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Castle Camus, Isle of Skye: buildings, materials and radiocarbon analysis in the borderlands of medieval Sleat

Mark Thacker[1]

ABSTRACT

A study of Castle Camus is presented from the pilot phase of the Scottish Medieval Castles and Chapels C14 Project (SMCCCP). The study highlights various challenges faced by investigators seeking to interpret medieval sites where contemporary documentary evidence is late and the physical upstanding remains are fragmentary. Informed by a wider programme of buildings and materials analysis, the paper presents the first independent dating evidence relating to the construction of Castle Camus, through radiocarbon analysis of an assemblage of wood-charcoal Mortar-Entrapped Relict Limekiln Fuel (MERLF) fragments. This data is consistent with later traditions, reporting that a MacLeod clan chieftain died at the castle site in the very early 15th century, and suggests Castle Camus was the formal administrative centre of the lordship of Sleat throughout the later medieval period. Bayesian techniques are used to correlate these different types of evidence and generate an estimate for the constructional chronology of the earliest upstanding structure. The study suggests that construction of the south-east range at Castle Camus was completed in 1280–1330 cal AD (74.2% probability) or 1365–1400 cal AD (21.2% probability)*. Further discussion highlights the landscape context of the castle site; with a focus on woodland resources and socially constructed boundaries.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout much of the 2nd millennium AD, political and religious government across northern Europe was based on reasonably co-extensive and often topographically constrained areas of the landscape, administered from masonry castles and churches which became potent symbols of regional and national identity. This administrative system was based on a network of lordships and parishes which generally appear to have emerged across Britain and Ireland during the 12th and 13th centuries, although contemporary documentary accounts of this process are rare. Interpretation, therefore, generally requires correlation of a wide range of different sources and, where possible, this includes archaeological and architectural evidence from the church and castle buildings themselves.

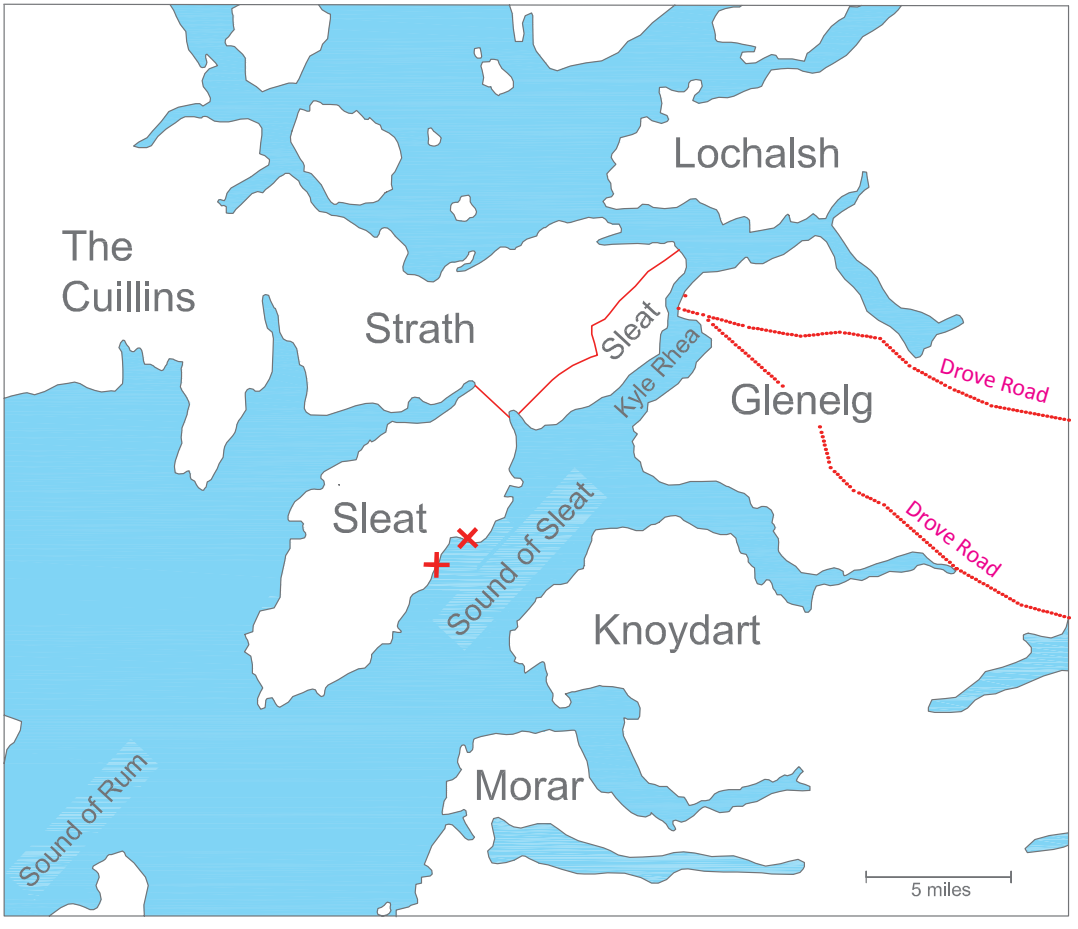
From this perspective, the high concentrations of upstanding medieval masonry buildings surviving across Scotland represent a hugely significant cultural resource, which continues to inform our understanding of how we relate to one another and to the wider landscape in which we live. The potential of that resource, however, is limited by very broad constructional chronologies which often lack the precision required for comparative transdisciplinary interpretations of historic cultural and environmental processes. This SMCCCP study of Castle Camus (Canmore ID 11544) is presented to highlight various challenges faced by buildings investigators across Scotland and elsewhere, and to demonstrate how even a very limited programme of materials analysis can begin to inform that discourse quite significantly. The location of the Camus site has added importance for Scottish medieval archaeology, however, as we seek to

[1] University of Stirling, 27 Upper Carloway, Isle of Lewis

understand how the castle and wider peninsula have developed relative to the various cultural, political and environmental boundaries with which they were surrounded.

PREVIOUS EVIDENCE

Castle Camus is located on a steep-sided promontory on the south-east coast of the Sleat peninsula, Isle of Skye, looking across the narrow sounds to mainland Scotland (Illus 1). Various significant cultural and political boundaries appear to have been imposed on these marine channels throughout the medieval period; with the Gaelic-speaking St Columba, for example, reportedly requiring a translator to speak to a (Pictish) chief of the 'Scian Isle' when he travelled north from the Inner Hebridean island of Iona in the 6th century (*Life of Columba*: 59). The channel at Kyle Rhea is so narrow that cattle can be swum across to mainland Glenelg to meet the drove roads heading east (Haldane 1973: 75–80), and yet Norse colonisation later in the 1st millennium is widely considered to have had a much greater impact on the culture of Skye than on the adjacent mainland, with the narrow sounds between subsequently serving as



ILLUS 1 Map of southern Skye and nearby mainland peninsulas. Also showing the parish boundary between Sleat and Strath (after Thomas 2008: fig 213), the locations of Castle Camus (×), Kilmore Church (+) and drove roads heading east across Glenelg from the Kyle Rhea crossing. (Map plotted from OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2020)

the formal border between Scotland and Norway from the late 11th century (*Heimskringla III*: 136; *Orkeyinga Saga*: 86; Thacker 2015).

Given that the whole of this north-western seaboard (both island and mainland fringe) is also effectively separated from the rest of Scotland by the *Druim Alban* mountain range, it is important to consider the extent to which these cultural distinctions and political boundaries persisted or changed in any given period. Despite Columba's earlier experience, from a later medieval eastern perspective this western fringe of mainland Scotland was identified as 'Argyll' (Middle Gaelic: 'the coastline of the Gaels') as far north as modern-day Ullapool, with lands to the north of Glenelg held within the earldom of Ross by 1312 (Ross 2003 I: 15–16, 26; *Mor. reg.*: no. 264). The borderland position of Glenelg in this period also supports the suggestion that this mainland peninsula can be identified as 'the land of Glenc' (Cochran-yu 2015: 51 n3), which is listed separately in Balliol's 1293 Sheriffdom of Skye between 'the lands of the earl of Ross in north Argyll' and 'the king's land of Skye and [?] Lewis' (*RPS*: 1293/2/16); an apparent independence from larger *supra*-lordships that may have its roots in a remarkable document discovered in 1282 entitled the 'Charter of Glenhelk, which belonged to the King of Man' (*APS I*: 4; *OPS II*(1): 207).

Returning to nearby Skye, the date at which the parish and lordship of Sleat were first constituted as discrete administrative units is unknown, but the lordship finally emerges into the surviving documentary record in a flurry of late 15th-century charters associated with the powerful Clan Donald. The first of these documents is a 1463 grant of 28 Marks of land in 'Slete', from the head of the kindred John MacDonald to his brother Gillespie (Latin: *Celestine*; Scots Gaelic: *Gilleasbaig*), in the same year that Gillespie was also granted a huge area of the nearby west coast mainland including Lochalsh (*ALI*: nos 76 & 80). This grant of lands in Sleat is somewhat curious, since younger brother Hugh (Latin: *Hugoni*; Scots Gaelic: *Ùisdean*), eponymic founder of the *Clann Ùisdean*, already carried the designation 'of the Isles of Slete' by 1461, and the same 28 Marks were confirmed to him; first by brother John in 1469 (*ALI*: nos 73 & 96) and then by the Crown in 1495 (*HP I*: 96–9; *RMS II*: no. 2286). This grant extends to almost the whole 30 Mark parish reported in the late 16th and 17th centuries, which includes a detached area in neighbouring Strath and the parish church of Kilmore (probably St Mary's; Scots Gaelic: *Cill Mhuire*), located 1.4 miles (2.3km) SSE of the Castle Camus site (Skene 1890: 432; Thomas 2008: 223; Illus 1).

None of these late 15th-century charters refer to Castle Camus specifically, however, and the first contemporary references to the site emerge in the 16th and 17th centuries. These include a 1549 account reporting that 'the Castill of Camus in Sleit' was owned by Donald 'Gromsone' MacDonald (Munro 1961: 68) and a 1575–6 account requiring 'James McDonill Growemych of Castell Cammes' to make payment to the bishop of the Isles for various obligations including the 'personage of Kilmoir in Sleat' (*CRA*: 9–12). Lands in Sleat and the Outer Isles were also confirmed to 'Donaldo Gorme [MacDonald] de Slait' in 1614 on the proviso that the 'castrum de Camys' should remain open to the king (*RMS VII*: no. 1087). The location of 'Castel Chamez' is finally identified on Blaeu's (1654) map of Skye later this same century; confirming its position on the south shore of the Sleat peninsula, close to a large bay from which the castle's name presumably derives.

Clan histories based on oral traditions push the evidence surrounding Sleat and Castle Camus back to an earlier period and, although these often partisan post-medieval accounts must be viewed with caution, a convincing narrative for previous developments emerges from consideration of multiple sources. The Clan Donald history composed in Sleat sometime after 1628, for example, states that a branch of the clan descended from Godfrey (son of John MacDonald I lord of the Isles and Amie MacRuari) and known thereafter as the *Siol Ghoraidh* (Scots Gaelic: 'seed of Godfrey') held title to the peninsula in the late 14th to early 15th century, together with other land holdings in the Outer Isles, Small Isles and the nearby mainland (*HP I*: 25). Various 20th-century commentators have also reported that the *Siol Ghoraidh* occupied another castle on

the north coast of Sleat known as *Dun Scathaich*, from 1389–1401 (Nicolson 1930: 31; Miket & Roberts 1990: 47), although this opinion is not universally held. Others have suggested *Dun Scathaich* was constructed by Hugh MacDonald later in the 15th century (MacIntyre 1938; *ALI*: xxix), and at least two authors have also reported that Sleat, and both castles were overrun by Crown troops in 1431 following the rebellion led by Donald Balloch (Nicolson 1930: 34; Grant 1959: 50; Miket & Roberts 1990: 16). A history of the neighbouring Clan MacLeod, meanwhile, reports that they had held the whole peninsula from the 13th century; and that their 5th chief William (Scots Gaelic: *Uilleam*) died suddenly at Castle Camus in 1402 (MacLeod 1927: 59; Miket & Roberts 1990: 13–15; *contra* Grant 1959: 46 who suggests William died in 1392). Importantly for this paper, this is the earliest date which has been strongly linked with the Castle Camus site, with MacLeod traditions reporting that both peninsula and castle were subsequently lost to the clan following the Crown takeover of 1431 and the MacDonald accession to the earldom of Ross (MacLeod 1927: 65).

This early 20th-century MacLeod narrative is broadly consistent with the contemporary documentary evidence available for this very late medieval period. The late 15th-century charters relating to Sleat highlighted above, are indeed all associated with a period when the head of Clan Donald held both the lordship of the Isles and the neighbouring earldom of Ross (John II; 1449 × 1493), and Gillespie MacDonald's rise through the Ross hierarchy from deputy sheriff of Inverness in 1450 to sheriff of Inverness and lord of Lochalsh in 1461 is very clearly documented (*ALI*: xix, nos 55 & 71). Moreover, although the lordship of Skye was granted to the earl of Ross by Robert I (probably in the very early 14th century; Cochran-yu 2015: 82), by the time of Hugh MacDonald's 1469 grant and the subsequent MacDonald forfeit of Ross it is clear that Sleat was at last held by Clan Donald within the lordship of the Isles (*ALI*: no. 96; *HP I*: 96–9; *RMS II*: no. 2286). Indeed, a 1336 indenture between John I and Edward Balliol (*ALI*: no. 1) suggests absorbing Skye within the Isles lordship was a long-held MacDonald ambition.

Whilst the list of island estates reportedly held by the *Siol Ghoraidh* in the 14th century appears very similar to those granted to Hugh MacDonald in the 15th century; Sleat is conspicuous by its absence from a very similar list of lands granted by the Crown to John MacDonald in 1372 and subsequently granted to his son Reginald (*RMS I*: no. 412; *ALI*: no. 7; Table 1). At least one scholar has suggested that the account indicating the *Siol Ghoraidh* held formal title to Sleat *c* 1400 may be a post-medieval attempt to legitimise the MacDonald takeover of the peninsula in the following century (Raven 2005: 67), and the authority for the reported late 14th-century occupation of *Dun Scathaich* by the clan is not known to the current author. That the head of the *Siol Ghoraidh* was signing charters from the MacRuari clan's mainland seat at *Eilean Tioram* and styling himself lord of the Isle of Uist by 1389, however, certainly indicates that this branch of the clan wielded significant power in this late 14th to early 15th century period (*ALI*: no. 10; Raven 2005: 68–71). I can also find no contemporary evidence for the Crown's reported takeover of Sleat and its two castles following the 1431 Battle of Inverlochy, although Balloch's rebellion is intimately bound up with a period of continued tension between James I and Alexander of the Isles, which ultimately led to the Crown's capture of the castles at Dingwall and Urquhart and direct administration of the earldom of Ross by the king from 1429 (Brown 1992). Indeed, given the recent history of co-administration and the proximity of these mainland castles, this MacLeod narrative provides a reasonable context for a 1429 Crown account detailing the transportation of armaments to the Isles (*ER IV*: civ, 511; MacLeod 1927: 65; Brown 1992: 310), with the king thereafter perhaps controlling both Ross and southern Skye.

James I's administration of these northern lands, however, was not to last. Castle Camus is only 35 miles from Inverlochy and Alexander may well have occupied lands in Skye and the western mainland soon after the battle, before formally succeeding to the Ross earldom sometime in 1436 (Brown 1992: 438; *contra ALI*: xxxiv). These dates suggest the rapid transfer of various island estates into the lordship of the Isles

TABLE 1
Various grants associated with Clan Donald and associated septs around Sleat in the 14th and 15th centuries

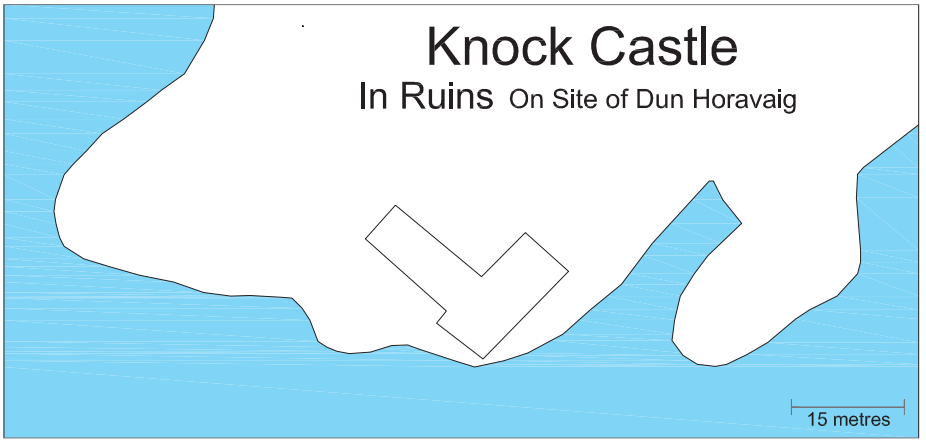
Title holder	*Date*	*Mainland*	*Inner Hebrides*	*Outer Hebrides*
John MacDonald *Clann Dòmhnaill*	1372	Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, **Knoydart**	Rum, Eigg	Uist, Barra, St Kilda.
Ranald MacRuari *Clann Ragnaill*	1372/3	Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, **Knoydart**, Sunart, Lochaber, Morvern	Rum, Eigg	Uist, Benbecula, Barra, St Kilda
Godfrey MacRuari *Siol Ghoraidh*	*c* 1400	**Knoydart**	Canna, **Slate**	North Uist, Benbecula, half of South Uist, Boisdale
Hugh MacDonald *Clann Ùisdean*	1469, 1495		**Slete**	Howmore, Benbecula, Griminish, North part of North Uist, Scolpaig, Balmartin, Oronsay, 'Waynlis', Gillegerre

before Hugh MacDonald's grant of 1469, and Sleat appears to have been an early addition to a newly reconfigured MacRuari (*Siol Ghoraidh* or Clan Ranald) then MacDonald lordship during that same period.

Tradition associates the first church at Kilmore in Sleat with *Crotach MacGille Gorm* – a 13th-century priest who had been trained at the monastery of Beauly in Ross-shire (a Valliscaulian House founded by the earl of Ross around 1230; Cowan & Easson 1976) – and reports that the medieval church was burned down during an early 17th-century conflict between the MacLeods and a sept of the Clan Donald, before being rebuilt in 1681 (MacPherson 1795: 538; Sleat Historical Society; Nicolson in MacLean 2012). Unfortunately, there are no traditions regarding possible patrons of the adjacent castle known to this author, and to investigate that past further we need to turn to the buildings evidence.

None of the late medieval references highlighted above, however, describe a particular building. Bleau's atlas includes none of the building depictions presented elsewhere by Pont, and by the later 17th century Castle Camus was reportedly 'abandoned and desolate' (Miket & Roberts 1990: 17). A late 18th-century account usefully reports that the ruins of '*castle I' Chamuis*' displayed evidence for two main phases; 'partly ancient, partly modern, one side being circular, and covered with ivy, the other being built in the common style of masonry' (MacPherson 1795: 538), but whilst a mid-19th-century painting portrays the complex as a roofless ruin comprised of three substantially upstanding ranges of two or more storeys high (McCulloch 1834?; Miket & Roberts 1990), the Ordnance Survey (1876) delineate a large L-shaped planned building apparently limited to two ranges of different dimensions conjoined at the south angle (see Illus 2). The OS description of the building as 'In Ruins On site of *Dun horavaig*' also alludes to the suspected Iron Age origins of the site and, in curious contrast to the medieval and early modern documents, both of these 19th-century sources identify the building as 'Knock Castle'.

Indeed, by the early 20th century the castle structure had clearly suffered further major collapse. The brief RCAHMS (1928) inventory account from this period reports that 'very little can be followed without excavation', whilst the fragmentary remains of Castle Camus which do survive above ground are essentially rubble-built with no surviving typologically refined dressed stone details. As a result, architectural characterisation of the upstanding building has been speculative, with many commentators appearing to follow the available documentary evidence. The RCAHMS (1928) suggestion



ILLUS 2 Map of the Castle Camus site with 'L-shaped' plan of upstanding buildings. (© Mark Thacker, after OS 1876)

that the limited upstanding remains are all 16th century, for example, corresponds to the first direct reference to the castle itself; whilst Coventry's (1995: 88) characterisation of the south-east range as a 'keep' and ascription to the 15th century corresponds to the earliest charters associated with the wider lordship of Sleat (see also Miers 2008). Elsewhere, Caldwell and Ruckley (2005) associate this building with the historic earldom of Ross and describe it as a 'great hall' similar to nearby Strome; whilst Dunbar (1981: 49, 67) and the RCAHMS (in a later period; 1975: 27–8) suggested this structure was a 'hall-house' of the same 'class' as the (presumably) 13th-century castle buildings of Fraoch Eilean and Lochranza. Miket and Roberts (1990: xxiv) more cautiously describe the south-east range as a 'tower' and, perhaps as a result of a more comprehensive examination, do not attempt to date the building any closer than the mid-13th to 15th century.

In summary, therefore, various strands of historical evidence suggest Castle Camus has been a focus for seignorial occupation during a medieval and early modern period in which the political geography of the surrounding peninsula and wider region was subject to a series of significant administrative changes. With architectural interpretations of the earliest surviving upstanding building on the site ranging from the 13th to the 16th centuries, however, the political context in which the castle was initially constructed and developed is unclear, and widely held reports that the nearby castle of *Dun Scathaich* was the ancestral home of the MacDonald lords of Sleat have lent further ambiguity to the later medieval relationship between this site and administration of the surrounding lordship. Stepping into this discourse it is notable that, in part at least, Castle Camus was selected as a case study site for the pilot phase of the SMCCCP because the very ruinous condition of the complex enabled access to high volumes of constructional materials.

METHODOLOGY: SURVEY, SAMPLING AND ANALYSIS

In line with developing methodologies (Thacker 2016), Castle Camus was subject to a preliminary programme of on-site buildings and materials analysis. This included close inspection of exposed masonry and mortars to a height of 2m, with the naked eye and a ×10 hand lens, to establish the character of surviving materials and identify samples for further lab-based analysis. A walkover survey of the local shoreline was also undertaken, to investigate whether current inter- and sublittoral sand and gravel compositions were consistent with the aggregates used to temper the castle mortars.

The location of selected in situ samples from the upstanding building were recorded by hand measurement from adjacent wall faces (laterally), and from a datum string line (vertically). These measurements were subsequently plotted onto a pre-existing plan drawing of the site, whilst the location of a loose sample of aggregate collected from the nearby foreshore was recorded by hand-held GPS. All samples were removed using hand tools from exposed contexts, stored in labelled and sealed sample bags within hard plastic containers, before air-drying at room temperature for 48 hours and repackaging. Samples containing suspected fragments of mortar-entrapped relict limekiln fuels (hereafter MERLF) were stored in a laboratory refrigerator.

Thin sections of the mortar and aggregate samples were prepared by Mike Hall at the University of Edinburgh, to a standard 30μm thickness. The mortar sample was initially sawn into slices approximately 5mm thick and dried on a hotplate for 48 hours at 50°C before consolidating one freshly cut surface on each sample with epoxy resin. Once cured, the consolidated surface was ground down on a horizontal lap to provide a flat surface for mounting onto a 76mm × 25mm glass slide. A cut-off saw and horizontal lap were then used to remove most of the excess material from the slide, before the section was hand polished and cover-slipped. Preparation of the aggregate sample proceeded by the same general methodology, but this loose material was cast into a resin block before initial slicing. Prepared thin sections were subject to microscopic examination in plane and polarised light, using a Leica DMLM polarising microscope with image capture by LAS V4.0 software.

Archaeobotanical analysis of suspected wood-charcoal MERLF fragments was undertaken with Mike Cressey of CFA Archaeology, Musselburgh. These fragments were fractured to expose transverse sections for examination in reflected light to ×40 magnification and identified to genus level (where possible) with reference to standard anatomical literature (Schweingruber 1990). Sample morphology was also characterised; including biostructural curvature, presence of pith, bark or heartwood/sapwood boundaries, number of annual rings, and an approximate sample age estimated (Thacker 2020). Where the analysis identified single-entity wood-charcoal MERLF fragments of reasonably short-lived taxonomy and/or morphology, then these were weighed, wrapped in aluminium foil, and placed in sealed sample bags to be considered for radiocarbon analysis.

Selected single-entity MERLF wood-charcoal samples were submitted to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC) for radiocarbon analysis. All submitted samples were subject to acid-base-acid (ABA) pretreatment and graphitization at the SUERC laboratory, before analysis by accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) (Dunbar et al 2016).

RESULTS

BUILDINGS ANALYSIS

The upstanding remains of Castle Camus are very fragmentary, and largely reduced to sections of a very thick-walled south-east building, and a less massively constructed south-west range (Illus 3–7). Two other fragments of masonry include: a small in situ and upstanding multiphase section of masonry at what appears to be the opposite north corner of the massive south-east building (Illus 7) and two small ex situ fragments of composite (two faces and core) masonry walls within the remains of the south-west range. Mortar evidence suggests this second ex situ fragment is also multiphase, and all four surviving contexts will be described further below.

The upstanding masonry of the south-east range is mostly comprised of the south-west and south-east walls which, as depicted by the Ordnance Survey (1876), meet at the south angle and define the southern extent of the site. A ground floor lintel-headed slit-window and the possible remains of a garderobe chute are evident within the longer south-east wall, but these are the only visibly surviving architectural features (Illus 5–7). Almost all of the internal facing blocks of these walls have been lost and, with external wall faces obscured by an extensive covering of ivy, characterisation of the wall faces is limited to very low courses externally (some

ILLUS 3 Aerial photograph of the Castle Camus site from the south-west, 2016. Highlighting two main upstanding ranges, meeting at the south angle of the summit of this steep-sided promontory. (DP29732 © Historic Environment Scotland)

ILLUS 4 Castle Camus from the west; 1964. Highlighting the ivy-covered remains of the south-east range in the background and the south-west range in the foreground. The south-west range had suffered further significant collapses by the time of the current work. (SC_1554980 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland (Scottish National Buildings Record))

ILLUS 5 The south-east range from the south-east, 2014. Note the flat-laid faces and uncoursed character of exposed external masonry at low levels. (© Mark Thacker)

of which are probably levelling/foundation) and some fragmentary higher courses internally. These wall faces are dominated by large flat-laid stretcher slabs of well-foliated gneiss, grading up to 500mm in length and 150–200mm high, in walls averaging 1.5m thick. There is little contrast between face and core in terms of stone size, lithology or emplacement-technique; in both contexts the blocks generally display very rounded arrises without any evidence for dressing or knapping and most are bedded horizontally upon the largest stone face (with edge-laid blocks only very rarely displayed). Externally there is no visible evidence for regular coursing, lateral bonding is poor, and the stones are sometimes off the level, but internally the few surviving fragments suggest a more formal masonry style pertained at a higher level.

The loss of much of the internal face from both of these two walls has revealed a large volume of upstanding core rubble (Illus 7). The rubble blocks within this core have often been laid with some stone-to-stone contact and the particularly coarse mortar surrounding suggests these were bedded as well as grouted with 'run lime'. Overall, however, this constructional mortar is compositionally consistent in core, bed and coating contexts, and there is no evidence that the surviving remains of this south-east range are anything other than single phase. This south-east range mortar was labelled Mortar 1 (Illus 8) and characterised in situ as follows:

- Mortar 1 is a coarse white/grey mortar with a high concentration of altered and discoloured *O. edulis* shell fragments and degraded carbonaceous probable wood-charcoal inclusions.
- Mortar 1 contains a high concentration of rounded to subangular quartzofeldspathic sands and gravels ranging up to 30mm.

ILLUS 6 The south-east range from the south, 2014. Note fragmentary remains of north corner of the range at the top right of this image, abutted by a secondary wall from the north-west. (© Mark Thacker)

ILLUS 7 The south-east range from the north-west, 1964. Highlighting the almost complete loss of internal facing from upstanding south-east and south-west walls, and the extensive exposure of lime-bonded core rubble. (SC_1554986 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland (Scottish National Buildings Record))

ILLUS 8 Mortar 1 in the core of the south-east range, 2014; scale 10mm. (© Mark Thacker)

- Mortar 1 contains a low concentration of vitreous inclusions to 20mm.

A small upstanding masonry fragment in the north-east of the site appears to be a surviving section of the north corner of this south-east range (Illus 6). The north-west wall of this corner displays extensive external mortar coating survival, and this coating is abutted by a small fragment of another masonry wall – oriented north-west/south-east and likely to be a surviving section of the north-east curtain (see Miket & Roberts 1990: 19). Although the stratigraphic relationship between these walls is clear, both features are bonded with shell-rich mortars containing a high concentration of *O. edulis* shell fragments and no clear compositional contrasts were apparent. The fragmentary turf-covered footings of another wall are visible along the south-west perimeter of the site, in line with the south-west wall of the south-east range, but health and safety considerations precluded close examination.

The upstanding south-west range of Castle Camus is mostly comprised of the remains of a south-west wall, oriented parallel to the long axis of the building and containing first-floor joist sockets, with very small stretches of the adjacent south-east and north-west end walls (Illus 4). Significantly for our understanding of the site's stratigraphy, the longer south-west wall of this south-west range is set back from the footings of a wall visible along the south-west edge of the site (noted above), whilst the south-east (end) wall of the building clearly cuts the north-west wall of the massively constructed south-east building. At 0.9m wide, the walls of the south-west range are also narrower than those of the (earlier) south-east range and the masonry is more formal; with well-defined and well-bonded courses of edge-laid face stones surrounded by smaller fissile snecks, pinnings and levellers. The mortar associated with this building is visible in widespread core and bedding contexts, with extensive remains of internal and external coatings including on the external face of the south-west wall overlaying the south-west range. In parallel with its finer masonry, this material is also very much finer than that of the south-east range. This finer material is now labelled Mortar 2 and was described in situ as follows:

- Mortar 2 contains a very high concentration of altered *C. edule*, *P. vulgata* and *O. edulis*

shell fragments, generally grading up to 5–15mm.

- Mortar 2 contains a poorly sorted mixture of shell (including gastropod) and lithic grains, locally to 4mm, but is dominated by very fine sub-mm sand and/or silt grains.

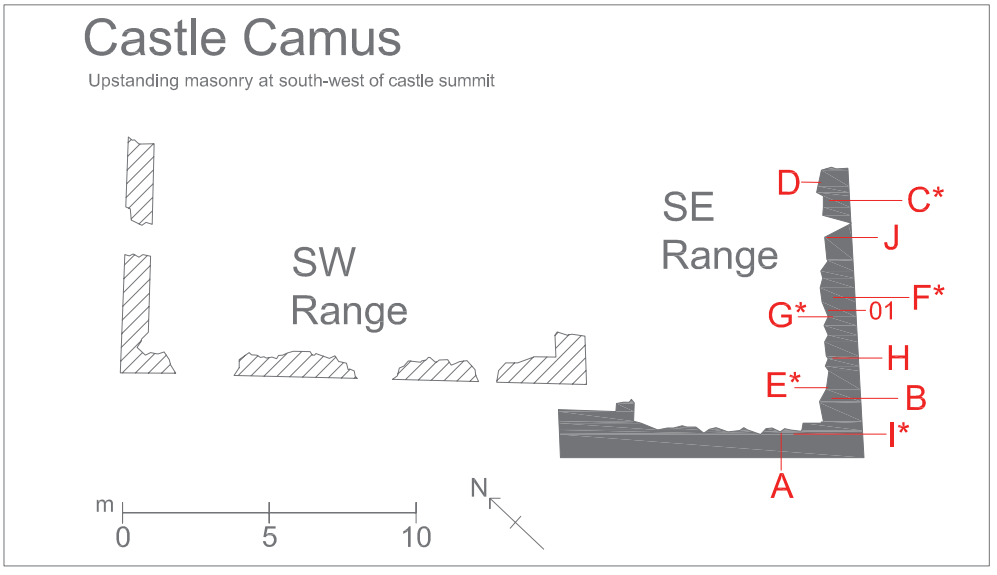
Two ex situ masonry fragments overlie the south-west range, the largest of which comprises a double-faced cross section of the corner of a building 1.0m high, 1.6m wide and 1.0m thick. The visible masonry faces appear to be comprised of flat-laid stone, but the larger fragment is probably of two phases as the lower masonry is bound with a shell-rich mortar whilst the upper section – and the whole of the smaller fragment – is bound with a mortar with abundant probable limestone (probable relict limekiln) inclusions. This limestone-rich mortar was labelled Mortar 3 and described in situ as below:

- Mortar 3 contains a high concentration of large subangular probable limestone inclusions, grading up to 60mm long and displaying a white/pink colouration. One mineral fuel inclusion was also noted.
- Mortar 3 contains a poorly sorted coarse lithic temper comprised of subrounded gneiss sands and gavels ranging to up 8mm.
- Mortar 3 contains a single large red/purple vitreous (bulbous with vesicles) inclusion.

For the purposes of this preliminary study of Castle Camus, all in situ samples selected for lab-based analysis were removed from the south-east range (Illus 9). This assemblage included one in situ mortar fragment (CCS.01), ten in situ fragments of MERLF (CCS.A-J), and an aggregate sample from the adjacent foreshore (CCS.B1).

LAB-BASED ANALYSIS

Mortar 1 sample thin-section CCS.01 contains a poorly sorted composite material including a high concentration of rounded, mostly transparent and colourless clasts up to 10mm, and curving blue and white probable bioclasts up to 12mm.



ILLUS 9 Annotated plan of the upstanding masonry on the south-west side of the Castle Camus summit, with phasing interpretations and sample locations plotted. Primary south-east range is blocked in black and the secondary south-west range is hatched with diagonal lines. Sample contexts are marked in red (without CCS. prefixes). MERLF samples labelled by letter with an additional asterisk (*) marking those that were subject to AMS radiocarbon analysis. (Original image *c* 1928, DP148155 © Crown Copyright: Historic Environment Scotland)

TABLE 2
Site context, archaeobotanical character, radiocarbon measurements and calibration date ranges for selected MERLF samples from Castle Camus. All samples were removed from constructional mortars consistent with phasing and in situ wall core contexts. All samples were single entity. $\delta^{13}C$ values are all reasonably close to the expected –25‰ level. Calibrated date ranges were calibrated by the probability method using OxCal v.4.3.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2017) and the IntCal.13 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al 2013) at five-year resolution. Calibrated date ranges have been rounded out to ten years

Site context			*Sample character*				*Radiocarbon measurements and calibrated date ranges*			
Phase	*Feature*	*Code*	*Taxa*	*Curve*	*Rings*	*Bark*	*Lab. code*	*$\delta^{13}C$ (‰)*	*^{14}C age (BP)*	*Calibrated range at 95.4% probability*
1	SE Wall	CCS.C	*Betula* sp	High	3–4	Yes	SUERC-62537	–24.0	712±34	1220–1390 cal AD
1	SE Wall	CCS.E	*Betula* sp	High	4	No	SUERC-62541	–26.1	672±34	1270–1400 cal AD
1	SE Wall	CCS.F	*Betula* sp	High	<20	No	SUERC-62542	–27.7	698±34	1250–1390 cal AD
1	SE Wall	CCS.G	*Betula* sp	High	6	No	SUERC-62543	–28.0	664±34	1270–1400 cal AD
1	SW Wall	CCS.I	*Pinus* sp	Low	<20	No	SUERC-62544	–28.6	637±34	1280–1400 cal AD

These are all supported by a fine buff-coloured matrix. In polarized light, a high concentration of *O. edulis* shell fragments is visible, and these display a wide spectrum of altered textures; often characterised by well-preserved foliated structure with altered prismatic layers. The lithic fraction is almost completely dominated by rounded to subrounded clasts of gneiss and quartz-rich mica-schists up to 10mm, with a very low concentration of subrounded sedimentary material, also containing rounded intraclasts of mica-schist. A low concentration of fine wood-charcoal inclusions up to 1mm and a single vitreous inclusion was also noted.

Aggregate thin section CCS.B1 contains a fine poorly sorted mixture of rounded clasts, most of which are transparent and colourless, to 5mm. In polarized light, this lithic material is dominated by quartzose mica-schist or gneiss clasts with clean well-defined grain boundaries, although some mica degradation is evident. No shell material was noted.

All ten mortar-entrapped carbonaceous inclusions were fragments of wood-charcoal. The assemblage included a narrow range of three different taxa; dominated by six fragments of *Betula* sp (60%), with three of *Quercus* sp (30%) and a single fragment of *Pinus* sp (10%). Eight of the fragments were interpreted as roundwood and one *Betula* fragment displayed some surviving bark. Five of these wood-charcoal fragments were selected for radiocarbon analysis on the basis of wide distribution and short-lived taxonomy/morphology, and the results of these analyses are presented in Table 2 opposite.

INTERPRETATION AND BAYESIAN ANALYSIS

Accepting that the relationship between the south-east range and the fragmentary turf-covered footings of south-west wall has not been resolved, both of these structures are earlier than the upstanding south-west range. Indeed, that the end wall of the south-west range partially overlies the north-west wall of the south-east range and displays extensive external mortar coating evidence, suggests the south-east range was ruinous when the later structure was built – perhaps serving as a curtain wall only by this

period. The provision for wide ground floor windows in the long south-west wall of this later structure, moreover, suggests any earlier south-west wall had also collapsed (or was dismantled) by the time construction of the south-west range was completed. We should not assume the fragment of north-west enclosure wall which abuts the south-east range is necessarily coeval with the opposite south-west range, however, and indeed there are textural contrasts in the constructional mortars of these structures which suggests the enclosure wall may be earlier.

The two main upstanding ranges present distinct contrasts in masonry technique and materials, although both have been constructed from local materials. A pre-Cambrian Lewisian inlier fringes the south-east coast of the Sleat peninsula and the bedrock geology surrounding Castle Camus is dominated by high-grade gneisses and schists crossed by dykes and sills of basalt with some larger extrusions of gabbro (Richey et al 1961: 6–7). The nearest mapped geogenic calcareous outcrops are located approximately 3.75 miles (6km) to the north-west where a much more complex geology includes some reasonably extensive outcrops of (Durness Group) Cambrian dolostone (ibid 11). Both main ranges at Castle Camus have been constructed of rubble stone blocks, consistent with very local outcrops, and shell-rich (possible shell-lime) mortars tempered with different grades of aggregate collected from the nearby foreshore. Mortar 3 (like Mortar 2) was not subject to comparative thin-section petrographic analysis, but the character of the large angular inclusions visible in this mortar (and in particular the pink colouration) is consistent with metalimestone limekiln relicts sourced from the nearby Skye/Glenelg area.

The *Betula/Quercus/Pinus* composition of the MERLF assemblage examined during the study is also reasonably consistent with the vegetational history of the locality. A pollen series from nearby Loch Meodal (only 1.6 miles (2.6km) NNW of Castle Camus and unusually well constrained by 11 radiocarbon dates) suggests the rapid expansion of alder at *c* 6500 BP into a Sleat woodland previously dominated by birch and hazel, to form 'mixed birch-hazel-alder woods with some oak, elm, rowan and holly' (Birks 1993). Woodland clearance began *c* 5200 BP, but the landscape still retained extensive woods of birch with some alder and hazel until *c* 300 BP. An anonymous late 16th-century account, almost certainly written by visiting Edinburgh merchant John Cunningham in 1596, reported that 'Thair is mony woods in all pairtis of this Ile of Sky, speciallie birkis [birch] and orne [oak]' (Skene 1890: 433; Caldwell 2015). The inclusion of *quercis* (as well as the usual *silvis*) in Gillespie MacDonald's 1463 grant of Sleat is unusual, however, and hints at medieval concern for conservation of precious oak stocks consistent with the low *Quercus* pollen concentrations in the Loch Meodal study (*ALI*: no. 80; Birks 1993; Smout et al 2005: 364). Pine has generally been regarded as absent from Sleat (Birks & Williams 1983), but a small percentage of *pinus* pollen was reported in zone 5 of the Loch Meodal sediment (Birks 1973: 331), and the MERLF sample removed from Castle Camus during the current study suggests some pine was present locally in the medieval period. Semi-natural relicts of Sleat's previously much more extensive woodland cover survive in the Ord valley in the north of Sleat (overlying a more complex geology), and a late 20th-century study reported this was also largely composed of birch, hazel and oak (Birks 1973, 1993). This woodland is also clearly mapped on Stobie's estate plan of 1763 and described as 'thriving' by John Walker in 1764 who reported a composition of birch, oak, ash, alder, rowan, holly, hazel and grey willow (Smout et al 2005: 367). The taxa listed in both of these historical reports from north-west Sleat are consistent with the pollen record from Loch Meodal, although the proximity of this geologically Lewesian loch site to the Moine may have skewed the pollen evidence and standing woodland populations on the south-east coast of the peninsula may have been less taxa diverse.

Radiocarbon analysis of the five MERLF samples selected from the south-east range of Castle Camus returned a very narrow range of measurements consistent with the single-phase interpretation of the upstanding building remains. These results are statistically consistent at 5%

significance level ($T' = 3.0$, $T'(5\%) = 9.5$, $\nu = 4$; Ward & Wilson 1978), indicating they could all be of the same actual age. Moreover, the sub-assemblage submitted for radiocarbon analysis was dominated by *Betula*; which is the shortest living common tree type in Britain, rarely reaches 100 years old, and displays very little post-mortem durability (Rackham 2003: 311). One of these samples also displayed surviving bark evidence.

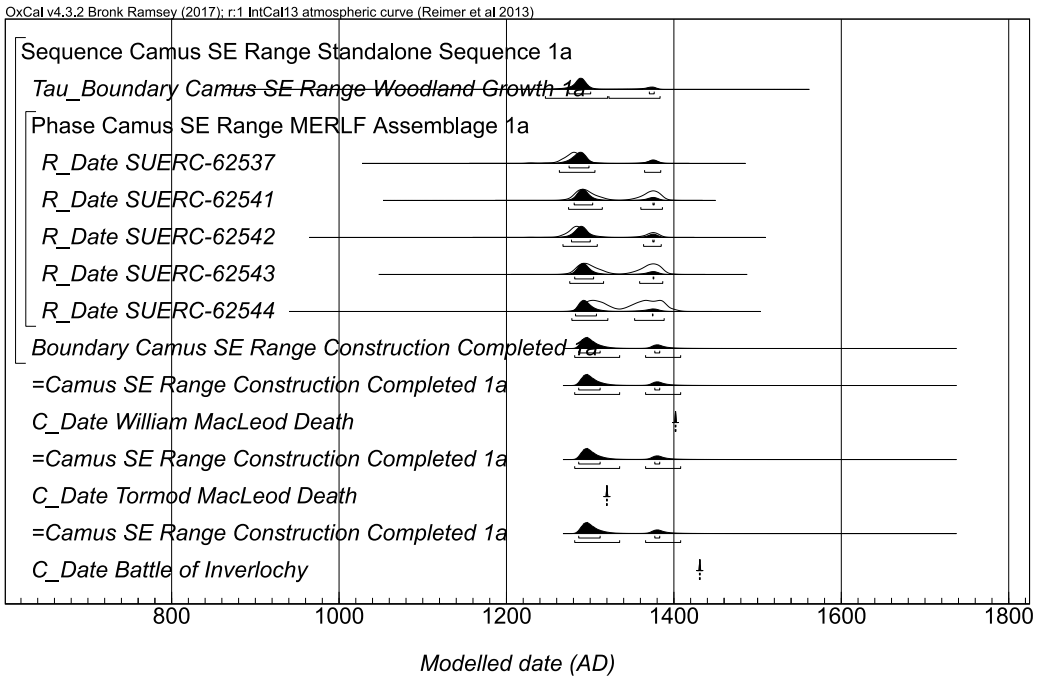
The use of local materials suggests the mortar was subject to very limited transport and this was probably deposited within the masonry fabric (as 'hot lime') very soon after manufacture. The south-east range measures approximately 18m × 7m inside walls 1.5m wide and was at least two storeys high. Although all of the radiocarbon measurements were from samples removed from ground floor level, it is reasonable to suggest the building is likely to have taken less than five years to construct. Ultimately, this is a single-phase constructional lime mortar manufactured from short-lived and/or local materials that were quickly deposited in a building of moderate size, and the disjunction between the radiocarbon measurements and completion date of the south-east range at Camus Castle is therefore likely to be very limited (Thacker 2020).

Informed by the above analyses, a series of Bayesian models were constructed within OxCal to generate estimates for the constructional date of completion of the Castle Camus south-east range. 'Standalone' Model 1a includes the buildings and materials analysis data only; constraining all the south-east range MERLF sample dates within a single phase, imposing an exponential distribution on that data using a Tau Start Boundary, and (due to the short-lived character of the samples) tagging each individual radiocarbon date measurement with a 5% outlier probability within an 'General' Outlier Model (Bronk Ramsey 2009; Thacker 2020). Within this model, the End Boundary distribution is regarded as the best chronological estimate for completion of the Camus south-east range, and in the standalone model this is compared to calendar dates for the reported deaths of William (1402) and Norman MacLeod (1320) using the OxCal Order function. On the basis that the south-east range is the earliest upstanding structure, in 'multidisciplinary Model 1b' the End Boundary distribution is constrained to a period earlier than the earliest reported reference to the site (the 1402 date of Willian MacLeod's death). Fuller details for both of these models are presented in the Supplementary Material (2.0 & 3.0) together with alternative standalone models 2a (which employs uniform Boundaries and no Outlier Model; Supplementary Material 4.0) and 3a (which employs a Tau Start Boundary and no Outlier Model; Supplementary Material 5.0).

Model 1a suggests construction of the south-east range at Castle Camus was completed in *1280–1335 cal AD (73.5%) or 1365–1410 cal AD* (*21.9% probability*; *Camus SE Range Construction Completed 1a*; Illus 10 & Supplementary Material 2.0). The introduction of a 1402 *TAQ* into the model therefore has very little effect on final End Boundary probability distribution but does tighten up the earlier peak slightly; this 'multidisciplinary' Model 1b suggests construction of the south-east range of Castle Camus was completed *1280–1330 cal AD (74.2%) or 1365–1400 cal AD* (*21.2% probability*; *Camus SE Range Construction Completed 1b*; Illus 11 & Supplementary Material 3.0). These models are robust with respect to data distribution, such that standalone Models 2a and 3a generated very similar constructional estimates (Supplementary Material 4.0 & 5.0).

CONCLUSION

This short multidisciplinary study has highlighted phase-specific contrasts in the masonry materials and techniques displayed by surviving structures at Castle Camus and presents the first independent dating evidence relating to building construction at the site by radiocarbon analysis of a small assemblage of MERLF fragments. Bayesian techniques have been used to generate 'standalone' estimates for constructional completion of the earliest upstanding structure, and that distribution has been further constrained in a 'multidisciplinary' model by employing the earliest historical date associated with the site

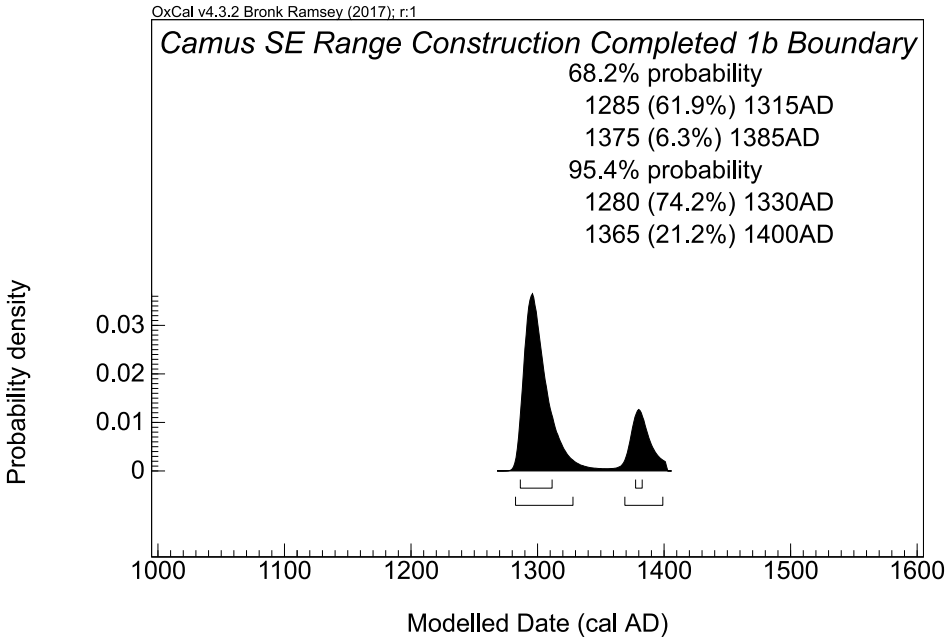


Illus 10 Probability distributions associated with Castle Camus SE Range 'standalone' Model 1a. Includes comparison with 1402, 1320 and 1431 calendar dates. This model was plotted in OxCal v4.3.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2017) and calibrated using IntCal13 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al 2013). See ESM 2.0 for further model details and results

as a *terminus ante quem*. This latter Model 1b suggests construction of the south-east range at Castle Camus was completed in *1280–1330 cal AD (74.2% probability) or 1365–1400 cal AD* (*21.2% probability*). The bimodal character of this distribution is unfortunate, but this estimate still represents a significant increase in accuracy and precision on the speculative range of 13th- to 16th-century dates previously ascribed to the fragmentary remains of this rubble-built structure; allowing the historical and environmental context of the building's construction to be reconsidered with greater confidence.

It is almost certain (*97% probability*; *William MacLeod Probability*; Supplementary Material Table S3) that the south-east range at Castle Camus was constructed before the 1402 date in which William MacLeod reportedly died at the castle site (MacLeod 1927: 59), and it is entirely possible that this was the very building within which he drew his last breath. That the south-east range was constructed before the 1431 Battle of Inverlochy, which reportedly precipitated the MacLeod loss of the castle and peninsula, is even more certain (*99% probability*; *Pre Battle of Inverlochy Probability*; Supplementary Material Table S5).

The close proximity of the parish church site of Kilmore suggests that Castle Camus can be simply identified as the administrative centre of the lordship of Sleat. That suggestion is also consistent with the 16th-century designation of James MacDonald as 'of Castle Camus', his obligations to the parsonage of 'Kilmoir', and the 17th-century proviso stipulated by the Crown regarding the Camus site noted above. By extending the constructional chronology of the castle site back to the 13th or 14th centuries, to a period consistent with traditions regarding the 13th-century foundation of the parish church, the current study suggests Castle Camus and Kilmore are likely to have been the dual secular



Illus 11 End Boundary probability distribution generated by Castle Camus 'multidisciplinary' Model 1b. This model was plotted in Oxcal v4.3.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2017) and calibrated using IntCal13 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al 2013). Distributions have been rounded out to five years. See electronic supplementary material (ESM)[1] 3.0 for further model details and results

and religious administrative foci of the lordship and parish from this earlier period.

There are no traditions regarding possible patronage of these church and castle buildings known to this author, but standalone Model 1a suggests there is a *70% probability* (*Tormod MacLeod Probability*; Supplementary Material Table S4) that the south-east range at Castle Camus was constructed during the rule of Norman (Scots Gaelic: *Tormod*); 2nd chief of the clan MacLeod who reportedly held power from 1280 until his death in 1320 (Nicolson 1930). The probability that this building was constructed before 1320 rises to *72% probability* in multidisciplinary Model 1b (*Tormod MacLeod Probability*; Supplementary Material Table S7).

Norman ultimately became the eponymic founder of the *Siol Tormod* (Scots Gaelic: 'seed of *Tormod*'), a designation used to differentiate the line of the Skye MacLeods from their (*Siol Torquil*) Lewis MacLeod neighbours. Tradition also reports that Norman 'held the office of Sheriff of Skye and all the Long Island during his Lifetime … lived to a good old age, and … his white beard was so long that he had to tuck the end of it under his girdle. He died at the Castle of Pabbay in Harris, and was buried alongside of his grandfather at Iona' (MacLeod 1927: 34).

DISCUSSION

By describing landscape transects that cut across various environmental boundaries, the laddered form of the *supra*-lordship administrative units which characterise north-west Scotland in the later medieval period appears to have enabled a reasonably equitable division of available resources between neighbouring clans. This often included an apparently tri-partite mix of sea-birds and arable from the cliffs and *machair* of the Outer Isles, extensive hill grazing in the Inner Isles, and timber from mainland woodlands (Illus 12), but the particular and changing

environmental character of each of these contexts is important for a finer-grained understanding of how these wider polities were negotiated.

A wide range of evidence suggests that Sleat has been the most heavily wooded part of Skye since the last glacial maximum – and this was undoubtedly a valuable resource – but the Sound of Sleat also coincides with a phytogeographic boundary which marks the natural limit of oak woodland distribution in north-west Europe (Jahn 1991: fig 13.12E). The relatively low (30%) *Quercus* fraction in the MERLF assemblage from the south-east building at Castle Camus and correspondingly low *Quercus* pollen levels presented by the Loch Meodal study are consistent with this range; suggesting the birch-dominated woodlands of Sleat have long contrasted with the oak-rich woodlands of mainland Moidart (Cheape 1993), Knoydart and Glenelg (Beith 1836: 130). In a medieval society within which the maintenance of elite status required access to oak timber for boat and building construction, this phytogeographic boundary is also of significant political importance.

Tracing their ancestry direct from the kings of Man, MacLeod traditions report that they held the Glenelg peninsula continuously from the beginning of Leòd's 13th-century rule (MacLeod 1927: 29), suggesting access to mainland timber for the construction of the south-east range at Castle Camus would have been straightforward. This narrative is not unproblematic, since at *1280–1330 cal AD* (*74.2% probability*) and *1285–1315 cal AD* (*61.9% probability*; *Camus SE Range Construction Completed 1b*; Illus 11) the most likely period of south-east range construction is broadly coincident with the formation of Balliol's sheriffdom, Bruce's lordship of Skye, and an early 14th-century period in which Thomas Randolph clearly held formal title to the Glenelg peninsula as part of the earldom of Moray (*RMS I*: app. 1, no. 31; *Mor. Reg.*, no. 264). Indeed, the 1343 charter which does grant two-thirds of Glenelg to Norman MacLeod's son Malcolm (*RRS VI:* no. 486; the other third appears to have been retained by the Moray earldom as part of the barony of Abertarff; Brown 1992: 324 n170) represents the earliest surviving contemporary reference to a MacLeod chieftain known to this author. As this also coincides with a period when the clan appear to be expanding their landholdings up the north-west seaboard (*RRS VI*: no. 487), following a reported marriage to a Nicolson heiress (MacLeod 1927: 10; Matheson 1979; Black 2018), the extent to which this represents a regrant of Glenelg lands previously held is open to challenge. Certainly, just as the Clan Donald might have exaggerated the extent of *Siol Ghoraidh* activity in late 14th-century Sleat, the Nicolsons are likely to have been more powerful than the MacLeod history allows. The lack of recognition of pre-existing landholders beneath the level of the king and earl in the 1293 Skye Sheriffdom is in stark contrast to the extensive list presented for the neighbouring Sheriffdom of Lorn, however, and so the two positions are not mutually exclusive (*RPS*: 1293/2/16 & 17). Moreover, sufficient timber for construction at Camus may have been available in Sleat itself during this period (the evidence does indicate that was at least some oak here), or access to mainland woodlands may have been negotiated by other means.

It also remains possible, however, that the south-east range at Castle Camus was constructed later in the 14th century when geopolitical continuity between the Sleat and Glenelg peninsulas through MacLeod ownership is more certain (Illus 12). Model 1b suggests there is a *24% probability* (*Malcolm MacLeod Probability*; Supplementary Material Table S8) that this building was completed after Malcolm MacLeod's 1343 charter for two-thirds of Glenelg was sealed, and this date range includes *6.3%* of the *68%* highest probability density (*1375–1385 cal AD*; *Camus SE Range Construction Completed 1b*; Illus 11). However, whilst a 1349 agreement allowing John of Lorn to construct eight large galleys has been highlighted to suggest that oak timber remained widely available in western Argyll in this same period (*ALI*: no. 5; Smout et al 2005: 41), the physical and political environment around the Sound of Sleat, as elsewhere, was now changing rapidly.

With the 15th-century loss of Sleat, the MacLeods appear to have lost control of the hugely important routeways both through and across the narrow sound between Skye and the

Illus 12 Skye MacLeod, MacKinnon and MacDonald/MacRuari Lordships *c* 1372. Crosses (×) indicate the locations of major secular centres with castle buildings in this period at Pabbay, Borve, Duntulm, Dunvegan, Camus and Tioram. The Skye MacLeod lordship is divided by the MacKinnon lordship of Strath and it is possible the Lewis MacLeods held Waternish in north-west Skye. (Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2020)

mainland (MacIver 1795: 266; Haldane 1973: 75–80; see Illus 1). This draws further attention to the striking lack of mainland estates under the control of the incoming Hugh MacDonald (Table 1), during a period when the transfer of Skye into the lordship of the Isles had effectively reinstated the Sound of Sleat as a major administrative boundary. Access to oak may have been relatively

Illus 13 Map highlighting selected Outer Hebridean Burial Grounds of the later medieval and early modern period, marked with red crosses (+) these include Lewis MacLeods (*Eaglais na h'Aoidhe*, Lewis), Skye MacLeods (Rodel, Harris), Sleat MacDonalds (Sand, North Uist), MacRuaris (Howmore, South Uist) and Barra MacNeils (*Cille Bharra*, Barra). (Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2020)

unproblematic when Hugh first received his grant for Sleat and his brother held several extensive mainland estates, but that *quercis* was also specifically listed in Gillespie's late 15th-century Lochalsh grant (*ALI*: no. 76) suggests that precious reserves of oak timber also required conservation here. Indeed, builders across the south and east of Scotland were already reliant

on imported timber by this late 15th-century period (Crone & Mills 2012), and emerging MERLF evidence is beginning to suggest a more general reduction in oak resources also pertained on the western seaboard (Thacker forthcoming). Any decline in timber quality across the region is likely to have increased pressure on those sources which did remain, and by the mid-16th century an interdict was required to prohibit Donald MacDonald of Sleat from removing timber for galley construction from MacKenzie lands farther east, in mainland Kintail (Smout et al 2005: 377).

The division of the MacLeod woodlands in mainland Glenelg between 'Sky Harries and Glenelg' reported in the early 18th century (Dodgshon 1998: 247 n26) is a valuable illustration of how the resources of a laddered lordship might be managed, and in a similar period the Clan Donald estate in Sleat and North Uist held rights to harvest from woodlands in neighbouring Knoydart (Smout et al 2005: 378). Although much later in date, these arrangements have emerged from management strategies and negotiations undertaken throughout the medieval and later periods, as the character of the surrounding physical, cultural and political environment continued to develop.

Laddered landholding configurations such as those held by the Clan Ranald, Clan Donald and Clan MacLeod in the later medieval and early modern periods appear to have fostered similar cultural practices, with the chieftains from all three clans, for example, being buried in the Outer Isles (at Howmore, Sand and Rodel respectively; Illus 13). Clan identities within individual communities, however, were maintained by highly visible animated lime-coated masonry castle and church monuments; constructed from materials gathered by the tenants themselves and transformed by craftsmen into imposing ancestral houses from which the clan elite and chosen saints could protect the local population, store their vital food supplies and administer justice. The efficacy of these protectors, the political boundaries which separated these lordships, and the economic stability on which the prestige and survival of each clan depended, however, were regularly and violently contested in rounds of cattle raiding, wasting of the land (Dodgeshon 1998: 87), and ultimately regime change. We can only speculate on the various emotions felt by different members of the local population in the event of the sudden destruction of a castle or church building but – given the relationship between these structures, clan genealogies and the surrounding land – I imagine feelings of dislocation are likely to be a factor.

Despite the high relief character of the surrounding landscape and the almost insular character of the peninsula itself, Sleat was associated with a remarkable range of different socially constructed boundaries during the medieval period. The conformations of these often large and sometimes discontinuous *supra*-lordship territories, and the divided character of the parish itself, clearly demonstrate that the natural 'enhanced topographies' of western Scotland did not simply determine medieval political boundaries (*contra* Woolf 2000: 104–5; Fall 2010). The Cuillin mountains of central Skye didn't preclude MacLeod control of the whole of the island in the 13th and 14th centuries – the MacKinnon title to Strath did (Illus 12) – and it was plainly a socially constructed boundary that attempted to keep the 16th-century MacDonald elites from the mainland timber they so urgently required.

A stratified late medieval chronology has emerged from this preliminary study of Castle Camus; composed of (late) MacDonald documentary evidence, (earlier) MacDonald/MacLeod oral tradition, and (even earlier) probable MacLeod upstanding buildings archaeology. The single phase multidisciplinary Bayesian Model 1b presented for the construction of the south-east range includes independent radiocarbon dates, archaeological phasing interpretations, archaeobotanical interpretations, and clan history accounts, but this model can also be modified to include any further chronological information which might emerge from future studies. It is possible, for example, that excavation might add another layer to the site's stratigraphy, perhaps even exposing earlier structures associated with the high medieval Clan *Mhic Gurimen* or their *Dun Thorovaig* ancestors, whilst lab-based

analysis of masonry fabric from the south-west range might add a later (probable MacDonald) phase of independent dating evidence from the upstanding resource.

Further work is also required to demonstrate when the various masonry phases displayed at *Dun Scathaich* were constructed, but tradition reports that feuding between the Skye MacLeods and MacDonalds was endemic and the process of regime change in medieval Sleat is somehow fossilised in the evidence for two surviving masonry castle buildings. Construction and maintenance of particular administrative centres was crucial for medieval clan elites to maintain the socially constructed boundaries on which their power depended, and that relationship between masonry and territory (as in the 17th-century Crown proviso) would ultimately become an explicit legal constraint. Changes in title to mainland Glenelg and the eventual loss of Sleat, however, suggests the MacLeods also had to fight hard to retain their association with the lands on both sides of the Sound of Sleat, and in a period characterised across northern Europe by increasingly unpredictable climatic fluctuations, disease epidemics and widespread famine (Lamb 1977 especially 454–9; Oram 2014), later medieval and early modern inter-clan cross-border competition for vital resources in the oceanic west of Scotland was fierce.

[1] **Supplementary material**: available online at https;//doi.org/10.9750/PSAS.149.1298

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALI Munro, J & Munro, R (eds) 1986 *Acts of the Lords of the Isles 1336–1493*, 4th series, vol 22. Edinburgh: Scottish History Society.

APS I Thomson, T & Innes, C (eds) 1844 *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, vol 1, 1124–1423. Edinburgh: HMSO.

CRA Iona Club (eds) 1847 *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, consisting of original papers and documents relating to the history of the Highland and Islands of Scotland. Edinburgh: Stevenson.

ER IV Burnett J (ed) 1880 *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, vol IV: AD 1406–36*. Edinburgh: HM General Register House.

Heimskringa III – Snorri Sturlson Heimskringla Volume I. Magnús Óláfsson to Magnús Erlingsson. Translated by A Finlay & A Faulkes, 2015, Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

HP I MacPhail, J (ed) 1914 *Highland Papers I*. Edinburgh: Scottish History Society.

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OPS II Innes, C 1854 *Origines Parochiales Scotaie*. Edinburgh: Lizars.

Orkneyinga Saga. The History of the Earls of Orkney. Translated by H Pálsson & P Edwards, 1978. Penguin: Harmondsworth.

RMS I Maitland-Thomson, J (ed) 1912 *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum. The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland A.D. 1306–1424*. Edinburgh: HM General Register House.

RMS II Paul, J (ed) 1882 *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum: The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland A.D. 1424–1513*. Edinburgh: HM General Register House.

RMS VII Maitland-Thomson, J (ed) 1892. *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum: The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland A.D. 1609–1620*. Edinburgh: HM General Register House.

RPS Brown, K (ed) *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*. University of St Andrews. John Balliol; Second roll, 16-02-1293. http://www.rps.ac.uk/. Accessed 21 November 2019.

RRS VI Webster, B (ed) 1982 *Regesta Regum Scottorum VI*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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