

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



FIELD MONUMENTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

4 DISTR:CT SKYE AND LOCHALSH		5 PARISH SNIZORT		1 SITE CODE H N G 4 4 N W 0 0 3	
7 AREA STATUS		8 SITE STATUS SCHEDULED		2 NGR N G 4 1 8 2 4 8 5 0 C E	
11 CONCORDANCE osNG 44 NW 3		12 FORM STANDING STRUCTURES		9 REGIONAL STATUS	
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS		17 CONDITION INCOMPLETE		6 SITE NAME SKEABOST ISLAND	
20 LAND USE CEMETERY = ROUGH PASTURE		21 GEOLOGY		10 GENERIC TYPE CHURCH + CHAPEL + GRAVEYARD	
22 SOILS		23 VEGETATION		14 PERIOD/DATE EM = LM	
24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE		25 RELIEF ISLAND = PENINSULAR		15 DATING METHOD DOC.	
28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)		26 ASPECT NW		18 SHAPE	
29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)		27 ALTITUDE 8 = 15m O.D.		19 THREAT AND DATE	
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY:1904:6" MAP 2. MUIR, T.S:1885:ECCLESIOLOGICAL NOTES ON SOME OF THE ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND: : :p35 3. MACGIBBON AND ROSS:1896:THE ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE OF SCOT.: : :p68-9 4. :1795:OLD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT: : : 5. RCAHMS:1928:SKYE INVENTORY:HMSO:pp192-3,No.616 6. SIMPSON,W.D:1927:THE HISTORICAL ST. COLUMBA: : :pp28&65 7. ORDNANCE SURVEY:1903:25" MAP (OVER)					
30 GROUND PLAN NO.		31 GROUND PHOTO NO. AO/61/69/4			
32 SLIDES NO.		33 HR. AP. NO.			
34 NMR. AP. NO.		35 OTHER AP. NO. SOURCE			
36 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION					
37 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY			38 SAMPLES		
39 PALYNOLOGY			40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.		
41 SMALL FINDS				42 MUSEUM/LOCATION	
43 OTHER					
44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER				45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER	
46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT				47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT	
48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS					
49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE				50 RECORDER: DATE FJ: 17.6.1986	
				51 CHECK: DATE FB: 26.6.1986	
52 TEXT					

"See continuation cards for text & illustrations."

"NG 418 485 Skeabost Island, St Columbas Church and other ecclesiastical remINS." (9)

(i)

52.

HNG 44 NWO03

"NG 4182 4850 Chapel (site of)" (1)(7)

"NG 4182 4850 Graveyard " (8)

" Skeabost Island is occupied by a churchyard containing the ruins of two churches, one of comparatively late date, and the other a Teampull, smaller and much earlier.

Both Muir (2) and MacGibbon (3), however, describe "a group of five or six chapels, the shell of two pretty entire, the others nearly reduced to the ground." The latter continues, "fragments of an enclosing wall or rampart can also be traced," and infers that it was probably a Celtic monastic establishment. The Old Statistical Account of Scotland (4) supports this, saying it was formerly "a habitation of monks and priests" and was in all probability the "metropolitan church of the whole island of Skye".

The teampull is dedicated to St. Columba. In 1501 "Schir Nichol Berchame" was "chapellane of the parsonage of Sanct Colmez Kirk in Sneesford in Trotternish, in the lordship of the Islis, togidder with the annexis and the vicarigis thair of, that is to say Kilmolowok and Kilmory in Walternes." (11) (but see Simpson(6))

The vicarage of Snizort and Raasay was received in 1526 by Sir Donald Monis. In 1561 the parsonage of Snizort pertained to the Bishop of the Isles"

(5)(11)(12)

"The site is associated with a Pictish symbol stone (Clach Ard HNG44NWO01), and is in all probability not to be assigned to St. Columba whose genuine foundations bore the name Columkille." (6)

"Scheduled"(10)

" The teampull and church on Skeabost Island are substantially as described by the RCAHMS (5) but deterioration of the fabric has taken place since the report and the SW corner is in a very unstable condition. The whole of the churchyard is in a neglected state. "

(OSFI:CFW:11.4.1961)

Church and Teampull, Skeabost Island.

—The island in the River Snizort, about 100 yards below Skeabost Bridge and about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile above its mouth, some $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-west of Portree, is occupied by a churchyard containing the ruins of two churches, one of comparatively late date and the other, the Teampull, smaller and much earlier.

CHURCH.—This building, which stands almost east and west and measures externally about 79 feet in length and 26 feet 9 inches in breadth, is now represented by grass-covered mounds rising generally about 2 feet above ground near the centre of the island. It has been encroached on by walled private burying grounds, and the only piece of building visible is on the north side near the eastern end. It would seem to have had a chancel.

FONT.—A broken stone font or stoup roughly square in shape, measuring 16 inches in length by 15 inches in breadth and 11 inches in height, with a cavity 10 inches in diameter at the mouth and 8 inches deep, was observed in 1914 lying on the grassy mound of the western wall of the church. It cannot now be found.

TEAMPULL.—Towards the west end of the island is the roofless church of St Columba in a fairly good state of preservation, the southern wall being somewhat broken down. It is orientated almost due east and west and measures 15 feet 10 inches in length and 9 feet 4 inches in breadth in the inside, the walls of stone and shell lime being 2 feet 8 inches thick. The northern wall, which is complete, stands 7 feet high; the gables are about 11 feet. Both gables are intaken 5 inches at the wall head, indicating that we have to do with an early mediæval not an old Celtic structure. The door, which wants the lintel, is 3 feet wide on the outside, being splayed on either side towards the interior; it is placed 4 feet 7 inches from the north-west corner of the building. There are two windows, both with inward splays. The first, in the centre of the east gable, 2 feet 9 inches from the ground, measures 20 inches in length by 5 inches in breadth externally and 3 feet 5 inches in height and 2 feet 3 inches in breadth internally; and the second, in the south wall, 7 feet 3 inches from the south-east corner, is broken on the western jamb.

The building is mainly of polygonal stones packed with some rectangular and many small stones.

HISTORICAL NOTE.—This church bears the name of St Columba. In 1501 "Schir Nichol Berchame" was "chapellane of the parsonage of Sanct Colmez Kirk in Sneesfurd in Trouterness, in the lordschip of the Islis, togidder with the annexis and vicaragis thairof, that is to say Kilmolowok in Raasy and Kilmory in Walternes (Vaternish)."¹

The vicarage of Snizort and Raasay ("Sneisport and Rairsay") was received in 1526 by Sir Donald Monro, author of the *Description of the Western Isles* (1549).² In 1561 "the personage of Snisport in Troutirnesse" pertained to the Bishop of the Isles.³ The parish of Snizort till 1726 included what was then disjoined to form the parish of Portree.

¹ *Reg. Sec. Sig. I.*, No. 675.

² *Orig. Paroch.*, vol. ii., part i., p. 355.

³ *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, p. 4.



FIG. 276—Effigy in Churchyard, Skeabost Island (No. 610).

In the dexter top corner the initials RMS are cut in late lettering. These are said to refer to a family named MacSween, who would have used this stone to mark their place of burial.¹ In the sinister corner is a small winged figure grasping a spear in his left hand and treading on an animal—St Michael.

Near by is a slab with a figure in high relief, which is clothed in the usual quilted coat to the knees with a very high pointed bascinet and camail; the right hand clasps the belt, the left rests on the quillon of the sword. This figure is broken at the feet and is much worn by weather. Within the church is another similar figure slab in high relief, which also is broken and badly weathered: in this case there is no quilted coat, while the claymore is grasped at the hilt by the left hand and hangs between the legs.

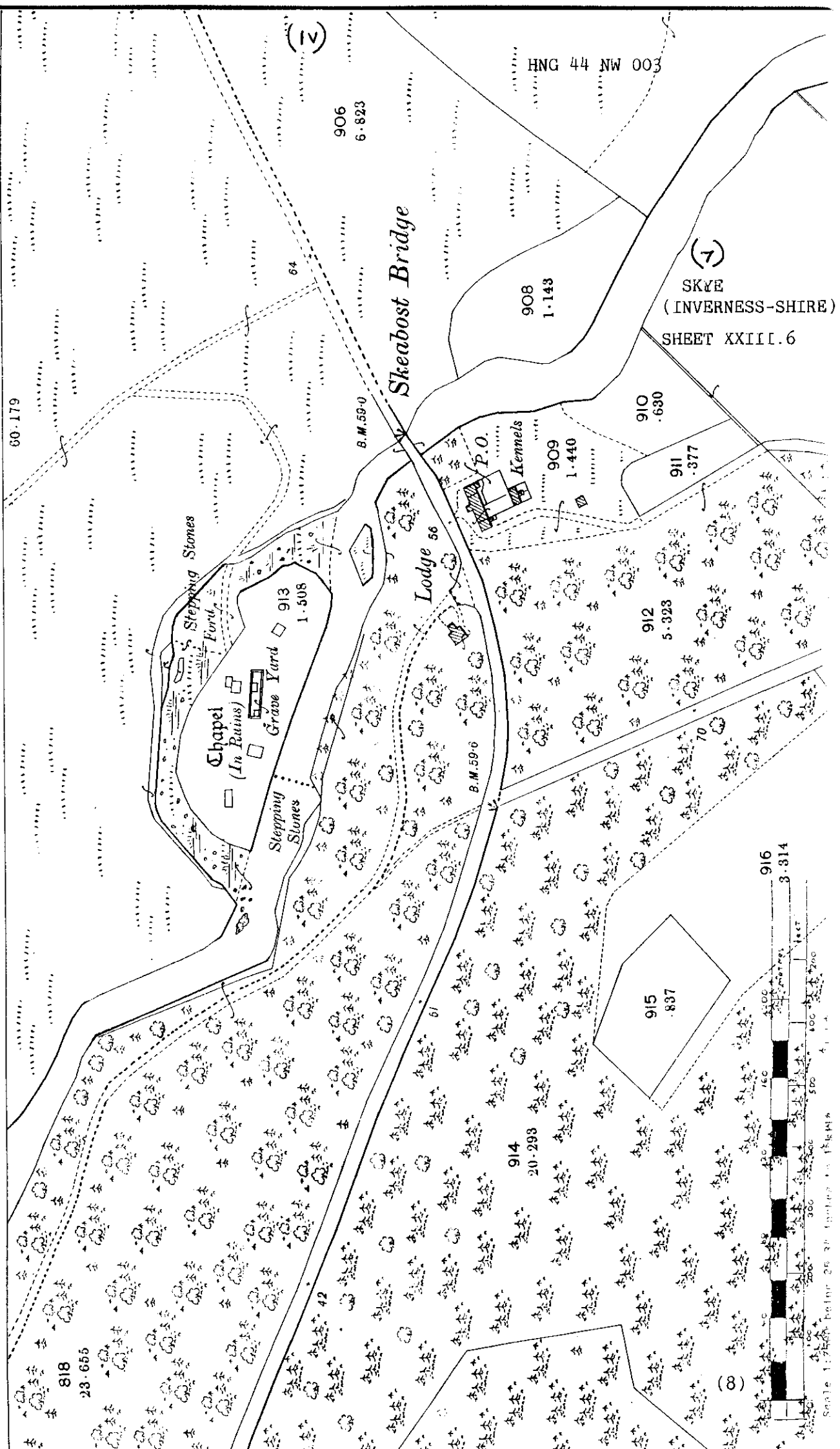
There is said to be a fourth figured slab, but it could not be found; the churchyard is in the usual island condition of being neglected and thickly overgrown.

MONUMENTAL EFFIGIES, SKEABOST ISLAND.—There are at least three grave slabs in the kirkyard with the figure of a knight carved in relief on their upper face. The best preserved lies to the south-west of the late church. It is of the usual bluish schist and measures 6 feet 7 inches in length, 2 feet in breadth at the top tapering to 1 foot 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the foot, and about 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. In a sunk panel following the contour of the figure it bears an armed man with a bascinet, camail of banded mail and quilted coat reaching to the knees. The hands are held in front, the left grasping a claymore 3 feet 6 inches long with the hilt 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and depressed quillons 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long. The blade tapers from 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the quillons to 2 inches at the point.

MMS

In the dexter top corner the initials RMS

IMS



(IV)

(7)

SKYE (INVERNESS-SHIRE)

SHEET XXIII.6

(8)

Scale 1:25000
Feet
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000

8. 'Scheduled under 'St. Columba's church'

29. 8. ORDNANCE SURVEY:1966:1/10,000 MAP
9. HBM (SDD):1985:LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
10. MACLEOD, F.T:1910:PROC.SOC.ANT.SCOT.:VOL.44:pp373-75
11. :1855:ORIGINES PAROCHIALES SCOTIA:VOL.2,pt 1:p355
12. : :COLLECTONEA DE REBUS ALBANICUS: :p4
13. : :REGISTRUM SECRETI SIGILL REGUM SCOTORUM:VOL.I:No.675

"In an islet in the river Snizort at this place there is an open burying-

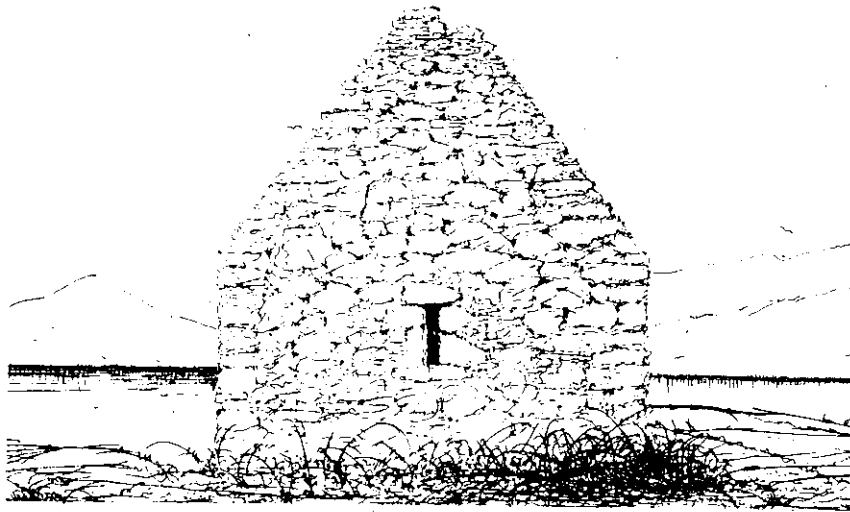


FIG. 31.—Skeabost, Skye. East Elevation.

* For a further example of a primitive church and cells, see the Brough of Deerness, described by Sir H. Dryden in the following pages.

ground containing a group of five or six chapels, the shell of two pretty entire, the others reduced nearly to the ground. Of the former, the one least perfect (Fig. 31) is a featureless building, externally 82 feet in length; the other—probably that mentioned in the *Originales Parochiales* as dedicated to St. Columba—is externally 21 feet in length, and has a flat-headed window (Fig. 32), 2 feet in height and 6 inches wide, in the east end, the west end blank. In the larger building there is a basin of a baptismal font, square, with rounded corners.”*

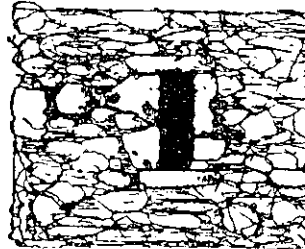


FIG. 32.—Window, St. Columba, Skeabost, Skye.

“On making the shore one is immediately struck with the intensely ecclesiastical character of the spot. From end to end the islet is covered with the remains of chapels.” †

Here we find a group of chapels which were formerly surrounded by a marsh, while fragments of an enclosing wall or rampart can also be traced.

Skeabost burial-ground is situated within a stone's-throw of Skeabost Bridge post office, about 6 miles from Portree. Adjacent to it there are ruins which indicate the existence in early times of a church of considerable size and importance. The site of the burial-ground itself is upon land which, under normal conditions, is a small peninsula, but which in times of heavy floods and severe weather is quickly converted into an island. The absence of access in times of flood involves great self-sacrifice, when the coffins have, of necessity, to be borne by the followers through water many feet deep.

The first stone of interest I found here was a monumental slab with a full-length effigy in relief, resting in a recumbent position in a little square building, which at one time, obviously, formed part of the church. The stone was of such a size and the effigy stood out in such strong relief that it was impossible to procure a rubbing of it; and the building was so confined and dark that a satisfactory photograph could not be obtained. The sculptured figure is that of a man in armour, both hands grasping a sword of considerable size.

Just outside this little building was another monumental slab, so much broken that it was impossible to recognise anything except that it contained a similar figure of a warrior grasping a sword.

About twenty yards to the south-west was a third monument of similar design, by far the best specimen of the three. The stone was in a



Fig. 1. Slab with Effigy at Skeabost.

recumbent position, but I had it lifted on end and photographed (fig. 1).

The figure of the man in armour is enclosed in a Gothic niche, and is excellently carved in the usual style of the West Highland effigies. This monument (as doubtless also the other two) was doing duty to mark a not very-ancient burial, and on it there were comparatively modern initials, which, I was informed, refer to a family of MacSweens.

There is also another stone carved in a primitive and curious manner, to which an interesting tradition is attached. It is a recumbent monument in memory of a woman who was killed by a bull. The carved figure is that of the skeleton of a woman, the sex being indicated by the presence of what appears to be a "mutch" round the skull. On either side of the skeleton two hoof-marks are carved to indicate the manner of death.

Having been informed that an ancient *copan baistilth* or baptismal font had been seen in this burial-ground, I made inquiries, and located the place where it lay. Until comparatively recently it was entire, but now, owing to the effect of the weather and neglect, it is gradually breaking up. It is simply a rough-hewn hollowed-out stone, with no ornamentation.