

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



ARTEFACTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE									
H	N	D	1	3	S	E	0	2	7
2 NGR		3 QUAL							
N	D	1	9	8	1	3	3	1	5
6 SITE NAME									
L	A	T	H	E	R	O	N		

4 DISTRICT	CAITHNESS	5 PARISH	LATHERON
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7 GENERIC TYPE	
CROSS SLAB (PICTISH CLASS II, ALLEGED) + OGHAM INSCRIPTION	
11 PERIOD/DATE	12 DATING METHOD
EM (PIC)	TYP
15 EXCAVATOR AND DATE	
16 EXCAVATION RECORD NO.	

8 CONCORDANCE	9 MUSEUM/LOCATION OF FIND(S)	10 ACCESSION NO.
OS ND 13 SE 27	RMS (QUEEN STREET)	IB.183

13 FIND CIRCUMSTANCES	14 CONDITION
STRAY FIND	-

17 LAND USE	18 GEOLOGY

19 SOILS	20 VEGETATION

21 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE	22 RELIEF	23 ASPECT	24 ALTITUDE

25 DETAILED DESCRIPTION/DIMENSIONS

26 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)

1. RCAHMS: 1911: CAITHNESS INVENTORY: HMSO: : pp82-83: No. 299
2. ANDERSON, J: 1903-4: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT: : Vol. 38: pp534-538
3. (DONATION): 1903-5: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT: : Vol. 39: pp117-118
4. BATEY, C: 1982: CAITHNESS COASTAL SURVEY: DURHAM U.P.: : p90: LAT 257
5. RCAHMS: 1985: PICTISH SYMBOL STONES, A HANDBOOK: HMSO: Pp 10-14
6. JACKSON A: THE SYMBOL STONES OF SCOTLAND: ORKNEY PRESS: PP 174-200

27 GROUND PLAN NO.	28 GROUND PHOTO NO.
29 SLIDES NO.	30 HR. AP. NO.
31 NMR. AP. NO.	32 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE
33 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION	
34 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY	35 SAMPLES
36 PALYNOLOGY	37 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.
38 OTHER	

39 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER	40 ATTITUDE OF OWNER

41 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT	42 ATTITUDE OF TENANT

43 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE	45 RECORDER: DATE	46 CHECK: DATE
	MWC: 5.2.1986	R.M.M. 14/2/1986

47 TEXT

"A rectangular slab bearing on one face a double rectangular figure in relief with double-spiral and interlaced patterns; below it, incised, a bird, a fish, and two horsemen; and down the left side of these inscriptions, a line of Ogham characters reading DUNNODNNAI MAQQ NETO, which was noticed in 1903 in the inside wall of a barn 1/4 mile (0.4km) S of Latheron Post Office was donated to the NMA in 1905 by Sir Francis Tress Barry (Acc.No.IB 183)." (1) (2) (3)

"This symbol stone was found at ND 1981 3315." (OSFI:NKB:25.31968)

"See continuation cards for text and illustrations." (2)

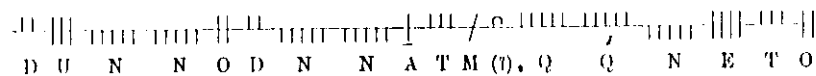
"SEE HNC 80 SW 013 FOR FOLDER ON OGHAMS."

NOTICES OF A SCULPTURED STONE WITH OGHAM INSCRIPTION, FROM LATHERON, PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM BY SIR FRANCIS TRESS BARRY, BART., M.P., HON. F.S.A. SCOT., KEISS CASTLE, CAITHNESS; AND OF TWO SCULPTURED STONES, RECENTLY DISCOVERED BY REV. D. MACRAE, B.D., AT EDBERTON, ROSS SHIRE. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT-SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The Latheron Stone.—This stone was found last year in the wall of an old byre in Latheron, and brought to Sir Francis Tress Barry at Keiss Castle, where I saw it in August last. I had previously received photographs and squeezes of the stone, and I had ample opportunity, during my stay there, of studying the stone itself and endeavouring to determine the more obscure portions of the inscription.

The stone (fig. 1) is a rectangular slab from the greyish beds of the Caithness sandstone, measuring 3 feet in extreme height by 17 inches in breadth and about 4 inches in thickness. The top and bottom are broken away, the fracture at the top passing obliquely across the stone, while that at the bottom is more nearly straight across. The stone appears to have had a marginal moulding along both sides, but that on the right hand side has been chipped away. The Ogham inscription runs the whole length of the stone on the left hand side, the stem line being drawn in a rude way parallel to the sunk line of the marginal moulding, and about an inch and a half inside of it. The whole face of the stone between the inscription and the right hand side is occupied with sculpture, partly in relief and partly incised.

The inscription is probably incomplete at both ends, owing to the breaking away of the stone at the top and bottom. What remains of it extends to 2 feet 8 inches in length and shows eighteen complete characters, and possibly part of a nineteenth. Read from the bottom to the top in the usual way they appear to be—



 D U N N O D N N A T M (T), Q Q N E T O

A single digit remaining of the nineteenth letter shows that it had been on the upper side of the stem-line. The characteristics of the inscription are chiefly normal, and northern. The A with the cross bar at the lower end occurs on the Lannasting stone, Shetland, on that from the Broch of Burrian, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, on the sculptured slab at Golspie, and on the sculptured slab from Formaston, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire. The letter after the M, which assumes the form of a semi-circle, appears in some lights to have a tail sloping to the right, but this seems to me to be an accidental score or flaw in the stone. A semicircular letter on the Lannasting stone has been read as O, and on the Formaston stone a letter which is a full circle bisected by the stem-line has been read as OI. The usual formula seems to demand that some equivalent of the key-word MAQQ should come here, and

DUNNODNNAT MAQQ NETO

Dunodnat son of Neto is obviously suggested, supposing that the inscription really begins at the break at the bottom.

This ogham is the second found in Caithness, and the seventeenth now known in Scotland. Of these, five are from Shetland, one from Orkney, two from Caithness, one from Sutherland, one from Nairnshire, four from Aberdeenshire, one from Kincardineshire, one from Fifeshire, and one from the island of Gigha, Argyleshire.

With regard to the sculpturings on the face of the stone, the double rectangular figure in relief on the upper part, with its prolongation of a narrower rectangle below, is not quite like any other form of the rectangular symbol, variable as it is. The upper and wider rectangle is filled with double spiral ornament arranged in C-shaped scrolls placed back to back. The lower and narrower rectangle is filled with an interlaced pattern.



Fig. 1. Sculptured Slab with Ogham Inscription from Latheron, Caithness. (1.)

299. *Sculptured Stone with Ogham inscription.*—Built into the wall, in the interior of the old barn mentioned in the previous paragraph, was found a few years ago a sculptured stone bearing an Ogham inscription. It is a rectangular slab of Caithness sandstone, and measures 3' in extreme height, 1' 5" in breadth, and about 4" in thickness. The top and bottom are broken away, the fracture at the top passing obliquely across the stone. The inscription runs the whole length of the stone on the left-hand side, but is probably incomplete owing to the fracture. What remains shows eighteen complete characters and possibly part of a nineteenth. The sculpturing, which is partly in relief and partly incised, and occupies the whole face of the stone, consists of the double rectangular figure in relief, the upper and wider rectangle filled with double spiral ornament arranged in C-shaped scrolls placed back to back, the lower and narrower filled with an interlaced pattern; and below, incised (1) a bird, (2) a fish, and (3) two horsemen (partly broken away).

The stone was discovered in 1903 by Mr. John Nicolson, Nybster, who brought it to Sir Francis Tress Barry, and the latter presented it to the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, where it now is.

(1)

Some thirty examples of Ogham inscriptions have been discovered on all three Classes of Pictish monuments, as well as on plain stones and on bone knife-handles. These inscriptions have all been transliterated into Roman script but, unfortunately, the results are quite meaningless and have given rise to the belief that the Picts spoke some unknown tongue.

It is generally agreed that the Picts borrowed the Irish Ogham alphabet and used it for their own purposes from the 8th and 9th centuries A.D. Basically, there are some twenty letters, which consist of one to five strokes made at different angles to a medial line (*fleasg*) and they are read from the bottom, vertically upwards of Fig.13. Unlike the Irish Oghams which follow set formulae and are generally memorials to the dead, the Pictish Oghams are variable in length and seem to contain no standard formulae. Half the Pictish Oghams occur on symbol stones and hence, if they really were funerary monuments, the use of Oghams would nicely complement the symbols. However, it has already been shown that the Pictish symbols serve other functions and since the Oghams display no obvious inscriptions like "To X, set up by Y, his son", it is also likely that the Oghams are not funerary statements either.

The problem can be better explained by looking at the inscriptions themselves. Fig 14 shows all the major inscriptions—some fragmentary Oghams are omitted.²⁵ Although the Oghams are set out to be read from left to right (our convention), it should be remembered that in fact they are read from bottom to top. Hence the page should be turned through a right-angle to gain a correct view, the left-hand side being at the bottom of the page. The translations of these Oghams are given in Table 28. It must be stressed that the renderings of these Oghams given here are only an attempt to give an overview of the inscriptions, since there are many difficulties in deciphering the strokes. This, then, is the kind of result that linguists have produced for us, even if some of the details are incorrect. It can be readily seen that the translations do not leave us any the wiser, give or take a few errors.

Name	Ogham groups	strokes	strokes total	strokes above/below fleasg
LATHERON	20	28,28	56	35/35
LOGIE				
ELPHINSTONE	12	7,14	21	16/6
LUNNASTING	40	28:28:25:25	106	61/67
NEWTON	26	7,28,39 +,7,14	95	51/84
N.UIST	11	14,21,3 →	38	31/15
ST NINIANS	18	14,21,19 →	54	33/44
SCOONIE	10	14,21	35	21/30
WEETING I	9	28	28	14/22
II	12	21,12	33	20/26

Table 27 : The Ogham strokes

→ indicates an incomplete inscription

17 LATHERON	DUV	<u>NODNNA</u> T <u>MAQQNA</u> HHTO...	PSAS xxxviii, 51
18 LOGIE			
ELPHINSTONE	CAULCHU		FCMS 176
19 LUNNASTING	<u>ETFCUHTTS</u> : <u>AUEHTHANN</u> : <u>HCCUVEVY</u> : <u>NEHTONS</u>		FCMS 17
20 NEWTON	<u>IDDARQNNNVORRENN</u>	IKU(A) KOSIE	FCMS 197/8
21 N. UIST	<u>M.QUINTENAC.T</u>		PSAS lxxvi 56
22 ST NINIANS	(...) <u>BESMEQQNANAMMOVVEZ</u>		FCMS 18
23 SCOONIE	<u>EDDARRNONN</u>		FCMS 347
24 WEETING I	<u>ULUCUVUTE</u>		Antiquaries Journal xxxii, 17
II	<u>GEDEVEM...DOS</u>		
*25 WHITNESS	<u>VNDAR</u>		PSAS lxxxi, 1913

Table 28 : OGHAMS: Transliterated

Triplets underlined (i.e. of the form: xyy)

* Omitted from further analysis because of their fragmentary state

A	↗	↘	(8) H	↗↘
O	↗↘	↗↘	(11) D	↗↘↗↘
(2) U	↗↘↗↘		(10) T	↗↘↗↘↗↘
E	↗↘↗↘↗↘	↗↘↗↘	(5) C	↗↘↗↘↗↘
I	↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘		(6) Q	↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘
(2) M	↗↘↗↘		(1) B	↗↘
G	↗↘↗↘		(5) L	↗↘↗↘↗↘
NG	↗↘↗↘↗↘		(7) V	↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘
Z	↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘		(1) S	↗↘↗↘↗↘
(17) R	↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘		(14) N	↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘↗↘

Undoubled (through strokes) Doubled (half strokes)
 Figures in brackets are the frequencies of doubled Oghams, e.g. ↗↘↗↘ (TT)

Figure 13 : Pictish Oghams

LATHERON

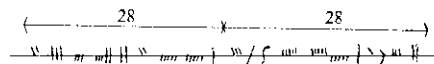


Figure 14 : The Ogham inscriptions

The only argument that the Oghams are a written form of language³⁰ is that presented by linguists, viz the appearance of certain 'words', among the 300-odd Ogham characters that exist. These words are *maqq*, *cross*, *Naiton* and *Edern*. Their occurrence is as follows:

<i>maqq</i>	Class	Location	Letters	No. of strokes
	II	Aboyne	<u>MAQQO</u>	14
	III	Altve	<u>AMMAQQ</u>	14
	II	Golspie	... <u>DMAQQ</u>	14
	II	Latheron	... <u>TMAQQNAHHTO</u> /	28
<i>cross</i>	III	Bressay	<u>CRROSCC</u> /	28
	III	Burrian	.. <u>(C)ERROSCC</u> /	28
<i>Naiton</i>	II	Aboyne	<u>NEHHT</u>	14
	III	Bressay	<u>NAHHTV</u> ...	14
	II	Latheron	.. <u>TMAQQNAHHTO</u> /	28
	Lunnasting		<u>NEHHT</u> ...	14
<i>Edern</i>	II	Brodie	<u>EDDAR(RN)</u>	14
	II	Scoonie		

Table 29 : The Ogham 'words'

The figures below this are merely incised, the lines being, as usual, picked out by a pointed tool. The bird is the raptorial bird represented on the sculptured monuments at Nigg, Strathpeffer, Monymusk, Birnie, Inveravon, Fyvie and St Vigean. It has the beak and the tail rendered in much the same manner as at Inveravon. The Fyvie bird is in better drawing, but has the same exaggerated spread of the upper part of the leg and the same rendering of the talons. At St Vigean the bird is represented as having the fish in its talons and stooping as if in the act of fixing its beak in the head of the fish. The bird occurs altogether eleven times on the monuments, ranging from Forfarshire to Caithness.

The fish here is of the usual form, the median line, the gill-cover, the eye, and the line of the mouth boldly rendered, and showing one dorsal and one caudal fin above, and a pectoral, ventral and caudal fin below, while the tail is rather exaggerated. The lower part of the outline of a fish, showing the three fins, is visible on the stone with an ogham inscription, which was found on the south side of Keiss Bay in 1896, and presented to the National Museum by Sir Francis Barry. A fish also occurs on the Ulbster sculptured slab, now at Thurso Castle. It occurs on the sculptured slab with an ogham inscription at Golspie, and in a slightly varied form on a small slab with incised symbols at Dmrobin, and on the pillar-stone called the *Clach Bhiarach* at Edderton. It occurs altogether fourteen times on the monuments, ranging from Perth to Caithness.

The group of the bird and the fish, representing the fish as the prey of the bird, however, only occurs twice on the monuments, viz., in this instance, and on the inscribed stone at St Vigean in Forfarshire. In both cases there can be no doubt that the bird is meant for the eagle. The group occurs also in the illuminated manuscripts of the early Celtic church—as in the Book of Armagh, written in the first half of the ninth century, where there is a page giving the symbols of the four evangelists, the symbol of St John being an eagle with a fish in its talons; and in the codex known as the *Grammatica Prisciani*, which was added to the library of St Gall in the middle of the ninth century. It occurs also in ecclesiastical sculpture on the doorways of early churches.

Below this group, at the bottom of the stone and partly broken away, is a group of two horsemen, which recalls the similar group of horsemen at the base of the cross-stone at Edderton, Ross-shire. This part of the stone has suffered some defacement, and the lines of the figures are difficult to make out, but the foremost rider seems to hold a spear over his shoulder, and the neck and head of the horse of the second rider are fairly visible.