

Carriden Anglian Cross

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The earliest Christian object that we have from the Falkirk area, this stone sculpture from the 10th century provides a direct link to the classical past and the idea of an earthly empire. It went hand in glove with writing and scholarship, which aided the administration of the country. The church became wealthy, influential and powerful and for over a millennium it dominated life in the Falkirk area.

[Introductory Film : The Carriden Cross](#)



Illus 1:
Broad interlace on side 1.

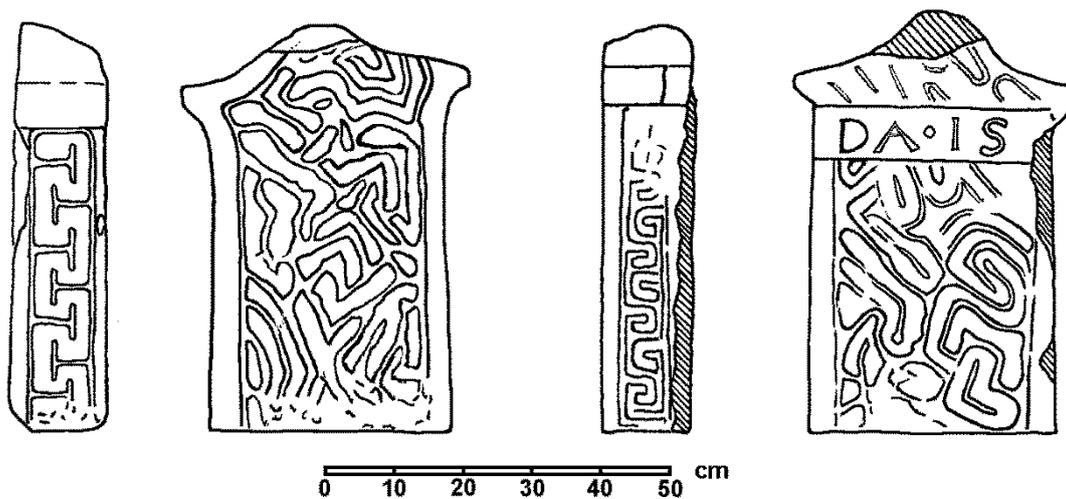
The fragment of an Anglian cross discovered in the old churchyard beside Carriden House in 2003 (Bailey 2003, 1-3) is part of the rectangular shaft from just below the cross (see illus 3). In 2018 the opportunity arose to examine the cross in more detail and to make a full record. The top of the shaft has a pointed overhanging neck – which feature would probably have been echoed on the arms. The circular cut outs for the armpits have been utilised by a monumental mason in the 18th century to create the typical sinuous top to a gravestone. There is no sign of a nimbus or circle – meaning that it should not strictly speaking be called a Celtic cross. The overall design suggests influences from the north of England and so the term Anglian Cross is appropriate, though they are often simply referred to as freestanding crosses or high crosses.

The surviving piece is 0.62m long overall, 0.36m wide at the base and 0.14m deep. It is a close-grained blonde sandstone, commonly found in this part of Scotland. The main faces contain panels of irregular broad interlace set within a plain flat band of moulding and the design is somewhat asymmetrical. The strands are probably meant to be paired. The broken interlace appears random when compared with the strict

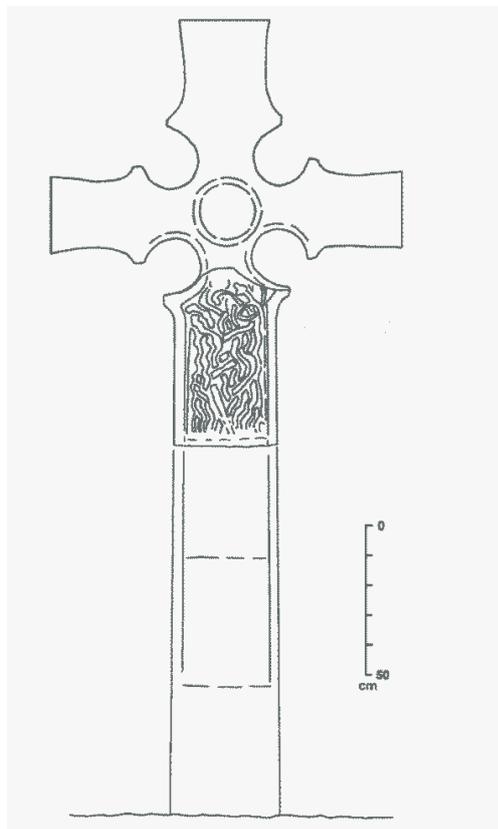
A History of Falkirk in 10 ½ Objects: Object 4

geometry of some of the elaborate plaiting seen on crosses nearby at Abercorn, and is made using the punched and grooved technique. The remaining hint of a horizontal groove at the bottom of side 1 suggests that the panel ended at this point. The overhanging neck and the broad interlace are seen on a similar fragment from Staveley in Yorkshire.

On the sides are different designs - a meander pattern on one side and key pattern on the other, which confirm that it is the shaft rather than an arm, and that it is 10th century. Being decorated on all four sides it is evident that the cross was freestanding.



Illus 2: Sketches of the four sides of the Carriden cross.



When the stone was re-used as a grave marker at some date in the 18th century the broken bottom was squared off and the margin flattened. A recessed band was cut horizontally across one side and the initials DA and IS carved for the husband and wife who had obtained the stone. It was erected within the churchyard just to the west of the 12th century stone church building and near to the former site of the 'joug tree.' This is the site of the principia of the Roman fort and many of the stones for the church would have been similarly recycled from the fort. The main drain at the Roman bathhouse showed evidence to suggest stone robbing at this time.

Illus 3: Reconstruction drawing of the Carriden cross.

A History of Falkirk in 10 ½ Objects: Object 4

The medieval church was replaced by one at Cuffabouts in 1766 and the old structure was demolished in order to improve the view from Carriden House. It is possible that the cross fragment came to light at that time and was re-used. It is also possible that other pieces may be discovered in the future.

The place name of Carriden, formerly pronounced "Carrin", is of some antiquity and is thought to be derived from the elements "caer" for the Roman fort, and "Eden" a personal name as in "Edinburgh". Around 1200 Carriden was described as a *civitas antiquissima* (Macdonald 1941; Dumville 1994). A Bronze Age socket axe was found just 200m to the south-east of the churchyard and more importantly a rapier was recovered from here in the 18th century (Cowie 2001,93-94). It is likely that there has been continuous occupation since then. The six acre Roman fort more or less marked the eastern terminal of the Antonine Wall in the second century AD and protected a coastal road to Blackness and Edinburgh (Bailey & Devereux 1987; Bailey forthcoming). Early post-Roman timber structures were picked up during excavations in 1994 (Bailey 1997). The cross fragment indicates the continuing importance of the location.



More intricate cross fragments have been found at Abercorn, the neighbouring parish to the east. Abercorn was noted by Bede as the seat of a Pictish bishopric in the eighth century. He also mentions Kinneil, the neighbour on the west side of Carriden, as the end of the Antonine Wall. Here a massive rood stone was discovered in 1951 built into the foundations of a 17th century loft attached to the south side of the 12th century parish church. This stone has been variously dated, but an 11th

century date seems reasonable. Aerial photographs have shown that this early ecclesiastical site is surrounded by a broad ditch which looks like a *vallum monasterii*.

Illus 4: Reconstruction drawing of the Kinneil cross.

Further along the coast we have Bothkenar Parish Church. Bothkennar has never been archaeologically excavated, but it is named after St Kinnera, a 6th century saint. The church sits on a slight rise in the carse land near a lost meander in the River Carron. Upriver from this is the churchyard at the Hills of Dunipace which was located at a very important crossing. Here we have the remains of a massive socket



stone for a cross with a square shaft (RCAHMS 1963, 158). Continuing northward along the coast we come to Airth. Airth Church was already very well established by the time that the large 12th century transitional style church was completed and a later aisle contains a re-used 13th century gravestone.

Illus 5: The socket stone at Dunipace.

Falkirk church, one of the most important in the area, houses a cross head that was initially identified as a sanctuary cross, though it may have been a headstone (Bailey 2010, 20). It would have sat on the top of a small shaft and the remaining piece measures 0.36m by 0.25m by 0.13m.

Illus 5: The Falkirk cross-head.

The Carriden cross can be seen as the earliest known of a series of churchyard monuments in the Falkirk district. Like the crosses at Abercorn it reflects influences from the north of England. The Forth was a conduit for goods and ideas from outside of the area. These crosses often pre-date the stone church buildings whose floruit was in the 12th century. They represent the



consolidation of Christianity in the area and its commemoration in a more permanent form.

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