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LIFE IN PIECES: LESSONS IN THE VALUE OF FRAGMENTS FROM THE SECRET LIVES OF THE STONE OF SCONE/DESTINY

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This study identifies, introduces and joins up the long lives of the geographically dispersed fragments that exist of the famed and fabled Stone of Scone/Destiny, used in inauguration and coronation of Scottish, English and British monarchs since medieval times. Based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines material culture studies and ethnographic methods, it characterises the networks in which the fragments have lived and considers what work these fragments were and are doing. It asks what difference fragmentation and the existence of fragments makes to our contemporary understanding of the meaning, values and significance of the Stone. The Stone and its considerable fragmentation evoke specific procedural and curatorial issues that invite wider reflection on the nature and role of fragments, and about private collections and their afterlives. Through the life of pieces, the study suggests, we can better understand what role social value could and should be playing in our museum and heritage practices.

Keywords: fragmentation; composite biography; social value; private collections; afterlives

INTRODUCTION

The Stone of Destiny has two enduring characteristics. One is to galvanise the nation of Scotland and the other is to twist the knickers of the British establishment. Last week, that celebrated lump of sandstone has demonstrated its power yet again.[1]

This assertion by the late Scottish nationalist Alex Salmond stemmed from the disruptive agency of a tiny fragment of the Stone of Scone, a battered rectangular block of sandstone with iron rings on each side also romantically known as the Stone of Destiny (the Stone).[2] With the

1. Alex Salmond, cited in *Daily Record* (Ferguson 2024).
2. The history of the Stone is often confused by treatment of myths and legends that misinterpret medieval sources, but some core facts are as follows: 1249, first known use of Stone of Scone as a symbolic object in royal inauguration, of Scottish king Alexander III; 1292, last use in inauguration in Scotland, of John Balliol; 1296, looted by English king, Edward I; 1297, presentation to shrine of St Edward the Confessor at Westminster Abbey; *c* 1300, enshrined in chair; 1301, emergence of Scottish mythical origins for Stone, travelling from Egypt via Ireland to Scotland, developing in the late 14th/early 15th century into journey from Egypt to Spain to Ireland (Tara) to Argyll, to Pictland; *c* 1327, English myth emerges that the Stone has biblical origins, was Jacob's Pillow (late 16th century appears in English writings); mid-14th century first record of 'Stone of Scone'; 1399, first known use in coronation of English king, Henry IV (used in

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2024 annual release of Scottish Cabinet Papers, the media jumped on the 'intriguing revelation' that Salmond had been personally gifted a 'fragment' of the Stone in 2008,[3] surprised that this deed had not become public knowledge. Politicians of contrary persuasions now had their opportunity to use the Stone fragment to criticise not just Salmond, former First Minister of Scotland, but to taunt his former colleagues in the Scottish National Party (SNP). The Conservative Leader of the House of Commons in London, Penny Mordaunt MP, gleefully mocked the SNP's Deidre Brock MP about the 'discovery' of what was represented in the media as an object illicitly acquired and carelessly looked after (in a Tupperware box, in a cupboard), with allusions to unresolved police matters dogging Nicola Sturgeon MSP, who had resigned as First Minister in March 2023.[4] Salmond had passed the fragment into the care of the SNP; in fact, it was a revered object, displayed on a Perspex stand, that would be shown to visitors on a shelf in their headquarters' library.[5]

This brief example hints at the potency and significance of a single fragment of the medieval Stone. This is not just any stone. When Scottish nationalists manhandled it out of the Coronation Chair and secreted it away from London's Westminster Abbey on Christmas morning 1950, this caused the English–Scottish border to be closed for the first time in four hundred years. The reason is that since the fourteenth century nearly all English, later British, monarchs sat over the Stone during their coronation, in an act that symbolised the subjugation of the Scots. For previously it was used to inaugurate Scottish kings at Scone. The English King Edward I took the Stone from Scone Abbey as a war trophy in 1296, ultimately gifting it to Westminster Abbey's shrine of St Edward the Confessor, where an ornate wooden chair was designed to hold it in *c* 1300. Since the early twentieth century, particularly from 1950, Scottish nationalists famously weaponised this medieval looting.[6] In 1950, four Glasgow students – Ian Hamilton, Kay Matheson, Alan Stuart and Gavin Vernon – between them broke into Westminster Abbey and secreted the Stone to Scotland, where others hid it for over three months before passing it back to the authorities. To cut a long story short, even though the Stone was ultimately officially returned to Scotland by an unpopular, outgoing Conservative government in 1996, it is still highly political. In November 2023, when on public display in Edinburgh Castle alongside the Honours (crown jewels) of Scotland, activists wanting attention to their cause attacked its glass case with a metal tool. This took place a few months after the Stone's brief return to Westminster Abbey for the Coronation of King Charles III. The Crown owns the Stone, as inalienable property of the kingdom, but the 1996 Royal Warrant passed care of the Stone to the [Scottish] Commissioners for the Safeguarding of the Regalia (the Commissioners)

coronation of nearly all subsequent English, and later UK, coronations, as well as second installation of Oliver Cromwell in 1657); late 16th-century first use of 'Stone of Destiny', name promoted in mid-19th century; 1884, Irish nationalists plot to take Stone; 1928, Parliamentary debate about removing Stone to Edinburgh; 1950, Scots seeking Scottish home-rule take Stone from Westminster Abbey to Scotland; 1951, its return; 1953, use in coronation of Elizabeth II; 1967 and 1974, failed attempts to take Stone; 1996, Stone returns to Scotland; 2020, decision to move Stone from Edinburgh to Perth; 2023, use in coronation of Charles III; 2024, move to Perth Museum. For amplification, see sources in fn 8.

3. NRS, SCR14/71/63.
4. *The Scottish Sun* 2024.
5. It was only ever in a cupboard temporarily, during redecoration work: Scott Martin, pers comm, 30 Dec 2024.
6. Munro 2003; Hamilton 2008.

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Fig 1. The Stone of Scone/Destiny as now displayed in Perth Museum. *Photograph*: © Culture Perth and Kinross/Rob McDougall.

and requires the Stone's return to Westminster Abbey for future coronations.[7] The most recent stage of its journey is the 2024 permanent move of the Stone to the acclaimed new Perth Museum (fig 1).

Although the Stone comprises rejoined fragments, it is primarily treated as a complete and monolithic object, in both a tangible and intangible sense, with a linear story. While it has been the subject of much rigorous multi- and interdisciplinary scholarship,[8] and while the coronation and move to Perth has stimulated new historical and scientific studies, the existence and significance of a diverse, dispersed body of small fragments of the Stone has been overlooked.

Arguably the most high-profile example of domestic repatriation that has been achieved within the countries of the United Kingdom,[9] this academically innovative and rigorous study of the known and newly (re)discovered fragments of the Stone therefore transforms our understanding of the Stone by revealing and illuminating its unauthorised history and meanings. It necessarily engages with and advances topical academic discussions about the nature and role of fragmentation,[10] private collections and their afterlives,[11] authenticity

7. Welander 2003, 256–7.
8. Welander *et al* 2003; Aitchison 2009; Rodwell 2013; Caldwell 2018, 2023.
9. Curtis 2014 for context.
10. See Sörman *et al* 2024a for an excellent review and analysis of 20-plus years of fragmentation studies, with its origins in the work of Chapman and Gaydarksa (2009), for which see their own considered reflections in Chapman 2024 and Gaydarska 2024.
11. Daubney 2022.

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and, in particular, the part that understanding social value could and should be playing in our museum and heritage practices.[12] In this context, such reveals challenge authorised heritage discourses and may bring discomfort but cannot be ignored.

Fragmentation studies to date have tended to be very archaeological, with the subjects mostly prehistoric. While social relationships (enchainment) and transmission of memories have been core to such understandings, the social significance of fragments, what they do in contemporary or near-contemporary contexts, has received limited attention. An example is Moshenska's study of the nature and character of children's collection and exchange of shrapnel from Second World War shell fragments. Drawing on a BBC dataset of oral histories, he identified the unexpected ways in which children valued the shrapnel, and the work this did, including helping them to navigate unfamiliar and difficult wartime experiences.[13] Jones's pioneering ethnographic study of the social value of the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish cross-slab is another important contribution.[14] The slab survives in two main portions and in thousands of tiny fragments, now curated in multiple places. Metaphorically, the fragmented biography of the cross-slab could be seen to inform 'complex processes of displacement' resulting from the nineteenth-century Highland Clearances in a contemporary community that felt itself to be marginalised in various ways.[15] Critical and imaginative thinking about the concept and 'practice' of working with fragments of historical and modern objects and places has also emerged in three Scandinavian studies: Röst has explored the agency of upcycled architectural fragments in deceptive memory-making at a Swedish manor; Arnshav and Immonen – exploring, respectively, a seventeenth-century shipwreck (the Swedish *Rikswasa*) that was deliberately and extensively robbed in the 1960s to create marketable souvenirs and memorabilia, and the contemporary tangible and intangible values of urban heritage (Turku, Finland) – both reflect on implications and wider benefits for heritage practices.[16]

We therefore need more academic studies that illuminate what we might think of as the 'debris field' (literal and metaphorical impact), power and potential of fragments – what fragments 'do'.[17] My Authenticity's Child project was designed as a study focused on understanding social value, the nature and role of authenticity of the Stone, considering contemporary attitudes within a more developed understanding of what has happened since 1950, and while the Stone was on the move in 2023 and 2024.[18] Social value is the significance of the subject to contemporary communities, including people's sense of identity, belonging, attachment and place. These values will be contextual, evolving and multiple.[19] My initial research design did not identify that modern fragments would need to be a specific theme, but as they and their surprising and fascinating stories began to emerge, and in rapidly increasing numbers, I recognised that they demanded a specific and targeted focus, indeed were the place to *start* my project outputs.

12. For example, Foster and Jones 2019.
13. Moshenska 2008.
14. Jones 2004, 2005.
15. Jones 2004, xii.
16. Arnshav 2024; Immonen 2024; Röst 2024.
17. Cf Sörman *et al* 2024a, 12.
18. Foster 2024.
19. Robson 2025.

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In terms of the Stone and its fragments, the main questions are therefore:

- What is the story of the fragmentation of the Stone and the afterlives of the individual fragments?
- What work were and are those fragments doing?
- What difference does fragmentation and the existence of fragments make to our contemporary understanding of the meaning, values and significance of the Stone?

The overall objective of the fragments' focus is to consider what is being lost and gained from a museum and heritage perspective. This behoves a reflection on aspects of current procedural and curatorial approaches to the Stone and future possibilities for what the fragments *could* be doing as part of this mix.

METHODOLOGY

British archaeological and anthropological material culture studies have been criticised for their 'disregard for the significance of method',[20] and more generally there is a positive move to outline possibilities and implications, albeit in an open and non-prescriptive manner.[21] This is a study led by the fragments. My wider project (see above) is underpinned by an object biography/itinerary-type approach, such as that broadly described by Woodward,[22] but distinguished by the way it *incorporates* ethnographic research. This is the pioneering tactic, underpinned by a suite of interlinked and triangulated interdisciplinary methodologies, that Siân Jones and I championed in our Hilton of Cadboll and St John's Cross replica studies, where understanding lives will bring us to contemporary social value, with its historical roots.[23] This approach creates 'composite biographies' that embrace the lives of fragments, replicas, copies, souvenirs and other representations.[24] In fragmentation studies, it is acknowledged that there is no one way to study fragmentation or interpret fragments.[25] Biography is a key method that can elucidate the interdependence of people, places and things across time and space, how enchainment references and communicates relationships in new contexts, and the part that memory and identity play.[26] Ontologically, my underpinning theoretical perspective is 'new materialist', embracing 'how desires, feelings and meanings contribute to social production – relational networks of animate and inanimate', in the context of understanding subject–object relations.[27] The research is particularly attuned to responses to materiality, and the messy and rhizomic nature of lives, relationships and networks, as well as our capacity to recover them.

Methodologically, in terms of identification and use of primary sources and original fieldwork (see Acknowledgements), the (re)discovery and elucidation of these fragments, their changing meaning and significance has arisen from:

20. Hicks 2010, 73.
21. Woodward 2020, 30, 118.
22. Ibid, 95–116.
23. Foster and Jones 2008, 2020a, 21–9.
24. Foster and Curtis 2016. Note the different use of 'composite biography' by Joyce (2015, 27) to refer to biographies of whole categories of things.
25. Sörman *et al* 2024a, tables 1.1 and 1.2.
26. Gaydarska 2024, 104, 119; Chapman 2024, 288, 290.
27. Brown 2001; Fowler and Harris 2015; Fox and Alldred 2015, 399.

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- Visiting and exploring archives, including oral histories.
- Systematic research in contemporary and historic newspapers held in multiple sources, including digital (Google Alerts for coverage during life of project), and judicious use of identified other media (television and radio coverage, YouTube etc).
- Discussions and formal consultation with collection curators and institutional experts to explore issues and access local knowledge and information in their behind-the-scenes records, including prompting new photography.
- Interviews and correspondence (direct and indirect) with members of three families associated with fragments, and other individuals with an association.
- Handling of a real-life fragment and learning its family story in a public workshop held at the University of Stirling.
- Discussion and participant observation in other workshops organised in Scone, Scone Palace and Perth.
- Ethnographic semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted with people in some way associated with the Stone since 1950, but particularly 1996, and staff, owners and visitors at Scone Palace, Westminster Abbey, Edinburgh Castle and Perth Museum.
- Detective work following leads about specific fragments, including those offered by people who generously engaged with the ongoing research (effectively, a form of snowball sampling).

In January 2025, the first anniversary of the event with which this paper opened led a journalist to discover my project website and contact me. Subsequent press wires about my research generated much media interest on and after 17 January. The result is that many members of the public have contacted me with their family's knowledge of credible Stone fragments, replicas and other memories relating to the movement of the Stone in 1950/51, often accompanied by supporting evidence. I have signposted where the emerging new knowledge elaborates or modifies any interpretation.[28]

This paper will now introduce the Stone fragments and the history of knowledge of their existence. It will then reveal more about individual lives, characterising the networks in which the fragments were created and circulated. This is the first step to critically exploring 'material culture' themes that emerge when reflecting on their meaning, values and significance. In drawing conclusions, the paper considers the implications of these findings not just for the Stone but for research and wider heritage/museum practice.

STONE FRAGMENTATION PROCESS AND KNOWN FRAGMENTS

This research pragmatically defines fragments based on their context and consequences of creation, regardless of whether deliberate or accidental and regardless of size.[29] The known fragments and their prime references are summarised in the supplementary materials. Normally, 'fragment' is used to describe the individual objects considered in this study,

28. My comments are necessarily preliminary, non-specific and unattributed at this stage, but I have confidence in them. Full detail and acknowledgement will follow further research in future publications; please also see the project website: www.TheStone.stir.ac.uk.
29. Cf Gaydarska 2024, 103, 111–13.

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Fig 2. The Stone survives today as a block of stone weighing 152kg and measuring approximately 67cm by 42cm by 26.5cm. The line of the break is visible in the bottom righthand quadrant and runs to the left of the ironwork (compare fig 5). *Photograph*: © Historic Environment Scotland.

except where the term used by others is quoted. The significance of how terminology is employed, and by whom, is discussed later.

As a monument, the Stone began its life as a fragment of the earth's geology. It was quarried at an unknown time near Scone, on the opposite side of the river Tay from what is now Perth. It is likely only in the thirteenth century that this stone, whatever its earlier life, became the symbolic entity we know as the Stone of Scone/Destiny (fig 2).[30]

As Stanley presciently observed, 'The iron rings, the battered surface, the crack which has all but rent its mass asunder, bear witness to long migrations'.[31] It is on these and more recent journeys that intentional and unintentional working of the Stone's surface resulted in loss of stone. Its six sides have been worked at many times in its life.[32] The full sequence of events, their dating and what they represent is difficult to establish, even after forensic examination.[33] Notably, there is a scholarly disagreement about whether the two iron rings attached to the side of the Stone were added in Scotland or once the Stone was moved to Westminster Abbey.[34] Certainly, metal tools in the hands of unknown people have resulted in the loss of outer surfaces. The most obvious example is the crudely worked sinkings made to allow the applied rings to lie flat within the Stone's body. There is also the incomplete rectangular outline cut into the top

30. Broun 2003.
31. Stanley 1868, 66.
32. Terminology for sides follows Historic Environment Scotland 2024, fig 1, where we need to think stage left (sinister) and right (dexter).
33. Hill 2003, 2016.
34. Caldwell 2023, 24–5.

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surface, which predates these insets. Fairly large fragments must have been somehow knocked off the arrises of the Stone, deliberately or otherwise. With two, possibly three, hollows visible on the front face of the Stone, Rodwell also argues 'it is almost inconceivable that pieces have not been detached from the Stone and taken away by souvenir hunters at various times', possibly relic hunters, and one German visitor in 1710 recorded how tempted he was to do so.[35] But it is only in modern times that we have documentary evidence that fragments were retained or were deliberately taken to be kept.[36]

The Stone was 'wickedly fractured during the fitting-up at Westminster in 1838', for the coronation of Queen Victoria.[37] This event, not since recognised in Stone scholarship, led to the first record of detached 'particles' of the Stone, removed for comparative geological analysis: 'in preparing this chair for the coronation, some small fragments of this stone were broken off', the author 'assured by a geological friend who contrived to obtain part of them' that Scone quarries contain similar stone.[38] Later, two celebrated mid- to late-Victorian geologists procured and examined fragments of the Stone, and these became the British Geological Survey (BGS) collection of Stone samples. It appears that in 1865 the Scottish-born Andrew Ramsay collected grains and a fragment of the Stone from gently sweeping loose matters from the underside of the Stone,[39] while Jethro Teall collected up to five small fragments in 1892, when the Stone was being cleaned. Overall, the BGS Scottish Rock and Mineral collection comprises, or rather *comprised*, four small fragments of the Stone and five samples of loose mineral grains mounted under a cover slip, some of which their register refers to as a group of 'crumbs from the Stone of Scone' (fig 3). In 1996, BGS 'consumed'/prepared 'with great care' one of the 'chips' in creating a thin section to reconfirm the Scone-area origins of the Stone.[40]

In 1914, Suffragettes targeted the Coronation Chair. Most contemporary reports described damage to the front face of the Stone, which 'bore traces of having been struck by bullets, little chips lying among the dust',[41] their subsequent fate unknown.

Under the excellent lighting and all-round viewing opportunities presented in Perth, the observant visitor notices a crude cementitious repair to the Stone. This is because the Stone comprises two conjoined fragments. Early on Christmas morning 1950, Ian Hamilton (d. 2022) dropped it onto the floor of Westminster Abbey with a clunk while removing it under the cover of night from the Coronation Chair. It fully fractured along its historic crack (see above) when tugged by one of its metal rings. Parties to the conspiracy made a crude repair shortly before the Stone was returned to the authorities on 11 April 1951, left on the high altar of the ruined Arbroath Abbey. A small 'chip' of the Stone broke

35. Rodwell 2013, 4, 169, 173–6, 195; fig 228 is an annotated photograph of the underside of the Stone that highlights and interprets the visible loss due to historic blows, breaks and fractures.
36. Public responses since 17 Jan 2025 include an example of 19th-century souvenir-taking.
37. Taylor 1852, xxxiii; Richard Keltie has searched for and failed to find other related sources. Cf Rodwell 2013 for 1865 photograph as the earliest record of the crack.
38. Craik 1845, 1,052.
39. Stanley 1868, 499–500. See Rodwell 2013, 264, for previously identified sources for crack.
40. Fortey *et al* 1998, 147; Phillips *et al* 2003, 36. Aitchison (2009, 40–7) offers a fuller history of interest in the Stone's geology, but note new examples and details in this paper.
41. *Daily Record* 1914.

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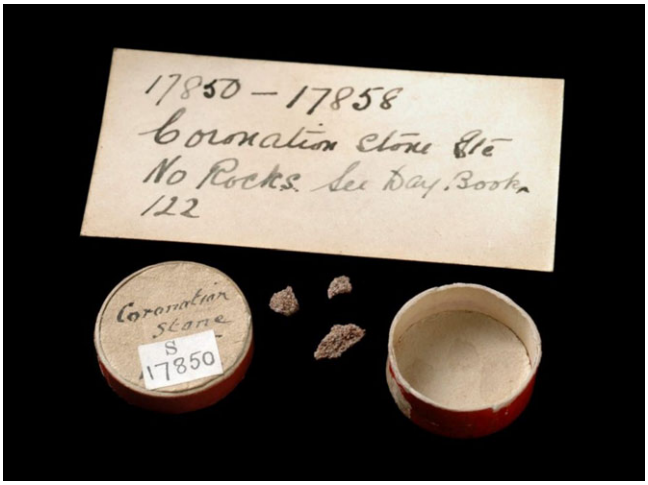

Fig 3. Three of the four 'crumbs from the Stone of Scone' that formed part of BGS S17850, one now mounted in the Diamond State Coach at Buckingham Palace (see fig 9). *Photograph*: British Geological Survey image, © UKRI 2024, All Rights Reserved Permit Number CP24/048.

off in Westminster Abbey, Scotland Yard bringing it in a suitcase to Glasgow in April 1951 to help identify the returned Stone.[42] From Glasgow, the Stone was 'wheeched' (whisked) to Westminster Abbey, concealed until the King died in 1952. Before being reunited, the two main fragments led separate and somewhat exciting lives as they were often roughly handled and covertly moved from Westminster Abbey around England.[43] Once in Scotland, severally and latterly conjoined, the fragments were moved clandestinely around and secreted in places encircling the Campsie Fells and other hills between Glasgow and Stirling (fig 4).[44]

Both fragments ultimately made their way to Robert (Bertie) Gray (d. 1975), who played a pivotal role in the removal of the Stone, its repair and its return. Gray was a monumental sculptor, Glasgow politician and magistrate with strong nationalist sentiments, a leading member of the Scottish Covenant Association, which sought some form of self-government for Scotland. His political and practical involvement with the Stone began early, for he made a replica of the Stone in the early 1930s, not long after co-founding the National Party of Scotland in 1928, which later merged to form the SNP in 1934. His idea back then had been to remove the Stone from Westminster Abbey and to substitute it with his replica.[45]

On Hogmanay 1950, Gray received the larger portion and placed it in the care of businessman John Rollo (d. 1985). 'Sickened' to see about a fifth of the Stone missing, Rollo hid it in his Bonnybridge engineering works but quickly moved it on to a trusted colleague in Stirling. Tam Smith proudly reported his role to the tabloid Scottish press in 1967, where his grandson Ken Lawton revived it in 2024. Smith, as a '200 per cent'

42. *Daily Express* 1951.
43. Hamilton 2008, 99–101, 109–12, 128–31.
44. BBC, John Rollo uncut interviews.
45. NRS, HH41/2099, doc 82.

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Fig 4. Key places associated with the Stone's movement, including (some of) the fragments. *Artwork*: Christina Unwin.

Scotsman, stored the fragment for three months under sacks and a work bench; 'The rest of the story everyone knows, except that there are still a few small pieces of the Stone in Scotland. I have one which I treasure greatly.'[46] Lawton told me that 'Stirling was quite a stronghold of nationalists and the nationalist movement' at this time, and his grandpa was 'part of the core post-war nationalists'. Within a fortnight, the smaller fragment also made

46. Smith 1967.

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its way to Bonnybridge via Bishopbriggs (per David Forrester and the father of Alan Stuart, one of the Glasgow students).[47] Rollo entrusted it to his co-director James Scott, who hid it in an HP Sauce carton in his Bonnybridge garage.

Bertie Gray was the righthand man of John MacCormick (d. 1961) when it came to both politics (they were Scottish Liberals) and the Stone. While Hamilton must be credited for the initiative to take the Stone in 1950, he did so in the context of supporting the Scottish Covenant Association, led by MacCormick, a lawyer and the leading activist for this 'all-party and non-party' movement.[48] Hamilton had led MacCormick's campaign to become lord rector of Glasgow University, and MacCormick offered financial support to the 'student reivers', as he later described them.[49]

Come the end of March 1951, MacCormick wanted the two Stone 'parts' to be reunited. King George VI was seriously ill and agitated that his daughter might not be able to be crowned upon on the Stone and fulfil its traditional prophecy.[50] It was important to take the initiative and return the Stone with pride and dignity (the activists were not anti-royalty).[51] Via Glasgow and Kilsyth, in the case of the smaller fragment, the fragments made their way to the Bearsden home of William Whyte, a chartered accountant and former treasurer of the National Party. Here Gray's foreman mason, Aberdonian Edward (Ned) Manley (d. 1962), 'a craftsman of the old school', rejoined the two fragments over the Easter weekend.[52] In 1955, MacCormick wrote vividly about the noise as Manley used a steel drill and mallet to make holes in the Stone into which 'bronze bolts' were inserted, the gap filled in with cement.[53] Manley allayed MacCormick's concerns about the Stone shattering by showing him the process. The guts of his repair, and scale of intervention – involving three dowels with metal sleeves, one around 15cm long – is exposed in X-radiographs (fig 5).

MacCormick recounted how 'there was a little pile of small chips and powdered stone on the table', which inspired him to ask whether the latter could be incorporated into the cement, which it was, and 'we felt satisfied that we had used the Stone's own material in its repair'. The thinking was that this helped make the repair less visible. First, though, Gray inserted a political message in one of the internal metal tubes, the text of which he left to his widow, revealed on her death in 1980.[54] Whyte's wife Kathleen later described how the Stone sat on her dining table as the cement repair dried, noting how visible in fact this was. Gray applied finishing touches to try to mask the line, using soot, carborundum and lead pencil. Gray and others present collected and took away the 'chips' of the Stone, and residual grains of sandstone; between them it seems that they neither left incriminating evidence nor threw any of it away – all of it was valued (see below).

47. BBC, John Rollo uncut interviews.
48. MacCormick 2008; quote from son Neil at p ix.
49. Eg Ibid, 184.
50. BBC, John Rollo uncut interviews – where politician Hector McNeil is cited as the source for this insight.
51. SPA/GA/PP/1/PUB/1; MacCormick 2008, 169–70.
52. The full repair story is recoverable from: *Calgary Herald* (Sanburn 1951); BBC, RADPROG 926571; MacCormick 2008, 174–6.
53. Gray's near-contemporary account also mentions the use of lead.
54. Text of message: 'March 1951. Stone of Destiny. This stone belongs to Scotland and it was stolen by Edward I of England in 1296. The Church of England should be ashamed to admit that they have allowed this stolen piece of property to remain in Westminster Abbey from that time. It must be returned to Scotland and no doubt it will be demanded for the reopening of the Scottish Parliament which was never closed but only adjourned in 1707', *The Scotsman* 1980.

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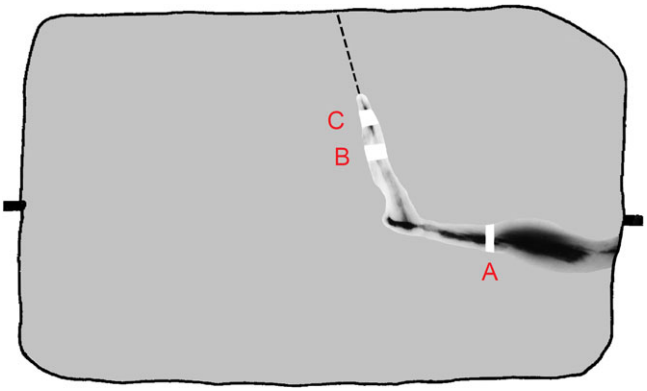

Fig 5. Outline of the upper face of the Stone with superimposed X-radiographs of its fracture. *Image*: Historic Environment Scotland.

Most of the known fragments have a link to that 1951 repair, and most were distributed due to the agency of Gray (fig 6).[55] An article in the *Calgary Herald* for 25 April 1951 is a revelation. Within weeks of the return of the Stone to London, the London correspondent of the *Calgary Herald*, Dick Sanburn, was in Glasgow to write an article about Scottish nationalism. He described attending a *ceilidh* (party) of the people involved with the Stone. His long article is largely taken up with what he learnt from Gray, 'one of the most fascinating of them all'. Gray described how 'When the stone was being repaired, a number of chips had to be taken off in order to fit the two pieces properly and smoothly together. These will be, later precious relics, carefully numbered and recorded to prevent a flood of fakes'; Sanburn ending with: 'I am the extremely proud [owner] of the tiny chip numbered 25.'[56] A 1956 newspaper article states that there were thirty-four 'tiny fragments', making the point that the Stone 'is not complete'.[57]

Public responses since 17 January 2025 evidence that Gray wrote numbers *on* fragments (multiple examples survive in different private hands) and was meticulous in cross-referencing accompanying letters of authenticity to these numbers. Gray also retained and distributed further tiny fragments that he did not number but would still authenticate in writing (if he always did this is unknown). In what follows, I cannot confirm whether the fragments described were among the numbered examples.

It seems probable that Gray used the festive *ceilidh* on 25 April 1951 to hand out a lot of the fragments that he had collected in Bearsden. Was this when Glaswegian writer and broadcaster Jack House (d. 1991) acquired the fragment he passed to renowned Scottish writer Nigel Tranter in 1971 (see later), 'a very wee piece of red sandstone nestling at the

55. Public responses since 17 Jan 2025 evidence that at least one other person there during the repair also collected and later distributed a small number of fragments among family members and friends.
56. [Owner] is the assumed meaning, with a word or possibly two missing from digital scans of the *Calgary Herald* (Sanburn 1951).
57. *Belfast News Letter* 1956. The ultimate source of the journalist/Percival-Prescott's information is unknown (no mention in Palmer and Percival-Prescott 1953; Percival-Prescott 1957). That author's suggestion that 'During the removal a fragment was broken away. This was later divided into the 34 tiny fragments in Scotland' appears to be a misunderstanding; it is not supported by the multiple strands of evidence for the origin of these fragments during the repair process.

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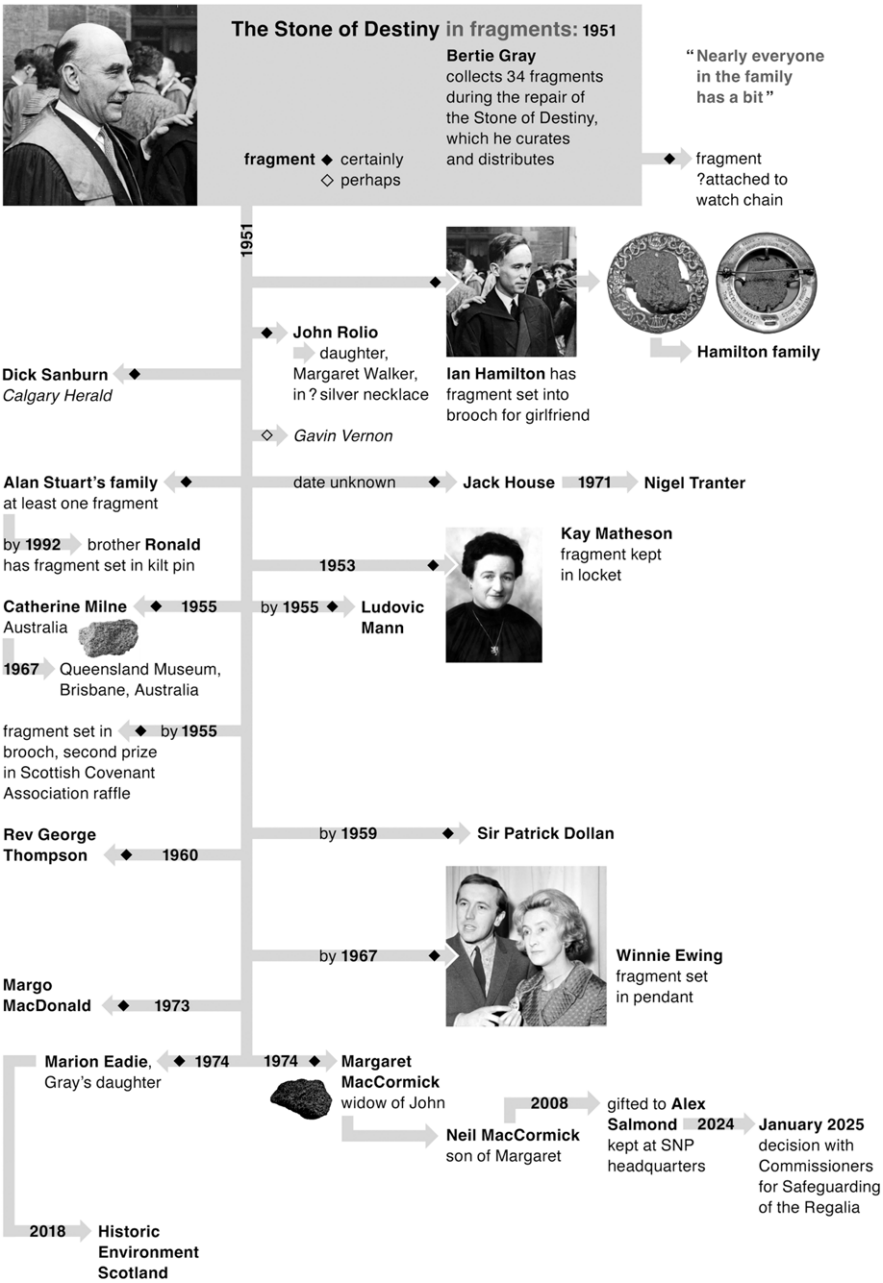

Fig 6. Summary of Stone fragments known to be dispersed by Bertie Gray, and their transmission (correct to December 2024). *Artwork*: Christina Unwin. *Photographs*: copyright *Herald and Times*/ Newsquest Media Group; Jamie Hamilton; *Scots Independent* collection, Scottish Political Archive, University of Stirling; Queensland Museum H2400.1, photographer Peter Waddington; photographer unknown via Getty Images; Scottish National Party, photographer Ross Colquhoun.

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bottom of an envelope ... guaranteed as genuine by Councillor Robert Gray, of Glasgow Corporation, and that means it's authentic'?[58]

Certainly, individuals who were closely involved with the planning and implementation of the Stone's removal received fragments. Sheila Hamilton, then wife of Ian Hamilton, revealed in 1996 that 'three pieces of the stone, each just larger than a 50p, were mounted as jewellery' and were 'thought to have gone to fellow conspirators'.[59] Hamilton had his fragment enshrined in a silver brooch with a symbolic if relatively modest design, as would have befitted his means at the time. Ian gave it to Sheila as a twenty-first birthday present on 8 July 1951, 'with best wishes for the years of wisdom'. On the back, the Stone's traditional fourteenth-century prophecy is inscribed, originally Latin but translated and popularised by Sir Walter Scott: 'Unless the fates should faithless prove and prophets voice be vain, where'er this sacred stone is found the Scottish race shall reign' (fig 7a–b). Sheila never wore her brooch, but kept it in a family safe. In 1980, Kay Matheson, who lived in Inverasdale and became a domestic science teacher, told a journalist that 'I have a tiny piece of the Stone in a locket round my neck to remind me of those days' (fig 7c).[60] Kay had had to let Gray know, through MacCormick, that she would like a 'small piece of the Stone of Destiny', duly posted on 19 November 1953, with apologies and a humorous 'with compliments' ditty 'from' the Dean of Westminster (see Supplementary Material).[61] The family of Alan Stuart were undoubtedly gifted multiple fragments, given their roles; one is known to have been mounted in the kilt-pin of Alan Stuart's brother, Ronald.[62] Did the fourth student, Gavin Vernon, also receive a fragment?

Then there were the people involved in or who witnessed the repair. Of Gray himself, not long after the Perth Museum opened in 2024, the nephew of a 'stone mason' told a visitor experience assistant (VEA) that his uncle had a piece of the Stone on his Albert chain, the opposite end from the fob watch, indeed that nearly everyone in the family had a bit; assuming his uncle was Gray as opposed to Manley,[63] this is likely the 'chipping' that Gray was carrying in his pocket at Ian Hamilton's 1952 graduation, and while in London in 1955.[64] Rollo witnessed Manley beginning to chip holes in the Stone; his daughter reported in 1989 that she had a 'fragment of the stone from the workshop floor', and sources local to Cambusbarron, near Stirling, where Margaret Walker lived, suggest that this became part of a silver necklace.[65] The MacCormick family also acquired a fragment. In March 1974, Gray provided a certificate for 'the small piece of sandstone in the possession of Mrs Margaret MacCormick', John's wife. John MacCormick knew of the fragment distribution, but was quite clear on his lack of interest in the Stone's materiality and I suspect he did *not* acquire his own fragment: 'We saw the Stone, not as an object of superstitious awe, but as a symbolic instrument to remind a whole people of their nationhood. It is not in material things, however great their real or their sentimental value, but the minds of men that destiny is fulfilled.'[66]

58. House 1971.
59. Dalton 1996. It seems unlikely that Hamilton collected his own fragment before he passed the Stone over to Gray on its arrival in Scotland.
60. Airs 1980.
61. Kay Matheson Archive, recognised as related during this research.
62. Gerber 1992, 127.
63. To 15 March 2025, no known sources evidence that Manley took fragments, although that is possible.
64. *The Sunday Post* 1952; *The Kirriemuir Free Press and Angus Advertiser* 1955.
65. *The Glasgow Herald* 1989; Ken Lawton, interview and pers comm, 25 Jul 2024 and 25 Oct 2024.
66. MacCormick 2008, 180.

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Fig 7. (a–b) front and back of the Sheila Hamilton brooch, with its dedication from her husband-to-be. *Photograph*: Jamie Hamilton. (c) Kay Matheson photographed for the press wearing her fragment-bearing locket, beside a framed text of the Arbroath Declaration of Independence. *Photograph*: © Mirrorpix.

Further to this, Gray 'wanted to send a piece to every land mass in the world'. On 2 July 1955, he gave a 'small piece of red sandstone . . . taken from the Stone of Destiny when it was being repaired by me' to Mrs Catherine Milne (fig 8a; journey in fig 4). Visiting Scotland from Australia, she met Gray and spoke about his repairs to the Stone. On her death in 1967, the family donated the fragment, accompanying letter of authentication and Gray business card to Queensland Museum.

The existence of fragments was certainly not a secret but revelations about them were highly dispersed, temporally and geographically. In 1959 Sir Patrick Dollan, a former Glasgow lord provost, stood up in front of 2,000 people and held up a 'fragment of stone

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Fig 8. (a) Fragment donated to Catherine Milne. *Photograph*: © Queensland Museum H2400.1–3, photographer Peter Waddington. (b) Winnie Ewing wearing her necklace with inset Stone fragment. *Photograph*: photographer unknown via Getty Images. (c) Framed fragment and letter donated to Marion Eadie. *Photograph*: © Historic Environment Scotland.

which he said was a piece of the Stone of Scone' after The Reivers folk band sang 'The Wee Magic Stane'.[67] John McEvoy had written this humorous and enduring political song in 1951, shortly after the Stone's disappearance became public. It teased the unfortunate Dean of Westminster after 'some rogue ran away wi his wee magic stane'. Dollan announced that 'it had been given to him by one of the Scottish nationalists concerned with abstracting the Stone of Scone from Westminster Abbey'.[68] At least two other (SNP) politicians also owned fragments: Winnie Ewing (d. 2023) was photographed wearing a

67. MacVicar nd.
68. *The Scotsman* 1959.

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locket with television host David Frost in 1967, admitting 'she would like to be arrested for being in possession of stolen property' (fig 8b), with other sources showing her wearing the necklace during her successful campaign for election to Parliament in November 1967.[69] When Margo MacDonald (d. 2014) won Govan in 1973, the 'nicest wee touch' was a gift from Gray of 'a wee chip off the Stone of Destiny'.[70]

In September 1974, Gray reported to the press that he did (still) have in his possession 'one or two small pieces' of the Stone.[71] On 4 December 1974, Gray wrote a letter of authentication 'about a small piece of sandstone' to Mrs Marion Eadie, his daughter (fig 8c). In 2018, Eadie put her framed letter and fragment up for auction, where it was expected to reach around £3,000.[72] Concern about the sale of part of the Stone led to the item's discreet withdrawal from auction. At a time when only one Stone fragment was known to the Commissioners, the case was put forward to the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel (SAFAP) for Treasure Trove allocation. This unusual case raised some difficult questions about ownership and reward responsibility, but the Queen's [now King's] and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer (KLTR), and SAFAP ultimately agreed its allocation to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) with an acquisition price of £6,500.

There are also at least two examples between 1951 and 1960 of individuals asking Gray for fragments so that the geology of the Stone could be tested (Ludovic Mann; George H Thompson, seeking to prove an origin in Israel). Thompson described receiving 'pieces from the "heart" of the Stone'.[73]

Finally, from the media it emerged during 2023 that a fragment of the Stone had been installed by an Australian royal coachmaker into the Diamond Jubilee State Coach, which the Australian Government donated to the British royal family in 2013. The King and Queen sat with the fragment between their legs as they journeyed to their coronation on 6 May 2023 (fig 9; journey in fig 4). Jim Frecklington designed the interior of the coach so that its occupants would be surrounded by a time capsule of fragments representing 'the most intense collection of the great events, figures and objects of British history ever assembled, items directly related to the most influential events and characters in British history, her greatest victories, her most treasured places, and her greatest contributions to the world'. Examples included timber and artefacts from the Tower of London, 10 Downing Street, numerous palaces, castles, cathedrals and the Ferriby Bronze Age boat; also included were 'segments' related to people such as William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Florence Nightingale and digital copies of Magna Carta and Domesday Book.[74] On television, Frecklington described the Stone as 'probably one of the most important items ... We could not have hoped to dream that a small piece of the Stone of Scone could be made available through the kindness and vision of the Government of Scotland'.[75] In around 2007, Frecklington had approached HES's predecessor body for a piece of the Stone. Historic Scotland declined – it would have required *breaking off* and creating a new fragment. Instead, Frecklington approached the BGS where

69. *The Daily Mirror* 1967; *The Sunday Post* 1967.
70. *The Sunday Post* 1973.
71. Main and Stewart 1974.
72. Mair 2018.
73. Gray 1971a, 1971b; Thompson nd and 1977, 4–6.
74. Frecklington 2007.
75. Today Show Australia 2023. Contra misleading press reports, this fragment does not date from the 1950/1 break/repair of the Stone, nor is it the fragment that ended up in the care of SNP HQ.

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Fig 9. The Stone fragment is inserted behind a circular glass window, immediately beneath the centre of the two front-facing seats of the Diamond Jubilee State Coach. *Photographs*: © Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2025/Royal Collection Trust.

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senior managers and its Collections Advisory Panel agreed to donate one of their samples (see above).[76]

WHAT WERE THE FRAGMENTS 'DOING'?

Context, of course, dictates the nature of the networks in which our fragments of the Stone were created in the act of fragmentation, circulated and recirculated, spoken of and reported, known of, and the polysemic meanings and values that have attached to and evolved with them.

As noted earlier, visitors and pilgrims possibly removed souvenirs and relics of the Stone. In documented sources, we first encounter fragments as evidence of origins, and that role endured. In the nineteenth century, a small body of geological samples were deliberately created and curated because scientific techniques could answer the critical question of geological origins, and fragments created in 1951 were later deployed in this way. This was of public interest because of the Stone's colourful and diverse mythology.[77] As we saw above, these tiny, curated fragments have since been considered partly expendable: they can be 'consumed' to create knowledge. A new life was injected into them when, with the return of the Stone to Scotland in 1996, public debate and opinions about its authenticity and origins was reignited,[78] and the authorities employed new geological analysis to aid discussions about the Stone's material authenticity. Petrology has remained the go-to method for authenticating the geological provenance of new fragments coming to light, even when there is a secure or persuasive provenience/provenance.[79] In the Diamond Jubilee State Coach, we find an example of fragments as curiosities, specimens of past national landmarks, cocooned in a regal *Kunstkammer*, a thoughtful gift that speaks to Commonwealth relations, if rather insensitive towards some domestic ones in its use and siting of a Stone fragment.

Attitudes to the 1950 break and 1951 repair of the main parts of the Stone are extremely eloquent. Overall, the students' adrenaline-driven handling of the Stone was cavalier, as a close reading of Hamilton's *Stone of Destiny* makes very clear.[80] However, breaking it *was* accidental, if fortunate in that the Stone was then easier to move. Hamilton talked shortly after of his immediate response:

> to howl and shout and bring down the watchman to us, to have it repaired. Then I remembered that, repaired or not, it would still stay in London, and determined that should never happen . . . I was more than ever anxious that it should be returned home, so that it could be repaired and kept with respect from ever being cracked again.[81]

76. BGS stated to Frecklington that they first sought and obtained the permission of the Right Honourable Jack McConnell, First Minister of Scotland, in his capacity as one of the Commissioners. Neither the Commissioners nor HES have been able to find any sources related to this request, but the outcome is that the coach fragment is now secure in the care of the royal family.
77. Overview in Aitchison 2009, 17–36.
78. Ascherson 2003.
79. Eg Scottish Government 2024.
80. Hamilton 2008.
81. Hamilton 1951. Note: in his many subsequent accounts of what happened, Hamilton is not consistent in terms of his attitude to the Stone breaking.

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We see here the fragments as political metaphor, as a vehicle to mending things in society for the better. The Stone broke along a historic crack, its 'final fracture new', according to Rollo, one of the first people to see both fragments on their return to Scotland.[82] Manley preferred an alternative argument: 'It's been an auld crack in the Stane. It wasna our laddies who broke it'. MacCormick noted weathering of the fracture, and the students and their other activists became quick to suggest that the Suffragette bomb had caused the full break.[83] Matheson went as far as to suggest that the students had 'discovered a State secret', deliberately concealed.[84] There is a sense of fragments as convenient political truth and fragments as a link to kindred dispossessed groups.

The behind-the-scenes story of the repair of the Stone evidences a respect for the Stone for what it stood for. From a conservation perspective we might be shocked by the repair methods (see fig 5), but Manley and Gray were proud of their speedy craftsmanship, as long-experienced makers of grave markers.

Tam Smith took his own fragment as souvenir, one he confidently 'liberated' with a cold chisel. Waste fragments and grains begat during the 1951 repairs were clearly carefully collected, curated and distributed by Gray over the course of the next twenty-four years.[85] We have to think here of what this collection of fragments was doing for Gray, and what they did for the recipients (and indeed the others present who took some fragments). Gray clearly had a sense of humour and spread replica-induced confusion in relation to the material authenticity of the Stone returned to Westminster Abbey,[86] but his practices in relation to the fragments were very serious indeed. Notably, he systematically numbered, curated and distributed thirty-four of the fragments as relics of the true Stone, their future authenticity and integrity to be ensured through affidavits, beyond the inner circle. If only we had the list that it seems likely Gray managed over his lifetime. Sanburn received such documentation in 1951,[87] which also accompanied known gifts in 1955 and 1974, while Matheson's accompanying label was affectionately wry and witty.

Gray traded on styling himself as the man who repaired the Stone, so we see him employing the fragments as a form of personal capital in his social and political networks. On present evidence, he appears to have circulated the fragments in five main ways. First, gifting to those closely involved in the Stone's recent life story, and to sympathetic, like-minded people who supported the cause, so fragments as markers of shared experience and trust. Second, Gray sought to ensure that fragments with a secure provenance could be found *around* the world. Was Gray flirting with the traditional prophecy that 'where'er this sacred stone is found the Scottish race shall reign'? Are we looking at fragments as subversive ambassadors for the tradition and authority of a more independent Scotland? Gifts to journalists at home and abroad may be more than media titbits, looked at in this light. Third, Gray gifted fragments to politicians that he respected, including fragments as deeply symbolic markers of political landmarks that were meaningful to Scottish nationalists. Fourth, in the years leading up to his death, Gray distributed the last fragments, perhaps remedying perceived gaps in who possessed a fragment (the MacCormick family). He also distributed the last parts of his stash among his

82. BBC, John Rollo uncut interviews.
83. MacCormick 2008, 174–5, first published in 1955; Rodwell 2013, 179–82; *The Times* (1914) only describes the Stone as 'slightly splintered'. Gray also argued the Stone was fully broken in Westminster Abbey: Thompson 1977, 5.
84. *The Evening Times* 1980.
85. Ritchie 1974.
86. This is evident in newspaper reportage relating to him; see also Gerber 1992, 14.
87. Taylor 1967.

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descendants, so fragments as directed heirlooms (only one family member could presumably inherit a watch). Finally, he responded to requests, whether oversights (Matheson) or for 'unauthorised' geological research.

To the fragment recipients, it is notable how fragments kept by families directly associated with the Stone's removal were, with one exception, encapsulated in items to be worn close to the person, in two instances jewellery of distinctively Scottish character, and in one instance with a political inscription that only the owner would encounter. The fragments were being transformed into fragments as mementos of conspiracy, their form *as* fragments being core to that expression. Other recipients also captured their fragment in jewellery, or behind glass, with the written proof that they were really from the Stone. With the fragments being so tiny and vulnerable to loss, they warranted being kept secure as well as protected.[88] With the likely perception of the fragments as being stolen property, few people opted to brazenly flaunt and taunt with their possession, except for some politicians.

Within the involved families, we witness the fragments as treasured biographical 'hooks', tangible expressions of a reservoir of intangible knowledge and emotions. They spoke to and of a network of people who together did something rather remarkable, acting as a prompt for passing down stories and renewed generation of familial pride. MacCormick's wife 'had a little bit of the Stone [in a box], but she was terribly proud of it, she used to keep in in the bookcase ... between two books. She was always showing this'.[89] Smith kept his fragment 'in a wee Bluebell matchbox, wrapped in a piece of tissue paper ... because he was very proud of it, and it was kept in a safe in his house [in Bannockburn]' (fig 10). He would occasionally ask his family, 'do you want to see the piece of the Stone' – something he regarded as a totem of subjugation of the Scots rather than something mystical – and he took it abroad to show friends.[90] So, the performance of retrieving the secreted object and accompanying act of narration amplified the significance of these tiny subjects, which referenced yearning for a politically transformed Scotland as well as important actions by forebears.[91]

Tranter received his special gift at a book launch in 1971, keeping the 'chip' for 40 years under the seat of a small silver Coronation Chair and finding it worthy of later talking to the press about, even though he believed the Stone to be a thirteenth-century fake.[92] A campaigner for self-rule, indeed vice convenor of the Scottish Covenant Association 1951–5, he had been brought into the Stone plot once a dignified way was sought to return the Stone to the king,[93] and the donor likely knew this. Journalist Sanburn had his 'tiny chip ... none other than a piece of the Stone of Destiny' and Gray affidavit framed behind his editor's desk in the *Calgary Herald* offices (journey in fig 4).[94]

Clearly, an enormous responsibility attached to caring for such tiny things, their significance recognised to be greater than a family story passed down generations. Mind you, Smith said that 'if I'd known the Stone of Destiny would eventually be returned to Westminster, I'd have dumped it in the Forth and to heck with the consequences', but 'at

88. Public responses since 17 Jan 2025 include further examples of fragments encapsulated in jewellery.
89. SPA/OH/BK/3.
90. Smith 1967.
91. Cf Stewart 2007, ix–xii.
92. House 1971; Gerber 1992, 126–7; Watson 1996.
93. MacCormick 2008, 179.
94. Taylor 1967.

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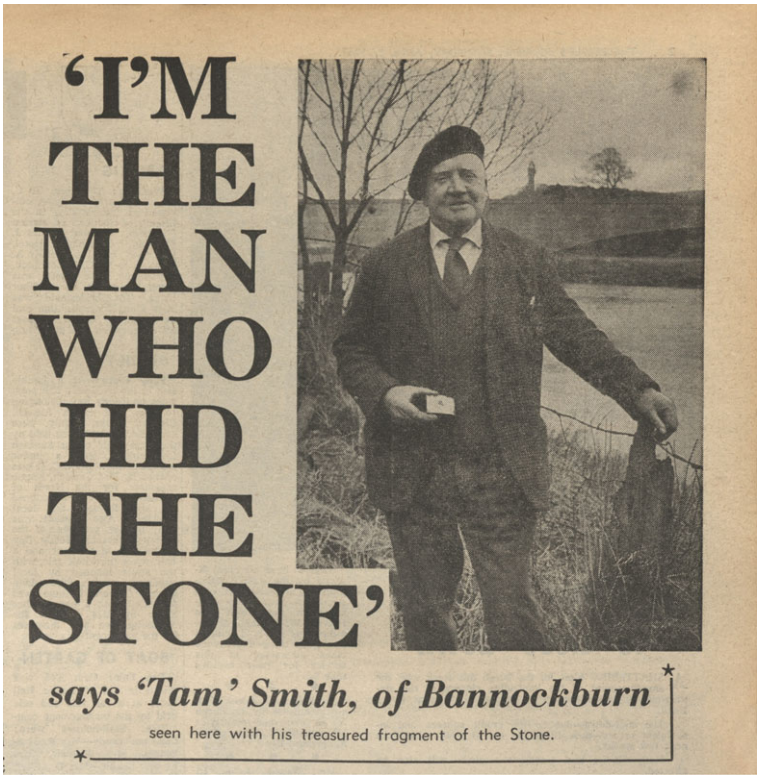

Fig 10. Extract from *The People's Journal, Perthshire Edition*, 8 April 1967 (Smith 1967). *Image*: Used by kind permission of D C Thomson & Co Ltd, photographer unknown.

least I've got a piece of Stone and its forever and it will be forever in Scotland'.[95] His family ensured the latter when he was apparently buried with it in Bannockburn Cemetery.

Of particular interest is what happened at the time of transaction when the fragments changed hands.[96] Their fates were planned for: as heirlooms that someone else appreciating their material authenticity would treasure. With such transitions, usually linked with changes in generations, came new lives and meanings. Knowing he would shortly die, Professor Neil MacCormick (d. 2009), son of John and Margaret, bequeathed that fragment to Salmond in 2008.[97] Alex Salmond properly declared this and the Permanent Secretary officially 'agreed that the fragment need not be surrendered to Historic Scotland', the body caring for the Stone in Edinburgh Castle on behalf of the Commissioners.[98] This is the action that ultimately led to the 2024 media furore with which this article began. The fragments started their lives as private things, perhaps known to family and friends, but have become more 'public' when the owners or their children died, or recognised they were very ill and sought to sell them, pass them to a museum, gift

95. Smith 1967.
96. Cf Klevnäs and Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015, 5.
97. Marion MacCormick, sister of Neil, reported in 2011 that the 'little bit' was given to 'Scottish Nats HQ', SPA/OH/BK/3.
98. NRS, SCR14/71/63.

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them to a person or institution that would appreciate the story and political significance of the fragment in question, or wanted to amplify the story of their ancestor's achievement and worth.[99]

Overall, we are witnessing fragments as extended objects that owe intangible meanings to the relationships of ordinary and extraordinary people – the networks in which they circulated and lived – as well as any intrinsic material significance as known fragments of the Stone. Whatever the context, the privately circulating mementos had a social value, amplified by the transmission of memories. My evidence is biased, because the known examples from 1951 mostly map directly to families *closely* involved with the Stone and politicians, and that is perhaps why they have survived, or their stories have gradually come to light and were the ones I could find. From these families, we see how they *cared* for them, emotionally and physically. We can also trace the fragments' progression to valued heirlooms.[100] These unique objects were more than souvenirs, and could survive, even if not enshrined or forming part of a 'collection'.[101]

WHAT ARE THE FRAGMENTS DOING NOW?

This section addresses relevant material culture issues within the overall framework of the 'heritage cycle', introducing even further new primary evidence. The heritage cycle has proved useful in offering a recognisable framework for considering different aspects of heritage and museum management and their inter-relationships.[102] Its premise is that an understanding of value (iteratively fed and shaped by knowledge and understanding of something), and hence cultural significance (the sum of values), is used to inform decisions about how to secure things for the future and how such resources can be engaged for wider public benefit, generating a desire to know more about heritage. As already mentioned, others are also now starting to use understanding of fragments and fragmentation as a lens for reflecting on heritage practices and related meta-narratives.[103]

Understanding and understanding value

How should an understanding of its fragments' polysemic meaning and values be built into assessing the cultural significance of the Stone *and of its dispersed fragments*? The 1950 break and 1951 repair are a highly significant element of its recent history, evoking the atmosphere and farcical antics of the contemporary Ealing Studios comedy *The Lavender Hill Mob*, or a John Buchan tale. Sometimes derided as a prank, the thrilling story, including that break, *continues* to captivate the media and public. Arnshav's study of the wrecked and purposefully fragmented *Rikswasa* argues for the value of the much-robbed remains, with the progressively criminalised form of public engagement with the collective memory and material heritage lying in its capacity to tell a story, as 'an iconic site in the [controversial] history of maritime cultural heritage management and as a representative of

99. Cf Stewart 2007, 139.
100. Public responses since 17 Jan 2025 reinforce these observations in relation to further fragments.
101. Which is how Stewart (2007, 132–68) suggests souvenirs of things tend to survive.
102. Foster *et al* 2016; Foster and Jones 2020b.
103. Arnshav 2024; Immonen 2024.

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a unique tradition of oak salvaging'.[104] There is a meta-narrative to talk about as well as the fascinating specifics of acts of fragmentation and fragment lives. We, too, can rethink what it means to fully understand a *broken and repaired* Stone, with dispersed fragments, particularly in relation to the activities of 1950/1, which split public opinion (see Interpreting and Presenting).

In an institutional context, each fragment or group of fragments might 'naturally' be assessed independently because of where organisational or territorial responsibilities start and end, but the *full* picture of understanding, value and significance can only be appreciated if the Stone and all its extended parts are considered as an assemblage. There are, or were, many fragments. The fragments cannot be divorced from their parent and siblings: not only does the long life of the cultural object in question need to be considered, but a *composite biographical* approach is necessary (see Methodology). The rhizomic and cumulative impact of all the individual stories must be considered, for each fragment develops its own life, some more interesting than others, but each contributes to the others and the whole. Not all will have the currency of fragment as weapon in the hand of politicians, but each example has a social value, as well as the more traditional cultural values (evidential, historic, aesthetic, etc), and can have more once they become better known. So, we must consider how we will understand and hence realise those values. The young adults, who as part of Authenticity's Child project and its partnership with Perth Museum produced a comic book about the Stone (*The Stone of Scone*), elected to bring fragments into the story *they* wanted to tell.[105] We must also not forget the life of the scientific samples. These might seem the Cinderella of the fragments described here, but they can also go to the ball, as the Diamond State Coach story illustrates.

It is Gray's thirty-four numbered fragments that have enabled me to suggest an interpretation for a recently published but puzzling feature of the Stone itself: a small, modern 'XXXV' is lightly incised on the underside of the Stone, close to the 1951 repair.[106] This 2023 HES observation led to media speculation as to what this inscription might mean and its age. While I cannot *prove* it, I believe Gray, having gathered the thirty-four fragments, applied the 'XXXV' as part of his 'finishing touches' to the Stone's repair: thirty-four fragments plus one is thirty-five. He used Roman numerals because these are easier to scratch into stone and, as a mason, he would have been familiar with historic masons' marks. He had the rare and almost unique opportunity to access the underside of the Stone, he had the means, he had the sense of humour and the number thirty-five would only have been meaningful and significant to him. Public responses since 17 January 2025 include the revelation that Gray attached a greater significance to fragments with earlier numbers; a low number would reflect the greater honour due to a recipient. So, numbering the Stone 'XXXV' may have embodied a more serious message about whose relationships with which bits of the Stone mattered.

The social value of the little-known fragments, associated with 'ordinary' and not so ordinary people, is inevitably limited so far to the people who know of or have encountered them, but the following examples illustrate their magic, power and potential. In September 2024, a VEA at Perth Museum told me some visitors had said: 'I know so and so who knows the stone mason and they've got them all over the house.' In this context, we see fragments as a personal connection to a wider world, just knowing of

104. Arnshav 2024, 284.
105. Magic Torch Comics 2024.
106. Historic Environment Scotland 2024, 23–5.

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them evidencing relationships with people linked to an unforgettable national *cause célèbre*, to something that merits being at the centre of a fantastic new museum, as source of local and national pride. As Jamie Hamilton, son of Ian, summarised it at a workshop, having first talked us through the life of the fragment and Stone in his family's life: '... breaking nations, joining nations, breaking hearts, breaking families, breaking the Stone. If it didn't break, would it be a different story? Would we have the fragments?' Jamie had handed around his mother's brooch: 'I have no problem with people touching it ... it's as real as you can get. ... one of the things is authenticity about these things.' This was the vehicle for 'Jean',[107] a life-long ardent nationalist with living experience of the 1950s, to passionately reflect on her part in a nation's political journey: 'I keep saying I'm a voice crying in the wilderness, really about the Stone, which is really about nationalism ... [but] maybe we're past that stage.' In her early twenties, student 'Sonia' concluded: 'When people are starting to really understand it on a more personal level, I think that's when people are going to start caring more.' Picking her favourite object to mark 155 years of the Queensland Museum, Chantal Knowles, head of the cultural and histories programme, chose their Stone fragment: 'If there hadn't been a Scottish member of staff, I'm pretty sure it would have remained on the shelf. It's a very small stone that measures two centimetres by one centimetre but is such an important object for Scottish people' (see fig 8a).[108]

Caring and securing

Jamie Hamilton also told us of an occasion when he sent a photo of his mother's brooch to someone in a heritage body, and they reprimanded him because 'That must not be sent. This is stolen property'. Similarly, his family has been told by a jeweller that 'it has authenticity, but I can't value it officially', because valuers regard it as stolen property. Lord Forsyth of Drumlean, the Tory Scottish Secretary who brought the Stone back to Scotland in 1996, told *The Telegraph* newspaper that the MacCormick fragment was 'stolen property ... obtained as a result of a criminal act' that belonged to the Crown.[109] Yet the police knew about such distributed fragments: the chief constable of Glasgow who worked with the Metropolitan Police to recover the Stone, reported as much after speaking to Gray, indeed accepted a fragment from Gray as a present some years later.[110] Politician Winning relished the idea of being challenged about her necklace (see above). This is not the context to open the debate about *who* rightfully 'owns' the Stone, but what these three responses illustrate is how fragments are deemed in quite different contexts to be part of the larger whole *and that larger whole will already have an owner*. This was the case in the treasure trove handling of newly excavated parts of the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish cross-slab,[111] and reflected the prevailing curatorial sense that such fragments should be together. However, in Scots law, if a moveable thing is 'accessioned' in some way to another moveable thing (eg jewellery), the general principle is that ownership follows the 'principal item', which may

107. Pseudonym for an ethnographic interviewee.
108. Hinchcliffe 2017.
109. Johnson 2024.
110. NRS, HH41/2099, docs 33, 40.
111. Curtis 2007, 347.

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include 'that which the other is taken to adorn or complete', although the question of whether the original ownership has been lost must first be examined.[112]

The sense that a fragment 'belongs' from an *emotional* perspective with the larger whole was evident in responses to the public discovery of the MacCormick fragment in 2024. Pete Wishart, MP for Perth and Kinross-shire, was much quoted in the press at the time: 'We'd like to believe we would have an *intact* Stone of Destiny. I'd just encourage anyone who knows anything about missing pieces to work together to ensure when the public come to Perth they are getting the *full* experience' (my emphases).[113] Such responses combined the desire to make something 'entire' again by replacing the fragment, but also to return the fragment to close to its point of origin, which was the ultimate rationale for Perth becoming the Stone's new permanent home, bringing anticipated socio-economic benefits for the city from a £27 million investment.

What will the institutional and public response be to 'securing and caring' as they learn from this research about the wider body of known fragments and their current fates, and as further fragments come to light and/or materialise? What might current carers 'fear' could happen (noting Jamie's experiences above), particularly if they are shy of sharing that a fragment exists, or if they want to consider how to pass on such fragments? Indeed, what should an institution be thinking about if they are offered a fragment (which will include checks on valid title to an object)?[114]

I am told that the Commissioners have no policy to actively seek to recover Stone fragments, and that as fragments become known, the Scottish Secretary would wish to advise the Commissioners on each specific instance and, if appropriate to the specific circumstances, discussion with the KLTR. Each example would be treated on its own merits. As this research shows, it would need to include an understanding of wider context. I was also told that current thinking is that if a fragment is in family care, or any other environment where it is being treated 'respectfully' and 'appropriately', then there is no public benefit in seeking to recover, unless there are specific circumstances dictating that it is in the public and/or Crown interests to do so.[115] There is the case for a short policy that codifies this approach, since this could instil confidence in and of current custodians.

There are lessons to be considered from an English Heritage study about the afterlives of private collections gathered by metal detectorists, which addressed collectors' thinking about the future of their 'collections', including passing them on, particularly at death. The collectors' concern was not just about where the things go but also of passing on the

112. Miller and Irvine 2005, 49–50, 78–81. Hector MacQueen, pers comm, 4 March 2025: 'The good faith or otherwise of the party performing the acts of accession is irrelevant ... There are two other things that need to be taken into account in determining that original ownership has been lost: (1) requirement of an indissoluble union of the two items, i.e. that the union cannot be undone without material damage to either item; and (2) which of the two joined items defines subsequent ownership of the unified thing. The usual approach to this second question is to ask whether one of the items can exist separately and the other cannot, which if so the first is the principal to which the latter accedes. If the two items can exist separately, the principal is the one which the other is taken to adorn or complete. If neither of these rules is relevant, then you consider their relative bulk rather than their relative value, although value may be relevant in borderline cases.'

113. Clark 2024.

114. Anticipating the implications of my research, I have proactively engaged with all relevant parties early in the research process.

115. James Hynd and Terri Thomson, pers comm, 2 May 2024. Note: the students who took the Stone in 1950, and their accomplices, were not prosecuted.

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memories of the people involved in their collection and care, as well as associated records.[116] In a similar way, if collecting and archiving the stories of those involved is *visibly* part of formal procedures, it may prove easier to persuade people to lend or gift their fragments, or to simply have them recorded. Capturing and sharing such information and social values would augment understanding and hence appreciation of cultural significance (see above) and might promote the passing of fragments and their associated records to institutions.

But passing on such objects *is* hard: 'I feel it belongs to our family and I'm the custodian ... it means something to us as a family to have the Stone of Destiny connection', Jamie told me, and families may have multiple members who feel such emotional pulls and will care deeply and possibly quite differently about what happens. Such families have become something like medieval dewars, hereditary keepers of saints' relics.[117] This is not the place for discussion of the difference between 'owning' and 'belonging',[118] but, as the Hilton of Cadboll example illustrates, this is likely to be where discussions may founder. Language is critical and it may prove helpful to use the neutral term 'cultural object' rather than 'property' or 'resource',[119] and to build a conversation around the concept of appropriate and respectful care.

If a fragment is to be allocated from the 'centre' to a public collection, as opposed to gifted by the family to a museum of their choice, then this begs the question of where is most appropriate. The place of allocation does not have to be the place or places of display, but is it better to place all museum fragments in the care of one institution, or to disperse that responsibility? So far in Scotland, one fragment went to HES because at that point they cared for the main Stone and it was then thought to be the only example. At the time of writing, the Commissioners are actively considering the future of another (the Margaret MacCormick>Neil MacCormick>Alex Salmond example). There is a case for both. Dispersal may make more sense, though, if the cultural significance of the *fragment* and its story-telling potential is considered in relation to place. To play devil's advocate, the MacCormick fragment and its accompanying letter tells a particularly strong *Glasgow* story, in the context of the role this city, its university and characterful inhabitants played in the lively post-Second World War Scottish National movement. When it comes to display, given its specific associations with the MacCormick family, and that John MacCormick 'was father to the Scottish nation we know today',[120] a public space in the Scottish Parliament could also be considered fitting.

Interpreting and presenting

> I mean, they're just charged with such meaning ... really powerful stories. ... What I would want most of all is that there is a sense that this story is joined, properly joined up ... for us to have the best and fullest history we can, but it's awkward, and it's a bit contested and ... you need to be aware of those different viewpoints (The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Westminster)

116. Daubney 2022, 3, 4, 6, 23–4, 26, 31.
117. I owe this parallel to Mark Hall.
118. See eg Jones 2004, 50–1.
119. Cf Messenger 2020, 3,848.
120. Hamilton's Foreword to MacCormick 2008, vii.

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With the Dean being one of my later interviewees, I could tell him about the emerging number of fragments of the Stone (then relatively modest), and he mused on their interest and potential. In one sense, as a historian and someone immersed in critical thinking about the role of material culture in coronations, his view is not surprising. Nor is my agreement. When it comes to fragments, whether of the Stone or more generally, this begs the question of how to use fragmentation *and its physical consequences* in the interpretation and presentation that is proffered to the public (fragments, scars of fragmentation, current and past). At Edinburgh Castle, the audio-tour told visitors about the Stone getting dropped and broken in 1950, and this was something that visitors shuffling past the Honours of Scotland and Stone in the Crown Room visitors would look for and regularly asked 'where did it crack?'.

When the Stone first emerged for public display out of the Chair, in 1996, an early response of the conservators at Historic Scotland was to tone down or disguise the raw colour of the now-cleaned cement scar with watercolour pigments,[121] to 'sweeten the crack', as 'Paul' informally described it to me. Something similar first happened at Westminster Abbey in 1973 with the result that 'the joint is not now readily apparent to the casual observer'.[122] The Historic Scotland stone conservator who undertook the work in 1996 recounts, however, that their plan was 'carried out in the 6ft to 6" principle (ie that a repair should be invisible from 6 feet away, but discernible from 6 inches)'. It was informed by the view that the cement was not damaging the Stone, and it would be harmful to remove it. Further, it 'had a cultural value of its own, being the most visible evidence of a significant event in the Stone's recent history'.[123] This is an undocumented example of where conservators discussed among themselves and effectively considered the ethics of how their interventions could materially change an object and risk changing ways in which its liminality, transition between phases of life, might be understood.[124]

The existence and *visibility* of the break's repair is why, with their few minutes of well-illuminated intimacy with the Stone, the observant visitor to Perth might now be curious about what they observe. The immersive presentation that visitors experience before they walk into a second room to meet the Stone does not, however, mention that the Stone broke in 1950. So, having all the VEAs briefed to 'show and tell' would invite visitors to *look slowly* at the Stone, and engage meaningfully with its materiality; for 'it carries the battle scars of life that can tell a story', as one of the thoughtful VEAs observed to me, 'seeing literally the physical story of it through the scrapes, those things that play on the imagination'.

CRACKING YARNS: WHAT CAN THE FRAGMENTS DO IN THE FUTURE?

The text of my initial submission presciently predicted that more fragments would be known before this paper was published. The welcome public responses to the January 2025 media interest are revelatory. They justify why a composite biographical approach to the Stone, its fragments and replicas is essential to fully understand contemporary meanings and significance. Sources clearly exist to aid study of fragment provenance. Subject to their consent, there is an unparalleled opportunity for future ethnographic work with the

121. Historic Environment Scotland 2024, 11.
122. Rodwell 2013, 194.
123. Colin Muir, pers comm, 24 Oct 2024.
124. Cf Marçal 2022.

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families that have come forward, to generate a rich understanding of the history and social value of these fragments. Indeed, it is desirable to collaboratively co-create a future for their fragment stories. Such an in-depth study would also permit an exploration of the work that the reported fragments do as contemporary relics (materially authentic or otherwise), alongside the role of replicas.

Its fragmentation and fragments, intentional and unintentional, make up the back stories of the Stone, transforming and magnifying its contemporary meanings, values and significance. The revelations described in this paper are particularly significant in relation to the events of 1951, after nationalists made the Stone a twentieth-century *cause célèbre*. This paper has tracked for the first time how fragments existed and 'secretly' made their way into private collections and have had significant, sometimes purposed, afterlives. Stone fragments collided with and amplified the lives and memories of many people and places, over time and space: activities and meanings are diverse and *unauthorised* because they involve *wide* elements of society.[125] Broken and modified, fragments can work a magic that readily links the tangible and intangible, relating materiality and social value.[126] Fragments are about more than scientific value; they and their fragmentation are stories not just grand and meta-narratives,[127] although cumulatively they can also contribute to – indeed actively subvert – the latter. Fragments as resources are a thing of importance and significance, not just an expression of loss. Visible acts of fragmentation and repair can productively speak volumes to visitors to museum and heritage sites, and not only in the context of culture in crisis.[128]

What fragments might yet do will also be bound up with how we label them. When in a museum or heritage context we talk of 'fragments' or 'particles', rather than 'chips', 'pieces' or 'grains', we perhaps use a technical language we are comfortable with to objectify such material culture and deem it 'fit' for the rigours of our scientific endeavour; but if we look at the words that the fragments' handlers most commonly use, or that appear in popular accounts, the words used in relation to the Stone tends to 'piece' or 'chip'. Arguably these descriptors better evoke the *relationship* between the fragment and the things from which it originated, with 'chip' not just referring to how the thing came into being but alluding to a positive familial relationship, as in a 'chip off the old block'. Either way, like 'replicas', terminology may also contribute to the dismissal of fragments; perhaps such an attitude to value underpinned the 2008 Scottish Cabinet outcome with which this paper opened.

This pioneering fragment-led approach to a cultural object, with its social value lens, illustrates how, even for such an apparently well-known subject as the Stone, there are new, nuanced, individually interesting and cumulatively important, if challenging, stories to be discovered through rigorous and imaginative modes of interdisciplinary research. Such an approach therefore invites critical thinking about how such a focus and resultant knowledge informs understandings and application of cultural significance, whether historically fragmented material or material that is fragmented due to current political or environmental crises. This is not simply within but across institutions and disciplinary silos,[129] and in overarching national and international bodies that can influence the fate and

125. Cf Arnshav 2023, 286.
126. Cf Sörman *et al* 2024a, 16.
127. Burström 2013.
128. The rehabilitated Mosul Cultural Museum in Iraq is a living example of this, where the recent history of damage is legible in its post-war architecture and its contents, Alessandra Peruzzetto, pers comm, 20 Sept 2024.
129. See Foster and Jones 2020b on replicas.

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future lives of such things, including movement across national borders.[130] Despite the averred apolitical stance of most heritage and museum bodies, such fragments are political, even all-party and non-party, if we mirror the concept of the mid-twentieth-century Scottish National Covenant. They owe their lives to this fact, and we risk losing something vital if that passion is suppressed.

Periodically there have been calls for the Stone to tour, in Scotland (1996) or in the Commonwealth after the late Queen's 1953 coronation.[131] The world is now a very different place, but fragments as 'extended objects', part of a composite biographical whole, can travel and work their contemporary power and magic in ways that the Stone practically cannot: 'maybe a fragment will come here one day, that would be an interesting thing wouldn't it' ('Phillip', Westminster Abbey).

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581525100231.

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130. Sörman *et al* 2024a, 7.
131. WAM, 63138; Cabinet Papers 1951; McNeil 1953.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

BBC	BBC Scotland Archives
BGS	British Geological Survey
HES	Historic Environment Scotland
KLTR	King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer
NRS	National Records of Scotland
SAFAP	Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel
SNP	Scottish National Party
SPA	Scottish Political Archive, University of Stirling
WAM	Westminster Abbey Muniments

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