

## HIGHLAND KIRKYARDS: Ross and Cromarty Pilot Project



1. Name of Kirkyard: Kilchrist Graveyard  
from HER (Kilchrist Burial Ground – Highland Council)

2. National Grid Reference: NH 5388 4920

3. Civil Parish: Urray

4. Description: A roofed redundant chapel within an old kirkyard. The late medieval church was the scene of a terrible massacre. In 1603, whilst the Mackenzie congregation were inside the chapel, a party of MacDonalds locked them in and set the church ablaze. It is said that the MacDonald piper walked round the church playing to mask the screams of those inside. The church was restored as a shell by W.C. Joass c.1870 and is now used as a mausoleum by the Mackenzie Gillanders family of Highfield. The graves in the burial ground are orientated to the east and the graveyard is reasonably maintained.

5. Setting: Rural. A single-track country road skirts the southern boundary of the kirkyard, leading to farms and farmhouses to the south and east. Open aspect fields to north and west. There are a few trees dotted about the graveyard, including Yews.

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6. Designations and Significance: The terrible tale attached to this site makes it an important memorial to those who were massacred. The simplicity of the building adds to the quiet atmosphere of the place which seems fitting. The use of the church as a mausoleum by a branch of the Mackenzie family continues the link with the site. The site has been used since medieval times and so has layers of history. There is a late 17<sup>th</sup> century stone burial enclosure on site and the church shows evidence of changes over time through blocked openings and 19<sup>th</sup> century additions such as the window in the east gable. The graveyard shows a range of gravestones, some now no more than small tips of stone poking up out of the ground, as well as table tops and uprights. The coped rubble walls are by Ross and Joass, who also restored the church and inserted the window in the east gable, c.1870. Kilchrist Chapel and Burial Ground were B-listed on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971.

Scheduled Ancient Monument

Listed Building

### 7. Elements:

**Redundant Kirk/Chapel:** The late medieval church was burned by the MacDonalds in 1603 with the Mackenzie congregation inside. It was restored as a shell by W.C. Joass c.1870. It is used as a mausoleum by the Mackenzie Gillanders of Highfield. The rectangular structure is roofed, and quite plain apart from a three light Gothic window in the east gable by Joass. Other windows in the structure have been filled in. A pointed arch wooden door allows entry in the south wall. The window in the east gable cannot be viewed properly as vegetation outside the church partially hides it. The west gable is leaning noticeably outwards and a more in depth structural assessment should be made. Patchy harling is revealing sandstone which is weathering. The roof has one or two slates missing but is in fairly good condition.

**Boundary Walls:** Rubble walls with semicircular coping stones, (Ross and Joass, 1862), surround the rectangular site. The southern stone wall skirts the road and acts as a retaining wall as the ground inside the kirkyard is higher the surrounding land to south. Mature tree roots are pushing into this wall, but could cause further damage if removed. The wall to the east is wavy and the ground inside the site is built up high against it. The north and west stone walls are more visible.

**Railings, Gates and Gateways:** A plain metal entrance gate is found in the south west corner of the kirkyard. It is set into two arched slabs which are covered by the semicircular coping of the boundary wall.

**Burial Enclosures:** To the south east of the church a white rendered stone burial enclosure with iron railing detail, for MacIennan. Bushes cover the east side. To the east of the church, stone built burial enclosure with an iron gate housing 20<sup>th</sup> century memorials. Evidence of large burrowing.

### 8. Ownership of Kirkyard:

Highland Council

Private

Other

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9. Risk: The most immediate risk is posed by the leaning building which needs to be properly structurally assessed and secured.

There is a small risk from the burrowing animals to the gravestones in one of the burial enclosures.

The vegetation in front of the east gable may pose a problem if not monitored.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic stone finials have been replaced with iron ones which has left the stone pair lying under a pile of leaves in the burial ground.

Vegetation is also a threat for one of the burial enclosures. Otherwise, a reasonably maintained graveyard.

On   No

10. Ancillary Issues:

**ACCESS:** Small boggy grassed area in front of south wall for parking. There is a larger tarmac covered area just after the site, in the middle of a group of farm buildings and houses. There are no paths on the site and the ground is somewhat uneven.

**INTERPRETATION:** There is no interpretation on site.