

Pictish Symbol Stones

As one of the heartlands of the Pictish community, Aberdeenshire is home to a large number of the elaborately decorated Symbol Stones for which the Picts are famed – around 20% of all Pictish stones recorded in Scotland can be found in Aberdeenshire.

The stones, incised or carved in relief, are decorated with a variety of symbols, ranging from geometric shapes and patterns, to animals (real and mythical), human figures, objects, and Christian motifs. Some earlier Pictish stones are also incised with a script known as **Ogham**, which comprises a pattern of short linear strokes crossing a vertical line. Said to have originated around the 4th Century AD, it is an early form of the Irish language. Most examples of Ogham inscriptions are thought to represent personal names.

The exact purpose of Pictish Stones, and the meaning of the symbols which adorn them, is not clearly understood, and continues to be the subject of much research and debate. Current thinking is that the symbols may represent the names of individuals or groups, possibly acting as some kind of land marker or commemoration stone.

Most of the Pictish Stones recorded in the North East of Scotland have been uncovered during agricultural operations or found in and around churches; with few of the stones on display today likely to be at their original location.

A large number of these stones are now in museum collections, but many Pictish Stones can still be seen in churchyards or built into the walls of the churches. Some are housed inside churches, accessible by arrangement, while others are scattered across the wider rural landscape. The association of Pictish Symbol Stones with later Christian churches seems to indicate an acknowledgement by subsequent generations of the importance of certain key sites in the region which might be considered "sacred".

Pictish Symbol Stones are traditionally divided into three categories, based on a classification devised by Allen & Anderson in the early 1900s:

Class I: 6th to 8th Centuries AD. An unworked stone or boulder, incised with symbols but not crosses.

Class II: 8th to 9th Centuries AD. Usually shaped, and are decorated in relief with a cross and other symbols, both Pictish and Christian.

Class III: 8th to 9th Centuries AD. Shaped stones, decorated with Christian motifs, displaying no uniquely Pictish symbols. Includes cross-slabs, gravemarkers and free-standing crosses.

Selected Reading

J. R. ALLEN & J. ANDERSON *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903) Reprinted Pinkfoot Press (1993)

I. FRASER *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland* (2008) RCAHMS

G. & I. HENDERSON *The Art of the Picts: Sculpture and Metalwork in Early Medieval Scotland* (2011) Thames & Hudson

When exploring Aberdeenshire, please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code:

Respect the interests of others

Respect the needs of other people enjoying or working in the outdoors and follow any reasonable advice from land managers.

Care for the environment

Take your rubbish home and consider picking up other litter as well. Don't disturb or damage wildlife or historic places. Keep your dog on a short lead or under close control where needed.

Take responsibility for your own actions

The outdoors is a great place to enjoy but it's also a working environment and natural hazards exist. Make sure you are aware of this.

www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Useful Links

For more information on these, and other sites to visit in the area, the following websites provide a useful introduction.

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/museums

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/visit/tourist_trails

www.visitscotland.com/aberdeenshire



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The Pictish Period 300 AD – 900 AD

The origin of the Picts can be found in the tribal society of the Iron Age. Their society was hierarchical, with a warrior elite and a lower farming class. They lived in Scotland, North of the Forth and Clyde rivers, between the 4th and 9th Centuries AD, with a particularly strong presence in what is now Aberdeenshire. This can be seen in the frequent occurrence of place names beginning "Pit", thought to indicate the site of a Pictish settlement, as well as the evidence from the archaeological record such as Symbol Stones and fortifications.

They acquired the name Pict, or Picti, meaning "Painted People", from the Romans – indeed, much of what is known of the Picts is derived from historical writers from outside of Scotland as they left no written records of their own.

The Picts are renowned for their elaborate and ornate artwork, which takes a variety of forms. Best known are the large carved Symbol Stones, decorated with geometric, animal and, in the later period, Christian motifs. These same symbols are also present on cave walls, and are repeated on decorative metal and bone-work.

RHYNIE MAN

SMR Ref No: NJ42NE0045 // NJ 9117 0691 // AB16 5GB

Class I Symbol Stone incised with a standing figure of a warrior, ploughed up on Barflat Farm near Rhynie in 1978. The carving shows a man wearing a knee-length, sleeved, belted tunic and pointed shoes. He carries a battle axe or pole axe over his shoulder. Pictish stones depicting figures are rare; this example probably dates to the 6th or 7th century AD. It is now housed in Aberdeenshire Council HQ, Aberdeen.

Directions: Located at Aberdeenshire Council HQ, Woodhill House, on the West side of Aberdeen. Access from the West end of Westburn Road (A944). Car park. The office is open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.



the Pictish Stone trail

A guide to ten of the best Pictish Symbol Stones in Aberdeenshire




RHYNIE STONES

SMR Ref Nos: NJ42NE0029 and NJ42NE0046 // NJ 4996 2659 // AB54 4HL

One Class I and two Class II stones. The Class I is pink granite, incised with a beast, comb and part of an arch symbol. It was found nearby at Barflat. The two Class II stones were found under the old church. One is whinstone, bearing a beast's head, double-disc, Z-rod, and mirror & comb. The other is red granite, incised with a double-disc, crescent & V-rod and mirror symbol.

Directions: c. 9 miles (c.14.5km) South of Huntly. At the South end of Rhynie, turn left off A97 (South Road) on to Manse Road, following the sign to the church. Continue down the hill for c. 0.3 miles (0.5km). The stones stand in a small enclosure in the graveyard carpark.



PICARDY STONE

SMR Ref No: NJ63SW0002 // NJ 6099 3025 // AB52 6LS

Class I stone, a rare example of a stone in its original position. It is whinstone with veins of quartz, incised with a double-disc & Z-rod, above a serpent & Z-rod and a mirror symbol. When excavated in 1856, the stone was found to be set in a low cairn under which was a grave.

Directions: c. 14 miles North West of Inverurie. From the B992 in the centre of Inverurie, turn North onto Market Street (Largie Road) for c. 1.5 miles, then turn left and continue on Largie Road for c. 0.3 miles. Park safely at the roadside; the stone is in the field on the left.



MAIDEN STONE

SMR Ref No: NJ72SW0001 // NJ 7037 2471 // AB51 5HR

Class II upright cross-slab of red granite. The South side is covered with interlacing and the North side with a knotwork pattern arranged in a double row. On the East face, 4 beasts fill the topmost of 4 panels. Beneath this are a notched rectangle & Z-rod, a beast, and a mirror & comb. At the top of the West face is a man standing with arms outstretched, between two fish monsters. Beneath this is a large ring-headed cross. At the bottom of this face, there is a roundel with four triple spirals and three double spirals at the centre.

Directions: c. 7.7 miles (c.12km) North West of Inverurie. Take the A96 from Inverurie for c. 5.8 miles (c.9km); turn left at Oyne, following the signpost, for 1 mile (1.6km). Park in the layby. Please note: the Maiden Stone cannot be viewed during winter months, when it is housed in a protective case.



ST PETER'S CHURCH, FYVIE

SMR Ref No: NJ73NE0001 // NJ 7685 3776 // AB53 8LL

Built into the exterior East gable of St Peter's Church, Fyvie, are three Class I Pictish Stones and the shaft of a Class III cross. The stones are arranged in a cross shape, and comprise: L: Crescent & V-rod above a beast and mirror; R: Eagle and double disc; Top: An arch symbol above a disc; Bottom: Part of the shaft of a cross, decorated with a key pattern and triangles.

Directions: 9 miles (14.5km) North of Oldmeldrum. From the A947, turn on to the B9005 at Fyvie. Turn right at the memorial cross and continue on the B9005 for c. 400m. The church is on the right, and the car park down the hill on the left.



BRANDSBUTT

SMR Ref No: NJ72SE0022 // NJ 7599 2240 // AB51 4GT

Class I stone, restored after being broken up by explosives. It is whinstone, incised with symbols of a crescent & V-rod above a serpent & Z-rod. On the left side of the stone is Ogham script reading "IRATADDOARENS", translated as "Eddarmon", which is possibly a rendering of St Ethernanus, a local saint.

Directions: From A96 Blackhall roundabout, take the B9170 (Blackhall Road) into Inverurie; at the roundabout turn left onto Burghmuir Drive for 0.5 miles (0.8km). Turn left on Gordon Road, then 2nd left onto Gordon Terrace. Park in the layby.



Scheduled Monuments

Most of the sites listed here have been designated as Scheduled Monuments, which are monuments of national importance to which Scottish Ministers have given legal protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. It is a criminal offence to damage a Scheduled Monument; historic sites should be treated with care and respect.

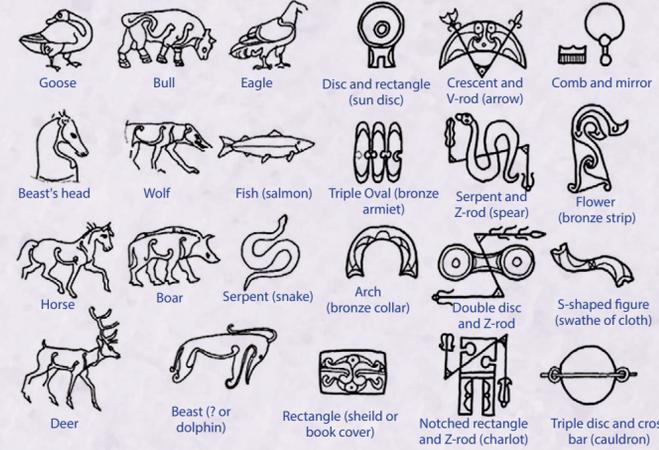
Treasure Trove Law

Under the laws of Treasure Trove in Scotland, all finds of archaeological or historical interest or importance are the property of the Crown. If you find an artefact please report it to either a local museum or contact the Archaeology Service (archaeology@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Timeline



Glossary



SMR The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) is a database containing information on nearly 20,000 sites of archaeological and historical interest in Aberdeenshire. Visit the SMR online and input the SMR Reference Number for each of the sites described to see more information.

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology/smr

INVERURIE CHURCHYARD

SMR Ref No: NJ72SE0011 // NJ 7800 2062 // AB51 3UA

Four Class I stones, said to have been found built into the walls of the old parish church, which formally stood in what is now the cemetery. The stones, which are displayed in a row, comprise: A – a pink granite stone, reshaped, bearing a disc & rectangle and an arch; B – a pink granite slab, recumbent, bearing a crescent & V-rod, disc & rectangle, serpent & Z-rod and double disc & Z-rod; C – a pink granite stone, reshaped, incised with a double disc & Z-rod; D – a pale pink granite stone incised with a horse in motion.

Directions: From Inverurie town centre, head South along the High Street (B9001) and continue on to Keithhall Road (B993). Pass under railway bridge and park in the layby.



KINTORE CHURCHYARD

SMR Ref No: NJ71NE0026 // NJ 7930 1627 // AB51 0UA

Class I stone, dug up in Kintore churchyard but which may have originally come from the motte at nearby Castle Hill. The stone is sculptured on both faces; one side shows a crescent & V-rod over a beast, while the other side has a fish above a cauldron symbol.

Directions: At entrance to Kintore parish churchyard, Kintore town centre, at the junction of Northern Road (B987) and Kingsfield Road. On street parking is possible; small car park behind town hall on Forest Road.



BROOMEND OF CRICHIE

SMR Ref No: NJ71NE0005 // NJ 7791 1967 // AB51 5UA

Class I stone, of grey granite, incised with an elephantine beast above a crescent & V-rod. It was moved to its present location, the centre of a Bronze Age henge, after its original site was quarried away.

Directions: From the Inverurie roundabout (South end of Inverurie) turn onto Elphinstone Road (B993) for 0.1 miles (c.160m) then turn right onto Mill Road. Park in the layby, and follow the footpath to the henge.

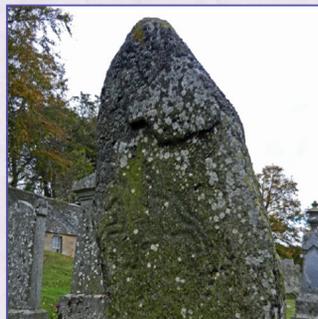


MIGVIE STONE

SMR Ref No: NJ40NW0002 // NJ 4365 0682 // AB34 4XQ

Class II pointed pillar of gneiss. It is inscribed on one face with an elaborate cross infilled with a knotwork pattern. In the angles of the cross are, clockwise from top left, symbols of a double-disc & Z-rod, an arch & V-rod, a man on horseback, and a pair of shears. On the reverse there is another, larger, representation of a horseman.

Directions: c. 9 miles (c.14.5km) North West of Aboynne. From the B9119 (Bridge Street) in the centre of Tarland, turn West onto Burnside Road. Continue for c. 1.1 miles (1.8km), turn right, signposted to Migvie, and continue for c. 2.4 miles (3.8km) before turning right onto a gravel track. The church is at the end; park at the track side. The stone is inside the churchyard.



KINORD CROSS

SMR Ref No: NO49NW0009 // NO 4400 9978 // AB34 5NB

Class III cross slab. An ornate interlace-filled cross occupies almost the whole surface of the slab. It has three arms of equal lengths, with square ends, spirals at each corner, and round hollows in the angles between the arms, which are connected by a ring. The spirals at the bottom of the shaft are double while the others are single. This stone dates from the latter part of Pictish period.

Directions: c. 6 miles (9.6km) West of Aboynne. Take the A93 West out of Aboynne towards Dinnet. After c. 4.4 miles (7km), turn right on to the A97; continue for c. 0.9 miles (1.4km), then turn left and follow signs to car park. From the car park, follow the signed walking path to the stone, c. 0.8 miles (1.28km).

