

The McNeill families of Argyll

Grave slabs and monuments recording the lives of important ancestors in our families

The ancestral history of our leading families in Argyll represents the families who lived in Knapdale on the Taynish peninsula, the families of the island of Gigha who were related to the Taynish families and the families of Tirfergus and Carskey on the Kintyre peninsula. Descendants of these families moved to live in Ireland, island of Colonsay, island of Islay and later to new world countries.

Argyll has cemeteries and burial grounds which hold important grave slabs and monuments relating to important leaders of McNeill families. Many of the grace stones date back as early as the 15th century and over the years the carvings of designs have been worn by weathering and those on the ground in chapels by parishioners walking over them..

Kilkivan chapel ruin and burial ground – west of Campbeltown

The earliest foundations of the chapel date back to about 600 AD and a stone church building was constructed to replace the wattle walls in 800 AD.

The Kilkivan parish continued until 1772 after which the church building was allowed to fall into ruin. The old graveyard continued to be used.

The beautiful gravestones have suffered from weathering and the images diminished. They are worth preserving and are of particular importance to our clan. There is one gravestone of a quilted warrior holding a large sword. This is believed to be the grave of Archie McNeill of Tirfergus, a famous duellist and swordsman in his day.

Archie's father Lachlan McNeill of Tirefergus who established a family dynasty on the Kintyre Peninsula and in Ireland is buried in tis cemetery.



Southend Kilcolmkeil cemetery

The second most important cemetery on the Kintyre Peninsula is located at the foot. It is the Southend Kilcolmkeil chapel ruin and cemetery. A number of McNeills are buried here, however in the chapel ruin there is a grave slab recording the death of Neil McNeil of Carskey who died in 1685. The McNeill families of Carskey and Tirefergus were believed to be related to the McNeills of Gigha.



Lower Kintyre Peninsula showing Southend at the foot and Kiljivan west of Campbeltown

Keills chapel on the Taynish peninsula, Knapdale

The Taynish peninsula and castle Sween across Loch Sween are well recorded in the history of the McNeill ancestors. They were closely related to the McNeill families of Gigha.



In the Keills chapel there is a carved grave slab commemorating Torquil McNeil who became chief of the McNeill clan of Gigha following the murder of Neil McNeill and other senior clan members by Allan MacLean and his followers in 1530. Torquil is described as a second cousin to Neil McNeill.

The box tomb carved lid in the SE corner with a ship reads – here lies Toquil son of Malcolm son of Niall. Nalcolm was chief of the McNeills of Gigha.

Kilchattan chapel and cemetery on the island of Gigha

Kilchattan church is a typical example of 13th century design, a small rectangular building with a steep roof, the length about twice its breadth, and with lancet windows in all of the walls.

Almost the entire floor of the church is covered with graveslabs. There are 33 including fragments. A row of great slabs - monuments of Heads of the local House - lie across the church from side to side,

immediately in front of the altar space. They have been more cared for than the rest and are therefore much better preserved.





GIGHA & CARA

APPROX.



Other important grave sites in Argyll in memory of our clan ancestors

- Oakfield mausoleum at Auchindarroch near the Crinan Canal erected in the memory of John McNeill of Gigha who died in 1817 and his children, John and Lilius.
- Kilnaish mausoleum – burial of McNeill Campbell family of Kintarbert and Druimdrishaig locates south east of Tarbert owned by the Argyll & Bute Council.
- Kilkerran cemetery near Campbeltown
- Kildaton cemetery on the island of Islay

A map of Knapdale, Kintyre Peninsula, Isle of Gigha and Isle of Islay Locations of important cemeteries and burial grounds for the ancestors of McNeill families 1500 – 1700 AD



1. Keills chapel in Knapdale
2. Kilchatten chapel and graveyard on Gigha
3. Kilkivan chapel and graveyard near Campbeltown
4. Kilkerran graveyard near Campbeltown
5. Southend Kilcolmkeil at foot of Kintyre Peninsula
6. Kildaton burial ground on Islay

The maintenance and restoration of these burial grounds and ruins

Dr. John Raven from Historic Environment Scotland provides the following information

The situation as to responsibility for these sites is, as I am sure you will not be surprised to hear, not clear cut. Any graveyard still in use in 1925 passed to the local authority to take care of – although many remained in private ownership, such as Kildalton. However, for those sites cared for by councils, care of burial plots and memorials remained the responsibility of the owner, or their descendants. There has also been some ambiguity over responsibility for ruined church buildings. A new Bill came into force last year which has a provision directly his seeking to redress this situation but the relevant part has yet to be worked through. Despite this we have had some successes over the years, working with councils and local communities but more recently, with budget cuts, councils have struggled to find the necessary budget and many communities have found themselves overstretched. Like councils we tend to rely on pressure from communities to get projects taken forward, whether that be church ruin consolidation or adapted maintenance regimes for graveyards containing historic gravestones.

While there are several small group of Scottish families interested to provide assistance in the program of restoration and maintenance I would be interested to learn of our kindred families living in various parts of the world who would like to receive further information or would like to participate in the restoration program.

Web sites

www.machrihanish.net/kilkivan/

<http://www.ralstongenealogy.com/keilchurchyard.php>

www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/southend/stcolumbaschapel/index.html

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keills_Chapel

www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk/destinations/kintyre-and-gigha/trips/kilchattan-chapel-gigha/

<http://www.gigha.org.uk/viewItem.php?id=9020&parentId=8926§ionTitle=About+Gigha>

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s121626/Supporting%20Statement.pdf

(Oakfield estate)

www.ralstongenealogy.com/kilnaish.php Kilnaish graveyard, south Knapdale

www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/details/913771 Kilkerren cemetery, Kintyre

www.myainfolk.ca/gallery/album/289

www.homepages.rootsweb.com/~steve/islay/photos/sue/index.htm Kildalton cemetery, Islay