



Notes for teachers and other youth group leaders who plan to visit Kirkmichael or Old Cullicudden Burial Ground

Background story

The Kirkmichael Trust has been working towards the restoration of Kirkmichael for more than 20 years. In 2016 it completed its goal of fully restoring the nave and chancel mausolea, all that remain of a longer building and in late spring 2017 these will re-open to the public.

Written records of Kirkmichael only begin in the C14th but the building may predate this as a mediaeval chapel which was an outpost of Fortrose Cathedral, served by one of its canons. The Cathedral itself was founded about 1260. It is very possible the little chapel offered a 'staging post' for pilgrims on their way to the ferry north to Tain, as well as a place of worship for local people.

Over the centuries, the chapel fell into disuse and a later church (now a private house off Fanny's Brae in Resolis) was constructed more centrally within the parish. Local families who owned large local estates such as Braelangwell, Newhall and Poyntzfield (or Ardoch) began to use the surviving areas of Kirkmichael, the nave and chancel, as mausolea - private burial enclosures - for family funerals, marked with commemorative wall monuments.

Recent archaeology has shown that the building has known many periods of dereliction and there have been at least two roof-falls, with the earliest roof possibly being made of heather thatch. Items such as a thimble, shroud pins and coins dating from the reign of Charles II were found during the works, plus a tiny flint arrowhead which dates from 3000BC to the Beaker period. Whether this was a random find within the soil, a talisman buried with someone, or a strike-light dropped by accident, no-one yet knows.

Visiting Kirkmichael today

Schools may visit at any time during daylight hours free of charge. If you wish assistance from one of the Trust's trained Learning Volunteers please book your visit via our website contact page. Kirkmichael will reopen to the public in the late spring/early summer of 2017. No visits will be possible before this.

Kirkmichael is located just off the B9163 Culbokie to Cromarty road on the Black Isle, about five miles east of Culbokie, just below Balbair, overlooking the RSPB reserve at Udale Bay.

The site today is not an active church but forms an unique display of existing wall-mounted monuments (the earliest dating from the C17th) combined with seven much earlier late-mediaeval period pre-Reformation wheel-cross grave slabs (C13th – C14th), plus one post-Reformation grave slab (C15th). There are also two 'as new' carved slabs for comparison.

Memento mori – symbols of mortality and immortality – are a feature of the stones of Old Cullicudden (some still in situ) and Kirkmichael. They range from skulls & crossbones to dead-bells, hour-glasses to trumpet-sounding cherubs, coffins to shears. The Resolis Stones were assembled from the burial grounds at Old Cullicudden and Kirkmichael itself (where they were at risk of damage from weather erosion and maintenance works). Most of these ancient stones had already been recycled for other burials many times down the centuries.

Bringing a school party to Kirkmichael can form part of many different curricular activities and we provide suggestions for this below. Kirkmichael Creative, our year-long engagement project with local schools (notably Fortrose Academy and Resolis, Cromarty and Tore Primaries) and students enabled us to trial different activities and resources on site. We provide an outline risk assessment but would remind teachers that a site visit in advance would always be advisable. There is ample space to park a coach or minibus. It should be noted that an active burial ground is immediately adjacent to Kirkmichael and pupils should be advised to behave respectfully, at all times.

We do not recommend picnicking within the grounds, but the small area opposite the entrance known as Kirkmichael Corner is suitable for this in fine weather.

The site is wheelchair accessible and open daily during daylight hours except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. It is unstaffed but should you wish further information or a guide, a message to the Kirkmichael Trust via its website on www.kirkmichael.info or Facebook www.facebook.com/KirkmichaelTrust will mean a rapid response.

Within our Learning Pages, we provide you with a variety of resources as well as these notes, including:

- A generic risk assessment for visiting and old kirk or burial ground
- Three powerpoints (one showing the development of the kirk over the course of its restoration, one highlighting memento mori and their meanings, one aimed at younger children about Kirkmichael's history and what it is being used for now)
- A collection of ghost stories written by Hugh Miller as he 'wrought' in the shade of the old belfry in the early nineteenth century
- A sketch of Kirkmichael as it may once have looked when fully intact
- A sketch of pre and post-Reformation memento mori to be found at Kirkmichael and Old Cullicudden
- A Burial Ground Detective activity sheet – originated during the site visits of Fortrose Academy, Alness Academy and Invergordon High School to Kirkmichael and to burial grounds in Easter Ross
- A recipe for Kirkmichael Bannock – originated during the Cromarty Primary mediaeval menu activities during 2016
- A pdf walking trail of 'the Chanonry' – early Fortrose, which explains how the cathedral was connected to early parish churches like Kirkmichael

The www.kirkmichael.info website provides other fascinating stories and details about both sites.

Visiting Old Cullicudden today

Old Cullicudden Burial Ground is located as a sharp turn towards the sea off the B9163 Culbokie to Cromarty road on the Black Isle, about four miles east of Culbokie, on the long, straight road known as the Firichean. Look out for a leaning burial ground sign and a carved squirrel opposite the junction.

This narrow lane leads past several private houses but opens out into a broad farmyard with ample parking and easy turning without reversing for a small coach or minibus. We recommend parking here, keeping well clear of farm buildings and the entrances to fields please.

From here Old Cullicudden is a short pleasant 10 minute walk down the roughly-tarmacked track through the fields towards the sea. Please note that Old Cullicudden is not visible from the farmyard.

Once at Old Cullicudden, an interpretive panel provides basic information and shows the original location of the stones which have been moved to Kirkmichael. Looking back along the south-west shore, you will be able to see Castle Craig, once a refuge for the Bishops of Ross, and now owned by the Urquhart clan. There is no easy access to the castle at present and it is in a dangerous and ruinous state.

Within Old Cullicudden, you will find several mediaeval pre-Reformation tombstones which have not been deemed to be at risk and which have therefore remained in situ. These include a wheel cross stone and plainer stone carrying the date 1600, so immediately after the Reformation. Other stones show fine post-Reformation symbols of mortality, notably skulls & crossbones in the Clan Urquhart enclosure and heraldic emblems such as the three boars heads for Clan Urquhart, lions rampant etc.

The kirk at Old Cullicudden is long ruined, the bulk of it covered in ivy, only the Ardullie Aisle dated 1609 (possibly itself used as a later mausoleum recycling odd bits of the original kirk) survives upright.

Most activities outlined for Kirkmichael will also work for Old Cullicudden, but it should be noted that the whole burial ground is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and so should not be disturbed in any way.

Humanities

Kirkmichael is an excellent site for combining a study of history, geography, modern studies and religious, moral and philosophical education. Activities during 2016 included:

- Finding out about the Scottish Reformation and what its impact was on the church in Scotland

- Comparing and contrasting three places of worship (our school chose Fortrose Cathedral, St Andrews Church in Fortrose and Kirkmichael)
- Using the tombstones as a calculator for average life expectancy in the area at different stages of history
- Assessing the location of Kirkmichael – why did its builders chose this precise place from a human point of view? Schools explored food sources from the sea and land, and looked at pilgrimage routes and ferry crossings.
- Looking at the wall monuments and trying to pinpoint where the people lived who were buried there (focusing on Newhall, Braelangwell and Poyntzfield (Ardoch) and why they might have wanted to be buried in a mausoleum rather than the burial ground.
- Exploring Old Cullicudden (just 5 minutes' drive from Kirkmichael) and looking at the pressures old carved stone can face in an old kirkyard.
- Looking at the Hugh Miller stone and finding out more about his work as a stonemason
- Becoming proficient in reading tombstone symbols (we have a handout sheet of pre- and post-Reformation symbols of mortality and immortality)

English

From *Greys Elegy* onwards, old kirkyards lend themselves to reading and writing. Activities during 2016 included:

- Retelling the ghost and other historical stories of Kirkmichael told by Hugh Miller in his book 'Scenes and Legends of the Highlands', notably:
The Sundial (this supernatural story appears to have inspired Charles Dickens, who was a great admirer of Miller, in writing the final scene with the Ghost of Christmas yet to come in *A Christmas Carol*)
Kirkmichael by midnight (a really chilling tale of an unpleasant old lady who gets her just deserts from the devil himself on horseback)
The letter gone astray (the story of Sir Robert Munro of Foulis, whose sister Lady Ardoch is interred at Kirkmichael, and whose marriage almost never happens due to some unexpected Jacobite interference)

- Encouraging pupils to write their own Kirkmichael-inspired poetry and prose (Kirkmichael Creative stories ended ‘...and then he (or she) walked away.’ This gets away from providing a limiting theme but prompts reflection on love and loss).
- Developing a ‘word hunt’ approach within the building and burial ground to help create haiku which communicate its sense of place.
- Reading appropriate poetry or prose within Kirkmichael

Art, photography and architecture

Kirkmichael’s older stones are fragile sandstone and unsuitable for rubbings, but combining photography and art works well. Schools during 2016 enjoyed:

- Comparing/contrasting the architecture of Kirkmichael, Fortrose Cathedral and St Andrews Church in Fortrose and using this to draw Kirkmichael completed as it might have been when first built
- ‘building’ Kirkmichael using a gable-end drawn on a large sheet of card and a selection of smaller ‘stones’ with which to cover it (very good for younger children)
- Looking at the ground-plan and elevations of the architectural drawings and relating them to reality
- Copying the interwoven designs of the wheel crosses using rotational symmetry
- Drawing memento mori (especially on to our project hard hats!)
- Using the powerpoint of building restoration to inspire pupils to envisage what other buildings would look like restored – Fortrose Cathedral, for example.

Science and health faculty

Kirkmichael is a natural sanctuary for all kinds of wildlife and plantlife. During 2016, schools have tried:

- Measuring and looking at lichens on tombstones through hand lenses and trying to identify and date them (NB we advise against the removal of lichen on stones, as this damages the stone underneath –

we have lists of all inscriptions in both Kirkmichael and Old Cullicudden)

- Drawing real flowers found in the kirkyard and relating these to the stone flowers carved into the tombstones
- Identifying the wildfowl which gather in the bay and plants which grow there – which would have been a massive food source
- Working out what kinds of foods people would have eaten in mediaeval times
- Cooking some of them using traditional methods and ingredients as far as possible (a recipe for ‘Kirkmichael bannock’ is provided separately)
- Feeding the results to parents!

We hope you enjoy your visit and are always happy to see copies of any work produced as a result of one. If we can help in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us via this website.

Notes prepared by Verity Walker for the Kirkmichael Trust in January 2017