

Pictish Symbol Stones – Case Study Cossans, St Orlands Stone

Features – with a mixture of commonplace and rarer designs including a “one-off” this Class 2 Stone is in an isolated, open location and overlooks water. On some maps it is shown as Cossins.

An isolated position in low lying fields (prospectively an original location), six inhumations found in the mid-1800s with 5 in cists and the “one-off” carving of six figures in a boat are a few aspects that make this Stone noteworthy.



Furthermore, deep recesses around the ringed Celtic Cross have Interlaced Animals on each side of the vertical. On the left a pair biting beak to beak, another pair biting beak to tail, one higher up alone and on the right several which are not readily decipherable.

This imagery is taken to the reverse of the Stone where two creatures with heads opposing at the top of the Stone have opposing fish style tails at the bottom connected by interlace patterns on the sides of the Stone – they appear to be fighting over what presumably is food. None of these objects suggests any specific story or message.

Register type layout is used on the reverse from a V-Rod & Crescent then Z-Rod and Double Disc at the top then an area that has been removed, a hunting scene in two registers – the top having two riders and the lower another two riders followed by two dogs, the figures in a boat and, finally, a Beast with Exaggerated Claws facing (attacking?) a cow. Decoding the objects is difficult except for the V-Rod & Crescent and Z-Rod & Double Disc (see the Case Study for Aberlemno for an outline explanation).

The name of the Stone gives no clues either as St Orland is not on any “Saint Lists”, or similar, researched so far; perhaps it is a corruption of another name. However, its location and proximity to the Dean Water (due south) and Loch of Forfar (due north east) plus all its symbols and imagery reinforced by the likely spirituality of the adjacent burials makes this is a prime example of a transition Stone (between Pictish-Mithraism and Christian beliefs).