

# KINNEIL CHURCHYARD

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**Geoff B Bailey**

The small churchyard surrounding the picturesque ruins of the 12<sup>th</sup> century church at Kinneil (NS 9810 8057) is today hidden from general view by a screen of trees in a corner of the country park. These trees include several excellent examples of the Kinneil cherry and are part of the complex designed landscape laid out in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century for the Dukes of Hamilton. By that time the church had been usurped by one planted at the west end of the brash new town at Bo'ness (see Bailey 2006; Bailey 2014). The building at Kinneil remained, first as a private building and then as a folly within the landscape of enclosures, avenues and vistas. The west gable served as a seamark, guiding ships up and down the Forth.

**Illus 1: The West Gable of Kinneil Church with recumbent stones in the foreground.**



Its early abandonment is what makes the churchyard at [Kinneil](#) unique in the Falkirk district. The old churchyards at [Carriden](#) and [Airth](#) were only closed after 1766 and 1810, following great debate. The discontinuation of burial practices at Kinneil after 1669 meant that the burial ground did not succumb to the 18<sup>th</sup> century fashion of having headstones erected in it, but remained clear of such obstructions. Throughout the medieval period, parish churchyards had been used for holding markets and for archery practice and so were uncluttered. The few inscribed and decorated stones that marked graves belonged to the rich and powerful, and tended to be inside the church,

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or against its external walls. Inevitably, as wealth and influence spread, so did the distribution of the monuments. Placing the stones upright against the boundary walls was an early solution. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century the use of recumbent stones was in vogue – at first adjacent to the paths and in the following century throughout the graveyard. This is what we see fossilized in the landscape at Kinneil.

44 recumbent stones have been recorded in the churchyard, although a few only survive as fragments. A further seven occur re-used in the paving of the nave, and six more from there are kept at [Kinneil House](#) for safe-keeping. Of these only six have legible dates:

No. 21	1601	shield
No. 26	1627	anchor
No. 27	1625	shield
No. 35	1648?	Plain – 5 sets of initials
No. 36	1648	Plain – 2 sets of initials
No. 39	1634	shield
No. 59	1632	crown over a hammer in a shield

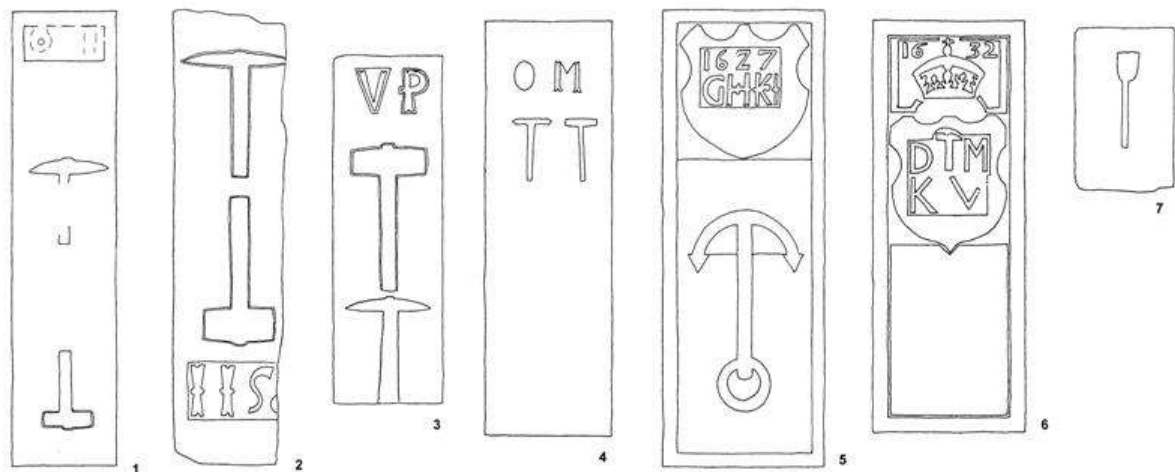
The average length of the complete stones outside the church is 1.82m and the width 0.62m. The most common design element is a shield (22 in number) located at the head or west end of the stone, often containing sunk rectangular panels with raised lettering. 21 stones have an incised line border on the face. The shield was used for the first three decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is so common that it seems to denote a status level rather than an individual rank or trade – perhaps members of incorporated trades. Specific trade stones are to be found. A large anchor in bold incised lines is shown on the lower parts of numbers 2 and 26; one dated and the other so similar that it must be contemporary. They presumably represent skippers or captains of ships belonging to the creek at Kinneil or the new port at Bo'ness. Solitary paddles are found on numbers 29 and 47. Ordinarily these would be



taken as representative of the baker's trade, but here there is a possibility that they represent the paddle used to turn salt in a saltpan. The absence of loaves such as those shown on a stone in Bo'ness Parish Churchyard (Bailey 2006, 16, no 65) is, unfortunately, not conclusive. Salters, despite being classified as serfs at this time, were still viewed as respectable members of the community and often became church elders. Four stones depict a combination of a hammer and a pick. Again we cannot be certain which trade is intended. The tools are traditionally those of the collier, but at Muiravonside seem to indicate a quarrier

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(Bailey 1997, 26). This is the preferred interpretation at Kinneil too. The trade is often allied with that of the mason and, understandably, is commonly represented on gravestones (usually using the three castles of the trade's coat of arms, or a mason's square). It may be no coincidence that all four stones occur inside the church. None are dated, but the incised outlines and Lombardic lettering suggest that they belong to the period 1600-1640. At that time the town of Bo'ness was rapidly expanding and the harbour was enlarged. Both quarriers and masons would have been in demand. The West Pier alone must have consumed great quantities of stone.



**Illus 3: 17<sup>th</sup> Century Gravestones.**

**These are numbered in the inventory from left to right 49, 46, 50, 48, 26, 59 & 47.**

The Lombardic lettering is a feature that Kinneil shares in common with its neighbouring parish church up the coast at [Airth](#) (Bailey 1999), where they date from 1580-1630, and a handful of stones in the Elphinstone aisle at Larbert are of a similar type and date. This style of lettering is present on less than half of the stones at Kinneil with shields, suggesting that its use was on the decline by 1620. It is found either in a plain recessed panel or on its own as large letters; the latter being typologically earlier. Later lettering is quite plain and is found on both of the 1648 stones. In these examples the dates are followed by sets of initials. The suggested typologies are:

Lombardic lettering	1580-1620
Shield	1600-1640
Incised border	1580-1640
Trade symbols	1600-1650

The nave of the church was first excavated around 1895 by agents of the Duke of Hamilton. Doreen Hunter of Falkirk Museum uncovered it again in 1951, and in June 2014 the author was able to re-examine it and make a full record on behalf of that Museum as part of the [Inner Forth](#)

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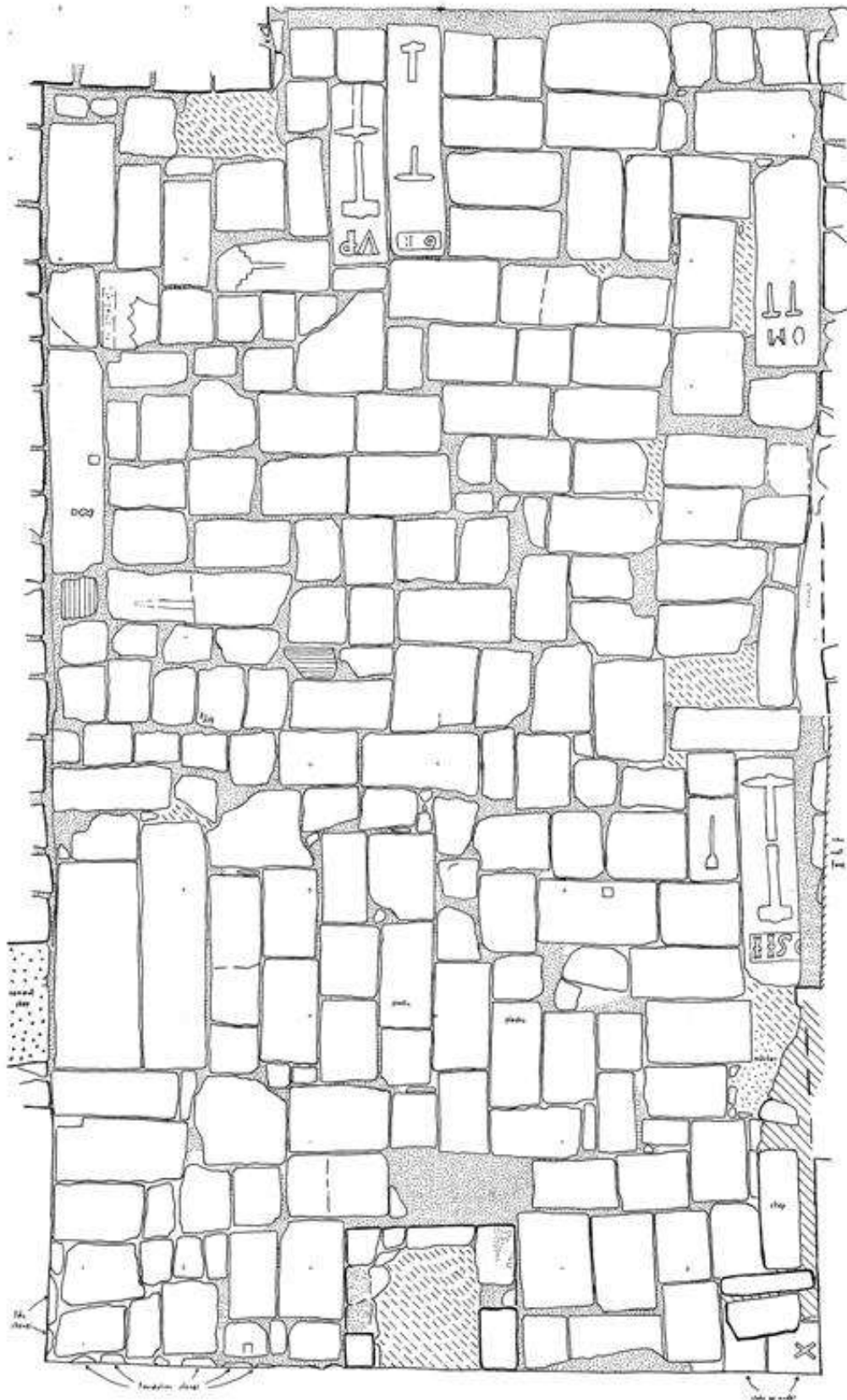
[Landscape Initiative](#). The project, undertaken with advice from [Historic Environment Scotland](#), included burying the floor under 24 tonnes of topsoil for its future preservation (given the previous intervals between exposures it should be due for excavation again around 2060!). The nave had been completely paved and seven re-used gravestones were noted, along with another three with remnants of incised lines. Most of the stones had been broken and it is probable that many of the remaining slabs were gravestones re-used upside down. Some of the gravestones had been cut down to fit gaps in the paving, such as number 46, making it abundantly clear that these were not their original resting places. They must have been gathered up from the churchyard for use in the paving at a date at least one generation removed from their original installation – more likely two. If we are correct in assigning the stones to the period 1600-1640, then we are looking at a date after 1690. The church was suppressed in 1669, but burial in the grounds would have remained contentious for some time. The church at Corbiehall became the new church of the combined parishes of [Kinneil](#) and [Bo'ness](#). Most of the churchyard there had been allocated and so the people from Kinneil were provided with plots on a southern extension, which was on a steep slope. 1691 is the traditional date for the final clearance of the village and it was probably then that the nave was floored as part of its change in use. The present day distribution of the gravestones in the churchyard makes it apparent where these “paving” stones came from. Those still in situ are concentrated to the west of the gable, with few in the area to the south of the church that is normally favoured. Removing them from this area would have made the approach on foot from Kinneil House less encumbered. The small footbridge over the Gil Burn is part of that romantic pathway.

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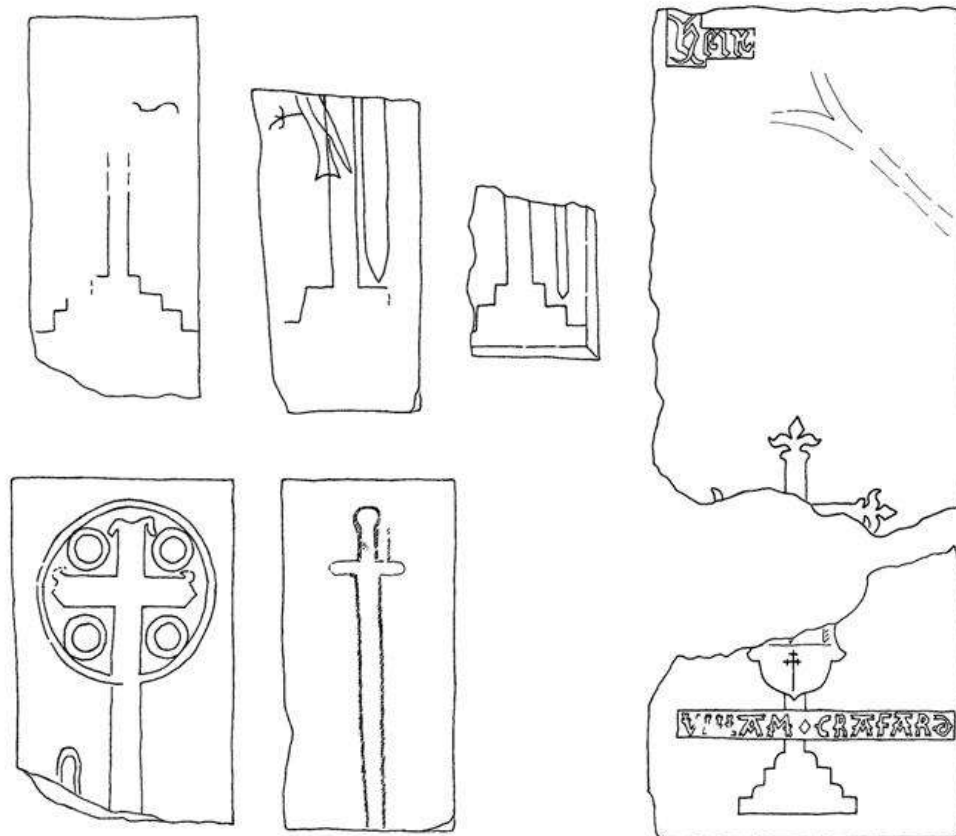


**Illus 4: Plan of the Nave showing the locations of re-used gravestones. East to the top.**

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Two of the carved stones in the nave had designs that were older than those already mentioned. One showed the base of a Calvary cross, with traces of a wheel head. The other had slightly tapering lines suggesting that it was all that remained of a sword. Both designs belong to the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and can be compared with examples from the site now preserved in the basement of Kinneil House. The slab containing the cross measured 0.92m by 0.41m; and like the other early examples was smaller than those of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These early stones were probably intended for use inside the church. All but one were found in the nave and are described in the inventory.



**Illus 5: 14-16<sup>th</sup> Century Gravestones.**

**These are numbered in the inventory from left to right 51, 57, 55, 60, 54 & 56.**

That commemorating William Crawford is larger and has Lombardic lettering. It thus forms a link between the early and late groups. It is tempting to equate him with the William Crawford of Manuel who died c1542 (Reid 1994, 85) – the crosslet on the shield linking it to the old nunnery (near Whitecross). The date would be about right, but it would be surprising if he was not buried there (Bailey 2009).

At the time that it was closed, the churchyard at Kinneil was sub-rectangular. The base of a drystone dyke can be traced running W/E to the north of the church and it is reflected by a slight break in slope. It is mirrored to the south of the church by an earth bank upon which some of the cherry trees are planted, indicating that both of these boundaries

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were in use by 1690. Cherry trees to the east presumably marked that side of the enclosure. On the west, 25m from the gable, is another bank, this time slightly curving. The ground level within this enclosure is higher than that outside, or that of the church floor, and it has been suggested that this was due to the importation of soil to create an extra tier of burial lairs.

Abandoned churchyards became mysterious locations and the superstitious tended to avoid them. Farmers who accidentally let their cattle stray into graveyards might throw the milk away rather than incur the wrath of God. There were other good reasons for not letting this happen. In 1869 several of the short-horned bullocks belonging to William Henderson of Borrostoun Mains Farm had been grazing on the Meadows when they strayed into the church enclosure at Kinneil. The next day four of the bullocks were found lying dead within the burying-ground. They were quite warm, and presented a swollen appearance. Clearly there was a curse on the graveyard, though the veterinary surgeon, who opened up one of the animals, found a quantity of yew leaves in the stomach, which he believed to be the cause of death. Two years later it was noted that the site was neglected:

*"The gravestones are scattered around it covered with debris, and in a disgraceful state of neglect. There is some dust lying there, we know, above which the sweetest and prettiest flowers should bloom, and not the hideous nettles and rank weeds which now grow and decay unchecked. The place could be made a flower-garden cheaply and easily, an oasis to mark where the dead are lying – at all events, it should not be allowed longer to remain a desert..."*

(Falkirk Herald, 3 August 1871).

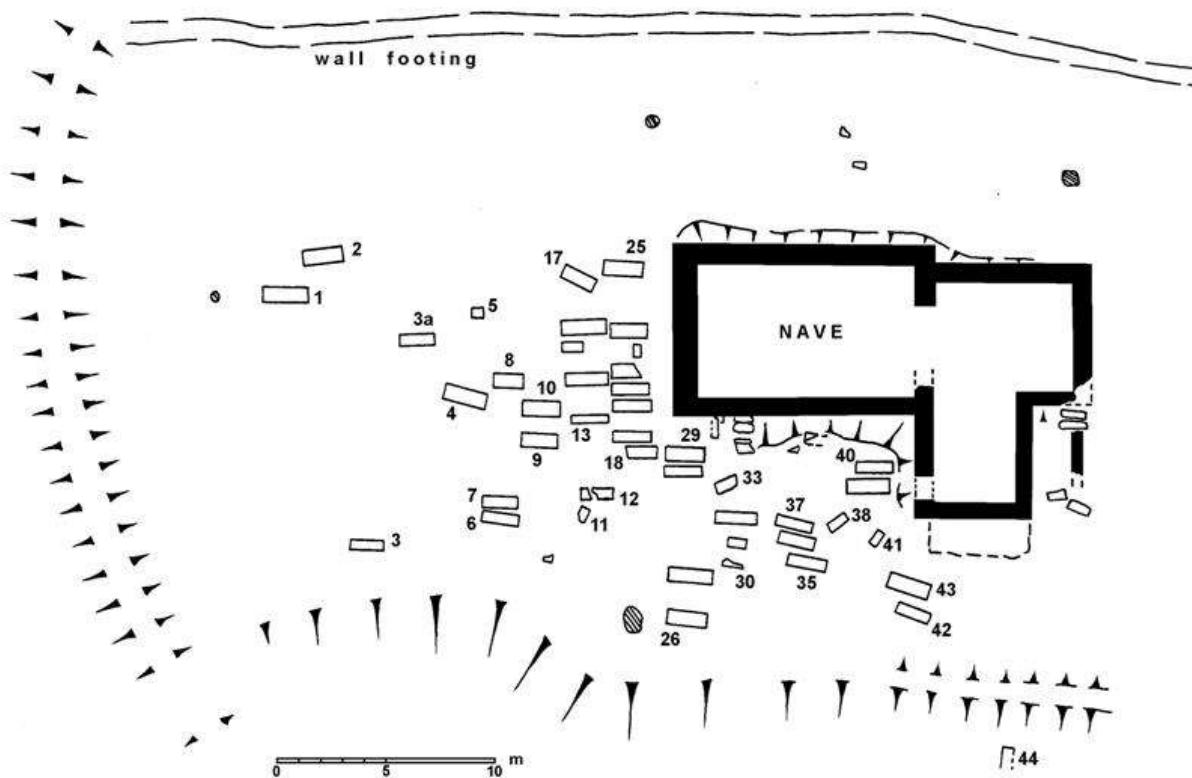
The enclosure of the 12<sup>th</sup> century parish church was inherited from that of an earlier religious establishment – probably a Celtic monastery. It was much larger and circular in shape. The surviving curving west bank formed part of this perimeter, which was fringed by a large ditch or *vallum monasterii* (seen on aerial photographs; see also the excavation reports for 1018 and 2019). That monastery would have had its own burial ground, probably in much the same area as that associated with the parish church from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The use of this small plot for 500 years of burials was only possible due to the re-use of lairs. Not surprisingly human bones can still be found on the surface.

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The 12<sup>th</sup> century stone church seems to have had a timber predecessor and it is to this that an immense 11<sup>th</sup> century rood stone belongs. The front depicts Christ on the cross and sides of the terminals of the cross shaft carry Maltese crosses. It is 1.76m tall and its back is only roughly dressed suggesting that it stood close to a wall. It is possible that it was placed in the graveyard, as would have been the recently discovered 10<sup>th</sup> century High Cross shaft found at Carriden Churchyard; if so, it may have been mounted on a stepped plinth as shown in the reconstruction drawing.



**Illus 6: Reconstruction drawing of the Kinneil Roodstone.**



**Illus 7: Plan of the Churchyard with gravestones numbered according to the inventory.**



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## INVENTORY

### A. In the Churchyard.

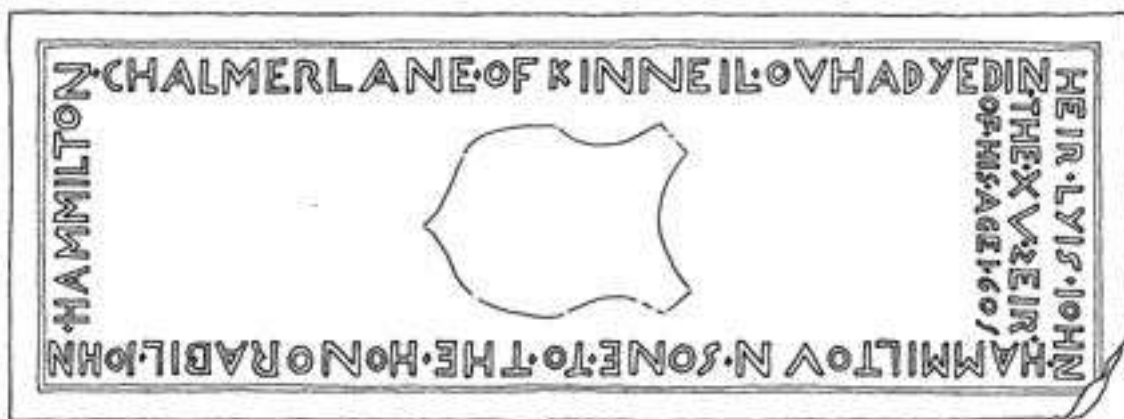
1	Flat	1.92 x 0.76m.	A[C] I- (in lobed panel)/ ---- (second lobed panel).
2	Flat	1.90 x 0.82m.	(Large anchor).
3	Flat	1.5 x 0.49m.	AL/ MP (in rectangular panels set in a shield).
3a	Flat	1.84 x 0.45m.	IE.
4	Flat	1.91 x 0.78m.	(worn rectangular panel); -- ?H (in rectangular panel).
5	Flat	+0.45 x 0.62m.	Broken
6	Flat	1.81 x 0.62m.	- M(?)/ F(?)H (in a shield).
7	Flat	1.62.x.0.59m.	-N (in a shield).
8	Flat	+129 x 0.74m	--/ M- (in a square panel set in a shield).
9	Flat	1.84 x 0.66m.	(The rough dressing on this stone suggests that it is upside down).
10	Flat	1.96 x 0.77m.	(Worn shield).
11	Flat(?)	+0.84 x 0.53m.	
12	Flat(?)	1.01 x 0.53m.	
13	Flat	1.66 x 0.46m.	AG (in rectangular panel).
14	Flat	2.00 x 0.73m.	HI BC (in shield).
15	Flat	+0.94 x 0.49m.	
16	Flat	2.02 x 0.66m.	(Worn shield).
17	Flat	+1.57 x 0.81m.	(Worn shield).
18	Flat	1.70 x 0.67m.	(Worn shield).
19	Flat	1.71 x 0.53m	T G/ - T (letters set in individual square panels in a shield).
20	Flat	1.84 x 0.63m.	(Worn shield with two rectangular panels).
21	Flat	1.76 x 0.55m.	160/ IH IG (in a shield).
22	Flat	+1.46 x 0.65m.	(Worn).
23	Flat	+0.35 x 0.48m.	Broken.
24	Flat	1.81 x 0.65m.	(Rectangular panel with two lines of lettering in a worn shield).
25	Flat	1.82 x 0.73m.	(Worn shield).
26	Flat	1.84 x 0.66m.	1627/ GH KI (rectangular panel in a shield, with large anchor below).
27	Flat	2.07 x 0.80m.	1625/ DG/ MM (in a shield).
28	Flat	1.87 x 0.76m.	(Very worn shield).
29	Flat	1.73 x 0.56m.	(Worn square panel with lettering, with baker's paddle below).
30	Flat	+1.87 x 0.50m.	(Partly buried, upper face slightly convex).
31	Flat	1.64 x 0.43m.	I.B/ A.B.
32	Flat	1.79 x 0.50.	I M C.
33	Flat(?)	+0.80 x 0.44m	(Rough face).
34	Flat	+0.79 x 0.54m	AH/ MT.
35	Flat	1.69 x 0.52m.	1648(?)/ R.I/ MW/ I.I/ H.F/ M.A.
36	Flat	1.69 x 0.69m.	1648/ IG/ IH.
37	Flat	1.88 x 0.64m.	IM(?)-- (in rectangular panel).
38	Flat	+0.98 x 0.60m.	(Rough face).
39	Flat	1.97 x 0.83x 0.20m	-63[0]/ IH/ IH ER (in square panel set in a shield).
40	Flat	1.62 x 0.58 x 0.16m.	DG/ AH (letters set in individual irregular panels in a shield).

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41	Flat	+1.45 x 0.54m.	
42	Flat	+1.55 x 0.48m.	
43	Flat	1.96 x 0.72m.	(Two rectangular panels with lettering set in a shield).
44	Flat	+0.44 x 0.55m.	(Very worn and broken).

### B. In the Nave.

45	Flat, broken fragment	+0.44x+0.40m.	(Figure X).
46	Flat	1.82 x +0.44m	PS II (hammer & pick).
47	Flat	0.66 x 0.40m.	(paddle)
48	Flat	1.66 x 0.51m.	OM (small hammer & pick).
49	Flat	1.82 x 0.43m.	O[?] I (hammer & pick).
50	Flat	1.39 x 0.44m.	VP (hammer & pick).
51	Flat	0.92 x 0.41m.	(ring headed Calvary cross with expanded arms).
52	Flat	+0.46 x c0.89m	(illegible, crown).
53	Flat	1.49 x 0.46m	(sword with wheel pommel; possibly a bird to the right).



### C. Inside Kinneil House.

54	Flat	+0.84 x 0.54m.	(ring-headed cross with a crosier at the base).
		+0.42 x 0.32m.	(the lower part of a stone showing a Calvary cross and sword blade; this was found upside down in 1952 in the south-east corner of the chancel).
55	Flat		
56	Flat	+0.85 x 0.42m.	(clumsily cut sword, with a mistake in the cutting of the hilt).
57	Flat	+0.78 x 0.41m.	(Calvary cross and blade with the lower part of a bird).
		2.00 x 0.73m.	HEIR LYIS JOHN HAMILTON N. SONE TO THE HONORABIL JOHN HAMILTON CHALMERLANE OF KINNEIL OVHADYED IN THE XV ZEIR OF HIS AGE 1605. (shield).
58	Flat		

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- 59 Flat 1.65 x 0.61m. 16 32/ D M/ K V (crown above a hammer in a shield).  
Heir/ VILIAM.CRAFARd (Floriated cross with stepped base supporting a shield, the arms a fess with a crosslet in the base and the upper part missing. In 1952 it was reported that the Lyon office knew of no Crawford arms with a crosslet in the base. Hunter suggested that it may have belonged to a cadet of Crawford of [Haining](#), and the cross would certainly be appropriate for Manuel or Whitecross).
- 60 Flat 1.91 x 0.60m.

### D. In the Chancel ?

- 61 Flat (Calvary cross, worn or badly cut, with an inverted shield. This stone was not recorded during the present survey, but was noted by Hunter 1967).

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