

The Papil Stone Factsheet



Where is the Papil Stone?

You can see the original stone at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. A copy of the stone is at Papil, Burra, at the original site in the graveyard.

How old is it?

We think it is about 1300 years old. It was made about the 700 AD, which was when people we call Picts lived in Shetland and 100 years before the Vikings came.

What was it for?

Some people think it might be a preaching stone – somewhere where people would meet to here monks and preachers speak about the Bible and Christianity. Other people think it was a gravestone and because of the carvings it must have been for a very important person – maybe an important priest.

Who carved it?

Some people think it might have been carved by Shetlanders while other people it was done by travelling stone carvers from Scotland. Who ever carved the stone was very good at it and some people think they carved the Monkstone you can see at Shetland Museum and Archives, because the monk carvings are identical.

Are there more stones like this?

There are lots of carved stones from this time throughout Scotland. In Shetland the most famous stones are the Bressay Stone and Monkstone. You can see a range of different carved stones at the Shetland Museum and Archives.

What do the pictures mean?

There are lots of ideas of what the different carvings mean, but we will probably never know exactly what they meant to the Shetlanders who lived then. The next page tells you some of the different ideas people have about the carvings. What do you think they mean?

Most people think these people are monks. Identical monks are carved on the Monkstone. Two of them are carrying bags, which people think were what they carried the Bible in.

The biggest carving is of a cross, a symbol of Christianity. This type of cross is a celtic cross and is found in many stones in Scotland and Ireland



What type of animal is this? Some people think it is a lion as the lion was used by Christians in drawings for hundreds of years to mean Christ.

What are these? Are they people dressed in costumes or are they mythological creatures like we have trolls and sea monsters? Look closely at whats between the two beaks – can you see a face?

Some people think this carving was done later by somebody else because its very sauint.