

Could the mystery of the Concho Stone be solved? Neolithic carvings found near a Scottish housing estate to be revealed for the first time in 50 years

- The Concho Stone was discovered in 1887 but was buried in 1965 to protect it from damage by vandals
- It has remained buried for 50 years on the edge of a council housing estate near Clydebank, Scotland
- High resolution scan will be used to record the surface of the 42 feet long slab of rock before it is reburied
- Archaeologists hope to gain new insights into the carvings and perhaps unravel their mysterious meaning

By [RICHARD GRAY FOR MAILONLINE](#)

Hidden within a scrap of woodland on the edge of a Scottish housing estate is one of Europe's most important artworks.

Buried to protect it from vandals, a slab of rock etched with Stone Age carvings is perhaps one of the UK's most neglected prehistoric sites.

Yet now, nearly 50 years since it was buried, the 5,000-year-old Concho Stone is to be re-excavated to allow archaeologists to study it.



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An archaeologist is seen excavating a stone slab (pictured) that has some of the UK's most important rock art etched into its surface. Known as the Concho stone, it was buried in 1965 by archaeologists to protect it from vandals

The stone, which measures 42 feet (13m) by 26 feet (8m), is covered in around 90 grooved spirals and indentations known as cup and rings.

The petroglyphs also include a ringed cross and a pair of four toed feet.

Researchers are now using cutting edge 3D imaging technology to record the ancient artwork to allow them to study it in more detail.

Dr Kenny Brophy, an urban archaeologist at the University of Glasgow who is leading the excavation, said it could help to shed new light on the markings and who made them.

He said: 'This is the biggest and I would argue one of the most important Neolithic art panels in Europe.

'The cup and ring marks are extensive but the site just happens to be in the middle of an urban housing scheme in Clydebank.

'It was last fully open to the elements and the public up until 1965.

'Sadly as it was neglected it was also being damaged through vandalism and people just traipsing all over it.

'It has been well recorded for archaeological purposes but we now feel the time, and the technology, is right to unearth it and see what new elements we can learn about its history and the people who created it.'

The excavation team will gather high resolution images of the surface of the stone using the same technology used to image Tutankhamun's tomb, revealing evidence of a new chamber.

Once complete the stone will be reburied to keep it safe from harm.

WHAT ARE CUP AND RINGS

Cup and ring marks are a form of prehistoric art found widely through out the world.

They consist of a round indentation – the cup – surrounded by a series of concentric circles that look like ripples on water.

The symbols date back to the Neolithic and early Bronze Age but some examples have been found to date from the Iron Age.

Some of the carvings have been found on boulders and outcrops overlooking major routes, hunting grounds or water-holes which has led to suggestions they are perhaps used to mark these spots.

Others have suggested they could be a mark of territorial ownership.

Later examples have been found in association with burial or ceremonial sites, suggesting they may have a sacred importance.



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The huge 42 feet long stone slab was first discovered in 1887. It features around 90 cup and ball marks carved into its surface. The pictures above show the marks highlighted using white paint



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The meaning of the cup and ring markings in the Cochno Stone (pictured) is still something of a mystery but they appear regularly in Neolithic artworks across Europe



Archaeologists are using high resolution scanning and imaging (pictured) to record the markings on the stone slab before reburying it under the soil to keep it preserved for the future

Discovered in 1887 by the Reverend James Harvey on a section of farmland near Clydebank in West Dunbartonshire, the Cochno Stone caused a sensation when it was unearthed.

It began to suffer vandalism, however, after the local council built the Faifley housing estate on the neighbouring land.

Archaeologists feared the ancient rock carvings would be destroyed as people walked over the rock and added their own carvings to it.



The Cochno Stone sits on the outskirts of a the Fairley council housing estate in West Dunbartonshire. When it was discovered, the area was largely fields, but urban development has left it next to a busy urban park



Archaeologists chose to rebury the stone slab in 1965 after people were found to be walking all over it (pictured) and even vandalising it, damaging the important historic artwork

In 1965 archaeologist Ludovic Maclellan Mann decided to bury it under several feet of soil to protect it from further damage.

The new project will aim to use the high resolution images to unpick which of the carvings were caused by vandals before it was buried and which belong to the original.

Little is known about what cup and ring symbolise, but they are found in many rock art sites around Europe.



Sadly visitors to the rock slab damaged it before it was reburied by carving their names (pictured) and other markings into the slab, potentially damaging the ancient rock carvings etched into its surface



Archaeologists studied the markings at the time they were uncovered, but it is hoped new imaging techniques will reveal new insights into how, when and even who made the markings



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Scientists believe the carvings (pictured) were made in around 3,000 BC but their meaning is lost in history

Some experts believe they may have been an ancient form of writing or recording events or perhaps a unit of measure.

Others have suggested they may be artworks that symbolise life and death. It is possible the Cochno stone was used in ancient Stone Age ceremonies.

Ferdinand Saumarez Smith, from the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Conservation, which is carrying out the imaging, said the images will also be used to create a replica of the stone slab that will go on display.



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The current excavation work (pictured) promises to preserve the rock face in a digital form so it can be studied in more detail without risking damage. A replica will also be produced to go on public display





The Cochno Stone (pictured in the 1960s left) measures 26 feet wide by 42 feet long, making it one of the most significant Neolithic artworks in the country. Alongside the cup and ring marks were crosses in circles and what look like feet (right)

He said: 'Factum Foundation captured the world's attention through its 3D scanning work that led to the discovery of evidence of a new chamber in the tomb of Tutankhamun.

'With the Cochno Stone, we are going to use similar recording methods to bring the world's attention to Scotland's equally important, mysterious and beautiful heritage.

'The Cochno Stone was taken away from the people of Clydebank in 1965 because of vandalism.

'We are going to show how digital technology can be used to resurrect this lost monument and give it back to the people it belongs to, because we believe that if we trust people, they will look after it.'



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The rock was originally found on a piece of farmland and was surrounded by a low rock wall to protect it (pictured), but this did not stop it from being damaged. Eventually archaeologists decided to rebury it under several feet of soil



The carvings also include some feet with four toes (marked with white paint in the above picture from the 1960s)



Faifley is a large council estate forming part of the town of Clydebank, Scotland, adjoining the former village of Hardgate