Logie Wester Burial Ground and Memorial Stones

NH 53528 54064

Also known as Loggie Wester, Logie Bride, Kilbride, Conanside and Old Conan.

Anne MacInnes and Members of NoSAS
Logie Wester burial ground is privately owned, and situated on Conan estate land just north of Conan House. Access is along a riverside track from Conon Bridge.

It has also been known as Loggie Wester, Logie Bride, Loggie Bride, Kilbride, Conanside and Old Conan.

The site is now quiet and isolated but at one time was situated on a routeway and beside a ford over the River Conon. The medieval road from Redcastle and Tarradale on the Beauly Firth came down by Bishop Kinkell, David’s Fort, past the township of Logiereich where Conan House (built in 1758), now stands, to the ford over the river. Wade’s (Avery) map of 1730 shows this ford over to Dunglass Island on the Conon River, along with the ferries at Scuddle at Conon village and another over to Brahan Castle. The routeways are also marked, indicating that the site was actually at a crossroads.

These routes were no doubt in use long before any map was produced.

In 1770 Bishop Forbes described an incident at Scuddle ferry which also relates to its physical relationship with the ford at Logie Wester. ‘At the boat of Scuddle some little dispute in Galic happened between Pitlundy and the
boatman, the latter insisting it was best for the Chaise to cross by the Ford rather than the ferry, the water being rather low, and offering to ride Pitlundy’s horse to direct the passage. Mr Cameron joined Pitlundy, alleging danger, but I begged leave to observe that the boatman would never run the risk of drowning for a frolic. Upon this the point was yielded and our driver declared he had never forded a Water more easily, the ford being pretty far up the water and out of our sight’ (Craven 1923,274)

The Scuddle ferry was replaced in 1810 by the Conon bridge.

**HISTORY**

The site is within the parish of Urquhart and on the Conan estate owned by the Mackenzies.

The area was known to have been occupied by the Northern Picts who had their headquarters at Inverness where King Brude was visited by St Columba in 565AD. Pictish forts were probably situated at Knockfarrel, Ord Hill, and Craig Phadrig. Several Pictish stone fragments have also been discovered in the vicinity, and now a cross slab at this ancient burial ground coupled with a Pictish barrow cemetery at Tarradale, supports the need for further research into the area.

This information also suggests that this has been an important site in the local landscape from the early medieval period.

The first written evidence suggests that Logie Wester was associated with the Diocese of Ross and the cathedral in Fortrose, the parish Priest of Urquhart and Logie Wester was the Treasurer of Ross. The Parish work was carried out by Vicars who lived in the Parishes while the Priests lived in manses near the cathedral.

It is possible that the parsonage of Logie Wester may have been a prebend of Ross by 1227 if its holder was one of the undesignated canons subscribing to an Episcopal agreement in that year. (Cowan) Logie Wester is one of 6 parishes in the diocese of Ross out of an eventual total of 37 pre-reformation parishes to be mentioned at this date.
By 1227 the vicarage of the parish of Longiebride had been erected, the name suggesting the existence of an earlier chapel (Cowan 1967 138) dedicated to St. Bride an early Christian Celtic saint (452 to 524 AD). However she did not come to Scotland. In ‘Dingwall’s Thousand Years’ (pg 280) the site is referred to as Allt Bride with a possible sepulchral cairn dedicated to her. This also ties in with the discovery of the Pictish cross slab and indicates an early and long used site.

In 1238 the garbal teinds of the parish of Logie Wester were assigned to the prebend of the archdeacon of Ross by Robert first Bishop of Ross (Cowan I.B. Parishes of Medieval Scotland SRS VOL 93)

On the re-erection of the chapter of the diocese of Ross in 1255/6 when 15 parishes are mentioned Logie Wester was disjoined from the arch deaconry.

In 1275 Logynbrid is listed in Bagimond’s Roll and had a vicar ( Bagimond’s Roll, 49-50)

The Scottish reformation took place in 1560, and the Parish of Urquhart came under the Presbytery of Dingwall, supervised by the Synod of Ross.

After the battle of Worcester in 1651, Cromwell’s soldiers overran Scotland planting garrisons, at, among other places, Inverness and Brahan. It is noted in the minutes of the Presbytery of Dingwall that ‘the presence of the English was not liked and on the 16th December 1651, the Presbytery met at Logie Wester privately, in regard of the enemie’

The foundations of Logie Wester Church have been calculated at 66ft by 30ft , a stone building thatched with heather. It had a loft, probably added to in the 17th century. (William Young 1984) Due to its position at the west end of the united parishes it always struggled to compete with the more centrally placed Urquhart Church. Both the records of the Kirk session and Presbytery of Dingwall show this with services dwindling in number and parish Ministers being ordered to hold services there.

Observations noted from The Kirk Session records 1729-1773 ref HR/673 (Urquhart).
29/06/1729

The Kirk needs thatched with heather. The Minister is appointed to contact Rory Dingwall to thatch the roof, and order the tenants to bring home the thatch. The window is to be fixed by a glazier from Culbokie. ‘The Session considering that the Kirk of Loggie is not only little but ill accommodated in seats especially that of the common loft is not filled with pews, appoints Rory McKenzie of Loggie to take the dimensions of the said loft and buy timber to repair it and be refunded by the session’

By August, the thatch has still not been collected and it is noted in November that the thatching continues.

11/05/1730 People who held burials at Urquhart or Loggie on the Sabbath at the same time as services at the other Kirk were declared ‘profamers’

1732; The charm of sieve and shears over water was used at Loggie to solve the theft of napkins. Noted that charms were used a lot at Loggie.

Observations noted from the minutes of the Presbytery of Dingwall show meetings at Loggie Wester until 1747.

10/09/1747; The Minister petitioned that “The Church of Urquhart is ruinous and like to fall” “people are in constant fear of the Church falling on them in time of worship”

13/10/1747; Meeting held at Urquhart.

“Baille Alexander Mackenzie pleaded for Gairloch, as the whole of his estate is in the Parish of Loggie which he reckons a different parish having a separate church which is also ruinous, that he be excused from any Burden with respect to the Reparation of this Kirk (Urquhart), and he being heard at full length”

However he was told that it did not appear to the meeting that there were two district Parishes and therefore no necessity to build or uphold two Kirks, or for any Heritor to be excused from a proportion of the expenses of building the new Kirk at Urquhart.
When he protested again that if he should pay for this then the heritors should also pay for the reparation of Loggie Wester he was told that there appeared to be no authentic document that ever showed there were two distinct Parishes, or any agreement that the Heritors should bear any phase of the Burden of the Kirk at Loggie. He was told it was up to him to decide if he wanted to repair Loggie Wester.

I suspect that after this the Kirk at Loggie Wester was unused and allowed to fall into ruin. However the burial ground continued to be used until the late 19th, early 20th century.

The Church at Urquhart was finished in 1751.

In 1792 the Rev. Charles Calder, the author of the OSA, Old Statistical Account Vol V  203 -17, states that there is no written record of the parishes of Urquhart and Logie Wester being united. The parochial records of 1709 shows one parish. He notes that “Loggy, the name of the parish, is a Gaelic word, descriptive of the situation of the old church of the parish, of which the ruins are still extant in a pleasant valley, on the water of Conan, with the contiguous grounds gently sloping towards it, and overlooked by those on the opposite side of the river. It is called Loggy Wester, to distinguish it from another parish of the same name, within the bounds of this Synod”

Four accounts about the burial ground:

The battle of Logiebride took place by the ford in 1597 at Candlemass between John M’Gillichallum assisted by the Mackenzies and Alexander Bain assisted by the Munros over a land dispute. Several people were killed but eventually the Bains submitted themselves to the Mackenzies and they were all reconciled by the mediation of friends.

In 1820 Hugh Miller was employed as a stone mason during the construction of the steading at Conan Mains and he describes the site,

“Our own side of the river, the more immature but fresh and thickly-clustered woods of Conan House rose along the banks; and I was delighted to
find among them a ruinous chapel and ancient burying-ground, occupying, in a profound solitary corner, a little green hillock, once an island of the river, but now left dry by the gradual wear of the channel, and the consequent fall of the water to a lower level. A few broken walls rose on the highest peak of the eminence; the slope was occupied by the little mossy hillocks and sorely lichenized tombstones that mark the ancient grave-yard;”

(Miller describes a rusting sundial beside the ruins, but we found no trace of it and by the time he visited again 25 years later the chapel walls had almost disappeared.)

There is also the undated legend of the Conon wraith; a group of men harvesting their crops above the ford and close to the chapel heard a voice coming from the ford “The hour’s come, but not the man”. Shortly after this a man on horseback, in a hurry, arrived at the scene making for the ford, but at the ‘fause ford’ actually a deep adjacent pool was stopped by the men explaining what they had heard. He did not want to be stopped, but was forced off his horse and locked in the chapel for his own safety. When the men deemed the danger hour had passed they went to release him but found him drowned in the small stone font. He did not escape his fate.

Another description of the chapel is provided by Dr John Mackenzie of Eileanach who wrote his memoirs towards the end of his life – he died in 1886. (Quoted in Byam-Shaw 1988, 59-60)

“ But I must go to earth – to our funerals of old. Our introduction to them arose from the burial ground and ruins of the old Logie Wester chapel being within four hundred yards of Conan House, on the bank of the river- I presume a Popish chapel, for the Conan henwife carried off and used for her hens’ drinking vessel a cupped stone that I remember projecting from the wall close to the ruined doorway. A pretty high stone wall, with long grass on its turfed top, surrounded the burial ground, and through this grass we boys privately inspected the proceedings inside at a funeral. A cart usually brought the coffin, a greybeard or an anker of whisky, with a box full of oatcakes and cheese. Also tools for the grave-digging. The refreshments were laid on one of the many elevated tombstones, and while one party took their turn digging the grave, the others refreshed themselves- and sometimes so liberally that they did not
resemble mourners. When the grave was ready the coffin was placed in it and then the whole party finished the refreshments, and generally so freely that the blood of one or more boiled over about some ancient jar, requiring fists ere all was smooth. We waited patiently till the row began, quite certain, if it was a ‘respectable funeral ‘( i.e. One where whiskey was liberally provided), that a good fight would be a consequent result. And we sometimes helped to keep up the blood boiling by a clever pelt of a stone on one of the combatants- we vanishing instantly into the jungle around”

The only reference I can find to the different spellings of Conan and Conon are in a letter correspondence (OS Name Books 1848-1852 vol 31,OA1/28/31/37A) between,

“Ordnance Survey Office, Inverness, 1st May 1872

Dear Sir Kenneth,

The spelling of your house and mains has been given to my men as “Conan House” “Conan Mains” many other objects in the vicinity take their name apparently from the river i.e.”Conon Inn” “Conon Station” “Conon Village” Will you kindly inform me if you approve of the mode of spelling in the two first named instances appearing on the Ordnance Plans?

Yrs.(Yours) very truly (signed) A.B. Coddington Capt. R.E. (Captain Royal Engineers)

To: Sir Kenneth Mackenzie Bart. (Baronet)

Ft. George, 2nd May

My dear Sir,

I always spell Conan with an “a” and it is only due to the accidental mis-spelling of the Inn signboard that the name has come to be spelt differently in the other cases you refer to. The Station and the Post Office are however now known officially as Conon and I suppose the spelling cannot now be altered, but I should like my own house and farm to be spelt Conan.

I thank you for your enquiries about this and I am yours very faithfully

(signed) Kenneth S. Mackenzie
SITE AND SURVEY

The burial ground, which is surrounded by mature woodland, lies on an eroded mound that was possibly an earlier island, beside the River Conon. It measures approximately 70 x 35m and rises to a height of 3m from the path on its eastern edge. The west side of the site runs parallel to a backwater of the river Conon with steep banks that are undercut and unstable in places.

The site was surveyed using linked planetables. (see fig. 1)

The resulting plan illustrates clearly the current layout, and sloping nature of the site with an earlier bank/boundary at the south end creating an oval shaped area more typical of early church/burial ground sites. The path leading to the ford on the south side of the burial ground is very overgrown and boggy. The burial ground is bounded by a stone dyke, ruinous in some sections, and a later iron post and wire fence. The dyke has fallen into the river in places on the west side. When visited in 2005 several cut stones and iron sections with fleur-de-lys were found in the river, however this was not attempted during this survey as the banks have eroded further. On the east side there is an earlier entrance, with an associated small building attached, perhaps a mort house. The current entrance is on the north east side with an iron gate.
Levels taken during the survey clearly indicate the chapel platform. (see fig.2) and the measurements noted match those described by William Young in 1984.
when he describes the foundations of the chapel as measuring 66ft(20m) x 30ft(9m).

As the burial ground in this area is now filled with graves it is difficult to confirm what are footings or lair boundaries, but away from the chapel area the site follows a more natural slope.

Hugh Miller describes the site as “a little green hillock, once an island of the river, but now left dry by the gradual wear of the channel, and the consequent fall of the water to a lower level.”

Using information from the Scottish Remote Sensing Portal which contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0, lidar survey information was processed. (copyright Alan Thompson)
This survey represents what is present today, but illustrates why the site was once considered to be an island and used as an ancient burial ground to escape predators.

The estate map of 1791 shows two unroofed buildings within the burial ground. A larger chapel and smaller building to the south.

By 1830 only footings remain.
To survey the memorial stones, the burial ground was divided into 6 sections, A – F, and each stone’s location marked on the section plans using tape and off-set methods. (Full details in the recording section of the report.)

The earliest stones found were an incised cross stone and a Pictish cross slab, (see site plans and records) both now removed for conservation, study, and display in Dingwall Museum with permission from the landowner. A few pre-reformation (1560) medieval carved slabs were also found under a covering of moss, some had been reused at a later date. These were also recorded and covered for their protection. Other stones ranged from small unmarked headstones, and lair markers to more elaborate table tombs and obelisks. The earliest dated stone is an ornate table tomb dated 1710. Lairs were marked using posts and railings or chains and sometimes just the lair markers. The burial ground has not been used for internments for over 100 years, although later commemorations are inscribed on family stones.
Finally each stone was measured and surveyed based on a recording form drawn up by Stuart Farrell and photographed.

A lair plan from 1903 has yew trees marked on it and most of these are still growing in the burial ground. We have also marked them on the plane table drawing.

References

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Online: OS name books and Wade’s plan

Estate maps and lair plan, copyright Conan house archives

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Plane table drawings and photographs, copyright NoSAS

Thanks go to: John Mackenzie for allowing this survey to take place.

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Anne MacInnes 2020