

# HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



# FIELD MONUMENTS

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE									
H	N	G	8	2	N	E	0	0	3
2 NGR		8 8 1 1		2 5 8 1		3 QUAL			
N G		CE							

4 DISTRICT SKYE & LOCHALSH			5 PARISH KINTAIL			6 SITE NAME CASTLE DONNAN			
7 AREA STATUS		8 SITE STATUS 'A' LISTED		9 REGIONAL STATUS				10 GENERIC TYPE FORT, TIMBER-LACED, VITRIFIED + CASTLE + CHAPEL (ALLEGED)	
11 CONCORDANCE OS NG 82 NE 3		12 FORM STANDING STRUCTURES		13 DIMENSIONS				14 PERIOD/DATE IA = EM = MO	
NMR								15 DATING METHOD TYP	
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS RENOVATED LATE MED. CASTLE ON SITE OF IA or EM FORT AND POSSIBLE EM CHAPEL				17 CONDITION				18 SHAPE	
20 LAND USE OPEN WOODLAND				21 GEOLOGY				19 THREAT AND DATE	
22 SOILS				23 VEGETATION					
24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE			25 RELIEF ISLAND			26 ASPECT 360°		27 ALTITUDE 0 = 8m OD	

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)	
29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)	
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1905: 6" MAP 2. MACGREGOR & ROSS: 1889: CASTELLATED AND DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE OF SCOTLAND: Vol. 3: p825 3. WALLACE, T.: 1912-13: TRANS. INVERNESS SCI. SOC. & FIELD CLUB: Vol. 8: p109 /+ PLAN 4. MACDONALD & POLSON: 1931: BOOK OF ROSS, SUTHERLAND & CAITHNESS: :p22 5. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1972: 1/10 000 MAP 6. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1905: 25" MAP, SHEET 123.12 7. NISBET, H.C.: 1975: SCIENCE AND ARCHAEOLOGY: Vol. 15: pp3-16 /continued overleaf	
30 GROUND PLAN NO.	31 GROUND PHOTO NO.
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 GS: 11.12.1985	51 CHECK: DATE AS: 13.1.1986

52 TEXT

"See continuation card for text."

EILEAN DONAN.

(3)

Another interesting example of vitrified work is to be seen on Eilean Donan, Dornie, Kintail. On this island stands the famous castle of the same name. On the landward side of the island are traces of a vitrified wall of considerable dimensions, indicating probably that the island had been the site of a prehistoric fort. It is worthy of notice that part of the castle wall is built over the remains of a shell heap. There is also a very large well cut out of the solid rock.

29. 8. COTTON, M.A:1954:ARCHAEOLOGICAL JOURNAL:Vol.III:p76
9. SCOTT, Rev.A.B:1906:TRANS.SCOT.ECCLES.SOC:Vol.1:p259
10. SCOTT, Rev.A.B:1914:THE PICTISH NATION: :p269
11. TRANTER, N:1970:THE FORTIFIED HOUSE IN SCOTLAND:CHAMBERS:VOL.5:pp154-156
12. HMB(SDD):1985:BSAHI LIST:SKYE + LOCHALSH

52. This castle is said to have originated as a vitrified fort, the remains of which were visible on the landward side of the island in 1912, in the form of a wall of considerable dimensions (3) and part of the later castle wall is built over the remains of a shell-heap. This fort was replaced in the 13th c. by a castle consisting of a great wall of enceinte, the outline of which can still be traced. A narrow passage between two walls seems to have formed the entrance from the loch on the W. It was probably originally a steep staircase, but is now only a slope of stones. A keep was erected on the NE angle of the enclosure, probably in the 14th c., its N and E walls superimposed on the older wall. The foundation of the tower 57' x 43' (17.49m x 13.22) with walls 10' thick (3.00m) exist all round and fragments of the N and S walls still stand to a considerable height. An unusual feature in a pentagonal water tower lying to the E of the castle, but connected to it by walls, about 5' thick (1.52m) and probably originally about 15' (4.68m) high, which enclose a long sloping court. In 1719 a body of Spanish troops were besieged in the castle which was battered and ruined by three English men-of-war. It has been restored by Lt.Col.MacRae-Gilstrap during the years 1912-32 (4)."

"Castle Donnan, a 13thc. keep, formerly ruined and now restored, as described above, built possibly on the site of a vitrified fort. All that remains is some vitrified material, discovered during restoration and heaped close by the water cistern." (OSFI:NKB:29.9.1966)

"Castle Donnan (restored)." (5)

"Castle Donnan is generally as described. A straight length of collapsed walling some 55.0m long lies close to the shoreline on the NW side of the bridge. This is what Wallace refers to as 'a wall of considerable dimensions', and loose pieces of vitrification occur amongst the debris. Despite this, however, it may be relatively modern, but there is little doubt that a vitrified structure formerly occupied the island." (OSFI:AA:19.6.1974)

"Substratum: Lewisian gneiss, probably of hornblende type. Structure: No information." (7)

"St.Donnan is thought to have founded a church on Eilean Donnan." (9) (10)

"No local knowledge, and no trace of a church on Eilean Donnan". (OSFI:NKB:29.9.1966)

"EILEAN DONAN CASTLE."(12)

*Eilean Donnan Castle.*—This Castle is situated on the island Donnan or Donan, and commands the entrance to Lochs Alsh, Long, and Duich. The island, which belongs to the parish of Loch-Alsh, is chiefly of rock, with a small patch of land capable of growing a few potatoes, but whether the soil is natural to the island, or has been carried there, is uncertain. The island is said to have got its name from St Donan, a Columban saint, who lived on it. As has already been stated, previous to the building of the present Castle, it was defended by a vitrified fort, remains of which are still to be seen on the east side. Here also may be seen the remains of a primitive pier or pathway, of which eleven stones are still in position.

The name may simply mean the island of the "Dun" or fort, and may have been given to it because of the vitrified fort already referred to. The old ruins at the back of Dornie are called the Dunan, and it is quite as likely that this island got its name from its "dun" or fort as from St Donan. True, we have the same name in Kildonan, which is taken to mean the Church of St Donan, a Columban saint. I leave this to the Celtic scholars. I might mention here that the names of two other Columban saints are associated with Kintail and Lochalsh—St Duthac and St Cougan. In the first part of my paper I referred to St Fillan. I take the passage of stones to belong to the vitrified fort period, as I have seen similar passages in connection with vitrified forts on islands in other parts of the country. A good example may be seen at Loch-Fruich, west of Kiltarlity. Remains of a kitchen-midden or shell heap are to be seen on the west side, containing shells and bones of the usual type. This also I take to belong to the vitrified fort people. It could not belong to the present Castle, as its walls are partly built upon it.

There is an interesting question in connection with the vitrified fort builders, viz.:—Were they the same people who built the Crannogs?

We have vitrified walls on the top of the piles in some of our Scotch Crannogs, but whether placed there by the same builders, or by a different race at a later period, is not easy to determine.

On the east side of the island there is a fosse or ditch, partly in the solid rock, about 12 feet wide. I was not able to determine whether this fosse was cut out of the solid rock, or whether it is a natural decomposition of the rock, or a fault. I am inclined to the latter opinion.

It should be stated that Dornie has the remains of another old castle. At the back of Dr Mathieson's garden there is a rising ground called the Duman, on which can still be seen the site and some of the foundation stones of the walls. In the year 1800 part of the walls stood 10 or 12 feet high.

Many relics have been found around this ruin; among others, there were two stone ladles, a stone image, a black seal, and in the garden ground between the Castle and the present houses, a stone cist was discovered. Captain Matheson says that in some old records it is stated that a Parliament was held here. In all probability there were "local parliaments," or barons' courts, held here, as elsewhere, but whether an Imperial Parliament was ever convened, the old records have still to tell us. In all probability this was the immediate predecessor of the Castle on the island.

*The Finds.*—Numerous cannon balls and coins have been found in Eilean Donnan Castle, and are now scattered or entirely lost. Some of the balls may still be seen in front of Brahan Castle. About 1850, a large octagonal brooch of superior workmanship was found on the island by Kenneth Macrae, of Dornie, who made a present of it to Keith Stewart-Mackenzie of Seafort. A similar brooch was found in Bruce's tomb in Dunfermline (1818), inscribed, "Jesus Nazareus Rex Indearum."

The one found in Dornie was larger and of superior workmanship, but with the inscription abbreviated to "Jesus Nasar." The brother and sister of the finder are living in Dornie (1890).

About ten years ago the Castle well was cleared out, and there were found the iron gate of the Castle and two small brass cannon. The gate lies at Duncraig House, and the cannon are in Hedgefield, Inverness, both the property of Sir Kenneth Matheson.

Mr Wallace added some of the legends and traditions, relating to the Castle, that had been picked up in the district.

This, perhaps the most photographed castle in all Scotland, occupies a tiny island at Dornie, in the mouth of Loch Duich, where that loch and Loch Long meet the wider Loch Alsh, opposite Skye, a position of great strength both tactical and strategic. It was long the chief stronghold of the Mackenzies of Kintail, chiefs of the name, and latterly in the keeping of MacRae constables.

(11)

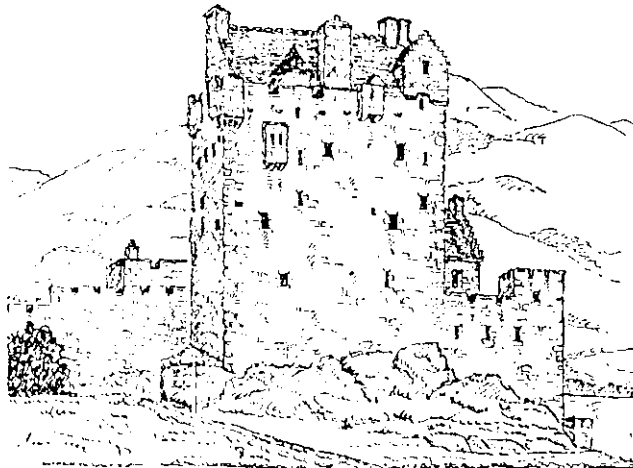
[154]

The building as it now stands is very largely a reconstruction, for it was long an ivy-clad ruin. But fortunately there was sufficient left, especially of the keep with its 10-foot thick walls, to restore to something of its original appearance. The site was always recognised as important, and here was a Caledonian vitrified fort. In the 13th century the lands are alleged to have been given by Alexander the Third to Colin Fitzgerald, a son of the Irish Earl of Desmond, for his aid in defeating the invading King Hakon of Norway at the Battle of Largs. Some claim that it is from a descendant of this Irish lordling, named Kenneth, that the Clan Mackenzie takes its origin—though this is denied by many experts. Be that as it may, the original Eilean Donan Castle was a fairly typical 13th-century 'castle of enceinte' of the sort so common in the West Highlands, consisting of little more than a very high and strong crenellated wall of irregular outline, enclosing a courtyard in which lean-to buildings were erected. As again so frequently happened, in the 14th or 15th century a rectangular keep was built at one corner, here the north-east angle, making use of part of the enceinte walling. This is the massive tower which, restored, now dominates the scene at Dornie, with fragments of the earlier enclosing walls incorporated in the secondary and more modern and lower building. There has been a flanking tower to the south-west, and an interesting water cistern enclosure connected to the courtyard by a sloping passage.

The keep rises three storeys to a gabled roof containing a garret, within a flush parapet. There is an open round at the north-west angle, a small gabled watch-chamber to the south-west, and conical-roofed caphouses on the east and west fronts giving access to the parapet walk; also a number of machicolated projections. But most of these features must be reconstructions, however authentic in style, since early drawings show little at parapet level surviving.

[155]

In 1331 Randolph, Earl of Moray, as an act of retribution and warning, decorated the curtain walls of Eilean Donan with the heads of fifty victims; and its continuing history was one of violence, inevitably, as significantly situated as it was and in the possession of so powerful and turbulent a clan. In 1504 Huntly took it, while quelling one of the many insurrections. In 1539 it was besieged by Donald Gorm of Lewis—but the siege was called off when Donald himself was killed by a lucky arrow fired from the castle. In 1719 it was the centre of the abortive Jacobite Rising, when the Spanish troops held it under William Mackenzie, Earl of Seaforth. After the Battle of Glensheil nearby, it was bombarded by three English men-of-war—which accounts for its drastic state of ruin prior to reconstruction by the late Colonel MacRae-Gilstrap this century. It is still the seat of the MacRaes, and now houses the Clan MacRae War Memorial.



SHEET 123.12

125  
2 049

128  
4 322

127  
1 653

126  
1 470

Loanellan

150

129  
3 065

130  
3 995

131  
1 537

*Bilean  
Donnan*

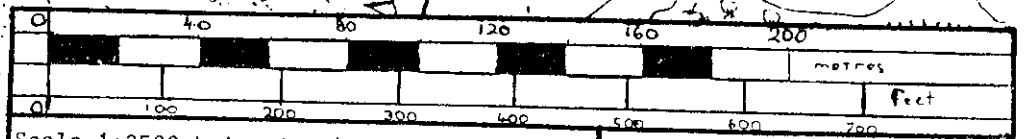
H.M.O.S.T.

Dungeon

Castle Donnan

High W

Watch Tower



Scale 1:2500 being 25.3/4 inches to 1 mile.

*Port an Tuairnir*

*ph of Ordinary Spring Tides*

*Cnoc an  
Tuairnir*

*Mark of Ordinary Spring Tides*

*Spring Tides*