

CHURCHES

map reference

Sorobay

984 417

There is a record of a monastery being established near here by St. Columbas cousin, St. Batheine in 565 A.D. There is no trace of the original building, but the churchyard there is still in use. Objects were found in the ground on the other side of the road in the gentle slope leading to the sea and part of a wall discovered during graveyard extensions about one hundred years ago. There is a record of the destruction of the monastery by fire in 673 but this appeared to be no deterrent. Various medieval artifacts are known to have survived and several slabs and stones were moved to Cladh Beg - Kirkapol - burial ground. A disc headed cross was moved to Inverary castle and re-erected there. Some possibly 13th century fragment were used as markers. Other items include a table tomb to Farquar Fraser, Dean of the Isles, who died on 14th February 1680 and a heavy cruciform slab carved on both sides. Farquar, incidentally, was succeeded by his son John.

The church of ST. Columba of Tiree was annexed by Ardchattan Priory before the end of the 13th century and Sorobay was then taken over by Iona in 1421. It remained in their charge until the Reformation. In 1618 Sorobay was united with Coll and Kirkapoll until the original Kirkapoll parish church was built in 1776.

St. Patricks Chapel - Ceann a' Mhara

937 401

Some walls of the tiny church remain. The stones were set in lime mortar and it was about 8 x 3½ metres. The base of the altar remains and there are

some stones with small carved crosses. Traces of several huts have been found nearby with the whole settlement within an enclosure. It is thought to have been an early monastery with chapel building added later, perhaps in medieval times.

Chapel and Burial Ground - Kilkenneth 943 447

Stone in lime mortar, approximately 8½ x 3 metres and with traces of plaster remaining. The slope of the top surface of the wall suggests that the roof was probably thatched. Other sections of wall remain, considered by some to have been part of the burial ground enclosure, but I consider them to have been too substantial for this purpose. The building is considered to be late middle ages and an outpost of Soroby.

Burial Ground - Cladh Beag - Hynish 978 390

Nothing identifiable remaining

Chapel and Burial Ground - Balephetrish 019 474

Thought to have been dedicated to St. Finnan. Only the site is known

Chapel and Burial Ground - Kenovay 994 468

Identified on Turnbulle map of 1768 it was apparently a stone and turf walled enclosure with an oblong building about 9 x 6 metres. The enclosure was said to have been used for the occasional burial of still-born children.

Chapel and Burial Ground - Cornaigmore 978 468

Dedicated to St. Bride, but nothing now visible.

Chapel and Burial Ground - Kilmoluag

965 480

No visible traces.

Chapel and Burial Ground Caolas

No visible remains

Chapel - Ruaig

066 482

Built by a congregational minister around the mid-eighteen hundreds. It is now in a poor condition. The timber safe-lintels above the windows have been eaten away by woodworm and all that remains of the balcony are beam sockets in the the stonework. The Hebridean Trust intends to renovate the building for use as a heritage museum.

Old Parish Church and Chapel - Kirkapol

042 472/473

Two substantial ruins, the older of the two perhaps going back to the 13th century or earlier. A few very old stones in the graveyard including some shifted from elsewhere.

Parish Church - Kirkapol

041 468

This building was built around 1842 and replaced an earlier church which had been built in Scarinish around 1776. It is a listed building of rather unusual design with cast iron columns supporting the balcony.

Parish Church - Heylipol

965 432

Built of local granite to be a smaller replica of the abbey on Iona, it is cruciform on plan with a bell tower at the main entrance. The panels on the pulpit were hand carved by local schoolboys.

of any local brigands, giving them something more important to think about than harrying the populace.

It is said that the Scots originally came over from Ireland to assist the Picts in their fight against the Romans. I have been told of a chariot training ground in Islay where the armies were put through their paces, and I can imagine the young men of Tiree being keen to join in, nevertheless the farmers would be able to harvest their corn and the women work out in the open without fear of attack.

Christians and Vikings

The next major influence was the coming of Christianity. Columba arrived in Iona in 563 A.D. and local rumour has it that he may have landed first in Tiree. Without questioning his itinerary too deeply it has been established that his cousin Batheine founded a monastery near Soroby on Tiree within about two years of the Iona landing.

Various religious sites were created and will be discussed later, and it would seem that the vulnerable monks were setting themselves up as targets for the emerging Viking raiders. The monastery at Soroby was burned in 672 or 673 A.D. but the monks and their followers were tenacious and there is a record of an abbot who died there about one hundred years later. This was the early Viking raiding period in the islands, perhaps when they set up some of their winter forts and it was about the end of the eighth century when they became properly established and either overcame the monasteries or themselves turned Christian.

In 1016 a battle fought by Olaf the Thick is thought to have taken place at Heylipol, perhaps at the castle now replaced by Island House. Olaf's unfortunate name no doubt referred to his girth rather than his mental ability as he later became King of Norway.

Viking control and influence lasted to varying degrees until 1266 - three years after their defeat at the Battle of Largs and there are occasional mentions of the island in the records. Magnus Barelegs got control in 1098 A.D. but after his death five years later King Godfrey of the Isle of Man took charge and, in 1123 A.D. made his son Reginald boss of the whole area

Late Middle Ages

After the Wars of Independence it turned out that Angus Og Macdonald had backed the right side and he was succeeded by his son John. Through a process of marriage, divorce and re-marriage to the daughter of the man who became King Robert II, John was able to become Lord of the Isles in 1354. A crafty politician, he made his former enemies, the MacDougalls, Baillies of Tiree with the right to keep a small navy at the island. From that point onwards the MacDougalls fade into obscurity as far as Tiree is concerned.

In 1390 the second Lord of the Isles appointed Lachlan Maclean as Baillie of Tiree and made him feudal landlord of Heylipol and Mannal. One hundred years later the Scottish Crown removed their charter but the Macdonalds ignored this for some years and retained actual possession, although in

1517 Lachlan MacLean of Duart was gifted the rents of Tiree. Ten years later the Campbells got into the act with pillage and plunder in revenge for acts carried out by the Macleans of Duart and thirty five years after that MacDonald of Islay took his turn and then repeated the atrocity 15 years later. The Duart estates were forfeited in 1594, but the Macleans hung on regardless.

Seventeenth Century

James IV and I apparently approved a plot in 1607 to wipe out the inhabitants of all the Hebrides bar Skye and Lewis. The offer to carry out the plan was made by the Marquis of Huntly. In return he was to receive a Crown Charter on the islands. Fortunately the Privy Council overturned the scheme.

In 1672 the 9th Earl of Argyll, as the Duarts chief creditor, claimed all of their rents and tried to evict 32 tenants on Tiree who refused to pay. Nothing much happened until 1674 when Argyll installed his own Baillie. One year later Maclean of Broilass, one of the Duart leaders, landed at Scarinish and Campbells man fled to Coll. Loyalties seem to have remained with the Macleans as several Tiree men are known to have fought with them in the cause of King James at the Battle of Killiecrankie. It was a famous victory, to such an extent that the opposing general, Mackay, at one point found himself totally alone on the battlefield, but with the death of 'Bonnie Dundee' the Jacobite forces were subsequently beaten at the Battle of Dunkeld. Duart was forced into exile and, ultimately, the Campbell family had backed the right side.

John Fraser was installed in Tiree as Dean of the Isles in 1678, but he refused to accept the Revolution Settlement and the charge was eventually declared vacant in 1697.

Eighteenth Century

After the 1715 rebellion the 2nd Duke decided it would be prudent to put some of his own men onto the island as tacksmen. Politically it may have made sense, but financially it was a disaster. He got rid of them in favour of direct tenants and this plan also failed with a number of the smaller farmers going bankrupt.

In 1745 large numbers of islanders tried to join Prince Charles although few succeeded as the island boats were stove in by Government forces. Argylls factor was forced to leave the island and did not return until after Culloden when he arrived backed up by militia.

By 1770 half of the island was held by 14 tenants, although the population was probably in the region of 2000, but this seemed to be an era of general prosperity with high prices for cattle and no shortage of food. There were, however, problems with sandblow which were thought at the time to be associated with harvesting methods, but to a lesser extent this persists to the present day.

Nineteenth Century