

INVERAVON PICTISH STONES



**Are the symbols from
a Pictish religion?**

Norman J Penny 19 Feb 2026

1

St Durstan was sent in 618 from Iona by Abbot Fergus (St Columba's successor) to evangelise the Picts of the Spey Valley. He built his first church at Sgir-Durstan in what is now Aberlour. From there early chapels spread along the Spey valley including, it is believed, Inveravon. The earliest recorded Inveravon church, dedicated to St Peter, built around 1108, stood at the centre of the parish for over 450 years.

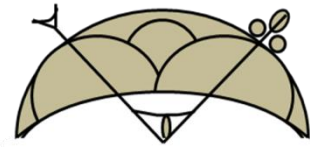
Following the Reformation, a church was built at the current location in 1568. The present church, erected around 1806/08 using some fragments of the 16th century building was remodelled in 1876 by Elgin architect Alexander Marshall Mackenzie - best known for the frontage of Marischal College in Aberdeen.

There is some inconsistency regarding the exact use or location of the Pictish Stones in the time of the 16th century church with one source considering three of the known four stones having been in the foundations of the earlier church. Another source states that the stone with the crescent & v-rod, three circles & a bar, comb and mirror symbols apparently stood in the middle of the churchyard and was moved to its recent outside location in 1903. The Pictish Beast stone seems to have come from a larger stone which was cut down and used as a building block placed in the east wall of the church [presumably the 1806/08 church]. The stone with the decorated shield, eagle, mirror and comb symbols was seemingly located in the wall of the preceding (1568) church.

These explanations are consistent with the practice of original use, loss, discovery and re-use (or display) of Pictish Stones elsewhere. This in itself is interesting as the so-called "pagan" stones may either have not held any threat for a Christian congregation, or maybe there was some superstition in avoiding them? 2

Perhaps the Stones and their symbols relate to an earlier religion practiced in parts of Pictland. Mithraism was popular in the Roman army and it is suggested that when it withdrew some followers stayed then developed and practiced a version with symbols as recorded on the so-called Pictish Symbol Stones. This author has proposed the name Pictish-Mithraism™.

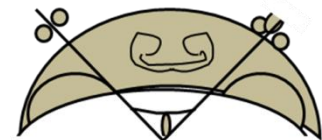
Inveravon (2)



Fundamental to Mithraism is the belief in the soul, that it travels from the celestial sphere at birth so into mortality then back at death into immortality. This belief would have been spiritually comforting – which partly explains its popularity amongst soldiers – and an enticement to join.

If the "V" of the "V-Rod and Crescent" is not a V but two arrows and the Crescent represents the sky ward view, then this Symbol can be deciphered. Inveravon's two examples very clearly show the direction of travel (in from the left hand side and out from the right) to a central point (the viewer).

Inveravon (4)

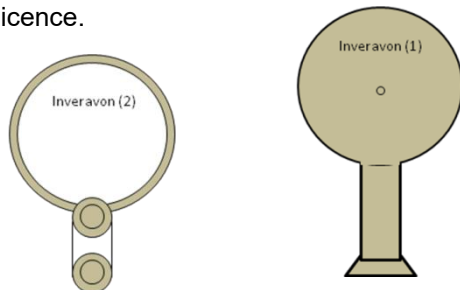


3

Two stones here have so-called Combs of different designs. One has seven teeth on each side of a central bar the other seems to have eight teeth below a single bar. The latter is very difficult to see and to decipher – it may have seven teeth. The number seven is of particular importance in Roman Mithraism being the number of planets known in the period. As “gates” it is via these planets that the soul travels from and to the Celestial Sphere. Also, there are seven Mithraic grades. The presence of features associated with the number seven on Pictish Symbol Stones further tends to support a follow through from Roman to Pictish Mithraism.



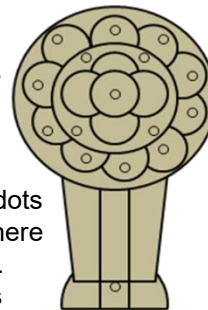
“Combs” are never seen without associated “Mirrors”. For Inveravon stone 2 the lower symbol could be a Double Disc (representing the earth, planets and Celestial Sphere) either extending out to a larger portrayal of the Celestial Sphere or to the zodiac. Double Discs are generally seen with Z-Rods – none at Inveravon. Stone 1 is a one- off for a Mirror design and is more like a Mirror Case. However, for this stone it does reflect the style of the Mirror Case suggesting some artistic licence.



4



Perhaps the most striking of the objects on the set of Inveravon stones is the “one off” design of the so-called Mirror Case – in Pictish-Mithraism the three distinct rings arguably represent the earth, the planets and the Celestial Sphere. Between the outer and first ring in are ten partial circles of slightly differing size with a dot in each; between the first ring in and second are four partial circles with dots in the spaces in between; there is a single dot in the middle. Neither the shapes nor dots nor the numbers of them suggests anything to do with Pictish-Mithraism – maybe like the lines and dots on the eagle they are merely decorative.



5

Generally, the Triple Disc looks like a receptacle with carrying rings and has been referred to as a cauldron. Having what looks like a bar or rod across the Triple Disc object brings together two ways of alluding to water as a circle with a horizontal line is a pagan symbol for water.

On the Mirror Case stone there is an eagle which in Celtic mythology was seen as one of the oldest creatures whose wisdom and age were only surpassed by the salmon. Many Pictish Symbol Stones have objects that have Celtic connections.

There is a complete Pictish Beast on stone number 4 and a fragment, mainly of the head, on stone number 3. One prospective meaning is the Leontocephalous (a complex imagery of never-ending time). Example below:-



First published as a tri-fold pamphlet by Norman J Penny – Nov 2012. All the Pictish Symbols have been individually recorded, described and largely deciphered in the author's web site at pictishsymbolstones.com

Until the spring of 2011 the Inveravon collection of four Pictish Symbol stones – the largest in the Spey valley - was clamped to the church's south wall. It is now protected from the weather in the porch whilst still being open for public viewing.

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