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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC041

Designations: [For whole PIC] Conservation Area (CA538)
Listed Building (LB4775) Category B

Taken into State care: 1961 (Owner)

Last reviewed: 2015

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

ST VIGEAN'S MUSEUM, DROSTEN'S STONE



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DROSTEN'S STONE, ST VIGEAN'S (VIG001)

CONTENTS

1	Summary	2
1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Statement of significance	2
2	Assessment of values	2
2.1	Background	2
2.2	Evidential values	4
2.3	Historical values	4
2.4	Architectural and artistic values	6
	Bibliography	7

1 Summary

1.1 Introduction

This Statement supplements the general Statement of Significance for St Vigeans and focusses on the particular historical, evidential and artistic importance of VIG001.

Known as Drosten's Stone, the Pictish cross-slab is 1.84m high, and was found in the graveyard of St Vigean's church. Its inscription with the names *Drosten*, *Uoret* and *Forcus* has generated enormous academic research as a rare example of the written word in Pictland. The well-preserved carving on the back richly encompasses the Pictish visual world, with the symbols, stag and boar hunting and a menagerie of other animals. There are interlace and vine scrolls up the sides and an interlace cross on the front, flanked by numerous monsters.

Part of a collection 34 early medieval carvings and more medieval architectural sculpture, found in the church walls and in the graveyard, Drosten's Stone was removed to the adjacent Historic Scotland museum at Kirkstyle in 1961. See the St Vigean's Site Statement for the significance of the collection and the social, spiritual and use values of the site as a whole.

1.2 Statement of significance

- Among surviving Pictish stones and within the St Vigean's collection, Drosten's stone is outstanding for the clarity of its ornament, the engaging variety of its motifs and its exceptional inscription. It is in a good state of preservation.
- Its inscription testifies to a written culture which was both Latin, Gaelic and Pictish, while the sculpture is a pre-eminent example of inventive Pictish art and strong Northumbrian influences.
- It is part of an elite suite of monuments (which include a shrine and prestigious tomb) whose rock was carried from a distant quarry.
- Its premier national importance was recognised in the first attempt to preserve key elements of British heritage, in the Ancient Monuments Act of 1882.

2 Assessment of values

2.1 Background

See St Vigeans museum Statement

Description

Drosten's Stone is made from fine grey sandstone, characteristic of rock from Balmashanner Quarry by Forfar.¹ It is 1.84m high; 550mm wide and 185mm thick. Its upper section was broken by the 18th century but it is now restored and missing sections filled with appropriate mortar. Its first precise recorded

¹ Nigel Miller and Suzanne Ruckley, Chapter 5 'St Vigeans Sculpture: the geology' in Geddes (forthcoming) . Identified as 'Stone type G'.

location, by the Ordnance Survey in 1865, was on the south edge the graveyard, near its southern entrance, standing on a boulder dressed to provide a flat framed base for the stone.

The carved detail

The front is dominated by an interlace Latin cross. Vividly carved hybrid monsters, with fangs and claws stalk its periphery. An enigmatic 'imp' with horns, and wings and exhibitionist pose flanks the cross-head on the left. On the back is one of the finest displays of Pictish art and culture. At the top a stag is beset by hounds and bird of prey, with a hare and bull below. In the centre is an exceptional display of symbols. There is a plain mirror and comb, a crescent filled with spirals, and double-disc filled by four-fold circular knots, crossed by a (reversed) Z-rod. In the lower section are a bear, hart suckling a fawn, eagle devouring a salmon, a prancing yale², and at the base, a bold hooded archer aiming a crossbow at an approaching boar. On one narrow side is a vine scroll with distinct triangular leaves, and a small creature devouring the fruit. On the other side a long interlace panel ends with the inscription, carved into a roughly squared-off frame. The lettering reads 'DROSTEN : . IPEUORET ETTFOR CUS', addressing three names Drosten, Uoret and Forcus.

The top is dressed and worn, but not decorated, with a deep drilled hole in the centre, relic of its previous fixing arrangement in the 1960's museum. At the bottom, two modern fixing holes have been drilled into the roughly flat base tenon.

Brief history

- Drosten's stone, along with 3 other key monuments, the recumbent tomb VIG008 and shrine VIG029, and the ring cross VIG015 are all made from stone greatly superior to the local supply. It is like that from Balmashanner quarry, Forfar about 11 miles to the north-west. Choosing the rock and bringing it to St Vigean's required technical skill and political power. Its date of creation is not known, but it must have been after the introduction to Pictland of cross-slabs carved in relief, after c.710, and during the period when Pictish symbols still retained meaning in the district, until the later 9th century.
- Patrick Chalmers gives the first written and illustrated account of Drosten's stone in 1848³ but his imprecise description leads to a somewhat confusing account of the recent history of the stone. He claimed it was 'part of the pavement, at the bottom of the stair in the church, leading to a gallery built in 1772', and another part of the stone (its broken top) was built into the staircase wall. However, by the time he recorded it, the lower part of the stone was located in the churchyard.

² Mythical antelope-like beast

³ Chalmers, 1848, *Ancient Sculptured Monuments of the County of Angus.*, 7, pl.1.

- The neat fit between the boulder base and Drosten’s stone photographed in c.1871 by John Milne of Arbroath and precisely located by the Ordnance Survey in 1859, suggests Drosten’s stone originally came from the lower entrance area of the churchyard. ⁴
- 1851–54, Henry Laing made casts for the Society of Antiquaries, of Drosten’s stone VIG001, 002,007, 008. These are now in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.⁵
- The top of the cross was recovered during the restoration campaign within the demolished eastern tower, as predicted, 1871–72, by Rowand Anderson, ably recorded by the minister William Duke.⁶
- In 1882, when the Ancient Monuments Act came into being, Drosten’s stone was placed on the first national register, and was examined by Inspector General Pitt-Rivers in 1884.⁷
- By 1899, the stone had been moved to the church porch.⁸
- 1961, the stone, along with the rest of the collection was placed under guardianship and moved to the adjacent museum at Kirkstyle.
- 2006, Historic Scotland renovated the museum, improving the visibility, access and coherence of the collection, making Drosten’s stone the key feature of the display.

2.2 Evidential values

The evidential value of Drosten’s stone is very high, due to the crisp condition of the carving, its legible inscription and its relative completeness. Its location, within the churchyard of St Vigeans, can be pinpointed with some accuracy in the south-east corner, where its base may still be buried. Its unusual geology, shared with the shrine, tomb and marker cross, allows these items to be considered as a unit of patronage, greatly enhancing their individual value. Together they represent a substantial investment in a shrine presumably for the saint’s relics, a tomb for an important patron, a marker perhaps indicating a sacred precinct, and Drosten’s stone itself like a beacon of identity and allegiance to Christ at the edge of the graveyard.

2.3 Historical values

Drosten’s stone is important because of its appealing and accessible design. Its selection of iconography reveals profound information about Pictish interests and social values.

- There are no manuscripts surviving from the eighth to ninth centuries in Pictland; the few lapidary inscriptions are mainly in ogham while Drosten’s stone is inscribed with Insular half-uncial, written as if by a scribe. It also appears to be partly written in Latin, which puts it in an

⁴ Allen and Anderson, 1903, 2, *pt III*, 235-39, *fig.250A and B*,

⁵ Laing, 1851-54, 294-96; 1856, 153-54.

⁶ Duke 1871-2, 494, 496

⁷ Chippindale, 1983, 48.

⁸ George Hay, 1899, 6-12

exclusive group of cursive Latin inscriptions in Pictland, including Dupplin Cross and Ravenscraig.⁹

- The inscription incorporates spelling from three languages: *Drosten* and *Uoret* in Pictish, *Forcus* in Old Irish, *ett* in Latin. This diversity provides a unique insight into the nature of Pictish society. Pictish kings and saints both shared these names although no individual can be identified by them.¹⁰
- The iconography (discussed in greater detail under Design and Artistic value) shows a similar cultural diversity to the inscription.
 - The symbols and life-like animal scenes on the back are typical of Pictish sculpture.
 - The monsters on the front derive from manuscript sources from England and the Continent.
 - The interlace is an Anglo-Saxon introduction into Pictish art and here is used in specific ways. The choice of interlace designs on the cross and side appears to relate patterns connected with the Lindisfarne community, while its very rare insertion into the Pictish symbols themselves shows an exceptional attachment by a Pictish patron or artist to this Lindisfarne design.
 - The vine-scroll, a Eucharistic motif, is likewise derived from Northumbrian sources.
- The overall design provides insight into the commissioning process which involves input from the sculptor with his choice of stone, a secular interest in terms of the hunting values and symbols on the back, and clerical interest in terms of the inscription and religious themes on the front and side.
- The hooded archer is a familiar Pictish character, found on stones at Shandwick and Glenferness. His short hooded cape is like that found at St Andrew's parish Orkney, now in the National Museum of Scotland.¹¹ His carefully delineated cross bow, with faint traces of the arrow, is a realistic weapon.¹²

Drosten's stone was the most conspicuous example of monstrous sculptures in the kirkyard, although other fragments were visible in the fabric of the church. Post-Reformation accounts of the site provide information about the later understanding of Pictish art.

An example of this are the superstitions regarding the church's construction by a water Kelpie, as related by Revd John Aitkin in 1791, and covered in greater detail in the St Vigean's Site Statement.¹³

⁹ Thomas Owen Clancy, Chapter 8 'VIG001 (The Drosten Stone0: The Inscription' in Geddes (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Thomas Owen Clancy, Chapter 8 'VIG001 (The Drosten Stone0: The Inscription' in Geddes (forthcoming).

¹¹ Henshall, 1951-52, 6,9-15.

¹² Gilbert, 1975-76, 316-17.

¹³ Aitkin; Jervise c.1872

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

Throughout Eastern Scotland, there are many early medieval carved slabs with a cross and animals on one side and a variety of other scenes on the back, on dressed stone, carved in relief. Where the cross is found in conjunction with Pictish symbols, the stones were classified as Class II by Allen and Anderson.¹⁴ However, the combination of features on Drosten's stone is unique and provides insight on how such a combination could be created.

The naturalistic animal and hunting scenes on the back, effectively executed, are within the normal range of Pictish animal art. Examples of similar scenes are found on stones at Shandwick, Latheron, Elgin, Tarbat, Kirriemuir 2. The monstrous beasts that surround the cross on the front can all be identified from manuscripts outwith Pictland, particularly the 'Tiberius Group' made in Mercia in the mid to late eighth century.¹⁵

The beasts, quelled by the cross, and the 'imp' or satyr can all be interpreted through the visions of St Antony in the Egyptian desert. This, bolstered by the appearance of St Antony and St Paul on VIG007, implies the Picts were familiar with the details of the *Lives* of St Antony and St Paul.

The vinescroll up one side is rare in Pictland, a Mediterranean and priestly import, which came via Northumbria. The particular type of vine scroll on Drosten's stone can be found on crosses at Lowther, Stamfordham and Ruthwell, then part of Northumbria.

The several designs of interlace also come from Northumbria, from examples which are all related to the Community of St Cuthbert from Lindisfarne.¹⁶ This Northumbrian cluster of 9th- to 11th-century crosses seems to reflect the great lost Lindisfarne cross of Bishop Aethelwold (d.740).¹⁷ The Pictish kings Constantin, Unust and Uuen (between 789 and 839) are recorded in the Durham *Liber Vitae* as exceptional supporters of the cult of St Cuthbert at Lindisfarne. The choice of interlace on Drosten's stone may reflect this close Pictish connection to Lindisfarne.

The circular four-fold knot is exceptional. It is found within the circles of the double-disc symbol, where normally the decoration is a type of Celtic spiral or circular ornament. It also features on the boss for the freestanding cross at St Vigeans, VIG009. It is found on the shaft of the Aycliffe cross, associated with Lindisfarne and also at Termonfechin, the Irish sanctuary of St Féchín in County Louth. It features again locally on the (later) cross slab from Edzell. Within Edzell parish, at Newdosk, was a church dedicated to St Drosten, with

¹⁴ Allen and Anderson, 1903, I, lvi- lxxvi; All cross slabs with symbols are illustrated in Fraser, 2008.

¹⁵ For instance the Stockholm Codex Aureus (Stockholm, Royal Library, MS A.135. f.11) and Barberini Gospels (Rome, Vatican Bib., Apostolica Barberini, Lat.570. Chapter 9, 'VIG001 (The Drosten Stone) a Cultural Hybrid' in Geddes (forthcoming).

¹⁶ St Oswald's Durham 1, Durham 5,6; Chester-le-Street 3A and C, Jarrow 3A; Aycliffe. Chapter 9, 'VIG001 (The Drosten Stone) a Cultural Hybrid' in Geddes (forthcoming) .

¹⁷ Cramp, 1984, pt.1, 27, 66-67.

other local indications of his cult in Glenesk. This design may have been chosen at Edzell out of association with Drosten's stone.

The art of Drosten's stone thus expresses a familiar but well executed Pictish repertoire of animals, an imported range of new monster designs from manuscript sources, a familiarity with the sculpture of Lindisfarne and its association with a saint's cult, and a hybrid use of language which includes Pictish, Gaelic and Latin.

The shared geology of 'Type G' stone from Balmashanner quarry (see above) probably links the patronage if not necessarily the sculptor with VIG008, 029, 015. The nature of this commission is significant. It includes the tegulated recumbent house shrine, presumably for relics; a recumbent tomb cover carved with a serpent and hunting scene, appropriate for a Pictish aristocrat; and Drosten's stone, carved with symbols, the hunter, animals and the cross, placed at the boundary of the churchyard, a major territorial marker. These make sense in the context of a substantial investment in the site, commemorating both a saint and a patron. An additional smaller monument of the same stone but less emphatic sculpture, VIG015, is possibly a sanctuary marker, again a sign of territorial power.¹⁸

For other values see St Vigeans main Statement of Significance

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