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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

ABERLEMNO SCULPTURED STONES: ABERLEMNO III

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.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

ABERLEMNO SCULPTURES STONES: ABERLEMNO III

CONTENTS

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Principal Office: Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH

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1   Summary

1.1   Introduction
Aberlemno III, standing by the roadside within Aberlemno in Angus, is a Class II Pictish upright cross-slab of Old Red Sandstone. It stands within a stone socket at an impressive 2.82m tall and dates to the late first millennium AD. This cross-slab is one of the finest in its class.

The front face exhibits a quadrilobate Christian cross with a central raised boss, carved all in relief, including numerous interlace and key-pattern decorated panels, although these are badly weathered. There are also two angels and two beasts on this face. The back face exhibits two Pictish symbols at the top, a hunting scene, a centaur, David splitting the jaws of a lion, and numerous other associated carvings. The left and right side are also decorated with carvings.

The stone is freely accessible on foot as a visitor attraction by the roadside in Aberlemno, although between the last working day of September and the first working day of April each year it is covered with a wooden box to protect it from wintery conditions and frost damage.

1.2   Statement of significance
The Pictish symbol stones, cross-slabs and crosses of early medieval Scotland are perhaps the most extraordinary and beautiful of all carved stones in the British Isles. These stones, carved by the Picts, or 'Painted People', 'offer remarkable testimony to their artistic skills and insights into Pictish life and artistic contacts'.[1]
Aberlemno III stands prominently on the roadside within Aberlemno. Its significance can be summarised as follows:
- It is an explicit expression on Christianity in southern Pictland.
- Although badly weathered at parts, its current state of survival is significant.
- It is likely carved in the first half of the ninth century,[2] although eighth century dates are also suggested. The latter date would coincide with the period when Pictish kings were actively promoting the development of the Pictish church.[3]
- Its fine carving and complex iconography, including a Pictish hunting scene and large symbols, as well as Biblical imagery, attest to its significance.

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[1] Fraser 2008, 1
[2] Trench-Jellicoe 1999, 618; Ritchie 1995, 8
[3] Foster 2004, 1

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- It is perhaps the first truly monumental cross-slab in southern Pictland.[4]
- This cross-slab demonstrates advances in the technical and architectural knowledge of the Picts, as is evident in its stature and the cutback that better reveals the cross.[5]
- The high relief carving on the front face is indicative of a style that is thought to have been transmitted from contemporary metalwork, although much of which has not survived.
- The mixing of Pictish symbols and Christian iconography on this cross-slab was not ambivalent, and therefore perhaps designed to convey complex messages during a time of conversion.
- It is part of a grouping of stones located in and around Aberlemno, and notably in an area which became a major route way.[6]
- This stone communicates to us that the Picts were not an isolated or primitive culture.
- The area of Angus contains a significant number of Pictish carved stones.

2   Assessment of values
2.1   Background

Description

The cross-slab is carved from Old Red Sandstone, rectangular in shape. The stone is consistent with a local source in the Aberlemno – Finavon Hill area.[7] It measures 2.82m in height, 1.02m wide across its base, 0.20m in thickness and 0.28m in thickness at the centre of the cross, as the cross protrudes in relief by 0.08m.[8] It is carved in relief and incision. It stands by the roadside (B9134) on a prominent route way along with Aberlemno I and IV, and the surrounding village of Aberlemno and the modern road provide its current immediate landscape setting.

The carved detail

The front face (facing the road), carved all in relief, is dominated by a large ring-headed Christian cross, including four interlace decorated round bosses at each angle of the cross and an interlace decorated connecting ring. The four raised lobes of the cross appear to be decorated with key-pattern and all with a rectangular depression in their middle. At the time of description by Allen he noted that this face was so badly weathered and encrusted with lichen that any decoration was difficult to

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[4] Trench-Jellicoe 1999, 618
[5] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 214
[6] Ritchie 1995, 8
[7] Miller and Ruckley 2005, 289
[8] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 214

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determine.[9] The lower arm of the cross and bottom two panels are badly weathered, however there is evidence for decoration at its base as well as four beasts. This part of the cross-slab has partially survived due to it being hidden by a small wall for an unknown period of time. The decoration and beasts did not reveal themselves until the wall was removed in the late nineteenth century.[10]

Providing the background to the cross are ten panels. These are split with five on each side of the cross appearing to symmetrically oppose one another. At the base of the cross-shaft, the left and right panels exhibit two beasts each, positioned one above the other. These are very badly eroded and so difficult to discern. The lower of the beasts on both sides appear to be backwards facing with their legs folded under themselves, particularly so on the left side. The next two panels up both exhibit two different key-pattern decorations, with the right panel being badly weathered. The middle two panels each exhibit an angel holding a book. The angels both appear to be bowing inwards towards the shaft of the cross, either in despair or admiration; hence this cross-shaft may at times be referred to 'The Mourning Angels'. The next two panels up exhibit what appears to be zoomorphic interlace, however this is so badly weather it is difficult to determine. The top two panels are badly worn, the left more so than the other. The panel to the right appears to display a beast and the panel to the left possibly also once displayed a beast. This is difficult to determine but is based on an earlier assumption.[11]

The right and left sides are incised with a continuous row of double spirals linked in an S-shaped format.

The back face (facing the field), carved in relief, can be broken down into three distinct panels. The top panel exhibits two elaborately carved large Pictish symbols: a double disc and z-rod, and a crescent and v-rod. The two discs are carved with seven interweaving spirals in a circle (or three interconnected triskele), and the crescent is carved with key-pattern in its centre and broken plait-work to its two peaks.[12] The middle panel exhibits an elaborate hunting scene. This comprises four men on horses, two on foot with trumpets behind the horsemen and one other on foot in front of the horsemen. Horse saddles and bridles as well as weaponry are apparent, and the scene also exhibits three hounds and three deer. The left of the bottom panel exhibits a centaur with an axe over his shoulder and a tree under his arm, and also the remains of an indistinct figure to his bottom left. To the right of this

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[9] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 214
[10] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[11] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 214
[12] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215

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is a man splitting the jaws of a lion, probably the biblical David, with a harp and sheep above the lion, perhaps indicative of the minstrel and the shepherd.[13]

Brief history
The following is designed to highlight the brief history of Aberlemno III. Providing a full biography for the stone is not possible at this stage in our understanding, as is common with early medieval carved stones. A fuller account of the timeline of the stone is given in Appendix 1, and any further details of archaeological investigation are presented in Appendix 2.
Assigning the name of a patron or carver, or even a date to Aberlemno I is difficult. This is the same with most carved stones of this period. It is probable that it was erected in the first half of the ninth century AD.

A reference is made to a stone with pictures of men and deer on it in 1569, noting that it stands beside a cairn of stones.[14] This is more than likely Aberlemno III.

The stone was subject to great antiquarian interest. Alexander Gordon made an engraving of the stone in the early eighteenth century.[15] Notably, Thomas Pennant illustrated it in 1772,[16] and James Skene and Charlotte Wilhelmina Hibbert both drew it during the first half of the nineteenth century.[17]

Sometime around 1857 it is noted that a small cairn of stones, human bones and remains of coffins were found in close proximity to the stone.[18]

In an effort to get better photographs for *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, a small stone built wall was removed for the base of the cross-slab, which in turn revealed the lower portion of the cross.[19]

In 1912 the stone was passed into guardianship,[20] thus providing evidence with regards to early concern for its preservation. Due to on going concern about the safety of Aberlemno I, designs were drawn up in 1913 for shelters to house the stone, including the other three from Aberlemno.[21]

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[13] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[14] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[15] Gordon 1726, Pl. 53
[16] Pennant 1776, Pl. 17
[17] RCAHMS n.d.; Henry and Trench-Jellicoe 2005, 229
[18] Jervise 1859, 192
[19] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[20] Foster 2004, 1
[21] Foster 2001, 21-3

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In 2002 the stone was digitally recorded with 3D laser scanning technology,[22] thus demonstrating a welcome engagement between carved stones and digital technology.

2.2   Evidential values
Aberlemno III is an exceptional example of a Class II Pictish cross-slab. It stands out in the archaeological record as a noteworthy surviving example of Pictish art on stone. Its completeness, complexity and good state of preservation, as well as its hunting scene and Christian iconographies, are of great importance to its current and future potential in research and education.

The stone more than likely stands in its original location on a prominent ridge,[23] perhaps signifying the location of a major route way, which now connects the modern areas of Forfar and Brechin. It has been stated that we should 'not lose the ability to recognise this on the ground',[24] thus highlighting the significance of this stones landscape setting, both immediate and beyond, as well as past and present.

This cross-slab probably had the role of a prayer cross and would have been 'erected under the patronage of secular or ecclesiastical aristocracy'.[25]
Aberlemno III has the potential to provide evidence of aspects of Pictish society, such as culture, religion and daily life (in this case hunting). This will be discussed in the following sections.

2.3   Historical values
Aberlemno III and other Pictish carved stones, although carved with beautiful but generally unintelligible symbols,[26] are of incredible historic value. Pictish symbols are explicitly identifiable as indicators of Pictish culture, yet without the discovery of 'contemporary literary reference' they will remain difficult to understand.[27] The details revealed in the numerous other carvings however can help in the elucidation of the culture, religion and lifestyle of the people of early medieval Scotland.

This stone is notably significant in its display of what is generally accepted as depicting a hunting scene. At the very least, it demonstrates the use of horses and hounds in the hunt for deer, thus highlighting aspects of daily life. The use of trumpets suggests an order to the proceedings, and presents the idea of structured society. There may however be a more symbolic or religious

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[22] Carty 2005, 368-69; Pictish Stones n.d.
[23] Ritchie 1995, 8
[24] Foster 2001, 31
[25] Foster 2004, 1
[26] Henderson 1967, 157-8
[27] Henderson 1967, 158

meaning behind why the Picts chose to depict hunting scenes on their carved stones.

Aberlemno III is a cross-slab and is therefore an explicit manifestation of Christianity in Pictland. It provides insight into the beliefs and religious practices of the population in this region during the late first millennium AD, as well as in the surrounding areas, and to some extent the rest of the British Isles. Whoever had this stone carved and erected was overt in their devotion to Christianity, thus providing intelligible links between elite patronage and religion in Pictland.

Erected at a time when Pictish kings were actively promoting the development of the Pictish church.

This stone provides further tangible historical reference to Christianity in the complex Biblical messages it appears to convey in its iconographies, such as through David and the lion.

2.4   Architectural and artistic values
Evidence for the Picts predominantly comes from their art, and particularly from carved stones. These carved stones are clearly products of accomplished sculptors and may provide evidence of a structured society. Skilled sculptors must have been commissioned to create these masterpieces, most probably at the behest of the Pictish elite. With the lack of other significant evidence for the Picts, these carved stones therefore give an insight into Pictish society, foreign contacts and cultural resources.

The architectural and artistic value of Aberlemno III can be summarised as follows:
The architecture of the stone is impressive. Its sheer size, protruding cross, socket stone and artwork are all evidence of highly skilled craftsmanship.

The beasts on the two bottom panels, although moderately indistinct, may have parallels in Pictland, particularly if indeed they are backwards facing.

The angels, their wings particularly, are said to have parallels on a recumbent slab from Kincardine in Easter Ross.[28] It is also noted that the form and design of the cross may be paralleled in Easter Ross, however it probably sits more securely within the early Iona school of Iona.[29]

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[28] Trench-Jellicoe 1997, 170
[29] Trench-Jellicoe 1999, 618

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Parallels for the rectangular depressions in the four lobes of the cross may be identified on the Kildalton Cross from Islay, and the round domed bosses from the armpits of Aberlemno III may have parallels from Iona on St John's Cross and St Martin's Cross.[30] For a parallel in metalwork, this form of boss organisation around a cruciform may be seen on the base of the Ormside liturgical bowl from Cumbria.[31] Ross Trench-Jellicoe has suggested that Aberlemno III indicates an attempt to combine the cross-slab tradition of southern Pictland with the free-standing high cross tradition of the eighth century Iona school, thus demonstrates far flung connections.[32]

Although not a direct parallel, Henderson and Henderson have suggested that the four rectangular mouldings found on the Bologna Shrine 'provides a very adequate model for the rectangular mouldings' found on the cross arms of Aberlemno III.[33]

The complex Pictish symbols on the back face are particularly significant due to their size and clarity, although the double disc and z-rod and the crescent and v-rod symbols are numerous in Pictland.[34] Notably however, the spiral designs within the double disc symbol on Aberlemno III are paralleled on the central boss of Aberlemno II. A Variation of this symbol, perhaps earlier, is found engraved onto a silver chain terminal from Whitecleugh in Lanarkshire, and a variation incorporating the triskele design in found engraved on two silver plaques from the Norrie's Law hoard, Fife.[35]

Pictish symbols of a similar scale can be found on the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab.[36] Significantly however, the hunting scene from Aberlemno III is also paralleled on the surviving face of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab,[37] of which also has two trumpeters. The messages conveyed by the numerous Pictish hunt scenes are a topic still at the centre of debate, and issues surrounding the relationship between the trumpeters and David and the lion are discussed elsewhere.[38]

The inclusion of David, the lion, the harp and the shepherd are probably intended to convey complex Biblical messages through

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[30] Trench-Jellicoe 1999, 618
[31] Henderson 1993, 214-5; Webster 2012, 138-9
[32] Trench-Jellicoe 1999, 618-9
[33] Henderson and Henderson 2004, 115 and 224
[34] Mack 1997, 2-3 and 6-7
[35] Henderson and Henderson 2004, 88
[36] See James et al. 2008
[37] Fraser 2008, 88-9
[38] Henderson 1986, 107-8

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art, and Isabel Henderson masterfully presents a summary of the 'David Cycle' and associated archaeological evidence elsewhere.[39]

As with the 'David Cycle', the centaur has had its significance discussed elsewhere.[40] It is interesting to note however that the centaur design appears on other carved stones from the 'Aberlemno School'.[41] The centaur appears on Meigle II in Perthshire with two axes in his hands and a branch under his arm,[42] similar to Aberlemno III, and it also appears on Glamis II holding two axes.[43]

The above discussion of the artistic parallels and the associated geographical spread of the iconographies carved therefore attests to the artistic value of Aberlemno III.

2.5   Landscape and aesthetic values
As with the majority of early medieval carved stones, its aesthetic significance has changed over time. This is relative to its changing landscape setting, but more importantly, to its changing audience. Those who view the stone today will have a different experience to those who viewed it within its original landscape setting.

Artistically, Aberlemno III is aesthetically significant due to the nature, complexity and survival of some of its artwork. Each design is expertly carved with precision and in most cases presented clearly, although some errors are apparent.[44] Its current state of preservation is good.

Original aesthetic
Currently, this stone stands in what is thought to be its original location on a ridge that became a significant route way.[45] Presently, there are two more stones seemingly specifically sited on this route way (B9134) in Aberlemno. These are Aberlemno I and IV. It is therefore more than likely that Aberlemno III shared its immediate original landscape setting with these two stones. Its original landscape relationship with nearby Aberlemno II is not known, although they all must have shared the original surrounding landscape of Aberlemno, and perhaps all have been intervisible.

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[39] Henderson 1986, 87-123
[40] Henderson 1997, 22-3
[41] Laing 2001, 236-7
[42] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 297-8
[43] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 221-3
[44] Henderson 2008, 174-5
[45] Ritchie 1995, 8

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Historic aesthetic

The stone was clearly appreciated for its aesthetic values from as early in the historic period as the late sixteenth century, where it is described in minimal detail as standing beside a cairn of stones.[46] Alexander Gordon illustrated the stone in the early eighteenth century,[47] and in the late eighteenth century Thomas Pennant illustrated it.[48] The stone was also subject to excavations in and around its vicinity, including the removal of a wall from in front of its base,[49] thus indicating an intrinsic value and archaeological significance being placed upon it during the nineteenth century.[50] Concern for its artistic aesthetic was expressed at the start of the twentieth century, and is evidenced in the creation of blueprints to house the stone.[51]

Present Day aesthetic

The stone currently has an immediate landscape setting of the B0134 Forfar to Brechin road, on which also stands Aberlemno I and IV. Nearby is Aberlemno II in Aberlemno churchyard.

The stone can be appreciated by the roadside as the dyke has been moved behind it. Notably however, for six months of the year it is housed beneath a wooden case to protect it from the winter elements,[52] thus impacting on its potential to have year round publically accessible aesthetic value. It does however stand as a significant reminder of Angus' Pictish past.

2.6   Natural heritage values
The stone stands by the roadside in Aberlemno. No natural significance is apparent.

2.7   Contemporary/use values

Social values
Community
The stone has probably been important to the community of Aberlemno for quite some time. Reference to the stone standing in the late sixteenth century attests to this. This suggests that it has survived unscathed in the landscape, even through the turbulent sixteenth century. Perhaps this was down to the community. The discovery of human remains in close proximity to it in the nineteenth century clearly must have sparked greater interest in the cultural significance of the stone. This is subsequently attested

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[46] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[47] Gordon 1726, Pl. 53
[48] Pennant 1776, Pl. 17
[49] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[50] Jervise 1859, 192
[51] Foster 2001, 21-3
[52] Foster 2001, 23

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to in the on going debate in the community regarding whether or not the stone should be removed from the roadside for its own protection.[53] This stone, along with the other two stones on the roadside, does not stand alone in the community. They exist as a group that can demonstrate the evolution of Pictish carving from Class I to II. Aberlemno III is therefore a significant attribute to the community of Aberlemno.

Spiritual
As an explicit manifestation of Christianity, this stone has undeniable spiritual and religious value. Its location on a prominent route way is significant, as this leads to it being continually encountered by people journeying past it. The stone is impressive in scale and so has continually been easily accessible as an expression of the Christian religion within this region. The complex Biblical imagery provides more spiritual value to this stone than perhaps its neighbours have. On the other hand however, the meanings conveyed by its two Pictish symbols continue to provide the stone with a tantalising characteristic.

Use values
Economic
The stone is located on the route way between Forfar and Brechin (B1934), however the A90 now supersedes this route and so removes the possibility of numerous visitors having a chance encounter with the site. However, as the stone is part of a grouping of four carved stones in Aberlemno it is likely that this will encourage people to visit the site, and so lead to modest contributions to the local economy. Those of the Christian faith in particular may be drawn from afar to pilgrimage to this stone for worship or prayer.

Access and education
Although the site is unstaffed it is freely accessible. There is a PDF leaflet briefly detailing early carved stones available online for download from Historic Scotland. This is titled *Investigating – Early Carved Stones*.[54] It is also available in Gaelic. A 3D scan is also available online.[55] Due to the clarity of this stone it clearly has an educational value with regards to generating discussions about the meaning of its symbols. This stone overtly displays features of early Christianity, and so may be used as a learning aid to demonstrate aspects of early organised religion in Scotland.

Corporate value
Although the stone is in the care of Historic Scotland, it is still standing within the landscape by the roadside, and so it is subject

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[53] Foster 2001, 21
[54] Historic Scotland 2009
[55] Pictish Stones n.d.

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to the natural elements as well as debris from the road. The former is managed by covering the stone for six months of the year during the autumn and winter, thus demonstrating best practice with regards to safeguarding the stone at the same times as allowing it to be experienced during the warmer months. Permission has been granted for the removal of this stone to a more suitable location within Aberlemno, yet no solution for this has been met as of yet.

3   Major gaps in understanding
- There is no single academic thesis on this stone, although it is widely discussed and referred to in other art historical literature.
- Is its current location, as was mentioned in 1569, its original location?
- Who had the stone created and who was the carver?
- Why was this stone created, and why was it erected in Aberlemno?
- What is the stones archaeological context? Is there a relationship between it and the nearby human remains?
- What is the purpose of the hunting scene iconography, if any?
- The stone is said to have stood close to a cairn of stones. Is the cairn that was mentioned in 1569 the same cairn that was later mentioned in c.1857?
- What is the relationship between the Aberlemno roadside stones and Aberlemno II?
- What are the wider landscape relationships between Aberlemno III and both the symbol stone from Flemington Farm and the cross-slab from Woodwrae?[56]
- Can the complex Christian iconography be fully understood?
- Does the stone have any associated sites or settlements?
- What do the Pictish symbols represent on this carved stone?

4   Associated properties
Aberlemno I, II and IV; Flemington Farm; Woodwrae; Finavon Fort; Hilton of Cadboll; Glamis II, Meigle II

5   Keywords
Pictish, cross-slab, Pictish symbols, Christianity, hunting scene, Insular art, Aberlemno, Angus, metalwork, David, interlace, key-pattern, zoomorphic, beast, centaur, angel

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[56] See Fraser 2008, 48-9 and 62-3

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APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Timeline

- **685 –** Battle of Nechtansmere (or Dunnichen), resulting in the death of King Ecgfrith of Northumbria and a victory for the Picts at the hands of King Bridei son of Beli,[57] and ultimately leading to a Northumbrian loss of territory in Pictland.[58]
- **c.710 –** Correspondence between Ceolfrid, Abbot from the Monastery at Jarrow, and King Nechtan of Pictland, in which Nechtan asks for the assistance of masons to help build a church in the Roman fashion.[59]
- **c.800x850 –** Aberlemno III is carved and erected,[60] but precisely when and by whom is a mystery.
- **843 –** Cináed mac Ailpín becomes king of the Picts.[61]
- **1569 –** The stone is said to be standing next to a cairn of stones.[62]
- **1726 –** Illustrated by Alexander Gordon, along with Aberlemno II, and recorded in *Itinerarium Septentrionale.*[63]
- **1772 –** Illustrated by Thomas Pennant and recorded in *A Tour of Scotland.*[64]
- **c.1857 –** A small cairn of stones, as well as human bones and coffins are said to have been found nearby to the stone.[65]
- **1893 –** A stone built wall sitting in front of its base was removed in order to take photographs for *Early Christian Monuments of* Scotland. This revealed the bottom portion of the cross shaft and four beasts.[66]
- **1912 –** The stone was passed into guardianship.[67]
- **1913 –** Drawings created of a potential shelter for the stone.[68]
- **2002 –** Archaeoptics Ltd undertook a 3D laser scan of the stone.[69]

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[57] Fraser 2009, 383; Woolf 2007, 10
[58] Woolf 2007, 4
[59] Henderson 1967, 82
[60] Trench-Jellicoe 1999, 620
[61] Woolf 2007, 351
[62] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[63] Gordon 1726, Pl. 53
[64] Pennant 1776, Pl. 17
[65] Jervise 1859, 192
[66] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215
[67] Foster 2004, 3
[68] Foster 2001, 21-3
[69] Carty 2005, 368-69

Appendix 2: Summary of archaeological investigations

Around 1857, Andrew Jervise visited the site and noted that Aberlemno I (which is just north of Aberlemno III) stood a little north of a small circle or cairn of stones.[70] He noted that this feature appeared disturbed, but that it measured 1.82m across and 0.76m deep in the middle. He also noted a conversation he had had with a local parishioner, in which he was told of the discovery of stone coffins and human bones in the field next to Aberlemno I.[71]

In 1893 a stone built wall was removed from the base of the cross-shaft in order to take photographs. This revealed the bottom of the cross-shaft and four beasts.[72]

Unfortunately, and due in part to limited archaeological excavation and inspection of the stone's immediate and surrounding contexts, the history of Aberlemno III will remain difficult to fully determine.

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[70] Jervise 1859, 192
[71] Jervise 1859, 192
[72] Allen and Anderson 1903, Part III, 215