

The Newton Stones and writing in Pictland, part 1: location, landscape, and historical background

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ABSTRACT

In the grounds of Newton House near Inch in Aberdeenshire are two Pictish monuments. One is an inscribed stone that also has an incised Pictish mirror symbol, and the other is a Pictish symbol stone with a notched double-disc above a serpent and z-rod symbol. The inscribed stone, commonly referred to as the Newton Stone, has an ogham inscription on one edge that continues onto an added stemline, and on the top front is a unique horizontal, six-line alphabetic inscription. This article examines the documentary record for these two monuments, which were moved from their original location in the 18th and 19th centuries respectively. Through analysis of the documentary evidence, and in comparison with the local geology, the area of the original findspot of the Newton Stone and associated symbol stone is identified. The original landscape of these stones is compared with the topographical features of other Pictish monuments, particularly those in Donside. This comparison reveals that the topographical and liminal features in the original vicinity of the Newton Stone and symbol stone correspond with the wider pattern of the siting of Pictish symbol stones and Pictish cemeteries, and the association between a potentially Pictish-age settlement and these monuments may be suggested through examination of local place-names.

INTRODUCTION

In the grounds of Newton House (Culsalmond Parish) in the Garioch district of Aberdeenshire is a Pictish symbol stone and an inscribed stone with a Pictish mirror symbol near its base and a spiral on the reverse (see Illus 1 and 3). The inscribed stone, often referred to as the Newton Stone, has an ogham inscription, and on the front face is a horizontal, six-line inscription in an alphabetic script. The horizontal inscription is completely unique.

The inscriptions on the Newton Stone were discovered around 1803, and it was one of the most widely studied Pictish monuments of the 19th century. The antiquarian interest in the Newton Stone inscriptions coincides with the popularity of the world-famous Rosetta Stone,

an Egyptian stele discovered in 1799 that preserves a royal decree in Greek, Demotic and Egyptian hieroglyphs, the latter of which were deciphered in 1822 (Budge 1929). There are over fifty sources discussing the Newton Stone pre-1900 (see Okasha 1985: 55 for bibliography), and it is even the first plate in Stuart's (1856) *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*. Numerous engravings, photograms and even casts (see Illus 2, NMS X.IB.108) were made of the stone to send to antiquarians, linguists and other scholars for examination. The earliest reference to copies being made is found in the *Aberdeen Journal* of 1806, and John Stuart of Inchbreck (1822: 317) and Stuart (1856: 1) also mention that a copy was sent to the Irish antiquarian General Charles Vallancey (*ante* 1812). Interest in the Newton Stone continued into the 20th century: an entire

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ILLUS 1 The Newton Stone beside the symbol stone in the grounds of Newton House. (Photograph by Richard Marshall)



ILLUS 2 Nineteenth-century plaster cast of the Newton Stone in the National Museums of Scotland, NMS X.IB.108. (Photograph by the author)

pamphlet was dedicated to the subject (Diack 1922), and it regularly featured in modern studies concerning Pictish epigraphy (see Okasha 1985). Since Forsyth’s (1996) dissertation, however, interest in the Newton Stone seems to have waned. This research aims to revive awareness of this significant monument and the associated symbol stone. In this article (Part 1) the original provenance of the Newton Stone and symbol stone is discussed, while Part 2 re-evaluates the inscriptions of the Newton Stone.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE NEWTON STONE AND SYMBOL STONE

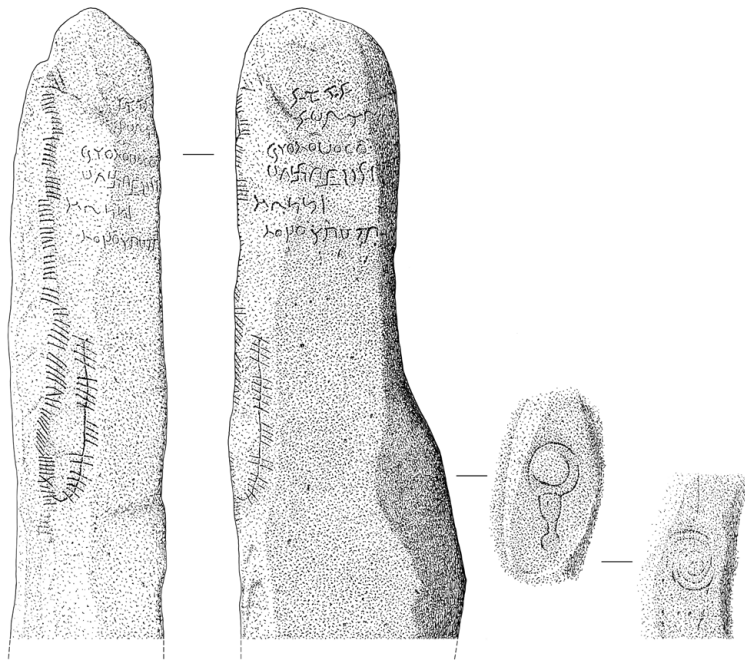
The Newton Stone is an irregular-shaped pillar of blue gneiss, *c.* 2.03m high by 0.50m wide and 0.26m thick (Canmore ID 18086). Gordon (1953–5: 45) demonstrates that the Newton Stone and associated symbol stone are hornfels, a type of metamorphic rock, found on the nearby Hill of Foudland (NJ 6030 3323), though they

were probably moved closer to their findspot as ‘glacial erratics’. Forsyth (1996: 424) observes that the Newton Stone and symbol stone were waterworn before the carvings were made, and suggests that both are probably reused prehistoric megaliths (see below).

The Newton Stone has four carvings: the six-line inscription on the face of the stone, the ogham inscription, as well as a recently observed incised mirror symbol on a flat facet near the side base, and a spiral near the base of the back (Fraser & Halliday 2007: 125, fig 7.11; Fraser 2008: 34–5, no. 38.2), the latter of which may be prehistoric, adding further weight to the theory that this stone is a reused prehistoric monument (see Illus 3). The handle of the mirror symbol is not set in the centre, and the mirror itself, formed by outer and inner circles, is slightly uneven, but this is perhaps due to the sloping surface on which it is carved. The handle of the mirror symbol on the Newton Stone is, however, unique. Cessford (1997: fig 5 and 107–9) identifies seven groups of handle styles on the Pictish mirror symbols,¹ and while

the lower ring and bar-type handle on the Newton mirror symbol has much in common with the ‘(1) bar handle with ring at both ends’, (2) ‘bar handle with terminal ring’ and (3) ‘shaped handle’ types, the connecting join between the mirror and the handle is crest-shaped, which is not paralleled elsewhere. It is possibly a variation on the above mentioned designs, or it may be a different style altogether, one which perhaps reflects local metalwork patterns.

The ogham inscription runs down a natural ridge of the stone and continues turned upwards towards the base along an added stemline. For measurements of the ogham inscription and the strokes, see Forsyth (1996: 425–6). The inscription on the front face of the stone has forty-three or forty-four well-spaced characters in six lines (see Part 2 below). This inscription is not carved in a smoothed panel, but instead across the natural ridges of the surface, which has made it difficult to photograph and copy. For measurements of the inscribed area and the height of the alphabetic letters, see Forsyth (1996: 437).



ILLUS 3 Ink drawing of the Newton Stone. (Illustration by John Borland, RCAHMS 2007 © Crown Copyright: HES, Canmore ID SC1080294)

The carving technique of the Newton Stone has been thoroughly examined by Gordon (1953–5) in response to a claim by Macalister (1935: 391–2; see also Jackson 1955: 139) that the non-ogham inscription was a modern forgery. Gordon (1953–5: 41–4) observes that the ogham inscription was carved by pocking with only ‘some attempt at trimming it’. The non-ogham inscription was also carved by pocking, but was ‘carefully smoothed off both on the edges of the groove and in its rounded bottom’ (Gordon 1953–5: 44). This technique of pocking and smoothing is typical of Pictish Class I symbol stones, and in Gordon’s (1953–5: 44) own words, ‘There is therefore no reason to regard the Newton alphabetic inscription as a forgery on technical grounds.’ Furthermore, Gordon (1953–5: 45), in the company of Thomas Phemister, Professor of Geology at the University of Aberdeen, observed that both inscriptions on the Newton Stone have tiny holes in the grooves. These holes are formed when spots of cordierite, which first appear when blue gneiss is fractured, have been exposed to weathering influences. Phemister’s opinion was that the symbol stone and the Newton Stone inscriptions ‘had undoubtedly been exposed to weathering influences since ancient times’ (Gordon 1953–5: 45).

Gordon (1953–5: 44) believed that the ogham on the added stemline was carved by a different hand. Forsyth (1996: 426), with whom I agree, argues that the ogham inscription is the work of one hand, and notes that the ogham on the aris and the added stemline are ‘so close as to be practically identical’, the only difference being that the strokes on the added stemline are ‘more shallowly cut’. Compare, for example, the nearby Brandsbutt (Canmore ID 18894) and Logie Elphinstone (Canmore ID 18855) ogham inscriptions, both of which are carved on incised stemlines on the face as opposed to the aris.

The Pictish symbol stone (Canmore ID 18084; see Illus 4), now located to the right of the inscribed stone in the grounds of Newton House, is also carved on an irregular-shaped pillar of blue gneiss. This has the same geological origins as the inscribed stone (see above). It is *c.* 2.05m high by 0.61m wide and 0.41m thick (Allen &



ILLUS 4 Pictish symbol stone in the grounds of Newton House. (Photograph by Richard Marshall)

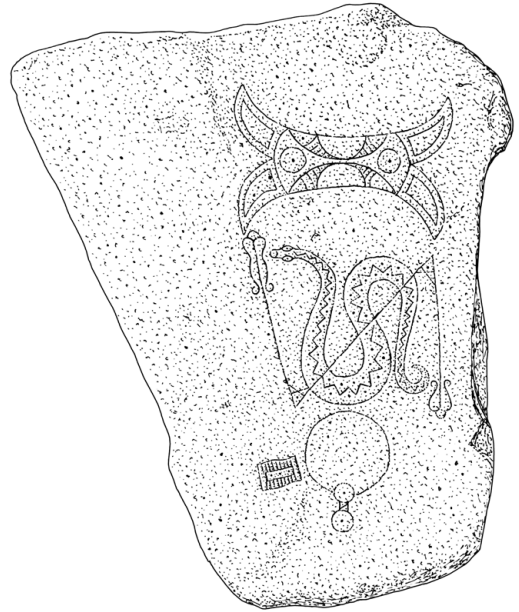
Anderson, 1903 vol 2: 178; Forsyth 1996: 439). Around the centre of the stone is a notched double-disc symbol above a serpent and z-rod (Fraser 2008: 34–5, no. 38.1). The Newton House symbol stone is a particularly fine and competent example of early Pictish sculpture (Henderson 1972: 171). The notched double-disc symbol is uncommon (Mack 1997: 7; Mack 2007: 51), and is only found elsewhere on the Inchyra stone (Fraser 2008: 124–5, no. 185) and possibly at Westfield (Fraser 2008: 70–71, no. 87.1), though note that there are some differences between these and the notched double-disc at Newton.² The left disc is formed of two concentric circles with a central dot. The right disc follows the same pattern with a notch on the bottom of the disc and the internal circle. The serpent faces the left side of the stone, which is unusual as in almost all other instances of this symbol the serpent faces right.³ The

body of the serpent is filled with scales.⁴ These are made from horizontal or curved lines across the body with central dots between the lines. In the middle of the serpent's body are two concentric circles with a central dot. The eyes of the serpent are visible as two circles extending from the head with central dots, and the final part of its tail gently curves to the right. The z-rod ends in two curved terminals by the head and end of the serpent; the lines of the z-rod appear to run beneath the body of the serpent, and the angles of the z-rod have been filled with an x-design. Like the inscribed stone, the carving technique used was pocking and smoothing, and Gordon (1953–5: 43) states that the symbols were 'deeply and roughly pocked' with slight smoothing.

The Pictish symbol stone associated with a burial in Dairy Park in Dunrobin, Sutherland has a similar incised serpent and z-rod symbol with internal decoration. New radiocarbon dates obtained for the human remains at Dairy Park place this burial, and possibly the carving of the symbol stone, between AD 575 and 625 (Noble et al 2018: 1342). The serpent on the Dairy Park slab (Canmore ID 6567; Fraser 2008: 98–9, no. 139) has circular eyes that extend from the side of the head; the body of the serpent is decorated with dots (around a central zig-zag pattern), the corners of the z-rod are filled with an x-design, and the terminals of the z-rod also have curved florets similar to the Newton symbol stone (see Illus 5). The similarity in technique and style of the serpent and z-rod symbols from Newton House and Dairy Park may suggest that they belong to the same period.

DISCOVERY AND RELOCATION

The Newton Stone and associated Pictish symbol stone are now located in the grounds of Newton House near Inch in Aberdeenshire, but were moved there at different times. The carvings on the Newton Stone were first recognised c 1803. In a letter reproduced by John Stuart (1856: 2) from the fourth Earl of Aberdeen (Prime Minister George Hamilton Gordon), Lord Aberdeen states that he first saw the Newton Stone in 1804, and



ILLUS 5 Ink drawing of the Dairy Park stone at Dunrobin, Golspie. (Illustration by John Borland © Crown Copyright: HES, Canmore ID 1359439)

recollects that the inscription 'had been discovered by some shepherd boys in the preceding year'. Lord Aberdeen goes on to state (Stuart 1856: 2):

The stone, at that time, was situated in a fir plantation, a few paces distant from the high road, and near to the Pitmachie Turnpike. The trees have since been cut down, and the stone removed to the House of Newton.

Lord Aberdeen (in Stuart 1856: 2) notes that it was strange the stone had not received more attention, as it 'had stood exposed for many centuries on an open moor (for the plantation was not more than fifty years old)'. The construction of turnpike roads did not commence in Aberdeenshire until 1796 (Day 2003: 154), and Stuart's editor (in Stuart 1856: 2, note b) adds that the turnpike gate was built in the vicinity of the stone after the construction of the Great North Road (now the A96), which 'increased the

number of observers, and assisted in bringing the stone into notice’.

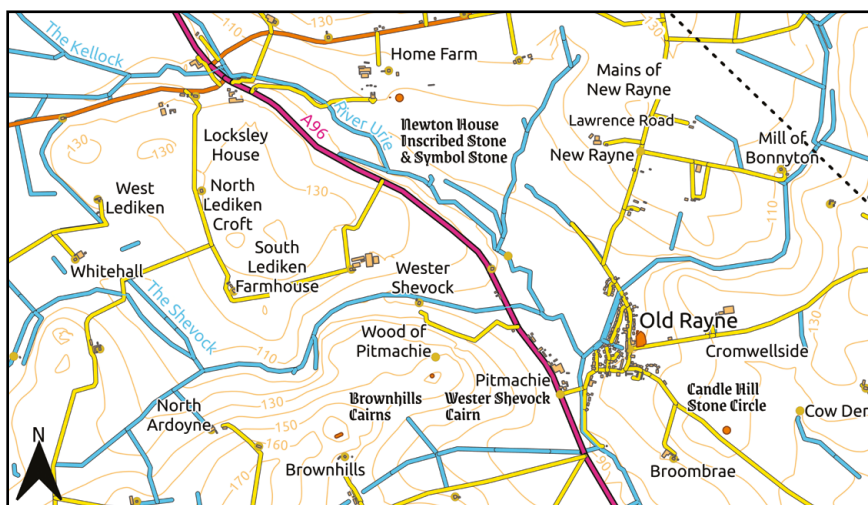
The earliest written record of the Newton Stone is found in *The Aberdeenshire Journal* (12 November 1806: 4, col 5) in a letter probably written by John Stuart of Inchbreck,⁵ Professor of Greek in Marischal College in Aberdeen (Diack 1922: 59), who notes: ‘A stone Obelisk of rude workmanship, was lately discovered in the park of Newton near Oldrain, having an inscription which appears to be of the most remote antiquity.’ Oldrain (modern Old Rayne) is located due east of Pitmachie across the River Urie (see Illus 6). In *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (October 1807, vol 57: 913) it is noted that the stone ‘stands in a field near Rayne’, and in *The Monthly Magazine* (July 1809, vol 27: 553–4) that the monument is ‘situated near the high-road, leading towards Huntly’. The second notice was probably written by John Stuart of Inchbreck (Diack 1922: 59–60), and the former is merely signed ‘R’. Pinkerton (1814, vol 1: xiii–xiv) records:

One of the most interesting monuments of this kind has been recently discovered at Pitmachie, in Aberdeenshire, being the second stage from Aberdeen on the road to Huntly. Here, in a small thicket near the toll-bar, were two stones of small-grained granite,

(while the others are mostly red sandstone, subject to decay,) and rising about six feet above the ground.

Pinkerton’s account records that two stones were discovered in the same thicket (presumably the plantation mentioned by Lord Aberdeen), and this must refer to the symbol stone and the inscribed stone. All early references to the inscribed stone point to the same general area (discussed below); however, confusion over the original findspot of the symbol stone led to further contradictions about the relationship between both stones in the early literature, which has subsequently led to confusion in modern sources. The early contradictory sources about the findspot and association between the inscribed stone and symbol stone now at Newton House was troublesome for James Carnegie, the ninth Earl of Southesk (1883–4: 24–5), who writes:

The Newton Stone originally stood in a plantation near Shevack toll-bar, on the slope of a hill above Shevack Burn. Its inscriptions were first noticed about 1803, when a new road had been opened in the vicinity. It was moved to a site behind Newton House about 1837, and was placed in its present position in 1873.



ILLUS 6 Ordnance Survey map of the area under discussion. (Contains Historic Environment Scotland and Ordnance Survey open data 2020)

The Serpent Stone *originally stood beside the Newton Stone*. This has never been doubted in the district, though written evidence of the fact is wanting. Some time during last century the stone was taken away from Shevack, with intention, it is said, to use it elsewhere as a march-stone, but difficulty occurring in traversing a swampy place, it was finally left there, about three-quarters of a mile from its supposed destination. Its position on that site is noted in a Newton estate plan of 1760.⁶ About 1794 it was again moved, this time to the site behind Newton House ... In 1873 the stones were placed together on their present site.

Southesk's explanation is probably correct. He emphasises that the two stones were originally located in the same plantation.

The confusion over the original association of the stones is probably due to the fact that the symbol stone was moved before 1760 to act as a march stone between the Rothney and Newton estates, while the inscribed stone was left in situ. The printed confusion seems to begin with John Stuart of Inchbreck (1822: 317), who notes that a copy of the Newton Stone was made 'along with a fac-simile of the sculptures upon another stone placed beside it, though they are supposed to have no original connection with each other'. Here Stuart refers to the symbol stone, which he shows in the engraving (Stuart 1821: plate IX; see Illus 7) to the left of the Newton Stone in the same position as in Pinkerton's (1814: plate XXII; see Illus 8) earlier engraving.⁷ According to John Stuart (1856: 1), Secretary of the Spalding Club, the Pictish symbol stone was:

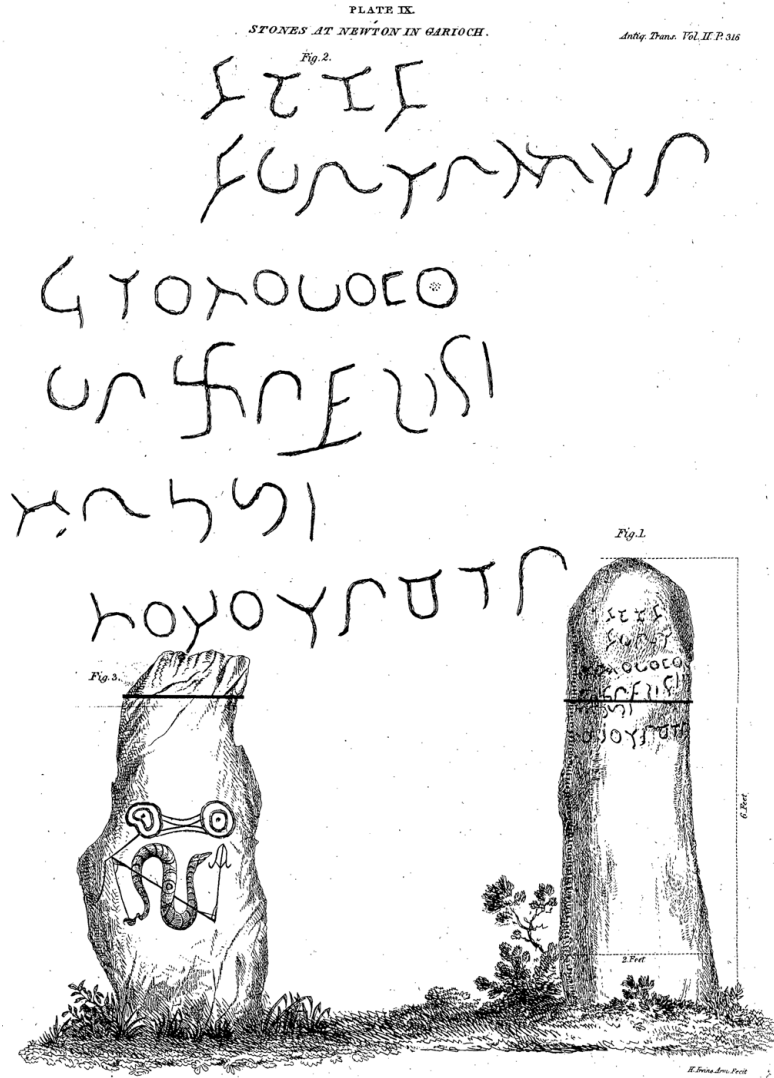
... placed on the march between the Lands of Rothney and Newton, about half a mile westward from the inscribed pillar, but was removed to the House of Newton upwards of sixty years ago.

Stuart's (1856: 1) account is also vague, and he merely notes that the symbol stone was 'placed' on the boundary between Rothney and Newton before being moved to Newton House; he does not mention its original location. Allen & Anderson (1903, vol 2: 199, note 1) state that the inscribed stone was moved to Newton House in 1794, but Forsyth (1996: 421) realised (based on Stuart's 1856 account) that Allen & Anderson

must be mistaken and the monument moved in 1794 was in fact the symbol stone.

After being moved for use as a march stone, the symbol stone was moved to the lawn of Newton House around 1794. John Stuart (1856: 1) records that the inscribed stone 'stood on a spot surrounded by wood, close to the present tollgate of Shevack'. The stone was in its original position when Stuart (1856: 1, note b) first visited the site in 1835. A drawing of the Newton Stone made in 1832 (Canmore ID SC 730239) shows the stone still in situ, and labels it 'Pitmachie House'. Stuart (1856: 1) also notes that the stone was sometimes called the Pitmachie Stone due to 'its proximity to the Inn and Farm of Pitmachie'. The inscribed stone was moved to Newton House in 1837 (Southesk 1883-4: 24). Both stones were placed together in the east grounds of Newton House in 1873 (Southesk 1883-4: 24) where they stand today at NJ 6623 2972 (RCAHMS 1999: 17, no. 34; see Illus 1 and Table 1).

All early references to the original location of the Newton Stone and the symbol stone point to the slopes of the hill west of Pitmachie above the River Shevock. They were probably located around NJ 6676 2883 (Fraser 2008: 34, no. 38.2). This is further confirmed by consideration of the local geology. Stuart (1856: 1) records that, when the original site of the Newton Stone was being 'trenched', 'several graves were discovered in a sandy ridge near to the stone'. The sandy ridge referred to by Stuart is clearly visible in geology maps (see Illus 9), and is located along the northern base of the hill between NJ 66014 28642 on the west and NJ 66773 28412 on the east. This further confirms the original location of the stones. This site is near Pitmachie Farm and Inn, a short distance from the Great North Road or Pitmachie turnpike referred to in the early sources (the modern A96), and the Bridge of Shevock, where the Shevock toll-bar or toll-gate mentioned by Stuart (1856: 1) and Southesk (1883-4: 24) was located. Diack (1922: 7) and Simpson (1943: 101) identify the Tollgate of Shevock as the east gate-lodge of Newton House in the mid 20th century, which Diack (1922: 7) located 'about 200 yards north-west of the bridge of Shevack'.



ILLUS 7 An engraving signed by H Irvine Arm: showing the Pictish symbol stone, the Newton Stone, and the non-ogham inscription published as Plate IX in Stuart (1821). (Courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of Scotland)

ORIGINAL LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

The original site of both stones falls within the wider pattern of topographical and historical features shared by many Pictish symbol stones in Donside, and elsewhere. Though the immediate landscape features around Pictish symbol stones may vary, Fraser & Halliday (2007: 119) note that many in north-east Scotland are on ‘elevated

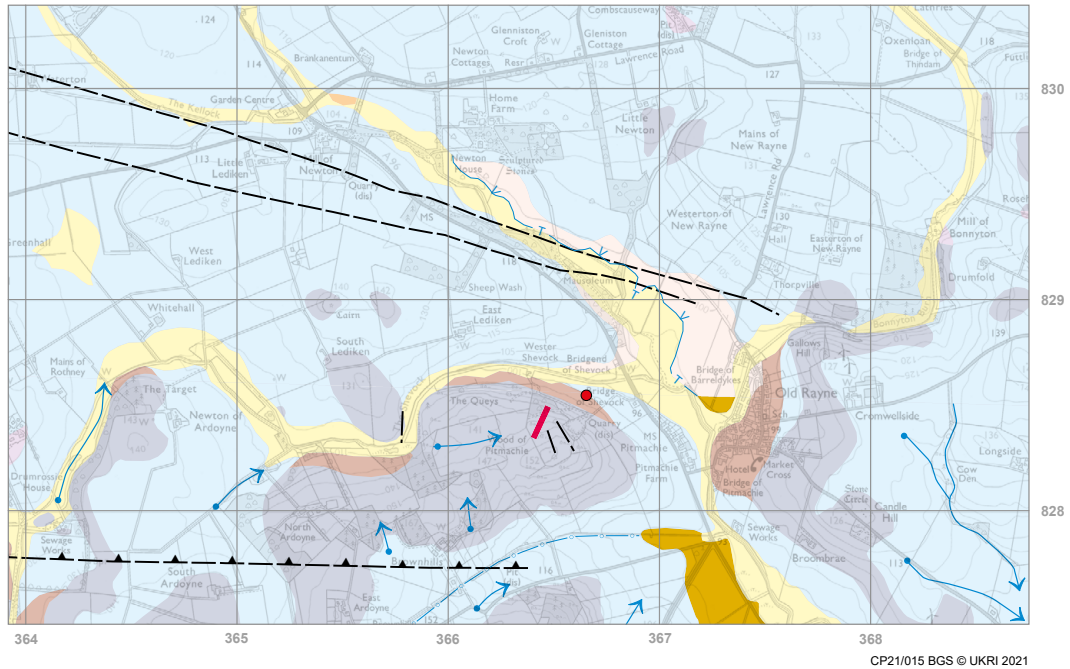
positions’, and they are predominantly associated with watercourses, with ‘a noticeable bias towards the confluence of lesser tributaries with the main stream’. The sand and gravel ridge on which the Newton Stone and the symbol stone were previously located is in an elevated position overlooking the River Shevock (the lesser tributary), near its confluence with the River Urie (the main stream).



ILLUS 8 An engraving showing the Pictish symbol stone and the Newton Stone made in Lizar's Edinburgh workshop printed as Plate XXII in Pinkerton (1814). (Courtesy of HathiTrust)

TABLE 1
Early documented timeline of the Newton Stone and symbol stone

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
<i>ante</i> 1760	Symbol stone moved from <i>c</i> NJ 6676 2883 to act as a boundary stone for Rothney Estate.
<i>c</i> 1794	Symbol stone moved to grounds of Newton House.
1796	Construction of the turnpike roads in Aberdeenshire.
<i>c</i> 1803	Carvings on the Newton Stone discovered by shepherd boys.
1804	George Hamilton Gordon (Lord Aberdeen) visits the Newton Stone (in situ).
1806	Earliest documentary reference to the Newton Stone published in <i>The Aberdeen Journal</i> 12 November 1806, p 4, col 5.
1807	Newton Stone recorded standing (in situ) in a field near Rayne in <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> October 1807, vol 57: 913.
1809	Newton Stone recorded standing (in situ) near the turnpike road leading towards Huntly.
<i>ante</i> 1812	Copies of Newton Stone inscriptions sent to General Charles Vallancey.
1814	Pinkerton publishes account of the Newton Stone and symbol stone, as having been together in a thicket near the (Shevock) toll-bar.
1821	John Stuart of Inchbreck publishes account of Newton Stone and symbol stone, incorrectly suggesting that they originally had no association with one another.
1832	Drawing, labelled 'Pitmachie House', made of Newton Stone still in situ (Canmore ID SC 730239).
1835	John Stuart, Secretary of the Spalding Club, visits the Newton Stone, still in situ.
1837	Newton Stone moved from <i>c</i> NJ 6676 2883 to the grounds of Newton House.
1873	Newton Stone and the symbol stone placed together in east grounds of Newton House at NJ 6623 2972, where they still stand today.



Linear features

- Axis of large-scale glacial furrow, generally associated with drumlins
- Back-feature of terrace, arrowheads denote uphill side
- Fault, inferred, crossmark on downthrow side, throw in metres
- Fault Thrust, inferred triangle on hangingwall side
- Glacial meltwater channel

Bedrock geology

- Insch Pluton, Middle Zone - Norite and gabbro
- Insch Pluton, Upper Zone - Fe-rich olivine-gabbro
- North-East Grampian Granitic Suite (Ordovician) - Pegmatitic granite and aplitic microgranite

Superficial geology

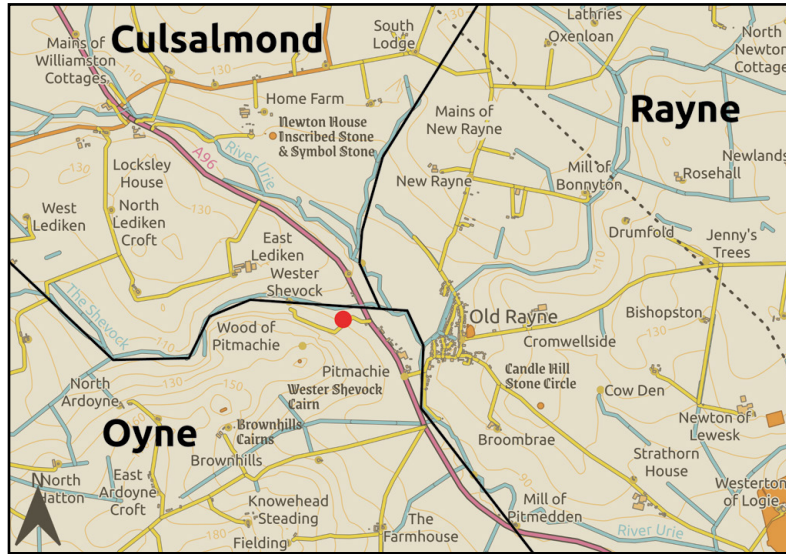
- Alluvium - Clay, silt, sand and gravel
- Banchory Till Formation - Diamictic
- Glen Dye Silts Formation - Clay, silt and sand
- Till, Devensian - Diamictic
- Glaciolacustrine Deposits - Clay, silt and sand
- Head - Gravel, sand, silt and clay
- River Terrace Deposits (Undifferentiated) - Gravel, sand, silt and clay

ILLUS 9 Geology map showing the probable findspot of the Newton Stone and symbol stone (in red) on the sandy ridge on the slope of the hill west of Pitmachie. (CP21/015 BGS © UKRI 2021. All Rights Reserved, Source – derived using BGS Geology 50K Data and provided by BGS Cartographic Services. Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2021)

Another feature of the siting of symbol stones in this region, particularly the ogham-inscribed symbol stones, is that many are located near medieval parish boundaries (Fraser & Halliday 2007: 124, 127–8). Though the Newton Stone and symbol stone are now in the parish of Culsalmond, their original location was near the northern border of Oyne parish, close to the apex between the parishes of Culsalmond, Oyne and Rayne at the confluence of the Shevock and the Urie, and the small stream to the north of the Urie

that delineates the lands of Newton and New Rayne (see Illus 10). The main crossing point in this landscape may have been over the Shevock to the east of Shevock Bridge where the river narrows at a meander (NJ6692 2864) and where the three parish boundaries meet. This further suggests that then, as today, the valley bottom of the Urie was historically the main routeway through this landscape.

The Newton Stone and the symbol stone, as discussed above in the ‘Descriptions’, were

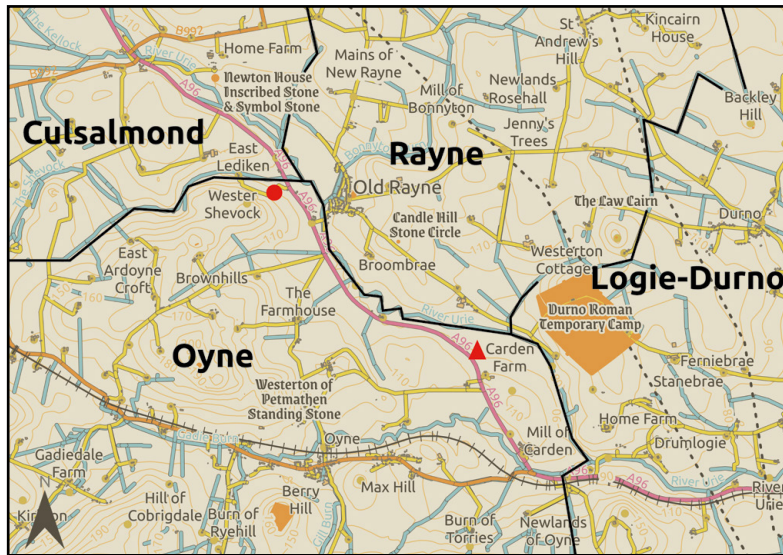


ILLUS 10 Map showing the parish boundaries and the probable findspot of the Newton Stone and symbol stone (red circle). (Contains Historic Environment Scotland and Ordnance Survey open data 2020)

probably reused prehistoric monuments.⁸ As Forsyth (1996: 423) states, these two stones ‘are as alike one another as peas in a pod and it is tempting to think that they came originally from a single stone circle’.⁹ In the north-east of Scotland in particular, existing man-made monuments within the landscape, such as standing stones and stone circles, were sometimes repurposed by the Picts (Mack 2002: 17–19, esp Appendix D; Fraser & Halliday 2007: 119). In the Donside region, reused prehistoric monuments include: the ogham-inscribed symbol stone at Brandsbutt (part of a stone circle; Canmore ID 18894; Fraser 2008: 14, no. 7), the two symbol stones and ogham-inscribed symbol stone now at Logie Elphinstone House (possibly from a stone circle, see Forsyth 1996: 385; Canmore ID 18856; Fraser 2008: 30, nos. 32.1–3); Nether Corskie (Canmore ID 18537; Fraser 2008: 34, no. 36), Kinellar (possibly from a stone circle; Canmore ID 19595; Fraser 2008: 26, no. 28), and Kintore, Castle Hill (Canmore ID 18590, 18591; Fraser 2008: 28, nos. 30.1 and 30.2).¹⁰ Similarly, the Ardlair Stone (Canmore ID 17636; Fraser 2008: 14, no. 3) is below a summit with a stone circle, and the ogham-inscribed, cross-incised, Mains

of Afforsk Stone (Canmore ID 80727) is located on a ridge with a cairn (Fraser & Halliday 2007: 119, 127).

The original landscape context of the Newton Stone and symbol stone is paralleled by the three Logie Elphinstone symbol stones (see Illus 11), located about 5km south, one of which is inscribed with a circular ogham inscription (Fraser 2008: 30, nos. 32.1–3). The Logie Elphinstone monuments were discovered west of Carden Farm, which is located on the hillside of the Moor of Carden (Allen & Anderson 1903, vol 2: 175). They are recorded there on the 6-inch Ordnance Survey Map (1870), but have been moved to Logie Elphinstone House where they stand today at NJ 7034 2588 (RCAHMS 1999: 16, no. 28). These were either located near the confluence of the Gadie Burn and the River Urie (Fraser & Halliday 2007: 119), or overlooked the apex of three parish boundaries, Oyne, Rayne and Logie-Durno, which is formed at the confluence (NJ 69102 27089) of the Urie and a small watercourse (now a drain) east of Strathorn. Like the Newton Stones, these were also possibly part of a stone circle (Forsyth 1996: 385, and see above).



ILLUS 11 Map showing the parish boundaries and the probable findspot of the Newton Stone and symbol stone (red circle) and the symbol stones and ogham-inscribed symbol stone now at Logie Elphinstone (red triangle). (Contains Historic Environment Scotland and Ordnance Survey open data 2020)

As mentioned above, Stuart (1856: 1) records that graves were discovered on the ridge where the Newton Stones were first located, and these graves were described to him ‘as having been made in the hard gravel, without any appearance of flagstones at the sides or elsewhere’. The immediate landscape of the original location of the Newton Stone and symbol stone, including the elevation, confluences, geology and routeway, is in keeping with the landscape patterns associated with Pictish barrow cemeteries (see Fraser & Halliday 2007: 123 for Pictish cemeteries located on gravel terraces near burns and rivers; Mitchell & Noble 2019: 101 for Pictish cemeteries near boundaries, confluences and routeways). Since the discovery of graves here in the 19th century, there have been no excavations in the area, and their connection to the Newton Stone and symbol stone remains unclear (Simpson 1943: 101). It is quite possible that the site was an early Pictish cemetery set within an immediate landscape of prehistoric monuments that were subsequently repurposed in the Pictish period. There are parallels for the association of Pictish cemeteries with prehistoric monuments elsewhere in Scotland, such as at North Mains in Perthshire, where a

Pictish inhumation cemetery was found in a henge monument (Fraser & Halliday 2007: 122).

Place-names are another valuable resource that can shed light on historic cultures, land-use and settlements. The majority of the place-names in the Urie Valley, in which the Newton Stone and symbol stone were located, are Gaelic, and were coined in the post-Pictish period (Kilpatrick forthcoming). Pitmachie, the nearest settlement to the original location of the stones, contains the element *pett* ‘farm, land-holding, unit of land’. While *pett* has been thought to be a Pictish place-name element (see, for example, Jackson 1955: 149), the place-name evidence indicates that *pett* is a Pictish loanword borrowed into Gaelic. The qualifying elements of numerous *pett* place-names are Gaelic (see Watson 1926: 407; Nicolaisen 2001: 200), suggesting that such names post-date the Pictish period. In the words of Taylor (2010: 79), the distribution of *pett*-names reflect ‘the extent of Gaelic-speakers in the tenth century’, when Gaelic became the dominant language in northern and eastern Scotland (see Clancy 2010: 382–6, and 390 fig 6). The qualifying element of the name Pitmachie (*Pethmalchy* 1362, *Petmauchly* 1512 × 1513) is a

Gaelic personal name, Máel Fhéichín ‘Fhéichín’s servant’, a name recorded in the *Book of Deer* (Forsyth et al 2008: 140–3).

Nearby Old Rayne, on the other hand, is one of three potential Pictish place-names in this region of the Urie Valley, the other two being Logie-Durno and the Moor of Carden where the Logie Elphinstone symbol stones were discovered.¹¹ Old Rayne is likely derived from Pictish **rann* ‘part, piece’, cognate with Old Irish *rann* ‘part, share’ (Alexander 1952: 359; Rhys 2015: 341; James & Taylor 2017: 193). Place-names in **rann* are rare in Scotland, and the original interpretation of **rann* in Old Rayne is uncertain. The name may relate in some way to early settlement organisation and land measurement. It is located south of the confluence of the River Shevock and the Urie, which forms the apex of three medieval parish boundaries (see above and Illus 10). Medieval settlements in the Urie Valley were organised into *dabhaichean* (Kilpatrick forthcoming), a land measurement system that is likely Pictish in origin (Ross 2015: 63). Although the boundaries and origin dates of the medieval *dabhaichean* in the Urie Valley are uncertain, medieval documentary and toponymic evidence suggests that at least some of the *dabhaichean* extended to either side of the River Urie (Kilpatrick forthcoming). It is quite possible that Old Rayne was once the main settlement of a *dabhach* comprised of lands on either side of the Urie. This *dabhach* will have likely included the area near Pitmachie where the Newton Stone and symbol stone originally stood, and the nearby graves discovered in the 19th century (see above). If there was an Iron Age or Pictish cemetery here, then the associated settlement was quite likely at Old Rayne. Mitchell & Noble (2019: 92–5) note that there are almost no known examples of unenclosed Pictish settlements in the territories of Fortriu and Cè, the latter identified with this region of Aberdeenshire, but this is in part due to intense modern agricultural activity.

Forsyth (1996: 423) suggests that Old Rayne may have been an early centre of ‘administrative importance’, and it is possible that it had ecclesiastical significance as well. The district of Rayne may have been granted to the bishops

of Aberdeen during the reign of David I (Barrow 1999: 80, no. 55). The settlement of Old Rayne and its church was confirmed by Pope Adrian IV to the bishops of Aberdeen in 1157 (Innes 1845: 5). It has also been observed (Fraser & Halliday 2007: 131) that *pett*-names in Donside are often located on royal or ecclesiastical estates, and the association of Pitmachie, a name possibly coined in the immediate post-Pictish period (see above), with Old Rayne may add further weight to the theory that Rayne was an early, possibly Pictish, settlement or ecclesiastical centre.

CONCLUSIONS

The Newton Stone was one of the most well-known Pictish monuments of the 19th century because of its inscriptions, which are discussed in detail in Part 2. A thorough analysis of the antiquarian accounts of this stone has not only demonstrated that it was historically associated with the symbol stone prior to their movement to Newton House, but has also helped to locate the original site of these stones. Their original landscape context fits within the wider pattern of symbol stone placements in the Donside region, and also with the locations of Pictish cemeteries. Stuart’s (1856: 1) account of the discovery of graves near these stones suggests that they may have been located at, or near, an Iron Age or Pictish cemetery. Although little is known about the relationship between Pictish settlements and symbol stones, the Newton Stones may be associated with the nearby settlement of Old Rayne, a potential Pictish place-name and a site of significance in the medieval period.

Having drawn attention to this site and its environs, it is hoped that future archaeological investigation will reveal more information about Pictish activity in this area of the Urie River Valley.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Please see the following article.

NOTES

- 1 These groups are (see Cessford 1997: 107–9): (1) bar handle with ring at both ends, (2) bar handle with terminal ring, (3) shaped handle, (4) ‘Paterae’ handles, (5) triangular handles with terminal ring, (6) figure-of-eight handle, and (7) flowering handle.
- 2 Only one disc of the Newton symbol stone has a notch, whereas both discs on the Inchyra stone have notches (on the bottom of the right disc and top of the left disc). Westfield may not be a notched double-disc. The outer rings of the circles are complete, and the ‘notched’ aspect, two semi-circular internal lines that connect to the inner rim of the discs where they are connected to the cross-bar, may be decoration. See Fraser (2008: 70–71, no. 87.1).
- 3 Of the 14 examples of the serpent and z-rod symbol, only the serpent on the Newton House stone, Tillytarmont no. 5, and probably that on Logierait no. 2 (carved in relief) face left (see Fraser 2008: 42–3, no. 46.5 and 126–7, no. 187.2). All other examples depict the serpent facing right with the exception of Logierait no. 1, which depicts a serpent coiled around a straight rod (Ibid: 126–7, no. 187.1), the vertical example at St Vigeans no. 2 (Ibid: 58–9, no. 67.1), and the obscured serpent and z-rod on Tarbat (Ibid: 94–5, no. 130), all three of which are carved in relief. Examples facing left include: Brandsbutt (Ibid: 14–15, no. 7), Inverurie (Ibid 26–7, no. 26.1), the nearby Picardy Stone from Myreton Farm, Inch (Ibid: 36–7, no. 42), Drumbuie (Ibid: 82–3, no. 109.1), and Dunrobin, Dairy Park (Ibid: 98–9, no. 139), as well as the Class II examples carved in relief at Balluderon, St Martin’s stone (Ibid: 50–1, no. 55), Gask (Ibid: 124–5, no. 183), and Meikle no. 1 (Ibid: 128–9, no. 189.1).
- 4 The serpent and z-rod symbol at Brandsbutt also depicts the serpent with scales (Fraser 2008: 14–15, no. 7).
- 5 John Stuart of Inchbreck (1751–1827) is mistakenly identified in Okasha (1985: 69) as John Stuart (1813–1877), Secretary of the Spalding Club.
- 6 Unfortunately, I have been unable to find this estate plan.
- 7 John Stuart of Inchbreck was in communication with Pinkerton about the Newton Stone in the early 19th century (see Pinkerton 1814: xiii), and both based their engravings of the non-ogham inscription on a facsimile produced before 1814 (see Illus 7 and 8). Pinkerton’s image shows the thickness of the letters, whereas Stuart’s reproduction in fig 1 are merely line drawings of these.
- 8 There are numerous prehistoric monuments within the immediate area of the original location of these stones, including: a stone circle at Candle Hill (NJ 679 280) south-west of Old Rayne; another stone circle near Candle Hill south of Rouplaw (NJ 660 267), near which is a standing stone (NJ 664 264). There is also a cairn between North and South Lediken (NJ 654 289). The first edition Ordnance Survey map marks the site of a cairn north of Ardoyne (NJ 656 278), a stone near South Lediken (NJ 653 286), and a stone near Westerton of Newrayne (NJ671 293).
- 9 Some of the earliest engravings of the stones (see Illus 7 and 8) show the symbol stone to the left of the inscribed stone. This could reflect how they were originally situated in the landscape (if the illustrators relied on local memory and descriptions), or they may have been depicted like this in order to be printed together on one page. Pinkerton and Stuart were in communication with one another about these monuments, and this may explain the similarities between their engravings (see note 7 above). Nevertheless, the paralleling of these two stones in the earliest engravings, and particularly the caption ‘Stones at Pitmachie’ (see Illus 8), further demonstrates their original association.
- 10 See Mack (2002: 19 Appendix D), for a list of reused standing stones, stone circles or henge monuments for Class I stones. Of this list, the only example not in north-east Scotland or Highland is Newton of Collessie, in Fife.

- 11 The name Moor of Carden may preserve a potential Pictish place-name element **carden* ‘woodland, thicket’ or ‘encampment, enclosure’, and across the River Urie from this hill is Logie-Durno, which contains the Pictish, or possibly Old Gaelic, place-name element **login* ‘ecclesiastical site, church’ (Kilpatrick forthcoming).

ABBREVIATIONS

NMS: National Museums Scotland
 RCAHMS: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland

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