

The history and survey of Tombuoy settlement in Argyll.

Alistair McIntyre (History) and Tam Ward (Archaeology)

Abstract

A typical West Highland abandoned settlement was surveyed as part of North Clyde Archaeological Society [NCAS] fieldwork projects and its history as far as is known is given.

Introduction

Tombuoy settlement is located at NS 2485 9530, the site is given on OS maps and is on Explorer 364, Loch Lomond North, 1: 25,000 series. It is located at 90m OD and lies on a prominent ridge aligned NE/SW on the lower flank of Beinn a Mhanaich, it overlooks the eastern shores of Loch Long. The site is within MOD land.

It is one of a series of such settlements in the area of interest of NCAS which the Society hope to investigate further by excavation and establish the true nature and date of such sites in this part of Argyll. Several other comparable sites along the eastern shore of Loch Long were also surveyed courtesy of MOD (PI 1).

Tombuoy lies within an area of mixed commercial and natural woodlands, however, only a few naturally growing trees are upon the actual site, some unfortunately growing within buildings. The features are covered in a heavy growth of moss and bracken, making identification of detail difficult, ground disturbance on MOD property is prohibited.

Extending for around 200m along the main ridge, and crossing a deep ravine on the southern side, the site consists of four main buildings (B1, 2, 5 and 7) and a corn drying kiln (B6). Details of secondary buildings are more difficult to determine because of vegetation growth or the survival of the remains. Small enclosures may be garden plots or animal pens and other enclosure walls/banks lie to the upper NE side of the site, these are not included and are assumed to be head dykes.

The walls of the main buildings are between 0.5 and 0.6m thick, built in drystone construction method, but rarely surviving to 2m in height, the outlines of the main buildings are nevertheless complete, with some entrances showing. No detail of roof construction or floors is visible. Internal areas are generally strewn with building stones which also surround most of the walls. The internal areas are level.



Plate 1 showing various sites along Loch Long to be surveyed.

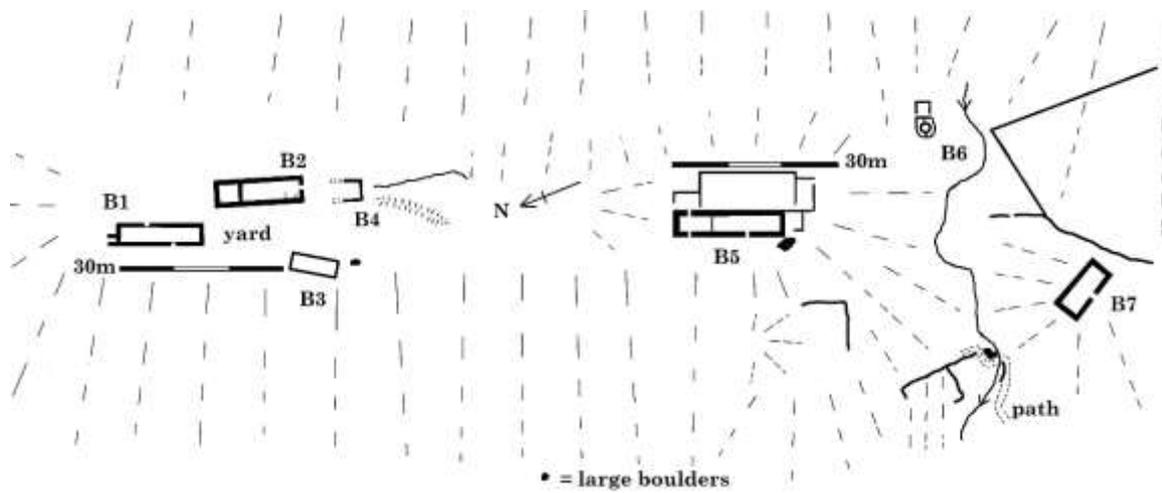


Fig 1. Plan of Tombuoy.

Survey

The survey was planned at 1:250 scale using tape offset method under favourable conditions.

Described here from the northern end;

B1 is a long narrow stand-alone structure measuring in total 16m by 4.5m. Two entrances are evident on opposing long walls and an 'add on' structure at the northern end is two short walls extending out 2m with a space of 1m wide between them, these may be a later (MOD?) build. The centre of the building is at NS 24850 95660. The ground drops down steeply along the west side.

B2 is also a long narrow stand-alone building measuring in total 16.5m by 5m. It comprises of two compartments, the larger of which is 10.5m long and has a well-defined entrance in the south gable wall, all the entrances on site are around 1m in width. However, dook holes for fixing door frames are located centrally in the walls showing the position of the door being hung. A sub division is hinted at on the west wall and in the SW corner is another slight feature which is likely to be later in the sites history. 4.5m along the external side of the west wall is a vertical joint in the otherwise random rubble masonry, the same does not occur on the east side. The northerly compartment is only 3m long and inexplicably has no visible means of entry, it certainly did not exist on the exterior walls as they survive well, therefore an entrance must exist in the dividing wall but is not evident even though the wall survives to over 1.5m high as perceived by the rubble. The ground to the east is level but soon rises steeply uphill. The ground between B1, B2 and B3 may be a level yard area.

On the south end of B2 and in line is an incomplete structure [B4] measuring in total 4m by 4m, it probably extended nearer to B1 when in use.

B3 provides no detail other than its total external size of 8.5 by 3m. The ground drops immediately down slope from here, and the area continues as very 'hummocky' being the product of bed rock, however, a length of curving bank runs across the ridge at an angle, it is about 15m in length and spreads to around 2m and is c0.7m high. The ridge continues before dropping down to the area of B5.

B5 is a complex, seemingly a long house with yards. The main building is 20.5m by 5m overall. It is sub divided into two chambers of 12m and 6m long with an entrance into the long room, placed almost centrally on the west wall, the shorter chamber has two entrances; one on each long wall, almost but not quite opposite one another. The central part of B5 is NS 24805 95562. Appended to the southerly end is a yard of about 2.5m square internally.

On the entire length of the eastern side of B5 are three yards, or perhaps garden areas, the largest centrally placed one measures is 16.5m by 7m. At the northern end, an enclosure is 4m by 3.5m and has an access at the north end while also connecting to the larger space. The southern yard measures 5m by 3m and connects external on the south end and also with the central enclosure. The ground drops down on all sides excepting the north where it rises to the upper ridge.

B6 is a corn drying pot kiln. It is seen as a classic bowl-shaped structure measuring c 3m by 3m, the lower rounded side has a flue at ground level measuring 0.5m wide, the kiln is around 2m high at this point. The bowl measures c 2m wide at the top and is currently 1.5m deep, it is choked with dead and living trees. On the upper side of the kiln is a rectangular area

measuring c2m square internally, it is separated from the kiln by two opposing gaps in its walls, indicating a tiny winnowing barn. A small aumbry is visible in its upper wall and a 'window' through to the kiln is indicated by a gap in the kiln wall. The walls of the upper chamber and the kiln there are 1.5m high. The NGR for the kiln is NS 24807 95523.

B7 lies on the southern side of the deep gully which dissects the site. It is a stand-alone building of 11m by 5m and has an entrance on its southern long wall.

To the immediate east of B7 are stone-built walls, two straight sections create an acute angle and are coursed stones while the other wall is more irregular and has a gap in its short end, each wall continues into the woodlands.

On the north side of the burn gully and below B5 are two areas of semi enclosed ground by irregular, but clearly seen, stony banks of variable condition.

Inside the gully, at burn level, a 3m length of very neatly built wall has been created to support a pathway, presumably leading to a bridge over the burn which would have been treacherous in flood conditions. The path may have crossed the burn *above* the boulders and not as shown here, below them, a short continuation of the path ascends the northern side of the ravine.



Pl 2. Looking north over B2 and B1.



Pl 3. Looking north to B2 entrance.



Pl 4. B7 looking north.



B6. Corn drying kiln, showing flue.

Note that variations in the spelling of this settlement include TOMBOWIE, TOMBOWY, TOMBOWYS, TOMBOWE, TOMBOWYE, TOMBOY, TOMBOYE, TOMBOYS, TOMBUY, TOUMBOUYS. There may well be others. This place-name is relatively common, and translates from the Gaelic as “Yellow Hill, or Hillock”. The name adopted here is the one used on modern OS maps (see Pl 1).

1590's “TOMBUY” is depicted with noteworthy accuracy on Timothy Pont's 1590's map of the Lennox.

1596 Contract between Alexander Colquhoun of Luss and John McCauslane in TOMBOWYS, containing disposition by said Alexander in favour of said John of an annual rent of £20 furth of said lands of Tomboye Parish and Barony of Luss, redeemable on payment of 300 merks. (Note: The reference to Parish of Luss conflicts with the entry under 1639 (q.v.) which states that Tombuie was located within the Parish of Rosneath. It is just possible that both statements are true: adjustments of parish boundaries did occasionally take place. However, simple error seems more likely. Note too that some McCauslans living in the area at this time, for example at Cullanach, about two miles north of Tombuie, were minor landowners, being styled “Barons”.

1602 TOMBUIE is listed as one of the places despoiled in the so-called Glenfinlas Raid of December 1602. Other places similarly despoiled include settlements in Glen Luss, Glen na Caoruinn, and Glen Mallan, which may well represent the route taken by the raiders from Loch Lomondside, as they made their getaway.

1639 Lands proposed for inclusion in a new Parish of Row include TOMBUY, Parish of Rosneath, then belonging to the Laird of Luss.

1694 The Hearth Tax of that year lists householders liable to the tax, and how many hearths possessed by each: unfortunately, the returns for Row Parish do not include names of individual settlements. However, in a perceptive analysis of the returns for that parish, contained in a letter, Glasgow-based Norman Easton, whose gt. grandfather (times 5), Patrick McInturner, was then tenant at TOMBUIE, has noted his inclusion early in the listing, and has argued persuasively that the list begins at the north end of the parish, and works south from there. Patrick 's name occurs twice, with one hearth on both occasions. Easton comments that this appears to be a convention denoting a domestic hearth and a non-domestic one, and state that his ancestor possessed a corn kiln. As this required a hearth, his reading of the entry is that one is for Patrick's house, and the other one for his corn kiln.

1710 Sir Humphrey Colquhoun of Luss sells the lands of Stronrattan, Garelochhead and TOMBOUIE to Dougall McFarlane, younger, of Tullichintaul.

1729 Headstone at Luss churchyard commemorates Patrick Turner, farmer, TOMBOUYS, who died June 1729, aged 58. (Note: this headstone is beside that of Patrick Turner, also of Tombuie- see entry under 1785. The presence of the Turners of Tombuie here, and not at

Row churchyard, almost certainly hints at a family connection with Luss parish, home to a number of prominent people called Turner.

1760 James Turner and Catherine Campbell, spouses, have the following children while living at Tombouie: Christian (1760), John (1763), Elizabeth (1767) (Note: this information comes from the Old Parish Registers (OPR's) for Row Parish, which cover the period 1760-1854) Patrick Turner and Christian Turner, spouses, have the following children: Kathrin (1761), Margaret (1763), Mary (1766), and Duncan (1771) (Row OPR's).

1762 Donald McIntyre and Janet McIntyre, spouses, have the following children: Janet (1762), Duncan (1764).

1762 Argyllshire Commissioners of Supply note that there is a droving stance at Tombowie, the next one to the north being at Glen Loin, and that to the south at Cameron Muir, located before the ford across the River Leven at Balloch.

1772 Norman McLeod and Sarah McKinnie, spouses, have a daughter, Sarah (Row OPR's).

1774 John Monroe and Mary Sinclair, spouses, have the following child: Henrietta (Row OPR's).

1776 A list of farms owned by Luss Estate has the following entry for TOMBUY: croft- 4 acres; outfield- 5.62 acres; oakwood- 34 acres; birch/alder- 10acres; sheep pasture- 0.

1785 Headstone at Luss churchyard, commemorating Patrick Turner, farmer, Tombouie, died 1775, aged 74, by son Duncan (Note: c.f entry under 1729).

1788 Donald Campbell and Kathrin Turner, spouses, have the following twin children; Peter and Rachel.

1788 Duncan Turner, Tombouie, and Mary McConachie, servant with John Turner, Finnart, have the following natural son: James. This is the last entry for Tombouie in Row OPR's.

1814 Rental for properties in Row parish owned by Sir James Colquhoun, has the figure of £200 for "TOMBOWIE and TENANT". This amount is relatively high compared with other farms. For example, the rental for Faslane, Chapelston, Greenfield and Dunnvaird (all one unit) is only a little higher, at £224. Does this perhaps suggest that Tombowie is now being run as a large sheep farm? Whether or not this is the case, did the tenant reside at the settlement? Note that there is no sign of stone-built sheep fanks at the site, suitable for processing large flocks of sheep.

1841 Census makes no mention of Tombouie.

1864 1st Ed. O.S. Maps show only unroofed buildings at the site, much the same as the present survey.

1894 West Highland Railway opens, the track passing a short distance above Tombouie

1970's Military training area extended to include Tombouie. Commercial conifer plantations introduced.

Discussion

Although there is some historical background information regarding Tombuoy it is nevertheless difficult to come to reliable conclusions regarding the occupation of the place in terms of time, function, material wealth and the actual people. Archaeological excavation would certainly go a long way to answering some questions, especially on the lifestyles of the occupants, and the purpose of the various buildings. However, some discussion, if not necessarily conclusions may be drawn from the survey plan and the history as is known.

The choice of site for Tombuoy was probably dictated by its presence to the workable land, being above the steep lower flanks of the hill, the A814 road is unlikely to have existed as a route when the site was occupied, access being along the line of Glen Mallan and Gleann Culanach where the railway and later the electricity pylons were built as an easier route through the area. Indeed, the other contemporary settlements in the area have adopted this line.

In the case of Tombuoy, using the ridge would have meant a relatively dry location while leaving any better land for the farm practices adopted, it would seem that arable farming is less likely than upland pasturing of sheep and perhaps some cattle. Although the corn kiln may suggest that cereal was grown on the farm. Surprisingly there is no evidence of lazy beds which one may have expected in the earlier days of the site, the enclosed yards beside B5 may be gardens but dating to the same age as the various buildings on the site.

It is unlikely that any of the buildings date to the earliest known period of the farm; around 1600 on Pont's map, such buildings at that time would have been of turf construction, perhaps having stone footings but certainly not the walls as are seen today. On balance the site as seen probably dates to the 18th century, and, it is surmised here, was abandoned in the 18th century, as the latter records seem to imply Tombuoy was incorporated into a larger land holding.

It seems likely that at least two habitations exist at Tombuoy, but possibly four, the long buildings may be house/byres. Corn kilns on such deserted settlements are quite common in both the Highland and Lowland context.

Details of floor surfaces, such as fireplaces and drains, which most likely exist, and of course artefacts would certainly illuminate on the function of the buildings, their dates of occupation and of course the lifestyles of the occupants.

Since the recent excavations of High Morelaggan (Kilmartin Museum 2011) and Millbrae (Ward & McIntyre 2015); the former being mostly late 19/early 20th century and the latter early 19th century, a possibility exists to establish a continuity of settlement in such upland farms back into the earlier centuries.

Acknowledgement

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References

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