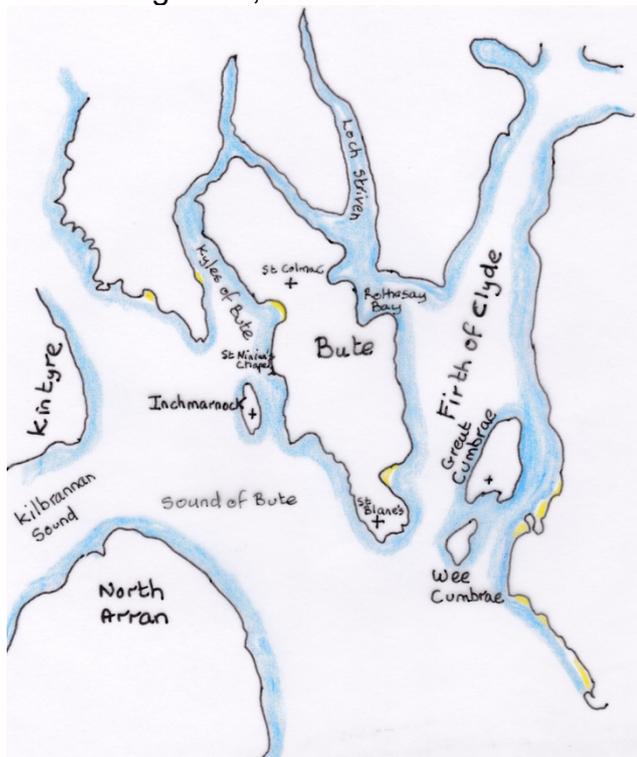


## Inchmarnock: beginning isolation

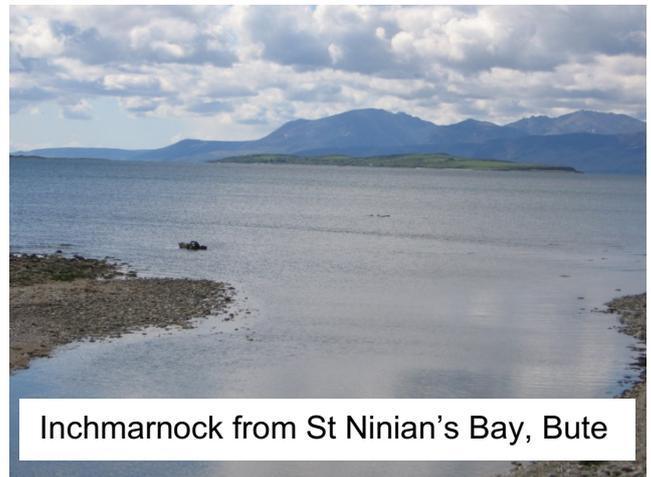
Inchmarnock, or the 'The Inch' as it is locally known, lies low in the Firth of Clyde, a satellite off the west coast of its better-known neighbour, Bute.



Once divided into three farms, in recent years it has been managed as one unit raising a fine herd of organically-reared highland cows. Folk-lore memory relates that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bute's nuisance-causing drinkers were shipped off to sober-up in isolation, when The Inch gained the tag, 'Drunkards Island'. I imagine that many so exiled and isolated, felt discombobulated, nursing a hangover and deep resentment that there was no prospect in sight of returning to normal life.

The centre of the isle houses the sparse remains of a mid-medieval chapel, within which lies, as if forgotten, an early-medieval cross.

Other early crosses, including the fine Inchmarnock Cross, have been removed, with most now treasured in Bute's Museum. The number and quality of crosses coupled with the dedication of the isle to St Marnock, a contemporary of St Columba, suggests that the site was once an early medieval monastic or eremitic retreat, perhaps from St Blane's on neighbouring Bute.



I wonder how those who chose to self-isolate on The Inch for a moment in time felt? Did a period of relative solitude provide a measure of release from some of the demands of life, and an opportunity to immerse oneself in prayer and scripture?

I visited Inchmarnock on a bright May day, and found my way up a hedge-blossom lined lane to an opening where the chapel once stood.



There, lying amidst encroaching grass, was the ancient weather-worn cross slab.

I knelt down, and traced my finger around the cross.

It felt a holy moment at a sacred site.

In that island wilderness, a place of isolation, I felt a connection across a millennia and more before me. The moment grounded me, and has stayed with me.

Today, as households start-out self-isolating, I wonder what Marnock and his contemporaries may teach? Perhaps the gift of letting go, of resting for a period, of seeking in silence, and knowing God.

As the palmist wrote, be still and know that I am God, Psalm 46.10.