



**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC256

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90210)

**Taken into State care:** 1930 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2016

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# MAIDEN STONE



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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## MAIDEN STONE

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# 1 Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

The Maiden Stone (NJ 70378 24714), also named the Drumdurno Stone, standing by a roadside northwest of Inverurie in Aberdeenshire, is a Class II Pictish upright cross-slab of pinkish granite. It stands at 3.01m tall and dates to the second half of the first millennia AD. This cross-slab is one the last Pictish symbol-bearing cross-slabs to be erected in Aberdeenshire.<sup>1</sup>

The front face exhibits a ring-headed Christian cross, carved all in relief, with a male figure and two fish monsters above. There are numerous panels decorated with interlace, knotwork and key-pattern below this, including a circular design with spiral work at its centre. The back face is split into four panels. These exhibit three Pictish symbol designs below a centaur and three other beasts. It is missing a triangular shaped fragment from one of its sides and has a triangular cutaway at its base.

The stone is freely accessible on foot as a visitor attraction within a modern enclosure in farmland by the roadside, although from mid-October to Easter it is covered to protect it from the winter elements.<sup>2</sup>

## 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'.<sup>3</sup>

The Maiden Stone stands prominently in the landscape. Its significance can be summarised as follows:

- It is an explicit expression of Christianity in northern Pictland.
- It is one of a very few Pictish cross-slabs to be erected in Aberdeenshire and northeast Scotland. It is closer in similarity to those Class II stones of southern Pictland although it may date to the ninth century.<sup>4</sup>
- Other than some degradation to the front face and a triangular shaped fragment removed from its side at the middle, it stands as one of the most complete of all Class II Pictish carved stones. It can readily demonstrate connections to Insular art of the British Isles.
- The stone is large therefore it commands good views across its surrounding landscape, including views of a potential Pictish powerbase on Bennachie.<sup>5</sup>
- There is a possible connection between the stone and the cult of St Medan,<sup>6</sup> although very little is known of this.

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<sup>1</sup>Historic Scotland 2015

<sup>2</sup>Historic Scotland 2015

<sup>3</sup> Fraser 2008, 1

<sup>4</sup>Foster 2004, 1

<sup>5</sup>Foster 2004, 4; These types of sites are now recognised to be Pictish (see Noble et al. 2013)

- There is also a possible mythical story behind the name of the stone. Folklore suggests it is a maiden turned to stone after losing a bet with the devil.<sup>7</sup>
- Architecturally the stone is significant. Attested in its large size and the triangular cutaway at its base.
- It probably stands very close to its original landscape location. Perhaps only moved a short distance to allow for a road.<sup>8</sup>
- It exhibits a variety of carved detail, including interlace, knotwork, key-pattern, spiral work and symbols.
- The stone is included in a Grampian stone circle trail.<sup>9</sup> It is clearly utilised in education and tourism.
- There is debate over its exact dating, be it an eighth or ninth century date.<sup>10</sup> This has implications surrounding the understanding of the evolution of Class II carved stones in the northern Pictland.
- It possibly has a newly identified Ogham inscription at the base of the back face.<sup>11</sup>

## **2 Assessment of significance**

### **2.1 Background**

#### **Description**

The cross-slab is carved from pinkish granite, rectangular in shape and tapering from bottom to top. Aberdeenshire is famed as a source of granite, including this pink type, although it would have taken considerable effort to transport this slab to its current location. It measures 3.01m in height, 0.91m wide at the base, 0.81m wide at the top, 0.30m thick at the bottom and 0.15m thick at the top. It stands within arable farmland by the roadside, near the Chapel of Garioch, just south of the A96 and northwest of Inverurie. The surrounding hills and farmland provide its landscape setting.

#### **The carved detail**

A large Christian ring-headed cross dominates its front face (west facing), with each angle of the cross having a circular hollow carved. A ring connects the arms of the cross. Interlace is carved in the arms of the cross, although they are badly damaged and difficult to fully interpret. Interlace is also apparent on both side of the cross-shaft, although also badly damaged. Standing atop the upper arm of the cross is a man flanked by two inward facing fish monsters. Both of these have spiralled tails and appear to be holding the man. Below the cross is a large roundel decorated with key-pattern that also has spiral work with c-shaped connections at its centre. The square panel providing the backdrop to the roundel is decorated at its four corners. The top two corners exhibit irregular knotwork and the bottom two exhibit a triquetra design each.

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<sup>6</sup>Historic Scotland 2015

<sup>7</sup>Aberdeenshire Council, 2015; Ritchie 1926, 311

<sup>8</sup>Fraser 2008, 32

<sup>9</sup>Foster 2004, 4

<sup>10</sup>Foster 2004, 1; Mack 1997, 75; RCAHMS n.d.

<sup>11</sup>Katherine Forsyth, pers. comm.

The back face (east facing) is the better surviving face of the cross-slab. It is split into four distinct and bordered panels. The vertical edges have three beads of bordering. The top panel exhibits a centaur and three quadrupeds. Below them is a notched rectangle and z-rod. Below this is a Pictish beast, elaborately decorated and beautiful in design. The bottom panel exhibits a fine mirror and double-sided comb. The survival of the detail of the carvings on this face is excellent, and there is also a potential Ogham inscription surviving below the handle of the mirror on this face.<sup>12</sup> Interlace on the north facing edge of the stone is also apparent of this face as there is a triangular notch cut into the bottom of the stone. A similar yet inexplicable notch may be found on the base of the Dupplin Cross for example.

The sides are also both carved. The north facing side is carved with Stafford knots,<sup>13</sup> and the south facing side with interlace.

### **Brief history**

The following is designed to highlight the brief history of the Maiden 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 Maiden Stone is difficult. This is the same for most carved stones of this period. It is generally thought that it was erected sometime between the eighth and ninth centuries.

This stone was subject to antiquarian interest. Alexander Gordon illustrated it in the early eighteenth century,<sup>14</sup> and in the late eighteenth century Charles Cordiner also illustrated this stone, along with sketches of the Pictish Beast symbol from Nigg and Brodie.<sup>15</sup> James Skene also illustrated both faces of this stone in 1832.<sup>16</sup>

The stone can be found recorded as the Maiden Stone, near Drumdurno, in John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland* in 1826.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to 1866 the stone probably stood in its original location until it was moved 'a few yards westwards' to allow for the construction of the road.<sup>18</sup> This is however uncertain, but there is no base apparent.

An Ordnance Survey benchmark has been added to the stone, presumably sometime during the nineteenth century.

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<sup>12</sup>Katherine Forsyth, pers. comm.

<sup>13</sup>Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 191

<sup>14</sup>Gordon 1726, Pl. 59

<sup>15</sup>Cordiner 1795

<sup>16</sup>RCAHMS n.d.

<sup>17</sup>Thomson 1826

<sup>18</sup>Fraser 2008, 52

The stone was first scheduled in 1923 and in 1930 it passed into guardianship.<sup>19</sup>

The site has been the subject of numerous visits, and archaeological inspection in 1855 and 2000 failed to find anything of significance.<sup>20</sup> Moving into the twenty-first century it was digitally scanned by 2004.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.2 Evidential values

The Maiden Stone is a magnificent example of a Class II Pictish cross-slab. It stands out in the archaeological record as one of a very few symbol bearing Class II cross-slabs in Aberdeenshire and northern Pictland in general. Its scale, near completeness, excellent state of preservation on its east side, as well as its confidence of carvings and Christian iconography, are of great importance to its current and future potential in research and education.

The stone more than likely stands in its original landscape setting, although perhaps moved a few metres in the late nineteenth century. Its relationship with its current setting appears to have endured since its erection, thus signifying its importance within this landscape of northern Pictland.

The cross-slab was and still is a visible statement in the landscape. It probably had the role of a prayer cross or boundary marker and would have been erected under elite patronage – secular or ecclesiastical aristocracy. The Maiden Stone has the potential to provide evidence of aspects of Pictish society, such as culture, religion and daily life. This will be discussed in the following sections. There is also notably folklore and mythological stories associated with this carved stone.

## 2.3 Historical values

The Maiden Stone and other Pictish carved stones, although carved with beautiful but generally unintelligible symbols,<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.

It is possible that stone was erected in the period that followed the activities of King Bridei son of Beli, a period following the victory of the Picts over the Northumbrians in Pictland.<sup>24</sup> This was a time when Pictish kings were actively promoting the development of the Pictish church during the late seventh/early eight centuries.

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<sup>19</sup>Foster 2004, 2

<sup>20</sup>Foster 2004, 2; Stewart 2000, 9

<sup>21</sup>Foster 2004, 2;

<sup>22</sup>Henderson 1967, 157-8

<sup>23</sup>Henderson 1967, 158

<sup>24</sup>Woolf 2007, 10

There are at least two potential stories behind the name of the Maiden Stone. Perhaps the most important of these is the potential links between St Medan and the stone.<sup>25</sup> If so, this stone gains a greater historical significance. The second, and least plausible story seems to be rooted in folklore stemming from the surrounding community. The myth appears to start with the death of the daughter of the laird Balquharn,<sup>26</sup> although this story has evolved into the mythological tale of a maid losing a bet with the devil and subsequently being turned to stone.<sup>27</sup>

This stone provides further tangible historical reference to Christianity in the complex Biblical message it appears to convey in its iconography. The whale swallowing and disgorging Jonah is said to be representative of the Entombment and Resurrection of Christ,<sup>28</sup> and this may be identified at the top right of a cross-slab from Woodwrae,<sup>29</sup> as well as on the bottom left of the Dunfallandy Stone.<sup>30</sup> Could the male figure being held by two fish monsters of the Maiden Stone also represent this Biblical story,<sup>31</sup> or is this a symbol for worship and protection.<sup>32</sup> This stone therefore has the potential to demonstrate how ideas of Christianity, although complex, may be manifest 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 Maiden Stone can be summarised as follows:

The architecture of this cross-slab is fairly impressive. Granite is extremely hard and would have required a very particular set of skills to be able to carve it with such precision and beauty. Its size, confidently carved symbols, artwork and decoration are all evidence of highly skilled craftsmanship.

The two fish monsters (discussed in 2.3) situated above the cross on the front face may have a parallel on a cross-slab from Logierait in Perth and Kinross.<sup>33</sup> On this cross-slab there are also two fish monsters above the cross, opposing one another with a blank circular symbol between them.

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<sup>25</sup>Historic Scotland 2015

<sup>26</sup>Rogers 1872, 313

<sup>27</sup>Ritchie 1926, 311

<sup>28</sup>Henderson and Henderson 2004, 142-3

<sup>29</sup>Henderson and Henderson 2004, 79

<sup>30</sup>Fraser 2008, 122

<sup>31</sup>Historic Scotland 2015

<sup>32</sup>Foster 2004,3

<sup>33</sup>Fraser 2008, 126-7

Similar iconography, although decorated in this case, may be found on the back face of a cross-slab from Brodie Castle (Rodney's Stone) in Moray.<sup>34</sup>

The elaborate decoration on the large lower panel of the cross face presents itself as a rarity.

The centaur on the Maiden Stone is fairly indistinct, perhaps 'Pict-headed'.<sup>35</sup> The centaur has had its overall significance discussed elsewhere,<sup>36</sup> and it appears on many other carved stones. For example, it appears on Meigle II in Perth and Kinross with two axes in his hands and a branch under his arm,<sup>37</sup> similar to Aberlemno III in Angus,<sup>38</sup> and it also appears on Glamis II in Angus holding two axes.<sup>39</sup>

The panels on the back face are very well preserved, and so display the symbols with beauty. The notched rectangle and z-rod is the least well preserved. Parallels for this are numerous and may be found on Aberlemno II in Angus,<sup>40</sup> and a notched rectangle can be found engraved on the terminal ring of a Pictish silver chain from Whitecleugh, South Lanarkshire.<sup>41</sup> The Pictish Beast is stunning on the Maiden Stone. Its scale and execution are impressive. Other fine examples can be found on a Class I stone from Tillytarmont in Aberdeenshire,<sup>42</sup> on a Class II stone from Golspie in the Highlands,<sup>43</sup> and on a Class II stone from Shandwick in the Highlands.<sup>44</sup> The mirror and double-sided comb are also of note. A parallel can be found on a Class I stone from Inveravon in Moray.<sup>45</sup>

The Maiden Stone stands out as architecturally and artistically valuable as there are very few Class II Pictish cross-slabs in Aberdeenshire.

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

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<sup>34</sup>Fraser 2008, 104

<sup>35</sup>Mack 1997, 75

<sup>36</sup>Henderson 1997, 22-3

<sup>37</sup>Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 297-8

<sup>38</sup>Fraser 2008, 48

<sup>39</sup>Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 221-3

<sup>40</sup>Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 209-10

<sup>41</sup>Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 473

<sup>42</sup>Fraser 2008, 42-3

<sup>43</sup>Fraser 2008, 98-9

<sup>44</sup>Fraser 2008, 92-3

<sup>45</sup>Fraser 2008, 110

Artistically, the Maiden Stone is aesthetically significant due to the nature, complexity and survival of some of its artwork. Each design is finely carved with precision and is presented clearly. Its current state of preservation is good on its front face and excellent on its back face.

### **Original aesthetic**

The original location is perhaps very close to where the stone currently stands, although its apparent move in the nineteenth century is uncertain. This location would have been, and still is, an open landscape with panoramic views all around the stone. It stands to the northeast of Bennachie. No evidence for an original location has been found during subsequent archaeological inspection.

### **Historic aesthetic**

The stone appears to have taken on further significance in the historic period. The possible connection to St Medan is of great historic interest and may have ascribed further significance to this stone and its location. The mythical story of how the stone may have got its name from a dead maiden is also fascinating and important in its biography. There is little evidence to suggest that the stone was ever not erect in the landscape throughout its lifespan.

### **Present-day aesthetic**

Today the stone stands in an arable landscape, with minimal modern activity encroaching upon it, other than the minor road leading to the major A96. The stone can be appreciated comfortably and relatively safely on foot by the roadside. From mid-October to Easter it is covered to protect it from the winter elements,<sup>46</sup> thus impacting on its potential to have year round publically accessible aesthetic value. It does however stand as a significant reminder of Aberdeenshire's Pictish past.

#### 2.6 Natural heritage values

The stone stands by the roadside within a small agricultural enclosure. No natural significance is apparent.

#### 2.7 Contemporary/use values

### **Community**

The stone stands in a fairly isolated location by the side of a minor road to the west of the Chapel of Garioch. As a Christian monument it will undoubtedly have importance to the surrounding community, although this is not assessed. The mysteries behind the name of the stone as stemming from the folklore history of a maiden as well as a potential link to a saint undoubtedly have significance within the surrounding community. This folklore is still very much still alive in the local community.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Historic Scotland 2015

<sup>47</sup>Foster 2004, 5

## **Spiritual**

As an explicit manifestation of Christianity, this stone has undeniable spiritual and religious value. If links between the stone and the cult of St Medan can be demonstrated this will undoubtedly increase the stone's spiritual value. The stone is large in scale and stands prominently in its landscape, most likely in the same location since it was erected. It has therefore been readily accessible as an expression of the Christian religion within this region for a considerable amount of 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 south of the major A96 route. This route connects Aberdeen with Inverness and therefore the possibility of numerous visitors having a chance encounter with the site is high if signage is heeded. Numerous Class I stones can be found at nearby Inverurie and Kintore, thus demonstrating the significance of this isolated Class II stone in this region. There is potential for daytrips to the region to take in the numerous varying monuments situated around the A96. 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 close to the Chapel of Garioch. There is a PDF leaflet briefly detailing early carved stones available online for download from Historic Scotland. This is titled *Investigating – Early Carved Stones*,<sup>48</sup> and is also available in Gaelic. The stone is notably also included in the Grampian stone circle trail.<sup>49</sup>

Due to the complexity and nature of this stone it clearly has an educational value with regards to discussions of its iconographies and their meanings. As this stone is one of a very few Class II carved stones in northern Pictland it stands as significant with the corpus of early medieval carved stones in Scotland. This stone overtly displays features of Christianity, and so may be used as a learning aid to demonstrate aspects of early organised religion in Scotland.

## **Corporate value**

Although the stone is in the care of Historic Scotland it is still standing within the landscape and so it is subject to natural elements. This is managed by covering the stone for six months of the year during the autumn and winter, demonstrating best practice with regards to safeguarding the stone at the same times as allowing it to be experienced during the warmer months.

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<sup>48</sup> Historic Scotland 2009

<sup>49</sup>Foster 2004, 3

### 3 Major gaps in understanding

- There is no single academic thesis on this stone, although it is widely discussed and referred to in other art historical literature.
- Is the current location of the stone close to its original location? If not, from where was it moved?
- Who had the stone created and who was the carver?
- Why was this stone created, and why was it erected here in northern Pictland?
- Can more be learned of the stone's archaeological context?
- What was the function of this stone? Prayer cross? Boundary marker?
- What are the wider landscape relationships between the Maiden Stone and others in the Aberdeenshire area?
- Can the complex Christian iconography be fully understood?
- What, if any, are the links with the cult of St Medan?
- A fuller and further understanding of the history and evolution of the folklore associated with the stone would be beneficial.
- 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; Dunfallandy Stone; St Orland's Stone; Dupplin Cross; Aberlemno II and III.

Other sites – Potential Pictish fort on Bennachie.<sup>50</sup>

Note – There is a high concentration of Pictish carved stones in this area of Aberdeenshire. Notably its collection of Class I carved stones.

### 5 Keywords

Pictish; cross-slab; Pictish symbols; Christianity; Insular art; Chapel of Garioch; Aberdeenshire; interlace; knotwork; key-pattern; Pictish Beast; Jonah, centaur; Ogham

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<sup>50</sup>See Noble 2013 et al.

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### Appendix 1 – Timeline

- **685** – Battle of Nechtansmere (or Dunnichen), resulting in the death of King Ecgfrith of Northumbria and a victory for the Picts at the hands of King Bridei son of Beli,<sup>51</sup> and ultimately leading to a Northumbrian loss of territory in Pictland.<sup>52</sup>
- **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.<sup>53</sup>
- **c.800** – Maiden Stone is carved and erected, but precisely when and by whom is a mystery.
- **843** – Cináed mac Ailpín becomes king of the Picts.<sup>54</sup>
- **1726** – Alexander Gordon illustrated the stone.<sup>55</sup>
- **1795** – Charles Cordiner illustrated the stone, along with sketches of the Pictish Beast symbol from Nigg and Brodie.<sup>56</sup>
- **1826** – The stone is mapped in John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland*.<sup>57</sup>
- **1832** – James Skene illustrated both faces of the stone in 1832.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Fraser 2009, 383; Woolf 2007, 10

<sup>52</sup>Woolf 2007, 4

<sup>53</sup>Henderson 1967, 82

<sup>54</sup>Woolf 2007, 351

<sup>55</sup>Gordon 1726, Pl. 59

<sup>56</sup>Cordiner 1795

<sup>57</sup>Thomson 1826

<sup>58</sup>RCAHMS n.d.

- **1855** – The stone was subject to archaeological inspection, but nothing of significance was found.<sup>59</sup>
- **c.1866**– The stone probably stood in its original location until it was moved ‘a few yards westwards’ to allow for the construction of the road.<sup>60</sup> This is however uncertain, but there is no base apparent.
- **1923** – The stone was first scheduled.<sup>61</sup>
- **1930** – The stone passes into guardianship.<sup>62</sup>
- **2000** –The site of the stone was subject to archaeological inspection, but nothing of significance was found.<sup>63</sup>
- **c.2004** – The stone was digitally scanned and modelled in 3D.<sup>64</sup>

## **Appendix 2 – Summary of archaeological investigations**

There have been numerous field visits to the site, with emergency photographs being taken in 1943 as well as several visits recorded by Grampian Regional Council and one by Aberdeenshire Archaeological Service.<sup>65</sup>

In 2000 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken in preparation for a new fence strainer post to be positioned around the stone.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately, and due in part to limited archaeological inspection of the stone’s immediate and surrounding contexts, the history of the Maiden Stone will remain difficult to fully determine.

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<sup>59</sup>Foster 2004, 2

<sup>60</sup>Fraser 2008, 52

<sup>61</sup>Foster 2004, 2

<sup>62</sup>Foster 2004, 2

<sup>63</sup>Stewart 2000, 9

<sup>64</sup>Foster 2004, 2;

<sup>65</sup>RCAHMS n.d.

<sup>66</sup>Stewart 2000, 9