

## PAS Winter Programme 2007–08 at Pictavia near Brechin

**Friday 14 March**

the last lecture of the season

John Sherriff (RCAHMS) has had to cancel and in his place John Borland (RCAHMS) will talk on:

*The Commission's recent work recording  
Early Medieval sculpture in Aberdeenshire  
and Angus*

Doors open at 7.00 pm and the lecture begins at 7.30. Tea and coffee are available before and after, at a nominal charge.

Please send notification of any nominations or notice of any points you wish to raise (even if unable to attend) to:

The Honorary Secretary  
Pictish Arts Society  
Pictavia Visitor Centre  
Haughmuir  
Brechin  
Angus DD9 6RL

Copies of the 2007 AGM minute, annual accounts and copies of our constitution will be available on the 17 May. Tea and coffee will be available in the upstairs hall at the Meffan from 10am. Following the AGM, there will be a talk (speaker tbc), followed by either a field trip or a museum visit depending on the weather.

## Notice of PAS Annual General Meeting 17 May 2008

The Annual General Meeting of the Pictish Arts Society will be held at the Meffan Institute, Forfar, on Saturday 17 May, 2008 at 10.30am to consider the following business:

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Approval of the 2007 AGM minute
- 3 Annual Report – President
- 4 Honorary Secretary's Report
- 5 Treasurer's Report: Presentation and Approval of Annual Accounts
- 6 Appointment of an Independent Examiner
- 7 Determination of Subscription Rates
- 8 Other Honorary Officers' Reports:
  - (a) Membership Secretary
  - (b) Editor
  - (c) Events Organiser
- 9 Election of Honorary Officers
  - (a) President
  - (b) Two Vice Presidents
  - (c) Secretary
  - (d) Treasurer
  - (e) Membership Secretary
  - (f) Editor
  - (g) Events Organiser
- 10 Election of Committee  
(Minimum six, maximum twelve)
- 11 Any other competent business

## Pictavia lectures

**18 January 2008 – Emma Sanderson**  
*Pictish perceptions*

A version of Emma's talk will feature in the next PAS Newsletter.

**15 February 2008 – Ian Shepherd**  
*Rhynie Man reviewed: saint or sacral king?*



*Norman Atkinson with Ian Shepherd at Pictavia*

An audience of over 40 people gathered at Pictavia to hear Ian Shepherd, Principal Archaeologist at Aberdeenshire Council, talk on The Rhynie Man. The man in question is the second of the single human figures to be represented in the Rhynie cluster of carved stones. This stone was uncovered by the plough down slope of the Craw Stane on the farm of Barflat in March, 1978, and was described in detail in a paper by Shepherd and Shepherd.<sup>1</sup>

The surface of the stone had been prepared and there are traces of an earlier carving, but the figure we know today is of a man, striding in profile towards the viewer's right, with curious, exaggerated features and carrying over his right shoulder an axe-hammer with a narrow shaft represented by a single incised line. The man wears a belted tunic, and his swept-back hair, or headdress, hangs below shoulder length.

In their paper in PSAS, Shepherd and Shepherd suggested an association with Esus, a Celtic woodland god said to have been worshipped by Druids. The figure is one of a small band of men carved on Pictish stones from as far apart as Mail in Shetland and Collessie in Fife. Each is very distinctive, although some share similar features. Several (Papil, Rossie Priory, Balblair, and possibly a lost Strathmartine stone) appear to be bird-headed, while the stone from Mail may be bird- or animal-headed. Possibly these strange heads represent masks, and it is possible that the strangely exaggerated features of Rhynie man also represent a mask. The odd figure at Mail seems to carry a similar weapon to Rhynie Man's, and both figures have an odd air of malevolence. It has long been thought that some of these figures date very early in the canon of Pictish carving.

Over the years since 1978, aerial photography has revealed enclosures around the Craw Stane, with two or three lines of ditches and some post holes apparent. Close by, other marks suggest that there was considerable activity here in ancient times. Excavations outside the scheduled area around the Craw Stane have revealed the remains of Bronze Age buildings, while a very early Bronze Age beaker was recovered from a scrape close to the Stane itself. Also in close proximity is a Bronze Age burial mound. Adjacent to the field where Rhynie man was found are the remains of an ancient church dedicated to St Luag, whose name suggests a possible pre-Christian cult site. There is evidence from widely separated eras that this area was seen as a special place.

A recently published paper by A S Dobat<sup>2</sup> led Ian Shepherd to consider a new interpretation of Rhynie Man. Dobat proposed that the axe-hammer found in the Sutton Hoo burial (possibly of the Anglo-Saxon king Raedwald) was in fact a sacral object used for 'sacrificing animals by pole-axing'. The object in question was one of the first to be placed in the coffin with the body;

other weapons were hung on the walls of the chamber in which the coffin had been placed. It is 700mm long, a hipped-profile axe-hammer with an iron shaft and a ring for suspension. It is possible that the single line used to represent the handle of Rhynie Man's hammer is an attempt to portray a relatively slender metal shaft. Dobat suggests that one of the duties of a king was to carry out the sacrifice, and that the axe-hammer was used to kill the sacrificial beast. It may have been included in the coffin because of the importance of this aspect of kingship, especially at a time when the pagans of East Anglia were under pressure from the spread of Christianity.

Elsewhere the spread of Christianity led to increasingly elaborate display of religious symbols, as if to assert the supremacy of older religions. In a recent article,<sup>3</sup> D V Clarke has suggested that the spread of Christianity prompted a reuse of prehistoric stones, these now being marked with Pictish symbols. It is possible that in the Rhynie area, which may be an origin centre for symbol carving, there was a vigorous reaction to Christianity. Rhynie man may represent the powerful figure of a sacral king (possibly a figure from tribal history). If this is a response to the spread of Christianity, it may bring forward the date of the carving to the 7th (or very late 6th) century, after the arrival of Columba at Iona prompted the spread of Christianity north-eastwards.

*Sheila Hainey*

1 Shepherd, Ian A G, and Shepherd, Alexandra N, 'An incised Pictish figure and a new symbol stone from Barflat. Rhynie, Gordon District' *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 109 (1977-78), 211-22.

2 Dobat, Andres S, 'The king and his cult: the axe-hammer from Sutton Hoo and its implications for the concept of sacral leadership in early medieval Europe', *Antiquity*, 80, no 310 (2006), 880-93.

3 Clarke, David V, 'Reading the Multiple Lives of Pictish Symbol Stones', *Med Arch*, 51 (2007), 19-39

## **Picts 12 Romans 0**

In the bleak midwinter – well on a bright winter's day in January – 12 Picts led and guided by our President Norman met at the NMS in Chambers Street in Edinburgh to see and appreciate some stones inside the museum. As we came up to look first at the Invergowrie cross-slab and the Forteviot arch we moved round the Roman re-enactment group entertaining visitors of all ages.

Norman explained some of the background of the Forteviot arch now set onto a wall onto which one of the King Lists has been printed. Bravely battling against the noise of the Romans and a great temptation to speak at length about the King List we moved downstairs to look at the stones around the Paolozzi figures including the Hilton of Cadboll Slab.

Nearby in the section called the Church in Pictish Areas were more stones from Monifieth, Abernethy, Latheron, Rosemarkie and Reay.

We saw stones from far and wide – from Flotta to Whithorn.

The Pictish items are not placed together but are spread throughout the museum and we next moved onto the collection named a Generous Land – still to the sound of the Romans above us. Facing us as we moved into this area is the Bullionfield Man stotting home on top of his grumpy horse with a baleful-eyed bird looking down on him from the end of the drinking horn – a few theories were voiced about how such a stone might have come to be carved.

That section in NMS is rich with stones and artefacts including the carnyx, silver chains, the Skaill hoard, Tarbat stones and many others including the delightful East Lomond Hill stone with the ox.

The sounds from the Romans became quieter but they were still there, so the Picts went underground – well we walked down the ramp to the base of the Tower of the museum where there is a beautifully presented section with many favourite stones and many favourite symbols – a Burghead Bull, a boar from Dores, the Easterton of Roseisle stone and others displaying double discs, crescents etc – the beautiful pin and plaques from Norrie's Law – again items covering the country from Benbecula to Orkney to Monifieth.

Picts by this time were getting thirsty and as some of us had to travel a reasonable distance, we decided to visit the café before we left. We thanked Norman for his information his enthusiasm and excellent guiding.

As we walked up towards the café, we realised that the Romans had left and the Picts remained. *ECB*

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## Foul play in Deer

[Colin Ironside related this tale at the December social gathering and, for the benefit of those who missed that event, he has kindly provided this written version.]

My brothers and I were born and brought up in Paisley, but every summer we spent a month at our granda's farm in the parish of Deer, which is how I heard this story.



© Colin Ironside

*Young Colin sitting next to his granda*

Deer is well known as a Pictish site especially because of the Book of Deer. There was also a Pictish Stone of Deer. In the reign of Queen Victoria, Deer and the South Ugie lay on the boundary between two big estates whose lairds lived quite close to other. Pitfour was a great muckle estate which stretched hyne awa to the Northeast. The Fergussons had a great muckle hoose which had 72 bedrooms. The laird had a great muckle carriage and he also had a great muckle quarrel with his neighbour Mr Russel of Aden. Aden was a muckle estate with a muckle hoose and the laird had a muckle carriage. He also managed to have a great muckle quarrel with his neighbour. The two lairds had been at it for years and I cannot mind half the stories or what order things happened but at one time Pitfour realised that Aden was keen on preserving the ruins of the abbey which



© Colin Ironside

*The 'great muckle hoose' of Pitfour*

stood on the north side of the Ugie and which included the Pictish Stone of Deer. Pitfour ordered the Stone of Deer to be broken up and buried in the foundations of a house!

Yet it appears that on one occasion the lairds agreed to cooperate and to build a bridge over the Ugie, just east of the abbey ruins and each would build his own half. Pitfour started first and made sure that the bridge was wide enough for his great muckle coach. Then Aden started and was careful that it fitted – his muckle coach.

To this day, if you go up the Ugie from Old Deer you will see that the Abbey Bridge is wider at the North end than it is at the South end.

*Colin Ironside*

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### The Dunadd boar: Is it Pictish?

Perhaps I might comment on one controversy aired in the last issue of PAS Journal? I was very struck by two diametrically opposing views about the Pictishness of the **Dunadd boar**, both expressed with absolute conviction.

Ewan Campbell (2003) said the ‘Pictish’ explanation for the **Dunadd boar** should be abandoned, but George Henderson (2008) says there is no doubt it was designed and executed in the Pictish manner. Personally, I tend to agree with Ewan Campbell, but in some circumstances, that I will specify shortly, I would agree with George Henderson. Some part of the controversy about the ‘correct valuation of the Dunadd sculpture’ concerns the idea that a characteristic feature of Pictish incised animals is that they have joint scrolls. But there are no joint scrolls on the *stag* incised on the back of **Glamis 1**, or the *wolf* on **Keillor**. Nor are there any joint scrolls on the crudely incised *boar* carvings from Essich House (RCAHMS 1999, 28) and **Old Scatness Broch** (RCAHMS 1999, 42), yet at least three of these four carvings are generally accepted as Pictish. Take the **Old Scatness Broch boar** for example. It faces left, whereas most other incised animals face right. It also seems to have one more leg than the canonical four, and it has very un-Pictish internal decoration, with no joint scrolls. Yet it is probably Pictish ‘in design and execution’, as it was found in the same broch that produced two other carved stones that have good claim to be Pictish: one with an equally crudely incised *crescent and V-rod*, the other with a much more

elegantly incised *boar*, complete with internal scrolls in the approved Pictish style. If, instead, the **Old Scatness Broch boar** had been found outside of Pictland proper, for example at Dunadd, I suspect it would be categorised as bearing ‘none of the hallmarks of Pictish craftsmanship’, and dismissed as non-Pictish. At any rate, that was the fate of the **Essich House boar** stone. Suppose, in other words, that the Dunadd *boar* and the *boar* at Old Scatness were swapped at birth by some druidic mischief, and they should really trade places. I think it fair to say that everybody would be much happier, and we would not have had this disagreement in the first place. Essentially, everybody would agree that the rock-face *boar* at Old Scatness (miraculously translated from Dunadd) is stylistically Pictish, whereas the boulder-inscribed *boar* at Dunadd (formerly at Old Scatness) is quite un-Pictish. We could then confirm that the Picts were much better at carving animals than Scots.

*Bob Henery*

#### References

- Campbell, E, 2003, ‘Royal inauguration in Dal Riata and the Stone of Destiny’ in Welander R, Breeze D J & Clancy T O (eds) *The Stone of Destiny: artefact and icon*, Soc Antiq Scot Monograph Series 22, Edinburgh, 43–59
- Henderson, G, 2008, ‘The Dunadd Boar: A Note’, *Pictish Arts Society Journal*, 17, 37–9
- RCAHMS, 1999, *Pictish Symbol Stones, An Illustrated Gazetteer*, Edinburgh

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### Govan Old - alive and kicking

Although there is as yet no word about the long-term future of Govan Old Parish Church, there is still much activity in it. The daily weekday services continue. Organisations still use the church halls.

Stanley Thomson, the organist, has persuaded colleagues and former students at the RSAMD to engage in a series of musical events, and the Friends of Govan Old are looking forward to the Annual Lecture which takes place on Saturday 8 March at 2pm. The lecturer is Dr Kate Forsyth and her subject is ‘Knots and Crosses – the decoration...’.

There is no charge and members of PAS are especially invited to attend.

*Irene Hughson*

[Apologies to Irene and the Friends as PAS News 46 is due to be despatched in the week after the Annual Lecture. Ed.]

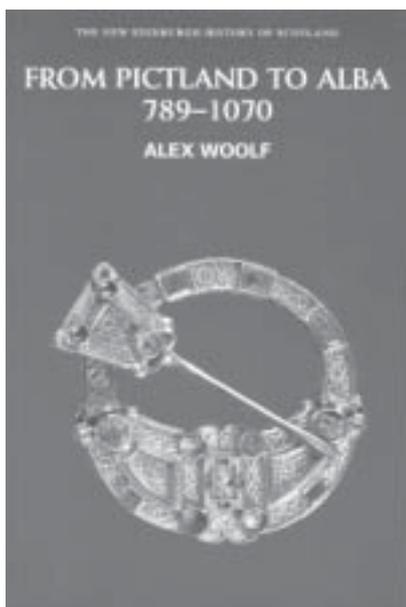
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## Book review

### *From Pictland to Alba, 789-1070*

Alex Woolf

The New Edinburgh History of Scotland, vol 2,  
Edinburgh University Press, 2007  
235mm; xv + 384pp; 11 maps; 11 tables  
ISBN 9780748612345  
£60 hardback; £19.99 paperback



This long-awaited book is in two parts. After an introductory section on ‘Land and People’, Part 1, comprising the bulk of the volume, concerns ‘Events’ and is partly thematic and partly chronological in structure while Part 2, ‘Process’, comprises chapters on ‘Scandinavian Scotland’ and ‘Pictavia to Albania’ (*sic*). However, historical processes are also discussed in Part 1, undermining the usefulness of this structure. Discussion in Part 1 tends to switch between the Picts, the Vikings, Northumbrians and back to the Picts again. This is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem.

The geographical scope of this book is much broader than its title suggests. While both Pictland and Alba (in preference to the unnecessarily Latinised ‘Pictavia’ and ‘Albania’) lay north of the Forth, the series aims to be ‘sensitive to Scotland’s regional diversity’ (p.ix). This Woolf achieves, despite considerable gaps in the evidence. However, the Anglian settlement of southern Scotland involves extensive discussion not only of Northumbria, as far south as the Humber, but also of Anglo-Saxon England in general. This, and analysis of the

Scandinavian background to Viking raids/settlement, fits the current fashion for studying Scottish history within its wider setting. But the frequent, detailed and lengthy digressions on peripheral and background issues, for example the causes of the Viking Age and Scandinavian prehistory (pp 52–5), results in a fragmented approach, lacking focus and cohesion. This disjointedness is exacerbated by the inclusion of 18 short, boxed articles on specific subjects throughout the book. This reads more like a collection of articles, or even short notes, rather than a book.

Woolf’s stated objective is ‘to present alternative interpretations of the sources’ (p.2). Although the frequently terse and obscure nature of the sources assists this, Woolf displays great skill in his critical analysis. He frequently gives multiple, detailed and digressive interpretations, but many are speculative and other interpretations are equally plausible. For example, Woolf attributes the discrepancy in the start date of Constantin’s reign to scribal confusion (pp 128–9) but this could represent the Viking occupation being expunged from later record, like Bede’s treatment of the Northumbrian apostasy. There are omissions from both the primary and secondary literature cited. For example, Adomnan’s reference to Gaulish sailors at a royal centre in Dal Riata, although earlier, provides unique textual evidence of foreign trade. And Woolf credits Kenneth Veitch for an unpublished suggestion about Macbeth’s pilgrimage (p.259) which was made by this reviewer in a 1999 book (*Macbeth: Man and Myth*, pp 81–2) which is not included in the bibliography.

Woolf makes several references to archaeological evidence, including sculpture, but makes little use of it. This is a fundamental weakness in the study of a period in which textual sources are so sparse and mostly external. It also contradicts the general editor’s stated intention that the series will ‘make full use of the explosion of scholarly research that has taken place over the last three decades’ (p.ix). In several cases, archaeological evidence supports his arguments but goes unremarked. For example, the section on ‘commerce’ focuses on Anglo-Saxon emporia (pp 36–7) without referring to imported pottery. Portable wealth is identified as the objective of Viking raiding (pp 55–6), but the archaeological evidence is not

discussed. But the Hunterston brooch, which is pictured on the front cover but not referred to, carries a runic ownership inscription on its reverse, attesting the Viking acquisition of native metalwork, by whatever means.

Woolf's unease and lack of familiarity with archaeological evidence is most evident in his treatment of royal centres and estates. He describes royal centres as 'in essence simply large farms' (p.23) but only notes that the subject of royal estates is 'under-researched' (p.29), without discussion or reference. He then interprets Dunadd and other royal centres as 'largely ... of ceremonial and ritual importance and strongholds into which kings could retreat in times of war' (p.29). This was presumably because royal fortresses were 'fundamentally uncomfortable' (p.30) and explains why 'Kings spent much time at the margins of their kingdoms' (p.31). Instead, 'the richer farms may have been on crannogs' (p.30), although no evidence or examples are cited. The only royal centre discussed is Forteviot (pp 104–5). There is a passing reference to 'royal villas' (p.30), but the only recorded example, at Meigle, is not referred to until much later (p.313).

The intended readership is unclear. The general editor remarks that the series is intended to be accessible (p.ix), but this volume is anything but. Its asides, puns and modern historical analogies give the impression of devices intended to maintain the attention of restless undergraduates (indicating the origin of this book?) and this is supported by its consistently didactic nature, for example, on manuscript terminology (p.89). This book is unlikely to appeal to the 'general reader'.

There are some geographical slips. The River Avon doesn't flow through Linlithgow (p.4), Watchet is in Somerset, not Devon (p.218), while 'Devonshire' (p.73) is either archaic or refers to a dukedom. There are few typographical errors, although this reviewer's name is mis-spelled (p.104). There are, however, some missing, extraneous or repeated words (eg pp xii, 119, 246, 256, 195), a quoted source is repeated (pp 199, 209), while the confusion of 'affect' and 'effect' (pp 202, 209) should not have eluded editing and proofreading.

Its reliance on documentary sources makes this book read like a litany of battles and kings. Despite belonging to the New Edinburgh History of Scotland, this book harks back to an earlier

age of historical writing that predates Geoffrey Barrow's *The Kingdom of the Scots* (1973) and Archie Duncan's *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom* (1975). As such, it represents a retrograde step and one wonders if Woolf would not have been better employed writing a history of Viking Age northern Europe or even a successor to Alan Anderson's *Early Sources of Scottish History* (1922) instead.

This book is testament to the broad range and depth of Woolf's knowledge and interests and to his perseverance; one can see why it took ten years to write and this makes its shortcomings all the more regrettable. It is, nevertheless, essential reading, will be a mainstay of historical study for many years to come and will fuel debate and stimulate further research. Despite its flaws, these are grounds for welcoming the publication of this book.

*Nick Aitchison*

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### **PAS Meeting with Angus Council Officer for Pictavia**

Vice President Stewart Mowatt and PAS Pictavia Liaison Group representative Joy Mowatt met with Ann Butler who joined Angus Council in January as Marketing Officer (Tourism). This meeting was held separately from the usual meetings because of difficulties getting a date that suited all the Liaison Group members.

As one of the key-holders and the first point of contact when the alarm goes off, Stewart felt it was appropriate to introduce himself to Ann as soon as possible. He was able to inform her about past problems and how solutions had been found, and to assist her in establishing the current list of contacts.

Joy discussed her role on PAS committee and the Liaison Group with Ann and they agreed to hold further meetings to discuss how Angus Council as owners of the building and PAS as users could work together for the benefit of visitors and members alike. Ann was very interested in our project to promote Pictavia as a research facility through lottery funding.

At the end of the meeting Stewart and Joy agreed that Ann is well suited to continue the excellent work started by her predecessor Sheila Faichney and look forward to working with her

*Joy Mowatt*

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## Bill Grant: an appreciation

### William Wallace Grant

Born 24 September 1920 Oakland, MD USA

Died 11 January, 2008 Edinburgh, Scotland



© Steve Harwood

*Bill Grant with his wife Dr Florence Grant after her graduation, University of Edinburgh, 27 November 2007*

Bill Grant was an American-Scot who had at least two lifetimes in his span of 87 years. He has been described as an extraordinary person who achieved more than a dozen people could even attempt. Bill was the quiet one who attended every meeting, every conference around Scotland and the British Isles in his latter years in Edinburgh's academic Celtic history world.

Little did folk know of all the stories that go with this wee man whom we all knew and loved.

He was born in Oakland, Maryland, 250 miles from the ocean. He was a Boy Scout and a very determined person who decided during his teenage years that he wanted to go to the US Naval Academy – even though no one from his area had ever attended that place.

At 16 he attended St John's College, Annapolis MD on scholarship. He was part of the 'new'

curriculum of the Great Books of the Western World – the first class. His instruction included reading texts in their original language, such as Euclid's Geometry in Greek. He then attended Randall's, a preparatory school for the Naval Academy. On 24 December, 1939 he received the telegram that he was appointed to the Naval Academy, and in June 1940 he was inducted into the Navy.

During his three years at the Academy he was on the varsity team as coxswain of the rowing crew, and a member of the wrestling team.

He graduated in June 1943 with a degree in Marine Engineering. Bill was assigned to the *USS Yorktown* (the Fighting Lady) that headed for the Pacific Ocean for the duration of World War II. When they found out he could fly an airplane he was assigned to flight duty. He was an ace, having shot down at least three enemy planes. Bill flew cover over Iwo Jima during the battle to retake that island. The importance of that action was that he was flying cover for the Marines. Later, as an Aide to an Admiral, Bill had diplomatic adventures around the world. His assignments over the years took him to the Mediterranean, Scotland, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. He did photo reconnaissance work, as well as being Executive Officer of the *USS Randolph*.

Sometime during his career, he took a shell in the cockpit. His one ear was therefore metal.

Bill's military career ended on 31 December, 1964 when he retired as a Commander. During the last years of his military career he attended Georgetown Law School and was awarded a Juris Doctor degree in Law and called to the Bar. Bill moved back to his hometown of Oakland MD to practice law and enter politics. He had suggested that the Court of Special Appeals should appoint Staff Attorneys rather than exclusively using clerks just out of law school. In 1975 he was the first person appointed as Staff Attorney, and became a member of the Board of Governors of the Bar Association.

During his time on the Court he attended simultaneously three universities for masters degrees – Georgetown Law School for a Masters in Law, Catholic University for a Masters in Celtic Studies, and the Ecumenical Institute housed at St Mary's Seminary in Baltimore MD for a Masters in Theology. During the summers he attended the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia.

Upon retirement in 1985 from the State of Maryland Court of Special Appeals he moved to Scotland and embarked upon the MLitt in Celtic Studies that he attained at the University of Edinburgh in 1991. He continued an affiliation/relationship with the university thereafter. He attended conferences and presented papers over the years including publications in academic journals and other magazines. He continued to study the various languages – Greek, Latin, Welsh, Gaelic, Irish, Middle Irish, Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, German, Ogam, Chinese, Russian, etc. He was still taking Gaelic classes and Gaelic conversation class at the time of his death.

Bill belonged to many clubs and societies in both his native and his adopted country. These included the Pictish Arts Society, Clan Grant Society, Edinburgh Welsh Society, Greyfriars Gaelic Community, Gaelic Societies in the US and in the UK, Edinburgh University Settlement and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland of which he was a Fellow.

Bill maintained the same weight, height, shape in 2008 as he was at the Academy in 1940. He was determined to retain that profile. His exercise regimen included climbing Arthur's Seat most days. Historic Scotland published an article in Spring 2007 celebrating the fact that Bill had made his 3,000th climb on his 86th birthday in 2006. His final climb was number 3,260 on January 3, 2008. This must be a *Guinness book of Records* achievement for his age, and he was famous for these climbing feats in all weathers.

Bill is survived by Dr Florence Grant, his wife of 18 years, his daughter Rebecca, a granddaughter Samantha Jane, two stepchildren Richard Paul Gilbert II and Carolyn Susan Banas, and two brothers, Dr B Linn Grant and Rev John A Grant of Oakland, Md.

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As a personal comment, Bill Grant seemed to me to epitomise the land of *Tir nan Og*, the land of eternal youth. Like the islands of *Imram*\* in the Gaelic otherworld, *Tir nan Og* is a sort of paradise that we all aspire to.

The Land of the Apples, the galley with foaming white horses, the golden bridges under water – these are all stunning images from a different world and understanding. Bill Grant did understand those worlds, and tried in

every way to figure them out, learning the language, developing new ways of teaching Gaelic and Old Welsh, Old Irish and other languages.

He was involved with the American based 'Discovery' TV channel advising on US Rock Art sites, and was an expert on American antiquities and early history. But Bill's abiding passion was Ogham, that mysterious written language of the Picts and the Irish.

I travelled to places on the West Coast with Bill where there was an ogham-like sculptured rock shelf in a cave shelter at Toward Point by Dunoon. Bill was convinced this was true ogham, matching a style you might find in the Arizona desert, although it was never proven.

He will be missed by all who met him or even saw him. And by the Old Ones. Following a Requiem Mass at The Church of St Michael and All Saints in Edinburgh, his body was flown to the United States for a full military funeral with honours.

*Marianna Lines*

\* *imram* (Old Irish 'rowing about' or 'voyaging') plural *imramha* in early Irish literature, a story about an adventurous voyage. This type of story includes tales of Irish saints travelling to Iceland or Greenland, as well as fabulous tales of pagan heroes journeying to the otherworld (*echtrae*). An outstanding example of an *imram* is *Imram Brain*, 'The Voyage of Brân', which describes a trip to the enchanted Land of Women.

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## St Vigeans date confirmed

The only certain date being bandied about at St Vigeans is that of our conference, which will be held on **Saturday 4 October** at St Vigeans church hall. Although the official opening of the new display of carved stones in the extended museum will be next spring, Historic Scotland is hoping to complete most of the work in the coming months and intends to give PAS conference a preview of the collection on that date.

Following Historic Scotland's Community Consultation evening, held in St Vigeans church hall on 6 February, there has been great excitement with the revelation of a socketed recumbent stone built into the south wall of the kirk. John Borland was charged with recording this stone, in what proved to be difficult working conditions, as access to its carved surfaces was extremely restricted. We are fortunate to carry his timely account below (see pp 13–15).

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## Stargazing between the covers



### *The Lost Language of the Stars* Heather Connie Martin

Saint André de Valborgne, France: Virevolte, 2007  
297 mm; 80 pp; b/w illuss;  
ISBN 9782953073201 £12 paperback<sup>1</sup>

What did the Picts make of what they saw in the night sky? More than you would ever have thought possible, according to the author of this book.

Heather Connie Martin describes herself as an artist/designer who draws ‘on her years of study of Pictish and Celtic culture’ to create ‘paintings and woven panels full of symbolic imagery in rich earth colours’. A native of Dundee and sometime resident in Glasgow, she now lives and works in the south of France.

This self-published book, a worthy achievement, in A4 format, neatly laid out in clearly defined sections, depends more on its copious monochrome illustrations than on its text, essentially a series of extended captions, to present its contents.

In the poetically-titled introduction, ‘Star Symbol Stone’, we learn of the author’s early interest in astronomy and, later, of her growing fascination with the Picts and their symbol stones, and of her experience one late, chill autumn evening when these two interests dramatically coincided ‘in a wholly unexpected way’,

As I stood looking up at the sky, following the curving lines of stars, I noticed something astonishing. I could make out the shape of the strange beastie carved on the Pictish stones; first the head and then the line of its back and the curls of its limbs. (p6)

This *eureka* moment led to further ‘discoveries’ convincing the author to assert that:

2000 or so years ago the stars were the inspiration for designs still visible today on the sacred stones of the people known as Picts; spiralling clusters of stars interpreted as the flowing spirals in skillfully worked designs of animals, birds and geometric shapes. (ibid)

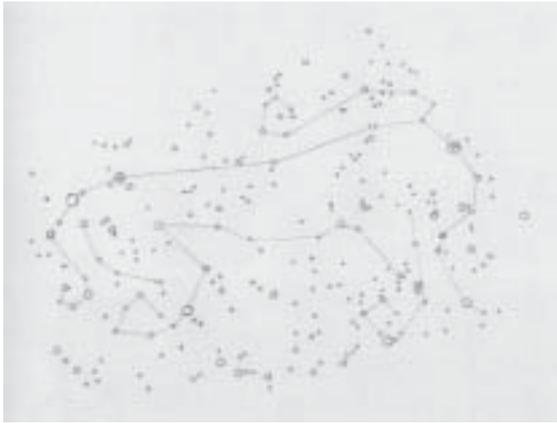
Consequently, Martin endeavoured to map and name these perceived ‘Pictish’ constellations based on the existing designs of the symbols. About 30 examples are illustrated, divided into five groups – Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Circumpolar Stars – each symbol allocated according to the season for viewing its supposed constellation. An outline drawing of each is given along with a plot of the figure as it appears (to the author) in the night sky. Directions to its location are limited to naming a ‘guiding’ star or stars of the constellation/s in which the figure is to be found. This presupposes a reasonable level of astronomical awareness on the part of the searcher, and it would have been easier to locate the figures if the conventional constellations too had been indicated on the plots.

It’s one thing to make out lines, shapes, and random patterns in star clusters, but quite another to invert the process by superimposing an existing design on the night sky with its almost infinite number of starry permutations, which will always allow a template to be placed to select paths of linking dots which will coincide with points on its fixed plan or outline. To then claim that the resultant asterism is the origin of the design is perverse and wholly unsustainable.

Almost without exception, writers on the subject of the perceived figures of the constellations, of almost every civilisation that has plotted them, state that they look nothing like the figures they are intended to represent. By trying too hard, Martin seems to have shot herself in the foot in producing over-elaborate versions of the symbol-constellations. Still, it is difficult to imagine how the Pictish ‘beast’ symbol, here renamed ‘the star beastie’ (illustrated overleaf), could derive its ‘fluid, flowing lines’ which ‘speak of a watery nature’ from the distinctly angular figuration of its given outline lurking in Auriga and Gemini.

The author is not alone in finding inspiration in the stars and, for comparison, I illustrate an alternative version of the ‘starry beastie’ from another source.<sup>1</sup> Unsurprisingly, the latter

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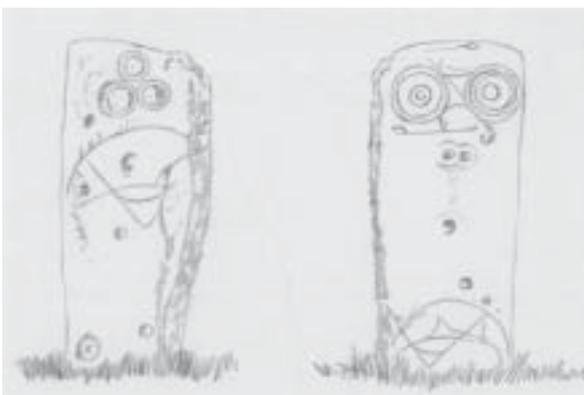
Martin's figure 2, 'The Star Beastie: guiding stars: Capella (Alpha Aurigae) and Castor (Alpha geminorum)'

vision does not coincide with that of our stellar quine, and it seems likely that if every PAS member attempted to sketch a Pictish beast in the heavens, few of the results would concur.

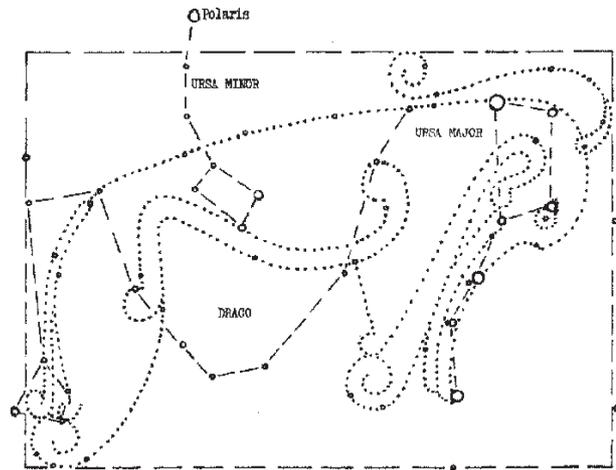
As well as the 'star beastie', Martin further subverts the canon of Pictish symbols by renaming several others – tuning-fork becoming 'the pillars'; flower – 'the Northfire'; mirror-case – 'the well'; divided rectangle – 'the doorway'; rectangle – 'the shield'; dogs head (Rhynie) – 'the water horse'. Others are added – 'the summer giant' (Rhynie) and 'the winter giant' (Golspie); 'the long-necked bird' (Wemyss); 'stars' (Brodie); and 'the rider' (Bullion). Speculative 'meanings' are applied with confidence, but there is no discussion of how these might apply to the symbol pairings. It would be interesting to learn if they had any astronomical significance, for example the constellar conjunction of 'the Doorway' and 'the Star Beastie', as found on the Maiden Stone; could it in any way relate to the supposed compatability of Virgo with Taurus?

Joining dots of light in the night sky is a harmless pursuit. Taking it further in an attempt to prove

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The French connection: Martin's 'Menhirs...' (fig 9), and the presumed source of her illustration on the right

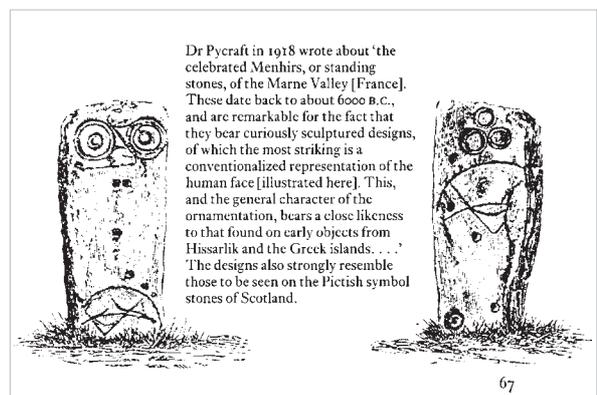


© Andrew Bain

'The Crichton pictish beast and the Northern stars'

that the Pictish symbols were derived from patterns plotted in asterisms is a pointless exercise and, possibly, a harmful one – for instance, the unwary could be seduced by the authoritative presentation of this book and thereby accord it more respect than it deserves. Fortunately, Martin demonstrates just how easily this can be done: Her figure 9 (p.13), captioned 'Menhirs from the Vallée de la Marne, France', appears to have been copied from the reproduction of two engravings in a popular book, along with the mistaken identity of their subject, which too has been uncritically regurgitated.<sup>3</sup> Any serious student of Pictish symbols (even one resident in France) should recognise that the illustration represents the carved faces of the Dingwall symbol stone alone, not two foreign imposters.

Despite its fundamental flaws, this book can be thought-provoking, but it answers none of the questions about 'Pictish astronomy' that it has inspired me to ask. Martin's altogether starry-eyed vision has nothing to do with the Picts and she fails to provide one scrap of evidence to even suggest that it has.



© Janet & Colin Bord

Of course, interpretation of what you see in the stars depends a lot on how you view the heavens – astronomically or astrologically – as a Moore or a Mysic Meg. For guidance, I consulted an online astrologer:

Try not to be too judgemental of new books that arrive on your desk. There is much you have to learn about the reasons for their appearance as the coming weeks will soon reveal. Aries love offers are more serious than you think. Call my starline now to hear why love must be your priority tonight.

I can't wait. Beam me up Scottie! DH

1 To order by Paypal, e-mail order with name and address to <[heatherconnie@hotmail.fr](mailto:heatherconnie@hotmail.fr)>; or by post with cheque for £12 (made payable to Heather Martin) to: H Martin, Starbug, Quartier la Virevolte, 30940 Saint André de Valborgne, France. Price includes postage and packing.

2 Bain, Andrew 'The Pictish beast and the stars', 2004 (unpublished paper in PAS archive). I am grateful to the author for permission to reproduce the illustration.

3 Bord, J & Bord, C, *Mysterious Britain: ancient secrets of the United Kingdom and Ireland* (London: Granada, 1974), p.67

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## Sir Daniel Wilson and the Pictifying of the Symbol Stones

In volume 16 of the *Pictish Arts Society Journal*, an article by Lloyd Laing paid tribute to the sterling work of Sir Daniel Wilson in the field of Pictish Art around the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> He highlighted one of the key events in Pictish art-historical studies: 'Wilson seems to have been the first to identify the creators of these works as the Picts specifically' (p.37), 'these works' being the symbol stones. The reference given is to Wilson's 1863 publication, at page 219.<sup>2</sup>

However, page 219 (of volume II) does not actually mention the Picts as such (excepting an oblique reference to 'the ancient *terra Pictorum* of Galloway'). The key pronouncement in this edition of Wilson's study is to be found several pages earlier, on page 215, where it makes its entrance by way of a discussion of stones bearing ogham inscriptions. Here Wilson talks of 'a class of sculptured stones peculiar to Scotland, if not indeed to its ancient Pictish territory'. This seems to fight shy of making a cast-iron definitive pronouncement, and when he comes to discuss 'that remarkable class of Scottish sculptured stones' on page 218, he does

so in Pagan/Christian terms, without a mention of the Picts.

Much the same applies when Wilson reaches his conclusion on page 220:

Whatever, therefore, be the date or origin of this remarkable class of monuments, they appear not only to be peculiar to Scotland, but are there confined to a small and well-defined range of country.

He clearly means Pictland, and it is something of a puzzle that he does not come out and say just that.

The Picts do crop up a little later, on page 224, but as with the discussion of ogham stones, the reference is again of an oblique nature:

It would be a discovery full of interest, and one in no degree calculated to diminish our estimate of the intellectual development of the Scottish Picts in the era immediately succeeding the withdrawal of the Romans if we could trace among them one or other of the early phases of Gnostic philosophy.

They get another mention, though again somewhat slanted, on page 231 in a discussion of the artistic content of the stones:

A careful study of the monuments altogether precludes the idea that the Pictish sculptor was limited in his models to the fauna of the British Islands;

and on the same page, while considering the (?) dolphin symbol, there is mention of 'the native Pict'. It is a little ironic, then, that when Wilson engages in a discussion of the St Andrews sarcophagus, he describes a panel as exhibiting 'one of the most elaborate of these Pictish hunting scenes' – notwithstanding that there is no Pictish symbol in evidence.

Once more; the Picts are absent when Wilson deals with one of the principal feature of their sculptured stones (pp.237–8):

The most common decoration on the more elaborate examples of this remarkable class of Scottish monuments, apart from the symbols and sculptured figures so frequently introduced, is the interlaced knotwork which appears to have been so favourite a device of Celtic art & the monuments on which it occurs as an accompaniment of the peculiar symbols and sculptures already described, belong exclusively to one limited Scottish area, and to a period which came to a close not later than the ninth century.

Again, he clearly means Pictland, yet again he declines to say so. Irony comes into play again

when he describes the scene of ‘dragons or serpents devouring a man, in accordance with the devices on several of the Pictish stones’ on page 240, yet the example which he introduces is at Bressay in Shetland – which again lacks Pictish symbols.

At last we touch upon the real thing when Wilson described the Drosten stone at St Vigeans as ‘probably preserving to us the only authentic literate memorial of the Scottish Picts’ (p.242). The stone itself he calls ‘one of the most characteristic monuments of a class peculiar to the ancient Pictish region’, though the discussion centres on the inscription, low down on one edge-face, rather than on the wider artistic merits of the stone. He goes on to make mention of ‘other inscribed stones belonging to the same Pictish district of Scotland’ on page 244.

It is perhaps symptomatic of Wilson’s curious unease at being seen as an overt Pictophile that his final reference to these monuments succumbs to yet another attack of vapidness, describing them as ‘the curiously-sculptured stones which pertain almost exclusively to one Scottish district’ (p.245). Where exactly would that be? Let’s say it for him – PICTLAND!!!

In view of all this somewhat nervous caution, it is rather surprising that in the first edition of his influential book,<sup>3</sup> published a dozen years earlier, Daniel Wilson was much less equivocal in his attribution of the symbol stones to the Picts. Not only did he state this in unambiguous terms, but he also included, a bonus, a basic subdivision which half a century later would form the basis of Allen and Anderson’s Class I and Class II categories. Here is what he wrote on that occasion (pp.498–9):

No sculptural memorials of the singular class so abundant in Scotland, have been discovered in Ireland, any more than in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, though so long ascribed to a Scandinavian origin. They are manifestly native monuments, though betraying the same traces of the influence of early Irish art, or at least indications of a period when the peculiar style of their ornamentation was common both to Scotland and Ireland, with which we are familiar in the works of the closing Pagan era. Only one known period of Scottish history answers to these requirements, and seems to point out the ruder class of sculptured standing stones as monuments of the Pagan Picts, and the more elaborate, accompanied with the symbol of the Christian faith as belonging to that period & when

Christianity was introduced to the Scottish Picts. As Wilson was making a statement of profound importance to the whole world of Scottish antiquarianism, it seems odd that he chose to make his pronouncement linking the symbol stones with the Picts in such a way as to see it diminished in its impact by intertwining it with his basic typological division of these stones.

At the same time, Wilson took a hefty sideswipe at some of the more fanciful theories which had previously been put forward regarding the origins of these stones, being highly critical of ‘the vague theoretical speculations, destitute of any foundation but the fancy of their originators, which have discovered in these Scottish sculptures Egyptian, Phoenician, Brahminical or Druidical symbols, as it chanced to suit the favourite theory of the hour’! (p.499). Having thus swept the more nonsensical candidates from the field of debate, and firmly established the Picts as the originators of the symbol stones, it seems curious that Wilson should be so diffident on the subject when he came to discuss it more fully in the second edition of his work.

Sir Daniel Wilson does indeed appear to be the first scholar to associate the mysterious symbols and the stones which bear them with the Picts (I first learned this some decades ago from my first lecturer in archaeology, Dr (later Professor) Charles Thomas), and it is timely that Lloyd Laing should remind us of his achievement. However, the second edition of his opus is so cautious in its generalities and so oblique in its particulars when compared with the more forthright declaration in the first edition, that it is 1851 rather than 1863 which we should celebrate as the date when this aspect of our Pictish heritage was provided with a sound academic footing.

*Graeme Cruickshank*

1 Laing, Lloyd, ‘Sir Daniel Wilson and Pictish Art’, *Pictish Arts Society J*, 16 (2001) 35–40.

2 Wilson, Daniel, *The Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, two vols (Edinburgh, 1863). [essentially a second edition of the 1851 book cited below]

3 Wilson, Daniel, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1851).

The deadline for receipt of contributions to  
**PAS Newsletter 47 is 17 May 2008.**  
Send articles, reviews, pictures etc. by email  
to <[pas.news@btconnect.com](mailto:pas.news@btconnect.com)> or by post to  
**The Editor, PAS News** at the Pictavia address.

## St Vigeans scoop

### Misunderstanding What We See: A surprising new discovery at St Vigeans

When the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland was recording the collection of Pictish and Early Medieval sculpture at St Vigeans in 2000/2001, we noted and recorded a large stone built into the south wall of the church (4). The size, shape and proportions of this stone made it likely (certain in my mind) that it was another large cross-slab and, based on its visible profile, I produced a conjectural reconstruction (5). Obviously, we had no idea how it was decorated but a scaled reconstruction let us view this new cross-slab in the context of the others from the site.

It therefore came as very exciting news to learn that, as part of the ongoing project to redevelop the museum at St Vigeans, Historic Scotland had been given permission to remove some of the masonry from above and below this stone to confirm exactly what it is and let us record at least part of its decoration.

So on a crisp February morning, a team of Historic Scotland's stone conservation specialists, assisted by some of their stonemasons based at Arbroath Abbey, began the painstaking process of carefully removing mortar and masonry above the stone to reveal what should have been the main face of the cross-slab. However, as the first stonework was removed, instead of revealing the well-preserved arm of a cross and the carved surface of a cross-slab, all it uncovered was a rough and broken surface of a much thicker stone (1). Indeed, the



© Joy Mowatt

2 Getting down to work. John Borland of RCAHMS recording part of the 'new' recumbent stone

clearly defined component that I and others were certain was the relief-carved arm of the cross in profile was purely the result of mortar pointing. Having previously published a paper on the St Vigeans collection entitled 'Understanding What We See, Or Seeing What We Understand', I now had that sinking feeling of completely misunderstanding what I had seen.

Luckily, any disappointment was short lived as the removal of a small stone underneath exposed a well-formed socket – our cross-slab was in fact a recumbent stone, built face down into the wall. Over the course of the next few days, all of the masonry underneath the stone was gradually removed and replaced with wooden chocks, enabling us to record virtually all the carved upper surface of this, the fourth recumbent stone from St Vigeans.

Initial interpretation of our survey is of a stone with some rather unusual features. At the foot, opposite the socket is what appears to be a panel



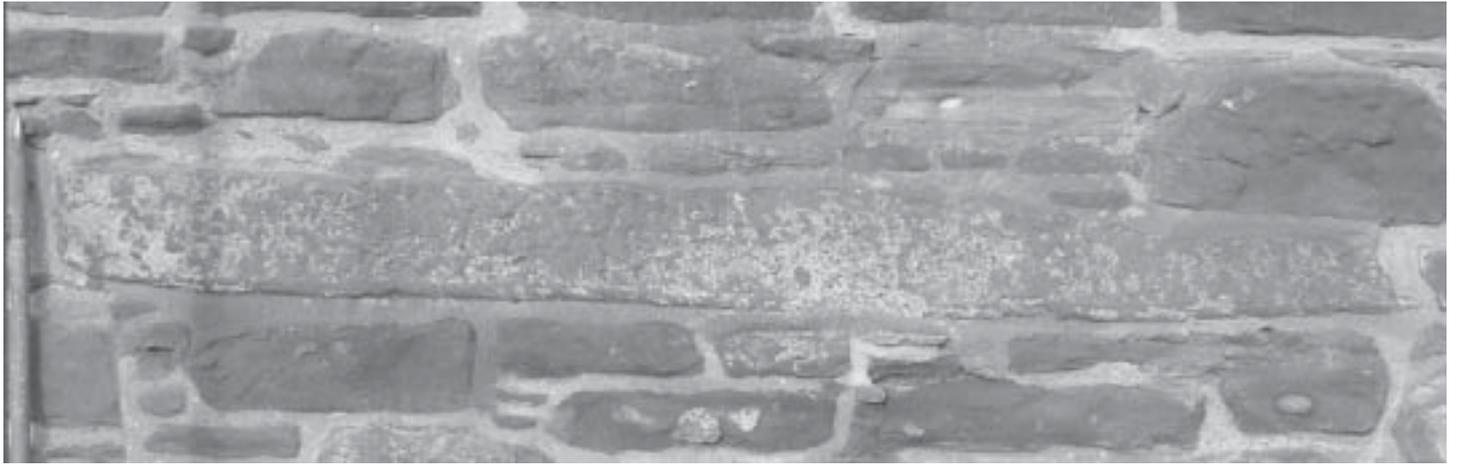
© Joy Mowatt

1 Alan McKenzie, one of Historic Scotland's stone conservation technicians, examining the newly exposed surface



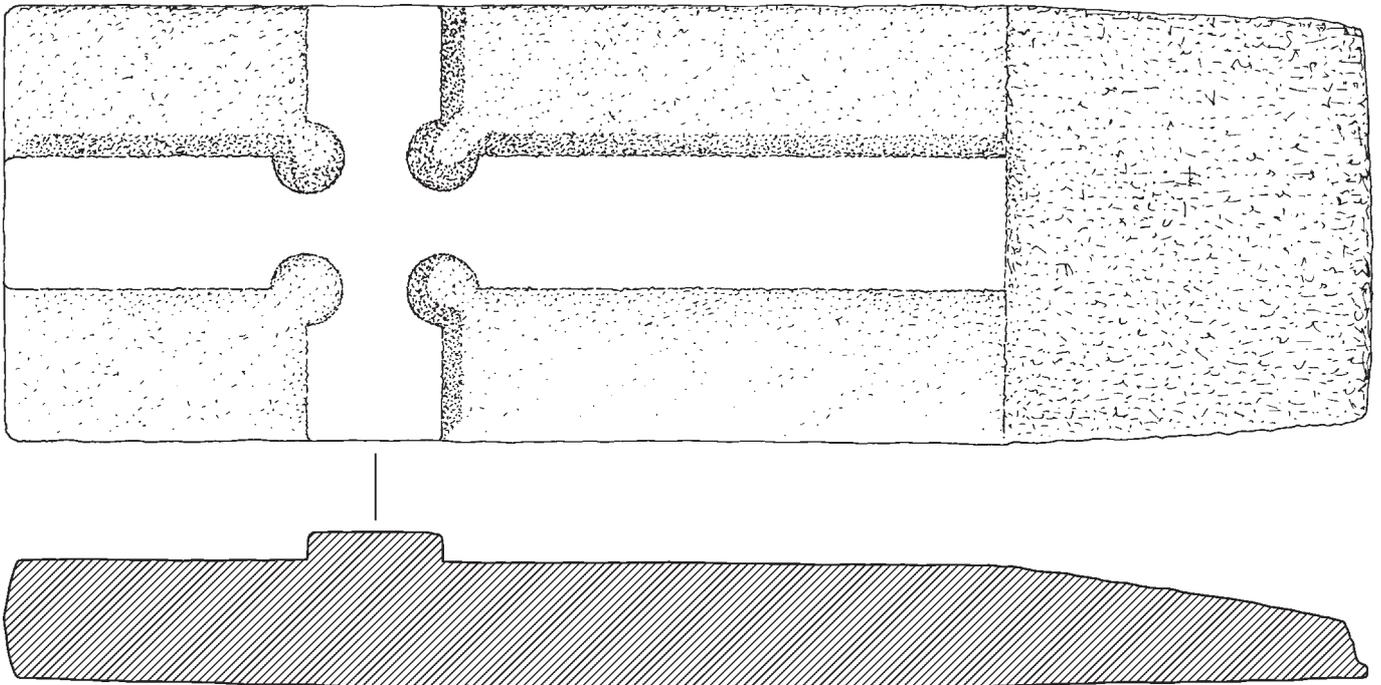
© Nigel Rackley

3 The lip of the main face running the length of the stone



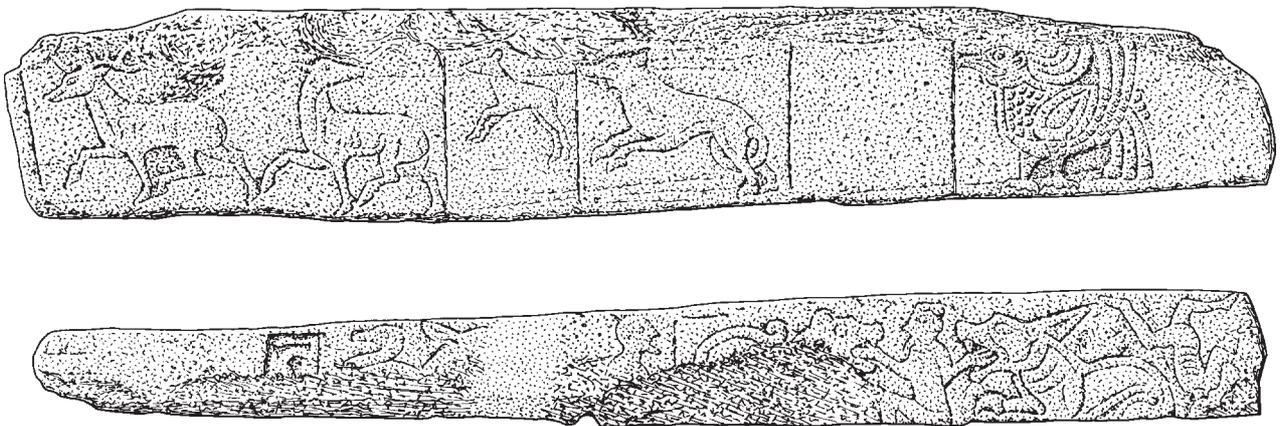
© Joy Mowatt

4 The large stone in the south wall of St Vigeans church, looking very much like the end-on view of a cross-slab, scale 1:10



Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

5 Drawn profile of stone and conjectural reconstruction of cross-slab, scale 1:10



Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

6 The figurative carving on the edge of St Vigeans 8 (upper) and St Vigeans 14 (lower), scale 1:10

of interlace, flanked by two raised borders, also decorated with interlace, which may run the full length of the stone. The central panel is decorated with a series of interlocking T-shaped grooves, rather like an oversized square key-pattern and at least one large circular hollow, not unlike a cup-mark. The exposed side of the recumbent, upon close examination, bears the faint remnant of a carved moulding running along its upper edge (3). The rest of this face is covered by rough stugging – either a roughly dressed and undecorated surface, or perhaps the result of a carved or dressed surface being removed when the stone was reused as building material.

However, as two of the three recumbent stones in the St Vigean collection are decorated on only one side, this raised the possibility that this new stone was also decorated on its unexposed side and the removal of a stone behind its inner face did indeed reveal a carved surface. A larger area of this face was carefully uncovered (the conservators were now working within a few centimetres of the church's inner wall) and, with the help of a small mirror, we were able to observe and record a very well executed and equally well preserved stretch of diagonal key-pattern (7). Unlike St Vigean 8 and 14 (6), we do not appear to have any figurative carving on

the side of this new stone but, like St Vigean 8, the carving on its side appears to be of a much higher quality than that on the top, indicating possible re-use or re-carving: it certainly seems to be the work of two unequal craftsmen.

After specialist geological examination, the removed stonework was reinstated but over the coming weeks, RCAHMS will be able to create a drawing that will hopefully convey something of the nature of this addition to the stones at St Vigean. It was never the intention to remove the stone from its present location within the wall of the church, but only to uncover enough to confirm exactly what it is. In proving that we now have a new recumbent stone and in exposing virtually all of the carved upper face, I believe Historic Scotland has met this brief and I for one would like to offer my congratulations and thanks to everyone concerned from HS for their labours. Despite being proved completely wrong in my initial interpretation, this has been a wonderful voyage of discovery at St Vigean and is clear confirmation of what many of us in the Pictish Arts Society know only too well: that even well-documented sites still have many secrets yet to be uncovered.

*John Borland*

Measured Survey Manager  
Survey & Recording, RCAHMS



7 Part of the well-preserved diagonal key-pattern carved on the inner edge of the stone, viewed using a small mirror

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## **First Contact: Rome and Northern Britain**

**A TAFAC special conference 31 May 2008**

**Dewar's Rinks Conference Centre, Perth**

**Advance booking only – places still available**

For further details see PAS News 45, and to book please contact: Mark A Hall, Perth Museum & Art Gallery, 78 George Street, Perth, PH1 5LB, Tel: 01738 632488, Email [mahall@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:mahall@pkc.gov.uk) The conference fee is £15.00 and cheques should be made payable to Tayside and Fife Archaeological Committee.

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## **Groam House Museum**

Several publications in the annual academic lecture series are out of print, but these are now available online to download as PDFs – to access, click on 'Archives' in the home page:

[<http://www.groamhouse.org.uk>](http://www.groamhouse.org.uk)

**LAST CHANCE TO SEE**

**Theory into Practice:**

**George Bain and the Celtic Art Revival**

Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie

1 May 2007 – April 2008

(but check below for seasonal opening times)

An exhibition reflecting the ancient influences that informed Bain's Mastery of Celtic Art will be displayed for a year amidst the Museum's collection of Pictish sculptured stones and accompanied by decorated metalwork and jewellery objects, specially loaned by the National Museums of Scotland.

**Free admission to the museum in 2008**

Opening hours:

1 Mar– 20 Mar weekends only 1400–1600

21–30 Mar daily 1400–1630 closed weekends

31 Mar–30 Apr weekends only 1400–1600

1 May–31 Oct daily 10.00–17.00;

Sun 14.00–16.30

1 Nov – 7 Dec weekends only 14.00–1600

8 Dec – Mar 2009 closed

This year's academic lecture will be given by

**Andy Heald** (title to be announced)

Groam House Museum

High Street, Rosemarkie

Ross-shire IV10 8UF

Tel: Museum 01381 620961

Office 01463 811883

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## **Scottish folklore degree**

Glasgow University is launching the first degree in Scottish folklore at its campus in Dumfries. The postgraduate masters course contains modules on animal myths, witch beliefs and hunts, storytelling and ballads.

Topics on the curriculum include the mythical selkies – creatures that could transform themselves from seal to human form and back again by putting on or removing their skin.

Another traditional Scottish myth is that of the kelpie – a breed of water horse that enticed people to ride on its back, then took them down to a watery grave.

Dr Lizanne Henderson, the course leader, said these myths reflected a cultural fear of water in an age when many lived by the coast but were unable to swim. As a result, a terror of the deep held by fishermen was passed down through the generations and gained mythological status. Much Scottish folklore existed as an attempt to explain events people couldn't understand. They were cultural explanations of unexplainable phenomena.

A particularly good example was if someone died suddenly. It was quite a common explanation to say they were taken away by the fairies. ... A baby's congenital deformity was often blamed on fairies, who, it was said, would steal a baby and leave a 'changeling' fairy child in its place. ... An accusation of witchcraft was often an attempt to explain crop failure or why a cow had stopped producing milk. ... Most people don't believe in fairies any more, but some of the myths surrounding them, such as dressing in green and abducting people, live on in the beliefs that people are abducted by aliens. This is a belief that has been brought up to date. Fears were often manipulated to control a community; for example, tales of a vicious monster in the woods would ensure that no-one ventured into a dangerous area.

The Loch Ness monster myth isn't that old. The first recorded incident of anybody seeing it was St Columba in the 6th century ... but then there is no mention of the monster until the beginning of the 20th century, when the road was built alongside the loch.

From an article in *The Scotsman*, 6 March 2008