

EARLY MEDIEVAL STONE SCULPTURES OF SCOTLAND WORKING GROUP

FINAL REPORT TO NCCSS

Mandate and Membership

The EMSS Working Group was formally constituted by the main committee of NCCSS at the end of 2003, with a mandate to explore and chart a way forward for the production of a new corpus on the early medieval stone sculptures of Scotland. This is not the place to give the detailed background history to the situation, those interested should consult John Higgitt's paper in the proceedings of the *Able Minds Practised Hands* conference of 2003¹. As far as the Working Group is concerned the case for a new corpus has been justifiably made and this report deals with the outcomes of the Working Group's deliberations.

The Working Group membership comprised members of the NCCSS along with a number of co-opted early medieval specialists: Ewan Campbell (Glasgow University and formerly NCCSS), Lesley Ferguson (RCAHMS), Ian Fisher (Glasgow University and formerly RCAHMS and NCCSS), Sally Foster (Historic Scotland and NCCSS), Katherine Forsyth (Glasgow University), Jane Geddes (Aberdeen University), Mark Hall (Perth Museum & Art Gallery and NCCSS chair), Isabel Henderson (independent scholar and formerly Cambridge University), John Higgitt (Edinburgh University and formerly NCCSS chair) and Ingalv Maxwell(or nominated rep.) (Historic Scotland conservation section).

Meetings

The Working Group met twice in 2004 on 11 May and 11 November and once in 2005, on 27 August (in Dublin) and these meetings were backed up by email and telephone discussions between various members of the group. Through detailed discussion the Working Group resolved the following, which now requires to be approved by NCCSS.

Results

(1) Recording Criteria

In terms of the necessary recording criteria to be used in the compiling of a new corpus the following categories were agreed as essential and to be adopted by all those working in the field. They were arrived at following currently known best practice from other projects, most notably *The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*². The criteria are:

- i) Site name/Location and number (to follow Allen and Anderson/ECMS³ as appropriate)
- ii) Concordance of names and numbers (including RCAHMS numlink⁴)
- iii) Description – including geology and where appropriate following the *Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament* (including the numbering of faces).
- iv) Photographs – all sides, straight-on views; general and details as appropriate to ensure coverage of ornament, inscriptions, damage, weathering, tool marks and setting/site context. Minimum of 35mm b&w and colour slide.
- v) Drawings: Ideally these should be done at a scale of 1:10, with 1:5 where appropriate for complex monuments; publication at 1:15 or 1:20 to facilitate comparisons. See point (2) below regarding 3-D scanning.
- vi) History – a) Individual stones or group of stones
b) The site (including concordance of site names if necessary)
- vii) Discussion – including an assessment of potential dating as part of a general discussion of the significance of the sculpture(s).
- viii) Condition - a formal conservation risk assessment that may require liaison with Historic Scotland; each assessment to carry the date it was carried out. See point (3) below.
- ix) Bibliography: each report should be both fully referenced and include a full specific bibliography for each monument.
- x) Author and date of field-work

(2) 3-D Recording

There was unanimous recognition of the importance of 3-D recording as a new and developing tool aiding the research and conservation of early medieval stone sculpture in Scotland. It was also recognised that this is currently very expensive to deploy. In view of the costs it was felt appropriate not to require 3-D recording as a

minimum standard but also to note that there is no objection to any project undertaking such recording. Indeed, if it is feasible it is only to be encouraged. It was further recognised that a project focussing on the 3-D recording of Scotland's sculptures would be both welcome and deserving of NCCSS support. Such a project could stand on its own and have built in links with a more regionalised corpus project.

(3) Conservation assessment

The Working Group recognised that the conservation condition of carved stones requires specialist knowledge and particular assessments by conservation professionals. This level of detailed assessment was deemed unfeasible in the compilation of the inventory based on the criteria listed above. However it is recommended that any corpus project does adopt the use of the appropriately amended HS/Carved Stones Adviser Project stone decay form. This will facilitate closer working with the conservation professionals and help to enable a parallel project which focuses on the conservation condition of the stones at a national level. In pursuance of this Historic Scotland has commissioned a desk-based assessment of the early medieval sculptures listed in the RCAHMS database. This will identify the order in which early medieval sculptures need to be visited by a professional stone conservator to assess their physical condition and to identify their conservation needs and will also allow the identification of priorities in terms of current knowledge of condition and risk. A clear distinction will be sought between an assessment of the physical condition of the sculptures and their state of preservation relative to when they were first carved.

(4) Funding and pilot project

The funding of a Corpus project: It was emphasised that NCCSS is not in a position to undertake a new Corpus project but is willing to support a project / series of projects by other institutions. The University members of the Working Group, led by Jane Geddes, have been able to discuss this informally and explore options and funding sources through the university system. As of 27 August 2005 Jane Geddes agreed to move forward with a pilot project focussing on Aberdeenshire. The Working Group fully supports this initiative and recommends that NCCSS does the same.

(5) Publication

Given that the recording parameters have been set and agreed for any project it is not (certainly at this stage) the role of NCCSS to determine the format of publication. The pilot project will need to make the decision on how best to disseminate its results, with an understanding of long-term consistency for an entire corpus project. There are certainly two basic elements which the Working Group identified as of crucial importance. The inventory recording of each of the sculptures and a set of accompanying essays for each volume to fully bring out the intricacies of context (local, national and international) and including appropriate comparisons with non-Scottish material.

(6) RCAHMS list

It was agreed that the list of known early medieval carved stones (prepared and circulated to the Working Group by Lesley Ferguson of RCAHMS) should be circulated for wider consultation to identify potential omissions and errors. Returns and comments should be sent direct to Iain Fraser at RCAHMS.

This report concludes the work of the Working Group as envisaged when it was established. The initiatives now set in train can proceed without the Working Group and any NCCSS involvement can be achieved through the main Committee and any necessary co-options to that Committee, though if deemed necessary a new working group can be set up at some future date. It only remains for me to thank the members of the Working Group for giving their time and hard work to the Group's deliberations.

Mark Hall
Chair, EMSS Working Group
18 November 2005

Notes

1. John Higgitt, 2005, 'Towards a 'New ECMS': the proposal for a new Corpus of Early Medieval Sculpture in Scotland', in S. Foster and M. Cross (eds) 2005, *Able Minds and Practised Hands Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the 21st Century*, Leeds (=Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 23), 37-80.

2. Rosemary Cramp, 1984, *Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament A General Introduction to the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, Oxford (British Academy & Oxford University Press).
3. J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson, 1903, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 3 parts, reissued in 2 volumes in 1993 by the Pinkfoot Press, Balgavies, with an introduction by Isabel Henderson.
4. The RCAHMS NUMLINK is usually given as part of a site's entry in the National Monuments Record (most readily accessed online via CANMORE; of course newly reported stones will need to be given a NUMLINK by the RCAHMS).