

RECENT FINDS ON INCHMARNOCK

Dorothy N. Marshall, FSA, FSA Scot.

Inchmarnock, low lying and fertile like Bute has always been attractive to man as a living place.

During the last year or two the Middleton family, Roy, Jessica, Jim, Robert, David and Kirsty — their father is the tenant farmer on the island — have been finding more of this occupation and of the history of the island. The Bronze Age monuments had been known for a long time but it was not until 1978 that anything from the Neolithic period was found. Two small axe heads (Fig. 2, 4) rather chipped, were picked up on plough land. Mr J. G. Scott, examining them, reported that they are made of porcellanite from Trevebullagh, Northern Ireland. They are smaller than is usual for this type of axe. This is evidence of trade between SW Scotland and Ireland in the third millenium BC. The following year two more axe heads (Fig. 1, 4) were picked up, one of them of the same material, the other a fragment of a basalt axe. Chips and flakes of flint and one definite artefact (Fig. 1, 5) were also picked up. Further evidence of trade came from a fragment of a pitchstone tool (Fig. 1, 6). This pitchstone comes from Corriegills, Arran.

The large Bronze Age cairn, just above the shore line, in the N end of the island, is an impressive monument. It can be seen from the Kilmory shore on Bute. Professor T. Bryce is said to have made a cursory examination of it about 1903 but he left no report of his findings. It comes earlier in the sequence of Bronze Age burials than the group of three cists or stone coffins set into the ground which were investigated in 1963. (Marshall 1963) The "Queen of the Inch" was found in a large well made cist lying on her side with a flint knife by her hands and a necklace of black beads scattered by her head. She was buried about 1500 BC.

A more recent finding is of cup and ring carvings on a boulder on the NW of the island. These examples of the enigmatic rock sculptures are very much weathered and difficult to see. There are cup marks on Bute but none with

rings round them.

Down by the shore a rim sherd of a cup and a plain sherd (Fig. 2, 4) of a hard well fired Iron Age ware were picked up. The fragment of lignite armlet (Fig. 2, 3) (canneloid shale) and the disc (Fig. 2, 2) also from the shore, are more difficult to date than the pottery. The relatively soft black stone, which can be cut and polished, has, like amber, a magnetic quality. It was used from prehistoric times right through the Iron Age to the Middle Ages.

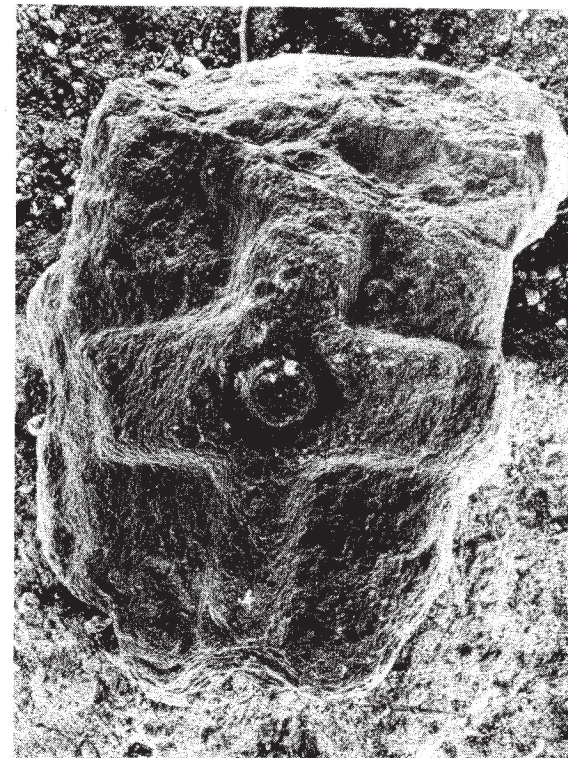
Interest in the early Christian history was aroused when one of the Middleton boys noticed that one of the stones built into the stackyard dyke had a cross incised on it. Another carved stone was found near by. They are now set in the dyke upright and so that the reverse of one of them which also has a cross on it, can be seen. There was nothing to be seen of the actual chapel before excavation began. This work showed that it was one of the few Romanesque chapels in the W of Scotland. St. Blane's is another.

(Traditionally Inchmarnock has been connected with the See of Saddle though Dr. Hewison could find no trace of a charter.

This Romanesque chapel was probably not the original one on the site dedicated to St. Marnock who was a boy when St. Columba lived and preached in Iona at the end of the 6th century. Two early crosses have been found, one uncovered in 1975 is a fragment of a marigold or sexafoil cross of 8th-9th century. The other, now in the Bute Museum, has an incised cross with forked terminals on a slab of schist. The latest carving in date is a fragment of a cross with a Runic inscription, probably Norse. It is in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh. These last two crosses were found in 1889.

Plans of the chapel drawn by members of the Royal Commission for Ancient Monuments in 1975 can be seen in the Bute Museum along with photographs of the site.

The fluted red sandstone bases of pillars uncovered between the nave and the chancel are distinctive. Red sandstone, which is not found on the Inch, was used in the walls of the chapel. In the late 18th century much of it was removed when the South Park farmhouse, now derelict, was



Carved stones found in Stackyard Dyke.



Chapel looking East.

Photographs by permission of The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

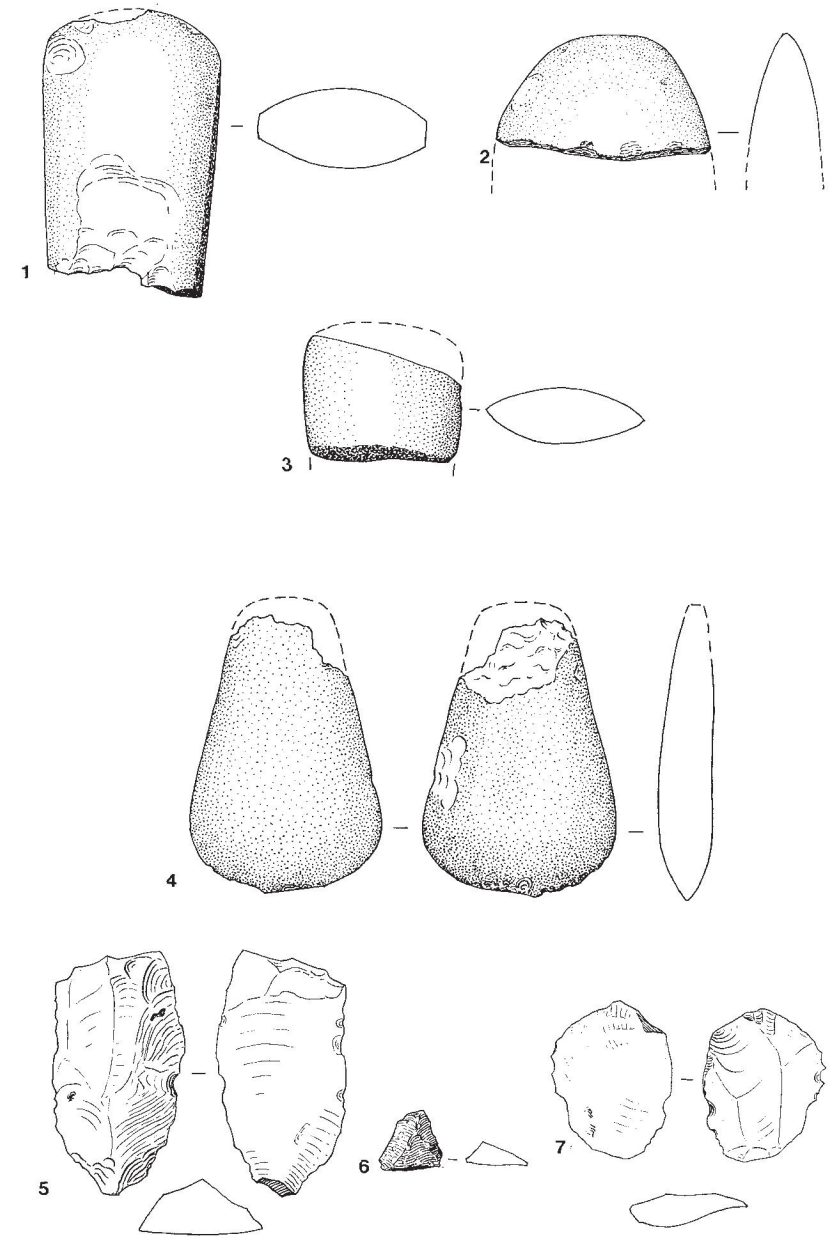


FIG. 1

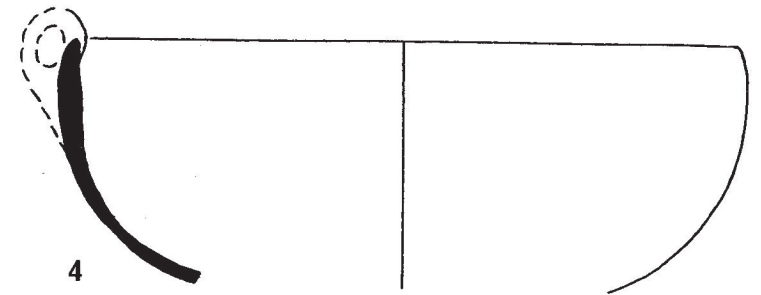
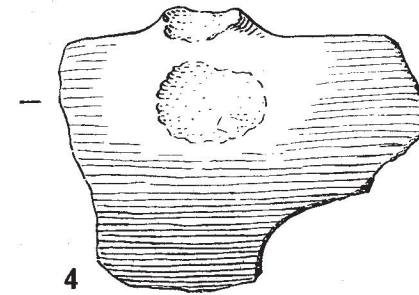
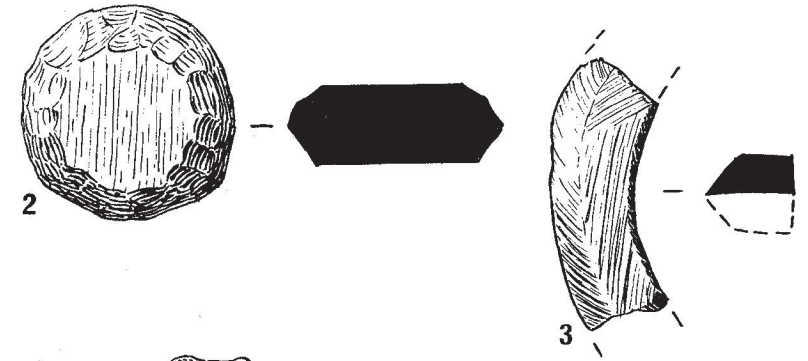
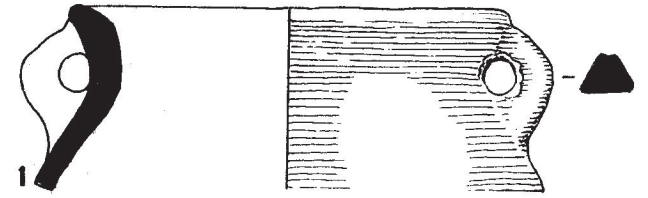


FIG. 2

built. It can still be seen in the window jambs and door lintels. As only one course of the chapel walls remains it is not possible to say how much of this red sandstone was used. The outer stones of the S wall of the nave were of red sandstone but not the inner face nor the walls of the chancel. The red sandstone blocks incorporated in the farmhouse are well-dressed blocks so perhaps this imported stone was used for architectural features rather than in the general build.

There were at least six burials in the chancel. The one to the S was in a long narrow cist constructed against the S wall. At the N side was a hog-backed stone with a sword carved on one side. Between these burials were four slabs of stone, one with a curious uncompleted carving of a pillar. The burials and the slabs had been disturbed, perhaps by the farmer. It may have been the disturbance of the bones that pricked his conscience and made him write to the Parish Church of Rothesay confessing that he had removed some of the chapel stones and giving some money for the poor of the town.

By charter William Bishop of Argyll granted the £5 land of Inchmarnock to Hugh Cumming his brother-germain, also part of it to Donald MacGilchrist on 30th April 1540. It is perhaps to this time that the traces of early buildings and turf covered foundations belong.

Medieval pottery of various dates has been dug up near stone foundations and also found on the sea shore. The most unusual sherd is part of a cup, probably two handled, of a soft fabric with a green glaze (Fig. 2, 1).

Two coins one a Dublin $\frac{1}{2}$ d and the other a silver Scottish long cross have also been picked up.

So far no Neolithic, Bronze or Iron Age dwellings have been found. As these would be flimsy huts, possibly wattle and daub and as the land has been so continuously tilled it is unlikely that they will be found.

These new finds on the Inch give a good sequence of occupation from the Neolithic axe heads, the Bronze Age sculptures and burials, the Iron Age sherds, the early Christian relic to the Medieval pottery. The recent finds are in the Mid Park Farm 'Museum' on Inchmarnock and are indeed a tribute to the interest and vigilance of the young Middletons.

INCHMARNOCK

- Fig. 1. 1, 2, 4. Neolithic Axeheads, Porcellanite.
 3. Fragment Neolithic Axehead, Basalt.
 5. Flint artefact. Irish type flint.
- Fig. 2. 6. Part of Pitchstone artefact.
 7. Flint scraper.
- Fig. 2. 1. Medieval green cup.
 2. Lignite disc.
 3. Part of lignite armlet.
 4. Sherd of cup. Iron Age ware.

References:

- Hewison J. King (1895) *Bute in the Olden Times* Vol I pg 134 Vol II pg 182 Blackwood Edinburgh and London 1895.
- Marshall D. N. (1963) *Trans Bute Nat. Hist. Soc.* Vol XV pg 5-10 1963.

BRONZE AGE CAIRN, LITTLE KILMORY, BUTE 59. 045500

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My attention was drawn to the site in 1977 by Mr Dan Boag of North Park, Inchmarnock, who had uncovered the edge of a metre long stone while ploughing. Investigation showed that it was a kerb stone of a cairn about 10 m in diameter. This stone had been pushed outward by the pressure of the cairn material and also perhaps by the cultivation of the field. The field has been tilled for generations so it is little wonder that the cairn has been almost completely ploughed out and was undetected until the edge of the kerb stone was uncovered. In the adjoining field to the S, three B.A. cists were found in 1933. The cists, sunk in the ground, contained the remains of three children aged 6, 11 and 13. A food vessel had been placed beside the eldest child (*Trans B.N.H.S.* Vol XI 73-79).

Mr Livingstone of Little Kilmory farm readily gave permission for the excavation of the site. This was carried out in 1978 and 79 by members of the Buteshire Natural History Society with the help of members of the Cowal and Cumbernauld Archaeological Societies under the direction of the writer. As the field is regularly cropped a complete excavation of the site was not possible but enough was done to establish the nature of the cairn.

The cairn lies some 250 metres from the shore in a field that slopes gently down to the sea with some outcrops of schist ridging the slope. A raised beach, showing on the ground as a shallow ridge stretches slightly inland beyond Kilmory cottage about 1.5 km. The shingle of this raised beach is unusual as the stones are angular and ice shattered not water rolled. Julian Hill, geologist and W.E.A. organiser, who examined the deposit, thought it would have come from some material laid down in the ice age but moulded into the form of a raised beach by the action of the sea. As kerb stone 3 was found to be set in earth and shingle and as earth lay to the S of it, it seems that the cairn was set against the end of this shallow ridge.