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Protecting Carved Stones in Scotland and Wales

Nancy Edwards and Mark A Hall

In both Scotland and Wales there are large collections of carved stones, some with inscriptions, others with complex ornament and iconography, dating from the early medieval period onwards. The majority of these are Christian and include freestanding crosses and cross-slabs, grave-markers of all types and architectural sculpture. A great many are associated with church sites, not only places of continuing Christian worship, where they may stand in the grave-yard or be built into the fabric, but also churches and chapels that have fallen out of use and become ruinous or have been put to a different function. Others are in private hands, for example standing in farmland, or are displayed in national and local museums and other heritage collections. Only some of the monuments in church or private hands are eligible for scheduling. In addition those built into fabric may have some protection as part of listed buildings. A significant number, however, are portable antiquities and as such cannot be scheduled or listed and sometimes disappear, usually through neglect, but occasionally as a result of theft. Weathering and other damage are also taking an unacceptable toll. Concern for the long-term future of all these carved stones has led to the establishment of national committees in both Scotland and Wales. The aim of these is to co-ordinate the better recording, protection and display of all inscribed stones and stone sculpture as well as greater public awareness of their importance.

Scotland

The National Committee on Carved Stones in Scotland (NCCSS) was established in 1993 with the aim of coordinating the preservation and publication of carved stones in Scotland. It comprises representative members from Scottish national organisations with an interest in carved stones, with a chairperson and up to five co-opted individual members. It is grant-aided and supported in kind by Historic Scotland, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and the National Museum of Scotland but it has no capacity to distribute resources in grant-aid or otherwise. The committee has six key objectives:

1. Drawing attention to the threats to carved stones and promoting understanding and appreciation.
2. Establishing best practice in relation to recording, conservation and display (Fig 1).
3. Promoting the protection, recording and better management of gravestones and graveyards.
4. Promoting the appropriate protection, recording and management of other carved stones which are exposed to the elements.
5. Continuing to raise awareness of the presence and significance of architectural sculpture and the issues affecting it.

Fig 1 Iona: Historic Scotland's conservation and redisplay of the huge array of sculpture associated with Iona Abbey is a clear example of the best practice looked for and encouraged by NCCSS



Clarifying ownership and responsibilities, particularly for non earth-fast sculpture (Fig 2).

NCCSS is then primarily an advocacy body that provides a forum for discussion. This is then turned into advice and communicated to both individuals and organisations. It makes formal responses to a diverse range of requests, including those from individual churches about the conservation of carved stone(s) in their care and from national organisations, such as Historic Scotland, on policy initiatives, including *Carved Stones: Scottish Executive Policy and Guidance*, launched in May 2005 (WS 1). It has a pivotal networking role, being the only forum where the bodies concerned can meet to focus on carved stones.

Even though it operates on limited resources and relies on encouraging others to take action, it has raised the profile of carved stones in Scotland, particularly through the information leaflets it has produced and the conferences it has helped to organise and support, including one on post-medieval gravestones and one on the St Andrews sarcophagus (Foster 1998). In July 1994 it agreed a set of *Principles of Recording and Preservation*. These formed the background to later statements made by the NCCSS in its two leaflets – *Carved Stones in Scotland: Threats and Protection* and *Protecting and Caring for Historic Carved Stones in Scotland Advice and Guidelines* – and its booklet on *Photographing Carved Stones* (Gray and Ferguson 1997). These have been widely distributed and appreciated and have more recently been joined by a website, *Carved Stones in Scotland* (WS 2), which seeks to raise the issue of carved

stones in an accessible way, provide links to other organisations and news of particular stones or relevant conferences and publications.

Other projects are ongoing. Firstly, in 2003 Sally Foster (on behalf of both Historic Scotland and NCCSS) organised a highly successful conference – *Able Minds and Practised Hands* – celebrating the 100th anniversary of the publication of Allen and Anderson's *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903). The concluding discussion of the conference asked the NCCSS to look at, and make recommendations on, the question of a revised corpus of early medieval stone sculpture in Scotland. A summary statement prepared by John Higgitt (the then chair of NCCSS) is set to appear in the forthcoming proceedings of the conference (Foster in press). In addition an NCCSS Working Group has been established that will conclude its deliberations in 2005 with a statement on the proposed set of recording criteria (building on best practice established by the British Academy *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (WS 3), the RCAHMS and others) by which a new corpus might be achieved and which would be adopted by all those involved in recording early medieval carved stones in Scotland. It seems clear that any new corpus of the Scottish material will have to take advantage of electronic publication but it will ultimately be for a body or consortium of bodies other than the NCCSS to take forward the actual work of a new corpus, probably on a regional basis.

Secondly, a new area that NCCSS is about to scrutinise is that of portable carved stones, that is those loose and



Fig 2 Hilton of Cadboll, Easter Ross: Excavations at Hilton chapel in 2001 triumphantly recovered the missing, broken-off lower portion of the magnificent Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab. This project raised a host of issues relating to Treasure Trove and ownership (Jones 2004) which will be amongst those to be tackled by the NCCSS in its look at portable stones.

vulnerable stones which form such a significant element of Scotland's carved stones inheritance and which often fall into legal and organisational loop-holes. The NCCSS will therefore consider a number of issues including the ambiguities of the legal framework, quantifying the vulnerability of the resource and producing relevant guidance that encourages action.

Wales

The establishment in Wales of *The National Committee for Recording and Protection of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture* has been much more recent. It was founded in December 2002 modelled in part on its Scottish counterpart. It was set up on the recommendation of the Ancient Monuments Board for Wales who in 2000 - 2001 chose the *Protection of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture* as their annual theme (AMBW 2001), a topic that had been one of those pursued by the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland in the previous year (AMBS 2000). The need for increased protection for the monuments in Wales was also highlighted by ongoing research for the *Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales* (Edwards 2000; in press; Redknap and Lewis in press) and the *Christian Inscribed Stones Project (CISP, WS 4)*. The membership of the committee consists of members of Cadw, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, the Representative Body of the Church in Wales, the four Welsh archaeological trusts, a stone conservator and others with an academic interest in the monuments.

So far the committee has considered a variety of issues. Initially it has decided to focus on the early medieval inscribed stones and stone sculpture but carved stones from later periods will not be excluded from the remit. With the help of Cadw and the archaeological trusts the scheduling of early medieval carved stones is being reviewed and a list of monuments considered most at danger has been established. From this a pilot scheme has been set up and has identified a small number of sites where there are active local communities who are being encouraged to apply for small Heritage Lottery Grants in order to safeguard and display their monuments locally, usually in the parish church with which they are associated. Alternatively, it is suggested that cathedrals and churches applying for repair grants from Cadw and the Heritage Lottery Fund might include a display of their sculpture as part of their application for grant aid. One model for this is the important collection of monuments from St David's, which has recently been

displayed to the public in a *lapidarium* within the gate-house to the cathedral. Another model is at Bangor Cathedral, where sculptural fragments will be conserved prior to display within the building. The committee is also keen to increase public awareness of the wealth and significance of the early medieval carved stones and later sculpture. To this end it has agreed to set up a website as soon as possible and put together a small portable exhibition on the significance of the early medieval carved stone monuments, which can be shown at venues throughout Wales.

Nancy Edwards (University of Wales, Bangor) is Chair of The National Committee for Recording and Protection of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales and Mark A Hall (Perth Museum) is Chair of The National Committee on Carved Stones in Scotland.

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- WS 3 *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* www.dur.ac.uk/corpus/index.php3 (Last viewed 17.05.05)
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