

BabelStone

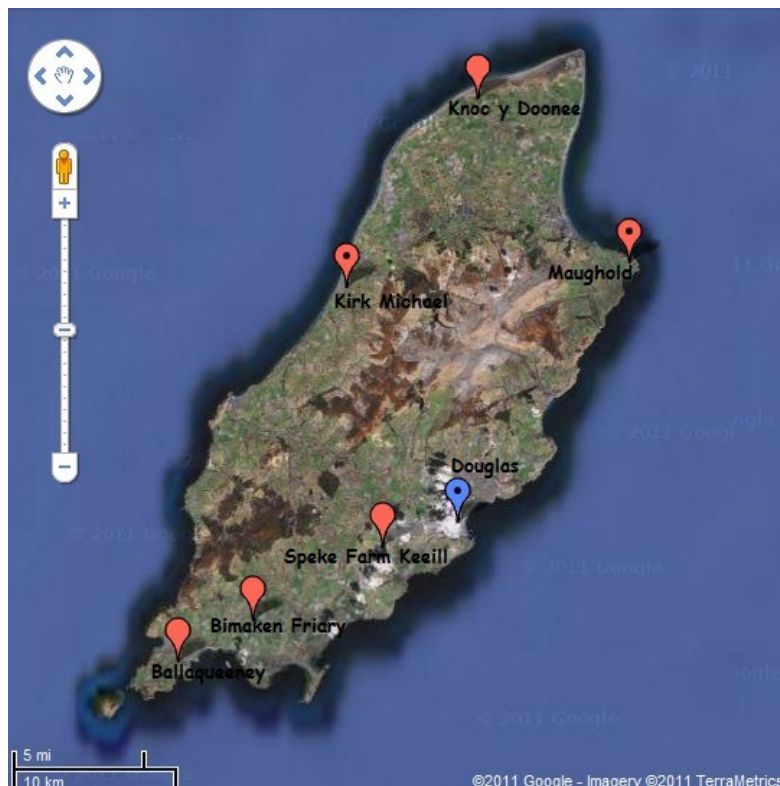
Thursday, 30 June 2011

The Ogham Stones of the Isle of Man

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- **The Ogham Stones of the Isle of Man**
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The [Isle of Man](#), situated midway between Ireland and Britain, has always been at a sea-faring crossroads, and over the centuries has been exposed to influences from many different cultures. This is well reflected in the relatively large number of monumental inscriptions that have survived on the island, which include both [runestones](#) and Ogham stones, exhibiting a mixture of Irish, British, Pictish and Norse influences.

Location of Ogham Inscriptions in the Isle of Man



*Red tags mark the sites of certain Ogham inscriptions (a dot indicates that the stone is in situ)
Blue tags mark museums or other sites where Ogham stones are held*

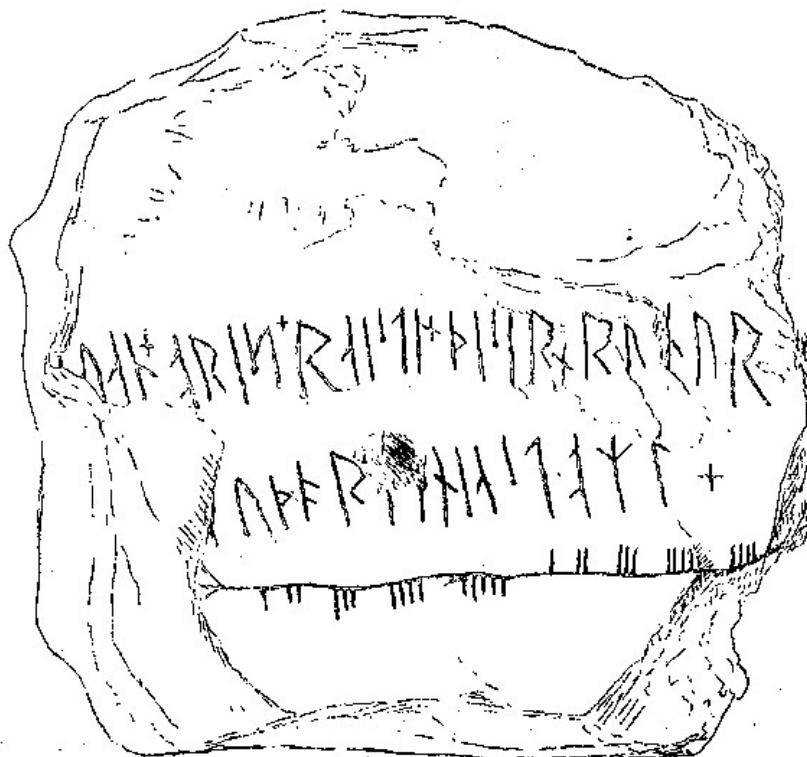
The Manx Ogham inscriptions are a heterogeneous group with a wide age span, some perhaps dating to as early as the 5th century, and others dating to as late as the 12th century. Typifying the fusion of Irish and Norse cultures on the island during the medieval period (9th through 13th centuries) are two unique monuments that combine Norse Runic inscriptions and Ogham inscriptions on the same stone :

- Maughold Stone (MAUGH/2)
- Kirk Michael Stone (KMICH/1)

The Maughold stone is a plain, flat stone with a line of Norse runes reading "John the Priest cut these runes" running across its centre, below which is inscribed the sixteen-letter "younger fuþark" in short twig runes. Below that is carved the first ten letters of the Ogham alphabet. Obviously Priest John carved the fuþark, but who carved the parallel Ogham inscription? If you take away the Norse runes the Ogham inscription is awkwardly placed near the edge of the stone, whereas the Norse inscription occupies the centre of the stone, so I do

not think that the Ogham letters predate that Norse inscription, but must have been carved at the same time as the Norse runes (maybe Priest John was showing off his skill in both runes and Ogham) or more probably at a later date. Priest John also carved the runes for another inscription that can be dated precisely to 1148, and so the Ogham inscription here must be mid 12th century or later.

Maughold Stone Inscription



Kermode 1910–1911 fig. 5

The Kirk Michael stone is a 11th century decorated cross slab with a long Norse inscription in long branch runes commemorating a foster son. There are faint Ogham inscriptions on both the front and back of the slab, the one on the front comprises the entire Ogham alphabet written in bind letters, but the one on the back is no longer legible (and the 19th century reading cannot be relied on). These two inscriptions are clearly not part of the original monument but must have been scratched on at a later date, probably sometime during the 11th or 12th century.

The fact that both these Norse monuments have been defaced by the addition of the Ogham alphabet is perhaps indicative of Gaelic reaction against the Norse occupiers of the island, and a resurgence of Gaelic nationalism. The use of a "feather mark" at the start of the Maughold inscription and the use of bind letters in the Kirk Michael inscription are indications that the Ogham alphabets scratched onto these stones may have been copied from a manuscript book such as the [Auricept na n-Éces](#) ("Scholars' Primer"), and so they may reflect a pedantic interest in a script that was no longer used for commemorative inscriptions.

In contrast to these unusual, very late Ogham inscriptions, there are a number of fairly typical Irish-style pillar stones with a monoscript inscription in typical Primitive Irish, commemorating people with Goidelic names :

- Bimaken Friary Stone I (ARBRY/1) : CUNAMAGLI MAQ[–] = *Of Cunamaglas, son of ...*
- Ballaqueeney Stone I (RUSHN/1) : DOVAIDONA MAQI DROATA = *Of Dovaïdo, son of Droata*
- Ballaqueeney Stone II (RUSHN/2) : BIVAIDONAS MAQI MUCOI CUNAVA[LI] = *Of Bivaïdonas, son of the tribe Cunava[li]*

These are dated to the 5th or 6th century. Two of these three stones were found in the burial ground of a [Keeill](#), a type of small, early medieval (5th–12th century) Celtic chapel. Large numbers of Keeills are found scattered throughout the island, and the Ogham stones associated with Keeills were probably used as grave markers. One other early stone that was also found in the burial ground of a keeill has a biscript Latin–Ogham inscription :

- Knoc y Doonee Stone (ANDRS/1) : AMBICATOS MAQI ROCATOS = AMMECATI FILIVS ROCATI HIC IACIT = *Here lies Ammecatus, son of Rocatus (Latin); Ambicatos, son of Rocatos (Ogham)*

The commemoration of a person with both a Latin inscription and an Ogham inscription is a typical feature of the Ogham stones of Southern Britain ([Wales](#) and the [South-West](#)), but is unknown in Irish Ogham stones. The name Rocatos is probably Goidelic, but his son has a Brittonized name, Ammecatus or Ambicatos, equivalent to the Irish Imbicatos. Thus, this stone shows evidence of an early (6th century?) mainland British influence on the Irish Manx culture.

One other monoscript Ogham stone is less typical :

- Bimaken Friary Stone II (ARBRY/2) : [--] MAQ LEOG[--] = ..., *son of Leog*

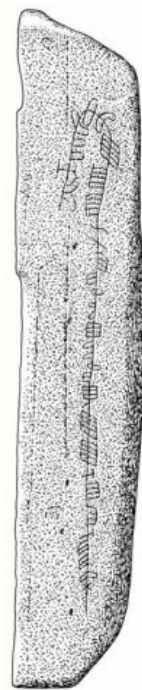
This stone is an odd, "cheese" shape, quite unlike the pillar stones that Ogham is normally inscribed on, and uses the linguistically late form *maq* for the earlier *maqi*, on which basis it has been dated to around the 6th to 9th centuries.

The most recently discovered Manx Ogham stone, discovered in the burial ground of an 11th century keeill during the filming of an episode of [Time Team](#) in 2007, is in my opinion the most unusual and most important Ogham stone ever to have been found on the island :

- Speke Farm Keeill Stone : [--][A] MAC[I] MUCOI CATIALL[I] = ..., *son of the tribe of Catiallus*

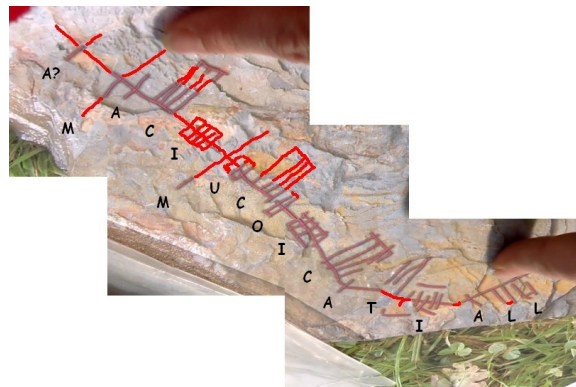
The stone is small and flat, and the Ogham inscription is carved using bind letters on an artificial stemline that meanders across the stone's flat surface. Ogham inscriptions on flat stone surfaces are highly unusual outside of Scotland, where they are typical of Pictish Ogham inscriptions. Bind oghams, a form of Ogham writing where the branches of each letter are bound together at their tips, are also a feature that is found on some Pictish Ogham stones, and so although the language of the inscription is Irish rather Pictish, there is probably a Pictish influence on the physical form of this Ogham inscription. Pictish Ogham stones are generally dated somewhat later than the typical Ogham pillar stones, and the linguistically late form *maci* for the earlier *maqi* in this inscription confirms that it must have been inscribed at a later date compared with the Ogham pillar stones discussed above.

Pictish Bind Ogham Inscription



SC1080221 © RCAHMS

Reconstructed Speke Farm Keeill Inscription



The stone was found close to a disturbed cist grave, and was probably a memorial for the young adult (about 14–20 years of age) who occupied the grave. A fragment of skull from the grave has been radiocarbon dated to AD 540–650, which would date the Ogham inscription to the second half of the 6th century or the first half of the 7th century. In my opinion this date is consistent with both the physical form of the inscription (bind letters) and its linguistic features. The significance of this find is that it is one of the few examples of an Ogham inscription that have been found during a modern archaeological excavation, and which can therefore be accurately dated from archaeological evidence. We are thus able to assign a date of *circa* 540–650 to the physical and linguistic features exhibited in the stone, indicating that "scholastic inscriptions" and bind letters are not just a feature of medieval manuscripts, but may also be a feature of 6th or 7th century monumental inscriptions.

Isle of Man (Ellan Vannin)

📍 Knoc y Doonee Stone (ANDRS/1)


Site	Knoc y Doonee, Kirk Andreas , Isle of Man.
NGR	NX 4040 0220
Current Location	Manx Museum [MM 5], Douglas.
History	Discovered in 1909 in the burial ground of a keeill.

CISP ARBRY/1
Macalister 1945 #501
Kermode 1907 #3



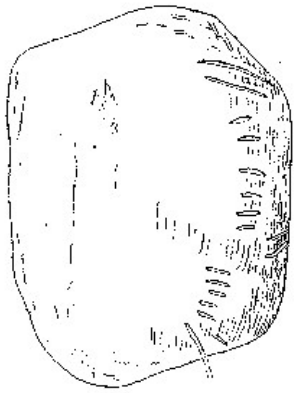
Kermode 1910–1911 fig. 3

Ogham Inscription

Ogham Text	 (left edge, bottom-to-top)
Transcription	CUNAMAGLIMA[Q][--]
Reading	CUNAMAGLI MAQ[--]
Translation	<i>Of Cunamaglas, son of ...</i>


📍 Bimaken Friary Stone II (ARBRY/2)

Site	Bimaken Friary, Kirk Arbory , Isle of Man.
NGR	SC 2490 7040
Current Location	Manx Museum [MM 4], Douglas.
History	Discovered in 1886, at which time it was built into a boundary wall near the friary farm.
Description	Rounded granite pillar stone with an Ogham inscription along one edge.
Dimensions	0.44 × 0.41 m.
Date	800–1199 (Kermode 1907) 550–900 (Ziegler 1994)
Notes	CISP ARBRY/2
References	Macalister 1945 #502 Kermode 1907 #4



Kermode 1910–1911 fig. 4

Ogham Inscription

Ogham Text	 (left edge, bottom-to-top)
Transcription	[--]MAQLEOG[--]
Reading	[--] MAQ LEOG[--]
Translation	..., son of <i>Leog</i> [...]

✓ Ballaqueeney Stone I (RUSHN/1)

Site	Ballaqueeney, Rushen , Isle of Man.
NGR	SC 2000 6800
Current Location	Manx Museum [MM 1], Douglas.
History	Discovered in 1871 at the side of a lintel grave in the burial ground of a keeill.
Description	Sandstone pillar stone with an Ogham inscription along the left edge.
Dimensions	0.96 × 0.35 m.
Date	466–533 (Kermode 1907) 500–550 (Ziegler 1994)
Notes	<i>CISP</i> RUSHN/1
References	<i>Macalister 1945</i> #503 <i>Kermode 1907</i> #1



Photograph by [Shimmin Beg](#), 6 April 2009



Kermode 1910–1911 fig. 1

Ogham Inscription

Ogham Text  (left edge, bottom-to-top)

Transcription DOFAIDONAMA QI DROATA

Reading DOVAIDONA MAQI DROATA

Translation *Of Dovaïdo, son of Droata*

Notes Kermode 1907 takes *droata* as a variant of *druada* "druid", but later authorities read it as a personal name.

Ballaqueeney Stone II (RUSHN/2)

Site Ballaqueeney, [Rushen](#), Isle of Man.

NGR [SC 2000 6800](#)

Current Location [Manx Museum](#) [0024.50] [MM 2], Douglas.

History Discovered in 1871 in the burial ground of a keeill.

Description Slate pillar stone with an Ogham inscription along one edge.

Dimensions 0.41 × 0.14 m.

Date 466–533 (Kermode 1907)

400–550 (Ziegler 1994)

Notes

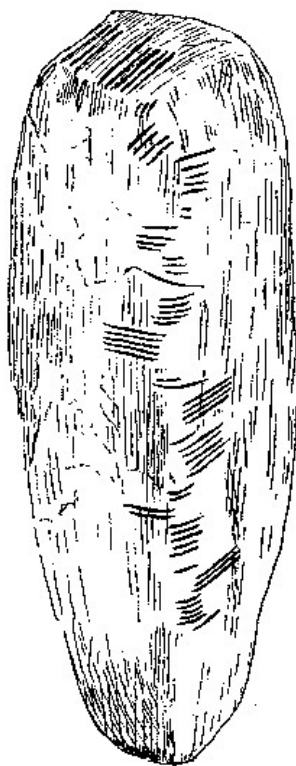
[CISP RUSHN/2](#)

References [Macalister 1945](#) #504

[Kermode 1907](#) #2




Photograph by [FinnWikiNo](#), CC BY-SA 3.0



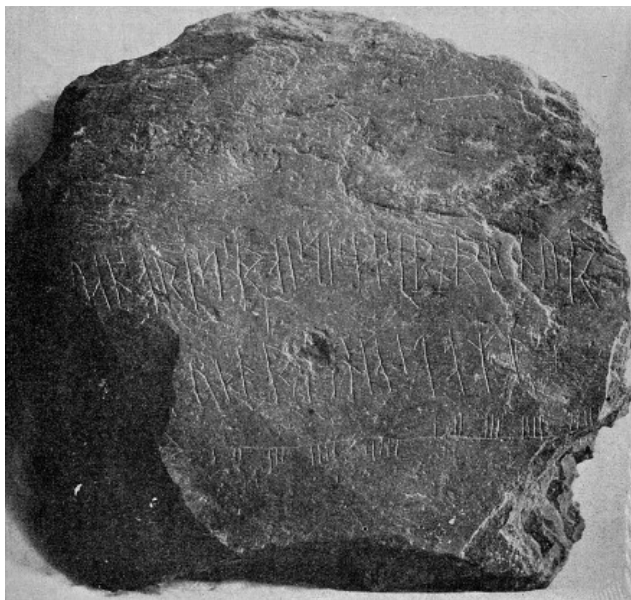
Kermode 1910–1911 fig. 2

Ogham Inscription

Ogham Text	 (left edge, bottom-to-top)
Transcription	BIFAIDONASMAQIMUCOICUNAVA[LI]
Reading	BIVAIDONAS MAQI MUCOI CUNAVA[LI]
Translation	<i>Of Bivaidonas, son of the tribe Cunavali</i>

✓ Maughold Stone (MAUGH/2)

Site	Maughold church, Kirk Maughold , Isle of Man.
NGR	SC 4930 9160
Current Location	The Cross Shelter [MM 145], Kirk Maughold.
History	Discovered in 1900 within the walls of Maughold church.
Description	Squarish stone slab with two lines of Norse runes above a single line of Ogham letters.
Dimensions	0.33 × 0.33 m.
Date	800–899 (Jackson 1953)
Notes	"John the priest" is mentioned on another stone (Kermode 1907 #114) which can be dated to 1148. The Runic futhark and the Ogham alphabet clearly placed in juxtaposition to each other, but there are differing opinions as to which came first or whether they were carved at the same time or not.
References	CISP MAUGH/2 <i>Kermode 1907 #115</i>



Kermode 1907 Plate LXIV


Runic Inscription A

Runic Text	IN-Ā:FRĪI:RĀIĪI:PI'R:RŌIŌR
Transcription	[I]UAN : BRIST : RAISTI : ÞISIR : RUNUR
Reading	IUAN BRIST RAISTI ÞISIR RUNUR
Translation	<i>John (the) priest cut these runes</i> (Kermode 1907)
Notes	Written using the "short twig runes" of the Swedish-Norwegian Futhork .

Runic Inscription B

Runic Text	ƿŋǫrkhnĭastbml+
Transcription	[F]UÞORKHNIAS T BML+
Reading	FUÞORKHNIAS T BML+
Translation	<i>f, u, þ, o, r, k, h, n, i, a, s, t, b, m, l</i>
Notes	The first fifteen letters of the sixteen-letter Swedish-Norwegian Futhork , written using "short twig runes". The missing sixteenth letter is the letter <i>ýr</i> (ʀ), which is written as a short vertical stroke (i) and so easily omitted in copying.

Ogham Inscription

Ogham Text	 (left edge, bottom-to-top)
Transcription	BLFSNHDT C [-]
Reading	BLVSN HD T CQ [-]
Translation	<i>b, l, f, s, n; h, d, t, c, q; ...</i>
Notes	The first ten letters of the Ogham alphabet, with an initial feather mark, which is unusual for monumental inscriptions, and indicative of a late date.

Kirk Michael Stone (KMICH/1)

Site	Kirk Michael , Kirk Michael , Isle of Man.
NGR	SC 3170 9080
Current Location	In the north transept of Kirk Michael church [MM 130].
History	First recorded in 1722, and Ogham inscription first recognised in 1887. Originally stood in the churchyard, by the wall on the north side of the lychgate.
Description	A decorated stone cross slab with relief carvings of figures on either side of the shaft, Norse Runic inscriptions running up the right and left sides of the back of the cross, a faint Ogham inscription written with bind letters on an artificial stemline in a cartouche on the face of the cross, and another faint and barely legible Ogham inscription on an artificial stemline in a cartouche on the back of the cross.

Dimensions 1.77 × 0.43 m.

Date 1099–1200 (Kermode 1907), 1000–1099 (Sims-Williams)

Notes The Norse inscription commemorating the erection of the cross dates the monument to the 11th century, and the Ogham inscriptions were evidently scratched onto the finished monument sometime later, so must date to the 11th century or later.

References [CISP KMICH/1](#)
Kermode 1907 #104




Kermode 1907 Plate LIV

Ogham Inscription A

Ogham Inscription B

Reading BLFSN HDTCQ MGNgZR AOUEI
 Translation *b, l, f, s, n; h, d, t, c, q; m, g, ng, st, r; a, o, u, e, i*
 Notes The complete Ogham alphabet, carved on an artificial stemline using bind letters.

Ogham Inscription B

Ogham Text  (on an artificial stemline in a cartouche on the back of the cross)
 Transcription MUUCOMALLAFIUAMULLGUC
 Reading MUUCOMALL AVI UA MULLGUC
 Translation *Mucomael grandson of O'Maelguc*
 Notes Reading and translation by James Carnegie ([Lord Southesk](#)) in "The Oghams on the Kirk Michael Cross", *The Academy* 26 November 1887 pages 359–361. Later authorities have been unable to confirm this reading because of the poor legibility of the inscription.

Speke Farm Keeill Stone (SANTN/2)

Site [Speke Farm Keeill](#), [Mount Murray](#) golf course, [Santon](#), Isle of Man.
 NGR [SC 3290 7450](#)
 Current Location [Manx Museum](#), Douglas.
 History Found in September 2006 during the filming of an [episode of Time Team](#). The stone was found close to a grave at Speke Farm Keeill, by the seventh fairway of the Mount Murray golf course.
 Description A small slate slab on the surface of which a single, curving line of Ogham text written as bind letters is carved along an artificial stemline.
 Dimensions 0.32 × 0.20 m.
 Date 900–1100 (Forsyth 2007)
 550–900 (BabelStone 2008)
 Notes The stone was found in the subsoil to the north of an east-west aligned cist grave (#213). The stone lining on the north side of the grave had been severely disturbed by the digging of a later ditch, and thus it is quite plausible that the Ogham stone was originally associated with this grave. Skeletal remains of a young adult (#215), about 14–20 years of age, were found in the grave, and a fragment of skull was radiocarbon dated to AD 540–650. Thus, archaeological evidence would date the stone to the second half of the 6th century or the first half of the 7th century. However, Dr. Kate Forsyth dated the stone to the 10th or 11th century (potentially 8th to 12th century) on the basis of the late features of the inscription (bind letters on a flat surface) and its supposed Middle Irish language, and the Time Team archaeologists therefore discounted any association between the stone and the grave. I think that this was a mistake, as although the artificial stemline carved on the flat surface of a stone and the use of bind letters do suggest a relatively late date for the carving of the inscription (compared with the 5th or 6th century date for typical Ogham pillar stones), these features are also found on Pictish Ogham stones, and are still consistent with a 6th through 10th century date. Forsyth concludes that the supposed Middle Irish inscription (BAC OCOICAT IALL = "corner/angle", "fifty", "throng/group") was not a formal inscription but perhaps "idle doodling or graffiti". However, a [closer examination of the inscription](#) suggests a reading of [--][A] MAC[I] MUCOI CATIALL[I] = "..., son of the tribe of Catiallus" which follows a conventional formula found on very many Ogham memorial stones. The language of the reinterpreted inscription is in the Primitive Irish of Ogham inscriptions, except for the form *maci* for earlier *maqi* which is suggestive of a late 6th century through 9th century date. Thus, both the physical form of the inscription and the linguistic features are, in my opinion, indicative of a date several centuries earlier than Forsyth's suggested 10th or 11th century date. Given that the reinterpreted inscription is a conventional memorial formula, I think it is reasonable to assume that the stone was associated with the nearby cist grave, and that the inscription commemorates the young occupant of the grave, in which case we can date the inscription to *circa* 540–650 per the radiocarbon dating.
 References [Wessex Archaeology 62511.01](#) (July 2007)
[BabelStone](#) (15 May 2008)



- [X^Y] = letter is uncertain but may be either X or Y
- [X!] = Ogham letter is incomplete, and may be X or any letter from the same series as X with more strokes than X (e.g. [T!] is equivalent to [T^C^Q], and [A!] is equivalent to [A^O^U^E^I])
- [-] = single missing or obliterated letter
- [--] = unknown number of missing or obliterated letters
- {X} = unusual glyph form of letter X (description on mouseover)
- {XY} = ligatured form of letters X and Y
- (X) = letter X in the inscription is extraneous and should be omitted in the reading
- <X> = letter X is missing in the inscription and should be added in the reading

Transcription of Ogham Letters

Letter	Name	Transcription	Notes
	Beith	B	
ᚁ	Luis	L	
ᚂ	Fearn	F	Read as F or V.
ᚃ	Sail	S	
ᚄ	Nion	N	
ᚅ	Uath	H	
ᚆ	Dair	D	Variants include 'Rabbit-eared D'.
ᚇ	Tinne	T	
ᚈ	Coll	C	
ᚉ	Ceirt	Q	
ᚊ	Muin	M	
ᚋ	Gort	G	
ᚌ	nGéadal	W	Read as Ng or Gw.
ᚍ	Straif	Z	Read as Z or St.
ᚎ	Ruis	R	Double R is occasionally written as a crosshatched ligature.
ᚏ	Ailm	A	Variants include 'Hammerhead A' and 'S-shaped A'.
ᚐ	Onn	O	
ᚑ	Úr	U	
ᚒ	Eadhadh	E	
ᚓ	Iodhadh	I	
ᚔ	Eabhadh	X	Read as É or K.
ᚕ	Ór	Ó	
ᚖ	Uilleann	Ú	
ᚗ	Ifin	P	Written as a single cross under the stemline in epigraphic texts.
ᚘ	Eamhancholl		Not found in epigraphic texts.

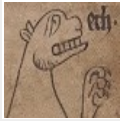
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