

The remarkable **Drosten Stone** teems with life and bears a unique and enigmatic inscription.

INVESTIGATING THE DROSTEN STONE

Information for Teachers





The Drosten Stone

Pictish symbol stones are among Scotland's most distinctive monuments. Their elegant and vivid symbols and images can be found carved into boulders and slabs of rock, and on specially cut and shaped freestanding stones. Most of the stones which survive today were carved between around AD 500 and 800.

A number of stones still stand in the landscape where they were positioned nearly 1500 years ago, but most stones have now been taken into museums for conservation reasons.

One of these is the Drosten Stone, which can be seen with other stones from this time in St Vigeans Sculptured Stones Museum near Arbroath. The village of St Vigeans was once a centre of huge religious importance and the carved stones which survive from this time our most tangible source of evidence. The Drosten Stone is one of the most richly decorated and bears an enigmatic inscription.

Practical information

- Location: St Vigeans Museum, St Vigeans, DD11 4RB; 0.5 mile north of Arbroath off the A92.
- Parking: Small public car park nearby which can accommodate minibuses but not a coach nearby. The car park by the village hall can take a coach and can be accessed from the A933. Please discuss when booking.
- Access: The museum is fully accessible.
- Nearest toilets: One toilet at the museum.
- Booking: For booking and opening hours, contact 01241 433739. Visits are free. For details of Historic Scotland's subsidised transport scheme, call 0131 668 8793.
- Note: Space in the museum is limited and can accommodate groups of up to 14 at one time. Other pupils could explore the nearby church in the meantime.
- Please note: for conservation reasons please do not touch or take photographs of the stone.

How to use this resource

This resource is designed to enable teachers or parent helpers carry out a simple investigation of the Drosten Stone in the museum at St Vigeans. Simple discussion points focus pupils' attention on what they can see and encourage pupils to interpret this evidence.

This activity guide should be used in collaboration with the much larger full-colour booklet *Investigating Carved Stones*, Historic Scotland 2009. This is available free of charge to teachers from Historic Scotland and can also be downloaded from the Historic Scotland website. This booklet sets the Drosten Stone in the context of other Pictish stones and provides a wealth of additional suggestions for pre-visit, on-site and post-visit activities.

Call **0131 668 8793/8736** or visit www.historic-scotland.gov.uk for more details.

Suggested activities

- Estimate the height of the stone, so that back at school you can recreate a life sized or scale model of it.
- Draw one element from the stone. Back at school pupils can use these drawings as a basis for scale drawings of the stone or modelling work. Or they could be used to inspire imaginative writing or expressive art work. The symbols are a good motif for press printing work.
- 'Carve' a pattern or emblem from the stone into a tile of clay. These could then be fired and placed in the school playground.

Further reading

- Historic Scotland Education, *Investigating Carved Stones*, Historic Scotland 2009.
- Anna Ritchie, *Picts*, Historic Scotland/HMSO 1995.
- Iain Fraser and John Borland, *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland*, RCAHMS, 2008.



Did you know...

The top part of this stone was found in use as one of the steps in St Vigean's Church!



Carved animals, both real and mythical



Highly decorated cross shaft

Background information

This may be read aloud to pupils either before the visit or on site.

- This stone was carved more than 1200 years ago by a group of people called the Picts. They were the people living in the north and east of Scotland between AD 300 and 900.
- We're not sure exactly what stones like this were for. It was probably a grave marker for someone important, but it could have been a territory marker, or a place for religious ceremonies. It used to stand outside where everyone could see it.
- There are lots of Pictish stones in Scotland. We know they are Pictish because they are carved in a similar style and show many of the same symbols or patterns.
- This stone is really unusual, because as well as patterns and decorations, it also includes writing. There is only one other stone in Scotland which uses letters like the ones we use today.
- The stone might have been decorated or painted when it was new.
- This stone was found in two pieces. The bottom part was used as a piece of pavement in the church, and the top part was a step in a stair!



Discussion points



*Mythical animals crawl
around the Christian cross*

Teacher prompt

Have a quick look at the cross. Look for a symbol or pattern that you like. Show it to a friend.

Pupil responses

Pupils' own responses.

Look at the side with the cross on it. What is the cross usually a symbol of? What does this tell us about the Picts?

A Christian symbol.

They were Christians.

Look at all the carvings round about the cross. Are the animals real animals or made-up, mythical animals?

Monsters and strange beasts.

Why do you think the Picts carved monsters around the cross?

Perhaps to show that the power of Christianity could scare off monsters.

What can you see in the top left corner? Historians think there may have been an angel in the top right corner.

A imp-like creature – looks very mischievous.

Look at the pattern on the shaft of the cross. What does it remind you of? It's known as knot work, or interlacing, like lace.

Pupils' own ideas – knots, braided hair, rope.

Is the pattern regular? Look for how the patterns are repeated.

Yes, regular pattern – though top group of knots is slightly different.

Try and follow the pattern with your eyes. It's usually one long continuous line of pattern.

Some historians believe that the Picts carved knot work so that when you looked at it, your mind calmed down, suitable for praying to god.



A deer hunt



Mysterious symbols



The hunter and the hunted!

Look at the other side. What makes this side different from the first side?

No cross.
Shows lots of animals and a person.
No patterns.

There are three groups of images on this side of the cross – Pictish symbols, a hunting scene, and general images connected with hunting. Can you work out the order, from top to bottom?

Top – hunting scene.
Middle – symbols.
Bottom – general images connected with hunting.

What kind of animals can you see?

[from top to bottom]

Dogs, stag, hare (under deer), bear, doe with faun, two mythical beasts, eagle pecking at salmon, wild boar.

Would you say that the deer in the hunting scene is realistic? What does this tell us about the Picts?

Yes, very. The Picts probably hunted deer and other animals like wild boars.

Some of these animals are extinct in Scotland now. Do you know which ones?

Bear; wild boar.

Can you see any people?

Person in hood at bottom left.

What is he doing?

About to fire a crossbow.

Some people think that he may be a kind of signature by the carver.

Look for these signs or symbols:

- A crescent
- A double disc with a Z-rod
- A mirror

A crescent – middle left; a double disc with a Z-rod – centre; a mirror – middle right

Nobody today knows what the symbols mean. They could be a kind of language, or they could represent names of people. A symbol like the double-disc might show when two families became connected through marriage. Some people think that certain symbols are connected with women – perhaps the comb and the mirror.

What do you think these symbols could mean?

Pupils' own ideas.

Compare these with the symbols on other stones. The quality of carving on the Drosten stone is much higher. Maybe it was carved by a master craftsman, and the others were carved by people who were learning.



What does the inscription mean?

Look for a panel of writing on the stone.

Historians think it says DROSTEN
IPEUORET ETTFOR CUS

Although we can make out the letters,
we can't be sure what language it's in, or
what the words mean.

The word DROSTEN might be a name –
so this stone is called the Drosten stone.
Can you find the word Drosten?

Why might his name be on the stone?
What kind of person do you think he
must have been?

The stone might be his grave marker, or
a memorial to him.
Must have been rich or important.

Which side of the stone do you think is
the front or main side?

Probably the cross – important religious
symbol.

Which side of the stone do you like
best?

Pupils' own responses.