

CARVED STONE CROSS FROM INCHMARNOCK

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The carved cross which is illustrated here came from Inchmarnock and can be seen in the Bute Museum. It is an unusual stone with its rather crude workmanship and somewhat confused design. No one who has seen it or photographs of it knows of a parallel. This is why we are publishing the drawing hoping that someone can tell us of a similar stone.

We thank Chris Unwin, who drew the stone, for her skilful and sensitive drawing of it.

It came from the chapel site on Inchmarnock. The saltire (St Andrew's Cross) symbol is later in the early Christian period rather than earlier, perhaps eleventh century.

An unusually rough schist was used to make it. As it is carved on each side it would have been free standing, perhaps one metre high. The shaft shows that it cannot have been set deeply in the ground as it seems unlikely that saltires would have been buried in the ground.

The part of the stone sketched in in the drawing represents a stone which I saw beside the chapel in 1986. It has not been seen since. The massive stone must have been unstable and may not have stood very long before it fell, breaking into at least three parts.

The design on the head of the cross is difficult to interpret. Two observers, Chris Unwin was one, thought they could distinguish two birds, with possibly a tree of life below them.

The Chapel Site

The chapel on Inchmarnock was dedicated to Saint Marnock who is thought to have been a contemporary of Saint Columba sixth-seventh century. His name was given to Kilmarnock and to Ardmarnock near Kilfinan.

The site was partially excavated in the mid-1970s on the initiative of Jessica Middleton, daughter of the farmer. Help was given her by members of the Bute and Cowal Archaeological Societies and her family. A team from the Royal Commission on Historic and Ancient Monuments spent four days drawing, planning and photographing the site.

Low foundations of the latest chapel were uncovered. There were fluted red sandstone pillars between the nave and the chancel, this showing features of the Baroque period. Red sandstone — not found on

Inchmarnock — was also used to embellish other parts of the chapel. A farmer last century took some of these stones to embellish his own farm house.

In the chancel a narrow long cist burial was uncovered lying against the South wall. A hog-back, triangular stone, with a much denuded carving of a sword, is near the North wall. Several possible grave slabs, one with a design with deep grooves, lie East–West in the chancel. In the nave there is the head of a ring cross well executed in fine grained schist.

The rim and handles of a soft buff ware with green glaze, part of a medieval inkpot, was found when digging in the nave. This may indicate a later use of the chapel than the carved crosses found suggest.

An interesting series of crosses has been found in and around the chapel. Some of these came over to Bute about one hundred years ago. The rest came over in 1986 when the island was put up for sale.

From the fragment of a marigold stone and a stone with a peaked cross with trident-ended arms we know that there must have been a Christian settlement in the sixth or seventh centuries. The latest stone to be found is the fragment of a cross with a runic inscription probably of the eleventh century. It is now in the Royal Museum of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh. The other stones can be seen in the Bute Museum.

Much could be learnt of the chapel site and its surroundings from further excavation. It is hoped that this may be carried out some time and a complete report written.

