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# An additional medieval sculpture at Tealing, Angus

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The former parish church of Tealing lies amid the rolling arable landscape of Angus between the Sidlaw Hills and the northern outskirts of Dundee. The existing church dates from 1806, and is now disused and in a sad state of advancing dereliction, its interior partially dismantled and a roost for pigeons. It is best known for a small collection of sculptured stones which illustrate passages of its medieval history, and which form the subject of a number of articles by the local antiquarians Andrew Jervise and Alexander Hutcheson (Jervise 1875; Hutcheson 1896 and 1911). This paper is intended to draw attention to a further fragment, not noted by these writers, and which has attracted only cursory published notice (McKean and Walker 1984, 119).

Hutcheson recorded the belief that the various stones were brought from an earlier church or chapel in the grounds of Tealing House, about 1km to the east (Hutcheson 1896, 41). Whether or not this is so, the dates on the funerary monuments indicate that the present graveyard has been in use since at least the 17th century, and the fragments have themselves been on the site since at least the late 18th century. The *Statistical Account* of the parish noted that the predecessor to the 1806 church, a building 'indifferent both in style and condition', nevertheless incorporated 'a few fragments of carved stones' which 'seem to indicate that the original church was an elegant Gothic structure' (*Stat Acct*, 4 (1792), 99).

The oldest of the sculptures is a late Pictish cross-slab displaying a fish-tailed monster and the 'elephant' symbol, which is now on display in the McManus Galleries, Dundee. This indicates Tealing's existence as a site of some ecclesiastical significance long before its first documented appearance in the 12th century. Although the church was granted initially to St Andrews Priory, by 1442 it had been annexed to the archdeaconry of Dunkeld. One of the two late medieval pieces preserved within the church is an inscribed panel commemorating Archdeacon Ingeram de Kethenys, who died in 1380. The other is an

elaborately sculptured lintel of a sacrament house, of particular interest for its close similarity to those at Foulis Easter and at Cortachy (Hutcheson 1896, 41-8; 1911, 420-6; Jervise 1875, 287-93), and, with little doubt, the product of the same workshop.

The stone which is the subject of this note is conspicuously situated in the outer face of the wall, 4m west of the gateway on the north side of the kirkyard. It is a block of red sandstone, measuring 0.55m in height by 0.48m in maximum breadth and at least 0.12m in thickness. It bears a seated figure, carved in high relief and portrayed facing directly forwards, the upper portions of its arms held away from the body and its thighs covered by a long robe. The figure sits within a trefoil-headed niche, which is recessed to a depth of 0.08m. The lower right-hand edge of the slab bears a column with a broad foot, either part of an architectural frame or more probably intended to represent the leg of the bench or chair upon which the figure sits.

The sculpture has suffered heavily from weathering or, possibly, from deliberate mutilation, which has resulted in the loss of the surface of the figure's face, torso and lower legs, and also the lower portion of the frame. The only details surviving are long, curling, tresses of hair, folds in the robe, and a belt with decorative square studs on either side of the torso, all of which have been afforded comparative shelter by the depth of the niche.

In view of the stone's location at a parish church, the subject is likely to be religious rather than secular in nature, and, despite its mutilated condition, the impression is of a male figure, probably Christ. There is no indication of a head covering, which might be expected in a formal portrayal of the Virgin, nor of any object in the lap of the figure, as would appear in a representation of the Virgin and Child. Seated figures of Christ may be seen elsewhere in Scotland in the Guthrie Doom (Apted and Norman Robertson, 270-1) and on the Kilmartin cross, in Argyll, where the



*Illus 1. The much worn figure of Christ in Majesty, incorporated in the face of the kirkyard wall at the former parish church of Tealing.*

enthroned figure of Christ is depicted with raised hands to exhibit His wounds (RCAHMS 1992, 139). Unlike these, however, the Tealing effigy is clad in a robe, more closely comparable with the figure affixed to the Guthrie bellshrine (Eeles 1927, 415–6). A further representation appears on a grave slab formerly at Arthurstone in Perthshire, now in the National Museums of Scotland. This grave slab, which is believed to have come originally from the Cistercian abbey at Coupar Angus (RCAHMS 1994, 137), bears a conventional depiction of the enthroned Christ in Majesty, clad in a long robe, one hand holding a gospel book, the other raised in blessing. Although the Tealing figure now lacks its lower arms, the alignment of

the surviving upper arms indicate that its hands were similarly positioned. The nimbus that encircles the head of the Arthurstone figure was evidently provided on the Tealing stone by rope-moulded decoration, traces of which survive around the inner edge of the niche. In its original state, this would presumably have been highlighted with colour.

An unusual detail of the Tealing carving is the asymmetry of the crocketed upper corners of the slab, which points either to an error in its execution or else to physical constraints imposed by the stone's original architectural setting. The stone may have been an element of a decorative scheme, conceivably over a doorway, or possibly of the



*Illus 2. The enthroned figure of Christ on a grave slab formerly in the walled garden of Arthurstone House, near Coupar Angus, and now in the National Museum of Scotland. (Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland).*

reredos of an altar, as has been suggested for the Annunciation panel from the nearby church of Mains (Richardson 1928, 218).

In view of the slab's relative simplicity and the loss of so much detail, it is only possible to assign a general date between the late 13th and the 15th centuries. Nevertheless, the stone is an interesting

addition to the corpus of late medieval sculpture in Scotland and further confirmation of a rich decorative tradition which extended beyond the greater monastic houses and cathedrals to the rural parish churches, of which all too few examples are still standing.

## Note

In the National Monuments Record of Scotland, the parish church of Tealing is allocated the site number NO 43 NW 9 (NGR NO 4035 3794), and the chapel in the grounds of Tealing House, NO 43 NW 13 (NO 413 381).

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## Abstract

*This note draws attention to a medieval sculpture of Christ in Majesty, now incorporated in the kirkyard wall of the former parish church of Tealing, Angus.*

Keywords: Tealing, Christ in Majesty, medieval sculpture

