



HISTORIC
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SCOTLAND

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

TEMPLE WOOD STONE CIRCLES



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Cover image: General view of remaining standing stones at Temple Wood Stone Circle. © Historic Environment Scotland.

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I. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Temple Wood Stone Circles are located in Kilmartin Glen, Mid Argyll; the glen is famous for richness of its prehistoric monuments, several of which are in the care of Historic Environment Scotland. The site comprises the remains of a timber circle, one partial and one full stone circle, as well as a number of burials, cists and cairns. The circles, located some 12m apart, are known as the North-East Circle, and the South-West Circle.¹

While the whole site is scheduled, only the South-West Circle is in State care under a Guardianship agreement. The Guardianship area was defined in 1932, before the existence of the North-East Circle was known. Both circles are, however, cared for and maintained by Historic Environment Scotland and this document assesses the significance of the whole site.

The site has been excavated, most thoroughly in the 1970s; this work revealed many features, including the North-East Circle which was previously not recognised. After excavation, the site was consolidated, and some elements partially reconstructed for presentation purposes. The reconstruction did not aim to present the site at one particular point in time, but reconstructed aspects from different phases of the very long life of the site. For instance, round marker posts now indicate the position of the timber circle; the partial stone circle is indicated by rectangular marker posts.

Temple Wood Stone Circles are located in a roughly crescent shaped area of ground bordered by a stone wall, adjacent to a single-track road that runs between Nether Largie Farmhouse and Kilmartin School, to North Lodge and the road junction to the village of Slockavullin. The land that surrounds the site is part of Nether Largie Farm.

Nether Largie South chambered cairn is around 250m to the north-east and Nether Largie standing stones are around 300m to the south-east.

The site is not staffed, there is no entry charge, and it is freely accessible throughout the year. Parking is available at Lady Glassary Wood, a 400m walk from the site. 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 Some published sources, including Scott (1989) - who was the main excavator of the site - use the terms North and South Circles. RCAHMS uses the longer descriptions, and these descriptions will also be used in this Statement of Significance.

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.)

1.2 Statement of Significance

Kilmartin Glen is a world-class archaeological landscape. There is a wealth of upstanding prehistoric monuments,³ including: burial cairns, an Early Bronze Age linear cairn cemetery, a timber circle, a cursus monument, a henge, standing stones, stone rows, and numerous rock art sites.

Temple Wood Stone Circles sit at the centre of this palimpsest prehistoric landscape, and the site as a whole is one of the most complex and visually impressive. In 1929, the South-West Circle was briefly excavated by J. H. Craw, at which point only one stone of the North-East Circle was visible. J. G. Scott extensively excavated the site between 1974 and 1980, and discovered, amongst other features, the North-East Circle. This site was marked by a spread of cobbles with one stone at the centre.⁴ Scott's excavations revealed a complicated ritual and funerary site which was in use in prehistory for more than 2000 years.

The earliest activity discovered by Scott was the construction of a timber circle at the North-East site, dating between 3000 and 2500 BC; the Late Neolithic period. This was then replaced, possibly quite soon after, by a partial circular stone setting. Late Neolithic communities then constructed an elliptical or oval shaped stone circle at the South-West site.

The upright stones of the North-East Circle were removed, and a layer of water-rolled stones was spread over the site. Sheridan suggests this may have occurred in the Early Bronze Age (2200 - 1900 BC).⁵

Over time, Bronze Age peoples further adapted and reworked the site, making the South-West Circle the focus of burials. In summary, at least five, possibly six, prehistoric burials took place in and around the southern circle, three (or four) in the interior – all cremations – and two outside⁶. Upright stones were used to fill the gaps between the original stones of the circle, creating a closed ring. The exact sequence by which the site was constructed and re-worked is not fully understood, but it is thought that no further burials took place at the site after this reworking.

Temple Wood Stone Circles are of great cultural significance as part of the group of ritual and funerary monuments that make up the highly significant archaeological landscape of Kilmartin Glen. Additionally, the elements of the site are important on a number of counts:

- They are rare examples of large and unusually complex multi-period monuments with a life-use in prehistory of at least 2000 years.

³ RCAHMS, 1988

⁴ Scott, 1989: 106

⁵ Sheridan 2012: 177

⁶ Scott, 1989: 65

- They provide an outstanding example of the changing role and re-fashioning of monuments over time during the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods.
- The site retains potential for further discoveries and analyses. It is highly likely that further archaeological deposits remain undisturbed, and there is potential for the application of new techniques to revise or clarify understanding of already excavated material.
- They present an unusual opportunity for archaeologists to examine the stratigraphic relationship between the original monuments and the features that were later added to their interior.
- They possess unusual structural elements including the massive central cist, kerbs and stone settings.
- The remodelling of the original South-West Stone Circle with interval stones is an unusual feature.
- Some of the stones of the South-West Circle at Temple Wood have been carved with motifs, which is very unusual. Motifs currently detected are:
 - Two concentric circles carved on one of the main upright stones;
 - Two cup marks on an 'interval' stone;
 - A double spiral, pecked onto two faces of one of the upright stones.
- The spiral is an exceptionally rare example on an upstanding monument in Scotland.
- The circles may possibly demonstrate both solar and lunar astronomical alignments.
- The scale and complexity of the site is of great interest to visitors. The wooded setting makes it very appealing to visitors, especially during bluebell season.
- The incorporation of the site into the wider Poltalloch designed landscape is an added feature of interest.

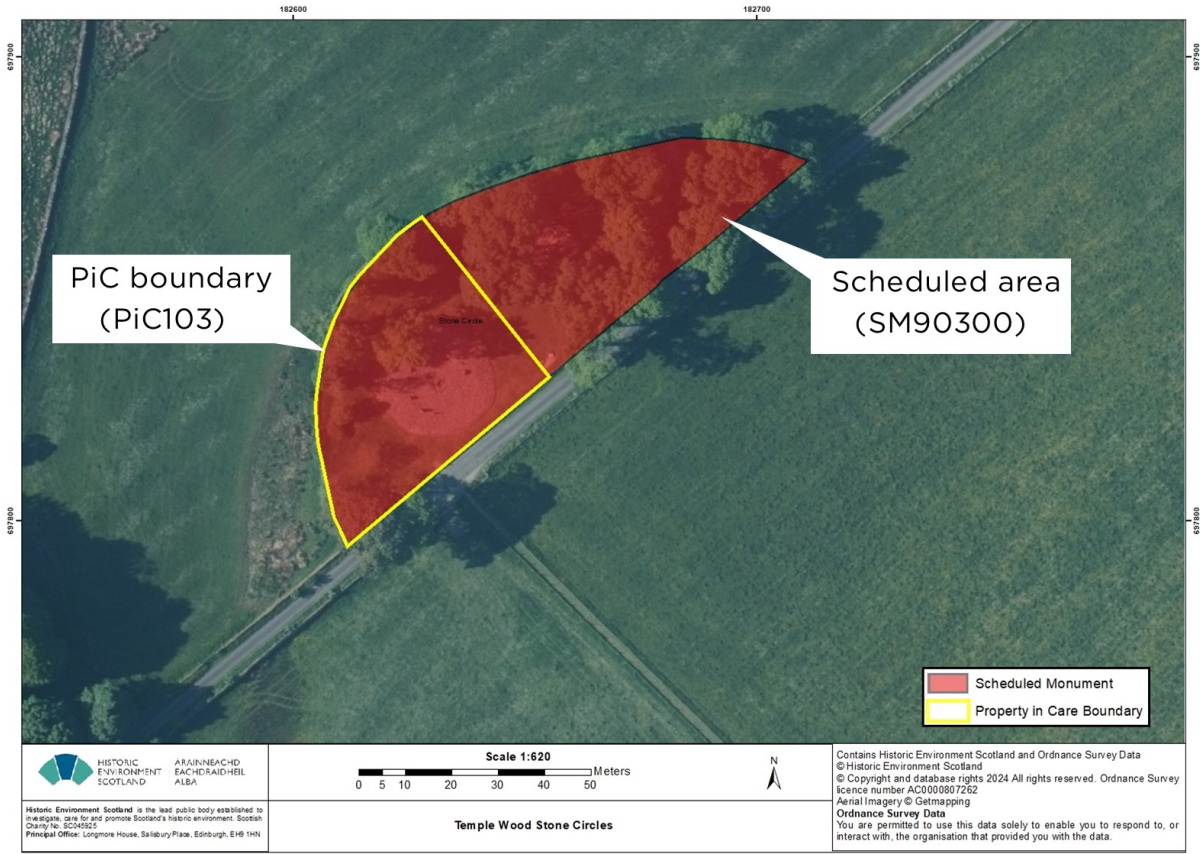


Figure 1: Temple Wood: Scheduled Area and Property in Care boundary – for illustrative purposes only. Note the Guardianship area was defined in 1932 and therefore does not extend to the North-East Circle, which was revealed during subsequent excavations. Both circles are, however, cared for and maintained by Historic Environment Scotland.

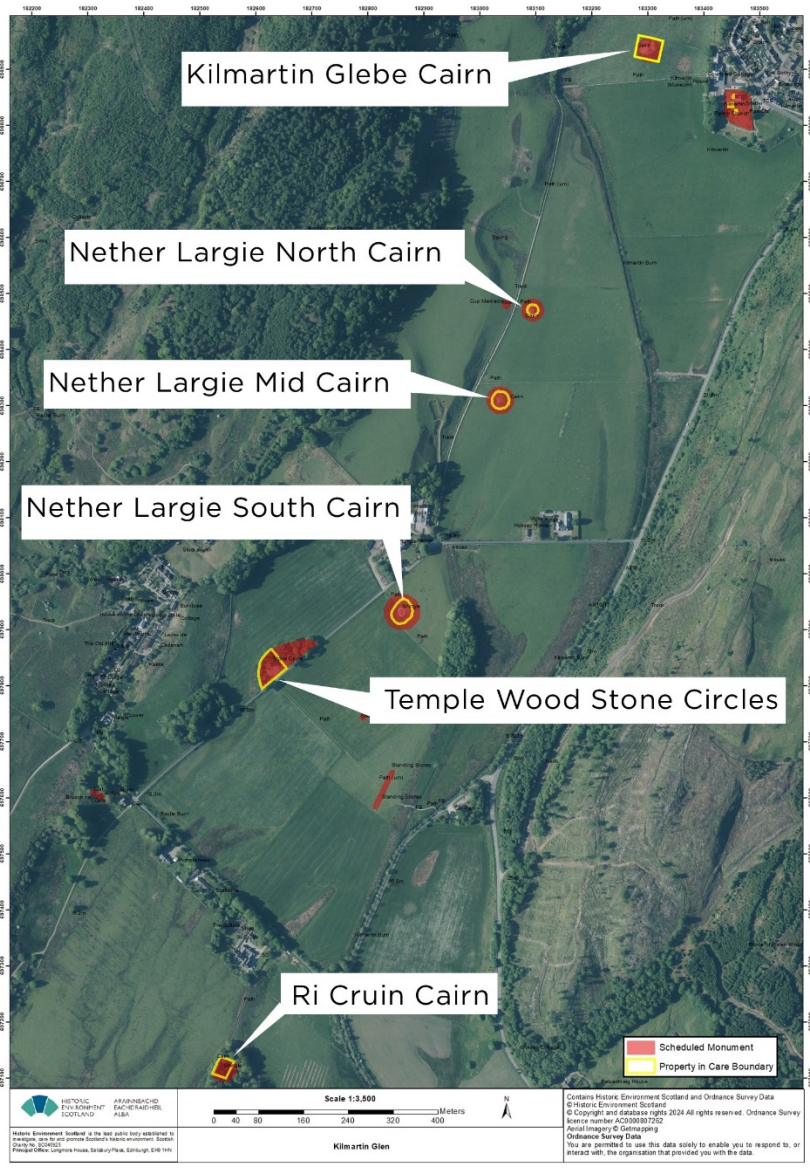


Figure 2: Location map of Temple Wood Stone Circles in relation to the neighbouring cairns of the Linear Cemetery, Kilmarting Glen.

2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

Note: A full introduction to Kilmartin Glen’s prehistoric monuments, and a detailed description of the Temple Wood site is given at Appendix 1: Archaeological Overview: Temple Wood in Context.

The earliest known record of the site is a print by William Daniell published in 1817.⁷ This view of the South-West Circle also shows **Nether Largie**

⁷ Scott, 1989: 57

South Chambered Cairn and Nether Largie Standing Stones – a scene which has been created with a measure of artistic licence.

Historical records note that in the late 1700s or early 1800s, a coin hoard – the latest of which is thought to have dated to the 11th century AD – was found buried at the South-West Circle.⁸ This also highlights the possibility of disturbance at the site.

In the 19th century, the site was incorporated into the Poltalloch designed landscape. Oak trees were planted around the circles, and it was named Temple Wood, or Half Moon Wood.⁹ At this point, the existence of the North-East Circle was not known.

2.1.1 **Craw’s excavations**

In 1929 J. H. Craw undertook a small excavation, during his more extensive investigations of Dunadd and other sites in the Glen.¹⁰ Thirteen stones in an incomplete circle were noted at Temple Wood, and his work aimed to determine if this had once been a complete circle, and to examine the central cist. Craw noted that the cist had no cover stone, and that tree roots were growing inside.¹¹ The work identified a broken 14th stone which was buried, and the sockets of four more.¹² These works were confined to what is now known as the South-West Circle, as traces of the North-East Circle had not been recognised at this time.

2.1.2 **Scott’s excavations**

Between 1974 and 1980, comprehensive excavations were undertaken at Temple Wood by J. G. Scott. This work revealed the complexity of the site, including (in 1979) the North-East Circle.

The earliest activity discovered by Scott was the construction of a timber circle at the North-East site. Dating between 3000 and 2500 BC, this intervention by Late Neolithic farming communities was made in a landscape already marked as significant by other monuments, including **Nether Largie South Chambered Cairn**. The timber circle was then replaced, possibly quite soon after, by a partial stone setting, which was elliptical in shape rather than a true circle. This monument may not have been completed, or it may never have been the intention of the builders to actually create a circle.

The focus of the Late Neolithic communities’ attention then moved to the South-West Circle where they constructed an elliptical or oval shaped Stone Circle, consisting of at least 22 stones, 13 of which now remain. One of the stones was carved with a double spiral, pecked onto two faces of the

⁸ Scott, 1989: 57. The whereabouts of the coins are currently unknown (2019).

⁹ Scott, 1989:55; after Craw 1930: 130

¹⁰ Craw, 1930

¹¹ Craw, 1930: 130.

¹² Craw, 1930: 130

stone, a motif closely linked to Irish passage grave art. Another upright stone has been carved with two concentric circles pecked onto one face. On the outer face of another of the upright stones are several cup marks, and one of the later 'interval' slabs also bears two small cup marks. All the stones were thought to have been of local origin.¹³

The upright stones of the North-East Circle were removed, and a layer of water-rolled stones was spread over the site. Sheridan suggests this may have occurred in the Early Bronze Age (2200 – 1900 BC) with the stones being used to create burial cists elsewhere.¹⁴

Over time, Bronze Age peoples further adapted and reworked the site, making the South-West Circle a focus for burials. In summary, at least five, possibly six, prehistoric burials took place in and around this circle, three (or four) cremations in the interior, and two probable inhumations outside.¹⁵ In detail, possibly beginning as early as 2200 – 1900 BC,¹⁶ the first burials took the form of two cairns containing cists, which were positioned outside the circle on the north-east and west. The North-East Cairn contained a very fine Beaker pot and three barbed and tanged arrowheads.¹⁷ A strong phosphate signal suggests the burial was an inhumation, which had completely decomposed. The West Cairn also contained a phosphate signal indicating an inhumation burial, of which survived one tooth from a child aged between four and six years old.

Other burials were built inside the South-West Circle. This included a very large cist with a low kerb and covered with cairn material (water-rolled stones) which was inserted in the centre of the circle. The top slab of this cist was found to be missing during Scott's excavations. Scott also noted that a depression is visible in the centre of the circle in Daniell's engraving of 1813,¹⁸ which indicates that it had been removed some time before then. The kerb consisted of upright stones with a 'false portal' built into the inner face of the south-east side of the ring. Cremated remains were found in both the central cist and in the setting of the 'false portal'.

A small kerb cairn was built to the north-east of these central features. This also had a false portal, and cremation deposit was found in a pit at the centre. The kerb cairns probably date to the Middle to Late Bronze Age (1500 – 1100 BC).¹⁹

¹³ Scott, 1989: 55

¹⁴ Sheridan, 2012: 177

¹⁵ Scott, 1989: 65

¹⁶ Sheridan, 2012: 177

¹⁷ These finds are now located in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, and displayed in the permanent exhibition in the archaeology gallery, having previously been on loan and display at Kilmartin Museum from 1997 to 2006.

¹⁸ See: <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/458082>

¹⁹ After Sheridan, 2012

A further burial was found at a higher level, presumed by Scott to have been inserted at a later date. Another cremation deposit was found placed within a setting of stone slabs to the south-east of the central burial.

At some point, upright stones were used to fill the gaps between the original stones of the circle, creating a closed ring. This ring formed the internal revetment for a bank of stones that covered both external cairns. Some of the stones at the site may also have been the result of field clearance. The exact sequence by which the site was constructed and re-worked is not fully understood, but it is thought that by the end of the Bronze Age, no further burials took place at the site.

At some undetermined point in the past, although likely not to have been in prehistory, part of the south-east arc of the South-West Circle was destroyed and stones removed. Later activity and re-use of the stones is evidenced by the attempt to re-work one of the stones into a mill (or quern) stone.

2.1.3 State care, consolidation and scheduling

In 1932 the South-West Circle of Temple Wood came into State care along with a number of other prehistoric sites on the Poltalloch Estate.

Following Scott's excavations, in 1980 the Department of the Environment (predecessor body to HES) undertook work to consolidate and facilitate public access and understanding of both the South-West Circle and the newly discovered North-West Circle. The result was aimed at elucidating features that would not have been visible at any one point in prehistory but presents the public with as broad a view as possible of the different phases of the monuments. In addition, the place where the timber posts of the North-East circle once stood is marked by round concrete pads, and the missing stones indicated by square concrete pads.

'Temple Wood Stone circles and cairns' were scheduled on 14th December 1994. The HES Statement of National Importance states:

The monument is of national importance because it represents the remains of important Bronze Age field monuments, albeit largely reconstructed, which retain well defined field characteristics. The stone circles, of which these are the only two²⁰ in the area, are part of a larger Neolithic and Bronze Age 'ritual landscape' in Kilmartin Valley which includes nearby stone settings, a chambered cairn and a Bronze Age linear cemetery. This monument therefore continues to

²⁰ It should be noted that a timber circle was subsequently excavated at Upper Largie Quarry, at the northern end of Kilmartin Glen during developer funded excavations in advance of gravel quarrying which were undertaken between 1982 and 2005 (Cook, Ellis and Sheridan, 2010). This timber circle dates to a later period than that supposed for the timber circle at Temple Wood North-East (Ibid, 2010: 190-191). The stone setting found under the Glebe Cairn as described by Greenwell, who excavated the cairn in 1864 (Greenwell, 1866) may also be a similar stone circle to Temple Wood South-West.

have the potential to provide information about Bronze Age ritual and funerary practice and to contribute to a wider understanding of the development of Neolithic and Bronze Age society.²¹

It is intended to collect terrestrial laser scan data of the site as part of the Rae Project. This objective digital record will underpin the management and conservation of the site in years to come.

2.1.4 Interpretation

Stone Circles are rare nationally, but are also not commonly found in Argyll, as was noted by Scott.²² Richard Bradley, who revisited the excavation data for his analysis of the significance of prehistoric monuments²³ makes the point that Temple Wood might be more correctly defined as several successive types of monument, rather than one individual type.²⁴ Scott's work, as noted by Bradley, has provided us with one of the fullest and most detailed sequences of such monuments.²⁵ The work also demonstrated that Temple Wood Stone Circles are the end product of a lengthy and complex history of site use and re-use in prehistory. The North-East Circle, constructed in the Neolithic period, was transformed from a timber setting to a partial stone circle, before being reworked to a spread of water-rolled stones with one large stone in the centre. First constructed in the Neolithic period as an open enclosure, a series of successive acts of transformation gradually closed off the centre of the South-West Circle, until it became completely inaccessible... *"as if a monument that had once served a wider community was being appropriated for the burials of a narrower portion of society"*.²⁶ An open area, defining a sacred space, was transformed as a place of burial. It is possible that the act of cremation itself took place at the site, as suggested by Scott's discovery of sporadic remains of cremated bone within the South-West Circle itself.²⁷ The meaning and function of stone circles in the Neolithic period has been much debated. There have been suggestions that they had astronomical functions, which Scott himself postulated might have been the function of the North-East Circle in its first phases.²⁸ Although there is no consensus, most researchers agree that these monuments defined spaces where rituals or ceremonies took place, which may have involved celestial elements, but that this was not their sole purpose. These activities may also have been observed from outwith the circles. - A further intriguing observation is that the stones of the South-West circle have been positioned with their smoothest surface facing outwards; apparently enhancing the appearance of the circle when

²¹ [HES portal. Temple Wood, stone circles and cairns 330m SW of Nether Largie \(historicenvironment.scot\)](#) (accessed: 20 December 2024).

²² 1989: 77

²³ Bradley, 1998

²⁴ Bradley, 1998: 136

²⁵ Bradley, 1998: 135, 137

²⁶ Bradley, 1998: 132

²⁷ Scott, 1989: 65

²⁸ Scott, 1989

viewed from outside.²⁹ Clearly, the history and meaning of these places is likely to be more complex than a single use or purpose at any one point in the past.

The South-West Circle's structural elements - in the form of the internal perimeter wall and bank of water-rolled stone - are difficult to place in the broader sequence of the site, but probably date to the Bronze Age phases. Bradley suggests that at this stage, the top of the stones of the original circle were still visible, but that the monument had been totally transformed conceptually from its original form.³⁰ He also notes that this is one of the few sites where the stratigraphic relationship between the perimeter and the interior features can be studied.³¹

The series of Bronze Age burials at the South-West Circle broadly follow similar patterns elsewhere in Kilmartin Glen and the rest of Scotland at that time.

Sometime around 1000 BC, towards the end of the Bronze Age, the climate of Argyll is thought to have deteriorated. Peat began to form and advance from a residual bog in the Crinan Basin³² spreading north into the narrower end of Kilmartin Glen. It has been suggested that advancing peat bog eventually completely covered the site, obscuring the upright stones. It does seem likely that the northern end of Kilmartin Glen contained peat before the agricultural improvements instigated by the Poltalloch Estate. It seems unlikely, however, that the stones of the South-West Circle were ever completely obscured by peat. William Daniell's engraving published in 1817 shows the upright stones of the South-West Circle, with people undertaking peat cutting and gathering in the background.

2.1.5 Remodelling

The remodelling of ancient sites, and the re-use and incorporation of structural elements within Bronze Age monuments has been suggested to have occurred at a number of other sites in Kilmartin.³³ **Nether Largie South Chambered Cairn**, built possibly some 1500 to 1800 years before the Linear Cemetery, was later re-modelled to take on the appearance of a round cairn. Sheridan also suggests that the cist slab at **Nether Largie North** may have originally been a cup marked outcrop of bedrock which was quarried, shaped, and carved with the shape of flat axes some of which were superimposed onto the cup marks.³⁴

The practice of remodelling was also detected at Temple Wood by Scott.³⁵ The timber circle was remodelled to form a partial stone circle. At some

²⁹ Richards and Wright, 2013: 43

³⁰ Bradley, 1998: 13

³¹ Bradley, 1998: 138

³² Sutherland 1997

³³ Stevenson, 1997; Sheridan, 2012:177; Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

³⁴ Sheridan, 2012: 177, Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

³⁵ Scott, 1989

point the stones of this circle were removed and possibly used in cists.³⁶ Scott believed the North-East Circle was not removed for hostile reasons, but was dismantled by choice.³⁷ Scott reported that the site was spread with cobbles and a central stone had been laid on a north-south axis in the centre,³⁸ which could be viewed as a reworking of the site, rather than destruction.

Other elements of the site may have also been re-used. On the basis of its dimensions and style of decoration, Sheridan has suggested that a stone pecked with a motif representing two circles, found under **Nether Largie North Cairn**, may have been taken from Temple Wood.³⁹ She also notes a possible connection between the Badden slab, found a few miles from Temple Wood, stating “*this worthy of further investigation, not least because the dimensions of the Badden slab match those of the socket for the central recumbent stone at Temple Wood North*”.⁴⁰

It has also been suggested that the cists themselves might have been architecturally stable, or free-standing for a time before they were buried under cairn material.⁴¹

2.1.6 Rock Art at Temple Wood

As noted above, Kilmartin Glen contains the greatest density of rock art known anywhere in the British Isles.⁴² Temple Wood South-West Circle has carved elements, including:

- Two concentric circles carved on one of the main upright stones;
- Two cup marks on an ‘interval’ stone;
- A double spiral, pecked onto two faces of one of the upright stones that form the circle.

It is also worth noting that several cup marks pecked onto one of the standing stones were recorded, but considered doubtful by Scott.⁴³ Craw noted an axe-head carved on one of the end slabs of the central cist, however this has not been substantiated; Morris notes that it is unrecognisable.⁴⁴

As well as the abundance of rock art on earth-fast rocks, several monuments in Kilmartin Glen have carved elements, including the cairns of

³⁶ Sheridan, 2012: 177

³⁷ Scott, 1989: 106

³⁸ Scott, 1989.

³⁹ Sheridan, 2012: 177

⁴⁰ Sheridan, 2012: 173

⁴¹ Jones, 2001: 223

⁴² For more information on prehistoric rock art in Kilmartin Glen and elsewhere in Scotland, see Scotland’s Rock Art Project at: www.rockart.scot/

⁴³ Scott, 1989: 59

⁴⁴ Morris, 1977: 120

Nether Largie North, Ri Cruin and Nether Largie Mid; the standing stone settings of Nether Largie, **Ballymeanoch** and Torbhlaren Standing Stone; as well as Badden and Cairn Bán cist slabs. This represents a diversity of monuments as well as motifs. Such a practice, and in such abundance, is not common throughout Britain. A stone with large concentric circles very similar to the carved stone at Temple Wood was found at **Nether Largie North Cairn**. Sheridan⁴⁵ tentatively suggests this stone, and even possibly the Badden and Cairn Bán cist slabs, may have been taken from Temple Wood and reused in later monuments as is noted above.



Figure 3: Illustration of concentric circles on stone within Temple Wood South-West Circle. SC 414613 © Crown Copyright: HES.

The most striking rock art at Temple Wood South-West Circle is, without a doubt, the carved spiral which extends over two faces of one of the main upright stones (stone nine – see illustration below). Discovered in 1973⁴⁶ it is an extremely rare example of an upstanding monument on which such a motif has been found, in situ, in Scotland.⁴⁷ A similar spiral was carved on the earth-fast rock art site at **Achnabreck**. Both spiral motifs are sometimes described as ‘horned spirals’.⁴⁸

The spiral motifs at both Temple Wood and Achnabreck are associated with Irish passage grave art.⁴⁹ Scott relates the motif to the decoration on a flint macehead found at one of the passage tombs at Knowth, Ireland.⁵⁰ This clearly suggests contacts between the people living in Kilmartin Glen

⁴⁵ Sheridan, 2012: 171, 177

⁴⁶ Scott, 1989: 55

⁴⁷ Scott 1989: 77. Since 2013, stones pecked with a ‘protospiral’, or a joined spiral motif, have been found in situ within upstanding architecture during excavations at two Neolithic sites in Orkney: Smerquoy and the Ness of Brodgar (see Thomas, 2015: 81, 255; Towers, 2018)

⁴⁸ Bradley, 1997: 110

⁴⁹ Scott, 1989: 73-74; Bradley, 1997: 110; Jones, 2001: 220; Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

⁵⁰ Scott, 1989: 74

and Ireland in the Neolithic period, for which there is abundant other evidence.

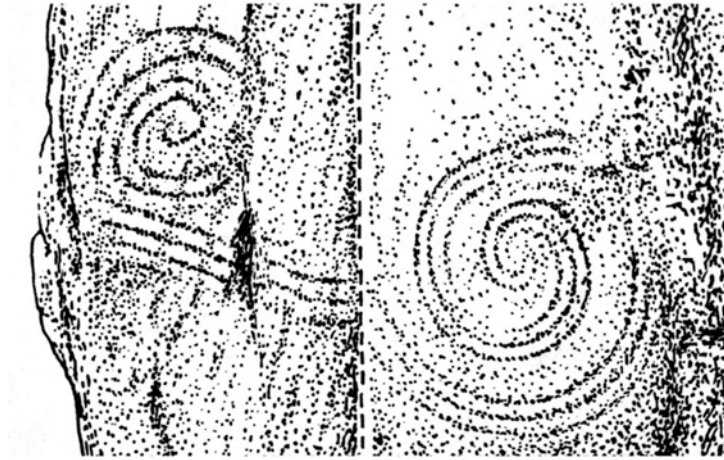


Figure 4: Illustration of spiral motif on stone within Temple Wood South-West Circle. SC 414614 © Crown copyright: HES.

Sheridan suggests the spiral was carved in two phases. Firstly, a spiral was carved on one face of the stone in the Late Neolithic, around 3000 – 2500 BC.⁵¹ This carving was then extended around the stone onto its eastern face because the northern face had become obscured by cairn material in the Earliest Bronze Age 2200 – 1900 BC.⁵²

The meaning and purpose of spiral motifs has been much debated. Jones suggests that, along with other motifs designed to be seen in the open air, we should see them as communicative statements linked to the reproduction and animation of memory.⁵³

2.1.7 Dating

Many of the prominent monuments in Kilmartin Glen were excavated before modern-day scientific methods were available. Temple Wood is an exception however, and carbon was recovered during Scott's excavation, which was subsequently submitted for radiocarbon dating.⁵⁴ However, Bradley states the "*radiocarbon dates from the site are not particularly helpful.*"⁵⁵ This is reiterated by Sheridan.⁵⁶

Despite this caution, Bradley⁵⁷ and Sheridan⁵⁸ generally agree with the following sequence – which broadly follows Scott.⁵⁹

⁵¹ Sheridan, 2012: 171

⁵² Sheridan, 2012: 177

⁵³ Jones, 2001: 220, 226

⁵⁴ Scott, 1989: appendix C 115-117

⁵⁵ Bradley, 1998: 136

⁵⁶ Sheridan, 2012: 172-173

⁵⁷ Bradley, 1989

⁵⁸ Sheridan, 2012

⁵⁹ Scott, 1989

Late Neolithic activity (3000 – 2500 BC)

- Timber circle constructed at Temple Wood North-East.
- Subsequent stone circle built at Temple Wood North-East⁶⁰.
- Stone circle built at Temple Wood South-West.
- A spiral is carved on one of the upright stones in the South-West Circle (possibly just one face).

Sheridan states that a date within the first two centuries of the 3rd millennium BC can be proposed for the stone circles: *“This is because they can be understood as part of the southward spread of a practice that may well have originated in Orkney with the erection of the Stones of Stenness around the 30th century BC, with the Temple Wood circles forming part of the Atlantic façade arc with Callanish on Lewis and Machrie Moor on Arran ... and now, thanks to a recent discovery with a timber-then-stone circle at Armadale on Skye.”*⁶¹

Chalcolithic (2500 – 2200 BC) to Earliest Bronze Age activity (2200 – 1900 BC)

- Beaker burial outside Temple Wood South-West Circle.⁶²
- Tentative suggestion that the second cairn and cist burial outside Temple Wood South-West Circle dates to this period⁶³.

Earliest Bronze Age activity (2200 – 1900 BC)

- Temple Wood South-West Circle converted into a ring-cairn complete with a central cist.⁶⁴
- The spiral design was extended onto the eastern face of the stone because the northern face had become obscured by the cairn.⁶⁵
- Temple Wood North-East Stone Circle was dismantled, and its stones deployed in cists elsewhere.⁶⁶

Middle to Late Bronze Age activity (1500 – 1100 BC)

- Kerb cairns constructed within the South-West Circle; one was constructed immediately above the central Early Bronze Age cist, and the other, next to it, was used twice.

⁶⁰ Note a similar pattern is observed at Machrie Moor on Arran, where Stone Circle 1 replaces an earlier timber circle. Richards and Wright, 2013: 61

⁶¹ Sheridan, 2012: 173

⁶² Described as North-East Cairn above and RCAHMS

⁶³ Sheridan, 2012: 177. Described as the West Cairn above and RCAHMS.

⁶⁴ Sheridan, 2012: 177

⁶⁵ Sheridan, 2012: 177

⁶⁶ Sheridan, 2012

Sheridan cites dates ranging between 3100 +/-35 BP (SUERC-17361) and 3065 +/-35 BP (SUERC-17362) for the three dates for cremated bone from the Temple Wood graves, which suggest their use between c.1450 and 1200 BC.⁶⁷ These radiocarbon dates were obtained between 2007 and 2008 and sponsored by HES.⁶⁸

2.1.8 Possible astronomical alignments

Various authors have examined the possibility of astronomical alignments at Temple Wood.⁶⁹ Jack Scott himself suggests the Northern Circle might have been, in its first phases, an observatory for plotting and recording the winter solstice.⁷⁰ In 2012, Sheridan reviewed the evidence for astronomical alignments at Temple Wood, noting that it had been argued that both lunar and solar observations could be made.⁷¹ Citing Douglas Scott,⁷² who re-examined the suggestions of alignments, she concludes that although there are still issues to debate, it is likely that the circles were constructed with a view to marking celestial events – in particular: *“when viewed from the northern circle, the southern circle seems to mark the setting midwinter sun (and the concentric circles and spiral on two of the stones could symbolise this), whilst the northeast alignment of the circles orientates to the rising major standstill midwinter full moon.”*⁷³

2.2 Evidential values

Temple Wood is important as it is one of the key sites in Kilmartin Glen, and arguably the most complex. Neither Craw, nor Scott’s excavations of the site were complete, and thus there is potential for undisturbed remains. Pertinent questions remain unanswered, some of which have the potential to shed light specifically on the dating, sequencing and function of Temple Wood as well as more generally on the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. The site has evidential potential to significantly inform our understanding of this important landscape and would therefore be a strong candidate for inclusion in any future research programme aiming to further explore the Neolithic and Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen.

2.3 Historical values

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

⁶⁷ Sheridan, 2012: 180

⁶⁸ Sheridan, 2008: 201 -205

⁶⁹ Ruggles, 1999; Hawkins, 2002; Scott, 1989; Scott, 2010

⁷⁰ Scott, 1989: 95-98

⁷¹ Scott, 2012: 174

⁷² Scott, 2010

⁷³ Sheridan, 2012: 174

possible that the track known as the ‘coach road’ was deliberately designed so that the circles, cairns and other monuments could be viewed when passing along this route. It was probably at this time that the oak trees were planted, and the site was named Temple Wood, or Half Moon Wood.⁷⁴ 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 Temple Wood Stone Circles - 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 Empire⁷⁵ has highlighted that Temple Wood Stone Circles has ‘property’ empire connection⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ During the 1970s excavation at Temple Wood, Scott specifically acknowledged the help of Mr R L Malcolm, the proprietor of the estate at the time.⁷⁸

2.4 Architectural, artistic and aesthetic values

Temple Wood South-West Circle, in particular, has been the subject of many artists over the years, beginning, as far as is known, with William Daniell’s 1817 depiction. One of the most popular images of the site is Tom Shanks’ water colour of the circle surrounded by bluebells in spring.

The carvings at Temple Wood (as described and discussed above) represent some of the earliest art (if they can be understood in that way) in Britain. The spiral is the only in situ example on an upstanding monument in Scotland that is accessible to the public

⁷⁴ Scott, 1989: 55; after Craw, 1930: 130

⁷⁵ 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.hes.scot.nhs.uk/properties-in-care-and-the-british-empire)

⁷⁶ ‘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.

⁷⁷ Mullen *et al* 2024, 50-55.

⁷⁸ Scott 1989, 53.

As a monument type, architecturally, Temple Wood is hard to categorise since it has undergone so many phases of transformation – some of which have been detected by excavation. The South-West Circle has unusual structural elements (interval stones, cist burials, massive cists).

These rare elements equate to high artistic, architectural and aesthetic value.

Part of the reason for Scott's excavation work was to improve the display and understanding of the monument.⁷⁹ What is present at Temple Wood today is partially a reconstruction based on excavation evidence, however this does not detract in any way from its value.

2.5 Landscape values

The site's bedrock belongs to the Tayvallich Volcanic Formation, comprised of metalimestone and metabasaltic rock. Superficial deposits are comprised of sand and gravel; Raised Marine Deposits of Holocene Age.⁸⁰

Temple Wood Timber and Stone Circles would have been dominant features in the landscape. Temple Wood South-West Circle remains so today. Both the circles were deliberately positioned relatively close to a gravel bank which creates an amphitheatre-like setting for the circles – a configuration of landscape features often chosen for the siting of stone circles.⁸¹

It is probable that the Kilmartin Burn meandered around the cairns in the Linear Cemetery, which is close to Temple Wood. 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 South Cairn and Nether Largie Standing Stone Setting can be seen from Temple Wood. It is possible that **Nether Largie Mid Cairn** could previously be seen, however trees and buildings currently obscure the view.

The site is a very pleasant place to visit, especially in May, when the ground between the circles is full of flowering bluebells.

As such, Temple Wood has very high landscape value.

⁷⁹ Scott, 1989: 53

⁸⁰ British Geological Survey, 2019

⁸¹ Bradley, 1998: 135

2.6 Natural heritage values

At the point of writing,⁸² the site had no special natural heritage designations, however, the area in State care includes Lowland Meadow of Unimproved Neutral Grassland, including species such as False Oat Grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*). Unimproved Neutral Grassland is considered to be one of the most threatened lowland habitat types in the country, surviving mostly as small, isolated meadows which have not been subject to any significant degree of agricultural improvement. This habitat has likely survived as a result of the protection it has as a historical site.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

2.7.1 Social values

The social values of Temple Wood 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.

Temple Wood, 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 annually⁸³ which gives an indication of visitor numbers and interest.

The Temple Wood Stone Circles have interpretation boards installed by HES which provide information to visitors about the site and other monuments in the area.

Kilmartin Museum was founded in 1997 with the mission 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.

Kilmartin Museum's education team regularly use Temple Wood Stone Circles, and the other major sites in Kilmartin Glen, in its education programmes. – Particularly those involving Kilmartin School, because of the deep connection the teachers and pupils have towards the monument,

⁸² February 2019

⁸³ 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.)

partially due to its close proximity, but also the pride they feel in having such an important monument on their doorstep. Kilmartin Museum organises a weekly volunteer-led guided walk along the Glen, visiting Temple Wood and all of the cairns in the Linear Cemetery. Kilmartin Museum and the education service are part-funded by Historic Environment Scotland.

In 1980, following excavation, Temple Wood Stone Circles were prepared for public access and interpretation. Concrete posts were used to mark the previous positions of timber and stones within the North-East circle, and the South-West circle was reconstructed to reveal as many features as possible. It is important to note that neither circle would have looked thus in prehistory, and although this is very obvious to visitors at the North-East circle, it is not so clear at the South-West Circle.

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.

All these activities render Temple Wood Stone Circles as having very high social values.

It should be noted, however, that the tourism generated by the archaeological monuments, and their national and international importance 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.

2.7.2 Spiritual values

Although it is assumed that these sites were used for rituals and ceremonies in the past, it is important to remember, as Bradley states, that: *"nothing is known about what took place inside these early circles"*.⁸⁴ It seems clear, however, that in the prehistoric period, Temple Wood had great spiritual significance as a monument, and then later as a place of burial. The re-use of monuments in Kilmartin Glen, 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.⁸⁵ This is particularly the case with Temple Wood, probably because they are stone circles and thus associated with sites such as Stonehenge, which have received a great deal of attention from people with modern-day alternative belief systems that involve archaeological monuments. The circles were

⁸⁴ Bradley, 1998: 136

⁸⁵ 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.

designed in prehistory to be imposing and awe-inspiring, and the South-West Circle, in particular, has remained so since it was constructed.

Many visitors appreciate the special qualities and atmosphere of the place, and for some this includes a feeling of connectedness to the “deep past”, to past generations, and their funeral practices. As such, Temple Wood is considered to have high spiritual value.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

Although Scott’s excavations revealed much information, there are some major gaps in our understanding of the site:

- What was the date of the first activity on the site?
- What is the sequence of construction and deconstruction?
- How was this site used in the Neolithic period?
- Are there more undiscovered burials?
- From when do the carvings date? Were they reused from an earlier site, carved as part of the construction of the stone circle, or carved in situ once the monument was created?
- Can the theory about the multiple phasing of the spiral carving be tested?
- Can the link to Irish passage grave art be untangled?
- Would other carvings be revealed by laser scanning?
- Can a quarry site be identified from which the stone was sourced?
- Can the theory regarding the possible re-use of stones from Temple Wood be tested using virtual or digital techniques?
- How does Temple Wood relate to other similar monuments in the Glen?
- Does the Badden slab have connections to Temple Wood?
- At what date did prehistoric activity end at the site?
- What is the precise nature of the possible lunar and solar alignments?
- Were the cists of the South-West circle once free-standing prior to being covered by cairn material?
- How does Temple Wood relate to the other prominent prehistoric sites in the Glen?

Added to these questions is also a lack of understanding about the relationship of Temple Wood 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 Kilmartin Glen as a whole remains relatively unexplored. It would also be beneficial to further fine tune the chronology for the development of stone circles throughout the British Isles.

Is it possible to be more specific about the way in which this site, and others, were incorporate into the Poltalloch designed landscape, including the understanding and appreciation of the sites at that time?

We know very little about the social values that modern day communities place on these monuments. This is also worthy of further investigation.

Added to the specific questions above, there are major gaps relating to the periods to which this monument belongs. These have been recently summarised by Alison Sheridan in the Regional Archaeological Research Framework for Argyll, as key research questions⁸⁶ and this is given at Appendix 2.

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Associated local properties managed by HES:

- Achnabreck 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 Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Kilmartin Glebe Cairn
- Kilmartin Sculptured Stones and Neil Campbell Tomb
- Nether Largie Mid Cairn
- Nether Largie North Cairn

⁸⁶ Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

- Nether Largie South Cairn
- Ri Cruin Cairn

Associated properties managed by HES elsewhere:

- Auchagallon Stone Circle
- Calanais Standing Stones
- Cullerlie Stone Circle
- Drumtroddan Standing Stones
- Easter Aquhorthies Stone Circle
- Laggangarn Standing Stones
- Loanhead Stone Circle
- Machrie Moor Stone Circles
- Ring of Brodgar
- Steinacleit Cairn and Stone Circle
- Stones of Stenness
- Tomnaverie Stone Circle
- Torhouse Stone Circle

5. KEYWORDS

Stone circle; timber circle; cist; Beaker; Neolithic; Bronze Age; Kilmartin Glen; rock art

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: TEMPLE WOOD IN CONTEXT

Overview of prehistoric Kilmartin Glen

Kilmartin Glen is located in Argyll and Bute, on the west coast of Scotland. The landscape of this part 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,⁸⁷ including burial cairns, a linear cairn cemetery, a timber circle, a cursus monument, a henge, standing stones, stone rows, and numerous rock art sites. Temple Wood Stone Circles are the most complex of these elements, incorporating the remains of a Neolithic timber circle, and stone circles as well as Bronze Age monumental burials. Kilmartin Glen 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

⁸⁷ RCAHMS, 1988

disposal of high-status artefacts and the construction of complex and prominent 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.*”⁸⁸ Evidence for the earliest activity around these themes dates to the earliest Neolithic (3800 – 3700 BC)⁸⁹ and accumulates through to the Late Bronze Age (1500 – 1100 BC), a timespan of some 2300 years.⁹⁰

Mid Argyll’s rock art stands 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 bed rock and also on constructed monuments. Recent work on dating rock art sites points to those created on earth-fast bedrock as being Late Neolithic, between 3000 – 2500 BC.⁹¹ It should, however, be noted that only relatively few radiocarbon dates are available. Rock art found on constructed monuments has, in some cases, been loosely dated by association to the monuments themselves, or at least the date at which the rock art was re-used.

The South-West Circle at Temple Wood has carved elements (a double, or ‘horned’ spiral, two concentric circles, and cup marks) and some of the cairns in the Linear Cemetery (Ri Cruin and Nether Largie North and Nether Largie Mid), also have a number of structural features bearing carved rock art. Some of these may be re-used elements from other monuments, or earth-fast rock art sites, and is a comparatively rare feature.

Kilmartin Glen’s prominent monuments attracted antiquarian and archaeological interest from the early 1900s, 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 in the 1960s by local antiquarian Marion Campbell of Kilberry and her companion Mary Sandeman.⁹² 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. The earliest evidence of occupation in the Glen dates to the Later Bronze Age, leading some to speculate that the area was used solely for ritual purposes. No

⁸⁸ RCAHMS, 1988: 14

⁸⁹ Sheridan, 2012: 166

⁹⁰ Sheridan, 2012

⁹¹ Sheridan, 2012: 171; Jones and Riggott, 2011: 253

⁹² Campbell and Sandeman, 1962

systematic survey or excavation programme has been undertaken across the whole Kilmartin 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 utilising it as a ritual landscape, but the evidence for this has not yet been found.

Dingwall and McGowan noted that many of the known archaeological monuments in the Glen lie within areas developed as designed landscapes in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁹³ It is very likely that the most conspicuous monuments, including Temple Wood South-West Circle (the North-East circle might not have been visible at that time), the Linear Cemetery, Duncraig Cairn, Baluachraig Rock Art site, Nether Largie and Ballymeanoch Standing Stones were deliberately incorporated as significant points of interest in these landscape designs.

The Neolithic and Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen

Archaeologists characterise the Neolithic period, beginning around 4300 – 3900 BC, as the move away from a hunting and gathering lifestyle to a wholly new way of living which involved animal husbandry and cereal cultivation. Novel forms of material culture, including tools and pottery, were also introduced. People began altering the earth in ways that had previously not been seen, by constructing monuments including megalithic tombs, cursus monuments and later, stone circles. This indicates that radically different cultural belief systems were also evolving as the economy and settlement patterns changed.

The factors which precipitated the transition from a hunting and gathering lifestyle to a farming one has been much debated, with broadly two schools of thought emerging – that new practices were introduced by immigrants, or that indigenous communities gradually took on these practices over time. A recent summary in an Argyll context is given in Sheridan's contribution to the Regional Archaeological Research Framework for Argyll⁹⁴ and an alternative view given in Cummings' contribution to the framework.⁹⁵

It is assumed that once it had taken hold, the 'Neolithic lifestyle' necessitated communities to settle in one place. There is, however, little evidence of settlement, in the early phases of the Neolithic at least, although it is likely that people were associating themselves with an area of land in a way that earlier hunter gatherer communities had not.

⁹³ Dingwall and McGowan, 1996: 43

⁹⁴ Sheridan, 2017

⁹⁵ Cummings, 2017

Evidence of Neolithic settlements have not been found in Mid Argyll as yet. However, palaeoenvironmental evidence of barley dating to 3600 BC has been detected in Kilmichael Glen (which joins Kilmartin Glen at its southern end), indicating the presence of Neolithic communities engaged in crop production at this time.⁹⁶ The cursus monument at Upper Largie Quarry dates to between 3800 BC and 3650 BC⁹⁷ indicating Neolithic activity in Kilmartin Glen around the same time.

As well as creating monuments at this time, people also expressed themselves by making rock art, probably in the later part of the Neolithic; although there is, as yet, tentative dating evidence for this. This was a particularly important practice in Kilmartin Glen and the surrounding area. Motifs were also carved on monuments at this time, a practice that continued into the Bronze Age.

Other evidence for Neolithic communities is found in the form of chambered cairns. These structures served as places of communal burial, often over long periods of time, with earlier internments sometimes moved aside to make way for later ones. Their distribution in the landscape suggests the tombs were associated with a discrete local community, or extended family, since they are often clustered at relatively evenly-spaced distances. Nether Largie South Cairn, some 250 metres from Temple Wood, is an example of this type of cairn, and it would have been standing in its Neolithic form when the timber circle, and then later stone circles, were constructed at Temple Wood.⁹⁸

The creation of other monuments in Kilmartin Glen took place during the Late Neolithic (3000 – 2500 BC),⁹⁹ and it is thought that the first phases of activity at Temple Wood date to this period. A timber circle, followed by a partial stone circle, was created at the North-East site, after which a stone circle was created at the South-West site.¹⁰⁰ In the latter circle, one of the stones bears a pecked spiral design, which has been linked to Irish passage grave art, and another stone has concentric rings.¹⁰¹

The link to Ireland embodied by the spiral design at Temple Wood is one of a number of pieces of evidence for wide-ranging networks of exchange, along which ideas, technology, material culture, motifs, and probably people moved in the Neolithic in Britain.

New ideas continued to flow in and out of the area. The use of copper appears 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.¹⁰² Other

⁹⁶ Tipping et al, 2011: 167

⁹⁷ Cook et al, 2010: 175; Sheridan, 2012

⁹⁸ Sheridan 2012: 166; 2017, RARFA

⁹⁹ Sheridan, 2012

¹⁰⁰ Scott, 1989

¹⁰¹ Scott, 1989; Sheridan 2012: 171

¹⁰² Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

changes also occurred, including the construction of cairns containing just one or two individual burials. Two such burials were created at Temple Wood, both inhumations, one of which also contained a fine Beaker pot, three barbed and tanged arrowheads and a scraper. This move to individual burial marks a change from the earlier Neolithic practice of communal burial.¹⁰³ It is widely accepted that social stratification is visible in the archaeological record, 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.¹⁰⁴

Although this is seen elsewhere in Britain, the intensity of finds in Kilmartin Glen 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.¹⁰⁵ It is possible that mining was also taking place in and around the Glen as there are known copper deposits which were certainly exploited in the early modern period.¹⁰⁶ Whether copper was acquired locally, 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 suggests these links extended to Ireland, the north-east of Scotland and Yorkshire.¹⁰⁷

The Early Bronze Age, described by Sheridan as a 'golden age' in Kilmartin,¹⁰⁸ saw the construction of a highly visible, deliberately imposing linear cairn cemetery, of which five large cairns survive today. These are 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 monuments in the Glen, and this might have been an influencing factor in the siting of the Temple Wood Stone Circles and, later, the Linear Cemetery as well as other monuments.

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.¹⁰⁹ The original trapezoidal linear shape of Nether

¹⁰³ RCAHMS, 1988: 14

¹⁰⁴ RCAHMS, 1988; Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

¹⁰⁵ Sheridan 2012: 175; Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

¹⁰⁶ Steiniger, 2012

¹⁰⁷ Sheridan, 2012: 177

¹⁰⁸ Sheridan, 2012: 175

¹⁰⁹ RCAHMS, 1988: 14

Largie South was substantially altered to appear circular.¹¹⁰ The practice of dismantling and remodelling monuments seen at Nether Largie South is echoed at Temple Wood where it has been suggested that the stones of the North-East Circle were removed and may have been re-used to create burial cists.¹¹¹

Temple Wood continued to be a focus for burials into the Middle to Late Bronze Ages.¹¹² The Stone Row at Ballymeanoch has been tentatively dated to this period, and thus by association also possibly the stone setting at Nether Largie, both of which may incorporate re-used slabs of rock that had already been carved with rock art.¹¹³ There are other burials in the Glen which are thought to be of a similar date.

Detailed site description Temple Wood Stone Circles

Temple Wood Stone Circles are situated 250m from Nether Largie South Cairn, the nearest neighbouring prehistoric monument.

Between 1974 and 1980, extensive excavations were undertaken by J. G. Scott, then Keeper of the Department of Archaeology, Ethnography and History at Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum.

The following description of the site, based on Scott's published account,¹¹⁴ is taken from the account given in RCAHMS:

The chronological relationship of the main structural features of the two monuments could not in all cases be precisely determined, but the main phases may be outlined as follows: the earliest is represented by a timber setting in the North-East Circle; this was later replaced by a stone setting on the same spot, although this may never have been completed. Subsequent activity seems to have been focussed on the South-West Circle, the most important part of the site, the earliest element of which is a circle of twenty-two standing stones; two small cairns, both containing cists, were built outside the stone circle on the NE and W; the spaces between the stones of the circle were filled with upright slabs, here called 'interval slabs', and the circle was thus made into a closed ring; this ring was then surrounded by a bank of stones covering both the external cairns. It is difficult to be certain at what point the structures inside the circle were built; there is a small stone setting on the SE, a central cairn with a cist, and a further circular setting to the NE of the central

¹¹⁰ RCAHMS, 1988: 14; Sheridan, 2017, RARFA

¹¹¹ Sheridan, 2012: 177

¹¹² Scott, 1989

¹¹³ Sheridan, 2012: 180

¹¹⁴ Scott, 1988-1989

cairn. All the internal features were later sealed by a covering of cairn material.

SOUTH-WEST CIRCLE

The major feature of the site is a ring of standing stones now partly masked by cairn material; the stones are laid out not in a true circle, but in an ovoid measuring about 13m by 12m. There were originally twenty-two uprights, standing to heights of 1.6m above ground level, but the stones of the SE quadrant have now been removed. When Craw examined the circle fourteen stones were recorded and the stone-holes of a further two were found on the SW; one of these contained the pinning for a stone that had been removed, and the stump of the second stone still remained in position. On the SE arc the positions of the missing four stones were 'clearly traceable by the deep soil' and in one of the stone-holes broken fragments of the stone were discovered. There is a stone on the SE, which is the only upright set at right angles to the circle; it measures 1.05m in height, 1m in width, and 0.1m in thickness.

Two of the standing stones (a and b on the RCAHMS plan) are decorated with pecked ornament: one bears concentric circles (now very faint); the other has a double spiral spread across two faces of the stone, the better executed side (the outer face) bearing three-strand ornament, which curls to form a single-strand spiral. On the outer face of one of the uprights (c) there are several small possible cupmarks, and two more small cupmarks were recognised on one of the interval slabs (d). At the time of the destruction of the SE arc, one of the fallen slabs was partly shaped to form a millstone (e), but this was abandoned in an unfinished state.

Both of the cairns which were constructed outside the stone circle on the NE and W covered cists containing inhumation burials. The NE cairn measures some 3m in diameter, the kerbstones of the SE quadrant remaining intact; elsewhere the perimeter was represented only by the trench from which the kerbstones had been removed in antiquity. The central cist (1m by 0.6m and 0.6m deep) was covered by a massive slab (1.65m by 0.95m and 0.15 m thick); on its pebble floor were found a fine Beaker, three barbed-and-tanged arrowheads and a flint scraper, all of which had probably accompanied an inhumation burial, as the phosphate analysis of the floor deposits clearly suggests.

The W cairn held a cist (1m by 0.6m and 0.5m deep), which was covered by a large slab. The cist was floored with flat stones, on which there was a thin layer of gravelly earth containing only the tooth of a child aged between four and six years. A strong phosphate reaction from the earthy fill suggests, however, that there was formerly an inhumation burial, of which only the tooth survived. The

cairn measured 4.2m by 3.6m and 0.5m in height, and had a carefully constructed perimeter of upright stones linked by drystone walling in a 'post-and-panel' style. The cairn is not circular, and it may be suggested that the straighter E flank has been designed to respect the position of the upright of the earlier stone circle 0.7m to the E.

Other burials were deposited within the circle. The central cist, which was covered by a cairn with a low kerb, measured 1.4m by 0.8m and 0.65m deep. It was composed of four very large slabs and was set in a pit in such a way that it was partly below and partly above ground level. The N end-slab was over 1.3m in height, but its lower edge was set 0.75m below the level of the floor of the cist in order to keep its upper edge on a level with those of the side-slabs. The S end-slab was also set in a deep socket. Any capstone appears to have been removed before the early 19th century, for, although a hollow in the centre of the cairn is shown on Daniell's coloured engraving of 1813, there is no sign of any cover slab (Daniell 1818). The kerb consisted of upright slabs 0.3m high with a 'false portal' setting on the inner side of the ring in the SE quadrant. Much of the kerb was destroyed in recent years, and its position is shown as a narrow trench on the plan (0.35m deep and 0.1m to 0.25m broad); the ring of stones that is visible today is largely reconstructed. Cremated remains were found both in the central cist and in the small box-like setting of the 'false portal'.

The cist, the ring of upright slabs and the setting were all subsequently sealed by cairn material. To the NE of these central structures there is a small kerb-cairn, 2.5m in diameter and 0.75m high, with a 'false portal' arrangement on the SE; at the centre of the cairn there was a cremation in a pit (0.7m by 0.8m) covered by a flat slab. A later burial was found at a higher level, probably inserted at a stage when the cairn was enlarged and the uprights were enclosed within an outer slab-built kerb.

A further cremation deposit was found to the SE of the central burial; it lay within a setting of flat slabs defining an area 1m by 1.1m externally and 0.6m by 0.6m internally.

The role of the uprights of the stone circle as free-standing monoliths was completely changed by the addition of smaller orthostats designed to fill the spaces between them and to form a closed ring; this ring was thus composed of the taller stones of the circle and the lower slabs, here described as 'interval slabs'. In one instance horizontal slabs were found on top of an interval slab. This ring of uprights formed the internal revetment of a bank of stones that enclosed the stone circle and covered the cairns on the NE and W. It is uncertain how this external bank was constructed, and it is possible that the interval slabs had an independent existence before the building of the bank itself. The interval slabs stood to heights of

about 0.4m above ground level, and some of the stones of the circle were trimmed so that these slabs could be neatly set in position. Excavation has shown that the upper part of the bank, as at present visible, is of recent origin and may be the result of field-clearance.

Early in the second millennium BC, peat began to form over the site. A ditch on the W side, which ran past the edge of the bank, appears to be ancient in origin, but to have been recut in more recent times, perhaps in the course of drainage and peat-clearance during the 19th century. The state of the site in the early 19th century is shown in the Daniell engraving mentioned above, which also illustrates peat-cutting in progress. A manuscript note accompanying the Hutton Drawings (Nat Lib of Scot Adv Ms 30.5.22 (Hutton drawings) no.23k), in the National Library of Scotland is dated to 30 May 1818: 'Rasella near Kilmartin Loch Crenan Argyshire. Mr Daniell informed me that several years ago (probably about 25), a great many Coins were found in the excavation in the Center of the Druidical Circle, which were afterwards distributed among various hands'. This presumably records the discovery of a cache of coins, perhaps of medieval date, but none appears to have survived. During the 19th century the site was masked by field-gathered stones. Later that century the trees around the circles were planted and the grove was given the name Half-Moon or Temple Wood.

NORTH-EAST CIRCLE

The North-East Circle, which was discovered in 1979, has been reconstructed with concrete markers to indicate the two main phases of activity, the earlier being a timber setting (circular markers), which was subsequently replaced by upright stones (rectangular markers). The timber posts, set upright in deep sockets, were carefully positioned with the four largest posts in pairs some 10m apart. Because the posts were later removed, it is not certain how many were standing at any given time, but there were certainly six, and possibly a further three, and there was also a post at the centre of the ring. After the post-ring was dismantled, preparations were made for a stone setting, the stone holes being dug and at least five stones erected, with an upright slab at the centre. The setting was elliptical rather than circular, measuring 10m by 10.5m; one of the uprights is still visible, and the stump of a second was found during the excavation, as well as traces of two other stones, all within the western arc. The two stones of the setting and the central stone are indicated on the plan; the positions of stones which were slighted in antiquity and of stone-holes that were dug but not necessarily filled are also shown on the plan. Parallel to the central slab and 1m to the W there was a shallow hollow, which may have been the socket for a second upright. Analysis of a charcoal deposit in the socket for a stone has provided a radiocarbon date of 3075 BC +/-190 (GU-1296),

and it is clear that the circle was dismantled in prehistoric times and finally covered by a layer of cobbling.¹¹⁵

APPENDIX 2: REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR ARGYLL

Key research questions for the Neolithic period

1. **What is the precise nature of the settlement pattern and subsistence strategy for the inhabitants of Argyll and Bute between c. 3750 BC and c. 2500 BC** - especially during the relatively poorly-attested period 3500 - 3000 BC? Are we correct in assuming that population was increasing over this period? And is there any evidence for survival of indigenous Mesolithic communities after c. 3750 BC?
2. **Where did the people who constructed the Nether Largie South ([CANMORE ID 39460](#)) Clyde Cairn and the other Neolithic monuments in Kilmartin Glen live?** Currently there is no unequivocal evidence for Neolithic settlement in the Glen; was it solely a 'ceremonial landscape' at the time, or are there remains of habitation waiting to be found?
3. **What was the full range of funerary practices used during this period?** We need better dating of passage tombs and Clyde cairns (and related monuments).
4. **What was the specific trajectory of ceramic development (and development in other aspects of material culture) over this period in Argyll and Bute?** For example, the proposed ceramic sequence for western and south-west Scotland as presented in 2003¹¹⁶ needs to be underpinned by more dates.
5. **Is there further evidence for participation in the Orkney-Boyne nexus in the centuries around 3000 BC?** Is there much more evidence for the use of Grooved Ware to be uncovered in Argyll and Bute? And where, apart from Townhead ([CANMORE ID 40377](#)) on Bute, are the settlements that date to this time? What did participation in this extensive network mean for the social organisation of the farmers in Argyll and Bute? Were they, too, engaging in some kind of competitive conspicuous consumption?
6. **How does cup-and-ring rock art fit into our overall understanding of the nature of society, beliefs, and external contacts in Argyll**

¹¹⁵ RCAHMS, 1988: 138-142

¹¹⁶ Sheridan, 2003

and Bute? Currently it tends to be studied in its own right, but it needs to be situated within Late Neolithic practices (and more dating evidence for its creation is needed).

Outstanding research questions for the Chalcolithic period

1. **Where did the users of Beaker pottery live; what was their subsistence strategy; and what impact (if any) did they have on the environment?** (The abundant evidence for Beaker settlements in the Outer Hebrides is not matched on mainland Argyll.) See [Section 4](#) for comments on our current understanding of the Chalcolithic palaeoenvironment.
2. **How many incomers were there?**
3. **How did the initial immigrants relate to/interact with the indigenous population?** It would appear that they were accepted, since the practice of using Beakers (and associated novelties) clearly continued in Argyll and Bute after the initial appearance of the phenomenon; but we know too little about where and how the indigenous inhabitants were living to have much sense of the interactions. Indeed, the archaeological record for the second quarter of the third millennium is very sparse for Argyll and Bute; we need much more information about lifestyle, material culture and practices. The Beaker novelties seem to appear in a kind of vacuum, although this is clearly a function of archaeological recovery.
4. The users of Beaker pottery appear to have belonged to a socially-differentiated society (as suggested, for example, by the Largizean ([CANMORE ID 40255](#)) halberd hoard); **how did this compare to the nature of indigenous social organisation before 2500 BC?**
5. **Was there any prospecting for, or extraction of, copper in the region at this time?** It is known that copper-bearing rock is present near Kilmartin Glen, for example, but there is no evidence for its use at this time. Were people coming to prospect for copper, as they had done at Ross Island in Co. Kerry, in south-west Ireland¹¹⁷?
6. **Were these people engaged in the north-eastwards movement of copper from Ross Island in County Kerry to north-east Scotland, via the Great Glen,** as seems to have been the case from 2200 BC onwards? It is clear that Ross Island copper was reaching north-east Scotland before 2200 BC, and it may be that Kilmartin Glen was already being used as a routeway up towards the Great Glen but there is no unequivocal evidence for this.

¹¹⁷ O'Brien, 2005

7. Was Iberian copper used for one of the Largizean ([CANMORE ID 40255](#)) halberds? And if so, how had it reached Bute? Was Iberian copper circulating widely at this time?

Key research questions for the Early Bronze Age period (2200/2150 – 1900 BC)

1. Where did the people who were buried in the ostentatious graves live? (Once again, it appears that Kilmartin Glen was used just as a place of burial and ceremony.)
2. Was there a hierarchy of settlement, reflecting an inegalitarian society?
3. Was there regional variability in subsistence activities during this time? How typical is the evidence from Kilellan ([CANMORE ID 37496](#)) and Ardnave ([CANMORE ID 37488](#))?
4. Was control over the flow of metal the only source of wealth and power in this part of Scotland at that time?
5. Was the incoming metal just Irish copper, or were bronze items or ingots also coming in? And was there any local exploitation of copper?

Key research questions for the rest of the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age period (1900 – c. 1100/1000 BC)

1. Is the downturn in expressions of ostentation really related to a decline in the ability of the inhabitants of Argyll and Bute to control the flow of bronze and/or copper, once sources other than Ross Island began to be used?
2. The choreography of climate change and its effects on human behaviour needs to be refined for this period. How, if at all, did settlement and land use change?
3. What was responsible for the shift to cremation as the normative funerary rite over this period?
4. Where did the people who built the monuments in Kilmartin Glen live?

Key research questions for the Late Bronze Age (c. 1100/1000 – 800 BC) period

1. The choreography of climate change and its effects on human behaviour needs to be refined for this period. **How did settlement and land use change?**
2. **What was the nature of farming activities at this time?**
3. **When precisely did the Mòine Mhór expand?**
4. **How did social organisation change over this period?** Does the apparent proliferation of weaponry during the Late Bronze Age relate to an increased incidence of conflict?
5. **From where was the metalwork being obtained over this period?**