

# The Kincardine Stone

This has been described as The Pictish "David" Gravemarker



## Kincardine and the Picts

The gravemarker is all that survives of what must have been an important Pictish burial ground or burial chapel. It provides a glimpse of the people represented in the place name "Kincardine"; this contains the element "carden", wood or thicket linguistically and geographically considered to be Pictish.

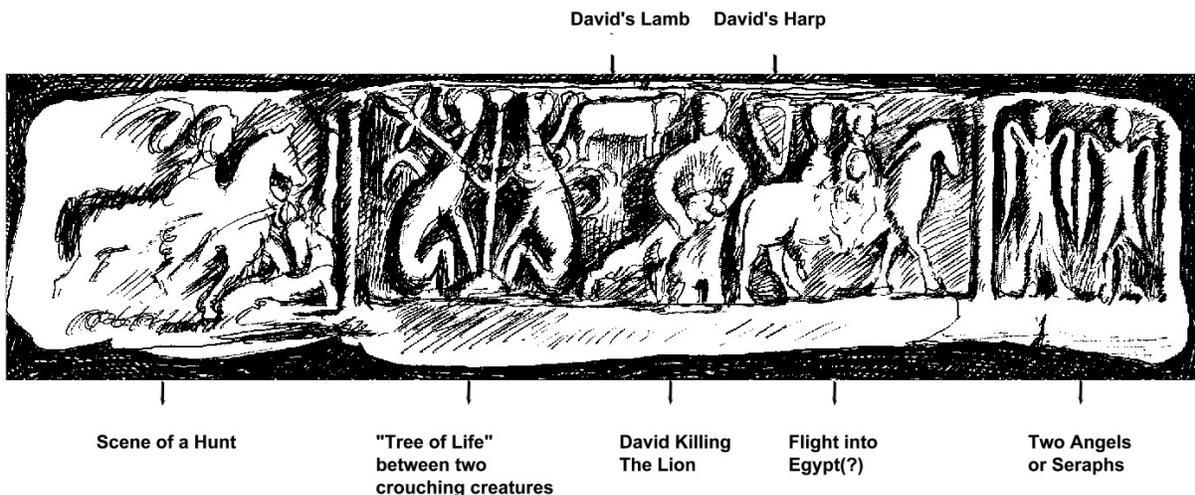
The Picts were a political power from around AD 502 to AD 900. Thereafter, a new the Kingdom called ALBA, came into being when the Picts and Irish speakers are from the west of Scotland merged.

## **Pictish Gravemarker**

The Kincardine gravemarker is the most northerly example of a type of monument unique to the Picts and carved from the mid eighth century

The Kincardine example measures 5 feet (1524 mm) by 1 foot 2 inches (355 mm) high and 1 foot 8 inches (548 mm) wide. It was intended it to be laid horizontally over a grave and would have been carved on most of the faces.

The best known examples of the type are found at Meigle, Perthshire and at St Vingeans, Angus, but in recent years a fragment was found at Rosemarkie (on display in Groam House Museum) and an almost a complete example turned up at of the Tarbet excavations (on display in the Tarbet Discovery Centre". Evidently this method of marking a grave was used in both northern and southern Pictland. No gravemarker has been found carrying of the well known Pictish symbols, but their art style is identical with that of the symbol bearing cross slabs.



## The Carvings

The carvings on the **long face** have been interpreted as David rendering the jaws of the lion and other subjects

The monument shape may have been chosen so that the carvings could be displayed on the sides. The carving on the Kincardine gravemarker is very worn but it was evidently set within panels in the usual Pictish manner. The recent recognition that one motif represents David rendering the jaws of the lion in order to save a lamb in his flock (Authorised Version 1 Samuel chapter 17 ) give the Kincardine grave marker special importance since this is the only example of scriptural imagery on a monument of this type.

David's heroic act of killing a lion or with his bare hands is one of the examples of Salvation cited in an early medieval prayer; "Deliver me O God, as David delivered the lamb from the month of the lion". The image it was therefore a very suitable one for a grave marker.

In a Pictish sculpture, the figure of David killing the lion is best known on the so-called Saint Andrew's sarcophagus. This takes the form of a stone box made out of panels slotted into corner posts. There is a figure of David killing the lion on the cross slab at Nigg and a fragment of such a figure from Draine, Kinneddar, now in the Elgin museum.

One or two mounted figures are represented to David's right.

The stag is a symbol of the soul which Christ yearns to capture.

The motif on the left of David shows two creatures on either side of a plant, feeding on its Fruit. This is a common way of evoking the words of Christ, "I am the true vine".

Two Angels are carved on the far right representing God's intermediaries on earth.

## The end carving

One of the narrow faces carries a section of carving which is difficult to interpret, two men, or perhaps two birds or animals, inclined towards each other. This may be a purely decorative motif but it has been suggested that the subject is the hermit saints, Paul and Anthony facing each other, as they break the miraculous loaf of bread brought to them. That scene was a favourite with Pictish sculptors. There is a detailed illustration of it on the Nigg cross slab, but more work will have to be done to decipher at this sculpture. Its position on the monument signals its importance. The example at Tarbet has a cross on a narrow face, which is unique, but which compares to the cross in this position on the Saint Andrew's sarcophagus. Some Pictish grave markers have slots on the top face, presumably for holding a cross.



**The Pictish David grave marker after the Pictish era.** Such monuments provided useful bits of building stone and were reused over the centuries, sometimes inserted in the walls of later mediaeval churches, perhaps in a spirit of reverence, but not necessarily. The Tarbet grave marker was built upside down into the walls of the 12<sup>th</sup> century church.

The Kincardine gravemarker was also turned upside down and two cells hollowed out possibly for ecclesiastical use but perhaps more probably to serve as a horse trough.



The slab is first recorded in the graveyard, in use as a grave store with apparently a modern inscription, now illegible, on the upper face. If this is true, then the hollowing out would presumably have taken place later period.



Closer examination of the monument may result in other suggestions for the experts, local people, and visitors. We would welcome your views on the carvings and on the nature of the later use of the monument. Originally it must have been commissioned by an influential section of society, wishing it to mark the grave and secure the salvation of an important man or woman. It is a battered but precious relic of the Christian picts of the Firthlands.

*The stone is now inside the Heritage Centre to protect it from the elements and can be viewed by arrangement. Let us know when you want to come and we can open up if the centre is not already open.*