

Eilean nan Naomh Saint Columba's Other Island

On the sea lanes of the early Irish missionaries, Tiree became one of the most important centres of the early Celtic church in Scotland.

St. Brendan the Navigator was the first Irish missionary to arrive on the island, landing in 514. The adventurer Tim Severin recreated Brendan's voyage in 1976 by sailing a leather boat from Ireland to Newfoundland.

In the year 563 Saint Columba sailed from Northern Ireland and built his famous monastery on Iona, soon followed by another on Tiree called *Mag Luinge*. This is often thought to have been at the site of Soroby graveyard where there used to be a church. A nearby inlet is still called *Port na Luinge*, meaning harbour of the boat. It may, however, have been at Kirkapol.

Mag Luinge also took men seeking to atone for past crimes. One of these penitents was *Librán*. He told Columba, *I killed a fellow [in Ireland]. After this I was held in chains as a guilty man. But a relative of mine, who was extremely rich, came to my rescue in the nick of time. He paid what was needed to get me off... and he saved me from death'. Librán* swore to serve his relative all his life, but soon broke his promise and fled to Iona. Columba sent him to his Tiree monastery for seven years where he was known as the reed cutter. He eventually died as a very old man at a monastery in Ireland, having made peace with his family.



MacLean's cross in Soroby churchyard



Teampal Phàraig, St. Patrick's chapel, Kenavara. Beside the chapel there are the remains of the monks' tiny cells of a small monastery



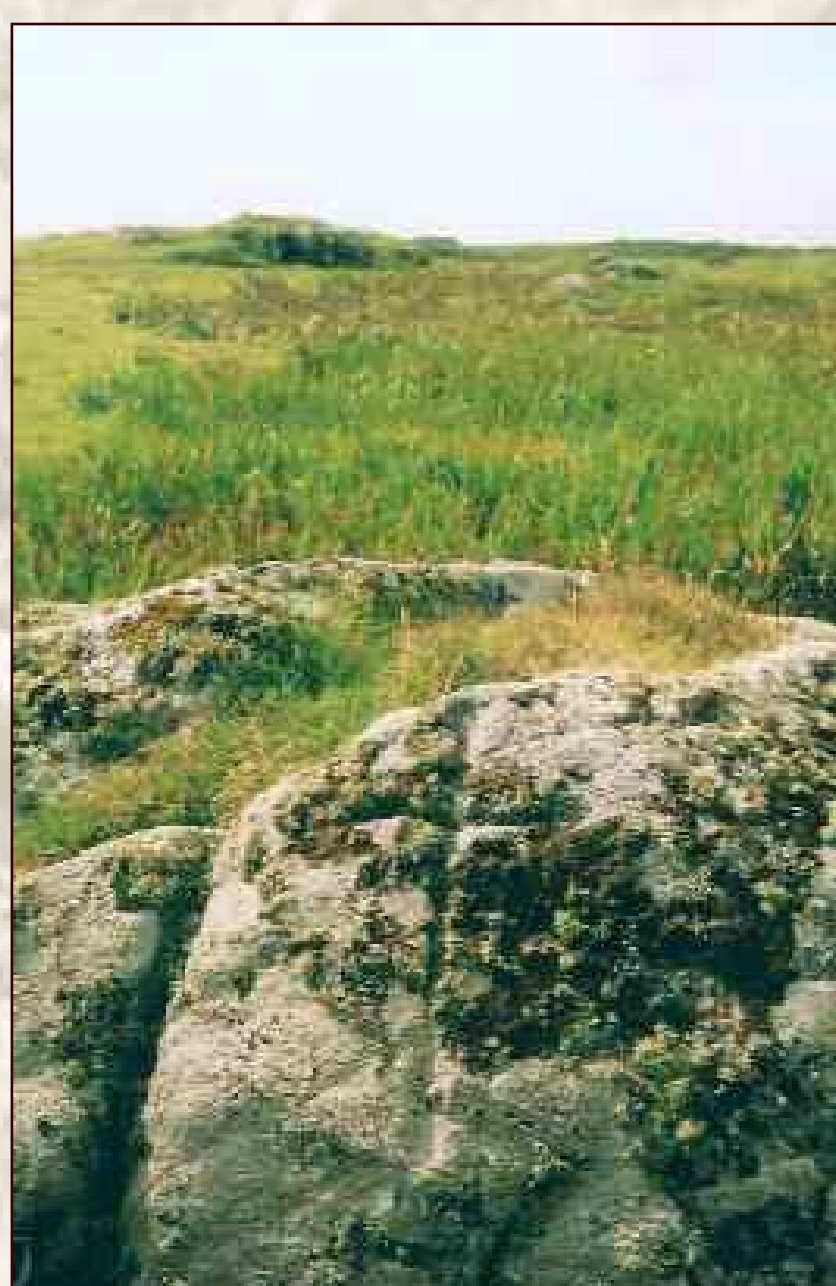
The larger of the ruined Kirkapol chapels, the medieval parish church of the east of the island. It was dedicated to St. Columba

Columba is credited as having had miraculous powers. Once two holy men wanted to leave Iona and sail in opposite directions. Each wanted a following wind. Columba said, *"Tomorrow, first thing in the morning, Baithéne [the abbot of Tiree] will have a following wind for his journey..."* The Lord granted this...and at the third hour of the same day Columba sent for Colmán the priest and said to him, *"Baithéne has now arrived safely at the harbour [on Tiree]... Soon the Lord will bring the wind round to the north."* Within an hour the south wind had obeyed St. Columba's word and had become a breeze blowing from the north [for the voyage to Ireland].

The island was known even then for its fertility and has been described as Iona's granary. St. Columba once ordered the Tiree monastery to send a fat beast and six measures of grain to a dying man on Coll after he had been caught trying to kill some seals that belonged to Iona.

According to local tradition, Columba himself sailed to Tiree and landed on Gott Bay. He tied his boat to some seaweed growing on a rock at the Scarinish end of the beach. When the tide came in, the boat pulled free, and Columba cursed the rock, prophesying that seaweed would never grow there again. It is still known as *Mallachaig*, the cursed one. Columba then rowed down to the other end of the beach in front of Brock. There he roped his vessel to another rock, still called *Naomhaig*, the blessed one, where his boat remained safely moored.

There was another monastery on Tiree at *Teampal Phàraig*, which sits in a hollow below Kenavara, at the end of Balephuill beach. The gable end of a small chapel, with an engraved cross, still stands there along with the remains of the monks' tiny cells.



A cross incised on a rock behind the chapels at Kirkapol