

PART

1

Background and aims

1.1 Carved stones

1.1.1 For the purposes of this document, ‘carved stone’ is used as a generic term for what in Scotland can be broadly categorised under the headings of:

- prehistoric rock art
- Roman, early medieval, later medieval and post-reformation sculpture
- architectural sculpture
- architectural fragments
- gravestones.

(More information about this range of carved stones is provided below).

These represent an extraordinary cultural resource spanning over 5,000 years of human activity in



Figure 1 Carved Stones are all around us: a gravestone from Melrose Abbey, Scottish Borders.

Scotland; they are an important and significantly large proportion of the monuments and artefacts that survive from past times (Fig 1). Such worked stones provide evidence for the beliefs and technological skills of our ancestors, how life varied from one part of Scotland to another and how this differs from elsewhere in the world. Carved stones help to define the character of our environment and present-day identities, both local and national. They have enormous and largely untapped potential, particularly for sustainable tourism and educational initiatives; but they require active conservation.

1.1.2 The emphasis here is on carved stones that are still physically associated in some way with their place of manufacture or one of their stages of use, rather than carved stones that are now found as artefacts in off-site museums. No attempt is made specifically to address the needs of recent monumental public sculpture. Nonetheless, there is much here that we hope will be of wider relevance.

1.2 Background to this document

1.2.1 Scotland’s first policy statement on carved stones was produced in 1992.¹ In preparing this new statement Historic Scotland has drawn on 120 years of their and their predecessor bodies’ experience of dealing with carved stones. This revised policy statement was the subject of a three month consultation period early in 2004 and has benefited considerably from the feedback received.

1.3 Aims

1.3.1 This policy and guidance is primarily aimed at those with a professional interest in carved stones and/or responsibility towards their conservation as part of the historic environment, although it contains much that is of interest to a wider audience.

¹ Historic Scotland 1992 *Carved Stones: Historic Scotland’s Policy*.

1.3.2 In producing guidance that updates and supersedes our 1992 policy we are seeking to effect:

- the protection and optimum conservation of what is likely to be deemed to be significant by future generations
- the assessment and understanding of a monument's cultural significance before any decisions are made regarding its future or any changes to its fabric or setting
- the interpretation of a carved stone or a place associated with a carved stone in a manner appropriate to its cultural significance
- conformity with and contribution to the development of national and international best conservation and interpretation practice
- the full use of existing expertise to further our understanding of carved stones in general
- the encouragement of interest in carved stones and awareness of the importance of this resource and of the need for concerted local efforts if the most significant examples from throughout Scotland are to be adequately understood, protected and conserved for future generations to appreciate
- the definition of what Historic Scotland can do and what it should encourage and facilitate others to do, and the responsibilities of other national and local bodies.

1.3.3 A distinction is made between strategic policy that the Ministers will seek to uphold (see 2.0), operational policy that relates specifically to the work of Historic Scotland (see 3.0), and more general guidance for everyone to follow when dealing with carved stones (see 4.0). For ease of cross-reference, each of these is presented in this document under five general headings:

- Legal protection
- Raising awareness
- Conservation strategies and practice, including intervention
- Research and information
- Historic Scotland setting example of best practice.

1.3.4 To help with the implementation and application of the policy and guidance contained in this document, Historic Scotland intends to produce strategies and action plans for the conservation of carved stones in general and specific categories of carved stone. The Agency will seek to involve key stakeholders in their development and make them available on its website.

Other organisations are encouraged to do the same for their own areas of responsibility.

1.3.5 Historic Scotland may also be able to offer financial support towards the conservation of carved stones (see Appendix D).

1.4 Why produce generic policy and guidance for the treatment of carved stones?

1.4.1 The guidance recognises the shared attributes of carved stone and embraces all types, rather than individual types of sculpture. Most obviously, these types of monuments are often prone to the same range of threats. Formed from stone that has been worked to a greater or lesser degree by human hands, they share vulnerability to environmental erosion, which varies with the geology of the stone in question, and hence demand the same type of specialised conservation (Fig 2). The fact that they are often ornate and beautiful monuments in their own right increases their historic and present value in monetary as well as cultural terms. Many, particularly those that are already portable, are unfortunately vulnerable to theft. They can also be vulnerable to inappropriate human management practices, whether associated with land management (e.g. allowing grazing

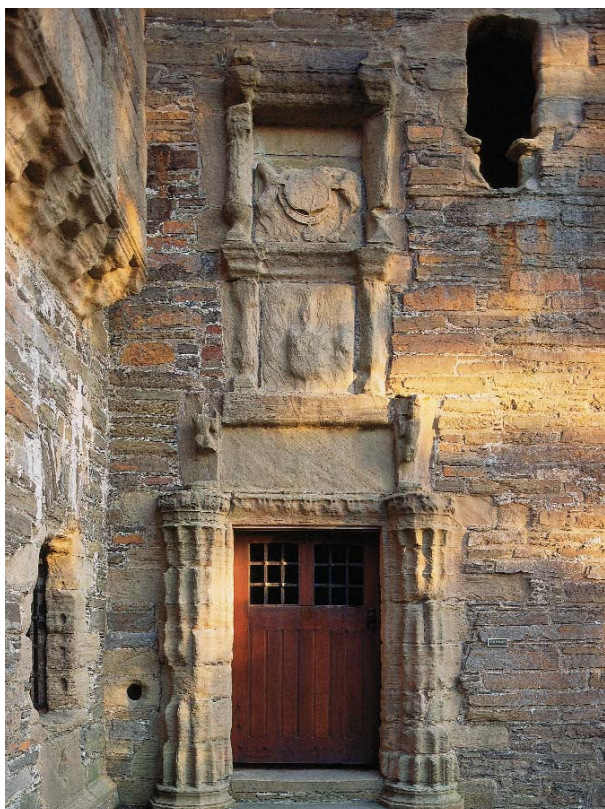


Figure 2 Carved Stones are often vulnerable to weathering and environmental erosion: external doorway at Earl's Palace, Kirkwall.



Figure 3 We can inadvertently damage carved stones: cattle congregating on prehistoric rock art in Dumfries and Galloway.

animals to stand on carved rock surfaces: Fig 3) or the enthusiasm of visitors (touching, rubbing, chalking or cleaning of carved stones).

Vulnerability to such threats will, in part, be a factor of where the carved stones are located and whether or not they are portable.

1.4.2 A carved stone may have a dual identity – is it a monument or is it an artefact? This is not simply a question of formal legal definition, but is bound up with the related issues of ownership and ‘belonging’ (the perceived relationship between monument, community and place that can be particularly important in local perceptions of identity).² Carved stones can be both monuments in their own right and parts of larger monuments – a gravestone and a part of a graveyard, a decorated archway and part of a church. In each case carved stones have a strong association with their place of use. However, once they become technically portable (they are not earthfast or wallfast), on the basis of their present form and context, the law tends to regard them as artefacts (Fig 4). This has implications for how and if they can be legally protected, who then legally owns them, where and how they are administered and by whom. This in



Figure 4 Now a portable artefact in legal terms, this 12th-/early 13th-century architectural fragment originally formed part of Dryburgh Abbey, Scottish Borders, although its precise function is unknown.



Figure 5 On behalf of Scottish Ministers, Historic Scotland looks after some of the most important carved stones in Scotland: 16th-century MacLeod's tomb, St Clement's Church, Rodel, Western Isles.

turn may have implications for how the physical association between a carved stone and its place of use is retained.³

1.5 Ownership, responsibility and protection

1.5.1 Identifying owners of carved stones can be complicated (see Appendix A). As with any monument, the owner or legal guardian is responsible for the conservation of the carved stone, although there is unlikely to be a legal obligation to take any action. Historic Scotland provides advice on the appropriate action for scheduled ancient monuments, the local authority provides advice on those that are not scheduled.⁴

² Jones 2004 *Early Medieval Sculpture and the Production of Meaning, Value and Place*, section 6.1.

³ This distinction, its history and implications as related to early medieval sculpture, can be found in Foster 2001 *Place, Space and Odyssey*.

⁴ In the case of Category A listed buildings, the local authority may need to forward relevant enquiries to Historic Scotland.



Figure 6 Museums play a vital role in caring for portable carved stones: Tarbat Discovery Centre, Highland, contains a very important collection of early medieval carvings from the Pictish monastery on which it is sited.

1.5.2 Scottish Ministers have the powers to undertake any works urgently necessary for the preservation a monument that is not in their care.⁵ Local authorities can serve a ‘repairs notice’ on a listed building, specifying works considered reasonably necessary for its proper preservation.⁶

1.5.3 Over 330 scheduled ancient monuments are in the direct care of Scottish Ministers and conserved and protected on their behalf by Historic Scotland. These include very significant collections of sculpture of all periods and types, as well as individual monuments (Fig 5).

1.5.4 The type of legal protection that can be applied to a carved stone will depend not only on the significance of the carved stone but also on whether or not it is movable and where it is (see Appendix B). Both the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (the 1979 Act) and Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 (the 1997 Act) can be applied to the legal protection of carved stones.

1.5.5 An estimated 4,000-5,000 examples of portable carved stones of all periods are owned by and/or in the care of museums in Scotland. Such museums, most of which are administered by local authorities, therefore play a significant part in caring for this important aspect of Scotland’s heritage (Fig 6). They also play an invaluable role in interpreting and raising awareness of the carved stones that are not housed in collections.

1.6 Range of carved stones

1.6.1 Prehistoric rock art is an ‘artificially created mark that is cut, engraved, incised, etched, gouged, ground or pecked into, or applied with paint, wax or other substances onto, a rock surface’.⁷ In a Scottish context this means carved stone boulders (Fig 7), slabs or surfaces, which may form part of natural bedrock, be earthfast or incorporated into a structure (they have an architectural function). The carvings usually originate in the Neolithic or Bronze Age, but are sometimes reused in later contexts. A newly recognised phenomenon, found in some



Figure 7 Prehistoric rock art in Scotland is found in a variety of contexts: this carved boulder forms part of a stone circle in Perth and Kinross.

⁵ Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, section 5.

⁶ Historic Scotland 1998 *Memorandum of Guidance*, 3.30.

⁷ Bournemouth University and Institute of Archaeology 2000 *Rock Art Pilot Project*, 13.

Figure 8 Sculptures from Whithorn, Dumfries and Galloway, include evidence for the earliest documented Christians in Scotland, from the 5th century AD.



Neolithic tombs and houses, is so-called scratch art. A preliminary analysis suggests that there are at least 1,640 examples of prehistoric rock art in Scotland, about half the number of the known examples in Great Britain as a whole. By its very nature, much of this is in the open, predominantly in the countryside where it is vulnerable to a range of threats, not least erosion. Less than 10% of these are protected by scheduling.⁸ Scottish prehistoric rock art encompasses enormous regional variety, as well as some of the most spectacular and important examples in the British Isles, some of which are in the care of Scottish Ministers. A recent assessment of the regional, national and international importance of rock art in Great Britain reveals its value both as an academic resource and as a highly visible and publicly accessible component of the historic environment.⁹ We are beginning to explore with fellow British and international organisations how the needs of Scotland's prehistoric rock art might be addressed, sharing experience and good practice.

1.6.2 Scotland possesses one of the richest bodies of early medieval carved stones in Europe and certainly the most diverse range to survive anywhere in the British Isles (symbol-incised stones, symbol-bearing cross-slabs, cross-slabs, cross-incised stones, free-standing crosses, shrines, hogbacks, architectural sculpture, etc). It provides a unique insight into the early medieval peoples of Scotland

and is critical to understanding the formative period of the Scottish nation (AD 450-1050). It is a rich vein of source material in a period with few written records. It provides insights into: the nature of pre-Christian ritual practices; the introduction of Christianity to Scotland and its impact on society; the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authorities; the movement of different peoples speaking different languages into Scotland; the structure and evolution of early medieval society; and Scotland's place in the intellectual and cultural developments of this period, its intellectual horizons and contacts (Fig 8). There are estimated to be nearly 1,800 early medieval carved stones in Scotland, of which around 350 individual sculptures are scheduled ancient monuments (or form part of scheduled ancient monuments) in the care of Scottish Ministers and a further 180 or so are scheduled and in the care of others. Historic Scotland has produced a single Interpretation Plan for all the early medieval carved stones in our care with the aim of demonstrating how these monuments might be interpreted and presented to

⁸ Scheduling is a passive form of protection, but scheduled ancient monuments are visited on 3-5 year cycles by Historic Scotland's Monument Wardens who assess the condition of the sites and try to persuade their owners to improve their condition with advice, and sometimes financial assistance, from Historic Scotland.

⁹ Bournemouth University and Institute of Archaeology 2000 *Rock Art Pilot Project*, 47-51.

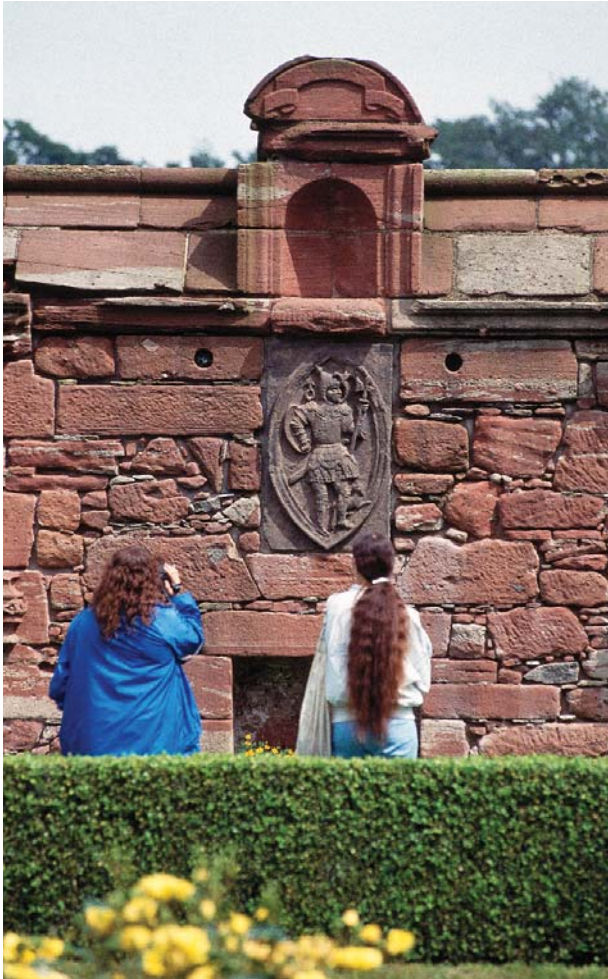


Figure 9 Gardens may also contain important Scotland, as here in the early 17th-century formal gardens at Edzell in Angus.

the public.¹⁰ The NCCSS¹¹ is taking the lead in establishing what a 21st-century corpus of such carved stones should contain, an initiative that will be of relevance to other types of carved stones.

1.6.3 In the later medieval period Scotland witnessed spectacular ecclesiastical and secular building campaigns (churches and castles, for instance), high status buildings that were often highly decorated. Scottish urban architecture also has its origins in this period. The majority of the surviving carved stones from this period therefore fall under the categories of architectural sculpture, architectural fragments and gravestones (see below), although garden sculpture (Fig 9) and public monuments, such as graveyard and market crosses, also date from this period.

1.6.4 *In situ* architectural sculpture largely dates from no earlier than the medieval period (most Roman and all early medieval architectural sculpture to date has only been discovered *ex situ*; carved stone within prehistoric buildings is considered under the category of prehistoric rock

¹⁰ Historic Scotland 2003a *Early Medieval Carved Stones in Historic Scotland's Care*; Foster 2005 forthcoming, Know your properties, recognise the possibilities.

¹¹ National Committee on Carved Stones in Scotland.

Figure 10 Aside from its artistic, historic and technological values, architectural sculpture often has particular merit as being one of the most useful means by which the dates of buildings can be most readily assessed in the absence of documentary sources, although this is usually on art-historical grounds rather than because the carving is dated: a dated lintel from a towerhouse at Greenknowe, Scottish Borders.





Figure 11 Gravestones are potentially one of the best guides to the activities of masons working in particular areas and are a unique source of evidence for regional variations: examples of West Highland medieval graveslabs from Kilmodan, Argyll and Bute.

art). It ranges from decorative items (such as finials from buttresses, canopies of decorative niches, blind tracery, arcading, etc) to moulded stones which have a definite architectural or structural function (such as window tracery, vault ribs, column shafts, etc). These types of carved stones are to be found in properties in care,¹² scheduled ancient monuments,¹³ churches in use and other sites (Fig 10). This is a resource that has not been quantified.

1.6.5 Architectural fragments are the large (but unquantified) assemblage of carved stone that were once part of the fabric of buildings but are now physically divorced from their former fabric (they are *ex situ*). Individually, or as assemblages, these may be very important indeed, adding a missing dimension to the understanding of how a building was used and what it originally looked like. Such carved stone is the direct responsibility of Historic Scotland when it is associated with properties in its care. All of our artefacts have entries in the Artefacts Collections Database maintained by our collections manager. Our knowledge of architectural sculpture has been enhanced since 1996 with the introduction of a programme of compiling site inventories.¹⁴ These unpublished reports provide a snapshot in time of the condition of the collection and are valuable for tracking and

auditing purposes. Each stone has an identification number as a part of this process. Where specific carved stones or collections particularly merit further research, these have been identified. However, significant collections of architectural fragments can also be found throughout the country on sites in the care of others.

1.6.6 Gravestones are likely to be the most numerous form of carved stone, although there are no statistics to prove this.¹⁵ They are important for a very wide range of reasons. Often they are the only documents of ordinary people, they reflect the lives, beliefs and attitudes to death, burial and remembrance of past communities and individuals. They have enormous social significance as genealogical, epidemiological and historical records for a broad cross-section of the past population. An especially important element in the fabric of the historic environment of most local communities throughout Scotland, they can also retain modern symbolic and religious significance. The design and style of the gravestones is also of interest to art historians and can be appreciated by many (Fig 11). Their lettering is a unique cultural record that ranges from folk art to a highly skilled craft. In groups, as part of graveyards, gravestones contribute to the setting of important monuments and form historic landscapes in their own right.

1.6.7 Historic Scotland has encouraged and sponsored the appointment of the Council for Scottish Archaeology's Carved Stones Adviser, whose primary aims relate to graveyards and gravestones. This project is intended to be a successful and ready means of delivering Historic Scotland's objectives with regard to graveyards and gravestones through contact with professionals, interested groups and individuals. Relevant Historic Scotland guidance includes the 2001 *Guide for Practitioners on Conservation of Historic Graveyards* and the 2003 series of *Electronic Leaflets on Graveyards and Gravestones*. To date, graveyard surveys have been undertaken at four of our properties in care.

¹² A monument that has been formally taken into the care of Scottish Ministers under the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

¹³ A monument that has been protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

¹⁴ The Carved Stones Inventory Project has now recorded for the first time over 5,500 carved stones at some 40 properties in care. Copies of finished reports have been lodged in the Historic Scotland Library and NMRS. See also Mårkus 2003, Historic Scotland *ex situ* carved and moulded stones project.

¹⁵ The number of graveyards that exist is being assessed by the RCAHMS in liaison with the CSA Carved Stones Adviser.