

Kilmartin Museum re-opens the doors to over 12,000 years of history



6th September 2023

One of the key attractions in Argyll and Bute, Kilmartin Museum re-opens following a period of vital redevelopment work. A custodian of the artefacts that come from Kilmartin Glen, one of Scotland's richest prehistoric landscapes, the Museum houses a collection with a Nationally Significant status, offering visitors of all ages a fascinating insight into the lives of our ancestors inhabiting the area over the last 12,000 years.

Sunday, 3 September 2023 marks the re-opening of Kilmartin Museum, revealing its incredible renovation which includes a much larger exhibition space, a stunning learning space which can be used to deliver and participate in cultural and educational activities, new galleries housing temporary art exhibitions, laboratories in which to process new finds and acquisitions and a state of the art collection store.

The new Museum building has been designed by **Reiach and Hall Architects**, highlighting its unique position which celebrates the immediate connection between the artefact collection and its surrounding prehistoric landscape.

The re-opening also marks the moment when many of the recently recognised **Nationally Significant Collection** of over 11,000 prehistoric artefacts will be on display for the first time. The Museum showcases Argyll and Bute's rich archaeological heritage, bringing alive **over 12,000 years of history in the stunning surrounding Kilmartin Glen through stories, visualisations and artefacts.**

Some of the collection highlights include:

- the **remains of a Bronze Age woman** found in Kilmartin Glen, displayed alongside a reconstruction of her face, allowing visitors to look into the eyes of their ancestor;
- **Mesolithic flint core**, 12,000 years old, one of few artefacts representing some of the first evidence of human presence in Kilmartin Glen;
- **Axe heads**, possibly buried as part of a ceremony, one has stylistic qualities the are traditionally Irish and the other typically Scottish;
- **Three Beaker pots**, from a grave of a person who originated on the continent.

The Museum also showcases over 60 loans from National Museums Scotland including:

- **The Poltalloch jet necklace** – a piece of internationally important Bronze Age jewellery from Kilmartin Glen;
- The stunning **Glebe Cairn vessel**, displayed with a view towards the Bronze Age cairn it was found in;

Several more objects are **on loan from the British Museum**.

Within a stone's throw of the Museum, visitors are able to enjoy several sites offering a fascinating insight into prehistoric times, including:

Kilmichael Glassary Rock Art: 5,000-year-old rock art featuring motifs such as cup and ring marks. Similar carvings are observed in other rock art sites in Kilmartin: Cairnbaan and Achnabreck. The Kilmichael Glassary site also features several unusual keyhole-shaped carvings.

'Linear cemetery': a 2km long line of five cairns, dating about 5,000 to 3,500 years ago. It includes – Nether Largie Mid Cairn, the high-status burial monument featuring the rare axe-head carvings found in one of the cairn's two cists. The carvings suggest this was the burial place of a high-status individual (since axes are thought to be indicators of wealth);

Nether Largie North, Nether Largie South Cairn and Glebe Cairn. The Glebe Cairn is thought to contain at its centre two concentric rings of boulders, with a burial cist placed in the centre.

Ri Cruin, the southernmost point of the prehistoric 'linear cemetery' which was extensively damaged in the 1700s and 1800s.

Temple Wood Stone Circle: a complex ritual and funerary site which was in use for more than 2,000 years (before 3000 BC and continued into the Bronze Age, ending about 1000 BC).

It features 13 standing stones, one of them marked with a spiral which is a motif closely paralleled in Irish passage-grave art.

The Glen is also home to one of Scotland's most important early medieval sites – Dunadd Fort. It rises proudly from the Moine Mhòr – the 'great moss' – in the southern end of Kilmartin Glen. It was home to a fort 2,000 years ago, and a royal power centre of Gaelic kings in the 500s to 800s AD.

The museum's curators share fresh insights, from the newly discovered techniques used to create one of **Europe's largest concentrations of prehistoric rock art** to revealing the story of a **Neolithic Cursus** – and its staggering destruction which involved burning of nearly 400 oak trees at the point where humans started to make their impact on the landscape known.

Two galleries for special exhibitions have been added to the Museum, and **locally based artist Lizzie Rose** takes the Cursus as the inspiration for her new exhibition **Carbon Legacy**. Reflecting the need for our collective action against climate crisis, Carbon Legacy is an installation which includes nearly 400 oak tree seedlings which will later be planted in a collaborative action, creating a living monument in Kilmartin Glen near the original site of Neolithic Cursus.

Museum Collections will also present artworks of four other local artists who were commissioned by the Museum to create work to celebrate the opening of the Museum. These include **painter Margaret Ker**, **weaver Louise Oppenheimer**, **painter Jae Ferguson working with clay and charcoal** and **multi-art form artist Alice Strange**.

Dr Sharon Webb, Museum Director and Curator said: “We’re so excited to be opening the new museum finally after many challenges, including the global pandemic. Kilmartin Glen’s archaeological landscape and the artefacts found here are internationally significant, and it’s been a privilege to have been part of the team telling their story in the new exhibition. We’ve been able to display many more of our own collections, most of which are recognised as Nationally Significant. The new museum facilities also mean that we can welcome visitors, undertake educational activities and research into this amazing legacy. Importantly, the new building also allows us to professionally curate our own archaeological collections and those of Argyll and Bute Council which we also care for.”

Dr Matthew Knight, Senior Curator of Prehistory – Bronze Age Collections at National Museums Scotland, said: “We’re delighted to have been able to support the opening of the new Kilmartin Museum through the loan of over 60 objects as well as a range of other work. The displays include several of the most significant prehistoric and early medieval artefacts from Scotland. We hope that the new museum will attract many visitors and inspire them to visit some of the country’s most important and attractive archaeological sites.”

Caroline Clark, Director for Scotland, The National Lottery Heritage Fund said: “Kilmartin Museum has a world class collection in a very special location we are very proud to have supported this redevelopment to deliver a beautiful venue to house it and make it more accessible for visitors to enjoy.

“At the heart of the redevelopment has been strengthening further the close ties between the museum, landscape, ancient monuments and the communities of Kilmartin Glen. It is creating new opportunities for people, businesses and a wider range of partners to explore, enjoy and share the heritage of this magical part of Argyll with each other and with visitors. We believe it will support sustainable but transformative change to deliver wider benefits for people and place.”