

## II.

## THE STACK FORT ON UGADALE POINT, KINTYRE.

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The Ugadale fort stands on top of a craggy stack of schist at the end of a low peninsula on the east coast of Kintyre, about half-way between Campbeltown and Carradale. It is shown on the Ordnance Survey maps at Grid ref. 16/785285, and a small scale air-photograph is available.<sup>1</sup> Attention was drawn to the site during the excavations of the galleried dùn at Kildonan,<sup>2</sup> which lies half a mile to the SSW. It was possible that investigations here might supply complementary information on the long period from perhaps the 4th to the 14th century during which the galleried dùn was occupied at intervals. More important, the Ugadale fort provided an example of a series of unknown date occurring in Argyllshire. These "forts" are normally on the coast and are uniformly small to the point of being minute; for example Dùn Domhnuill on the west coast of Kintyre at Grid ref. 16/681408. For defence they lie on a site difficult of access—a stack of rock is characteristic—and low featureless walling is all that frequently remains to indicate the structure. While not absurdly small for a fort, Ugadale promised to throw light on this series and to require only a small scale excavation.

In June 1939 work commenced with the help of the Rev. N. J. H. MacCulloch and Mr and Mrs A. J. Turner; no paid labour was employed on this small site, and we intended a leisurely investigation over several seasons should the political situation allow. During the War, the relics and specimens obtained became accidentally mingled with the general collection in Campbeltown Museum, and the death of the curator left a state of confusion in this respect which could not be cleared up. The Museum was very thoroughly rearranged by Mr and Mrs J. G. Scott recently. It then became apparent that the material obtained was present, and that a report on the investigations might be written, though not all of the specimens could be disentangled from the Museum collection. It is to be remarked that the 1939 excavations were only a beginning, but a provisional account is clearly indicated owing to the lapse of time, with no immediate prospect of concluding the work. A plan of the site was constructed in August 1954 with the help of five students from Glasgow University Geography Department.<sup>3</sup> With theodolite and level, we spent nearly a week on the complex

<sup>1</sup> 106G/Scot/UK46: 4 May 46: F20°/540 SQDN. 4092-3.

<sup>2</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIII (1938-9), 185.

<sup>3</sup> Misses C. Galbraith and M. Macphedran, and Messrs W. Dunn, W. McConnell and J. Stark.

stack; everything outside high-water mark was neglected or otherwise our task would have been endless. The contours are approximate, but sufficiently accurate to simplify the description of the site where structural details and natural features are closely integrated.

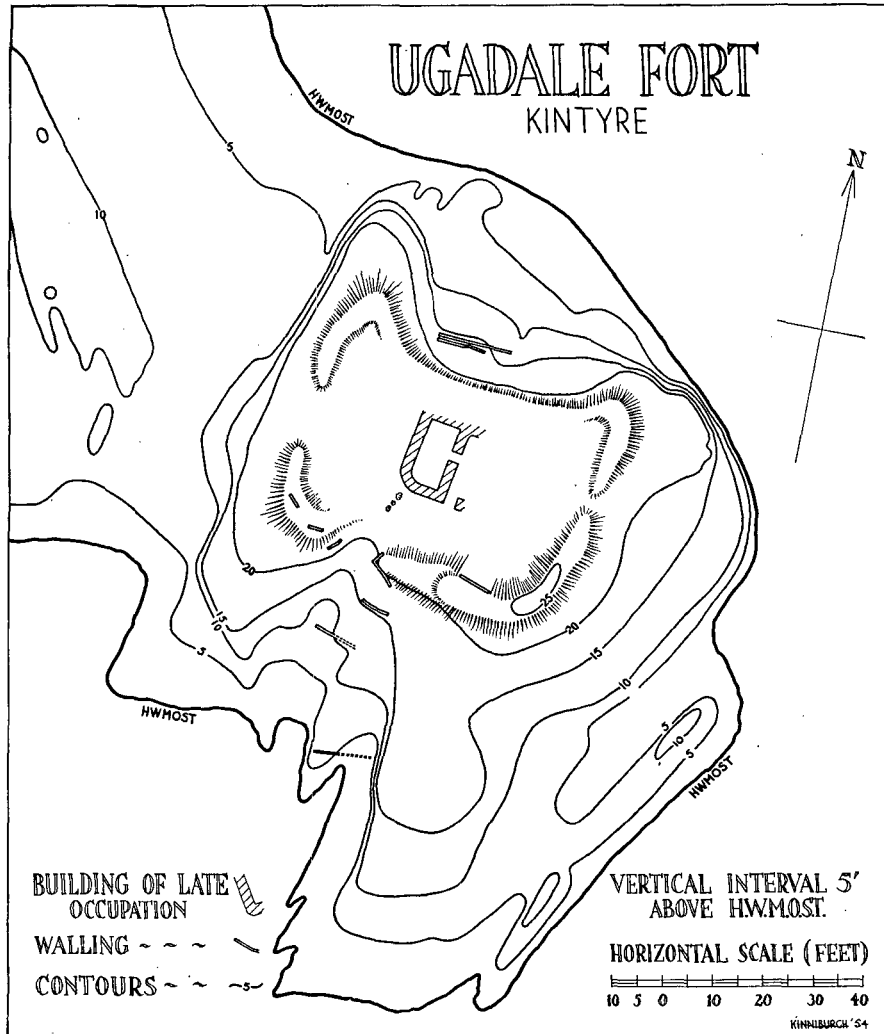


Fig. 1. Plan of site.

#### THE SITE IN GENERAL.

The irregular stack of schist rises steeply on all sides; the SW., NW. and NE. corners are vertical, or even overhang to form natural bastions about 20 ft. above high water (see plan, fig. 1, and photographs, Pl. IV). The

western or landward side is a nearly straight edge which, however, can be easily scaled in the centre, where several well-worn footholds give access to the summit from a grassy ramp which reduces the vertical height to about 7 ft. Between the two bastions on the north a steep slope, mainly grassed over, forms a hollow up which a scramble is not difficult; near the top, two parallel lines of stone revetment, one almost on top of the other, indicate where the natural defences had been improved by scarping. The east side of the stack is formed by steeply inclined though not vertical schist; an additional complication occurs in the form of a nearby edge of rock running parallel on the seaward side. The south face again is less steep, and a double cleft in the rock runs up to the summit from the beach. This offers a natural entrance passage where defences had been obviously improved with short stretches of walling. In two places rather flimsy dry-stone walling seems to have obstructed the eastern part of the double cleft. This may be relatively modern, to prevent grazing animals from wandering on to the stack summit, and the same explanation is possible for further walling at the top of the entrance. It is noteworthy that the lower end of this cleft is on the beach below high-water mark spring tides. Around the stack, low tide uncovers a very irregular shelf of rock 50 yds. or more wide; out of it rise crags which jut out like teeth at high water. An easy landing for boats is available nearby within Kildonan Bay. From the top of the stack there is a wide view far up and down Kilbrannan Sound and out to Ailsa Craig. The site is very exposed, and as a permanent dwelling-place would have been almost insufferable during a south-east gale in winter.

The stack has a surprisingly smooth top for such craggy sides, and it may well be that natural clefts have been filled in as was the case at the galleried dùn. The maximum distance across this summit area is nearly 100 ft., but in the central part there is a minimum of only 43 ft. An irregular bank, mainly of stones now grassed over, encloses a still smaller space measuring 60 ft. E.-W. by 37 ft. N.-S. This "rampart," if it may be so described, varies in height and width as the hachures attempt to show; it does not follow the edge of the summit area and seems irrelevant as a defensive feature, for it is well marked in places where the stack has vertical or even overhanging sides. A clearly defined inner revetment is visible for about 6 ft. in the SE. Within this surround the turf sloped down to a saucer-like depression, thickly overgrown with nettles, near the top of the entrance passage. Vague traces of low internal banks were noticeable before excavations commenced.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS.

Four of us worked during the period 20th June to 4th July 1939, when the weather was almost perfect, and, strange for the excavator on the west

coast, we worked in soil which was almost bone-dry. Operations were confined to a strip 16 ft. wide along the top of the northern "rampart," extending some 30 ft. to the entrance on the south. Commencing excavation against the northern rampart, there was found immediately below turf the stone foundations of a carefully constructed building, shown on the plan, fig. 1, and in the photographs, Pl. V. This building was against the northern rampart; the western and southern walls, which were 2 ft. thick, consisted of stones of varying size, carefully laid but not coursed, rising in places to a height of nearly a foot; the south-western corner was smoothly rounded. A cross-wall 1 ft. 8 ins. wide formed a compartment 12 ft. 0 ins.-9 ins. long and 6 ft. 5 ins.-11 ins. wide; half-way along was a doorway 2 ft. 6 ins. wide. The doorway to the building, which obviously extended eastwards, was 2 ft. 5 ins.-9 ins. wide on the southern side, and built with squared slabs. The floor within was of hard dark brown earth and flat stones unevenly spaced.

Working southward from this rectangular building towards the entrance passage, the hard earth and slab floor was very quickly lost in an unexpected complication in the form of a small maze of rabbit-holes. Here a dark friable soil had been disturbed to such an extent that modern brass cartridge cases were found nearly 3 ft. below turf. No stratification was discernible, nor, to add to the difficulties, could the precise line of an inner revetment to the southern rampart be established at the horizon we were working. It seemed quite possible that this rampart on either side of the entrance passage was already ruinous by the time of a late occupation represented by the rectangular building; an early and a late occupation were clearly indicated by the relics found. At the upper end of the entrance passage, which was 4 ft. 3 ins.-5 ins. wide, a slabbed floor was found, probably in use during both periods. The rabbits had, as it were, provided a "window" through the upper floor.

At this unsatisfactory stage a break in the weather occurred, and since a fresh approach was indicated, working towards the entrance from the east where the line of the inner revetment to the southern rampart was visible, we brought the season's work to a close and filled in to the level of the foundations of the rectangular building.

#### THE RELICS.

Such an exploratory investigation confined, except for the accidental "window," to a late occupation, hardly merits more than a note, but the relics are of significance.

The following were found within the rectangular building:

Part of a small quern, probably a pot-quern.

Fragment of a disc of schist, diameter approx.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ins., 0.3 in. thick, bevelled

at the edge, perforated centrally, crudely decorated with 2 fine grooves round both faces, with vague cross incisions. This may be part of a toggle.

Fragments of 2 spindle whorls and an uncompleted large whorl or weight (found in the walling).

Eight unworked flint flakes: small fragments of iron: some carbon, slag and bone in small quantities.

The following occurred between the rectangular building and the entrance:—

Two silver coins:

1. Threepence of Elizabeth, dated 1579.
2. Penny of James IV, minted in Edinburgh.

(Identifications by Miss A. S. Robertson.)

Part of a bronze needle rather similar to one from Kildonan, Period I.

Parts of three armlets of "jet" (probably black shale):

1. 1 in. fragment, 0.8 in. section, rough plain surface flattened inside.
2. 1 in. fragment, 0.4 in. section, smooth plain surface flattened inside.
3. 2½ ins. fragment, 0.4 in. section, rough plain surface rounded.

Three beads:

1. Dark blue glass, slightly rounded, 0.3 in. diameter and 0.15 in. perforation, 0.15 in. long.
2. Blue glass, translucent and rounded, 0.5 in. diameter, 0.2 in. perforation, 0.2 in. long.
3. Blue glass, translucent and rounded as above, but with a plain collar at the perforation on either side, and with four small projections spaced round the centre and decorated in a spiral of blue and white, 0.5 in. diameter, 0.3 in. perforation, 0.4 in. long.

Mr J. G. Scott suggested a comparison between (3) and a bead now in Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery, which was found on Loughbardan Hill, Lough Swilly, County Donegal. It is apparently of the same material and colour, but longer, with white inlay round the collars, and with more numerous projections, each identical with those of the Ugadale specimen. According to Mrs Piggott, the Loughbardan bead dates to about the 8th century A.D. This "horned-eye" type was reported from the crannog at Lagore, County Meath.<sup>1</sup>

A spindle whorl.

Fragments of two crucibles somewhat similar to that found in the Kildonan dùn, Period I.

Thirty-four flint flakes, all unworked; carbon; fragments of iron; pieces of bone, one just possibly used as a point; several very small potsherds of green, green glazed, red, and brown ware, all of which may be recent.

<sup>1</sup> Hencken, "Lagore Crannog: an Irish Royal Residence of the 7th to 10th centuries A.D.," *Proc. Irish Acad.*, LIII (1950-1), p. 1.

## COMMENTARY.

The excavation threw little light on the fort in its original state save to confirm the existence of a passage-way from the beach to the south; operations had been concerned with a late occupation. Parallels to a number of the relics can be found in the nearby galleried dùn at Kildonan, Periods I and II, which a penannular brooch (possibly a pin) shows to have lasted to the 7th century A.D.; these include the bronze needle, the small dark bead, and the crucibles. The bead with the spiral decorations suggests a date about the 8th century A.D. "Jet" armlets flattened on the inside were common in the Early Iron Age, but occur at Dark Age sites, including Dunadd. It seems reasonable to assume an occupation in the "Scottic" period and provisionally to date the fort to the Dark Ages.

The rectangular building is completely strange to the buildings of the galleried dùn in Period III of the late 13th and early 14th centuries. The coins, admittedly found outside, point to the 16th or even 17th century.

The fact clearly emerges from both Kildonan and Ugadale that the structures designated "forts" include sites in Kintyre occupied into a time far removed from prehistory. While to the historians this may be little more than a sad reflection on the state of security in such a late period, it is a warning to the prehistorian not to consider all forts as Iron Age or even Dark Age in date. Furthermore, to group small stack forts, occupied and possibly even constructed well within the historical period, with such sites as the Caterthuns under one general term "fort," is patently absurd and grossly misleading. Could not some such name as "refuge" be used meanwhile for these very small "forts" of western Argyllshire which seem to be post-Roman?

Mr Torquil Macneale of Ugadale, by whose permission excavations were undertaken, had the family records searched for data relevant to the late occupation. A letter signed by Mr J. Richardson stated:

"The earliest Charter that I can find amongst your titles is a Charter under the Great Seal of James VI to Donald and Ewin McCay Moir of the Office of Coroner of Kintyre with the lands of Arnagill and Ugadill dated 26th December 1615. This Charter narrates that the lands have been held beyond memory of man by Mackays and then refers to a charter of James V confirming Ewin McCay Moir and his heirs in the Office of Coroner of Kintyre with the four penny lands of Arnagill and Ugadill in Mid-Kintyre as belonging to the said office. This Charter is dated 11th August 1529. . . . There is evidence, however, of Mackays in Argyll in the 14th century and I think we may take it that there were Mackays at Ugadale a considerable time before the reign of James V. . . . the Charter of James V is a Charter of Novadamus, which is given to replace a former Charter that may have been destroyed. My own opinion is that the fort was the early residence of the Mackays. . . ."

The well-known Ugadale Brooch belongs to the Macneales and is an heirloom from the Mackays.<sup>1</sup> The local legend is that Bruce gave it as a present to the Mackays after a short sojourn at Ugadale ("Bruce's Stone" is shown on the O.S. map at Grid ref. 16/782288); the brooch itself may be two centuries later than this legend suggests. It is quite probable therefore that the hereditary Coroner of Kintyre, the possessor of the famous brooch, even if he did not reside in the Ugadale fort as Mr Richardson believed, at least used the stack as a refuge.

<sup>1</sup> An interesting alternative spelling of Ugadale appears in a note supplied by Mr Duncan Colville: "The Marriage Contract of Torquil Mcneill, lawful son of the deceased Lauchlan Meniell of Tirfergus, and Barbara McKay (daughter of Daniel McKay of Ugadale), was dated 16th April 1695 as recorded in Sasine dated 7th February 1702 and registered in Argyllshire Register of Sasines, infetting her in the 2 Merk Land of 'Uggadaille.'"



1. Ugadale fort from the SW., with the cleft forming the entrance running up from the end of the shingle beach.



2. Ugadale Point, from the galleried dùn at Kildonan, with the stack fort at the eastern extremity.





3. General view of the excavations at Ugadale, to the south of the late building shown in 4.



4. The foundations of the late building within the Ugadale fort, viewed from the SE.

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5. Three fragments of black shale armlets, part of a stone toggle, and three beads, all from Ugadale fort.