

# PRESS INFORMATION

## THE ST VIGEANS STONES FAQs

### **Why are the stones so special?**

Partly because they include a lot of human detail, telling us about how the Picts lived. There are also rare details like St Paul (not the apostle) and St Antony, the first Christian monks, breaking bread in the desert. They sought a life of purity and worship away from the sinfulness and temptation of society. The ideals and practices of these saints were brought from Egypt, through Europe to Ireland where they had a profound effect on early monasticism. These ideas were then brought to what we now know as Scotland by Irish monks participating in the conversion of the Picts.

### **How important are they?**

They are the first rank of importance alongside the Early Medieval carved stone collections at Meigle, St Andrews, Whithorn and Iona, all in the care of Historic Scotland.

### **Why are they at a small village near Arbroath?**

St Vigeans may be a small village now, but it was once a royal centre with an important monastery. Indeed, Arbroath was just the port which served St Vigeans.

### **When do the stones date from?**

Many of the stones come from the decades before 843 AD when the Pictish kingdom was united with Gaelic Dal Riata under a single monarch – leading to the birth of Scotland. The stones are among the last and very finest expressions of Pictish art, which makes them tremendously important.

### **How many are there?**

The collection consists of 38 stones and fragments. Some 32 are Early Medieval in date and many are carved with superbly crafted symbols and images of birds, animals and holy men, as well as scenes from Scripture.

### **Are there any particular highlights in the collection?**

The most famous is the Drosten Stone, a cross slab with ornate cross and fantastic beasts. It bears an inscription – which is very rare for a Pictish stone – which features the names *Drosten* along with *Uoret* and *Forcus* (Fergus). Who these people were is not entirely clear but Drosten is a Pictish name, and he could have been a priest or a nobleman, and indeed there is a St Drosten. There is also a St Fergus. Uoret may have been the King Uurad, son of Bargoit, who died around 842 AD.

**Is the name St Vigeans significant?**

It certainly is. Historic Scotland commissioned research into the collection from renowned experts. This ranged from geological analysis to art historical and placename research. The research establishes St Vigeans as a cult centre of the Irish saint, St Féchin (who died around 664 AD). His name was changed to Vigean in the local tongue. It may also have been a significant pilgrimage centre, perhaps due to the presence of relics of the saint.

**What would the stones have been used for?**

These large stone crosses would originally have been set up as monuments, boundary markers and gravestones for Pictish lords and priests on the church hill at St Vigeans.

**What happened later?**

The stones were eventually taken down in the later Medieval period and many were reused as building materials for the church. This allowed quite a number to survive. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were either on display in the porch of the church or lying in the kirkyard. Their importance was acknowledged and they came into state care in 1961 at which point they were placed in the museum which HS has just upgraded.

**Where is the museum?**

The museum is in the village of St Vigeans, one mile from Arbroath off the A92.

**When is it open?**

It is open during the summer season from April to October on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 3pm. Opening times between November and March are from 10am to 1pm. Tickets are £3.70 for adults, £3 for concessions and £1.85 for children. Telephone 01241 878756.

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