had a defensive function. Excavation in trench 5 indicated erosion of artificial structures along the island shore adjacent to building P.

Eilean na Comhairle

Eilean na Comhairle (English, 'the council island') is circular, 25m in diameter, rising to a height of less than 3m above water level, and lies some 45m to the south-west of Eilean Mór (Illus 6.17, 6.18). Because it is not normally accessible it is in summer clothed with a dense crop of long grass, nettles, thistles, etc, masking the ruins of three structures on its summit. The remains of a stone causeway connecting the two islands lie under the water. There is a 6m length mid-channel resting on a bare rock



Illustration 6.15
The cross-wall partitioning off the end of Eilean Mór nearest Eilean na Comhairle, with house P beyond



Illustration 6.17
Aerial view of Eilean na Comhairle



Illustration 6.16
Structure M.1

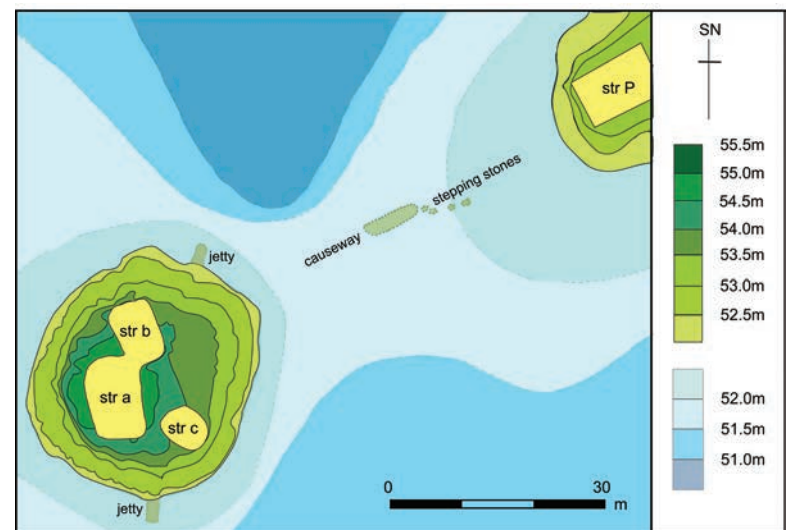


Illustration 6.18
Eilean na Comhairle, contour survey

platform, with some of its stones scattered on either side. It is about 2m wide and is composed of large sub-rounded boulders, defining the two sides, with smaller stones packed in the narrow space up the middle (Illus 6.19). Only one course is evident but to have been an effective means of crossing the water dry-shod there may have been at least one other, and in places more courses.

When a dam was created on the edge of Eilean na Comhairle in the summer of 1997 to allow the excavation of underwater midden deposits (trench 25), the westwards continuation of the causeway to the island could be traced via aerial photography (Illus 13.37). Eastwards, there are a series of boulders that can sometimes be seen breaking the water's surface, serving as stepping stones. They would not enable the complete crossing from one island to another and may only have been positioned in recent times by sport fishermen. There is no evidence that these stepping stones replaced a missing stretch of causeway. There may only have been a need for them due to the erosion of the adjacent end of Eilean Mór. The use of the causeway in medieval times seems certain, although it is possible that it is earlier in origin. Two small boulder jetties on Eilean na Comhairle may relate to more recent access by fishermen and other visitors.

It was assumed that the bulk of the island results from the debris of human occupation over a long period of time but that at its core was a natural island, albeit of small size and no great height above the surface of the loch. Our limited excavations failed to reach or identify levels above loch bottom that were not the result of human intervention. The underlying rock is Dalradian limestone and phyllite, an extension of the same ridge as forms Eilean Mór. The rock is exposed as a shallow underwater platform extending at least 50m in a south-westerly direction beyond the smaller island, forming an area of shallow water. Here it is covered with a tail of boulders, some evidently tumbled from the collapse of structures on the island itself. Others may represent the residual remains of walls that extended from the island in this direction. It appears likely that erosion by wind and water ate away significantly at the exposed edges of the island in historic times.

The perimeter of Eilean na Comhairle from the jetty on its northern edge round anticlockwise to the jetty on its southern margin is composed of boulders and blocks of stone, some laid, some collapsed, but all the result of human activity (Illus 6.20). The remaining segment of shoreline adjacent to Eilean Mór is composed of silts and gravels. They form an apron extending underwater for a distance of about 6m before slipping down more steeply into a weedy channel with a silty floor. On this apron the depth of water is normally not any more than half a metre, with the channel reaching a depth of 1.5m (Illus 6.18). The apron appears to result from two processes, the natural creation of an alluvial tail in the lee of the island and the accumulation of midden material dumped here by the occupants in the past.

Prior to excavation it was clear that there were three houses (a, b and c) on the summit of Eilean na Comhairle, represented by turf-covered foundations (Illus 6.21). It is helpful to understand at the outset that the presence, shape and location of these buildings were to a considerable extent determined by major developments in the formation of the island in earlier times as a result of human activity. These were not at all evident prior to our excavations, but notably include the erection of a fort or dun, succeeded by a medieval castle (Illus 6.22).



Illustration 6.19

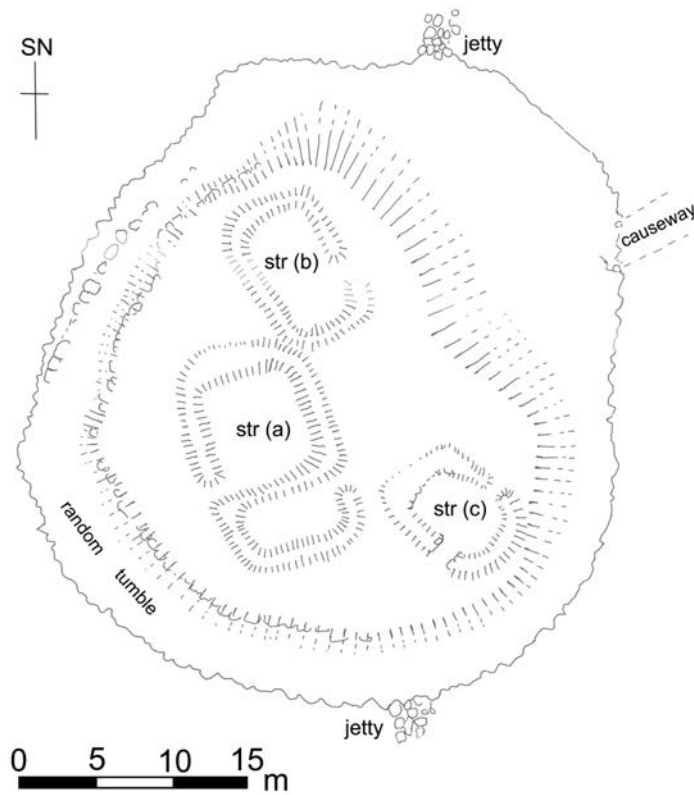
Surviving underwater stretch of the causeway between Eilean na Comhairle and Eilean Mór, drawn from an image taken from a drone; scale approximate



Illustration 6.20

Eilean na Comhairle, boulders round edge. Work in trench 23 in the background

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It was only as a result of our excavations that it became clear that much of the island consists of the ruins of a dun with massive drystone walls. Although only a very small part of this was exposed in our excavations, essentially in trench 23, it was possible to use this information, along with other observations of the island surfaces, both on the ground and from examination of aerial photographs, to interpret a circular fort with an overall diameter of about 20m. Its walls seem to survive for a height of up to 2m around much of the island. The dun was levelled and infilled with rubble in order to act as a platform for the castle, the presence of which had also been unsuspected. It in turn was flattened, but some of its walls remained in a reduced state to support houses (a) and (b).

Illustration 6.21
Plan of Eilean na Comhairle, redrawn from original survey by RCAHMS

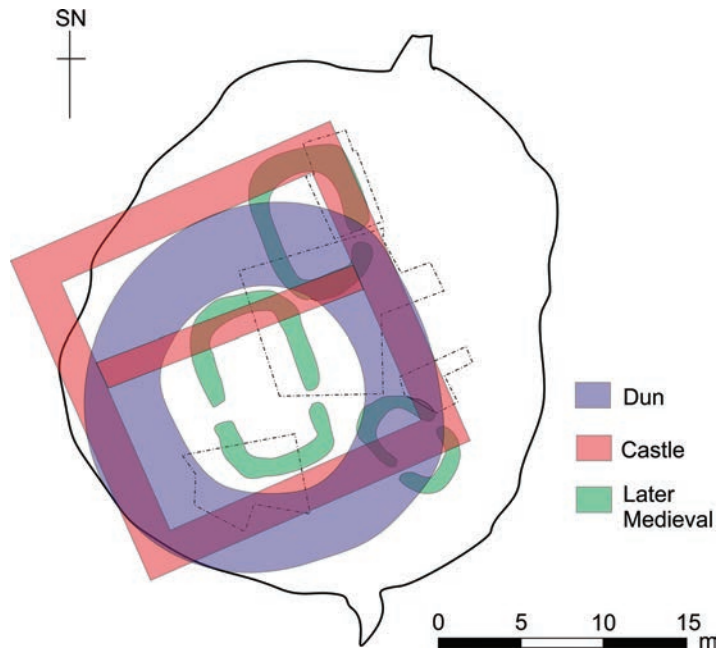


Illustration 6.22
Eilean na Comhairle, composite interpretative plan

Chapter 7

LOCH-SIDE EXCAVATIONS

Trench 13 (site no. 44)

This excavation was planned in 1992 to probe a hut group (B) in site no. 44 at the head of Loch Finlaggan, on the land of Portanelan (Illus 4.5, 5.26 B). A start was made by laying out and de-turfing this trench, about 3m east–west by 8m north–south, positioned over the south wall of the westernmost hut. A limited amount of work in a small area of the trench indicates that the hut wall contained no stone but consisted of turf, burnt when the house was destroyed. The wall was put down straight on top of a thin layer of peaty soil overlying the quartzite bedrock. The work came to a halt before it progressed any further due to lack of resources. There were no finds.

Trench 20, Rudh' a' Chròcuin (site no. 38)

A settlement site (no. 38) on a terrace adjacent to the remains of a small jetty of boulders on the west shore of Loch Finlaggan (Illus 5.17, 7.1) consisted of the traces of two type A houses (A and B). A small trench (trench 20), about 1 by 6m, was positioned to cross structure B from side to side, avoiding the possible entrance in the south wall (Illus 7.2, 7.3; Table 7.1). A small trial pit, about 1 by 1.2m, was later partially excavated in one of the end walls.

The walls of this building had been constructed of turf, probably supported on a framework of wattles. The walls are now badly slumped and damaged by the formation of an iron pan and peaty soil. The remains of the walls [20001, 20008] of house B were of dark brown silty clay with peaty soil [20005, 20006] filling up the interior space and sloping down the outside. The east-facing section of the trench possibly showed a stake-hole in the inner face of the north wall. To level up the interior and make a firm floor, a thick layer of silty sand [20003, 20010] was laid down. A pit was evident in the west-facing section, capped with a layer of charcoal [20025]. This was interpreted as a hearth.

Structure B was built on top of the collapsed and weathered walls of an earlier house, structure B.1. The time between the demise of B.1 and the erection of B was sufficient for the formation of a covering of turf [20023, 20020, 20011], partially burnt, much of which was probably shovelled away in levelling the site for the new house. Hence the division between the freshly exposed south wall of B.1 and the debris from it [20009, 20019] and the new build of the wall of B [20008] laid on it is not distinct in section. There are clues that B.1 had a different footprint from

B. First, the west-facing section seemed to cut along the east wall [20004] of this structure. Second, its west wall may be reflected by the edge of a terrace 2m to the west of B, allowing for a turf-walled house with rounded corners, of similar size to house B.

There was a patch of charcoal and ash [20013] under the south wall of B.1, perhaps from the burning of the grass and heather prior to construction of the house. The area within the walls was cleared down to a surface of natural silty sand [20015]. A shallow scoop, extending from the east-facing baulk into the trench, had peat ash and burning [20014] spreading out from it, and was interpreted as a central hearth.

No dating evidence was found for either structure B or B.1. It is thought likely that they are, at earliest, of medieval date. If structure B can be identified as a residence of those who farmed Laichtcarlane, it is worth recalling that Laichtcarlane disappeared from rentals after 1686 (see Chapter 3).

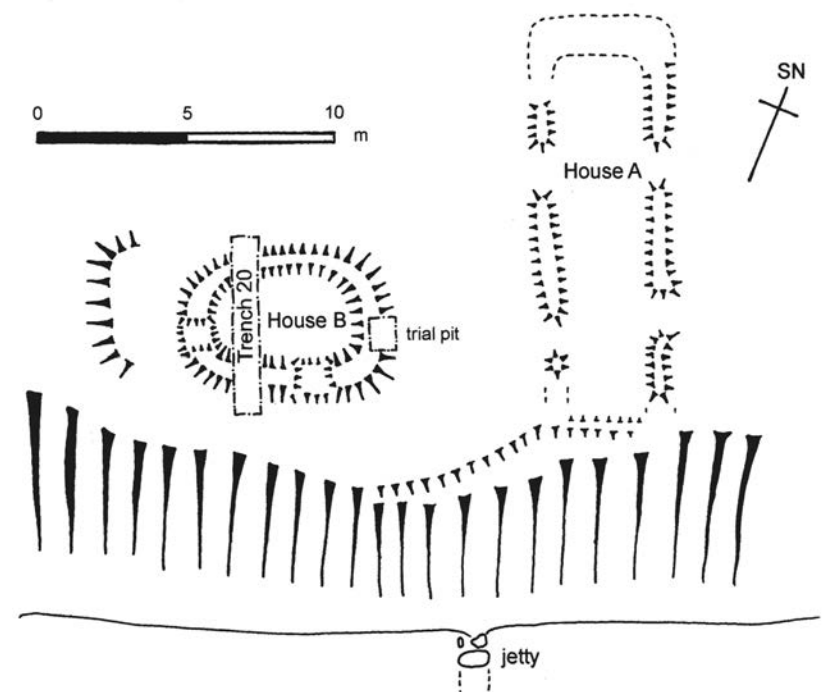


Illustration 7.1

Map of settlement at Rudh' a' Chròcuin, Portanellan (no. 38)

Trenches 21, 22, Cnoc Seannda (site no. 46)

There was never any doubt that the mound at Cnoc Seannda (Illus 5.29) consisted of solid rock, metamorphic limestone with the strata on edge. Some of these can be seen breaking the surface of the grass, tending in a south-west/north-east direction (true orientation). The mound attracted attention because it was considered a possible site of the inauguration ceremonies for the lords of the Isles. The idea that it was worthy of archaeological examination was presented to Channel 4's Time Team in 1994 and it undertook work over three days in June 1994, duly featured on the *Time Team* programme first aired in January 1995.

Initial survey of the mound by a team from the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England identified two adjacent low humps on the summit of the mound, running at right angles to the strike of the rock. The probability that at least one of these was the result of human intervention was reinforced by a resistivity survey carried out by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford

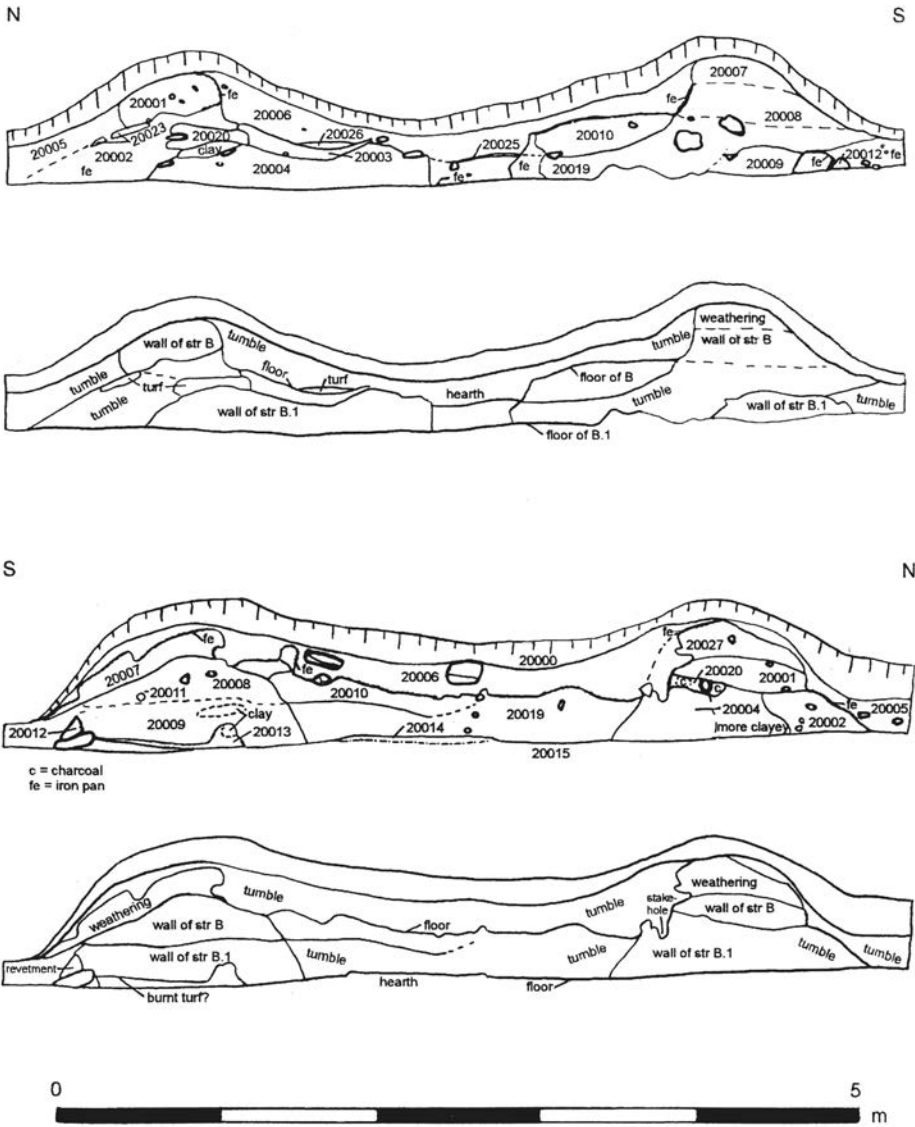


Illustration 7.2
Sections, trench 20, through house B at Rudh' a' Chròcuin: west facing with interpretation, and east facing with interpretation



Illustration 7.3
Trench 20, showing part of the east-facing section and the half-sectioned hearth [20014] of structure B.1

Context	Description	Interpretation
20000	Black silty clay	Topsoil
20001	Grey brown silty clay	Wall of str B
20002	Dark grey-brown clayey silt	Tumble from str B.1
20003	Dark brown silty sand	Floor make-up, str B
20004	Dark brown-black silty clay	Wall of str B.1
20005	Peaty soil	Tumble from str B
20006	Peaty soil	Tumble from str B
20007	Dark brown silty sand	Weathering, wall of str B
20008	Dark brown-black silty clay	Wall of str B
20009	Dark brown sandy silt	Wall of str B.1
20010	Dark brown silty sand	Floor make-up, str B
20011	Ash and charcoal	Burnt turf
20012	Stones	Revetment of wall of str B.1
20013	Ash and charcoal	Burnt turf under wall of str B.1
20014	Ash and charcoal	Hearth of str B.1
20015	Pale brown silty sand	Natural/floor of str B.1
20019	Dark grey-brown sandy silt	Tumble from str B.1
20020	Clay, charcoal, stones	Turf with burning
20023	Very dark brown clay	Turf
20025	Ash and charcoal	Hearth of str B
20026	Very dark brown clay	Turf
20027	Dark brown silty sand	Weathering, wall of str B

Table 7.1
Trench 20 contexts

LOCH-SIDE EXCAVATIONS

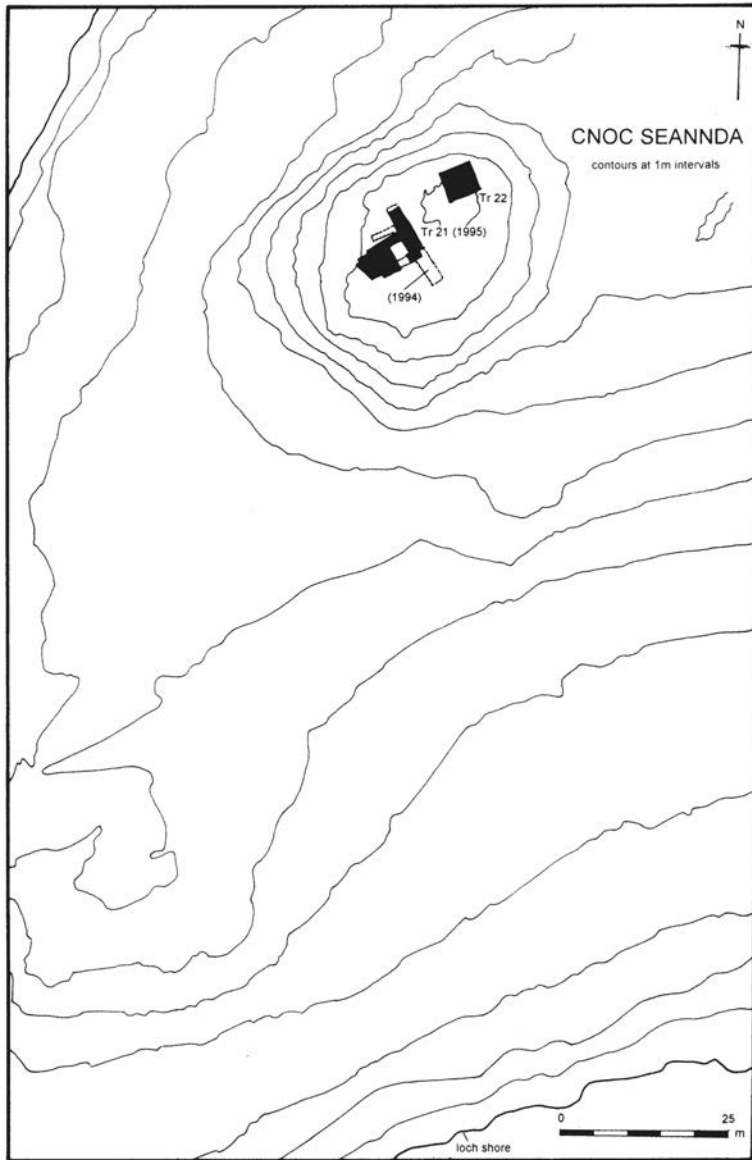


Illustration 7.4

Location plan of trenches 21 and 22 on the mound at Cnoc Seannda

(Illus 5.28). It picked up two patches of high resistance on top of the mound, one of which turned out to be the 'chamber'. The other may reflect the underlying geology rather than the kerb cairn. There was also a suggestion from the English Royal Commission's work that there were traces of a low bank at the north-east edge of the summit area. Two trenches were opened to explore these features.

Trench 22 was 5 by 5m and positioned to the north-east of the summit area (Illus 7.4, 7.5). The removal of the turf and a very thin layer of topsoil revealed bedrock, the strata here twisting round and fortuitously giving the impression of a low bank. Trowelling of the topsoil produced a total of 14 flints.

Trench 21 developed in shape as a reversed F with its main axis lying approximately north-west/south-east. Here was revealed a stone-lined chamber excavated into the bedrock. Spread around were numerous flints, identified as of Mesolithic type, and a sondage into the deposits within the chamber led to the recovery of cattle bone. At this point it was decided to suspend excavation and to leave a more thorough examination of these features for 1995.

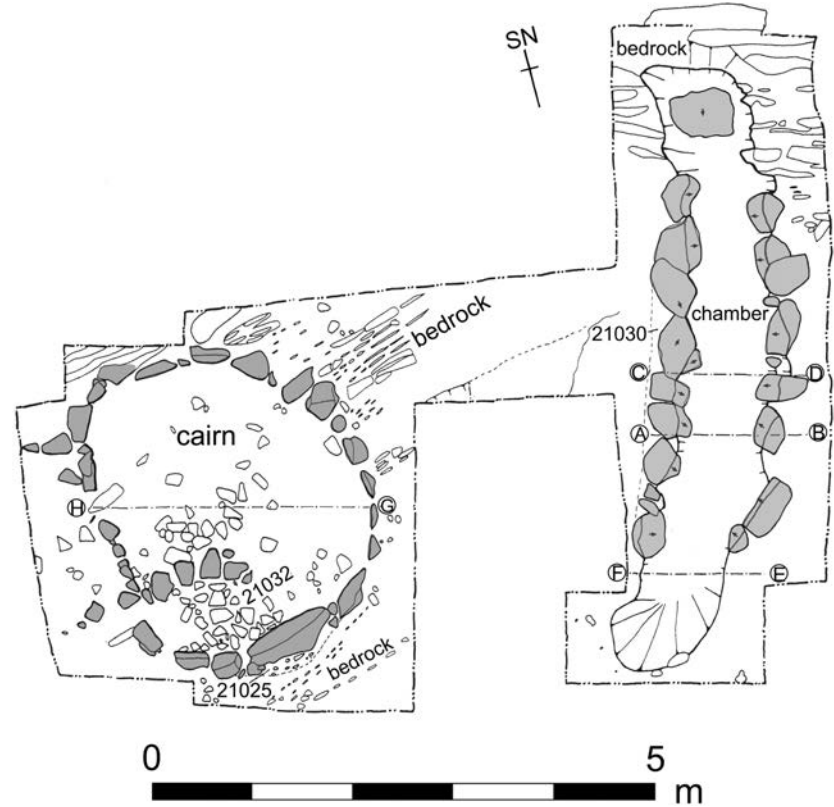


Illustration 7.5
Plan of trench 21 (1995)

In October 1995 the area of trench 21 containing the chamber was reopened and the trench extended to take in the adjacent hump identified in the survey of the mound. This proved to represent the remains of a small kerb cairn (Illus 7.5, 7.11; Table 7.2).

The natural stratigraphy on the top of the mound consisted of a relatively thin deposit of topsoil and turf overlying the limestone bedrock. Over much of the area excavated in trench 21 there was a gravel spread [21014, 21007] sandwiched between the topsoil and bedrock. It contained flints and was possibly the main source of the several hundred flints recovered from various deposits within the trench and identified as Mesolithic (see Karen Hardy's report in Chapter C1 of the Catalogue). The possibility was considered that this gravel spread might be a Mesolithic deposit in situ, but it was stratigraphically later than the chamber and may rather be interpreted as material robbed from the cairn and spread around.

The cut for the chamber turned out to be banana-shaped, about 6m long and 1m deep (Illus 7.6, 7.7). The actual chamber itself was only about 4m long, 1.5m wide at the top and narrowing towards the bottom, and it was not obviously curved. It was lined on both sides by large boulders and slabs, some of them pieces of limestone prized from the bedrock, some of them with smaller boulders on top to level up the sides. The two ends of the cut contained sandy silt and fragments of limestone [21018, 21037], representing the original backfill from when the chamber was built. Overlying this deposit in the north end was a large slab of limestone that may be the dislodged end piece of the chamber (Illus 7.8). There was no similar slab in the corresponding position at the south end of the chamber. The bottom of the chamber, and the gaps between the boulders and slabs, had a deposit [21028, 21030] of silty clay with flakes of limestone, interpreted as silting.

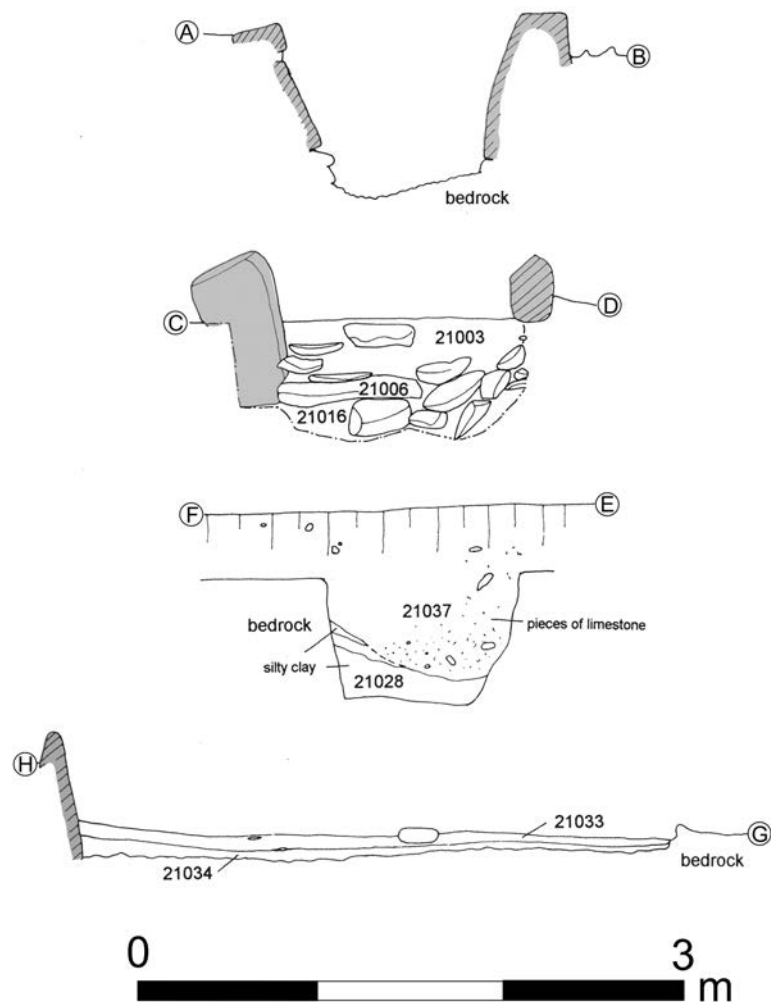


Illustration 7.6
Sections, trench 21 (1995)



Illustration 7.7
Trench 21, the chamber, fully excavated



Illustration 7.8
Trench 21, showing large slab of limestone that may be the dislodged end piece of the chamber

Context	Description	Interpretation
21003	Clayey silt	Top fill of chamber
21006	Rubble	Fill of chamber
21007	Sandy silt with gravel	Imported gravel
21014	Sandy silt with gravel	Imported gravel
21016	Clayey silt	Fill of chamber
21018	Sandy silt, pieces of limestone	Backfill in cut for chamber
21023	Clayey silt with gravel	Cairn material
21025	Small stones, clayey silt	Backfill in cut for kerb of cairn
21028	Silty clay, limestone flakes	Silting
21030	Silty clay, limestone flakes	Silting
21032	Rubble	Cairn material
21033	Silty clay	Levelling within cairn
21034	Clay, limestone fragments	Levelling within cairn
21035	Clay	Levelling within cairn
21037	Sandy silt, pieces of limestone	Backfill in cut for chamber

Table 7.2
Trench 21 contexts

LOCH-SIDE EXCAVATIONS



Illustration 7.10
Flint barbed and tanged arrowhead (SF 21157)
found in the chamber on Cnoc Seannda



Illustration 7.11
Trench 21, the kerb cairn

Under a build-up of peaty soil [21003] the chamber contained deposits of rubble and clayey silt [21006, 21016], perhaps material backfilled in antiquity when the structure was reopened and robbed. The rubble included slabby pieces of limestone and quartzite, but none were big enough to be convincingly interpreted as the remains of lintel stones for the chamber. There were also several fragments of animal bone in 21003, including five identified pieces of cattle and one of red deer (Table C9.15r in the Catalogue).

From the clayey silt fill in the bottom of the chamber [21016] was recovered a pierced bone disc (Illus 7.9), identified as an Iron Age whirligig, possibly a toy, and also a flint barbed and tanged arrowhead of chalcolithic or Bronze Age type (Illus 7.10). It was found at the bottom of 21016 in the north-west corner of the chamber. Whereas the whirligig might provide a clue for when the chamber was robbed of its original contents, the arrowhead might be all that remained of the latter.

The small denuded kerb cairn had no sure stratigraphic relationship to the chamber. It is D-shaped, about 3.5 by 2.8m (Illus 7.5, 7.6, 7.11). The kerbstones were graded in size and height, with the largest on the southern segment, and the bedrock was cut back to take them. Within the kerb the surface was levelled up with clay [21033, 21034, 21035]. A spread of stones [21032], particularly in the south-west segment of the cairn, represented all that remained in situ of the cairn superstructure, sealed by a layer of clayey silt with gravel [21023]. Within 21032, there was an alignment of boulders running east-west, perhaps the remains of a burial chamber. It was clear, however, that the cairn had been robbed. Small pieces of calcined bone and charcoal were recovered from the gravelly material [21023] and from the make-up deposits.



Illustration 7.9
Bone whirligig (?) (SF 21154) found in the chamber on Cnoc Seannda

Chapter 8

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

Trenches 3 and 18

Trench 3, 10 by 2m, was positioned in 1990 to examine the bank enclosing an area of lazy beds (Illus 6.6, 8.1, 8.2, Table 8.1). The trench extended inside the bank on to a cultivation rig and to the exterior alongside a low circular mound supposed to be a

collapsed tower or entrance – the gatehouse – at the terminus of the causeway leading to Eilean Mór from the loch-side (Illus 6.7). It is here described as if it were laid out with its long axis on an east–west line. The bank was fully sectioned and natural deposits underlying it were reached, but the east end of the trench was not

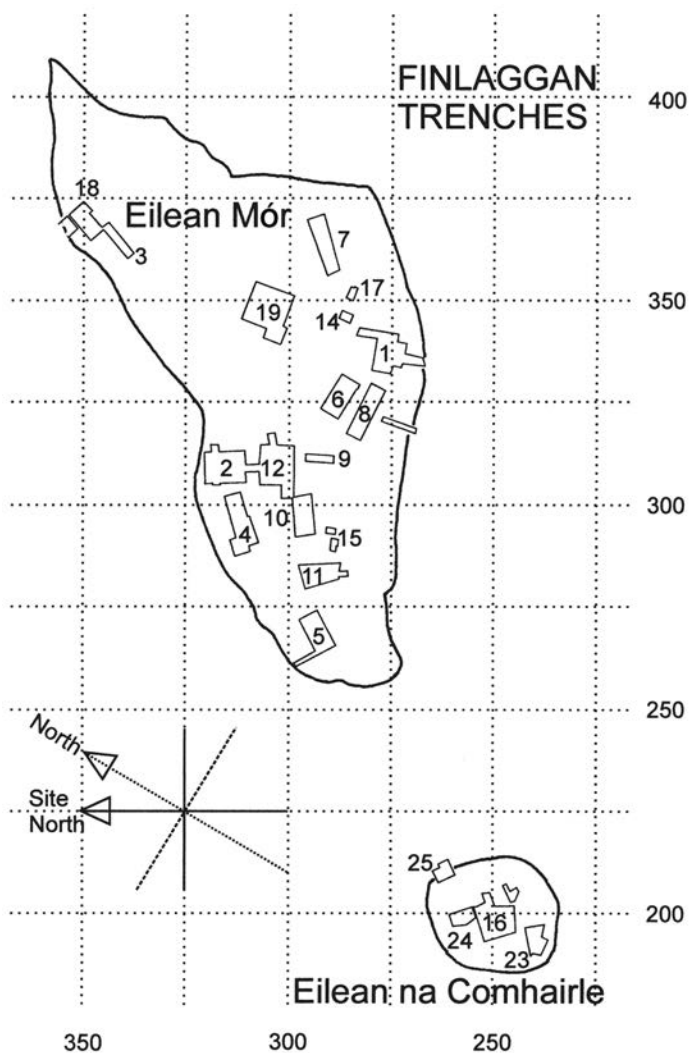


Illustration 8.1

Map showing locations of the trenches on Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle

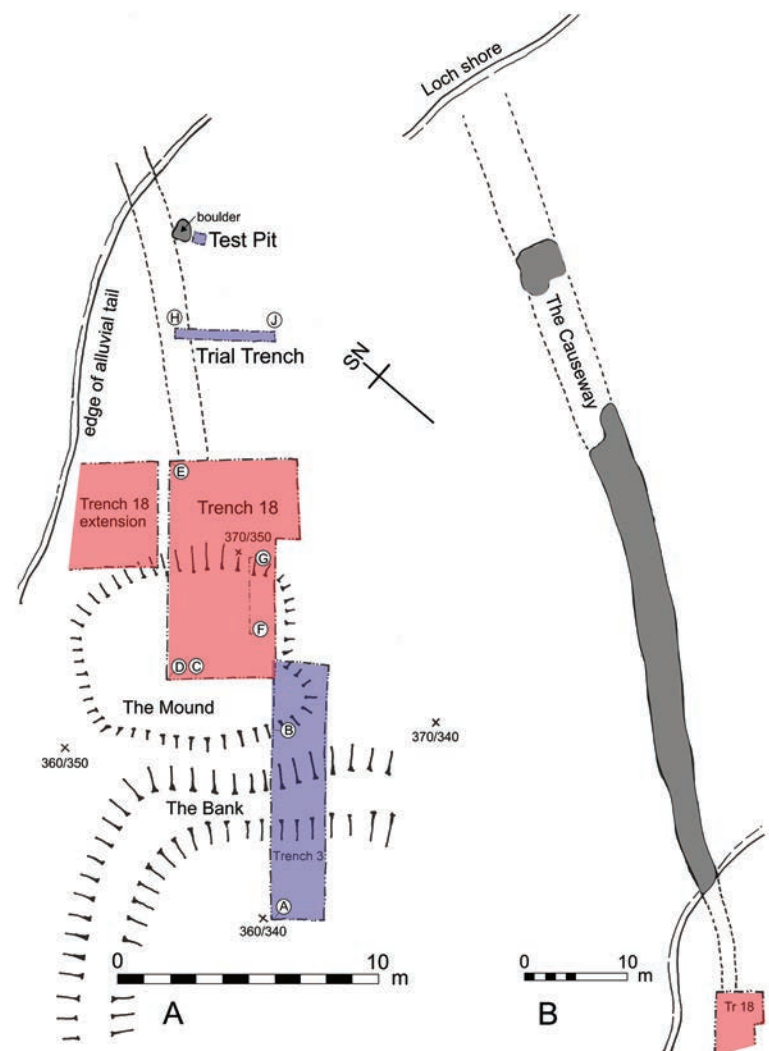


Illustration 8.2

(A) Location plan of trenches 3 and 18, drawn sections marked by letters A–G; (B) survey of the line of the submerged causeway from Eilean Mór to the loch-side

fully excavated. Useful information was gathered on the bank and its use as a support for a palisade, but not enough was done to elucidate the history of the mound and its relationship to the causeway and alluvial tail. Thus, it was decided to open up a larger area, trench 18, contiguous with trench 3.

Trench 18 was excavated in 1994. It was positioned partly over the mound and partly in the alluvial tail. The trench when first laid out was about 7m east–west by 4m north–south, its south–west corner touching the position of the north–east corner of trench 3. It was fairly soon extended east and south. At a later stage another area, 4m wide, was dug north towards the water’s edge, remaining separate from the main trench by a narrow baulk (Illus 8.2, Table 8.2). Problems in excavating this extension and the east end of the main trench were presented by flooding in rainy weather, and a pump had to be used on several occasions. Nevertheless, all the main artificial features encountered were examined or sampled, and a survey was undertaken of the adjacent submerged causeway (Illus 8.2 B).

Agricultural activity

Under the gatehouse was an old ground surface [18067], the interface between it and the underlying sand corrugated as the result of ploughing. This can be seen on section C–D (Illus 8.17). Section C–D also shows a post-hole [18097] filled with sand [18096], sealed under the ploughing. This ploughing may be post-medieval or medieval in its final manifestation, having eaten into or removed most earlier traces of human activity.

After the erection and use of the gatehouse, bank and palisade, this area of the island was again returned to agriculture. To the interior of the bank there were lazy beds, represented by 3016, grey, stony clay, extending up the face of the bank and, therefore, being of more recent date than it (Illus 8.3 A). Further lazy beds were excavated in trench 19 (see below).

A post-hole [3058] in the crest of the palisade bank, with a clearly defined rectangular post-pipe and associated modern nails, suggested the presence of a fence in recent times, possibly a continuation of one extending down the north side of the Finlaggan Burn, rather than one around Eilean Mór, and another fence line, probably of no great age, may be represented by small post-holes, including 3020 and 3015, running diagonally across the bank from south–west to north–east. A post-pipe about 10cm in diameter was traced in 3020. Cut through the collapsed debris on the gatehouse mound were at least two, probably three, later post-holes [18018, 18025], both shallow, and possibly considerably truncated (Illus 8.6). The former had a diameter of about 40cm and contained four packing stones. The latter had a diameter of about 30cm.

Bank and palisade (Illus 8.3, 8.4, 8.16)

Where cut by trench 3 the bank spread to a width of 4m and a height of 0.6m. The outer face was steeper than the inner. The bank was composed of fine-grained, light brown soil [3014]. It had been dumped over an earlier feature – the collapsed gatehouse – partially dug away to give the bank a steeper, higher front face rising out of a shallow ditch, partially silted up [3006]. Cut into the back edge of the bank was a shallow irregular trench containing

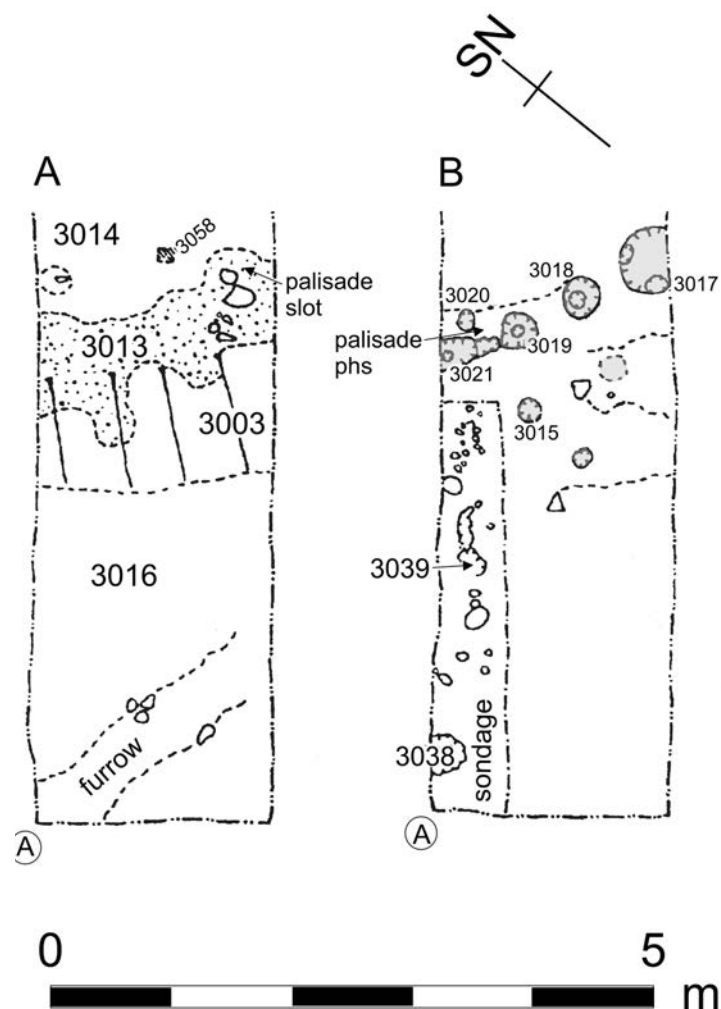


Illustration 8.3
Trench 3: plans showing (A) bank 3003 and lazy bed 3016; (B) post-holes for palisade in bank 3003



Illustration 8.4
Trench 3, lazy bed, bank to right with excavated post-holes for palisade

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

gravelly soil [3013]. From this trench were dug a series of four large post pits [3017–3019, 3021]. They were rounded in plan, centred about 60cm apart, over 30cm in diameter and tapered to a point at a depth of as much as 40cm. These post-holes indicate the former existence of a substantial wooden fence or palisade. Heaped on the back of the bank, and originally retained by the palisade, was a deposit [3003] of gritty, humic soil, interpreted as the slumped remains of a step for the defenders of the palisade.

The gatehouse (Illus 8.5–8.9, 8.17, 8.18)

The core of the bank underneath deposit 3014 was part of the collapsed structure, the gatehouse, represented by the mound. Prior to excavation the mound appeared as a low grassy hump, about 7m in diameter, separated from the bank by a shallow ditch. It was covered with spreads of gravelly soil [18006, 18009], interpreted as the weathered and decomposed residue of turf from the demolished or collapsed structure of the gatehouse.

The main part of the mound was composed of clay-rich soils [3012, 18007, 18069, 18053, etc]. In section, 3012 appeared in trench 3 as a complex layered deposit with pale yellow material alternating with grey (Illus 8.16). It is believed that this resulted from the decomposition of blocks of turf stacked one on top of the other to form a stable walled platform about 11m in diameter when originally built, its surface out of reach of inundation by loch water. The turf was laid on an old ground surface [3031, 18067] over beach deposits of sand and gravel and deposits of clay. At the time this was done the site of the gatehouse, as now, was probably at the very apex of firm ground on Eilean Mór, with only the marsh of the alluvial tail projecting further north-east and south-east into the loch.

The size and shape of the gate-tower itself was defined by the settings for a circular timberwork with an overall diameter of about 9m. These were best seen in trench 3 where a group of six were excavated. They showed as rectangular gaps in a spread of small boulders [3004], clearly forming an arc of a circle, no more than two courses high (Illus 8.5, 8.6). The posts would have been about 12cm square and centred at distances of about 60cm, one from another. Two larger post-holes [3050, 3061], each capable of holding a timber about 24cm square, lay inset from the others. This circular timberwork was less well preserved in trench 18, perhaps both because this segment of the structure was more exposed to damage and because there was a gap here anyway for an entrance-way (Illus 8.7, 8.8). Running across trench 18 there was a spread of possible packing stones [18046], probably mostly not in situ.

From one of the post-holes [3025] a group of three iron rivets and five roves was recovered. Counting each rove as evidence for one rivet, at least 10 could be identified as coming from the structural remains or debris of the gatehouse, all apparently of small size. A typical rove would appear to have been about 20 by 15mm and the thickness of wood gripped about 15mm. Other fragments of ironwork can be identified as nails, perhaps all or mostly of large size. One complete one (SF 18081) has an overall length of 83mm and its head is 23 by 19mm. All of this ironwork either came from contexts and debris associated with the gatehouse or later contexts like the lazy bed [3016]. None can be associated with the palisade and bank or earlier features like the causeway (Illus 8.9).



Illustration 8.5

Trench 3, the palisade bank to the left partially overlying the arc of stones containing post-holes for the timbers of the outer face of the gatehouse. The hollow retaining water results from the digging away of the gatehouse platform to give the bank a steeper face

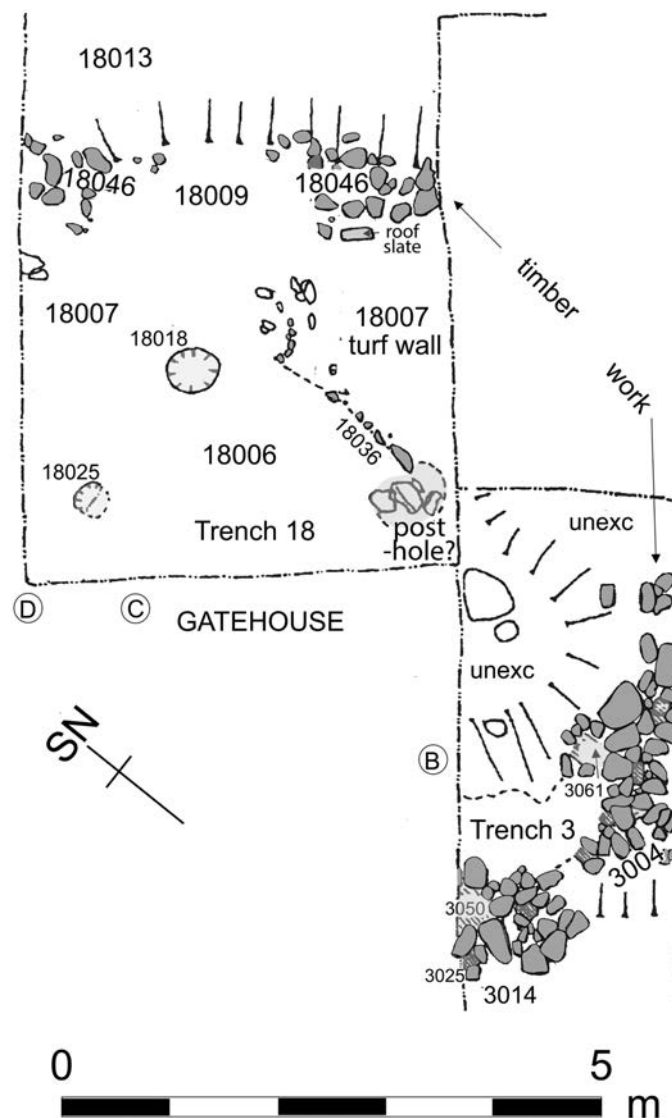


Illustration 8.6

Trenches 3 and 18, plan of features associated with the gatehouse, plus two later post-holes [18018, 18025]



Illustration 8.7

Trench 18, interior of the gatehouse, residual traces of the stone packers [18046] for the timbers of the outer face, still in situ, to the right



Illustration 8.8

Trench 18: the linear arrangement of small stones [18036] represents the inner edge of the turf wall of the gatehouse

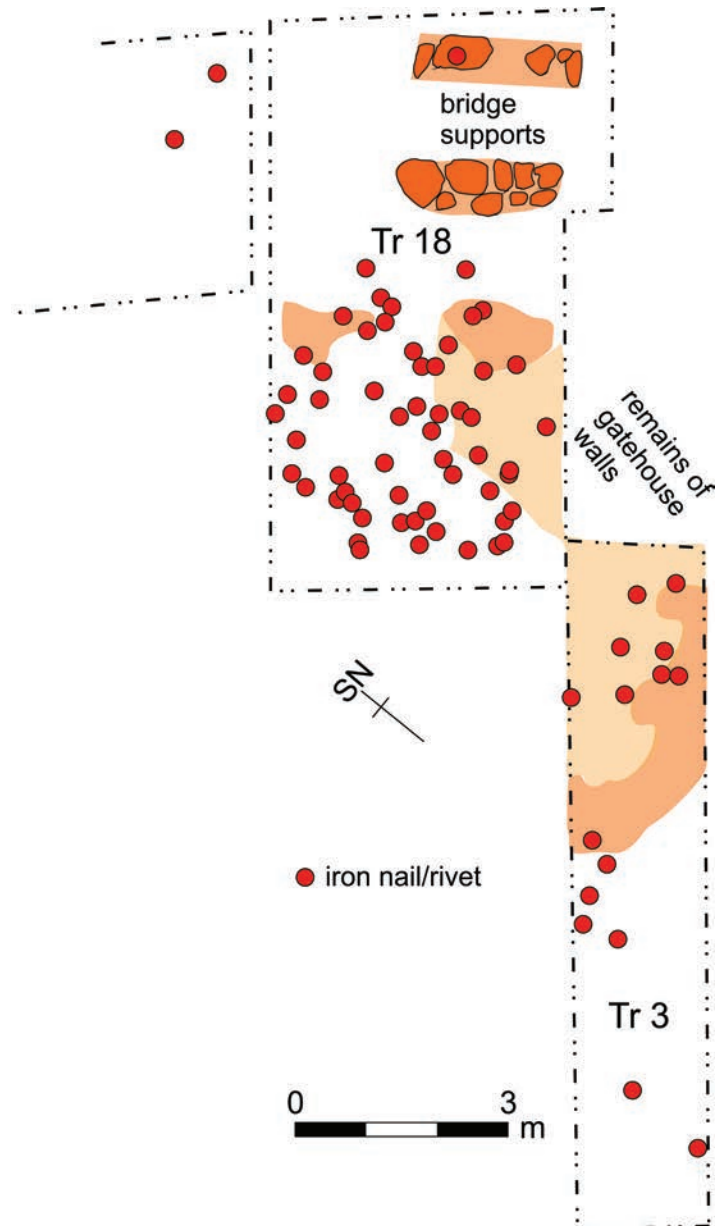


Illustration 8.9

Trenches 3 and 18, distribution of nails and rivets associated with the gatehouse

Within the circuit of timber uprights were the remains of a substantial wall of turf [18007], over 1.5m thick, represented by severely truncated deposits of firm, compact silt. Its inside edge was defined by an alignment of small edge stones [18036]. The circular chamber contained in the gate-tower would have had a diameter of about 5m.

The bridge (Illus 8.10, 8.11)

Some large blocks that protruded from beneath the turf were included within the area of trench 18 in the expectation that they were part of the causeway to the island. It was soon obvious that, instead, there was a substantial stone plinth [18001], 2.4 by 0.85m,

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

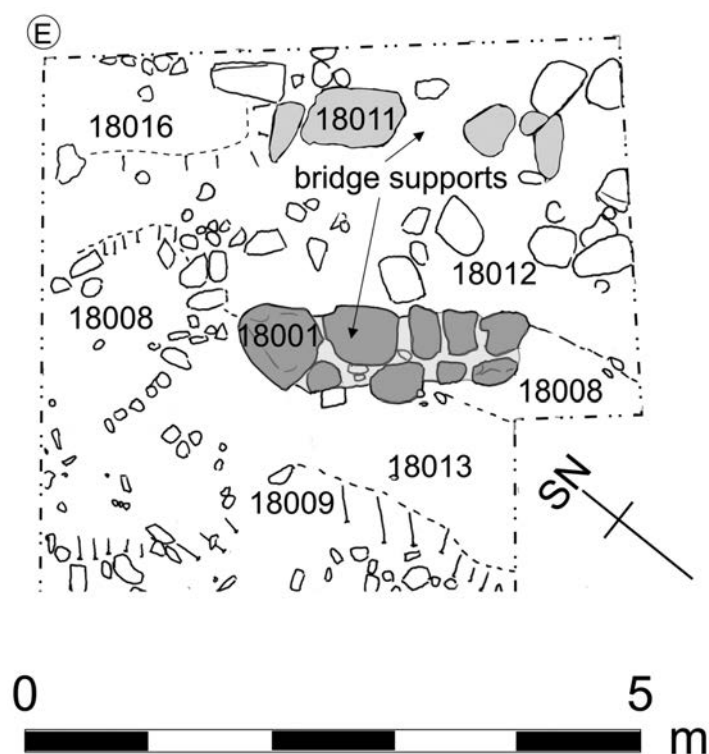


Illustration 8.10

Trench 18, plan showing the two stone supports for a bridge providing access to the gatehouse

oriented north-west to south-east. It is probably incomplete in both length and height, which was 0.32m at most. It was of dry-stone construction, composed of roughly rectangular blocks, only one course high.

A large tumbled block and other stones [18011], about 1.5m to the north-east, were supposed to be the remains of another similar plinth. Both have been interpreted as supports for a wooden bridge or raised walkway providing access to the gatehouse, and their position suggests an approach to the island from along the alluvial tail, not much different from the route of the modern wooden walkway. As already noted, no traces of an actual entrance or doorway have survived in the gatehouse.

The builders of these two plinths may have been aware that, between them, was an earlier ditch [18032], but the plinths themselves were laid on the surface of a band of silt [18012], one of the uppermost in a sequence of such deposits that had washed into the ditch and levelled it up.

The causeway and ditch (Illus 8.2 B, 8.12, 8.13)

The remains of the causeway from Eilean Mór to the loch-side were also surveyed. The distance from the gatehouse mound to the opposite shore was over 90m, and for about half this distance the boulders forming the causeway could be traced in the water, mostly under a layer of silt, forming a low mound of tumbled stones, from 2m to over 4m in width (Illus 8.2 B). Adjacent to Eilean Mór's alluvial tail, where the causeway still appeared to have some structural integrity, it seemed rather different in character to that connecting Eilean Mór to Eilean na Comhairle. It



Illustration 8.11

Trench 18, view of the two stone supports for a bridge providing access to the gatehouse

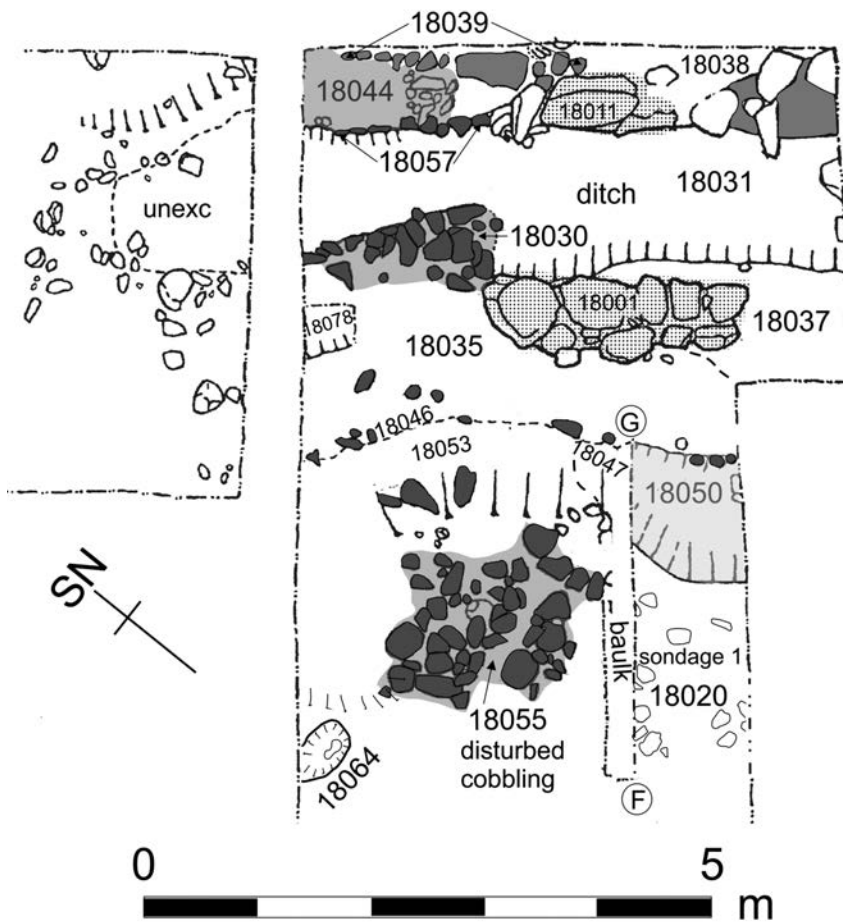


Illustration 8.12

Trench 18, plan showing the ditch [18032] and the access way [18044, 18030, 18055] across it from the causeway

was composed of smaller blocks and boulders arranged more irregularly. Assuming that the causeway was of reasonably substantial construction and solidity when in use, it is unlikely that time and tide alone could account for its present ruinous state. That may be down to deliberate destruction.

A small trial trench (Illus 8.2A, 8.19) was dug into the alluvial tail in the hope of exposing some intact causeway. It was positioned about midway between the end of trench 18 and the last visible segment of the causeway in the water adjacent to the alluvial tail. No trace of the causeway was found. At the time this was excavated it was supposed that the stones of the causeway had here been robbed, or else that this section was of timber, perhaps a removable bridge. In hindsight, it is probable that the trial slot was neither excavated deep enough nor quite on the right line. It was dug to a maximum depth of 52.08m OD, whereas levels on the visible stretch of causeway in the nearby water ranged from 51.57 to 52.45m OD.

Evidence for the continuation of the causeway, rather than the actual causeway itself, was found in trench 18. It was exposed in the north corner, under a band of in-washed silty sand [18016]. It appeared as a slightly raised, firm, gravelly surface [18044], extending over ditch 18032, and underneath the north-east side of the later gatehouse it could be identified as a patch of disturbed stones and boulders [18055] set in a matrix of clay silt [18065] (Illus 8.14).

Ditch 18032 ran across the full 4.8m width of trench 18 and could be seen to extend another 1.6m northwards into the trench extension to join up with the loch. As initially dug, it was about 2m wide with a depth of 0.6m. It was cut through natural deposits of sand, gravel and silt. On its outer edge it appeared to have been defined or revetted by stonework [18039] (not fully excavated). This seemed to indicate that there was at least a small area of firm ground to the north-east of the ditch at the time it was dug, prior to encroachment by the Finlaggan Marsh.

The ditch was filled with a sequence of deposits, stratigraphically from top to bottom:



Illustration 8.13

Trench 18, view showing ditch 18032 partially excavated, and the stone pier [18030], bottom right



Illustration 8.14

Trench 18, view showing ditch 18050, sectioned in foreground; beyond and to the left is the disturbed cobbling [18055] of the access route into the gatehouse

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- 180003, 18005, etc, deposits of silt, interleaved with 18006, a band of silty sand
- 18031 marsh sediment
- 18066 silty sand
- 18092 marsh sediment.

In broad terms the deposits of marsh sediment and silt can be identified as natural silting, while the bands of sand represent in-wash from major flood episodes. From 18031 were recovered a piece of leather, twigs and several pieces of wood, including the corner of a wooden panel (SF 18173), 8 to 10mm thick, with chamfered edges.

The crossing of the ditch by the continuation of the causeway was aided by the insertion of stonework. On the outer side this took the form of upright stone slabs [18057] about 0.6m in from the original ditch edge. Projecting from the inner edge of the ditch was a substantial drystone pier [18030] narrowing the ditch at this point to about 0.9m, perhaps readily bridged by stone slabs or wooden beams.

Earlier activity

A shallow trench [18050], to the south-west of ditch 18032 and parallel with it, was found to lie under the remains of the gatehouse. This may have been a drainage gully marking the edge of agricultural activity in medieval or earlier times, or perhaps the eavesdrip of an earlier gatehouse. A sherd of wheel-turned redware (SF 18152) was recovered from it. The trench was 1m wide and 30 to 40cm deep (Illus 8.12, 8.15, 8.17). It had largely filled up with marsh sediment [18048], over which was a deposit of gravelly silt [18049] and a patch of burnt soil and charcoal [18047].



Illustration 8.15
Trench 18, view of ditch 18050

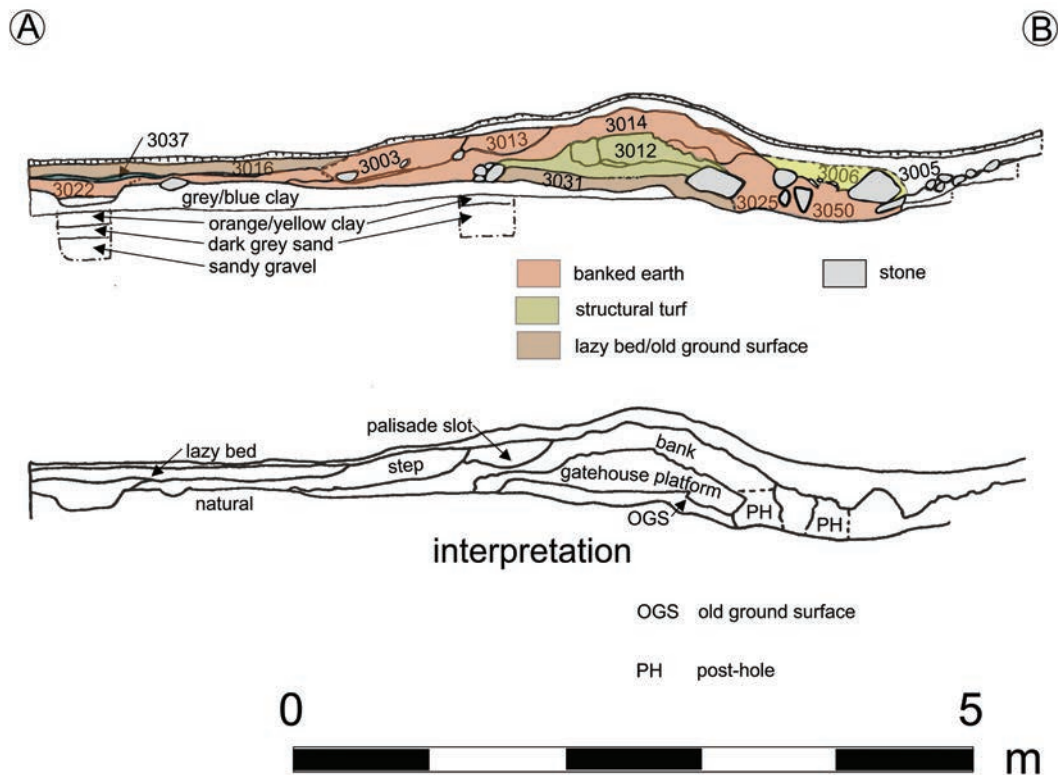


Illustration 8.16
Trench 3, section A-B and interpretation

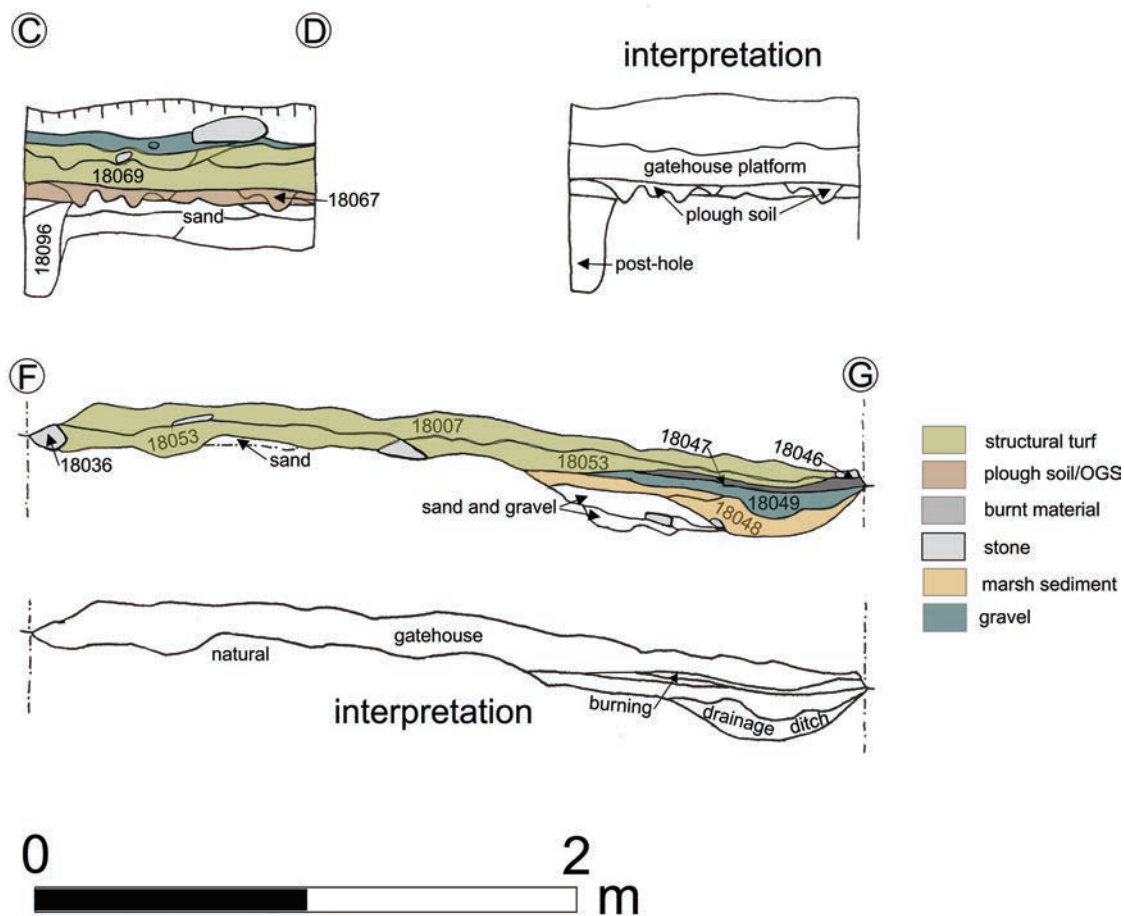


Illustration 8.17
Trench 18, sections C–D and F–G and interpretations

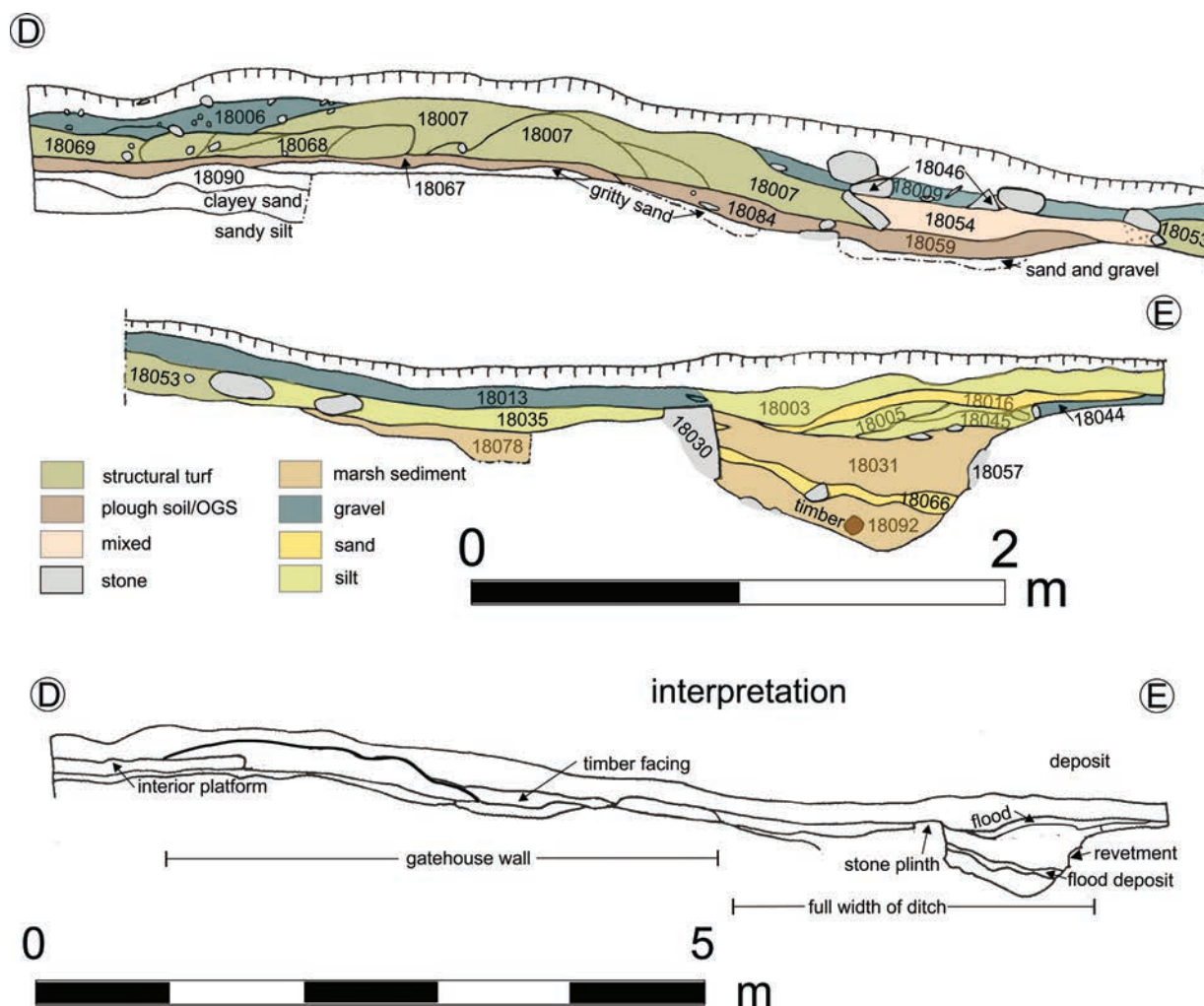


Illustration 8.18
Trench 18, section D–E and interpretation

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

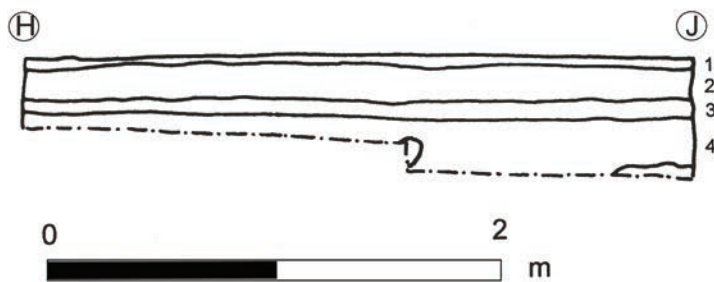


Illustration 8.19

Section H-J through the alluvial tail in a trial trench to the north-east of trench 18: (1) surface vegetation (modern root layer), up to 15cm thick; (2) very sticky gleyed clay (roots less abundant), up to 40cm thick; (3) dense organic marsh peat, up to 20cm thick; (4) coarse sand (not bottomed), its surface at about 52.60m OD

Context	Description	Interpretation
3003	Gritty humic soil	Step at back of palisade
3004	Boulders in dark brown earth	Packing for gatehouse uprights
3005	Earth and stones	Weathering, soil formation
3006	Yellow clay silt	Silting
3012	Green-grey clay	Turf platform for gatehouse
3013	Gritty soil	Fill of slot for palisade
3014	Light brown soil	Bank to support palisade
3015	Cut	Post-hole in palisade bank
3016	Grey stony clay	Lazy bed
3017	Cut	Palisade post-hole
3018	Cut	Palisade post-hole
3019	Cut	Palisade post-hole
3020	Cut	Post-hole in palisade bank
3021	Cut	Palisade post-hole
3022	Grey-brown clay	Fill of 3038
3025	Dark brown silty clay	Fill of gatehouse post-hole
3029	Dark brown earth, charcoal	Gatehouse destruction
3031	Dark soil deposit	Old ground surface
3032	Grey-blue clay	Natural
3034	Orange-yellow clay	Natural
3037	Gravel	Sorting by earthworms
3038	Cut	Post-hole
3039	Cut	Post-hole
3050	Dark brown silty clay	Fill of gatehouse post-hole
3058	Cut	Recent post-hole? (Unexcavated)
3061	Set stones	Gatehouse post-hole?

Table 8.1
Trench 3 contexts

Of unknown date and significance were two truncated post-holes [3038, 3039] encountered in a sondage excavated in the north-west of trench 3 beneath the lazy bed [3016]; 3038 was 34cm and 3039 was 20cm in diameter. As with other features under the lazy beds in trench 19, they may provide a clue to the whole island being covered with houses and other structures in post-medieval, medieval or earlier times.

Beach sand and gravel deposits underlying plough soil [18067] and the remains of the gatehouse were sampled in a sondage at the north-west corner of trench 18. It was noted that they contained small flakes of worked flint, thought to represent Mesolithic activity. Unfortunately, the samples were lost prior to processing. Section C-D also shows a post-hole [18097] filled with sand [18096], of unknown date.

Context	Description	Interpretation
18037	Sand and silt	Flood deposit
18038	Silt	Silting
18039	Stone alignment	Outer edge of ditch 18032
18044	Gravelly surface	Causeway continuation
18045	Silt	Silting
18046	Boulders	Packing for gatehouse uprights
18047	Burnt soil, charcoal	Fill in ditch 18050
18048	Marsh sediment	Fill in ditch 18050
18049	Gravel	Fill in ditch 18050
18050	Cut	Drainage ditch
18053	Silt	Turf platform for gatehouse
18055	Stones	Cobbled causeway extension
18057	Stones	Revetment of ditch 18032
18059	Silty sand	Old ground surface
18064	Cut	Post-hole
18065	Clayey silt	Matrix of 18055
18066	Silty sand	Early flood deposit in 18032
18067	Grey-brown clayey sand	Early plough soil
18068	Silty sand	Turf platform for gatehouse
18069	Clayey silt	Turf platform for gatehouse
18078	Marsh sediment	Fill in ditch 18032
18084	Silty sand	Old ground surface
18086	Sandy silt	Fill in ditch 18050
18089	Gritty sandy clay	Flood deposit in extension
18090	Fine sand	Early activity
18092	Marsh sediment	Fill in ditch 18032
18096	Sand	Fill in 18097
18097	Cut	Post-hole

Table 8.2
Trench 18 contexts

Context	Interpretation	SF no.	Type	Date	Notes
3002	Lazy bed	3015	Pottery	Early medieval	
3014	Palisade bank	3019	Copper peg	Early medieval	For musical instrument
3026	Gravel horizon	3018	Pottery	Early medieval	
3031	Old ground surface	3034	Pottery	Early medieval	
18002	Gatehouse debris	18002	Coin	Early medieval	Henry III (1247–72) 1d
18002	Gatehouse debris	18006	Pottery	Early medieval	
18002	Gatehouse debris	18007	Pottery	Early medieval	
18003	Silting	18079	Lead shot	Post-medieval	
18006	Gatehouse debris	18011	Pottery	Early medieval	
18006	Gatehouse debris	18027	Pottery	Early medieval	
18006	Gatehouse debris	18028	Pottery	Early medieval	
18006	Gatehouse debris	18036	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18067	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18068	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18073	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18075	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18083	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18097	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18097	Roof slate	Medieval/post-medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18103	Pottery	Early medieval	
18007	Gatehouse turf work	18171	Roof slate	Medieval/post-medieval	
18013	Gatehouse debris	18156	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18042	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18043	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18044	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18047	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18060	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18061	Arrowhead	Early medieval/medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18064	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18065	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18067	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18076	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18077	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18078	Pottery	Early medieval	
18015	Gatehouse debris	18078	Roof slate	Medieval/post-medieval	Type A
18017	Gatehouse debris	18023	Pottery	Early medieval	
18035	Silting	18096	Glass	Modern	
18040	Gatehouse turf work	18100	Pottery	Early medieval	
18041	Gatehouse turf work	18091	Pottery	Early medieval	
18053	Gatehouse turf work	18109	Pottery	Early medieval	
18053	Gatehouse turf work	18123	Pottery	Early medieval	
18065	Causeway/access route	18126	Pottery	Early medieval	
18065	Causeway/access route	18132	Copper pin	Early medieval	
18086	Fill of palisade slot	18152	Pottery	Early medieval/medieval	Handmade
18089	Silting	18157	Pottery	Early medieval	

Table 8.3
Selected small finds from trenches 3 and 18

Dating evidence (Table 8.3)

A musical instrument peg of medieval type (C121) came from the bank [3014] and a fragment of a 13th-century long cross penny (N9) was recovered from weathered demolition debris [18002] over the top of the gatehouse.

Other apparent dating evidence was provided by the 50 sherds of pottery from trenches 3 and 18. Of these, 36 were wheel-made, all of Scottish origin: 30 white gritty, 1 redware and 5 oxidised gritty ware. Almost all of them were associated with the gatehouse rather than any other feature, many of them being incorporated in its structure, including its platform and walls.

None of these finds, however, necessarily date the construction or use of the gatehouse and bank and palisade. One sherd of white gritty (SF 3034) came from the old land surface [3031] under the gatehouse, and possibly does indicate occupation or land use in this immediate area of Eilean Mór in the earlier medieval period. The rest of the finds, including the musical instrument peg and coin, may have been grubbed up from earlier occupation material in the immediate locality. White gritty ware is believed to be no earlier than the 12th century, and perhaps much of that recovered from Finlaggan dates to the 13th century. Another sherd of white gritty pottery (SF 18126) was recovered in the make-up [18065] of the cobbled path extending from the causeway, as well as an earlier medieval copper-alloy dress pin (C10). These may be an indication that the causeway, and access to Eilean Mór across the ditch, dates to earlier medieval times.

Finally, and most importantly, there is the evidence provided by five pieces of roof slates recovered from trench 18, three of type A, one of type B and one of type C (see Chapter C2 in the Catalogue for an explanation of slate types). Two of these were unstratified and a third came from silting [18035]. A fourth (SF 18078) was recovered from collapsed gatehouse debris [18015]. The fifth (SF 18171) was found in the turf wall [18007] of the gatehouse. These are not considered to be evidence for how the gatehouse was roofed. It would be remarkable if the destruction or demolition of such a roof would have left so few pieces of slate. Some medieval buildings on Eilean Mór, including the great hall and the chapel, were covered with slates. After the great hall was dismantled, apparently about 1500, it seems that some of its roof slates were recycled, especially for drain covers in building 12.5. We suppose that the slates listed here are only likely to have become available post-1500. Our excavations elsewhere on Eilean Mór also demonstrated that pieces of roof slate became fairly widely scattered post-1500 and the presence of a piece in the walling of the gatehouse may indicate that the turf for building it was dug up on the island.

We are, therefore, of the view that the gatehouse was built some time in the 16th century. The short length of bank and palisade excavated in trench 3 post-dated the destruction of the gatehouse, perhaps later in the 16th century.

Interpretation (Illus 8.20)

The turf platform and walls of the gatehouse were piled straight on to ground at the edge of the island proper in the earlier 16th century, although there must by that time have been a considerable area of marsh between it and the head of the loch, albeit not so large as the tail so much in evidence today. When constructed, the gatehouse may have been the main entrance to Eilean Mór,

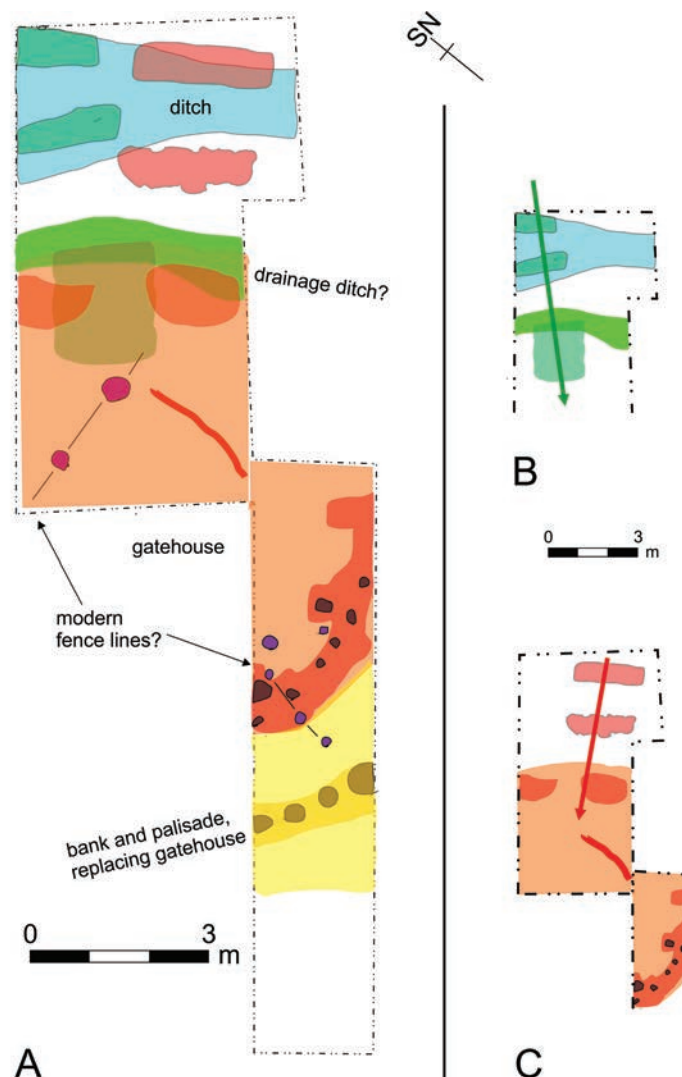


Illustration 8.20

Trenches 3 and 18: (A) composite interpretative plan; (B) earlier medieval access to Eilean Mór from a causeway, across a ditch; (C) post-medieval gatehouse accessed from the alluvial tail by a bridge

approached by a timber bridge, and possibly a walkway through the Finlaggan Marsh, replacing access by boat. It was part of a larger scheme of timberwork defences, of which more later.

Thick turf walls gave the gatehouse a considerable degree of solidity, but it would have appeared externally as a circular or polygonal wooden structure. A number of rivets or clench bolts found in the excavations may indicate how it was finished. These rivets were essentially for fastening together thin planks of wood, for example on the hull of a clinker-built boat. A similar exterior skin of overlapping weather boards on the gatehouse would have been a sensible way of preventing slippage or erosion from the turf walls.

No clues were provided as to the height of the gatehouse, but the solidity of the timberwork, with a ring of uprights braced by large timbers behind, is surely an indication that it rose to some height, perhaps in the form of a more open fighting-deck or battlements.

The rivets are broken apart and there are traces of burning in the form of pieces of charcoal and burnt clay from debris associated with the demise of the gatehouse, including contexts 18015, 18017 and 18006. Although other flecks of charcoal noted in several

contexts excavated in trench 18 may be wind-borne or washed in from elsewhere, or indeed related to domestic activities, the possibility that they resulted from the deliberate destruction and demolition of the gatehouse cannot lightly be dismissed.

More tentatively, a question might be posed as to whether the demise of the gatehouse involved military action. This could be suggested by the presence of two pieces of lead shot (SF 18170, 18079), one unstratified, the other from subsoil, plus an arrowhead (SF 18061) probably of military type from destruction deposits.

The gatehouse was already demolished when the bank was erected on its back edge to provide support for a palisade. Possibly this palisade was merely bridging the gap in the island's defences caused by the removal of the gatehouse. No ironwork was recovered, in an admittedly limited area of excavation, in convincing association with the palisade slot and post-holes. The diameters and spacing of its uprights, however, would have been ideal for interweaving wands of hazel or oak. Such a wattle fence would have been very sturdy, and a considerable defensive barrier rising from a bank around the water's edge with a step inside for its defenders to stand on.

Earlier in date than both the gatehouse and the bank and palisade was the stone causeway connecting Eilean Mór with the loch shore. From the edge of the island it continued as a cobbled path, bridging a ditch which may have been as much about water management and limiting encroachment by the Finlaggan Marsh as defence against hostile humans. Causeway and ditch may be of earlier medieval date, as also the gully or trench [1850], identified as for drainage rather than anything to do with defence. The causeway and ditch were most likely to have been long out of use by the time the gatehouse and its wooden access bridge were erected.

The traces of earlier activity, including the sherds of white gritty pottery and the plough marks under the gatehouse, are not much of a basis for reconstructing how this part of the island was used in medieval times. The agricultural activity represented by the lazy beds inside the line of the palisade appears to be of more recent date than, or to have carried on after, the erection of the palisade.

The lazy beds and trench 19 (Illus 6.6, 6.10, 8.21)

Geophysical surveys

In 1992 two geophysical surveys, using a metal detector and a fluxgate gradiometer, were carried out in the area of lazy beds on Eilean Mór to assess whether these might overlie the remains of earlier structures (Illus 8.22). For the metal detector – in the hands of an experienced operator, Roger McWee – an area about 900 sq m was laid out and systematically swept. It was reasoned that any significant clusters of iron readings might be a clue to the presence of ruined houses or other structures. 'Hot spots' were marked with canes and plotted in with EDM. An attempt was made to distinguish signals made by different metals,

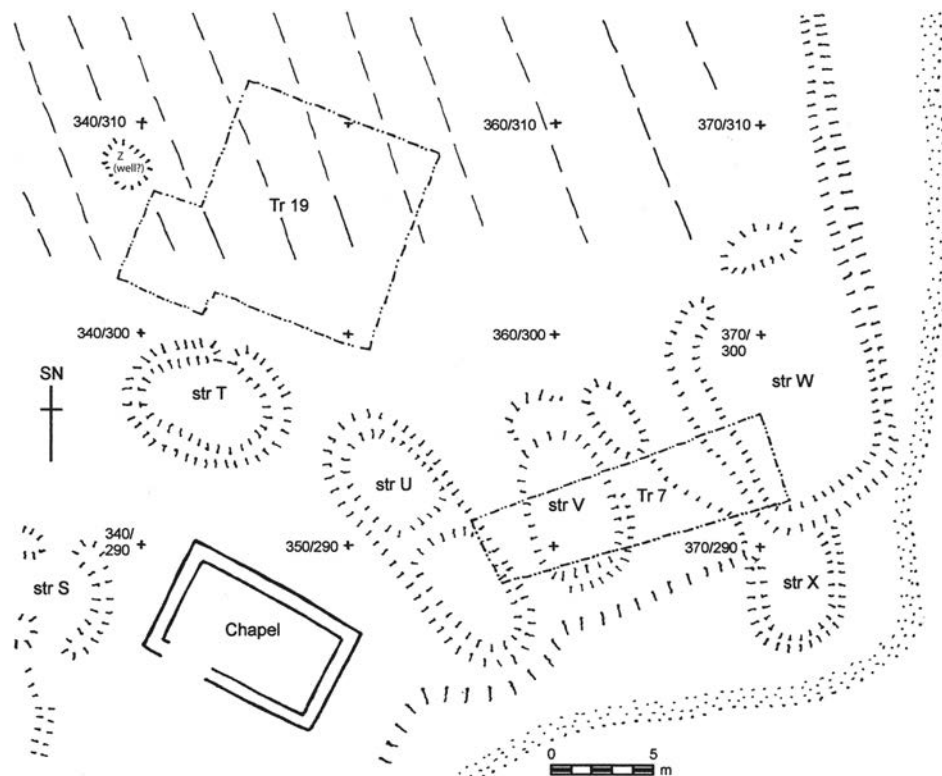


Illustration 8.21
Location map for trenches 19 and 7

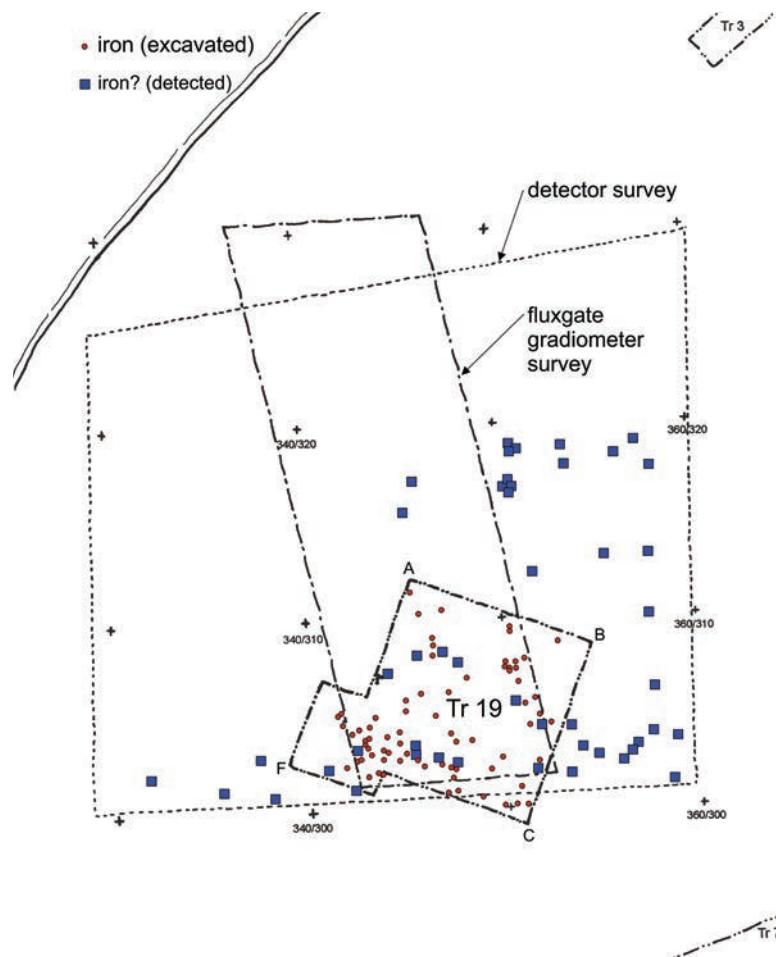


Illustration 8.22
Location of geophysical surveys, using a metal detector and a fluxgate gradiometer, carried out in the area of lazy beds on Eilean Mór

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

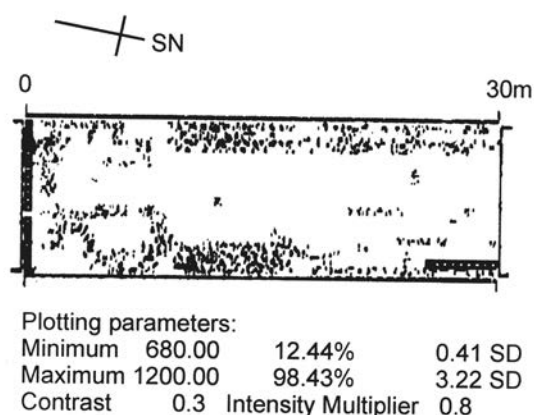


Illustration 8.23

Plot of the readings from the fluxgate gradiometer survey on Eilean Mór

resulting in 3 possible copper alloy and 47 iron readings. They were grouped along the southern edge of the area and in the south-east quadrant below buildings T, U and V on the higher ground. No attempt was made to dig and check any of the signals.

For the fluxgate gradiometer survey, a strip 10 by 30m was laid out within the area of the metal detector survey (Illus 8.23). The readings from this seemed to reflect the linearity of the lazy beds. There was also a strong impression of what appeared to be a two-roomed, sub-rectangular or oval house, coinciding with a concentration of 12 or so iron readings.

Trench 19 (Illus 8.24–27, Table 8.4)

Trench 19 was excavated in 1994 and was deliberately placed to examine the supposed house predicted by our interpretation of the geophysical data. Excavation, however, was to demonstrate that this picture was misleading. It became evident that the metal detector only recorded a few items near the ground surface, and with the benefit of hindsight the supposed structure appeared to a large extent to reflect concentrations of stones in the underlying natural deposits, especially 19013 and 19015.

The natural deposits were mostly a compacted clay soil, oxidised red, containing several large stones [19018]. It was largely made up of weathered quartzite, giving a sandy, gritty texture. In the north-west corner of the trench it was grey [19015] as a result of waterlogging. A band of small stones [19013] in a matrix of clay silt, overlying sand [19068, 19040], stretched along the base of the chapel, representing an early shoreline at a height of about 53.90 OD (Illus 8.30).

As initially laid out, the trench was 10 by 10m, here described as if it had the same orientation as the site grid. The whole of it was excavated down to natural deposits. At a later stage a further area of about 12m² was opened up at its south-west corner, but only the topmost deposits in it were examined (Illus 8.25). Apart from the lazy beds, some 10 structures were defined, most on the basis of selecting patterns of post-holes.

Lazy beds (Illus 8.26, 8.27)

No precise dating material was collected for the construction and cultivation of the lazy beds, but their form was obvious, with evidence for the use of turfs and little sign of post-use deformation.



Illustration 8.24

Trench 19, general view looking northwards of excavation in progress, after removal of lazy beds



Illustration 8.25

Trench 19, the extension with the post-holes of structure 19.9 partially excavated in the soil of the lazy beds. At the bottom right, excavation has exposed an earlier surface. Note the piece of roof slate with a peg-hole

A total of five beds were partially excavated [19141, 19112, 19006, 19007, 19140]. They were about 3m wide, rising to a height of about 0.3m (excluding turf covering). They were separated by furrows, 0.5 to 0.75m wide. The ends of all but 19140 were located in the trench, just where the ground started to rise appreciably towards the chapel.

Underlying the lazy beds was a gravelly horizon [19003, 19136, 19137], the result of sorting by earthworms. From 19136 and 19137, in the south-western extension of the trench (Illus 8.25), were recovered several fragments of roof slate, probably from the ruin of the chapel.

Structure 19.1

In the south and south-west of the trench and the extension was a group of at least six post-holes arranged in a straight line stretching from north-west to south-east (Illus 8.26, 8.35). It was thought likely that all were of relatively recent date, perhaps contemporary

Context	Description	Interpretation
19003	Sandy loam, gravel	Subsoil under lazy beds
19004	Stones	Wall of str 19.2
19005	Stones	Wall of str 19.2
19006	Clay silt	Lazy bed
19007	Silty clay	Lazy bed
19008	Silty loam	Subsoil
19009	Clay silt	Floor deposit, str 19.2
19010	Stones	Tumble
19012	Silty clay, sand, gravel	Occupation deposit, str 19.10
19013	Boulders in clay silt	Early shore
19014	Clayey silt, charcoal flecks	Occupation deposit, str 19.10
19015	Silty clay, stones	Natural leached horizon
19017	Silt, charcoal flecks	Hearth, str 19.7
19018	Silty clay, stones	Natural
19020	Silty clay, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19022, str 19.7
19022	Cut	Pit, str 19.7
19023	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.4
19024	Clay silt, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19023, str 19.4
19025	Cut	Hearth, str 19.6
19026	Silty clay, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19025, str 19.6
19027	Stones	Fill of 19025, str 19.6
19028	Silty sand, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19029, str 19.2
19030	Cut, lined with stones	Post-hole, str 19.4
19031	Sandy silt, stones	Fill of 19030, str 19.4
19032	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3
19033	Sandy silt, stones	Fill of 19032, str 19.3
19034	Cut	Post-hole
19035	Silty sand	Fill of 19034
19036	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19038	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.8
19039	Silty clay, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19038, str 19.8
19040	Silty sand, stones	Natural
19044	Cut	Hearth, str 19.10
19045	Silty clay	Fill of 19044, str 19.10
19047	Silty clay, stones	Natural
19048	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3
19050	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.5
19051	Silty clay, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19050, str 19.5
19054	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.8
19055	Clay silt, charcoal	Fill of 19054, str 19.8
19056	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3
19057	Silty sand, gravel	Fill of 19056, str 19.3
19058	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.9
19060	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3, 19.8
19061	Clay silt	Fill of 19060, str 19.8
19063	Clay, stones, charcoal	Fill of 19048, str 19.3
19064	Silty clay, stones	Fill of 19025, str 19.6
19065	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3
19066	Silty clay, gravel	Natural
19067	Clay, oxidised red	Natural

Context	Description	Interpretation
19068	Sand	Early shore
19069	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3
19070	Clay	Fill of 19065, str 19.3
19071	Clay loam, stones	Fill of 19060, str 19.8
19072	Silty clay, stones	Fill of 19060, str 19.3
19073	Sandy silt, stones	Fill of 19065, str 19.3
19074	Silty clay	Fill of 19065, str 19.3
19075	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.4
19076	Silty sand, stones	Fill of 19075, str 19.4
19077	Cut	Post-hole
19079	Sandy silt	Fill of post-hole, str 19.4
19082	Silty sand, charcoal flecks	Fill of 19108, str 19.1
19085	Silty sand, charcoal	Fill of 19100, str 19.4
19091	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19093	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19095	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19097	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19100	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.4
19101	Cut	Post-hole
19102	Silty sand	Fill of 19107, str 19.8
19103	Silty sand	Fill of 19106, str 19.5
19104	Silty sand	Fill of 19105, str 19.3, 19.5
19105	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.3, 19.5
19106	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.5
19107	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.8
19108	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19109	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19112	Silty clay	Lazy bed
19122	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.9
19124	Cut	Post-hole
19125	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19126	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.9
19127	Cut	Post-hole
19128	Cut	Post-hole
19129	Cut	Post-hole
19130	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.9
19131	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.9
19132	Cut	Post-hole
19133	Cut	Post-hole
19134	Cut	Pit
19136	Gravel, coarse silty sand	Subsoil under lazy beds
19137	Gravel	Subsoil
19138	Sandy silt	Fill of 19139
19139	Cut	Post-hole
19140	Clay silt	Lazy bed
19141	Clay silt	Lazy bed
19143	Cut	Post-hole, str 19.1
19144	Sandy silt	Fill of 19069, str 19.3
19145	Clay silt	Subsoil
19146	Silty loam	Subsoil

Table 8.4
Trench 19 contexts

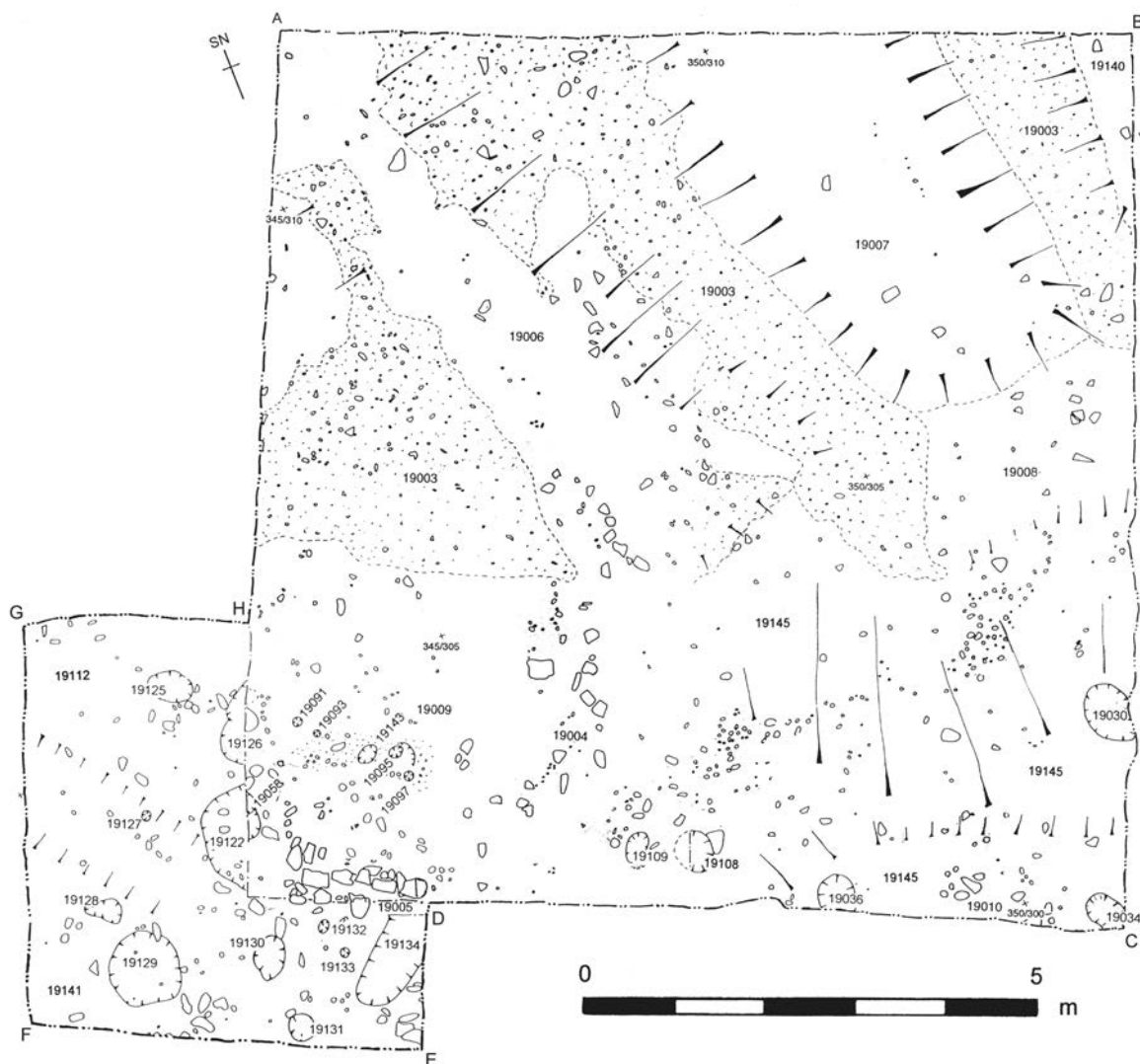


Illustration 8.26
Trench 19, lazy beds and other features

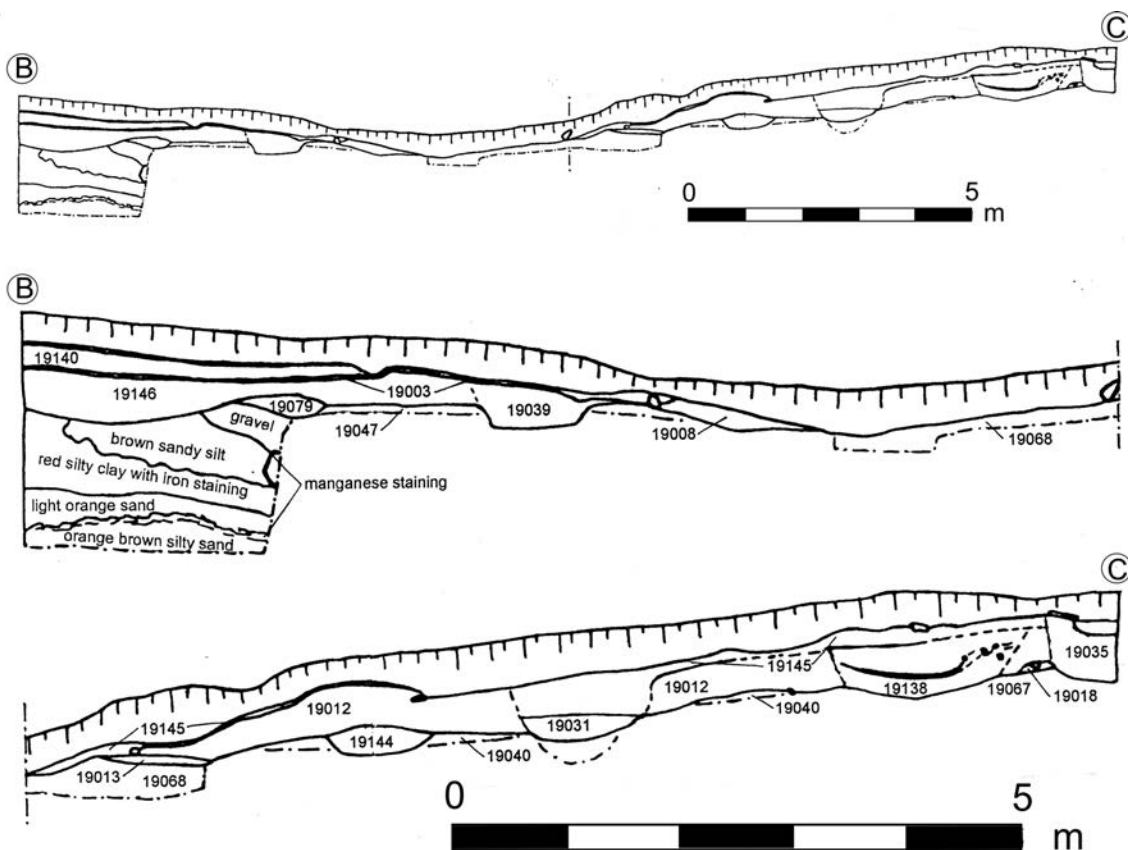


Illustration 8.27
Trench 19, west-facing section along east edge of trench

with some of the agricultural activity that led to the creation of the lazy beds. The five main post-holes on this alignment were 19125, 19095, 19109, 19108 and 19036. All had a diameter of about 40cm or less and there was no evidence in them for posts. They were spaced at about 2m intervals with 19108 possibly being a replacement for 19109. Post-hole 19125 was cut through a lazy bed, while 19036 was sealed by 19145, a thin layer of clay silt containing stones, pottery and nails, possibly debris spilling downslope from buildings T and U. Structure 19.1 can tentatively be identified as the remains of a fence.

Structures 19.2, 19.9, 19.10 (Illus 8.28, 8.29, 8.35)

Also in the south-west corner of the original trench, the remains of two lines or spreads of stones [19004, 19005] were identified, perhaps representing the vestigial traces of internal faces of turf walls. They enclosed two sides of an area of clay silt deposits [19009] interpreted as an associated floor deposit. These together have been labelled as structure 19.2. All had been much disturbed by subsequent agricultural activity. From 19009 came a quantity of fragments of iron, mostly apparently nails rather than rivets, and also several sherds of pottery. These included 163 pieces of hand-made pot and one sherd of Scottish redware (SF 19128). A post-medieval (16th-century) date for 19.2 seems likely since 19005 incorporated a piece of white sandstone roof ridge (SF 19047) thought to have come from one of the later medieval slate-roofed buildings which would have been dismantled in the 1490s or later. Another piece (SF 19040) was found in the topsoil at the north end of the trench.

A hearth [19028], consisting of a circular patch of silt with ash, charcoal and burnt bone, about 0.6m in diameter, in a shallow scoop in the natural, was located beyond these floor deposits but may, nevertheless, have been associated with them

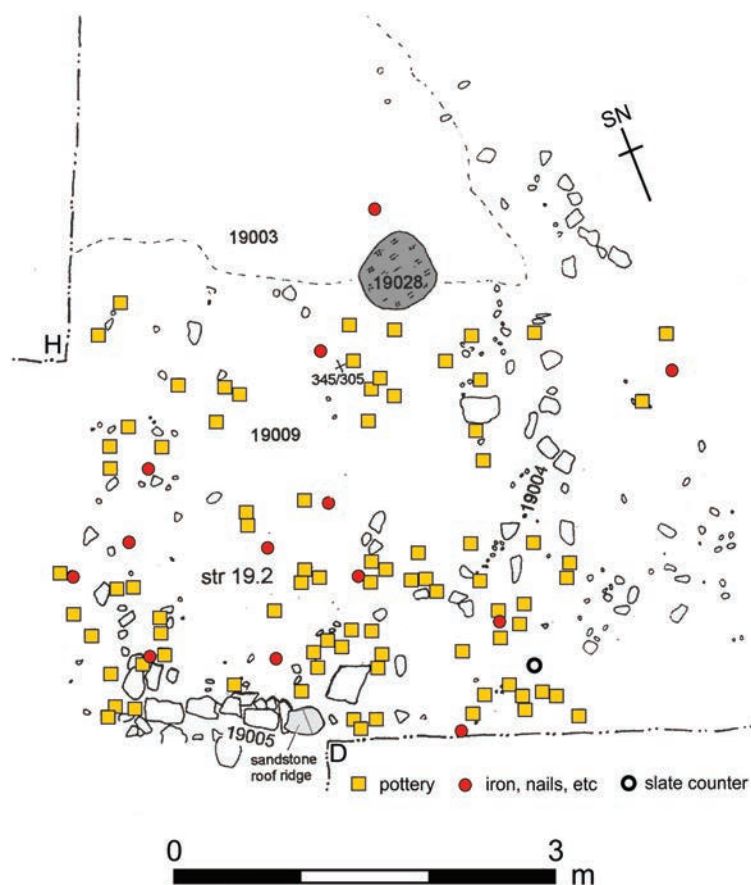


Illustration 8.28
Trench 19, structure 19.2

before the disturbance caused by the digging of the lazy beds. This hearth was sealed by gravelly spread 19003, a subsoil deposit associated with the lazy beds, but the context from which its scoop was dug was lost. The evidence of features and finds together can be used, tentatively, to identify the vestigial remains of a barrel-shaped house with a central fireplace, with its long axis oriented approximately (site) south-west to north-east.

To the south-west of structure 19.2, in the extension to the trench which was not fully excavated, were several post-holes sealed by the topsoil, including four which may have belonged together, 19131, 19130, 19122 and 19126 (Illus 8.26). They formed an arc just to the west of the expected position of the west wall of 19.2, and extended southwards from it. They were labelled 19.9 and may be of more recent date than structure 19.2.

Sealed by the floor of 19.2 was an earlier deposit of silty clay [19012], mixed with sand and gravel, extending the full width of the trench as originally dug but eaten away to the north by the lazy beds. The artefacts associated with it included fragments of nails and two sherds of wheel-made pottery – one of redware (SF 19354) and the other of oxidised gritty (SF 19383). Dug in it was a shallow circular scoop [19044, 19045] about 0.4m in diameter surrounded by a crude setting of stones and reused roof slates, forming a hearth. Deposit 19012 also contained patches of darker brown, interpreted as decomposed turf, and there was more of this turfy material in 19014, a deposit of clayey silt with flecks of charcoal. It lay adjacent and to the north of 19012 and was stratigraphically earlier. Both 19012 and 19014, together with the hearth 19044, are reckoned to be the tenuous traces of at least one further house, structure 19.10. The pieces of turf perhaps represented the tumbled remains of walling. It may also be of post-medieval date, the roof slates only becoming available for recycling from the 1490s.

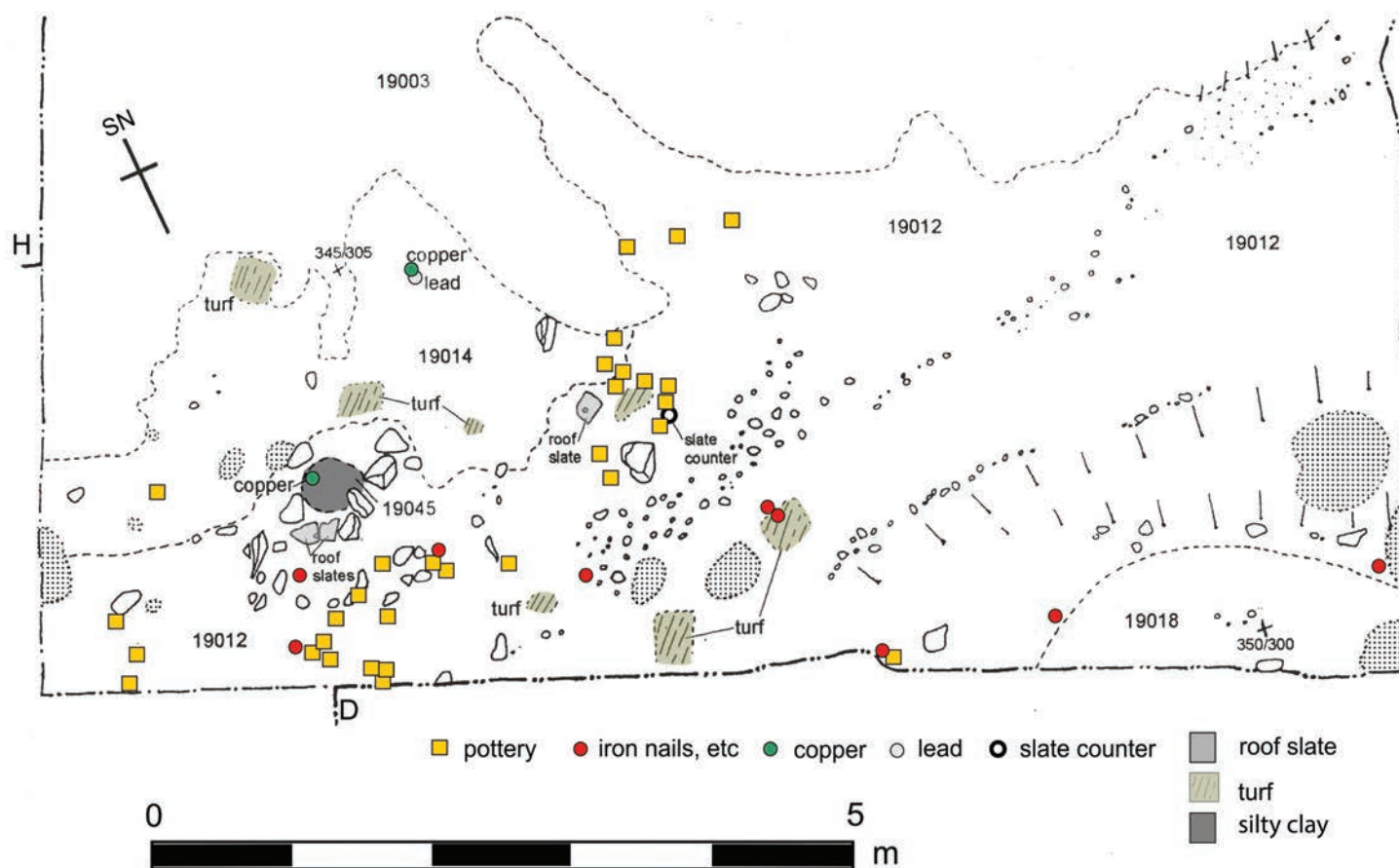


Illustration 8.29
Trench 19, tenuous traces of a house (?), structure 19.10

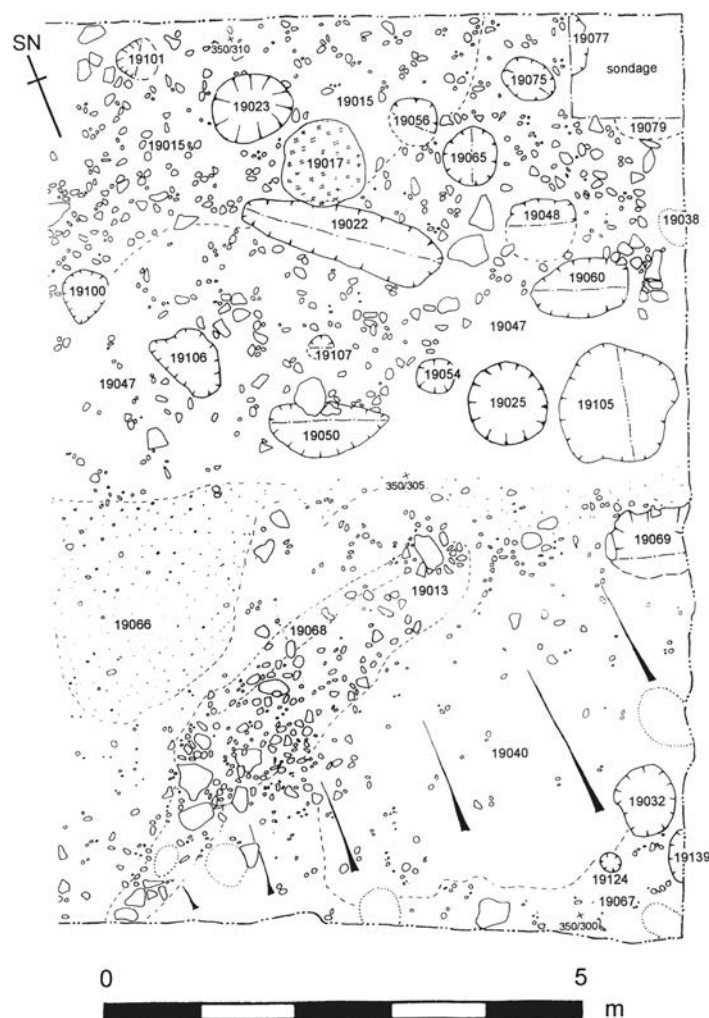


Illustration 8.30

Trench 19, plan of pits and other features under the lazy beds



Illustration 8.31

Trench 19, pits and other features under the lazy beds, looking south. Pit 19022 (structure 19.7) is located centrally between the drawing frame and the blackboard

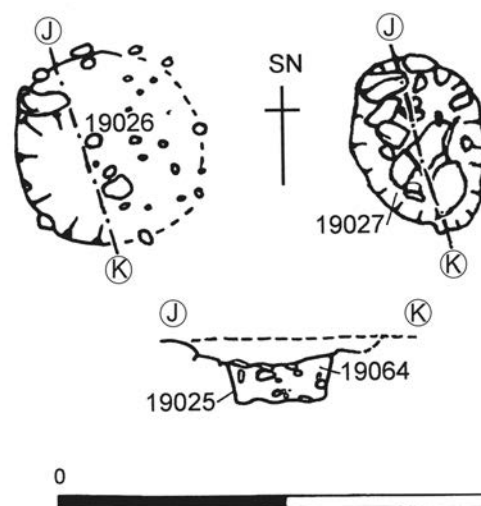


Illustration 8.32

Trench 19, plans and section of structure 19.6

Structures 19.3–8 (Illus 8.30, 8.31, 8.34, 8.35)

Under the lazy beds and cut into the natural in the main area of the trench were found several truncated pits with no direct stratigraphic relationships to each other.

Structure 19.6 (Illus 8.32, 8.33) consisted solely of a circular, flat-bottomed pit [19025] 0.8m in diameter and 0.2m deep. It was mostly filled with a deposit [19064] of silty clay and stones, over the surface of which was a dished arrangement of flat stones [19027] containing a deposit [19026] of more silty clay, with charcoal and sherds of a Bronze Age food vessel type pot (SF 19524–26). This suggested that structure 19.6 should be interpreted as the remains of a hearth, but there appeared to be no obvious relationships with any of the other structures in trench 19.

Structure 19.7 was represented by a contiguous hearth and pit (Illus 8.30, 8.34, 8.35). When first discovered it was expected that the pit [19022], oval in shape, about 2.2 by 0.6m and 0.3m deep, aligned east–west, would turn out to be a grave, but no traces of a body were detected in it, and on-site phosphate tests provided no supporting evidence for one. The evidence for this can be found on



Illustration 8.33

Trench 19, structure 19.6

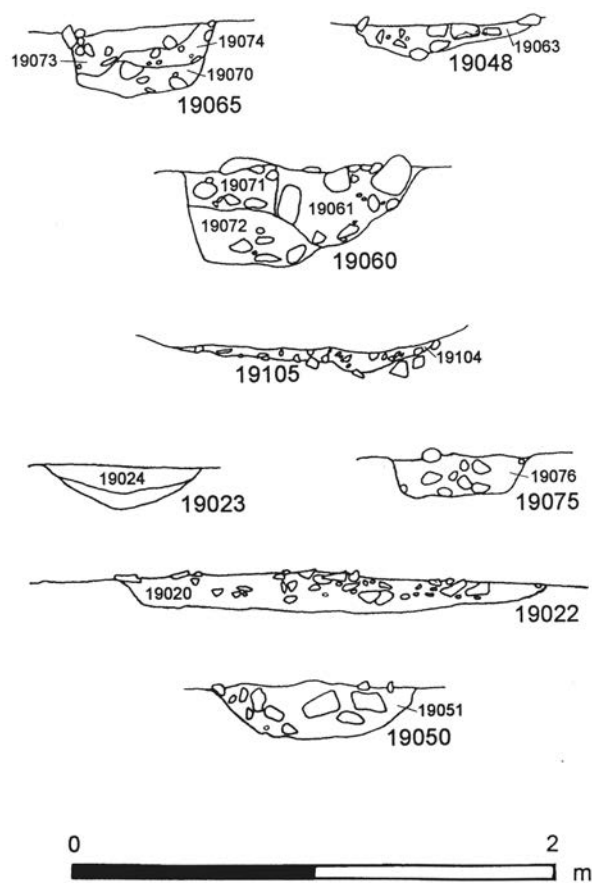


Illustration 8.34
Trench 19, sections of pits and other features

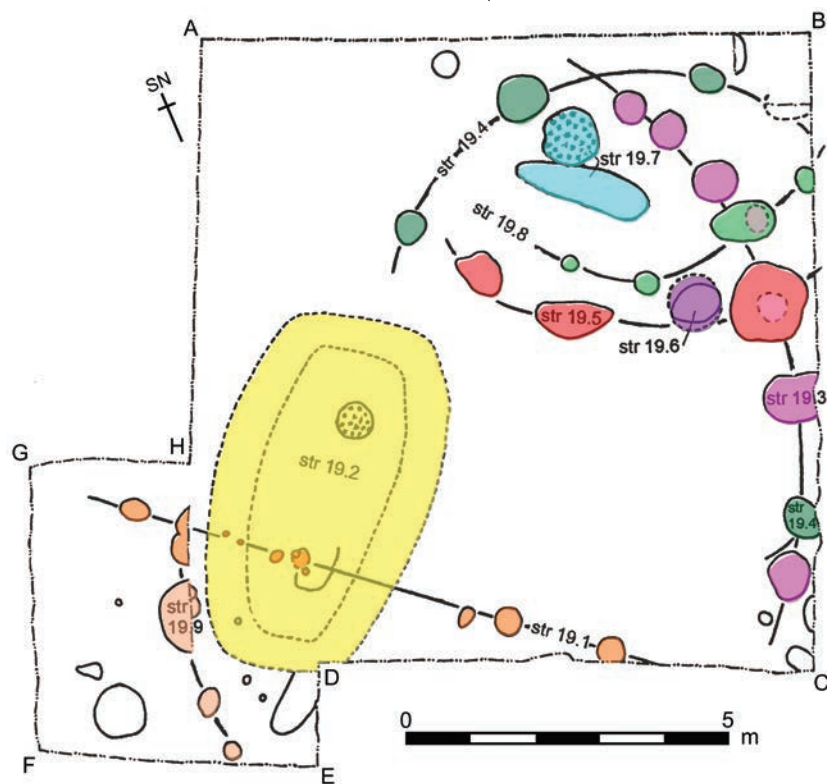


Illustration 8.35
Trench 19, interpretation of main features

pages 16–17 of the Environmental Notebook, now in the site archive. Its fill [19020] of silty clay and stones included charcoal, and from its bottom came an iron nail (SF 19392). An alternative explanation for it is that it held a cooking trough, heated with red-hot stones from the neighbouring hearth [19017], represented by a circular patch, 0.9m in diameter, of ash and charcoal. As with the hearth 19.6 it is not clear that this pit and hearth can be associated with any of the groups of post-holes in the trench.

The rest of the pits in this area of the trench were evidently post-holes, although no post-pipes or packing stones were detected in their fills (Illus 8.30, 8.34). The interpretative plan (Illus 8.35) demonstrates how most of them can be grouped into arcs, and four, 19.3–5 and 19.8, are indicated as possible structures. Table 8.5 gives the main features of each post-hole assigned to one or other of these structures.

On the assumption that these groupings into four structures are valid, the order in which three were built and used can be deduced since a post-hole of 19.3 was cut into a post-hole of 19.5, and a post-hole of 19.8 was cut into one of 19.3. That only excluded 19.4 from this chronological sequence and so it was not possible to place it reliably. The presence of an iron nail in the fill of one of its post-holes was at least an indication that it was later than 19.3, since the latter had two of its holes sealed by medieval

Structure	Post-hole		Size in cm	Fills	Sealed by	Finds
19.3	19056		56×44×15	19057	Lazy beds	
	19065	Recut	53×53×17	19073	Lazy beds	Prehistoric pot
	19048		70×40×13	19063	Lazy beds	
	19060		90×75×40	19071/72	Str 19.8	
	19105	Recut	48×48×9	19104	Topsoil	
19.4	19069		48×?×11	19144	Medieval	
	19032		60×50×13	19033	Medieval	
	19100		60×50×14	19085	Lazy beds	
	19023		75×65×27	19024	Lazy beds	Nail
19.5	19075		65×40×25	19076	Lazy beds	
	19079				Lazy beds	
	19030		60×50×20	19031	Topsoil	Prehistoric pot
	19106		80×60×12	19103	Lazy beds	
19.8	19050		95×60×25	19051	Lazy beds	
	19105		150×150×20	19104	Str 19.3	
19.8	19107		18×18×8	19102	Lazy beds	
	19054		54×35×13	19055	Lazy beds	
	19060	Recut	56×56×31	19061	Lazy beds	
	19038		45×35×8	19039	Lazy beds	

Table 8.5
Trench 19 post-holes

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

deposits and a third containing prehistoric pottery. We may therefore, tentatively, place 19.4 later than 19.3 and 19.5, and possibly 19.8. On the further assumption that these arcs of post-holes formed complete circles, it was possible to calculate the diameters of the circles so formed. The main features of each structure can thus be listed as follows:

- Structure 19.4: diameter \approx 8m, possibly more recent than structure 19.8
- Structure 19.8: diameter \approx 6.4
- Structure 19.3: diameter \approx 14.4m, earlier than structure 19.8, probably prehistoric
- Structure 19.5: diameter \approx 8m, earlier than structure 19.3.

Interpretation

No precise date can be offered for the creation of the lazy beds. They clearly post-dated structure 19.2, which included in its walling sandstone roof ridge from a building with a slate roof. The most likely source for it was the chapel, or else the great hall. The evidence presented later in this volume suggests that the chapel remained in use in the 16th century, but the great hall was dismantled in the 1490s. This indicated that building 19.2 was no earlier in date than the very end of the 15th century and possibly dated to the 16th century, while the lazy beds could belong to any time after that. No further information was gathered from any of the other trenches to tie their date down any closer, and, of course, the ground might have been cultivated long after the island was abandoned as a residence. It is not implausible that these lazy beds were in use as late as the 19th century.

The evidence for reconstructing the group of features labelled 19.2 as a barrel-shaped house is admittedly tenuous, but not unreasonable, since it is a type recorded elsewhere at Finlaggan. The central hearth and quantities of sherds of pottery imply a domestic use. Structures 19.9 and 19.10 may either have represented the tenuous remains of other 16th-century houses or else have been part of the same building as 19.2, with low stone-faced turf walls incorporating timber uprights. Deposit 19009 could have been the remains of a replacement to an earlier floor represented by 19012.

There was no evidence to tie down the dates of structures 19.4 and 19.8. Each of these two groups of post-holes can be interpreted as the foundations for a ring of posts, either for supporting the roof of a larger roundhouse, or else providing the framework of a post and wattle exterior wall. The construction of circular shieling huts in the Highlands and Islands well into post-medieval times provides a clue that this tradition of circular building might not be totally unexpected in other contexts long after the prehistoric period, and we would tentatively suggest that they might date to some time in the centuries after the birth of Christ. Construction and occupation in Viking or early historic times equally cannot be discounted.

Structures 19.3 and 19.5 can be identified as the tenuous remains of early, probably prehistoric, roundhouses, and the hearth, structure 19.6, was clearly also of prehistoric date. The palimpsest of prehistoric to post-medieval structures actually sampled in trench 19 may be taken as an indication of how the whole island was at times covered with buildings.

Structure 19.7 cannot be securely dated, but compare the interpretation given below for a pit and hearth of medieval date in structure V.2, trench 7.



Illustration 8.36
Trench 7, view from west in initial stages of excavation

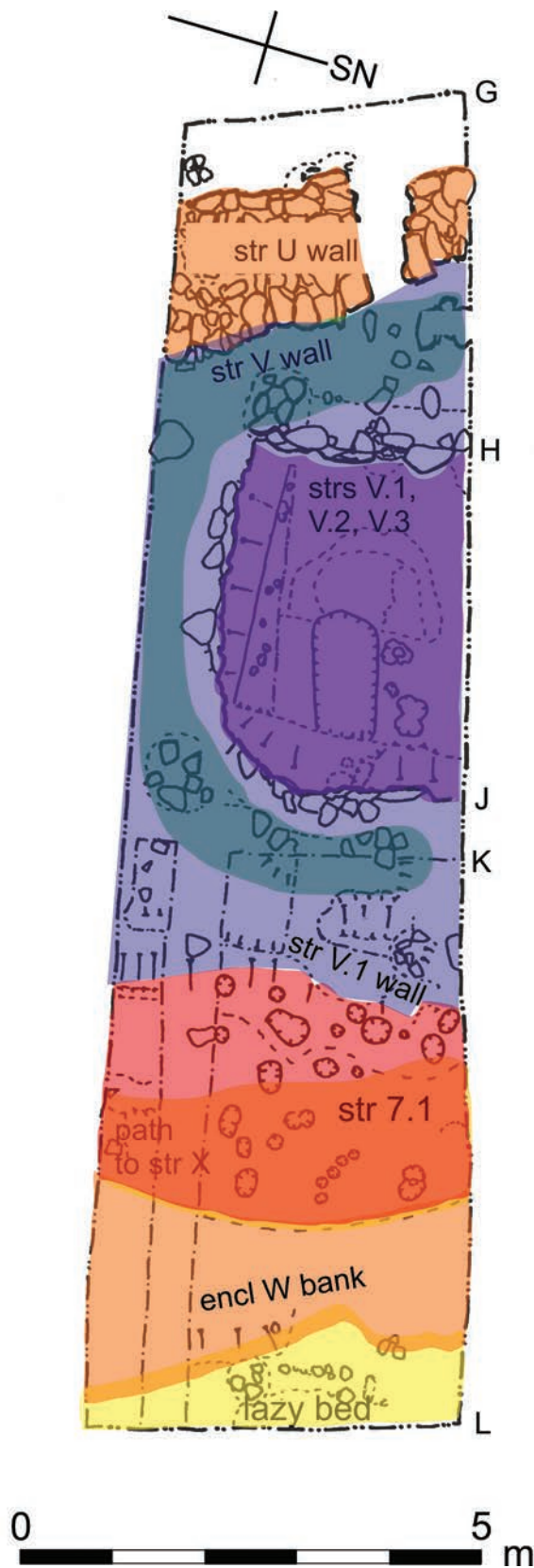


Illustration 8.37
Trench 7, interpretation of main features

Trench 7 (Illus 8.21, 8.36–38, Table 8.6)

Trench 7 was excavated in 1992. It was approximately 4 by 15m, with its long axis running east–west through building V. This structure appeared of particular interest as the most substantial building within the ‘enclosure’ (the area of lazy beds bounded by a bank), apart from the chapel (Illus 6.9). Indeed, it was thought it might be the base of a tower-house. The excavation was designed to test what it was and its date. It was also hoped to provide answers on its stratigraphical or functional relationships to the adjacent building U, the lazy beds, enclosure W and the supposed timberwork fortifications around the north-east end of the island.

Agricultural activity and enclosure W (Illus 8.39, 8.40, 8.46)

Beneath the turf and topsoil of the trench, sloping down gently from building V to enclosure W, much of the area was covered with a deposit of dark brown silty peat [7007], about 10cm in

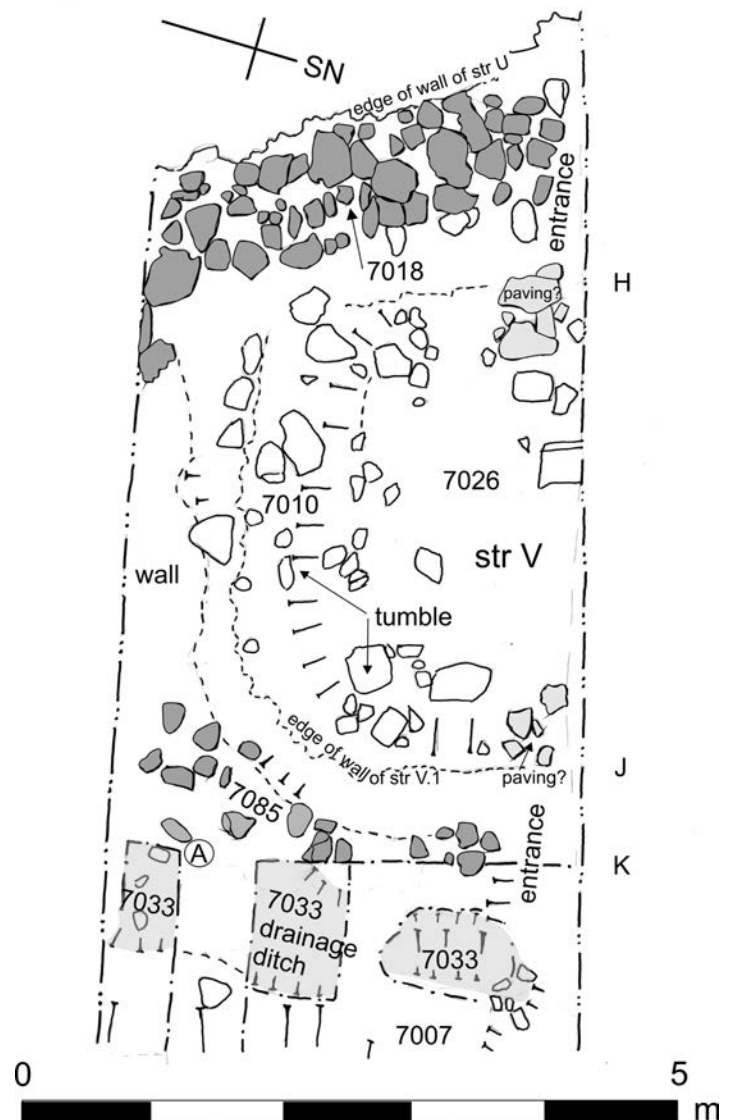


Illustration 8.38
Trench 7, plan of building V

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

Context	Description	Interpretation
7002	Stones, earth bonded	Revetment, str V.1
7003	Stones, earth bonded	Wall, str U
7004	Clayey silt, stones	Wall, str V.1
7005	Stones, earth bonded	Revetment, str V.1
7006	Clayey silt, stones	Wall, str V.1
7007	Peaty silt	Garden soil
7008	Stones, earth bonded	Revetment, str V.1
7009	Dark brown soil	Bank, str W
7010	Clayey silt, stones	Debris from str V walls
7011	Stones	Tumble
7014	Stones	Tumble
7015	Silty soil	Lazy bed, upper horizon
7016	Clay silt	Path to str X
7017	Gravel, clay silt	Garden soil
7018	Stones	Wall of str V
7019	Stones	Blocking in str U entrance
7020	Clay, charcoal flecks	Floor, str U
7022	Gravel, stones etc	Path to str X
7026	Humic soil	Build-up in ruin of str V
7027	Humic soil	Floor, str V.1
7028	Clay	Floor, str V.2
7029	Sandy silt	Debris from str V.1
7030	Sandy clay, ash etc	Floor, str 7.2
7031	Sand and stones	Natural
7033	Gravel	Fill of drainage ditch
7034	Silty sand	Wall of str V.1
7037	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7038	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7039	Peaty soil and silty sand	Laid turfs, wall of str 7.1
7041	Gravel, stones etc	Core of bank 7009
7042	Gritty clay silt	Debris from str V.1
7043	Sandy silt	Lazy bed, lower horizon
7044	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7045	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7046	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7047	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7048	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7049	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7050	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7051	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7052	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7054	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7057	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1

Context	Description	Interpretation
7060	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7062	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7064	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7066	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7067	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7069	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7071	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7073	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7074	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7077	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7078	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7080	Cut	Post-hole, str 7.1
7082	Cut	Stake-hole, str 7.1
7085	Stones	Wall of str V
7086	Cut	Pit, str V.2
7087	Stones	Tumble in str W
7088	Ashy silt	Fill of 7086
7089	Silty clay	Fill of 7090
7090	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7091	Organic silt	Fill of 7086
7093	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7094	Gravelly clay	Fill of 7086
7095	Clay silt	Fill of 7096
7096	Cut	Edge of str V.2
7097	Cut	Stake-hole, str V.1
7098	Silty gravel	Fill of 7099
7099	Cut	Wall or fence slot, str V.2
7100	Silty sand	Wall of str V.1
7101	Silty sand	Wall of str V.1
7106	Silt with clay and charcoal	Fill of 7107
7107	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7108	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7109	Silt with clay and charcoal	Fill of 7110
7110	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7111	Clay silt	Fill of 7110
7112	Clayey silt	Fill of 7113-15
7113	Cut	Stake-hole, str V.2
7114	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7115	Cut	Post-hole, str V.2
7116	Ash	Hearth, str V.2
7117	Sandy clay	Wall, str V.2
7118	Clay	Floor deposit, str V.2

Table 8.6
Trench 7 contexts



Illustration 8.39

Trench 7 from east with stony tumble in the foreground collected in the furrow between lazy beds, then the spread bank of enclosure W, and beyond that the post- and stake-holes of structure 7.1

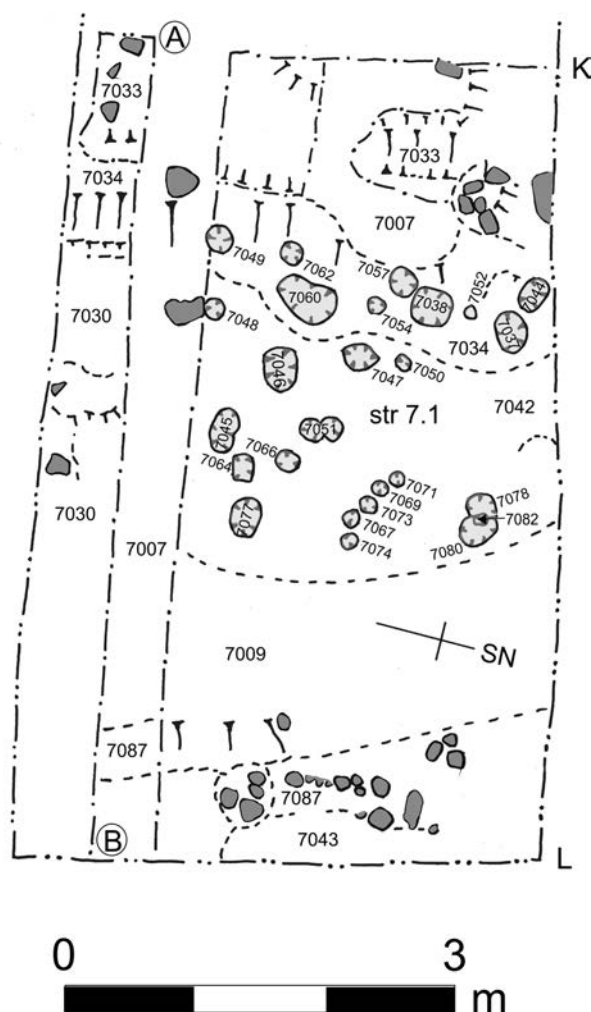


Illustration 8.40

Trench 7, plan of east end with structure 7.1 post- and stake-holes

depth, overlying a thin gravelly spread [7017]. The formation of 7017 is attributable to the action of earthworms within 7007. From these two contexts were recovered over 150 sherds of hand-made pottery, 2 sherds of reduced gritty and 1 of oxidised gritty ware, nails and rivets, stone counters or playing pieces and a brooch (C2) considered to be of 15th-century date. It is possible that 7007 and 7017 represent the spreading of midden material, or else soil grubbed up from deposits underneath in order to create a soil suitable for gardening. Evidence for the latter appears to be provided by the distribution of sherds of a vessel in a reduced gritty fabric, one of which (SF 7119) was recovered from 7007. Stratigraphically earlier is a sherd (SF 7158) recovered from the underlying earth core [7039] of the wall of house V.1, which can be dated to the 15th century.

From the RCAHMS plan of Eilean Mór and aerial photographs it was evident that the series of lazy beds examined in trench 19 extended into the area included in trench 7, particularly the small turf-banked enclosure (W) in the corner of the larger enclosure. The west bank of W [7009] was spread, flattened and incorporated in a lazy bed, appearing as a low, spreading mound of turfy material, at most 1.8m wide and only 0.25m in height, containing a core [7041] of more mixed occupation-derived material with small stones. A number of nails from topsoil, tumble and the path adjacent to structure W may have related to the construction of this bank (or house wall?). To the east our excavation clipped the edge of another lazy bed, sorted into two horizons, with a silty soil [7015] containing sherds of pottery etc overlying 7043, a more solid, dark brown, sandy silt – that is, an A and B horizon respectively. The furrow between 7009 and 7015 had collected some stone tumble [7087].

Immediately to the west of enclosure W the lazy bed which had deformed bank 7009 had also smothered a path, evident as a stony hollow [7016, 7022], created by a combination of slope-wash and trampling feet making their way to the shore and structure X.

Structure V and post-holes 7.1 (Illus 6.9, 8.21, 8.36, 8.37)

Before excavation, structure V appeared as an oval hollow partially bounded by low banks. It suggested a building about 11 by 8m overall, with its long axis approximately from south of south-east to north of north-west (but in the account that follows, for the sake of simplicity, described as if it were oriented north-south). Unlike many of the ruined structures on Eilean Mór, the banks did not appear to include a lot of stone. Trench 7 was positioned to take in the south half of the structure only.

Building V's surviving walling consisted of a low bank of earth and stone [7018, 7085] (Illus 8.38). The west segment was immediately adjacent to, and stratigraphically later than, the outer face of wall 7003 (structure U) with its blocked entrance. The north baulk of trench 7 passed through opposed entrances to building V, the west one with some crude paving. The interior space was hollowed or dished and was spread with earth [7010] which had washed from the encircling banks, and some tumble embedded in a layer of humic soil, up to 25cm thick, perhaps including collapsed roof material (turf) [7026]. There were no finds, and nothing to suggest human occupation.

Excavation on the east side of structure V also provided evidence of a ditch or gully, almost 1m wide and with a depth of

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about 33cm, filled with gravel [7033], marking the eavesdrip of building V. It was sealed by 7007. Beyond the ditch to the east, and also sealed by 7007 and 7017, were a number of truncated post- and stake-holes, none of which retained any signs of post-pipes (Illus 8.39, 8.40). There were few clues for phasing them or dividing them into groups. The closely set group of stake-holes, 7074, 7067, 7073, 7069 and 7071, might be explained as evidence for a wattle wall or fence. Post-holes 7077 and 7047 could be interpreted as the continuation of fence 19.1 identified in trench 19. Others might have belonged to a timberwork enclosure, running here below the higher ground occupied by the chapel and its burial ground, rather than round the perimeter of the island. For ease of reference they are grouped together as structure 7.1 although they may have varied considerably in date. From west to east they included:

7049	sub-rectangular
7062	circular, diameter 14cm, depth 10cm
7060	oval (recut?), 51 by 30cm, depth 13cm
7054	circular
7057	oval, 20 by 25cm, depth 26cm
7038	oval, 32 by 30cm, depth 12cm
7052	circular, diameter 20cm, depth 18cm
7044	sub-rectangular, 30 by 20cm, depth 14cm
7037	sub-circular, 30 by 22cm, depth 12cm
7048	circular, diameter 20cm, depth 20cm
7047	sub-rectangular, 30 by 20cm, depth 26cm
7046	sub-rectangular, 32 by 25cm, depth 20cm
7050	circular, diameter 17.5cm
7045	sub-rectangular, 30 by 20cm, depth 10cm
7051	circular (recut), 32 by 20cm, depth 12cm
7064	sub-rectangular, 26 by 18cm, depth 9cm
7066	circular, diameter 22cm, depth 12cm
7077	sub-circular, 30 by 20cm, depth 7cm
7071	circular, diameter 10cm, depth 7cm
7069	oval, 15 by 11cm, depth 10cm
7073	circular, 12cm, depth 12cm
7067	circular
7074	sub-circular, 19 by 15cm, depth 9cm
7078	circular, diameter 20cm, depth 13cm
7082	circular
7080	sub-circular, diameter 26cm, depth 12cm; recut of 7078

Table C5.4 in the Catalogue lists 66 nails, 17 rivets and a further 31 undifferentiated nails/rivets recovered from the overlying garden soil, lazy beds, etc, many of which may have originally been used in the structure of 7.1.

Structure U (Illus 8.41, 8.42)

The west end of the trench took in the east wall [7003] of the house labelled as U by RCAHMS. Structure U, not necessarily all of one build, appears to have been long and rectangular, about 15 by 5m overall, with rounded ends. There was a cross-wall creating two rooms but no obvious signs of doorways. The excavated wall was up to 1.5m wide and 0.5m high, built of field stones with earth bonding. An entrance, only about 0.66m wide, provided access to the south room. It had been carefully blocked with



Illustration 8.41

Trench 7, entrance through wall 7003 in the foreground, with beyond the floor of building V.2 within the walls of house V.1

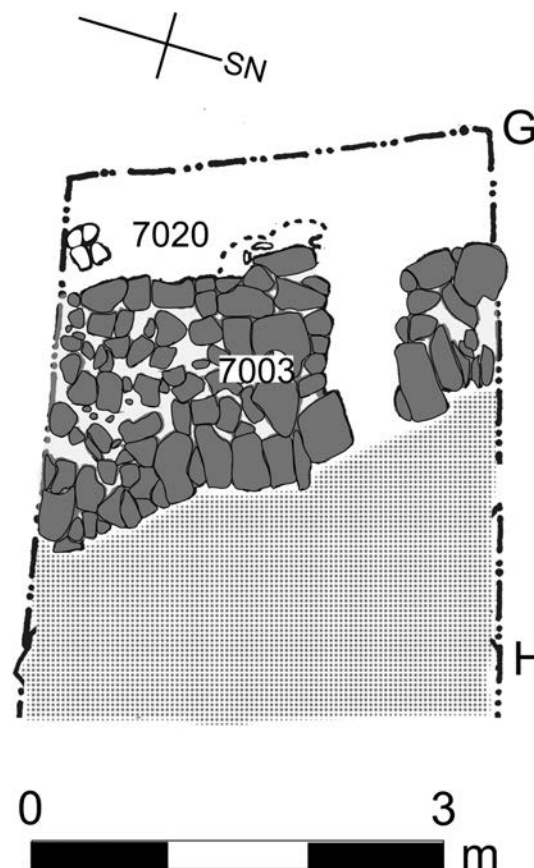


Illustration 8.42

Trench 7, plan of building U wall



Illustration 8.43
Trench 7, excavated remains of structures V.2 and V.3, bounded by the walls of house V.1

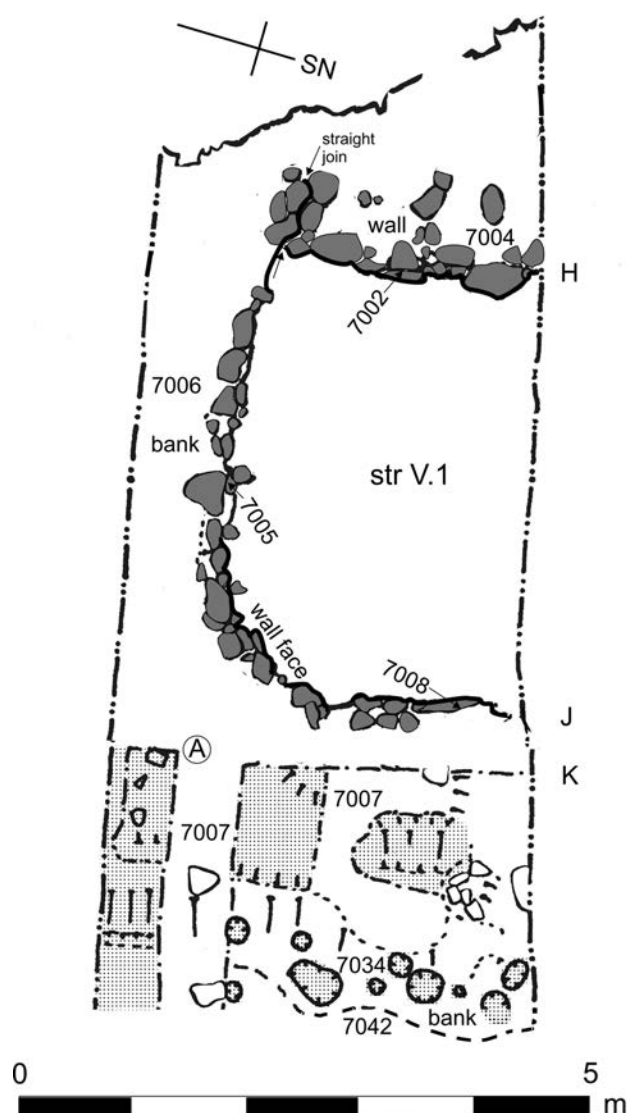


Illustration 8.44
Trench 7, plan of house V.1

stones [7019]. In the interior was a floor surface [7020] composed of clay with charcoal flecks. The site notebook recorded quantities of 'white/grey slate (roof slate)' (fragments of type A roof slate) in association with wall 7003, but with so little excavated and knowledge of the reuse of these slates elsewhere on Eilean Mór it would be rash to assume that these were evidence for how the building was roofed. No other finds were recovered to offer a guide to dating.

Structure V.1 (Illus 8.43, 8.44)

It was evident that structure V sat on top of an earlier building (V.1), not necessarily with a similar footprint, probably with more than one room. The main elements that were excavated were the interior face of a south wall [7005], adjacent stretches of interior wall faces to east [7008] and west [7002], and associated occupation deposits [7027]. Its remains had been levelled to create a platform for the erection of house V.

The walls of house V.1 were of sandy clay [7004, 7006, 7034], perhaps largely derived from turf, faced in the interior with dry-stone walling standing to a maximum height of about 0.7m, in two to three courses. The stones were mostly local erratics and water-washed boulders. Several stones inside V.1, mixed with slumped bank material, had obviously fallen from this facing, but the number and size of these did not indicate that the facing had ever stood much higher. Perhaps these walls of earth and stone served as a plinth for a wooden superstructure of clapboard or weatherboard construction. The exterior of these walls was partially located in a narrow sondage along the south edge of the trench. There was no trace of an outside stone facing or evidence of one having been robbed. The overall width of the wall was about 2m.

The walls defined an irregularly shaped room, 3.6m across with a real south-west corner but a continuous curved wall where a south-east corner might have been expected. It is possible that the west wall was an internal wall of a building V.1 which extended further west. It appears to have been erected against the stone facing of the south wall.

Inside building V.1, under slope-wash [7010] and humic soil [7026], was a floor deposit [7027] up to 15cm deep of humic soil mixed with material collapsed or slumped from the walls and roof. Table C5.4 lists 5 nails, 5 rivets and 11 undifferentiated pieces of nail and rivet from 7027, which, along with others recovered from garden soil 7007 and 7017, may have served a structural function in the upper walls.

Also from 7027 were retrieved 18 sherds of pottery, including 6 of handmade vessels and a rim sherd of oxidised gritty ware (P54). The other 11 were sherds of reduced gritty ware. The metalwork included a copper alloy ring brooch (C3) and a type VI groat of James III (N34), minted c 1485. It showed no obvious signs of wear. Flotation of a sample of 7027 led to the recovery of fragments of charcoal and some wheat (*Triticum* sp) and oats (*Avena* sp).

To the east of the wall of house V.1 [bank 7034, 7039] a layer of gritty clay silt [7042] overlay a deposit of sandy silt [7029]. Both were observed in section, and most of the 7.1 post- and stake-holes were cut into the surface of 7042, which had probably been truncated and degraded by later agricultural activity represented by 7007 and 7017. The relationships of 7042 and 7029 with other

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE LAZY BEDS

structures in trench 7 were not fully established. It is probable that they related to the dilapidation and destruction of building V.1.

Structures V.2 and V.3 (Illus 8.43, 8.45)

The removal of 7027 revealed that the stone wall facings of building V.1, to east and south, were bedded on a low bank [7117], possibly carved out of the natural rather than piled up using excavated material. It consisted of compacted, stony clay soil, oxidised red. The stones were mostly weathered quartzite, giving a sandy, gritty texture. Evidently 7117 represented the base for, or stubs of, an earlier structure, labelled V.2. If structure V.2 had clay walls they would probably not have been sturdy enough to support roof timbers. The solution would have been to support them on crucks. A post-hole to the east [7093], and another possible one to the west (unexcavated), may have been for supporting such timbers. Post-hole 7093 was D-shaped, its back edge to the wall, 22cm across. It narrowed to a pointed base with a depth of 30cm.

The floor of structure V.2 was a composite horizon of redeposited clay [7028]. Cut in it was a rectangular pit [7086], 1.45 by 0.75m, with a depth of 0.5m. Small slabs of decomposing schist alongside its north and south sides might have represented the remains of a stone lining. It was backfilled with a very ashy silt [7088] containing lenses of sandy clay, four nails, three rivets and a U-shaped staple, and also two sherds of pottery, one handmade containing organics and fire-blackened on its exterior, the other (SF 7323) oxidised gritty ware. Underneath it was a thin layer of gravelly clay [7094], and in the bottom of the pit a thin deposit of black organic silt [7091], from which came two nails, one still with some wood adhering to its shank.

Adjacent to the south edge of this pit was a thin patch of clay [7118] similar in character to 7117, and to the west was an area of burning [7116] or a hearth containing ash and charcoal. The association of the pit with a hearth suggested, as with structure 19.7, a type of cooking or other heating process in which the contents of a trough were kept on the boil with stones heated in a fire, although in neither case were any fire-cracked and reddened stones ('pot-boilers') recovered.

One post-hole [7090] to the south of pit 7086, a group of six to the north and a slot also may relate to structure V.2 or may be the truncated remnants of another structure dug away in the process of building structure V.1. Their main characteristics were as follows:

- 7090 circular, flat-bottomed, diameter 30cm, depth 14cm; fill [7089] of silty clay sealed by 7027
- 7107 circular, shallow scoop (truncated post-hole?), cut by 7108, diameter 27cm, depth 5cm; fill [7106] of silt with flecks of clay and charcoal sealed by 7027
- 7108 circular, shallow scoop (truncated post-hole?), diameter 40cm, depth 5cm; fill [7109] of silt with flecks of clay and charcoal sealed by 7027
- 7110 oval stake-hole narrowing to pointed bottom, diameter 11cm, depth 7cm; fill [7111] of silt with flecks of clay and charcoal sealed by 7027
- 7115 truncated, sub-rectangular post-hole with stone-packing, probably cut by 7114, 30 by 22cm, depth 6cm; fill [7112] of clayey silt sealed by 7027

- 7114 circular post-hole, cut by 7113, diameter 20cm, depth 8cm; fill [7112] of clayey silt sealed by 7027
- 7113 circular stake-hole with stone-packing, narrowing to pointed base, diameter 20cm, depth 8cm; fill [7112] of clayey silt sealed by 7027
- 7099 slot (for wattle fence?) with two possible stake-holes, cut across the clay bank [7117] beside the west wall of V.1, length 46cm, width 12–16cm and depth 14–17cm; fill [7098] of silty gravel sealed by 7027.

Structure V.3 was represented by a straight cut [7096], filled with clay silt [7095] and sealed by 7117. It ran approximately east to west, and had a length of at least 2.72m and a depth of up to 0.2m. At its east end another cut extending northwards was found to form a right angle, but the excavation of this was only pursued for a distance of a few centimetres. It appeared likely, however, that we had here the internal corner of an earlier house. Within the cut were a series of stake-holes, about 8–10cm in diameter, probably representing a wattle wall.

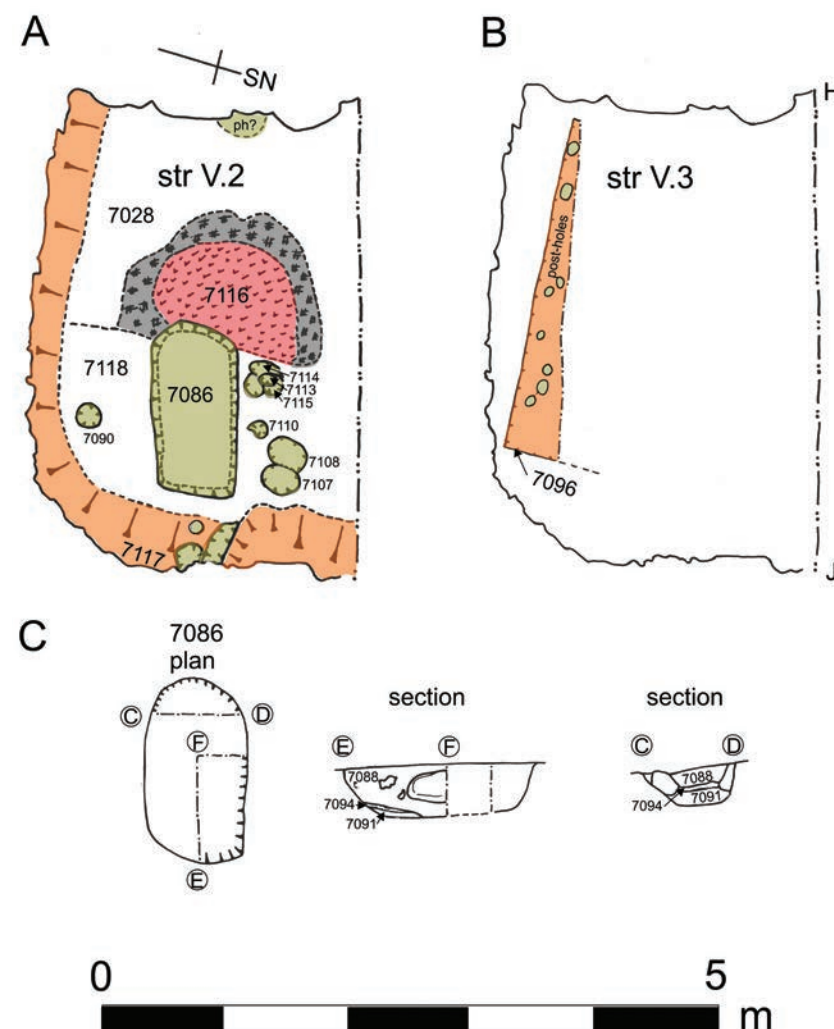


Illustration 8.45

Trench 7: (A) plan of structure V.2; (B) plan of structure V.3; (C) plan and sections of pit 7086 in structure V.2

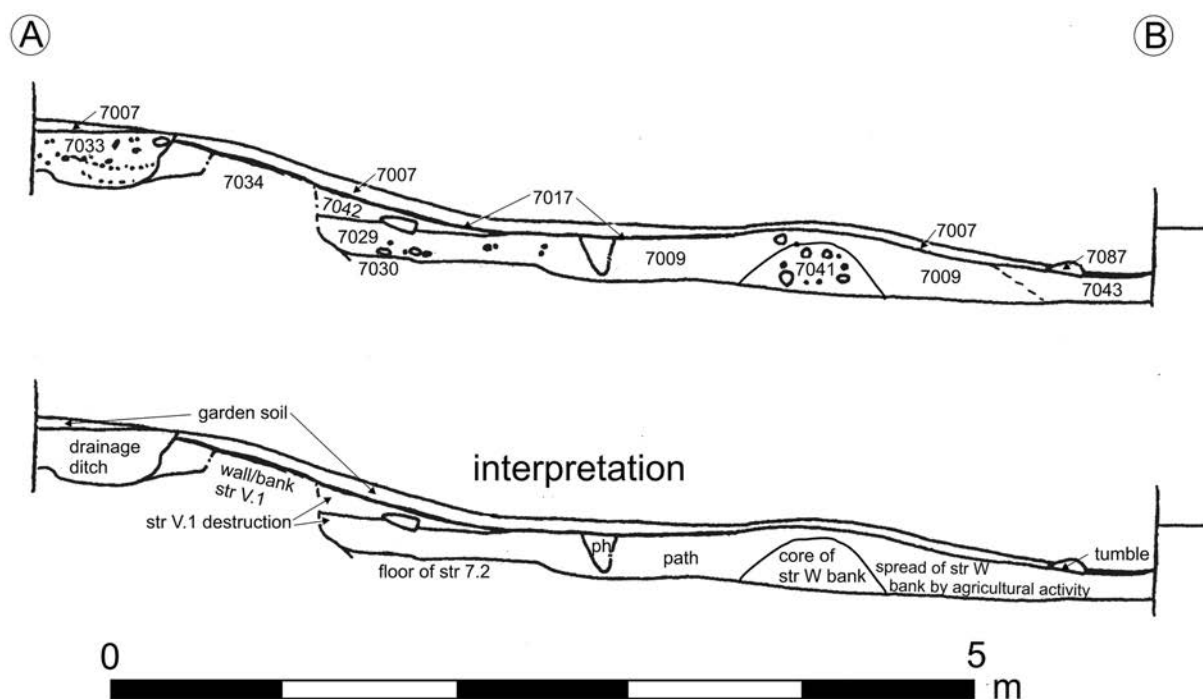


Illustration 8.46
Trench 7, south-facing section A–B

Structure 7.2 (Illus 8.46)

In the sondage excavated along the south edge of the trench a sandy clay floor or surface [7030] with patches of burning – peat ash, charcoal and calcined bone – was partially exposed, extending to the east end of the trench. It lay on top of natural sand and stones [7031] from the surface of which were recovered small pieces of carbonised wood. Surface 7030 was at approximately the same level as the floor [7028] of V.2 and may well have belonged to a structure of similar date.

Interpretation (Illus 8.37)

Excavation in trench 7 provided another tantalising glimpse of earlier medieval activity and structures. Building V.2 with its pit and hearth can be dated on the basis of sherds of wheel-turned pottery to the 13th century. No dating evidence was recovered for structures 7.2 and V.3, which were at least as early, if not earlier.

Structure V.1 appears to have been a substantial later medieval house, probably with walls of timber construction founded on stone-faced earth and turf banks. The finds of pottery and a brooch from its occupation deposits suggested domestic use. The presence of oats was what might be expected, but wheat was not believed to have been grown locally and should be considered to have been an imported luxury. The James III groat from deposit 7027 would indicate that building V was destroyed or dismantled at the end of the 15th or the beginning of the 16th century.

Structure U could only be dated on the basis of its stratigraphical relationship with house V.1. It therefore was no earlier than about 1500. On the basis of our understanding of other structures and developments on Eilean Mór, a 16th-century date would seem likely. The area immediately to its east, previously occupied by building V.1, remained as an open area while building U was in use. At a later stage, perhaps still in the 16th century, house V was erected in this open area. Since its wall was built directly up against the wall of structure U, the door of which was then blocked, it can be supposed that structure U was then in ruins or no longer in use as a house. Building V probably served as a barn or store rather than a dwelling house. Its use may relate to the time and occupancy of Eilean Mór in post-medieval times that saw the creation of the lazy beds and other agricultural activity.

An assumption prior to undertaking work in trench 7, not tested by excavation, was that enclosure W was formed on its east and south sides from the bank of a palisade defending this end of the island. The short segment of the west bank of W exposed in the excavations had evidently been greatly damaged by later agricultural activity. If, on the one hand, it was an enclosure, as identified by RCAHMS, it might have been used as a garden or pen for animals. On the other hand, it might actually have represented the denuded remains of a house. At least some of the post-holes grouped as structure 7.1 might have belonged to a continuation of a defensive palisade around Eilean Mór, dating to sometime in the 16th century.

Chapter 9

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE CHAPEL AND BURIAL GROUND

Survey of upstanding chapel walls

A 17th-century MacDonald history (Cameron 1894: 2.159–60) mentioned the construction or restoration of the chapel at Finlaggan by John I Lord of the Isles (1336–87). A 14th-century date certainly appeared believable prior to survey and excavation, even though there were no architectural features visible in the upstanding walls. The initial strategy for the excavations on Eilean Mór did not envisage the chapel's excavation. A survey, however, was made of the external faces of its surviving walls in 1989. In 1998 the rock types used were added by the geologist Nigel Ruckley, with the data plotted on the 1989 survey drawings (Illus 9.2). A hand-held magnetic susceptibility meter was employed to speed up the process of identification.

The chapel is one of only two buildings on Eilean Mór with substantial, upstanding walls, until recent conservation work much encumbered with mounds of debris (Illus 6.8, 9.1). The drawings by the artist J M W Turner in 1831, cited in Chapter 2 above, show that by that time the ruins of the chapel were very much as they are now. The structure was well founded on the level summit of the highest part of the island, arguably the best building plot on Eilean Mór. It measured 10.1 by 6.1m over walls about 0.8m thick. It was oriented (true) east–west. On all sides the ground sloped away except to the burial ground to the south.

The walls were of random rubble, with blocks and boulders laid roughly in courses and set in lime mortar. The majority of stones were rough-dressed blocks of limestone (over 50%) and dolerite (about 34%). The former would have come from the adjacent north end of Loch Finlaggan, the latter from geological dykes, the nearest of which crosses the middle of the loch. They were for the most part placed together tightly, with relatively few pinnings compared with other medieval West Highland architecture. This type of masonry was described as type 4 in a review of medieval architecture in the Lordship of the Isles by Caldwell and Ruckley (2005: 103). It was typical of architecture in the southern region of the Lordship of the Isles in the 14th and 15th centuries. There was no obvious pattern to the distribution of the blocks of limestone and dolerite, nor any readily definable difference in size and shape between the two types.

The exterior walls were originally covered with harling, no doubt leaving the dressings exposed. The quoins were of grey-yellow sandstone. The interior walls were plastered. The door

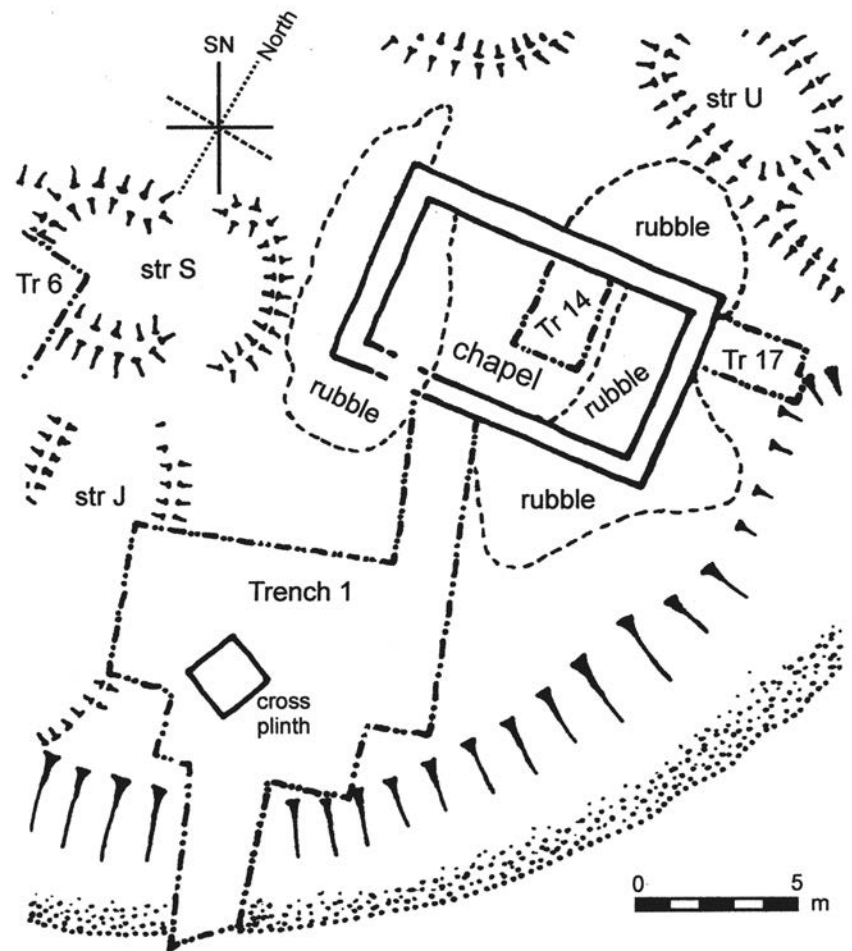


Illustration 9.1
Location map for trenches 1, 14 and 17

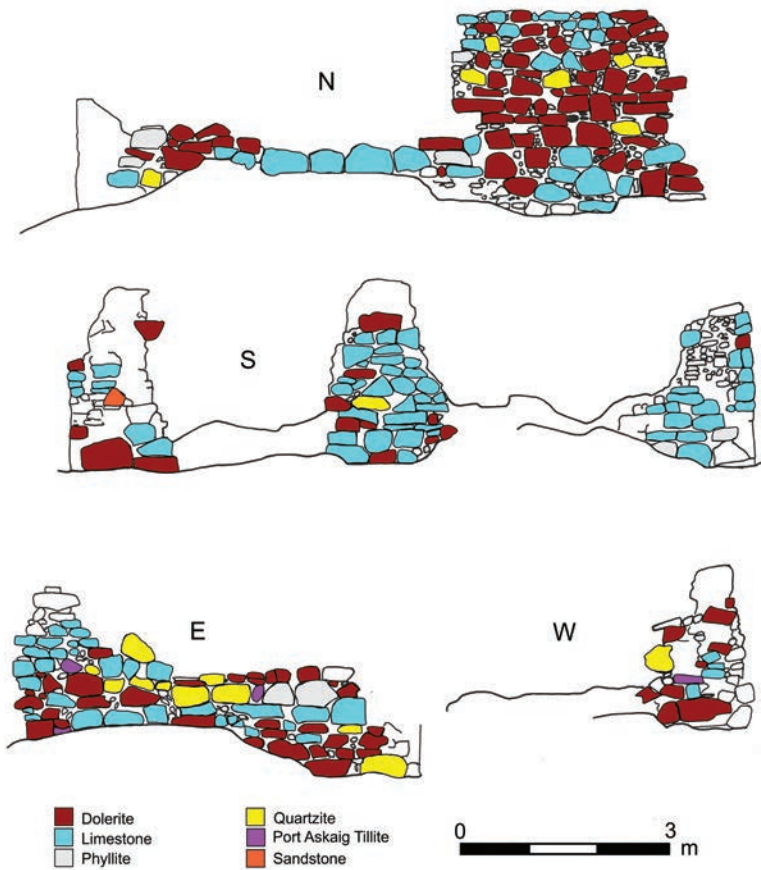


Illustration 9.2

The chapel, elevations of exterior walls showing rock types used in their construction

was at the west end of the south wall. None of its jamb stones remain in place, and there are no traces of window openings in the upstanding walls.

Trench 1, the burial ground (Illus 9.1, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, Table 9.1)

The level area adjacent to the chapel was partially excavated in the first season of digging in 1990. Although RCAHMS had identified it as a burial ground, it was felt this interpretation was open to question, first because there appeared to be no depth of soil above bedrock, making the digging of burial pits difficult. Second, this highest point on the island was obviously a desirable platform for the dwellings of the living. It rapidly turned out that the RCAHMS hypothesis was the correct one.

Initially trench 1 was 10m east-west by 5m north-south, but it was extended southwards as work progressed, and a strip 2m wide was excavated northwards to the chapel wall, and another southwards to the water's edge, giving a total area of about 84 sq m.

On removal of the turf and well-sorted topsoil, a level gravelly horizon [1007] was encountered over the whole area of the plateau at a depth of about 14cm. It was thought that much of this gravel, which consisted mostly of small water-washed pebbles from the loch shore, derived from the mortar, made either with



Illustration 9.3

Trench 1, general view of excavation in progress

lime or clay, used in the construction of the neighbouring buildings, especially the chapel. The south wall of the chapel had collapsed over the top of this gravel. Included in this tumble [1039] beside the chapel wall was a grey-yellow sandstone rybat (R27), most probably from one of the chapel windows. Embedded in the surface of 1007 was a broken moulding of similar sandstone (R26), possibly part of the jamb of the chapel doorway. The stratigraphical relationship of 1007 to the chapel was not established in this trench.

Off the surface of the gravel came several animal bone fragments, some burnt. There was also an assortment of sherds and pieces of metal. From a dating point of view, attention should be drawn to the following:

- SF 1005 (C1), copper alloy ring brooch – 15th to 16th century
- SF 1053, tiny sherd of Saintonge polychrome ware – late 13th to early 14th century
- SF 1099 (N39), billon coin – plack of James IV (1488–1513).

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE CHAPEL AND BURIAL GROUND

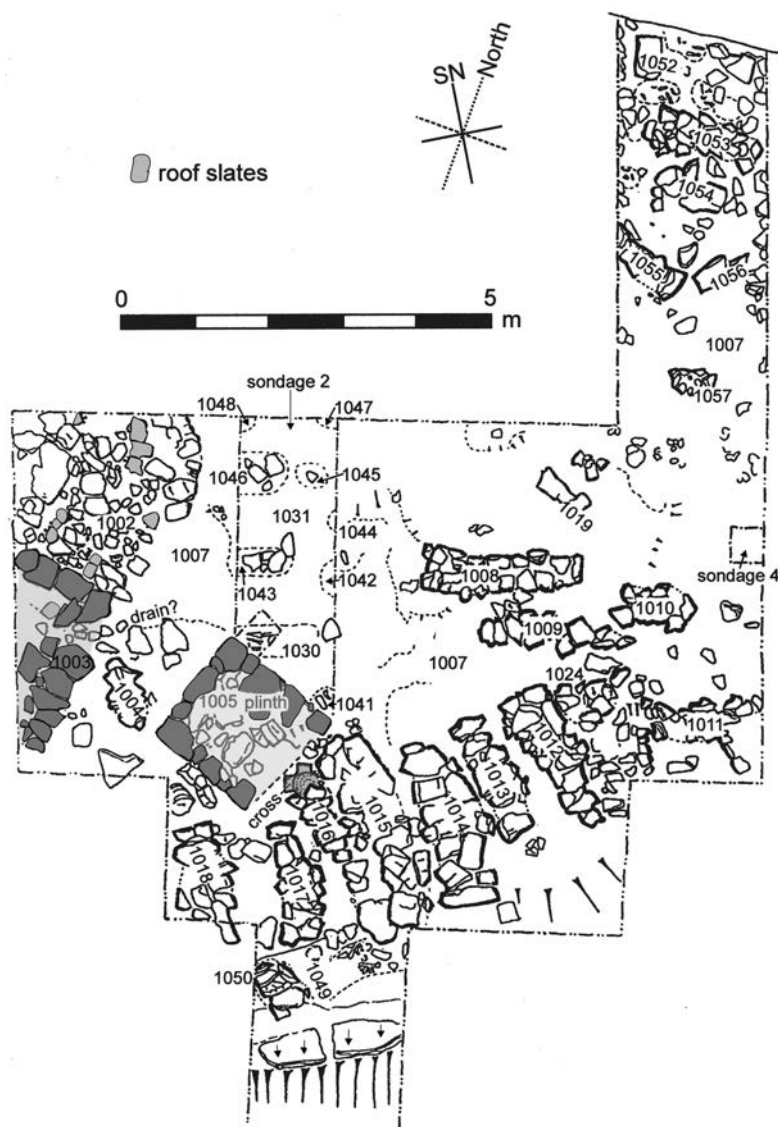


Illustration 9.4

Trench 1, main features exposed under the turf and topsoil

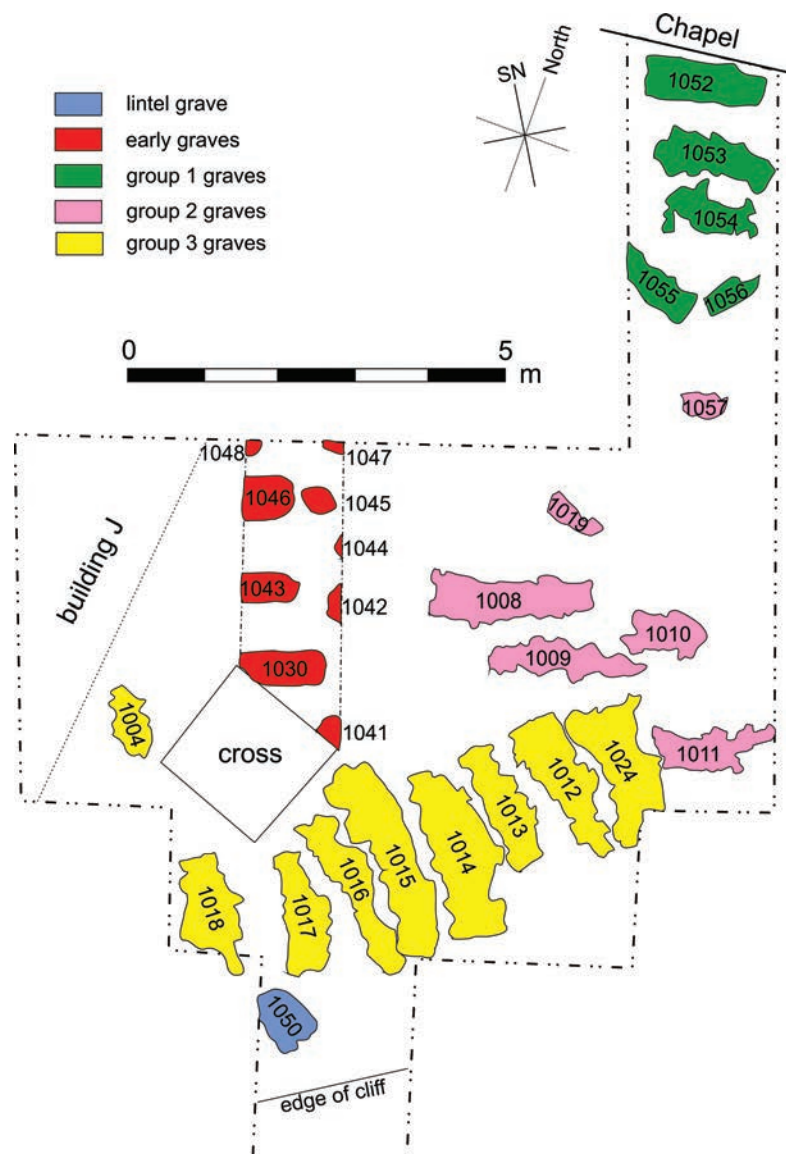


Illustration 9.5

Trench 1, interpretative plan of groups of graves

Presumably most of these objects sank onto the gravel in the course of time as a result of worm activity. Also, since the area was dug over so intensively in the process of depositing bodies, it is likely that pieces of an earlier age were churned up and redeposited. These finds, therefore, do not provide a secure guide to dating 1007. The formation of 1007 must also be largely due to earthworm activity, and the material in it may have derived from several episodes over a long period of time, including the construction and collapse of the chapel and other nearby structures. Nevertheless, since the gravel seals some graves (see below) but not others, it clearly is a chronological marker in the use of the burial ground, perhaps coinciding with the construction of the chapel.

Building J (Illus 9.4, 9.6)

Building J was mostly outside the area of trench 1, but part of its east wall [1003] was uncovered. It was reduced to its bottommost course above the level of the adjacent burial ground and appeared to have been of drystone construction. The south jamb of a doorway could be traced in it. The entranceway was paved with rough cobbles [1002], and there appeared to be a drain running under the wall from the interior of the building, exiting next to the south jamb of the doorway. This area of the trench was not fully excavated. Several type A roofing slates were recorded among the tumble from the wall of J. Several nails and some rivets from the gravel horizon [1007] over the burial ground were deemed more likely to have come from the demolition of building J rather than the chapel. More such material clearly associated with building J was excavated in trench 8, whereas further work



Illustration 9.6

Trench 1, with entrance and wall of building J in foreground and the cross plinth beyond to the right

in and adjacent to the chapel in trenches 14 and 17 failed to produce any.

The Finlaggan cross (Illus 9.4, 9.7)

An obvious feature encountered in the early stages of excavation was a rectangular plinth of mortared stonework $\approx 1.65\text{m}$ square [1005] and 40cm high, corresponding to R on the RCAHMS plan of the site, and rightly guessed by the Commission to be the plinth for a cross. It was oriented with its sides facing true WNW, NNE, ESE and SSW – notably on a different alignment from the chapel or any of the surrounding burials. The orientation of commemorative medieval crosses elsewhere in the West Highlands and Islands seems to have been with the main faces east and west. In the WNW side, part of the upper stone of a rotary quern of mica schist had been incorporated. The ESE side had collapsed, or perhaps more probably had been attacked with a pickaxe so that the cross-shaft could be levered out. Excavation along its north-east face revealed that it was founded on 1031, the clay deposit that formed the matrix for the burial ground. It protruded from the gravelly surface 1007. The plinth was therefore of earlier date than the formation of 1007.

The head of the stone cross (R.20), datable to the 14th or 15th century, was found where it had been knocked off this plinth, pitched head-first into the gravelly surface 1007. There was no trace of its shaft. Lying on the surface of 1007 under the cross-head and between graves 1017 and 1016 was a cup-marked bullaun stone (R.82, Illus 9.8).

Graves (Illus 9.4–6)

A series of longitudinal arrangements of boulders, readily presumed to be graves, were discovered. The stones were a mix of local types, and some had protruded slightly above ground surface before the turf was removed. It was evident that 18 of these 20



Illustration 9.7

The Finlaggan cross, R20 (SF 1037) (© National Museums Scotland)



Illustration 9.8
Bullaun stone R82 (SF 1047)

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graves – [1052–56, 1008–18, 1024, 1004] – had been dug from, more or less, the present ground surface and cut the gravel surface 1007. One of the other two graves [1057] was represented by a covering of stones set in the surface of 1007. It was, therefore, probably of earlier date than the 18 burials just listed. Other stones [1019] in the surface of 1007 may be the remains of one or more other graves of similar date to 1057. In terms of alignment there were at least three groups of them, the orientations of which were approximately:

1. True west–east. This group included at least three adjacent and parallel to the chapel: 1052, 1053, 1054, and probably a fourth and fifth, 1055 and 1056, though not enough of them were uncovered in situ to be certain of their orientation.
2. True WSW to ENE. There were six graves in this group: 1008–11, 1019, 1057.
3. True north–west to south–east. This group included nine graves: 1004, 1012–18, 1024.

If there was any chronological significance in this division one might suppose that the group 3 graves, mostly on the edge of the platform, furthest from the chapel and on a true north–west/south–east alignment, were the most recent. One of them [1024] was partially overlain by grave 1012, also of group 3. The stone covering of another group 3 grave, 1016, appeared to partially overlie the cross-head. Since it can be supposed that the cross would not have been smashed while Finlaggan served as the residence of the lords of the Isles, this is a significant clue that burials continued to be made in post-medieval times. The graves of group 1 had been disturbed by the collapse of the chapel wall over the top of them.

Having established that there was indeed a graveyard next to the chapel and that some of the graves were likely to be post-medieval in date, the prime concern was to discover whether the site might have been given over to other purposes at an earlier period. Strategies were evolved for doing this without embarking on a haphazard programme of disinterring burials. Nevertheless it seemed appropriate to excavate at least one of the burials with the expectation that it might open a window of opportunity into the strata that lay below.

Grave 1008 of group 2 was chosen (Illus 9.9, 9.10). The alignment of boulders covered a very shallow pit containing an extended inhumation, head to the ‘west’ (WSW), and arms to the sides. The pit was barely long enough for the body, resulting in the skull being propped up against the pit end. The right hand was over the pelvis, but if the left had been so placed, it had slipped sideways soon after deposition. It is probable that the stone alignment over the top was not intended to show above the ground surface. There was no evidence of any coffin or other container for the body, or of any fastening for a shroud. There was, however, a group of disarticulated human bones [1020B] stacked over the feet of the body, presumed to be from earlier inhumations disturbed at the time of burial. At least three adults and two children were represented by them. The main inhumation [1020A] was a male, probably about 35 to 40 years of age. For more information see the report in Chapter C8 of the Catalogue by Kath McSweeney on the human bones from Finlaggan.



Illustration 9.9

Trench 1, grave 1008 partially excavated, showing group of disarticulated human bones [1020B] stacked over the feet of the body

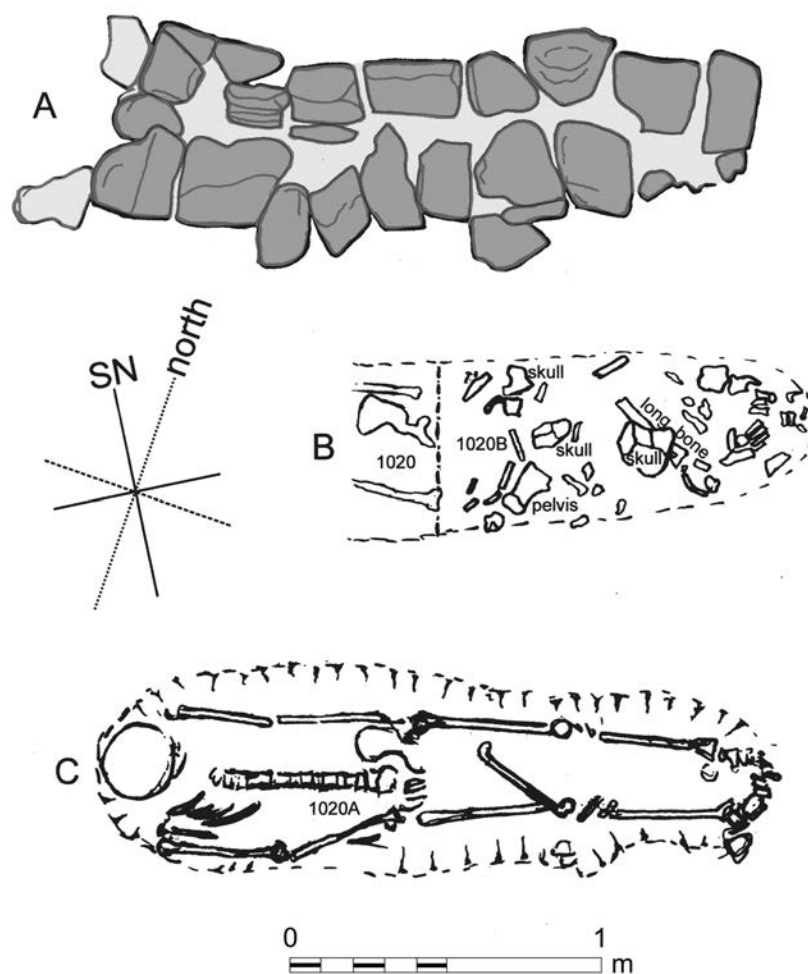


Illustration 9.10

Trench 1, grave 1008: (A) covering of boulders; (B) group of disarticulated human bones [1020B] stacked over the feet of the body; (C) fully excavated inhumation 1020A



Illustration 9.11
Trench 1, sondage 2 and the cross plinth from north

A strip of the gravel surface 1.3m wide, running northwards from the cross plinth, was removed (sondage 2) (Illus 9.5, 9.11). The gravel was about 5cm deep and consisted of small water-washed pebbles mixed with a spread of pieces of smashed angular white quartz (over 30 by 30mm). It covered at least another nine burial pits [1030, 1041–48] apparently all on the same alignment as 1008. These were not excavated, apart from a small sondage (1) into one of two [1030] partially covered by the cross plinth. Part of the pelvis, spine and left arm bones of an individual were exposed but not lifted, lying at a depth of about 20cm below 1007. At least three of these burial pits, 1041, 1043 and 1046, had pieces of limestone flush with their surfaces.

Two other small sondages were dug to check for earlier use of this burial ground. One (sondage 3), about 1 by 0.5m, was excavated from the base of grave 1008 (Illus 9.12). This partially revealed three other inhumations [1037, 1038, 1040] on the same alignment as 1020A but only 6cm deeper. The other sondage (4), about 0.5m square, was excavated to the east of grave 1008, adjacent to the trench edge (Illus 9.4). Here the gravelly surface 1007 sealed a deposit of grey-green clay [1031] mixed with fragments of

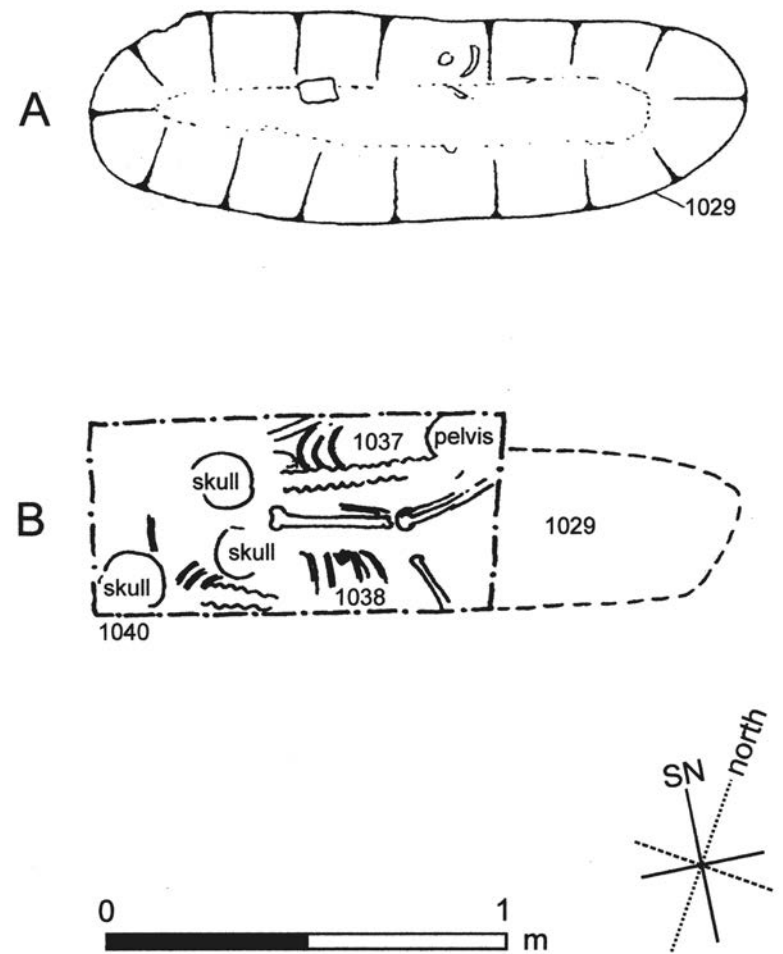


Illustration 9.12
Trench 1, grave 1008: (A) burial pit with inhumation 1020A removed; (B) sondage 3

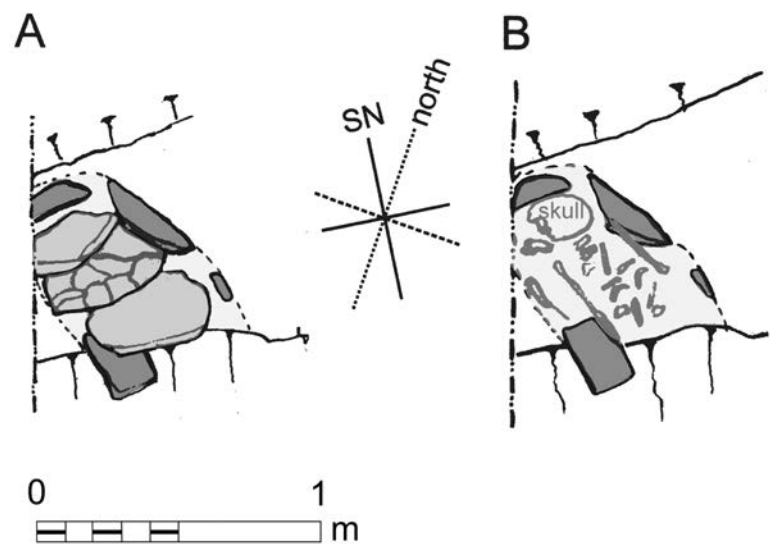


Illustration 9.13
Trench 1, lintel grave 1050: (A) with lintel stones in position; (B) with lintel stones removed

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Illustration 9.14
Trench 1, lintel grave 1050

bedrock churned up from below. It was about 34cm deep over limestone bedrock. This was apparently created by the frequent digging of graves over a long period of time.

A trench extension taken southwards down the cliff edge to the water revealed a process of rock fall and weathering resulting in the exposure of burials. One other grave here [1050] was fully excavated (Illus 9.4, 9.13, 9.14). It was positioned on a rock shelf on the very edge of the cliff, at a lower level than any of the others. The body was aligned true north-west to south-east and was contained in a grave with side stones and covering slabs of local limestone. Such graves are often now called ‘lintel graves’ by specialists, in preference to the widely used term ‘long cist’, the use of which is often restricted to graves with side stones only (O’Brien 2003: 67). The bottom portion of both grave and skeleton had weathered out of the cliff, but there was enough of the latter for it to be identified as that of a female of about 25 years. A radiocarbon determination (see Chapter 1, ‘Dating’) from the left humerus of the body suggested it was interred in the late 7th century AD.

Adjacent to burial 1050 and on the same alignment was another grave [1049], still with a skull in place. There was no evidence for any stone lining or covering to this grave, but it had clearly been disturbed by erosion and collapse of the cliff here at the edge of the island. At least some of the disarticulated human bones immediately to the east may have come from it. A rim sherd of decorated handmade pottery (SF 1083) from 1049 was probably of Early Bronze Age date but possibly redeposited.

Interpretation

The excavation of trench 1 confirmed the presence of a burial ground containing a commemorative cross and provided evidence for burials from early historic to post-medieval times. On the basis of excavation elsewhere on Eilean Mór, especially in the neighbouring trenches 8 and 17, some evidence might have been expected for a perimeter wall or defence. It is clear, for example from the fragmentary remains of the lintel grave, that the edge of the island here has suffered from erosion and collapse. More consideration of building J is given in the section on trench 8.

Context	Description	Interpretation
1002	Stones	Crude cobbling
1003	Stones and earth	Wall of str J
1004	Stones	Grave, group 3
1005	Lime-mortared stones	Cross plinth
1006	Stones, mortar	Tumble from cross plinth
1007	Gravelly spread	Construction and worm activity
1008	Stones	Grave, group 2
1009	Stones	Grave, group 2
1010	Stones	Grave, group 2
1011	Stones	Grave, group 2
1012	Stones	Grave, group 3
1013	Stones	Grave, group 3
1014	Stones	Grave, group 3
1015	Stones	Grave, group 3
1016	Stones	Grave, group 3
1017	Stones	Grave, group 3
1018	Stones	Grave, group 3
1019	Stones	Grave, group 2
1020A	Earth and human bones	Disturbed inhumations
1020B	Earth and human bones	Inhumation, grave 1008
1024	Stones	Grave, group 2
1030	Cut	Grave, early group
1031	Clay	Redeposited from digging graves
1037	Earth and human bones	Inhumation
1038	Earth and human bones	Inhumation
1039	Stones	Tumble from south chapel wall
1040	Earth and human bones	Inhumation
1041	Cut	Grave, early group
1042	Cut	Grave, early group
1043	Cut	Grave, early group
1044	Cut	Grave, early group
1045	Cut	Grave, early group
1046	Cut	Grave, early group
1047	Cut	Grave, early group
1048	Cut	Grave, early group
1050	Stones	Lintel grave
1052	Stones	Grave, group 1
1053	Stones	Grave, group 1
1054	Stones	Grave, group 1
1055	Stones	Grave, group 1
1056	Stones	Grave, group 1
1057	Stones	Grave, group 2

Table 9.1
Trench 1 contexts

Excavation and clearance work at the chapel

The Finlaggan strategic plan proposed a small trench inside the chapel with an area of about 10 sq m. As a result of discussions with Historic Scotland in August 1993, it seemed appropriate to extend this area of excavation to the exterior of the chapel. What was actually envisaged was a trench 2 by 6m running over the north chapel wall, but when the site was inspected the following month it was clear that this was not practical for reasons of safety and to avoid large accumulations of tumbled stonework. The solution was to dig two separate trenches, numbered 14 and 17 (Illus 9.1).

The objectives of this exercise were fairly limited. The work was undertaken to collect information on levels in advance of the programme of conservation to be undertaken by the Finlaggan Trust. It was proposed that the excavation within the chapel walls needed only to go as deep as the latest floor surface in use while the building was still intact.

Trench 14 (Illus 9.1, 9.15–22, Table 9.2)

Trench 14, 2m east–west by 3m north–south, was laid out in the centre of the chapel, with its north edge on the interior face of the north wall. This was a relatively level area that was expected to have only a few centimetres of material overlying a floor. Lying on the surface of the ground was a metabasite slab (R33), either a

grave-slab or, more probably, lintel. The topsoil had much decomposed mortar intermixed with it and gave on to a deposit [14002] of disturbed, redeposited, sandy silt. This, and the topsoil, contained fragments of 19th-century bottle glass and clay pipe stem, along with quantities of human bone.

Underlying 14002 was a level surface [14005] of clay silt, cut by graves. Only the east half of the trench was fully excavated to this level, and at least six graves (see Illus 9.22 for grave nos and associated contexts), apparently all aligned east–west on the chapel axis, were defined in it. None of these were fully excavated, but it was noted that grave 14.4 cut grave 14.5 and was in turn cut by grave 14.2. This last grave had a capping of stones [14010], including R17 (SF 14004), a fragment of a grave-slab. The cut was coffin shaped (rhombic or shouldered) and two iron nails were recovered from the fill, indicating that the body, of an adult, had been deposited in a wooden coffin. The bones were not lifted.

The fragment of grave-slab R17 can now be shown with reasonable certainty to be from the upper left-hand corner of R11, the 16th-century slab with the effigy of Donald MacGillespie (Illus 9.18). The upper part of the slab is severely fractured, the damage being consistent with levering and sliding the slab out of its resting place from its bottom end. It is possible that such a process could have resulted in R17, a substantial flake, becoming detached and being left in the ground to mark the position where the slab lay – that is, covering burial 14008. If that is the case, R17 (SF 14004) was only approximately in its original position (Illus 9.15).

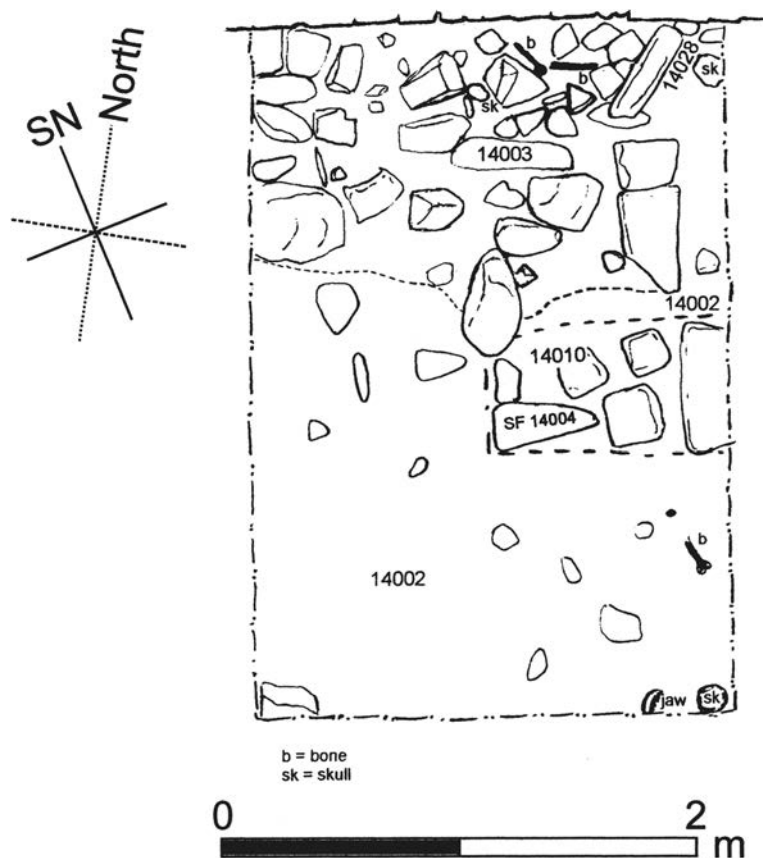


Illustration 9.15

Trench 14, plan showing capping [14003] of the charnel deposit and the capping of grave 14.2 [14010]



Illustration 9.16

Trench 14, the capping [14003] partially removed to reveal charnel deposit [14004] underneath

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Illustration 9.17

Trench 14, grave 14.2 partially excavated with grave 14.3 beyond it



Illustration 9.18

Grave-slab of Donald MacGillespie (R11)

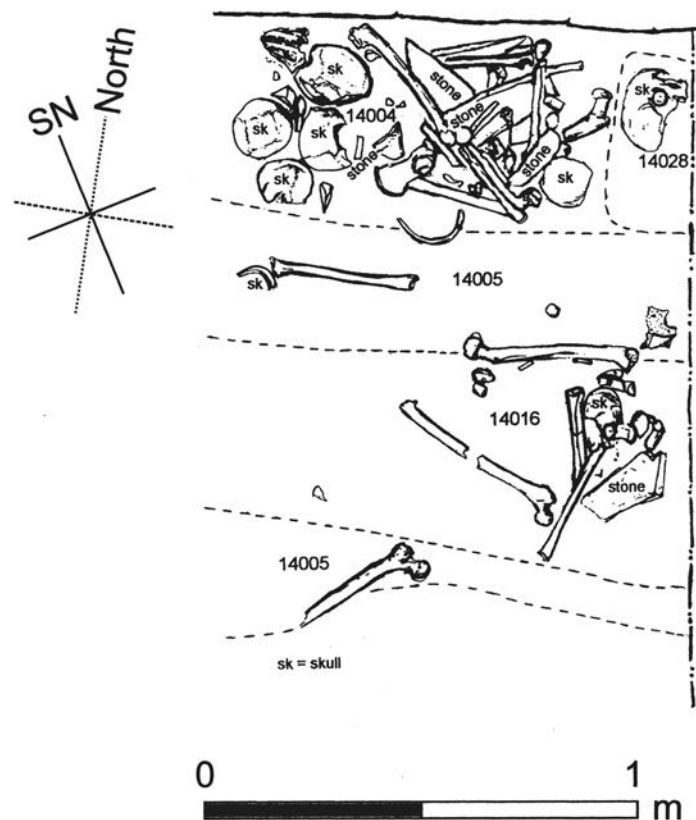


Illustration 9.19

Trench 14, plan of charnel deposit [14004] and graves 14.1 [14028] and 14.3 [14016]

When Miss MacLagan visited Finlaggan in 1882 she only noted three 'noteworthy' slabs, apparently not including Donald MacGillespie's effigy (MacLagan 1883: 38, 1898: 38). It therefore appears likely that it was one of the fine grave-slabs found in the chapel in 1894 when the Laird of Islay had rubble cleared from it (Graham 1895: vii, 28). This clearance work would explain why no floor surface was found in this part of the chapel. The slabs would have formed that surface at a level of about 55.40m above sea level. The glass and clay tobacco-pipe fragments of 19th-century date in the deposits overlying the sub-floor deposit [14005] are further evidence of this disturbance to a depth of 30cm or more below floor level.

One motive for this earlier clearance work may have been the recovery of the grave-slabs, but in the process several burials were disturbed. There may also have been a well-intentioned concern to conserve the ruins, reflected by signs of consolidation on the walls, but a local farmer (Arra Fletcher), then retired, told us in 1994 that about a hundred years previously local crofters dug in the chapel for treasure, but stopped when they heard bag-pipes. Even earlier clearance work is implied by the discovery about 1830 of part of a supposed font (R19) under the ruins at the east end of the chapel.

Along the north wall face of the chapel, under the disturbance [14002] caused by 19th-century excavators, was a layer of stones [14003] acting as a cover for a charnel deposit of disarticulated human remains [14004, 14006] packed into the foundation trench for the north wall. These bones may have been gathered up from earlier burials disturbed when the chapel was being erected. The

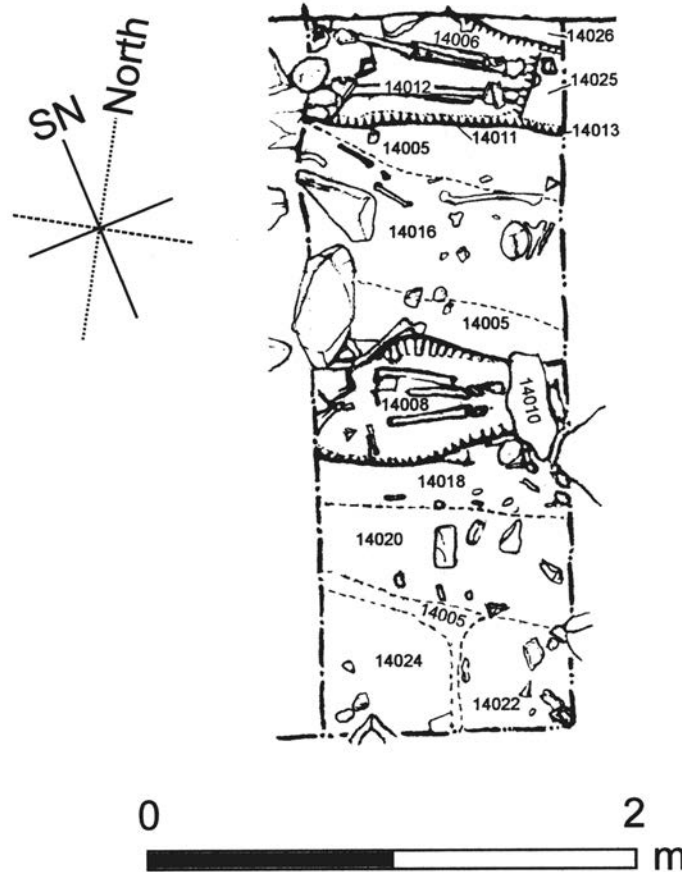


Illustration 9.20

Trench 14, showing full extent of excavation in the east half of the trench

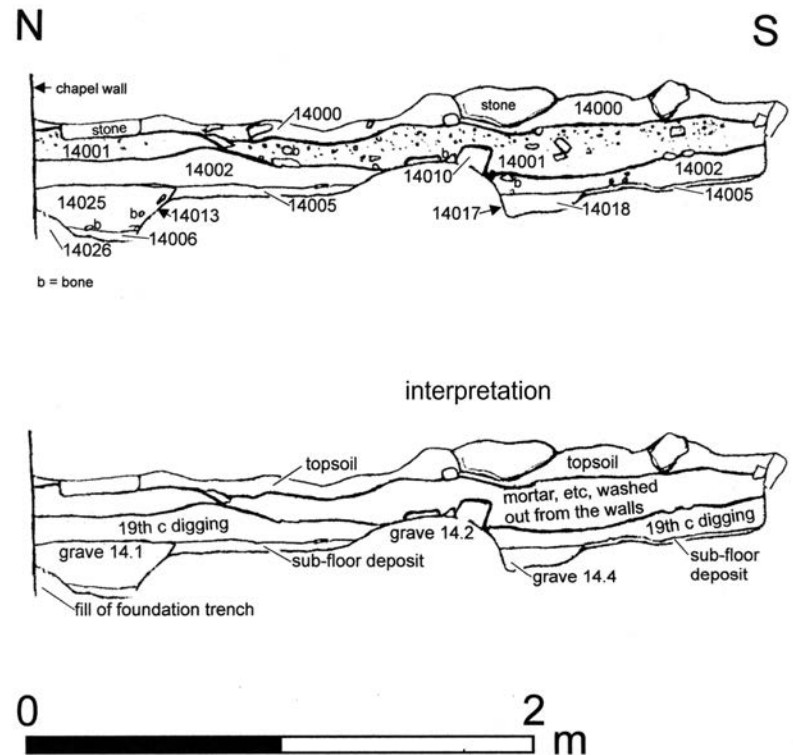


Illustration 9.21

Trench 14, west-facing section

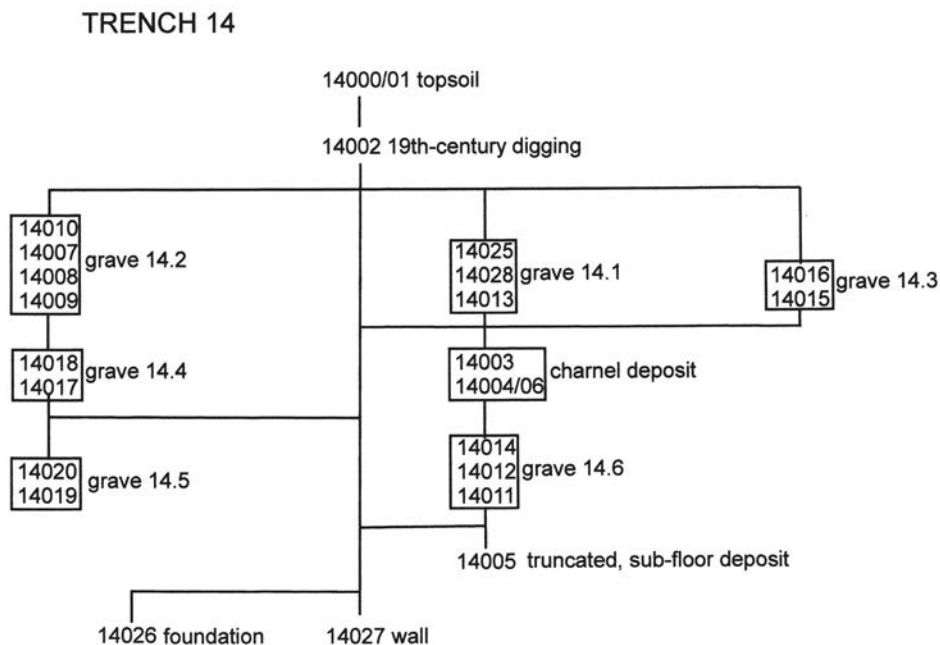


Illustration 9.22

Trench 14, diagram showing stratigraphic relationships and numbering of the graves and other contexts

decision was made to excavate part of this, as it appeared likely that its removal would create a window on to earlier sub-floor deposits. Apart from human bones and loose soil, the deposit contained 27 pieces of roof slate, of which 22 were type A, 4 type B and 1 type C.

It was found that the charnel deposit cut an earlier burial [grave 14.6]. It widened out from the foot, probably to give an overall shouldered or rhombic outline. This, together with the recovery of an iron nail to the right of the lower right leg, is a strong indication that there was a wooden coffin. It had been capped with flat stones, dislodged by the decay of the body and subsequent digging of the charnel deposit. Only the lower portion of a skeleton was exposed in the excavation, but not lifted. From the region of the pelvis was recovered B3, a piece of decorated bone, probably a plate from the hilt of a scale-tang knife.

This burial was cut at its east end by another [grave 14.1], mostly outside the area of the trench. It was at least partially dug through the capping of the charnel pit, and

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Context	Description	Interpretation
14000	Sandy silt	Topsoil
14001	Topsoil with decayed mortar	Washout from chapel walls
14002	Silty sand	Redeposited material, 19th-century digging
14003	Loose stones, silty sand, mortar	Stone capping of 14004
14004	Human bones, loose soil	Charnel deposit
14005	Clay silt	Truncated sub-floor deposit
14006	Greasy silt	Bottom of charnel deposit 14004
14007	Silt with sand, small stones	Grave 14.2, fill
14008	Skeleton, legs only	Grave 14.2, coffin burial
14009	Cut	Grave 14.2
14010	Stones	Grave 14.2, capping
14011	Cut	Grave 14.6
14012	Skeleton	Shroud burial
14013	Cut	Grave 14.1
14014	Stones, broken roof-slates	Grave 14.6, capping
14015	Cut	Grave 14.3
14016	Gritty clay silt	Grave 14.3
14017	Cut	Grave 14.4
14018	Gritty clay silt	Grave 14.4, fill
14019	Cut	Grave 14.5
14020	Sandy silt	Grave 14.5, fill
14022	Clay silt	Grave fill
14024	Gritty clay silt	Grave fill
14026	Soil with stone fragments, bone	Fill of chapel foundation trench
14027	Stones, lime mortar	North chapel wall
14028	Human skull	Grave 14.1

Table 9.2
Trench 14 contexts



Illustration 9.23
Trench 17, with turf removed

therefore of more recent date. This was not apparent when its skull was lifted, on the assumption that it belonged with the others in 14004. The skull belonged to a young man aged between 17 and 25. It had three cut marks which were the probable cause of death. These had been made with an implement like a sword or axe. From the fill of this grave, underneath the skull, was recovered a piece of lead shot (SF 14009). It is improbable that firearms would have been in use in Islay before the middle of the 16th century.

Against and extending under the wall of the chapel, there remained a wedge of soil and stone [14026], including pieces of lime mortar, soft yellow sandstone and human bone. This was interpreted as the fill of the foundation trench for the wall.

Trench 17 (Illus 9.1, 9.23–30, Table 9.3)

Trench 17 was located outside the east wall of the chapel, adjacent to its north-east corner. The trench was initially 2 by 3m, with the chapel wall forming one end; an extension of about 1 by ½m was later added at the other end. The ground here sloped away

from the base of the chapel wall, about 1m over the full length of the trench. It then fell steeply to the water's edge. Under the turf and topsoil there was a thin spread of lime mortar and several blocks of tumbled stone [17001], possibly derived from the 19th-century excavations within the chapel; 17001 lay over an earlier ground surface [17002] formed over earlier tumble and wash-out from the chapel wall [17003]. Included in 17002 were two pieces of type D roof slates (R66, R67), and other broken roof slates were recovered from 17003, along with human bones and two fragments of a West Highland grave-slab (R13), one decorated with foliage. The inclusion of bones and broken grave-slabs suggested destruction rather than dilapidation.

Under the spreads of tumble and wash-out was deposit 17004, 5 to 10cm thick, predominantly of gravel in a matrix of clay silt, covering most of the trench. It included pieces of human bone, flecks and lumps of lime mortar, and fragments of type B roof slates. It was cut by the foundation trench for the chapel [17006], less than half a metre wide and as much as half a metre deep from the surface of 17004. A small piece of red sandstone (SF 17004) was recovered from it. The base of the wall was packed with

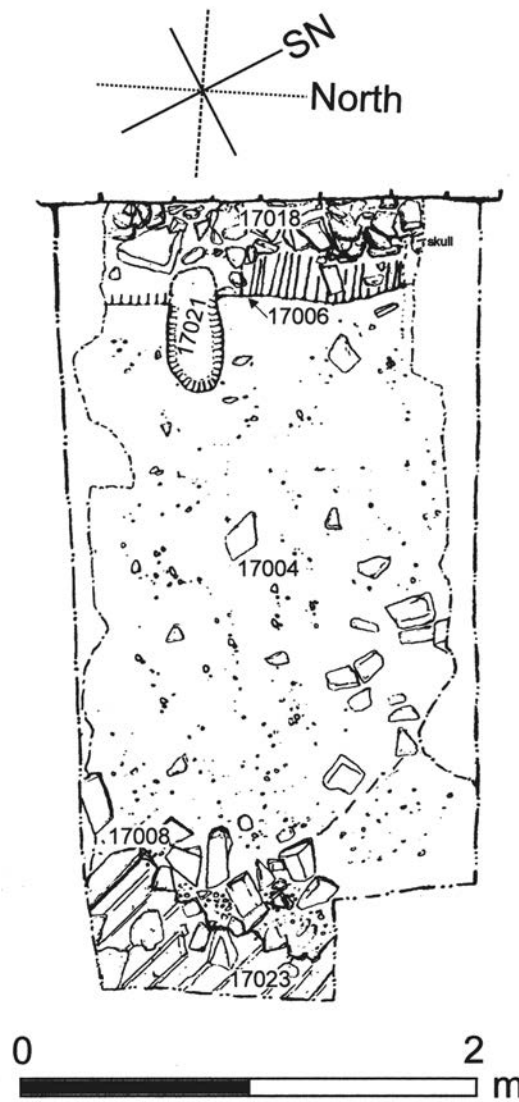


Illustration 9.24
Trench 17, plan showing chapel foundation trench [17006] and the turf bank [17023]

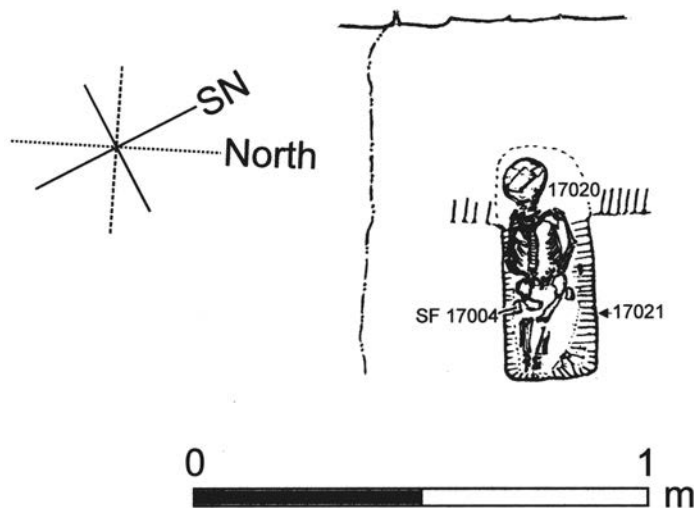


Illustration 9.25
Trench 17, plan of burial 17020 with infant 17021

fragments of limestone [17018]. The silt and sand main fill of the trench was cut by a sub-rectangular post-hole [17040], perhaps for scaffolding when the chapel was being erected.

Graves and other structures

The gravelly deposit 17004 was cut by two graves oriented (true) east-west. They also cut the chapel's foundation trench. One of them [17021] contained the skeleton of a baby [17020] about six months old (Illus 9.25). It lay on its back, head to the west, its knees slightly bent and its hands over the pelvis. Three small pieces of white quartz were found under the corpse.

The other grave [17030], containing an adult, probably male [17032], was not fully excavated. The body was also laid out on its back, head to the west and hands over the pelvis. Several small pieces of white quartz were recovered from the fill over the pelvis.

Under the gravel layer 17004 was a low, metre-wide terrace of mottled clay [17024], cut by the chapel's foundation trench. It

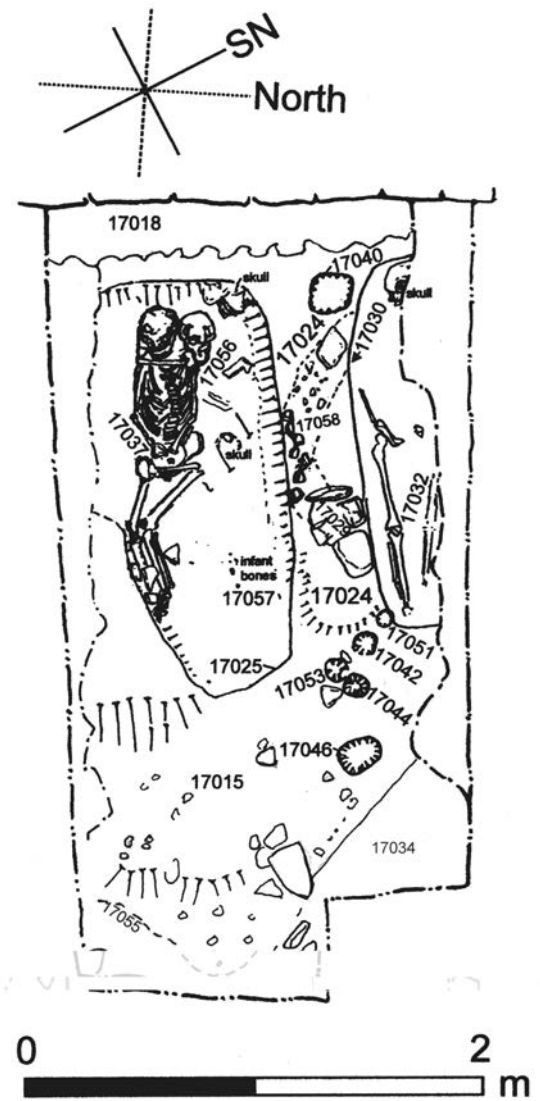


Illustration 9.26
Trench 17, plan showing the burial pit [17025] and the clay terrace [17024] with stake- and post-holes and feature 17058



Illustration 9.27

Trench 17, burial pit 17025 and grave 17030 with remains of terrace 17024 and other features in between

sealed a burial pit [17025] almost 2m long by about 0.9m across. This was only partially excavated, revealing two adult inhumations [1737, 17056], side by side, on an east–west orientation, heads to the west, with an infant [17057] beside them at the foot of the pit. None of these bodies were lifted. The pit fill [17025], a mixed deposit of silt with sand, clay, pieces of lime mortar, some small fragments of white quartz and disarticulated human bone, was generally crumbly or friable, and it was difficult to trace cuts within it.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the three articulated bodies had not all gone in and been covered over in the one operation. The child burial was evidently the most recent. One of the adults [17037] was sealed under a capping of stones, and was partially overlying the other adult [17056], whose skeleton was not fully revealed. Skeleton 17037 had its hands positioned over the pelvis and its legs slightly flexed to the right, apparently because the pit was not long enough for them to be stretched out. There were pieces of mortar in the fill.

The terrace 17024 also had traces in its surface of a curving feature [17058] identified as a construction slot (Illus 9.26, 9.27), with a stony fill and at its east end a post-hole [17029] with stone packers. It was not excavated. Beyond to the east was a group of four stake-holes [17051, 17042, 17044, 17053] cut in natural and sealed by 17004. They had diameters from about 8 to 10cm and



Illustration 9.28

Trench 17, collapsed stone facing [17008] of turf bank 17023

two of them had pointed bottoms. They had no direct stratigraphic link with slot 17058 and could be earlier or later in date. The same applied to a post-hole [17046] adjacent to these stake-holes. It was rectangular in shape, about 14 by 18cm, and had sharp sides and a flat bottom at a depth of 12cm.

A timberwork defence? (Illus 9.28)

Just within the bottom end of trench 17 was some slumped stonework [17008] interpreted as the remains of the internal revetment for a turf bank [17023]. This was represented in our excavation by a 3cm thick deposit of gritty clay silt. Both stood on natural, here a compact, orange sandy clay deposit [17015]. On removal of 17008 and 17023, the surface of 17015 was found to have a sharp cut [17055] forming an angle of about 115° in the natural, its legs running approximately south–west to north–east and north–west to south–east (Illus 9.26). The cut may have been one edge of a slot for timbers, now filled with mottled clay silt [17034] (not excavated).

Interpretation (Illus 9.29, 9.30)

The limited extent of excavation in trench 17 and lack of datable finds make interpretation difficult. The clay terrace [17024] cut by the burial pit 17025 had stake- and post-holes and a possible construction trench [17058]. The terrace was earlier in date than the chapel, but there was no meaningful stratigraphic relationship between it and the features at the east end of the trench. Indeed, the terrace may have been shaved away as part of the process of creating a platform for the erection of the turf bank [17023], internally faced with stone. The cut [17055] found underneath the turf bank may have related to a perimeter timberwork defence.

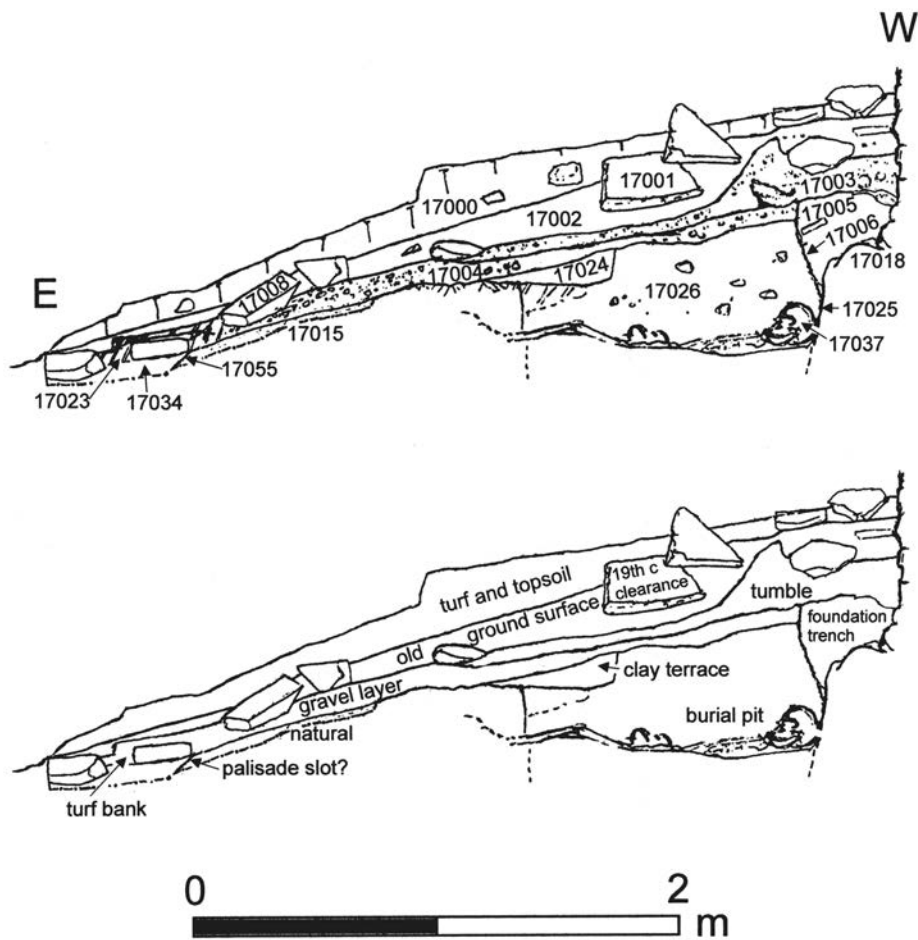


Illustration 9.29
Trench 17, north-facing section

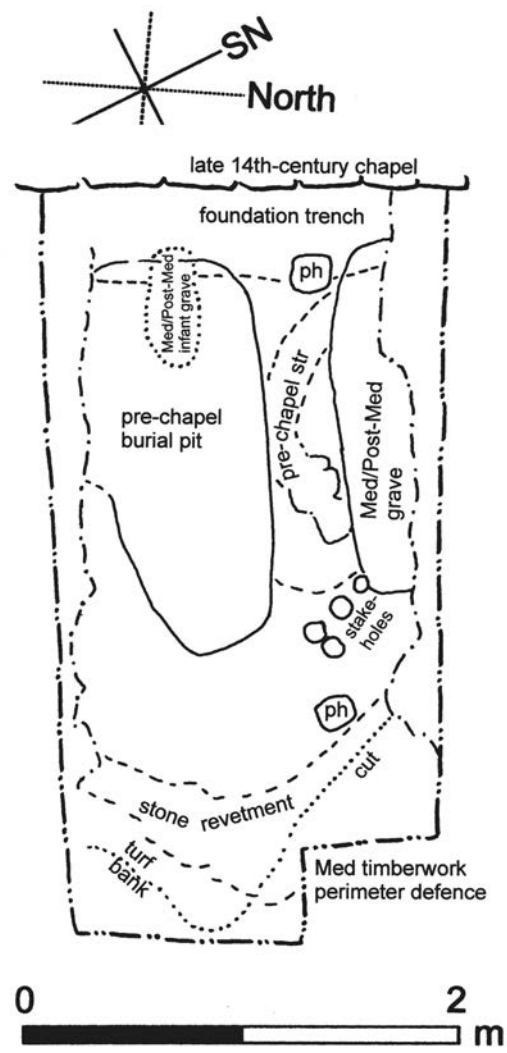


Illustration 9.30
Trench 17, interpretation of main features

Context	Description	Interpretation
17000	Soil with stones	Turf and topsoil
17001	Stones, mortar, debris	19th-century clearance
17002	Peat silt	Old ground surface
17003	Mortar and gravel	Washout from chapel ruins
17004	Gravel with silt	Construction and worm activity
17005	Silt and sand	Fill of foundation trench
17006	Cut	Foundation trench
17008	Stones	Slumped revetment for 17023
17015	Orange sandy clay	Natural
17018	Limestone fragments	Packing in base of 17006
17019	Gritty clay silt	Fill of grave 17021
17020	Skeleton	Child burial, pit 17021
17021	Cut	Pit for burial 17020
17023	Sandy clay silt	Turf bank for palisade
17024	Gritty clay silt	Artificial terrace
17025	Cut	Pit containing 3 burials

Context	Description	Interpretation
17026	Gritty clay silt	Fill of pit 17025
17029	Cut	Post-hole
17030	Cut	Pit for burial 17032
17032	Skeleton	Burial in pit 17030
17034	Mottled clay silt	Fill of 17058
17037	Skeleton	Burial in pit 17025
17040	Cut	Post-hole
17042	Cut	Stake-hole
17044	Cut	Stake-hole
17046	Cut	Post-hole
17051	Cut	Stake-hole
17053	Cut	Stake-hole
17055	Cut	Palisade slot?
17056	Skeleton	Burial in pit 17025
17057	Skeleton	Infant burial in pit 17025
17058	Cut	Construction slot?

Table 9.3
Trench 17 contexts

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE CHAPEL AND BURIAL GROUND

Clearance work in 1998 (Illus 9.1, 9.31, 9.32)

In 1998 scheduled monument consent was received on behalf of the Finlaggan Trust to clear rubble and debris around the ruins of the chapel as a preliminary step to conservation of the upstanding walls. The work was carried out by members of the Edinburgh University Officers' Training Corps from Sunday 5 July to Friday 10 July. Archaeological supervision was provided by the author, with geological advice from Nigel Ruckley. The chapel walls were conserved in 2001 and in the following year its associated grave-slabs were installed inside the ruin, further protection being provided by sheets of glass.

Most of the material removed in 1998 consisted of blocks of stone collapsed from the chapel walls. In total, about 12 cubic metres was taken away. Illus 9.1 indicates its approximate extent before work commenced. Not all of it was removed. The safety of the remaining ruins demanded that temporary buttresses should be left at strategic points.

Along the exterior of the south and north walls of the building the debris consisted of loosely packed stones with some decomposing mortar, unencumbered by soil or vegetation. It is possible that most of this stonework fell when the freestone dressings of the door in the south wall and supposed windows in the north and the south walls were robbed. The quoins had also been removed from the exterior corners of the building, and it was assumed that they also were of freestone, which does not occur naturally in Islay.

At the west end of the chapel much of the gable had collapsed, both inside and outside. Inside, the removal of this stonework revealed some wall surface still clad with plaster. Outside, the rubble was contained in a matrix of soil with a healthy growth of grass, nettles, etc, and here caution had to be exercised so as not to damage the adjacent building S.

Outside the east wall of the chapel there was a pile of debris, grassed over before the commencement of work. It contained some blocks of stone, presumably from the chapel walls, but was largely composed of sandy silt with decomposing mortar, human bones and fragments of grave-slabs. Similar material [17001] in trench 17 was interpreted as material thrown out of the chapel after it fell out of use.

The top part of this debris mound was excavated carefully to a depth of about 0.4m, revealing lime rendering (no different from the interior plaster) still in place on the wall surface. The rest of the heap, which was compact and stable, was left in place. Partial removal of this debris mound did, however, reveal a grey-yellow sandstone quoin still in situ low down at the south-east corner of the chapel. Pieces of other similar sandstone blocks recovered in the clearance work probably served a similar purpose.

Inside the east wall of the building there was a slope of debris, covered with nettles and grass, about 1.25m wide at its base and 1m high against the wall. This contained blocks of stone and human bones in a matrix of decayed lime mortar and plaster with much pale brown sandy silt and root penetration. It is probable that this material was piled up fairly recently. There was also evidence that the south-east corner of the building was tampered with and re-mortared.

Underlying the debris against the east wall were substantial remains of an altar surrounded by more collapsed material of an



Illustration 9.31
The chapel altar

earlier date, generally equivalent to the disturbed, redeposited sandy silt with human bones [14002] encountered in trench 14. It also contained 19th-century bottle glass and was thought to be evidence of the late 19th-century clearance work.

The altar is 0.90 by 1.55m, with a maximum surviving height above floor level of 0.58m. There was a gap of about 3cm between its back and the east wall of the chapel, which was plastered before the altar was erected. The altar was composed of blocks of stone in a generous mix of lime mortar. Only the bottom course of facing blocks was completely in place, the two front corner stones being of dressed grey-yellow sandstone.

An area of irregular paving slabs was uncovered immediately adjacent to the front and south side of the altar, including pieces of limestone, dolerite, quartzite, chlorite schist and bits of type A roofing slates. They were laid over a deposit (unexcavated) of sandy silt with mortar debris and small pieces of red sandstone which had accumulated, or been laid down, after the construction of the altar. The surface of this paving was at about the same level as was computed for the floor in trench 14.

In the course of this work several pieces of worked sandstone were recovered, of at least three different types:

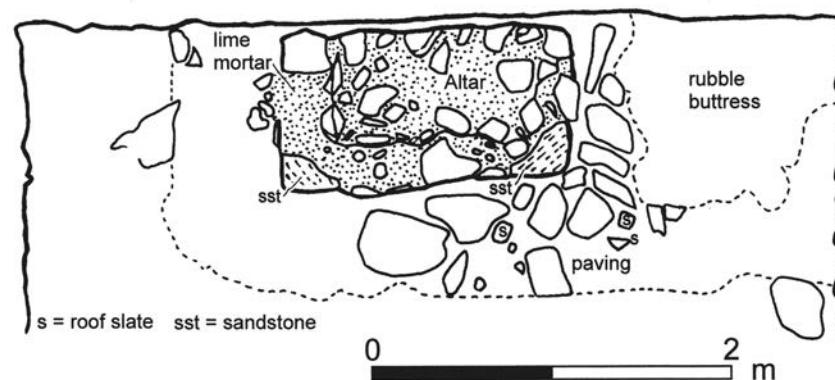


Illustration 9.32
The chapel altar, plan



Illustration 9.33
Ivory arm from a crucifix found in the chapel, B6 (SF 14013)

One piece of very crumbly green-yellow sandstone with no worked faces was recovered lying on the paving to the south of the altar. It can be identified as coming from the Carsaig Quarry in Mull. It is the first piece of Carsaig sandstone to be identified from a medieval context as far south as Islay. It possibly comes from a grave-slab. There are grave-slabs of Carsaig sandstone at Iona Abbey and elsewhere.

Several pieces of red or pink sandstone, probably from quarries in Kintyre, Arran or Ulster. These pieces generally have not worn well, and most of the pieces are small and lacking worked faces.

The largest group (in terms of bulk) consists of pieces of fine-grained grey-yellow sandstone, some pockmarked with holes as a result of weathering. Quarry sources for it have not been identified, but are also likely to be in Kintyre, Arran or Ulster. Some faces preserve the traces of diagonal tooling. The pieces include



Illustration 9.34
Halfgroat of Robert II (N24, SF 14011) incorporated in the mortar of the chapel (© National Museums Scotland)

blocks which probably served as quoins, at least two with broad chamfers from window or door embrasures and a broken jamb stone (SF 26007) from a window (?), recovered from the rubble against the exterior of the north wall of the chapel.

Some pieces of worked chlorite schist slabs were recovered, including three pieces which may have belonged to the altar top, found in the debris around the altar (R34/SF 14016, 14017, 14018). They are 30mm thick, with chamfered edges and pitting on the underside to help secure the slab in place. A fourth piece (SF 14019) reused as a paving slab was probably from a grave-slab. There was also part of the lower half of a medieval West Highland grave-slab, probably a child's (R14), recovered from the debris outside the east wall of the chapel. The design included a central cross with foliated base, a sword to one side flanked by scrollwork terminating at the bottom in a dragon's head. The carving is very fine, showing absolutely no sign of weathering.

Part of the lower stone of a rotary quern (R91) was recovered from the debris outside the east wall. It is of epidiorite – a foliated metabasite with pale feldspar (?) porphyroblasts, similar to rocks near Kildalton, Islay. It is probable that it had been built into the chapel wall.

Other finds included B6, a piece of carved ivory (Illus 9.33) identified as part of a crucifix from the debris in front of the altar, but perhaps originally sealed within it as a saint's relic, and a small strip of lead (SF 14014), possibly a piece of window came. The most remarkable find was N24, a bent coin (Illus 9.34), embedded in a substantial lump of lime mortar, well buried in the rubble against the exterior of the south wall. It is a halfgroat of Robert II, datable to 1371–90. It is clearly confirmation that the chapel was erected about that time.

Chapter 10

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS ON THE SPINE OF THE ISLAND

Trench 6 (Illus 10.1–3, Table 10.1)

Trench 6 was positioned with its long axis approximately on a north-west to south-east line and was 10 by 5m. It was opened in 1991 to ascertain the relationship between building S and the adjacent stretch of bank, and to test whether this bank was the continuation of the timberwork defence enclosing the northern portion of Eilean Mór, a stretch of which was

sectioned in trench 3. Unsuspected prior to the commencement of digging was a substantial paved roadway on a line connecting the chapel with the great hall and evidence for a structure, labelled as 6.1, interpreted as a wooden watch tower of the 16th century. A substantial medieval midden was also encountered.

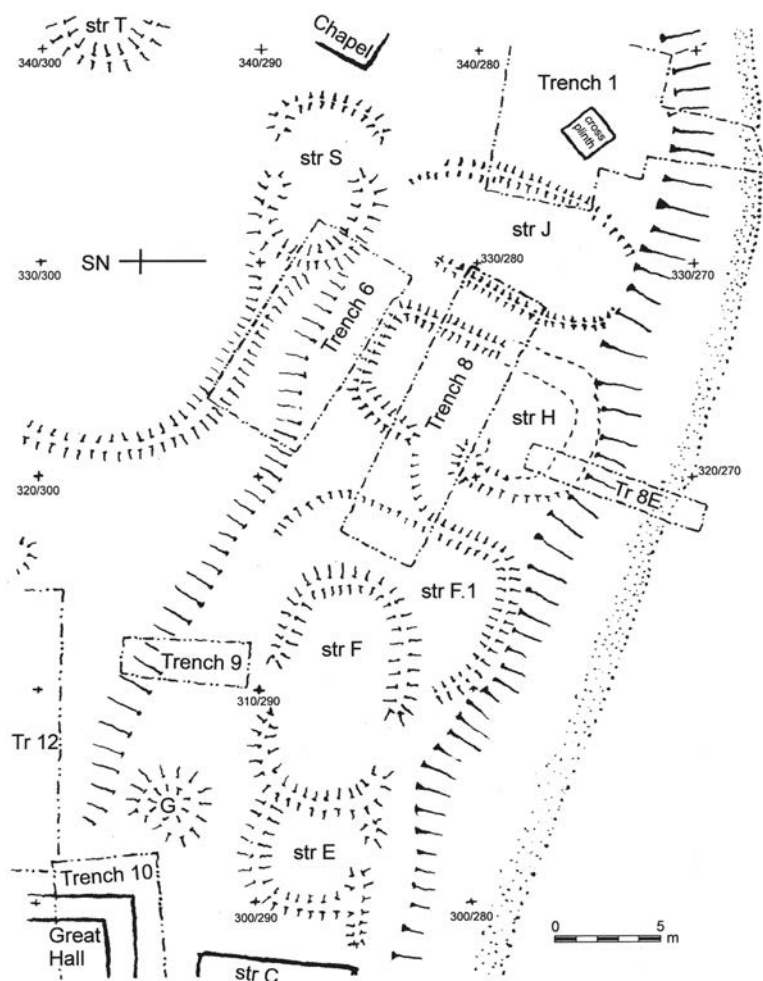


Illustration 10.1
Location map for trenches 6, 8 and 9



Illustration 10.2
Trench 6, main features exposed under the turf and topsoil

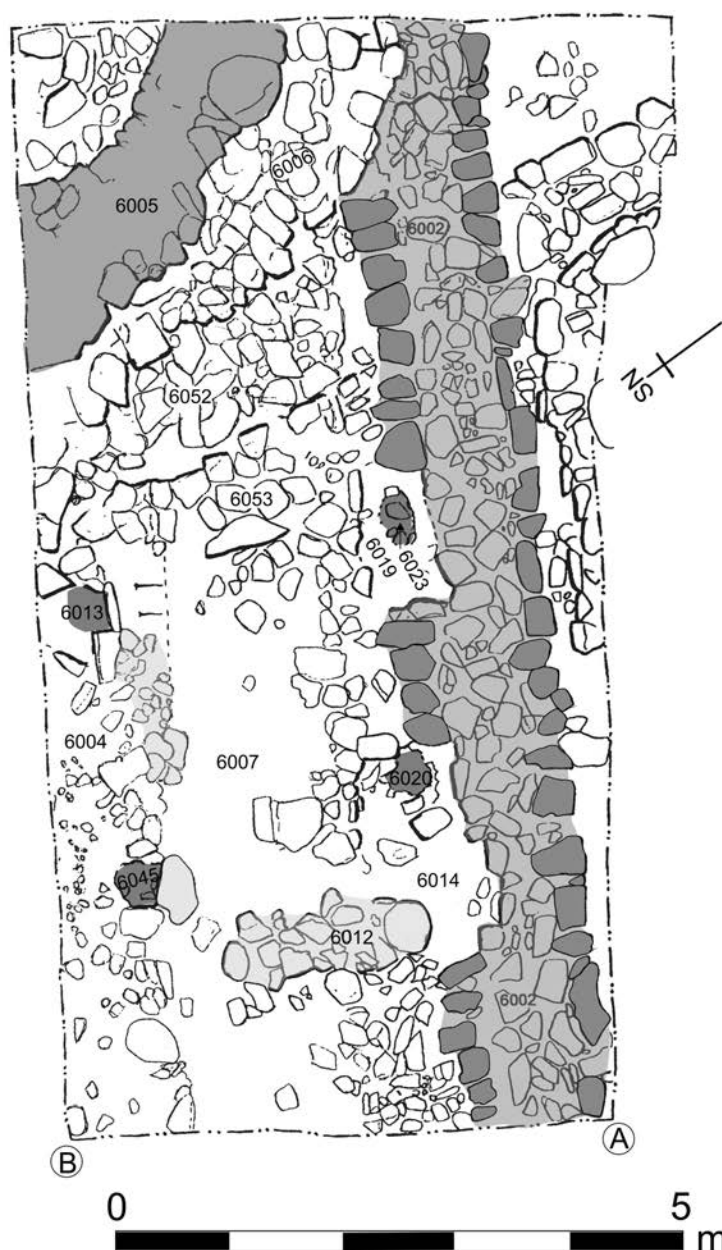


Illustration 10.3

Trench 6, plan showing the corner post-holes of structure 6.1 and house S

Extending over much of the trench was a gravel horizon [6018], largely the result of earthworm activity. It was apparent that it was the same phenomenon encountered in the burial ground in trench 1 as 1007. It was as much as 10cm deep in the hollow between the bank and the road, and here was sandwiched between a build-up of humus [6007] above and midden [6022] below. It also extended over the palisade bank and the surface of the road, but under tumble [6052] outward from the wall of house S. From it were recovered several small finds, including a Jew's harp (F53). The most significant from a dating point of view were two late 15th-century groats of James III (N32, N33), on the basis of their condition unlikely to have been lost any later than the early 16th century.

Buildings S and S.1, and structure 6.1 (Illus 10.2–5)

From surface indications, building S appeared prior to excavation as a sub-rectangular structure with rounded corners and, probably, opposed entrances in its longer sides. It measured about 8 by 6m overall, and lay contiguous to the end wall of the chapel and only slightly lower than it. Only a small segment of it was included in trench 6, but it was clear from this that its walls [6005] were of drystone construction, up to 1.7m thick at their base. The outer face had up to two courses in place, of massive boulders, with a distinct batter, while the inner face was composed of smaller stones. The wall core was of rubble. The stones used in the construction of building S were all of local origin, quarried (but not dressed) rather than boulders. The main types were quartzite and Port Askaig tillite, with occasional blocks of limestone.

Within trench 6 the wall of S, a metre or more in thickness, stood to a maximum height of 0.7m. Wrapped around its exterior was a series of rubble tips [6006, 6052, 6053], resulting from the collapse outwards of its walls, and possibly an earlier structure as well, a putative house S.1. The uppermost tumble [6006] spread over the surface of the adjacent cobbled road. The interior of building S was also much encumbered with tumble [6051], with voids, a growth of nettles and moss over some of the stones. As with other drystone houses on the island, there was no evidence for a laid floor. A firm floor surface [6016] was provided in this case by the flattened and levelled remains of an earlier wall, running north-east to south-west, with one face coinciding with the south-east end of the trench. Incorporated in it was a large post-setting, about 40cm across, defined by a stone surround [6017] (Illus 10.6). This was not fully excavated but might be interpreted as more evidence for another building (S.1) the other side of the main road to house J. Alternatively, it might have been a continuation of structure 6.2.

No finds or dating evidence were recovered from house S, but it seemed likely it belonged to the 16th century like the other drystone structures on Eilean Mór which encumbered the medieval remains.

Structure 6.1 was identified on the basis of four large post-holes with rectangular settings arranged in a square, giving an overall size for the structure of about 2.6 by 3m. Post-hole 6045 was



Illustration 10.4

Trench 6, view looking north-west with paved road and tumbled remains of structure S in right foreground

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS ON THE SPINE OF THE ISLAND

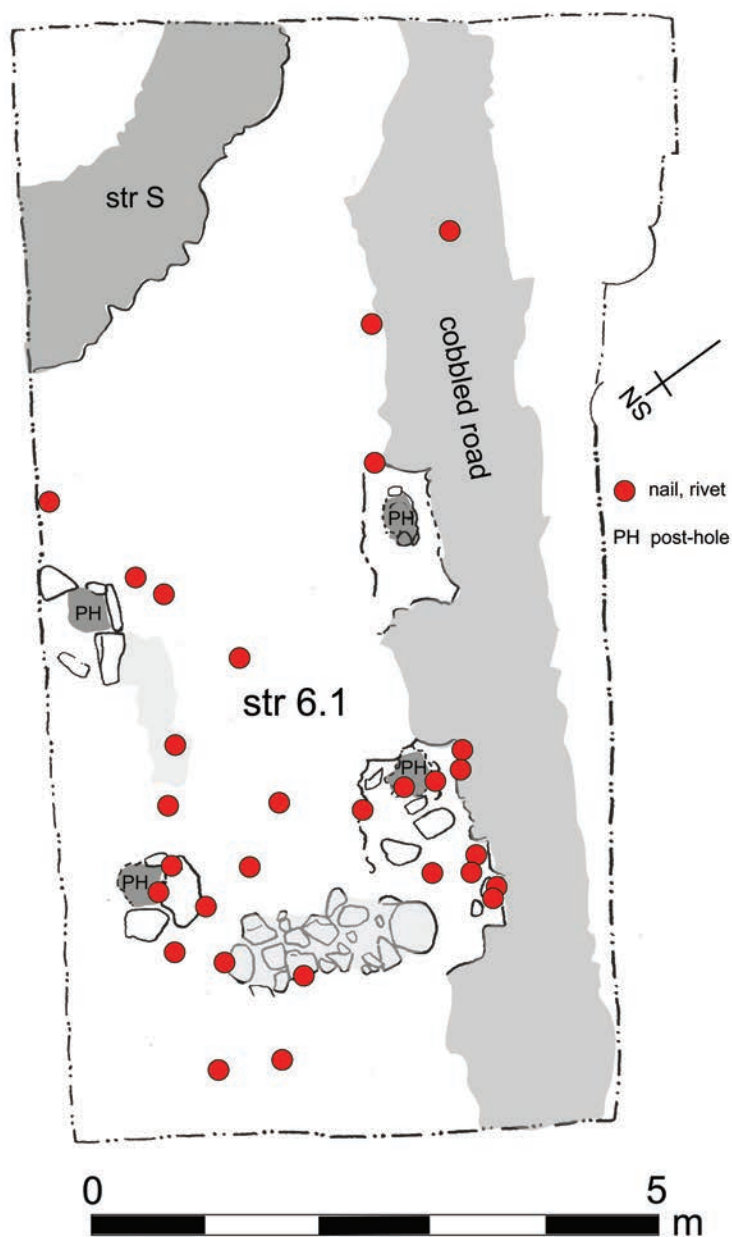


Illustration 10.5
Trench 6, distribution of nails and rivets associated with structure 6.1

cut into the stone revetment of the palisade bank, and was about 40cm square and 26cm deep. There was an iron nail (SF 6109) in its fill. Post-hole 6013 was dug through the top of the palisade bank. It was rectangular in shape, its south side defined by a massive slab of Port Askaig tillite. It was over 40cm across and 32cm deep.

The other two post-holes of structure 6.1 pierced the earlier cobbled road. Post-hole 6020 was 31 by 29cm, and 38cm deep from the top of the road surface. The fill of sandy silt [6020] contained a large iron rivet (SF 6046) which would have clenched boards with a combined thickness of as much as an inch (25.4mm). There was also a large lump of iron slag (SF 6047) at the bottom, perhaps placed there deliberately as a protection for the timber upright supported in the hole, helping to draw moisture from it and prevent rotting. Post-hole 6023 was oval in shape at the top,

with stone packers defining a rectangular shape about 35 by 31cm and a depth of 41cm below the road surface. There was a large centrally place stone at its bottom.

The creation of these two post-holes involved the removal of cobbles and kerbstones from the road, creating two rectangular areas, 6037 and 6041, backfilled with humic earth [6019, 6014]. Some of the uplifted cobbles were reused with other stones to form the rectangular arrangement of stones [6012], about 3 by 0.6m, interpreted as the remains of a plinth or a step outside the north-west side of structure 6.1.

Spread around the structure 6.1 post-holes, in their fills and in the overlying gravel spread [6018] were over 20 nails and a few broken rivets, possibly all from the demolition of structure 6.1.

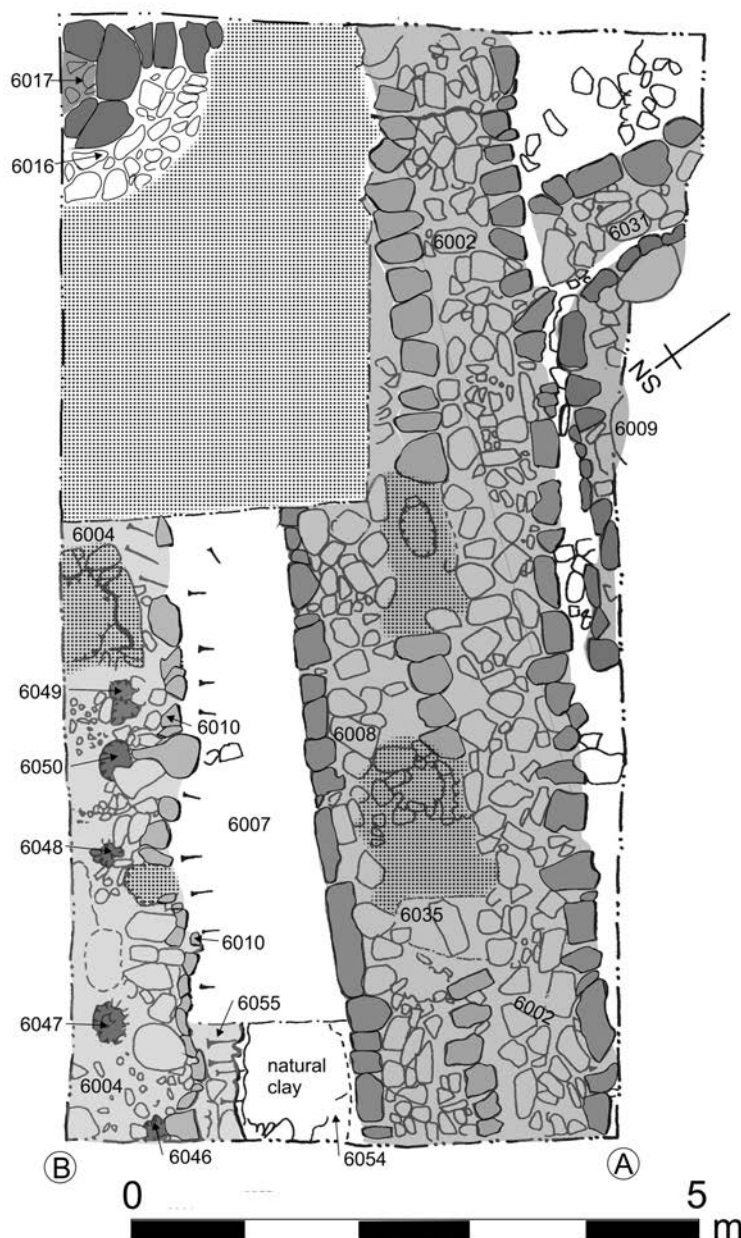


Illustration 10.6
Trench 6, showing the palisade bank and paved road



Illustration 10.7

Trench 6, view showing the cobbled road sloping down into midden deposits and tumble round the exterior of the wall of building S

The road and building H (Illus 10.4, 10.6, 10.7)

The well-preserved cobbled surface of the road lay immediately under the turf and topsoil. It ran along the edge of the spine of the island adjacent to the series of buildings J, H and F, joining the chapel to the great hall. It was up to 2.4m wide but only the 1m wide strip [6002] adjacent to building H was level. The rest [6008] sloped down at an angle of 15° or more from the horizontal. This may have been the unforeseen consequence of laying the road partially over yielding deposits of earlier midden. A point to note is that there was a distinct break up the centre of the road formed by an alignment of stones that had the appearance of being an earlier kerb [6003]. It is therefore possible that the road was constructed in two stages, the strip nearer H only being added once

the other had started to sink. We have, however, judged that 6002 along with kerb 6003 (and a matching kerb adjacent to house H) was the original road and that 6008 was an addition. Part of our reason for this conclusion is that the kerb of 6008 was so different in character from the others. It was neater, and formed of generally narrower rectangular blocks.

The full width of the road was composed of a single course of flat stones of various local types, roughly uniform in size, but with a few small packers. The majority were of Port Askaig tillite with lesser quantities of limestone, epidiorite and other rocks. Near the south-east end of the trench there appeared to be a straight joint in the road, perhaps marking the threshold or gate into the graveyard. Within the hole [6041] cut for one of the posts of structure 6.1 the cobbles could be seen to be lying on a bed of gravel [6021]. A small sondage dug to a depth of 40cm beneath this gravel bed encountered dark grey-brown humic earth [6035], apparently a continuation of midden 6022. A large pitched rock was also encountered.

Just clipped by the trench's south-west baulk was the end of building H [6009], adjacent to the south edge of the road. It appeared probable that the road was aligned with the building rather than the other way around. Only the exterior wall face of house H and its rounded north-east corner were revealed. The wall stood two courses high. It was composed of quarried blocks of stone, mostly Port Askaig tillite. A paved path [6031] ran from the main road between it and building J. It was about 80cm wide and composed mostly of flat pieces of Port Askaig tillite.

Structure 6.2 and a midden (Illus 10.6–8)

The remains of the bank [6004] for supporting a palisade – structure 6.2 – ran approximately north-west to south-east (Illus 10.6, 10.7). Its inner, north-east-facing side lay outside the trench, but prior to excavation it appeared to be about 1.5m wide and about

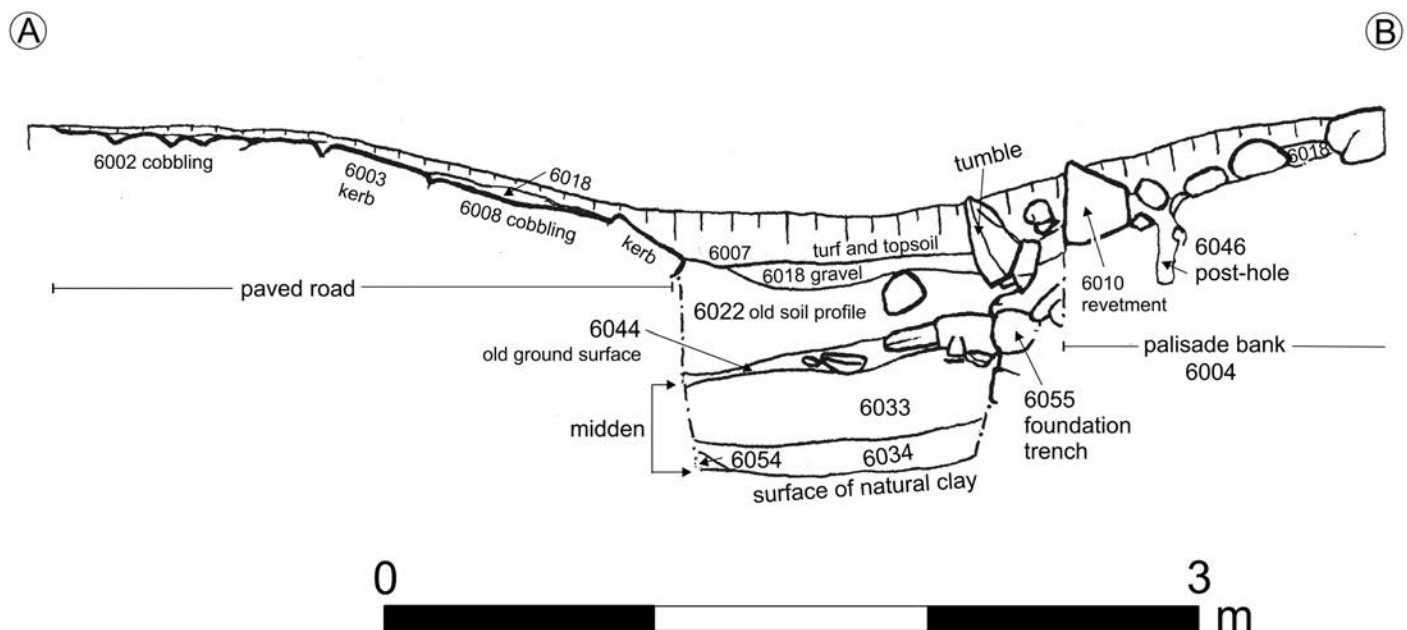


Illustration 10.8

Trench 6, section A-B facing south-east along the trench edge

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS ON THE SPINE OF THE ISLAND

Context	Description	Interpretation
6002	Laid boulders and blocks	Paved road
6003	Line of laid stones	Kerb of 6002
6004	Silty clay	Bank for supporting palisade
6005	Laid stones	Wall, str S
6006	Stones	Tumble from str S
6007	Humic soil	Subsoil
6008	Laid boulders and blocks	Paved road
6009	Laid stones	Wall, str H
6010	Laid stones	Revetment of 6004 bank
6012	Laid stones	Plinth or step, str 6.1
6013	Cut	Post-hole, str 6.1
6014	Humic soil	Fill of 6041
6016	Stones	Floor, str S / wall, str S.1
6017	Stones	Post-setting, str S.1
6018	Gravel spread	Worm activity
6019	Humic soil	Fill of 6037
6020	Cut	Post-hole, str 6.1
6021	Gravel spread	Bedding for road 6002
6022	Sandy silt, charcoal, ash	Midden
6023	Cut	Post-hole, str 6.1
6031	Laid stones	Path between str H & J
6033	Sandy silt, charcoal, ash	Midden
6034	Grey silt	Midden
6035	Humic soil	Midden, equivalent to 6022
6036	Grey silt	Old ground surface
6037	Cut	For post-hole 6023, str 6.1
6041	Cut	For post-hole 6020, str 6.1
6042	Grey-white clay	Natural
6044	Stones in humic soil	Old ground surface
6045	Cut	Post-hole, str 6.1
6046	Cut	Post-hole for palisade
6047	Cut	Post-hole for palisade
6048	Cut	Post-hole for palisade
6049	Cut	Post-hole for palisade
6050	Cut	Post-hole for palisade
6051	Stones	Tumble from str S
6052	Stones	Tumble from str S
6053	Stones	Tumble from str S
6054	Ash, charcoal	Midden
6055	Sandy silt, stones	Fill of foundation trench 6056
6056	Cut	Foundation trench for 6004

Table 10.1
Trench 6 contexts

50cm high. Excavation demonstrated that its outer, south-west-facing side had three or four courses of stonework [6010] forming a vertical face above the level of a foundation trench [6056]. The bank itself was of earth and contained post-holes for timber uprights. A series of five [6046, 6047, 6048, 6050, 6049] were identified in the 5.5m stretch excavated adjacent to building S. They were placed at irregular intervals, but further excavation of 6004 might possibly have led to the recognition of more. All were set with stones to hold the posts upright, were from 35cm to over 40cm in depth and could hold posts with a diameter of 8 to 15cm. A deposit of grey clay [6042] under the earth core of the bank was cut through by one of the post-holes [6013] of structure 6.1. It was presumed to be the underlying natural.

A knife in two pieces (F62) was recovered from post-hole 6046. Two pieces of daub (SF 6144) from the stone face of the bank retained impressions of withies, perhaps a clue that the palisade was wattled. Sherds of wheel-made pottery (reduced gritty) confirmed that the bank was no earlier in date than the 12th century. More significant from a dating point of view for the construction of the bank was a carved piece of grey-yellow sandstone (R30), the lower part of a human head, perhaps from the end of a hood moulding, incorporated into it. It was clearly from a prestigious building destroyed or altered prior to the construction of the timberwork. The choice would appear to be limited to the great hall, believed to have been dismantled at the very end of the 15th century, or else the nearby chapel which may have remained in use well into the 16th century.

Underlying the gravel horizon 6018 between the bank and the road and extending underneath the latter was a midden deposit [6022]. Its full depth was only observed in a 1m wide sondage cut at the north-west end of the trench (Illus 10.8). Here it was 42cm thick adjacent to the road, thinning to 10cm up against the face of the bank. It was dark brown sandy silt with grit and pebbles, fragments of charcoal and patches of peat ash. Animal bone was present but mostly in too poor a state of preservation for easy recovery. Nineteen sherds of pottery included one of redware (SF 6156) and another of oxidised gritty ware (SF 6117). There were several nails, including one, F46, identifiable as a 'fiddle-key' type of horseshoe nail, current from the 11th to the 13th century. The ironwork also included a small scale-tang knife (F61), and a barbed arrowhead (F31) of a type datable to the mid-13th century. There was a stone counter or playing piece (R71) and a piece of a type A roof slate (SF 6157).

Midden 6022 may have formed over a long period of time, and clearly the presence within it of medieval artefacts is suggestive of a process that started in that period. Perhaps, however, the most significant find from the point of view of dating was the roof slate. As we have argued elsewhere in this volume, roof slates were only likely to have ended up in middens and other contexts after the buildings that they covered had been destroyed or dismantled. In the case of Finlaggan that would mean about 1500 at earliest. The formation of midden 6022 as late as the early 16th century is consistent with the presence of groats of James III in the overlying wormed horizon [6018].

Beneath midden 6022 was a thin spread of stones in an earth matrix similar to 6022. This was labelled as 6044 and identified as an old ground surface overlying yet more midden deposits. It may either have represented an attempt to consolidate the ground surface or a

temporary cessation in the activities which had caused the midden to accumulate. The underlying midden deposit [6033] had a maximum depth of 30cm and was similar in character to midden 6022 but more variable in colour, indicating successive tips. Deposit 6033 gave on to 6034, the same midden, but greyer and siltier in character with a maximum thickness of 13cm. A wedge of red ash and charcoal [6054] under it may have represented a different episode, but too little of it was exposed for further comment. From 6034 was recovered a strap handle of partially reduced gritty ware (SF 6163).

Midden 6034 and 6054 gave on to a deposit of grey silt [6036] overlying the natural grey-green silty clay. It represented an earlier ground surface.

Interpretation (Illus 10.9)

The cobbled road with kerb stones that stretched the length of trench 6 has been identified as part of a medieval system, in this case connecting the chapel with the great hall. The lack of debris or soil build-up over its surface suggested that it was maintained

and remained in use into post-medieval times, beyond a time when the adjacent medieval building H, on the basis of excavations in trench 8, was in ruins. Although tumble from building S spread over the road, the structure itself seems to have been placed to keep the road open, or at least that side of it which was not slipping down into the midden.

The supposed palisade bank [6004] turned out to be that, with a presumption based on stratigraphy and finds that it was constructed in the 16th century. Its stratigraphic relationship with building S, or a putative earlier structure S.1, was not established, but it appeared likely that the bank was earlier than structure S.

Clearly later than the erection of the bank, and perhaps of similar date to building S, was structure 6.1. Its construction would have left the main part of the road open and perhaps have provided an entrance through the palisade to the enclosure beyond. It may represent the remains of a wooden watch tower. It was on the highest available piece of ground on the island, outside the burial ground. The plinth [6012] might have been a step providing access or supporting a ladder.

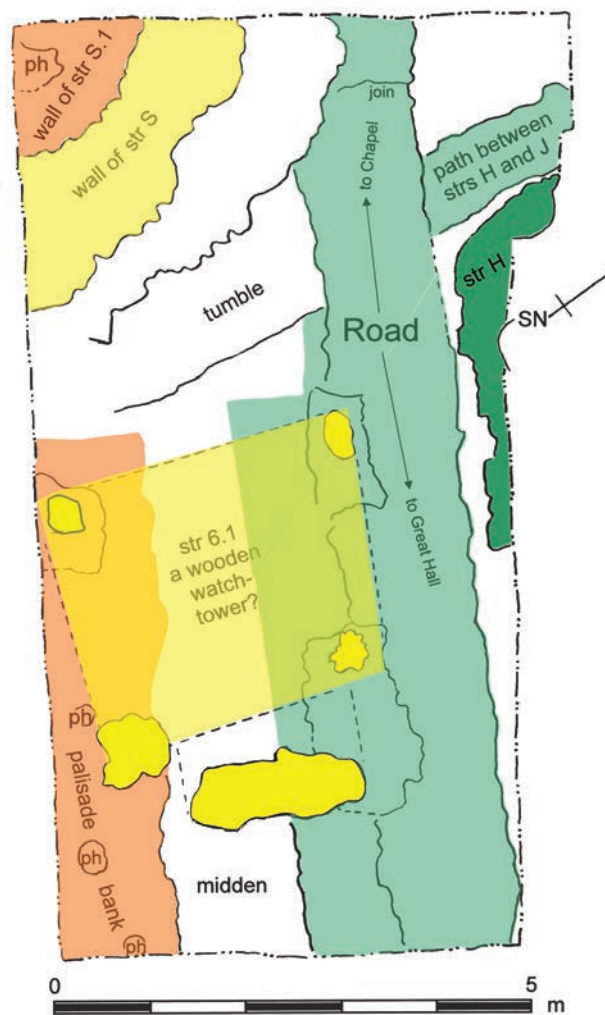


Illustration 10.9
Trench 6, composite interpretative plan of main features



Illustration 10.10
Trench 8, view looking south-east, with main features exposed under the turf and topsoil

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS ON THE SPINE OF THE ISLAND

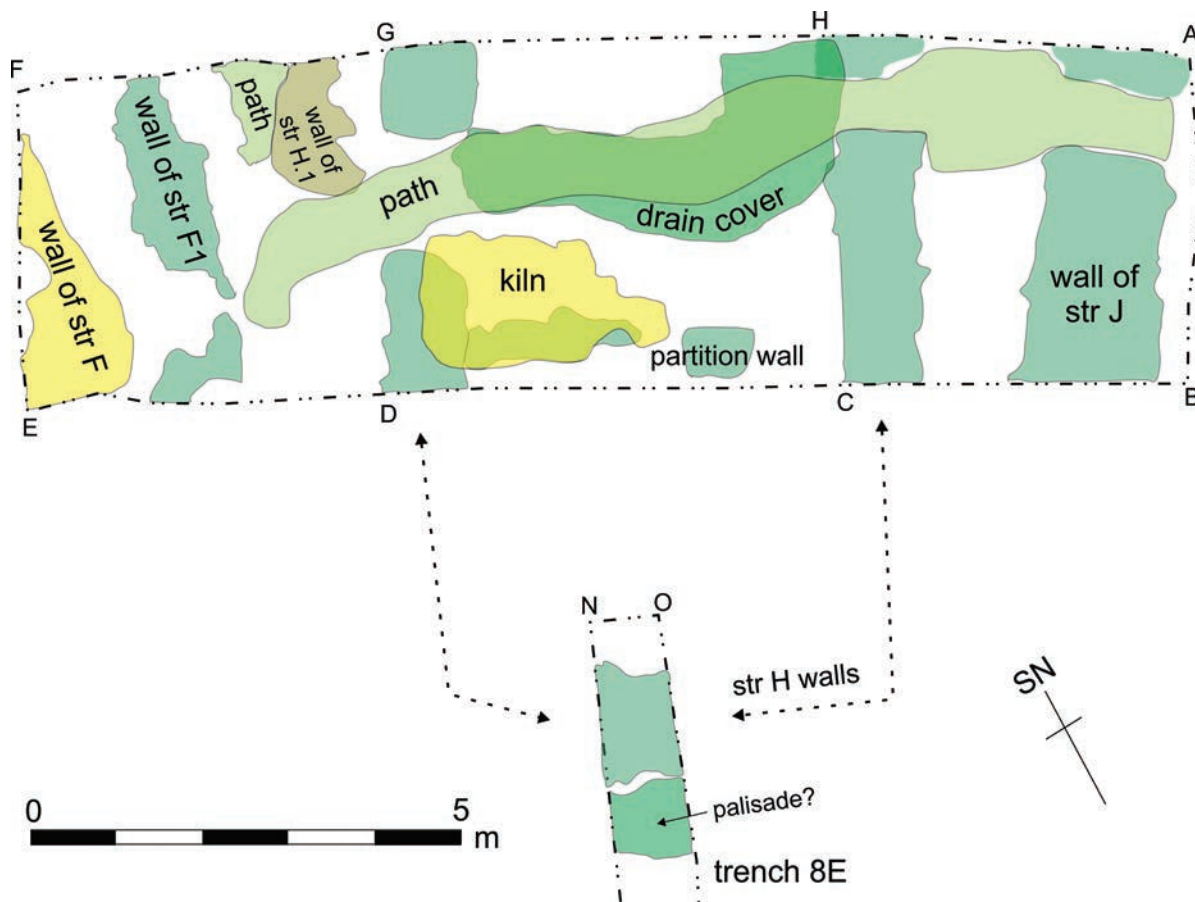


Illustration 10.11
Trench 8, composite interpretative plan of some features

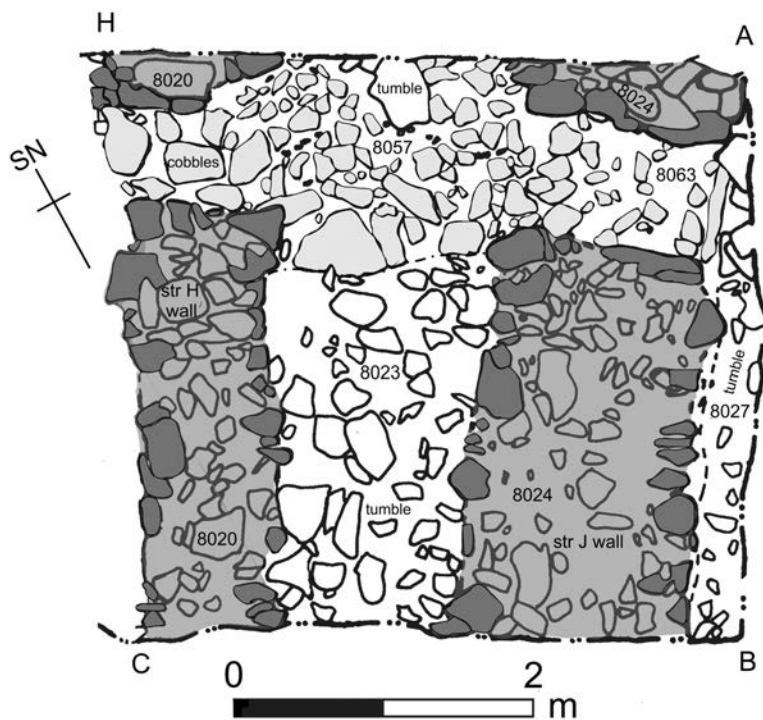


Illustration 10.12
Trench 8, plan of south-east end with alley between buildings H and J



Illustration 10.13
Trench 8, south-east end looking south-east. The large block of limestone at bottom left is probably a lintel for the doorway in the east wall of structure H

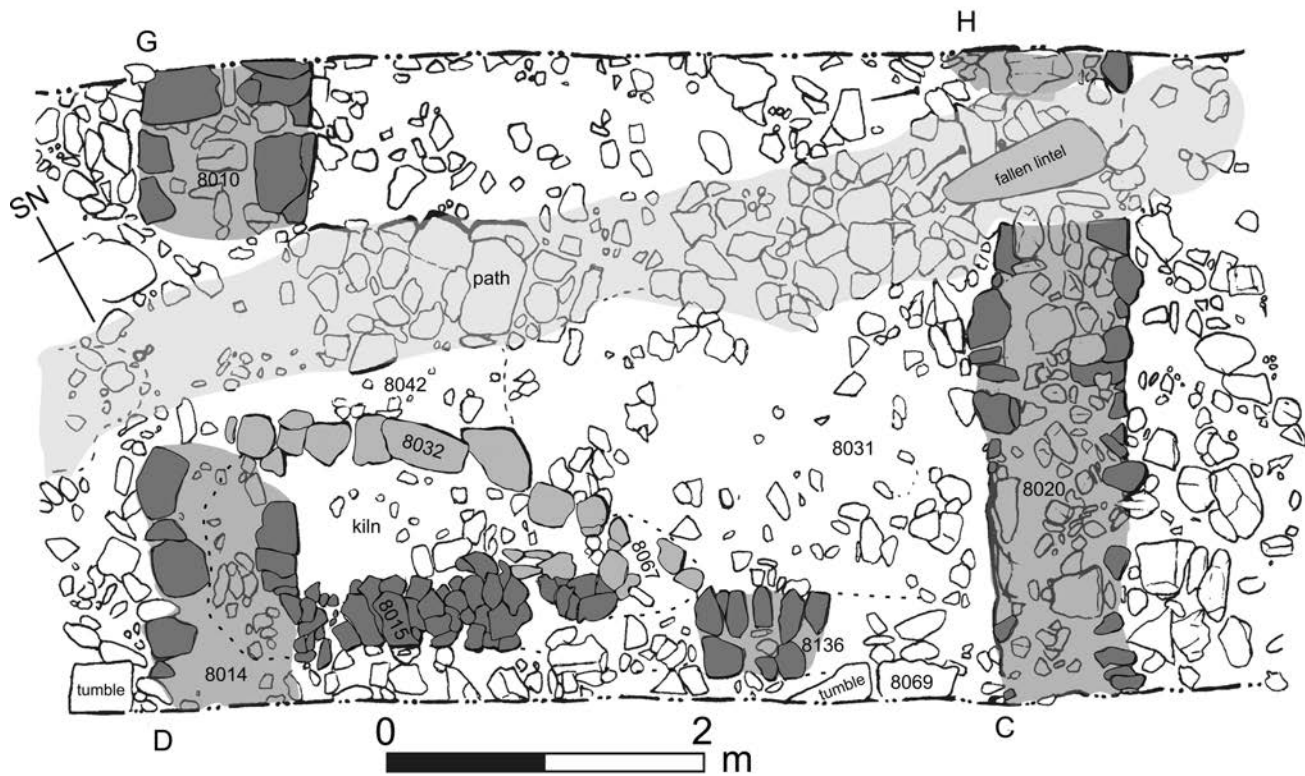


Illustration 10.14
Trench 8, plan of structure H with later kiln



Illustration 10.15
Trench 8, view from north-west looking across the excavated area of structure H

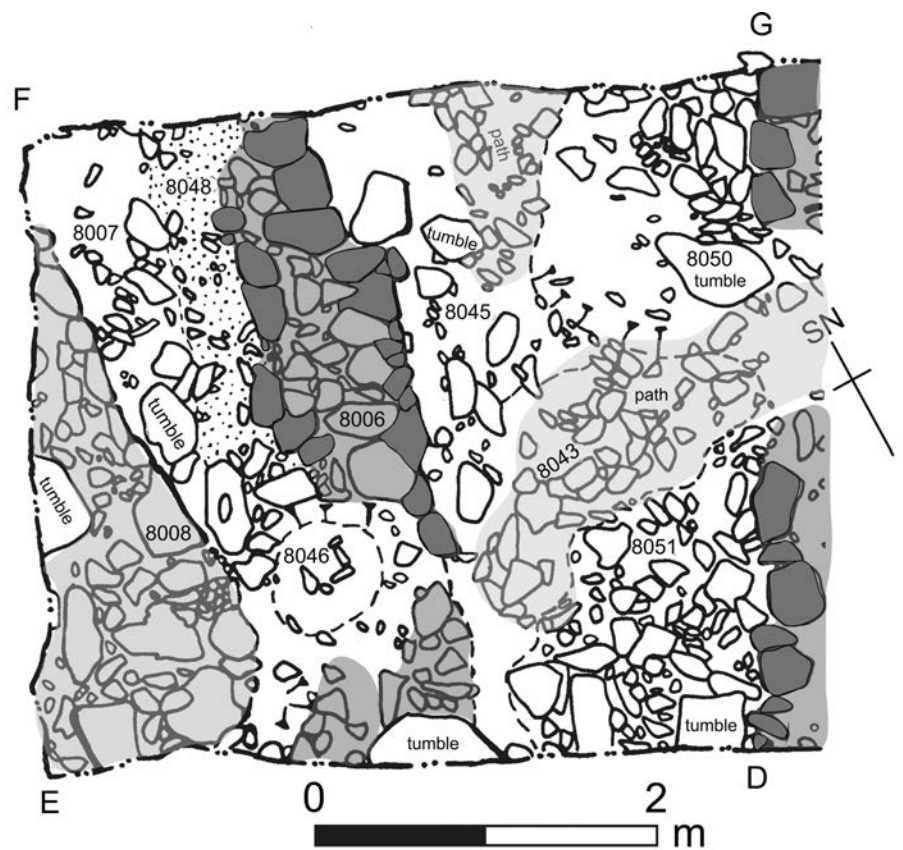


Illustration 10.16
Trench 8, plan of north-west segment of trench with walls belonging to structures F and F1



Illustration 10.17
Trench 8, view of north-west segment of trench looking south-east

Trenches 8 and 8E (Illus 6.12, 10.1, 10.10–12, Table 10.2)

Trench 8 was laid out in 1992 with its main axis running north-west to south-east through building H. It was 14m long by 4m wide. At the end of the 1992 season it was deemed necessary to carry on the excavation of this trench for a further season in order to achieve the objectives initially set. The central area within the walls of building H was covered with polythene before backfilling, and this was the area re-examined in 1993, with a small eastwards extension to take in the alley between H and J and the doorway of building J.

Trench 8E (Illus 10.1, 10.23, 10.24) was laid out in 1993 down the side of the island adjacent to the end of building H, right to the water's edge. The trench was later extended to take in the end wall of building H, but it was thought inappropriate to join it up with trench 8 in order not to remove any more of the deposits associated with that building. The trench was 1 by 8m and was expected to answer the question whether this side of the island had any artificial defences.

It was anticipated that building H would turn out to be one of a series of medieval structures, in this case relatively unencumbered with later houses or debris, aligned along the edge of the paved road leading from the great hall to the chapel. An opportunity seemed to be presented to look at an edifice of this period that was not obviously ceremonial or official in character. The trench was positioned so that H's relationship to adjacent structures – J and F1 – could also be explored. It was thought that this area of Eilean Mór, the ridge extending from the chapel to building C, was more likely to be viewed as an attractive setting for buildings at an early date than the more low-lying fringes of the island, and if we were to recover any evidence of occupation earlier than the 14th century this was the best place to look for it.

Removal of turf and topsoil from trench 8 revealed considerable spreads of tumbled stonework covering the whole area of the trench. It was only after much patient cleaning and recording that the main features were discerned.

Post-medieval activity? (Illus 10.14)

Through a gap in the ruined north-west wall of H ran a path, sloping down south-westwards between H and F1 to the shore. Here it formed a muddy gully [8043], partially hollowed out by feet and the outflow of the drain in building H on its way to the loch. Pieces of stone may have been pressed into it from time to time to make it less slippery.

A kiln, triangular in shape, about 1.6 by 2.0m, was erected within building H, apparently when the latter was already abandoned and roofless, since it overlapped the main external wall of building H and was built over the stub of an internal partition wall [8136] (Illus 10.19). This wall survived only two courses high, with other blocks of stone [8015] added in the course of constructing the kiln. The kiln's north-east wall [8032] was composed of a single row, remaining only one course high, of blocks of phyllite and limestone resting on the floor of H [8031]. At the apex of the kiln a hollow [8068] full of peat ash marked the position of the fire. It was oval in shape, about 90 by 45cm, with a depth of 13cm. A truncated post-hole [8084], 14cm in diameter, in its base probably dated to an earlier phase of activity. Inside the

main part of the kiln and overlying the floor of H was a thin layer of clay silt with fragments of charcoal and flecks of ash [8040].

This kiln presumably served for drying corn. A soil sample from the tumble and black clayey silt within the ruined walls of building H produced carbonised oats (*Avena*) and wheat (*Triticum sp.*). A number of nails, and an iron object (F106) tentatively identified as the foot for a gridiron for supporting the grain that had to be dried, were also recovered. The upper stone of a rotary quern (R88) was recovered nearby in the muddy gully 8043. An awl (F89), still with its wooden handle, was also found here.

Buildings J and H (Illus 10.12–15)

The north-west wall of J [8024], reduced to its bottommost course, had a width of about 1.4m. Its stones were all of local origin, undressed blocks of quartzite and limestone and water-washed boulders, varying in size from about 10 to 50cm across. It was pierced by an entranceway, about 80cm wide, opposite the entranceway in the south-east wall exposed in trench 1. There appeared to be a sill stone at the inner end of the entrance within trench 8. Too little of the interior of J was included in this trench to be fully excavated. It was choked with rubble and clay silt [8027] from its collapse and abandonment. In overall size the building had a width of just over 6m and a probable length of about 12m. Pieces of type A roof slates here and in trench 1 suggest that it had a slate roof.

Between buildings J and H there was an alley about 1.5m wide where the entrance to H opposed that in J. The alley was clogged with tumbled stonework and silty clay containing pieces of charcoal and lenses of peat ash overlying crude cobbling [8057] extending into the two entrances. This was the continuation of the paved path [6031] uncovered in trench 6.

Before excavation the low stone walls of H were clearly discernible underneath their covering of tussocky grass. The structure was rectangular with rounded corners, measuring about 12 by 7m overall. The doorway in the south-east wall was 65cm wide. A slab of limestone, 110 by 38 by 12cm, possibly its lintel, was found tumbled in the entranceway (Illus 10.13). The walls survived, at most, three courses above floor level, but the exterior of the south-west end wall [8060] in trench 8E had nine courses revetting the edge of the island (Illus 10.23, 10.24). The material used for them was all local rock, almost all quartzite and limestone, without any mortar. The blocks were mostly roughly dressed or cleaved naturally to give a straight-sided face, and most were less than 50 by 20cm.

The south-west end wall was over 1m in thickness. The side walls varied from about 1 to 0.8m. They appear to have been carefully constructed, being founded in shallow trenches. The foundation trench 8129 (Illus 10.24, trench 8E) for the south-west end wall was about 40cm wide in the interior of the building, with a depth of about 17cm. It was fully excavated for a length of about 60cm, within which the cuts for two post-holes [8128, 8132], possibly of earlier date, could be traced. The former was 23cm in diameter and 12cm deep from the base of the trench, while the latter was 34cm across but only 4cm deep. From the fill of this trench [8061] were recovered some sherds of handmade pottery identified as of prehistoric date (SF 8361), and two sherds of partially reduced gritty ware. The foundation trench [8112] for

the south-east wall (Illus 10.22) was 22cm wide internally. At its most complete it narrowed to 11cm at a depth of 17cm. Its fill of clay silt [8109] included several pieces of stone, a piece of slag and also a sherd of partially reduced gritty pottery.

A foundation trench [8121] for the north-west wall was located, but not excavated. It was about 20cm wide internally, only present towards the south-west end of the wall. Here the wall [8014] had a core of clay silt [8052] overlying a thin layer of turf or earlier ground surface [8122]. It is possible that the wall was set on the truncated remains of an earlier bank, with only its facing stones founded in trench 8121. Towards its north-east end the wall was supported on a turf bank [8044] and a raft of rubble [8133], and the north corner and north-east of the building were levelled up with rubble [8081] and other material. This was because the underlying bedrock dipped in a line from H's east corner to the mid-point on its north-west wall.

From the tumble and debris in and around the ruins of building H in trench 8, and also from the area immediately adjacent to H's end wall in trench 6, were recovered over 200 pieces of type A roof slates and about 30 fragments of type B slate. This can be taken as evidence for the roof covering.

Underneath the path and kiln in building H was the earth floor [8031, 8035, 8062] in use when the building still had a roof on it. It was of medium clayey silt, flecked with peat ash and charcoal. No trace of it was observed in the small internal area of H excavated in trench 8E, presumably due to erosion at the cliff edge. Running north-west to south-east through building H, and dividing it approximately into two halves, was the internal partition wall [8136] already referred to in the description of the kiln. It sat on the floor surface and was probably inserted at some point after the initial erection of the building.

A drain [8115], partially cut into the underlying bedrock, ran north-west to south-east across the internal area of building H, about 1.5m to the north-east of wall 8136 (Illus 10.18, 10.19, 10.20). It was about 17cm wide and about 20cm deep from its bottom to the top of its capstones, and was filled with silty grey clay [8111]. It most probably flowed out under H's north-west wall and down towards the loch, but began adjacent to the south-east door jamb as a small basin, 17 by 27cm. It had been capped with thin slabs of phyllite [8098] (not reused roof slates), but these had obviously not worn well and had been replaced by substantial slabs of quartzite and limestone [8033, 8034], partially supported on side slabs of the same rock types, forming a strip of paving extending from the entrance across the width of the building. Another area of paving [8100] was added to it along the interior of the south-east wall and beyond the entrance.

From the interface between the floor and the tumble and detritus within and around building H were recovered several pieces of ironwork, including large quantities of nails, a few rivets, staples, a small pintle (F109), two hooks (F112, F113) and a key (F118), much of which may have derived from H's internal fittings. There were also sherds of one or more reduced gritty jugs, and several sherds of handmade pottery, apparently from small globular vessels with out-turned rims with diameters from about 8 to 14cm. They were mostly of fine clay with organics, several blackened from being heated in the fire. Other finds included a

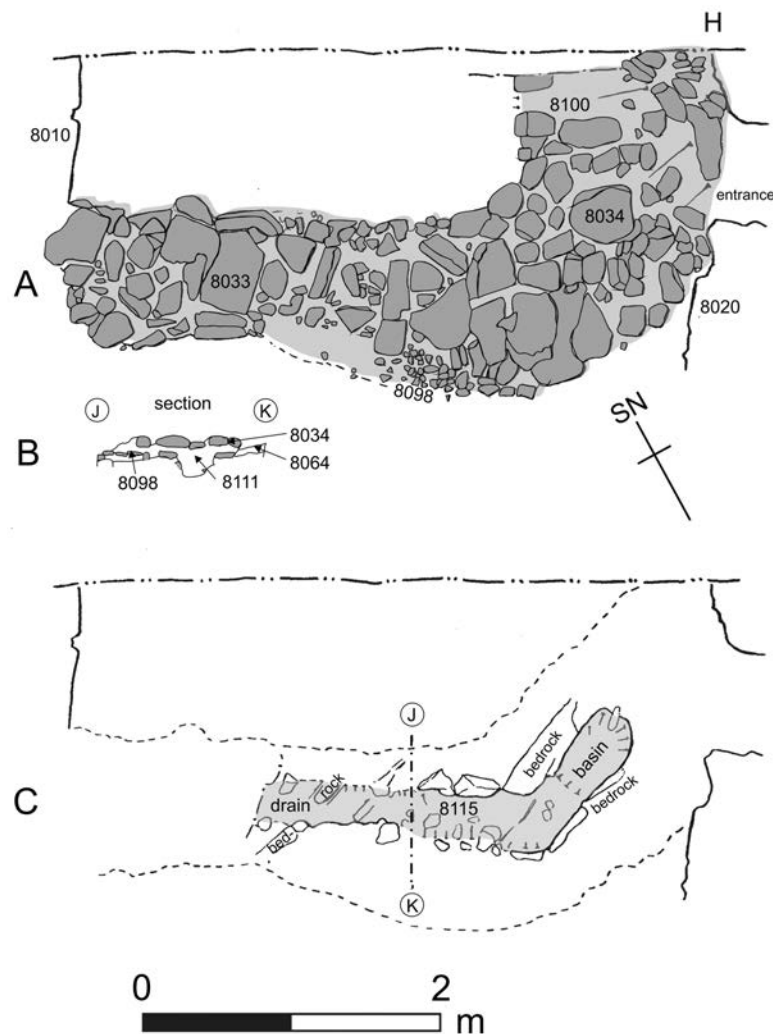


Illustration 10.18

Trench 8: (A) plan of drain with capstones in place; (B) section through drain; (C) plan with capstones removed



Illustration 10.19

Trench 8, structure H looking south-east, with the drain to the left of the far ranging-rod and the kiln to the right



Illustration 10.20

Trench 8, view of capstones of drain within structure H, looking south-east



Illustration 10.21

Trench 8, view with the remains of the wall of structure F1

whetstone (R93), a small decorated ring brooch (C4) and an arrowhead (F32) of military type. A slate scratched with a gaming board (R68) was found in the fill of the foundation trench for the south-east wall. Perhaps the most significant finds were several fragmentary horse teeth.

Buildings F1 and F (Illus 10.16, 10.17)

To the north-west of building H part of the wall [8006] of structure F1 was encountered. Although the Royal Commission identified F1 as an enclosure in its survey of the island, it appeared more likely to be another house, similar in size and alignment to H and J, overlain by a later drystone house, building F. Only one course of wall 8008 remained in situ. It consisted mostly of pieces of quartzite and limestone and had a maximum width of 1m. The stretch uncovered in trench 8 was badly damaged, some of it robbed [8046, 8047], perhaps in connection with the later construction of building F.

At the west end of trench 8 part of the wall [8008] of house F was encountered, apparently a relatively late building erected within the ruins of house F1. RCAHMS planned it as a sub-rectangular structure with opposed-entrance doorways in its side walls, with an overall size of about 10 by 7m. The outer face of its wall within trench 8 was defined by a series of small blocks aligned on edge, and its core appeared to be of rubble. Tumble [8007] spread from it over a wormed, gravel horizon [8048], perhaps representing the top of occupation deposits in house F1.

Building H.1 (Illus 10.21, 10.22)

Underlying building H there were traces of at least one earlier structure, probably a house, the flattened side walls of which served as a core for the north-west and south-east walls of house H. No trace was detected of a south-west end wall, possibly because it was cleared away in the building of house H. It could, however, remain to be found in the unexcavated area between trenches 8 and 8E. The bank [8044] which supports part of the north-west wall of H (Illus 10.16, 10.17) probably started off as

the turf wall of H.1. More of it was detected as 8052, a gritty clay silt in the core of this wall of house H. A post-hole, 8116, sealed by the floor of H was probably for supporting a cruck for the roof of H.1. It contained stone packers for its post and was 60cm in diameter at its mouth, narrowing in its lower portion to 23cm, with a total depth of 33cm. No post-pipe was observed in its fill [8114], but it included a sherd (SF 8442) of white gritty ware and three nails.

No trace was observed of the south-east wall of house H.1, presumably because the south-east wall of H was constructed over it. Another post-hole [8096] partially dug away by the foundation trench for H's south-east wall can be interpreted as for the matching roof cruck to that contained in post-hole 8116. It was circular, cut down into bedrock, with a diameter of 50cm narrowing to 30cm about 15cm down from its top. It had a total depth of about 28cm. Four angular stones were found inclining into its top, having obviously served to pack an upright timber, and a probable post-pipe [8093] of dark brown-black silt, about 16cm in diameter, was traced in a matrix of mottled mid-brown silty clay [8092].

A large hearth took up much of the area excavated within house H.1. It was represented by an area of peat ash up to 16cm deep [8064], lying in a shallow hollow cut in the limestone bedrock. It was partially removed by the structure H drain. This hearth was about 2m across and was probably defined by a kerb of stones. A fired clay sample from it was submitted to Mark Noel of GeoQuest Associates for archaeomagnetic dating, which indicated a date range of either AD 1080–1220 or AD 1440–1550. The earlier range is preferred on the basis of stratigraphy and finds.

Thin spreads of tumbled stone [8081, 8069] within the area of house H may be from stone facings to the turf walls of H.1. Several sherds of pottery were found in 8081, including reduced gritty and redware. Patchy, thin layers of clay and silt [8137, 8110, 8091, 8099] are all that remain of one or more floors for house H.1. Underlying these occupation deposits for house H.1 were the remains of an old ground surface [8134, 8135] overlying natural clay [8087, 8089] and bedrock.

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Timberwork defence (Illus 10.23, 10.24)

Outside the end wall [8060] of building H, well down the steep slope to the shore, there was a construction slot [8072] 20cm wide, full of angular, pitched rubble, with voids in between, bounded front and back with kerbs. The risk of destabilising the end wall of house H prevented further excavation of this feature, but it seemed reasonable to suppose that it contained the footings of a wooden palisade.

On the foreshore outside this construction slot was an area of laid stones [8076], as much as 2m wide and tailing off on the shoreline as a result of erosion. One edge was defined by an alignment of large boulders [8075] running north-east to south-west from the front of slot 8072. These might tentatively be identified as the foundations of a defensive tower projecting from the palisade.

Context	Description	Interpretation
8006	Laid stones	Wall of str F1
8007	Stones	Tumble from wall of str F
8008	Laid stones	Wall of str F
8010	Laid stones	North-west wall of str H
8014	Laid stones	North-west wall of str H
8015	Laid stones	Wall of kiln
8020	Laid stones	South-east wall of str H
8023	Stones, clay silt	Debris in passage between H and J
8024	Laid stones	North-west wall of str J
8027	Stones, clay silt	Tumble in str J
8031	Clay silt, peat ash	Floor of str H
8032	Laid stones	Wall of kiln
8033	Laid stones	Stone capping of drain
8034	Laid stones	Stone capping of drain
8035	Clayey silt	Floor of str H
8040	Clay silt, peat ash	Fill in kiln
8042	Silty clay, charcoal	Floor of str H
8043	Peaty soil with stones	Muddy gulley
8044	Clay silt	Turf bank/wall of H.1
8045	Clay silt, stones, slates	Tumble from str H
8046	Peaty soil with stones	Pit dug into 8006?
8047	Peaty soil with stones	Robbed-out wall 8006
8048	Gravel in clay silt	Wormed horizon
8050	Stones, slates, silt	Tumble from wall of str H
8051	Stones, slates, silt	Tumble from wall of str H
8052	Gritty clay silt	Turf wall of str H.1
8057	Laid stones	Cobbling between str H and J
8060	Laid stones	South-west wall of str H
8061	Silty clay	Fill of foundation trench 8129
8062	Silty clay	Floor of str H
8063	Gap	Entrance in wall of str J
8064	Ash, clay silt	Hearth of str H.1
8067	Silt, burning, roof slate	Hearth of kiln
8068	Cut	Hearth for kiln
8069	Stones	Tumble from wall of str H.1
8072	Stones	Fill of palisade slot

Interpretation (Illus 10.11)

The evidence for house H.1 was admittedly slender but was enough to add to the picture created from other trenches on Eilean Mór that the island was densely covered with buildings throughout the medieval period. House H.1 can be interpreted as a turf-walled house with central hearth and its open roof supported on crucks. The archaeomagnetic determination from its hearth suggested occupation some time from the late 11th to the early 13th century.

The supposed palisade slot in trench 8E is interpreted as part of the island's circuit of defences, dating to the 12th or 13th century. The palisade must have gone by the time building H was erected. It cannot be said whether, or to what extent, it overlapped in time with house H.1.

Context	Description	Interpretation
8075	Laid stones	Alignment of boulders
8076	Laid stones	Foundation for tower?
8081	Stones	Levelling for floor of str H
8084	Cut	Post-hole in base of 8068
8086	Clay silt	Floor of str H.1
8087	Grey-green clay	Natural clay
8089	Redeposited clay	Natural clay
8091	Clay silt	Floor of str H.1
8092	Mottled silty clay	Fill of 8096
8093	Silt	Post-pipe in 8096
8094	Clay	Disturbed natural
8096	Cut	Post-hole, str H.1
8098	Smashed phyllite	Earlier drain cover
8099	Silt	Floor of str H.1
8100	Laid stones	Stone capping of drain
8101	Silt	Floor of str H.1
8103	Clay silt	Floor of str H.1
8109	Stones, clay silt	Fill of 8112
8110	Clay silt	Floor of str H.1
8111	Silty clay	Fill of drain
8112	Cut	Foundation trench for wall 8020
8114	Silt, packing stones, etc	Fill of 8116
8115	Cut	Drain in str H
8116	Cut	Post-hole, str H.1
8120	Mottled silty clay	Floor of str H.1
8121	Stones, silt	Fill of foundation trench for 8014
8122	Gravelly silt	Old ground surface
8128	Cut	Post-hole in 8129
8129	Cut	Foundation trench for wall 8060
8132	Cut	Post-hole in 8129
8133	Laid stones	Foundation for wall 8010
8134	Dark silt	Old ground surface
8135	Dark gravelly silt	Old ground surface
8136	Laid stones	Partition wall in str H
8137	Clay silt	Floor of str H.1

Table 10.2
Trench 8 contexts

Although there was no secure dating evidence for buildings H and J, it seemed reasonable to place them in the medieval period, perhaps the later part of the 15th century, and date their destruction or collapse to the end of the 15th century. The finds from the debris surrounding and encumbering their ruins all appeared to be medieval, and their exterior walls and doorways were aligned and connected with the medieval road system. Building F1, also medieval, could well date to about the same time as H and J.

Building H with its drain and horse teeth invites identification as a stable. The solidity of the walls – despite the lack of evidence for mortar – and the evidence for a slate roof suggest it could have been two stories high. Indeed, one might wonder if some of the finds, like the brooch and pottery, could have dropped from an upper floor. Many of the nails that were recovered may have been for securing timber floorboards as well as the sarking to support a slate roof.

Building J had more substantial walls than H, and like the latter probably had a slate roof. It too may have been two stories high. The two structures seem to belong together, with a door from J giving direct access into H. Excavation in trench 1 showed that J had another door giving access to the burial ground and chapel.

The kiln appeared to have been built within the flattened remains of house H. Perhaps in the 16th century this segment of Eilean Mór, bounded by the burial ground, the island edge, and houses S and F, was waste ground.

Trench 9 (Illus 10.1, 10.25, 10.26, Table 10.3)

Trench 9 was dug in 1992 on the north edge of the main spine of Eilean Mór as part of the same campaign that saw the initial laying out of trench 12 a few metres to the north. It measured 2 by 6.5m with its long axis running north–south. Before removal of the



Illustration 10.25
Trench 9, looking south, after removal of the turf

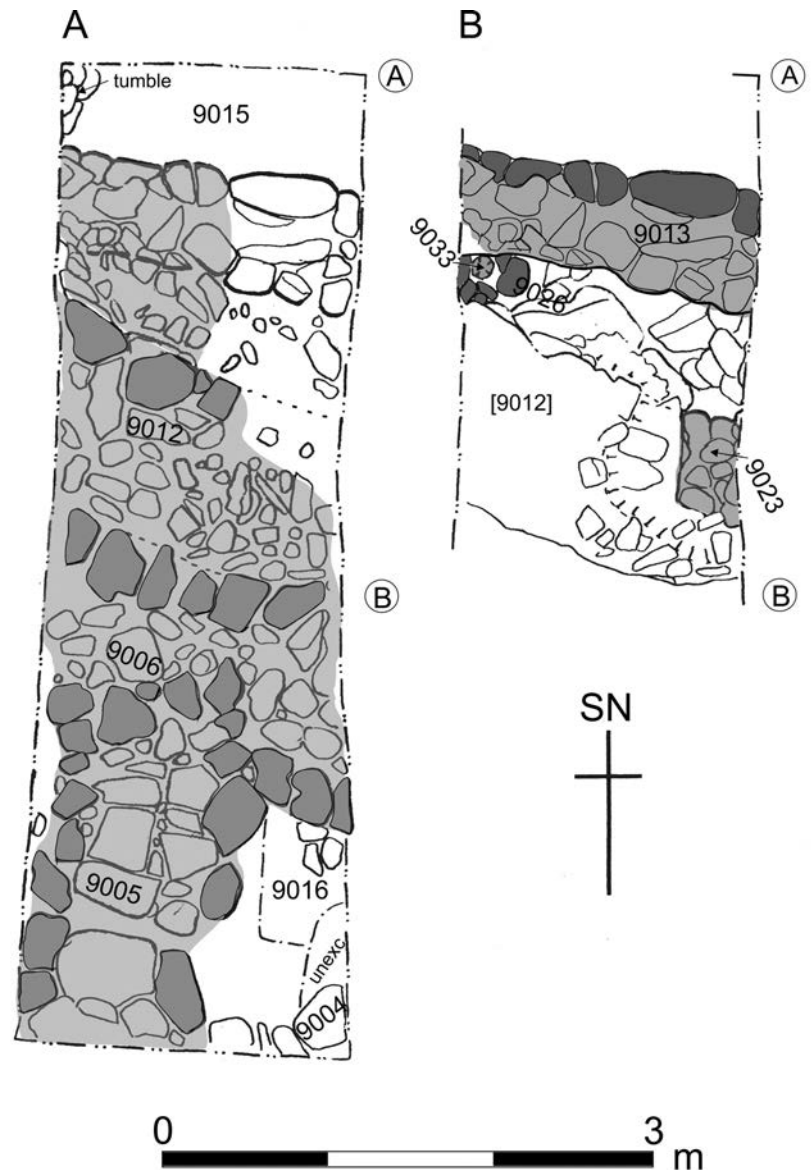


Illustration 10.26
Trench 9, plans, showing main features

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS ON THE SPINE OF THE ISLAND

turf there were no surface indications of the underlying features, only a noticeable slope downwards in the north portion of the trench, reflecting the edge of the island's high ground or spine.

Excavation in trench 12 in the apparently open area adjacent and to the north of trench 9 showed that it had been cultivated in post-medieval times. This gardening activity had extended into the northern end of trench 9, being evident in the form of a layer of loam intermixed with gravel, fragments of charcoal and several small angular pieces of stone, especially limestone [9007]. It had a maximum depth of 23cm. The tools that had worked it had eaten away at the north edge of an earlier cobbled road [9012].

Road and paths, and structure 9.1 (Illus 10.26–30)

The main features encountered in trench 9 were a series of cobbled roads and paths. Stratigraphically the most recent was a path [9005] running north–south, partially integrated with the structure of an earlier road [9006, 9012], which it crossed obliquely.

The path probably connected with the entrance into house F, supposed on the basis of surface indications to lie just to the south of trench 9. It would have headed in the other direction into the garden area where it was encountered as path 12159. At the south of trench 9 some tumbled stones [9004], including a few small fragments of type A roof slates possibly reused as pin-nings, might be supposed to have come from the walls of house F. An iron key (F121) from the topsoil overlying 9004 might have been for its door.

Road 9006 was identified as a segment of the main medieval road from the chapel to the great hall exposed the previous year in trench 6. Like path 9005, the surface of this road lay just under the turf and topsoil and was largely unencumbered with tumble or debris, suggesting that it remained in use into the post-medieval period. As with the continuation of this road encountered in trench 6 [6002, 6008], it also may have been bipartite in construction, laid down initially as a 1.4m wide cobbled path [9006] with well-defined kerbs, and then increased to a total of about 2.4m by the



Illustration 10.27
Trench 9, looking west, path 9005 running over the road [9006] to the right



Illustration 10.29
Trench 9, looking east, from left to right, road 9013, road 9012/9006 and path 9005



Illustration 10.28
Trench 9, view looking south of path 9026/9005 crossing over road 9012/9006

Context	Description	Interpretation
9003	Soil, gravel	Demolition tips
9004	Stones	Tumble from str F
9005	Set stones	Path from str F to garden
9006	Set stones	Road from great hall to chapel
9007	Loam, gravel, stones	Garden soil
9009	Compact gritty clay	Demolition tips
9011	Silt, ash, bone	Midden
9012	Set stones	Widening of road 9006
9013	Set stones	Cobbled road
9015	Sand gravel	Beach deposit
9016	Clay silt	Old ground surface
9017	Set stones	Support for road 9012?
9021	Silt, stones	Fill of 9013
9023	Clay, stones	Clay-bonded wall, str 9.1
9026	Set stones	Path, reusing surface of 9013
9033	Cut	Post-hole in road 9013

Table 10.3
Trench 9 contexts

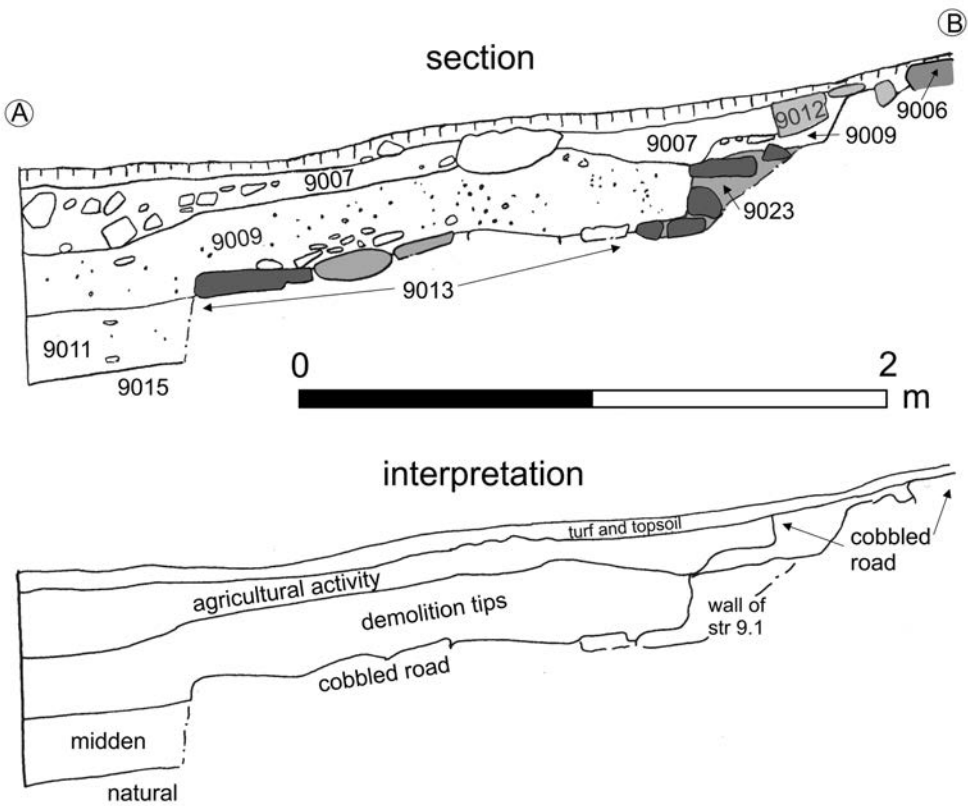


Illustration 10.30
Trench 9, section A-B

addition of a further width of cobbling [9012] on its north side. Here too the additional width sloped down northwards, and its edge was defined by a kerb of large boulders.

It appeared that the road was partially laid over the ruins of an earlier structure (9.1), represented by a possible clay-bonded wall [9023] surviving two courses high, only a short segment of which was exposed in our digging. Other large slabs [9017] may have been arranged to support the road, and both 9023 and 9017 were enveloped in tips, up to 27cm thick, of sandy, gravelly clay [9009], some of which was probably derived from decomposed mortar. Also included were several broken roof slates, including type A, and nails. In the area to the south of the road and east of path 9005 the continuation of these tips was recorded as 9003. A small sondage under 9003 located a deposit of clay silt [9016], possibly an old ground surface. A sherd of redware pottery (SF 9044) was recovered from it. A core under it indicated there was a thin black deposit containing seed remains.

An earlier cobbled road [9013], on a similar alignment to road 9006/9012, was found to underly structure 9.1 and the 9009 tips. It appeared to have had an overall width of over 1.7m. Its south edge was not located, but on the north it had a neat kerb. Many of the stones used in its construction were quartzite. It sloped noticeably downwards in a northerly direction where it could be seen to overlie a midden deposit [9011]. A post-hole [9033] was identified in 9013, rectangular, 16 by 15cm, with a depth of 30cm. A sherd

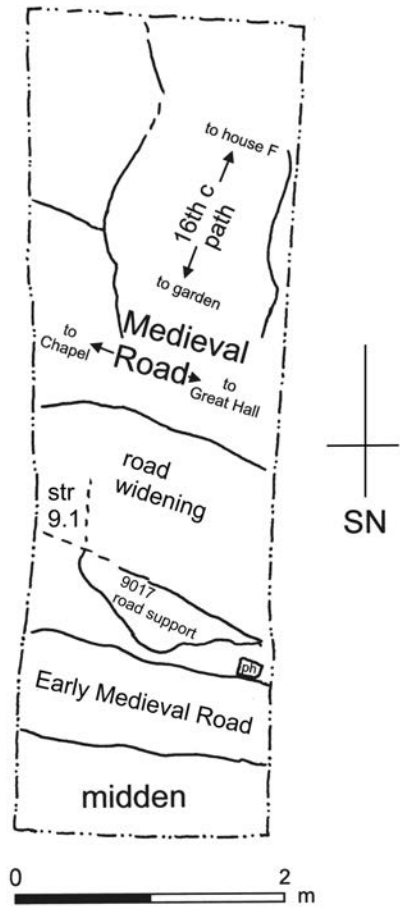


Illustration 10.31
Trench 9, interpretative plan of main features

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of white gritty pottery (SF 9042) and another of reduced gritty pottery (SF 9046) were recovered from among the cobbles.

A midden (Illus 10.30)

To the north of road 9013 and extending under it was a midden deposit [9011], probably a continuation of the midden [6033, 6034] encountered in trench 6. It contained lenses of charcoal, peat ash and quantities of animal bone in a very poor state of preservation. A sample (no. 23) weighing 8.7kg failed to produce any carbonised plant remains when it was subjected to flotation. Two sherds of white gritty pottery (SF 9032, 9035) and two of imported pottery were also recovered. One was a piece of base (P70), the other a rim fragment (P69), both from a polychrome jug from the Saintonge area of France. These finds suggest a 13th-century date.

This midden had accumulated in a build-up of silt, to a depth of 22cm, over a beach deposit of grey and yellow coarse sand and

gravel [9015]. The surface of this sand and gravel was at a level of about 53.19m, half to three quarters of a metre above the present surface of the loch in good summer weather.

Interpretation (Illus 10.31)

Much of the evidence from trench 9 relates to a late medieval system of cobbled roads and paths which may have remained in use into, or was refurbished in, post-medieval times, when the adjacent ground to the north was being used as a garden and there was a house (structure F) to the south. The road [9006/9012] could reasonably be identified as a routeway connecting the great hall with the chapel, but the earlier road [9013] did not necessarily do so. The sherds of pottery recovered from it might suggest that it dated to the 13th century, and there was no more than tenuous evidence for a structure (9.1) alongside it removed prior to the construction of road 9006/9012.

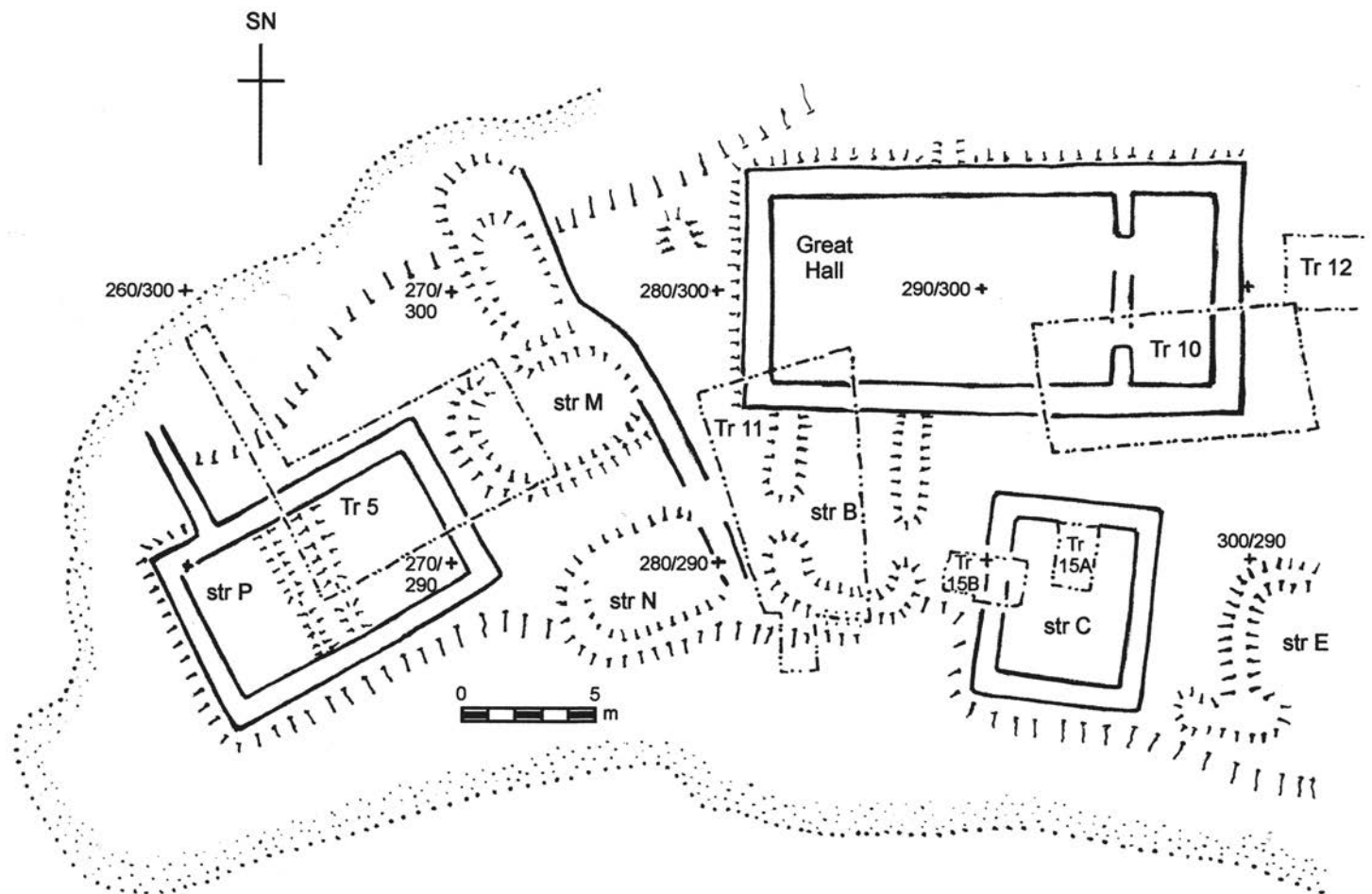


Illustration 11.1
Location map for trenches 15, 10, 11 and 5



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.

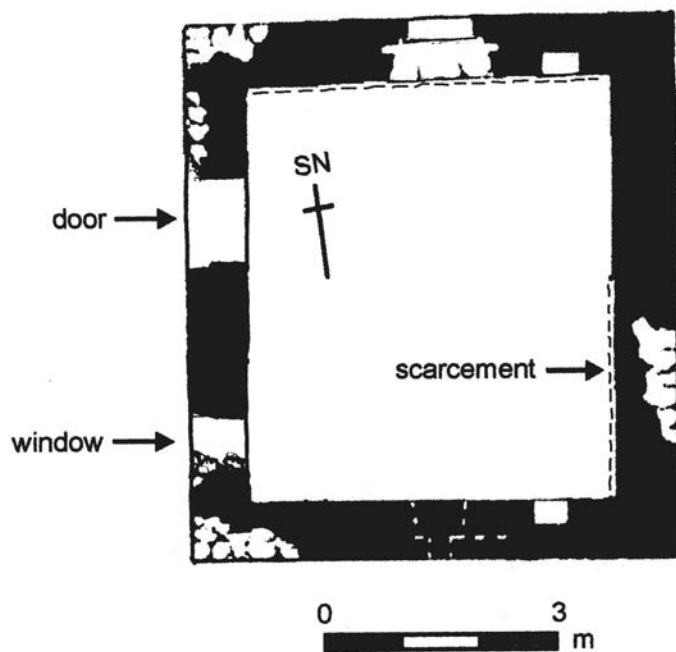


Illustration 11.4
Building C, plan of ground floor

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



Illustration 11.5
Building C, exterior of north gable

N gable interior

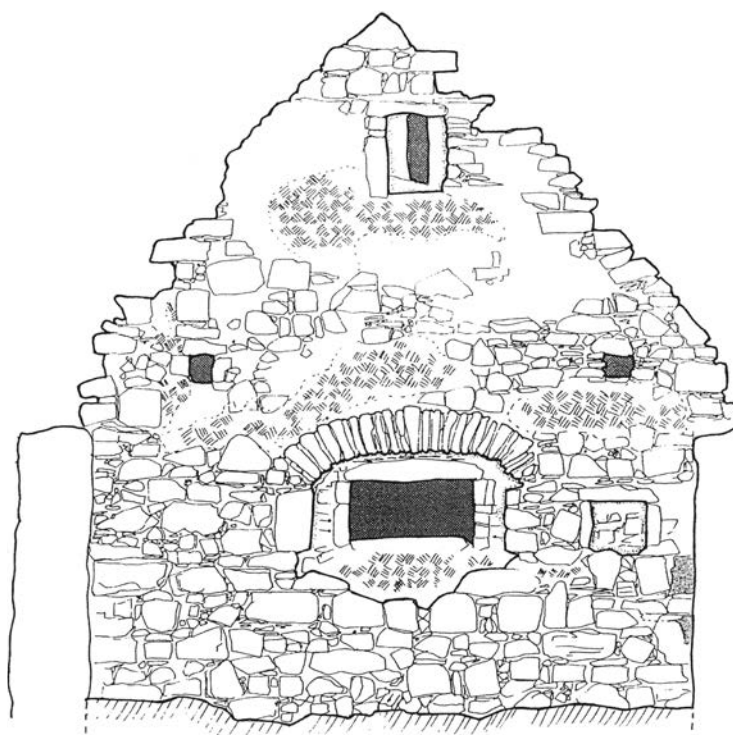


Illustration 11.6
Building C, interior of north gable

S gable exterior

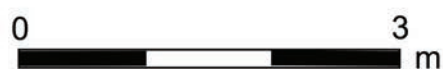
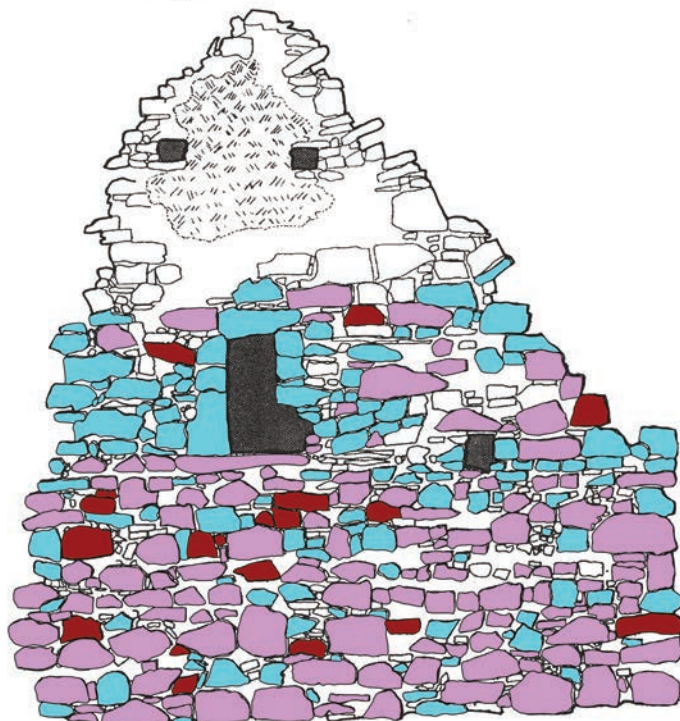


Illustration 11.7
Building C, exterior of south gable

S gable interior

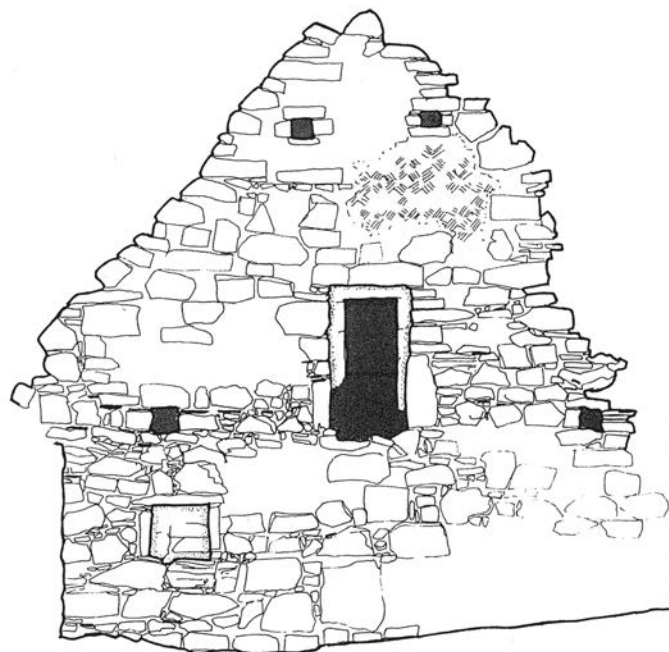


Illustration 11.8
Building C, interior of south gable

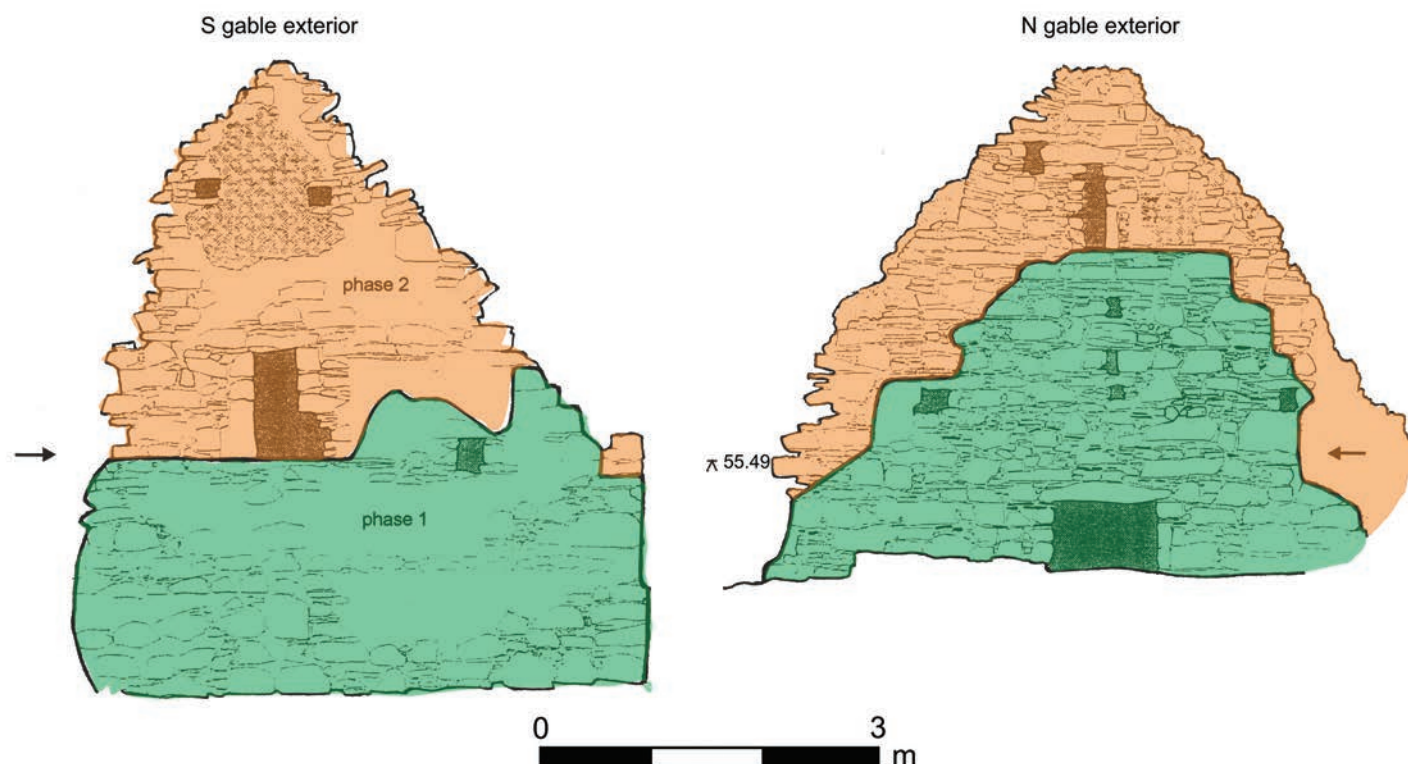


Illustration 11.9
Building C, gable elevations showing phases 1 and 2. The arrows mark the level of the beam-slots

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

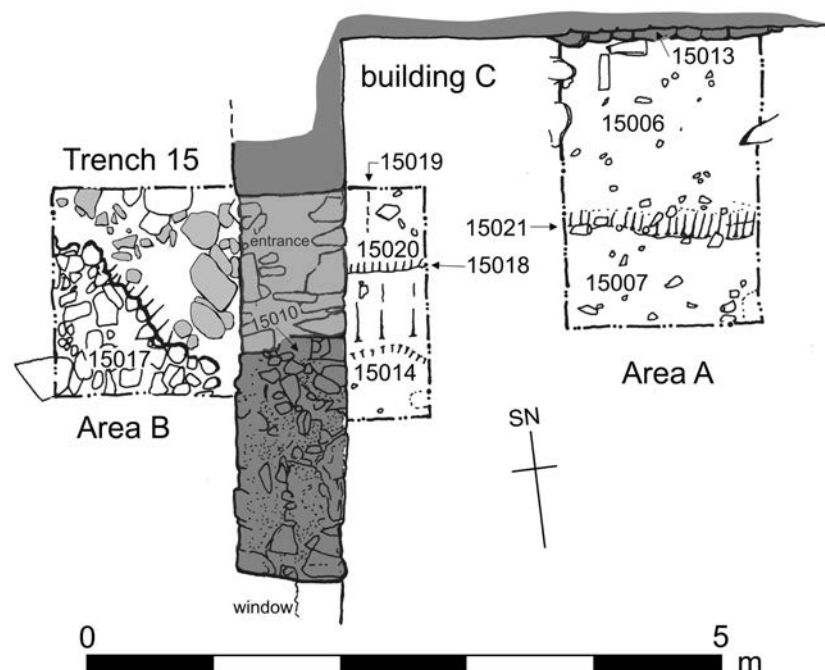


Illustration 11.10
Trench 15, plan



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 inexpert 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

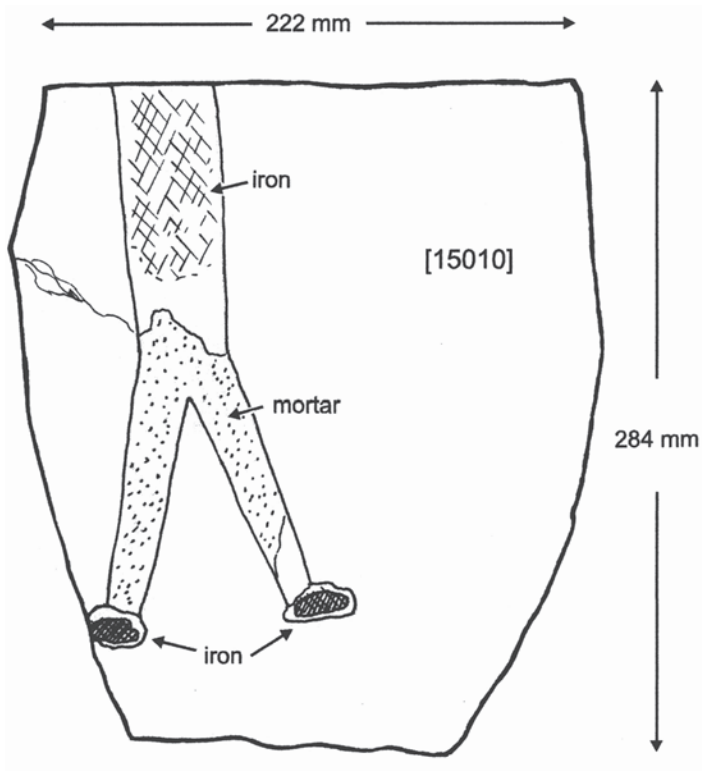


Illustration 11.14
Trench 15B, jamb stone from doorway with traces of iron mount

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

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS IN THE GREAT HALL AND ADJACENT BUILDINGS



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

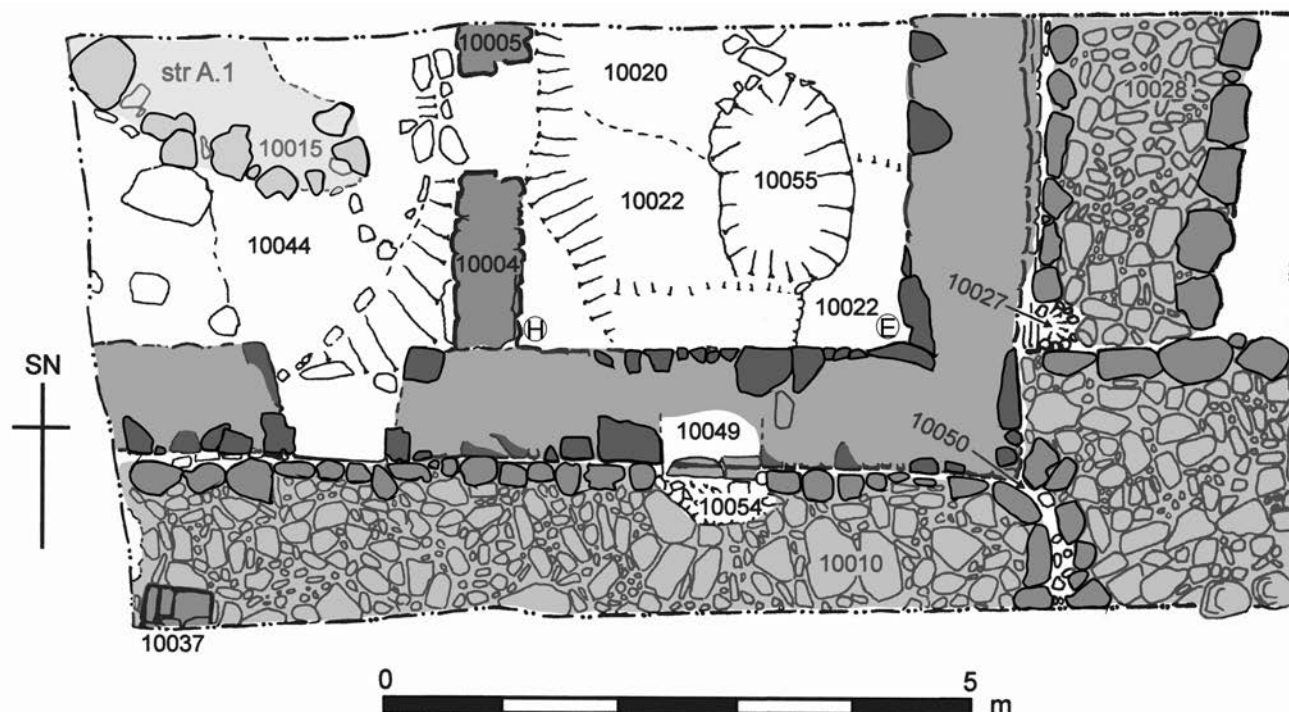


Illustration 11.20
Trench 10, plan



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

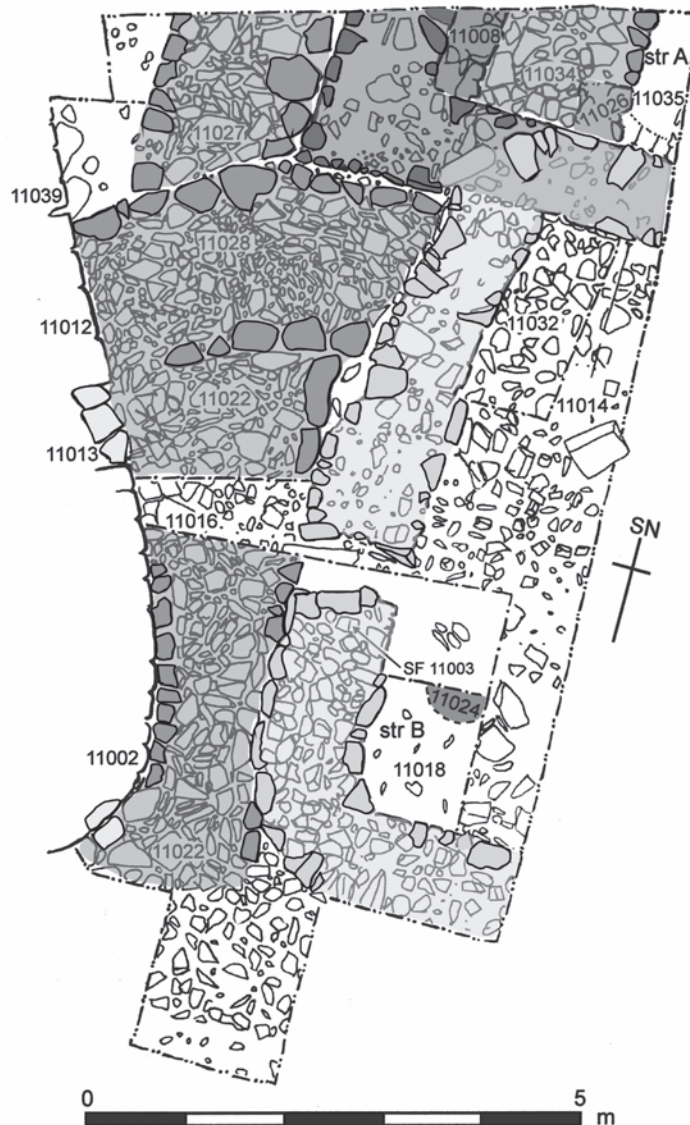


Illustration 11.23
Trench 11, plan

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

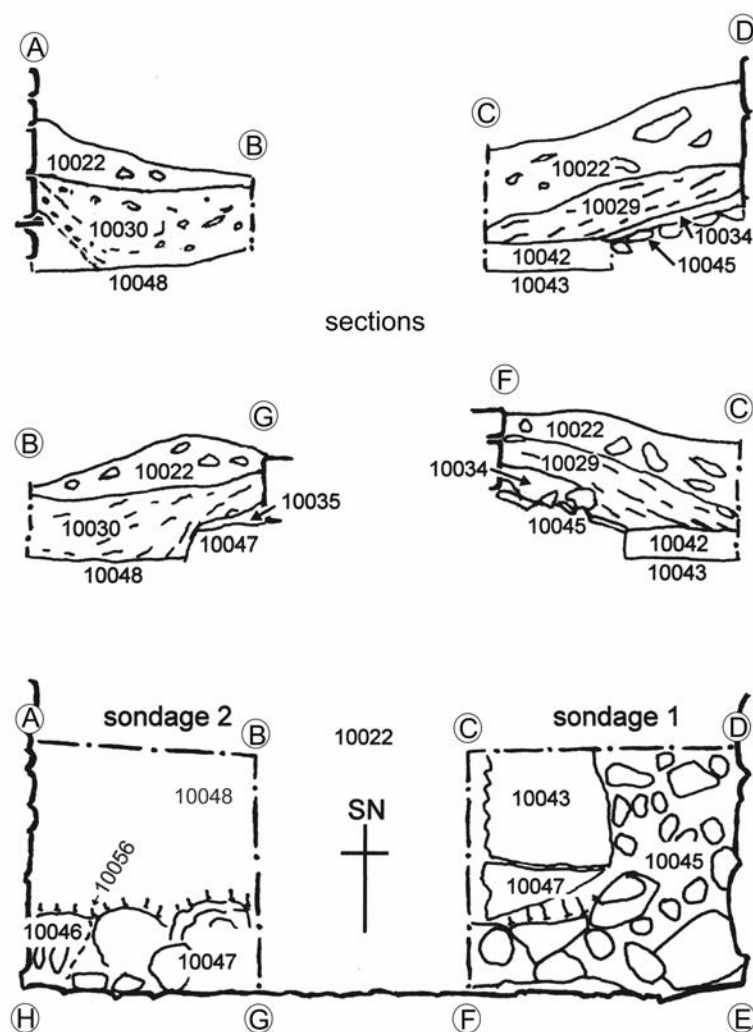


Illustration 11.28

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]

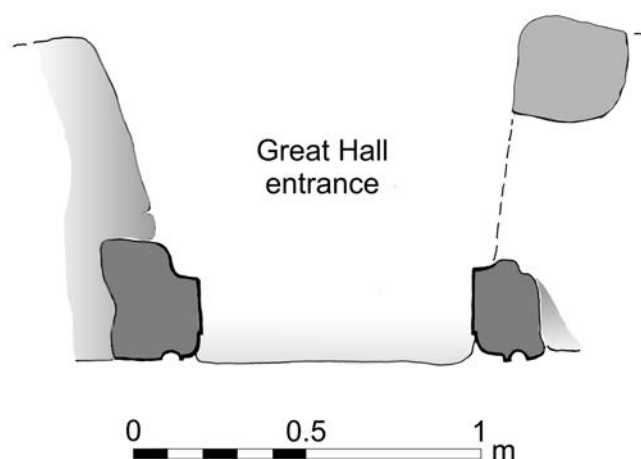


Illustration 11.32

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

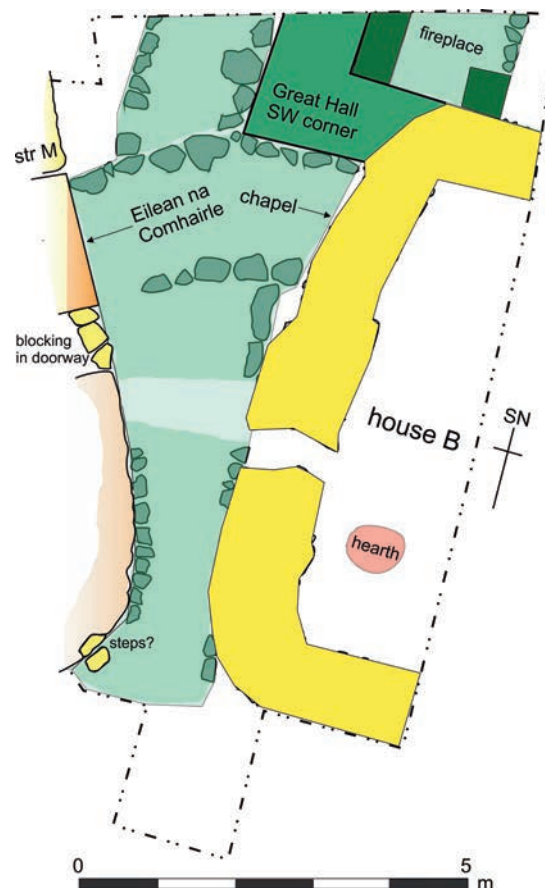


Illustration 11.40
Trench 11, interpretative plan of main features



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

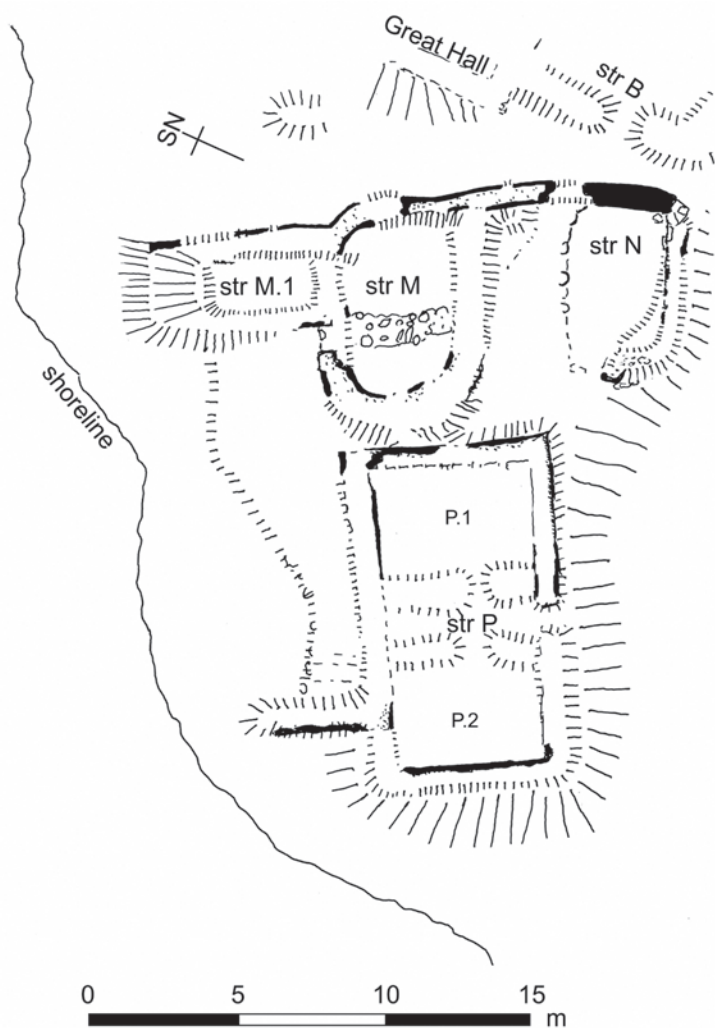


Illustration 11.42
Plan of building P and related structures, redrawn from the original survey made by RCAHMS



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

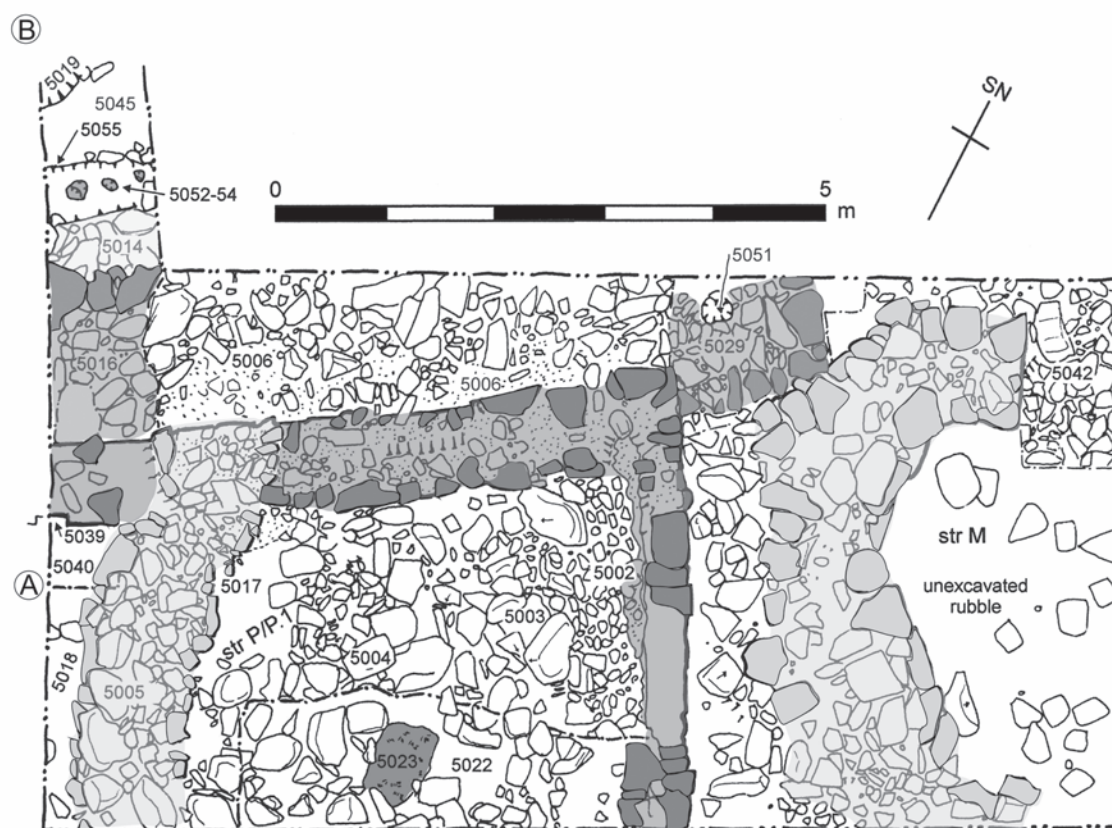


Illustration 11.45
Trench 5, plan



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

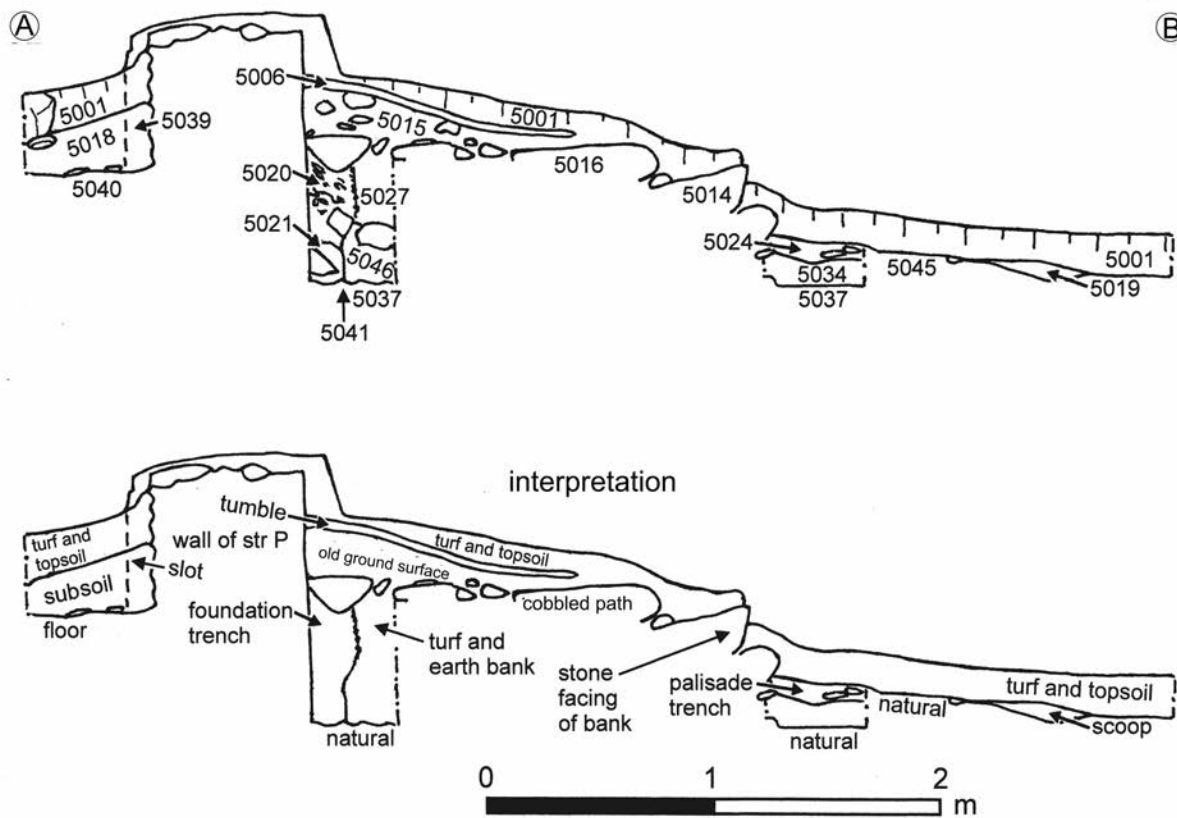


Illustration 11.48

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.

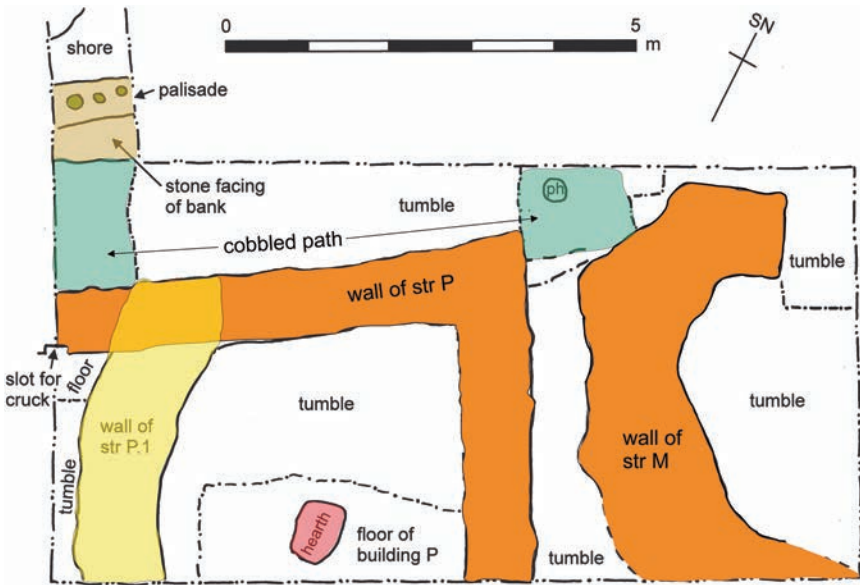


Illustration 11.51
Trench 5, interpretative plan of main features

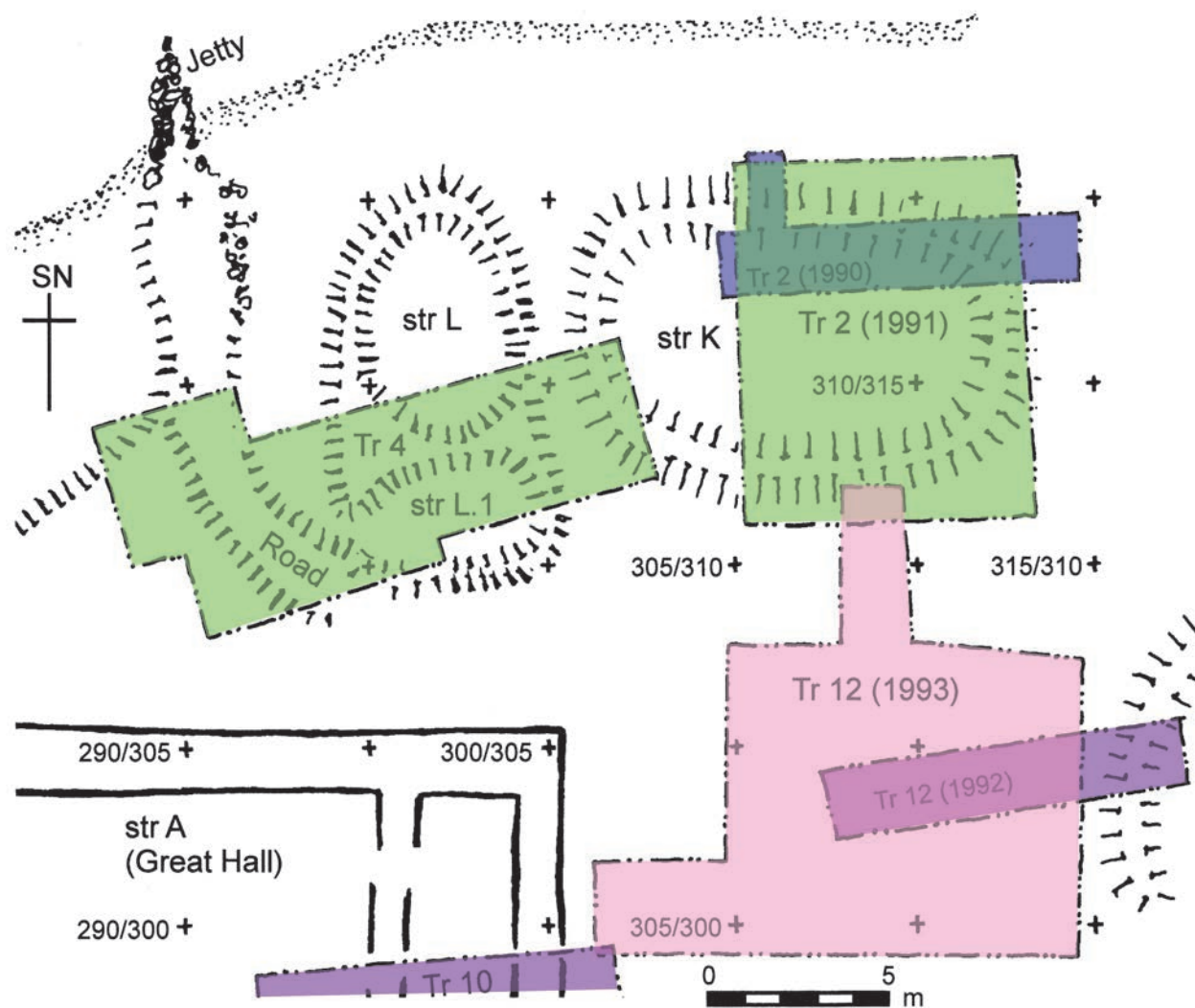


Illustration 12.1
Location map for trenches 2, 4 and 12



Illustration 12.2
Building K



Illustration 12.3
The jetty

Chapter 12

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS OF HOUSES BY THE JETTY AND THE KITCHENS

Trenches 2 and 4 (Illus 12.1, 12.4, Tables 12.1, 12.2)

Trenches 2 and 4 were placed to sample two houses on the north edge of Eilean Mór (Illus 6.14, 12.2). These were the ruins of drystone buildings, one at right angles to the other, building L (12 by 5m overall) apparently containing two rooms, and building K (11.9 by 7m overall). It was assumed that these formed a unit dating to the post-medieval period.

In 1990 trench 2, 10m long by 2m wide (corners A, D, E, F), was positioned to go over the end wall of structure K and just to clip one of the long walls internally (Illus 12.1). A small extension (B, C) was later dug laterally to take in an entrance through building K's north wall. It was hoped to assess the complexity of construction and also collect some dating evidence, but the results

were so promising that an enlarged version of trench 2 was excavated the following year (corners G, H, J, K). It measured 8 by 10m and took in the east end of building K. Trench 4 was laid out nearby, an irregular area 14.5m long and 4 to 6.5m wide, including the south-west corner of K, part of building L and paved roadways leading to a jetty to the west of building L (Illus 12.3, 12.4).

Building K (Illus 12.2, 12.5–8)

Building K is of drystone rectangular construction with rounded corners. Its external walls are about 1.2 to 1.5m thick and are composed of a mixture of boulders and cut blocks of

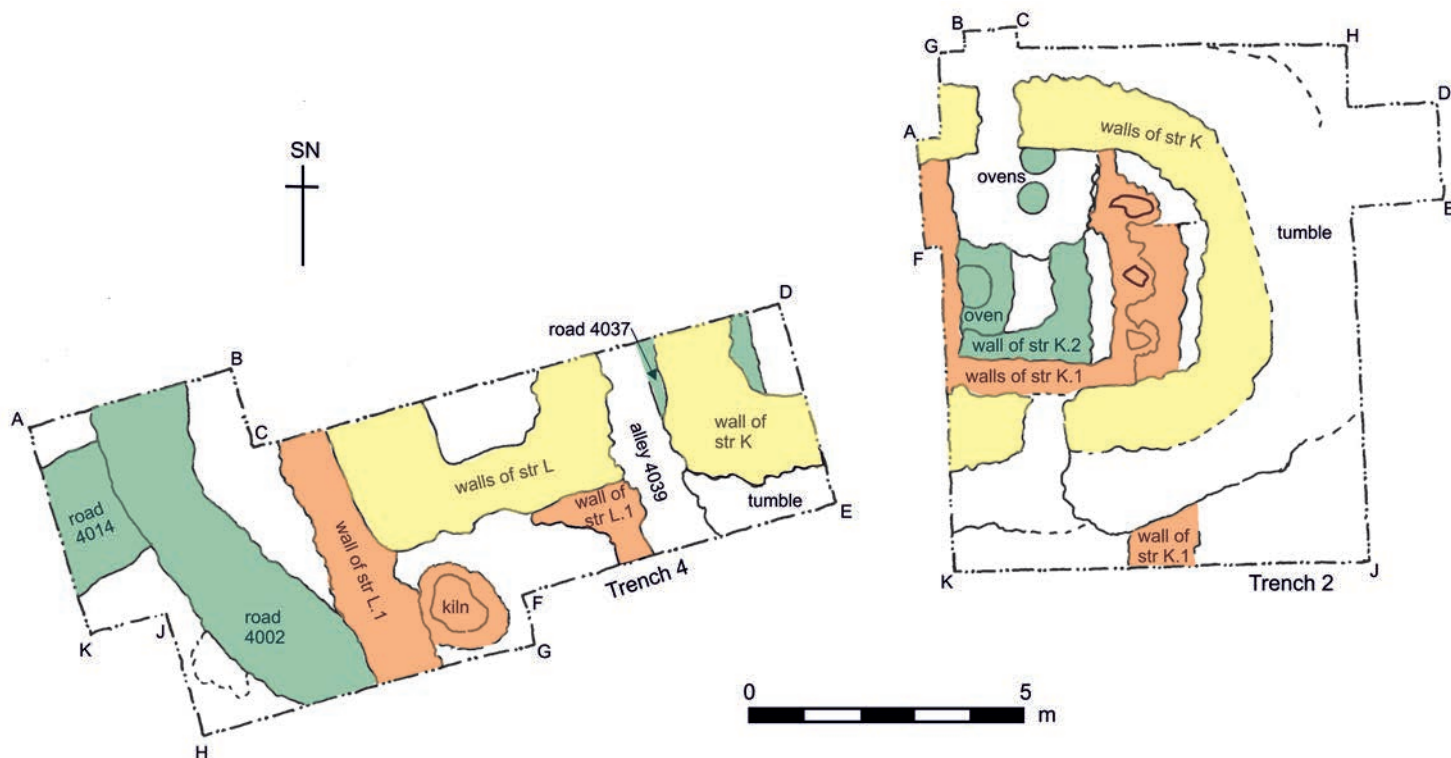


Illustration 12.4
Interpretative plan showing the main features in trenches 2 and 4



Illustration 12.5

Trench 2 (1990), excavation of building K.1, with north wall and entrance of building K

local stone (limestone, phyllite, Port Askaig tillite, etc) laid in courses. They survive to a maximum height of three courses, about 0.5m above the internal floor surface, but in so far as the interior of the building and the immediately adjacent area are encumbered with tumbled stones [2003, 2059, 2026] must have stood rather higher when the structure was in use (Illus 12.5). Otherwise, in the excavated vicinity of building K, turf and topsoil overlie a thin layer of grey silt [2010] resting on natural sand [2011].

Two entrances were identified, one in the long north wall, 0.8m wide, and another in the south wall 1.0m wide (Illus 12.6). They are not exactly opposite each other. In the tumble [2013] filling the north entrance was found the remains of an iron barrel padlock (F124) and four nails, possibly from a door. The south entrance was not fully excavated. The floor [2005, 2033] consists of an undulating layer of brown clayey earth overlying a gravel horizon [2035] up to 5cm thick. The latter is probably the result of sorting by worms, representing the maximum depth of their activity in this area. From these layers were recovered some sherds of pottery, including handmade pieces (P81), three of reduced gritty and a base sherd of North French ware (P75). All might well be residual from earlier deposits, but P75 is probably of the 16th century, our preferred date for the construction and occupation of building K. There were also eight small pieces of iron, including two nails, and a small fragment of a pierced type A roof slate.

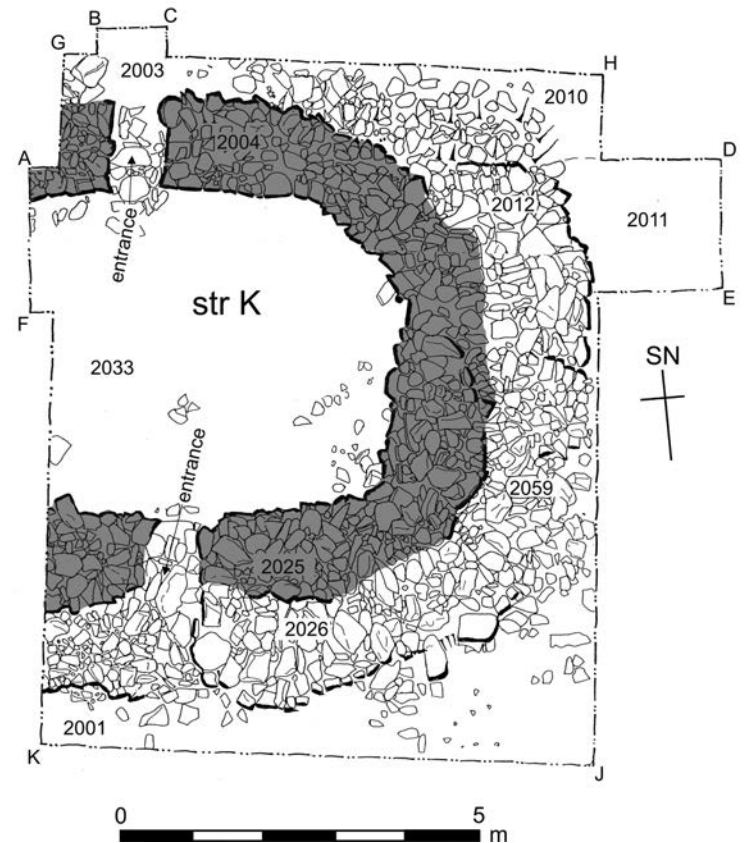


Illustration 12.6

Trench 2, plan of building K

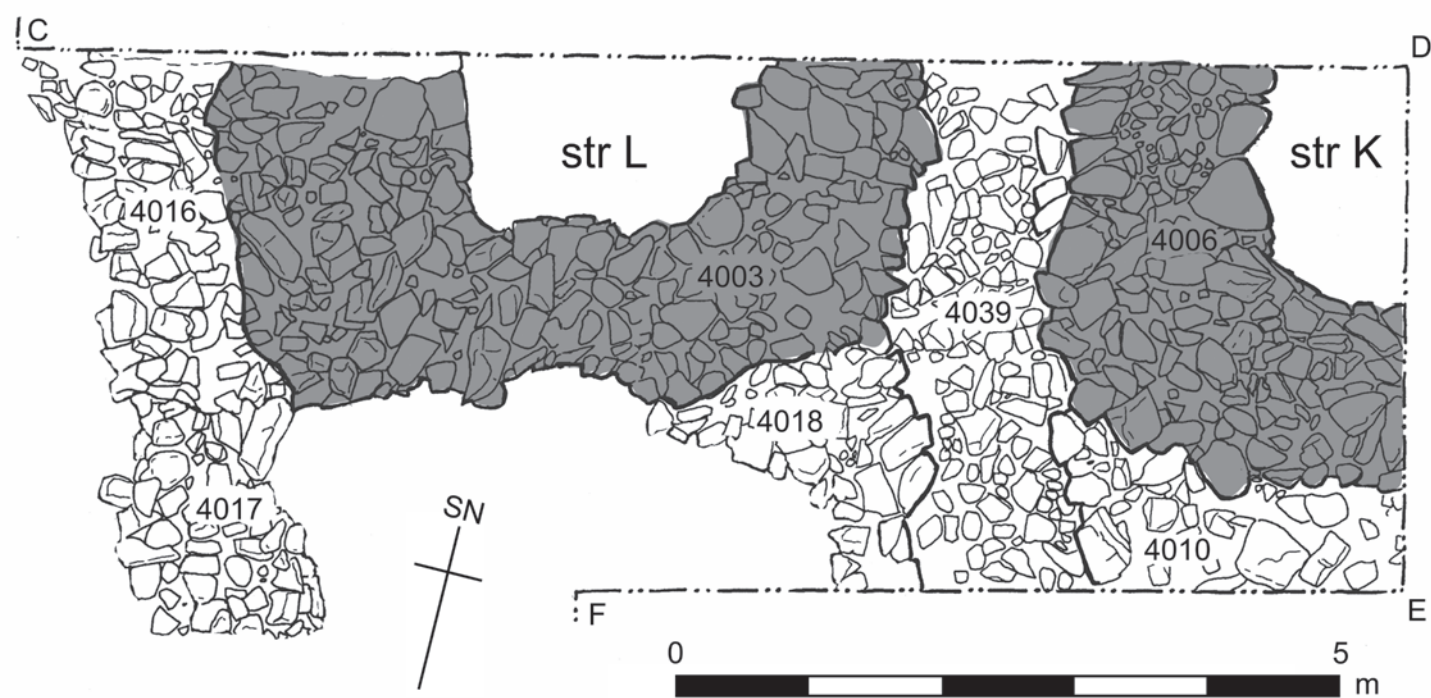


Illustration 12.7
Trench 4, plan of excavated areas of buildings L and K



Illustration 12.8
Trench 4, the wall of building K overlying road 4037, with the alley 4039 to the right



Illustration 12.9
Trench 4, excavation, interior of building L in foreground

Building L (Illus 12.7–9)

Building L is separated from building K by a narrow alley (Illus 12.8), about 1m wide, with crude cobbbling [4039]. Structure L is shaped like a reversed capital 'D' and is unicameral, about 9 by 5m overall, with walls from about 1.2 to 1.8m thick (Illus 12.9). The south room supposed by RCAHMS is the end of an earlier structure (L.1). Building L's entrance is outside the area of trench 4 but can be traced midway in the west wall.

The building is of drystone construction, with rounded boulders and rough blocks up to about half a metre across, mostly quartzite and some glacial erratics. The walls only survive to a height of about 0.5m or less, or two courses, and there was less evidence of tumble than in and around building K, perhaps indicating that stone was robbed from the site after the building had fallen out of use. Its walls are set on the reduced tumbled remains of the walls [4016, 4017, 4018] of an earlier structure (L.1).

Structure L.1 (Illus 12.10, 12.11)

Under building L, apparently on the same alignment and extending to the south of it, is structure L.1. Its length and plan are unknown, but it is wider than building L, about 6m overall, with walls varying in thickness from about 0.6m to over 1.0m. Its west wall [4046] rides over the edge of the medieval paved road 4002. Underneath tumble [4044] and overlying the floor [4027] is a gravelly layer [4023, 4024] up to 10cm thick. On the one hand, the quantity and solidity of this indicates that it was not just the result of worm activity, but probably derived from clay or poor-quality lime mortar washed out of the building's walls. Several fragments of ironwork, including nails and rivets, were recovered from it, along with two pieces of type A roof

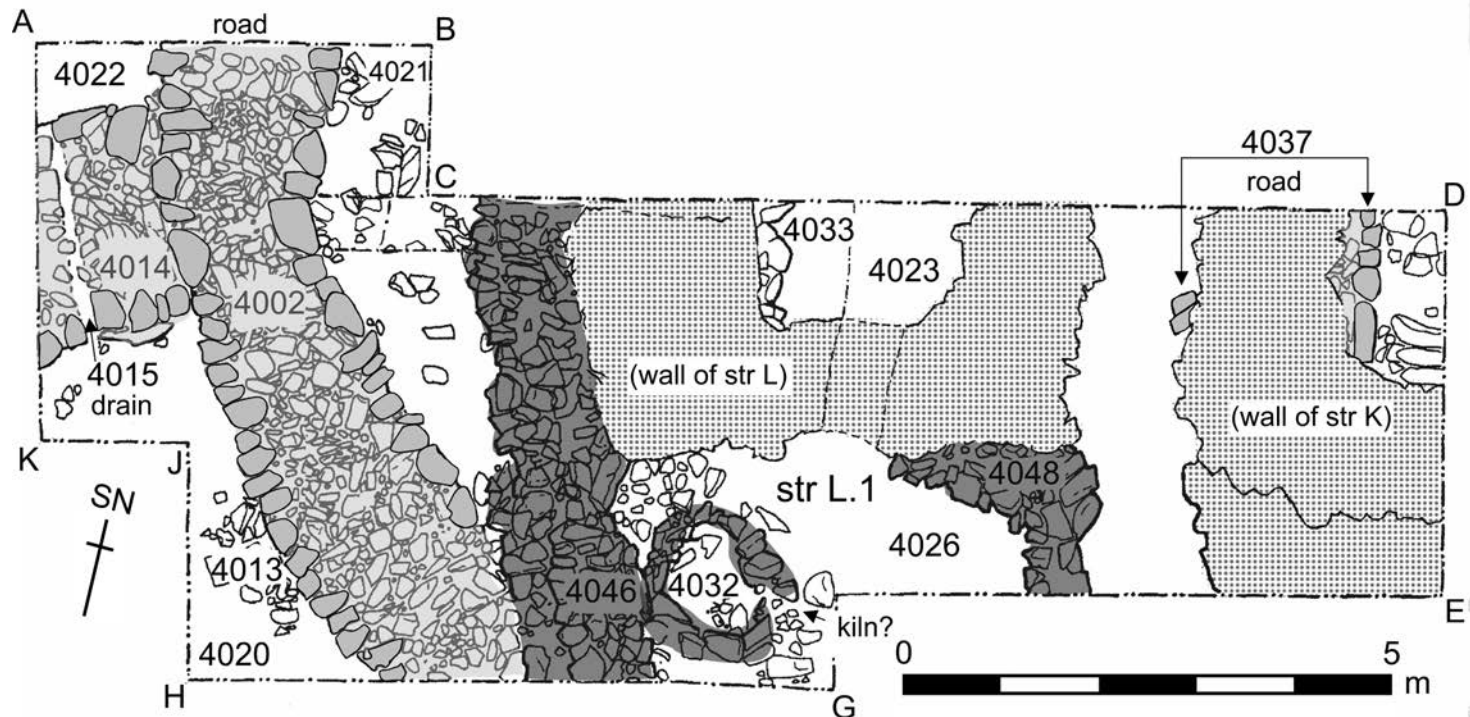


Illustration 12.10
Trench 4, plan showing building L.1 and its kiln (?), and earlier cobbled roads 4014, 4002 and 4037



Illustration 12.11

Trench 4, the ranging rod lies in front of the kiln (?) [4032] in structure L.1

slate (SF 4040, 4055) and a sherd of North French ware (P73) datable to the 15th or 16th century. On the other hand, a fragment from a clay tobacco pipe bowl (SF 4046) was also recovered from Context 4024. It has no diagnostic features that would allow it to be closely dated. It is unlikely, on the basis of our knowledge of smoking, to be any earlier than the 17th century, but it could be as recent as the 20th century. Our preferred interpretation is not to accept it or C4024 as dating evidence for the use of building L.1.

The floor [4027], sectioned within the area of structure L, is a clay-rich soil containing ash and charcoal, on top of a layer of clay [4030]. Its walls and floor deposits were laid down on peaty soil [4031] which had developed on natural loch-side gravel [4033]. In the south-west corner of building L.1 is a circular, bowl-shaped feature lined with stone [4032], with an internal diameter of about 1.2m, not fully excavated (Illus 12.11). It is identified as a corn-drying kiln. There is an area of crude cobbling adjacent to the north of it, and a flue may have been positioned to feed hot air from the east or south-east. Small patches of burning were noted in the surface of the floor of L.1 to the east of 4032, adjacent to wall 4048.

The jetty and roads (Illus 12.3, 12.10, 12.12, 12.13)

A jetty, immediately to the north of trench 4, juts into the water at right angles to the island foreshore and is built of substantial sub-rectangular blocks of local stone, mostly Port Askaig tillite and quartzites. Extending southwards from it is a cobbled road [4002], up to 2m wide, passing just to the east of building L.1. Since the latter is partially built over it, that may be an indication that the road was not maintained when building L.1 was in use. The road then curves gently south-eastwards to avoid the east end of the great hall.

Another road [4014], 2.20m wide, branches off south-west along the edge of the island in the direction of building P and Eilean na Comhairle. Its kerb, facing the shore immediately under the vegetation, is fairly easy to trace for a distance of about 14m beyond the end of trench 4. Within the trench a drain [4015] was excavated running across it. The drain is a simple slot that has filled up with black peaty soil. A sondage excavated adjacent to the east kerb of 4002 shows that the road is only one layer of



Illustration 12.12

Trench 4, the junction between roads 4014 and 4002 in foreground



Illustration 12.13

The kerb stones of road 4014 exposed to the south-west of trench 4

stones thick, laid down on peaty soil overlying natural gravels. A patch of rubble extending from under 4002 might indicate more localised underpinning. Also in trench 4 another paved road [4037], running north-south, was partially revealed under the west wall of building K (Illus 12.8, 12.10).

Structure K.1 (Illus 12.14–17)

The gravel horizon 2035 under the floor of building K sealed a trampled surface [2042] characterised by yellowish-red and dark reddish-brown peat ash and substantial amounts of charcoal (Illus 12.14). Surface 2042 was bounded to the east, south and west by wall lines [2030, 2034, 2076] within the bounds of the later walls of K. Wall 2030, to the east, survives to a height of about 0.5m and width of about 1.5m. It has a stone face consisting of a drystone wall [2030] about 0.5m thick. It retains a wall core [2047], at least 1.5m wide. A west-looking stone face seems to be represented by some of a linear arrangement of stones [2048] located in a sondage dug into 2047 (Illus 12.16). Integral with 2030 are three stone settings for

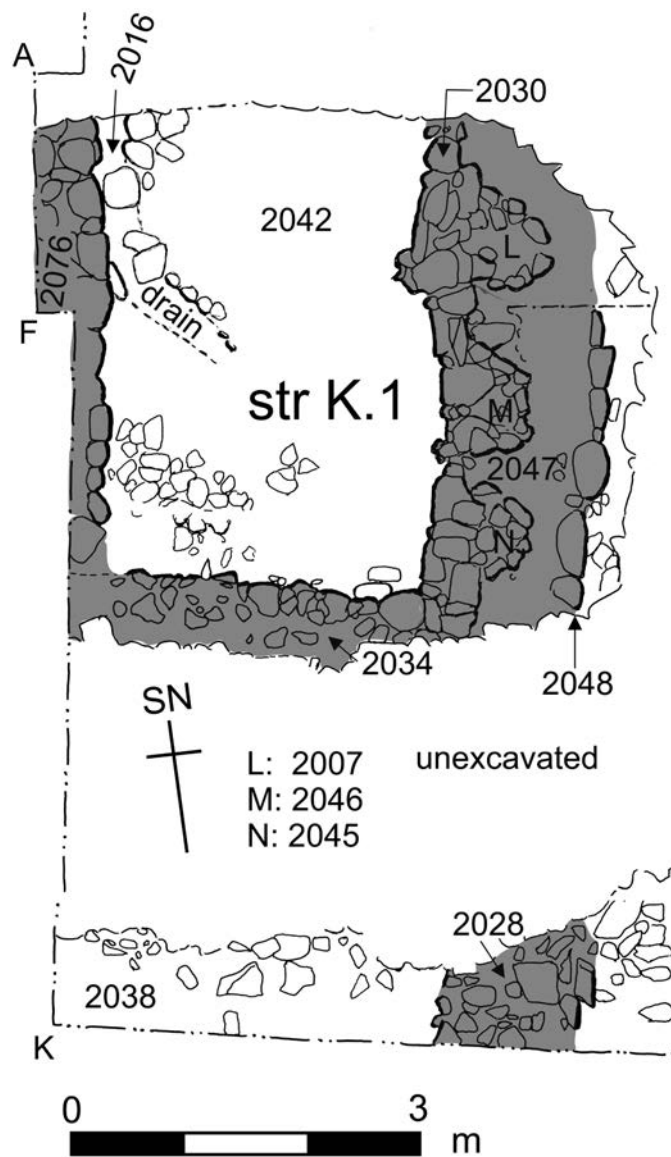


Illustration 12.14
Trench 2, plan of structure K.1

posts containing tumble and topsoil. Two of them, 2045 and 2046, have an internal diameter of about 30 to 40cm. The only one which was full excavated, 2007, is about 40 to 50cm across internally and 28cm deep. It has a flat bottom lined with stones, underneath which was found an iron ploughshare (F85). No traces of post-pipes were identified in any of these settings. A southwards extension of this east wall of structure K.1 [2028] was detected to the south of building K but not fully excavated (Illus 12.17). It appears in the north extension of trench 12 as wall 12016. Structure K.1 may thus be the north end of a much longer building 12.5, partially excavated in trench 12. A piece of engraved slate, possibly part of a gaming board (R69), may have come from the core of wall 2047.

Within the area of building K, surface 2042 is bounded to the south by wall 2034 (Illus 12.14, 12.15). This also appears to be a



Illustration 12.15
Trench 2, looking east. The ranging rods are positioned in front of the faces of walls 2030 and 2034 of structure K.1. Later and earlier features are also visible in this view

stone-faced wall with earth core, partially lying under the later south wall of building K. The remaining stone facing is only two courses high. The west end of the trench caught the internal face and part of the earth core of another wall [2076] running north-south and similarly reduced in height. It continues northwards under the north wall of building K. Surface 2042 also extends under the north wall of building K.

Structure K.1 thus appears to be a rectangular room of a building with an earth floor [2042], an internal width of about 2.8m and a length of over 4m. Although no trace of a north wall was detected, it is unlikely that it could have lain much to the north of building K owing to the proximity of the loch shore. Its remains may well be yet to be discovered under the later wall of structure K. A probable drain [2016], perhaps largely removed by the construction of



Illustration 12.16
Trench 2, stonework 2048 looking north

building K, was noted along the internal face of the east wall. A type A slate (SF 2079) lying in it may be evidence for the reuse of roof slates as capstones, as in the probable continuation of this drain [12109] excavated in building 12.5 in trench 12.

Trodden into the floor deposits were a few pieces of ironwork, including a possible lock bolt (F125), a scale-tang knife (F56) and an arrowhead (F29). There were also a few small pieces of type A and B roof slates and sherds of pottery, including a rim sherd of redware (P42), a large piece from a reduced gritty jug (P51) and sherds of heavily sooted, grass-impressed handmade pot (P82).

Structure K.2 (Illus 12.18–23)

Building K.2 was found to underlie structure K.1. More than one phase of activity in K.2 was detected, with kilns, or more probably ovens, going out of use and being replaced by others. The floor [2042] of K.1 was found to be resting on firmer deposits of similar material [2017, 2055] which also contained much evidence for the



Illustration 12.17
Trench 2, the possible collapsed remains [2028] of the southwards extension of wall 2047 of structure K.1. The ranging rod is aligned with this wall



Illustration 12.18
Trench 2, tumble and collapsed stone [2055], over the floor of structure K.2, levelling up for the floor of building K.1. The ranging rod is placed on wall 2056



Illustration 12.19
Trench 2, cobbled floor [2060] of structure K.2, with oven 2053 in foreground

flattened remains of ovens, ash and stone tumble. The final levelling of the interior of building K.2 and the reduction of its walls were undertaken to create a level surface for the overlying building K.1 (Illus 12.18).

An east–west wall [2043] was detected partially underlying and supporting wall 2034 of K.1. It has a stone face and earth core, surviving to a maximum of two courses high (Illus 12.15). Associated with it is a good-quality paved surface [2060] composed mostly of small irregular quartzite and limestone slabs, tightly packed (Illus 12.19). Sitting on it is the bottommost course of wall 2056, forming a corner with 2043 and running northwards. It is only about 0.7m wide and is interpreted as an internal partition, for example the wall of a fireplace or oven. The possible remains of the east wall of structure K.2, consisting of a linear setting of stones [2075], were uncovered in a sondage dug into the core of the east wall of K.1.

As considered further below, structure K.2 appears to be the northern end of a complex or range of buildings stretching southwards, much of which was excavated in trench 12 as building 12.6. The paved road [4037] encountered in trench 4 running north–south under the later west wall of building K probably marks its western boundary, and indicates that there would have been an entrance door in this location. A further room to the east is possible. Another possible north–south wall is hinted at by a group of stones [2040] encountered in the south–east corner of the trench. A small sondage was excavated beside it revealing (under 2038 and 2039) a surface [2050] which might be the equivalent of 2017.

Sitting on the 2060 paved surface and adjacent to wall 2043 was an oven [2053], only partially within the confines of the



Illustration 12.20
Trench 2, pit 2058 in structure K.2 filled with boulders [2020] and the kiln bases 2018 and 2021 still in place

trench and not full excavated. Collapsed stonework [2036] was incorporated in the levelling material for the floor of structure K.1 (Illus 12.15). All that was in situ was an arc of stonework, one course high, indicating that the oven may have had an overall diameter in the region of 2m. Stonework 2036 was overlying a crust of peat ash and charcoal [2054] which was on top of a semi-circular patch of burnt red clay, about 1.3m in diameter, truncated by the west baulk of the trench (Illus 12.18, 12.19, 12.21). This was the oven chamber. An earlier oven was seemingly represented by an area of burnt clay immediately to the north and included within the wall of oven 2053. It also sat on the paved floor.

A large part of the paved floor 2060 was found to have been removed by the digging of a large pit [2058] which may just have avoided making oven 2053 inoperable. It stretched east and west under the walls of K.1 and extended northwards under the later north wall of building K (Illus 12.20, 12.21). It also truncated the partition wall 2056 mentioned above. It was only partially excavated, enough to reveal a loose filling of large boulders (there were air gaps) [2019], levelled up with sand and gravel [2023]. The pit is at least 0.25m deep, and if circular might have had a diameter in the region of 3 to 3.5m. The pit also contained fragments of burnt bone, heat-affected stones and sherds of oxidised gritty ware (fabric 4.4). It was dug down to natural sand and gravel [2063].

The top of the pit was covered with deposits of ash and charcoal, including the bases of two ovens. One [2021] was represented by a green schist upper millstone, bottom side up (Illus 12.22), with a rim of baked clay, about 15cm wide, being all that survived of its



Illustration 12.22

Trench 2, millstone reused as the base of a kiln [2021] in structure K.2

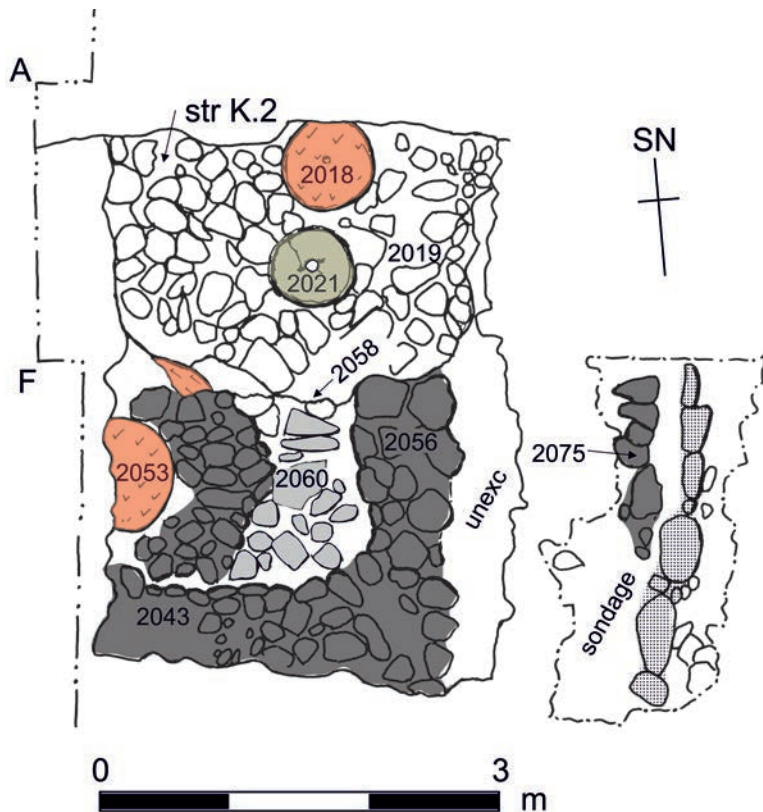


Illustration 12.21

Trench 2, plan of structure K.2



Illustration 12.23

Trench 2, ghost of millstone kiln base [2018] in structure K.2

FINLAGGAN

Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
2001	Vegetation and topsoil	Topsoil	
2002	Stones	Tumble from wall 2004 within str K	
2003	Stones	Tumble from walls of str K	2026, 2059
2004	Blocks and boulders	North wall of str K	
2005	Brown clayey soil	Occupation/floor of str K	2033
2006	Boulders and blocks	West face of east wall of str K.1	2030, 2034, 2076
2007	Stones	Post-setting in 2047, str K.1	
2010	Silty grey deposit	Old ground surface	
2011	Grey-white sand, iron-panning	Beach deposit	
2012	Rubble	Tumble from str K and earlier structures	
2013	Rubble	Tumble in north entrance of str K	
2014	Soil and stones	Core of wall, faced by 2030	2047
2015	Surface, peat ash, charcoal	Floor of building K.1	2042
2016	Stones	Drain in str K.1	
2017	Compressed layers of peat ash	Floor deposits of str K.2	
2018	Hard red setting	Ghost of millstone oven base, str K.2	
2019	Boulders and black earth	Fill of pit 2058, str K.2	
2021	Green schist millstone	Oven base, str K.2	
2023	Greenish-grey gravel and sand	Fill of pit 2058	
2025	Boulders and blocks	Wall of building K	
2026	Rubble	Tumble from str K and earlier structures	2003, 2059
2028	Stones	Wall, probably both K.1 and K.2	
2030	Boulders and blocks	West face of wall 2047, str K.1	2006, 2034, 2076
2033	Brown layer, compact	Occupation/floor of str K	2005
2034	Stone-revetted mound under 2025	Wall of str K.1	2003, 2006, 2076
2035	Gravel horizon	Worm activity within area of str K	
2036	Stones	Tumble from oven 2053, str K.2	
2037	Brown soil with ash, charcoal	Floor of str K.1	2042
2038	Brown layer, compact	Trodden external surface?	
2039	Gravel horizon under 2038	Worm activity	
2040	Stony feature, unexcavated	Possibly wall of str K.2	
2042	Peat ash deposit	Floor of K.1	2015
2043	Stone-revetted earth bank	Wall of str K.2	
2045	Stones	Post setting in 2047, str K.1	
2046	Stones	Post setting in 2047, str K.1	
2047	Soil and stones	Core of east wall of str K.1, faced by 2030	
2048	Line of stones	East face of wall of K.1	
2050	Surface impregnated with ash	Internal floor surface, str K.2?	
2053	Stones, baked clay	Oven, str K.2	
2054	Crust of peat ash and charcoal	Rake-out from oven 2053, str K.2	
2055	Blocks, boulders, ash	Tumble in K.2, make-up for K.1	
2056	Stones	Wall in str K.2	
2058	Pit	For drainage? Str K.2	
2059	Spread of stones	Tumble from str K and earlier structures	2003, 2026
2060	Stone paving	Floor, str K.2	
2061	Peat ash deposit	Viewed in side of 2058, str K.3	
2062	Earthy deposit	Viewed in side of 2058	
2063	Gravel and sand	Disturbed shore deposits, bottom of 2058	
2068	Dark blotchy soil	In sondage under 2060, cf 2062	
2069	Sand, gravel, soil	Cf 2063	
2070	Peat ash deposit	Cf 2061	
2075	Line of stones	East face of wall of K.2	
2076	Laid stones and earth	West wall of str K.1	2006, 2034, 2076
2078	Stones	Drain in str K.1	

Table 12.1
Trench 2 contexts

superstructure. The millstone, which was not lifted, is 0.58m in diameter, with a central hole ('eye') of 13cm with two slots, 4 by 7cm, for housing a bar (the sile, driver or rynd) which connected with the spindle which turned the stone when it was operational. It is severely heat damaged and cracked in two. Adjacent to it the other oven base [2018] is represented by a circular patch of fired clay (Illus 12.23), 0.65m in diameter with a small central hole, apparently indicating it had also had a millstone as a base. Presumably one of these ovens replaced the other, but it is not clear which came first. Other adjacent patches of fired clay suggest that these are only the two most recent and obvious of a series of similar ovens erected here, the use of which produced the deposits of ash and charcoal intermixed with clay from the oven superstructures.

Three samples of this material were submitted to the National Museum of Scotland Research Laboratory for possible evidence of industrial processes. No unusual elements, such as lead or zinc, were detected by XRF, and there was no evidence for very high temperatures, such as would have been associated with metal-working. No hammer scale was detected. These observations are consistent with our preferred interpretation that these deposits are rake-out from ovens or kilns used in brewing or baking. No reports have been received on samples submitted elsewhere, specifically for the detection of charred grain and other environmental material.

Structure K.3

From the evidence of a small sondage cut through paving 2060 it was seen that there was earlier occupation on this part of the island. Separated from the paving by a thickness of 10cm of soil [2068] containing charcoal and fragments of burnt bone was another horizon of peat ash [2070], about 5cm thick, also seen in section in the side of pit 2058 as Context 2061. Underneath it were disturbed deposits of gravel and sand [2063, 2069]. No dating evidence was recovered from these deposits.

Interpretation

We interpret buildings L and K as a unit, connected by a cobbled alley, and probably occupied in the 16th century. The

EILEAN MÓR EXCAVATIONS OF HOUSES BY THE JETTY AND THE KITCHENS

Context	Description	Interpretation
4002	Laid blocks and boulders	Paved road from jetty
4003	Laid blocks and boulders	Walls of building L
4006	Laid blocks and boulders	Wall of building K
4010	Blocks and boulders	Tumble from K
4013	Stones, rubble	Sealed by 4002 road
4014	Laid blocks and boulders	Road, going west to building P
4015	Slot	Drain across 4014
4016	Blocks and boulders	Tumbled remains of 4046
4017	Blocks and boulders	Tumbled remains of 4046
4018	Blocks and boulders	Tumbled remains of 4048
4020	Sandy gravel, rock fragments	Shore deposits
4021	Sandy gravel, rock fragments	Shore deposits
4022	Sandy gravel, rock fragments	Shore deposits
4023	Gravel wash	Decomposed mortar from str L.1?
4024	Gravel wash	Decomposed mortar from str L.1?
4026	Clay and soil, charcoal, ash	Floor deposits, str L.1
4027	Clay and soil, charcoal, ash	Floor deposits, str L.1
4031	Peaty soil	Old land surface
4032	Laid stones	Kiln bowl
4033	Gravel	Natural
4037	Laid blocks and boulders	Paved road
4039	Laid blocks and boulders	Paved alley between buildings L & K
4044	Blocks and boulders	Tumble from building L
4046	Laid blocks and boulders	West wall of str L.1
4048	Laid blocks and boulders	East wall of str L.1

Table 12.2
Trench 4 contexts

pottery and other material recovered from building K, including the padlock to fasten its north door and the substantial floor deposit of clayey earth, are all suggestive of domestic occupation. No trace was detected of a hearth, but it may be supposed that that would have been situated in the unexcavated western portion of the building. The lack of a clear or substantial floor deposit within building L is a situation which can be compared with building U in trench 7, M in trench 5 and S in trench 6. It is possible that this is an indication that they were not habitations, that they were for sheltering neither humans nor animals. They may have been for the storage of food, fodder or fuel (peat).

The substantial quantities of rubble around the outside of the walls of building K and L may be an indication that they were abandoned and allowed to fall down, largely through natural causes. The outwards pressure exerted by the collapse of their roofs, presumably covered with turf and thatch, would have encouraged the stonework of the walls to fall outwards, and there is enough of this still around to suggest that little of it has subsequently been removed.

Structure K.1 can be dated after about 1500, on the twin assumptions that the pieces of roof slate that were incorporated in its floor came from the great hall and that neither building K.1 nor other earlier structures on this part of Eilean Mór had slate roofs.

We will make the case below that K.1 appears to be the northern end of a building, more of which was excavated in trench 12 as 12.5. Its walls mostly only survive in a fragmentary



Illustration 12.24

View over apparent open area, the location of trench 12, with building C and the great hall in background

condition, much damaged by later activity, but the stretch of wall excavated in trench 2 as 2030 is very well preserved, perhaps to its full height. The post-holes suspected or cautiously identified in other such stone-faced turf or earth walls at Finlaggan can here be seen to be complete, but with no sign of the posts having rotted or burnt in position. The discovery of a ploughshare under the stone footing of the largest of the three post-holes in 2030 can hardly be regarded as coincidental. A large lump of iron slag (SF 6047) recovered from the fill of a post-hole in structure 6.1 can be explained as possible protection for a timber upright, but this does not appear to be a comparable situation. Its presence may have some ritual or magic purpose.

Structure L.1 can tentatively be identified as a kiln-barn of post-medieval date.

Trench 12 (Illus 12.1, 12.24, 12.25, Table 12.6)

Although much of the main area of Eilean Mór seemed to be occupied by buildings, there appeared to be an open rectangular space bounded by the great hall and structures K, Y and F. It was proposed that a trench should be positioned to check if there was a courtyard here.

Excavation in 1992 of trench 12, then 2 by 10m, running approximately east-west in the area to the east of the great hall and south of building K, led to the then surprising conclusion that this part of Eilean Mór had been built up in the medieval and post-medieval period, with a sequence of several buildings, one on top of the other. We were aware that the limited area of the trench was hardly sufficient to resolve and characterise a complex stratigraphic sequence, and it therefore seemed appropriate to extend the area of trench 12 for excavation in 1993 (Illus 12.25). This was done in such a way that the new trench was linked to trenches 10 and 2 to provide direct stratigraphical relationships.

The new trench was about 10 by 8m and oriented with its longer side east-west and all but the eastern 3m of the 1992 trench

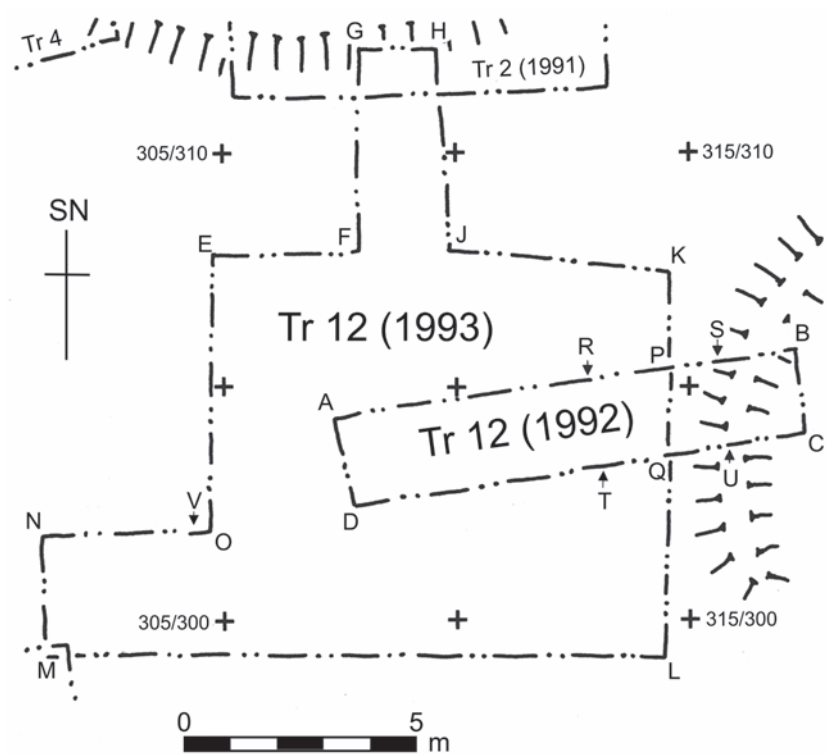


Illustration 12.25
Trench 12, outline plan

running across the middle of it. From the north edge a 2m wide strip extended 4m to within the area of the 1991 trench 2, and another extension, 2.5 by 3.5m, connected with the north-east corner of the 1992 trench 10.

A garden

It is now clear that the level, empty appearance of the central area of Eilean Mór is due to its cultivation as a garden after the demise of the medieval and later buildings, perhaps sometime in the 17th century. This would explain the development of a peaty soil [12002, 12036,

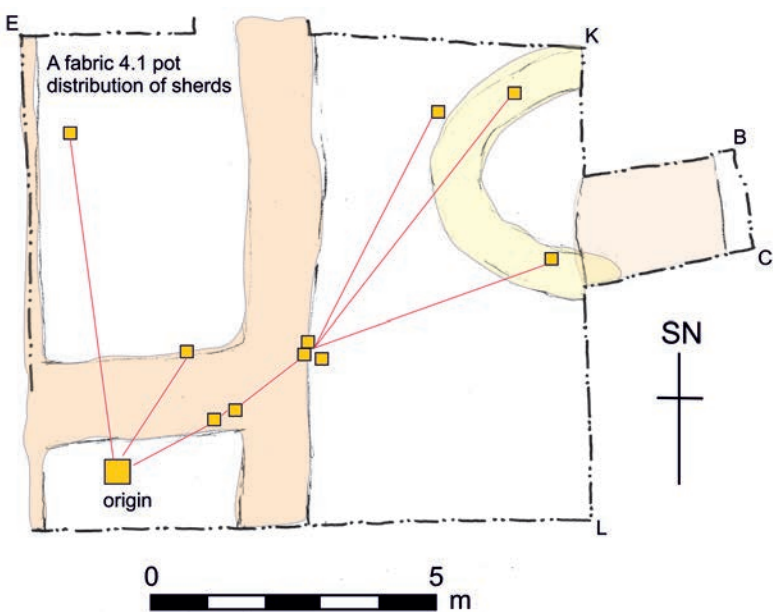


Illustration 12.26
An oxidised gritty ware vessel: distribution of sherds

12101, 12193] under the turf and the poor survival of the walls and floor deposits immediately beneath. Unlike the post-medieval cultivation in the east end of Eilean Mór (see trench 19), there was no evidence here of rigs or lazy beds. This garden had an area of about 15 by about 15m, being bound to the west by the cobbled road [12136] along the east wall of the great hall. The road's intact surface immediately under the turf shows it was not dug into by the gardeners and may have continued to function as a path. To the north the garden was edged by building K (partially excavated in trenches 2 and 4), to the east by the ruins of structure Y1, and to the south by the cobbled road running from the great hall to the chapel. Although the present surface of this area is generally quite level, with only a slope downwards of a few centimetres from east to west and about 30cm from south to north, on excavation it appeared that more damage had been done to the ruins of the earlier built structures to the south and east than to the north and west.

Context	North French	White gritty	Redware	Reduced gritty	Oxidised gritty	Handmade
		Fabric 1	Fabric 2	Fabric 3	Fabric 4	
Topsoil, gardening [12000, 12002, 12101]			2	12	25	126
Str 12.1 [12014]				1		
Str 12.4 [12044]			1	2		
Str 12.5 [12130]				4	1	4
Str 12.6 [12134, 12138, 12110, 12145, 12133]		1	4	7	6	5
Str 12.7 [12160]					1	
Str 12.8 [12163]		1				
Pre-buildings [12030]				2	1	
Totals for all of trench	1	3	11	34	53	214

Table 12.3
Trench 12 ceramics, contexts

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The topsoil in the excavated area of the garden contained many pieces of roof slate, mostly type A, almost certainly from the demolition of the great hall at the very end of the 15th century. There were also many sherds of medieval pottery and pieces of metalwork, no doubt mostly churned up from earlier deposits by gardening activity. Table 12.3 shows how 52% (165 out of a total of 316) of sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery recovered from the trench 12 excavations came from the topsoil and other deposits associated with the gardening. The majority of these sherds are from local handmade vessels, and it is likely that they were originally in use in the stratigraphically uppermost buildings on the site, especially structure 12.5. We will argue below that building 12.5 dates to the 16th century, but none of the wheel-made pottery in the topsoil and related deposits is

likely to be of more recent date than the 14th century, and none of it would have remained in use for any longer than a few years at most.

The presence of so much medieval pottery in the topsoil has to be evidence for substantial damage to the deeper deposits by the gardeners, and a considerable amount of churn or redistribution of artefacts over time as a result of successive structures being built and destroyed. Table 12.3 lists sherds, a total of 13% (41 sherds), from operational areas like floors and hearths in structures 12.1, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7, 12.8 and silt underlying the building sequence [12030]. The remaining 110 sherds (35% of the total from the trench) were recovered from walls, foundation trenches, post-holes, etc where it can reasonably be supposed that deposition was accidental and not directly linked to their use.

	Ceramic no.	Fabric	Origin	Sherd	Context	Description
Groups of joining sherds	45	3.1	Str 12.6	12341	12110	Oven debris, str 12.6
				12337	12130	Floor of str 12.5
				12101	12101	Turf and topsoil
	52	3.1	Pre-building	12305	12030	Old soil profile
				12072	12044	Hearth, str 12.4
				12559	12131	Flattened wall of 12.5
	94	Handmade	Str 12.5	12334	12130	Floor of str 12.5
				12335	12130	
				12104	12101	Turf and topsoil
				12107	12101	
				12167	12101	
				12175	12101	
				12283	12101	
				12284	12101	
				12285	12101	
	[b]	4.1	Str 12.5	12269	12101	Turf and topsoil
				12394	12134	Floor of str 12.5
	[c]	4.1	Str 12.5	12247	12101	Turf and topsoil
				12462	12145	Demolition, 12.6
Other sherds, part of [b] + [c] vessel?	[b+c?]	4.1		12408	12134	Floor of str 12.5
				12410	12134	
				12409	12134	
				12028	12015	Make-up for floor of 12.0
				12068	12036	Garden soil
				12192	12101	Turf and topsoil
				12230	12101	
				12135	12101	
				12242	12101	
				12241	12101	
				12241	12101	
				12120	12101	
				12144	12101	
				12209	12101	
				12210	12101	
				12211	12101	
				12212	12101	
				12228	12101	
				12246	12101	
				12267	12101	
				12298	12101	
				12309	12101	

Table 12.4
Trench 12 multi-context ceramic vessels



Illustration 12.27

Trench 12 (1993), view from north-east corner over east plot

The distribution of a group of sherds supposed to be from one vessel may be instructive. The pot in question includes over 27 wheel-made body sherds of Scottish oxidised gritty ware (fabric 4.1), reckoned as representing less than 20% of one vessel, probably of 13th- or 14th-century date. The scattering of the sherds is plotted in Illus 12.26 and Table 12.4 (b+c). Only 13 of the sherds join with others, though not in one group, but we have a high degree of confidence on the basis of appearance that all are from the one vessel. Some originate from the floor deposits of the south chamber of building 12.5, although the vessel was probably long since broken by the time they got there. One sherd (SF 12028) got incorporated in the levelling-up deposits or floor [12015] for building 12.0, and 21 come from the topsoil or garden soil [12101, 12036]. Perhaps the main thing to note from the distribution as mapped in Illus 12.26 is how the sherds have been dispersed, mostly in a linear fashion over a distance of approximately 10m. This effect may be supposed to result from the sherds being dragged through the soil by gardening tools.

Path and plots (Illus 12.26–32)

The garden soil sealed the remains of two sequences of buildings on two plots (Illus 12.27–29, Table 12.5), separated by a path a metre or so in width, defined by rough cobbling, altered and repaired at different times [12105, 12157, 12158, 12159] (Illus 12.30–32).

We will describe the sequence of structures in each plot in turn, starting with the one further to the east, from top to bottom, 12.0, Y1, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3 and 12.4. Uppermost on the plot to the west was building 12.5, succeeding 12.6, and before that vestigial traces of structure 12.7. A key consideration is the



Illustration 12.28

Trench 12 (1993), view from south over west plot



Illustration 12.29
Trench 12, interpretative plan showing the main structures and building sequence

temporal relationship of these two sequences of structures. Independent dating evidence resulting, for example, from a study of artefacts associated with them does not provide a firm or precise chronological framework. There are, however, some significant clues. First there are the type A roof slates, which we suppose can only have become available for distribution and reuse when the great hall was dismantled about 1500. On that basis, structure

Date	West plot	East plot
17th century		Garden
Late 16th/17th century		Str 12.0
16th century	Str 12.5	Str Y1
14th/15th century	Str 12.6	Str 12.1
		Str 12.2
		Str 12.3
13th century	Str 12.7	Str 12.4

Table 12.5
Trench 12 building sequence



Illustration 12.30
Trench 12, view from south. The ranging rods mark the path dividing the east from the west plot

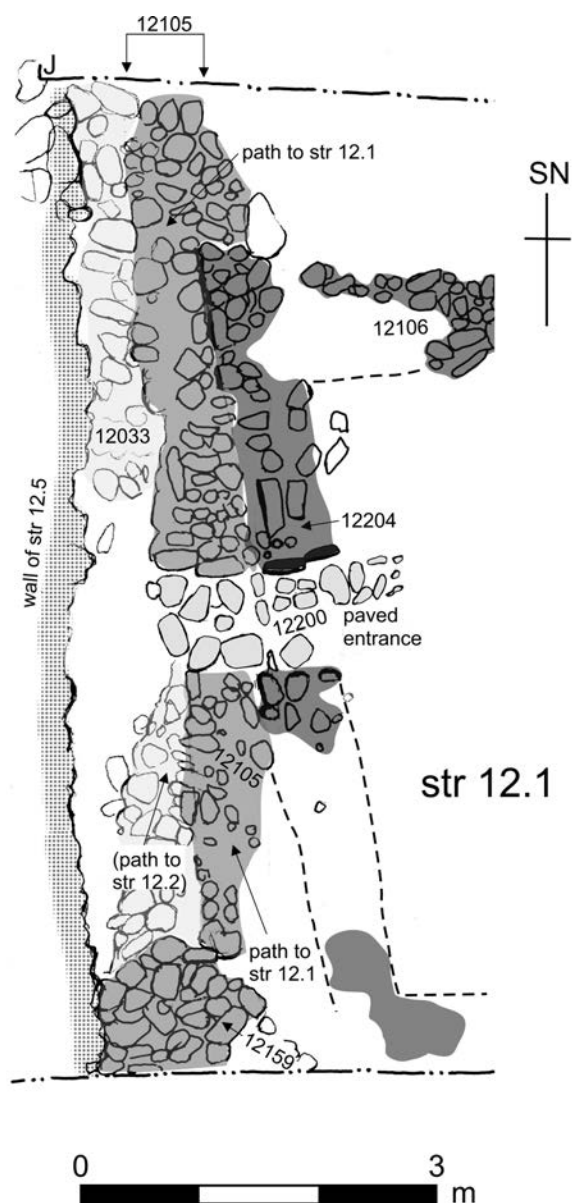


Illustration 12.31
Trench 12 (1993), plan of path serving building 12.1

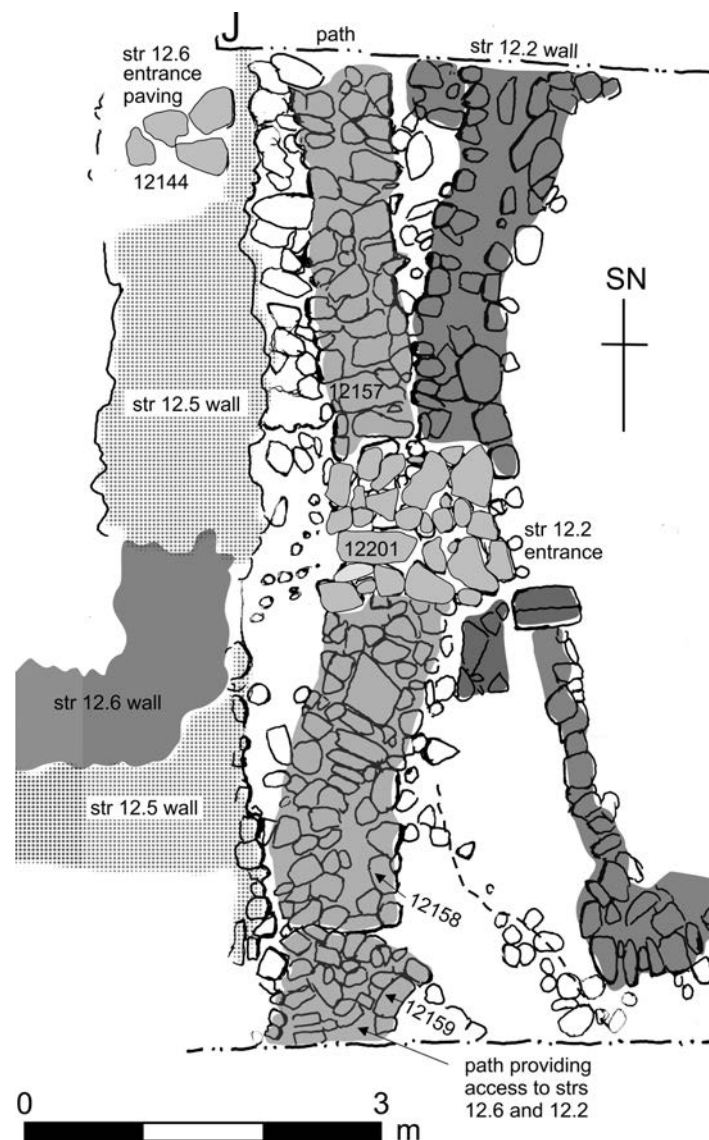


Illustration 12.32
Trench 12 (1993), plan of path serving buildings 12.2 and 12.5

12.5 dates to the 16th century or later. Second, there is the relationship of buildings to the path up the centre of the trench. It provided access to an entrance into structure 12.5 to the west and successively structures 12.2 and 12.1 to the east. Using these observations and taking into account more general dating evidence provided by artefacts and our overall understanding of the dating evidence for features like the paved roads, our working hypothesis for a building sequence is laid out in Table 12.5 and illustration 12.29.

Structure 12.0 (Illus 12.33, 12.34, 12.38, 12.40)

The uppermost structure on the eastern of the two plots was 12.0, apparently an oval-shaped building of drystone construction, with walls about 1m wide, reduced at most to a low pile of

stonework [12107] (Illus 12.33, 12.34). This building seems to have been oriented approximately east-west with an overall width of about 4.5m and unknown length. It was erected in the flattened remains of building 12.1, extending over bank Y1 to the east. As we have noted with other post-medieval buildings on Eilean Mór, there were no obvious traces of a floor, other than the top surface of a levelling-up layer [12015], or occupation deposits, only a roughly oval setting of flat stones, 90 by 60cm [12007], identified as a possible pad for a timber upright. This may have been because either the building was a storage unit, or all traces of occupation have been removed by later garden activity.

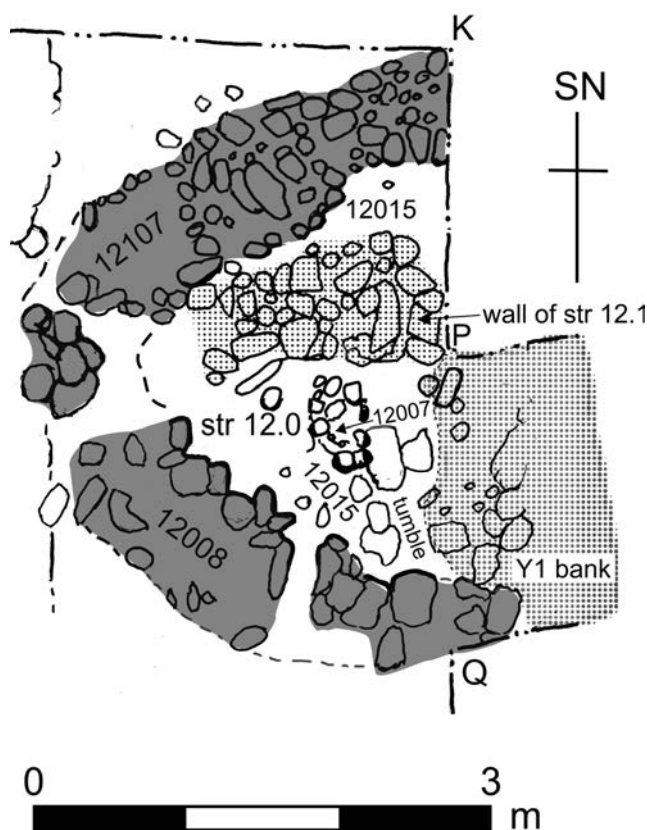


Illustration 12.33
Trench 12, plan of structure 12.0



Illustration 12.34
Trench 12 (1993), wall 12107 of structure 12.0 in foreground; ranging rod on wall 12106 of house 12.1

Building 12.1 (Illus 12.34, 12.36–38, 12.40–42)

Building 12.1 was a rectangular, stone-walled structure with walls about 0.8m wide (Illus 12.41). None of the walling is preserved more than one course above floor level, and to a large extent reliance has had to be placed on the presence of foundation trenches to trace its extent. The stonework is mostly roughly dressed local material, especially pieces of quartzite and dolerite of no great size (Illus 12.34, 12.42). A spread of gritty yellow sand [12003] over the remains of the east wall is believed to be evidence for decayed lime mortar. There was only a limited amount of tumble present, presumably because of later gardening activity.

The building is 4.5m wide overall but its length could not be determined with any certainty. It is not absolutely clear that the remains of a north wall [12106] are an external wall rather than an internal partition, and while a scatter of stones in the south of the trench may be all that remains of its south wall (in which case an overall length of about 7m could be posited), it is quite likely that it was positioned beyond the south edge of our trench. Entrance was off the pre-existing cobbled path to the west by a doorway defined on the north side by kerb stones [12019] and paved with large cobbles [12200].

Foundation trenches, broad and shallow, less than half a metre deep, were detected for the walls of building 12.1, apparent in the sections through, or adjacent to, the east, west and north walls, with a fill of clayey silt [12117, 12141, 12123, 12054] (sections

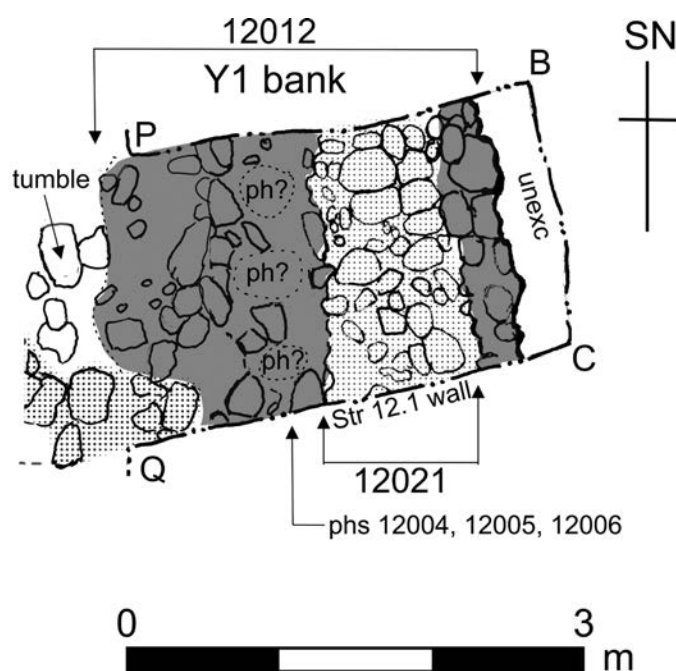


Illustration 12.35
Trench 12 (1992), plan of Y1 bank



Illustration 12.36

Trench 12 (1992), bank Y1, incorporating wall of house 12.1, from north

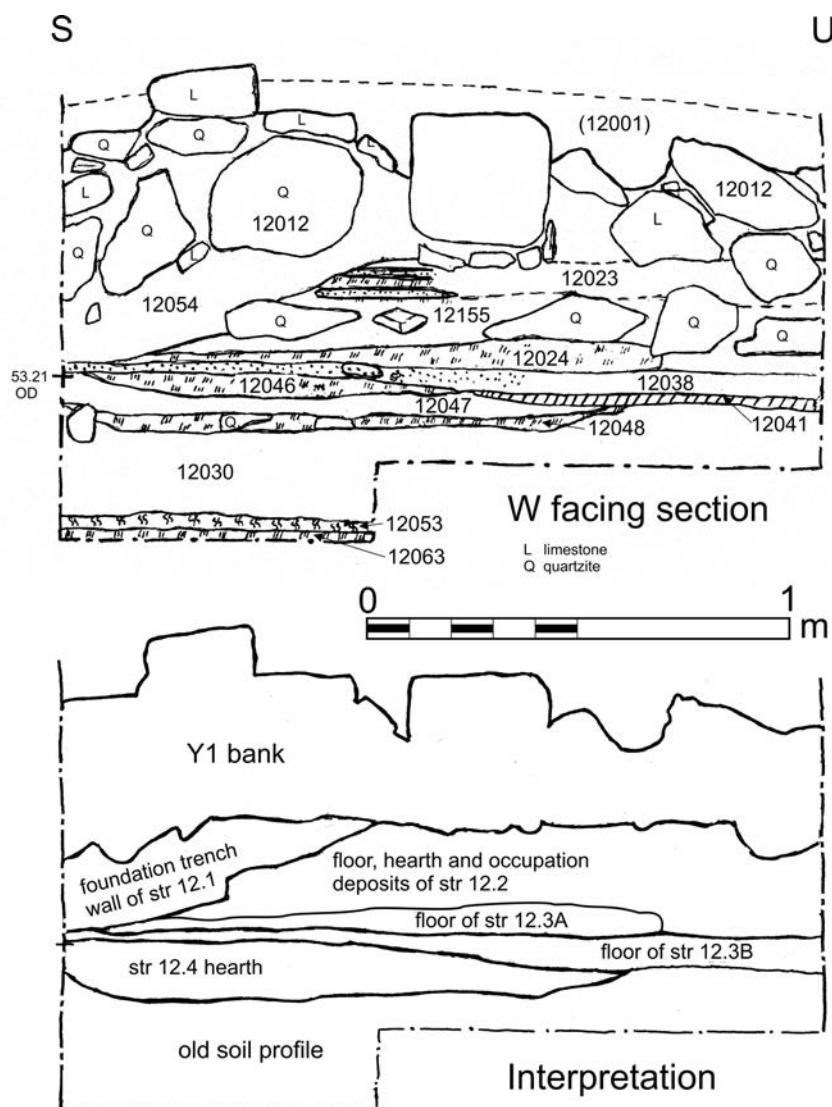


Illustration 12.37

Trench 12 (1992), section S-U

S-U, R-S, K-P; Illus 12.37, 12.38, 12.40). The foundation for the west wall appears to have been cut into the north-south path and topped up with cobbles [12010]. To create a level floor, the underlying remains of building 12.2 were flattened and the space levelled up with brown clayey silt [12124] to a depth of up to 27cm. Included in it were sherds of Scottish oxidised gritty ware. The surface of this [12014] represents the disturbed remains of an earth floor. From it were got an iron hasp or latch (F131) and sherds of pottery, including a piece of Scottish reduced gritty ware (SF 12008). At least some of the 47 nails recovered from the topsoil in trench 12 might have had a structural use in building 12.1. There is no specific evidence for how it was roofed.

Building 12.2 (Illus 12.43, 12.44, 12.45)

Building 12.2, on the same orientation as house 12.1, is represented in trench 2 by the remains of its west wall, including an entrance, some of the floor with a substantial hearth and a short stretch of its south wall (Illus 12.43, 12.44). If the entrance was centrally placed, it might be supposed that the internal length of the building was about 7m. The surviving walling is 1m or less thick and of drystone, cut into the turf bank of an earlier structure, building 12.3. There is no evidence that the exterior of building 12.2 was itself clad or banked with turf. Its side is noticeably convex, suggesting an overall barrel-shaped outline. Its internal drystone facing [12104, 12031] is composed of boulders and blocks of local stone, especially quartzite and dolerite, standing to a height of about 0.5m or two to three courses high. Stones from its upper courses have been pushed into the interior, but no more were present than would be enough for a total stone wall height of about 1m at most. At the south-west corner there is a setting of stones [12111], about 55 by 75cm, probably packers for a timber upright or roof couple. Another post-setting [12205] was detected at the supposed north-west corner. The entrance in the west wall is paved and accessed from the cobbled path [12157-59]. A large rectangular stone block [12127] slumped in the entrance was originally its south jamb.

A line of possible post-holes, at intervals of about 0.7 to 1m, was detected at the interface between the internal stone face of the west wall and the floor. They might have supported uprights. None of these were excavated. The floor deposits are a complex series of silty clay layers and lenses containing charcoal and peat ash [12023, 12142], including a central area paved with large flat stones [12026, 12155] showing signs of fire damage from use as a hearth. From these floor and hearth deposits were recovered several artefacts, a group in the surface of these deposits in the general area of the paving, including two decorated bone tablemen (B1 and B2), a woodworking bit (F91) and an iron purse mount (F14). There were also the remains of a drinking (?) horn represented by its butt mount and fragments of horn (B8), an iron buckle (F5) and a copper alloy hasp (C95), possibly from a casket. An iron hasp (F108) and other pieces of ironwork, including a handle and a hinge strap (F103 and F110), might well be from a chest (Illus 12.45). There were no sherds of pottery. A well-shaped whetstone of fine-grained siltstone (R96) was recovered from the material [12124] within structure 12.2 used to make up the floor of building 12.1. All or most of these finds may represent items in actual use at the time building 12.2 was abandoned.

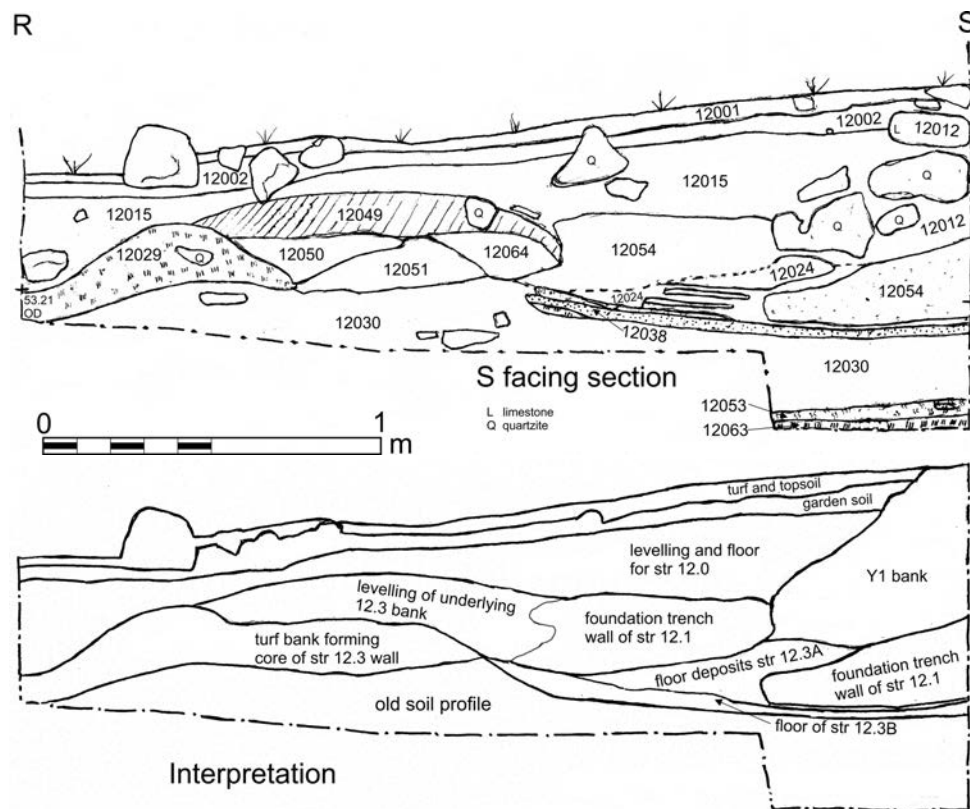


Illustration 12.38
Trench 12 (1992), section R-S

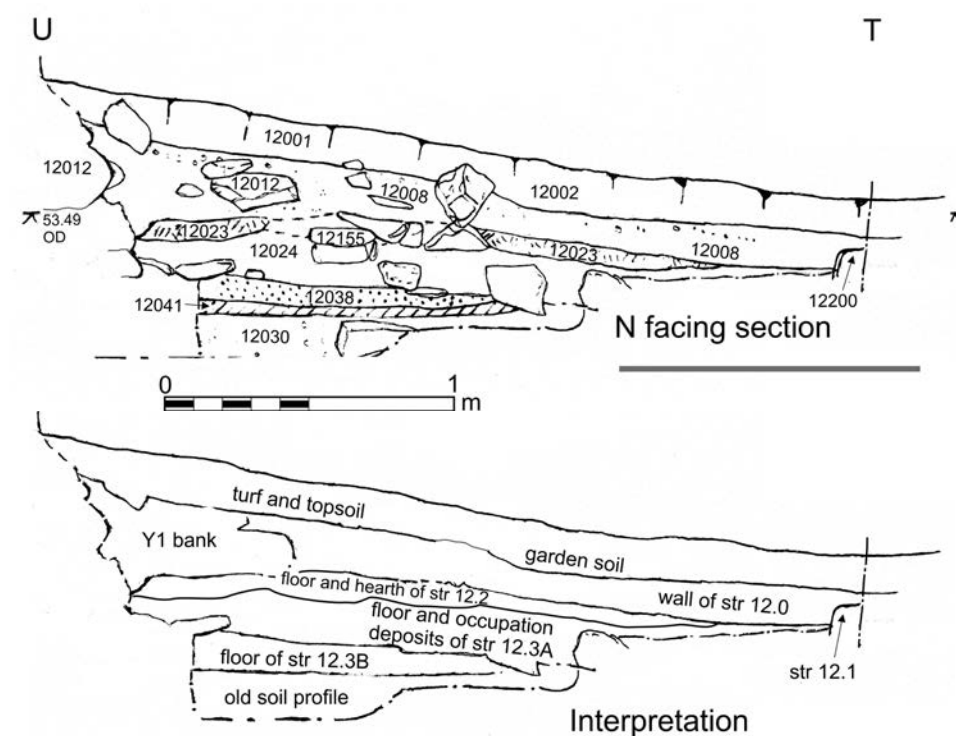


Illustration 12.39
Trench 12 (1992), section U-T

Building 12.3 (Illus 12.37–39, 12.46–48)

Only some of the west and north wall of building 12.3 and some of its floor was excavated. It may have been a rectangular structure with rounded corners. Neither its north nor south ends were fully excavated, nor its full width, but perhaps it was of similar length to structure 12.2. Its walling consisted of a substantial complex bank [12140, 12122, 12050, 12051] composed of compact, pale grey, silty clay, with individual turfs visible, especially in section. It appeared likely to reflect different phases of construction over a substantial period of time, and had evidently been much damaged and altered in use and final demolition. In the description that follows, two phases are recognised, 12.3A (Illus 12.46) and 12.3B (Illus 12.48), undoubtedly a simplification of reality.

The earliest recognisable floor consisted of pink sandstone [12038], 6cm thick, set in a layer of pale grey-green sand [12041]. In the north end of the building some of this has been removed by the digging of the foundation trench for the north wall of structure 12.1. The sandstone is so badly heat affected that it has almost totally disintegrated, but it may have been laid as regularly shaped slabs. The corner of such a slab of pink sandstone (R23), 42mm thick, was recovered in 1998 from the chapel ruins. This floor terminated against a wall to the west, now represented by banks 12029 and 12051 incorporated in a more complex bank structure. Together they are identified as structure 12.3A. Overlying some of the stone floor was a thin layer [12168] of occupation material, mostly silty clay, perhaps only representative of the final use or dismantling of 12.3A.

Later flattening and levelling of the 12.3A wall resulted in a thin layer of sandy silty clay [12139] being preserved under later bank material [12148]. Where 12139 was excavated for a length of about 1.5m along the internal face of the west wall, it was found to contain nine complete rivets, three of which could clench boards with a total thickness of about an inch (25.4mm). The other six were of smaller size, with space for boards with a total thickness of about 18mm. There were over 20 other roves and broken rivets. All of this may be evidence for wall cladding within building

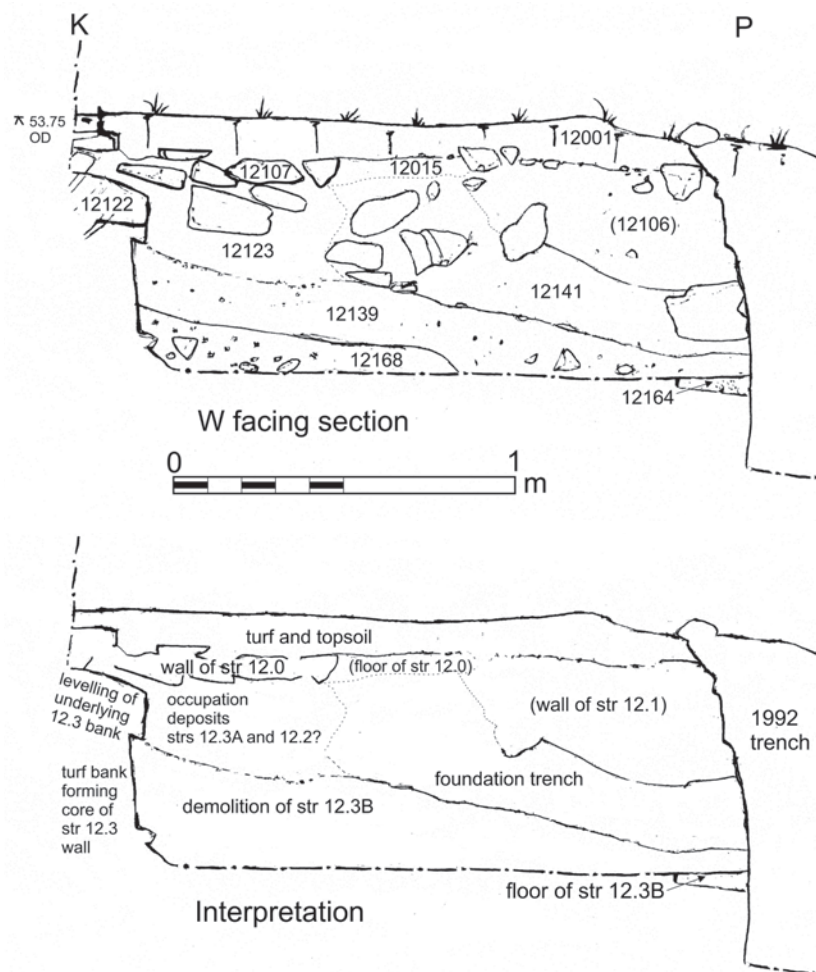


Illustration 12.40
Trench 12 (1993), section K-P

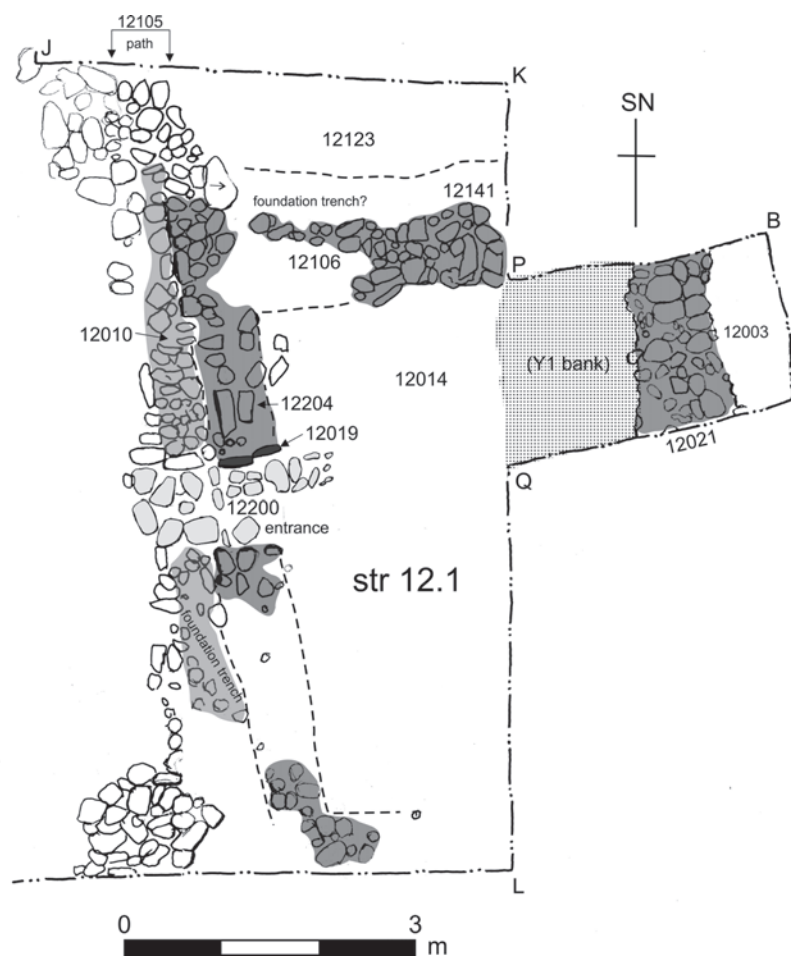


Illustration 12.41
Trench 12, plan of structure 12.1



Illustration 12.42
Trench 12 (1992), west wall and entrance of building 12.1 from north

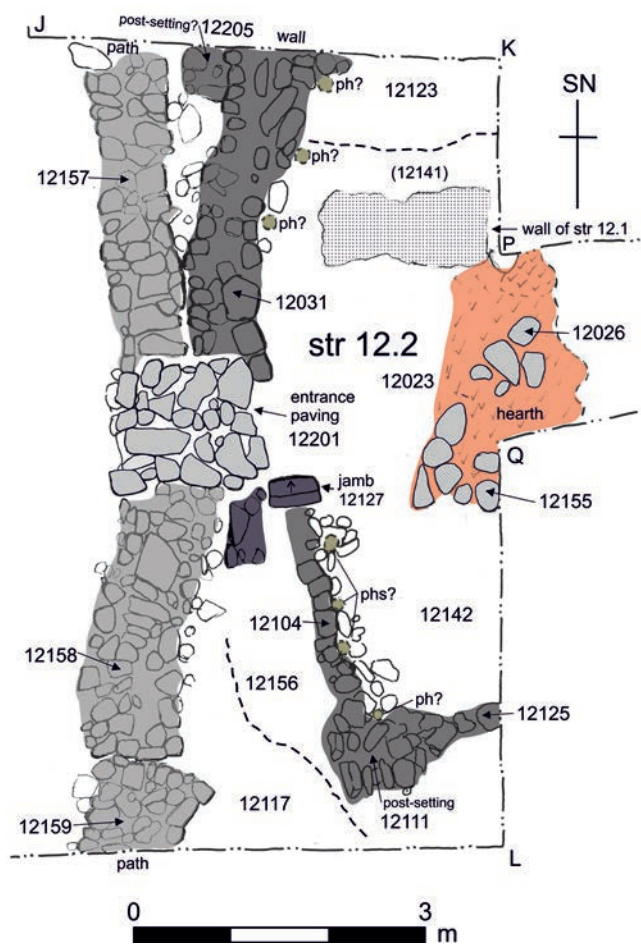


Illustration 12.43
Trench 12, plan of structure 12.2



Illustration 12.44
Trench 12, view from south-east with structure 12.2 in foreground

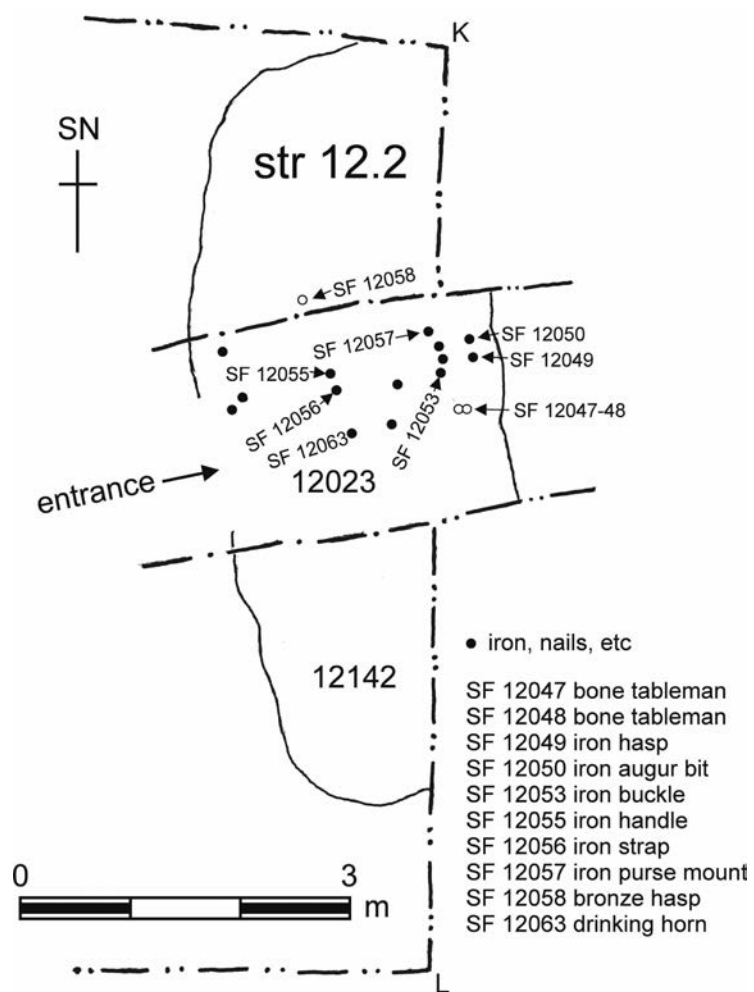


Illustration 12.45
Trench 12, distribution of finds within structure 12.2

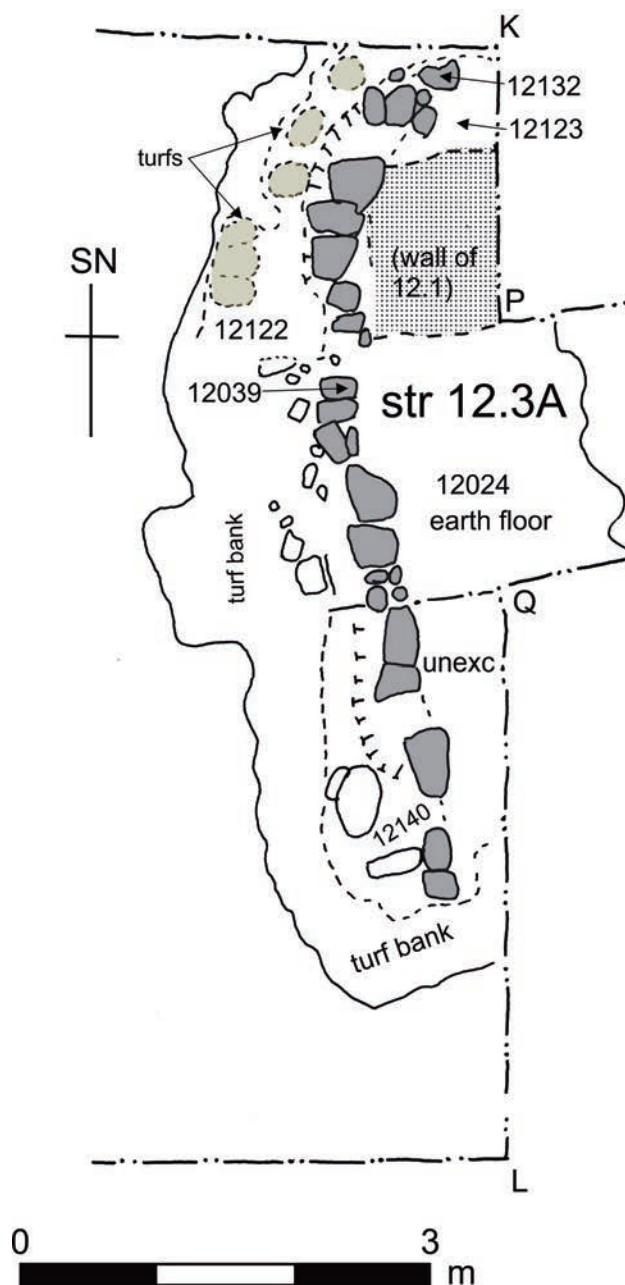


Illustration 12.46
Trench 12, plan of structure 12.3A



Illustration 12.47
Trench 12, view of excavated area of building 12.3A

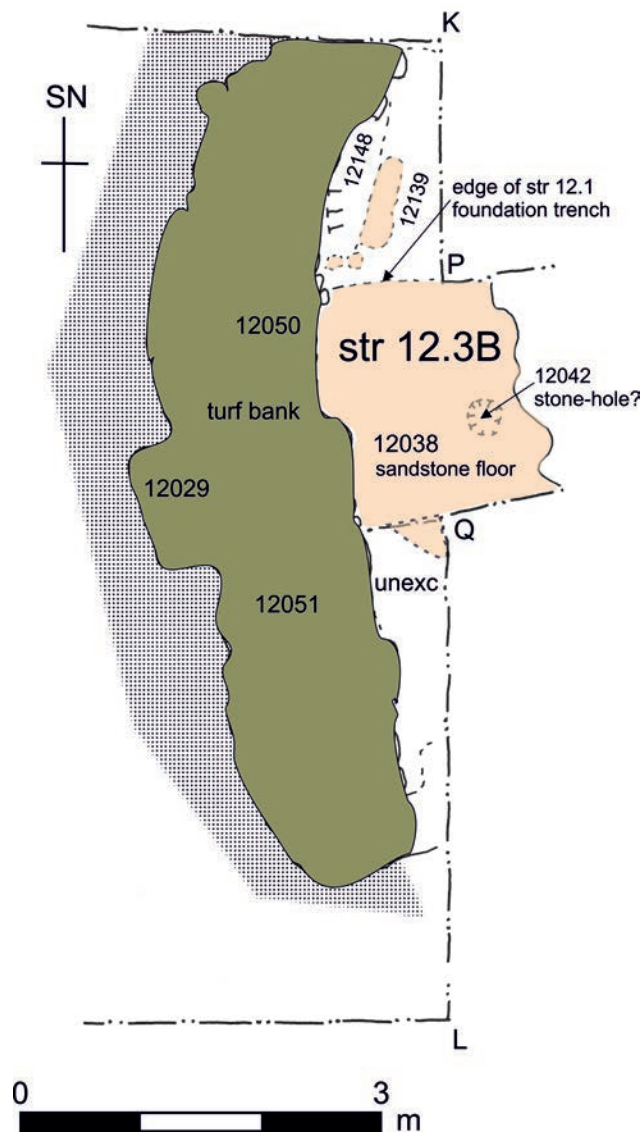


Illustration 12.48
Trench 12, plan of structure 12.3B

12.3A. The preparation of a level space for the construction of building 12.2 involved the truncation and flattening of these walls, with not just the stone facings being dislodged but also turfs as well [12148], toppled over a thin layer of sandy silty clay [12139].

Building 12.3B probably had the same footprint as its predecessor. Now the turf bank forming its wall was augmented and faced internally with stone blocks and boulders, surviving up to two courses high [12039, 12132]. It was not possible to check whether there was also an external stone face to the wall. The floor within structure 12.3B was of clay, with layers and lenses of ash [12024].

Building 12.4 (?) (Illus 12.37, 12.49)

The evidence for this structure is a hearth excavated in the original 1992 trench immediately under the degraded sandstone floor of building 12.3A (Illus 12.37, 12.49). Neither its extent nor shape was established. A bank [12029, 12170] of dark grey silt containing a considerable amount of charcoal may also belong. It was found to be incorporated in the west bank of structure 12.3. The hearth consists of a thin spread of charcoal [12044] containing pieces of burnt bone, a sherd of redware and two of reduced gritty pottery. It overlies lenses of silt impregnated with charcoal and peat ash [12046–48], with a maximum overall thickness of 13cm, hollowed into the underlying deposit of silt [12030]. This layer of silt, 20cm and more in thickness, is essentially a natural accumulation, though sherds of pottery were recovered from it, including Scottish reduced gritty and oxidised gritty ware. Between it and natural loch-side sand and gravel is a thin layer [12053] of yellow clay, resulting from a fluctuating water table, overlying a thin layer [12063] of black silt containing fragments of charcoal.

Building 12.5 (Illus 12.50–53)

Building 12.5 is the uppermost of the structures on the western plot excavated in trench 12, its walls to a considerable extent reused from, or on the line of, those of an earlier building, structure 12.6 (Illus 12.50). Both 12.5 and 12.6 have been very badly



Illustration 12.49
Trench 12 (1992). The ranging rod rests on hearth 12044. The sandstone floor, bedded on sand, of building 12.3 can be seen in section above it. Compare section S–U in Illus 12.37

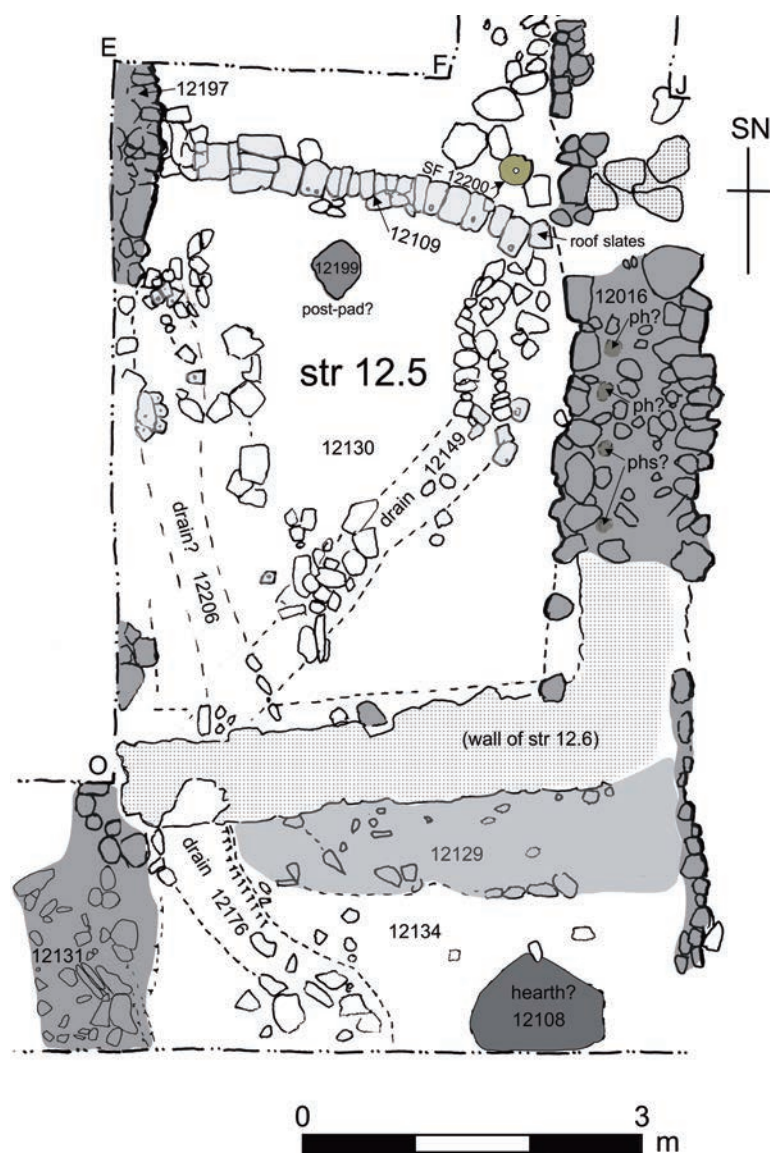


Illustration 12.50
Trench 12, plan of building 12.5

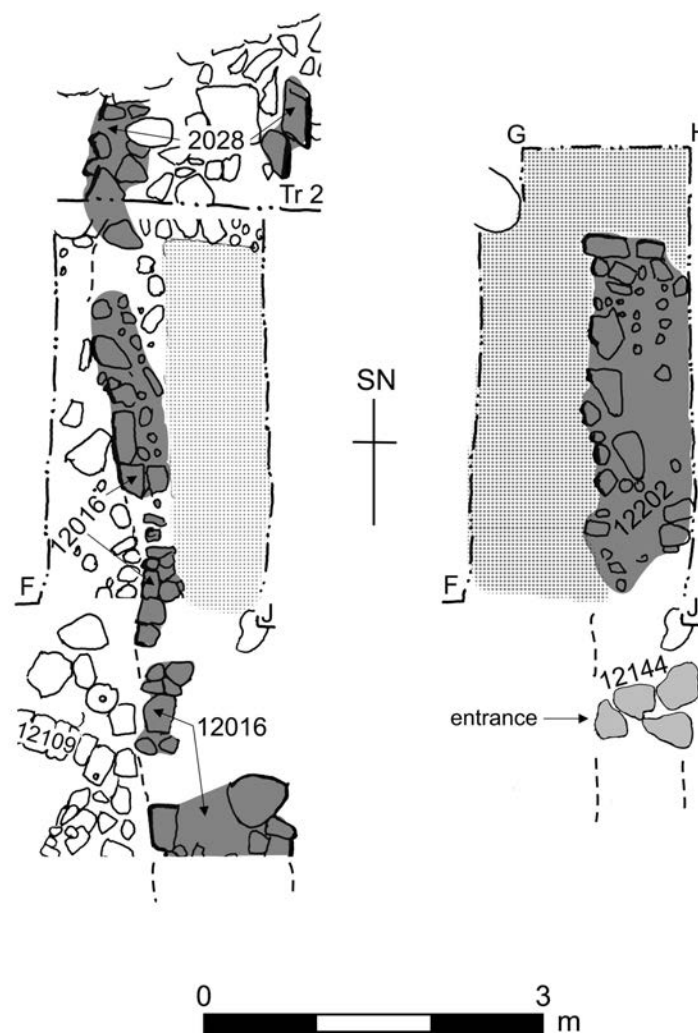


Illustration 12.51
Trench 12 (1993), plans of north extension of trench

damaged by later gardening activity. The best-preserved segment of walling [12016] is part of the east wall which encases the stub of the east wall of building 12.6. It is of clay, stone faced, some 1.4m in width, surviving to a height of up to 0.4m or three courses. The internal stone facing included fire-reddened and cracked stones, probably recycled from earlier building on the site. Wall 12016 can be traced running northwards through the north extension of trench 12 and into trench 2 as wall 2028 and 2030 of structure K.1 (Illus 12.51). As with wall 2030, it appears to have had post-settings, defined by packing stones, adjacent to its east face and at intervals of between 1 and 0.8m. From wall 12016 itself was recovered a piece of slate engraved on both sides with representations of animals, including a heraldic lion (R84).

The internal face of the west wall [12197] appears just to have been clipped in our excavation, giving an internal width for 12.5 of about 4m. An east-west wall [12129], is erected over the stub of an earlier wall [12102] of building 12.6. Here the exterior clay and

stone thickening has largely fallen or been dug away, leaving a low, spreading bank along the south wall face. An iron rivet (SF 12490) was recovered from it (Illus 12.52). 12129 appears to have been an internal wall with building 12.5 extending for an unknown length to the south of it. To the east the outer face of the east wall [12016] can be traced extending towards the south baulk of the trench, and to the west the southward extension of wall 12197 is suggested by a low, spreading clay bank [12131] with some tumbled stones. There was thus at least a north and a south chamber. Immediately to the west was an open area [12152].

All that remained of a floor in the north chamber was a spread of stony, silty sand [12130]. Set in it, and neatly cut through underlying deposits, was a large, level, flat-topped boulder [12199], which probably served as a pad for a post supporting an upper floor (Illus 12.53). A drain [12109, 12149, 12176] has also been cut into the floor. It is about 24 to 28cm in width and of no great depth, its sides defined with smallish stones. It runs



Illustration 12.52
Trench 12 (1993), building 12.5 from south

east–west, cutting through the rear wall of the 12.6 oven, before turning a sharp corner and heading south–west. It was then cut through the south wall of the chamber (Illus 12.50). The direction of flow was not established but is likely to have been northwards. It was capped with type A roof slates and at least one type B (SF 12595). Another drain [12206] oriented approximately north–west/south–east seems to have been dug in, perhaps at a later date, to the west of the 12.6 oven site. No capstones remained in place, but broken roof slates scattered adjacent to it probably indicate how it was covered.

Sitting on the floor deposit 12130, with other tumbled stones, was the upper stone of a rotary quern (R90). From deposit 12130 itself were recovered two sherds of a large handmade pottery vessel (P94). Several other sherds of the same pot were found in the overlying topsoil [12101]. There were also sherds of Scottish reduced



Illustration 12.53
Trench 12, building 12.5, with roof slates covering drain 12109 in foreground. The pad-stone 12199 is immediately to the right of the blackboard

gritty and Scottish oxidised gritty ware, a small slate discoid (SF 12338) and an iron U-shaped staple (SF 12411). In the south chamber the equivalent floor deposit to 12130 is numbered as 12134 and on it is a charcoal-rich patch [12108], perhaps representing the remains of a hearth. From layer 12145, representing worm action over 12134, and the open ground to the west, and 12134 itself, came an iron staple (SF 12478), two medium-size slate discoids (SF 12441, 12442) and several sherds of pottery, including Scottish red-ware, reduced gritty and oxidised gritty ware.

Building 12.6 (Illus 12.51, 12.54–57)

The walls of building 12.6 have survived as stubs incorporated within the broader walls of structure 12.5 (Illus 12.51, 12.54). Much of its east wall [12103, 12202] can be traced, and part of the very edge of its west wall [12203] was caught within our trench.

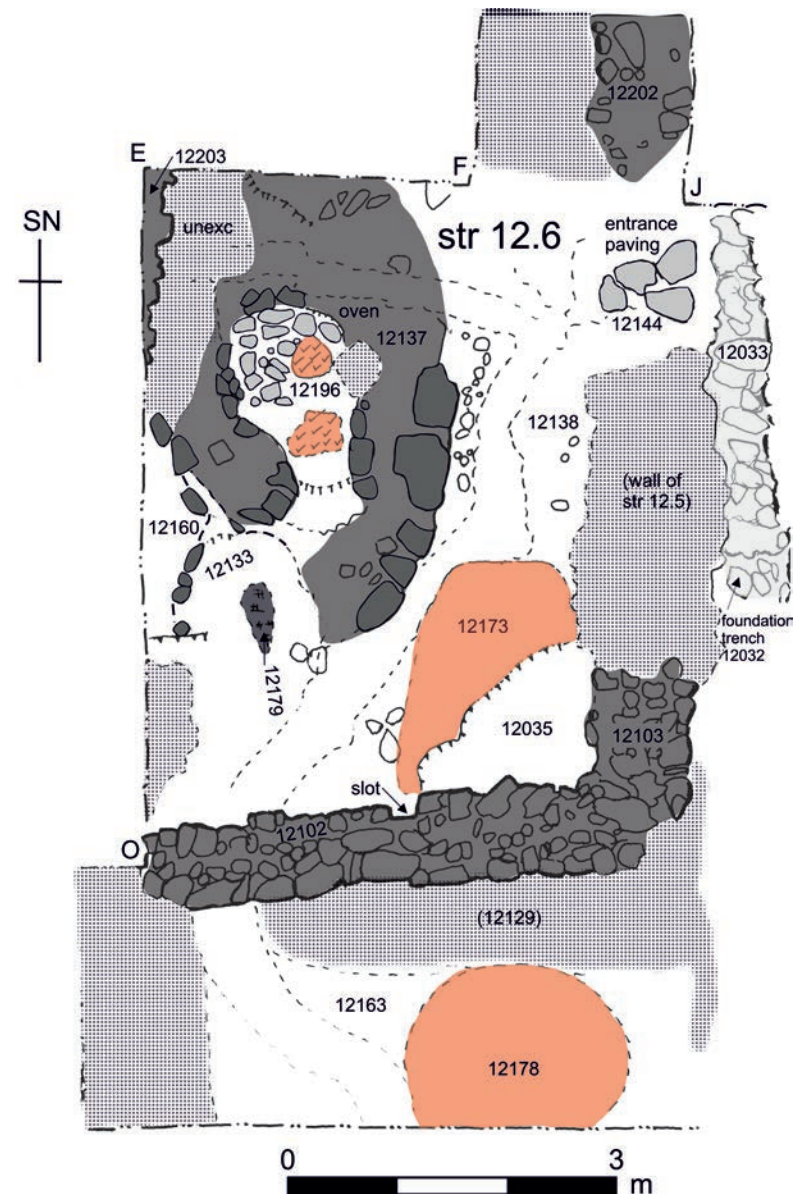


Illustration 12.54
Trench 12, plan of building 12.6

To the south there is an east–west wall [12102] incorporated in an interior wall of building 12.5, but it appears that this was the external wall of 12.6. The walls are about 0.8 to 1m wide, of clay-bonded local stones, and survive to a maximum height of two courses. A cut, probably for a foundation trench [12194], was identified in the interior south–east corner, but its fill [12035] was not fully excavated. This foundation trench was also identified on the east side of wall 12103 as 12032, backfilled with clay loam and stones [12033].

The interior breadth of building 12.6 was about 4m, with an overall width of about 6m. Its length is less clear. If, as seems likely, structure K.2 excavated in trench 2 is its northern end, it may have had an overall length of over 20m. There was an entrance in the east wall, only about 1m wide, defined by the paving slabs [12144] buried under the later walling of structure of 12.5. There was probably another doorway at the north end of the north extension of the trench, but this was not fully excavated.

The only possible evidence of how the building was roofed is in the form of a vertical slot, extending from below floor level, in the interior face of wall 12102, perhaps for housing a cruck. The floor [12138, 12160] is of clay, with much of the area taken up with the flattened remains of an oven with a circular chamber about 1.1m in diameter (Illus 12.55, 12.56). Its walls are constructed of yellow clay [12137] with interior and exterior facings of blocks of stone, mostly less than 500 by 350mm, and an entrance on its south side. These walls survive only to a height of about 12cm above the stone cobbled floor of the oven chamber, which was about level with the surrounding floor of the room. The clay could easily have been dug up on the spot, a few centimetres down, from the band [12053] identified in trench 12 in 1992. Collapsed inside the oven were the remains of its domed clay superstructure [12196], including two large fragments of baked yellowish-red clay. The wall to the east of the oven mouth is extended to act as a baffle to redirect heat from a fire into the interior. A circular scooped patch of burnt clay floor [12133] with a deposit of charcoal [12179], just to the west, is evidence of where the oven was set.

Such an oven would be appropriate for baking bread, but that other types of food were prepared in this area is suggested by a discreet patch [12161] to the north of the oven containing much fragmentary animal bone. Two vessel legs from the floor, one of copper alloy (C141) and the other of lead alloy (L17), may be taken as evidence for culinary activity. There was also part of a reduced gritty ware jug (P45) from oven rake-out material [12110], a sherd of Scottish redware (SF 12358) and a small slate discoid (R72). Three small pieces of lead alloy (L14–L16), apparently from a vessel, were incorporated in the clay from the oven wall [12137].

About the time building 12.6 was dismantled or demolished and replaced by building 12.5, the oven was flattened with material from its superstructure, and ash and charcoal from its operation were packed into its chamber [12196, 12198] and spread across the top of its reduced walls and over the neighbouring floor [12110]. This created a level surface for the floor of 12.5.

It is not clear what lay immediately to the south of building 12.6. Immediately to the east was the cobbled path separating the two plots, and to the west was the paved road already encountered in trench 10 as 10028, and just clipped here as 12136 in the western extension of trench 12 (Illus 12.57). It is founded on a rubble



Illustration 12.55

Trench 12 (1993), building 12.6 from north-west; oven in course of excavation



Illustration 12.56

Trench 12 (1993), building 12.6 from north-east; oven excavated, with the structure 12.5 pad-stone [12199] still in situ

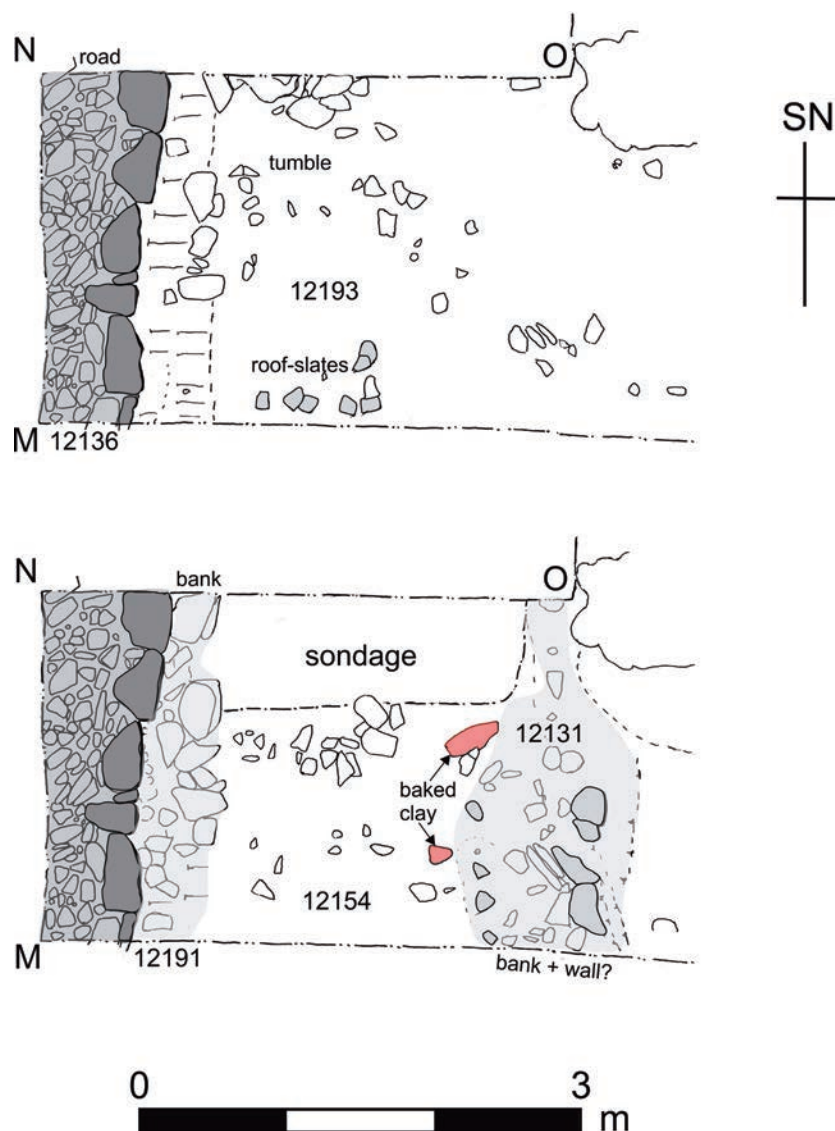


Illustration 12.57

Trench 12 (1993), plans of west extension of trench

bank [12191], perhaps an addition to the one encountered in trench 10 as 10045 and 10047, rather than part of it. It was separated from building 12.6 by a strip of open ground about 2.5m wide. A gravelly horizon with pieces of charcoal and patches of baked clay and ash [12154], representing an external trodden surface, related to the construction and use of both the road and building 12.6. It had developed over an old ground surface [12162] formed on natural grey gravels (Illus 12.58, 12.59).

Building 12.7 (Illus 12.53, 12.54, 12.56)

The foundation trench [12194] for the south-east corner of building 12.6 is cut into an earlier, dark red surface [12173] composed of a mixture of peat ash and fine sand. It was originally exposed in the 1992 excavation as 12034 and identified as a hearth of a building that preceded 12.6, here labelled as 12.7. An archaeomagnetic date on 12173 indicated either a date range of AD 1425–75 or



Illustration 12.58

Trench 12 (1993), view eastwards over west trench extension

an age centred on AD 1290. The latter date appears more likely on stratigraphic grounds. Some of the floor of 12.7 may be identified in the clay surface [12163] encountered to the south of building 12.6, from which was recovered a sherd of Scottish white gritty ware pottery (SF 12553). Set in its surface was another hearth, represented by a circular patch of burning, impregnated with pieces of charcoal [12178].

Interpretation (Illus 12.29)

The original aim in opening trench 12 in 1992 was to explain an apparent empty area adjacent to the great hall. The expectation that it might be a medieval courtyard can now be dismissed. Instead, there was a substantial area of agricultural activity, here apparently dating to the late 16th and 17th century. Whereas the agricultural activity sampled in trench 19 resulted in a system of lazy beds, there are no traces of any rigs and furrows in the area

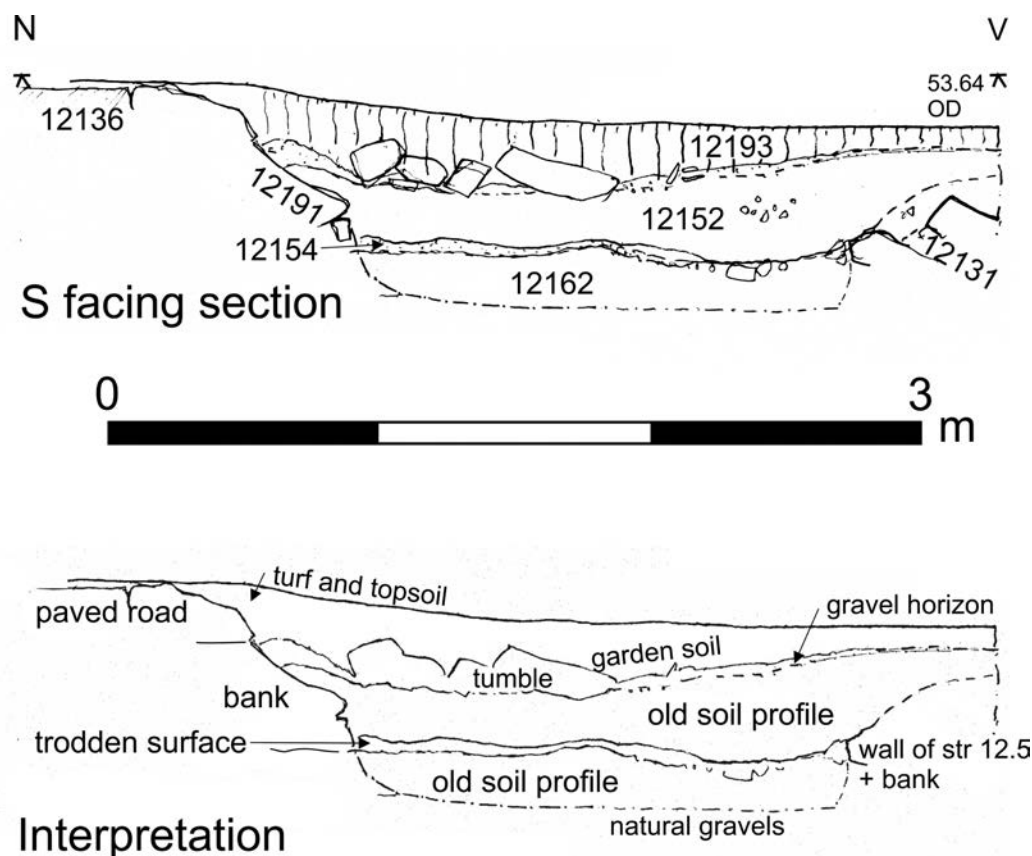


Illustration 12.59
Trench 12 (1993), section N-V

of trench 12. Hence, we have described it as a garden, perhaps for the growing of vegetables. To the west this garden was bordered by a cobbled road of medieval origin but possibly still in use. Perhaps buildings K and L to the north, excavated in trenches 2 and 4, were the house and barn of the owner of the garden, replacing or superseding structure 12.0. It was also of post-medieval date but possibly not a dwelling house.

Building 12.0 straddled the remains of structure Y1, a bank and palisade that was part of the works that included the gatehouse in trenches 3 and 18, and the supposed wooden tower (structure 6.1) in trench 6. Judging by surface remains, structure Y1 might have been a circular bastion projecting from the palisade bank that cut off the east end of Eilean Mór.

To the west of Y1, and partially contemporary, was a substantial long, narrow building, 12.5, dated by us to after 1500, perhaps not long afterwards, on the basis of the roof slates reused in its drains. On the assumption that structure K.1 excavated in trench 2 was part of it, it had an overall length of over 22m and interior width of about 4m. It was multi-roomed and had earth floors cut by a system of drains, but no obvious signs of fireplaces or hearths, and no abundance of artefacts to suggest that it was a residential space. Its broad earth or turf walls, faced with stone, were probably of no great height, serving as supports for upright timbers with wattle work or weather boards. Given that the building's width was relatively narrow, no great challenge in terms of spanning it with roof timbers, the identification of a

substantial pad-stone [12199] for an upright might indicate a requirement to support the floor of an upper storey or loft. Alternative identifications of K.1/12.5 as a barn or barracks are considered in Chapter 14.

It appears that two large buildings stood side by side in this area of Eilean Mór in the years prior to about 1500, separated by, and accessed from, a cobbled path running north-south. To the west of the path was building 12.6, perhaps a long, narrow, rectangular multi-roomed structure, about 20 by 6m overall, the north end of which was excavated in trench 2 as structure K.2. From the evidence of several ovens, it was clearly kitchens and/or a brewhouse. Adjacent to it and to the west of the path was structure 12.1, a rectangular building with relatively thin, well-founded lime-mortared walls and a width, overall, of about 4.5m.

The kitchen building 12.6 was preceded in earlier medieval times by other structures (12.7), perhaps also connected with food preparation. Rather more information was captured on the medieval house 12.2 that was replaced by building 12.1. In size, shape and basic constructional details, 12.2 may be typical of a local building tradition that goes back at least to the 13th century, and in the case of 12.2, and building V in trench 7, continued through the 15th century. These houses, perhaps all for residential use, had barrel-shaped outlines defined by earth or turf banks, faced internally with stonework. Typically 12.2 also had evidence for an open hearth and post-pads at its corners. Its immediate predecessor, building 12.3, was evidently of similar type.

Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
12001	Turf and topsoil	Turf and topsoil	12101
12002	Peaty soil	Agricultural activity	12036, 12193
12003	Gritty yellow-brown sand	Decayed mortar? from 12021	
12004	Clay silt	Post-hole in bank Y1?	
12005	Clay silt	Post-hole in bank Y1?	
12006	Clay silt	Post-hole in bank Y1?	
12007	Laid slabs	Post-pad? in 12.0	
12008	Stones	Walls of 12.0	12107
12010	Stones	Fill of fd tr of west wall of 12.1	
12012	Clayey silt, stones	Y1 bank	
12014	Brown silty loam	Floor of 12.1	
12015	Dark brown silty loam	Make-up for floor of 12.0	
12016	Slightly silty clay	East wall of 12.5	2028, 2030
12017	Peaty, clay loam	Agricultural activity	
12019	Two orthostatic stones	Door jamb of 12.1	
12021	Linear stone feature	East wall of 12.1	
12023	Brown clay loam, charcoal	Floor deposits, 12.2	12142
12024	Orange-brown ashy clay	Floor deposits, 12.3A	
12026	Stones	Hearth in 12.2	12155
12029	Dark clay silt, charcoal	Bank incorporated in wall of 12.3	12170
12030	Grey-brown silty clay	Old soil profile	
12031	Linear stone feature	West wall of 12.2	12104, 12125
12032	Trench	Foundation trench for 12103	
12033	Clay loam and stones	Fill of 12032	
12034	Peat ash, fine sand	Floor, 12.7?	12173
12035	Mixed silt and clay	Fill of 12194	
12036	Sticky brown loamy clay	Garden soil	12002, 12193
12038	Heat-affected pink sandstone	Floor of 12.3	12164
12039	Linear stone feature	Internal stone face, wall of 12.3A	12132
12041	Pale grey-green sand	Bedding for floor of 12.3	
12042	Cut	Stone-hole? in 12038	
12044	Black silt with charcoal	Hearth, 12.4	
12046	Lenses of black silt etc	Under 12044	
12047	Very sticky black silt	Under 12046	
12048	Grey-brown sticky silty clay	Under 12047	
12049	Light blue-grey clay	Spread bank material, str 12.3	12122, 12140
12050	Brown clayey silt	Turf bank of 12.3	
12051	Brown silty sand	Turf bank of 12.3	
12053	Yellow clay	Loch-shore deposit-inundation?	
12054	Mid-brown loam	Fill of foundation trench, 12.1	
12063	Black silt, charcoal	Sealed by 12053	
12064	Mid/dark grey silt	Spread bank material, str 12.3	
12101	Turf and topsoil	Turf and topsoil	12001
12102	Clay-bonded stonework	South wall of 12.6, reused in 12.5	
12103	Clay-bonded stonework	East wall of 12.6	
12104	Linear stone feature	West wall 12.2	12031, 12125
12105	Linear spread of stones	Path associated with 12.1	
12106	Linear stone feature	North wall of 12.1	
12107	Linear stone feature	Walls of 12.0	12008
12108	Charcoal-rich soil	Circular patch – site of fire, 12.5	
12109	Line of roof slates	Drain covering, floor of 12.5	
12110	Clay and peat ash	Rake-out from oven	
12111	Pad of stones	Post-setting, corner of 12.2	
12117	Silty sand	Fill of foundation trench, 12.1	
12121	Linear stone feature	West wall of 12.2	12031
12122	Grey, compact, silty clay	Bank material, 12.3	12049, 12140
12123	Clayey silt, stones	Occupation deposits, 12.3A, 12.2	
12124	Clayey silt	Make-up for floor of 12.1	
12125	Linear stone feature	South wall of 12.2	12031, 12104

Table 12.6
Trench 12 contexts

Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
12127	Stone block	Door jamb in 12.2 entrance	
12129	Silty clay	Collapsed wall of 12.5	
12130	Grey-brown silty sand	Floor of 12.5	
12131	Clay and stone	Flattened wall of 12.5	12197
12132	Linear stone feature	Internal stone face, wall of 12.3A	12039
12133	Dark, slumped, circular patch	Hearth associated with oven	
12134	Silty clay	Floor S room of 12.5	
12135	Linear stone feature	Kerb of road along east of hall	
12136	Linear stone feature	Road along east of great hall	10028
12137	Yellow clay	Slumped walls of oven	
12138	Yellow, brown-red clay	Floor deposit, 12.6	
12139	Sandy silty clay	Demolition of 12.3A	
12140	Silty clay	Bank forming south and west of 12.3	12049, 12122
12141	Red-brown silty clay, charcoal	Fill of foundation trench, 12.1	
12142	Red-brown silty clay, charcoal	Floor deposit, 12.2	12023
12144	Stone paving	In entrance in east wall of 12.5	
12145	Sandy loam	Demolition, 12.6	
12147	Dark clay silt	Fill of drain = 12180	
12148	Pale grey sandy silt	Slipped turfs from 12122	
12149	Stones and slates	Drain in 12.5 floor	
12150	Sandy silty clay	Debris from demolition of 12.6	
12151	Silty loam	Str 12.4?	
12152	Gritty sandy clay	Soil profile in west extension	
12154	Silty clay	Trodden external surface	
12155	Stones	Hearth stones, 12.2	12026
12156	Silty sand	Robbed-out wall of 12.2	
12157	Cobbled surface	Path between 12.6 & 12.2	
12158	Cobbled surface	Path between 12.6 & 12.2	
12159	Cobbled surface	Path between 12.6 & 12.2	
12160	Clay and peat ash	Floor deposits, 12.6	
12161	Clay and peat ash, bone rich	Discreet patch of 12110	
12162	Clay loam	Old soil profile in west extension	
12163	Clay loam?	Floor of 12.7?	
12164	Heat-affected pink sandstone	Floor of 12.3 = 12166	12038
12165	Stonework	Stonework of oven	
12168	Mixed deposit, silt, sand, clay	Demolition of 12.3A	
12170	Dark grey silty clay	Burnt? bank, 12.4	12029
12173	Red-brown silt and clay	Floor surface, str 12.7?	12034
12176	Sandy clay	Fill of drain in 12.5	
12177	Silty sand	Bank, str 12.2	
12178	Orange-brown silt, charcoal	Hearth in 12.7?	
12179	Sandy clay	Charcoal patch in 12133	
12185	Loch-side sands, gravels	Natural	
12191	Rubble bank	Support for road 12136	
12193	Turf and topsoil	Garden activity in west extension	12002, 12036
12194	Cut	Foundation trench, walls of 12.6	
12196	Mixed clay, blocks of clay	Collapsed dome of oven	
12197	Clay-rich silt and stones	West wall of 12.5	12131
12198	Mixed clay, blocks of clay	Infill in collapsed oven	
12199	Boulder	Post-pad? in 12.5	
12200	Laid stones	Paving in entrance of 12.1	
12201	Laid stones	Paving in entrance of 12.2	
12202	Stonework	East wall of 12.6 to north of entrance	
12203	Stonework	West wall of 12.6	
12204	Stonework	West wall of 12.1	
12205	Pad of stones	Post-setting, corner of 12.2	
12206	Cut	Drain within 12.5	

Table 12.6 (cont.)
Trench 12 contexts



Illustration 13.1
Eilean na Comhairle from Eilean Mór

Chapter 13

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS

Introduction

Four trenches (16, 16E, 23, 24) were excavated on Eilean na Comhairle in 1993 and 1994 (Illus 13.1, 13.2). Many of the features and contexts encountered manifestly extended from one trench to another, and it therefore seems appropriate to describe the results of all this together. In 1994 limited reconnaissance work by the Scottish Trust for Underwater Archaeology demonstrated the presence of medieval midden deposits on the side of Eilean na Comhairle adjacent to Eilean Mór. In 1997 it was possible to sample these, thanks to the cooperation of the Army, particularly the Edinburgh University Officers' Training Corps, in building a dam and pumping out the water (Illus 13.37). This work was labelled trench 25 and is described separately.

Trenches 16, 16E, 23 and 24 (Illus 13.3–36, Tables 13.1–3)

Our plan in laying out trench 16 in 1993 was to find an explanation for buildings (a) and (b) and to demonstrate whether they lay over earlier structures. As excavation progressed, traces of the stone-walled castle were encountered, which occasioned changes in strategy.

Trench 16 was at first quadrilateral in shape with sides 8.5m, 10m, 6m and 8.5m in length (Illus 13.2, 13.3). It was positioned to take in the east half of building (a) as far its doorway, part of the supposed, adjacent yard, and the south portion of building (b). A smaller area was added on the east side to expose more of the castle wall, and in 1994 some of the trench was again opened up and extended to form an excavation about 2 by 6m, positioned to cross the east wall of the castle [16025] (Illus 13.17).

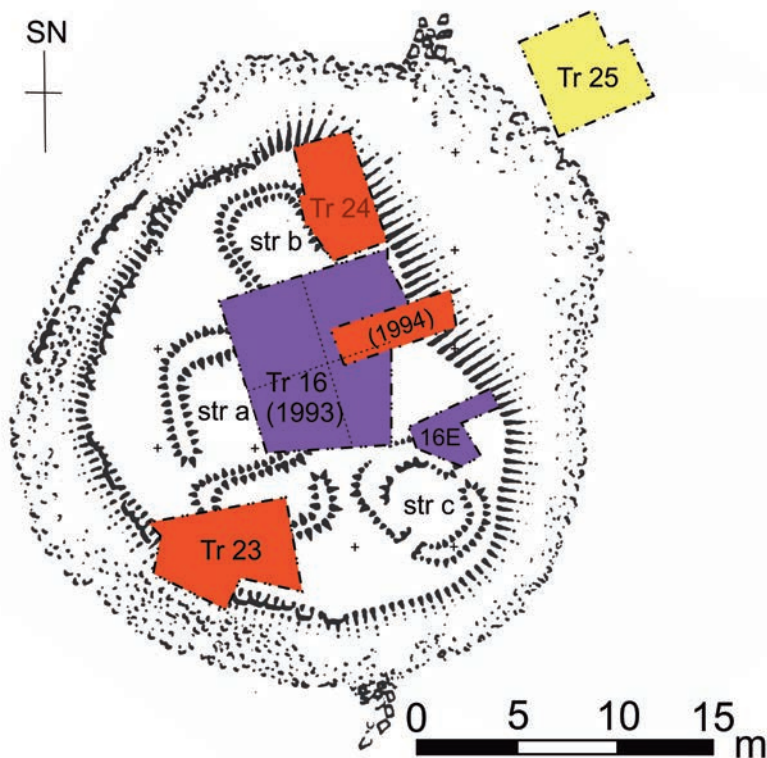


Illustration 13.2
Eilean na Comhairle, layout of trenches

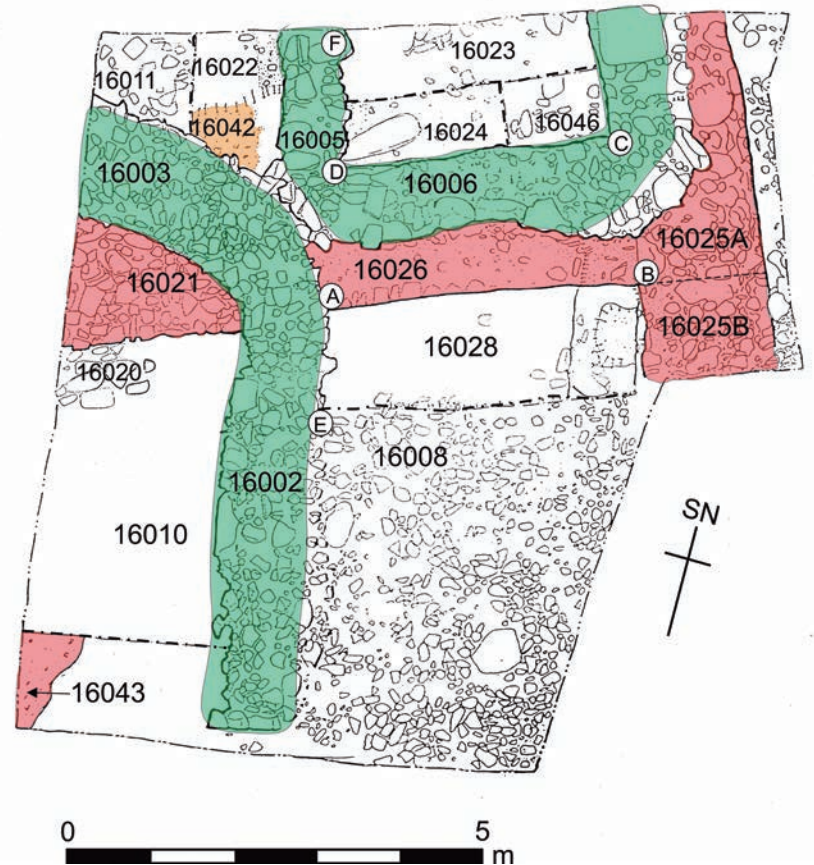


Illustration 13.3
Trench 16 (1993), main structures



Illustration 13.4
Trench 16 (1993), structure (a), courtyard beyond

Trench 16E (Illus 13.13) was dug in 1993 to increase our knowledge of the castle. It was irregular in shape, with an area of about 8 sq m, and lay to the south-east of trench 16, immediately adjacent to the north-east corner of building (c).

Trenches 23 and 24 were both laid out in 1994 in the hope of defining the south and north extent of the castle. Trench 23 had an area of about 28 sq m and took in the south-west corner of structure (a) (Illus 13.22). While excavation in this area produced useful information on building (a) and the much earlier dun, the aim of improving our knowledge of the castle was largely frustrated by the discovery that its ruins had been eroded out of this edge of the island. Trench 24 covered the north-east corner of structure (b) and was about 6 by 3.6m (Illus 13.29).

Building (a) (Illus 13.4–7, 13.19, 13.20)

Building (a) is rectangular with an overall size of 10.8 by 6.7m and rounded corners, giving it an outline similar to a playing card. One entrance was excavated in its east wall, and it is clear from surface indications that it is matched by another opposite it in its west wall, some stones of which were found to break through the turf when this area of the island was scythed. Building (a) is centrally placed on the flat summit of the island, broadside on to the supposed approach from the causeway connecting with Eilean Mór. On removal of the turf in trench 16, within the building, a Victorian or early 20th-century bottle (SF 16102) was found containing a document. Unfortunately the bottle had already been broken and the ink on the paper had smudged beyond any hope of decipherment. A wooden rod had been inserted in the bottle's

mouth, probably with the intention that it would project upwards from the ground surface.

Other evidence of relatively recent activity about building (a) was soon evident. The apparent cross-wall planned by the Royal Commission, creating two rooms in the interior, turned out to be a low bank [16010, 16019] of redeposited gravelly soil, created by recent digging into an old ground surface and removal of tumble. An occupation deposit [16017] partially survived this episode. A small portion of the interior of house (a) was also excavated in trench 23. There, there was no evidence for recent disturbance and a topsoil containing tumble from the walls [23006] was found to have developed over a dark brown occupation layer [23009], the equivalent of 16017, containing many small fragments of bone. A sherd of reduced gritty ware and pieces of ironwork from 16010, including two knives (F74 and F75) and a mail ring (SF 16029), were probably churned up from the underlying occupation deposit which also contained medieval wheel-made pottery. Two other iron objects (F104 and F105), also from 16010, are identified as pot handles, possibly relating to 19th-century activity.

The walls of building (a) [16002, 16003, 23003] are reduced uniformly to a height of about half a metre above the present ground surface around and inside the building, and although some tumble [23006], as already noted, lies adjacent to the interior of the south wall, the overall impression is of a neatly manicured ruin, tastefully laid out (Illus 13.4, 13.5). A pile of large blocks and boulders wedged between the adjacent corners of buildings (a) and (b) escaped the tidying-up process that created this phenomenon.

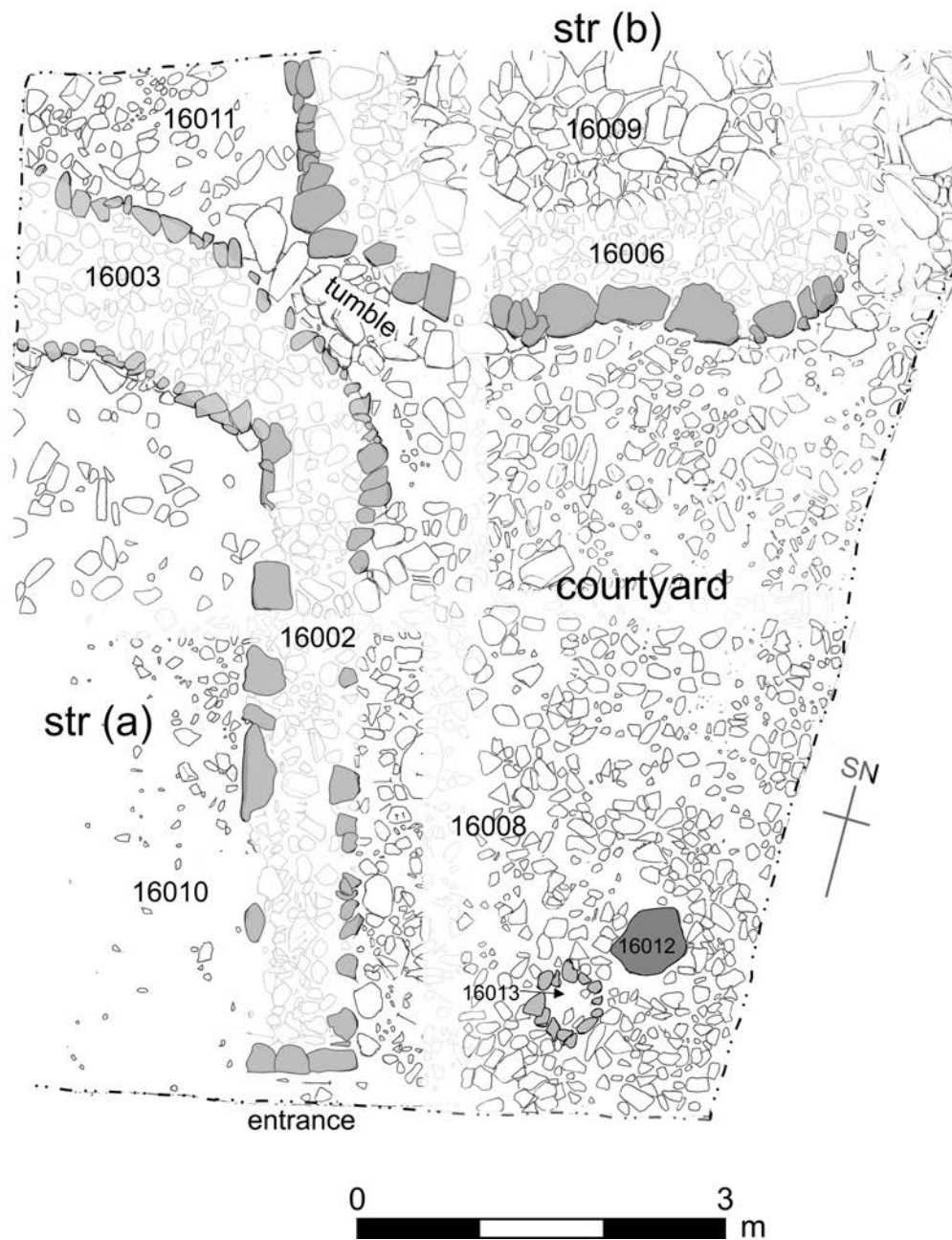


Illustration 13.5

Trench 16 (1993), plan with structure (a) and metal surface [16008] in the courtyard

The walls of building (a) vary in width from about 1.4 to 1.6m. Two internal corners were excavated, at the north-east and the south-west. They appear to have been built as right angles but then had rubble wedged in place to give a more rounded shape, corresponding to the external angles. It is not clear whether this was a medieval adaption or, perhaps more likely, the result of more recent restoration. The stonework around the entrance may also be of recent date, perhaps deemed necessary to tidy up the space created by the robbing of dressings, which could be expected to be of sandstone.

The actual original wall faces of building (a) stand no more

than one course high, but the presence of substantial, well-spaced, quarry-dressed blocks forming the faces, with smaller rubble material forming the wall cores, suggests masonry characterised by Caldwell and Ruckley (2005: 102–03) as type 3 – coursed boulders and blocks with panels of pinnings. It is a type that was ubiquitous in medieval times in the West Highlands and Islands. The stone present in building (a) is mostly local quartzite and limestone with occasional use of phyllite, dolerite and glacial erratics. It appears to have been held in a poor-quality lime mortar that has all but disintegrated, leaving spreads of sand and gravel.



Illustration 13.6

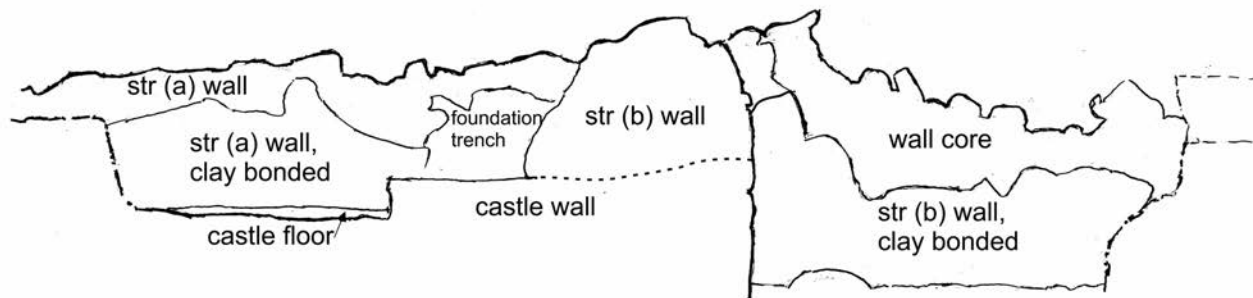
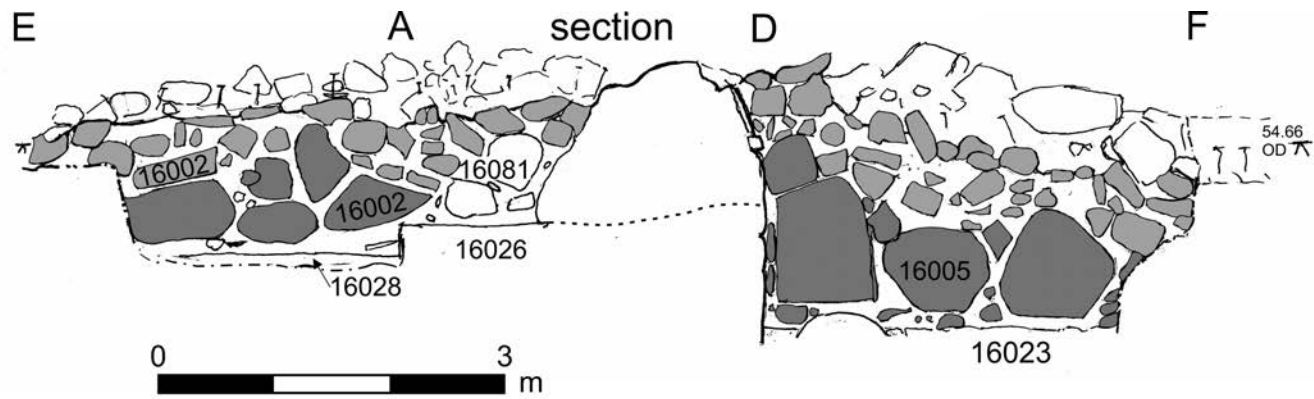
Trench 16 (1993). The 1m ranging rod lies on the mortar floor of the castle, with the wall of structure (a) beyond. The 2m rod rests on the reduced remains of the interior east/west castle wall [16026]. To its right is the south wall of structure (b)

A sondage against the exterior of the east wall shows that it has a substantial foundation of clay-bonded boulders, about 0.3 to 0.4m in depth (Illus 13.6, 13.7). This was laid over the mortar floor [16028] of the ruined castle. The south wall [23003] also appears to be founded on clay-bonded boulders laid over the castle floor [23017] (Illus 13.26). The north wall sits partially atop the flattened, level remains of a castle wall [16021] (Illus 13.3).

In trench 23 a short section was excavated of a cobbled path [23007] (Illus 13.19, 13.20), possibly extending along the west side of building (a). A bone playing-piece (SF 23029) was got from it. A wall [23004] extends from the south-west corner of structure (a) towards the edge of the island, about 0.7m wide and now only a single course in height. Its faces consist of limestone and quartzite boulders, with other pieces of similar rock forming its core. To both sides of it tumble and loose stones [23005, 23027] have slid down the eroded side of the island (Illus 13.20, 13.21). Also, in trench 23 it was observed that the house (a) floor [23009] lay on a ground surface [23011] traceable outside the building as 23023,

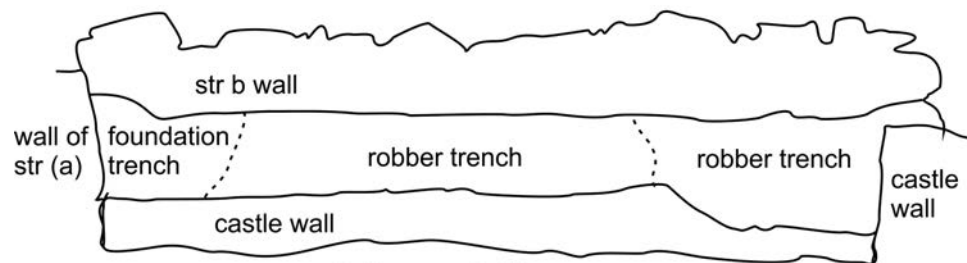
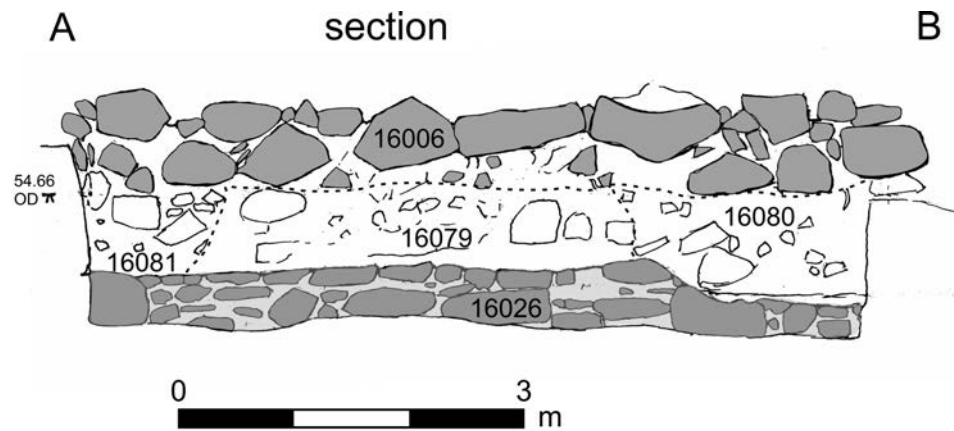
capping midden deposits [23024, 23039, 23012] consisting of tips of peat ash that had accumulated after the destruction of the castle.

To the east of house (a) is an open, level area extending over much of the summit of the island, designated by us as the courtyard (Illus 13.5). As with the present form of building (a), it seems to be the result of considerable, relatively recent modelling. It has a crude, metalled surface [16008], formed from an even spread of smallish stones, from 50 to 150mm across, in a matrix of earth. Sitting on the surface of 16008 there was one large rectangular quartzite boulder, about 500 by 580 by 310mm high [16012]. There was no trace of any working on it or shaping by human hand. It was positioned about 2m from the wall of structure (a). Nearby was a post-setting (unexcavated) with a diameter of about 0.4m [16013]. The metalling 16008 lies over an earlier ground surface [16015] which seals another rubble spread [16016] resulting from the destruction of buildings (a) and (b).



interpretation

Illustration 13.7
Trench 16 (1993), section E-F



interpretation

Illustration 13.8
Trench 16 (1993), section A-B



Illustration 13.9
Trench 16 (1993), interior of structure (b) with buttress 16014



Illustration 13.10
Trench 16 (1993), interior of structure (b) cleaned down to the surface of 16023

Building (b) (Illus 13.5–11, 13.28–30)

Building (b) was partially exposed in trenches 16 and 24 (Illus 13.2). Prior to excavation it appeared as a rectangular house with rounded corners, not quite on the same orientation as structure (a). Its south-west corner is adjacent to the north-east corner of (a), with a gap too small for anyone to pass conveniently between the two. It is about 4.8 by 7.5m overall, with an entrance in its east wall.

As with building (a), its walls appeared uniformly reduced, possibly as a result of the 19th-century clearance work described for structure (a) and the courtyard. Excavation revealed that its walls, from about 0.75 to 0.95m in thickness, were constructed of boulders and blocks of local stones set in a poor-quality lime mortar, the larger ones forming the faces, with smaller material in the core. They did not appear to be of the same type 3 construction as house (a). There was no clear indication which of these two structures was of earlier date, but perhaps, in any case, they were basically contemporary. The south wall [16006] (Illus 13.8), the east wall [24003] (Illus 13.33) and the north wall [24004] were all founded on earlier castle walls. The west wall [16005], like the east wall of house (a), had a substantial foundation of clay-bonded boulders (Illus 13.7, 13.10, 13.11). The south-east corner appears to have been built reusing castle stonework after the original castle wall had been robbed out (Illus 13.35, 13.36).

In the interior of building (b) there was an earth floor [16024, 24012] lying over debris and the mortar floor of the ruined castle [16045, 24019] (Illus 13.34). It was some 80mm thick and had a trampled, gritty surface. Over it, after building (b) had fallen out of use, a peaty soil [16023, 24007] had developed, and over that

there was a considerable depth of rubble [16009, 24006]. Some of it was deliberately and carefully positioned to form a buttress for the south-west corner [16014] (Illus 13.9). This would seem to indicate that the interior remained open for a space of time and there was a fear of some of the walling collapsing. The whole interior space, however, was filled to a considerable depth with rubble [16009], either resulting from the collapse of the walls near the time the building fell out of use or, perhaps, largely consisting of tumble dumped here as part of the later tidying-up operations.

In the north-west corner of this trench a small area bounded by buildings (a) and (b) was excavated (Illus 13.3). Nineteenth-century clearance work was represented by a layer of debris [16011] lying on dark brown soil [16022], an earlier ground surface, probably equivalent to 23023. Under 16022 was burnt, dumped material [16042], including an iron nail (SF 16075), equivalent to the post-castle peat ash tips [23024, etc] encountered in trench 23.

Building (c)

A small portion of the exterior wall of building (c) [16038] was just clipped in trench 16E, but not enough to say anything meaningful about it (Illus 13.13). On the basis of surface traces (Illus 6.21) this structure, about 10 by 12.5m overall, was rectangular, with rounded corners and opposed entrances in its long sides. It may be presumed to have been in use at the same time as houses (a) and (b). It truncates an earlier castle wall [16025B].

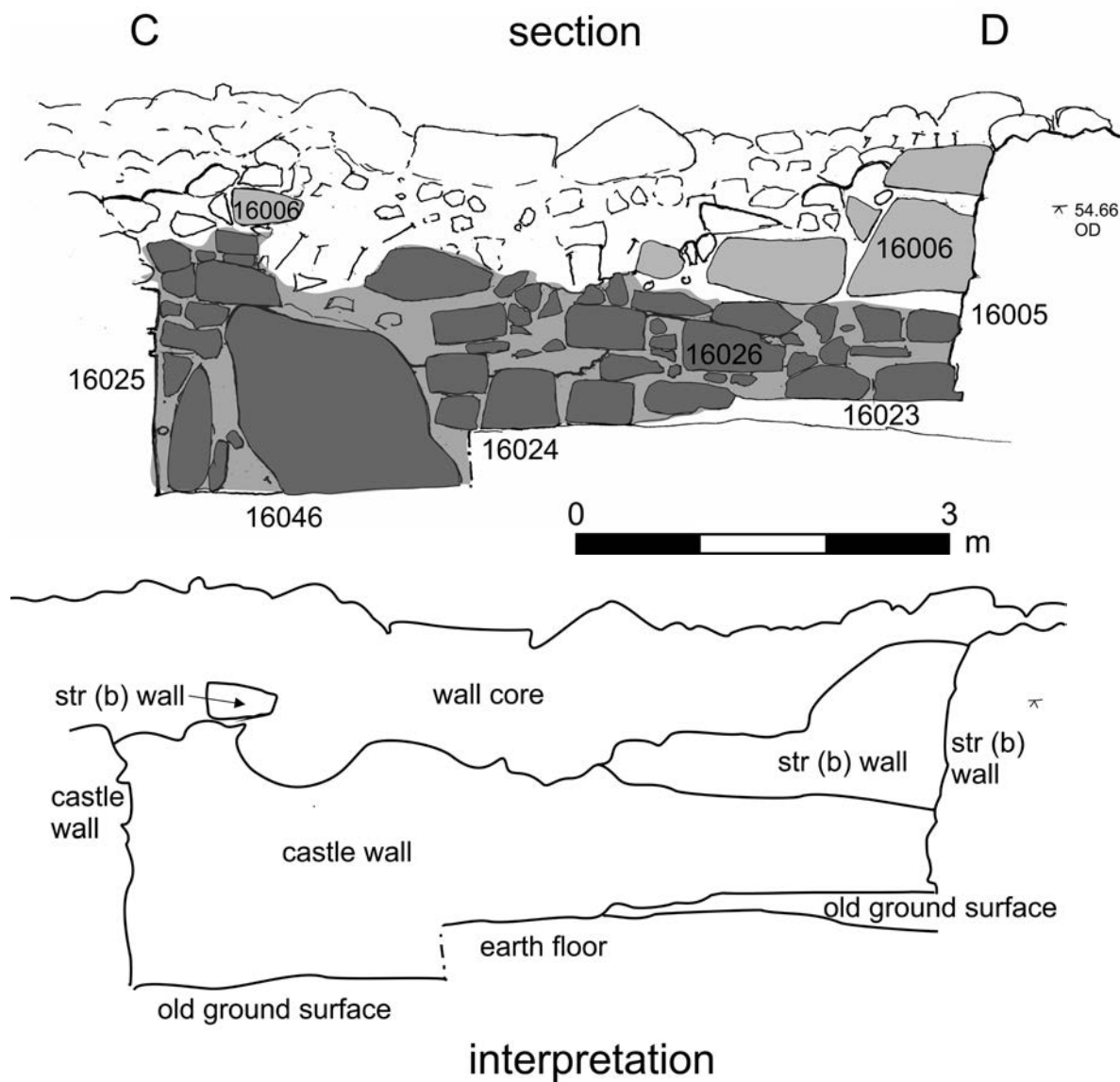


Illustration 13.11
Trench 16 (1993), section C-D



Illustration 13.12
Trench 16E, castle wall

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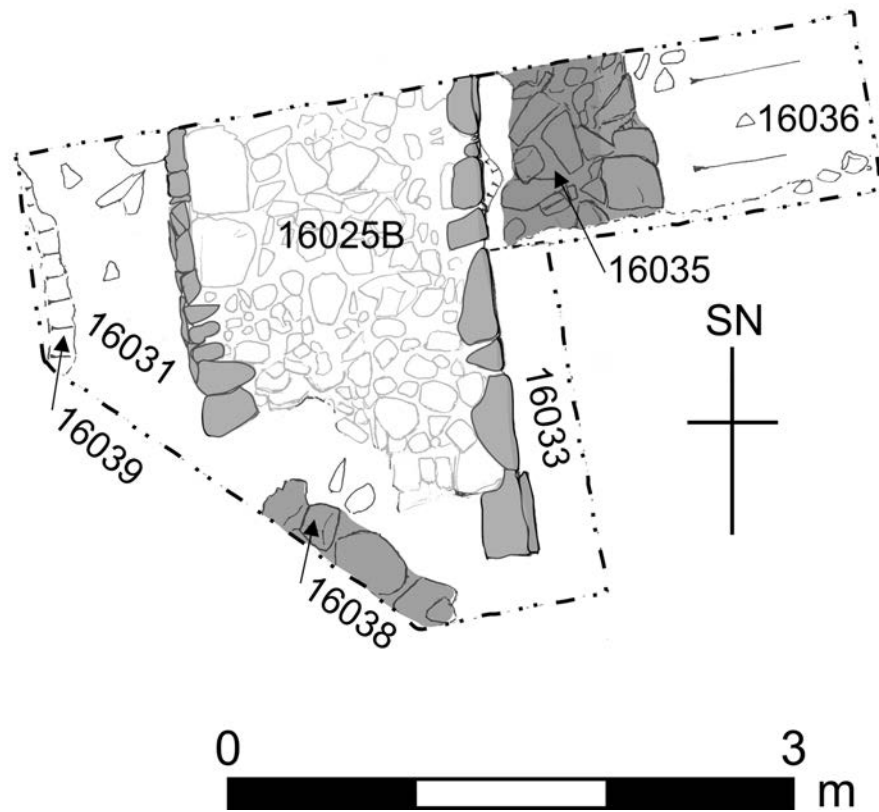


Illustration 13.13
Trench 16E, plan

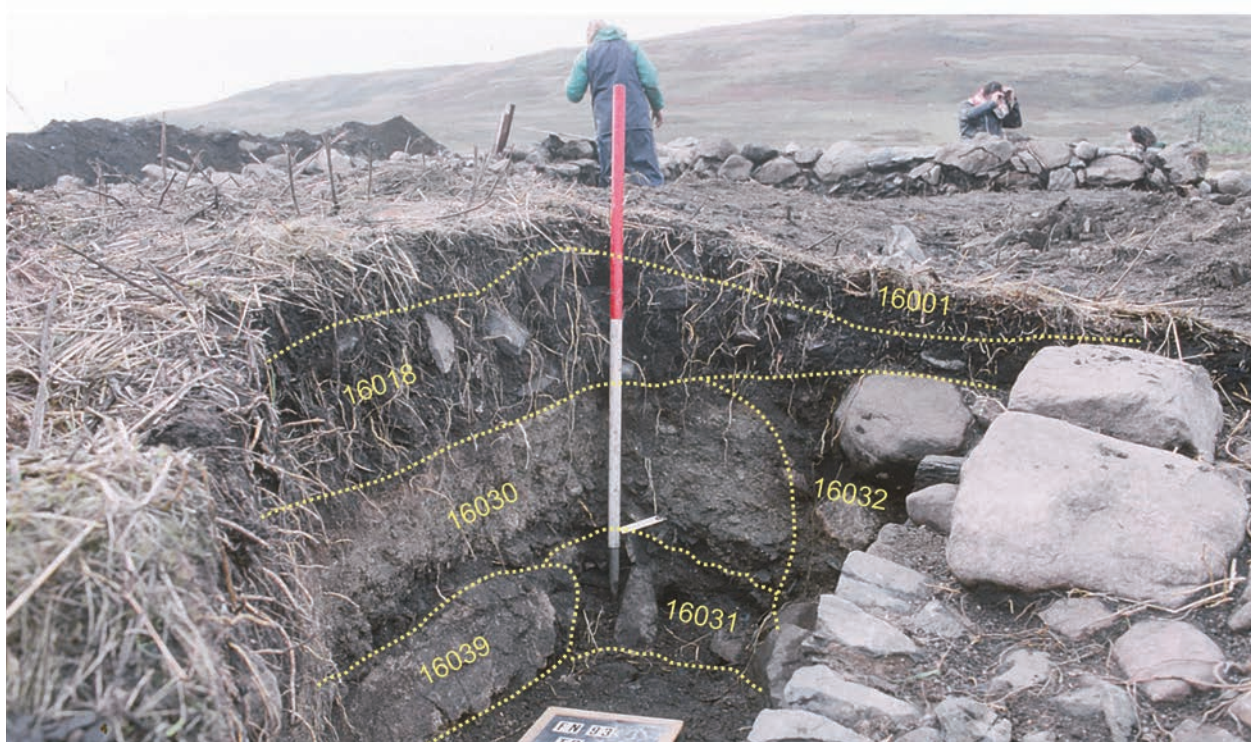


Illustration 13.14
Trench 16E, castle wall to the right. 16018 levelling; 16030 castle floor; 16031 fill of foundation trench for castle wall; 16032 drain (?); 16039 edge of foundation trench

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS



Illustration 13.15
Trench 16 (1994), looking east with castle floor in foreground



Illustration 13.16
Trench 16 (1994), looking west over plinth 16062 and castle wall 16025B. A fragment of red sandstone marks the side of the much denuded castle entrance. To the right the straight join between wall 16025B and 16025A is visible

The castle (Illus 6.22, 13.3, 13.6, 13.8, 13.12–18, 13.22, 13.26, 13.30, 13.36)

The remains of the castle are characterised by massive masonry walls, reduced for the most part to foundation level and with their surviving faces subsequently robbed for building stone (Illus 13.15, 13.16). The stonework is cemented by lime mortar, its mix including rounded gravel-size quartzite pebbles, probably from the loch-side, and pieces of limpets and other shells. The faces were of a type characterised by Caldwell and Ruckley (2005: 100–01) as type 1, that is, of coursed work, mostly with long, low rectangular blocks of local stone, including phyllite and quartzite, roughly dressed (Illus 13.8). They are typically 800mm long by 300mm high or smaller. The core of the walls has more of a mix of blocks, much of it limestone, and boulders held together by liberal quantities of lime mortar.

The east-facing wall [16025], partially excavated in trenches 16 and 16E, was clearly built in two segments with a straight joint (Illus 13.16). That portion to the north has been labelled as 16025A and the rest to the south as 16025B. In terms of construction, they appear identical, with a width of about 1.8m. Limited excavation of their east faces in trench 16 in 1994 shows that they were founded on an old ground surface [16068], which was then built up with a series of bands of sandy gritty soil containing fragments of phyllite [16065] (Illus 13.18). This acted as a base for a separately constructed clay and stone revetment or plinth, about 0.7 to 1.1m wide and surviving up to 0.8m high [16062], running along the exterior of the castle wall (Illus 13.16, 13.17). It was also observed as 16035 in trench 16E and in trench 24 as 24022 (Illus 13.13, 13.30). On

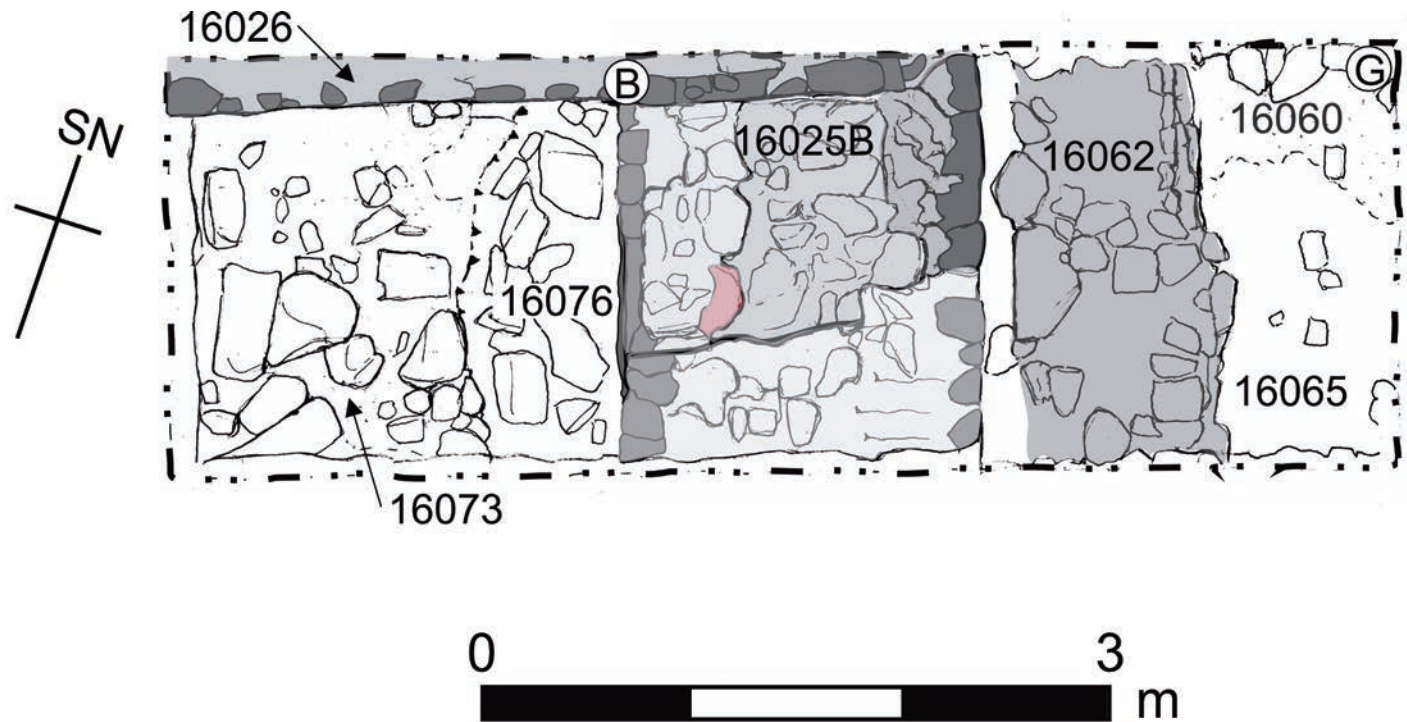


Illustration 13.17
Trench 16 (1994), plan

the west or interior side of wall 16025B a foundation trench, filled to an unknown depth with mixed soil and stone fragments [16031, 16076], was located in trench 16 and 16E, about 0.8m wide from its edge [16039, 16075] to the wall face (Illus 13.13, 13.14, 13.17). The ground [16074] on the interior (west) side of wall 16025B had been levelled up with a dump of large blocks and boulders [16073].

One side of the much robbed and denuded cobbled entrance to the castle through wall 16025B was also exposed within trench 16, indicating that this doorway was lined up with the causeway from Eilean Mór. It was splayed, being wider to the exterior, and dressed with red sandstone, a small fragment of which remained in situ (Illus 13.16, 13.17). The adjacent surface of the exterior revetment showed wear from serving as a step.

Wall 16025A continues northwards on the same alignment as 16025B, supporting the east wall of building (b) before turning

through 90° to form a north wall near the edge of the island. None of the actual castle north wall was located in trench 24, only a trench [24028] where it had been robbed out. An east-west wall [16026] of similar appearance to 16025A abuts the west face of the latter and continues at right angles, with a straight joint, supporting for some of its length the south wall of building (b) and continuing westwards under the north wall of building (a) as 16021 (Illus 13.3, 13.6).

In trench 23 the position of the castle's south wall was also represented by a robber trench [23047] (Illus 13.26). No evidence was found for a west wall to this castle, but we suspect that the structure would have been square, or near square, about 19 by 19m overall (excluding a plinth), and the line of its west wall lies in what is now loch water. Erosion and destruction have removed much of the evidence that might have been expected for the

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS

Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
16001	Turf and topsoil	Turf and topsoil	
16002	Blocks and slabs	East wall of (a)	
16003	Blocks and slabs	North wall of (a)	
16005	Blocks and slabs	West wall of (b)	
16006	Blocks and slabs	South wall of (b)	
16008	Mixed soil and stones	19th c? metal surface in courtyard	
16009	Large boulders in (b)	Dump	
16010	Gravel-rich soil	19th c? clearance in south of (a)	
16011	Mixed soil and stones	Debris north of (a), west of (b)	
16012	Boulder	Placed on surface of 16008	
16013	Stones and soil	Post-setting? within 16008	
16014	Boulders, clay bonded	Revetment in south-west of (b)	
16015	Peaty soil	Pre-19th c? turf in courtyard	
16016	Mixed rubble and soil	Demolition debris in courtyard	
16017	Gravel layer	Remnants of occupation in north (a)	23009
16018	Thick deposit, soil, clay, rocks	Levelling up in courtyard	
16019	Dark brown soil	19th c? redeposited in (a)	
16020	Boulders and slabs, pitched	Tumble from 16021	
16021	Slabs and blocks	East/west castle wall	
16022	Dark brown soil	Old ground surface north of (a), west of (b)	23023
16023	Peaty soil	Old ground surface in (b)	24007
16024	Gravel and soil layer	Floor of (b)	24012
16025	Lime-mortared wall	North/south castle wall, east of courtyard	
16026	Lime-mortared wall	East/west internal castle wall	
16028	Trampled mortar layer	Castle floor	
16030	Trampled mortar layer, 16E	Castle floor	16028
16031	Mixed soil and stone fragments, 16E	Fill of 16039	
16032	Mixed stone and soil fragments, 16E	Drain?	
16033	Mixed soil, gravel, stones, 16E	Build-up east of wall 16052	
16035	Boulders, clay, 16E	Castle plinth	
16036	Dark brown soil, 16E	Build-up against 16035	
16038	Boulders and slabs, 16E	Wall of (c)	
16039	Cut	Foundation trench for 16025	
16042	Burnt deposit, red/black/brown	Peat ash dump, north of (a), west of (b)	
16043	Burnt clay patch	Hearth or burning on castle floor	
16045	Mortar debris, sandstone block	Castle demolition	
16046	Black soil	Old ground surface under (b)	
16060	Stone fragments and soil	Demolition tip to east of wall 16025	
16061	Mortar and sand	Demolition tip from 16025	
16062	Clay-bonded stonework	Castle plinth	16035
16063	Silty sand	Old ground surface	
16065	Pieces of phyllite, 30% sand, silt	Make-up for 16062	
16066	Sand and mortar layers	Castle floor	
16068	Soil	Old ground surface	
16070	50% phyllite fragments, 50% sand	Pre-castle medieval	
16072	Massive rounded boulder	Foundation of wall 16025	
16073	Flat stones and black soil	Levelling up of 16074	
16074	Black soil	Old ground surface	
16075	Cut	Foundation trench, wall 16025	
16076	Phyllite chips, mortar, silt, soil	Fill of trench 16075	
16077	Rubble, sandy silt	Pre-castle deposit	
16079	Mortar, rocks, sand	Fill of robber trench	
16080	Mortar, rocks, sand	Fill of robber trench	
16081	Stone fragments and soil	Fill of foundation trench for wall 16002	

Table 13.1
Trench 16 contexts

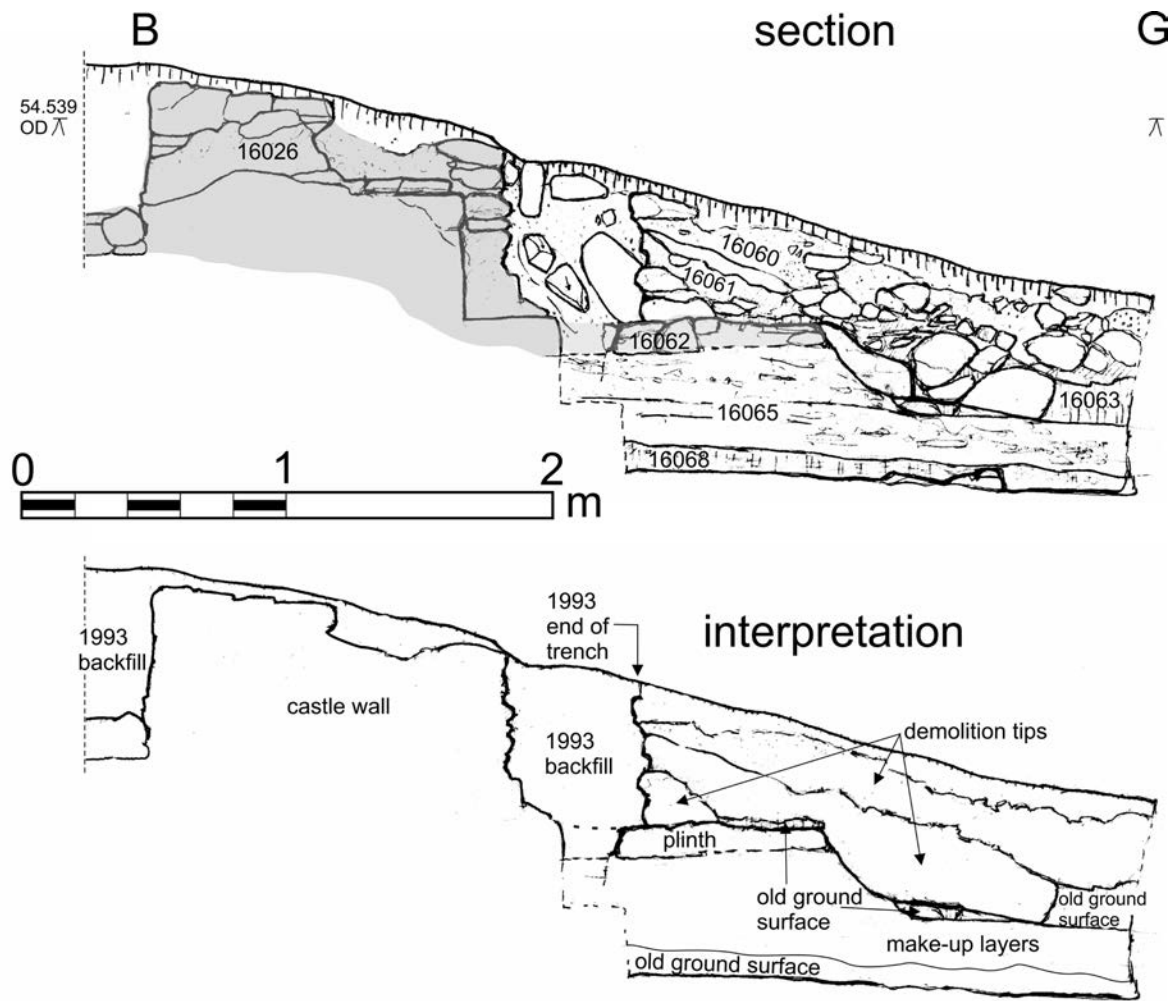


Illustration 13.18
Trench 16 (1994), section B-G



Illustration 13.19
Trench 23, looking south-east. The ranging rod to the left marks the walls of house (a); the rod to the right, wall 23004

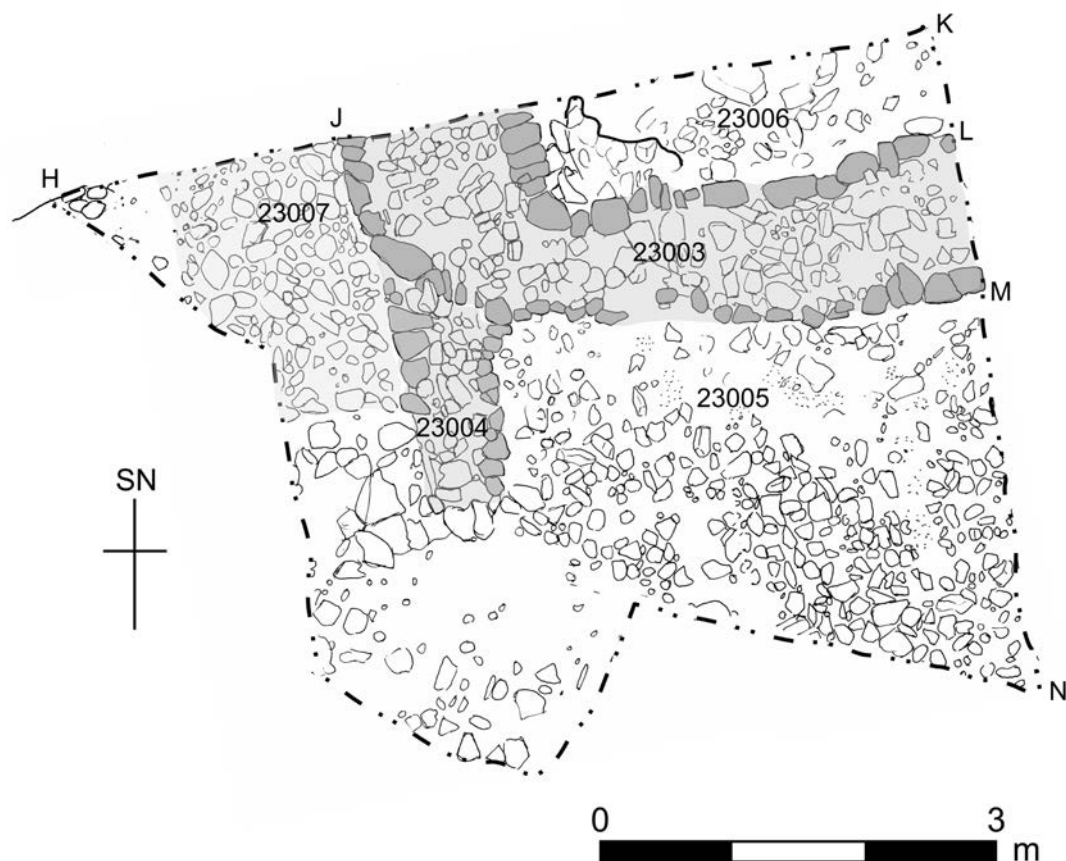


Illustration 13.20
Trench 23, plan with house (a)

south-west of the castle in trench 23. The tenuous remains of the castle floor [23017] were found to have been laid down over a make-up layer [23018], 200mm and more thick, of mixed soil and midden, itself piled over a ground surface [23033] masking earlier ruins (Illus 13.26).

The only other architectural feature relating to these castle remains which should be noted is a broken white sandstone rybat with slots for hinges or other fittings (R28), recovered from debris [16045] from the castle's destruction, sealed under the floor of building (b). Pieces of iron slag from Eilean na Comhairle are listed in Table C5.1 in the Catalogue, at least some of which may relate to the forging of metalwork when the castle was built.

In trench 16, excavation in a strip about 1m wide alongside the south side of wall 16026 revealed a level, smooth mortar floor surface [16028] some 150mm thick (Illus 13.3, 13.6). A fragment of it was also encountered within the area of the later building (b) as 24019 (Illus 13.30, 13.36). Its surviving surface corresponds in level to 16028. Elsewhere in trenches 16 and 24 to the north of castle wall 16026 it appears that the castle floor was removed by later activities. In trench 16E this mortar floor was encountered as 16030 (Illus 13.14). In trench 23 there were also traces of it [23017] seen in section to the south of building (a) (Illus 13.26). Within the walls of building (a) a small area of it was cleared in trench 16, revealing a patch of burning [16043], perhaps a hearth (Illus 13.3), which was sampled for archaeomagnetic dating by GeoQuest Associates and gave dates of 1230–1310 or 1420–75. The former range is preferred

on stratigraphical grounds. It perhaps gives an indication that occupancy of the castle ceased by the early 14th century.

No precise date was provided by the excavations for the castle's construction. From the fill [16031] of the foundation trench for the east wall [16025B] in trench 16E was recovered a sherd of oxidised gritty ware (SF 16077). Two sherds of white gritty and one of redware were recovered from sandy soil [16070] beneath 16068, the old ground surface pre-dating the castle wall, and in trench 23 a copper alloy dress pin of medieval type (C11) was found in the make-up level [23018] for the castle floor, and a redware cooking pot rim and shoulder (P36) in the ground surface [23033] underlying that. On the one hand, this indicates that the castle was constructed sometime in the 13th century, or the 12th at earliest. On the other hand, it suggests that there was 12th- or 13th-century activity on the island prior to the erection of the castle. Over 40 sherds of medieval wheel-turned pottery, including white gritty, redware, reduced gritty and oxidised gritty, were recovered from trenches 16, 16E, 23 and 24, some in contexts directly related to the castle, the rest probably churned up by later activity.

At least two phases in the castle's demolition can be recognised. First, the reduction and removal of its walls, probably to a uniformly low level. This process resulted in a layer about 300mm thick of mortar and debris inside the castle [16018]. Externally, at least to the north and east, there were tips of mortar and stone [24018, 24010, 1660, 16061]. Subsequently, perhaps not much later, trenches were dug through this demolition debris, along the wall lines, primarily to remove the remaining facing stones. A

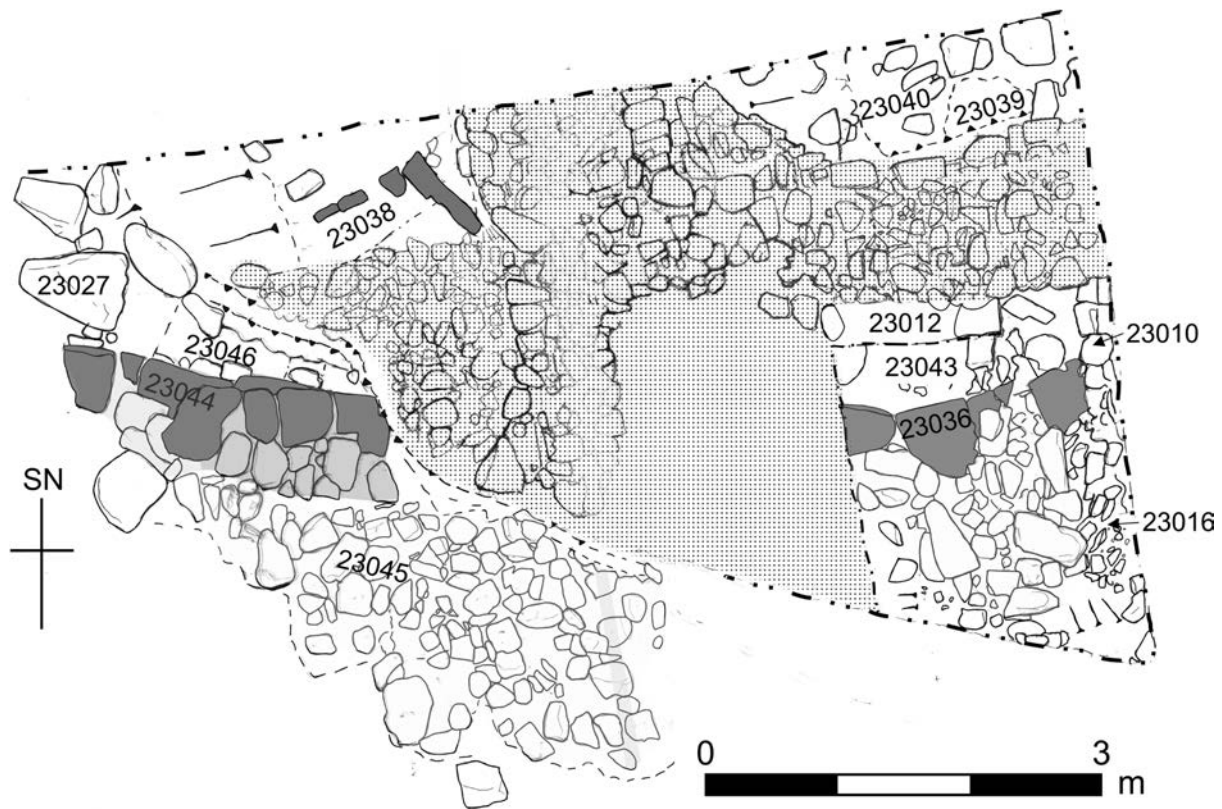


Illustration 13.21
Trench 23, plan with wall of dun

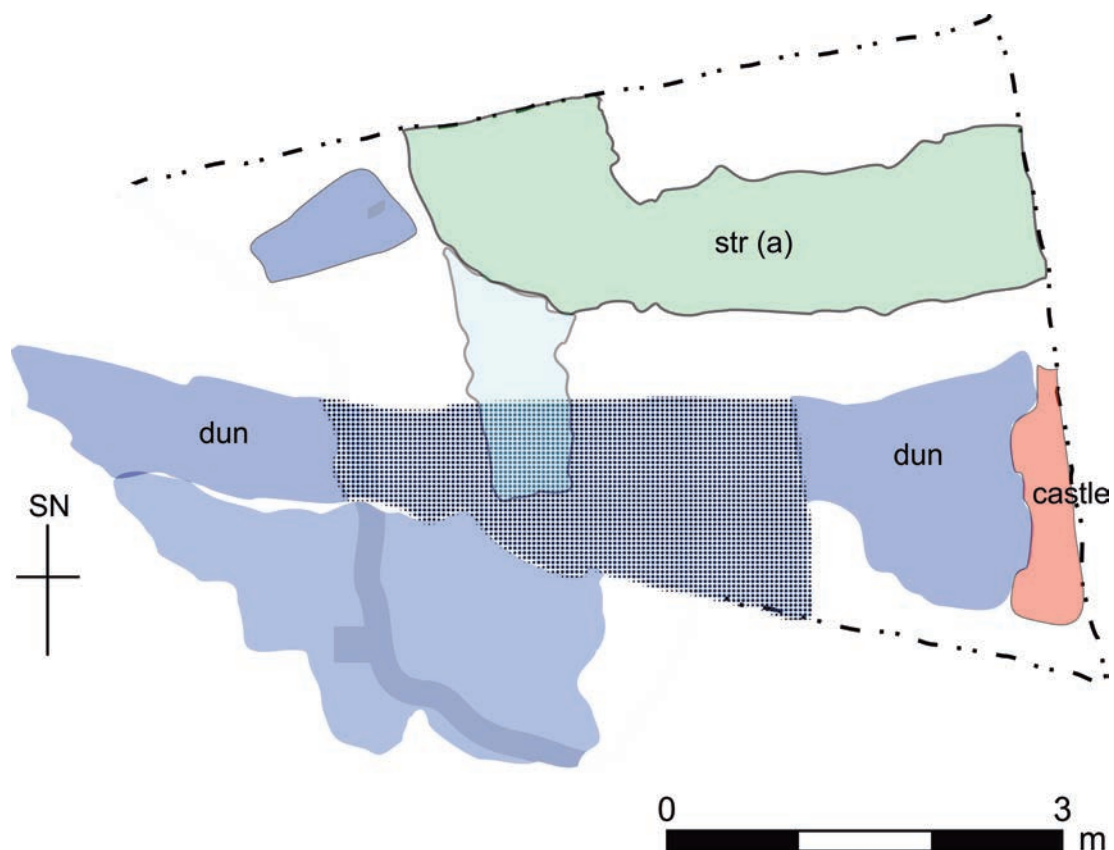


Illustration 13.22
Trench 23, composite interpretative plan



Illustration 13.23
Trench 23, dun wall looking east

robber trench [16079] along the south face of wall 16026 can be seen in section in Illus 13.8. It is cut at right angles by another [16080] that allowed the removal of the interior facing stones of wall 16025. Another robber trench [24028] encountered in trench 24 enabled much of the north wall of the castle to be removed (Illus 13.30), and in trench 23 yet another [23047] was the main clue for the location of the castle's south wall (Illus 13.26).

Sufficient evidence for the castle walls survived for their remains to be used as a base for the foundations of the later medieval houses, (a) and (b). In trench 24 the development of turf, a ground surface [24015], was detected between the ruined castle wall and the wall of structure (b) (Illus 13.33), and in trench 23 a ground surface [23011] was seen to have developed prior to the forming of the earth floor in house (a) (Illus 13.25), suggesting a gap in time between the two.

The dun (Illus 13.21–23, 13.26, 13.27)

Much of the island is composed of the ruins of a dun, a fact of which the builders of the castle would have been aware, although it is probable that when they commenced their work this earlier structure was grassed over. The immediately pre-castle ground surface is represented by 23033, seen in section M–N (Illus 13.26).

Two segments of the curving inner face of a massive drystone wall [23036, 23044] were exposed in trench 23 (Illus 13.21, 13.23). The portion of this face excavated as 23036 had a length of about 1.7m and a width of about 0.8m. It can be expected to have been considerably wider than that, but its outer face would have been beyond the trench. It was composed of large quarried blocks, about 80% limestone, 20% quartzite. At least two courses survived. The

exposed segment to the east [23044] was similar in character, with a length of about 2.3m and three courses surviving. Individual blocks average about 450 by 300 by 200mm in height. The courses tilt outwards, and there is a distinct break between the stones of the inner face and other stonework [23045] to the south, which is probably largely in situ walling rather than tumble. All this suggests deformation or subsidence of the dun remains caused by the weight of the overlying castle walls (Illus 13.21, 13.22).

Very little of the interior of the dun was seen in the excavations apart from stone debris [23025, 23040, 23043, 23046], perhaps derived from the dun walls, loosely packed with soil, leaving several voids. From 23046, adjacent to the interior of the dun wall, was recovered a Neolithic stone axe (X11). A stone box-like feature [23038] was partially revealed within the area enclosed by the dun wall (Illus 13.21, 13.27), but not excavated extensively enough to establish its relationship to 23046 or stratigraphically earlier contexts. It had vertically set side slabs and paving, and a width (or length) of slightly over a metre. Within it the presence of burnt bone, charcoal, pebbles and clay was noted, some of it affected by the formation of an iron pan [23037].

Over the rubble and other material filling up the internal space of the dun was a layer of midden [23034], 200mm thick, composed of mixed ash, animal bone, soil and clay, sealed by the development of the old ground surface [23033] which preceded the erection of the castle (Illus 13.26).

The foundation trench (fill 16076 – see Illus 13.17) for the east wall of the castle [16025] was seen to reach or cut into an earlier deposit [16077] of unknown depth or extent, composed of rubble and sandy silt. It is likely that this is equivalent to the rubble filling of the dun excavated in trench 23 [23025, etc].

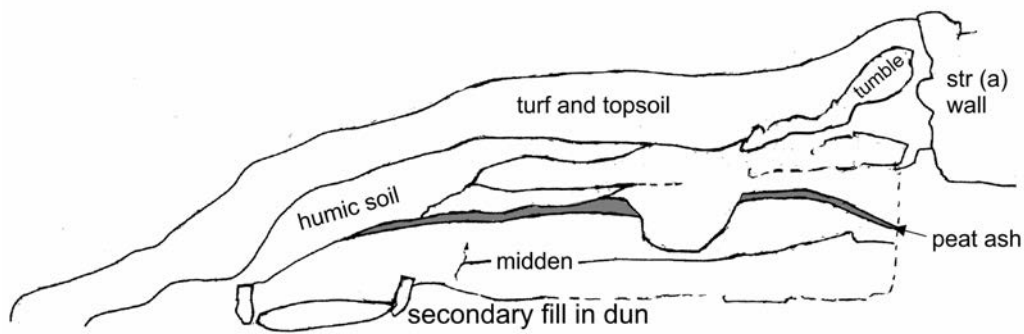
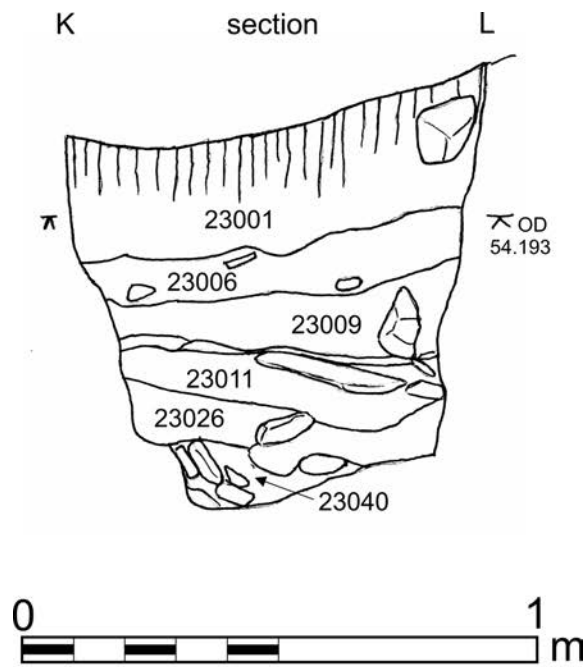
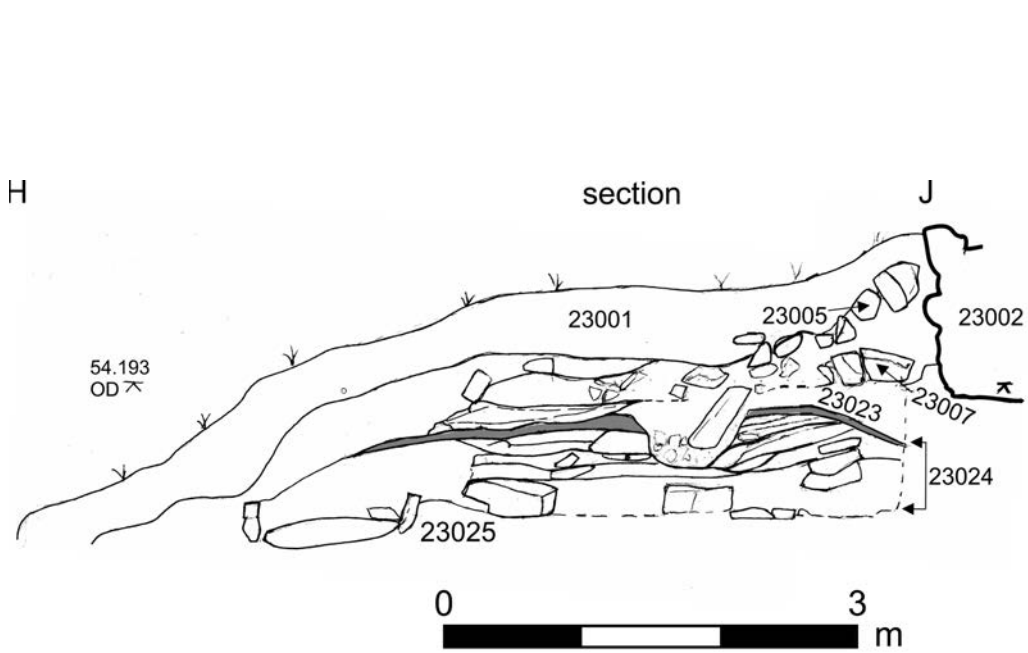
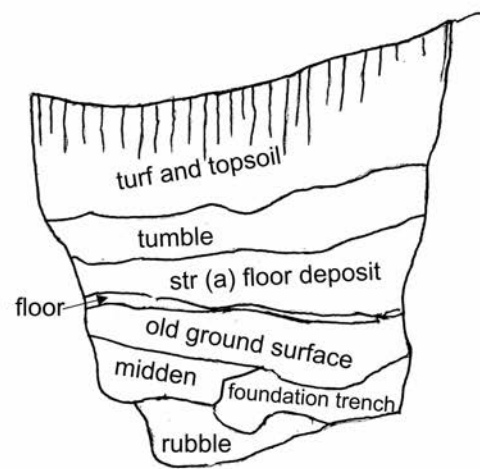


Illustration 13.24
Trench 23, section H-J



interpretation
Illustration 13.25
Trench 23, section K-L

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS

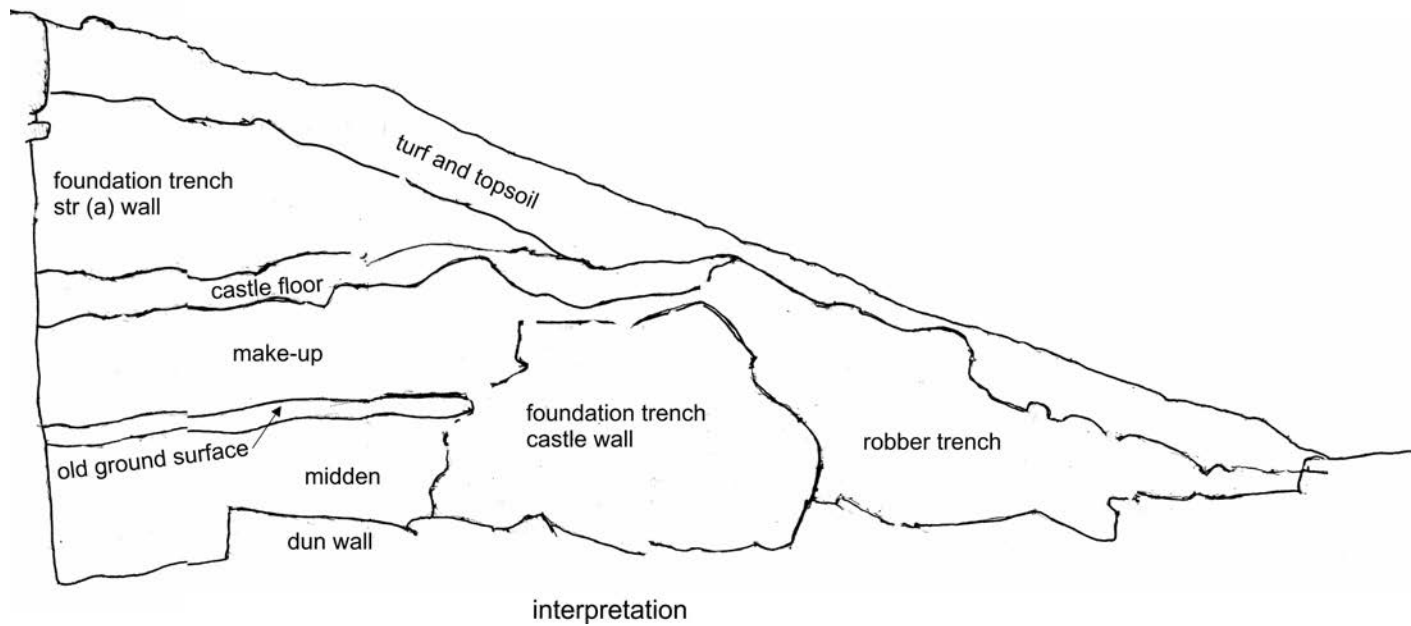
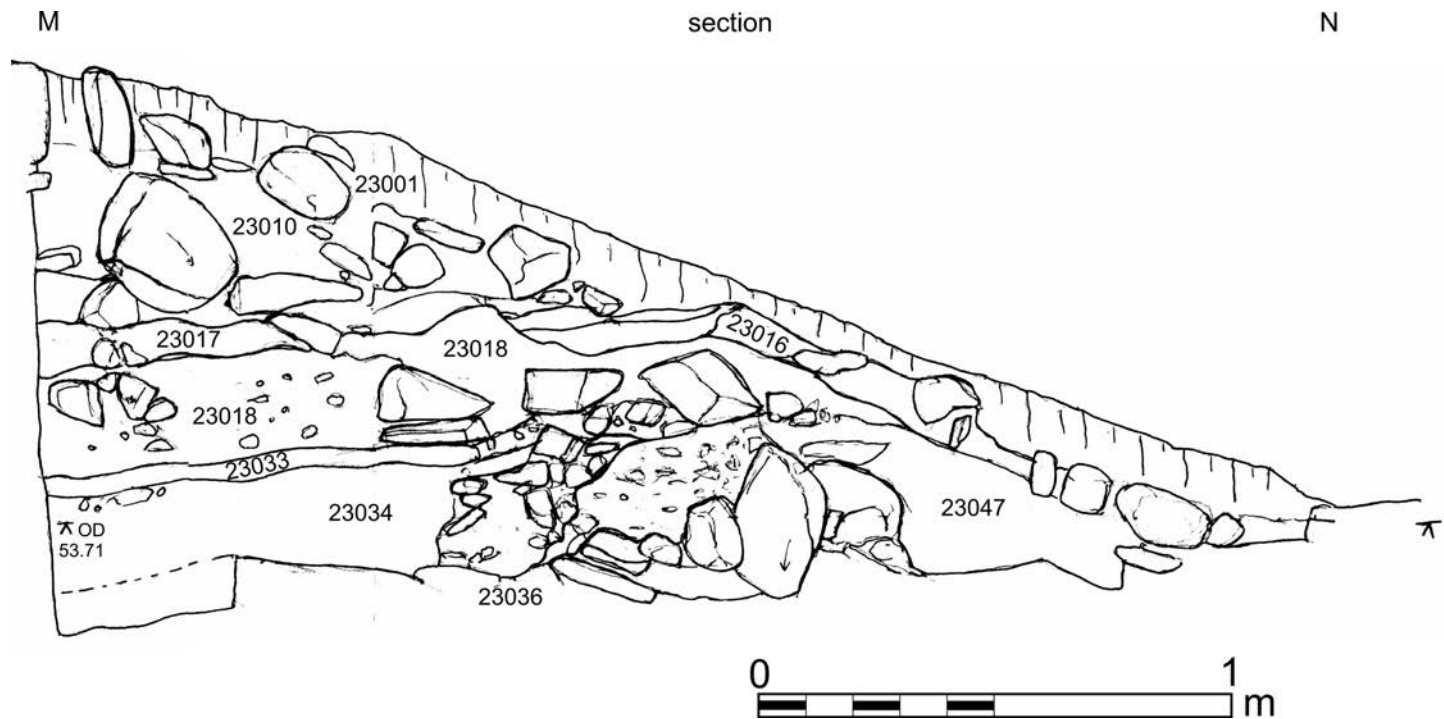


Illustration 13.26
Trench 23, section M-N

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Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
23001	Turf and topsoil	Topsoil	
23002	Grit, gravel, 5% mortar debris	Washout from ruin of (a)	
23003	Boulders and blocks, sand, grit	Walls of (a), south-west corner	
23004	Boulders, slabs, soil/grit	Wall from south-west (a) to island edge	
23005	Rock fragments	Tumble from wall 23003, south of (a)	
23006	Stones, dark brown soil	Tumble and topsoil in (a)	
23007	Blocks and boulders, 30% soil	Path, crude cobbling, east of (a)	
23009	Peaty soil, 10% grit	Occupation deposit in (a)	16017
23010	Stones and slabs, up to 40% soil	Tumble to south of (a)	
23011	Soil	Old ground surface	
23012	Peat ash	Midden deposit	
23014	Soil	Topsoil	
23016	Mortar, sand, 10% gravel	Within 23017	
23017	Mortar and gravel	Weathered castle floor	
23018	Clayey soil, 5% small stones	Make-up layer	
23023	Dark grey-brown clay-rich soil	Old ground surface	16022, 23011
23024	Black-red burnt material	Peat ash	
23025	Loose earth and stones	Fill, secondary, in dun	
23026	Peaty soil, 5% gravel	Pre-castle midden deposit	23034
23027	Large stone blocks	Tumble	
23028	Dark brown soil	Fill of 23027	
23031	Large stone blocks	As 23027	
23033	Dark grey-brown clay soil	Old ground surface	
23034	Dark brown clay soil, ash	Pre-castle midden deposit	
23036	Large quarried blocks, 20% soil	Dun wall	
23037	Stony clay soil, 50% charcoal	Fill of 23038	
23038	Set slabs	Secondary fireplace in dun?	
23039	Orange clayey ash	Midden deposit	
23040	Slabs and blocks, 5% soil	Prehistoric tumble	
23043	Slabs and blocks, 10% soil	As 23040	
23044	Large slabs, 10% soil	Dun wall	
23045	Large slabs, 10% soil	Dun wall	
23046	Stony soil, 50% clay	Secondary occupation or tumble	
23047	Dark brown clay soil	Robber trench fill	

Table 13.2
Trench 23 contexts

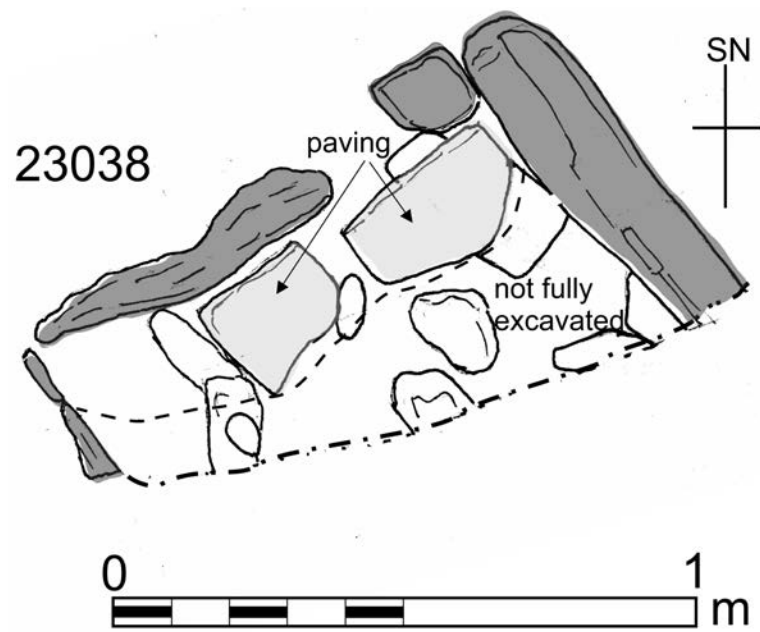


Illustration 13.27
Trench 23, feature 23038



Illustration 13.28
Trench 24, looking north over wall of house (b)

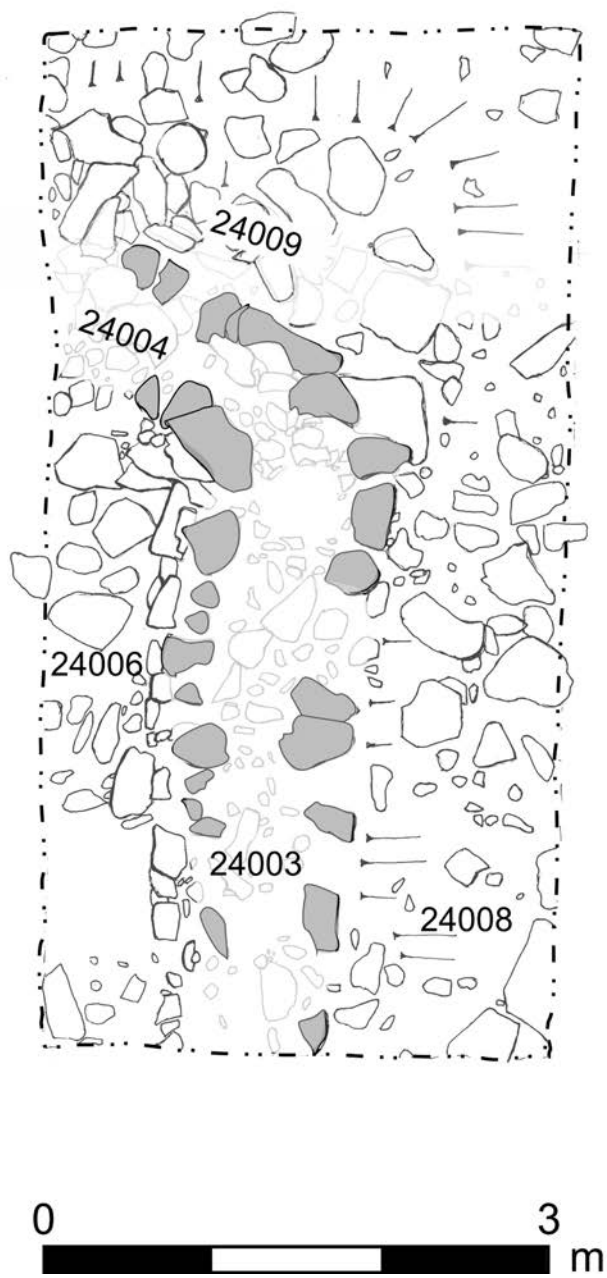


Illustration 13.29
Trench 24, wall of house (b)

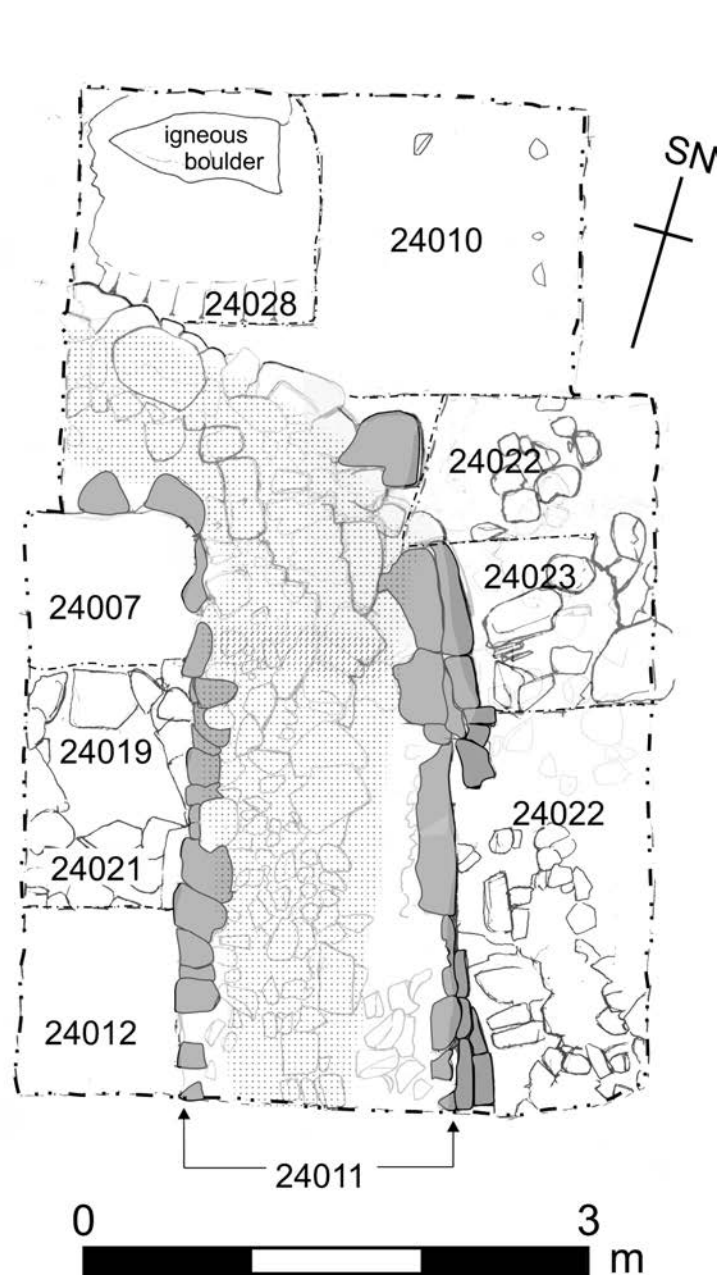


Illustration 13.30
Trench 24, castle wall

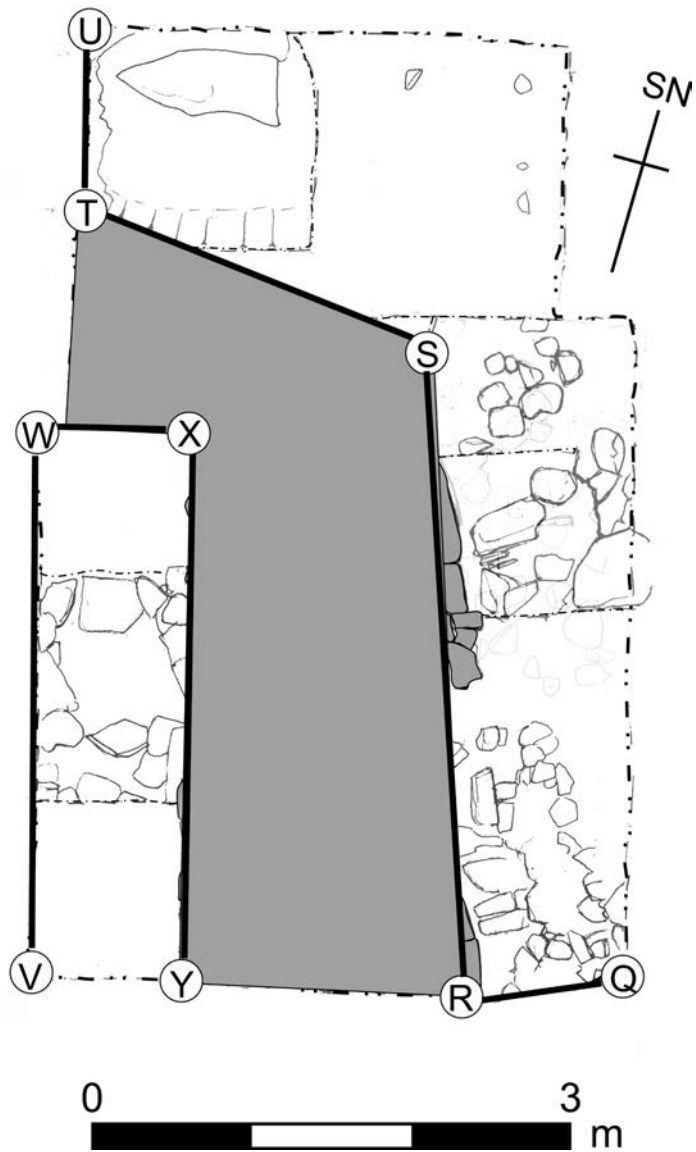


Illustration 13.31
Trench 24, location plan of section drawings

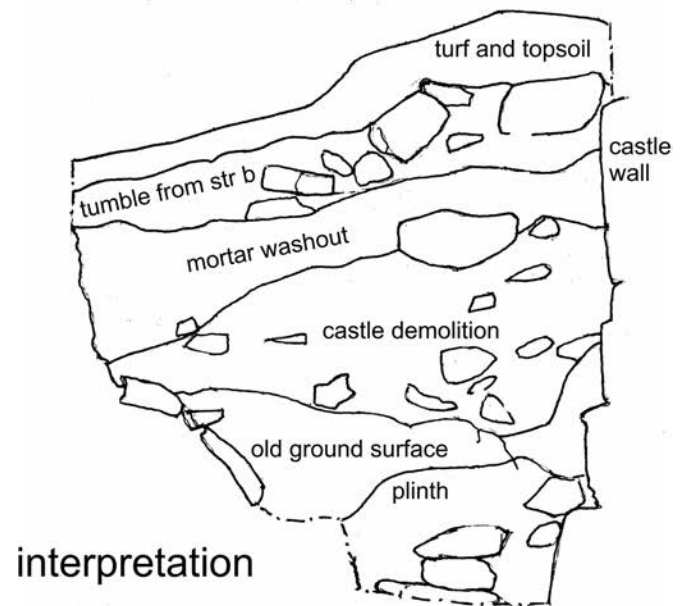
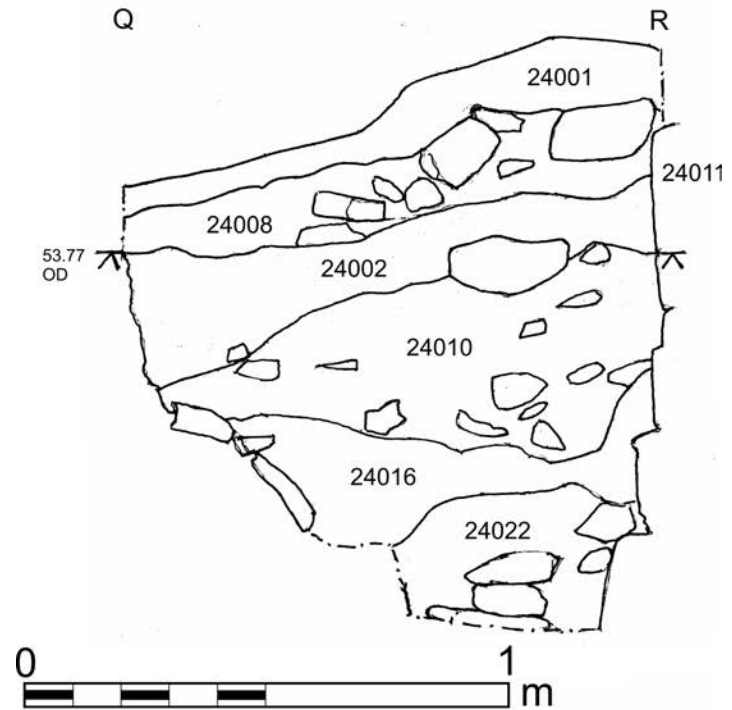


Illustration 13.32
Trench 24, section Q-R

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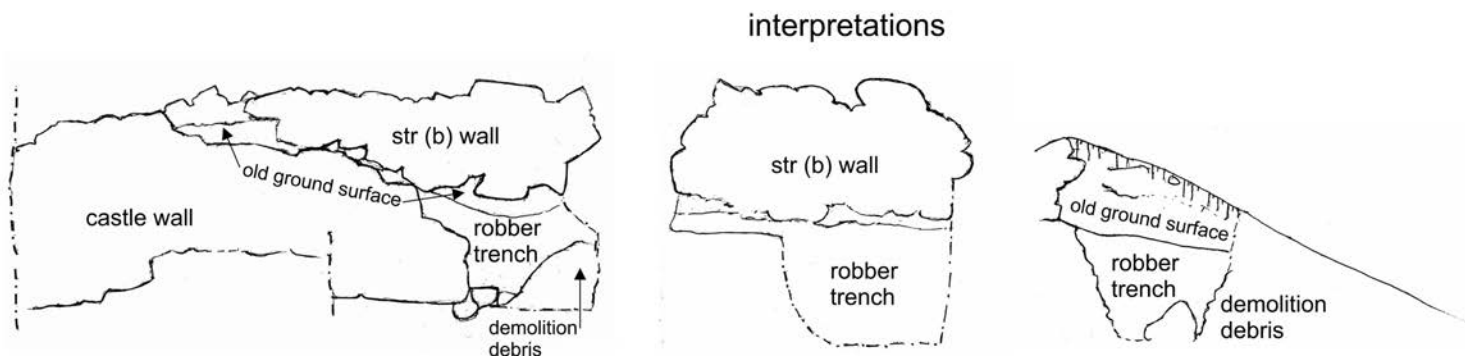
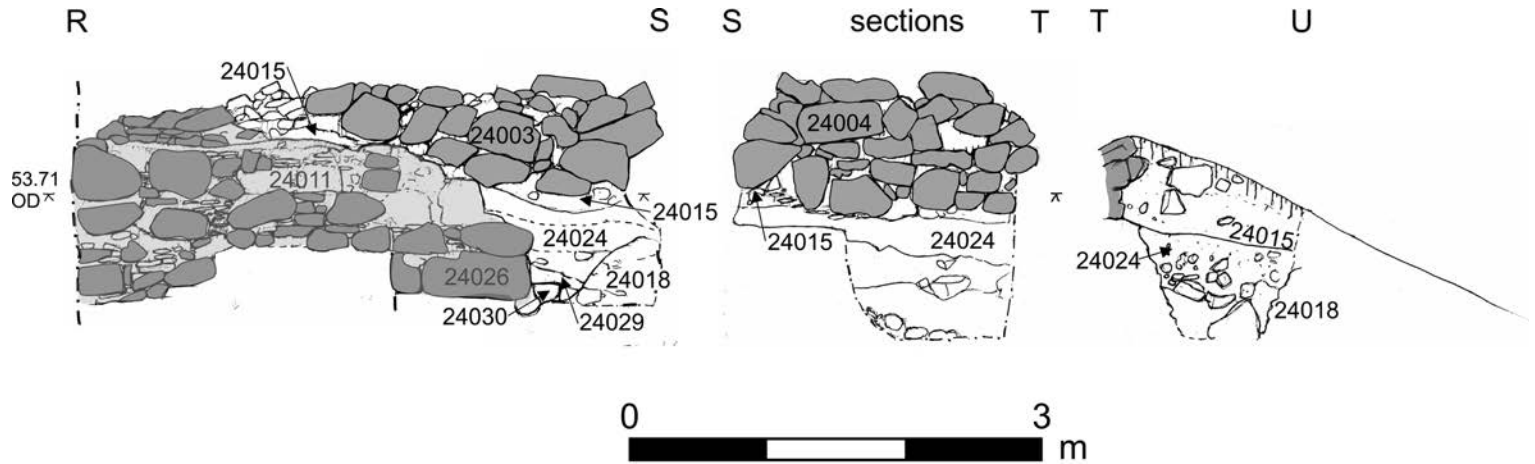


Illustration 13.33
Trench 24, sections R-S, S-T, T-U

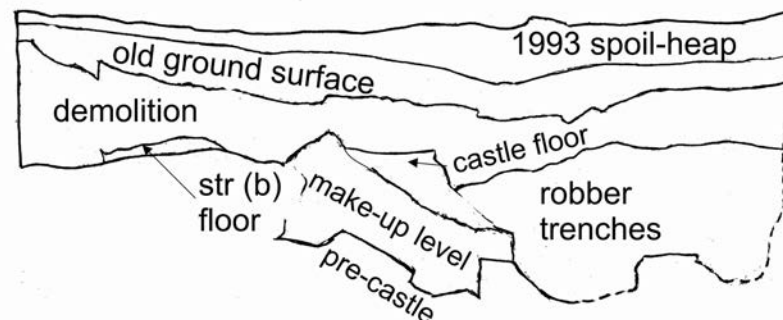
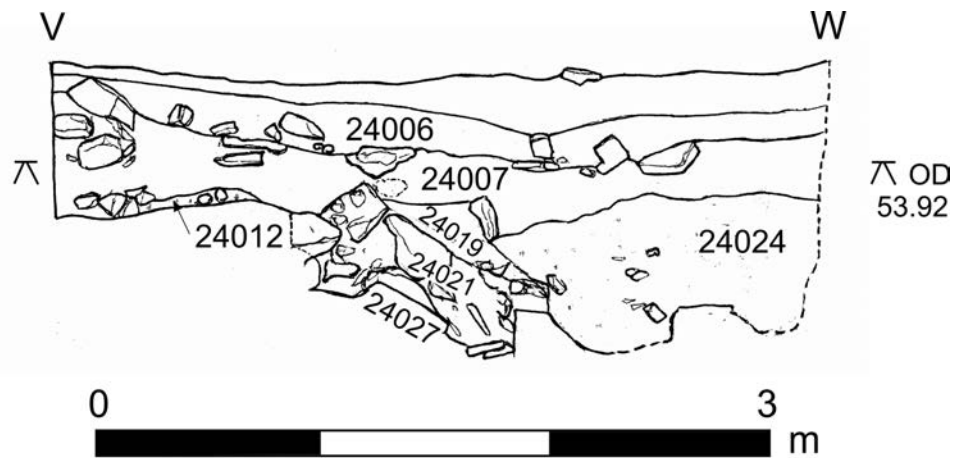


Illustration 13.34
Trench 24, section V-W



Illustration 13.35
Trench 24, interior north-east corner of wall of house (b)

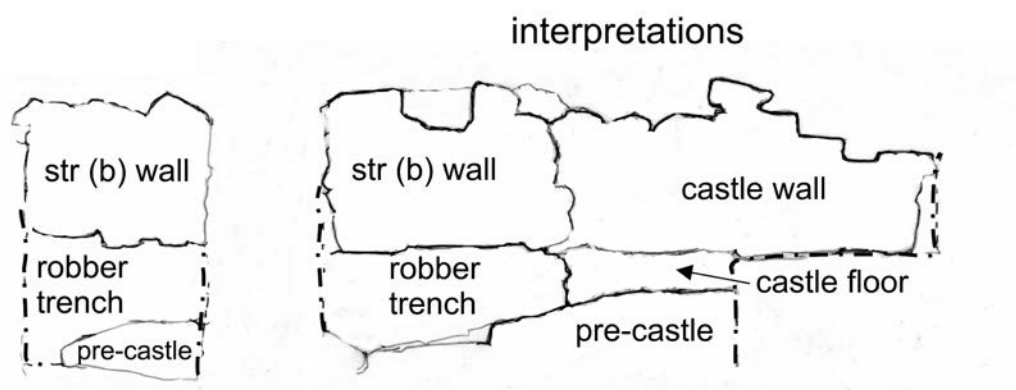
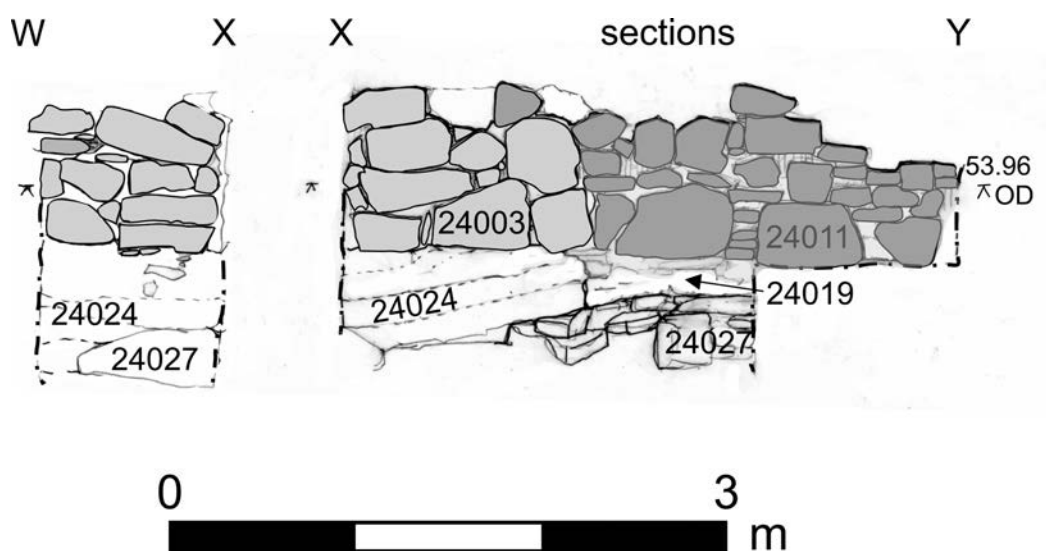


Illustration 13.36
Trench 24, sections W-X, X-Y

Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
24001	Turf and soil, vegetation	Topsoil	
24002	Gravel, sand, 5% mortar	Mortar washout from 24003	
24003	Slabs, blocks, 5% rotted mortar	East wall of (b)	
24004	Slabs and blocks	North wall of (b)	
24006	Slabs, blocks, 35% soil	Demolition/collapse of (b)	
24007	Peaty soil, up to 30% gravel	Post-occupation soil development	16023
24008	Tumble and soil	Tumble from wall 24003	
24009	Slabs, boulders, 20% soil, grit	Tumble from wall 24004	
24010	Mortar debris, stone fragments	Demolition of wall 24011	
24011	Lime-mortared masonry	North/south castle wall	16025
24012	Dark brown, gritty soil	Floor of (b)	16024
24013	Soil, up to 25% gravel	Soil within 24009	
24015	Dark brown soil, 10% grit	Old ground surface	
24016	Clay, silt, 20% stone fragments	Old ground surface	
24018	Mortar debris	Demolition of castle	
24019	Mortar, 10% sand	Castle floor	
24020	Black silty soil, 10% rock fragments	Make-up level	
24021	Phyllite slabs, 20% clay and soil	Make-up level	
24022	Stones, 25% silty clay	Castle plinth	16035, 16062
24023	Rocks, 30% soil and clay	Fill of foundation trench	
24024	Mortar and sand	Top fill of cut 24028	
24026	Large boulder	Foundation of wall 24011	
24027	Rocks, 20% soil and clay	Pre-castle	
24028	Cut	Robber trench	
24029	Mortar and sand, organic 20%	Bottom fill of 24028	
24030	Burnt clay or slab	Pre-castle	

Table 13.3
Trench 24 contexts

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS

Trench 25 (Illus 13.37–40, Table 13.4)

In 1997 midden deposits on the bottom of the loch, adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle on the side facing Eilean Mór, were sampled from within the confines of a dam with an area of about 80 sq m. For recording purposes, the working area was gridded into metre squares, in rows from C to G and columns from 4 to 8. Thus, each square could be identified by a letter and number, from C6 to G8 (Illus 13.39). A more detailed explanation of the system used is provided in the section on trench 25 excavation and recording in Chapter 1. It is estimated that the midden may have spread over a total area of about 400 sq m, including, on the basis of the excavation of sondages 4 and 5, the fringes of the island itself. Refuse probably settled here because this side of the island is sheltered. The causeway to Eilean Mór and possibly a jetty may have helped to trap it.

The surface of the loch bottom within the dam was flat, dropping eastwards about 25cm from the present shore of the island. We trowelled an area 4m east–west and 5m north–south

(Illus 13.40), removing topsoil [25001] and sand and gravel beach material [25002, 25003], permeated by an iron pan [25004]. Medieval artefacts were recovered from these surface deposits, including from the iron pan in F5 an English short-cross penny of the early 13th century (N2). This material had probably mostly been washed out from the edge of the island.



Illustration 13.37
Aerial view of dam with trench 25



Illustration 13.38
Trench 25

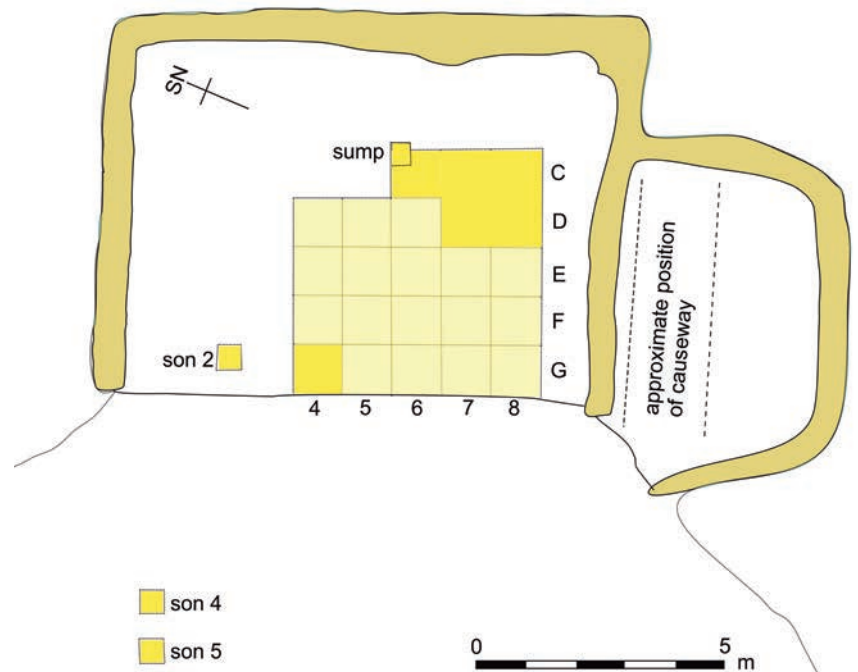


Illustration 13.39
Trench 25, grid system

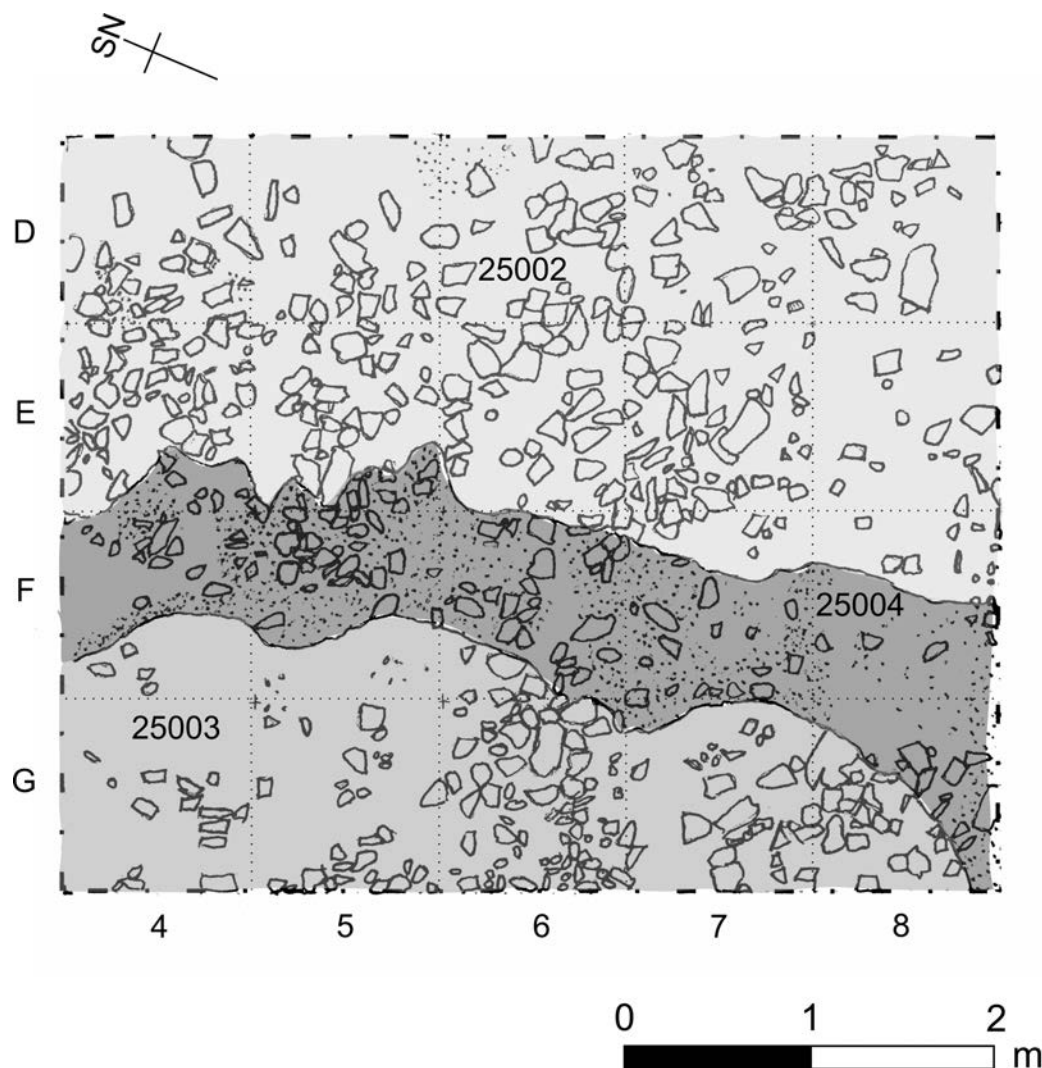


Illustration 13.40
Trench 25, surface deposits

A medieval midden (Illus 13.41–47)

The gravel, sand and iron pan sealed a substantial midden [25008], the prime target of the 1997 project. Further excavation was undertaken in five adjacent metre squares (C8, C7, C6, D8, D7), as well as a separate metre square (G4), removing all 25008 present. This 25008 midden was also encountered in sondage 2, 1.5m to the north of G4. In two small sondages (4 and 5) excavated on the island proper, to the west of the dam, midden [25026, 25031] is also present, here without waterlogging and preservation of organic content. It is, however, likely to be the equivalent of 25008.

A comprehensive sampling and sieving strategy was developed, with the work supervised by Leonie Paterson. All excavated soil was wet sieved on-site through a 1cm mesh. The midden had a depth of about 400mm. Because no stratification could be observed in it, it was removed in horizontal spits, each a few centimetres deep, labelled A to G from top to bottom (with an extra spit marked as H in G4). Scrutiny of the excavated sections in G4

later suggested that there were layers in it that were sloping down gently northwards, perhaps here close to the midden's edge. The excavated spits in G4 did not totally respect this configuration (Illus 13.47). Samples of about 3 litres each were taken from each spit for processing for insect remains and other analyses. Ten litres of soil from each spit in squares C8 and G4 were subjected to flotation sieving for the recovery of seeds and other small pieces of organic matter.

The midden had an organic, sandy, fibrous matrix, packed with considerable quantities of environmental material and artefacts, the subject of more detailed reports in the Catalogue (Illus 13.41). Suffice it to note here that there were considerable quantities of animal bone, some of fish and birds, clearly relating to high-status dining. There was an abundance of hazelnut shells and some fragments of almonds and walnuts, along with cherry stones, seeds and strands of moss. There were pieces of round wood, twigs and off-cuts of worked timber. Illustration 13.45

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS



Illustration 13.41
Trench 25, medieval midden (spit C of 25008) in square C8

shows some typical residue left after sieving on-site through 1cm mesh. Artefacts included leather shoes (H1 and H2), a leather draw-string pouch (H3), wooden pins, and pieces of wooden drinking or eating vessels. There were also over 100 sherds of Scottish wheel-turned pottery, the majority white gritty, and three sherds of imported Saintonge wares.

Also included in the 25008 midden were significant quantities of rock fragments (Illus 13.45). A report by Nigel Ruckley on samples from spits A, B and C is lodged in the site archive. It notes that the rock is all local, mainly limestone and phyllite, and the fragments are mainly angular to sub-angular in shape, mostly smaller than 10cm across. Ruckley supposed that if the fragments

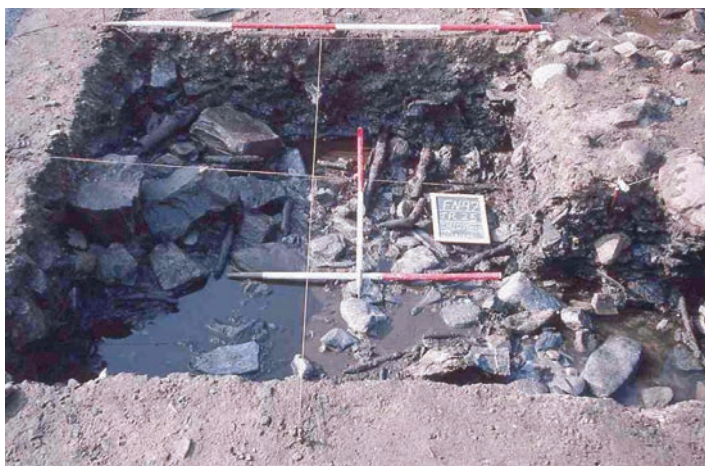


Illustration 13.42
Trench 25, main excavated area looking west with rubble 25013 to the left. The crossed ranging rods are on the 25013 cobbling

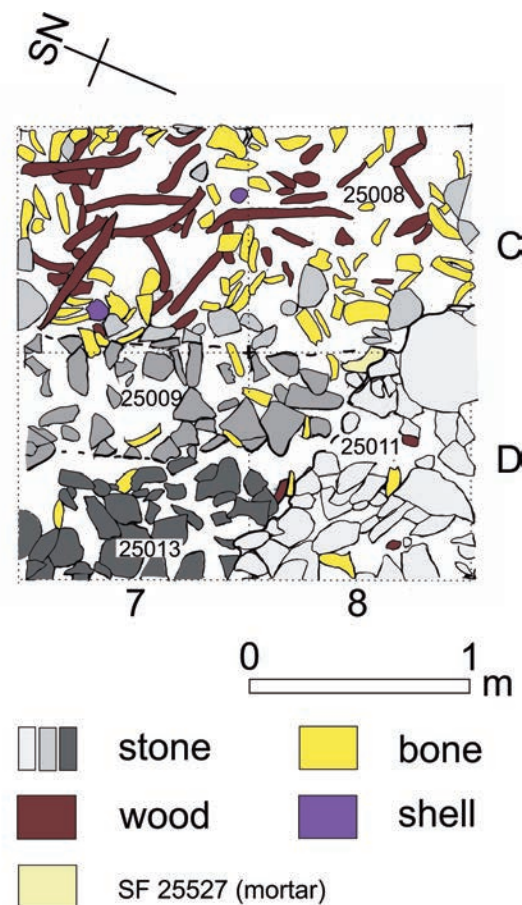


Illustration 13.43
Trench 25, plan of main excavated area, medieval contexts

N facing section

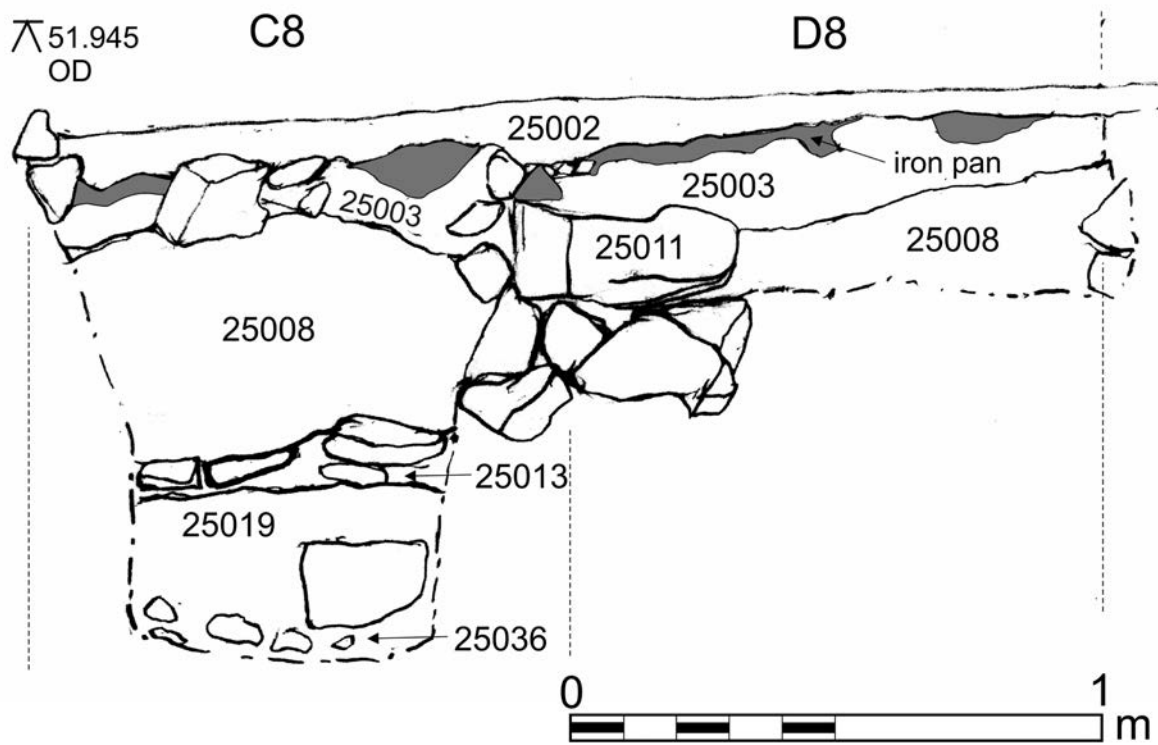


Illustration 13.44
Trench 25, main excavated area, north-facing section



Illustration 13.45
Trench 25, typical sieved residue from the medieval midden 25008

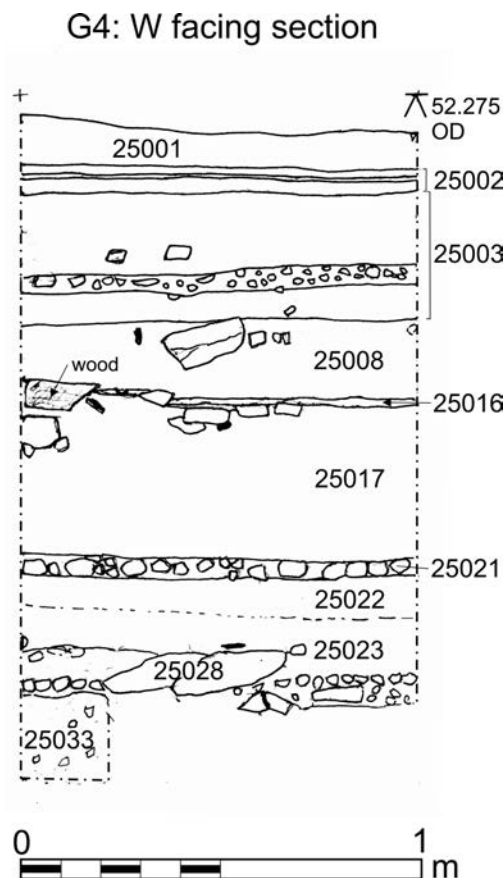


Illustration 13.46

Trench 25, square G4, west-facing section

C8 east facing

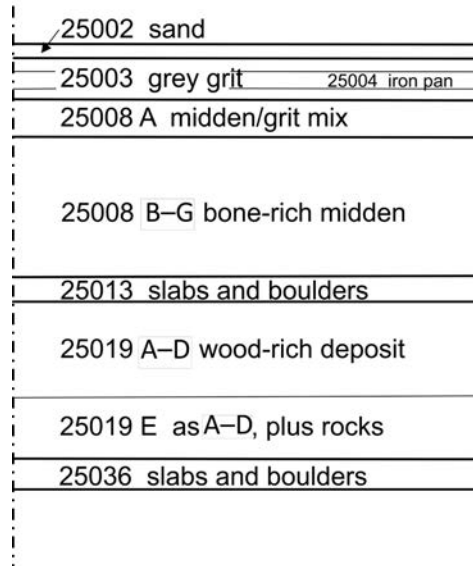
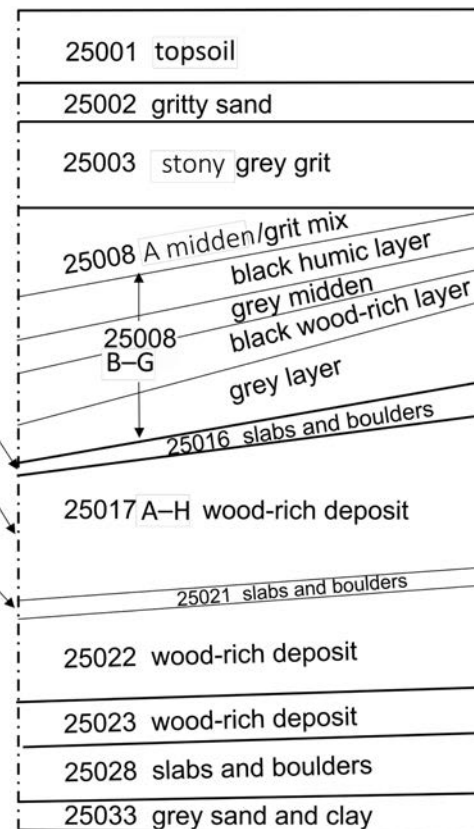


Illustration 13.47

Trench 25, diagrammatic concordance between contexts in square G4 and main excavation

G4 north facing



came either from the loch or the glacial gravels there would have been a greater proportion of sub-rounded to sub-angular stones. He therefore suggested that the material included builders' waste material.

Also within the 25008 midden, projecting into square D8 from the south, was some stone rubble [25011], apparently tumble rather than a built feature. A possible explanation is that this is castle stonework dropped by accident from the causeway as it was being taken away for reuse on Eilean Mór (Illus 13.42, 13.43). Other stonework [25009] at the bottom of 25008 consists of rough limestone blocks, each less than 200mm across, arranged as a linear feature less than half a metre wide and only one course high, running north-south (Illus 13.43). It is possible that this represents the remains of a wall or revetment. Included in it was a broken stone mortar (R85) of medieval date.

It is suggested in the ceramics report that the range of Scottish wares from this midden is likely to date prior to about 1300. The sherds of imported French pottery are also believed to date to the 13th or early 14th century. With the caveat that the spits in which midden 25008 was excavated may bear little relationship to a stratigraphic sequence, it is noticeable that wheel-made pottery almost all comes from spits A to D. Only 5 sherds were got in spit E and 3 in spit F. There may be a clue here that midden 25008 began to accumulate before the importation of this pottery to Finlaggan. Seven fragments of lime mortar were also recorded from

midden 25008, all from spits E and F. There was also a small piece of sandstone (SF 25020) from spit F in C6, possibly, like the mortar, derived from building operations at the castle.

A crannog (Illus 13.46–49)

Feature 25009 lay on cobbling [25013] covering the area of C6, C7 and D7. It was not exposed in D8. It consisted of rough blocks and slabs, mostly of limestone. Also resting on this cobbling, and under 25009, were several lengths of round wood, 40mm or more in diameter, arranged parallel to each other, approximately east-west (Illus 13.42, 13.48). It is also noticeable how similar sticks to the east of feature 25009 generally had a north-south orientation (Illus 13.41, 13.43).

Further digging in the main area of excavation was confined to squares C7 and C8. Two empty post-settings were identified in the 25013 cobbling (Illus 13.48). One [25014], half-sectioned by the east baulk, had an internal diameter of about 0.45m, defined by limestone edge stones. The other [25015] is less certain, represented by edge stones forming only half its internal diameter of about 0.7m. Under the 25013 cobbling was another organic-rich deposit [25019], similar to 25008 but with noticeably greater quantities of wood, especially withies and also pieces of peat. It had a depth of about 0.25m. There was some animal bone and an iron rivet (SF 25160), but also in the small area excavated the stubs

of three birch posts [25034, 25035] and a group of stakes [25032], all encountered in situ (Illus 13.49). It is probable that this wood-work with the overlying cobbling represents the remains of a crannog. An underlying wood-rich organic deposit with blocks of limestone and quartzite [25036], some 200mm thick, rested on a mix of gravel and midden [25037] of unknown depth.

One further metre square, G4, was fully excavated to a considerable depth (Illus 13.46, 13.47), through a comparable sequence of deposits. A diagrammatic concordance is given in Illus 13.47. A radiocarbon date from a piece of worked wood in 25017 (equivalent to 25019) gave a 1σ calibrated age range of AD 434–598 (2σ cal AD 419–637). Earlier crannog material underneath 25017 was excavated to a loch bottom of sand and clay [25033]. Another radiocarbon determination was got from a piece of hazel branch wood from within this earlier crannog material [25022]. It

provided a 1σ calibrated age range of BC 89 – AD 46 (2σ cal BC 168 – AD 71).

A note on sampling of the midden in 1998

In the summer of 1998 a further small excavation was made in sector C1, adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle, by Clive Warsop. This was made possible by the construction of a new dam and the removal of loch water. A section through the medieval midden was achieved and an extensive programme undertaken of wet sieving, flotation and sampling for the retrieval of palaeoenvironmental remains, the primary purpose of the project. The work was done just within the confines of the 1997 dam (Illus 13.39), to the north (site north) of the area of trench 25, using an extension of the recording system for that trench. A brief report on the 1998 excavation was published by Warsop in 1998. The important group of medieval artefacts that was recovered, including a silver brooch (S3) and copper alloy mounts from dog collars (C87 and C88), is included in the corpus of finds dealt with in this report.

Interpretation

The prehistoric origins of settlement on Eilean na Comhairle are clear from these excavations. It is probably best to take a cautious view with the Neolithic stone axe (X11) and not conclude that its presence in a later context implies Neolithic settlement. Over 1,000 struck lithics generally of Mesolithic type were recovered from trench 25, but none from contexts that could be regarded as of that date.

The interpretation that appears merited by the limited extent of excavation at Eilean na Comhairle is that an approximately circular fort or dun with massive drystone walls and an overall diameter of about 20m was erected at some time in the Iron Age, probably on a rocky island, not significantly larger than the dun itself, nor emerging much more than a metre above the surface of

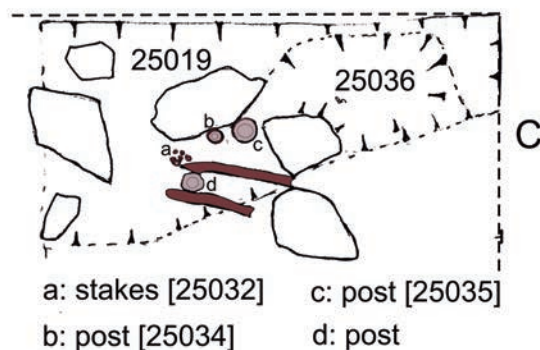
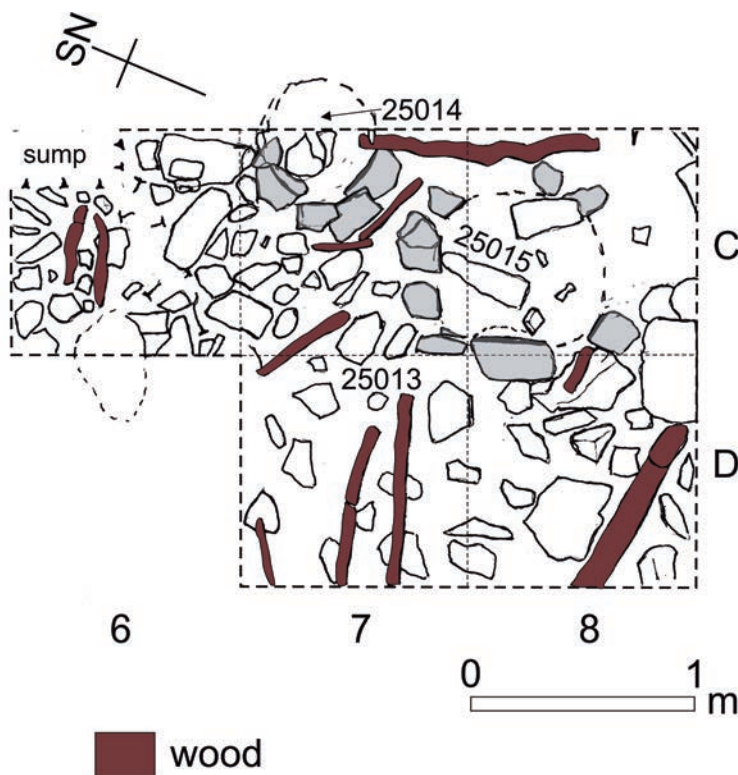


Illustration 13.48

Trench 25, main excavated area, crannog contexts



Illustration 13.49

Trench 25, a stake and two posts at time of excavation, from left to right: 25032, 25035, 25034

EILEAN NA COMHAIRLE EXCAVATIONS

Context	Description	Interpretation	Equivalent to
25001	Turf and soil, vegetation	Topsoil	
25002	Sand	Beach material	
25003	Gravel	Beach material	
25004	Iron-rich compacted sand, gravel	Iron pan	
25008	Organic rich	Medieval midden	
25009	Limestone slabs	Wall? Revetment?	
25011	Blocks and boulders	Tumble	
25013	Slabs, mostly limestone	Cobbling	
25014	Post-setting	Crannog structure	
25015	Post-setting	Crannog structure	
25016	Slabs, mostly limestone	Cobbling in G4	
25017	Peat, wood-rich organic deposit	Crannog structure in G4	
25019	Peat, wood-rich organic deposit	Crannog structure	
25021	Slabs and boulders	Crannog structure in G4	25036
25022	Organic, wood rich	Crannog structure in G4	
25023	Organic, wood rich	Crannog structure in G4	
25026	Stone, clay soil mix	Medieval midden in sondage 4	25008
25028	Slabs and boulders	Crannog structure? G4	
25031	Stone, clay soil mix	Medieval midden in sondage 5	25008
25032	Group of stakes	Crannog structure	
25033	Sand and clay	Loch bottom	
25034	Wooden post	Crannog structure	
25035	Wooden post	Crannog structure	
25036	Slabs and boulders	Crannog structure	25021
25037	Mixed gravel and midden	Crannog structure	

Table 13.4
Trench 25 contexts

the loch. Whether the actual stone causeway that substantially still survives underwater, or an earlier version of stone or timber, it is reasonable to suppose that there was from the beginning access by such means from Eilean Mór.

The soil and rubble fill in the interior of the dun may represent an attempt to level up the site after its abandonment to serve as a platform for later structures, or it may be part of a scheme to create secondary structures or houses within the wall of the dun while it was still standing. The partially excavated box-like structure [23038] may be the hearth for such a house.

Excavation in trench 25 indicates an associated peat and brushwood crannog structure, held together by timbers, built in shallow water adjacent to the dun. Compression, collapse and deliberate destruction will be among the factors that account for its remains only on the loch bottom. Interpretation of the two radiocarbon dates is problematical. They could either indicate a long-lived, refurbished construction, potentially from about the time of Christ into the 7th century AD, or else two structures separated by a considerable period of time. Neither date necessarily has much relevance for the dun.

Although the next major phase of activity on Eilean na Comhairle is represented by the building of the castle, perhaps about 1200, there are clues that the island was not totally abandoned in between, including the midden 23034, stratigraphically later than the dun and earlier than the castle. The presence of sherds of

medieval pottery, including, as noted above, P36 from contexts of earlier date than the construction of the castle, raises the possibility that the castle may have had a medieval predecessor.

The walling identified as the remains of a castle probably belonged to a massive tower rather than a small open enclosure castle. That is the implication of the mortar floor, ideal for a roofed structure but not typical of open spaces. It had an overall north-south length of about 19m, and we have supposed that it might, in line with many other early stone towers, have been square. A possible explanation for the straight join in the east wall near the entrance doorway is that this is something to do with a forework, either intended or realised, but not part of the original plan. This is a point that might easily be determined by a geophysical survey or limited excavation. Seemingly also an afterthought is the provision of a plinth along the exterior of at least the east wall, thickening the exterior wall from 1.8 to about 2.5m.

A key observation to make about the Finlaggan castle is that considerable efforts were made to remove it. There is no clear evidence as to whether enemy action played some part in this or it resulted from a change of requirements or activities. Indeed, the castle may not have been a completed building. Whether it was or not, much of its stonework may have been removed from the island for reuse on Eilean Mór. It was not replaced by a defensive structure on Eilean na Comhairle, nor does it appear that

perimeter defences were maintained on Eilean Mór in the 14th and 15th centuries. If, as argued above, the castle was a substantial tower, it is possible that it had developed structural problems as a result of its placement on top of the earlier dun.

The substantial medieval midden [25008] sampled in trench 25 obviously largely relates to the occupation of the castle. While it may have started forming prior to the building of the castle, none of the recovered artefacts could be expected to be any more recent than the early 14th century. The midden contents are suggestive of a high-status family living there for extended periods of time. The recovery in 1998 of several decorated metal mounts identified as belonging to dog collars is both an important indication of this and confirmation of the significance of Finlaggan as a place that its noble owners used as a base for hunting.

The development of a ground surface over the castle ruins prior to the erection of houses (a) and (b) suggests that there was probably a gap in time between the two. No close dating evidence for the erection and use of structures (a), (b) and (c) was gathered, nor did the excavations add anything substantial to our understanding of their function. The writer is inclined to suggest that building (a) was the council chamber mentioned by Donald Munro (Munro 1961: 56–57). It was the largest of the three houses, placed centrally and side-on to the approach from the causeway. It had entrances in both sides and an open courtyard area facing Eilean Mór. The limited evidence suggests it might be reconstructed as a single-storey hall with open roof. This might offer a suitably prestigious setting for important meetings.

PART IV

AN ASSESSMENT OF FINLAGGAN'S ROLE AND STATUS

The archaeological data presented in Chapters 7–13 backs up historical accounts and traditions that hint at Finlaggan's role as the ceremonial, administrative and judicial centre of a medieval kingdom and successor lordship. In this final part the evidence is reviewed and evaluated.

Structure	Type	Location	Period	Notes
A	Hall, great	10, 11	Early/late medieval	Lime mortared, slate roof
A.1	House	10	Post-medieval	Drystone, in ruins of A
B	House	11	Post-medieval	Mortared walls, central hearth
C	House	15	Late/post-medieval	Lime mortared, later two-storey post-medieval house
D	Gap?	Unexc		
E	House	Unexc	Late medieval?	
F	House	8	Post-medieval	Drystone walls
F1	House	8	Late medieval	Stone wall
G	Kiln	Unexc	Post-medieval	
H	House, stable	8, 6	Late medieval	Drystone, slate roof
H.1	House	8	Early medieval	Stone and turf walls, crucks, central hearth
J	House	8, 1	Late medieval	Drystone, slate roof
K	House	2, 4	Post-medieval	Drystone walls
K.1	Barn?	2	Post-medieval	Same as 12.5? Stone-faced turf walls with post-holes
K.2	Kitchen	2	Late medieval	Same as 12.6? Stone-faced turf walls
K.3	Kitchen?	2	Early medieval?	Deposit of ash, burnt bone etc
L	House	4	Post-medieval	Drystone walls
L.1	Kiln barn?	4	Post-medieval	Lime-mortared walls
M	House	5	Post-medieval	Drystone walls
M.1	Defensive work?	Unexc	Post-medieval	
N	Gap?	Unexc		
P	Hall	5	Post-medieval	Lime mortared, roof supported on crucks
P.1	House	5	Post-medieval	In the ruins of P
P.2	House	5	Post-medieval	In the ruins of P
Q	Chapel	1	Late medieval	Lime-mortared walls, slate roof
R	Cross	1	Late medieval	With lime-mortared plinth in burial ground
S	House	6	Post-medieval	Drystone
S.1	House?	6	Late medieval?	Under str S
T	House	Unexc	Post-medieval	Drystone
U	House	7	Post-medieval	Earth-bonded walls, two rooms
V	Barn?	7	Post-medieval	Earth and stone banks
V.1	House	7	Late medieval	Stone-faced turf walls
V.2	House	7	Early medieval	Clay walls, roof supported on crucks
V.3	House	7	Early medieval	Stake-holes for wattle wall?
W	Enclosure	7	Post-medieval?	Enclosed by turf bank
X	Defensive work?	Unexc	Post-medieval?	
Y	House	Unexc		
Y1	Defensive work?	12	Post-medieval	
Z	Pit	Unexc		Well?
6.1	Tower	6	Post-medieval	Timberwork
6.2	Palisade and bank	6	Post-medieval	
7.1	Post-holes	7	Early to post-medieval	Several structures?
7.2	House?	7	Early medieval	Clay floor and hearth
9.1	House?	9	Early medieval?	Clay-bonded walls
12.0	House/store?	12	Post-medieval	Drystone walls
12.1	House	12	Late medieval	Lime-mortared walls
12.2	House	12	Late medieval	Drystone walls, central hearth
12.3	House	12	Late medieval	Turf walls, stone floor
12.4	House	12	Early medieval	Hearth and bank only
12.5	Barn?	12	Post-medieval	Same as K.1? Stone-faced turf walls with post-holes
12.6	Kitchen	12	Late medieval	Same as K.2? Stone-faced turf walls
12.7	Kitchen?	12	Early medieval	Clay floor, ash
19.1	Fence	19	Post-medieval	Line of post-holes
19.2	House	19	Post-medieval	Vestigial, with central hearth, pre-lazy beds
19.3	Hut circle	19	Prehistoric	Arc of post-holes
19.4	Hut circle	19	Early historic?	Arc of post-holes
19.5	Hut circle	19	Prehistoric	Arc of post-holes

Table 14.1
Finlaggan structures, Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle

Chapter 14

FINLAGGAN: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

In this chapter we review chronologically what we have learned from our project about Finlaggan from earliest times to the present day. For the scheme of periods and date ranges used as a framework, see Table 2.1. See also the author's historical guide to Islay, Jura and Colonsay (Caldwell 2011). For a list of structures on Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle, see Table 14.1.

Finlaggan, c 6500 – c 700 BC

The discovery of prehistoric remains in our survey and excavations was not intended but is not surprising. At the least they demonstrate human occupation from Mesolithic times onwards.

None of the Mesolithic lithics from excavations on Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle or from the mound at Cnoc Seannnda can be shown to have come directly from Mesolithic occupation deposits. Rather the presence of many of them seems to relate to their being dug up with turf needed in later times for construction projects, or the specific use of gravel, with which they were inter-mixed, for example for making mortar, both clay and lime based.

Nevertheless, these lithics do suggest that Finlaggan was from earliest times favoured as a hunting ground. If so, that may relate to the Bonahaven Fault (see Chapter 3) running south-west by north-east from the head of Loch Finlaggan, creating a geological unconformity where there would have been rock exposures,

Structure	Type	Location	Period	Notes
19.6	Hearth	19	Bronze Age	
19.7	Hearth and pit	19	Early medieval?	
19.8	Hut circle	19	Early historic?	Arc of post-holes
19.9	House?	19	Post-medieval	Arc of post-holes
19.10	House	19	Post-medieval	Vestigial, with hearth, pre-19.2
	Bridge?	18	Post-medieval	Stone plinths for supporting raised walkway
	Burial pit	17	Early medieval?	Multiple inhumations
	Causeway and ditch	18	Early medieval	Access to Eilean Mor
	Charnel pit	14	Late medieval	Disarticulated human remains in chapel foundation trench
	Construction slot	17	Early medieval?	
	Cross-wall	11	Late medieval	Lime mortared, cutting off west end of island
	Drainage ditch	7	Post-medieval	Associated with str V
	Drainage ditch	18	Early medieval	Associated with agricultural activity?
	Enclosure			Area with lazy beds defined by (earlier) banks
	Garden	12	Post-medieval	
	Gatehouse	18	Post-medieval	Turf and timberwork
	Graves	1, 14, 17	Early historic to post-medieval	In and around the chapel
	Jetty	Unexc	Late medieval	Access to cobbled system of roads
	Kiln	8	Post-medieval	In the ruins of str H
	Lazy beds	19, 3, 7	Post-medieval	Within enclosure defined by (earlier) banks
	Middens	6	Early to late medieval	
	Middens	10	Post-medieval	Within ruins of great hall
	Path	12, 9	Late medieval	Cobbled, approximately north/south
	Ploughing	18		[18067]
	Road	6, 9, 10, 11	Late medieval	Cobbled road, great hall to chapel
	Road	9	Early medieval?	Cobbled road, great hall to chapel?
	Road	4, 10	Late medieval	Cobbled road from jetty to great hall
	Road	4	Late medieval	Cobbled road from jetty towards Eilean na Comhairle
	Timberwork defence	17, 8E, 5	Early medieval	Around perimeter of the island

Table 14.1 (cont.)
Finlaggan structures, Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle

especially on the Finlaggan River, containing minerals for deer and other animals to lick.

Neither the Neolithic stone axe (X11) from Eilean na Comhairle nor the two leaf-shaped flint arrowheads (X9, SF 19074) from Eilean Mór appear to come from meaningful Neolithic contexts. There is evidence for Bronze Age occupation on Eilean Mór. A hearth, structure 19.6, containing sherds of food vessel type pot (X15–17; SF 19524–26) could not be related to any other house remains, but in the same vicinity the truncated remains of post-holes suggested the presence of two roundhouses, structures 19.3 and 19.5, probably of prehistoric date (Illus 8.35). If the surviving arcs of post-holes for each, respectively with diameters of approximately 14.4m and 19.5m, were for housing a ring of roof posts, then the actual diameters of these houses may have been rather larger, with low exterior walls of turf and stone, like the hut circle excavated by RCAHMS (1984: 134–35; Stevenson 1985) at Cùl a' Bhaile in Jura. On this interpretation, house 19.3, a replacement for 19.5, may have been a particularly large – and prestigious? – building.

Roundhouses – ‘hut circles’ – mostly thought to be of Bronze Age date, abound in the archaeological record of Islay, rather more than those recorded in the RCAHMS inventory published in 1984. In our Finlaggan survey area there is one at Robolls (site no. 63), and in 2007 a group of three were identified 3km to the east of Finlaggan at Druim a' Chùirn, Carnbeg (NGR NR 420 680) along with a souterrain (Caldwell and Ruckley 2008: 40).

Also possibly of Bronze Age date is a burnt mound (no. 74) in the Finlaggan survey area at Kepollsmore, and another possible one (no. 50) at Cuing-sgeir, Portanellan (Illus 5.36). Only four burnt mounds in Islay were listed by the Royal Commission in its ‘Islay Inventory’, all at Borraichill Mór, near Bridgend (RCAHMS 1984: no. 246). It is probable that there are many more to be discovered now that there is more awareness of the type.

Burnt mounds (known as *fulachta fiadh* in Ireland) consist of the debris from a type of cooking, often carried out in the open air, that involved the heating of the food – stew, soup or other food with a high liquid content – with stones (‘pot-boilers’) pre-heated on a fire. The cooking vessel would often be a wooden trough set in the ground, and the heaps of cracked and broken pot-boilers accumulated round about. Many date to the Bronze Age, and one of the burnt mounds on Borraichill Mór has produced a radiocarbon determination of 1745 BC±60 (GU-1465) (Russell-White 1990: 82). This tradition of cooking survived for a very long time in this part of the world. There is possible evidence of it in medieval times on Eilean Mór (structures 19.7 and V.1), and it was reported as still being practised by the poorer elements in some of the Western Isles as late as the mid-18th century (Burt 1998: letter xxv, pp 271–72). A controversial research project in Ireland has attempted to make the case that *fulachta fiadh* were primarily for the brewing of beer or other alcoholic beverages (Quinn & Moore 2007).

Cnoc Seannnda

A small kerb cairn of Late Bronze Age type, containing a cremation burial, was erected on the summit of the mound at Cnoc Seannnda (no. 46), a prominent local landmark (Illus 5.29). Such

burial monuments are relatively common in Argyll, where they are dated to the years from about 1450 to 1200 BC (Sheridan 2012: 180). The Cnoc Seannnda mound might have been one element in a wider ritual landscape, most obviously represented by a nearby standing stone and evidence for at least one other having stood into post-medieval times (nos 47, 70). Prehistoric ritual landscapes with burial cairns, standing stones and other monuments have been identified elsewhere in Argyll, for instance at Kilmartin on the mainland and at Ardnacross and Lochbuie in Mull.

The credentials of Cnoc Seannnda as a ritual centre potentially at an even earlier date appear to be suggested by an adjacent feature (the ‘chamber’), cut into the summit of the mound, containing a barbed and tanged flint arrowhead (X10) of chalcolithic or Bronze Age type (Illus 7.10). Both chamber and arrowhead, however, present challenges of interpretation. The chamber, approximately 4m long and less than 2m wide, is lined with orthostats. The arrowhead was recovered from clayey silt [21016] in the bottom of the chamber, and there is, therefore, a strong case to regard it as evidence for the date of this structure. There is no meaningful stratigraphic relationship between it and the kerb cairn, but since the latter clearly had a funereal role, it was an obvious line of inquiry to consider that the chamber had been a tomb. In favour of this interpretation that it was a grave were comparisons with a unique, complex Late Neolithic and later burial mound at Millin Bay at the tip of the Ards Peninsula in Co Down, Ireland, excavated in 1953 (Collins & Waterman 1955). This monument was found to include a complicated sequence of structures, including a ‘long cist’, defined by stone slabs forming a subterranean chamber about 5.5 by 0.8m. It contained the bones of at least 15 individuals, neatly sorted and stacked. Around it were several small cists containing cremation burials.

There are, however, no traces of human bones in the Cnoc Seannnda chamber, nor any other clear signs that it functioned as a place of burial. More pertinent than the comparison with the Millin Bay long cist is one of two souterrains excavated just a few miles away in Islay at a prehistoric to earlier medieval site at Kilellan Farm, Ardnave. Souterrain 118 was created in a trench averaging 1.1m wide and 1m deep with battered sides. The souterrain, of unverified length in excess of 5m, was gently curved in plan and came to a rounded end. It was lined with orthostats. There was no evidence for a roof, although horizontal slabs were laid on top of some of the orthostats. Adjacent to this souterrain and apparently of similar date was an oval pit of similar construction, 2.1 by 1.45 by 0.75m deep, with three covering stone lintels still in place. Souterrain and pit belong in the excavator’s phase 3.1, Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age. No function was suggested for either in the excavation report (Ritchie 2005: 32–36). Souterrains, although a well-known archaeological phenomenon in late prehistoric and early historic Scotland and beyond, vary considerably in size, structure and supposed function (for example, storage, concealment and escape). The similarity between Kilellan and Cnoc Seannnda is particularly close. While a key characteristic of most souterrains is that they were roofed with stone lintels, it may just be a coincidence that both Kilellan and Cnoc Seannnda had these removed in antiquity, or perhaps it can be supposed that they were roofed with timbers, as, for instance, some in eastern Scotland (Armit 2000: 581–82).

The chamber contained a thick deposit of rubble [21006] over clayey silt [21016], the two together perhaps representing the one action of filling in or levelling up the void of the chamber when it finally fell out of use. The separation into two archaeological layers resulted from smaller, finer material percolating downwards through the looser rubble. This infill material may have had no direct relationship to the function of the chamber, merely being scraped up or dug out from round about. Apart from arrowhead X10, the clayey silt deposit 21016 also included X30, a bone artefact (Illus 7.9) identified as a whirligig (toy). Comparisons (see Chapter C1 of the Catalogue) suggest an Iron Age date for it, but this is by no means certain. Both artefacts could have been dumped in the chamber when it was being filled in at the end of use. Levelling up the interior of the chamber, over rubble [21006], was a layer of clayey silt [21003] from which were recovered five cattle bones and one red deer bone (Table C9.15r in the Catalogue).

On the basis of this interpretation a date for the construction of the chamber is uncertain, as also the length of time it remained in use. We are inclined, on the basis of its similarity to souterrain 118 at Kilellan, to suggest that it dates to the Late Bronze or the Iron Age. Souterrains appear normally to belong in a domestic context, with a direct relationship with houses or forts. That does not appear to have been the case with the Cnoc Seannnda chamber, located on a prominent mound.

Perhaps of relevance is Mine Howe at Tankerness in Orkney (Canmore ID 2998), where there is another example of an underground chamber, datable by sherds of pottery to the Iron Age, dug into the top of a natural mound, about 3m high within an oval ditched enclosure about 41 by 37m. The Mine Howe chamber is considerably more complex than the one at Cnoc Seannnda. Its walling is of drystone, and it has steep steps descending to an intermediate landing and two side chambers, and then downwards to a chamber, about 2.8m in length, with a corbelled stone roof and flagged stone floor at a depth of 7.4m from the surface of the mound. Around the mound there is considerable evidence for Iron Age occupation and metalworking activity. Coincidentally (?), the neighbouring glacial moraine of Long Howe is surmounted with a Bronze Age kerb cairn, the make-up of which included several Mesolithic microliths. Downes and Card (2003) have provided a detailed description of the Mine Howe chamber and considered its possible functions. They have noted that it is not set in a domestic context and dismissed the notion that it was primarily a well or a cistern. They favour a ritual interpretation.

A ritual purpose would seem to be a likely, if vague, interpretation for the Cnoc Seannnda chamber.

Finlaggan, c 700 BC – c AD 800

The archaeological evidence for the Iron Age and early historic period in Islay and more generally in Scotland consists primarily of occupation sites, perceived to be high status and often characterised as defended sites. They include forts, duns and crannogs (Nieke 1983: 299–325; Nieke 1984, 2: 114–59). The discovery through our excavations that Eilean na Comhairle had a past including both a dun and a crannog is a significant addition to our understanding of Finlaggan.

Both dun and crannog may have been largely coeval and occupied for a long period of time. The crannog, constructed of

brushwood and peat held together by timbers, may be perceived as a reinforcement and extension to a natural island, its origins, on the basis of a radiocarbon determination, lying about the time of Christ. A second radiocarbon date indicates rebuilding or refurbishment in the 7th century AD. For what it is worth, these two dates fit within the two main periods identified by Crone (1994) for Scottish crannogs, from 850 BC to AD 200 and from the 4th to the 7th century AD. The dun, a substantially built roundhouse, can be assumed to be founded on natural rock. Our work at Finlaggan provides no information on the date of this dun or duns in general, but the recovery from the loch of the bronze zoomorphic brooch (X29) of the late 1st century BC at least holds out the prospect that someone of high status was in residence here at that time.

Eilean na Comhairle is an example of a type of Iron Age settlement site often referred to as island duns and island brochs, well known from work by the University of Edinburgh in Lewis at Dun Bharabhat and Loch na Beirigh (Harding 2000: 311–16). RCAHMS (1984: 153–57) inventoried 11 ‘crannogs and related structures’ in Islay, not including Eilean na Comhairle. Six of them have obvious surface remains of medieval or more recent buildings, but in the light of work at Finlaggan it is possible that further research will show that some of these have a history of occupation extending back to the prehistoric era. The crannog at Ardnave and ‘fortified island’ in Loch Allalaidh (RCAHMS 1984: 153, 155) look likely to be island duns. The Ardnave crannog has in its centre traces of at least five small slab-built structures resembling cists, on average about 0.6 by 0.5m and 0.5m deep, three with capstones. They are possibly a similar phenomenon to the box-like structure [23038] in the interior of the Eilean na Comhairle dun.

The date of the causeway connecting Eilean na Comhairle to Eilean Mór is not known, but it would seem reasonable to suppose that access to the smaller island by causeway was provided from prehistoric times by way of the larger island. Clear indications of Iron Age occupation of Eilean Mór were not identified, although some of the truncated features in trench 19, especially the possible roundhouses 19.4 and 19.8, might tentatively be advanced as candidates.

The discovery of a lintel grave [1050] in trench 1 pushes burials on Eilean Mór back to the 7th century, still well short of the lifetime of Columba (521–97) and his follower Findlugán, but more excavation backed by research on dating might well have bridged this chronological gap. Graves of Early Christian date, including lintel graves and long cists, often occur in large groups with no obvious signs of an enclosure or church (Thomas 1971: 50; Maldonado 2011, 2013, 2016). The distribution of such cemeteries extends to Wales, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Scotland in the Early Christian period (Thomas 1971: 48–58; Edwards and Lane 1992: *passim*). They are known at the important religious centre at Whithorn in Galloway. There a substantial group has been excavated in a cemetery dating to the period from c 500 to c 730 AD. Some were wholly or partly lined or covered with wood rather than stone (Hill 1997: 70–73). Another classic example is on the Isle of Man at Balladoole, Arbory, where lintel graves are sandwiched stratigraphically between a small Iron Age fort and a pagan Norse boat-burial of the 9th century (Bersu and Wilson 1966: 10–13). In Ireland lintel graves are usually dated to the 7th century or later (O’Brien 2003: 67).

Lintel graves have been excavated in the West Highlands and Islands, a notable example being those (described as ‘cists’) at Galson in Lewis (Ponting 1990). A radiocarbon determination from a leg bone in one of them suggests a burial date in the late 4th century. This seems surprisingly early, but there is no good evidence to equate such graves with Christian burial. One lintel grave and two graves with side slabs but no capstones (‘long cists’) have also been excavated at Chapelhall, Innellan, on the east coast of Cowal, along with other burials. A radiocarbon determination from a long bone in the lintel grave suggests a burial date about the late 10th century (Atkinson 2002: 654–56). Four lintel graves are recorded at Poltalloch in the Kilmartin area of mainland Argyll (RCAHMS 1992: no. 91) and others at Glenforsa in Mull (Fisher 1997: 194).

The association of St Findlugán with Eilean Mór in Loch Finlaggan does perhaps suggest that this was from early times a place of worship. It is not impossible that some of the tenuous traces of structures in trench 17 relate to an early historic chapel. There appears, however, to be no compelling reason to accept the suggestion picked up by RCAHMS (1984: 224) that the small D-shaped enclosure (our no. 44 D) near the Portanellan/Finlaggan loch edge was a burial ground, whether of early historic or more recent date.

The naming of Eilean Mór after St Findlugán and the possible presence of an early burial ground raise the question of whether the island might have been an important religious centre, a monastery, in early times. There is evidence for early monasteries in Islay, most obviously at Kilchoman and on Nave Island in the form of large enclosures and the presence of early historic sculpture (Caldwell 2011: 148–50, 155–56; Caldwell 2017: 25, 341 n38). None of the traces of enclosure banks or fortifications excavated on Eilean Mór, of which more below, could be attributed to the early historic period, and there is no early sculpture.

A potential comparison between Kilchoman and Finlaggan in early historic times is worth further examination, since these two places are known to have been the main Islay residences of the lords of the Isles in the later medieval period. At Kilchoman the predecessor of the medieval lordly residence would appear to have been a multivallate fort, now flattened and built over, primarily known from aerial photographs. It must have been either in or adjacent to the supposed early monastic enclosure. It can be compared to the two well-preserved multivallate forts in Islay, Dùn Nosebridge and Dùn Gàidhre, neither of which can be dated, but both of which are suspected to have been occupied in early historic times (Caldwell 2011: 131–32, 134; Caldwell 2017: 21). So at Kilchoman a medieval lordship centre may have been prefigured by an early monastic centre with an associated lordly residence.

The case for a similar development at Finlaggan is very slight. It would depend on the recognition of the Eilean na Comhairle dun as a significant early, high-status centre. It would also require very considerable assumptions to be made about lintel grave 1050 on Eilean Mór being evidence for an associated cemetery and early church. If they existed, positioned on the flat, level summit of the island, which would have been deemed the best plot of land, then, perhaps that could be taken as an indication of the primacy of an ecclesiastical authority over a secular one, as far as occupation and use of Finlaggan in historic times is concerned. It

is difficult to see how any of the excavated remains on Eilean Mór could provide corroboration for such a development.

It is worth recalling at this point that there is no evidence that Eilean Mór was known as ‘the Island of St Finlaggan’ any earlier than the 15th century, and that Adomnán’s account of Findlugán saving St Columba’s life provides no information on Findlugán other than that he was one of Columba’s brethren (Sharpe 1991: 173). The possibility should be considered that the cult of Findlugán was brought to Islay from Ireland comparatively late. The place there with which he is particularly associated is the civil parish of Tamlaght Finlagan (Co Londonderry) in the barony of Keenaght, from the 12th century the territory of the O’Cathans. Angus Óg, the chief of the MacDonalds who fought for King Robert Bruce at Bannockburn in 1314, married Áine Ní Chatháin, daughter of the chief of the O’Cathans. Her wedding retinue is said to have included the ancestors of several families in the Isles and Highlands (MacPhail 1914: 20). Perhaps Áine also introduced veneration for Findlugán.

Unless or until more evidence, probably archaeological, becomes available for religious activity on Eilean Mór in early historic times, it would seem wise not to assume that it was a monastic centre.

Other Iron Age or early historic occupation of our study area is not particularly obvious. The island dwelling (no. 61) of Eilean Mhuireill in Loch Finlaggan, adjacent to the land of Robolls, is clearly later medieval or post-medieval in its present form, but, as with Eilean na Comhairle, its origins as a settlement site may lie very much earlier. The fort (no. 69), Dùn Cheapasaidh Mór, does not appear to be typical of many other Iron Age forts in that its stone rampart, of which there are only slight traces, seems to have been set back from the edge of the summit on which it is positioned. There is at least the possibility that it was an estate centre or farm for an early historic predecessor of the medieval and later land of Kepollsmore. A sub-circular enclosure at Druim a’ Chùirn (no. 22), Sean-ghairt, defined by a low turf-covered rubble bank, has been suggested as a palisaded enclosure or fort – of Iron Age date? Whether the occupation of these sites was contemporary or overlapping could probably only be ascertained by further field-work and excavation.

It is to be hoped that a major environmental and geographical research project – Waves of Colonisation in the Sea of Moyle – now underway and led by the University of Southampton will throw some light on local weather, land use, etc at Finlaggan, as well as the issue of whether there was a significant influx of human populations at any time in this period.

Finlaggan, c AD 800 – c 1300

No structures or deposits on either Eilean na Comhairle or Eilean Mór deemed to be of the Viking age (c 800 – c 1100) have been identified.

The Finlaggan castle

There can be no doubting that Finlaggan was a centre of importance in the earlier medieval period (c 1100 – c 1300). The most obvious sign of that is the large stone tower on Eilean na Comhairle (Illus 6.22). Its presence was not suspected prior to excavation, not least because there are no early records of such a stronghold.

Remarkably, we do not even know its name. Eilean Mór was described as the island of St Finlaggan when a charter was given out there in 1427 (Munro & Munro 1986: no. 21), but the first mention of Eilean na Comhairle is in Donald Monro's 1549 description of it as the site of a council house (Munro 1961: 56–57). It cannot be identified among the castles listed in the description of the Hebrides incorporated in John of Fordun's *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation* (Skene 1872: 2.39–40). The date and authorship of this account are the subject of debate (Oram 2017: 256), but for Islay, in recording only two mansions and the castle of Dunyvaig as residences of the lords of the Isles, it can be deduced that it is reflecting a situation when an earlier fort at Kilchoman and the castle at Finlaggan had disappeared to be replaced by 'mansions', and a time prior to Dunyvaig Castle being granted to John, the progenitor of the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig, by his father, John, the first lord of the Isles, who probably died in 1387 (Caldwell 2017: 55–58).

The description 'castle' was not used in connection with Finlaggan until recent times, for example by RCAHMS in their inventory (1984: 275). That Finlaggan at an early stage had a castle name is surely hinted at by a shieling on the land of Portanellan called Airigh nan Caisteal (no. 34).

The castle consisted not just of the tower on Eilean na Comhairle but also of a bailey occupying all of Eilean Mór (Illus 14.1). It thus conformed in plan and concept to a European model in which there was a strong tower or donjon, which provided living quarters and extra security for the lord, and adjacent to it one or more baileys or courtyards containing other facilities. These might include a hall, kitchens, a chapel, workshops, other accommodation and storage space. What was unique about Finlaggan was that this castle occupied two islands. Integral to its plan were two causeways, one providing access from the loch-side to the bailey (Eilean Mór) and the other connecting the bailey with the tower. A point that might be worth exploring in any future campaign of archaeological research is whether the later medieval separation of the west end of Eilean Mór from the main part of the island by a cross-wall reflects an earlier division between an inner and outer bailey.

The limited evidence from our excavations on Eilean Mór does not necessarily indicate that the perimeter timberwork was a serious defence, even taking account of the obstacle provided by the surrounding loch. Its primary functions may have been to define the physical limits of the site and provide a barrier for unauthorised access or egress by either humans or animals. Short lengths of it were identified in trenches 5 and 8E and less certainly in trench 17, all of which we have cautiously identified as the one system. In trench 5 a turf bank faced with stone supported the stakes of a palisade. Stratigraphically it was earlier than a later medieval cobbled path. In trench 8E a palisade slot was identified on the steep edge of the island, possibly with an associated defensive tower, and the continuation of this palisade slot was possibly picked up in trench 17. The main access to the island may have been via the stone causeway to the apex of Eilean Mór, crossing a ditch [18032], perhaps more to do with drainage than defence. If there were a gatehouse or gate it may have been totally destroyed by later activity, its outer edge being reflected by the drainage gully 18050. The archaeological evidence for the presence of this causeway in the earlier medieval period or earlier depends on the recovery of a sherd of pottery (SF 18126) and a

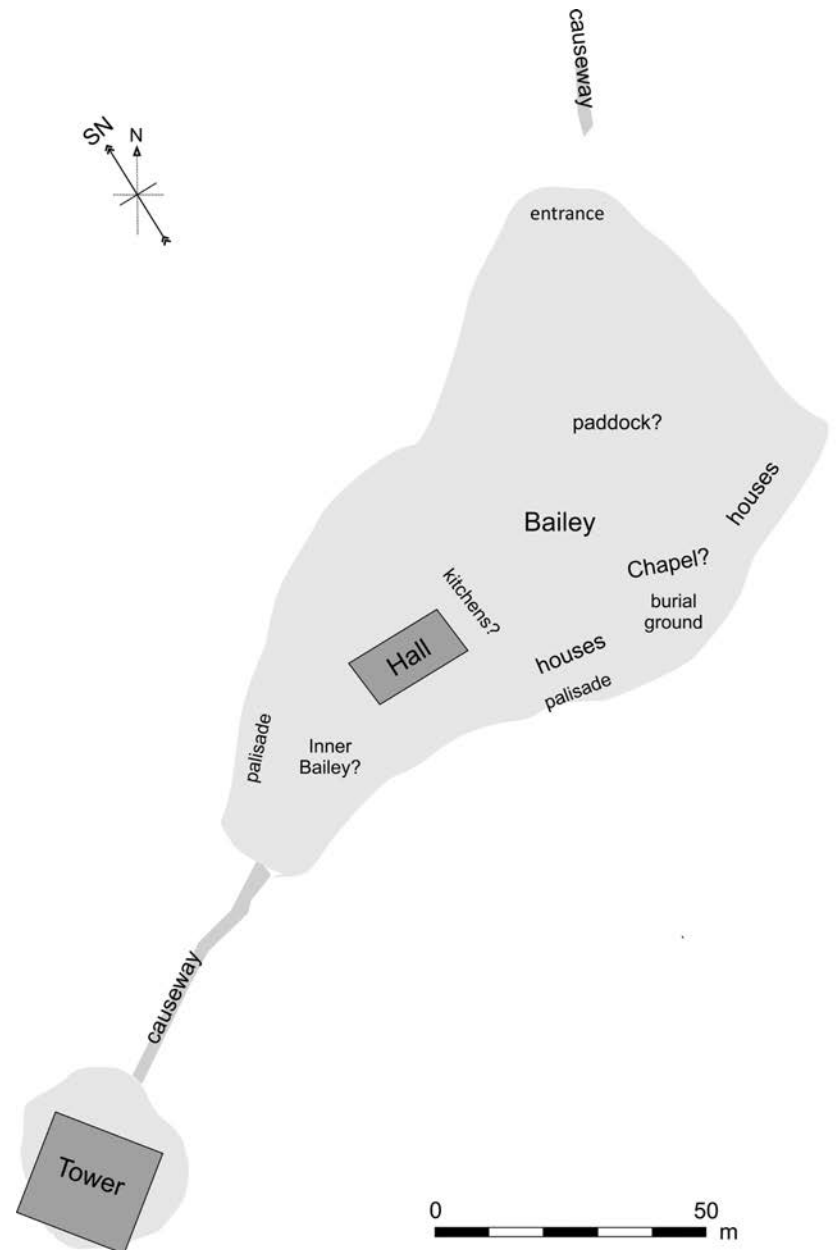


Illustration 14.1
Plan of the castle, earlier medieval Finlaggan

dress pin (C10) from the cobbled path extending from the causeway on to the island.

Islands in freshwater lochs were often chosen by magnates and lairds in what is now Scotland for the erection of castles. Examples from the 13th century include the Earl of Carrick's castle in Loch Doon, Ayrshire (Canmore ID 63601); Lochindorb Castle, a stronghold of the Comyns in Moray (Canmore ID 15463); and the Campbell castle of Innis Chonnell in Loch Awe, Argyll (Canmore ID 23162). Excavation in the future may well show that these and other island castles superseded undefended centres or timberwork defences.

Practically all medieval castles in the West Highlands and Islands were constructed adjacent to the sea – hence the recent



Illustration 14.2
John de Courcy's late 12th-century tower at Carrickfergus in Ulster

interest among castellologists in the concept of ‘galley castles’, ones which dominated the seaways of the Hebrides and west coasts of Scotland (Martin 2017). None of them appear to be close parallels in architectural terms to Finlaggan. As we will argue below, perhaps there were particular reasons to do with administration and state ritual that made Finlaggan an appropriate place for a major castle.

Excavation was too limited to comment much on the range of structures at Finlaggan and their function, apart from the tower and hall. The need for a great hall on Eilean Mór as well as a large stone tower on Eilean na Comhairle, where, on the basis of the midden material excavated in trench 25, feasting took place, defines the importance of the castle. The presence of both suggests a division between private and more public space, as well as clearly indicating the high status of its lords, the extent of the resources they commanded, and their need for ostentatious display and giving. In having both a large stone tower and a separate hall, the castle at Finlaggan compares with John de Courcy’s castle at Carrickfergus in Ulster in the late 12th century (Illus 14.2). The presence of both at Finlaggan probably reflects the considerable numbers in the lords’ retinue and the need to provide food and shelter, both within the hall for many of them.

Earlier medieval (1100–1300) material was found in most trenches on Eilean Mór (see Table 14.1), albeit mostly in small areas due to the limited extent of our excavations. This would

appear to suggest that this island was fully occupied at least some of the time in this period. No obvious traces of earlier medieval buildings, with the possible exception of structure 19.7, a hearth and pit, were identified in trench 19, although an area of 100 sq m was excavated to natural deposits. These were covered with spreads of silty loam and other sediments identified as subsoil (Table 8.4, Illus 8.26, 8.27) underlying later lazy beds and post-medieval houses. It is possible that these so-called subsoil deposits represent the residual remains of an earlier medieval phase of agricultural activity. The recovery from trench 19 of F51, a horseshoe, and F52, a horseshoe nail, both datable to the 13th or 14th century, raises the possibility that this area of the island might have served as a paddock.

Limited excavation in trenches 2 and 12 suggests the presence of earlier medieval buildings, structures K.3, 12.4 and 12.7. The concentration of sherds of wheel-made pottery recovered from later medieval and post-medieval contexts in trench 12, many apparently grubbed up from earlier medieval deposits, might suggest that, just as in later times, this was a food preparation area associated with the great hall.

More substantial evidence for a house was recovered from trench 8. House H.1 there consisted of the residual remains of a turf-walled house with central hearth and roof supported on crucks, probably dating prior to about 1220 (Illus 14.3 A). It was perhaps about 12 by 7m in overall size, assuming that house H,

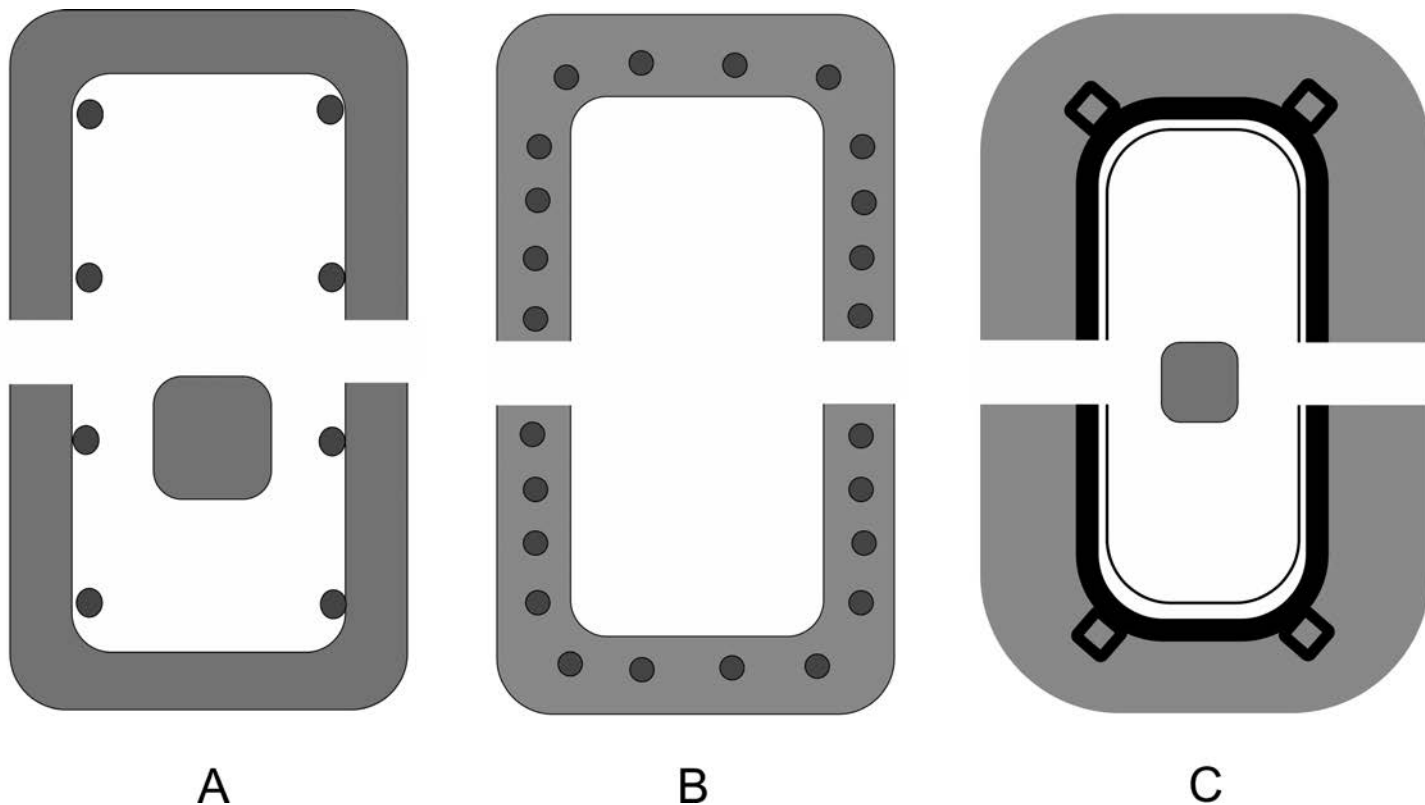


Illustration 14.3

Diagrammatic plans, not to scale, of medieval house types. (A) house (based on structure H.1) with turf and stone walls and post-holes internally for supporting crucks for the roof. There is a central hearth. (B) house (based on structure V.1) with post-holes within its turf and stone walls for supporting the upper walls and roof. (C) house (based on structure 12.2) with turf walls faced internally with stone and wattling. There is a central hearth and corner-stone settings for supporting roof couples

which succeeded it, had the same footprint. Iron artefacts were recovered from two of its post-holes – F90, a possible rake tooth, and the shank of a nail (SF 8440). These could just have been deposited accidentally, but, as with an iron knife found under a post-pad in a 13th-century house at Kilchoman, Islay (Ellis 2015: 24), some deliberate ritual or magic intent may have been involved. Other more obvious examples of this can be found in later medieval and post-medieval contexts at Finlaggan.

Structure H.1 is an early example of our broad category of type A houses, described in Chapter 5 as oval or barrel-shaped in plan, or rectangular with rounded corners. They were of turf and/or drystone construction, often with opposed entrances in their long sides. Neither H.1 nor V.2 had load-bearing walls, and they relied on crucks for supporting their roofs. A mid-13th-century house that is broadly comparable has been excavated at Tildarg in Co Antrim. It had low sod and clay walls with an overall size of about 16 by 6m, and the excavator suggested that it had a hipped roof supported on crucks. There was evidence for a line of stake-holes against the interior of one internal end wall (Brannon 1984; Horning 2001: 377–81). Comparisons between any medieval and later houses at Finlaggan and ‘Irish cabins’, ‘creats’ and the like, some represented on 16th- and 17th-century plans (Horning 2001: 376–79; Andrews 2008: 54), will remain very general until there is more detailed archaeological research.

Remains of houses, probably of earlier medieval date, were also partially excavated in trench 7. Structure V.3 was merely represented by a cut in the natural clay edged with stake-holes. Perhaps this is a glimpse at a house with wattle-work walls, such as were prevalent in Scandinavian towns and settlements, for instance Dublin (Wallace 1992), in earlier medieval times. Enough of V.2

was uncovered to suggest a building with an internal width of a bit less than 4m, and a roof supported on crucks, or timber uprights adjacent to the interior wall faces. The interior of V.2 appears to have been cut out of the natural clay, creating a sunken floor. If so, parallels may be sought with sunken-floored buildings elsewhere in the Scandinavian world. There was a central hearth adjacent to a rectangular pit about 1.45 by 0.75m, by 0.5m deep, possibly originally lined with wood or containing a wooden trough. The recovery from it of a sherd (SF 7323) of oxidised gritty ware indicates a date no earlier than the 12th century. No heat-affected stones, such as might have been used for heating liquid, were observed or collected in or adjacent to the trough, and so, perhaps, it was not used for cooking or brewing but for some other industrial process, like retaining water used in quenching iron being worked by a smith. A small 10th-century sunken-floored building (A5) next to the feasting hall at Hofstaðir in Iceland has been interpreted as a smithy (Lucas 2009: 103–07).

The largest and most imposing structure on Eilean Mór was phase 1 of building A, representing the remains of a relatively large, prestigious hall, the main public building on the island. As originally built in the 12th or 13th century it probably had an earth or paved floor and a central fireplace. It may have been roofed with type A and B slates. Reused jamb stones in the phase 2 hall door, if from the phase 1 hall, suggest an entrance of some grandeur. If two fragments of sandstone (R32, R21) recovered from the wall of building B are from the same source, then it had nail-head decoration and, probably, a hood-mould with stops in the form of human heads (Illus 14.4).

Halls of various sizes, shapes and materials, mostly for domestic occupation, were a typical component of high-status residences

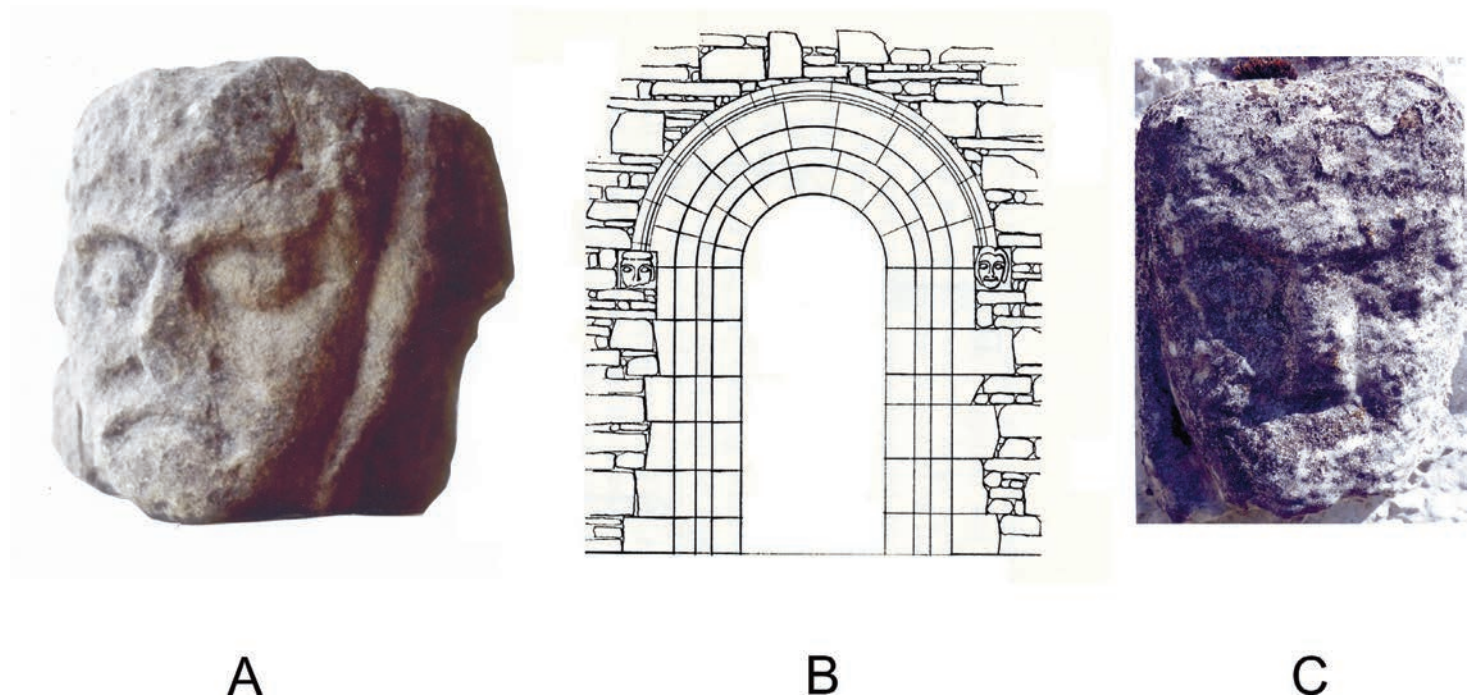


Illustration 14.4

(A) probable label stop (R32) from Finlaggan compared with (B) exterior of a doorway in the south wall of the choir of the cathedral on Lismore (after RCAHMS 1975: fig 150); (C) detail of one of the Lismore label stops (photo: Robert Hay)

in the wider European world in earlier medieval times. Useful comparisons for the Finlaggan phase I hall can be limited to rectangular masonry structures of similar or larger size. With an internal size of about 16.3 by 7m, the great hall is not too different from those of other major magnates in Scotland, like the earls of Carrick in Turnberry Castle, on the Ayrshire coast (Dixon & Wyeth 2021: 38), and the bishops of Aberdeen on an island in Bishop's Loch, Aberdeenshire, which dates prior to 1280 (Cruikshank 1944; RCAHMS 2007: 442, fig 8.26). It is considerably smaller than the mid-13th-century hall of the earls of Mar in Kildrummy Castle, Aberdeenshire. It is marginally smaller than another hall within the area of the Kingdom and Lordship of the Isles of which there are fragmentary remains in Castle Camus, Skye. That has a latrine chute near one corner and is constructed with type 1 masonry like the Finlaggan hall (Caldwell & Ruckley 2005: 113). It is, however, not much more than a quarter of the size of the hall built for King Hakon of Norway at Bergen in the mid-13th century (Simpson 1961). The hall in Caernarfon Castle, built by Edward I of England in the early 1290s as his main administrative centre in north Wales, was comparable in size to Bergen (Peers 1917: 36), while King Henry III's hall of the mid-13th century in Dublin Castle can be deduced from early plans to have been even larger (McNeill 1997: 46–47). All of these were completely dwarfed in size by King William Rufus's hall at Westminster, built in 1097. These comparisons may be seen as useful context in further considerations of the significance of the kingdom or lordship of which Finlaggan may have been the administrative hub.

There is evidence for earlier medieval lime-mortared masonry halls in Orkney, for instance at Tuquoy on Westray (Owen 2003: 139–41; 2023: 230, 232), but none appear to have been as large as the Finlaggan hall, with the exception of the bishop's palace in Kirkwall, Orkney, possibly dating to the 12th century. This hall, almost 26 by about 7.6m internally, was at first-floor level (Simpson 1961: 65–77). This was a typical arrangement in many earlier medieval halls, with ground-floor storage and food preparation areas. That was how King Hakon's hall in Bergen (actually at second-floor level) was designed (Simpson 1961: 23–29). There are examples of earlier medieval first-floor halls (some of them called 'hall-houses' by architectural historians) in the west of Scotland and Ireland, including a 13th-century one of the MacNaughtons on Fraoch Eilean on Loch Awe (RCAHMS 1974: 213) and Greencastle in Co Down, erected by Hugh de Lacy II in the mid-13th century (McNeill 1997: 88–91). If the Finlaggan phase I hall were at first-floor level, the flooring of such a wide space would have required the floor joists to be given sufficient rigidity by the insertion of Samson posts supporting a central bresummer or girder. This was the case at Fraoch Eilean and less certainly for the hall of Achanduin Castle, Lismore, a residence built about 1295–1310, probably by the MacDougalls (Caldwell & Stell 2017: 28, 57, 58).

There are good reasons, which will be explained more fully below, for assigning a late 14th-century date to the chapel on Eilean Mór, but it may incorporate walling from an earlier medieval predecessor or occupy the site of one. The recovery of two pieces of type B roof slates from 17004, the make-up layer created prior to the erection of the chapel, might also be seen as a clue that there was an earlier building here. Some of the sandstone

fragments recorded from the chapel ruins, including R22, a piece of red sandstone with a roll moulding, may also be recycled from an earlier church. R30, a possible fragment of the cap of a nook shaft found in nearby trench 6, could have strayed when an earlier chapel was destroyed or demolished. They might, however, be recycled stonework from the demolition of the tower on Eilean na Comhairle.

The case can certainly be made that the burial ground was in use in earlier medieval times, perhaps even continuously so since early historic times. The charnel deposit of disarticulated human bones packed into the foundation trench of the chapel's north wall is best interpreted as a gathering of remains from burials disturbed when the chapel was being erected. Cut by it was an earlier coffin burial [grave 14.6] capped with stones.

The foundation trench for the chapel's east wall cuts into a burial pit [17025] containing at least two adults and a child (Illus 9.25 and 9.26). The only further dating evidence that can be provided for it is the observation that its fill contains pieces of mortar, interpreted as contamination from the erection or destruction of a nearby building. It is unlikely that lime mortar would have been in use locally any earlier than the 12th century. This burial pit is markedly different in character from the medieval and later graves encountered elsewhere in the burial ground, and was presumably always at the edge of the area of burials, if not separated from them by a predecessor of the present chapel. In general, multiple graves are not the norm in medieval Europe. We may be witnessing here, as in later medieval times, the interment of individuals whose deposition in the main burial ground was sanctioned, for one reason or another. A possible explanation is that they were victims of a plague or epidemic.

R6 and R7 are high-status grave-slabs that the author believes date to earlier medieval times and show considerable Scandinavian influence. The ancestry that the MacDonalds claimed for themselves was Irish and 'Celtic', distinctly not Scandinavian, despite their descent from Somerled (Old Norse Sumarliði, 'summer warrior'). These slabs are important evidence for the ongoing impact of Scandinavian culture (Caldwell 2024: 69). In trench 9, 9013 looks like it might be a predecessor of the later medieval cobbled road running from the great hall to the chapel.

The stone tower on Eilean na Comhairle would have been the most conspicuous structure at earlier medieval Finlaggan in terms of its bulk and role as lordly residence. No evidence was traced for a defensive wall around Eilean na Comhairle or for a gate at the causeway end on that island. There was no readily usable space around the tower exterior, and the island edge may only have been reinforced with boulders (Illus 6.20). There is evidence for other rectangular stone towers in Orkney and Caithness, believed to have been erected for Norse noblemen. The best known are Cubbie Roo's Castle on the island of Wyre, the mid-12th-century home of Kolbein Hruga, and Old Wick Castle on the coast of Caithness, possibly built by Earl Harald Maddadson about 1200 (Gibbon 2017). These towers, however, were very much smaller than the one at Finlaggan. Cubbie Roo's was less than 8m square overall, and Old Wick was only about 7.3 by 5m. They probably belonged to a different architectural tradition and functioned in a different way than the Finlaggan tower.

The Finlaggan tower was of a size and type identified in castle studies as 'Norman keeps'. The use of sandstone dressings

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and the internal cross-wall are features of other large masonry towers built in Britain and Ireland in the 12th and 13th centuries. While towers of this type and date may have been erected in royal castles at Edinburgh (Fernie 1987: 401) and Jedburgh (Canmore ID 57114), any expectation by castle experts that any more will be discovered within the bounds of present-day Scotland is not apparent.

The Finlaggan tower, estimated to have been about 19 by 19m overall (about 21m square including a plinth), would have been of a handsome size compared with other better documented and preserved examples, for instance that of the bishops of Durham in Norham Castle on the border with Scotland, about 25.6 by 18.3m, as rebuilt in the second half of the 12th century (Dixon & Marshall 1993); Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland, about 17 by 17.7m, erected by John de Courcy from about 1178 to 1195 (McNeill 1981: 42); and the keep in Carlisle Castle, begun by King Henry I of England, 17.9 by 20m, and completed by King David I of Scotland (McCarthy et al 1990: 119–20). The only other such tower within the lands of the Kingdom of the Isles is at Castle Rushen in the Isle of Man. Of these three towers – Carrickfergus, Carlisle and Rushen – Carrickfergus is the closest

to Finlaggan in terms of distance, less than 80 miles (125km) as the crow flies and not much further in sailing distance.

Castle Rushen was one of the main administrative and residential centres of the kings of the Isles. At its core is a rectangular tower, about 18 by 19m, not much of which survives or is readily visible. Its masonry is described as limestone rubble, roughly dressed (Illus 14.5), but never really squared (8–18 inches long; c 203–457mm) and as a rule fairly well coursed (c 8 inches to the course) (O’Neil 1951: 2). This is similar to the surviving Finlaggan wall facing (Illus 13.8). Castle Rushen was built for a king of the Isles in the late 12th or early 13th century. Recent scholarship favours the idea that the king in question was Rognvald Godredsson, great-grandson of Godred Crovan, who reigned 1188–1226 (Davey 2013: 57, 63). He can be considered as a contender to be the builder of the Finlaggan tower.

Although the breakup of the Isles into two separate kingdoms may only finally have come about in the mid-13th century (Caldwell 2009a), many of the Isles may have been under the effective lordship of Somerled and then his descendants continuously from the 1150s. The first MacSorley clearly identified in contemporary sources with the lordship of Islay was Angus Mor,



Illustration 14.5

Castle Rushen tower, Isle of Man, from south-west. The phase 1 masonry of similar date and style to the Finlaggan tower can be seen in the main block above the large plinth

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who flourished in the second half of the 13th century (Caldwell 2017: 33–47). Angus was a great-grandson of Somerled and grandfather of John MacDonald, first lord of the Isles. Angus could well have inherited Islay, including the castle at Finlaggan, from his father, Donald, and grandfather Ranald. Ranald, who possibly died in 1207 and was described in contemporary sources as a king, has to be considered as an alternative candidate to King Rognvald as the builder of the Finlaggan tower. There is potential confusion, as pointed out by David Sellar (2000: 195–98), in early sources between King Rognvald and Ranald, son of Somerled, a problem not solved, in this writer's opinion, by Archie Duncan's analysis of the original text of one of the main sources for their deeds, the *Chronica* of Roger of Howden (Duncan 1999: 143 and n51; cf McDonald 2007: 110).

In Britain and Ireland the erection of large rectangular stone towers was essentially limited to great Anglo-French lords and kings. None are known to have been built by Scottish magnates. The erection of two within the Kingdom of the Isles must be

interpreted as a political statement, as well as a sign of the wealth and connections of the ruling class.

Alan Macniven has drawn attention to a group of farm names around or close to Loch Finlaggan (Illus 14.6). They consist of the Gaelic generic *baile* ('town') followed by a personal name – thus Ballachlaven, Ballighillan, Ballimartin, Balole and Balulive, the townships, respectively, of Clement, Gillan, Martin, Olaf and Uilbh (Macniven 2015: 64–67; Caldwell 2017: 142). Macniven surmises that these names were coined in the 12th or 13th century and may reflect a restructuring of estates and new grants of lands to these named individuals. The obvious context would be a takeover of Islay from the descendants of Godred Crovan by Somerled and his progeny in the years after Somerled's victory over King Godred Olafsson in 1156. The clustering of the lands of these named individuals around Finlaggan might suggest that they were an elite group with obligations to their lord, including defence of his castle.

Whether or not one of them was the actual builder of the castle at Finlaggan, its occupancy by the MacSorleys for most of

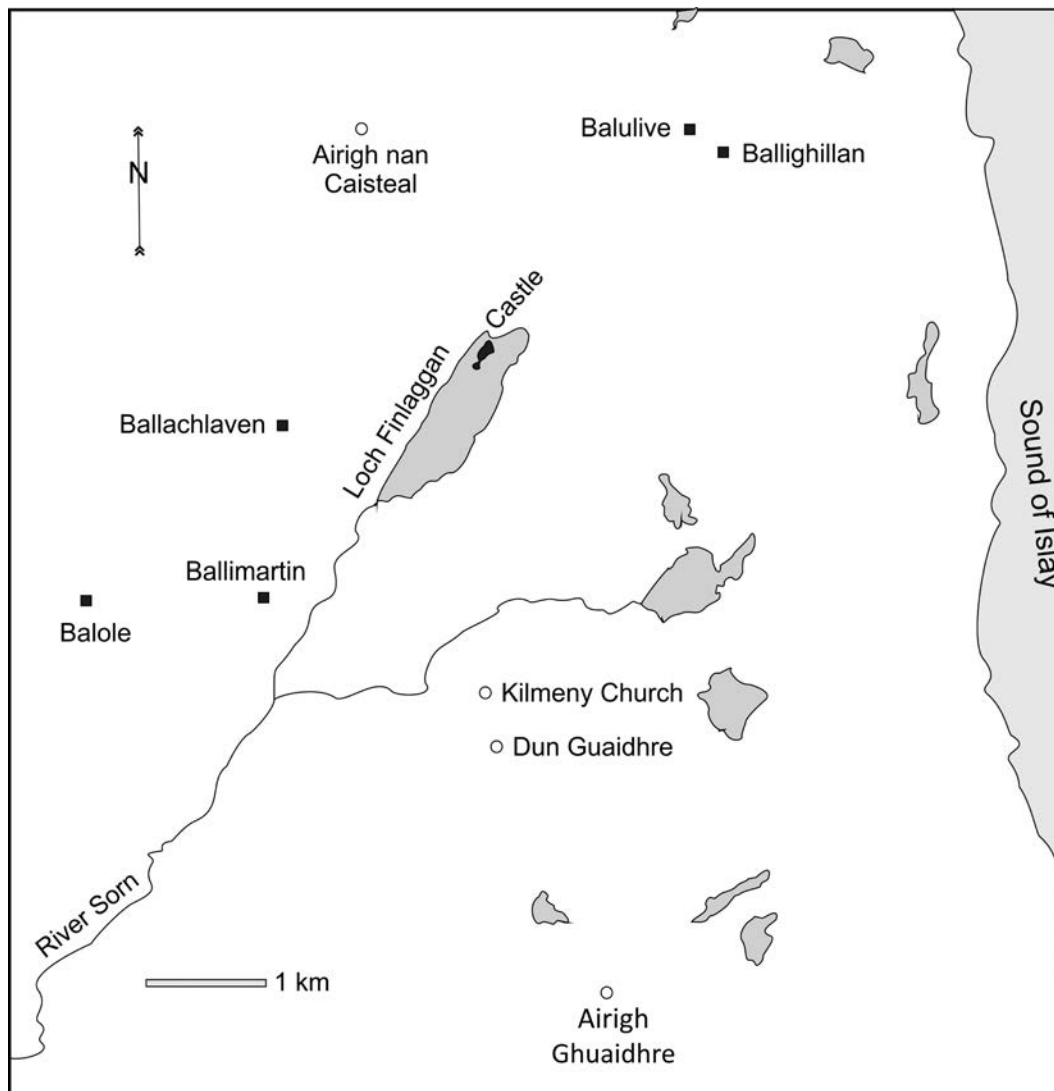


Illustration 14.6

Map of the area round Loch Finlaggan with names of places of possible relevance to the castle at Finlaggan

its existence is strongly suggested by the contents of the midden adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle, with its many sherds of pottery from Lowland Scotland but none from England nor the Isle of Man. The midden in any case is best interpreted as the refuse from fine dining or feasting by a lordly household, not that of an administrative officer or a garrison. Their diet was probably broadly similar to that of other aristocratic households across much of northern Europe (Bertelsen 2011: 132). Nowadays Islay is home in winter to large flocks of wild geese, especially Greenland white-fronted and greylag geese. There are few bones of such birds from the midden (Table C10.2 in the Catalogue), perhaps indicating that occupation of the tower was largely seasonal, confined to the summer months.

The meat consumed consisted of good cuts of meat of the four main food animals, cattle, sheep, pig and deer, all raised locally and much of it served up at table roasted rather than in stews. From her study of the age structure of the cattle cull (Catalogue chapter C9), Nicola Murray has deduced that the production of quality beef and veal for upper-class dining was as important as dairying, presumably mostly the making of butter and cheese. The cull pattern for ovicaprids (all or mostly sheep, rather than goats?), with almost all animals being killed in their second or third year, also suggests that they were valued for their meat rather than their wool.

Once the large assemblage of larger mammal bones recovered from excavations at Peel Castle, Isle of Man, is fully published, there may be useful comparisons to be made with Finlaggan. For the periods from the 8th to the 12th century and in the 13th century the majority of the bones are cattle, with fewer sheep and far fewer pig (Freke 2002: 248–49). At Coileagan an Udail (the Udal) on North Uist, the seat of ‘a local magnate’ in the 12th and 13th century (Gaelo-Norse Period, Udal North, phases VII–IX), excavations led to the recovery of large quantities of animal bones, a study of which has been published in advance of the final excavation report. The large mammal bones are almost all cattle and sheep – almost a third cattle, two thirds sheep and a small quantity of pig. On the one hand, the high percentage of cattle slaughtered at birth is believed to be indicative of an economy that needed to produce butter and cheese rather than fine cuts of meat. On the other hand, the culling of sheep from two to five years suggests that the consumption of lamb and mutton was not the only or most important consideration in raising these animals but that acquiring their wool was a major consideration (Serjeantson 2013: 52, 56, 61).

At Cille Pheadair in South Uist, a Late Norse farmstead (phases 6–8, about 1100–1200), there was, similarly, just a small number of pigs represented, but sheep were about 58% of the whole large mammal assemblage and cattle only about 35%. As at the Udal, a high percentage of the cattle were culled in their first year (Parker Pearson et al 2018: 419–48). A similar pattern can be detected at the larger Late Norse settlement at Bornais in South Uist (Sharples et al 2015: 249–51).

The large mammal bone assemblages from six Late Norse (about 1050 to 1350) settlement sites in the Northern Isles have been conveniently compared and reviewed by Ingrid Mainland (2023). The ratio of cattle to sheep varies considerably from site to site, and, as at Finlaggan and the sites in the Uists, a high proportion of the cattle were culled in their first few months at Snugar

and Quooygrew. The numbers of pigs at these northern sites is higher than at the Uist sites. Earl’s Bu, the residence of the earls of Orkney, provides an especially interesting comparison with Finlaggan, with relative frequencies of about 45% for cattle, 24% for sheep and 30% for pig. The figures for the midden [25008] off Eilean na Comhairle at Finlaggan are 44% cattle, 23% sheep/goat and 21% pig. Finlaggan also has 8% red deer.

In general for most of these sites in the Hebrides and Northern Isles, cattle and sheep formed the largest element of meat, but the desire to have tender, succulent cuts was off-set by a need to produce dairy products and wool, not to mention other animal products like hide and horn. Pig husbandry was evidently very limited at most sites, but the evidence for its importance at Finlaggan is worthy of further comment. The pork is considered to be from domesticated rather than wild animals, and Nicola Murray draws attention in her report in Chapter C9 to the numerous boars’ heads, suggesting that they might have made centrepieces at feasts. Pig bones are not present in later midden material from Eilean Mór, and while 16th-century and later rentals of Islay provide copious information on the animals and other products that each farm owed yearly, including cattle, sheep and poultry, there is no mention of pigs (Smith 1895: 484–543). Perhaps of relevance, however, is the name of an Islay farm, Eilean na Muice Duibhe (Gaelic: ‘island of the black pig’), first recorded in 1494, but of unknown date (Caldwell 2017: 306–07).

There is no evidence for sty-based pig husbandry in Islay or neighbouring parts until recent times. The pork served up at Eilean na Comhairle probably came from pigs that were allowed to graze local woodland and other uncleared ground, which may have been in very limited supply after the 13th century as the land was cleared for agriculture and grazing cattle. Much of the carpentry waste recovered from the medieval midden in trench 25 is oak, very probably of local origin. Oak woods were ideal for pigs.

Excavations at another Lordship of the Isles stronghold, Castle Sween in Knapdale, produced evidence for a higher than expected consumption of pork in the period from the early 14th to the 16th century, possibly because pigs could still graze there in woods dominated by oak (McCormick 1996: 553). The roots of tormentil, which still grows at Finlaggan and which is represented in the medieval midden adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle, may also have been a major part of pig fodder. Elsewhere in the lands of the lordship, evidence from North Uist demonstrates a turning away in medieval times from pig raising, which had been prevalent in earlier times. A similar phenomenon has been noted in the Faroe Islands, and in both areas it has been supposed that one of the main reasons for the demise of this form of animal husbandry was the detrimental effect on the land caused by free-range pannage, pigs breaking up fragile soils in their search for food (Arge et al 2009: 24; Serjeantson 2013: 96).

Recent studies of pigs in the earlier medieval West have concluded that landed elites often ate a higher percentage of pork relative to the average consumption of other meats (Kreiner 2020: 151). Of particular relevance for Finlaggan is a study of Late Norse commensality in Orkney with evidence from the earl’s farm (the Earl’s Bu) at Orphir that demonstrates this (Mainland & Batey 2019).

Domestic fowl and marine fish, especially cod, were also part of the diet. Although there was an extensive business in preparing and trading stock-fish in northern Europe in the 13th century

(Barrett 2016: 257–62), it is probable that the fish were mostly locally caught around the shores of Islay and by line fishing from inshore boats. Fish were required for the numerous days when the Church forbade the consumption of meat.

The presence of fine-quality cuts of venison is another key indicator of the high status of the residents of Eilean na Comhairle in the earlier medieval period. Hunting, primarily deer, was a noble pursuit from which lesser mortals were excluded. The driving of deer, in which game was rounded up from a wide area and directed to a spot where the hunters were waiting to slaughter them, was a favourite among Scottish and Irish aristocracy throughout medieval times, and probably earlier (Gilbert 1979: 52–68; McManus 2018). This activity required access to vast areas of uncultivated land, such as would seem to have been available in the north of Islay, to the north-west and north of Finlaggan. Large numbers of men (known as the ‘tinchell’ in Scotland) were also needed to flush out the deer and drive them for distances of miles to the spot (sometimes called the ‘elrick’ in Scotland) where the nobles were waiting to slaughter them. Hunting dogs of two types were employed, those which hunted by scent (compare beagles) and hounds which hunted by sight (McManus 2018: 160–61). Dogs are carved, attacking deer, on several later medieval West Highland grave monuments, apparently demonstrating that the chasing of deer was also, at least by that time, popular in the West Highlands and Islands (Caldwell 2012: 54–55; Gilbert 1979: 55–56).

In Chapter C4 of the Catalogue a group of copper alloy mounts, C83–C90, has been identified as belonging to dog collars or leashes. C87–C90 possibly represent a pair of collars with gilt mounts datable to the 13th century. C9, a piece of copper alloy chain, may be part of a leash. They bring to mind the mid-13th-century praise poem to Angus Mor (see Chapter 2) which describes how Angus inherited his hounds with their leashes from his father, Donald (Clancy 1998: 288). The similarity noted in Chapter C4 between the animal heads ornamenting these mounts and those on silver spoons from a hoard buried in the nunnery on Iona suggests that both groups of objects might be the work of craftsmen based in the Isles (cf Caldwell 2014b: 87). The small silver brooch (S3) from the midden adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle may not be local work, but also suggests ownership by someone of status. A piece of copper alloy wire also from the midden next to Eilean na Comhairle may be identified as a string from a musical instrument, most likely the clarsach of a professional harper.

A small but significant element in the food refuse in the 25008 midden consists of imported luxury products like almonds, walnuts and cherries. The sherds of pottery jugs from the Saintonge region of France can be regarded as a clue to the purchase of claret, the jugs either being acquired already containing choice vintage wine, or else being used to decant wine from casks and serve it at table. While all of these products are likely to have come from southern Europe or the Mediterranean, it is not necessary to envisage that this was via direct trading links. It is probable that locally based merchants could sell their wares and buy luxuries from further afield in Scottish, English and Irish ports. Since, with few exceptions, the wheel-made pottery from Finlaggan, considered mostly to have arrived on-site prior to about 1300, is from kiln sites in the Scottish Lowlands, it may

have been the case that the main trade links were with ports on the Firth of Clyde like Ayr, erected as a royal burgh 1203 x 1206 (Pryde 1965: 16). It is known that Alexander Lord of the Isles held the lands of Greenan on the coast near Ayr by 1456 (Munro & Munro 1986: p xxxvii–xxxviii). It is possible that this was the continuation of an arrangement of much earlier date that facilitated trade.

There are 10 coins of short-cross and long-cross types from Finlaggan, dating to the period from 1180 to 1278, and a further 11 single-cross pennies minted in the period from 1279 to about 1314. All were individual, no doubt accidental, losses. They may reflect the role Finlaggan would have had as a rent-gathering centre and may also be viewed as evidence for a money economy, at least from the later 13th century.

Seven crucible sherds and a complete vessel were recovered from trench 25, all supposed to have been associated with metal-working. Two of these, P108, a possible lid, and P109, a complete crucible, were from the earlier medieval midden [25008]. There is also a sherd of another crucible (SF 12546) associated with house 12.4. Iron slag from that midden and Eilean na Comhairle itself (Table C5.1) may largely relate to the building of the castle. The same explanation can be offered for some of the woodworking debris from midden 25008. The leather from the latter context, perhaps from just one throw-out incident, could represent the activities of a visiting cobbler or shoemaker. W26 may be one of the cobbler’s awls.

A study of later documentation (see Chapter 3) suggests that in the later medieval period all the land around Loch Finlaggan, apart from Robolls (Illus 3.6), was held in demesne by the lords of the Isles, a situation which might well have pertained in earlier medieval times as well. In that case there would have been significant quantities of produce, animal and vegetable, being brought in from the immediate locality for consumption and storage, and yet more as rent in kind from a much wider area. The enclosed field systems at Sean-ghairt (no. 16), Cuing-sgeir, (no. 18), An Tàmhanachd (no. 20) and Dùn Cheapasaidh Mór (no. 21) are likely to be at least as old as the castle.

Finlaggan, c 1300 – c 1500

The later medieval period at Finlaggan, about 1300 to 1500, coincides with the time of the lordship of the chiefs of Clan Donald, Lords of the Isles. There is evidence that the castle came to a definite end. The tower on Eilean na Comhairle was reduced to ground-floor level and even its foundations have been partially dug out. These remains were not notably encumbered with collapsed stonework and other debris. It is conceivable that the tower was never completed. It may have been dismantled because it was structurally unsound. Its erection over a ruined dun did not necessarily provide the surest of foundations. It is also possible that the demise of the whole castle was largely due to enemy action. There is no archaeological evidence for this, but the destruction of captured castles in the national wars of the late 13th and early 14th century is well documented. A possible context in the case of Finlaggan is 1297, when the then chief of Clan Donald, Alexander, son of Angus Mor, reported that his lands had been devastated and burnt and his people killed by Alexander (MacDougall) of Argyll (Caldwell 2017: 44).

The Finlaggan palace (Illus 14.7)

The new Finlaggan that began to take shape in the 14th century was not a castle. It can best be described as a palace. The great tower on Eilean na Comhairle was not replaced by a stronghold of any sort, and the perimeter timberwork fence around Eilean Mór was removed and built over by other structures.

If more of the structures and buildings of earlier medieval date on Eilean Mór had been excavated it is probable that more evidence of continuity into later medieval times would have been observed, at least in the overall planning of the island. The basic layout of building plots may largely have been in place prior to the 14th century. Nevertheless, the impression formed from our excavations is of a great rebuild, with buildings deliberately positioned in an overall plan.

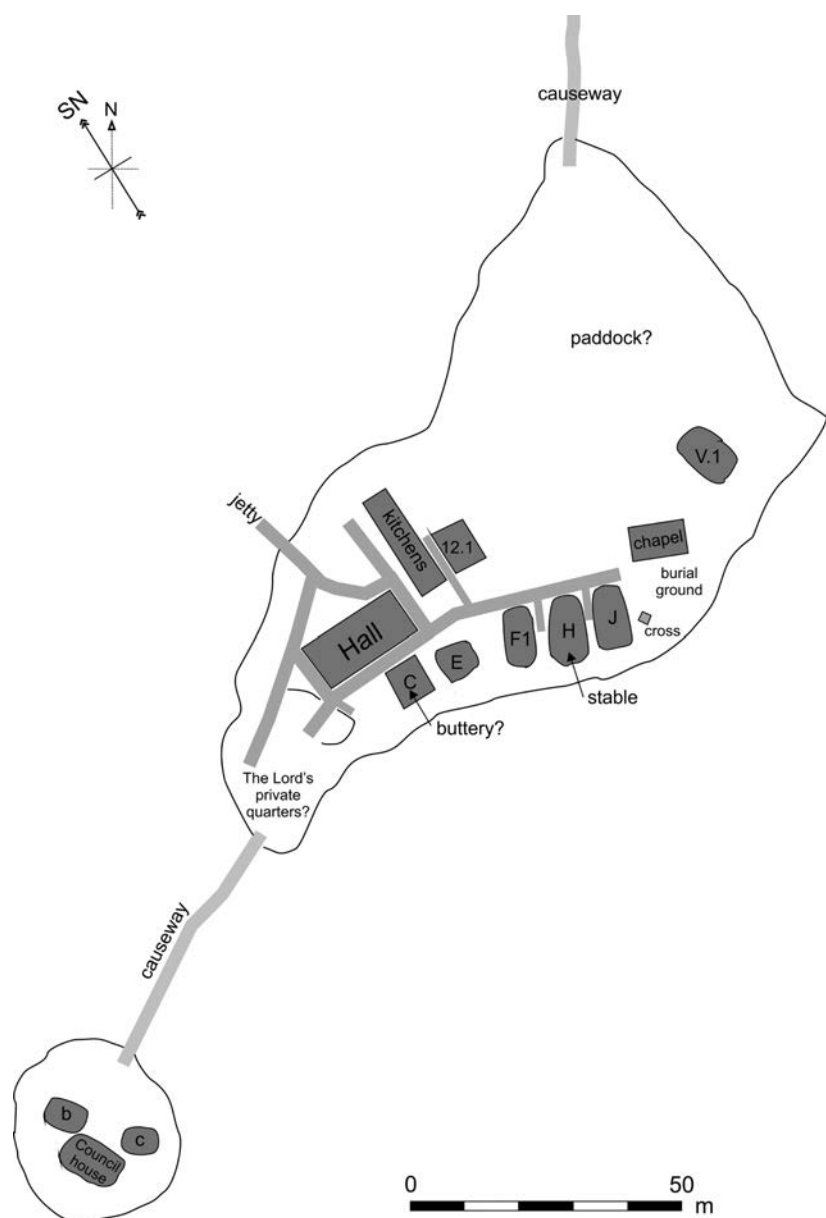


Illustration 14.7

Plan of the later medieval palace on Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle

Access to Eilean Mór was now by boat from the loch-side to a jetty from which roads branched out to the great hall, the chapel and Eilean na Comhairle. Lesser cobbled paths led off these main arteries to the doors of individual buildings, which were positioned side by side and parallel to each other like a contemporary urban setting. This built-up area excluded the east end of the island, already identified as a possible paddock, and the status at this time of the causeway to the loch-side is not known. It and the causeway from Eilean Mór to Eilean na Comhairle are likely to have remained in use.

In interpreting later medieval Finlaggan it is important to consider the description provided in 1549 by Donald Monro, dean of the Isles, given in full in Chapter 2 above. He wrote that the lords of the Isles often stayed on Eilean Mór when they were meeting with their council, because the island was well built in traditional palace-work and there was a fine chapel. This palace-work may all have been gone prior to Monro's birth, but there would still have been memories of it at the time he wrote.

By palace-work Monro may have meant a complex of separate buildings, perhaps single-storey structures. This would be in contrast to castles elsewhere in his time, with rooms piled one on top of the other in a tower-house, or else houses with connecting wings. This interpretation is backed up by the observations of Alexander Myln, writing approximately the same time as Monro about the bishop's palace at Dunkeld. At the beginning of the 15th century it had been constructed in the Highland fashion of large ground-floor houses. These were later replaced by a tower (-house), along with a first-floor hall with larder and granaries underneath (Myln 1823: 16; Hannay 1915: 336).

In later medieval times Finlaggan had no obvious defences. The lack of them may be another factor in Donald Monro's description of Eilean Mór as being well built in traditional palace fashion. The absence of both stone defensive walls and a tower-house distinguished Finlaggan from the residences of important lordship chiefs like the Macleans, MacKinnons, MacNeills, MacLeods and other MacDonald chiefs. Their tower-houses were status symbols, normally housing the castellans and their families. With battlements and other defensive features they were intended to project an image of strength. Perhaps Finlaggan, specifically its great hall, was consciously intended to look welcoming and accessible. The mark of a truly great man like the lord of the Isles was the ability and desire to entertain.

Cobbled roads and paths on Eilean Mór provided access to kitchens, guesthouses, a chapel and probably storehouses. Apart, it may be supposed, from private quarters for the lord and his family when they were in residence, there was a house and stable, perhaps the main dwelling of the chaplain, and other houses for lordship officials and household members. Such may have been the main building on Eilean na Comhairle used as the council house. Many of the main buildings had slate roofs and lime-mortared walls. Dressed freestone, much of it probably recycled from earlier buildings, was used sparingly, especially for door and window openings. The layout was orderly, with buildings arranged side by side, no doubt according to an overall plan.

The wider landscape around Loch Finlaggan was mostly farmed land, much of it held in demesne by the lords of the Isles, but not Robolls with its island settlement of Eilean Mhuireill (no. 61), the residence of MacIain of Ardnamurchan, the bailie of Islay

in the late 15th century (Caldwell 2017: 70). It has the foundations of two buildings, possibly as early as that. They are not dissimilar in size to buildings (a) and (b) on Eilean na Comhairle, and may be interpreted as a dwelling house and a barn.

The millstone reused as an oven base in the kitchen (structure K.2) on Eilean Mór would presumably have come from the mill (no. 44 G), the traces of which survive by the Finlaggan River near where it flows into the loch. Martin Martin believed in the late 17th century that he could identify the houses on the loch-side of the bodyguard of the lords of the Isles (Martin 1703: 240). Possibly he was referring to the remains of various turf huts on the farm of Portanellan, including those described in our survey of sites and monuments under no. 44.

The council house and other structures on Eilean na Comhairle

On Eilean na Comhairle the development of a ground surface over the tower ruins, prior to the erection of houses (a) and (b), suggests that there was a gap in time, not necessarily of more than a few years, between the comprehensive robbing and removal of castle masonry and the erection of these later buildings. Building (a), now reduced to its foundations, was rectangular with rounded corners, having an overall size of 10.8 by 6.7m and opposed entrances in its long sides (Illus 14.8 A). Its walls were lime

mortared and had substantial foundations. Its floor was of earth. It lay broadside on to the causeway from Eilean Mór, fronted by a flat area, probably a crudely cobbled courtyard. There was a cobbled path along its rear.

Building (a) can best be reconstructed as a single-storey hall with an open roof, probably covered with thatch (there are no roof slates from Eilean na Comhairle). As such, it probably belonged in a local tradition of hall building. Others of similar size, reduced to turf-covered foundations, can be traced as the principal structures on other island sites and residences of chiefs and lairds elsewhere in Argyll. Without excavation the date of any of them is difficult to know, but it is a reasonable assumption that many are of post-medieval date. A good candidate to be of similar age to building (a) on Eilean na Comhairle is a structure with an overall size of 12.8 by 6.8m, of similar shape with opposed entrances (RCAHMS 1992: 303, no. 141). It is on Eilean dà Gallagain in West Loch Tarbert, known to have been visited by John Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles in 1455 (Munro & Munro 1986: 86–87, no. 58).

Owing to later landscaping and clearance work on Eilean na Comhairle, there were no surviving internal features or artefacts associated with building (a) which could throw any light on its occupancy. It can, however, be identified as the council house mentioned in 1549 by Donald Monro as the place where the

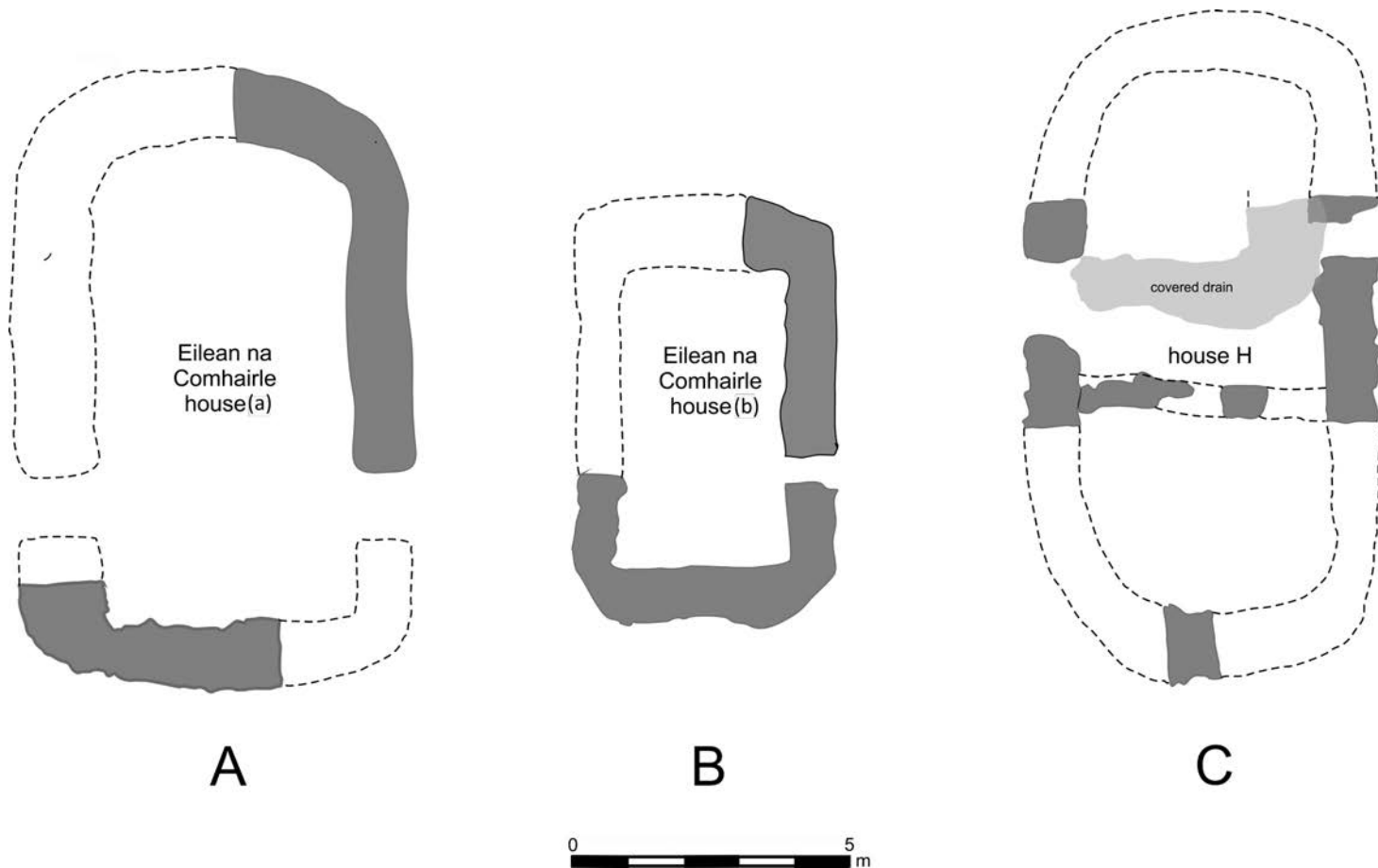


Illustration 14.8

Plans of later medieval houses: (A) Eilean na Comhairle house (a) (council house?); (B) Eilean na Comhairle house (b); (C) house H

Council of the Isles met in the time of the Lordship of the Isles (Munro 1961: 56–57). If it were not for this information provided by Munro – and the author sees no good reason to doubt it – it would probably have seemed logical to identify building (a) as the private hall of the lords of the Isles. Apart from the very few days in the year when it housed the Council of the Isles, perhaps it acted as a base for an officer of the lords' household, one of status with responsibility for managing Finlaggan throughout the year.

The extensive midden sampled in trench 25 produced no material or artefacts that could confidently be dated later than the 13th century, and our assumption is that the end of feasting and occupancy of Eilean na Comhairle by a high-status household coincided with the removal of the tower. If the island was regularly or permanently occupied in the 14th and 15th centuries, it must be supposed that different arrangements were made for rubbish disposal.

Building (b) was another rectangular house with rounded corners, about 4.8 by 7.5m overall, with an entrance in its east wall. Its south-west corner was adjacent to the north-east corner of (a). Its south, east and north walls were all founded on earlier castle walls. It had an earth floor and its stonework was set in poor-quality lime mortar (Illus 14.8 B). As with building (a), later clearance work removed evidence for how structure (b) was used. Building (c), hardly touched by our excavations, might well be of more recent date than structures (a) and (b).

The private quarters of the lords?

The west end of Eilean Mór was divided from the rest of the island by a cross-wall with a gate, through which passed the cobbled road from the chapel to the great hall and onwards towards the causeway to Eilean na Comhairle. RCAHMS (1984: 278) suggested that the wall separated the private quarters of the lords of the Isles from the rest of the island, and that seems to us a plausible explanation. The main structure here, building P, as we will explain below, appears to be of 16th-century date, but it may well have been erected above the ruins of medieval structures and partially over a cobbled road along its north-west side. Erosion at this end of the island may have been responsible for removing medieval buildings, one represented by the foundations of a wall projecting north-westwards from near the west corner of building P. Elsewhere in the 14th century, great lords built themselves massive tower-houses as their private residences, set alongside halls and other structures for more public use. A particularly relevant example is the Douglas castle at Threave in Galloway, which, as we will discuss below, has other points of similarity to Finlaggan. The lords of the Isles do not appear to have built tower-houses for their private use at other castles in their lordship. There is no good reason to speculate that there might have been one on Eilean Mór.

The great hall

One building, or at least significant portions of its walls, did survive from the earlier medieval castle, and that was the great hall (Illus 14.9 C). A cross-wall, incorporating two doorways, was inserted near its east end to separate off a service area and storage for food and drink. It might be supposed that there would have

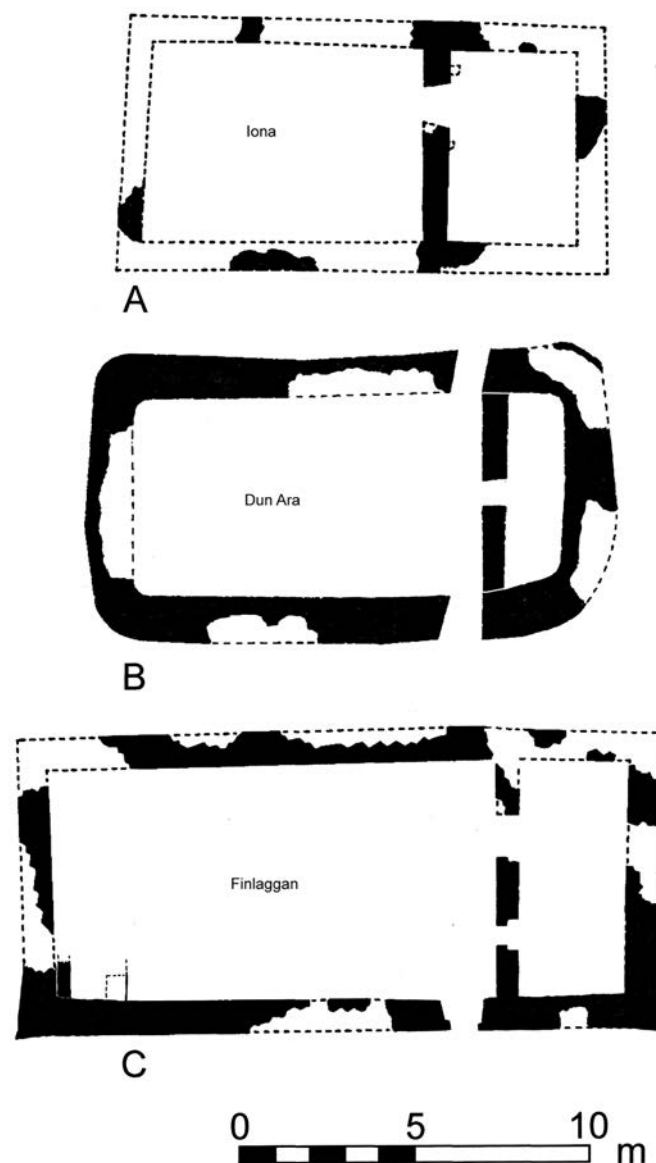


Illustration 14.9

Hall plans: (A) the bishop's house, Iona; (B) Dun Ara Castle, Mull; (C) Finlaggan

been a door from the service area to the nearby kitchens, but this would have to be verified by further excavation. There was also an upper chamber at the east end with its own latrine, perhaps intended for the use of the steward of the lord of the Isles' household, at least three of whom are recorded from the late 14th and 15th century (Munro & Munro 1986: 246). It is not yet clear where and how access was provided to this upper chamber. Although there is no evidence for one, there may also have been a gallery opening on to the hall for the use of musicians. Documentary evidence for the lords retaining a family of hereditary harpers (Steer & Bannerman 1977: 146) and the recovery of musical instrument pegs, and possibly strings, from Finlaggan (C121–C126) indicate the importance of musical entertainment.

The hall itself now had a large fireplace in its east gable wall and was entered through its south wall. The hall entrance was

rebuilt or repositioned in the south wall. The whole building had a slate roof and, probably, sprung-timber floors. A large hall in another MacDonald castle at Strome in Wester Ross also appears to have had a sprung-timber floor (Cullen & Driscoll 1995: 21). In a survey of medieval and later Irish praise poems addressed to Gaelic and Anglo-Irish lords, Katharine Simms (2001) has drawn attention to descriptions of the interior decoration of their houses, including hangings, wooden panelling and paintings or carvings of hunting scenes. It may be supposed that the Finlaggan hall would have been similarly well appointed.

Some fragments of copper alloy vessels recovered from Eilean Mór, including C138, C142, C145 and C147, may be from the ewers or aquamaniles which would have been used for pouring water for washing the hands of diners at the beginning and end of meals (Henisch 1976: 165–69). P69 and P70, sherds of polychrome ceramic from the Saintonge region of France recovered from a nearby midden, could well have belonged to one or two jugs which graced the tables of the diners during meals.

Dun Ara in Mull (RCAHMS 1980: 200–02), a castle of the MacKinnons, appears to be another Hebridean castle with a later medieval hall with service areas at one end (Illus 14.9 B). The clearest parallel is the bishop's house in Iona (Illus 14.9 A). It measures about 14 by 7m over walls 0.6 to 0.8m thick, now all reduced to grass-covered foundations except for the partition wall, standing to a height of 3.7m. On the evidence of this the structure has walls of uncoursed boulders and blocks with pin-nings and lime mortar. From a description of the building, then in ruins, by William Sacheverell in 1688 (Sacheverell 1859: 103), and the illustration of Iona in Pennant's *Tour in Scotland* (1774: pl XXI), showing it complete but for its roof, it is possible to deduce much more about its plan. The larger western chamber was the hall proper, open to the roof and containing a fireplace with a chimney in the west gable. The smaller eastern chamber, described as the buttery, was entered by a door in the cross-wall, and there was an upper chamber here in the roof, possibly reached by a ladder and lit by a window in the east gable. The Royal Commission (RCAHMS 1982: 252, no. 14) supposed the bishop's house dates to the 1630s. It may either be of earlier date or reflect a local tradition extending back into the medieval period to the time of the great hall at Finlaggan.

There are two other halls in the lands of the Lordship of the Isles which are relevant to Finlaggan. They are at Dun Aros in Mull and Ardtornish in Morvern. Both are centres particularly associated with the lords themselves, and both are described in 15th-century documents as castles (RCAHMS 1980: 173–76; Munro & Munro 1986: 28, 29). The former has, contained within a stone curtain wall, a large first-floor hall (also referred to as a hall-house, and more recently as the north-west block), which can now be dated to the 14th century thanks to a scientific analysis of the mortar used in its walls (Thacker 2021). Internally at first-floor level it was about 21.4 by 7.9m, but probably included in that length was a solar with access to a latrine-tower. The Ardtornish hall can be estimated to have been 17.2 by 8.8m, also, perhaps, including a solar. There is also evidence for access to a latrine. On the basis of these observations, whatever household and retinue the lords of the Isles accommodated in the great hall at Finlaggan could also be contained in the halls at Dun Aros and Ardtornish.

A buttery?

Building C on Eilean Mór has largely survived until today as a roofless ruin since it was rebuilt in the 16th century (Illus 11.2, 11.3). It was erected adjacent to the great hall as a rectangular house, 7.3 by 6.4m overall, probably of more than one storey. Coin evidence indicates that it dates to the 14th century. The pieces of red sandstone and perhaps most of the rest of the stones used in its lime-mortared walls may have been recycled from the tower on Eilean na Comhairle. In searching for an explanation for the putlog holes in the gables, the possibility was entertained that they supported a timber gallery overlooking the loch and a passageway to an upper chamber at the east end of the great hall. The evidence for either is not convincing. Parallels can be drawn to other medieval buildings in the Isles which show similar constructional characteristics. These include a church at Kilmory, Loch Eynort, in Skye; the small church (of St Columba) on Skeabost island, Skye; and Teampull na Trionaid at Carinish in North Uist. A better understanding of these features is needed.

Given the attention paid to security and the hatch in the wall facing the hall, it seems an obvious interpretation for building C that it was erected as a buttery, a place to store wine and other comestibles for consumption in the hall. If that were the case, it may have been planned prior to the decision to remodel the hall with its own service and storage facilities.

Kitchens

Evidence from trenches 2 and 12 demonstrated that kitchens and food preparation facilities were positioned to the east and north-east of the great hall. They probably took the form of a long rectangular multi-roomed building, excavated in trench 2 as structure K.2 and in trench 12 as structure 12.6 (Illus 14.10 A). It contained evidence for several ovens or kilns and C141, the leg of a large cast-metal cooking pot. The internal area of about 76.5 sq m (not factoring in internal walls) compares with the free space in the remodelled hall of about 70.35 sq m. This appears to be a generous provision of space, perhaps indicating a need for catering on a large scale.

The only obvious parallel to the Finlaggan kitchens in the area of the Lordship of the Isles is a building at Iona Abbey (Illus 14.10 B), excavated in the late 1960s, identified as the medieval bakehouse and brewhouse, with an internal area little different from that of Finlaggan K.2/12.6. It had lime-mortared rubble walls. Down the centre of the building there was a series of slabs identified as pad-stones for wooden roof supports. Interpretation as a food preparation area is based on the excavation of hearths, layers of ash, stone-filled soakaway-pits and a deposit of charred barley (Reece 1981: 29–37; RCAHMS 1982: 138). The stone footings of a building (A), 20.7 by 9.1m overall, in Dun Aros Castle are a candidate for identification as kitchens to service the adjacent hall (RCAHMS 1980: 174, fig 203).

An interesting comparison from outside the lordship can be made with Threave Castle in Kirkcudbrightshire, a residence of the 'Black' Douglases. In 1369 Archibald Douglas (from 1388, third Earl of Douglas) acquired the Lordship of Galloway, the successor to an earlier, independent native lordship that was absorbed into the Kingdom of Scotland as was the Kingdom of

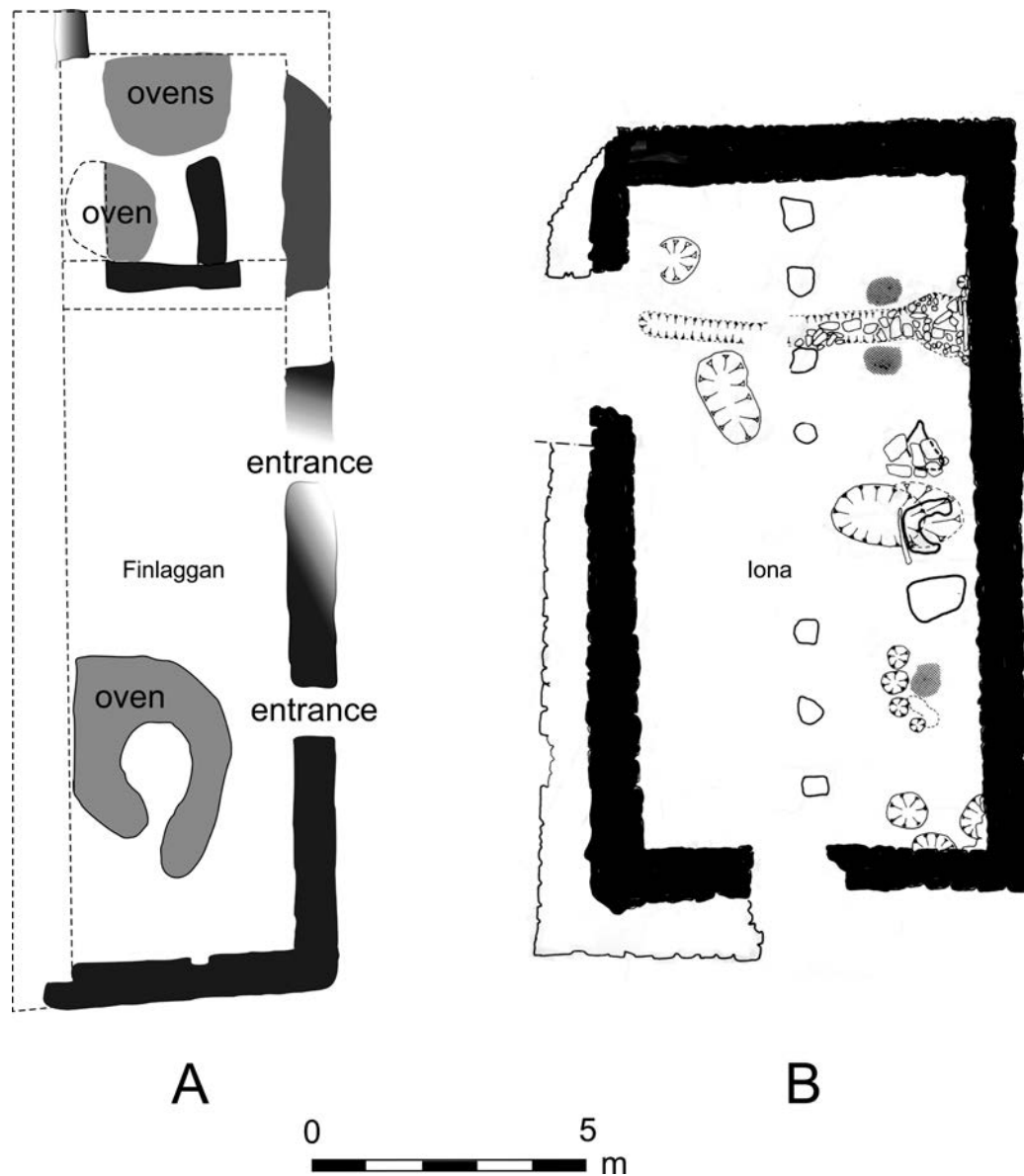


Illustration 14.10
(A) Finlaggan, structure K.2/12.6 – the kitchens; (B) Iona Abbey, medieval bakehouse and brewhouse

the Isles. Threave, also an island site, was probably one of the main Galwegian centres of power from early times, but what is most obvious now is the massive tower-house erected by the third earl, probably soon after he acquired the Galloway lordship. Beside it the reduced walls of two substantial rectangular buildings, apparently of similar date to the tower-house, were laid bare in excavations undertaken in the 1970s (Good & Tabraham 1981).

Building 1, with an overall size of 22.4 by 12m, was believed by the excavators to be a two-storey structure with a hall or dormitory over an undercroft. This writer, however, thinks it should be interpreted as a ground-floor hall with a massive fireplace in its east end, supported on a central pier (K59). A layer of broken slates provided evidence of how it was roofed. Building 2, at right angles to building 1, had clay-bonded walls, an overall size of 21.6 by 6.7m, and evidence for two internal partition walls. There is a

small wing at its south-east corner and, externally, two structures that can be identified as ovens (L115 and L148). Burnt deposits in the interior provide a basis for interpreting it as a kitchen block.

The chapel and burial ground

The chapel on Eilean Mór may quite simply be a work of the late 14th century. That is the reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the inclusion of N24, a silver halfgroat of Robert II (1371–1390) deposited in its south wall. While a political message may have been intended by its selection and deposition, it can be understood that there was much more to it than that. A groat was valued at four pence and a halfgroat, therefore, was worth two pence, quite a substantial sum of money in the late 14th century. The coin would appear to have been deliberately bent, an action that

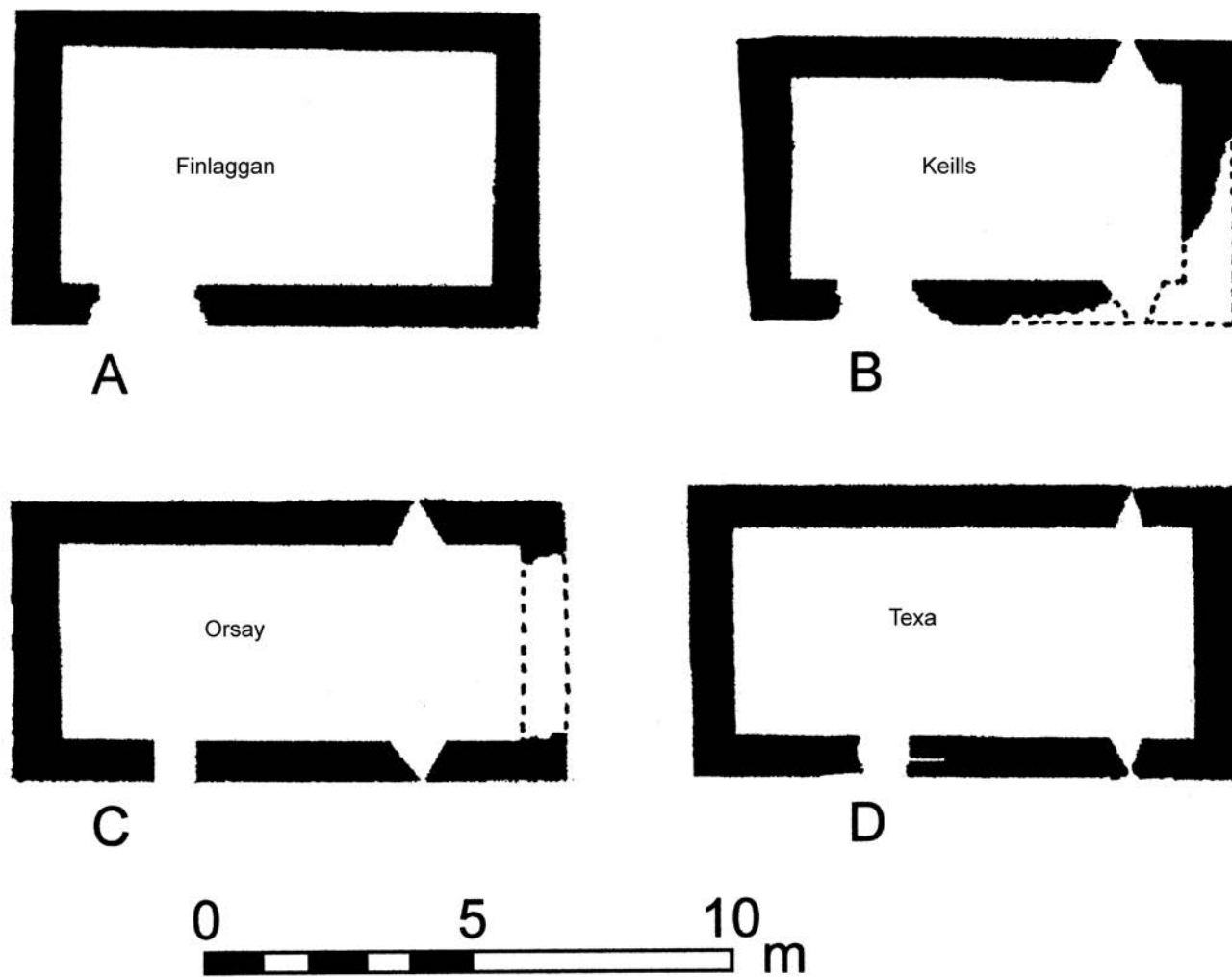


Illustration 14.11
Chapel plans: (A) Finlaggan; (B) Keills, Islay; (C) Orsay; (D) Texa

required a reasonable amount of force, more than could have been applied by most just with bare hands.

There is evidence from England that coins were deposited by pilgrims and worshippers at churches and shrines, the coins being bent as a sign that they were being dedicated for the use of the local saint (Hall 2012: 81). Perhaps one of the builders on Eilean Mór was a devotee of Findlugán, or a visiting pilgrim was able to deposit the coin in the fresh mortar of the unfinished chapel when nobody was looking. A more likely explanation may relate the coin's deposition to the chapel's supposed founder, John I Lord of the Isles, who died in 1387. He himself might have required the coin to be bent and deposited, or else his wife, the Princess Margaret, as a symbol of their devotion to the Church and St Findlugán. It is also of significance that the King Robert represented on the coin by a crowned bust with a sceptre

was Margaret's father. It is possible that that link would be seen to be strengthened by the deposition of the coin, and not necessarily just in a religious context. The chapel, or the adjacent burial ground, may have been the place where important pronouncements were made and documents witnessed, their integrity protected by God and his local saint, Findlugán. Some of those proclamations and documents would have related to dealings with the king whose authority was represented by the coin.

It is possible that the deposition of a silver coin in the wall of a church will be found to be a feature of customs and beliefs in the medieval West Highlands and Islands. A penny of Edward I was excavated from a supposed chapel at Baliscate in Mull, and its excavator judged that it had possibly originally been deposited in one of its walls (Ellis 2017: 72, 100).

The Finlaggan Chapel (Illus 6.8, 14.11 A) was a relatively simple rectangular building, 10.1 by 6.1m in overall size, with walls of random rubble, lime mortared and laid roughly in courses (type 4 according to Caldwell and Ruckley 2005: 103). The exterior walls were covered with harling, no doubt leaving the dressings exposed. The quoins were of grey-yellow sandstone. The interior walls were plastered. The door was at the west end of the south wall and might well have been a relatively simple opening with a flat lintel, possibly R33, a metabasite slab recovered from collapsed material within the chapel walls. R26, a grey-yellow sandstone moulding found in the burial ground, might be interpreted as part of a jamb of such a door, similar to the one in the chapel on the island of Texa, off the south coast of Islay. It is likely to date to the 14th century (RCAHMS 1984: 259–61).

The chapel could have had windows in its north and south walls, positioned to shed light on the altar. Graham (1895: 28) wrote that there were indications of a double window at the east end, meaning, apparently, of the south wall. He does not specify what exactly he saw. Possibly, and not necessarily then in situ, it was R29, a carved, grey-yellow block of sandstone that can be identified as a mullion, recovered from the tumble around the chapel in 1998. It does not, however, match two pieces of light yellowish-brown sandstone (R27 and SF 1101), fallen from the north and south walls of the chapel respectively, that appear to be broken rybats, grooved to take glass. They are similar to those of the original fenestration of the church of Oronsay Priory, narrow windows with trefoil-cusped heads splaying out to segmental arched embrasures in the interior (RCAHMS 1984: fig 236B). That church is also the work of John I Lord of the Isles.

A MacDonald clan history of the late 17th or early 18th century in the *Red Book of Clanranald* recorded that John I Lord of the Isles ‘covered’ the Chapel of Oilen Fionlagain (Cameron 1894: 2.159). The Gaelic word *comhdaich* (covered) used here may have been intended to mean, quite simply, that John built the chapel. The author, however, is grateful to Ronald Black for suggesting to him that it might have the sense of ‘permanently covered’ as opposed to *thugh*, ‘thatched’. This is of significance since it appears that the chapel had a slate roof. Several fragments of roof slate, especially of type A, were recovered from within and around the chapel ruins, and three pieces of grey-yellow sandstone roof ridge (R24, R25 and SF 19040) were discovered nearby.

There may have been a font or holy water stoup. R19, a piece of stone, now missing, discovered under the ruins at the east end about 1830, has been interpreted as part of one. The only other interior fitting identified is the altar (Illus 9.31, 9.32), which may be the original one. It appears to have had a chlorite schist as covering and to have contained, as a holy relic, a piece of an ivory crucifix (B6). Perhaps it was believed to have belonged to St Findlúgán. Few other medieval altars survive in a sufficient state of repair to make meaningful comparisons, but it may be noted that the altar in the chapel on Inch Kenneth, Mull, similarly has dressed sandstone blocks at its front corners. That chapel can be dated to the 13th century (RCAHMS 1980: no. 288). Another medieval West Highland church, St Patrick’s Chapel, Ceann a’ Mhara, Tiree, has remains of an altar of lime-mortared rubble (RCAHMS 1980: no. 325).

In size and plan, with its door at the west end of its south wall and windows to right and left of the altar, the chapel on Eilean Mór is typical of others in the West Highlands (Dunbar 1981: 62). A particularly apt comparison is with the chapel (Illus 14.11 C) on the island of Orsay off the end of the Rhinn of Islay, since it is also said, not unreasonably, by a 17th-century MacDonald historian to have been built by John I Lord of the Isles (Cameron 1894: 2.159). The Orsay Chapel (RCAHMS 1984: no. 387), the walls of which are largely upstanding, is almost the same length but narrower, and has no freestone dressings. Its door has a pointed arch, and its window embrasures have segmental arches. Its walls, built in the same fashion (type 4) as those of Finlaggan, have also been harled.

It is also useful to compare the chapels nearby at Keills and on Texa (Illus 14.11 B, D; RCAHMS 1984: nos 327, 391). The chapel at Keills was dedicated to St Columba, was only marginally shorter and narrower than the Finlaggan Chapel, and, although much ruined, can be seen to have had its entrance similarly positioned and two narrow splayed windows on either side of the altar. The masonry is also type 4, but uncoursed, with many split boulders and much use of pinnings. There remains a broken piece of orange sandstone as a dressing in the north window embrasure, but it evidently did not have freestone quoins. Since, on the evidence of presentations to the chaplaincy (RSS 1: no. 911; 2: no. 4566), the patronage of Keills had passed to the crown in the 16th century, it must have belonged to the lords of the Isles prior to that. The differences in its masonry may suggest, however, that it was not part of the same building campaign that saw the erection of the chapels at Finlaggan and on Orsay.

Texa is a small island adjacent to the MacDonald castle of Dunyvaig on the south coast of Islay. It has upstanding walls and is almost identical in size to Orsay. It has similar type 4 harled masonry. Its two windows are too ruinous to indicate whether they had freestone dressings, but some of grey sandstone survive in the door opening, indicating jambs with a chamfered surround externally and, probably, a flat-lintel head. The window embrasures are also lintelled. Texa Chapel is probably of similar date to Finlaggan and Orsay, and to have been built for a senior member of Clan Donald. It may be of relevance that its graveyard had a commemorative cross to John I Lord’s son Ranald, the eponym of Clanranald. Its shaft is now in the collections of the National Museum of Scotland.

Chapels within residences were by no means common in medieval Scotland. They are to be found in royal castles and palaces, for example Edinburgh (late 12th century) and Linlithgow (late 15th century). Kildrummy in Aberdeenshire (late 13th century), a residence of the earls of Mar, is unusual in having a substantial purpose-built one. The only other example in the Lordship of the Isles is the island fortress of Cairnburgh Castle in the Treshnish Isles. It possibly dates to the 15th century (RCAHMS 1980: no. 335). The remoteness of Cairnburgh from other churches, and the likelihood it at times held a large garrison, no doubt offers some explanation for the presence of a chapel there.

Finlaggan is nearly 5 miles (8km) by road from the medieval parish church of Kilarrow, at Bridgend, a not inconsiderable distance, but there were two other churches much closer to hand – the chapel at Keills, about 1½ miles (2.4km) to the east, and the

church 2 miles (3.2km) to the south at Kilmeny. It is not known whether Keills and Kilmeny are earlier or later in date than the Finlaggan Chapel, but this concentration of churches is remarkable. Kilmeny is described as a parish church in 1549 (Munro 1961: 57) and had possibly been separated from Kilarrow much earlier.

The main reason for a chapel at Finlaggan in the medieval period may relate to the need for clergy in the household of the lords of the Isles and their role in officiating at major events, most notably the inauguration ceremonies of new lords, said to have taken place at Finlaggan. The Council of the Isles which met here every year is said to have included the bishop of the Isles and the abbot of Iona (Munro 1961: 57). The chaplains included in the lords' household would not have been the only officials in clerical orders, but there would also have been, for instance, the secretaries (Munro & Munro 1986: liii, 245–46). When a notarial instrument was drawn up and witnessed on 14 June 1456 to record a decision of John II Lord of the Isles, it is specifically said to have been done in the chapel (Munro & Munro 1986: no. 62). This was probably the normal place for such business to be transacted.

Given that the chapel was not a parish church, it is surprising that there is considerable evidence for burials. Its extent, including the chapel and taking into account possible loss around the edge due to erosion, might have been about 325 sq m. It should be expected that it was enclosed, but our excavations were not placed to trace evidence for this, except to the north of the chapel where the supposed perimeter timberwork defence encountered in trench 17 would also have served as the graveyard boundary. Excavation of grave 1008 combined with sondage 3 suggests the possibility that there might be the remains of nine or more bodies – perhaps considerably more – in any one square metre. These are very rough-and-ready calculations based on very limited evidence, but nevertheless suggest that there were thousands interred in this graveyard.

Apart from the early historic lintel grave [1050] excavated in the burial ground, four further horizons of burials have been recognised (Illus 9.5). These have been distinguished on the basis of stratigraphy, grouping and orientation as:

- Early graves
- Group 1 graves
- Group 2 graves
- Group 3 graves.

It is probable that they range in date from before 1300 and into post-medieval times.

There has been little archaeological work on other medieval West Highland graves. Excavations at Keills Chapel in Knapdale (Brooks 1979), the chapel and burial ground on the Isle of Ensay in the Outer Isles (Miles 1989) and a medieval cemetery at Colonsay House (Johnston & Roberts 2001) have provided little useful comparative material on the form of the graves themselves. As, for example, at Jedburgh Abbey (Lewis & Ewart 1995) and the Carmelite friaries at Aberdeen, Linlithgow and Perth (Stones 1989), many of the dead appear to have been deposited in simple pits, large enough, and no more, for the body to be laid out full length, with no permanent marker above the ground.

Three graves in the early group [1041, 1043 and 1046] encountered, but not excavated, have pieces of limestone in their

fill. These did not appear to be capstones in the sense of being supported by side slabs or overlapping the sides of the burial pit. A similar phenomenon of 'grave-associated' stones has been discovered in many of the 11th- to 12th-century graves excavated in a cemetery at Newhall Point, Balblair, Ross and Cromarty. There the excavator has suggested, not implausibly, that the phenomenon mimics lintel graves, the latter being higher status or more expensive (Reed 1996: 790).

Different from these graves with limestone slabs in their fill are those of groups 1, 2 and 3, covered with longitudinal arrangements of boulders. In these the stonework lies over, rather than in, the grave fill. These crude stone coverings could have functioned as supports for grave-slabs. Without such support, grave-slabs would have sunk quite quickly below the turf, through both their own weight and the activity of earthworms. To date no complete medieval grave-slab still in its original relationship to its burial has been excavated anywhere in the West Highlands.

The Christian tradition for interments is to bury the body on an east–west alignment, the head to the west. Arriving at the correct orientation was not a matter of science but required only an approximation. The result at Finlaggan, and no doubt many other cemeteries, was graves facing different directions, we suppose not totally at random, but in series with successive graves tending to be aligned with the immediately previous one.

Position of the grave in the burial ground or chapel is a factor indicative of status. On the one hand, burial inside the chapel might be expected to be reserved for clerics and those of some rank in society. On the other hand, the burials of a baby [17020] and adult [17032], hidden away behind the chapel, presumably while it was still in use, suggest outcasts or individuals who had in some way offended against social norms. A late 19th-century account of Eigg by an antiquary notes how the ruined church of St Donan (of late 16th-century date) was still used for burials by the Catholic population, with unbaptised infants being buried outside its north wall (MacPherson 1878: 582).

It is likely that the majority of bodies of all dates were simply deposited in their graves, having first been wrapped in a shroud. A small iron pin (SF 17001), recovered from the topsoil in trench 17, and an unstratified broken bone object (SF 17005) from the same trench, identified as a peg, are the only evidence collected of possible fastenings. The fragment of a knife (?) grip from grave 14006 might, however, suggest someone buried in his clothes. The engraved fragment of slate (SF 17004) from the grave of a child [17020] may not have been deposited with the body on purpose. Other slates with doodles have been recovered elsewhere in the Finlaggan excavations.

The presence of pieces of white quartz has been noted in the fill of two of the graves [17020 and 17032] outside the east end of the chapel, and also in the fill of the pit [17026] pre-dating the chapel, containing at least a further three burials. Most of the pieces are less than 70mm across, like other pieces of quartz that are part of the make-up of the gravel spread 1007 in the burial ground, and white quartz occurs commonly in the area around Finlaggan. White quartz pebbles and other white stones were clearly, however, deliberately deposited in graves at Whithorn dating to the period from c 1250 to c 1600 (Hill 1997: 472–73) and also at the nearby chapel at Barhobble, Wigtownshire, in graves dating from the 11th to the 13th century (Cormack 1995: 35–36).

They have been found in post-medieval graves at St Ronan's Church, Iona, and the practice may have been widespread around the Irish Sea over a long period of time (O'Sullivan 1995: 358–59; Edmonds 2019: 28–29). The practice may relate to the white stones referred to in Revelations 2: 17, apparently as a symbol of innocence. We may tentatively conclude that the presence of white quartz in the Finlaggan graves is not fortuitous, but that it was placed there as part of the funerary ritual. The majority of the quartz found in grave fills and other deposits around the chapel at Finlaggan are not water-worn stones from the shore of the loch, but pieces smashed from larger rocks or deposits.

On the one hand, animal bone fragments, some burnt, from off the gravel surface 1007 could be dismissed as domestic rubbish which has spread here at a time when the graveyard was out of use. On the other hand, it might be more appropriate to see these as evidence for the feasting which has always been associated with funerals.

There are at least 18 medieval carved West Highland grave-slabs ranging in date from the 13th to the 16th century. Detailed descriptions of them are provided in the catalogue of West Highland sculpture in Chapter C2 of the Catalogue. The more complete ones are now displayed under protective glass covers within the walls of the chapel. When excavations commenced on Eilean Mór in 1990, they were laid out in two rows in the burial ground. A photograph taken in 1963 (Canmore image SC 2523902) shows several of them leaning against the chapel wall.

Four of the Finlaggan grave-slabs are of small size and might, therefore, be identified as belonging to children (R1, R2, R3, R14). This is of interest given the tradition recorded by Thomas Pennant in 1772 (1774: 259) that the wives and children of the lords of the Isles were buried at Finlaggan, while they themselves were taken to Iona for interment. There is a certain amount of evidence from medieval Ireland that women and children were sometimes buried in separate burial grounds to their men (Fry 1999: 176–80). Martin Martin records at the end of the 17th century that this had long been the case on the island of Taransay in the Outer Hebrides (Martin 1703: 123–24), and a post-medieval women's cemetery, possibly carrying on a medieval practice, has been excavated at St Ronan's Church in Iona (O'Sullivan 1995: 359–60). The tradition for Finlaggan recorded by Pennant and backed up by the presence of small medieval grave-slabs can be considered plausible, but only for some of the period the burial ground was in use. As the report on human bones indicates, there were several adult males interred at one time or another. Small medieval grave-slabs are relatively uncommon in the West Highlands. There are singletons at Dalmally in Glenorchy and at Kilchoman on Islay (RCAHMS 1974: pl 26D; RCAHMS 1984: 201, no. 21).

One medieval slab at Finlaggan (R7) provides a clue to ownership. It is an early monument, perhaps of the 13th century, but has had a representation of an anvil added to the design later in the medieval period. This is surely an indication that it was purloined to commemorate a smith, perhaps one of the hereditary armourers or smiths of the lords of the Isles. An early 19th-century source recorded a tradition that these craftsmen lived near Finlaggan (Macnicol 1852: 363).

Commemorative stone crosses are a feature of many burial grounds in the West Highlands. In stylistic terms the Finlaggan

cross (R20) can be compared with others at Kildalton and Kilarrow in Islay (RCAHMS 1984: 186 (10), 213 (8)) and at Lochaline in Morvern (RCAHMS 1980: pl 21 A–B), all in locations dominated in medieval times by Clan Donald. RCAHMS, following the work of Steer & Bannerman (1977) on later medieval West Highland sculpture, considered that such crosses were Iona School work – that is, carved on that island in the 14th or 15th century. The author has written elsewhere (eg Caldwell et al 2010: 18–20) about the tenuous nature of the evidence for an Iona School and considers it is probable that they were carved in Islay or Kintyre.

The stratigraphical relationships of the Finlaggan cross plinth indicates it was erected prior to the chapel. It may well date to the mid- or late 14th century. It is possible that, as with the cross at Lochaline, it was originally surmounted by a solid stone slab with a slot for the cross-shaft. If not, then the incorporation of a piece of quern (SF 1084) in its top surface could be of significance. The hole for its handle may have mimicked the cups ground in monuments elsewhere. An apt comparison in Islay is with the cross at Kilchoman, the stone plinth of which has four cups worn by the turning of a stone pestle. It is claimed that expectant mothers anxious to conceive a boy turn the pestle in the hollow, but originally this act may have been associated with cursing or seeking a blessing (Caldwell 2017:13).

A unique design feature of the Finlaggan cross is the cross-crosslet positioned prominently on the front face. It is probable that it should be read as a heraldic allusion. A hand grasping a cross-crosslet features in several MacDonald arms, including the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig and the Glens, for whom it was also a crest. If the cross commemorated one of that family it would have been John (Iain Mór), the founder of the family, younger brother of Donald Lord of the Isles, died in or before 1427 (Munro & Munro 1986: 293).

It is clear from our excavations that the cross was not associated with a particular grave. Rather, it may have been about clan identity, as can be supposed for many others in the West Highlands and Isles. Perhaps it could be 'read' by visitors and locals alike as marking the dominant local power.

Later medieval houses

Along the spine of Eilean Mór, between the chapel and building C, was a range of houses, E, F1, H and J. A significant amount of information was gathered from the excavation of house H and to a lesser extent house J, both with drystone walls and apparently roofed with slate. Not enough information was gathered to suggest the function of house J, but its substantial design, position next to the chapel and an entrance directly into the burial ground suggests the possibility that it was the house of the chaplain serving the chapel and that at nearby Keills. He would also have had an administrative role for the lords and been viewed as a person of considerable status.

Adjacent building H could be accessed directly across an alley from house J, and it has been identified as being a stable at ground-floor level, possibly with an upper storey (Illus 14.8 C). Perhaps it also belonged to the chaplain, a man who would have been a year-round resident of Islay and would have had a need to travel. R68, a fragment of a slate gaming board, was recovered from the

foundation trench of one of its walls, where it might, possibly, have been deliberately deposited.

Structures 12.3, 12.2 and V.1 are other buildings identified as residences. Building 12.3 had turf walls, probably faced internally with timber boards. The evidence for this is clench bolts, believed to have fixed such boards together in clinker fashion. In an earlier phase (12.3B) the floor was at least partially covered with sandstone slabs. Later (phase 12.3A) the internal timber facings were replaced by drystone walling, and the sandstone slabs were superseded by a clay floor. House 12.3 can be viewed as another example of the Scandinavian heritage of Finlaggan. Viking and later turf-walled houses have been well studied in other northern countries, especially Iceland (Stefánsson 2019). Our interpretation, however, that house 12.3 was lined internally with wooden boards, clinker fashion, may be a Scottish development. Elsewhere tongue and groove boards may have been more normal.

Structure V.1, possibly with more than one room, also had turf walls faced internally with stonework. The recovery of several rivets and nails may indicate that the upper walls had timber cladding. From the floor deposits came several sherds of pottery, both local handmade and wheel-turned imports from the Scottish Lowlands, and flotation of a sample demonstrated the presence of carbonised wheat and oats. There was also a type VI groat of James III (N34) showing no obvious signs of wear. These coins were minted about 1485.

A feature of the construction of building V.1 which was not adequately explored was the apparent incorporation of timber uprights in stone settings within the thickness of its walls (Illus 14.3 B). The same constructional approach was clearly seen in a post-medieval building, K.1/12.5, on Eilean Mór (Illus 14.12), and in both cases it is our interpretation that the upper walls were of timber construction. A parallel for this type of build comes from a site excavated at Kilchoman on Islay. In 2013 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken at the Shepherd's Cottage there, actually within the area of the fort described above, although its relationship to it was not established. This led to the partial excavation of a sub-rectangular house of unknown length but about 3.5m in internal width with pit hearth. The walls were made of sand, with an internal stone revetment and posts within the main bulk of the wall, some of which were supported on slate post-pads. The house was dated by the excavator to the 13th century (Ellis 2014). An even earlier example of a structure (1a/b, site VII) with stone-faced, earth or turf walls incorporating post-holes was uncovered on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney. It was dated by its excavator to the 8th or 9th century (Hunter 1986: 80, illus 24).

This type of wall construction may have been much commoner over a long period of time than is implied by the paucity of examples recovered archaeologically. In many archaeological contexts it might be difficult to detect the settings for these wall posts, or in other cases the surviving walls have been reduced to below the level of the settings. At Finlaggan building V.1 (and the post-medieval building 12.5) the stone and turf bases of the walls appear to be preserved to their full height. The nails and rivets recovered from the interior of V.1 and more widely spread in later deposits might have secured upper walls composed of wooden boards.

House 12.2, barrel-shaped in plan, was recessed into the earlier remains of 12.3. It may have been lined internally with

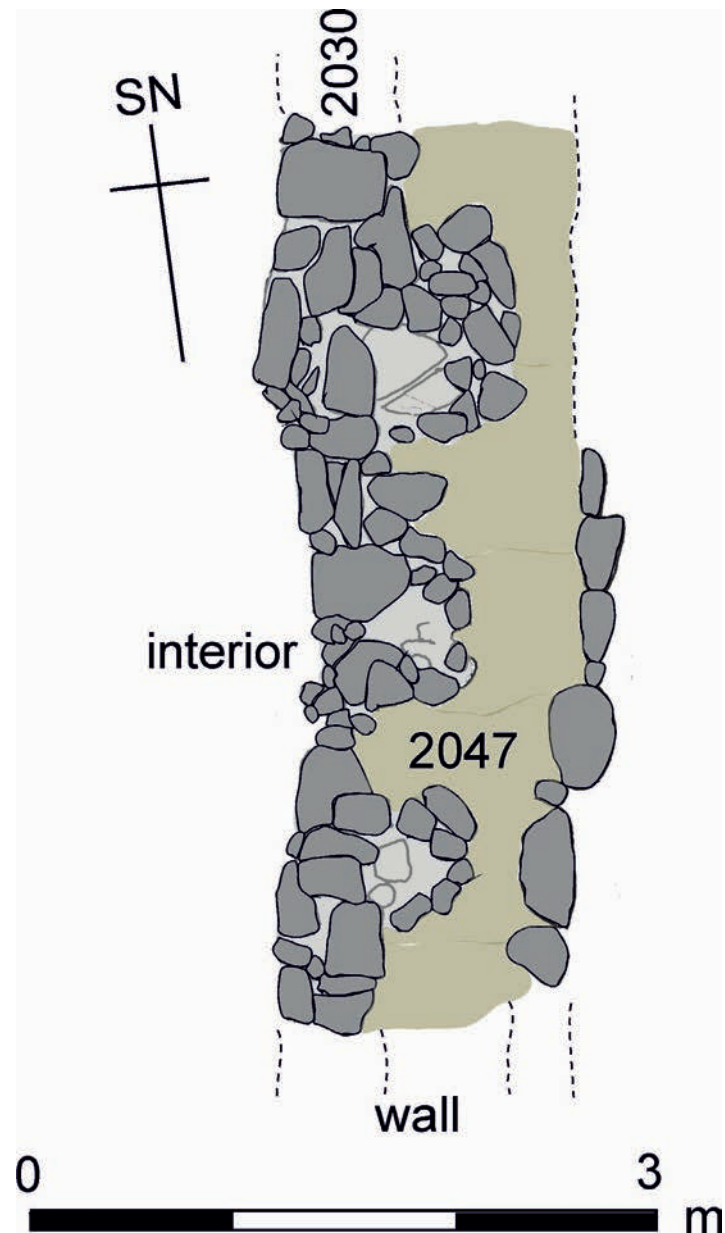


Illustration 14.12
Plan detail of the wall of structure K.1 with settings for timber uprights

upright posts supporting wattling (Illus 14.3 C). It had a central hearth and produced several finds, including bone playing pieces (B1, B2), a purse mount (F14), the remains of a drinking (?) horn (B8), a whetstone (R96) and metal mounts identified as being from a casket and chest (C95, F103, F110). It is perhaps notable that there were no sherds of pottery. Might this be because house 12.2 was a lodging for guests who dined in the great hall?

A note of caution that should be registered about our interpretation of buildings 12.2 and 12.3 is that it is conceivable that the ends of large, long houses were excavated, rather than, as has been assumed in this report, the sides of relatively small structures.

House 12.2 on the plot to the east of the kitchens was replaced by building 12.1, probably sometime in the 15th century. Its

excavated remains were very slight, but, as a relatively large rectangular building with lime-mortared walls, in the context of Finlaggan it is likely to have had a prestigious use – guest accommodation for notable visitors to replace earlier such lodgings represented by houses 12.2 and 12.3?

People

The large corpus of small finds from Finlaggan provides much information on people in later medieval times, their pursuits and quality of life. A silver signet ring (S2) is one of the very few objects that can be related to a particular individual, in this case a man called Robert. The need for a signet to authenticate or seal documents suggests a person of some standing, perhaps a merchant. There is also L5, a lead seal matrix of an unidentified cleric, perhaps a member of the lords of the Isles' household or administration. Religious devotion is also suggested by L1, a base-metal pilgrim badge from Rome, perhaps recording a trip there by a layman rather than a cleric.

The lords of the Isles retained the services of a family of hereditary harpers, the MacIlshenochs (Steer & Bannerman 1977: 146). The harp pins and lengths of wire (C121–C126) identified as possible strings are likely to have belonged to them. The presence of high-status warriors is suggested by C58, a small enamelled shield with the French royal coat of arms. Links of mail, including C131, F26 and F27, are probably an indication that armour was being worn at times by men at Finlaggan.

The evidence, or at least our understanding of how to interpret it, seems to be heavily biased in favour of men. It is in fact difficult to point to any single artefact in the Finlaggan medieval assemblage and claim it as unambiguously the belonging of a woman or a child. Yet, women and children there must have been. It often seems to be supposed that annular brooches like C1–C3 were only worn by women. The basis for this was an account of the island of Skye, written at the end of the 17th century, in which it was claimed that only women then used brooches ('buckles') for their arisaids (plaids worn by women), with the men fastening their plaids with a pin (Martin 1703: 208–09). It is not clear that this is a fashion statement of relevance to medieval times. Nor should it be assumed that mirrors, represented by C132 and L4, or a needle (C127) necessarily belonged to women. For further discussion of mirrors in the Lordship of the Isles, see Caldwell (2014c: 247).

No assumptions are made about the gender of the owners of other personal items reviewed here, prominent among which are knives, the main function of most of which would have been cutting and picking up food. It appears to have been the norm in medieval times for all classes of people to supply their own knives when at their own table or invited to dine out (Henisch 1976: 178). Knives could be hung on or attached to belts and girdles, represented in the finds assemblage by various mounts and buckles, mostly of copper alloy.

Playing pieces, ranging from finely carved bone tablemen to crudely roughed-out discs of slate, provide evidence of the importance of board games as a pastime. F53, a Jew's harp, is a not untypical find.

Administration, trade and industry

The concentration of mounts and keys (C91–C107, C112, C113, C115) that can be identified as belonging to caskets is a key indicator of Finlaggan's status and role as a centre of administration. This is postulated on the basis that the function of the caskets was to protect documents and other valuables, including money. Mark Hall suggests in his report on stone discoids and tablemen in Chapter C2 of the Catalogue that they might also be for holding gaming pieces. The remarkable quantity of casket mounts and keys suggests that the losses reflect rather more than the private property of one aristocratic family. Our suggestion is that they relate to administrative or judicial processes by which caskets, primarily their contents, changed hands as power and authority was delegated or resigned as the lords of the Isles exercised control over their lands and lordship. Some copper alloy mounts and clasps (C41–C44) have less certainly been identified as coming from book bindings, possibly devotional books, but administrative registers and the like are another possibility.

There are five groats and halfgroats from the late 14th and early 15th centuries. All of these coins would individually have had high purchasing power, small change only being represented by seven billon pennies of James I, II and III. The discovery in house 12.2 on Eilean Mór, occupied in the 15th century, of F14, a purse, represented by its iron mount, also implies a daily need for coins. Three class VI groats of James III (c 1484–89) are thought to relate in some way to the end of medieval occupation at Finlaggan, the demise of the lordship.

There is little clear evidence for imports, either luxuries or everyday essentials. Much of the metalwork from Finlaggan, whether of iron or copper alloy, looks little different in type and design from material that might turn up anywhere else in medieval Britain. Analysis of copper alloy artefacts using XRF demonstrated that most were composed of gunmetal, an alloy of copper with tin, zinc and lead. It is likely that this was because they were made from a range of recycled zinc-rich and tin-rich copper alloys rather than imported, unworked metals. This does not prove one way or another whether objects are imports, but there are clues from Finlaggan for local manufacture of copper alloy artefacts. Fragments of crucibles may all be of 13th rather than 14th- to 15th-century date, but it is worth noting that the residues from the rim of one (SF 25446), recovered from beach deposits [25002] adjacent to Eilean na Comhairle, were analysed and found to contain copper, zinc, lead and tin, suggesting that it was used for mixed copper alloys. One copper alloy object (C123), identified as an unfinished harp peg, might on the basis of its incompleteness be seen as locally made.

It is clearly the case that wheel-turned pottery was not manufactured locally but imported from the Scottish Lowlands. It is possible that many of the sherds recovered from 14th and 15th century contexts are actually residual, that is, the vessels they are from had long been broken and discarded when the deposits from which they were recovered were formed. Nevertheless it was probably the case that reduced gritty and oxidised gritty ware fabrics were still in use as late as about 1500, as indicated by sherds of both from the floor deposits of building V.1 in trench 7. A few sherds of North French wares (P73–P75), one of Beauvais stoneware (P76) and stoneware from the Rhineland (P77) may relate to luxury imports.

Lack of imported wheel-turned pottery is compensated for by over 1,100 sherds of handmade pottery. Unlike the wheel-made pottery, this is not the work of professional potters. The majority of sherds are from globular pots with everted rims ('croggans'), many used for cooking, but at least one vessel copied a wheel-made jug. Handmade pottery is not represented at all in most assemblages of material from medieval sites in mainland Scotland, and can in this case be seen as largely made in the vicinity of Finlaggan, perhaps with some coming in from other islands and Ireland. Much of it is indistinguishable from Ulster coarse ware. It is almost all from contexts of 14th-century or later date. There is a suggestion here, which has to be followed up in future work, that in the time of the lordship there was less requirement than previously for the import of wheel-made pottery. This may have been down to different patterns of food consumption, or because, for instance, the stuff previously imported in ceramic vessels now came in larger quantities in barrels. L6, a small lead sealing, is a clue to the import of materials or commodities from elsewhere, perhaps continental Europe.

The work of local smiths is evident in the nails and other ironwork recovered from the excavations. To what extent they operated as armourers and sword smiths, as tradition avers, is not altogether clear. Grave-slab R7 at the chapel on Eilean Mór has been identified as a monument for one of them. There are relatively few tools in the ironwork assemblage. Some, like awls F89 and F99, may have belonged to leather-workers, and two auger bits (F91, F96) and F98, a possible reamer, may have been lost by woodworkers. Not surprisingly there are the remains of agricultural tools, including a ploughshare (F85), a possible sickle (F93) and two teeth, F87 and F90, possibly from rakes. Other teeth, F88, F92 and F100, have provisionally been identified as coming from heckles. There is otherwise no evidence for flax cultivation.

Furnishings

No actual wooden furniture survives, but there are two iron hasps, F107 and F108, which might have secured the lids of large chests. Such chests might have been fully jointed, with no other metalwork apart from a staple to connect with the hasp and a lock to secure the two together. F108 was recovered from building 12.2. Some keys, for instance F116, a padlock key from building V.1, and two keys, F118 and F119 from building H, may also be from locks securing chests or other furnishings.

Ceramics, imported and local, have already been reviewed. None are obviously tableware but rather jugs and ewers for storing or decanting liquid, and storage and cooking vessels. A small group of metal fragments, L14–L17, may be from one or more base-metal drinking vessels, and several pieces of cast bronze vessels, C138–C148, may all or mostly be from imported cooking vessels.

Finlaggan, c 1500 – c 1700

There is no dating evidence for the demise of buildings (a) and (b) on Eilean na Comhairle, but in 1549 Donald Monro spoke of the council house in the past tense. Likewise, he does not create the impression that the well-built palace-work on Eilean Mór and the chapel there were still intact (Munro 1961: 56–57).



Illustration 14.13
Composite interpretative plan of post-medieval structures on Eilean Mór

The archaeological evidence from Eilean Mór indicates a major change from the administrative, ritual and residential centre of a great lordship at the end of the later medieval period to more diverse settlement and use in post-medieval times (Illus 14.13). The James III type VI groat (N34) in good condition from house V.1 points in the direction of that building's occupation ending not long after the death of that monarch in 1488. Other James III coins from Finlaggan include two other type VI groats and two billon pennies. From the succeeding reign of James IV (d 1513) there is a halfgroat and two placks. None of these coins

come from a useful context in terms of providing dating evidence for the use and demolition of structures, but they are the most recent coins from the site apart from a handful of Victorian and 20th-century losses.

The coins mark an ending somewhere in the region of AD 1500. Inevitably that invites an association to be sought with the arrest of the leaders of Clann Iain Mhóir at Finlaggan in 1499, recorded in a clan history (see 'Finlaggan in history and tradition' in Chapter 2). The perpetrator of that deed, John MacIain of Ardnarmurchan, was acting as an agent of King James IV, then intent on suppressing the Lordship of the Isles and preventing any new lords emerging from Clan Donald. MacIain may have had instructions from his royal master not only to arrest the leading MacDonalds but also to destroy Finlaggan to prevent further inauguration ceremonies and the convening of councils of the Isles.

Some of the medieval road system may have been refurbished and/or maintained in post-medieval times, but some stretches were built over or destroyed, for example by structures B and L. At some point the causeways connecting Eilean na Comhairle with Eilean Mór and the latter with the loch-side were dismantled, possibly as part of the programme of destruction about 1500. One building on Eilean Mór which may have survived undamaged from medieval times or been refurbished was the chapel. The archaeological evidence from it includes paving around the altar, almost certainly secondary and of post-medieval date, since it includes pieces of type A roof slate. It is probable that the building originally had an earth floor, with the passage of time set with grave-slabs, although a fragment of pink sandstone (R23), recovered from clearance work in 1998, has been identified as part of a paving slab. We have noted above (in 'Finlaggan in history and tradition' in Chapter 2) how there was a gap from the early years of the 16th century to 1527 when there was no chaplain, perhaps reflecting the turmoil consequent on the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles, if not the destruction of Finlaggan. Another chaplain was appointed as late as 1542, although this cannot be taken with any certainty as evidence that he had a roofed chapel in which to say Mass.

The burial ground probably remained in use, and, inside the chapel, coffin burials 14.6 and 14.2 are suggestive of wealth. Both were capped by stones that may have helped support grave-slabs laid flush with the floor – in the case of burial 14.2, the slab (R11) with the effigy of Donald MacGillespie, the crown tenant of Portanellan/Finlaggan in the 1540s.

A good case has been made that a number of medieval commemorative crosses in Kintyre had their heads knocked off in 1647 by soldiers in the Covenanting army led by General David Leslie in pursuit of Alasdair MacColla and his royalist forces. These crosses would have been viewed as monuments of idolatry, an unacceptable reminder of the old religion. It may also have been at this time that a more sympathetic Marquis of Argyll rescued two fine crosses, had the figures and crucifixions erased from them, and planted them as market crosses at Inverary and Campbeltown (Rixson 1988).

This same army, with the Marquis of Argyll as one of its officers, moved into Islay in 1647 to besiege Alasdair MacColla's supporters in Dunyvaig Castle (Smith 1895: 399–400). Perhaps it was at this time that the Finlaggan cross (R20) was vandalised. The cross-head lies where it fell, and the end of grave 1016

partially covers it. Since none of the graves are likely to be later than the mid-17th century, by which time ministers of the Reformed Church were firmly established, this gives a *terminus ante quem* for this act of destruction. The shaft has probably been removed for use as a lintel.

Trapped under the cross-head was a bullaun (R82, Illus 9.8). This Irish term is now used to describe a variety of stone features associated with churches and burial grounds in Ireland and parts of Scotland, often containing holes or hollows. Sometimes these are carved in the living rock, sometimes they are free-standing basins and the like (cf Hamlin 2008: 144–54). At church sites in Islay, bullauns include a prehistoric cup-marked slab at Kilchiaran Church (RCAHMS 1984: 62) and a saddle quern at the church at Kilnave. It is not known what these stones would have been called in Islay in earlier times, or to what extent it is legitimate to view them all as the same phenomenon. The Finlaggan bullaun is unusually small, and with its six hollows, one in each face, apparently unique. It is probably no coincidence that it was in the burial ground adjacent to the cross.

If, as suggested above, the Finlaggan cross had its head knocked off by soldiers of the Covenanting army in 1647, they might equally have wrecked a chapel that they considered had associations with popery. It took a long time for the reformed faith to establish itself in Islay. It was noted in a report written in 1615 about the suppression of the MacDonald uprising that the people of Islay still adhered to the old religion and that many religious images were rooted out and burnt (MacPhail 1920: 185). Islay is known to have been fertile ground for the Irish Franciscan missionaries who operated in Argyll in the first half of the 17th century, and the high altar of the priory church on the neighbouring island of Oronsay seems to have been restored for Catholic worship in 1624 (Giblin 1964; RCAHMS 1984: 238, 254). It would not be surprising if the chapel was also used for Catholic worship about that time. It had certainly been abandoned by about 1695, when Martin Martin (1703: 240) specifically describes it as being ruinous.

Another medieval building that survived, at least partially, for reuse was building C. Its remodelling into the structure we see today cannot be dated with any certainty. It probably took place in the 16th century. It could have served as a dwelling house for someone of some status locally. There are no obvious parallels elsewhere in the West Highlands and Islands. The provision for shutters secured with bars in the windows in the new work in the upper storey indicates that security remained a prime concern.

Eilean Mór was covered with several buildings and structures in the 16th and 17th centuries, the dates and relationships of which are not altogether clear. Our interpretation (Illus 14.13, 14.14) recognises three main complexes:

- A high-status residential complex at the west end of the island
- A timber and earthwork fortification at the east end of the island
- A farming township with houses, barns, other structures and gardens spread across the whole island.

The earliest of these is likely to be the residential complex, perhaps already being developed about 1500, with construction and

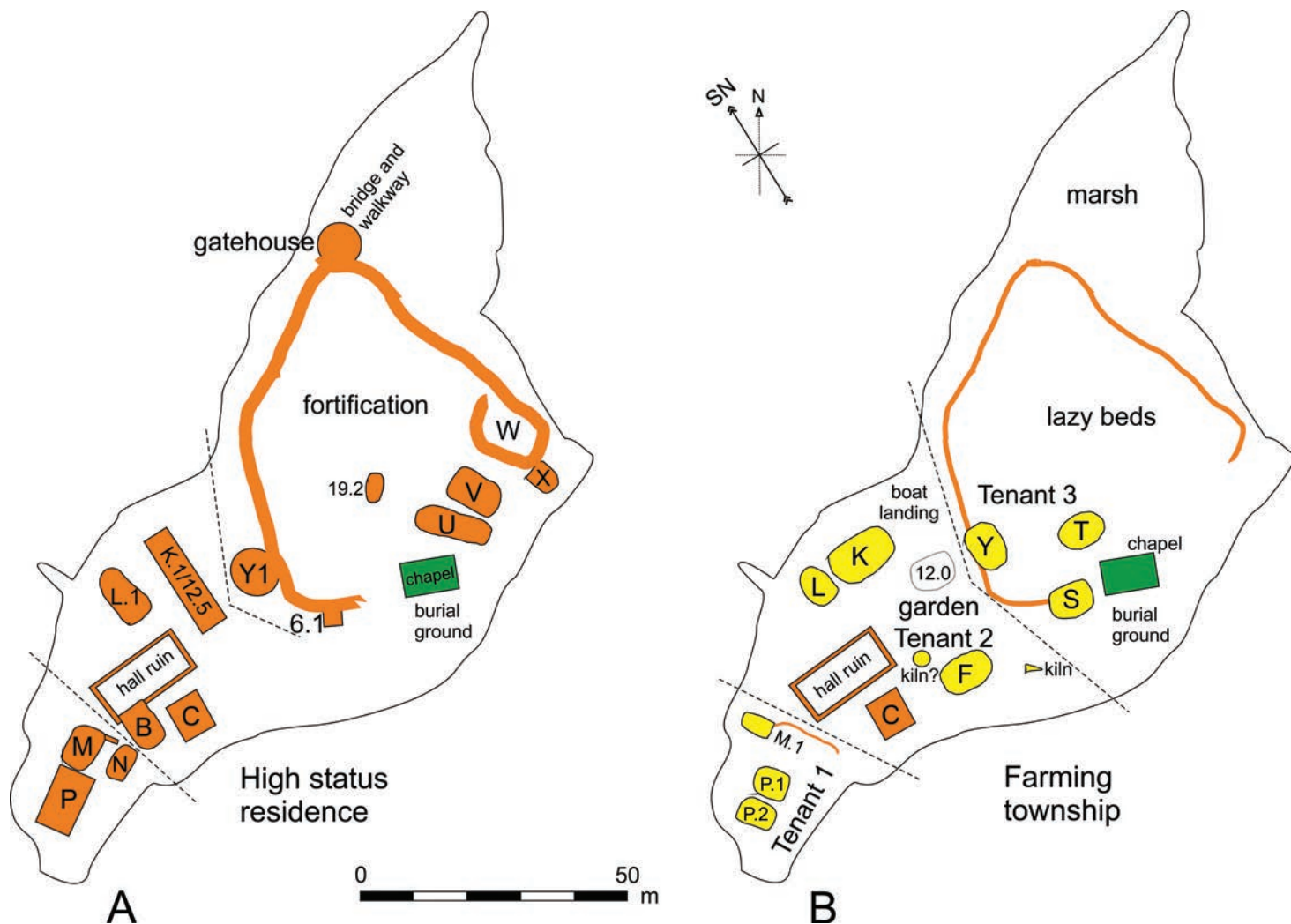


Illustration 14.14

Plans of post-medieval occupation of Eilean Mór, distinguishing (A) a high status residence and fortification and (B) a joint tenancy farming township

occupancy of some of its buildings extending through the 16th century. It makes substantial use of the ruins of the medieval buildings. The fortification may overlap with it chronologically. It has not proved possible to pin a precise date on its erection, but parallels for it cited below suggest that it may date to the late 16th century. The farming township demonstrably supersedes both, since its buildings and gardens overlie their remains. At earliest it may have developed in the late 16th century, and its occupancy may not have extended very far into the 17th century. The chapel and burial ground were there for all three. No artefacts known to be typical of sites of all types occupied elsewhere in Scotland in the 17th and 18th centuries, including Throsk type earthenware, glass bottles, clay tobacco pipes (with one exception) and appropriate low denomination coins, have been recovered from the two islands.

High-status residential complex

This complex includes the remodelled building C, houses B, M and P, a probable barn (K.1/12.5) and structure L.1 (Illus 14.14 A). It is probable that it grew and evolved over many years. The group

is divided in two by a cross-wall, surviving from medieval times, spanning the relatively narrow width of the island at this point. The cross-wall separated buildings P and M from the other structures, with access between the two being provided by a door or gateway. Not much can be said of structure M other than it was a building with drystone walls, probably contemporary with P.

Building P had lime-mortared walls and a roof, possibly covered with slates (Illus 14.15 A). It is not dissimilar in size and shape to other Islay buildings known only from unexcavated ruins but likely to be later medieval or post-medieval high-status houses. At two of them, cruck slots are visible, which is likely to indicate that they were single-storey structures with turf and thatch roofs. One of these is on Nave Island, adjacent to the enclosure wall of the burial ground round the 13th-century chapel (Illus 14.15 C). It is labelled as building F by RCAHMS (1984: no. 383). Nave Island was part of an extensive estate belonging in the medieval period to the Abbey of Iona (Caldwell 2017: 36-7), and building F may have been the hall or house of a local manager or substantial tenant. There is no dating evidence for it. The other building is the hall (structure A) incorporated in a 1615 earthwork

FINLAGGAN

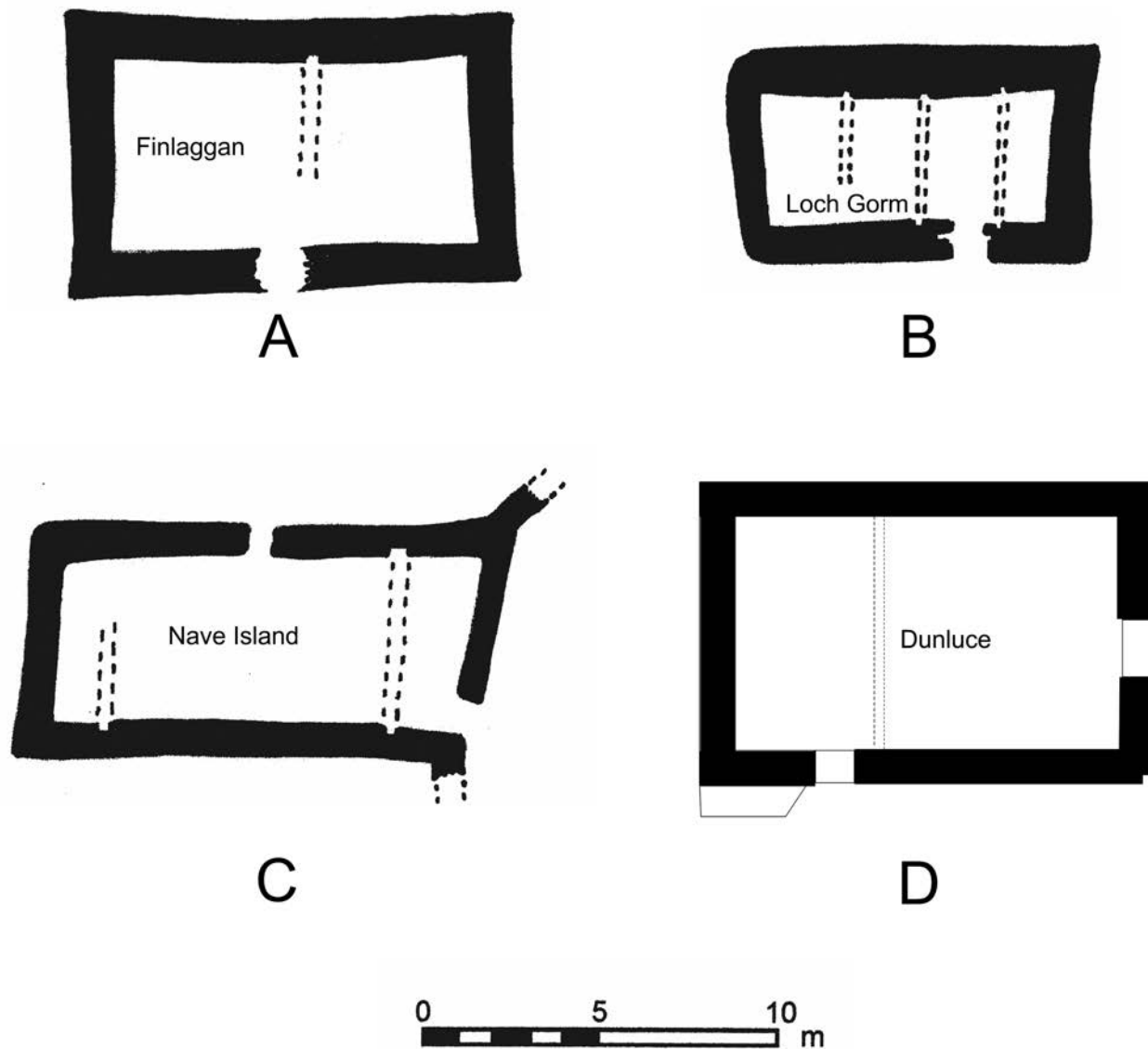


Illustration 14.15
(A) building P at Finlaggan; (B) structure A in Loch Gorm Castle; (C) building F on Nave Island; (D) the buttery in Dunluce Castle

fortification, the castle in Loch Gorm (Illus 14.15 B; RCAHMS 1984: no. 406; Caldwell & Ruckley 2005: 110–11).

Attention is drawn to these here because it would be possible to think of building P at Finlaggan as being a similar structure with the slot excavated in its north-west wall being for a cruck. If, alternatively, it is identified as a slot for securing a wooden partition wall, dividing the interior of P into two rooms, then more appropriate comparisons may be made with a building in Dunluce Castle, County Antrim, now known as the buttery (Illus 14.15 D). It is similar in size to building P (internally 10.05 by 6.07m) and its lime-mortared walls are largely upstanding, incorporated in the later 'Jacobean House'. It has two stories, the lower divided by a wooden partition into two similar sized chambers. It is considered to date between about 1585 and 1611 and to have been a 'small hall' erected by the 'MacDonnell' chief, owner of the castle, for receiving visitors (Breen 2012: 89, 108). That chief

is most likely to have been Sorley Boy or either of his sons, James of Dunluce or Randal (later Earl of Antrim). Sorley Boy's elder brother, James MacDonald of Dunyvaig and the Glens, received a tack of the lands of Portanellan (Finlaggan) from Queen Mary in 1562 (*RSS* 5/1: no. 1112; Smith 1895: 67–69, 78), but it is probable that that was merely recognising the reality of MacDonald occupation and/or control for some time beforehand. We might expect that this James MacDonald (d 1565) or his sons Archibald (dead by 1569) or Angus (forfeited 1594) would have had use for a 'high-status residential complex' at Finlaggan.

Building C, as remodelled in post-medieval times, is likely to have been a residence for someone of status (Illus 11.3). Its physical separation from building P by the cross-wall might be a clue that that was not an actual MacDonald chief. A possible candidate is Donald MacGillespie, crown tenant of Portanellan in the 1540s, whose grave-slab is in the chapel. Although not vaulted, it

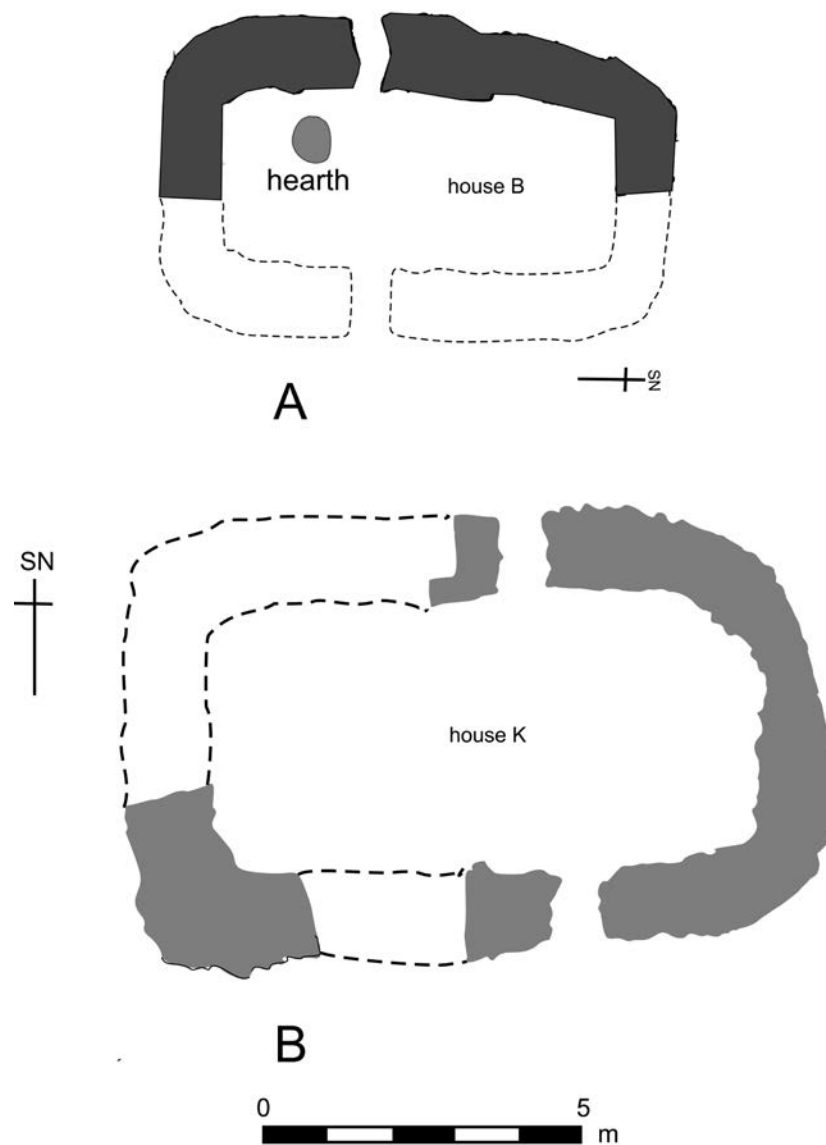


Illustration 14.16
Plans of post-medieval houses: (A) house B; (B) house K

provides an interesting parallel to the bastle houses of the border regions of Scotland and England, many of which are also surrounded by farming townships, like the 17th-century one excavated at Glenochar in Clydesdale (Ward 1998). The possibility cannot be discounted that building C remained, or was adapted to be, the residence of one of the incoming Campbell lairds in the 17th century, specifically George Campbell, younger brother of Sir John Campbell of Cawdor, who had a feu by 1628 of a large estate in the region of Finlaggan, including Staoisha, Portanellan (Finlaggan), Mulreesh, Mullinmadagan and Margadale (Caldwell 2017: 109, 133).

To the east of the cross-wall and adjacent to building C was house B (Illus 14.16 A). It had mortared walls, opposed entrances and a central hearth. Its end wall was founded on the reduced south wall of the medieval great hall which had ruthlessly been removed. Incorporated in the wall of building B adjacent to one

of its entrances (see Illus 11.23 for this location) was R32, a sandstone human head, possibly a label stop or corbel from the entrance to the great hall. This has the appearance of being a deliberate positioning, for reasons we do not understand.

The lower portions of the hall walls may have been retained to form an enclosure or yard for house B. Spilling from it was an extensive midden. Although the cattle bones mostly indicated the use of high-quality meat joints, poor-quality mutton meat was also represented, along with considerable quantities of shells, especially limpets. This midden may represent the cooking and serving up of portions of stew for large numbers, but when exactly is not clear. It could relate to the feeding of a military force. It can be compared to the evidence for a food stall serving visitors to the annual fair at Dunluce in Ireland in the earlier 18th century (Breen 2012: 177–79). Structure A.1 might turn out to have been a serving booth.

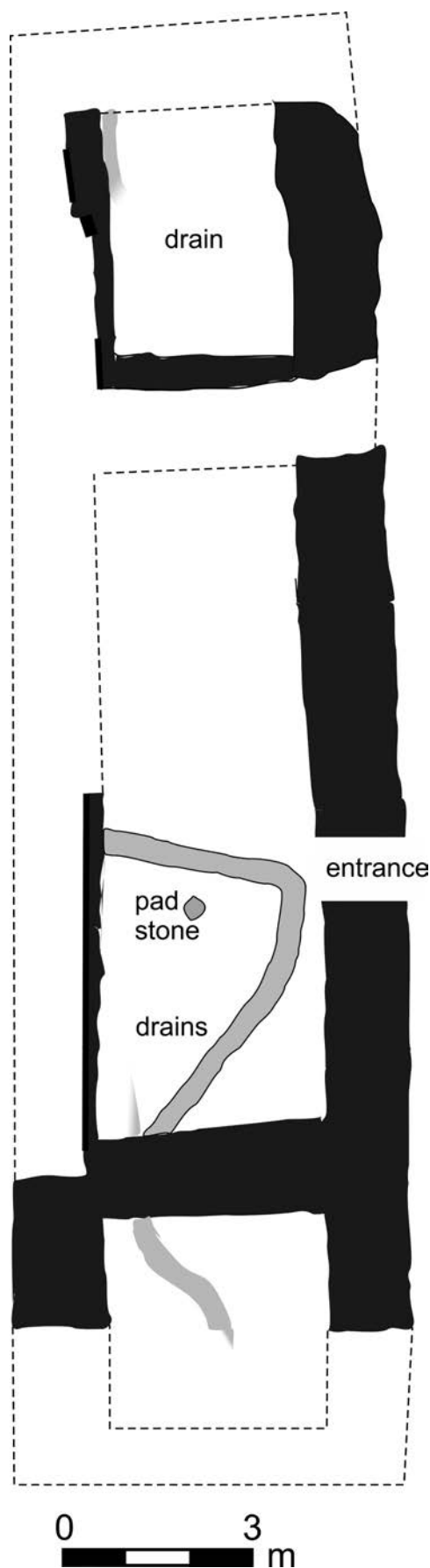


Illustration 14.17
Post-medieval structure K.1/12.5, possibly a barn

Further west was a substantial long narrow building, K.1/12.5, possibly of more than one storey, erected over the flattened remains of the medieval kitchen (Illus 14.17). On the one hand, a system of drains and a quern (R90) recovered from its floor, along with a lack of domestic material, might suggest that it should be identified as a barn. On the other hand, as a long narrow building, possibly of two stories, it might have functioned as barracks, like those in Cairnburgh Castle (actually on Cairn na Burgh More), Treshnish Isles (RCAHMS 1980: no. 335). The ruined barracks there had stone walls of two stories, 16.2 by 6.3m over walls 0.7m thick. An internal cross-wall divided the ground floor into two unequal chambers, and there was an upper storey or loft. RCAHMS believed they could be dated to either the 16th or 17th century. In the 16th century Cairnburgh Castle belonged to the Macleans of Duart, who, like the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig and the Glens, retained warriors as bodyguards and for service as mercenaries (Caldwell 2014a, 2015).

Views of forts in Ulster by the English surveyor Richard Bartlett about 1602 show buildings which may have been similar, although there is no supporting information for their function. The main fort at Charlemont, actually erected in 1602, contains two long narrow oblong buildings, covered with tiles, slates or shingles. One of them is of two stories with a hipped roof and a chimney, perhaps indicating some sort of industrial activity. The other is single storied and with gable end(s) (Hayes-McCoy 1964: IV and p 7; Andrews 2008: 54, pl 9). Although the fort was English, the houses in it may have reflected local Irish building traditions. Another long house of two stories, this time with a ridged thatched roof, is represented in Inisloughan Fort, Co Antrim, captured by the English from Brian MacArt O'Neill in August 1602 (Hayes-McCoy 1964: IV and p 7; Andrews 2008: pl 14).

An iron ploughshare (F85) appears to have been deliberately positioned under one of the settings for an upright post in the east wall of structure K.1 at Finlaggan, though what this was intended to achieve is not now apparent. Less certain as a ritual deposit is the inclusion in the same wall of R84, a piece of slate scratched with a heraldic lion and other beasts.

Only a small part of structure L.1, to the west of 12.5/K.1, was located by excavation, but enough to suggest that it might be a kiln-barn, perhaps in use at the same time as 12.5/K.1. A later medieval kiln-barn has been excavated at Bornais in South Uist (Sharples 2005: 89–93), but at Baliscate in Mull a corn-drying kiln of the 12th century was deemed by the excavator to have been inserted in a long house when it was already in ruins (Ellis 2017: 96). The tradition of having corn-kilns within barns continued in the Hebrides into post-medieval times (Whitaker 1957). The wall of L.1 partially covered the cobbled road leading from the jetty that had been the main access to Eilean Mór in later medieval times. This may be a clue that the island was again approached from the east, now via a bridge and wooden walkway across the alluvial tail.

Our tentative interpretation of this building complex is that it represents an estate centre for the chiefs of Clann Iain Mhóir, perhaps normally the residence of a tenant – in 1541, Donald MacGillespie. Despite the forfeiture of the lords of the Isles in 1493 and the capture of the MacDonald chiefs at Finlaggan soon afterwards, perhaps they remained in control there all through the 16th century. Their main Islay residence was Dunyvaig Castle,



Illustration 14.18
Augher island, 1602 (National Library of Ireland, MS 2656, x)

but that had been granted by King James IV to MacIain of Ardnamurchan sometime prior to 1506 and seems only to have been regained by the family in the early 1520s (Caldwell 2017: 70–71, 78–79). That might suggest a need for Finlaggan as a residence for MacDonald chiefs in the early 16th century.

In 1540 James Canochson (MacDonald), chief of Clann Iain Mhóir, was captured, possibly in Islay (see Chapter 2 above), by King James V during his expedition to the Isles. He was imprisoned for over two years and royal garrisons were installed in Islay (Caldwell 2017: 82). The payment of fees to their captain, Archibald Stewart, along with three gunners, are recorded in royal financial records (*TA* 7: 238, 438; *ER* 17: 278, 279), the writers of which were clearly confused or misinformed. They note that the ‘castles of Dunnewik and Iland, Lochbrum in Ilay’ were garrisoned. ‘Lochbrum’ is reasonably a mistake for Loch Gorm, captained by Archibald Stewart’s brother, but it is not clear if ‘Iland’ was a third castle. If it were, Eilean Mór at Finlaggan would be the obvious candidate.

Gunners at this time, and in this context, would have been artillery specialists rather than men equipped with firearms. An observation worth making is that three probable pieces of round shot for artillery have been recovered from Finlaggan, two of

stone (R98, R99) from Eilean na Comhairle, and the third (L10) a composite piece of lead and stone from trench 19 on Eilean Mór. Both have damage consistent with their having been fired. Round shot like these are most likely to date to the 16th century and to be associated with the guns of a royal expedition. James V’s expedition of 1540 is certainly a possible context for their loss. In Chapter C5 of the Catalogue the possibility is also considered that some of the arrowheads (F29–F38) from the two islands might relate to one or more actual attacks.

Timber and earthwork fortification (Illus 14.14 A)

RCAHMS plotted a substantial bank (‘dyke’) enclosing two sides of a triangular area of lazy beds at the east end of Eilean Mór. They opined that this enclosure had originally been a garden but offered no further interpretation for the bank. A working hypothesis for the author during the excavations was that it was the remains of a medieval perimeter timberwork defence, consisting of a palisade set in a turf bank, a view that (mistakenly) seemed to be confirmed as a result of excavations in trench 3 in 1990. It is still the writer’s interpretation that there was such a defensive work in the earlier medieval period, and the bank may overlie the

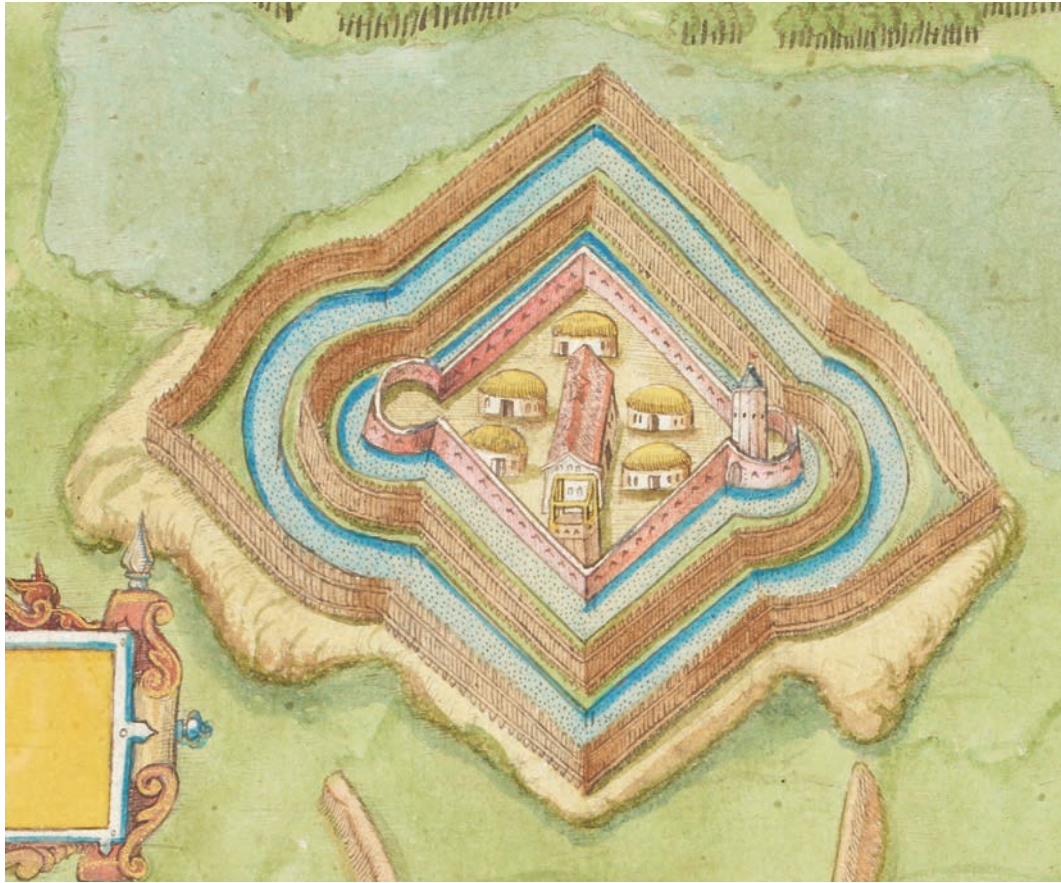


Illustration 14.19
Inisloughan Fort, 1602 (National Library of Ireland, MS 2656, vi)

remains of some of it. It is now clear, however, that the bank as it survives is a work of more recent date, and that it had bastions or towers, one identified as a gatehouse. The dating evidence is provided by considerations to do with stratigraphy, especially in trench 6; the occurrence of roof slates in trench 18, either as debris or recycled from later medieval structures; and comparisons with other late 16th-century fortifications.

This does appear to have been a serious fortification, but one that only enclosed about half of Eilean Mór (excluding the alluvial tail). In spatial terms it is separate from the high-status residential complex just described, and so both could have co-existed for much of their lifespan. The line of fortification between structure X and the later house S is not clear. It is possible that the chapel and burial ground were excluded from the fort.

The bank was partially excavated in trenches 3 and 6, and was found in the latter to have been faced on the exterior with stone and to have supported a series of upright posts. The post-hole for one of these produced a knife (F62), perhaps deliberately deposited after being broken in two. The posts may have been for supporting a wattle fence. Such wattle fence defences are known to have been employed in native Irish fortifications. They can, for instance, be seen in English illustrations of about 1602 of Augher Fort (Illus 14.18) and Ulster crannogs under siege (Hayes-McCoy 1964: V, X, XI; Andrews 2008: pls 10, 15, 16). Palisades or wattle fences backed by a fighting platform or step are typical of earth

and timber fortifications of the medieval period in Europe (Higham & Barker 2004: 244–325).

The short length of the bank excavated in trench 3 also had post-holes for a fence or palisade, backed by a firing step for the defenders. Here the bank replaced, and cut into the back of, a circular flattened bastion at the apex of the fortification, identified as a gatehouse. No dating evidence was recovered for this section of bank, but it is supposed that it represents a remodelling dating to a time when the fortification was still functioning as such.

The gatehouse was possibly similar in overall appearance to a tower sited in a circular bastion at one corner of the O'Neill stronghold at Inisloughan (Illus 14.19) (Hayes-McCoy 1964: VI; Andrews 2008: pl 14; MacDonald et al 2012). This tower was tall and the colour in Richard Bartlett's contemporary view evidently indicates it was of wood, while the conical roof might be covered with slate. In our account of excavations in trench 18 (Chapter 8) we dismissed the idea that the Finlaggan gatehouse had a slate roof. That is an interpretation that might be revisited, especially if more excavation were to be undertaken. The Inisloughan tower was either circular or polygonal in plan, with vertical lines in its illustration representing the junctures between wooden boards. Small slit windows are indicated in an upper storey.

The Finlaggan gatehouse was approached across the alluvial tail by a bridge and wooden walkway which would have been dismantled at the same time as the gatehouse. Access to the fort,

and more generally Eilean Mór thereafter, may still have been across the alluvial tail or by boat from other points around the loch shore. The north edge of the island between house K and the fort could have functioned well as a boat-landing. Tenuous clues that the gatehouse may have witnessed military activity, including an arrowhead (F37) and two pieces of lead shot (L9 and SF 18170), have already been noted (Chapter 8). See also the lead shot and sprues listed in Chapter C4 of the Catalogue. F135, the remains of an iron mechanism recovered from the gatehouse's demolition deposit, might possibly be a firing device from a handgun.

Judging by surface remains and limited excavation in trench 12, structure Y1 might have been another circular bastion projecting from the fortification towards the residential complex at the west end of Eilean Mór. A third, smaller bastion may be represented by structure X, the foundations of which can be traced at the water's edge. None of it was included in the excavations, but a path leading to it from within the enclosure was detected in trench 7.

In trench 6, structure 6.1 was identified as the remains of a rectangular wooden watch tower added to the exterior of the palisade bank at the highest point of the island outside of the burial ground. Two rectangular timber towers are shown in English views of native Irish forts in Ulster in 1602, already referred to. The O'Neill stronghold of Inisloughan has one in an angle of its enceinte (Illus 14.19). It appears to be of comparable height to a large two-storey building. It has gun-loops below a flat top surrounded by a wooden handrail. The other is in an unidentified crannog, perhaps one in Roughan Lough, County Tyrone, captured by the English in 1602 (Andrews 2008: 30, pl 16). The crannog has three single-storey thatched houses and a wooden tower within a wattled palisade. The tower is shown only as a framework of timbers – four corner-posts braced together at top and bottom by cross-beams. Perhaps it was erected hurriedly in anticipation of the siege but left incomplete.

Significant areas of the interior of this fortification were excavated in trenches 7 and 19, and residual traces of three houses, structures 19.2, 19.9 and 19.10, were recovered despite subsequent damage over most of the area by the digging of lazy beds. House U and enclosure W may both also relate to the use of the fort.

This timber and earthwork fort at Finlaggan does not appear to belong with the artillery forts with round bastions – Loch Gorm in Islay and Loch an Sgoltaire in Colonsay – which were erected in 1615 during the uprising led by Sir James MacDonald of Knockrinsay (RCAHMS 1984: nos 405–06; Caldwell 2009b: 89–110; 2011: 184–86). A possible context for its construction might be the deadly feud in the 1590s between the MacDonalds and the Macleans of Duart, and their machinations to provide mercenaries for the wars in Ireland, the MacDonalds in support of the Earl of Tyrone and the Macleans to bolster the efforts of the English administration. In July 1595 Lachlan Mor Maclean of Duart wrote to Robert Bowes, the English agent in Edinburgh, that he had just disbanded a force of 600 men whom he had had in garrison for three months (*CSP Scot* 11, no. 581). Lachlan was angling to get paid by the English for his services and was hoping to discourage the two MacDonald chiefs, Angus of Dunyvaig and Donald Gorm of Sleat (Skye), from joining in an expedition to Ireland to support Tyrone. It is probable that his force of 600 men

was garrisoned at Breacachadh Castle in Coll, where there is evidence, largely from a contemporary report, that he had created an extensive fort with timber and earthwork defences around the medieval castle (Caldwell 2014a, 2015: 361).

Meanwhile, Angus of Dunyvaig was under serious threat from the government in Edinburgh for his bad behaviour. He had been forced to submit to a royal army led against him by Sir William Stewart, commendator of Pittenweem, and among the penalties he was to suffer was the loss of Dunyvaig Castle (Caldwell 2017: 91). In the following years, until the MacDonald uprising in 1615, Dunyvaig Castle changed hands more than once between the MacDonalds and royal garrisons. It would therefore not be surprising if sometime in those years Angus MacDonald, or his son and heir, James MacDonald of Knockrinsay, found it expedient to have a fort at Finlaggan for concentrating local forces prior to military campaigns in Ireland or elsewhere in the Isles. It is known that the number of fighting men that Islay was meant to produce at that time was 800 (Caldwell 2015: 359), the majority of whom would have been MacDonald clansmen or supporters.

Farming township (Illus 14.14 B)

Several of the more obvious, turfed-over structures visible today on Eilean Mór are the ruins of the houses, barns and stores of a farming township. They appear to have been abandoned, their walls collapsing in situ and not obviously robbed for building materials for use elsewhere. It can be deduced that they represent the final occupation of Eilean Mór before settlement was relocated off the island. They include houses P.1, P.2, M.1, L, K, Y, T, S and F, all of which appear to have been of drystone construction, largely made up of recycled blocks and boulders. Their roofs of turf and thatch were probably removed for use as manure and their roof timbers taken away for reuse prior to the houses being abandoned. As a consequence their walls became unstable and collapsed.

All these buildings, whether occupied as homes or used as barns or stores or for other purposes, are generally of a form described in Chapter 5 as type A houses. Regrettably our excavations did not provide any substantial information on how they were used or furnished. Of the houses listed, the one that was most substantially excavated was house K (Illus 14.16 B), partially built over the ruins of structure K.1/12.5. It had opposed entrances, from one of which were recovered some nails, perhaps from a door, and the remains of a padlock (F124). It is assumed to have been a dwelling house, although excavations in trench 2 were not extensive enough to locate a central hearth. The floor was of earth and, like others in medieval and later houses on Eilean Mór, would have been prepared in the same way as that employed by the natives of St Kilda in the mid-18th century. They spread peat ash over the area of the floor, adding a mixture of earth and peat dust before watering and treading this into a mulch that was then dried off with a fire. This process was repeated regularly. These floors could be dug out seasonally to provide manure for growing crops (Gannon & Geddes 2015: 77).

The distribution and grouping of these buildings might imply a joint tenancy farm with at least three tenants, with tenant one based in building M.1, along with P.1 and P.2 nestling in the ruined walls of building P. Tenant one's holding would have been

separated from the neighbouring tenant's by the medieval cross-wall. Tenant two would have occupied the paired structures K and L, with house L serving as a storehouse for the occupiers of house K. They may have tended the adjacent garden partially excavated in trench 12. Another supposed storehouse nearby, structure 12.0, was removed by gardening activity, probably by the occupants of house K. Separated from house K by a garden was building F, with a corn-drying kiln in the ruins of building H, and possibly another kiln (G, between the ruin of the hall and structure F), close by. Building F was not excavated, but it would not be unreasonable to surmise that it may have been a barn. The banked enclosure left by the timberwork fortification at the east end of the island made a good area for the digging of lazy beds, possibly by a third tenant based in buildings Y, T and S.

Two other possible early joint tenancy farms have been identified in Islay. One consists of the ruins of seven houses on an island in Loch Ballygrant, Ellan Charrin (RCAHMS 1984: 155), suggested in Chapter 3 to be where Donald Dubh convened a meeting of the Council of the Isles in 1545. The island, belonging with the land of Scanistle, was by 1549 another residence of the Macleans. At Ballore, near the deserted township of Creagfinn in Kildalton Parish, there is a group of five stone houses like those at Finlaggan, nestling on a low rise overlooked by a rocky outcrop. This too may be a 16th-century settlement (Caldwell 2017: 173, fig 9.6).

Whether the chapel and building C remained in use throughout the whole time of the occupancy of the island by joint tenants is not known. Nor is the exact date when Eilean Mór was abandoned as a settlement. If the island had been occupied or regularly visited between the early 17th century and modern times, artefacts like tobacco pipes, bottle glass, sherds of pottery and small denomination coins might have been jettisoned. Instead there is practically no artefactual material to fill this time slot. After the civil wars of the mid-17th century it may have been obvious that there was no advantage from a security point of view for tenants to be cut off from their land by the waters of the loch. A shift of settlement to Portanellan may have been encouraged by the Laird of Islay.

The wider Finlaggan study area

In Islay the houses on the island in Loch Ballygrant and at Ballore all appear to be of our type A, and like those at Finlaggan to have stone walls. Similar houses can be identified elsewhere, some with turf walls. In the Finlaggan study area examples have been identified at Druim a' Chùirn, Sean-ghairt (no. 22, house H); Rudh' a' Chròcuin (no. 38) on the shore of Loch Finlaggan; at Cuingsgeir, Portanellan (no. 51); and at An Tàmhanachd, Robolls (nos 57, 58). All of these, except house H at Druim a' Chùirn, are in, or adjacent to, systems of small, irregular enclosed fields containing rigs, representing farms abandoned prior to the modern period.

One of these houses at Rudh' a' Chròcuin was excavated (Chapter 7, trench 20), demonstrating that it had a central hearth and was possibly lined inside with wattling. It was probably similar to other houses, sometimes called creel houses, known from the mainland, especially the Highlands. A good description of such a house is given by an English army officer, Edmund Burt,

based in Inverness in the 1720s and 1730s. The skeleton of the 'hut' was formed of 'small crooked timber' with a large beam for the roof. The walls were about 4ft (1.2m) high, lined with sticks 'wattled like a hurdle', built on the outside with turf. Thin 'divets' of turf were also used for covering the roof, and the floor was of earth. There was a small peat fire in the centre with a small hole in the roof to let the smoke escape (Burt 1998: 169–70; Noble, 1984, 2000). Reconstructions of such houses have been erected at the Highland Folk Museum at Newtonmore and the National Trust for Scotland Visitor Centre in Glencoe.

Unfortunately no dating material was collected from this house at Rudh' a' Chròcuin, a predecessor to it or a larger unexcavated turf-walled house adjacent to it which was thought likely to be a barn. A question for future research is whether there is a chronological or other distinction between these type A houses of stone and those of turf, or whether the difference is to do with mundane matters like the availability of building materials. A preference for building turf-walled houses might have been brought to Islay by the Campbells of Cawdor and their tenants in the 17th century. Turf or creel houses had spread elsewhere in the West Highlands and Islands by the 18th century (Dodgshon 1994: 422).

The shieling huts occupied in the summer months, for instance two groups (nos 26, 27) on the land of Sean-ghairt below the summit of Cnoc an Tighe, also appear to have been erected in a similar fashion. These huts are circular or oval in shape, varying in diameter from about 5 to 10m. None of them have been excavated, but there is an illustration and account of some still in use in 1772 on the neighbouring island of Jura in Thomas Pennant's *Tour* (Illus 14.20; Pennant 1774: pl XV). No furnishings were observed apart from two blankets and a rug, some dairy vessels and pendent shelves of basketwork to hold the cheese that was being produced. Jura was in the hands of other branches of the Campbells from 1614. A relatively large but poor island, it was heavily influenced by developments in Islay.

Fieldwork around Loch Finlaggan and elsewhere in Islay has amply provided evidence for an infield–outfield system of agriculture which likely developed over several generations. One of the main impetuses behind its introduction to the island may have been the incoming Campbells bringing in mainland practices, including runrig, with which they were familiar. The MacDonallds and Macleans had notoriously not paid the rents and fees they owed the crown, except under duress. From 1614 continued possession of Islay by the Campbells depended on the payment of these dues in full, while they garnered profits for themselves. A shake-up in farming methods was part of the solution.

Surviving rentals demonstrate that the Campbell lairds required a higher proportion of their rents to be paid to them in money rather than in produce. The most likely source of that money for many tenants was through the sale of livestock, principally cattle. In the 1630s the laird was exporting between 100 and 200 cattle per year. By the 1680s, 1,000 or more head of cattle were being exported yearly from the island (Innes 1859: 351–52; Cawdor muniments, 590, nos 3, 25, 41, 47, 77, 78). Increased interest in cattle raising by the 1630s is perhaps also demonstrated by a shift in the rentals from payment of cheese (made from the milk of sheep or goats?) to butter, which could only be produced from cow's milk. More cattle meant more manure, and thus it

XV



Sheelins in JURA and a distant View of the Paps.

Illustration 14.20
Sheelings in Jura in 1772 (Pennant 1774: opposite p 204)

became feasible to manure not just the infield but also parts of the outfield by folding the cattle into areas intended for crops. Indeed, it is likely that the development of infield–outfield cultivation on Islay depended on an increase in the number of cattle.

One of the main archaeological characteristics of an infield–outfield system is a ‘head dyke’ at the normal limit of cultivation to prevent cattle and other beasts pastured on the moors in the summer straying on to the growing crops. Since protection for them was provided by the head dyke, there was no need for them to be enclosed as previously in small fields. The infield, normally the best land nearest the settlements, was regularly manured or fertilised and was intensively farmed. It is characterised by open fields – unenclosed groups of rigs. Other groups of unenclosed rigs are to be found in the outfield, the less intensively farmed area between the infield and the head dyke. Crops would be sown in parts of the outfield for a couple of years or so which were then left fallow for several years. A runrig system of farm management in which the tenants’ rigs were intermingled and reallocated from time to time in proportion to the extent of their holding is implied. Lord Teignmouth recorded that runrig was still

prevalent in Islay in 1836, with rigs being exchanged at three-yearly intervals (Teignmouth 1836: 308).

Head dykes and areas of infield and outfield are best identified on the farms of Sean-ghairt and Robolls (Illus 4.21 and 4.25). At Sean-ghairt, overlooking the west shore of Loch Finlaggan, there are traces of open fields that probably remained in use until the 1860s. Regular series of rigs are grouped around two clusters of houses (nos 22 and 23), with occasional groups of rigs further out. A head dyke marks the division between green and rough pasture, part of it serving as the march with the neighbouring farm of Ballachlaven. Direct access to rough pasture on the neighbouring moor, for summer grazing, thus seems to have been cut off for the Sean-ghairt farmers who were sub-tenants of the Campbells of Ballachlaven in the 17th and early 18th centuries (Chapter 4, no. 15).

It is notable that shieling huts sometimes occur just outside the line of head dykes. Small groups of them are to be found near the head dyke of Sean-ghairt (nos 26, 27). Is it possible that these represent a phase before the erection of the head dyke and that the line of the head dyke consciously abuts a zone of shielings? These shielings could mark the nearest point to the arable land

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where beasts would be tolerated in the growing season. There is plenty of evidence for other groups of shieling huts further out on the moors. Those that may have been occupied by the tenants of Ballachlaven and Sean-ghairt are at Airigh na Creige (NGR NR 363 693), Airigh Ruadh (369 689), Airigh an t-Sagairt (368 698), Airigh an t-Sluic (363 699) and Airigh nan Sidhean (366 715). The nearest, Airigh Ruadh, is about half a mile (0.8km) away from the head dyke, while the furthest, Airigh nan Sidhean, is over 2 miles (3km) away. It is likely they were not all in use at the same period. At Robolls (no. 20) our interpretation of the complex series of dykes, rigs and other features shows a system of small enclosed fields being superseded by an infield–outfield system.

Finlaggan, c 1700 – c 2020

In general the landscape around Loch Finlaggan shows considerable traces of ‘improved’ methods of agriculture, a subject dealt with more fully for Islay as a whole by the writer elsewhere (Caldwell 2017: 152–83, 199–208). Some of the more obvious signs are the replacement of sinuous turf banks by straight

drystone dykes and wire fences. By the time Islay was first mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1878, new field systems had swept away earlier infield–outfield systems with their unenclosed rigs, all over the island. These are to a large extent the fields that can be seen today, the old rigs and dykes ploughed flat and drainage provided not by surface run-off between the rigs but by subsoil drains. Some of the small kilns around Finlaggan, for instance four on the land of Kepollsmore (nos 65, 67, 68, 71), will have been used for burning lime for dressing the arable fields. The continued importance into the 19th century of pasturing beasts on the moors in the summer months is demonstrated by the building of little rectangular stone houses for the use of herdsmen at some shieling sites (nos 34, 36). Growing population pressure in the late 18th and earlier 19th century is hinted at by the colonisation of old shielings with houses, probably occupied all year round, and lazy beds (nos 31, 35, and probably 32 and 33).

Our Finlaggan study area contains several houses and structures, mostly ruins grouped in abandoned farming townships on the lands of Sean-ghairt, Portanellan/Finlaggan, Mulreesh, Robolls and Kepollsmore. They are inventoried in Chapters 4



A Cottage in ILLAY.

Illustration 14.21

A weaver's house between Bowmore and Kilarrow (Bridgend) in 1772 (Pennant 1774: opposite p 204)

and 5 and documentation for them is surveyed in Chapter 3. No excavation was undertaken by us on any of these, but, given the quality of some of the remains and the documentary record, some further analysis is offered here. Most of the houses in question have been labelled as type C by us, essentially meaning that they are rectangular with drystone or clay-bonded walls.

Features of type C houses which appear to be of typological, if not chronological, significance should be noted here – first, the relative width of the structures, and second, whether they are largely constructed of field stones or quarried material. Gailey (1962: 170) has suggested that there may be a tendency for earlier drystone houses to be narrower than later ones, since their builders may have been slow to take advantage of the relative ease of spanning wider spaces from load-bearing walls. The use of quarried stone suggests professional input, and perhaps the involvement of landowners in introducing improvements. In multi-phase structures, walls of quarried stone are sometimes added on to structures made from field stones, but apparently never vice versa.

These houses all appear to date from the late 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. None of those inventoried in our study area were in such a condition that woodwork or roofing (thatch) survived, nor was there evidence in their depleted walls for the slots that would have housed crucks for supporting the roof couples. Nevertheless, on the basis of comparative data from better preserved or documented type C houses elsewhere in Argyll, it seems reasonable to suppose that the couples were anchored in such a way (eg RCAHMS 1984: 307; 1992: 462). Crucks and couples were either formed from single timbers or pegged together.

One of the best descriptions of such a house, with illustrations of its exterior and interior, was provided by Joseph Banks, when he visited Islay in 1772 in the company of Thomas Pennant (Illus 14.21). The house was between Bowmore and Kilarrow (Bridgend) and occupied by a weaver:

A highland house so miserably constructed that it tempted us to have drawings made of every particular in it. T'was built of stones so loosely laid together that wind & rain could scarcely be stop'd in their course by them. There were two door ways one of which serv'd at all times for a window for the house was furnished with only one door or rather substitute for one a faggot of sticks not more closely tied up than faggots in general are which was occasionally plac'd in one or the other doorway as the family found it most convenient.

In the middle of the house was the fire over which hung a pothook not in the chimney but under that hole which was made in the roof as an expedient to let out a part of the smoak which it did but not till after the house was full so that none seemed to be look'd upon as superfluous but the more overflowings. Round this upon miserable benches sat the family consisting of a weaver his wife her mother a stranger woman & six children. These had two beds to accommodate them. The rest of the furniture consisted of a loom & a lamp. (Rauschenberg 1973: 201)

On the basis of one of the illustrations, but unmentioned by Banks, the house had an extension – a barn or byre? – broader in width, with its wall shored up by a buttress. The upper part of the gable end of the house is shown to be of turfs.

The 1855 'Valuation of Wood' excerpted in Chapter 3 (Mitchell Library: TD 1338/2/2/34) also contains sufficient detail to allow houses, apparently all of type C, in the Finlaggan study area to be characterised (Table 14.2). Their approximate sizes can be computed by the enumeration of 'couples with rubbs' in each. Houses still with couples or observable cruck slots tend to have then spaced about 7ft or 2m apart. So a house with five couples might have an internal length of about 12m, or up to 14m overall, externally.

Perhaps with a programme of research excavations it will be possible to match the buildings listed in 1855 with the ruins still traceable today. Here it is worth noting that two of the houses at Mulreesh, those of Duncan McDermid and John Campbell, appear to have been byre dwellings, since their woodwork included ravel (rails) for six and five cows respectively. Mantle pieces in a house at Portanellan and three at Kepollsmore imply fireplaces with flues in the gable walls. The chimney vent in a house at Sean-ghairt indicates a centrally placed open fireplace, with a hanging chimney through the thatch to help disperse smoke. Several houses had lofts and furniture.

There is evidence for the extraction of galena (lead ore) in Islay at least from the early 13th century and in the 16th century (Caldwell 2014b: 84; 2017). Trials or open-cast works within the Finlaggan study area at Robolls and Mulreesh probably date back at least as early as post-medieval times, with a considerable expansion of activity from the later 18th century through the following century, all described in Chapter 4. The most recent, late 19th-century, mining activity at Mulreesh is represented by a series of buildings, open or only partially filled-in shafts and other features.

Farm	Tenant	Structure	Couples	Notes
Sean-ghairt	Donald Lamont	Room and kitchen	5	3 doors, 2 windows
		Barn	2	
		Stable	1	Loft with 2 joists
		Stirk house	2	
Sean-ghairt	Duncan MacNab	Room and kitchen	3	3 doors, 2 windows, loft
		Stable and byre	2	
		Stable	1	
		Barn	2	
		Cart house		
		Sheep house	2	
Sean-ghairt	Neil MacCallum	Room and kitchen	5	
		Stable	2	
		Sheep and stirk house	2	
Sean-ghairt	Donald MacCallum	House		Loft with 3 joists, chimney vent
Portanellan	John Smith	Room and kitchen	4	2 windows, 3 doors, loft with 3 joists
		Stable	2	
		Barn	2	
		Pig house		
		Cottar's house	2	
Portanellan	Archibald Bell	Room and kitchen	4	Loft, 4 doors, 4 windows
		Stable	1	
		Byre	1	
		Byre	2	
		Stable	2	1 manger 13.5 ft [4m] long
		Barn	3	
		Cart house		
		Two pig houses	2	
		Cottar's house	1	
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	1	
Portanellan	Malcolm Bell	Room and kitchen	4	4 doors, 2 windows, loft with 4 joists
		Byre	2	
		Byre	1	
		Byre	2	
		Barn	3	
		Stable	1	
		Cart house		
		Pig house		
		Sheep house	1	
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	3	
Portanellan	Neil Bell	Room and kitchen	6	3 doors, 2 windows, loft
		Barn	5	
		Stable	2	
		Byre	2	
		Stirk house		
		Calf house		
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	3	
Portanellan	Gilbert Lamond heirs	Room and kitchen	6	Loft, mantelpiece etc
		Milk house		
		Barn	4	
		Byre	2	
		Byre	4	
		Byre	2	
		Byre	4	
		Byre	1	
		Stable	2	
		Potato house	3	
		Turnip house	2	
		Cart house		
		Stirk house		
		Young cattle house	1	
		Sheep and pig house	1	

Table 14.2
Buildings and their tenants in the Finlaggan study area listed in the 1855 'Valuation of Wood'

Farm	Tenant	Structure	Couples	Notes
		Potato house	2	
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	3	
		Cottar's house	3	
Mulreesh	Hugh MacDermid	Dwelling house	3	Window, 2 doors
		Son's house	2	Door, window
		Barn	4	
		Stable	2	
		Byre	2	
		Potato house	2	
Mulreesh	Duncan MacDermid	Room and kitchen	4	Byre dwelling?
		Barn	4	
		Potato house	2	
		Byre	2	
		Stirk house	2	
		Turnip house	4	
		Stable	1	
		Sheep house	1	
		Two cart houses		
		Cottar's house	2	
		Cottar's house	2	
		Cottar's house		
Mulreesh	John Campbell	Room and kitchen	8	Byre dwelling?
		Byre	3	
		Stable	2	
		Barn	4	
		Sheep house	2	
		Cottar's house	2	
		Cottar's house	1	
Kepollsmore	Dugald MacNiven	Room and kitchen	6	Mantlepiece, 3 doors, 3 windows
		Byre	2	
		Barn	2	
		Barn	2	
		Stable	4	
		Sheep house	2	
		Cart house		
Kepollsmore	John Shaw	Room and kitchen	6	Mantlepiece, 3 doors, 2 windows
		Barn	4	
		Stable	4	
		Sheep house	2	
Kepollsmore	Donald MacKay, jr	Room and kitchen	4	Wooden partition, loft etc
		Barn	3	
		Stable	1	
		Byre	2	
		Stirk house	2	
		Sheep house	4	
		Potato house	1	
Kepollsmore	Donald Shaw	Room and kitchen	5	2 doors, 2 windows, mantelpiece
		Barn	4	
		Stable	2	
Kepollsmore	Hugh Fletcher	Room and kitchen	4	Partition, furnishings etc
		Barn	4	
		Byre	3	
		Stable	2	
		Potato house	3	
		Sheep house	3	
Kepollsmore	Donald MacKay	Room and kitchen	3	3 doors, 2 windows, loft
		Barn	2	
		Byre	2	
Kepollsmore	John Smith	Room and kitchen	5	3 doors, 2 windows, joists
		Barn	4	
		Byre	1	
		Stable	2	
		Pig house		
Kepollsmore	Donald Currie	Byre	1	
		Barn	2	

Table 14.2 (cont.)
Buildings and their tenants in the Finlaggan study area listed in the 1855 'Valuation of Wood'



Illustration 15.1
Finlaggan with the Paps of Jura in the background. Note the Cnoc Seannda mound at the left-hand edge

Chapter 15

FINLAGGAN: THE CENTRE OF THE ISLES?

Introduction

Underlying the writer's thinking at the start of this project was the expectation that Finlaggan would be shown to be an important centre, especially in the medieval period. The task in this chapter is to assess whether Finlaggan deserves to be considered the centre of the Isles. That term, 'Centre of the Isles', is a recent construct, the coining of which is largely the responsibility of the author. It had seemed an obvious step to so call the place where lords of the Isles were inaugurated and they held their council meetings.

Viewed from a Hebridean perspective, Finlaggan would have appeared an attractive area for settlement and exploitation from Mesolithic until recent times. The surrounding moors provided opportunities for hunting. The soils that had developed on the limestone around much of the loch were suitable for growing arable crops, and could be worked with spades and simple, non-mechanised ploughs. The raising of cattle was probably a crucial part of the farming economy from Neolithic times onwards, and summer use of the rough pastures in the hills would have been valued. Finlaggan, however, never appears to have developed into a significant centre of permanent population and from the mid-18th century was by-passed by the main routes connecting different parts of Islay (Caldwell 2017: 194). Nor was Finlaggan ideally placed in terms of access by sea to a wider world.

Arguments in favour of Finlaggan as a major centre of importance cannot depend on an assessment of its land quality, its location as a route centre or other economic factors. None of these factors would identify it as a significantly more favoured place than many others in the Isles. If it is accepted that Finlaggan deserves the title Centre of the Isles, we may have to accept that that resulted from processes we will never be able fully to understand, perhaps including a mix of serendipity, an association with events and people, and a continuing respect for tradition.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the historical record for Finlaggan is meagre and there are no contemporary medieval documents which specifically identify it as a place of any importance. Later records and traditions have been drawn upon to add more. In 1549 Donald Monro described 'Eilean Finlaggan' as having been a residence of the lords of the Isles and Eilean na Comhairle as the place where they had a council house built for their council meetings. Monro specifically states that the 14 councillors gave forth decisions based on the laws made by King Ranald, son of Somerled, and they administered justice, even when the lord of the Isles was hunting or at other games (Munro 1961: 56–57).

In the later 17th century the Sleat historian described inauguration ceremonies for lords of the Isles, apparently at Finlaggan, including use of a stone cut with a footprint. The Isle of Finlaggan was also where MacDonald had his council meetings. There was a stone table there and a stone on which MacDonald sat (MacPhail 1914: 24). Later sources repeated or embellished the information provided by Monro and the Sleat history, sometimes adding new material. In the 1690s Martin Martin viewed the remains of the houses of the bodyguard of the great MacDonald, King of the Isles, on the loch-side (Martin 1703: 240–41). In 1772 Thomas Pennant was informed that the wives and children of the lords of the Isles were buried on Eilean Mór. He saw on the loch-side the remains of a pier with a stone cut with AII for Angus Òg (Pennant 1774: 259).

These sources add up to a very incomplete view of Finlaggan in earlier times, but they do suggest certain strands that might be teased out further. Primarily they are the making of kings or lords, and the administration of justice by a council for the whole kingdom or lordship. Possibly implied by Donald Monro are the making of laws by that council and the assembling of a wide range of people who perhaps engaged in the games that attracted the attention of the lords. Also to be considered in the case of Finlaggan is the extent to which ceremonial, judicial and other proceedings may have local Irish or Scottish roots, and/or may represent ideas imported by Scandinavian settlers. The possibility also has to be considered that much of the supposed tradition of councils and inaugurations was invented in later medieval times to enhance the prestige of the lords of the Isles.

The location of the council meetings seems clear, on the appropriately named Eilean na Comhairle (the council island). The actual place for holding inauguration ceremonies is not specified. The Sleat history describes the presence of clergy, including the bishops of the Isles and of Argyll, as well as the chieftains of all the principal families. This would seem to signal a larger concourse of attendees than the 14 or 16 councillors, perhaps too many to participate in an outdoor ceremony on Eilean na Comhairle. The Sleat history also mentions that Mass was said after the ceremony, but that does not necessarily place either the ceremony or Mass at the chapel on Eilean Mór.

An early royal inauguration place?

The author had excavations undertaken on the mound at Cnoc Seannnda because he believed it might be the place where inauguration ceremonies took place. As will be explained further below, the location and appearance of the mound are similar to other attested and suspected assembly and inauguration places in north Europe. Neither the name Cnoc Seannnda nor an association between a mound and ceremonies at Finlaggan is mentioned in early sources or traditions. The name Cnoc Seannnda is first recorded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1878. The dictionary meaning of *seannnda* is 'old, antique, old-fashioned, oldish' (Dwelly 1994: 800), perhaps only an appropriate name if it were perceived that the mound was not totally natural. A clue may be provided by the English language name – 'Tomb' – of a settlement, clearly Cnoc Seannnda, listed by the census enumerators in 1861. It would seem that there was a belief that the mound was a tomb, which was right, we now know, in the sense it was crowned by a Bronze Age burial cairn (Illus 7.11).

The archaeological evidence for prehistoric settlement at Finlaggan is not surprising. What potentially marked it out as different are the indications that it was a place where, not

necessarily for very long in its long prehistory, ritual activities took place. If this evidence only consisted of the Cnoc Seannnda kerb cairn and nearby standing stones (Illus 3.1, 5.33) it could readily be dismissed as of limited significance compared with other concentrations of such monuments elsewhere in Argyll, but the knowledge we now have of an enigmatic chamber dug into the top of the mound alongside the kerb cairn does suggest other lines of enquiry and interpretation, even though no stratigraphical link was detected between cairn and chamber. While the former can reasonably be placed in the Late Bronze Age, there is less certainty about when the chamber was built and how long it remained in use.

The mound itself is a prominent local landmark, a regular hemispherical mound with a base diameter of about 50m and a height of over 6m above the adjacent ground (Illus 15.1, 5.29). Mounds are a typical feature of royal inauguration places elsewhere, for example the Moot Hill at Scone, Scotland, and Tynwald Hill in the Isle of Man. Irish examples have been well documented in a study by Elizabeth FitzPatrick (2004: 41–97, 227–34). She identified 30 which are well attested, of which 9 were defined by the presence of mounds. She listed a further 38 sites which could reasonably be suspected to have been



Illustration 15.2
Tynwald Hill, Isle of Man

inauguration sites, of which 26 had mounds. These mounds might be prehistoric barrows or cairns, or purpose-built monuments. There is a lack of modern archaeological examination of most of them, but FitzPatrick (2004: 43; see also Warner 2004) believed that the staging of royal ceremonial on earthen mounds in Ireland could be traced back to late prehistoric times. Prehistoric origins for other supposed inauguration ceremonies in Britain is suspected, but there is a lack of convincing early documentation.

Of particular relevance for Finlaggan is the ceremonial site at Tynwald in the Isle of Man, since, as will be considered further below, it was the assembly place in earlier medieval times for delegates from the Western Isles, including Islay, until it was replaced by Finlaggan. The possible pre-Viking age ceremonial use of Tynwald has been minutely scrutinised. Its mound, given a stepped profile at an unknown date (Illus 15.2), is supposed to have been a prehistoric burial mound, and non-specific parallels have been sought for the early historic period with the Irish royal centres at Tara in Co Meath and Emain Macha in Co Armagh, and others in the north of England (Broderick 2003: 80–83; Darvill 2004). While these linkages to prehistoric times and across the sea to Ireland are plausible, they are hypothetical. The name Tynwald obviously identifies it as a *thing* (assembly) site and could not have been coined earlier than the 9th century. The earliest reference to Tynwald as a place of assembly is in the *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles* for 1238 (Broderick 1996: fol 45r).

The Cnoc Seannnda mound is of natural rock rather than earth, a geological fact that may either not have been realised or have been of any consequence in a supposed selection process for a ceremonial site. Like Irish royal inauguration places it has splendid views in all directions, especially the length of Loch Finlaggan and across to the Paps of Jura, from here rising to heights in excess of 700m as two massive breasts (Illus 15.1). The Bronze Age burial cairn on the summit of Cnoc Seannnda would have given a ‘mound on mound’ profile similar to those of some Irish sites with smaller mounds or cairns on their summits, like Coggins Hill in Co Sligo, Ráith Cruachan in Co Roscommon and Sgiath Gabhra at Cornashee in Co Fermanagh (FitzPatrick 2004: 81–85).

Martin Martin, in his *Description of the Western Islands*, showed a considerable amount of interest in cairns and superstitions and traditions relating to them. He noted that:

The formalities observed at the entrance of . . . chieftains upon the government of their clans were as follow:

A heap of stones was erected in form of a pyramid, on top of which the young chieftain was placed, his friends and followers standing in a circle round about him, his elevation signifying his authority over them, and their standing below their subjection to him. One of his principal friends delivered into his hands the sword worn by his father, and there was a white rod delivered to him likewise at the same time.

Immediately after, the chief Druid (or orator) stood close to the pyramid, and pronounced a rhetorical panegyric, setting forth the ancient pedigree, valour, and liberality of the family as incentives to the young chieftain, and fit for his imitation. (Martin 1703: 102)

Martin could well be recording a tradition for inaugurating chiefs that took place in living memory in some kindreds in the Isles, and a cairn in a prominent position like the one at Cnoc Seannnda might have seemed an ideal location. There is, however, no basis to extrapolate from that observation that cairns on top of mounds were generally used in such a way, either in post-medieval times or much earlier.

In any case, there is a different tradition concerning inauguration rituals at Finlaggan for lords of the Isles, first recorded in the Sleat history in the 17th century (MacPhail 1914: 24). It involved the new lord placing a foot in a footprint carved in a rock. If corroboration could be discovered for the existence of that footprint, it might strengthen the case for tracing the origin of king-making ceremonies at Finlaggan to late prehistoric or early historic times. The basis for that would be a comparison with the footprints carved in a rock surface in the fort at Dunadd in mainland Argyll. Dunadd is recognised to be an early Dalriadic capital, and the two separate footprints are adjacent to a Pictish carving of a bull and an ogham inscription, the latter two of which can be considered to date to the late 7th or 8th century. There is a not unreasonable view that at least one of the Dunadd footprints is of similar date to these other carvings and, further, that its presence relates to the inauguration of Dalriadic overkings (Lane & Campbell 2000: 247–49, 251).

Footprint stones in Ireland and Scotland have been discussed and inventoried by Elizabeth FitzPatrick (2004: 108–29, 235–41) and Hunter & Hunter (2017). There are post-medieval and more recent accounts and traditions for the use of some of them in inauguration ceremonies. Several of them are manifestly of medieval or more recent date. There is no unimpeachable evidence that any are earlier in date. We will consider further below an alleged footprint stone (R4) at Finlaggan which clearly cannot be any earlier than the 14th century.

Many prominent mounds, whether or not places for royal inauguration ceremonies, might also be places for tribal, regional or national assemblies and courts. The holding of such assemblies is reasonably well documented in Britain and Ireland in medieval times, but the question to be considered here is whether there might be a case for identifying Cnoc Seannnda as such an assembly place in prehistoric or early historic times. If there is, it largely depends on a comparison of certain aspects of the geology of the area around Cnoc Seannnda with Irish places associated with the legendary warrior and hunter Finn mac Cumhaill (FitzPatrick 2015). Some of these are in geological contact zones similar to what can be seen at Finlaggan with the Bonahaven fault, trending north-east/south-west from Eilean Mór, separating Port Askaig tillite and quartzite to the west of Loch Finlaggan from the limestone of Eilean Mór itself and an area around the north of the loch. The mound of Cnoc Seannnda is adjacent to this fault. The tillite represents the boulder clay or till of an Ice Age of late Pre-cambrian times, metamorphosed to produce a rock exhibiting pebbles set in a coarse quartzitic matrix. The limestone, part of the Dalradian sequence, is metamorphosed, blue-grey in colour with prominent thin veins of calcite and small cubes of iron pyrites. It also contains veins of lead mineralisation (galena). The different character of the tillite and limestone should have been readily apparent in early times. The effect on vegetation is striking, with green pasture, and in the past arable, overlying the



Illustration 15.3

Finlaggan, aerial view. The presence of the Bonahaven fault is reflected in the vegetation cover, with green pasture to the right of the fault, and rough pasture and conifer plantations to the left (photo: Mick Ashton)

limestone, while the tillite is covered with rough pasture and now a conifer plantation (Illus 15.3). Places in Ireland associated with Finn mac Cumail were often not just hunting places, but they and other hunting grounds were also tribal assembly places (*óenaige*) (FitzPatrick 2012: 116–17).

In a study of Scottish medieval open-air judicial assemblies, O'Grady (2008: 333–40) noted that several of them were located at prehistoric monuments, including cairns, barrows and settlement sites. He supposed that reuse of prehistoric monuments might in some cases indicate the appropriation of existing court sites specifically for such purposes in later medieval times, but it has so far proved difficult to provide clear evidence of this. In Ireland there was also a tradition of law courts (*airechta*) being held in the open air on mounds, a practice that continued in some cases into post-medieval times (Simms 2020: 464). If it were not for the specific traditions that the Council of the Isles met on the 'council island' (Eilean na Comhairle), the Cnoc Seannnda mound would seem an obvious candidate for the location of early law courts. Perhaps it was in early times.

We provide our considerations of the merits of Cnoc Seannnda as an early royal inauguration site, the location for tribal

assemblies originating in prehistoric times and even a law court despite later traditions that only specifically mention Eilean na Comhairle and Eilean Mór, and which may only relate to later medieval times. It is possible that the qualities of Cnoc Seannnda for such activities were recognised and acted upon on more than one occasion over a very long period of time. Nevertheless, the idea that Finlaggan's role as a medieval centre of power might have prehistoric roots at Cnoc Seannnda should not be lightly dismissed.

A Viking age and earlier medieval *thing* site?

The research undertaken on the Vikings in Islay by Alan Macniven while the excavations were being undertaken has posed some interesting challenges for our interpretation of Finlaggan. Macniven supposes that Islay suffered a predatory migration of settlers from Norway in the second half of the 9th century, after a period of raiding when the local warrior class was eradicated and much of the rest of the population enslaved. On the basis of his study of Islay place-names, he suggests that the extent and thoroughness of the occupation of the island by settlers from



Illustration 15.4
Càrn Bàn, a natural hillock at Gruline in Mull, crowned by a Bronze Age cairn

Scandinavia has been underestimated, and that the whole island was taken over by them (Macniven 2023).

Archaeological evidence for this influx of settlers is thin so far (see Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998: 89–91) and does not include any actual settlement sites or houses for any time in the Viking age from about 800 to 1100. There was a reasonable expectation by the writer that research at Finlaggan might fill that gap. However, no Viking age material or occupation has been identified. It may be there, but we quite simply failed to reach it or identify it.

Under any circumstances it would not appear likely that a location which may have been a centre of some local significance in the Iron Age and early historic period should then have been totally abandoned for several hundred years prior to it then being chosen as a royal or lordly centre of importance. Possibly, Viking age magnates were attracted by other local places for their own settlements and the actual enjoyment of Finlaggan was given to lesser folk who have left no traces of their existence. It might also have been the case that an annual summertime assembly of large numbers was not compatible with crop-growing. If Finlaggan were already a place for inaugurations and assemblies prior to the arrival of Scandinavian magnates, they might have wished to keep it that way, separate from their own residences.

New fieldwork and excavation at Finlaggan would be necessary in any attempt to identify Viking age residence, but it would not be inappropriate to consider where else it might be located in the area round about. If Finlaggan were not a Viking age centre of power, where else might one have been located? A site worthy of examination would appear to be Dùn Gàidhre, only about 3km from Finlaggan as the crow flies (Illus 14.6). Its date of construction is not known, but conventional archaeological wisdom would favour the Iron Age. If that were the case it would not preclude the possibility that it remained in use for a very long time or was reoccupied at a later time. There are two features about Dùn Gàidhre which hint at Viking age or earlier medieval residence. First, its name, ‘Godred’s fort’ in Gaelic. The local islanders are in no doubt that the Godred in question was Godred Crovan, the 11th-century king of Man and the Isles. Presumably the same Godred features in the name of a nearby farm, Airigh Ghuaidhre, ‘Godred’s shieling’, first recorded in 1494 (Macniven 2015: 100, 242). There are local traditions about Godred Crovan being in Islay (Caldwell 2017: 32) and also the statement in the *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles* that he died in Islay in 1095 (Broderick 1996: fol 33v). Second, the level, flat summit of Dùn Gàidhre has the vestigial remains of what may have been a rectangular hall (Caldwell 2011: 131–32).

FINLAGGAN

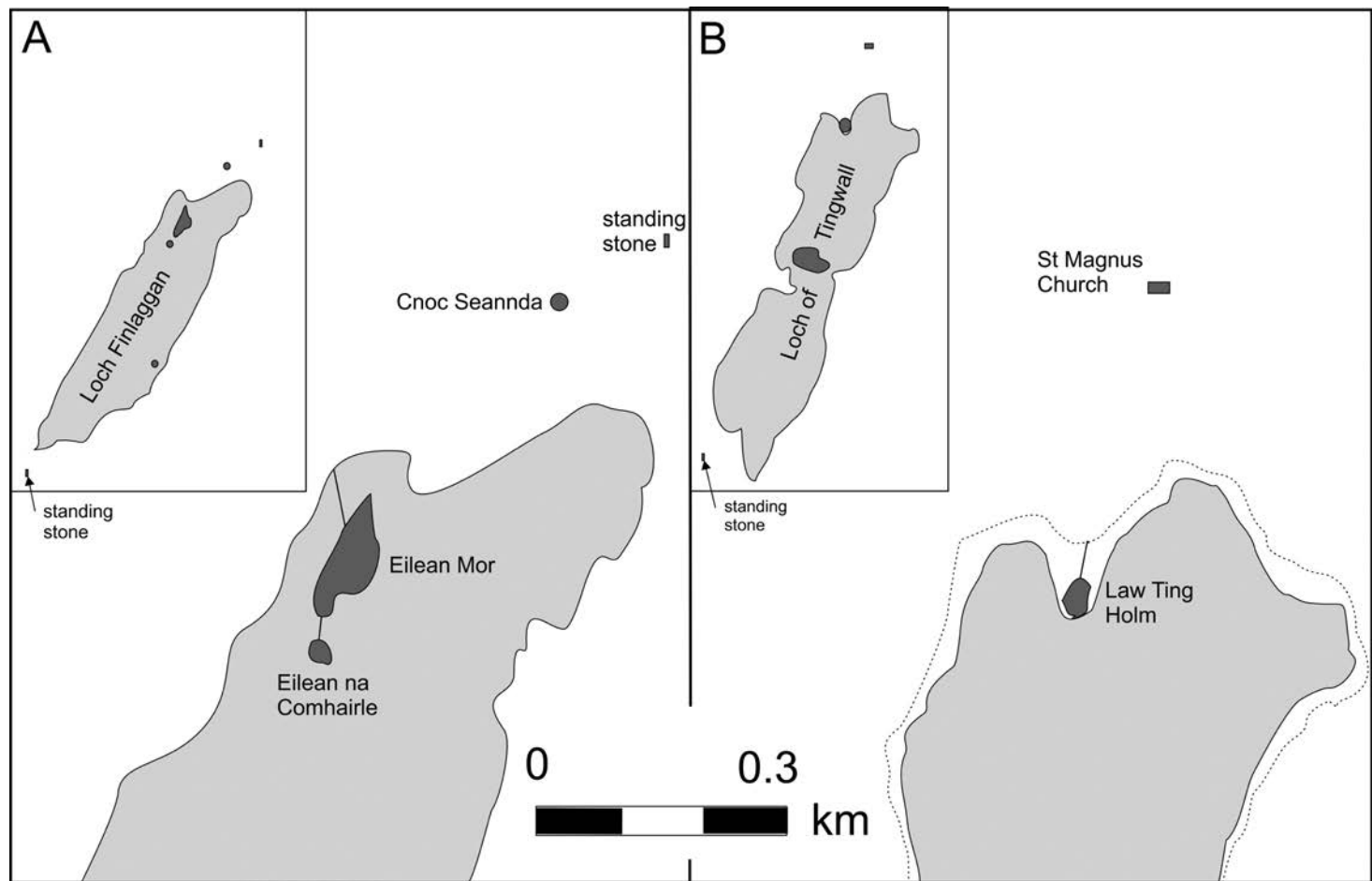


Illustration 15.5
Maps comparing Finlaggan with Tingwall, Shetland

On the slopes below it are the remains of the later medieval parish church and burial ground of Kilmeny (RCAHMS 1984: no. 370), possibly with origins in earlier time.

The physical characteristics of the Cnoc Seannda mound not only suggest an early Celtic or Irish centre of power but also align it with *thing* sites in the Scandinavian world. Individual traits like proximity to freshwater, reuse of an earlier monument, the presence of a large mound, a sheltered position and (possible) proximity to a church or a chapel are recognisable characteristics of Scandinavian *things* (Sanmark 2013: 103–04; 2017: 172). Excavation, however, at the Mute Hill, Dingwall, Ross-shire, has shown that it is an artificial mound constructed in the 11th and 13th century, presumably for the holding of the assemblies implied by the name Dingwall (O’Grady et al 2016). Coincidentally, the adjacent castle was the residence in the 15th century of the lords of the Isles as earls of Ross.

Alexandra Sanmark (2017) has identified 11 potential *thing* sites, including Finlaggan, in the islands off the west coast of Scotland. The most interesting from our point of view is one on the island of Mull which has both a place-name containing the element *thing* and manifest signs of prehistoric ritual activity. The etymology of Gruline, the place in question, is interpreted as Old Norse (ON) *grjót* ‘(rough) stone(s); stony ground; cleared and

cultivated ground’ + ON *þing* ‘assembly-place’ (Whyte 2014: 117). Gruline is situated on a narrow neck of land between the head of Loch Bà and the sea at Loch na Keal. There is a crannog at the head of Loch Bà, apparently occupied in the mid-16th century and possibly much earlier (Munro 1961: 61; RCAHMS 1980: no. 245). An adjacent group of prehistoric monuments includes two cairns, supposed to be of Bronze Age date, and two standing stones (RCAHMS 1980: nos 39, 106). One of the cairns is on top of a prominent knoll known as Càrn Bàn (Illus 15.4). Cnoc Seannda must have looked the same prior to its cairn being flattened.

Gruline’s credentials as a Scandinavian *thing* site are suggested by the etymology of its name. That is also the case for five others of Sanmark’s list of 11 potential sites. It is the place-name evidence which places them in a survey of *thing* sites and therefore implies Scandinavian rather than Celtic or Irish origins. They could all, of course, have been rooted in both a Celtic and Viking past, and perhaps any attempt to distinguish the two is meaningless. In the case of Finlaggan, however, there are important considerations beyond those relating to Cnoc Seannda.

The general similarity of Finlaggan and its adjacent landscape to the site of the main *thing* or *lawthing* in Shetland, at Tingwall Loch (Illus 15.5), has been noted by historians (Munro 1961: 99; Crawford 1987: 206–10). The name Tingwall is derived from ON



Illustration 15.6
Tingwall, Shetland: aerial view of Law Ting Holm and its causeway (© Crown Copyright: HES)



Illustration 15.7
Finlaggan aerial view (© Crown Copyright: HES)

þing völlr, meaning the parliament or court field(s). Tingwall valley is one of the most fertile areas in Shetland. Law Ting was an island connected by stepping stones (later a causeway) to the head of the loch, but it is now a peninsula through the lowering of the water level in the loch in relatively recent times (Coolen & Mehler 2014: 119, 125). Documentation for the Shetland *lawthing* at Tingwall goes back to 1307 (Sanmark 2013: 98), but it very probably originated much earlier in the Scandinavian occupation of the islands. Excavation on the island itself has indicated Iron Age settlement and nearby was St Magnus Church, the main parish church in Shetland, believed to have been of 12th-century date. The island site with Iron Age occupation approached by stepping stones or a causeway and the presence of a church provide points of comparison with Finlaggan (Illus 15.5–7).

It may not be a coincidence that at both places there is a standing stone at the south ends of their respective lochs. At Finlaggan the stone in question (no. 70, Illus 5.52), now fallen over, is on the land of Kepollsmore. The stone at Tingwall, the ‘Murder Stone’, is associated with traditions that might indicate it marked the boundary of a sanctuary girth associated with the *lawthing* (Coolen & Mehler 2014: 127). It is tempting to suggest that the Kepollsmore stone served a similar function.

Finally, in comparing Tingwall with Finlaggan attention must be paid to a 1701 report of the former describing three or four great stones, apparently on the island itself, ‘upon which the judge, clerk and other great officers of court sat’ (Coolen & Mehler 2014: 6). These stones are now lost, but it is legitimate to ask whether they were similar to the stone table said by the Sleat history to have been where the Council of the Isles sat in the ‘Isle of Finlaggan’ and ‘the stone on which MacDonald sat’ (MacPhail 1914: 24). They were carried away by ‘Argyll’, quite possibly within the lifetime of the historian. The occasion could have been 1647, when the Marquis of Argyll was with the Covenanting army which came to Islay to recapture Dunyvaig Castle and mop up the remnants of Alasdair MacColla’s supporters. The ‘Isle of Finlaggan’ would seem best to describe Eilean Mór, and in any case there is no evidence for a functioning council house on Eilean na Comhairle as recently as that. The table and seat were not necessarily both together or housed inside.

Although the account of the Finlaggan stone table and seat is relatively recent and vague, it is worth pursuing further here because of potential comparisons in earlier medieval or earlier Scandinavian *thing* sites. It is possible that the Finlaggan stones were not actually removed or destroyed but have been hidden in plain sight – that they can be identified as two stones on the shore of the loch near Eilean na Comhairle, one (no. 39, Illus 5.18–20) engraved with ‘AI’ and the other (no. 40, Illus 5.21–22) with cut marks that were believed to be readable as ‘AII’. Might they be the items of furniture referred to in the Sleat history? In 2003 the writer suggested that these stones might have been used in inauguration ceremonies for early leaders of Clan Donald, specifically Angus Mor and Angus Òg. The ‘AI’ on no. 39 would have commemorated the former and the ‘AII’ on no. 40 would have been for the latter (Caldwell 2003: 72–73; see also Caldwell 2023a: 147–52). Since then the author has realised that the supposed ‘AII’ on stone no. 40 is more akin to the slice marks identified as a phenomenon on a range of monuments in Ireland, Wales and Scotland dating from the 5th/6th century to the 12th century,

including cross-slabs, high crosses, bullaun stones, ogham stones, inauguration/assembly stones and occasionally churches (Newman 2009), and became less inclined to believe that they were meant to be read as an inscription. The hypothesis that there might be separate stones used to seat successive kings or lords in their inauguration ceremonies is strengthened by knowledge of such a collection at Mora, near modern Uppsala in Sweden, where several kings of medieval Sweden were elected (Larsson 2010). Olaus Magnus further describes how at Mora there was a large rock known as the Mora stone, and round about it 12 rather smaller stones, set fast in the ground. These were the seats of the councillors who chose the king (Olaus Magnus 1998: 2.350).

Recent scholarly interest in *thing* sites across the Scandinavian world (for example Sanmark et al 2013, 2016; Sanmark 2023) provides evidence for a network of them, some of them of national or royal significance, others merely for local business. Finlaggan might be considered the latter, perhaps just serving one of the three wards of Islay, but for later traditions about its paramount importance within the Kingdom of the Isles. How such a role may relate to Tynwald is worthy of further examination.

It has been claimed that Tynwald was converted in the Viking or earlier medieval period from a local ritual site to the one of national significance for the whole Kingdom of the Isles, extending from Man itself to the Butt of Lewis in the north. Annual assemblies are still held on the tiered mound at Tynwald on St John’s Day at midsummer, and the Manx parliament, now located in Douglas, is known as Tynwald through its origins in the annual assemblies at Tynwald. It is claimed as the oldest parliament in the world with an unbroken existence (Broderick 2003).

A report from the sitting of Tynwald in 1422 has been interpreted by modern scholars as demonstrating that it was then understood that ‘in King Orry’s Days’ (Godred Crovan, 1079–95?) 16 of the keys (representatives) who attended Tynwald came from the Isle of Man and a further 8 represented the ‘Out Isles’, assumed to mean the Lewis and Skye groups of islands. However, this arrangement would have come about in or after 1156, at a time when the Mull and Islay groups of islands (and Arran and Bute?) had been ceded to Somerled and his descendants. There are still 24 keys in the Manx parliament, all drawn from constituencies in the Isle of Man itself, and it is supposed that this number derives from a post-1266 reorganisation reflecting the new reality that there would no longer be representatives attending Tynwald from outside Man (Broderick 2003: 65–66).

Basil Megaw further suggested that the original number of keys would have been 32 – 16 from Man, 8 from Lewis and Skye and 8 from Islay and Mull. He pointed out that the 16 members of the Council of the Isles, who, according to the 17th-century Sleat history, met at Finlaggan in the time of the Lordship of the Isles, might have been the successors of the keys who attended Tynwald in the time of the Kingdom of the Isles (Cubbon & Megaw 1942: 59–61). This is an attractive hypothesis but one lacking substantial support from early sources.

The earliest reference to Tynwald as a place of assembly is in the *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles* for 1238. It is specifically stated that the assembly was for the entire Manx population (Broderick 1996: fol 45r). If there is any truth in the claim, noted above, by Donald Monro that the medieval Council of the Isles based its legal decisions on laws made by King Ranald, son of

Somerled, then that implies that that council could have been meeting at Finlaggan by the later 12th century.

A considerable challenge for historians of the Kingdom of the Isles is how to make sense of the relatively few early sources that record events there in terms of its unity and political cohesion. Godred Crovan, probably from Ireland but with a support base in the Western Isles, established himself as king in Man, about 1079 (Duffy 2015: 17–21). He was also, as we have just seen, held to have had a major role in establishing Tynwald. Later in his career, he was ejected from Man and died in Islay probably in 1095 (Duffy 2015: 21). Might he have played a significant part in establishing both Tynwald and Finlaggan as national assembly centres? On present evidence there cannot be any certainty as to which came first.

The breakup of the Kingdom of the Isles

At many places of inauguration, courts and assemblies in Europe, business continued to take place in the outdoors and there was no development into urban centres or transformation into palaces or castles. The discovery that Finlaggan was a castle in earlier medieval times, and later what may be described as a palace, puts it in a different category. On the assumption that Finlaggan was a Scandinavian *thing* site, how can the erection of a massive castle tower be explained? The kings of Alba and later kings of the Scots were inaugurated at Scone in eastern Scotland, where there was also a royal palace and, at least from the 12th century, a major church (Caldwell 2023b: 29). Westminster, the place for crowning English kings, developed as a major palace and church, and the same general situation can be seen at other royal and inauguration centres in northern Europe, notably Aachen (Airlie 2003: 133–36).

In interpreting the development of Finlaggan as an important earlier medieval centre, the main challenge is deciding whether Eilean na Comhairle was the equivalent of Law Ting Holm at Tingwall in Shetland, the actual meeting place of a Council of the Isles prior to the erection of the tower, or whether such a council might have convened elsewhere in the vicinity, for instance at Cnoc Seannnda. The evidence is not clear, but the author is inclined to think that the tower was deliberately erected over the top of a functioning *thing* site. If so, it would have been intended to make a strong statement about a new order, a takeover by a new force that replaced or suppressed the existing power structure. It is this observation that leads the writer to conclude that the builder of the Finlaggan tower is more likely to have been Ranald, son of Somerled, rather than Rognvald Godredsson, the two main contenders for this role identified in Chapter 14, perhaps about 1200.

An entry in the mid-13th-century *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles* states (in translation from Latin) that:

In the year 1156 a naval battle was fought on the night of the Epiphany between Godred and Somerled and there was much slaughter on both sides.

When day dawned they made peace and divided the kingdom of the Isles between them. The kingdom has existed in two parts from that day up until the present time, and this was the cause of the break-up of the kingdom from

the time the sons of Somerled got possession of it. (Broderick 1996: fol 37v)

This is understood to have created a situation where Godred and other kings based in the Isle of Man controlled that island as well as Lewis and Skye, while Somerled and his descendants (the MacSorleys) took the Uists and Barra, the Mull and Islay groups of islands, and also Arran. There is a tacit assumption that the Manx kings continued to hold Lewis and Skye until Man and the Isles became part of the Kingdom of Scotland as a result of the Treaty of Perth in 1266.

The author (Caldwell 2009a) has previously questioned the nature of the splitting of the Kingdom of the Isles in 1156, wondering if there really was a division into two separate states, at least prior to 1249, when King Hakon IV of Norway, by recognising Somerled's great-grandson Ewen (MacDougall) as a king, acknowledged that there was no longer a unitary kingdom of the Isles and that the kings based in Man were unable to control other islands (Anderson 1990: 2.548). The erection of the Finlaggan tower can be interpreted as an indicator that Finlaggan was being established as the main centre of MacSorley power in the islands from about 1200, a rival royal centre to Peel, Rushen and Tynwald in the Isle of Man.

In 1266, by the Treaty of Perth, the Western Isles, including Islay, passed from the overlordship of the kings of Norway to that of the kings of Scots. From being one of the leaders of King Hakon's invasion fleet in 1263, the owner of Finlaggan, Angus Mor, became a baron of the realm of Scotland. The author has written elsewhere (Caldwell 2022) about the lack of documentary and archaeological evidence for the Scots getting to grips with the control and administration of their new territories. Links with the Scottish mainland are most clearly demonstrated at Finlaggan by the presence of Scottish wheel-made pottery. There is as yet limited evidence for its use at other contemporary sites in the Hebrides. The Scottish pottery at Finlaggan is most probably the result of trade in whatever the vessels held. This trade likely commenced prior to 1266 and continued long afterwards. The assemblage of finds and other material datable to the earlier medieval period at Finlaggan represents consumption by a noble household rather than, for instance, a garrison of soldiers. The fact that there is no earlier medieval Scottish pottery from the Isle of Man and conversely no Manx pottery from anywhere in the West Highlands and Islands, including Arran and Bute, also seems to add weight to the idea that there was a separate post-1156 kingdom in the Isles, and Finlaggan was its centre.

Meetings of the Council of the Isles

If our interpretation is right about Eilean na Comhairle being the actual place where representatives from a wide area met in council prior to the building of the tower, it may be supposed that such meetings would have continued elsewhere at Finlaggan in the earlier medieval period. Perhaps this council had been meeting at Finlaggan regularly since before the erection of the tower on Eilean na Comhairle, guided, as Donald Monro was later to claim, by the laws of King Ranald, son of Somerled (Munro 1961: 56–57). So this may have been a continuation and development of the tradition



Illustration 15.8

Loch Ballygrant, Islay, with tree-covered island identified as 'Ellan Charne' and the remains of a crannog to its left

of Viking age *thing* meetings at Finlaggan rather than a totally new invention. The predilection for islands for *thing* sites in the Scandinavian world in earlier times has already been noted. An account by Olaus Magnus of approximately the same date as Munro's about the holding of important meetings on islands by the peoples of Scandinavia suggests that the council meetings on Eilean na Comhairle may have been part of a geographically much wider phenomenon. He described how in Sweden councils and assemblies of noblemen convened to restore unity to regions and their inhabitants might be held on islands (Olaus Magnus 1998: 2.568–69).

Elsewhere in the West Highlands and Hebrides, Eilean na Comhairle may have been the inspiration for the selection of other islands as meeting places. Eilean Tigh na Slige in Loch Treig is said to be the council island of the MacDonald chiefs of Kerpoch (Canmore ID 23904), and an island in Loch Ballygrant in Islay can be identified as 'Ellan Charne', where Donald Dubh, a would-be new lord of the Isles, met with the 'Barons and Council of the Isles' in 1545 (Illus 15.8). It may be significant that here there are the remains of a small crannog connected by a causeway to the main island, perhaps mimicking the arrangement at nearby Finlaggan of a council island accessed from a residential island (Caldwell 2017: 82–83).

We have identified building (a) on Eilean na Comhairle as the council house mentioned by Donald Munro (Munro 1961: 56–57). In Scandinavia *thing* meetings seem generally to have been held outside until the late 16th or 17th century. Evidence for purpose-built '*thing*-cottages' of earlier date is unusual. One datable to the 14th century has been excavated at the *thing* site at Anundshög in Västmanland in Sweden. It was of wood construction, with a fireplace, and had an estimated size of 6.7 by 6.7m. It is known to have been furnished with a table, later removed for use elsewhere (Sanmark et al 2019). There was no medieval equivalent to the Finlaggan council house at Tynwald in the Isle of Man, nor does anything similar appear to have been known in Ireland. Perhaps the stone table for the use of the Council of the Isles and the stone on which the lord of the Isles sat (nos 39, 40) were housed in building (a) prior to about 1500.

It is not known whether the Council of the Isles which met on Eilean na Comhairle in later medieval times was a reimagining or recreation of a parliament that met there prior to the erection of the tower, or, as suggested by Basil Megaw, a breakaway organisation consisting of delegates who would previously have attended Tynwald in the Isle of Man (Cubbon & Megaw 1942: 59–61). Whether it was a body with a continuous tradition

of convening at Finlaggan from early days or a later MacDonald invention, the provision of a purpose-built council house has to be seen as a significant development, part of a programme by the MacDonald lords to boost their status and image.

The footprint stone

Possibly also a later MacDonald invention was the part played in the making of new lords of the Isles by a footprint stone. The Sleat history says there was such ‘a square stone, seven or eight feet long, and the tract of a man’s foot cut thereon’, on which the new lord stood while being handed the symbols of his authority and being proclaimed lord (MacPhail 1914: 24). It is possible that grave-slab R4 is the stone in question, though only 1.72 by 0.46m (about 6ft 8in by 18in). The hollow in it identified as a footprint (Illus C2.6b) is on the back of a slab which can be dated on stylistic grounds to the 14th or 15th century, and so can hardly be of earlier date than that. Also, if the identification with the Sleat history footprint stone is valid, its presence in the burial ground on Eilean Mór would be a strong indication that inauguration ceremonies were held there adjacent to the chapel. Pennant (1774: 259) claims to have seen the stone on which ‘the great MacDonald’ stood when he was crowned king of the Isles. Pennant is a reliable observer and recorder of local information. If he had seen the footprint on slab R4 we might expect that he would have mentioned it. His crowning stone may have been something else, perhaps a misunderstanding of the cross-base in the Eilean Mór burial ground.

The list of footprint stones in Ireland and Scotland compiled by FitzPatrick (2004: 235–41) includes an earlier medieval grave-slab at Inis Cealtra in Co Clare with two footprints on its front surface. It is difficult to tie down the date of most of these footprint stones, or even to be sure of their authenticity, but it seems to the writer that the (re-)invention of inauguration ceremonies in the later medieval period involving the footprint in slab R4 is a possibility not to be dismissed lightly.

An alternative model of lordship

The great tower on Eilean na Comhairle was deliberately flattened, probably about 1300, and for the next 200 years or so, a period spanning the time of the MacDonald chiefs known as the lords of the Isles, defensive walls and towers were not a priority at Finlaggan. Instead a palatial complex was created on Eilean Mór, which, alongside the council house on Eilean na Comhairle, demonstrated the leadership and regal pretensions of the lords of the Isles.

It is possible to detect in the layout of this palatial complex a conscious configuration that accentuated status and helped to limit access. Approaching the site from the main routeway that then ran up and down the west side of Loch Finlaggan, the great hall would have stood out in the centre as the largest and most imposing structure with, to one side, on higher ground, the chapel and, on the other side, Eilean na Comhairle, the council chamber. Access by boat to Eilean Mór helped to restrict access only to those who belonged or deserved to be there, no doubt an important consideration when there were thousands of people present for great events.

Early travellers Martin Martin (1703: 240–41) and Thomas Pennant (1774: 259) drew attention to the ruins of the houses of the lord’s bodyguard on the shore of the loch adjacent to Eilean Mór. Probably what they noticed were the slumped remains of turf huts (nos 43, 44) which they may well have identified correctly. However, groups of turf-walled huts at Viking age assembly sites in Iceland and elsewhere have more generally been identified as the booths of delegates attending the assemblies (Vesteinsson 2013). The vestiges at Finlaggan may represent a similar phenomenon in later medieval times.

On Eilean Mór all roads led to the great hall, as a place of feasting and other entertainment, the provision of which was the mark of a great lord. Northwards from the great hall a cobbled road went directly to the chapel. Southwards a cobbled road and causeway went straight to the council chamber. Perhaps on great occasions dignitaries and representatives progressed along these. The multitudes on the loch-side might have watched, possibly even witnessed from afar as proclamations were made or documents approved beside the commemorative cross or before the council house.

At Iona the MacDonald lords bolstered their prestige, not just by assigning their earthly remains to the ground in a place made holy by the saintly Columba, but also by creating the alleged burial places of kings of Scots, Ireland and Norway (Caldwell 2018: 139–43; 2021: 18). The cobbled ‘street of the dead’, the processional way stretching from the MacDonald funerary chapel, St Oran’s, to the abbey, is similar to the cobbled roads at Finlaggan. Perhaps Finlaggan and Iona as they were developed in the 14th and 15th centuries should be seen together as complementary visions of MacDonald greatness, their desire to be seen as kings.

The Finlaggan excavations have provided one significant piece of dating evidence for the development of this scheme. Embedded in the mortar of the south wall of the chapel, near the altar, was a crooked tuppence, in this case a halfgroat (N24) of King Robert II (1371–90), father-in-law of John I Lord of the Isles. It cannot be doubted that this was a deliberate deposition and it strongly suggests that the later layout of medieval Finlaggan, however long it took, was conceived by this lord prior to his death, possibly in 1387.

There are no obvious close parallels to later medieval Finlaggan in Scotland, Ireland or the Scandinavian world. It appears to be a unique projection of lordship, one which was consciously different, and often at odds with the Scotland of the Stewart kings. In Lowland Scotland, power, wealth and authority were largely concentrated in urban centres – burghs – with settled populations of artisans, merchants and administrators. Although in the 15th century the lords of the Isles spent much of their time in the burghs of Inverness and Dingwall, dealing with the affairs of their vast earldom of Ross, there was no move to establish such urban centres in their Lordship of the Isles. If it were just a matter of selecting a place well-endowed with natural resources and good communications, Finlaggan could have been a good choice for burghal status. But Finlaggan was never an urban centre, nor was it fortified in the later medieval period. It was probably largely deserted as a residence for most of the year.

Finlaggan was not large, nor were any of its buildings imposing. The lordship to which it belonged was not by

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European standards particularly extensive, and in any case came to an end in 1493 with the forfeiture of John II Lord of the Isles. So not a place of much significance. Yet, there are two things about Finlaggan that argue for it to be taken seriously as a centre of importance. First, it provides an insight into an alternative model of lordship to the European norm, perhaps even a state

intent on establishing itself as an independent entity. Second, despite the forfeiture of the lord of the Isles and later attempts by governments in Edinburgh and London to suppress the Gaelic language and culture of the West Highlanders, Finlaggan has contributed a great deal to the identity of the Scots, a truly global brand.

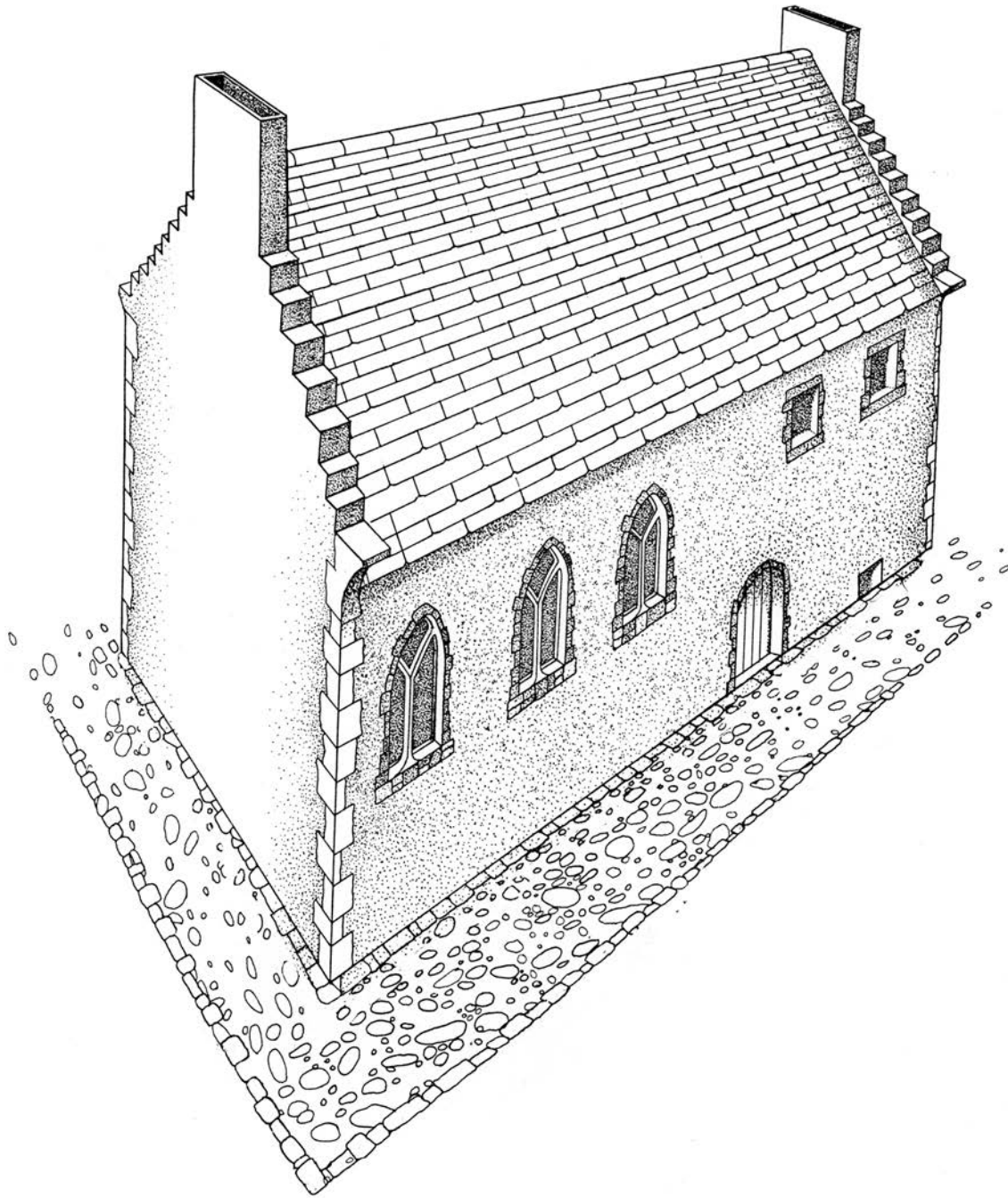


Illustration A1.1
Reconstruction of the great hall in later medieval times

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Reconstructing medieval Finlaggan

It was always an aim of the author to reconstruct what Eilean Mór and Eilean na Comhairle looked like in medieval times. There were never appropriate or realistic options to restore or rebuild any of the structures on the two islands, although potential opportunities might still be considered to experiment with the erection off-site of buildings similar to those identified in the excavations.

While the excavations were underway, the author experimented with reconstruction sketches to help his understanding of what was being excavated. Illus A1.1 visualises the great hall in later medieval times. It possibly gives a reasonable impression of what it may have looked like. The form of the three large windows is derived from the hall building at Aros Castle in Mull, possibly of similar date and also built for a lord of the Isles.

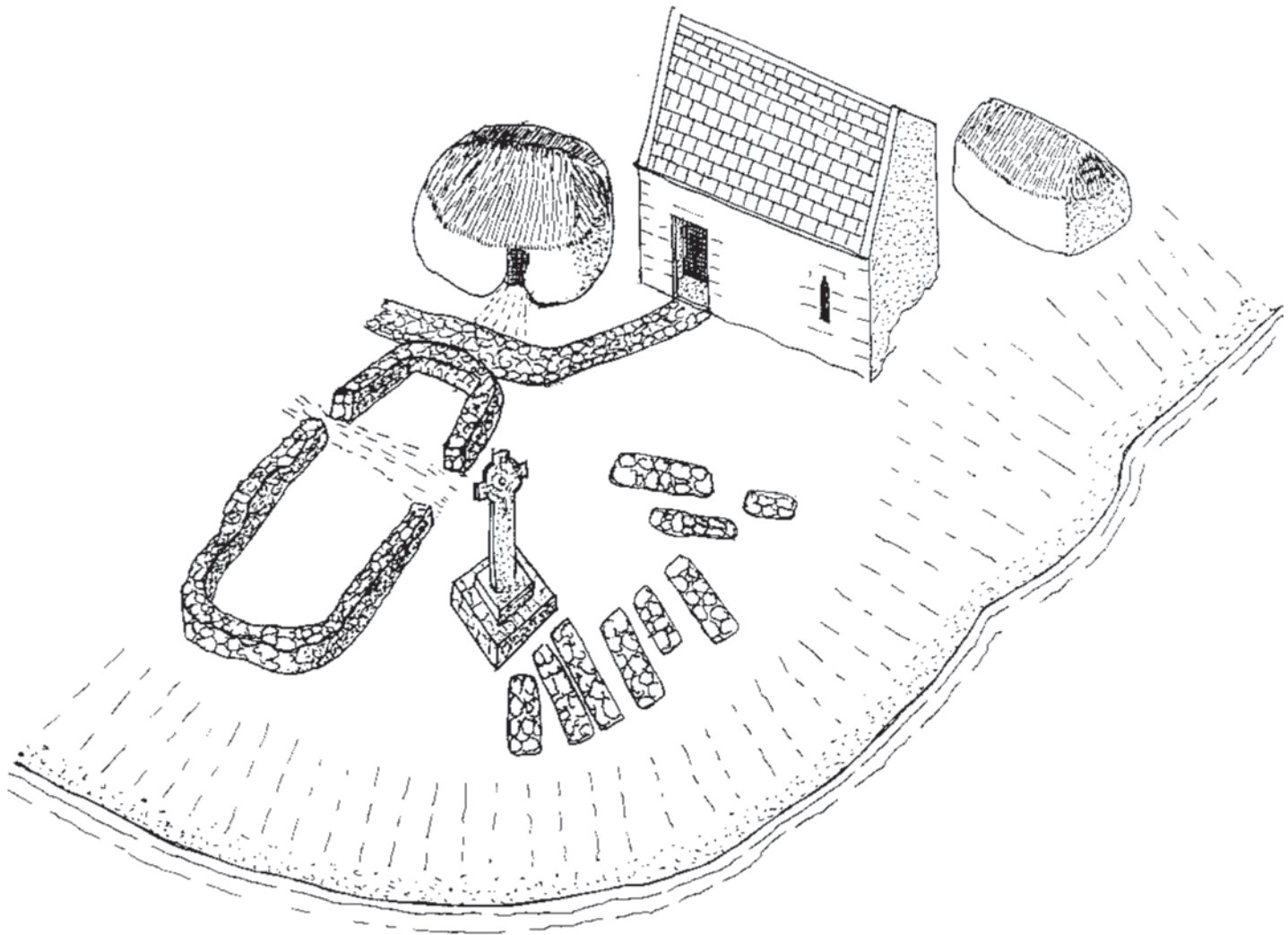


Illustration A1.2
Reconstruction of the chapel and burial ground in the 16th century



Illustration A1.3
Visualisation of the castle, Finlaggan (© David Simon)



Illustration A1.4
Visualisation of later medieval Finlaggan (© David Simon)



Illustration A1.5
Visualisation of later medieval Finlaggan (Open Virtual Worlds at University of St Andrews)

Illus A1.2 shows how the chapel and burial ground on Eilean Mór might have looked in the 16th century.

Illus A1.3 and A1.4 are visualisations of medieval Finlaggan by an experienced professional historical illustrator, David Simon. For the earlier of the two, the castle, in the lack of extensive archaeological evidence, much of the detail is derived from a process of projecting information on later structures and features back in time. The influence of Richard Bartlett's images of post-medieval fortifications in Ulster (Andrews 2008) will be evident. The device of representing the tower on Eilean na Comhairle as being unfinished and clad in scaffolding stemmed from a supposition that it may not have been completed prior to being dismantled. One of the main intentions in the later of the two views (Illus A1.4) was to suggest how built-up Eilean Mór was in later medieval times, and the artist has achieved that effect admirably. Since, however, the picture was completed, the author has reassessed the archaeological evidence and concluded that there was more open ground, probably a paddock for horses. In the distance the Cnoc Seannnda mound is identified by a hedge around its base. There is no archaeological evidence for that, but it seems a very likely feature to have been present.

Illus A1.5 and A1.6 are two of many images of medieval Finlaggan developed by the Open Virtual Worlds Team at the University of St Andrews in 2019 on behalf of the Finlaggan Trust. The interior view of the great hall is an authentic reimagining in terms of the furnishings, utensils and clothing of those present, but is not based on a particular Finlaggan dataset. Perhaps the most

controversial feature of this view (this author's suggestion) is the tartan wall hangings rather than tapestries.

All of these illustrations should be seen as part of an ongoing process of better visualising Finlaggan in its heyday. There is much more that could and should be done.

Appendix 2: Site archive contents

The archive consists of six main elements:

(A) Finds and Samples. The soil samples at the time of writing (June 2023) have now all been jettisoned.

(B) Key Data: Guides and Lists, including:

- Information on the site grid
- Statistics on areas of trenches
- List of archaeological contexts
- Harris matrices for all the trenches
- List of Finlaggan plans
- List of record photos
- List of finds with contexts, coordinates and levels
- Finds illustrations
- List of soil samples.

(C) The Primary Site Record

This is the original documentation on fieldwork and excavations, mostly generated on-site during the campaigns in Islay from 1989 to 1998. It includes:

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Illustration A1.6

Visualisation of the interior of the later medieval great hall at Finlaggan (Open Virtual Worlds at University of St Andrews)

- Diary
- Trench notebooks
- Context sheets
- Finds and samples record sheets
- Plans of trenches, sections, record drawings of upstanding walls, etc
- Slides and photographs
- Survey notes and levels
- Environmental data.

For trenches 1 to 13 (1990–92), most recording was done in the trench notebooks, with information on finds and samples being logged in separate finds notebooks. For trenches 8, 12, 14–25 (1993–97), context sheets, finds record sheets and sample record sheets were used. Record photography of the excavations was done using 35mm single-lens reflex cameras loaded with colour slide film and black and white film for producing prints.

(D) Post-Excavation and Contextual Data, including:

- Interim reports
- Correspondence
- Specialists reports and data on finds, environmental material, etc
- Report on bathymetric survey in Loch Finlaggan
- Radiographs of finds, mostly ironwork
- Data on C14 and archaeomagnetic dating
- Geological data

- Survey material on sites and monuments in the Finlaggan Survey Area.

(E) The Final Report: a complete paper copy of the report for publication, as completed by D Caldwell in June 2023.

(F) Digitised Data, including much of the material listed in sections B, D and E, other relevant reports and illustrations.

At the time of writing the allocation of (A), the finds and samples, was still to be made through the Treasure Trove process. The rest of the archive (B–F) is now lodged in the Historic Environment Scotland Archives (collection number 551/2513).

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PSAS: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (Proc Soc Antiq Scot)*.

RCAHMS: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (now part of Historic Environment Scotland).

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