

# Two unrecorded carved stones at Tower of Lethendy, Perthshire

by I Fisher and F A Greenhill

The two carved stones described below were brought to the attention of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland by the late Mr C Gairdner, owner of Tower of Lethendy, in March 1969. They were examined by the first-named writer on behalf of the Commission, and subsequently one of the stones, an incised slab of sixteenth-century date, was examined by Mr F A Greenhill, who has contributed the section describing it.

Tower of Lethendy is situated  $3\frac{1}{4}$  miles (5.3 km) SW of Blairgowrie, and about one mile (1.6 km) N of the River Tay, at NGR NO 140415. The oldest part of the building is a towerhouse of L-plan, probably of late sixteenth-century date, which displays some unusual features (MacGibbon and Ross 1887-92, iii, 591). It was the home of the Heron family, whose arms survive on a much-weathered panel, said to have borne the date 1678, above the entrance doorway. This is now included within a large addition in Scottish Baronial style, built to the designs of Andrew Heiton in 1884, when certain alterations were made to the towerhouse.

The carved stones have been re-used as lintels above the first flight of the staircase that leads from the ground floor to the entresol room at the south end of the wing of the towerhouse. They serve no structural purpose, being too short fully to span the staircase, and are inserted in a clumsy way which is equally at variance with the skilful construction of the original building, and the smooth finish of the nineteenth-century additions. Furthermore, the more recent carving is supported by a chamfered wooden beam of considerable age. It seems probable that the stones were used for repairs carried out during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, possibly in 1678.

## I. A 'PCTO-SCOTTISH' RELIEF CARVING

This slab (pl 36a), which may be ascribed to the tenth century, is carved in a pocked technique from a fine-grained greyish stone. The upper edge of the slab is broken irregularly, and a small part of the base is built into the side-wall of the staircase; part of the left edge has been cut away, and this area and the face of the stone bear several knife-cuts. The maximum dimensions are 3 ft  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in (1.13 m) in length, 1 ft  $2\frac{1}{4}$  in (0.36 m) in width, and 5 in (0.13 m) in thickness. The exposed face is divided into three sections, the lowest of which is the uncarved butt by which the stone was inserted in the ground.

The upper section contains the figure of an angel, immediately above two clerics whom he is sheltering under his wings. The angel is a cruder version of that on the earlier stone at Rossie Priory, Perthshire (Allen and Anderson 1903, iii, 306-8; Cruden 1964, pl 13), with long wings which rise from the shoulders, but no arms; the body is feathered and each of the dangling feet

has three toes. The feet and wings almost touch the heads of two frontally-placed moon-faced clerics who wear 'corrugated' vestments similar to those on the late stone, Invergowrie 1, now in the National Museum (Allen and Anderson 1903, iii, 255-6; Cruden 1964, pl 16). The hems of the vestments are decorated, that on the right with a square key-pattern of alternating T's (Allen and Anderson 1903, no. 899) and that on the left with a continuous wedge-shaped pattern. The cleric on the left carries a rectangular object, presumably a book, which he supports with hands placed on top and underneath, while the other holds in his right hand a rod or sceptre having a fleur-de-lis terminal, and in his left hand a conical beaker or chalice with a flat base. To the right of the clerics and rising to the height of their elbows is a vertical pole with a knob at the top. Since the left edge of the slab is damaged by the cut described above, it is not possible to be certain that a similar pole existed on that side, but it is probable that there were two poles representing a throne such as occurs on a stone at St Vigean, no. 11. This depicts two ecclesiastics who hold sceptres and books, and have dangling toed feet like the clerics on the Lethendy carving.<sup>1</sup>

The middle section of the slab is a recessed panel  $12\frac{1}{4}$  in (0.31 m) square, which contains the standing figures of two musicians facing each other, a dog, and a rectangular object. Both musicians wear tunics with waist-bands and that on the left appears to have a hemmed sleeve which ends at the elbow. The latter musician is playing a harp with a heavy soundbox and seven strings, similar to the instrument shown on Monifieth 4, now in the National Museum (Allen and Anderson 1903, iii, 265), where, however, the harpist is seated, as in other examples at Dupplin, Ardchattan and Iona (Allen and Anderson 1903, iii, 321-2, 378, 382). The other musician plays a triple pipe, whose lowest pipe is considerably longer than the others and appears to be slightly enlarged. This may well represent a terminal horn, for which Baines (1960, 59) argues in the case of the comparable but much-weathered Irish examples at Monasterboice and Clonmacnoise (Henry 1964, pl 42, 48). The only Scottish example of a triple pipe is at Ardchattan, in an area of strong Irish influence. The cheeks of the piper are puffed out realistically, and the ridges surrounding the faces and pointed beards of both musicians contrast with the moon-like faces of the clerics. The dog is shown in some detail, with pointed ears, a curled tail and clawed paws, and wears a collar. Between the musicians is a vertical elongated rectangular object, probably a barrel-drum with the head turned downwards. Such instruments are rare in Early Medieval iconography, although there is a well-known representation of one, symbolising profane music, in a French manuscript of the twelfth century (Hughes 1954, frontispiece).

This remarkable scene is unique among early carvings in Scotland. Two genuinely Pictish stones, at Nigg and Aldbar (Allen and Anderson 1903, iii, 80, 246), use the harp as an attribute of David, who is depicted killing the lion. Of the four examples, referred to above, of seated or enthroned harpists, two are in Argyll and two in Southern Pictland; all are of late date. The carvings at Iona and Ardchattan that also show pipers are less closely connected with the Lethendy-scene than are some of the Irish examples representing a simplified version of the common Early Medieval motif of David with his musicians (Roe 1949, 39-59). Especially relevant are the east face of Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice, where a harpist and triple-piper are seated on either side of the figure of the triumphant Christ, and the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise where the same musicians occur, one on each edge of the cross but evidently forming a pair (Henry 1964, pl 48; Henry 1967, pl 91, 106-7). The presence of the dog may be explained by a conflation of the pastoral scene of David the shepherd, shown accompanied by his dog in the tenth-century Byzantine Paris Psalter (Buchthal 1938, pl 1), and the courtly scene of David and his musicians.

In assessing the significance of this scene in relation to the musical instruments known and used in early Scotland, it must be remembered that percussion and reed instruments, with

their pagan associations, were frowned upon by the Western church in the early centuries of the Christian era (Harrison and Rimmer 1964, 9). It is accordingly improbable that the forms of pipe and drum depicted at Lethendy were derived from a Christian iconographic source imported from outside Britain. The pipe, probably a reed instrument playing in two parts with a drone, like the *launeddas* of modern Sardinia, was evidently an Irish type, imported into Pictland in the period of Scottish influence, after 843, and used here to represent one of the ancient Hebrew instruments of music named in the Old Testament.

The Irish connections suggested by this scene are confirmed by other features of the carving, such as the dangling toed feet, the ridged treatment of the profile faces, and the conical chalice, all of which can be paralleled in the Book of Kells, of *c* 800, or on Irish crosses. The book supported by a hand below, however, is characteristic of Anglian carving (Stone 1955, pl 6, 9a, 14b, 15) although it occurs also on a stone from St Vigeans, no. 18, now in the National Museum (Allen and Anderson 1903, iii, 276). Most of the examples of the key-pattern of alternating T's are also of Anglian origin (Allen and Anderson 1903, ii, 334).

The left edge of the slab is not visible, but it is possible to feel carving, apparently a diagonal key-pattern terminating above the butt of the slab. The other face and edge are at present inaccessible, but the slab appears to be intact in width and thickness. In view of the nature of other carved stones of this period, it is probable that the concealed face bears a cross.

While this stone illustrates the diverse artistic influences, from Ireland and Northumbria, to which the former kingdom of the Picts was subjected after the ninth century, its immediate local connections are with south Perthshire and Angus. The slab probably stood in a field near Lethendy until it was removed to be used in the repair of the Tower staircase.

## II. A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY INCISED SLAB

Built face downwards into the stairway of the tower is part of the dexter side of a slab of sandstone (pl 36b), the portion visible, 3 ft 11 in (1.19 m) long by 10 in (0.25 m) wide, still in good preservation, showing slightly less than the right half of a figure in civil dress, from the shoulder down. The overall width of the surviving part of the slab is 1 ft 11½ in (0.60 m), but most of it is obscured by two beams. The attire consists of a loose-sleeved gown reaching to a little below the calves, a purse (*gypcière*) worn over and obscuring the girdle, close-fitting hose and broad-toed shoe cut away over the instep and fastened by a strap below the ankle. The figure was depicted in the attitude of prayer normal in Britain in the later Middle Ages. Under the foot, on a marginal strip, in black-letter type, are the last four letters of a word, NBUL, evidently part of a surname, the first part of which is hidden under a stout beam, on the far side of which it is just possible to descry what looks like MS, apparently the end of the Christian name (?Willielmus).

Save for the ugly posture of the foot, turned out at 180 degrees, the figure is very well executed, and in surprisingly fine preservation, considering the vicissitudes to which it has been subjected.

As it seemed that the surname would probably have been 'Turnbul' – there was a south-country family of that name which provided Bishop William Turnbull of Glasgow (1447-51) who founded the University – various works on local antiquities were consulted at Perth, on the chance of finding a clue to the man's identity. The following entry was found: 'June 12, 1503. Dean William Turnbull, Procurator of the Charterhouse, obtains in name of the Prior and Convent, seisin of a tenement on the south side of the North Street, and also of a garden on the west side of the New Row' (Lawson 1847, 50).

The date fits perfectly with the style of dress shown on the stone, which may be placed at c 1510–20, and as this William Turnbull was evidently a notary who acted for the Charterhouse as its man of business in arranging property transactions, it would be quite normal for him to be buried in its church.

Following Knox's unfortunate sermon in the Town Kirk on 11th May 1559, and the violent outburst of iconoclasm that immediately ensued, the first objective of the 'rascal multitude', after they had finished in St John's, was the nearby Charterhouse, and as the tomb of James I, greatest of the Stewarts, and his Queen was not spared, the humbler monument of the lawyer, whose inscription probably included a request to pray for his soul, was no doubt broken up, to be subsequently utilised as building material. At what time this piece found its way to Lethendy, whether at the first erection of the Tower or during some subsequent repair, is unknown, but, as is suggested above (p 238), it may well have been inserted in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. The date 1559 seems too early for the Tower, and it is more probable that the slab was obtained as re-used material from a demolished Perth building at a later period, than that it lay unused in a builder's yard for 25 or 30 years.

Evidently, in view of the still excellent state of the engraving, the stone must either have been inserted in some building face inwards or kept well covered up until such time as it was despatched to Lethendy.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writers wish to express their appreciation of the help and encouragement received from the late Charles Gairdner of Lethendy and Mrs Gairdner. They are indebted for information and advice to Mr F Collinson, Drs I Henderson, J N G Ritchie and K A Steer, and to the staff of the Sandeman Public Library, Perth. The photographs were taken by Mr G B Quick and are Crown copyright.

#### NOTE

- 1 Immediately above the heads of these ecclesiastics is the lower part of a small figure with dangling feet. This figure, which is omitted from the drawing given by Allen and Anderson (1903, iii, 271) but is visible in Cruden's photograph (1964, pl 45), may provide the only parallel for the close association of angel and clerics at Lethendy.

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*The Society is indebted to the Civil Service Department for a grant towards the cost of this paper.*



a Picto-Scottish relief carving



b Late-medieval incised slab

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