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Property in Care (PIC)ID: PIC189

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90087)

Taken into State care: 1913 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2003

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CROSSRAGUEL ABBEY



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CROSSRAGUEL ABBEY

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- On A77 about 2km south of Maybole.
- The monument comprises the extensive remains of the Cluniac Abbey of Crossraguel, founded in the 13th century, surviving as substantial stone structures, as earthworks, and as buried archaeology. The site is partly enclosed by a wall which defines the extent of the precinct.
- Fragments of a cruciform church of 13th-century date can still be seen, parts of which were incorporated into the later church. The abbey lay within an extensive walled precinct, fragments of which still survive. Three new courts were laid out to the east and south of the claustral core, late on in the history of the monastery. Buildings around these courts included a new gatehouse, and a row of small houses, where the monks were probably allowed to live individually, contrary to their original rule of communal living.
- The claustral ranges sat at the heart of a large precinct, the parameters of which can still be determined, bisected by the modern road.
- The church was divided into two parts by a solid wall in the later medieval period, the west part becoming the Lady Chapel used by both monks and laity. Here in 1530, Lady Row was buried in a fine tomb beneath an ornate window. Some of the grave slabs, including Lady Row's memorial, have been removed from the church and placed in the east range undercroft. This and another slab have been copied with the casts being replaced in their original position within the church.
- In the south-east corner of the complex is a tower house, possibly dating from the late 15th century, which formed the residence of the last abbots and of the Commendators who succeeded them. The gatehouse south-west of the cloisters is of 16th century date, as is the dovecot.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- The early forms of the placename suggest that it meant the Cross at, or of, Riaghail, an Irish saint of the early Christian period.
- Crossraguel Abbey was founded in the second half of the 13th century originally as a daughter house of Paisley Abbey.
- During the Wars of Independence the community sided with Robert Bruce (born at nearby Turnberry), and consequently the church, and the other primary monastic buildings, were badly damaged. A new simple rectangular church was erected in the 14th century, together with the east and south ranges which enclosed the cloister and the abbot's house.

- A major building campaign took place in the second half of the 15th century under the direction of Abbot Colin; the choir was rebuilt with a polygonal east end, and the sacristy and chapter house were entirely rebuilt.
- The buildings were partly destroyed by Reformers in 1561, though monks continued in occupation until 1592, and in 1617 the entire benefice was annexed to the bishopric of Dunblane.
- The Abbey was taken into care in 1913, with a programme of clearance and consolidation following soon after.

Archaeological Overview

- A report on the condition was prepared in 1912, in advance of being taken into guardianship, with recommendations to carry out clearance works as part of a major programme of consolidation works (NAS file ref MW/1/506). Excavation is likely to have taken place within the church, and in the cloister alley and garth, but this was chiefly to remove post-medieval debris to expose buried walls, rather than digging down into sealed deposits. Some trenches were also excavated along the outside of the church walls to inspect and/or repair foundations. This work will have caused some destruction of the archaeology (file MW/1/505). The exposure of the grave slabs in the floor of the church has resulted in considerable deterioration. This programme was well advanced by May 1917 when a further report was prepared (file MW/1/505), with this work continuing until 1924.
- The entire guardianship area and beyond is of considerable archaeological sensitivity, both below and above ground. Although clearance works at the monument in the early 20th century has had some impact on the buried archaeology, it can be safely assumed that the majority remains sealed and intact.
- A cemetery is likely to have existed in the area around and to the east of the church. This area should be treated with particular sensitivity, due to the likelihood of human remains being present close to the surface.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The scale and richness of these buildings can be seen as an expression of the Cluniac form of the Benedictine rule, where great emphasis was placed on offering to God the best that could be afforded. Evidence of this can be seen at Crossraguel, especially in the detailing of the choir as rebuilt in the later 15th century.
- The sacristy and chapter house, two of the most important rooms within the monastery, survive largely intact. These spaces help to provide an understanding of the impressive nature of these buildings when complete. The influence of the design of the Crossraguel chapter house can be clearly seen at Glenluce.

- Lady Row's tomb gives insights into patronage and popular beliefs. She arranged for burial next to the Lady Altar in the north-east corner of the nave. Her endowment allowed for the re-modelling of the adjacent window to provide a canopy over her own burial place. Thus she enriched the architectural setting, while ensuring that her own remains were placed in an area deemed to be imbued with holiness.
- The sometimes extravagant provision made for the private accommodation of late medieval abbots is well illustrated at Crossraguel, where a tower house, kitchen and adjacent range was provided, again under the direction of Abbot Colin, around a separate court to the south-east of the church.
- Crossraguel features one of our finest, modern interpreted architectural stone displays, split between the gatehouse tower and the outer parlour.

Social Overview

Not assessed

Spiritual Overview

- The property provides evidence of medieval monastic spiritual life, a life largely unfamiliar to contemporary society.
- The completeness of some of the spaces, for example the chapter house, provides strong echoes of that life, and helps connect with a world in which spirituality and belief were bred in the bone.

Aesthetic Overview

The ruins of Crossraguel sit within the rich, rolling farmlands of Carrick. What could be a peaceful and evocative setting is rather spoilt by the proximity and inherent danger of the adjacent main road.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The nature of any pre-13th century ecclesiastical use of the site.
- What became of Riaghail's cross?
- More precise dating of the 13th century development of the monastery.
- A better understanding of the post-Reformation use of the buildings.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- Crossraguel is one of the most complete large monastic complexes to have survived, giving a clear impression of the extent and range of buildings and functions required within such an establishment. The surviving buildings, and associated buried archaeology, have the potential to inform an understanding of the integrated liturgical, domestic and economic functioning of a large medieval religious house.

- Crossraguel has the potential to inform an understanding of the impact of the Wars of Independence on such an institution.
- When compared to the original layout, the mature form of the plan reflects significant changes in monastic life. This site can inform an understanding of the domestic life of abbots in the later medieval period.
- The important collection of grave slabs can contribute to an understanding of medieval funerary memorials.

Associated Properties

Glenluce Abbey;

Keywords Monastery; Cluniac; monasticism; grave slabs