

7. NOTE ON A PICTISH CROSS-SLAB FROM GELLYBURN, PERTSHIRE.

At the request of the Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities I visited Perth Museum in October 1949 to take notes of a Pictish sculptured stone preserved there. The Curator of the Perth Museum at that time was Mr James Wood, to whom I express my thanks for facilities to record and photograph the slab. He also informed me that the stone (Pl. XVIII) was found in the wall of a house at Gellyburn on the Murthly estate during renovations by workmen earlier in the year; the location is shown on the map (fig. 9).

Unusually small in size but intricately and beautifully carved as if by the hand of an expert craftsman, the stone has borne a raised cross on the front, and on the back there has been a cross above two Pictish symbols. It has been broken into three pieces in its length, and the upper part is missing. As it stands the stone measures 2 ft. 7½ in. from the fractured top to a pointed base, but this dimension may have been increased to an inch or two over 3 ft. as scaled to the extremity of the suggested geometrical restoration of the head which has been

left unhatched in the drawing. The width approximates to 10 in., and the thickness varies from 4 in. at the roughly finished butt end to $2\frac{3}{4}$ in. in the effective sculptured portion above.

When complete the cross on the front is estimated to have been 2 ft. long but only the shaft remains, and it tapers from $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. at the base to 3 in. at the top in its length of $14\frac{1}{2}$ in. It is raised fully half an inch above the field, the surface

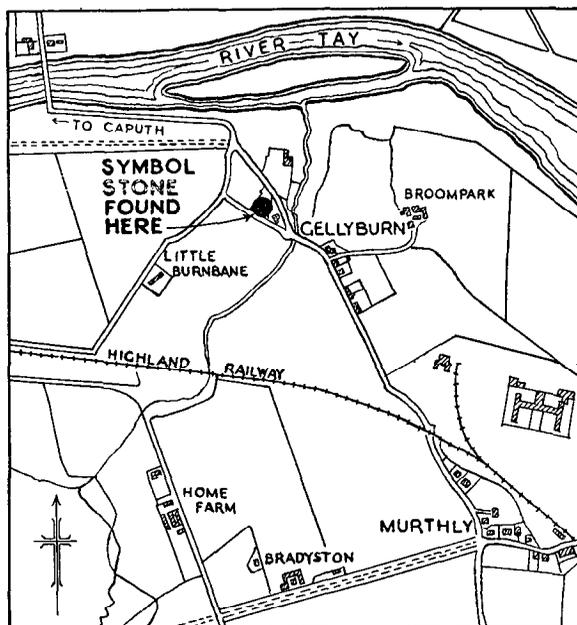


Fig. 9. Location map.

of which is finished in stugged work enclosed by an incised marginal line defining a half-inch border. A similar border on the shaft itself surrounds a shallow sunk panel, which is elaborately decorated in low relief with an interlaced design and a scroll ornament. The interlacing occupies the bottom part of the panel and is a knit-work of ribbon pattern, finely cut, in two and a half roundels, while the scroll above consists of four closely connected spirals. An animal's head inverted and set horizontally between these motifs terminates the scroll-work, and in the spandrels separating the individual spirals there is a bud-like offshoot from the main stem or else, in two cases, a small plain boss or pellet. These may be presumed to be vestiges of the leaves and grapes of a vine-scroll pattern of Northumbrian type. A somewhat different instance of a debased vine-scroll occurs at Abernethy on a cross-shaft.¹

At the intersections of the arms, circular holes, diam. $2\frac{3}{8}$ in. and emphasised by a border, have pierced right through the slab. Penetration of the hollows in this manner is a rarity among the Pictish sculptured stones. In this case it is probably a development of the emphatic but unpierced arm-pits surrounded by raised rings which are a feature of quite a number of cross-slabs in the Perthshire

¹ *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, pt. iii, fig. 326A, p. 312.

and Angus area, notably the churchyard cross at Aberlemno¹ and a small slab at Meigle.² There are two large pierced examples in Perthshire at Mugdrum (from Carpow)³ and at Moncrieff House (from Gask),⁴ but the hollows of the latter are not circular.

As on the front, the sculptured panel on the back is framed by a narrow border, and contains in downward sequence from the top a cross within a ring, a crescent and broken rod ornament and an elephant symbol. These designs, mainly in low relief, are also partly incised and are set close, touching one another. The ring, which impinges on the border, has confined an equal-armed cross, and it is evident from what remains that the head has been adorned with ribbon interlacing which had developed into a triquetra at the end of each arm. Such a circular cross is most unusual, though it might be compared with that on the Bressay Stone from Shetland⁵ and with the circular heads of the late Northumbrian free-standing crosses in south-west Scotland. There are indeed close parallels in northern England for the interlaced design⁶ but not in Scotland.

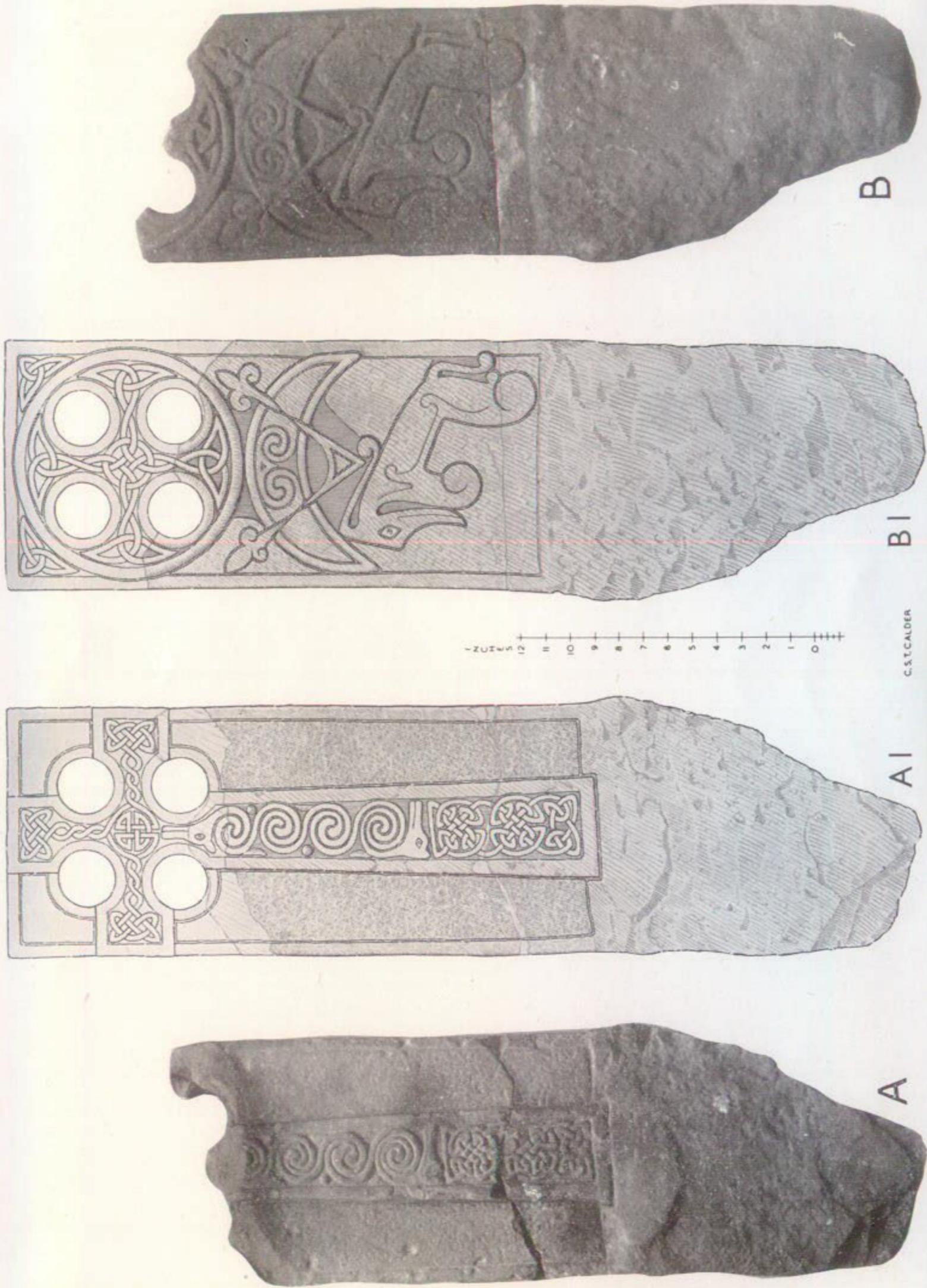
The crescent occupies the full width between the marginal lines, and is outlined also with a border. Its central portion between the arms of the broken rod which finish in a fleur-de-lis is filled with two opposed spirals. The tail of the elephant symbol touches the sinister margin but the head falls short of the dexter one; conventional spiral curves are lightly incised on the body of the animal and accentuate the limb joints.

The bottom of the stone has been roughly worked but does not have the appearance of being shaped as a tenon to fit a socketed base; it would seem that the butt end has been left rather long so that the slab could be stood upright in the ground.

The small size of the slab and some of the features that have been discussed suggest a fairly advanced date in the Pictish series, but the symbols remain relatively large and prominent; it could tentatively be assigned to some time in the second half of the ninth century.

I am indebted to Mr R. B. K. Stevenson for some valuable suggestions.

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PICTISH CROSS-SLAB, GELLYBURN: A, front; B, back. Suggested reconstruction, A I, B I.