

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



FIELD MONUMENTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE											
H N H 8 7 N W 0 0 1											
2 NGR											
N H 8 3 7 3 7 7 2 8 CE											
3 QUAL											
6 SITE NAME											
F E A R N A B B E Y											

10 GENERIC TYPE											
CHURCH+CHAPELS+BURIAL VAULT+ RELIGIOUS HOUSE (MONASTRIES)											
14 PERIOD/DATE											
LM/ c.1237											
15 DATING METHOD											
DOC											

18 SHAPE											
19 THREAT AND DATE											

21 GEOLOGY											
23 VEGETATION											

26 ASPECT											
360°											
27 ALTITUDE											
10=15 MOD											

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)											
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29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)											
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30 GROUND PLAN NO.											
31 GROUND PHOTO NO.											
87/3/4/1,3,5											

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											
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44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER											
45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER											

46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT											
47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT											

48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS											
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49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE											
50 RECORDER: DATE											
51 CHECK: DATE											
MWC: 28.10.1986 SM: 29.10.1986											

52 TEXT											
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53 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE											
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55 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE											
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4 DISTRICT				5 PARISH			
ROSS AND CROMARTY				FEARN			
7 AREA STATUS		8 SITE STATUS		9 REGIONAL STATUS			
		'A' LISTED					
11 CONCORDANCE		12 FORM		13 DIMENSIONS			
OS NH87NW1							
NMR		STANDING STRUCTURES					
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS				17 CONDITION			
CHURCH BUILT ONTO 13th C. ABBEY				CHURCH - FUNCTIONAL MONASTERY - MUTILATED			

20 LAND USE				21 GEOLOGY			
CEMETERY							
22 SOILS				23 VEGETATION			

24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE				25 RELIEF			
				LEVEL GROUND			

26 ASPECT				27 ALTITUDE			
360°				10=15 MOD			

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)							
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38 SAMPLES				39 PALYNOLOGY			

40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.				41 SMALL FINDS			

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51 CHECK: DATE				SM: 29.10.1986			
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52 TEXT							
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53 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE							
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"NH 8373 7728 Church on site of Abbey." (1). "The Premonstratensian Abbey of Fearn was originally founded 1221-2 or c. 1227 at Edderton on the Dornoch Firth by Farquhard, Earl of Ross, but was transferred to a more suitable site in Tarbert (now Fearn ph.) c. 1238 This is about 10 miles S.E. of the original site. Rebuilding took place from 1338 to 1372 and again in the 15th c. It was annexed to the bishopric of Ross, in parliament, 1609. The church is a simple oblong structure, and part of it is still used as the parish church. It has been much patched and altered. All traces of domestic buildings and cloister have now gone." (2) (3). NH 837 773: Early monastic establishment of Nova Ferna (OSFI. C.W.P. D.A. Index 22.7.1965) "The remains of Fearn Abbey are generally as described and illustrated. It is still used as the Parish Church". OSFI: I.S.S. 29.8.1972. "Premonstratensian....

OVER/

29.

6. SOC ANT SCOT: 1979: ARCH SITES & MONS OF EASTER ROSS: RCHAMS: p27, No 229
7. WELSH, T.C:1969:DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND:CBA (SCOTLAND): P 45

52.

.....Order of regular canons was founded in 1119 by St. Norbert in Coucy near Laon. The site of the foundation was apparently pointed out in a vision and hence called "Premontre" or, in Latin "Protum Monstratum", "The meadow pointed out". (MCW). "NH-8373 7728. Church and remains of Abbey (Premonstratensian)". (4). "Fearn Abbey". (4).
"See continuation cards for text, plan etc" (2)

(1)

FEARN ABBEY, ROSS-SHIRE.

This abbey is one of the monastic establishments founded in the far North during the reign of Alexander II. It was originally settled, in 1221, by Farquhard, Earl of Ross, at Edderton, on the Dornoch Frith, and its first abbot was brought from the priory of Whithorn, in Wigtonshire. The occupants were therefore of the Premonstratensian Order of Canons Regular, being the order of the parent house.

The situation originally chosen was found to be too near the turbulent tribes further north, and, in 1238, leave was granted to Malcolm of Uig, the second abbot, to transfer the abbey to a new and more peaceful site. The new locality is about ten miles south-east from the first site, and had the advantage of being in more fertile soil. Being well within the domains of the Earl of Ross, the abbey received his protection, and was also richly endowed by the successive earls.

The connection with Whithorn was kept up, and many of the abbots came from the parent house. In 1321, Mark, a canon of Whithorn, and son of Sir Mark Ros, was presented to the abbacy by the Prior of Whithorn, and not chosen by the monks. He is said to have rebuilt the abbey about 1338, and the rebuilding was completed under the rule of Abbot Donald, in 1372.

Abbot Finlay M'Faed was appointed in 1442, and his rule lasted for forty-four years. He built the cloister, and procured an organ, tabernacles, chalices, vestments, and other ornaments from Flanders, with which he enriched the abbey. He died in 1485, and was interred in St. Michael's aisle at Fearn, in which his monument was erected, and where it still survives.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century the commendatorship of the abbey was held by a mere boy, afterwards destined to become famous in Scottish history—Patrick Hamilton, the first martyr for Reformation principles in this country. He was a natural son of the Earl of Arran, a M.A. of Paris in 1520, and also of St. Andrews. When twenty-six years of age he was burned as a heretic at the gate of St. Salvator's College, in St. Andrews, in 1528.

The buildings of Fearn Abbey having fallen into disrepair, Robert Cairncross, Bishop of Ross (1539-45) was appointed abbot of Fearn, being recommended by the king to the Pope, on the understanding that the bishop, who was wealthy, would be able to restore the abbey. Bishop Cairncross also held several other appointments, being Provost of Corstorphine, Abbot of Holyrood, and chaplain to James V. He resigned the abbacy in 1545, and died soon after. Nicholas Ross, provost of the Collegiate Church of Tain, held the abbacy, possibly as a secular charge, seeing that, in 1560, he sat in Parliament, and voted for the abolition of the Roman Catholic religion.

The last commendator was Walter Ross of Morangy; but he was only titular, for in 1597 the lands of the abbey were erected into the temporal Barony of Geanies, and granted by James V. to his favourite, Sir Patrick Murray.

Some of the church lands were, as usual, feued off to relatives of the abbots. Abbot Walter Ross procured a grant in his own favour of Morangy and the mills thereof, which remained with his family for several generations.

The church continued to be used as the parish place of worship, and in 1742, during divine service, the vaulted roof fell, when about fifty people were killed.*

Of this extensive and richly-furnished abbey there now only remain a part of the church and the ruins of some structures attached to it.

(2)

The church is a simple oblong chamber (Fig. 935), 96 feet long by 26 feet wide internally. Part of it is still used as the parish church, but the eastern end is partitioned off and set apart as the burial-vault of the family of Ross of Balnagown. After the fall of the roof last century, the south wall of the church was to a great extent rebuilt, a new roof put on, and the interior plastered. The eastern portion, with the exception of the building up of some of the windows and the reconstruction of the gable, has been left intact. The chapels, or "aisles," attached to the church have been erected against the original walls, as is evident from the remains of windows still visible, which are built up.

The features of the church are extremely simple (Fig. 936). The windows are all tall lancets. In the east gable there are four of these all of equal height, and the walls have been pierced with similar lights, in pairs, between all the buttresses round the walls. Some of these remain in the north wall (see Fig. 936), and in the south wall (which has been remodelled and partly rebuilt, with large windows inserted) some portions of the old lancets can yet be traced.

There is nothing very distinctive of any particular period in the architecture, but the features correspond fairly well with the date assigned to the rebuilding of the abbey by the abbots Mark and Donald during the

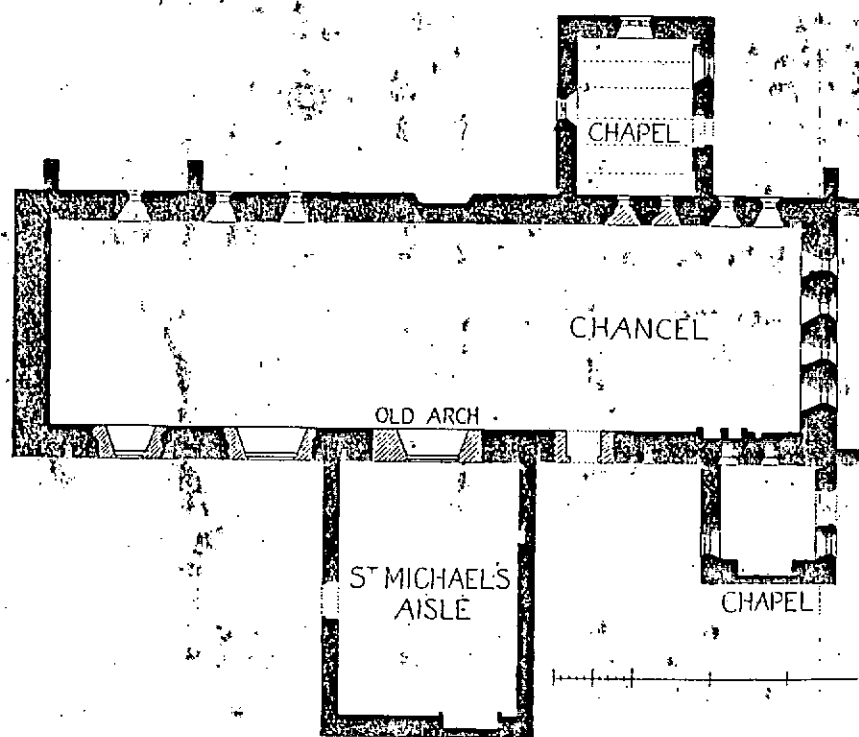


FIG. 935.—Fearn Abbey. Plan.

fourteenth century. The lanceolate form of the windows seems at first sight to indicate an earlier period, but, on careful inspection, it will be observed that there is no hood moulding, a feature almost universally used in first pointed work. Besides, the lancet form of window was employed in the north even as late as the sixteenth century, as in the west front of Beaulieu Priory, built by Bishop Reid about 1550. An ambry, piscina, and sedilia are still preserved in the south wall of the chancel.

The most important of the additions made to the main building is the south wing or chapel, which was dedicated to St. Michael. This chapel is said to have been erected by Abbot Finlay M'Fead, who died in 1485. It is 32 feet long by 23 feet wide, and has been connected to the church by an archway 14 feet in width. The walls of the aisle are now reduced to about 5 feet in height, and contain a doorway in the west side and an ambry on the east side. In the south wall is the monument to Abbot Finlay M'Fead (Fig. 937). The canopy is segmental, and the mouldings are bold, but the enrichments are much decayed. On the shield over the

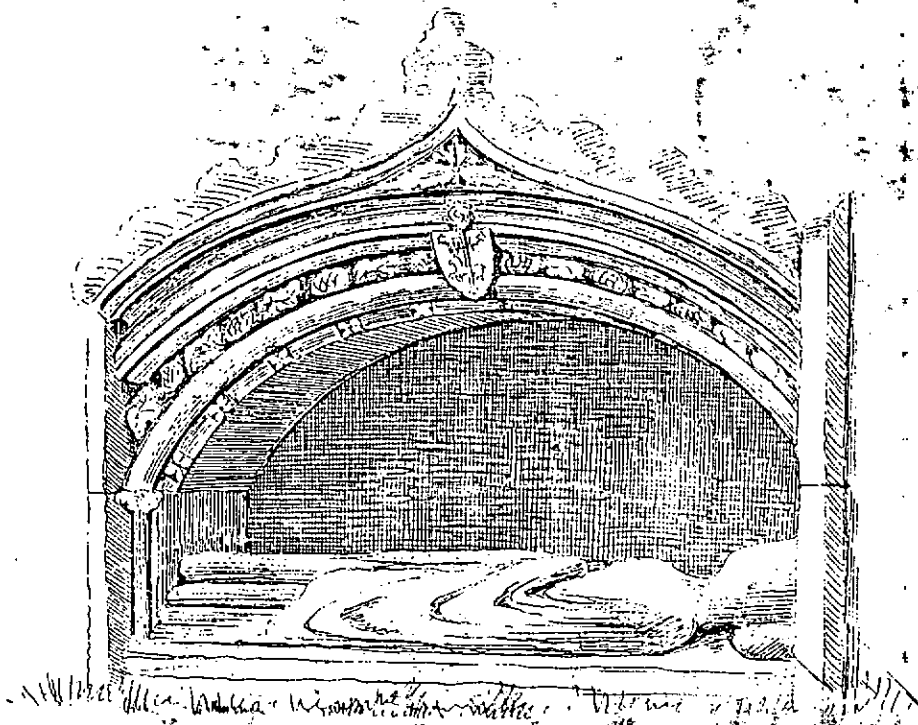


FIG. 937.—Fearn Abbey. Monument to Abbot Finlay M'Fead.

centre of the arch the arms of the abbot are still legible—a stag behind a tree, with three stars in chief, and a crozier above. The inscription, which is much decayed, is said to be, "Hic jacet Finlaidus M'Fead abbas de Fern qui obiit anno MCCCCLXXXV." It will be remembered that, through the liberality of this abbot, the monastery was much enriched. His effigy still rests, though much mutilated, in its original place.

A small monumental chapel has been erected against the south-east angle of the church and blocks two of the windows. It is probably, from its details, of the sixteenth century. There is a pointed doorway in the east side (see Fig. 936), and a pointed window in each of the east and west walls. The south wall has contained a monument, but the outer part of the wall has been broken out, and none of the features of the monument are preserved.

Another chapel, doubtless also monumental, has been built against the north wall (see Fig. 936), where there have been two windows of the church. The walls of the above chapels seem to be built out from two of the buttresses of the church. The buttress forming part of the east wall of the north chapel is still quite distinct. This structure is evidently of a very late date. The windows have had mullions, which simply intersect one another in the arched head, without any trace of foliation. The chief peculiarity of this chapel lies in its roof. This has been constructed with six ribs, composed of portions of wall carried on plain pointed arches, on which were laid the overlapping stone flags, of which the roof was formed. Two of the arches and a small part of the stone roof still survive (see Fig. 936).

All traces of the cloister and domestic buildings of the monastery have been completely swept away.

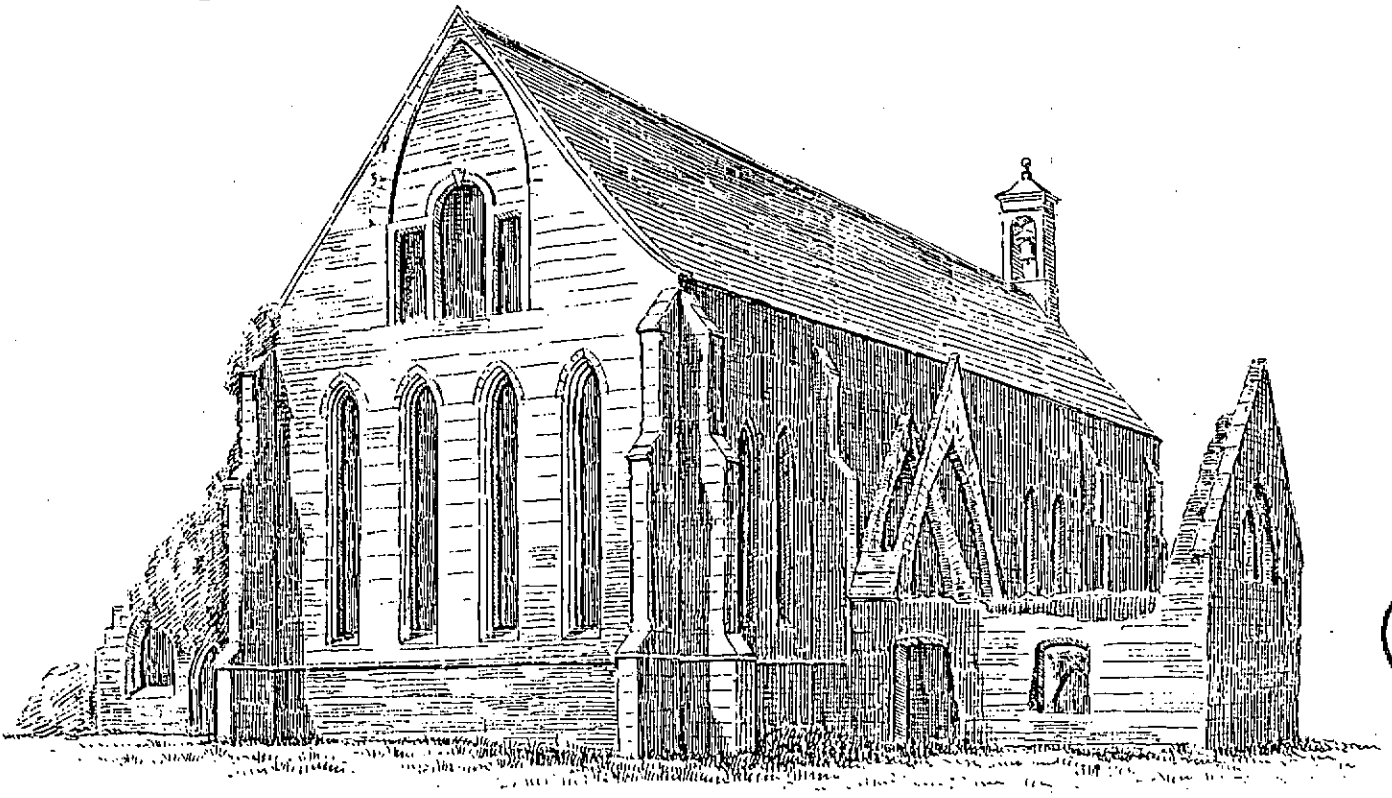


FIG. 930.—Fearn Abbey. View from North-East.

(2)

"A granite lintel 5'x3'x4" thick was found in 1959 in the floor of a byre at Fearn Farm. The stone was moved to its present resting place in the churchyard at Fearn Abbey. It carries the coat of Arms with three lions (sinister), and three buckets (dexter), and the inscription:

"T.McCullā, nobilis est leoni."

The word 'sine' has been written across the left side in large capitals, evidently later. On the underside, below the coat of arms is a fragment of iron, in socket. Thomas McCulloch was Abbot for 3 years from 1485 and thereafter expelled on a false Papal Bill. An account of the lintel will be included in the rev'd J.L Macfaddens forthcoming book 'The Monks of Fearn'." (7)