

THE EARLY CHURCH  
and  
THE LOCH OF SPYNIE  
in  
MORAYSHIRE

BY  
A FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND

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## THE LOCH OF SPYNIE: AN INTRODUCTION.

Necessarily, the story of Morayland through the ages is interlaced with the great *Loch of Spynie* – once so vast an expanse of water that it was known as the *Sea of Spynie*. Because of its present, much reduced, extent, it is apt to be overlooked by many social historians, yet from prehistoric times it has been a major resource providing for the well-being of the local people. Indeed, for the earliest hunter-gatherer peoples of the area, this vast expanse of relatively sheltered water must have drawn them inexorably to its salubrious shores.

In the early post-glacial period, sea-levels rose worldwide as a result of the melting of the Arctic ice sheets.<sup>1</sup> Around 6,500 years ago, this rise was at a maximum causing flooding around the Moray Firth. Coastal peat and woodlands were drowned, and a narrow postglacial coastal plain was formed.<sup>2</sup>

The result was that the land to the north of the Loch of Spynie (henceforward *the Loch*) was all but cut off from the mainland by a huge expanse of what was then sea-water. There is, indeed, a tale told that during the Viking incursions of the 8th-century it was possible for the Northmen to travel by boat from *Burghead* to *Spynie* by this inland passage.<sup>3</sup>

But the earliest available maps are restrictive of our understanding of the extent of the Loch because of their relative modernity, e.g.

- Pont's map of c.1583-1596
- Gordon's of 1640
- Blaeu's of 1654
- Kinnaird's of 1783

Of course, much of what is of the greatest interest to us lies further back in history than these maps portray.

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<sup>1</sup> Gillen (1993), p.19; quoting Smith (1977)

<sup>2</sup> Gillen (1993), p.19; quoting Smith (1977). Remnants of these peat-beds, complete with ancient tree-root systems, are uncovered from time to time along the coast west of Burghead when overlying layers of sand are stripped away by violent storms.

<sup>3</sup> Young, R. (1871), p.50

It is only with Hugh Kinnaird's work<sup>4</sup> that we have a reliably *scaled* map that has been produced by a professional surveyor using relatively modern techniques. But even this work has the serious drawback that, at both eastern and western extremities, the Loch is somewhat truncated. Of course, this was because Kinnaird's commission, from the Lords of Council and Session, only related to the extent of the Loch as it existed in 1783. This is a severe limitation since, by that date, its extent had been considerably diminished by both natural and artificial events. The Court of Session sought to resolve the ongoing dispute between the laird of Gordonstoun and the Brander brothers, who held the Pitgaveny and Kinneddar estates, over the ownership of the Loch. The Court's commission, therefore, instructed Kinnaird to map the Loch and its perimeter lands as it existed in 1783 paying little or no regard to the Loch as it may have existed in ancient history.

But one fundamental fact remains. Recent research has shown that there were settlements round the Loch from the very earliest of times and that they existed in some numbers. Lewis and Pringle (2002) record thirteen features from what they call "*Prehistory (Period 1)*."<sup>5</sup> These they locate on a sketch map. Clearly, except for their *Site 11*, the locations of these sites have been influenced by the suggested ancient shore-line of the Loch.

However, as is noted above, Kinnaird's map is relatively recent, and it seems foolish to try to relate the location of prehistoric remains to modern geographical features without recourse to an investigation, even a cursory one, of the limits of the Loch in prehistory. We need a map which reflects the extent of the Loch in these times, not some 1,600 years later!

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<sup>4</sup> Kinnaird (1783), <https://scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/record/nrs/RHP427/plan>

<sup>5</sup> Lewis and Pringle (2002), p. 166-7

## THE LOCH IN PRE-HISTORY.

In Keillar (1993) there is a comment that, “5,000 years ago sea-level was some five metres higher than at present, and falling.”<sup>6</sup> Gillen (1993) comments that, “Around 6,5000 years ago, this rise,” in sea-levels worldwide resulting from the melting of the Arctic ice sheets, “was at a maximum and caused flooding around the Moray Firth.”<sup>7</sup> Smith (1986) also remarks that, “Sea-level has remained essentially constant for at least 3,000 years.”<sup>8</sup> Here we have

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suggestions about how the Loch came to be formed by the inundation of the sea, but not how it then became separated from the sea of which it had been a part for so many centuries.

Along the whole length of the southern coast of the Moray Firth there flows a pronounced westerly *longshore drift*<sup>9</sup> which has acted over the ages to push the river mouths of the *Spey*, *Lossie*, *Findhorn* and *Earn* (Nairn) ever westwards. Great sand or gravel *spits* built up acting as constrictions to the rivers’ flow and partially damming back the waters behind them.

Sometimes, this damming became complete for a period, only to be punched through by the river when in spate or by the sea under storm conditions. Submerged *bars* still grow across these outflows and present serious obstacles to navigation as anyone who has exited Findhorn Bay either side of low-tide will know only too well! Such deposition, resulting from longshore drift, was clearly one of the causes of the eventual closure of the eastern outflow from the Loch to the sea. In addition to the extended process of longshore drift, there have been occasional catastrophic ‘events’, such as violent storms, that have had a powerful effect on the topography of the area.

## THE LOCH IN MEDIEVAL TIMES.

In the reign of King Malcolm III (1058 – 1093) there occurred, “the irruption of the Goodwin

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<sup>6</sup> Keillar (1993), p. 27

<sup>7</sup> Gillen (1993), p. 19; quoting Smith (1977).

<sup>8</sup> Smith (1986), p. 1-22

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longshore\\_drift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longshore_drift)

Sands ... and from Buchanan's History it might be inferred that its effects were not limited to that quarter alone, but must have extended over all the eastern coast of Britain."<sup>10</sup> Shaw goes on to quote Buchanan as saying, "Among the prodigies of that period may be reckoned an inundation of the German Ocean, so extraordinary, as not only to have overspread and overwhelmed the country with sand, but to have overturned also villages, towns, and castles."<sup>11</sup>

In the thirteenth-century, another extremely violent storm occurred. In the year 1266, a great wind arose from the north, on the eve of the *Feast of the 11,000 virgins* (20 October); the sea broke in, and many houses and villages were overwhelmed.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, these events may have closed the entrances to the Loch for a time.

But there is a second effect of longshore drift which it is important that we recognise when considering the western entrance from the sea to the Loch in later Medieval times. The westerly drift current, encountering the great prominence of *Burghead*,<sup>13</sup> creates an area of slack water behind and to the west of the headland. This *back-eddy* effect – well known to any river boatman – allows for the accelerated deposition of sediment and the vast expanse of sand along the coast west of *Burghead* is immediate evidence of this. The result was that, over the ages, the western entrance to the Loch of Spynie tended to silt up and eventually to close. No longer was the stretch of land between *Burghead* and *Covesea* – the *Ros(s) Ey* (Ros(s) Isle = 'Roseisle') – an island!

What we have, then, is a fluctuating pattern – at times the Loch was open to the sea by one or two routes, whilst at other times these openings were 'closed', and the Loch would have become at least *brackish* if not fresh-water. Consequently, the water-level of the Loch would also have fluctuated – higher when the waters were held back behind sand and boulder dams across the outlets; lower when the water could flow out to the sea.

As has already been noted, if we are to believe the old records then we should accept that a complete inland route for shallow-draught boats (the Viking *drakkars*<sup>14</sup> being ideal

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<sup>10</sup> Shaw (1882), vol. 1, p. 336

<sup>11</sup> Shaw (1882), vol. 1, p. 336

<sup>12</sup> Shaw (1882), vol. 1, p. 336

<sup>13</sup> Some scholars consider *Burghead* to be the *Torness* of Viking times. [Marren (1993), p. 45]

<sup>14</sup> The *drakkar*, or the dragon ship, was a term often used by the victims of the Northmen



examples) was available c.800. The fact that the Bishop of Moray had a ‘harbour’ beneath his castle of Spynie evidences that navigation to the open sea was still possible c.1400.

Bishop Pilmuir (1326-1362) is known to have ‘enhanced’ this harbour. We are told that the bishop’s plans involved sinking a number of vessels close to the fisher-town of Spyny.<sup>15</sup> This sounds as if he was trying to create some sort of breakwater, or perhaps even a length of wharf-side that boats could tie up alongside in order to off-load their cargoes across the decks of the sunken, but not totally submerged, vessels. The relatively steep nature of the shore below Spynie would have meant that only the very smallest vessels could have been beached. The term *harbour* is perhaps the wrong one to use here – at least in its modern sense. In the early days, smaller boats would have been drawn up onto the shore while larger vessels would have anchored-off, to be unloaded onto rowing-boats, and the cargo would then be ferried ashore.<sup>16</sup> But such an exercise was not without its difficulties and the provision of a form of dock eliminated the need for the small ferry-boats and unloading and loading would have become much easier and faster. The same sort of arrangement seems to have existed at *Duffus*, almost opposite Spynie Castle on the north shore of the Loch. Bishop Pilmuir’s actions were intelligent. The sunken vessels would have provided a more secure anchorage, with any flood waters from the River Lossie being deflected away, whilst also providing moorings for vessels of a deeper draught which could not approach the shore so closely. Some observers have suggested that this was an attempt to deepen the channel but, since this was already the deepest part of the Loch this suggestion would appear to be open to question. The draught of any boat wishing to approach the harbour at Spynie would have had to be such that it could pass through the shallower waters of the Loch and there would, therefore, be no point in deepening this area.

Bishop Alexander Bur (1362-1397), is recorded defending both his episcopal rights, and those of the deep-sea fishermen who were based in the village that existed on the hinterland the harbour at Spynie, against the avaricious intentions of the Earl of Moray and the burgesses of Elgin. In naming *Johannis de Dunbar* (the then earl, d.1390), he particularly asserts the ancient episcopal rights in the lands of *Spyny*, *Kintrae*, “*et terra insule*” (the islands in the Loch). He underlines his rights to the *Port of Lossie* (alias Spynie) and the

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<sup>15</sup> Crammond (1903), p. 16

<sup>16</sup> Mackintosh (1927), p. 6

fishing and *fisher-fowk*, with their *coblys* and *batellis*, including salmon, grilse, and “pectines” (shellfish<sup>17</sup>) and all other species of fish, and including the right of passage (navigation) for boats going to and from the sea.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately for Bishop Bur, the king had previously given these rights<sup>19</sup> to *Thomas Randolph*, then earl of Moray (c. 1278–†20 July 1332), during an interregnum in the bishopric, and the earl, with admirable cupidity, had tried to suggest that the gift had been permanent!

The *Register* of the diocese includes an informative account<sup>20</sup> that, in 1383, whilst crossing from his castle at *Kinneddar* and intending to head via the ford over his water of Lossie at *Krannokysford*<sup>21</sup> to the church {priory?} of *Urquhard*, Bishop Bur found a small merchant vessel (a *farcost*)<sup>22</sup> lying in-by, having come from the sea. He discovered that the burgesses of Elgin had given permission for its cargo to be landed, in clear contravention of his episcopal rights. The bishop promptly ‘arrested’ the vessel and continued on his journey to Urquhard. On his return that Sunday afternoon, he found two Elgin burgesses busily engaged in unloading the vessel, taking out barrels of beer, tallow and flour by horse and sled onto the bishop’s lands of Kinneddar. No doubt, being incensed by their actions, the bishop now arrested the ship, her cargo and her anchors – “lock, stock and barrel”!

At that time, poor Bishop Bur was, facing attacks to his episcopal rights from both the Earl of Buchan (the notorious *Wolf of Badenoch*) in Strathspey and the Earl of Moray closer to home!

However, for our present purposes, we have here clear evidence that navigation to the sea from the Loch was still open c.1400.

Mackintosh speaks of there having been two small lochs at the western end of Spyny Loch – the *Loch of Roseisle* and the *Loch of Keam* – which, he says, before the Culbin Gale of 1695,

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<sup>17</sup> Shaw (1882), vol. 1, p. 338; his interpretation here is *pectines* = “finnacs”.

<sup>18</sup> Moray Reg., no. 163, p.192.

<sup>19</sup> During an episcopal vacancy rights temporal reverted to the Crown along with the income derived from them.

<sup>20</sup> Moray Reg., no. 289, p.369-40.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.oldroadsofscotland.com/miscmedmoray.htm#krannokysford> (accessed 15/9/17)]

<sup>22</sup> *Farcost*, *farcostas* (pl.) – a small cargo-vessel. [ME. *farecost*, *ferrcost* (c 1300), ON. *farkostr.*]

[*Dictionary of the Scottish Language*.

<http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/farcost> (accessed 15/9/17)]

both drained into Burghead Bay.<sup>23</sup> But Dorret's map (see below) clearly shows that c.1750 there was still an outlet to the sea.



Figure 1: James Dorret's map of 1750 showing the western lochs (© National Records of Scotland)

Fifty years later, Arrowsmith shows much smaller lochs and no outlet to the sea.



Figure 2: Aaron Arrowsmith's map of 1807 showing much reduced western lochs (© National Records of Scotland)

<sup>23</sup> Mackintosh (1927), p. 15



The point of interest here is that, as a result of the vast amount of sand blown into the area, the tidal outlet from these two lochs, which had powered *the outlet mill* owned by the laird of Duffus, was effectively dammed. This rendered the mill, which had stood there for many years, totally useless and required the poor laird to build another. The *Mille* (Mill) is shown on Dorret's Map. This sand migration eventually resulted in the final severing of the western outlet from the Loch to the sea.



Pont's map of c.1590 shows the position of "mills" at the outlet of the larger of the two lochs, which he names as "*L. of Rofsyl*".

## MAPPING THE LOCH OF ANTIQUITY.

Returning to more ancient times, we are left with the question of how to map the extent of the Loch in pre-history.

In previous pages, several references have been made to sea-levels in the pre-historic period. Some scholars have said that the levels were some 5m above modern datum and falling.

Purely as a ‘rainy-day exercise’ I traced the 10m contour on a modern Ordnance Survey map<sup>24</sup> and the result was most revealing (see page 15). The approach here is not in the least scientific, but it does point in the direction of the truth regarding the extent of the Loch in antiquity.

The surface area revealed by this simple exercise is vast, but not surprisingly so. Many well-attested features are revealed, most particularly the two islands to the north. The larger extends from *Burghead* eastwards to the modern lighthouse at *Covesea* – this is the *Ross Eye*. Then there is the outlier island of *Stotfield*. Other islands are also revealed – *Salterhill* {NGR: NJ 20\_67\_}, *Balormy-Ardivot* {NGR: NJ 22\_67\_}, *Pitgaveny* {NGR: NJ 24\_65\_}, *Buthill* {NGR: NJ 13\_65\_}.

Another feature, this time regarding the boundaries of the Loch, also becomes apparent when we look at this ‘hypothetical map based on the 10m isoheight. Because of the relatively steep slope up to the *Spynie Ridge*, the southern shore-line of the Loch does not alter very much as water-levels change. The same can be argued at the foot of *The Tappoch*, along the *Bank of Roseisle* {NGR: NJ 15\_ 67\_}. This explains why, even when using Kinnaird’s more modern map, Lewis and Pringle could show on their sketch map<sup>25</sup> that many of the remains of their ‘*Period I*’ prehistoric settlements in these areas were still positioned on the coastline of the Loch since the shore-line had changed so little over the centuries.

This also goes a long way towards an explanation of the choices made by these prehistoric peoples of settlement sites. The sites that they selected were characterised as being locations which were on permanently dry land throughout the ages and regardless of changes in water-level.

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<sup>24</sup> OS 1:50,000 Second Series, Landranger Map 28

<sup>25</sup> Lewis and Pringle (2002), p.166-7

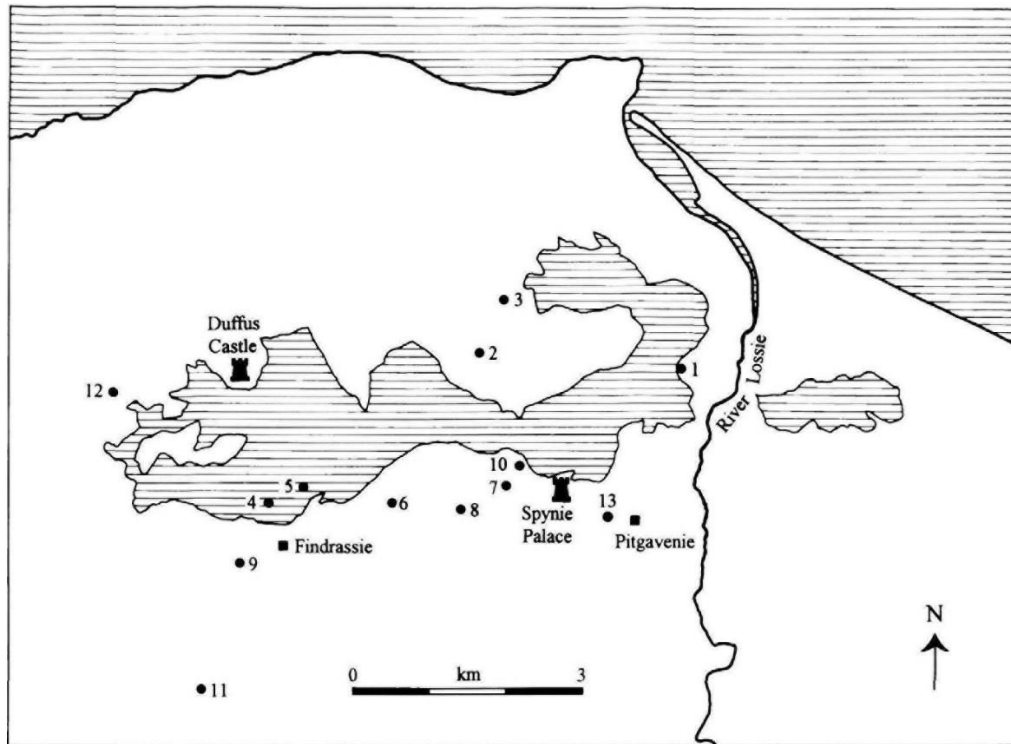


Figure 4: Spynie Loch - Prehistoric Sites (Lewis & Pringle, page 166)

- |                                       |                                |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Caysbriggs – earthworks.           | 8. Palace – ring ditch.        |
| 2. Balormie – circular huts.          | 9. Palace – kerb cairn.        |
| 3. Muirton – various features.        | 10. Palace – shell midden.     |
| 4. Lower Mains – ditches, enclosures. | 11. Quarrywood - henge         |
| 5. Midtown – ditches, enclosures.     | 12. Duffus Castle – cropmarks. |
| 6. Lochside – crop-marks.             | 13. Pitgavenie – enclosures.   |
| 7. Palace – enclosure.                |                                |

However, where the bed of the Loch is ‘flatter’, changes in water-level have a pronounced effect on the position of the shoreline. This is particularly so in the area between *Kintrae* {NGR: NJ 17\_ 65\_} and *Clarkly Hill* {NGR: NJ 13\_ 68\_}, which areas were of old called *Wateryside* and *Westfield*. As the first name implies, these locations were marsh (often salt-marsh) which were of little use for settlement, although of great value for animals, fishing and ‘wildfowling’. There are numerous locations of this nature round the Loch’s shoreline. The middens at these sites often contain the remains of very large (by comparison to modern examples) of oyster which are not now found in the Moray Firth, but which were obviously plentiful in pre-historic times and would have been a major source of high-protein food.

However, for the purposes of mapping, even a cursory inspection shows that the arbitrary choice of 10m is too high, certainly when moving on to consider the medieval period, since several known ‘dry’ features would be submerged if the loch-level were so high. The road from *Kinneddar* to *Elgin*, passing over the documented bridge at *Caysbriggs* {NGR: NJ 248666}, is an outstanding example.

There is an OS ‘spot height’ of 3m marked on the map only a matter of two hundred metres south of the farm-building at *Caysbriggs*, whereas, on the road-side just to the east of this same building, there is a spot-height of 9m. In addition, anyone who has cycled this road knows that there is every feature of a steep shore-line at this point.

I would suggest that a map drawn along the 4m isoheight would represent a better approximation of the extent of the Loch. Tidal variations would influence the extent of the salt-marsh in its liminal regions.

Of course, it would have only required a modest rise in water levels (up to about 8m OD) to allow navigation from the Loch, up the course of the River Lossie, as far as the inflow of the *Tyock Burn* at *Moycroft* {NGR: NJ 235627}, i.e. as far as the burgh of Elgin itself. Admittedly, only small boats could have made such a passage, and then only at neap-tides, but it would have provided an easy and sheltered route from the ‘harbour’ at Spynie to the Chanonry and the town beyond.





Figure 5: Map of the Loch based on 10m isoheight. (OS Landranger Series, Map 28)





(see map below.)



Figure 7: Holms off the lands of Findrassie

- Islands off the **Wateryside** shore:
- Wester Holm
  - Easter Holm
  - Tappies Holm
  - Skene's Holm

(see map below)



Figure 8: Holms off the lands called Wateryside

It is of great interest that a number of these islands are called by a Scandinavian name – *Holme (Holm)*.<sup>26</sup>

### SCANDINAVIAN PLACE-NAMES AROUND THE LOCH.

It should not surprise us that there is a collection of place-names around the shores of the Loch that appear to have Scandinavian origins.

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, are the *Holms* - the islands that are scattered mostly at the western end of the Loch. For the Northmen, they would have offered a sheltered and secure place where they could draw their *drakkars* or *skeids* up onto the shore for maintenance. They would also have offered camp-sites for small parties which could be more

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<sup>26</sup> There are numerous islands containing the word **Holm**, especially in Scotland. In many cases the name is derived from the Old Norse *holmr*, meaning "a small and rounded islet".  
[Wikipedia "Holm", accessed 11/10/17]

easily defended if need arose and, perhaps in terms of longer-term habitation, a place for captured horses, cows and sheep to graze.

Most of the two-element names that were given to the Holms carry a first part that is distinctly Scottish in appearance. It would seem that either the local peoples had, themselves, adopted the ‘holm’ part into their own vocabulary, so that it continued in use after the Norse influence disappeared, or, perhaps, the holms originally bore the names of individuals – such as Bjarne’s Holm, Glimps Holm, Sweyn Holm (the last two in Orkney) – and that, after the yolk of thrallship was lifted, the names were changed in order to erase the memory of the individuals concerned.

### **Philaxdale**

{NGR: NJ 168679}. On Roy’s Map this site is called *Phillochsedale*.

### **Oakenhead**

{NGR: NJ 242685}. Of old this was known as *Aikenhead* which would appear to be a use of the O.N. word *herað* in conjunction with *oak* to form the ‘the area of the oaks.’ If this is accepted, then one would not have to wonder for long to understand why such an area would have been of interest to a maritime people.

The Scandinavians, by choice, used oak for building and repairing their longships. This can be seen in excavated examples such as that known as *Skuldelev 1*, whose keel was of solid oak, although slow-growing pine (not an option in Scotland where the trees grew too fast!) was used for some of the hull strakes.<sup>27</sup> The *Nydam Boat*, some 24m in length, was built from a single oak tree felled around AD310x320;<sup>28</sup> *Skuldelev 2*, a warship almost 30m long, dates from c.1040-45 and required, amongst many other items, the felling of some fourteen oak trees, each of a thickness of about 1 metre.<sup>29</sup> It is estimated to have required some 27,000 manhours of work to complete!

### **Roseisle**

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<sup>27</sup> Williams (*et al*) 2014, p. 209

<sup>28</sup> Williams (*et al*) 2014, p. 204

<sup>29</sup> Williams (*et al*) 2014, p. 214

{NGR: NJ 67\_13\_}. This name has already been touched on above, but to what has already been said may be added an alternative derivation:

*Röis, Röiser* (pl.) ~ a stone construction as in *Stenröis* – a ‘burial mound’ (Old Norse.)

... *ay* ~ e.g. Ronaldsay, Eday, Sanday (all in Orkney)  
- meaning a ‘larger island’.

Gives *Röisay* = *Ross Ey* = Roseisle?

If we accept the suggestion put forward previously, that the name should be applied to the whole ‘island’ - from Burghead to Covesea - then the *Röis* might equate to the stone constructions at the old fort of Burghead.

### **Burghead**

(*Byrgisherað*). This is dealt with in Appendix B.

### **Surradale**

{NGR: NJ 170658}. This is a *dal/dalr* remnant, relating to meadow/farmland. This site is positioned on the southern shore of the Loch.

### **Furingdale**

This is shown on Kinnaird’s map (just above the second ‘R’ of *South Crookmuir*) at a position approximating to {NGR: NJ 170658}.

### **Halliman & Covesea Skerries**

{NGR: NJ 214723} and {NGR: NJ 199719}. These rocky skerries are about 1km. off the coast, to the north-east, of the *Ros-Hy*. They carry a very common Norse second part to their names. The O.S. map<sup>30</sup> also shows a small ‘*skerrie*’ just off the north coast of Burghead {NGR: NJ 110694}. Whilst *skerry* is not a very common name on the southern shores of the Moray Firth,<sup>31</sup> it is found in abundance in the Northern Isles.

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<sup>30</sup> 1:50,000 scale Second Series. OS Landranger Map 28

<sup>31</sup> There is an ambiguous ‘*The Skellies*’ north of the *Rattray Head Light* {NGR: NK 109583} and an unambiguous ‘*The Skerry*’ off *Peterhead Power Station* {NGR: NK 140432}, but these are some distance from the *Ros-Hy*.



Writing in 1929, Dr A.W. Brøgger noted that, “there is one main point in this naming which is conclusive for our problem. The Norse newcomers very often adopted the old name, adding their own generic terms.”<sup>32</sup> Taking this warning to heart it is still impossible not to be impressed by the place-name evidence around the Loch. It indicates that there must have been a strong Norse influence here for a reasonable period of time.

### **ANCIENT CHURCH SITES AROUND THE LOCH.**

To ecclesiastical historians the Loch of Spynie presents a veritable ‘treasure trove’ which echoes the enthusiasm of the ancient Christian *peregrins* to establish communities or *muinntirs* on its shores. These missionary clerics were, by the very nature of their vocation, drawn to any place where there was a concentration of tribespeople. In the main, these were not eremitical individuals seeking some *desert* in the wilderness. These were men who sought to live in common with the local people, hoping to convince them and bring them to faith by and by, usually starting with the tribal chieftain and his immediate family. That is not to say that the way of the hermit was totally unknown in the Province and, if the story can be accepted, then the rocky east face of the island of *Stotfield* was for long the home of hermits.

### **Kinneddar.**

Continuing this theme brings us to the early days of Christianity and the story of *St Gartnay*, called in Latin, *St Gernadius*. *Gartnaidh* is a name encountered regularly in the list of [Pictish High Kings](#) which would point to our hermit-saint being, perhaps, a ‘local’ man, although Farmer says that he was an Irishman who came to Moray.<sup>33</sup> He also says that, “Gerardine’s legend claimed for him some contact with the English soldiers sent by King *Æðelstan* (Athelstan) in AD934, as well as the providential arrival of wood for his church by a river swollen in the storm.” In Symeon of Durham’s *Historia Regum Anglorum [HRA]*<sup>34</sup> we read that in AD934, “Ethelstan, the valiant king of the Angles, - because Constantine, king of the

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<sup>32</sup> Brøgger (1929), p. 59

<sup>33</sup> Farmer (1978), p. 168

<sup>34</sup> HRA, 88.

Scots, had broken the league which he had made with him, - set out for Scotland with a strong naval force and no small army of cavalry and he ravaged Scotland with his land force as far as *Dunfoeder* (*Dunottar*) and *Wertermore* (the mountains of *Fortriu*),<sup>35</sup> and with his navy as far as *Caithness*, and in great measure depopulated it.”

If we accept Dr Woolf’s suggestion of a northern/Morayshire location for the Pictish province of *Fortriu*, then the story of St Gartnaidh makes a great deal of sense. The implication from *HRA* is that Æðelstan’s land forces penetrated as far as “the mountains of Fortriu” which we can now propose to be the southern flanks of the *Mounth*. His naval forces, however, pushed on as far as *Caithness*. Now, in these days, any sensible ship’s captain would tend to sail within sight of land, which would mean taking a course round *Rattray Head* and then westwards, hugging the coast, until the lands of *Sutherland* appeared over the horizon, allowing the fleet to then strike north towards the shores of *Caithness*. But what sensible fleet commander would not have taken advantage of the shelter offered by the Loch of Spynie? If the story is true, then it is very probable that this is how it came about that Gartnaidh had some contact with the ‘soldiers’ sent by King Æðelstan. I would go so far as to say that this story provides an element of support for Dr Woolf’s theory regarding a more northern location of *Fortriu*.

Gartnaidh is said to have died in his hermitage above Kinneddar on or about 8 November, 934.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the above we should stop to take note of the implications of the lineage of the ‘Scottish’ king who was subdued by this military expedition. The king was *Caustantín macÁeda* (son of *Áed macCináeda*), the first individual who scholars recognise to have borne the title *King of Alba*. But his father *Áed* was very much a Pict and had been, in his time, King of the Picts, as his father *Cináed* had been. This *Cináed* is more commonly known as *Kenneth MacAlpin* who was called ‘King of Scots’ but who, as modern scholars point out, was actually ‘King of Picts.’<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Woolf (2007), p. 161, gives *Dunottar* and *the mountains of Fortriu* here.

<sup>36</sup> Forbes (1872), p. 354-5.

<sup>37</sup> Woolf (2007), p. 96.

So here, in St Gartnaidh, we have a saintly hermit bearing a ‘royal’ name, founding a church first at *Kinneddar*, before then retiring to his cave amongst the east-facing cliffs of the *Coulard Hill*, a site known as *Halliman (Holyman) Head*. This site was still visible, and much venerated, up to the nineteenth century when it fell before the spikes and hammers of quarrymen.

A final note to add here is the possibly significant similarity between the King’s name, *Cináed* (found variously as *Kinadius*, *Ciniod*), and *Kinnedd(ar)*. This is, perhaps, worthy of some attention from scholars. The name in its modern form is singularly awkward and the notion that it stems from *ceann* + *fothir* = “end of the territory/terrace” is commonly suggested - but the second element is uncertain. It is either *fothir* (Gaelic) = “terrace” or a *G* adaptation of a *P* word *uotir* = “territory”, which certain scholars suggest is perhaps some kind of administrative unit. But the matter is far from clear.

It would seem, then, that a church was founded here at *Kinneddar* towards the beginning of the tenth-century, but it was neither the first nor the only church on the site. It is also recorded that in the very early days of the diocese, when the bishops were becoming more ‘territorial’ in their outlook, they are known to have had a residence at *Kinneddar*. It would be wrong, perhaps, to call it a *castle* – in the same sense that a [\*muinntir\*](#) was not a *monastery*. We should not imagine a stone-built fortification but rather a wooden dwelling, perhaps set amongst the other buildings of the *muinntir* that most scholars now consider to have existed on the *Kinneddar* site.

There is a strong likelihood that St Gartnaidh’s later church was to be found here too. The removal of the bishop’s residence from *Birnie* to *Kinneddar* is commonly dated to c.1187 which, interestingly, was within ‘living memory’ of Freskyn de Moravia’s great building project - to erect the original earthwork-and-timber motte-and-baillie at nearby Duffus. This proto-castle was later replaced by one constructed of stone-and-lime, the remains of which are still to be seen today. Of course, by this time, it was usual to consider the church wherein a bishop had his *sedes* to be his *cathedral*. This corresponds to the episcopate of Bishop Richard of Lincoln (1187-1203). As his name implies, he used his knowledge of the organisation of the English dioceses to act as the matrix within which he moulded what was to become the diocese of Moray. Before his time the bishops in the province were still very much of a peripatetic nature - in a sort of middle-ground following the days of the Early



Church bishops wandered across the face of all Alba and Pictavia, having no recognised base, no set territory and, certainly, no cathedral, nor the plethora of territorial structures of the later Medieval Church. They went where they were needed, staying in one of the *muinntirs* under the authority of the local *ab*, for as long as was required. Hence, it was not unusual for a *muinntir* to find itself offering a home to several bishops at any one time.<sup>38</sup> It was only with the reign of King Alexander I (1107-1124) that the concept of the rigorous division of the whole country into territorial diocese became an ideal to be aimed at.

Archaeological evidence for the existence of a community of the Early Church in the vicinity of Kinneddar is now abundant. Since the work carried out in 1989 as part of the *Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project*, the importance of the Kinneddar site, as a “probable Dark Age monastic site,”<sup>39</sup> has been generally accepted. Many Pictish Era stones have been collected from the site since 1855. The majority of these may be assigned to Class III and they include one fragment, the *David Stone*, which is considered to be closely related to the long-panel of the *St Andrews Sarcophagus*. It depicts the Old Testament story of King David rending the jaws of the lion.<sup>40</sup> This stone is of immeasurable importance when it comes to interpreting the Kinneddar site. Most scholars draw a parallel with the St Andrews Sarcophagus which clearly points to a royal association. Whatever were their original contents, it is very likely that these two sarcophagi, being of such high quality, were unlikely to have been commissioned by any other than royalty – possibly the King of Picts himself? These stones, some bearing Christian symbols, date the Kinneddar settlement to around the eighth-ninth centuries. But one of the stones certainly takes us back to a time before there was any major Christian presence here. Bearing the dreadfully inappropriate name of *Drainie I*, we have a symbol stone of obviously early Pictish provenance.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately it was ‘lost’ before 1930!

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<sup>38</sup> The ‘nonsense’ story of the original site of the diocese/cathedral of Aberdeen being at the *muinntir* of *Mortlach* mirrors this situation exactly. (See “When a Monastery is not a Monastery”: <http://www.cushnieent.com/articles/muinntir.pdf>)

<sup>39</sup> HES Canmore database, no. 16459 (NJ26NW 1), accessed 4/1/18

<sup>40</sup> Samuel 17:34

<sup>41</sup> HES Canmore database, no. 16482 (NJ26NW 3.01), accessed 22/1/18. It was dated to the seventh-century.

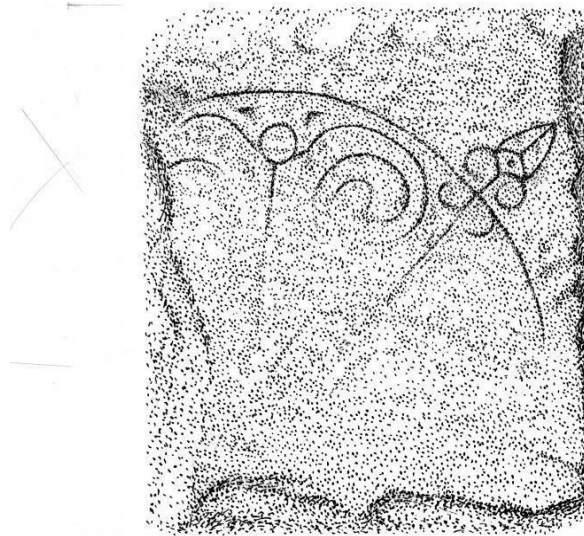


Figure 9: The Lost Symbol Stone - Drainie 1

In total, thirteen other fragments were found along with the symbol stone when the old manse of Kinneddar was removed in 1855. Who is to say how many more might be found if an extensive and thorough excavation were to be carried out.

Further exploration carried out in 2015 as part of the *Northern Picts Project*<sup>42</sup> suggested the existence of a *monastic vallum* enclosing an area having a diameter of c.200m. This work also confirmed the presence of the stone-built castle (episcopal palace) of the Early Medieval period. The remains of this structure were still visible above ground when visited by Pococke in 1760.<sup>43</sup>

For several reasons, the site at Kinneddar has, unfortunately, not attracted the degree of attention of scholars which it so thoroughly deserves. One causatory factor is that a great deal which would be of significance lies within and under the cemetery (which is still used on occasion), thus precluding any systematic excavation. The same cannot be said of the site of the bishops' residence nor much of what remains within the supposed *vallum* of the ancient *muinntir*.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/geosciences/departments/archaeology/the-northern-picts-project-259.php>

<sup>43</sup> Pococke (1887), p. 186

A second factor is that many of the stones which have been found are currently housed in Elgin Museum - a far from satisfactory situation. These stones, and those found at Burghead, are of national if not international significance. When one considers the approaches employed at St Andrews, Iona and Portmahomack, then there must be a certain sense of shame owned by 'the authorities.' What a wonderful display or visitor centre could (should?) be made of them. Perhaps this possibility will find supporters in the future. But surely, now that Dr Woolf's hypothesis is becoming part of the mainstream of historical thought and scholarship, consideration should be given to creating a centre to celebrate the centrality of the Spynie Loch littoral to the history of the Picts in our country – the history of royal *Fortriu*.

Of course, Bishop Richard of Lincoln's move to Kinneddar was not an option until the last of the Viking *aggressors* had passed from these shores. But his comparatively lengthy term in office (c.16 years) was to have far-reaching consequences for the future diocese and it was he who, it can be argued, laid the foundations upon which the later diocesan 'structures' were built by his successor, Bishop Bricius (Brice) de Douglas (1203-1222). In Bricius' petition to the pope requesting permission to allow him to move his *cathedra* to the church of the Holy Trinity at Spynie, Kinneddar is described as being located, "in a certain angle of the sea" which none of his parishioners could cross without great difficulty. What was now being presented as a distinct disadvantage was the very feature which had once been of such benefit to the local community.

### **Inchbroom.**

There has long been a tradition of a pre-Reformation chapel at Inchbroom {NGR: NJ 254665}. On occasion it was called "Our Lady's Chapel of Inch" and "Chapel of the Isle of Spinet." In the Ordnance Survey Name Books, the chapel is said to have had a churchyard<sup>44</sup> and to have been "disposed of ... upon the suppression of the Priory of Urquhart upon which it is supposed to have depended."<sup>45</sup> The chapel was dedicated to St Mary and, although no sign of

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<sup>44</sup> OS Name Books: OS1/12/21/87.

<sup>45</sup> Shaw, (1882), I., p. 334.

the building remains to be found today, a cropmark was recorded in 1976 which possibly shows the location of the site.<sup>46</sup>

### **Spynie.**

Reference is first made to “the Church of the Holy Trinity of Moray” in a charter issued at Forfar by King William on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1199.<sup>47</sup>

We have already noted that, early in the episcopate of Bishop Bricius, a petition was sent to the Pope requesting permission to move the ‘*cathedra*’ to the church of the Holy Trinity at Spynie. The existence of a ‘primitive’ fisher community at Spynie, which developed into a ‘harbour’ complex in the medieval era, is not doubted and we should understand that, although modest by modern standards, this harbour would have had a major impact on the early economy of the area. This community would have acted as a ‘magnet’ when decisions were being made regarding the siting of the first parishes in the province. It is most likely that a church would have existed here from very early times but, to date, no archaeological remains have been found that would indicate that there was a *muinntir* on the site before the early Medieval church was founded.

### **Kintrae.**

It has always been the tradition that there was a *muinntir* at Kintrae during the Pictish era. The physical evidence is very thin on the ground, but it is not entirely negligible. The approximate position of the site is still known. The chapel (and *muinntir* buildings) stood in the eastern margins of a field called *Chapelfield* {NGR: NJ 168651}, on the *Westfield* estate. Unfortunately, this site is just off the western edge of Kinnaird’s map, but older Ordnance Survey maps show it clearly. Of interest is what must have been two areas of raised land, (similar to the *Holms*), further to the north {NGR: NJ 169656 & NJ 166652} which, one might suppose, would have presented a drier site for the establishment of a community. When members of the Ordnance Survey walked the Chapelfield site in December 1962, soon after it

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<sup>46</sup> Moray Historic Environment Record: NJ26NE0014

<https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/detail.aspx?Authority=MOR&refno=NJ26NE0014>

<sup>47</sup> RRS, II., no. 421, p. 400.

had been ploughed, a “thin scattering of rubble was noted in the area of the Chapel.” At a site about 20m. NE of the supposed chapel site {NGR: NJ 16886517}, a number of human bones including fragments of a skull were found in the soil.”<sup>48</sup> It is obvious is that this site must have been virtually on the shoreline of the Loch. As is evidenced very clearly in the valleys of Deeside and Donside, in Aberdeenshire, churches or chapels were often built on one or both sides of a water crossing. This was a throw-back to the times of primitive religions and suspicions, when dangerous spirits and water-demons who dwelt in the waters were to be avoided wherever and whenever possible! But, when avoidance was impossible, then a chapel could provide a place in which to pray, either for a safe passage, or in thanks after a secure crossing had been effected. The same can be seen at either end of several mountain crossings in various parts of Scotland.<sup>49</sup> It is tempting to suspect that the chapels which existed at *Kintrae* and *Unthank* could have acted in this way, guarding and protecting those crossing the waters of the Loch.

A final piece of evidence has been hinted at already – Bishop Bricius’ charter of 1203-22, at which early time in the life of the bishopric, *Kintrae* is referred to as an “ancient church” (*veteri ecclesia de Kyntra*).<sup>50</sup> If *Kintrae* was already called *ancient* at the start of the thirteenth-century then it must, indeed, have been very old! Also, this was not some casual comment by the bishop, but it was an epithet used in the charter to mark what must have been a special and commonly recognised status – it was a mark of the bishop’s veneration for the site. If he, as an incomer to the province,<sup>51</sup> wished to convey such a measure of veneration then how much more ardently must the local people have held it as being a holy place?

## **Inchkeil.**

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<sup>48</sup> H.E.S. Canmore database no. 16122 (NJ16NE 19). Accessed 09/01/18

<sup>49</sup> A chapel existed at both ends of the hill track from *Pitcandlich* {NGR: NJ 425164} to the *Cabrach* {NGR: NJ 386268}, a route joining Donside and Morayshire.

<sup>50</sup> Moray Reg., 211, p. 273-74.

<sup>51</sup> Before becoming Bishop of Moray, Bricius (Brice de Douglas) was prior of *Lesmahagow*, a Tironensian house in Lanarkshire, within Glasgow diocese.

We have, here, only the hint of a church/chapel site preserved in a place-name. It lies towards the northern end of a low-lying promontory to the south of the *Bank of Roseisle* on the other side of the old western outflow from the Loch at {NGR: NJ 144657}.

Slightly more than 1km SSW of Inchkeil is *Standingstone* {NGR: NJ 136643}. Dunbar recounts, “... a tradition of a battle between the Picts and the Vikings,” at this site.<sup>52</sup> If this source is to be accepted then, very probably, this was the site of the important *Battle of Torfness*, in which Thorfinn, Earl of Orkney, defeated King Duncan I on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1040.<sup>53</sup>

### **Unthank.**

Some of the arguments regarding this site are narrated in greater detail later on in this paper. My suggestion is that, along with *Kinneddar* and *Kintrae*, we have here what amounts to a triumvirate of Christian communities of the greatest antiquity. However, an additional piece of evidence was noted by Alasdair Ross in his doctoral thesis which lends great weight to the argument in favour of the presence of an important Early Christian community here. He says, “... there may have been a much earlier Christian presence in Duffus. This is because there are three *Andóit* place-names in this parish, stretching westwards from Duffus to Roseisle: *Bonny Annot*, *Watery Mains of Annot* and *Annot Pool Park*.”<sup>54</sup>

These pieces of land, then, lie in the very location we know as Unthank. Ross’s conclusion was that, “There may have been a very important pre-parochial mother church in Duffus.” By this, I assume that, rather than the village of Duffus itself, he meant the present parish of Duffus which, of course, incorporates Unthank.

There is another interesting detail recorded in the *Registrum* of the diocese. In 1190, Bishop Richard (of Lincoln) gave to *William*, son of Freskyn (de Moravia), the lands of *Logy* and “*le Ermyt dykes*” in the barony of Duffus, in return for the payment of a stone of wax at the Feast of St Peter. In the charter, Bishop Richard also confirms the gift of the whole tithes of these lands to the church of St Peter of Duffus, which originally had been the gift of his

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<sup>52</sup> Dunbar (1906), p. 13, 15.

<sup>53</sup> “Battle of Torfness.” <https://canmore.org.uk/site/16247/standingstone> (accessed 22/02/2023)

<sup>54</sup> Ross (2003), vol. 1., p. 59, quoting from [Elgin Archives LDN P1; NAS, RS29 (Elgin), viii, 447r]

predecessor, Bishop Simon de Toeni (1171-1184).<sup>55</sup> Later, in 1294, Bishop Archibald (1253-1298) feus for two shillings per annum (payable at the Feast of St John the Baptist (29<sup>th</sup> August), the lands of *Logy* “juxta ecclesia de Duffhus”, the lands of “*le Hermitdykys*” and the mill of “*Uchtyrspyny*”.<sup>56</sup> These two charters immortalise the existence of a Hermitage somewhere near Duffus church which, if true, no doubt was attached to the *muinntir* of Unthank.

### **Burghead.**

There has been a tradition of a chapel or hermitage at Burghead for many years. The physical evidence offered is a fragment of a *corner-block* from a shrine/sarcophagus, several pieces of carved stone showing interlace and the presence of a well, supposedly dedicated to St Aethan (St Ethernan).

The corner-post<sup>57</sup> is of a similar type to that found at Kinneddar. It was found sometime before 1867 within the old churchyard at Burghead and, subsequently, it was placed within the enclosure of St Aethan’s Well. Although traces of a rectangular building have been found in the cemetery it is far from certain that these mark the remains of a chapel. Neither is there any dating evidence apart from the corner-post. However, Bruce Bishop recalls the traditional tale of a disciple of St Columba, one *Aidan* or *Aeda*, having sojourned here c.563.<sup>58</sup> This is an interesting parallel, both in name and geography, with St Aidan (d. 651) of *Bamburgh* in Northumbria.

It must be said, however, that there is no record of a Christian establishment at Burghead in the records of the medieval diocese of Moray. It is hard to understand this if we are to believe that there was an early church or chapel site of any consequence here. Certainly, stone fragments dated to the 8th or 9th-century do little to evidence a saint who is said to have died c. 563! It is just as possible that they were left behind by a Viking raiding party who, having

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<sup>55</sup> Moray Reg., 119, p.131

<sup>56</sup> Moray Reg., 131, p.144

<sup>57</sup> HES Canmore database, no. 318372 {NGR: NJ 11012 69094}

<sup>58</sup> Bishop (2010), p. 3



‘visited’ Unthank or Kinneddar, carried off these ‘trophy’ only to be angered at finding that they contained only mortal remains rather than riches!

The final major piece of evidence put forward is the well - supposedly dedicated to St Aethan. The structure is, indeed, as impressive as it is mysterious, and many wonderful tales have grown up about its possible function. But the fact remains that, even in this modern age, the archaeological interpretation of this structure is ‘speculative’, to say the least!

### THE QUESTION OF THE “COLLEGE OF ROSEISLE.”

Another point of interest that arises when one considers the “10m Map” is the land at the western outlet from the Loch.

It is reasonable to speculate that this western outlet was, in fact, the ancient mouth of the River Lossie in pre-historic times. The *Millie Burn* (Mill Burn) {NGR: NJ 117665} still flows through these lands from *Mossyards* {NGR: NJ 159669} marking the approximate course of the old outlet, and perhaps also of the River Lossie, to the sea. The present eastern outflow of the River Lossie at Lossiemouth is considered to have been created in later times by a breach blown through the extensive low-lying dune systems east of Lossiemouth, by some devastatingly powerful winter storm.

The fact is that where, on modern maps, there is marked *College of Roseisle*, that area was in fact saltmarsh and swamp, if not open water, at least up to the Viking age. All sorts of stories have been invented to explain away the place-name. In the extreme, we are presented with a collection of Celtic monks; a medieval collegiate foundation; a community of Celi Dé – indeed, a veritable procession of images and ideas that follow on like some Morayshire *Semana Santa* procession! But years of research by scholars has failed to turn up a reliable reference to an ecclesiastical establishment here. Even *Historic Environment Scotland’s* records leave the cupboard bare, stating, “The site of the College is uncertain, and its history has perished.”<sup>59</sup> This information, contained in the *Canmore* data-base, is largely attributed to

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<sup>59</sup> HES Canmore Database no. 1376646 (NJ16NW52) accessed 19.10.17. At College of Roseisle, “... in the 7th century there is presumed to have been a Columban chapel established from St Aetlian’s Oratory at Burghead; and in Culdee times a small settlement of monks. The site of the College is uncertain, and its history has perished.”<sup>60</sup> (Referenced from *Elgin Past and Present*.)



that stalwart of *Moray-abilia*, Mr. H.B. Mackintosh<sup>60</sup>, whose accounts can, at times, be a little on the ‘whimsical’ side. My own opinion is that such a religious community never existed on this site. The settlement that did exist nearby, certainly in Pictish times, is now labelled on modern maps *Old Roseisle* or *Oldtown*, a name that is most revealing. It lies higher up the western flank of the *Tappoch* {NGR: NJ 139674}, some 30m above modern datum, on land that would have guaranteed dry footings for buildings and a pleasantly sheltered location to reside in and grow crops. This old community lies on the north side of what would have been a natural and eminently easily defended route or track leading to the important fort system at Burghead. We should not fail to note in passing, the tantalising place-name to the south of the outflow channel – *Bridgend* {NGR: NJ 149661} – less than 1km south of Roseisle.

Another consideration is that, of old, Roseisle was not actually the name of a place but, as maps show, it was the name of the hill area to the north. This is the most prominent eminence on what was virtually an island and an area which is full of signs of pre-historic human habitation.<sup>60</sup> Here, there is a concentrated collection of ancient remains – *Cup-and-Ring Stones*; the *Camus Stone* and *Cairn* at *Inverugie*; the substantial fortifications at *Burghead*; a jet-bead necklace found on top of the *Tappoch*<sup>61</sup>; a wonderful spear-head found on the flanks of the same hill<sup>62</sup>; a famous cist burial was also found 8m west of the round cairn on the summit of the *Tappoch*<sup>63</sup>; crop-marks showing circular enclosures have been noted near *Unthank*<sup>64</sup>.

A review of the numerous archaeological finds made on *Clarkly Hill* {NGR: NJ 131675} quickly reveals the richness of the area and a case can easily be made for a more extensive survey and detailed research to be carried out. A considerable effort has been expended on the ‘fort’ at Burghead, but it is my opinion that the focus of future effort should be the area at, and to the east of, *Clarkly Hill*. Surely this is where the major settlements were – close to the sheltered, south-facing, slopes and beaches. The fort was a good defensive position in

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<sup>60</sup> For example, the famous *Sculptors Cave* {NGR: NJ 189711}.

<sup>61</sup> HES Canmore Database, no. 16160

<sup>62</sup> HES Canmore Database, no. 16164

<sup>63</sup> HES Canmore Database, no. 16208

<sup>64</sup> HES Canmore Database, no. 107623

time of need, but it would certainly not have afforded such comfortable dwelling sites as were offered to the immediate south.

Although I argue that there was not a Christian community at Roseisle, it is apparent from the archaeology that the Tappoch was an area of some considerable significance to the ancient peoples for ritual purposes. Given the island's geographical prominence this is not very surprising.

But we must stop for a moment and consider again the very name *Roseisle*. At first sight it is a very English name. However, consider, instead, *Ros(s) Eye* – ‘the island of the headland.’ I would suggest that the whole of this area could, of old, have been called *Ros(s) Eye* (or *Ros(s) Hy*), with only the rocky outcrop where Lossiemouth now stands known separately as *Stotfield* or *Coulard Hill*, and it is for this reason that I suggest that we should use the name *Ros(e) Eye* or *Ros Hy* rather than *Roseisle* whenever possible.

If the above is accepted then, when one adds to the ‘mix’ the presence of very old communities at *Unthank* and *Kinneddar*, one seems to be left with an inescapable conclusion that this must have been one of the largest and most important areas of Pictish habitation in the country. If Wolf's suggestion that the territory called *Fortriu* is, indeed, to be found in Morayshire, then I would suggest that the *Ros-Hy* is perhaps the strongest of contenders for any provincial ‘capital’ or power-base. The much less advertised *Dunearn* {NGR: NH 932407}, which commands the vital crossing of the River Findhorn at the better known *Randolph's Leap*, and the route to the south – the same route that the Old Military Road took in much later times - is also very impressive and has an early church site immediately below it. The alternative sites identified as contenders near Inverness present impressive fortifications but they are not accompanied by Christian sites. They may well have been very important ‘military’ sites in pre-history but I would suggest that in Pictish times the power-base had moved to the *Ros-Hy* and that this concentration of settlement was what attracted the Christian *peregrins* to locate themselves at *Unthank*, *Kinneddar* and, one must not forget, also at *Kintrae* on the island of *Inchbrock*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See above page 11; and the extract of Pont's Map on page 7 which clearly shows *Kintré* (sic) on the island of Inchpöck. In 1203-1222, Bishop Bricius's charter refers to this church as “*Veteri ecclesia de Kyntra*”, revealing that so early in the diocese's history, Kintrae was recognised as an ‘ancient’ establishment. [Moray Reg., no. 211, p. 273]

I also believe that the *Ros-Hy* makes the much-vaunted and heavily publicised site at *Portmahomack* fade into the background. This more northern site was certainly a Christian community of significance, but no more so than Kinneddar, where equally impressive stonework of the Pictish era has been found. Sadly, Kinneddar (and the rest of the *Ros-Hy*) has not enjoyed the intensive attentions of the archaeologists' trowels that the Portmahomack site has benefitted from, and so its importance has, in my opinion, been sadly overlooked.

In conclusion, the focus of Roseisle's interest lies not in medieval history but much further back in the so-called Dark Age - the very earliest days of the Picts and beyond, into the misty realms of pre-history. I don't believe there was ever a *college* here – it is not a commonly found term (that in the Chanonry of Elgin is a 'modern' invention). But there are other sites of *muinntirs* nearby which may prove to be of importance when considering the presence of early Christianity in the area.

## UNTHANK.

In Shaw's *History of the Province of Moray* the author says that there was a *College* name associated both with Roseisle **and** Unthank {NGR: NJ 172669}.<sup>66</sup> In dismissing the former I believe that Shaw has recorded where a *college* (or *banchor*) **did** exist. There is a companion tradition of an early Christian *muinntir*<sup>67</sup> at Unthank and it would seem reasonable to conclude that *the college* was situated here and not at Roseisle. It is most unlikely that there would have been two *muinntirs* so close together.

I believe that the existence of this ancient *muinntir* was recognised by Bishop Robert Hepburn in 1542. It was he who created the last of the *prebends* in the Cathedral at Elgin. It was formed from the chaplainry of the Blessed Virgin Mary that had been founded in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century, and consecrated by Bishop Bricius, within *Duffus Castle*. But in naming the prebend, Bishop Hepburn chose to call it *Unthank*, thus, I believe, recognising and commemorating the ancient *muinntir*.

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<sup>66</sup> Shaw (1882), II., p. 81.

<sup>67</sup> *Muinntir* (Gaelic) = 'folk, kindred, people'; (de Moravia (2017), p. 3)

Looking at the “10m Map” one is struck by the site of the old community of Unthank. It was on a promontory that extended into the Loch and, as such, it is somewhat similar to the promontory site at *Portmahomack*. In early times, and certainly in the Viking era, this area was heavily forested. Shaw states, “remains show that the whole ‘lower ground’ and even in the stiffest clay soil, this part of the country must have once been an entire forest of different kinds of timber – oak, elder, birch, hazel and fir; and it is reported that the oppressed local inhabitants were compelled by the Danes to carry oak from the valley near Roseisle to build their ships” at the *Burgh* (Burghead).

Shaw, writing c.1882, records that the stones of the old chapel at Unthank, “were lately taken up to repair the mill.”<sup>68</sup> This may refer to repairs made to the mill that the laird of Duffus had been forced to erect to replace the *Outflow Mill*.

Looking again at the 10m Map, there is an obvious land-route from the bishop’s residence at *Kinneddar* {NGR: NJ 222696} into western Morayshire. It would have passed both Unthank and Old Roseisle, and *St Peter’s Church* at the *Kirkton of Duffus* {NGR: NJ 175687},<sup>69</sup> an establishment of the greatest antiquity and one of the earliest medieval ecclesiastical foundations in the Province. Dating from the 11<sup>th</sup>-Century, St Peter’s was the burial place of the [de Moravia](#) family, from *Freskyn* onwards. The suggestion here is that Unthank lay on what would have been a main route for travellers.

## PASSAGES ACROSS THE LOCH

There can be no doubt that the physical presence of the Loch presented a considerable obstacle to travel in all ages. For the Picts on the *Ros Hy* this would have been a great boon in defensive terms whilst for the medieval bishops in their ‘castle’ at Kinneddar it would have acted so as to isolate them from their diocese - although, from both sides of the fence, this may, at times, have been seen to be an advantage!

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<sup>68</sup> Shaw (1882), II., p. 83

<sup>69</sup> The place-name Duffus itself lends to our argument about the nature of this part of the Sea of Spynie. Scholars suggest that its name is derived from *Dubh-uis* ~ “black (or stagnant) water. [Shaw (1882), II., p. 77]

Several routes have revealed themselves as having been in regular use at various points in history. Some came back into use, only to be abandoned again, according to the vagaries of the water-levels in the Loch. A survey of these routes is more meaningful when made by viewing the Loch from west to east.

### **Bridgend**

From studying the “10m Map” I believe that it is reasonable to suggest that there was a crossing-point here in very early times. Whether the crossing was made by boat/canoe, by swimming alongside animals, or perhaps by the use of stepping-stones at low tide, cannot be known since there is no extant evidence in the archaeological or historical records. However, considering the geography of the site, this this would have been a natural crossing place.

### **Kintrae – Unthank.**

Travelling east, the next crossing encountered was that carrying the road from *Causie* (Covesea) to Elgin. This involved crossing the *Long Steps*, a causeway originally constructed from a succession of large stones set into the bed of the Loch. This was the main route from Burghead and Kinneddar to the lands of western Morayshire and Elgin.

### **Leals Ferry.**

On Kinnaird’s map, just to the east of the Long Steps, there is marked, “Tract of Kenneth Leals boat”. Mr Leal had a house on the south side of the outflow from the Loch and, apparently, he provided an alternative to the Long Steps at times when they were impassable.

### **Road to Mid Holm.**

Kinnaird noted a “road begun by the Messrs. Brander” running from the southern shore of the Loch, at the very eastern edge of the Findrassie lands, northwards to the island of Mid Holm. He also records that there were said to be stepping-stones here. It is not clear if this road was continued elsewhere or if the project was abandoned.

### **The Salterhill Ferry.**

Only a little further east lay a principal ferry-boat crossing. It ran from the south shore, on Myreside lands, to the pier which had been built at the foot of the *Point of Salterhill* {NGR: NJ 204671}. The ferry-boat station on the Myreside lands was at the foot of the sand-bank to the north of *Lochside Farm* and close to the ruins of an old cottage situated about 100m to the east of the *Covesea Road* {NGR: NJ 208659}.<sup>70</sup> This ferry was operated, latterly, by the Laird of Gordonstoun to whom the income, which would not have been by any means negligible, accrued.

### **The Bishop's Steps.**

The Bishop's Steps are said to have existed in early history. They are said to have been constructed with large quarry-stones running northwards from Spynie, although the exact route is not known. It is said that this crossing had been constructed by a bishop who wished to make it easier for the cleric taking the morning services in St Andrews church {NGR: NJ 249627} to then travel north to the church of Ogstoun {NGR: NJ 193689} to take afternoon services. In later years, as the water levels rose again these stepping-stones were submerged.

### **Causeway.**

There is a suggestion of a causeway from the Greens of Kinneddar to the Fowl Inch which is marked on Kinnaird's map. Since the island was a favoured place to graze animals such a causeway would have offered an obvious advantage to the local people, but it is only marked on the map as a 'possibility'. It is possible that some remains of this crossing had been revealed as the result of the Brander brothers' efforts to drain the Loch. It is thought that it went no further than the Fowl Inch.

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<sup>70</sup> When Priest & Co. started its brickworks in this neighbourhood, this cottage became known as *Egypt* – supposedly commemorating a place once famous for brick-making.

### **The Kaysbrigs Road.**

As we have seen, there was a major route leading from the lands of Kinneddar, southwest over the bridge at *Kaysbrigs* (Briggsies), and onwards through *Pitgaveny* estate to Elgin. Kinnaird's map details two routes leading from *Ogstoun* to meet with this road - one called the *Summer Bridges Road* and the other the *Winter Bridges Road*. In the later history of the Loch this would have offered a dry route to Urquhard and eastwards to the River Spey. This route had the distinct advantage that, save for the 'bridge' itself, a traveller was not required to cross any stretches water. For travellers with animals, carts, or mounted on horses, this would have been invaluable.

### **HARBOURS.**

From written records we know that there were 'harbours' or anchorages at *Spynie*,<sup>71</sup> *Duffus*<sup>72</sup> and, possibly, below the *Hill of Kinnairdie* just north of *Meft* {NGR: NJ 269642}.<sup>73</sup> But, from the accounts of Bishop Bur's encounter with the *farcost* at Krannokysford, as related above,<sup>74</sup> we can be sure that the liminal land in the area of the *Greens of Kinneddar*<sup>75</sup> would have provided adequate landing places also. To any sailor who knew these coasts, the Loch must have presented an almost unbelievable natural haven on what was otherwise a most treacherous stretch of coast. Many have come to grief on the *Holyman* (Halliman) and *Covesea Skerries* off Lossiemouth and the *Boar's Head Rock* further east {NGR: NJ 289680}.<sup>76</sup>

### **THE LOCH IN POST-MEDIEVAL TIMES.**

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<sup>71</sup> Moray Reg., no. 163, p. 192.

<sup>72</sup> Keillar (1993), p. 50.

<sup>73</sup> Morrison (1871), p. 251

<sup>74</sup> Moray Reg., no. 289, p. 369-70

<sup>75</sup> See extract of Kinnaird's map in Appendix C.

<sup>76</sup> See Appendix D for a most entertaining story concerning the minister of Urquhart who set out to determine why his congregation had been found 'wanting' one Sabbath day. Many very religious people, whose 'communion' had been supplied in merrily large quantities of wine from a wreck which had been brought ashore, were found scattered across the countryside to the north of the village, completely unable to find their way to church!

A first attempt at draining the Loch (or at least lowering the water-level) was made 1480<sup>1500</sup><sup>77</sup> at the instigation of the Bishop.<sup>78</sup> The drainage system employed was well-maintained by successive bishops up to the time of the Reformation. But, the absence of ‘the personal interest’ of a bishop after this time meant that the system fell into disrepair because those now holding the lands – the secular Lords of Spynie – were often absentee landlords. Land which had been reclaimed and put to profitable use returned to marsh, swamp and open water.

One consequence of this was that the ancient causeway, known as the *Bishop’s Steps*, was submerged requiring the operation of a ferry-boat for the use of travellers on what was known as the *Covesea Road*. As detailed above, it ran from *Salterhill* (NGR: NJ 204 671) to the lands of *Myreside* (NGR: NJ 206 658).

The Loch’s drainage continued to be neglected during the disastrous struggle between Episcopacy and Presbytery that resulted from the various ‘restorations’ of the post-Reformation period. The consequence was that, “it had spread out so as to extend to the length of 4 miles, and in no part of less breadth than one, covering the space of 2000 acres.”<sup>79</sup> To the local lairds this marked a significant loss of arable land and, consequently, of income.<sup>80</sup>

There had been another ferry-boat in the pre-Reformation period which operated from the Palace of Spynie to a place on the lands of *Ardivot* (NGR: NJ 225 657) called *the Weir*. But it is said that it too passed away with the Bishops!<sup>81</sup>

The islands in the Loch were of great use in the summer months as a secure pasture for cattle and the animals would be carried out to them by boat or by swimming them across. As has been noted above, a more permanent causeway had existed from the lands of *the Greens* to

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<sup>77</sup> Young (1871), p. 9

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Stewart was bishop from 1482-1501. He was the youngest son of Queen Joan Beaufort, widow of King James I, by her second husband, James Stewart of Lorne.

<sup>79</sup> Shaw (1882), I., p. 339.

<sup>80</sup> The principal estates surrounding the Loch at this time were *Gordonstoun*, in the parish of Drainie, to the north; *Pitgaveny* to the east; the estate of the Earl of Fife, in the parish of Spynie, including the *Bishop’s Precinct* which belonged to the Crown, to the southeast; the estate of *Findrassie*, in the parish of Spynie (formerly episcopal lands) to the south; the estate of *Westfield*, also in the parish of Spynie, to the west; the lands of *Duffus*, in the parish of Duffus, to the north-west.

<sup>81</sup> Mackintosh (1828), p. 18.



the *Fowl Inch*, which causeway is clearly marked on Kinnaird's map, but its existence was only revealed when the water-level was again lowered. This Fowl Inch was greatly resorted to by water birds as a breeding place, from whence, no doubt, its name originated.<sup>82</sup>

However, the splendid modern incomers of the RSPB would be overcome with a fit of apoplexy to read Shaw's comment that, "it (the Loch) abounds with pikes and gidds, and is in winter haunted with swans that yield fine diversion in killing them."<sup>83</sup>

There were disastrous floods in Moray in 1637 and these would, no doubt, have had a major effect on what was left of the drainage system of the bishops' time.

At length, a *Mr David Anderson of Finzeach*, an engineer and burgess of Aberdeen, was consulted with a view to lowering the water-level. Anderson, whose father was by some, known as Davie ... do a'thing" (David ... do everything), was a member of an astonishing Aberdeen family. His uncle Alexander Anderson (1582-1619), although he died when he was still quite young, was Professor of Mathematics at the University of Paris. For many years the family had the manse, barn and yards of the old Blackfriars monastery in Aberdeen. At length, they sold the property to Robert Gordon who founded the (Gordon's) Hospital, now College, on the site.

Anderson determined that, to be successful, the River Lossie would have to be banked up.

The Loch could then be drained. "Two ditches, each varying from 6-14 ft. in width and 4-5 ft. in depth, some 300 yards or thereby in length, converged into one after passing under the *Stotfield-Elgin* road at *Kaysbridge* (Caysbriggs {NGR: NJ 248668}), thus draining the waters of the Loch of Spynie into this new cut."<sup>84</sup> The bridge over these two 'canals' was originally of wood. It was taken down in 1748 and replaced by a stone bridge of two arches which was built at the Town's expense.<sup>85</sup>

The course of this canal is shown clearly on Kinnaird's map flowing northwards above *Inchbroom* {NGR: NJ 254669} and continuing into the River Lossie at a point which is marked "C" on his map {NGR: NJ 254684}.

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<sup>82</sup> Young 1871, 22

<sup>83</sup> Shaw 1882, 3.94-95

<sup>84</sup> Mackintosh 1828, 10. Locally, *Kaysbridge* was known as *Brigsies*.

<sup>85</sup> Mackintosh 1828, 11

About the year 1779 the *Brander* brothers – *Alexander*, of Kinneddar (1729-1794), and *James*, of Pitgaveny (1733-1780), came on the scene. The brothers had made their fortunes in the citrus trade in the lovely climate of the Azores. James operated from the islands, first shipping the fruit to Lisbon, for onward transportation to London where his elder brother, Alexander, took control of the marketing part of the business. It was at this time that the Royal Navy started to use citrus fruit, principally lemon juice, to prevent *scurvy* amongst the sailors of the fleet. There is a record of the will of Alexander Brander, Merchant, Sheriff of London, in the National Records Office at Kew.<sup>86</sup> Alexander appears in office as Sheriff of London in 1792 (along with Sir Benjamin Tebbs).<sup>87</sup> He had been elected Sheriff whilst Master of the Worshipful Company of Wheelwrights.

James is thought to have been born in Moray c.1733, so, when he started improving his estate of Pitgaveny, he was about 46 year of age. The brothers set about restoring, renovating and developing the drainage system but had not, perhaps, won over some of the neighbouring lairds to their schemes and it was this that had resulted in the matter of ‘ownership’ of the Loch being referred to the Court of Session.

The brothers were great supporters of improvement projects in Moray a major example being the new harbour at Lossiemouth (Branderburgh).

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<sup>86</sup> PROB 11/1247/98, 4 July 1794

<sup>87</sup> Traditionally there are always two Sheriffs of London elected by the Livery Companies

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## MAPS.

**Kinnaird, H. (1783)** The Loch of Spynie and adjacent grounds surveyed by authority of the *Right Hon the Lords of Council and Session and agreeable to instructions from Sir William Gordon of Gordonstoun*. Edinburgh: The National Records of Scotland. Site ID: RHP427. Court of Session Records (CS). Coordinates: 321548, 869004.  
<https://scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/record/nrs/RHP427/plan-loch-spynie-and-adjacent-grounds-moray/nrs> (Accessed 05/01/18)

## APPENDICES.

### A: SOME NOTES ON HUGH KINNAIRD'S MAP OF 1783.

The original of Kinnaird's map of the Loch and the surrounding estate lands has been traced to the National Records Office (Scotland).

It is a large 79x64 cm single sheet with details such as estate boundaries outlined in colour. It is an impressive example of the engraver's art and was made in Edinburgh by Ainslie & Kirkwood.

Of course, it also stands as a monument to the professional skills of Hugh Kinnaird as surveyor. His practice was established in Nairn where he was a land surveyor for many years and where, in time, he was admitted a Burgess. Kinnaird would have spent a considerable amount of time on such a detailed survey and his skills must have been recognized in the country's capital for the Court of Session to appoint him to the task.

Kinnaird's map of 1783 has depths marked which, presumably, were taken from measurements made from a boat. These 'soundings' are helpful in that they allow us to trace, in a limited way, the submerged contours of the Loch. They also bear testament to Kinnaird's attention to detail.

Copies of the map were included in a pocket at the end of Mr. H.B. Mackintosh's short book, *The Lossie and the Loch of Spynie*, which had a small publication in 1928 by W.R. Walker & Co., of Elgin. However, the considerable size of the map and the difficulty of inserting it into the pocket means that it often went missing or perhaps became a framed 'trophy' on various study walls! The copy of the book in the Special Collections of the Library of Aberdeen University<sup>88</sup> has suffered this fate.

The map is now available in digital format and any serious student will wish to download a copy.<sup>89</sup> The 'definition/detail' of several extract maps reproduced in this paper is not of the

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<sup>88</sup> Aberdeen University Library Special Collections: Shelf No. [L Mo2 B6.4 McKi1]

<sup>89</sup> <https://scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/record/nrs/RHP427/plan-loch-spynie-and-adjacent-grounds-moray/nrs>



highest quality. However, reference to the digital copy removes these problems and the very finest of detail is available.

Kinnaird's map frequently represents the presence of what he calls *Star Bush*. It has proved difficult to identify this plant but following recent correspondence with Mr Hardy, Serials Librarian of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh, it would appear that it could be a name for the *Common Reed*, (*Ditch Reed*, *Reedgrass*). He directed me to a source, *Collectanea for a Flora of Moray*, where there is the entry, "*Arundo Phragmites*. § "*Streeds*," *i.e. Star reeds*?" Mr Hardy added that this was the only reference to *star* in the work. This plant, now known as *Phragmites australis* (Cav.) Trin. Ex Steud, was recorded as being found in the vicinity of the Loch of Spynie.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon 1839, 5

## **B: THE NAME “BURGHEAD.”**

The origin of this place-name is of considerable interest and I will presume to suggest a possible derivation.

It is obvious that the whole of the *Ros-Hy* was inhabited from the very earliest of days – the evidence, as pointed to previously, is abundant. We are also relatively certain that the Northmen constructed a fort, perhaps using a site previously established by Pictish peoples.

The chiefs of Nordic ‘tribes’ and their followers were in the habit of pegging out their claims on ‘virgin’ territory. Such a district became known as a *herað*.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the Old Norse term *byrgi*<sup>92</sup> was commonly applied to an entrenchment or a mound. Indeed, in Orkney there is a district called *Byrgisherað*<sup>93</sup> – a district of the mounds/entrenchments or *fortress district*.

The modern name in Orkney is often given as Burghead. This is the same name as the Morayshire *Burghead* – ramparts, mounds and fort are all present.

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<sup>91</sup> *Herað* (O.N.) = a “district” or “country”

<sup>92</sup> *Byrgi* (O.N.) = “shut up”

<sup>93</sup> The saga records describe the area covered by the modern parishes of Birsay and Harray as *Byrgisherað* - which translates roughly as, “the fortress district.” Similarly, *Birsay* comes from *Byrgisey*, meaning “fortress island”, referring to the *Brough of Birsay*. <http://www.orkneyjar.com/placenames/parish.htm> (Accessed 13/11/17)

Figure 10: Greens of Kinneddar - from Kinnaird's Map

## D: SHIPWRECKS ON THE COAST.

**January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1650:** “It was reported that since by providence a ship loaden with wyne and other commodities was broken on the sands betwixt *Speyslaw* {NGR NJ 284 668} and the mouth of the *Lossie Water* that severall persones from severall quarters wer found scandalouslie drunk so that some were reallie dead therby others were drunk so as they wer not able to return home bot were necessitate either to sleep out ther riotnes and drunkenness or els to be caryed home upon the shoulders of others or on horses and carts. The elders to make inquiries.” [Crammond 1899: 29]

**January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1650:** “Delate for drunkenness at the broken ship – *Jhone Chrystie* in Finfan, Helen Geddes in Maverstone, Christen Man and Janet Grant in Meft, David Simsone in Unthank, and eight other men and two women, also three men and three women from Garmouth, Corskie, etc. Also *Thomas Chrystie* in Langbryde and three men and a woman in the parish of Kinedor. All these to be summoned to make their repentance in the kirk of Urquhart.” [Crammond 1899: 30]

**January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1665:** “Compeired *James Sanders* and *James Rob*, who sieing probatione like to goe against them, did confess that they had taken from the broken ship that had bein cast by storms of weather upon the shore at Speyes Law some iron nailles. They were ordained for this break of the Sabbath to stand on day at the pillar and be rebuked before the congregation.” [Crammond 1899: 49]

{The sin seems to have been breaking the Sabbath, not helping themselves to the nails!}

{These extracts of the Kirk Session Minutes of Urquhart are all taken from Crammond (1899?)}

I believe that the ships, in both cases, may have foundered on the Boar’s Head Rock.