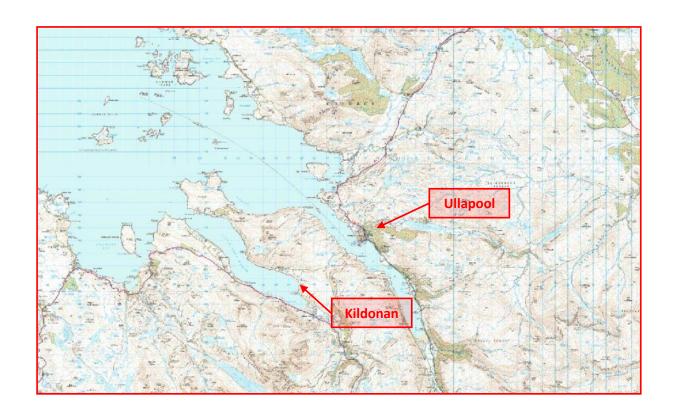
A Survey of Kildonan Township

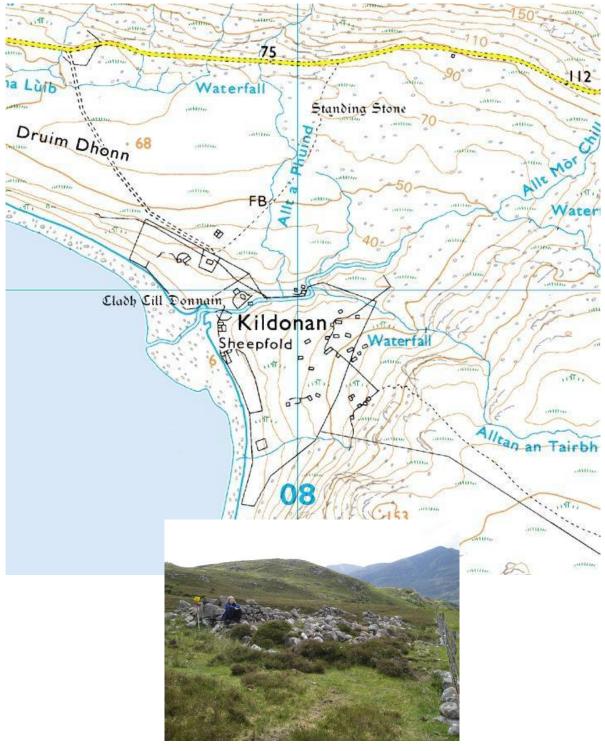
2011
Mary Buchanan, Jim Buchanan, Anne MacInnes



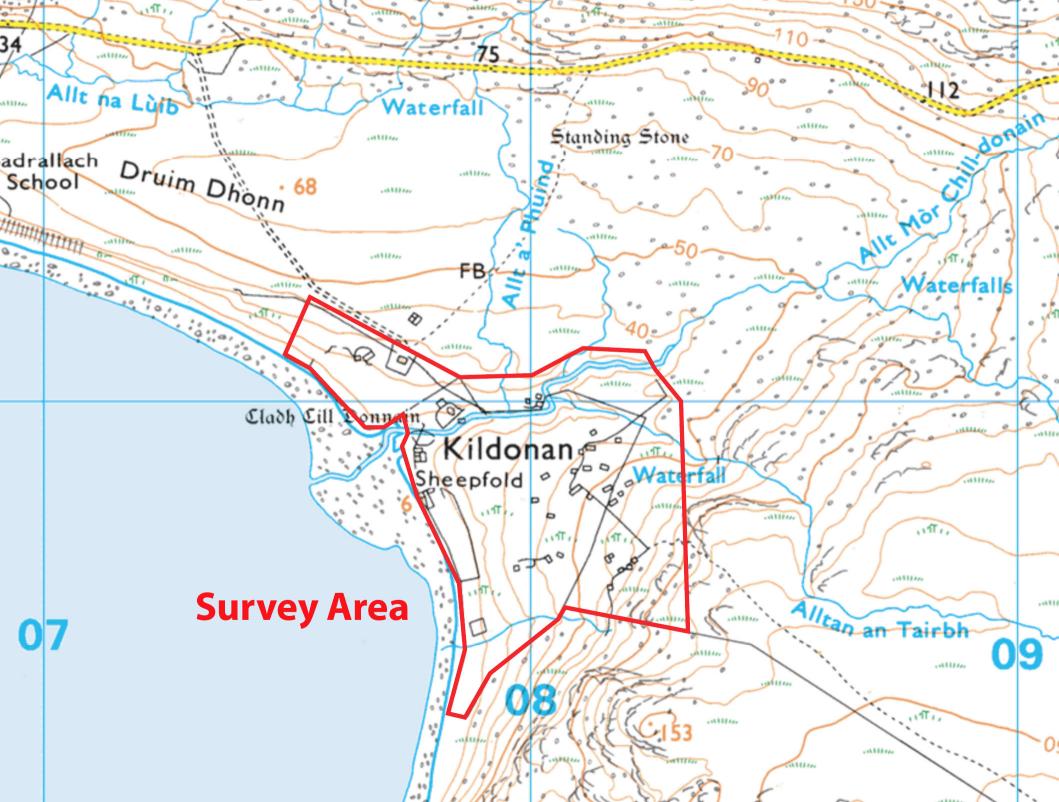
Kildonan, Little Loch Broom

Kildonan Township

Kildonan, Dundonnell Centred on NH 0782 9097



Dedicated to the memory of Mary Buchanan who started this survey.



Kildonan township was described by Jonathan Wordworth in 1995 as one of the most important post-medieval settlements in Wester Ross, because it has been undisturbed by later development, with its field system largely intact.

Kildonan is shown on Roy's map of 1750 with lazy beds marked.

There is little information on the early settlers of the township, but it is documented that people cleared from Strath na Sealga and Glenarigolach settled here. Local folklore indicates that Norse settlers spent some time here and the burial ground is reputed to have originally been the grave of a Viking princess. Certainly the ruins within the township are relatively long in comparison with most found in Wester Ross so perhaps they were built on earlier Norse footprints?

The township area is within Dundonnel Estate, which came into Mackenzie hands in 1610. This is the clan branch associated with Castle Leod, Strathpeffer, and the Earl of Cromartie.

There is a square stone enclosure on the shore known as the Square of Cromartie. When trying to raise money, the estate sold off parcels of land so that people owned part of the Cromartie estate.

We know that people were cleared out of Kildonan to make way for a sheep farm but available documentation comes up with 3 dates. 1750, 1840, 1850. the latter is probably correct.

In 1840 it is known that 20 young families (136 people) were evicted from Kildonan and Dundonnell to Scoraig where they settled on the rocky moor. Before they left the township, having been given just 40 days notice, they burned the crops and took their roof timbers with them. They gradually improved the land at Scoraig, having to go to the Summer Isles for seaweed as there was none on the local shores. The Laird of Dundonnell demanded 10 days of free labour in lieu of rent for the crofts.

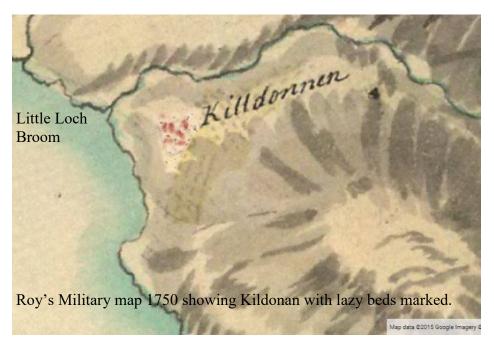
Kildonan census records show that in 1841 there were 16 households with a total of 46 people headed by 2 farmers, 3 crofters, 2 cottars, 1 agricultural labourer, and 1 carpenter.

By 1851 there were only 6 households with 25 people, headed by 1 farmer (Simon Mackenzie, one of the Mackenzie lairds family) with 20 acres of arable ground and 800 acres of hill ground, 1 farmer of 6 acres, 1 shepherd, and 3 paupers aged 74, 77, and 80.

It seems that the estate was establishing a sheep farm. We know that a house (the ruins of which are now completely submerged in brambles) on the slope to the NW of the township and beside the existing Kildonan house was lived in before 1845 as there is a record of Barbara Mackenzie, widow of James of the Glen living there.

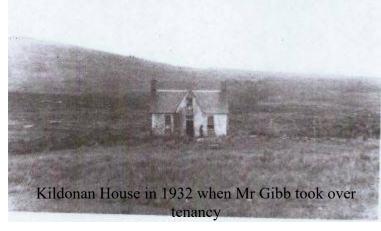
The present Kildonan House was built in 1851 and the farm was tenanted by Barbara's two sons until a snowstorm in 1898 killed all the livestock and they relocated to Slatterdale near Gairloch.

The house was then unoccupied until 1932 when it was leased to Mr Gibb by the estate. His daughter Jean continued to live there until 1996 since when it has lain empty.





Ruin of original house shown on old aerial photo before it became overgrown with brambles.



Kildonan, Dundonnell, Centred on NH 0782 9097

The site is situated on a SW gently sloping raised beach running down to Little Loch Broom. The site is dissected by the Allt Mor Chill-Donnain which cuts a steep sided course to the N of the township.

To the N of the burn are the burial ground, chapel, lime kiln and footings of four other buildings, as well as the present farmhouse with the ruined earlier house.

To the S of the burn lies Kildonan township.



The 1st OS shows all the buildings within the township to be unroofed, however the shepherds house and byre by the shore are both roofed along with the two farmhouses.



Aerial showing the site of the two shore buildings in relation to the township on the upper slope.

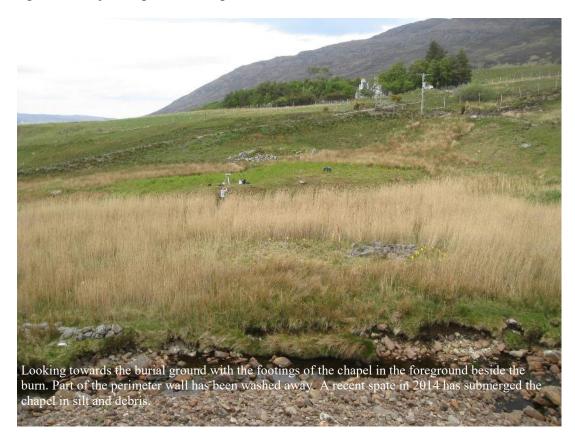


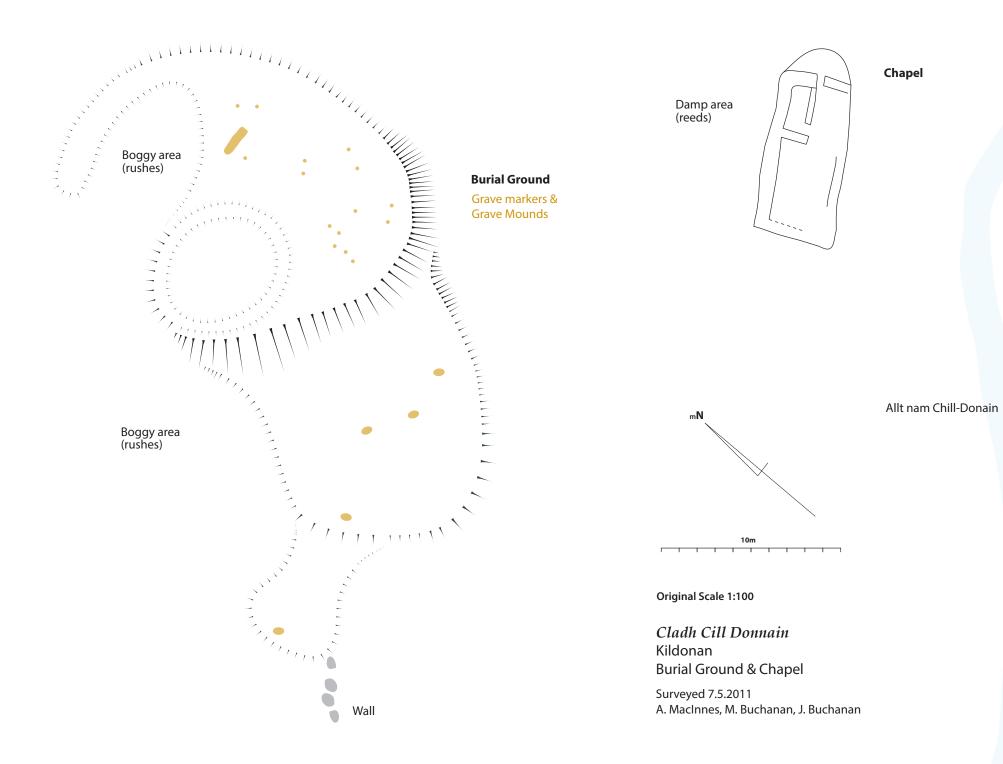
Aerial showing The Square of Cromartie to the S of the shore buildings

Kildonan Burial Ground and Chapel NH 07834 90968 elevation 13m 'Clach Cill Donnain'



The area is named after the Irish priest/monk Donan (Donnainn) who was martyred on Eigg in AD617 and later made a saint.. He was reputed to have had a monastic cell here and the graveyard and footings of the adjacent possible chapel are associated with him.





A large standing stone situated at NH 0803 9152 is usually associated with the monastic foundation, but there is debate as to whether it is natural or a prehistoric standing stone?



The burial ground and chapel were plane tabled (see diagram).

A large man made mound of small boulders that seemed to be constructed in two phases.

The older upper section of the graveyard has within it a circular stone bank. There are several flat grave slabs and small upright marker stones. No engravings were seen.

This section drops down to a lower level where the graves are marked with small boulder cairns rather than slabs. Beyond this extends a further smaller tongue with another cairn.

The burn running down from the road has been diverted away from the farmhouse, now running to the W. side of the burial ground causing a very boggy area. There is a later enclosure to the W. of the burial ground.

According to local knowledge the burial ground was last used around 250 years ago.







Some of the grave slabs

More grave slabs and markers.









The outline of walls and a mound of stones are all that remains on the chapel site. It is in serious danger of being washed away as the bank of the burn erodes in spates.







Following our survey we were concerned at the damage being done by cattle to the burial ground so with permission and help from Dundonnell estate we have fenced off both the burial ground and the chapel. Access is by gate or stile.

Lime kiln NH 07988 90886 elevation 14m

This structure which is built into a terrace on the N. bank of the burn has always been recorded as a corn drying kiln. We puzzled over this as it seemed very large for a corn drying kiln in this area and why would it be on the other side of an often fast flowing full burn from the township? Lime kilns were often situated away from settlements due to the smell.

Having cleared away the main tumble and plane tabled the structure (see plan), we continued to clear away the debris in one corner of the bowl and found obvious deposits of lime and heat affected stones.

There do not seem to be any large limestone sources in the local area although some small boulders have been found. However its known that limestone was brought back in boats from Ireland having gone over with seaweed and fish.

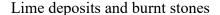




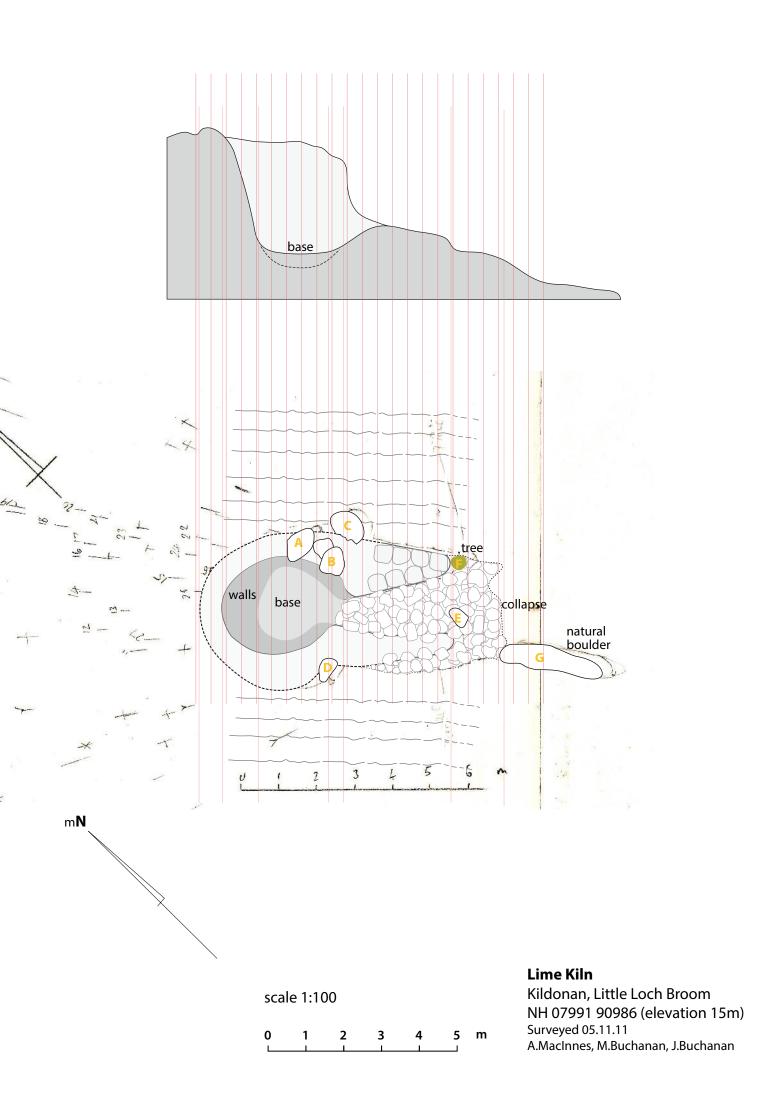


The kiln structure.

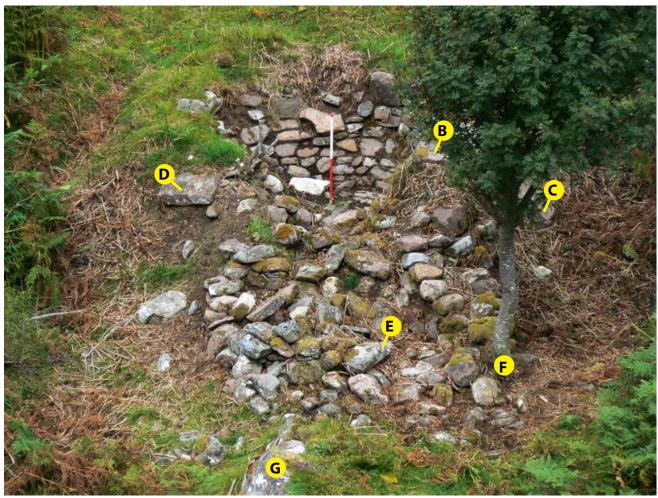
Is it possible that this kiln is the modified structure of St Donan's cell that is reputed to have been located here?











We have also found further up the burn on the same side as the township a smaller corn drying kiln situated at NH 08257 90912 elevation 36m. It is very overgrown but the structure is intact.





Adjacent to this is a possible older corn drying kiln situated at NH 08273 90916 elevation 34m



Beside the lime kiln are the footings of 3 buildings mentioned in previous walkover surveys. NH 08004 90988 elevation 10m measuring 3 x 5m NH 08016 90995 elevation 15m measuring 3 x 5m

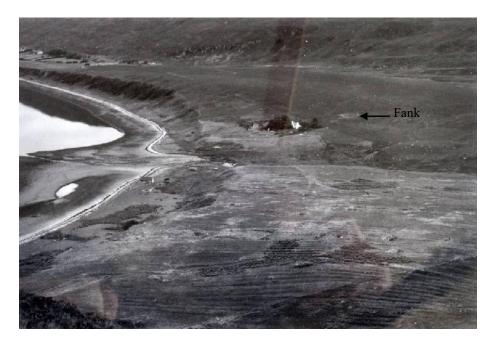
NH 08034 90980 elevation 12m measuring 2 x 4m $\,$







Kildonan House NH 07746 91079 elevation 19m



An old photo showing Kildonan House in relation to the township.



Kildonan House today showing the new track that runs down the hillside from the road above.

The house lies on a SW facing slope above Little Loch Broom. The structure is still roofed but damage unless repaired will lead to deterioration of the house. It has remained unoccupied since 1996. The 1st OS shows both the present house built in 1851 and the earlier house as roofed. It is not known if the earlier house post dates the township, being built when the sheep farm was established, but its construction of dressed stone unlike the ruins within the township, suggests this.

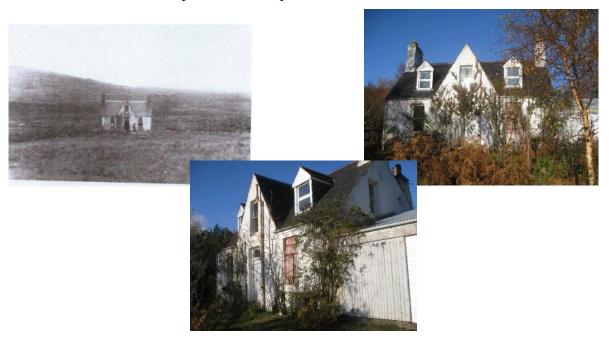
The main house measures $9.7 \times 7.4 \text{m}$ with two extensions measuring $3.8 \times 5.5 \text{m}$ and $4.0 \times 7.3 \text{m}$. Elevation is 19m.

The older house has three main compartments with two outshots. A rough measurement gave an overall length of 25m and width of 3.3m. Elevation 14m

Further up the hillside above the house lies the old fank, also marked on the 1st OS. A well marked on the map has been filled in and latterly water was drawn from a well below the house at the edge of the raised beach.

A deer fence around the property, now broken down, allowed trees to grow and a garden to be established. This has now gone wild but some shrubs still remain.

Kildonan house as it is at present, in comparison to 1932.



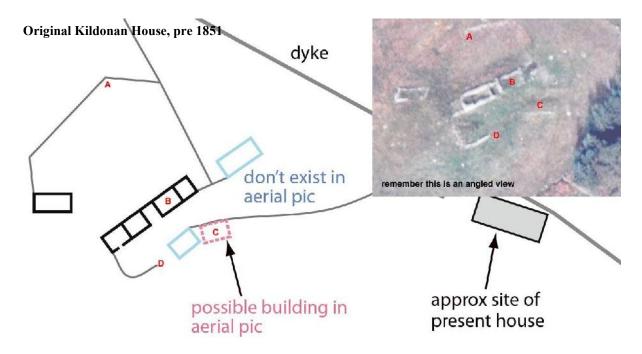


Diagram mapped out from earlier aerial photo showing the original Kildonan House which is now overgrown with brambles and bracken







Buildings on the shore.

There are two buildings on the shore below the raised beach and township. Both are shown as roofed on the 1st OS.

The Byre with its sheepfold as marked on the 1st OS is situated at NH 07768 90878 elevation 4m. The 'Shepherds House' situated at NH 07782 90794 elevation 9m. This house was occupied until the late 1940's.



There are no firm dates as to the construction of these buildings but they were probably contemporary with Kildonan House around the time of the establishment of the sheep farm.

The 'Byre'

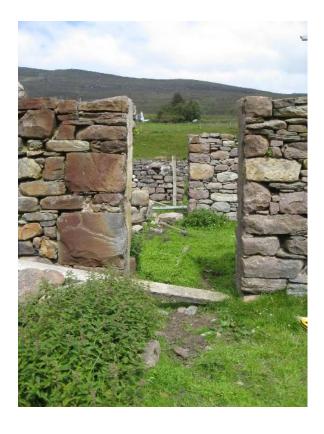


The 'byre' is now unroofed with only remnants of corrugated iron roof left. However the walls remain upstanding (see plan). To the front there is a doorway and one window, and in the rear wall an opposing door. The E. gable wall has a small window.





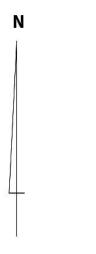
The walls are constructed with dressed stone which has been layered, and around the doorway and at the corners of the building are larger dressed stones. There is snecking between the larger stones to make it wind and watertight.

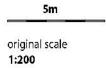


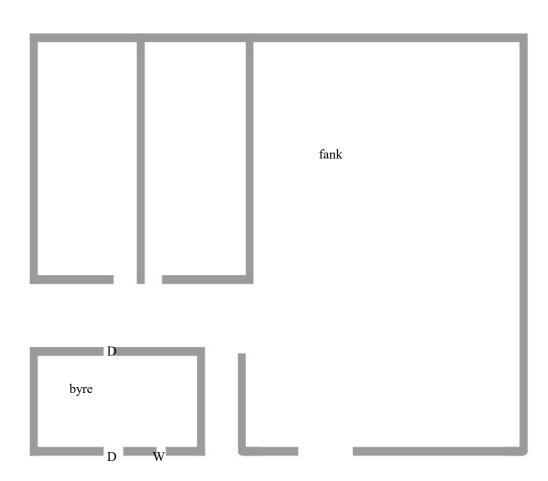


NH 07768 90878









The walls of the surrounding sheepfold are still largely intact, and are neatly constructed with layered dressed and chosen stone. (see plan) The dipper also remains in good condition.





The Shepherd's House. (see plan)
This building is still roofed with corrugated iron which has two skylights to the front elevation, and one to the rear.

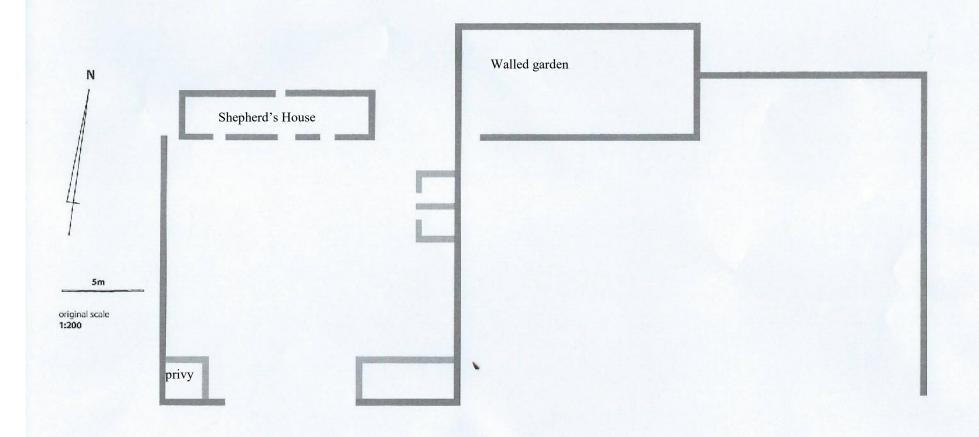


The walls are constructed with layered dressed stone that has had some harling over them. This is now breaking off. To the front there is a doorway with two windows and to the rear one small window. There is a chimney at each gable. Above the doorway and windows there are large lintel stones.





Kildonan Shepherd's House & Enclosure
NH 07782 90794



Within the building the two fireplaces and floor of the upper rooms can be seen. It was too dangerous to attempt to see into the upper floor.







As can be seen the walls were whitewashed.



The building is surrounded by the remains of an enclosure marked on the 1st OS. Local knowledge indicates the later use of part of the enclosure. The ruins of various outhouses remain (see plan) There was no evidence of the well marked on the 1st OS map.



The walled garden as marked on the 1st OS



The ruins of the two outbuildings also shown as roofed on the 1st OS.



Kildonan Township, Kildonan, Dundonnell centred on NH 0782 9097

Our survey found the footings of 25 buildings within the main township area.

There are several walls of both stone and turf construction, some used for terracing.

Three enclosures and the Square of Cromartie.

Numerous large stone clearance piles.

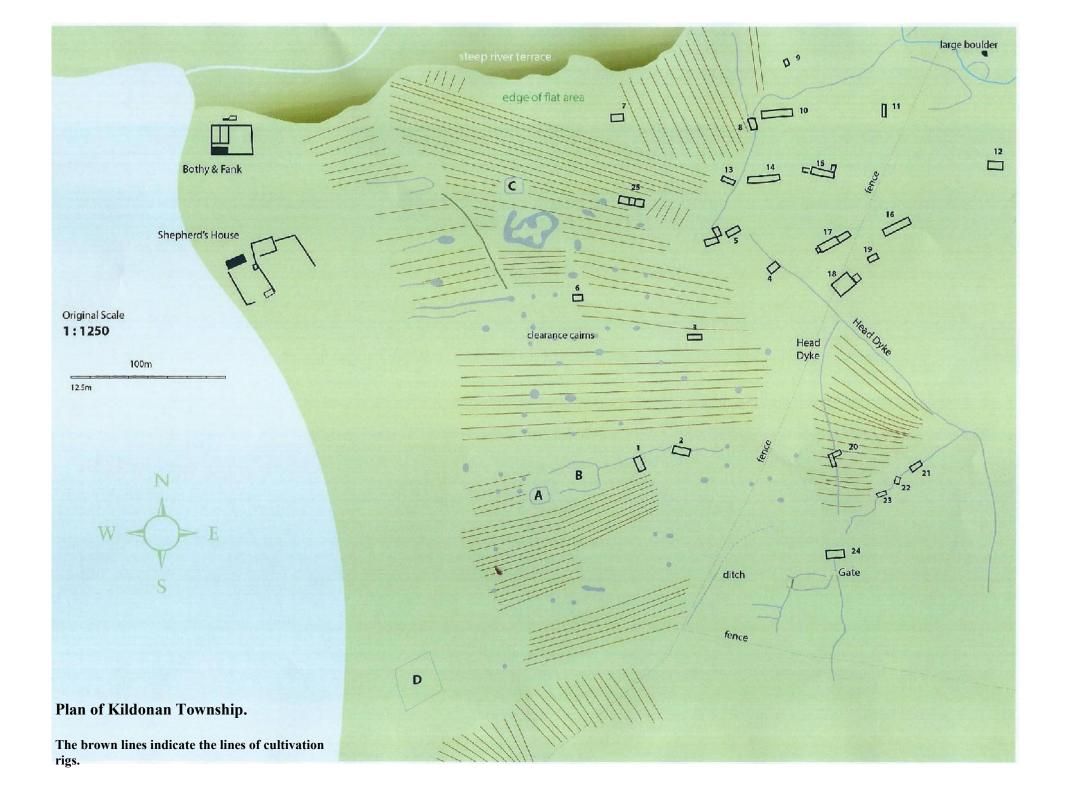
The area is covered with both narrow and broad rigs.

The head dyke forks and this may indicate two different phases.

All are mapped on the plan.



Looking South across the moor to the Township. The steep sides of the Allt Mor Chill-Donnain can be seen.



RUINS AT KILDONAN TOWNSHIP CENTRED ON NH 0782 9097

Numbers as marked on map.

1. Footings of building measuring 4.10 x 9.7m. NH 08035 90666 elevation 46m The walls are constructed with undressed boulders with the remaining walls averaging 0.6m in width to a maximum height of 1.2m. There is a door opening in the S. facing wall which is down slope and beyond this a narrow terrace is built up. No evidence of any windows.





2. Footings of building adjacent to and upslope from building 1. NH08063 90673 elevation 47m. The building measures 12.5 x 4.8m with an inner dividing wall at 9.4m. There is a door opening on the N. facing wall with two large upright stones marking a possible entrance to the smaller section of the building, a probable byre. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders with an average width of 0.7m to a maximum remaining height of 1.3m on the gable end. The inner dividing wall has a width of 0.5m.







3. The footings of a building measuring 11.10 to 4.40m. NH 08074 90747 elevation 45m. The building is constructed with undressed boulders to a maximum remaining height of 0.5m and a width of 0.6m. There is a door opening in the S. facing wall but no evidence of any windows.





4. The ruin of a building measuring 8.0 x 3.8m. NH 08122 90794 elevation 52m. The building is mainly constructed with undressed boulders with some chosen stones with some layering. It has an inner dividing wall at 4.6 m along the S. wall with evidence of a door opening on this wall. There is no evidence of any windows. The walls, including the dividing wall, average 0.5m in width to a remaining maximum height of 1.0m.







5. The ruin of a house with adjacent sectioned barn/byre. NH 08089 90815 elevation 48m. The house is constructed with layered chosen stones with a dividing wall and doorway, no visible windows, and measures $14.4 \times 4.5 \text{m}$. The barn/byre is constructed with boulders, has 3 sections with one measuring $4.0 \times 8.9 \text{m}$, no visible doorway, and at right angles to this the other two sections totalling $10.0 \times 6.6 \text{m}$ with two visible doorways. Attached to this section is a field wall leading off in a N. direction.









6.8 Ruin of building measuring 6.5×3.7 m. NH 07997 90771 elevation 31m. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders to a maximum height on the W. gable of 1.3m with an average width of 0.5m. There is a door opening on the S. facing wall but no remaining evidence of

any windows.





7. Ruin of building measuring 7.4 x 4.3m. NH 08024 90888 elevation 3.2m. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders to a maximum height of 0.8m on the W. gable wall with an average width of 0.6m. There is a door opening on the S. facing wall but no remaining evidence of any windows.







8. Ruin of building measuring 8.1 x 5.4m. NH 08104 90885 elevation 34m. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders with large boulders at the base of the walls. The walls stand to a maximum height of 1.1m and an average width of 0.7m. There is a door opening on the E. facing wall but no evidence of any windows. A platform of stones 2m in width runs along the external side of the NE gable wall, and a stone dyke leads away from the SE corner of the









9. Ruin of building measuring 4.4 x 3.3m. NH 08127 90921 elevation 33m. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders to a maximum remaining height of 0.7m and an average width of 0.7m. There is a door opening in the NE corner of the building but no remaining evidence of any windows. An external platform of stones 2m in width runs the width of the N. gable wall.







10. Ruin of a building measuring 19.9 x 4.6m. NH 08124 90891 elevation 36m. The walls are constructed with chosen flat boulders with some layering and rise to a maximum remaining height of 1.3m with an average width of 0.7m. The ruin has a dividing wall at 8.2m along its length with a width of 0.9m. This wall is only 4m long centrally placed thus leaving a gap at either end for access between the compartments. The only external door opening is on the N. facing wall, with no evidence of any windows. To the S. side of the building there is an external ditch running the full length and to the N. side there is a midden.







11.Ruin of a building measuring 7.5 x 3.3m. NH 08188 90893 elevation 45m. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders to a maximum remaining height of 0.5m with an average width of 0.7m. There is a door opening on the E. Wall but no remaining evidence of any windows.





12. Grass covered footings of a building measuring 9.8 x 4.5m. NH 08262 90852 elevation 55m. There is a base of large boulders with a well defined edge remaining to a height of 0.7m with a width of 0.9m. Within the building there are the remains of a drain leading to the door opening on the N. downslope wall. Externally a ditch runs along the E. And S. uphill walls.







13. Ruin of a building measuring 9.3 x 3.3m. NH 08096 90842 elevation 37m. The walls are constructed with undressed boulders to a remaining height of 0.9m with an average width of 0.5m. There is a door opening on the N. facing wall but no evidence of any windows.



14. Ruin of a phased building with one section measuring $8.3 \times 3.9 \text{m}$ which is butted on to the larger building measuring $11.7 \times 4.4 \text{m}$. NH 08107 90843 elevation 42 m. The walls are constructed with some chosen but mainly undressed boulders to a maximum height of 1.5 m with the walls in the main building averaging 0.9 m width and 0.5 m wide in the rougher smaller building. There is an outshot measuring $3.8 \times 3.8 \text{m}$ on the N. facing wall of the smaller section and from this a stone lined midden measuring $7 \times 7 \text{m}$ is clearly visible. There are two door openings on the N. facing wall, one for each section. At the door entrance in the smaller section is a partially dressed boulder. Along the S. external wall there is a ditch running the full length of the two buildings.











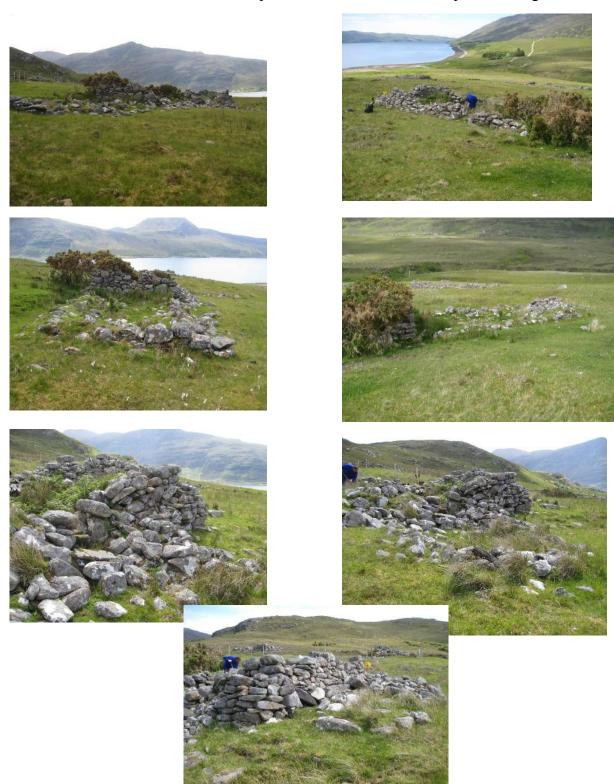
15. Ruin of a building measuring 15.5 x 4.3m. NH 08150 90850 elevation 45m. The building is constructed with a mixture of boulders and selected stone with some layering and snecking. The walls average 0.7m to a remaining height on one gable of 1.8m. The building is divided by a wall at 6.9m along its length which has a doorway in it, and there is a further doorway on the N. facing wall. No remaining evidence of any windows. There is an outshot measuring 4.8 x 3.10m butted on to the NE corner of the building with a doorway on to the hillside. No access into the building. A platform measuring 5 x 4m has been built out from the building on the W edge. 4m distant from the building on its N. side lies a 6m diameter midden.



16. The ruin of a substantial building measuring 19.6 x 4.8m. NH 08202 90816 elevation 61m. The building is constructed with large boulders and some chosen stones, and has two dividing walls at 6.8 and 12m along its length. The walls remain to a maximum height of 1.2m with an average width of 0.7m. There are two doorways one on the N side of the building, and a wide doorway within the southernmost dividing wall. This has a column of boulders stacked on either side.



17. The ruin of a building with the footings of an adjoining building attached. NH 08155 90808 elevation 64m. This ruin is constructed with a mixture of boulders and chosen stones to a maximum remaining height of 1.4m with an average width of 0.7m. The building measures 13.7 x 5.10m with the attached footings measuring 8.4 x 4.5m. Within the building is a dividing wall at 4.0m with a doorway in it. There is another doorway in the N. facing outer wall at 2.2m which leads into the footings of an outshot measuring 4 x 3m, with this section of the building at a lower level. Beyond this there is a midden of 6m diameter ringed with stone with a buttress separating the building wall from the ring of stones. Running along the outer length of the building is a ditch on the S. side, and to the W. there is a platform built out from the slope measuring 2 x 4m.



18. Ruin of building with footings of another building attached to it. NH 08172 90786 elevation 62m. The building measures 14.6 x 5.1m to a remaining height of 1.3m with walls of 0.7m wide. It is constructed with boulders and chosen stones with some layering and snecking. Within the building there are two dividing walls at 6m and 9.6m the latter having a doorway within it. There is another doorway on the outer N. facing wall. There are three platforms built out from this building. Two at opposite ends on the N. facing wall, both measuring 3 x 3m, and contained within one is a large lintel stone. We query if this might have been a kiln as the platform has built up stone walls. The third platform is on the S. gable end, running the width of the building to 1.5m. The footings of the attached building measure 6.3 x 4.4m and are constructed with boulders. To the rear of the buildings (upslope), along the full length runs a ditch.













19. Ruin of a building measuring 7.4 x 3.6m. NH 08187 90801 elevation 57m. The walls are constructed with boulders to a remaining maximum height of 1.1m and width of 0.7m. There is a doorway on the N. facing wall but no remaining evidence of any windows. To the rear of the building a ditch runs along its full length.







20. Footings of a Y shaped building consisting of three compartments. NH 08160 96673 elevation 64m. The walls are made with boulders and chosen stone with some layering remaining to a maximum height of 0.9m and width of 0.6m. No evidence of any doors or windows remaining. The main building measures 7.3 x 2.8m with a dividing wall, and attached to this at an angle is another building measuring 5.4 x 3.6m.









21. Ruin of a building measuring 7.5 x 3.10m. NH 08213 90665 elevation 82m. The walls are constructed with boulders to a maximum remaining height of 0.75m and width of 0.6m. There is no remaining evidence of any windows or doors, and the building is attached at each gable end to the S. side of the later township head dyke.









22.Ruin of a circular pen built into the later township head dyke. NH 08200 90656 elevation 72m. The walls are constructed with boulders to a maximum remaining height of 1m and a width of 0.6m. The diameter of the pen is 5.8m. The head dyke joins on at opposing sides of the pen. There are two openings within the walls both leading out on to the hillside outwith the township.









blocked doorway

23. Ruin of a building attached to the later township head dyke at each gable end. NH 08193 90650 elevation 72m. This building is constructed with boulders to a maximum remaining height of 1m with walls 0.6m wide. It measures 6.3 x 3.3m. There is one doorway leading out on to the hillside outwith the township. On the inner side of the head dyke there are the remains of rig and furrow.







24. Ruin of a building attached to later township head dyke at each gable end. NH 08163 90607 elevation 63m. This building is constructed with boulders to a maximum remaining height of 0.9m with walls 0.6m wide. It measures 6 x 4m. There is a dividing wall within the building with one section being lower than the other. In the lower section there is a doorway leading out to a midden. To the rear of the building a ditch runs its full length.







25. This ruin was so overgrown and tumbled that it was difficult to see if it was one or two buildings. NH 08030 90836 elevation 36m. The overall length of the walls was 4.6 x 16m along the same line. The walls remain to a height of 0.8m with a width of 0.6m and are constructed with substantial boulders. Within the building/s are two substantial walls across the full width at 5.5m and 9.5m with a width of 0.7m. It is between these walls that the query gap is.







The ground lying between most of the buildings and the edge of the raised beach has been improved. Rigs can still be seen and there are numerous stone clearance piles, some very large and

some piled in linear banks.

Aerial photo showing the cultivation rigs and stone clearance piles quite clearly.









Photos of some of the rigs in the township. Different light highlights some of the features

Some of the stone clearance piles







An example of a linear stone clearance bank also used as a terrace.



The head dyke around the village splits just S. of building 18 and also divides the township. This may indicate different periods in the township development, or may have been for stock control. It is constructed with both turf and stone.





Enclosure A NH 07971 90644 measuring 10 x 8m and D shaped.





Enclosure B NH 07997 90639 measuring 25 x 16m



A stone dyke runs east from this enclosure to buildings 1 and 2.

Enclosure C NH 07957 90842 measuring 8 x 6m possibly a walled garden?





Although the site was swamped in bracken the outlines of the wall can be seen in the photos.

Enclosure D, NH 07884 90524 elevation 10m is The Square of Cromartie as previously described.



The gate marked on the plan seems to be an opening from the township on to the hill grazing allowing access for livestock.



At the S. end of the shoreline the remains of a wall and building measuring $10 \times 7m$ can be found in the vegetation. NH 07794 90145 elevation 4m. This was most likely associated with fishing, possibly herring which is known to have been plentiful at one time.





At NH 0827 9094 beside the burn and dissected by it lies an enclosure approx 14m diameter with a very large erratic boulder beside it. Purpose unknown. Imaginary 'preaching stone' perhaps?



A walkover of the area between Allt Mor Chill-Donnain and Allt a Phuind to the N. of the township found several features.

These included several walls running alongside and down to the burns, shielings, and the footings of three more buildings.

NH 08323 91090 elevation 39m, measuring $6 \times 3m$ with a platform at its E. Gable measuring $3 \times 3m$ and made of large boulders.



NH 08308 91134 elevation 35m measuring 3 x 2m

NH 08273 91113 elevation 27m measuring 4 x 2m

One of the walls and a possible shieling hut in the area



Situated on the N. side of Allt Mor Chill-Donnain just upstream from the lime kiln lies a wall at 08196 91078 elevation 26m. On the opposite bank a turf and stone dyke runs down to the burn.



There are the footings of a small building at NH 07969 90943 elevation 24m



An enclosure known as An Phuind (the pound) is situated at NH 08139 91130 elevation 42m. It measures approximately 20m diameter. The walls are substantial and the enclosure straddles the burn of the same name. There is a gateway within the walls. Rules stated that if you impounded someone's sheep for straying you had to provide them with water.



Built into the hillside 20m upstream from the enclosure is a building measuring $6 \times 3m$. NH $08157 \ 91148$ elevation 45m. There are some very large boulders within its walls, purpose unknown.





This concludes our survey of Kildonan Township.

There are still areas to be surveyed in more detail such as the outlying shieling grounds and walls. Where exactly is St Donan's cell?

Jonathon Wordsworth did a walkover survey of the wider area in 1995 and the results of this are available online.

NOSAS has carried out a detailed survey of the neighbouring township of Keppoch in 2014.

We would like to thank Dundonnell Estate for their help and allowing us access, especially to Alastair MacDonald for liasing with us about keys and fencing!

Jean Gibb for providing us with numerous facts and an insight into life at Kildonan.

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Jeremy Fenton for helping with the walkover survey and pulling Anne out of streams.

Jim Buchanan and Anne MacInnes

Postscript 2015

On a visit to Kildonan in March 2015 we were shocked to find that during the spates of August 2014 substantial damage had been done to the chapel remains and the new fence.

The chapel is now filled with sediment and rubble, the last bit of retaining wall along the burn has been washed away, and the E. Side of the fence bent and buried under the washout. Unfortunately this means that livestock can now access the burial ground, although fortunately because it is raised up it escaped any damage.

