

A REPORT ON EARLY ARTEFACTS FOUND AT ST. NINIAN'S CHAPEL

Dorothy N. Marshall

When the chapel site on St. Ninian's Point was excavated in 1952 and 54 by W. Glen Aitken (Trans B.N.H.S. Vol XIV 1955), the flint tools were not reported on. These came to the Bute Museum in November 1984. Mr J. G. Scott has examined them and his report follows this note. The flints were found in kitchen midden material which ran up to and under the cashel wall.

That there are examples of Neolithic and Bronze age work adds much to the interest of the site. It means that it has been occupied from perhaps 3500 BC, when the retreat of the Early Post Glacial sea made it possible for the Neolithic farmers to settle. There was a burial cairn of this period at Ballycurrie but it has been ploughed out. We knew of the Bronze Age men because of the two standing stones. There is no clear evidence of the Iron Age though the four pagan burials (not orientated E – W) within and beyond the cashel wall of the chapel were perhaps late Iron Age. The fragment of bronze (11 Fig. 2) was found on a skeleton lying E – W in front of the altar. Excavation showed that the woman, aged 27 and about 5' 4" tall, had been buried before the Chapel was built, probably in the 6th or 7th century. It may well have been part of a shroud pin.

Some pottery was found and is also reported on by J. G. Scott. A sherd of 12th century green glazed ware and two dull green sherds dated to 17th century came from the infill of the chapel. There is also a sherd of samian ware which J. G. Scott suggests is Antonine in date rather than earlier in date (2nd century). So far no Roman remains have been found on Bute but at Little Dunagoil two small very much rolled sherds of samian ware were found. This St. Ninian sherd is decorated and in good condition. Two objects, the brooch (16 Fig. 2) and the part of a blue glass flask (15 Fig. 2) are later, 18th and 19th centuries so may have been dumped in the infill of the chapel by the cottagers.

On the grassland of the peninsula, one can see diverse patterns of rig and furrow showing different periods of cultivation. The cottages were built when fish were plentiful and fishing was the way of life at the Straad.

So this peninsula has a history of the longest continuous occupation of any site so far found on Bute.

I am most grateful to W. F. Cormack, J. G. Scott and R. A. Hattatt, who examined and reported on the finds and to Mrs Susan Gell who drew them so skilfully.