

ART. I. *Two Newly Discovered Cup and Ring Marked Stones from Penrith and Hallbankgate, with a Gazetteer of all known Megalithic Carvings in Cumbria*

By PAUL N. K. FRODSHAM

'The five stones of the Old Parks Tumulus are slabs of sandstone, now fast weathering. Hence good illustrations are greatly to be desired, and in the future will become increasingly valuable.'

Rev. Canon Thornley (August 29th, 1901).

CUP and ring marks and associated forms of 'rock art' appear commonly throughout Northumberland, Yorkshire and much of Scotland, but are comparatively scarce in Cumbria. There is much evidence for human activity in Cumbria during the later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, the period from which these carvings undoubtedly originate, so their relative absence from our region remains a paradox.

At the time of writing there are only eighteen sites in Cumbria at which examples of what we shall term 'megalithic art' have been recorded. In total there are at least twenty-five individually decorated stones known, although at least two are of dubious antiquity and others have been dismissed by some as simply the products of natural weathering. Every example is on a 'portable' rock, although these rocks vary in size from slabs a few inches across to enormous glacial erratics and standing stones. This is in contrast to many examples from Scotland, Northumbria and Yorkshire, where large areas of exposed bedrock are decorated with dozens of adjacent cup and ring marks and other carvings. It certainly appears as though the population of Cumbria at the time that these carvings were executed was on the fringe of the rock-carving tradition; a fact which is surprising when one considers the abundance of carvings to the north, east, south-east, and to the west in Ireland.

The Cumbrian carvings consist of differing combinations of cupmarks, concentric rings, spirals and other designs. While most of them have been described in these *Transactions* over the years, it will surely be of use to catalogue them all here, so an illustrated gazetteer is included in this paper. While it is difficult to speculate in any great detail on the meaning or purpose of this ancient and enigmatic artwork, a brief discussion, in which a few ideas are suggested, follows the gazetteer and thus concludes this paper.

We will begin with analyses of the two newly discovered carvings, these being, to the best of my knowledge, the first examples of megalithic artwork to have been discovered in Cumbria since the stone at Dean was ploughed up in 1918.

The Stag Stone Farm Stone, Penrith

This stone was discovered by Sue Cotton in 1984 during work by British gas on the Longtown to Lupton pipeline. It was found at the base of a dry-stone wall on a verge to the south of Stag Stone Farm (at NGR NY 53663157). The stone is shown in Fig. 2 (drawn by Gavin Edwards), and also in Plate 1.

The decoration consists essentially of a single cupmark (3 cm in diameter and about

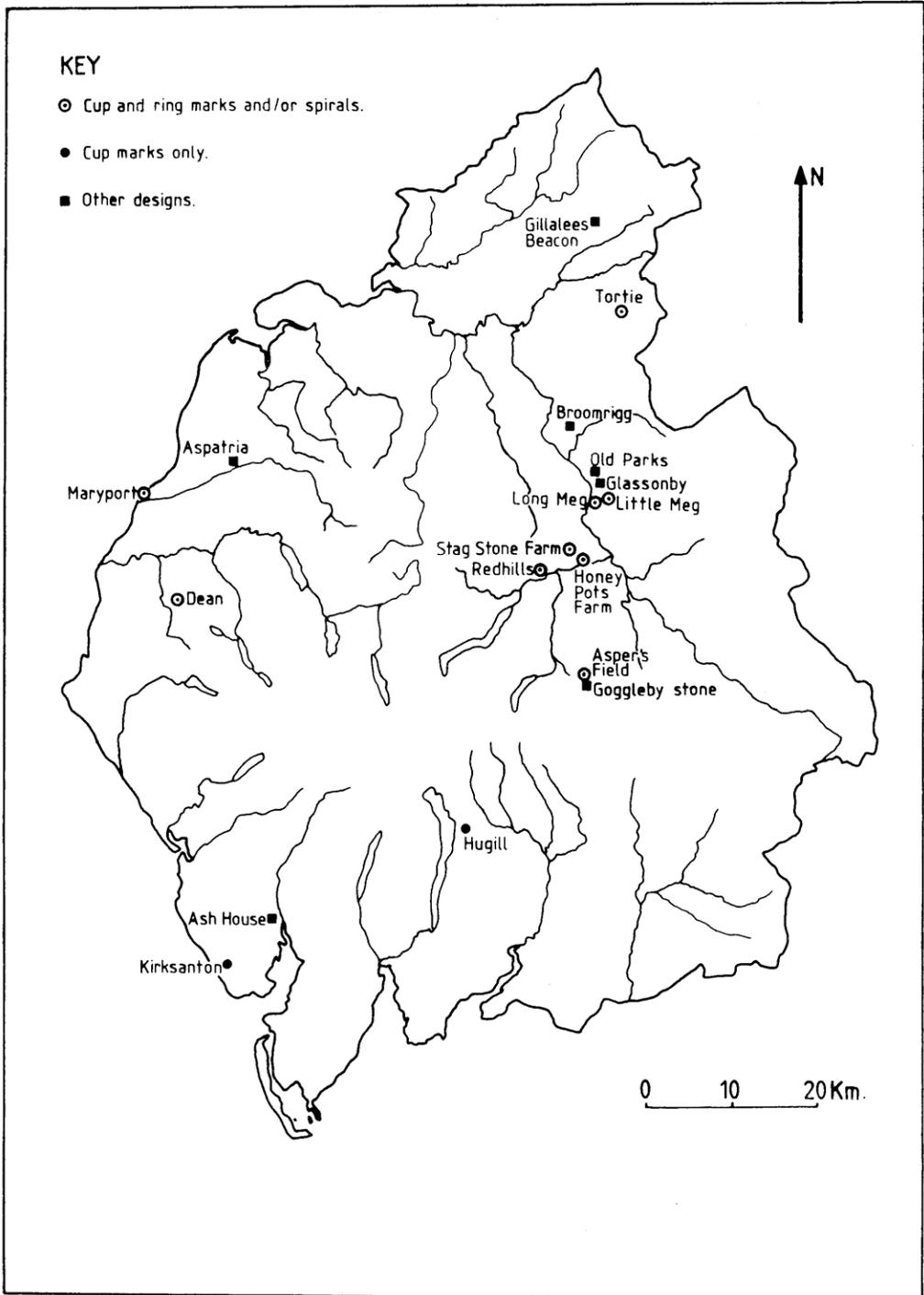


FIG 1. The distribution of cup and ring marks and associated prehistoric carvings in Cumbria.

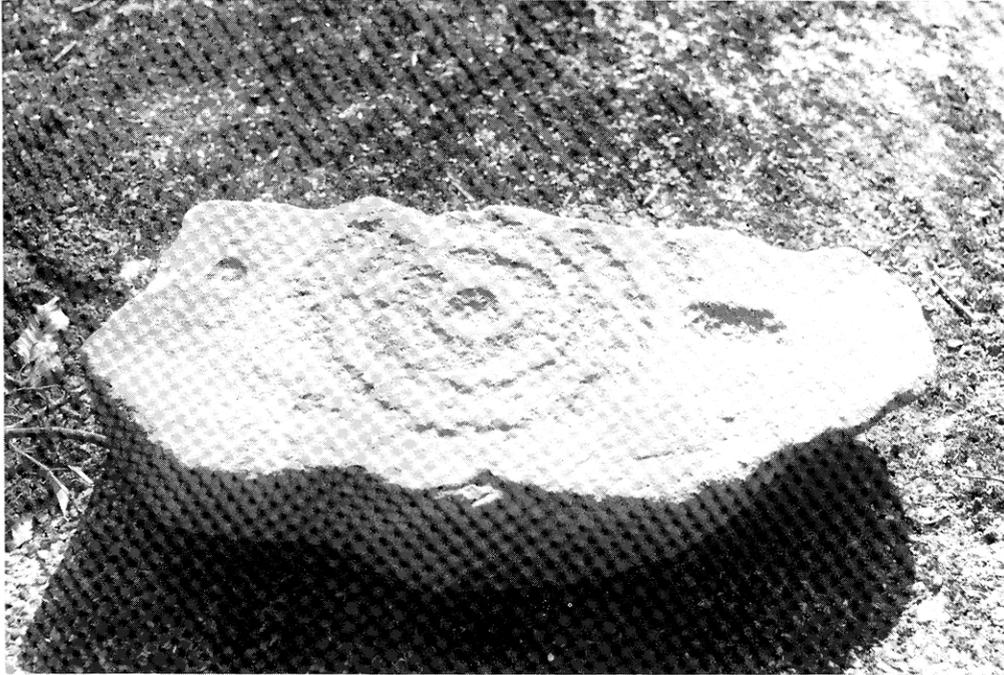


PLATE 1. The Stag Stone Farm Stone (see Fig 2. for scale).

1 cm deep at its centre) surrounded by three concentric but incomplete rings (each carved to an average depth of 0.5 cm, with the outermost ring having an external diameter of 22 cm). Peripheral to this design is one large (6.5 × 4.5 cm) rather elongated cupmark, adjacent to which is a mark which resembles a section of a fourth concentric ring, although no sign of such a fourth ring appears elsewhere on the stone. There is a second elongated cupmark (about 3 × 2 cm) on the opposite side of the rings from the large one, and it may be significant that the three major cups in the design are all situated on a single axis along the centre of the stone. There are also four other shallow depressions or pits in the stone (shown clearly in Fig. 2) but these may well be natural in origin.

An instantly noticeable feature of the design is that none of the concentric circles is actually complete, there being a 'causeway' through each of them at one point. Adjacent to this feature it will be seen from the diagram that the arc of the outermost ring passes over the edge of the stone, but we cannot be certain whether this was a feature of the original design or whether the stone has been broken during the millenia since the carving was executed. The surface of the stone is quite friable today, but as the stone is now safe within the sanctuary of Penrith Museum it should escape further damage at the hands of the Cumbrian climate.

This carving bears a close resemblance to the one from Dean (in the gazetteer). Both carvings have three rings, with a suggestion of part of a fourth ring adjacent to a large outlying cupmark, and both have a channel through all three rings, although in the case

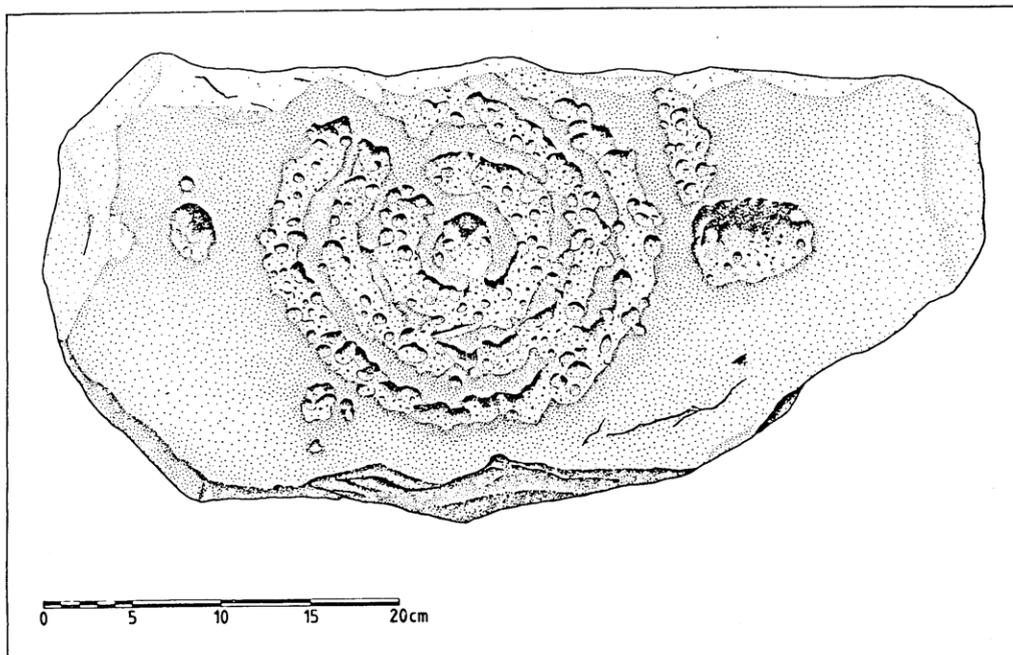


FIG 2. The Stag Stone Farm Stone (Drawn by Gavin Edwards).

of the Dean carving this channel is incised into the rock to accentuate its presence, rather than simply being left in relief. On a wider geographical scale the cup surrounded by two or three rings with a causeway through them is perhaps the most common form of carving, and in Cumbria such motifs are incorporated within the designs from Honey Pots Farm and Redhills (both in the gazetteer). Such similarity between these carvings is not coincidental: there is a meaning in them which was so universally recognized that people throughout very wide areas of northern Britain were somehow drawn to execute independently such strikingly similar designs.

The location of the find, at the base of a drystone wall, suggests that this was not its original setting. Unfortunately we have no clue as to the stone's original function, there being no indication of a tumulus or megalithic monument of any kind in the vicinity of the findspot. For now we must gratefully accept this stone as a most fortunate 'chance find', and hope that future work may perhaps throw some light on its possible origins.

The Tortie Cottage Stone, Hallbankgate

The carvings on this large boulder were discovered by Mrs Jennifer Waldron in January 1987. The boulder is in a prominent position on the hillside behind Tortie Cottage and is easily visible from the track below. It may be lying over the top of a small cairn as there are many small stones protruding from the ground beneath it. The field in which it is situated may prove to be of great interest as the writer has noticed that, while the field is largely devoid of boulders, there are two arrangements of irregular

stone 'oblongs' which each consist of four large stones set well into the ground. The most prominent of these arrangements is located within a few metres of the carved boulder, suggesting that perhaps the cup and ring carvings and the stone arrangements are interlinked in some way. The field at Tortie has been accurately surveyed and will hopefully form the basis of a subsequent paper.

The carved stone measures about 200 cm from north to south, 105 cm east-west, and stands some 55 cm clear of the ground, although it may extend down further below the present turf level. The carvings on the stone are now extremely faint, but some of them do become surprisingly clear in low sunlight. The stone would be very difficult to draw accurately as its markings are inscribed upon several faces: thus no diagram is included here and the two photographs form the only illustrations. All of the obviously artificial

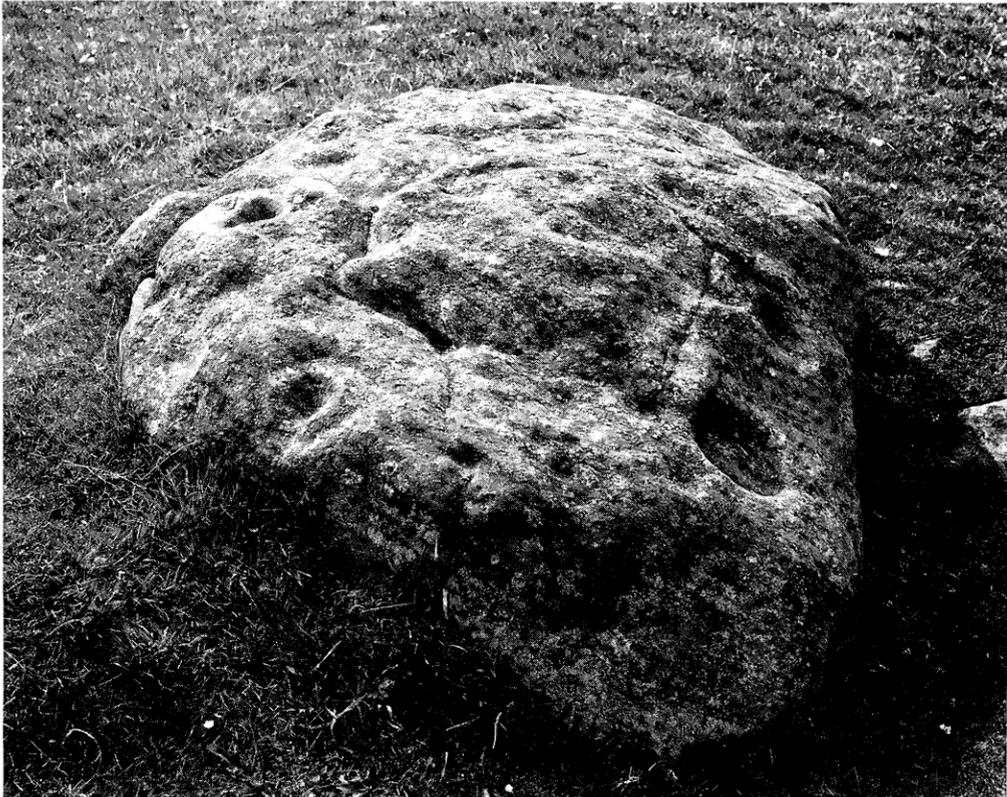


PLATE 2. The Tortie Cottage Stone from the North (photo by G. Pawle, Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery).

markings are chalked in in Plate 3, and these are clustered together towards the northern edge of the stone. They consist of four cups with a relatively well defined ring around each (the largest ring having an external diameter of about 13 cm), and also a 'disc' 14 cm in diameter with a slightly protruding centre rather than a hollow cup. At least one of the ringed cups has an apparently artificial channel running from it, through its ring, and down the stone towards the ground. Marks elsewhere on the stone, including several cuplike depressions on its southern half and some elongated grooves, may well

be natural, and the possibility of the artificial rings having been inscribed around pre-existing natural cups should not be discounted. The linear incisions which together enclose a rectilinear shape on the top of the stone (clearly visible on Plates 2 and 3) have

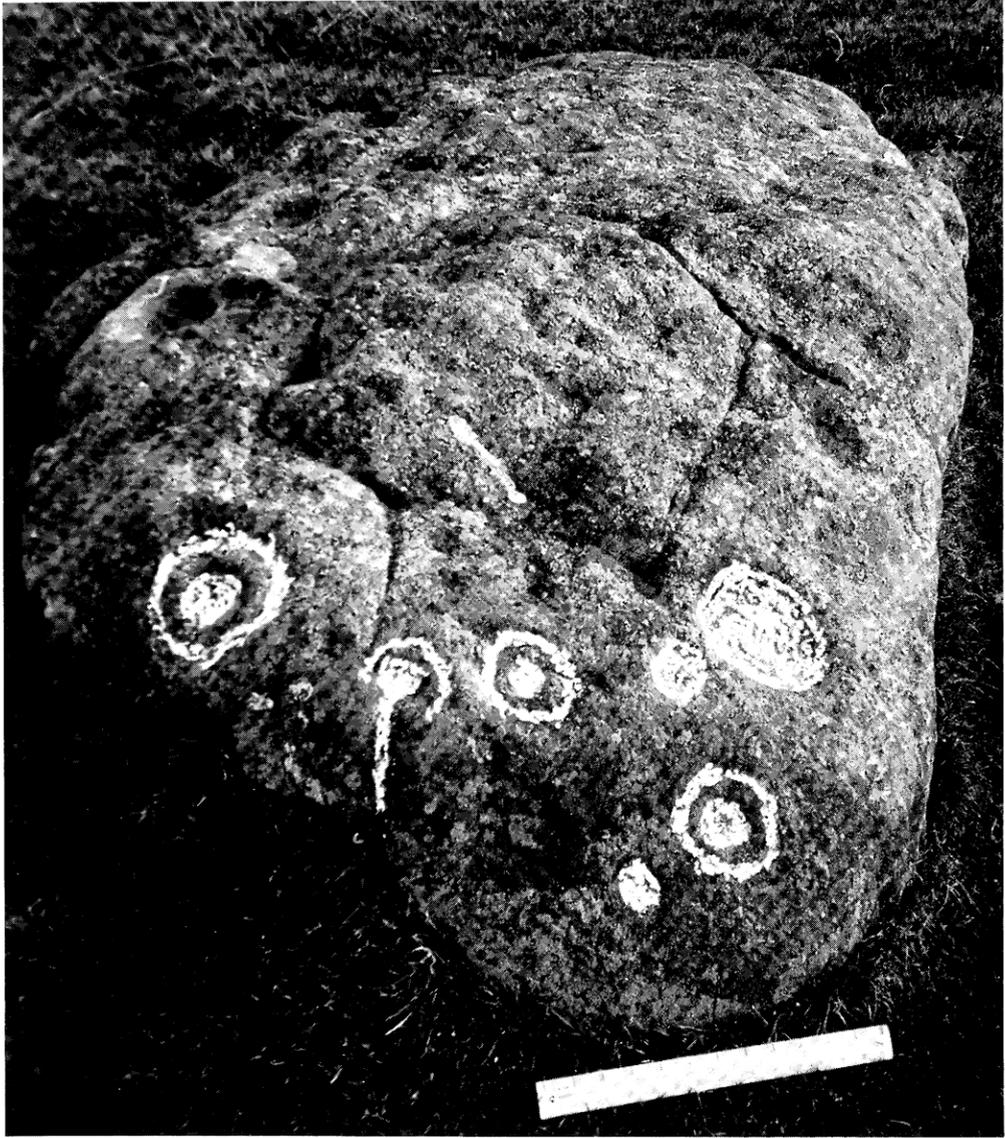


PLATE 3. The Tortie Cottage Stone: a similar view to that in plate 2, but with all the certain carvings chalked in. (The white mark above the carvings is a bird dropping!).

certainly been enlarged by natural erosion but may initially have been artificial in origin. Other markings on the stone may have been wholly lost to the elements, as indeed they may have been on one or two large stones in adjacent fields, but a brief survey failed to identify any further unambiguous carvings.

There is no close parallel for this stone in our region as there is for the Stag Stone Farm Stone. Had there been no rings around any of the cupmarks then the stone would probably never have been remarked upon at all, and as noted above we are still in a quandry as to whether some or all of the cupmarks on the rock are natural in origin.

The discovery of these carvings suggests that there may well be others in the county awaiting discovery or recognition. One is left to wonder how many more such sites, which were unquestionably of great value to their creators, remain to be 'rediscovered' some 3 or 4 millennia after their construction and subsequent fall into disuse.

A Gazetteer of Megalithic Art in Cumbria

There follows a brief description of each known carving in the county: the order in which the stones appear in the list is simply alphabetical. Further details of each may be obtained by reference to the appendix and bibliography at the end of the paper.

There are a number of examples of 'natural cupmarks' in Cumbria, and when these appear on rocks associated with known prehistoric sites it can be very difficult to ascertain whether or not they are in fact artificial in origin. The most obvious such example is to be seen at the Casterton stone circle (SD 639800), where what appear to be six well defined cups are inscribed into one of the stones of the circle. Analysis of many naturally occurring boulders in the surrounding field, however, shows that these too display similar such 'carvings': hence all must be regarded as natural. One stone of the Swarth Fell circle (NY 457192) similarly displays an apparently natural cupmark. Any carvings which have previously been recorded as artificial but which are considered by the present writer to be probably natural are included in the gazetteer, but with a suitable note of caution attached.

On the diagrams the shaded areas represent the inscriptions in the surface of the rock, while the white areas represent the untouched (but often much weathered) surface of the stone. Where a marking is uncertain it is shown by means of a dashed line. In most cases the whole of the decorated face of a stone is depicted, but where the carving occupies only a small fraction of the face of a stone the carving is drawn within a rectangular border without the edges of the stone. The diagrams are based on a combination of evidence obtained from field visits, old photographs and existing (though often somewhat inaccurate!) drawings, and all are drawn at a uniform scale. It should be borne in mind that these diagrams are by no means ideal representations of the carvings, it being very difficult to represent realistically a three-dimensional figure in diagrammatic form. To appreciate each stone fully it should be visited and studied at first hand, and to this end the present whereabouts of all stones are included, as are their findspots and county SMR (sites and monuments record) numbers: where an SMR number has not been specifically allocated to a carved stone the number given is that of the overall monument of which the carved stone forms a part.

ASH HOUSE

No diagram. NGR: SD 193873. SMR Number 1469.

Present location: *in situ*.

At this site there remain two standing stones, almost certainly the remnants of a circle

of twenty-two stones erected on a level plain near Ash House. The smaller of the two stones has a set of four parallel grooves, each about 1 cm deep and 15 cm long, the purpose and antiquity of which are unknown. It has been suggested that the grooves are the result of attempts to topple the stones in modern times, but this seems unlikely. An alternative suggestion is that they were formed by continued sharpening of stone or metal tools on the stone in question, perhaps over a period of many centuries. Given this uncertainty we must include this 'carving' here, even though it does not give the appearance of being a deliberate design as does, for example, a cup and ring marking.

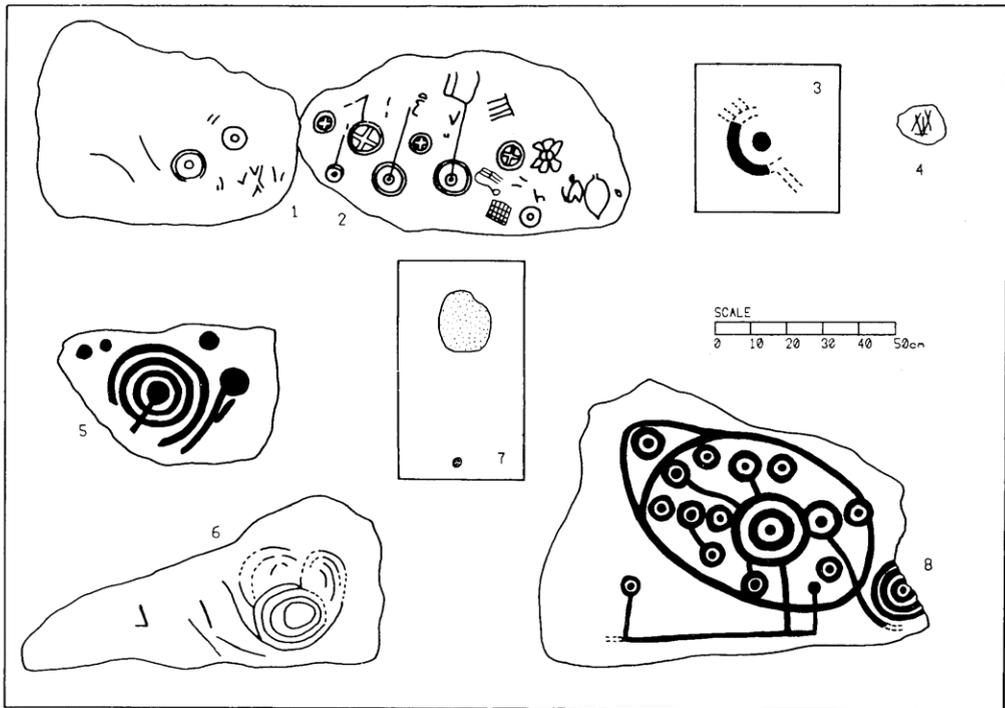


FIG 3. The Gazetteer: diagrams 1-8: 1 and 2 Aspatria; 3 Asper's Field; 4 Broomrigg; 5 Dean; 6 Glassonby; 7 Goggleby Stone; 8 Honey Pots Farm.

ASPATRIA

Diagrams 1 & 2. NGR: NY 14134185. SMR Number 601.

Present location: unknown (lost?).

Two carved stones (measuring approximately 92×45 cm and 81×50 cm) were discovered in a barrow on Beacon Hill to the north of Aspatria. They formed one side of a cist in which was found a skeleton and several weapons (sword, dagger, battle axe, shield, etc.). These stones were found as early as 1789, and they were objects of much discussion over subsequent years. Many authorities believe them to be of Viking origin, especially as the rims and crosses on them were originally recorded as having been 'cut in relief'. This may indeed be the case, but as the articles from the cist have been lost along with the stones, and are therefore not available for analysis, we cannot discount

the possibility of the carvings having had a prehistoric origin, and thus they are included here. Some of the motifs on the stones do bear a close resemblance to some figures found in Irish passage grave art, and it is not impossible that the stones could have been re-used having previously been part of a neolithic structure. The motifs include several circles (in some cases concentric) and many other curious symbols, all of which are best appreciated by reference to diagrams 1 and 2. There are rumours that the finds from the site do still exist: for now we can only hope that these rumours are true, and that the objects will one day be recovered.

ASPER'S FIELD

Diagram 3. NGR: NY 55831521 SMR Number 1568.

Present location: *in situ*.

There is a large, partly toppled monolith (once part of the Shap Avenue) in the field known as Asper's Field, about 150 yards north-west of the Goggleby Stone. On the south-east corner of this monolith may be seen a much eroded but still clearly discernible cup mark, partly surrounded by an incomplete ring. The diameter of the cup is about 5 cm and it is about 2 cm deep. The ring has an external diameter of about 20 cm, but is not cut to a uniform depth: indeed much of the ring is hardly incised at all, but the surface of the stone around the cupmark has apparently been smoothed down to form a flat circular area. It is as though the area intended for the carving has been prepared but the ring was then left unfinished. In overall design this pattern bears a close resemblance to the third carved stone from Little Meg (see diagram 14), and if such a comparison is valid then we must assume the incompleteness of the ring to have been a deliberate aspect of the design. There are hints of a channel leading down from the ring and of other markings above it, as well as a possible second cupmark, but all of these may be natural.

BROOMRIGG

Diagram 4. NGR: NY 548466. SMR Number 759.

Present location: Tullie House, Carlisle.

During the excavation of the stone circle now designated 'Broomrigg B' a small block of red sandstone (about 14 × 11 cm) with an obvious carving on it was found. This carving is very neatly executed, and consists of what looks like two letter 'X's' with a vertical line between them: in fact the design is virtually identical to the Roman number 'XIX'. If genuinely prehistoric (which in the writer's opinion is doubtful) then this stone is unique, and there is precious little else to say about it at present. The carving differs from all others detailed in this survey in being on such a small stone, as well as in being of such an unusual design.

DEAN

Diagram 5. NGR: NY 073250. SMR Number 1029.

Present location: Dean Post Office, shortly to be moved to St. Oswald's Church, Dean.

In 1918 a cup and ring marked boulder was ploughed up in a field here. There is a monolith and two large mounds (which look suspiciously like burial mounds) in an adjacent field, but there is no evidence to link this stone with these. The carving consists

of a central cup 5.5 cm wide and 2 cm in depth, surrounded by three concentric rings (the largest of which is about 26 cm in external diameter) which are intersected by a single channel running out from the cup towards the edge of the stone. The outer ring is missing in the quadrant around this channel, and appears to have never been present here rather than to have been eroded away. Outside of this main design are three cupmarks of various sizes (the largest being about 8 cm in diameter) and a fragment of an apparent fourth concentric ring. In overall design the Dean stone is remarkably similar to the newly discovered Stag Stone Farm stone, a fact which is alluded to in the earlier description of the latter. In September 1987 I was informed that the Dean stone was shortly to be installed in Dean Church for permanent safekeeping: it should be there by the time this work is published.

GILLALEES BEACON

No diagram. NGR: NY 57127088. SMR Number 3715.

Present location: *in situ*.

There are four low and apparently artificial mounds (to which the above SMR number relates) in the field centred on the above grid reference. Amongst the scatter of boulders in the field is one with a deep circular hollow and 'V' shaped groove. While these could be natural, they are thought by some to be artificial and are therefore included in this catalogue. Unfortunately no diagram is available.

GLASSONBY or GRAYSON LANDS

NGR: NY 57293934 SMR Number 977.

The circle of stones now referred to as the Glassonby stone circle was uncovered from within a tumulus by an excavation at the turn of the century. There is some confusion as to whether there were one or two decorated stones from the site as the following text will demonstrate. In order to be as comprehensive as possible in this survey, though, we will allow for the possibility of there having been two separate carved stones at the site.

a) No diagram. Present location: unknown (lost?).

It is recorded that a block of red sandstone three feet long and two feet high existed at the Glassonby cairn-circle in about 1875, and that this stone had 'spiral or concentric circles, like the figures on Long Meg, incised on its side'. W. G. Collingwood's plan of the site (1901) shows a red sandstone slab close to the supposed location of this decorated stone, but his text does not suggest that this was the stone in question. A recent search of the site by the current author located several red sandstone blocks within and around the stone circle, including one close to the supposed position of this decorated stone, but none displayed any visible decoration. The dimensions given for this stone are very similar to those of the decorated stone still *in situ* at the site (see below), and the possibility of this being the same stone, previously incorrectly described and located, must be borne in mind. For the time being we must award this lost carving an individual entry in our catalogue, and presume that it has either been removed from the site or that it has simply weathered away since the site was excavated.

b) Diagram 6. Present location: *in situ*.

This carving has become known as 'Mickey Mouse' for reasons which should be obvious from the diagram! The work was crudely executed, being only very slightly incised into the hard cobble-stone. The outermost of the concentric rings measure 21 cm in diameter, and the whole figure about 30 cm in height. The stone is in the south-east quadrant of the circle and is labelled 'stone 28' on Collingwood's plan (1901) although he makes no reference to the carvings upon it. On visiting the site in 1987, the stone was easily located, but the carving was invisible, being overgrown with lichen. It is to be hoped that the carving is preserved behind this lichen covering, although it may be that it has largely weathered away since being exposed some nine decades ago.

GOGGLEBY STONE

Diagram 7. NGR: NY 55921509. SMR Number 3001.

Present location: *in situ*.

The Goggleby Stone is a 2.3 metre tall monolith, once part of the Shap Avenue, which was re-erected by Tom Clare in 1975. On the north face of this stone, towards its base, may be seen a clearly cut 'disc' about 14 cm in diameter, with a smaller (2.75 cm diam.) but similarly cut disc just below it. In fact neither disc is really circular, and the larger one bears something of a resemblance to the so called 'mother-goddess' symbol carved into the fourth trilithon at Stonehenge. It should be stressed that these discs are not at all like cupmarks, but are cut to a uniform depth of about 2 or 3 mm over the whole of their areas: perhaps 'saucer marks' would be a more valid term in their respect.

HONEY POTS FARM

Diagram 8. NGR: NY 552299. SMR Number 2836.

Present Location: Tullie House, Carlisle.

This whinstone boulder constitutes one of the finest examples of cup and ring art to have been found in Cumbria. It was found in 1909 on the Edenhall estate, but probably not in its original position. No sign of a cairn or of a burial of any kind has been recorded from the vicinity of the findspot, and the stone may once have been built into a nearby dry-stone wall. The boulder weighs over 3200 kg., and measures $115 \times 76 \times 38$ cm at its maximum dimensions. Unfortunately it seems to have been broken at some time, and part of the original design (hopefully only a very small part) has apparently been lost. The overall design consists of a multitude of classic cup and ring markings, the largest of which has three rings and an overall diameter of 20 cm while most have a single ring and are about 10 cm in diameter. Most of the cups and rings are contained within an irregular oval ring, built into which is another single-ringed cup. Outside the 'oval' is another cupmark with a single ring, and another with three incomplete rings which pass over the broken edge of the stone. A further single-ringed cup is contained within a small arc which is attached to the main oval ring. There are also a number of grooves linking various individual cups and rings together. The design, being on resistant whinstone rather than on sandstone or limestone, is relatively well preserved, although the surface does show some evidence of weathering.

HUGILL

No diagram. NGR: NY 4373 0097. SMR Number 1907.

Present location: *in situ*.

At the Hugill settlement site three stones are reported as having possible cupmarks upon them. These may, however, be wholly natural, and the Romano-British date now afforded to the site casts much doubt over the authenticity of these 'carvings'. The odds must be firmly in favour of these features being purely natural.

KIRKSANTON (GIANT'S GRAVES)

No diagram. NGR: SD 13608110. SMR Number 1472.

Present location: *in situ*.

Two large monoliths stand here, and although Hutchinson (1794) reported that they were in a cairn, Clare (1973) considers this unlikely. There is a clearly ground cupmark to be seen about half-way up the larger (eastern) stone. The cup is about 4 cm deep and about 8.5 cm in diameter.

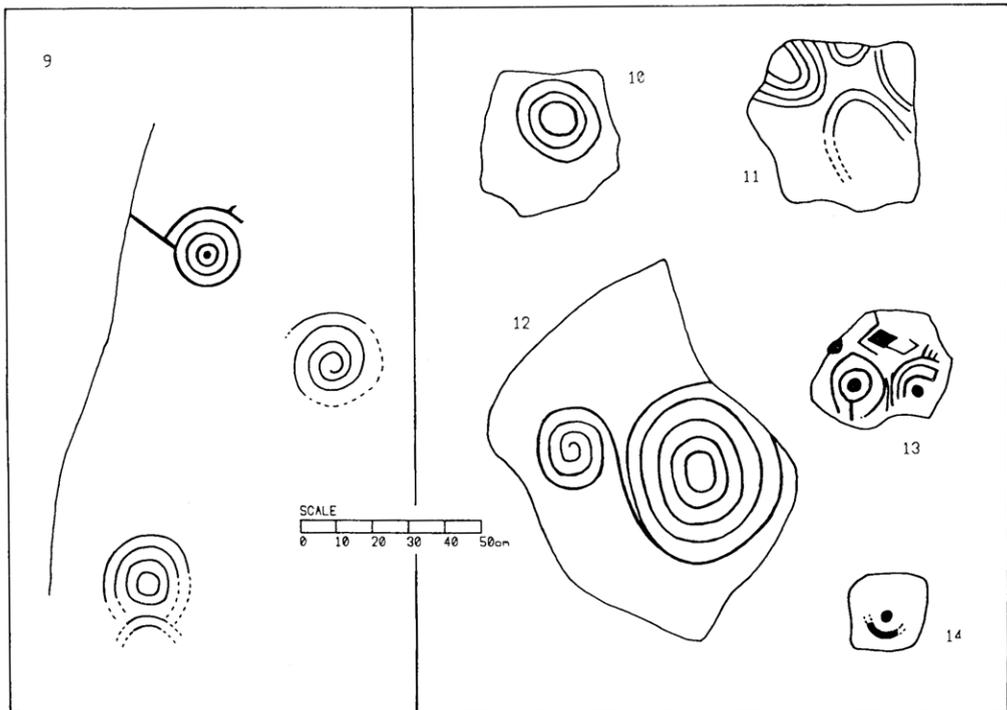


FIG 4. The Gazetteer: diagrams 9-14: 9 Long Meg; 10 and 11 Maryport; 12, 13 and 14 Maughanby.

LONG MEG

Diagram 9. NGR: NY 571372. SMR Number 6154.

Present location: *in situ*.

Many visitors to the splendid megalithic circle of Long Meg and her daughters fail to

notice the faint and rather crudely executed carvings on the north-east face of Long Meg herself. There are three distinct and separate carvings, the uppermost of which consists of three concentric rings (overall diameter 22 cm) around a very shallow cupmark, with a channel leading from the outer ring up to the side of the stone: there is also a segment of a fourth ring which adjoins this channel and passes over the top of the concentric rings. The very faint middle carving is a spiral with additional markings above it. The lower of the three sets of carvings consists of four concentric rings (overall diameter about 25 cm), the outer two of which are incomplete, with possibly a linked set of three concentric rings (or a spiral) underneath it. These carvings are much eroded, but the upper and lower ones are very easy to locate when one knows where to look: the central carving is relatively difficult to make out. The chronological relationship between the erection of the massive red sandstone monolith and the carving of these symbols is not known; just as the relationship between Long Meg herself and the circle of her Daughters remains uncertain. It is possible that the carvings were added to the stone long after its original erection, but these carvings are not like classic cup and ring art and it could be that they belong to the earlier passage grave art tradition, in which case they may well be of the same age as the stone circle itself.

MARYPORT I

Diagram 10. NGR: NY 04683766. SMR Number 822.

Present location: Senhouse Collection, Maryport.

This carving is on a limestone slab found in 1880 within a heap of stones along Beck End Lane, the heap of stones having been previously removed from a nearby field. The slab has maximum dimensions of 46 × 41 × 18 cm. The design consists of a cup surrounded by three elliptical rings. The cup is 5 cm broad and 1.75 cm deep, while the rings are carved to a depth of about 0.6 cm. The reverse side of the slab is ploughscarred, suggesting that the stone had been 'face-down' in the soil. Thus it may originally have lain over a cist, though no sign of such a cist was found in the vicinity.

MARYPORT II

Diagram 11. NGR: NY 04683766. SMR Number 822.

Present location: Senhouse Collection, Maryport.

This limestone block is evidently only a portion of a once larger decorated stone, which has been much weathered as well as being broken. It was found in a hedgerow, having previously been dug up in a field. The visible patterns are of two quite clearly etched sets of concentric elliptical rings (one set with two rings and the other with four), and two less clearly defined sets of dual rings, all of which combine to produce a single integrated pattern. The rings are carved to a depth less than 5 mm, but nevertheless are all clearly visible. There is no sign of a cup anywhere on the stone, although this obviously does not preclude the possibility of there having been one or more within the overall design.

Both Maryport stones are presumed to have come from the same original site, although the nature of this site obviously remains uncertain.

MAUGHANBY or 'LITTLE MEG'

NGR: NY 57693749. SMR Number 979.

There are at least two, and almost certainly three decorated stones from this site. The original form of Little Meg seems to have been an oval of eleven large stones surrounding a mound-covered cist in which was found an urn and 'some burnt bone'.

a) Diagram 12. Present location: *in situ*.

This carving, on what has become known as the 'Maughanby Stone', consists of a spiral 25 cm in diameter, the outer limb of which is extended to surround a system of five concentric ellipses the largest of which has a diameter of 45 cm. There is not a cupmark within the design. The stone, located at the northern edge of the 'circle', has been much weathered over the millenia, but the carvings can still be made out without great difficulty.

b) Diagram 13. Present location: Penrith Museum.

This sandstone slab apparently formed part of the cist at Little Meg. On the decorated face there are four cupmarks, with at least one more being located on the edge of the stone. The largest of these cupmarks (about 9 × 7 cm) is diamond shaped rather than circular in outline, and the incomplete ring which partly surrounds it is also angular rather than circular. A second cupmark (about 5 cm diameter) is surrounded by two rings, the outer of which is most unusual as it is angled to form a kind of apex adjacent to the diamond shaped feature: on the opposite side of the cup from this apex the ring is left open and an incised line leads from the inner ring out through the gap. A third cupmark is partly surrounded by three concentric ring segments, the inner two of which are joined to each other by a line near the edge of the stone, while the outer one has three indistinct lines attached to it. The fourth cupmark, which is located at the right on the edge of the decorated face of the stone, has no rings around it. The overall design is best appreciated by reference to diagram 13. Some of the rings display clear 'peckmarks', and must have been pecked out with a sharp tool of some kind, but the surface is now very flaky and some aspects of the design are very hard to make out.

In conclusion this stone displays many unusual features, but also incorporates all the major elements of classical cup and ring art.

c) Diagram 14. Present location: Penrith Museum

There is no certainty as to the findspot of this stone, but it is probably from the Little Meg cist. It is a squarish sandstone slab having a single cupmark about 5 cm in diameter with a small segment of an incomplete ring. The cup is about 2 cm deep, but may once have been deeper as the surface of the stone is very friable and the original surface layer may have largely flaked away. Due to the incomplete nature of the ring this carving bears a resemblance to that on the Asper's Field stone.

OLD PARKS, KIRKOSWALD

Diagrams 15, 16, 17. NGR: NY 56993988. SMR Number 930.

Present location: Two at Tullie House, Carlisle: one missing.

A tumulus was sited on the natural mound here to the east of a vanished standing stone. It consisted of loose stones and was systematically destroyed at the end of the last century for road metal. It was oval in form (approximately 24 × 19 metres at its maximum

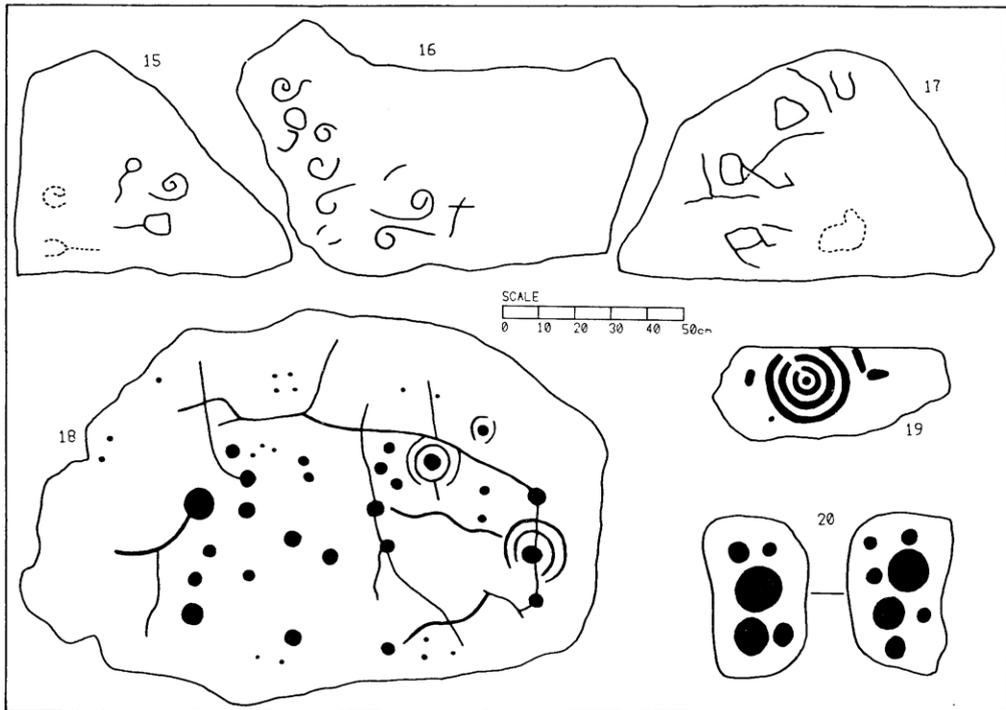


FIG 5. The Gazetteer: diagrams 15–20: 15, 16 and 17 Old Parks; 18 Redhills; 19 Stag Stone Farm; 20 Unprovenanced.

dimensions), and stood about 120 cm high. Five erect slabs stood in a line across the narrower (north-south) axis of the site, forming a low wall about 4.5 metres long, and three of these slabs were artificially decorated with unusual grooves and markings. Two of these stones (numbers 4 and 5 in Ferguson's (1985) report; diagrams 16 and 17 here) were found by the current author in September 1987, lying moss-covered and overgrown in the grounds of Old Parks Farm. These are now at Tullie House Museum where they are to be displayed alongside the excellent collection of finds from the tumulus. The stone in Diagram 16 has been broken, but a single portion on which all the carvings are situated remains intact. The third stone (Ferguson's number 1; diagram 15 here) could not be located and must be presumed lost, although it may conceivably still lie somewhere on the farm, perhaps close to the original site. The finds from the Old Parks tumulus are an intriguing mixture of Neolithic and Bronze Age artifacts, so the exact dating of the cairn is problematical.

The designs on the Old Parks stones are quite different from any other carvings in Cumbria, and bear no apparent comparison to cup and ring marks. They have been likened to ancient Phoenician letters, but any such resemblance is surely coincidental. It should be noted that there are several crude spirals amongst the carved symbols, although whether or not these can be related to developed spirals such as that at Maughanby remains a matter of conjecture. Although now much eroded, it was noted at the turn of the century that the carvings had apparently been incised 'by repeated slight blows of a rude hack or stone hammer', rather than with a chisel.

REDHILLS

Diagram 18. NGR: NY 50182777 SMR Number 4681.

Present location: unknown (presumed lost).

The Redhills stone represents one of the finest examples of cup and ring art ever found in Cumbria, and its loss is to be deplored. There are rumours that it was once in the old Penrith Museum, but it had certainly never been in the new one and extensive research elsewhere has proved fruitless. The stone was found in 1881 lying *in situ* over a rock-cut and partially cobble-lined grave in which were found 'bones and charcoal'. It is a slab of limestone, roughly ovoid in form and having maximum dimensions of 163 cm by 107 cm, and a thickness ranging from 20 to 34 cm. As it lay over the grave it was the stone's lower face which was decorated; the upper face being much scarred by the plough.

Taylor (1882) divided the carvings on the Redhills stone into four distinct groupings, although each individual symbol should not be viewed in isolation but rather as one small aspect of the overall design. The four classes of carving are as follows:

- a) 24 cup-shaped hollows of various sizes and depths.
- b) 2 central hollowed cores each surrounded by 2 concentric circles, the concentric circles in both cases being incomplete and bisected by a radial groove.
- c) Hollowed out and interlinking channels, like gutters, running in various directions.
- d) Various little pits or depressions picked out all over the face of the stone.

It is to be hoped that this magnificent stone is still in existence somewhere, and that its whereabouts will again come to light before any damage can befall it.

STAG STONE FARM

Diagram 19. NGR: NY 53663157. SMR Number 6507.

Present location: Penrith Museum.

Found in 1984 by British Gas, this carving consists of a single cupmark surrounded by three concentric rings, with some additional outlying markings. For further details see the description earlier in this paper.

TORTIE COTTAGE

No diagram. NGR: NY 589578. SMR Number 6508.

Present location: *in situ*.

Discovered in January 1987 by Mrs J. Waldron, the decoration on this stone consists of several cupmarks, some surrounded by rings. The stone is described in detail earlier in this paper, and no diagram is included here for reasons given in that description.

UNPROVENANCED (Penrith Museum).

Diagram 20. SMR Number 5492.

Present location: Penrith Museum.

This sandstone block has both of its long faces decorated with cupmarks: one face having one large and four smaller cups, and the other two larger and five smaller cups. Its status as a prehistoric carved stone is not beyond question, but Penrith Museum intends

to class it as one until or unless a more prosaic explanation of its origin can be demonstrated.

Some Concluding Comments

It will be appreciated from the above catalogue that the relative scarcity of megalithic carvings in Cumbria is in some ways compensated for by their diversity. Traditionally the megalithic carvings of the British Isles have been divided into two categories: passage grave art and cup and ring art. Passage grave art is to be found in many of the great Irish passage graves such as New Grange and Knowth, and is rarely encountered in Britain (two examples in the north-west are at Barclodiad y Gawres on Anglesey, and at the Calderstones in Liverpool: both the result of Irish influence). None of the Cumbrian examples can unambiguously be included in this category, although the designs from Aspatria do include a few unusual motifs which are similar to some Irish passage grave carvings. Examples of the second and somewhat later group are lumped together as 'cup and ring' art, a term used by many professional archaeologists but which is shown by the examples in this catalogue to be quite inadequate as an umbrella term: in no way can the Old Parks and Glassonby carvings be thus described. This is not to say that cup and ring marks themselves were not of great importance (indeed they were probably of paramount importance), but that they should be regarded as merely one aspect of the megalithic carving tradition in northern England. We should also take note of the variety of carvings produced within the framework of the cup and ring tradition: for example how does the intricate pattern on the Honey Pots Farm stone relate to the relatively simple design in Asper's Field?

We can make several general observations on the Cumbrian carvings; for example, on the close similarity between the Dean and Stag Stone Farm stones; on the wholly unique nature of the Old Parks carvings; on the marked geographical concentration of carvings in the Penrith area of the Eden Valley and, of course, on the relative scarcity of carvings from Cumbria as a whole. It is also very interesting to note that Long Meg, Little Meg and Glassonby, all located within a few hundred metres of each other, are the only examples of Cumbrian 'stone circles' to display carvings (if we discount the curious lines at Ash House), and this certainly introduces interesting questions regarding the relationship between the circle builders and the carvers. It is perhaps of significance that Long Meg acts as a 'marker' for the Mid-Winter sunset, and is also carved with symbols of a type which have been linked with some form of early sun-worship. The fact that both the Goggleby and Asper's Field stones display carvings suggests that perhaps many more examples were lost with the destruction of the Shap Avenue: however no more were ever recorded and any that did exist are unlikely to be rediscovered now.

Proof that the symbols are somehow connected with death, and possibly with the concept of an afterlife, is provided by the stones from Aspatria, Maughanby, Old Parks and Redhills, all of which were directly associated with burials. The examples from Dean, Honey Pots Farm, Maryport and Stag Stone Farm were found out of context and may once been associated with ritual or burial structures and the Tortie Stone has yet to be excavated to determine whether or not it is associated with a burial cairn. However, we should also note that several Neolithic and Bronze Age burial structures have been excavated in Cumbria and found to exhibit no carvings at all. Examples of these include

the Moor Divock monuments (at least two cairn-circles) and the ring-cairn complex at Hardendale, all of which are within a few kilometres of Penrith: perhaps it is somehow significant that these are on high ground while all the carvings known from the Eden Valley are from low-lying locations.

Cup, ring and spiral carvings are known from prehistoric sites throughout Europe (for example in Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Italy) and similar designs exist elsewhere in the world (a few examples from the American Southwest are indistinguishable from those of prehistoric Britain). Whether such symbols are merely pictograms (representing, for example, the sun or the moon) or whether they had deep, abstract ideological meanings remains a mystery to us today. What is beyond doubt, however, is that the artists responsible for the symbols at Old Parks, at Honey Pots Farm or at Redhills were suggesting something of great importance to the society of the time: after all the carving of such intricate symbols into solid rock is no simple undertaking.

In seeking to reach an understanding of the carvings we should not search for direct translations as we would with, for example, Egyptian hieroglyphs, but rather we must continue to examine them with open minds and hope that one day we may succeed in unlocking some of their mysteries. For now we must accept that these enigmatic carvings undoubtedly held a powerful meaning for their creators and that, while this power still exists in the aura the stones hold for us today, our ignorance ensures that their true significance continues to elude us.

Acknowledgements

I unfortunately had to leave Cumbria while still researching this paper, and I would like to thank Kevin and Jennifer Waldron and Bette Pehrson for providing me with information I would otherwise have had to travel 300 miles to obtain. Thanks also to Colin Richardson at Carlisle Museum and Judith Clarke at Penrith Museum for their assistance, and to Tom Clare for setting me on course in the first place. And thanks finally to Bob Bewley and, especially, to David Fraser for their valuable comments on an early draft of this paper.

Appendix

This appendix lists the major references to each carving; the numbers refer to those in the bibliography.

Ash House 6, 26.

Aspatia 22, 16, 10.

Asper's Field 12, 24.

Broomrigg 15.

Dean 17.

Gillalees 6.

Glassonby 7, 25.

Goggleby Stone 12, 24.

Honey Pots Farm 13.

Hugill 8.

Kirksanton 9.

Long Meg 10, 26.

Maryport 1.

Maughanby 25.

Old Parks 10, 25.

Redhills 10, 24.

Unprovenanced (Penrith Museum): no references other than Penrith Museum's catalogue.

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