

PERTH MUSEUM

THE GREAT HEIST OF THE STONE OF DESTINY



Image: Stone of Destiny at Westminster Abbey London, for the inauguration/crowning ceremony of King Charles in 2023.

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THE GREAT HEIST OF THE STONE OF DESTINY IN THE 1950'S

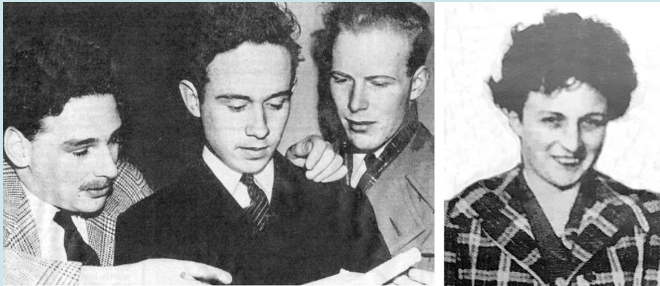
This heist of the Stone of destiny in the 1950s was a historically significant plot to steal the stone of Destiny from England and return it to Scotland. The heist was a powerful political gesture, repatriating the Stone to its first known and documented location here in Scotland. It must not be forgotten that the Stone was originally stolen by King Edward I (of England) in 1296 from Scone in Scotland and taken to Westminster Abbey in England.

Repatriating objects back to their original communities and ancestral home is currently a huge debate for Museums and governments to resolve in modern society.

It is interesting to note that the stone has kept its symbolic historical importance for hundreds or even perhaps a couple of thousand years according to myths and legends.

The heist was carried out by 4 Glasgow University Students Ian Hamilton, Kay Matheson, Gavin Vernon, and Alan Stuart.

This is the chain of events, and story of the heist.



Images: Glasgow police Museum, Glasgow, Scotland – The conspirators of the Stone of Destiny Heist
The four co-conspirators left to right, Gavin Vernon, Ian Hamilton, Alan Stuart & Kay Matheson.

CHAIN OF EVENTS DURING THE GREAT HEIST

1. The four students waited until nightfall before parking two Ford Anglia cars they had driven from Scotland, and broke into Westminster Abbey in the early hours of Christmas morning 1950.
2. Kay waited close by as a getaway driver in one of the cars whilst the others broke into the abbey.
3. Ian, Gavin, and Alan managed to remove the Stone of Destiny from the base of the ceremonial throne. They attempted to pull and lift the stone with the two iron rings and drag the Stone across the floor on a coat. Sadly, the stone broke into two pieces.
4. Ian ran out of Westminster Abbey with the slightly smaller piece of the stone and he and Kay quickly put it on the backseat of the car and covered it with Kay's coat. This was just in time before a police officer noticed the car and the two of them. They pretended to be kissing. The officer spoke with Ian and Kay, sending them on their way to find accommodation after he believed their story they were trying to find a place to stay for the night.
5. Gavin and Alan put the larger piece of the stone in their car boot and fled the scene.
6. The four of them temporarily buried the larger piece of stone in a field in Rochester Kent and left the smaller piece with a friend in their garage in Birmingham.

7. When the stone had been noticed as missing it caused an international scandal and the police closed the Anglo-Scottish border to search all vehicles for the stone.
8. Judging it safe, the four students returned to collect the two pieces of the stone. The larger piece of stone buried in Kent, had a tent full of people camping on top of it, who all helped to remove the stone with the students from the muddy ground. It was hidden under the floorboards at a factory in Bonny Bridge, and later at a remote spot near Cambuskenneth Abbey in Stirling.
9. The smaller section was brought up from Birmingham and taken with the larger section of stone to a stone Mason in Glasgow who rejoined the pieces with copper tube doweling.
10. After the stone had been repaired it was returned by the Scottish Covenant Association of which the 4 students were members.
11. The stone was symbolically placed at Arbroath Abbey in April 1951 , where, in 1320, the Declaration of Arbroath was written. This was a letter from Scottish barons to the Pope seeking his intervention on their behalf to help secure their independence from England.
12. The plan had worked, the Stone of Destiny had received lots of attention, raising the political heat around the question of Scottish independence. That debate continues and for many the Stone continues to be an important symbol of that independence.
13. On April 11th, 1951, the Stone was transported to Westminster Abbey where it was placed back in the base of the throne later in 1953 for Queen Elizabeth I coronation, which was broadcasted on television for the first time ever for the entire world to watch.



Image: Glasgow Police Museum, Glasgow, Scotland - Arbroath Abbey April 1951 (Stone recovered from the Abbey by police)

Fact:

Even though the police had worked out who stole the Stone of Destiny, no arrests were made, to avoid generating more support for Independence.

When the police were investigating the students as suspects, Ian Hamilton's library record showed he had taken out an endless list of books about the Stone of Destiny months before the Stone's disappearance!

“TO DO SOMETHING FOR YOUR COUNTRY THAT SPILLS NOT A DROP OF BLOOD, IS, I THINK, SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF.”
IAN HAMILTON