THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER 79 SUMMER 2016

And Another Strider?

PAS Newsletter 75 (Summer 2015) contained the article 'Another Strider' which discussed the repeat appearances of a solitary 'pedestrian hunter' who, weapons in hand, vigorously crosses Pictish cross slabs on the trail of assorted animals. He dominates Kirriemuir 2, Eassie and Glamis 4 (and Golspie?). He appears in a smaller but related version on the Nigg cross slab. Clearly, he must have been a favoured character and enjoyed wide currency.

1 *Fragment, Invermay Cross*

2 *Drawing by Ian Scott, Invermay Cross*

In the exhibition 'Cradle of Scotland' a worn fragment of the Invermay cross slab is on display, dated to the 8th or 9th centuries. It shows a striding figure, with shield in one hand and indeterminate weapon (axe?) in the other. Like the Pictish examples mentioned above, he moves from left to right and he follows on the heels of an animal. Although he is small in comparison to the suggested size of the cross slab, and so does not dominate the picture like the above examples, this looks like another representation of the solitary 'pedestrian hunter'.

If so, it would extend this Pictish character's range geographically further to the south and west. It would be further proof of his widespread popularity and his staying power. *Elspeth Reid*

Forthcoming Event

The 2016 PAS conference will take place in Inverness on Saturday 8th October. Entitled 'Northern Picts', it shall explore recent research and excavation. Speakers include Dr Gordon Noble, Cait McCullagh, Candy Hatherly, David Anderson and Leanne Demay, Daniel MacLean, Juliette Mitchell and Matt Ritchie.

For those arriving in Inverness on Friday 7th, there will be an opportunity to book a private evening visit to Inverness Museum, with its fine collection of local Pictish symbol stones. On Sunday 9th, there will be a field trip by coach, visiting some of the symbol stones to the north of Inverness in the morning and Groam House Museum in the afternoon.

Full program and booking details in the next newsletter.

Spring Lecture Series

18 March 2016 - John Sherriff
Pictish Forts: Some new thoughts as a result of recent research

Our March talk at Brechin Townhouse Museum was from John Sherriff, one of the most experienced archaeologists and archaeological surveyors working in Scotland today. In some respects, he could be considered a local boy, having started in the museum services in Angus, and for a number of years running a series of field walking events around Kinnettles. Having worked for many years with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, he is now with Historic Environment Scotland: the amalgamation of RCAHMS and Historic Scotland.

John narrowed down his talk to focus largely on Pictland north of the Forth and east of the Great Glen, and the period from the early first millennium to the mid-ninth century AD. He defined the 'Forts' of his title as structures having thick stone walls which were not designed to support a roof, preferably associated with a ditch or ditches. St. Bride's Ring at Kingennie was shown as a small example.

He then went on to describe the processes involved in surveying such monuments and how they have evolved over the years. (Details of the surveys of each of the sites mentioned can be found on **https://canmore.org.uk** together with photographs.) His first example was Castle Law, Forgandenny, which was surveyed by RCAHMS in the 1950s. At that time, the timber house platforms which overlie the walls were not remarked on: many archaeologists then believed that such unenclosed settlements were not to be found north of the Forth.

Nowadays, there is a more rigorous process that takes into account all the separate features. The site is visited in the late winter/early spring, when obscuring vegetation is at a minimum. All identifiable features on the ground are plotted using GPS (Global Positioning System), a process that requires a keen and experienced eye. The processed GPS data is used to create a basic but very accurate scaled framework. This is taken back on site, where standard symbols are used to create an accurate interpretive plan, depicting man-made features such as banks, ditches and scarps as well as the natural topography. Once again, an experienced eye is required to identify subtle nuances on the ground. Indeed it is standard practice for two people to work together to subject the interpretation process to a thorough check. By deciding which features overlie other, the team can separate out different phases of development.

At Forgandenny, at least four separate phases were recognised. All the fortifications appear to be prehistoric, with timber round houses overlying all phases of enclosure. So far, there is no evidence for much in the way of fort building, or the refurbishment of defensive enclosures between about the 2nd century BC and about the 6th century AD.

In 1949, RBK Stevenson excavated at Dalmahoy, in Midlothian. This came to be seen as the type site of the Dark Age nuclear forts, which had multiple enclosures spreading downhill from a citadel enclosure on the summit. Examples of nuclear forts include Dundurn and Dunadd. It was once believed that the shape of the hill was chosen to suit this hierarchical design of fort, but over the years evidence has accumulated to show that these were multiphase sites, sometimes with many years separating phases. The shape of the hill may have been far more important in defining the resulting pattern of fortifications than any desire to reflect social hierarchy.

At Trusty's Hill, near Anwoth, where Pictish symbols are carved on the rock by the entrance, Charles Thomas believed he had found features similar to a nuclear fort, although he obtained no dating evidence. A recent RCAHMS survey suggested that natural features or earlier phases of construction were responsible for many of the features that Thomas ascribed to a Dark Age period of building. Recent excavations have indeed confirmed that the site was first enclosed around 400 BC, then after a long period for which we have no evidence of occupation, the site was re-used in the 6th to 7th centuries AD. Evidence for metal working and imported pottery from this later period of occupation were found around the summit – a feature common with many of the hillforts reoccupied in the Pictish period. Craig Phadraig, near Inverness, is one such, where excavations in the 1970s showed that there was a 4th-century BC vitrified fort on this site, overlain by slight evidence for a Pictish period occupation in the form of

imported E-ware and a clay mould, recovered from a structure built into the ruinous wall. It is possible that there was some form of corresponding enclosure, perhaps simply a palisade on top of the remains of the ancient wall.

Murray Cook's work on the Hillforts of Strathdon project uncovered a similar pattern of early construction and occupation, followed by a long hiatus before later reoccupation in the Pictish period at several sites (Maiden Castle, Dunnideer, Bruce's Camp and Barra Hill). Recent work by Gordon Noble on what appeared on aerial photographs as an oval ditched enclosure at the Craw Stane near Rhynie suggests that this might have been a small fort, with two external ditches and a timber rampart. Imported pottery of the 6th century among other finds confirms its use in the Pictish period. This raises the questions of how many such enclosures seen on aerial photographs date from this period, and what their relationship is with hill-top forts. It seems to be stretching the imagination to suggest that there was a folk memory of the people who built, and abandoned, a fort on top of a hill eight hundred years previously. Another fort close to the region is at Dunnicaer, now a sea stack, but probably much eroded from the 3rd century AD when a series of buildings occupied its top.

Nearer to home, only two forts in Strathearn have as yet been shown to have been occupied in Pictish times: Dundurn at the west and Clatchard Craig in the east. At Jackschairs the ramparts fell into decay after around 500BC. Although at least one of two timber platforms overlies an earlier rampart, these were not excavated in the recent campaign there. Detailed survey was only carried out after the excavations. At Castle Craig, a timber palisaded enclosure overlay a massive stone broch, whose destruction debris included numerous 1st/2nd century artefacts. A Norse bronze pin was found at the site.

The last seventy years have seen the slow accumulation of information from research, speculative and rescue excavations. What have we learned in that time? Some hillforts were refurbished in the Pictish period, some appear to have been newly built. Keyhole excavation does not necessarily retrieve any dating information, or evidence as to the function of a site.

Very few of the hillfort sites excavated in Strathearn have yielded evidence of occupation during the early medieval period. Perhaps in future it may be possible to identify potential early medieval sites, and then to carry out detailed survey to target excavation within such sites in order to increase chances of obtaining dating or other occupation evidence.

As a final treat for a local audience, John briefly ran through the history of survey work at Finavon. He left us with a final question: does the pattern of evidence, suggesting that the reoccupation of hillforts in the Pictish period in Aberdeenshire was common, but lacking in Strathearn, mark a cultural difference as reflected by the prevalence of symbol stones in the north and crosses in the south?

Sheila Hainey

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15 April 2016 - Kelly Kilpatrick
The Representation of the 'Book' in Early Medieval Insular Sculpture

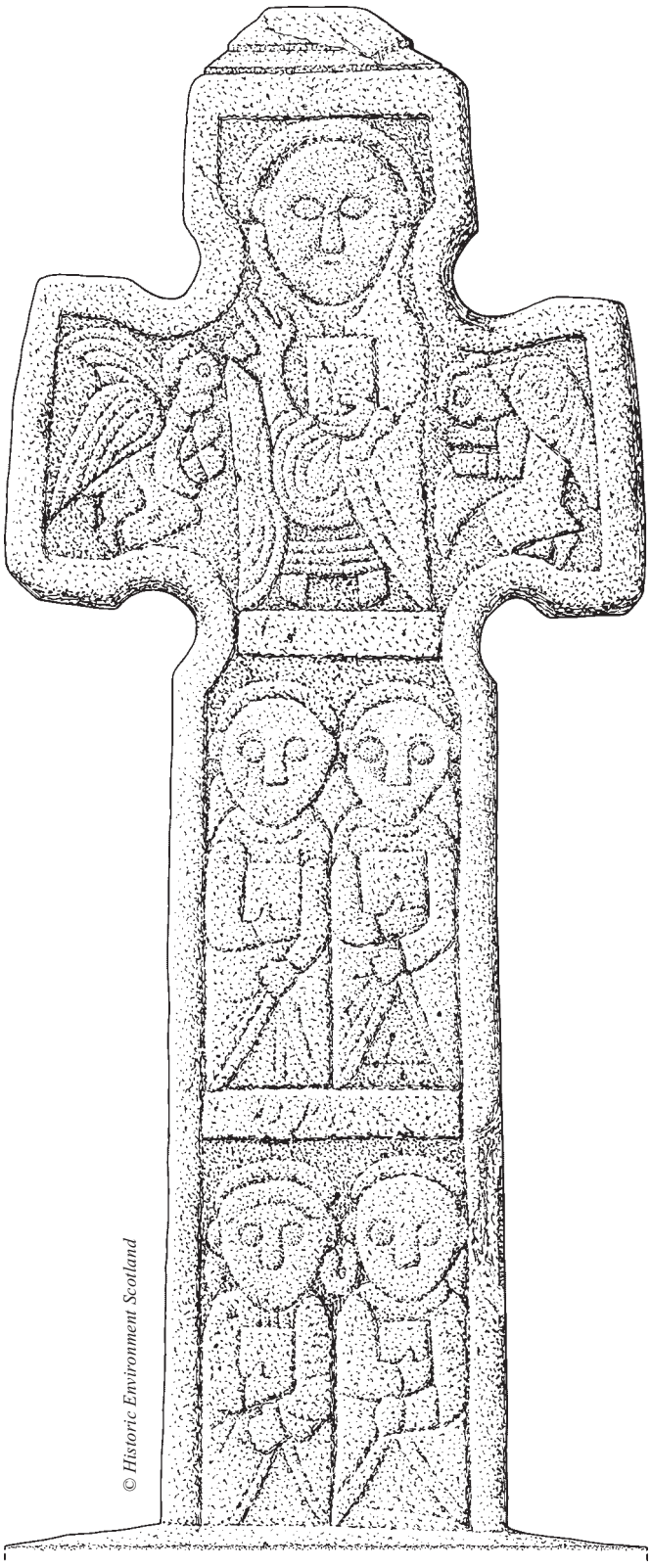
Kelly Kilpatrick is currently a Research Fellow in the University of Nottingham. She has degrees in History from the University of Montevallo, Alabama and from Oxford where she studied medieval languages and culture, and conducted research into place-names, landscapes and the role of place-names in medieval literature through the course of her D Phil. She is a member of PAS since she came to the UK, and it was a pleasure to have her talk on 'The Representation of the Book in Early Medieval Insular Sculpture'.

Her research follows on from the observation of the many representations of the book in Pictish sculpture, and the comparisons that they invite with such representations in other insular art. Can such comparisons lead to a better understanding of the role of the book in early medieval, and specifically Pictish, culture?

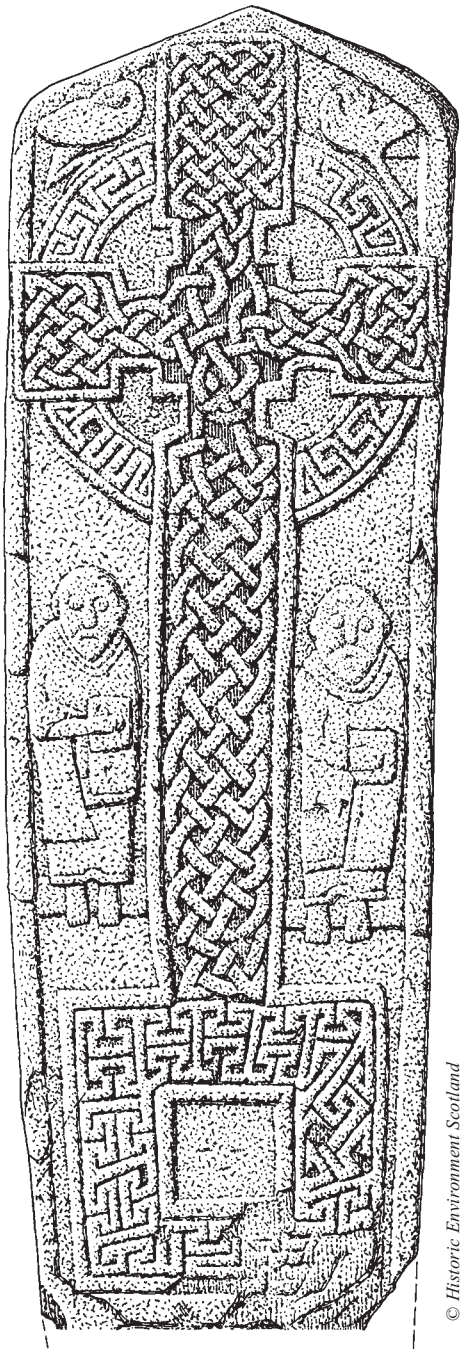
What role did books play during the conversion period? There was what might be defined as a 'book culture' within the Roman Empire, where scrolls were written and read widely among a certain level of the population. The Bible was venerated as the word of God. The four gospels in particular came to assume importance in the telling of the Christian story and were incorporated in the liturgy of the early church. A decline in literacy in 4th- and 5th-century Britain meant that, in this phase, the Anglo-Saxons left no books (although Gildas' works

show that literacy was not entirely lost in Britain).

Books, however, played an important role in what might be termed the 'missionary' period. Bede tells us that Augustine brought many books; a 7th-century Life of St Patrick describes him as leaving an altar stone and a book with



Camuston. SC1358366



Aldbar. SC1050149

his new converts as he set about founding new churches. The book seems to have been central to the process of establishing new Christian foundations. Few of the new converts would have been able to read. Indeed, Pope Gregory the Great advised preaching and painting as ways to educate the illiterate lay audience – but the clerics would be taught to read.

Books took on a quasi-magical significance. Production was controlled by the church, and the book carried or written by a saint often came to be regarded as a relic, an object venerable in itself and pointing the way to salvation. In early insular art, books were always shown as being held by someone or something. Objects were

St Vigeans 11. SC1052873

used to identify people; so books came to mark members of religious orders as surely as weapons designated warriors. One of the difficulties in studying Pictish sculpture is that carved surfaces are often heavily weathered and fragmented. What appear as incised rectangles are probably mostly closed books, but could have been small shrines.

However, it appears that books were often presented in a stylised way, as on St Vigeans 11, 17 and the reverse of 18. The book was held in the left hand, with the right hand (or the index and middle fingers of the right hand) resting on top. This pose is widely attested throughout the classical world in author portraits. The two fingers held closely together may represent the fingers of blessing, a gesture made with the right hand (thus the necessity for the left hand to support the book). It is possible that it has to do with the way in which, in late antiquity, the quill appears to have been held. Kelly showed many illustrations of this on crosses from Hoddom, Rothbury, Clonmacnoise and St Vigeans as well as in illuminated codices such as the Book of Kells, Codex Amiatinus and the Trier Gospels. On the Ruthwell, Camuston and Keills crosses, Christ holds a book in his left hand as he performs the blessing with his right.

Kirriemuir 1. SC769982

The book may be held in one hand, positioned in front of the chest – as at Aldbar, Kirriemuir 1, St Vigeans 11. The other hand may hold something else, possibly a crosier, at Kirriemuir and Aldbar. The hand which holds the book may vary according to the location of the figure on the cross-slab or on what is held in the other hand – again we had a large number of illustrations.

A very common pose in Northumbrian art has yet to be identified in Pictish carvings. This gesture is rare in Irish contexts too. Here, the book is held chest high by a standing figure or waist high by a seated one, in both hands. Prior to the 6th century, books were usually represented as open, while in later times they tend to be shown closed (perhaps emphasising

the mystery). There are possible Pictish examples of open books at Nigg and Aberlemno.

On a number of stones, books are associated with angel figures, as at Aberlemno and Brechin. Some show books associated with the symbols that had come to stand for the four apostles: the Man for Matthew, the Calf for Luke, the Lion for Mark and the Eagle for John. These can appear in early medieval art either with scrolls or codices: examples from Brechin, Devenish and a Carolingian manuscript were shown.

The infant Christ, Apostles and Saints are all sometimes depicted with a book in their hands. In a number of cases, the apostles are shown with books in their hands, looking towards Christ enthroned. On a few of the northern Anglo-Saxon crosses, the book is replaced by a scroll (Rothbury, Ruthwell and Bewcastle).

Satchels seem to be more of a Pictish phenomenon, and stones from Papil, Bressay, St Madoes and St Vigeans all depict hooded figures carrying satchels. It has been suggested that the satchel is a sign of a traveller, as possibly is the crosier. Are these pilgrims visiting a holy site, or are they itinerant clerics? Charles Thomas suggested that the panel from Papil might represent the founding father and his followers. Crosiers, also seen as symbolic of the shepherd's staff, became the stuff of hagiography, associated with miracles. Satchels, carrying books, also had their miracle tales. Adomnan tells how a book written by Columba survived immersion when the satchel it contained fell into a river. There are three surviving examples of Irish book satchels and one from Loch Glashan, and they do resemble the ones depicted on the stones. The satchel may be depicted as facing front over the chest, carried round the neck rather than over the shoulder. Is it possible that this shows the book worn as a relic or protective charm?

On two of the Irish crosses (the Tall Cross at Monasterboice and the Broken Cross at Kells) the depiction of the baptism of Christ shows John with the book in his left and a vessel in his right, about to pour baptismal water over Christ. He wears a satchel. The scene is echoed in an ivory plaque showing the baptism of Clovis.

The Pictish depictions of the book are mostly on crosses but some are on shrine panels. They are all intended to be visible. Do these illustrate the place of the book in teaching and conveying messages to an illiterate laity? Are there different cultural representations here? The stones show that the Picts clearly had those among them who were literate – and Kelly noted Katherine Forsyth's comment that it is inconceivable that books and literacy did not exist in a Pictish context, as the church could not exist without them. Indeed, Martin Carver's evidence from Portmahomack shows the Picts producing books.

At the very least there is good evidence that the Picts were part of a rich religious culture centred on the book. *SH*

Antony Charles Thomas (1928–2016): a personal memoir

The passing of Charles Thomas a few weeks ago has robbed the Pictish world of one of its principal scholars and greatest enthusiasts. Immensely knowledgeable, persuasive in his arguments, and possessed of an impish sense of humour, it was a pleasure to be in his company, guaranteeing as he did that any conversation would be both fulfilling and enjoyable.

Born at Camborne in Cornwall and educated at Winchester College, a spell in the Army followed, his final posting to Egypt helping to inspire his interest in archaeology. He delivered his first lecture while just 18 years old, to the Old Cornwall Society. Graduating from Oxford University in law in 1951, he then studied archaeology in London under V. Gordon Childe. He made his reputation as director of the long-running excavations at Gwithian in Cornwall (1949 63). Following part-time lecturing for the Workers' Educational Association in Cornwall, he was appointed lecturer in Archaeology at Edinburgh University in 1958. He conducted a number of excavations in Scotland, notably at Iona Abbey, on Ardwall Island in Kirkcudbrightshire, and at Abercorn in West

Lothian. One of his principal interests became the Picts and in particular their symbol stones.

Of the greatest value to Pictish scholars are the two highly influential papers which he published in the *Archaeological Journal*: 'The Animal Art of the Scottish Iron Age and its Origins' in 1963, and,of even greater importance, 'The Interpretation of the Pictish Symbols' in 1964. While other theories have been advanced, both before and since, none have had the same impact on Pictish studies nor achieved a greater degree of acceptance among its adherents. This has been widespread, though not universal, and some of the specifics have been the subject of debate and challenge, yet the seminal nature of his work on the Picts and their art has ensured a permanent place for Charles Thomas in the Pictish Pantheon.

My first encounter with Charles was at the British Summer School of Archaeology in 1966, when it was held at Dundee. I was shortly due to matriculate at Edinburgh University and reckoned this would be a good introduction to the subject. The talks and field trips concentrated on the prehistoric archaeology of Angus, including of course Pictish stones. I was unaware at the time that only a few weeks later, the principal speaker at that event was to be my university lecturer. Not only were his classes packed with interest, they were great fun too. While showing the plan of an excavated roundhouse, Charles pointed out how the director of the dig had joined up the dots, big and small, to construct the outline of the main building and its subsidiary structures. He then wryly commented, "Join them up in a different way, and you get a profile of Sir Winston Churchill smoking a cigar!"

I recall pushing my luck with him more than once during my student days, such as just before the crucial football match when Celtic attempted to become the first club from northern Europe to lift the European Cup. The live televised Final clashed with an important lecture of his, with examinations perilously close. I put the situation to him, and displaying enormous magnanimity, he said that he would postpone the planned topic and instead deliver a general talk of no relevance to the impending exams. The upshot was that I (and a sizeable portion of the class) was able to witness the triumph of the Lisbon Lions, and also pass the exams. Such was the generosity of spirit of this kind-hearted and understanding man.

In 1967 Thomas was appointed to the new post of Professor of Archaeology at Leicester University but our paths were to cross there too when, coincidentally, I followed on to do a one-year post-graduate training course in Museum Studies. Although I had read Archaeology at Edinburgh, I had veered more towards documentary history. Leicester offered a choice of six academic disciplines, and I plumped for Local History. I felt somewhat rueful, I will admit, when I learned that Charles himself was conducting the Archaeology option. I attended his seminars anyway. At the end of that year (1970), I had the pleasure of his company at the Leicester University Archaeological Society annual dinner, where he was guest speaker. We spent several hours engaged in happy conversation, the subject of the Picts featuring for much of that time.

In 1972, Charles Thomas achieved his ambition of securing his future in his beloved Cornwall when he set up and became Director of the Institute of Cornish Studies (ICS) at Truro. The ICS was affiliated to Exeter University, where Thomas was appointed as its first Professor of Cornish Studies. He had no need to prove his Cornish credentials, but his commitment to all things Cornish was reflected in the number of local organisations in which he was involved, rising to be President in several, such as the Royal Institution of Cornwall (and its honorary librarian, until 2011), the Cornwall Archaeological Society, and the Cornish Methodist Historical Society. He kept up with archaeological practice as well, being Chairman of the Cornwall Committee for Rescue Archaeology, a topic always dear to his heart. In a wider field, he was now recognised as a prime expert in early Christianity in Britain and Ireland.

Being ensconced in the far south-west of the country did not prevent Charles Thomas from maintaining his interest in Pictish studies. He made a number of trips to Edinburgh, notably to deliver a paper to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in the National Museum, and on another occasion, to address the Pictish Arts Society. At that time, the Society was still based at its first home in the School of Scottish Studies in George Square, almost next door to the previous premises of the Department of Archaeology where he had been a lecturer all those years before.

Charles Thomas retired in 1991, the same year as he received a CBE for services to archaeology. He continued to live in Cornwall, in the little village of St Clement just outside Truro. That is where I met him for the last time, about five years ago. I had been requested to enlighten the good people of Liskeard on the splendours of Scottish pottery production, after which I pressed on westward to visit the China Clay Heritage Centre near St Austell, and the related displays in the Royal Cornish Museum in Truro. I couldn't be that close to Charles without at least saying hello.

We spent a couple of hours in his book-lined study, talking over all matters Pictish, before resorting to the local inn for a pint and a pastie. Much time was devoted to discussing the interpretation of the Aberlemno battle scene, and the identification of the 'swimming elephant' symbol (a nonsensical name, of course), now more commonly called by the term 'Pictish beast' (a vapid generality), and he left me with his firm conviction ringing in my ears: "Of course it's a dolphin!". I concurred, partly out of courtesy, partly out of deference, but mostly because that is what I believe too. That is the sort of effect which Charles Thomas had upon many of those fortunate enough to encounter this most engaging of men.

Graeme Cruickshank

W.F.H. Nicolaisen 1927–2016

Willhelm Fritz Hermann (Bill) Nicolaisen was born near Leipzig in 1927 and studied folklore, language and literature at the Universities of Kiel, Newcastle (England) and Tübingen and Celtic Studies in Glasgow. From 1956 to 1969 he was based in the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh before moving to New York State University at Binghampton. While there, he was very much involved in folklore studies and teaching, and was for a time President of The American Folklore Society. His *Scottish Place Names* was first published in 1976, including the now familiar distribution maps of place names including Pictish elements. On his retirement from Binghamton in 1992, he moved to Aberdeen, where he was Professor Emeritus at the Elphinstone Institute. It was there that he first had personal dealings with the Pictish Arts Society, becoming a member and helping to organise, as well as address the Aberdeen conference in 1999. His infectious

Bill Nicolaisen (left) conducting fieldwaork. Photo courtesy of Glasgow University

enthusiasm for all his research interests, which he was happy to share, was an endearing characteristic. He published many articles, both scholarly and popular (including a long-running series on place names in *The Scots Magazine*. Another in *Leopard Magazine* celebrates the culture of his adopted home in the north-east. A great communicator, an enthusiastic and rigorous scholar, and a warm and generous man, he will be missed. *SH*

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The deadline for receipt of material is

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Please email contributions to the editor:

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