

Dunyvaig Castle | Dun Naomhaig

Isle of Islay





Dunyuvaig Castle, Dun Naomhaig, located on Islay's southern coast, is an unrealised asset, not just for Islay but for the whole of Scotland.

Islay Heritage* wishes to explore the possibility of undertaking excavation at Dunyuvaig to document its turbulent history, with the view of transforming this neglected site into a vibrant heritage centre for the residents of Islay and visitors to the island.

This booklet introduces Dunyuvaig and our ideas for the project. We wish to develop these in collaboration with interested parties from Islay and beyond. We hope you will be keen to join us in this exciting project.

Steven Mithen

Steven Mithen FBA, FSA, FSA (Scot)

Trustee of Islay Heritage and
Professor of Archaeology

www.islayheritage.org

info@islayheritage.org

*Islay Heritage is a charity devoted to furthering knowledge about Islay's past and the many ways it can be explored and enjoyed by everyone (SC046938)



Reconstruction of Dunyvaig by Andrew Spratt, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38002/islay-dunyvaig-castle>

Dunyvaig was once the naval fortress of the Lords of the Isles, the chiefs of Clan MacDonald. Although the current remains of the castle are predominantly of the 16th century, its foundations are undoubtedly much earlier and it may have been constructed on top of a prehistoric fort or dun. After being forfeited to the crown in 1493, the castle was the object of much wrangling between the MacDonalds and rival clans until the Campbell's of Cawdor eventually took up residence. Upon relocating to Islay House, the castle's final occupant, Sir Hugh Campbell, had it demolished in 1677.

For further information see <https://canmore.org.uk/event/693213>



In October 1604 a royal expedition under the overall command of Sir John Campbell of Cawdor, sought to capture Dunyvaig from the MacDonalds. In order to avoid a protracted siege an additional force of 200 soldiers and heavy ordnance were shipped from Ireland. The artillery was to be *'sufficient for the battery and forcing of the said house of Dunevege, which wee are informed is a place of good strength, being strongly built of it seife, and, besides, it is compassed with iii stone walles, each of them conteyninge thirty and sixe feet in thickness'*. The besieging force under Sir Oliver Lambert completed their artillery platform at the end of January 1615 and on 1 February began their bombardment of the castle. As Lambert later reported to King James VI, *'Three dayes batterye with the ordnance wee used was powerful to ruyne the whole howse, invincible without the canon and famyn'*.

The Dunyvaig Project

2017 is Scotland's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology

Islay Heritage would like to mark this year by launching the Dunyvaig Project as a flagship research and heritage initiative for Scotland.



Public access and information

To enhance the visitor experience and provide an asset for community and educational activities.

Conservation

To protect the monument for future generations.

Research

To use excavation to reveal the history of the castle and its significance for Islay and Scotland. To learn about the life and times of those who resided within and were associated with the castle.

Archaeological training school

To use the excavation and its finds for training volunteers and students in archaeological methods.

Improve public access

The current path to the keep and tower is along an uneven and slippery track, with no protection from a vertical drop. There is a single warning sign, partly buried in the grass.

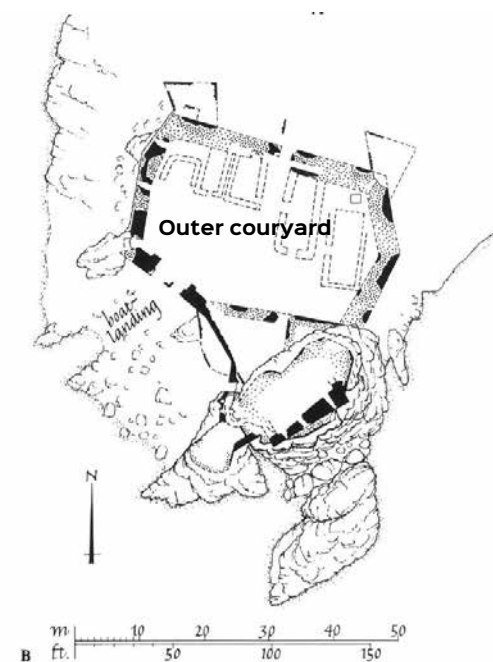




Outer courtyard

Enhance visitor experience

When viewed from the tower, the walls of the outer courtyard can only be vaguely identified. There is no information for visitors about the architecture and remarkable history of Dunyuvaig.



1985 Plan of Dunyuvaig by the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)

Protect the site

Exposed to Atlantic gales and rough seas, the tower appears in a perilous state, while the eastern wall is being visibly eroded.



Research questions

An excavation at Dunyuvaig can address a wealth of research questions, ranging from the specific history of the castle to Dunyuvaig's role in the transnational political and economic history of the 15th–17th centuries. Here we suggest some possible themes, but these need shaping so that a project and excavation strategy can be devised.



Origins of the castle

The current dating of the castle is based on a combination of written records and its architectural style, but the exact date of its establishment and the original construction is not known. Only excavation can provide dating material securely related to the very beginning of the fortification at Dunyuvaig. The possibility of earlier settlement remains on this site, either early Medieval or prehistoric, needs to be fully investigated.

Structural history of the castle

It is clear from the RCAHMS survey that even the visible remains at Dunyuvaig are unlikely to have been constructed all at the same time. Excavation can unravel the structural history of the castle, identifying its phases of construction and destruction. By dating these we can establish the chronology for the castle's development, supplementing the sparse information from written records.

Place and function in the landscape

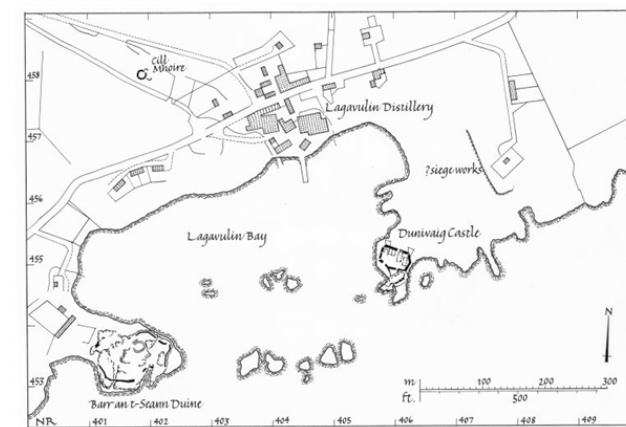
While Dunyuvaig as the seat of the McDonalds and its political and military history are relatively well documented, its function in the landscape and seascape of Islay are less understood. How did the castle control Lagavulin Bay and its harbour at different times in its history? What was the role of Barr an t-Seann Duine located on the opposite side of the bay? A maritime survey might provide new insights into the naval history of Lagavulin Bay.

Military and residential life within the castle

The written history and the current interpretation of the castle focus on its political and military significance. While it was home to a military garrison for some parts of its history, at other times the castle was an elite residence. Who was based in the castle and what types of activities were undertaken? What types of foods did they eat and clothes did they wear?

Castle environs

What archaeological remains survive in the immediate vicinity of the castle? Are there traces of siege works, gun platforms, post-medieval dwellings? Are there settlement remains which pre-date the castle? What was the local and regional environment of the castle? What impact did the castle have on its surrounding landscape and communities?



<https://canmore.org.uk/collection/423754>



An archaeological training school at Dunyuvaig?

An excavation at Dunyuvaig will expose walls and floors that will need to be placed into stratigraphic order; it will produce a wide range of finds of different materials, including stone, brick, tile, pottery, glass, metal and bone; plant remains, animal bones and sediments will enable the environment within and around the castle to be reconstructed. With the tasks of surveying, digging and finds processing, the excavation will provide participants with an excellent all-round field experience.

This provides an opportunity to use the Dunyuvaig excavation as an archaeological training school, open to participants of all levels of experience and ability. Such training would be open to universities and colleges seeking professional training for their students as part of accredited modules for degree courses. A training school would especially welcome participants from Islay to develop archaeological field skills and knowledge within the island community.

The training would be designed to provide participants with opportunities to acquire the Archaeological Skills Passport. This is endorsed by the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists as a means to demonstrate competence in a range of archaeological techniques for those wishing to build a career in archaeology, secure employment on digs, or for personal development. www.archaeologyskills.co.uk

A vision for Dunyuvaig

The development of Urqhart Castle on Loch Ness indicates what might be achieved at Dunyuvaig.

Access has been made available for visitors of all abilities using safe and pleasantly designed walkways. Information boards have been carefully positioned to provide sufficient guidance for visitors but without interfering with the beauty of the ruins and the surrounding landscape. Within the nearby information centre, excavated artefacts are on display, the history of the castle can be explored at varying levels of detail, a film provides an evocative recreation of the castle's past, and a wide range of gifts and mementos can be purchased.



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Islay Heritage is grateful to The Ian Mactaggart Trust and to the Lagavulin Legacy Fund for financial support