Illus 1 Location of Balgay Park, Dundee (above) and detailed locations of the sculpted stones (below).
Sculptured stones in Balgay Park, Dundee

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Introduction

This paper details an audit of a series of sculptured stones in Balgay Park, Dundee (NGR NO 3795 3065). The audit was commissioned by Historic Scotland and undertaken by SUAT Ltd in September 2002. Sculptures stones were noted at twelve locations (L1 – L12; Illus 1) within the park, of which five, L2 (the Rose Window), L3–L5 and L12, were known beforehand. Photographs of all of the stone locations were taken and drawings were made of the stones, except at L9– L12, where access to the stones was awkward. In addition to the sculptured stones, three quarries, possibly opened to provide material for paths in the park, were noted in the walkover survey.

Description of the stones

L1 This single stone, which measures 0.44m in length by 0.3m in width and 0.25m in thickness, was moved by SUAT Ltd off the driveway immediately south-east of the Rose Window to the flowerbed beside the window.

L2 The Rose Window (Illus 2) is incorporated into a former flowerbed on the hillslope immediately north of the driveway, about 70m west of the eastern entrance to the park.

L3 Two adjacent earthfast stones are set into the slope on the north-east side of an old quarry about 120m N of the Rose Window. The eastern stone, which measures 0.56m in length by 0.2m in width and 0.23m in thickness, is a possible fragment of window tracery/balustrade. The western stone measures 0.18m in length by 0.09m in width and 0.23m in thickness; it bears a socket measuring 30mm in diameter by 45mm in depth.

L4 An earthfast stone, which measures 0.45m in length by 0.2m in width and 0.22m in thickness, lies on the west side of the same old quarry as L3. It bears a groove 120mm in width and 50mm in depth.

L5 Twelve stones, forming a semicircle, are set into the ground at a former viewpoint about 10m SW of the old quarry; a thirteenth, apparently unworked stone, lies just outside the setting, on the crest of the slope. Three of the stones, including the two nearest the driveway, have small sockets in them.

L6 An octagonal stone, which measures 0.7m across by 0.23m in height and is currently cemented to a stone plinth, 1.27m in length, is situated about 45m west of the Rose Window. The stone is set into the slope so that only three of its roughly dressed faces and parts of two more are visible. The upper edge of the stone is bevelled and the top surface bears what may be a shallow socket as well as traces of mortar or cement. The rough dressing of the stone indicates that it is unlikely to be of medieval date.

L7 Another octagonal stone is situated on the south side of the driveway, about 170m west of L6. The stone measures 0.68m across by 0.14m in visible height and its upper surface is bevelled. It is roughly faceted surfaces bear traces of mortar or cement, and, like the stone at L6, this stone is unlikely to be of medieval date.

L8 Three earthfast stones are set into the slope on the north side of a path about 90m NW of the Rose Window. Of the two lower stones, which are adjacent, the larger measures 0.58m in length by 0.5m in width and 0.17m in visible thickness. Two of its visible corners are bevelled. The second stone is a fragment of possible tracery/balustrade with a small socket in one end. The third stone, which has been set into the slope a short distance upslope from the other two, measures 0.58m in length by 0.24m in width and has score marks on it.

L9 A line of stones, some 15.25m in length, is situated on the south side of a path about 130m north of the eastern entrance to the park. The stones are largely concealed beneath turf, undergrowth or the roots of a tree, but a straight edge is visible on one of them and traces of mortar on another.

L10 This single, loose, stone, which has tool marks at the corner of one face, is wedged against a tree about 40m SW of L9.

L11 Four separate earthfast stones are situated in a partly cleared area on the slope immediately below L5 and about 100m north of the Rose Window.

L12 A single stone, a complete urn with drapery from a 19th-century funerary monument, lies about 25m west of L11.

Conclusions and recommendations

It seems very likely that the Rose Window and some of the other carved stones in Balgay Park originated in St Mary’s Church in the Nethergate (Illus 3) and that they were moved to the park following the restoration of the church in the 1870s. However, many of the stones are either not diagnostic or too well concealed for their true character, including date, to be revealed. Several of the loose stones, originally spotted by Mrs Eva Bennett, have been removed to a secure location by Dundee Council Parks Department.
Of the extra stones identified and recorded during the course of the audit, those that are not earthfast are at most risk and should also be moved to a safe store. Consideration should also be given to moving the Rose Window, preferably to a location where it could be suitably displayed. As part of the drawn survey of the window, the individual stones were numbered so that they may be correctly reconstructed, should it be removed.

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Abstract

SUAT Ltd were commissioned to conduct an audit of sculpted stones that had been located in Balgay Park, Dundee. This paper describes their locations and suggests that some of them may originate from the restoration of St Mary’s Church in the Nethergate.

Key words

Dundee
rose window
St Mary’s Tower

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