

IV.

FURTHER NOTES ON THE ANTIQUITIES OF SKYE, CHIEFLY IN
THE DISTRICTS OF SLEAT AND STRATH. By F. T. MACLEOD,
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These further notes upon Antiquities in Skye form a continuation of a paper read by me to this Society on the 9th of May 1910. The districts dealt with in my first paper were Skeabost, Dunvegan, Trumpan, and Glendale, popularly known as the MacLeod country. In these notes I propose to deal mainly with the districts of Sleat and Strath, in the south-east of the island (the Macdonald and MacKinnon country). The matters to be referred to form a very small portion of a large number of interesting remains well worthy of a closer and more systematic survey.

I take first the district of Strath, or Strathsworddale, or Strath Mhic Ionmhuinn (MacKinnon's Strath), in the neighbourhood of the Coolin Hills. About four miles to the south-west of Broadford, on the north side of the road leading to Sligichan, are the ruins of Kilchrist Church (fig. 1). According to the *Origines Parochiales*, King James IV. in 1505 presented Sir Kenzeth Adamsoun chaplain to the rectory and vicarage of Kilchrist. In 1508 the same king presented John Ronaldsoun clerk to the rectory "of the parish church of Strath called Christskirk in the Isle of Skye," vacant by the decease of Sir John Johnesoun. In 1561 the parsonage of Kilchrist belonged to the Abbot of Iona, the Bishop of the Isles having one-third. In 1662 the church of Strath was assigned by King Charles II. as one of the "proper kirks" of the Archdeacon of the Isles, then appointed by that king.

Scots Fasti gives a short account of each of nine ministers who officiated in this building between 1627 and 1840, when a new church was built at Broadford.

Kilchrist Church is 58 feet 8 inches long (excluding the small

building forming an annexe at the eastern end). The height of the wall with the doorway in the centre is 18 feet 8 inches. The breadth of the building, measured from the inside face of each wall, is 22 feet 5 inches. The building, now roofless, faces south. In the south wall are two windows and a central doorway, the latter being 5 feet 8 inches high, 3 feet 6 inches broad, and 2 feet 4 inches deep. There are three sockets, two of which were evidently used to support



Fig. 1. Kilchrist Church, Strath, Skye.

the door, and one for the reception of a bolt or other fastening. The windows are 4 feet 8 inches high, 2 feet 9 inches broad, and 2 feet 3 inches deep. In the inside face of the east gable there is a recess. The west gable of the little building at the east end of the church is common to both buildings. This annexe is 19 feet 6 inches long and 7 feet 6 inches high. It is entered by a separate doorway of more modern design than that of the principal building, and is also roofless. The range of small ornamental pillars forming a parapet points to the roof having been flat. The ground thus enclosed is the burial-place of the MacKinnons, one stone bearing the date 1740.

In the adjacent burial-ground there is only one stone of special interest (fig. 2). The carving is very rough, and I do not care to hazard an opinion upon the design.

About a mile to the east of Kilchrist Church there is a group of standing stones on the top of a mound known as Dun Sithan.

About two miles to the west of Kilchrist Church is the district of Kilbride. According to the *Origines Parochiales* there were at its date remains of an ancient chapel at Kilbride, used as the parish church for some time before the new church was built at Broadford. When I visited the locality last spring there were no trace of such remains. I venture to think that Kilchrist Church, and not a building at Kilbride, was formerly the parish church. It is not improbable that in Pre-Reformation days there was a chapel in close proximity to the standing-stone at Kilbride, "Clach-na-h-annait" (fig. 3), and the well "Tobar-na-h-annait" (fig. 4). "Clach-na-h-annait" is about 7 feet 6 inches high and has four aspects, N.E., S.W., N.W., and S.E., is 1 foot 2 inches wide at the part facing S.W., 1 foot 4 inches wide at the part facing N.W., and 1 foot 7 inches wide at the part facing S.E. Dr A. D. Mackinnon, with whom I conversed on the occasion of my visit, informed me that this stone fell down during the time his father occupied the estate upon which it is situated, and that underneath were found a bell and holy water stoup, both of which, he thought, were handed over to a London or Edinburgh Museum. Martin, always interesting but not always accurate, states: "There is an erected stone in Kilbride, which is 10 feet high and $1\frac{1}{2}$ broad." The well (fig. 4) is within a stone's throw of the Kilbride stone, and is doubtless "Tobar-na-h-annait." It was built in and covered by the mill-stone by Dr Mackinnon's grandfather. The use of the word "annait" in association with the stone and well provides fairly conclusive evidence that both are in the immediate vicinity of what at one time was ecclesiastical property.

At Borreraig, on the shores of Loch Eishart, the south boundary of



Fig. 2. Carved Stone in burying-ground at Kilchrist Church.



Fig. 3. Standing Stone, Clach-na-h-annait, at Kilbride.

Strath, I came across the standing stone of which fig. 5 is a photograph. A second stone lay uprooted at a distance of a few yards. The erect stone is situated on a slight elevation around the base of which lie several boulder stones. The dimensions of these stones are as follows : Standing stone, height 3 feet 9 inches by 2 feet 4 inches ; recumbent stone, 4 feet 4 inches by 1 foot 10 inches. There is another group of these stones (fig. 6) a short distance away. In the immediate vicinity, close to the seashore, there are extensive ruins, probably of a chapel, which, according to the *Origines Parochiales*, was dedicated to St Congan. There are many desolate spots in Skye, but none more desolate than Borreraig, nor more difficult of access. To obtain the photographs of the standing stones at this place I had many miles to walk over hill and moor, during which time I neither saw nor heard any evidence of human habitation.

Regarding the district of Sleat, the *Origines Parochiales* states that at the Reformation the parsonage of Sleat belonged to the Abbot of Iona, the Bishop of the Isles being entitled to one-third. In 1576 James M'Donill Growemech of Castell Cammes paid yearly to the Bishop of the Isles at Ycolmkill, between Petersmess and Beltane, 18 marks for the parsonage of Kilmoir in Slait and 16 marks for the bishop's third of the same. In 1662, on the appointment of an archdeacon for the Isles by King Charles II., the kirk of Slait, which appears to have been at the time united to Strath, was assigned to him as one of his "proper kirks." This account states that "The church, dedicated perhaps to the Virgin Mary, stood at Kilmore near the middle of the parish, and at the same place is a church built in the seventeenth century, and still used as the parish church." The length of this seventeenth-century building is 55 feet 8 inches, and the internal width 20 feet 1 inch. The gables face east and west. The walls are about 11 feet high. The doorway is situated at the south-west end in the south wall, and in the same wall there are three windows. There is also one window in the east gable.



Fig. 4. The Well, Tobar-na-h-annait, at Kilbride.



Fig. 5. Standing Stone at Borreraig, Strath, Skye.

One, at least, of the recumbent slabs in the churchyard is of a much earlier date than the present building. The carvings on this slab generally resemble those described in my former paper—a two-handed sword, with oblong panels above and below the quillons. The surface of the stone is so worn that it is impossible to judge whether there were any, and if so, what the designs were upon the lower panels. On the upper panel there are traces of a foliage design. In another



Fig. 6. Group of Standing Stones near Borreraig.

case the mortuary emblems are arranged in a rather unusual manner. The spades, instead of being arranged crosswise, are placed in a vertical position side by side, and the cross-bones and hour-glass are carved in one piece and so arranged that the head of each bone is attached to the lower corners of the hour-glass.

Martin states that there are three standing stones "on the sea coast opposite to Skeriness (about four miles west of Portree), each of them 3 feet high, and that the natives have a tradition that upon these stones a big cauldron was set for boiling Fin Mac-Coul's meat. This gigantic man is reported to have been general of a militia that

came from Spain to Ireland and from there to those Isles ; all his soldiers are called Fienty from Finn. He is believed to have arrived in the Isles in the reign of King Evan." The exploits of Finn MacCumhal are frequently referred to in the book of the Dean of Lismore, as, for instance, in the following :—

"Finn MacCumhail is my father,
Who nobly leads the Feinn's seven bands ;
When he his hounds lets loose to hunt
To follow him is truly sweet."

Dr Skene, in his introduction to that work, relates the account of the Feinns as given by the Irish, at the same time stating that it cannot be accepted as history in any sense of the term. The Irish account of Finn, though perhaps not historically accurate, is interesting. That account states that Finn MacCumhal lived in the reign of Cormac MacArt, who ruled from A.D. 227 to 266, and whose daughter Graine he married. Finn was slain in the year 285, his grandson, Oscar, having fallen in the battle of Gabhra, fought in the following year.

Martin's generalities are sometimes a little misleading. There can be little doubt that the stones to which he refers are three stones lying in a straight line north-west and south-east, the centre stone being equidistant from the other two. It is inaccurate to describe them as "on the sea coast," and the smallest of them is more than "3 feet" high. Their measurements are as follows :—

North-west Stone.—Height, 3 feet 4 inches ; breadth, 2 feet 3 inches.

Centre Stone.—Height, 5 feet ; breadth, 2 feet 3 inches.

North-east Stone.—Height, 5 feet 10 inches ; breadth, 2 feet 2 inches, at the broadest of its five faces.

An accommodation road, made about six years ago, skirts these stones. The contractor, who superintended the making of the road, informed me that at the time of the making of the road the proprietor

of the land, Macdonald of Skeabost, gave strict injunctions that in the course of the operations these stones were to be left intact. The line of the road passed so close to the positions of these stones that in the course of preparing the bottoming, the foundations of the stones were exposed. Mr Roderick MacLeod, the contractor, informed



Fig. 7. View of a Broch near Dunvegan.

me that at the foot of each stone he saw long flat stones, which when struck with a hammer indicated that they formed the covering stones of hollow chambers.

I am indebted to the Rev. R. C. MacLeod of MacLeod for photographs of a broch near Dunvegan, and a portion of the gallery thereof (figs. 7 and 8).

About three miles from Dunvegan, on the north side of the road between it and Glendale, immediately at the base of Dunosdale, is

the well called "Tobar-na-maor." From time immemorial up till two years ago this well was partly covered by a large slab. About two years ago MacLeod of MacLeod, believing this stone to be of



Fig. 8. View of entrance to one of the galleries in the broch near Dunvegan.

unique interest, had it transferred into the courtyard of Dunvegan Castle, where it is at present preserved. MacLeod's factor informed me that from a cursory examination of it made by him it bears a striking resemblance to the standing stone with incised symbols

figured on page 385 of the *Proceedings* of the Society for 1910, the characteristic features of which are the symbol known as the double disc and zigzag floriated rod of the sculptured stones of the East of

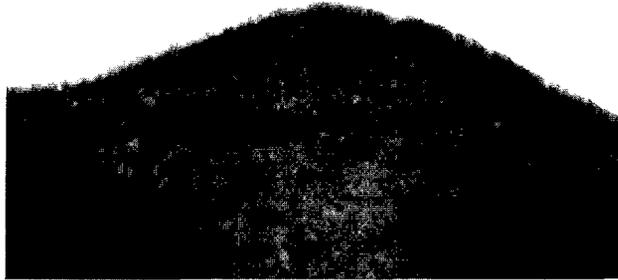


Fig. 9. View of one of two tumuli at Roag.

Scotland and crescent with V-shaped floriated rod towards the upper part of the stone.

My last illustration (fig. 9) is a photograph of one of two tumuli at Roag.