

The Stone of Destiny



The **Stone of Scone** (pronounced 'skoon'), also commonly known as the **Stone of Destiny** or the **Coronation Stone** (though "Stone of Destiny" sometimes refers to Lia Fáil) is an oblong block of red sandstone, about 26 inches by 16 inches by 10.5 inches in size and weighing approximately 336 pounds. The top bears chisel-marks. At each end of the stone is an iron ring, apparently intended to make transport easier. Historically, the artifact was kept at the now-ruined abbey in Scone, near Perth, Scotland. It was used for centuries in the coronation of the monarchs of Scotland, the monarchs of England, and, more recently, British monarchs. Other names by which it has sometimes been known include **Jacob's Pillow Stone** and the **Tanist Stone**, and in Scottish Gaelic, "*clach-na-cinneamhain*", "*clach Sgàin*" and also "*Lia(th) Fàil*".

The legend of the Stone of Destiny goes back to the foundation myth of Scotland. In about 1400BC, an Egyptian Pharaoh had a daughter called Scota, who married Goídel Glas. They were exiled from Egypt and eventually settled in northwest Spain. Their descendents later conquered Ireland and became the Scotii, who also in time came to rule Scotland.

When the descendents of Scota arrived in Scotland, the story continues, they brought with them a block of sandstone weighing 152kg. This had been used as a pillow by Jacob when he had the dream reported in Genesis about Jacob's Ladder. The Stone of Destiny, as it became known, was first located at Dunadd during the time of Dalriada, before being moved to Scone by King Kenneth I.

In 1296 the Stone was captured by Edward I as spoils of war and taken to Westminster Abbey, where it was fitted into a wooden chair, known as St. Edward's Chair (above), on which all subsequent English sovereigns except Queen Mary II have been crowned. Doubtless by this he intended to symbolize his claim to be "Lord Paramount" of Scotland with right to oversee its King. However, there is some doubt whether Edward I captured the real stone — it has been suggested that monks at Scone Palace hid the real Stone in the River Tay or buried it on Dunsinane Hill. If so, it is possible that the English troops were fooled into taking the wrong stone; some have claimed that historic descriptions do not appear to fit the present stone. If the monks did hide the real stone, they hid it well, as no other stone fitting its description has ever been found.

In 1328, in the peace talks between the Kingdom of Scotland and the Kingdom of England, Edward III is said to have agreed to return the captured Stone to Scotland. However, this did not form part of the Treaty of Northampton. The Stone was to remain in England for another six centuries. In course of time James VI of Scotland came to the English throne as James I of England but the stone remained in London; for the next century, the Stuart Kings and Queens of Scotland once again sat on the stone — but at their coronation as Kings and Queens of England. Since the Act of Union 1707, the coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey has

applied to the whole of Great Britain, and since the Act of Union 1801 to the United Kingdom, so the stone may be said to have returned, once again, to its ancient use.



On Christmas Day 1950, a group of four Scottish students (Ian Hamilton, Gavin Vernon, Kay Matheson and Alan Stuart) took the Stone from Westminster Abbey for return to Scotland. In the process of removing it from the Abbey, they broke it into two pieces. After hiding the greater part of the stone in Kent for a few weeks, they risked the road blocks on the border and returned to Scotland with this piece, which they had hidden in the back of a borrowed car, along with a new accomplice Johnny Josselyn. The smaller piece was similarly brought north a little while later. This journey involved a break in Leeds, where a group of sympathetic students and graduates took the fragment to Ilkley Moor for an overnight stay, accompanied by renditions of "On Ilkley Moor baht 'tat".

The Stone was then passed to a senior Glasgow politician who arranged for it to be professionally repaired by Glasgow stonemason Robert Gray. A major search for the stone had been ordered by the British Government, but this proved unsuccessful. Perhaps assuming that the Church would not return it to England, the stone's custodians left it on the altar of Arbroath Abbey, on 11 April 1951, in the safekeeping of the Church of Scotland. Once the London police were informed of its whereabouts, the Stone was returned to Westminster. Afterwards, rumors circulated that copies had been made of the Stone, and that the returned Stone was not in fact the original.

In 1996 the British Government decided that the Stone should be kept in Scotland when not in use at coronations, and on 15 November 1996, after a handover ceremony at the border between representatives of the Home Office and of the Scottish Office, it was returned to Scotland and transported to Edinburgh Castle where it remains. Provision has been made to transport the stone to Westminster Abbey when it is required there for future coronation ceremonies.