

*'The Pictish Stones'*

The artworks were exhibited at the Waterfront Hall, Belfast and Clothworthy Arts Centre, Antrim in  
2012 & 2013

The article *'The Pictish Stones a seductive riddle'* was originally published in History Scotland  
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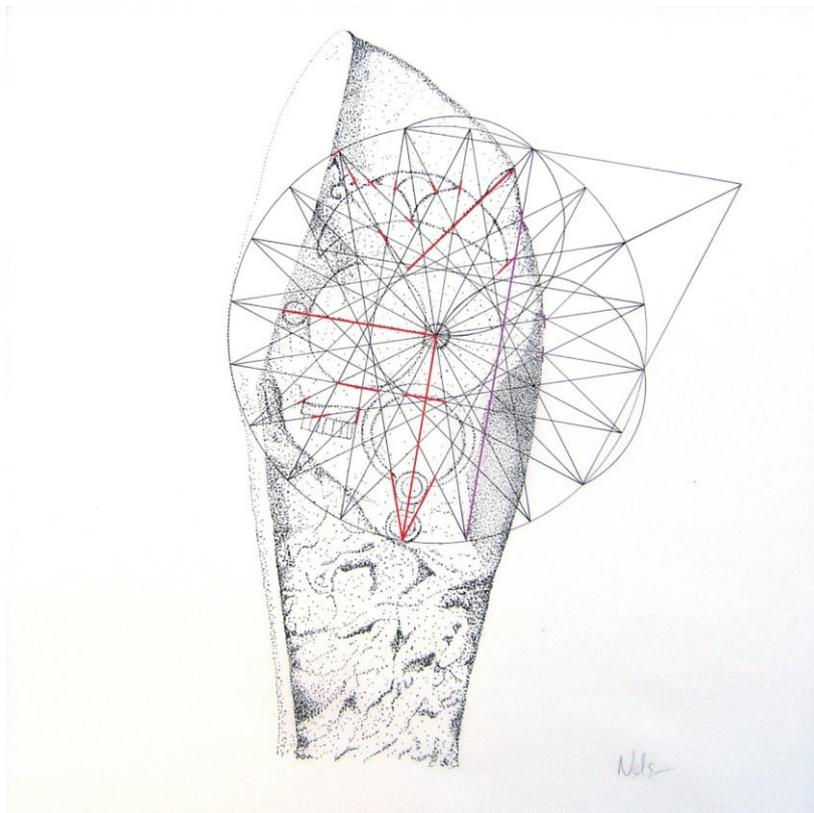
## **The Pictish Stones a seductive riddle**

The Pictish people used numerous images on their stone carvings and incorporated both animal and abstract shapes. The most enigmatic symbol is the Pictish Beast, a creature which appears almost abstract in its various guises. The Pictish Beast makes up 40% of all the animal carvings, with the Salmon the second most common image, yet it is the wonderful abstract shapes that often accompany the animals that make the Pictish stones so intriguing.

The symbols that the Pictish people used are always beautifully inscribed into the surface of each stone. The Picts carved with a high level of skill.

Yet when studying a photograph of a stone at Inveravon Church, Moray, I noticed that the four abstract shapes, v-rod, cauldron, mirror and comb, seemed to be unbalanced in their relationship with each of their neighbours. It is difficult to verbalise why, but seen as a whole rather than as individual elements the complete image does not ring with harmony or have a strong compositional value. For a people who are renowned for their craftsmanship this seemed odd. Any art which is crafted by a skilled artisan always has an underlying balance and beauty but for some reason the Pictish sculptor did not apply his/her visual aesthetics to the work. So the question is why not?

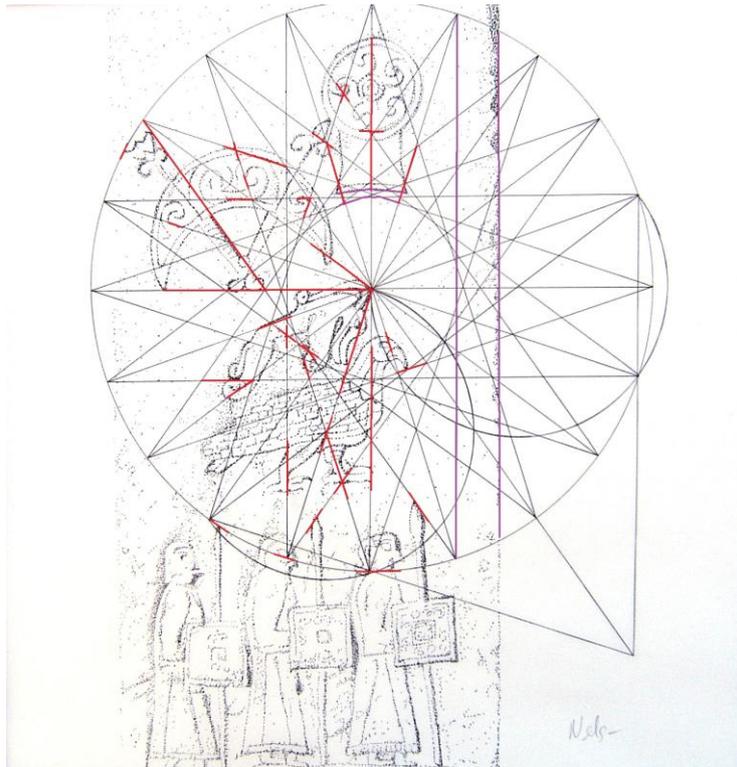
On closer inspection of the photograph, I noticed that the stone's symbols had a connection between certain points. There appeared to be a visual link which ran through the centre of the mirror, to one of the handles of the cauldron and another line that passed through the centre of the cauldron, meeting the first at ninety degrees. There seemed to be a geometrical unity. If this is the case the visual balance of each abstract image would be secondary to the geometric construction. After numerous straight lines were sketched over a copy of the photograph, a pattern seemed to emerge which was not random, but highly organised. The pattern used star polygons. *(Please see illustration on next page)*



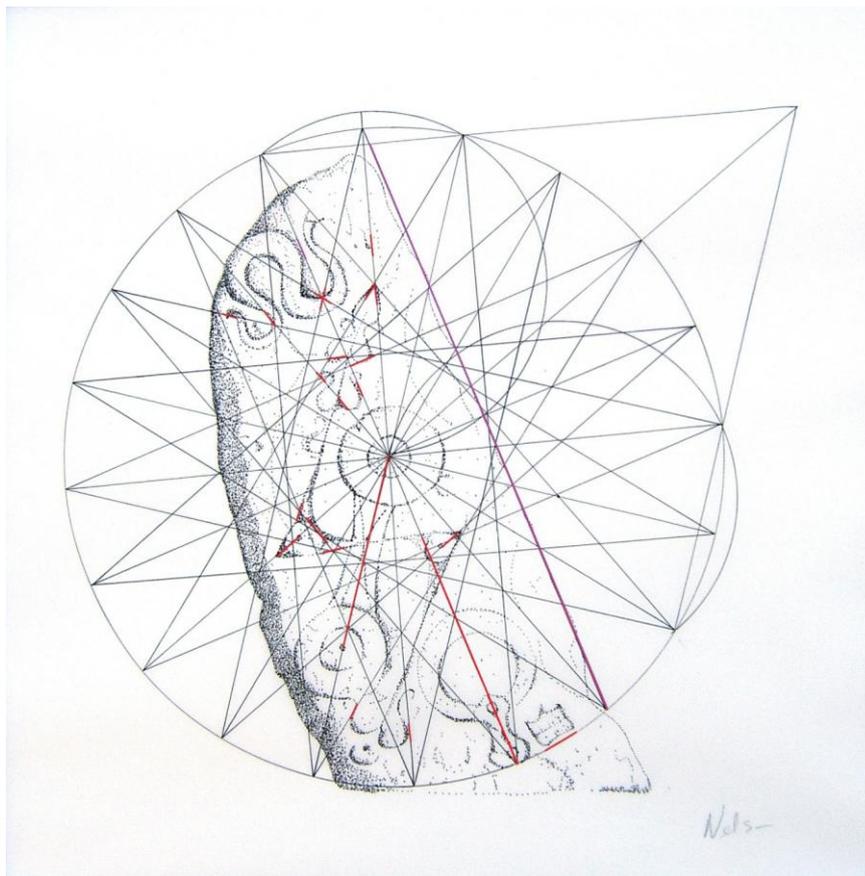
*Illustration of Carved Stone, Inveravon Church.*

*Please note for ease of visual reading the points and lines of intersection of both the Pictish inscription and the star polygons have been shown in red. Also the lines which have a parallel correlation have been shown in purple.*

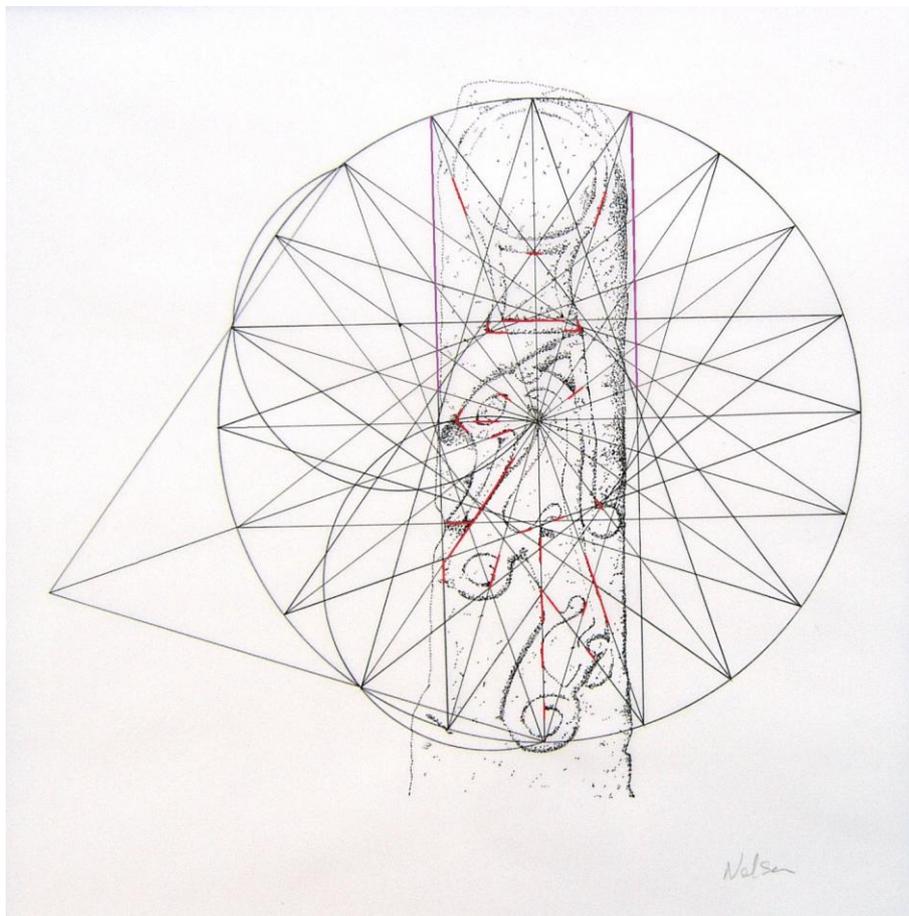
Of course just because one Pictish Stone, at Inveravon Church has some correlation to star polygons it does not mean that all follow such a pattern. Four other Class 1 stones were investigated and all four seemed to use the same basic pattern



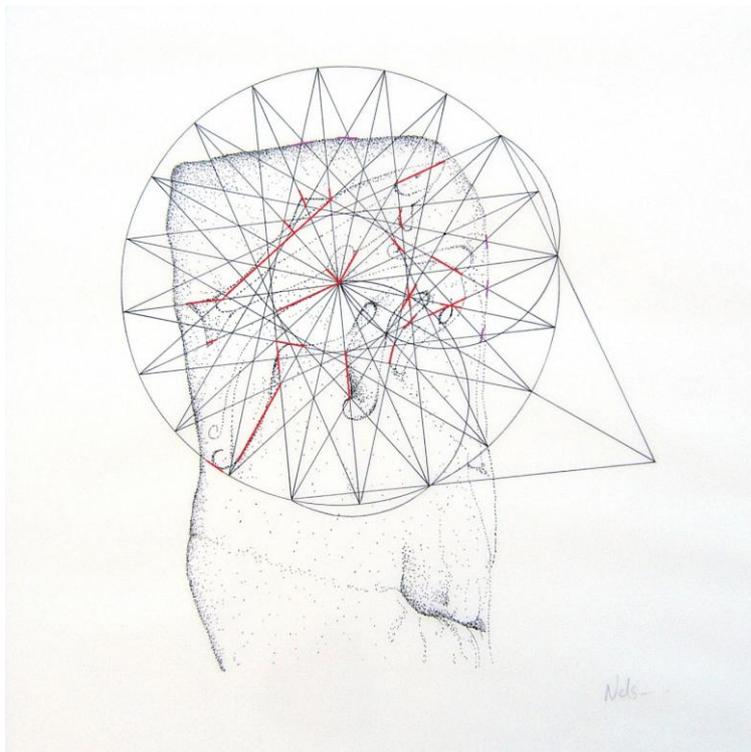
*Illustration showing the Pictish Stone from the Brough of Birsay, Orkney*



*Illustration showing Pictish Stone on the Aberlemno roadside*



*Illustration showing Pictish Stone from the Meikle Museum*



*Illustration showing Craw Stane, Rhynie*

For the complete article please see History Scotland Vol.13 No.6 Nov/Dec 2013 or visit [www.historyscotland.com](http://www.historyscotland.com)