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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KILBERRY SCULPTURED STONES



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



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KILBERRY SCULPTURED STONES

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The Kilberry Castle carved stone collection comprises 26 pieces of early Christian, medieval and late medieval sculpture housed within a shelter near Kilberry Castle. Most of were formerly held at the Campbell family mausoleum 40m east of the castle, with others pieces of sculpture from around the Kilberry estate. In 1997, the Kilberry Cross, a broken medieval cross-shaft, was removed from its location near the Cambell Mausoleum and removed to the stone shelter, while a cast was erected in its place.

Notable items in the collection includes three early Christian cross-marked stones, several medieval cross-shafts, and several late medieval graveslabs and effigies carved in the West Highland style. The RCAHMS Argyll Inventory volume 7 gives detailed descriptions.

It is widely believed that the collection probably originates from the medieval parish church that stood in the vicinity of the Campbell of Kilberry mausoleum. First documented in the 14th century, the church is stated to have been burnt in the 1640s by the Campbells of Kilberry whilst besieged by Alasdair MacDonald ('Alasdair MacColla'). The burial ground remained in use until the 18th century, and probably lies beneath the present bowling green.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

c.1350: Kilberry is one of four churches listed as prebends of the Chapter of the Cathedral of the Isles.

c.1620-1660: Kilberry church described as a 'paroch church'.

1640s: The parish church is burnt by the Campbells of Kilberry to prevent it being of any use to the Royalist force of Alasdair MacDonald.

c.1780: The old parish churchyard passes into disuse. The site is later covered by a bowling green. Some sculptured stones removed to the Campbell mausoleum.

pre-1849: head of the Kilberry Cross broken off.

c.1860: cross-head found in woodland nearby and stapled onto the shaft.

c.1865: Kilberry Cross moved to avoid danger of damage from unsafe tree.

1920s: work on a drain beneath the bowling green exposes human remains.

1927: Kilberry Cross is scheduled.

1948: Marion Campbell of Kilberry, archaeologist and local historian, has the stones removed to the castle basement to prevent further deterioration, and invites the Ministry of Works to take them into care.

1951: Ministry of Works shelter constructed.

1997: Kilberry Cross moved to the stone shelter to prevent further deterioration.

2000: the stone collection is surveyed by Historic Scotland conservation staff.

Archaeological Overview

As the stones have been moved from their original locations at least twice, they possess no direct associations with their immediate surroundings.

It is believed that many of the Kilberry stones came from a medieval church dedicated to either St Berach (an Irish chronicler who noted the accession of Macbeth to the Kingship of Scotland) or St Berchan (an Irish saint of the 7th century). The church is known to have stood in the vicinity of the Campbell Mausoleum as rubble footings appear to align with the mausoleum. The burial ground probably lies beneath the bowling green as human bones were recovered during work on a drain beneath the green in the 1920s. Writing in 1948, Marion Campbell of Kilberry stated that an ancestor had the parish burial ground moved elsewhere, with an agreement that the burial ground would not be ploughed.

The collection has been the subject of several academic studies, the earliest in 1846 by J S Howson as part of his 'Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Argyllshire'. T P White's 'Archaeological Sketches in Scotland', published in 1876, provided descriptions and illustrations of the stones. Marion Campbell of Kilberry published a number of articles and a guidebook on the stones throughout the 20th century. RCAHMS provided the most comprehensive study of the stones in Argyll 7. The late medieval stones are discussed in Steer and Bannerman's 'Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands', while the early Christian material features in Ian Fisher's 2001 monograph 'Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands'.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

The Kilberry collection comprises 26 sculptured stones arranged along either side of the shelter's central wall. The stones range from incised early Christian grave markers, fragments of medieval crosses and a large number of graveslabs (including two effigies) in the highly elaborate and finely detailed West Highland tradition. Several post-medieval slabs show the loss of quality in the period after the decline of the West Highland carving tradition.

Early Christian

The three early Christian gravemarkers are all cross-marked, one bearing a deeply chip-carved hexafoil cross within an incised circle.

Medieval

There are eight medieval graveslabs, a mixture of complete slabs and fragments. The majority are tapered, and most have some form of leaf decoration or plant scroll within a border; some also bear swords. RCAHMS dates these between the 14th and 16th centuries.

Three slabs are particularly notable for their carving. The first is decorated with a network of intertwined plant stems, springing from the tails of two pairs of animals at its top, while at the foot of the stone there is a comb, inverted shears and what appears to be a rectangular casket. The other slabs bear effigies carved in relief and show aketon-clad warriors. One also bears an inscription: 'HIC IACET IO/HA(N)NES M[A]V/RITI(I) ET EIV/S FILIVS' (Here lies John, son of Mauritius, and his son). The other has a small depiction of St Michael slaying the dragon carved in its top left corner. RCAHMS identifies the first as belonging to the Kintyre 'School' of carving, while the pair of effigies are considered to be the work of the

Iona 'School'. The name Mauritius is probably a Latinisation of the Gaelic name Muiredach or Murchadh, common amongst the MacMurachies, who are reputed to have held the Kilberry area at one time.

The collection also includes fragments of six crosses, believed to be of 14th to 16th century date. These include cross-heads, cross-shafts and cruciform stones, at least one of which was probably re-cut from earlier monuments at a later date.

The most significant of these is the Kilberry Cross, a cross-shaft standing 1.05m in height. The west face of the shaft bears three figures, a mounted warrior on a rearing horse at the bottom, in the centre a robed and mitred cleric with one hand raised in benediction while the other holds an archbishop's staff, and part of a second robed figure at the top of the shaft. The east face is decorated with intricate leaf-scroll looping around a pair of back-to-back prancing lions at the foot of the cross.

Associated with the Kilberry Cross is a cross-head, bearing a depiction of the crucifixion surrounded by plant-scroll. The cross has a fleur-de-lys finial while the foot of the cross is supported in the mouth of a small dragon. The rear of the cross-head is worn. Discovered in the 19th century, the cross-head was fixed onto the shaft as it was believed to be the missing part of the Kilberry Cross.

One cross-shaft bears an inverted sword on one face while the other has a miniature effigy, with what appears to be a female figure kneeling with a rosary.

Post-medieval

This group comprises seven irregularly-shaped slabs, dating from the 16th or 17th centuries, a period following the decline in the West Highland carving tradition. The execution of these stones is of a cruder quality, which are largely decorated with simple repeated geometric forms.

Social Overview

A lack of formal research into the social significance of these monuments hinders any assessment. However, the monuments feature in several archaeological guides to the area.

Spiritual Overview

As many, if not all, of these stones were created as gravemarkers or acts of religious devotion, the collection holds some spiritual significance in this sense.

Aesthetic Overview

The stone shelter lies within the scenic grounds of Kilberry Castle, in an area close to the sea.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The fate of the upper part of the Kilberry Cross is unknown.
- There is a persistent tradition in the area that there was a monastery at Kilberry although there is no documentary evidence to support this.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- The early Christian stones of the collection are significant as they show that Kilberry probably has a long-standing history as an ecclesiastical centre. Apart from Iona, Knapdale has the richest concentration of early Christian stones in the region.
- The development of a highly distinctive West Highland style of art is one of the most remarkable aspects of life in late medieval Scotland. Apart from a few rare artefacts, such as the Queen Mary harp or the Guthrie bell-shrine, this rich tradition is represented by monumental sculpture as found at Kilmartin churchyard.
- The effigies in this collection are probably the work of a mason of the Iona 'school', one of the finest in terms of detail and style.
- The inscribed effigy links with the claim that the MacMurachies were once proprietors of the Kilberry area.

Associated Properties

Kilmartin churchyard (collection with similar range of material); **Iona Abbey** (probably the production centre for Iona school carvings, and the richest collection of Iona school carvings); Kilberry Castle (the church stood in the grounds of the castle, and was burnt by the garrison in the 1640s); **Oronsay Priory** (which houses a similar collection)

Keywords hexafoil; cross; early Christian; cross-shaft; Kilberry Cross; cross-head; plant-scroll; interlace pattern; effigy; graveslab; West Highland;