

# *Scotia* *Archaeology*

**REPORT  
TO  
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**TRENCHING FOR NEW  
UNDERGROUND CABLES  
AT  
KILCHERAN  
LISMORE**

**Watching brief  
March-April 2012**

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the excavation of a trench for an underground cable to replace an overhead power line at Kilcheran, Isle of Lismore, Argyll. The watching brief was commissioned by Gavin Carswell of Scottish & Southern Energy plc (SSE), on behalf of Vanessa Norman of Kilcheran, and undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology.

The watching brief was intended to mitigate any action that might damage the surviving archaeological record during the excavation of the trench.

## THE SITE

Kilcheran House is located in a slightly elevated situation at NM 82443 38783, towards the south-west end of Lismore. The house is set within a landscape of undulating ground given over predominantly to sheep-grazing with outcrops of bedrock and occasional small plantations of trees.

Several sites and monuments of archaeological significance are located near Kilcheran. These are listed below.

## INVENTORY OF SITES AND MONUMENTS

Sites and monuments are listed according to the catalogue numbers ascribed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), for example NM83NW 48, or on Historic Scotland's list of historic buildings, for example HB 12359.

### **NM83NW 48 Kilcheran House**

Kilcheran House is a Category B listed building (HB 12359) and dates from the 18th and early 19th centuries. Essentially, it consists of two houses connected by a chapel with several additions and out-houses to the rear. It was occupied by the Catholic seminary between 1801 and 1831 and, following a programme of repairs, taken over by the United Secession from 1840 to 1845.

### **NM83NW 18 Fort**

The slight remains of a fort are located 175m east of Kilcheran, at NM 8266 3877 on a low, rocky ridge defended by steep faces. It was surrounded by a single wall enclosing an area of approximately 120m by 40m, surviving only as a band of stony debris along its north-west and north-east sides.

### **NM83NW 11 Human remains**

In 1855 human bones were discovered at NM 8262 3873, a short distance south of the fort although apparently no trace of an urn, coffin or cist was found.

### **NM83NW 27 Lime kilns**

Centred on NM 82571 38625, near the shore, are the remains of several lime kilns and associated store-rooms and shed, all dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.

### **NM83NW 17 Burial ground, chapel**

Cill Chiarain, an ancient chapel or monastic cell, is believed to have been situated near the site of the modern house of Kilcheran. No trace of the chapel now survives above ground and the only grid reference known for it is the somewhat vague one of NM 824 387. A burial ground, measuring 7.5m square within a modern wall and containing the graves of two Catholic bishops, is located nearby, at NM 8240 3882.

### **THE WATCHING BRIEF**

The cable trench ran from Pole B, as shown on the attached plan, westwards to the side of Kilcheran House. Initially the wrong pole (Pole A) was taken as the starting point although this trench (Trench 1) was eventually extended and used to house an earth cable from Pole B. The intended route, between Pole B and the house, is Trench 2. It should be noted that the locations of at least some of the poles on SSE's map are not accurate: indeed, the correct position of Pole A (NM 82721 38965) is some distance from that shown on their map.

Monitoring was undertaken in two stages. On 27 February Trench 2 was started at Pole B (at NM 82699 38908), finishing at a fence some 60m from the house, at NM 82514 38817. On 26 March 2012 excavation continued across the garden (Trench 3) as far as the house, at NM 82459 38798. The overall length of Trench 2/3 was approximately 260m and Trench 1, which followed a circuitous route between Poles A and B, some 75m.

The excavation crossed mostly pasture covered with relatively short grass, the cable trench being 0.4m wide and 0.6m deep. Turf overlay topsoil which varied in depth from 0.2m to 0.5m and comprised mostly dark grey-brown, silty loam with a few small stones. Topsoil gave onto glacial till of brown sand and gravel except for occasional outcrops of very hard limestone bedrock which almost reached the surface in places. Although the field was waterlogged in places at the time of the excavation, water had not penetrated far into the topsoil other than where mole drains had been damaged. This stratigraphic sequence continued throughout Trenches 1, 2 and 3 as far as Kilcheran House.

No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered during the watching brief and no artefacts predating the late 19th century retrieved from any of the trenches.

During the second visit to Kilcheran the proposed route of another underground cable was investigated. This cable will replace a stretch of overhead line running alongside the public road to the south of the house. It will begin at a new pole (see plan), a short distance from existing Pole C (which will be removed) from where it will run to the south-west, along the edge of the road through ground that has been disturbed on an earlier occasion.

It had been intended that a trench for an earth cable would be excavated to the east of the new pole, along the base of the knoll upon which the remains of the fort (NM83NW 18) are located and where human remains (NM83NW 11) were discovered. For this reason, a

watching brief was to take place during the excavation of this trench. However, the route shown on SSE's drawing was rejected when it became clear that it would run through ground where bedrock lies barely below the surface. As a consequence, it was decided that the earth cable would also be buried close to the edge of the road, within ground that was already disturbed. There was clearly no point monitoring the excavation of this trench and the watching brief was called off at this point.

## CONCLUSIONS

No trace was found of anything that might have been related to an early Christian site near Kilcheran House although it should be noted that the trenches were very narrow and such remains might yet survive in the vicinity of the house.

The hope of retrieving finds from the fort or burial to the east of Kilcheran was ruled out when it was decided to place both the power and earth cables in a channel created when the adjacent road was laid in recent times.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below form part of the project archive and are not included in printed versions of this report.

- 1 Trench 2, viewed from the west
- 2 West end of Trench 2, viewed from the east
- 3 East arm of Trench 2, viewed from the north-west
- 4 East arm of Trench 2, viewed from the south-east
- 5 East arm of Trench 1, viewed from the west
- 6 East arm of Trench 1, viewed from the east
- 7-9 Views to the south from the north edge of the field
- 10 Middle arm of earth cable trench, viewed from the west
- 11 South arm of earth cable trench, viewed from the north-east
- 12 Trench 3, viewed from the east
- 13 Kilcheran House, viewed from the south-east
- 14 Trench 3, viewed from the west
- 15 View to the east along proposed route of earth cable from new pole
- 16 View to the west along proposed route of underground cable from new pole