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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DUNFALLANDY STONE



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DUNFALLANDY STONE

CONTENTS

1	Summary	2
1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Statement of significance	2
2	Assessment of values	3
2.1	Background	3
2.2	Evidential values	5
2.3	Historical values	6
2.4	Architectural and artistic values	7
2.5	Landscape and aesthetic values	8
2.6	Natural heritage values	9
2.7	Contemporary/use values	9
3	Major gaps in understanding	11
4	Associated properties	11
5	Keywords	11
	Bibliography	12
	APPENDICES	
	Appendix 1: Timeline	14
	Appendix 2: Summary of archaeological investigations	15
	Appendix 3: Images	16

1 Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Dunfallandy Stone (NN 94629 56530), standing at the top of a steep slope or mound just south of Pitlochry in Perth and Kinross, is a Class II Pictish upright cross-slab of Old Red Sandstone. It is also known locally as *Clach an t-Sagart*, the Priest's Stone, although this is disputed.¹ It stands at 1.52m tall and dates to the second half of the first millennia AD. This stone is one of the best surviving symbol-bearing cross-slabs.

The front face exhibits a quadrilobate Christian cross, carved all in relief, including numerous spiral-work, key-pattern and interlace decorated panels. This face also exhibits various beasts, a stag and angels. The back face exhibits three human figures (two seated and one on horseback), a raised platform with a freestanding cross, numerous Pictish symbols, as well as a hammer, tongs and anvil. This face is bordered by two fish-monsters with a human head between the tongues (or flames) of the monsters. The sides are undecorated.

The stone is freely accessible as a visitor attraction in the ruins of the old church, although it is now enclosed within a protective structure.

1.2 Statement of significance

The Pictish symbol stones, cross-slabs and crosses of early medieval Scotland are perhaps the most extraordinary and beautiful of all carved stones in the British Isles. These stones, carved by the Picts, or 'Painted People', 'offer remarkable testimony to their artistic skills and insights into Pictish life and artistic contacts'.²

The Dunfallandy Stone stands relatively hidden within a modern shelter atop a steep slope. Its significance can be summarised as follows:

- It is an explicit expression of Christianity in southern Pictland.
- Probably of an eighth century AD date, and carved at a time when southern Pictland was under some influences from the Columban church in the seventh to eighth centuries AD.³
- Erected at a time when Pictish kings were actively promoting the development of the Pictish church during the late seventh/early eighth centuries.
- Other than some damage or wear to the central panel of the cross-face, it stands as one of the most complete of all Class II Pictish carved stones. Its current condition is excellent.
- It can demonstrate connections to Insular art and art found on other mediums.
- It exhibits complex spiral-work, interlace, key-pattern and boss decoration, indicative of a 'sophisticated coalescing of motifs'.⁴

¹Dixon 1921, 97

² Fraser 2008, 1

³ Foster 2004, 3

⁴Henderson and Henderson 2004, 44

- Architecturally the stone is moderately significant, as the clarity of the cruciform standing out in relief is impressive.
- It appears to be standing in its original location atop a steep slope or mound, although perhaps slightly moved to re-erect the stone. This is perhaps indicative of early activity, such as an early medieval church being located here.
- The stone depicts complex Biblical imagery. This stone in particular is said to specifically demonstrate early Trinity iconography.⁵
- The mixing of Pictish symbols and Christian iconography on this cross-slab was not ambivalent, and therefore perhaps designed to convey complex messages during a time of conversion.
- The use of specific Pictish symbols in relationship with human figures is particularly distinctive. Perhaps the symbols gave attributes to the figures they are juxtaposed with, or even gave names or were identifiers.⁶
- The high relief carving on the front face is indicative of a style that is thought to have been transmitted from contemporary metalwork, although much of which has not survived.
- The stone perhaps depicts a scene of royal inauguration.
- This stone communicates to us that the Picts were not an isolated or primitive culture.

2 Assessment of significance

2.1 Background

Description

The cross-slab is carved from pinkish-brown sandstone and is rectangular in shape. The stone is not local to the area, and most likely has an origin in Strathmore.⁷ It measures 1.52m in height, 0.65m wide and 0.13m thick. It is carved all in relief on two faces. It stands atop a prominent mound on the west bank of the River Tummel and to the west of a major road (A9), It stands just south of Pitlochry and close to a chapel site in Dunfallandy, but not Killiecrankie as was previously indicated.⁸ Its relationship with its immediate landscape is impeded by trees and its modern shelter.

The Carved Detail

An impressive Christian cross dominates the front face, with four square-shaped lobes and a central square panel. At each angle of the cross is a semi-circular cutaway at the corner of each lobe. The central panel of the cross was once decorated, although this is now difficult to determine as it was perhaps defaced.⁹ The lobes to the left and right are decorated with three raised bosses each on a background of key-pattern, and the top and bottom lobes are decorated with five raised bosses each on a background of

⁵Henderson and Henderson 2004, 227

⁶Goldberg 2012, 167

⁷Miller and Ruckley 2005, 288

⁸ See Fraser 2008, 122 for clarification; Stuart 1856, 15; Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 286-7

⁹Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 287

impressive spiral-work. The upper arm of the cross-shaft is decorated with interlace at the top and triangular interlace at the bottom. The front face is also bordered on its left and right with interlace work, apart from where the left and right lobes of the cross touch the edges.

Providing the background to the cross are nine different panels inhabited by a variety of carvings. To the bottom left is a fish-monster consuming a human figure whose legs are protruding from the mouth of the monster. To the bottom right is a backwards-facing beast with its legs curled beneath it. Above this is a fantastic high-thighed beast with a reptilian head. Opposite this are a pausing backwards-facing stag with a backwards facing-facing beast with lolling tongue above it. To the right of this are two similar angels one above the other with four wings spiralled at the join with their bodies. To the top left is a backwards-facing beast with an elongated snout and to the top right are two beasts, one on top of the other.

The back face is bordered on the left and right by two fish-monsters with a dragonhead each and fish tails, stretching almost to the base of the cross-slab. Between the mouths of these fish-monsters is a human head at the top centre of the back face, and notably the figure appears to be held by the monsters. Below this are a Pictish Beast, double-disc and a crescent and v-rod. Directly below these symbols is an intriguing scene. Two seated figures, most likely a male to the right facing a female to the left, although this is uncertain and varying interpretations are offered (see 2.3 and 2.4 below). Between them is a freestanding cross on an elevated platform. In the centre of the back face is a figure on horseback with a crescent and v-rod and a Pictish Beast to its right. Below this are a hammer, anvil and tongs. John Stuart incorrectly suggested that these might have been a later addition.¹⁰

All of the detail is confidently carved and impressive in its execution, with a suggestion of deliberate placement of Pictish symbols in juxtaposition with the human figures. This may have a significant meaning.

Brief History

The following is designed to highlight the brief history of the Dunfallandy Stone. Providing a full biography for the stone is not possible at this stage in our understanding, as is common with early medieval carved stones. A fuller account of the timeline of the stone is given in Appendix 1, and any further details of archaeological investigation are presented in Appendix 2.

Assigning the name of a patron or carver, or even a date to the Dunfallandy Stone is difficult. This is the same for most carved stones of this period. It is generally thought that it was erected in the eighth century. It has more than likely been associated with the mound it currently stands upon since it was erected.

¹⁰Stuart 1856, 15

James Skene illustrated the stone in 1832 although the two bottom panels of the front face are not indicated on this sketch.¹¹

Referred to as the stone of Dunfallandy in 1845, and was subject to local superstition, ultimately leading to the site being surveyed in 1863, 1898 and 1923.¹²

In around 1880 a photograph displays the base of the stone as it was propped up against branches in preparation to be replaced in the mound.¹³

A cast of the stone was made in 1882, and is currently with National Museums Scotland.¹⁴ From 2002 to 2003 this cast was part of a primarily photograph based exhibition held at Perth Museum.¹⁵

In 1935 a shelter was erected over the stone, and in 1959 the stone passed into guardianship.¹⁶ Its current semi-glazed shelter was erected to protect the stone in its current location in 1975.¹⁷

2.2 Evidential values

The Dunfallandy stone is a beautiful and iconography rich example of a Class II Pictish cross-slab. . It stands out in the archaeological record as a potentially early surviving example of a Pictish Class II stone. Its completeness, complexity and remarkable state of preservation, as well as its Pictish symbol treatment and Christian iconographies, are of great importance to its current and future potential in research and education.

The stone likely stands in its original location and therefore seems to have continually had a relationship with this site on the western bank of the River Tummel. It may provide evidence to the location of an early meeting or assembly place, or even perhaps the location of an early Pictish church.

This cross-slab probably had the role of a prayer cross and would have been erected under elite patronage – secular or ecclesiastical aristocracy. No burial has been found associated with this cross-slab as yet.

The nature of the cross carving provides links to metalwork, which for the Picts is unfortunately limited in the archaeological record. The nature of the carving of the designs on the front face is evidence for a 'sophisticated coalescing of motifs'.¹⁸

The Dunfallandy Stone has the potential to provide evidence of aspects of Pictish society, such as culture, religion (complex Biblical imagery is

¹¹RCAHMS n.d.

¹²Mack 1997, 46

¹³Allen and Anderson 1993, Vol 2. (Part III), frontispiece

¹⁴Foster 2004, 4

¹⁵Hall 2005, 345

¹⁶Foster 2004, 1

¹⁷Muir 2005, 175

¹⁸Henderson and Henderson 2004, 44

apparent) and daily life (the tools of a smith?). This will be discussed in the following sections.

2.3 Historical values

The Dunfallandy Stone and other Pictish carved stones, although carved with beautiful but generally unintelligible symbols,¹⁹ are of incredible historic value. Pictish symbols are explicitly identifiable as indicators of Pictish culture, yet without the discovery of 'contemporary literary reference' they will remain difficult to understand.²⁰ The details revealed in the numerous other carvings however can help in the elucidation of the culture, religion and lifestyle of the people of early medieval Scotland.

The inclusion of the masterfully carved hammer, anvil and tongs may perhaps indicate a person of high status within Pictish society, of who would have been useful to the monastic community.²¹ Such imagery alludes to the significance of the smith in the Pictish period.

The stone has great historical value with regards to revealing themes of early Christianity and possibly of royal inauguration in southern Pictland. On the back face, the scene with the seated figures may be interpreted in many ways. Perhaps these two figures are Picts,²² and this scene is a symbol of the Celtic inauguration of a Pictish chief at a moot hill site while his heir looks on.²³ There is no surviving archaeological evidence of a Pictish wooden throne, and therefore this stone also provides a link to how a throne may have looked and been constructed. Notably, the Glenmorangie Research Project have created a Pictish throne based on this type of evidence.²⁴

It has also been suggested that the two figures may represent the Christian imagery of St Paul meeting St Anthony (in truncated form).²⁵ However, the figure to the left has since also been re-identified by some as female and therefore this scene may also represent the Pictish equivalent of a memorial to Helena and Constantine.²⁶

The encroachment of the symbols to these figures is intriguing. The horseman below shares symbols with the two figures above, therefore perhaps he could have been related to both,²⁷ or it may be that the symbols are providing the human figures with shared attributes.²⁸ The interpretation of this face is clearly open to debate, but it does succeed in providing evidence of a potential historical event as well as also highlighting how the Picts may have engaged with aspects of Christianity.

¹⁹Henderson 1967, 157-8

²⁰Henderson 1967, 158

²¹Henderson and Henderson 2004, 153

²²Mack 1997, 46-7

²³Stuart 1870, 102-3

²⁴National Museums Scotland n.d.

²⁵Henderson 1967, 148-9

²⁶Henderson and Henderson 2004, 153

²⁷Mack 1997, 47

²⁸Henderson and Henderson 2004, 65

This stone provides further tangible historical reference to Christianity in the complex Biblical messages it appears to convey. On the bottom left panel of the front face is perhaps the story of Jonah. Here the whale, or fish-monster, is swallowing and disgorging Jonah and is said to be representative of the Entombment and Resurrection of Christ.²⁹ Perhaps the male figure being held by two fish-monsters at the top of the back face of the Dunfallandy stone, and similar to imagery on the front face of the Maiden Stone from Aberdeenshire,³⁰ also represents this story.³¹ This could also be a symbol for protection.

The Dunfallandy Stone has the potential to demonstrate how ideas of Christianity in Pictland, although complex and varying, may be manifest in different ways on material culture.

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

Evidence for the Picts predominantly comes from their art, and particularly from carved stones. These carved stones are clearly products of accomplished sculptors and may provide evidence of a structured society for example. Skilled sculptors must have been commissioned to create these masterpieces, most probably at the behest of the Pictish elite. With the lack of other significant evidence for the Picts, these carved stones therefore give an insight into Pictish society, foreign contacts and cultural resources.

The architectural and artistic value of the Dunfallandy Stone can be summarised as follows:

Architecturally, the stone is relatively small compared to most other Class II stones, however it is remarkably beautiful and so great care has clearly been taken to shape and carve this stone. An abundance of thought must have gone into its production, particularly so when considering that the sandstone it is carved from is not local.

The possible Jonah symbolism (see 2.3 above) may also be identified at the top right of a cross-slab from Woodwrae in Angus.³² In the Woodwrae example it appears that the beast said to be consuming and disgorging Jonah has been stylised in a Pictish fashion through the inclusion of a 'goggle-eyed snake's head to the end of the Ketos's (fish-monster/beast/whale) tail', a style coincidentally paralleled in Scythian designs.³³ The variation and distribution of this artistic motif across Pictland is fascinating evidence of changing ideas and cultural contacts.

The collection of fantastic and naturalistic animals exhibited on the front face is impressive. There are several backwards-facing beasts on the front face of

²⁹Henderson and Henderson 2004, 142-3

³⁰Fraser 2008, 32

³¹Historic Scotland n.d.

³²Henderson and Henderson 2004, 79

³³Henderson and Henderson 2004, 79

the stone, and although different in design this style of backwards-facing animal is fairly common on Pictish carved stones. Aberlemno II in Angus exhibits a fairly beautiful example on its top right, perhaps a deer or horse, although this is discussed elsewhere in further detail.³⁴ The fantastic high-thighed beast with a reptilian head has a parallel on St Orland's Stone from Angus,³⁵ and the stag is interesting in the fact that it appears to be pausing and looking over its shoulder.

Returning to the potential relationship between the human figures and the Pictish symbols on the back face. If they are indeed connected and give attributes to the figures, we need then look no further than St Madoes cross-slab,³⁶ also in Perth and Kinross. The back face of this Class II stone has three riders on horseback above the crescent and v-rod, Pictish Beast and double-disc symbols. This proves significant in the search for the potential meanings of Pictish symbols.

Unfortunately the survival and recovery of Pictish metalwork is not great. Fortunately however, surviving carved stones attest to the transfer of art between these mediums. This is evident in the style of the cross on the Dunfallandy Stone, particularly in its square lobes and raised spiral bosses. A parallel for this type of carving can be found on the cross-slab from Fowls Wester,³⁷ and on the cross-slab from St Madoes,³⁸ both from Perth and Kinross.

It is also remarked that long and slender fish-monster motif, as seen on both sides of the back face of the stone, may also be seen in a different scale on the edge of the Tara Brooch from Ireland,³⁹ of which is a fine example of Insular metalwork.

The above discussion of the artistic parallels and the associated geographical spread of the iconographies carved therefore attests to the artistic value of the Dunfallandy Stone.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

As with the majority of early medieval carved stones, its aesthetic significance has changed over time. This is relative to its changing landscape setting, but more importantly, to its changing audience. Those who view the stone today will have a different experience to those who viewed it within its original landscape setting.

Artistically, the Dunfallandy Stone is aesthetically significant due to the nature, complexity and survival of its artwork. Each design is masterfully carved with

³⁴Laing 2002, 247-50

³⁵Fraser 2008, 50-1

³⁶ Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 292-96

³⁷Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 289-20

³⁸Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 292-96

³⁹Henderson and Henderson 2004, 105 and 153

precision and presented clearly. Its current state of preservation is remarkable.

Original aesthetic

The stone likely stands in its original location, or very close to it, although the surrounding landscape would have been lacking in trees originally. The stone is situated in the valley of the River Tummel, which flows to its east. It is possible that the mound it is situated on would have been a contemporary assembly site, and it may also be that the stone provides evidence that this location may also have been the site of an early Pictish church. Due to the nature of the mound the stone must have been visible to the surrounding areas that provided its immediate landscape setting.

Historic aesthetic

The location of the stone appears to have an additional role throughout its history. In the nineteenth century the location was known as 'Mausoleum Mound', and this is attested to in the fenced off burial enclosures in its general vicinity.⁴⁰ It appears that the site was probably appropriated for its religious significance, perhaps as it was also the 'site of an ancient chapel'.⁴¹ A photograph taken around 1880 depicts the cross-slab, with the earth removed from its base, and also shows fenced burial enclosures in the background.⁴²

Present day aesthetic

The location of the cross-slab atop a high piece of land would make for an excellent view, both to and from the carved stone, however the overgrowth of surrounding trees make it difficult to appreciate the stone in its present environment. It is accessed via steps built into the slope. The surrounding vegetation makes it particularly dark,⁴³ and so this makes it more difficult to make out the details of the relief carvings. This is affected further by the protective structure surrounding the stone. The shelter does however protect the stone from the trees and elements, but the glare of the glass is an issue,⁴⁴ and it is locked to the public.

The carved stone is available to access year round, however its present surroundings encroach upon the aesthetic value of the stone. Ultimately this may affect how the current audience engage with the stone, and unfortunately it also appears to disconnect the stone from its surrounding landscape.

2.6 Natural heritage values

The stone stands atop a steep slope or mound. No natural significance is apparent.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

⁴⁰Mack 1997, 46

⁴¹Mack 1997, 46

⁴²Allen and Anderson 1993, Vol. 2 (Part III), frontispiece

⁴³Maxwell 2005, 168

⁴⁴Maxwell 2005, 168; Undiscovered Scotland n.d.

Community

Since the nineteenth century it appears that the site of the stone has been significant within the local community. Surrounding burials attest to this, and the site was for a time known as Mausoleum Mound within the community.⁴⁵ The stone was subject to superstitious attention in the middle of the nineteenth century,⁴⁶ thus highlighting local interest in the stone and its site. A photograph taken during the late nineteenth century reveals how the stone was being cared for, as it was carefully excavated, propped up and subsequently re-erected.

Spiritual

As an explicit manifestation of Christianity this stone has undeniable spiritual and religious value. Its location supposedly on the site of an ancient chapel, with the addition of a later burial ground, crystallises its religious value. The stone is small in scale but it is stunningly beautiful, and so has more than likely been easily accessible as an iconographically rich expression of the Christian religion within this region for some time. On the other hand however, the meanings conveyed by its Pictish symbols continue to provide the stone with a tantalising characteristic.

Economic

The stone is located just off the major north-south route way in the east of Scotland (A9), therefore the possibility of numerous visitors having relatively easy access to the location of the stone is high. The stone is approximately one mile south of the tourist town of Pitlochry. Tourists come from afar to see the River Tummel as well as the famous salmon fish ladder in this area. The stone makes for a leisurely stop off when travelling the monotonous A9 route. Those dedicated to the pursuit of Pictish art, and those of the Christian faith in particular may be drawn to this stone regardless of its location. It is unlikely that this stone has a great impact on the local economy however.

Access and education

Although the site is unstaffed it is freely accessible, and there are two PDF leaflets detailing early carved stones available online for download from Historic Scotland. They are *Investigating – The Dunfallandy Stone*,⁴⁷ designed for teachers, and the more detailed *Investigating – Early Carved Stones*.⁴⁸ The latter is also available in Gaelic. Due to the complexity and nature of this stone it clearly has an educational value with regards to discussions of its iconography and meaning. This stone overtly displays themes from Christianity, and so may be used as a learning aid to demonstrate aspects of early organised religion in Scotland. The stone is also significant for demonstrating artistic parallels between Pictish sculpture and Insular art from other mediums.

⁴⁵Mack 1997, 46

⁴⁶Mack 1997, 46

⁴⁷ Historic Scotland n.d.

⁴⁸ Historic Scotland 2009

Corporate value

This stone demonstrates current best practice with regards to the conservation and management of a fragile cultural resource. Under the care of Historic Scotland it is now housed within a protective glazed shelter.⁴⁹ This protects the stone from rogue tree branches, the elements and any potential future vandalism, yet this is to the detriment of its aesthetic value.

3 Major gaps in understanding

- There is no single academic thesis on this sculpture, although it is widely discussed and referred to in other art historical literature.
- Can the original location of the stone be confirmed as its current location?
- Who had the stone created and who was the carver?
- Why was this stone created, and why was it erected in here?
- Does this stone infer the location of an early Pictish church, or an assembly place?
- What is the stone's archaeological context? The site would benefit from a modern survey.
- What are the wider landscape relationships between the Dunfallandy Stone and others in the Perth and Kinross area?
- Can the complex Christian iconography be fully understood?
- Does the stone have any associated sites or settlements?
- What do the Pictish symbols represent on this carved stone?

4 Associated properties

Other Pictish cross-slabs/crosses – Eassie Stone; Maiden Stone; St Orland's Stone; Dupplin Cross; Aberlemno II and III.

Other – National Museum of Scotland has a cast of the stone.

Note – There is a high concentration of Pictish carved stones in Perth and Kinross.

5 Keywords

Pictish; cross-slab; Pictish symbols; Christianity; Insular art; Dunfallandy; Perth and Kinross; interlace; spiral-work; key-pattern; angel; Pictish Beast; throne; royal inauguration; Jonah; metalwork

⁴⁹See Muir 2005

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Appendix 1 – Timeline

685 – Battle of Nechtansmere (or Dunnichen), resulting in the death of King Ecgrith of Northumbria and a victory for the Picts at the hands of King Bridei son of Beli,⁵⁰ and ultimately leading to a Northumbrian loss of territory in Pictland.⁵¹

c.700x800 – Dunfallandy Stone is carved and erected, but precisely when and by whom is a mystery.

c.710 – Correspondence between Ceolfrid, Abbot from the Monastery at Jarrow, and King Nechtan of Pictland, in which Nechtan asks for the assistance of masons to help build a church in the Roman fashion.⁵²

843 – Cináed mac Ailpín becomes king of the Picts.⁵³

1832 – James Skene illustrated both faces of the stone in 1832, although the two bottom panels of the front face are not indicated on these sketches.⁵⁴

1845 – Referred to as the stone of Dunfallandy, and was subject to local superstition.⁵⁵

1863 – The site was surveyed.⁵⁶

c.1880 – A photograph displays the base of the stone as it was propped up against branches in preparation to be replaced in the mound.⁵⁷

1882 – A cast of the stone was made.⁵⁸

1898 – The site was surveyed.⁵⁹

1923 – The site was surveyed.⁶⁰

1935 – A shelter was erected over the stone.⁶¹

⁵⁰Fraser 2009, 383; Woolf 2007, 10

⁵¹Woolf 2007, 4

⁵²Henderson 1967, 82

⁵³Woolf 2007, 351

⁵⁴RCAHMS n.d.

⁵⁵Mack 1997, 46

⁵⁶Mack 1997, 46

⁵⁷Allen and Anderson 1993, Vol 2. (Part III), frontispiece

⁵⁸Foster 2004, 4

⁵⁹Mack 1997, 46

⁶⁰Mack 1997, 46

⁶¹Foster 2004, 1

1959 – The stone passed into guardianship.⁶²

1975 – Its current glazed shelter was erected.⁶³

2002-2003 – The cast of the Dunfallandy Stone was part of a primarily photograph based exhibition held at Perth Museum.⁶⁴

Appendix 2 – Summary of archaeological investigations

The site was surveyed several times in the nineteenth century, and again in the twentieth century,⁶⁵ but modern archaeological survey and excavation methods have not been employed as of yet. A photo taken towards the end of the nineteenth century shows the base of the cross-slab exposed,⁶⁶ however nothing of archaeological significance has been found or discussed.

Unfortunately, and due in part to no limited archaeological inspection of the stone's immediate and surrounding contexts, the history of the Dunfallandy Stone will remain difficult to fully determine.

⁶²Foster 2004, 1

⁶³Muir 2005, 175

⁶⁴Hall 2005, 345

⁶⁵Mack 1997, 46

⁶⁶Allen and Anderson 1993, Vol 2. (Part III), frontispiece

Appendix 3 – Images of Dunfallandy Stone

