The Pictish Arts Society

NEWSLETTER 91 SUMMER 2019

Spring Lecture Series

15 February 2019 – Dr Gordon Noble

The development of the Pictish symbol system: nscribing identity beyond the edges of Empire.

The 2019 Spring lecture series got off to an earlier start than usual with a bonus lecture in February, given by Gordon Noble. As members will know, Gordon's Northern Picts project has been making some remarkable archaeological discoveries over the last few years and he has been a regular contributor to PAS events, keeping us informed of his progress. This talk was drawn from a recently published article, written by Gordon, Martin Golberberg (NMS) and Derek Hamilton (NTS), which drew on recent research and excavation.

Précising the historical record of the Picts, Gordon described the symbol stones as an 'iconic element' of the Picts' archaeological record. He summarised the important work done by antiquarian scholars in noting the symbol stones' geographical distribution and the pairing of the symbols. Since then there have been numerous attempts to decipher their meaning and interpretations have ranged from boundary markers, religious icons (both pagan and Christian), marks of rank or tribal identity, signifiers of marriage alliances, memorials to the dead and, as Gordon put it, numerous 'fringe' theories.

The current consensus among most scholars is that the symbols represent a form of writing, as yet undeciphered. Pictish symbols can therefore be viewed in context with other forms of writing that were developing at the time on the northern fringes of the Roman Empire, such as runes and ogham. As is the case with these other forms of writing, paired Pictish symbols were probablynused to represent personal names, but unlike runes or ogham, symbols do not represent an alphabetical script. The theory of personal names is arguably backed up by the many examples of symbols carved in close proximity to specific figures on so-called Class II sculpture (see below).

The dating of Pictish symbols has always been a matter of great debate. In *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), Allen sets out a classification system still widely used today, with Class I monuments (usually unshaped boulders with incised symbols) being assigned to the 7th–8th centuies AD and Class II monuments (usually shaped stones with symbols often carved in relief, alongside a Christian cross, figurative carving and ornament) assigned to the 9th–10th centuries. Other scholars such as Charles Thomas have argued for an earlier date for some incised symbols but contextual dating remains elusive and so dating and chronology still relies heavily on art historical interpretation. It is that issue which Gordon, along with Martin and Derek are seeking to address.

One of the few Pictish symbol stones to be found in modern times in an archaeological context is the Dairy Park stone found in the policies of Dunrobin Castle, Sutherland in 1977. Found in association with a cairn containing a female skeleton, the excavation yielded two radiocarbon dates ranging from AD635–770, which Gordon described as low precision. An ox phalange (toe bone) from the Broch of Burrian, Orkney, carved with a crescent and V-rod and mirror case gave a C14 date of AD570–655 whilst a bone pin from Sanday, Orkney, (also carved from an ox phalange) decorated with a double disc and Z-rod gave a date of AD410–570.

Three of the stones from Dunnicaer have long been considered as bearing early or proto-Pictish symbols: a crescent with overlapping triangle, two adjacent but unconnected circles with central dots and a rudimentary fish. A fourth stone, possibly re-worked in modern times, has a version of a double disk and Z-rod and a fifth has a convincing double disk and Z-rod on one face and flower symbol on the other. They were found in 1832, apparently built into a wall which enclosed the sea stack. Gordon's excavation of Dunnicaer found the remains of that wall and the dates recovered from the site show it being abandoned by AD345–425. So although these stones cannot be dated with absolute certainty, they would seem to have been set into the wall sometime before that time. Similarly simple Pictish symbols can also be found in Sculptor's Cave, Covesea in Moray and in the caves at East Wemyss, Fife, and both of these sites have yielded dates of the mid-3rd to late-4th century AD.

The excavations at Rhynie show the Craw Stane set up at the entrance to the palisaded building, along with a second but now missing stone (Rhynie Man was found down slope from here so is a possible contender). Dates recovered from this site show it abandoned by the end of the 6th century AD at the latest. A series of moulds found at Rhynie would have cast small animal figures stylistically very similar to animal images carved in stone.

Some scholars have proposed the theory that Pictish symbols arrived on the scene fully fledged and ornate from the 7th century onwards, derived from Christian manuscripts, and that they became simpler over time. Archaeological evidence is increasingly pointing towards a different paradigm. The evidence from Dunnicaer suggests a tentative symbolic language developing perhaps around the 3rd century AD. By the end of the 4th century, small symbols with no

ornament are being carved into the walls of Sculptor's and Wemyss Caves. The more precise date obtained from the bone pin from Orkney shows the symbols remaining relatively simple through the 5th century. The large and confidently carved symbols of the Craw Stane at Rhynie show this language in full flow by the 6th century. The Dairy Park stone at Dunrobin in Sutherland indicates that internal ornament in the symbols arrives between the mid-7th to mid-8th century. *JB*

To see the published article by Gordon Noble, Martin Goldberg and Derek Hamilton in full, visit:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/development-of-the-pictish-symbol-system-inscribing-identity-beyond-the-edges-of-empire/4F09B9C943A1C29F226591A20BEC5248>

And the additional tables:

<https://static.cambridge.org/resource/id/urn:cambridge.org:id:binary:20181029163348811-0396:S0003598X18000686:S0003598X18000686sup001.pdf >

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15 March 2019 – Dr James Bruhn

Roman frontiers and the creation of new societies in the lands beyond: A shift to pastoral farming and social re-structuring caused by the building of Hadrian's Wall?

PAS welcomed back Dr James Bruhn of Historic Environment Scotland for the second talk of the Spring lecture series. James' paper was an adaptation of one he had given the previous year with Dr Nick Hodgson, principal *archaeological* projects manager at Tyne and Wear Museums.

The native Iron Age settlement of pre-Roman northern England and southern Scotland followed a consistent pattern of square or rectangular enclosures with a single large roundhouse in the centre. The archaeological remains of such settlements are plentiful, often visible as cropmarks. The investigation of these sites in the first half of the 20th century, prior to the discovery of C1, turned up very little in the way of dateable finds so it remained very difficult to date them with any accuracy. This type of settlement appeared to come to a very sudden halt and although there was no real evidence to back it up, the suspicion was that this rapid change was probably connected to the Roman invasion.

Since the early 2000s, an increase in developer-funded archaeology has changed this picture. Larger areas have been excavated, revealing much more detail and, crucially, resources are now available to obtain large numbers of radiocarbon dates. This has revealed that the sudden change in settlement pattern and type did not coincide with the Roman invasion in the middle of the 1st century AD as previously thought, but rather with the building of Hadrian's Wall in the first quarter of the 2nd century AD.

From this point, there is a divergence of settlement types north and south of the Wall. In the north, the traditional native settlement, enclosures with a big roundhouse, is abandoned, the houses burnt and the enclosure ditches filled in. Meanwhile to the south, new types of site emerge using Roman materials and technologies. These settlements are much denser, showing people coming together in communities. Some, such as Hardwick Park near Sedgefield, cover an area comparable with a Roman fort.

Whilst those living south of the Wall increasingly adopt Roman ways, many of the abandoned sites north of the wall undergo changes. Sites such as St George's Hospital, Pegswood, Huckhoe and Castle O'er display these changes clearly. Here the addition of large enclosures shows a change in use from settlement to livestock management on a large scale. Although it is early days, evidence of a similar pattern is emerging just beyond the Roman frontier in Germany.

Are sites such as Pegswood and Castle O'er evidence of the native tribes living north of the Wall coming together to trade with the Roman frontier, cashing in on a new and substantial market for cattle? Or do they point to a native population under the Roman thumb, supplying cattle as a tax?

Up to around AD160, Roman goods such as Samian ware, glass bangles and metalwork are widely distributed among native Iron Age sites. After this date, objects are targeted on fewer sites and are more exotic in quality, with a concentration on personal ornament, drinking and feasting. This is perhaps an indication of new emerging centres of social authority, such as Traprain Law. The high status goods seem to stay at these centres of power with little or no evidence of trickle down into surrounding society.

From AD160–230, the distribution of Roman coin hoards seem to be concentrated in the heartland of 'Maeatae' and 'Caledonii' tribes in the north, an attempt no doubt to placate them. Was it the case that around the middle of the 2nd century AD, the south of Scotland was taxed by their Roman overlords whilst the north was bribed to keep it sweet? By the middle of the 3rd century AD there is much less evidence of silver and coin hoards being sent north, so perhaps at this point the Romans shifted the focus of their attention to the southern tribes, bribing them to act as a buffer for an increasingly hostile north?

The traditional view of Hadrian's Wall was that the indigenous population either side of it was little affected by the Roman presence and many Iron Age specialists see the so-called 'Roman Iron Age' in Scotland as a seamless continuity from the pre-Roman Iron Age. In Britain, many Roman archaeologists do not see social change beyond the frontier, except for the simplistic notion that tribes coalesced into larger political entities in the late-Roman period, based on textual evidence (cue the appearance of the Picts in AD297). Romanists

account for the comings and goings of the Roman army and their choice of frontier lines in purely Roman political terms. These models fail to explain why 'barbarians' wanted to attack the Empire, or the dislocation in the archaeological settlement record north of the Wall.

The structure and culture of societies beyond Roman frontiers were transformed by the very presence of the empire and the precious metals, status objects, food, livestock and slaves that could be obtained from it. New social structures emerged, based on who could obtain and control these resources. Raids on the Roman Empire became a permanent and integral part of the economy and culture of the societies of NE Scotland. *JB*

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19 April 2019 – Dr Adrián Maldonado
Pictish Art after the Picts:
new work on the archaeology of Alba

A full house welcomed Adrián Maldonado back to deliver the April lecture. Adrián is the current Glenmorangie Research Fellow based at the National Museum of Scotland. Following on from the work of Martin Goldberg and Alice Blackwell, Adrián's research will cover the 9–12th centuries, from the Viking invasions to the establishment of the kingdom of Scotland as we know it. So the first part of the title of his talk, Pictish Art after the Picts, sums up perfectly the transition he'll be looking at. He started by acknowledging that, for many people, the sculpture of this period is often characterised as 'late', which to some is a euphemism for 'rubbish'. But as he went on to demonstrate, this is far from the truth.

One of the first problems Adrián has to deal with is what to call Scotland during this period. Pictland is on the way out by the latter part of the 9th century but Alba still only relates to part of the area he is concerned with. His work is also encumbered to a certain degree by the constraints of the existing definitions and categories within the National Museum. He pointed out that a display of sculpture in the NMS entitled 'The Pictish Church' actually included many post-Pictish stones that would come within his project.

Looking at examples of Viking sculpture, Adrián demonstrated how wide-ranging it is stylistically. The Vikings' adoption of Christianity is mirrored by their adoption of different Insular art styles and their sculpture reflects this. From the Shetland Islands to Iona to Whithorn, Viking sculpture reflects many different influences. This variability is also reflected in other aspects of their material culture, such as metalwork.

Turning his attention to the large assemblage of sculpture from St Andrews (the second largest in Scotland, after Iona and the largest in mainland Britain) Adri·n noted that upright grave markers predominate – a few freestanding crosses but mostly cross slabs. This is very much in keeping with Pictish sculpture in general but stylistically, most of the cross slabs at St Andrews may well be post-Pictish. There is certainly a complete absence of Pictish symbols on the sculpture as it survives although we should be cautious of taking this at face value, given that the vast majority of the stones are incomplete.

Many of the St Andrews cross slabs bear a cross on both sided but Adrián noted the distinct difference in where the carving ends on each face. One side often starts higher up the slab than the other. He also noted that although the house style uses a relatively small set of components, these are assembled in a modular fashion. So although there is an initial appearance of mass production and lack of variety, no two cross slabs are actually identical.

Picking up on this modularity, Adrián then pointed out similar trends with the Viking Age sculpture of the Govan School, where a limited palette of motifs is recycled in different arrangements. Backtracking to Iona, he compared a recumbent cross slab with Gaelic inscription to a Viking version, complete with runic dedication. This cultural melting pot is also evident on a cross slab from Bressay in Shetland, where a Pictish ogham inscription includes the Norse word 'DATTR' meaning daughter.

Although it is home to some of the earliest Christian sculpture in Scotland, much of the sculpture in Galloway, and certainly the Whithorn School, dates from the Viking Age. The distribution of church sites (and their associated cross slabs) shows the church formalising itself into parishes at this time. A similar pattern can be seen in the north west of England around this time. So the Church did more than merely 'survive' the Viking Age.

Looking at motifs and patterns, Adrián then contemplated when these might have gone out of use. It is generally accepted that Pictish symbols cease to appear on sculpture by the early part of the 9th century. The spiral motif, an integral component of Pictish sculpture, lasts a little longer, appearing on a variety of late Pictish or early post-Pictish crosses. There is extensive use of spirals at St Andrews but late examples also can also be found at St Vigeans, Kingoldrum, Kirriemuir and Ardchattan in the west. But even this feature loses its currency.

Later on, different motifs become more prominent. Did the lozenge at the centre of a carpet page depicting the four Evangelists in the Book of Kells become a Christological symbol appearing on sculpture from Kirkmadrine and at Brechin Cathedral Round Tower? Another page in the Book of Kells depicting the Virgin Mary shows her wearing a lozenge-shaped brooch. Do numerous Viking Age pins with lozenge terminals mirror this motif?

There was never a preponderance of freestanding crosses in Pictland but there seems to have been an increase in their prevalence in the post-Pictish era. In examining these, Adrián focussed on a group depicting Christ crucified, an image that is new on

the scene. Fragments from Abernethy, Kingoldrum, Monifieth (2), Goodlyburn and Kinneil all depict the Crucifixion, as does the complete Camus Cross. It also features in the most prominent place on the sculptured doorway of Brechin Cathedral Round Tower.

Contrasting with these freestanding crosses, which are all centred on south Angus, south Perthshire and north Fife, Adrián looked at the prevalence of recumbent stones in other parts of Scotland. St Andrews has a few, Iona has more but they are plentiful at Govan and in Highland Perthshire.

Summing up his ongoing research, Adrián described his aim to define a new paradigm for pre-Romanesque sculpture, where the designs are driven by modularity rather than motifs. What can we learn by examining function and context? With a move away from upright cross slabs, could recumbent stones and freestanding crosses be considered as the spirit of the age? I think we all look forward to the conclusions Adrián draws. *JB*

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17 May 2019 – Dr Kelly Kilpatrick

Manuscripts and Writing in Pictland:
New Thoughts on the Newton Stone Inscriptions

Kelly Kilpatrick, research associate at the department of Name Studies at Nottingham University, gave the last in the Spring 2019 lecture series with an in-depth look at an inscribed stone at Newton House in Aberdeenshire.

The Newton Stone was uncovered during road-building at the Aberdeenshire farm of Pitmachie in 1804. During the 1830s the stone was moved about a mile to the garden at Newton House, near Insch; hence the name.

It is very unfortunate that the current owner of Newton House appears unwilling to allow researchers access to the stone. Consequently, Kelly was forced to rely on existing drawings, photographs and a cast in the National Museum of Scotland. Obviously, this means there are no laser scans which could perhaps reveal hitherto undetected details.

The Newton Stone has an ogham inscription on its left hand face. This inscription runs the length of the stone but untypically turns and loops back up, extending its length by about a third. (A similarly looped ogham came to light on the Dyce cross slab when it was removed from the wall of the church several years back.)

The Newton Stone has a second very unusual inscription in an unknown cursive script, adjacent to the top third of the ogham.

Detailed recording by RCAHMS in the 1990s noted the presence of a Pictish mirror symbol pecked on a small facet low down on the right hand side as well as a (prehistoric?) spiral near the foot of the stone on the back.

Dealing first with the ogham, Kelly provided an extensive list of various readings of the inscription, including from the 19th century:

Skene (1862-4)
UD DDAROT NUN NGORRMAONN EAGE JOSA EI

Brash (1872-4)
AIDDARCUN FEAN FORRENNI EA (I or R)S IOSSAR

Southesk (1883-4)
(A)IDDAI QNEAN FORRERI IBH UA IOSIE

Nicholson (1896: 7)
AEDD AIQ NNN VOR RENN I PUA ROSIR

And from the 20th century:

Browne (1921)
AIDDAI FORTRENNI QNNN UA IOSII

Diack (1922 and 1944)
IDDIAQNNN VORRENNI CI OSIST

Macalister (1940)
IDDARRN(o)NN VORRENN IPUOR

Forsyth (1996)
IDDARRNNNVORENNIxO(t/c)(c/e) (i/r)OSR(r/n)

Cox (1999)
IDDARQNNNVORRENNIKOTC-ROSQC

Noting the component IDDARRNNN which features in a number of readings, Kelly listed several other stones with similar inscriptions (Brodie, Scoonie and Fordoun). The Pictish name *Edarn* or *Idarn* can be identified here, deriving from Ethernan, but Kelly dismissed a connection to the early saint of that name as unlikely. The component VORENN can also be connected to a Pictish name.

Turning her attention to the second inscription, Kelly listed some of the theories of the antiquarian scholars. Stuart (1821) was of the view that it was neither Greek nor Roman but was perhaps a Scandinavian language. Mill (1863) thought it might be Phoenician via Hebrew. Skene thought it a debased form of Latin, although Macalister (1935) asserted that although the characters looked Greek, the inscription was a modern forgery.

Kelly then drew a parallel with the Hackness Cross, a fragment of Anglo-Saxon sculpture from north Yorkshire. It is unusual in having multiple inscriptions in a variety of scripts: Latin (4), Anglo-Saxon runes (1), Hahal or Hauchal (cryptic) runes (1), and angular markings akin to pseudo-ogham. This assortment of inscriptions and especially the presence of cryptic runes led her to believe that the Anglo-Saxons who created it may have had access to some sort an Abecedarium, a manuscript which compiles alphabets in various scripts.

Originally focussed on the three sacred languages, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, many medieval Abecedaria compare other languages and scripts, such as ogham, numerous forms of runes, and even exotic alphabets. They were used as a teaching aid, allowing their owners to access a variety of inscriptions and written material. They could also be used for cryptography, putting something into a script that only certain others could access.

The 9th century *Abecedarium Nordmannicum* in St Gallen, Switzerland, contains Hebrew characters, Greek, Anglo-Saxon Runes and Norse Runes. A page from another Abecedarium in Bern, Switzerland displays the Greek and Hebrew alphabets as well as pseudo-runes. Another page from this volume shows the ogham alphabet along with other alphabets, some of whose characters are very similar to letter forms used in the Newton Stone inscription. Is it possible that this inscription was carved by someone with access to or knowledge of scripts recorded in an Abecedarium? Kelly showed some examples of Abecedaria from England and Ireland that are certainly closer to home. *JMcK & JB*

Pilgrims from Pictland? How features of the East may have ended up on Meigle 1

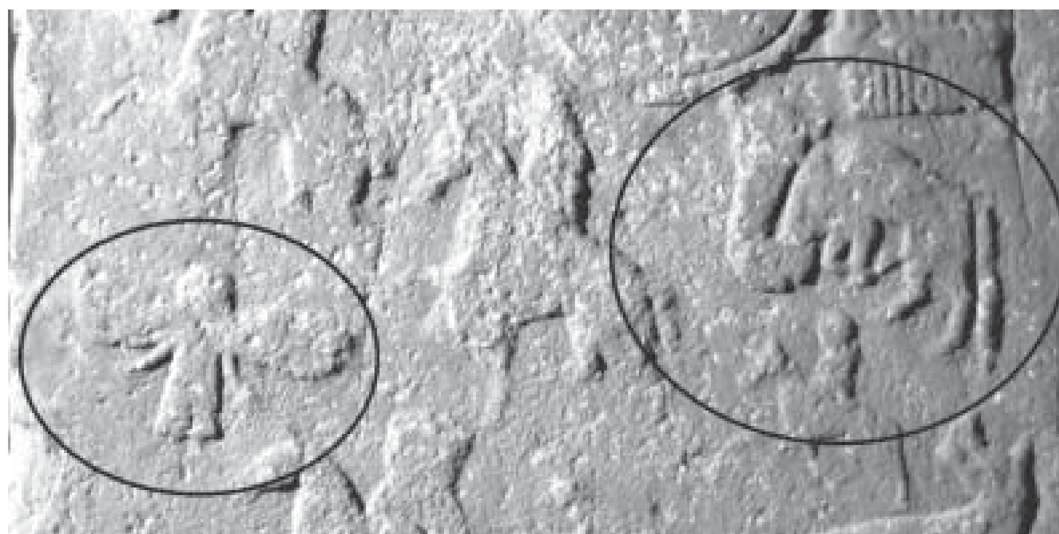
On the back of Meigle 1 [non cross-side] are two images found on no other Pictish stone to date. The first is an animal, recognisable to modern eyes as a camel, front legs folded and hind legs straight, which is indeed how camels behave. The second is a winged figure, hovering in front of a female rider; it is quite unlike angels on other Pictish stones.

Anna Ritchie suggested 'the Persian god and camel must have been copied from some imported treasure.'[1] Jill Harden asked, 'Where did the craftsman get his illustrations for a kneeling camel and broad-winged 'god' or angel? These are figures from beyond Europe. He may have marvelled at the very existence of these creatures on an ivory casket in a monastic treasury somewhere. Or the cleric may have seen them in a sacred manuscript.' [2]

We know that long-distance trade was taking place across and around Europe and Asia. Recent excavations underline that Pictland had plenty of exposure to the outside world. At Rhynie, for example, Dr Gordon Noble found Mediterranean

pottery, probably for storing wine, and fragments of glass vessels from France which may have been used for drinking it. Travelling merchants no doubt brought to Pictland exotic objects or told stories of the animals and features of foreign lands.

However, it is also possible that some Picts saw camels with their own eyes. Pilgrimage to the Christian holy places in Palestine was well established in Europe from the fourth century onwards. In 386 St Jerome wrote from Bethlehem to



a friend in Rome, encouraging her to make a trip to the Holy Land: 'Every man of note in Gaul hastens hither. The Briton, 'sundered from our world', no sooner makes progress in religion than he leaves the setting sun in quest of a spot of which he knows only through Scripture and common report.'[3]

Of course, St Jerome's comments predate conversion to Christianity among the Picts, which is commonly thought to have occurred between the 5th and 7th centuries. But it seems possible that high-status Picts, when they followed other nations in enthusiastic conversion to Christianity, did what others had been doing for years and set out to visit the holy sites for themselves.

Any journey to Palestine would have been dangerous, arduous and expensive, presumably possible only for the elite, but St Jerome in his day had declared it essential for any Christian: 'it is still your duty as believers to worship on the spot where the Lord's feet once stood and to see for yourselves the still fresh traces of His birth, His cross, and His passion.'[4] He built lodgings for arriving pilgrims next to his monastery. Lodgings were set up in many places en route and beside the holy places to house the influx of international pilgrims.

When Jerusalem came under Persian control in 614, there was a great massacre of Christians. The city was briefly regained by the Byzantine emperor, then reconquered by the Muslims in 636. But from then on Christians were tolerated and research has concluded that 'pilgrimage was not interrupted'.[5] Churches were rebuilt, new hostels for pilgrims established, gazetteers written to guide the tourists. There must have been mingling between Christians and Muslims with opportunities for the travellers to see symbols of other cultures. We know this because there are written accounts by various pilgrims over the following centuries.[6]

No matter what century is ascribed to the carving of Meigle 1, pilgrimages to the Holy Land were taking place at that time. Pious Picts may also have made the journey East, bringing back first-hand experience of camels and knowledge of a foreign angel.[7]

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Notes

1 Anna Ritchie, *Picts*, Historic Scotland 2004, p.58. Persian god - see online 'Faravahar' and 'fravashi' (guardian angel) for similarity

2 Jill Harden, *The Picts*, Discover Scottish History, Historic Scotland 2010, p.72

3 *The Sacred Writings of St Jerome*, Letter XLVI, trans. WH Fremantle and P Schaff, Jazzybee Verlag 2017

4 Ibid., Letter XLVII

5 John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Aris & Phillips 2002, p.18

6 Yitzhab Hen, 'Holy Land Pilgrims from Frankish Gaul' in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 1998, vol. 76, 291-293. Bernard, a monk from Mont-St-Michel, provided a travelogue ca.870: he took ship from Italy to Alexandria, visited holy sites in Egypt, before riding through the desert on camels and donkeys to Palestine

7 Thomas O'Loughlin, *Adomnan and the Holy Places*, Bloomsbury 2007
Adomnan may have spread interest in pilgrimage by telling his readers that Bishop Arculf had visited Jerusalem about 670 and dictated his eye-witness story to Adomnan (even if this is a literary fiction)

Marianna Lines – A legacy

Marianna was one of the founder members of the Pictish Arts Society, an idea that grew out of a chance encounter in Edinburgh betweenn her and Stuart McHardy back in the 1980s. Most folk in the Society who are familiar with Marianna and her work might be wondering what has happened to it all, and to her Wash-house Studio. Here are a few answers.

For the past 10 years or more I, along with several others, had been unsuccessfully trying to persuade Marianna to catalogue her work and give serious consideration to how it might be properly conserved for the future. Since she died, I have been working closely with her family to help dispose of her property, make an inventory, and more recently clear and disperse her possessions. There was talk of maintaining the studio as a museum for her work, but issues of on-going maintenance of the property and the need for the long-term conservation of her work made this a non-starter.

The house and studio have recently been sold to a young couple from Edinburgh who are just about to start a family.

Marianna's brother and I had given much serious thought to how to keep her collection together and looked after in the long term. We both favoured some form of organisation or institute that recognised the collection's historic importance, together with the expertise and funding to be able to conserve the fabrics in perpetuity. Although we agreed it would be ideal if the collection could remain in Scotland, we were prepared to seek a home for the collection anywhere within the UK, Europe or the USA.

Fortunately, our first choice was to approach Historic Environment Scotland (HES), which we did through John Borland. In the meantime, I enlisted the help of Niall Robertson to begin a catalogue of her textiles. These included examples of prehistoric rock art from Scotland, Northumberland, Brittany, New Mexico and Easter Island, together with a great many Pictish and medieval images, 16th–19th century headstones from Scotland and New England and more recent sculptured stones. Over four sessions we identified most, but not all, of over 400 pieces of work – a task that would have been impossible without Niall's expertise.

In December 2018 I was contacted by Veronica Fraser of HES and we made an initial visit to the Wash-house so she could get some idea of the range and scale of work. At the start of 2019 Veronica returned with her husband Iain and we were able to examine about a quarter of the material assembled. Subsequently, arrangements were made to take the entire collection to HES in Edinburgh. Two days before collection I discovered another 100 pieces in the house which we had overlooked. Last month Marianna's brother formally handed over the 500+ pieces to the care of HES.

It is expected that work will start on the collection this autumn. Our expectation is that in due course the images will be digitised and put on CANMORE, so they will be available for everyone to view and enjoy.

Marianna's journals, diaries and artbooks have gone to her family in the States. Many of her own framed pieces of artwork have gone to friends and neighbours.

Pete Kinnear

Back to front, or front to rear?

I always have an uneasy feeling about referring to Pictish stones as having 'fronts' and 'backs'. It is preferable, I feel, to refer instead to them having two sides, which can be differentiated by verbal means, thus avoiding having to make a judgement which is generally subjective and occasionally uncertain.

The problem does not arise with Class I stones, of course, and most of the time it†is not seen as being a contentious matter regarding Class II stones either, but there are quite a number of intermediate stones where it can be a matter of debate. These might be referred to as Class I+, Class I/II, or even Class I/ Class I/II, such are the complexities of the transitional period. (More on this another time *in extenso.*)

In pure Class II examples, there is no denying that the Christian cross is the dominant single artistic element, and so, other factors being equal, it may be considered appropriate to designate the cross side as the 'front', in which case the side containing the symbols and a narrative scene etc would be the 'back'. (Pagans may disagree.)

Such a stance has not always had universal support. Angus Butterworth once dismissed the notion of 'cross = front' as no more than 'pious etiquette'. Such objections may be regarded as unimportant, even hair-splitting, but there are instances when the distinction is important in determining the way in which certain stones should be viewed if we are to understand the Pictish psyche which created them. One crucial factor may be whether or not the two sides of a stone are contemporary; in some cases they clearly are not.

Probably the best known example of an unsynch-ronised stone is the large slab located in the garden of Glamis Manse. One side is clearly Class I, while the other is more or less Class II, though jamming together the symbols (still incised) and two narrative scenes in close proximity to the cross. The sculptor had no option, considering that the reverse was already occupied by symbols of Class I character and date.

These considerations lead to the inescapable conclusion that the two sides of this stone were executed at different times, meaning that the Class I side pre-dates the Class II(ish) side. Where now do we stand on the issue of 'front' and 'back'? This was exemplified in an article in the last issue of the newsletter, No. 90, which has triggered this response. In the final part of her fascinating study of 'Ecclesiastics on Pictish Sculpted Stones', Sarah Louise Coleman illustrated the cross-side of this stone, captioning it as the 'front'.

Here we see the problem raised by the relative chronology of the two sides. Yes, it can be argued strongly that this is the way the stone should be viewed today, and for the last millennium and more – but that was not always so. There was an earlier time when the Class I side was the 'front', by definition, because it was the *only* side. Such was the situation for perhaps several decades, or longer, and it remains chronologically in first place.

The same article also illustrates the non cross-side of the giant Class III stone in Meigle Museum, the caption referring to it as being the 'reverse', but it has not always been viewed that way. It is now commonly known as the 'Daniel stone', because the central figure appears to be being licked by lions, suggesting the Biblical tale of Daniel in the Lions' Den (though Coleman promotes St Antony in his stead).

Traditionally, however, the figure's flowing garb was taken to represent that of a woman, reflecting the old Arthurian legend of Vanora (the Britonnic Queen Guinevere) being savaged to death by wild beasts as punishment for her illicit relationship with Mordred, King of the Picts. This stone previously stood in Meigle Churchyard adjacent to a mound captioned on Ordnance Survey maps as 'Vanora's Tomb', and called 'Vanora's Mound' on the modern signage. Decades ago, one of Historic Environment Scotland's many predecessors produced postcards of the stone in question showing it in Meigle Museum, the caption reading 'Queen Vanora's Stone'. Impressive though the cross is on the other side with its 'ring of glory', the Vanora image would have determined which side constituted the 'front' of this slab in many people's eyes over a long period of time.

On the subject of which side came first, this is vital to the dating of the stone at Kirkton of Aberlemno.

Its cross is arguably the finest in the entire field of Pictish sculptural art, yet it is best known for the battle scene which occupies most of the other side (which may well represent the Battle of Dunnichen, which took place not far away). Virtually alone among Pictish stones, we have the opportunity here to apply an absolute, albeit approximate, date, if we allow that the two sides were not executed at the same time (and there is abundant evidence to demonstrate that this is indeed the case).

A cogent argument can be made for the battle scene and symbols having been carved before the present cross-side, or at least some of it, so should the battle side be regarded as the 'front'? Nineteenth-century antiquarians evidently thought so; Gershom Cumming, illustrating the three Aberlemno stones in an imaginary grouping in 1848, chose to show the battle-side rather than the cross-side of the Kirkton stone, while Patrick Chalmers in that same year illustrated both sides, choosing to give precedence to the battle-side. For many scholars past and present, that is the 'front'.

Still in Aberlemno, the other great slab near the Crosston throws up a different dilemma. Sarah Coleman illustrates what she terms the 'reverse', being the non cross-side. Like its neighbour, this one also has a fine cross, though of a different type (possibly an enlarged representation of a portable hand-held bejewelled cross), but the other side in arguably the more important.

Above the narrative scenes are two gigantic symbols; most stones of this *genre* are up north in the Black Isle area (4), the other southerly one being Meigle 1. Robert Stevenson has argued that these immense symbols were being used as badges of Pictish identity, a final expression of Pictish independence before their nation was lost to the Scots. The symbol-bearing sides of such stones may therefore have been viewed as the 'fronts' by the last of the Pictish nationalists.

More examples may be cited, but the above discourse illustrates how easy it is to allow a first impression to dictate a questionable conclusion. Of course, on many occasions, such judgements are able to stand up well to scrutiny, but equally there may be times when they can lead to deductions of a dubious nature. Attempting to second-guess the intentions of Pictish sculptors is always liable to be a game of chance, so on matters such as determining the question of which is the 'front' and which the 'back' of many stones, I would advocate that it is only prudent to employ the kind of objectivity which using terms such as 'cross-side' and 'symbol/narrative side' can bring.

Graeme Cruickshank

Following the theft of the Early Christian handbell from Fortingall last year, it is sad to report the loss of another, this time from Eilean Fhianain (St Finan's Isle), Loch Shiel.

Forthcoming Events

Autumn Lecture Series
Brechin Town House Museum

Friday 20 September
Dr Alan Macniven

Friday 18 October
Dr Alex Woolf

Friday 22 November
Dr Jane Geddes

PAS Annual Conference
Forfar 4–6 October 2019

Friday 4 October
Evening Reception (details TBC)

Saturday 5 October
Reid Hall, Forfar

Conference & AGM (details TBC)

Sunday 6 October
Fieldtrip (details TBC)

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The deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 24 August 2019

Please email contributions to the editor:
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