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Category B)

**Taken into State care:** 1939 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2015

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# FOWLIS WESTER CROSS SLAB



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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## FOWLIS WESTER CROSS SLAB

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# 1 Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

The monument comprises an 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century Pictish symbol-bearing cross-slab now located within Fowlis Wester Parish Church (St Bean). The stone is known to have had several locations over time and has been associated with Fowlis Wester since the late medieval period, though the exact date of its erection here is not known. It was scheduled in 1923 and taken into guardianship in 1940. In 1991 it was moved inside the church for conservation reasons. A replica was erected by Historic Scotland at its previous location in the village square. Both the cross-slab and its replica are in the care of Scottish Ministers.

## 1.2 Statement of significance

The cross-slab is important to the corpus of early medieval monuments and to our understanding of the period.

The state of preservation and completeness of this monumental late 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century cross-slab is highly significant in itself as a survival of the Pictish period and given the fragility of other indicators of early medieval Scotland.

In a British context, the form of the cross-slab is unique: specifically in the projection of the cross arms beyond the sides of the slab. This is taken as evidence of a transitional monument form between the classic Pictish cross-slab and the Irish-style free standing cross and significantly the wider Strathearn area boasts examples of all three monument types (including for example the Dupplin Cross [Constantine's Cross] and the Crieff Burgh Cross). Its rarity makes it highly significant and its survival allows for comparison with Irish examples, which is likely to enhance our understanding of the period.

The image of a man leading a cow with a bell around its neck on the rear of the cross-slab is not known from any other Pictish stones and is therefore a significant addition to the iconographic repertoire of Insular art.

# 2 Evidential values

## 2.1 Background

### Description

The Fowlis Wester 1 cross is a massive cross-slab sculpted in Old Red sandstone and which would be conventionally described as a Class II monument, combining Pictish symbols with overtly Christian iconography (including an abstractly patterned cross).

The 3.15m high cross-slab is a single piece of locally-sourced Old Red Sandstone; it tapers from 0.83m in width at ground level to 0.54m at the tip, and varies from 0.11-0.15m in thickness. The front bears a cross carved in relief with side arms that project beyond the sides of the slab by 5cm; this was probably an optical device to convey the impression of a free-standing cross, the only example known in Great Britain. Its shaft is adorned with bosses and interlaced decoration and an iron chain is attached to the slab at the junction

of the cross-head and the shaft. The back is decorated with a hunting scene, a group of figures with a man leading a cow (an image not known at any other surviving examples), Pictish symbols and an eagle.

### **Current and Previous Locations**

The stone currently stands inside the kirk at Fowlis Wester (since 1991) and before that in the village square (since the 19<sup>th</sup> or late 18<sup>th</sup> century) and before that at east end of the Kirkyard. That may be its original location or it may have been moved there from a former chapel site in the Sma' Glen. Both the kirk and the (now lost) chapel site in the Sma' Glen have/had dedications to St. Bean. In 1927 a further cross slab, the 8<sup>th</sup> century "Fowlis Wester 2" was found during building works at the Church. It was displayed within the church and remains there today. It is not in the care of Scottish Ministers.

It was intended to relocate the stone into the N offshoot of the medieval parish church of Fowlis Wester when it was remodelled by Jeffrey Waddell & Young architects in 1927. (This offshoot had originally been a laird's aisle but was adapted as a vestry and display space). However this proposal was dropped after the discovery of 'Fowlis Wester 2' during building works and this was displayed in the transept instead, Fowlis Wester 2 remaining outside. Concerns over the condition of the significantly larger cross-slab in the village square were expressed on several instances thereafter leading to it being offered into guardianship by James Drummond Moray of Abercairney in 1938; the stone came into care two years later in 1940.

The stone has been treated on a number of occasions due to delamination and biological growth by pointing broken edges, cleaning and applications of preservatives. In 1987 the kirk session were approached about the relocation of the stone into the church and this was realised in 1991. The lower 0.85m of the stone was painted with bitumastic paint and lowered into a socket in the floor of the N transept into which a lime concrete mix was first compacted and a damp-proof membrane laid.

### **Replica Stone**

Before it was moved into the Kirk, a full-size clay model was made from which a plaster mould was taken (the cross-slab itself was too fragile to take a mould directly from it). Though not entirely successful because of the inaccuracies of the free-hand depiction nevertheless it was an innovative, conservation-led approach to creating a replica.

## **2.2 Evidential values**

The evidential value of Fowlis Wester 1 includes both the physical evidence of the stone itself and what we know of its earlier location and the evidence provided by its iconography and art historical values – these latter aspects are discussed in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4.

After the cross-slab was removed to the nearby church, its former location was excavated in August 1991. This showed that the cross-slab had been secured within its 1.06m long, 0.4m wide and 0.85m deep socket cut into the bedrock using well-compacted mortared rubble, probably from a demolished

post-Reformation building. It was not known when the socket was first created and how much alteration had been necessary to keep the cross upright; the findings of the exploration were therefore inconclusive as to whether or not the setting was early (Lewis, 1991).

### 2.3 Historical values

The historical values of the stone relate to both its original conception, purpose, social and religious importance, and the later meanings and associations whereby the stone was re-interpreted and co-opted to a variety of more secular roles.

#### **Original context**

Primarily this cross slab provides important evidence of Christianity following the conversion of Picts (from the 6th century) and, as was common, combines both secular scenes and symbols originating from earlier Pictish sculpture with biblical scenes. In E Scotland crosses were often carved on slabs rather than being free standing, and usually located at centres of religious activity (though some might have been marker stones, such as the prestigious, and free-standing, Dupplin (Constantine's) Cross, once located near the royal palace at Forteviot and now sited within Dunning church).

Fowlis Wester 1 would have been highly significant to its patron, local community and clergy of the late 8th-9th centuries and to later generations. The shared dedication to St Bean held by both Fowlis Wester kirk and the chapel at Buchanty where the cross was said to have formerly stood indicates a strong possibility that the cross may have been linked to the cult of St Bean in a specific way (cf. for example the cult of St Fechin at St Vigean, Vigean being the Pictish version of Fechin, see Geddes forthcoming). This in turn opens up a possible link between Fowlis and Dunkeld, for St Bean was a monk at Dunkeld and the teacher of St Catroe (Macquarrie 1997, 201-3; Hall 2005, 69). These links may be instructive in further understanding the changing ecclesiastical landscape of Strathearn and Strathmore (substantially determined by the patronage of the earls of Strathearn) – since the 13th century it has been in the diocese of Dunblane rather than Dunkeld, contra its possible earlier links (CSMPC; Lindsay, Dowden & Thomson 1908).

#### **Origin myths/interpretations recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Tracing the history and biography of the stone is difficult as there are inevitably discontinuities and periods in which it was forgotten. Ironically this made it possible for successive generations to create a biography for the monument. This has often been focussed around trying to find an origin story for the stone. The principal versions of its origin recorded in the 19th century are :

- The earliest legend links the cross and its hunting scenes with the chase and capture of a wolf that infested the neighbourhood in antiquity (Stuart 1856, 17; Marshall 1880, 36). The tale is extended in the NSA (1844, 254), which talks of the wolf running through the village of Fowlis and tearing the head off a boy – a scene thought to be shown on the stone (actually a depiction of a monster with a head in its mouth,

making the image a depiction of the fate of the wicked – Henderson 1997, 46-49). This linking of the iconography of the cross with Fowlis Wester also shows that at the same time stories were circulating that linked the cross to Buchanty there were other stories linking it to Fowlis Wester.

- Korner (1858) recounts the tale that has the Cross erected as an unadorned pillar to mark the grave of a Roman soldier killed at a battle at Fendoch Roman fort in AD 84. Later, when the first church was built in Fowlis Wester the stone was moved there and its images ‘emblematic of Romanism’ (p. 96) carved upon it. This account seems to have been influenced by the account in the NSA (1844, 254-55) which recounts that the father of Fingal, Comhal Cult, fought the Romans at Fendoch but lost and that another battle was fought at the Fowlis turnpike (now New Fowlis) interpreting the Bronze Age cairn and standing stone there as having been raised in remembrance of a hero or chieftain killed at that battle. This account also mentions the wolf legend and the lost chapel at Buchanty as three separate, unconnected elements of local history. It is 35 years later that Marshall’s account appears in which he says the Cross is said to have been brought ‘from Balnacroisk, near the mouth of the Sma’ Glen; Balnacroisk signifying the town of the Cross’. (1880, 306) “Steading of the cross” is a reasonable etymology but no exploration of the place names of the district has been carried out and it is a compelling need.
- Sinclair (1858: 95-97) links the cross to the post Roman foundation of the church (attributing to it a pedigree as an uncarved Roman tombstone before that) and extends back to this early medieval period its later medieval and post-medieval use as a market cross in the churchyard, east of the church, where a Sunday shoe market was held.

### **Post medieval meanings and associations**

As originally erected the stone’s significance was religious and this remained a key element of its meaning through changes in location and purpose. Reverence for its religious status lent an important authenticity to its role as landmark within the village and its serving as a market cross for the Sunday Shoe Market. It is likely that the use of the Cross as a pillory, with jougs attached overlapped with (and may pre-date) the market cross function.

Jougs, or branks, were attached to the cross as is evidenced by the surviving links of the chain still attached to Face A. As a form of punishment jougs were associated with ecclesiastical and market infringement punishments in the 16th and 17th centuries. This makes for another comparison with the Crieff Burgh Cross, which also bears the remains of a fixing point for a joug (Hall et al. 2000, 181-182).

Nineteenth-century accounts record less sombre associations noting the cross also served as a school playground (Sinclair 1858, 96) reminding us how these monuments had a play value for children, something also demonstrated by the Goodlieburn Cross (Hall, Fraser & Scott 2011). That this was contested Sinclair (1858, 97) alludes to in his account of Major Moray

Stirling girding it with 'a strong hewn stone surmounted by a strong iron railing.' No doubt this would have served as much to keep children from clambering about it as to define it as of protected significance to community and landlord identity. It also served to protect the cross from traffic – into the 20th century the main Perth road went through the village (Mayall 2004, 74-75).

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century then, the Cross was surrounded by a small rectangular enclosure of iron railings set into a sandstone base. This set the cross apart explicitly marking it out as protected and underlined its significance for the community and the reverence they felt for it.

#### 2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The Fowlis Wester 1 cross-slab is a singular monument of towering form with strong evidential values related to its form and content. These combine a uniquely transitional form of monument which marries the cross-slab form with the sense of a free-standing cross, and a rich iconographic repertoire of symbols and narrative. This characteristic form is one of Fowlis Wester 1's most significant attributes as the projecting side arms are not found on any other surviving examples in Britain though parallels can be found in Ireland.

In the middle of the head of the cross on Face A of the slab are eight raised spiral bosses arranged round a central spiral boss. A diagonal key-pattern can be distinguished on the side arms, and there are traces of interlaced work, birds and beasts on the shaft. The background of the cross is divided into three panels; that round the upper arm has a figure at the top, but was described by Allen and Anderson (1903) as being "too worn for its character to be made out". The short, square side arms project by 5cm and the top arm does not reach the top of the slab.

Face B of the slab consists of a single panel, containing from the top; first, a double disc and Z-rod symbol; then, below that, a horseman, a beast, two horsemen riding abreast (one having a hawk on his arm), and a cow with a bell round its neck, the last led by a man and followed by a procession of six other men; beneath this group, on the left, is a crescent and V-rod symbol, and on the right a bird; and at the bottom of the slab, a man apparently being devoured by a monster. Evidently we have a rich mixture here of symbols and narrative art (both folk story and Biblical exegesis).

The other is the group of figures with the cow, perhaps referring to the worship of the Golden Calf or to a legend connected with some local saint; this theme is not represented in any other surviving Pictish symbol stones or symbol-bearing cross-slabs. Lucas (1989, 23) discusses cattle bells in an early medieval Irish context, observing that lead animals with a bell had a privileged status. Kelly (1997, 29) gives several references to cow bells including a saint's bell named 'calf' (Bóban Coímegein or 'Kevin's calf') as a term of endearment and the use of the bell of St Mo Chuta to cure both animals and livestock. Taken together these suggest a link between bells for animals and bells for saints, and that moving from one category to the other

was not impossible, not given the perceived apotropaic powers of bells to avert misfortune and demons.

## 2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

### **Fowlis Wester landscape context**

The historic landscape context relating to the stone is two-fold: the growth of the 8th and 9th century Pictish church and the wider landscape setting in which the Pictish monuments related to an early strata of prehistoric monuments and have a continuing biography within later landscape changes. Fowlis Wester itself is set within and part of a human landscape of great time depth. To south, west and north are significant Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments (cairns, standing stones [some with cup-markings] and stone circles – all Scheduled Ancient Monuments) and a strong sense of the impact this landscape still had in Pictish times and later medieval times. One of the standing stones on Ardoch Moor, for example, has been incised with a simple, small cross which probably indicates Christian conversion of a powerful pagan site, a practice echoed in the Fowlis Wester 2 cross-slab, which appears to have been a prehistoric standing stone Christianised in Pictish times.

Fowlis Wester, with a nearby castle site, was a power centre of the Earls of Strathearn, who were also patrons of Inchaffray Abbey in the valley bottom (documents record movements by boat between these two sites by the Earls of Strathearn). A much more dispersed village with an emphasis on weaving has shrunk significantly since post-medieval times. Much more recently several World War II Civil Defence observation huts were built on Ardoch Moor to take advantage of its fine views in all directions. There is a complex story of landscape evolution to be teased out around Fowlis Wester in which the Fowlis Wester cross plays a key role.

### **Current setting within church**

The cross-slab is centrally located within the N offshoot of Fowlis Wester parish church and is framed by a broad segmental arch as seen from the nave. The church entrance is from the W, and the cross-slab is 'revealed' as one walks along the nave aisle. A short flight of steps to the right of the cross provides access to the vestry and the 'Fowlis Wester 2' cross-slab, displayed on a plinth against the rubble wall to the left with the two cross fragments that were found at the same time cramped on to the wall next to it. The vestry door, steps, smaller cross-slab, wall and floor finishes do not detract from the taller stone nor does the stone itself compete with the church interior; thus the immediate setting, within a religious building close to its last known location, is appropriate.

### **Replica setting**

The replica is set within a small, railed enclosure, on slightly larger grassy, kerbed area in the village square which provides a through route and some parking to the E. It is surrounded by one and two-storey 18th-19th century houses and the church is visible on a mound behind its graveyard wall to the NE. The replica is prominently located and, though the original is within the

church and the stone was probably moved to the square in the first instance, its setting is still sensitive as it remains significant as a distinctive feature around which the village is oriented and it preserves the former setting of the original as an important part of the cross-slab's history.

2.6 Natural heritage values  
Not assessed

2.7 Contemporary/use values

#### **Social Values**

The cross-slab and its replica are located in a very small village set in a rural idyll of Perthshire. The local attachment to the physical presence of the cross-slab in the square as its home for over 100 years would seem to be firmly rooted in village identity and thus the provision of a replica stone formed part of the 1991 scheme. The prominent location of the stone in the square as one approaches or passes through the village also adds to the place and significance of Fowlis Wester in the mindset of the wider community.

The church is open to visitors during the day and there is no known vandalism problem. The location of the original stone within the body of the parish church, which is still used for worship adds to the significance of the stone to the local community. This is testified by the successful series of guided walks undertaken for both Doors Open Day and for Perth & Kinross Archaeology Month (and led by M A Hall of Perth Museum & Art Gallery)

#### **Use Values**

There remains a strong local and wider interest in the cross, church and village, evidenced in recent years by the programme to make a complete record of the furnishings of the kirk by the Tayside Decorative and Fine Art Society, tours of the kirk and Pictish sculptures as a regular element of Doors Open Day every September, and regular guided walks around the kirk and sculptures as part of the wider landscape (including the village square replica and the various prehistoric and WWII sites) for Perth and Kinross Archaeology Month.

#### **Corporate Value**

The Fowlis Wester cross-slab demonstrates best practice in two ways:

- It improves the care of the monument whilst retaining it locally and engaging community support and
- For its time, it demonstrated an innovative if not entirely successful, conservation centred approach to creating a replica to occupy the village square site.

### **3 Major gaps in understanding**

The significance of the carvings and the form of the cross-slab in relation to surviving examples of the period might be better understood through the detailed recording of its faces and a full art historical appraisal to modern standards. This should include the other sculptures in Fowlis Wester and the cross-incised prehistoric standing stone on Ardoch Moor above the village.

The surface erosion of the Fowlis Wester slab makes it an ideal candidate for 3-D scanning both to advance understanding of the detail of its imagery but also for the prospect of creating a more accurate replica for the village square and also for online interpretation (e.g. enabling various colour schemes to be applied by users).

Research into the possible former location of the cross-slab and compilation of sources that refer to its movements would benefit our understanding of the monument and its biographical trajectory. A key aspect of this would be an analysis of the area's place names to seek to elucidate the evolving nature of the ecclesiastical landscape.

Research into the local understanding and value-perception of the Fowlis Wester sculptures has been minimal and has much potential in line with the model approach taken with the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (Foster and Jones 2008, 223-284).

#### **4 Associated properties**

Other Pictish crosses/cross-slabs:

- St Vigean's Museum (especially sculpture no.7)
- Eassie cross-slab
- Woodrae cross-slab
- Dunkeld Cathedral sculptures
- Constantine's Cross (Dunning Church)
- Crieff Burgh Cross
- Meikle Museum

Other Pictish sites:

- Dunkeld Cathedral
- Forteviot
- Portmahomack

#### **5 Keywords**

Picts; cross-slab; early medieval; Christian; sculpture; St. Bean; bells; carved stones; joug; cultural biography

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Timeline

- c. 700-c.900 – erection of Fowlis Wester cross-slab
  
- c. 1200-c.1700 (?) – cross-slab probably stood at the eastern apex of the Kirkyard, serving as a market cross
  
- c. 1500-c.1700 – joug fixed to Face A of cross-slab
  
- c.1700-c.1900 (?) – cross-slab relocated to the village square
  
- 1991 – cross-slab removed to the Kirk and a replica placed in the village square

### Appendix 2: Summary of archaeological investigations

The archaeological investigation of the cross-slab is not extensive and worth quoting in full from the published record:

Lewis 1991 (p.73): 'The removal of the cross-slab to the nearby church was preceded by an investigation of the stone's setting within the centre of the village. It was evident that the stone had been moved on a previous occasion, having been secured within its 1.06m long, 0.40m wide and 0.85m deep socket with well-compacted mortared rubble, probably from a demolished post-Reformation building. Trenching within the recess below the laird's loft on the north side of the church revealed the outer face of the building's primary north wall which had been built directly upon glacial till.'

Strachan 1997 (p. 63): 'An archaeological excavation was undertaken in August 1997 prior to proposed remedial works at Fowlis Wester Church. Two trenches were excavated at its SE and NE comers, adjacent to the E gable end of the structure. In both trenches the stratification was similar, showing a high density of human remains within the graveyard immediately E of the church. The upper 0.6-0.9m of deposit consisted of mixed backfill, presumably derived from the constant cutting and backfilling of graves. This layer contained an abundance of disturbed human bone and modern artefacts, as well as a single sherd of medieval pottery. All but one of the graves encountered were of modern origin, and likely date to within the last century. The date for the lowest grave exposed cannot definitely be ascertained, although its location against the church wall and immediately above bedrock may indicate an early date. The excavation showed that the church foundations rest directly upon bedrock. The subsidence and cracking of the N and S walls (which instigated the need for remedial work) cannot therefore be caused by the building subsiding as a result of its position on top of graves, at least in this area, as previously thought. All of the finds and human remains recovered during these excavations were reinterred in their respective trenches.

In terms of the wider, early medieval archaeological context, this is equally limited but still significant, revolving around the discovery of other early medieval sculptures, a complete cross-slab monolith and two fragments reused in the fabric of the church and extracted in the early 1930s (Waddell 1932) and a class IV slab, 'Set into a path in the kirkyard, somewhat below present ground level, is a large irregular slab, maximum length 138cm, maximum width 90cm, marked towards the broader end with a lightly incised equal-armed cross. The large size and irregular shape suggest that the stone has always been recumbent.' (Robertson 1988, 27)