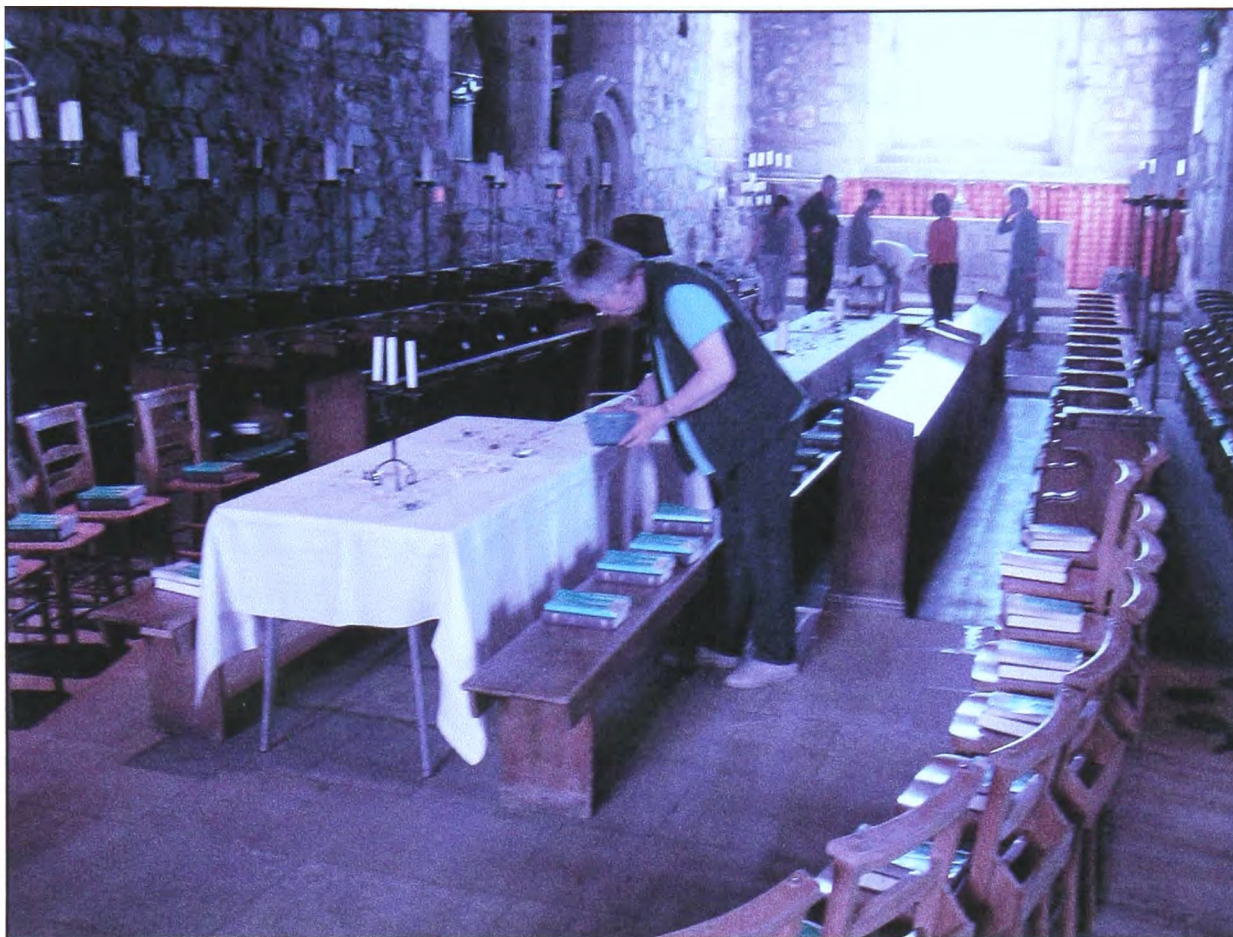


Living the Liminal: Facilitating Pilgrimage on the Isle of Iona, Scotland



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This thesis consists of approximately 100,000 words
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THESIS ABSTRACT

‘Living the Liminal: Facilitating Pilgrimage on the Isle of Iona, Scotland’

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Michelle Chew, Regent’s Park College

This thesis spotlights a social group—pilgrimage site staff—heretofore neglected in anthropological research. The main subjects are the Resident Group (‘ressies’) working at the Iona Community’s guest centres. Based on an accumulative 16-month fieldwork, the ethnographic evidence challenges the assumptions that pilgrims’ ‘sacred’ encounters are unmediated, that site staff passively acquiesce with the dominant ideology, and that the production of pilgrimage experience is unproblematic. Building on existing paradigms of pilgrimage as ‘contested’, ‘movement’-oriented, and a form of ‘practice’, the Turners’ classic view of pilgrimage as *rite de passage* is deployed to show that ‘place’ and ‘landscape’ are key themes in people’s understanding of and engagement with this ancient pilgrimage isle today.

Part I lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork and introduces the research locale, locating it within recent Celtic revivalisms. It also addresses how the Iona Community (ressies’ employers) situate their religio-political vision within the wider sociological and theological contexts of contemporary British Christianity.

Part II recounts the historical and contemporary formulations of Iona pilgrimage and tourism. A Heideggerian perspective of ‘dwelling’ illuminates how devotees appropriate Iona’s ‘sacred’ geography as a resource for personal revelation and self-transformation. Ethnographic accounts of visitors’ ‘Iona experience’ are provided as a comparative foil to the site staff who enable this distinctive pilgrimage encounter.

Part III explores ressie’s motivations, discourses, and experiences at Iona as a locus of ‘holistic’ work (and worship). It elucidates their complex relationship with the Iona Community and how ressie’s contest their idealised corporate identity. Van Gennep’s concept of ‘liminality’ and Ardener’s ‘paradox of remote places’ emerge as central themes in analysing ressie’s ‘betwixt and between’ ‘selves’. An investigation of the social and ideological structures of the Resident Group setup as a ‘total institution’ further reveals the impact of the ‘leaving Iona’ rhetoric and reality upon ressie’s post-Iona lives.

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Introduction: The Research Question

Making Visible the ‘Invisible’

In the study of pilgrimage, anthropologists have tended to focus on the experience of pilgrims and their devotions. Little attention has been given to those who organise and facilitate pilgrimage for others. In counterpoint to the classic question, ‘What is pilgrimage like for the *pilgrims*?’ this thesis instead asks, ‘What is pilgrimage like for the *site staff*?’.

On one side are the pilgrims, the ‘consumers’ of pilgrimage experience, so to speak, while on the other are the people who work behind-the-scenes to ‘produce’ or make possible pilgrims’ encounters with the ‘sacred’.¹ The latter category may comprise members of the local population, religious élite or ritual specialists (e.g., nuns, priests), and/or lay persons such as guides and helpers (e.g., Hospitallers at Lourdes). They may provide pilgrims with spiritually oriented succour or essential services like transport, lodgings, food and drink, legal advice, and healthcare (see Turner & Turner 1978: 22; Turner 1974), but they are largely taken for granted by pilgrims as well as by pilgrimage researchers. For instance, why do people choose to be wardens for the pilgrims’ refuges along the Camino de Santiago? What do the employees hired to operate the Youth Village’s restaurant and accommodation at Lourdes feel about their work and the pilgrims they serve?

Very few studies explore how shrine organisers or site staff construct their own identities—individually and collectively—vis á vis the pilgrims and other social groups, or how staff themselves engage with the ‘sacred’ place. It is seldom asked how staff represent and resist, embody and contest the ideologies associated with a place of pilgrimage, for it is almost always assumed that their role as ‘worker’ at the site means acquiescence with the

¹ The use of the terms ‘consumer’ and ‘producer’ is intentional—they imply an economic relationship between staff and pilgrims, as well as the aspect of ‘theatre’ or ‘performance’ in the way church services and other pilgrimage-related events are ‘produced’ by staff for an ‘audience’ of pilgrims. These issues will be explored in later chapters.

dominant discourse. Pilgrimage staff are the ‘invisible other’ which this dissertation seeks to make visible.

My research intends to fill this gap in the literature by exploring how one group of staff—the Iona Community’s Resident Group—serve as crucial agents in the ‘pilgrimage experience’ at the Inner Hebridean isle of Iona, the legendary ‘cradle of Christianity’ in Britain. Visitors’ main impressions of the ‘holy’ island arise from their experiences at the restored Abbey. For several decades, the Resident Group employed by the Iona Community—a dispersed, ecumenical Christian organisation—have been the primary caretakers and mediators based at Iona Abbey. The island’s religious reputation, current and historical, is what attracts pilgrims and shapes their expectations and experiences of the place. Although Historic Scotland took over conservation management of the Abbey in 2000, the Resident Group continue to have a vital presence there. They work daily to provide a meaningful and memorable ‘Iona experience’ for those who have taken the long, often arduous journey from as far away as New Zealand or Africa. Many visitors view the Resident Group as a model community living an ideal life, continuing the tradition of religious life on Iona in this secular, ‘(post)modern’ era.

Formulating Pilgrimage: A Brief Genealogy²

Pilgrimage has long inspired intellectual curiosity. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century was already debating about the meanings attached to places of pilgrimage (Williams 2003: 31). However, initial anthropological ventures into the field were scant (e.g., Robertson Smith’s (1899/1907) *Religion of the Semites*, Hertz’s (1913/1983) study of St Besse). In 1934, H. M. Gillet explored the significance of the Walsingham pilgrimage shrine. In 1958,

² Because of space constraints and as the pilgrimage literature has been capably covered by numerous authors (e.g., Dubisch 1995; Badone & Roseman 2004), I will give only a brief summary here.

Eric Wolf studied the Virgin of Guadalupe as a Mexican national symbol. Early anthropological research tended to account for pilgrimage in Durkheimian terms. If God is society worshipping itself, then pilgrimage is one way in which that collective consciousness is created and its ideals reinforced. From this strict functionalist viewpoint, pilgrimages like Durkheim's 'great religious festival' operate as 'social unifier and moral regenerator' (Eade & Sallnow 1991: 3).

An alternative approach was devised when Victor and Edith Turner (1969, 1974, 1978) published their seminal works on pilgrimage, calling attention to its symbolic and social processes as a *rite de passage*, a term taken from Arnold van Gennep (1908/1960). Stimulated by the Turners' texts, the study of pilgrimage began to catch like wildfire. Previous works (e.g., Vidyarthi 1961; Bhardwaj 1973), alongside a growing list of ethnographies and articles—spanning across different religious traditions and venerated sites (Neville 1987; Sallnow 1987, 1991; Naquin & Yu 1992)—began to be noticed within mainstream anthropology. For the most part, these were reactions to the Turners' structuralist paradigm.

In 1991, however, Eade and Sallnow offered a way to transcend the prevailing dichotomous view of pilgrimage as 'either supporting or subverting the established social order' by asserting that pilgrimage is instead 'a realm of competing discourses' (Eade & Sallnow 1991: 5). They critique the functionalist and structuralist theories to argue for 'the essential heterogeneity of the pilgrimage process' (*ibid.*: 2). Opposing a reductionist approach, Eade and Sallnow advocate investigating each pilgrimage 'in terms of its particular social context and its "historically and culturally specific behaviors and meanings"...' (Badone & Roseman 2004: 4). Furthermore, for Christian pilgrimage at least, they propose that analysis should be broadened from the traditional place-centred viewpoint to take into account the three coordinates of 'place-person-text'. Many works have since

springboarded from this triadic formulation of pilgrimage. This shift is also significant in that it opens up possibilities for exploring how ‘persons’ *other* than the pilgrims, such as local residents and shrine workers, perceive and participate in the pilgrimage process.

In 1992, Alan Morinis demonstrated the complexities of organising and understanding pilgrimage. ‘Journeying’ for him is nevertheless a key defining feature of the phenomenon (Morinis 1992: 3). Soon after, Coleman and Elsner (1995: 206) continued this theme by emphasising ‘movement’ as a central feature that distinguishes pilgrimage from other forms of religious ritual. By this time, studies on pilgrimage and tourism were increasingly converging. In the late 1970s, the Turners (1978: 20) had already observed that: ‘A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist’. Indeed, tourism is often portrayed as ‘secular pilgrimage’ and ‘...rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism, or pilgrims and tourists, no longer seem tenable in the shifting world of postmodern travel’ (Badone & Roseman 2004: 2). This common theme of ‘movement’ underpinning both pilgrimage and touristic activities has served to broaden the academic discourse and semantic fields within which they can be understood (see Coleman & Eade 2004: 1–25; Badone & Roseman 2004). No longer strictly confined to the realms of the ‘exceptional’ and the ‘religious’, the study of pilgrimage must also take into account other, more quotidian or secular practices previously neglected.

The fact that anthropologists have generally overlooked such pilgrimage ‘others’ as site staff—whose ordinary, everyday work makes possible pilgrims’ extraordinary encounters with the ‘sacred’—is suggestive of the analytical models with which they are working.

Pilgrimage ‘Others’

Research on both pilgrimage and tourism has focused primarily on the traveler: the pilgrim and the tourist, respectively. Pilgrims and tourists are temporary visitors to particular sites which are actually home to surrounding communities. Whether centred on place, place-person-text, or movement, pilgrimage studies have tended to prioritise the journeying pilgrims over the (apparently) fixed, emplaced locals.³ Furthermore, pilgrimage shrines do not exist in isolation, but are part of a wider social network of communities at various levels: global, national, regional, and local—all of which are organised and managed by groups of people with particular skills, agendas, discourses, and experiences of the place (e.g., Vidyarthi 1961). In 1978, Turner and Turner (1978: 22, see also 25–6) described the ‘environment’ counterpart to their pilgrimage ‘organism’ as:

...the network of mundane ‘servicing mechanisms’—markets, hospices, hospitals, military supports, legal devices..., systems of communication and transportation, and so on....

Yet the social groups who occupy this network ‘environment’ have largely remained hidden from the anthropological gaze. In the early 1990s, John Eade (1991) pointed out this area of academic negligence and Naquin and Yü (1992: 28) raise the issue in reference to Chinese pilgrimage. Fifteen years later, there are still only a handful of relevant publications. I will summarise the most notable and salient contributions.

Michael Sallnow’s Andean Shrine Élites

Sallnow (1987), in his ethnography *Pilgrims of the Andes*, examines the religious landscape of the Andes vis-à-vis the cults of shrines of Christ and the Virgin scattered across the Cusco

³ ‘Hosts’ or local residents, after all, also travel and become visitors—pilgrims, tourists, or otherwise—elsewhere (see also Turner 1974: 191).

region. His analysis shows how peasant pilgrims use the sacred terrain as an ongoing symbolic resource to recover and redefine their ethnic identities in a politically fraught world. Pilgrimage becomes, for different groups, a way of articulating and enacting competing interests and goals. Understanding the Andean shrine organisers' actions and attitudes sheds light on this complex contestation for power. Devotees vie for ethnic superiority, even while shrine élites—clergy and laity—seek to override and exploit the parochial pilgrims for their own political ends. So while clerical authority is imposed upon the peasantry, the pilgrims are simultaneously involved in reconstructing an indigenous, nonimperial realm of social relations and identity.

In a later work, Sallnow (1991) elaborated upon this confrontation between priest and pilgrim. At one Catholic shrine he investigates, pilgrims continue to perform customary ritual dances against clerical censure. The priests are also powerless to prevent 'popular' practices of self-flagellation amongst pilgrims. On the flip side, although at some shrines the lay brotherhood have the right to inflict penitential ceremonial whippings on pilgrims, many disapprove of doing so. As Sallnow (1987: 268) earlier concluded, 'To identify the spirit of *communitas* in such phenomena would be sanguine, to say the least'. Although Sallnow's analysis capably engages with the roles of 'shrine custodians' and 'ritual specialists', their discourses and practices, his project is fundamentally based on seeing things from the pilgrim's viewpoint.

'Contesting the Sacred': Communitas Confounded

Eade and Sallnow's (1991) pivotal book *Contesting the Sacred* charts a few scholars' brief attention to residents and staff at pilgrimage sites, the most pertinent being John Eade's (1991) 'Order and Power at Lourdes'. Eade discusses the organisation of the groups of *brancadier* staff (lay helpers and Hospitallers) and explores the ways in which helpers and

pilgrims conflict over official practices and discourses. Subverting shrine officials' remit to keep discipline and order, pilgrims pursue their own strategies to shape their ritual practices. For instance, at the baths, the Hospitallers struggle to maintain a prayerful atmosphere and to keep areas clear and queues orderly; pilgrims, however, talk amongst themselves to alleviate tension and uncertainty and some even present 'documentation' claiming to allow them direct access to the baths. Officials, especially those holding lower positions, occasionally side with the pilgrims. Nonetheless, pilgrims are forced to conform—their freedom is, on the whole, tightly contained by the strict regulations and staff's imposition of authority. Eade's study unveils the elaborate web of discord lurking beneath the veneer of pilgrimage as *communitas*. He takes seriously how officials as 'shrine custodians' mediate pilgrims' experiences of the sacred. However, Eade's analysis just falls short of giving us an insider's view of what motivates staff to offer their time and services, what compels *them* to abide by the official rules and procedures, and what are *their* experiences at the shrine. Can *brancadiers* also be considered 'pilgrims'? Does their stint at Lourdes transform their lives, like it supposedly does the pilgrims'?

Richard Stirrat's (1991) study on Sinhala Catholic pilgrimage delineates how unorthodox forms of religious expression have flourished outside the declining authority of the institutional Church. Stirrat highlights devotees' principal focus on charismatic individuals as new sources of sacred power. Advantaged by mobility, it is easier for these holy men—seen as personalising the divine—to elude the Church's control. Stirrat (*ibid.*: 131) proposes that 'there was a congruence between the secular polity and the world of the gods', where the old bureaucratic systems of stratified religion and of a 'patrimonial state' were giving way. Instead, modern Sri Lankans, living in a world of electoral politics, identify with MPs who personalise the state. Similarly, contemporary devotees adulate the holy men as individuals, independent of the encompassing structure of the Church.

However, we learn little by way of the motivations and reactions of the former official shrine clergy and laity and of the perspectives and intentions of these new ‘shrine custodians’ who embody the sacred. How do *they* articulate the changes taking place in the religio-political landscape of their homeland?

In his contribution, Christopher McKevitt (1991) articulates how the sacred locale of San Giovanni has become inhabited by foreigners and controlled by secular and church organisations with little regard for the resident townspeople’s interests: ‘The town has been entirely marginalized by the holy place it spawned’ (McKevitt 1991: 13). McKevitt’s work is one of the first anthropological studies on the impact on and reaction of local people at a pilgrimage site (*ibid.*: 95). For the townspeople, their patron saint Padre Pio was more than a religious figure; he was also an advocate for important secular benefits, political and material, such as the hospital he founded. Residents’ experiences of their sacred locale is very different from those of pilgrims: local Sangiovanni regard devotees’ exaggerated religiosity as fanatical; they resent having their beloved patron saint appropriated in such overly pious ways; and they dissociate themselves from what goes on at the shrine. In turn, the devotees loathe and are suspicious of the Sangiovanni, seeing them, within a religious idiom, as aligned with the evil, sinful world. The dividing line, in this case, is not simply between residents and pilgrims *per se* but between local Sangiovanni and *all* devotees, both visitors and permanent settlers. However, other groups also vie with one another for ‘ownership’ of Pio’s legacy, spiritual and material. The Capuchin friars control the shrine and intensely promote special devotion to Pio. Profit-seeking outsiders have moved to San Giovanni to capitalise on the growing tourist industry. Political controversy was rife over the hospital that Pio started for the poor but is now owned and run by the Vatican: ‘The institution dominates the town both physically and economically, but its affairs are [largely] secret to ordinary folk in the town’ (*ibid.*: 88).

Not only does McKevitt effectively illuminate the views and experiences of an often-overlooked local community, but his work also alerts us to the fact that categories such as ‘shrine organisers’, ‘shrine custodians’, and ‘ritual specialists’ are not synonymous and neither are ‘local residents’ all the same. Interesting comparisons will be drawn between San Giovennesi and Iona’s own intricate web of communities.

Orthodox Monasticism at Mt Athos: A Reference Point for Iona

So far, the pilgrimage literature has skirted around the role of ‘shrine staff’. However, René Góthoni’s (1993) ethnography hits the nail squarely on the head. His fieldwork amongst an Eastern Orthodox monastic brotherhood on Mt Athos seeks to articulate pilgrimage experience from a ‘staff person’s’ standpoint—a refreshing approach which breaks the mould of privileging the pilgrims and their devotions.

In a supposed ‘postmodern’, ‘post-Christian’ world, Góthoni seeks to understand why monastic life on Athos has revived since 1972. He explains that young men, despairing of ‘secularisation’ within and without the Greek Church, are inspired by a counter-cultural devotion to fulfill a deeper calling in life. Skepticism about the Church, as well as the overall decline of religious brotherhoods, has limited the options and (ironically) led many youths to choose a monastic life at Athos. The reputation of the place and the hermits’ renown also draw men with interest in ‘things of the spirit’. New spiritual centres have sprung up at Athos where old monasteries used to be located. Improved communication between laity and monks has produced a ‘pro-monastic atmosphere and greater appreciation of the tradition/spiritual heritage of the Holy Mountain’ (*ibid.*: 33). Rapid expansion of tourism has driven monks at older monastery sites to seek greater seclusion and easier travel has increased visitor numbers and heightened interest in monastic life—‘...after all, most of the [Athonite] monks came originally as visitors, pilgrims or tourists (*ibid.*).

The monastic life of the Athonites, their social structure and daily routines, is set apart from the outside, secular world. For instance, time is demarcated by the Julian, not Gregorian, calendar and adjusts to the rhythm of the changing seasons. Alongside prayer, acts of obedience, and the daily offices (following the Byzantine schedule), the monks engage in tasks and manual jobs, including woodcutting, preparing food, cleaning, harvesting, painting icons, etc. Today, however, they also cater to the rising numbers of pilgrims and visitors touring the monasteries from Easter to the end of October. Guests nowadays are expected to stay only one night, and a monastery's daily programme carries on regardless of visitors who may participate in some services and at meals. In marked contrast, the Iona Community's paying guests engage in a full, six-day programme (e.g., workshops, services, meals, chores) on the island facilitated by the Resident Group.

Góthoni's study describes a highly structured religious brotherhood within a long-standing Orthodox tradition. Tourism now flourishes alongside pilgrimage practices and religious revivalism, which all contribute certain pressures and expectations. Góthoni's ethnography is one of the first comprehensive attempts to scrutinise pilgrimage from the other side of the lens, uncovering the Athonites' motivations, organisations, and way of life. It provides many helpful reference points for my own research, in particular: (1) the idealisation of 'living in community'; (2) the tough day-to-day realities in contrast to outsiders' expectations of a placid, sacrosanct monkish life; and (3) the question of whether a cloistered life is a way of escaping from or engaging with the world. I will elaborate on these three main points in subsequent chapters.

Some Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

Except for the few aforementioned relevant works, the positioning of site staff as 'other' is reflected in their near absence within the pilgrimage literature. The heavy focus on pilgrims

and their devotions has methodological and theoretical considerations. In general, pilgrims have been more easily accessible to researchers than staff, such as clergy or other authority figures, at traditional pilgrimage sites. Religious élites at sites governed by an Establishment Church tend to be less open to outside scrutiny. In comparison, talking with strangers about themselves is natural and intrinsic to many pilgrims' experiences of pilgrimage.

Conducting research amongst staff such as monks and nuns or priests may also be highly circumscribed given the nature of monastic or ecclesiastical ways of life. Despite early anthropological interest in Christian forms of worship (e.g., Hubert & Mauss 1898/1964; Mauss 1909/2003; Hertz 1913/1983) and the question of belief (e.g., Tylor 1958; Needham 1972; Ruel 1982),⁴ it seems curious that many contemporary treatises on traditional religious life are theological, historical, or devotional, with few ethnographic exceptions (e.g., Williams 1975; Gothóni 1993; also SanGiovanni 1978). Without the requisite qualifications for membership, it may be difficult to get an 'insider's view' of a religious community or as a ritual specialist (SanGiovanni 1978: 20). One of this thesis' objectives is to discover ethnographic insights gleaned from *leading* and *enabling* pilgrimage in order to complement analyses by fieldworkers who prioritise the pilgrims' vantage point.

Traditional pilgrimage sites such as Mt Athos have tended to be staffed by religious, where the ministry of hospitality is extended to visitors as a 'by-product' of the order's life together. In other words, these traditional 'staff communities' of monks and nuns do not exist solely for receiving visitors and guests. Although the ministry of hospitality is still important to many religious orders, since the Reformation direct economic dependence on

⁴ Much anthropological literature on Christianity has also focused on its impact on indigenous peoples in colonial contexts (e.g., James & Johnson 1988).

pilgrims has generally declined. In the early half of the 20th century, a fresh generation of intentional communities in Britain began to emerge. These lay, ecumenical, or ‘alternative’ groups proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s and continue to be popular today. Many are residential communities catering specifically for retreats, conferences, therapy, and other spiritually oriented events. For instance, the Community of Aidan and Hilda, founded by an Anglican priest in the 1980s, has a house on Lindisfarne that offers guests organised programmes and retreats with Celtic themes. Lee Abbey in Devon, a Christian movement dating back to 1945, offers youth camps, ‘getaways’, silent retreats, self-catering units, church group programmes, and family holidays. While typically spearheaded by an ordained minister, the staff who run such centres of hospitality are generally ordinary, lay people whose daily work involves quotidian tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and gardening. Perhaps because of its relatively recent origins, this aspect of ‘labour’—and its economic corollaries—at religious/pilgrimage sites has been understudied thus far. Yet these workers are responsible for creating the very environment necessary for pilgrims to focus on their devotions; more than that, staff also may mediate pilgrims’ actual experiences of the ‘sacred’. Pilgrimage staff thus are crucial agents in the setting up of the material and spiritual conditions essential for pilgrims to attend to their business with ease.

The issue of *human* mediation is important. Theoretically, the ‘invisibility’ of staff in the literature reflects and reinforces the perception that sacred sites somehow provide more immediate or direct access to the ‘divine’—this is commonly the expectant pilgrim’s aspiration. It is often used to justify why pilgrims undertake long, arduous journeys for the sake of reaching a special, more holy place than is attainable in ordinary life. God is seen as somehow more present, more discernible at pilgrimage sites, as evidenced by the miracles, special rituals, and other extraordinary experiences pilgrims hope to encounter there. At holy sites, ultimate ‘Otherness’ seems just within reach. The paradigmatic pilgrim basks in

the ‘basic elements and structures of his faith in their *unshielded*, virgin radiance’ (Turner & Turner 1978: 15, italics added), where human mediation seems unnecessary. The mundane things of everyday life, such as who makes their beds, cleans the toilets, or washes up after them, may thus fade from pilgrims’ consciousness or care.⁵

Given the importance of pilgrimage sites and the vested interests in maintaining them, however, sacred places might actually be even *more* mediated than pilgrims’ ordinary, local churches. It would be tempting, though, to think that ritual experts at pilgrimage sites are the only staff who *really* mediate the ‘sacred’; but whose view does this reflect, or rather, privilege? The pilgrims? The ritual specialists? Perhaps the current literature too narrowly defines what constitutes the ‘sacred’ by not taking into account those ‘unseen’ staff who perform apparently non-religious yet vital services for pilgrims. How staff believe they contribute to others’ pilgrimage experience and how they themselves experience the ‘sacred’, through their work, are questions not raised by previous studies. This thesis seeks to rectify site workers’ assumed secondary status in the current literature.

The ethnographic and analytical neglect of those working behind-the-scenes has also contributed to an emphasis on the performance of formal rituals over what happens ‘backstage’—all the preparation, rehearsals, and close ‘stage’ management necessary to create for pilgrims an apparently seamless and coherent experience of the ‘sacred’. Such a paradigm prioritises the pilgrims as ‘consumers’ or participants over the staff who ‘produce’ the event, as if the production or mediation of pilgrimage is itself unproblematic. This view obscures the reality that shrine workers, too, have an equally valid experience of pilgrimage or of ‘the sacred’ through their ‘profane’ activities. For instance, how do the scripted ‘dramas’ enacted for a public audience compare and interact with the ‘dramas’ in staff’s private lives?

⁵ Or take on heightened religious significance for pilgrims who may desire a ‘special spirituality’ for

The prevailing tendency to privilege pilgrims' point of view has also served to reify pilgrimage through its separation from the wider social order and to reinforce its difference from 'normal' life. The normative pilgrimage pattern entails travel to a distant place or 'peripheral locations' (Turner 1974) in search of transformative encounters with an 'Other'. However, not only do people visit local shrines (e.g., medieval English pilgrims, see Coleman & Eade 2004: 13) but sacred centres, wherever they are located, also are home to other social groups for whom pilgrimage practices are part of their everyday lives. Following Coleman and Eade's (2004) recent 'reframing' of pilgrimage—which considers the wider social, cultural, and religious contexts within which 'sacralised' movement occurs—this thesis examines how the Resident Group, as staff hired to enact a specific set of practices and ideals within the pilgrimage landscape of Iona, come to embody the 'liminal' in complex ways.

Anthropologists have long been well aware of the performative aspects of religious ceremonies and events (e.g., van Gennep 1908/1960; Turner 1974; see also Parkin 1996; James 2003; Rappaport 1999); in recent years, such concepts also have been applied to touristic practices (e.g., Coleman & Crang 2002; Abram *et al.* 1997). Anthropologists have classically preferred the indigenous point of view, and it is often the 'natives' who organise and perform for 'outsider' tourists. Less academic interest is usually given to non-native staff. As the distinctions between 'pilgrimage' and 'tourism' blur, research on 'performance' from the perspective of the 'producers'—religious or otherwise, native or not—might begin to contribute to a wider understanding of the role staff and area residents play in the 'production' of place and the negotiation of identity and 'authenticity' at places of pilgrimage.

mundane tasks such as cleaning the cutlery.

The ‘invisibility’ of pilgrimage staff in the literature also gives the impression that they are passive representatives of the dominant ideology. It may seem safe to presume that staff who choose to work at a holy site do so because they agree with the beliefs and aims of the religious institution administering the site. But is this assumption true? What do the employers require of staff in terms of their individual faith and job skills? Are there non-believers lurking amongst site workers? Is there any conflict between staff members’ personal aspirations and their employers’ goals? In what ways does working at a sacred site affect people’s faith? Do they leave spiritually invigorated or deflated? How do staff collude or contend with pilgrims’ expectations and assumptions about them? And how are workers’ expectations themselves confirmed or confounded? These questions make problematic any supposition that site workers simply comply with their assigned roles and their employers’ discourses.

My research also partly follows Nancy Frey’s (1998, 2004) concern about the lack of emphasis on pilgrims’ return home. Frey (2004: 96) argues that:

The dominant Western post-Enlightenment organizing paradigm of progress and the view of life as a line have influenced the reading of pilgrimage as *a linear narrative*...the focus is on the pilgrim’s journey and action at the goal. The return seems to be culturally constructed as unimportant, uninteresting, or simply unnoticed.... Instead, metaphors of breaking new ground, forward progress, and discovery are privileged. In contrast, expressions like ‘going backwards’ and ‘going in circles’ are pejorative in tone. (italics added)

Already in the 1970s, the Turners (1978: 23) suggested that the pilgrimage road is metaphorically ‘an ellipse, not a straight line’, for the return journey is psychologically different for pilgrims than their outgoing peregrination. Frey’s critique of ‘reading[s] of pilgrimage as a *linear narrative*’ in terms of Santiago de Compostela pilgrims has significant applications for the Resident Group on Iona—also known as ‘ressies’.

It is important to note that, in the Iona case, there are at least two categories of ‘potential pilgrims’, loosely distinguished by purpose and time. The first are those who visit Iona briefly, while the second are those who relocate to the island for an extended period to work in a spiritual or faith context. The first category comprises all types of visitors, from daytrippers and holidaymakers to ‘Scottish cousins’ (see Chapter 4) and the Iona Community’s weekly paying guests. These visitors may or may not be initially or explicitly motivated to visit Iona for spiritual reasons, but may develop such interests to an extent as to self-identify as a ‘pilgrim’. The second category, however, consists of people who go to Iona in order to live and work there, usually in a religious retreat house or for the Iona Community at the Abbey and the MacLeod Centre. Because these site workers are focused on *serving* the pilgrims, they rarely label themselves ‘pilgrims’; but it is possible their Iona tenure may effect transformations within them comparable to what pilgrims classically experience. While Frey’s (1998, 2004) Camino pilgrims may approximate Iona’s first ‘potential pilgrim’ category of ‘visitors’, I instead compare her Camino pilgrims with Iona’s second category of ‘potential pilgrims’—the Iona Community’s *ressies*. My reasons for doing this will become clear in the following chapters.

Building on Frey’s insight, this thesis explores what happens to *ressies* after their contracts with the Iona Community expire and they must leave Iona to pick up their ‘former’ lives (usually on the British mainland). The difficulty of ex-*ressies*’ dispersal on their return ‘home’ was overcome by maintaining regular contact with them via letters, email, and telephone, as well as occasionally exchanging visits—reflecting the usual ways whereby former *ressie* colleagues stay in touch with one another. As such, while my primary ethnography is based on fieldwork on Iona, it also has ‘multi-sited’ dimensions (Marcus 1998). This research takes seriously Frey’s (2004: 97) point about the need for processual

models of pilgrimage where travelers'—in this case, residents'—reincorporation into their social groups at 'home' is taken into account.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis aims to make visible in anthropological analysis the hitherto 'invisible' site workers at one place of pilgrimage. It brings to the fore the people who work behind-the-scenes to mediate and facilitate the 'sacred' for others. The thesis falls into three main parts.

Part I 'Setting the Scene' lays the methodological groundwork and introduces the research locale—the isle of Iona—locating it within recent Celtic revivalisms, which sustain and enhance its prestige as a long-venerated place of pilgrimage. The single previous ethnographic study conducted on Iona is mined for its comparative historical and analytical insights, and I argue that 'liminality' is a particularly important and appropriate concept for understanding the enduring social force of this tiny Hebridean island. Part I also broadens the anthropological perspective to take in the wider sociological and theological contexts of British Christianity today. What makes Iona the place it is and why up to 200,000 people flock to it annually can only be understood in light of the societal and theological changes of the last century. Out of the embers of early 20th-century events, the Iona Community—the Resident Group's employers and one of the island's top 'attractions'—emerge as a unique social movement set to reinvent and revive Christianity in a 'post-Christian', 'postmodern' age. Their particular religio-political ideology reconstructs Iona's narrative and interpretive frameworks, which the Resident Group are expected to assimilate, embody, and propagate to visitors. Through their remit to desacralise and 'decentre' the island, the notions of 'place' and 'lived paradox' become defining aspects of Resident staff's own 'Iona experience'.

Building on Part I's broad contextual and theoretical scaffolding, Part II 'Escape to the Edge: Visitors to a Sacred Isle' focuses on how the island developed as a pilgrimage site of such status and renown. It recounts the historical development of Iona pilgrimage practices and the growing dependence of the island's economy on a vibrant tourist industry. In investigating how modern-day visitors experience the 'sacred' on Iona, the themes of 'landscape' and 'practice' (or 'dwelling') come to the foreground to explain people's fascination and engagement with a place they believe has agency and intention unequalled elsewhere. To properly grasp who are the Resident Group, it is necessary first to understand the impact their day-to-day labour has on the people they serve and against whom they are primarily defined—the Iona Community guests and other visitors. To that end, Part II also provides an ethnographic account of this social group's 'Iona experience', before turning the spotlight in Part III on the site staff who enable this distinctive pilgrimage encounter.

Part III 'Living the Liminal: The Resident Group on Iona' is the culmination of and driving force behind Parts I and II. It addresses this thesis' main purpose to illuminate the role one group of 'invisible' staff play in producing and mediating 'pilgrimage experience' on Iona and provides a nuanced analysis of their motivations, everyday practices, and experiences. What becomes evident is that the Resident Group identity is highly contested and creates considerable internal and external conflict—their complex relationship with their 'absent' employers the Iona Community being one crucial source of tension. The Community's vision and ambivalence toward their Iona centres (inadvertently) end up situating the Resident Group within several 'lived paradoxes', where 'living the liminal' becomes the dominant existential mode by which these staff exist. In response to the realities of 'living in community' in the face of others' constant idealisation, staff strive to assert their individuality through subversive strategies and submerged discourses. Many successfully reinvent their vocational, sexual, spiritual, and/or natural or true 'selves' during

their Iona tenure; and the daily worship services and the weekly Pilgrimage they are responsible to organise and lead become the stage upon which self-experimentation and -transformations take place.

Part III additionally picks up the earlier themes of ‘landscape’, ‘place’, and ‘practice’ to elucidate how the weekly Pilgrimage—as a particular way of engaging with Iona’s natural and human landscape—exposes the politics of place *and* politicises the place. Each of Iona’s social groups (e.g., the locals, visitors, Resident staff) is, in a sense, defined by how they relate to the landscape via their own historical and ongoing activities and narratives. An analysis of the Pilgrimage reveals that instead of the popular perception of Iona as a straightforwardly ‘sacred’ place, its landscape is, in fact, ‘dense’ with multiple layers and inhabited by mutually interdependent social groups—each making possible the existence of the others.

Finally, Part III explores the problematic ways in which the Iona Community’s ‘leaving Iona’ rhetoric affects Resident staff and their post-Iona lives. By investigating the social and ideological structures of the Resident Group setup as a ‘total institution’, the key themes of ‘liminality’, ‘lived paradox’, and ‘place’ are drawn together. Within their current *raison d’être*, in order to fulfil their remit to sustain a holistic lifestyle collapsing the ‘sacred/secular’, ‘work/worship’, ‘prayer/politics’ dichotomies, Resident staff embody these dualities as ‘lived paradoxes’ in problematic ways that linger far beyond their Iona sojourn.

The Conclusion synthesises the thesis’ main arguments, reiterates the core contributions to the field, and offers suggestions for future research into continuing to make visible the ‘invisible others’ of pilgrimage.

I. SETTING THE SCENE

Iona...is...the *greatest place of spirit* among all the mystical sites of Britain.... I have found it impossible not to be in tune with its magic or unaware that it is not only on the edge of the ocean's vastness but *on the edge of another dimension*. Here...is the amalgam of everything that is magical about Britain. Pagan and Christian influences blend to create an essence of spirituality which once was common in many parts of the land and which still lives on here.

...there is *no conflict* between the angels and fairies of Iona, between the dark strands entwined with the shining—*all forces are balanced* to generate a power which you can sense all about you. I believe those who have told me that when they leave the island *they are different persons* from when they arrived; that they have become aware of *their own potential*.... If the island did not have its own mystic name, it should be called the Isle of Perception...

Alexander (1981: 85, italics added)



Iona Abbey shrouded in winter mist

Chapter 1. The Research Locale

‘Celtic’ Britain, Anthropologically

The Hebridean islands have long enchanted writers and artists as places of rugged beauty and inspiration. Especially from the 19th century onwards, during the Romantic and Antiquarian movements, Celtic Britain on the whole was lauded for the ‘sublime’ quality of its landscape. The Western Isles were an extreme example of the exoticisation of Highland Britain (see MacDonald 2002; Johnson 1972) and its ‘spiritual’ appeal. Today, the notion of ‘Celticity’ or ‘Celtic spirituality’, through various historical revivalisms (see Bradley 1999), has lost its linguistic and cultural moorings in wider society.

Hechter (1975) argues that the 19th-century renaissance of ‘Celtic culture’ was a nationalistic reaction against the history of ‘internal colonisation’ by England. Alongside this political development were Celtophiles like Matthew Arnold and Ernest Rénan, whose works (e.g., Arnold 1867; Rénan 1896) contributed hugely to popular imaginings of Celts as ‘sensitive, visionary, poetic, spiritual, mercurial and given to melancholy’ (Bradley 1999: 121; see also Chapman 1978). The 20th-century Celtic revivalism—with its distinct political, feminist, and ecological slants, and concentrating again on a highly romanticised ‘Celtic fringe’—has been critiqued by many academics, notably historian Donald Meek (2000) and anthropologist Malcolm Chapman (1992). Meek (2000) argues that the notions of ‘Celtic spirituality’ and ‘Celtic Christianity’¹ are themselves part of this wider ‘reinvention’ of the ‘Celtic noble savage’ to meet modern/postmodern needs. He also asserts that, contrary to what ‘Celtic Christian’ devotees like to believe, there is no historical evidence for the existence of ‘The Celtic Church’—a centrally organised ecclesiastical structure with a cohesive theology, somehow

¹ For a recent account, see Davies (1999).

growing in parallel with and pitted against the Latin Church in Rome. Certainly the Irish and Scottish monasteries shared some differences from their Roman counterparts, but St Columba² himself would have practiced and propagated a doctrine and faith very much in line with that of his superiors in Rome.

The so-called ‘Celtic Church’ or ‘Celtic Christianity’ continues to enjoy a tremendous surge of interest today, especially by non-Celts and most recently by charismatic Anglicans. It is portrayed variously as ecologically minded, culture friendly, feminist, holistic, and as a form of spirituality—both Christian and pagan—‘indigenous’ to the British Isles, ‘more pure and primitive’ (Bradley 1999). Used in this way, however, the term ‘Celtic Christianity’ has virtually nothing to do with Gaeldom nor the sabbatarian form of Christianity practiced by native Celts (traditionally Gaelic speakers) in areas such as the Outer Hebrides (see, e.g., Parman 1990). Instead, it is used to refer to the practices and expressions of faith which modern-day Christians attribute to Celtic saints such as Columba, Patrick, Brigid, and Aidan. It is this latter phenomenon that characterises contemporary Celtic Christian revivalism, attracting such diverse followers as charismatic evangelicals, liberals, and traditionalists. Many places in Britain associated with these Celtic saints (e.g., Durham, Glastonbury, Iona, Lindisfarne) attract large numbers of pilgrims keen to recapture an apparently ‘indigenous’ British or Celtic spirituality. ‘Celtic Britain’ and ‘Celticity’ continue to loom large in the public’s imagination.

Outside of Ireland, major ‘Celtic’ sites such as Glastonbury and Lindisfarne have attracted numerous devotees; but because of its link with St Columba and its remote island location, Iona has inevitably been the focus of revivalists’ attention³—what Meek (2000:

² The 6th-century Irish saint who according to legend was responsible for Christianising Britain (or at least Scotland) from Iona; see Chapter 3 for more details.

³ In the late 1980s and 1990s, Lindisfarne became the centre of Celtic revivalism, especially amongst charismatic English Anglicans. In 2003, however, in a BBC Radio 4 survey of ‘Britain’s Favourite Spiritual Places’, Iona was only pipped to the post by Walsingham, with Lindisfarne in sixth place (BBC

57) calls, ‘a primitivist’s dream’. Over the centuries, political and religious agendas have been formulated around this supposed ‘cradle of Christianity’, drawing continual public attention to it. Today, Celtic revivalism is one of the prime reasons why up to 200,000 visitors annually make their way to Iona, some still regarding the Abbey—which hosts a present-day worshipping community, the Iona Community’s Resident Group—as the ‘Celtic Mother Church’. Although the idea of a 21st-century ‘religious community’ seems anachronistic, more intriguing is its growing renown in an era which many regard as ‘post-Christian’, ‘postmodern’, and irrevocably ‘secular’. Certainly, Iona’s geographically peripheral, island location appeals to popular imaginings of Celtic exoticism.

Anthropologists such as Edwin Ardener (1989), Anthony Jackson (c.1981), Malcolm Chapman (1978, 1992) Edward Condry (1981), Judith Ennew (1980), Peter Mewett (1982), and Tamara Kohn (2002) have written about ‘Celticity’ and/or the Western Isles. Their research mainly focus on the identity of the ‘Gael’ and issues of ‘belonging’ in relation to local communities and provides important insights which inform this thesis’ understanding of Hebridean life. My research, however, concentrates on *outsiders* who are employed to work on Iona, most of whom are non-Celts. Another point of divergence is that due to its religious history and ongoing status as a pilgrimage site, Iona is regarded on many fronts (including by local people) as atypical of the Hebrides. Local life on Iona has been affected by the influx of visitors for much longer and more dramatically than on other Western Isles. For instance, in marked contrast to the rest of the Highlands and Islands, the last generation of native Gaelic speakers on Iona has long died out and the island’s primary school only teaches the language very intermittently. More recently, Basu (2004) and Kohn (1997) have studied the nature and impact of tourism in the Highlands and

2006). According to Bradley (1999: viii), Iona continues to be viewed as ‘a place of exceptional spiritual power, ecumenical potential and renewal of the church’.

Islands. Their research has useful resonance with my own interests in the role outsiders play in island life. I will refer to these authors' works as appropriate throughout the thesis.



Fig 1.1 Several of Iona's 'native Celts' playing football

Previous Research on Iona

The island of Iona has inspired innumerable guidebooks, devotional literature, poetry, fiction, and music. The first account of Iona to be published was by Thomas Pennant, a 'gentleman of means' whose *Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1774–1775) was based on his expedition to the Hebrides (Christian & Stiller 2000: 10). The first book dedicated solely to Iona was Lachlan Maclean's (1833/1841) *An Historical Account of Iona*. Subsequently, more Iona literature was published by visitors, including numerous scholarly works and guidebooks (e.g., Maxwell 1857; Campbell 1870; Stewart 1886; MacMillan 1898). Iona is ubiquitously featured in writings on 'Celtic Christianity', closely linked with St Columba and his famous ministry in the British Isles. The Iona Community have also published a range of books charting their history, vision, and association with the island (e.g., Morton 1977; Ferguson 1990, 1998; Shanks 1999). Through the Wild Goose Resource Group (WGRG), the Community also offer a variety of highly popular liturgical and worship materials 'associated' with Iona. Some books on

‘Celtic Christianity’ written by scholars mention Iona but their main aim is either to puncture the myth of ‘Celtic Christianity’ (e.g., Bradley 1999; Meek 2000) or to bolster the usefulness of ideas and issues the phenomenon raises for contemporary believers in spite of the historical weaknesses (Bradley 2000; Davies 1999). Twentieth-century academic research about Iona itself has been surprisingly thin. To date, there are only three contemporary academic texts on the ‘sacred’ isle.



Fig 1.2 Locals' boats and houses along Iona's east coast

In the 1990s, Mairi MacArthur published two fine social histories of Iona. The first book, *Iona: The Living Memory of a Crofting Community*, examines ‘Iona’s economic and social history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period that saw profound change across the Highlands and Islands’ (MacArthur 1990: back cover). The second volume, *Columba’s Island: Iona from Past to Present* (MacArthur 1995), recounts how the presence of various religious communities over the last 1,400 years has impacted the locals and their continuing way of life. Both these books, as well as ongoing conversations with

the author, provide invaluable sources of information which are referred to throughout the dissertation.

Only one previous anthropological study of Iona has been conducted. J. M. Golliher's (1989) doctoral thesis is titled, 'Pilgrimage as quest and protest on the Isle of Iona, Scotland: The organization of the pilgrims' experience as revealed by cognitive analysis of meaning conveyed through explanatory discourse'. Golliher's primary interest was in testing and applying a specific methodology. Using cognitive analysis, he conducted 'pre-Iona fieldwork' in a small Episcopalian congregation in New York and then used a similar approach on Iona. His research goals, while differing from mine, are nonetheless worth critiquing and the results yield interesting comparisons with my own project.

Golliher's Iona Study: Some Points of Comparison

Golliher and his wife were volunteer staff at Iona Abbey for about ten weeks in the late 1980s, after which he spent an unspecified amount of time working at Bishop's House⁴ nearby. With a nod towards participant observation, his methodology was to interview staff by having them 'participate in a data elicitation process' (Golliher 1989: 101). Nine members of staff were asked to comment generally about their experiences, while another four were asked to discuss specific topics, e.g., their experience in the Prayers for Healing service, on the weekly Pilgrimage. Golliher then collated their responses to establish any patterns of variation, which led to respondents being randomly tested to account for the variation. My own fieldwork *modus operandi* significantly differs from Golliher's and is explained in the next section.

⁴ The Episcopalian Retreat House on Iona run by an English couple, with four or five seasonal staff and capacity for about 25 guests.

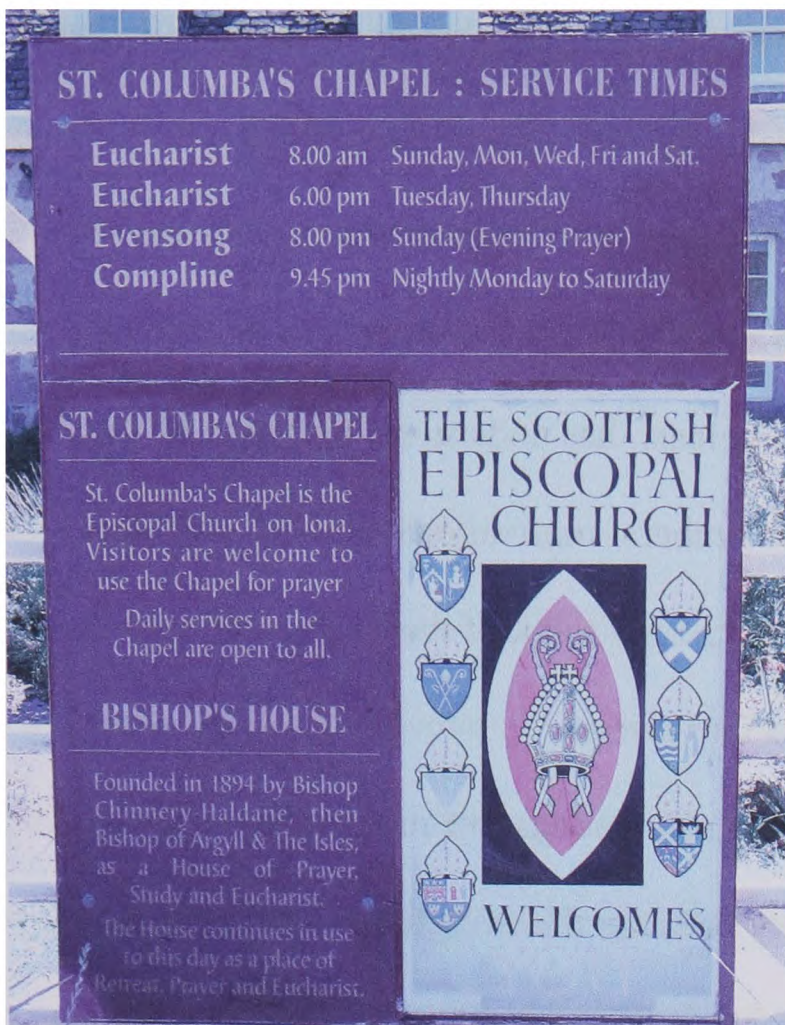


Fig 1.3 Bishop's House sign giving service details

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of Golliher's work is his conclusion that 'pilgrims' (i.e., his label for staff) come to work on Iona for the Iona Community as:

...a quest for meaningfulness in experience and as a protest against Euro-American culture patterns, e.g., institutional religion, urban life, nuclear family household structure, the international arms trade and environmental devastation... (*ibid.*: 3)

Iona 'pilgrims' see themselves and their goals in terms of being 'culture critics'; they are attracted to work on

Iona because of the idealised 'community life' at the Abbey and MacLeod Centre; and through the 'counter-culture' lifestyle on the island, they attempt to live out an alternative vision of 'liberation theology' or a heightened 'spiritual consciousness'.

My research affirms some of Golliher's findings and his work provides interesting historical insights. Anecdotally, some of my informants associated with the Iona Community confirm that, in the 1980s, the Community was widely regarded as being 'much more radical' and attracted staff and guests who were more 'politically motivated' than they are today. The changes in staff and guest profile are discussed in Chapter 5. In light of Golliher's use of the term 'pilgrim' to refer to site staff, it is curious that during my fieldwork in 2001–2002 over an accumulated 16 months, none of the staff—i.e.,

volunteers⁵ and resses—ever referred to herself or himself as a pilgrim. It is possible that in the 1980s, during the height of Celtic revivalism, staff thought of themselves more explicitly as ‘pilgrims’. Over the past 20 years, however, the ‘culture’ and size of the staff team has changed to meet the growing demands of guests and visitors as well as increasing governmental regulations. The Resident Group, at least, has undergone a gradual process of ‘professionalisation’, which means that staff members’ motivations and self-identities have also altered. While they may no longer consciously think of themselves as ‘pilgrims’, whether or not they can be considered as such is intriguing.

On another point, Golliher does not distinguish amongst his respondents between resses and vollies. This is because the boundary between the two groups was less pronounced in the 1980s. But at the turn of the 21st century, due to their differing lengths of time spent on the island, the nature and level of responsibility of their work, the amount of contact they have with visitors and Iona Community Members, and the structural differences in their social life and organisation, resses and vollies have remarkably distinct ‘Iona experiences’. Several of the resses I interviewed were initially volunteers; their comparisons between the different roles they played are illuminating.

The absence of any discussion about the local population is a particular flaw in Golliher’s (1989) account. One key defining feature of staff’s—especially resses’—tenure on Iona is their relationships and interactions with the islanders. While the local inhabitants and Iona Community staff are mutually interdependent and supportive in many ways, their historical (and ongoing) relationship is also fraught with tension and discord. It is impossible to paint a full picture of a ressie’s ‘Iona experience’ without taking into account the politics and identities of the local people. Not only do they work alongside one another all season long, but they also share a common social life during the winter

⁵ Volunteers or ‘vollies’ supplement the Resident Group on short-term stints; see Chapter 5 for details.

months. While Golliher's study is helpful in some respects, my project intends to delve not only more deeply into how the Resident Group mediate 'the sacred' for others but also into their actual experiences of living and working at a pilgrimage site and the impact it has on their lives, faith, and self-understandings.

Fieldwork and Methodology

From February 2001 to January 2002, I worked as Sacristan at Iona Abbey and lived there as a member of the Iona Community's Resident Group. In July 2000, I had written to Reverend Dr Norman Shanks, Leader of the Iona Community at the time, to inquire about the possibility of conducting research on the island; at the time, not fully grasping the seemingly paradoxical idea of a 'dispersed community', I was still under the notion that Members lived on Iona. Coincidentally, I also attended a talk at Regent's Park College given by John Bell, who I discovered was a liturgical specialist and Member of the Community. Shortly afterwards—at the suggestion of then Iona Abbey Warden Rev Brian Woodcock and Sacristan David Hawkey—I paid the island a short reconnaissance.

My initial interest in Iona was the resurgence of healing practices and beliefs within the 'Celtic tradition'. A weekly service of 'Prayers for Healing' is held at Iona Abbey. Its theology and format is unique, attendance is high, and prayer requests continually flutter in from all over the globe. I intended to study this ritual and uncover its anthropological mysteries. My brief preparatory trip to Iona, however, clarified some points but raised further questions. What the Warden had said on the telephone was true: it was difficult to appreciate how a group which called itself the 'Iona Community' did not in fact live together in one place nor on the island after which it was named. The 'worshipping community' at Iona Abbey were actually *representatives*—*not* Members⁶—

⁶ This crucial distinction will be discussed later.

of the Iona Community. But who were these people, what was their way of life, and why did they choose it if they were not Community Members? What was the nature of their relationship with the Community, the locals, and visitors? These questions would come to form the bedrock of my research.

It quickly became clear that the most effective and practical way for me to conduct fieldwork on Iona was to become a full-time Resident member of this 'staff community'. I was encouraged to apply for a post; in December 2000 I was offered the job as Sacristan. Gaining the Iona Community's support and acceptance of my project was pivotal. Initially, they had justifiable concerns over how 'disruptive' my presence as a researcher would be to the safety and trust upon which a small group existing closely together in a remote place depends. From the beginning, I made explicit my research agenda and intentions and took advice from the Warden and other staff line managers on how best to handle self-disclosure with my colleagues.

As Sacristan, I was responsible for the Abbey church and chapels and for coordinating and implementing all the religious services and events. I was also a member of the Programme Team, which plan and carry out each week's workshops and sessions for guests. My role as Sacristan put me in a prime position to relate naturally with a wide range of people, including tourists, pilgrims, and other visitors. The majority of guests and visitors were extremely forthcoming when they learned of my project. Together with the Warden, the Sacristan also had to handle the day-to-day negotiations of sharing space and resources with Historic Scotland staff at the Abbey. I was thus strategically situated to gather information about this embryonic partnership and its implications for tourism, pilgrimage, and heritage conservation on the island.

As a Resident Group member, I shared in the daily life of the staff and guests, developing friendships as a matter of course and actively participated in the task of

‘building community’. During Staff Training, I was elected as ‘Staff Rep’. The Staff Rep, an honorary member of the Management Team, is responsible for mediating the staff’s relationship with the Iona Community Islands Committee. This meant I gained first-hand insights into what the Community think of themselves, their ethos and goals. I had access to the different levels of management as well as to the private sentiments of those staff who chose to confide in me. Being entrusted by resses in this way, however, meant I had to negotiate very carefully the integrity and ethics of using people’s ‘secrets’ as ‘research fodder’.

Wearing all these different ‘hats’, so to speak, gave me a unique ‘insider’ fieldwork experience. It also made it possible for me to form contacts with the dispersed Community Members, who were better predisposed to help with my research than if I had been a complete stranger. In such an intimate setting, it was crucial that I had an official role and a reason to be on Iona. Being a ressie provided a ‘base identity’ from which I could more easily approach the locals; even if many tend to distance themselves from ‘those religious nutters’ at the Abbey, at least I would be a known quantity.

As this is the first extensive ethnographic work to be conducted on Iona, I am especially aware of my responsibility to the islanders, the Resident staff and, the Iona Community, as well as to future researchers. I appreciate that fruitful diachronic analyses arise from a commitment to long-term investment by the researcher in the people and field of investigation and that permission to conduct research is a privilege granted by the group under study. The data and other personal information contained in this dissertation are included with permission and pseudonyms are used throughout to protect people’s privacy.

Building trust with colleagues, Community Members, and islanders was vital to my approach, which strives to be reflexive and interactive. Following Jenkins (1994: 433–55), I understand the processes of fieldwork to reflect social life as constituting ‘acts of mutual

interpretation' when essentially incompatible systems of comprehension meet. To be 'in' the field is to be involved, to recognise that in order to participate the investigator must take up one of the roles being offered; my formal post as Sacristan demonstrates the importance and necessity of this. Such a method surrenders the myth of the 'objective researcher' and acknowledges the impossibility of neutrality and transparent representation. This does not, however, negate the possibility for a researcher to work towards an 'objective' (though not necessarily 'positivistic') articulation of the fieldwork that is comprehensive, fair, and helpful for comparative work.

My methodology aims for a multi-vocal representation by highlighting the interrelationships and treating the fieldwork process as a collaborative venture between the researcher and the researched. In practice, this calls for intensive cooperation both on a daily level and in the production of knowledge and also takes into account the creative potential of serendipity (Pieke 1998). Furthermore, this approach allows the subject's needs and priorities to influence the research agenda. In fact, it was the experience of being fully immersed in Resident Group life and, day after day, hearing (and commiserating with) staff's struggles over their individual and collective identities, which made me rethink my original research focus. I discovered that these *facilitators* of pilgrimage for others had their own distinctive and significant 'Iona experience' seldom discussed in the anthropological literature. Several staff crises further underlined the fragility and contradictions of staff's encounters of the 'sacred' on Iona. In the process of fieldwork, I discovered the issue of 'healing' was subsumed under the more dominant rhetoric and praxis of 'identity' and 'place'. The Iona Community's fascinating (and at times, frustrating) ambivalence about the resses who play such an important part in the Community's 'public image' confirmed the re-direction of my study.



Fig 1.4 A Sacristan and a volunteer working in the Abbey church

Several personal attributes were assets in the field. For the Iona Community—as the first ethnic Chinese and Singaporean ressie—I was a welcome addition to the diversity they seek to promote. Being a ‘curio’ on an Hebridean island often worked to my advantage, I felt, as guests and visitors seemed particularly inclined to

engage with me. Not being British also served me well as I stand outside the longstanding English–Scottish controversies; I was probably privy to certain opinions to which other (mostly English) staff were not.

Interestingly, it was my being a scholar and from Oxford that I was warned might ‘put people off’. This seems to echo Golliher’s (1989: 3) discovery that staff ‘mistrust journalists and social scientists, including anthropologists, who they see as lackeys of a social institution, viz the university, which has “sold out” to the status quo’. However, in 2001, the concern was less politically inspired and more over my possibly being ‘too posh’ or ‘clever’ to relate well with other staff and the locals! Later in the season, I was told that an earlier ‘researcher’, who claimed she was from Oxford, had gone ‘cold-calling’ door to door asking questions. Apparently, the locals had viewed her suspiciously, refusing to cooperate with her. The local person who relayed the story said he was pleased my questions showed I ‘know something about the place’. It also underlined the responsibility researchers owe to one another over their behaviour in the field.



Fig 1.5 St Columba Hotel, now owned by a small 'collective', including a Community Member offspring, incomers, and locals

As someone with a Christian background almost as ecumenical as the Iona Community's membership, I could appreciate their ethos and fulfill my role as Sacristan. On the other hand, their unusual practices and the diverse assortment of people and beliefs I encountered helped keep me on my intellectual toes, being critical and reflective. I was also aware that my sincerity and intentions—in terms of my commitment to the Community and my job while simultaneously conducting research about them—would continually be 'tested'. Fieldwork seldom just 'ends' when a researcher leaves the site, and the researcher-informant relationship often extends beyond the formal boundaries. As such, my role and positionality as a researcher will continue, albeit in a different way than during fieldwork, to be an ongoing process of evaluation and negotiation.

After my 12-month stint as Sacristan, I spent another six months in 2002 returning to Iona in various guises. I wanted to 'triangulate' my primary field research. I rented a cottage on one of the crofts for a week to establish myself outside the Resident Group context. I volunteered thrice at the St Columba Hotel, then owned by a consortium of people informally linked via the Findhorn Foundation, a New Age residential community based in northeast Scotland. My aim was to conduct some comparative work with a similarly 'spiritual' (although with a New Age ethos) staff community on Iona.



Fig 1.6 Gates leading to the MacLeod Centre (situated on a local's land), kept shut because of the sheep

I stayed as a guest at the MacLeod Centre during the 'Local History Week' and at the Abbey for the 'Celtic Symposium Week'. These weeks were chosen deliberately for the content of the programmes and the external leaders and guests they would attract. Finally, I was stand-in Sacristan over Community Week 2002—the annual gathering of Members on the island. The initiation of new Members, called the 'Hallowing Service', is a fixed event during this week, and in 2002, the first female Leader was also installed.

These follow-up visits allowed me to refresh and further develop previous contacts and to gain additional perspectives on how the Resident Group, the island centres, and the Iona Community are regarded by the islanders. Juggling my various, and at times conflicting, alliances between these different social groups threw into sharp relief the unstated and seemingly irresistible tensions underlying life on Iona. It also highlighted the good humour and sense of camaraderie that binds all those—locals, incomers,⁷ and staff workers—who have endured a long season of hard toil catering to 'the punters'.

Those locals who agreed to speak with me were aware of my research agenda and promise of discretion and confidentiality. Many of my impressions of the local context arose from casual conversations and encounters in ordinary, everyday settings—waiting at

⁷ Ardener (1989: 220) rightly points out that 'island-born' are not always native natives *per se*, but may be 'internal incomers, former incomers, products of mixed incomer-island marriages'.

the jetty for another ferry load of ‘punters’, over a pint or meal at the pub, during village ceilidhs, at the local Spar shop, in a kitchen over tea, and along the village street.



Fig 1.7 The local convenience store and Iona's recent lone taxi service

During my collective time on Iona, I conducted formal and informal interviews with guests, day visitors, resses and vollies, and Iona Community Members. Afterwards, I sent out over 200 (individualised) open-ended questionnaires to them, half of which were

completed and returned to me. I also corresponded with many of them by phone and email in order to trace what happened in their lives post-Iona (see Frey 2004). In addition, I was invited to and attended a Family Group meeting, a regional gathering of Members (and sometimes, Associates⁸) which takes place once every two months. Members meet to share news, discuss Community affairs, and account for their keeping of the Rule.⁹ I attended ‘Greenbelt’, a popular pan-Christian festival with a pronounced presence of people linked with the Community. The Community’s music and liturgy specialists (the Wild Goose Resource Group—with whom I volunteered as a helper) are especially popular, always leading the 5,000-strong Sunday communion service at the festival’s climax.

⁸ Iona Community Associates are one step down, so to speak, from Members. Associates have not undergone the two-year New Members’ Programme required for full initiation and are expected only to keep some of the same commitments as Members.

⁹ An important mark of Community membership; see Chapter 2 for details.

To some extent, as a member of the very group I was studying, I inevitably had an impact on Resident Group life: just like the other staff, my personality, background, and idiosyncrasies contributed to the ‘culture’ of that year’s staff group. However, it is also true there is a limit to which individuals can effect any immediate or lasting change. Relatively small and temporary adjustments, such as newspaper preferences or how staff meetings are conducted, can happen quickly through the leadership of the Wardens on the island. But larger structural or processual changes requiring the wider Community’s involvement are much harder and take longer to implement. Because of the high turnover of staff, generally suggestions from one year are seldom carried over to the next. In fact, as observed by many regularly returning guests and older Community members, the individual staff person may come and go, but the essential way of life embodied by the group continues unaltered. It is this enduring mode or *raison d’être*—expressed and experienced by one particular staff group—which my project explores.

The approach taken in this thesis closely follows Coleman and Eade’s (2004: 17) ‘micro-level examinations of the embodied motion inherent within pilgrimage practices...’. It is important to note that Iona hosts a diversity of pilgrimage practices, from daytripper groups led by parish priests or independent pilgrimage operators to individuals and church groups who book in to stay at one of the other religious retreat houses on the island, i.e., the Episcopalian Bishop’s House, the Roman Catholic House of Prayer (‘Cnoc a Chalmain’), the Presbyterian Duncraig, or even the Findhorn Foundation-sponsored meditation/retreat house Traigh Bhan. The locals, too, are engaged in the hospitality industry by providing many services to pilgrims and other visitors. Interestingly, great numbers of ‘Protestant pilgrims’—a seemingly oxymoronic term (see Coleman 2004a: 45)—find their way to Iona, many of whom stay at the Abbey or MacLeod Centre under the guidance and care of the Resident Group and vollies. Instead of pilgrimage

traditionally serving to ‘intensify the pilgrim’s attachment to his own religion, often in fanatical opposition to other religions’ (Turner & Turner 1978: 9), the Iona Community conversely encourage a more ecumenical and inter-faith approach.



Fig 1.8 Besides Iona Abbey, there are three popular religious retreat houses on the island (e.g., Bishop’s House, foreground)

For the purposes of this thesis, my research focuses on the pilgrimage site as a locus of ‘work’, specifically for the Resident Group who are the most sizeable and main—though not exclusive—facilitators of pilgrimage on the island.

Rites de Passage: Locating ‘Liminality’

The Turners’ formulation of pilgrimage as a ‘liminoid phenomenon’ acknowledges its intellectual roots in Arnold van Gennep’s (1908/1960) classic *Rites de Passage*. The notions of ‘practice’, ‘space’, and ‘movement’, which came to the forefront of much anthropological discourse toward the end of the 20th century (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995; Ingold 1993, 2000), were already contained within van Gennep’s

original analysis. While the term has taken on common metaphorical usage, van Gennep (1908/1960) actually refers to *rites de passage* literally as movements or activities which occur within or across physical spaces such as territorial boundaries and frontiers or thresholds of houses. Spatial separation between the uninitiated and their tribe or village during a *rite de passage* is commonplace (*ibid.*: 4). He also describes ancient ‘neutral zones’ between states or tribal lands as ‘symbolic and spatial areas of transition’ where anyone within such spaces are ‘physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds’ (*ibid.*: 18). Such ‘betwixt and between’ places are what van Gennep calls ‘the spatial location of liminality’ (*ibid.*: 4).

My research suggests that the isle of Iona is not so much a ‘sacred’ site as it is a ‘liminal’ place. Not only do people come to Iona during times of crisis or transition in their lives, but as the Turners (1978: 3) point out, liminality is also *potentiality*—the island symbolises the possibilities of ‘what may be’ and offers the hope of aspirations fulfilled. As a pilgrimage site, Iona’s ‘liminality’ includes the potential for encountering the ‘sacred’, but seen from perspectives *other* than (but not precluding) the pilgrims’, it equally contains the possibility of confrontation with the ‘profane’. What is holy can also be dangerous or polluting, classically requiring complex ceremonies and rituals in order to circumscribe its ambiguity (Douglas 1969; Turner 1969).

While Hastrup’s (1998: 136) analysis of the ‘double nature’ of features in the Icelandic landscape seems to locate liminality *between* the divisions of ‘nature/culture’, ‘danger/safety’, ‘sacred/secular’, etc., my understanding of liminality in the Iona case is about *transcending* these dualistic categories or, rather, by holding them in tension as ‘lived paradoxes’. The quotation that opens Part I gives one version of this phenomenon: ‘...there is *no conflict* between the angels and fairies of Iona, between the dark strands entwined with the shining—*all forces are balanced* to generate a power which you can

sense all about you' (Alexander 1981: 85, italics added). This mythology of the island being uniquely able to contain opposing forces in balance ('Pagan and Christian', 'angels and fairies') reflects a modern, wistful reinvention of early Christian Celts as innovators of 'inculturation' who regarded Christianity and paganism as not incompatible religions.

In terms of the Iona Community, their emphasis on incarnational theology and the priority of practice within (local) places asserts that 'transcendence' can only be found by the seemingly contradictory act of being fully immersed in the world—for God by their reckoning is *immanent* in the world, not set apart from it. Hence, transcendence and immanence are themselves two sides of Iona's 'lived paradox' of liminality. Through their *raison d'être*, resses actively contribute to constructing this 'liminality' for guests and other visitors. Employed by the Community, resses (plus vollies) labour to 'build community' with new sets of weekly guests through the 'common task' of 'work and worship'. Rather than promoting the 'sacred' ('worship') over the 'secular' ('work'), resses are supposed to embody the collapse of such divisions in their daily, communal life—a 'wholeness' of existence where work *is* worship. As such, Iona's 'liminality' is not only about actualising potentialities (Hirsch 1995); it is also a way of transcending or deconstructing the 'sacred/secular' duality in a place where multiple, competing discourses and practices (and social groups)—numinous and mundane—have co-existed for a long time. Furthermore, like Hastrup's (1998: 124) Icelandic landscape which is 'more than topography, [and] is also a set of resources', Iona's dense and multi-layered landscape is pregnant with not just the past, but also the present and the future—all related to various different forms of 'dwelling' or practice. For the landscape 'is a total social fact' and 'time and space are components of action, not containers for it' (*ibid.*). We return here to the themes of 'space', 'practice', and 'movement'—articulated by van Gennep almost a century ago.

The Community's emphasis on 'common *task*' is intentional and revealing. It underscores their belief that 'community' is created through *doing* things together. More than that, *ressies* *do* these things in a specific *place*—the ancient, 'sacred' isle of Iona. While the guests participate with the Resident Group in this 'common task', they do so only for one week. A week of 'living the liminal' can be exciting and illuminating for guests, but *ressies* practicing this 'liminality' repetitively, week after week for up to three seasons, have a very different 'Iona experience'. Their 'extended liminality' on Iona raises questions about identity, individually and collectively, their relationship with locals and the landscape, and how their Iona sojourn impacts their faith and lives afterwards. In the attempt to incarnate their employers' ideological vision—through their particular form of 'dwelling' via the daily ritualised and routinised activities of 'work and worship'—this thesis contends that *ressies* end up embodying the 'liminal' in problematic and paradoxical ways. What happens, after all, if worship *becomes* work?

'Iona is a Thin Place': Lived Paradox

Although George MacLeod—the Iona Community's founder—may not have coined it, he is attributed with having made famous the phrase, 'Iona is a thin place' (see Bradley 1999: 182). For many people, the island is such a 'tissue' between the spiritual and the material where the 'sacred' seems more discernible than elsewhere. In this sense, all pilgrimage sites are 'thin' places—their attraction stemming from an apparent 'closeness' of heaven to earth and hence as sources of divine power, 'where special things happen'. Self-professed pilgrims like to hold services on Iona for they say it is a place made 'thin' by centuries of worship and devotion by people whose lives (and deaths) are dedicated to God. Besides *spiritual* permeability, Iona Community guests and staff in particular also recognise Iona's 'thinness' as the quality of *social* porosity. One Abbey guest explains:

Perhaps it's because Iona is an island, or perhaps because the phone isn't ringing, or because it's such a departure from everyday life, or because at Iona one comes into contact with many Christians he/she would not otherwise have met, perhaps for the sake of Iona's beauty, or because of the exertion required by the pilgrimage...for any or all of those reasons combined, one's soul is more open to God than in the pedestrian nature of life. I don't know that God speaks louder at Iona, but I think our ears are more open.

People's sense of *communitas* or feelings of closeness with one another, to nature, and to God are enhanced by the island's small size; in addition, the structures and the staff's efforts at the Community's centres are all aimed at facilitating easy sociability between strangers. Developing intense connections with people in a short space of time is widespread amongst Iona enthusiasts. Many people ascribe Iona's 'thinness' to a return to the simple things of life, much like Frey's (2004) Camino pilgrims who found walking or bicycling a liberating change from their normally fast-paced lifestyles. With apparently fewer 'material distractions', people say that on Iona they feel more able to concentrate on 'higher' or spiritual values. As articulated in this Part's opening quotation, Iona is perceived to be 'on the edge of another dimension' (Alexander 1981: 85), a gateway to the unknown and therefore to potentiality. Like other pilgrimage sites, Iona's thinness could thus be equated with 'liminality' in terms of potentiality, an opening up of possibilities in pilgrims' aspirations. Indeed, many Iona Community guests and staff search out Iona during times of crisis or transition in their lives.

However, Iona's 'liminality' works in other ways, too. The island is not just a 'thin' place but an exceptionally 'thick' one, too. For guests and staff, this sometimes manifests itself in unfulfilled expectations. Some people are disappointed by the island (meaning the Abbey) being 'too religious' (i.e., too institutionalised) or not religious enough (i.e., not enough direct proselytisation); others, such as daytrippers, have been heard to complain, 'What's there to see here?'. This inability to identify Iona's 'thinness',

if only for its natural beauty, is considered by locals and Iona devotees alike as the ultimate mark of a ‘tourist’. Instead of being moved positively by its ‘thinness’, these ‘tourists’ experience Iona as a profoundly ‘thick’ place (‘They just don’t get it!’).

For locals, Iona is ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ in different ways. The island can be regarded as ‘thin’ in terms of the precariousness of their crofting customs, of keeping up a viable human population,¹⁰ and the fragile balance of heavy dependence on tourism with maintaining their traditional way of life. In the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak, Iona farmers had to weigh up the threat to their animals against restricting visitors’ access to the land. With up to 1,000 visitors¹¹ a day converging on a five-square-mile space, Iona is also a prime example of Ardener’s (1989: 215) observation that in ‘remote areas’, ‘...from the inside outwards there [is] an almost exaggerated contrary sense of the *absence* of any barrier to the world—a peculiar sense of excessive vulnerability, of ease of entry’. This constant intrusion of the ‘outside world’ is what finally made islanders surrender the proposal of building a ‘Fixed Link’, a bridge between Iona and Mull: ‘they liked being an island too much’.¹² In fact, the Sound of Iona and the Atlantic Ocean act as a blessed moat around the isle when the boats and ferries stop running at the end of each day. Paradoxically, the flood of visitors makes Iona feel simultaneously ‘thick’—in terms of people density—and ‘thin’ in terms of the island’s borders being continually traversed by outsiders.

¹⁰ In 1999, a *Guardian* article describes the urgency Iona locals felt about their ‘fragile community’; the ‘factfile’ reported a more than 40% shrinkage in population over the past seven years, with a total then of 102 locals—of which greater than 40% were over 60 (Seenan 1999).

¹¹ Which is 10x the local population of about 100.

¹² Though locals were initially fiercely divided on the issue.



Fig 1.9 Visitors boarding a local Iona boat to Staffa

The social permeability which thrills many guests and visitors (and staff to some extent) can be experienced by locals as invasions of privacy typical of a small, rural village, where everyone knows everyone's business—and has an opinion on it. The complex politics of island life are beyond the ken of most outsiders; in fact, many locals would disavow Iona's 'thinness' in its MacLeodian meaning and assert instead that the island can be a 'thick' place, 'a very solid, rocky, earthy place to me. Even when the sky is black and the stars are amazing, it never feels thin'. They would likely agree with Ardener's (1989: 221–23) assessment of 'remote areas' as 'event rich' or 'dense', where every thing that happens and every personality who passes through take on exaggerated proportions—'that note of eccentricity and overdefinition of individuality'. Many locals do not resonate at all with the spiritual quality or 'thinness' that dominates Iona devotees' experience of the place; for the island is *home* to the locals, the place where they work with soil and sea, marry and

raise families, bicker and reconcile, and conduct all the quotidian duties of normal life.

Viewed as such, Iona is a ‘thick’, grounded place for the islanders.

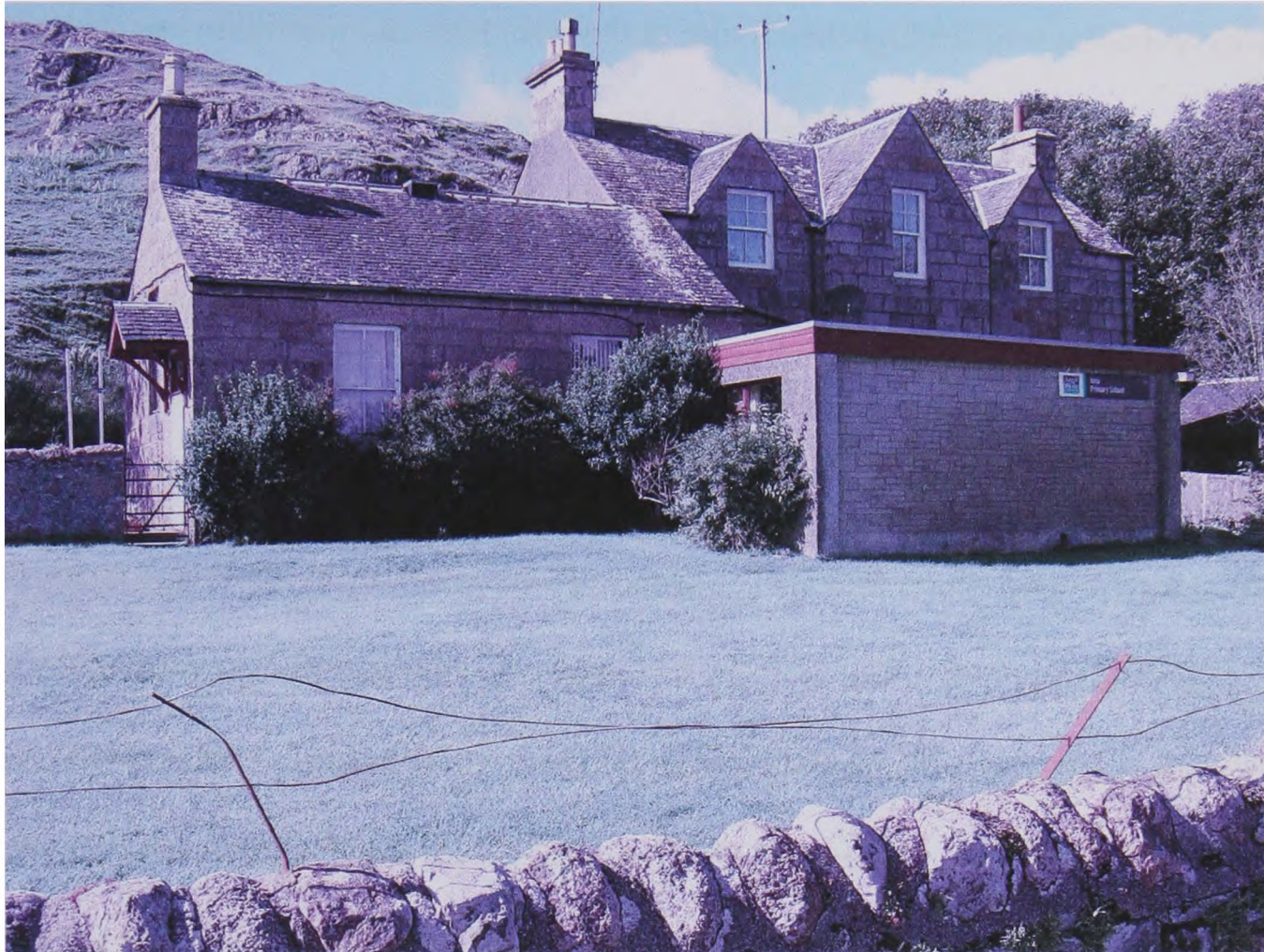


Fig 1.10 Iona Primary School, which periodically suffers closure for want of pupils

Poised between the ‘outsider’ travelling visitors and the ‘emplaced’ locals, how do Iona’s ‘thinness’ and/or ‘thickness’ resonate with resses? This question lies at the heart of this thesis’ aims. In brief, the following chapters will demonstrate how resses embody Iona’s ‘thinness’ (in the MacLeodian sense) for guests and visitors through submersing themselves in the ‘thick’ daily grind of community life, which parallels locals’ own busy lives. In addition, because the Iona Community believe the *material* matters as much as the spiritual, resses must incarnate Iona’s ‘thinness’ in a way that refocuses guests on the material world and its problems—i.e., making the ‘thickness’ of ordinary places and conditions of life as critical as, if not more so than, the ‘thin’ ones.

Most outsiders' 'Iona experience' is primarily about its 'thinness' or spiritual porosity. For some *repeat* guests at the Iona Community centres, however, the Community's theology of finding the Divine in the mundane and quotidian begins to take hold:

... When I visited this year [compared to a previous visit] it was also a special time but for me much of what made it special was in *the very ordinary things* like watching a football match or chatting in the rooms. Although Iona is a very special place I now feel much more that *anywhere* can be a 'thin place' if I am open to what God wants to do. (italics added)

For many guests, it may take a few visits to Iona before they fully grasp this paradox of places being simultaneously 'thin' and 'thick', where the apparent divisions of modern life (e.g., 'sacred/secular') are collapsed. Resses, however, daily confront and must themselves *embody* this 'lived paradox', or liminality—what they make of the island's 'thinness' and 'thickness' throughout and at the end of their Iona sojourn is uncovered in the rest of this dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I set the wider sociological and theological contexts of contemporary British Christianity. How the Iona Community, its Resident Group, as well as Iona's numerous visitors (pilgrims and otherwise) understand and define themselves, can only be fully appreciated against the textured and complex backdrop of 'British Christianity'.

Chapter 2. An Old Place, A New Monasticism?: The Wider Picture

‘What has happened to Christianity in Britain?’ asks sociologist Duncan MacLaren (2004: 1), echoing the concern of those lamenting the decline of Western Christianity. Unlike his detractors, MacLaren proposes that credibility can be restored to the Church. He suggests that the ‘very old monasticism’ of the Columban church might offer Christians today one viable model of a distinctive, inculturated, and engaged community by which Christianity can flourish again (*ibid.*: 187–200).

This dissertation explores this perennial question about British Christianity in reference to the experiences, discourse, and practices of a group of Christians working at the ancient pilgrimage site of Iona. Set in the originating landscape of Columban Christianity, does the Iona Community’s Resident Group exemplify the ‘new monasticism’ hinted at by MacLaren and others (e.g., Gardiner 2002, 2005)? Is Iona the birthplace of a new religious movement that will revive Western Christianity? Or is it a theological and missiological outpost as remote from the mainstream Church as the island is geographically peripheral in the British Isles?

The Sociological Context

At the turn of the 21st century, the religious landscape of Britain is said to be reshaping itself. In the press, political arena, popular culture, and other forums, Britain is touted as a ‘multicultural’, ‘multi-faith’ society. Although still primarily dominated by Christian adherents, British religiosity now includes Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and those claiming ‘No religion’, amongst other groups listed on nation-wide statistical surveys (National Statistics 2001). TV and radio programmes exploring other faiths, especially Islam since ‘9/11’, continue to abound. During traditional Christian holidays, there is no

lack of public debate (e.g., BBC Radio 2's 'Jeremy Vine Show') over whether more 'innocuous', less religiously 'tainted' terms like 'winter holidays' or 'festive season' should replace such Christo-centric labels as 'Christmas' and 'Easter'. The climate of 'political correctness' has vociferous advocates on both sides, each voicing the struggles of a society trying to come to terms with its changing demographics and cultural milieu. Britain, like other modern, industrialised Western inheritors of the European Reformation and Enlightenment, has apparently undergone the processes of 'secularisation' (Bruce 1996: 57).

Secular, or Not So Secular?

Much has been written about 'secularisation theory', both for and against it (e.g., Berger 1969; Wilson 1966, 1976; Bruce 1996, 2002; MacLaren 2004; Gill 1993). I will not rehash the arguments here, but suffice to say it is widely accepted that Christianity, its institutions, practices, and doctrines, no longer plays the central role in modern Britain as it once did before the Enlightenment. Because of changes attributed to 'modernity', such as population mobility, division of labour, the notion of leisure, and the loosening of traditional social structures, Christianity has lost its force as cultural meta-narrative and 'social cement'. The decline of Christianity's popularity and social significance is often gauged by 'alarming' drops in church membership, numbers of churches and clergy, and church use and attendance (MacLaren 2004: 1–2; Bruce 1996: 32ff). Much scholarly attention on the state of religion in modern Britain has relied heavily on such statistical evidence to show a dramatic loss in Christian belief.

Christians seem to recognise it, too. Third World churches increasingly feel the need to send missionaries and to export Christianity back to the Northern Hemisphere (Hanciles 2003). At Greenbelt, the largest annual pan-Christian festival in the UK, an

array of workshops, talks, and ‘experimental’ worship styles is offered to help Christians understand, contend with, and even appropriate the haphazard, pick ’n mix ‘postmodern’, ‘post-Christian’ spirituality prevalent in British society (see also Wilson 1976: 93ff).

Underlying the diversity of attitudes and proposed ‘solutions’ to Western Christianity’s apparent demise is the general opinion that Christianity indeed needs resuscitation.



Fig 2.1 An alternative worship session at Greenbelt 2006 involving stones, candles, a Celtic cross, and a labyrinth

MacLaren (2004), however, makes the case that secularisation is multifaceted. He distinguishes between religion itself and the social impact of religion, so that the social force of a religious body or church can increase even while its membership decreases, and vice versa.

Furthermore, religious thinking, practices, and institutions—sociological factors typically used to analyse religion—may shift unevenly and not necessarily in proportion or relation to one another. Not to mention: how does one measure ‘belonging’ or ‘belief’ anyway (Gill 1993; Needham 1972; Ruel 1982)? The point is that determining whether a society is becoming more or less secular is not straightforward. Religion and secularisation may not be immutably antithetical after all.

The story of decline in traditional, community-oriented religion is usually accompanied by the claim of a parallel rise in diverse, more individualistic forms of spirituality. Studies (e.g., Wilson 1976; MacLaren 2004; Bruce 2002) show that, within the Church itself, older denominations may have diminished but newer denominations and

sects (e.g., Pentacostalism, other charismatic movements) have burgeoned in both Western societies and Third World countries (e.g., Martin 1998). Other major world religions have shown signs of growth, while alternative communities too are gaining prominence. All this suggests that instead of a clear-cut tumbling gradient of faith and belief, Britain's religious topography is being reconfigured in more complex ways. Statistical analysis alone falls short of explaining the situation on the ground, of illuminating people's experiences and motivations within the shifting balance of religious commitment in Britain (Francis & Brierly 1997; Jenkins 1999). Nevertheless, René Rémond (1999: 204) reminds us that 'even in the most secularised societies [of Europe], the religious factor [i.e., Christianity] assessed statistically is still clearly in the majority, and is by far the most massive social element of a voluntary nature' (see also National Statistics 2001).

Building on the work of sociologists like Peter Berger, Steve Bruce, and Grace Davie, amongst others, MacLaren (2004) outlines 11 scenarios of what he calls 'desecularisation' in modern Europe, where religion continues to persist, strengthen, or be revitalized. The three categories of 'stable', 'holistic' and 'public' religion—most directly relevant to my research—will be discussed below. Whether one agrees with MacLaren's typography and prescriptions or not, the question of religion and secularisation in the West is still vibrant and remains at the forefront of much public debate.

Stable Religion

Recent statistics show a leveling off of religion's descent in Europe. Comparing data used by Grace Davie, Robin Gill, and Steve Bruce with the European Values Study (EVS) surveys and the BBC 'Soul of Britain' questionnaire in 2000, MacLaren (2004: 74) contends that British 'religious belief', 'religious identity', and 'confidence in the church' have remained stable or even grown. Although the British average is lower than that of

Europe as a whole, MacLaren (*ibid.*: 75–7) argues that four indicators of ‘religious identity’ or religious disposition—belief in a personal God, self-identification as being religious, gaining comfort and strength from religion, and time taken for prayer or meditation—are roughly the same in 1999–2000 as in 1981. This statistical trend, and even a small increase, is also true in regards to the British people’s ‘confidence in the church’ to answer moral, family, spiritual and social problems (*ibid.*: 77).¹

MacLaren’s analyses serve to balance out the widespread assumption that Christianity in modern Britain is or will soon become defunct. Although EVS surveys do not assess only the state of Christianity in Britain but of British religiosity in general, it is nevertheless interesting to note that religiosity is remaining stable, or even growing, in a so-called secular society in the West at the end of the 20th century. Just where is this growth taking place and why? This thesis suggests that some Christians in Britain are finding innovative ways to reinvent their faith and redefine their religious identity.

Holistic Religion

Alongside the demise of traditional or institutional religion has been the blossoming of ideas, beliefs, and practices often known collectively as ‘New Age’. The social origins of today’s new religions or New Age movements go as far back as the late 18th and 19th centuries (Hexham & Poewe 1997: 46–7; Hunter 1996: 108; Wilson 1976) as European industrialisation took root. Instead of trying to revive or reform Christianity, many new religious movements created ‘new traditions that merged old Christian themes with exotic elements from other sources’, e.g., Eastern philosophies, Jungian psychology, indigenous traditions, and even science (Hexham & Poewe 1997: 46–7). They are a ‘product of modernity’, a reaction against the ratiocination and rationalization of modernity yet

¹ MacLaren’s use of the figures is not unproblematic, but due to lack of space, his analysis is accepted at face value here.

simultaneously facilitated by technological innovations which made it possible for people across the globe to communicate and learn about other religions and beliefs—as well as to market or ‘sell’ their own brand of New Age spirituality.

New Age movements often appeal to those who feel fragmented by modern life, divided between their ‘public’ and ‘private’ selves, in a world where old social structures and kinship ties have broken down and relationships seem shallow and fleeting. Weber called this phenomenon, “the disenchantment of the world”: a loss of a sense of magic, mystery, prophecy, and the sacred’ (quoted in Bruce 1996: 181). Holistic religions thus have in common ‘the search for “spirituality”, conceived as a way of integrating the disparate elements of body, mind, spirit, community, the ecosystem and so on, into a meaningful unity’ (MacLaren 2004: 85).

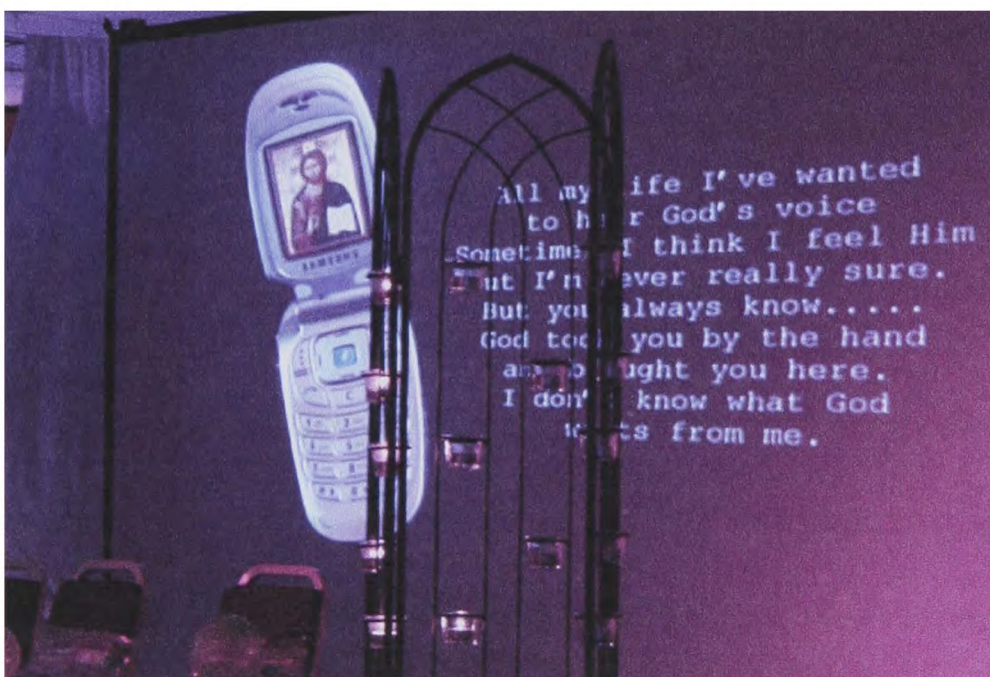


Figure 2.2 A Greenbelt 2006 display—reclaiming ‘mystery’ in a disenchanted era? (see also Wilson 1976)

Social groups in

Western societies attracted to the New Age tend to have above-average education and incomes. This is because participation in these religions requires a degree of self-regard in believing one deserves such attention and

of self-confidence to view the ‘self’ as a powerful autonomous agent, as well as being literate and articulate (Bruce 1996). Although New Age religions tend to be highly individualistic, the idea of ‘community’ is emphasised in contradistinction to the perceived selfish individualism of mainstream Western society.

‘Community’ is idealised as the place where meaningful relationships can be discovered, where a diversity of cultures and a common humanity can be appreciated and celebrated, where people can live more ‘authentic’ lives in touch with themselves, with nature, and with the divine. ‘Community’ is where they can reclaim a sense of the unity of life and of the self. New Age religions often offer a global vision, where all peoples and cultures can join together to create a whole and ‘radically new world culture’ (Hexham & Poewe 1997: 46). Such a vision tends to appeal to those who applaud the ‘liberal’ values of pluralism, freedom of expression, and interconnectivity. Interestingly, many Iona devotees, Christian and otherwise, fit easily into this profile of ‘New Age’ adherents.

Traditional notions of ‘community’ also have been revived; witness the proliferation of face-to-face, ‘alternative’ communities, where people choose to relocate to live together, usually in a specific place. A plethora of intentional communities abounds, offering lifestyles as ‘antidotes’ to mainstream society—related to concepts like veganism, organic farming, eco-warriorism, anarchism, non-violence, healing, sustainable technologies, etc. The Intentional Communities Directory² lists over 1,600 communities worldwide, which is by no means exhaustive. These communities seek to live in stark contrast to what is variously deplored as the urban, dehumanised, individualistic, consumerist, capitalist, modern world. Some groups have roots in the counter-culture of the 1960s and 70s, in the hippie and commune movements, e.g., the Findhorn Community (1962) in NW Scotland. Most are much more recent, having been formed in the past 15 years or so, with many more still forming or re-forming.

The popularity of and surge of interest in intentional communities confirms MacLaren’s (2004: 86) view that ‘the preoccupations of the 1960s—authenticity, immediacy, and experience—are no longer marginal, but have now been disseminated

² Website <<http://directory.ic.org>>, accessed September 2006.

throughout mainstream culture'. Even if only a minority claim to be 'New Age' adherents, 'holistic spirituality' is implicitly accepted by much larger numbers of people in society. Choosing to relocate to live in a community requires a much higher level of commitment than buying homeopathic remedies, for instance, but many groups like the Findhorn Foundation offer short-stay programmes to give people a 'taster'. Since 1974, Findhorn's long-running 'Experience Week'—where guests pay to engage in shared work and to experience Findhorn's 'spiritual principles'—has attracted over 30,000 participants.³ Findhorn's growing popularity illustrates not only people's fascination with such communities, but also their willingness to invest (financially) in exploring them.

For the UK, the Intentional Communities Directory cites 91 'intentional communities', while 'Diggers & Dreamers—The Guide to Communal Living in Britain'⁴ lists 88 such communities, plus another 13 'embryonic' ones; it is likely there are hundreds more unlisted (e.g., Simon Community provides housing for homeless people in London). Not all these groups can be considered 'New Age'. Many are co-housing projects with socio-political foci or therapeutic communities for the disabled or disadvantaged (e.g., L'Arche). Some have a shared spiritual path, while others self-consciously reject all religions, preferring a more materialist approach.

Several well-known UK Christian communities also date back to the 1960s' and 1970s' counter-culture movements, e.g., the Ashram Community (1967) in Sheffield; the New Creation Christian Community, home of the Jesus Army (1974). Although variable in ethos and methods, they too advocate that a more integrated, healthier, and 'holistic' life can be better achieved through corporate living. This 'holistic' vision has been part of Christianity for a long time, taking different forms throughout history. The collaborative lifestyle adopted by the early apostles, as described in the 'Acts of the Apostles', has been

³ Website <www.findhorn.org/brochure2005/experienceweek.php>, accessed January 2006.

⁴ Website <www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk>, accessed September 2006.

a model for many types of Christian intentional communities, e.g., traditional religious orders, the house church movement, and groups like the Amish where members live out their faith in a collective context. The majority of UK Christian communities are located at specific geographical sites, be they shared houses, neighbourhood schemes, or conventional cloisters. Many sprang up out of particular traditions or denominations, such as the Othona Community (Anglican) or the Grail Community (Roman Catholic), and were usually inspired by an ordained minister or other religious. Some of these characteristics, however, may be changing.



*Figure 2.3 Sunday Communion at Greenbelt 2006—
'community' in the making?*

Ecumenism, for instance, has become a greater priority. Many groups that began under the auspices of one denomination have developed an inter- or non-denominational ethos, while others are formed explicitly to promote reconciliation

and Christian unity, e.g., Corrymeela Community⁵ in Belfast which encourages Protestant and Roman Catholic youth volunteers and participants. Alternative ways of organising communities are also being explored. For example, technology is harnessed to create online communities like Christians on the Net (<<http://christiansnet.com>>), cyber-churches like Ship of Fools (<www.shipoffools.com>), or the Church of England diocese of Oxford's 'i-church' (<www.i-church.org>). Many people who regularly help organise,

⁵ Which was inspired by the Iona Community, with whom it has close ties.

volunteer, and participate in major para-church events, such as annual conferences and festivals, such as Spring Harvest or Greenbelt, also regard themselves as ‘mobile communities’ and even meet together informally between festivals.

Instead of dwelling together in one place, some communities are geographically dispersed with members agreeing to be bound together by a ‘Rule’. The Northumbria Community, officially founded in the 1990s, has a ‘Mother House’ in Northumberland, but its membership is ‘a network of hugely diverse people, from different backgrounds, streams and edges of the Christian faith’.⁶ The Community of Aidan and Hilda founded in the 1980s by Ray Simpson, an Anglican priest, is headquartered on Lindisfarne, where its main house offers retreats and programmes to guests. The actual Community is ‘a world-wide fellowship whose members seek to live out Christianity *as a complete way of life*’.⁷ Both these groups are self-styled ‘Celtic Christian’, ecumenical communities whose visions emphasise healing, wholeness, and unity. Both these communities were inspired—not the least structurally—by the Iona Community, whose roots stretch further back to 1938.

The early part of the 20th century—dominated by the two World Wars and the Depression—spawned a handful of influential and enduring Christian communities. Some of them have developed social and political visions, which pertain to MacLaren’s designation of ‘public religion’ discussed in the next section.

Public Religion

MacLaren (2004: 89–90) regards ‘public religion’ as that which ‘forc[es] itself onto the public agenda...refusing to accept its relegation to a “private” sphere of personal preferences, subjectivity, leisure, family life, etc. Instead, [it]...rais[es] its head in public

⁶ Website <www.northumbriacommunity.org/WhoWeAre/index.html>, accessed January 2006.

⁷ Website <www.aidan.org.uk/about-cah/about-cah_main.html>, accessed January 2006, italics added.

as a potent force in politics, education and culture'. Far from becoming restricted and irrelevant, MacLaren thinks religion has in fact gained public significance. For Britain, he cites examples from the 1980s when religious and political figures clashed over incidents such as the Falkland's War memorial service (*ibid.*: 91). More recently, much of the public outcry against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq was spearheaded by religious leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The controversy over the rights of Muslim schoolgirls in France to wear the *foulard* also illustrates the ongoing potential for religious issues to intrude upon the public agenda.

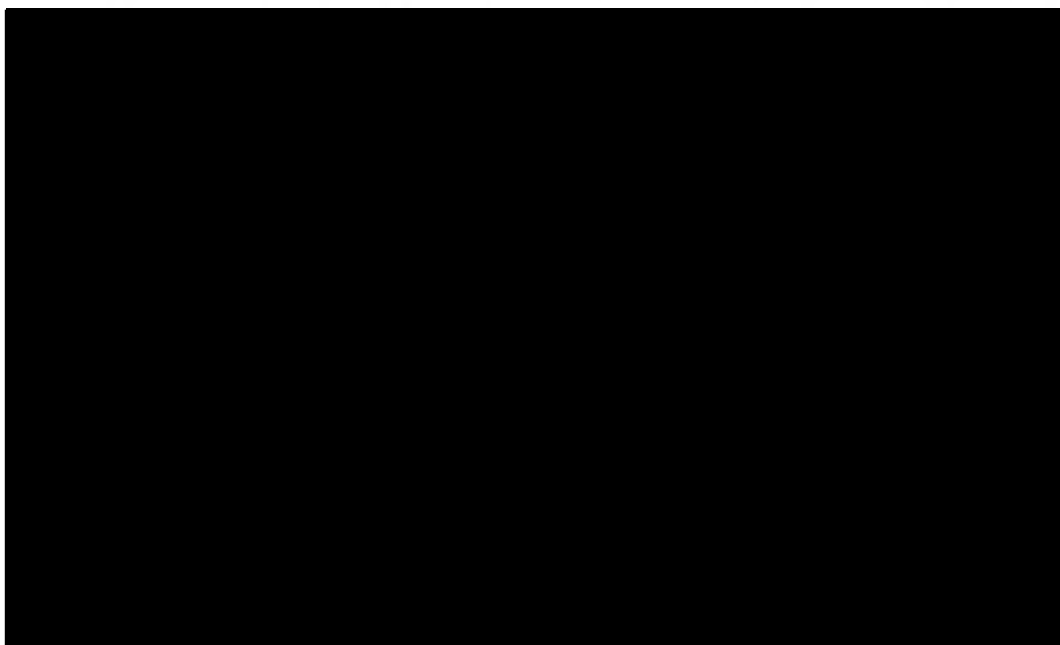


Figure 2.4 Youth at Greenbelt supporting 'Trade Justice'

Religions that have social force, however, are generally not those called 'New Age'. Bruce (1996) suggests that New Age-type religions prioritise maximising each person's human potential, and while the environment is a central concern, the inherent

individualism and relativism of New Age beliefs and practices renders such groups politically impotent. Their organisational structures tend to be loose and strong group allegiance is usually unnecessary. Environmental and societal problems—and their solutions—tend to be linked with personal ones. Nevertheless, their ideological underpinnings are expressed as forms of 'protest' against so-called Western secularisation, techno-industrialisation, and individualism. Interestingly, the Turners (1978: 39) predicted that pilgrimages would increasingly serve:

...not so much to maintain society's status quo as to recollect, and even to presage, an alternative mode of social being, a world where *communitas*, rather than a bureaucratic social structure, is preeminent.

Could the growing numbers of people who frequent New Age communities—set in their own alternative societies in secluded refuges—also be regarded as contemporary pilgrims? In any case, many such groups in Britain seek to transform society, not so much through political action, as through a reinvention of supposedly traditional beliefs and practices which are seen as 'closer to nature' and more indigenous, e.g., neo-paganism, druidism, Wicca, Celtic spirituality. These communities usually serve as havens or retreats from a corrupt and corrupting society, even if they hope their commune ideologies will eventually spread worldwide. Without enough group cohesion or discipline, they have made little impact upon mainstream public life.

Bruce (1996: 190) contrasts New Age religions with the new religions of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Methodism, which although also individualistic, effected radical political and social change, e.g., anti-Slavery movements, literacy, and savings banks. The evangelical revivalisms of that era are well documented. In Britain, groups like the Quakers, the Methodists, and the Clapham Sect were prolific social reformers, basing their zeal on the belief that religion and public morality are and should be closely intertwined. The Christian Socialist movement—from which the Labour Party was later founded—grew out of the notion that Jesus Christ was the world's first socialist. Although many evangelicals prioritised individual spiritual salvation, in practice their faith and politics were inseparable.

Callum Brown (1997) asserts, however, that at the end of the 1880s, evangelicalism—strongest in Western urban areas—was decaying. Brown's (1997: 124ff) work focuses on Scotland but he reckons this trend was not unique to it. Changing leisure habits, the rise of socialism, the labour movement, and the bourgeois crisis of faith all

challenged people's understanding of Christian mission. Brown argues that evangelicalism had operated as a single hegemonic ideology of social reform by resting on the direct commandment of God, but the cumulative effect of the liberalisation of presbyterian standards, the modernisation of worship, and the advance of modern biblical criticism all served to undermine confidence in Christian values as an agent of social and individual betterment.

The uncertainties provoked by two World Wars and the Great Depression inspired a new generation of Christian movements and communities. The Iona Community, in particular, stands out for its 'political' vision and theological and corporeal experimentation. The events of the early 20th century helped shape other communities' work, e.g., during WWII, Brother Roger sheltered refugees in a house in Taizé before the community grew to include more than a hundred Catholic and Protestant brothers from 25 countries today. Taizé is best known for its style of worship, using meditative chants, which is emulated all over the world, including on Iona. Other well-known groups created during this time, such as the Bruderhof Community (1920s), Moral Re-Armament (MRA) (1938), and the Othona Community (1946), amongst others, have also developed socio-political aims, but they tend to concentrate on spiritual or moral development as a prerequisite to building a more just society.

Groups like the Taizé brotherhood, the Corrymeela Community, Wellspring Community⁸ (in Australia), and the Iona Community attract thousands of people—especially women, young people, and disillusioned middle-classes—who feel they 'fall within the cracks' of the Church. These 'disenfranchised' are keen on 'spirituality' but cold on institutionalised religion. The growing popularity of 'marginal' religious communities and movements in the West—including New Age groups like the Findhorn

⁸ An offshoot of the Iona Community begun by former guests.

Foundation—may be a reaction to or result of the phenomenon of Christians today ‘believing without belonging’ (Davie 2000: 3). Rather than mitigating against the desire to belong, this phenomenon may instead fuel the hunger for a common and communal identity. This thesis investigates how the Resident Group utilise their ‘Iona experience’ to reinvent their identities and sense of belonging in relation to the place (and to each other). Rémond (1999: 204) contends that while Christianity has been evicted from the positions of power it formerly occupied, it continues to persist ‘in the heart of societies’; Christianity may now exist at the margins of society, but what happens at the margins endures and matters. In light of this, what is the relation between the centre and the periphery? How do these communities see themselves in relation to the Church, and vice versa? Why are services at places like Taizé and Iona bursting at the seams with attendees while mainstream churches appear to empty of members? To approach these questions, it is important to recognise what theological shifts have been taking place within this apparently ‘postmodern’, ‘post-Christian’ age.

The Theological Context

It would be foolish to draw hard lines between the various theological camps in Western Christianity today. Many subtle and sophisticated differentiations and overlaps exist amongst them. It is possible to apply any number of litmus tests based on doctrinal formulation, credal orthodoxy, worship style, Biblical hermeneutics, church affiliation, etc. to discern the ‘appropriate’ labels, or to posit a spectrum with axes running from ‘Catholic’ to ‘evangelical’, ‘conservative’ to ‘liberal’, ‘charismatic’ to ‘high church’, or whatever else, to try to delineate British Christianity. All too often, words such as ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’, ‘traditionalist’ and ‘orthodox’, ‘evangelical’ and ‘Evangelical’ are loosely tossed around, used and confused by people on all sides. A particularly pedantic Iona

Community Member asserted he is one of a handful of ‘evangelicals’ in the Community, insisting upon the small ‘e’; this fine distinction is probably not easily grasped by most Christians.

The meanings of such terms are commonly misunderstood, compounded by the perpetual conflict between emic and etic definitions. For instance, Trevor Williams, a former leader of the Corrymeela Community, regards himself as an Evangelical (capital ‘E’) but reckons most other Evangelicals would not.⁹ The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams draws fire from self-proclaimed, hard-line Evangelicals who fear he is too soft on the matter of homosexuality, for example, as well as from so-called Liberals who fear he will finally favour conservatism in order to avoid Anglican schism. Where one stands in reference to a particular community or point of doctrine can be viewed very differently depending on another’s position, whether inside or outside of the tradition, and how far in or out. In a sense, these terms and positions are all relative to one another.

It is beyond this thesis’ scope and expertise to articulate the friction- and faction-filled history of Western Christian theology and its concomitant terminologies. Instead, I present two main forces within British Christianity, broadly characterised by their attitudes towards and exercise of ‘mission’. My rationale is that it is within this ‘mission’ framework that the Iona Community understands itself and that others judge them, whether approvingly or critically.

Missions and Mission

According to David Bosch (1991), for most of Christian history, ‘mission’ referred exclusively to the (Western) doctrine of the Trinity and the mutually defining ‘sending’ relationships amongst them: the Son was ‘sent’ into the world by the Father and the Holy

⁹ Personal communication, interview, June 2001.

Spirit is continually being ‘sent’ by the Father and the Son. From the 16th century onwards, however, starting with the Jesuits, the term ‘mission’ became used to describe outward journeys by Christians to bring people under the Roman Catholic Church’s authority and into the faith. This coincided with the age of European colonial expansion and conquest, from which most of today’s overseas missionary movements derive. As such, contemporary populist usage of ‘mission’ is almost synonymous with the idea of ‘missions’, i.e., the propagation of Christianity through the conversion of non-believers. For many Christians, particularly Evangelicals and fundamentalists, ‘saving souls’ is the most important, if not sole, aim of a believer’s life. Ardent proselytisation takes place via a range of activities like the Alpha course, house churches, street evangelism, seeker services, lunchtime businessmen services, outreach rallies, home/cell groups, and relational/friendship evangelism, etc.

There is another understanding of ‘mission’, however, which some Christians feel should be broader than personal evangelism or ‘missions’. For them, the kingdom of God encompasses the whole of life, in its social, economic, cultural, and political entirety. ‘Mission’ thus extends to the establishment of justice, peace, and equality in every human sphere. This notion of ‘mission’ frames Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection in terms of power and oppression. Sin is not merely individualistic but corporate, and salvation requires Christians to work collectively to redeem society’s structures and institutions. Theologians of this stripe (e.g., Gardiner 2002) stress that Western Christianity must rethink and dismantle its old approaches to ‘mission’ and ‘missions’ if it is to have any kind of potency in current times.

Of course, being ‘Liberal’ or ‘Evangelical’ does not necessarily determine which ‘mission’ attitude one holds. In the US, for instance, some Evangelical (with a capital ‘E’) parachurch groups, such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, are radically dedicated to

social justice and urban regeneration, yielding numerous grassroots programmes and communities in poverty-ridden areas (e.g., inner-city Los Angeles). Their commitment is to work towards a holistic renewal of their neighbourhoods, from housing and health to racial reconciliation and social reform. In the UK, organisations like Tearfund and Christian Aid have similar public agendas, although they might differ in doctrinal orientation.

Theology or Politics?

What does calling someone a ‘liberal’ or a ‘conservative’ Christian really mean? To begin with, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘theology’ and ‘politics’. For one can be theologically conservative like the self-identified Evangelical (and sociologist) Tony Campolo—one of three pastors who met regularly with Bill Clinton during his presidency—but be politically on the left. The reverse is also true. Although it is less likely that theologically liberal Christians, like John Hick or Paul Tillich, would support ‘Christian right’ politics, liberal Christians do sometimes hold conservative views which appeal to history, tradition, or authority. They also exist across the mainline denominations, such as Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Roman Catholic, but tend to be incompatible with fundamentalist and Evangelical convictions.

Sometimes, the term ‘liberal Christianity’ is used to denote a liberal theological outlook, whereas ‘Christian liberalism’ refers to a liberal political outlook to which some theologically conservative Christians adhere. Nevertheless, the word ‘liberal’ tends to connote a more ‘progressive’ attitude towards Christianity, characterised by greater tolerance for doctrinal unorthodoxy, inclusive fellowship and ecumenism, emphasis on Christ’s humanity, respect for individual freedom and religious experience, the priority of the social Gospel, and a general precedence of ‘right’ action over ‘right’ belief. In addition,

‘liberal’ can be applied to a form of Biblical criticism, where the Bible is interpreted as a human document created within a historical and cultural context. Employing liberal hermeneutics may or may not necessarily lead to theologically or politically liberal positions.

Within this slippery range of definitions, where do the Iona Community fit?

The Iona Community: Toward Rome or Moscow?

Within any group or tradition, there is usually a continuum of views. People who would accept the label ‘liberal Christian’ may hold a mix of theologically conservative and liberal positions. This is true of Iona Community Members, whose church affiliations range ‘from Quaker to Catholic, and everything else in between’. Most of the original Members—primarily ministers and all men—were of the Church of Scotland. But from the start, the Community were viewed with suspicion by the Establishment. The Community’s founder George MacLeod took a strong anti-nuclear and pacifist stance, and although Members did not necessarily share all of MacLeod’s opinions, they were accused by the national Church of being ‘half way towards Rome and half way towards Moscow’ (Ferguson 1998: 56). They were frequently labeled Communists or betrayers of the Reformation (*ibid.*: 62).

By today’s standards, the Community appear conservative, at least ecclesiastically. They have never questioned, for instance, that the visible Church is the divinely appointed Body of Christ. They do not seek to replace the Church, but rather to remain a reforming movement within it; for decades, however, mainstream British Churches felt threatened by the Community’s presence and their particular blend of radical theology and politics.

Almost 70 years on, the Iona Community have more than come of age. The Community consist of 250 Members, over 1,500 Associates, and around 1,400 Friends

worldwide. Members—women and men of diverse backgrounds, more lay than ordained—live throughout Britain, with a few overseas. Their five-fold Rule involves: (1) daily prayer and Bible reading; (2) sharing and accounting for the use of money; (3) planning and accounting for the use of time; (4) action for justice and peace in society; and (5) meeting with and accounting to each other. Their administrative headquarters are in Glasgow, where their youth work is also based. They have a publishing house (Wild Goose Publications), a bi-monthly magazine (*Coracle*), and the closely affiliated Wild Goose Resource Group (WGRG) who are world-renowned worship and liturgical specialists. Iona Abbey and the MacLeod Centre on the isle of Iona are the Community's two main guest centres, while Camas on the nearby Ross of Mull serves as a third centre, a back-to-basics camp for disadvantaged youth.



Fig 2.5 Bust of George MacLeod in the Abbey Refectory

The Community continue to exist under the auspices of the Church of Scotland to whom they are obliged to report annually at the General Assembly. But as mentioned before, the membership encompasses a wide range of denominations, and the Community are now formally associated with the ecumenical bodies for Britain (CCBI), Scotland (ACTS), and England (CET). The socio-political climate of Britain has also changed since MacLeod's heyday, but the founder's original purpose 'to apply on weekdays what we sing about on

Sundays' remains unshaken (MacLeod, in Ferguson 1998: 12). Although the Community do not stir up quite the same kind of shock waves as they did back in the post-war period, they continue to be at the forefront of exploring cutting-edge theology and of social and political activism. Protesting, and being arrested, at Faslane (a controversial nuclear

station in Scotland) is a common experience for Members. The current Leader Kathy Galloway preached at the 2005 Labour Party conference in Brighton at the behest of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Basing her reflections on that day's lectionary readings, Galloway (2005: 2) spoke about how Jesus—in overturning the moneylenders' stalls at the Temple—'challenge[d] the status quo, and put forward an alternative vision of holiness...[which] was profoundly disturbing and threatening to the [political and religious] authorities in Jerusalem'.

The Iona Community defy easy categorisation. On one hand, Evangelical Christians think they are too 'liberal', even uncomfortably close to 'New Age'. While some may share the Community's social justice concerns, Evangelicals are generally wary of the apparent lack of emphasis on direct evangelism and personal piety. The Community's explicit engagement with controversial issues like homosexuality, feminism, and inter-faith dialogue and their habit of pushing the boundaries of tradition and orthodoxy often cause conservative Christians to shy away. On the other hand, more liberal Christians, such as Unitarians or universalists as well as non-Christians, regret the Community's proximity to institutional religion and complain their liturgies are too Christo-centric. One volunteer argued that the Community's 'inclusive' language 'did not go far enough', disappointed by the neglect in addressing the divine as 'Goddess'. Yet thousands continue to flock to the island centres to participate in 'Iona-style worship' and to 'live in community' for a while. The Community, too, actively resist becoming too large as people clamour to join.

People are drawn to the Community and to Iona for a variety of reasons explored more fully in later chapters. Suffice to say the Community's blend of 'integrated spirituality' seeking to bring together 'work and worship, prayer and politics, sacred and secular' is heartily cheered by enthusiasts. Ron Ferguson, a former Leader, echoes

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's call for “‘holy worldly’” people—followers of Jesus who live in the world but who are sustained by an arcane, or secret, discipline of prayer. Ferguson (1998: 148) states that “‘contemplation’ or ‘action’ for the Iona Community are false alternatives’.

Incarnational Theology

Incarnational theology is central to the Iona Community's Christian ethos. It is premised on the notion that God entered into the material world as a human being, Jesus Christ, within a particular historical and cultural setting. Several theological strands emerge from this idea. Firstly, the humanity of Christ is being reclaimed and rediscovered. To be a Christian is to emulate the historical person of Jesus Christ in whom God was perfectly immanent. Some adherents go so far as to deny Christ's ontological deity as the incarnate God-man, proposing instead that he had become the ideal human being, the ‘supreme example of God indwelling man’ (Sawyer 1998: 11). The emphasis here is on humanity's redeemed status rather than on its original fallenness. St Augustine's ‘original sin’ is replaced by his contemporary (the British heretic) Pelagius' rejection of it—Celtic Christian revivalists today like to claim Pelagius as one of their own (e.g., Meek 2000: 128; Davies 1999). There is thus a greater celebration of the human body, including sex, and of the common humanity (and sanctity) of all peoples, regardless of their faith affiliation or lack of it.

Secondly, incarnational theology implies that the corporeal world matters to the divine, that He participates in it in all its suffering, and is in constant communion with it to bring about redemption and perfection. The immanent God is the God of an ongoing evolution of humanity and creation. History and human freedom are viewed optimistically. Proponents (e.g., Ward 1991) seek to mitigate against previous over-emphases on the

transcendental qualities of God. For most of Western Christian history, the conventional focus on an ‘otherworldly’ faith, as Foucault points out, gave rise to techniques of examination, confession, obedience, and guidance aimed at ‘a kind of everyday death’, a ‘mortification’ in this world, a renunciation of this world and of oneself, ‘A death which is supposed to provide life in another world’ (quoted in Bauman 1998: 59). Transcendental theology declares that salvation and eternal life are to be gained in an ontological time and space beyond the present physical one. A theology of immanence, however, proposes a new kind of eschatological narrative, one in which it is life in *this* world *before* death that counts, for the epistemology of the afterlife cannot truly be grasped. Christian Aid’s 21st-century slogan, ‘We believe in life before death’, testifies to this theological shift.

Thirdly, incarnational theology has implications for the role of the body of believers called the ‘Church’. If Christians are called to be ‘like Christ’ and Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God on earth, then Christians, too, are to be God’s incarnated ‘Body’. God’s immanence in the world is thus facilitated through the actual presence of people who live out their faith in the material here and now. Instead of waiting for divine intervention from an otherwise aloof, transcendental God ‘up there’ to solve societal ills, for instance, incarnational theology declares that Christians themselves *are* the ‘divine intervention’, what the Iona Community describe, quite literally, as ‘God’s hands and feet in the world’. ‘The Church’ therefore cannot stand apart from ‘the world’; it is responsible for the state of the corporeal world—in all its political, economic, and social spheres—and not simply for the spiritual redemption of intangible souls.

Liberation Theology

The theological shift emphasising God’s immanence is in line with the advent of the controversial ‘liberation theology’—which equally informs many Iona Community

Members' convictions. Liberation theology emerged from the economic, political, and national foment of Latin America of the 1950s and 1960s and from native Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians' revolutionary engagement with the social Gospel. Combining radical biblical exegesis, Marxist-style class analysis, and the hermeneutics of praxis, theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973) claim that God has 'a bias for the poor'. This view reacts against predominant First World theologies that liberationists believe have all-too-often rendered Christians passive or indifferent, even complicit, in situations of injustice and oppression (e.g., Nazi Germany). Overlapping with ideas within incarnational theology, liberationists understand God's humanly embodiment in Jesus Christ to be a total immersion of the divine in a historical context of conflict and violence. Jesus' death, not merely a vicarious compensation on behalf of sinful humankind, in fact exemplifies God's suffering in 'all the crosses of the oppressed'.

Working to bring about social transformation and freedom from economic and political exploitation for the marginalised and disempowered are thus regarded as Christian imperatives. Author, researcher, and activist Alastair McIntosh—former business advisor to the Iona Community—has applied the tenets of liberation theology to Scottish land reform and community empowerment, which in 1997, after seven generations of landlordism, brought the Isle of Eigg in the Hebrides into communal ownership (McIntosh 1999). Although not a religion-based project, McIntosh nevertheless believes that recovery of 'spirituality' is fundamental to 'authentic community development'. His articulation of liberation theology involves 'the process of becoming aware of the circumstances that cause oppression' (*ibid.*). This awareness leads to action—and 'the continuous process of action and reflection is known as "praxis"' (*ibid.*).

This is an important element of liberation theology that many prominent Iona Community Members (e.g., Ian Fraser) strongly identify with; it resonates with Gutiérrez's

(1973) definition of theology as ‘critical reflection on historical praxis’—in other words, theology should arise from dynamic engagement with the actual conditions of present-day society. Many Members see themselves as inheritors of the Scottish tradition of democratic intellectualism, which values knowledge for its usefulness and service to the community and attempts to resist the danger of creating self-serving elites. In fact, rather than theology *per se* or even political inclinations, it could be argued that what Community Members hold most in common with one another is this understanding of *practice*. ‘Doing’ theology in this way also echoes the beliefs of another key figure Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who called for the Church to redefine religion by first seeing the world with ‘a view from below’.

Remonking the Church, the Bonhoeffer way?

In 1935, in a letter to his brother, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called for a counter-cultural movement against the Third Reich, which was becoming increasingly influential within the German Church. He referred to ‘a new kind of monasticism’ from which ‘the restoration of the Church will surely come’. A few months later, Bonhoeffer founded a residential seminary for men as an ‘experimental community’; it was eventually made illegal and shut down by the Nazis. Bonhoeffer was later imprisoned and executed.

By the turn of the millennium, Bonhoeffer’s seminal ideas about a ‘new monasticism’ have been appropriated by Christians of almost every theological bent, resulting in an explosion of ‘alternative’ communities and ministries springing up all over the West intent on marrying traditional monastic spirituality with contemporary society (e.g., Gateway Ministries in Northern Ireland). In the US, young evangelicals are creating small intentional communities in poverty-stricken areas, ‘who see in community life an answer to society’s materialism and the church’s complacency to it’ (Moll 2005). On the

website of ‘Fresh Expressions’—an initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and supported by the Methodist Council to discover and cultivate ‘missionary church’ renewal—the only movement specifically mentioned is ‘new monasticism’, citing groups as organisationally and theologically divergent as the Iona Community, Taizé, the Tertiary Franciscans, the Northumbria Community, and the Order of Mission as leading examples.¹⁰

This widely differing modern usage of the term ‘new monasticism’ is ‘developing into a large umbrella of interpretations that is in danger of becoming something of a symptom of our post-modern cultural thirst for anything “new” in order to make sense of our lives’.¹¹ Monos, a limited company by guarantee, was launched in 2004 to enable research on the historical and current engagements between monasticism, society, and the Church. It is unclear whether Monos is in the business of serious scholarship or, judging by its list of conferences and workshops offered at a fee, if it too is chasing the cash cows of ‘Celtic spirituality’ and ‘new monasticism’.

In terms of the Iona Community, Bonhoeffer’s impact on MacLeod led to a much broader and deeper understanding of ‘new monasticism’ that some present-day imitators miss. It was Bonhoeffer’s belief that ‘Christianity had to address the centre of life rather than the “religious” margins’—to the point of risking one’s life—that left an enduring mark on the Community’s ethos (Ferguson 1990: 219). They are convinced that God is involved in all aspects of society and not confined merely to the Church or ‘religion’.

While others may regard it as a pioneer of ‘new monasticism’, the Iona Community did not self-consciously choose to be so. Certainly, there are close correlates of theological outlook and concrete, radical outworkings of faith between the Iona Community and Bonhoeffer’s ‘new monasticism’ ideals (Gardiner 2002, 2005). But

¹⁰ Website <www.freshexpressions.org.uk/section.asp?id=218>, accessed January 2006.

¹¹ Monos website <www.monos.org.uk/monos_about_secular.php>, accessed September 2006.

aspects such as its geographically dispersed paradigm of community and its ‘monastic’ five-fold Rule were initially unplanned and arose organically in response to earliest members feeling that they ‘continued to belong together’ long after their Glasgow curacies in Govan’s housing projects were over.

Nevertheless, contemporary attempts to ‘remonk’ the Church continue to find inspiration in the Iona Community and its supposed model of Bonhoeffer’s ‘new monasticism’. Perhaps one reason for this is because of the romantic appeal of Iona itself and the imaginative way in which it has played a pivotal role in the Community’s origins and in the ongoing ‘experiment’ of corporate living and worshipping at the island centres.

A Theology of Place

Much has been written about the significance of ‘sacred space’ in Judeo-Christian tradition, of which Jerusalem—heavenly and earthly—is probably the most poignant. Typically, factors like tradition, martyrdom, miracles, associations with Jesus, saints, and other holy persons, contribute to the sacred quality of a place.

In recent years, theologians and others have begun to look afresh at the relevance of ‘place’ as a solution to today’s ‘postmodern rootlessness’. Building on philosophical and anthropological research, as well as on the work of architects and novelists, Philip Sheldrake (2001) argues that how human beings construct their personal and religious identities is crucially linked to their ‘rootedness’ in their places of habitation. John Inge (2003), too, proposes that the loss of a sense of place in a globalised world has led to dehumanisation and must be recovered.

Andrew Phillips (n.d.) makes the case that a theology of place can help where people are struggling to consolidate an authentic sense of belonging. He argues that the Church, instead of condemning neo-pagan or secular enthusiasm for Cornish Revival (e.g.,

holy wells decorated with ‘prayer cloths’), should be contributing to Cornwall’s attempts to create a unique and distinctive (Celtic) identity for itself—one which can be shared by all its sub-cultures. Similarly, Alastair McIntosh’s (1999) experience with the Isle of Eigg found that ‘belonging’ to a place could be re-defined, beyond bonds of blood, as people’s ‘willing[ness]...to cherish and be cherished by that place and its peoples’.

Why does ‘Place’ Matter?

For many of the types of intentional or utopian communities mentioned—whether inspired by the Iona Community, ‘new monasticism’, or collective empowerment—establishing a ‘local’ and/or ‘emplaced’ identity appears to be pre-eminent. A distinctive identity rooted in ‘place’, whether romantic (e.g., Findhorn or Iona) or gritty (e.g., inner-city Govan or Philadelphia), is necessary for participation in the global ‘spiritual’ marketplace. Groups may seek to ‘reinvent’ the place history and to ‘re-indigenise’ place identities and ‘spiritualities’ in order to legitimise their claims to the place. For example, the appropriation of Pelagius and his teachings by British¹² Christians today is one way in which they try to reconstruct and authenticate an ‘indigenous’ Celtic spirituality unconstrained by the institutional Church (e.g., Meek 2000; Davies 1999). The proximity of Celtic monasticism in style and structure to the Desert Fathers of the Orthodox tradition is used to assert Celtic Christianity’s ‘more pure and primitive’ (Bradley 1999) spirituality.

The islands of Lindisfarne and Iona, for instance, are where some of these ‘authentication’ processes are taking place in Britain. The Iona Community is one of several intentional communities in the Western Isles and the Highlands of Scotland. Many groups choose to situate themselves in such remote, striking landscapes for their historical

¹² Including Australians, New Zealanders, and North Americans claiming Scottish, Irish, or Welsh descent; see Chapter 4 for discussion on Iona visitors searching for their ‘roots’.

‘Celtic’ associations and alluring geography. The appeal of such places is precisely because they are ‘other’, outside of urban, mainstream society and ‘closer to nature’.

While ‘place’ matters greatly to them, ironically many of these communities have ambivalent, sometimes antagonistic, relationships with the local people who feel their ‘true’ identity, land, and heritage have been usurped by outsiders. This phenomenon is not unlike the ‘town and gown’ divide in Oxford. Local inhabitants in rural settings like Findhorn or Iona themselves struggle to maintain their own place identities in the face of rampant competition from these ‘invasive’ groups, who are often empowered with more education, money, and other resources than the locals. Phillip (n.d.) is optimistic that a distinct Cornish identity can be shared by all sub-cultures through the Cornwall Revival, while Kohn (2002) found that although achieving ‘islander’ status in the Hebrides is possible for ‘incomers’ through active participation in locals’ everyday practical and social worlds, they nonetheless contend with the longstanding discourse of identity as being rooted in blood ties and ethnicity.

These highly potent contestations for ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ in places located in the ‘periphery’ reflect Ardener’s (1989) insight that ‘remote areas’ are ‘event dense’. Because of their social and cultural (if not geographical) distance from the mainstream or ‘dominant zone’, inhabitants in such ‘Celtic borderlands’ are vulnerable to ‘continuous threat’ from the outside world to their own social and self-definitions. This threat comes not just from visitors but sometimes from ‘outsider’ groups who, feeling themselves at variance from the mainstream world, set up permanent camp on locals’ territory and claim it as their own ‘spiritual’ *and* physical home. Ardener’s (*ibid.*: 222–3) assertion that such social spaces are ‘very crucibles of the creation of identity’ certainly holds true for Iona. Iona inhabitants have been subject to constant ‘intrusion’ from outsiders for a long time. The relationship between the islanders and the Iona Community (and the Resident Group),

however, is very different from that during the Columban and Benedictine periods on Iona. Amongst other factors, much of this is due to how the Iona Community is situated within the sociological and theological frameworks of British Christianity today, as laid out in this chapter.

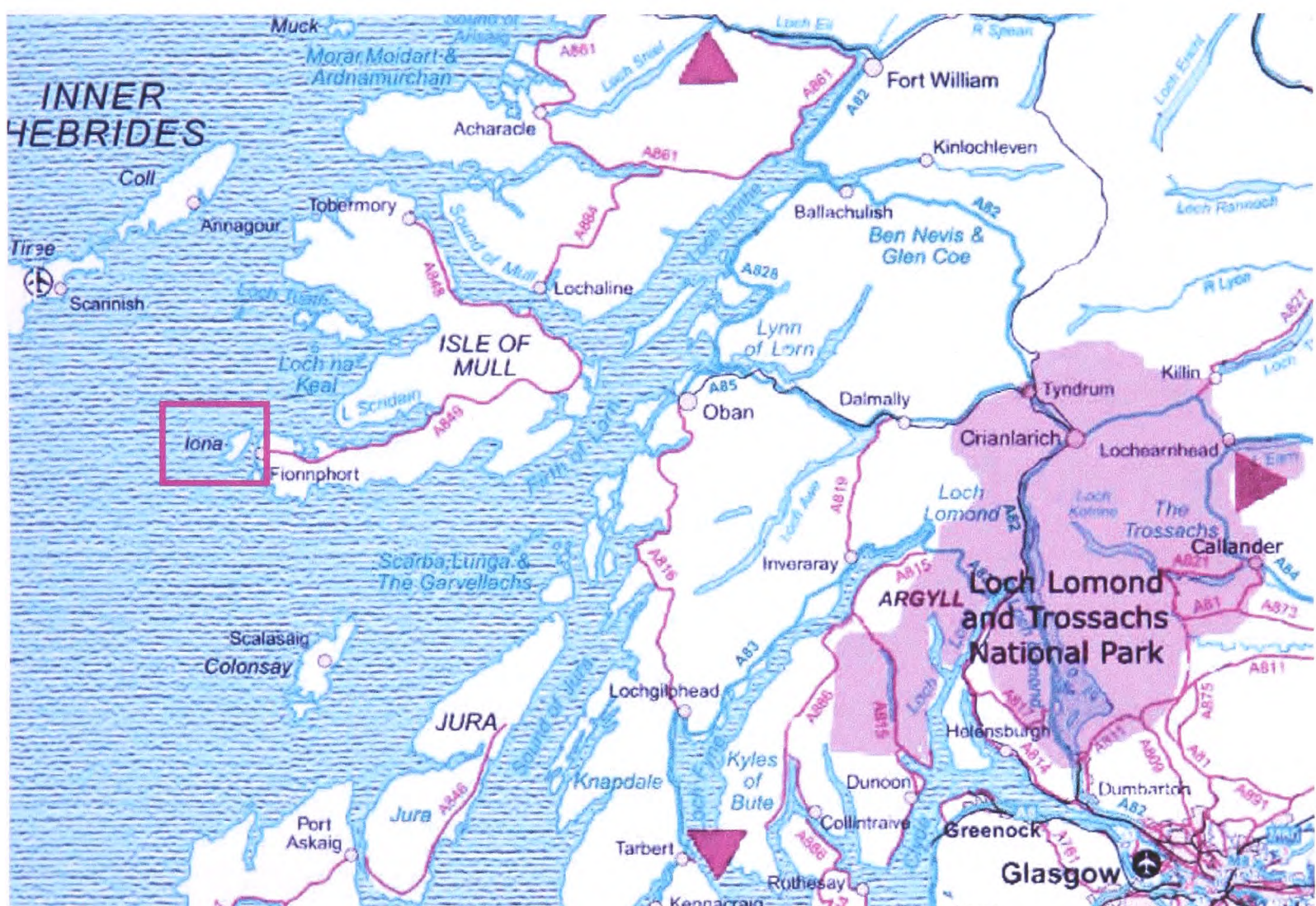
Broadly speaking, contemporary British Christianity harbours a split between Liberal believers and conservative Evangelicals. In their most extreme forms, the latter verge towards a fundamentalist worldview where personal piety and proselytisation are quintessential, while the former tilt toward a universalist or relativist attitude where ‘belief’ is subordinate to living by an ethical moral code. It is within this theological gulf that the Iona Community find themselves. Members’ convictions are variously informed by incarnational theology, liberation theology, and theologies of place—all of which serve to cultivate the notion of social and political engagement in people’s local contexts as a necessary, holistic expression of faith.

For many Western Christians today, the Iona Community—and their offshoot, the Resident Group—are regarded as models of Bonhoeffer’s ‘new monasticism’, an egalitarian ideal that values ‘community’ through monastic discipline *and* valorises involvement in, not renunciation of, the world. On Iona, the Resident Group seek to embody the Iona Community’s vision of ‘rebuilding the common life’ amongst disparate groups. The recent Celtic revivalisms, the contemporary sociological and theological climate, and the complex web of social groups—and their respective, sometimes rival, agendas—which populate the locale of Iona all conspire to make the tiny, remote island an exceptionally ‘dense’ place, a place of ‘lived paradox’. It is into this ‘crucible of the creation of identity’ (Ardener 1989: 222–3) that thousands of visitors journey in search of an exceptional, transformative ‘Iona experience’, and it is to this group of Iona enthusiasts we now turn in Part II.

II. 'ESCAPE TO THE EDGE': VISITORS TO A SACRED ISLE

This *secret* is strictly between you and me: *Scotland's furthest edge*. You may have heard of it but only by *escaping to the edge* are its mysteries uncovered. ...only then will you realise that the *total experience at the edge* is considerably greater than the sum of its component parts of nature, culture, beaches, islands, sea and sky... There is one common denominator in all this diversity, that's the sense of peace, solitude and well-being which washes over and cleanses you *at the edge*....

Opening text, website sponsored by VisitScotland¹ (italics added)



Partial map of Scotland showing Iona in relation to Glasgow, Oban, and Mull

¹ 'Escape to the Edge—The Highlands and Islands of North and West Scotland' website, VisitScotland, part of the Scottish National Tourist Board, <www.escapetotheedge.co.uk>, accessed 10 August 2006.

CHAPTER 3. Iona Pilgrimage and Practice

Iona is the most famous ecclesiastical site in Scotland's Highlands and Islands. Measuring approximately three-and-a-half miles by one-and-a-half miles, Iona lies off the Scottish west coast in an island group called the Inner Hebrides. The Ross of Mull rests between Iona and the coastal town of Oban. Iona's rocks are hailed as being amongst the oldest in Britain, if not in the world, adding to the isle's mystique. The rugged landscape laid bare to the elements is home to the rare corncrake and a species of wild orchid. Its wide expanse of sky and white, silvery beaches contrast with the red granite of the Ross of Mull and the black basalt columns of Staffa. Indeed, Iona's landscape—although not as dramatic or striking as other Hebridean islands—invites intense romanticisation. Its historical associations with Celtic pioneers like St Columba and George MacLeod has further excited mythmakers and mythmaking.

Over the past several Celtic revivals, where much fact and fiction became enmeshed, Iona has gained much international renown. The Book of Kells was supposedly begun by Iona's Columban monks before being taken to Kells in Ireland for safekeeping. Although the island was indeed a 'burial place of kings', their actual number and identities are impossible to verify; much speculation nonetheless persists and visitors frequently inquire after Macbeth's grave. Celtic Christian enthusiasts have also reinvented Iona as the last Celtic bastion or stronghold against the decision for Rome at the Synod of Whitby (AD 664), where it is (erroneously) claimed the 'Celtic Church' asserted its independence. Most significant is the island's reputation as 'the cradle of Christianity' in Britain (or at least in Scotland), upon which recent historical opinion casts doubt, suggesting St Ninian's earlier missionising efforts at Whithorn had more permanent impact than previously believed (see, e.g., Meek 2000: 128–30; MacArthur 1995).

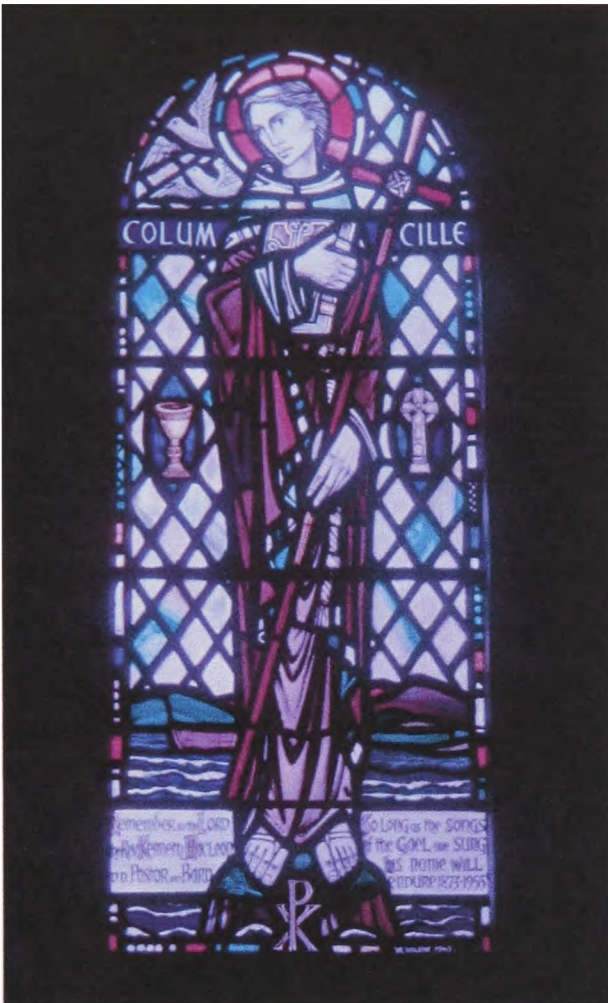


Fig 3.1 A modern stained-glass window of St Columba in the Abbey church

Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that in AD 563 a charismatic Irish prince and monk named Columba arrived on Iona and established what eventually became the first of many influential monasteries all over Britain.¹ The fraternity of religious houses Columba founded in Scotland and Ireland acknowledged his Iona base as ‘the mother church’, the head and centre of Columban Christendom. This model of a ‘dispersed Christian community’ led by a strong, dynamic figure and held together by a common vision—not unlike a clan—would later be taken up by the Iona Community.

Iona Pilgrimages Past: From ‘Centre’ to ‘Periphery’

Early and Medieval Pilgrims to Iona

The island’s earliest attraction for pilgrims was the heroic figure of St Columba himself, his miracles, and his mission base.² The fact that Columba descended from a powerful lineage and had strategic connections with the Dál Riata Scots in the area is significant. During its heyday in the 6th and 7th centuries, Iona received streams of pilgrims seeking teaching, healing, penance, and absolution. Royal and ecclesiastical visitors, monastic envoys,

¹ Columba’s legend is contested by historians (see Sharpe 1995a), the gist being that he had copied without permission from his mentor’s Psalms manuscript. The copyright controversy led to a battle Columba’s kinsmen won but over which he felt great remorse at having caused so many deaths. Depending on the theory, he then left Ireland either voluntarily as penance or was exiled. Whatever the cause, following the heightened devotional value the Irish Church placed on pilgrimage overseas, Adomnan (n.d.: 105) portrays his patron, predecessor, and kinsman as having chosen to leave Ireland for Britain to be ‘a pilgrim for Christ’.

² There is speculation Iona was already a sacred destination in pre-Christian times.

political and other exiles seeking refuge and protection, as well as the more humble pilgrim all made their way there. Some even sought to join the Columban community (Sharpe 1995a: 12) or to live out the rest of their lives in that holy place.

After Columba's death in 597, his remains were moved and divided between Iona and Ireland several times.³ The Iona monastery continued to be highly influential, remaining integrated into the Irish Church. Through to the late 7th century, Iona's pre-eminence in Scotland, Ireland, and parts of England was unparalleled, both politically and religiously. During this 'golden age of saints', Iona was by no means considered remote or peripheral. With its natural and strategic advantages, the island lay at the hub of important trading and political waterways (MacArthur 1995: 10–11) and at the core of a network of Hebridean and mainland churches in Argyll (Sharpe 1995a: 25). Viking raids severely disrupted life in the Western Isles, but after settlement and conversion to Christianity, the Scandinavians too came on pilgrimage to Iona.

By the 10th century, the venerated isle was at the crossroads of three cultures: Scottish, Irish, and Scandinavian. The effect of the Viking raids, however, meant the chief seat of the Columban order was permanently moved to Kells (*ibid.*: 82–3). The geographical shift of political interests (e.g., from western to eastern Scotland) also resulted in Iona becoming considerably marginalised (*ibid.*: 83; MacArthur 1995: 33ff). Rulers and chiefs from the different kingdoms nevertheless continued to be brought for burial in Iona's sacred soil to be close to the saint's remains.⁴

Although the Viking raids necessitated removing his relics—including his tunic, hand-bell, pastoral staff, and gospel-book—for safekeeping, pilgrims still travelled to Iona. Its continuing status as a royal burial ground, up until the 11th century, further enhanced the

³ Apparently all were taken to Kells and Dunkeld for safekeeping in 849, but there is evidence at least one of Columba's bones was brought back to Iona by the early 15th century (MacArthur 1995: 43).

⁴ Shakespeare tells in *Macbeth* that Duncan's body was 'carried to Colme's kill: The sacred storehouse of his predecessors, And guardian of their bones'.

island's prestige and holiness. Funeral processions, landing at Martyrs Bay, would have taken the Street of the Dead to their final destination. In 1203, Somerled's son, Reginald, established the Benedictine community on Iona. He also founded the Nunnery of Augustinian canonesses situated near the centre of the village. Irish clergy, strongly opposing this 'lurch' towards Rome, traveled to Iona to stage a *coup*. However, the Benedictines were not deterred and Iona Abbey ceased to be part of the Irish church (Sharpe 1995a: 85).⁵



Fig 3.2 The Nunnery today, ruins preserved and converted into gardens

⁵ Cultural ties between northern Ireland and the Hebrides remained strong up until the 16th century.

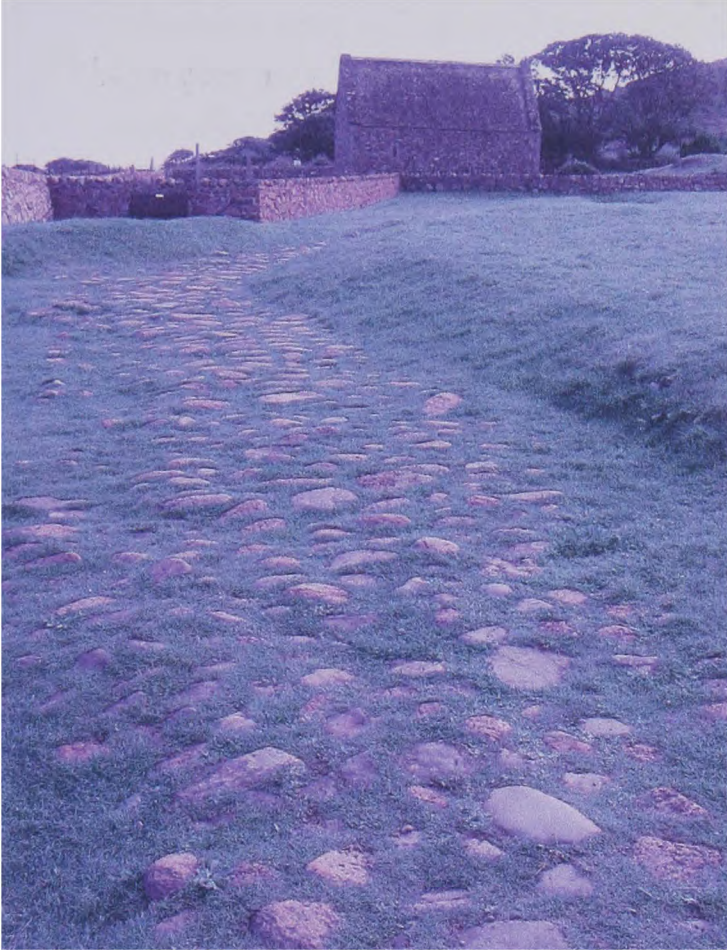


Fig 3.3 The Street of the Dead, leading towards the Reilig Odhrain graveyard, the famed 'burial place of kings'

Over the next three centuries religious life on Iona was reinvigorated (Ritchie & Fisher 2001: 42). In 1499, Iona Abbey began operating (*de facto*) as the Cathedral of the Isles. Iona's renewed status enticed a steady stream of pilgrims drawn by the rumour that some of Columba's relics had been brought back. Powerful men and nobles continued to be buried on Iona, traditionally including the Lords of the Isles.

For early and medieval pilgrims, St Columba's shrine on the island was probably the culminating point of a circuit of

'many satellite pilgrim stations, outlying chapels, burial grounds (at least nine existed on Iona), hermitages and holy sites associated with St Columba's miracles...' (*ibid.*: 44).

Adomnan's *Life of St Columba* recounts stories of 'miracles of power' and angelic visitations, for instance, at the Hill of the Fairies (or Angels) beside the Machair (Book III 16). Pilgrims would have travelled to Iona particularly on great feast days. Early pilgrims may have rowed or sailed by curragh to Martyrs Bay or Columba's Bay. Because of its island geography, tidal changes, and weather patterns, there were always various routes to Iona by land and sea. Also possible were individual sea-routes by curragh or sailing skiff from anywhere north or south along the Scottish west coast or from Ireland (see Fig 3.4).



Fig 3.4 Map showing early travellers' routes to Iona (and parish divisions)

A handful of Irish high crosses on Iona probably served as markers leading pilgrims along the route to the saint's shrine. A series of standing stones along the Ross of Mull towards Fionnphort was thought to have been 'guide-posts to strangers visiting Iona on pilgrimage' by land, but MacArthur (1995: 5–6) thinks these pre-Christian erections have had 'an extra reputation foisted upon' them because of their closeness to the venerated isle. Rumour persists that up to 360 Iona crosses were cast into the sea during Reformation frenzy; in reality only a few crosses may have been broken (*ibid.*: 20). Of those that survive, MacLean's Cross, at which medieval pilgrims probably stopped to pray, still stands on the road leading to the Abbey.

Social historian and Iona descendent Mairi MacArthur in her book *Columba's Isle: Iona from Past to Present* further speculates:

[Pilgrims] may have paused on the path from the shore to pray in St Mary's Chapel, of which only a fragment now stands. They washed their feet at the granite trough at the church's west door before thronging the nave to hear, through a screen, the sacrament celebrated or to touch the monastery's sacred relics. (*ibid.*: 43)

The Benedictines heartily encouraged pilgrims, who were a major source of income, especially to fund construction works being undertaken. In 1428, a papal petition from the Iona Benedictines requested an indulgence of three years off purgatory to all pilgrims visiting Iona on Columba's feast day (*ibid.*: 43). The Nunnery probably also served as guest lodgings for 'highborn ladies travelling as pilgrims' (Ritchie & Fisher 2001: 45).



Fig 3.5 St Columba's Shrine, the small roofed chapel, is tucked between St John's and St Martin's Crosses

The Reformation Period

In the mid-16th century, the Reformation brought an end to the era of monastic life on Iona. Political and ecclesiastical complications—compounded by its remoteness and parish allocation—resulted in Iona's monuments being destroyed and the Abbey and Nunnery buildings left to decay. In the 1630s, Charles I tried to re-use the church as the Cathedral of the Isles, but failed. After almost a thousand years of monastic occupation, Iona pilgrims

could no longer come to worship or witness religious life first hand. The once vibrant and thriving religious and political ‘centre’ had become obsolete. Peripheral to large-scale events taking place on the British and European main stages, Iona had been relegated a negligible role.

The following saying, probably based on oral tradition, appeared in print in the late 18th century. Although highly unlikely, it is often attributed to St Columba as a ‘prophecy’ he had made about Iona:

An I mo chridhe, I mo ghràidh
An àite guth manaich bidh geum bà
Ach mun tig an saoghal gu crìch
Bidh I mar a bha.

In Iona of my heart, Iona of my love
In the place of monks’ voices will be lowing of cattle
But ere the world shall come to an end
Iona shall be as it was.

MacArthur (1995: 45) suggests this saying might have been composed by a Benedictine brother on Iona who, in the middle of the 16th century, ‘sensed the winds of change’. The prediction that ‘In the place of monks’ voices will be lowing of cattle’ came true as the medieval monastic buildings fell derelict and locals allowed their animals to roam freely amongst the ruins. It was not until the latter part of the 18th century that the outside world began to take interest once again in visiting Iona ‘to walk through the ruins and invoke ancient memories’ (Ferguson 1990: 154). The second part of the ‘prophecy’ is nowadays invoked by those who believe the Iona Community’s 20th-century renewal of worship and communal life at Iona Abbey fulfills it. However, whether this means ‘Iona shall be as it was’, honoured as a sacred site and regaining its former pre-eminence in the Western world is open to debate. Can the ‘centre’ be recovered?

‘Those Illustrious Ruins’: Early ‘Tourism’ on Iona

After the Reformation, although the religious orders may have dissipated, Iona’s ‘secular’ population did not. Local life continued to revolve around cultivating the land and raising cattle, sheep, and horses. No travellers’ accounts to Iona between 1549 and 1688 survive (MacArthur 1995: 57), but from the late 17th century onwards, the sporadic adventurer did make his way to Iona. During this time, travel in Scotland was difficult and the country’s wilder, more remote areas were deemed ‘unfashionable’ (Christian & Stiller 2000: 9). By the second half of the 18th century, however, people’s curiosity about the Western Isles had been piqued. Explorer and naturalist Sir Joseph Banks’ ‘discovery’ of the geographical wonders of Staffa and Dr Samuel Johnson and James Boswell’s celebrated tour of Scotland stirred public fascination and inspired many followers in their footsteps. Felix Mendelsson’s ‘Hebridean Overture’ (1832) captivated further attention. Sir Walter Scott, Keats, Wordsworth, Prince Albert, Earl Grey, and Robert Louis Stevenson were amongst Iona’s most distinguished visitors, as well as George MacLeod’s great-great-grandfather Reverend Norman MacLeod.

With the upsurge of interest in British history and antiquities, coupled with the rise of Romanticism, travelers and antiquarians began to visit Iona and produced illustrations, etchings, and engravings of its landscape, together with written accounts. Road conditions were much improved and interest in Britain’s untamed landscapes had also become ‘respectable’. It was popular for ‘gentlemen of means’ to tour extensively and publish their expedition records; Christian and Stiller (2000: 10) regard these as ‘early tourists’. Being one of few locals who could speak English, the Iona schoolmaster regularly acted as guide to the increasing numbers of visitors from the end of the 18th century. The guides narrated information obtained from the local store of oral tradition and from written sources, which themselves were ‘a mixture of fact, myth and impression’, such as an Irish *Life of Columba*

(MacArthur 1995: 66). Travellers' accounts and antiquarian writings reproduced such information—and inspired more visitors and imitators—making it difficult to disentangle legend and conjecture from history, as 'fact and fable continued to weave their many layers around the Sacred Isle' (*ibid.*: 66–7).

It was due to antiquarian attention and visitors' concern over the state of 'those illustrious ruins', as Dr Johnson famously called them, that Iona was brought back into the public eye. In the late 19th century, major consolidation of the Abbey and Nunnery ruins was undertaken. When the Iona Cathedral Trustees were given the responsibility by the Duke of Argyll to restore the Abbey church, controversy arose over what rebuilt feature was or was not 'authentic'. More fundamentally, some people had serious reservations about and resistance to the rebuilding; one archaeologist hoped 'there would be no "tinkering" with Iona Cathedral as its chief attraction for artists lay in "its ruinous and desolate appearance"' (quoted in MacArthur 1995: 85).

Preserving 'those illustrious ruins' had become preferable to restoring the Abbey church for public worship. In some quarters at least, it seemed a shift had taken place: nostalgia for the past and the way it was evoked by the materiality of the ruined stones was now paramount. The broken stones testified and hearkened back to a glorious past, the 'golden age of saints', such that even the wider landscape was ignored by artists. Scottish geologist John Macculloch (1824) wrote:

The ruins of Iona are the soul and centre of the Painter's Landscape. Without them, the landscape is nothing; with them, it is every thing; because, in it, they are, themselves, every thing. (quoted in Christian & Stiller 2000: 15)

The romanticising of Iona's ruins and, later in the 19th century, its island landscape through artistic license and exaggeration is in line with the Victorian predilection for the 'picturesque' and for sweeping, empty vistas.⁶

The demands of tourism fueled the local economy's diversification and developed its infrastructure. By the early 19th century, Iona had an alehouse/inn, then a merchant shop, together with souvenir pebbles on sale to tourists (MacArthur 1990: 57, 61). Increasingly more frequent steamer services brought daytrippers to Iona, for instance, directly from Glasgow (Christian & Stiller 2000: 19). Local boats were engaged in carrying passengers to shore. Travellers' accounts mention participating in evening dances and enjoying hospitality of good cheer, even including some 'exchange' of goods—e.g., a quantity of island-bred Highland cow milk for a measure of tobacco (MacArthur 1990: 61–3). The influx of tourists also filled the occasional need for medicine and medical help (*ibid.*: 64). In 1847 Queen Victoria sailed to Iona (but did not land), while in 1956 Queen Elizabeth II arrived on the island to much fanfare by crowds of locals and visitors (*ibid.*: 175). By the late 19th century, greater publicity and improvements in transport had made the island more accessible.

The islanders grew to depend on tourism to supplement their increasingly precarious crofting economy (MacArthur 1995: 121–33). Toward the 19th century's close, it was already common practice for locals to let their whole house to holidaymakers bringing with them their families, servants, and provisions. Boarders came from as far away as across the Atlantic, and 'from fifty to sixty tourists make their appearance here daily' (MacArthur 1990: 248, 166). As demand for summer-lets grew, many Iona families added a second house or extension to their homes (*ibid.*: 101). Both the Argyll and St Columba Hotels were thriving

⁶ Remarkably, except for certain 'hotspots', Iona's landscape today of crofts, farmland, and moors is actually relatively 'unpeopled'.

and expanding. The craft business the Ritchie family had set up offered a wide variety of items to tourists, including ‘Iona marble’ souvenirs and high-quality intricate silverwork using designs inspired by Iona’s many carved grave-slabs and crosses. Regular holidaymakers, mostly Scots, injected more than just money into local life. They showed special interest in the school, donating books, bookcases, and other gifts (MacArthur 1995: 95). A variety of sports events, concerts, dances, whist drives, and bazaars came to life as islanders and ‘regulars’ mixed and their children grew up together. Today, these ‘regular’ holidaymakers are quite distinct from the majority of tourists amassing on Iona’s jetty.



Fig 3.6 Some clansmen’s grave-slabs on Iona

Pete McHugh,

National Trust area manager for the Inner Hebrides, reckons Iona is ‘very different from other communities in the West Coast of Scotland because it’s had a vibrant tourist industry’, which had been growing since the 1700s. Tourism indeed has

become the mainstay of Iona’s economy; while income from farming is still generated, McHugh believes it can no longer be considered people’s livelihood—tourism is the ‘money earner’.⁷ Amidst the endless flows of modern visitors, pilgrims too began to journey to the ‘sacred’ isle. The nature of post-Reformation Iona pilgrimage, however, diverges significantly from its Columban and Benedictine predecessors. The following section explains why.

⁷ Pete McHugh, personal communication, telephone, 11 July 2006.

Iona Pilgrimages Present: Recovering the 'Centre'?



Fig 3.7 Remains of the original St John's Cross at the 'Infirmary' Museum beside the Abbey

Today, many groups and individuals go 'on pilgrimage' to Iona, although there is no one sanctioned route or set rites to perform at their destination. By comparison, pre-Reformation Iona pilgrimage was as ritualised as other contemporary Irish and Roman Catholic holy sites. Present-day pilgrimage and parish groups typically bring their own priest in order to celebrate the Eucharist at the Abbey or one of the chapels. Iona is sometimes one of a series of pilgrimage stops they make on their 'Irish Saints' or

'Celtic Christian' tours. On the island, they like to visit other 'religious' sites of interest, such as the standing crosses, the Reilig Odhrain and Chapel, the 'Infirmary' Museum where 'Columba's Pillow' is housed, or the other denominational retreat houses. If there is time, they may walk along the paved road to the North End to the White Bay of the Monks, or west to the Machair to see the Hill of the Angels; off the paved road, other 'holy' places such as Columba's Bay are trickier to access. The groups are usually offered a Historic Scotland tour of the Abbey, which remains the central focus of their devotions. Besides holding mass at the Abbey's marble altar, people like to light a prayer candle at the 'Quiet Corner', sit in silence in the Choir Stalls, or browse the Iona Community displays in the North Transept. A copy of the Book of Kells sits in a humble glass case at the back of the Nave for the observant to admire.



Fig 3.8 An Iona Community 'peace & justice' display in the North Transept, where people can sign petitions and make donations; in 2001, Historic Scotland decided such displays 'belonged' only in this designated 'political space' and nowhere else in the Abbey church

On the whole, with no officially sanctioned routes or rituals, visitors are free to roam the Abbey and the island however they like. How has it transpired that a sacred site as ancient and celebrated as Iona today appears to be so devoid of pilgrimage traditions? The answer has to do with historical contests for religious authority, the 8th Duke of Argyll's unprecedented move towards ecumenism, and the Iona Community's prominent 'reinvention' of religious practice on the island.



Fig 3.9 Map of Iona showing several key sites of interest

Contests over Access and Authority

The importance of Iona to the British Isles is clearly illustrated by how various Christian denominations have tussled over claims of access to its sacred spaces. At one point or another in its history, the Irish, Roman Catholics, (United) Free Church, Episcopalians, and Church of Scotland have all asserted some level of ecclesiastical or spiritual authority over Iona as a pre-eminent site of British Christianity.

From the beginning of Columba's ministry, Iona was considered part of the Irish church. When the Benedictines arrived on the scene in the early 13th century, the island then came under the direct control of the Roman Catholic Church. Up until the

Reformation, it can be assumed that the islanders followed the faith of the Columbans and the Benedictines. In the 16th century, however, they were converted to Protestantism—at which time Iona Cathedral (as it was locally known) fell into disuse and ruin. In the post-Reformation religious foment, changes in authority over islanders' spiritual health reflected the various dissensions between Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, and later (United) Free Church factions.

In the absence of a parish minister, islanders were reported to have gathered regularly amongst the Cathedral/Abbey ruins every Sunday. By the end of the 18th century, the Iona population was 'entirely Presbyterian in its religious adherence' (MacArthur 1995: 56) and in 1828, the Telford-design Establishment church was built for local worship. The Duke of Argyll, whose ownership included the Abbey remains, however, did not have the resources to rebuild it. So while responsibility for locals' faith was officially ensconced in Church of Scotland hands, the struggle for control over the tumbledown Abbey was only beginning.



Fig 3.10 Iona Parish Church, completed in 1828

During the post-Reformation period—as with many other Roman Catholic sites—Iona pilgrimage, so prolific for a thousand years, severely ebbed. As detailed earlier, the Antiquarian and Romantic movements of the 18th and 19th centuries revived public interest in Iona's ruins. Before the advent of steamships, small groups of visitors probably came by foot, horseback, small boats, etc. With greater publicity and improved access to the island, by the 1830s steamships were bringing daytrippers twice daily to Iona (MacArthur 1990: 60). It is hard to discern whether or not these visitors had religious aspirations. In social historian Mairi MacArthur's trawl through the records, the word 'pilgrim' very seldom occurs 'in a solidly Presbyterian place such as Iona'.⁸ One 19th-century observer described a visiting group as:

...a gay party in veils and frocks, who would look for an hour at the ruins and graves and the three little huts for the living and then move off again. (Carl Klingemann, quoted in MacArthur 1990: 60)

Visitors came to the West Highlands from Britain, Europe, and as far away as America (*ibid.*). With a variety of (sometimes overlapping) reasons, they were motivated by interest in Hebridean natural history, to see the 'famous' Iona of Scottish history taught to them in schools, and for religious or spiritual/New Age reasons. Locals' kith and kin, friends, and others who visited regularly have formed a substantial category of Iona visitors since the late 19th century. More recently, because of the Internet and 'roots' tourism (Basu 2004), growing numbers of emigrant descendants are also finding their way there. MacArthur reckons that 'with an awful lot of visitors to Iona over generations, Columba was quite simply not the main draw'.⁹ Nevertheless, she admits elsewhere that 'for many Iona is primarily, even solely, a site of historic and religious significance' (MacArthur 1995: 192).

⁸ MacArthur, personal communication, email, 26 June 2006.

⁹ MacArthur, personal communication, email, 26 June 2006.

The shift of religious authority on Iona from Roman Catholic to Presbyterian contributed to these changing visitor demographics. Fewer visitors were overtly or exclusively ‘pilgrims’ and historical Protestant aversions to pilgrimage meant no officially sanctioned tradition developed on Iona after the Reformation. Today, however, increasing numbers of Protestants—of various stripes—are making pilgrimages or visits to holy places in the UK such as Walsingham, St Peter’s in Bradwell, Durham Cathedral, and the Shrine of St Albans. Celtic revivalism has stirred keen interest in such places as St David’s Cathedral and Lindisfarne, while ecumenical pilgrimages to Roman Catholic, Protestant, even Orthodox sites are booming, e.g., to the Holy Land, Rome, Asia Minor, Greece. Interdenominational centres like Lee Abbey, Taizé, and Iona are also highly popular. On Iona, the climate of ecumenism arrived surprisingly early.

The 8th Duke of Argyll and Iona’s ‘Ecumenical Pull’

From the 19th century onwards, Roman Catholic and Episcopalian pilgrimages to Iona began to be organised again. Bringing their own clergy, devotees often held services within the crumbling Abbey walls. These were viewed with deep misgiving by the Presbyterian islanders (MacArthur 1990: 250–1). The Episcopal Church sought permission to build a chapel and retreat house on the island which, despite robust opposition, the Duke of Argyll granted in 1893.

Roman Catholics, too, kept requesting a place to worship on Iona and there were ‘clear hints...that the Catholic Church wished to secure the island for themselves’ (MacArthur 1995: 84). An offer was made from Roman Catholic quarters to purchase Iona from the Duke, who refused, maybe mindful of the earlier Episcopalian controversy (Ferguson 1990: 160). In 1897, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics held three separate events on Iona to commemorate the 1300th anniversary of St Columba’s

death—which some felt was a missed opportunity for inter-denominational co-operation (MacArthur 1990: 251).

While staunchly Presbyterian, the eighth Duke was strangely ecumenical in his outlook; or rather, he was ‘said to be wearied and aggravated by inter-church strife and the ecumenical pull of his most famous property was clear’ (*ibid.*: 252). In 1899, he signed a Deed of Trust handing Iona’s ecclesiastical remains to a public trust tied to the Church of Scotland. He declared that the ‘Eaglais Mhòr’ church be re-roofed and restored for public worship again, but for members of *all* Christian churches. In 1905, after the first stage of rebuilding, parish services began to be held in the Abbey church which was:

...claimed [by locals]...as their own, an additional place of worship which was to become increasingly familiar to them and in which generations of islanders were to feel at home. (*ibid.*: 252)

The Presbyterian locals accepted that other denominations also wished to worship at the Abbey. Just months before the formal Church of Scotland and United Free Church of Scotland reunited in 1929, the two congregations even held a joint thanksgiving service there for King George V’s recovery from illness (MacArthur 1995: 138). Starting in 1920, students from Scotland’s four divinity halls came on retreats led by top theologians from different Scottish denominations. This was seen as an opportunity to build and strengthen denominational relations across the country. But the Duke’s early ecumenical vision was taken to another level when Church of Scotland minister George MacLeod began his ‘very small experiment’ in 1938.

The Iona Community and ‘Embodying God’

As early as 1903, questions began to be asked publicly about what purpose the ‘reparation of Iona’ was to serve. Ideas revolved around converting the site into a seminary or theological

college, a retreat for missionaries, and/or a centre of Celtic learning. Interest also soared across the Atlantic from the American Iona Society, a group of Highland émigrés, to restore the Abbey living quarters as a new seat of Celtic studies (Ferguson 1990: 157).

Various applications were submitted, some with very close aims: concern over the West Highlands' future and the Church's role in addressing practical problems of unemployment and community decline in both rural and new urban fringe areas. After years of negotiations and plans and financial backing being withdrawn, the only viable proposal left was Reverend George MacLeod's scheme to rebuild Iona Abbey's living quarters as a radical experiment to rediscover the Church's 'Corporate Witness' (*ibid.*: 159). His parish work in Govan, one of Scotland's most deprived areas, amongst other poignant experiences, had persuaded him how out of touch the Church had become from the 'common life' of ordinary people.

In the summer of 1938, MacLeod brought to Iona the first group of unemployed craftsmen/labourers and seminarians as an experiment of disparate groups to live and work corporately on a 'common task'. Then in light of the start of WWII, he modified the building project. The craftsmen continued the building work, while for three months a year clergy, divinity students, and laity gathered on Iona for conference and retreat. Iona Abbey thus began to be known in the 20th century as a 'place of study, community learning and training in discipleship for the wider Church' (Ferguson 1998: 58). MacLeod raised the first sums of money from personal contacts; later, donations and funds contributed by thousands signing up as Friends and Associates of the Community started poured in.

In the post-war era, international interest in the 'Iona experiment' grew while the numbers of pilgrims to the island surged. The project began to take on its own life as Members decided to create a more permanent group bound together by a shared 'Rule', even after their Iona-based training period had ended. The membership was thus dispersed,

forming a fellowship and network of like-minded people who believed that ‘political action for justice and peace was an imperative of the faith’ (*ibid.*: 62). Thousands of young people intrigued by the Community’s work flocked to Iona; Camas, a new back-to-basics camp on the nearby island of Mull was created specially for them. In Glasgow, Community House became the mainland base where adults and young people gathered for discussion and training, drawn to ‘the unusual mixture of religious inspiration and radical politics’ (*ibid.*: 70).

In 1965, the Abbey rebuilding was completed. Various discussions had arisen over how the restored Abbey would be used, including MacLeod’s idea to run it as a theological college. In 1971, however, Iain Reid, MacLeod’s successor as Leader, said, ‘Now that the building of the Abbey is complete, we are engaged on the building of people’ (quoted in Galloway 2003: 1). In fact, ‘the focus of the Abbey was evolving to be the experience of living in community, offered to the guests, primarily parish groups, who came to stay for a week’ (Galloway 2003: 1). Around this time, the Resident Group as it is known today began to develop. In 1988, after a slew of fundraising over many years, the MacLeod Centre—standing across from the Abbey—was opened. This second guest centre replaced the youth camps on that site and was designed to be usable for young people, families, and the disabled.

MacLeod had never been shy about situating the work of the Community within Iona’s religious traditions; in particular, he cannily emphasised its Celtic ‘heritage’. It was also not difficult for people to draw parallels between MacLeod’s dynamic and driven personality with St Columba’s visionary leadership. Subsequent Leaders and Wardens have varied in their attitudes towards ‘Celticity’; after the 1980s Celtic revivalism, some Members have tried to steer the Community’s image away from the more popular, romantic versions of ‘Celtic Christianity’ (e.g., Shanks 1999). Instead, the Community’s particular

brand of ‘Celtic Christianity’ appropriates St Columba’s political connections and activity to undergird their leanings toward the social Gospel.

While MacLeod’s project was initiated under the Church of Scotland’s auspices, he was a difficult figure to pin down:

Many ministers were suspicious of this charming, charismatic, Scoto-Catholic, with his dynastic pedigree, privileged upbringing and Winchester accent redolent of the English ruling classes. His allegedly Anglican and Roman Catholic ways, along with his pacifist and socialistic tendencies, made him a confusing and suspect as well as fascinating figure.... (Ferguson 1990: 165)

MacLeod’s own ecumenical leanings came from his experiences in WWI trenches, where denominational distinctions were irrelevant. He believed ‘the exclusive ecclesiastical positions adopted by some Churches were part of the Christian problem in the twentieth century’ (*ibid.*: 91). He felt the Church was ill-equipped to cope with the early 20th century Western European disillusionment with democracy, economic expansion, modern science, and psychology. In his book *We Shall Rebuild*, MacLeod observed:

...we live in a *total* experience....we cannot disengage. One world that is all our world is part of our consciousness.... Modern man... knows himself to be total: while the essential thing we [the Church] say to him seems to be sectional... a *duality*.... (MacLeod 1944: 10–11, italics added)

In other words, the Church had lost sight of the ‘wholeness’ of life and divorced ‘what we sing about on Sundays’ from what is done on weekdays (MacLeod 1998: 12). MacLeod’s answer to this fundamental problem was Christ’s incarnation and its implications for the social Gospel:

...Christ entered the physical at Christmas to declare the *nexus of the spiritual and the material*; disparate but conjoined... to declare their ultimate reunion—in *His own Body*.... by taking on our flesh... from that moment challenges the rightness of any child being born in untoward surroundings. The *physical* becomes the only arena for the display of holiness.... (MacLeod 1944: 13, italics added)

From the Iona Community's inception, the material world and how humans act within it were the highest priorities. As the Body of Christ, believers' *own bodies* become 'the nexus of the spiritual and the material' in how they live out their faith. Instead of creedal or doctrinal assertions, it is in the realms of:

...political concern, economic obligation, social betterment, and scientific search... through which alone our Faith can be apprehended. So seen, healthiness becomes inherent again in Christian Holiness, as indeed...the two thoughts were [once] conjoined. (*ibid.*: 13–14)

For the Community, God is 'to be obeyed in material problems' (MacLeod 1998: 13) if wholeness/holiness is to be attained. Ron Ferguson, former Leader, says in his biography of the Community:

...the creator of the universe expressed himself not in ideas or words or telegrams but in a human being in a particular time and place.... The Gospel is about the *embodiment* of the spiritual—the *fleshing out* of the eternal. (Ferguson 1998: 145, italics added)

Today, the Community's guest centres on Iona seek to propagate MacLeod's vision of 'rebuilding the common life' amongst the staff and weekly guests. The Community are adamant that the Abbey and MacLeod Centre are not *retreat* centres¹⁰ but active hubs where relationships between disparate social groups and individuals are forged through the shared experiences of worship, work, leisure, and conversation. Workshops, mealtimes, chores, church services, etc. all reflect the Community's beliefs and values. Every week, guests from diverse backgrounds (e.g., elderly parish women's groups, L'Arche members and helpers, school children, activists and campaigners, Buddhists, musicians) come together to 'live in community'.

¹⁰ Nor therapeutic or conference centres (Shanks 1999: 85).

The 8th Duke of Argyll's foresight paved the way for the Iona Community's ecumenism, which in turn has encouraged other interdenominational interest in and expeditions to the island. Groups as divergent as the Scottish Cross, the Friends of Orthodoxy on Iona, and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) now regularly hold Iona pilgrimages. Because of the island's post-Reformation Protestantism, ancient pilgrimage *traditions* may today be scarce but pilgrimage *practices* are nonetheless plentiful and diverse.

With the modern proliferation of religious activity at the site, it seems safe to assume that Iona has recovered its pre-Reformation status as a sacred 'centre'. A St Columba Hotel guest was overhead saying, 'The whole world comes through Iona'. The notion that Iona is 'secretly the centre of the universe' is often half-jokingly bandied about amongst regular visitors, guests, and staff (at the Iona Community centres, but also in the hotels). In contrast to its early and medieval pre-eminence, however, Iona's contemporary appeal as a 'centre' is precisely because it is on the 'periphery' of the mainstream, mainland world, geographically and socially 'other'. This phenomenon fulfils the classic role of traditional pilgrimage as *rites de passage*, being spatially, socially, and structurally removed from wider society while also remaining a central defining experience for the initiand *and* for maintaining the community's status quo (Turner & Turner 1978). In addition, Iona aptly demonstrates one of Ardener's (1989: 211–23) paradox of 'remote places', which he applied to Western Scotland where 'canonical levels of "remoteness" are to found': that remote areas are not remote; they are concurrently 'centre' and 'periphery', secluded yet exposed, invaded by the outside world yet always 'other' from it. Carried a step further, this thesis suggests that Iona has become simultaneously 'sacred' and 'secular' for those who visit—whether tourist, pilgrim, both, or something else entirely—as well as for those who

dwell there. Although ‘half the world beats a path’ to Iona, its true, unparalleled significance is a ‘secret’ to which only those ‘in the know’ are privy.

In this Part’s opening quotation, a website linked to the Scottish National Tourist Board intimately invites people to share in the ‘secret’ of ‘Scotland’s furthest edge’, the North and West Highlands and Islands, including Iona. For Iona devotees, however, the ‘secret’ is not simply about the enchantment of geography and the exoticisation of Gaelic cultures; it is about how Iona’s landscape is a powerful testament to the island’s unique history and intrinsic ‘spirituality’. I use the term ‘spirituality’ here to mean what the majority of Iona enthusiasts say is a numinous quality not confined within ‘religion’ or ‘institutions’, and sometimes intentionally juxtaposed against them. Notoriously difficult to define, I nevertheless suggest that ‘spirituality’ in the Iona context is closely linked with perceptions of and practices within its landscape—which makes manifest or possible a process of ‘self-knowing’ or ‘self-transformation’. The next section will show how one regular visitor understands Iona as a landscape of ‘revelation’ or ‘self-transformation’ through his work and identity as an artist. We begin with a brief account of changing attitudes to Iona’s landscape.

Changing Attitudes towards Iona’s Landscape

Iona is part of the wider landscape of the Scottish ‘Highlands and Islands’, dominated by the ideals of the Romantic and Antiquarian movements. While English landscapes tend to be restrained, orderly, and Arcadian, in contrast the Scottish landscape:

...has long been lauded as a paradigm of a certain kind of beauty—*sublime, wild and romantic*—and Scotland’s tourist industry still trades on these notions and values... (Mayhew 2004, italics added)

Iona's landscape has long lent itself to portrayal. As described earlier, in the first half of the 18th century, travellers to the north 'actually claimed to loathe the scenery they saw' (Christian & Stiller 2000: 9). With improved transport and changing aesthetic tastes, however, the remoter parts of the country gradually became fashionable to 'tour'. While the dramatic Highlands symbolised the untamed beauty of Nature, Iona's gentler terrain was virtually 'invisible'; 'seen' and admired were its ecclesiastical ruins and stone crosses—nostalgic testaments to an apparently glorious and spiritually pure Celtic past. The earliest pictorial records of Iona's landscape (e.g., Richard Pococke, Lilliman, Adam de Cardonnel) most valued the antiquity of its ecclesiastical ruins. The natural and inhabited landscape was regarded as 'nothing' without them (Christian & Stiller 2000: 15).



Fig 3.11 Iona Abbey restored, set in today's wider landscape

In the 19th century, Iona's religious and historical aspects continued to dominate artists' renderings, but some illustrators began to treat them as part of the wider scenery. Artistic licence was often taken, in keeping with the contemporary tendency to dramatise and

exaggerate, e.g., ‘the ruinous state of the western end of the nave and especially the overgrown nature of the chapel’ (Christian & Stiller 2000: 18). Like many of Gainsborough’s sketches, these Iona images were ‘landscape “composition”, designed to evoke and reflect a mood’ (Gombrich 1992: 372)—i.e., the picturesque and nostalgic quality so sought after during this period. In the latter half of the 19th century, a revival of interest in Scottish history—including its early church and key figures like St Columba—inspired leading history painters to depict episodes from the saint’s life (Christian & Stiller 2000: 38). Increasing numbers of artists also began to illustrate other parts of the isle’s coast, occasionally choosing more mundane, idyllic subjects such as Patrick Adam’s (1876) ‘Fisherman’s home, Iona’ and Colin Hunter’s (1891) ‘Iona crofters’.



*Fig 3.12 Contemporary artists at work
by Iona jetty*

It was at the turn of the 20th century that ‘the unique colours and light of Iona’ captivated painters’ imagination (Christian & Stiller 2000: 51). Works by S. J. Peploe and F. C. B. Cadell, two of the ‘Scottish Colourists’, have continued to shape people’s perceptions of Iona today. Their love affair with the views at the white sands of the North End, the subtle and changing hues of the sea, the craggy rocks on the beaches, the endless play of light and colour on Ben More, and the line of cottages on the Village Street,

amongst other scenes—many reminiscent of Cézanne—has influenced generations of Iona artists. At the beginning of the 21st century, the rebuilt Abbey, the Nunnery gardens, the standing crosses, and other *man-made* monuments feature prominently in visitors’

photographs. But amateur and professional artists, as well as local and outside photographers, increasingly converge on Iona to capture its array of land- and seascapes.

Far from being a mere backdrop for the religious buildings, the island's landscape has moved into the foreground of people's interest and 'gaze'. It has become highly 'visible', its ancient geology and unique palette of colour and light closely associated with a spirituality allegedly pre-dating institutional religion, pre-dating the 'obvious' Christian



Fig 3.13 Sligineach Beach on Iona

structures that once defined and dominated visitors' fascination. Akin to Walsingham's 'embodiment of a supposedly unchanging rural English past' (Coleman 2004b), 'nature' on Iona is equated with the historical. Rather than being a 'national shrine', however, the majority of the Hebridean island's enthusiasts are non-Scots/Celts intrigued by Iona as an embodiment of an unchanging, 'spiritually pure' Celtic past. The widespread appeal of Celticity contributes to the island's exoticisation and appropriation by many non-Celts as a divine resource that transcends human categories like nationality, ethnicity, and language.

A Case Study of Place and Practice: The *Hau* of Iona

But the landscape is not a ‘fixed cultural image and resource’ upon which people’s longings are simply etched (Hirsch 1995; see also Coleman 2004b; Hastrup 1998). In particular, because of the island’s location, size, and exposure to the elements, ‘nature’ on Iona is omnipresent in a way urbanites are not used to and often awed by. Its susceptibility to rapid changes in light, cloud cover, wind, rain, etc. has a direct effect on people’s perception and experience of the place, typically enhancing their sense of the sublime. As Hastrup (1998: 123) says of Icelandic everyday life, ‘nature becomes a social agent in its own right...’. Like Hastrup’s (*ibid.*) Icelanders, dramatic ‘nature’ is part of Iona islanders’ ordinary, daily lives, where ‘nature’s movements are registered as history’.¹¹

Many images and views of Iona incorporate the surrounding waters and islands, such as Staffa or Jura, and especially the Ross of Mull (which lies just one mile east across the Sound of Iona) and the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast beaches. Interestingly, what often inspires visitors’ intuition of the ‘sacred’ is not so much Iona’s low-lying, unassuming terrain *by itself* but rather its *juxtaposition against* and *contrast* to its neighbouring features. What people see over the white crests of the surrounding waters are Mull’s pink granite hills and the blue-white cliffs of the Burg, the Paps of Jura to the south, Staffa’s black rocks to the north, or on a clear day the shores of Ireland to the west. People do not ‘see’ Iona as such; in fact, it is their location *on* Iona which allows them to look out upon the rest of the world and to see it—and *themselves*—in a new way. One regular visitor John said:

Before my visit to [Iona] I was uncomfortable in my own presence alone, on Iona I spent many hours alone just watching the tide ebb and flow. I think of Iona as the centre of a giant clock face. If you have ever stood on Dun I [the highest point on the

¹¹ Nature’s agency was poignantly felt when four island sons died in a freak boating accident in the Sound of Iona in December 1998.

island] and turn 360 degrees you will know what I mean, you can watch the sunrise and sunset passing backward and forward, like a giant pendulum...



Fig 3.14 A view of the Burg on Mull from one of Iona's east coast beaches

For many people, Iona becomes the pivotal reference point of their lives and faith or spirituality, sometimes literally. No matter where they are in the world, even if they relocate, emigrate, change jobs, swap churches, lose partners, etc., Iona remains a stable, timeless 'centre' for them: time passes 'backward and forward, like a giant pendulum', upon which Iona is the pivot. People make the physical journey to Iona again and again when they feel the need to find their life or spiritual bearings anew, to re-focus their 'selves' in reference to the rest of the world. As the 'Escape to the Edge' website promises: 'the sense of peace, solitude and well-being...washes over and cleanses you at the edge...'. Some visitors believe that instead of the places where they ordinarily live and work, Iona is their 'true home' and they may even aspire to move there one day.

John, in his late 40s, first came to the island in 1997. Except at school, he had never been taught to paint, but during that Iona trip he discovered an 'innate gift' for painting:

I created an image that was *completely for the first time, my own work*, and taken from the natural features of Iona. (italics added)

The island's 'natural features' powerfully inspired John to create his 'own work', to try something entirely different from his previous modes of working and being. For 30 years, he had been a technician and metallurgist in the weapons systems industry. Coming to a low point in his health and career, he felt 'a bit of a lost soul', disillusioned with the ethics of his field. Putting technical manuals aside, he began to read about painting. At the recommendation of friends—who had once sent him a postcard of a sunrise over Iona Abbey—John decided to visit this 'place of retreat':

...I had packed a box of pastels, an unwanted gift a friend had suggested I take, because she thought, what would I do on Iona, *there is nothing to do there*...

I was aware that I was walking [along the Street of the Dead] where few had trodden before, and that *the landscape I witnessed was probably not much changed* since the time the Abbey was built. I remember looking through the west window of the door, there were candles and figures passing through the light, probably taking part in some deeply sacred ritual, I was intrigued to ask, what is going on...

I was not deeply religious, although I did feel that here, I was *in the presence of a source of ancient religion and standing on holy ground*. I remember the sensation of a deep longing to feel as I did before I became unwell. This sensation was present wherever I went on the island that week, *as if it was stalking beside me like a shadow*.... on the Sunday we went to the service at the Abbey; a harp and a cantor sang in the raised floor above the Sacristy. This was very different to what I expected to experience, the whole building seemed to fill with singing and beautiful music. I remember thinking 'This is what people come to this place to witness'.

...I [wanted to arise]...before dawn to watch the sunrise over Mull, even better I had thoughts of going to the Abbey, to stand on the hill at dawn. *I could then witness the very event on the postcard that had been sent to me, revealing the Abbey with the sun rising over Ben More*. (italics added)

The natural and human landscapes—and their apparent timelessness—exerted an intense 'presence' on John, stirring in him a 'deep longing'. Interestingly, he couples the external force of the landscape with his inner yearning so it becomes an almost palpable thing with intention and agency—'as if it were stalking beside me like a shadow'.

Shadows are attached to their subjects and cast upon subjects positioned in time and space. John's shadow is not static but 'stalks' him, its shape depending on the hour and place. The shadow is, in a sense, a manifestation of a subject's act of embodiment in a place—in this case, Iona. The shadow cannot exist without John and it reflects not only whether he stands, sits, walks, etc., but also where and how he does so. It exists because of the interface between John's body and the sun or other sources of light in the landscape. To be with or without a shadow, and what kind of shadow, implies certain things about one's surroundings and how one is interacting with it, as well as how the landscape—and objects within it—is moving or acting upon him. The island is very much alive to John for, as Ridler (2002: 94) observes, enactment is both to act upon something and to be enacted upon *by* something.

Furthermore, John seeks to place himself in a very specific position *within* the landscape, in *relation* to the Abbey on the hill, from which he could 'witness the very event on the postcard that had been sent to me'. To recreate the postcard's image, conjured up in his mind and realised in actuality, is not simply inscribing on the landscape what John wishes to see; rather, memory, imagination, and movement are incorporated through the processes of embodiment. It is not that John projects meaning *onto* the landscape as much as he situates himself in relation to certain features within it so he can access the meaning(s) he believes is already present. This understanding follows a Heideggerian formulation where:

A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there—to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance. Thus whereas with space, meanings are *attached* to the world, with the landscape they are *gathered* from it.... (Ingold 1993: 155, original italics; see also Gosden 1994; Hastrup 1998)

Far from having ‘nothing to do there’, responding to what he intuited from Iona’s landscape, John found himself engaging in certain activities:

...I chose to walk to the shore taking my pastels, this was the first time I painted a landscape which would be my own creation.

It took me until Thursday morning to pluck up the courage to go to the Abbey alone and watch the sunrise *as the postcard had shown*.... I entered the [back of the Nave]...I was alone, it was dark inside, a light was shining into the choir from a side aisle at the crossing.

I walked in and sat down.... It was so quiet I could hear a bird walking on the stone floor at the far end of the nave. It was so peaceful, I could hear my own heart beating.

I took out my pastel and book from my rucksack and proceeded to draw the column facing me, looking up, I saw the words ‘Donaldus O Brolchan Fecit Hoc Opus’. My friend later told me this meant he [Donald Ò Brolchan] made this space.

I walked to the column and moved my hand around it, looking for other marks. There was a small ‘I’ carved in the south side of the pillar. Moving my hand upwards, it slipped into a depression shaped like a hand. I could feel the surfaces the sculptor had created. *I wondered how many had done this before*.

When I looked upwards I noticed a grotesque face on the arch of the crossing (I call him the watcher), it seemed to be deforming the very stone plastically, forcing its way into the choir space. As if *the building itself was watching* those who entered, me in particular...

...I have visited Iona up to three times each year since to witness the seasons, to paint and to visit the place where the consciousness of my soul is at rest.... (italics added)

John’s account is rich with a sense of discovery, not of something new *per se*, but of something *old*. Exploring the nooks and crannies of the stone columns, he attends to the textures of sounds and sights around him: the bird walking, his heart beating, the grotesque face ‘deforming’. The connections he feels with the past manifest themselves through what he sees, touches, and hears—what he is *doing* now—and his wondering ‘how many had done this before’, i.e., people through the ages have seen, touched, and heard the same things in this very same place:

To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is... engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past. (Ingold 1993: 153)



Fig 3.15 The 'tortured face' of medieval origin; legend says it reminded preachers of their responsibility to save souls from the terrors of hell and/or to keep their sermons brief for fear of incensing the congregation (Semple n.d.: 18)

John's 'act of remembrance' is more a form of 'imagining' about past events, clues of which are embedded in the fabric of the Abbey landscape.

Some of these 'clues' are historical (e.g., Donald Ò Brolchan's carved name), while others are conjecture (e.g., 'I wondered how many had done this before?') though not necessarily without material indication (e.g., 'There was a small 'I' carved in...the pillar...a depression shaped like a hand').

Sometimes, people regard the

Iona Community services as 'too

modern'. They prefer to sit in silence in the empty space, imagining the monks performing their devotions and feeling themselves enter into that 'same spirit' of piety. Some also believe their individual acts of prayer and meditation are closer to 'traditional' religious practices at the Abbey. Many who pray and worship there feel the church is 'special' precisely because countless numbers before them have also prayed and worshiped in the same space. They say the building is '*dense* with thousands of prayers', as if the stones were 'alive' with the hopes, pain, and energy poured into earnest petitions to the Divine.

Some New Age practitioners believe the Christian structures were built over an ancient pagan place of worship. 'Elisabeth', a foreigner who has lived on Iona for several years now, regularly meditates beneath the high arch at the front of the Nave. She believes it

is a key point of divine energy. Together with a teacher, Elisabeth has also walked through the church identifying its ‘chakra points’ and their correspondence *to her own body*.



Fig 3.16 Some believe the Nave’s arch, of Benedictine construction, is a focal point of pre-Christian spiritual energy

Elisabeth, like many others, senses a strong affinity between the materiality of the place and her own bodily movements within it. For them, the Abbey is a living thing, a physical structure that manifests, even hones and transmits sacral power in the way that humans embody divine force; certain appropriate behaviours thus allow the ‘cosmic vibrations’ of the Abbey and their bodies to resonate with each other. On the other hand, some neo-pagans and New Agers feel the Abbey—as a *man-made* building where

‘oppressive’ Christian rites take place—actually distracts from, mutes, and even ‘profanes’ the purity of cosmic energy ‘naturally occurring’ at that spot. Whatever the opinion, it is clear people often think of Iona Abbey as more than mere stones and mortar.

John, too, is percipient that ‘the building itself was watching those who entered’. But is people’s sense that the church is somehow breathing and moving metaphorical or literal? Ingold (1993: 170) explains that buildings are not fixed, immutable human constructions but are subject to ‘forces of weathering and decomposition’ and interactions

with animal and plant life, as well as to efforts to preserve and maintain them in order to prevent the natural tendency towards disintegration—for buildings too have a ‘life-cycle’. Iona Abbey’s ‘life-cycle’, with its several constructions and reconstructions, is well documented (e.g., Ritchie & Fisher 2001). The well-weathered Abbey ruins so admired by Johnson and Boswell testify to the vulnerability and fragility of seemingly solid, permanent structures. Despite what people might wish, Iona’s ‘ancient’ landscape has not remained unchanged; it has been involved in a long, ongoing process of transformation.



Fig 3.17 The monkey here is complemented by a cat (unseen) on the window’s other side, symbolising the Benedictine virtues of ‘activity’ and ‘contemplation’

The Abbey’s susceptibility to organic processes is evident from the clumps of ferns growing out of an interior church wall. The Iona Community point them out as signs of ‘creation’ and worship being closely intertwined on the island, hearkening back to the ‘intimate relationship’ ancient

Celts apparently had with nature. Indeed, blackbirds, robins, and once a peregrine falcon, regularly find their way into the church, chirping merrily along during worship. The ferns, however, tell another, more modern tale about the Abbey. They are anchored into the cement which MacLeod and his ‘Iona men’ used during their rebuilding in the early 20th century. Today, these ferns are ‘maintained’ as a quaint feature but no more of ‘creation’ is allowed to take root.

Of course, not everyone suggests that Iona Abbey is literally alive. Nevertheless, the Abbey is ‘the embodiment of a developmental or historical process, and is rooted in the

context of human dwelling in the world', where 'the church... resonates to the cycles of human [and animal] life and subsistence' (Ingold 1993: 170, 169). The thrice-daily services, signalled by the church bells pealing; the Abbey tours led by Historic Scotland guides every hour; locals' weddings and funerals; the church shutting down in wintertime and re-opening before Easter; the bustle of mealtimes in the Refectory; the Cloisters providing shelter for nesting birds—all examples of the Abbey's resonance with and embeddedness in the island's multivarious life cycles. Drawn by the Abbey's presence, incalculable social groups (e.g., monks, pilgrims, staff, guests, tourists, locals) have and continue to 'attend to one another'—and to the place—consciously or otherwise, as they go about their business (*ibid.*: 159–60). The people (and 'creation') are as much bound up in the life of the Abbey as the Abbey is in the lives of the people (and 'creation'), in a relational, accumulative, and never-ending process or 'movement of becoming of the world as a whole' (*ibid.* 168). Organic movement and metamorphosis of things constituting the landscape are inherent in the processes of time—its 'temporality' (see Ingold 1993; Hastrup 1998; Gosden 1994).¹²

Since that first visit, John has created, sold, and given away countless Iona paintings, some of which remain on the island while myriad others are exhibited on the mainland. He is now a full-time artist and about to graduate with a BA in art history. He says, '...the journey I started on that Wednesday afternoon in August 1997 on Iona continues'. Mutual transformation characterises John's relationship with the island: the postcard may have planted a seed in him, but it was in *being* on Iona—entering into its landscape, so to speak—that John felt something awaken in him, an impulse that helped him discover his

¹² I recognise that Ingold (1993) and Gosden (1994) apply their respective Heideggerian 'dwelling' perspectives to archaeology, just as Hastrup (1998) discusses the Icelandic landscape in terms of tradition and history. My application of these 'longue duree' understandings of 'practice' to Iona where outsiders engage only briefly with its landscape may thus seem inappropriate. However, John—like other Iona visitors—is immersed in wider sociological and theological conditions (discussed in Chapter 2), which stimulate his particular understanding and mode of relating to the island. For Iona is set within the broader context of Western Christianity, whereby people increasingly posit an intimate relationship between ideas of 'place' and 'landscape' with 'practice' in their approaches to 'spirituality'.

talent for painting; through his ongoing depictions of Iona, he also promotes and shapes how others perceive the place, even as they in turn may be inspired to visit and begin their own engagement with the island. John's very presence, easel and paintbrush in hand, in a quiet corner of a beach, makes him part of Iona's landscape which other visitors see (and hear). They may discuss together mutual Iona interests, and he may feature in other people's photos and pictures as an 'Iona artist', perpetuating the longstanding romance artists have had with the island.

John's story illustrates the temporality of the landscape—which helps serve as a corrective to the Western convention of dichotomising mind over matter, form over process. For 'through living in it, the landscape becomes part of us, just as we are a part of it' (Ingold 1993: 154). The island's landscape, in becoming 'part of' John, goes wherever he goes. He says, 'When I left...I was carrying the experience of Iona with me...'. The changes effected extend beyond Iona's shores as John's life and career switched course: he decided to go to university, began to teach others painting, and joined an artist guild and society. The landscapes of his home, community, workplace, etc. have been subsequently affected by his participation in novel activities consistent with his new occupation. Interestingly, John reflects that, away from Iona, '...from time to time I sense, Iona stands beside me like a shadow...'. If the 'shadow' discussed earlier is a product of his 'dwelling' in the island's landscape, then this 'shadow' which 'stands beside me' is an extension or result of his 'Iona experience'—an experience that casts its own penumbra on the other landscapes of his life.

At every repeat visit to Iona, John may feel his artistic vocation confirmed as he immerses himself in the place, both transforming it and being transformed by it. He may, one day, decide to portray Iona differently, cease his artistic activities, take up an alternative role as a hotel worker, for instance, or stop visiting altogether. All these forms of 'dwelling' (and its *absence*) have consequences for the island's landscape, albeit in a limited way

through one person; but the sum of the various forms of ‘dwelling’ which Iona’s inhabitants and visitors practice has considerable impact. For it is ‘in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance’ (Ingold 1993: 155).

There has been a tendency in anthropology to regard people’s intuition of how a place affects them as merely manifestations of their longings and expectations—i.e., as ‘culture’ is etched onto ‘nature’, meaning is ‘inscribed’ onto space to create ‘landscape’. This thesis contends it is important to take seriously people’s claims of being changed *by* the landscape in some way, that they believe the place itself has agency and force, if not quite intention. Hastrup (1998: 111) says the Icelandic landscape:

...is not simply a surface, or a stage upon which people play their social roles: it is part of the social space. It infiltrates practice and makes history. There is, as it were, agency on both sides; the opposition between nature and culture dissolves...

Reflecting on his new artistic vocation, John says, ‘I have...sometimes felt that I was acting out a fate that was pre-determined. In that *Iona was using me, if I let it*’ (italics added). In John’s complex and mutually accommodating relationship with Iona, the island is an equal participant and player. Instead of simply being the projection of people’s desires or of society idealised as ‘God’ and located in ‘Nature’, meanings are ‘*gathered from*’ the world in a ‘dwelling perspective’ such as Ingold’s (1993: 152):

...the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of—and testimony to—the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves.

In fact, the anthropological concept of the ‘agency’ of material things (e.g., Appadurai 1986; Gell 1998) has roots which stretch back to Mauss (1954/1970) and his analysis of the Maori *hau* (spirit of the thing) which animates a *taonga* (gift object) and creates obligatory reciprocity between giver and recipient. In a sense, Elisabeth and other Iona devotees are

responding to what they perceive as the *hau* of the total Iona landscape, including its human constructions. Whether the Iona *hau* is the immanence of the Christian God in nature, a pagan spirit, an impersonal force or energy, or the combined force of nature, human imagination, and the material world, from the way people talk about Iona's landscape, it appears to be both the giver and the gift—it gives of itself to people through their mutual engagement. Certain ways of interacting with the landscape animates the possibility of a reciprocally transformative relationship between the place and the person. Not everyone feels compelled to respond, but those who do often say the compulsion is irresistible, almost primal. Similar to how the Maori *hau* becomes part of the giver and gives him power over anyone who possesses the *taonga*, the Iona *hau* becomes an integral part of the person's (process of) 'being'.

This chapter has given a historical account of Iona pilgrimage and brought us up to date on pilgrimage practices on the island today. In particular, contemporary Iona pilgrimage is intimately linked with how people understand and engage with the island's landscape, natural and man-made. Visitors' changing attitudes towards Iona's wider landscape have yielded a belief in its 'intrinsic' spirituality and transformative agency in shaping the activities and self-understandings of those who come into contact with it. The next chapter explores the textures and hues of present-day visitors' 'Iona experiences', concentrating on the weekly guests who book in at the Iona Community centres in order to 'live in community'.

CHAPTER 4. Visitors' 'Iona Experience': Veni, Vidi, Amavi...

This thesis' main intention is to bring to light one cohort of site staff—the Iona Community's Resident Group—who facilitate 'pilgrimage' at the venerated isle. To do so, it is first necessary to understand the purpose and impact of staff's daily labour on the people who come to stay in the Community's centres and/or attend worship at the Abbey. These visitors' 'Iona experience' will also serve as a useful foil for comparison with residents' own distinctive type of 'Iona experience' analysed in subsequent chapters.

The growing kinship between pilgrimage and tourism has aroused recent theoretical speculation and empirical enquiry (e.g., Cohen 1992: 47–61; Coleman & Eade 2004; Schramm 2004; Badone & Roseman 2004). Early attempts were made to distinguish between the two, usually employing bifurcations such as sacred/secular, formal/informal, serious/playful, leisure/duty, centre/periphery, deep/superficial, etc. (e.g., Bauman 1996). In his Iona study, Golliher (1989: 229) juxtaposes tourist as 'cultural exploiter' against pilgrim as 'cultural refugee'. He argues that Iona pilgrims see one another as fellow 'cultural refugees' but view Iona tourists as 'cultural exploiters'; what 'tourists' think of this distinction Golliher does not say. Also, he categorises 'pilgrims' as Iona Community staff and guests, but it can only be assumed that he means 'tourist' to refer generally to *all* other visitors to the island who are not associated with any religious establishment.

While my data confirms that some visitors do indeed go to Iona to seek 'refuge' from mainstream 'culture' and that others do not, the 'tourist/exploiter' and 'pilgrim/refugee' divisions and correlations are too simplistic.¹ Instead, I suggest that many people who go to Iona are 'potential pilgrims'; as explained in the Introduction, this

¹ Golliher (1989: 212) himself admits the reality is more complex but offers no further elucidation.

means ordinary visitors as well as Community staff may develop characteristics commensurate with a classic pilgrim's experience. This does not take for granted that all residents and staff at the religious retreat houses are 'pilgrims', nor does it exclude the possibility that Iona's 'potential pilgrims' are potentially something else, too.

On Iona, a pilgrim's behaviour may not be easily differentiated from the tourist's when, for instance, they purchase the same types of souvenirs, take similar pictures of the Abbey, attend an Historic Scotland tour, or combine a family holiday with their Iona 'pilgrimage'. Conversely, daytrippers with no particular religious aspiration often attend the Abbey's afternoon service of Peace & Justice, light a prayer candle, buy devotional items from the Iona Community Bookshop, or become inspired to visit other, related holy sites such as Lindisfarne. As Simon Jenkins (2001) says of himself, people may even have neither strictly 'religious' nor 'touristic' motivations but possess, for instance, an intellectual or architectural interest in religious buildings.



Fig 4.1 Iona visitors—pilgrims or tourists?—browsing in Historic Scotland's shop

The rise of the heritage industry and the commodification of place, amongst other factors, have increasingly made strict distinctions between 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' untenable (MacDonald 2002; Badone & Roseman 2004). Wider studies of travel and identity—including diaspora and the search for ethnic origins (Basu 2004; Schramm 2004)—have also brought the two concepts closer together. The aspects of travelling and journeying emphasise *movement* as a common denominator between the two phenomena, for pilgrims and tourists are always having to get somewhere, and back. The terms 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' often still permeate how visitors themselves articulate their sense of purpose and self-identity, but it is the motivations for and the manner in which such journeys are undertaken that fruitful analysis can take place (Schramm 2004: 136).

This chapter focuses on visitors' articulation of their experience of this 'sacred' island. The primary data comes from questionnaires, interviews, and email exchanges conducted with 18 visitors, heavily supplemented by day-to-day observations and informal conversations with hundreds of people, during mealtimes, chores, services, workshops, Pilgrimage walks, childcare, and myriad other casual encounters—people were almost always keen to talk about themselves and their 'Iona experiences'.

Iona Visitors: Pilgrims or Tourists?

On Iona, the terms 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' are less heard than might be expected. Iona Community staff call those staying at the centres 'guests'. People staying at the religious retreat houses, hotels, or B&Bs are also referred to as 'guests', implying a relationship with islanders based on hospitality. 'Punters' is sometimes used by locals to refer to anyone visiting the island. One local suggests islanders rarely use the term 'pilgrim' because of their own Presbyterian or secular outlooks. 'Tourists' or 'daytrippers' tend to be applied to large groups on guided tours who traipse off buses or cruise ships (e.g.,

Hebridean Princess) to converge *en masse* on Iona. 'Visitors' is the overall, most neutral and commonly used appellation which covers all these categories. These terms, of course, are not exclusive, with room for overlap. A 'guest' to Iona Community staff, for example, could be labelled derogatorily as a 'tourist' or 'religious punter' by a local.²

Locals regard certain types of visitors as 'Scottish cousins'. These are the regular holidaymakers discussed in Chapter 3 who typically rent the same cottage every year and contribute to the social fabric of local island life. People like the former Labour leader John Smith, whose family spent many summers on Iona and has strong ties with the locals, fall into this category. That he was given special permission to be buried in St Oran's graveyard shows how well regarded he was amongst the normally (and understandably) territorial islanders. Several Iona Community Members have also established a 'Scottish cousins' relationship with locals.

During my fieldwork, the only time I heard someone describe themselves, unprompted, as a 'pilgrim' was an elderly Roman Catholic woman on an organised pilgrimage from Ireland. The majority of guests at the Abbey and MacLeod Centre are Anglican or Presbyterian or of another Protestant stripe with a weak pilgrimage tradition. People certainly 'come' on pilgrimage to Iona, or 'go' on the weekly island Pilgrimage, but it is more *something they do* rather than a self-conscious, cohesive identity to be asserted.³ If in the 1980s the Community's staff (and guests) regarded themselves explicitly as 'pilgrims' (Golliher 1989), they appear to do so no longer. The Community sometimes apply 'pilgrimage' themes to their annual programme (e.g., 2001—*A Faith Odyssey*), but their pronounced ecumenism and (perceived) ambiguous relationship with institutional Christianity mean their staff and guests do not necessarily see themselves in

² Neither are all 'locals' the same; for the sake of convenience, however, the term 'locals' will be used.

³ The identities that matter most are spoken of in terms of church tradition or in opposition to institutional religion.

conventional 'pilgrim' terms.⁴ Whether 'pilgrim', 'tourist', or otherwise, people thus utilise whatever resources the Iona Community (also Historic Scotland, religious retreat houses, local Heritage Centre, parish church, etc.) offer to meet their own spiritual, heritage, or other needs.⁵



Fig 4.2 The Abbey's South Aisle Chapel where visitors light candles and pin supplications to the Prayer Cross

While those on spiritual endeavours like to differentiate themselves from 'the more frivolous and less serious "tourist"' (Golliher 1989: 212), ambiguity and complexity pervade the distinction. Reflecting common usage in the field, I will employ the term 'visitor' to refer to any non-local who spends limited time on the island for leisure.⁶ Where appropriate I will distinguish between guests and other types of visitors, but whether people are 'tourists' or 'pilgrims' will be left open-ended;

instead, they are referred to as Iona 'enthusiasts' or 'devotees' to denote the *passion* people express for the place, whatever their motivations. Many visitors seek to have a distinctive 'Iona experience' regardless if they stay a few hours or a few weeks on the island, and assert their Iona visit is memorable and meaningful for a range of reasons.

⁴ Contributing factors to the lack of Iona pilgrimage traditions are explained in Chapter 3.

⁵ Visitors often defy Historic Scotland's and the Iona Community's 'interpretations' of the Abbey's spaces (respectively, heritage and politics), using and redefining them for their own purposes.

⁶ Which includes 'religious' and 'spiritual' motivations.

For the purposes of this thesis, I concentrate on the 'Iona experiences' of one core group of visitors—the weekly guests staying at the Iona Community's two centres. Instead of being a daytripper, a holidaymaker at a B&B or hotel,⁷ up to 100 paying guests/week stay at the Abbey or the MacLeod Centre (known in local parlance as the 'Mac'). During that time, staff and each new set of guests are supposed to live, worship, and work together to 'build community'—this 'deeper' experience of Iona is what most guests say they desire.

Making the First Connection

People's first visits to Iona may not have any religious intent and are often part of a day tour including other famous Hebridean sites like Mull and Staffa. They come because it is logistically convenient to combine it with a holiday 'up north'. Families appreciate that 'children's staff-workers' are on hand to supervise and organise activities. Students, especially from overseas, sometimes sign up for trips organised by their university's chaplaincy to take advantage of the opportunity to travel. From that initial brief visit, however, a relationship with the place begins to evolve. Some people retain precise memories of their earliest visit:

1960 as part of our honeymoon...

90 minutes in 1958, when GFM [George F. MacLeod] invited me to be a guide, which I was for a month in 1959.

Visited with my parents on a day trip from Oban when I was 11 years old...

Visitors learn about Iona and the Iona Community in different ways: contact with Members, the music and liturgy of the Wild Goose Resource Group (WGRG), at church,

⁷ Or at one of the religious retreat houses, e.g., Bishops House, Duncraig, or the Catholic House of Prayer.

and at friends' recommendation, etc. People in their 50s and older tend to have had some link with George MacLeod. A few older guests recalled they learned of the Community:

...[as] a teenager living in Glasgow (Govan), when I visited the IC Centre beside St Andrew's Cathedral. (My paternal grandfather, a Roman Catholic, was a close associate of George MacLeod's father).

...[when] George MacLeod visited and stayed with us when [he was] moderator [of the Church of Scotland].

The connections sometimes stretch beyond the British Isles, as several early Members were overseas missionaries, e.g., Ralph Morton in China, Tom Colvin in Malawi. The initial generations of Members worked in churches, social care, health, youth and community outreach, etc. and took many groups to Iona who otherwise did not have the means to do so. Members sought to bring people 'on the edges' of society—those already 'socially liminal'—to a place at the geographical and ecclesiastical 'edge' of Britain. Rather than trying to 'overcome (their) liminality' by making them 'connect...with the core symbols of...society' (see Dubisch 1995: 97) or integrating them into institutional religion, however, Members hoped these people's 'Iona experience' would help them discover the 'centrality' of spirituality *through* community living.

Today, some Members and longer-term staff feel the guest demographic has shifted from Scottish working class, disadvantaged groups to more middle-class, middle-aged English churchgoers. Some believe this phenomenon reflects an aging Community membership who are retiring from spheres of work and ministry amongst the working classes, and a trend of middle-class people—less involved in marginalised communities—seeking to join because of their infatuation with the island or the Community's innovative music and liturgical style. Although the Community are careful to redress this pattern, Iona on the whole has become a destination for those who can afford the luxury of travel. Increasingly, it is those at the 'core' of society—the middle-aged and middle-class—who

increasingly journey to the 'Celtic edge' of Iona on their own volition and means. While they are not 'socially liminal' in the way that the poor and disadvantaged mentioned earlier are, many of them feel 'spiritually liminal'—a kind of middle-class malaise or disenchantment with modern life.

Many Scots first encounter St Columba's island and its place in Gaeldom in primary school. Because of their history and Members' involvement in church and public life, the Iona Community is well-known in Scotland. The Community's membership network spans other parts of the UK, especially England, where some churches regularly hold 'Iona services' (e.g., Oxford's Wesley Memorial Church). Iona also attracts pastors and priests on sabbatical or retreat. In non-religious circles, the island has become generally renowned through the various Celtic revivalisms—celebrating Celtic art, prayers, poetry, folklore, and music—and the widespread resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality. Although Lindisfarne, too, features prominently, Iona is regarded as pre-eminent for its inextricable tie with St Columba. Internationally, the UK-based band *Iona* has popularised the name in Europe, North America, and as far away as Japan and Australia. Whatever it is that prompts people to consider visiting Iona, the impulse can be magnetic, drawing them from halfway across the world to 'Scotland's furthest edge'.

Getting to the 'Edge'

Unless they are a pre-arranged group (e.g., parish or church group), Community guests arrive separately. Groups often travel by airplane, coach, car, or rail. Individuals and couples or families usually drive. Arranging travel to Iona is not straightforward. For example, the most direct train route from Oxford to Oban requires two changeovers (at Birmingham and Glasgow) and can take up to 13 hours. At Oban, guests take a 45-minute CalMac ('Caledonian MacBrayne') ferry ride to Craignure on the Island of Mull, followed

by a 75-minute bumpy bus/car ride on a single-track road heading west to Fionnphort, where they take another 15-minute CalMac ferry across the Sound of Iona to reach their longed-for destination. In total, a single journey between Oxford and Iona can last 16 hours.

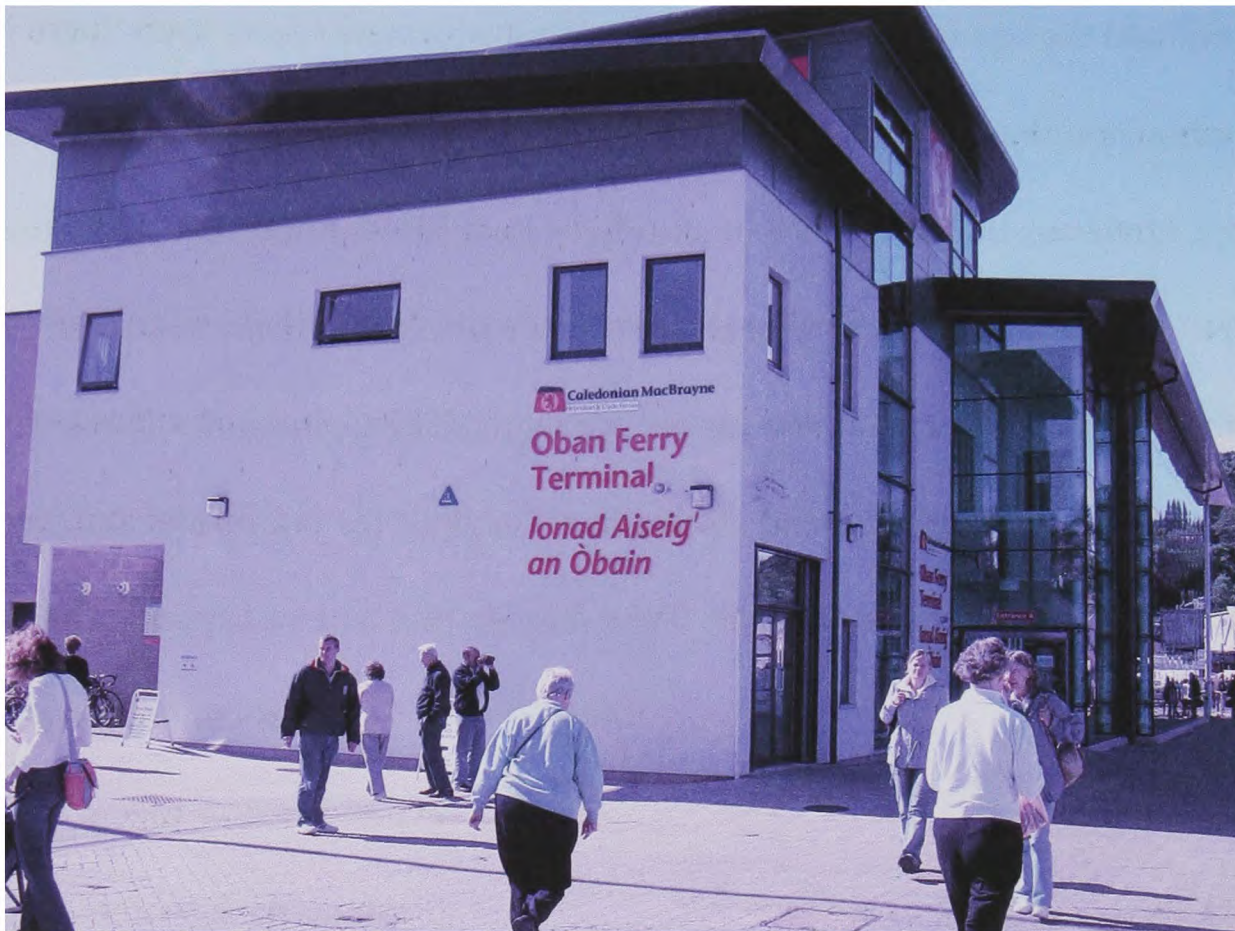


Fig 4.3 The newly refurbished Oban Ferry Terminal

Those relying on public transport must coordinate their itinerary meticulously in order to catch the last Iona ferry at 6.00 PM. Inclement weather (responsible for many a cancelled ferry and boosting the business of strategically placed B&Bs) is also a factor. Traveling to and from Iona is tedious and physically grueling for many, but not quite in the same sense as at pilgrimage sites like Mt Croagh Patrick in Ireland. Part of the stressfulness of reaching Iona has to do with the constraints and inconveniences of rural services, especially for urbanites used to getting to places quickly and at their ease. Many also struggle with the Gaelic place names and pronunciations, e.g., Fionnphort is pronounced 'Fin-ni-fert'. The 'foreignness' of being somewhere so 'wild' and remote, even for British visitors, can be overwhelming.

Unlike medieval Iona pilgrimage and present-day pilgrimages elsewhere (e.g., Santiago de Compostela), the notion of 'penance' is rarely why Community guests, and visitors in general, come to Iona. According to Coleman and Eade (2004: 10), Tomasi (2002) shows the decline in penitential discourse within European pilgrimage since medieval times and the rise in discourses about self-transformations; as such, there is now a greater emphasis on the process of journeying than on the actual destination. For many Iona devotees, however, the experience of getting to Iona is less important than actually arriving at the 'sacred' isle. This is because it is Iona's *landscape* that effects the processes of self-transformation or 'revelation' for them. The Community, however, attempt to sublimate the experience and discourse of 'arrival' for guests and staff into a more significant 'reality' of 'leaving Iona'. Why they do this will be explored in Chapter 8.



Fig 4.4 Passengers boarding the CalMac ferry at Oban bound for Mull

It is common for experienced or repeat visitors to break up their journey at places along the way, e.g., the Lake District or Glasgow, treating their trip to and from Iona much like a leisurely holiday. For some Iona 'pilgrims', a strong spiritual need does not

necessarily translate into a sense of urgency to get there. Once they arrive, however, leaving can become emotionally difficult. Nevertheless, the predominantly urbanite guests' shared discomfort over the long journey can forge bonds between them. The tougher and more plentiful the obstacles, the stronger the sense of camaraderie.

Guests' first point of convergence is at Oban, where they board the large CalMac ferry, the MV Isle of Mull (*An t-Eilean Muileach*),⁸ with hordes of people of unknown destinations. Arriving at Craignure, buses await them at the top of the jetty. Passengers search among the vehicles intended for various destinations around Mull; there is usually confusion as those going to Iona realise they must take the *Fionnphort*-marked bus as opposed to an 'Iona'-marked one. Along the route across Mull, the occasional local alights and strangers eye one another curiously the closer they trundle towards Fionnphort. Tentative questioning and spontaneous conversations may break out amongst passengers. Some prefer to sit quietly contemplating their 'inner journey' while taking in the scenery around them, an attitude which they feel is 'more appropriate to the spirituality and wildness of the landscape'. Getting 'closer to nature' is essential to the majority of visitors' aspirations.



Fig 4.5 A view of Mull's wild 'natural' landscape, on the way to Iona

The normally taciturn bus drivers sometimes point out wildlife glimpsed along the way—most famously, the golden eagle soaring over lochs and heathered hills. The 'wildness' of

⁸ 962-passenger and 80-car capacity

the landscape, peopled with animals and crofters, topped by a wide expanse of sky, starkly contrasts with urbanite visitors' own cityscape and frenetic pace of life. Other passengers swap stories about how far they have traveled, what moved them to make the trip, and



Fig 4.6 Inside a Fionnphort-bound bus on Mull's one-track road

their hopes for their time ahead. They especially like to compare notes on the travails of British public transport and the 'obstructiveness' of Scottish weather. Connecting emotionally with 'fellow pilgrims' this way is part of preparing for their 'Iona experience'.

Seeing the 'Sacred' Isle

Approaching Fionnphort, visitors catch their first sight of Iona across the Sound. Almost any type of weather—halcyon or tempestuous—adds to the drama of the scene. On a good day,

the eye traces along the squat houses lining the eastern coast, culminating northwards at the stone Abbey, built from Mull red granite, flushed pink in a certain light. The church tower barely competes with the mildly undulating tors and duns, low, rocky, and treeless. Visitors frequently anticipate their Iona trip for a significant period of time, and in a sense, their 'Iona experience' begins during that preparatory phase. But actually *seeing* the island with their own eyes marks a critical stage in their 'Iona experience'.



Fig 4.7 Visitors at Fionnphort gazing at Iona while waiting for the CalMac ferry

Standing at Fionnphort waiting for the ferry, the visual image of the island—tantalisingly just within reach—stirs people's excitement and imagination of what may come. One visitor describes being 'impressed by the naked grandeur of the place'. Visitors stand gazing at Iona, confronted by the perimeters of both islands and the body of water in between—physical markers of the boundaries they are about to cross, a frontier that promises new experiences and unique encounters with the 'divine'; it is a gateway to second chances and the opportunity to leave the humdrum existence of mainland, mainstream life behind. Spiritual fulfillment and dreams about to come true beckon.

'Perhaps in this "*thin place*" I might find a closer link with the God of my *understanding*', hoped a self-professed member of the 'Ancient Celtic Church/Scottish Episcopal Church' (italics added). It is *her* understanding of the 'divine' which she seeks to affirm over an historical or institution-based faith. The claim of affinity to the reinvented 'Ancient Celtic Church' is one way in which this visitor validates the historicity of the God of her devotions.

The island's remoteness on the geographical limits of British soil corresponds to the self-positioning of 'pilgrims' as disenchanted believers at the margins of institutionalised religion; their external, physical journey to Iona parallels their internal, spiritual journey to find solace and affirmation outside the strictures and structures of mainstream faith. Some are optimistic and buoyed up by their 'Iona experience' to return to their home churches to effect change. Others are not as interested in seeking a way back *into* organised religion as they want to learn to cope with being on the periphery of an alien and alienating Church. For many, it is the island itself, rather than the Iona Community or what takes place at the Abbey, which inspires spiritual renewal.



Fig 4.8 A string of cars and tour buses lined up at Fionnphort

Girded with apprehensions and expectations, visitors board the CalMac ferry MV Loch Buie (*Loch Buidhe*) to Iona. Even with 250-person capacity, during the height of the season crowds are sometimes left at Fionnphort awaiting the next crossing. Bus- and car-loads of daytrippers augment the hosts of people booked in to stay at the Abbey/the Mac and in B&Bs and guest houses, swelling the passenger numbers considerably. According to CalMac's estimate for the Iona ferry service, the island received 122,834 visitors in

2001, while the National Trust estimates a gross visitor figure of up to 200,000/year.⁹ On clear days, passengers squeeze onto the upper deck to keep the island in sight as they draw nearer; even when rain lashes down, the more adventurous venture outside to savour their first eyeful of that 'sacred' isle.



Fig 4.9 Visitors struggling to photograph Iona on a tumultuous day

On the Other Side of the Sound

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Sound, Iona Community resses and vollies—plus locals and hotel staff—gather on the Iona jetty to welcome their guests. Given public transport schedules and established practice, most guests (also at the B&Bs and hotels) arrive on Saturday afternoons. During the season the jetty on Saturdays becomes an informal meeting place where Iona's various social groups of islanders and staffworkers await their respective guests. Some mingling occurs between locals and staff, including the occasional invitation to sip coffee at the pub between ferry runs.

⁹ Pete McHugh, personal communication, telephone, 11 July 2006.



Fig 4.10 Visitors' 'ideal' first view of Iona

As at other pilgrimage or tourist destinations, hospitality is an essential trait of Iona's tourist industry; because of Iona's location and terrain, every effort is made to meet each guest personally when they disembark, especially those requiring extra assistance. Only locals are allowed to bring their cars onto the island, so walking is the primary mode of travel on Iona for visitors—another key contrast to urbanites' way of life (similar to Frey's (1998, 2004) Camino pilgrims). Repeat visitors, particularly those renting guest houses, tend to develop friendships with the owners. Locals commonly greet them warmly at the jetty like old friends. Daytrippers and tourists who wander onto the island on their own, however, are often regarded by islanders and staff as having a more cursory 'Iona experience'.

As the only way visitors can access and leave the island, the jetty serves as a frontier where the outside world intrudes upon the island as well as sustains its economy. It is also a threshold in van Gennep's (1908/1960) sense and a social space, a meeting ground and place of firsts and lasts. It provides a focal point of people's memories, as a

highly concentrated 'liminal space' where how you arrive and how you leave determines your relationship, present and future, to the island. Much depends on who is there to greet you at the jetty and perhaps more importantly, who is there to see you off when you leave.¹⁰ This issue of 'leaving Iona' will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

Entering into the 'otherness' of Iona's landscape is akin to a second chance or a beginning of something new or different. For many people, Iona is where they can cast aside the restrictions of institutionalised religion: '... those on the fringes of organised religion are welcomed and... we are encouraged to journey together and learn from each other'. Paralleling the popular idea that the 'Celtic Church' once resisted the influences of Rome and asserted an 'indigenised', inculturated Christianity, contemporary 'pilgrims' view Iona as a spiritual outpost where alternative practices of faith outside the Church's traditional hierarchy and doctrines can once again flourish.

Arriving on Iona

Unlike Frey's (1998, 2004) Santiago travelers where the journeying is paramount and arrival 'anticlimactic' or ambivalent, for most Iona visitors arriving on the island means everything. This is partly because people travel disparately, taking different routes and various forms of transport (even cruise ship or private yacht). Unless part of a church group or pilgrimage tour, the journey there can be a profoundly individualistic experience. Clad in similar weather-proof gear and loaded up with luggage, the Iona pilgrim is virtually unidentifiable from backpackers, campers, tourists, other holidaymakers, and sometimes locals themselves returning from vacationing elsewhere—except for the occasional visitor who dons a large Celtic cross necklace or some other distinguishing apparel (see the two 'robed' figures in Fig 4.7).

¹⁰ Interestingly, the newsletter Community staff sporadically produce is called 'The Jetty'.

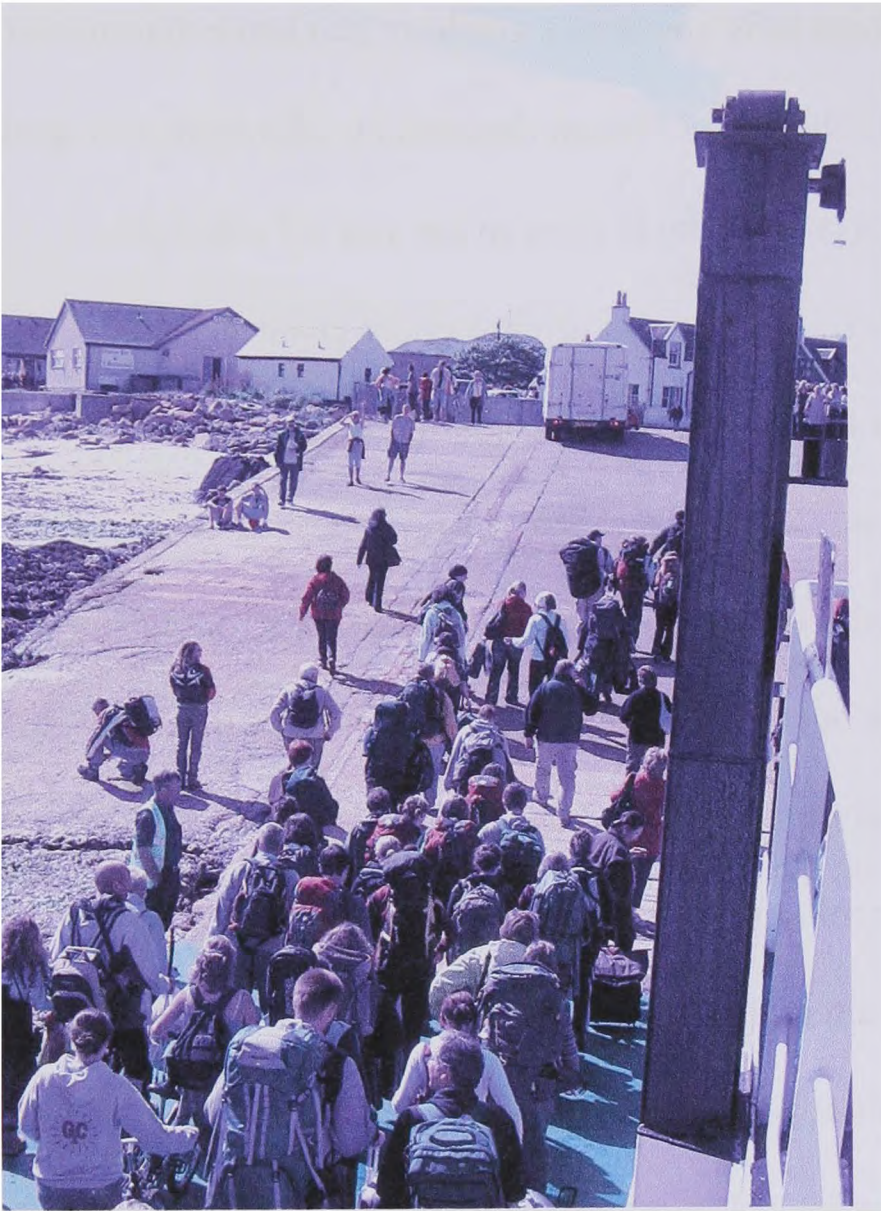


Fig 4.11 Iona visitors arriving at their 'sacred' destination

For Iona Community guests at least, it is only on arrival and joining the staff community and participating in the programme and services that their communal 'pilgrimage experience' fully commences.

The Community have the largest crew of staff poised at the jetty. The maintenance staff sit nearby in the 'white elephant' van ready to collect guests' luggage. The programme staff take turns

waiting for guests to arrive. As soon as the ferry ramp yawns open, passengers pour out onto the jetty. While B&B, hotel, and guest house hosts usually wait at the top of the jetty, the Community programme staff move into the throng to identify their guests, calling out, 'Who's staying at the Abbey/the Mac? Are you staying at the Abbey/the Mac?'. A suggestion was once made that, to reduce the flurry of activity, staff should hold up signs labeled 'The Abbey' or 'The MacLeod Centre' so guests come to them instead. The then Wardens rejected the idea on the grounds that while it might be 'more efficient', it was 'less personal'; they wanted to steer clear of the 'Butlins holiday camp' model, to demonstrate their rule of hospitality where 'you make the effort to welcome or reach out to others, rather than expecting people to come to you'.



4.12 The Iona jetty—a 'threshold' for people's aspirations

What budding *communitas* there might have been amongst travelers generally dissipates as people disperse with their hosts to their various places of accommodation. Visitors staying in different places may see one another on the road, at the shops, or during the weekly Pilgrimage, but Community guests tend to have such busy schedules mostly confined to the two centres and 'community' to build amongst themselves that, once they arrive on Iona, they seldom interact with other visitors.

Sorted into two groups by centre, the Community guests are led up the road by resses who chat with them to get 'a feel for' the group. It is a 15-minute walk to the Abbey, with an additional five minutes uphill to the Mac. At the centres, freshly baked goodies and hot drinks await them. The Wardens and/or programme workers give a general orientation, emphasising health and safety regulations, and assign guests their rooms. Throughout the (Saturday) afternoon, each ferry-load of guests are greeted by Community staff who repeat the procedure. The bookings secretaries encourage guests to arrive within the same time-frame, but late arrivals are not atypical and often frustrate staff's careful planning. Guests are often travel-weary and first-timers may feel shy and uncertain over spending an intense week 'in community' with strangers in a religious

environment. Over the course of the week, it will be every staff member's responsibility—especially resses—to change this dynamic.



4.13 On the road to the Abbey

Generally, each adult guest pays between £224 to £237 per week for full board,¹¹ inclusive of VAT and the Islands Access Fund levy (£12 per week).¹² Travel arrangements and expenses are guests' own responsibility.

Accommodation at the Abbey costs slightly more than at the Mac; older guests tend to prefer the more 'authentic' feel of the Abbey, while others, especially families, like the more modern and spacious MacLeod Centre. The

Abbey has mostly two-occupancy rooms,

while the Mac has same-sex dormitory-style rooms that each sleep between four to eight. Most rooms have bunk beds. Toilet and shower facilities are communal, and each centre has a 'common room' and 'dining area'. Increasingly more provision is being made for disabled guests, e.g., ramp access, toilets, 'disability' scooter. But the Community resist converting their accommodation into single, *en suite* rooms partly due to their 'commitment to simplicity of life-style' and belief that 'individual fulfillment is to be discovered only in community' and partly because of financial and architectural constraints (Shanks 1999: 85).

¹¹ Compare with Findhorn Foundation's charge of £485 per person for an 'Experience Week' and Lee Abbey's usual charge of £45 to £62 per night per person.

¹² Which goes to help subsidise those unable to pay the full charges, e.g., full-time student/young person and people on low income.



4.14 Part of the Mac's open plan dining/common area, with artwork by that week's guests on display

From the moment they step foot on Iona, guests are given every consideration. Staff are available to answer questions, find spare wellies and blankets, look out for people's safety and welfare, even bend a listening ear. Staff do not only ensure the smooth operation of the centres, but also are responsible for setting up the sociological conditions conducive for guests to gain a memorable and meaningful 'Iona experience'. All activities for guests, from church services to daily 'chores', are planned and organised to provide:

...an experience that relates to basic issues of identity, belonging, values and priorities...that recognises the spiritual reality that...self-development cannot be achieved apart from a concern for one another and for the world around us...
(Shanks 1999: 85)

The first time all staff and that week's guests meet is at each centre's Saturday evening meal. Guests are welcomed by staff and a short song or prayer of thanks, often humorous, is given. Staff and guests mingle at the tables and, over the course of the week, will take

turns serving and washing up. At the close of the meal, a Warden or programme worker describes the centres' structure of community life (e.g., meals, chores, services) and briefly discusses the week's programme. Usually, only the events between each meal are announced, intended to help guests adjust to a different mode of being by focusing on the here-and-now. At the end of the first meal, every vollie and ressie stands up to introduce themselves and their country of origin—which emphasises the international 'flavour' of life at the Iona Community centres.



4.15 Guests and staff eating together in the Abbey Refectory

Organising Time and Space: The 'Rhythm of the Week'

There are three temporal levels at which the Abbey and the Mac function: daily, weekly, and yearly.¹³ Taking them in reverse order, the centres offer weekly programmes clustered around a main *annual* theme. In 2001, it was *A Faith Odyssey*; the Warden (Woodcock 2001: 1) explained that 'programme leaders are running weeks on countless variations of

¹³ Staff's lives are also governed by the main 'season', offset by the winter or 'off-season' months.

journey: into healing, into justice, into ourselves, into the future, into life and beyond, into hope, into the unknown, along tightropes, across bridges...'. In 2002, the theme was *In God's Time*, while in 2006 it was *Entertaining Angels*. Within the overall annual theme are *weekly* themes, such as the following:

- Crossroads: A Meeting Place: A week of Buddhist/Christian dialogue led by a Buddhist nun and a Christian nun
- God in Our Place: '...a week for individuals and groups seeking to make sense of God's good news for the poor in our cities'
- Fair Trade in the Web of Life: 'Fair trade can make a real difference in this divided world...'
- Confronting Global Conflict: '...taking action in the overwhelming context of international relations and conflict'¹⁴

The morning and afternoon workshops/sessions reflect that week's topic. The Abbey and the Mac have separate, but occasionally overlapping, weekly programmes. The Mac tends to host more families and children, while the Abbey generally appeals to an older, more overtly 'religious' crowd, many of whom are 'middle-aged, middle-class, middle-English Anglicans'. 'Open Weeks', with no fixed theme and providing more flexibility, are also offered for those guests who seek a more 'neutral' experience. Leaders for programmed weeks are culled from a wide network linked through the Community, including Associates, former staff, and experts in various fields of work and ministry.

Besides the annual and weekly programmes, each *day* also has a fixed theme (e.g., Saturday = Welcome, Monday = Peace & Justice) which determines the content of that day's worship and workshops/sessions (see Table 4.1). For example, on Tuesdays, a session on the Iona Community's 'healing ministry' takes place after dinner to prepare guests for the evening Prayers for Healing service; while on Wednesdays, the evening Act

¹⁴ The first two are taken from *2001—A Faith Odyssey: The Iona Community 2001 Islands' Programme*, the final two are from *Entertaining Angels: The Iona Community 2006 Islands' Programme*.

of Commitment service might relate to that day's Pilgrimage and help the congregation consider what kind of 'commitment' they might be ready to make to themselves, someone else, or God. The 'rhythm of the week' provides the elementary structure around which every week's programme is arranged.



Fig 4.16 Guests performing in the Wednesday Guest Concert

The week guests spend on Iona is governed by the daily and weekly 'rhythm'. From the Saturday afternoon when they arrive to the Friday morning when they leave,¹⁵ each day is marked out by an

established routine including the thrice-daily Abbey services—which are all open to the public. Days begin with guests and staff gathering in the Abbey church for the 9.00 AM service. The Morning Service liturgy specifically ends, in place of a benediction, 'simply with responses that prepare us to go straight out to the life of the world, there to continue our worship in the context of our work' (Iona Community 2001a: 11). At 9.00 PM, another service is held which closes the day with a final blessing. During the summer months, a 15-minute Peace & Justice service takes place at 2.00 PM for day-visitors who cannot attend the other services. They are commonly found debating in whispers at the back of the Nave over whether they can attend the service and still catch the next Mull ferry. The liturgy of the Morning Service is kept constant, providing a predictable point to an otherwise hectic, changeable schedule, and usually lasts 20 minutes or so, while the

¹⁵ During the original seven-day programme week, guests left on Saturday morning and new guests arrived that same afternoon; see Chapter 5 for details of the change to a six-day week.

Evening Services—especially the Prayers for Healing—with varying content and liturgy, can take up to an hour or more.

Table 4.1 'Rhythm of the Week' Timetable, 2001–2002

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.15			Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9.00	Morning service	Breakfast	Morning service	Morning service	Morning service	Morning service	Leaving service
9.30		Chores	Chores	Chores	Chores	Chores	<i>Guests leave</i>
10.15		Communion Service	Programme session + coffee break	Programme session + coffee break	Pilgrimage	Programme session + coffee break	
1.00		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Packed lunch	Lunch	
2.00	Peace & Justice service	Session on 'What is the Iona Community?'	Peace & Justice service	Peace & Justice service	Peace & Justice service*	Peace & Justice service	Peace & Justice service*
2.15	<i>Guests arrive</i>	and 'Big Sing' session	Staffa option (Abbey) Programme session (Mac)	Staffa option (Mac) Programme session (Abbey)	Pilgrimage	Free time or Programme session (or Staffa fallback)	
6.00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
7.30	Welcome session	Free time	Justice & Peace session	Healing Ministry session	Service or Guest concert preparation	Reflection session	
9.00	Welcome Service	Quiet Time Service	Justice & Peace Service	Service of Prayers for Healing	Act of Commitment Service or Guest-led Service	Communion or Agape Service	Evening Service*
9.45	Tea & coffee	Tea & coffee	Tea & coffee	Tea & coffee	Tea & coffee	Tea & coffee	Tea & coffee*
10.00	Programme option	Programme option	Ceilidh/disco (in village hall)	Taize or meditation session	Guest concert	Programme option	

* These public events take place even when Iona Community guests are not present.

These three points of daily devotion highlight the Community's vision of the holistic, continuous nature of 'work and worship', 'prayer and politics', 'the sacred and the secular'.

Taken together, they establish a certain pattern of the week guests find is a refreshing

change from their normal routines involving weekday work and Sunday worship. This 'rhythm of the week' is followed unerringly and repeated over the 32-week season.

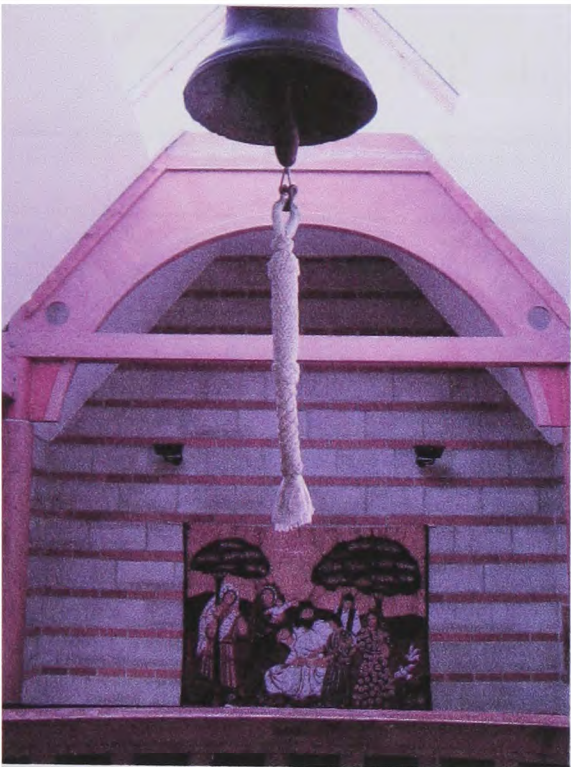


Fig 4.17 The MacLeod Centre bell

Much like a religious order, the flow of life at the Community's centres is ordered and punctuated by the ringing of bells. A bell wakes guests up at 7.00 AM and at 8.15 announces breakfast. The church bell is rung at 8.50 in three strings of seven to call people to the 9.00 Morning Service. The same happens for the other meals and services and the weekly Pilgrimage. After the morning service, guests return to their respective centres to perform 'chores' with vollies (e.g., cleaning toilets, chopping vegetables). Between 10.15 and lunchtime, guests participate in various sessions/workshops led by external leaders and/or programme staff. The afternoons are similarly spent, with a Staffa boat trip option arranged with a local, David Kirkpatrick. Sometimes, guests are given free time but most like to take advantage of the activities on offer, especially the music and craft options. The pealing of bells indicate *where* people ought to be and what they ought to be *doing* in those spaces, whether in the Abbey church, the common room, or elsewhere, for time and space are entwined. For the Iona Community, to live 'in community' is to be aware of the interconnectedness of all things, of how every act or sound is purposeful and affects other events and people. It is by this general rule that guests spend their week on the island.

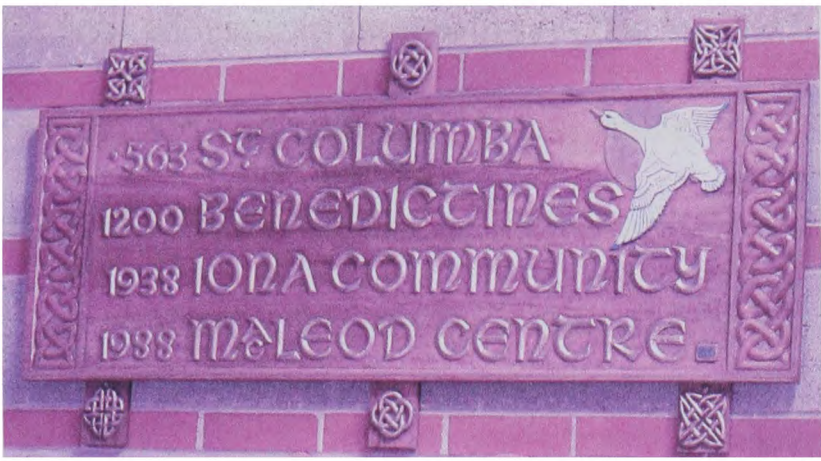


Fig 4.18 Time is telescoped here by positioning the Iona Community within the succession of Iona's 'religious communities'

Ideally, guests move seamlessly from one scheduled activity to the next, from one defined space to another within the Abbey and the Mac. They are guided by the ringing bells, assisted by staff and fellow guests, reminded by notices and signs—all aimed towards helping

guests settle into the 'rhythm' of 'living in community'. The Turners (1978: 11) contrast the 'individual character' of Christian pilgrimage and its 'inner transformations' with tribal societies where communal regeneration is prime. Here, the Iona Community purposely seek to invert this Christian tradition, or rather the apparent Western bias towards 'self-centred' atomism in order to reclaim the notion that salvation is *collective*. Through the range of meticulously coordinated activities, some mundane and quotidian (e.g., washing up) and others spiritually challenging (e.g., a service about sexuality), guests are meant to gradually shed their 'individual' persona for a holistic, 'corporate' one. Their 'pilgrimage' centres on this mode of transformation, to reverse the 'compartmentalising' effects of Western industrialised values upon their souls and lifestyles, if only for a while. By going to this remote place, where time and space are structured differently than in ordinary life, moving at a different pace with different priorities, guests desire an alternate 'rhythm' which they hope to emulate back on the mainland, many of whom already feel out of sync with mainstream life and the mainline Church.



Fig 4.19 Guests 'building community' in the Mac foyer

As discussed earlier, the Iona assert that 'community' can only be forged through 'praxis', in the actual doing of things together—what MacLeod called the 'the common task'. Back in the 1940s and 1950s, that 'common task' was a physical reconstruction of a building; in the 21st century, however, the project of 'building community' or 'the building of people' can seem much more nebulous. Nevertheless, many guests claim their abbreviated 'Iona

experience' does leave its mark on them.

The 'Iona Experience': Beyond Quest and Protest

Many Iona visitors, especially Iona Community guests and others on 'spiritual quests', do not like to be called 'tourists'; they want to claim a more special and intimate relationship with the place. One visitor described her first trip to Iona:

...I remember being impressed by the naked grandeur of the place, but the *masses of tourists* spilling on to the island at the same time as myself *prevented any deeper feelings from occurring* and I was disappointed to have to leave Iona before having a chance to absorb its atmosphere in peace... (italics added)

This sense of dissonance from other visitors—seeing *them* as tourists, as an anonymous, rowdy horde vs. herself as an individual seeking a more genuine and ethereal encounter—is not uncommon. The presence of 'masses of tourists' obstructed this visitor's ability to

take in or engage emotionally with the island's 'atmosphere', reflecting a popular association of 'sacredness' with an empty or idyllic landscape. The constraint of time as a daytripper also impinged upon her 'Iona experience'.

Indeed, how long a visitor stays on the island, along with other factors such as with whom or where she stays (e.g., in the 'sacred' Abbey or at a 'secular' hotel), how well she knows the locals and (perhaps more importantly) vice versa, how frequently she visits, and what activities she participates in, not only expands her experience of the place, but also bestows legitimacy to claims of 'closeness' to Iona. Similar to Kohn's (2002) sense of the possibility of 'belonging' through practice, all these ways of behaving on Iona are also what determine how accepted a person is by local residents—even if she can never quite achieve full 'islander' status. Iona locals are familiar with, and wary of, the range of reasons why the island holds special attraction for visitors. Amongst these motivations are Golliher's (1989) insights about 'pilgrims' coming to Iona to 'quest' and 'protest'.

Golliher's (1989) study focuses entirely on staff workers at the Abbey as 'pilgrims', but his research nevertheless has applications for other 'outsider' social groups such as Iona Community guests. Golliher's 'quest and protest' thesis raises interesting points which help illuminate Iona devotees' many-sided motivations.

To Quest: In Search of 'Home'

The element of 'questing' is very strong in visitors' characterisation of the island's allure:

7 years ago I stayed at the Abbey. This was due to...a general longing for something to change in my life and a longing to experience *some dramatic kind of spiritual reality*.

...Personally I expected some particular *revelation* of God whilst on the island—a Damascus road type experience of God... (all italics added)

As with other holy sites, people tend to go on pilgrimage during key or watershed periods in their lives, whether at crisis or momentous turning points. One person whose marriage was on the verge of breaking down said:

I needed to get away by myself. Time to think and reflect.... no heavy couples scene or children—because I left my teenage children at home I didn't want to be reminded of them and miss them too much.

Another woman had waited a long time before she could fulfil her desire to visit:

I had been wanting to come for ages but at that time I needed a break from the family and an opportunity arose which I grabbed.... I wanted to find some space away from the roles I felt trapped by to discover some new possibilities.

Several people elaborated on their desire for an intense mountain-top experience of the Divine, where being on Iona would serve as a 'spiritual catalyst' of sorts:

I...hoped to feel God's touch on my life in a very real and unmistakable way. I had been a Christian for about 6 years and was aware of God slowly and gently working in my life and healing some areas. I came to Iona hoping that *something dramatic* would happen *to speed up this process*. (italics added)

Another guest admitted about her first trip to Iona:

My expectations were really longings and were very high. I expected to be changed and to feel different and happier and to finally find a place where I genuinely felt I 'fitted'. I also hoped that I may meet a life partner who was a real kindred spirit.

Although she did not find a life partner on her first visit, her second trip was with her fiancé. She said, '...Iona has been important to me and I felt that sharing an experience there would make us closer'. She envisaged inner and outer transformations being stimulated by their physical presence on the island. Iona frequently becomes a key reference point in people's lives as they seek to reconfigure the map of their inner selves as

well as the topographical lines of their social relationships in relation to their 'Iona experience'. Her yearning to belong, both in a committed relationship and in a community setting, is shared by other visitors.



Fig 4.20 Guests, staff, and other visitors mingle in the intimate space setup for the Thursday Evening Communion service

'Belonging' and 'community' are crucial to most people's 'Iona experience'. With varying degrees of gusto, guests generally rise to the week's challenge of 'living in community' and expect a cohesive sense of *communitas* to develop:

I longed to feel... safe, 'at home', with people I could share with....

I liked the thought of being in a group of different and new people for a short period.

I have always had a feeling of not quite 'fitting' in.... I hoped that in the Iona Community I would feel different and feel that I belonged...

Finding and/or solidifying romance on Iona is a salient feature of many people's 'Iona experience'. During my fieldwork, numerous couples used the Abbey for their wedding, and it is common for people to fall in love within Iona's idyllic environs. For a small island community struggling to retain its population, especially young people, the influx of visitors and staff also provides locals with augmented possibilities for romance and/or finding life partners.

One of the most powerful narratives employed by visitors is about their intuition of Iona as a 'spiritual refuge'. Those who normally do not profess a faith often say only on Iona is the 'divine' real to them. An American couple decided to get married at the Abbey, despite the distance and inconvenience involved in planning and transporting guests in from the US, because they felt Iona was their 'true spiritual home'. Countless people articulated how inspired they were by the island and the spirituality it embodied for them:

It feels like a spiritual 'home'—or rather a spiritual springboard. I find something from the experience that resources my continuing pilgrimage.

...The overall effect of all these books [about Celtic Christianity] was to present to me *an overwhelming sense of homecoming* for, in what they had to say about the nature of the Celts' worship... I for the first time in my 52 years of spiritual searching, felt myself *embraced by a spirituality with which I felt completely comfortable* and which gave me a craving for more knowledge.

Of course it was not long before I moved into the Internet and searched out the Iona Homepage... (italics added)

But the 'questing' or 'homecoming' is not always in spiritual terms and may take on ethnic or cultural hues. Visitors to Scotland include a significant proportion of what Basu (2004) calls 'roots-tourists', i.e., people claiming a common Scottish heritage in search of their origins. These members of the Scottish diaspora tend to be middle-aged, middle-class, urban whites from Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand. Their strong identification with Scotland is often based on extensive genealogical research and internet

networking across the continents, culminating in actual travel to and gathering at their respective 'clanlands'.

Basu makes a strong case for why the notions of 'home' and 'homecoming' have such emotional force and cultural resonance:

...if this proverbial home may be understood as a place where one belongs in some profound sense, to be in a position to make a homecoming suggests that...this home exists elsewhere, somewhere and/or sometime 'other' than the here and now. To contemplate making a homecoming is therefore to recognize that *one is living in a state of exile* from this longed-for 'place'. Indeed...this seemingly most commonplace of locations has, in an age characterized by movement, also become the most elusive. As society becomes increasingly mobile and fragmented, there is thus *a corresponding nostalgia* for the (imagined) stability and coherence of past times and places. It is precisely in response to this desire of the 'dislocated' self to 'relocate' itself in time and place that roots-tourism is so effective in providing the promise of a route 'back' home. (Basu 2004: 157–8, italics added)

Iona's neighbour, the Ross of Mull, is ancestral home to the many well-known clans, e.g., MacLean. On Iona itself, some surnames (e.g., Black, Tindal, MacDougall) stretch back several generations, but the island's eventful history and relatively high turnover of people have yielded a fairly scattered set of genealogies. Certainly, 'roots-tourists' do come specifically to Iona, but the hunt for an ancestral homeland is sometimes conflated with a spiritual sense of homecoming, or else the sacred connections are prioritised over genealogical ones. An Australian guest 'Thomas' says:

...For the white man [in Australia] there is, to my knowledge, NOT A SINGLE SACRED SITE on this vast continent that stands as a tribute to our Saviour as the overseer and Lord of the land.... Basically, we were founded a pagan nation, with no icons, no sacred sites, just a legacy of week-kneed (in the face of God's law) clergy, cruelty and gross injustice. Put simply, Australia's white origins were formed as a place of punishment—NOT forgiveness—of God or man.... (original emphasis)

Reflecting on 'our true native people, the Aborigines', Thomas expresses awe and admiration for their 'history of creation' and countless holy sites, especially Uluru, honoured as 'the ultimate sacred structure'. He continues:

But it [Uluru] is not my Cathedral, it is not my Iona Abbey, not my Oran's Chapel, and never can be in my heart.

Which brings me back to ME and MY long, long trek to tiny Iona.... the *awareness and discovery of my Celtic roots* was something of only very recent times, but brought with it *such a powerful sense of belonging and origin* that it left me with no option but to pursue it, even tho money was an obstacle and I now find myself in middle age desperately wanting to further follow those roots but unable to do so.... *I believe I belong on the other side of the world*, immersed in a tradition that is not to be found in Australia, except perhaps in small, difficult-to-find pockets...and even there, entry would be difficult without *the mark of the clan* upon your forehead...

...In [Iona's] ancient stones beats a rhythm that no amount of empathy on my part can uncover in the rocks of Australia's mountains and desert stones. I can thrill to the didgeridoo..., but never can that approach the heartrending call of the eulian pipes or the pulsating beat of the bodhran.

That's where I belong. I only wish I'd discovered this food for the soul 40 years ago—or perhaps in another time... (original emphasis, italics added)

Thomas goes on to develop the link between his Celtic heritage, Australian nationality, and Christian faith:

Apart from the fact that many Australians of Anglo-Saxon descent could trace their heritage to early Celtic history (which was the case for me), my nationality means little, but my claim to being a Christian means a great deal, for here, on Iona, I was able to find numerous places and structures that allowed me *to focus on my quest for a deeper understanding of the love of God*, and the ways of God and His will for my life. The high crosses, St Columba's Sanctuary, Oran's Chapel, St Columba's Bay and the quarry, all provided me with different levels of awareness... (italics added)

Thomas' deep yearning for Iona and a Celtic heritage is expressed specifically in *spiritual* terms over any ethnic or national identity, and yet reveals the profound importance of place. In fact, ethnic ties do matter insofar as they validate a 'natural' claim to a type of spirituality perceived as indigenous to a geographical place: according to Thomas' reflections, Aborigines have Uluru as right and proper to their heritage and tradition, and

white Australians—particularly Christians—have places like Iona as befits their birthright and legacy.

On the other hand, Thomas spurned those Australians who would insist on 'the mark of the clan upon your forehead' before allowing access to a Celtic tradition. He implies that this tradition should not be limited by actual lines of descent, but be available to all who identify with it. There is a delicate balance in play here, between how this guest both objects to exclusivity based on genealogy *and* wields white heritage to legitimise his identification with Celtic spirituality. It is important to note this is an account of Thomas' 'personal pilgrimage' and not intended as an indictment against those non-whites, non-Celts who might also regard Iona as a 'homeland'.

Thomas' recurring sense of belonging 'on the other side of the world' also resonates with Basu's point about diaspora Scots 'living in a state of exile':

The 'exile's return' to Scotland may therefore be understood as a profound homecoming at multiple levels: it may be understood, for example, as a return to the 'cradle' of a craved-for collective identity; as an existential journey to the source of the self. (Basu 2004: 161)

Whilst the homeland may be an imagined one initially constructed from a visitor's readings on Celtic history, spiritual devotionals, and internet research, it is also rooted 'in a particular geographical territory which may be visited by the *body*, touched, photographed, driven across and walked upon' (*ibid.*: 160, original italics). Basu (*ibid.*: 159) further states that 'roots-tourism', 'the imperative to recover a more "authentic" sense of home...betray[s] a more pessimistic view of modernity in which the individual evidently does not celebrate his or her liberation from the "genealogical rhetoric" of blood and territorial attachment, but on the contrary seeks to re-assert it'.

This point can be similarly applied to people such as Thomas discussed above, but not only in terms of a Celtic or Scots diaspora. Rather, it can be argued that the

religious malaise of the 'postmodern', 'post-Christian' West has dislocated many Christians' sense of connectedness with the Church and their fellow believers—people thus scramble to find other ways of defining one's religious identity. Ethnicity and history are tools utilised in this process, but what emerges as equally, if not more, important is *place*. Not just any place, but places with particular myths, narratives, and practices attached to them, places which can confer legitimacy on whites whose ethnic identity has fallen prey to 21st-century identity politics, and places which can validate claims of an 'authentic' and 'indigenous' spirituality. For many people, Iona is such a place:

I think it is a place that takes our deepest experiences seriously. It is a place that is grounded, authentic, meaningful so gives permission for me to be me and for me to grow.

Iona speaks to me of the groundedness of a spirituality within a place, and of the necessity for a deep spirituality to be grounded in its geographical place.... As a Christian Iona speaks to my roots, of course (if not for Iona's place in mission, what/where might I be?)...

The island is perceived and appropriated as the heartland not so much of a Scots diaspora but a 'Celtic spiritual' diaspora which crosses ethnic and cultural boundaries. Iona becomes a foil against which the mainstream Church and dominant forms of Western Christianity are judged and evaluated. The island and visitors' 'Iona experience' become a potent reference point around which people's personal and religious identities are navigated and formulated. It appears that Thomas' inner longings prompted a search for an external 'homeland' like Iona. People's desires often find support in Iona's multilayered landscape—substantiated by appropriating its specific history, archaeology, and/or geology. For instance, the age of Iona's rocks is cited to support New Age claims about the island as a focal intersection of powerful ley lines.



Fig 4.21 Meditating at the Hermit's Cell—a resonant energy point?

In another case, an American woman 'Eudora' came on her second Iona visit in 2000. On her first trip, she had apparently felt an eerie sense of familiarity with the island. Eudora came to discover she had been, in a past life, one of the Columban monks slaughtered during the 7th-century Viking raids. She was convinced, 'I have lived and died here before, and I will live and die here again'. For her, the Iona inhabited by present-day locals matters little; rather, it is the Iona of the past she connects with—via a traumatic act which left its mark on the landscape and was

reinvigorated through a spiritual awakening of memory precipitated by her actual bodily presence on the island. Iona thus becomes a central point of reference, allowing Eudora not only to reconstruct a personal history and sense of 'self', but also to anticipate a future that holds the promise of resolution, a coming of full circle—of coming 'home'.

To Protest, or Not to Protest?

In the late 1980s, Golliher (1989: 3) found that 'Iona pilgrims reject, as a rule, the dominant social institutions governing Western culture and they are very vocal about it'; such as institutional religion, urban life, nuclear family household structure, the international arms trade and environmental devastation, etc. While this may be true of Golliher's staff informants, my recent research amongst Iona visitors revealed this theme

of 'protest' did not always dominate their discourse.¹⁶ Those who did raise the issue indeed had strong feelings about it and, as Golliher stated, were indeed quite vociferous.

One Community guest shared:

...I stayed at the Abbey...due to a growing desire to visit the Community because of a feeling of dissatisfaction with my own Church.... For me [Abbey worship] was wonderful as my inability to make this connection [of 'church' and 'work or home life'] in my own church created a deep dissatisfaction in me and a tendency to be critical of the church. I also liked the way that none of the doors were locked and the services were led by various volunteers. The worship was the responsibility of 'ordinary' people and not just 'experts'.

As a parent, one guest bemoaned the loss of 'community' and its impact on human relationships:

...I find the model of 'community' as parents and children (the 'nuclear' family) draining and debilitating and I am horrified at how much damage can be done behind closed doors (in the home). I would like to explore other ways of resourcing relationships and of bringing up children.... At my lowest times I believe that the institutional church has immense power to turn people away from God. I also believe that I am called to serve God within the institutional church but believe that my task is to turn people round to find God in life—their life and the life of the world—rather than putting God in a box and expecting people to see God through our window...

These, and other, visitors felt that the Iona Community offered 'alternative spaces' on Iona within which to push the boundaries of conventional ideas about faith and spiritual practice and to give voice, as 'culture critics' (Golliher 1989: 3), to their disaffections with Western society. However, these Iona 'pilgrims' do not go to the island 'to protest', for to whom are they protesting? Instead, they are in search of people *like themselves* with whom they can feel 'at home' and be empowered by; they want to '...find like-minded people, stimulating conversation, sense of belonging, unity, model of a lifestyle I'd like to emulate'.

¹⁶ Nor did it loom large amongst the resses with whom I worked.

The booking secretaries say it has been increasingly difficult to sell 'protest' or 'politics' weeks to people, compared with 'spirituality' themed weeks, especially the Celtic variety. Occasional groups of social activists and campaigners do book in at the centres, but for the most part, people with frenetic mainland lives are disinterested in spending a week on the island arguing about politics or thinking about the world's problems. People whose jobs focus on addressing such societal issues (e.g., social workers) seldom wish to spend a week's holiday in a beautiful place immersed in them. Indeed, this is a perennial dilemma for the Iona Community; some Members argue that the island centres are antithetical to the Community's vision about being 'in the world' rather than being set apart from it. While many Community guests are akin to the 'cultural refugees' which Golliher (1989: 229) refers to, this does not exclude them being 'cultural exploiters', too. A case in point was when a social activist, after teaching a group an 'anti-globalisation' song, including a line about 'anti-technology', asked staff where on the island she could check her email.

Interestingly, a small number of visitors bemoan that the Community itself is becoming institutionalised or is too close to traditional Christianity in its language, liturgy, and structures. Most critics tended to be non-religious themselves or aligned with New Age or neo-pagan spiritualities; while they may visit the Abbey and even attend a service, they avoid staying at the Community centres. But, in at least once instance, the negative appraisal came from an Abbey guest. This guest, in his early 20s, understood the Community's goal as:

To renew the world through social and personal action and using 'culture friendly' techniques. To bring new and quite radical ideas to people using old techniques.

When asked how important this vision was to his own life, he replied:

Becoming less so, as I am uncomfortable with the conservatism implicit in such an approach. I feel that renewal is not good enough and instead there needs to be a process of creative destruction applied to preconceptions in many of the areas in which the Community is active.

Whether or not Members would agree with his grasp of the Community's ethos, this guest's attitude is not uncommon amongst a certain generation of Christians in Britain, especially those in their 20s and 30s. It can be found in some radical sectors of 'emergent church' movements in the West and in circles where basic notions of 'church' or 'priesthood' are being thrown out in the attempt to completely reinvent Christianity in response to 'postmodernism'.¹⁷ Some leaders in this field think the only way to recover Christianity is by demolishing the Church, its traditions and hierarchies, entirely. For them, the Iona Community does not go far enough.

Of course, not all Iona visitors frame their sense of purpose in terms of 'quest and protest'. People frequently mix and combine different reasons for visiting the island. Some choose specifically 'neutral' weeks where the theme is not overtly religious, e.g., Local History Week, or an Open Week where there is no fixed programme. Others are looking for a 'working holiday', while some guests see their stay at the Iona Community centres as a way to gain certain skills, especially in worship or in writing liturgy and music during the highly popular programme weeks facilitated by the WGRG. One music teacher shared that she '...hoped to learn more about leading worship *and* to have a holiday with a spiritually rewarding element' (*italics added*).

Whatever their initial motivation, many Iona visitors subsequently return to the island for other visits. What galvanises them to undergo that long journey again and again?

¹⁷ Somewhat anarchic and fluid, adherents tend not to promote one model over another and downplay 'missions' in favour of a broader, more socially conscious and politically radical vision of faith.

Iona Revisited

Unlike traditional Christian—i.e., Roman Catholic—pilgrimage practice, Iona pilgrimage does not confer any formal spiritual kudos upon participants, e.g., penance or the remission of sins. Yet Iona frequently receives repeat visitors. Frey (1998: 211ff) found that a number of Camino pilgrims repeat the journey to fulfil something missing from previous trips; others are 'serial pilgrims' 'addicted' to the experience.¹⁸ Similarly, people return to Iona for a variety of reasons, often seeking to replicate or extend an initial positive and powerful 'Iona experience'. When asked if they had revisited and why, guests at the Abbey and the Mac said they needed 'battery recharging':

Yes, wanted to come back and see what they [the Community/Resident Group] were doing and stay in a fabulous place.

Yes, because I am recharged by the experience and feel that my deepest yearnings are 'touched' and encouraged...

The special experience keeps me wanting to come back. God has done something special in my life each time I just never know what it will be...

For many people, sharing their 'Iona experience' with loved ones was one meaningful way to define and/or cement their relationships. Twenty years after her first trip, one visitor returned to Iona with her new partner to 'share a pilgrimage' organised by their church. She wrote:

...I was very excited in 1999 going on pilgrimage, as I longed to sense its [Iona's] spirituality, which I had been learning more about in my recent studies of Scottish History at Edinburgh University. Also, it was a personal pilgrimage, seeking out a new path in life with [my fiancé].

Being on Iona together to mark the start of their marriage, to 'dedicate our love and our life to the service of God—to follow in Columba's footsteps', was a critical event for them.

¹⁸ One ressie expressed concern about 'Iona junkies' who seem to need regular spiritual 'fixes' on Iona in order to survive in 'not-Iona'; she felt it is unhealthy when people think they cannot 'truly' worship anywhere except in Iona Abbey.

Many people say a special sense of welcome and 'belonging'—whether at the Iona Community centres, Bishop's House, or for 'Scottish cousins' amongst the locals—is the main impetus for why they retrace their steps to Iona; regular visitors return to 'renew' their social connections with the island and its communities.

It is quite common for guests later to decide to become Iona Community Friends or Associates or even return to volunteer at the centres. In fact, a number of ressiess began their long-term relationship with Iona as a daytripper, then a guest, then a volunteer, etc. There are several 'relationship' trajectories, but the point is that people actively seek out various ways of experiencing Iona in different capacities.

Although many people express the hope and desire to revisit, some are limited by practicalities—the cost, distance, and time involved in travelling, plus the commitments of work and home life. Sometimes, they deliberately refrain from revisiting:

The distance and time spent travelling prevents me coming as often as I would like, it is *this distance that also makes it so special...*

Less frequently in recent years, *lest familiarity make it stale.*

I have responsibilities at home which are important to me and take priority over *excessive self indulgence.* (all italics added)

Visitors recognise that for Iona to remain 'special', it has to remain strange and distant at some level, peripheral to their daily, mundane lives. While Iona may be at the centre of their faith, some may desire it but rarely does someone actually relocate to make Iona the physical centre of their lives:

Perhaps impractical, but it would be a privilege and a joy to live on Iona. It would be lovely to be involved in God's work on Iona in some way...

I think I'd feel a little isolated and find all the comings and goings quite difficult.

No. Some aspects of living in community are very stressful.... I would miss my friends and family in Birmingham too much to live so far away on a long term basis.

Over time, Iona may not remain the same for people and the evolving relationship they have with the place may end. One Abbey guest first learned of the Iona Community through his parents' church in 1996, which had employed a youth worker with ties to the Corrymeela Community near Belfast. That same year, he attended the Youth Festival on an organised trip and camped outside Iona Abbey with other young people. Since then, he had revisited and stayed at both Iona centres and at Camas on Mull. This Abbey guest said, 'I root much of my faith in the 'Iona tradition'. However, as I move from that vision of faith, I am beginning to consider it much less relevant'. The relationship he had with Iona the place paralleled his relationship with the Iona Community. When asked what kept or prevented him from returning to Iona, he stated, 'The need to understand my first experience kept me coming back. *The need to change may stop me going back soon*'.

While Iona visitors carry with them a fair share of nostalgia and romanticism, many also recognise the shortcomings and the potential for disappointment and unfulfilled expectations. The previous guest's insight about 'the need to change' illustrates a dynamic relationship between the visitor and the pilgrimage site. It shows that, for some, Iona may not forever remain their 'sacred' centre; it is one of a plethora of places that people are attached to for a while and may move away from.

Veni, Vidi, Amavi—'I Came, I Saw, I Loved'

The 'Iona experience' varies from person to person, yet at the same time, at least for guests at the Abbey and the Mac, certain aspects are always emphasised. For instance, the internationalism of the guests, staff, and other visitors tends to be highlighted; to recall a visitor staying at the Columba Hotel who declared, 'Iona is the centre of the world.'

Everyone comes through here'. This is due not just to the efforts of the Scottish tourist industry, but in large part to the Iona Community and its two centres, which attract people from places such as Scandinavia, Namibia, Japan, and the Sudan. It also confirms Eliade's (1959: 36ff) assertion that sacred space is often defined by a central *axis mundi*.

Guests at the Community centres describe how they were exposed to different forms of worship and learned new understandings of faith. A group of schoolchildren from the Gorbals mingled with an elderly ladies' church group from England; (disabled) members of the L'Arche Community, together with their helpers, led a service of worship washing the congregation's feet; a strident collection of social activists were confronted with the spirituality of political protest; etc. Whatever its exact nature, the 'Iona experience' is seldom ineffectual. At one level, visitors said they felt inspired and encouraged in their Christianity:

It has strengthened and confirmed our love and our faith and our deepest desire to service God and our fellow beings as Christ requested.

Just reinforced the fact that God loves me. I made some friends who have prayed and supported me since my return. I am confident of God's unconditional love for me and for humanity...

Others found healing and a way of progressing forward from the crisis point in their lives:

Allowed me to experiment, grow, and more recently to move towards resolution of an old hurt.

One couple became Iona Community Associates after their 'Iona experience'. The husband shared:

Being an Associate member and member of a Family Group meeting monthly kept me going through seven years in a parochial 'Siberia'.

Not all 'Iona experiences' are straightforwardly positive and its effects on people's lives can be quite mixed. One guest reflected with honesty and humour:

Yes, it has affected my life but in gentler and less dramatic ways than I had hoped. I have tried to make simple wholesome food (*this lasts for about a week* after returning from Iona), to maintain the rhythm of worship by using the worship book (*this lasts less than a week*), to practice hospitality, etc. Despite my shortcomings it does work a subtle change in my attitude and helps me get my priorities a little more straightened out. By giving me a practical vision for my faith [it] has also made me more accepting of other people but I cannot claim that change yet!!....

I felt that by the end of the week I had been deeply touched by God's love and that this experience would make me a different, happier person after I left. I was in reality changed in far gentler and subtler ways and realised by about the time I reached Oban that much of life would be *just the same as it ever was*. (italics added)

Whatever 'lessons' visitors take away with them when they leave Iona, they ubiquitously comment on how their encounter with the 'sacred' island is evocative and impactful:

We reached out to Iona and Iona reached out to us. Immense gratitude for God's grace.

Timeless, [its] spirituality [is] powerful and relevant at the same time.

A special place where special things happen...

Visitors talked a lot about 'being happy' and content, being touched or moved by a service or by time spent alone in Iona's 'sacred' landscape:

I fell in love with both the island and the Abbey/community as physical and spiritual places...

I loved the place, met some incredible people and encountered challenges and new ways of looking at things. (all italics added)

Representing the sentiments of so many visitors, one person summarised her 'Iona experience', saying:

I felt a spiritual closeness to God everywhere on the island and a sense of being at peace with myself and the world. I could say—*veni, vidi, amavi—I came, I saw, I loved.*

Many regular Iona visitors or 'pilgrims' hold affection for the island as a *place*; for them, from the first encounter, a relationship with the island's landscape, history, and ongoing communities begins to develop. It is a unique relationship beyond the tenets of 'questing' or 'protesting'—which people characterise as 'falling in love' with the place. Although increased devotion to God, spiritual edification, and/or personal transformations are key components of numerous visitors' 'Iona experience', it is the island's multi-layered landscape which they feel makes these life-changing processes possible. Like the artist John discussed in Chapter 3, some outsiders develop a long-term relationship with Iona and its different communities of locals and staff workers. They repeatedly return to this 'liminal' place, bringing loved ones to share in their 'Iona experience' and find personal refreshment and renewal—spiritual, social, and recreational—to carry them forward in their ordinary, mainland lives, until the next visit. Indeed, VisitScotland's promise (quoted on Part II's opening page) of 'the sense of peace, solitude and well-being' that will 'wash over and cleanse' visitors 'at the edge' seems wholly fulfilled. In John's case, Iona's unique landscape is a source of spiritual and artistic inspiration, which translates into images on canvass and provides him with a completely new—and more satisfying—livelihood and vocation. For many, Iona's 'sacred' geography effects momentous revelations and self-transformation.

For the majority of Iona visitors, the island remains a special, 'thin' place where they feel 'at home' spiritually, more so than at their local church where the presence of the Divine seems blocked, 'thickened' by the quotidian concerns of daily life and the strictures and structures of institutional religion. However, some Iona devotees, especially repeat

guests at the Iona Community centres, do develop a more nuanced view of the island. One Mac guest said:

I am *far less starry eyed* about Iona than on my first more intense visit and realise that God does special things in the *very ordinary events of life* too.

This guest's reflection demonstrates a gradual acceptance of the Iona Community's ideology: that God is to be found in the apparently 'thick' places and circumstances of people's normal lives—not just on Iona.

As discussed in Chapter 1, however, Iona is not only a 'thin' place but also a 'thick' one. This 'lived paradox' is most evident in the 'common life' of the Iona Community's Resident Group. Parts I and II have laid out the background history, sociology, and theology and provided an analytical assessment of the social group usually referred to as 'pilgrims', but who in the Iona case are the guests at the Community centres whom residents live and work to serve. Part III moves into this thesis' core contribution to the anthropology of pilgrimage by spotlighting how site staff themselves understand and experience 'pilgrimage' on the 'sacred' isle of Iona.

III. LIVING THE 'LIMINAL': THE RESIDENT GROUP ON IONA

Iona.
The island full of emotions.
Here
The tears taste saltier.
The laughter sounds lighter.
And love is stronger.

With each step
With each minute
This island becomes more mysterious to me.
Colours explode in my head
 The deep turquoise of the sea
 The red rocks of Mull
 The green of the grass
Paths become a labyrinth,
My head an island full of questions.

Am I home?¹



CalMac ferry crossing the Sound of Iona—leaving the 'liminal'?

¹ A poem written by a former ressie.

Chapter 5. 'Betwixt and Between':

The Resident Group and the Iona Community

The next four chapters delve into the heart of this thesis through an anthropological analysis of one group of staff workers at a pilgrimage site—the Resident Group on Iona. Chapter 5 sketches the contours of the Resident Group identity and examines their complex relationship with their employers the Iona Community. Chapter 6 explores the 'ressie' socialisation process and how the individual 'self' resists and is reinvented through the experience of 'living in community'. Chapter 7 focuses on the related themes of 'place' and 'landscape' that emerge from an analysis of the Community's weekly Pilgrimage and 'ressies' experiences of facilitating this key event for visitors. Chapter 8 concludes Part III by elucidating how the Community's 'leaving Iona' rhetoric impacts 'ressies' and powerfully shapes their post-Iona lives. Part III is entirely devoted to bringing to the foreground a social group usually 'hidden' in the pilgrimage literature—to uncover how site staff are crucial agents in the construction and mediation of the 'Iona experience' for others, and how they, in turn, are transformed through their sojourn on the island as a locus of work.

Introducing a Resident Group

During the 2001–2002 season, the Resident Group consisted of 25 people¹—19 women and six men. There were three Scots, one Welsh, three Germans (one of Greek extraction), one Canadian, one Singaporean, and the other 16 were English by nationality. The youngest was 22 and the oldest about 60. I was the only 'non-white' full-time staff member. Full-time staff are required to self-identify as Christians,² although a couple of younger staff were less

¹ Excluding the two Camas programme workers, who reside at the camp on Mull, but includes the Camas Co-ordinator who also had accommodation in Iona Abbey. The demographics here refer to the original Resident Group who started the season together.

² Occasional exceptions have been made before.

theologically clear or resolute. Most were of Protestant or Reformed persuasion, with two Roman Catholics and one Greek Orthodox. Of the Protestants, four or five had Evangelical backgrounds, which the Warden said was an ‘unusually high’ number that year. The theological tensions between these staff and the Iona Community’s more liberal leanings yielded rich research fodder.

Of the ressies, three were Community Members, one on the New Members Programme, and another an Associate. The others had no prior formal acquaintance with the Community. The number of Members and Associates amongst staff varies from year to year, and only the Warden is required to be a Member, with a preference that the Deputy Warden be at least an Associate. The Warden post is normally filled by a minister, and it is convenient if at least one ressie is ordained whatever their Resident Group job. Following institutional church practice, a ressie minister presides over the two communion services held each week at Iona Abbey.



Fig 5.1 Dunsmeorach—probably the most coveted ressie accommodation

The majority of ressies live in accommodation provided by the Community: a house in the village (*Shuna*); a house along the road to the Abbey (*Dunsmeorach*), originally George MacLeod’s, and a small flat (*Cul Dunsmeorach*) behind it; a flat at the MacLeod Centre (the *Mac Flat*); and two cosy flats and

several rooms at the Abbey (the *Warden’s Flat*, the *West Range Flat*, and the *Warren*). As a rule, ressies are contracted to work for up to no more than three years, most of whom have

one-year or one-season³ agreements. At the start of the 2001–2002 season, 11 resses—almost half the Resident Group—were brand new (starting contracts of different lengths), three were on longer-term contracts, and the other 11 were at various stages of their three-year contracts. Alongside their individual jobs, resses understand they are also signing up for ‘life in community’, ‘a way of life’ (The Iona Community 2000: 1). This distinct lifestyle involves sharing meals, chores, close living quarters, limited working and social spaces, leisure time, and a host of other resources and day-to-day activities with one another (plus guests and volunteers). The Resident Group is meant to function much like an extended family.



Fig 5.2 A vollie refilling candle oil in the Sacristy

At any one time, up to 30 volunteers (‘vollies’) assist the Resident Group in running the Iona Community centres on Iona and at Camas⁴. In a year, more than 100 volunteers augment the staff group, each for usually 6–12 weeks at a time. All staff must be in sympathy with the

Community’s aims and objectives, but vollies do not have to profess a faith, as long as they accept that ‘worship is a central part of [the] common life together’ and are willing to attend ‘a fair number of the services’.⁵ Vollies are line-managed by resses in their various departments, while the Resident Group is line-managed by ressie heads of departments (i.e., the Wardens, Staff-Co-ordinator, Bursar, Domestic Supervisor, Maintenance Co-ordinator).

³ Usually excludes the winter months.

⁴ For the dissertation’s purposes, however, I focus on the two Iona centres.

⁵ The Iona Community website <www.iona.org.uk/vacancies/faq.htm>, accessed March 2006.

The department heads, plus an elected Staff Representative from amongst the other resses, together comprise the Management Team. The Warden reports to the Leader of the Iona Community (see Appendix A for the Resident Group's 'Organisational Structure').

Depending on that year's needs, ressie management relationships, job specifications, and length of contracts may be tweaked occasionally (e.g., Craftworker becomes a vollie post).

But besides demographics, what actually defines this social group? What motivates such different individuals to uproot their lives, give up financial and familial security, to live on a small, remote Hebridean island? Is it a naïve attempt to start life anew somewhere more idyllic *a la* TV shows *Get a New Life* and *No Going Back*? Or popular 'social experiments' of 'living in community' like *Castaway* or *Big Brother*? What compels people to join a Christian community—their faith, or something else? Do they find what they were looking for? What is the *raison d'être* of this staff community they seek to join? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the nature of the Resident Group's relationship with the Iona Community.

Not the Iona Community then?

Visitors to Iona are frequently surprised to discover the Iona Community do not actually live on the island. They expect to see contented families and singles dwelling in a self-sufficient, 'spiritually cohesive' way: *close to nature* (e.g., tilling the soil, growing organic vegetables); *close to one another* (e.g., young and old alike sharing housing, eating together, caring for one another's children); and *close to God* (e.g., worshipping in the Abbey or outdoors, focusing on spiritual growth and personal piety). Some imagine a Christian 'village' like the Taizé brotherhood in France or a New Age-type commune like the Findhorn Community in the Scottish Highlands. They conceive of the Iona Community as a physical collection of Members living together in one geographical location.

The concept of a ‘dispersed community’ seems contradictory; more confusingly, this ‘community’ named after a specific *place* do not even exist on the site itself. The locals—the contiguously ‘real’ community⁶ on Iona—as might be expected, have never been very happy with this appellation, which tends to render *them* invisible, irrelevant, subsumed under the island’s religious reputation and current resident ‘religious community’.

The Iona Community staff find themselves in the middle of all this confusion and misperception by outsiders. Most Iona daytrippers leave none the wiser, believing the group of people worshipping at the Abbey are indeed *the* Iona Community. Ressies constantly field questions about who they are, or rather who they are *not*. No, they are not Iona Community Members, nor do they all intend to become Members. No, they are not locals, neither are they all Scottish. No, they are not ministers in training or novice nuns, nor have they necessarily taken vows. No, they do not live permanently on the island, nor do they all possess a divine plan for post-Iona life.

If none of these things, who then exactly are the Resident Group? How are they defined by (or against) these expectations and within the network of social groups associated with this pilgrimage island?

Just the ‘Hired Help’?

Like staff at Lee Abbey, a retreat centre in Devon, ressies are hired by the Iona Community to run their two centres on Iona. Up to 200,000 visitors flock to the island every year, most on day visits. As discussed in Chapter 4, up to 100 guests stay weekly in the Abbey and the MacLeod Centre to participate in carefully organised programmes of workshops, communal chores, worship, social events like the ceilidh, and the weekly Pilgrimage, amongst other

⁶ The category ‘locals’ is not without its nuances and variability; one local confided, ‘There is not *one*

activities. As part of the hospitality industry, resses are responsible for the logistics of operating the two centres, from orienting guests to the facilities and safety regulations, to cooking, cleaning, changing bed linen, and mending curtains, etc. Maintenance staff transport luggage and anyone less mobile, fix leaky pipes and clogged sinks, undertake small building projects, and co-operate with the on-site Monument Conservation Unit.⁷



Fig 5.3 An MCU member repointing the Abbey church tower, exposing the original 12-century mixture of broken shells, lime, and ash

Resses train and manage the vollies, build 'team spirit', and develop friendships with them, and try to ensure their short time on Iona is productive and enjoyable. Front Office staff answer phone calls and field visitors' endless questions about where Macbeth or St Columba are buried or where

Harry Potter was filmed. Staff also sell books and souvenirs in the Iona Community Bookshop, tend the Abbey garden, deal with daily finances and countless staffing issues, tidy the church pews, order candle oil, and coordinate and carry out the weekly programmes. As described in Chapter 4, most weeks have a meticulously planned programme, and the Programme Team usually supplement external leaders' sessions with other activities, e.g., art and craft projects, short nature walks, Abbey tours for children, 'Big Sing'/music

Iona Community, but *many* Iona communities (lowercase 'c')'; the density of communities on this tiny island will be discussed throughout the thesis.

⁷ The Monument Conservation Unit (MCU) used to work under the Iona Cathedral Trust, but Historic Scotland have since taken over their management. In 2001–2002, the MCU comprised three craftsmen and one apprentice, all locals. They are in charge of the physical conservation work of the Abbey buildings.

sessions, and the ever-in-demand talks on ‘Celtic Christianity’.⁸ What is offered changes depending on that particular staff group’s skills, talents, and willingness.



Fig 5.4 Visitors paying their respects at former Labour Leader John Smith’s grave in the Reilig Odhran

The term ‘Christian Butlins’⁹ is sometimes bandied about by staff, half-jokingly referring to their work with guests. From the minute guests disembark the ferry on a Saturday afternoon, staff are on hand to identify Abbey and Mac guests from other ‘punters’, sort out their luggage, walk them up the main road to their respective

centres, and orientate them to the buildings and the upcoming programme. For the next six days, staff guide and assist guests in whatever way necessary. They keep children occupied in the Craft Room, distribute phone messages and post, and lead people on the weekly Pilgrimage. They eat, do chores, and socialise with guests and offer them myriad workshops and activities. They operate the ‘disability scooter’, check up on seemingly lonely guests, and help people figure out their travel schedules. And finally when guests leave (on Friday mornings), come sleet or shine, staff gather for a big sendoff at the jetty with a Mexican wave finale. Afterwards, it is back to the centres to strip beds, clean rooms, wash sheets and towels, attend staff meetings to debrief the week, order food lists, dust the church, change the flowers, etc.—to prepare everything for the next set of guests arriving the following day, who expect an enthusiastic and capable staff to welcome and ‘build community’ with them.

⁸ This topic’s popularity amongst visitors was a constant source of amused exasperation for the Community and staff; the Community’s own re-appropriation of ‘Celtic Christianity’ is discussed in Chapter 7.

⁹ Butlins was started in 1936—two years before MacLeod founded the Iona Community.

This routine is performed every week during the 32-week season and modified only during the winter months when a few individual guests are allowed to stay.



Fig 5.5 Staff waving goodbye to the past week's guests

But are staff merely 'the hired help'? Except for the Christian context, are they any different from workers at holiday camps and resorts? What difference does a religious setting like Lee Abbey or the Youth Village in Lourdes make? The Iona Community are adamant that the Abbey and the Mac are not places of *retreat* but *active* centres where 'community' is created and re-created every week amongst guests, staff, and to some extent, other visitors. Yet is this claim accurate? Do staff feel they are more than workers at a 'Christian Butlins' camp? Or as one ressie said, are they merely 'one of the cogs'? In what ways are the Resident Group more than just the sum total of their various jobs?

*Maybe Monks and Nuns?*¹⁰

One day in summer 2001, staff buzzed with bemusement at the news that someone had brought over 'victuals for the nuns and monks' of Iona. The bearer of cured ham and

¹⁰ Throughout this chapter, 'religious orders' refers to those within Christianity only.

home-made bread was apparently a visitor from one of the outlying islands. It was odd a neighbour appeared not to know Iona Abbey had stopped being occupied by religious since the Reformation. Nevertheless, the incident aptly demonstrates one common misperception people have of the 'religious community' living and worshipping at Iona Abbey.

Letters sometimes arrive addressed to 'The Mother Church on Iona' or 'The Mother Celtic Church', which the postman dutifully delivers to the Abbey (for where else would they go?). The content of such correspondence are usually gestures of goodwill or heartfelt prayer requests, which are added to the daily prayers or pinned to the Abbey's prayer cross. Many such letters express the romanticised nature of much 'Celtic' revivalism today. The Wardens, sometimes addressed as 'The Abbot' or 'The Abbess' in the correspondence, are perplexed over how to handle requests for 'Celtic Christian advice' to resolve some personal or ecclesiastical crisis. The odd visitor, counting on the hospitality of traditional orders, sometimes shows up at the end of a day expecting a bed for the night. This causes staff a great deal of consternation and anxiety, for it is not uncommon for the 'pilgrim', when refused, to become aggressive and accuse the Iona Community of 'betraying' its spiritual heritage.

As mentioned earlier, people—envisioning Community Members sharing a holistic, corporate lifestyle on the island—are often disappointed to find instead a seasonal group of staff, no monks or nuns, and hardly a Member in sight. Confusing the Resident Group with a religious order can be vexing for staff, but people mistaking 'religious community' for 'religious order' is not unreasonable, especially in a place renowned for its monastic traditions. In fact, the Resident Group do share some similarities with traditional religious orders.

‘Work and Worship’

The Resident Group operate on two related understandings of ‘worship’. In the first, work is a form of worship offered to God, while the second is more literal. Firstly, unlike staff at a ski resort, theme park, or holiday camp, the Resident Group are meant to be more than just the ‘hired help’. Their jobs consist of similar ‘mundane’ tasks like greeting visitors, cooking, giving directions, fixing blocked drains, and ‘entertaining’ guests; but *ressies* also are considered members of an ‘experimental community’ living and working to incarnate the Iona Community’s holistic vision:

We [the Iona Community] owe our very existence...to the central Gospel conviction that worship is all that we are and all that we do. Either everything we do is an offering to God, or nothing. We may not pick and choose. (The Iona Community 2001a: 11)

By extension, staff’s quotidian work activities are meant to be ‘worship’, too. Two housekeepers reflected on how they feel their daily work is a ‘ministry of hospitality’ that fits within the Community’s ethos:

My work here as housekeeper is to accept guests without question, help them to be at peace and to relax...

Enabling guests in their short stay...to feel welcomed, valued, and *physically comfortable* in order to make the most of their experience on Iona... (italics added)

Another *ressie* said of her job as Abbey cook:

...For me the phrase ‘seeing Christ in others’ was/is very important—I felt that I probably wasn’t made to go to Africa to teach children or rescue victims of famines, but [to] live here to create good one-to-one relationships with people, *to stop a different kind of hunger*, this hunger for somebody to listen, hunger for company, for a smile, etc. I see myself as a supporter of the people up front, one of the ones who prepares and helps, who has the meal ready when the ‘peaceful fighters’ come home. (italics added)



Fig 5.6 Staff in the Abbey kitchen

For many resses, being ‘one of the cogs’ is a way in which they can use their individual skills (e.g., cooking, bookkeeping, carpentry) to support guests and the ‘peaceful fighters’ (e.g., Members and staff who protest at Faslane), both physically and emotionally.

Instead of becoming a missionary or having an explicitly religious calling, many resses see their ‘non-religious’ work as equally valid and necessary, possessing spiritual value. They know *someone* has to clean the rooms and prepare the meals in order for others ‘up front’ to perform the work suited to *their* vocation—here, instead of its general usage as synonymous with ‘occupation’, ‘vocation’ recovers its earlier meaning as ‘a calling from God’.

Without the Programme Team’s organisational and people skills, guests would miss out on interesting, enjoyable activities to which ordinary visitors have no access. Without church staff ensuring the aesthetics and acoustics of worship are perfect and making available the necessary service implements, guests, visitors, and other staff would find Abbey worship uncomfortable and confusing. Without the kitchen personnel’s ability to cater on a tight budget and with limited food sources, 150 guests and staff would go hungry every day. Without the Maintenance Team’s technical know-how, the vehicles and buildings would fall apart. Without friendly, competent staff at the Front Office—the organisational core of daily life where staff rotas, pigeon holes, office equipment, and worship resources are housed—no post would be distributed nor phone calls, queries, or emails answered, and the flows of communication amongst staff and with the outside world

would ebb. Without the expertise of the bursars, staffing co-ordinators, and bookings secretaries, guests and staff would struggle to make affordable arrangements to stay on the island at all.

The Resident Group is based on the idea that every ressie is an essential part of the whole, which follows the understanding of the constitution of the ‘body of Christ’ based on Romans 12: 4–6,¹¹ where every ‘member’ belongs to one another and each has different gifts to contribute. This ‘priesthood of all believers’ perspective is congruent with post-Reformation emphasis on giving equal weight to the work of lay people. As such, *all* forms of work, whether officially religious or not, if conducted as an ‘offering’ to God can be regarded as ‘worship’:

...we...express our conviction that the whole of our day is all of a piece, bracketed with common prayer, but continuing throughout every action of work, common life and recreation as one liturgy, one work of service offered to God. (The Iona Community 2001a: 11)

Meaning and dignity are integral to every vocation, none of which is viewed as simply ‘menial’, and all serve to humanise every person within the community. Individual identities are inextricably bound up with the corporate one. This indeed is the Iona Community’s vision of community life which the Resident Group strive to enact and embody on Iona.

Góthoni’s (1993) Athonite monks idealise religious community life in a similar way. Distinguishing between Catholic and Orthodox monasticism, they assert that the latter—undivided into separate orders—is a mixture of both active and contemplative aspects of religious life and therefore ‘more like real life’. One of the Athonites, Father Joachim, explains, ‘Orthodox monastic life is ordinary life, and when you come here you

¹¹ Also 1 Corinthians 12: 26–28.

realise that it is just like being in the world and the monastery is just like a family.... One should see the spiritual dimension in everything one does' (quoted in Góthoni 1993: 116). But just as the reality of the Athonites' daily life is often less than ideal, the difficulties and complexities of Resident Group life in reality will be explored throughout the next chapters.

The Iona Community's first understanding of 'worship' refers to people's ordinary, daily work as an offering to God; the second is more straightforward. The 'common life' of island staff is characterised by the 'rhythm' of work and worship (see Chapter 4). Like a traditional religious order, daily life begins and ends with worship. Importantly, the three daily services are planned and led by resses. Regardless of their theological training or ecclesiastical experience, or lack thereof, everyone has the opportunity to participate in and even front Abbey worship: '...all members of the Resident Group are expected to share in the leadership of services, as and when you feel able...we hope that everyone will share in this part of our common task...' (The Iona Community 2000: 5).

In fact, this crucial trait is what distinguishes the Resident Group from mainstream churches and other Christian communities, where only (often-male) clergy or qualified lay people are permitted to lead worship. Regardless of sex, age, nationality, sexual orientation, or denomination, resses can teach and preach from the pulpit, select their own songs and Bible readings, and spearhead and organise creative forms of worship. For example, one service in the Abbey—led by a 20-something Glaswegian lad who left school at 16—began with (an edgy English rock band) *The Verve*'s 'Bittersweet Symphony', followed later by another of the band's songs, 'The Drugs Don't Work'. The music resounding in the 12th-century church heralded a service with an anti-drug message, which also pleaded for a more compassionate understanding of why young people turn to drugs.



Fig 5.7 Strips of cloth, candles, and copies of texts used for an 'action' during an Abbey Commitment Service to get 'bums off seats'

However, while resses are exhorted to be experimental and creative, they are allowed to do so only within the general parameters of the Community's worship content and style. During Staff Training, resses are instructed by members of the Wild Goose Resource Group (WGRG)—who are lauded even within mainstream

church circles as worship and liturgy specialists. Resses are taught how to make use of movement/stillness, silence, colour, symbolic objects (e.g., bowl of water, pebbles, maps), drama, and the church space in order to 'give shape to the service' and to create 'a fully rounded expression of our faith' which taps into people's senses, emotions, and intellect. Throughout the year, the Warden is responsible for ensuring resses (and other staff) keep to this approach.

During 2001–2002, available for use in the Abbey were the *Church of Scotland Hymnary 3*, the ecumenically inspired *Common Ground* (1998),¹² and the Community's own 'worship manual' called the *Iona Abbey Worship Book*. Having existed in a few forms over several decades, the last publication was extensively revised in 2001 and the Community (2001a: 7) assert that it remains 'provisional, and must always be' because of their notion of worship as 'a dynamic process based on relationships, seeking to find words for that which words cannot express'. Very popular amongst guests and other visitors, it is sold in the Iona Community Bookshop on the island, while many churches order from a

¹² Its editorial committee was convened by John Bell, a WGRG pioneer and Community Member.

variety of online bookstores and from the publishers Wild Goose Publications. Resses are encouraged to use other WGRG worship resources including books containing dramatic readings, poetry, reflections and stories, and creative liturgies.

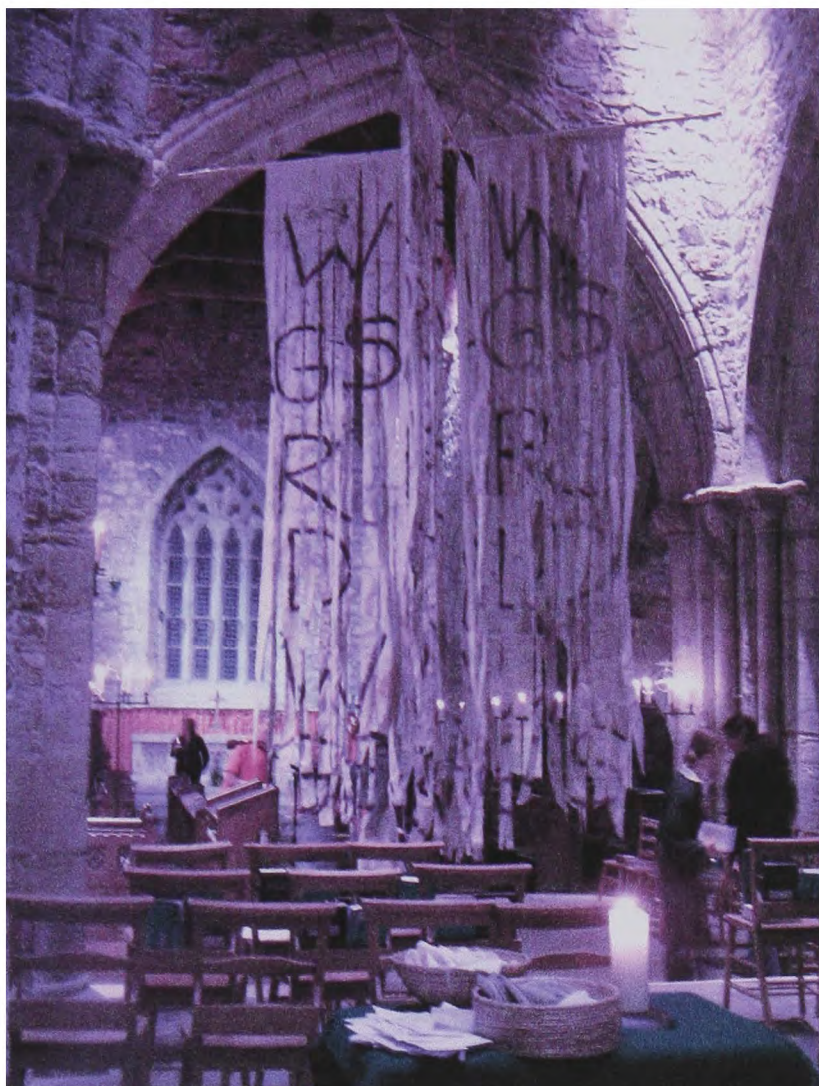


Fig 5.8 The church 'decorated' for a service involving a symbolic action of exchanging 'old rags' for new

As proponents of ecumenism, the Community's approach to worship draws from 'the traditions of all churches' (The Iona Community 2000: 4). Viewing themselves as 'inheritors' of the Celtic, Benedictine, and Reformed traditions, they also use 'the words, music and forms of today' (*ibid.*: 4) and self-consciously incorporate indigenous songs from all over the world. They feel that doing this reverses and inverts the 'colonial' import and imposition of Christian songs from the West by Western

missionaries on non-Western peoples. Just as African and Asian Christians sang Wesleyan hymns in the 19th century, the Community feel Western Christians today should respect indigenous music traditions and show solidarity with suffering or oppressed people around the world by singing and making known *their* songs. Many of these songs are used in the original language, and the Community similarly employ Scottish (and other British) folk tunes to keep them alive and relevant to modern Christianity. These appropriations of 'native' music traditions and tunes speak to the importance the Community put on 'place' and the theology of place. Members believe that people's lives and experiences—especially

of poverty or oppression—are deeply rooted in specific places (see Galloway 2006). MacLeod's ministry in inner-city Govan fuelled his own vision, while his Iona rebuilding project inextricably linked the Community with the island (see Morton 1977: 45). The dispersed Community's 'embodied spirituality' also compels Members to engage with the life and struggles arising in their own locales.

Reflecting their liberal leanings, the Community even use indigenous music that is not explicitly 'Christian'. For example, a Native American song to the 'Great Father' is viewed less as evidence of inculturation¹³ and more as placing Christianity on par with other faiths and traditions. Some Community Members assert that adhering to a faith is about which 'story' someone identifies most with: people are Christians because the story of Jesus Christ resonates most deeply with them, whereas a Buddhist may feel more passionately about Buddha's life and teachings than, say, the Hindu Mahabharata. Other Members, however, oppose a fully relativistic stance on this issue. Whatever Members' opinions on religious relativism, the Community's worship staunchly remains the most Christo-centric element of their expression of faith. Resses are expected to practice this form of worship as part of their jobs to present and represent the Iona Community to guests and visitors on the island.

The priority of worship (and work), as incarnated by Iona Community staff, thus lends itself to comparison with religious orders whose routines are similarly structured around prayer and daily services. Moreover, the shared life of the Resident Group is akin to a religious' life in another way.

¹³ Which asserts every culture has a 'seed' of the Divine, only needing the Gospel to bring it to life.

'Vows of Monastic Life'

Every new ressie is given a copy of the 'Resident Group Notes', which compares the three principles by which the Resident Group is organised with the vows taken by traditional religious:

...perhaps the best way to describe membership of the resident group is that it is a religious life in the classical sense. We are, as much as the monks and nuns of the Middle Ages and of today, undertaking a life which is committed to Christ... (The Iona Community 2000: 9)

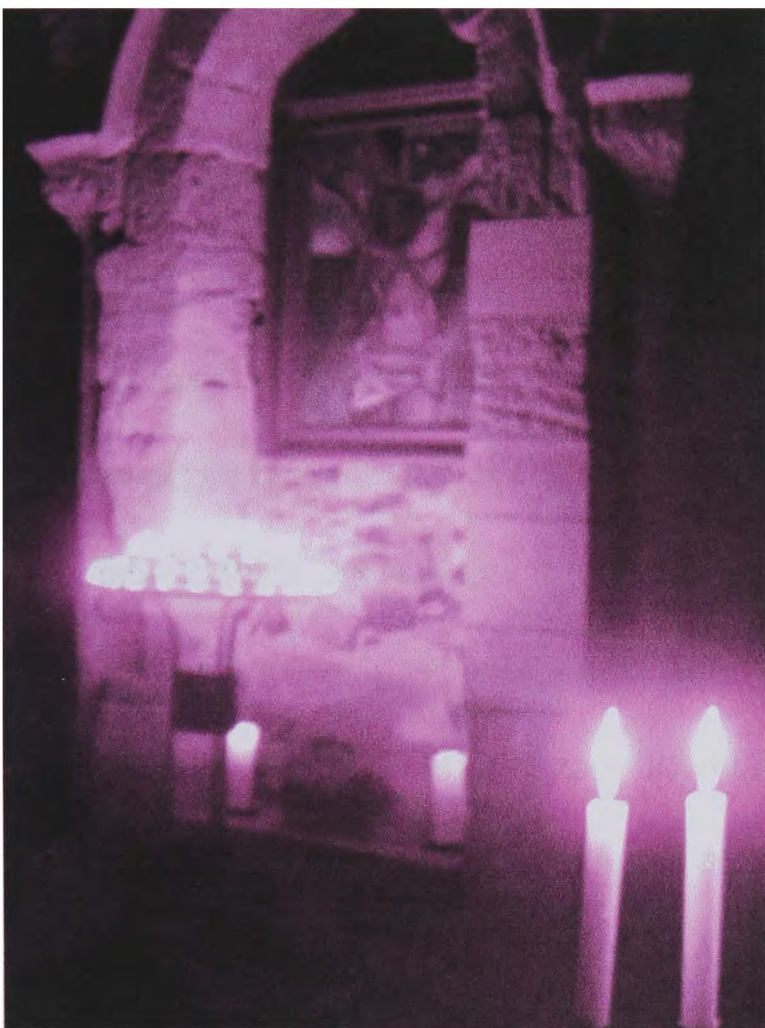


Fig 5.9 The culmination of an 'action' during a service where people were asked to light a 'prayer' candle in the North Transept

Iona Community Members, when they are 'hallowed', promise to uphold their 'Five-Fold Rule' (see Chapter 2). Island staff are not required to commit to these same rules, only to be sympathetic to the Community's aims. Instead, three principles, similar to 'vows of monastic life', are highlighted for staff; although the organisational structures already reflect these 'vows', staff are expected to consciously choose to abide by them.

Poverty: Unlike religious, resses are not required to surrender all personal possessions. Instead, 'an economic model

based on need' is employed. Room and full board are provided and everyone receives 'an allowance which is the same regardless of job qualifications, professional standing, age or

experience' (£303.50/month).¹⁴ Depending on length of contract, resses are also given a removal allowance (between £120 to £360 each way), up to five weeks' holiday leave, and a travel and holiday allowance (£174.44/week). Long-term resses receive a relocation allowance upon leaving and a pension scheme also may be provided. The 'vow of poverty' is about simplicity of lifestyle and 'corporate responsibility for money'. All resources (e.g., 'community car', household supplies, laundry facilities) are shared to reflect an attitude of 'detachment from material possessions and towards an appreciation of things that cannot be bought with money' (The Iona Community 2000: 9–10).

Chastity: Unlike monks and nuns, the Resident Group are not a celibate community. Married couples and children are welcome members of staff. Relationships are accepted as inevitable and good. However, a concept similar to celibacy is advocated: '...the chastity of understanding that, in community, we are not free to please ourselves without thought for what might be awkward or embarrassing or distressing for others...'. The overarching principle is of moderation and sensitivity towards others in matters of sex, alcohol, and drugs, so as not to exclude people or cause pain. Importantly, resses are to set an example in their behaviour for the sake and safety of vulnerable or young staff and guests 'to whom [they] represent the Iona Community', as well as to consider how the islanders would view them. The wisdom of consideration and 'the discipline of chastity in one's private life is not easy', but is necessary in such a small community (*ibid.*: 10).

Obedience: Religious usually take a vow of obedience to a person—an abbot, the superior, or the Pope. For Iona Community Members, the principle of obedience binds them not to an individual but to 'the Rule of the Community, and in its structures, [they] account to one another in family groups for their faithfulness to the Rule. It is corporate obedience' (*ibid.*: 11). Similarly, resses are bound to a personal and corporate obedience to 'the task in

¹⁴ All figures cited are taken from the 2001–2002 terms and conditions of employment.

which we are engaged, which...is the running of the Centres as places of worship and witness' (*ibid.*). This obedience compels a ressie to continue attending often-tedious meetings,¹⁵ get up at 6.00 AM to breakfast and see guests off at the jetty, lead yet another ceilidh, and make conversation with vollies and guests week after week, even if they have little or no natural affinity with one another.

These principles of poverty, chastity, and obedience are meant to give structure and meaning to a way of life set apart from mainstream society. The Resident Group lifestyle—which grew out of MacLeod's initial project to rebuild the 'common life' of a divided, individualistic world—emphasises the corporate aspects of social and religious life over the individual. How the Resident Group actually live out the Iona Community's vision will be spelled out later.

Idealising 'Community': Development of the Resident Group

Although the guest centres are (symbolically and economically) important to the Iona Community, the Resident Group's way of life on the island is by no means a realistic option for most ordinary people today. A more accessible option is the Community's 'dispersed' model of Members living in their local contexts, working for peace and social justice in their neighbourhoods, yet also being personally accountable to one another; indeed, this is the Community's *intentional* model of living holistically and grounded in a 'fragmented' world. This network of Members forms and re-affirms its bonds through various instituted activities meant to sustain a sense of 'community' transcending geographical distance. Members (and some Associates) gather regularly in regional 'Family Groups' and as an entirety at four Plenaries throughout the year and at the annual 'Community Week' on Iona—the only time the majority of the Community is physically present on the island.

¹⁵ The fixed routine of meetings, not unlike that of some corporations (e.g., Matsunaga 2000),

For most people, however, what takes place in the Iona centres is far more immediate and captures the imagination more vividly. The Resident Group lifestyle fits into preconceived ideas of a religious community dwelling in a rural setting, romantic and remote. The Iona Community, in contrast, is an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) in the classic sense for Members; it remains an elusive concept for most people, who have difficulty conjuring up the paradoxical notion of a ‘dispersed community’ where Members, for example, live in Norfolk or Dundee, conduct a recycling project here, promote Fair Trade there, or volunteer at a refugee centre nearby. Such ‘mundane’ settings and situations have less public appeal because most of society is already familiar with them and dwell in similar contexts. The images of ordinary people doing good works in their neighbourhoods are regularly featured in the media (e.g., Children in Need), with little sense of mystery about them. What draws people to the *idea* of a religious, holistic community located on Iona is that its ‘otherness’ suggests the possibility of discovering something unknown and unattainable in mainstream, mainland life.

Rather than being circumscribed by physical limits, the Community’s boundaries are *symbolic*, insofar as its historical and iconic centre is on Iona, and *ideological* as a model of a ‘holistic’, politicised form of Christianity. How does the Resident Group fit within the boundaries of their employers’ *raison d’être*? The answer is problematic. The Resident Group both personify the Community’s iconic centre *and* compete with their employers’ self-identity: the Community perpetually face the dilemma of trying to promote their ‘dispersed’ version of community as *engagement* with ‘the world’ yet they depend on the marketability and bankability of the more popular, Resident Group’s ‘embodied’ version on the island—which many Members are wary appears too much like *escapism* from the world. While Góthoni’s (1993: 54, 107) Athonite Orthodox monks see their cloistered life as a

includes daily morning ‘library’ meetings, weekly ressie, vollie, and all-staff meetings, plus regular meetings

valid and vital way of *engaging* with the world and its problems via intercessory prayer, the Iona Community emphasise that *true* engagement takes place ‘out there’ in the ‘real world’, rather than on Iona; this is partly because the Community’s main concern is to empower people to *act* for social and political change and partly because, unlike the Athonite monks, the Resident Group are not an intentional community nor is the contemplative aspect of faith valued as much in their structures and ethos.

A parallel could be drawn between how islanders both resent and depend on the Community’s centres and renown for much of their livelihood—and how the Community themselves also harbour ambivalent feelings toward the Resident Group, who are not just their employees but also, as some Members admit, their ‘public face’. Unlike, say, a company hiring a public relations firm to devise a campaign to sell a ‘community’ or recruiting actors to people a ‘living history’ museum, the relationship between the Community and the Resident Group is not based on economics alone—but has complex and ambiguous hues. This important point is explored later in this chapter. Understandably so, the emphasis of the relationship is usually on the Resident Group’s need to understand the Community’s vision in order to incarnate it, while the Community—during a formal interview process—carefully search the motivations of *individual* ressie candidates. The Resident *Group*’s own identity, however, has seldom been the Community’s priority. This is partly because despite being perceived as a model of community today, the Resident Group did not actually begin as an *intentional* community, nor is it quite one now.

During 1938–1967, the Community’s purpose on Iona was defined by the Abbey rebuilding scheme. The main personnel involved in MacLeod’s project were ‘full-time, permanent professional craftsmen and builders (several lived locally on Iona and Mull), the Iona Community members and volunteers who came to assist with the rebuilding, but not

within each department (e.g., Programme Team) and the Management Team.

usually staying for longer than three months' (Galloway 2003: 1). Otherwise, there was the Warden, cook, housekeeper, and domestic assistants, considered 'very much staff', in that the cook and housekeeper ate separately in the kitchen, for instance, and staff were not involved in the worship as they are today (*ibid.*).

From the late 1960s onwards, after the rebuilding was finished and under various Wardens' supervision, the staff group began to develop in size and structure, comprising permanent, seasonal, and volunteer workers—roughly a dozen people on two- to five-year contracts. An early Youth Camp worker used to describe how MacLeod dominated the place by sheer force of personality and will. He organised and led the worship services himself and, following his own agenda, made decisions that shaped the communal life of the Community and the Abbey staff. In 1967, however, MacLeod retired and successive Leaders and Wardens then developed the ethos, dynamics, and organisational structure of what eventually would become the 'Resident Group'.

Over time, the programme of activities changed and the original Youth Camps were demolished, making way for the new MacLeod Centre which opened in 1988. The 'Mac' was built to accommodate families and had better disabled access. With two centres to run, the number of staff increased, their job responsibilities and demographics reflecting the increasing statutory regulation and broader social changes, respectively. Necessary organisational structures were put into place, such as the line management system. Kathy Galloway (2003), current Community Leader, explains that:

...the Resident Group developed based on the premise of everyone—staff, volunteers and guests discovering the community of a week, and a season, together. When the RG model started, there was no pub on Iona, and social life was solely confined to what people made themselves. The staff group was also smaller, and so what was both possible and desirable was different. In 1976, John Harvey described the Resident Group as being like an extended family, and this was still possible in the 1980s. Some of the tensions of living in community are much the same as they ever were, but may be accentuated simply by the sheer size of the group.

This thesis suggests that today's tensions within Resident Group life are complicated by factors other than, but not unrelated to, its 'sheer size'.

Changes in Staff Profile

Initially, the Iona Community regarded the staff posts as providing opportunities for people—especially those on the fringes of mainstream society—to learn new skills, boost their self-esteem, become productive citizens, and/or have an 'alternative' experience of God and of faith. In many ways, this is still true. One recent ressie shared:

...practically I wanted to learn transferable skills so that I could move on to Church/charity work afterwards.... Being formally unqualified had thus far prevented me from working with the main (overseas) charities...

This ressie, from a farming background, sought to explore a career option previously unavailable to her. Working for the Community was an important stepping stone in gaining the experience, training, and confidence necessary to move her closer to fulfilling her goals. Also, as a wide-ranging network of people involved in various sectors of British society, the Community frequently provide useful contacts for people wishing to enter certain areas of work or Christian ministry.

In the past—primarily from areas in Scotland where most Members worked or were based—young people, the unemployed, and people from homelessness organisations used to supply a constant stream of staff workers (Galloway 2003: 5). One longer-term ressie observed, '...we used to be staffed by loads of Glasgae toe-rags on income support'. In a sense, the jobs themselves were secondary to the primary experience of living and working in a supportive, accepting environment.

From the late 1980s onwards, however, the staffing profile changed. The age range widened, leaning towards an older demographic, so that many ressiees now come with

school-age children to support, mortgages and loans to pay, and other financial and familial obligations to maintain. More overseas people, especially Europeans and North Americans, joined the staff teams. Of the *ressies* during my fieldwork, most were English, reflecting the booming south-of-the-border interest in the Community. Changes in government regulations have also affected the profile in that, for instance, staff can no longer work on Iona and still retain their Housing Benefit. The staff demographic has thus diversified in some ways and narrowed in others. As a result, certain tensions have arisen within the Resident Group and a change in staff's attitudes toward their jobs and roles also has come about.

Referring to the guests, Kathy Galloway (*ibid.*: 4) notes that 'with greater social affluence has come greater expectation in terms of personal space, facilities and comfort'. Guest profiles have shifted from youth/school groups and Scottish inner-city or housing scheme parishes to those able to afford the rising costs of spending a week on a Hebridean isle. In conjunction, escalating statutory regulation—such as health and safety, building by-laws, child protection, disability access, immigration controls, etc.—have affected the way the Resident Group has evolved. Consequently, more work roles have been created and more specialised knowledge also is now required, at least at the supervisory level. For example, while professionals are not necessary to fill the Housekeeping and Sacristan posts, the Domestic Supervisor and Musician roles cannot be taken on by novices. Of course, people's skills and life experiences are often transferable, e.g., one *ressie* who was a psychiatric nurse made for a successful Programme Worker! More than technical competence, however, *ressies* must be resilient enough—psychologically, emotionally, and physically—to handle the season's demanding workload and intense pace.

Curiously paralleling the changes in guest profile, the shift in staff demographics means *ressies* also now tend to be those who can afford, financially and time-wise, to take a

year or more out from their ordinary lives. Instead of the unemployed or homeless, more applicants today are retirees or young (and not-so-young) adults exploring life and career options, or the rare individual with fewer financial and familial restrictions and the wherewithal to seek out such unusual opportunities. As *ressie* jobs become more specialised, often requiring some amount of professional expertise (e.g., bookkeeping, human resources, building regulations), it is also increasingly difficult to attract those most qualified to do the work, i.e., people in the prime of their careers. On-the-job training is common practice but proves problematic during the busiest times. The Community thus have to balance the goal of creating a caring, congenial environment for staff against the necessity of having well-oiled, operational centres for guests. Theoretically, both are mutually dependent; in reality, guests' needs often come first.

It is often commented upon that working-class people are more likely to *work* for the Iona Community than *join* it. The Community's predominantly middle-class, highly educated membership nevertheless shapes the organisation's ethos and culture—including *the Resident Group*—such that *ressies* today often complain about 'too many meetings, too many procedures, and too much wordiness' (especially in worship). What *ressies* are reacting against, though, is not a straightforward class conflict. The broader tensions lie in the societal impact of institutionalisation and capitalism, which the Community have been unable to avoid.

Commodifying the Iona Community

While the Iona Community seek to remain a decentralised, grassroots movement wherever Members live, as they approach their 70th anniversary they nevertheless feel, and strive to resist, the pressures of becoming institutionalised. The administrative headquarters in Glasgow, which include Wild Goose Publications and the Wild Goose Resource Group,

have had to move several times to larger premises to accommodate growth. However structurally ‘flat’ they aim to be, the Community’s organisational system has become more complex and compartmentalised as the membership and support base has multiplied. While Members seek to maintain an egalitarian, open, and informal work culture—both in Glasgow and its guest centres—formal arrangements and corporate practices, such as line-management, disciplinary action procedures, and specialised sub-committees, have been implemented as a certain amount of ‘professionalisation’ has taken place. Establishing official partnerships with outside groups (e.g., New World Foundation in the US) also brings additional economic and organisational implications. Members and staff have been heard griping about excessive paperwork and other bureaucratic tasks and worrying over the ecological impact of the Community’s activities (e.g., ‘too much travel’).

The Community’s pattern of development strongly echoes Weber’s (1947) notion of the ‘routinisation of charisma’, where a revolutionary movement—begun by a dynamic, often prophetic leader—in order to continue in a stable form requires bureaucracy and organisation (see also Wilson 1966).¹⁶ George MacLeod, the Community’s founder, certainly fits Weber’s description of ‘charismatic’ leadership as an exceptional person who inspires followers by his radical vision and forceful personal qualities. Power and authority are vested in this dynamic individual, but over time his followers choose to band together to pursue his/their ideals. Weber (1947: 361) posits ‘charismatic’ authority as the antithesis to ‘rational/legal’ and ‘traditional’ authorities in that the latter two are ‘specifically forms of everyday routine control of action’, but to which the former inevitably gives way. An administrative staff become necessary to manage the group’s mundane and material interests; in fact, the first staff appointment MacLeod made was precisely to cope with and

¹⁶ Akin to Turner’s (1969: 133ff) ‘normative communitas’ and his analysis of how the Franciscans had to routinise their founder’s charisma and the group’s structural arrangements.

develop a ‘workable pattern of *economic* discipline’ for the Community (Morton 1977: 41, italics added).

The Community appear to have evolved along what Weber (1947: 386ff) calls ‘the transformation of charisma in an anti-authoritarian direction’, which is consistent with their own ‘egalitarian’ ethos:

When the organization of the corporate group undergoes a process of progressive rationalization, ...instead of recognition being treated as a consequence of legitimacy, it is treated as the basis of legitimacy. Legitimacy, that is, becomes ‘democratic’.

Indeed, today, Leadership candidates are nominated and Members vote to elect him or her democratically. Following a ‘servant leadership’ model based on the idea that Jesus ‘did not come to be served, but to serve’,¹⁷ the Leader is similarly exhorted to be ‘the first servant of the Community and who always seeks to consult with...others...and isn’t out for their own agenda’ (Iona Resident Staff 2001: 2). The Leader is ‘in a sense, the guardian of the tradition’ (The Iona Community 2001b: 4). In solid presbyterian fashion, the Community is managed by committees and sub-committees (e.g., Islands Committee, Finance & Staffing Committee), where the Leader’s powers are curtailed by accountability to the Community Council.

However, the Community continually face the tension between Members’ desire for a ‘guru-like’ figure with the need for a Leader with administrative experience and skills. A recent Leader had a strong background in civil service and administration but some Members felt he was not ‘visionary’ enough. While MacLeod was complemented by administratively capable Deputy Wardens, today’s Leader is mainly assisted by the ‘Support Services Manager’ (see Appendix B for the Iona Community’s ‘Organisational Chart’).

¹⁷ Matthew 20: 28; Mark 10: 45.

‘Charismatic’ authority thus may provide a compelling ‘vision’, but an organisation needs ‘management competence’ to *effect* that vision. One former Leader said, ‘I found being pastoral in relation to staff whom I also had to manage as employees *extremely* difficult!’ (The Iona Community 2001b: 4, original italics). This statement captures the Weberian dilemma which the Community, like other organisations initiated by ‘charisma’, face: increasing bureaucracy is necessary in order to sustain the group, yet the forms of institutionalisation themselves threaten to quash the very creative, prophetic qualities that inspired the movement in the first place.

Fearing the staidness of ‘over-organisation’ and the loss of face-to-face relationships, the Community self-consciously check their tendency towards institutionalisation. Their ‘dispersed’ model is itself one check against over-centralisation, but they are nevertheless uneasy about the growing size of membership and about wasting resources spent just in maintaining itself and its structures—hence, becoming unable to respond to change or take action when needed. Numerous Leaders and Members have insisted that the Community must be ready to disband at any time ‘if God wills it’. But disbanding becomes more problematic as the Community mature as an organisation and become further ingrained and commodified in the religious marketplace.

The commodification of the Iona Community, its ‘trademark’ Celtic associations and proliferation of consumer products, is one obvious way they are succumbing to capitalist practices. Weber (1947: 371) asserts, ‘It is not possible for the costs of permanent, routine administration to be met by...contributions, gifts, and hospitality, as is typical of the pure type of military and prophetic charisma’; in other words, ‘routinisation of charisma’ necessitates a regular income. On offer are an array of Iona Community materials from books, tapes, CDs, and devotional items (on topics like ‘holistic spirituality’, ‘social justice’, ‘political and peace issues’, ‘healing’, and ‘innovative approaches to worship’). They are

available online, at the Community Bookshop on Iona (including ‘souvenir’ items, e.g., carved wooden Celtic crosses, locally made jewellery and cards), at Christian workshops and festivals (e.g., Greenbelt), and numerous other venues. Within the last ten years, the Bookshop on Iona alone has contributed as much as 33% to the Community’s annual income (The Iona Community 1997a). A tension exists between the Community’s intent to distance themselves from popular romantic, escapist notions of Celticity and their canny use of the ‘Celtic’ label—initiated by their founder—for marketing purposes. For instance, the website of the Community’s publishing house, Wild Goose Publications, states it is ‘established in the Celtic tradition of St Columba’.¹⁸



Fig 5.10 Members during Community Week on Iona, many wearing blue apparently in honour of the first Members who wore the colour to show solidarity with the ‘blue-collar’ working classes

Because of its counter-cultural nature, however, the Community strive to be sensitive towards capitalistic exigencies. The wild goose symbol—often pitted against the traditional, ‘tame’ white dove of the Roman Church—is a potent example. During Community Week 2002, Members fiercely debated the creation of a new ‘logo’. The existing, predominantly used Celtic knotwork goose had been drawn up during the 1980s’ height of Celtic revivalism (see Fig 5.11). Supposedly based on practical considerations, the proposal put forth by a

¹⁸ Website <<http://ionabooks.com/>>, accessed April 2006.

small contingent was to create a single wild goose logo to unify and make consistent the various logos printed on the Community's products.¹⁹ Some Members, however, suspected another agenda aimed at 'revamping' the Community's image to give it 'a more corporate presence' in a competitive religious marketplace. People strongly objected to the 'bland conformity of a corporate image', which some felt would subsume the Community's

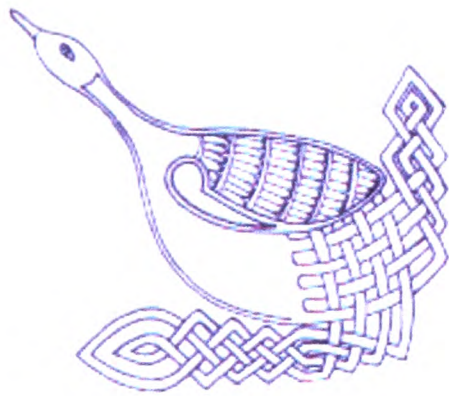


Fig 5.11 The Iona Community's existing Celtic 'Wild Goose' logo

diversity and the fact that 'sometimes we fly in different directions'. Fervent discussion revolved around the Community's 'core message' versus their 'image', and Members were asked to choose between three professionally commissioned alternative logos. The exercise's main result was a lot of disagreement and criticism ('Why do we even need a new logo?'). For the

time being, the original Celtic knotwork goose icon endures and the Community's products continue to bear idiosyncratic versions of the 'wild goose' imprint. Interestingly, contestations of 'corporate identity' both within companies (e.g., Matsunaga 2000) and other 'communities' are not unknown (e.g., Findhorn too recently sought, unsuccessfully, to create a new logo).

Capitalistic forces seem to impact upon the Iona Community to mixed effect. This is aptly illustrated in the 2002–2003 'Review of Strategic Priorities', which was led by the 'Strategic Priorities Review Group' and conducted throughout the Community. Contributions were invited from Members, Associates, and staff. Emphasis was placed on a more narrative-based approach, using literary phrases such as 'Our Common Story' and 'Shaping our Lives Together', and Family Groups were asked to detail their discussions in the form of 'a letter' to the Review Group. This amalgam of business-speak and poeticism

¹⁹ Wild Goose Publications and the WGRG use different 'goose' logos for their materials.

highlights the Community's attempts to stay true to its values amidst the pressures of a capitalistic milieu. Somewhat ironically, in the 'Interim Report to [the Iona Community] Council' (The Iona Community 2003), one of the top three things listed that the Community should 'let go of' is: 'We should stop allowing strategy to be determined by market forces...'.

This intent, however, is not easily carried out. Indeed, as a registered charity, the Iona Community (SC003794) is subject to regulatory laws set out by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). Charities submit a statement of accounts every fiscal year and may be subject to tax audit. During 2001–2002, the Community's first-ever 'Business Plan' was devised. In both the Review of Strategic Priorities and the Business Plan, the Community were required to set out clear targets, quantify goals and results, provide statistical evidence, and conduct a risk assessment, amongst other forms of 'accountability' distinctive of capitalistic enterprises. Members have also argued over whether it is ethical for the Community to apply for Lottery funding. Although they prefer not to distinguish between the 'sacred' and the 'secular', the market-dominated world of business and 'bottom-line' accounting nevertheless impinges upon the public sector and on organisations' access to public monies. The more the Community must account for themselves, the more the Resident Group, too, have to follow suit, with further ramifications upon their already complex relationship—elucidated later in this chapter.

For resses on Iona, participating in exercises like the Strategic Priorities Review and the Business Plan can feel pointless not only because the extra meetings and administration involved take up time in their relentless work schedules. They often also feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically distant from the Community, believing these exercises concern only Members and the Glasgow office—those with the power to make any *real* decisions—and that their opinions as resses 'hardly count'. This attitude is not unlike that

of lower-level employees, in Matsunaga's (2000) study of a Japanese corporation, toward the process of 'consultative decision-making'; they doubted how seriously their suggestions were taken by senior management. Many resses are also resigned to the fact that they will not be in the Resident Group long enough to witness or implement any suggested changes. The turnover of staff—intended by the Community as injections of fresh energy, perspectives, and skills into the island centres—can sometimes actually serve to perpetuate resses' feelings of powerlessness.²⁰ Given their day-to-day busy-ness and seemingly endless rotations of guests and vollies, it can be hard for resses to think beyond that particular season, much less consider the 'bigger picture' or continually make well-defined connections between their work on Iona and the Community's 'wider' mission.

Talk about budgets, strategic reviews, and business plans can seem trivial and abstract to resses compared to having to feed 150 hungry guests and staff, prepare meaningful worship services, clean rooms and change beds, brave gale-force winds to collect vollies at the jetty, and perform other more immediate and pressing tasks packed into a ressie's normal day—the most crucial being their official remit to 'build community' with the paying guests week after week.

The Economics of '(Im)Piety'

The relationship between the Resident Group and the Iona Community is about more than economics. The Community regard the island centres as safe, alternative places where staff (and guests) are empowered in their personal growth and spiritual journey—by trying new things, developing confidence and self-esteem, honing practical skills, meeting a diversity of people, reflecting on their understanding of faith, practicing their commitment to 'peace and justice', and/or gaining the valuable experience of leading worship. Indeed, the

²⁰ On the flip side, some Members and ex-resses approve of the policy as a way of mitigating against

overwhelming majority of resses agree these aspects of their ‘Iona experience’ are the most compelling. Nevertheless, there is an underlying economic relationship between the Community and the Iona centres, of which amongst the resses only the Management Team is normally fully conscious. Before turning to other aspects of the nature and quality of the Resident Group’s relationship with their employers, it is important to understand the Community’s basic financial structures.

At the end of 2005, the Community’s gross income was £1,826,054. Sales from the Bookshop on Iona contributed about 19%,²¹ and income (i.e., donations, service collections, board and lodgings, etc.) from the Abbey and MacLeod Centre about 26%—which means the sum total of the Community’s activities on Iona, *all operated by the Resident Group*, yield almost *half* of their overall revenues. The Community also own various properties on the island used primarily for staff housing. Generally, the Abbey and the Mac generate a small net surplus of a few tens of thousands, which is then absorbed by other additional costs, such as administrative expenditures (e.g., staffing, maintenance) and ‘outreach projects’ (mainly, the Community’s Youth Department and the Wild Goose Resource Group). Overall, the Community tend to operate within budget every year; at the end of 2005, including all forms of reserves, they had a fund balance of £2,926,601.

While it is not compulsory for Members to donate money to the Community, the majority tithe about 10% of their disposable income. Sixty percent of this tithe is distributed according to individual Members’ choice, while 40% is shared amongst various funds within the Community (see Appendix C for ‘Distribution of Members’ Tithe’). In addition, there are the Islands Access/Subsidy Funds, generated from full-rate guests at the Abbey and the Mac to subsidise low-income guests (e.g., in 2005, the amount utilised was £31,076), the

the ‘possessive’ tendencies people can have over Iona and their jobs (‘No one is irreplaceable!’).

²¹ A significant drop from the 1997 figure of 33% due to the Historic Scotland Shop displacing the Iona Community Bookshop from the Abbey Cloisters in 2000.

Leader's Fund, which is used at the Leader's discretion for individuals or other agencies in need (e.g., in 2005, the amount released was £4,277), and several other funds comprising different types of legacies, grants, and reserves. The Community's Support Services Manager Graham Boyle states that the Community's general remit is to act as a resource network to 'empower Members in their individual projects', rather than to raise money to fund large-scale enterprises. Members with specific schemes in mind may use the Community website to ask for contributions or apply to the Common Fund Trustees or another fund.



Fig 5.12 Displaced from the Abbey Cloisters by Historic Scotland, the Iona Community Bookshop (left) is now situated across from the Abbey (right, unseen)

For instance, one Member belongs to a Presbyterian church in Guguletu, a black township in South Africa, where she works in an AIDS/HIV ministry. In 2005, the church minister asked the Community to send someone to 'walk alongside the folk in Guguletu and reflect with them on their work' (Millar 2005). As a result, an ex-Warden from the UK lived with them for several weeks, while another English Member later flew out to join him and several

Members offered to help financially. In another case, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) (a World Council of Churches initiative established in 2002) sends ‘ecumenical accompaniers’ with Palestinian and Israeli activists in non-violent actions and public advocacy efforts; at least one Member has volunteered and EAPPI vacancies are advertised on the Community’s website.

While personal faith is important to Members, the Community exist primarily to bolster their corporate, political convictions over any strictly spiritual or pious endeavours. In fact, the Community have been criticised by conservative Christians for mixing ‘politics’ and ‘religion’. Members’ activities such as acts of protest leading to arrest or giving open support for gay rights are even branded ‘blasphemous’ by their strongest critics. From this perspective, as a Christian organisation the Community’s structures, financial and otherwise, may be regarded as reflecting an ‘economics of *impiety*’.

Theoretically, there are no restrictions on staff at the island centres to apply to the Community’s various funds for assistance in personal initiatives or for other needs, even after their work contracts end. However, *ressies* and *vollies* are not told about this possibility, primarily because the Community’s main interest is in supporting Members. While this is a reasonable priority, it also reflects the Community’s level of investment in the island itself and in the Resident Group as a community unto themselves—a highly contentious subject amongst Members and staff. Some assert that *ressies* should be content with the allowances and ‘privileges’ already afforded to them—including the fact that were it not for the Community, *ressies* would not have had the opportunity to live on Iona—while others argue the Community should ‘practice what they preach’ by committing more resources to support the local community of islanders as well as the Resident Group.

It would be unfair to say the Iona Community have ignored *ressies*’ needs. The recent reduction from a seven-day weekly programme, which was the norm for decades, to

six days was made for the sake of staff's wellbeing. It had become clear that the traditional seven-day programme was taking its toll on staff, particularly the *ressies*. With one set of guests departing and another arriving the same day, staff laboured under tremendous pressure to effect the tight 'turnaround'. The 'extra' day created by the six-day programme is intended to ease the pace and give staff time on their own to debrief and unwind before preparing for the guests arriving the next day.

Some Members, however, argued that the seven-day week 'was never a problem before' and that guests' experience would suffer from the loss of a day. For them, the Community's top priority on Iona is the paying guests, many traveling long distances to participate in 'community life' in the Abbey and the Mac. However, other Members feel the Community should take more responsibility for staff's wellbeing, especially the Resident Group who have evolved into a 'community' in their own right, with concomitant needs and a separate identity. A few even believe the *ressies* and their 'Iona experience' constitute a unique form of 'ministry', which the Community ought to acknowledge and purposefully nurture. In 1997, the 'Rediscovery of Spirituality' Working Group within the Community put together a paper reflecting on the Iona centres called, 'Have we created a monster?'—it suggested that:

...the centre of gravity on the island needed to shift... instead of pretending that the island community's primary function is serving *all* these people [i.e., the world], it realigns its heart... and begins to see *itself* as its prime *raison d'être*.... This would represent a rebirth of the island community putting staff, volunteers and guests on a more equal footing to explore their Christian experience in the new millennium. (The Iona Community 1997b: 3–4, original emphasis)

Enough Members recognised that 'times have changed' and growing guest expectations plus government/EU policy requirements have made staff's workloads more demanding, so after a two-year trial, a host of questionnaires, and countless discussions, the six-day programme was formally instituted in 2000.

What difference, however, has this change actually made to Resident Group life? Several regular guests remarked positively that staff seem ‘more relaxed, less exhausted’ under the six-day regime, while others (some Members included) sorely lamented the loss of a ‘precious’ day from their ‘Iona experience’. At one level, it is difficult to compare the effect on staff of the seven- and six-day systems because the high turnover means new resses (and first-time guests) simply accept the six-day week as the norm. What does not appear to have altered very much, though, is the stressful, frenetic pace of life that characterised the Resident Group of the seven-day era. Of course, the ‘work culture’ of each Resident Group depends in part on the Wardens and on the particular composition of resses’ personalities and skills that year. Since the institution of the six-day week in 2000, however, throughout the various combinations of staff, Resident Group life appears to continue to lurch ‘from crisis to crisis’, primarily over problems of hiring and firing. Why is this so? Is it merely down to the challenge of finding the ‘right staff’ to work in such a unique environment? While this staffing difficulty is certainly true, this thesis suggests it is necessary to look more closely at the Resident Group’s *raison d’être* and the fundamental dynamics of their relationship with their employers.

For the Guests’ Sake

The entity called the ‘Resident Group’ came into being organically as the Iona Community responded to changes brought about by skyrocketing numbers and needs of guests. The Resident Group appear to function well, operating year after year with great success —‘success’ being defined by guests (and staff) as saying they had a unique and memorable ‘Iona experience’. Most, if not all, resses would say the Resident Group experience is exceptional, well worth having in spite of the tensions and personality conflicts, the demanding, high-energy workload, the social and physical claustrophobia of a small island

community, the sheer physicality of the natural landscape, and the often punishing weather. The wonder of being in such a breathtakingly beautiful place, the chance to lead worship in a 12th-century Abbey, the gift of strong friendships only intense shared experiences can forge—all these contribute to the special connections resses feel with one another and with the place after spending an extended period of between one to three seasons/years on the Resident Group.

On the other hand, by the time their contracts end, resses also *ubiquitously* state they are ‘absolutely exhausted’, ‘had nothing more to give’, and are ‘more than ready to leave’. Many resses’ post-Iona lives also are characterised by periods of disorientation, illness, depression, joblessness, and/or a need to ‘recover’ from their ‘Iona experience’. This particular phenomenon will be fully explored in Chapter 8, but suffice to say here that being a ressie is both rewarding *and* costly. Resses’ ‘Iona experience’ is far more textured and layered than simply working to provide services to guests and visitors. It would be interesting, for future research, to compare resses with, say, Youth Hostel staff at Lourdes, wardens at Camino pilgrims’ refuges, or workers at Lee Abbey. Are they as weary and discombobulated as many resses seem to be at the end of their jobs?

Resses also do not lead a purely ‘spiritual’ lifestyle. Christian monasteries and nunneries may provide hospitality for outsiders, but their *raison d’être* is usually unto themselves as an intentional community. Religious’ daily life and routine more or less proceeds independently of any visitors taking refuge within their cloistered walls. These visitors may attend the services and those on a longer retreat might be expected to accommodate themselves to the religious order’s communal life, perhaps helping with gardening, cooking, etc. But religious orders generally do not depend on outsiders for their existence or primary livelihood—the visitors or guests are incidental to religious’ life together. This is in stark contrast to the resses.

Put simply, if it were not for the guests, the Resident Group would not exist. This is still the prevailing perspective of their employers, as evidenced by some Members' assertions that the Iona Community will shut down the centres 'as soon as people stop wanting to go to Iona'. Given the certainty that Iona as a 'sacred' and historical site will always attract devotees, regardless of the Community's 'presence' there, such declarations seem disingenuous. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the reality that staff are predominantly hired for the sake of 'inviting people to come and share in the common life of work and worship on Iona' (The Iona Community 2000: 3). The Resident Group Notes explain:

Between March and October the [Resident] group shares *its* common life of work, worship and recreation with hundreds of guests who come from all over the world to stay at...the centres.... (*ibid.*: 2, italics added)

The use of the phrase 'share *its* common life' is noteworthy, the implication being that this 'common life' exists for *ressies* *outside* of the period between March and October when guests flock to the centres—as if the Resident Group were a continuous residential and intentional community that guests can join for a time during the season. *Ressies* whose contracts include the winter months do indeed live by a modified version of 'work, worship and recreation' off-season. Their offer of hospitality to a few individual guests during this 'down time' comes closer to how a religious order normally welcomes the occasional visitor seeking retreat.²² Winter guests—often ministers on sabbatical or retreat—eat with *ressies*, socialise a little, and may help with chores, but other than attending the 'dressed down' services in the Michael Chapel with *ressies*, they are content to spend most of their time on their own.

However, the off-season months mark a period of 'rest' from what actually is the *norm* for *ressies*—to 'build community' weekly with each group of guests. *Ressies*'

²² Except for the Christmas House Party when the Abbey re-opens to welcome around 50 guests.

relatively relaxed winter lifestyle is the exception that proves the season's rule. During the season, staff are responsible to make each guest feel accepted and valued, 'no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they have done' (The Iona Community 2000: 3). Ressies (and vollies to a lesser extent) are responsible to ensure guests feel safe and cared for in the process of gaining an authentic experience of 'community'. Guests' arrival and departure, their needs, expectations, and almost every aspect of their 'Iona experience' are what govern rессies' entire schedule of life and work.

Beyond Employee–Employer: A Maussian Conundrum

In *The Gift*, Mauss (1954/1970) contrasts the archaic form of exchange—gift and counter-gift—with the more modern utilitarian form, which he laments is 'turn[ing] man into an economic animal' or a 'calculating machine' in Western societies. For Mauss, the 'economy of gift-exchange' of pre-industrial societies binds social groups to one another by ties of reciprocity that are 'total', encompassing and embedded in all spheres of life (e.g., 'religious, legal, moral, and economic', *ibid.*: 1). Distinguishing the post-industrial system of 'commodity exchange' is its individualistic, impersonal, and strictly legal and economic character. In many ways, the Iona Community would be sympathetic to Mauss' perspective that Western societies are degenerating into breeding grounds of autonomous individualism and self-interest. When MacLeod and his 'brotherhood of Iona men' set out to 'rebuild the common life', it was to counter what he saw as the Church's neglect of the corporate and corporeal dimensions of human life; only through the experience of 'community' can people regain a whole and interconnected sense of 'self' (see Chapter 3).

Carrier (1995), however, objects to a strict dualism between 'primitive' gift systems and 'Western' commodity systems and aptly demonstrates that neither extremes of the exchange spectrum is accurate. Of most relevance to this thesis, Carrier shows how some

areas of Western capitalist societies (e.g., household transactions, some types of retail trade) rely on highly personal social relations, taking on strong moral hues like trust and loyalty.

Employing Tönnies' (1925) classic distinction, the Iona Community's vision is to assert a new kind of *gemeinschaft* ('community') in the face of the Western world's prevailing mode of *gesellschaft* ('society'). In the former, group interest, shared mores and values, personal relationships, and simple social institutions dominate, while the latter is defined by instrumental relations, loose ties and loyalties, and sophisticated divisions of labour. As discussed in 'Commodifying the Iona Community', Members strive to resist the pressures of capitalist and institutional exigencies, for fear of losing their unique *gemeinschaft* character, by limiting the Community's size and preserving a face-to-face, egalitarian ethos, amongst other precautions.

Importantly, the Resident Group is also meant to exemplify the Community's efforts towards fostering *gemeinschaft*, or the personal and moral quality of social relations defining 'gift exchange'. Ressies, along with vollies and guests, live together in one place, sharing meals, chores, worship, and other daily activities. Feelings of *communitas* and a sense of belonging and mutual interdependence are characteristic of this holistic, simplified lifestyle, far from the frenetic, self-interested individualism typical of 'commodity exchange' or the *gesellschaft* of mainstream, mainland city life. Yet the Resident Group are *contracted* to live this lifestyle, to perform certain tasks assigned by their *employers*; ressies are subject to the terms and conditions of employment and at the end of their agreements they *must* vacate their posts for someone else to fill. These contractual features exemplify Mauss' critique of modern forms of exchange that are impersonal and utilitarian.

Tönnies (1925: 67–9) states that the existence of *gemeinschaft* 'rests in the consciousness of belonging together and the affirmation of the condition of mutual dependence', whereas the unity of *gesellschaft* is based on 'common traits and activities and

other external phenomena' and includes 'communities of work'. On the whole, resses do ascribe to the Community's vision and possess a genuine sense of group belonging and interdependence, and yet in many ways they are essentially a 'community of work', individuals employed as staff to facilitate pilgrimage for 'consumer' guests. Indeed, it appears that the Resident Group embody a social form caught between Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, between Mauss' pre-industrial and post-industrial states of being. The Resident Group's particular combination of these contrary elements reinforces Carrier's argument that the West, while distinguished by *gesellschaft* or commodity relations, is not overcome by them. But what does it mean for the Resident Group to exist in such a liminal position, 'betwixt and between' two (supposedly) diametrically opposed ways of life?

Each ressie's contract with the Community stipulates his or her specific job responsibilities (see Appendix D for various 'Employment Documents'). The documents spell out a legal and economic relationship between employer and employee, together with a host of guidelines and procedures about disciplinary action, health and safety, sexual harassment, etc.—all obviously intended to safeguard both parties. These terms and conditions were implemented only in the last ten years or so as part of the 'professionalisation' process (including additional divisions of labour) in response to increasing governmental regulations and consumer (i.e., guest) expectations. The proliferation of such documents and the legalese contained within them demonstrate a typical shift towards *gesellschaft*, where relations between people are based on objective, legal agreements instead of 'shared feeling' (*ibid.*).

However, the Resident Group and the Iona Community are bound to each other by *more* than just the terms and conditions of employment. Officially, these 'extra bonds' are suggested by the somewhat nebulous requirement that resses must participate in 'the work,

worship and responsibilities of the common life'; this requirement's vagueness is precisely because *gemeinschaft*, in a sense, is difficult to prescribe and enforce. Yet resses' failure to fulfill it is grounds for discipline or dismissal.

A former ressie who worked on the Staffing Team observes, 'People would go to work on Iona *even without the contracts*. Ninety to ninety-five percent of staff *have no real interest* in the employer-employee contract as *their goals have nothing to do with it*; they go to Iona for other reasons, like wanting to be on the island or to be part of a community...'. Indeed, people's motives for joining the Resident Group are often less about the Iona Community than about themselves and their individual aspirations. In a sense, this 'extra' motive is what makes the Resident Group successful—because people come *willing* to give of themselves in ways beyond what is stated in their contracts. However, this is also partly why staff problems are notoriously tricky to resolve by resorting to purely judicial definitions of people's jobs and work relationships. This arises from Members' and resses' (Christian) belief in giving people second chances, sometimes at the risk of compromising other staff. Indeed, strong moral and spiritual links bind the Resident Group and the Iona Community, reminiscent of Mauss' (pre-industrial) ties of reciprocity—intangible yet more potent, and more important, than the legal force of any signed contracts.

Underlying resses' jobs as staff operating the two guest centres and conducting the technical aspects of worship is a vital 'spiritual' dimension. This 'special situation of Iona' is laid out in the document 'Grounds for Disciplinary Action' (2001: 2; see Appendix D): 'Employees choosing to come and work in Iona...are joining a religious community'. As members of this 'religious community', people are to set an example in their 'ressie' roles 'beyond what may normally be expected elsewhere' (*ibid.*). Although never stated explicitly, the reality is that this ideal *gemeinschaft* lifestyle of 'work and worship' is only

achieved if resses *give fully of themselves* to the creation and sustenance of this ‘common life’.

In essence, everyone who joins the Resident Group is being asked to invest themselves at a significant existential level and adopt the corporate ‘ressie’ role. This form of self-giving is consistent with the Community’s holistic vision of ‘the rebuilding of the common life’. Unlike ‘living history’ employees (e.g., at Colonial Williamsburg) who, at the end of the workday, shed their costumes and persona for their ‘true’ selves, resses cannot, or rather, should not do so. Unlike Community Members who live, worship, and work in different places, resses are expected to create a kind of *gemeinschaft* closer to pre-industrial, face-to-face communities dwelling in a shared place. To *continually* facilitate an authentic, unique ‘Iona experience’ for guests, vollies, and other visitors, resses must literally embody the Community’s vision, body *and* soul. While people imagine Resident Group life is a gentle refuge from the hustle and bustle of mainland, city life, resses in fact must be psychologically, emotionally, and physically capable of coping with the rigorous ressie lifestyle, much less flourish in it.

This thesis contends that Resident Group life is so stressful partly because resses are stuck between the *gemeinschaft* of a traditional monastic order and the *gesellschaft* of a modern business venture, having to incarnate the spirituality of one and obey the law and economics of the other—yet without the long-term commitment and support of one nor the clearcut boundaries of the other. In Maussian terms, the Resident Group are meant to make manifest an ideal, ‘total’, pre-industrial form of community while having to operate under the modern laws and regulations of a capitalistic economy. An interesting inversion of this mode is the notion of Japanese companies as ‘communities’ or ‘families’, where employees are given spiritual training and a ceremonial welcome, as well as other aspects that foster a

sense of common belonging (Matsunaga 2000). Heterogeneity and conflict, however, appear to pervade both forms.

Although forewarned during their job interviews, new ressiees cannot anticipate how intense Resident Group life is until they are in its midst. By then, there is barely time to perform all their tasks, much less to step back and ponder the impact of the ressie lifestyle and corporate persona upon their individual spiritual journeys and personal identity. Mid-season in 2001–2002, several staff raised the question, ‘Why are we [ressiees] here?’. Some felt the weekly meetings had become ‘too business-like’, focused on fixing technical and logistical problems rather than providing personal and spiritual support for one another. Others observed that as soon as the season began, most ressiees barely saw one another as they worked almost exclusively in separate departments; even when opportunities arose (e.g., mealtimes), they had to concentrate on their remit to socialise with the guests. This *gesellschaft* mode of work contrasted with the time ressiees had spent bonding and ‘building community’ with one another, during Staff Training, as if they *were* an intentional *gemeinschaft* unit.

At the heart of these observations was ressiees’ profound worry over the Resident Group’s *raison d’être*: if staff are employed primarily for the guests, does that mean ressiees are only the ‘hired help’ of a *gesellschaft* corporation? But ressiees also have moral and spiritual responsibilities not unlike a *gemeinschaft*. To complicate things further, they additionally exist to represent an absent ‘other’, the Iona Community—their legal *and* spiritual bosses, so to speak. At the start of every service, staff are directed to announce that they ‘live and work here, *on behalf of the Iona Community*’. Some ressiees expressed frustration over this wording as they felt it implied they do not live and work on Iona on behalf of *themselves*. Instead, they are a ‘living symbol’ of the Community to a public who mostly believe the Resident Group on Iona *are* the Iona Community. Caught between

existing to serve the guests and existing to present and represent their ‘absent’ employers, resses struggle to understand what it means to exist *for themselves*.

As the season progresses, many find themselves contending with these complicated ‘betwixt and between’ existential states. Certainly, resses’ weariness and uncertainty is due in large part to the relentless repetition of the ‘rhythm of the week’, the seemingly endless turnovers of staff and visitors, and the need to be ‘this “all singing all dancing” community [to outsiders, while simultaneously having to]...live with the continuous strain and stressful drama of life in the Island Centres’ (The Iona Community 1997b: 1).

This extended liminal state that resses dwell in—reinforced each time they utter the words ‘on behalf of the Iona Community’ while simultaneously feeling unable to articulate they are also there for *themselves*, or every time they attend a weekly ‘business’ meeting while feeling unable to be personally or spiritually vulnerable with their fellow ‘community’ members—can bring a deep sense of unreality, a suspicion that sometimes all they are doing is *performing* a role. This is why the term ‘Christian Butlins’ so offends Members yet sometimes has a strange ring of truth for resses.

Brian Woodcock, Warden during the 2001–2002 season, asserts that performing or knowing the element of ‘theatre’ is part of, say, leading worship at Iona Abbey does not necessarily diminish its value and authenticity for the congregation nor the ressie leader. Because the Iona Community’s style of worship emphasises experimentation, and creativity, and the fact that visitors expect Abbey worship to be ‘special’, resses sometimes feel under pressure to ‘put on a good show’. Most find leading worship a nerve-wracking but nevertheless exhilarating and rewarding experience. Competitiveness amongst staff is not unknown, though, and at the end of evening services especially worship leaders are ubiquitously anxious to receive feedback on ‘how they did’. As resses generally develop their own service content and format, garnering affirmation from others is essential to their

sense of having ‘done well’. Some resses are buoyed up by this kind of participation in worship, while others felt ‘it was too contrived’.

The tensions in Resident Group life are not unknown to the Iona Community. Several Members (though by far the minority) have been resses themselves and can appreciate how stressful and demanding Resident Group life is. One Member who worked for several months as Deputy Warden in the late 1970s reflected:

I know from experience, albeit a long time ago, *how exhausting it can be to work for the IC* in whatever capacity. I always seemed to draw the short straw of having to see people off on the early ferry, and the only time I could concentrate on administration was *often after midnight*. Even then, I could almost guarantee that when someone saw a light on in the office, there would be a timid knock on the door and someone would want to get something off their chest! Having a job to do, and giving out all the time, week in and week out is hard work, but it is an important part of caring and offering hospitality. (italics added)

To help resses cope with the trials and travails of Resident Group life, the Community have implemented certain organisational structures. For example, the line management system is intended to provide personal support and work supervision, while each new ressie is given a ressie ‘buddy’ and a Mainland Family Group Link in order to develop ‘supportive relationships’ between Members and resses. Besides that, resses can participate in an annual staff review, a mid-season reflection, and a final/annual reflection, all designed to help them process their ‘Iona experience’ and work through any problems. Resses also have recourse to the Community’s Islands Committee if they require ‘impartial support’. In theory, this ‘web of support structures’ is all resses should need. The reality, however, is often more entangled.

Some real-life scenarios include the following: (1) the relationship between some resses and their line manager is the source of serious problems, resulting in the former making a formal complaint against the latter, and to continue co-existing in close quarters during the investigation and disciplinary action process is extremely awkward and

considerably affects other staff; (2) the mid-season reflection, which is conducted corporately, merely replicates the established ‘unbalanced’ Resident Group dynamics where shyer, less confident resses are dominated by those with larger personalities; and (3) the Mainland Family Group Link—with Members seeming distant from resses’ daily exigencies—becomes yet another ‘duty’ to their employers resses feel obliged to fulfill, which defeats the Link’s purpose.

It can be said that, as employers, the Iona Community do provide their ressie workers with *more* than the necessary resources required by law. From this perspective, and in many ways true to reality, the Community are highly agreeable employers to work for. Nevertheless, why is it that resses still end up weary and ‘completely drained’? Are they simply, as some Members suggest, playing up the role of the ‘whinging’ worker, never content with their jobs no matter how perfect the employer? After all, what can Members do if resses do not take advantage of the ‘web of support structures’; in other words, if they won’t help themselves? Surely Members who have also been resses understand full well what is needed to sustain a healthy Resident Group?

As reasonable as are many of their criticisms, what the Community still miss is that even when Members work as resses, they are still first and foremost *Members*. Member-resses do not ‘live and work here *on behalf of* the Iona Community’, they *are* the Iona Community and exist fundamentally for themselves even within the ‘ressie’ role. Members have already completed the membership process and signed up to the Community’s vision; being a ressie on Iona is only one of *several* ways to express their previously established commitment. Non-Member resses enter the Resident Group on very different terms. Unlike other resses, Member-resses do not exist in quite the same ‘liminal’ state, for their Member identity is paramount, indisputable. The two-year New Members Programme serves as the *rite de passage* to becoming a Member, while for ordinary resses

their Resident Group stint is *their rite de passage*—but with no defined purpose or shared identity *on the other side*, for their communal ‘ressie’ identity is surrendered and sundered when their work agreements end. New Members, as a group, undergo a formal ‘Hallowing Service’ during Community Week and are fêted afterwards to celebrate their successful incorporation into the Community; resses leave Iona disparately, often in ones or twos at different times of the year, dispersing to different places, heading for futures often unknown or uncertain.

Relatively secure and stable in their individual and corporate identities, the Community tend to underestimate how powerfully their status as Members can be wielded amongst other resses. For much of their ‘Iona experience’, many ordinary staff search to define their own sense of their ‘ressie’ selves. In addition, if resses indeed give of their ‘selves’ to the Resident Group project, how does this shape what they feel they receive in return from the Community? Caught in this liminal state ‘betwixt and between’ Mauss’ two opposed categories of ‘exchange’ and their concomitant systems of reciprocity, the relationship between the Resident Group and the Iona Community faces a Maussian conundrum of sorts. Do the Community owe resses only what is stated in their employment documents, and after resses’ contracts are completed are the ‘intangible’ moral and spiritual ties of obligation between employer and employee also finished? Some former resses believe that just as the Community expect resses to fulfill certain moral and spiritual responsibilities during their Iona contract, the Community similarly owe resses reciprocal responsibilities, including after the conclusion of their formal relationship as resses cope, often individually and disparately, with the aftermath of their ‘Iona experience’.

So far I have painted a picture of the relationship between the Resident Group and the Iona Community in stark contrasts; the reality is, of course, more nuanced than that. Many Members and Member-resses are sympathetic towards resses and/or advocate

strongly for revising the Resident Group's basic premise, just as there are numerous ressiees who thoroughly enjoy their Iona sojourn and leave content and happy. Also, the boundaries between the two social groups are permeable both ways: not only do some Members become ressiees (or vollies), some ressiees also choose to become Associates or Members because of their positive 'Iona experience' (and/or as a way to resolve a post-Iona need for 'belonging').

My portrait thus far also makes ressiees appear as 'victims' of their employers. In a sense, employers *do* hold more clout than employees and the high staff turnover does make it difficult for ressiees to organise or protest as a group; ironically, while the Community's ethos seeks to redress power imbalances in society and in the Church, some ressiees end up overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness, of 'not being heard', and in the most extreme cases, of feeling *exploited* by their Christian employers. The problem stems from the fact that the relationship between the Resident Group and the Iona Community is sometimes based on the signed contracts, sometimes on something less tangible but more imperative —this latter category most resonates with Maussian ideas of 'pre-industrial' reciprocity. This 'intangible' quality is what compels many ressiees to willingly invest of themselves beyond what is stipulated on paper, but which also causes frustration when the Community, in response to ressiees' complaints or concerns, sometimes behave like a modern employer. One ex-ressie says:

My perspective looking back is...to question what extent [the Resident Group] was an intentional community, it was definitely *a unique hybrid of being an employee and a ressiee*. Sometimes these two things *were very hard to reconcile...* (italics added)

On the other hand, of course, questions abound as to how far people really take on their 'ressie' persona and 'buy into' the Community's ideology. What cynicism, internal doubts, subversive strategies, and contestations exist behind-the-scenes when guests and Members

are not looking? It is into this 'liminal' space—betwixt and between 'selves', betwixt and between the 'ideal' and the 'real', betwixt and between the cracks in resses' 'Iona experience' and afterwards—that the next three chapters take us.

Chapter 6. Being and Becoming a 'Ressie'

Going to Iona: A Sense of 'Calling'

Like guests and other visitors, Resident staff learn of the Iona Community or Iona through myriad avenues. An overseas ressie saw a television documentary about the Isle of Mull, which mentioned Iona and the Iona Community. Another ressie—with a friend—had been invited by the World Council of Churches through their youth church group in East Germany to visit Iona. Some staff had previously come on day visits, while others heard of the Community from watching *Songs of Praise* (January 1988) or through the Wild Goose Resource Group (WGRG) music and liturgy. Many were recommended by friends, colleagues, or a church minister, or had had contact with an Associate or Member who encouraged them to visit.

Sometimes, children of Community Members volunteer or become ressies, even if they are uninterested in becoming Members themselves. They feel a connection with the island, perhaps from holidaying there as children or from having lived on Iona for several years when their parents were on the Resident Group. This is especially true of past Leaders' or Wardens' offspring who frequently develop friendships with locals and an affection and concern for the island—over and above any particular devotion to the Community itself. Being a ressie gives them one way, amongst others, to establish and maintain their relationship with the place as an adult.

Many ressies were first a vollie or guest before applying to return in a longer-term role. The formative episode as a vollie can whet people's appetite for a more sustained experience of 'living in community' and help define their personal aspirations and expectations of future contact with the island. People may repeatedly return as a guest or vollie for some years until the 'right' opportunity presents itself to apply to be a ressie.

Two Associates—a couple in their 60s—decided to apply after leading a programme week on Iona; after ten years of living in one place on the English mainland, they said: '...we were considering our next step. A year on Iona seemed to be a logical stage on our journey'. As one way of expressing their shared values and relationship with the Community, some Associates are drawn to join the Resident Group—which in turn reinforces their commitment to the Community's aims:

[My 'Iona experience'] proved that this sort of engaged, varied, challenging, exciting spirituality and living together is possible.... My year on Iona was an important stage in my ongoing faith journey, affirming the direction in which I trust I am still travelling, and have been for a number of years.

[My 'Iona experience'] strengthened and confirmed my theology of encountering God in the 'fingerprints', 'footprints' and 'fire'!

Although resses thus often have prior knowledge or experience of the Community and the island, during my fieldwork several staff had known of neither until they came across a Community job advertisement. Generally, while some people come specifically to seek out the 'Iona Community' on Iona, others do not connect the Christian movement with the island at all. The Community's job advertisements clarify that link and, in effect, offer people a unique way to 'live out their faith' by becoming *part* of that vital connection—the Resident Group. The underlying point is that however famous the island and the Iona Community may be by themselves, the Community require ongoing strategies—and the presence of a staff community on Iona—in order to develop, maintain, and *make visible* that connection. Staff are needed to make explicit for others the 'sacred' history of the place and its unique association with the Community, as well as to exemplify the Community's vision and values. In fact, resses themselves *are* the primary evidence of that ongoing relationship and serve as 'living advertisements' to others who might in turn consider applying to work for or to support the Community.

Most people who responded to the Community's advertisements were already considering a major change involving a new or different kind of job or way of life. Like the guests, many resses looked to Iona at significant turning points in their lives; unlike the guests, however, these turning points or crisis moments were powerful enough to warrant a *total* dislocation in lifestyle and place for an *extended* period of time. One staff person, going through a traumatic divorce, said:

...first I came as a 'vollie' ...during major person[al] problems. Going back home made [me] realise I needed to return. I therefore came...initially for 1 year which extended to 2. I felt it was a healing place.

Many resses have seasonal contracts, which sometimes become protracted. During my fieldwork, at least three resses returned for a second season. Filling every post each year can be tricky, and contract extension depends largely on staffing needs although personal reasons are also considered. The Community's official limit is for resses to stay no longer than three consecutive years, though occasional exceptions are made; on the flip side, not all staff complete their contracts.

One person intriguingly said that what compelled her to become a ressie was 'a MacLeodian coincidence'. She is alluding to a loose collection of near-mythical stories about the Community's founder and the mysterious 'coincidences' that surrounded his rebuilding scheme. One story tells how he 'obtained' the Abbey's silver cross (see Fig 6.1). Apparently, as soon as MacLeod espied the cross at an exhibition, he knew it was 'meant' for the Abbey and strode over to purchase it. The exhibitor rebuffed MacLeod's insistent offers—not a mean feat—saying her husband had crafted it for a special purpose. MacLeod had no choice but to leave unhappily without it. Later on, however, that same cross arrived on the island, offered as a dedication to the rebuilding project. The craftsman

had made the cross especially for Iona Abbey, with no idea MacLeod himself had tried to buy it!¹



Fig 6.1 The celebrated silver-plated Celtic cross in the Abbey church

It is common for resses to feel compelled by 'something greater than themselves' to go and work on Iona. Many resses speak of their motivation in terms of a 'calling', as a force almost beyond their ken and control:

On [the] last visit [I] started to get [a] vague sense that I should be working there...

Interested in one post...but applied to become a resident for [another] season (The question of not being appointed did not enter my mind—so convinced was I that this was the place for me.)...

...maybe the most important reason: it was like a call, a loud forceful feeling in myself. I needed to go.

This 'feeling'—nebulous or conspicuous—is not unlike conventional Christian understandings of 'calling' as a divinely inspired or appointed vocation. Staff seldom explicate it as a command or directive from God; instead, the language used emphasises an intuition within themselves, even a beckoning emanating from the island itself. It may take time for the 'calling' to be identified and to coalesce into action, but most staff regard the impulse as something demanding a positive response.

Resses go to Iona with a variety of expectations, depending on how familiar they are with the Iona Community and if they had visited before and in what capacity. They normally will have had the benefit of the two-day interviews where finalists for a post are invited to the island. However, candidates catch only a glimpse of what Resident Group life is like. These interview-visits are short and frequently take place out of season, plus much of what resses do is behind-the-scenes, hidden from a casual observer's view. Even

¹ The official, slightly different version of the story is found in Ferguson (1990: 194–5).

fronting the worship services, which last at most around an hour, belies the huge amounts of time, energy, and care ressies put into the preparations. Ressie candidates, like guests and other visitors, seldom witness the 'real' Resident Group life.

Associates and Members do visit the centres, a small number more regularly than the rest, and some have worked as vollies or ressies; but as explained in Chapter 5, even their understandings of Resident Group life can be uneven or limited. Being a vollie gives some insight, but vollies operate at a different pace over a much-abbreviated period. Ressie candidates are repeatedly told no description can accurately capture what Resident Group life is truly like—it must be *lived* to be understood. These warnings, meant to dissuade the faint-of-heart, may actually add to the mystique of living in such a 'sacred' place.

While people often feel mysteriously 'called' to Iona, becoming a ressie actually entails exacting selection procedures and intensive socialisation; 'ressies' do not arrive on Iona fully formed.

The Selection Process: Fitting Place and People

Applying to join the Resident Group involves a rigorous process. After the requisite form filling (see Appendix E), a few finalists per job are invited to the island (all expenses paid) for two days' worth of interviews and to see the actual living and work settings first-hand. Candidates are given a tour of the centres and socialise a little with the staff. Each finalist is formally interviewed by a panel of three or four current ressies, including a Warden, the post's line manager, a Staffing Team member, and at least one other Management Team personnel. While the Iona Community's mainland office assists in processing the

application paperwork, the interviews are conducted entirely by resses.² Except for one longer-term ressie currently on the Management Team, every three years the interviewers themselves are brand-new. Usually, a few resses' contracts overlap, but this practice of a high staff turnover nevertheless accounts for some of the continuity problems resses encounter from year to year.

Candidates undergo an extensive hiring process, where they are evaluated on their suitability for the job and for 'living in community' in Iona's particular context. Ideal candidates can be scarce, and sometimes one aspect is sacrificed for the other. The general approach is that work skills can be learned but the 'right' kind of personal traits or attitude necessary for 'living in community' on the island cannot be taught. As pressure from governmental/EU regulatory bodies mounts, however, it becomes more crucial that staff with 'proper' qualifications and experience be hired for certain jobs (e.g., Maintenance Coordinator, Domestic Supervisor). Besides the two-hour formal interview, each finalist is also informally interviewed by another ressie (who usually becomes the successful candidate's 'buddy' to help them negotiate the initial adjustment period). By the end of the two days, candidates leave with a taste of what 'community life' might be like and existing resses gain a sense of who might soon become an integral member of their staff group.

This interview procedure and—what for some finalists is their first—visit to Iona are critical. The Management Team, and other resses, regard it as a 'weeding out' or self-selecting process of sorts. Face-to-face, people's personalities and quirks become evident—essential to determining if the person will 'fit' in the Resident Group and with island life. The interviews also seek to dispel candidates of any rosy views of community living, reiterating the hectic pace and heavy workload—the *mundaneness* of everyday

² Except the Musician post where candidates are first assessed by the WGRG for their musical skills and general 'fit' into their ethos.

existence in this 'sacred' site. Besides the official evaluations, resses often also assess candidates amongst themselves. As the centres' *raison d'être* is about 'building community', an individual's personableness and personality tend to be paramount. How self-aware and socially adept, how self-confident with strangers, how flexible and adaptable to change, and how comfortable an applicant is in a rural, remote setting all factor into the official and unofficial evaluations of potential resses.



Fig 6.2 Staff taking a break in the Abbey Refectory

Importantly, there is a sense in which the *place* itself plays a key role in 'selecting' resses. Not everyone can cope with the physicality of the landscape, the ever-changing weather, and the isolation. Confronted with the place as an actual entity,

candidates test the mettle of their desire to live and work there. The interviewers hope people will recognise the island's challenging aspects and their own limitations and so decide for themselves if they are physically and mentally capable of enduring the often-gruelling environs. On the other hand, Iona's dramatic beauty and idyllic qualities can also confirm people's sense of 'calling' to live there. Both its harshness and placidity can contribute to the place's reputed innate spirituality.

Applicants for the same post can be vastly different from one another. Besides myself, a 30-something Singaporean woman, the other finalists for the Sacristan job were a middle-class English woman in her early 20s and a working-class Scottish man who had recently taken early retirement. Occasionally, the Management Team interview an

overseas applicant by telephone, from as far away as New Zealand or the USA. Even with strong references, if they have never been to Iona, these 'unseen' applicants in current resses' minds remain a somewhat risky 'unknown quantity' until they arrive.

The Staffing Team on Iona—in conjunction with the Support Services Manager in Glasgow—are responsible for appointing resses. Because of the resources invested in interviewing finalists and because each new ressie becomes a member of the Resident Group (and hence, an Iona Community representative), the selection procedure tends to be meticulous. Sometimes, however, the pressures of staff shortages can result in hasty choices which, in turn, lead to more staffing problems. For instance, one overseas applicant made false claims about his background and identity which were not properly verified until after he had already started the job. From the time of my fieldwork onwards (and also before, anecdotally at least), it seemed the Resident Group were perpetually having 'staff crises', with people leaving abruptly, falling seriously ill, and/or falling out with one another irreconcilably—all of which put enormous strains on the core group of 'stable' resses who had to 'hold it all together' for the sake of the guests and vollies. The realities of 'living in community' indeed are seldom idyllic.

The Management and Staffing Teams have a policy to protect the 'integrity of a post', whereby no ressie interviews their potential successor. They believe each person should determine the tenor of the job and so bring to it their own gifts, skills, and personality; they try to avoid imposing a 'blueprint' of what constitutes a 'good' ressie. The underlying hope is that the person becomes the driving force in how they go about doing the job. While a post's logistical aspects are 'handed over' from generation to generation, ideally, each year's Resident Group should be composed of a different assortment of individuals, each with a unique contribution to shaping the staff community. For example, the Musician must be technically competent, although one year he might be a

soft-spoken Englishman with a penchant for African rhythms, while another year she might be a boisterous New Zealand woman who prefers Wesleyan hymns.

The Resident Group (as is also true for vollies) is designed to encourage change and fluidity—characteristics of *movement*—so as to avoid institutionalisation and staidness. In 1976, a Warden reflected on the Resident Group: '...[I hope] we have paid heed to Bonhoeffer's dictum that "the person who loves his or her blueprint of community more than the actual community itself" is in danger of destroying that very community to which [he or she] has been called' (John Harvey, quoted in Galloway 2003: 4). As seen in Chapter 2, the Community's evolution had strong resonances with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's own experiment of 'community living'. His 1949 book *Life Together* continues to be a popular model for Christian groups today and is often cited by 'emerging church' movements as the source of a 'new monasticism' set to resuscitate Western Christianity. Iona Community Members, and hence the development of staff life, were influenced by Bonhoeffer's seminal ideas much earlier on.

Whatever the Community's aspirations are for the Resident Group, it would be naïve to believe no notion of the 'ideal' ressie exists. For instance, regardless of the Musician's personal tastes, he or she must predominantly use and promote the WGRG's songs. No matter how much 'freshness' each new addition brings to the Resident Group, it does not fundamentally change the deeply ingrained ethos that every ressie must assimilate at some significant level. Similarly, while individual personalities vary, certain attributes and behaviours nevertheless set apart a 'good' ressie from a less-than-ideal one.

Socialising the Resident Group

Staff Induction and Training

Like volunteers going to a Third World country on long-term development projects, the socialisation process for new ressie begins before they embark on their outbound journey. Prior to leaving home, each ressie receives a leaflet giving practical advice on weather- and terrain-appropriate attire, travel options, access to shops, transport, telephones, banking facilities, etc., and outlining the upcoming period of 'Staff Induction and Training'. More than giving information, this catalogue of details makes explicit what in ordinary life is taken for granted (e.g., clothes, basic amenities, telecommunications) and underscores how dramatic the lifestyle and identity contrast will be. That the leaflet is produced and sent from the Staffing Team on Iona, not from the Glasgow headquarters, emphasises the wide disparity between mainland and island existence: only those *on* Iona can properly give counsel about living there.

As Chapter 3 discussed in reference to guests, organising the convoluted travel arrangements also brings home to new ressie just how remote and faraway Iona is from most of mainland Britain. The physical distance to Iona parallels the social and cultural distance between mainstream, urban society and the alternative, communal lifestyle of the Resident Group. Many people become ressie in order to dislocate themselves from the mainstream Church and to participate in cutting-edge Christian practice on Iona. For others, this centre-periphery relationship is inverted: Iona, situated at the margins of the British Isles, is regarded as the nucleus of (certain strands of) Western contemporary spirituality. Its physical remoteness from the British mainland—and hence, from the corrupting powers of secularisation, capitalism, consumerism, etc.—enhances its purity and sacred 'centredness'. Like other pilgrimage sites, Iona's 'otherness' from ordinary life is what attracts enthusiasts and devotees, ressie included.

Staff Induction and Training takes place at the end of winter, typically in February/March when visitors are scarce. Matsunaga (2000: 53) suggests that the induction of new staff at a Japanese retail store can be viewed as a *rite de passage*, where recruits are transformed via 'training that targets attitude and general behaviour as much as specific skills' into *shakaaijin*—a mature, adult member of society, not simply a company employee. New resses on Iona (together with existing resses) follow a not dissimilar programme, the intention being to produce 'resses' who are not just the 'hired help' but representatives of a specific *way of life*. During this five-to-six-week intensive socialisation into their new identities—through videos, practice sessions, and talks given by Members, including the current Leader and WGRG representatives—resses are acquainted with the Community's history, organisational structures, and aims (especially its 'Peace & Justice' focus), given extensive tours of the Abbey and Mac buildings, taught first aid and health and safety procedures, introduced to the various departments and posts, instructed on working with volunteers, and oriented to 'Iona-style' worship and the weekly cycle of services.

To help resses become familiar with local life, they visit the island's Heritage Centre, attend worship at the Parish Church, learn ceilidh dances, and host a special party for the islanders. During this time, new resses begin to learn their jobs and what is expected of them when the season kicks off. Their lives start to take shape around the 'rhythm of the week' (see Chapter 4) that structures even the winter mode of being. There are innumerable details and bits of information resses must absorb and 'own', knowing they will be responsible to present and represent the Iona Community to thousands of guests and visitors in a matter of weeks. This education into the practice and shared beliefs of the Community is crucial because, in every act and word, resses will *literally* have to incarnate the Community's vision of communal living in contradistinction to the

'selfish individualism' dominant in the mainstream world. From the range of activities in the socialisation process, I want to highlight two events in particular: 'Sharing Stories' and the 'Enneagram and Teambuilding'. Because they are intended to cultivate the 'ressie' identity, these activities importantly help to illuminate how resses address the discourses put forth by the Community and their attempts to negotiate an individual 'self' within their corporate initiation into the Resident Group.

'Sharing Stories': One Rite of Passage

In 2001, the daytime Staff Induction sessions revolved around giving logistical and practical advice, such as 'Money Matters', 'Rotas', etc. New resses here were mainly passive receivers of information and instruction. Other than tours of the Abbey, the MacLeod Centre, and the Iona Community Bookshop, they generally sat in the Abbey Common Room or the Chapter House while a Member or more experienced ressie offered a plethora of knowledge for them to absorb.

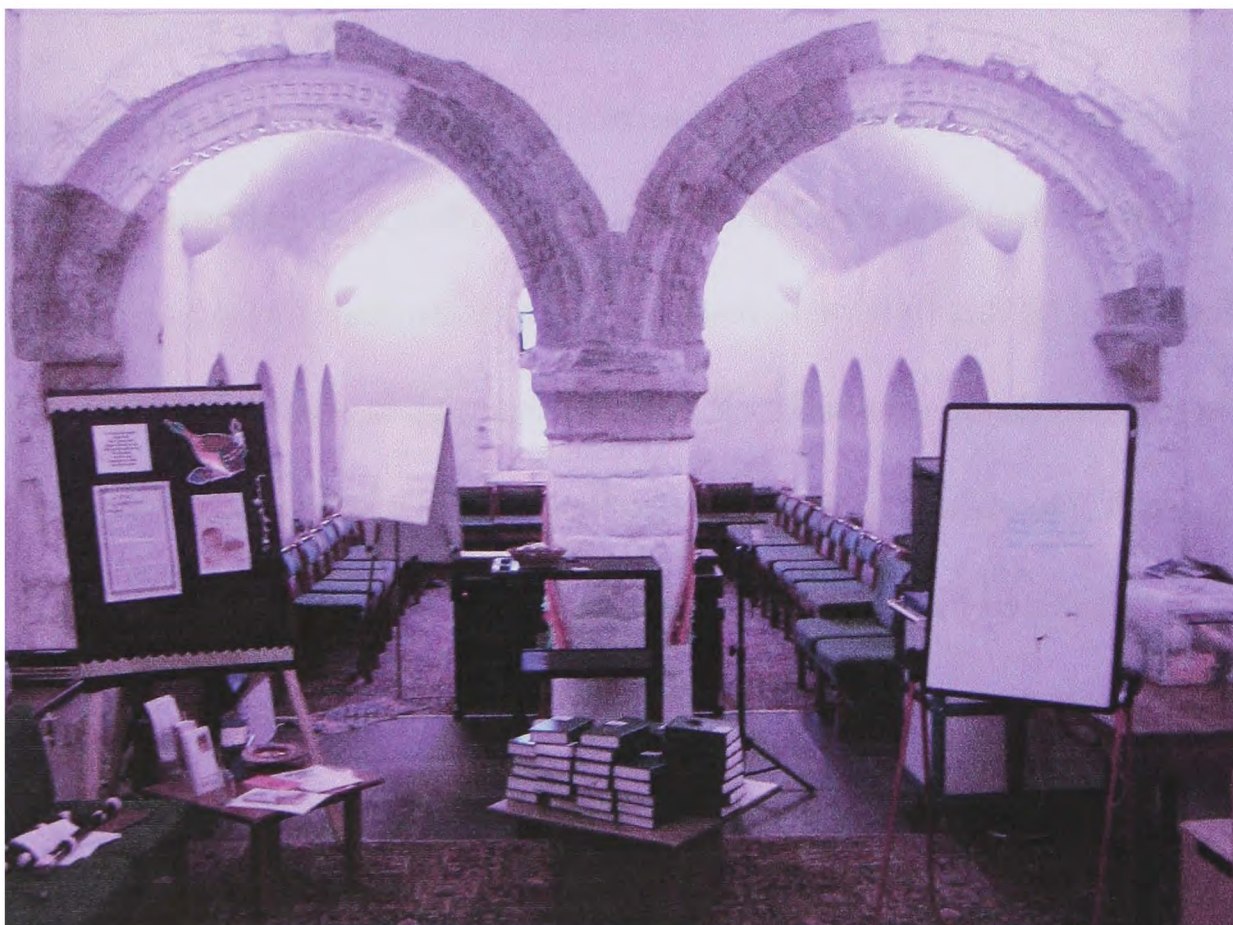


Fig 6.3 The Chapter House, where meetings and workshops are held

The evening sessions tended to be 'gentler', with more free time and social events. Also scheduled for this quieter part of the day was an event called 'Sharing Stories'. It began late in Week 1 after people had had a few days to settle in and adjust. There was one 'Sharing Stories' session in Week 1, two in Week 2, and a final session in Week 3, each lasting about an hour. They were held in the Abbey Common Room, an informal, comfortable space, with low-level lighting and individual seats arranged in a circle. In this cosy setting, the Warden led the session by explaining its strictly confidential nature—that 'nothing will go beyond these four walls'³—and invited resses to take turns sharing their personal life stories with the group, to help others better understand 'who they are'.



Fig 6.4 To the Abbey Common Room, used by guests and for staff meetings

As might be expected, this exercise generated considerable tension. It is a ressie's first risky act, to choose to trust these relative strangers with their most vulnerable 'selves'. There were long periods of silence, especially at the start as people acclimated to the event. Taking part is voluntary, but most eventually chose to participate. People narrated different aspects or sections of their life history, but all culminated in what motivated them to come to Iona to work for the Community. Stories varied in tone and detail—some were less revealing, more surprising, or briefer than

others—and seemed to be listened to with attention and respect. As each person finished,

³ For this reason I did not take notes and only comment generally on the process, dynamics, and what some resses said afterwards on reflection.

however, the room swelled with an almost palpable sense of relief coupled with heightened pressure on those who had not yet spoken.

This event can be viewed as a ritual where, in publicly narrating the key elements of their 'pre-ressie' lives *to the group*, new ressiees were being made ready to shed their past 'selves' and adopt their new roles as members of the Resident Group. Presumably, the aim of the exercise is to integrate their old and new identities, but as will be seen later this proves to be somewhat problematic in practice.

Each 'Sharing Stories' session happens before the evening service, so ressiees go straight into worship afterwards. This scheduling is intentional, meant to dispel any awkwardness or tension engendered by the intimacy of the session. The formal services act as a 'transition' by giving ressiees space and time to reflect and gather themselves before returning to normal social situations. However, the service immediately afterwards also acts as an important rite of incorporation (van Gennep 1908/1960: 11), to inculcate and reinforce ressiees' new corporate identity. Preceding the sessions is the evening meal and free time, so ressiees enter the Abbey Common Room disparately from the surrounding buildings. Like a classic rite of passage, the 'Sharing Stories' session breaks down or re-structures the internal frameworks of people's pre-Iona, pre-ressie lives by revealing how by different processes they had all reached the same, ultimate destination—Iona. It echoes the physical journey they each undertook to the island only days ago and parallels, more recently, how they gathered together to sit within the circle—a traditional symbol of equality and unity—of chairs in the Common Room. Ressiees' life histories are recast in light of this meta-narrative that situates Iona at the centre of their new (Resident Group) world. The Wardens sometimes kickstart the event with their own story; once one or two people use this discursive schema, the rest generally follow suit.



Fig 6.5 The Michael Chapel set up for a winter service

After the 'Sharing Stories' session, most resses headed straight to the service, walking the twenty or so paces between the Common Room and the Michael Chapel⁴ in silence or whispered conversation. While the exercise to some extent helps people feel closer, hearing people's secrets can be discomfiting and exposing one's private 'self' can bring fear of judgment.

Moreover, as nothing was to 'go beyond these four walls', some resses struggled with how to approach one another

afterwards: Do you refer to someone else's story, or not? How do you assimilate your

new 'private' knowledge of someone with the 'public' person they present to the world? What about those who shared nothing—are they concealing something about their private 'selves'? What is left unsaid may be just as or more disturbing.

The confidentiality 'clause', meant to protect people's privacy, unintentionally raises questions about the private vs public 'self'—an issue that plagues many resses throughout their Iona tenure. How relevant is a ressie's pre-Iona life to their new identities? Are their personal stories and 'selves' to be confined only within the sessions' 'four walls'? In such a close and closed setting, what room is there for public and private 'selves' to co-exist? Of course, individual resses who eventually become friends do speak with one another about their life stories; but these 'underground' discourses further reinforce the

⁴ Winter services are held here instead of the Abbey church.

idea that their personal 'selves' are to remain hidden, removed from the public domain, or subsumed under the corporate 'ressie' persona.

The session's hushed, confidential tones and the vulnerability people feel also prepare them for a particularly poignant experience of worship as a rite of incorporation. Perhaps significantly, the 'Sharing Stories' sessions were planned for Tuesdays and Thursdays—the nights of the Evening Communion and the Prayers for Healing Services, two services that purposefully seek to create or restore unity and corporate wholeness.

The Evening Communion focuses on the sharing of the Eucharist. Normally, long tables are laid out between the Abbey church's Choir Stalls and extra seats added to 'close' the ends of the Choir Stalls, drawing people into a 'circle' around a 'common table'. When blessing the elements, one Warden used to emphasise, 'We do this to *re-member* you', as he held the torn halves of bread together along its tear. In other words, in the sharing of Communion, participants are unified, made into one whole 'body' with its individual parts or members *re-membered* or *re-bodied*. The bread and wine are passed along from person to person and, instead of clergy, each administers the elements to their neighbour, completing the sense of equality and solidarity amongst the congregation. The final lines of the Closing Responses (The Iona Community 2001a: 112) bolster this freshly constructed sense of unity and 'homecoming':

<i>Leader:</i>	At our end and new beginning,
<i>ALL:</i>	THE ARMS OF GOD TO WELCOME US AND BRING US
	HOME.
	AMEN.

The Prayers for Healing Service, too, has powerful corporate dimensions. It directly addresses people's fragility and frailty, including the 'brokenness' of communities and nations; for example, the regular prayer format includes the following phrase:

...Loving God, we hold in your healing presence the suffering people of our world, and the places where people are experiencing division, injustice and violence...
(The Iona Community 2001a: 96)



Fig 6.6 The Prayers for Healing service 'ritual space'

At the Abbey church's Crossing, a circle of cushions is arranged with a small wooden cross at its centre, surrounded by a small circle of tea lights. During the service, people are invited to approach the cushions if they 'wish to receive or share in the ministry of the laying-on of hands, either for themselves or for another person or situation'. Others stand behind them, placing their hands on a back or shoulder so that everyone is physically linked. The service leaders stand in the space between the candles and the cushions; they move round the circle from person to person, laying their hands on the participants kneeling or standing at the cushions. The leaders and congregation say aloud the same prayer for each participant:

ALL: SPIRIT OF THE LIVING, PRESENT WITH US NOW,
ENTER YOU, BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT,
AND HEAL YOU OF ALL THAT HARMS YOU,
IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN. (The Iona Community 2001a: 91)

During the winter services held in the Michael Chapel, the physical arrangements are modified to fit the smaller space. The more intimate setting, coupled with fewer visitors, actually enhances the potency and relevance of these two services to the Resident Group. More than at any other time of the year, the winter services minister almost exclusively to the ressiees themselves. Held straight after the 'Sharing Stories' session, the evening service ends the day's schedule and concludes a set of ritual sequences that serve to create a brand-new 'ressie'.

The Enneagram: Negotiating the Individual 'Self'

Ressiees are also put through a series of group- and self-awareness exercises and teambuilding techniques. In 2001, the highlight was the Enneagram, a personality theory using the figure of a circle enclosing nine equidistant points connected by nine intersected lines (see Fig 6.7). Supposedly part of oral tradition for over a thousand years, its philosophical and symbolic origins are disputed. It was discovered in the Sufi tradition, but in the 1950s, Jesuit missionaries in Bolivia brought it to North America, where it acquired a Christian framework. Since then, the Enneagram has been variously 're-invented' and incorporated into different belief systems and practices, increasingly in mainstream fields such as psychology, self-help, education, even business. Portrayed as a link between the spirit and the psyche, it is also popular amongst those engaged in New Age spiritualities. Innumerable books have been published on the Enneagram (e.g., Rohr & Ebert 2001; Riso & Hudson 1999; Baron & Wagele 1994), so I will only give a brief description here.

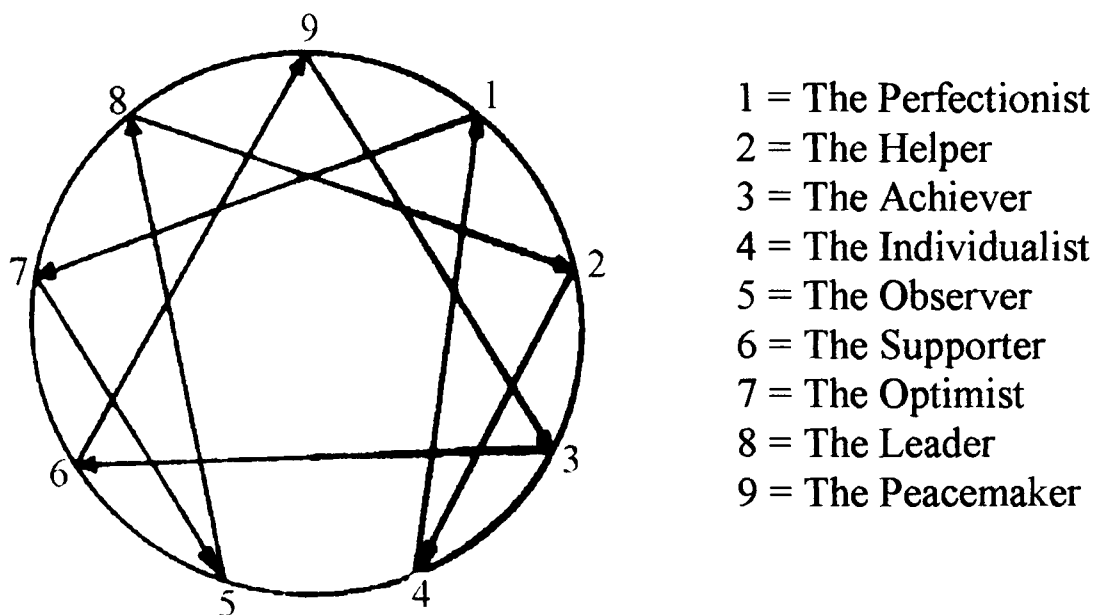


Fig 6.7 Enneagram diagram and typology

Each of the 'points' or 'types', referred to by a number, represents a primary motivator in human personality and behaviour, e.g., compassion, power, wisdom. Each type has positive and negative sides and is linked with the other types, showing directions for growth or change in order to 'balance' out a person's behaviour and worldview. Together, the nine types supposedly form a whole, representing 'the divine face of God'. In Week 2 of Staff Induction, a Community Member—a trained spiritual director and Church of Scotland deaconess⁵—led the Enneagram sessions to help ressiees discover what 'type' each was. While the aim was partly to enable them to recognise their personal 'giftedness' and 'brokenness', the ultimate goal was for ressiees to understand how inter-personal conflict can arise from differing 'motivators'. In other words, as one ressie later observed, it was more a 'teambuilding' exercise than a way to celebrate people's individuality.

Ressiees were unevenly enthusiastic about the Enneagram. A few had encountered it before, while to many it was a radical way of thinking about themselves and others. Of most significance here is how ressiees used the Enneagram in different ways to assert their individual 'selves'. Firstly, a few dismissed the exercise as 'pointless' and reacted vehemently against being 'categorised'. Other, more enthusiastic ressiees tried to persuade

⁵ Who was also Abbey Warden in the late 1980s.

them otherwise, but they remained staunchly unconverted, claiming the right not to have to 'fit' into someone else's typology. Secondly, several resses thoroughly enjoyed the self-discovery process and over the course of the year referred to it constantly; unsurprisingly, they were predominantly '4's, i.e., the 'individualists'. Compared to other resses who accepted the Enneagram at face value, the '4's were most comfortable with *being* '4's. They celebrated their '4'ness and went further to scrutinise how they were *unlike* one another, how each embodied '4'ness differently. For instance, one '4' claimed to be more 'balanced' than another '4' because the latter sometimes displayed melodramatic outbursts. Thirdly, one ressie was distressed over not knowing to which 'type' he belonged—he genuinely seemed to want to 'fit' but was unwilling to commit himself.

Certainly, these are all normal reactions to a complex system purporting to explain something as elusive as human nature. This thesis contends, however, that resses used the Enneagram in strategic ways to distinguish themselves from one another, both positively and negatively, and from the *group*. For some, the Enneagram represented an official 'agenda' or 'discourse' that they rejected outright ('why can't I just be myself?'); for others (the 'individualists'), it offered a tool and common language they happily manipulated in order to express subtle but significant degrees of difference from others and from one another ('she's more of a "4" than I am...'); and one ressie's sustained ambivalence made him the most unique of all.

Interestingly, when serious staff conflicts did arise, the Enneagram was never referred to in official arbitrations. This might be because, after Staff Induction, the Enneagram 'lingo' went underground, so to speak—it became part of resses' daily, informal discourses of play and banter; for instance, a '6' (the 'supporter' or 'loyalist') joked she should break a rule just to act against 'type'. Resses used the Enneagram colloquially to comment upon other people's behaviour; at times it was tongue-in-cheek

(‘she’s always so happy, she *must* be a “7”, like Ferris Bueller!’), but sometimes it was severe or critical (‘he’s so aggressive, typical of a power-hungry “8”’). Although teachers of the Enneagram warn against using it to stereotype others—as the Community Member did with resses—the temptation is hard to avoid. More than that, however, the Enneagram became for resses an ‘insider’ vernacular that set them apart from ‘outsiders’, i.e., vollies, guests, and casual visitors. Only very occasionally did resses apply it to non-resses, perhaps unconsciously limiting its relevance to strictly within the Resident Group. Even if they disagreed with it, only resses who had undergone Staff Induction could understand it. Indeed, the need to assert boundaries between ‘insider/outsider’, ‘us/them’ is widespread on Iona.

As mentioned before, the Enneagram was also appropriated by a loose collection of ‘4’s who used it to validate their own individuality. Rather than simply accepting the system at face value, however, the ‘4’s used its rules and terms in *self-parody* in order to carve out a distinctive identity for themselves *against* the official Enneagram discourse. They spoofed the Enneagram’s list of ‘4’ characteristics (e.g., self-centeredness—‘It’s all about me, me, me!’) to subvert its authoritative categories, thereby proving their true uniqueness. But this strategy is not without ambivalence. Ironically, it was sometimes used to rein in the ‘self’ from standing out *too much*. For instance, when a ‘4’ caught herself being overly talkative, she wryly confessed, ‘Yes, *I know*, it’s all about me, me, me...’; or when a ‘4’ complained too much about something, another ‘4’ checked her behaviour by saying, ‘It’s not all about “me, me, me”, you know...’. As the ‘individualists’, the ‘4’s demonstrated the most blatant and sophisticated negotiation of a personal ‘self’; other resses were not passive but less explicit and self-conscious. The extreme case of the ‘4’s underlines how pressing this struggle for an individual ‘self’ can be for resses.

Intriguingly, two resses who were indifferent to or disliked the Enneagram left Iona before the end of their contracts. One resigned halfway through the season after a formal complaint against him was made, while the other—on a three-year contract—amicably arranged to leave towards the end of his second season. In some ways, the latter ressie 'Peter' did not undergo the intensity characterising many resses' 'Iona experience'; his case history will be examined more fully in Chapter 8. Suffice to say here that Peter expressed he felt little affinity for the worship, for living in community, or even for the island ('I prefer the Scilly Isles, more variety! Better weather!!); to top it off, he found Iona a spiritually stagnant place for him. Peter's overall negative critique of his 'Iona experience' stands out as an exception to the norm. His frankness *without rancour* also deviates from those resses who left for other unhappy reasons. How then do we make sense of Peter's participation in the Resident Group? Given his unusual, rather dispassionate stance, could he be considered a 'bad' or 'unsuccessful' ressie? Was his early departure the ultimate move to re-claim his individual 'self', by forsaking the corporate 'ressie' lifestyle and identity entirely? Or, as one ressie speculated, 'Maybe he was just not very into the whole thing'?

Certainly, resses have a spectrum of 'Iona experiences' depending on their expectations, personalities, backgrounds, etc., including external factors such as the constitution of that year's Resident Group, the Wardens' leadership style(s), staff shortages, foot-and-mouth crises, inclement weather, conflicts with locals or Historic Scotland, etc. Nevertheless, consistent patterns or trends do emerge from the data to show not only that most resses' 'Iona experience' share common features, but that there are also implicit notions of what constitutes a 'good' 'Iona experience'. For instance, to suggest Peter's negative critique stems from a lack of personal engagement—i.e., 'maybe he was just not very into the whole thing'—hints at two things: firstly, that resses *ought* to be 'into the

whole thing' and, secondly that, if they were, they would then have a more passionate (even if not entirely positive) 'Iona experience'. To further explore these issues, we need to examine how resses depict and reflect upon their 'Iona experience'.

Reinventing the 'Self'

Intentionally or otherwise, resses' Iona sojourn is often marked by a time of 'self'-exploration and discovery', even reinvention. As explored in Chapter 5, many resses exist within a 'liminal' state because the Resident Group's corporate identity is itself ambivalent and contested, 'betwixt and between', primarily defined by negation against other social groups. Consequentially, even while (or perhaps because) resses struggle to make sense of this, they also encounter opportunities for self-transformation. 'Liminality' indeed offers potentiality (Turner & Turner 1978: 3), but I also use liminality here to refer to 'lived paradox' (see Chapter 1) where contradictions and opposites are not necessarily resolved or resolvable but are held in a kind of tension, sometimes productive, sometimes problematic. Resses dwell for a *prolonged* period in this liminality, soaking in the 'lived tensions' or 'paradoxes', and emerge at the end of their work contracts in unexpected yet patterned ways.

In the next sections, I highlight several key areas within which such re-making or re-discovery of the 'self' proliferates: the vocational, sexual, spiritual, and natural or true 'selves'.

The Vocational 'Self'

It is true that, post-Iona, some resses are able to pick up their careers where they left off. For instance, an overseas ressie holding a psychology degree spent three years on the island as Programme Worker; afterwards, she decided to pursue postgraduate studies with

the aim of becoming a psychotherapist. Many resses, however, undergo a significant shift in their career path. They use their time on Iona to try out alternative careers or to identify and hone their vocational goals.

One ressie, 'Mark', had worked in IT for most of his career. Until going to Iona, he had lived at his family home in a small city in northeast England. In his early 30s, he wanted to see if he could transform his 'hobby' as church musician into a full-time profession. Becoming the Musician on Iona was the first crucial step Mark took. It led directly to gaining a place on a prestigious music and theology course, successfully completing the degree, and obtaining a coveted job as music director of a church near London. Mark saw his 'Iona experience' as '...the chance to do a type of work I felt a possible calling to' and helped clarify and confirm his discernment of a divine vocation.

More dramatic switches in careers pre- and post-Iona also are common. One ressie was previously a town planner, but after three years on Iona she moved into working 'full-time in various aspects of Christian lay ministry.' In another instance, an overseas ressie said her Iona tenure: '...gave me confidence and help[ed] me develop skills I didn't know I had. In terms of changing my life, I decided that I wanted to go to Law School while on Iona'. Many guests expect staff working at a holy site must be fervently dedicated to their faith. They imagine resses are seminarians or novitiates or else intend to enter some kind of Christian ministry. Partly because of my role as Sacristan, I was asked repeatedly if I was training to be a nun or a minister! On occasion, staff do formulate an interest in a religious vocation while on Iona, though it stems more from the experience of leading worship rather than their actual jobs.

For example, one Scottish ressie 'Richard' in his late 20s had not considered Christian ministry until his Iona sojourn. During his work as assistant bursar over three seasons, he led countless services and sought advice from Community Members and others.

He felt Abbey worship was: '...different to what I was used to, it was challenging, more relevant to "life", more accepting. It was/is more "real"'. After leaving Iona, Richard decided to enquire into training for priesthood with the Church of Scotland. He is now in Glasgow finishing his theology degree and anticipates wearing his 'dog collar' before long.

However much resses' 'Iona experience' may help them identify a vocation, it can also serve to confuse and bewilder. One ressie, a writer and retiree in her 60s, admitted, 'I found it difficult suddenly not having a defined, valued ministry'. Both she and her husband, a retired science teacher, eventually became involved in local community and church volunteer work. Of course, people's success in finding suitable jobs largely depends on factors like age, gender, health, and chosen career field. But the reality of taking one to three years 'out' from ordinary, mainland life does affect many resses' post-Iona job hunts. Persuading potential employers that two years spent at an Abbey on a Scottish island is not detrimental to one's curriculum vitae can be tough, even if within the same line of work. For example, a Scottish ressie in her mid-40s worked as Domestic Supervisor for three seasons—a job directly related to her profession in the catering business and yet: 'It took a long time (18 months) to get back to where I left off when I went to Iona—now 2 months into a "proper job"'.

The difficulty of finding a job is often compounded by the fact that few resses return to exactly the same situation as they left; that is, after their Iona sojourn, many resses relocate to an entirely new area (often in Scotland), they may have lost or gained a partner, and/or they decide to pursue a different vocation altogether or seek re-training. In other words, major life changes resulting from their time on Iona can disrupt people's lives *without* necessarily giving any direction or resolution. Post-Iona resses can be compared with Frey's (2004) Camino pilgrims whose pilgrimages often take several weeks or months and cover hundreds of miles; like many post-Iona resses, Camino pilgrims also

view returning home with ambivalence and experience a significant period of disorientation, 'a time of transition between [the] two realities' (Frey 2004: 100): Iona or the Camino, and home life. This issue is further examined in Chapter 8. Importantly, dwelling 'holistically' on Iona can also revise how resses understand themselves in relation to the notion of 'work' and alter their expectations of future jobs.

Regardless of whether resses' vocational 'selves' are clarified or confounded, the common denominator is that their 'Iona experience' is pivotal to realising a fresh calling or vocation in life, often seen in spiritual terms.

The Sexual 'Self'

Resses' 'Iona experience' also raises and reconstructs issues of sexual identity. The Iona Community espouses a liberal Christian understanding of sexuality. One of the North Transept displays in the Abbey highlights gay rights, and key themes of some programmed weeks and worship services explore and promote the notion of inclusivity. For example, the 2006 Programme contains a week called 'Coming In':

...A week for lesbians, gay men and their friends, integrating spirituality and sexual identity through a range of creative media, in a safe space....

Community Members in same-sex relationships talk openly of their experiences in the mainstream Church. In 2002, 'Sexuality' was the focal point of one of the Community's plenary sessions. Because of its liberal attitude and commitment as an 'equal opportunities' employer, the Iona Community is widely perceived as being 'gay friendly'. Its island centres attract a fair number of gay staff and guests. Not every Member, staff, and guest feels equally comfortable with the Community's stance on homosexuality, but as one male ressie in his late 20s stated, its overall inclusive ethos: '... means "acceptance" to me as a young gay Christian'.

For some staff, it also means hearing a sermon or being led in worship by an openly gay person for the very first time. Through the rigours of community living and robust exchanges, people's preconceptions of others', as well as their own, sexuality are put to the test. 'Elsie', a 30-something ressie, knew little about the Iona Community when she was hired. At 18, she converted to Christianity and accepted an Evangelical understanding about her homosexuality; i.e., as long as she did not act on her desires, she was not 'in sin'. While working on Iona, however, she was confronted by the Community's liberalism—which compelled her to rethink her theology as well as her own self-perception. Things were further complicated when Elsie and a vollie 'Martha' fell in love. Martha had only ever had heterosexual relationships but was responsive and took some initiative in their courtship, while Elsie was plagued by uncertainty and guilt.

By the end of her Iona stint, although she still had unresolved questions, Elsie decided to move in with Martha (who lived in England). Over the next few years, they returned to Iona several times to visit friends/former colleagues, always together. They both became involved in the local Iona Community Associates group, but found suburban life lonely and unfulfilling. They began seriously to consider moving back to the Inner Hebrides. When the time seemed suitable, they decided to return to Iona as ressites.⁶

Elsie was reluctant to rejoin the Resident Group, but Martha's enthusiasm won her over. They both expressed how comfortable and accepted they had felt on Iona and hoped past experience would help them better cope with ressie life. Both their jobs were in line with their respective professions and fitted well with their own career trajectories; they were most excited, though, about the chance to return to that geographical area and to work in 'a meaningful community setting'.

⁶ It is unusual for ex-ressies to return in the same role (vs. as a guest, holidaymaker, etc.); Elsie and Martha's appointments are rare exceptions.

These two staff members' 'Iona experience' entailed profound and unexpected shifts in self-understanding. With varying degrees of internal conflict, Martha came to terms with her first lesbian relationship, while Elsie—who no longer sees herself as an Evangelical Christian—struggled to reclaim her homosexuality without sacrificing her religious integrity. Central to their respective transformations in sexual identity was the island, where they had met and where Elsie, in particular, had been powerfully challenged by the Community's liberalism. Returning to the birthplace of their relationship and catalyst for the processes of self-reconstruction, as an *established couple*, could be seen as coming full circle—as Elsie and Martha seek to negotiate a different relationship with Iona in their now more accepted and fulfilled sexual 'selves'.

In community life, the topic of sex is unavoidable. Because of the Community's broad-minded outlook, not all sexual activity is prohibited; instead, 'chastity' in terms of moderation and consideration for others is a key 'discipline' of Resident Group life (see Chapter 4). Romance is acknowledged as good and inevitable, and many people come seeking to meet 'someone special' on Iona. Love affairs and lasting relationships birthed on Iona are common, but inappropriate sexual liaisons such as infidelity and promiscuity are as much a reality. Frey (2004: 103–4) reports that Camino pilgrims can 'compartmentalise' the realities of pilgrimage and home life, where 'as an inversion of daily life, what occurs on the Camino is understood as "out of time and place." Affairs among pilgrims are not uncommon, and experimentation of many types is frequent'. Similarly, on Iona, people may feel, say, or do things they would not otherwise in 'ordinary' life. Akin to holiday trysts, some regard the island as an exceptional space, set apart from the 'real' world where their behaviour is immune from 'real' consequences. Some people feel liberated to take positive risks to explore their own sexual identity, while others may feel it permissible to indulge more gratuitous impulses. The boundary between

these motivations, however, is not always clearcut and can lead to messy relational quagmires.

In such an intense, circumscribed setting—despite, or perhaps *because*, of the religious element—strong feelings and attractions easily develop and surface. The secrecy and risk in doing what is forbidden can add to the sexual *frisson*. Youthful indiscretions may receive an official slap on the wrist, but more serious transgressions have caused people in leadership to be asked to leave the island. Repercussions can affect the entire staff group, even guests and locals. Stories trickle down through generations of staff (and locals) recalling past scandals, etched firmly into people's collective memories. In a situation where secrets are hard to suppress and where the communities are so closely entwined, the impact of people's sexual behaviour on the social unit can be devastating.

At this pilgrimage site, alongside resses' devotional 'self' co-exists an often-heightened sexual 'self'. For many staff (and guests), the Iona Community's centres provide safe, alternative spaces within which people can respectfully discuss and explore their sexual 'selves' without incurring the immediate reproach they experience in the mainstream Church.

The Spiritual 'Self'

Given the island's status as a pilgrimage site, it seems obvious that 'faith' should be a core component of resses' 'Iona experience'; in reality, its impact on resses' religious devotion is surprisingly variable. As might be expected, many resses felt positively about how their spirituality developed:

[Iona] strengthened and encouraged my faith. Made me feel much less isolated, as a radical/liberal Christian, than hitherto. Gave new direction to my life. Helped me recognise a calling to lay ministry...

My faith is strengthened. My life enriched by the people I met/lived with. I saw Iona as ongoing, my 'church' job and faith continue to challenge me as I journey through life.

My year on Iona was an important stage in my on-going faith journey, affirming the direction in which I trust I am still travelling, and have been for a number of years...

While their 'Iona experience' challenged and gave 'new direction' to some resses, it often affirmed or confirmed their already-held beliefs rather than introduced or converted them to radically different worldviews. Individuals with more conservative Evangelical backgrounds like Elsie may experience a greater faith transformation, but generally, few religiously conservative people are attracted to the Iona Community in the first place. Applicants to the Resident Group are required to be 'in sympathy' with the Community's vision, so it is unsurprising that 'radical/liberal Christians' are most drawn to working at the centres.

On the other hand, some resses believe their spirituality had stagnated or diminished. One ressie said his 'Iona experience' affected him: 'Not over positive faith-wise. Seldom got to 'receive' in worship...'. His job as Musician meant working during most services; with three services a day, he was kept very busy. Counter to the expectation that religious workers must gain tremendous spiritual benefit from their daily work, this ressie found that when 'worship *is* work' his personal faith, at best, had gone on hold. 'Peter', a ressie mentioned earlier, whose job was unrelated to the worship, was similarly disappointed by what happened to his faith during his two-plus-year stint on Iona. Back on the mainland, he eagerly returned to a church he felt more 'used to' and participated in activities to 'reinvigorate' his faith:

I need to get re-involved, reading Bible liturgies, etc. lapsed. I need to work at it. There will be local help... Bible groups, Bible society action groups getting back into the swing [of things].

Interestingly, numerous resses articulated neutral or ambivalent attitudes toward how Iona had influenced their personal faith:

I don't think my faith has changed dramatically. I was inspired by others to focus on my faith more—bringing it from the background to the foreground...

[My faith was] unchanged.

[My 'Iona experience']... may continue to help me out of the church. I don't know.

[My 'Iona experience' gave me] more confidence, less cynicism.... I don't go to church. [I'm] still working on it [faith].

I think I am now more 'honest' about my faith than before.... I am not attending any church services at the moment, though I am still officially a member of my church.

Such remarks may be surprising coming from full-time staff at a Christian pilgrimage site.

Becoming 'more honest' or 'less cynical' could be viewed as positive results, but not attending church or possibly leaving it altogether ('may continue to help me *out of the church*', italics added) might worry many mainstream Christians. This attitude is not confined to those who, pre-Iona, were already uninterested in church life; some regular churchgoers found it took months, sometimes years, to even *want* to join a congregation again. One ressie, a faithful churchgoer pre-Iona, said that after her three-year stint, she longed to be part of a 'normal congregation' because the high turnover of people at the Abbey made her feel like 'a stranger in your own church'. Yet on returning to the British mainland, she found it difficult to join or develop a sense of 'belonging' in a 'normal congregation'.

The Iona Community is criticised by some conservative Christians for neglecting proselytisation and the cultivation of personal piety. Steve Bruce (1996: 86–9) observes that liberal or radical congregations tend to lose members because their belief structures are 'extremely diffuse'. Have these resses, as a consequence of immersion in the

Community's liberal ethos, become renegade Christians? Is their church non-attendance a sign of weak or declining religious commitment?

Bruce (1996: 88) suggests that liberal Christians defect to join 'narrower organisations, which, because they enjoy greater cohesion, are more likely to achieve their goals'. Most Community Members, however, are dedicated churchgoers. How is it that these radical Christians do not desert their churches? Numerous Members explain that if it were not for the Community, they would have 'long abandoned the Church'. For them, the Community complement their conventional church involvement by providing the cohesive, political ethic they need as believers. But what about the resses? The ambivalence resses express about post-Iona church commitment may confirm Bruce's contention about Christians of a liberal stripe. Yet these same resses were willing to spend up to three years of their life in an explicitly religious context. This issue will be addressed in the Conclusion.

The Natural or True 'Self'

Iona is frequently regarded as a liberating place, where the layers of civilisation, urbanisation, etc. peel away to reveal the most true, natural, and real person within or beneath it all. One ressie in her early 40s compared it with the freedom of youth, where 'it felt like leaving home as a teenager again...'. The comparison is apt given that adolescence is classically characterised by rebellion and self-discovery. This also fits with how Iona is variously perceived not just as a place on the fringes of mainstream society, but more importantly, as a core location of defiance or resistance against the dominant and domineering: Iona, a final Celtic outpost against the Roman Church; Iona, the cradle of Christianity and new 'spiritual' hope in an age of rampant secularisation; Iona, 'home' to the Iona Community, a reforming movement (a 'new monasticism', see Chapter 2) within

the institutional Church; and for many ressies, Iona, a unique place of revelation and emancipation in a world that oppresses and divides the 'true self'. An overseas ressie 'Beatrice' confirms this viewpoint:

...The job 'Abbey Cook' seemed challenging to me—I had just discovered how much I love cooking and how little I enjoy being a business woman (That's what I studied)...

Beatrice eventually became a full-time chef in one of Iona's hotels and has now settled down on the island and married a local. She continues:

I feel I have disconnected myself from the traditional way my parents brought me up and expected me to go.... So very significant was for me that I chose to live my life the way I thought it would be good for ME... (original emphasis)

Being on Iona was a catalyst for Beatrice to individuate from her parents, rethink her career decisions, and forge a completely different existence on a remote island by relying on her *natural* abilities as a cook instead of fulfilling her formal training to be a high-flying business woman in a city. She says:

In coming to Iona I felt I got to know myself quite a bit better. It was a bit like letting a mask come down, or *getting rid of a skin which never really fit me.... One is made to remember the[ir] own abilities and chances*. One is made to think about life from a different angle. One is made [to feel] accepted for the things one can offer.... I did what I loved and wanted to do, knowing that I would certainly make mistakes but learn from it. (italics added)

Most ressies come from urban or suburban areas and see their 'Iona experience' as an opportunity to 'de-urbanise'. By being 'close to nature', ressies hope to shed 'a skin which never really fit me', to 'remember' and come to terms with their true 'selves'. In their perspective civilisation debases, while 'nature' humanises and elucidates people's real identities.

In all these cases, resses' 'Iona experience' involve some kind of self-metamorphosis. While guests and daytrippers also are inspired by their visit, and some do effect significant life changes afterwards, the island for them is primarily a 'landscape' of spiritual fulfilment expressed through feelings of affection or a 'love relationship' they develop with the place. By comparison, applying Ardener's (1989) assertion about people in 'remote areas', Iona is for resses a 'dense' social space where 'identity' can be forged and re-forged—a sort of crucible for the 'self'. This 'density' is partly derived from the multi-layered island landscape within its rich accumulations of archaeology and geology, its unique religious history, and the ongoing diverse practices of tourism and pilgrimage that add further textures to the place. This is why Iona is not just a 'thin' place, but an eminently 'thick' one as well (see Chapter 1).

The 'density' of Iona is also enhanced by the specific rhetoric and practice of 'building community' *a la* the Iona Community—where the 'self' is to be located within the processes of intentionally bringing together disparate social groups to create a 'whole' and holistic unit. The interconnectedness between individuals is consciously highlighted and developed through organised activities within the centres for guests and staff. Generally, guests' short 6-day stint of 'community living' is characterised by growing feelings of closeness and affection for one another and for the island. Of course, as seen in Chapter 4, among guests disagreements and disappointments also occur—not all is *communitas*. But after one week, they depart the island and go their separate ways. For resses, however, 'community living' is their primary mode of life and is experienced as an inevitable interdependence on one another, for better or worse.

Living in Community: 'The Best of Times, the Worst of Times'

The category 'people' ubiquitously tops ressie's lists of what they most enjoyed about their 'Iona experience', especially the 'amazing variety' of international guests and vollies.

Numerically, however, the figure is not very high: over the course of a 32-week season, roughly 3,400 people (counting all staff and guests) come through the two centres.⁷

Famous pilgrimage hotspots like Lourdes, Santiago de Compostela, and the Vatican receive far more visitors and self-professed pilgrims, running in the millions. In Ireland, St Patrick's Purgatory and Croagh Patrick each receives about 30,000 pilgrims a year. Taizé, at the height of the summer, hosts 'more than 5,000 young people from 75 different countries' a week, which in that one week alone already exceeds the number of staff and guests at the Iona Community's centres in an entire season! Iona's 'pilgrim' numbers, at least at the Abbey and the Mac, seem paltry by comparison.

When ressie's rave about the 'people' they have met, it is less about the quantity than with the experience of 'living in community'. In fact, it could be argued that the low figures, the island's small size, plus the setup at the centres to facilitate 'face-to-face' encounters, all serve to heighten the closeness people feel on Iona. Following are how some ressie's described 'living in community':

...[it] means a lot less isolation as a full-time Mum. It makes one more aware of our interdependence...

Being part of the whole with a job on which many people relied...

A chance with others to 'live a parable of community'—new every week—to be supported and to have a valued role in that community...

⁷ Excluding holidaymakers, daytrippers, out-of-season visitors, and guests at the religious retreat houses, who add significantly to the Abbey services (especially on Sunday mornings) and to the weekly Pilgrimage participant count.



Fig 6.8 Some vollies from Africa, Canada, Great Britain, and Scandinavia

On the whole, ressiees have positive 'Iona experiences'. They feel the unique communal lifestyle is a helpful antidote to their previous lives in the atomistic mainstream world. Having a job within a face-to-face context gives ressiees a deeper sense of their interconnectedness, value, and role in contributing to the group's wellbeing. On Iona, people achieve an easy familiarity with one another in a remarkably short space of time.

The intensity of communal living, the openness to share very personal things with virtual strangers fosters strong bonds of friendship and breeds a kind of *communitas*: '...it was the sense of being an integral part of a community—of the closeness developed between people—I felt free to open up and be me...'.

On the other hand, ressiees also articulated how emotionally complicated 'living in community' is:

[It meant] Lots of things, close friends, but also committed to working at the tension points. Living in community...requires a higher level of openness—when you are surrounded by people, it is harder to conceal emotions—learn to be vulnerable and also supported.

At times working and sharing life with the same people *all the time* (And especially the ones I wasn't connecting with!). The constant struggle of trying to get on with people I didn't feel I was connecting or understanding...

I didn't fulfil my obligations to attend worship and I struggled with a lot of guilt around that issue. I wasn't challenged much intellectually and I find that difficult.... [I]t was a great challenge that brought great results. Living in community is difficult, but you learn about yourself and the importance of community.... [You] struggle to remain true to yourself, honest, and loving to others around you.

While the affirming aspects of ressie life are equally valid, the flip side—the conflicts and ‘tension points’—is highly revealing, for it is at these ‘tension points’ where the *real* test of ‘community’ lies. The Community’s purpose for ‘building community’ at the Iona centres is to push people’s boundaries and challenge their assumptions about faith. For ressies, however, the challenges were far more subtle and complex.

At some point or another, ressies find such sustained *communitas* stifling. Theoretically, the tight interweaving of lives should compel people to iron out differences and forge a better way of co-existing. Certainly, this does happen within the Resident Group, but the converse is also frequently true. In such a close and closed group, conflict has far-reaching consequences and tensions in a ‘work’ relationship can easily spill over into social interactions or other areas of community life and impact the entire group. For example, a disagreement takes place between two Domestic Staff members who also happen to share the same accommodation. Leaving workplace problems behind at the office is near-impossible, so these ressies’ house-mates may get caught up in the conflict. Bad feelings may develop if the house-mates are tempted to take sides, which could then affect their own work relationships in other departments. The increasing circle of ressies involved may also be scheduled to lead a worship service together, for which they must spend time together preparing and later present in a convincing, meaningful way for the congregation. Ressies not initially ‘in the know’ about the brewing tension eventually hear of it through the ‘ressie grapevine’ and may feel upset at being ‘left out’ of the communication loop. In small communities, ‘gossip’ is typically rife; but for ressies, at least, ‘gossip’ can serve to help re-affirm a person’s place and belonging in the group, rather than being purely malicious or thoughtless. To *not* be ‘in the know’, when everyone else seems to be, can feel like social exclusion.

To resolve discord also takes time and energy—two resources in short supply during the season. As a result, instead of airing them, staff disagreements are sometimes postponed or suppressed for the sake of keeping things functional. Especially towards the latter part of the season when resses are increasingly weary, 'survival' at all costs becomes the dominant mode. Depending on the confluence of personalities and leadership styles, different Resident Groups react differently to the tensions in community life. Resses in one year may cope with stress by withdrawing into themselves, whereas in another year shouting and door-slamming predominate. Longer-term resses who have 'seen it all' cannot decide which is healthier, only that in this small, tightly inter-connected community, it is almost inevitable to '...[reach] people's points of no compromise/change—where solutions needed to be reached but no one was willing to take the essential steps'. The stresses and strains of Resident Group life take their toll in different ways. Some resses slip into default survival modes, while others give up and leave; some fall ill, while others flourish. The warp and weft of 'community living', which unify and make Resident Group life distinctive, can begin to fray and unravel as people feel they must 'hold it altogether'. Because of the relentless flow of guests (and vollies) coming through the centres—expecting to be welcomed and offered a positive 'Iona experience'—regardless of what ressie dramas are unfolding behind closed doors, sometimes maintaining the façade of a well-functioning Resident Group seems more important than addressing the frictions and fractures of 'community living'.

To cope with these pressures, resses develop strategies to give voice to their frustrations or to find relief from the seriousness of 'building community', such as playacting (rather than deception *per se*) or using humour. As the season wears on, resses feel the strain and tedium of answering the same questions about themselves repeatedly and of trying to facilitate interaction amongst guests; even the most extroverted resses

finds these aspects increasingly tiresome. During the 2001–2002 season, a couple of resses (of different sex)—out of boredom with having to say the same things about themselves over and over again—took to swapping names and job titles when introducing themselves to guests at the first meal. The Wardens eventually asked them to stop because their behaviour came across as 'exclusionary' and confused guests, making them feel like the butt of an 'inside-joke'.

Some resses involved in teaching guests WGRG songs replaced lyrics with their own tongue-in-cheek versions. For example:

Laudate omnes gentes,		Latte and cappuccino,
Laudate Dominum. (x2)	became:	Latte, espresso. (x2)

The 'posh coffee' version was a reference to resses' limited access to certain beverages, especially non-Fairtrade ones, and expressed a kind of yearning for coffee of the taboo multinational, Starbucks-type variety only to be found on the mainland. This 'subversive' song was never made known to guests, nor circulated to other staff, but was kept amongst those resses who devised it as another 'inside-joke', bringing fits of giggles and knowing looks whenever the Latin version was sung in church.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, resses sometimes struggle with the fact that leading worship is a less 'spiritual' exercise than expected. One ressie expresses her dilemma this way:

They say the holy spirit is in your preparation for worship, and I believe that, but it doesn't FEEL like that at the time. Sometimes when I've done a service I have felt carried, that it is right, that people are moved and connecting, but it feels more like I've carried off *a performance* successfully—I'm not even aware really of God or Jesus, even if I'm talking about them. It's weird. (original emphasis, italics added)

Most resses script every word of their services, partly to obtain feedback from others and partly because in presenting and representing the Iona Community's world-renowned style

of worship—in its place of origin, Iona Abbey, no less—they are anxious not to cause disappointment by getting something ‘wrong’. Resses also carefully choreograph the aesthetics (e.g., lighting, symbols, movement) and acoustics (e.g., sound levels, musicians) of the ritual space in order to set the ‘right mood’. Rehearsing beforehand is commonplace to double-check the pace, enunciation, and participants’ timing and coordination. If during the service something is delivered or conducted incorrectly, the leader(s) can become quite upset, even while maintaining a ‘professional’ exterior. Some resses take mistakes in their stride, while others enjoy dissecting their own and others’ ‘performances’.

Organising Abbey worship can be as much about ‘profane’ elements like ego and competitiveness as it is about facilitating people’s encounters with the ‘sacred’. Leading worship, for many resses, is a platform upon which they can push the limits of their self-confidence, resourcefulness, and artistry. The opportunity to experiment with their ‘selves’ this way is not unrelated to resses’ faith or spirituality, but as the above quotation highlights, the ‘sacred’ may ironically be ‘absent’ from their consciousness during service preparations and presentations. Although cautioned by the Wardens not to put on ‘novelty shows’, resses are tempted towards ‘over-creativity’ in worship. Unlike the mainstream Church, the Community’s approach to worship encourages people to try new things and resses eagerly take advantage of the chance to experiment. Perhaps the best compliment is when a ressie-colleague asks to re-use another’s material for their own service; some, though, take pride in never ‘borrowing’ from others or repeating the same format. They strive to make each service unique partly to alleviate a sense of ‘routine-ness’ about Abbey worship. Ironically, while weekly guests find Iona Community-style worship extraordinary and exciting, it can become staid and ‘mundane’ for staff when conducted week after week after week. Whether mainstream or alternative, routinised worship runs the risk of becoming predictable and quotidian, in this case, for those who lead it.

While innumerable guests and staff appreciate that the Community offer safe spaces and refreshing alternatives of theology and practice to mainstream Christianity, some resses find that they, too, need 'alternatives' from the Community. Resses' subversive strategies were used to create a measure of psychological and emotional distance from the Community's dominant discourse and ideology. While they continued to do their jobs and to 'build community' with guests and staff, as the season wore on, increasing cynicism and internal doubt emerged over what the Resident Group is truly about—the 'ideal' and the 'real' were rapidly diverging. On the whole, resses *are* highly sympathetic to the Community's political and theological leanings; however, the more some resses agreed with the Community, the more they were critical about how the Resident Group's *raison d'être* fits within the Community's 'peace and justice' espousals. Some resses went so far as to appropriate the Community's principles to argue that they were 'exploiting' resses—as employees for whom working 14-hour days is the *norm*.

The intimacy of 'living in community' with people not of one's own choosing is challenging even for the most easy-going or sociable ressie. The levels of closeness in shared accommodation, shared meals, shared recreation, shared worship—the very nature of corporate existence—and the lack of personal space is highlighted by some as the most life-changing aspect of their 'Iona experience', both negatively and positively. As one ressie aptly puts it, living in community was: 'A privilege/a joy/a mid-life challenge. The best of times and the worst of times'.

All these experiences and dissonances that resses as site staff go through are what is often hidden or 'invisible' in previous accounts of pilgrimage. Chapter 7 will further illuminate what goes on behind-the-scenes for resses who organise and lead the Iona Community's distinctive weekly Pilgrimage event.

Chapter 7. Layers of Landscape: The Weekly Pilgrimage

This chapter goes behind-the-scenes in the production of ‘pilgrimage’ and brings to the ethnographic and analytical foreground the Resident staff who prepare, rehearse, and ‘stage’ manage the weekly Pilgrimage on Iona for visitors. It inverts the paradigm common in the literature that usually prioritises pilgrims’ experiences and devotions and neglects the ‘backstage’ staff who work to make possible those ‘sacred’ encounters. By spotlighting the Resident Group and their taken-for-granted work in leading the Pilgrimage, this chapter demonstrates that the facilitating of ‘pilgrimage’ is not unproblematic and that site staff, too, have a valid—though complex—experience of the ‘sacred’ through the ‘mundane’ activities of their labour. Particular layers of Iona’s ‘sacred’ landscape unfold for different social groups through their engagement with it—for *ressies*, the ‘sacred’ and the ‘self’ become inextricably entwined as conducting the weekly Pilgrimage becomes a means for experimentation and self-transformation.

What’s in a Name?: The Power of Place

The name, the ‘Iona Community’, is a curious misnomer. It refers to the historical origins of the movement founded through MacLeod’s ‘rebuilding project’ and to the present-day Community’s guest centres on the island. It does not, however, describe what the Community do or stand for. It is named after a place, but *not* the place where Members actually live. For a movement heavily prioritising social and political *action* as a necessary accompaniment to faith, to be called after a *place* where only one or two Members temporarily dwell seems odd. MacArthur (1995: 195) suggests the Community:

...may all along have had the wrong name. Something that expressed *what* it was trying to do, rather than where, might have avoided much misunderstanding [with the locals] over the years. (original italics)

Paradoxically, the island is intrinsic to Gaeldom's history and identity, yet in spite of its name and claims of inspiration the Iona Community is not in any 'fundamental sense...rooted in the Gaelic heartland of Scotland' (*ibid.*; see also Meek 2000: 190). Only a few people of Highland background or Gaelic speakers have been involved in the movement, and a 'common purpose and common life' with the native community has never transpired (MacArthur 1995: 162). In fact, the Community greatly emphasise being dispersed 'in the world', rather than cloistered on a remote island; i.e., they believe the *place* Iona should not be elevated above other, more mundane sites where God, too, is present and at work. Morinis (1992: 24) suggests that 'pilgrimage places can be valuable resources in socio-political processes'—this is certainly true of the Community who by associating themselves with Iona harness the power of the 'sacred' place to forward their own purpose.

On one hand, the appellation 'Iona Community' is deeply misleading to the masses of people who flock to Iona eager to witness or participate in the Community's holistic lifestyle. On the other hand, it was a stroke of marketing genius by the Community's founder, linking his contemporary project with the island's illustrious Celtic Christian history. The misnomer testifies to how powerful Iona is *as a place*—to be named after it conjures up, in the public mind, vivid images of religious devotion and exciting, fresh incarnations of Celtic spirituality. Indeed, the island's status as the spiritual and symbolic heart of the Iona Community tends to overshadow the actual lived landscape of 'home' to locals.

MacArthur (1995: 193) asks why, if Iona's mystical qualities are so blatant, she whose family 'has lived for several generations amid the self-same landscape' of Iona has never felt them. Is it because she is not 'in tune' or too 'prosaic' to notice them? Unintentionally, MacArthur's question resonates with the Community's attempts to 'de-

sacralise' the island—to be discussed later. In response to her query, however, this thesis argues that just as there are many 'Iona communities', there also are multiple 'layers' of Iona's landscape—each textured, moulded, and linked by the people, practices, and forces of nature co-existing on the island. It might be said that MacArthur's engagement with Iona carries with it the accumulative gravity of her ancestors' practices at and associations with the place. The Iona stories she grew up with may reveal, for her, certain meanings embedded in the landscape which may be 'hidden' from other social groups (e.g., *ressies*, visitors). Her research with National Trust experts further deepens her understanding of the 'layers of history in the land'.¹ Iona's other social groups have their own practices and stories that 'unlock' other meanings—meanings that some locals find baffling. This chapter will examine how these other groups understand the island's landscape—and one another—through a particular activity: the Iona Community's weekly Pilgrimage. It is salient that MacArthur and many locals are confounded by the Pilgrimage, while for others it is the pinnacle of their 'Iona experience'.

'De-sacralising' Iona

The character of Iona's landscape is drawn from its status as an enduring place of pilgrimage. Referring to the 'dwelling' perspective explored in Chapter 3, the quality of Iona's 'sacred' landscape is both continuous and in flux. Metamorphosis constantly occurs, as well as resistance to change. For example, the Iona Community aim to 'de-sacralise' the island by downplaying people's expectations of it as a 'holy' place. *Ressies* make clear to guests that Iona is 'not Lourdes'. Before each weekly Prayers for Healing service is a special session for guests where *ressies* spell out the rationale behind the Community's ministry of healing: the service is not led by 'special healers' nor is prayer more

¹ MacArthur, presentation, 'Local History Week' on Iona, 12 June 2002.

efficacious on Iona; nothing is ‘magical’ about the laying-on of hands, which simply ‘makes tangible’ others’ support through touch; ‘healing’ is not about the strength of one’s faith; and remarkable things may not happen at all.

Sometimes, however, guests object to such ‘de-sacralisation’ attempts:

You’re *deconstructing* the whole thing! Iona *is* a special place, something is different about it, otherwise we wouldn’t be here.... We *do* expect something from God here...

Many (highly educated) visitors desire the ‘sacred’ to be kept ‘supra-rational’; they reject ‘ressies’ endeavours to demystify the rituals and expose the mundane, underlying logic. Despite ‘ressies’ assertions to the contrary, many visitors insist that ‘living in community’ on Iona is ‘super-spiritual’. One guest, during washing-up duty, asked if staff have a ‘special spirituality for cleaning the cutlery’—she was disappointed to learn staff are usually just rushing to finish the chore. Visitors revering how Iona staff ‘must so enjoy the peace and quiet’ miss the irony when the comment is directed to an out-of-breath ressie hurrying from meeting to meeting.

In their attempts to ‘de-sacralise’ the island, the Community via the resses encounter not only people’s defiance, but also the resistance of the *landscape* itself—for Iona’s ‘sacred’ landscape is ‘pregnant with the past’ (Ingold 1993: 153), full of memory, history, and traces of previous and ongoing ‘dwellings’ that bolster and cultivate its reputation as ‘holy ground’. More than 1,500 years of religious practice are not easily thrown off. However, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, pilgrimage sites are not merely ‘sacred’ places. They are in fact multifarious, textured spaces, ‘dense’ landscapes of natural and ‘secular’ habitations, labour, leisure/tourism, politics, conservation/heritage, consumption, etc. Over time, Iona’s landscape has multiplied and diversified, as more, different groups of people engage in different forms of practices on the island.

Because guests travel to Iona disparately, the Iona Community focus on people's experiences when they actually arrive on the island. Visitors certainly find their own meanings in their journeys to and from Iona, but it is their Iona sojourn that the Community primarily define. The event that most clearly evinces the Community's ecumenical ethos and 'holistic' approach to faith is the 'weekly Pilgrimage' around the isle. It also serves to elucidate the politics of place, showing how each social group defines itself in relation to the landscape and makes possible the existence of the other groups.

In light of Coleman and Eade's (2004) focus on *movement* as constitutive of pilgrimage and place, I argue that the Community's weekly Pilgrimage, an informal yet structured and regularly repeated activity, facilitates a 'performative construction of place through movement' (*ibid.*: 21). Resses lead pilgrims through a series of symbolically charged spots, moving peripatetically through the landscape, appropriating each locale—its features, history, and myths—to service the Community's religio-political convictions. For example, the Machair, the island's common grazing land, becomes a 'parable of sharing' supporting the principles of the Fairtrade Movement.

The weekly Pilgrimage both undermines *and* underscores the island's status as a pilgrimage site. In contrast to the islanders' traditional Presbyterianism, this event is 'ecumenical' and without a 'destination', confounding local ideas of 'pilgrimage'. The Pilgrimage is a pivotal activity, which at once gathers together the politics of place and *politicises* the place. It is a form of 'dwelling' which reveals the multi-layered character of Iona's landscape.

The Weekly Pilgrimage: 'A Peripatetic Act of Worship'

Instigated by MacLeod in the post-WWII years, the Iona Community's 'weekly Pilgrimage' is seen now as something of an 'institution'. While the Community regard it

as a flexible, dynamic activity, others view it as the closest thing to an officially sanctioned ritual for visitors to perform on arrival. Historic Scotland include on their 'interpretation' signboards in the Cloisters a stylised map showing 'The Pilgrimage Stations on Iona'.² For almost 60 years, the Pilgrimage took place on Wednesdays as the mid- (and turning) point of the Community's weekly guest programme. It was eventually moved to Tuesdays at the recommendation of staff (and guests) who felt this pivotal activity should accommodate the abbreviated six-day schedule. In 1977, a Deputy Leader reflected:

This natural and unforced meeting of people of all sorts in activity in the open air served many essential purposes of personal contact, free discussion and *simple, united activity*. (Morton 1977: 60, italics added)

A key excursion that almost unfailingly helps people 'bond', it moves the group dynamic to a greater level of intimacy and forwards the Community's goal of 'building community', where *communitas* is expected and actively encouraged.

Not limited to Iona Community guests, the Pilgrimage has always been open to the public and free of charge. Other visitors and holiday-makers join in, many day-trippers specifically coming on 'Pilgrimage day' just to participate. In the summer, numbers can swell to more than 200 with a long trail of people stretched across the landscape. For some, it is a 'convenient', guided tour of the island, most of which can only be seen on foot. Most people, leaders included, however, find the Pilgrimage both physically *and* spiritually challenging.

² The Iona Community, however, dislike the word 'stations' for its 'overly religious', conventional connotation and the implication that the Pilgrimage route and each stop's meaning are 'fixed'.



Fig 7.1 Visitors perusing Historic Scotland's 'interpretation' signboards in the Cloisters

What distinguishes this Pilgrimage from traditional peregrinations is its focus on mobilising pilgrims to consider 'the life of the world' and to act accordingly to transform it, rather than on a purely individual or inner progression of faith. Norman Shanks (1999: 93), former Leader, describes it as:

...a guided walk led by members of the resident staff group, *a peripatetic act of worship*, covering about seven miles and taking up to six hours, stopping for a prayer, song and brief meditation at places of historic and religious significance, reflecting on the *journey of our own lives* and the *life of the world*. And in so doing it sums up *within the compass of a single event*, the Iona experience and the Community's understanding of spirituality. (italics added)

Given its prominence in the Community's self-definition and as the highlight of people's Iona visit, this weekly Pilgrimage uniquely gathers together several of this thesis' major themes: place, landscape, and practice.

Organising the Pilgrimage

New resses are taught the Pilgrimage route during Staff Training and Induction. Each Pilgrimage requires at least two resses, one to lead and one to ‘back-mark’. Vollsies on days off and the occasional visiting Community Member are often happily co-opted into helping out. It usually takes a few tries to recognise the route and develop confidence, so ressie ‘buddies’ initially partner-up with new staff. Depending on the number of resses signed up, in a season each can lead between two to five Pilgrimages. During my entire fieldwork, I co-led three Pilgrimages and attended a few more as a ‘pilgrim’.³

The Pilgrimage stops have generally remained constant over the years, although the route has been modified a few times. The ‘circular’ route now used (see Fig 7.40) dates only from 2000 and its permanence is not guaranteed. The ‘traditional’ source for the ‘script’ resses use is ex-Warden Peter Millar’s (1997) *Iona: Pilgrim Guide*. Various editions of the *Iona Abbey* or *Iona Community Worship Book* also have a section on ‘The Iona Pilgrimage’. The Abbey Front Office houses a ‘Pilgrimage folder’ containing a hodgepodge of material garnered over the years, including a variety of poems, songs, dramatic readings, and facts and figures supplied by charities and NGOs like Amnesty International, Christian Aid, and Oxfam.

Each stop has four main components: (1) historical information; (2) religious reflection; (3) political point; and (4) song/chant/prayer. While resses can use their own initiative, many stick rigidly to the prescribed stops and the basic ‘script’. Each stop has main emphases that the Community wish resses to communicate to pilgrims. The more adventurous may add their own ‘specialities’ and, depending on personal interests, may embellish their ‘script’ with more details (e.g., geology, social history, flora, ornithology). Readings or reflections with current relevance (e.g., World Aids Day, Make Poverty

³ Compared with ordinary visitors to the island, the majority of Pilgrimage participants have explicitly religious or ‘spiritual’ motivations; as the main pilgrimage practice associated with Iona today, its participants are most comfortable with being labelled ‘pilgrims’—and so I call them as such.

History, '9/11') are popular. To make the event more participatory and add more 'voices' (e.g., children), *ressies* often ask pilgrims to do a reading or lead a song.

More experienced *ressies* may *ad lib*, but most read from sheets of material prepared beforehand. The range of leaders' flair, eloquence, and imagination hinges on their self-confidence and personal talents. *Ressies* understand the Pilgrimage's importance and organise their 'script' with great care to make it interesting and accessible. Each has their own style and co-leaders negotiate over how to adapt the 'script'. Newer *ressies* tend to defer to more experienced leaders, but all are encouraged to find their own 'voice'. While no one has been castigated for leading the Pilgrimage 'wrongly', it can be difficult for wayward leaders to be discovered—i.e., unless a pilgrim 'tells' on them, especially repeat pilgrims who may feel they 'know better' than *ressies* what the Pilgrimage *should* be like.

As a consequence of leaders' skill, knowledge, and personal preference, plus other factors like the weather and combination of participants, Pilgrimages vary from week to week. During a week with younger guests at the centres, it may be intentionally 'less wordy' and more interactive. Less mobile guests might be offered an alternative 'on-road' or Abbey Pilgrimage. In a sense, the Pilgrimage is 'reinvented' every week and is intended to be a fluid event, reflecting the people and circumstances that constitute it. As such, no 'standard' Pilgrimage really exists.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, and as this Iona Pilgrimage has never before been brought to academic attention, I will outline the 'circular' route most ascribed during my fieldwork, describe each stop, and cite the main points, giving examples of a few leaders' 'reflections'. Throughout, Eade and Sallnow's (1991) classic 'person-place-text' pilgrimage triad, and Coleman and Eade's (2004) emphasis on 'movement', will be explored where relevant.



Fig 7.2 On 'Pilgrimage day', participants gather expectantly outside the Abbey

Getting Started: The Preliminaries

Since MacLeod's time, the Pilgrimage has begun at St Martin's Cross. On Pilgrimage day, the church bell is rung at 10.00 AM as a signal for people to gather at the Abbey.

Pilgrimage leaders welcome the group, introduce the staff, and give thorough 'health and safety' warnings about temperamental weather conditions and walking over rough, sometimes steep, terrain. Footwear and raingear are also checked. People are asked to stay close as getting lost is easy, to lend a helping hand, and to look out for one another in the 'spirit of pilgrimaging together'. Leaders carry bright yellow vests for easier identification and walkie-talkies to communicate with the Front Office in case of emergency; ressiess take their responsibility for people's safety seriously.⁴ On occasion, a rescue helicopter has been flown in to take the injured to hospital on the mainland.

⁴ For liability reasons, the Pilgrimage cannot be 'properly advertised' as a formal 'guided' event. Because not all staff are qualified outdoor guides or trained in First Aid, the Community cannot assume complete responsibility for participants. As such, the name and 'essence' of the Pilgrimage have been retained, while strict safety instructions are given and participants made to understand the nature of the activity as a 'come along if you want to' affair.

Ressies tell pilgrims they will have several opportunities along the way to discontinue the Pilgrimage if they wish, that ‘it’s the participation that counts, not necessarily the completion’ of the walk. Most people nevertheless like the challenge of finishing the event, even without a badge, certificate, or other external recognition of having done so. Their reward is in the personal sense of achievement and an informal elevated social status (see, e.g., Turner & Turner 1978: 9, 15) amongst families and friends and in their home churches: to have come to Iona and ‘done’ the weekly Pilgrimage is to have ‘properly’ and uniquely experienced the place. After the preparatory talk, the leaders direct pilgrims’ attention to their first object of interest.



Fig 7.3 The ressie leader explains the significance of St Martin’s Cross

St Martin’s Cross

Pilgrims are introduced to the only complete original ancient high cross on the island still standing, erected sometime between 750 and 800 (Ritchie & Fisher 2001: 6). The saint was a fourth-century, Hungarian-

born Roman soldier who, after giving half his cloak to a ‘disabled person’ or beggar, had a vision of Christ. After his conversion, Martin ‘became known for his conscientious objection to serving in the Roman army’ and later ‘as Bishop of Tours, he played an important role in the mission to the Celts’ (Millar 1997: 8). Ressies sometimes link St

Martin's 'conscientious objection' to war and violence with MacLeod's pacifism and the Iona Community's anti-nuclear stance and tell how the saint's compassion towards the beggar is reflected in the Community's concern for marginalised people in society.



Fig 7.4 The west face of St Martin's Cross shows Old Testament scenes; its centre depicts the Virgin and Child

Ressies always explicate the Celtic designs on the Cross (see Fig 7.4). Following Millar (*ibid.*: 9), they claim the ring on Celtic crosses originated on Iona before spreading to Ireland⁵ and might represent eternity or the importance of the sun in pre-Christian beliefs. Some leaders tell how MacLeod used to turn around the silver Celtic cross in the Abbey so that the circle faced 'outwards' because he believed 'creation' came first before Christ's incarnation—this story is used to illuminate the Community's environmentalism. Ressies explain how High Crosses, like St Martin's Cross, were erected in the pre-Christian tradition of standing stones at sites 'considered to be cosmic entrance and exit points, areas where the

material and spiritual world came into especially close contact' (Millar 1997: 8); this idea resonates with MacLeod's famous declaration that 'Iona is a thin place'. Ressies usually say a prayer asking that 'on our pilgrimage today we [will] look at the spiritual at the heart of the physical world' (*ibid.*: 9).

⁵ However, the origins of the Celtic cross have also been linked with St Patrick and the Roman use of the chi-rho symbol.

Leaders explain the importance of pilgrimage to the Celts, symbolising an inner journey of perpetual exile and a quest for Christ. Pilgrims are to emulate this vision on their own peregrination around the island today. At the end of the leaders' reflection, a song or chant is typically taught to the pilgrims, such as the South African traditional, 'We are marching in the light of God'. The Pilgrimage leader then forges ahead, as people sing together heartily traipsing behind her or him. Pilgrims begin to mingle with those walking beside them and the initial burst of enthusiastic singing trails naturally into friendly conversation.



Fig 7.5 Clad in raingear and sturdy boots, pilgrims embark on the Pilgrimage; coming almost full circle, the final stop will be St Oran's Chapel, the building in the background

The Nunnery

After leaving the Abbey gate, the route follows the paved road towards the Nunnery straight ahead. The Pilgrimage halts amongst the beautifully preserved ruins and converted flower gardens, for which Historic Scotland is now responsible. Resses explain the Nunnery was dedicated to St Mary the Virgin; Irish Augustinian canonesses may have provided initial training for novices, while West Highland families entered their unmarried

daughters into the convent (MacArthur 1995: 37). Although built around the time the Benedictine Abbey was established, few historical records about the Nunnery exist—in contrast to the wealth of information on the Abbey. Most of the nuns were buried anonymously, but occasionally a ressie tells of Prioress Anna Maclean who died in 1543 and whose memorial tablet was much admired by early travellers (*ibid.*: 37).



Fig 7.6 Crowded amongst the Nunnery ruins, pilgrims listen to (and videotape) the Pilgrimage leaders

Ressies ask pilgrims to reflect on ‘the neglect of women in a society and Church of male domination’. The Nunnery is situated near the heart of local life beside the primary school, doctor’s surgery, the post office, and village hall—much as women, unseen and unsung, are often the lifeblood of human social life, although ‘not in the places of power’ (The Iona Community 2001a: 165). Sometimes, the allegedly gender-balanced ‘Celtic Church’ is mentioned here as a celebration of both the feminine and masculine. Ressies ask pilgrims to imagine the undocumented lives of the women who dwelled in the spaces where they now stand:

These walls now remind us of all the silent and hidden women of history for whom we give thanks to God. They also speak to us of all the women who today are struggling for freedom and justice, often in places of poverty and exploitation. (Millar 1997: 23–4)

The 2001–2002 Wardens always shared how the Community, too, was culpable, only admitting its first woman Member in 1969, a year *later* than the Church of Scotland admitted female priests. Furthermore, the Nunnery was not part of the original route MacLeod devised—he used to ‘stride right past the Nunnery as if it weren’t even there’.

Pilgrims also consider the other unheard ‘voices’ of marginalised people, including children, the poor, refugees, and the disabled. A humorous dramatic reading ‘God and Man and Woman’ (see Appendix F) is popularly used by resses to alleviate the reflection’s weightiness. In the spirit of ecumenism, a final benediction some leaders use is ‘Sabbath Prayer’ (see Appendix F), before moving on to the next stop.



Fig 7.7 Pilgrims stop to look back at Martyrs Bay, unaware they are blocking the main road

Martyrs Bay

Leaving the Nunnery, the Pilgrimage passes the village hall, as the paved road gradually becomes a track rising to a small hillock. From that height

advantage, the leader stops so people can look back the

way they came. Turning around, pilgrims take in the panorama of houses, the jetty at St Ronan’s Bay, and to the south-east, Martyrs Bay—where 68 monks were slaughtered by Norse invaders in AD 806. The ‘hallowed’ bay once was the landing place for funeral

processions of royalty and ordinary folk. Ressies describe a war memorial standing north of the bay (unseen from the hillock) commemorating the locals who died in the two World Wars:

Here in this place of violence and death we are reminded of all victims of torture and massacre in our contemporary world, and the continuing need for reconciliation, peace and justice. We will take a few moments of silence now to remember—in the place where we have come from, in the places close to our hearts, in places near and far—the lives broken and bruised, devastated and despairing, because of men and women’s inhumanity to each other...

After the reflection, a ‘Celtic traditional’ prayer (e.g., Millar 1997: 28) is usually said before the Pilgrimage carries on.



Fig 7.8 Pilgrims walking southwards past ‘anonymous’ farm buildings and cottages

The Crossroads

The Pilgrimage wends its way along the track past Maol Farm and Clachancorrach—two local homesteads which go unnoticed. Pilgrims chat with one another until they reach Iona’s only ‘Crossroads’ where leaders again stop. Ressies explain that, in times past, this was a lively meeting place for islanders who stopped to exchange gossip and share news.

The Crossroads is presented to today's pilgrims as both a literal and metaphorical place of choice. Here, they can turn west to the Machair, east towards Sligineach, return the way they came, or continue on the Pilgrimage route. Additionally, resses say the physical Crossroads symbolise life's many 'crossroads', asking pilgrims to think in silence of what dilemmas, trivial or momentous, they currently face and how they might respond to them.



Fig 7.9 Facing north at the Crossroads, Clachancorrach (left) and Maol (right) can be seen in the distance

Although free to do so, rarely does anyone leave the Pilgrimage here. Pilgrims are warned they will soon walk over much rougher ground. As the Pilgrimage moves forward, passing Ruanaich on the right, there is a good stretch of walking as people begin to negotiate wet, muddy terrain. Heads down, eyes scanning ahead, they lend one another a hand to find the least difficult route.



Fig 7.10 Upon leaving the tract, people negotiating a route through the increasingly challenging terrain

Before long, they arrive at a fence and small wooden gate—the first of several they will encounter. After crossing this marked boundary, the Pilgrimage leader pauses for people to catch up.



Fig 7.11 Looking down from Ruanaich, north along the track, to whom do the land, farm buildings, and cottages belong?

Those who look back can see the spread of farmland on either side of the track they had just taken. However, seldom are they able to recognise the buildings and other objects in the landscape and *ressies* almost never name them. All people ‘see’ are a hint of the sea, the rise of Dun-I in the background, and unidentifiable cottages as signs of civilisation in a rural vista about to become ‘wilder’. The land rises higher as *ressies* lead pilgrims over the rocky, often boggy hills of Sliabh Siar.

A ‘High Place’

The Pilgrimage hugs the east coast, aiming for the Marble Quarry. Some leaders first take pilgrims up to Druim Dhùghaill, a high point with a 360° view of the island’s surroundings. They try to spy the Cuillins of Skye in the north, the Paps of Jura in the south, Ben More at 996m on Mull to the east, and Iona’s highest point, Dun-I at 102m. Sometimes, another ‘High Point’ is used later in the Pilgrimage. The focus of the reflection is on discovering new perspectives and on the power of enduring places like mountains:



Fig 7.12 Pilgrims climb to a ‘high place’, their colourful garments standing out against the landscape

By withdrawing from our normal surroundings, our normal viewpoint, we gain a whole new perspective. We see our situation in relation to other things. This is symbolic of stepping back, seeking a distance, before making assumptions, allegations, statements.

A high place is also one of joy and strength. Here we may feel nearer to God. Mountains are strong and faithful, even when clothed in cloud.

Sometimes, the reflection ends with Psalm 121 ('I look up to the mountains; does my strength come from mountains?...') or a prayer for God's blessings of joy and 'liberating power'.



Fig 7.13 The Pilgrimage stretches over relatively dry moorland; each stop allows people to come together again as a group, to reassert the corporate nature of the event

The Marble Quarry

On rainy days, this quite steep feature may be skipped over because of the danger of slipping. Generally, pilgrims can choose to wait at the Valley of the Bull above the Quarry as others head down to it. It is a favourite stop for many people, and repeat pilgrims lament when the risk is too high to chance it.

Situated at the island's south-east corner, the Quarry is known to have been worked sporadically from medieval times or earlier (MarArthur 1990: 31). This outcrop of rare

marble is white, streaked with yellow-green serpentine. It was officially ‘discovered’ in 1789 during an Argyll estate survey, although the Abbey’s original marble table that survived until the mid-18th century was of local origin (*ibid.*). Quarrying recommenced in the early 20th century—to meet the growing souvenir industry—but was interrupted by WWI and shut down permanently (*ibid.*: 203). The Quarry is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) on National Trust land, where the machinery used by the quarrymen are conserved (National Trust for Scotland 2004: 4).

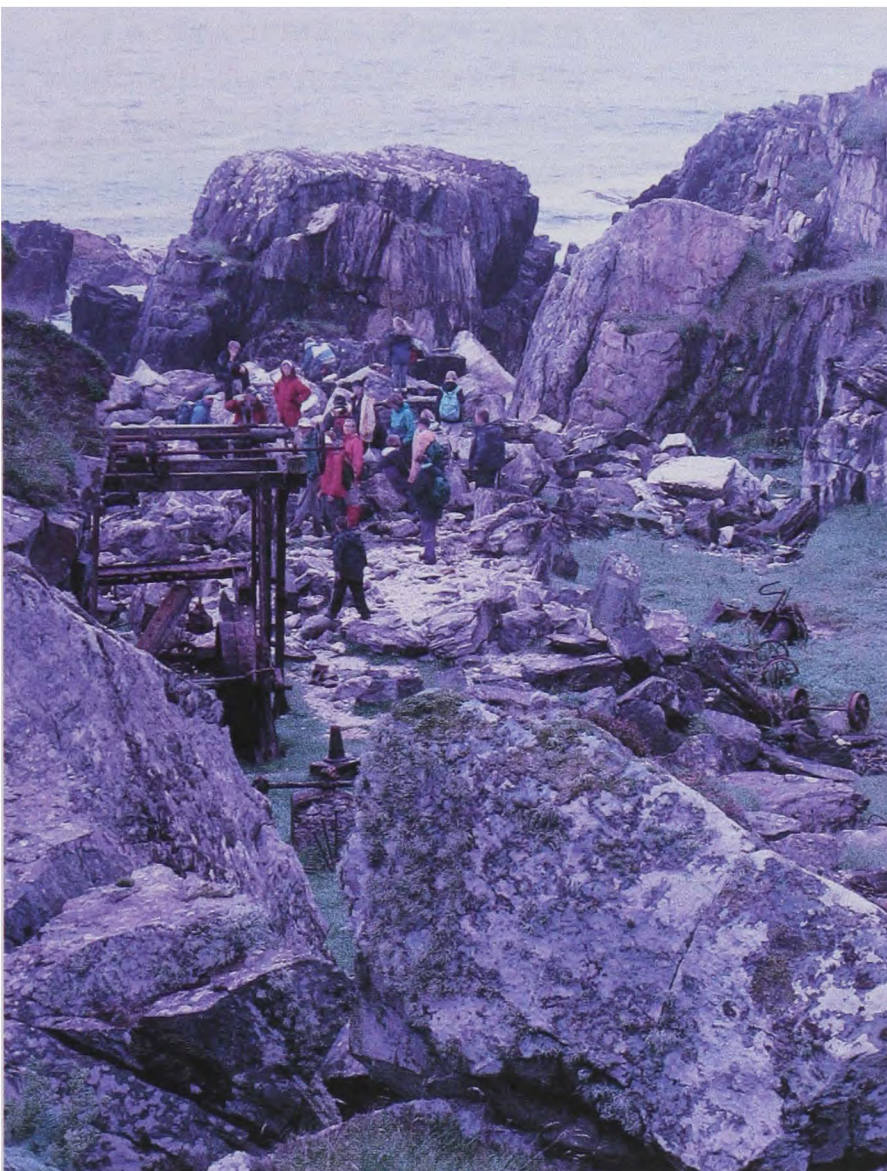


Fig 7.14 Machinery remains preserved at the Marble Quarry; some rersies here discuss the impact of the Industrial Revolution

Leaders point out that the Abbey’s current marble table and baptismal font are made from Iona marble. The Victorians used Iona marble in public buildings, churches, and private homes in the UK and overseas. For example, the communion table in St Andrew’s Church in Jerusalem is also made of it (Ferguson 1990: 124). Pilgrims like to clamber over the broken rocks, searching for small pieces of marble to take as souvenirs. Some sit close to the Quarry’s edge to watch the

waves crashing rhythmically against the boulders. Once people have had a chance to explore the inlet, the leaders gather them together to explain how this is a good place to:



Fig. 7.15 Pilgrims sitting on broken blocks consider the reflection on 'creation'

...reflect on the situation in our world. Natural resources exploited. Human lives broken in pursuit of wealth and power. The hidden workers of the world taken for granted. The local men who worked here, often under extremely harsh conditions. The machinery here remind us of...work that puts food on the table and uses human skills.

This quarry, situated above some of the oldest rocks in the world, reminds us of the earth's evolution over hundreds of millions of years...of our place within creation and our responsibility to care for the

earth. Human life is fleeting and fragile compared to the stone. Yet each of us here is cared for by God, and he has a plan and purpose for our lives. We can give thanks for the goodness of creation, and for the ways we can be co-creators with God.

Sometimes, resses also talk about the need for repentance over how human beings are destroying the earth. Pilgrims are asked to take positive steps to remember this in their daily lives.



Fig 7.16 Pilgrims help one another down a slope

Leaving the Marble Quarry—usually several rocks heavier—the Pilgrimage veers southwest towards Columba's Bay. They go over moorland, then climb down to the flat grazing land leading to the distinctive pebble beach of Port a Churaich.

Columba's Bay

It is usually about 1.00 PM when the Pilgrimage reaches Columba's Bay, and pilgrims are given time to eat their pre-packed lunches. They sit individually and in small groups sometimes with friends but just as likely with total strangers. Some wander about on the hunt for unusual pebbles, especially 'Columba's tears'—small teardrop-shaped, white-green stones people like to believe are formed of Iona marble.



Fig 7.17 Pilgrims having lunch at Columba's Bay; legend says the long grassy ridge is where the saint and his 12 monks buried their curragh

A half-hour later, ressiess congregate people on the beach to recount the legend of Columba's Bay. The bay is where the saint apparently landed on the Day of Pentecost in AD 563. He and his companions climbed to a hill further west of the bay called 'Carn Cùl ri Eirinn' or 'Cairn of the Back to Ireland', from which Columba determined he could not

see his beloved homeland.⁶ Iona thus became the base for his famous mission, first to the Picts in the north, then the Anglo-Saxons in Northumbria, and across Europe as far as western Russia (The Iona Community 2001a: 167).

From the 6th century onwards, St Columba has featured prominently in people's motivations for visiting the island; when MacLeod was alive, he too attracted many people to Iona (see Ferguson 1990). Parallels between Columba's and MacLeod's charisma, visionary ambition, and force of personality were often drawn by MacLeod's contemporaries, for good or ill. While many Iona devotees still revere St Columba, especially Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, the weekly Pilgrimage is not focused exclusively on him or on MacLeod but includes many other historical figures—e.g., St Martin, Iona's monks and nuns, the quarrymen, and even pagan Celts. All these characters, however, are included only insofar as they are relevant to the stops and help illustrate the Iona Community's political persuasions.

Instead of one historical person, what fascinates many Iona enthusiasts is a present-day, worshipping *community* of people. The Iona Community's *enacted* ideals arouse people's curiosity and aspirations, and the West Highlands and Islands *setting* is the ultimate icing on the cake, à la *Castaways* with a spiritual twist. 'Place' and 'practice' come together to form a virtually irresistible magnet for up to 200,000 visitors annually—many of whom aspire to attend the weekly Pilgrimage.

Here, at Columba's Bay, Pilgrimage leaders introduce the 'Iona Gloria' to pilgrims, an evocative 'ancient' chant that Iona's monks supposedly used when starting a missionary journey—those on the shore sang it responsively with the missionaries in the boats until out of earshot of each other (*Common Ground* 1998: No. 64).

⁶ It is possible Columba first landed on islands south of Iona, from which he could still see Ireland, before finally deciding on Iona. According to locals, this bay is one of the island's most dangerous, casting doubt on whether or not Columba really landed here and whether his arrival was intentional or accidental.

The Turners (1978: 10) explain how pilgrimage ‘root paradigms’ draw on crises in the founder’s life as experiences all believers can share in. Similarly, resses describe Columba’s pivotal decision at the Bay where he apparently finally decided to abandon his old life in Ireland to begin a fresh one on Iona; for today’s pilgrims, this small bay also can be a place of ‘new beginnings’:

It is said that he buried his coracle in the bay here [hence, the name ‘Port a Churaich’], in order to be sure of not going back to a former life. No second thoughts!

Perhaps we could all benefit too from letting go of something we no longer need, something that weighs us down? Regrets, angers, hurts, worries, unhelpful habits or thought patterns...?



Fig 7.18 Pilgrims listen earnestly to the legend of St Columba told by a ressie

Leaders then invite people to pick up two stones: one to cast into the sea as a symbol of something they wish to surrender and the other to take home ‘as a sign of a new commitment in our heart’ (Millar 1997: 39).



Fig 7.19 Pilgrims stride to the water's edge to perform the suggested ritual



Fig 7.20 Pilgrims throw their stones into the sea, lingering to contemplate their act

After this ritual, the leaders move the Pilgrimage on. Having come to the island's southern end, from the bay the Pilgrimage continues its way northwest across grazing land and up along a footpath towards the Machair.



Fig 7.21 Pilgrims making their way along the sheer footpath

Loch Staonaig

At the periphery of a fenced-off loch, the leader comes to a stop. Following Millar's (1997) translation, *ressies* say 'Staonaig' is Gaelic for 'rocky pool'.⁷ Peat-coloured and high in mineral content, it was Iona's main water supply until 1992 when water began to be piped in under the sea from Mull.

Ressies tell how pre-Christian Celts believed divinities

lived in rivers and lochs and regarded springs and wells as healing and sacred. Christian Celts also associated wells with certain saints and 'the sea played a significant role in the spirituality of Columba and his fellow monks'; *ressies* cite the examples of St Cuthbert and St David who waded into the sea to chant psalms (Millar 1997: 33). Following this tradition, MacLeod had also compelled his 'Iona men' to take an early morning invigorating dip in Iona's waters.

Pilgrimage leaders describe the significance of water in Christianity (e.g., baptism) and the Bible (e.g., the spirit of God over the 'face of the waters' in Genesis 1, Jesus offering the Samaritan woman the 'water of life' in St John's Gospel). Part of the latter story (John 4: 4–13) is sometimes read aloud to illustrate the gift and importance of 'spiritual' and 'literal' water to human wellbeing. *Ressies* contrast how the West takes for

⁷ MacArthur (1990: 6–7) asserts it is 'inclining ground' and originally referred to the whole area south of the loch.



Fig 7.22 Situated on the common grazing land of south end crofts, Loch Staonaig remains the emergency reservoir

granted easy access to ‘cool, clean, refreshing water’ against war-torn or poverty-ridden places like Sierra Leone where ‘only 25% of its 5 million population has access to safe water and sanitation’; resses point out that many of the world’s poor people walk the distance the pilgrims have trekked today just to collect ‘a jar of dirty water’.



Fig 7.23 Leaders amuse pilgrims with vivid description of the loch’s ‘peaty water’

Unlike conventional pilgrimages, the Bible is only one of many textual sources used to explicate each stop's spiritual meaning. Even the key texts normally associated with Iona—the Book of Kells and Adomnan's *Life of St Columba*—appear to be largely irrelevant. The stories *ressies* tell revolve around the island's religious history and landscape features, as well as the places made 'holy' by association with St Columba (if not quite with MacLeod). *Ressies* are free to incorporate readings from the Bible, but substitutions of other stories and writings (e.g., feminist literature, African or South American prayers), including fiction and poetry, are common. Perhaps surprisingly for a prominent Christian pilgrimage site, no text is universally preferred by Pilgrimage leaders. In some cases, they use stories associated with a site to serve as a devotional focus (e.g., St Columba's Bay and 'new beginnings'); while in others, stories or texts—not always religious—are employed to illustrate a political point (e.g., Marble Quarry and ecological concerns). (See Appendix F for a sample 'political' prayer about water.)



Fig 7.24 After the loch, pilgrims walk to the 'Bay at the Back of the Ocean'

From Loch Staonaig, the Pilgrimage moves over fairly level ground to the shared grazing land on the island's west coast. There will be a refreshment break at the Machair, and leaders encourage the weary to discontinue the Pilgrimage, if they wish, by taking the paved road back toward the village.



Fig 7.25 Pilgrims trailing thinly across the island's 18-hole golf course, kept immaculate by grazing sheep

The Machair

As scheduled, the Iona Community van has already trundled along the paved road to the Machair. By around 2.00 PM, it awaits the tired pilgrims with much-welcomed hot tea and flapjacks; no distinction is made between Community guests and other participants. People mill around, gratefully accepting second helpings from the serving staff. Leaders get a chance to catch up with news from the centres and to check on anyone who might be struggling. After everyone arrives and has rested, the leaders gather people together again.



Fig 7.26 Pilgrims having a refreshment break at the Machair while the others catch up

Ressies explain that ‘Machair’ is Gaelic for ‘raised beach’ and it overlooks the bay known as ‘Camus Cùl an t-Sainth’ (‘Bay at the Back of the Ocean’). The land was used by the Columban monks for agriculture and as a cornfield by the Benedictines. Today, farmers and crofters use it in common for grazing. It is also a golf course, which plays host to an annual competition. Over the centuries, islanders have improved the land using lazybeds and, by rotation, ensured the land was regularly redistributed. Ressies present the Machair as a ‘parable of sharing, of community’:

This symbol of common ownership is in stark contrast to an increasing drive in our society towards private ownership: cars/homes/bank accounts/phones, etc. etc.

Here then we reflect on the huge rift between the haves and the have-nots, and the ancient practice of the people who crofted here in a sustainable way—that sharing carries with it an inner wisdom.

Another ressie, who works in the kitchens, talks about the Fairtrade Movement and unfair global trading practices, concluding with another politically inspired prayer (see Appendix F).



Fig 7.27 Pilgrims listen to the reflection as a farmer drives by on his tractor; some leaders relate the Highland Clearances to the contemporary situation of asylum seekers and refugees

Ressies warn pilgrims that the rest of the Pilgrimage after the Machair will take another hour and a half and involves rougher ground than before. Leaders emphasise to pilgrims how far they have already travelled and achieved, so no one should feel pressured to push



Fig 7.28 A golfer plays a round in the distance as (most) pilgrims bow in prayer

themselves to complete the entire route.

Following the lead of the Wardens, ressies downplay ‘destination’ and promote the aim of the Pilgrimage—and pilgrimage in general—

as the actual ‘journeying together’ that counts. This model of pilgrimage, prioritising process over arrival, is frequently lauded by today’s Celtic Christian revivalists as being closer to the Irish *peregrini* tradition of lifelong pilgrimage, which they believe is

especially relevant for addressing the rootlessness of ‘postmodern’ times. Here, several people usually choose to walk back on the paved road or hitch a lift with the Community van, but about two-thirds, including children and elderly people, are always up for the challenge.



Fig 7.29 Re-energised, pilgrims march towards the hills of Sliabh Meadhonach, the farm buildings of Culbhuirg ‘unseen’ by them

If the Pilgrimage did not go up Druim Dhùghail earlier on, they now head up to Cnoc Fada for the ‘High Place’ reflection. First, though, pilgrims reach another fence and stile they must shin over. For most of them, these boundary markers are little more than minor obstacles to overcome—raising scant curiosity about whose private land or property they demarcate. The island is typically regarded by visitors—and many staff—as entirely ‘public’.



Fig 7.30 Pilgrims queue at the first stile—entering a local's land (Culbhuirg) from the Machair

The landscape starts to rise again into rocky hills, thick with heather in the summertime. Pilgrims must cross another fence and stile, which again arouse minimal inquisitiveness. The undulating land throws up boot-sucking bogs and moors, giving pilgrims plenty of opportunities to help one another through difficult spots—always cheerfully and with much humour.



Fig 7.31 Pilgrims approach another fence and second stile—from local's farmland (Culbhuirg) onto common grazing land

The Hermit's Cell

The next stop on the route is the Hermit's Cell. Usually, at the 'High Place' on Cnoc Fada, leaders ask pilgrims to walk down to the ring of stones in complete silence. They are to alert their senses to the sounds, sights, and smells normally unattended to, to be *mindful* of their surroundings.

The silence is also in recognition of the purpose of sites like the Hermit's Cell—as places of solitude where monks (and nuns) spent time alone in prayer and meditation.



Fig 7.32 Pilgrims walk silently to the small ring of circles (right); in the past, locals used the large stone semi-circle (left, at the base of Dun-I) as a stock enclosure during poor weather

Going through a small gate, they slowly all arrive to sit within the stone circle, listening to the whistling wind and keeping the ‘sacred’ silence.

Speaking solemnly, resses explain that the Gaelic name (‘Cobhan Cùilteach’) for what is popularly known as the Hermit's Cell means ‘secluded hollow’ in English. Several similar stone foundations are also scattered around the island, which were either temporary houses or animal shelters/enclosures. Tradition has bestowed upon the Hermit's Cell an exclusively religious role, but locals probably reused it as a holding place for herds.

Resses sometimes tell pilgrims that:

If this was a place that sheltered animals, rather than monks, it still has sacred significance. Over the centuries, the cow and her calf within the island's economy were truly rich gifts from the Creator's hand. (Millar 1997: 41)



Fig 7.33 Pilgrims sit quietly at the Hermit's Cell; the fence separates local farmland (Cuilbuirg) from common grazing land

Whatever its history, this spot has invited the prayers and meditations of innumerable pilgrims. Here also today's pilgrims are to stop and be silent. A few minutes are given for people to absorb the atmosphere and imagine what it might have been like to dwell

here alone, in contemplation. Tucked between the hills, pilgrims cannot espy any signs of 'civilisation' or 'modernity', and only the presence of Dun-I helps orient them to their location. The utter silence enhances the feeling of remoteness and seclusion. The following popular 'Celtic blessing' is usually pronounced:

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the shining stars to you,
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you. (cited in Millar 1997: 43)

Leaving the Hermit's Cell, pilgrims backtrack their steps through the gate, the back-marker being careful to close and latch it. The leader takes pilgrims round the back of the MacLeod Centre as they aim for the next stop at the Reilig Odhrain, the graveyard beside the Abbey.



Fig 7.34 Tired pilgrims on the last leg of the route, over Maol farmland, walk singly or in small groups



Fig 7.35 To the left lies the Iomaire Tochair embankment, but pilgrims' gaze are fixed on the muddy ground and the Abbey ahead

Along the way, pilgrims pass the Iomair Tochair on the left, an artificial embankment leading from the ancient monastery vallum. Archaeologists speculate it might have been built as a causeway or bridge across the landscape or as a dam or for a water-meadow. Whatever its purpose, it was one of the many ways in which the monks cleverly managed the resources of the land (MacArthur 1995: 14). Pilgrims walk beside this feature of the landscape, barely 'seeing' it as they

chat with one another, feel relief at leaving the bogs behind, and drum up the energy to finish the route. The MacLeod Centre and Abbey are en route, so a few guests sometimes skip the final stop for a headstart on the shower queue. Of those faithfully proceeding to St Oran's Chapel, some are already considering the evening's activities, exchanging contact details, and making dinner plans.

To reach St Oran's Chapel, pilgrims must walk through the Reilig Odhrain, the ancient cemetery of Iona, the burial place of chiefs and kings during the 9th–11th centuries.



Fig. 7.36 The Reilig Odhrain, now the locals' cemetery

St Oran's Chapel

By the time everyone arrives, the small stone chapel is crammed full of people, lined up against the walls, squashed onto the benches, and sitting side-by-side on the cold stone floor. This physically intimate setting reflects pilgrims' growing emotional closeness to one another at the tail end of the Pilgrimage. A small window on the south wall lets in

meagre light, and the building's sensitive acoustics are tested by pilgrims' every squeak and shuffle as they settle themselves. The chapel is renowned for its 'atmosphere'—druids and neo-pagans are known to perform late-night ceremonies here.

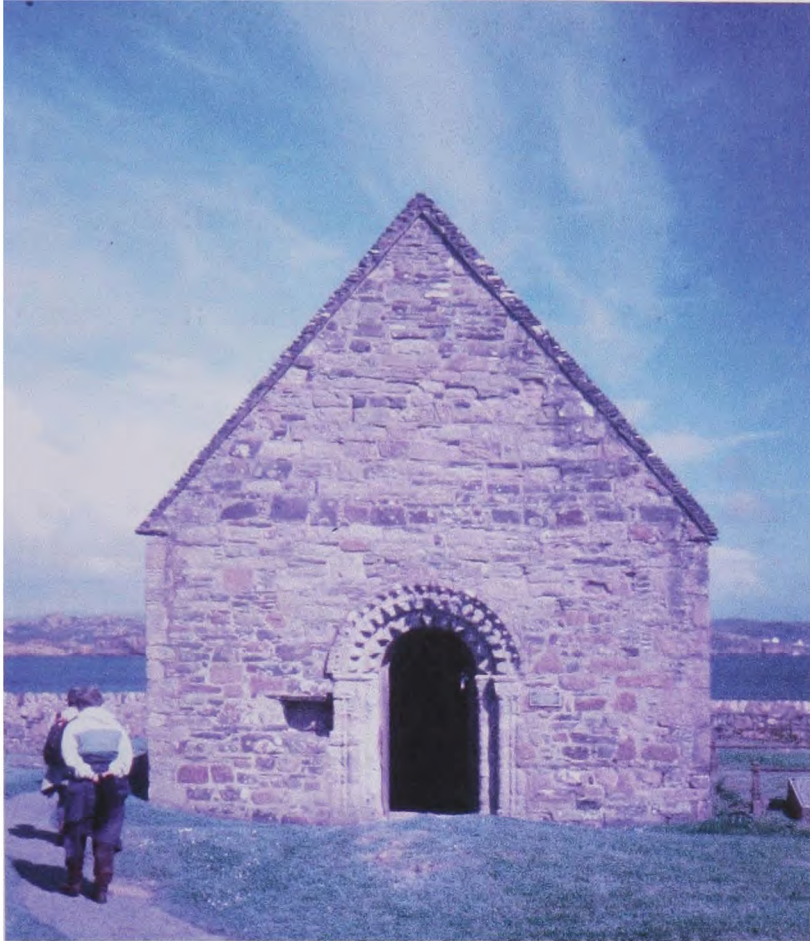


Fig 7.37 Pilgrims enter St Oran's Chapel, the final stop—but not the destination

St Oran's Chapel is the oldest building on the island. It was constructed in the 12th century, possibly by one of the ruling families of the time, as a family tomb (MacArthur 1995: 43). It is named after a cousin of Columba, Oran, who was one of the first Columban monks to die and be buried on Iona.⁸

Some resses like to recount the gruesome tale of Oran being buried alive as a sacrifice to ensure the

mission's success. Three days later, Columba opened the grave to see what had happened to Oran. Still alive, Oran exclaimed, 'There is no wonder in death, and hell is not as it is reported'. Columba was apparently so shocked that he had Oran hurriedly reburied (see Sharpe 1995b: 360–2)! Some resses (and many pilgrims) enjoy this deliciously irreverent story, which they also feel resonates with the Iona Community's own sense of humour.

Pilgrims learn that, for protection and conservation purposes, the ancient graveslabs were removed from the surrounding cemetery to the Cloisters and the (Infirmary) Museum on the other side of the Abbey. Depending on the ressie, sometimes the myth that '48 Scottish kings, 8 Norwegian, 4 Irish and many Lords of the Isles rest

⁸ Adomnan does not mention him, but the story is widely known in the Highlands and Islands (see MacArthur 1995: 25) and probably reflects the 'interweaving of pre- and post-Christian belief that underlies much of Gaelic tradition'.

here' is repeated, but some leaders emphasise that exact numbers are uncertain for 'on Iona legend and fact are not easily disentangled' (Millar 1997: 46).

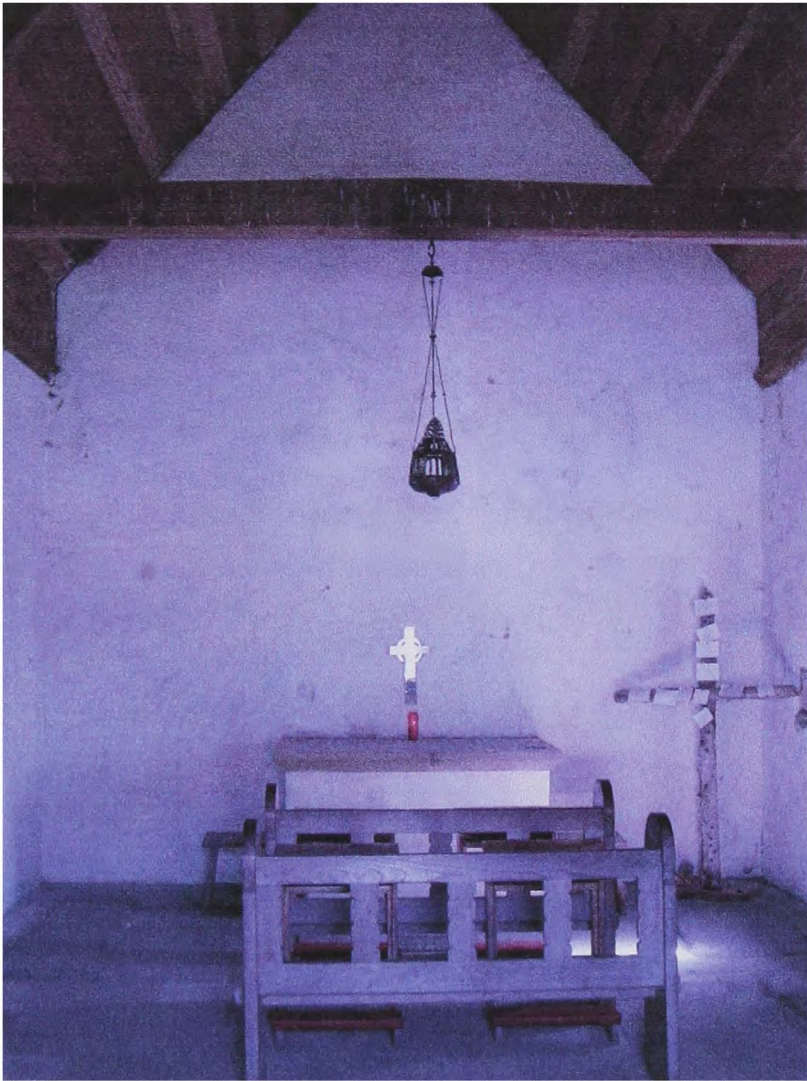


Fig 7.38 Inside St Oran's Chapel, sans pilgrims. A New Age hotel-worker who regularly uses the chapel complained this arrangement is too 'institutional'; the benches usually line the chapel's sides creating a more 'open' setting

For the more religiously minded, this final stop at St Oran's Chapel echoes the traditional Stations of the Cross, which also ends in a burial place. Ressies share the following reflection:

A graveyard may seem an odd place to end our Iona pilgrimage but in the Christian church we celebrate that it was in a graveyard that our resurrection faith began, and it is often in places of death and apparent hopelessness that new beginnings emerge.

Our prayer is that through the self-giving and deaths of Oran and Columba and the many other women and men who have gone before us, we may be granted the strength and vision to continue on our journeys with Jesus.

Sometimes a poem or story is read (e.g., see Appendix F for 'I Never Wanted to be Born'), but ressies invariably take advantage of the chapel's acoustics by teaching pilgrims a simple song or chant, usually a song of celebration, e.g., the lively South African song, 'Amen Siyakadumisa' ('Amen! Praise the name of the Lord') (*Common Ground* 1998: No. 7). Pilgrims sing enthusiastically as they slowly stream out of the chapel into the graveyard, start to disperse in various directions, and thus come to the close of the Pilgrimage.



Fig 7.39 Easter Sunday on Iona begins with a dramatic re-enactment, at St Oran's Chapel, of the story of Christ's resurrection

The Pilgrimage event—lasting about seven hours—often finishes close to 5.00 PM, in time for daytrippers to catch a ferry back to Mull. Other participants wander off to their respective dwellings, and Pilgrimage leaders head to the Abbey Front Office to return their gear and debrief a little. Those ‘pilgrims’ staying at the Community centres rush to scrub up in time for the 6.00 PM evening meal.

For guests and resses alike, the weekly Pilgrimage is a favourite highlight of their ‘Iona experience’. In keeping with the general focus of this thesis, however, the Pilgrimage is now analysed from the perspective of those who organise and lead it, bringing to the foreground what is usually hidden behind-the-scenes in accounts of pilgrimage.

Leading the Pilgrimage

‘... There Are Still Places I Haven't Been’

Generally, resses agree with the Pilgrimage content and goals. New staff tend to be nervous, eager to learn everything in order to ‘get it right’. They are on a steep learning

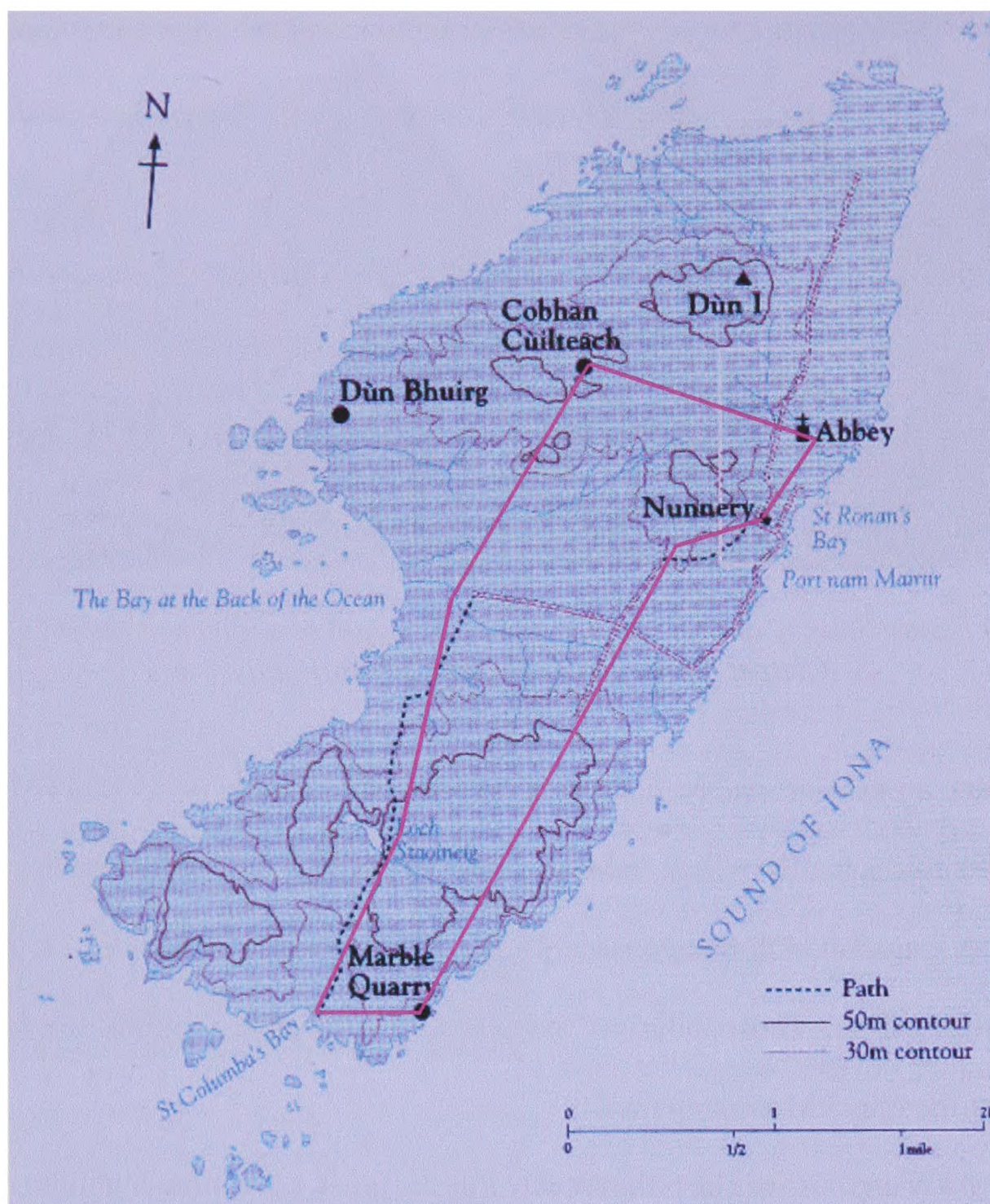


Fig 7.40 Map of Iona showing today's 'circular' weekly Pilgrimage route

curve as the season starts shortly after Staff Training. Already sympathetic to the Community's goals, it becomes more a technical matter for resses to master the Pilgrimage's content and format. Once they grasp the basics, variations can be added. Some resses focus more on helping pilgrims reflect on their 'inner journey', giving minimal historical facts, while others are more conscientious about chronicling local and religious history. A rare few dare to experiment with the route or try out new material. Staff witnessing or hearing of a particularly 'good' or 'popular' variation often ask the innovator for details. It may be added to the 'Pilgrimage folder' where it is 'recycled' and

used afresh by future generations of resses. Less favoured material may, over time, fade from usage. All this contributes to the Pilgrimage's fluidity and susceptibility to change.

While the Pilgrimage is intended to sum up 'within the compass of a single event, the Iona experience and the Community's understanding of spirituality' (Shanks 1999: 93), it also constructs and enhances people's sense of themselves as 'pilgrims' and of the place as a 'sacred' landscape. Following Heidegger's determinacy of locality, movement serves to constitute place (Lee 2004: 2). On Iona, the weekly Pilgrimage is a specific kind of movement or form of 'dwelling'. Unsurprisingly, post-Pilgrimage, pilgrims claim to feel a stronger, more comprehensive connection with the island *as a place*—and with the divine. Ressie leaders, too, are similarly affected.

Because resses' lives are concentrated within the two centres, the Pilgrimage is one major chance for them to venture out into the wider Iona landscape:

...the pilgrimage made you realise the island was a lot bigger than you thought. You could get used to going from the jetty to the shop to the Abbey and thinking that's all there was...

Those whose jobs confine them to an office or kitchen or who are not directly involved in the guest programme particularly welcome the opportunity the Pilgrimage provides to mingle with guests, visitors, and vollies—during the event itself and as a talking point afterwards. Many resses feel the Pilgrimage is crucial in better acquainting them with the island. One three-year ressie admitted that, were it not for leading the Pilgrimage, she 'would not have gotten to know the island as well'. On the other hand, her experience and familiarity of the island was also *confined* to places on the route. She seldom visited other sites of interest (e.g., the North End beach), precisely because 'no one had showed them' to her or how to get there. Another ressie echoes this view: '...for such a small island you

wouldn't think things could remain hidden, but there are still places on Iona I haven't been'.

For *ressies*, the Pilgrimage can both extend and circumscribe their *engagement* with Iona. Some are 'more adventurous' to explore other parts of the island, but the reality is many do not have time or energy to venture out on their own. In a sense, leading the Pilgrimage evokes the feeling of having 'done' the island, perhaps incompletely, but nevertheless having covered all the 'important' sites (e.g., Columba's Bay, Marble Quarry). Feeling they have 'seen enough' of Iona, *ressies* can reserve days off for resting or visiting Mull or another neighbouring island. On their days off, many *ressies* feel a strong need to get away from wherever they may be *recognised* as a 'ressie'; such 'island fever' compels them to leave Iona as frequently as possible. Having 'done' the Pilgrimage, in a sense, gives them the necessary 'excuse' to escape the island during their time off.

The Pilgrimage also expands and restricts *ressies*' *knowledge* of Iona. Certainly, some *ressies* devour information about its history, geology, archaeology, etc. and reflect such details in their presentations. They see the Pilgrimage as a starting point from which they can gain a wider understanding of the island, the region, and the country. One *ressie*, who loves walking, had seized the opportunities when she was a guest and a *vollie* to explore the place and local history:

So I felt I knew my 'way around'...the island before I lead my first pilgrimage. I love maps so I quickly knew some place names. Getting to know the locals and where they live I found out about croft and place names.

...preparing [for] the pilgrimage made me look on the map and find out about [Gaelic] place names and their meaning. Being on the pilgrimage I also got interested in what I saw and would look it up later.... my relationship with [a local], and through that the acquaintance with other people living full time on the island, enlarged my knowledge about the island. I also read some of M. MacArthur's books and other literature about Iona.

Now married to the local, she is one of a few *ressies* who has integrated well into the island community. The majority of *ressies* do not engage with the landscape and people in such depth. Most take at face value what they are told about the Pilgrimage stops and repeat it verbatim to pilgrims. *Ressies* on one-year contracts follow the ‘script’ quite rigidly. The intensive pace of Resident Group life also limits people’s enthusiasm for ‘enlarging their knowledge’ about place names and local geography.

While a handful are confident ‘from day one’ to lead from the front, most *ressies* are urbanites somewhat nervous about finding their way on open land. Lack of familiarity with rural landscapes in general and Iona’s landscape specifically—its seemingly obscure features and what they *mean*—is a source of anxiety for *ressies*, especially the fear of getting lost. Looking at a map is not sufficient to navigate the route on the ground—learning how to *see* and identify markers in the landscape is a crucial skill for ‘wayfinding’ (Lee 2004: 5–6; see also Gell 1985). One *ressie* invented an ‘alternative geography’ to help leaders recognise and memorise the route. Inspired by the shapes of two rock formations, for example, she cheekily christened them, ‘Columba’s teeth’ and ‘Columba’s balls’; situated on the way to Columba’s Bay, they indicate proximity to the mouth of the Marble Quarry. This tongue-in-cheek appropriation of features of the land serves as a mnemonic aid for *ressies* finding their way in Iona’s ‘lived landscape’.

Many *ressies* feel hampered by the responsibility of leadership, worried about the ‘...safety of guests, what I’m saying, timings, looking out for people who don’t seem to have anyone to talk to, or whom I haven’t yet connected with during the week...’. Unlike the pilgrims whom *ressies* believe have a much more ‘relaxing and reflective’ experience, leading the pilgrimage is challenging, hard work. Many felt it was nonetheless ‘part of [their] personal journey’, too, through the process of introducing the island to participants, walking together across the terrain, sharing ‘some very powerful and deep stories’, and

‘talking with fellow travellers’. One ressie reflected, ‘I nearly always felt I had travelled on a bit, spiritually’ while another shared, it was ‘a pilgrimage into myself’. Although ressie leaders themselves are highly visible during the Pilgrimage, how the event affects them personally can remain unexpressed or hidden. Some incorporate their own convictions in the Pilgrimage meditations, while others prefer to keep to the ‘script’ and retain more emotional distance. Leading the Pilgrimage inevitably makes ressie leaders vulnerable to criticism, which can add pressure on leaders.

‘...A Bit of Drama and Showmanship...’

Some ressie leaders are averse to leading the pilgrimage, whether out of shyness, physical limitations, or simply that it fell on their day off. Those who did participate said it was ‘an excellent way to spend a working day’, out of the office, away from other duties, to savour the fresh air and breathtaking beauty of the island: ‘It never felt like work’. Leaders also tend to be more recognised by guests and visitors afterwards, informally enhancing their social prestige, including amongst the volleys. Ressie leaders felt honoured that people were willing to ‘follow and trust’ them, that it was a ‘privilege’ because ‘how many job descriptions have “leading pilgrimages” in them?’

Many ressie leaders feel the Pilgrimage narratives they are taught serve to unlock certain meanings that are ‘hidden’ in Iona’s landscape. While the Iona Community choose the Pilgrimage’s ethos and the main prescribed stops, ressie leaders can also select which narratives to tell and hence which meanings pilgrims are to ‘discover’. This hierarchy of power (exercised implicitly) shapes and demarcates what people within the Community’s spheres of influence understand about Iona and asserts a particular way of engaging with the landscape. The Community ‘interpret’ Iona’s landscape as ‘religio-political’, even as Historic Scotland prescribe their ‘interpretation’ of Iona Abbey as ‘heritage’.

While ressie Pilgrimage leaders generally abide by the Community's 'politicised' approach to the landscape, many also see it as a unique opportunity for creative self-expression. One ressie 'Sam' said the Pilgrimage was:

...a chance for me to express myself a little bit, both creatively (in how I would tell stories and stuff) and also in what MY version of Christianity was free from the constraints or guidelines or a worship book. (original emphasis)

Freedom of self-expression outside the bounds of institutional religion, even outside the 'constraints or guidelines' of the Community's 'worship book', most appealed to Sam. The Pilgrimage provided an alternative, creative 'space' within which he could push the boundaries of convention and enact his own understandings of faith and worship. He not only gained a personal sense of liberation and achievement but also garnered the rapt attention of his 'audience', the pilgrims.

A cheeky Glaswegian in his early 20s, Sam cites two incidents of which he is particularly proud. The first took place at the Hill of the Angels (near the Machair), where according to Adomnan, Columba had been witnessed surrounded by angels while praying:

...I decided to take the story further back and use that point of the pilgrimage to reconnect with our Celtic/Pictish past cos it was reputed to be a very, very old structure/mound, so I recited the 'ballad of Crom Cruach' and I told them a bit of history and Celtic druid rituals, and I also I admit, spiced up the tales a little for dramatic effect. (To me the pilgrimage was *also a huge part of Theatre, a bit of drama and showmanship to better sell the tale.*) So I throw in some nudity and sex rites and naked virgin slaughtering and what not, and a woman started complaining... that I was slandering her religion (it turns out she was a modern druid) so I had to apologise and say druids did not slaughter virgins (I bet they did!)... (italics added)

As mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6, some ressies feel conflicted about the element of 'theatre' or 'contrivance' in leading Abbey worship—this is true of the Pilgrimage to a lesser extent. Because ressies lead far fewer Pilgrimages than church services each season, plus the unpredictable combination of weather conditions and participants, the Pilgrimage

seldom feels routinised and gives further scope for individual creativity. On the second occasion, at the Machair itself, Sam says:

I told the story of the Highland Clearances, about the great injustice and the suffering endured by the poor and oppressed. I told this tale as we looked out over the mighty grey of the Atlantic towards America...how these same people went on to build some of the mightiest cities in America and thrive and prosper, but how these same oppressed went on to become oppressors and played a part in slavery and the abuse of blacks. I then on that wind-tossed beach read aloud Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream speech' and at the end of it 7 SEPARATE PEOPLE BURST INTO TEARS!!! Yes that's right, my pilgrimage kicked ass!!! (original emphasis)

What comes across so compellingly in both narratives is Sam's flair for storytelling, his sense of humour and pride in being able to sway his audience. His co-leader, one of the Wardens, sometimes had to curb his enthusiasm for the 'sensational and gory'; but on the whole his attitude towards the Pilgrimage as a 'moral journey with us telling a wee Aesops fable type story at each stop' was regarded and received positively. Not every ressie takes the creative liberties Sam did, but his reflections on his experience of leading the weekly Pilgrimage illuminates what pilgrimage looks like from the 'other' side. Pilgrims who think Pilgrimage leaders are strictly spiritually minded may be surprised by some ressie's 'profane' concerns for ego and showmanship that are typical of any performer's 'self'.

But does Sam's case prove that the island is merely a setting upon which to inscribe clever, melodramatic stories? This is what Sam said the Pilgrimage meant for him:

The island is an allegory. That's why it has to be on Iona, because of Iona's unique history it can exist out outside of time, or at all times at once. So we are not actually walking round the island, but round our world our own history. So the first stop takes us to the time of female oppression in the church.... [At the Machair]...I used...to talk about the Highland Clearances, the old stone age ruins further up the hill took us back to an almost primeval sense of ourselves and the island, again reinforcing the idea of the savagery of island life and how precarious life was there rather than some picture postcard.... and finally the Relig Oran. The end, but also the beginning of the pilgrimage... the oldest standing structure on the

island. Like life and death it has been here since the beginning. So at the end of the pilgrimage *you should feel like you've visited lots of different times and places but also at the same time sunk into the soul of Iona.* (italics added)

An 'allegory' is 'a story, poem, or picture which contains hidden meanings' (OED 2002).

If, as Sam claims, 'the island is an allegory', then its multi-layered landscape contains the hidden meanings that leaders' narratives and the physical movement traversing the land, going from stop to stop, unfold and reveal to pilgrims. It is not merely a blank canvass onto which people simply project their longings and fictions; it is not a two-dimensional 'picture postcard'. It is not merely timeless ('it can exist outside of time'), for Iona is also time-full ('at all times at once').⁹ Temporally and spatially, Iona's unique history is embedded in—and embodied by—the landscape. Its features, the ridges and ruins, moors and machinery, rocks, sea, animals, and constructions, are all clues for today's pilgrims to discover *if they know how*. There are many ways of making this discovery, just as there are many discoveries to be made. The Pilgrimage offers one way of traversing the island which overlays with walking 'round our world our own history'. It takes people into 'lots of different times and places but also at the same time sunk into the *soul* of Iona'—whereby pilgrims and leaders, with every footstep, also physically sink into the *soil* of Iona.

Contestations of Place

When more self-assured, resses 'relax into' doing the Pilgrimage and may introduce their own readings or risk an alternate route. For example, some lead the Pilgrimage from the Nunnery along the eastern shore to Martyrs Bay, pausing near the war memorial to reflect on 'violence and death'. Instead of the inland path past Maol and Clachacorrach, these resses come to the Crossroads via Sligineach and the row of cottages and B&Bs strung along the coast. Compared with the regular route, this Martyrs Bay alternative has the

⁹ Another liminal quality (see also Turner 1974: 197).

advantage of bringing pilgrims right to the bay itself. It also passes the public toilets at the jetty and the paved road is easier than the inland track for walking. Choosing one option over another may actually be for banal or practical, rather than ‘spiritual’, reasons. Druim Dhughail and Cnoc Fada are equally good ‘high places’ from which to view the island’s surroundings; neither has any ‘intrinsic’ or historically salient meanings unlike, say, Columba’s Bay.

In a sense, almost anything in Iona’s landscape can be used as a Pilgrimage stop. On one occasion, a ressie leader got lost on the way to the Marble Quarry. Visibility was poor, and he simply could not find the right place to descend to the Quarry. Realising the pilgrims were getting increasingly anxious, he decided to give up looking. Instead, he stopped where they were and improvised a reflection about ‘finding our way’ in life and in faith. This ressie’s response—and the other examples mentioned above—nicely pinpoints the Iona Community’s spirituality that God is to be found in life’s ordinary things and quotidian situations. However, because people *already* regard Iona as a ‘sacred’ place, leaders’ selection of mundane spots for religious meditation ironically serves to enhance pilgrims’ preconceptions. For pilgrims, the narratives resses tell bring alive the spiritual meanings ‘embedded’ in the nooks and crannies of Iona’s landscape, making it seem even more ‘sacred’ and extraordinary. Whatever situation they find themselves in on Iona becomes imbued with special purpose or significance; to them, Iona’s ‘thinness’ manifests itself even in the toughest, most challenging circumstances.

Historic Scotland and the National Trust

In the last few years, resses suggested starting the Pilgrimage in the Cloisters. They felt beginning at the centre of the Abbey buildings was strongly symbolic; leaders could discuss the Lipchitz statue and its link with the Community’s ecumenism and social justice

commitment. Practically, the Cloisters are also a better, sheltered place for pilgrims to gather. However, Historic Scotland decided they were not ‘happy about people clogging up the Cloisters when they’re trying to do their tours, etc.’, so *ressies* have reverted to the original meeting point at St Martin’s Cross.

This situation is a consequence of ‘living with the landlord’, so to speak.

Previously, directly under the Iona Cathedral Trustees, the Community and their staff had more leeway to determine how space within the Abbey buildings was used and defined, whereas any attempt towards improvisation or innovation now must be approved by the state, in the form of Historic Scotland, both in terms of logistics and ‘interpretation’. The assumption underlying Historic Scotland’s decision is that ‘heritage’ has greater right-of-way. The Abbey’s past, in the form of ‘heritage’, is prioritised over the ‘living and breathing worshipping community’ present there today. Maintaining the Abbey as an *historical* place of pilgrimage, preserving a pristine ambience of a quiet, relatively empty religious space—where a few Benedictine monks of old might have roamed—is paramount. Noisy crowds of present-day pilgrims—in many ways looking, acting, and speaking like the visitors themselves—have no place in this re-created, re-interpreted ‘heritage’ space. Visitors, it is presumed, desire the ‘otherness’ of Iona’s (sacred) past. Even when Historic Scotland tours mention the Iona Community, it is usually a brief reference to its origins in the late 1930s.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ironically, the ire some Community Members and staff feel at having ‘their Abbey’ usurped by Historic Scotland is not dissimilar from how locals felt when the Community took over ‘an Eaglais Mhòr’, their cathedral—which they rightfully felt was their own. Historic Scotland’s presence, besides providing more local jobs, has done little else to restore islanders’ connection with the Abbey; both managers to date also have been brought in from the mainland. The agency’s remit to ‘safeguard the nation’s built heritage and to promote its understanding and enjoyment’ (Historic Scotland 2001) targets outside visitors over the Community staff who dwell there and the locals to whom the Abbey’s ‘heritage’ properly belongs.

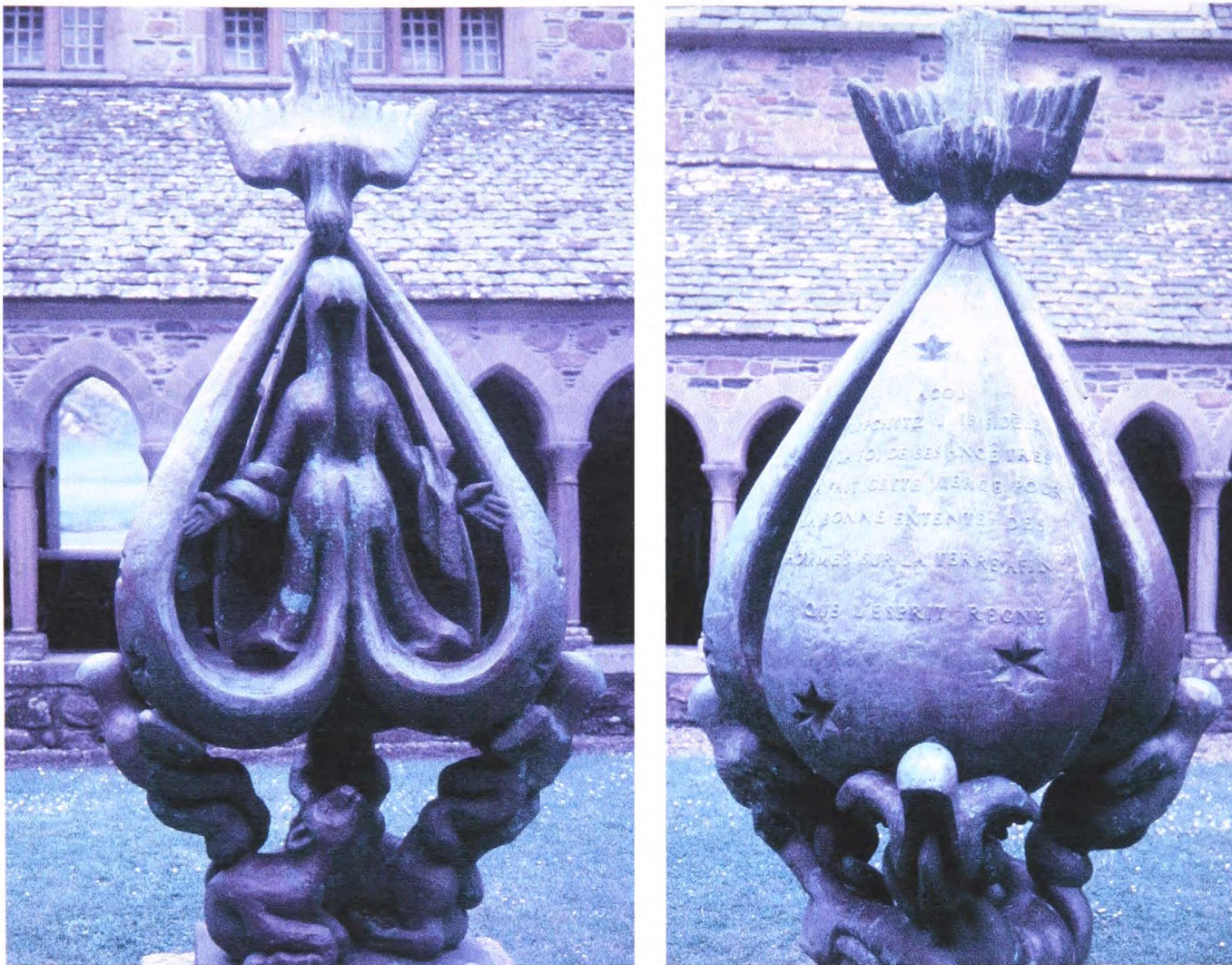


Fig 7.41 Made by a practising Jew, this controversial statue, the 'Descent of the Spirit', was donated to Iona Abbey in 1955; the inscription on the back reads, 'Jacob Lipchitz, faithful to the religion of his ancestors, has made this Virgin for the better understanding of men on earth that the Spirit may reign'¹¹

Since 2003, the National Trust for Scotland has employed an area manager for the Inner Hebrides in order to provide local communities with more face-to-face support to conserve the land and the Scheduled Ancient Monuments. While Historic Scotland are 'live-in landlords' to the Iona Community, the National Trust has, in the past, been like 'absentee landlords' to the islanders. On a recent footpaths consultation, the area manager Pete McHugh addressed an area of local concern related directly to the weekly Pilgrimage: the path between the Machair and Columba's Bay where clear signs of soil erosion are evident. The erosion is as much due to the high density of daily visitors between the two popular spots as to the weekly Pilgrimage. The National Trust's present concern is to find the

¹¹ See Ferguson (1998: 151) and Shanks (1999: 2) for two interpretations of the statue.

resources to correct and prevent more damage.¹² This is partly because, in 2000, the Community had already made a major change to the Pilgrimage route in response to locals' anxiety over this issue.

When the Pilgrimage first began, crofters asked the Community not to use the Ruanaich track to reach the island's south end. The route thus went from the Abbey and Nunnery, west on the paved road to the Machair, south to Loch Staonaig, Columba's Bay, and the Marble Quarry, after which it backtracked the same way to the Machair for lunch, before heading north to the Hermit's Cell and up Dun-I. In recent years, locals had increasingly expressed unhappiness over the damage caused by pilgrims—sometimes 200-people strong—churning up earth and precipitating erosion, especially at Dun-I and the twice-over traipse between the Machair and Columba's Bay. As a result, in 2000, the Warden decided to alter the route to its present-day 'circular' formation. Dun-I was to be left out during lambing season but, due to an unfortunate misunderstanding, it was dropped entirely from the route and replaced by other 'High Place' options.

The Locals

In the past, local attitudes towards the Pilgrimage ranged from 'overwhelming indifference' to hostility—in line with early negative relations between the island community and the Iona Community, which locals deeply felt for a very long time. Today, some still find the Pilgrimage a nuisance because of the hazards caused by large groups standing in the road blocking traffic, trampling over farmland, scaring sheep, leaving gates open, and defacing the land. During the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak (which Iona fortunately escaped), local farmers were understandably concerned over so many outsiders entering their land. The Wardens offered to limit or cancel the Pilgrimage, but locals gave

¹² Pete McHugh, personal communication, telephone, 11 July 2006.

permission for it to continue. The Community agreed to ensure guests were disinfected and to contain ‘overly energetic’ pilgrims from straying outside certain bounds. The farmers commented, ‘We knew the Abbey would be supportive’. Largely because of recent Wardens’ efforts, the historically frosty relationship between the Community and the islanders has warmed significantly. Locals also accept the reality of needing to strike a fine balance between protecting their animals and keeping up the mainstay of their economy, tourism.

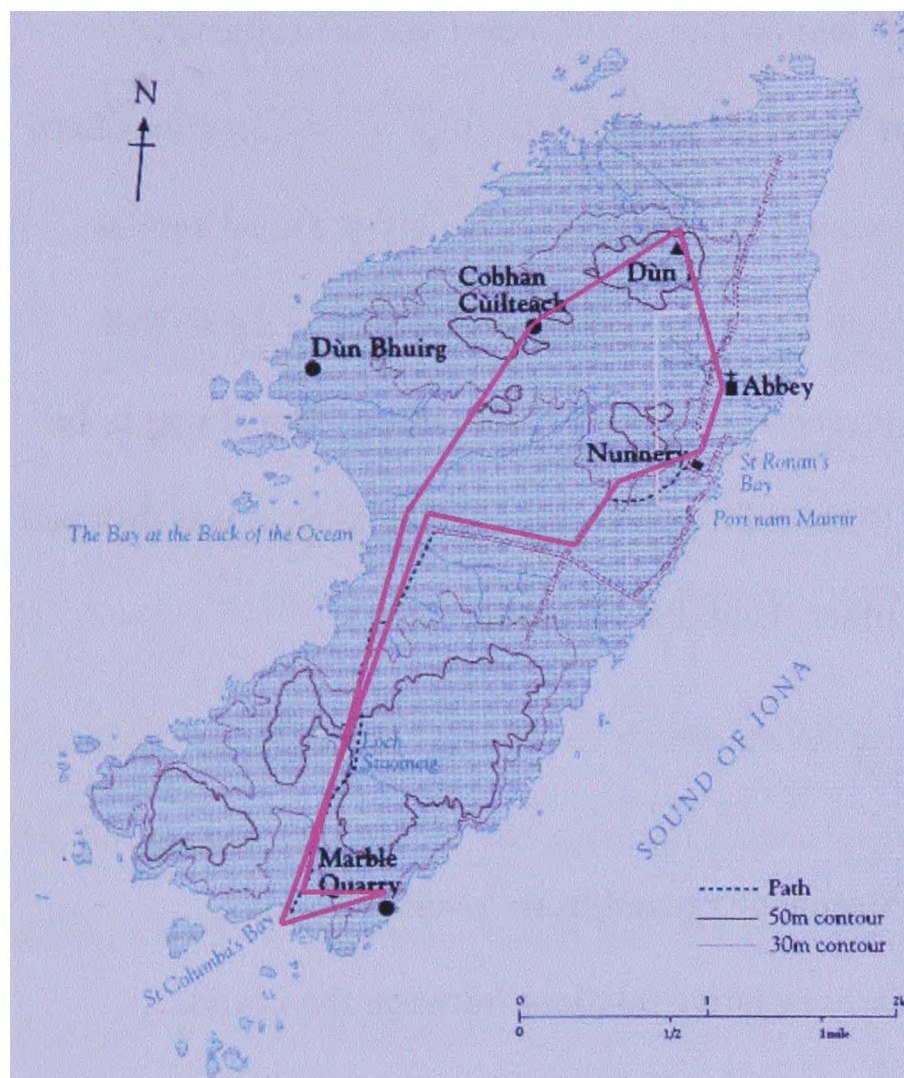


Fig 7.42 Map of Iona showing the pre-2000 weekly Pilgrimage route

In 2002, for reasons mentioned earlier, Pilgrimage day was moved from Wednesdays to Tuesdays. The Community did not consult with the locals on this decision, unaware of its repercussions on the island's B&Bs and shops which provide visitor information, including details of the popular weekly Pilgrimage. On a day-to-day basis, resses and locals actually have very little contact

with one another. Some jobs require more interaction (e.g., the Wardens may attend local Community Council meetings), and individuals who become friends do visit with one another. But, overall, the nature of their respective jobs and the physical distance between the Community centres and the village mean that most resses encounter locals only

sporadically at the jetty, post office, shops, or pub. With a few exceptions (e.g., postman, parish church elder), locals rarely enter the Abbey or the Mac. In many ways, the locals and the Community staff and guests (and many Members, too) inhabit almost entirely separate ‘Ionas’—the social distance between them can be vast.



Fig 7.43 A local's quad bike—astutely observed by one Member-ressie as a modern 'shepherd's crook'

In spite of this, the reality is that each group closely depends on the others. The existence of the local community, their co-operation and support, makes possible the existence of the Iona Community and their staff and guests on the island. More

than that, the locals' way of life, their crofting/farming practices and protectiveness over the land, sustains the kind of 'picturesque', rural Scottish landscape that attracts close to 200,000 visitors per year (Community guests and staff included). The Community, on the other hand, perpetuate the island's religious renown, attracting countless visitors from all over the world who flock to Iona to witness and participate in contemporary 'Celtic' worship and communal living. These visitors are vital to the tourist industry, which is the lifeblood of the local economy *and* the Iona Community who generate a significant income from visitors' purchases at their Bookshop. What visitors spend in the local shops, B&Bs, hotels, boat services, etc. enables islanders to continue crofting and farming the land even when such livelihoods are no longer economically viable. Nothing demonstrates how tightly intertwined these social groups are, despite the tensions between them more clearly than the politics and politicisation of the Iona landscape through the weekly Pilgrimage.

The Politics and Politicisation of Place

Building on an earlier point made by a local, this section delves further into locals' 'overwhelming indifference' to the Pilgrimage. One local 'Susan' insists, 'What on earth is it FOR?' (original emphasis). What is it about this particular practice that many local residents at this pilgrimage site find so confounding? Susan continues:

...it is a strange thing. Why is it a 'pilgrimage' when *there is no journey with a destination?* It's a big circular walk, isn't it?! It is a legacy from George MacLeod, who invented it, and I suppose the staff just keep reinventing it as the years go on...
...I really find the whole 'IC pilgrimage' ritual completely exasperating...
 (italics added)

Susan contends that the island's staunch Presbyterianism resulted in locals, especially the older generations, viewing the concept of 'pilgrimage' as foreign and strange. To them, 'pilgrimage' is identified with other denominations, especially Roman Catholicism, and entails travelling to a special or sacred place like Lourdes or Rome. Although locals recognise Iona is a 'holy' destination for visitors, the weekly Pilgrimage's movements *at* the destination make little sense to them. Susan observes, on the two occasions she attended part of the Pilgrimage, that:

The pilgrimage day was wet and the weather got so bad that, half-way through, at the Machair, it was abandoned...

...Without the invitation...it would never have occurred to me to go on one of the IC's pilgrimages—and *I really mean NEVER!* For a start it just seems *badly out of scale* for such a large group to be marching about all together over such relatively small spaces—groups of a few walkers, or one or two, *are much better suited to the landscape*. And anyway I never had any interest in *transferring religious worship*—prayers, hymns, readings, rituals—*directly onto particular parts of Iona*. Those things seem to me to *belong more properly in church services*. That may perhaps be at the heart of why the older generation regarded 'the pilgrimage' with indifference or even hostility... (original emphasis, italics added)

While a far cry from the sabbatarianism of the Outer Hebrides, Iona locals' religious conservatism nevertheless reacts against the Iona Community's liberalism and associated activities. Certainly, Susan's insistence that acts of worship 'belong more properly in church services' strikes a Reformed note. What seems to most irk Susan, however, is the Pilgrimage being unsuited to the landscape—she raises it in both quotations. Two aspects of this 'landscape-inappropriate' problem are discussed below.

Re-scralising the Landscape: Shared Movement

Firstly, Susan feels Iona's 'relatively small spaces' do not accommodate large groups 'marching about all together', echoing the farmers' complaints discussed earlier over the damage incurred by masses of people trampling over the land. She suggests reduced groups of walkers would 'better suit the landscape'. If the Pilgrimage was simply a 'big circular walk' for visitors to explore the island, then Susan's critique is valid. Smaller groups wandering on their own on a clear day would be less bothersome to locals and more pleasant for participants. But this somewhat misses the purpose of the Pilgrimage.

Susan says:

...I was appalled that it even got that far, *as it seemed to be a completely miserable experience*—people with inappropriate shoes, covered with mud, wet through, exhausted...! (italics added)

Miserable as pilgrims may be on an inclement Pilgrimage day, the point is they are miserable *together*. The obstacles encountered or suffering endured—although generally not for penitential reasons—classically adds to their sense of achievement, making it all the more memorable. One ressie recalled:

...Some of the most profound [pilgrimages] I had was when everyone was faced with a problem, either through inclement weather or through caring for an elderly

straggler who was determined to drag their two hip replacements and wooden leg down to the Marble Quarry...

It is the *shared experience* of walking together, the dynamics of ‘listening, or looking, or connecting with their soul’, as one ressie puts it, that cannot be captured by disparate groups and individuals exploring Iona on their own.

Treading well-worn paths in the bracken and on the track, pilgrims intuit a connection with their predecessors, imagining themselves as part of an ongoing ‘tradition’ that will continue, week after week, perhaps indefinitely. Temporally and spatially, the stops and interstitial walks between them form a ‘whole’ through the leaders’ narratives and the actual motion of journeying on foot. It is an ‘integrated and integrating embodiment of the Community’s... spirituality... as “an energising kind of connectedness”’ (Shanks 1999: 96–7). Following a map and guidebook renders up a different sort of experience of Iona’s ‘lived landscape’.

Susan elaborates on her confoundment: ‘...the word [pilgrimage], to me—and surely to a very many people—means *a journey from A to B* (and *not from A back round to A again!*)... (italics added). Guests at the Community’s centres travel separately to and from the island, so this ‘A back round to A again’ pilgrimage is their *only* shared movement together. Compared with Santiago de Compostela where the intense experience of traveling to the site perhaps diminishes the arrival (Coleman & Eade 2004: 12), in the Iona case, the more diffuse and varied experiences of journeying to (and from) Iona whets people’s desire for a striking experience at the ‘sacred’ place. The Pilgrimage’s intention is to foster *communitas* among participants and with the place. At the week’s crucial mid-point, the Pilgrimage helps guests and staff make the transition from friendly, superficial acquaintanceship to facing the tougher aspects of ‘community living’. Pilgrims may ask difficult questions (e.g., why does the Iona Community believe homosexuality is

acceptable for Christians?) and contest what they are told at the stops (e.g., at the Nunnery, a gay man criticised the leaders for concentrating on the neglect of women, excluding men like him who also experience discrimination). It is in these awkward encounters—in the elements seemingly most disruptive to harmonious social relations—that the Iona Community believe *real* community between people can develop. For them, genuine experiences of ‘community’ entail difference and dissonance. While guests get a taste of this, resses must live with these tensions continually.

Resses feel a strong spiritual element is integral to the Pilgrimage, that it is not ‘just a walk’ but ‘a walk *with God*’. Susan’s view that the Pilgrimage has no destination is correct in that participants have already arrived at their main objective, Iona. Technically, the place of departure (St Martin’s Cross) and the final stop (St Oran’s Chapel) are not the same but they do bring people close to a complete circuit, ending up almost where they started. The ‘circular’ Pilgrimage resembles other religious traditions’ rituals of circumambulation; e.g., Buddhists go around a stupa, Muslims circulate the Ka’ba, and Catholics follow the Stations of the Cross (e.g., Morinis 1992: 16; Coleman & Eade 2004). Although not exactly ‘circular’, the Pilgrimage route can nevertheless be viewed as a circumambulation of the ‘sacred’ island of sorts. Many aspects of its content and format give the event a ritualised feel. It celebrates people’s arrival at their destination (ending the ‘linear striving’) and ‘encapsulates the sacred centre in a circular embrace’ (Coleman & Elsner 1995: 32–3).

While people typically regard Iona as the ‘sacred’ end-point of their pilgrimage aspirations, the Iona Community seek to replace this ‘linear’ perspective with the alternative viewpoint of the island as a ‘crossroads’ or ‘stepping stone’ in a lifelong process of faith, where leaving is not only inevitable but critical to people’s spiritual quests. The weekly Pilgrimage is intended to propagate the Community’s ideology, but

this is in fact double-edged. For ‘if the act of encircling the sacred goal defines a sacred space’, then the weekly Pilgrimage unwittingly acts to further sacralise the Iona landscape—through a ‘performative construction of place through movement’ (Coleman & Elsner 1995: 32)—and ironically works against the Community’s aspirations. People are led around their ‘sacred’ destination ritualistically—which creates ‘sacred’ bonds between pilgrims and place—yet the Pilgrimage’s purpose is to tell pilgrims the most important places are ‘out there’ in the ‘real world’. A cynic might argue the Community want it both ways: they structure activities like the Pilgrimage so people will form a special attachment to the island and promote it to others and/or return to pay to participate again in the ‘Iona experience’, but in forwarding their ‘real world’ agenda, they also undermine the importance of Iona as a ‘sacred’ place so people will *not* grow overly attached to it and instead support the Community’s wider vision.

Interestingly, labyrinths and mandalas are commonly found on Iona, produced by New Age or neo-pagan activity and by Community staff and guests for personal and corporate reflections through the acts of meditative walking and drawing. In somewhat ‘postmodern’ fashion, the Community’s weekly Pilgrimage is about the *process* of journeying, the shared movement of people through a landscape which makes it a ‘pilgrimage with no destination’.¹³ This prioritisation of the journey itself over arrival at the destination is in line with the relative decline in penitential discourse in Europe and increased focus on self-transformation (Coleman & Eade 2004: 10).

¹³ See Satish Kumar’s (1992) book *No Destination*, which charts his pilgrimage walk through Britain’s holy places, ending intriguingly on Iona.



Fig 7.44 This labyrinth at Columba's Bay appeared within the last ten years; rumoured that 'New Age folks' created it, it is now a near-permanent feature of the Iona landscape

Because Christians, New Agers, and neo-pagans alike postulate close links between the 'natural' and 'supernatural' on Iona, the weekly Pilgrimage as a repeated, ritualised movement for them serves to effect an embodiment of the 'sacred' by the *island* itself. Not confined to the Abbey and other 'formal' religious spaces on Iona, the divine can thus be directly accessed through nature as *personified* by the landscape.

One ressie felt that, through the Pilgrimage, she got to 'know the island more intimately, *like a good friend...*'. Leading a Pilgrimage can yield for ressie a deep sense of connection with 'otherness'. A ressie who is a Christian minister and Community Member said:

...I always had a feeling of *added attunement* to the natural environment of the island, and to some extent, I think, to the people who had inhabited it hundreds of years ago. So what I felt about the island was a sense of its *accepting presence/spirit/ancient inhabitants*. I would have a *deep sense of belonging*, and a kind of forlorn desire to have more time to just *BE in that place*, to wander, to do all the things it's very difficult to do when you're a [ressie] or an Abbey guest.

A bit mystical, that. A touch of my New Age-ness. For which I make no apology. (original emphasis, italics added)

Additionally, as Coleman and Elsner (1995: 205) point out, ritualised motion at a sacred site can give participants from different backgrounds and places a shared religious identity ‘which transcends parochial assumptions and concerns’. Instead of promoting an exclusively Christian identity, however, the Pilgrimage reflects the Community’s ecumenical, religio-political vision. One does not have to be ‘religious’ in order to embrace the principles of peace and social justice. Lacking the official backing of any religious institution, the Pilgrimage instead serves to foster a common identity linked with the *place* through pilgrims’ shared movements or activities on Iona. This ‘emplaced’ identity runs counter to the ‘postmodern’ supposition that increased mobility undermines the importance of places (see Coleman & Eade 2004: 15; cf. Augé 1995). The pivotal role Iona plays in so many people’s self-understandings and corporate identity suggests that some places matter more than ever. For the Community, however, Iona matters only insofar as it is their historical and symbolic centre; for the island’s primary purpose today—demonstrated in the Community’s centres—is as a connecting-point or gateway to the ‘real’, globalised world of unfair trade practices, discrimination and bigotry, violence and oppression ‘out there’, beyond Iona’s white shores.

The Community’s weekly Pilgrimage, with or without a destination, serves to reinforce the notion of the island as a ‘liminal’ place—where alternative spaces are offered for people to explore and reinvent their ‘selves’ before the inevitability of rejoining mainstream, mainland society. Guests are affected by this liminality in a limited way, while its impact on *ressies* is more provocative and profound.

Enacting Iona's Landscape

Susan's first 'landscape-inappropriate' objection to the Pilgrimage is premised on the event being too large and disruptive; she misses its purpose to foster *communitas* amongst participants as well as its unwitting effectiveness in 'sacralising' the landscape. The conflict of perspective between Susan and the Iona Community's social groups over the Pilgrimage is an issue of 'perception', for Iona's landscape is not homogeneous but is in fact 'multi-layered'. As a local, Susan taps into particular layers, while the Community, pilgrims, and *ressies* resonate with other layers. Susan's second 'landscape-inappropriate' objection further demonstrates this. She opposes 'transferring religious worship...directly onto particular parts of Iona', the idea of the Pilgrimage inscribing 'religion'—as something alien and *out of place*—onto the landscape. For her, religious worship 'belong[s] more properly in church services'. The Community, on the other hand, are in the business of breaking down conventional boundaries separating 'religion' from the rest of life, including 'creation'.

For many *ressies*, the Pilgrimage is an 'act of worship' in the broadest sense, sometimes surpassing that in the Abbey church; it was:

...a liturgical journey on various levels, *both physical and mental*.... A chance to see *God's otherness* around them, a chance to interact with and witness (sometimes subconsciously) God's omnipresence, as opposed to God's transcendence that is so often portrayed in many 'traditional' forms of church-based worship...

... 'We are your church not made of stone' kind of way. To me Christianity is *more about the doing* than the talking. And it's about *nature*. Nature humbles you, ...reminds you how small and insignificant you are it, reminds...how savage and vicious it can be, it teaches you to be patient when the rain is stinging you in the eyes, it takes your breath away with its sheer beauty, it also reminds just how precious and wonderful life is... (all italics added)

However, are the Iona Community—via the Pilgrimage—imposing their type of (religio-political) spirituality *onto* the island's landscape? Are the forms of 'worship' enacted during the Pilgrimage as *misplaced* as Susan suggests?

As 'inheritors of the Celtic tradition', the Community (2001a: 12) take the view that 'God's glory [is] in all of creation'. The Pilgrimage's reflections, prayers, readings, and songs thus follow the supposed ancient Celtic practice—pagan and Christian—of worshipping outdoors in nature.¹⁴ Furthermore, many *ressies* say the stories they tell are *taken from* the landscape itself. One *ressie*, also a Member, prepared for the Pilgrimage by studying maps, reading up on Iona's history, visiting the island's Heritage Centre, and conversing with islanders, listening for the correct pronunciation of place names, etc. Her explicit intention was:

I wanted whatever we did *not to be our ideology imposed* on the landscape, but to *reflect its realities*—history, geology—and the perceptions and stories of the islanders. (italics added)

Admittedly, most *ressies* are not as conscientious as she, but their general view is that the stories they narrate arise from the place itself. One *ressie* describes how he felt at the close of the Pilgrimage:

...on leaving [the Reilig Odhran], I'd have a *weird sense of well being*, like I'd just said goodbye to *an old friend*. You know, a friend who'd tell you lots of funny stories? Well *the island had just told you lots of funny/sad stories* and it was like you were *remembering* them and saying goodbye till the next time... (italics added)

Although he had prepared the 'script' beforehand, he nevertheless felt the Pilgrimage *enabled* these stories to be recalled from the landscape, to come alive as it were, as people journeyed from stop to stop. In the past, a few locals—or rather, incomers—have

¹⁴ Ironically, Susan, a present-day Celt, disapproves of such behaviour.

participated in the Pilgrimage because of their involvement with the Iona Community (e.g., children of Members, ex-Abbey staff). The ‘local locals’, however, mainly continue to be indifferent or hostile to it—an attitude reflecting the social gap between the two groups who, for almost 70 years, have been vying for the spaces of Iona, the right to use them and to define their purpose. Locals are understandably riled when outsiders treat Iona as ‘one big park’, asserting Scotland’s ‘right-to-roam’ policy as their legal entitlement to go anywhere on the island, farm and croft land included, without first asking permission.¹⁵ Daytrippers are ‘irritating enough’, but locals feel Community staff ‘should know better’ (e.g., volleys organising a BBQ at a beach without first obtaining the landowner’s consent; staff and guests clambering up the ancient MacLean’s Cross and the Nunnery ruins to decorate them for Easter).

Besides the misunderstandings, misencounters, and conflicting approaches to religion between locals and Community Members and staff, however, the Pilgrimage may also genuinely baffle locals like Susan for another reason. The very nature of the Pilgrimage is an *activity* to lead people into seeing and engaging with *particular layers* of Iona’s landscape—i.e., the religio-political dimensions. Ressie leaders tease out these landscape dimensions or layers through the ‘true’ narratives and stories they tell. Although these religio-political ‘layers’ may not be unknown to the locals, they nevertheless lie submerged under other layers of greater, more immediate priority—e.g., the buying and selling of crofts, negotiations with National Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage over signage and fencing, delays in new developments because of archaeological surveys, funding applications for path maintenance and conservation projects, disputes with the Planning Agency’s rejection of controversial house designs, pursuit of schemes

¹⁵ The Pilgrimage may unintentionally give people the impression that anyone can go anywhere they like, that the whole island is ‘sacred’ and the ‘sacred’ is accessible to all.

such as the Fixed Link or a new harbour, interviewing outside families to run a B&B, encouraging the corncrake population, and keeping the farming economy afloat.



Fig 7.45 Some local fundraising projects

These layers of the ‘local landscape’, so critical to islanders, are unseen by and unknown to most resses and non-locals. The clues are there for people to discover, but they lack the narratives to recognise and understand them. During the

Pilgrimage, the stiles climbed over, the fences crossed, the barns, farm implements, and cottages walked past—all these indications of the islanders’ present-day, living landscapes are not consciously registered by most resses (or pilgrims); they are ‘layers’ of the landscape ‘unseen’ by outsiders though imperative to locals. Furthermore, recalling Ingold (1993: 155), what people *do* is how certain meanings are gathered from the landscape. Resses are not involved in farming or other local council quandaries, etc. and so lack not only the *narratives* but also the *acts or behaviours* required to unveil the other layers of Iona’s landscape. For those staff content to engage with the island only via their work at the centres and on the Pilgrimage, just as those locals who are satisfied to remain within their traditional purview of farming/crofting and tourism, some layers of Iona’s dense landscape—and the people and activities within them—will continue to mystify.



Fig 7.46 View of Columba's Bay; outsiders seldom 'see' the faint patterns of old runrigs, one 'hidden layer' of Iona's landscape

It is little wonder that each social group, despite some corrective efforts and good intentions, keep perceiving and representing the 'other' in terms of the past. The weekly Pilgrimage focuses primarily on Iona's religious history, with references to local life that tend to be superseded by or used to emphasise a broader political point (e.g., at Loch Staonaig, piped water from Mull is mentioned, but the reflection concludes with the politics of water). At the Abbey, Historic Scotland tours mention the origins of the Iona Community, while some 'local locals' harbour long memories of accumulated wrongdoing going back to MacLeod's time. This perpetual misrepresentation or misrecognition is a way of maintaining a distinct social identity in the midst of high turnovers of people and the unrelenting intrusion of outsiders (Ardener 1989).

As much as people today are finding ways to build friendships across boundaries and to learn from and move beyond the past, each social group inherits and must contend with its respective legacy and the resistance to change. The past, on Iona, is difficult to escape; the past is not a different country for it is densely embedded within the multiple layers of the present-day Iona landscape, in the island's very soil and 'soul'.

Dissemination of Place: ‘Recycling’ and Extending Iona

In the 20th century, Iona’s longstanding status as a ‘sacred’ place was revived in large part by the Iona Community and its staff community’s presence at the Abbey. The religious retreat houses, mainly 20th-century foundations, including a New Age meditation house, have also augmented its international reputation. Historic Scotland’s recent arrival has also meant more ‘professional’ advertisement and commercialisation of the island. On offer to visitors for purchase are souvenirs like plastic Abbey replicas, teddy-bear monks, and ceramic puffin ‘piggy-banks’, but most prefer, quite literally, to take away a piece of Iona with them.



Fig 7.47 Iona Abbey’s (second) altar table made of local marble

While the ‘cheap souvenir symbolizes the ideals of the shrine but in no way attempts to rival or reproduce the perfection it contains’ (Morinis 1992: 6), a ‘Columba’s tear’ pebble from Columba’s Bay or a small chunk of Iona marble taken from the Marble Quarry is prized for its ‘authenticity’. Victorian visitors notoriously chipped bits off the original marble altar table in the Abbey, while one 20th-century visitor tried to make off with the head of Abbot MacKinnon’s stone effigy.

Some think Iona’s stones, because of the island’s antiquity and ley-line juxtaposition, have intrinsic magical or spiritual properties. Others value them as ‘genuine’ mementos and a *tangible* mode of maintaining ongoing connectivity with the place. For instance, the ‘two-stones’ Pilgrimage ritual at Columba’s Bay transforms an (ordinary) Iona stone into a symbol of hope, commitment, or promise;

but the symbol is made eminently more powerful by virtue of it being an actual piece of the ‘sacred’ place.



Fig 7.48 An ‘Iona stone’, taken away by one pilgrim, now being returned by another

On one Pilgrimage, a middle-aged woman shared how she and a friend decided to come to Iona because a fellow church member had visited years ago and brought back two special ‘Iona stones’, one specifically for each of them. She had explained this meant they too must visit the island, return the

stones to Columba’s Bay, and choose two more each to pass on to other friends, and so on.

In this way, a relational chain was created whereby Iona’s stones become the tangible, ever-multiplying links between individuals and the motivation for making the journey.

This story testifies to the power of the place, made manifest in the materiality of its rocks—the very things that constitute Iona itself. Such ‘recycling’ of Iona stones fits nicely with the Community’s ecological concerns and plays a key role in the dissemination of (and return to) place. Some Iona devotees go home to rename their houses or christen their children ‘Iona’ or, less commonly, ‘Columba’, while others give away scrupulously collected pebbles or locally made jewellery and other decorative items.

The Iona Community’s first autobiographical video, written and narrated by George MacLeod, was titled, ‘Sermon in Stone’, referencing his rebuilding project as a modern-day parable, a spiritual lesson made concrete through the erecting of Iona Abbey’s stone walls. Other writers (e.g., Semple, n.d.) have remarked on the various types of stones associated with the island, from its geology to the collection of ancient tombstones,

high crosses, and other stone monuments, including a rock reputed to be ‘Columba’s Pillow’.

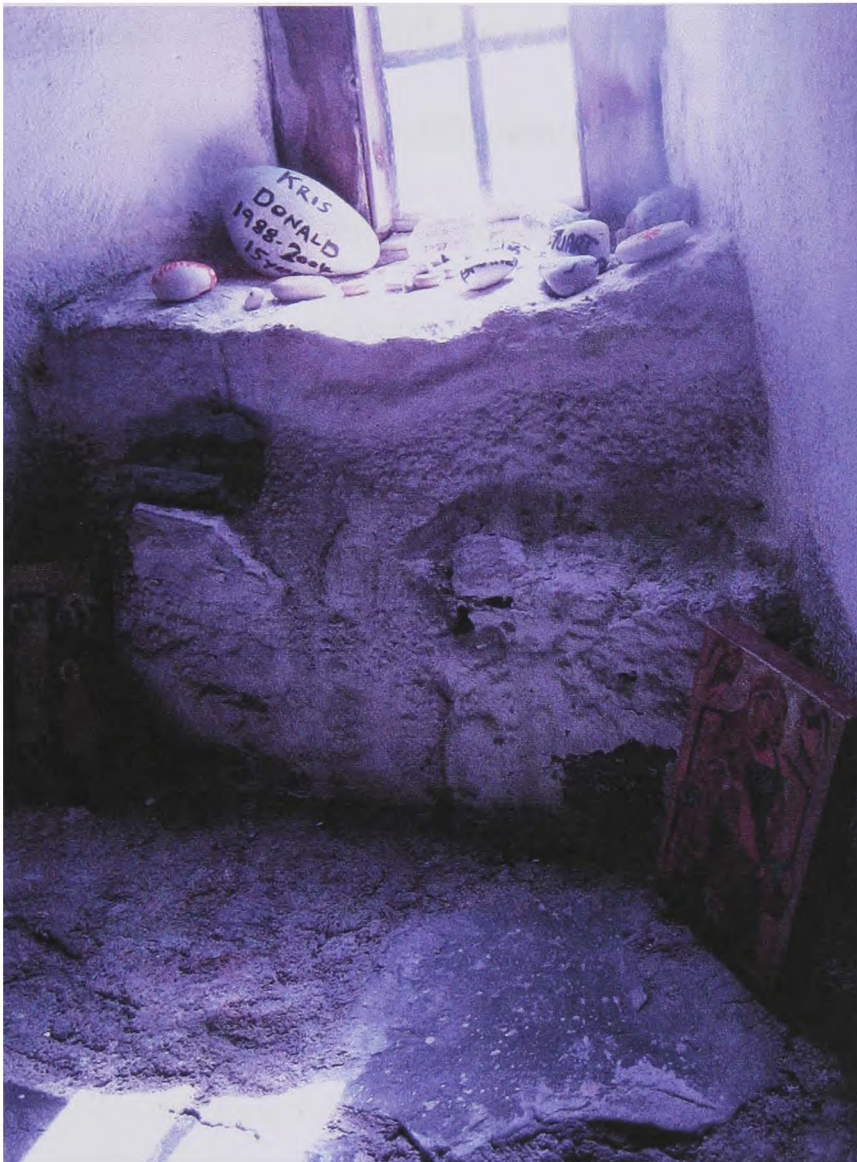


Fig 7.49 People also leave behind ‘memorial’ or ‘prayer’ stones in the chapels

The weekly Pilgrimage employs legends and stories from the island’s religious and social history to draw out themes that reflect the Community’s peace and justice concerns. Instead of providing signposts to an ‘other’ world—i.e., an afterlife—the weekly Pilgrimage gives directions to pilgrims about the mainstream, present-day ‘other’ world in which most urbanites live. Iona’s landscape is deployed to show pilgrims how to live in their own,

mainland landscapes. More than merely being a ‘sacred’ space, the Iona landscape provides ‘alternative spaces’ where people can embody and enact practices, rituals, and behaviour normally unavailable to them in mainstream Christianity—and in so doing, they take a bit of ‘Iona’, literally or otherwise, with them back to the mainland.

The Iona Community’s weekly Pilgrimage is not a straightforwardly religious event, but a political one both in terms of the Community’s ethos and the island’s politics of place. The Pilgrimage reveals how the main social groups—locals, the Community and staff, and visitors—are fiercely interdependent, on one another and on the land. Whatever the tensions between them, they nevertheless make each other’s existence possible. The

history and practice of the Pilgrimage sums up the Community's religio-political spirituality and unearths the complex web of socio-political relationships amongst the main social groups—how they are defined not only against one another but also in reference to Iona's multi-layered landscape.

This chapter has made explicit the role *ressies* play in making possible the weekly Pilgrimage—the definitive event of many visitors' 'Iona experiences'. Through their organisation and leadership of the Pilgrimage, the *ressies* are crucial mediators of the Iona Community's religio-political agenda to countless pilgrims. The themes of 'landscape' and 'place' also come to the foreground through examining the Pilgrimage as a political and politicising activity, revealing the complex dynamics between Iona's various social groups. The tiny island emerges as a highly heterogeneous place, dense with many 'Iona communities' (lowercase 'c') and textured with many layers of its landscape. Depending on the narratives and practices people use to engage with Iona's natural and man-made features, certain 'layers' of its landscape become accessible or remain hidden. Each social group's relationship with the landscape defines who they are, and each makes possible the existence of the others.

The previous three chapters investigated the Resident Group's development, organisation, and socialisation and their ambivalent relationship with their employers the Iona Community. We have explored *ressies*' various motivations for relocating to Iona and the complex, self-transformational experiences they encounter there. This next, final chapter focuses on the impact that 'leaving Iona' has on *ressies*, rhetorically and in reality.

Chapter 8. Leaving Iona, Leaving the ‘Liminal’?

This final chapter deals with the powerful rhetoric of ‘leaving Iona’ espoused and encouraged by the Iona Community. It is based on the convention that pilgrims eventually return home—pilgrims’ ‘return’, however, has only recently garnered anthropological interest (see Frey 1998, 2004). The metaphor of ‘journeying’ is used discursively by many Community guests and staff about their own spiritual and life trajectories, situating their ‘Iona experience’ within the framework of (inner) movement and personal growth. In order to counter the temptation of Iona devotees towards romantic escapism, however, the Community recast the island’s pilgrimage status from a ‘sacred destination’ into a ‘stepping stone’ in a person’s faith journey—no less, but no more ‘sacred’ than other, more mundane places. For guests, ‘leaving Iona’ generally means returning home to carry on their (religio-political) spiritual quests in their local contexts. Ressies, on the other hand—for whom the term ‘home’ becomes problematic—the Community’s discourse of ‘leaving Iona’ affects them more profoundly. Even though ressies *intellectually* understand their contracts are limited, their actual experiences at the ‘sacred’ site are not straightforward and what they take away with them is more convoluted and controversial than anticipated. What is ‘sacred’ may actually become ‘profane’, ‘polluting’, or dangerous, as illness, depression, and disorientation are commonplace amongst ressies when they leave.

Leaving Iona, Discursively

While the Resident Group resemble traditional religious orders in some ways (see Chapter 5), a fundamental difference is that ressies do not make lifelong vows. They agree to fixed ‘contracts’ at the end of which, as a rule, they leave Iona permanently. Some contracts

may be renewed or extended, but generally no ressie lingers beyond three years. The transitory and transitional nature of Resident Group life is a given. However, the Iona Community frame the notion of ‘leaving Iona’ in a very specific, highly potent way. The rhetoric is employed in the Thursday Evening Communion service and Friday Morning ‘Leaving Service’ to help guests anticipate their imminent departure. Staff also are meant to reflect on ‘what they have learned or received’ during the previous week and consider how to apply them in the future when their turn to leave finally comes. The Community present Iona as a temporary locus from which people will and *should* inevitably leave for ‘the real world’—a discourse based on the Community’s own ‘dispersed community’ model and which (unintentionally) serves to subvert ressie’s own ‘Iona experience’. This ‘leaving Iona’ rhetoric—which staff themselves have to *present* to guests *repeatedly* even while they themselves are emplaced on the island—can cause ressie’s ambivalence.

On one hand, to fulfill their remit to embody the Community’s ‘holistic’ vision of corporate living, ressie’s must *give of themselves* in such a way as to make their lives on Iona as stable and real as any ‘home’. On the other hand, they are reminded every week, through the services and myriad other ways, that their sojourn on Iona is eminently temporary. The contrariness of making Iona ‘home’ yet perpetually being on the verge of *having* to leave it—the ‘lived paradox’ of experiencing the island as both ‘self’ and ‘other’—creates an existential precariousness for ressie’s. Those on one-season or one-year contracts feel this ‘liminality’ particularly strongly but it also affects ressie’s on longer contracts.

To become a ‘ressie’, people must make copious adjustments. They leave behind social networks of family, friends, job/career, and church, plus pets, cars, house, furniture, and other property and belongings. Arrangements are made for everything and everyone (e.g., elderly parents, even spouses or grown children) they cannot take with them to Iona.

Many abandon urban existences and hectic city lifestyles, and all are expected to take on a way of life with new—usually completely unfamiliar—routines and responsibilities in a remote, rural island setting unlike anywhere else they have ever lived. While *ressies* eagerly embrace their decision to relocate to Iona, it is nevertheless a complicated affair that requires tremendous effort and coordination.

After people arrive, begin to adapt to the arduous pace of life and work, and just as they settle into community life and the ‘*ressie*’ role, the season is suddenly over; *ressies* (especially single-season ones) must then prepare to leave. They invest virtually everything to make Iona ‘home’ yet it *cannot* be their home. *Ressies* live in a ‘liminal’ time and space, always knowing leaving is imminent but rarely even having the time or energy to process and plan for it. The pace of work and the ‘rhythm of the week’ structure (see Chapter 4) orient *ressies* to a sense of ‘time’ that feels immediate, urgent, and ‘cyclical’, to the extent that anything or ‘time’ beyond each week’s ‘rhythm’ feels ‘unreal’ or distant. Many *ressies* for whom their Iona stint is a ‘time-out’ to consider making life changes—i.e., they *want* and *appreciate* the temporary nature of their contracts—say it is nigh-impossible to do this during the season before they are confronted with having to leave. Moreover, maintaining contact with mainland friends and family is difficult enough, how much more so when *ressies* need to job search, house-hunt, research options, plan travel, or make other preparations most other people take for granted if they are planning a new life. While as *ressies*, people’s connections with the ‘outside world’ are logistically and emotionally tenuous and their lives on Iona potentially ‘totalising’—all of which make their transition back into the ‘real world’ challenging and unsettling. Similar in some ways to Frey’s (1998, 2004) Santiago pilgrims, Iona *ressies* view ‘going home’ with ambivalence.

Iona versus the 'Real World'

As discussed earlier, the Iona Community downplay the popular notion that Iona, as an ancient pilgrimage site, possesses any 'innate' spiritual quality that makes it holier than other places. The 'dispersed' principle underlying the Community's structure and vision prioritises localised, quotidian expressions of faith over any 'mountain-top high' experience; i.e., any epiphany must translate into 'real action' in places with 'real problems'. Outsiders usually regard the 'sacred' island as distinct from and in contrast to the 'real world' on the mainland. This attitude tends to overlook the actual problems and struggles locals face—the fact that Iona is very much the 'real world' to them. This inattention to local life is compounded by how easy it is for Community guests and staff to exist almost entirely within the confines of the Abbey, the Mac, and the staff houses, interacting infrequently or superficially with locals.

The 'Iona versus the "real world"' syndrome also can undermine ressiess' cogent experiences of the place, implying what happens on Iona (to them) is not as vital or important (to the Community)—except insofar as the guests receive a positive 'Iona experience'. It also creates a hierarchy between what Community Members do 'out there' over what ressiess do 'here'. Several ressiess expressed frustration over having to promote the idea that what matters most takes place on the mainland—in Members' and guests' local contexts—while personally feeling that what happens for themselves (and islanders) on Iona in their daily work and lives is equally important, if not experientially more immediate. To constantly 'decentre' your own centre can be existentially trying.

For weekly guests, the movement from home to pilgrimage site and back home again is fairly straightforward, primarily because their Iona visit is brief and their 'community living' experience is limited. Their role as guests within the centres, while more involved than at a resort or holiday camp, allows them nevertheless to remain quite

passive; they face no serious consequences if they opt out of doing chores or attending services. For most guests and visitors, 'home' and 'Iona' are defined, relatively fixed categories that do not change during their short Iona sojourn. Those undergoing crisis or transition points still must return home to resolve them. In other words, the 'sacred' site, even if it becomes guests' 'spiritual home', is only a stop gap, an extraordinary interlude from their ordinary, mainland lives which they invariably pick up and resume.

The Welcome Service at the start of the week formally unifies 'those already here' with 'those just arrived', but the Leaving Service uses a 'reciprocal blessing' to ritually separate those staying from those departing:

Leader, with all who are staying:

The Maker's blessing be yours
on your road
on your journey
guiding you, cherishing you.

All who are leaving today:

The Son's blessing be yours
wine and water
bread and stories
feeding you, challenging you...

...

**ALL: GOD'S BLESSING BE OURS;
THE BLESSING OF PILGRIMS
ALL THE NIGHTS AND DAYS
OF OUR JOURNEY HOME. (The Iona Community 2001a: 28–9)**

Here, staff are those 'who are staying' and guests are those 'leaving today', with the collective, final emphasis on 'our journey home'. Guests and visitors have families, friends, pets, churches, jobs, and homes waiting to receive them. Unlike guests, 'home' for resses is on Iona, *is* Iona. When resses agree to relocate to the island, they leave behind all those things that constituted 'home' before in exchange for a new kind of

existence. This new Resident Group lifestyle can impact them in unexpected and unpredictable ways, making leaving Iona more than simply leaving a *job*.

Knowing When to Leave...

When they do depart, many resses reflect positively that it was the ‘right’ time to go, that their ‘calling’ to be on Iona was over:

...I felt like I had been there the right length of time; the length that I was supposed to be.

I had a great 3+ years on Iona and loved nearly every minute but was glad to move on.

I was more than ready to leave, when I did so! It felt very much like having accomplished a task...and being now ready to move on to something new...

I knew...that I had much to look forward to, and that it was time to go. I was very glad that I had not waited too long to go.

In the midst of resses’ upbeat comments lurks a darker tone. Phrases such as ‘more than ready to leave’, ‘ready to move on to something new’, and ‘glad that I had not waited too long to go’ are revealing. Implicit in the ‘rightness’ of their departure is the possibility that staying longer on Iona would have been ‘wrong’ in some significant way. Here are more ressie deliberations:

...I will return to Scotland and England, to see friends, but I have no plans to return to Iona. To me it was a specific moment in time and cannot be re-visited.

I was exhausted and had given everything I had to give—I needed a break and it was the right time to move on.

It felt right to leave—looking back I was tired and ready to go, despite the fact that I was addicted to the job—loved it or at least some aspects of it. I had outlived other aspects... I still feel its loss...

The element of extreme fatigue—and to a certain extent, loss and grief—repeats itself in many resses' reflections over why it was 'right' to leave when they did. Having reached their limits of endurance, to continue on was to court further exhaustion, if not worse.

Resses on longer contracts have been known to negotiate to end their agreements early, again professing the sense that it was 'right' to do so at that particular time. Most decamp from Iona on good terms:

I was ready to leave, I had enjoyed [it] and would not have missed my time there where the world came to me, but felt the need to get back to and be involved.

My Iona experience was eye opening, mind bending and extremely rewarding.... I have lived on Iona for 3+ years. The world is much bigger. I have a lot of other places I would like to live.

There are those, however, who leave in unhappy circumstances. The Community's three-year maximum policy for resses was devised after some earlier Wardens had stayed 'far too long' (the longest was seven years) and suffered severe 'burn out', including ill health and divorce. The concept of the hidden or imminent danger of sacred places is not uncommon in anthropological literature (Durkheim 1912a; Eliade 1959; Douglas 1969). The line between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' may not be easy to locate or define, but it is critical resses avoid crossing it. In a sense, the 'sacred' for resses has to be carefully contained so it does not become contaminated or contaminating—as one ressie said of his 'Iona experience', 'it was a specific moment in time and cannot be re-visited'; to do so might be to tempt fate.

Many resses say that knowing *when* to go also means knowing how to *let go*.

How they arrive at this point varies. Those on shorter contracts may be given the option to renew and decide to take it for different reasons. Some see it as a chance to hone or learn additional skills, others want more 'time-out' to decide what to do next, and some desire to prolong the opportunity of 'living in community' in a beautiful place. Occasionally, a

ressie feels the pull of Iona in a more dramatic way. ‘Siobhan’, a ressie in her early 50s, felt that Iona ‘...was a healing place.... I don’t want to leave the island. I feel Iona is not only my spiritual home but where I would like to spend the rest of my life’.

Siobhan worked in the Iona Community centres for two seasons, then joined the staff group at one of the Christian retreat houses. She became a member of the village hall council and made efforts to participate in local life. It was clear Siobhan very much wanted to live permanently on Iona. At various times, however, her health kept her from being able to work; she finally ended up in hospital for several weeks, at which point her then employers abruptly terminated her contract. It was a painful and humiliating way for her to ‘leave Iona’. More than two years on, Siobhan has made peace with what happened and now part-owns and runs a B&B in the area with a former ressie colleague. She is doing the hospitality work she had always wanted to, but her dream of living on Iona has been postponed indefinitely.

In many ways, Siobhan’s story confirms the Community’s injunction against staying ‘too long’ on Iona. The warning aims to ward people off from romanticising island life and from ‘over-identifying’ with the place, which is frowned upon as a form of escapism. Some see Siobhan’s physical deterioration as ‘proof’ not only that she should not have tried so hard to continue living on Iona, but that she simply could not—that her body ‘betrayed’ the truth even if her mind could not accept it. They suggest Siobhan did not realise when it was ‘right’ for her to go and let go of Iona—because of this, Iona, the ‘sacred’ or healing place, eventually became an unhealthy and ‘dangerous’ place for her.

Leaving ‘Before’ Their Time...

What about ressies who leave ‘before’ their time? This category includes those who leave of their own accord and those who are ‘fired’. During my fieldwork, at least three ressies

resigned or were asked to leave. Formal disciplinary procedures were initiated against two of them: one case involved bullying, while the other had falsely represented himself. The latter had passed himself off as an American monk—donning his robe every day and insisting on being called ‘Brother’—when he had never, in fact, taken vows. These two cases did not overlap; coincidentally, one succeeded the other in the same post—which some resses half-seriously say is ‘jinxed’ because in recent years holders of that post kept leaving unexpectedly or were sacked. Both cases were brought about by staff who witnessed or felt targeted by these men’s behaviour. They were perceived as being aggressive and moody, as ‘unstable’, ‘domineering’ presences in a tight-knit community that heavily depends on predictability, co-operation, and trust to function. Many staff feel that, for better or worse, Iona exposes people’s ‘true colours’.

The intensity of community life in such a closely circumscribed place can bring out the best in people, and the worst—laying bare any weaknesses, secrets, or lies. It was rumoured both men had ‘drinking problems’. Other behaviour that stirred resses’ disapproval was the feeling each thought himself better than others. For instance, resses disliked how the ‘pseudo-monk’ (ironically) used his robe and title as a way to distinguish himself and draw attention to his (alleged) elevated status. Some staff were miffed because he played on the historical idea of ‘Iona monks’ and acted as if he were somehow more ‘authentic’ or had more right to ‘belong’ there.

Iona Community Members and staff generally believe a Christian community ought to give people ‘second chances’; they endeavoured to resolve things amicably in these two cases, but after several months things came to a head. What is interesting is that people were willing to tolerate these men’s ‘eccentric’ behaviour, as long as it was perceived to be harmless. The fact that Iona attracts ‘odd’ people is commonly accepted with fairly good humour by locals and staff. Only when people’s behaviour threatens the

well-being of others that action is taken.¹ The two men's behaviour worried other staff, but their departure also left behind a wake of problems. Staff shortages or incompetence inevitably means other resses have to bear the extra brunt of work. Both these men's presence and absence caused disorder and disruption, turning a 'safe', sacred place into a simmeringly perilous one.

These two cases live on in resses' collective memory, as examples of people who probably should not have come to work on Iona. Some staff feel the reason for or the manner in which these people left the island illuminate their 'real' intentions and their characters. But is this appraisal fair? Are the problems that arise for resses exclusively attributable to their personal 'baggage', to what they *bring* with them? Is there something about Iona, or Resident Group life, that potentially puts resses 'at risk' and makes leave-taking so fraught? Is leaving Iona for resses appreciably different from leaving any other job or place?

The Corporate 'Ressie' Self: Two Case Studies

To address why leaving Iona can be complicated for resses, it is necessary to elucidate their self-understandings, especially the tensions they live with. The character of resses' 'Iona experience' determine, in large part, the direction and quality of their post-Iona lives. Frey (2004: 99) makes a similar observation about the Camino pilgrims:

Depending on *how deeply the person felt impacted* by the Camino, the adjustment may be difficult and may result in personal, professional, and familial changes. The returned pilgrim may unexpectedly find himself or herself viewing daily life with different eyes and realize that perhaps the changes are coming from within... (italics added)

¹ The island does not have a police force; when necessary, mainland police are called in.

For many resses, their stint on the Resident Group ‘deeply impacts’ them in unexpected, troubling ways and makes the post-Iona period fraught with difficulties. What is it about ‘living in community’ in this manner on Iona that precipitates this phenomenon?

In many instances, resses do enjoy their work and corporate identity. They feel a strong sense of *communitas* with guests and other staff, as well as with the natural world and the physical buildings on Iona:

[Enjoyed]...having *my own defined role and work* within the working team.
Feeling part of the Community, the island, creation...the cosmos!

Being part of the whole with a job on which many people relied. Always having people around to support me....

Friendships and people met. The SEASONS and going with them. Smiling at people as you and they walk and saying hello. Leading worship with friends. Drinking whiskey in intimate gatherings. The moon, skies, wind, rough seas.... Seagulls dancing for worms!! Being given opportunities to develop; having good colleagues. *Being part of a group of people with a similar commitment.* Experiencing something that will never happen again. *The sense of community.* Lack of traffic. The ferry leaving at the end of the day. None of the usual busyness of life on the mainland. Worshipping in the Abby and the Michael Chapel; *sense of belonging.* (original emphasis, all italics added)

Such rosy recommendations, however, are also balanced out by what resses say are the ‘down sides’:

Personality clashes. A divided Resident Group. Hours of work. Lack of space/privacy sometimes.

Living with people you work, eat and worship with. Not being able to escape...

Shortage of personal space. Other people imagining they could do other people’s jobs better.

Living with lots of insignificant rules. Sometimes ‘living in community’ is the loneliest time I have known...

Certainly, corporate life is no guarantee against loneliness or dissension. The feelings of claustrophobia (‘not being able to escape’) expressed by so many resses are worth paying

attention to. Ressies describe it variously as ‘lack of space/privacy’ or as the ‘goldfish bowl syndrome’. At the heart of ressies’ complaints of feeling ‘hemmed in’ is the question of identity. I highlight two particular case studies of ressies reflecting—after the season was over—on what was most difficult about their ‘Iona experience’.

‘Sarah’: Living in a Goldfish Bowl...

‘Sarah’ is a ressie and a mum in her mid-30s. Along with her two small children, Sarah came to Iona in 2000 with her partner when he was hired by the Community; she worked as General Assistant when she was not caring for her girls. At the close of her first season, she reflected:

The intensity [was most difficult]. Now at the end of the season I am yearning for some anti-social anonymity! When I wait for [my daughter] outside school I am often questioned, it’s like working in one of those modern ‘experience’ museums where people are paid to dress in period costume and answer questions!

Two significant points are raised here. Firstly, Sarah feels so powerfully the ‘intensity’ of her ressie identity such that, out of season, she ‘yearns’ not only to be ‘anti-social’ but also to be ‘anonymous’. She wants to shed the ‘ressie’ persona that marked her out to others and obliged her to socialise with them. The desire for anonymity implies an erasure of Sarah’s ressie ‘self’; to be unknown, unrecognisable, no one, with no social ties or obligations is to be the complete opposite of what it means to be a ‘ressie’—i.e., to be totally and mutually embedded in other people’s lives.

Unlike Historic Scotland staff who wear uniforms and name badges, ressies do not bear any external markers of their identity. From their interactions at the centres, most guests recognise ressies when they encounter them elsewhere on the island. But to the casual visitor, ressies can be virtually invisible. Visitors may spot a ressie who led a service they attended, but only the most sensitive would be able to distinguish a ressie

from a guest or local. For resses wear woolly hats, anoraks, and walking shoes like any sensible visitor does and can easily blend into a crowd of tourists if they so choose.

However, Resident staff's unrelenting self-consciousness about being 'resses' demonstrates how fully they internalise their corporate identity, believing people are always recognising them as such.



Fig 8.1 A ressie wisely wrapped up against the wind and rain

As mentioned earlier, after a trip to the mainland, a ressie sometimes 'boasts' she participated in conspicuous consumption by buying lots of clothes or eating 'unhealthily', almost as an act of rebellion. This behaviour illuminates how, even off the island, where they *are* anonymous, resses are still hyper-aware of their 'on-Iona' identity to the point of specifically acting against it.² The point here is that Sarah's 'yearning for some anti-social anonymity' reveals

how forceful and intense the 'ressie' identity can be, even away from its source.

Secondly, Sarah's somewhat bemused reflection over visitors treating her like 'one of those modern "experience" museums' elucidates how Resident Group life on Iona can sometimes be felt as 'unreal'. In this case, being recognised while picking her daughter up from school simultaneously validates her status as an 'insider' to the 'outsider' visitor *and* causes her to feel inauthentic, a poseur. The difficulty is not that she is pretending to be local when she is not one, but that the way visitors approach her makes her feel she is *supposed* to be representing some forgotten way of life—as if every 'local' on the Hebridean island should. Her discomfort at being exoticised, treated as the 'other', makes

² On the other hand, sometimes resses prefer not to be inconspicuous as Resident Group status awards a certain amount of prestige; it gives resses a sense of belonging on Iona greater than that of 'just any visitor' and plays into the 'possessiveness' the venerated isle seems to evoke in people.

her feel she is not and cannot actually be *herself*, that she is merely playing a part in someone else's idea of 'authentic history'. Another ressie echoes Sarah's feelings when she says:

...I learnt so much...about people, about the real world, which is definitely here (almost condensed if you compare it to the mainland) although *some people sometimes think they come to Disneyland* where everything is beautiful and possible... (italics added)

This problem of exoticisation is, of course, not unique to Iona nor to the Western Highlands and Islands. It is widespread in other pilgrimage and tourist hotspots in out-of-the-way places. But, compared to larger, more sparsely populated Hebridean islands, Iona's size and spatial arrangements mean visitors tend to encounter more people they think are 'locals' going about their daily business. It is one thing, however, to be interrogated by tourists while catering to them in a shop and quite another to be accosted while standing by the roadside waiting for the school bell to ring. The island's religious renown, plus the 'Iona Community's' reputed exemplary lifestyle there, seems to provoke visitors' curiosity in every person they encounter. These factors contribute to why ressies—and locals—often feel they are living in a 'goldfish bowl'. One ressie-incomer describes the shift she made from full-time Resident Group life to living as a 'local' person: '... You go from being in a real goldfish bowl, totally accountable [as a ressie], to being relatively anonymous [as a local]. You're still in a goldfish bowl, you're just not as aware of it'.

In contrast to the locals, the Resident Group are responsible for developing and perpetuating the Iona Community's (and hence, Iona's) religious renown. When ressies rail against the pressure of feeling constantly scrutinised, they may in fact be striving against the prevailing Community ideology they have to uphold as Resident staff and which sets them apart from other Iona inhabitants. As seen in earlier chapters, ressies do

employ strategies to negotiate their individual ‘selves’ against the corporate ‘Resident Group’ identity. But these are mostly submerged, not displayed to the public eye, what Goffman (1961: 180) calls the ‘underlife’ of an institution or society. We will return to Goffman momentarily.

‘Beatrice’: Leaving One Place, or Two?

‘Beatrice’ is an overseas ressie in her late 20s who had worked for the Iona Community for three consecutive years. She and a local ‘Cameron’ had begun a serious relationship and planned for her to stay on the island. Beatrice shared her greatest difficulty about being a ressie: ‘In my last year I struggled sometimes with balancing my personal life (relationship with “Cameron”) with “living in community”’.

Some other ressies who have had relationships with local people expressed similar views. It is interesting Beatrice associates her ‘personal life’ with her relationship with Cameron, someone outside the Resident Group—the implication being she does not have a personal life *within* it. Relationships within the Resident Group itself can be trying; ressie couples often bemoan how, because of long work hours and full schedules, some days they barely meet at all. Sustaining a successful relationship with a non-ressie, even one living on Iona, often requires Herculean efforts to ‘balance’ it against the demands of community life. For example, except on days off³ and two other services, ressies are expected to attend all the 9.00 AM and 9.00 PM daily services and to take most meals with the guests at the centres. Social/romantic assignments must be carefully organised, so the ressie is not accused by colleagues of being ‘uncommitted’ to the Resident Group or ‘unfocused’ on her job.

³ Ressies are supposed to take one-and-a-half days off each week, but these are often not consecutive and half-days off commonly disappear at the height of the season.

The logistical difficulties point to a larger tension: that Iona is not one place, but two (at least). When Beatrice stopped working for the Community and made the transition to becoming an ‘incomer’, she said:

...Knowing that I would stay on the island made it of course much easier. I only had to leave the Community—*I left only one place, others two.* (italics added)

Beatrice’s insight is that there are two, almost entirely separate worlds co-existing on Iona—that of the locals, and that of the Iona Community via the Resident Group. To be fully in one can mean having to negate the other; it is extremely difficult to equally invest of one’s ‘self’ in both domains. Beatrice continues:

Because I stayed on Iona I felt I first needed space from the IC—to disconnect myself properly to be able to build up a different kind of relationship with the Abbey and to build my life ‘down’ in the village. I didn’t go to services until the end of March [two months after she left the Resident Group]. It was quite odd to be in the Abbey church and not belonging to the resident community anymore. I would have loved to go to more services over the season, but because of [my] work pattern I wasn’t able to.

Certainly, the practical aspects of people’s daily lives, where they live, work, and play on the island, determine their modes of social interaction; there is nothing intentionally sinister about the distinction between these two ‘places’ or ‘Ionas’. But Beatrice’s observation does reflect the historical divide and the ongoing spatial and social segregation of the two Iona communities (lowercase ‘c’), one perceived as ‘religious’, the other as ‘secular’. In a small island, such a split is perhaps felt more keenly and not easy to bridge. Even in public spaces like the pub and village hall where the two groups have the chance to mingle, the spatial divisions between them are surprisingly literal and clearcut.⁴ In a bigger place, social groups may have more room—literally and figuratively—to disagree

⁴ For example, during the weekly discos, locals and hotel staff line one side of the village hall, while Community guests and staff line the other creating a wide, empty space in-between the two groups.

and/or live autonomous lives. In this ‘dense’ pilgrimage site, however, these two Iona communities cannot avoid being cognisant of each other, their ‘nearness’ and ‘otherness’. Even for someone as easy-going and well-liked by the locals, Beatrice felt the need ‘to disconnect myself properly’ from the Abbey and ‘to build my life “down” in the village’. Her intuition is that these two worlds are fundamentally disparate, if not quite opposed.

As Beatrice astutely points out, when other *ressies* leave Iona, they leave ‘two places’. While this is certainly true, it is also important to note that most *ressies* do not have long-term relationships with locals nor do they have strong enough motivations to navigate a way through both social realms as successfully as Beatrice has. Nevertheless, when her *ressie* contract ended, in order to fully embrace her ‘incomer’ identity, Beatrice forsook her previous ties with the Abbey.

Before analysing what it means for *ressies* to leave ‘two places’, it is important to understand how they inhabit ‘one place’ as the Resident Group. What is it about the ‘*ressie*’ identity that exerts such a dogged pull on people like Sarah and Beatrice—two strong adult women with considerable outside interests (e.g., children, local partner) besides the Resident Group’s remit to ‘build community’ with guests and *vollies*? How do they come to feel they either exist in a ‘goldfish bowl’ and long for anonymity, or are compelled to compartmentalise or sunder their ‘*ressie*’ identity from their ‘personal’ one?

Identities Total and Taboo

As discussed earlier, becoming a member of the Resident Group demands commitment to an entirely different way of life alien to most people. In every respect—socially, economically, religiously, and geographically—*ressies* are removed from what was familiar and comfortable to what is strange and challenging; indeed, that is part of the appeal of becoming a ‘*ressie*’. Nevertheless, in order to adapt to and cope with, much less

flourish in, the ressie mode of life, people must somehow transform ‘Iona, the pilgrimage site’ into ‘Iona, my home’. Cognitively, emotionally, and physically, ressie must shed their prior individual identities to take on their new corporate roles as members of the Iona Community’s Resident Group. To some extent, a dialectic does exist between the individual, personal ‘self’ and the corporate, ressie ‘self’; but because the ‘*corporate*’ is always celebrated by the Community over the ‘individual’, the latter shows itself increasingly only in subversive strategies and discourses as the season wears on. Beyond the normal adjustments people make to adapt to a new job or a new context, ressies must do *both* in a setting laden with a pre-eminent history and imbued with ‘sacred’ meaning.

During my reconnaissance visit, the then Warden recommended that if I wanted to conduct research (about the Iona Community) on the island, I should apply to join the Resident Group. I was warned that as an outsider no one would talk to me—locals and ressies would be far too busy and lacking a clearly defined role or accepted link with the people or place would place me under suspicion. Becoming a ‘ressie’ gave me an acceptable ‘base identity’ from which other people could relate with me. As a stranger, I had to fit into the *pre-existing* offerings of Iona identities. This is generally true for any outsider who wishes to remain on the island for an extended period.

As described in Chapter 6, the process of constructing their ressie ‘selves’ is kickstarted by Staff Induction and Training. Education into the Community’s shared practice and beliefs is crucial to enable ressies to *literally* embody their employers’ vision of corporate living in striking contradistinction to the mainstream, mainland world. The nervousness and trepidation ressies feel when the first guests arrive is not just anxiety over their ability to do their jobs but, more significantly, over how well they have incorporated or adopted the ressie ‘self’. Implicitly, the ideal ressie ‘self’ attends all requisite services and meals, socialises easily with guests, effectively line manages and befriends vollies,

leads services with sincerity, creativity, and knowledge, promotes the Community's vision with understanding and sympathy, takes initiative with peace and justice issues, is competent, considerate, and always available to lend a hand—doing all this cheerfully and willingly.⁵ How much resses are able to attain this ideal 'self' when the guests arrive—and keep on arriving—becomes the real test of the Resident Group as an authentic model of 'community living'.

With practice, resses gradually lose this self-consciousness. Through the actual *doing* of the appointed tasks of work and worship, of 'building community' with guests and vollies, the unique, corporate entity called the 'Resident Group' is *produced*. The relentless, repetitive nature of the weekly schedule reinforces and hones this new identity, in a way resses could not have anticipated or prepared for. Perpetually surrounded—physically and cognitively—by a range of social groups each with its own distinctive identity, the Resident Group find themselves constantly defined *by* and *against* them. Resses are situated as the go-between, so to speak, between two main groups—the Iona Community and the guests/visitors. Additionally, although they live for an extended time on Iona, resses are never considered 'locals', or even 'incomers'. More recently, while both exist around the Abbey, resses and Historic Scotland staff belong to two separate, even rival, bodies. Intentionally or otherwise, Iona's social groups strongly maintain and perpetuate their own inimitable identities and agendas—whether they like it or not, new resses are initiated into this dense, multi-layered social web of Iona identities. The boundaries between all these groups can be formidable, the strategies for crossing them potentially costly.

⁵ This 'ideal' is seldom openly discussed but comes to the fore when a ressie is criticised for some infraction. Also, both 'underdeveloped' resses (i.e., lacking commitment to their work or the Resident Group) and 'overdeveloped' resses (i.e., exhibiting 'martyr-like' tendencies) are judged by their colleagues. The rare ressie capable of sustaining healthy 'boundaries' between the individual 'self' and the Resident Group can be as much envied as they are criticised for not being willing to go the extra mile.

For a new ressie to assert independence from the Resident Group, for instance, is risky. On one hand, she risks being judged as lacking commitment to the Resident Group, a behaviour inviting criticism and rebuke from her employers and colleagues. On the other hand, locals may view her waywardness suspiciously: why would a ressie not act like one? They may wonder why she prefers to befriend islanders, for instance, or, not being a visitor or guest, if she has some other, ulterior reason for coming to live on Iona. The renegade ressie occupies an ambiguous—and hence, precarious—social space until she either chooses to fully embrace her ‘ressie’ identity, finds some way to be accepted into an alternate group, or leaves. To invent and profess an identity other than those already established is nigh impossible, even taboo.

This dynamic was demonstrated when a vollie ‘Adi’ decided to ‘hang around’ after finishing his official stint. Adi’s stated aim was to promote a few ‘green’ schemes to the Community centres and to locals. He often visited the centres to see friends and asked to meet with the Warden and other ressies. Although he was not ‘dangerous’, his persistent presence caused uneasiness—staff felt he disrupted their work and guests did not know what to make of him. The fact that this ex-vollie now did not have *a clearly defined role* made everyone uncomfortable; unfortunately, he was also not well accepted by the locals. It was generally felt Adi needed to realise ‘his time on Iona’ had come to an end. This ex-vollie occupied an indeterminate social space, fitting nowhere, and—while not exactly ostracised—the lack of enthusiasm for his schemes eventually persuaded him to leave the island. Adi had failed to understand that, in order to remain on Iona, he needed to reconstruct and re-negotiate his former vollie identity into another prescribed identity (e.g., visitor or hotel staff) and to behave accordingly. He could not simply be ‘himself’, a free-floating agent with no distinct ties to any social group. Akin to Mary Douglas’ (1969)

notion of purity and danger, to be caught in the interstices of this thick network of Iona identities is taboo.

The Resident Group: A Total Institution?

Goffman's (1961) work on total institutions has applications here. Although he focuses primarily on prisons and mental health institutions, Goffman (*ibid.*: 17) includes the category of:

...those establishments designed as retreats from the world even while often serving also as training stations for the religious; examples are abbeys, monasteries, convents, and other cloisters.

While the Resident Group is not a religious order nor, as the Community insist, are the centres 'retreats from the world', it can be argued residents inhabit a 'total world' of sorts. The original workgroups of the 'Iona experiment' were run with a regimental discipline and autocratic hand by the Great War veteran CO George MacLeod (Ferguson 1990: 179ff). While today's Resident Group is run along more democratic lines, Goffman's (1961: 1) definition is still spot on:

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable amount of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life....

Goffman (*ibid.*: 17) contends that the basic social arrangement found in modern society consists of individuals who 'sleep, play and work in different places with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an over-all rational plan'. Total institutions purposely break down the normal barriers separating the three basic spheres of life (sleep, play, and work). In doing so, they circumscribe an all-encompassing lifestyle that has strong resonances with Resident Group life.

Firstly, ‘all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same central authority’. With the exception of each having their own bedroom, resses share all living, work, religious, and recreational spaces with other people, all provided by the Community. The Staffing Team try to arrange for resses who work together, for example, to live in separate abodes, but this is not always possible. Secondly, every member of a total institution is treated alike and must carry out tasks corporately. Regardless of training, experience, age, or professional standing, resses are paid the exact same monthly allowance. The same standards of ‘poverty, chastity, and obedience’ are expected of them. Working co-operatively or in teams is the norm for resses, including doing set daily chores with guests and vollies.

Thirdly, in total institutions, time is managed and tightly scheduled by ‘a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials’ imposed on members. Resses’ (inherited) daily schedules are regimented, revolving around fixed events such as mealtimes, services, workshops/sessions, pilgrimage walk, etc. The ‘rhythm of the week’ strictly demarcates one day from another, with allocated themes and activities for each day, repeating itself in an unvarying, pre-determined cycle. Any suggestion to alter the schedule must pass muster with the Management Team and the relevant Community committees. For example, the momentous decision to switch from the seven- to six-day week (see Chapter 5)—and its consequences for the well-established ‘rhythm of the week’—aptly demonstrates the third characteristic of total institutions, i.e., how thoroughly the Community manage the spatial and temporal arrangements of ressie life. Fourthly, all the ‘enforced’ activities are explicitly designed and organised into a ‘single rational plan’ to ‘fulfill the official aims of the institution’. The entire setup of the island centres and the Resident Group’s *raison d’être* is precisely to embody the Community’s vision of ‘rebuilding community’ as they ‘seek new ways of living the Gospel in today’s world’ (The Iona Community 2001a: 9).

Besides breaking down the structural and organisational barriers between sleep, work, and play, Resident Group life is also premised on collapsing the cognitive divisions of ‘work/worship’, ‘prayer/politics’, and ‘sacred/secular’. On a linguistic level, all Iona Community discourses emphasise this ‘holistic’ worldview, especially pervading the worship material that resses daily present and ‘own’. Existentially, resses struggle to negotiate their individual ‘selves’ against what can at times feel like a ‘totalising’ group ideology. Where, one could ask, is the line between ‘holistic’ and ‘totalising’? This issue is raised in one ressie’s reflection:

...I found the community environment quite supportive, inspiring and encouraging, though... I think I would see the challenge in not having much privacy. One would share a home with fellow ‘residents’, so you live and work quite closely with the same people.... The working time is also not very clearly defined, so *often people end up spending 14 hours or more with the guests* and basically for my understanding [that means] being ‘on duty’ and working, *whether this is recognised by the community or not. There are no clear boundaries between private and working/community life.* So, all in all I see my experience of ‘living in community’ as a very valuable one and I certainly don’t regret at all having done it (rather the opposite!). But I also now *value my independence* very much and wouldn’t recommend community life as a ‘long term’ option. (italics added)

In such a ‘total’ world, the ‘holistic’ ideal of extinguishing the supposed Cartesian dualities of modern life (e.g., ‘public/private’) can, in practice, be difficult for resses to sustain without cost.

Maintaining Social Distance

Without wanting to overstate the parallels, Goffman (1961: 18) interestingly highlights a ‘basic split between a large managed group,...called inmates, and a small supervisory staff’. The ‘inmates’ are confined to the physical institution, with restricted contact with the outside world, while the ‘staff’ have fixed work hours and are socially integrated with the outside world. In the Iona case, the ‘inmates’ could be equated with the resses, while

the ‘staff’ could be compared with resses’ ‘supervisors’, the Iona Community and, to a lesser degree, the islanders.

Taking the islanders first, by no means are their interactions with resses ‘formally prescribed’ or officially restricted like prison inmates and staff. But it is true the social distance between them can be vast, stemming from the well-known historical hostilities from MacLeod’s time and the background and class differences between the seminary students and the islanders. Although the relationship is improved and more co-operative these days, as one ressie-incomer observed:

...however well things seem to going, it will only ever take an infinitesimal mistake to get the locals snarling against the IC again. They’ll get over it as always, but that tightrope/buried resentment is always there.

The tension between the two social groups may be attributed to the protectiveness Iona locals feel over their territory and homeland, and how they feel the Community and their staff have impinged upon their way of life. As stewards of the land, the islanders are responsible for ensuring that, while staff groups (and visitors) come and go, the island—their inheritance and legacy—is cared for and fit for future generations.

Stereotyping the ‘Other’

Goffman (1961: 18) states that prison staff and inmates tend to ‘conceive of the other in terms of narrow hostile stereotypes’. While things are not so severe between locals and resses, the issue of stereotyping is highly relevant.⁶ At worst, locals regard resses—and everyone ‘up at the Abbey’—as pompous, religious fanatics (‘God’s anointed condescending to the yokels’), while staff perceive locals to be unfriendly, obstructive, and even irreligious. Interestingly, McKevitt (1991) found that local Sangiovannesi resent

⁶ Stereotypes exist amongst locals themselves, e.g., ‘incomer’ vs ‘island-born local’, especially during disagreements and conflicts; the islanders, too, have fine distinctions of identity amongst them. See also Jackson (c.1981).

devotees' 'fanatical' appropriation of their beloved patron saint Padre Pio and as such distance themselves from the shrine's goings-on. All devotees—visitors and residents—on the other hand, view locals as irreligious, even sinful. There is a similar, albeit less stratified, dynamic on Iona where those whose work and lives revolve around 'religion' (e.g., the retreat houses) and a handful of local Christians generally have more in common with one another; they also tend to be on friendlier terms with the Resident Group, compared with the rest of the locals who disavow religion altogether. Some resses have also been known to dissociate themselves from what they regard as the 'overly pious' behaviour of guests and other resses. McKevitt usefully shows that not all 'locals' nor site staff are the same and that the conflicts at pilgrimage sites are more nuanced than expected. On Iona, current relations between locals and the Community's staff are generally amiable and some people do make genuine efforts to cross the social groups' boundaries. Yet the stereotypes persist, for the successful friendships that develop are often seen as exceptions.



Fig 8.2 Locals ubiquitously congregate to the far right side of the pub

Stereotyping is most obvious in public places such as the pub, the jetty, and village hall, where the social groups tend to gather *en force*. Their respective body language and type of activity or conversation demarcate almost-palpable boundaries between them. Often, this is out of shyness rather than hostility and at the close of a

busy day people simply want to be with their mates. Nonetheless, 'purposeful misunderstanding' is sometimes used to bolster the stereotypes. For instance, on their final

night, guests like to converge at the pub and relive highlights of the week. They frequently mimic the Community's song-teaching method by waving their hands about and even break into fits of singing, maybe a Taizé chant or an African hymn. The pub's other customers find such behaviour quite bizarre. Although locals are used to it and may even recognise the perpetrators are guests, not staff, it does not stop them from rolling their eyes and resolving once again to avoid 'that mad lot up at the Abbey'.

Such intentional misunderstanding is mutual. Encountering a few affable locals may reinforce to staff how 'truculent' the rest of them are or that the exceptional ones are 'incomers' and not the 'real' locals. When I asked staff or locals why they do not initiate conversations with the other, both sides almost invariably replied, 'Well, why don't *they*?' In any case, breaking down or traversing social thresholds between groups can take more energy and time than people possess during the hectic-ness of the season.

Stereotyping also exists between the Iona Community and resses. At its most extreme, Members view resses as complainers whinging about being over-worked and under-appreciated, whereas resses think of Members as distant 'employers' who needlessly interfere with or disrupt the functioning of Resident Group life. These stereotypes are harder to maintain because there are several organised interactions and exchanges between the two groups. For instance, Members take turns to 'Mac sit' a week at a time, providing opportunities for them and staff to get to know each other. Every season, the Leader spends six consecutive weeks on the island and visits on other occasions. Importantly, a number of Members and Associates have themselves been vollies or resses, and vice versa, encouraging mutual understanding and empathy. As a Member, the Warden can also serve as a helpful mediator between resses and the Community.

Physical and Existential 'Worlds'

There is another way the Iona Community could be equated with Goffman's 'prison staff' in relation to the *ressies*. Members live on the mainland and, like prison staff, are integrated with the 'outside world', while *ressies* are 'confined' to Iona. Members have jobs they travel to, friends they socialise with, a range of cinemas and restaurants to patronise, and families and homes they return to at the end of each day. They live in the mainstream world of multiple places, people, and possibilities. For *ressies*, however, the island's circumference serves as the physical limits of their world, much as prison walls delimit the inmates' domain. The self-contained tendency of the Abbey and MacLeod Centre can further circumscribe staff's world to those premises. Goffman (1961: 15–16) explains how these tangible borders work for total institutions:

Their encompassing or total character is symbolised by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, water, forests, or moors.

It is common practice for Members to boycott Starbucks, Nestlé, and other multinational companies they think are unethical or have unfair trade practices; the purchasing policy of the Community Bookshop and the centres' kitchens on the island follow the same principle. While Members have access to and thus have the *choice* to avoid these products, *ressies* do not. Staff, of course, can purchase such items from the local Spar shop, but some half-jokingly confess they would feel 'too guilty' buying something 'forbidden'. As representatives of the Community, most *ressies* feel obliged to live in a manner consistent with their employers' beliefs (and usually their own, too) at all times. However, as mentioned earlier, when away on the mainland, some staff purposely have a Starbucks coffee, as an act of asserting their individuality (often 'boasting/confessing' it on their return). The compulsion to do this shows an underlying ambivalence *ressies* can feel

toward the Community's ethos. What starts out as appreciation for an ethical lifestyle, over time can breed resentment over their inability to exercise personal choice, to express their individual 'selves'. As Turner (1974) points out, 'When *communitas* becomes force rather than "grace", it becomes totalism, the subordination of the part to the whole instead of the free creation of the whole by the mutual recognition of its parts'. Ressies not only inhabit specific physical spaces on Iona, primarily the Abbey and MacLeod Centre, but their lifestyle and *raison d'être* are also tightly circumscribed by their employers to form a total institution defined spatially and existentially.

One important aspect of Members' relative 'freedom' is that the 'individual' aspect of their faith is sustained by the local church they attend, while their Community membership nurtures the 'corporate' dimension missing from mainstream Christianity. On Iona, however, some ressies feel that their 'individual' faith is constantly subsumed under the predominant Community emphasis on the 'communal'. Certainly, ressies can attend services at the Parish Church or Bishop's House, for example, for their own edification but this does not exempt them from required participation in Abbey worship. What for Members (and guests) operates to 'balance' out the 'individualistic' tendency of mainstream spirituality can end up overwhelming ressies' personal faith.

Ressies may feel that Members inhabit the mainstream world of infinite choice, compared with islanders who are geographically restricted in their access to that world, and further compared with Resident Group life which is constrained by place *and* ethos—both belonging to someone else; the island, to the locals, the ethos, to the Iona Community. The things that define ressies' world ultimately belong to *others*. As much as they strive to 'own' either, they can never truly be a local, nor can they live permanently as a ressie to

‘represent’ the Community.⁷ It is this elusive, ‘betwixt and between’ quality of Resident Group life that I contend can frustrate and enervate resses and, in a sense, precipitates the ‘identity crisis’ many experience while they are on Iona and which often continues to affect them when they finally leave.

Power over the ‘Self’

Total institutions are always places of power imbalance; the Resident Group is not exempt. Resses might begin by feeling ‘empowered’ to try new things like leading worship, but over time can feel disenfranchised by the ‘corporate ethos’—instead of acting out of personal choice, they go through the motions out of necessity and compulsion to keep up the ‘ressie’ persona. This often manifests itself in reheated conversations about being hired ‘solely’ to cater to the guests (and vollies) and about staff existing on the island only ‘on behalf of the Iona Community’. The main meta-narrative of Resident Group life can, ironically, end up excluding or subjugating resses’ own, personal reasons for being there. Not being an ‘intentional’ community that exist for themselves in some explicit way, the lack of focus on the ‘individual’ and their personal journey can eventually become disempowering for resses.

Goffman (1961: 154) argues that:

The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense *is not a property of the person* to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self *as constitute it*. (italics added)

⁷ Some resses apply to become a Member and, if successful, can then establish a sense of ‘belonging’ to the Community and to the island that way.

If Goffman is right, then the implication is the Resident Group setup—as a total institution—threatens to totalise not just ressie’s way of life, but their very *being*. Are ressie’s doomed? Is there no way around this? As described elsewhere, some ressie’s practice what Goffman (1961) calls ‘secondary adjustments’ whereby people use a set of strategies to assert their individuality, to resist the prevailing mode of behaviour ‘prescribed’ by the Community as ressie-‘appropriate’. Like the mental patients Goffman documents, a ressie’s individual ‘self’ can be tenacious, possessing a need to ‘express distance’ from the social unit, from any *prescribed* sense of ‘being’ (*ibid.*: 188; see also Freidson 1983).

Of course, not every ressie experiences an identity crisis of this sort nor to this degree; but because of the prevailing forces of the total institution mentioned above, this thesis argues that to reclaim and reconstitute the personal ‘self’ on one’s own terms is monumental for ressie’s. While the ressie ‘self’ is not systematically mortified the way a prison inmate’s might be, each person on the Resident Group nevertheless sacrifices significant parts of their individual, pre-Iona ‘selves’—first through the Staff Induction exercises and then ritualistically every week, repeated in the very pattern of life, of work and worship, every single day. The entire setup is meant to produce ‘ressie’s’ who conform to the Community’s vision and to guests’ expectations of a ‘holistic’ community.

Some ressie’s believe things might be different if the Resident Group were an ‘intentional community’:

...Sometimes the staff group didn’t feel like a community but the house we lived in...always did. Building community with guests each week was a challenge, but always a worthwhile one. It might all have been easier if the community had been intentional.

Talk of it being community slightly irritates me. We are *employees with a common task*, living very close to each other. *People can get sacked and some I hardly see.* (all italics added)

At first glance, these quotations contradict each other. The first says ‘building community’ is possible (if difficult), while the second rejects the idea. What is common between them is they acknowledge something is *absent* in Resident Group life. The first focuses on a key missing ingredient (‘intentionality’), whereas the second argues that, for all the talk about ‘community’, *it* does not actually exist.

The second quotation also bluntly expresses what resses (and some Members) may sometimes suspect: that staff are simply the ‘hired help’. It calls into question the prime reason why many people apply to become resses—the allure of ‘living in community’ on Iona. Other resses have asked what the point is of making the Resident Group *feel* like a community via the Staff Induction when afterwards, during the season, they are mostly confined to their departments and have few meaningful interactions with one another. Therein lies the contradictions and tensions in resses’ ‘Iona experience’—an encounter between ‘self’ and ‘other’ which is far more convoluted and problematic than for most guests and visitors.

Leaving Iona, Leaving Two Places

Peter: Iona is a Thick Place

As summarised from my fieldnotes, let us consider the case history of ‘Peter’, a ressie introduced in Chapter 6:

Peter is in his early 60s, a white English man, and a Baptist. Of a middle-class background, he works in the building trade. He learned of Iona through the Community’s hymns and songs. In 2001, he saw the Community’s advertisement for a job at the Abbey and decided to apply. His beloved wife of over 30 years had died about a year earlier and he’d ‘needed something which would be a complete change’. He immediately felt ‘at home’ on the island, even during the interview.

But half-way through his three-year contract, Peter decided to go. He said, ‘I was ready to leave, I had enjoyed [it] and would not have missed my time there where the world came to me, but felt the need to get back to be involved’. For him,

‘living in community’ was ‘great for the vollies, great out of season but the rest of the time the guests got in the way’.

While on Iona, Peter and another ressie had begun a relationship, which ended soon after he left. A year after settling back at home, however, Peter is happily remarried and involved in his local church.

As a Christian, Peter said he actually found Iona a difficult place to be; his experience of the place ‘was contrary to George MacLeod [who had said Iona is a ‘thin place’]. I found it a “thick” place, my personal faith went on hold, instead of growing I felt it shrank’. Earth was not closer to heaven at this pilgrimage site for Peter, but the very opposite.

For Peter, moving to Iona was a complete break from his previous life. Living in a Christian community in a beautiful, remote place felt safe, especially as he was still grieving for his late wife. But, contrary to his expectations, he did not find much ‘community’ with fellow resses during the season when ‘*the guests got in the way*’. Interestingly some Athonite monks also feel increasing daily pressures in having to receive streams of pilgrims and visitors, including their own friends and relatives—to the point where one monk observed that the ministry of hospitality ‘becomes something of a burden’ (quoted in Góthoni 1993: 118). The tough day-to-day realities of ‘community life’ at a pilgrimage site can often be incongruous with popular images of a placid, sacrosanct religious life.

For Peter, too, it was not enough simply to live and work for the guests; something was ultimately missing for him. Far from having an uplifting, ‘mountain-top’ high religious epiphany, Peter’s personal faith ‘went on hold, instead of growing I felt it shrank’. Although he too led many of the church services, he felt they were ‘too contrived’. It is as if, having worked behind-the-scenes, what was ‘holy’ to guests and visitors had become far too prosaic and technical, too orchestrated for him, like a performance. Peter did not last his original three-year contract. What was ‘sacred’ for others in Iona, the ‘thin’ spiritual place, had become for him ‘profane’ in Iona, the ‘thick’ mundane space.

If Resident Group life is indeed a total institution and the corporate ressie ‘self’ is constituted (and the individual ‘self’ potentially engulfed) by it, what are the implications for ressie when they leave it? Although the transition from ressie life to normal life took Peter many months, he was happier for having left Iona when he did—being there was starting to ‘cost’ him more than he was willing to surrender. It seems being and becoming a ‘ressie’ raises unsettling questions and foments identity and other types of crises that can carry on beyond Iona’s white shores.

Certainly, many ressie’s ‘Iona experience’ are formative and transformative. For example, there is ‘Sam’ a young Scottish ressie who had never before left Glasgow. Post-Iona, however, Sam went to work at a bear sanctuary in America, then a homeless centre in London, and later a rehabilitation centre in Bradford—his passion for working in these ‘peace and justice’ fields and his confidence to do so were clearly invigorated by his ‘Iona experience’. During his Iona stint, though, Sam often seemed a less-than-ideal ressie who skived off work, was socially gauche, and bent not a few Resident Group rules. Many of his ex-ressie colleagues are astounded and impressed by his subsequent transformation. It could be said that, although his behaviour was considered disruptive to Resident Group life, his ability to retain his ‘individuality’ by breaking rules and resisting conformity to the dominant ‘institutional arrangement’ (Goffman 1961: 154) was what made his ‘Iona experience’ particularly positive and powerful—and his adjustment to ordinary life afterwards relatively trouble free.

There are others, however, who find ‘leaving Iona’ much more disorientating. Perhaps like the medieval Christian pilgrim whose peregrination may have cost him his job even if it benefited his faith (Turner & Turner 1978: 15), some ressie find their prolonged absence from previous careers reduced their chances of returning to it (see Chapter 6). One ressie deliberated over her post-Iona career quandary:

Job? None as yet—finding it hard to commit to anything that may require me to promote myself as an applicant—I come up against a brick wall. Is it that I have given so much in the last three years and so I have become commitment phobic? Or is it that I need to commit to something that was AS significant as Iona? I do have a niggling voice that wants me to *do something for myself*—interesting.
(original emphasis, italics added)

This ressie's reflection elucidates the way in which the individual 'self' can struggle to assert itself again, after three years of being immersed in the corporate 'ressie' identity. Ressies' post-Iona 'angst' is even more pronounced when describing their church experiences back on the mainland:

I'm struggling to find meaning in my church life. I'm missing being surrounded by enthusiasm and passion—sometimes there's very little life in the church!...

A long, difficult search for the right place [church]. In our new home in Northumbria I think I have found it in our tiny parish church. But I still miss Abbey worship terribly....

Impatience with the institutional church as it is and as it seems to want to remain. A longing for a real liberation of the church...

Scared of how I would fit back into the church and society after our experiences on Iona. Wondering what the future would hold; where we would live; what our ministry would be...

What is it about leaving Iona that yields so much trepidation and uncertainty in ressie's?

If, in Goffman's formulation, Resident Group life is a total institution, being removed from it has overwhelming consequences. When ressie's finally do go, they leave behind not just a job, a place, a group of friends—they literally leave *everything*, they lose an entire *world*, or even as Beatrice (who remained on Iona as an 'incomer') observed, they lose *two* worlds or places, '...Knowing that I would stay on the island made it...much easier. I only had to leave the Community—I left only one place, others two' (italics added).

For those with something specific to return to, such as a house, family, spouse/partner, or job, leaving Iona may be less disturbing; for many resses, however, Iona serves as a temporal and spatial place of transition, a break from mainland life during which they re-evaluate themselves and their future. Even one ex-Warden (a Member and minister) who, with his wife, went directly into a mainland parish job said that during their first post-Iona year, ‘I struggled with the vacuum I felt I had moved into’. Unlike guests for whom Iona is always ‘the pilgrimage site’, from which they return home, resses almost inevitably conflate ‘Iona’ and ‘home’. After Iona, they may have nothing secure or definite to return ‘home’ to because, quite simply, the island has become *home*. Moreover, decamping from Iona means being thrust out from an all-encapsulating world into a vastly different, urban, mainland one—into all the negative aspects they had been sheltered from (for total institutions also protect those within it). In addition, the former ressie is now expected to create a new ‘home’ in this pulsing, bustling, polluted, unfriendly, concrete-covered world, and even if she craves anonymity, she must reclaim and reconstruct a new ‘self’—a non-ressie, post-Iona ‘self’.

This phenomenon bears some similarity to Frey’s Camino pilgrims who also find their ‘return’ disorienting and disruptive to their former lives and ‘selves’:

Daily life may not seem as relevant, exciting, and open as being on the road. Moreover, the abrupt experience of return rarely allows most people to process the weeks and miles. Feeling “disoriented” is common... Many miss the clear sense of direction that the Camino provides’ (Frey 2004: 99).

As a total institution, the Resident Group setup provides resses with a defined (if contested) sense of ‘self’ and a complete, structured, and meaningful lifestyle. One post-Iona ressie said, ‘I was glad not to be as ridiculously busy as we always were on Iona, but I felt I wasn’t doing my work properly when I kept finding gaps. So I started to fill them with the things I was missing...’; it took him three years after leaving the island to ‘finally

[get] my dependence on Resident Group busyness out of my system'. Even if leaving Iona brings resses welcome relief, the transition to a more diffuse, ordinary life can be prolonged and painful. To get a fuller sense of how this develops, let us consider another ressie's case history as she reflects on her Iona tenure and subsequent adjustment to life post-Iona.

'Jane': My 'Identity' had included the Island...

Jane, in her late 30s, is a white English woman from a farming community. She had seen an Iona Community recruitment ad a long time ago, but did nothing about it then. In the mid-1990s, she stayed twice at Bishop's House [on Iona] and attended services at the Abbey. 'My experience of the island was powerful, profound and liberating. I felt that I had to come back for more!'

After a stint as a vollie, Jane accepted a Resident post in 1999. She was absolutely convinced she would be offered the chance to live and work on Iona, 'I wanted to commit to the life there and in so doing make a commitment to God—be completely involved. It was not a hard decision to make. It would have been harder not to go!' During her Iona sojourn, she felt completely alive and at one with the elements and with God and thoroughly enjoyed being with people from all over the world.

As a Christian, Iona for Jane was 'a place of prayer and pilgrimage' where worship and creation co-exist, boundaries are challenged, and 'the island becomes a place of worship outside the church walls'. Being there made her realise she didn't have to strive anymore, she 'recognis[ed] that I had found what I had been looking for (for that time)' and it was healing for her in unexpected ways.

Jane kept extending her contract up to the three-year maximum. At that point, however, she 'felt right to leave', she was tired and ready to go. But it was harder for her to leave the island and the people more than the Abbey. 'My "identity" had included the island for three years. The only time I have called another place home other than my parents' home. I still feel its loss...'

Since leaving Iona, Jane has had difficulty fitting into a church environment. Her faith has been charged and challenged by Iona, but her future life direction is uncertain. For her, the 'thinness' of Iona meant 'nothing could be hidden whether good or bad. Physical or spiritual'. She saw in the landscape and light a reflection of her experience of being 'exposed' to her emotions and where God felt very (painfully) close at times.

While she understood her work responsibility was to provide hospitality to guests, being a ressie:

...had a *separate identity* for me—an international group of people working and living together largely focused on *daily life on the island*. In my [department] we practised...as far as possible acceptance of those who society had/might shun/ed. However I do not feel that I was ever 100%

actively engaged in the [IC's] vision—as [it] is about promoting awareness and involvement *in one's own community* and so therefore Iona could not be about that? (italics added)

During her first post-Iona years, Jane struggled with depression and other physical illnesses. She eventually started a course at a residential college but found 'living in community' again completely draining. Comparing it to her time on Iona, Jane realised on reflection that her 'Iona experience' had 'cost' her in more ways than she had thought. It took her almost two years before she felt 'ready' to visit the island again, during which she spent most of her time with the locals and stayed away from the Abbey community. She expressed wanting to resist getting drawn back into that 'overwhelming' environment again.

Jane's move to Iona had been like a response to a divine calling. She experienced a powerful spiritual boost, feeling a strong sense of *communitas* with 'the elements and with God' and the diversity of people. Iona seemed to be what had been missing from her life previously. However, she acknowledges that the fixed limit of her contract was necessary as she was exhausted from her ressie work. With hindsight, Jane sees how her ressie 'Iona experience' left her with emotional and physical burdens to contend with—yet post-Iona she was on her own, without a support network; her loneliness was felt more perniciously for its contrast to the previous years spent living in community, for better or ill. After her vastly different experience of worship on Iona, Jane felt ambivalent in mainstream churches. She did not want to front services again, instead wishing desperately to be 'anonymous', but she was nonetheless dissatisfied with the narrowness of mainstream Christian language. Jane's feelings of being 'exposed' and 'laid bare' on Iona, while having its healing aspects, also made her feel raw and vulnerable after she left. Iona may have been a 'thin', safe, and holy place for Jane, but it was also an overwhelming and even dangerous encounter.

Jane's case study suggests that, not dissimilar to prison inmates, circus people, or former religious, rezzies inhabit total worlds that make re-entering the 'real world' problematic. No doubt people bring their own 'issues' and problems with them to Iona, hoping to find release and resolution. While many do experience the island as a 'healing' place, rezzies' Iona tenure can nevertheless catalyse or create more difficulties and confusion, which come to fruition when they finally leave. To some extent, and ironically—given that the 'Iona experience' is meant to liberate people from mainstream strictures—Resident Group life, as a total institution, institutionalises. It regulates almost every aspect of rezzies' lives, from housing and recreation to mealtimes, chore duties, and worship. It determines the temporal, spatial, linguistic, and existential dimensions of the rezzie 'self'. Rezzies, post-Iona, often say they look forward to living 'an independent life, free from the commitments and restrictions of community life'. Even so, as inmates may relish the joy of freedom from prison while simultaneously feeling lost and disorientated, rezzies like Jane struggle to make sense of the 'lived paradoxes' of their 'Iona experience'. Reflecting on her rezzie identity, Jane acknowledges she had a 'separate identity' from that envisioned by the Iona Community; this was because she realised her Iona sojourn was *not* just about the Community, but was also about her personal 'self' and the *island*—'the only time I have called another place home other than my parents' home'. Leaving Iona, for Jane and many others, is not only about leaving 'two worlds' but also about leaving one type of 'liminality' for another. It could be said that rezzies' experience at this pilgrimage site, rather than straightforwardly helping to resolve any previous feelings of 'unbelonging', can heighten a personal sense of 'liminality' when they leave.

Post-Iona: 'A Very Large Punctuation Mark...'

Leaving Iona often thrusts resses unexpectedly into another kind of 'liminality'. Their Iona tenure, at a pilgrimage site living an unusual lifestyle, was *intended* to be the hiatus from normal life; except on leaving the island, they discover 'normal life' has also become elusive. Throughout my fieldwork and particularly toward the end of my contract, I was told by the Warden, other Members, and former staff that resses often do not fully understand the significance of their 'Iona experience' until they leave, sometimes for years after. They assert it almost invariably proves to be life-changing, even if people cannot always articulate or pinpoint its exact nature. The impact, however, can be highly ambivalent; for, along with more overtly positive outcomes such as learning skills, building confidence, or defining a vocation, depression and ill health also dominate many resses' immediate post-Iona lives.

One ressie 'Harold', after leaving Iona in 2004, took an extended break to travel around the world; this is how he explains that crucial post-Iona period of his life:

It has taken me a long time *to get the Ressie thing out of my system*. This is not to say I was not ready to leave, I was, very much so. I found the last season on Iona very hard for all sorts of reasons [including ill health and a relationship breakup]...

I needed *a very large punctuation mark* between the ressie life and any kind of 'settled' thing that came next. The Antarctic was the furthest away I could get so I went for it...! I really needed that time of travel and *reconnecting with who and what I was about* independent of this *all-consuming thing called the resident group*. It was also helpful to regain a sense of perspective where items on an agenda did not include whether people should take eggs back to their accommodation (although of course in community such things can matter!)...

I think I shall always feel that being on the resident group was one of the most intense periods of my life. For good or for ill I felt alive, I wouldn't do it again, but I wouldn't have missed it either.

Harold needed 'a very large punctuation mark' between his time as a ressie and what normal or 'settled' life might come afterwards. Whether a comma, a full-stop, ellipses, or a question mark, his post-Iona 'punctuation mark' necessitated extreme travel to the

Antarctic, amongst other places, and the need to reappraise ‘who and what I was about’ independent from his ‘ressie’ identity. Other resses, too, have needed different types of ‘punctuation marks’ after leaving Iona. Some, like Harold, go traveling, take a long retreat, or start a new course of study or training, while others fall ill or become depressed, unable to find work or to know what work they want or can do now. Some former resses have remained in a state of uncertainty and insecurity for years, exhibiting symptoms not unlike post-traumatic stress disorders. Comparable to Frey’s (1998, 2004) observation that seldom are there any rites of incorporation to ease Camino returnees’ transition to ordinary life, ex-resses too struggle to process and integrate their ‘Iona experience’ into their post-Iona lives.

What many post-Iona resses go through is similar to that of people who leave religious orders, prisons, even cults. For different reasons, all of these relinquish a well-defined role within an often-rigid institutional environment and engage in a process sociologists of religion (e.g., SanGiovanni 1978; Bromley 1979) call ‘status passage’, whereby these former ‘members’ must negotiate a new role or reconstruct a sense of ‘self’ for themselves in the ‘real world’. SanGiovanni’s (1978) study of ex-nuns reveals this transition is, amongst other things, ‘emergent’ in that it is created, discovered, and moulded by people over time and involves numerous role transitions simultaneously—characteristics also marking resses’ complex post-Iona adjustment period. One ressie who left Iona four years previously reflects on the persistence and ‘density’ of the ‘ressie’ identity:

On Iona we dressed ourselves in layers, and I think I shed the layers at different times. The outer layer came off quite quickly, because at least I had a job to go to, and had to get stuck in at once... But the feeling of isolation, and of going to church on Sundays rather [than] BEING it all week...took perhaps a couple of years to grow out of. And the attempts to fill gaps with resident group busyness only stopped when I couldn’t take any more on—maybe two years ago. My

FEELING of being a ressie disappeared quite quickly, but I can only assume layers of that feeling must have remained at some level... (original emphasis)

Bromley (1998) posits that people's 'exit process' from organisations is significantly determined by the organisation's power and congruence with the surrounding society. Applying his ideal-typology to the Resident Group inevitably raises questions about their relationship with the Iona Community. For a movement much-identified with radical, left-wing politics, the Community surprisingly best fits Bromley's (1998: 147ff) ideal-type of 'allegiant organisations'—at least in regards to ressie—which sit at the most mainstream, socially integrated end of his spectrum (e.g., colleges, mainline churches, professional organisations).⁸ As most ressie are not Members, ressie have a different relationship with the Community than do Bromley's 'defectors' with their allegiant organisations (e.g., ex-priests with the Catholic Church). Nevertheless, defectors and ex-ressie share several commonalities—of which there is only space to discuss a few.

Allegiant organisations wield the authority to grant 'permission for role relinquishment and control the exit process as well as the interpretive narrative' (*ibid.*)—the Iona Community's 'leaving Iona' rhetoric, examined in this chapter, powerfully shapes ressie's self-understandings and interpretation of their 'Iona experience'. Additionally, 'exit often is constructed as an organizationally sponsored and controlled separation ritual' (*ibid.*)—the Community stipulate the conditions and length of ressie contracts and, at the end of their agreements, ressie are always offered a ritualistic way to celebrate their imminent departure (e.g., a party, a special worship service).

As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, ressie's immediate post-Iona lives are often fraught with existential and practical uncertainty—with limited *official, sustained* recourse to the Community for support to resolve any conflicts or have any 'alternative

⁸ At the other end, 'subversive organisations' (e.g., cults) are regarded by wider society as dangerous and dispute settlements with their 'apostates' typically involve external oppositional coalitions (e.g., human rights groups).

narratives' taken seriously. Bromley's (*ibid.*: 148) observation of how defectors adjust to ordinary life outside allegiant organisations confirms my own research with post-Iona resses:

To the extent that the former organization was the source of *a distinctive life-style and identity*, there is inevitably a period of instability as individuals find themselves *between identities* and the *former identity colors* current identity building efforts... (italics added)



Fig 8.3 Whenever staff leave Iona for good, remaining staff congregate at the jetty to see them off

Furthermore, his (*ibid.*) insight about the outcome of defectors' *contested* exits is illuminating:

The account... is typically one in which the exiting member professes sincere intention and acknowledges failures despite genuine, persistent effort. Departing members are likely to reaffirm the organization's values and goals; the organization professes regret but understanding. This resolution leaves the organization positioned such that it has exercised appropriate responsibility to both exiting member and the larger society. No great stigma attaches to either side, although the *exiting member shoulders ultimate responsibility*. (italics added)

Indeed, some Iona Community Members attribute the negative aspects of ressie's Iona tenures entirely to the notion that staff bring 'latent' issues with them, which are ignited or precipitated by their 'Iona experience', which in turn are reframed as necessary precursors for 'healing'. Others acknowledge that Resident Group life is hard and can be costly to people's wellbeing. Some Members hold both, or other, views. The diversity of opinions amongst Members reflects the fundamental ambivalence the Community still hold toward this entity called the 'Resident Group'. Echoing the 1997 paper written by several Members, the question remains unanswered: *Have* they created a monster? Being a ressie can greatly empower people and transform their post-Iona lives for the better, but it can also ill-equip, even disadvantage, people to cope with the consequences of their ubiquitously intense and exhausting 'Iona experience'.

What is commonly accepted is the apparent 'mystery' or 'indescribability' of the lived experience of being a 'ressie'—as something that defies hasty explications and tidy narratives (something not unlike the field ethnographer's own quandaries). Compared with guests, it might be said that ressie's are the ones who undergo the more fundamental life transformations expected of pilgrimage encounters. They, in fact, confront a double-transformation—first into a 'ressie', then afterwards into a post-Iona 'self'. Ressie's are not like members of religious orders who, in taking lifelong vows, must come to terms with their new corporate identity and lifestyle as a (theoretically) complete and lasting new 'self' (cf. SanGiovanni 1978). Under the Iona Community rubric, ressie's—like guests and visitors—must eventually leave Iona for the 'outside' world. Yet the *hau* of Iona (see Chapter 3) affects ressie's differently, more intensely than it does guests and visitors. While on Iona, ressie's must contend with the prevailing narrative that Iona—the 'sacred' (and profane) place which indelibly claims and marks them—can never be their final

destination; and on leaving, they must come to terms with the ways the Iona *hau* has become an integral part of their 'selves'.

While the island typically remains 'the cradle of Christianity' for many guests and visitors, for *ressies*, Iona is more 'a crucible of the self'. Out of this 'crucible', rather than monumental faith changes in explicitly religious terms (though these, too, do occur), the significance of their 'Iona experience' is to be found in the discourses of self-knowledge and self-transformation. Indeed, the Iona sojourn, for many *ressies*, proves to be:

A time of self discovery and self giving, a transitional and challenging place. A thin place...

Conclusion: Living the 'Liminal'

This thesis has offered one response to the question, 'What is pilgrimage like for *site staff*?' by spotlighting a social group heretofore neglected in pilgrimage research. The ethnographic evidence presented challenges the assumption that pilgrims' 'sacred' encounters are unmediated, that site staff passively acquiesce with the dominant ideology, and that the production of pilgrimage experience is unproblematic. Building on existing paradigms of pilgrimage as 'contested' (e.g., Eade & Sallnow 1991), 'movement'-oriented (e.g., Coleman & Elsner 1995), and a form of 'practice' (e.g., Eade & Sallnow 1991), I also deployed the Turners' (1978) classic formulation of pilgrimage as *rite de passage* to show 'place' and 'landscape' are key themes in how people today understand and engage with the ancient pilgrimage isle of Iona.

Given Iona is only second to Walsingham in a recent survey of 'Britain's Favourite Spiritual Places' (BBC 2006) and its wider international popularity, it has garnered scant anthropological attention (except Golliher 1989). My project significantly contributes to the anthropology of pilgrimage by investigating the historical formulations of Iona pilgrimage and its contemporary character and practices. I argue that most Iona visitors cannot be assumed to be 'pilgrims' but must be understood within the context of what they *do*; as such, they are 'potential pilgrims' but potentially other things (including 'tourists'), too.

Parts I and II elucidated how most visitors—including Iona Community guests—have one-off Iona encounters, but a not insignificant minority develop longer-term relationships punctuated by repeat visits to renew and extend their acquaintance with the place and its various communities. Thanks to Celtic revivalism and to the Community's presence on the island—via the Resident Group—Iona's landscape has come to personify

an indigenous, ‘more pure and primitive’ spirituality (Bradley 1999) both reviving *and* defying institutionalised Christianity. Illustrating Weber’s observation of the Western ‘disenchantment of the world’, for many people—disenfranchised with the mainstream Church—Iona represents liberating ‘alternative’ spaces and spiritualities. Utilising a Heideggerian perspective of ‘dwelling’, I demonstrated how devotees appropriate Iona’s ‘sacred’ geography as a resource for personal revelation and self-transformation, believing that the island’s agency (or Maussian *hau*) uniquely acts upon them (see Chapter 3).

Some Iona enthusiasts, however, feel this ‘natural’, spiritual quality is obscured by the Iona Community’s ‘too modern’ style of worship at the Abbey and/or ‘too conservative’ religio-political vision. The island is also popularly romanticised as containing a unique balance of normally oppositional forces (e.g., pagan and Christian). The Resident Group’s mediation of the ‘sacred’, as such, is too explicit or too ‘Christian’ for these people’s liking—i.e., they feel *ressies* are *too* ‘visible’. We will later return to this topic of ‘visibility’.

To redress the paucity of research on the role pilgrimage staff play in enabling ‘sacred’ encounters, I go beyond studying Iona’s ‘pilgrims’ and concentrate on the Resident Group—as crucial agents in setting up the sociological conditions conducive for countless visitors to gain a memorable and meaningful ‘Iona experience’. Part III thus forms the bedrock of my project and core contribution to the field. In particular, van Gennep’s (1908/1960) concept of ‘liminality’ emerged as a strong central theme in analysing how *ressies*—through their daily activities of ‘work and worship’—come to embody a state ‘betwixt and between’ identities and modes of being. The sentiment, mentioned above, that Iona somehow hosts a balance of antithetical elements intriguingly parallels the Resident Group’s remit to transcend the alleged dichotomies of ‘sacred/secular’, ‘work/worship’, ‘prayer/politics’ prevalent in Western Christianity.

However, in the attempt to incarnate the Iona Community's 'holistic' vision, the Resident Group become juxtaposed within these existential tensions or dualities, experiencing them as 'lived paradox'.

In contrast to religious rituals typically serving to contain and delineate the 'profane' from the 'sacred', the Community instead seek to erase that distinction. Organised and led by *ressies*, Abbey worship and the weekly Pilgrimage include explicitly 'political' content (e.g., Third World debt), turning what is usually regarded as belonging to the 'profane' or 'worldly' realm into 'sacred' concerns, and vice versa. However—in the hectic, relentless pace of Resident Group life—the collapse of the boundaries separating these supposedly contrary realms is no guarantee that one will not come to *dominate* the other; i.e., rather than 'work' being a form of 'worship' offered to God, for some *ressies* *everything* they do (e.g., socialising with guests, preparing services) becomes the burden of 'work'. In anthropological terms, the 'sacred' can become 'profane', dangerous or polluting, to *ressies*—as evidenced by their ubiquitous exhaustion and other post-Iona struggles.

The Community's religio-political ideology, inspired by incarnational and liberation theologies (see Chapter 2), also prioritises the 'corporate' over the 'individual'. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Resident Group setup is intended to recover a kind of *gemeinschaft* against the prevailing Western mode of *gesellschaft*. Or, in Maussian terms, to reclaim 'total' social relations characteristic of pre-industrial societies against the trend of individualistic and utilitarian social relations dominating Western, post-industrial societies. But the very relationship between the Resident Group and the Iona Community is compromised between these states of being. *Ressies* are required to embody a communal ethos akin to a religious order, but do so without the long-term commitment and support structures of an *intentional* community; *simultaneously* and *antithetically*, they

must abide by the legal and economic regulations of a modern enterprise but without the corresponding separations between the different spheres of life (e.g. ‘work’, ‘home’, ‘leisure’). As their remit from and relationship with the Community is neither solely spiritual and moral nor strictly employee-employer, but a mixture of both, the Resident Group inhabit what I call a ‘Maussian conundrum’.

The Resident Group’s current *raison d’être*, arising organically in response to changing governmental regulations and visitor expectations, situates them between working *primarily* to serve the weekly guests and to present and represent the ‘absent’ Iona Community. As ‘living symbols’ existing to fulfil other people’s aspirations—and being constantly defined (by negation) against these social groups—many *ressies* during their Iona sojourn struggle to know what it means to exist, positively, *for themselves*.

As non-natives of the island, *ressies* are considered ‘outsiders’. Unlike visitors, because of the efforts made to *relocate* to Iona, the *extended period* spent there, and the *nature* of their work, ‘Iona’ and ‘home’ for *ressies* become conflated. To incarnate the Community’s place- and practice-centred spirituality, *ressies* give of themselves—body *and* soul, through the ‘rhythm of the week’, repeatedly, ritualistically—to the project of ‘building community’. However, while traditional religious’ lifestyles of ‘routinised spirituality’ complement a complete, permanent change of identity, *ressies* have *time-limited* contracts—and identities. Who they are during this intensely ‘liminal’ state on Iona also has repercussions for when they leave, compelling them to confront a double-transformation of the ‘self’.

As a pilgrimage site, outsiders perceive Iona’s ‘thinness’ as ‘spiritual permeability’ where the divine is more accessible and as ‘social porosity’ where genuine *communitas* is easily fostered between people and with ‘nature’. The Resident Group are regarded as exemplars of this type of exalted, holistic existence. However, their labour in running the

centres and ‘building community’ repetitiously is, in reality, not dissimilar to the tough, ‘thick’, daily grind (the mostly ‘secular’) locals themselves face during the busy season. On one hand, resses contend with people’s idealisation of Iona as a ‘thin’ place and the Resident Group as a ‘super-spiritual’ community. On the other hand, because the Community place the *material* at least on par with the spiritual, resses must work to refocus people’s attention on the corporeal world and its problems. In light also of the Community’s ‘leaving Iona’ discourse (see Chapter 8), resses must therefore encourage the notion that ‘thick’, ordinary places and quotidian circumstances of life (away from Iona) matter *more* than any ‘thin’ (or ‘thick’) ones (on Iona). Yet this Community agenda, which resses themselves forward, unwittingly undermines *their* own powerful, emplaced, and frequently life-changing ‘Iona experience’.

As Chapter 8 explained, the ‘totalising’, ‘institutional’ tendencies of the Resident Group setup, plus the circumscribed island setting, can threaten to overwhelm resses’ individual identities and make leaving problematic. By reconstructing the island as a ‘stepping stone’ instead of a pilgrimage ‘destination’, the Community’s dominant narrative prioritises ‘leaving Iona’ for the ‘real world’. As suggested above, this discourse inadvertently subverts resses’ highly *emplaced* ‘Iona experience’. Resses’ post-Iona period of adjustment into ‘normal’ life is characterised by fatigue, disorientation, and ambivalence—another form of ‘liminality’, sometimes lasting years. While the majority of resses enjoy, grow from, and appreciate the privilege of living and working at this ancient pilgrimage site, the immediate aftermath of their ‘Iona experience’ is surprisingly mixed.

One main aftereffect is upon resses’ post-Iona faith and church life. The question raised in Chapter 6 asks if ex-resses who shy away from joining a congregation fulfill Bruce’s (1996) observation that ‘liberal Christians’ tend to weaken in church commitment.

Put another way, why has spending a significant period of their lives in a blatantly religious context resulted in so many resses feeling enervated about religion? The answer is not straightforward. Resses' extreme lassitude—physical, emotional, existential—fits the pattern of 'burnout' not uncommonly suffered by people in Christian ministry. Many resses for a long time find it difficult, even if they desire it, to commit to being part of *any* institution, much less the Church. Ex-resses often look for independence, personal space, and other ways to establish their individual 'self' again after such an intense, 'totalising' period of their lives.

If 'faith' is measured by factors like church attendance, then many ex-resses do appear to have lost their Christianity. Is their faith's 'demise' attributable to the Iona Community's 'liberal' influence? The issue hinges on the definition of 'faith' or 'Christianity'. Indeed, many Members hold to the notion that faith or spirituality can exist, even flourish, outside institutional religion (though not outside 'community'). They see 'faith' as processual, a lifelong 'pilgrimage', rather than a moment of 'conversion' alone. Reflecting their incarnational and liberation theological leanings, Christianity for them is about becoming more fully 'human', where distinctions between 'sacred' and 'secular' spheres of life are dissolved. However, many ex-resses, having actually *embodied* this 'holistic' vision, struggle to adjust to a 'separate-spheres' mainland world, despite yearnings for it. Iona may 'spoil' resses for returning to the mainstream Church—but whether it dilutes their 'faith' is less clear.

As outlined above, the tensions generated by resses' 'lived paradox'—by holding together opposites or contradictions (e.g., 'thick/thin', 'work/worship')—can be highly problematic. But is this phenomenon unique to the Resident Group on Iona? It would be interesting to compare the Resident Group's ethos and pace of life with that at, say, Lee Abbey or the pilgrims' refuges on the Camino de Santiago. For instance, Lee Abbey staff

meet every morning to share how they are each ‘doing spiritually’, while ressie’s morning meetings attend to the day’s ‘business’ and their weekly staff meetings generally lack ‘spiritual checkups’. How do staff at other pilgrimage or religious sites negotiate issues of personal piety with ‘corporate’ faith, if at all? Do those staff also possess unresolved dissonances between the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’, between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, etc., that ressie’s daily confront? What is the nature of those staff’s relationships with *their* employers?

Ressie’s ‘lived paradox’, while onerous in many ways, can nevertheless be *productive*—for liminality also offers potentiality (Turner & Turner 1978: 3). Indeed, neatly fulfilling Ardener’s (1989) ‘remote areas’ thesis, Iona does serve as a ‘crucible of the creation of identity’. In particular, as summarised above, the Resident Group distinctively exemplify the *paradoxical* character Ardener attributes to remote places and Turner asserts for the ‘liminality’ of pilgrimage as *rite de passage*. Within the ‘lived paradox’ spaces where people contest and contend with their new corporate ‘ressie’ identity, opportunities also emerge to explore and reinvent the ‘self’. Although Iona visitors and guests also face self-revelatory possibilities (i.e., they are all ‘potential pilgrims’), this dissertation contends that ressie’s, in fact, more fully embody the transformative encounter of ‘self’ and ‘other’ typical of conventional pilgrimage. Arguing that long-term British missionaries in New Guinea ought to be considered ‘pilgrims’, Fife (2004: 141) asserts that pilgrimage, usually conceived as relatively restricted in time and space, should be redefined as ‘a process independent of *temporal* and *spatial* boundaries’ (*italics added*). Similarly, I propose that although ressie’s are more *place*-bound and their Iona sojourn *longer* than for guests and visitors—who traditionally fall in the ‘pilgrim’ category—the *nature* and *duration* of their ‘Iona experience’ make them into a kind of ‘time-extended pilgrim’. Ressie’s prolonged ‘liminality’ on Iona actually often results in

the more permanent, life-changing transformations the Iona Community mainly seek to effect in guests. As such, although Golliher (1989) is correct to call his staff-informants ‘pilgrims’, I arrive at this conclusion by employing different analytical tools, using guests and visitors as a comparative foil, and consulting ethnographic evidence that stretch beyond resses’ Iona tenure. Further comparative research could be conducted to discover, for example, if *brancadiers* in Lourdes share any commonalities with Iona resses—are they, too, ‘potential pilgrims’? Frey (1998: 96ff) discovers hospitaleros at the Camino refuges are usually former pilgrims who ‘want to give something back’ and regard their volunteer experience as ‘another way of making the pilgrimage’. But how does ‘working-as-pilgrimage’ for them compare with ‘walking-as-pilgrimage’?

Undoubtedly, many people still travel to Iona specifically on pilgrimage, most in groups for a day, some for several days at a retreat house, while others head to the Abbey and MacLeod Centre for a week’s stay. For Community guests and staff, traditional associations of the island with St Columba, his relics and miracles, are not the primary attraction. Diverging from conventional (Catholic) pilgrimage paradigms and discourses on penance, miracles, or vow-making, for example, the majority of the—mostly Protestant—guests and staff regard Iona as an ‘exception’ to the mainstream Church’s theologies and practices, where they can explore and push the boundaries of faith and the ‘self’.

Through events like the weekly Pilgrimage, the Community aim to promote ecumenism and inter-faith understanding (see Chapter 7). Instead of pilgrimage usually serving to reinforce participants’ common religious identity (Coleman & Elsner 1995: 205), the weekly Pilgrimage fosters a shared identity linked with Iona the *place* via pilgrims’ *shared movements* or activities there. With ecumenism increasingly in vogue (see Wilson 1966), is it possible that ‘praxis’ and ‘place’ are playing a greater part in (Western)

people's constructions of their religious identities and sense of 'belonging'? After all, several Members admit that the dispersed, ecumenical Community are bound together more by what they *do*, than by doctrine (see Chapter 2), and by Iona as their historic and symbolic 'centre'. Many disillusioned with institutional religion also appear to quest for an alternative 'spiritual' identity at places like Iona, Lindisfarne, and Taizé. Perhaps this is even more true of people like the *ressies* who, beyond making occasional visits, invest their lives and 'selves' by actually relocating to the 'sacred' site for a significant period in order to incarnate their aspirations. In so doing, the pilgrimage site becomes 'home'—a notion of 'place' of unparalleled emotional force and cultural resonance (see Chapter 4).

How the island becomes 'home'—spiritually, physically, or otherwise—for guests and staff at the Iona Community centres is primarily achieved through two key modes: 'community' and 'work'. While people often join the Resident Group for personal reasons (e.g., 'inner healing'), their *raison d'être* is to work to provide a ministry of hospitality through 'service'. Moreover, *ressies*' tendency to 'overwork' raises intriguing questions about the possible nature of 'Protestant pilgrimage'. Could it be argued that 'Protestant pilgrimage'—conceived as such in reference to the majority of guests and staff—is primarily effected or effective through the medium of labour? Even the guests do 'chores' as a way of 'building community'. What distinguishes *ressies* and their 'Iona experience' from other Iona 'outsiders' is precisely their mode of 'work' (and worship). What attitudes, by comparison, do staff at Catholic pilgrimage sites have towards their 'work'?

But the Community's goal at the centres is not work for its own sake but as a specific form of 'labour'—'common tasks' to perform towards the reconstruction of 'community' or *gemeinschaft*. People can choose to stay in Iona's hotels, B&Bs, even the religious retreat houses, but many purposely target the Community's centres for the communal lifestyle idealised there. Fife (2004: 140–1) argues that mission stations are

shrines to the activity of evangelism; similarly, at the centres, Iona is conceived not as a standard pilgrimage site devoted to saintly persons, places, or texts, but as a shrine to the activity of ‘building community’ or *gemeinschaft* in an atomistic *gesellschaft*-dominated age. Given the Community’s ‘corporate’ priority, the ‘sacred’ at this pilgrimage site is thus only truly accessible through ‘community’; indeed Turner (1974: 203) observes that pilgrims journey toward ‘a sacred source of *communitas*’.

Neville’s (1987) study of ‘Protestant pilgrimage’ as the journeys made by American Protestants ‘returning’ to family reunions and gatherings has interesting applications to the Iona Community centres. She argues that ‘Protestant pilgrimage’—which includes people congregating at denominational conference centres in rural settings—is a reaction against the bureaucratic rational system of postindustrial Protestantism’ (Neville 1987: 27), a way in which an ‘anonymous’, ‘depersonalised’ Protestant individual can re-imagine and renew his affiliation with a broader network of social and religious relations within a communal context. While staff and guests are not linked by kinship as are Neville’s ‘pilgrims’, amongst other differences, they nevertheless share in common with Neville’s ‘Protestant pilgrims’ the search for ‘intentional *communitas*’ by travelling to a place made holy not by relics or saints *per se*, but by an ongoing community of believers over time. Unlike Reformed traditions, however, Iona Community worship—practiced by *ressies* at the Abbey—richly incorporate symbols and images, re(dis)covering the poetics and aesthetics closer to Roman Catholic and Orthodox practices but with a modern twist.

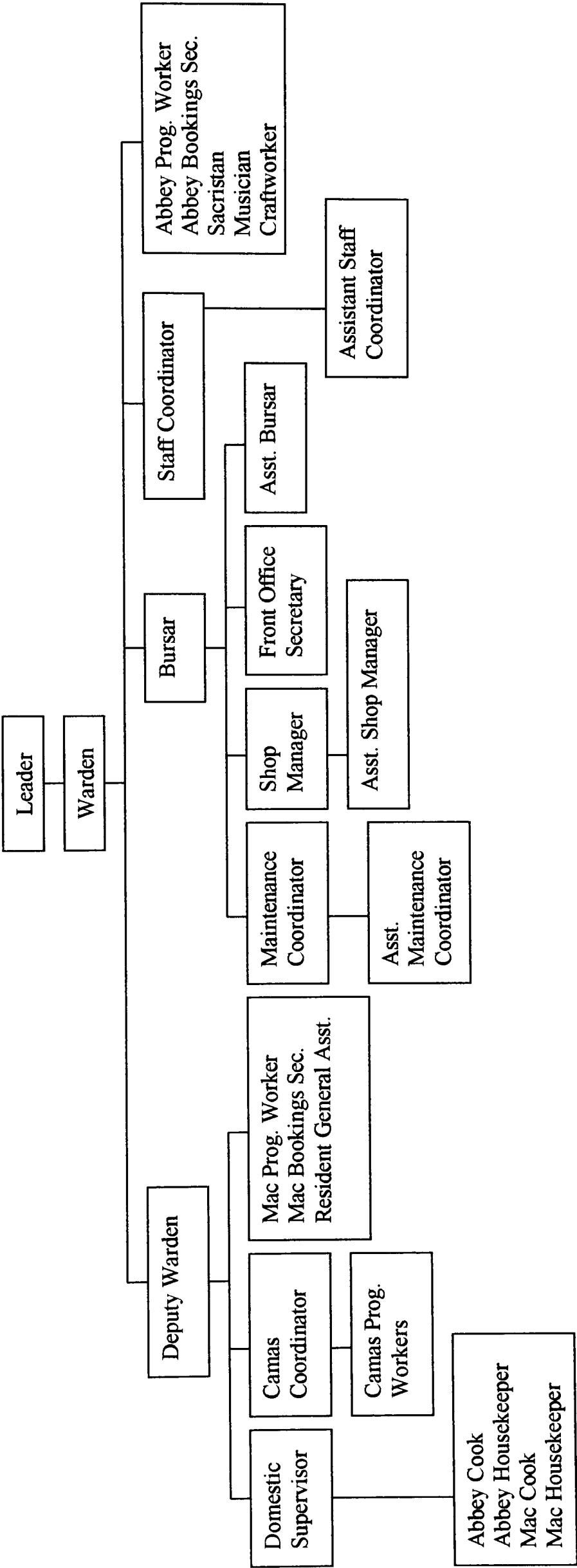
Chapter 2 queried if the Iona centres—perceived as manifestations of the ‘new monastic’ movement—are indeed contributing to the Community’s wider goal of changing society and the Church. Theoretically, guests (and visitors) influenced by the Community’s religio-political vision return to effect it in their home churches and locales.

Staff, with even more pronounced experiences of ‘community’, supposedly leave to perpetuate it elsewhere. However, as this study has discovered, resses’ Iona ‘labour’ is not unproblematic and the outcomes are ambivalent. Further diachronic research could be conducted to discover how, if at all, post-Iona resses transform their ‘Iona experience’ into day-to-day realities within the mainstream world. Based on the current ethnographic data, it appears that despite the Community’s communal ideology, people continue to be moved by personal, even individualistic, reasons to become resses. As resses, their individual ‘selves’ contest and contend with the prevailing rhetoric emphasising the ‘corporate’. At the end of their contracts, ex-resses often find themselves displaced from the Resident Group, from Iona, from the mainstream Church, and from the Iona Community—while coping with the next transformation of ‘self’.

Informal friendship networks do develop amongst ex-resses, and some relocate to Scotland and/or choose to become Associates or Members, thereby tapping directly into the Community’s resources to aid their navigation back into mainstream society. Some Members also take interest in ex-resses with whom they had a special connection, and vice versa. Nevertheless, if what resses (and guests) undergo in their ‘Iona experience’ can be considered a form of ‘pilgrimage’, it appears that contemporary pilgrimage discourse today—Catholic or otherwise—is indeed increasingly about the ‘self’. Although Neville (1987: 22) asserts that ‘Protestant pilgrimage’ idealises ‘communal life’, many guests’ and staff’s actual ‘Iona experiences’ are nonetheless concerned with self-actualisation; for some resses, this arises *out of* a ‘total’ immersion in ‘community’.

In seeking to make visible the ‘invisible’ category of pilgrimage site staff, I may have inadvertently come upon an extreme case, a Maussian ‘maximal representation’. The Resident Group on Iona is based on the post-Reformation model of the ‘priesthood of all believers’, where everyone can directly access or mediate the divine and all labour has

APPENDIX A **The Resident Group on Iona** **Organisational Structure**



APPENDIX B
Organisational Chart of the Iona Community¹

Camas Staff Team	Iona Resident Group	Iona Volunteers	Marketing Officer	Office Administrator	Secretarial Assistant	Youth Development Worker	Coracle Editor	Domestic Assistant	Membership Secretary	Accounts Assistant	
Camas Coordinator	Management Team			Assistant Publishing Manager	Admin. Support Worker			Secretary			Admin Secretary
Deputy Warden											
		Warden		Publishing Manager (Wild Goose Publications)	Wild Goose Resource Group	Support Services Manager					
Leader											
Community Council											

¹ As at January 2001.

APPENDIX C
Distribution of Members' Voluntary (10%) Tithe to the Iona Community

Percentage of a Member's tithe	Fund(s) designated	Additional notes
60%	To 'the wider work of the Church' and other bodies	Members' personal choice (e.g., one Member gives 45% to the two churches in his parish and 15% to an Indian charity)
20%	To the 'Community Fund'	Together with donations from Friends and Associates, this goes into the Iona Community's 'Central Administration' budget That is, the costs of running the Community and organising any central projects (e.g., Faslane protests)
10%	To the Family Group	For purposes decided by individual Family Groups
5%	To the 'Common Fund' (e.g., the 2005 'income' was £12,076)	Not held centrally, but by the Treasurer of the Common Fund Trustees (Members who are elected) Helps fund other charities/projects in which Members are involved Applications are made directly to the Trustees
5%	To the 'Travel Pool'	Held centrally, pays Members' travel for Community Plenary meetings
Total: 100%		

APPENDIX D

Resident Group Employment Documents (various)



na (Registered Office)
Community House,
Pearce Institute,
840 Govan Road,
Glasgow G51 3UU
Tel: 0141-445 4561
Fax: 0141-445 4295
e-mail: ionacomm@gla.iona.org.uk
web site: www.iona.org.uk

also at: **Iona Abbey**
Isle of Iona,
Argyll PA76 6SN
Tel: 01681-700404
Fax: 01681-700460
e-mail: ionacomm@iona.org.uk

MacLeod Centre
Isle of Iona,
Argyll PA76 6SN
Tel: 01681-700404

Camas Centre
Bunessan,
Mull PA67 6DX
Tel: 01681-700367
(Enquiries: Tel: as above)

Our Ref: GB/IM

04 January 2001

Michelle Chew
Regent's Park College
Pusey Street
OXFORD
OX1 2LB

Dear Michelle,

Further to our conversation and information from your University, I am pleased to offer you a work placement with the Iona Community as part of your course work. This letter of appointment is issued as required by Section 1 of the Employment Rights Act, 1996.

1. Your position within the Iona Community will be that of Sacristan and your duties will be as described in the attached job description for the post.
2. Your place of work will be located on the island of Iona.
3. Your employment will commence on 10th February 2001 and will continue until 17th November 2001. No employment with a previous employer counts as part of your continuous period of employment with the Community.
4. Remuneration will be by way of payment in accordance with the current Resident Staff Allowances as set out in the attached Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group)(January 1998).
5. The work, worship and responsibilities of the common life make for full days of engagement. Members of the Resident Group are expected to take one and a half days off per week.
6. You will be entitled to annual leave of five weeks, pro rata, inclusive of public holidays. Reference to the attached Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group)(January 1998) will give further details.
7. In the event of sickness or injury, you will be entitled to leave and pay as detailed in the attached Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group)(January 1998).
8. In respect of this appointment and if you have a grievance, the procedure for addressing same is detailed in the attached Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group)(January 1998).

THE IONA COMMUNITY is an ecumenical Christian movement founded in 1938 by the late Rev. Dr. George MacLeod (Lord MacLeod of Fuinary)
LEADER: Rev. Norman Shanks REGISTERED CHARITY No: SC003794 (Scottish IR) LIMITED COMPANY Registration No: SC096243

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- 9. The notice required to be given in writing should you or the Iona Community wish to terminate your employment, is detailed in the attached Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group)(January 1998).
- 10. In respect of this appointment, you will be answerable, ultimately, to the Islands Committee of the Iona Community, but will work under the day to day supervision of the person to whom the Committee delegates this function, whether such delegation is by explicit mandate or through previously established precedent.
- 11. This appointment requires you to be vetted in respect of the Children's Act and is conditional on you satisfying the relevant the Authorities.
- 12. This offer is subject to the agreement of written guidelines within which you will conduct your research.
- 13. This offer is subject to you obtaining the necessary visa clearance and/or permission to take up the post.
- 14. Your other terms of employment are set out in the Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group) (January 1998).

Please acknowledge receipt of this Letter of Appointment, together with the accompanying Job Description for the post and the Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group) (January 1998), by signing both copies of this letter and returning one to me at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature]

Graham Boyle
Support Services Manager

[Redacted signature]

- Enclosures:
- 1. Job Description
 - 2. Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment (Under 1 Year Resident Group) (January 1998)
 - 3. Vetting Form

The Iona Community

Job Description for the post of Sacristan

The Iona Community is an ecumenical Christian community, founded in 1938 by the late George MacLeod (the Very Rev. Lord MacLeod of Fuinary) and committed to seeking new ways of living the gospel in today's world. Gathered around the rebuilding of the ancient monastic buildings of Iona Abbey, but with its original inspiration in the poorest areas of Glasgow during the Depression, the Community has sought ever since the 'rebuilding of the common life', bringing together work and worship, prayer and politics, the sacred and the secular in ways that reflect its strongly incarnational theology.

The Community today is a movement of over 200 Members, approximately 1500 Associate Members and about 1700 Friends. The Members – women and men from many backgrounds and denominations, most in Britain, but some overseas – are committed to a rule of daily prayer and Bible reading, sharing and accounting for their use of time and money, regular meeting and action for justice and peace.

The Iona Community maintains three centres on Iona and Mull: Iona Abbey and the MacLeod Centre on Iona, and Camas Adventure Camp on the Ross of Mull. Its base is in Community House, Glasgow, where it also supports work with young people, the Wild Goose Resource and Worship Groups, a bi-monthly magazine (*Coracle*) and a publishing house (Wild Goose Publications).

The Post

The Sacristan is responsible for the stewardship and caretaking of the Abbey Church, the Michael Chapel and the Oran Chapel, and for ensuring that all the necessary preparations are made to enable the conduct of public worship. In addition, the Sacristan has an educational/facilitative role with guests staying in the Abbey and MacLeod Centres in relation to the Iona Community's ministry of healing, and is responsible for supervising volunteer staff attached to the Abbey Church. S/he will participate fully in the common life of the Resident Group, the responsibilities of which cross the different centres, together with sharing in the conduct of the services of worship.

In April 2000 responsibility for the upkeep of the Abbey Church, grounds and precincts passed, on behalf of the Cathedral Trustees, to Historic Scotland. As host and liaison person in the Abbey Church on behalf of the Iona Community, the Sacristan has a key role in the developing relationship with Historic Scotland, which holds ultimate responsibility for the Abbey. This requires close liaison with Historic Scotland Staff in relation to the Iona Community's use of the Abbey Church for public worship, and in relation to group tour bookings, weddings, pilgrimages, concerts and other events and special services. Details of the working relationship, methods of communication and liaison etc are being established in close cooperation with Historic Scotland staff and this new and developing context requires flexibility from the postholder.

Responsibilities

The Sacristan is responsible for:

1. Ensuring the preparation of the Abbey Church/Michael Chapel for worship, including books and worship materials, candles, sound system, furniture, communion preparation etc, and being available to assist with rehearsals.
2. Welcoming and briefing visiting worship leaders; welcoming worshippers and stewarding before, during and after services.
3. Responsibility for caretaking of the Abbey Church and cloisters, Michael Chapel and Oran Chapel. (*Cleaning of the Abbey Church, chapels and cloisters is undertaken by Historic Scotland. However the Sacristan should be prepared to undertake this role if required as part of his/her caretaking duties.*)
4. Orientation and induction of volunteer staff attached to the Abbey Church, and supervising them in caretaking, worship preparation and stewarding duties.
5. Liaising closely with the Warden, front office staff and Historic Scotland staff in relation to bookings and the use of the Abbey church for special services and events.
6. Accountability for the budget for worship resources and ordering of church supplies (candles, incense, communion wine, flowers etc).
7. Responsibility for the counting, sorting and recording of offertory monies and other collections, in preparation for second counting and banking.
8. Overseeing the move from the Abbey Church to the Michael Chapel for regular worship at the close of the season.

9. Dealing appropriately with correspondence and prayer requests, in close liaison with the Iona Community Prayer Circle Coordinator based on the mainland.
10. Preparing the weekly intercessions list for the intercessory prayers in the healing service.
11. In rotation with other programme staff, sharing in the leading of weekly sessions on Healing for the Community's guests. This includes an explanation of the work of the Iona Community Prayer Circle, the format and purpose of the healing service, and a general discussion on the issue of healing.
12. In liaison with other programme staff, preparing and facilitating other guest sessions as required - including, for example, Iona's history and Christian heritage, prayer & meditation, creative workshops, guest services.
13. Organising the staff rota for afternoon prayers for justice and peace which take place daily during the season.
14. In cooperation with other staff as appropriate, ensuring that the justice & peace displays in the Abbey Church and the Centres are kept up to date.
14. Any other duties appropriate to the post which are agreed upon with the Warden.

Person Specification

The person appointed should share the Iona Community's Christian commitment. An understanding of the central principles of the Iona Community is essential, and ideally a good understanding of the Community's thinking about prayer and healing. S/he should be well organised, able to supervise and support volunteer staff, and motivated to carry out this important role of church stewardship. Flexibility to adapt to a new and changing situation, and the ability to foster good working relationships are important. Experience of taking part in the leadership of worship, and of living in a residential community are desirable. Experience/ability to lead creative workshops would be an asset, but is not essential. Basic computer skills are desirable.

Responsible to

Working as part of the Programme Team, the Sacristan will be line managed by the Warden, and is ultimately responsible to the Iona Committee of the Iona Community.

Conditions of service

This post is offered on a seasonal contract from February to November. Full details of terms and conditions of employment will be made available upon request to shortlisted candidates.

Approved by the Islands Committee: November 1999

Approved by Finance and Staffing Committee: November 1999

Amended September 2000

IONA COMMUNITY

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

UNDER ONE YEAR RESIDENT GROUP

A. Recruitment and Appointments Policy and Procedure:

1. The Iona Community strives to be an equal opportunity employer. The aim of the Community's policy is to ensure that no applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment than any other on any grounds including race, nationality or ethnic or national origins, religion, (Islands Staff must share the Iona Community's Christian Commitment), (All staff are expected to be in sympathy with the defined goals of the Iona Community), gender, sexual orientation, marital status or disability. This policy shall apply to recruitment, selection, promotion, training, facilities and procedures.
Notwithstanding the above, it is recognised that certain posts within the Community are designated as only being available to full Members of the Iona Community. It is also noted that it would be impractical for someone with ambulant disabilities to be employed within the Abbey properties.
2. The Community will seek to recruit staff of the highest possible quality.
3. Prior to advertising a vacancy, the responsible Committee will draw up or review the job description for the post. This will then require to be approved by the Finance and Staffing Committee in order to ensure that it is in agreement with the broad thrust of the Community's employment policy.
4. All new posts and vacancies will normally be advertised:
 - a) through the Members, Associates and Friends network and, if appropriate
 - b) through the media and as widely as the relevant Committee responsible for the post deems necessary.
5. Existing staff will be notified of, and will be eligible to apply for all vacancies, except for such posts which are available to Iona Community Members only. The filling of vacancies through promotion, where no recruitment takes place, is at the discretion of the responsible Committee with the approval of the Finance and Staffing Committee.
6. Based on advice received, the Support Services Manager will be responsible for issuing letters of Offer of Appointment to successful candidates.
7. At the soonest possible opportunity, the Finance and Staffing Committee should be advised by the responsible Committee of the filling of the vacancy.

B. Nature of Contract and Service

1. **Duration of Contract.** This is detailed in the letter of appointment and any letter in confirmation or modification of the terms and conditions.
2. **Redundancy.** Staff on a fixed term or temporary contract are deemed, by acceptance of the post, to have agreed to waive any right to redundancy payment at the end of the fixed term. This is in line with part 6 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act, 1978.
3. **Retirement.** Retirement age from the Community will be as the law dictates at the time.

C. Place of Employment

1. Your normal place of work is as stated in your letter of appointment.

D. Remuneration

1. The Community's policy for remuneration of Resident Group staff on the islands is to make payment according to need and not according to qualifications or responsibility. All Resident Group Staff are remunerated at the same rates.
2. The rates of remuneration are reviewed by the Finance and Staffing Committee each December for the following calendar year.
3. Payment of allowances will be made calendar monthly in arrears on the 20th of the month by credit transfer.
4. Allowances are as detailed in Appendix 1 to these Terms and Conditions.

E. Hours of Work

Your normal hours of duty are as stated in your letter of appointment or, in the case of employment on the Islands of Iona or Mull, as determined by the pattern of the common life.

F. Removal Expenses

1. For staff employed for under 1 year but more than 8 months, travel and removal costs incurred in moving to the islands will be paid from any destination within the U.K. up to a maximum of £120 for staff in furnished accommodation, which is the norm. The return costs up to a maximum of £120 from the islands to any destination within the U.K. will only be paid if the contract is completed or, in the event of the contract not being completed, at the discretion of the Warden/Staff Co-ordinator.
2. Staff who have been requested by the Islands Committee to take up unfurnished accommodation would be expected to obtain a minimum of three quotes from removal firms and submit these, for approval, to the Islands Committee.
3. Removal expenses will not be payable if the employee is moving to a position where the new employer would be willing to finance removal costs.
4. Expenses considered to be unnecessary by the Warden, or in the case of dispute, by the Islands Committee, will not be payable.
5. The rate is reviewed annually.

G. Holiday/Leave Entitlement

1. Your holiday/leave entitlement is as stated in your letter of appointment.
2. Leave must be taken during periods mutually convenient to you and the Community, through your Line Manager.

H. Sickness

1. Should you be unable to attend your normal place of work due to sickness, disability (or for any other reason), you or your representative should inform your Line Manager within one hour of your normal starting time.
2. Employees are entitled to sick leave and pay according to the scales detailed below:

	Full Allowance for:	Half Allowance for:
During term of employment	2 weeks	1 week
3. A medical report must be furnished at the end of the half allowance period, showing the cause of incapacity and its probable duration, after which the Council decides whether to place the employee's name on a reserve list (i.e. the job would be kept open for that individual and the post would not be filled on a permanent basis by anyone else), or extend the payment of sickness allowance for a further period, or take such other action as it may deem appropriate.

I. Board and Lodging

1. All staff on Iona are expected to be resident but, in certain circumstances, there may be up to three non-resident staff members.
2. All resident staff and their children living with them will receive at no charge all meals while on Iona or Camas on Mull.
3. All resident staff will be provided with their own room with access to shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Children will be provided with 1/2 a room each, i.e. a couple with one or two children will have three rooms, a couple with three or four children will have four rooms, a single parent with one or two children will have two rooms, etc.
4. The Iona Community will be responsible for the payment of all costs associated with the living accommodation of resident staff on the islands.

J. General

1. It is clear that what is expected of resident staff is more than just a job. Flexibility in carrying out your duties will be expected, as well as a willingness to cover for other staff in an emergency and where otherwise necessary.
2. As a member of the resident staff, you are expected to welcome people into your home with all that that involves, as outlined in the Resident Staff Handbook.
3. Resident staff are also expected to participate in and attend the regular worship on the islands.

L. Resettlement Allowance

1. Provided a resident staff member with a contract of more than eight months and for less than one year completes his/her contract, the Islands Committee, at its entire discretion, may pay a resettlement allowance, which payment will be included in the last allowance payment made to the relevant member of staff.
2. Payment, if any, will be made on the following basis:
 - a. Couples will be treated as two single individuals.
 - b. Payment will be considered as "remuneration" and will be subject to Tax and National Insurance.
 - c. Payment will be calculated as one times monthly gross pay at the current Standard allowance, including Holiday Allowance monthly equivalent.
 - d. If appropriate, resident dependent children will receive a resettlement allowance, the calculation of which will be on the same basis as their parent/guardian.

M. Travel Costs

Resident staff will receive half the return cost of their travel fare from their U.K. departure point to Iona and will receive the remaining half only if the contract is completed or, in the event of a contract not being completed, at the discretion of the Warden/Staff Co-ordinator.

N. Grievance Procedure

In the event of a grievance the procedure which should be followed is set out in the attached Appendix 3 "Grievance Procedure".

O. Disciplinary Action

Appendix 4a and 4b to these Terms and Conditions of Employment sets out the guidelines and grounds for which disciplinary action will require to be taken and Appendix 5 details the procedure which will apply in the event of action requiring to be taken.

P. Health and Safety

Appendix 6 sets out the Iona Community's policy on Health and Safety.

Q. Staff Travel Policy and Guidelines

Appendix 7 to these Terms and Conditions of Employment sets out the Community's policy, with guidelines, for staff undertaking travel while on business.

R. Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Appendix 8 to these Terms and Conditions of Employment sets out the policy and procedure for dealing with sexual harassment as the matter relates to staff in the workplace.

S. Sexual Harassment in the Centres

Appendix 9 to these Terms and Conditions of Employment sets out the policy and procedure for dealing with complaints of sexual harassment relating to guests and visitors at the Centres on Iona and Mull.

T. Termination of Appointment

1. The notice required to be given should you or the Iona Community wish to terminate your employment, provided you have been continuously employed for four weeks, is four weeks.
2. In circumstances of gross misconduct, dismissal may be immediate subject to the terms of the Disciplinary Procedures of the Community (See Appendix 5).

U. Trade Unions

1. The Iona Community recognises and respects an employees' right to choose whether or not to belong to a trade union and employees are also free to choose whether or not to belong to a staff association of the Iona Community, if such exists.

APPENDIX 3**THE IONA COMMUNITY****GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE****Introduction**

Employees of the Iona Community (Non-Resident or Resident Staff or Volunteer) have the right to express any grievances relating to their employment and this procedure is set out to resolve grievances as quickly and as fairly as possible.

An employee at any stage in this procedure may be accompanied by anyone of his/her choosing, or may elect to have this person represent the complaint on his/her behalf.

The procedure is written on an individual basis, but shall equally apply to a group of employees having a common grievance.

The procedure shall also apply in respect of:

- a) grievances regarding salary grading and in such cases the time limit may be extended by mutual consent;
- b) an expression of dissatisfaction with any disciplinary action taken against the employee.

Procedure**1. Stage one:**

- a) In the first instance, there should be an informal discussion of the grievance between the employee and his/her line manager.
- b) The line manager will initiate action to redress the grievance within two working days of the meeting and inform the employee accordingly.
- c) If the employee is not satisfied with the action taken, he/she must write to his/her line manager within one working day of being informed:
 - i) setting out the grievance;
 - ii) expressing the reason for dissatisfaction;
 - iii) requesting the procedure move to Stage Two.
- d) If, on hearing the grievance, the line manager decides that he/she is not able adequately to address the grievance and so informs the employee, the employee must provide the line manager with a written note of the grievance and the line manager will move to Stage Two of the procedure.
- e) Within two working days of receipt of the written submission in c) or d) above, the Line Manager will write to the Convener of the appropriate Committee (Mainland, Islands or Publishing) or Council enclosing a copy of the employee's letter with a cover note explaining what action has taken place so far and requesting the invocation of Stage Two of the procedure.

2. Stage Two

- 1 Within five working days of receipt of the letter in 1e) above the Convener (or Vice Convener) of the responsible Committee, or the Convener of Council, in respect of Council appointed staff will arrange to meet with the employee and his/her line manager and seek a mutually acceptable solution.
 - 1.a In the event of an agreement not being reached, the Convener (or Vice Convener) will issue in writing within one working day of the meeting his/her decision to the employee and the line manager, indicating what action is to be taken to resolve the grievance.
 - 1.b If the employee is not satisfied with the decision and the action proposed, he/she must write to his/her line manager and to the Convener of the responsible Committee within three working days of receiving the written decision requesting the grievance be moved to Stage Three of the procedure.
- 2 Where the grievance relates to salary grading and the employee is dissatisfied with the Convener's, or Vice Convener's decision, as in 1b) above, the employee will give notice to his/her line manager as in 1c) above and the matter will be dealt with as follows:
 - 2.a Upon receipt of notice, the Convener, or the Vice Convener who chaired the meeting, as in 1. above, will request, through the Convener of the Finance and Staffing Committee, a sub-committee of same to hear the grievance as soon as possible. This sub-committee will comprise three members of the Finance and Staffing Committee, one of whom will be the Convener or Vice Convener who will chair the meeting.

- 2.b At this meeting of the Finance and Staffing sub-committee the only people present will be the employee (and his/her representative, if wished), his/her line manager and the Convener or Vice Convener, as appropriate, of the responsible Committee. At the invitation of the Convener/Vice Convener of the Finance and Staffing Committee, the Convener, or Vice Convener of the responsible Committee will outline the details of the grievance, the parties involved and the decision so far reached.
- 2.c The employee (or his/her representative), his/her line manager and the Convener, or the Vice Convener of the responsible Committee will, in turn, be given the opportunity to present a case to the sub-committee and to ask questions of one another. Members of the sub-committee may also put questions to all parties at this stage.
- 2.d On completion of the submissions all parties will withdraw and the sub-committee will discuss the grievance. During this the sub-committee may recall, if necessary, all of the parties, to clarify points of uncertainty on evidence already given.
- 2.e On completion of its deliberations, the sub-committee will call the parties together and make known its decision and the action to be taken. This will be confirmed in writing to all parties by the Convener/Vice Convener of the Finance and Staffing Committee within two working days of the meeting.
- 2.f If the employee is not satisfied with the decision and the action proposed, he/she must write to his/her line manager and to the Convener/Vice Convener of the responsible Committee within three working days of receiving the written decision requesting the grievance be moved to Stage Three of the procedure.

3 Stage Three: Council Appeal Procedure

- a) Upon receipt of the notice, as in 2.1b) and 2.2f) above, the Convener/Vice Convener of the responsible Committee, will request, through the Convener of Council, a sub-committee of Council to hear the grievance, as soon as possible. The sub-committee will comprise three members of Council, one of whom will be the Convener or Vice Convener, who will chair the meeting. In the event of the Convener of Council having been involved in Stage Two of the process, he/she will not participate in the procedure as a member of the sub-committee.
- b) At this meeting of the Council sub-committee the only people present will be the employee (and his/her representative, if wished), his/her line manager, the Convener/Vice Convener of the responsible Committee, and if the grievance relates to salary grading, the Convener/Vice Convener of the Finance and Staffing Committee.
- c) The employee (or his/her representative), his/her line manager and the Convener, or the Vice Convener of the responsible Committee will, in turn, be given the opportunity to present a case to the sub-committee and to ask questions of one another. Members of the sub-committee may also put questions to all parties at this stage.
- d) On completion of the submissions, all parties will withdraw and the sub-Committee will discuss the grievance. During this the sub-committee may recall, if necessary, any or all of the parties to clarify points of uncertainty on evidence already given.
- e) On completion of its deliberations, the sub-committee will call the parties together and make known its decision and the action to be taken. This will be confirmed in writing to all parties by the Convener/Vice Convener of Council within two working days of the meeting.
- f) The decision of Council will be final.

APPENDIX 4a

THE IONA COMMUNITYDISCIPLINARY PROCEDUREGUIDELINESIntroduction

Nobody relishes the thought of being involved in the management of discipline in the workplace, especially when, at one level, the relationship between the employee at the receiving end of the discipline procedure and the manager administering could very well be that of good friends both within and outwith the work environment. Cases where discipline has to be exercised have very often been the source of unhappiness and conflict within the workplace and, to ensure that this does not happen, it is important for all staff to understand why disciplinary issues need to be dealt with and dealt with sensitively and with a great deal of understanding from all concerned.

The disciplinary procedure sets out a process for dealing with issues which may from time to time require to be dealt with, either on Iona/Mull or on the mainland. The procedure is intended to be simple and to be understood by all staff. Some issues may be very complicated and may require a considerable amount of investigation while others are clearer and simpler to deal with.

Whatever the issue and however complicated it is important that each is treated in as consistent a manner as possible and for this purpose there are certain "keypoints" in the process and "guidelines" which should be observed in respect of holding disciplinary interviews, no matter the stage in the disciplinary procedure.

KEYPOINTS

1. **Handling A Disciplinary Matter**
 - a. Remember that disciplinary action is intended to encourage an unsatisfactory employee to improve.
 - b. Handle the matter promptly and gather all the relevant facts.
 - c. Be firm; it is the line manager's responsibility to maintain satisfactory standards.
 - d. If necessary/appropriate consider suspension with pay while the case is investigated. (See guidelines hereunder).
 - e. Be objective, fair and consistent.
 - f. Consider each case on its merits and avoid snap decisions made in the heat of the moment.
 - g. Follow the disciplinary procedure.
2. **Informal Procedure**
 - a. An informal process may often be a more satisfactory method of resolving problems than a disciplinary interview.
 - b. It should take the form of a discussion with the objective of encouraging and helping the employee to improve.
 - c. The employee should fully understand the outcome.
 - d. A note of the discussion should be kept for reference purposes.
3. **Holding a Disciplinary Interview**
 - a. Prepare for a disciplinary interview carefully and ensure all the relevant facts are available
 - b. Tell the employee what is being alleged and advise him or her of any rights under the disciplinary procedure.
 - c. Give the employee time to prepare and an opportunity to state his or her case.
 - d. Carry out sufficient investigation and come to a clear view about the facts.
 - e. Consider adjourning the hearing before deciding on any disciplinary penalty to allow proper consideration of all the matters raised.
4. **Deciding and Taking Disciplinary Action**
 - a. Before deciding whether a disciplinary penalty is appropriate consider the employee's disciplinary and general record, whether the disciplinary procedure points to the likely penalty, action taken in previous cases, any explanations and circumstances to be considered and whether the penalty is reasonable.
 - b. Dismissal for gross misconduct without warning or notice should only be for very serious offences (examples of which should be specified in the rules) and should only occur after a disciplinary investigation and interview.
 - c. Leave the employee in no doubt as to the nature of the disciplinary penalty, the improvement expected and the method of appeal.
 - d. Except in the event of an oral warning, give the employee written details of any disciplinary action.
 - e. Keep records of disciplinary action secure and confidential.
 - f. Do not normally allow disciplinary action to count against an employee indefinitely.

GUIDELINES**1. Holding a Disciplinary Interview****a) Preparing for the Interview**

- Prepare carefully and ensure you have all the facts
- Tell the employee of the complaint, the procedure to be followed and that he or she is required to attend a disciplinary interview
- Tell the employee that he or she is entitled to be accompanied at the interview
- Find out if there are any special circumstances to be taken into account. (For example, are there personal or other outside issues affecting performance or conduct?)
- Exercise care when dealing with evidence provided by an informant who wishes to remain anonymous. Take written statements, seek corroborative evidence and check that the informant's motives are genuine
- Ask yourself whether the standards of other employees are acceptable or is this employee being unfairly singled out.
- Consider what explanations may be offered by the employee and, if possible, check them out beforehand
- Allow the employee time to prepare his or her case (e.g. written statements). In complex cases it may be useful and save time at the interview if copies of any relevant papers are given to the employee in advance.
- Arrange a time and, if possible, a quiet place for the interview with adequate seating, where there will be no interruptions
- Ensure that all the relevant facts are available, such as personal details, disciplinary record and any other current warnings, other relevant documents (eg. absence or sickness records) and, where appropriate, written statements from witnesses
- Establish what disciplinary action was taken in similar circumstances in the past
- Where possible ensure that any witnesses who can do so attend the interview, unless the employee accepts in advance that the witness statements are statements of fact
- If the witness is someone from outside the organisation who is not prepared to attend the interview, try to get a written statement from him or her
- If there are likely to be language difficulties consider whether a friend of the employee can assist as an interpreter or other arrangements can be made
- Consider how the interview will be structured and make notes of the points which need to be covered

b) The Conduct of the Interview

Interviews rarely proceed in neat, orderly stages but the following guidelines should help:

- Introduce those present to the employee and explain why they are there
- Explain that the purpose of the interview is to consider whether disciplinary action should be taken in accordance with the company's disciplinary procedure
- Explain how the interview will be conducted.

c) Statement of the complaint

- State precisely what the complaint is and outline the case briefly by going through the evidence that has been gathered. Ensure that the employee and his or her representative is allowed to see any statements made by witnesses or is told very clearly exactly what they contain
- Remember that the object of the interview is to discover the truth, not to catch people out. Establish whether the employee is prepared to accept that he or she has done something wrong. Then agree the steps which should have been taken to remedy the situation.

d) Employee's reply

- Give the employee the opportunity to state his or her case, ask questions, present evidence and call witnesses. Listen attentively and be sensitive to silence as this can be a constructive way of encouraging the employee to be more forthcoming.
- If it is not practical for witnesses to attend, consider proceeding if it is clear that their evidence will not affect the substance of the complaint.

e) General questioning and discussion

- Use this stage to establish all the facts
- Adjourn the interview if further investigation is necessary or, if appropriate, at the request of the employee's representative
- Ask the employee if he or she has any explanation for the misconduct or failure to improve or if there are any special circumstances to be taken into account
- If it becomes clear during this stage that the employee has provided an adequate explanation or there is no real evidence to support the allegation, stop the proceedings
- Keep the approach formal and polite but encourage the employee to talk freely with a view to establishing all the facts. A properly conducted disciplinary interview should be a two-way process. Use questions to clarify all the issues and to check that what has been said is understood. Ask open-ended questions (eg. What happened the?) to get the broad picture. Ask precise, closed questions requiring a yes/no answer only when specific information is needed.
- Try not to get involved in arguments and do not make personal or humiliating remarks. Avoid physical contact or gestures which the employee might regard as threatening.

f) Summing up

- After general questioning and discussion summarise the main points concerning the offence, the main points raised by the employee and any matters that need to be checked. This will ensure that nothing has been missed and will help demonstrate to the employee that he or she has been given a fair hearing.

g) Adjournment

- It is generally good practice to adjourn before a decision is taken about a disciplinary penalty. This allows proper consideration of all the matters raised. As noted in the procedure it may be appropriate for you to consult your line manager at this point.
- Do any further checking that it is necessary and come to a clear view about what took place. Where the facts are in dispute, decide which version is the most probable. If new facts emerge, consider whether the disciplinary interview needs to be reconvened.

h) Handling Problems during the Interview

- Not every disciplinary interview will go smoothly. Where problems are expected it is particularly important to ensure, wherever possible, that a second member of management and where requested, an employee representative are present.
- If the employee becomes emotionally distressed during the interview, allow time for the employee to become composed before continuing. The issues however cannot be avoided. If the employee continues to be so distressed that the interview cannot continue, it should be adjourned and resumed at a later date.
- During the interview a certain amount of 'letting off steam' may be inevitable. This may be no bad thing and may be helpful in finding out and understanding precisely what happened. However, if misconduct or gross misconduct – for example abusive language or threatened physical violence – takes place during the interview treat it as such. Adjourn the interview and reconvene it at a later date when this offence can be considered as well. Consider suspending the employee with pay to allow time for him or her to calm down and to allow a full investigation.

Suspension with Pay

In cases which appear to involve serious misconduct, a brief period of suspension should be considered while the case is being investigated. This should be with pay as suspension without pay may in itself amount to a disciplinary penalty. Where there has been physical violence, or where tempers have been raised, it is often wise to get those concerned off the premises as quickly as possible while the matter is investigated. They should be told clearly that they are suspended, that it will be for as short a period as possible and that they will be called back for interview.

APPENDIX 4b

IONA COMMUNITYGROUND FOR DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Working for the Iona Community, as with any Community which employs staff, involves the understanding that there are certain forms of behaviour or practice which are unacceptable to the Community as an employer. They may be unacceptable for a number of reasons:

- a) From the employer's point of view. They may damage the good name and standing of the Iona Community, or they may bring the Community under legal proceedings, or, they may be detrimental to the work of the Iona Community.
- b) From the point of view of other employees. They may put the ability of other employees of the Community to do their jobs properly under intolerable strain, or, they may affect good working relationships between employees to an unacceptable degree, or, they may put the safety and health of other employees at risk.
- c) From the point of view of those with whom the Community's work is concerned, e.g. guests staying in the Islands Centres, people engaged in the various programmes of the Iona Community, etc. whose interests may be put at risk by such unacceptable behaviour.
- d) From the point of view of the employee himself/herself. Such behaviour, even if not grounds for dismissal, will put at risk the potential of the employee to find job satisfaction and a congenial working environment.

Such behaviour and practices which are thought to be unacceptable and which may constitute grounds for disciplinary action, are outlined below. Many of them are standard to all organisations and companies. However, a number of them relate, specifically, to the fact that employees working at the Islands Centres are part of a religious community.

There are, therefore, a number of things which, although not illegal, nor affecting the ability of the employee to do his/her job efficiently, nevertheless are contrary in spirit and aims of the work of the Iona Community at the Islands Centres. These are listed separately.

There are a number of things which will be considered completely unacceptable as behaviour or practice and which may lead to dismissal. The legal term for these is "Gross Misconduct". Foremost among these will be:

1. Theft of any kind, whether from the Iona Community, or a fellow employee, or a guest of the Community, or a member of the general public.
2. The use or threat of violence, whether towards a fellow employee, or a guest of the Community, or a member of the general public, or anyone else.
3. Malicious damage to property of the Iona Community, or its clients, especially where such damage threatens the safety of any person or persons.
4. Breach of confidentiality about the Community or its work, unless this is clearly accidental.
5. Corruption in the course of employment, including failure to account for money or goods received on behalf of the Community, giving false information, the removal, or alteration of documents, etc.
6. Committing a criminal offence: where an employee, either in the course of work or outside the scope of employment, commits a criminal act which affects the Community's reputation in any way, this may be construed as gross misconduct.
7. The use or supply of controlled substances, unless where medically prescribed. Failure to comply with this will be liable to lead to instant dismissal.

This is not an exhaustive list, but includes main grounds for gross misconduct. If in doubt about practices, please refer to your Line Manager.

There are other forms of behaviour or practice which, whilst not constituting "Gross Misconduct", are nevertheless cause for concern and all these will be liable to warning. Repetition of such behaviour will render the employee liable to more serious disciplinary action, including the possibility of dismissal. Mitigating factors will always be taken into account by the employer when considering the appropriateness of any disciplinary action. The legal term for these is "Misconduct" and this category would include:

1. Deliberate discourtesy or abuse of others on the grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability or background.
2. Sexual harassment of a fellow employee, guest or client of the Iona Community or member of the general public.
3. Failure to meet the Community's conditions governing hours of work.
4. Persistently bad time-keeping.
5. Failure to comply with legal regulations binding on the community, e.g. fire safety regulations, health and safety regulations.
6. Discourteous or persistently thoughtless behaviour.
7. Being absent without leave or reasonable excuse.
8. Incompetence in carrying out tasks as defined in the employee's job description, or unfitness to do so, other than on medical grounds.
9. Being at work under the influence of alcohol.

Addition: Concerning the special situation of Iona and Camas.

Employees choosing to come and work in Iona or Camas are joining a religious community, where an emphasis is placed on the desirability of mutually resolving conflict and on the need to be welcoming and courteous to fellow employees and guests, beyond what may normally be expected elsewhere: and where it is expected that employees will make every effort to co-operate as part of a team. In addition, employees working on Iona and Camas, as well as working together, share a common lifestyle by mutual consent, and with the encouragement of the Iona Community. This lifestyle is shared with a large number of volunteers, most of whom are very young, and towards whom there is a responsibility for setting standards of good behaviour. Therefore, the following behaviour or practices would be considered unacceptable and would be grounds for discussion and if not resolved, may lead to disciplinary action.

1. Failure to comply with the guidelines laid down for the use of alcohol on Iona or Camas. (No consumption of alcohol in public places on the Community's premises, or in private parties including voluntary staff or guests, without the express permission of the Warden or Head of the relevant Centre, or his or her deputy). This is important in a place where people come to stay who are seeking to avoid the use of alcohol, (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous).
2. Failure to observe the Community's policy regarding co-habitation, in terms of accommodation offered, either in married couples or in couples in a stable, long-term relationship. This is an area of great sensitivity as many people, especially young people, both voluntary staff and guests, are in the Community's premises in a situation of trust and must be protected from sexual exploitation.
3. Consistent failure to participate in the common lifestyle of the Community. Since this lifestyle is part of the very reason for the Community's existence, deliberate disregard for this, or encouraging others to disregard this, would suggest a serious problem in the employee's understanding of the nature of his/her function on Iona or Camas. This is not to suggest that uniformity or rigidity or participation is expected, not to suggest that valid criticisms cannot be made, but to say that a willingness to see the common life as part of the terms of employment is necessary.
4. Failure to observe certain standards necessary when people live together at close quarters, e.g. excessive noise, unacceptable untidiness in shared facilities, etc.
5. Lack of respect for the local people and their livelihoods, e.g. persistent nuisance in the village, or disregard for agricultural land.

These things listed above might come into the realm of person choice elsewhere, but in community, where individual liberty is seen in the context of the well-being of the whole community, they constitute unacceptable behaviour.

APPENDIX 5

IONA COMMUNITY
DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

Introduction

Appendix (4b) of The Iona Community Terms and Conditions of Employment sets out certain forms of behaviour or practices which are unacceptable to the Community as an employer. These rules are accepted as a guide to acceptable behaviour but cannot cover all the circumstances which may arise and should not, therefore, be considered as an exhaustive list of kinds of behaviour which may result in disciplinary action. Any behaviour which puts another person or the Community's property, operations or interests at risk is unacceptable from any employee and the following procedures apply to all employees (Non-Resident or Resident Staff or Volunteers) of the Iona Community.

Principles of the Procedure

- a) The procedure is designed to establish the facts quickly and to deal consistently with disciplinary issues. No disciplinary action should be taken until the matter has been fully investigated using the guidelines as a basis.
- b) At every stage the employee will be advised of the nature of the complaint, will be given the opportunity to state his/her case, and may be represented or accompanied by anyone of his/her choosing.
- c) No employee will be dismissed for a first breach of discipline, except in the case of gross misconduct, when the penalty will normally be dismissal without notice and without pay in lieu of notice.
- d) The procedure may be implemented at any stage as set out below, if the employee's alleged misconduct warrants such action.
- e) The employee has the right to appeal against any disciplinary action taken at any stage using the procedures outlined in the Community's Grievance Procedure.

Procedure**1. Informal**

In the event of an alleged minor infringement, the line manager will meet with the employee and will make every effort to deal with the matter by informal discussion. The line manager will make it clear to the employee that if this fails to bring about the desired improvement within a specified period the matter will be pursued through the Formal Procedure.

2. Formal**Stage One – Oral Warning**

In the event of the minor infringement allegedly continuing, or in the case of an alleged minor infringement where there has been no previous informal discussion and it is felt appropriate the line manager will meet with the employee and, following investigation, the employee will be given an oral warning, making clear:

- a) the nature of the offence and the reason for the warning;
- b) that this warning is the first stage of the disciplinary procedure;
- c) that a brief note of the warning will be kept in the employee's file, but it will lapse after 6 months, subject to satisfactory conduct;
- d) that the employee has the right of appeal, to be initiated within two working days of the warning being given.

Stage Two – Written Warning

In the event of alleged repetition of misconduct or failure to improve, following an oral warning or of an alleged single more serious offence, the line manager will meet with the employee (and his/her representative) and will conduct an investigation into the incident(s). Following the investigation, and if appropriate having consulted with his/her own line manager, the employee's line manager will give the employee a written warning, (copied to the Convener of the appropriate Committee) making clear:

- a) the nature of the offence and the reason for the warning;
- b) the stage of the procedure reached and the consequence of a further similar offence within 6 months of the date of the letter;
- c) that a copy of this letter will be kept in the employee's file, but it will lapse after 6 months, subject to satisfactory conduct;
- d) that the employee has the right to appeal, to be initiated within two working days of the letter being received.

Stage Three – Final Written Warning

In the event of alleged repetition of misconduct or failure to improve following Stage Two, or of an alleged single very serious act of misconduct, the line manager will meet with the employee (and his/her representative) and will conduct an investigation into the incident(s). Following investigation, and if appropriate having consulted with his/her own line manager, the employee's line manager will give the employee a final written warning, (copied to the Convener of the appropriate Committee) making clear:

- a) the nature of the offence and the reason for the warning;
- b) the stage of the procedure reached and the consequence of a further similar offence occurring within 6 months of the date of the letter;
- c) that a copy of this letter will be kept in the employee's file, but it will lapse after 6 months, subject to satisfactory conduct;
- d) that the employee has the right to appeal, to be initiated within two working days of the letter being received.

Stage Four – Dismissal

In the event of alleged repetition of misconduct or failure to improve, or where the employee is alleged to have been responsible for an act or acts of gross misconduct, the line manager will meet with the employee (and his/her representative) and will conduct an investigation into the incident(s). Following investigation and, if appropriate, having consulted with his/her own line manager, the employee's line manager will give the employee a letter of dismissal, (copied to the Convener of the appropriate Committee) making clear:

- a) the nature of the offence and the reason for the letter;
- b) whether there is an appropriate period of notice or there is payment of salary in lieu of notice, (although in the case of dismissal in respect of gross misconduct it is likely to be without notice and with no payment of salary in lieu of notice);
- c) that the employee has the right of appeal, to be initiated within two working days of the letter being received.

APPENDIX 6

IONA COMMUNITY - TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Statement of General Policy with regard to Health and Safety in Terms of Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Section 2 (3).

Implications of the Act

Although the final responsibility for avoiding accidents lies with the employee and volunteer, this does not diminish the responsibility of the employer to ensure that hazards are assessed and removed as far as it is reasonably practical.

The employer, therefore, has an obligation to note areas where accidents could occur and to ensure by code of practice that employees and volunteers are made aware of these and, therefore, take the necessary precautions.

Failure to follow a code of practice does not necessarily render the employee or volunteer liable to criminal or civil proceedings, but in the event of an allegation of contravention, the provisions of the code of practice will be considered in evidence.

Employer's Policy Statement

It is the general policy of the Iona Community, to seek to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of their employees and volunteers at work and the protection of others against risks to their health and safety arising out of work activities. To this end, every effort will be made to provide, as appropriate, safe machinery, protective clothing and at all times, a safe and healthy working environment. The Iona Community expects all individuals to accept a degree of responsibility for carrying out this policy and to adhere to the following code of practice.

Code of Practice

1. Employees and volunteers should co-operate at all times with the Community in ensuring that the highest standards of safe and healthy working conditions are maintained and, to this end, must comply with all instructions and guidance given by the person responsible for the relevant area of work.
2. Employees and volunteers are expected to familiarise themselves with first aid procedures and with the facilities available. Appropriate First Aid training will be made available to relevant staff.
3. Employees and volunteers will not engage in any hazardous operation which involves unnecessary risk of personal injury either to themselves or to any other employee or person in the vicinity.
4. The Act requires employees and volunteers not to interfere with or mis-use anything provided to protect their health, safety or welfare.
5. Should any employee or volunteer become aware of equipment or procedures which are likely to be dangerous, they are instructed to report such circumstances to the Health and Safety Officer at their place of work.
6. Notification of accidents should be made, without delay, to the Health and Safety Officer.
7. Employees and volunteers shall, at all times, make use of the safety equipment available. They shall comply with safety procedures for operating machinery and performing the duties of their employment. In particular, no machinery or vehicle shall be operated without all the necessary guards and rails being in the correct position. Employees and volunteers will ensure that no person is in a position in which s/he is likely to be injured while a machine or vehicle is in operation. Employees and volunteers are expected to familiarise themselves with the situation and operation of fire appliances provided and fire procedures.
8. Protective clothing will be provided for the use of employees and volunteers, as appropriate and employees and volunteers will be obliged to wear this when necessary.
9. The danger to children in particular is appreciated and employees and volunteers are instructed to take special care in this regard. All gates, manhole covers, etc. must be shut and firmly secured when not in use. If children are permitted to ride on any vehicle, care must be taken for their safety and compliance with any statutory provisions must be ensured. Items must not be stored or left in situations where they could fall on children, trap fingers, trip them up, or toxic or caustic substances be played with or consumed.
10. Likewise, all machines and implements must be securely stored when not in use. Working areas must, at all times, be kept in neat and tidy condition.

11. Heavy equipment should only be moved with the utmost care and with the knowledge and assistance of the Maintenance Staff.
12. Machines and equipment in any department should only be used by staff in that department or with the specific permission and supervision of the appropriate department.
13. Work areas should only be used by employees or volunteers working in the appropriate department, or with the specific permission of the appropriate person. Particularly, kitchen areas should not be used as short cuts into other parts of the buildings.
14. Staff working at keyboards of any kind should be aware of the importance of being seated at the correct height (so that forearms are parallel to the desk top) and with good back support. Particular care should be taken by computer operators who may find themselves achieving very high keying-in rates such as can cause "repetitive strain injuries" (RSI). Such muscle overuse syndromes can be avoided by, in addition to the above precautions, taking regular short breaks from keying (at least four in every hour), preferably by interspersing keying work by work which either rests the hands and arms or makes use of different muscle groups. Working at high speed under conditions of unusual stress must be avoided as this aggravates muscle tensions. Total keying-in time per day for people working in excess of 12,000 key strokes per hour should not exceed four hours, exclusive of the breaks (i.e. around 7,000 words). By following these procedures, painful and disabling keyboard syndromes ought to be completely avoided and eye strain minimised.
15. Employees and volunteers who object to the health hazards, unpleasantness and lingering smell of cigarette smoke shall not be required to work for prolonged periods or on a regular basis in the proximity of people who are smoking. Where there is a problem of this nature, it should either be sorted out informally, or raised at the appropriate staff committee so that accommodation of the rights of non-smokers and the needs of smokers, may be arrived at.
16. A staff room, private room or other place of rest and recreation will be made available.
17. The Health and Safety Officer for each place of work must be made aware of hazardous substances (gas, petrol, solvents, acids, etc.) in use or storage and measures to take in the event of accident. This information will be maintained by the Officer in a Register.
18. General care should be taken with any part of the building or component of it which could cause any accident, e.g. stairs, windows and loose carpets. Any employee or volunteer who becomes aware of such items should report them immediately to the Health and Safety Officer.
19. It is the Community's policy to keep abreast of developments in safety techniques and to up-date procedures where appropriate. When new machinery or procedures are introduced, employees and volunteers will be adequately instructed about this to ensure safety. If any employee or volunteer is in doubt as to any matter of safety, they should consult their Health and Safety Officer.
20. Health and Safety Officers will be nominated by the Resident Group on the islands and the Staff on the mainland, as appropriate. Officers will provide a short, written, report to Finance and Staffing Committee in May each year, indicating any areas where they have taken action or where policy review is required.

APPENDIX 7

THE IONA COMMUNITY – TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

STAFF TRAVEL POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Policy

As we move into the 21st Century, society is becoming increasingly aware of the devastating effect on our environment of the car. The consequences relating to an increasing number of cars on our roads is well documented and because of this The Iona Community has established the policy that staff requiring to travel in respect of their work should do so by public transport.

Application

The Community's Policy assumes that an adequate public transport system exists throughout the UK and this is not always the case. For example, it is not cheap, it does not cover all the areas staff might want to travel and it is not always convenient in terms of time. In applying the Travel Policy therefore it is appropriate for staff to have the flexibility to decide to use the most cost effective and efficient mode of travel, if necessary in consultation with their Line Manager.

Guidelines

Deciding which mode of transport best suits the current needs will depend on a number of factors, e.g., the destination, the time of travel, the number of people travelling and whether goods are being carried. Staff are required to assess each particular travel need and decide on the most appropriate form of travel using, for example, the following questions:

environmental impact – what is the most environmentally-friendly way for me to travel?

time – what is the quickest way for me to travel?

accessibility – is the place I'm travelling to accessible by public transport?

car sharing – are several people travelling by car or is one person travelling alone?

loads – are they heavy or bulky loads to be carried?

safety – what is the safest way for me to travel? – e.g. women travelling alone at night

expense – what is the cost of my journey?

Therefore, accepting that the policy of The Iona Community is that staff will use public transport when travelling in respect of work, it is acknowledged that staff will require to determine the appropriate mode of travel for each particular journey and be accountable for that decision within the line management process.

Appendix

Supplementary to this Policy it is also the policy of The Iona Community that when drawing up contracts with outside providers or consultants it should be stated, wherever possible, that travel costs will be reimbursed based on the use of public transport.

APPENDIX 8

IONA COMMUNITY - TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT
SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

POLICY

The Iona Community deplores all forms of sexual harassment and seeks to ensure that the working environment is sympathetic to all its staff. The following procedure informs staff of the type of behaviour that is unacceptable and provides staff who are the victims of sexual harassment with a means of redress. Implementation of the policy and procedure is the duty of Council, its Committees and all staff.

PROCEDURE

Women and men have the right to work in an environment free from sexual intimidation which is also a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment or a fine.

Examples of Harassment

1. Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature by one member of staff towards another. Sexual harassment takes many forms, from relatively mild sexual banter to actual physical violence. Employees may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes sexual harassment but they must recognise that what is acceptable to one person may not be acceptable to another.

Examples of harassment include:

- a. insensitive jokes and pranks
- b. lewd comments about appearance
- c. unnecessary body contact
- d. displays of sexually offensive material, e.g. "pin-ups"
- e. requests for sexual favours
- f. speculation about a person's private life and sexual activities
- g. threatened or actual sexual violence
- h. threat of dismissal, loss of promotion, etc. for refusal of sexual favour.

The examples above are not exhaustive. Item 1(g) is an obvious example of gross misconduct, punishable by summary dismissal, but other items may constitute gross misconduct depending on the circumstances of the case in question.

The Environment

2. The Community prohibits the display of sexually offensive material, e.g. pin-ups and posters, and will if necessary ensure that workplaces are inspected and offending material removed.
3. All new staff will be informed of the Community's policy towards sexual harassment at induction training, when it will be stressed that all complaints of sexual harassment will be treated very seriously.
4. The Community expects all staff to ensure that this policy and procedure is adhered to at all times.
5. The Community recognises the sensitive nature of complaints of sexual harassment. Members of staff who wish to discuss such complaints, in confidence, should contact the person designated for this purpose.

Informal Remedy

6. Staff who are victims of minor sexual harassment are advised to make it clear to their harasser that the behaviour is unacceptable and must stop. If a member of staff is unable to do this verbally, then a written request (explaining the distress which the behaviour is causing) handed to the harasser may be effective. The appropriate Designated Person can assist staff in taking such action.

Formal Procedure/.....

Formal Procedure

7. Where informal methods fail, or serious harassment occurs, staff are advised to bring a formal complaint. The complaint should be made in writing, and where possible, state
 - the name of the harasser
 - the nature of the harassment
 - dates and times when harassment occurred
 - names of witnesses to any incidents of harassment
 - any action already taken by the complainant to stop the harassment

The complaint should be sent, in confidence, to the appropriate Designated Person.
8. **IMMEDIATELY** a complaint of harassment has been received, action will be taken to separate the harasser from the complainant; this may involve temporary transfer of the harasser to another department, or suspension with pay until the complaint has been resolved.
9. The Designated Person handling the complaint will carry out a thorough investigation as quickly as possible and no later than within 48 hours, maintaining confidentiality at all times. All members of staff involved in the investigation are expected to respect the need for confidentiality. Failure to do so will be considered a disciplinary offence.
10. Copies of statements made by witnesses will be made available to the harasser and the complainant. Witnesses will be encouraged to appear at the complaint hearing if requested by either party. It is acknowledged that some witnesses may be reluctant to do so. In these circumstances the Designated Person will, if necessary, adjourn the hearing and ask supplementary questions of witnesses in private.
11. The complainant may, if he or she wishes, be supported throughout the procedure and hearing by a colleague of his or her choice. The members of staff accused of harassment will also have the right to be accompanied at the hearing.
12. On conclusion of the complaint hearing, and within 24 hours of same, the Designated Person will bring the matter to the attention of the Islands Management Team, setting out in writing his/her findings. In consultation with the Leader, failing whom, the Support Services Manager, the Management Team will conclude whether harassment has taken place. The result of these deliberations will be given in writing to both members of staff.
13. If the complainant is not satisfied about the way his or her complaint has been handled, he or she may ask for it to be reconsidered by personal representation to the Management Team. Requests for reconsideration of the complaint should be made within two working days of receipt of the written notice in 12 above. The decision of this second complaint hearing will be sent, in writing, to both parties and will be final.
14. If it is concluded in 12 or 13 above that harassment has taken place, the Community's Disciplinary Procedure will be initiated immediately and at a level appropriate to the severity of same.
15. The severity of the penalty imposed upon a member of staff guilty of harassment will be consistent with those detailed in the disciplinary procedure (e.g. gross sexual harassment will normally result in summary dismissal). Where a lesser penalty is appropriate (e.g. a written warning), this may be coupled with action to ensure that the victim is able to continue working without embarrassment or anxiety. For example, after discussion with the victim, the Management Team may order the transfer of the harasser to a different work area, or arrange for the amendment of working practices to minimise contact between the two members of staff. If the victim so wishes, his or her own transfer will be arranged subject to practical limitations.
16. An employee who brings a complaint of sexual harassment will not suffer victimisation for having brought the complaint. However, if the complaint is untrue and has been brought in bad faith (e.g. spite), disciplinary action will be taken.

APPENDIX 9

IONA COMMUNITY – TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE CENTRESPOLICY

The Iona Community deplores all forms of sexual harassment and seeks to ensure that the residential environment is sympathetic to all its guests, visitors and staff. The following informs staff and guests, when necessary, who are victims of sexual harassment, the procedure for dealing with complaints. Implementation of the policy and procedure is the duty of Council, its Committees and all staff.

PROCEDURE

Women and men, guests and staff have the right to live in an environment free from sexual intimidation which is also a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment or a fine.

Examples of Harassment

1. Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature by one person towards another. Sexual harassment takes many forms, from relatively mild sexual banter to actual physical violence. Employees may not always realise that their behaviour constitutes sexual harassment but they must recognise that what is acceptable to one person may not be acceptable to another.

Examples of harassment include:

- a. insensitive jokes and pranks
- b. lewd comments about appearance
- c. unnecessary body contact
- d. displays of sexually offensive material, e.g. "pin-ups"
- e. requests for sexual favours
- f. speculation about a person's private life and sexual activities
- g. threatened or actual sexual violence
- h. threat of dismissal, loss of promotion, etc. for refusal of sexual favour.

The examples above are not exhaustive.

The Environment

2. The Community prohibits the display of sexually offensive material, e.g. pin-ups and posters, and will if necessary ensure that workplaces are inspected and offending material removed.
3. All new staff will be informed of the Community's policy towards sexual harassment at induction training, when it will be stressed that all complaints of sexual harassment will be treated very seriously.
4. The Community expects all staff to ensure that this policy and procedure is adhered to at all times.
5. The Community recognises the sensitive nature of complaints of sexual harassment. Members of staff who wish to discuss such complaints, in confidence, should contact the person designated for this purpose.

FORMAL PROCEDUREA. ADULT GUEST COMPLAINT:1. Against Staff Member:

- a. In the event of a guest or a visitor bringing to the attention of a staff member a complaint against another member of staff, the staff member who has received the complaint will immediately advise the appropriate Designated Person.
- b. The Designated Person will meet immediately, or as soon as is practicable, with the complainant and hear the nature of the complaint. The Designated Person will then set out the procedure for dealing with the matter (sections c. and d. below). The guest will then be asked (a) at this stage, bring criminal proceedings against the member of staff or (b) without prejudicing any other rights they might have, whether she or he wishes to continue with the procedure as set out.
- c. If the guest wishes to bring criminal proceedings against the member of staff, at this stage:
 - i. the Designated Person should provide the guest with the opportunity to advise the police.
 - ii. the Designated Person should advise the member of staff of the complaint against him or her whereupon he or she will be suspended with pay.
 - iii. if following investigation, charging and conviction, the member of staff is found to be guilty, the Community's Disciplinary Procedure will be initiated immediately and at a level appropriate to the severity of same.

- iv. if, following conviction, the member of staff is found to be not guilty, he or she will resume his or her duties. If the guest wishes to continue with the procedure as set out hereunder, the Designated Person should request the guest to put his or her complaint in writing, and where possible, state -
 - the name of the harasser
 - the nature of the harassment
 - dates and times when harassment occurred
 - names of witnesses to any incidents of harassment
 - any action already taken by the complainant to stop the harassment
- i. **IMMEDIATELY** a complaint of harassment has been received the harasser will be suspended with pay.
- ii. The Designated Person handling the complaint will carry out a thorough investigation as quickly as possible and no later than 48 hours, maintaining confidentiality at all times. All members of staff involved in the investigation are expected to respect the need for confidentiality. Failure to do so will be considered a disciplinary offence.
- iii. Copies of statements made by witnesses will be made available to the harasser and the complainant. Witnesses will be encouraged to appear at the complaint hearing if requested by either party. It is acknowledged that some witnesses may be reluctant to do so. In these circumstances, the Designated Person will, if necessary, adjourn the hearing and ask supplementary questions of witnesses in private.
- iv. The complainant may, if he or she wishes, be supported throughout the procedure and hearing by someone of his or her choice. The member of staff accused of harassment will also have the right to be accompanied at the hearing.
- v. On conclusion of the complaint hearing, and within 24 hours of same, the Designated Person will bring the matter to the attention of the Islands Management Team, setting out in writing his or her findings. In consultation with the Leader, failing whom the Support Services Manager, the Management Team will conclude whether harassment has taken place. The decision, which will be final, will be given in writing to both guest and the member of staff.
- vi. If it is concluded that harassment has taken place, the Community's Disciplinary Procedure will be initiated immediately and at a level appropriate to the severity of same.

2. Against Another Guest:

- a. In the event of a guest or a visitor bringing to the attention of a staff member a complaint against another guest, the staff member complained to will immediately advise the appropriate Designated Person.
- b. The Designated Person will meet immediately, or as soon as is practicable, with the complainant, hear the nature of the complaint and discern which of the two options the complainant wishes to take.
 - i. If the complainant wishes to bring criminal proceedings against the other guest at this stage:
 - a. the Designated Person should provide the complainant with the opportunity to advise the police
 - b. the Designated Person should advise the harasser of the complaint against him or her and notify that the police have been advised.
 - ii. If the complainant wishes to leave the centre and return home:
 - a. the Designated Person should arrange for this to be done.
 - b. the Designated Person should advise the harasser of the complaint against him or her and notify him or her that he or she must leave the centre.

B. **STAFF COMPLAINT:**

1. Against Guest

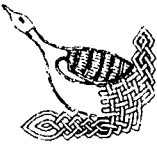
- a. In the event of a member of staff suffering sexual harassment from a guest or visitor, he or she should immediately advise the appropriate Designated Person.
- b. The Designated Person will meet immediately, or as soon as is practicable, with the complainant and hear the nature of the complaint. The Designated Person will then set out the procedure for dealing with the matter (sections c. and d. below). The member of staff will then be asked whether (i) at this stage bring criminal proceedings against the guest or (ii) without prejudicing any other rights they might have, she or he wishes to continue with the procedure as set out.
- c. If the member of staff wishes to bring criminal proceedings against the guest at this stage -
 - i. The Designated Person should provide the member of staff with the opportunity to advise the police.
 - ii. The Designated Person should advise the guest of the complaint against him/her.
 - iii. If following investigation by the police, the guest is charged with an offence, he or she will be asked to leave the Centre.

- d. If the member of staff wishes to continue with the procedure as set out hereunder -
- i. The Designated Person should request the complainant to put his or her complaint in writing, and where possible, state:
 - the name of the harasser
 - the nature of the harassment
 - dates and times when harassment occurred
 - names of witnesses to any incidents of harassment
 - any action already taken by the complainant to stop the harassment
 - ii. The Designated Person should advise the harasser of the complaint against him or her and notify him or her of the procedure.
 - iii. The Designated Person handling the complaint will carry out a thorough investigation as quickly as possible and no later than within 48 hours, maintaining confidentiality at all times. All members of staff involved in the investigation are expected to respect the need for confidentiality. Failure to do so will be considered a disciplinary offence.
 - iv. Copies of statements made by witnesses will be made available to the harasser and the complainant. Witnesses will be encouraged to appear at the complaint hearing if requested by either party. It is acknowledged that some witnesses may be reluctant to do so. In these circumstances, the Designated Person will, if necessary, adjourn the hearing and ask supplementary questions of witnesses in private.
 - v. The complainant may, if he or she wishes, be supported throughout the procedure and hearing by someone of his or her choice. The member of staff accused of harassment will also have the right to be accompanied at the hearing.
 - vi. On conclusion of the complaint hearing, and within 24 hours of same, the Designated Person will bring the matter to the attention of the Islands Management Team, setting out in writing his or her findings. In consultation with the Leader, failing whom the Support Services Manager, the Management Team will conclude whether harassment has taken place. The decision which will be final, will be given in writing to both guest and the member of staff.
 - vii. If it is concluded that harassment has taken place, the guest will be notified and asked to leave the Centre immediately.

C. COMPLAINTS BY MINORS:

1. In the event of a Minor bringing a complaint to the attention of a staff member or the Minor's representative (e.g. Parent, Group Leader, Teacher, etc.), the person complained to will immediately advise the appropriate Designated Person.
2. The Designated Person will meet immediately, or as soon as is practicable, with the complainant and in the presence of the Minor's representative or a senior member of staff (Management Team?), hear the nature of the complaint.
3. If the Minor has a representative, he or she, in consultation with the Designated Person, will decide immediately on the next course of action and will take full responsibility for that decision.
4. If the Minor has no representative, the Designated Person, in consultation with the senior member of staff, will decide immediately on the next course of action. The options available are:
 - a. Advise the police, who will then take responsibility for the process.
 - b. Advise the complainant's parents or guardians who will then take responsibility for the process.
5.
 - a. If the harasser is a guest, he or she will be advised of the complaint by the Designated Person and will notify him or her of the process which is to be undertaken.
 - b. If the harasser is a member of staff, he or she will be advised of the nature of the complaint by the Designated Person and immediately will be suspended with pay.
6. The Designated Person will be responsible for advising the Management Team of what has happened, what course of action has/will be taken and, if the harasser is a member of staff, determine what action is to be taken against him or her, in consultation with the Leader or the Support Services Manager.

APPENDIX E
Iona Community Resident Group Application Forms



the iona community

CONFIDENTIAL

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

Please write or type in black ink and use additional sheets if necessary

DO NOT USE THIS FORM IF APPLYING FOR A VOLUNTEER POSITION

Position applied for:	How did you learn about this vacancy:
-----------------------	---------------------------------------

(1) PERSONAL DETAILS:	
Surname:	First Name(s):
Title: Rev/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss <i>delete as appropriate</i>	
Address where you can be contacted:	Date of Birth: ____/____/____ N.I. No: ____/____/____/____/____
	Nationality:
Tel. No: (daytime): (evening):	Are you required to have a work permit: Yes/No
Fax No:	If yes, do you have a work permit: Yes/No
Email :	

(2) EDUCATION:	
(Examinations passed: degrees/diplomas or other professional qualifications with subjects, dates taken or to be taken, and results.)	SPECIALISED TRAINING: (e.g. shorthand, typing, apprenticeship, youth work, etc.)
SECONDARY:	
FURTHER/HIGHER:	

[illegible]

(5) WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS POST?

Application Form A/02

(6) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF? WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES?

For Applications for Islands based posts:
(7) WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON LIVING IN AN ECUMENICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY?

(8) REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS ACT 1974:

Because of the nature of our work, which includes providing accommodation and recreational facilities for young people, the post you are applying for is exempt from Section 4(2) of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and spent convictions should be stated, as provided by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (Exemptions) Order 1975.

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence or have any criminal charges pending? _____.

If 'yes' please complete the attached declaration form and return it along with this application form in a separate sealed envelope. This will only be opened if you are short listed for interview, otherwise it will be returned to you unopened, and information you provide will not necessarily preclude you from working with the Iona Community.

Please note that applicants will be subject to a Scottish Criminal Records Office disclosure.

Applicants residing outside of the UK will be required to provide a criminal record disclosure from their national criminal records office, or police department.

(9) MEDICAL HISTORY:

Are you in good health? Yes/No

Please state, with dates, any serious illness, operations, etc.

How many periods of absence from work (in excess of two weeks duration) have you had as a result of illness in the past two years?

Have you any disabilities which may affect your application?

In relation to any disability mentioned above:

What reasonable adjustments do you feel should be made to the recruitment process which would assist you in your application?

What reasonable adjustment do you feel should be made to the job itself which would enable you to carry out the job?

(10) MARITAL STATUS, etc:

What is your marital status?

For applications for islands-based posts:

Will you be accompanied by a partner? YES/NO If yes, has s/he also applied for a position? YES/NO

Please give details of any accompanying children or other dependants:

Application Form A/02

(11) REFEREES:

Name, Address and Occupation of 3 referees, 2 of whom should know you in a work capacity, if previously employed. Please tick the box if you have objections to a referee being contacted prior to interview.

1. Name and Address:		Occupation:
Fax No: Email :		
2. Name and Address:		Occupation:
Fax No: Email :		
3 Name and Address:		Occupation:
Fax No: Email :		

(12) DECLARATION:

(12) DECLARATION:
I CERTIFY THAT ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS FORM IS TRUE AND CORRECT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE. I REALISE THAT FALSE INFORMATION OR OMISSIONS MAY LEAD TO DISMISSAL WITHOUT NOTICE.

Signature:..... Date:.....

To be returned to:

Staff Co-ordinator, The Iona Community, Iona Abbey, Isle of Iona, Argyll PA76 6SN

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:	Detail/ Number	Signature
ID Check:		

the iona community

CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS - DECLARATION FORM

Private & Confidential

Please complete this form in full, if you require additional space please continue on a separate sheet.

Section 1:

- a. **When did the offence take place? What were you charged with? What sentence did you receive?**
- b. **What were your circumstances at that time?, i.e. family, financial, etc.**
- c. **What have you learned from the experience?**
- d. **What is your present situation and your future expectations?**

Section 2: Declaration (I certify that all information contained in this form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and realise that false information or omissions may lead to dismissal).

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Should you be appointed for the position applied for you may also be required to provide a Standard or Enhanced disclosure as provided for under the terms of the Police Act 1997, Part 5.

NOTE: Please seal this form in a separate envelope, mark it: 'Declaration Form - Confidential' and return along with your application form. The information you give in this form will be treated in the strictest confidence and if you are called for an interview will be shared only with those people directly involved in the interview, otherwise it will be returned to you unopened.

APPENDIX F
Sample Material from the Weekly Pilgrimage

The Nunnery

God and Man and Woman

by John Bell

(This can be read by two people standing apart, allowing for pauses for thought and laughter as appropriate.)

A: In the beginning God made man.
He was so disappointed that He tried again,

and the next time, He made woman.

B: Eve, the first woman, was a vegetarian.
She liked apples, and ate the wrong one.

Men have been suspicious of vegetarians ever since.

Noah didn't eat apples.
He was a manso he drank alcohol.
In fact, he drank so much alcohol that one day
his sons found their old man completely sozzled
and lying in the nude.

Women have been suspicious of alcohol ever since.

A: Lot didn't eat apples or drink wine.
He just lived in a city where there were funny goings-on.
So God told him to leave the city, and so he did.
God said, "Don't look back, for I'm going to burn down the city."
So Lot didn't look back, but his wife did
and she turned into a pillar of salt.

Women have never looked back since.

B: Delilah didn't eat apples, drink wine or look back.
She was a hairdresser.
Samson didn't know that,
but while he was resting his macho muscles,
Delilah cut his hair and took his strength away.

Men have avoided being bald ever since.

A: St. Paul didn't know Eve, Noah, Lot or Delilah.
But he did know some women.

and those he did must have given him bad memories.
 Because he told them not to speak in church,
 not to go to church without a hat
 and always to obey their husbands.
 Paul also said that men shouldn't get married
 unless they were unable to control themselves.

Men have been unable to control themselves ever since.

B: But Jesus was different.

He was strong, but he cried.
 He even cried in front of other men.
 He knew that some women had bad reputations,
 but that didn't keep him back from them:
 he knelt beside them.

He loved his disciples who were mostly men
 and he wasn't afraid to tell them that he loved them.
 And though he was never married,
 he was always surrounded by women who, at his death,
 were more faithful to him than the men.

Jesus didn't make a fuss about who was who, or who was what.
 He said that everyone who loved him was his mother,
 his sister
 his brother.

A&B: Thank God for Jesus.

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Sabbath Prayer

by Naomi Janowitz and Maggie Wenig

Blessed is She who spoke and the world became.
 Blessed is She who in the beginning gave birth.
 Blessed is She who says and performs.
 Blessed is She who declares and fulfils.
 Blessed is She whose womb covers the earth.
 Blessed is She who lives forever, and exists eternally.
 Blessed is She who redeems and saves.
 Blessed is her name.

Source: Peter Millar (1997) *Iona: Pilgrim Guide*, p. 25.

Loch Staonaig

An example of a 'political' prayer about water:

God, you are God of the waters, the seas, the burns, the broad, muddy rivers
which you give to us freely.
Jesus turned water into wine.
We have turned water into power, grief and profit.
We squander what we have while others go without.
God, give us generous hearts to pray, to give and help us to right this wrong.
Amen.

Source: Provided by current (2006) ressie.

The Machair

A politically inspired prayer about Fairtrade:

God, we thank you for this Machair, for the common land, for sharing.
God, we thank you for the growth of the Fairtrade Movement.
God, we thank you for practical justice for people and land.
God, we pray for just and workable agreements, in relation to food production
and trade, to be reached across your world. Not out of greed and dishonesty but
from a desire to treat people and land fairly.
Amen.

Source: Provided by current (2006) ressie.

St Oran's Chapel

I Never Wanted to be Born

by John Bell

The older I grew
the fonder I became
of my mother's womb
and its warmth
and its safety

I feared the unknown
the next world
about which I knew nothing
but imagined the worst

yet as I grew older

I sensed in my soul
that the womb was not my home forever

though I did not know when
I felt sure that one day
I would disappear through a door
which had yet to be opened
and confront the unknown
of which I was afraid

and then
it happened

in blood, tears, and pain
it happened

I was cut off from the familiar
I left my life behind
and discovered not darkness but light
not hostility but love
not eternal separation
but hands that wanted to hold me

I never wanted to be born

I don't want to die

the older I become
the fonder I become of this world
and its warmth
and its safety

I fear the unknown
the next world
about which I know nothing but imagine the worst

yet as I grow older
I sense in my soul
that this world is not my home forever

though I do not know when
I feel that one day
I will disappear through a door
which has yet to be opened

perhaps having come so safely through the first door
I should not fear so hopelessly the second

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