

## MONUMENTAL STANDING STONES IN THE BURIAL GROUND ON LUNDY, BRISTOL CHANNEL

by

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The late Professor Charles Thomas, at the request of the Lundy Field Society, in 1969 examined the Burial Ground and in his book, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak*, published in 1994, gives much information. He classified the four stones as follows:

1. ref. no. 1400 Optimi
2. ref. no. 1401 Resteuta (British and Feminine)
3. ref. no. 1402 Potiti
4. ref. no. 1403 Tigerni.

There has been much more published since then. Douglas B. Hague in 1982 published a pamphlet called 'The Early Christian Memorials Lundy' which contains much useful analytical information. However, Charles Thomas (1994) emphasises that the subject remains largely unresearched and unclear. This is when he also suggested that the Beacon Hill Burial Ground is the most important one in Western Europe. It might therefore be helpful to consider the context in which these monumental stones appeared on Lundy. It has been suggested that they were erected in the fifth-sixth centuries. We know that at that time the Romans had largely withdrawn and that Christianity was gaining ground amongst the higher echelons of ecclesiastical and secular society. By their very nature the more ambitious monuments reflected the status and enhanced prestige of those named. The act of engraving and setting up the monuments implies performance, status, remembrance in the society at that time. Three of the monuments have crosses at the top. One of them, 1403, does not but that may be because the top appears to be missing. The four monuments are all different which is significant. The language appears to be Latin and would have been used by ecclesiastics at that time and 1401 appears to be feminine suggesting that this was a family unit or part of one. The majority of inscribed monuments were established near ecclesiastical sites and we know that an early 'church' exists within the Burial Ground. The inscriptions are not identical in their format. 1400 and 1403 are vertical and 1401 and 1402 are horizontal. These characteristics are relevant as they can be seen as referring to particular areas and monastic centres. The same applies to the forming of the letters. The actual position of the inscriptions does on these stones, I suggest, relate to the size and shape of the original stone bearing in mind the practical problems that had to be overcome. At this time in 2017 this is broadly about the limit of our knowledge on this subject.

However, many questions remain unanswered. Who were these people? Where did they come from? Where had they hoped to go?

Over the past year I have read many academic papers, books and pamphlets, and endeavoured to obtain a picture of life in the fifth-sixth centuries in western Britain. The dominance of Roman society was largely gone and they had left ruling families/chiefs who were gradually adopting Christianity. Pilgrimage was important and it was seen as

a way of ensuring entrance to the 'after life' and led large numbers to make long and difficult journeys. One of these routes was down the west coast of Wales to what we now know as St David's, where in the fifth century David resided with his fellow ecclesiastics, Paul, Samson and Gildas. It is said that his popular name was in English 'The Aquatic' as he only drank water. The Pilgrims' route passed through their community to Caldey and the South coast of Wales. They sailed from there to the coast of Devon and Cornwall. If we take a line from Caldey, where there was an early Christian settlement, to the Camel estuary it will be seen that it passes about ten miles west of Lundy. From the Camel they might have remained in the area – there are Enodoc, Kew, Endellion etc. – or moved on to Falmouth and then to Brittany and even to Rome.

However, they may have been blown ashore on Lundy and never had the means to leave. This would account for our monuments. The implications on the lives of those concerned is beyond our imagination. There must have been a group of them and they may have spent the rest of their lives marooned and lost to their world. Charles Thomas has suggested that the Burial Ground contains a hundred graves.

As we examine this subject it becomes more speculative and open to imaginative indulgences, but I would venture to suggest would lend itself to serious academic research rather than field work. Further digging in the Burial Ground is not realistic bearing in mind the number of people buried there in the last 100 years. To assist any prospective researcher there are already a number of publications that report on the monuments and some are listed in the references below.

In one publication in the National Library of Wales Archives and Manuscripts/Monuments/the early medieval Church in South West Wales, page 9, there is a reference to Gildas writing in the mid-sixth century about Vortipor as a 'Christian though sinful ruler'. This name is similar to Vortimer who was the son of Vortigern who was 'cursed three times' by Germanus for incest and who 'fled south'. Could this relate to stone 1403?

After many hours of research this is the limit of my findings but it poses the questions that I have referred to earlier. Therefore, I am happy to leave it to others to take up the challenge and answer the questions.

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**Plate 1** (above): The early Christian memorial stones in Beacon Hill burial ground on Lundy.  
Photo © Jennifer Ellis



**Plate 2** (right): The Tigerni memorial stone, showing some of the lettering.  
Photo © Jennifer Ellis