

Prehistoric Cochno stone to be unearthed for first time since 1965 burial next to Glaswegian housing estate

The 5,000 year old stone was originally buried to protect it from vandalism



The stone panel dates back to 3000BC and is one of the best examples of Neolithic cup and ring markings in Europe

A prehistoric stone panel said to be the "most important in Europe" is being unearthed for the first time in 50 years - next to a housing estate in Clydebank.

The Cochno Stone, which dates to 3,000BC and is described as one of the best examples of Neolithic or Bronze Age cup and ring markings in Europe, is being fully excavated for the first time since being buried in 1965 to protect it from vandalism.

The stone lies on land next to a housing estate near Faifley in West Dunbartonshire.

Archaeologists will use 3D-imaging technology to make a detailed digital record of the site on excavation and hope this will provide more information on the stone's history, purpose and the people who created it about 5,000 years ago.

Dr Kenny Brophy, from Glasgow University, is leading the dig at the site next to Cochno farm. Work started on Monday and is expected to last three weeks.

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.

"Renowned archaeologist Ludovic Maclellan Mann, with a team of experts, decided the best way to preserve it was to cover it over to protect it from further damage. It has lain there ever since."

A trial excavation last year indicated modern graffiti is "probably extensive" over the stone's surface. The joint project between the university's archaeology department and the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Conservation aims to gather high-resolution data of the stone's surface before reburial. The foundation then hopes to produce a life-size copy of the 8m by 13m stone using the recorded digital data and historical sources, including the graffiti as well as prehistoric surface.

The foundation's Ferdinand Saumarez-Smith 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."

"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."