

## I.

ANCIENT SCULPTURINGS IN TIREE. BY LUDOVIC MACLELLAN  
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During five days at the end of August and beginning of September of last year I visited Coll and Tiree for the fifth time in some twenty years. Tiree (which alone I shall now deal with) must have been an attractive place to the early Hebrideans because of the abundance and fineness of its pasturage. In early Christian times it was quite renowned for its production of grain. There is evidence that, like four other islands in the Inner Hebrides, it was inhabited during Azilian times, and, of course, during the later prehistoric periods. Rarely in Britain within the same extent of area have so many stone implements been recovered as in Tiree. The sculpturings of the island are (1) prehistoric carvings of such figures as cups and ovals on the living rock-surface and on a standing-stone; (2) prehistoric carvings of large, deep, mostly oval cavities on the shore rocks; and (3) Early Christian carvings on slabs.

During my last visit particular attention was paid to the rock-surfaces in the hope of detecting cup- and ring-markings, not easy work owing to the weathering of the surfaces and the growth of lichen. On the other hand, the extreme hardness of the native gneiss and of the ice-carried granite boulders has occasionally permitted the survival of these markings, even if they have never been thickly coated by vegetation.

Dr Erskine Beveridge in his *Coll and Tiree* remarks briefly only one instance of rock-markings—those on an ice-carried granite boulder called the Clach-à-Coille, the Kettle or Ringing Stone. He seems inclined to side with the popular view that the cavities, so obviously artificial, have been made by the people striking the stone to hear it ring; but this can scarcely be correct. The boulder, poised on the shore rock 3 feet above high-water mark, is 5 feet 7 inches high and at a height of 3 feet has a girth of 26 feet 5 inches. Upon it are sixty regularly cut cavities, circular and elliptical, ranging from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 8 inches in diameter, and having a maximum depth of  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches, distributed over all parts except the underside and the base of the sides of the boulder. They have been very carefully polished in the interior and show no tool markings. The largest specimens are set on the vertical sides of the boulder.

In Tiree granite boulders are very rare. The only other showing sculpturings is a little north of the manse at Gott Bay, and, like the Ringing Stone, its base is washed by high tides. There are six small circular cups upon it, very difficult to detect, as the surface is roughened

by weathering and is peeling off. The sculptured face (fig. 1) looks out across the south end of the bay towards the opposite promontory, where the new pier is built.

In the extensive meadow half a mile east of Island House is a great, isolated, quadrate boulder, cut with six small circular cups and two vesica-shaped cavities.

At Balinoe is a large isolated rock with a smooth, slanting face in a field 50 yards south of Mr M'Arthur's store and on the other side of the road. Upon it are sculptured thirteen cups and a straight channel, and perhaps an oval cavity, which, however, is much weathered.

At Hynish House, some 900 yards from the signal station, is a rocky hillock called Cnoc Linain, the Linen Rock. On clearing its surface of a heavy growth of lichen I discovered sculptured upon it eighty-six cups and an oval cavity.

Near the centre of the island at Cornaig is Cnoc Fionigir. This prominent, central place was unfortunately chosen as the site for the recent Peace bonfire, the authorities being unaware that the rock-surface of the summit was sculptured with deep and regularly cut cups. The fire lighted upon them has destroyed the majority, and only forty-four survive, some badly injured. Among them are three pairs of overlapping cups.

At Cornaigmore is a conspicuous boulder with a group of cups. To the north, and 24 feet from the edge of this sculptured area, is a low-lying rock bearing isolated upon it a marking like an animal's hoof (fig. 2, No. 1). Hoof-prints occurred on the Blackshaw Rock, Ayrshire (now unrecognisable owing to weathering, the turf not having been put back on its surface since the time of its discovery, thirty-seven years ago). Similar markings are to be found on a stone at Fern Churchyard, Forfar, and l'Andresse, Guernsey, and many other places.

At Soroby, Port na Luinge, a little north of Balamartin, Balinoe, there is an old ecclesiastical site, certainly the *Campus Lunge* of Adamnan and the *Campus Navis* of Magh Luinge of the Irish Chronicles (Reeves, *Monograph*, p. 240; and *Adamnan*, p. 59; Beveridge, *Coll and Tiree*, p. 144).

In the graveyard is a cross of about the ninth century. A little north of the graveyard was found a prehistoric cemetery, and not far distant, in the middle of a marshy field called Cuigeas (perhaps from "cuig," a cup) is a flat rock, rising just a little above the grass. Sculptured upon it,

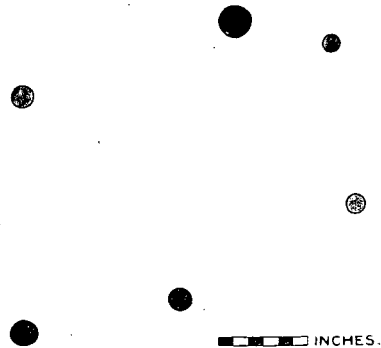


Fig. 1. Cup-marks on boulder a  
Gott Bay, Tiree.

amongst other cavities (fig. 2, No. 3) is one of deep boat-shape (fig. 2, No. 2), and another of shallow, triangular, tray-like form (fig. 3). Such boat-shaped hollows are rare, but one appears on the Cochno Rock, Dumbartonshire.

An assemblage of prehistoric carvings occurs a short distance to

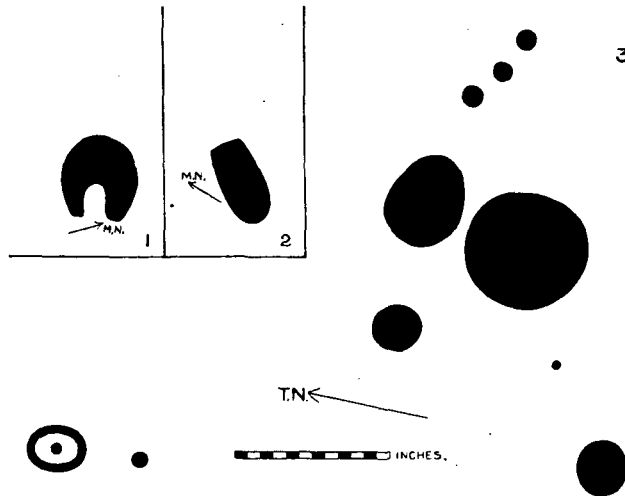


Fig. 2. (1) Hoof-shaped Sculpturing at Cornaigmore, Tiree ; (2) Boat-shaped Cavity and (3) other Sculpturings on rock at Cuigeas, Tiree.

the north, at Caesusach, a place which has got on to the Ordnance map under the guise of "Caensa," the *u* evidently having been mis-read by the map-maker as *n*. This new place-name has now become current, the islanders having begun to use it in their correspondence, though they still pronounce it correctly.

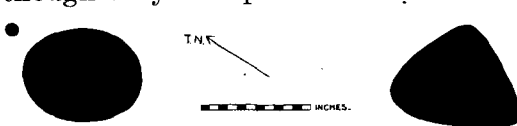


Fig. 3. Sculpturings at Cuigeas, Tiree.

There is a group of twenty-one cups on the living rock-surface of the high ground called Cnoc na Cuilean'an, and 3 feet from the margin of this carved area is another comprising twenty-four cups. On making the rubbings of these I was assisted by Mr Hector MacLean of Upper Balnoe, and on the following day, when I returned to the spot on receiving a message from him, he pointed out a finely-cut cavity on a little conical rock 174 feet 9 inches from the centre of the larger group, and 11 feet from a well.

On the farm is a standing-stone, 12 feet high and particularly broad. On the eastern face were noted eighteen cups, one partly ringed (fig. 4),

and a few much weathered on each of the other sides. The eastern sculptured area, of which I took a rubbing, was just on the point of peeling off, and probably by this time the cups have vanished.

It has recently been said that cup-markings on stones which form or

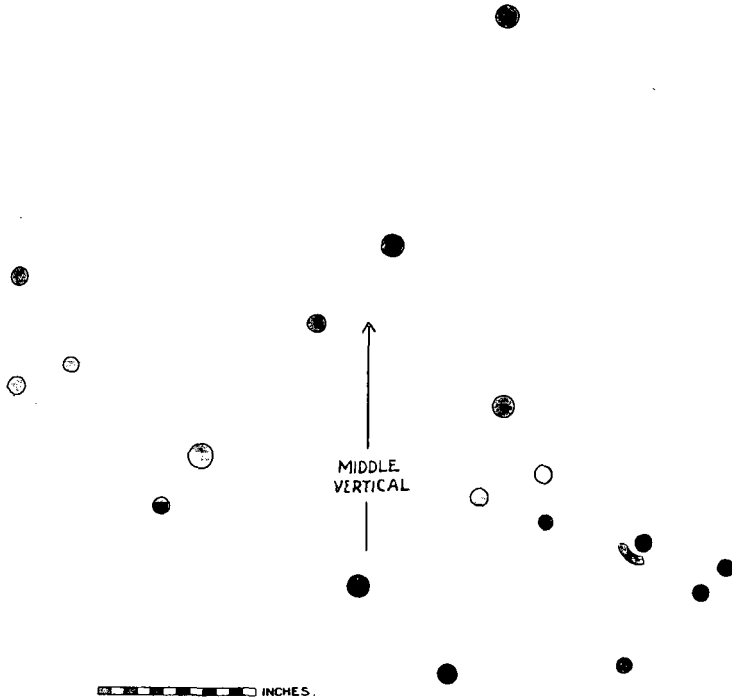


Fig. 4. Cup-marks (one partly ringed) on Standing-stone at Balinoe, Tiree.

formed part of circles of stones are restricted to those of the northern Scottish circles. In 1921, in Coll, I found cups cut on a monolith. I have seen cups on standing-stones, either now or originally part of an assemblage of standing-stones, over a wider field; as in Crinan, Perthshire, Arran, Cumberland, Lancashire, and the Channel Islands. On the Continent I discovered last year cups cut on the great obelisk at Dol, Normandy, and on many menhirs in the alignments at Carnac, in Brittany.

About twenty groups of rock-markings of the ordinary types are found well distributed over Tiree.

There is still to be noted another class of ancient carvings in the island—groups of large, often deep, circular and oval basins nearly always on the shore. These I noticed in 1920 on the shore rocks of the

Island of Risga, Loch Sunart, where about one hundred occur, some associated with small circular cups. Several on Risga are situated well under high-water mark.

Since the Risga discovery, Messrs John B. Simpson and V. A. Eyles, of H.M. Geological Survey, having had their attention drawn to the carvings there, noticed some of these basins on the rocks of the neighbouring islets of Carna and Oransay. During their survey work in Coll in 1921, they observed many of these artificial cavities, and consequently asked me to visit that island, where they kindly pointed them out. Like carvings occur in Eilanmor, off Coll, inland in Western Wigtownshire, Mid Argyll, and Yorkshire, and in Switzerland.

Mr J. Sands (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xvi. p. 459) referred to shore basins in Tiree, and, like most critical observers, dissented from the

popular idea of the islanders that the cavities were modern and made for keeping bait. The cavities differ in all respects from the natural pot-holes, only of geological interest, to be seen, though rarely, on the shores of Coll and Tiree.

Miss K. J. Cadell of Edinburgh, who assisted me in Tiree, found, after I left the island, twenty-six

oval and circular cavities on the south side of Gott Bay, not far from the pier, and cup-markings at Balaphetrish, where three human foot-prints occur in line. Messrs Donald Munn and Archibald MacLean showed me a group of forty-five at Baugh, Tiree, at the point of a low promontory, under high-water. Some were noted at Ballymartin, Heanish, and Scarinish harbour. They occur along the shores of Coll and Tiree. On the Red Ledge (Leachach Ruadh) at Hynish House there are thirty-seven, the depths of the two largest being 8 inches and  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches. An adjoining group has fourteen, and another twenty-eight, cavities. Sometimes the cavities coalesce. A group with this characteristic is in the middle of the bay there (fig. 5), and there is a trio at Traigh Sgiobasail. Perhaps the largest group (about one hundred specimens) is near Arnagour in Coll.

In Tiree the maximum vertical depth of their positions under the level of living sea-weed is 5 feet 11 inches, which indicates a submergence of the land since the period of the sculpturings. Last year I found many submerged prehistoric sculptured surfaces. Some, now washed by the waves, are near Brodick, in the Island of Arran, and on the Dyck Rock, Havre des pas, Jersey. These facts are to be

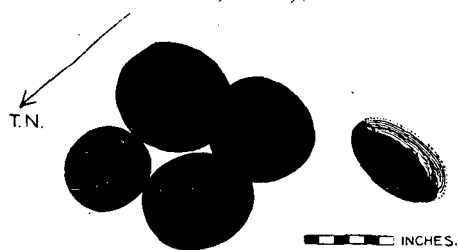


Fig. 5. Group of Littoral Basins on shore near Hynish House, Tiree.

added to many other pieces of archæological evidence as to a submergence of Western Europe since the Bronze Age.

With five fishermen, a minute scrutiny was made of the small, uninhabited island of Eatharna. We discovered there a little rocky plateau with a wonderful, closely-set assemblage of these basins. Such littoral basins are reported to me as occurring also on the north-east corner of Scotland, about high-water mark from Rosehearty to Aberdour, and at several places such as Scattald Marches in Unst, the northmost island of the Shetland group; also at Funzie in Fetlar; in Yell; on the

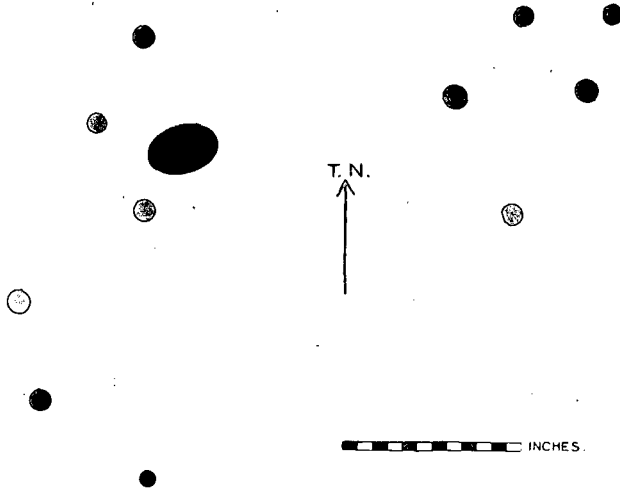


Fig. 6. Sculpturings on natural rock surface of floor of Kirkapoll Chapel, Tiree.

north side of the Voes of Snarravoe; and near Palyabag and Clivocast, Uyua Sound, Shetland; and in the Outer Hebrides.

There is another set of archaic sculpturings in Tiree. These involve cruciform figures. Some of them belong to the earliest part of the Christian era, but others may be of pagan origin. The most interesting of these groups is at Kirkapoll, inland some 400 yards from the middle of the shore at Gott Bay. Here are two ancient chapels 100 yards apart; the older and smaller has no graveyard and is unenclosed. It is referred to by Thos. S. Muir (*Characteristics*, p. 151; *Ecclesiological Notes*, p. 30); Joseph Anderson (*Scotland in Early Christian Times*, i. p. 67); MacGibbon and Ross (*Ecclesiastical Architecture*, i. p. 88); and Beveridge (*Coll and Tiree*, p. 149), but all very briefly.

What struck me on entering the smaller chapel was that the floor still retained its undulating natural rock-surface. On clearing the rock from growth of nettles and long grass a group of eleven cups and one

oval cavity were revealed (fig. 6). The "Kerrepol" Chapel seems to have been built upon a much earlier sacred site, and to be referred to by Unger and Huitfeldt (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum Christiania*, 1867, v. vii., No. 293, p. 307) as dedicated to St Columba, and by Munch (*Chronicle of Man*, pp. 186-7), as noted in a Vatican document of 1375.

On scrutinising a west sloping rock-surface which outcropped above the fine grass in the immediate neighbourhood of the chapel, there were noticed, some 189 feet to the north, cut in the living rock, a

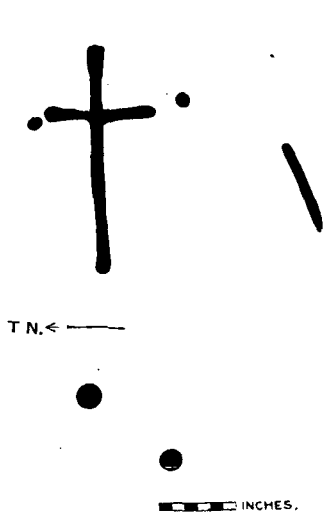


Fig. 7. Sculpturings on Rock north of Kirkapoll Chapel.



Fig. 8. Sculpturings on Rock north-north-west of Kirkapoll Chapel.

cruciform figure accompanied by four cups, a pointed oval cavity, and a short channel with pointed end (fig. 7).

To the west, 69½ feet from these carvings, I found on a south-west sloping rock-surface carvings of a cruciform figure, an irregular oval, and three circular cavities (fig. 8). From the centre of the chapel to this rock-surface is 219 feet. A plan of the area (fig. 9) is submitted. The crosses had been seen five years ago by the farmer when casually rubbing off the lichen with his walking-stick.

It is unusual to find crosses cut on the living rock-surface except in caves, as in Fifeshire and Arran, but pagan cruciform figures are not unknown in Scotland. One is to be found, now almost obliterated by weathering, set within an oval on one of the cup-and-ring-marked rocks at Cochno, Dumbartonshire.

On speaking to Mr Malcolm MacLean of Hynish House about these

matters he showed me a little quadrate pillar-stone with a cross cut upon it (fig. 10). Dr Beveridge had heard of a cross in this locality (*Coll and Tiree*, p. 155, note 2), but could not trace it. Mr MacLean also pointed out a slab 4 feet 2 inches long, 18 inches broad, and 9 inches

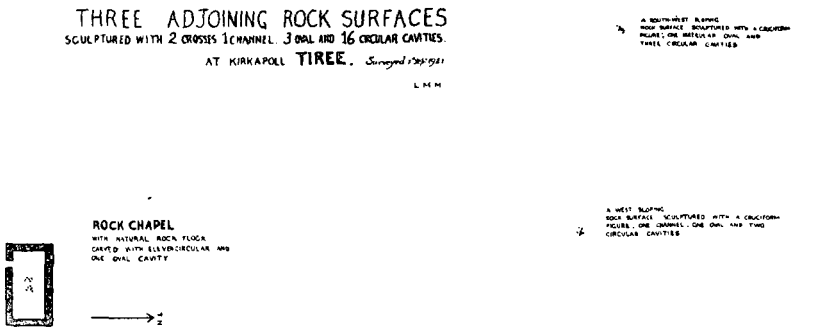


Fig. 9. Plan of Kirkapoll Chapel, Tiree, and adjoining Sculptured Rock Surfaces.

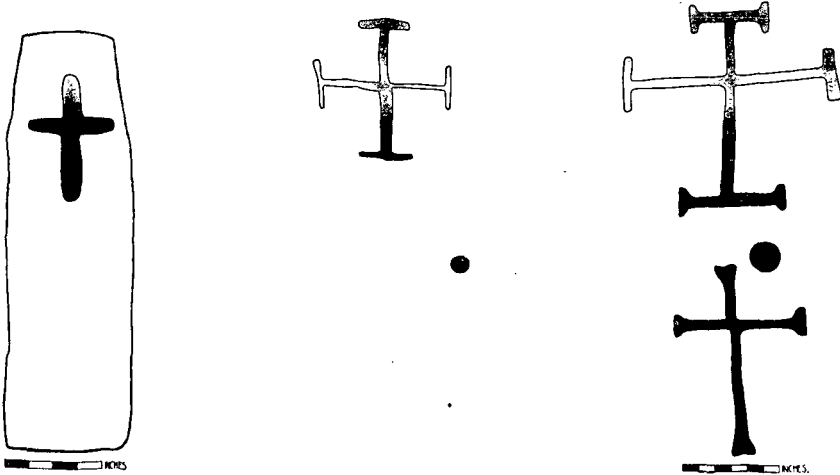


Fig. 10. Cross-slab (No. 1) at Hynish House, Tiree.

Fig. 11. Back of Cross-slab (No. 2) at Hynish House, Tiree.

Fig. 12. Face of Cross-slab (No. 2) at Hynish House, Tiree.

thick, which formed part of the pavement of the byre buildings. Cut upon its surface is a cross with nearly equal arms furnished with transverse channels at the terminals, and accompanied by two cups (fig. 11). I asked him to get the stone lifted, and, if any sculpturings were seen on the other side, to let me know. I have since received from him a letter, with a rubbing, stating that the slab had been lifted, when two crosses were discovered carved upon the under surface of a like



character to that on the upper surface (fig. 12). These, again, were accompanied by cup-markings. At Hynish gate is a fine slab with traces of an incised cross. The Hynish slabs seem to have been associated with an ancient graveyard in the district.

The association of cross and small cavities recalls the so-called dots which occur with crosses on other early Christian slabs and in the early Christian MSS.

A slab with cross and cups was once on Eilean Mor, Loch Sween (*Early Christian Monuments*, p. 402). Another like slab is at Taynish House, Loch Sween (*ibid.*, p. 406).

These little cavities are associated with cruciform figures on some of the Wigtownshire stones (*Archaic Sculpturings*, pp. 41-47), in early English and Welsh monuments and early MSS., and on a silver chain (*Early Christian Monuments*, p. 407).