

## Early Historic sculpture and landscape: a case study of Cladh a’ Bhile, Ellary, Mid-Argyll

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### ABSTRACT

*The burial ground at Cladh a’ Bhile in Mid-Argyll contains a collection of 29 carved stones, which is the second highest concentration of recorded Early Historic sculpture in Argyll. The descriptive recording and analysis of this sculpture has been the main focus of previous study, particularly as the site presently retains its function as a burial ground. The sculpture itself currently offers limited scope for interpreting what Cladh a’ Bhile was in the Early Historic period. However, through a consideration of the potential Early Historic features at and around Cladh a’ Bhile, more information can be brought to bear on the function and context of this collection of carved monuments. Different functions can be proposed for the site, including an isolated cemetery or a monastic context. However, the incorporation of Cladh a’ Bhile into the wider coastal landscape of Loch Caolisport suggests a further context for the site. Through the exploration of the associated archaeology, topography and place-names set within this landscape, it may be suggested that the burial ground and its sculpture may have played a part in inaugural rituals associated with Early Historic kingship.*

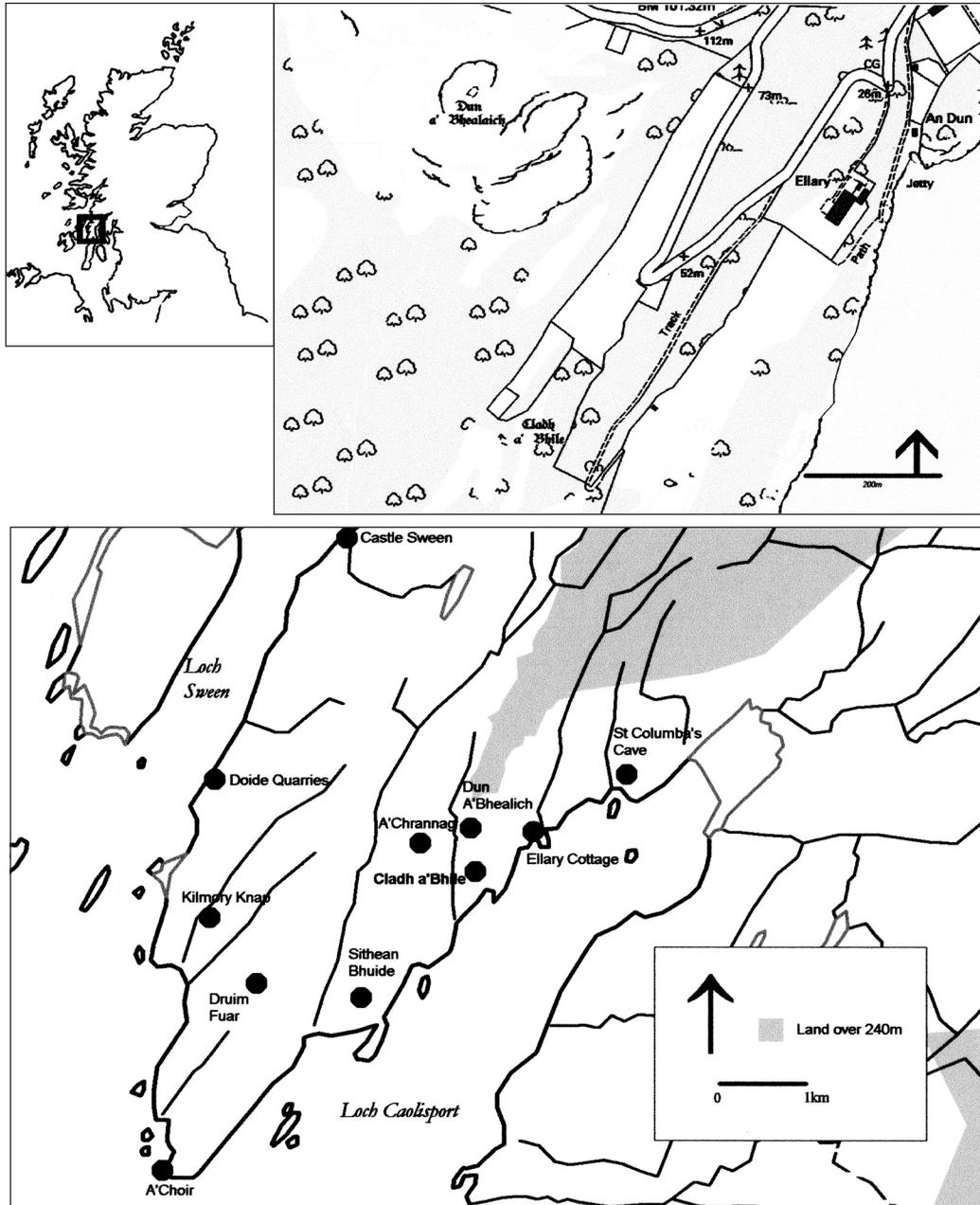
### INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the trees above the coast of Loch Caolisport, one of the many sea lochs penetrating the shore of Argyll, lies the burial ground of Cladh a’ Bhile (NGR: NR 7333 7560), a site that has to date made relatively little impact on Early Historic archaeology.<sup>1</sup> The site appears in the RCAHMS inventory for Mid-Argyll (RCAHMS 1992, 53–61) and has had its most in-depth review in a paper by William Galloway presented in 1876 to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, in which he promoted the unusual nature of the burial ground and its sculpted stones (Galloway 1878). The sculpture has not escaped notice and the RCAHMS (1992, 5–7, 53–61), Anna Ritchie (1997, 90) and Ian Fisher (2001, 8) have noted Cladh a’ Bhile’s remarkable collection and the general lack of context for it.

In archaeological terms, it is the sculpture that initially draws interest for any understanding of this site as Cladh a’ Bhile has never been excavated, there are no associated structures, no early documentary references to it and no saintly dedication associated with it.

As a burial ground, Cladh a’ Bhile is less likely to be the focus of intrusive archaeological examination. However, it is argued below that understanding of the site is dependent on those archaeological features considered (or assumed) to be relevant (or irrelevant) to the site itself. Even without intrusive archaeological methods, considering the sculpture within its immediate and local contexts presents multiple scenarios for the purpose and presence of Cladh a’ Bhile and its sculptural collection. The presence of the sculpture and its relatively well-preserved state means it is archaeologically recordable

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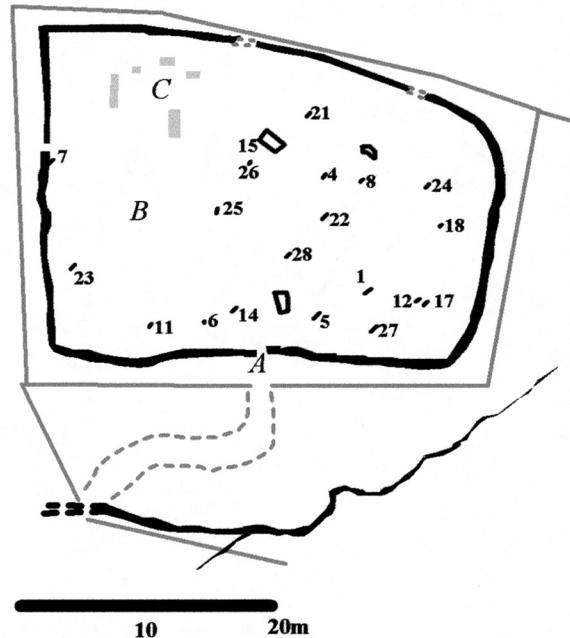


ILLUS 1 Location of Cladh a' Bhile and other sites mentioned in the text (Basemap data © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

and is complex enough for the analysis of symbolism and date, which has been the focus of previous study. The display of sculpture, however, is an unlikely reason for the presence of Cladh a'Bhile. Sculpture is the by-product of the social, religious, political and economic actions of those people who established and used Cladh a'Bhile. To that end, further analysis of the burial ground itself, even if it were not hindered by various circumstances, might shed only minimal light on these actions and contexts that created the sculpture. For this, Cladh a'Bhile needs to be situated within the context of Early Historic society; its art understood in the context of Insular art, the enclosure understood as one of many in Scotland and Knapdale, and the burial ground recognized as part of an Early Historic landscape.

### THE BURIAL GROUND

Cladh a'Bhile is now set within mature planted woodland on the Ellary Estate, approximately half a kilometre to the south-west of Ellary House, and partially used as a private family burial ground (illus 1). The site is approximately 400m above the loch on levelled ground between steep-sided slopes (RCAHMS 1992, 53). The burial ground is now enclosed by a thick, subrectangular drystone wall of variously sized rough local slabs enclosing an area of under c 900sq m and with two large boulders marking the main entrance in the eastern wall (illus 2, A; RCAHMS 1992, 54). In an 1875 account, T P White, who visited the site between



ILLUS 2 Plan of Cladh a'Bhile noting location of carved monuments: (A) orthostat-defined entrance; (B) 'bare' area of burial ground; (C) modern burials and markers (after RCAHMS 1992, 54)

1869 and the early 1870s, recorded no visible enclosure (White 1875, 57; RCAHMS 1992, 53). White remarked:

It will be a most unfortunate thing if what is left of antique monumental art at this ancient site be allowed to perish from neglect, or disappear out of all sight and mind in the overgrowth that must inevitably go on increasing apace in such a swampy thicket as this, if nothing is done to it (White 1875, 58).

White's enthusiasm and suggestions for improvement to the landowner seemed to have been heeded. When Galloway visited the burial ground in 1875, he noted a thick, moss-covered drystone wall and that the site had recently been cleared to the limits of this subrectangular boundary (White 1875, 33).

The RCAHMS suggest the current wall is the result of 1870s maintenance by the landowner although reusing, and probably following, the

wall recorded by Galloway (RCAHMS 1992, 54). It is uncertain whether Galloway's wall is a late 19th-century structure or was missed in the overgrowth by White. The antiquity of the enclosure is thus difficult to ascertain, having apparently been largely rebuilt. The large boulders marking the main eastern entrance are potentially an Early Historic characteristic. At the medieval and probably early medieval ecclesiastical site at Templeteenaun in County Wicklow, orthostats also mark the entrance to the enclosure, and at the large monastic site of Nendrum, County Down, large boulders make up the basal layers of the enclosure wall (Edwards 1990, 107; O'Sullivan & Warren 2004). The gaps in the southern and eastern walls at Cladh a'Bhile are much smaller and not marked out in any way, perhaps suggesting they are later features. The RCAHMS (1992, 54) also record a spring that has been converted into a drystone lined and lintelled well on the hillside to the south-west of the enclosure.

The Natural History and Antiquarian Society of Mid-Argyll, particularly under the presidency of Marion Campbell, took considerable interest in the Ellary Estate and Cladh a'Bhile and the first excursion of the society visited several sites on the estate (Campbell & Sandeman 1962; MacKenna 1977; Tyler 2005). At Cladh a'Bhile, they noted the carved stones and the landowner, Mr Rogers, indicated where a 'bee-hive cell' had stood 'just inside the south-west entrance' (Tyler 2005, 15–16, based on a report in the *Advertiser and Echo*, 18 May 1955). This is the only recorded indication of a structure in this area (presumably near no 7 and area B on *illus 2*). Beehive cells are most commonly found in the west of Ireland, particularly in Counties Kerry and Dingle (Harbison 1994, 98). The structures are usually associated with early Christian sites, such as at Reask, County Kerry where there is sculpture and the use of B Ware dating aspects of the site to the fifth–seventh century (Fanning 1981, 158). There are upstanding remains of a double beehive cell at Eileach An Naoimh, part of the Garvellachs, a small island

chain north of Jura. The building consists of conjoined drystone cells, with a low passage connecting the two chambers (RCAHMS 1984, 174). There is some modern restoration to the structure, but it is generally considered to be part of the Early Historic remains on the site, which also include carved stones (*ibid*; Fisher 2001, 136). It seems curious that Galloway did not make note of any beehive cell within the enclosure at Cladh a'Bhile upon his visit, as he does indicate the ground was cleared and such a structure, if foundations or walls were intact, would presumably have been visible. A beehive cell would not be completely unexpected in this context and it is feasible that perhaps the feature was revealed only through later maintenance work. There is, however, no trace of a structure recorded in Campbell & Sandeman's (1962, 65) survey in the 1960s of the site or in the Royal Commission survey conducted in 1985 (RCAHMS 1992, 53–4).

#### THE SCULPTURE AT CLADH A'BHILE

The RCAHMS (1992, 54) recorded 29 carved stones at Cladh a'Bhile, many in an upright position, one cross-incised boulder, a socketed slab and several whole and fragmentary rotary querns (of unknown origin) placed inside the enclosure. Galloway (1878, 33) recorded that none of the 12 stones he examined were still erect, but lay partly buried in the soil. It can only be assumed that these stones were re-erected by the landowner(s) during maintenance work at some time after Galloway's visit. By the 1960s, many stones appear to have been set upright (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 65; RCAHMS 1992, 54). The current locations recorded by RCAHMS show that most monuments occur in the northern and eastern areas of the enclosure, leaving the south-west corner (*illus 2*, B) clear of early monuments (*ibid*). The westernmost corner of the enclosure (*illus 2*, C) is now the site of private family burials dating from 1883 to 1999 used by the Fox-Tarrat and Rogers families.

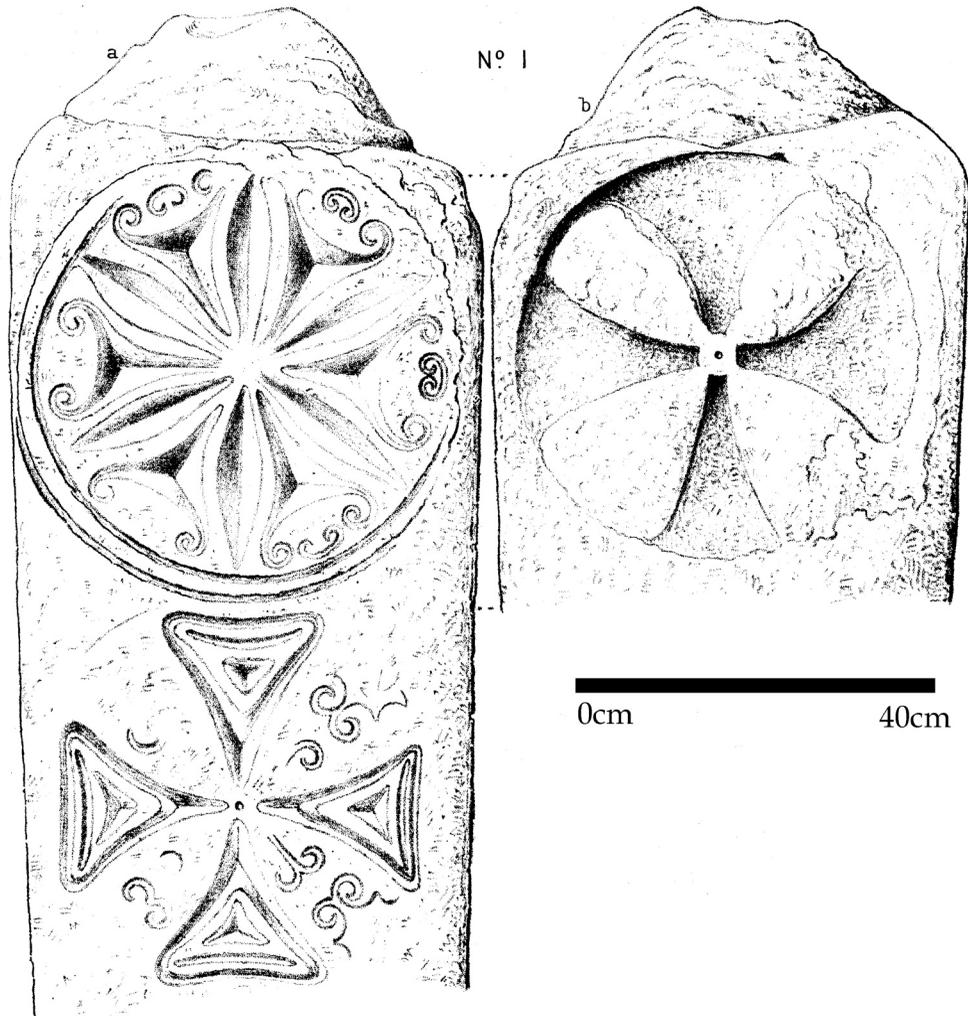
Together, areas B and C (illus 2) have a general rectangular shape and a rough east–west orientation, which prompted Anna Ritchie (1997, 90) to suggest a lost building, perhaps an early timber chapel, in this area. This is also generally the site of the reported beehive cell. However, the squared corner of the enclosure near area C suggests a much more concerted rebuilding effort here by the 19th-century or later landowners. Considering the lack of upstanding monuments when Galloway visited in 1875, we cannot assume that monuments were re-erected in relation to where they fell and this absence of monuments in area B might also be part of 19th-century maintenance, with the area purposefully cleared to make way for the family burial plots. A timber chapel, or indeed beehive cell, might help to explain the existence of this burial ground with so many monuments, but their presence cannot be confirmed or resolutely denied without further investigation of the burial ground itself.

Regardless of whether the monuments at Cladh a'Bhile are currently upstanding in or near their original positions, the nature of the sculpted stones at the site suggests that nearly all of them were designed to stand as pillars or upright cross-slabs. It was this in particular that drew the attention of Galloway in 1875, who remarked that it was a rare characteristic in the West Highlands and advocated an early date for the collection based on the assumption that upstanding monuments generally preceded recumbent slabs (Galloway 1878, 51–3). Considerably more is known about the corpus of Early Historic sculpture from the west, and the predominance of upstanding monuments at Cladh a'Bhile is perhaps not as unique as Galloway argued. In comparison, the seven stones of comparable date from Achadh na Cille, Oib, also in Mid-Argyll, are also primarily upstanding pillars or slabs (RCAHMS 1992, 45–7; Fisher 2001, 140). At Iona, the majority of the simpler cross-incised stones are also potentially uprights (RCAHMS 1992; Fisher 2001, 126–8). Upright monuments may be a sign of early date,

but in the case of Cladh a'Bhile, date might be more convincingly argued from the predominant motifs rather than by form alone.

Because the sculpted monuments have been illustrated and described previously, analysis of individual monuments will be restricted (RCAHMS 1992, 55–61; Fisher 2001, 141–3). Cladh a'Bhile has the second highest collection of carved stones in Argyll after Iona, which has 111 monuments (Fisher 2001, 8). However, unlike Iona, none of the sculpture at Cladh a'Bhile seems to be later than the eighth century and the majority probably date to the seventh century, suggested by stylistic features on the stones (RCAHMS 1992, 5, 54). The concentration and nature of sculpture at Cladh a'Bhile in the seventh century suggests a site of some importance. The most elaborate of Cladh a'Bhile's monuments, a pedimented pillar stone carved on both faces, portrays two of these seventh-century stylistic elements (no 1, RCAHMS 1992, 55–6). One face (illus 3a) bears a deeply incised six-petalled hexafoil (or marigold) within a double circle and with triangular leaf-shaped depressions with curvilinear ends between the petals augmented by internal C-scrolls. Underneath this is a cross-of-arcs with deep triangular depressions in the arms, again with curvilinear ornament between the arms. There appears to be a shadow of an enclosing circle. On the RCAHMS drawing, there is the faint trace of a double spiral below this cross.

The reverse (illus 3b) bears another plain cross-of-arcs within a circle with sunken spaces between the arms and a circular centre. F S Mackenna (1977) suggested additional ornament on this face of the pillar based on examination of photographic slides and verified by other observers, although of the slides or the stone it is not clear. The additional ornament consisted of a small incised cross on the triangular top of the pillar (which is a rough surface, potentially broken or possibly roughly shaped) and curvilinear ornament adjacent to the circle. Extending from the cross-of-arcs, he depicted a



ILLUS 3 Galloway's (1878, plate II, no 1) drawing of Cladh a' Bhile number 1

rectangular stem, making the cross resemble a *flabellum*, with a central saltire cross in a circle and part of a stand or base (ibid, 14). In addition to this ornament, Mackenna identified a *Chi Rho* hook on the cross-of-arcs on both faces of the pillar (ibid, 14–15). By the 1985 Royal Commission survey, this proposed decoration was indiscernible, as the resulting published drawings reflect (RCAHMS 1992, 55–6). Mackenna (1985) visited the monument in 1985 and confirmed the absence of the proposed

ornamentation, although suggested slight traces of the handle could still be seen. The illustration accompanying Galloway's (1878, plate II, no 1) drawing does not show any further ornament on this face, presumably restricted to the visible ornament in 1875 of the cross-of-arcs, and the triangular top bears no incised cross (illus 3). Mackenna's (1985) sketch remains the only record of the possible *flabellum* design and the presence of the two *Chi Rho* hooks, as even the slide that sparked the revision is lost.

## PARALLELS AND CHRONOLOGY

The hexafoil, or six-petalled marigold, occurs on three of the stones from Cladh a'Bhile (nos 1, 2 and 3). In 1959, a fragment of a carved stone was found re-used in a path by a garden cottage associated with Ellary House (NGR: NR 7400 7610; RCAHMS 1992, 57). It bears a hexafoil pattern within a double-line incised circle and is compatible with the other sculpture from Cladh a'Bhile and is usually grouped in catalogues with sculpture from the site (no 3). Hexafoil or 'marigold' symbols are not common in Argyll, appearing on only seven monuments (Fisher 2001, 12, 27). The closest parallel to the Cladh a'Bhile monuments is from Kilberry, across Loch Caolisport (RCAHMS 1992, 95). The hexafoil was a pattern adapted into Christianity from generally popular motifs of the Late Antique world (Fisher 2001, 12). One of the finest examples from Scotland comes in the form of a carved drain cover from the Roman bath-house at Bothwellhaugh, near Motherwell, dating to the second century AD, now in the Hunterian Museum (Maxwell 1975, 34–5). Other sculptural parallels to the more elaborate Cladh a'Bhile hexafoils in the Insular world occur at, for example, Carndonagh, County Donegal, Maughold on the Isle of Man, and the burial ground at Kirkton on the Isle of Great Cumbrae off Bute.

Hexafoils occur on three monuments associated with the church at Maughold (Kermode 1907, 111–13). The most elaborate of these is a pillar (Kermode's no 27) with an incised hexafoil enclosed by circles and an inscription under which there are two crosslets, each with a *Chi Rho* hook and their own inscriptions (Kermode 1907, 111–12, plate X). The form of the hexafoil is not as elaborate as the pillar at Cladh a'Bhile, as the wedge-shapes between the petals are left undecorated. Dates for this monument centre on the seventh century based on the form and content of the inscriptions (Cubbon 1982, 260–1). The most similar monument to Cladh a'Bhile no 1 is Kermode's

no 26, which bears a cross-of-arcs and a hexafoil (Kermode 1907, 111, plate X). A small slate slab with only one carved face, the monument is not as elaborate but also has two small incised crosses in diagonal frames. The third example of the motif at Maughold is a round-headed pillar with a double circle on the head enclosing a pattern of adjoining hexafoils. The round-headed pillar from Maughold is similar in shape to the pillar from Kirkton on Great Cumbrae off Bute. Here the monument is carved with a hexafoil as part of decoration on both faces (Curle 1962, 223–4; Fisher 2001, 70). The pillar from Carndonagh on the Inishowen peninsula has two decorated faces carved in relief. One face bears a depiction of the crucifixion and an equal-armed cross filled with interlace below. The other face shows two figures holding staffs flanking the shaft or stem of what has been identified as a *flabellum* decorated with a seven-petalled marigold. The marigold also has arcs joining the petals together and each wedge contains a single pellet or small boss. At the base, in a similar layout to the Cladh a'Bhile pillar, is an encircled cross-of-arcs in relief with the 'leaves' between the cross arms extending and looping around the outer circle (Henry 1965, 128–30, plate 59). On art historical parallels, Henry (1965, 126–30) suggested a date as early as the seventh century for the Carndonagh pillar, and M Herity (1995, 43) suggested it belonged to c. AD 600.

The hexafoil also appeared in other Christian media by the seventh century. Folio 1v of the 'Bobbio Orosius' (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS D.23.SUP) is a carpet page at the start of the text of the *Chronicon* that includes an encircled eight-petalled marigold in the centre with encircled hexafoils in each of the corners of the page. The manuscript is generally given an early seventh-century date on art historical and palaeographical grounds (Brown 1984, 313; Henderson, G 1987, 27). Considering the artistic parallels and art historical and archaeological evidence for dating, the hexafoils used at Cladh a'Bhile perhaps sit most comfortably within a seventh-century context, even if a concrete

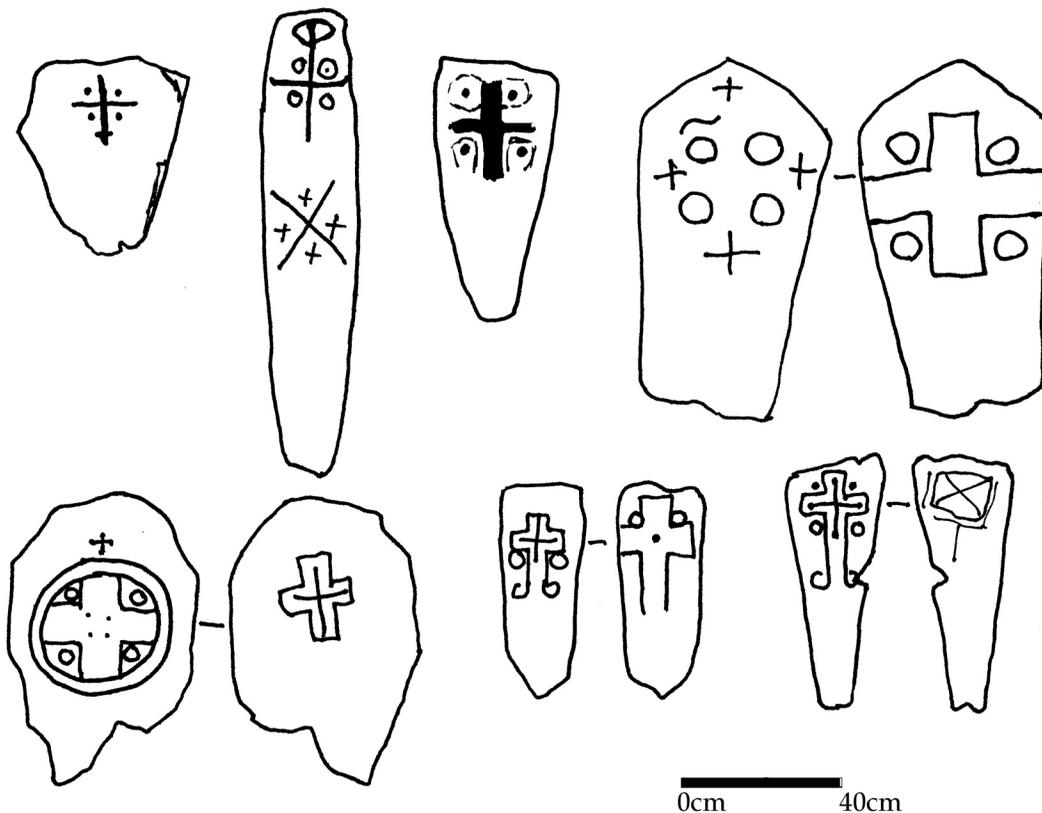
date cannot be determined (RCAHMS 1992, 5, 54). The use of the hexafoil at Cladh a’ Bhile suggests relatively sophisticated influences on the designer and/or carver of the monuments that bear the design. It occurs a total of three times at the site, significant for a motif that is not generally widespread in the region.

While only occurring on one of the monuments from Cladh a’ Bhile, the cross-of-arcs motif, of which two appear on Cladh a’ Bhile no 1, is a more common symbol on sculpted stones in Britain and Ireland (Trench-Jellicoe 1998, 501–2). The degree of elaboration on the Cladh a’ Bhile pillar, however, is more unusual, with the best parallels coming from Ireland, in particular on a pillar from Reask, County Kerry (Fanning 1981, 139–52). Here the

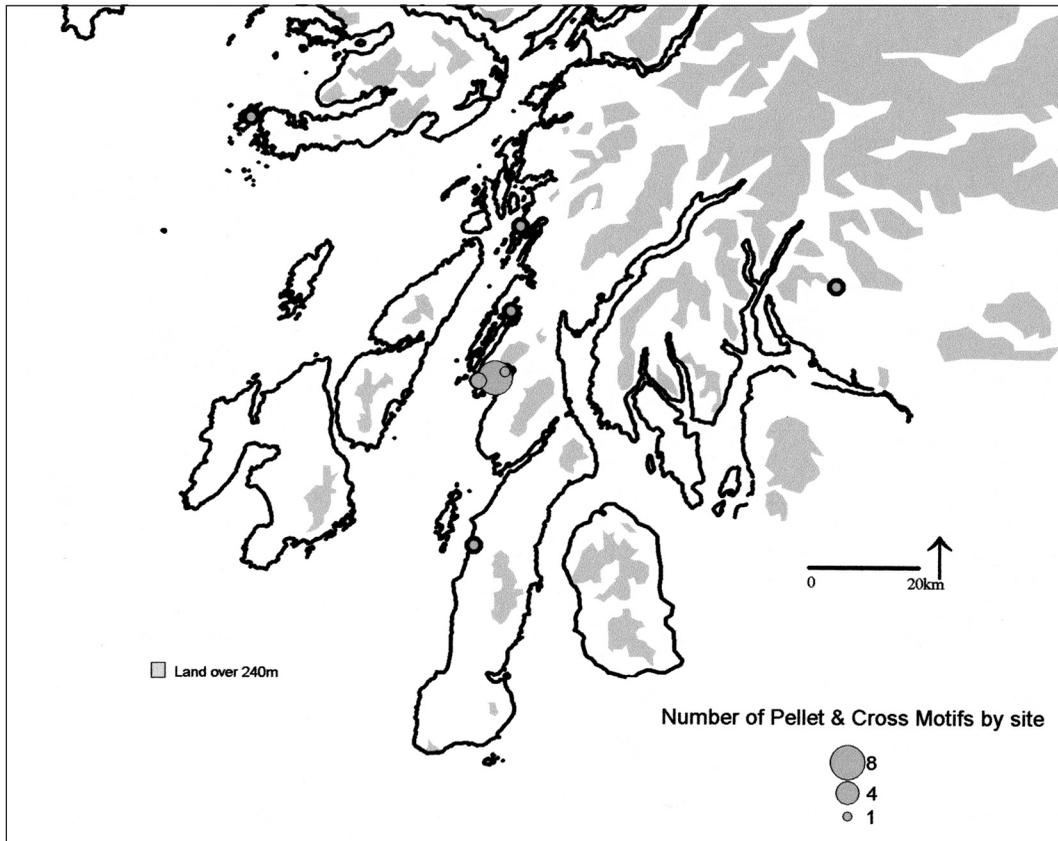
cross-of-arcs is also enclosed within a circle, but has a stem or pendant ornament of S and C spirals. The designs between the arms have been likened to the Greek letter *omega*, and a similar connection has been made for the ornament on the Cladh a’ Bhile pillar (ibid, 140; RCAHMS 1992, 55). The Reask pillar was in association with an ecclesiastical settlement of circa fifth- to seventh-century date, a date complementary to the art historical dates for hexafoil motifs (Fanning 1981, 152).

#### CROSSES AND PELLETS

While both hexafoils and cross-of-arcs may be characteristic enough to suggest a general date for some of the sculpture at Cladh a’ Bhile, the



ILLUS 4 Simplified comparative sketches of the cross and four pellet motif on monuments from Cladh a’ Bhile. From left to right: top – nos 12, 11, 21, 22; bottom – nos 23, 19, 20 (after Fisher 2001, 29, 32, 33)



ILLUS 5 Weighted distribution map of the number of cross and four pellet motifs occurring in the west of Scotland (Basemap data © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

majority of the sculpture from the site is in the form of incised crosses. These crosses without additional ornament could date to any time after the introduction of Christianity, but are often assumed to be early due to their simplicity (Henderson, I 1987; Henderson & Henderson 2004). In the context of the sculpture at Cladh a'Bhile with its lack of forms generally dated to the eighth century and later, an early date seems likely. Seven slabs from Cladh a'Bhile (illus 4: nos 11, 12, 19, 20(a), 21, 22(a & b), 23) use the motif of an incised cross with four accompanying pellets or circles, which are not circular armpits, with one of these using the motif on both faces. Fisher (2001, 13) suggests that pellets on cross-slabs were replicating

the look of jewelled metalwork. The number four has obvious symbolic meaning as it related to the Four Evangelists and the four elements of the material world. If any of these proposed meanings for the four pellets were intended, even these rough-looking and simple monuments show a degree of sophistication in theological discourse or understanding of elaborate Christian art in other materials.

Examination of comparative drawings in Fisher's (2001) catalogue for west coast sculpture shows that the motif of the cross with four pellets is not particularly rare, but that the greatest concentration of these types of monuments is in Knapdale (illus 5), with by far the densest concentration occurring at

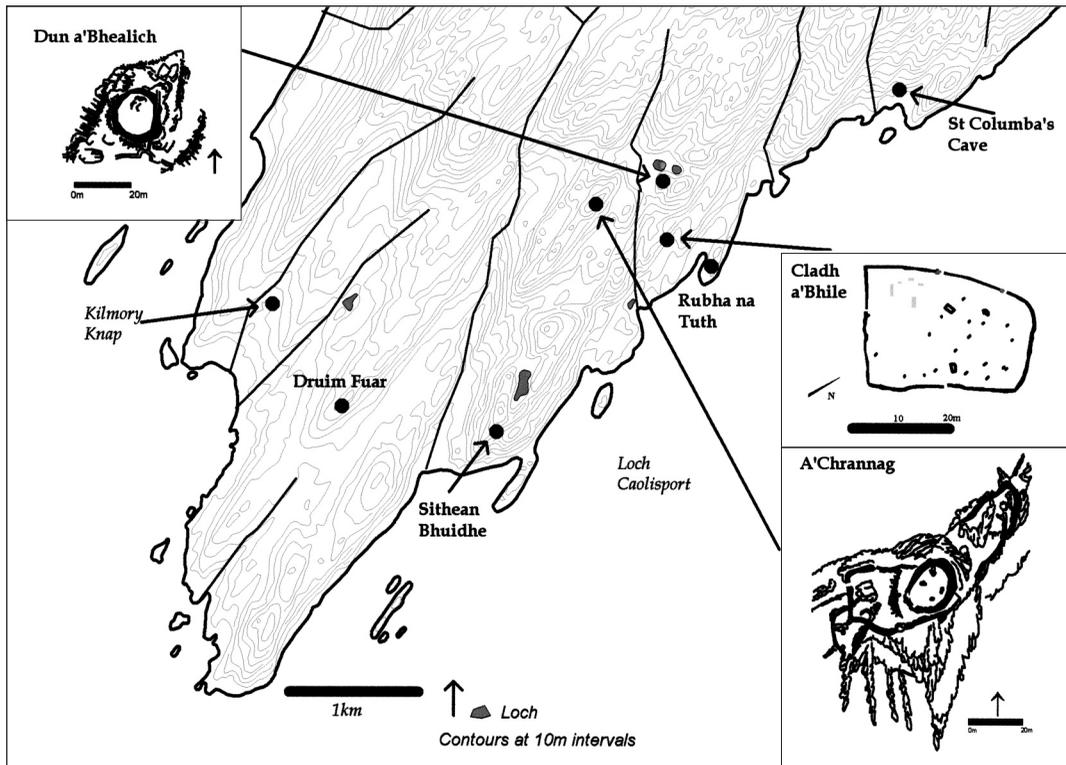
Cladh a'Bhile. A similarly limited distribution of another relatively simple incised motif, the expanded terminal cross, was used by Campbell (1987) to suggest artistic and social links between Iona and related sites. Campbell (*ibid*, 110–11) argued that the 'reach' of the motif of an expanded arm cross indicated the extent of Iona's influence around the seventh century. Following this, it may be that the cross and four pellet motif is indicating a similar reach of influence based at Cladh a'Bhile. However, the context for this sculpture and any influence or power based at Cladh a'Bhile within seventh-century Knapdale remains unknown.

#### DECODING THE EARLY HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

The archaeological landscape of this peninsula between Lochs Sween and Caolisport is relatively dense and has been the focus of Campbell & Sandeman's (1962) survey of Mid-Argyll, the Royal Commission's survey of Argyll (RCAHMS 1992) and Tolan-Smith's (2001) survey of cave sites in Mid-Argyll. The overall distribution of recorded archaeology suggests that the centre of the peninsula was marginal land from prehistoric to post-medieval times, the hills here possibly acting as a deterrent to dense activity. The Early Historic period is the period we know the least about in the region in terms of recorded sites, with the majority of these being only loosely attributable to the period, for example forts and duns that may be of earlier Iron Age construction and use (RCAHMS 1988, 28–31). Considering the relatively sparse archaeological investigation apart from survey in this area of Knapdale, it is difficult to understand Cladh a'Bhile in the context of its Early Historic landscape. However, the spread of sites that may be contemporary with Cladh a'Bhile, particularly on the western shore of Loch Caolisport, are a critical resource for understanding the context of this remarkable site and its sculpture.

#### THE WESTERN COAST OF LOCH CAOLISPORT (ILLUS 6)

The only recorded excavation with Early Historic deposits in the immediate vicinity of Cladh a'Bhile is at St Columba's Cave (NGR: NR 7512 7679). Outside the cave stands the remains of a 13th-century chapel. The cave is also the site of sculpture, as it bears three incised crosses cut into the rock wall (RCAHMS 1992, 200–1; Fisher 2001, 151; Tolan-Smith 2001, 26). One of the crosses bears the four pellets in each angle, the motif popular at Cladh a'Bhile (Fisher 2001, 30, 151). Inside the cave is a mortar-built altar, probably not of Early Historic construction, but placed as to respect and augment the carved crosses. The cave has been cited as a stopping place for Columba on his way to visit his relative, a king of Dál Riata at Dunadd, but the association with St Columba is only documented as far back as the 16th century (Tolan-Smith 2001, 25). The site is a safe landing place for small vessels and the main cave, when excavated in the 19th and 20th centuries, revealed occupation deposits that included Early Historic layers (*ibid*, 25–72). The site consists of two adjoining caves, and apparent features include a rock 'shelf' on which the altar stands and two hollowed-out oval basins (*ibid*, 26). The Early Historic use is not closely dated and relies on typological dating of artefacts. Activity appears to have been a mix of domestic and industrial from the presence of hearths, midden deposits, slag, furnace debris, moulds, crucibles and burials (*ibid*, 37–51). The crucibles are similar in shape to examples from Dunadd and a range of the sixth to ninth century is likely (*ibid*, 51). The moulds are too fragmentary to identify the finished products, but they appear to be from two-piece castings. Both the casting technique and the use of crucibles indicate that the metalworking taking place in or near St Columba's Cave was non-ferrous. The significance of fine metalworking in Early Historic society has been explored in relation to not only the use and distribution of



ILLUS 6 Map of features potentially related to an inaugural landscape on the east coast of Loch Caolisport (Plans after RCAHMS 1988, 170 and 182, and RCAHMS 1992, 54. Basemap data © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. An EDINA Digimap/JISC supplied service)

the finished products but also the control and status inherent in the ability to carry out the process itself (Nieke 1993; Lane & Campbell 2000, 253).

Immediately to the west of Cladh a'Bhile are two duns: A'Chrannag (NGR: NR 7277 7589) and Dun a'Bhealach (NGR: NR 7329 7607) (illus 6). Of these, Alcock & Alcock (1987, 134) have suggested A'Chrannag may be a settlement, with substantial outworks dividing the space on the hill in a way reminiscent of a nuclear fort and with the potential for an Early Historic phase. Campbell & Sandeman (1962, 44) have also suggested 'nuclear fort status' for Dun a'Bhealach. The two forts are neighbours with a saddle connecting them and forming a small pass between (hence the name Dun a'Bhealach

– fort of the pass). They sit next to twin lochans (illus 6 and 7). The focus of the sites is clearly to the sea. The views stretch unbroken to the south, east and west, with Ireland, Kintyre, Gigha, Jura and Islay all visible on a clear day. There are higher hills at some distance to the north and north-east. A'Chrannag is the higher and more commanding of the two, with a clear view of the lower fort, and sits at the northern end of a flattish ridge stretching to the south.

Dun a'Bhealach, situated at the north end of a low ridge, measures approximately 14m across within a wall c 3m thick with a probable entrance in the south-west (RCAHMS 1988, 181–2). Campbell & Sandeman (1962, 44) noted the presence of internal structures in the dun, at least one circular and no longer visible, and



ILLUS 7 Photograph from the north-east looking to A'Chrannag with one of the twin lochans in the foreground (photo by author)

lower terraces offering the potential to extend the site. Walling on these lower terraces is potentially of later origin (RCAHMS 1988, 182). Whilst access is easy along the ridge to the south and via the western saddle, the northern slopes of the hill are also reasonably accessible (if a steep climb now flanked with bracken and tree growth). No finds or historical accounts are associated with the site, and its period of construction and use might fall anywhere from c 700 BC to AD 500 or in the Early Historic period (RCAHMS 1988, 28–31).

A'Chrannag occupies the highest point on a rocky ridge of the same name, which hinders access on the north-west and south-east flanks of the site. The core of the settlement is the dun, which shows evidence of vitrification, suggesting the walls were of timber-laced construction. The two main outer walls do not show vitrification and incorporate rocky outcrops to augment the enclosures (RCAHMS 1988, 170). Internal features of the enclosures include a circular depression enclosed by boulders in the north-east corner of the site that may be a spring or well, and two level platforms to the south that may be house platforms or settlement areas (ibid). Campbell & Sandeman (1962, 45) noted

that, to the north of the citadel, a natural hollow in the rock looked artificially enlarged possibly as a cistern or basin for collecting water.<sup>2</sup> The presumed multi-phase construction of the settlement is comparable to other Early Historic fortifications such as Dunadd where multi-period building is a characteristic of the enclosures (Lane & Campbell 2000, 86–97). The easiest approach to the fort is via the western slopes. Approach is possible from Dun a'Bhealaich to A'Chrannag over the saddle, but the north and eastern

flanks of A'Chrannag are steep and guide you around the northern base of the fort to approach again via the easier western slope. An approach from the south would entail climbing and traversing the flattish ridge northwards to the fort. A'Chrannag may be a version of *crannach* or 'tree-place' (Watson 1926, 352), although Campbell & Sandeman (1962, 45) give an alternative name to the site as 'Fort of the Pinnacle'. Evidence for an Early Historic date for the occupation of the fort is limited to the parallels with Early Historic nuclear fort plans such as Dunadd.

Druim Fuar, or Clach an Dobhrain (NGR: NR 708 743), lies in the hills almost mid-way between the coasts of the peninsula. The site is on a ridge and is a large flat-topped boulder with no markings (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 89). There is no archaeological evidence associated with the site, although Campbell & Sandeman note some turf dykes near the boulder. They included Druim Fuar in their survey as an example of a court hill or assembly site based on local traditions, which associated the site with a 'meeting-place for settling differences and concluding agreements between the two districts' (ibid). The period of use of the site

is not known and the districts involved are not specified. It is included in this context because assembly sites of the medieval or later periods may have had some earlier significance, the Thing site on the Isle of Man being the most well-known example. Campbell & Sandeman (*ibid*) noted the fine view from Druim Fuar down to the western coast of the peninsula. The ridge the boulder is located on is also visible from A'Chrannag, the entrance of which faces this west/south-west direction. Campbell & Sandeman suggest the place-name means 'the Otter's stone' or 'Clach an Dobhrainn' and may have some association with water or a streamlet (Watson 1926, 456). Druim Fuar, the name appearing on the modern OS maps referring to the ridge, means 'cold ridge' (Mackenna 1974, 9). Campbell & Sandeman (1962, 89) cite a late 18th-century estate map showing the monument, although it is not clear if its assembly associations were active at that time.

#### THE EASTERN COAST OF LOCH SWEEN

On the Loch Sween side of the peninsula, divided from the Loch Caolisport side by low hills, lies the chapel at Kilmory Knap. The medieval chapel probably dates to the 13th century and there is no recorded presence of an enclosure earlier than the current 19th-century wall (RCAHMS 1992, 161). An Early Historic religious site is postulated from the presence of seven carved stones of likely Early Historic date. The most elaborate is a fragment of a tapered slab with a ringed cross accompanied by sophisticated geometric and figural images (*ibid*, 164; Fisher 2001, 150). The motifs and form of cross used on this slab suggest parallels with the shape and decoration of the elaborate free-standing crosses of Iona and a date in the eighth–ninth centuries. The rest of the sculpture consists of cross-slabs, often quite substantial slabs or pillars. All of the crosses are outline crosses, unlike the single-line incised crosses predominant at Cladh a'Bhile (Fisher 2001, 27–41, for comparative drawings). At least four

are ringed or encircled, a style associated with the free-standing crosses (eg St Martin's and St John's crosses) of Iona, which are generally dated to the eighth or ninth centuries (Fisher 2001, 15).

The secular focus for this area from the 13th century onwards is at Castle Sween, where building of the fortification began *c* 1200 (Ewart & Triscott 1996). There is no evidence as yet to suggest an Early Historic site underneath Castle Sween, although duns and forts nearby have not been explored. The presence of some centre of secular power on the west coast of the peninsula might also be implied by the presence of the Doide quarries, which have been identified as the source of stone for carvings of the medieval and Early Historic periods (Collins 1977, 199; RCAHMS 1984, 201; Caldwell & Ewart 1993, 163). Several of the duns and forts on this side of the peninsula are reasonable candidates for Early Historic periods of occupation.

The localized shift in focus in terms of the creation of sculpture from the east coast to the west coast between the seventh and eighth/ninth centuries, along with the natural topography and distribution of surviving archaeological features, suggests there may have been some territorial division (secular, ecclesiastical or both) utilizing the hills as natural barriers. The mention of Druim Fuar as a meeting place to settle agreements between the 'two districts' might also be seen as an indication that the area was generally thought of as having distinct territories. Anecdotal evidence also records a 'charter' inscribed on a rock at A'Choir at the Point of Knap attesting to a MacMillan claim to the territory, but later defaced by the Campbells (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 93). Parish boundaries are of little direct assistance in determining potential medieval or earlier territories as this area of Knapdale has seen significant change in boundaries in post-medieval times. Prior to the creation of North and South Knapdale as parochial units, it is unclear if the entire peninsula was within one parish or territory (MacLean 1983, 53).

## INTERPRETATIONS

The site and its environs suggest several possibilities for the use and significance of Cladh a'Bhile in the seventh century. The interpretation of the site and its possibilities can, however, change significantly depending on which evidence is interpreted as having direct relevance to the burial ground. The enclosure of the burial ground need not limit the archaeology drawn upon to construct interpretations of Cladh a'Bhile, and different approaches to the interpretation of Cladh a'Bhile can be considered on the levels of site, area and landscape.

If we consider Cladh a'Bhile itself, the carved stones and its visible enclosure remains, we might draw the conclusion of Anna Ritchie (1997, 90) and postulate a type of lay cemetery without church or monastery. Apart from the anecdotal evidence of a beehive cell within the enclosure, which has no other supporting evidence, there is no evidence for structures associated with the burial ground. Even the 'gap' in carved stone distribution within the enclosure, which might indicate the site of an Early Historic building, is questionable considering the lack of upright stones recorded in the 19th-century accounts and the 19th-century maintenance. Ritchie's suggestion of a lay cemetery in the face of the dearth of associated features is perhaps supported by the degree of skill and sense of display of the elaborate pillar (no 1). Whoever carved and designed the stone or whatever its purpose (eg grave or sanctuary maker), it seems likely that some secular support or patronage, albeit linked to ecclesiastics, would have been needed to enable the environment capable of the production of such a sophisticated monument. A settlement context for high status lay people associated with the site could be any one of the duns on the peninsula and, although now archaeologically invisible, presumably lower status farms and fishing settlements once populated the area. Having a burial ground without an identified accompanying church is not necessarily problematic for this period of

Christianity (Proudfoot 1998; Carver 2003). Those presumably buried at Cladh a'Bhile may even have used Kilmory Knap or Keills, which became the later medieval centre for the area, as an ecclesiastical centre (MacLean 1983, 53). However, the sculpture is the earliest evidence to date for a religious community at Kilmory Knap and there is a similar situation at Keills. At both of these sites, there is no evidence that the sculpture needs to be dated to before the eighth century (RCAHMS 1992, 86–93).

Even if Kilmory Knap was active by the seventh century, it may be feasible for another seventh-century ecclesiastical establishment to have thrived in the region, considering the multitude of early ecclesiastical sites in Scotland and our degree of understanding of the organization of Christianity during this period. Extending the relevant evidence from the burial ground itself to include the Early Historic use and carved crosses of St Columba's Cave and the findspot of the carved stone at Ellary Garden Cottage, an argument might be built for a monastic-type settlement with multiple features along the coast, including sacred caves, springs, enclosures and craft activities of various kinds. From St Columba's Cave to Cladh a'Bhile is c 2km, a walk of perhaps 20 minutes. The hexafoil slab from Ellary Garden Cottage was found in a re-used context, but there is no definitive reason why it must come originally from Cladh a'Bhile rather than some spot at the shore, even though it is stylistically related to the main burial ground. The scattering of cross-marked monuments within a monastic settlement seems to have been a regular occurrence. Adomnán tells us of crosses erected where saints rested and died (*Vita Columba* I.45, Sharpe 1995, 148) and crosses may have marked significant points of the settlement, such as sacred boundaries or entrances as depicted in the eighth-century *Book of Mulling* (Henry 1940, 102). St Columba's Cave and the site of the later chapel building may have been one part of a monastic landscape, and in this respect, one that might resemble the site at Eileach an Naoimh with its multiple enclosures

and features including a sacred cave, carved stones, burial grounds and churches (RCAHMS 1984, 170–82).

#### SCULPTURE AND LANDSCAPE

Both the ‘site’ and ‘area’ approaches and interpretations considered above concentrate on identifying what Cladh a’ Bhile *was* in the seventh century. Identifying the immediate context of the site will surely further our understanding of why so much early sculpture occurs here; however, further expanding the analysis of Cladh a’ Bhile from ‘site’ to ‘landscape’ offers another potential reading of the significance of Cladh a’ Bhile, if not necessarily the burial ground’s specific context and function. The features of the eastern coast of the peninsula, if read together, create an interconnecting network of religious and secular sites encompassing high status, ritual and possibly assembly at Druim Fuar. The landscape of Cladh a’ Bhile shares many characteristics of identified Irish and Scottish early medieval inaugural landscapes.

The starting point for the potential inaugural connections of the landscape of Cladh a’ Bhile is the name of the burial ground itself. Galloway identified both elements of the place-name as Irish: *Cladh* indicates a churchyard or burial ground and *Bile* (*Bhile*) is a great or old tree giving the equivalent of ‘burial ground of the great tree’ (Galloway 1878, 34; RCAHMS 1992, 54; Tyler 2005, 15). In the Gaelic-speaking world, *bile* may refer to a tree associated with a ritually important site often connected to king-making (Lucas 1963; FitzPatrick 1997, 20). An alternative reading of *Bhile* might come from Watson, although he did not include Cladh a’ Bhile in his study of place-names; he suggested meanings for possible *bile* derived names such as Tullichville and Coshievile (both Perthshire) from Gaelic *bil* meaning hillside, especially along a river rather than ‘tree’ (Watson 1930, 278). While Cladh a’ Bhile does sit on a slope, it is part of a ridge stretching down to the sea loch rather than a river and there does not appear

to be a particular geographic imperative to opt for this interpretation of *Bhile*.<sup>3</sup> The potential for A’Chrannag to have a link to trees is also notable.

Of particular interest is the association of sacred trees with inauguration in early medieval and medieval Ireland. Sacred trees can be associated with monastic sites in Ireland, such as the oak of St Brigid, although this does not necessarily rule out the significance of the tree for assembly or kingly ritual in either pagan or Christian times (Lucas 1963, 27–36). FitzPatrick (1997, Vol 1, 11–13; 1997, Vol 3, 34) has noted the connection between ecclesiastical sites and medieval inaugural sites in Ireland, some of which also display sculpture. The royal site of Clogher, County Tyrone, identified by Warner (1973; 1982; 1988; 2004) as an inaugural site, has a ringfort and inaugural mound adjacent to a religious establishment. The inaugural importance of the tree may stem from the use of a rod of kingship, or *slat na ríghhe*, in inaugural ceremonies where the rod is cut from the sacred tree (FitzPatrick 1997, 20). The destruction of a dynasty’s or territory’s sacred tree was considered a significant insult and act of aggression and such events have been recorded in historical texts for the early and later medieval periods in Ireland (FitzPatrick 2004, 57). The tradition of the *bile* in Ireland as a significant spot for assembly, dynastic identity and religious beliefs is strong and, considering the links between Knapdale and Ireland in the early and later medieval periods, such associations with sacred trees in Knapdale are certainly possible.

The place-name of Cladh a’ Bhile appears on the OS County Series map for Argyllshire (1873), but the antiquity of place-names is notoriously difficult to define (Barrow 1998). Blaeu’s atlas of Scotland, from 1654, does not show the burial ground or record the place-name Cladh a’ Bhile, although Ellary is noted (spelled ‘Eillery’) and between Ellary and the now deserted township of Stronefield (Schronfelt) lies a farm or township with the name of ‘Owa’ (Blaeu 1654). This name does not occur on any other map and cannot yet

be identified with any surviving place-name although there is a post-medieval building located between Ellary and Stronefield. The meaning of this place-name is not clear, although suggestions have been made that it might relate to *oda*, a term meaning tongue of land or horse-race (R Butter, pers comm). The latter meaning would fit remarkably well into an interpretation of inaugural landscapes as horse racing was reputedly a part of assembly and kingly rituals both in Ireland and Scotland (Driscoll 2004, 83), but the form is not conclusive and the many small peninsulas on the coast mean that tongue of land is topographically attractive. Neither Cladh a'Bhile nor Ellary appear on a 1794 chart of the west coast of Scotland, although the western coast of Loch Caolisport (Loch Kylisled) is called 'Ru Chryn', a unique phrase on maps of the area and of unknown meaning (Huddart et al 1794). The derivation of 'Ellary' is similarly unknown. An 'Illeray' occurs on North Uist, apparently meaning 'island' (Fraser 1973); although Ellary is not an island, there are small islands off the coast. While the temptation is great to interpret the '-ry' ending as having a relationship to *rígh*/ king, it remains spurious until the place-names are definitively studied by toponymic specialists.<sup>4</sup>

If the sacred tree of the burial ground and its relatively substantial amount of display are going to suggest an inaugural context, the remaining landscape must stand up to scrutiny as to its potential for ritual and assembly. The potential Early Historic sites discussed above create a landscape of high status secular settlement, a site of burial with display of status, fine metalworking, ecclesiastical activity and potentially judicial or assembly activity considering the traditions of Druim Fuar. As an inaugural landscape, however, the eastern coast of Loch Caolisport lacks several features associated with other identified inaugural sites. Although rock outcrops are numerous along the coast and at both of the forts, there are no recorded instances of footprints carved into the rock. Whilst a concerted search for footprints

has not been attempted, prominent outcrops on the forts and along the shore were scrutinized for this symbol of ritual. The use of a carved footprint into rock, the best Knapdale example being the single shod footprint at Dunadd (the likely inaugural centre of the kings of Dál Riata), seems to have signified the king's virtual 'mating' and connection to the land (Campbell 2003, 46–7). The general rarity of existing footprints, however, surely suggests not every Early Historic inaugural ceremony required one. There is also a lack of contemporary or later documentary accounts indicating an inaugural function for this landscape. This is hardly surprising and not necessarily a great hindrance to the theory, considering the lack of historical sources generally for this region and period. Using the Scottish inaugural sites as examples, the Cladh a'Bhile landscape also appears to lack a mound where the ritual could take place (as at Scone) and the association with prehistoric sepulchral and ceremonial monuments seen at Dunadd, Scone and Forteviot (Alcock & Alcock 1992; Campbell 2003; Driscoll 2004).

There are, however, a substantial number of features in the landscape – archaeological, topographical and toponymic – which, when combined, begin to make the theory of an inaugural landscape to accompany the sacred tree a feasible one. Prospect and access were important factors for inaugural sites (FitzPatrick 1997, 47). Both A'Chrannag and Cladh a'Bhile have views across Loch Caolisport to the mainland of Knapdale. A'Chrannag, at approximately 160m above sea level, falls within the range of heights usually associated with Irish inaugural sites (*ibid*) and it has commanding views to the south, east and west. Transportation by sea, enabled by the many sea lochs of this area of Mid-Argyll, would have made these locations easily accessible.

Lack of historical tradition means that no inaugural mound is known from this landscape. FitzPatrick (2004, 54), however, has stressed the heterogeneous nature of the inaugural mound in medieval Ireland. Mounds might be natural hills

perhaps augmented with structures or ‘furniture’ such as chairs, new purpose-built features, re-used prehistoric monuments or placed within sepulchral or ceremonial prehistoric landscapes (ibid, 48). Warner (2004, 38) noted that mounds could be adjacent to ‘royal residences’ or even incorporated into ringforts, as at Clogher. In the Cladh a’ Bhile landscape there are several strong contenders for a potential mound feature. Firstly, both of the forts provide the height and mound shape attractive for display of ritual. The topographic setting of the Clogher mound may provide a rough parallel, although here the features of residence and mound are much closer together. If A’Chrannag is the more likely of the two forts to have an Early Historic occupation phase, having multiple outworks and enclosed terraces, then Dun a’ Bhealaich, which is connected by a saddle and less than 400m away, might provide us with an accompanying ritual mound. The sites are clearly intervisible and both the saddle and the ridge on which A’Chrannag sits are suitable gathering spaces. Another option may lie at the shore practically due east of A’Chrannag and Cladh a’ Bhile where there is a point of land with an apparently natural low flattish mound, which is intervisible with A’Chrannag. This area is adjacent to the gardens of Ellary House and now partly maintained as a practice golf area for estate guests, although the rest of the point is densely covered with vegetation masking any potential features. The amount of landscaping and when it was done here is not clear, but the majority of the point has been left seemingly untouched and overgrown. The name of the point is Rubha na Tuth (Rudh’an Tubhaidh on the 1873 County Series OS map). ‘Rubha’ is a common term for a promontory in Argyll (Fraser 1986, 197). ‘Tuth’ appears to have no direct translation, suggesting it is derived from some similar word; a likely candidate may be *tuath*, the Irish term for ‘people’ or ‘tribe’ (Dinneen 1927, 1267). The attractiveness of a place-name meaning ‘point of the people’ in an inaugural landscape hardly needs elaboration, but the translation and antiquity of the name

may both be considered circumspect. The final possibility for a mound might be the hill and fort known as Sithean Bhuidhe (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 59; RCAHMS 1988, 169). Its potential as an inaugural mound is related to its place-name and setting. Warner suggested that inaugural mounds required the ability to act as sites of communication to the otherworld. This is reflected by the association of mounds, and also wider inaugural landscapes, with otherworld portals sometimes recognizable by the use of *síd* place-names. In medieval literature, *síd*-mounds were places where otherworld beings lived (fairy hills) and the term also has etymological connections with inaugural terms such as *forad/* over-seat, *suide/sit* and the Welsh *gorsedd/* throne-mound (Warner 2004, 32–3). Even if not a mound, the *síd* place-name of the hill and nearby lochan may suggest an otherworldly association to the landscape suitable for inaugural traditions. Driscoll (2004, 79) has noted the propensity for identified Scottish Iron Age ritual sites to have impressive enclosed high places juxtaposed with wet places suitable for offerings. Such physical characteristics occur at both A’Chrannag/Dun a’ Bhealaich with their twin lochans and at Sithean Bhuidhe where the enclosure includes a small loch.

The Cladh a’ Bhile landscape may be lacking suitable inaugural ‘furniture’, such as chairs, footprints, or *leachta* (flat slabs used for ceremonial purposes), compared especially with later Irish medieval inaugural sites (FitzPatrick 1997, 105, 108). Driscoll (2004, 85) has noted the possibility that the Stone of Destiny, the inaugural stone of Scone, could have been cut from a *leac* and the outcrop on Dunadd is also an example. The Cladh a’ Bhile landscape is peppered liberally with flattish outcrops and it would be difficult to distinguish one as special without any additional markings or historical evidence, such as at Druim Fuar. There are flat-topped, squarish outcrops a little under a metre high at Cladh a’ Bhile identified as *leachta*, one of which is incised with crosses (RCAHMS 1992, 59, no 15). The outcrops are rather too square

for natural boulders, but are moss-covered now, masking any potential tool-marks to show that they were purposefully shaped. Although it is unclear what, if any, function these squared boulders had, there is certainly potential for them to be used in rituals associated with church rites such as patterns or processions if not necessarily as *leachta* associated with king-making rituals.

Perhaps the most considerable obstacle in furthering an inaugural interpretation for this landscape is the apparent lack of prehistoric remains to create a suitable ancestral backdrop for ritual. These ancestral landscapes have been considered to be a major characteristic of many of the main identified Early Historic inaugural sites in Scotland and Ireland, perhaps best personified by Tara, Rathcroghan, Forteviot, Scone and Dunadd (Driscoll 2004). There does not appear to be any monumental prehistoric sepulchral tradition for these putative kings to exploit on the west coast of Loch Caolisport. The majority of identified prehistoric monuments are cave sites and rock shelters, whilst on the Loch Sween side of the peninsula there is more variety, including a few examples of rock art and cairns (RCAHMS 1988). However, an identifiable ancestral landscape need not be a prescriptive element of Early Historic inaugural sites considering the number of potential Early Historic kings and our lack of knowledge of how and where their king-making rituals might have taken place.

To interpret the significance of the sculpture and the site of Cladh a'Bhile, the limitations of our understanding of what constitutes the meaningful archaeological evidence relevant to the site must be flexible. This is partly because the burial ground itself is not available for in-depth archaeological examination, but it also serves to integrate the burial ground into its wider social and physical contexts. As a lay cemetery, the burial ground would be of considerable status and a centre of display in terms of investment in sculpture. As one feature of a monastery on the coast of Loch Caolisport, the site becomes one of a group of better understood Early Historic sites and can be integrated into the understanding

of the organization and place of Christianity in Dál Riata. Neither of these possibilities precludes the interpretation of Cladh a'Bhile as part of a network of sites making up an inaugural landscape. As a landscape, the coast incorporates some suggestion of assembly and territorial division, high status secular settlement, appropriate levels of proximity, siting and prospect, potential mound features, investment in display and high status activities, a connection with the otherworld, some potentially relevant place-names including the sacred tree and potential 'furniture' including the *leachta* in the burial ground.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of a conjectural inaugural landscape on the shore of Loch Caolisport centres on the changing perception of the politics of Dál Riata, and indeed the nature of secular–ecclesiastic relations in the seventh century and their impact on one of the most dominant aspects of material culture for this period – stone sculpture. Recent work on the documentary sources relevant to Early Historic Argyll have stressed the dynamic and multiple nature of kingship in the region, noting that, particularly in the seventh century, Argyll contained many kings and kingships rather than the overarching political hegemony stressed by authors such as Adomnán (Fraser 2004). Similarly, Warner (2004, 40) has stressed the proliferation of kingships in early medieval Ireland. If all of these petty kings took part in inaugural rituals of some sort, the characteristics of inaugural landscapes may be much more varied than those that are currently accepted as such. Cladh a'Bhile's landscape may represent the physical remains of one of these political units that populated Argyll up to the eighth century. From the eighth century, there is potential for a more cohesive political unit within Dál Riata, with its centre possibly at Dunadd and with its ecclesiastical heart at Iona (Fraser 2004).

Whilst some secular support in the foundation and continuation of churches and monasteries in both western and eastern Scotland is generally acknowledged (Clancy 1996, 121), there is little evidence yet to suggest that the ability to produce stone sculpture could be more directly related to secular support, for example, in a way similar to the midlands monasteries of Ireland. Here secular links were occasionally displayed through inscriptions on elaborate stone monuments (eg ninth- and tenth-century crosses at Clonmacnoise, Durrow and Kinnitty). These elaborate monuments are only the most overt messengers of this relationship, but the work of Ó Flóinn (1998) on the seventh- to tenth-century cross-slabs from Clonmacnoise suggests that political circumstances may affect production generally at some centres in terms of both style and capability of production. If such a pattern of secularly related sculpture and its production can begin to be seen in the west of Scotland, rather than the more usual interpretation of sculpture as artistically related to and thus dominated by Iona, then stone sculpture may become a more powerful tool for the analysis of localized secular and ecclesiastical power networks and politics.

Cladh a'Bhile sits patiently nestled in the rhododendrons above Loch Caolisport, content to confound explanations of why it should be the second most significant site in Argyll in terms of the number and quality of sixth- to seventh-century stone sculpture. It would be, as White (1875, 58) argued, an unfortunate thing to let it disappear out of sight and mind because of restricted opportunities to investigate the burial ground further due to its current use as a sacred place. Its continuation for what may have been its intended purpose can be seen as an opportunity to evolve methodologies that develop our understanding of the site in context, rather than identify the site's function and 'primary' purpose, which will benefit the archaeology of churches and sacred places generally. Whether lay cemetery, monastic site, or part of inaugural landscape (or all of the above), Cladh a'Bhile,

its sculpture and its setting are marked out as of some significance in the seventh century, likely eclipsed by the rise of other dominant secular and ecclesiastic powers by the eighth/ninth century. With the identification of the relevance of its landscape, the prospects of future archaeological work to inform our understanding of the site, no longer centred on the sacred ground itself, are greatly expanded. Without a saint, church, or history to call its own, the interpretations of Cladh a'Bhile have relied on its remarkable collection of sculpture, the enclosure and the place-name. The incorporation of its landscape context is a natural progression and perhaps points to a way forward to understanding the significance of sculpture and landscape in seventh-century Dál Riata.

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#### NOTES

- 1 The site is part of a privately owned estate and access is restricted. Access should only be obtained by permission of the landowners. The author visited the area in July 2004 as a paying guest of the estate. Permission was not given to

the author to enter the enclosure of Cladh a'Bhile, although the author did visit and view the site from outside the enclosure.

- 2 Upon visiting the site, this feature could not be located due to bracken cover.
- 3 Other possible *bile* names in Argyll include Dun Cór-bhile and Bile Garbh near Inverary and Cladville/Ben Cladville on Islay. These sites do not have any recorded Early Historic sculpture.
- 4 The possibility of Ellary being associated with *airigh* or 'shieling' was noted by the anonymous reviewer to this article. Having consulted place-name scholars Rachel Butter and Simon Taylor on the matter, I can only conclude that more in-depth work needs to be done on the earliest forms of the place-name to ascertain if this is a likely possibility (R Butter & S Taylor, pers comm).

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