

Site Dupplin Cross

N.G.R NO 05051895

Project Description Excavation in advance of removal

Report

Kirkdale Archaeology were asked to excavate a trench around the Dupplin cross (NO 05051895), with the aim of determining how large its' base stone is, and how much concrete had been placed around it in the 1920's. At the same time it was hoped that it might be possible to determine when the stone had been erected in its' current location. This work was to facilitate the removal of the cross for conservation, and was undertaken between 1/4/98 and 2/4/98.

The cross itself is elaborately decorated and set in a monumental stone base, both being fairly coarse dark red sandstone, and is situated some 1,500 m N. of the village of Forteviot, on a fairly steep S facing slope, commanding wide views over Strathearn. The shaft, some 255 cm high, is decorated on all four faces, and recently an inscribed Latin panel has been noted on its' W face, possibly referring to Constantine, son of Fergus, a historically documented king of the Picts, thought to have died in 819/820. Certainly the images on the cross, featuring biblical David scenes and displays of military strength, would be consistent with a hypothesis of royal patronage for this monument. The shaft is set in a monumental stone base, trapezoidal in shape, with the broad end to the W. This block has obviously been dressed, with the W face being vertical, while all the others incline, adding to the prominence given to this side. The W face also has a horizontal line carved along it, with smaller lines leading upwards off it, which has been interpreted as an, untranslatable, Ogham inscription. Much of the stone has been heavily weathered, but a possible continuation of this line can be seen along the S face.

The cross is recorded in this position in the nineteenth century, although it is possible that it was put here in that century (R. Fawcett *pers comm*). In the 1920's the cross had started to slip to the S (downslope), and remedial work was done at this time. Black paint can be seen under the arm of the cross on its' S side, where a prop was placed to support it, and concrete was known to have been placed around the base.

A trench was laid out, roughly centred on the cross, measuring some 300 cm E-W, by 240 cm N-S. Excavation quickly revealed a concrete plinth running right around the base stone of the cross, averaging 30 cm wide. On the N (uphill) side of the cross some 25 cm of hillwash had accumulated, while to the S the concrete lay directly under the turf line, c. 5 cm thick. Around the concrete, to the edges of the trench,

was a light brown clayey silt, with an orange hue, with many stones throughout, but particularly to the S, interpreted as being a foundation trench for the concrete, from which modern iron objects were recovered. A sondage was dug along the S face of the concrete plinth, showing the concrete to be some 20 cm thick, with the foundation trench bottoming on an orange-light brown clayey silt, probably undisturbed subsoil. A smaller sondage against the W face of the concrete was excavated, producing a similar sequence.

On the second day Historic Scotland's stone conservation squad chiselled off two areas of this concrete, to the S and the W. That to the W revealed the stone to be 54 cm thick at this point, with the concrete not reaching the bottom of the stone.

However to the S it was shown that the stone was only 37 cm thick here, and the concrete ran under the stone for some 15 cm. At the NW corner of the base stone further markings were recorded, which had been buried under the hillwash on this side. They consisted of two parallel lines, some 20 cm long, either side of the corner (i.e. on both N and W faces), with at least four interconnecting lines forming a 'ladder' running up this corner. In places, particularly lower down, the carving is still relatively sharp and deep, showing it to have been, at least partially, protected from the elements.

Interpretation

Unfortunately the presence of concrete below the stone shows how serious the disturbance was in the 1920's. However as it only ran under the stone on the S side it may be that the stone was jacked up on this side, and concrete poured underneath, rather than the whole stone having been removed. The disturbance involved in this operation meant that the question of when this cross was first erected here remains unanswered.

The cross base stone proved of most interest. The truly monumental size of this, together with its' very specific shape were emphasised at the two points where its' dimensions were recorded. The W end of the stone is the largest, the most vertically faced, and the only definitely decorated side of the whole block. In this context it is interesting that the probable inscription is on the W face of the cross. The grooves carved on the NW corner of the base stone suggest a decorative border rather than Ogham, and it may be that the already recognised marks on this face are also purely decorative.

Finds No finds were retained