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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KILMARTIN – GLEBE CAIRN



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KILMARTIN GLEBE CAIRN

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I. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

The Glebe Cairn is an Early Bronze Age burial cairn, located in Kilmartin Glen in Argyll. Kilmartin Glen is a world-class archaeological landscape, and one of Scotland's most important. There are a wealth of upstanding prehistoric monuments,¹ including an Early Bronze Age 'Linear Cemetery', consisting of massive monuments, of which the Glebe Cairn is one. There are also the remains of other burial cairns, stone circles, a timber circle, a cursus monument, a henge, standing stones, stone rows, and numerous rock art sites within the Glen.

Although partially robbed of stone, the Glebe Cairn, remains a massive monument. It was excavated in 1864 revealing two concentric rings of boulders set about 1.5m apart (measuring 8.2m and 11.3m in diameter respectively) under the south-west quadrant of the cairn. A stone cist aligned north-east and south-west lay at the centre. This cist was found to contain a Food Vessel and the fragments of a jet necklace, which comprised two spacer-plates, three cylindrical beads and twenty-three disc-beads. A second cist on the same alignment was found at the centre of the cairn, and contained a fragmentary Food Vessel. No human remains survived in either cist, but it is assumed that they once contained inhumation burials.

The site is not staffed, there is no entry charge and it is **freely accessible throughout the year**. Precise visitor numbers are not recorded, however annual visitor figures for Kilmartin Museum, which acts as a hub for the Glen, are 25,000 annually² which gives an indication of visitor numbers and interest.

1.2 Statement of Significance

- The Glebe Cairn is a rare example of a large and complex Early Bronze Age Burial cairn
- The cairn has unusual structural elements in the form of a cist surrounded by two circular stone settings.
- Fragments of a rare spacer plate necklace (now lost) and two Food Vessels, including one of the most significant Bronze Age pottery in Scotland, were found during the excavations of the cairn.

¹ RCAHMS 1988

² This figure relates to people visiting Kilmartin Museum to get information etc., as opposed to c.13,000 ticket-buying visitors (Sharon Webb, pers.comm.).

- The Glebe Cairn is part of the ‘Linear Cemetery’, a larger monument of a form that is rare in Scotland.
- The Glebe Cairn is one of a number of funerary and ritual monuments that make up the highly significant ritual archaeological landscape in Kilmartin Glen.
- The Glebe Cairn has inherent potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the past.

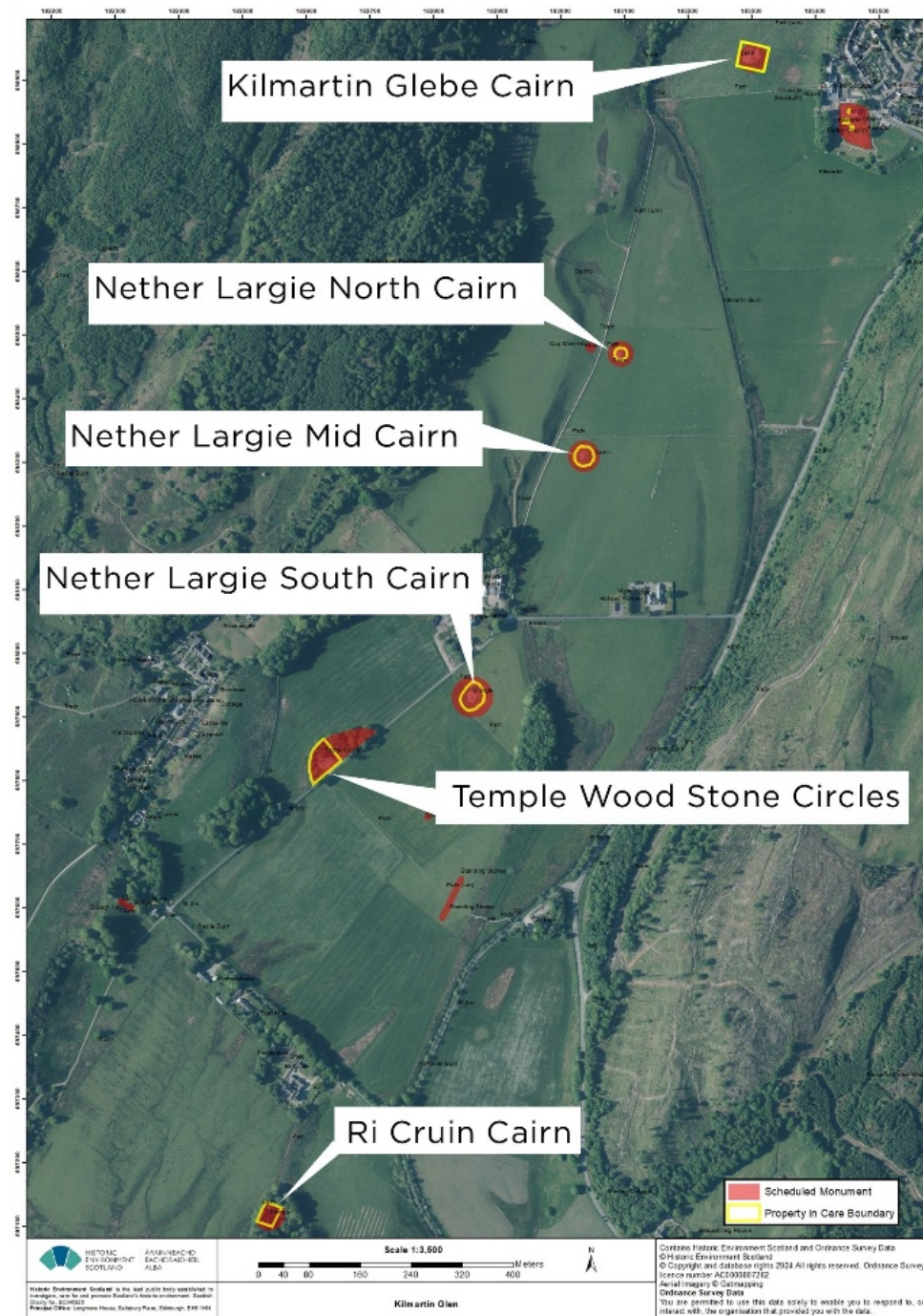


Figure 1: Location of cairns in Linear Cemetery, and neighbouring Temple Wood Stone Circles. For illustrative purposes only.

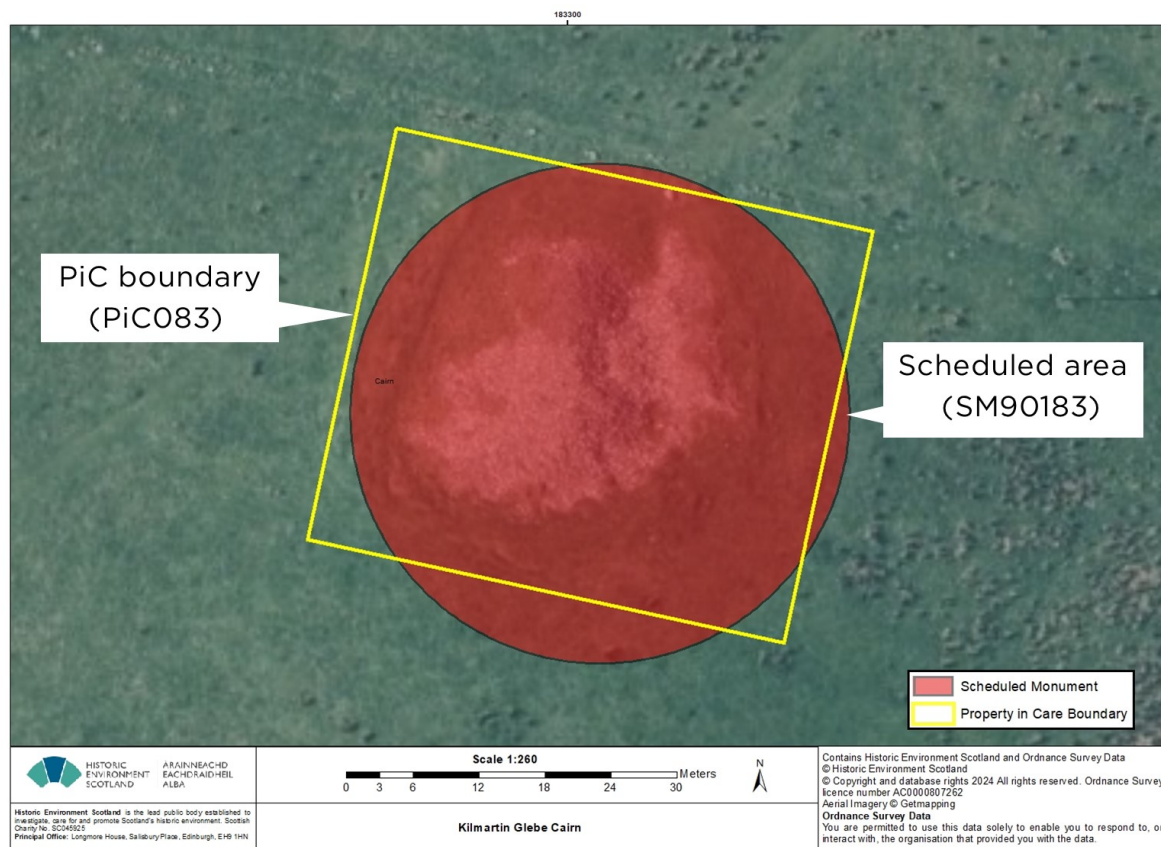


Figure 2: Scheduled area and Property in Care Boundary, Glebe Cairn. For illustrative purposes only.

2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

The Glebe Cairn was scheduled on 30th September 1933 and came into State care / Guardianship in 1956.

The cairn is located in the Glebe Field, which is currently owned by the Church of Scotland. The field, which is pasture, is bordered by the Kilmartin Burn on the west, and the boundary of Kilmartin Museum (built in the former Church of Scotland Manse and farm steading) to the east. The monument has been partially robbed of its stone.

The Glebe Cairn is a burial monument, which, along with **Nether Largie North Cairn**, **Nether Largie Mid Cairn**, **Nether Largie South Cairn** and **Ri Cruin Cairn**, form a larger monument known as the 'Linear Cemetery'. The Glebe Cairn is the most northerly. This line of Early Bronze Age burial cairns, along the floor of Kilmartin Glen, was designed to be an imposing feature in a landscape that had already been marked as a significant place for ritual and funerary activity.

The Cairn was excavated by the Reverend William Greenwell (later to become Canon Greenwell at Durham Cathedral).³ The work, undertaken in 1864, revealed two concentric rings of boulders set about 1.5m apart (measuring 8.2m and 11.3m in diameter respectively) under the south-west quadrant of the cairn. A stone cist aligned north-east and south-west lay at the centre and within this was found a Food Vessel and the fragments of a jet necklace, which comprised two spacer-plates, three cylindrical beads and twenty-three disc-beads.

A second cist also aligned north-east and south-west was found at the centre of the cairn, in which was found a fragmentary Food Vessel. Greenwell regarded this to represent the primary internment,⁴ however it is possible that the earlier burial was represented by the cist surrounded by two concentric circles of stone. It has been suggested that this feature may have been part of a ring cairn that was then incorporated into a larger cairn.⁵ Both Food Vessels are highly decorated – one with lugs suggesting suspension.

See Appendix 1 for an overview of Glebe Cairn in context (including an archaeological overview of Kilmartin Glen's Prehistoric Monuments, and the Early Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen and the Linear Cemetery).

Archaeological Overview of the Glebe Cairn

The Glebe Cairn, constructed on a slightly raised area which may represent a sand bank or gravel deposit, is the most northerly of the cairns that make up the Linear Cemetery. The cairn was excavated by the Reverend William Greenwell in 1864⁶ and the following description is largely based on the summary given in RCAHMS (1988):

Situated on the glebe land of Kilmartin 180m NW of the parish church, there is a large cairn which was 33.5m in diameter and 4.1m high before being reconstructed to its present diameter of 30m and height of 3m. Excavations were carried out in 1864 by Greenwell, and the following account is based on his published report.

In the SW quadrant of the cairn he found two concentric rings of boulders set about 1.5m apart and measuring 8.2m and 11.3m in diameter respectively, the outer ring lying about 2.4m inside the perimeter of the cairn material and about 4.9m from the centre of the cairn. In each ring individual stones were about 0.9m high and 0.6m broad and were placed at intervals of between 0.9m and 1.6m, except on the NE arc, 'where, in both circles, four stones were found placed together', and nearby the space between two upright stones had been filled by 'a wall of smaller stones placed flat'. At the centre

³ Greenwell 1866: 336-351

⁴ Greenwell 1866: 340

⁵ Sheridan 2012:177 after Scott, 1989

⁶ Greenwell 1866: 336-351

of this circular setting there was a cist composed of four slabs and a capstone; aligned NE and SW and measuring about 1m by 0.7m and 0.5m in depth, the cist was half filled with river gravel and contained a Food Vessel 'covered by the gravel' with a jet necklace placed above it. The vessel and necklace had probably accompanied an inhumation, of which no trace remained. The necklace, which comprised two spacer-plates, three cylindrical beads and twenty-three disc-beads has not survived, (the necklace was lost in a fire at Poltalloch House), but the Food Vessel is in the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

At the centre of the cairn there was a cist, which is described as 'a hollow sunk into the surface of the ground, and lined with rounded boulders, and having a large slab of schist . . . for its cover'. The cist was aligned NE and SW and measured 2.3m by 0.9m and 0.9m in depth; the cover slab measured 2.7m by 1.4m. At the SW end, about 0.3m above the floor, there was a flat slab on which there was a quantity of black unctuous matter', and about 0.3 m from the slab, and some 0.2m above it, there was a Food Vessel in fragments. At the NE end there was a similar slab with a comparable deposit both above and below it. The cist had subsequently been filled with gravel to within 0.3m of the underside of the cover slab. The Food Vessel is preserved in the British Museum, London.

Greenwell (Greenwell 1868) records that the N and E sides of the cairn were not examined, but from the available evidence it is likely that two periods of construction can be distinguished, the earlier represented by the boulder rings and the slab-built cist, and the later by the boulder-built cist and the enlarged cairn. (RCAHMS 1988: 63-64)

Interpretation and Dating

The Glebe Cairn is a rare example of a large and complex Early Bronze Age Burial cairn. It has unusual structural elements in the form of two concentric stone settings, and important artefacts (two Food Vessels and fragments of a jet spacer plate necklace) were found here. It is part of a larger monument, the Linear Cemetery, the only known such monument in Scotland.

Sheridan dates the linear cemetery to the earliest Bronze Age (c.2200-1900 BC),⁷ although this is based on stylistic elements, it is widely accepted.

It has been suggested that the cist surrounded by two concentric circles of stone may have originally been part of a ring cairn that was then incorporated into the larger cairn.⁸ The remodelling of ancient sites and re-

⁷ Sheridan 2012:175-176

⁸ Sheridan 2012:177 after Scott, 1989

use of structural elements in Bronze Age monuments has been suggested to have occurred at a number of other sites in Kilmartin.⁹ Ritchie regards the Early Bronze Age cairns in the Glen as one of the best demonstrations of sequence, reuse and veneration in Scotland.¹⁰

The artefacts found at the site allow for a more nuanced interpretation. For example, the jet necklace suggests wide ranging contacts in that jet is found only in Whitby, Yorkshire. Sheridan interprets the grave in which it was found as being that of a female, based on this necklace.¹¹ She also highlights that the Food Vessel is Irish in style¹² which emphasises the Irish connections seen in some artefacts found in Kilmartin Glen dating to this period and earlier.

2.2 Evidential values

The Glebe Cairn is important as it is one of the key sites in the Glen and is an integral element in a much larger monument (the Linear Cemetery). The site has been partially excavated, and there is potential for undisturbed remains, both within the cairn and in the surrounding area. For these reasons, the Glebe Cairn would be a strong candidate for inclusion in any future research programme aiming to further explore the Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen.

The site has evidential potential in terms of:

- It's relationship to other contemporary monuments and burials.
- Potentially undisturbed deposits/burials/artefacts, which could further add to our knowledge of the site.
- Potentially undisturbed ancient botanical remains, which may elucidate the nature of the climate, vegetation and agricultural practices in the Glen when the cairn was in use.
- The distribution of similar sites in the landscape.
- How sites of a similar age related to one another in the Early Bronze Age and in later periods.

2.3 Historical values

Archaeological features such as the Linear Cemetery and other prominent monuments in Kilmartin Glen, including the nearby Temple Wood Stone Circles, were integrated into the designed landscape of the Poltalloch

⁹ Stevenson, 1997; Sheridan 2012: 177; Sheridan 2017 RARFA

¹⁰ Ritchie 1997: 82

¹¹ 2012: 176

¹² 2012: 176.

Estate. It is possible that the track known as the ‘coach road’ was deliberately designed so that the cairns and other monuments could be viewed when passing along this route. As an example of a landscape in which features have been re-used, respected and incorporated into a palimpsest spanning thousands of years, the whole of Kilmartin Glen and all the monuments it contains, including the Glebe Cairn, has great historical value. The incorporation of prehistoric monuments into the designed landscape has undoubtedly contributed to their survival.

Recent research into the relationships between the Properties in Care of Scottish Ministers and the British Empire¹³ has highlighted that Kilmartin Glebe Cairn has ‘property’ empire connection¹⁴ as it was owned by the Malcolms of Poltalloch. The Malcolms of Poltalloch acquired significant slavery-derived wealth during the colonial era in Jamaica. This included acting as merchants, holding shares in companies trading in the region, and owning enslaved people. Considerable monies came through compensation given when slavery was abolished in Britain. Neil Malcolm collected almost £40,000 compensation in 1835. The family used this wealth to become major landowners in Scotland, with the acquired estates containing many sites that would become Properties in Care. The estates were cleared to create aesthetically pleasing landscapes, with funds also being directed to the excavation of some of the archaeological sites.¹⁵ The active interest they took in the sites that were part of their estates is also evidenced by the artefacts that were removed from Kilmartin Glebe Cairn (for example a necklace) and kept at Poltalloch house.¹⁶

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

Glebe Cairn is a rare example of what would once have been a massive cairn with complex structural elements, which equate to high artistic, architectural and aesthetic values.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Across Scotland, burial cairns are often inter-visible, and apparently positioned to maximise their visual impact; this is certainly true of the cairns which comprise the Linear Cemetery. Collectively, they form a dominant feature in the landscape, deliberately positioned in a striking

¹³ Full report can be downloaded from HES website: [Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c. 1600-1997 \(historicenvironment.scot\)](https://www.historicenvironment.scot/research-and-archives/surveying-and-analysing-connections-between-properties-in-care-and-the-british-empire-c-1600-1997)

¹⁴ ‘Property’ connection describes land or buildings owned by either an established propertied family which participated in the Empire, or a recently enriched family which, through involvement in colonial activities, acquired the means to secure property. See Mullen *et al* 2024, 30-31 for a full definition of typology.

¹⁵ Mullen *et al* 2024, 50-55.

¹⁶ This was lost in a fire at Poltalloch house. RCAHMS 1988: 63-64.

location and, in its current form, stretching nearly two kilometres along Kilmartin Glen. It is probable that the Kilmartin Burn meandered around the cairns, and the traces of old river channels can be seen, but it is not known to when these date. The Kilmartin Burn was canalised in the 19th century as part of the farm improvements undertaken by the Poltalloch Estate. **Nether Largie North** and **Nether Largie Mid** Cairns can be seen from the Glebe Cairn. As such, it has very high landscape values.

2.6 Natural heritage values

To be assessed.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Social Values

The social values of Glebe Cairn lie – together with the other Kilmartin Glen sites – as a visitor attraction, education and learning resource, and the atmosphere and special qualities of the place, all of which are highlighted in online social media reviews.

Glebe Cairn, like many of the Kilmartin Glen sites, is relatively easily accessible and the site is interpreted and presented in order to aid understanding and access. The site is not staffed, there is no entry charge and it is **freely accessible year round**. **Precise visitor numbers are not recorded**, however annual visitor figures for Kilmartin Museum, which acts as a hub for the Glen, are 25,000 annually¹⁷ which gives an indication of visitor numbers and interest.

The Glebe Cairn has an interpretation board installed by Historic Environment Scotland and another in the nearby vicinity was installed by the Dalriada Project (a Heritage Lottery Fund funded landscape partnership scheme), both of which provides visitor information on the site and other monuments in the area. The cists and the stone settings are not currently visible to the public.

Kilmartin Museum was founded in 1997 and its mission is to inspire and educate people by interpreting, explaining and conserving the internationally important archaeological landscape, artefacts and natural heritage of Kilmartin Glen.

A large percentage of tourists to the area cite the archaeological monuments and Kilmartin Museum as a reason for visiting. Cultural tourism is one of the region's largest economic drivers.

¹⁷ This figure relates to people visiting Kilmartin Museum to get information etc., as opposed to c.13,000 ticket-buying visitors. (Sharon Webb, pers.comm.)

Both Food Vessels from the cairn are currently¹⁸ on display at Kilmartin Museum. The Museum's education team regularly use the Glebe Cairn, and the other sites in the Linear Cemetery, in its education programmes. The teachers and pupils of Kilmartin School, in particular, feel a deep connection to the monument due to its close proximity. Kilmartin Museum organises a weekly volunteer-led guided walk along the Glen visiting all the cairns in the Linear Cemetery, and Temple Wood Stone Circles. Kilmartin Museum and the education service are part funded by Historic Environment Scotland.

In 2007, Kilmartin Glen was the setting for '*Half Life*', a cultural event spread over several weeks which involved landscape art installations and a performance created by the Scottish theatre company NVA in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland.

In 2002, Tony Robinson of Time Team (a highly successful, long running television programme about archaeology) made the following comment about the Glebe Cairn and Kilmartin Museum: *"How many museums can you go to where you can examine a Bronze Age pot and look out of the window and see the burial mound where it came from?"*

All these activities and actions render the Glebe Cairn as having very high social values.

It should be noted, however, that the tourism generated by the national and international importance of the archaeological monuments, is not necessarily seen as positive by everyone in the local community, since this presents certain challenges for farming, and restrictions related to other forms of land use.

Spiritual Values

It is clear that the monument had great spiritual significance as a burial monument and part of the Linear Cemetery in prehistory. The re-use of these monuments, which is evidenced through excavation, demonstrates that they remained a spiritual focal point for a long period of time.

There is anecdotal evidence that these sites are special for people today and this is evidenced by 'offerings' of flowers and other items.¹⁹

Cultural Values

The Glebe Cairn is situated in one of Scotland's richest archaeological landscapes. It has great significance as part of the Kilmartin Glen ritual and funerary landscape, and is also part of a multi-monumental feature (the Linear Cemetery), designed in prehistory to be imposing and awe inspiring.

¹⁸ 2018

¹⁹ Such actions can inadvertently harm archaeological sites, and visitors are reminded that the use of candles or naked flames are not permitted at any HES properties.

It has remained so to this day. It therefore, has great multi-generational cultural significance.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

There are some major gaps in our understanding of the site.

Although the Glebe Cairn has been excavated, this work was undertaken at a time when modern techniques were not available. Therefore, no scientifically-determined date for the site is available, and the postulated date is based on stylistic evidence from other sites. The north and east sides of the cairn were not examined by Greenwell, and he himself states that it is “very probable that one or more cists still remain undisturbed.”²⁰ This site therefore has high archaeological potential and should be considered as a priority for any research programme focusing on the Early Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen.

There are also major gaps relating to the period to which this monument belongs. These have been recently summarised as key research questions:

- Where did the people who were buried in the ostentatious graves live?
- Was Kilmartin Glen used only as a place of burial and ceremony?
- Was there a hierarchy of settlement, reflecting an in-egalitarian society?
- Was there regional variability in subsistence activities during this time? How typical is the evidence from Kilellan and Ardnave?
- Was control over the flow of metal the only source of wealth and power in this part of Scotland at that time?
- Was there a hierarchy of settlement, reflecting an in-egalitarian society?
- Was the incoming metal just Irish copper or were bronze items or ingots also coming in? Was there any local exploitation of copper?²¹

Added to these research questions is also a lack of understanding about the relationship of monuments such as the Linear Cemetery to other contemporary ritual and funerary monuments as well as those of later periods. In addition, the nature of the contemporary climate, vegetation and agricultural practices in the Glen as a whole remains relatively unexplored.

²⁰ Greenwell 1866: 341

²¹ Sheridan, 2017

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

- Ach nabreck Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Ballygowan Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Baluachraig Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Cairnbaan Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Carnassarie Castle
- Dunadd Fort
- Dunchraigaig Cairn
- Kilmartin Crosses
- Kilmichael Glassary Prehistoric Rock Carvings
- Kilmartin Sculptured Stones and Neil Campbell Tomb
- Nether Largie Mid Cairn
- Nether Largie North Cairn
- Nether Largie South Cairn
- Ri Cruin Cairn
- Temple Wood Stone Circles

5. KEYWORDS

Round cairn; Food Vessel; Bronze Age; jet necklace; linear cemetery; Argyll, Kilmartin Glen

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Site Number NR89NW 9
NGR NR 83300 98930

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: GLEBE CAIRN IN CONTEXT

Kilmartin Glen's Prehistoric Monuments

Kilmartin Glen is located in Argyll and Bute, on the west coast of Scotland. The landscape of the west coast of Scotland is typified by rocky hills and relatively deep Glens. The undulations of the land and the underlying rock formations generally follow a north-west to south-east axis. Kilmartin Glen follows that pattern, being narrower at its northern end, with steep-sided hills and gravel terraces, broadening out to the south into a flatter, wide area which intersects with the south-west end of the adjacent Kilmichael Glen. The south is bordered by the Knapdale Hills, and the flatter area to the south-west is now the Mòine Mhòr – an expanse of peat bog which gradually changes to salt marsh towards the Crinan Estuary and the open sea. The Kilmartin Burn flows down the Glen, joining the River Add as it emerges from Kilmichael Glen, before meandering through the Mòine Mhòr to the sea. Both watercourses have been extensively altered by canalisation and straightening as part of the 19th century land improvements by the Poltalloch Estate.

The wider area of Mid Argyll and Kilmichael Glen, which intersects Kilmartin Glen, contains a number of important sites. There is, however, an extraordinarily dense concentration of monuments in Kilmartin Glen itself. Many of these are upstanding, highly visible prehistoric monuments,²² including burial cairns within a Linear Cemetery, of which Glebe Cairn is one. There are also the remains of stone circles, a timber circle, a cursus monument, a henge, standing stones, stone rows, and numerous rock art sites. It is a world class archaeological landscape and one of Scotland's most important.

The dramatic topography of the Glen and surrounding landscape almost certainly lent itself to the creation of a highly significant prehistoric ritual, funerary and ceremonial landscape. Belief, social status and particularly the relationship between the living and the dead have been expressed by generations of people through cultural practices relating to the use and disposal of high-status artefacts and the construction of complex and

²² RCAHMS 1988

powerful monuments in an already naturally striking landscape. The dense concentration of artefacts in the Glen is also outstanding: “Many individual finds such as jet necklaces or Food Vessels have been found in other parts of Argyll, but the dense distribution around Kilmartin is unique.”²³ Evidence for the earliest activity around these themes dates to the earliest Neolithic (3800-3700 BC)²⁴ and accumulates through to the Late Bronze Age (1500-1100 BC), a timespan of some 2300 years.²⁵

Mid Argyll’s rock art stands out as one of Europe’s finest groups of prehistoric monuments. The concentration is unparalleled in Britain. Rock art in the area appears both on earth-fast bedrock and also on monuments. Recent work on dating rock art sites points to those created on earth-fast bedrock as being Late Neolithic, between 3000 - 2500 BC,²⁶ although it should be noted that only relatively few radiocarbon dates are available. Although apparently not present in Glebe Cairn, some of the other cairns in the Linear Cemetery, (**Ri Cruin**, **Nether Largie North Cairn** and **Nether Largie Mid Cairn**), has a number of structural features which have been carved with rock art. Some of these may be reused elements from other monuments, or earth-fast rock art sites.

Kilmartin Glen’s prominent monuments attracted antiquarian and archaeological interest from the early 1900’s, and a wealth of important artefacts have been found as a result of that work. Survey and recording of much of the Mid Argyll landscape was undertaken by local antiquarian Marion Campbell of Kilberry and Mary Sandeman in the 1960’s.²⁷ In more recent decades, the work of Kilmartin Museum, academics, and developer-funded archaeologists have discovered many other monuments, subsoil features and artefacts. In addition, members of the public have also found artefacts by chance. All this knowledge has significantly contributed to the understanding of Kilmartin Glen and the surrounding areas, firmly establishing the Glen as one of Britain’s most significant archaeological landscapes.

As noted above, most of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early and Middle Bronze Age monuments are of a ceremonial or funerary nature. Currently, the earliest evidence of domestic occupation in the Glen dates to the later Bronze Age, leading some to speculate that the area was used solely for ritual purposes. No systematic survey or excavation programme has been undertaken across the whole Glen landscape, however. Therefore, the archaeological record is likely to be biased towards large and upstanding monuments than more ephemeral subsoil features and it is entirely possible that people were living in the Glen in earlier prehistoric periods as well as

²³ RCAHMS 1988: 14

²⁴ Sheridan 2012: 166

²⁵ Sheridan 2012: 166.

²⁶ Sheridan, 2012: 171; Jones and Riggott 2011: 253

²⁷ Campbell and Sandeman 1962

utilising it as a ritual landscape but the evidence for this has not yet been found.

Dingwall and McGowan noted that many of the archaeological monuments in the Glen lie within areas developed as designed landscapes in the 18th and 19th centuries in particular.²⁸ It is very likely that the most conspicuous monuments, including the Linear Cemetery, **Dunchraigaig Cairn**, **Baluachraig** Rock Art site, **Temple Wood Stone Circles**, Nether Largie and Ballymeanoch Standing Stones were deliberately incorporated as significant points of interest in these landscape designs.

The Early Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen and the Linear Cemetery

The use of copper appeared in Argyll in the 25th century BC and, by the 22nd century BC this was alloyed with tin to produce bronze across Britain and Ireland.²⁹ Other changes also occurred, including the construction of cairns containing just one or two individual burials. This is markedly different from the earlier Neolithic practice of communal burial.³⁰ It is widely accepted that social stratification is visible in the archaeological record at this time, and in Kilmartin this is expressed by the construction of striking and conspicuous funerary monuments, as well as the acquisition of prestigious objects and ornaments.³¹ Although this is seen elsewhere in Britain, the intensity of finds in Kilmartin is remarkable. Sheridan has suggested that Early Bronze Age elites in Kilmartin were able to control the flow of copper and also possibly bronze from Ireland to the north-east of Scotland, which was expressed in terms of conspicuous consumption and large scale monument building as the elites visibly demonstrated their wealth and power.³² It is possible that mining was also taking place in, and around, the Glen as there are copper deposits which were certainly exploited in the early modern period.³³ Whether copper was acquired locally, or from further afield or both, the connections of the people living in Kilmartin were clearly wide ranging. Evidence in the form of materials or stylistic affinities suggest these extend to Ireland the North East of Scotland and Yorkshire.³⁴

The Early Bronze Age, described by Sheridan as a 'golden age' in Kilmartin,³⁵ saw the construction of a highly visible, deliberately imposing Linear Cemetery of cairns, of which Glebe Cairn is one. Taken as a single

²⁸ Dingwall and McGowan, 1996: 43

²⁹ Sheridan 2017, RARFA

³⁰ RCAHMS 1988: 14

³¹ RCAHMS 1988; Sheridan 2017, RARFA

³² Sheridan 2012:175; Sheridan 2017 RARFA

³³ Steiniger 2012

³⁴ Sheridan 2012: 177

³⁵ Sheridan 2012: 175

entity, the Linear Cemetery is the grandest of all the prestigious monuments in the Glen.

Today, the Linear Cemetery consists of five large cairns – the **Glebe Cairn, Nether Largie North Cairn, Nether Largie Mid Cairn, Nether Largie South Cairn** and **Ri Cruin Cairn**. The cairns were constructed on gently raised areas of ground on the flat valley floor of Kilmartin Glen – these raised areas are most likely to be areas of sand and/or, gravel – deposited by melt water following the end of the last glaciation. The Kilmartin Burn would have followed a more sinuous course past the cairn cemetery in prehistory prior to it being straightened and canalised in the 19th century. Flowing water may have been significant to the builders of the cairns and this might have been an influencing factor in their construction. As well as potentially referencing running water, the cairns are carefully sited in a line. Although not evenly spaced, they are roughly central to the valley bottom and form a very prominent complex of monuments. Even though all of the cairns have been denuded to a greater or lesser extent they still have great impact in the valley today. Many of the other prominent monuments are visible from the Linear Cemetery, including Temple Wood Stone Circles and Nether Largie Standing Stones (from Ri Cruin and Nether Largie South Cairns).

It has been suggested that the Linear Cemetery once comprised of more cairns. Two possible other sites are represented only by cists today with any cairn material having been removed.³⁶ Speculation that there may also have been a further cairn in between Nether Largie Mid and Nether Largie South has never been investigated.

The builders of the Linear Cemetery incorporated the earlier Neolithic Nether Largie South Chambered Cairn into the alignment and this may have been its initial focus.³⁷ The original trapezoidal linear shape of Nether Largie South was substantially altered to appear circular.³⁸ Linear Cemeteries are known in other parts of Britain however they are rare in Scotland. A clear parallel with a similar chronological range is the line of cairns at Balnuaran of Clava near Inverness which also has other similarities including associations with rock art.³⁹

³⁶ RCAHMS 1988: 14

³⁷ RCAHMS 1988: 14

³⁸ RCAHMS 1988: 14; Sheridan 2017 RARFA

³⁹ A. Watson, pers. Com.