CORRIGENDUM – June 2014

REF : GRAVESLAB No. 161 – IT’S CURRENT LOCATION.

This corrigendum is to provide the correct situation that graveslab No. 161 is not still on the north or Gospel side of the altar in St Oran’s Chapel. However, Historic Scotland now agree with me that this honoured position is, by ritual and custom, most likely where Reginald, the Abbey founder, is buried. (See their 2014 Official Guide to Iona Abbey, p.39. And its p.17 (and Credits) also acknowledge my essential “reinterpretation of the inscription” on slab no. 150 which identifies it as Angus Og Macdonald’s, died, c.1318; see the detail in Ch. 6, this book).

I now propose that this “much worn” slab 161, which has very indistinct carvings, was uplifted from its medieval position on the north side of the altar in 1860, along with the others, and then relaid incorrectly near the door in 1921-5 by the Public Works Dept {they had no plans to show where the slabs laid originally.} There is strong photographic evidence that No. 161 is not currently in its original, medieval position (plus corner missing and cracked through the centre from being uplifted).

The mistake was made because slab no.116 and the “blank” one now apparently in its place {a non-medieval replacement?}, both appear flat and undecorated on the top surface, both have bevelled edges and only a tiny variation in shape and size. The partly incorrect 1977 RCAHMS map of the slabs in the chapel also confounds the confusion {No. 161 represented as “undecorated”, no bevel edges}.

See overleaf for a complex, diagrammatic explanation which gives the “picture” of slab 161’s key movements from 1207 to 2000. {Early draft provided to Historic Scotland, 2013. Smallest type may be hard to read.}

I have proposed since 2011 that slab No. 161 is the monument of Reginald mac Somerled, the Iona Abbey founder. But Historic Scotland have selected slab No. 191 {and I have explained with emphatic reasons why this cannot be so}. I have provided a strategy and project model for future archaeology in the chapel - a suitable framework based on the successful “Looking for Richard III” project and also using the 2012 SCARF reasons and recommendations.

The pages in the book which this corrigendum relates to are :-

• pps 32, 128, 133.

See website for further research and analysis on all the above :-

http://www.ionaabbeyandclandonald.com/1-kings--lords-of-the-isles---graveslab-attribution.html
Corrigendum 2014

ST ORAN’S CHAPEL. Slab No. 161

Reginald mac Somerled - Iona Abbey Founder.

Its key movements c.1207 to 2000. (not to scale)

[A] Why is it the right slab for founder? It is “transitional”, i.e. pre-Iona school; earlier, very “much worn”. It is the only St Oran’s slab with rare ecclesiastical power symbol – moesh, a rare pilgrim staff [like one in tomb of West Minster founder “Edward the Confessor”]. It is sandstone [usually earlier material] same as original altar base and this patron would normally be beside the altar. It is the right period, right designs ‘right’ material for Reginald mac Somerled, the founder.

[B] Why is the position beside the altar right for founder? Depositio ad sanctos; and “founder standard position” = Status – custom; contemporary Irish ritual precedent, King and son each side of altar. [C] Why isn’t the slab beside the altar? It was uplifted, with no detail or plans made, for 66 years [no ‘memory’] and then “re-instated” by Public Works in the wrong location. [D] Is there a “match”? A common denominator? 161 is the only non-tapered [rectangular] slab in the chapel. This utter “blank” beside altar “1” is extremely close to rectangular (3b). [E] Rectangular is by far the much less common shape in Reilig Odhrain. Both are bevelled edged. RCHAHS: Only a few cases appear not to be ornamented (p.210; most sandstone); St Oran’s Chapel “7 set gravestones only 2 decorated”. A ridiculous proportion not ornamented – and all in one spot, AND the least likely spot of all “Founder/Kings/Lords of Isles having undecorated slabs? Never!”, 13th century flat slabs were ornamented; no Iona School “Class” was undecorated. They are simply not medieval slabs! And far too many. Why was a totally blank ‘replica’ bevel edged? Slab 161 and the “blank” next to the altar are almost the same unique shape within the chapel, have the same edge treatment, are very close to the same size.

1. 1207: REGINALD – ABBEY FOUNDER (with his pilgrim staff?)

Depositio ad sanctos – proximity to saints relics = status.

The Gospel side - “This came to be the standard position for the burial of founding patrons.” Irish ritual precedent, eg. of contemporary O’Connor Kings; the father, the son, “Solidarity of kindred” – other side Somerled [Epistle].

2. 1860, 1st uplift. Slab (only) by Iona Club and displayed in a position N-S along north wall on “blocks” (pic 2).

8 uplift – but no plans made of each slab’s location.

Graham’s 1850 ‘record’, pl. 6, through the door is useless.

1777 uplift – 5 good condition gravestones. [3, much worn” are left.] Floor openings replaced by ordinary floor pavers, not replica slab “blanks” because they were not marking exact original graves. These 5 taken to the cloister. Without reference to neth wall. Among Qg’s, was left there, wrongly attributed, and a “ring-in” replaced it.

3a. 1921-5, No. 161 is “re-instated”, with no plans, not in original position by Public Works [under Trustees] and the paved floor realid [5th side first]. Why 161 in this high wear area with nothing to indicate it should go there? Possibly because it was the only one with a broken corner and cracked in half (done 1860?) and being sandstone and 2nd earliest was likely already very worn [later becoming “much worn”]. Not uplifted in 1977 because it was by then worse and already deemed “beyond conservation”. [Slab 161 is easily confused as indicated in my proposed ‘original position’ for it as per ‘l’ on this RCHAHS plan p.246. ARGYLL VOL. 4: : “only two decorated” of total 7; ie, 57 sealers/blanks? are “161 and 167”, ie, as denoted by a border, “set into the floor”. On this plan ‘3’, 161, is shown as an undecorated ‘blank’, ie, denoted by not having a border, eventhough it has faint decoration and has bevelled edges. It shows a border corner missing but that alone is not unusual or prescriptive. [No 185, “much worn, decorated, is on blocks, recess, 5th wall, done 1921-5.]]

NB: Question? Is there any such thing as an original undecorated, flat medieval gravestones slab of any type on Iona? “few?” RCHAHS.

3 b. 1926, REPLACEMENT BLANK REPLICA – A marker “GRAVE SLAB” {Does not appear to be medieval}.

INSERTED IN 1926 AFTER MOVEMENT 3a is complete, and after the concrete blocks (2) are destroyed. It is not worn smooth at all. It has a uniformly “rough” flat finish (so 19th c?; 1926?) slightly smaller size to fit inside the space left – not overlap on top?). These blanks exactly EXCEED number of known burials + ornamented slabs of Lords of Isles in chapel. The 5 “undecorated” so-called gravestones end up matching in number the 5 real ones removed – co-incidence???