

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



ARTEFACTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE H N D 1 6 S W 0 0 2 B

2 NGR N D 1 3 0 9 6 2 0 5 3 QUAL LO

6 SITE NAME S T T H O M A S ' S C H A P E L L

7 GENERIC TYPE
CROSS SLAB, PICTISH,
CLASS II

11 PERIOD/DATE EM 12 DATING METHOD TYP

15 EXCAVATOR AND DATE

16 EXCAVATION RECORD NO.

4 DISTRICT CAITHNESS

5 PARISH HALKIRK

8 CONCORDANCE
OS ND 16 SW 2
NMR

9 MUSEUM/LOCATION OF FIND(S)
THURSO MUSEUM

10 ACCESSION NO.

13 FIND CIRCUMSTANCES

14 CONDITION
RESTORED

17 LAND USE
CEMETERY

18 GEOLOGY

19 SOILS

20 VEGETATION

21 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE

22 RELIEF
LEVEL GROUND

23 ASPECT 360°

24 ALTITUDE
30 = 61m OD

25 DETAILED DESCRIPTION/DIMENSIONS

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

1. RCAHMS: 1911: CAITHNESS INVENTORY: HMSO: pp122-23, No. 445
2. ALLEN, J.R.: 1903: EARLY CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS IN SCOTLAND: : PT. 3: p30-33
3. MUIR, T.S.: 1855: ECCLESIASTICAL NOTES: : : p105
4. RCAHMS: 1985: PICTISH SYMBOL STONES, a handlist: HMSO: pp10-14

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
HAR: 20.3.1986

46 CHECK: DATE
MWC: 25.3.1986

47 TEXT

"See continuation card for text."

445. *Sculptured Stone, Thurso Museum.*—In the museum at Thurso lies in pieces a remarkably fine sculptured stone, taken from the chapel at Skinnet. It is a rectangular slab of sandstone 7' 6" in length, 2' 2" in width, and 7" in thickness, and is sculptured partly in relief and partly with incised lines on four faces, thus: *Front*—A cross in relief in the centre of the slab, having four equal arms with expanded ends and small round hollows in the angles; a long, narrow shaft, and a rectangular base. In the background, round the head of the cross, four circular bosses or medallions; on each side of the shaft a serpentine creature, and below the base a pair of stepping horses, evidently yoked together. The ornamentation consists of spiral work, interlaced work, plait work, and loops. *Back*—A cross in the centre of the slab, having a head with square ends and rectangular hollows between the arms: a long, narrow shaft, and a rectangular base, the outline being formed by a band, making a loop at each corner. Though much defaced, the cross had apparently been filled in with interlaced and spiral work. Below the cross is the triple oval symbol similar to that on the Sandside and Keiss stones (Nos. 407 and 577), and at the bottom of all, the crescent and V-shaped sceptre symbol, both symbols being decorated with spiral work in relief. *Right side*—Divided into three panels, one containing an eight-cord plait, another interlaced work almost obliterated, and the third being defaced. *Left side*—Defaced.

This stone was discovered by Mr T. S. Muir in 1861, and the circumstances of its discovery and the state in which it then was, are narrated in his *Ecclesiological Notes* quoted below. It was subsequently removed to Thurso Museum.

See Muir's *Eccles. Notes*, p. 105 (illus.): *Early Christ. Mon.*, pt. iii. p. 30 (illus.).

(1)

CLASS II.

Halkirk—Skinnet Chapel.—St Thomas' chapel at Skinnet is situated 4 miles S. of Thurso railway station on the W. side of the Thurso River (Inch Ordnance Map, Sheet 116).

(2)

This chapel was in early times the church of a parish, which, about the time of the Reformation, was united to the parish of St Fergus of Halkirk. The Skinnet stone originally stood, according to Dr Stuart, at the E. end of the building in the inside (*Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 41), but Mr Muir says it was at the W. end. His account of his discovery of the stone is so interesting that it may be quoted at length, as follows:—

“Nothing east up, except nettles, to keep us at St Drostan, but Skinnet unexpectedly furnished us with a couple of hours' work in examining the remains of the church—of St Thomas, I believe—and digging out, cleansing, and—though not quite successfully, as you see—finning a carved pillar, which I found sunk to its middle at the west end of the building. Besides our task of clearing away the rubbish which fastened it tightly below, we had nearly the whole length of the pillar to relieve from the grasp of the wall of the church, in the rearing of which the pillar seems to have been used as a stone of construction. Though assisted by men from the neighbouring farm, the work of sufficiently disclosing the stone took a good deal of time to do, as, from fear of hurting the sculptures, the instruments had to be used with great caution and delicacy. There was, to be sure, some tugging now and then, but I do not think we injured anything in the slightest, and on leaving I engaged the men to an instant replacement of the stone, as well also to an evermore watchful care of it, as it was one of the greatest wonders in all Caithness, and an honour to the neighbourhood!” (*Ecclesiological Notes*, p. 105.)

Since this was written in 1861 the stone has been removed to the Thurso Museum where I saw it on my visit (July 9, 1890). It was broken into six fragments, which were piled up one above the other on the floor under a bookcase. The fractures are in three directions at right angles to each other, the stone being broken across, lengthwise, and split up the middle, so that its restoration was no easy matter. The monument seems to have been entire when Muir saw it, and it would be difficult to use too strong language in condemning the stupidity or carelessness which is responsible for having damaged beyond hope of repair one of the finest sculptured slabs in Scotland. In the plate in Dr Stuart's second volume, published in 1867, two of the largest fragments as now existing are shown together, forming one stone without any fracture, but there is no indication of the stone being longer or of the existence of sculpture on the back. The slab as shown in Stuart is only 5 feet 9 inches long, but when the fragments in the Thurso Museum were all put together it turned out to be nearly 1 foot 9 inches longer with the additional pieces at the bottom. When restored, the whole was a rectangular slab of sandstone, 7 feet 6 inches long by 2 feet 2 inches wide by 7 inches thick; and sculptured, partly in relief and partly with incised lines on four faces thus—

Front (figs. 28 and 29).—A cross in relief in the centre of the slab, having a head with four equal arms with expanded ends and small round hollows in the angles, a long, narrow shaft, and a rectangular base.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



FIELD MONUMENTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE H N D 1 6 S W 0 0 2 A

2 NGR N D 1 3 0 9 6 2 0 5 3 QUAL CE

6 SITE NAME S T T H O M A S S ' S C H A P E L

4 DISTRICT CAITHNESS 5 PARISH HALKIRK

7 AREA STATUS 8 SITE STATUS SCHEDULED 9 REGIONAL STATUS

10 GENERIC TYPE CHAPEL + GRAVEYARD + CROSS-SLABS

11 CONCORDANCE OS ND 16 SW 2 12 FORM STANDING STRUCTURES 13 DIMENSIONS

14 PERIOD/DATE EM = LM 15 DATING METHOD TYP

16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS 17 CONDITION CHAPEL - RUINED GRAVEYARD - DISUSED

18 SHAPE 19 THREAT AND DATE

20 LAND USE CEMETERY 21 GEOLOGY

22 SOILS 23 VEGETATION

24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE 25 RELIEF LEVEL GROUND 26 ASPECT 360° 27 ALTITUDE 30 = 61m OD

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)

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

1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1970: 6" MAP
2. RCAHMS: 1911: CAITHNESS INVENTORY: HMSO: pp28-30; Nos. 91-93
3. : 1855: ORIGINES PAROCHIALES SCOTIAE: 2 pt. 2: 756
4. : 1795: OLD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND: : 19: 47
5. ALLEN, J.R.: 1903: EARLY CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS IN SCOTLAND: : PT. 3: p30-33
6. MUIR, T.S.: 1855: ECCLESIASTICAL NOTES: : : p105
7. STUART, J.: 1867: SCULPTURED STONES OF SCOTLAND: : 2: 41 /cont. PTO...

30 GROUND PLAN NO. 31 GROUND PHOTO NO.

32 SLIDES NO. 33 HR. AP. NO.

34 NMR. AP. NO. 35 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE

36 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION

37 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY 38 SAMPLES

39 PALYNOLOGY 40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.

41 SMALL FINDS 42 MUSEUM/LOCATION

43 OTHER

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER 45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER

46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT 47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT

48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS

49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE 50 RECORDER: DATE FAM: 18.3.1986 51 CHECK: DATE MWC: 25.3.1986

52 TEXT

"See continuation card for text."

"ND 131 620. Halkirk, St Thomas' Chapel." (9)

(HD 1309 6205) St Thomas's Chapel (HR) (Remains of) (1)

52.

The ruins of the Chapel of St Thomas are situated about 1/3 mile NE of Skinnet farm. In pre-Reformation times this was the church of a parish subsequently united to the parish of St Fergus of Balcirk. (2) (3) (4)

The S and W walls vary in height from 3 to 7 ft; the N wall is reduced to 2 or 3 ft, as is also the greater part of the E wall. On plan, the building has been of the chancelled type, measuring interiorly 59 ft 6 ins, whereof the nave measured 38 ft by 16 ft and the chancel about 21 ft by 13 ft. The walls, which have been built with clay for mortar, are 3 ft 6 ins in thickness. The entrance to the nave has been through the S wall at 12 ft from the SW corner, while an entrance to the chancel at its W end has also been through the S wall.

At the British Linen Bank House, Thurso, there is a rough ovoid stone measuring 1 ft 6 ins by 1 ft 3 ins, with a hollow basin 8 ins by 9 ins in diameter and 7 ins in depth, which was brought from the chapel and may have been a holy water stoup.

Standing some 6 ft out from the S wall of the chapel and towards the W end of it is an upright slab, measuring 4 ft 11 ins in height above ground, 2 ft 9 ins in breadth and 5 ins in thickness. On the W face are the remains of an equal-armed Celtic cross, with a central boss 2½ ins in diameter from which the arms radiate. Only the upper arm remains at all perfect, the rest of the face being almost effaced owing to the flaking of the surface of the stone. (5)

This arm expands upwards and is 1 foot in length, and 1'3½" broad at its outer end, where it is convex in outline. It is surrounded by a single moulding and contains a triquetra knot of interlaced ornament. At the point of intersection it is 2 feet in breadth.

Another sculptured stone taken from the wall of this chapel, in which it had been used as building material, is in Thurso Museum. It is a rectangular upright cross slab sculptured on four faces partly in relief and partly by incision, and bears the crescent and V-rod symbol. The left side is defaced. (see HND 16 SW 002 B)

The ruins of St Thomas's Chapel, on a natural hillock within a disused graveyard, are as described above. The upright cross slab some 2 m from the chapel is as described, and the other cross slab has been restored and is in Thurso Museum.

Published survey (1:2500) correct.

(OSF1:NKB:15.2.1982)