



## Autumn Conference

The annual conference will be held this year at St Vigean on Saturday 4 October.

We are happy to be holding this conference with the support of Historic Scotland in advance of the official opening of the renovated museum of carved stones from this important site.

Peter Yeoman of Historic Scotland will give an overview of the work that has been carried out in extending the museum and preparing the stones for display, as well as the multi-disciplinary programme of research that has been carried out in conjunction with this work. A full programme of talks will include contributions from Isabel Henderson, Thomas Clancy, Simon Taylor, John Borland and Norman Atkinson.

The day will include the opportunity to be conducted round the new display, allowing the chance to see the stones in their new setting before the official opening in Spring 2008. Proceedings will begin with registration at St Vigean church hall at 9.30, and lunch is included in the registration fee. On Sunday 5 October, there will be a tour of stones and sites in the area.

For those unfamiliar with St Vigean, it lies just north of Arbroath, off the A92. Accommodation is available in Arbroath and in the surrounding area. A booking form accompanies this newsletter.

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## AGM Report

The annual general meeting of the Society was held on 17 May in the Meffan Institute in Forfar, with a select group of 12 people attending. Apologies were received from a further nine members.

The following account summarises the reports of the President, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Events Co-ordinator, with contributions from the Vice-Presidents and other committee members.

The President thanked the committee for their work over the year, and noted that there had been seven committee meetings. The new member-

ship leaflets have been widely distributed, and have attracted considerable attention. Marianna Lines, Ron Dutton and Robert Henery were all very much involved in the production and their efforts were very much appreciated. Joy Mowatt was thanked for taking responsibility for procuring the computer, projector, software, storage and consumables paid for by an Awards for All lottery grant. Our gratitude to the National Lottery Fund was also noted.

The new equipment has allowed us to guarantee good quality projection facilities for our speakers, and has also allowed us to plan the management of a resource centre for Pictish studies, based on our current book collection and promised donations. It is intended that this will be available for consultation by members at Pictavia. The equipment may also be borrowed by other societies, under the supervision of a member of the committee. A similar arrangement applies to a PA system owned by Brechin Civic Trust: we should be able to borrow this for use at our talks.

Throughout the winter, the varied programme of evening talks at Pictavia continued to attract audiences of up to 45 people. Thanks to local advertising, a core audience has been supplemented by people who come along to listen to talks of particular interest. Short summaries of the talks have been published in the newsletter to try to share these with the wider membership. The dates for next season have been fixed, but the programme has not yet been finalised. It will be published soon.

A successful annual conference was held last year on 6 October in Perth and was also reported in the newsletter. Our next conference will be held on 4 October 2008 at St Vigean, where Historic Scotland has invited us to preview the renovated museum before its official opening in Spring 2009.

Over 20 members made the trip to Caithness for the first weekend in September, for a programme of lectures at Dunbeath Heritage Centre on the Saturday, rounded off by a visit to the Ballachly site. Fine weather on the Sunday saw members driving around Caithness to visit a number of stones and sites, pausing for lunch at Thrumster

House. The co-operation of Caithness Archaeological Trust, particularly the work done by Emma Sanderson, made this weekend a real success, and highlighted the importance of having local contacts in organising such events. January saw a visit to the stones in the NMS in Edinburgh, with a dozen members attending. The Events Co-ordinator, Eileen Brownlie, made a plea for any suggestions for trips or events, with details of local contacts, to be put forward. While the Society's finances are currently in a healthy state (our bank balance as of the December year end stood at £10,985.24), several items of expenditure incurred in 2007 had not been billed to the Society as of the year end. There is need to exercise a degree of prudence in maintaining a reserve to cope with likely increased future expenditure on maintaining the computer equipment and on associated consumables. Increases in postage costs, together with the increased cost of producing larger newsletters on a regular basis, mean that we are likely to need to raise subscription rates. The Treasurer, via the Secretary, suggested that membership fees be raised to £16 for full membership, £18 for joint and £14 for concessions when the next membership leaflet is printed (probably before the AGM next year). The increase would apply to existing members at the first renewal date after this event. There are currently serious difficulties for overseas members who do not have access to sterling accounts, as banks in the UK have raised the minimum amount for any US \$ cheque cashed here to \$75. The Treasurer and Membership Secretary have been exploring alternative ways to make payment easier for both overseas and UK members, and it is hoped that this will progress over the next year.

Membership, defined by payment of subscriptions, has stabilised at around 160, with several reciprocal arrangements in place with museums and other societies.

January finally saw the publication of Journal 17. The committee has been acutely aware of the delay in producing this volume, and regrets especially the problems that have arisen for contributors. This concern was echoed from the floor of the meeting, with claims that there were a number of papers that have been submitted over the last few years that are still awaiting publication. If this is indeed the case, the new committee would be grateful if contributors

would get in touch. Occasional publications will still appear, but there is an understandable reluctance after the experience of the last few years to promise the appearance of a regular journal.

The newsletter has been appearing on a regular basis, and offers scope for publishing short papers as well as news likely to be of interest to Society members. The frequent and regular appearance of the newsletter makes it a suitable vehicle for communicating in a timely fashion. The suggestion was made from the floor that we should examine again the desirability of offering the newsletter in an electronic format, and the new committee would appreciate comments on this from the wider membership.

The President thanked Cath Drain for her management of the website. Material for the website has been gathered and passed to Cath by Stewart Mowatt, and fresh material is constantly sought. The programmes for the conference and for the new season will be appearing on the site soon.

At the moment, we co-operate with Angus Council and Brechin Castle Garden Centre over Pictish-themed events in return for our use of Pictavia. The system of volunteers has been suspended while the role of the volunteers is clarified; there had been some problems of PAS volunteers being treated as free casual labour by some members of the council staff. It is hoped that this can be resolved in the near future. At the moment, Joy Mowatt represents our interests on the Pictavia Liaison Committee, the liaison in this case being between the Council and the Brechin Castle Centre.

Two bits of non-routine business were put forward. It was proposed that the constitution should be altered such that the first sentence of paragraph 9.1 reads 'The quorum at any general meeting shall be ten.' Ironically, although there was no opposition to this, the business of the AGM will require to be ratified at the next quorate meeting of the Society.

Several years ago, the Society agreed to institute a group of Honorary Members, as a means of recognising outstanding contributions to Pictish Studies and to the raising of awareness of the historical importance of the Picts. At the AGM, it was proposed that Tom Gray, whose iconic photographs of Pictish stones have been enjoyed by so many, and, indeed have acted as the introduction to the Picts for many of those who

have been encouraged to learn more about them, should join that small group. This proposal was received with enthusiasm by the meeting.

Finally, the meeting elected the new committee as follows:

*President* – Norman Atkinson

*Vice-Presidents* – David Henry and  
Stewart Mowatt

*Treasurer* – Andrew Munro

*Secretary* – Sheila Hainey

*Membership Secretary* – Joy Mowatt

*Events Organiser* – Eileen Brownlie

*Committee Members* – John Borland,  
Liz Tosh and Nigel Ruckley

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## **The potential of fieldwork for learning more about the Picts**

**John Sherriff**

After the business of the AGM on 17 May, we were joined by a few members of the public to hear a talk given by John Sherriff of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). John has had a long association with areas of the country associated with Pictish monuments, having been responsible for the creation of a Sites and Monuments Record for Angus before he joined the Commission. In addition, his involvement with the Tayside and Fife Archaeological Committee is well known.

He gave a densely-packed review of the archaeology of Pictish settlement over the past 30 years, setting this against the background of research and recording of archaeological monuments in Scotland generally.

Although Scotland is a relatively small country, 30 years ago there were still large areas where little archaeological work had been done, and about which very little was known. There was unevenness also in the recognition of sites of different periods: little was known about the Neolithic in Angus for example. The principal bodies which held records on a national scale were the Ordnance Survey (OS) and RCAHMS. Ordnance Survey record cards for sites and finds were held at OS headquarters in Edinburgh. The cards contained brief descriptions, plans, sketches and bibliographies of sites which had been recorded and visited by officers of the

Survey, and were to be passed on to RCAHMS when the OS archaeology branch closed in 1982. The Commission had been recording sites and buildings on a county-by-county basis since its beginnings a hundred years ago. Not only did the Commission verify sites known or suggested by others, but intensive field work has resulted in the recording of many hitherto unrecognised sites over the years. These records formed the basis for a national computerised record, which even now can hardly be regarded as complete. The present record is uneven as to both the quality and the quantity of information held: updating of the record consists of inputting reports (such as those to be found in the annual *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*) without there being any facility for verifying the information. There are still large areas where there has been no modern work, either on known sites or in searching for others. There is no national strategy in place for identifying and quantifying sites dating to the Pictish period. Furthermore, there are some problems with the definitions employed in the record, partly due to the difficulties of recognising site types, as anyone who has tried challenging the database to produce lists of Pictish sites such as houses or graves can testify.

Indeed, 30 years ago, very few such sites had been recognised. The lack of typically 'Pictish' settlement sites was recognised by Wainwright, as part of *The Problem of the Picts*. Over the years since, a number of site types found in areas where Pictish activity is suggested (by place-name evidence or the distribution of symbol stones) have been shown to date to the Pictish period (broadly, the first millennium AD). Such sites include the so-called nuclear forts, multivallate hill-top sites where at least one, (usually late) phase has in some instances been shown to date to the period. However, relatively few of these sites have been surveyed over the same period, and fewer excavated. (Examples include Moncrieffe Hill, Castle Law, Forgan-denny and Dunsinane Hill).

Long cist cemeteries were first recognised in any numbers south of the Forth: the last 30 years has seen the distribution in the east of the country extend far to the north. Dates from Hallowhill place the use of the cemetery there between the 6th and 9th centuries, firmly in the Pictish period, while Derek Alexander's excavations at Redcastle showed that burials in long cists below

square or round barrows, grouped in small cemeteries, could also be dated to this era. Other such cemeteries have been recognised; some were already known but not associated with the first millennium.

Along the Moray coast, dates obtained from the promontory forts of Burghead and Green Castle also place these in the Pictish period. First millennium use of souterrains had long been inferred, but the instigation of RCAHMS programme of recording sites visible as cropmarks has resulted in a large increase in the density of souterrains in areas of Angus and Grampian where conditions are conducive to the production of such marks.

The RCAHMS survey of north-east Perthshire, already around 20 years old, resulted in the recognition of a group of sub-rectangular buildings, 15–30 metres long and about 7m wide, with edge-set inner and outer wall surfaces, some with partially sunken floors. Named 'Pitcarmick' after the type site, these include one room with a central hearth and one, evidently a byre, with a drainage sump or soakaway. Excavation and radiocarbon dating has placed at least two of these in the Pictish period. Pitcarmick houses have left relatively slight remains, often difficult to spot in areas where the heather cover is rank. Were any once present on land since subject to intensive cultivation, it is likely that the remains would have been obliterated. Only the sort of intensive prospective survey of a large area that was possible 20 years ago would lead to the recognition of the Pitcarmick type, it is unlikely under current survey regimes that such recognition would be possible. Other settlement types may yet be recognised: the oddly-shaped structure excavated at Carn Dubh in the 1980s and dated to the second half of the first millennium AD, may be one of a class also represented in Glen Clova. Other examples may yet come to light.

John's final group of monuments which may repay further study is that of parish boundary markers. Some of these are very old, with cross-marks which may date back to the first millennium. He raised the intriguing possibility that some of these boundaries may have their origins in the Pictish period, as estate boundaries. Fifty years ago, Wainwright could see little archaeological evidence for the Picts. The

intervening period has seen demonstration that some known types were indeed to be associated with the Picts, while other newly recognised types also belong to their time.

John gave a wide-ranging overview of the work that led to these discoveries. His enthusiasm was infectious, and can hardly be conveyed in this compressed note. However, we should all be aware of the intriguing possibility that much more remains to be recognised. This fact should encourage all those with an interest in the Pictish period to press for more prospective fieldwork.

*Sheila Hainey*

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## Notes on a talk

### 'Perceptions of Pictish Heritage'

I started with a question – 'Why do we ignore the Picts?' A question I have been pondering ever since I started my masters many years ago. At the moment brochs are sexy, the Stone Age is impressive as it is so far back in time, everyone seems to love the glossy image of the Vikings, and for some very strange reason people seem to want to find a Roman soldier on their doorstep. But why do they ignore the Picts?

Until recently the Picts were barely considered in representations of popular Scottish heritage, but this has started to change. Certainly Enlightenment scholars promoted a classical view of the Picts, yet despite the countering interest of the Romantic Movement, the first half of the 20th century saw Pictish studies as the preserve of dry-as-dust academics. The style may be due to a lack of interest in making heritage accessible – books written by academics for academics. The perfect example of this would be the original publication of *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (J. Romilly Allen and J. Anderson, 1903), one of the most important and still referenced works in Pictish studies. Now things are starting to change. The Picts may be largely ignored by the national curriculum, and may not be popular enough to get their own television series, but there is an increase in the adoption of a Pictish past by communities which have Pictish monuments in their locality. Though sometimes this adoption is reluctant.

In my talk I looked at three different communities, though concentrated on one that has embraced its Pictish inheritance wholeheartedly:

for two summers I worked in Hilton of Cadboll presenting the village's Pictish monument to the public. I was not just an archaeologist or a curator, I was also teacher, politician, intermediary and often devil's advocate, creating a control for discussions and I believe enabling people to talk freely. In this work I engaged with academics and the general public, the passion of the local population and interests of tourists from as far afield as Australia and America, and found out what they thought of the Picts.

An hour's drive north of Inverness, Hilton of Cadboll is a village on a peninsula that is particularly rich in Pictish Sculpture. To the south lies Nigg, home to an impressive cross-slab; to the north is Tarbat where recent excavations have uncovered fragments from numerous cross-slabs in the vicinity of a Pictish monastery; and a short distance from Hilton is Shandwick, home to a much undervalued cross-slab. The Shandwick stone is not in the best state of preservation with iron bars holding the pieces stable, but, other than academics commenting on the difficulty of photographing the stone, a relative lack of controversy has meant that the Shandwick stone has attracted little attention.

So why is there so much controversy surrounding Hilton? Historically the Hilton stone has been broken into three large fragments: The main part travelling the country, engaging controversy and now resting at The National Museum of Scotland; the lower portion, uncovered in 2001 by GUARD, spending two seasons (2002 & 2003) in Will Patterson's salmon shed for preservation and display; and the tenon, which is still missing. In 1676 the cross face of the main slab was defaced – all the sculpture was chipped away to make space for an inscription for Alexander Duff – a few thousand fragments of which were also uncovered in the 2001 excavations.

Before the discovery of the lower portion, Barry Grove, local artist, was employed in the reconstruction of the back of the stone, then in 2002 he used the lower portion and fragments to extrapolate a design for the cross face.

### **The Hilton museum**

The doors of the display opened on 10 July 2002. The schedule in my first season included regular opening hours, my accompanying three coach tours per week and opening the museum for private viewing.

During season two I was based in the museum, spending no time on the coaches. Each week one tourist coach came to see the display and despite visitor numbers in Highland as a whole being up by 20% that year (Inverness Tourist Information Services; pers com, 2004), the numbers on the coaches were down. Despite this, the overall number of visitors to the display still increased.

Coach tours were already running from nearby Dornoch but my accompanying the tours meant that these could then stop to view the Hilton fragment. Such coach tours are popular with the elderly and those with restricted mobility; this renders the visiting of the reconstruction impractical, especially given time limitations. Until the fragment was displayed, Hilton was by-passed by a large number of tourists, and an important section of Easter Ross's narrative was closed to them. If the fragment were removed to Edinburgh this would again be the case. A rubbing of the reconstruction, also displayed in the museum, enhanced the sense of appropriate context.

A number of concerns were raised during my time at the museum, one of which came from a social worker who claimed there was nowhere to take children over winter that did not "charge the earth" (25/09/02). Although it was not feasible for the museum to have regular opening hours over winter due to the obvious issues of heating and salary costs, the stone was accessible for planned visits. Such restrictions do not initially compare favourably with the NMS where, undoubtedly, more people might visit the stone for longer. However, the disadvantages incurred in Hilton – where there would be one fewer educational centre open to local children,



*The Hilton 'stump' photographed in situ soon after excavation. It shows the remarkably well preserved carving of the cross face. The cross shaft is lost, but its width can be determined as it is still possible to see exactly where it met its stepped base.*

© Barry Grove

and locals and visitors would have fewer places to visit, having a negative knock-on effect on local businesses – merit equal consideration.

Visitor numbers could increase were Hilton included on the Pictish trail leaflets covering the area from Inverness in the South to Dunrobin in the north (and soon to be extended again). Until recently this would not have been feasible as access to the stone would need fixed hours, and a named contact person responsible for showing people around, even out of season. The printing of such leaflets requires sites to be stable, and although the site is, its opening hours are unlikely to be advertised in this way for the foreseeable future.

The carving of the reconstruction by Barry Grove did little to stem local feeling re the returning of the Hilton stone; if anything, knowledge and feelings about the stone were heightened. Barry's work on the stone has promoted interest in people of all ages. The reconstruction was carved within the village, in the same building as the museum where the lower portion was displayed. During my summer work with the lower portion of the stone, local school children came to visit, many bringing along friends during their summer holidays. They came to visit the stone and discuss designs for their own Pictish stones; Barry has been working with the local schools on this.

A number of tourists did suggest swapping the stone in Edinburgh with the stone in Hilton, but interestingly, as has been made clear to me by the local population, Barry's stone is now also considered part of their heritage; it is part of their community. Heritage need not be ancient, its durability can stretch into the future, instead of the past; it is the symbolic and cultural value to the public that discerns heritage (J. Carman, 2002, 194). The reconstruction of the stone has almost as much meaning to the locals as the original. The villagers saw the development of the carving of the stone, they saw it evolve, and they were part of its creation. It ties them into its Pictish roots, their Pictish identity, while being there for their future. Barry opened his work to the public once a week. Most weeks brought a mixture of familiar faces and new. Some people visited every Saturday, sometimes staying for the whole day just to see the carving develop. The locals provided a building for Barry to work in, helped with the final moving

of the stone to its new home, and were there to see it planted. This is why the stone has become part of the community, and why the fight to retain the lower portion, and to return the main stone, is not only ongoing but had become even more passionate. If the reconstruction had been carved elsewhere, it would never have had the same impact.

Which brings to question ideas of heritage: Heritage maybe a familiar term yet it can mean different things to different people; it has come to mean more than mere inheritance. It is a term that can generate great passion and feeling as we will continue to see, while causing others to scoff. As Carman (2002, 2) comments, it can be seen as separate from real history. The term carries negative baggage being regarded by some academics as little more than a populist perversion of history (D Lowenthal, 1998, 88–9 & 102–04). When a presentation of the past is historically inaccurate it seems to be instantly labelled heritage be it print or film (ibid, 127), but this is not heritage, it is a poor appreciation of the importance of historical accuracy.

I have touched upon the notion of the reconstruction as heritage, the new stone having become part of the community, but what of the lower portion? The lower portion, or stump as it is often referred to, has been in the community some 1200 years, even if unseen. When Historic Scotland held a public meeting at the Chapel site in August 2001, they had no idea of the strength of feeling within the local community. During my two summers at the museum, I built up a spreadsheet of information. In the first season I noted every time a visitor claimed the stone as being their heritage. More than this, each time someone claimed this, I asked, "What does heritage mean to you?" Here are examples of replies to this question:



*The base mounted and displayed in the salmon shed museum at Hilton of Cadboll*

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24/07/02 Your heritage is something that belongs to you, something you can pass down to your children. (Retired male, Hilton)

31/07/02 Heritage tells you who you were, and who you are. (40+ female, Hilton)

01/08/02 Heritage shows you where you came from, and is a link to your history. (Teenage female, Balintore)

07/08/02 It is something that belongs to people, like the stone belonging to Hilton. (40+ female, Tain)

10/08/02 Heritage belongs to the community; heritage is our history in the form of objects. (40+ female, Hilton)

13/08/02 Heritage is something that you can pass down to your grandchildren that tells them something about you, or like the stone, which tells you something about your community. (60+ female, Hilton)

05/09/02 Heritage is tangible history. Heritage belongs to the people, whether it is the Hilton stone belonging to the people of Hilton, or the Elgin Marbles belonging to the Greeks. (60+ male, Nottingham)

Heritage shows you where you have come from, yes and it should belong to the community, it is so nice to see the stone here where it belongs. (60+ female, Nottingham)

Yes it is nice to see it still in the village. I hope it stays here where it belongs. I agree that heritage belongs to the people it came from. I would like to see the rest of the stone back here. (60+ female, Durham)

17/09/02 Heritage is our history. (40+ female, Hilton)

24/09/02 Heritage is history, like the stone, it belongs to where it came from, kind of like me. I am showing my wife where I came from. (20+ male, London – but originally from Hilton)

Heritage links you to your ancestors. It is something that belongs to people, like the stone

belonging to this community. Don't let them take it away it belongs to all of you. (20+ female, Colombia – wife of above)

The term 'link' was introduced twice when talking of heritage, but it arose a lot more often in casual conversation over the first season – a link to the past; to ancestors; to who we were. This idea of a link to times gone by, often with rose-tinted spectacles, shows how important the stone is. It doesn't matter that they did not know the person who carved the stone; they may not even have been their direct descendants. They simply felt that it tied them into the greater scheme of things, gave them a sense of place, a claim to that place through an artefact produced there, in a community prefiguring their own. This sense of unification through heritage is a common occurrence (B Graham et al, 2000, 40–1), whether it be within a small community, a nation, a class or ethnic origin. But the Picts themselves have yet to be adopted as an aspect of national identity.

Thus, from these few statements we can also see how well the reconstruction fits in as a piece of modern heritage, a link to a people's history and a link to future generations who may claim it as their history. It is a monument to how people feel about their heritage, their history today, their identity.

Of interest are the comments made by the couple on 24/09/02. The husband was showing his wife his history, his past, which was very important to him. He felt like part of him would always belong to the community, a link which won't be broken, which he compares to the stone, like the stone, he belongs to this community. From these statements heritage seems to mean a link to your past, the past of your people, and to the future – passing things onto future generations, not just bits and pieces found in museums. Another comment made was, "A shame that it is kept in a museum". No other alternative was suggested.

The majority of visitors were happy with the position of the stone, most claiming that they preferred it to stay in the village, in a local museum, than in Edinburgh. For example the comment made on 04/09/02, "It is more atmospheric to keep it in context" – in reference both to its place in Hilton, close to its place of discovery, but also to its position "I am glad it isn't being kept in some sanitized space" – something that I heard from about half a dozen visitors.



© Barry Grove

*The reverse showing the emergence of the inhabited vine-scroll from the centre of the lower framing border*

The 24/09/02 entry made by the Colombian female is a condensed version of our conversation; she was not surprised about the fight to keep the stone, as explained to her by her husband. History is very important to her, breaking down the barriers of time between herself and her ancestors. She brought up the idea of identity but not in direct relation to the stone. Heritage links you to your family “who once were”, to your ancestors who in turn tell you about who you are. This would make heritage an indirect connection to your identity, to who you are.

From these few statements it can hardly be surprising that the fight for the stone has become so passionate. The public meeting held by Historic Scotland in 2001 certainly encouraged the community to pull together behind this common goal.

Since my time in Hilton the lower portion has been moved temporarily into the Seaboard Memorial Hall, Balintore, just outside the village of Hilton of Cadboll. The stone, in its new display is now open to the public, locals and tourists alike, all year round in a secure controlled environment. Though if you are thinking of taking a trip north it is always worth giving the hall a ring to confirm its opening times.

To conclude as far as I can. With the perceived abduction of a member of their community the people of Hilton clung on as much as they could to their Pictish past. This sense of injustice pervaded the local psyche and the village developed with a strong tie to their Pictish past. With over a century of this sense of loss the locals have clung on to a past many communities ignore.

Most communities do not have this indoctrination into their Pictish heritage. The lack of the Picts in our schools and media does affect the way we see the Picts, and a lack of general knowledge about the Picts does in turn support the lack of coverage in education and popular culture. It is a vicious circle. Portrayals of the Vikings and Romans are all around us in day to day life, and as such are popular to cling to. A familiar, recognisable, easy to understand concept, to which we can connect.

Many people I came across in the museum still thought of the stories of Picts as little people who live underground (which probably won't

be helped by Terry Pratchett), and yet at least the older generations have heard of the Picts, the same cannot be said of some of our young.

But I do not wish to end so negatively. The Picts are starting to break into popular culture, communities are developing Pictish identities and work on exciting sites such as Portmahomack are fascinating young students, inspiring them to enter the study of the Picts – which I believe will eventually have a knock on effect to the general public.

And what of the position and future of the Hilton stone? As things stand with the main part in Edinburgh and the lower portion in Hilton both sides seem relatively content. There are villagers in Hilton still wanting to fight for the main part of the stone but the majority accept the current state, the storm for now, has been calmed.

*Emma Sanderson*

[We are very grateful to Emma for providing this abbreviated version of the talk she gave to the Society at Pictavia on 18 January 2008.]

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## Homeward bound

The St Ninian's Isle hoard of Pictish metalwork, discovered in 1958, is returning to Shetland this summer on loan from the National Museum of Scotland. This notable event heralds a new partnership agreement between National Museums Scotland and the redeveloped Shetland Museum and Archives managed by the Shetland Amenity Trust.

The new museum facilities on Shetland offer a safe place for the display of artefacts usually kept in Edinburgh, and the four-year agreement presents opportunities for skill-sharing as well as widening access to the national collections.

Enthusiasing about the partnership, Dr Gordon Rintoul, Director, National Museums Scotland stated, “ We hope it will allow us to look at other areas of our collections that would be of interest to the community of Shetland and help to develop audiences to the Shetland Museum and Archives.”

The Pictish silver will be exhibited from July to September 2008, and further loans, joint exhibitions and collaboration on community projects will follow. The Gunnister Man, a body found buried in peat and dating from the late 17th century, providing the earliest examples of knitted clothes from Shetland, will be loaned to Shetland in 2009.

Jimmy Moncrieff, General Manager of the Shetland Amenity Trust regards the partnership with the National Museum as positive recognition of the quality of museum provision in Shetland, and the Trust looks forward to many fruitful initiatives in the years ahead.

National Museums Scotland intend to develop wider access to NMS collections and support other Scottish museums.

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## Deo Ord: the lost hammer-god of the pagan Picts

Ian Shepherd's reassessment of the figure portrayed on the stone from Barflat,<sup>1</sup> Rhynie, Aberdeenshire (as reported by Sheila Hainey in PAS News 46) is of great interest. Inspired by a paper interpreting the axe-hammer discovered in the Sutton Hoo ship burial as a sacral object used to pole-axe sacrificial animals,<sup>2</sup> Shepherd proposes that the Rhynie man is portrayed wielding a similar artefact and may therefore represent a saint or tribal king. This is an attractive theory and is to be welcomed for reopening debate on one of the most striking and enigmatic of Pictish sculptures.

However, Shepherd's reappraisal rests on the interpretation of a single item from an Anglo-Saxon grave, an interpretation which, in turn, is derived from Continental evidence. Although plausible, this interpretation is difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate and is unsupported by Pictish evidence. In contrast, an alternative reinterpretation of the Rhynie figure not only rests on a wider evidential base but is, most unusually, also supported by Pictish documentary evidence.

The hammer-god is a widespread phenomenon of pagan religion in later Iron Age and early medieval north-west Europe. Hammer-gods appear in various forms and with different names, most notably as the Celtic god Sucellus, the 'Good Striker', and the Norse god Thor, with his divine attribute, his hammer Mjollnir. These gods possessed a range of related powers and functions. Thor was the Norse god of thunder, but also had a fertility function, while Sucellus was associated with agriculture, forests and fertility. Given the prominence of the hammer-god in both Celtic and Norse religion, it is tempting to interpret the figure on the Rhynie stone as a representation of a Pictish hammer-god. Indeed, there is both iconographic and

textual evidence to support this. The Rhynie figure is depicted in a similar manner to representations of the Celtic hammer-god, mostly in the form of Romano-Celtic statuettes and sculpture, with his short tunic, belted at the waist, and his hammer with a long, thin shaft. Thor's belt was, in addition to his hammer, another of his attributes, attesting the widespread distribution of these associations. The aggressive stance and appearance - his furrowed brow and bared teeth - of the Rhynie 'man' also distinguish him from the mere mortals portrayed in other Pictish figural sculpture. The figure depicted on the Rhynie stone appears to be a Pictish hammer-god.

Remarkably, this god is referred to in the only extant Pictish text, enabling him to be named. The Pictish regnal lists survive in various versions and have been Gaelicised to varying degrees, although some preserve original Pictish orthography. These regnal lists are best known through the work of the late Dr Marjorie Anderson,<sup>3</sup> which focused on the relationship of the various texts and the historical kings recorded in them. The so-called 'prehistoric horizon' of the Pictish regnal lists have received less attention and the seemingly outlandish nature of several of the names listed in this section, such as Usconbutts and Canutulachama, has often led to this part of the lists being dismissed as so corrupted by scribal errors as to be incapable of interpretation. However, several other names in the 'prehistoric horizon' are recognisably Pictish, including Cinioid, Drust, Erp, Gartnait and Tarain, revealing that not all the names in this section are corrupted.

As has long been noted, several names in the 'prehistoric horizon' possess similar elements: *deo*, *diu* and *tiu*. These names may be identified as theonyms on the grounds that *deo*, *diu* and *tiu* are cognate with Old Irish *dia* and Old Welsh *duiu*, derived from Celtic \**devos*, 'god' (compare Latin *deus*). Some of these names may be translated and the nature of the gods identified. For example, Deo Artiuois is the bear god (compare Old Irish *art*, Welsh *arth*, 'bear'), a well-known deity in pagan Celtic religion. The name Deoord is of particular interest within the context of the interpretation of Rhynie 'man'. *Ord* is cognate with Old Welsh *ord*, Old Irish *ord*, derived from Celtic \**ordo*, 'hammer'. This word also occurs in the name of a population group in Iron Age Wales, the Ordovices.

Deoord is, therefore, literally a hammer-god. Given the presence of a reference to a hammer-god in a Pictish source, it is presumably no coincidence that this deity is depicted in Pictish sculpture. On this basis, the figure represented on the Rhynie stone may be interpreted not as a man, king or saint but as Deo Ord, the Pictish hammer-god.

This reappraisal has far-reaching implications for the study of the Picts in general and Pictish pagan religion in general. It reveals the importance of the prehistoric horizon of the Pictish regnal lists as a source of the names of Pictish pagan deities. It also raises the possibility that pagan deities are represented in Pictish sculpture. Can any other examples be identified? We need not look far. One of the other sculptures from Rhynie, although not as well preserved as the Rhynie 'man', is of a human figure carrying a shield and spear. This figure is almost identical in form to that on a monolith at Newton of Collessie, Fife. These representations tentatively may be identified as a warrior-god.

This analysis underlines the importance of Rhynie as a focus of Pictish ritual activity and key site for the study and understanding of Pictish pagan religion. At least one concentration of Pictish 'Class 1' sculptured stones formerly existed at Rhynie.<sup>4</sup> Aerial reconnaissance has identified a large multivallate earthwork enclosure and other features at Rhynie, which have been the subject of recent geophysical survey.<sup>5</sup> This reappraisal of the Rhynie 'man' and his companion suggests that Rhynie was a Pictish pagan sanctuary. This, in turn, points to new lines of investigation into the archaeological, as well as the textual and iconographic, study of Pictish pagan religion. Thirty years after its discovery, the Rhynie/Barflat stone has begun to yield its secrets and open up new avenues of enquiry into Pictish pagan religion.

A more detailed analysis is now in preparation.

1 Shepherd, I.A.G. and Shepherd, A.N. 1978. 'An incised Pictish figure and a new symbol stone from Barflat, Rhynie, Gordon District', *Proc Soc Antiq Scotland* 109 (1977-78): 211-22

2 Dobat, A.S. 2006. '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: 880-93

3 Anderson, M.O. 1980. *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, 2nd edn, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press; first pub. 1973

4 Mack, A. 1997. 'The Rhynie cluster – or clusters?', *Pictish Arts Soc J* 11 (summer 1997), 2-5

5 Gondek, M. and Noble, G. 2007. 'The Craw Stane/Barflat, Rhynie: geophysical survey', in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, new series 7 (2006), 21

Nick Aitchison

Illustration on p.9 adapted from Ritchie, A, Scott, I G and Gray, T E *People of Early Scotland: from contemporary images* (Brechtin: Pinkfoot Press, 2006) p.20.

## Property ladder

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## Stargazing author's reply

To the Editor

Thank you for reviewing my book *The Lost Language of the Stars*. The review by DH was highly critical of the basic premise of my book, that the Picts had their own system of constellations which they illustrated with their unique symbols. I would be pleased if you would allow me space to reply in the spirit of fair play and in the hope of some healthy debate.

The main criticism of my theory would seem to be the objection to ‘superimposing an existing design on the night sky’ and then claiming ‘that the resultant asterism is the origin of the design’. This process is described as being ‘perverse and wholly unsustainable’, strong words indeed. When I first began to see forms within the stars which reminded me of certain Pictish symbols, I did ask myself whether I was simply fitting the forms I knew into a field of stars, with as DH describes ‘its infinite number of starry permutations’. If I had only recognised two or three symbols in this way, I would have remained in doubt. As I picked out more of these constellations it became less likely that their fitting so neatly should be coincidental. I may not have identified every symbol correctly, but I am convinced that the basic theory is correct. I would ask anyone who is interested to decide for themselves, simply by waiting for a clear night and looking at the stars.

I have been encouraged by the response of astronomers who have reacted favourably to my ideas. In a review in Journal No 55 of The Astronomical Society of Edinburgh the writer describes his own experience of looking for the constellations; ‘The reviewer had mixed success finding the constellations, but then he does not see elaborate figures in our Greek constellations either, and skies within travelling distance of the city are not nearly as dark as in Pictish times. Some bright constellations from the book are easy to make out, some others – though fainter – can help making sense of sky areas with few bright stars’.

The star maps in the book are simplified and intended as a guide to allow readers to find the patterns in the sky for themselves. I made the decision to use a few of the brighter stars as guides rather than using a potentially confusing mix of Pictish and conventional constellations. Far from being ‘over-elaborate versions of the symbol-constellations’, the diagrams I have provided do not reveal the full richness of the constellations seen in the night sky. As I stated in the book: ‘As well as these chains of bright stars, less intense stars add to the sense of image when they form lines and spirals; or when they cluster together to provide a glowing area of sky in contrast with very dark starless areas of sky; so that much more subtle images of light and shade are observed than can be demonstrated in the diagrams.’

In addition to illustrating the constellations, I provide a brief introduction to possible meanings for each of the symbols. These are intended as springboards for further discussion. In the absence of written corroboration from the Picts themselves this will always remain speculative or intuitive at best. In the book I explain my reason for using this approach: ‘I have included comparisons with other ancient belief systems in order to explore similarities in form and meaning. I have referred to close neighbours of the historical Picts and also to peoples far away in distance and time. The Picts were a trading people, and the busy sea-routes carried not only goods to be exchanged, but a sharing of ideas, a telling of stories, news and fresh discoveries from remote lands. Knowledge of the symbolism used by other cultures, and an exploration of the traces of meaning which survived into historical eras, can provide us with clues about the meanings held within the symbols of the Picts.’

In my discussion of the Double Disc symbol I have incorrectly labelled my illustration (fig 9) as showing a stone from the Marne Valley in France. DH rightly states that my illustration is based on an older illustration by Dr Pycraft which is clearly a drawing of the Dingwall Stone. I believe the original article in which it appeared referred to the menhirs to be found throughout the Marne valley, in particular ‘La Haute Borne à la Maistresse’ a grouping of seven stones three of which have both cup marks and engravings of a geometric appearance. In hindsight the decision to include this tentative but interesting link without more rigorous investigation was perhaps premature.

The use of star signs as symbols does not preclude any of the other possible reasons for marking stones set in the landscape: e.g. tribal badges, territorial boundaries or memorials. It may be that we shall never know why certain symbols were chosen to embellish particular stones, or why these stones were placed in a particular location. Further study of the relationships between symbol pairings on stones and comparisons with the movements of constellations may help to explain some of the reasons. I have made no suggestion that the Picts used their star signs as an astrological system akin to present day horoscope readings, although it is not impossible. The saltire story hints at belief in signs to be found in the sky and it is

not improbable that the Picts may have looked for guidance in the movements of the stars. Exploring relationships between paired symbols by referring to astrological theory in a search for 'astronomical significance' as DH suggests, '... the supposed compatability of Virgo with Taurus', does not seem to me a sensible approach. This would in any case be a look for astrological significance, not astronomical. More fruitful perhaps would be a deeper study and comparison with early Christian descriptions of the sky, for example the 6th century work of Saint Gregory of Tours, *De Cursu Stellarum*. In Christian monasteries the classic star map was a very practical tool for identifying stars in order to record the passage of time for the setting of night time observances and as a guide to the alignment of buildings.

Have I 'subverted the canon of Pictish symbols' by providing my own names for certain symbols? The modern names such as 'tuning-fork', 'flower' and 'dogs head' are not set in stone. Surely they are also based on speculative ideas about the less obviously naturalistic symbols. In the case of the 'tuning-fork' we have a symbol rather absurdly named after an object invented in the eighteenth century. If DH can provide evidence of the original Pictish names for the symbols, I am sure we will all be astounded.

A forum has been started at <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pictish-constellations>> for anyone who wishes to join in further discussion.

Yours etc, *Heather Martin*

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## Pictavia appeal

The administrator of Pictavia is hoping to sign up to the Scottish Archeology Month events programme and wonders whether any members might be able to give craft demonstrations etc during the month of September. If anyone is able to help, please contact:

Ann Butler, Marketing Officer (Tourism)  
Angus Council, Economic Development  
County Buildings  
Market Street  
Forfar  
Angus DD8 3WD

Tel: 01307 473345 Fax: 01307 467357

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## Groam House Museum

Talks in Fortrose Community Theatre (01381 621252) at 7.30pm. Admission £3.00 (Members £1.50). Talks on Thursdays except Friday 18 July. Dates may change – please check beforehand to avoid disappointment.

26 June

*Red Squirrels in the Highlands*

Ian Collier (Chairman, Highland Red Squirrel Group)

27 June

*Natural History walk in Rosehaugh Estate:  
Squirrels and Trees†*

Led by Ian Collier, & Juliet Robinson (Red Squirrel Conservation Officer for the Highlands)

† Please contact the Museum for details of where and when to meet

18 July

**Annual Academic Lecture**

*Forging the Picts: Crafts and Craftsmanship  
in Early Historic Scotland*

Dr Andrew Heald (AOC Archaeology Group)

14 August

*Memories of Rosehaugh*  
Kath MacLeman of Avoch

18 September

*Foul disease, fuel crisis and fuilzie: burgh  
life in northern Scotland c.1500–c.1800*

Richard Oram

23 October

*Roderick Murchison – the Black Isle's  
other Geologist*

Dr Eric Grant of Tarradale (birthplace of Murchison)

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Email: [curator@groamhouse.org.uk](mailto:curator@groamhouse.org.uk)

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

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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.