

## **The Mourne granite Downpatrick High Cross**

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Down County Museum is leading a 2-year project to research, protect and interpret the 1100 year-old Downpatrick High Cross. In December 2013 the Cross was moved from outside Down Cathedral a short distance down the Mall to the Museum where it has been conserved in preparation for its installation in a purpose-built extension in the summer of 2015, as a centre-piece of an exhibition about the Hill of Down from the time of St Patrick onwards, entitled 'Raising the Cross in Down'. The research programme has included the geological identification of the stone as G2 Outer Mourne granite, and the commissioning of a replica cross from granite quarried from Thomas' Mountain above Newcastle, close to the geological source of the original. Historical research has been undertaken to establish the original location of the Cross, the date it was dismantled and the context of its reconstruction in 1897 at the east end of the Cathedral.

An initial conservation assessment of the Cross identified the damage caused by weathering, organic growth and human intervention over the centuries. The move of the Cross to the Museum has facilitated the conservation of the monument and the discovery of new information about its original and subsequent construction. Conservation, photography and illustration of the cross-shaft and head has enabled analysis of the iconography of the carved panels, including new identifications of biblical scenes and a new interpretation of the overall message conveyed by the east and west facing sides of the Cross. The cleaning and replication of the Cross has also demonstrated how the original Cross would have had a sparkling appearance in sunlight, reminiscent of the gem-covered Cross erected on the Hill of Golgotha in Jerusalem in the early fifth century.