



The National Committee  
on Carved Stones in Scotland

## Annual Report 2013

The Committee met in Edinburgh on 26 April, 23 August and 6 December 2013. We are grateful to Historic Scotland (HS) for a grant to cover our miscellaneous costs and the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust and RCAHMS for kindly hosting these meetings.

### Changes in membership

Dr Sally Foster (then of Aberdeen University), succeeded Dr Katherine Forsyth (University of Glasgow) as independent Chair in December 2012. HS's Heritage Management Group expanded its representation to also include Mrs Sheila Clark.

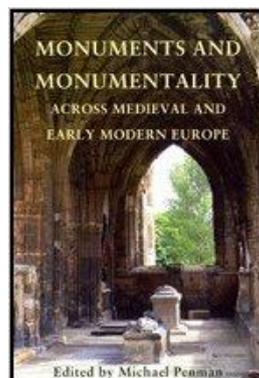
### Developing strategy

In order to clarify its role and develop a more strategic function, the Committee initiated an analysis of the problems faced by carved stones, their causes and effects, the impacts the Committee aims to have on them, and how best to achieve this (an exercise completed in 2014 – see website). In September, in order to improve its communication, the Committee successfully applied for grant-aid from HS to design and re-implement its website (in 2014-15).

An important way that the Committee considers strategic issues and developments, as well as learns from best practice, is through invited speakers. We were pleased to welcome Professor Harold Mytum of the Centre for Manx Studies, Liverpool University to our December meeting to talk about his recent project to consult stakeholders in England about recording standards, data management and archiving of records for graveyard surveys.

### Research developments and outcomes

We initiated an annual bibliography of publications relating to carved stones in Scotland (see website). This is intended to provide a resource for researchers and other interested parties, as well as helping to celebrate the breadth of



interest there is in carved stones in Scotland. A particularly noteworthy publication was Michael Penman's *Monuments and Monumentality across Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

### Casework (including new discoveries)

The Committee recognises that its role is not to undertake casework actively as a body. However, it also recognises the value in considering individual cases as they arise for three reasons. First, this overview of developments allows the Committee to identify and promote examples of good practice.

Second, it can recognise curatorial issues and broader trends that may need sector-wide solutions and explore how to contribute to addressing these. Third, it provides a forum for the pooling of expertise about diverse aspects of carved stones and their care which members, on behalf of their institutions, can draw on for help in identifying the nature and considering the significance of specific carved stones, and for exploring key curatorial issues.

Over the course of the year the Committee discussed 44 cases and projects, including a number of new discoveries, e.g. Neolithic scratch art found built into a ruined post-medieval building at Rhu Arasaig (Highland)(relocated to Arisaig Heritage Museum), early medieval sculptures ploughed up in a field at Craigellachie (Moray) and noted by a keen observer at Cill Choirill, Braes Lochaber (Highland), the excavation of a 13C Calvary cross-slab at Infirmary Street in Edinburgh, a medieval carved head from the walls of Coldingham Parish Church (Scottish Borders), and a probably 17C sundial found at a croft at Houlland (Shetland) along with other 15-17C worked masonry.

### Examples of good practice

- The active role of the Pictish Arts Society, such as assisting with fundraising for the new display of sculptures at Logierait (Perth and Kinross) and securing the future of the early medieval sculptures from Glamis (Angus).
- The recording of important carved stone collections by the RCAHMS, such as the Kirkmadrine stones (Dumfries and Galloway), and



## Curatorial concerns

- the continuing work of Ian G Scott, formerly of the RCAHMS, in Shetland.
- A working group including representation from HS aims to prepare a Conservation Plan for Wemyss Caves (Fife), while SCAPE and Northlight Heritage were involved in digital recording for the Visualising Wemyss Caves project.
- Govan Old (Glasgow) redisplayed its early medieval carved stone collection, launched by the Deputy First Minister, while the Nigg Trust redisplayed the Nigg cross-slab (Highland).
- Caithness Horizons improved the display of its carved stones.
- HS's conservation of the carved stones at Kirkmadrine (for redisplay in 2014) and creative redisplay of the museum of carved stones at Iona Abbey (Argyll and Bute), informed by new research.
- HS's loan of the Jedburgh Shrine (Scottish Borders) to an international exhibition at Paderborn in Germany, while one of the Govan hogbacks was lent to the British Museum for its Viking Exhibition.
- HS grant-aid supported conservation of Barbreck's Well, Ardfern (Argyll and Bute).
- Edinburgh World Heritage Site appointed a part-time Graveyards Development Officer.
- The Scottish Association of Family History Societies made public information about its graveyards inventory.
- In June 2013 a conference took place in Glasgow in honour of Isabel Henderson, while in October the Pictish Arts Society held its annual conference in Perth.
- Several Adopt-a-Monument schemes involved local communities in caring for graveyards.



Nigg cross-slab redisplayed.  
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- There were several instances of the sale of redundant churches which contained carved stones, sometimes of considerable significance, with implications for their future protection and preservation of the stones.
- Changes in ownership, including sale of churches to private owners, can affect access to important stones, such as the Glamis Manse cross-slab.
- We noted that some owners of carved stones are reluctant to allow continued access to those in their gardens, even when requested for purposes of recording and study.
- We noted the considerable challenges that museums, trusts and other bodies face obtaining funds to conserve and present their carved stones, and the practical struggles small, sometimes voluntary, bodies can face, as at Shandwick (Highland).
- There are still instances of prehistoric rock art being discovered by people who disturb the surrounding ground without archaeological supervision. This is a concern because there is increasing scientific evidence for potential archaeological evidence to survive that can help us to understand their creation and use through time.
- There is no easy way of easily establishing which carved stones have been laser scanned, and where the data is curated, so opportunities for others to use and recycle digital data for research and other purposes is being missed.
- The fate of loose and vulnerable stones remains a key concern because the locus of different bodies is confusing and/or they can fall between responsibilities. Issues include: that much depends on the significance attached to 'primary' locations, when biographies of stones mean that secondary locations are also significant; stones can change status as a result of accident of deliberate acts; the weight given to historical background as evidence; and how carved stones might be covered by scheduling and the implications of the 2011 Historic Environment Amendment Act for scheduling artefact scatters, i.e. technically portable things that are not *in situ*.



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### Other

The Committee noted the retirement in September 2014 of Norman Atkinson from Angus Council, who in his professional and personal capacity has made an outstanding contribution to the preservation and promotion of Pictish carved stones, in particular.

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24 December 2014