Archaeological investigations at Kinbane Castle, County Antrim and its Scottish connections

Colin Breen* and John Raven†

ABSTRACT

Kinbane Castle is positioned at the base of steep cliffs on the north Antrim coast, with views northwards to Rathlin Island and Islay and eastwards to Kintyre. Recent investigations have demonstrated that this headland was fortified in the 1540s by certain MacDonalds who had arrived in Antrim from Islay. The site was built to act as a bridgehead into Ulster as this family, and its associated mercenaries, attempted to establish themselves as a major force amongst the Gaelic lordships of west Ulster. Its occupation was short-lived, since it was effectively abandoned in the 1550s following defacement by English forces and the reconfiguration of MacDonald settlement across north-east Antrim and the Southern Hebrides.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the authors initiated a research project examining the character of late medieval settlement and Gaelic lordship in north Ulster and the Hebrides. Initially, the project focused on two castle sites, Dunluce and Ballylough, associated with the MacQuillans and the MacDonnells in north Ulster (Breen 2012). Investigations were also subsequently conducted at Kinbane Castle, an enigmatic site located in an unusual position at the base of high, steep cliffs and virtually inaccessible by land (illus 1). The site has traditionally been related to a branch of the MacDonald family and was believed to have been constructed in the 1540s (Hill 1873). The site is a scheduled monument, so only limited excavations, designed to test specific research questions, were proposed and conducted in tandem with geophysical and topographic survey. The upstanding architectural remains had also been previously surveyed in 2007, using a Cyrax laser scanner, in advance of conservation work across the monument.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE MACDONALD FAMILY

By around 1400, the Clan Donald had become the dominant lordship on the west coast of Scotland, assuming the title of Lord of the Isles. By the end of the 15th century, however, the lordship increasingly lost its cohesion and dominance. As a result of the Lords of the Isles' attentions being predominantly focused on extending their influence eastwards, into Ross and the Scottish heartlands, competing branches of the Clan Donald disputed the headship of the lordship and competed for ownership of the clan's core territories. One of these sub-lineages was the Clan Iain Mhóir. They had been one of the most influential kin-groups under the Lordship and perhaps maintained the greatest claim to be the inheritors of the Lordship. During the 15th century, they became increasingly focused on Ulster, where they became more commonly known as the MacDonnells. Their initial focus had been on the Glens of Antrim, in east Ulster, and, by the mid-1400s, they had

* Colin Breen, School of Environmental Sciences, Ulster University, Coleraine, Northern Ireland BT52 1SA
   cp.breen@ulster.ac.uk
† John Raven, Historic Scotland, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH.
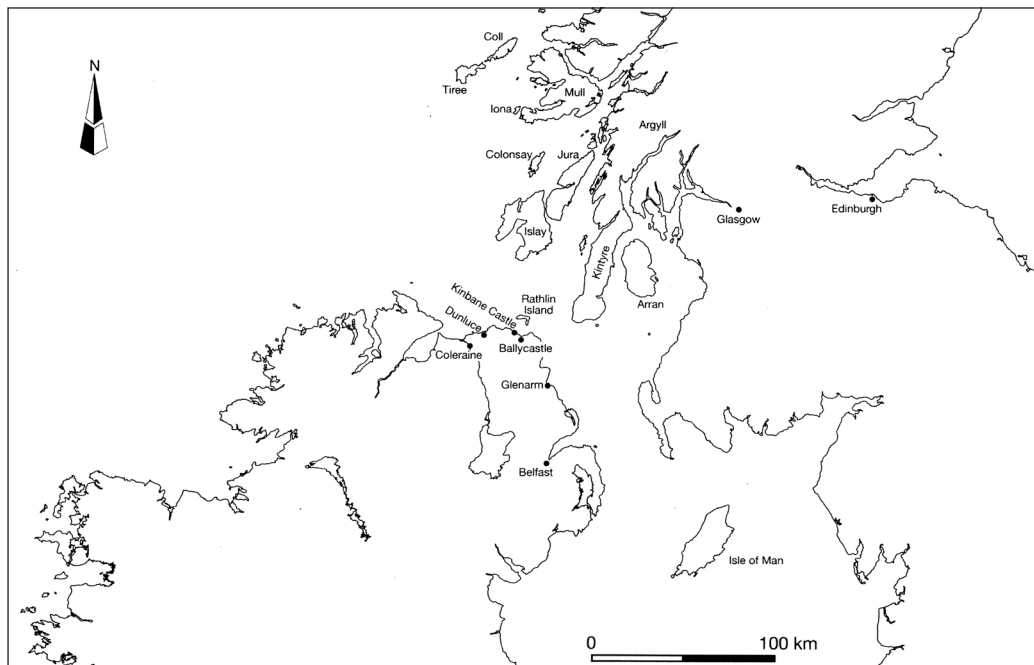
Illus 1   Location map of Kinbane Castle

taken over possession of most of the Glens from the Bissetts. Initially, they retained their primary power base in Islay, importantly incorporating Dunyvaig Castle. From early in the 15th century and onwards, the chiefs of the Clan Ian Mhóir had styled themselves 'of Dunyvaig (or sometimes Islay) and the Glens'. From then on, an increasing number of the family members appear to have become almost wholly involved in the family's affairs in Ulster. As the 15th century progressed, and particularly after the forfeiture of the lordship of the Isles in 1493, when their position in Islay became increasingly precarious, the Clan Iain Mhóir intensified its interests on its holdings in the Glens, consolidated its borders and began to look to expand elsewhere in Ulster (for a fuller account of the Clan Iain Mhóir and Ulster in the 1400s see Kingston 2004, and also Paterson 2001).

By the 1520s, Alexander Canochson of Dunyvaig does not yet appear to have gained ascendancy over the Clan Ian Mhóir but was still viewed as a close ally by the Ulster MacDonnells, led by Alexander Carrach, and he provided many fighting men for warfare in Ireland. Having briefly risen in rebellion in 1529, following the potential loss of his lands on Islay, Alexander Canochson submitted to King James V of Scotland in 1531 and the Clan Iain Mhóir regained titles for their lands on Kintyre and, presumably, on Islay (Caldwell 2008). Part of Alexander's coming to terms with the Scottish king seems to have resulted in the Clan Iain Mhóir's fermentation of instability throughout the northern part of Ireland as a counterpoint to English authority, so much so that in 1532, after 8,000 Hebrideans gathered in Ulster, the English-dominated council in Dublin famously appealed to Henry VIII for help to contain the number of Scots coming to Ireland under the banner of the Clan Donald (*Cal. S.P.Ire*. 1532). Later genealogies provided Alexander with the title 'of Islay, the Glens and the Route' (Gregory 1836: 194). Alexander died in 1536, having assumed headship over the whole Clan

Iain Mhóir, his son James Canochson assumed his father's mantle and also claimed the title of Lord of the Isles (Caldwell 2008: 79–85). Like his father before him, both he and his brothers, Colla and Sorley Boy, took an active interest in Ulster. They quickly established themselves as a formidable mercenary force and subsequently focused their efforts almost entirely on north Antrim and Donegal.

North Ulster in the 1540s

The Clan Iain Mhóir's renewed focus on Ulster in the mid-16th century was set against a background of almost incessant internecine conflict in Ulster and the ambitions of the Scottish crown. The situation was so unstable that the English Crown forces revitalised their efforts to subdue Ulster and pacify the warring parties. In north Ulster, the MacQuillans and O'Cahans, located east and west of the River Bann respectively, had been engaged in near-continual conflict with each other for decades – while both parties also had a tempestuous relationship with the O'Donnells of Donegal. In July 1543, a memorandum was drawn up in an attempt to settle the differences between O'Donnell and MacQuillan (*Cal. Carew MSS* 1543: 209). In compensation for MacQuillan's aggressions, O'Donnell was to receive 100 cattle. This attempted agreement clearly did not work as O'Donnell led a large force into the MacQuillan territory known as the Route, a stretch of land contained between the rivers Bush and Bann in Antrim and Derry. He took the MacQuillan 'wooden castle … [of] impregnable fastness' on Loughan Island, on the Bann and gave it to O'Cahan (*AFM*: 1544). While O'Laverty (1887: 154) refers to two earthen fortifications surviving on the island in the 19th century, the island is now extensively covered in woodland that serves to mask the surviving earthworks. Additionally, the Bann drainage scheme deposited large linear banks of sediment on the island that further confuses interpretation of the remains. It does appear, though, that two discrete earthworks, at either end of the island, represent vestiges of the former fortifications. On the same expedition, O'Donnell took the castle of Ballylough, seizing weapons, armour, copper, iron, butter and other

provisions from both places. He then moved on and took the island sites, or crannogs, on Loughaverra and Lough Lynch before returning home. MacQuillan, in response, engaged the services of James and Colla MacDonnell (as the family became known in Ulster) who took back Loughan Island, killing Brian O'Cahan and others (*AFM*: 1489; *AC*: 737). O'Cahan then hired the gallowglasses of Rory MacSweeney and attacked MacQuillan near the Bann, although on this occasion he escaped with his life. This type of small-scale conflict was typical of the period, but its relevance here is that it provided the foothold for the Clan Iain Mhóir incursions into this part of Ulster. The MacQuillans' invitation to the MacDonnells to join them in their campaign against the O'Cahans, along with Colla's marriage to Elveen MacQuillan, is generally seen as the basis for subsequent MacDonnell claims on the Route (following Hamilton 1790: 122).

Following this prolonged period of hostilities, a degree of peace appears to have settled across Ulster, presumably strongly influenced by the looming presence and influence of the MacDonnells on the area. They had, by the early 1550s, effectively settled in north Antrim and begun to flex their muscle and, in doing so, raised increasing concern in Dublin. The Scots from the Isles had always posed a threat to crown control in north Ulster, but their settlement along the north coast posed an even greater threat. The Lord Justice supported an expedition in 1551 against them and sent four ships to Rathlin where James and Colla were now based, presumably having withdrawn to the safety of the island from Kinbane Castle. The Scots repelled the small armada and exchanged a number of captured English officers for the release of Sorley Boy from imprisonment in Dublin (*AFM*: 1551). Thomas Cusack, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, wrote to the Earl of Warwick in September 1551, informing him that the Scots now effectively controlled all of the lands from MacQuillan's house (Dunluce?) to Belfast (Hill 1873: 47–51). He also made reference to Colla MacDonnell's castle at Kinbane, although his assertion that it was no longer defensible was an exaggeration and a statement made to cover the fact that the English

forces had failed to take the site from the Scots during this expedition.

Kinbane Castle

Tradition records that Colla MacDonnell, brother of James and Sorley Boy, built this castle in the 1540s (Hill 1873) and that the site represents an intial attempt by the MacDonnells to establish a base on the north Ulster coastline. Having arrived in the region during the early part of the decade, following their invitation from the MacQuillans to invade the Route and expel the O'Cahans, they required a base from which to operate. Kinbane provided this bridgehead into Ulster, positioned strategically at the coastal border between the Glens and the Route and easily accessible by sea from Islay. Its role as a maritime gateway was its primary function and explains its unusual position.

If viewed from a terrestrial perspective, it appears hard to access – with limited views and lacking defensive capabilities – as it is located at the base of steep cliffs. A stream that runs to the immediate west of the site also marks a parish boundary and may have marked the extent of the territory of the Glens at that time. The strategic placement of a fortification between an area of traditional Scots settlement and Gaelic Irish lands is interesting and demonstrates possible expansionist ambitions amongst the newly arrived islanders. The castle itself is located on a dramatic promontory of white chalk and consists of a small two-storey tower with an enclosure wall built along the edge of the headland (illus 2). An entrance, protected by a small angle tower, is located on the southern curtain wall, but no other buildings survive in the interior.

ILLUS 2 Photograph of Kinbane Castle with Rathlin Island visible on the northern horizon

In 1551, James Croft initiated a military campaign to lessen the emerging power of the Scots forces in the north and Kinbane was targeted. Thomas Cusack, Chancellor of Ireland, wrote an account of the movements of Lord Deputy Croft and Kinbane was mentioned as follows:

> and also Coll McDonnell, second brother to James, had a strong castle built upon a rock, with a strong bawn of lime and stone, over the sea, named the castle of Kinbane, which my Lord caused to be defaced, and broke much part thererof, so as now it is not defensible, which I am sure that never had for so much more displeasure done to them (*Cal S.P. Ire*. 1551: 116).

This episode does not seem to have displaced Colla as Hill (1873) suggests he was still in possession of the site, but possibly not occupying it in May 1558, when he died – although it is unclear whether he died at the castle or at some location nearby. He had three sons; Gillespig or Archibald, Alexander or Alister, and Angus. Gillespig died in 1570, with tradition stating that he was gored by a bull outside Ballycastle (McDonnell 2004a: 141) and succeeded by his son Colla Ciotach. The castle is again referred to in 1574, in a list associated with an ill-fated and ultimately unconsummated plan to bring English gentlemen adventurers to Ulster. The reference states 'Whitehead, whereupon standeth a castle, not appointed' (Hill 1873: 418), indicating the castle was never granted to anyone. Whether this indicates that the castle was not occupied at this date or that potential occupants remained daunted by taking on a site that could almost be considered inaccessible in the landscape – and a place that remained strongly associated with the still aggressive Scots – remains speculative. Its physical position would hardly be attractive to incomers without a strong maritime connection, the necessary resources to keep boats to provide access to the site or the resources to maintain the structures. The absence of adjacent agricultural land must also have undermined its potential as a redoubt for an incoming planter.

At the end of the 16th century, the sources refer to the MacAlisters of Kinbane, when they sided with James MacDonnell and his 'highlanders' against a MacQuillan incursion into the Route in 1589/90 (McDonnell 2004a:144). The MacAlisters had their origins in Scotland, with land in Kintyre, but appear to have participated in Irish affairs from the 14th century. It seems much more likely their presence in Ulster stems from the 16th century, when they lent support to the Clan Iain Mhóir both there and in Kintyre (see MacDonald & MacDonald 1896–1904: 27–57). A number of years later, in 1636, the MacAlisters of Kinbane were confirmed in their holdings by Randal MacDonnell (Hill 1873). Neither of these latter references need be taken as proof of 17th-century occupation of the castle, but are instead associated with the regranting of the land around Kinbane to the MacAlisters, following Colla's death. Certainly, the excavations that have been conducted would indicate that the site ceased to be actively occupied in the 16th century and no artefactual material of 17th- or 18th-century date was recovered. Any subsequent settlement of the lands of Kinbane must have taken place in the townlands above the cliff face.

In the 1560s, the main counterweight to Clan Iain Mhóir ambitions, the O'Neills, were temporarily pacified by events elsewhere, allowing Sorley to continue to consolidate their Ulster holdings, which he obtained a grant for from the English regent in 1586. Sorley seems to have resided primarily at Dunineny, another fortified coastal promontory, which is less accessible from the coast but also seems to have been occupied by insubstantial houses surrounded by a masonry enclosure wall (McNeill 2004). From this period, the Ulster and Islay branches of the Clan Iain Mhóir became increasingly isolated from one another. Unlike their Scottish relatives, the MacDonnells successfully vied for James VI's favour and actively participated in undermining the House of Dunyvaig in the 1590s. This more-or-less marked the end of the MacDonnell interest in the Isles and the demise of a pan-Irish Sea-Clan Iain Mhóir lordship.

However, the Ulster branch of the MacDonells associated with Kinbane remained intrinsically connected to west Scotland into the 17th century. In the wake of the brief uprising between 1614 and 1615, which could be viewed as an abortive attempt to re-establish the wider patrimony of Clan Iain Mhóir, Coll Ciotach acquired Colonsay

from Malcolm MacDuffie, whom he subsequently killed in 1623. The men of Islay complained to the Crown, that during this rebellion they were subjected to harsh and foreign Irish forms of rental under the MacDonnells (*CdRA*: 160). This may reveal how far the two branches of the Clan Iain Mhóir had parted (although they could just have been trying to demonstrate their compliance with the new laws instigated by James VI). Coll Ciotach's grant of Colonsay was negotiated with Archibald, 7th earl of Argyll. In 1639, Coll was evicted from the island by Archibald, 8th earl of Argyll. Coll's son, Alasdair, subsequently sided with the Earl of Antrim and made a name for himself throughout Scotland and Ireland as a military leader during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

ARCHITECTURE

Kinbane is not a textbook example of a castle but is perhaps best described as a fortified promontory. It is located on a white chalk promontory at the base of steep cliffs, 4km west of Ballycastle in Country Antrim. Primarily designed to be approached from the sea, there are landing places either side of the promontory. On its eastern side, vessels could be drawn against a vertical rock outcrop and find shelter from the prevailing south-westerly winds and strong tidal movement. A small embayment lies on its western side and a boat naust has been recorded here, at the top of an area of former beach clearance. It should be noted that neither places are ideal and are only suitable during certain weather and tidal conditions. Approaching the site on foot, the visitor has to first climb a basal section of bedrock. Formerly, rock-cut steps were present and access would also have been presumably facilitated by wooden steps. The entrance into the fortified complex was positioned at the western end of a curtain wall. This has now collapsed, but it is clear from early 19th-century written descriptions and illustrated sources that this consisted of a gateway built into the enclosing wall. The Ordnance Survey Memoirs (1994: 121) recorded that this had a tapered entrance measuring 1.5m wide internally and just under 2m in height. A possible bust or head was visible above its east corner. A flanking tower lies immediately west of the entrance, but this is now in a ruinous state. Its western wall is completely destroyed and only small projecting sections of its northern and southern walls have survived.


ILLUS 3   Kerr's 1809 view of Kinbane Castle from the west (courtesy of Hector MacDonnell)

Its eastern wall contains a narrow loop providing direct coverage over the entrance area. This structure was still largely intact at the beginning of the 19th century. Kerr's 1809 sketch of the site illustrates that this would have stood to at least the height of the curtain wall (illus 3). A later 1811 sketch shows its south-facing elevation had a small window, while the entrance to the fortification is shown as a plain-linteled covered doorway. The curtain wall itself survives to a height of over 3m along the southern edge of the promontory and would originally have facilitated a wall-walk and parapet along this south-facing length. The walls on the promontory would have enclosed an area of c 360m^2. However, much of the internal area is very uneven and unsuitable for building upon. Sections of the north-west curtain survive to a maximum height of 1m in places. This is largely featureless, aside from a projecting abutment 15m north of the south-west corner. Test excavation (T1) at this location would suggest that this was built as a supporting revetment for the wall, which was constructed on top of a high section of bedrock (illus 4). This outcrop could potentially have caused a structural weakness in the wall and undermined it, so additional masonry support was required. This may also have served as the base for a set of wooden steps providing access to the wall, but there is no visible evidence for this.

The primary feature in the complex consists of a square tower in the southern corner (illus 5). This two-storey structure measures approximately 6.6m externally and 4m internally. Its southern angle fell in the second decade of the 19th century, while the quoins of its north-western and north-eastern corners are missing. The upper section of the south-west angle is beveled and decorated with sandstone quoins. This form of angle is unusual in the context of late medieval architecture in Ireland, although the lower portion of the north-western corner of Bonamargy Friary is similarly shaped. A further feature at Kinbane includes a string course above the first-floor level on its north and south faces, with a series of weep-holes above. The tower is entered through a ground-floor door in its north wall. This no longer has its side dressings but would originally have been approximately 2m high and just over 1m wide. The south wall has two windows, while a wall recess is present in the north wall, west of the doorway. Three joist-holes are visible on the north wall and would have provided a structural base for a wooden floor. There is no surviving indication on how this floor level could have been accessed. Windows were present in the north and south wall, while a doorway giving access to the western section of curtain wall and parapet is present in the west wall. Two wall recesses are present in the east and west walls. The remains of a mural chamber with a wicker-centred vault survive in the east wall. The Ordnance Survey Memoirs (1994: 121) make reference to a local tradition that this chamber was referred to as the 'officers' sleeping room'. McNeill (1983: 112) suggests that the roofing material was lead. The available space only allowed for a very small attic, if one was present at all. While the structure has clear defensive capabilities, it also likely served as the administrative centre of the complex and possibly the domestic quarters of the lead occupants.

The eastern section of wall runs at an acute angle from the tower in the southern corner of the complex. A possible garderobe is present at its southern end, which the Ordnance Survey Memoirs refer to as a 'slanting funnel'. This is indicative of some form of building adjoining the tower and wall at this location, but a test trench (T5) failed to uncover any evidence for such a structure. The soil depth was very shallow across this area and no cultural features were noted. Two loops survive on the wall. One of the loops is located 10m north-east of the tower and may originally have been incorporated into a small watchtower. In 1838, the Ordnance Survey Memoirs (1994: 121) record that the ruins of a 'watch-room' were located 34 feet north of the castle … on which is the ruins of a narrow window 3 and a half feet in height and looking to the south east'. It has been postulated that a further building was located on an elevated natural projection north of this feature (McNeill 1983: 112). However, two test trenches (T2 and T3) in this area revealed no evidence of cultural activity and no stone walling, merely shallow natural wind-blown sediment deposits sitting directly on bedrock. In January 1833, a site sketch appeared in the *Dublin Penny Journal*
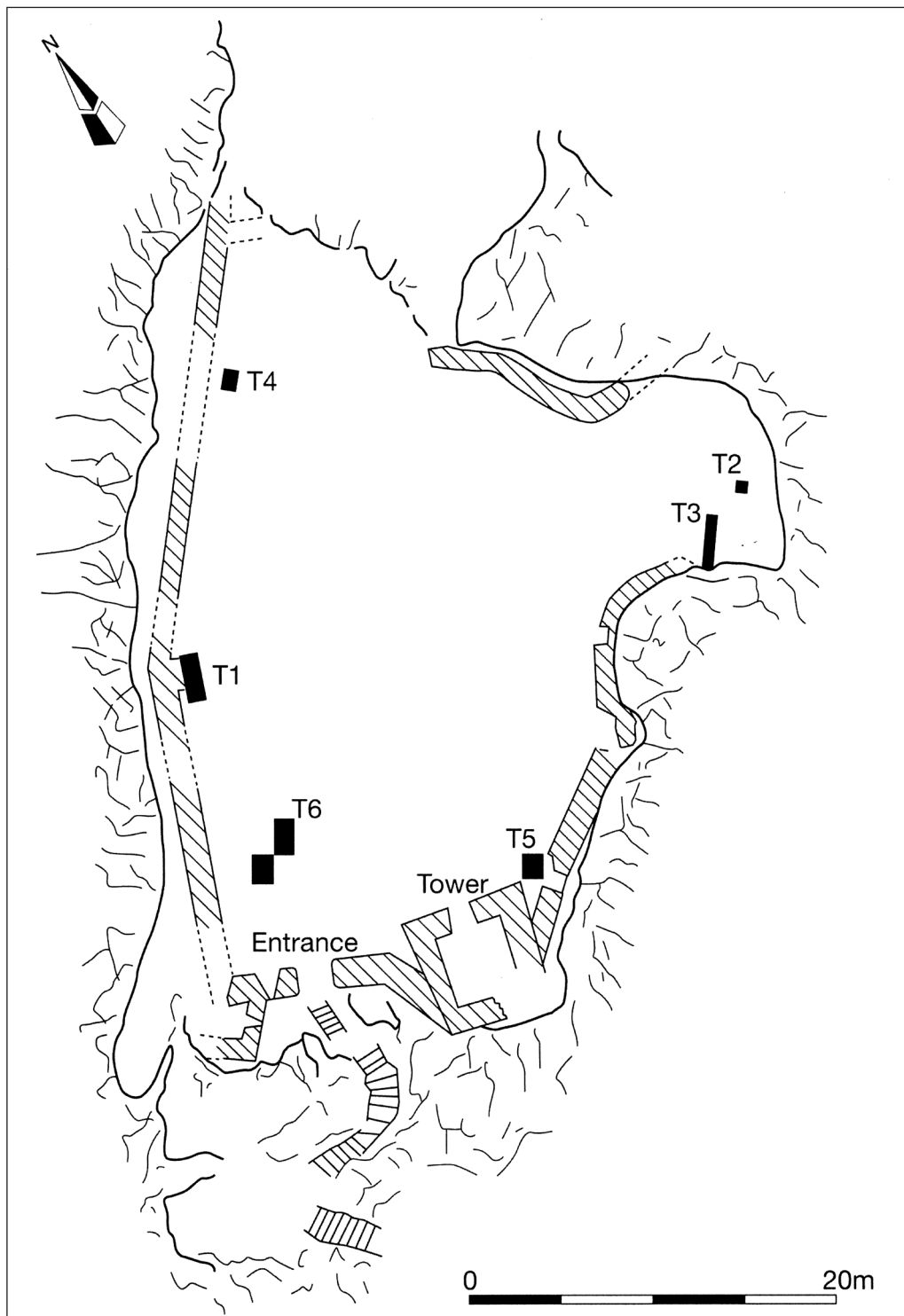
ILLUS 4   Plan of the site showing the location of the six excavated test pits

(1:31). The southern curtain wall and entrance were still intact at this date, but the southern angle of the tower had collapsed. This sketch also appears to show a small watchtower-like building at its north-eastern corner.

EXCAVATIONS

At Easter 2011, four small test trenches were excavated in the castle's enclosure in an attempt to ascertain the nature of the surviving archaeology and to gain some insight into the castle's settlement history. Topographic and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) surveys were conducted at the same time. The GPR data showed little of cultural interest, although the undulating topography of the interior, coupled with large areas of high or exposed bedrock, militated against the success of this. Two further test trenches (T5 and T6) were conducted in June 2012, in tandem with a number of local community groups, as part of the AHRC Connected Communities funded project.

Two of the trenches on the eastern elevated side of the enclosure produced no cultural stratigraphy. Trench 1, located midway along the western enclosure wall, was excavated against a stone abutment feature, previously noted as a structural support that may have supported steps leading to a wall walk. A quantity of domestic faunal refuse, including cattle and sheep bone, was found, but no dating evidence was recovered.

A second trench, T4, uncovered a linear stone feature that could be collapse associated with the curtain wall, with an overlying burnt deposit associated with the destruction of the site. Alternatively, this could be a foundation deposit of a building and the above burning could have constituted an occupation deposit, although this latter interpretation appears less likely. A number of sherds of Ulster Medieval Coarse Pottery were found, associated with the burnt deposit. These sherds were heavily burnt but are very similar to other examples found across Ulster.

Trench 6 was located in the central court area 9m north of the entrance. It consisted of two conjoined trenches measuring 1.4m×0.9m and 1m×2m and respectively. The primary feature encountered from the late medieval occupation deposits was a roughly oval-shaped spread of flint with significant charcoal inclusions (C.03), 1.7m in length and 0.13m thick. While not a hearth per se, it may have been the base of a brazier. In terms of dating, a rim sherd of everted rim ware or Ulster Medieval Coarse Pottery was recovered immediately above this spread. This unglazed rim sherd had a brown to black fabric with numerous inclusions of quartz and grits and a thin red/ brown surface. Pottery of this type was probably produced locally from the medieval period through to the 17th century and can be used here to date this occupation deposit to the late medieval period.

South-Facing elevation

West-Facing elevation

0   5m

North-Facing elevation
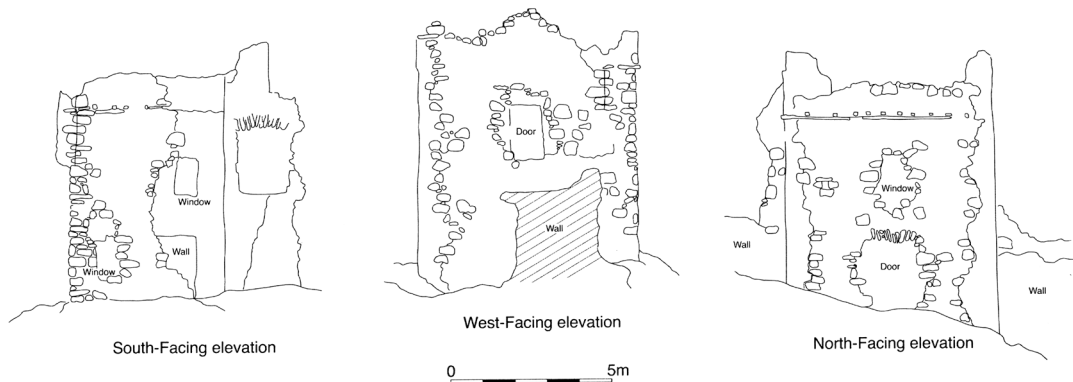
ILLUS 5   External elevations of the tower at Kinbane

Ivens (1988) describes a sherd from an everted rim body found at Eskeabouy near Lough Macrory, in Tyrone, that had a hard fabric, back core and thin red/brown surface layer, gritted with fine mica/quartz chips, with small angular quartz. This sherd was similar to examples recovered from Tullyliss Rath, Dungannon, and from the Rath of Dreen, Antrim. The sherds recovered from Kinbane would appear to fall into MacSparron's Category B of late medieval coarse pottery (MacSparron 2009). It may be important to note that these sherds are also similar to later medieval ceramic traditions visible throughout western Scotland (see Raven 2005: 375–7). What is additionally interesting from the excavations is the complete absence of 17th-century or early modern artefactual material. Finds from sites of this later period are usually numerous and distinctive, inclusive of clay pipe stems and, in a context such as this, evidence of firearm use. The authors' work at upland house sites in Colonsay, for example, has produced evidence for the manufacture of gun flints and lead shot. This absence, combined with the historical reference to castle defacement in 1551, is indicative of a short phase of occupation before the site was ultimately abandoned after the middle of the 16th century. The lack of any definitive evidence for internal structures would also appear to confirm this, but equally this could result from the constructional nature of late medieval dwelling houses, which often leave little evidence in the archaeological record. The departure of Colla's descendants to Colonsay and the entrenchment of the MacDonnells in other sites across the north coast is likely to have militated against the need for the castle at Kinbane and it seems to have fallen out of everyday use, remaining only as a site of symbolic importance in the landscape. It should also be noted that deposits dating to before the late medieval period, including prehistoric flint, were apparent, but their dating and interpretation will require further excavation. It is clear from other sites along this coast that these headlands had been subject to cultural activity for many millennia and it is likely that Kinbane was witness to similar activity.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the historical and archaeological evidence clearly point to a site that was occupied for a limited period of maybe ten to fifteen years, from the mid-1540s to the late 1550s. While the English siege by itself was not enough to end the occupation of the site and break the MacDonnell connection to it, it was part of a broader chain of events that led to its abandonment. The death of Colla in 1558 and the acquisition of Dunluce Castle by the Ulster MacDonnells rendered the initial purpose of the site obsolete. By the end of that decade, the family had become firmly established across the former territories of the MacQuillans in north Antrim. The Clan Iain Mhóir's original bridgehead, positioned so unfavourably from a terrestrial perspective, was simply no longer needed as Colla's descendants shifted their focus to the Scottish western Isles and Colonsay in particular, and Dunluce became the centre of a reinvigorated MacDonnell lordship in Ulster. Kinbane was never intended in the first place to function as a permanent base.

Its broad enclosure points to it being predominantly a military landing and staging post, bearing in mind its defensive character and unique coastal position. It was built to support the men arriving off vessels from the isles bringing supplies, weapons and foodstuffs from their homeland. The large walled enclosure would probably have been used primarily for storage and the short term accommodation of men in temporary buildings. Certainly, the widespread distribution of faunal material across the site and presence of a number of localised hearth-like burning areas suggest groups of individuals occupying this place on an occasional basis. The limited material culture recovered from the excavations suggests that the pots they used for cooking and storage were sourced within the local landscape, which is presumably indicative of established social interactions and trading activity in the region.

However, this picture does not do justice to the south tower, which although not a complex piece of domestic architectural display, contains sufficient details to suggest it performed a more polite function and was designed to display at

least the semblance of status, lordly occupation and permanence, and not simply a functional military role. It is relatively small in size and appears to have been built without a fireplace. This could potentially indicate that it was not built by a leading MacDonnell lord with a view to housing his family. There is some limited evidence to suggest that there could have been an annex attached to the tower, and this might have fulfilled a more domestic role, though the surviving architecture could still support an interpretation that it had a more specialist and event-specific role. On the other hand, the string coursing, dressed quoins, bevelled corner and relatively large, non-defensive windows perhaps relate to towerhouse architecture elsewhere in Scotland and Ireland. The fact that there was a perceived desire to adopt these features perhaps suggests the tower was intended to provide a suitably embellished venue for housing the normal functions of lordship (entertainment, negotiating, law-giving, justice-taking, etc), if not necessarily providing a high level of domestic comfort. Similar small towers were appearing in the Western Isles, from the end of the 15th century, none of which were primarily military in function, but which perhaps provide a precedent for Kinbane. The two best preserved are Castle MacLeod, in Barra, and Eilean Bheagram, in South Uist, and are as similar to one another and Kinbane to serve as a contrast. Castle MacLeod contains a similarly proportioned tower with a number of similar embellishments, such as largeish windows and spouts, and may have had an associated house alongside it. Eilean Bheagram, a minor centre of the Clanranald lordship in the Uists in this period, contains a series of houses alongside a tower of similar size but contains no similar domestic niceties, only a small slit window – possibly a gun loop. Like Kinbane, neither of the towers at these sites contain fireplaces and were presumably heated by embrasures, as was common throughout many tower-houses along Scotland's north-western seaboard (see Dunbar 1981).

Kinbane also questions our contemporary understandings of nationalist-based identity. To the modern observer, the castle, like its larger counterpart at Dunluce, was built in a 'Scottish' style. It is unlike any other fortification across Ulster, differing considerably in size, layout and form from the tower-houses of County Down or Donegal, for example. It was commissioned by a family from the Southern Hebrides whose kinsmen had enjoyed links with east Ulster for generations. However, sections of the architecture, including the wicker-centred mural passage, indicate that masons of an 'Irish' background were involved in its construction. Similarly, the material culture recovered from the site was most likely made and sourced locally, which would testify to the extent of local connections and relationships during the site's occupation. However, can we state that this was a Scottish castle built in an Irish landscape? Or, were the people who lived in, or at least occupied, this castle continuing a tradition of communication, settlement and trade in a local maritime world where they either did not see or did not perceive national borders but existed in a region where local kin-based alliances had existed in what could be termed the broader Gaelic world (see McLeod 2004). This was a region that had been witness to millennia of close cultural affinities originating in the Mesolithic and continuing through plantation and into the 20th century, before world wars, the collapse of the fishing industry and the Northern Irish troubles served to sever these connections. Such simplistic assignations of Scottishness or Irishness are arguably the products of resurgent nationalism in the 19th century and of more recent decades. As with all archaeological material within this theatre, should we not then look beyond artificial notions of ethnicity and think rather of people linked geographically and by shared cultural traditions within the same maritime world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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