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# Five Neolithic carved stones from Angus

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## Introduction

A corpus of the Neolithic carved stones of Angus was published in volume one of this journal (Sherriff 1995). Since then four new discoveries and one rediscovery have been made. This short paper details these carvings and attempts to set them into context.

Since 1995, the boundary between the administrative areas of Dundee and Angus has changed. However, because all of the stones noted in this paper lie within the old administrative area of Angus District Council, it was felt that reference to the old boundary (Illus 1) was still valid. The decorated stones from the area formerly covered by the old administrative area of Dundee District Council will be detailed in a future paper.

## Description

Easter Denoon, Glamis, NGR NO 3493 4390 (Illus 2a)

This sandstone slab, measuring 0.54 m in length by 0.46 m in breadth and up to 0.15 m in thickness, was found in August 1997, when part of the former stackyard at Easter Denoon was levelled prior to the erection of grain stores. There are eleven cup marks, six of which are circular and measure up to 40 mm in diameter by 18 mm in depth, and five of which are oval and measure up to 95 mm in length. One of the circular cups is surrounded by three eccentric rings and partially surrounded by two others. A radial channel runs from this cup past two oval cups on the left edge of the stone. A second, broader channel, set roughly parallel to the first, extends from the central cup through all five rings to then run into an oval cup. Another of the circular cups is surrounded by three eccentric rings cut by a radial groove, and a third is accompanied by two fragmentary rings and a short length of radial groove.

Turin Hill, Aberlemno, NGR NO 5117 5410 (Illus 2b)

This earthfast boulder, which measures at least

1.1 m in length from N to S by 0.6 m in breadth and 0.15 m in height, is situated in unimproved pasture low down on the N face of Turin Hill, some 300 m SW of the cottage at Back of Turin Hill. At the higher, S end of the boulder there are ten simple cup marks which measure up to 40 mm in diameter; two of the cups are linked by a very short channel.

Guthrie Hill, Letham, NGR NO 5621 5122 (Illus 2c)

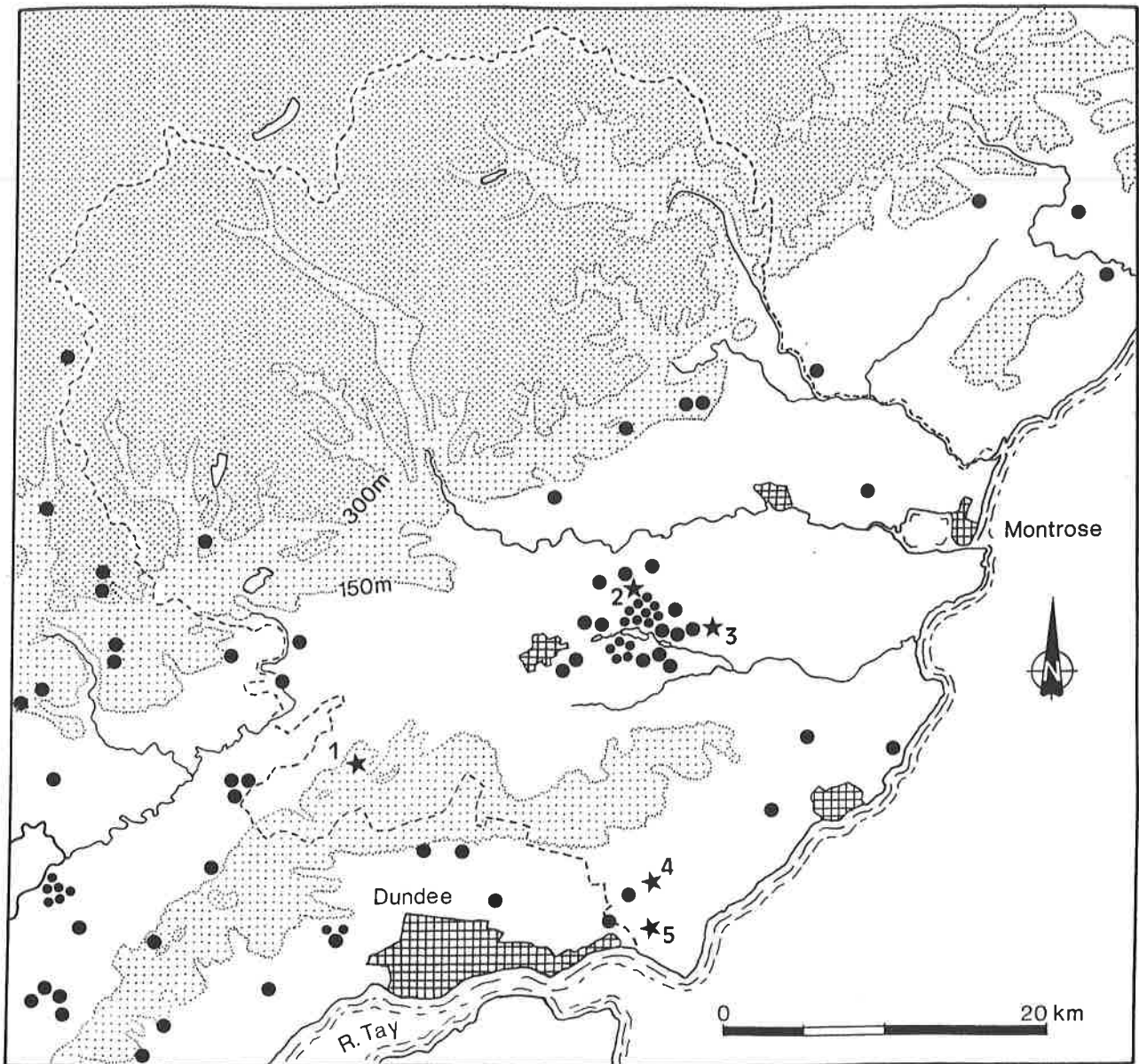
This broken sandstone slab, measuring 0.64 m in length by 0.5 m in breadth and 0.19 m in thickness, was discovered in a small pile of field-cleared stones in 1996 and is presently at The Bents farmstead (NO 555 523). There are twelve circular cup marks and two which are oval, measuring up to 60 mm in diameter; three of the cups are partly ringed, one with a short channel or gutter leading to the edge of the stone.

Old Downie, Carnoustie, NGR NO 5184 3658 (Illus 2d)

This sandstone boulder, which measures 0.82 m in length by 0.53 m in breadth and 0.37 m in thickness, was ploughed up in 1996; in February 1997, it was incorporated into a new garden wall of Old Downie farmhouse (NO 5193 3654). A single cup mark on the present west face of the stone is surrounded by two incomplete rings measuring about 80 mm and 140 mm in internal diameter respectively.

Woodhill House, Monifieth, NGR NO 5200 3429 and NO 5185 3424 (Illus 2e-g)

Three fragments of a decorated boulder, first reported but not described in the 19th century (Jervise 1879, 331), are situated in a shelter belt between Woodhill House and Balhungie steading. They were rediscovered in April 1997. One fragment (Illus 2e) is situated at the E end of the shelter



*Illus 1. Distribution of Neolithic carvings in Angus, Dundee, Eastern Perthshire and South Aberdeenshire. (1) Easter Denoon; (2) Turin Hill; (3) Guthrie Hill; (4) Old Downie; (5) Woodhill House.*

belt (NO 5200 3429), the remaining two (Illus 2f and 2g) lie close together 153 m to the WSW (NO 5185 3424). Fragments 2e and 2f bear the remains of drilled 'jumper-holes'.

(e) The easternmost fragment measures 0.88 m in length by 0.8 m in breadth and at least 0.56 m in thickness. On its upper surface there are eleven cup marks measuring up to 70 mm in diameter, at least three, possibly four, of which are associated with incomplete single ring marks measuring up to 130 mm in overall diameter. Further, close to the E edge of the stone, there is a roughly pecked grooved arc measuring about 25 mm in width and 0.65 m in length.

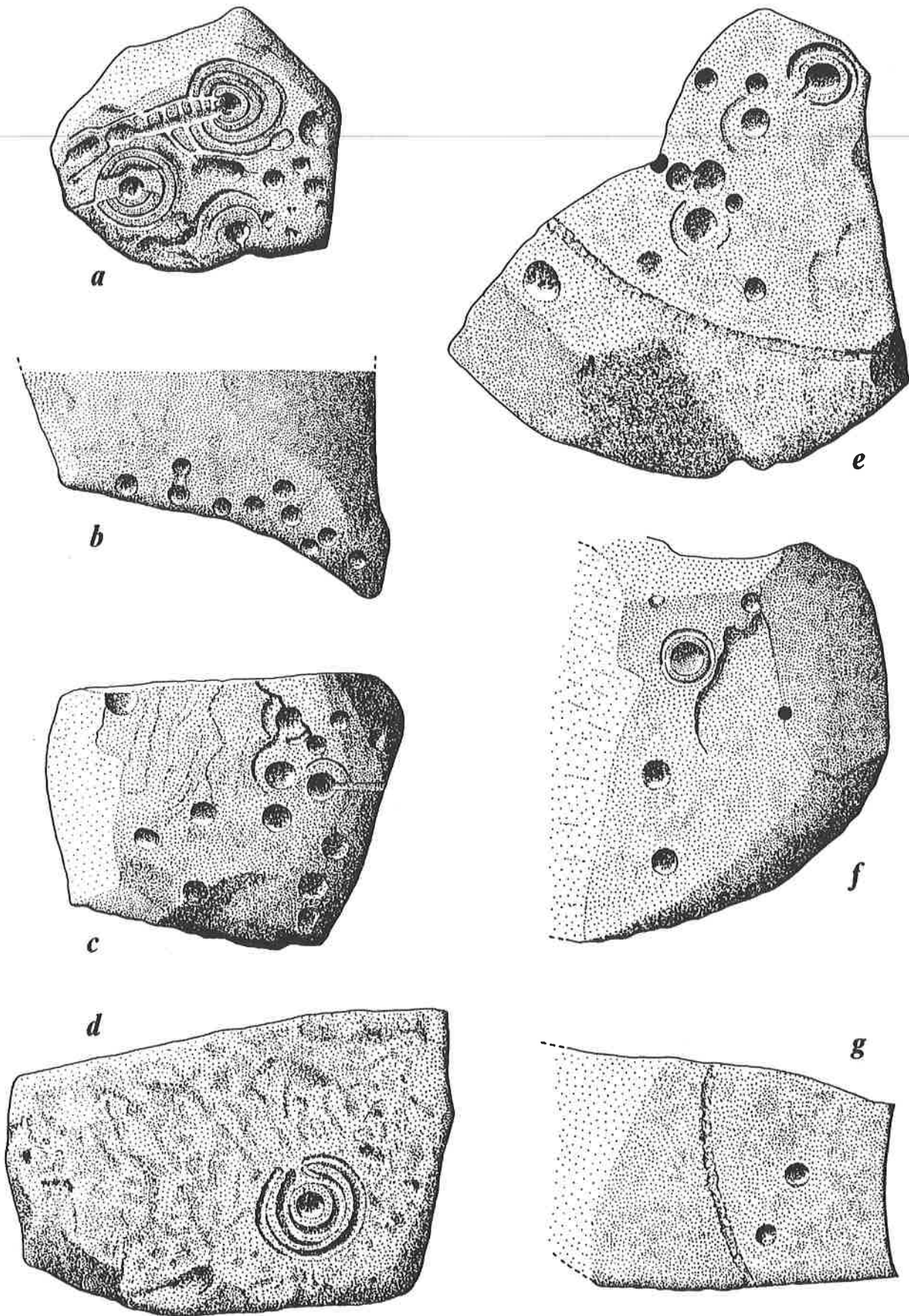
(f) The second stone measures 1.08 m in length by 0.71 m in breadth and at least 0.4 m in thickness.

There are three complete cup marks, measuring up to 65 mm in diameter, and the truncated remains of two others; the largest cup is surrounded by a complete ring mark measuring 80 mm in internal diameter.

(g) This fragment measures 0.9 m in length by 0.82 m in breadth and at least 0.42 m in thickness; on its present N face there are two cup marks and a short length of a pecked, grooved arc of similar character to that described on the easternmost fragment (e).

### Discussion

These most recent discoveries bring the total number of cup markings and cup-and-ring markings in the former administrative area of Angus District to fifty-one. The finds at Turin Hill and



Illus 2. (a) Easter Denoon; (b) Turin Hill; (c) Guthrie Hill; (d) Old Downie; (e-g) Woodhill House. Scale 1:10.

Hill of Guthrie, whilst unremarkable in themselves, reinforce the already heavy concentration of Neolithic carvings to the E of Forfar (Illus 1); the Old Downie carving and the confirmation of the Woodhill stone adds to a growing list of cup-and-ring markings along the coastal plain between Dundee and Arbroath; and the Easter Denoon stone, only just inside Angus, appears to form part of a relatively extensive, yet dispersed, distribution of rock carvings in southern Strathmore (RCAHMS 1994, 35, Illus 35A).

With the exception of the examples from Letham Grange and Welton (Sherriff 1995, 22, nos 20 and 42), none of the Angus carvings is as highly decorated as the stone from Easter Denoon (Illus 2a). Almost all of the principal surface of the stone has been decorated and there is evidence that the carvers took account of the shape of this face when planning the design. It is clear that the upper right cup in the illustration has been placed so that the ring markings roughly mirror the natural arc of the edge of the stone. Further, that same cup and its ring markings provides evidence for at least three phases of carving. The position of the cup allows space for only three whole rings, though two further incomplete rings have been placed below and to the left of the others and terminate on a rather slight, shallow radial channel which runs parallel to the upper edge of the stone. This channel is the same depth and general character as the ring marks but a second much wider, deeper and altogether more crudely executed channel, which runs parallel to it, is probably later since it clearly cuts through the relatively slight rings. In addition, it is clear that the large oval cup in the centre of the face was already in existence when the fourth and fifth rings were executed. The former could not follow a line concentric with the third ring and it has had to 'dodge' around the upper edge of the oval cup, and the latter has been merged with the former close to the oval cup.

Although three phases of execution can be inferred from the decoration, there is little indication of the exact character of each phase, and there is no evidence for their dating. The first phase of decoration could easily have comprised a series of simple circular and oval cup markings, but could also have included ring markings around three of the cups and the radial channel leading from the uppermost cup. The second phase appears to have included the addition of two incomplete rings to the uppermost cup. The third phase seems to have included a second, more crudely executed channel or groove, which leads from the uppermost cup and cuts through the earlier rings.

These phases may have been executed many years apart and there is little evidence of cohesion in the elements of the design. It is unknown whether the original design of the decoration made

any allowance for it to be added to in later years, but the final result gives the impression not of integrated design, but of a hotchpotch of decorative motifs. In this respect in particular it is very similar to the decoration on the stone from Letham Grange.

The Old Downie stone, with just a single cup and double-ring mark, is unique in an eastern Scotland context; though parallels may be seen elsewhere, most commonly in Northumberland, eg Fowberry Moor, Chillingham, and Yetlington Lane (Beckensall 1983, 146, 169 and 179 respectively).

The Woodhill stone, or rather its fragments, are tantalising. It is likely that all three fragments belong to one original stone the size of which, judging from the dimensions of the fragments, must have been very large. It is therefore also likely that the three surviving fragments represent but a relatively small fraction of the original stone. That it was highly decorated seems obvious. One of the more interesting features is the pecked lines, describing part of an arc of a circle of large diameter, which are present on fragments (e) and (g). A similarly pecked line describing most of a circle measuring just over 0.8 m in diameter has been recorded on the Girdle Stane of Dunnichen (Sherriff 1995, 22, no 13). The grooves on both stones are similar to the grooves pecked out on large boulders and areas of bedrock prior to the cutting of millstones. However, the Girdle Stane has a second length of groove close to one of its pointed ends which demonstrates fairly clearly, because of its position on the stone, that it could not have had such an association, and that such grooves may legitimately be seen as part of the decoration of a stone, though not necessarily contemporary with the cup-and-ring markings.

Finally, the rediscovery of the Woodhill fragments is a useful reminder that 19th-century sources cannot be taken literally. Jervise (1879, 331) describes the fragments as 'bearing cup marks', but the fact that the ring marks are not mentioned and a more exact position for the fragments is not given, leads the author to suggest that Jervise was told about the fragments, but that he did not actually see them himself.

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My thanks go to David Henry for informing me about the Turin Hill and Guthrie Hill stones; to Norman Atkinson (Angus Council) for the Easter Denoon stone; to Rachel Benvie (Montrose Museum) for the Old Downie Stone; and to Don Lindsay (Forest Authority) and Ian Armit (Historic Scotland) for the Woodhill stone. My gratitude also to Jack Stevenson (RCAHMS) and Graham Ritchie who read and commented on this paper, and to all the owners and tenants for allowing me to record the carvings.

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## Abstract

*Five Neolithic carved stones, four of them recent discoveries and one a recent rediscovery, are described and illustrated.*

Keywords: Neolithic, ceremonial, rock art, cup-and-ring marking, Angus