

St. COLUMBA'S ISLAND

This ancient ecclesiastical complex is first recorded in 11th Century Norwegian documents as the seat of the Bishop of the Isles, a suffragan bishop of the Archdiocese of Trondheim.

It next appears on record in 1223 when Godred Donn, son of the Norse King of Man and the Isles, was surprised and mutilated here, by his uncle, while he was apparently laying siege to Bishop Reginald, the, then, incumbent, who was marginally involved in the family quarrel.

At the end of the Norse occupation of these islands in 1265, the Bishopric removed to Peel in the Isle of Man but, in 1327, a new Bishopric of the Isles was established here, the first bishop being Bernard of Linton, Abbot of Arbroath and, previously, Chancellor of Scotland.

The Bishopric of the Isles developed on a strictly parallel course with the Lordship of the Isles, a power virtually independent of the Kingdom of Scotland. Its continuing importance is indicated by the fact that, in 1428, Angus Macdonald was elected Bishop, the son of the Lord of the Isles and cousin to King James First of Scotland.

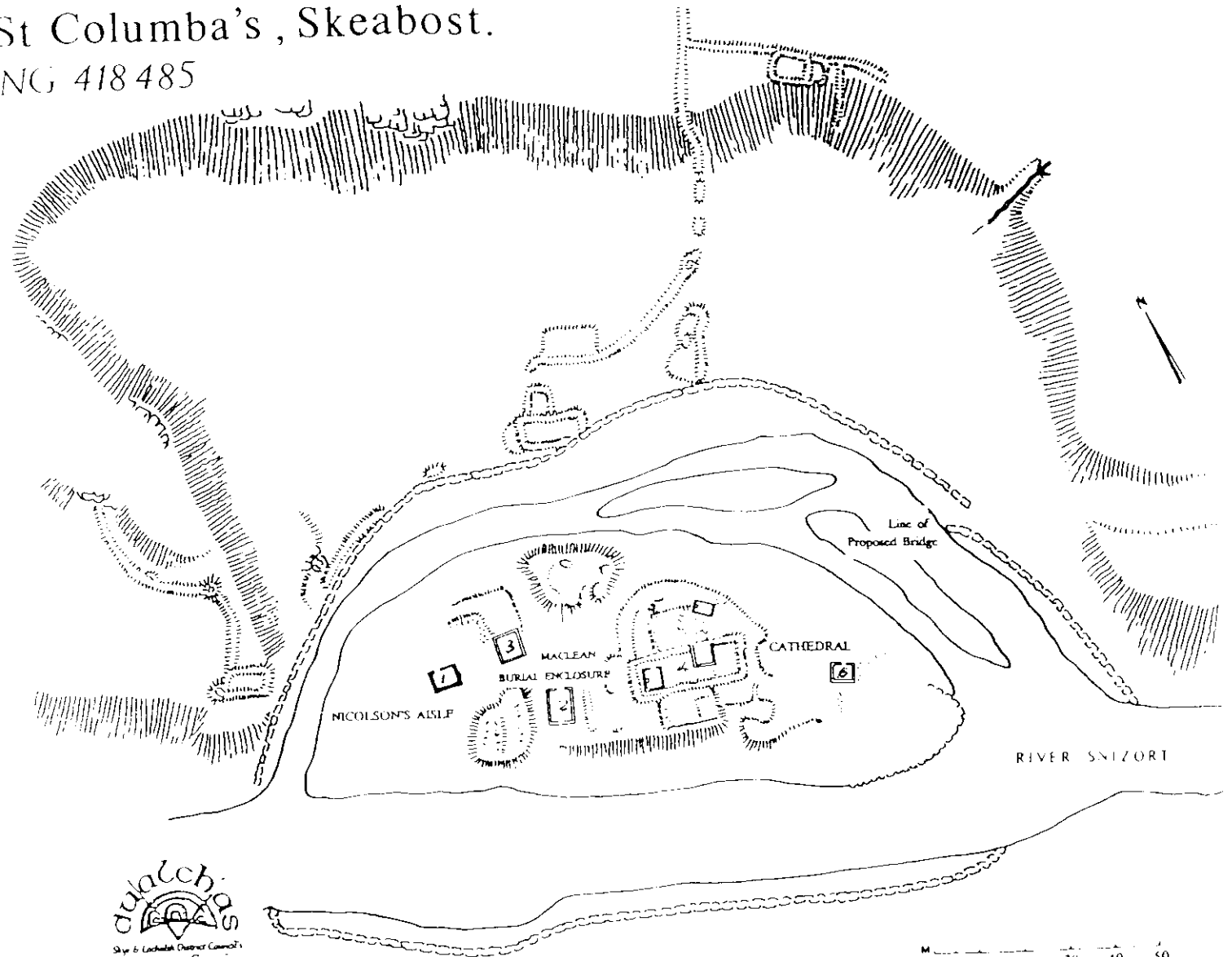
Despite their close kinship the Kings of Scotland, from Robert the Bruce onwards, were jealous of the power of the Island magnates and finally, in 1492, the Lordship was forfeit to the Crown. The Campbell Earls of Argyll siezed the opportunity of occupying the resultant power vacuum and a Campbell bishop was able to transfer the episcopal seat to Iona.

The Cathedral building was, presumably, built sometime after 1327 but the small size, 80 feet in length, reflects the relative poverty of the diocese and also probably indicates that it was never intended as a permanent episcopal seat. As late as 1490 the Bishop was anticipating the time when his "principal Kirk in the Ile of Man be recoverit from Inglismen" The advent of the Reformation in the 16th Century spelt the eclipse of the Church on St. Columba's Island, which apparently was never afterwards occupied although the burial ground continued to be used into the first half of this Century

The small chapel (1) is Nicolson's Aisle, where according to tradition 28 chiefs of that name are buried. The high relief effigy, ?16th. Century, which lay within this chapel, has been moved outside for safety until the walls be stabilised. The burial enclosure (2) to the east of this was built by John D. Maclean, said to be the wealthiest man in Australia, in his day, to mark the graves of his parents. (3) Unidentified (4) The Cathedral building shows only a few courses of masonry and burials obscure the outlines. In the south transept a better preserved 15th C. effigy is associated with a MacSwan family. (5) To the north of the Cathedral is an 18th C. slab commemorating Donald MacQueen of Kingsburgh and his spouse, Gormil (Blue Eyes) Buy. Both names are now uncommon in Skye. East of this a decayed slab which may represent a Madonna and Child. (6) Burial enclosure of successive ministers of Snizort.

St Columba's, Skeabost.

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