

Another part of a Pictish symbol stone from Little Ferry Links, Golspie, Sutherland

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INTRODUCTION

During preparatory work for the opening of a new gallery at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery in 1982, it was realized that a hitherto unprovenanced and unpublished fragment of a Pictish symbol stone in the collections formed a larger part of a piece found in 1880 by the Rev Dr J M Joass on Little

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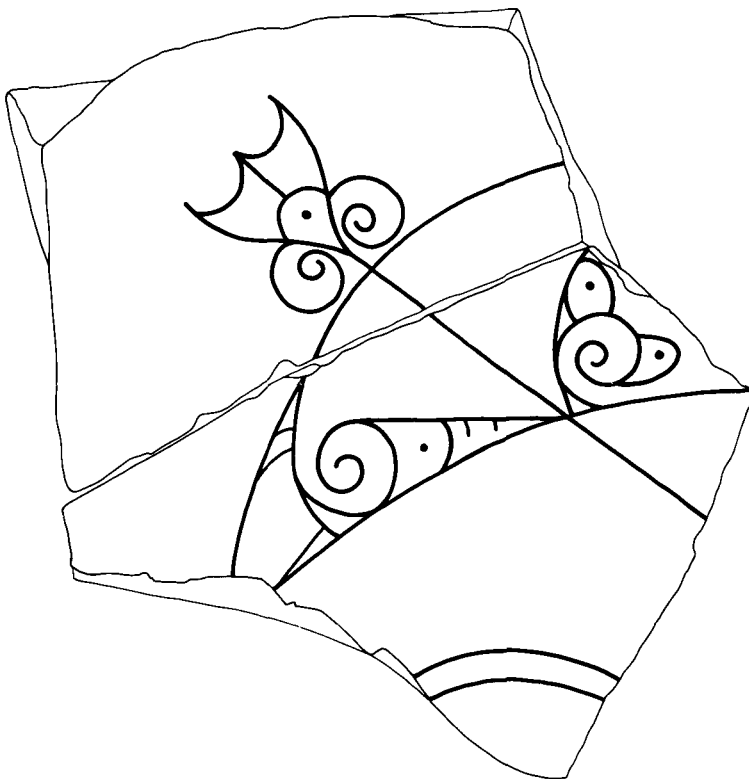
Ferry Links, some 2 miles (3.2 km) (south-) west of Golspie, (NGR NH 8196), and now in Dunrobin Castle Museum.

THE INVERNESS STONE

The stone in Inverness Museum has probably been in the collections since between 1909 and 1917 (Wallace 1909, 9; 1917, 60), although no details pertaining to the circumstances of its discovery or the donor have survived. It is part of a slab of red sandstone, trapezoidal in shape, measuring 370 mm maximum length, 250 mm maximum width and 85 mm thick. Incised on the flatter, prepared(?), surface of the slab is the left side of a crescent and V-rod symbol, and below it the upper arc of part of a disc. The outline is very fine and excellently executed, being 3 mm wide and 3 mm deep on the less weathered areas.

On this fragment only the shaft of the left side of the V-rod is present, cut by the deeper incised outline of the left point of the crescent. This part of the crescent is infilled with a simple spiral and an appended lobe and dot motif within a triangular area. Part of the central area of the crescent is also represented and is similarly decorated with lobes and dots on both sides of the spiral (illus 1). There are also traces of spiral decoration in the small extant area towards the angle of the V-rod at the right of the stone.

Just below the left side of the crescent and V-rod are two parallel arcs of a disc with maximum radius 90 mm, which form part of another symbol. The incised lines are similar in technique and



ILLUS 1 Part of the Pictish symbol stone from Little Ferry Links, Golspie, Sutherland. The lower part is in Inverness Museum, the upper part in Dunrobin Castle Museum (scale 1:4)

dimensions to those of the upper symbol and could be part of a disc, mirror, double disc, mirror case or triple disc symbol.

Stephen Crummy produced the reconstruction drawings of all the symbol stones in Inverness Museum's collections for display purposes. Whilst researching the forms of the various Class I symbols he discovered a possible link between this example and one in Dunrobin Castle Museum (Allen & Anderson 1903c, 47, No 4). With the co-operation of Lord Strathnaver, the Inverness example was taken to Dunrobin Castle by the then Assistant Curator (Archaeology), Catharine Millar, to test the suggestion that the two were parts of the same stone. The two fragments did indeed fit together (illus 2).



ILLUS 2 The Dunrobin and Inverness parts of the Little Ferry Links stone placed together

THE DUNROBIN STONE

This trapezoidal fragment of a Pictish symbol stone on red sandstone, found on Little Ferry Links, has maximum dimensions of 300 mm by 220 mm by 90 mm. It is incised with the termination of a V-rod and the upper arc of part of a crescent. To quote from Allen:

Although a mere fragment, this stone is valuable as affording one of the most perfect and beautiful examples of the ornamental termination of the V-shaped rod yet found in Scotland. The artistic feeling exhibited in the drawing of the subtle curves is unquestionably great.

As discussed elsewhere (Davidson 1946, 32–3; Lacaille 1954, 265–6) the Links between Golspie and Little Ferry have, in the past, yielded many indications of the prehistoric use of the area. Mesolithic and later flint artefacts and débitage abounded, as well as shell and bone middens, stone axe fragments and potsherds. It was in this same general location that the stone in Dunrobin Castle Museum was found and presumably, therefore, that now in Inverness Museum. Three other fragments of Pictish symbol stones were also found in this area (Allen & Anderson 1903c, 46–7).

THE SYMBOLS

The crescent and V rod is the most commonly found Pictish symbol, occurring on more than 50 examples of Class I stones and on about 20 Class II stones. However, the refinement of execution of this example far surpasses that exhibited on the majority of stones, such as those from Garbeg, Inverness (Wedderburn & Grime 1984, 161) and Kintradwell, Sutherland (Allen & Anderson 1903c, 44, No 3). The stylistic achievement of this Little Ferry Links stone can possibly best be compared with examples from South Ronaldsay, Orkney (*ibid*, 21, front) and Findlarig, Moray (Stuart 1867, pl 106), although neither of these use exactly the same motifs to fill the crescent and V-rod outlines.

The lobe and dot motif can be seen in the crescent and V-rod symbols from Inverurie (Allen & Anderson 1903c, 168, No 1) and Kintore (*ibid*, pl 23, back) but neither also exhibits the spiral motif and the latter is particularly unrefined in its style. The flowing spirals within the Little Ferry Links stone suggest a confidence of technique not readily paralleled on other Class I stones using the motif, although a simpler form of spiral can be seen on the Logie Elphinstone example (Stuart 1856, pl 3, No 2).

Some 30 crescent and V-rod symbols occur on the same face as the symbols of the disc, double disc (and Z-rod), triple disc, mirror and/or mirror case on the Class I stones. There are also nearly 10 examples of Class II stones bearing these same characteristics. These various circular symbols all occur in some instances immediately below and to the left of the crescent and V-rod as on the Little Ferry Links stone. Examples include the disc on the back of the Easterton of Roseisle stone, Moray (Allen & Anderson 1903c, pl 15), the double disc and Z-rod from Rosemarkie, Easter Ross (*ibid*, pl 7, back), the triple disc on the Inveravon stone, Banff (*ibid*, 153, No 2), the mirror from Knowe of Burrian, Orkney (RCAMS 1946, fig 58) and the mirror case from Advie, Moray (Joass 1906, 346).

CONCLUSIONS

Although still fragmentary, this symbol stone from Little Ferry Links is an example of artistic craftsmanship of singular merit and adds a further dimension to the details outlined by Allen. It also forms an addition to the list of Class I symbol stones which have more than one symbol inscribed upon them, although the glimpse of that second symbol is tantalisingly indefinite.

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