



Case information

Case ID	300010067
File Reference	AMH/250/2/1
Name of Site	Colonsay House, Cross

Local Authority	Argyll and Bute
National Grid Reference	NR 39578 96816
Designation No. (if any)	SM250
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	23/03/2012
Decision Date	19/09/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1923 and the documentation does not conform to current standards. The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to update the entry in the Schedule as **Colonsay House, Cross**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1923; no subsequent amendments.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the 2012 Argyll and Bute project and visited on 02/09/2013.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling criteria has been carried out (see Annex A). The monument was found to meet the criteria on the determination of national importance for scheduling.

The criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50. <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Colonsay House, Cross

1 Description

The monument is a cross slab believed to date to about the 7th or 8th centuries AD. It is visible as an upright stone slab with low relief carvings of a cross with a naturalist human head and an abstract body, limbs and long ornate ‘robe’ on the front, and a moulded collar on the reverse. The stone was moved around 1870 from the site of a chapel and burial ground at Riasg Buidhe, to its current location adjacent to the well of Tobar Oran in the grounds of Colonsay House.

The cross-slab is broken obliquely at the foot and measures 1.37m high by 0.36m across the arms, which have a maximum projection from the slab of 45mm. It is roughly triangular in section, with a maximum thickness of 120mm, while the side arms are about 70mm in thickness. The front is carved with a Latin cross, terminating at the top in a bearded human head with prominent features. The head is carved in the round with the rear more plainly decorated; a moulded collar extends onto the back, where it splits to enclose a lozenge shaped hollow. Mouldings form spirals in the side-arms and curve in the shaft to suggest the legs of a figure, enclosed in a ‘robe’.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, measuring two metres in diameter, centred on the cross slab, to include the monument and an area around it for its support and preservation, as shown in red on the accompanying map. The scheduling specifically excludes all elements of the well of Tobar Oran. The monument was first scheduled in 1923 and the documentation does not conform to current standards; the present amendment rectifies this.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is a well-preserved cross slab with elaborately carved decoration. Although now broken at the foot, this has had little impact on the carved decoration and the cross slab retains its original form. The decorative carvings survive in very good condition and are still visible on all of its faces. The stone was moved to its current location around 1870. Prior to this it stood at the east end of the chapel at Riasg Buidhe (scheduled monument reference SM5974; Canmore ID 319764) and was also used as a cover for a well near the church. Based upon the decorative style and similar decorations found on stone, in metal and manuscript decoration elsewhere, the monument is of probable 7th or 8th century date. Therefore, the cross

slab has the potential to enhance the study of early Christian carved stones, the techniques and iconography of early stone carvings, their functions and role within contemporary religious practices.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Although carved cross slabs are found throughout Scotland, there are no close Scottish parallels for the form of decoration on the slab at Colonsay House. The Colonsay example does have some similarities with a cross from North Rona (Canmore ID 319424), which depicts a figure with its head in the top arm, and the facial type is also comparable with that depicted on a Pictish Bronze pin from Golspie, Sutherland (Canmore ID 15356). However, the closest parallels are found in Ireland, and include stone crosses from Clogher, Co. Tyrone, Kilbroney, Co. Down and Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry as well as a bronze mount from Longford. This small group of art work is characterised by the representation of the disembodied head of Christ set over what appears to be an ornamental breastplate, a form of depiction that may be derived from Palestinian representations of the head of Christ over the cross of Golgotha. The monument, therefore, represents a rare Scottish example of a type of iconography more commonly employed in Ireland. The decoration also suggests much wider connections with early Christian art styles. The monument, therefore, can enhance our understanding of the origins and spread of Christianity and belief in western Britain and the influence of Ireland upon the early church in Scotland. It has the potential to contribute towards our understanding of the connections between the Christian community at Colonsay and others in the area and more widely.

The importance of the monument is enhanced by its original association with an early Christian chapel, about 1.7km southwest of its current location. The probable date of the cross attests to the early establishment of Christianity on Colonsay. A number of other early Christian chapels have been identified on Colonsay, at least one of which (Balnahard: scheduled monument reference SM5082; Canmore ID 38168) is associated with carved stones of early Christian date. Additionally, several carved stones of less certain provenance are known, including the fragment of a cross slab now also located in the grounds of Colonsay House (Canmore ID 318214). There is potential to study these carved stones and chapels together to understand their functions within the local communities, the development of decorative styles and the place of carved stone monuments within early Christian practice and belief.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

The stone appears to be associated with the early adoption of Christianity on Colonsay, which potentially spread from the early Columban monastery of Iona, founded in the late 6th century. The form of the monument is also influenced by the decorative styles in use in the 7th and 8th centuries, seen on metalwork and manuscripts as well as in stone carving. In addition, the monument has significant aesthetic attributes. The use of a human head on a cross slab in this way is rare in Scotland, and the naturalistic representation of the head contrast with the abstract nature of the body, arms and legs.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

Our site visit suggested the stone is in a stable condition and well preserved. Designation as a scheduled monument is the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

4 Assessment of national importance

The monument is of national importance because of its potential to make a significant addition to our knowledge of the past, particularly our appreciation and understanding of early ecclesiastical sculpture and the development of Christianity in Scotland. The cross retains its original form, and the decorative carvings survive in very good condition and are still visible on all of its faces. Although no longer in its original location, the cross slab is important because its carvings are highly unusual. Its importance is enhanced by its original association with an early chapel 1.7km to the southwest of its present location. The monument has the potential to contribute towards our understanding of the origins and development of Christianity in western Scotland, and the wider relationships between this Christian community and others in the area and more widely. The loss of the monument would diminish our ability to understand and appreciate ecclesiastical sculpture, its influences, and the origins, nature and spread of early Christianity in Colonsay and across the west of Scotland.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 319764 (accessed on 18/04/2016).

The West of Scotland Archaeology Service Historic Environment Record reference is 2805.

Close-Brooks, J. (1974-5) A pictish pin from Golspie, Sutherland. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 106, 208-10.

Fisher, I. (2001) *Early Medieval sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands*, RCAHMS/Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph series 1. Edinburgh.

RCAHMS. (1984) *The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Argyll: an inventory of the monuments volume 5: Islay, Jura, Colonsay and Oronsay*. Edinburgh.

Rose, H. M. (1960) A stone cross at Clogher, Co. Tyrone. *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 90(2), 191-206.

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