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**Taken into State care:** 1924 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# BAROCHAN CROSS



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



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# BAROCHAN CROSS

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument comprises a free-standing, British, sandstone cross of approximately 10<sup>th</sup>-century date. It now stands in **Paisley Abbey**, where it was moved for its protection in 1981. It is said to have originally stood near the mill at Barochan, near Houston, and was moved to the top of a local knoll in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to form a landscape feature.

Excluding its base, the cross stands around 1.95 m high. Decorated on all four sides, the majority of the decoration comprises panels of bold, median-incised interlace with some key pattern. The large lower panel on the front contains an interesting figural scene that includes: a mounted warrior carrying a spear; a man carrying a drinking horn; three men, one with an axe; and two opposed animals. On the back the two main panels each contain a line of four identical figures, in addition to interlace: in the upper panel is the outline of four figures in long garments; below four figures in profile, blowing trumpets and carrying spears.

The cross is now mounted in a modern base; the original still lies at Barochan.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

Antiquarian sources shed light on the biography of this monument, which has been moved several times. It is said to have originally stood very close to the Mill at Barochan. Sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was moved to a nearby knoll, as a landscape feature overlooking the west entrance to the policies of Barochan House.

In 1924 the cross and its associated ground were taken into guardianship. This area remains in guardianship, despite the fact that the cross is now in Paisley Abbey.

In 1981 Historic Scotland moved the cross to **Paisley Abbey** because here it could provide a safe environment for the sculpture.

### Archaeological Overview

The Barochan Cross belongs to an important series of sculpture from the former British (early medieval) kingdom of Strathclyde. Dating from c. 900 – 1100 AD, this group of sculpture is probably the least familiar of all Scotland's early Christian monuments. With the exception of the Govan collection, the Strathclyde monuments are poorly recorded and little-known. However, the sculpture has come to be recognised as central to any understanding of the British kingdom in Strathclyde.

An understanding of the original landscape setting of the cross is crucial to appreciation of its original function. In contrast to much of the surviving sculpture from Strathclyde, Barochan Cross appears not to have been directly

associated with a church. In its original location the cross was sited in a sheltered position by the ford of a burn at a point where the land (mainly low rolling hills) begins to rise steeply, and close to a waterfall. Although the adjacent road is now only minor, this route could lead towards a crossing of the Clyde and towards **Dumbarton Rock**, the political centre of British Strathclyde. In its original location the cross would also have looked south to the adjacent low hillock which was the site of the old castle of Barochan, seat of the barony before its replacement by Barochan House in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Recent aerial photographs reveal that this prominent flat-topped knoll is enclosed by a triple-ditched rampart which may be of medieval date or earlier. The associated centre of lordly patronage may, therefore, have been here. (Note: the older significance of this area is reflected in the Roman fort sited on the nearby Barochan Hill less than 1km to the east, possibly to be identified with the site named by Ptolemy as *Coria* of the Dumnonii. If correct, this name is potentially significant because it derives from a Celtic word meaning 'hosting place' and may thus imply that in the Roman period Barochan was some kind of tribal centre.)

Moved to the flat-topped knoll in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the base of the cross remains here today. The prominent martial imagery on the cross itself may lend credence to the notion that its original context was primarily secular.

The relationship of the Barochan Cross to the local ecclesiastical landscape is not obvious. While it lies roughly equidistant between two later medieval parish churches, it does not appear to coincide with a known boundary between the two. The status and date of other ecclesiastical sites in the near vicinity is also uncertain.

None of the Strathclyde crosses survives in its original location, but there is much that can be learnt about the group as a whole from research into where they originally stood.

### Artistic/Architectural Overview

The cross has broken into two, and subsequently been repaired (1920s and 1980s, for instance), and this fracture is readily visible.

The present cross base is modern, since the original is still at Barochan. Early medieval cross slab and cross bases are a neglected area of study, yet these would have had a spiritual as well as a structural function. The tall height of the Barochan socketed base not only added to its impressive height but also emphasised the Calvary symbolism.

There are aspects of the Strathclyde monuments, including Barochan, that encourage thinking about a common tradition and perhaps a school of sculptors (common aesthetic themes, forms, decorative treatments and techniques, implying the existence of a central workshop where artists are trained). The tendency to consider the sculpture as a single 'Govan school' should be avoided.

The dating of the Strathclyde monuments on art historical grounds is not a precise science and requires more art historical and archaeological study.

The Barochan Cross is one of three surviving complete crosses from British Strathclyde (Govan 'sun-cross' and Netherton), fragments from other crosses also survive. Of these Barochan is the most ambitious and the most representative of the rest of the Strathclyde group of sculpture.

Art historical connections between the art of the Strathclyde group and the 'Whithorn school' merit explanation.

### Social Overview

Through time the Barochan Cross gradually lost its original social significance, eventually being reduced to a landscape ornament. However, through piecing together its biography it is possible to understand what it may have meant to the people who commissioned it, and later reused it. For example, its secondary Victorian setting on a knoll dominating the approach to the 'big house' reflects contemporary upper class values about landscape and authority. In its earlier location, the cross may well have stood in an analogous relationship to the knoll, marking the final approach to the old castle and its predecessors.

The relocation of the cross to Paisley Abbey in 1981 was complicated, since the local community wished it to stay in the parish (no acceptable alternative could be found). Active local interest in its return still exists (e.g. for Millennium year). The cross has now also acquired a value to the congregation of Paisley Abbey. Historic Scotland recognises the desirability of returning it to Barochan, or nearby, providing the long-term conservation needs of the monument can be satisfactorily addressed. Suggestions have also included erecting a replica on the former cross site.

### Spiritual Overview

The cross was an overtly Christian monument, apparently erected under secular patronage and not physically associated with a church (note: local ecclesiastical landscape requires further research).

The figural imagery of the cross requires further research to understand better its full range of meanings (both secular and religious).

### Aesthetic Overview

None of the Strathclyde sculpture exhibits the technical expertise or artistic vision seen in the finest sculpture from Pictland or Argyll, but this does not diminish their wider value. The flatness and lack of detail on the worn surfaces may indicate that sculptures, such as Barochan, were finished with paint. The contrast with other early medieval sculpture in Scotland will in part be a reflection of chronology, local political circumstances and prevailing tradition and status of patronage of the arts, including the access to art of other media (such as manuscripts).

### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

Detailed art historical record and analysis is required. Until more detailed work is done on the finds locations, stylistic affiliations and chronology of all the

Strathclyde sculpture, it will not be possible to come to a definitive conclusion about the 'Govan School' and the place of Barochan in this.

Understanding of the original landscape setting of the cross is absolutely crucial to understanding its significance. Glasgow University have undertaken some preliminary work, but much remains to be learnt through further multi-disciplinary research.

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

A well preserved free-standing cross of probable 10<sup>th</sup>-century date, one of only three surviving complete crosses from early medieval Strathclyde, and, of these, the most ambitious.

Key example of a group of sculpture (c. 900-1100 AD) that is highly significant for our understanding of the British kingdom or kingdoms in Strathclyde during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Present models show this sculpture to be complex with a great diversity of monument types, decorative motifs and landscape locations. It seems likely that there were two or more centres producing sculpture for a range of purposes, under different types of patronage, both secular and ecclesiastical, with Barochan being an example of the former.

As presently displayed, the cross has lost its direct physical associations with its base and original location (some 10 km away). Recognition and understanding of its full original form and biography, particularly its original landscape setting and relationship to lordly power centres and routes of communication, are key to appreciation of its full significance.

The Strathclyde group of sculpture has been understudied and is not yet well understood. In contrast to much other early medieval sculpture in Scotland it is not so technically or artistically accomplished, but this does not diminish its wider significance. Links with the sculpture in other parts of the British Isles, not least south-west Scotland, are important and these too require further study.

The martial imagery of this Christian monument is striking, albeit the meaning is not entirely clear.

### Associated Properties

**Paisley Abbey** (present location, no known historical association).

**Dumbarton Rock**, Govan (as key political and royal centres in British kingdom of Strathclyde; nb. related sculpture at Dumbarton).

Other examples of Strathclyde group of sculpture, both associated with their findspot (e.g. important collections at Govan and Inchinnan) or any materials that are in Glasgow Museums (e.g. 'Mountblow, Capelrig and Old Kilpatrick). The other examples of Strathclyde crosses are: Netherton (Hamilton) and Govan 'sun-stone' (still complete); Inchinnan, Arthurlie; Cambusnethan; Lochwinnoch; Old Kilpatrick, 'Mountblow', Capelrig, Lesmahagow and **Kilwinning** (cross-shaft).

**Whithorn** (wider artistic connections).

See Interpretation Plan for *Early Medieval Carved Stones in Historic Scotland's Care*.

Keywords Free-standing cross, early medieval, British kingdom of Strathclyde, secular patronage; former location, missing base.