Pictish Arts Society
Conference 2017: Pictish Fife
afternoon session

After an excellent buffet lunch, laid on by a new local bistro (The Press, George Inn Pend, Crossgate, Cupar), the conference's afternoon session commenced with Simon Taylor's paper, *The Picts and their place-names: Fife and beyond*. Simon began by making it plain that in dealing with place names, he was not entering into any debate on the nature of a Pictish polity. His intention was to let place name studies stand for themselves. Having made that proviso, he proceeded to take us through some of the difficulties encountered in trying to elucidate Pictish place names.

Not the least problem is the question of dating. Documentary evidence for place names is rare before the 11th century. It is very difficult to work out how names were coined before this time. For example, 'Cupar' is a non-goidelic term for a settlement at the confluence of the Lady Burn with the Eden. It probably derives from a Pictish cognate of the Gaelic *comar*, Welsh *kymer* or Breton *kember* (from which Quimper). If, as the evidence suggests, Gaelic became the dominant language in Fife around 900, we would expect a non-goidelic or Brythonic name to have been coined before this date – but how long before? 'Cupar' also appears in Coupar Angus (confusingly transferred to Perthshire in 1890), at the confluence of the Ericht and the Isla or of the Lunan and the Isla (or both?). *Comar*, the Gaelic cognate, gives rise to Comrie, where the Blair and Carnock Burns join.

Pictish *aber* or Gaelic *inbhir*, the brythonic and the goidelic words for the mouth of a river or burn also present us with problems. Both forms are present in Fife, but again it can be difficult to date the coinage. It is possible that some existing *aber-* names were retained while others were adapted to the Gaelic *inbhir-* form. Perhaps new settlements were named by Gaelic speakers, using the *inbhir-* form from the beginning. Abernethy possibly dates back to the 8th century as a Pictish formation. By the late 12th century, it may have referred to a much wider territory, giving space for a new name, Innernethy, to be coined for a new settlement. There are a number of reasons why the old name may have been retained; the better known or more important places are perhaps more likely to have preserved their name through later language changes in the area. (Simon did point out that the importance of a place might drive name changes, as in the example of

St Petersburg). However, it may be that some of the persistent names may have been given to local power centres, whether secular or ecclesiastical, in the Pictish period.

A possible test of this hypothesis is to examine the medieval parishes in the medieval sheriffdom of Fife. Most of these were in the diocese of St Andrews, but some belonged to Dunkeld and some to Dunblane. Around 1300 there were fifty-seven parishes, of which thirty could have been adapted or adopted from Pictish. Some of these are relatively straightforward – four *aber-* names for example. Others are ambiguous, with a possible origin either in Gaelic or Pictish (e.g. Dunbog). Another group consist of both Gaelic and Pictish elements. Simon drew attention to Tullybole, where the first part of the name is the Gaelic 'tulach' while the second element is the Pictish 'bothwyn', and Inverkeithing, where the burn name is Pictish.

We have a situation where it seems that a number of elements originated as Pictish. These may have formed place names in the mouths of native Pictish speakers. They may have been borrowed by Gaelic speakers and the loanword used only in name formation (e.g. pett). Some words may have been borrowed into Gaelic from Pictish and remained in everyday use. Some elements may have been originally Gaelic, but their use influenced by Pictish usages, where words of similar sound may have had different meanings. An example of the latter would be 'strath', which in Ireland retained the meaning of water meadow or haugh but which in Scotland came to be applied to a major territorial area. And, indeed, some may be indistinguishable, with a possible origin in either language. Furthermore, names may have been easily adapted from one language to the other, a situation easy to imagine where both were Celtic languages with a large amount of common vocabulary and sound changes that would have been easy to make.

Simon was of the opinion that adaptation may have been common. He gave the example of Kincardine, which appears eight times north of the Forth, including in Fife. This name is not found in Irish Gaelic, but has a Welsh cognate, and is almost entirely to be found in 'historic' Pictavia. Coined as something like 'Pen-cardine', it has been adapted to the Gaelic 'Kin-'. Another example, with an early date, is to be found in Adomnán's Life of Saint Columba. This is Airchartdan (Urquhart) by Loch Ness. Simon derived this from Old Gaelic *air* or *er,* (Pictish *ar* originally?) meaning on, or beside with *carden*, meaning perhaps encampment.

Having given much food for thought, Simon gave a list of references for those who might wish to delve deeper into the mysteries of the Picts and their place names. A visit to the website of the Scottish Place Name Society <**www.spns.org.uk**>will find them listed under the 'Specialised' Section of the Bibliography either under Pictish language or in the regional section.

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Edwina Proudfoot's talk, entitled *What do Pictish Stones tell us about the Picts? A look at the Picts in Fife* in fact took us much further afield than Fife. Using a large number of illustrative slides, Edwina considered a wide range of features that we might ponder when we look at Pictish stones.

She suggested that we should perhaps focus on looking at the details which we can still see on Pictish stones, and consider what they might tell us about Pictish society and culture. The cross slabs in particular carry a great deal of information, including as they do depictions of activities such as horse-riding and deer hunting. Illustrations of clothes and weapons, books and chairs – all alert us to the fact that the people who commissioned these carvings were part of a vibrant, wealthy society in close contact with the rest of Europe.

Slide rapidly followed slide as Edwina gave examples of the features that we might look out for. On some stones we can see tool marks clearly visible – the evidence is there for the shape of chisel wielded by the masons. Elsewhere, the probable existence of an earlier site, church, monastery or burial ground, may be hinted at by fragments of carved stones incorporated in present church buildings. In other cases, an isolated slab, apparently in its original position may be an ancient marker of the boundary of territory appropriated to an ecclesiastical establishment.

It is worth while trying to examine, say, the horses which are so well represented and to reflect on the obvious differences between the animals depicted on different stones – sometimes even in different registers of the same stone. The frequency with which horses are carved suggests that they held an important place in Pictish society. Horses race along in the hunt, or pace sedately in procession, with clear differences in the size and breed – but always there is clear indication of the mastery of a craftsman who knew his subject.

It is also fascinating to compare and contrast the various human figures. Rhynie man, for example, looks rather a ferocious character, with strongly marked features, but does his short, belted tunic give us an insight into contemporary clothes? Other figures wear cloaks (some long, some short), carry shields, or book satchels or spears. Some wear long tunics, others have tight fitting trousers below shorter tunics. Some people are clearly depicted wearing shoes whilst others may be barefoot. Some individuals have long, curly hair, others wear caps, helmets or hoods. Rich embroidery appears on a longer tunic at Rosemarkie, elaborate harness on a horse at Logierait. A rare boat appears on the St Orlands stone, clerics sit on elaborate chairs as at Fowlis Wester, musicians play on the Dupplin cross and elsewhere. The Pict on the Bullion stone, with his elaborate drinking horn raised to his lips while his horse ambles along, is clearly a real character with his own story.

Edwina showed us many examples of Pictish carved stones, inviting us to look closer and, observing the details, step back into the vibrant world of those who commissioned them and the craftsmen who made them and left us such a legacy. Follow Edwina's injunction and go out and look at your favourite stones once again.

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Oliver O'Grady and Joe Fitzpatrick gave a joint presentation on their recent excavation titled *New findings from East Lomond Hillfort*. East Lomond hill is an imposing feature in the landscape of southern Fife. At 1500 feet high it can be seen from far and wide, from Dundee to Edinburgh, from the length of the Forth, and even from distant Schiehallion. The hillfort on its summit is spectacular: the sheer scale of the works points to the importance of East Lomond as a power centre. A series of aerial photographs brought this point home. A number of finds have been made on the hill over the years: a fragment of Pictish symbol stone with an incised steer, quite different from the bulls of Burghead, was found here around 1920, while two fragments of symbol stones were recovered from the lower slopes at Westfield farm. A horse bridle bit, similar to one found at Tynron Doon in Dumfriesshire and probably dating to around AD500–700 indicates a horse-owning society here, while evidence of metal working also suggests a site of considerable, possibly kingly importance.

The first excavations here were carried out in 2014 as part of the 'Big Dig'. The dig location was on the southern slope of the hill facing out over the Forth, just inside a hitherto unrecorded outer boundary that was discovered by geophysical survey and proved by trenching. Dating evidence showed that the hill was occupied at the time of Agricola's northern advance, during the period of the Severan campaigns and at the time the first monastery was founded on the Isle of May. In 2017, more investigations were carried out, with the aims of understanding the sequence of occupation and the underlying stratigraphy, dating any structures and looking for evidence which would give some idea of the status of the hillfort here. Oliver described his work leading this project, which the Falkland Stewardship Trust intended would engage local communities. Seven of the local primary schools took part.

The trenches were again placed on the south side of the hill, just outside the area designated as Scheduled Ancient Monument. A number of significant finds came to light, providing some insight into occupation of the hillfort from the 1st–7th centuries AD. A stone setting, box-like in shape, held a number of curiously coloured stones. Another, lined with clay may have been a quenching tank for metal working. A possible furnace bowl was uncovered, and finds of hammer scale gave more evidence for metalworking. Ingot moulds, similar to finds from Clatchard Craig, on the north shore of Fife may point to silversmithing. A carved fragment of mica schist was found beside the putative workshop, possibly part of a rotary quern.

A stone-surfaced path was traced across fifteen metres of the site. From here came hammer stones and tools. An iron spearhead of 5th–6th century date was found beside the path, and a conical spear bulb of the same period was also found. Sherds of E-ware pottery also signify an elite settlement here around the 5th–7th century, when this ware was imported via a west coast route, possibly from western France.

Traces of a large building with a stone hearth and several post settings were found. An unfinished shale armlet was found near to some cores which indicated that manufacturing took place on site. A small corded fragment of a jet ring may have come from Yorkshire around the 4th century AD. Late Roman pottery, probably of the same era, would have been associated with feasting and drinking. A projecting ring-headed pin in copper alloy, of the rosette type found at Traprain Law and Covesea, probably dates to the 3rd or 4th century, emerging in the late Roman period.

Two earlier hearths were found. A fragment of a white glass armlet with a blue corded pattern dates to the 1st or 2nd century. Finds of this type come from across Britain, with a concentration in the present Borders area. A fragmentary melon bead and the foot ring of a glass vessel also indicate Roman connections at this period. These are indications of trading in what may have been a buffer zone between Roman Britain and hostile peoples further north.

Earlier activity on East Lomond was represented by a Bronze Age cairn containing two cremation burials. Iron ore was found on the cairn. Is there a connection between sacred places and smithing sites?

With less than one percent of the site excavated, there is already evidence to suggest that the hillfort on East Lomond was a pre-eminent royal centre, one of a network of such in Fife. A pattern of continuity and redevelopment over centuries has emerged, beginning much earlier than conventional nuclear forts elsewhere in southern and western Scotland.

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The final paper of the conference came from Sally Foster with the attention-grabbing title *Expiscation! George Buist and the early duplication of Pictish monuments and artefacts in Fife*. (Expiscation – the act of fishing out, finding out by skill or laborious investigation, searching out.) Sally gave a brief summary of the history of plaster cast replicas of ancient and medieval artworks from their use in the art schools of the late eighteenth to their heyday in the museums of the late nineteenth century. Originally seen as useful ways of instructing students, and then making the objects accessible to a wider public, they fell seriously out of favour in the mid-twentieth century, when many were destroyed. In more recent times, they have become valued once again, the survivors often being seen as worthy of study in their own right. George Buist, the hero of today's talk, was central to procuring some of the earliest replicas of medieval art, in around 1839.

Born in 1805, the son of a Church of Scotland minister in Tannadice, Buist studied at St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities, was licensed as a preacher, and settled down as a journalist in 1832, working in Dundee. In 1837, he took over the Fifeshire Journal, based in the county town of Cupar, and launched into a very active couple of years in north-east Fife. Buist was a member of both the St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Society and the Fifeshire Literary, Scientific and Philosophical Society (Cupar). These were early examples of local societies that brought together members with a wide range of intellectual interests and which became very popular in the Victorian period. The St Andrews Society was dominated by a coterie of well-connected academics, while the Cupar society included a number of affluent tradesmen and merchants among its membership. The St Andrews Sarcophagus was important to both.

The Sarcophagus was recovered during grave-digging in 1833. Buist's influence, from his arrival in Cupar was important in the setting up of museums by the two Societies, one in St Andrews and one in Cupar, with the object of preserving and exhibiting local antiquities among other items of interest. — The St Andrews Society acquired the Sarcophagus for display in its museum. Buist worked with the curator of the St Andrews museum, John Adamson, to arrange a temporary loan so that a cast could be made for the Cupar Museum. A Cupar plasterer, Mr Ross of the Bonnygate, Cupar, was commissioned to prepare the cast. In a letter to the St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Society outlining the advantages of this, Buist noted that by these means '*a step will have been taken for the expiscation of information in reference to one of the distant and least known branches of Archaeology*'. Casts of the Sarcophagus (or of the Cupar replica) were later to be found in the National Museum of Antiquities of

Scotland (1849), in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1848) and Dublin (1854). Details of when and by whom these were made or commissioned are still rather vague.

While Sally was investigating the Sarcophagus replicas, Alice Blackwell, Martin Goldberg and their colleagues at the National Museum of Scotland were working on Scotland's early silver, a project funded by Glenmorangie. Items from the Norrie's Law hoard, found near Largo in 1819 and now in the NMS collections, were studied intensively. Two sets of pairs (two plaques and two pins) had long intrigued historians. Alice and her colleagues now demonstrated that one of each pair was a nineteenth-century copy of the other member of the pair. More fishing on their part established that in 1839 Buist had commissioned pewter replicas of pieces still in the possession of General Durham, on whose land the hoard had been found. The Cupar silversmith, Robert Robertson, who was given the work, had originally bought, and melted down, a large part of the hoard from its finders. The pewter replicas were destined for the St Andrews museum. Buist hoped that their display might encourage anyone who had any items of the original hoard to come forward. He did indeed retrieve what he believed to be two such items, the plaque and pin that have since been shown to be copies – possibly made by Robertson himself.

Buist was a firm believer in the value of making accurate replicas of items of antiquarian interest to enable wider study of such objects. He was driven by a desire to make such material available to as wide an audience as possible. It is intriguing to speculate what use Buist the journalist would have made of the developments that took place in St Andrews around and just after the time he left Fife to take up a post in Bombay. For St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Society was to be at the forefront of the use of the new art of photography. John Adamson, who as curator of the Society's museum had lent the Sarcophagus to Buist, produced the first calotype in Scotland. (His younger brother Robert was one half of the Hill and Adamson partnership, famous for their portraits and scenes captured between 1843–1847.) Buist would surely have used the new technology to bring knowledge of antiquities to a far wider audience than even his replicas had done. For more details of Buist's extraordinary career, see below.

Sheila Hainey

Reference

Foster, S M, Blackwell, A & Goldberg, M 2014
    The Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Replicas for Object Cultural Biographies: Lessons in Duplication from 1830s Fife.

Autumn Lecture Series
20 October 2017 – David McGovern
Carving King Cinaed

A full house turned out to hear PAS committee member David McGovern tell us about his commission to carve a new 3m high cross slab for Forteviot. David's background is in IT, where he worked for 18 years. But for light relief from the day job, he loved carving stone or "chappin' rocks", as he put it. He had a love of Pictish stones from childhood and he told of his excitement when he first found out about the collection of stones from his native Monifieth (all of which are long-since located in Edinburgh).

So David kept himself busy at weekends and evenings, carving small replicas and panels with well-known Pictish motifs. If you have attended a PAS conference in the last 3 or 4 years, you will no doubt have seen some of his craftsmanship on display (and on sale). Whilst attending a conference for his day job, David described a moment of clarity when he decided that the world of IT was not for him so he returned home to concentrate on his business, Monikie Rock Art, taking on commissions and running stonecarving courses. He was very excited when McManus Galleries in Dundee commissioned him to carve a replica of the diminutive Monifieth 2 cross slab for their permanent display.

In 2015, Glasgow University's 10-year long SERF project (Strathearn Environment and Royal Forteviot) was drawing to a close, culminating in the Cradle of Scotland exhibition which opened first in the Hunterian Museum and then in early 2016 in Perth Museum & Gallery. When the Tay Landscape Partnership (TLP) decided to commission a new 9-foot high monument to commemorate King Cinaed Mac Alpin for the village of Forteviot in Perthshire, David was eager to submit a tender. During the interview process, TLP noted that David had never carved anything on this scale before. Undaunted, David's reply was "who has?".

They were clearly impressed by the examples of work David presented and by his confidence so he was duly commissioned. Sourcing a block of workable stone measuring 9 feet x 3 feet was not easy and an English quarry was finally selected. When the block arrived, David described how, like a cracked bell, it didn't ring true. It clearly had a flaw. So there was a delay whilst a replacement block was quarried.

David outlined the parameters of the commission. It was to be a cross slab with an overall theme commemorating King Cinaed Mac Alpin. It was to be a new design, drawing on the fragments from Forteviot and nearby Invermay but with no Pictish

David McGovern's magnum opus takes shape

symbols. And the design process should engage the local community.

When the design process was complete, David and his apprentice set to work in a large farm. He showed us photos of the stone as work progressed and talked us through the motifs used. On the cross, key pattern from Iona, representing *Dàl Riadic origins, interlace with pellets from the local fragments. On the back, a large figure of* Cinaed riding a regal horse with his hunting eagle on his arm. He is accompanied by two outriders, rival claimants to the throne.

Below this, an eagle subdues a raven, pinning it to the ground, a clear reference to Cinaed's military success against the Norse invaders. But the raven defiantly raises a claw – it is not vanquished. And below this, the local legend of St Serf slaying a dragon at nearby Dunning is portrayed. Although the stone is boldly carved in deep relief, it still has many nuanced details. The ears of the hounds which flank the cross base stuck in my mind.

One of the major logistical problems David faced was turning the stone over once one side had been carved. He showed a video of two operators from the company who supplied the stone flipping the stone using two JCBs and two slings. Remarkably it worked. The new cross for King Cinaed is now erected in the village square, Forteviot. Go see it for yourself. *JB*

17 November 2017 – Dr James Bruhn
The role of glass bangles in Late Iron Age and Roman period society in Britain

Before James commenced, he circulated a couple of replica glass bangles, copies of examples from pre-Roman Gaul. Most of the archaeological evidence we would be looking at on screen was fragmentary so these complete specimens would give everyone an idea of what he was talking about. It was immediately apparent just how colourful and eye-catching these bangles were.

James outlined the work of antiquarian scholars and noted that close study of the subject in Scotland predates that on the continent. He paid tribute to the meticulous work of James Curle at the end of the 19th century, which still forms the basis of our differentiation between Roman and native bangles. However, studies of glass bangles in Britain have tended to be very insular, examining British examples within a British context. So a quick overview of continental research helped set the subject into a wider context.

James then gave us a detailed rundown of glass bangle typology with slides to illustrate the three main types and the various sub-groups within them. Type 1 bangles are rare and have a distribution limited largely to Scotland south of the Forth and Clyde. They have bands of colour, principally red and yellow or blue and yellow, applied as a surface treatment to a core.

Type 2 bangles have narrow cables, usually of blue and white, fused lengthwise on to a translucent core. They are often connected with Roman sites so may be of Roman manufacture. The production of raw glass in the Roman Empire was limited to a few sites in Israel and Egypt, from where it was exported and then reworked. Glass bangles in Britain and elsewhere in Europe may have been manufactured from that raw glass but it is possible, likely even, that many were made from recycled glass. Therefore any Roman glassware would have been viewed as a valuable resource.

Type 3, considered to be more associated with native design and production, is divided into subgroups A-J, with the opaque white 3A being by far the most common. The opaque yellow 3B is rare except at Traprain, where it is the dominant type.

The Traprain assemblage numbers more than 200, setting Traprain apart from virtually all other sites. There is no solid evidence for the production of glass bangles at Traprain but then glass production is notoriously difficult to pin down in an archaeological context. Like metalworking, it requires a lot of heat so an industrial hearth or kiln is a contender. However unlike smelting, glass working does not require moulds and unlike smithing, it leaves little or no tangible evidence such as hammerscale.

But whether produced on-site or traded, the prevalence of opaque yellow bangles at Traprain would certainly suggest that either the 'raw' material (i.e. recyclable Roman glassware) or the finished product was being made available to the inhabitants. Did these bangles, or the material to make them, serve as a sweetener to those living in this important native power centre beyond Hadrian's Wall? Did it help keep them 'on side'? Perhaps it also worked the other way. Maybe these conspicuous baubles enabled their wearers to proclaim we're 'in' with the Romans. We can access these goodies, or the material to produce them. Similar possibilities emerged in Fraser Hunter's paper at the 2017 conference, where he postulated that the prevalence of Roman hacksilver in Fife and Moray may have been a means to buy off some tribes and thus create a buffer zone with the more hostile native elements. (See Newsletter 85 for a review of Fraser's paper.)

James concluded with a discussion on the nature of the various types and subgroups. Some are robust whilst others are more delicate. Could we be looking at different styles and different colours for male and female, adult and juvenile? Without doubt, James gave us a detailed insight into a fascinating subject and I for one was surprised that the two beautiful replicas he circulated at the beginning of his talk actually made it back to the front of the room. *JB*

Colouring on!

My article 'Colour my World (Pictish style)', which appeared in PAS Newsletter 84, has drawn a considerable response. My thanks are due to those who took the trouble to offer their thoughts, published in the following issue. Let me say that although I had examined the topic at some length, I was aware that there were aspects which I had barely touched.

Ron Dutton's title, 'Colourful Picts: a Chromatic Fantasy', says it all. He has looked in depth at certain crucial issues, perhaps the most important being the question of what colouring agents would have been available to the Picts. Running through a range of options, he reached a fairly damning conclusion:

> If we were to go on to critically consider every known colouring medium from the period, we could probably narrow the number of possible candidates down to somewhere close to zero. This fact alone brings into serious question the belief that the stones were once coloured.

There was certainly colour in the Pictish world, but the difficulty of linking it to stone sculpture in the manner illustrated by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) seems virtually insurmountable. Some agents were suitable for manuscripts and textiles, for instance, but not so for the decoration of stones outdoors. Ron also highlights concerns regarding the purpose of doing so and picks up on the Aberlemno battle-scene which I looked at in some detail.

Although I do not interpret Incident 1 in quite the same light as he does, I agree with his general conclusion:

> HES has chosen to apply colours to the Pictish stones in a manner which does not appear to take any account of their symbolic significance.

With talk of 'naive fantasy' and 'an attention-grabbing exercise targeted at gullible culture tourists', Ron certainly pulls no punches in his critique of the colouring of Pictish stones as proposed by Historic Environment Scotland, describing their efforts as 'an insult to those who strive towards a better understanding of Pictish art, and whose work is being trivialised by this misguided attempt to spice up the carvings'.

Some of the points mentioned above are also made by Flora Davidson, emphasising the incongruity of treating Class I and Class II stones, with their fundamentally differing sculptural techniques, in what amounts to the same fashion. Marianna Lines is also quite scathing about the 'novice graphics employee of HES who was not given much of a brief'.

These views were also echoed by further comments which I have received by telephone, email, and personal encounter. No-one seems to have had a good word to say about the promotion of coloured Pictish stones in this way, and the recipient of all the criticism, HES and Perth Museum, have chosen not to respond.

So where do we go from here? Ron advocates that PAS should 'take a proactive approach', whereas Marianna says 'Let's ignore it and move on'. The trouble is that we can't ignore it when it's so much in our face. Several lurid HES information boards are already in place, and others are scheduled for erection later this year. So the question now is: should PAS tackle the problem head on?

Graeme Cruickshank

Red, Gold and Blue

The responses in PAS Newsletter 85 to Graeme Cruickshank's earlier article on coloured Pictish stones all make mention of the fact that there are a few examples of Early Medieval carved stones which show traces of having been coloured. The ones referred to are from Northumbria, Mercia, and northern and eastern Pictland, and there are several others besides. They are all either fragments or small panels, and so are not necessarily representative of large outdoor sculptures. One very interesting feature is the fact that in each instance, the colour preserved is red.

As Flora Davidson mentioned, Martin Carver reported recovering numerous stone fragments carved with interlace and bearing traces of having been coloured with red and black (*Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts,* pp.101–02). He describes

them as 'probably deriving from cross-slabs', a view which, though not unreasonable, is certainly open to challenge. They might just as easily be from decorative stonework from within the building.

An obvious question which arises is why is it that whenever any traces of colour are found, they are always of red pigment, (and just occasionally black)? It could simply be the case that these have survived because they were the most durable of the colours employed. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, it might be that red and black were the only colours ever used to paint the carvings.

That would certainly be a strange state of affairs, especially if the carvings were indeed intended for display inside a church. Church buildings of the period were largely windowless, and the interiors consequently very dark. The red and black colours of the carvings would be barely discernible in the gloom. (It should be noted that the red pigment involved here was a relatively dull red ochre, not one of the brilliant reds which we are so familiar with today.) And when the interior was illuminated by flickering candlelight, this would only serve to bathe all interior stonework in the same warm glow, whether painted red or not, rendering the colouring pointless.

However, there is one intriguing possibility which deserves to be considered. The traces of red colourant surviving on a small number of Early Medieval stone carvings and fragments could well be bole, a red material which was used prior to applying gold leaf to a surface. This would imply that these carvings were originally gilded, rather than painted, a suggestion that is not as unlikely as it might first appear.

Many early churches in the likes of Rome, Ravenna and Byzantium employed gilding as part of their internal decoration. The Church in Britain took much of its inspiration from such places, so it would not be surprising if they also made some use of gold ornamentation in the interiors of their own buildings.

The availability of gold is beyond doubt, and the cost would not be an issue, as the quantities involved were incredibly small. Using modern methods, a single gram of gold will provide twelve square metres of gold leaf. Even assuming that Early Medieval craftsmen could only achieve around half of that figure, it would still provide enough leaf to gild a carving the size of the Hilton of Cadboll cross slab, both sides, and the edges too, for example. To paint that size of stone would require several hundred grams of pigment, some of it even more expensive than gold. Gilding would actually be far less costly than painting, as well as providing more impressive results. The only limiting factor would be the availability of the necessary expertise.

The technique employed for wood or stone carvings involved coating them with gesso, to which bole, a strong red earth pigment, had been either added or overpainted. The purpose of the bole was to impart a fiery glow to the gold leaf, which had been beaten so thin that it was translucent. Once the gesso was dry, the gold leaf was applied using a method known as water gilding. This was a fairly simple process, but one which required consummate skill and dexterity on the part of the craftsman, in order to manipulate the extremely fragile leaf. This particular technique was only suitable for indoor applications, but had an advantage over other more robust methods, in that it permitted burnishing of the finished piece. Items gilded and burnished in this way would have the appearance of being made of solid gold. They would catch any faint rays of light, and gleam brilliantly in the dimness of a church interior, or glisten by candlelight.

When the gilded carvings ultimately met their demise, for whatever reason, the lure of the sparkling gold would ensure that it was scavenged for reuse. Removing the fragile gold leaf alone would have been well-nigh impossible. The technique that it would have been necessary to employ involved scraping off the underlying layer of gesso complete with fragments of gold leaf attached. The gesso could then be re-liquefied by gently heating in a vessel, allowing the heavier gold to separate out and sink to the bottom. Although all the gold would be assiduously removed from the sculpture, small areas of red bole, which in themselves were of no use whatsoever to the scavengers, would remain in the hollows and crevices, precisely as noted by later archaeologists and art historians.

There is no record of traces of colour being found on any of those Early Medieval stones which were unequivocally intended for outdoor display. Consequently, the rare instances where red pigment is discovered on a carved stone or fragment, might well indicate that it was once gilded, and therefore does not necessarily provide clear and convincing archaeological evidence to support claims that all, or any, Pictish stones were once painted.

As well as questioning whether or not some Pictish carvings were painted, or even gilded, we might also like to consider the Picts themselves – were they painted, too? It appears to be widely accepted, at least amongst the general public, that they were, especially when going into battle. This popular view is reiterated in the comments by Marianna Lines in PAS News-letter 85, when she states that the Picts 'used woad to paint their bodies with symbols before battle, so we are told in legend'. Legend, indeed, but what about the facts?

That ancient Britons painted their bodies with woad is almost universally believed, but on what evidence? The most commonly cited source is the description of ancient Britons in Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (5.14). This is despite the fact that he never

actually makes any mention of woad in that work. What he said was that the Britons 'coloured their bodies with *vitrum*, which gave them a blueish hue'. '*Omnes vero se Britanni vitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum efficit colorem*.'

Vitrum normally means 'glass', which does not appear to make much sense in this context, and so it was claimed that *vitrum* must have had an alternative meaning, as some sort of blue dye, in order to account for the blueish hue which Caesar describes it as causing. Woad was the dye suggested, despite the fact that it was not a plant native to Britain, and there was no history of its use, or even evidence of its availability at the time. Nevertheless, this explanation was widely accepted, to the extent that many Latin dictionaries now give 'woad' as a secondary meaning for '*vitrum*', solely on the basis of this account.

However, this interpretation is highly suspect. If the ancient Britons had used woad, then Caesar had a perfectly good word at his disposal, '*indicum*', which referred to both woad and indigo dyes, and which he would surely have employed. And if he had used this or any other word meaning 'blue', then the always succinct Caesar would not have felt it necessary to add the fact that it gave them a blueish tinge – that would be restating the obvious. A more sensible interpretation of '*vitrum*' in this context would be as a 'glaze' rather than 'glass'. This is the term used by artists and others for a transparent wash of colour. It is non-specific as far as hue is concerned, and so it would be necessary to add the additional information that it made them appear blueish. A revised inter-pretation of the original Latin text would be that the Britons 'coloured their bodies with a glaze, which gave them a blueish hue'. It therefore follows that there is nothing in Caesar's account to indicate the use of woad, specifically.

Although woad was widely grown in Britain in the later Medieval, as a dyestuff for the flourishing textile trade, it is not known when it was first introduced, but there is some tenuous archaeological evidence for its presence during the Iron Age (a single seed of the woad plant), at least in southern Britain, though not in the north. Even if it was used for body painting by the tribes of southern Britain, that does not necessarily mean that it was also used in the north, by the Picts. There are no contemporary references to them doing so.

Use of the Latin term, '*Picti*', which is often taken to mean painted, is sometimes regarded as clear evidence that the Picts must have used body paint. If this is indeed the meaning of the word in this particular case, and if most of the various tribes of southern Britain encountered by Caesar painted their bodies, as it is claimed, then why were none of these southern groups referred to as '*Picti*'? It seems strange that the tribes of the north were singled out for this term, if body painting was the normal practice amongst other populations of Britain.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to assume that the Latin '*picti*' always means exactly the same as the English word 'painted', as this is certainly not the case. 'Painted' indicates that something has had paint applied to it, while '*picti*' merely suggests that something is coloured, which may or may not be the result of it having been painted – the colour might be intrinsic, as in the case of a flower or bird, for example. In the context of the Picts, it could well have alluded to their red hair, a trait which contemporary writers sometimes reported as a distinguishing feature of northern tribes, or perhaps even freckles. Picts with freckles – now there's a thought.

Roman triumphal sculpture often depicts defeated enemies, including Britons, as being naked, though this is possibly done to emphasise their savageness rather than to reflect reality. Interestingly, though, they are never depicted with any form of body decoration.

Did the Picts go naked into battle? It was certainly not the case in the 7th century, if the evidence of the battle scene on the stone in Aberlemno kirkyard is to be believed. The Pictish warriors portrayed here clearly went into battle heavily attired. This being so, there would have been little point in them painting their bodies, with woad or any other substance. If any of the native population engaged in this practice, then it must have been way back in the early part of the 1st Millennium, at a time before they became widely known as 'Picts'. However, Tacitus, writing extensively about the battle of *Mons Graupius,* which took place in AD83, significantly makes no mention of either naked or painted warriors.

The term 'Pict' seems to have become more commonly used in the centuries subsequent to the period of Roman occupation, and was employed well on into the Early Medieval, by which time the northern warriors were certainly neither naked nor painted, if indeed they ever had been. If the name really was simply a reference to their painted bodies, then it would surely not have persisted to such a late date, having long since become inaccurate and irrelevant.

Tattooing is another possibility which is sometimes considered, and certainly seems more plausible than body painting. The idea that Pictish symbols were used for this purpose, though, is much less convincing. In order to earn the name '*Picti*', they would presumably need to be quite extensively tattooed – complete limbs, or even the face or whole body. In other societies where this custom has been practised, it was almost always achieved using either abstract repeat patterns, or flowing linear designs. In northern Europe, in the late Iron Age, this would probably involve some kind of anthropomorphic design, perhaps in the 'La Tene' style. It is difficult to imagine how most Pictish symbols could be

adapted to this purpose. And without knowing their meaning, we cannot be sure that they would be considered desirable as body adornment, anyway.

We must keep an open mind concerning the artistic practices of the Picts, but, as it stands, there is no clear and incontrovertible evidence for either painted stones or painted Picts.   *Ron Dutton*

Pictish Arts Society Conference 2017

Pictish Fife fieldtrip

Once again PAS conference delegates were blessed with fine autumn weather for our annual conference fieldtrip. After Saturday's stimulating conference on Pictish Fife, the Sunday fieldtrip set off from Cupar to explore various sites in Fife's East Neuk.

First stop was Largo church and the Largo Cross. The stone was found in two parts in 1839, one close to Norrie's Law, the other about half a mile away, being used as a drain cover. The two fragments were reunited and erected in the grounds of Largo House but the stone was subsequently relocated to another of the family's country residences, Polton House in Midlothian. It returned to Fife in the early 1930s and was displayed in the churchyard at Largo inside a purpose-built wrought iron shelter.

Said shelter may have offered some protection from the elements over the last 80+ years but the stone today is in poor condition and is badly in need of conservation and re-display within the kirk. Moreover, the shelter's ornate wrought iron greatly impedes any chance of appreciating the carvings. On the day of the fieldtrip we had procured the key to the shelter's one gate so delegates were at least able to get a good look at (and photograph) the back of the cross slab.

Conference delegates examine and discuss Largo cross slab.

Fife is home to a large assemblage of early medieval sculpture, including almost 100 cross slabs but only a handful of them are symbol-bearing. Largo Cross is one of that handful with a large double-disk and Z-rod and Pictish beast located within a processional hunt scene. Discussion on the day centred on the marked absence of incised symbol stones and symbol-bearing cross slabs in Fife, outwith the large assemblage of symbols in the caves at East Wemyss. Our resident geological expert Nigel Ruckley also noted that the red sandstone of this cross slab was markedly different from the local yellow sandstone. It was generally agreed that stylistically, Largo Cross appeared to look north and west to Angus and Perthshire for its inspiration.

Next stop on the trip was the west lodge of Balcaskie House and a long walk up the drive and through the woods to Abercrombie Church. The young Laird of Balcaskie met some of our stragglers on the drive and kindly ferried them to the site in his Volvo.

There are 8 complete or fragmentary pieces of Pictish sculpture built into the walls of Abercrombie Church, all located around a doorway on the northern side. Ordinarily the large iron gate in this entrance is locked, but arrangements had been made to have it open for our visit so we were able to inspect all the stones closely. Some believe the stones were incorporated into the structure in the late 16th/early-17th century, when the church was still in use, but to my eye, the Pictish sculpture, along with numerous architectural and post-Reformation fragments give the appearance of a 19th-century confection, relating to when the roofless church was remodelled into a family burial aisle. Most of the stones at Abercrombie are decorated with geometric pattern and could be viewed as relating to the St Andrews school. Only one fragment shows evidence of figurative carving (human and animal) – something that is noticeably absent from the St Andrews cross slabs.

Our next stop was Kilrenny and another walk, this time along a well-metalled track to the Skeith stone. Kilrenny preserves the name of St Ethernan and Skeith may indicate a boundary so this stone, which looks to be *in situ*, may be a marker for the precinct of an early monastery associated with Ethernan and connected to the monastic settlement on the Isle of May.

The stone itself is an unusual piece of sculpture with a large cross-of-arcs carved within two incised rings. However the gaps between the arms of the cross each have two petal-shaped depressions, effectively making this a relief carving and at the same time creating a second (saltire) cross. The overall effect is highly decorative but arguably, the visual strength of the main cross is weakened.

Much has been made about the presence of the Rho-hook of a Chi Rho symbol on the upper arm of the cross, instantly creating a Ninianic connection to this

The location and significance of the Skeith cross is debated.

part of southern Pictland. To my eye, (and many others that day) there is little or no evidence of this feature. Discussion here centred on the previous day's papers by Simon Taylor on place name evidence and by Peter Yeoman on the Isle of May.

We then headed to Crail parish church and the cross slab therein. This stone was used as a paving stone within the church in the early part of the 19th century and was only removed from the floor in the 1890s. It has a menagerie of creatures flanking the cross shaft, which itself appears to emanate from the torso of a human figure. Indeed this figurative carving is given precedence over the connecting ring which is completely absent in the two lower quadrants of the cross. There is no record of any carving on the reverse of the slab and as it is fixed to the wall, there is no way of checking. Once again it was noted how strikingly different in style this cross slab is to the nearby St Andrews school.

After lunch in the kirkyard, it was a short walk to Victoria Gardens and the Standing Stone of Sauchope. Originally located near Sauchope farm, to the east of Crail, it was moved to the public park in Crail in 1929. Now very weathered, the carvings are difficult to discern. On the front is a ringed Latin cross with round hollows (undecorated?) with two opposing figures below, all within a broad rounded border. On the reverse are two horsemen and a dog, surmounted by another indistinct figure, all surrounded by the same rounded border. A hunt scene seems likely.

The coach then took us to the last stop of the day – St Andrews Cathedral Museum. This is home to more than 70 pieces of early medieval sculpture, making it one of, if not *the* largest display in Scotland. (The assemblage on Iona is larger but only around a third of it is now on show. The assemblage from Portmahomack could be larger, depending on how many of the fragments there can be linked but again, little of this is currently on show.) The St Andrews display is split in two with selected pieces, including two large cross shafts and the undoubted star of the show, the sarcophagus, on show in a well-lit room with some fairly recent interpretation. In the second

room, the rest of the assemblage is displayed in serried ranks, poorly lit and with little or no interpretation. It is no wonder that many visitors, including some of our party that day, consider these stones to be the 'also-rans'.

However, this view is unjust. The fact that St Andrews was so prominent that its workshop was 'churning out' cross slabs in vast quantities and in a generic style sets it apart from most other sites. The complete absence of Pictish symbols from this assemblage and the relative absence of figurative carving is also noteworthy, as is its apparent lack of influence on other Pictish sculpture in east Fife. (Apart from Abercrombie, we saw little evidence of the St Andrews school in the East Neuk). St Andrews has a story to tell that goes well beyond the attention-grabbing sarcophagus, wonderful as it is. Historic Environment Scotland is aware that the current setup is lacking and a major re-interpretation and re-display is mooted. Watch this space. . . .   *JB*

One of the Abercrombie cross slabs, built into the church upside down but shown here in the correct orientation.

PAS Newsletter 87

The deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 19 May 2018

Please email contributions to the editor:

john.borland@hes.scot

Intensely Patriotic Painting

"I don't do tears. I come from Dundee."

This expression of true grit from the well known broadcaster and author, Andrew Marr, was evident in an exhibition of his work staged during June and July of last year, at the Corke Art Gallery in Liverpool. The show of 100 paintings was aptly titled *Strokes of Colour*, the profits from sales going to the Action for Rehabilitation from Neurological Injury charity for stroke survivors and families, which provides specialist rehabilitation and exercise support after hospital and community physiotherapy finishes.

Marr used to be a Sunday painter producing conventional, run-of-the-mill landscapes, still life studies, and portraits of people he knew. However, that came to an end following a serious stroke in January 2013, which has left him partially paralysed on the left side. He was unable to paint for two years, but then a neighbour in North London offered him space for a studio and he started again, abandoning his previous 'boring' style for a more adventurous, bright and lively method of working, a genre he calls 'independent art'.

One of the exhibits harks back to his homeland, being an extremely colourful, semi-abstract painting awash with Pictish symbols, which, according to its title, *Intensely Patriotic Painting*, appears to be a compilation of images proclaiming national identity of some sort. With another painting in the show containing a Pictish symbol, *Swimming with the Picts,* it is clear that Marr's rehabilitation and artistic rebirth presented him with an opportunity to acknowledge his Pictish patrimony.   *DH*

Swimming with the Picts

Full-colour images of Marr's paintings can be viewed on the Corke Gallery website <http://www.corkeartgallery.co.uk/>

A footnote on frowning Picts

Two objects from the north-eastern coast of Pictland have a special significance in terms of Pitish beliefs. One is a gilded bronze pin from Golspie in Sutherland and the other is an incised pebble from Portsoy in Moray, and despite being very different types of object they share the image of a frontal human face with pronounced horizontal lines on the forehead (figs 1 & 2). The pin would probably have been used to fasten a cloak, but the pebble appears not to have had any practical everyday purpose. It has in the past often been called a whetstone on analogy with the whetstone set in a sceptre from the royal burial at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, but the two stones bear no resemblance to one another and this unlikely tag is no longer generally accepted. The Portsoy pebble is a slim elongated oval in shape and oval in section, and there are two incised heads, one at either end, and between them an arch, a crescent, a fish and an outline Latin cross. When Charles Thomas drew attention to the Portsoy pebble (1963, 48) (Canmore 17940), he described the lines across the foreheads of the two faces as brow-lines, whereas a decade later Joanna Close-Brooks described them as 'frown-lines' in her paper on the Golspie pin (1974, 209) (Canmore 15356), and frown-lines (without her apostrophes) they have remained, except for my own suggestion that they might represent painted or tattooed lines (Ritchie, Scott & Gray 2006, 50). In a recent very interesting paper interpreting the Portsoy faces as those of Adam and Christ and the Golspie face as Christ, Michael King uses the term frown-lines once again, suggesting that in the case of Portsoy the lines 'show the suffering that links the two heads in their respective deaths' (2017, 133-4).

But are the Golspie and Portsoy faces really frowning? I would argue that the lines are not frown-lines but forehead lines: true frown-lines are set vertically between the eye-brows, whereas horizontal lines above the brows are forehead lines or wrinkles, which are caused by the action of the frontalis muscle on the forehead, which contracts when the eyebrows are raised. You may wonder if the distinction matters, but it does matter because it affects how we interpret these Pictish faces. Frown-lines mostly imply disapproval or perplexity, whereas forehead lines mostly imply surprise rather than suffering, and of course both types of wrinkle are signs of aging. It may be that it is the image of a venerable being that is important here. Apart from the forehead lines, the faces are not identical, even the two on the Portsoy pebble: the latter are clean-shaven and bald, whereas the Golspie man has a beard and a head of hair, but one of the Portsoy heads has prominent ears, as does the Golspie head. There is a strong resemblance, as Joanna Close-Brooks noted, between the Golspie head and that on the stone cross from Riasg Buidhe in Colonsay, but the latter lacks the forehead lines

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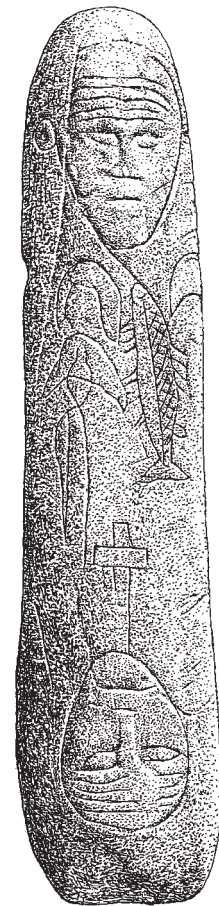
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1 *The Golspie pin.*   **2** *The Portsoy pebble, drawing by Ian G Scott*

(Canmore 319764). The Golspie pin and the Portsoy pebble are still the only examples of faces with pronounced forehead lines in early medieval Insular art, and it seems inescapable that there must be a common tradition behind them, whether of pagan or Christian origin. This is an image on a par with the fearsome character on the slabs from Rhynie and Mail, or the crouching archer of Shandwick, Meigle 10 and St Vigeans 1, and like them it must surely be an allusion to a story or belief well-known to the Picts but not to us. Perhaps the Venerable Man can take his place alongside the Formidable Man and the Crouching Archer as distinctive Pictish images.

Anna Ritchie

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