



Discovery of a cup and ring marked stone from South Lanarkshire

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Introduction

While Austin John Reid, a dyker from Peebles was rebuilding drystone dykes on Easton Farm, near Dunsyre in South Lanarkshire in June 2010, he recognised a stone slab decorated with cup and ring marks. Mr Reid posted a photo of the stone on a web site; The Megalithic Portal, and T Ward was informed of this by one of the local archaeology volunteers. Contact was soon made and the stone was handed into the custody of T Ward for reporting and for the purpose of Treasure Trove consideration, which has been done.



The finder Austen Reid with the cup and ring stone at Dunsyre

The stone

The stone is pink coloured and is a slab of Old Red Sandstone. It measures overall 600mm long by 330mm wide by 90mm thick.

The design consists of a clear but incomplete cup and ring motive and two further cups which form a straight line with the central cup of the main design.

The end cup measures 60mm in diameter by about 12mm deep, but the detail of this side of the stone has been eroded. The central (single) cup is 50mm in diameter by 20mm deep, the gap between the two cups is 50mm.

The main design consists of a cup 45mm in diameter by 20mm deep, it is centrally positioned within four rings, the outer one forming a c150mm radius from the centre of the cup. Each ring is c10mm wide by c8mm deep and about 50% of the rings are missing on one side.

The original condition of the carvings can now only be conjectural but they were probably much better defined than they now are.

What is obvious both from the condition of the stone and the organic growth which covered part of it, is that it has been eroded at both ends since its use in a drystone dyke some time in the 19th century. Each end, including the end cup and part of the cup and rings can be seen to have been eroded, while the middle of the stone for about 350mm can be seen to have more fresh surfaces, also the featureless back of the stone is also fresh. This implies that the stone was part of a larger slab and which may have been broken, intentionally or otherwise, for use in the dyke.



Full decoration View showing fresh break along edge



View showing staining where exposed on dyke Worn edge surface on left, fresh surface in middle



View showing staining where exposed on dyke



Worn edge surface on left, fresh surface in middle

Other decorated stones from South Lanarkshire and Borders area

This discovery is the first of its type to be found in South Lanarkshire; in fact the nearest examples of cup and ring are from Wigtownshire (Stell 1986) where multiple examples are carved into more intractable greywacke rock than the Dunsyre sandstone. In South Lanarkshire, only two examples of pre-historic rock art have previously been discovered; one of these is fairly local to the present find, being only 8km to the west at Wester Yardhouses Farm, Carnwath. The two carved stones (from Carnwath and Dunsyre) mark the west and east ends of one of Scotland's most prolific concentrations of pre-historic monuments and sites (RCAHMS, 1978) and which date from the Mesolithic through the Neolithic to Bronze Age periods (Clarke, 1989).

The Wester Yardhouses stone is decorated with spirals and pecked triangles and was found as the capstone of a Bronze Age cist within which a beaker was found. This stone is from the Neolithic period judging by the design and the fact that the stone appeared to have been re-used for a capstone. The other stone was similarly found as a re-used Neolithic decorated stone, again for a Bronze Age cist, and this was at Ferniegair near Hamilton. The Ferniegair stone is carved on its sides with concentric circles, spiral and linear designs, and the suggestion is that this stone was set up as a free standing monument. Therefore the Dunsyre stone remains unique as the only true cup and ring marked stone from the County.

Nearby in Peeblesshire there are four recorded examples of rock art, only one of which is a cup and ring stone. This has three rings around a cup and was found as a fragment near the Roman fort of Lyne (RCAHMS, 1967/1) and is now in Peebles Museum. The other examples are; the most recent being found as part of the make up of a Bronze Age burial site at Woodend and which is given on BAG web site (www.biggararchaeology.org.uk), it consists of part of a design of seven concentric circles pecked into a piece of greywacke rock. On the opposite bank of the River Tweed from Woodend at Drumelzier a stone was found in a similar site to Woodend, this was carved with four sets of double rings and a single ring (RCAHMS, 1967/2). The final stone was recovered from a site near Lamancha (RCAHMS, 1967/3) and is now in the National Museum. This one has multiple examples of double and single rings and also spiral decoration and probably dates to the Neolithic period.

Dating and purpose of rock art

The dating of such rock art can only be done by association with monuments wherein it is included. Instances where cup and ring are found in situ in chambered tombs help with a Neolithic interpretation of date, such examples may be seen in the north east of Scotland at the Clava Cairns near Inverness (Close-Brookes, 1993). Cup and ring marks generally are found on in situ rock faces and excellent examples of these may be seen along the west coast of Scotland. However, it is generally believed that cup and ring decoration is also a feature of the Bronze Age period. The symbolic function of such rock art can only be conjectural and many theories exist.

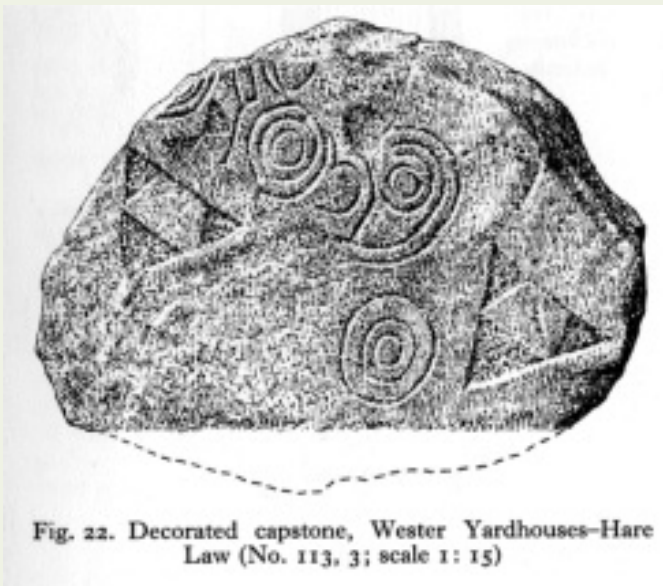


Fig. 22. Decorated capstone, Wester Yardhouses-Hare Law (No. 113, 3; scale 1: 15)

RCAHMS, 1978

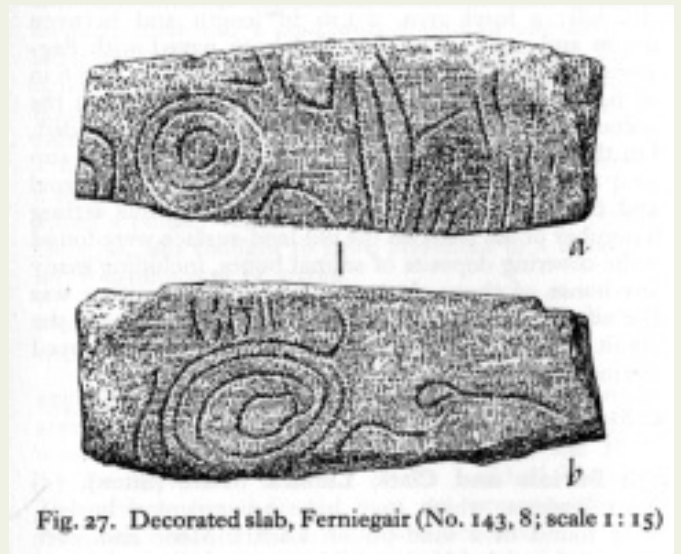


Fig. 27. Decorated slab, Ferniegair (No. 143, 8; scale 1: 15)

RCAHMS, 1978

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