

**Kilmory Oib, North Knapdale  
Dalriada Project**



**Data Structure Report**

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## Summary

The excavation revealed two structures that were probably in use until the settlement was abandoned. Structure 3, while built with solid footings, would appear to have been an outbuilding, store or workhouse, the only real evidence for its use being a possible store for peat. Structure 3 it would seem replaced Structure 17 and perhaps utilised its beaten floor. The age of this earlier structure proved elusive with no recovered diagnostic artefacts associated with its use.

Structure 7, given its central drain, would appear to have been a byre at least in its last use. It is probable that this is the northern end of a byre dwelling. A later structure was built over the byre this likely to have been a shepherds bothy constructed after the settlement was abandoned and converted for sheep working. Both buildings, as with other structures in the settlement appear to have rapidly declined and it is possible these had been deliberately demolished. Whether this was part of a deliberate policy of demolition so the buildings could not be reused or to facilitate the reuse of the building material is not clear. It is possible that much of any demolition material was used in the construction of the track to the east of the site which appears to have utilised substantial quantities of stone in its construction.

When the settlement was abandoned is not yet clear, although ongoing documentary research possibly indicates it was not long after the Arichonan clearance in 1848. In 1843 those tenants liable to pay road money from Kilmory are listed as Neil McCallum, John Gillies, Archibald McDugall and Angus McDougall. Further research needs to be completed, but it is possible that these men and their families were the last to occupy the settlement, and it is part of their material culture that we have recovered during the excavation.



## Acknowledgements

Kilmartin House Museum would like to thank the Forestry Commission and Historic Scotland for their cooptation and help during the project. As usual the project was sustained by a great deal of volunteer input and the Museum would like to thank all those involved in the excavation work they include; Mary Anne and Andy Buinton, Liz Dollan, Sue Furnace and Fiona Jackson.

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## 1. Introduction

This report will deal with the results of the excavation at the deserted settlement of Kilmory Oib. This follows on from preliminary survey undertaken in 2006, the results summarised in the subsequent Data Structure Report (Regan 2007).

The project aims to survey and excavate the site to gain a better understanding of medieval/late-medieval settlement patterns in Mid Argyll. Permission to carry out a survey and excavation was granted by the Forestry Commission (the current owners), and the work was by funded by the Dalriada Project and Kilmartin House Museum. The site is scheduled and Ancient Monument Consent was granted by Historic Scotland. The excavation took place between 24<sup>th</sup> April-12<sup>th</sup> May 2008 and the Site Code was KIL 08.

### 1.1 The Dalriada Project

This project is part of a programme of research that seeks to enhance the understanding and promotion of archaeology in the area. The project is part of the Dalriada Project, a Heritage lottery funded landscape partnership scheme. The work also promotes the Forestry Commission's aim to better understand the archaeological sites and monuments within its land in North Knapdale and augments recent survey work undertaken by Heather James and Kilmartin House Museum (James 2003, Regan & Webb 2004 & 2006). In particular the work will lead to a better interpretation of the monuments. The Dalriada Project is also an opportunity for the local community to get involved in the archaeological process. This work will build on connections previously established between the local community and Kilmartin House Museum through previous projects.

### 1.2 Excavation Criteria

Kilmory Oib was selected for excavation for three main reasons. The site appears to have existed from at least the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and offers an opportunity to look at settlement patterns from that period and establish the presence of any earlier settlement activity. As some buildings appear to overlie others this would afford an opportunity to understand the chronological and stratigraphic relationship between building phases. Secondly, the settlement, while typical of this categorisation of deserted site in North Knapdale (many of which have been surveyed) would afford comparative analysis of this relatively common but poorly understood resource in Argyll. Thirdly the site is open and presented to the public and excavation would inform both the Forestry Commission and Historic Scotland as to future management policies.

## 2. Location and Topography

The settlement of Kilmory Oib, centred NR 78080 90245 (Figures 1 & 2), lies within North Knapdale Parish and is situated in North Knapdale Forest. The forest is bordered on the west by the Sound of Jura with Loch Crinan and the Crinan Canal demarcating the northern side. The settlement is accessed from a Forestry Commission car park located at a sharp bend of the B8025 road between Tayvallich and Bellanoch. The site lies 400m south of the car park along a forestry track located on natural terrace above the north west shore of Loch Coille-Bharr (65m AOD), and 1.5km from the head of Loch Sween. The main arrangement of buildings is located along the foot of an east-facing ridge that delineates the western side of the settlement. The settlement is one of three former settlements located on this peninsula, the others being Kilmory Mill and Oibmore. The underlying geology consists of banded epidote-chlorite schist covered by peat and clay based soils. The site is located within open ground and the main vegetation is grass, moss and bracken. More established undergrowth exists to the east of the southern buildings, including blackthorn and birch scrub. Mature sitka plantation exists around the settlement to the north, south and west.

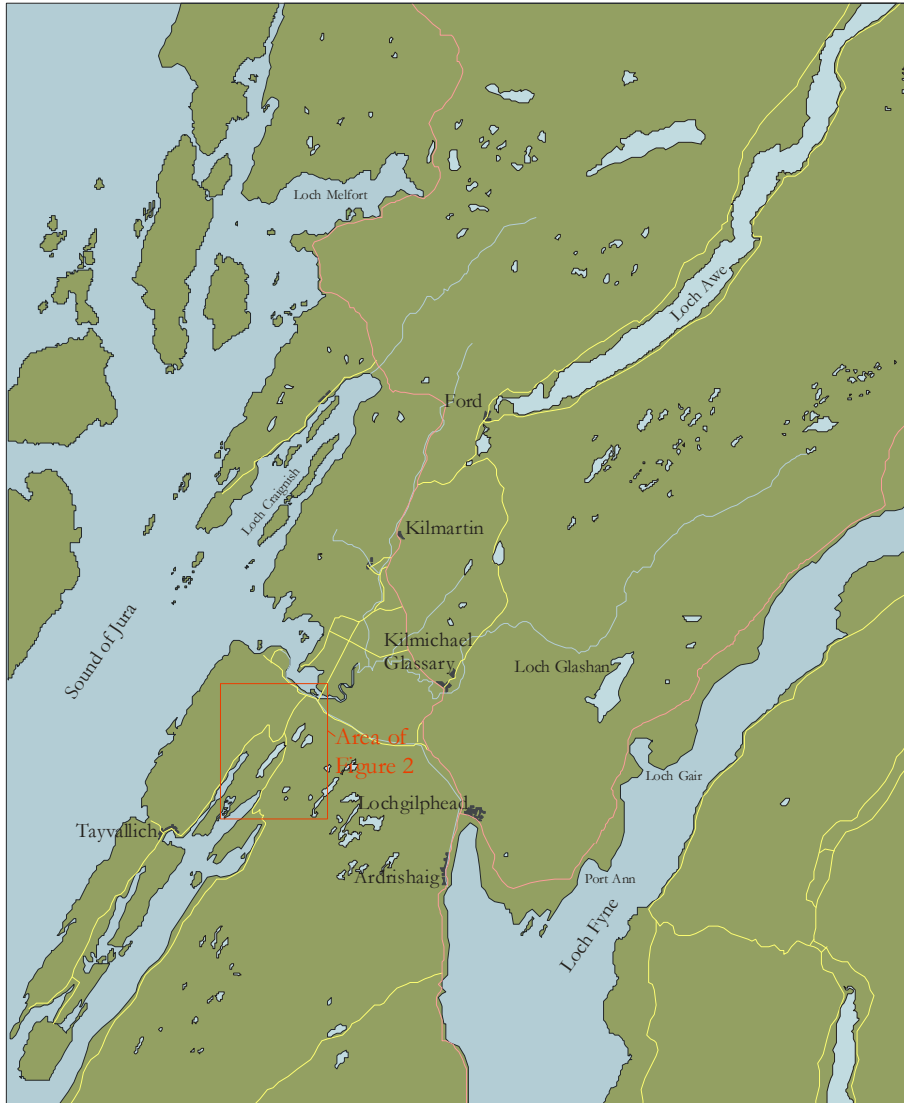


Figure 1: Site Location in Argyll

### 3. Previous Work

The excavation phase of the project builds upon the results of previous survey work which is summarised below.

#### 3.1 Field Survey

A field survey including a photographic record of the site was undertaken by Kilmartin House Museum for the Dalriada Project in October 2006 (Regan and Webb 2006). The settlement buildings were photographed and recorded in detail, along with measured sketch plans drawn, to give an overview of archaeological potential of the site. Seventeen potential structures were identified, these in various states of preservation. The structures appeared to represent both byres and domestic buildings while two 'sub-circular' mounds of rubble possibly represent corn dryers. At least two buildings had been partially demolished with surviving sides incorporated into a later sheepfank structure. The survey also appeared to show buildings superimposed over earlier structures. In September 2007 the site was also surveyed as part of the Scotland's Rural Past Project, where local volunteers were introduced to site survey techniques, including the use of plane tables, by a team from RCHAMS.

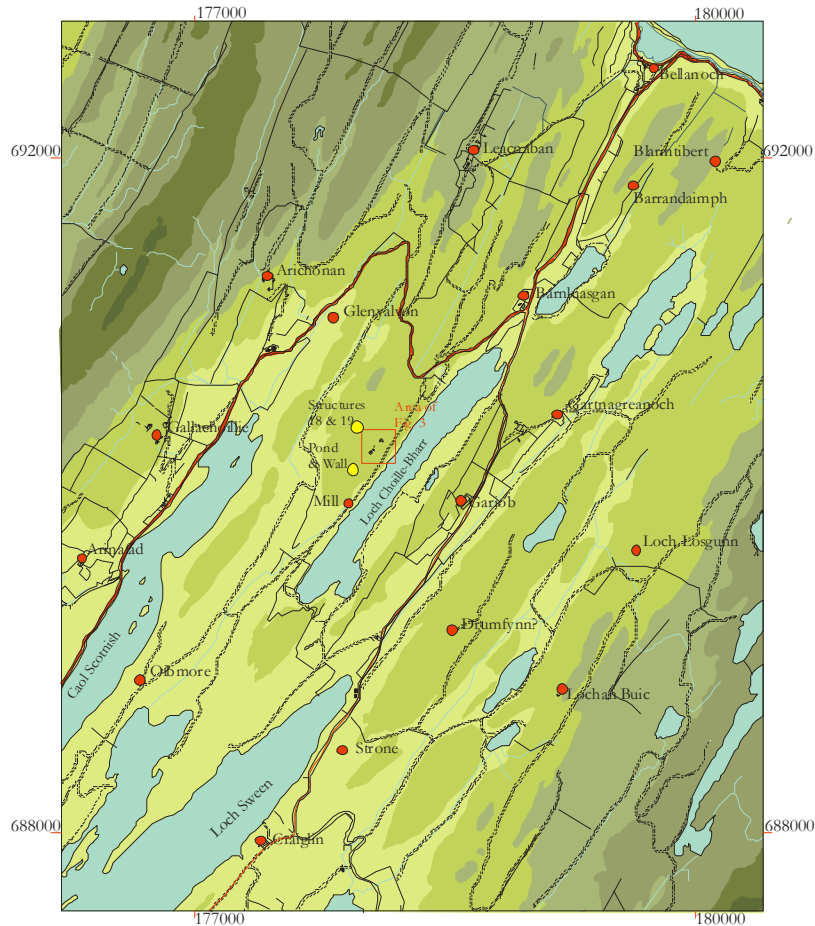


Figure 2: Location of site in North Knapdale

### 3.2 Aerial Photographs

Ref: BO288 5116 1950

The print from 1950 shows the site, albeit in heavy shadow, which highlights the more substantial or less ruined structures. Few features that are not now apparent on the ground are indicated. The exception to this is what may be a ditch running from the well area to the south east before turning at a right angle to the north east. The area surrounding the site has already been planted with sitka. A possible oval pond area that was noticed during the survey undertaken by Kilmartin House Museum also appears to the south of the settlement (see Appendix 1).

### 4. Excavation Aims and Objectives

The broader research aims and objectives are outlined in the project design prepared for Historic Scotland (Regan and Webb 2008). Within this the main aim of the excavation was to establish a history of occupation of the settlement. This will include the excavation and recovery of environmental materials (charcoal, burnt bone, burnt seeds, etc.), recovery of artefactual materials (pottery, glass, metalwork, slag, etc.), identification of separate phasing within a structure and recovery of secure dating evidence for buildings. Within these parameters more specific aims are listed below.

- 1) To determine the extent, character and date of the archaeological deposits and features present within the designated area.

- 2) To excavate strategic trenches within and around structures, therefore establishing the stratigraphic sequence.
- 3) To determine the survival of any related archaeological deposits lying outside the designated scheduled area.
- 4) To understand the relationships of the buildings within the settlement their duration of use and possible functions.
- 5) To record and understand any structural sequences.
- 6) To attempt to establish the date of occupation of the settlement through artefactual, scientific, and stratigraphic analysis.
- 7) To define and characterise any possible late Medieval activity within the site.
- 8) To understand the geographical and environmental elements of the site and to understand how the natural landscape has influenced human settlement and activity within the area.
- 9) To place the settlement within its historic and landscape framework.
- 10) To evaluate the preservation of the structures and possible potential damage by present and planned management policies.

## 5. Excavation Methodology

The work principally involved the removing of topsoil cover and excavation within strategic trenches in order to gain an understanding of the stratigraphic sequence and overall preservation of the targeted structures. The strategic aim of each trench is outlined below as they appeared in the Project Design. In total 2 trenches were examined Trenches 1 and 2 (Figure 3).

### Trench 1 (10m x 10m)

This was located over the eastern end of Structure 3 in order to establish whether this denuded building was a domestic structure.

### Trench 2 (8m x 8m)

This trench was placed over Structure 7 and will establish its relationship with Structure 8, the latter appearing to be later in the sequence.

The recording of features and deposits was carried out using standard KHM context sheets, the sheets and recording system used being an amended version of the Museum of London methodology (Spence 1990), which is single context recording, supplemented by section information. Context descriptions can be found in Appendix 1 with a full list of contexts in Appendix 2.

Bulk samples were taken from all significant contexts and those deemed appropriate by the on site team. These are listed within Appendix 5.

Plans of the trenches were drawn at 1:20 and sections at 1:10 and 1:20 depending on their size and complexity. A full graphics list is produced in Appendix 6.

An EDM survey was conducted of the settlement and its surrounding topography (see Figure 3).

A walkover survey was conducted within the forested areas to the south and west of the settlement (see section 6.2 below).

The previous photographic survey of the buildings will be complemented by a site excavation photographic record and by the work of professional archaeological photographer and artist Aaron Watson. The photographs are listed in Appendix 3.

All the trenches were covered in protective geo-textile and backfilled with the excavated soil prior to the turf being replaced.



Figure 3: Location of Structures and Trenches on EDM Survey.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Excavation Results

For continuity of reference the buildings in this report are numbered as they were in the Survey Report and Project Design. A brief narrative of each trench is given below, while fuller descriptions of the recorded contexts, including structural details, can be found in Appendix 1.

#### *Trench 1*

Structure 3- This was an NW/SE oriented rectangular structure that measured 9.30m by 5.70m externally. The building consisted of south, east, north and west walls, respectively, [019]-[022]. A threshold was located along the southern wall. The walls measured between 0.82m-1.00m in width and stood up to 1.70m high at the western gable end. The western end of the structure appears to have been cut into the slope of the hill, although little attempt appears to have been made to create a more level platform as the ground/surface sloped decidedly from west to east..

The vegetation cover over the structure consisted of moss and grass with some bracken, brambles and nettles [026]. Removal of the topsoil revealed rubble collapse within and around the perimeter of the walls ([012], [013] and [016]). The bulk of the collapse was situated at the eastern end of the building and perhaps suggested sudden collapse of the eastern gable end, rather than gradual decline. In comparison to this there was comparatively little stone collapse at the western. end of the structure. This suggesting the wall stones had been robbed or the rubble constructed walls never stood to any great height along the longer sides of the building.





Figure 4: Trench 1

Stone robbing does appear to have taken place, with evidence particularly around the southern wall, where facing stones appeared to have been removed from the threshold area of the building.

The internal rubble collapse [012] lay partially within and over a brown humic deposit that became thicker at the eastern and lower area of the building [014]. The 'blocky' nature of this deposit suggested that this may have been degraded peat, this likely stored in the building before it went out of use. Below this peat deposit was a dump of rounded stones [018], this confined to the eastern end of the building. The nature of this deposit has so far proved elusive. A levelling deposit at this end of the structure would have made sense given the slope of the ground, however as a surface/floor the stones would have made a very uneven surface although it is possible they were a preparation for such a surface, this gone or never finished? This said no convincing floor for the structure was evidenced during the excavation, although it is possible that the floor of Structure 17 was utilised as the floor of the later building Structure 3.

A sondage was excavated to the N of Structure 3 to investigate the external stratigraphic sequence (Figure 6). This revealed a substantial soil accumulation, likely representing cultivated colluvial soils up to 1.10m deep ('clean' natural was not reached).

Structure 17- This building lay below the walls of Structure 3 and consisted of two sides of a building indicated by a wall footings and an alignment of post and stake holes. Associated with this structure was a compacted earthen floor which had evidence of two hearth positions. The alignment of posts suggest a rectangular building, possibly 3.0-3.20m in width, although having little trace of a southern wall this is open to question. Possibly associated with this structure was metallised gravel surface/path [017] located to the south and running under wall [019] of Structure 3.

#### *Trench 2*

Structure 7- This was a SW/NE oriented rectangular building. The structure measured 6.2m in external width, with walls 0.84m-0.90m in width and standing up to 1.10m in height. Its full length was not revealed as the building runs under, and is partially incorporated into the later Structure 7 at the south. It is likely that this is the northern/byre end of a longer c 19m range its southern end recorded as Structure 9 during the survey work. The building consisted of east, north and west walls, respectively [028]-[030], with central drain [027] and internal surface/s [031].

The ground cover consisted of moss and grass cover with some bracken, brambles and nettles. Within the structure and to the east of the building this lay over a layer of dark grey humic silt [001] with frequent rubble fragments. To the west of the structure the turf/scrub lay over dark brown sandy silt [002] lying over the W edge of wall [030]. As the east/inner edge of the western wall stood higher than the west/outer edge this indicated that robbing of the larger outer facing stones had taken place and [002] had accumulated post demolition/robbing. To the north of the structure the topsoil lay over a mass of building rubble that lay within a red brown soil accumulation [004]. Cleaning over the internal area of the building quickly revealed the probable drain structure running down the centre of the building indicating this end of the building was a byre. Within the structure and partially lying over the east wall were a series of stone heaps [008], with large, medium and smaller stones gathered into sorted piles, possibly for reuse post demolition. The stone heaps lay within and over a dark grey humic silt, suggesting an accumulation of organic material over the floor. A similar deposit [010] also filled the central drain [027]. This humic accumulation could represent either the collapse of roofing material, or byre accumulation, (animal dung/straw) or more likely a combination of both. This in turn lay over the uneven later floor/s of the byre building [031]. Cleaning down to the floor surface/s revealed a series of post and stake holes these probably representing wooden internal divisions and fixtures within the structure. Given time restrictions only a few stake holes were defined and

their upper extents excavated, these given a group number [032]. A sondage was excavated through building rubble [004] at the north of the structure.

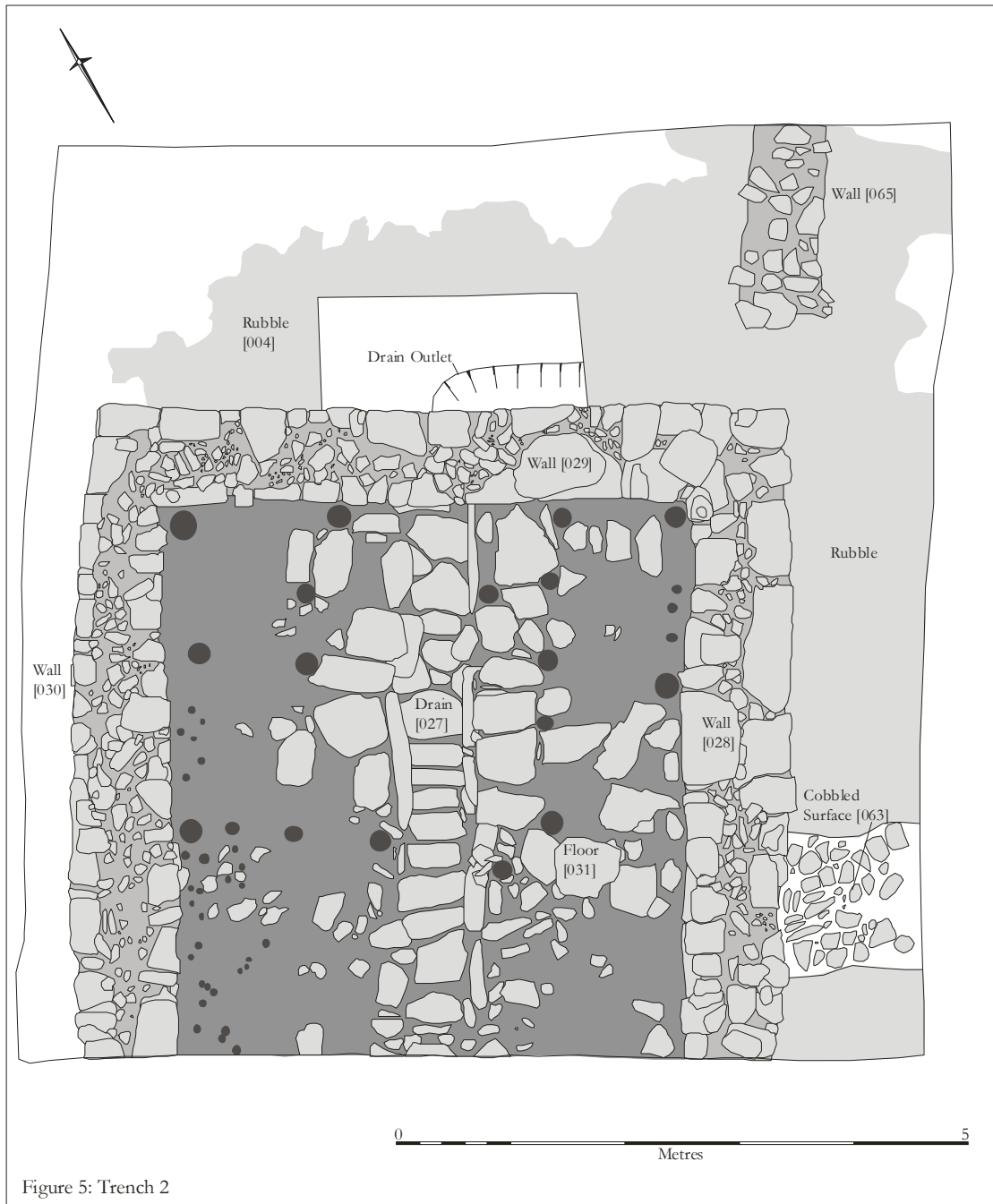
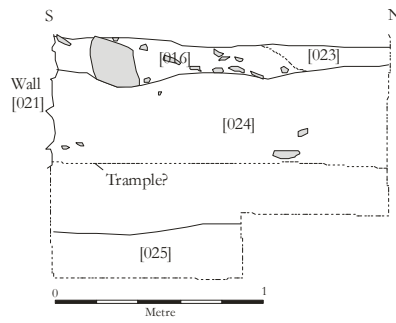
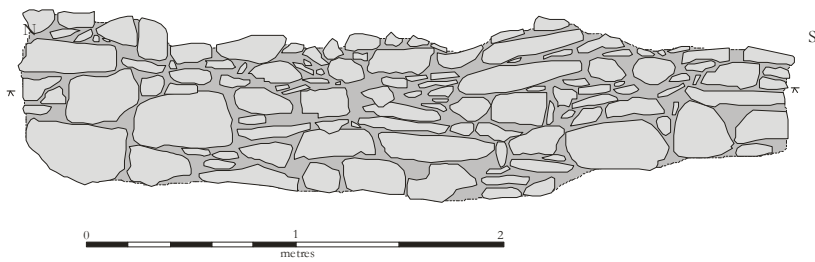


Figure 5: Trench 2

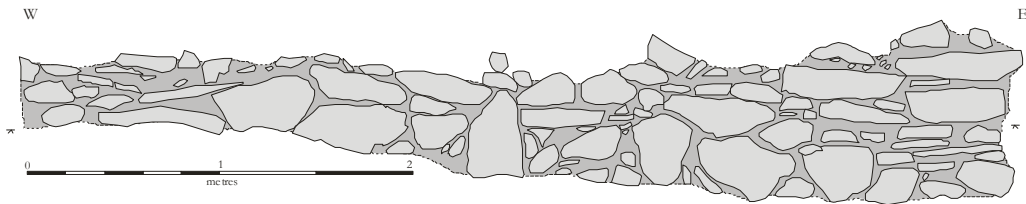
The rubble lay all along the outer face of the northern face of the N wall to a depth of 0.80m. The angle of the stones within the rubble collapse suggests the north gable end of the building had been pushed over rather than being subject to gradual decline. The rubble lay over the fill of the drain outlet [009], this a red brown silt. To the east of the structure a dark grey humic silt [005] lay over part of external rubble accumulation [011]. Part of this rubble was excavated to reveal an external cobble surface [063].



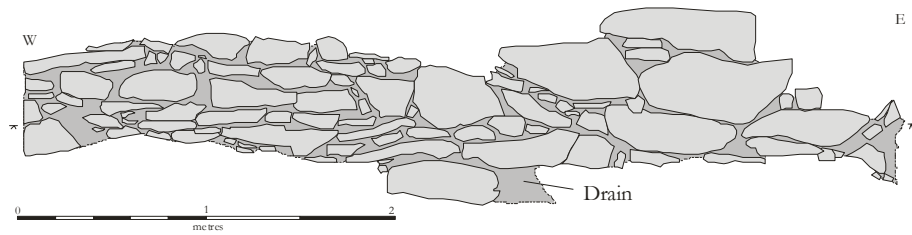
East Facing Section of Sondage North of Structure 3, Trench 1



West Facing Elevation Wall [020] Structure 3



South Facing Elevation Wall [021] Structure 3



South Facing Elevation Wall [029] Structure 7

Figure 6: Sections



Structure 3 and Rubble from SE



Structure 3 from SW



Structure 7 Rubble at North End



Structure 7



Structure 3, Drain[027] and Floor [031]



External Cobbled Surface [063] Structure 7



Structure 17 N side with Hearth [035] at Left of Scale



Surface [017]

## 6.2 Walkover and EDM Survey

Several features came to light during both the EDM survey and the Walkover Survey. The Walkover Survey was conducted over the area to the south and west of the settlement which was covered with mature sitka plantation.

Dyke, track and pond. An enclosure wall lay some 130m SE of Structure 13 sealing off the end of a steep sided terrace. This possibly marked the southern boundary of the infield area of the settlement. Also enclosed by the dyke was a pond that lay on a slightly higher terrace to the west (Figure 2, NR 77967 90134). A track could be traced that linked the pond and lower terrace area.

Two structures were located to the west and above the settlement (Figure 2, NR 78001 90320), these possibly representing corn drying structures or small kilns. The structures lay 6m apart.

Structure 18-Was oval in shape and measured 4.40m by 3.80m externally with walls 0.90m to 1.00m wide and up to 0.80m high. The internal facing appeared to be fire reddened indicating this may have been a small kiln.



Structure 18

Structure 19-Sub-circular in shape the structure measured 3.70m by 3.40m externally. The walls and internal area were badly disturbed mature trees growing within the structure.

## 7. Artefacts

A full catalogue of the recovered artefacts is listed in Appendix 4

### *Pottery*

In total 244 sherds (1760g) of pottery were retrieved from the excavation, 103 from Trench 1 and 141 from Trench 2. Identifiable vessels include; tea-cup, tea-pot, plates, bowls and storage jars. Most of the pottery appeared to date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century although some fragments of glazed red earthen wares could date to an earlier period. The majority of sherds consisted of white wares (24% by sherd count), polychrome wares (23%) and blue and white decorated wares (19.7%). Glazed red earthen wares (7.5%) and salt glazed stone wares (2.8%) and trail decorated slip wares (1 sherd) were represented in smaller quantities.

### *Tobacco Pipes*

8 fragments of clay tobacco pipe were recovered. 4 pipe stems bear a 'Glasgow' impression, two of these impressed with 'J. Agnew' on the opposite side. 2 of the 3 recovered bowl fragments were decorated, one with a simple ribbed design the other with a more ornate pattern of thistles in a vase and cornucopia.

### *Glass*

In total 134 fragments (2405g) of glass were retrieved from the excavation, 34 from Trench 1 and 100 from Trench 2. The bulk was white and green bottle glass with only 8 fragments of flat, window or lantern glass.



### *Iron*

The bulk of the iron objects were retrieved from above the floor of Building 8, these included; a cruise lamp, a chain, nails, hinges, 3 tool blades (one possibly a sickle), a possible belt strap, 3 shoe/boot heels and a stirrup. All were in a corroded condition.

### *Slag*

Two fragments of iron slag were retrieved from building 8 suggesting small scale iron working in the vicinity.

### *Flint*

2 flints were recovered from post medieval deposits ([001] and [003], that from [001] possibly a strike-a-light. The third was recovered from subsoil [025].

### *Bone*

Few bones would seem to have survived the acidic soils with only 8 fragments recovered (7 of these were the fragmented remains of 2 bones). One other fragment was burnt.

### *Shell*

One oyster shell was recovered from context [004].

## 8. Conclusions

The excavation revealed two structures that were probably in use until the settlement was abandoned. Structure 3, while built with solid footings, would appear to have been an outbuilding, store or workhouse, the only real evidence for its use being a possible store for peat. Structure 3 it would seem directly replaced Structure 17 and perhaps utilised its beaten floor. If so then the hearth burning seen on the floor may have belonged to either building, but is more likely to date to the earlier less substantial structure. The age of this structure proved elusive with no recovered diagnostic artefacts associated with its use.

Structure 7, given its central drain, would appear to have been a byre at least in its last use. It is probable that this is the northern end of a byre dwelling, the southern end recorded as Structure 9 in the previous survey work. Structure 8 was built over Structure 7 utilising its western and possibly some of its southern walls (although the latter was less clear). The later building was likely to have been a shepherds bothy constructed after the settlement was abandoned/cleared and converted to a sheep working.

Both structures appear to have rapidly declined given their relative state of collapse, especially when compared to the well preserved buildings that were incorporated into the sheepfank (Structures 4a &b). It would appear the walls of the two excavated buildings had been demolished and this is possibly the case for the other less well preserved other structures within the settlement. Whether demolition took place so the buildings could not be reused or whether it facilitated the reuse of the building material is not clear. That the wall material had been reused is suggested by the 'graded' piles of stone seen collected within Structure 7. If all the collapsed building material had been present then the expectation would have been of a greater quantity of rubble, which perhaps suggests much had been removed. It is possible that any demolition material was used in the construction of the track to the east of the site. This appears to have utilised substantial quantities of stone with much of the track paved with stones lain on edge.

When the settlement was abandoned is not yet clear, although ongoing documentary research possibly hints that it was not long after the Arichonan clearance. This well documented clearance took place in 1848 and was part of the reorganisation of the estates owned by the Malcolms of Poltalloch, the Oib Estate purchased by them in 1798. The active role played by the residents of surrounding settlements, including Kilmory, in the disturbances that accompanied the Arichonan clearance, suggest that this opposition was triggered by the threat of a wider clearance programme in North Knapdale. The last estate rentals, so far traced, that mentions Kilmory is in

1828, the tenants listed as John McLennan, Neil McCallum, Dugald McPhail and John Gillies each paying £8.12s in rent. In 1843 those liable to pay road money from Kilmory as listed for the Potalloch Estate included; Neil McCallum, John Gillies, Archibald McDugall and Angus McDougall (Malcolm of Poltalloch). Further research needs to be completed, but it is possible that these men and their families were the last to occupy the settlement, and it is part of their material culture that we have recovered during the excavation

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