

**Insh Marshes RSPB Reserve****Access Audit (including Site 160)****Parish of Kingussie and Insh****Owner / Rep: Tom Prescott, RSPB, Ivy Cottage, Insh, Kingussie, PH21 1NT (01540 661518)****Local contact: As above****Description**

The Insh Marshes Reserve covers an area of the floor of Strathspey, roughly between the A9 (where it crosses the River Spey east of Kingussie) and Loch Insh. Much of the reserve area is marshland that has been drained and protected by levees at various times in the past but is subject to annual flooding. There are two sites of interest on the Insh Marshes; Cille nan Caetharnack, graveyard and site of chapel (NN79NE0002, Audit Site no. 160, NGR NN 7842 9993). The graveyard is enclosed by a relatively recent stone wall, which is now in a poor state of repair. The enclosed area is overgrown, a few recumbent gravemarkers visible, some with discernible lettering.

Nearby, in the open field to the north, is a cup-marked outcrop (either bedrock or an extremely large boulder - exposed area approximately 12 metres by 7 metres. The stone was identified during a visit on 11/1/2000. At least 30 cup-marks were located on this and a further visit (16/1/2000), which makes this the largest concentration of cup-marks in Strathspey. Much of the rock surface is obscured by a mat of turf, and it is possible that the cup-marking is more extensive than the pattern already observed. Cup-mark sites are believed to date to the Later Neolithic period, possibly extending into the Bronze Age, as they appear on standing stones (believed to be Bronze Age) and burial monuments. One argument, though, is that such examples represent reused stones. It is extremely difficult to date prehistoric sculpture, and to suggest a function for it - but it is just this enigma that makes such sites attractive, particularly for school children.

**Pros****Positive landowner**

Both sites are ideally suited to a low level, community-based project supervised by the community archaeologist

Both sites are located close to an existing trail, which RSPB will extend to incorporate them, so parking and access are not problems

**Cons****None**

### Proposals

Repair the drystone wall that encloses the site of Cille nan Caetharnack - this could be a project for the drystone walling class run by Nick Aitken (Ranger Service, HFM). (18/01/2000 – telephoned Nick and he will look at the site today to assess the feasibility of this; Nick has telephoned to say that he believes the entire length of the wall would need to be repaired, 60 metres, and that this would be a considerable task. He suggested breaking it up into distinct phases – he will provide an estimate for the number of days to do this job).

Remedial work to fencing around this site to prevent animal access.

Limited clearing of the graveyard, cutting back rank vegetation. There is a question as to whether the gravestones should be cleared to be recorded - if they are left then they will further deteriorate, but clearing will open them to more rapid deterioration. If done then this would be an ideal project for local volunteers, (B&S Local History Group have expressed interest in being involved).

Historical research on this site and the related coffin road would be necessary to inform visitors on the history of the site. A leaflet, including other information of historical interest on the reserve, would be the most suitable medium for interpretation.

RSPB will extend their path and provide access to the enclosed area.

The second site, the cup-marked rock, is located in the middle of a field, currently used for grazing.

Arranging access will therefore be more of an issue, though physical access should not be a problem.

The cup-marked rock needs to be stripped of all obscuring vegetation - this work should be carried out by local volunteers (B&S Local History Group members are interested in the Insh Marshes) under the supervision of the community archaeologist.

Care must be taken to avoid damage to a structure, a possible corn-drying kiln, which is built against the west face of the rock. Alternatively, this structure could also be investigated as part of the community project and form part of the interpretation.

The community archaeologist project should be prepared to commit at least 5 days to the work required to investigate these two sites. The cost of producing a leaflet will have to be discussed with RSPB representatives - however, work recording the history of the Insh Marshes has already been conducted by an RSPB volunteer (see notes in file), and a leaflet text could be based on this information.

### Costs

**5 days of the community archaeologist's time**

**Contribute toward costs of printing a leaflet (£500)**

Bibliography

Meta Scarlett, *In the Glens Where I Was Young*, 1988

(1)

## CILLE NAN CEATHARWACH

WE VISITED SITE ON 18/1/2000.

THIS HAS BEEN A NICE ENCLOSURE BUT SUBSIDENCE AND, POSSIBLY, FLOOR DAMAGE HAVE BEEN THE CAUSE OF A GREAT DEAL OF DAMAGE.

IT COULD BE REBUILT AND WOULD PROBABLY TAKE ABOUT 10 WEEKS WORK ON A CLEAR SITE.

BUT

- INVESTIGATION OF SIZE NECESSARY TO DETERMINE IF WALL IS FREESTANDING OR IF IT WAS A RETAINING WALL. THIS WOULD AFFECT REPAIR TIME
- SOME SECTIONS ARE IN REASONABLE ORDER ARE THEY "LEFT AS FOUND?"
- HOW WOULD ARCHEOLOGICAL INTERESTS DETERMINE RATE OF WORK?
- ASSISTANCE FROM RSPB VOLUNTEERS WOULD SPEED THINGS UP.

IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO REPAIR ONE SIDE TO ORIGINAL SPEC. — POSSIBLY THE SIDE NEAREST RIVER. THIS WOULD TAKE ABOUT 3 WEEKS, WOULD GIVE AN IDEA OF ORIGINAL SCALE OF BURIAL GROUND AND ONCE ONE LONG SIDE IS DONE IT WOULD BE EASIER TO JUSTIFY REPAIR OF THE REST.

②.

WHOLE PROJECT HINGES ON WHAT  
FINAL SPECIFICATION OF WALL IS. — THIS  
CAN BE CONFIRMED BY EXCAVATION.

GEORGE BUFF & TONY DYER WOULD  
GIVE AN IDEA OF MY COST. FOR 10 WKS

I WOULD BE PLEASED TO VISIT SITE  
WITH YOURSELF TO DISCUSS WHAT  
CAN BE DONE.

THIS MAY BE A BIT VAGUE ~~RE~~ BUT  
I HOPE YOU WILL FIND IT OF SOME  
USE

I'M AT HILTON OF CARROLL 19/20/21  
JANUARY AND WILL BE ON LEAVE  
FOR WEEK AFTER BUT IF YOU WISH  
TO VISIT SITE ON WEEK COMMENCING  
24/1/2000 I'LL BE PLEASED TO DO  
SO. PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE ON 673907  
OR 'PHONE ME AT HOME — 01540-661049  
PLEASE EXCUSE RUSHED HANDWRITTEN,

Nick -

## CLADH INVERTROMIE

This burial ground was surveyed as an RSPB volunteer project in November 1987. Enquiries locally and research in the Highland Folk Museum library produced a quantity of information about the recent history and use of the burial ground.

### Description

The burial ground at Invertromie is on the west side of the river Tromie, nearly a mile south of its confluence with the Spey, at NN 784 999. Here a pitted gravelly terrace rises just over 50' (15m) above the flood plain, and a sinuous drystone dyke hugs the foot of its steep slope between Invertromie Farm and the meander by Tromie Mills. The burial ground is a sub-rectangular walled enclosure about 96' x 65' (29m x 20m) contiguous with the dyke, the long axis being NW - SE. Outside it between the dyke and the steep slope there is a semi-circular area of very uneven stony ground, slightly higher than the flood plain. Some of the stones here may be from field clearance.

The drystone dyke, which is up to about 5'6" (1.7m) high, is battered on both sides, with a band halfway up, and finished with coping stones. The wall around the burial ground is superficially similar though not quite so high, except on the south west side, where it continues the line of the dyke. It is mortared, with a slightly battered exterior face and coping stones above. The ground level within the enclosure is slightly higher than outside, and all round the edge there is a sloping bank, up to 6' (1.8m) wide, concealing most of the interior face of the wall, except on the south west side. In places the bank has fallen away slightly, and some stretches of the wall, especially on the south east side, have slumped inwards, broken in sections, and partly fallen. The method of construction seems to have been to build the wall as a revetment against an earth bank on the inside face. It is difficult to assess the relationship between the drystone dyke and the enclosure wall at the west corner, but at the south corner it is clear that the exterior face of the enclosure wall butts up against the dyke, which ends within the corner, indicating that the enclosure wall as it stands is later than the drystone dyke. The north and east corners are rounded.

The entrance is almost central on the south west side, 3' 7" (1.1m) wide, between pillars 2' (0.6m) square, built of opposing dressed slabs with rough stone between, topped by stone blocks, and supporting a simple iron gate. There are signs that this is a replacement of an earlier gate, hung differently.

The burial area is overgrown, but some stones were readily visible, and modest clearance of vegetation and small sections of turf revealed several more, almost all within the south eastern half (see plan). There are sixteen recumbent stones: a few are uneven in shape, and were probably selected from stones locally available for their elongated, roughly rectangular shape. The rest are cut neatly to a rectangular shape, and at least six of these are inscribed, though one is only partly legible. Two groups of stones are in rows, some so close to each other as to overlap. In addition to these flat slabs, there are several vertical slabs, possibly naturally shaped, of heights up to 1'6" (0.45m), and a larger number of smaller upright slabs or oval boulders, none more than 6" (0.15m) high. Some of these are set at the ends of recumbent slabs: the others presumably mark the heads or feet of graves. None have any inscription on them. The pattern of flat slabs and upright stones suggests that there were seven rows of burials within the area, and the orientation of the graves was south east - north east. The inscribed stones all commemorate Stewarts and their wives (MacDonald, MacPherson) except for one to a Ferguson, and those which are dated, commemorate deaths occurring between 1807 and 1839.

A trench in the field beside the burial ground shows that the soil is probably sandy with many rounded pebbles - not too difficult to dig. Molehills have obviously contributed to the covering of some of the stones.

The approach to the burial ground is by a track, from the south, plainly visible where it descends diagonally the steep slope of the adjacent terrace, and still easy to follow as a scarcely used track leaving the B 970 beside a dyke, but there are short stretches between these two and the burial ground where it is difficult to trace.

This burial ground is in an inconspicuous place, low lying on the edge of the flood plain and tucked in against the slope of the higher plateau. Its situation contrasts with that of the old burial ground at Kincaig, on a

hillock beside Loch Insh, and the burial ground at Kingussie, on a hillock within the town. Although the soil should be well drained, there could have been problems in digging graves at times when the water table was high.

## History

Cladh Invertromie has several names.

On the Ordnance Survey map it is marked as 'Cille nan Ceatharnach' and the Ordnance Survey Name Book, compiled in 1870, gives Cill nan Ceatharnach, noting that 'there is no historical nor traditional information to be obtained about it'. The name was given by Mr Fleming of Ballindalloch, Mr McPherson of Killihuntly, and was on the estate plan. This name would mean that it was the burial ground (or chapel of the soldiers, heroes, freebooters, or even robbers).

Malcolm Fraser, whose grandfather farmed at Invertromie, referred to it as St Colman's, and said that it was very old, and that at one time there was a chapel outside the wall. Stewarts from Lynaberack were buried there, and the last burial, about 1922, he thought, was Alec MacGregor's grandmother.

The name St Colman's is supported by a manuscript notebook of A.R. Watts, which includes among place names supplied by one L Rattray "Cladh ma Chalmaig or Clach ma Calamic - St Colman's Chapel Yard by Tromieside and down by Invertromie Farm", and Sinton, in *Poetry of Badenoch* (1906, 229-231) refers to Cladh Machalmaig - the chapel yard of St Colman's, at Invertromie; so this name was known at the turn of the century.

Malcolm Fraser did not know the name Cill nan Ceatharnach, and Alec and Miss MacGregor knew of this burial ground only as Cladh Invertromie, the burial ground of Invertromie. Their grandfather went to Tromie Mills, just across the river from the burial ground, in 1843, and was succeeded as miller by their father and then by Alec himself. They remembered a lot of useful information, and said that the dyke round the plot, was renewed when they were young, the work being done by Charlie MacPherson of Kingussie; there was no building of any sort inside or outside the burial ground, and the stones were always flat. The people buried there would be from Drumguish, and from Insh and Lynaberack: they were buried there partly to save walking, as the deceased had to be carried to burial grounds, few people having carts, and partly because sometimes it wasn't possible to cross the Spey or the Tromie to take bodies for burial at Kingussie or Kincaig. There was also a burial ground on the Nuide road. Many of the people buried there would be MacPhersons. The last burial was that of their grandmother, Helen MacPherson, who died in 1926, and lies under a stone bearing the names of her husband, a Ferguson, and his parents. They could not remember that grandfather, who died some time before his wife. The burial ground was no longer used because it was full. There had sometimes been problems with the water level. At one time there was an iron cage there, which was used to protect graves in the days of the body snatchers.

This leaves us with something of a puzzle. If the name Cill nan Ceatharnach was known to Mr Fleming of Ballindalloch and Mr MacPherson of Killihuntly in 1870, it seems odd that the name is not known to the descendants of people living at Invertromie Farm and Tromie Mills at the time. It is also strange that while Malcolm Fraser knows it as St Colman's which is supported by Sinton's book, the MacGregors know it only as Cladh Invertromie; surely since their grandfather had moved to the Mills in 1843 and their maternal grandmother was buried there, any other name would have been known to them; besides, living just across the river, any new interments or other activity such as the renewing of the wall would have been a subject of comment; any other name current would surely have been mentioned. For the moment these inconsistencies must remain unresolved, together with the problem of whether there was ever a chapel there or not. There could be a rectangular outline on the stony area just outside the graveyard wall, but it is not at all certain, and could be a fortuitous shape in the uneven surface.

There are a number of Irish saints called Colman, who flourished in the fifth and sixth centuries; two who had some Scottish connections were St Colman of Lann Elo (555-611) who visited St Columba on Iona more than once, and St Colman of Lindisfarne (died 676) who became a monk on Iona, later succeeded St Finan as bishop of Lindisfarne, but after the Synod of Whitby retired to Ireland. (Attwater, *Penguin Dictionary of Saints*). If the dedication to St Colman is correct, it does seem likely that there was once a small cell at this site; other dedications in the area suggest fairly early foundations: St Columba's at Kingussie, St Adomnan's at Kincaig, and St Drostan at Balavil.

The MacGregor's recollection of the renewing of the wall explains why the wall as it stands appears to be later than the field dyke; both walls are marked on the 1870 O.S. 6" map.

It is clear from what the MacGregors say that burial here was not restricted to people from Lynaberack, the burial ground being used by several communities, sometimes as an alternative if severe weather prevented access to Kingussie or Kincaig. The stone commemorating their grandfather and his parents, which should be just inside the gate, was not found, which suggests that more stones may be buried under the turf.

The stones commemorating the deaths of two young men, and a mother with infant children, must represent only a few of many sad events to which this burial ground bears silent testimony. One more is recounted by Sinton: the story of the young widow of the tenant at Invertromie; after remarrying reluctantly, she pined away, and finally died on a hillock above Kingussie, mourning the husband who lay buried across the valley at Invertromie.

Further work.

Further information might be gained if the estate plan could be located. A search through early maps might help, and if it were possible to see the thesis referred to in 'Old Townships of Badenoch' by Rona MacPherson, Creag Dhubh 1958, more useful references might be found. Ultimately an appeal for information through Creag Dhubh, the Clan MacPherson magazine, might be worthwhile. Miss Gair, who lives at Invertromie Farm, says that occasionally foreign visitors ask for directions to the burial ground, presumably because they have relatives buried there.

#### Cladh Invertromie.

Information gleaned in Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie

Copy of ms. from notebook of A.R. Watt, Corrour, Kingussie - ?possibly an aunt of Malcolm Fraser  
Kingussie - he was born c. 1910. 'Some Place Names of Badenoch supplied by L Rattray'  
Under 'Old Chapels in the district' are listed several including Cladh ma Chalmaig 'Clach ma Calamic' - St Colman's Chapel Yard by Tromieside and down by Invertromie Farm; St Mu...ans or Finnian - at Nuide beside the old churchyard there, and Tom Eonan - on the site of the present parish church of Insh-Kincaig.

Church and Social Life in the Highlands

Alexander MacPherson

Blackwoods 1893

Pg. 315      Invertromie was long the seat of a family of Macphersons; like most other seats of families, Invertromie had a burial place.

Poetry of Badenoch

Rev. Thomas Sinton

Inverness 1906

pp. 229 - 231      MacDhonnachaidh Ruaidh of this ballad belonged to the MacPhersons of Invertromie - the Sliochd Thomais. He was a noted hunter, perhaps occasionally a freebooter. He died young and his widow was forced by friends to marry against her will the tacksman of Ardbroileach (just to the north of Kingussie - NH 758 013). She often walked up to Tom Barra (the hill immediately north of Ardbroileach, now forested), a bare summit near her new home, from where she could survey Invertromie, and Cladh Machalmaig - the chapel yard of St Colman - where her husband was buried. Her health deteriorated and one day, assisted by two maids to this spot, she gazed across the valley to Invertromie, sang part of the following elegy which she had composed, and died. These people can be traced in various records to the first half C18th.

The elegy has nine verses and a refrain.

pp. 486-7      - translation



'Red Duncan's son! 'tis of thee I'm thinking  
Red Duncan's son! 'tis of thee I'm thinking  
Red Duncan's son! 'tis of thee I'm thinking  
Thou wouldst not be alive and I on bread.

two sample verses:

That I got within four days,  
four great stags and four hinds,  
Four burdens of the fish of the river –  
Happy the young wife who got the like.

Thou wert the large man in whom was bulk,  
Thou wouldst be hither and thither through Tromie;  
With thy leister and with thy gaff,  
Thou wouldst kill the fish on the top of the waves.

Creag Dhubh - Clan MacPherson magazine 1958 pp. 17 - 22  
The Old Townships of Badenoch Rhona MacPherson

'remains of several early Christian chapels are seen in the district. Notable among these ... St Mochalumaig's at Tromie Bridge.'

Information from O.S. maps and records.

6" map 1870 edition marks Cille nan Ceatharnach  
The Name Book gives Cill nan Ceatharnach - a small enclosure used as a grave yard. There is no historical nor traditional information to be obtained about it.  
Information from: Mr Fleming Esq. Ballindalloch; Mr McPherson, Killihuntly; and the Estate Plan.

Information from Malcolm Fraser, Kingussie

Malcolm Fraser's father was born at Invertromie, where his father farmed; he left as a young man ?c. 1900 to be a joiner, and Malcolm Fraser himself was born in Kingussie.  
He said that the burial ground was very old, and was known as St Colman's, which he said is a variation of St Columba's - he had never heard of Cill nan Ceatharnach. The last burial there was about 1922, and was the burial of Alec MacGregor's grandmother - she was known as "Old Elley", but he couldn't remember her surname. Stewarts were buried at Invertromie - they lived at Lynabrack, in Glen Tromie, on the west side of the river (c. NN 765 940); they were originally tinkers and came over from Aberfeldy; till recently a lot of local engineers, blacksmiths and joiners were Stewarts.  
There used to be a chapel at the burial ground, outside the wall, near the gate.

Information from. Jessie Gair, Invertromie

Miss Gair lived at Invertromie Farm from c. 1942.  
She said that there was no trace of any building by the burial ground. There used to be more stones visible and some of them stood upright. She and another person were once planning to clear them of vegetation. People from New Zealand and Canada have come to ask about the burial ground because they have relatives there.

Alec MacGregor was the person to ask.

Information from Alec and Grace MacGregor.

The MacGregor's grandfather went to Tromie Mills in 1643. Their father took over the mill and in turn Alec took it on; milling stopped in 1946. They moved to Drumguish in (? c1968).

The only name the MacGregors know for the burial ground is Cladh Invertromie - the Invertromie burial ground. They said there was no building of any sort inside or outside the burial ground, and that the stones were always flat. The dyke round the plot, was renewed, and probably a new gate put in, when they were young - it was rebuilt by Charlie MacPherson of Kingussie. (this must have been late 1900-early 1910s)

The people buried there would be from Drumguish, and some from Insh, and Lynaberack - they were buried there partly to save walking, as people had to be carried to burial grounds, few people having carts and also because sometimes it wasn't possible for people from Lynaberack to cross the Tromie or the Spey to take bodies for burial at Kincraig or Kingussie. There was also a burial ground on the Nuide road.

Some of Sir Ian MacPherson's relatives would be buried at Cladh Invertromie (all this area is MacPherson country - Clan Museum at Newtonmore)

The last burial was the MacGregor's grandmother - Helen MacPherson who was married to ?? Ferguson; she was buried under a stone which bears the names of her husband and his parents, in 1926. Her husband had died some time before - the MacGregors couldn't remember him. The burial ground ceased to be used because it was full. There were sometimes problems with the water level too. At one time there was an iron cage there, which was used in the days of body-snatchers.



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5th November, 1999

## **RSPB Insh Marshes Nature Reserve: Past Present and Future**

I have pleasure in enclosing a copy of our most recent newsletter; **Insh Marshes Nature Reserve: Past, Present and Future**, which I hope you will find of interest. The newsletter highlights why the site is important and reviews what impact past management has had on shaping what we see today.

The reserve is run by reference to a Management Plan which is reviewed on a five yearly basis. The current plan expires at the end of March 2000. It is now RSPB policy in Scotland to inform and consult with local communities regarding the future management of sites which we own or manage. As part of that process we recently held two public meetings, one in Kincaig and one in Kingussie, as well as a series of discussions with key stakeholders. We also invited the local community councils to nominate a representative to be responsible for ensuring that any other local views are fed into the discussions for revising the plan. The two appointed local representatives are:

- **Mr Alasdair MacLeod, Kincaig Community Council, Carn Ban, Kincaig, Kingussie, PH21 1NU: Tel No: 01540 651313**
- **Mr Gordon MacPherson: Kingussie Community Council, 3 Cluny Terrace, Kingussie. Tel No: 01540 662275**

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the RSPB's management at Insh please get in touch with either Alasdair or Gordon or contact myself. If you would like an opportunity to comment on the draft plan or just the broad objectives then again please let me know and I will include you on the distribution list. The draft plan should be available for comment early in the new year with the new plan available in March.

Finally if you want further copies of the Newsletter or know of other people or groups who would be interested in receiving a copy again just let me know.

Best wishes

Tom Prescott  
Warden, Insh Marshes Reserve



The RSPB works with bird and habitat conservation organisations in a global partnership called BirdLife International.

Patron Her Majesty the Queen Chairman of Council John Lawton Director, Scotland Stuart Housden Chairman Scottish Committee G Francis CB RSPB registered charity no 207076

# ***Saving the birds ~ Saving the future***