



ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

## **Kilvickeon Church, near Bunessan, Isle of Mull**

### **Photographic and Measured Surveys**



National Grid Reference

**NM 41199 19622**

Site Code

**KVC13**

RoCAS Report

**2013-14/KVC13**

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Client

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## Contents

*Cover page: Kilvickeon Church, looking NW*

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>List of Plates</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.0 Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0 Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.0 Location and background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.1 Location</b>	
<b>3.2 Archaeological and historical background</b>	
<b>4.0 Aims</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5.0 Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5.1 Pre-conservation photographic survey</b>	
<b>5.2 Pre-conservation measured survey</b>	
<b>6.0 Results</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6.1 Desk-based Assessment</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6.2 Survey</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7.0 Conclusion</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>8.0 References</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>Appendix 1: Index of Photographs</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Addison Conservation + Design report</b>	<b>18</b>

### List of Figures

Figure 1: Site location	4
Figure 2: Excerpt from 1 <sup>st</sup> Edition OS map	7
Figure 3: Plan of the church and graveyard	9

### List of Plates

Plate 1: Church surrounded by gravestones	8
Plate 2: East end of the church	8
Plate 3: Panorama of the north wall	10
Plate 4: Internal view of the arched door	10
Plate 5: Sheela-na-gig	11
Plate 6: Internal view of the north wall	11
Plate 7: Panorama of the south wall	12
Plate 8: Internal view of the south wall	12
Plate 9: External view of the east wall	13
Plate 10: External view of the west wall	13
Plate 11: Aerial view of the churchyard	14

### Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was carried out by Lynn Fraser. We wish to thank Addison Conservation + Design for commissioning the work. All mapping, unless otherwise stated, is reproduced by permission of ProMap license LIG1044. Imagery is reproduced under ESRI licensing.

## 1.0 Summary

This report presents the results of a photographic and measured survey carried out on behalf of Addison Conservation + Design on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013 at Kilvickeon Church, near Bunessan, Mull to provide a baseline record in advance of restoration work on the church.

## 2.0 Introduction

Pre-conservation photographic and measured surveys were carried out at Kilvickeon Church, near Bunessan, Isle of Mull on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013 on behalf of Addison Conservation + Design. Prior to the surveys the site had been visited on two occasions, summer and winter, by Addison Conservation + Design at the behest of Historic Scotland in order to assess the church's physical condition and define a strategy for conservation works<sup>1</sup>. As part of that strategy, an archaeological photographic and measured survey was deemed necessary to provide a baseline record of the monument's present condition and extent prior to conservation.

## 3.0 Location and background

### 3.1 Site location

Kilvickeon Church is located approximately 3.6km southeast of Bunessan on the Ross of Mull at the end of a rough public track that is signposted for Scoor (NGR NM 41199 19622; Figure1). The church and associated burial ground sit in a slight dip at the base of a cultivated field, which slopes down towards the northwest. Loch Assapol lies to the northwest of the site.

### 3.2 Archaeological and historical background

An early Christian pilgrimage route is known to have crossed the Ross of Mull, a long, low peninsula ending to the southwest at Fionnphort and the Isle of Iona to the west of it. Iona is home to an Early Christian monastic site associated with Saint Columba's 563 AD landing on the island<sup>2</sup>.

Dun a'Gear, the well-preserved remains of a sub-rectangular galleried dun probably dating to the Iron Age, is located approximately 1km southwest of Kilvickeon Chapel on the south end of a steep-sided rocky spur<sup>3</sup>. The ruins of three farmsteads of at least Post Medieval date are located in the landscape around the chapel site at Tir Nan Spreidh, Creag Nan Con and Loch Assapol<sup>4</sup>.

Martin Martin briefly mentioned Kilvickeon Chapel, describing it *circa* 1695 as one of two parish churches, both of which had ministers, on the Isle of Mull. He describes it as a little chapel called *Kilwichk-Ewin* located 'at the lake above Loch Lay'<sup>5</sup>.

Kilvickeon Chapel, one of the seven medieval parish churches on Mull, was probably dedicated to Ernan, son of Eoghan, a nephew of St. Columba. It was in use until 1804, when a new church was built at Bunessan. The north and south walls are still standing to near roof height and the entrance to the church is intact. Above the doorway, the chapel also still bears an intriguing,

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<sup>1</sup> Addison Conservation & Design 2013

<sup>2</sup> Keay 1994

<sup>3</sup> National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) No. NM41NW2

<sup>4</sup> NMRS No. NM41NW12, NM41NW13-14 and NMRS No. NM42SW16

<sup>5</sup> Martin 1695: 156

KVC13: Photographic and Measured Survey of Kilvickeon Church

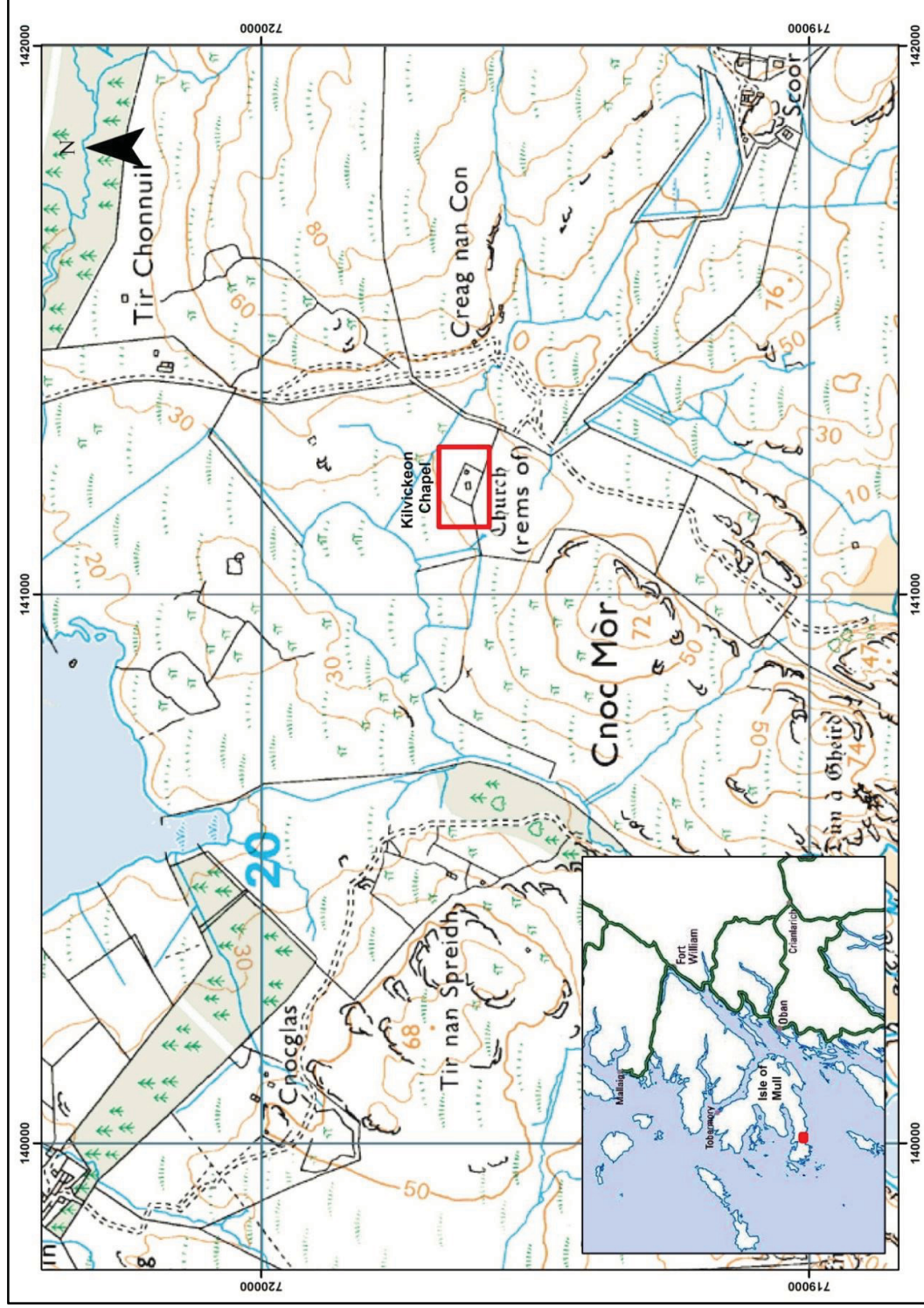


Figure 1: Site location



though worn, symbolic stone carving interpreted as a “sheela-na-gig<sup>6</sup>.” *Sheela-na-gigs*, figures usually found above doorways and arches on Christian churches and castles in Ireland and Britain, ordinarily show a figure with bent legs in a pose to display genitalia. They are interpreted as reminders of the sin of lust, or, if located in less visible positions, as aids to fertility<sup>7</sup>. The walls still contain projecting stones for holding down ties for a thatch roof and a 16<sup>th</sup> century grave slab is located inside the chapel ruins<sup>8</sup>. Architecturally, the chapel bears many similarities to St. Oran’s Chapel on Iona, and contains one of the first pointed arches in Scotland<sup>9</sup>.

## 4.0 Aims

The aim of the photographic and measured surveys was to provide an archaeological baseline record of the church in advance of conservation works.

## 5.0 Methodology

### 5.1 Pre-conservation photographic survey

A detailed photographic survey of the church was undertaken. Photographs, using a Nikon D3100 SLR mounted on a tripod, were taken of the structure commencing at the southwest corner of the south wall and thereafter round the exterior of the building in an anti-clockwise direction. Photographs were also taken of the internal faces of the walls and openings. Each camera position was recorded (Figure 2).

### 5.2 Pre-conservation measured survey

The measured survey was conducted using a Trimble Geo-XR Rover capable of centimetre accuracy. The internal and external walls of the church were plotted in, along with the extent of rubble spread at the base of the walls. In addition, to place the church in context the graveyard boundary wall and larger grave plots were also surveyed together with the majority of visible headstones.

The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of a *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland* (RCAHMS) Level 2<sup>10</sup> survey with the exception of detailed descriptive and/or analytical text. Reference should be made to the report by Addison Conservation + Design<sup>11</sup> for a detailed description of the structure and its condition (Appendix 2). All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with *Institute for Archaeologists’ Code of Conduct*<sup>12</sup>.

## 6.0 Results

### 6.1 Desk-based Assessment

A desk-based search was carried out in advance of the fieldwork.

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<sup>6</sup> NMRS NM41NW1

<sup>7</sup> British Museum 2013

<sup>8</sup> NMRS No. NM41NW1 and Historic Scotland 2013

<sup>9</sup> Addison Conservation + Design 2013

<sup>10</sup> RCAHMS 2004

<sup>11</sup> 2013

<sup>12</sup> IfA 2010

### 6.1.1 Cartographic Sources

The site location and surrounding landscape were examined on mapping held at the National Library of Scotland on-line<sup>13</sup>.

#### **Joan Blaeu's *Atlas of Scotland - Mula Insula*, 1654**

*Kilmakewin* is shown as a small church on the south side of the loch.

#### **Herman Moll's *The Isle of Mull & Part of Argyle Shire*, 1732**

The place-name of *Kilmakewin* is shown on the south side of the loch.

#### **John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland, 1832, Northern Part of Argyll Shire. Southern Part.***

A substantial church and a large building are depicted at *Kilvicuen*, to the southwest of *Loch Assapoll* and to the west of *Scour*.

#### **First Edition OS Six-inch-to-the-mile maps, *Argyllshire*, Sheet CXVIII – Surveyed 1878, published 1881**

The site of *Kilvicenen*, a chapel (in ruins) is shown as an unroofed structure aligned E-W located at the centre of a rectangular enclosure aligned WNW-ESE. A second possible unroofed building or crypt is shown in the NE corner of the enclosure (Figure 2).

#### **Second Edition OS Six-inch-to-the-mile maps, *Argyll and Bute*, Sheet CXVIII – Revised 1897, published 1900**

The second edition mapping depicts the site exactly the same as the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition mapping from twenty years before, although a boundary wall now runs from the southwest corner of the burial ground enclosure wall.

### 6.1.2 Site Records

A search of through the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) and Historic Scotland databases was made to assess the details of the site gathered during previous surveys.

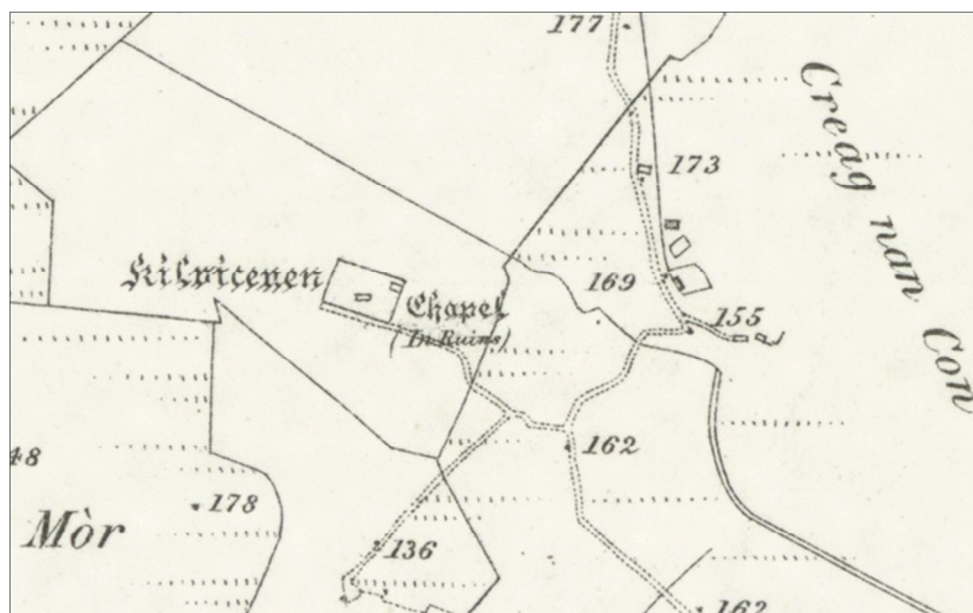
#### **WoSAS Pin 448      NM 41190 19610 Kilvickeon Old Parish Church, Mull NMRS No. NM41NW 1**

The WoSAS site record is incorrectly located at NM 41190 19610. The National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) is correct in locating the site at NM 41198 19621. This record describes the site:

*A ruined church stands within its burial-ground close to the E shore of Loch Assapol. It measures 13.1m from E to W by 5.7m transversely. The N and S walls are almost entire, but both end-walls are reduced to a height of about 1m. The masonry is of local slabs and boulders; there is some evidence to suggest that the external wall-faces were formerly harled. The original roofing, at least, was of thatch. The entrance-doorway, situated towards the W end of the N wall, was a tall*

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<sup>13</sup> National Library of Scotland (NLS) 2013



**Figure 2:** Excerpt from the First Edition OS map surveyed in 1878<sup>14</sup>

*arch-pointed opening. A little E of the doorway a fragment of carved sandstone projects from the outer face of the N wall at a height of 2.4m above ground level. This carving, now greatly worn, appears to have been of the type known as a sheela-na-gig. The E part of the interior seems to have been divided off from the remainder by a timber screen. Almost nothing is known of the early history of this church, which was evidently one of the seven medieval parish-churches of Mull, but the existing fabric may probably be ascribed to the 13th century. When the church first comes on record in the early 15th century it is described as the church of St Eugenius in Ross, but it has been shown that the dedication was more probably to Ernan son of Eoghan, a nephew of St Columba. The building appears to have continued in use for worship until the erection of a new church at Bunessan in 1804, but by 1795 the fabric had become ruinous. Within the ruined church is a grave-slab with an inscription, beginning HIC IACET LMA/RIOTA FIL IA... It probably dates to between 1500 and 1560<sup>15</sup>.*

### **Kilvickeon or Kilviceuen, Old Parish Church, Mull – Schedule Monument 7454**

Kilvickeon Chapel is a scheduled monument comprising the remains of a 13<sup>th</sup>-century church and its enclosure. The scheduled monument area measures approximately 55m WNW-ESE by 40m and contains the church, surviving to near wall-head level on the north and south sides with the east and west walls are largely collapsed. The remains of an earlier sub-circular enclosure, described as “fitting within the present rectangular enclosure,” may indicate that its ecclesiastical origins predate the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The Historic Scotland description also notes that the outer skin of the south wall has largely fallen away in contrast to the well-preserved north wall, which contains the entrance at the west end, a "sheela-na-gig" and stones for tying down the thatch. The masonry of the walls is

<sup>14</sup> NLS 2013

<sup>15</sup> NMRS No. NM41NW1



described as being “very similar to the bond found in the early 13th-century nunnery on nearby Iona.”

## 6.2 Survey

The church is a rectangular building aligned east-west, measuring 13.15m x 5.6m internally. It is surrounded by graves of varying ages (Plate 1), with the graveyard being enclosed by a Post-Medieval wall. The remnants of a former extent to the east-southeast enclosure wall and an earlier sub-circular enclosure were also recorded (Figure 3). The church is in a ruinous condition. The north and south walls stand approximately to their original height (about 3.5m from the current ground level internally), while the east and west walls now only stand to approximately 0.6m high (Plate 2).



**Plate 1:** Church surrounded by gravestones



**Plate 2:** East end of the church showing the extent to which the walls stand

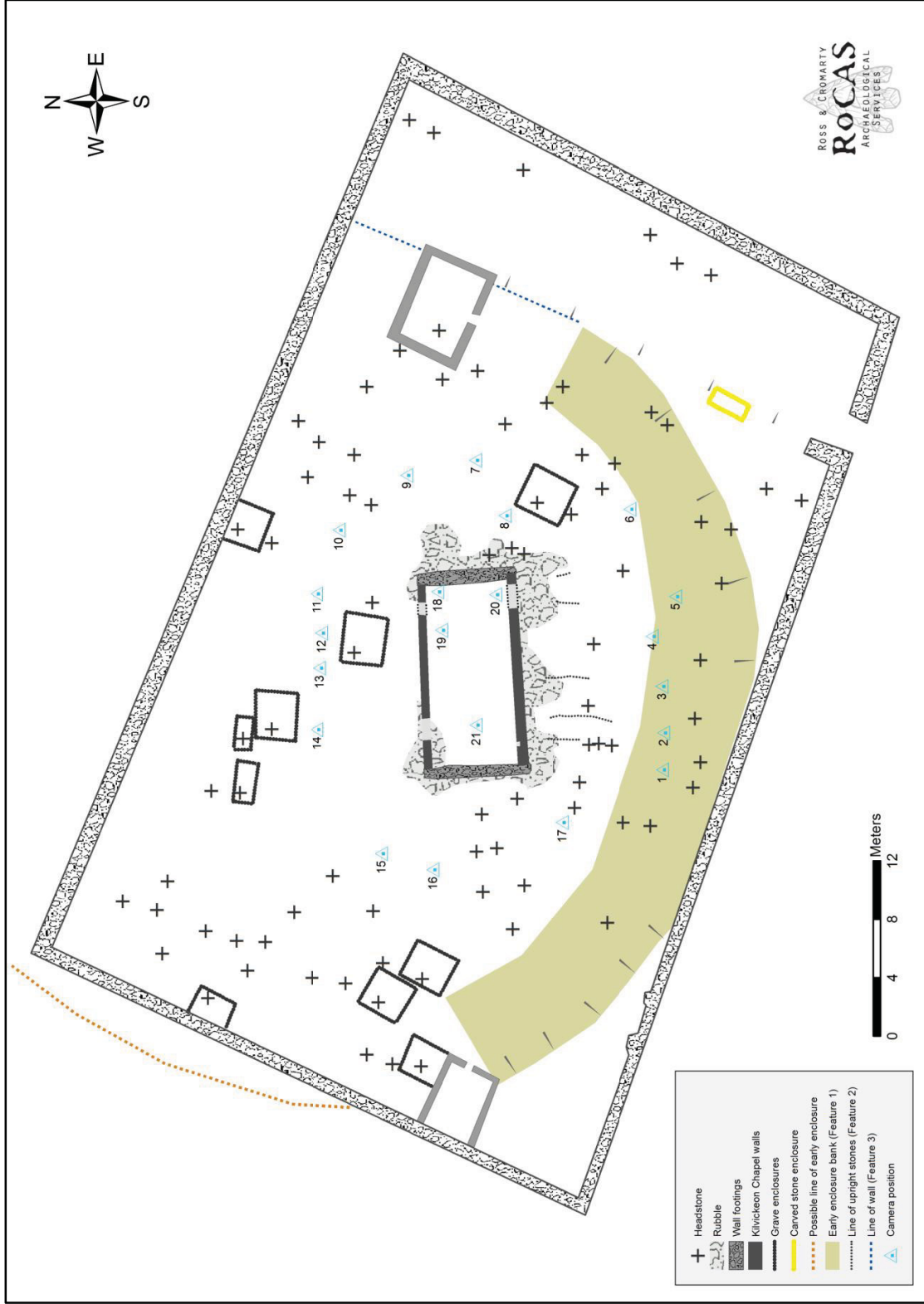


Figure 3: Plan of the church and graveyard



The external face of the north wall is in relatively good condition and an arched doorway is located at its west end (Plate 3), although the structural element of the arch has collapsed. It is approximately 2.5m high and would have been 1.34m wide (Plate 4). To the east of the door's apex is a much eroded fragment of carved sandstone projecting from the outer face of the wall (Plate 5). This thought to be a type of carving known as a *sheela-na-gig*<sup>16</sup>. A window is located at the east end of the north wall (Plate 3), which currently measures 0.93m at its external base. Stones projecting out of the wall below the wall-head would have been use to tie down the thatched roof (Plates 3 and 5). The internal face of the wall is exposed to the prevailing wind and is not so well preserved with some of the wall's cladding stones having fallen out (Plate 6).



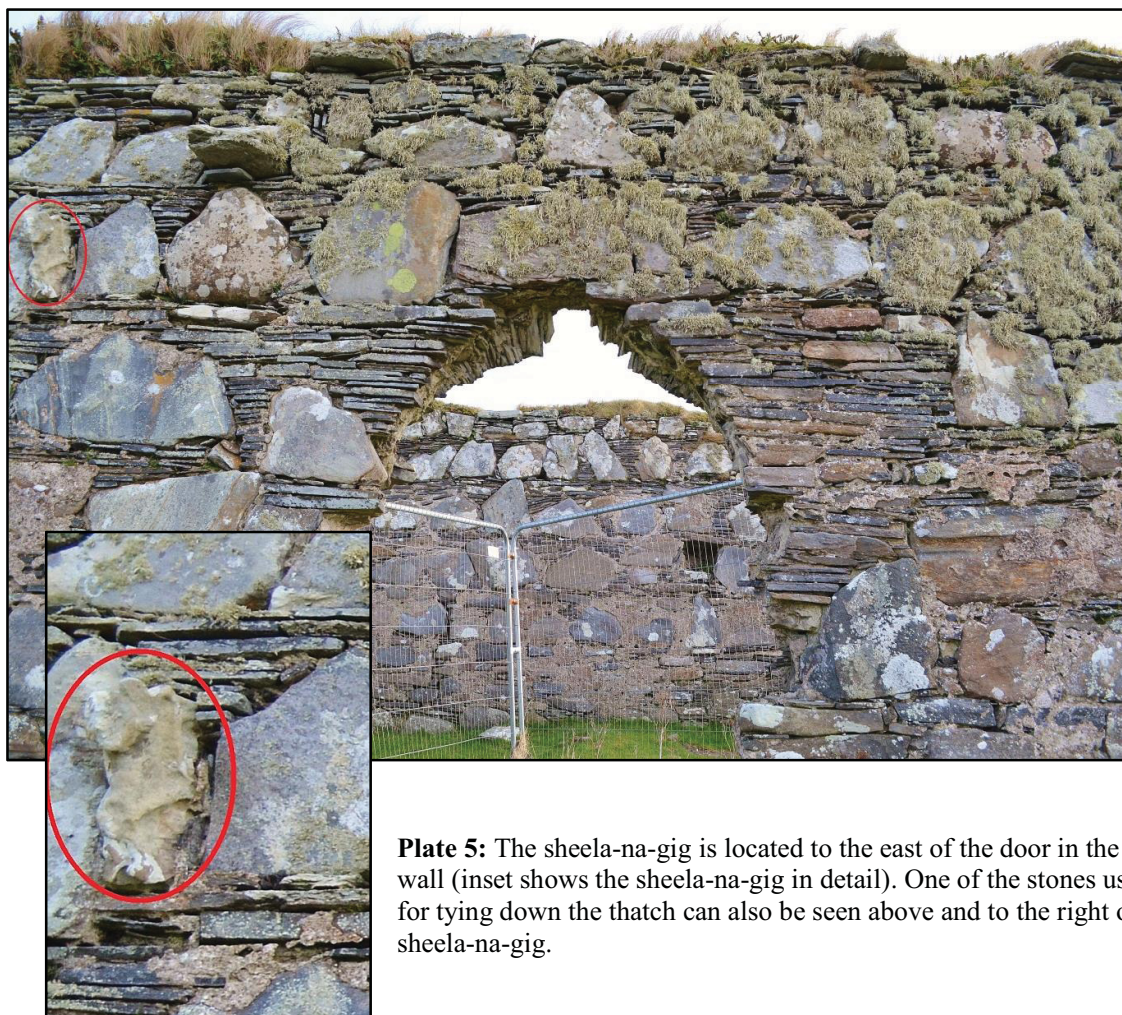
**Plate 3:** Panoramic view of the north wall showing the window and door apertures (scale 1m)



**Plate 4:** Interior view of the arched doorway showing the stones, which indicate the original width of the doorway

<sup>16</sup> WOSAS 2013





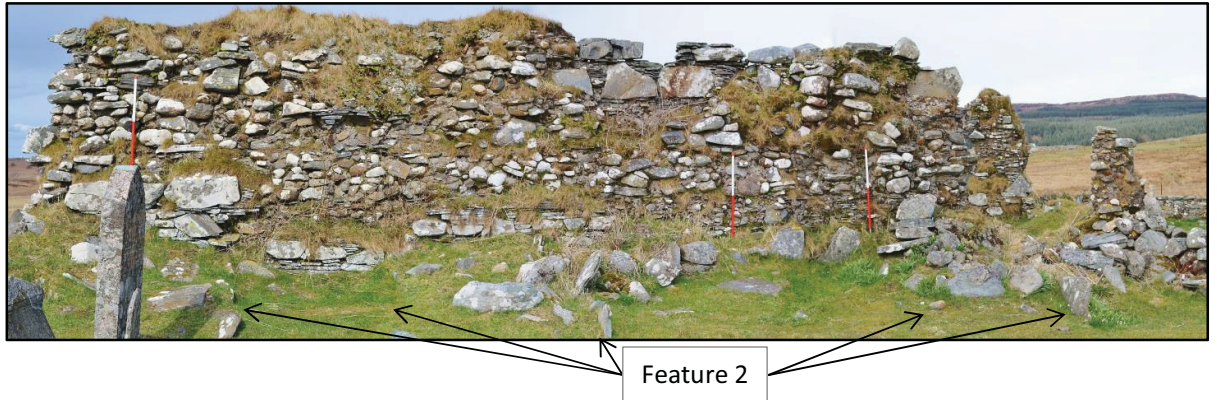
**Plate 5:** The sheela-na-gig is located to the east of the door in the north wall (inset shows the sheela-na-gig in detail). One of the stones used for tying down the thatch can also be seen above and to the right of the sheela-na-gig.



**Plate 6:** The internal face of the north wall; note the missing cladding stones (scale 1m)



The south wall is less well preserved with its external facing having eroded away and the base of the wall now obscured by tumble along its length. It is likely that there was a window at the east end of the south wall, opposing the window in the north wall, but this has fallen away (Plate 7). Five lines of stones set on edge of varying length were noted running perpendicular to the south wall (Feature 2; Plate 7). Due to the tumble it was not possible to determine whether they ran to the foot of the wall or ascertain their purpose. The internal face of the south wall is better preserved than the external as it is protected from the prevailing weather and is relatively intact (Plate 8).



**Plate 7:** A panoramic view of the external face of the south wall, which is in a much eroded state (scale 1m)



**Plate 8:** The interior face of the south wall, which is relatively intact (scale 1m)



The east (Plate 9) and west (Plate 10) walls only stand to a height of about 0.6m and both are partially covered by turf and tumble.



**Plate 9:** View of the exterior of the east wall (scale 1m)



**Plate 10:** View of the exterior of the west wall (scale 1m)

Survey of the graveyard revealed evidence of two different enclosures both of which are visible on aerial imagery (Plate 11). Feature 1 is the remnant of a sub-circular enclosure running from the southeast round to the west of the church. This is described by Historic Scotland as “fitting within the present rectangular enclosure,” however the survey shows that the enclosure in fact runs beneath the south-southwest wall of the more recent enclosure. It is most defined on the ground in the southwest quadrant of the graveyard. Feature 3 is a low mound, which runs as a



**Plate 11:** Aerial image of the church and graveyard showing features 1 and 3

continuation of the short tag of wall, which is perpendicular to the gate (Figure 2). The present east-southeast wall of the rectangular enclosure wall extends further beyond the east-southeast wall shown on the 1st Edition OS map and it can be deduced that Feature 3 is all that remains of that original wall.

## 7.0 Conclusion

Kilvickeon Church is a ruinous 13<sup>th</sup> century chapel, which sits within a later rectangular enclosure. This enclosure shows two phases of building having been extended after 1878 when the area was surveyed by Ordnance Survey. A sub-circular enclosure is visible to the southwest of the church running under the later stone enclosure wall; this earlier enclosure suggests that the ecclesiastical use of the site pre-dates the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The phasing apparent in the graveyard, together with the presence of a sheela-na-gig, make this an interesting and important site.

## 8.0 References

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**Appendix 1: Index of Photographs**

No.	Direction Facing	Camera Point	Notes	Taken By	Date
1	N	1	West end of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
2	NNW	1	West end of the south wall including some of the headstones in the cemetery	LF	19/03/2013
3	N	1	Wide angle shot of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
4	NNE	1	South wall	LF	19/03/2013
5	N	2	South wall	LF	19/03/2013
6	N	2	South wall	LF	19/03/2013
7	N	3	South wall	LF	19/03/2013
8	N	4	South wall	LF	19/03/2013
9	N	5	East end of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
10	NW	6	South-east corner of the church	LF	19/03/2013
11	NW	6	South-east corner of the church	LF	19/03/2013
12	WNW	7	East end of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
13	W	8	East end of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
14	W	9	East end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
15	W	9	East end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
16	SSW	10	East end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
17	S	11	North wall	LF	19/03/2013
18	S	12	North wall	LF	19/03/2013
19	S	13	North wall	LF	19/03/2013
20	S	14	The north wall including entrance	LF	19/03/2013
21	ESE	15	West end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
22	ESE	15	West end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
23	E	16	West end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
24	E	16	West end of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
25	NE	17	West end of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
26	SW	18	Internal view of the south wall	LF	19/03/2013
27	SSE	19	Internal view of the south wall- east end	LF	19/03/2013
28	NW	20	Internal view of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
29	WNW	20	Internal view of the north wall - east end	LF	19/03/2013
30	N	21	Doorway from inside the church	LF	19/03/2013
31	N	21	Doorway arch from inside the church	LF	19/03/2013
32	S	-	Doorway arch from outside the church	LF	19/03/2013
33	S	-	Doorway from outside the church	LF	19/03/2013
34	N	-	Doorway from inside the church	LF	19/03/2013
35	N	-	Window from inside the church	LF	19/03/2013
36	S	-	Window from outside the church	LF	19/03/2013
37	E	-	General shot of the west end of the church	LF	19/03/2013
38	SE	-	General shot of the north wall	LF	19/03/2013
39	-	-	Carved stone housed in a wooden box	LF	19/03/2013
40	-	-	Carved stone housed in a wooden box	LF	19/03/2013
41	NW	-	General shot of the church and graveyard	LF	19/03/2013

KVC13: Photographic and Measured Survey of Kilvickeon Church

<b>No.</b>	<b>Direction Facing</b>	<b>Camera Point</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Taken By</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>42</b>	NW	-	General shot of the church and graveyard	LF	19/03/2013
<b>43</b>	NW	-	General shot of the church and graveyard	LF	19/03/2013