PAS AGM 3 October 2015

The 2015 AGM of the Pictish Arts Society was held in the Kinloch Memorial Hall, Meigle, Perthshire at 2pm on Saturday 3 October.

Apologies for absence were received from Eileen Brownlie, Hugh Coleman,–Myra Davidson, Stewart Mowatt, and Bill and Linda Stephens.

The Minutes of the 2014 AGM were accepted as published in Newsletter 73. Graeme Cruickshank enquired whether the idea of a PAS journal or e-journal had now been shelved. The President John Borland replied that guidelines were being worked on using models suggested by Katherine Forsyth, and that the next step would be the collecting of suitable material. GC was encouraged to submit his work.

Next John Borland referred to the Annual Report for 2014-15, jointly prepared with Secretary Elspeth Reid, which had already been printed in Newsletter 76. The report was accepted by the meeting.

Copies of the Annual Accounts were handed out to everyone in the meeting and time allowed for their perusal. As the Treasurer Hugh Coleman had fallen ill, John Borland presented the accounts briefly and requested questions from members. Graeme Cruickshank pointed out there were no 'Sales of Merchandise' last year. However, sales of old journals made at the 2014 conference had been included under a different heading, 'Conference and Lecture Income'. The accounts were then approved.

It was agreed that the present independent examiner of the accounts should continue in the role.

In her role as Membership Secretary, Elspeth Reid reported that membership was creeping upwards and had reached 116. While a few members had left, new members had joined and some former members had re-joined. The breakdown of numbers saw 69 choosing to receive paper Newsletters by post, and 47 opting for the electronic version in pdf form. Geographically the concentration of members was very much in Scotland (93), followed by England (16), Wales and the USA (2), N Ireland, France and Australia (1 each).

Elspeth reported that the Society's Facebook page was very busy and constantly refreshed thanks to David McGovern's dedication. Facebook 'likers' stood at over 4,800. Although there was little sign as yet that they became paid members of the Society, they were nevertheless actively engaging with Pictish and related topics. The website had now been in existence for three years and the 'Total Visitors' number stood at 35,128. The President pointed out that online people interested in Pictish matters might be willing to make small donations when it came to fund-raising on behalf of Logierait 2, a large cross slab with symbols, which still lay flat in Logierait church. The PAS aim is to raise it to a vertical position in an armature, but several deaths within Logierait's Kirk Session have hindered progress. The Committee remained hopeful that PAS would in due course receive approval to proceed.

Speaking as Editor, John Borland warmly thanked all contributors to past newsletters and asked the room for new submissions for future issues. He stressed that small items, short pieces of information, bits of news and ideas were all welcome, not just full-length articles.

The President then left his seat and Vice-President David McGovern took over proceedings for the election of the Society's President. John Borland was re-elected unopposed with the agreement of the meeting.

There followed the election of other PAS officials: Stewart Mowatt was elected in his absence to continue in the role of Vice President; Vice President, David McGovern; Secretary, Elspeth Reid; Treasurer, Hugh Coleman in his absence; Membership Secretary, Elspeth Reid; Editor, John Borland; Archivist, Elspeth Reid; Events Organiser, John Borland. Re-elected as Committee Members were Sheila Hainey and Nigel Ruckley. The President called for further volunteers to join the Committee. Sarah-Louise Coleman expressed an interest, while recognising that distance might prevent her from attending Committee meetings. The President then left it open for all members to think over and to get in touch.

Any Other Competent Business: Bob Diamond made the point that the Newsletters raised the profile of the Society and provided a place to try out ideas safely. He also praised the high standard of lecture reporting, with other members concurring. John Borland thanked the principal report-writer Sheila Hainey for her excellent work.

Marianna Lines suggested moving the lecture venue to a more accessible place like Dundee which, unlike Brechin, is served by trains. It was suggested that she attempt to find a meeting place that was not too expensive, as the Committee was also concerned about the issue of accessibility. Perth was another suggestion. Other members, however, reminded the meeting that the Edinburgh lectures had to be discontinued due to lack of attendance, meaning that a big centre of population with good public transport did not necessarily produce large audiences. As Brechin Museum is currently made available to the

Society without cost, and as all Committee members can attend to put out chairs, equipment, refreshments, etc, the lecture series remained feasible and attracted a small but loyal group of attendees. Attendance is to be monitored over the coming months.

The AGM ended there and the afternoon programme of talks began.   *ER*

PAS Conference 2015

The 3rd October saw Meigle bathed in a golden autumn light as we gathered at the Kinloch Memorial Hall for our conference titled A Material World. We were treated to six excellent and varied talks over the course of the day. The committee reiterate our gratitude, on behalf of all who were there, to our speakers, to Anna Ritchie who graciously agreed to give up her lunch break to take three groups round the stones in Meigle Museum and our chairpersons for making it such a stimulating and enjoyable day. We are also grateful to Historic Environment Scotland for opening the museum for us, and to the Kirk Session who gave us access to the church. The lavish buffet lunch was provided by the Pot and Pantry, Meigle, and was thoroughly enjoyed.

Norman Atkinson, who chaired our morning session, introduced our first speaker, **Victoria Whitworth**. She is a lecturer at the UHI Centre for Nordic Studies and the author of Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England (2004). She now works primarily on sculpture, and has two forth-coming studies due to be published by Oxford University Press; one on crosses and the other on recumbents. Victoria took for the title of her talk *Pictish Grave Markers and the Bodystones Concept*. She began by explaining that this would be an extract from the opening chapter of her forthcoming book on recumbent stones, where the arguments are developed in more detail than time permitted here

Victoria began by explaining the notion of 'bodystone'. The term was used by Allen and Anderson in their *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* to describe asymmetrical tapering stones, and later taken up by Isabel and George Henderson in *The Art of the Picts*, although it has not yet been recognised by the Oxford English Dictionary. The bodystone is a recumbent grave-marker whose shape reflects that of the underlying shrouded body. It can convey many meanings: the body of the dead, the body of the live viewer and ultimately the body of Christ in whom lies hope of resurrection. Our attention was drawn to Meigle 25, usually described as a hogback stone. This type has been ascribed to Scandinavian influence, and is said to represent a house for the dead with a tiled roof. This massive stone does not, however, resemble a building in shape. Its pattern, rows of offset concave-sided rectangles, might more plausibly be said to resemble a mantle covering a shrouded body than roof tiles.

The slice of stone which survives as St Vigeans 26 and which has been compared to Meigle 25, might more reasonably be interpreted as house-shaped. It has a straight, V-shaped top and is on inspection very different in shape from Meigle 25.

Crown Copyright
Historic Environment Scotland
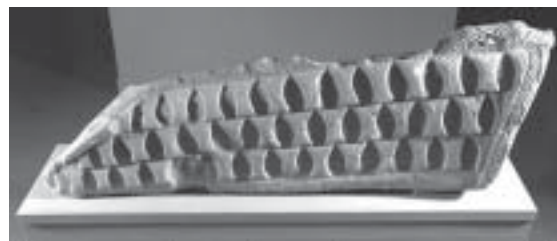
Meigle 25. SC397651

The curved shape and the concave sided 'tiles' of Meigle 25 also appear on hogback stones at Govan, Inchcolm and on some Northern English examples. The interpretation of these as house shaped may reflect an original deliberate ambiguity: the concept of the body as a building finds authority in St John's Gospel, where Christ's body is identified with the Temple. That this concept was recognised in the early medieval church is evident from the representation of Christ's body as a tegulated Temple in the Temptation scene in the Book of Kells. Victoria suggested that Meigle 25 is earlier than the Govan hogbacks, and that the latter derive from the Meigle stone. It may be that Meigle's influence lasted long after it ceased to be a royal Pictish burial site. An analogy would be Westminster Abbey, where royal burials ceased in the eighteenth century but which still maintains a significant place in national life three centuries later. Meigle 25 could well have continued to influence the style of funerary monuments for many years after it was placed over the grave of a royal Pict.

Victoria then turned to a group of recumbent grave markers represented by four examples at Meigle, two at St Vigeans and one at Strathmartine. These stones all have slots on the upper surface, towards the broader or head end. No evidence survives to give us clues as to what once fitted in these slots. Perhaps the material was too fragile or too valuable to be left there permanently, perhaps it was something that was only meant for display on particular feast days or at particular seasons of the year. None of the known examples of these slotted stones bears a cross or a Pictish symbol. Perhaps the missing element carried a cross and/or a symbol, whether it was painted on a board or carved from stone or ivory, or cast in metal. The slots vary in size and shape, so that whatever they held varied too. Taking as a working assumption that the slot once held a cross, Victoria examined in detail the programme of decoration on Meigle 26, which retains carvings on the top, sides and head end panel. By considering the placing of the images on the stone in terms of their relationship to areas of the underlying body, we see a movement from the confident, active,

integrated, human identity of the hunting scene, where man is in control of the natural world to the passivity of disintegration and fear as wild beasts dominate. As we move round from right to left, head to feet and back, we come to hope. A man's head, which the beasts that have devoured his body have not eaten, looks forward to the promise of reintegration, salvation and the resurrection. Augustine's assurance of resurrection and redemption extended to the martyrs is exemplified here. The bosses that lie centrally on the upper surface (and are also seen on Meigle 11, another slotted stone) are to be found on the Derrynaflan chalice with Eucharistic connections. If the slot did indeed hold a cross, the whole theme would have been played out around its foot. The massive size, complex imagery and fine workmanship all point to this stone having once marked the grave of one who enjoyed elite, possibly royal status.

Our next speaker, **Kate Britten**, is a lecturer in Archaeological Science at the University of Aberdeen and an Associate Researcher at the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig. She specialises in the use of stable isotope analysis for the reconstruction of past diets, movements, and environments. Her involvement in medieval research began with a study of changes in diet and mobility as the Burgh of Aberdeen developed, using skeletal material from St Nicholas' Kirk in the city. Since 2014 she has also been working with the Northern Picts Project. She spoke on *Isotopic Insights into the Lost Lives of Lundin Links: Reconstructing Pictish Lifeways*.

Kate's interest in Picts is focussed on ordinary people. Our few historic sources are biased towards the Pictish elite, while the enigmatic art of the stones shows few details of everyday life. Few domestic sites have been excavated, and from these, organic remains are scarce. We know very little about something so central to daily life as the diet of the Picts. As Kate noted, food is a biological necessity but also a cultural commodity. From a range of available foods, humans make a selection to include in their diet. Sometimes these include exotic imports; sometimes locally available foods are avoided. Before we can even begin to imagine the forces that drive such decisions, we need evidence as to what choices were made. For this, we get some clues from the evidence of human remains.

Running in conjunction with the Northern Picts Project at the University of Aberdeen, Kate's Pictish Isotope Project is one aspect of a wide-ranging research programme. Using skeletal material from a number of previously excavated sites, she has been studying the stable isotopes of carbon and nitrogen in collagen extracted from bone to identify the major sources of protein in the diet.

She gave us a rapid outline of the science behind her work. Chemical elements such as carbon, nitrogen and sulphur exist naturally in a number of forms distinguished by their atomic weight. These different forms are known as isotopes. In some cases, such as carbon14, an isotope may decay radioactively. Other isotopes of the same element, such as carbon12 and carbon13, are stable. For Kate's purposes, the stable elements are the interesting ones. Stable isotopes of carbon, nitrogen and sulphur are differentially incorporated by living beings. This means that the ratios of these isotopes differ between each level of the food chain. By using animal remains from the same period as her human bones, Kate can calibrate her measurements and ask questions about the place of animal and fish protein in the diet of the individual in question. The incorporation of stable isotopes of strontium and oxygen in tooth enamel can provide information about where the individual spent their early years: the strontium component being affected by the underlying geology of the region, while the oxygen isotope ratio reflects the sources of water, including the pattern of rainfall, particular to the area.

Picts from sites as widely separated as Westness in Orkney, Rhynie in Aberdeenshire and Lundin Links on the south coat of Fife have something in common with contemporary Anglo-Saxons: they did not eat fish. This was also true of the 5th/6th century bodies dumped unceremoniously in the Roman bath house at Cramond. In contrast, skeletons from Roman-period sites in England, as well as from the monastic period at Portmahomack and from medieval Aberdeen all registered fish as a regular source of dietary protein. The Christian custom of desisting from meat eating on fast days appears to have led to an increase in fish consumption, which declined after the Reformation. Given the proximity of all the Pictish communities thus far studied to rivers or sea, the avoidance of fish in the diet appears to be a definite choice, as indeed is the case for many of the contemporary groups studied from England. The reasons for such a choice are as yet unknown.

The Pictish cemetery at Lundin Links was excavated following the exposure of a number of graves by the great storm of 1965. From at least the mid-nineteenth century there had been sporadic reports of finds of long cist graves in the area. The excavations revealed round cairns, a 'horned' cairn complex and one shaped rather like a double-disc symbol, as well as a number of uncairned cist graves. Radiocarbon dates from skeletal remains suggest that the cemetery was in use from around the mid-5th to the mid-7th centuries. The bodies were oriented more-or-less east-west, and only a thistle-headed iron pin was recovered in the way of grave goods. The horned complex contained the remains of females, while the double cairn covered the cists of a male and a female. Many of the uncairned cists contained males.

One male, from the 'double disc' cairn, appeared to be somewhat higher up the food chain than the others

from the cemetery, suggesting that he had eaten freshwater fish (or birds or animals that had fed on such fish. Sulphur isotope analysis may be able to settle this point.) The other individuals all seem to have eaten meat but not fish. The females from the horned complex not only seem to have shared a remarkably similar diet, but some genetically determined skeletal features suggest a close family relationship between members of this group. It is hoped that DNA analysis may at some point shed further light on this.

Strontium and oxygen analysis of tooth enamel revealed that the females of Lundin Links all came from the immediate area. The male with the exceptional diet had also been raised in the immediate area. The males from the long cists may have been more mobile. However, they all appeared to have been raised in the general area of south east Fife. (By way of contrast, the possible monks from 6th- to 8th-century Portmahomack showed a much wider range of origins).

Although Kate's Pictish research is still at an early stage, she has already provided some interesting data and is beginning to direct attention to some equally interesting questions. Are the samples from the cemeteries representative of the communities from which the individuals were drawn? Why do the Picts of the 5th to 7th centuries appear to have chosen not to add fish to their diet? Is there any significance in the apparent inclusion of freshwater fish or game in the diet of a single individual at Lundin Links? More data is required before we can begin to answer these and other questions. Kate continues to seek out Pictish skeletons in the hope of finding answers.

Our last speaker of the morning was **David Henry**, a long standing member of PAS who runs Pinkfoot Press, which has published many significant works on Pictish matters, including the only modern edition of *ECMS*.

'*...the ridiculous in such a paltry place*'. With this quotation from a letter sent to the Dundee Courier in 1877, David plunged us into the controversy that surrounded the establishment of the Museum at Meigle.

By the mid-19th century, Andrew Jervise could describe Meigle as the 'capital of old sculptured stones'. In the 1850s he collected information on Meigle's stones and carried out some limited excavations around the bases of sculptured cross slabs in the graveyard. Something of the value of the fragments had been recognised by Mr Murray of Simprin (later of Arthurstone), who displayed a number of them built into a wall of the stable court at Meigle House. On the other hand, Mr Gellatly of Templehill was able to retrieve stones which had been less mindfully built into an old corn kiln. By 1867, a number of stone fragments had been removed to the church for protection, and were there seen and recorded by Chalmers and Stuart and their illustrators, Jaztrebski and Gibb, among others.

Unfortunately, on a cold, stormy Sunday in March 1869, a sudden draught through the stove that heated the building caused flames from the top of the flue outside to penetrate under the eaves; the fire in the roof spread quickly and in an hour the church was destroyed and many of the stones placed there for safe-keeping were lost. However, a number of other stones, including Meigle 26, came to light when the remains were cleared for rebuilding, having been built into the fabric of the doomed church at some earlier date.

In May 1871, the Earl of Strathmore sold the estate of Meigle to Sir George Kinloch of Kinloch. Some years later, the new landowner proposed to convert the old village school, which was about to be replaced, into a museum to house Meigle's sculptured stones. This sparked a furious reaction. For some, it was a question of utility; the village had more need of a hall to act as a meeting place that could house local functions than a museum. A museum of sculptured stones was not seen as a potential asset for the community. The plan would result in the disastrous loss of the school ground as a venue for the annual horticulture and poultry shows. The place of local landowners (Kinloch and his supporters among his fellow heritors) in determining issues affecting church and community was a serious issue for some. Although local feeling in favour of the conversion of the school to a village hall ran high, Sir George bid successfully at the auction of the old school, paying the large sum of £674 for the privilege of seeing his plans for a museum vilified in letters to the press. Late Victorian notions of normal language of debate would horrify many in our modern, politically correct days.

The robust nature of the opposition to Sir George was evident also in the response of the local Presbytery. Heritors had long been responsible for maintaining the fabric of church buildings, and their rights over the presentation of the minister to the pulpit played a role in the great schism in the Church of Scotland earlier in the century. It was hardly surprising that Sir George and his friends felt that they had not only the right to control the destiny of the stones, but the responsibility to preserve them. The local Presbytery disagreed, and wanted the stones left where they lay. To a background of vituperative correspondence in the press, expressing what Sir George mildly saw as 'want of public sympathy', he wrote to the Presbytery of Meigle with the backing of his fellow heritors and some of the leading antiquarians of the day to outline his plan for the museum. The records of the meetings of Presbytery which subsequently dealt with the matter reveal them to have been fractious and rowdy occasions, with demands for the return of all the stones wherever they were found in the village to

the churchyard. To add fuel to the flames of Presbyterian wrath, Sir George had, twenty-five years earlier, obtained from the then minister a medieval font which lay in the manse garden. The font was used at the baptism of Sir George's second son, and placed in the Episcopalian church at Meigle. There it remained. The fate of the font was seen as emblematic of what might happen to the stones, and the spirit of the meetings was hardly one of Christian forbearance.

Kinloch, nevertheless, wrote, detailing where the stones were found and explaining his plans for placing them in the museum, freely open to all who wished to visit it, under the guidance of a group of trustees. Some members of Presbytery were still prepared to make an issue of the font, which had been used (and cared for) by the Episcopalians of Meigle for twenty-seven years. However, it was felt that Sir George had taken a more conciliatory tone, and it was decided to form a committee to meet with the heritors.

The problem of ownership of the stones was a major point of contention: the view of Presbytery was that the stones belonged to the church and that the heritors had no rights in them. The preservation and display of these precious artefacts was of little interest to those whose concern for the 'rights' of a church that should be seen as independent were paramount. By the end of March 1881, Sir John Kinloch was acting on behalf of his father. A compromise was eventually agreed between the heritors and the Presbytery, whereby the old School was 'transferred' to the churchyard. The stones, with the exception of the two which were possibly in their original locations (nos 1 and 2), were to be moved into the former school. Sir George died in the June of that year, but his museum was soon fitted out and opened, although it was to take some time before the stones could be carefully cleaned and properly displayed.

Crown Copyright Historic Environment Scotland

Ownership of Meigle's pre-Reformation font was hotly contested in the 19th century. It is now on display in the parish church. SC397504

Meanwhile, legal opinion on the ownership of the pre-Reformation font had been sought. The verdict was that there was no evidence that the font had ever belonged to the Kirk Session at Meigle or ever been used by a minister of that parish. There was no evidence that the properties of the Roman church had ever been transferred to the Presbyterian Church. By extension, this opinion could clearly apply equally to ownership of the carved stones. As a final twist, the font was placed in the vestibule of the Presbyterian church at Meigle some eighty years later, and there it remains.

Although the stones were placed in a museum with free access for all, the controversy was not entirely settled. For some, such as Joseph Anderson, secretary to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and soon to publish with Romilly Allen *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, believed the stones should be in the Society's museum in Edinburgh rather than Meigle as 'in such local arrangements there is no recognition of their permanent interest as National Monuments'. For others, there was enthusiasm that the stones were safely and carefully housed in immediate proximity to the churchyard.

The first guide to the stones in Meigle Museum was written by A S Aglen, the Episcopalian minister of Meigle and Alyth. And finally: Mrs Anderson, wife of the old schoolmaster, lost the use of the yard by the old schoolhouse and, consequently, had to sell her show poultry.

———————————

Over the lunch break, we split into three groups to visit the Museum, under the expert guidance of **Anna Ritchie**.

———————————

Our afternoon session was chaired by **Jane Geddes**. She first introduced **Alice Blackwell**. Alice studied at the University of Leeds and then the University of Glasgow, before joining National Museums Scotland in 2008 as Glenmorangie Research Officer. Now Glenmorangie Research Fellow, she works on all kinds of early medieval artefacts and sculpture, but is currently engaged in a three-year programme of work on early medieval silver, which formed the basis of her talk: *Scotland's earliest silver: the Glenmorangie Research Project phase 3 (2015-2017)*.

Alice began by reminding us of the history of Glenmorangie's generous funding for research into aspects of Early Historic Scotland. The current (third) three year programme of funding is targeted at silver: its sources and uses. In the Pictish period, silver seems to have been the main material used for portable prestige objects. Alice's research will consider how its use reflected the emergence and evolution of Pictish kingdoms.

In the early part of the Pictish period, enamel was frequently used to enhance silver. By the time the Hunterston brooch was created, small amounts of gold were being used instead to highlight the display

of exquisite craftsmanship. The use of imported silver in the Late Roman period in northern Britain is attested by the great hoard found at Traprain Law – the largest hoard of Late Roman silver from outside the boundaries of the empire. Recently, the remains of three or four hacked-up silver vessels of the Late Roman period have been uncovered in Fife. There is no evidence for local silver mining until the later medieval period. Prior to that Roman silver was extensively recycled until the Vikings began to bring in fresh supplies. Given that at least thirty kilograms of silver went into the manufacture of the known Pictish period chains, there was clearly a large quantity of silver available. Elsewhere, similar patterns have emerged on the fringes of the Roman Empire.

Late Roman silver in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland has been extensively analysed. Glenmorangie's aid in allowing this to be extended into the Early Historic or Pictish period is welcome. Varying amounts of lead, tin, zinc, copper and gold are present in very small quantities, and can be used, for example to identify fragments of a single item which has been cut and folded into several pieces of hacksilver. X-ray fluorescence analysis provides a non-invasive and relatively cheap means of determining the impurities present in the silver, allowing many items to be processed. However, this provides surface analysis which does not necessarily reflect the gold and copper present in the body of the item. This difficulty can be overcome by the use of proton-induced x-ray analysis, but this technique is not'only expensive and much slower, but is also destructive. Limited application of this technique to some items from Traprain and Norrie's Law has allowed an assessment of the validity of the surface analysis. The results suggest that it can be a very useful first screen. The target pieces to be examined include medieval hacksilver, the massive silver chains and other, later pieces such as brooches and the St Ninian's Isle treasure.

Early medieval hacksilver as a source of information has been largely overlooked. While the Traprain hoard and several Viking Age hoards have been extensively studied, the 160+ fragments from Norrie's Law have been largely ignored. Perhaps the jewellery (the handpin and the plaque with their nineteenth-century replicas) drew attention away from the other fragments recovered from the site.

Until 2013/14, only three pieces from a comparable hoard found at Gaulcross – a spiral bangle, a handpin and a remarkable silver chain – were known to survive. Other pieces of silver dug up with these around 1830 had disappeared. Martin Goldberg's work in identifying the site of the stone circle where the hoard was found led to the recovery of roughly another 100 fragments of silver.

The handpins from Norrie's Law and Gaulcross are similar in both size and style. Both hoards contained hacksilver. Those from Norrie's Law have been carefully unfolded, revealing that three of these little parcels came from one object. None of the Gaulcross hacksilver has as yet been opened out. Pieces of cut-up objects from Gaulcross have been identified, however. The flat terminal and twisted hoop of a penannular brooch from Norrie's Law bear comparison with a terminal and hoop fragment from Gaulcross. Bracelet fragments from both sites also show clear similarities. Decorative features such as punched or drilled dots and hatched incised lines appear on items from both sites. Analysis of nineteen bracelet fragments from Norrie's Law identified six distinct groups as to metallic content, while seven pieces with hatched decoration were resolved into four groups by X-ray fluorescence scanning. Late Roman siliquae were found both at Norrie's Law and Gaulcross. Four of these were also found at Traprain, and a number have turned up as stray finds across the country.

Both the Norrie's Law and Gaulcross hoards contained a small but significant component of Late Roman silver. In neither case, as we now have the hoards, is there a complete Late Roman item. However, only 750 grams of a possible 12.5 kilograms of silver found at Norrie's Law survive, the rest having been melted down for reuse in the mid-nineteenth century. At Gaulcross, too, 'many pieces' were said to have been found. We have no way of knowing how representative a sample the Norrie's Law survivors form. At Gaulcross recent fieldwork turned up ingots of silver. If there were any such at Norrie's Law, were these preferentially melted down?

Alice outlined a number of questions that she hopes to explore. Can the original objects packaged up as hacksilver be identified? Can the little parcels tell us anything about the tools that were used on them, or how they themselves were used? For example, are the weights of the parcels significant? Some from Traprain Law and from the new Fife hoard appear to respect divisions of the Roman ounce. Were these from early in the period of recycling of Roman silver?

Is it possible to obtain more accurate dating? Similar hoards in Scandinavia and Denmark have been dated

The Gaulcross Hoard

to between the late 4th/early 5th and late 6th century. Art historical consideration of the Dog's Head symbol on the Norrie's Law plaque is the sole reason for dating that hoard to the 7th/8th century, although parallels to some of the other objects in that hoard may place them much earlier.

It has been suggested that purity of recycled silver may have declined over time. With no fresh input of precious metal available to match demand, debasement in an attempt to make the raw material go further was probable. This needs to be investigated. There is also the question of whether or not it may be possible to trace how much recycling preceded the manufacture of any surviving object. This may not be straightforward. Some of the heavy silver chains show remarkable consistency of content throughout their length: others vary from link to link. So far, all of the pieces from Norrie's Law have been subjected to surface analysis. The Gaulcross collection has still to be completed, and the new Fife hoard will also be investigated. At Meigle, we were privileged to see the outlines of the project close to its beginning.

Our next speaker, **Martin Goldberg** is Senior Curator for the Early Historic and Viking collections at National Museums Scotland. His research ranges from prehistory to the Early Medieval period and to early antiquarian ways of understanding the past. He also particularly enjoys finding new ways to understand the material evidence for religion, whether prehistoric or Christian. With *Creative Spirit: Researching Early Medieval Scotland*, Martin covered research projects already carried out under the auspices of the Glenmorangie Project. He described several different pieces of work, all linked by a common theme: the re-creation of objects from the Pictish period. This involved collaboration with modern craftsmen, using modern techniques and knowledge, to produce objects as similar to the originals as possible. In some instances, digital technology was used to create virtual objects, for reasons which became apparent as Martin detailed the specific examples of objects covered.

This approach differs from that of experimental archaeology. Its justification lies in the words of David Clarke: 'if we know that they could create the objects, we know they had the tools …', rather than relying on archaeological evidence to suggest the original manufacturing processes. A lot may be learned by working with craft experts who are accustomed to thinking through the technical challenges of what they have been asked to produce, and who constantly refer back to the original in order to explore which methods may have been used in the past.

The first example that Martin described was the re-creation of an early Christian brazed iron handbell, with the Kingoldrum bell taken as the model. This particular type of handbell was of iron with a bronze

Recreation of a bronzed early Christian hand bell

overlay, possible allowing for a larger bell than using bronze alone. The Kingoldrum bell is unusual in that the iron core survives, while much of the bronze sheath has flaked away. Any re-creation of an early Christian bell must result in a bell that rings and whose appearance fits the evidence (some variations in finish are apparent in the known ancient bells). In 2007 Tim Young of Cardiff University tried archaeological reconstruction based on evidence from the monastic site at Clonfad in Ireland, which suggested the use of a mould or shroud in the brazing process. This proved unsuccessful. Cormac Bourke's suggestion that the bells were cut out from a flat sheet pierced for rivets before folding and fixing tends to result in a 'cow-bell' effect, rather than giving a clear ringing tone. This is not really satisfactory, given the wide range of uses for bells in the early church: marking liturgical time, calling to services, noting the hour, sounding alarms and so on. Such bells were often associated with founding saints and preserved in parish churches.

Martin worked with craftsmen from Ratho Forge and Powderhall Bronze on this problem, and he provided spectacular illustrations of the processes involved. At Powderhall, the use of modern lost wax techniques (the descendants of the method used by Tim Young) to braze the bell only worked to a certain extent. The appearance was good, but the bell did not ring satisfactorily. At Ratho, direct application of bronze to the iron surface gave a better ring. Methods such as impregnating wax with bronze and applying that to the surface before using heat were also tried. The point of working backwards from modern capacities like this is that by identifying technologies that work and that might have been applied in the past, it is possible to consider what archaeological evidence such techniques may have left and hopefully it may lead to the recognition of such evidence as it is uncovered.

Martin's next example was a leather satchel. Fragments of leather were among the artefacts retrieved from the excavation of a crannog in Loch Glashan in 1960. The excavation and the artefacts discovered here were not fully described until a 2005 publication brought together the work of a number of experts to provide a detailed analysis of the crannog and its related finds. Among the fragments of leather, it was suggested that there were the remains of a satchel such as was used in the early Christian church to carry or store books. This was a significant identification for the interpretation of the site, as it was the only specifically Christian artefact recovered there. As Martin noted, the identification relied on a paper exercise: no attempt at physical re-creation was made at the time. For this, he turned to Ian Dunlop of SodaKitsch, an Edinburgh-based studio working in traditional, vegetable-tanned leather for help in re-creating the Loch Glashan satchel. Ian began by examining the fragments, noting the patterns of wear that remain on the leather. Book satchels contained precious objects that would require careful handling. When not carried (as by the monks on the Papil stone), these would have been hung from wall pegs. However, the satchel found at Loch Glashan had been subjected to the kind of use that subjects the base to much wear. Other features pointed to this having been a workaday bag that might have been used by anyone with things to carry – a craftsman, a hunter, a traveller. And, incidentally, Ian's re-creation would still be a very desirable workaday bag. He used vegetable-tanned deerskin. The size of the skin would limit the size of the bag. Today's skins are liable to be damaged by shot; it is possible that in the early historic period deer were trapped and killed at close quarters, allowing the hunter to be careful about where the skin was punctured. Few tools were needed to transform the tanned skin into the bag: a knife to cut the shape and possibly even the same one to make the holes for the leather lacing to hold the bag together. The craftsman who made the original would not necessarily have left much trace in the archaeological record.

Martin went on to deal with the silver 'fakes' which diverted attention from much of the genuine content of the Norrie's Law hoard. The duplicate plaque and hand pin almost certainly came from the same mould as pewter versions which were probably created as advertising material used in a campaign to seek any surviving material from the hoard. The copying of ancient artefacts had become common practice by the mid-nineteenth century, and remains a feature of museum gift shops to the present. There was, and is, rarely any intent to mislead. The motives behind the copying of ancient artefacts are a study in themselves.

The next project was a stunning example of the use of digital technology in the virtual re-creation of objects. The example here came from the hoard found on Traprain Law during the course of excavations there in 1919. Among the fragments recovered were two pieces from the beaded rim of a dish with gilded repoussé border decoration. Any attempt to re-create this in silver would have cost a large sum. Instead, Relicarte used digital technology to scan the fragments and work from them to create a stunning virtual 3-D image of a very lovely object, allowing us to see what the dish would have looked like when new.

Finally, working with Johnny Ross of Sutherland, an expert in the craft of working with horn, Martin took us through the process of making drinking horns. As well as showing us more spectacular illustrations, Martin evoked some of the downsides of working with horn. The horn, fresh from the slaughterhouse, is boiled up to soften the tissues that make up the core, allowing them to be scraped away. The process is smelly and messy, and the hollowed horn is then left in a running stream to remove any remaining fragments. The tools and materials used to smooth and polish the horn (knife, sandstone, sand and fat) would leave little trace in the archaeological record. However, the unpromising starting material – the gory horn of a Highland cow – was transformed under Martin's eyes into an elegant drinking vessel of warm translucent amber shades. As no two horns are identical, so each finished article is unique in pattern and precise shape.

The drinking horn on the Bullion Stone is very much larger in scale than those made from local cow horns. We know from an eighth-century Irish law document that such horns, probably from aurochs, the ancient wild cattle that were once widespread, were imported over long distances. The language used to describe them often shares terms used to describe glass. Martin's shots of Johnny's work showed how natural such comparisons must have been. Using imported horn from an African ankole (a species related to aurochs), a drinking vessel of the appropriate scale
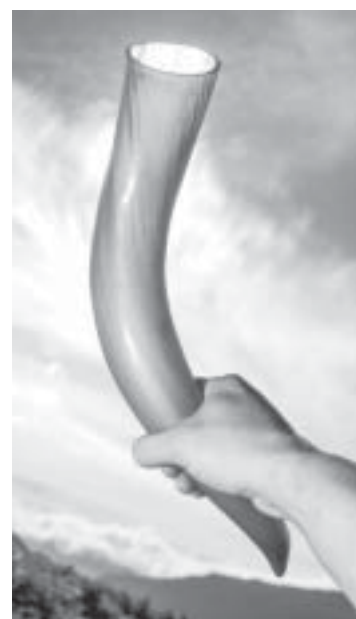
Johnny Ross's recreated Pictish drinking horn

was created. The description of the colour of such horns given in the old tract, 'the colour of the ninth wave', was indeed apt. Silver artist Jennifer Gray then set about designing a silver terminal, based on that shown on the Bullion stone. Digital technology came into play at the design stage, allowing the appearance to be created virtually before a 3-D print was used to create a wax mould for the creation of the silver mount. The final drinking horn, capable of holding a gallon, in contrast to the pint capacity of the horn from a Highland cow, and richly ornamented, was one that any hero would have been delighted to own.

Our final talk was a three-hander from **David McGovern**, **Paul MacDonald** and **Chris Grant**, entitled *Steel yourselves: reassessing the Gorton Sword*. Each of the three had a special expertise to bring to the problem of the sword found at Gorton in Speyside.

David is a stone carver, whose work is chiefly inspired by the art of the Picts. Carving in stone has given him insights into the kind of tools needed to achieve the great monuments of Pictland. Study of Pictish and other stones from early medieval Scotland and northern England has given him familiarity with contemporary objects depicted on them. This has led him to pose two questions. First, is there evidence that the Picts could work steel? It is likely that they would have used steel tools in their carving if that were the case. Second, how far are we justified in blindly accepting that the swords shown on Pictish stones are either Anglo-Saxon or Viking? Is it possible that the Picts made their own weapons to local designs? The sword unearthed during railway construction around 1860 at Gorton in Speyside is a possible candidate. This was an isolated find, with few details of its discovery in a location that is not close to any known Viking presence. The shape of the guard and the relatively broad blade closely resemble swords depicted on Pictish stones at Nigg and Aberlemno, and David Clarke has suggested that the Gorton sword may predate Norse activity in northern Britain.

© Trustees National Museums Scotland

The Gorton Sword: Is it Norse or Pictish? Is it iron or steel?

The sword is currently in Dublin, on loan to the National Museum of Ireland. When it returns to Edinburgh David hopes to study it more closely, and collaborate with Paul and Chris in replicating it.

Paul is a sword-cutler and Master-at-Arms who specialises in making high-quality reproductions of historical weapons for re-enactors, historical fencers, and collectors. He also researches and teaches traditional martial arts. With experience in recreating weapons dating from the Bronze Age to the modern period, he has made a careful study of the development of swords in particular. Paul gave his views on the question of whether or not the Gorton sword may have been a local Pictish design. He pointed out that we have evidence that the Picts were capable of high levels of craftsmanship in metals and stone work. In his experience, cultures which possess expertise in two or three areas generally have high levels of ability across a wide range: where metalworkers produce fine jewellery or stone carvers produce monumental works of art, he would not expect to find crude or primitive standards in the production of weapons. Paul agreed with David that the Gorton sword may have been produced locally: the distance from known Viking activity and the shape of the guard and pommel together with the width of the blade are different enough from known Viking types to make it a distinct possibility. The fact that swords of Gorton type are so faithfully depicted on stones implies that the stone carvers were familiar with weapons like this.

He showed an example of a replicated Viking sword, the original of which was found in a Finnish grave. The copy was faithful to the original in terms of size, weight and ornament, with a blade about 3mm maximum thickness, tapering to 1mm or less. This was a weapon light and easy to wield, and a swordsman would have been able to move quickly as he used it to full advantage. Swords of this quality could certainly have been produced in northern Europe in the Pictish period.

Over the previous year, Paul worked on an axe he had seen in the National Museums of Scotland. It was listed as an 'iron battle-axe head', but when he studied and measured it closely, his suspicion that it was something very different was confirmed. The shape of the axe head, the sharpness of the blade, the weight and balance all pointed to it being a planking axe. Although the original was found on Rannoch moor, it is very similar in form and proportion to Golspie Man's axe and to the Centaurs' axes on Meigle 2 and Aberlemno 3, and that wielded by the Bird Man at Papil. The haft of the axe, which he had brought with him, had a short utilitarian grip and the whole was finely balanced for working. The craftsmen who carved the stones at Golspie, Meigle, Aberlemno and Papil were surely familiar with similar tools.

Chris came to making knives roundabout, by way of making his own tools for woodcarving. Working with a skilled blacksmith set him on the road to creating specialist knives, working with steel and finishing the handles in wood. Honing his skills as a bladesmith, Chris developed an enthusiasm for steel – its manufacture, uses and history – that is truly infectious. Steel is basically iron with a carbon content of between 0.2 and 4%, and has the advantage over iron that it can be hardened. Cast iron, with a higher carbon content is not malleable.

Chris demonstrated the difference between iron and steel dramatically. A thin bar of iron, held at the ends and bent over his head, stayed bent. A similar bar of steel, bent over his head, flexed back into its original straight form when the tension was released. Iron makes for a poor sword, much inferior to one of bronze which gives a superior blade. In fact, bronze is superior to iron for a wide range of uses, graving points and chisels being two examples of tools which Chris noted. Only by case hardening and forge welding – mixing iron with high carbon steel – is it possible to harden iron. There is a small but growing body of evidence that steel was known and used in northern Europe from an early period, with high carbon steel in use at Broxmouth in East Lothian around 400BC. We have no reason to imagine that Pictish smiths were incapable of producing and working steel.

Chris went on to explain the technique of welding iron to steel to produce a laminated blade before giving his assessment of the Gorton sword. The differing levels of corrosion in the Gorton blade indicate that it is a bi-metal type laminate, consisting of an iron core, with steel edges. He suspects that a closer examination of the sword than he has so far been able to make will yield more information.

Chris highlighted the importance of hand files to bladesmiths and other metal workers. He considers files to be an essential part of the toolkit for producing clean welds in a pattern welded sword like the Gorton example. *Sheila Hainey*

Special thanks to Sheila for penning all of this year's conference reports (and the Brechin lecture report too)! *JB*

PAS Conference Field-Trip

The sun was shining when this year's fieldtrippers set off by coach from Meigle on the morning of Sunday 4th October. Our tour guide (and organiser), Norman Atkinson, made use of the coach's PA system to point out landmarks and historical sites as we wound our way through Perthshire's country lanes to the first stop on the day's itinerary: Keillor symbol stone.

Now cleared of its surrounding trees and bushes, this tall pillar of a stone sitting atop a low mound at the

side of the road is much more visible than it once was. As the last remnants of mist burnt off, the sun shone on the stone and on the vista of Strathmore. Much debate ensued about the nature of the animal carved on the Keillor stone, with badger being proffered as an alternative to wolf.

Back on the bus we wound our way briefly out of Perthshire and into Angus before returning to visit our second site: Bruceton. This symbol stone is located in the middle of a field, thankfully on this occasion unploughed. Once again, discussion ensued about the stone, its symbols and its location.

Our earlier-than-planned arrival in Alyth meant that we had to wait for Sunday service to finish in the Parish Church before we could congregate in the vestibule and admire the symbol-bearing cross-incised stone there. But when the kirk had emptied, the minister was very accommodating of our own special pilgrimage. Discussion here centred on the nature of the cross and how it was much more 'west of Scotland' in style than most other examples in Pictland. As it turns out, our very own Graeme Cruikshank was born nearby and was christened in Alyth church. His contribution to the discussion was of particular worth, noting that the relationship of the cross on one face and the double-disc & Z-rod on the other and the actual form of the stone made this an unsatisfactory candidate to be labelled a Class II cross slab.

A brief hop to Blairgowrie gave people a chance to buy lunch or eat their picnic in the town square under what was now a more overcast sky. Then it was back on the bus for the longest leg of the trip, over the Sidlaw Hills and down into the Carse of Gowrie to Rossie Priory. There, owner Caroline Best met us at the west gate of the estate and led us to the Kinnaird family mausoleum which houses an exceptional cross slab. Being on private land and within the locked mausoleum, access to Rossie Priory is rare so everyone was keen to examine, photograph and discuss this gem of Pictish sculpture.

From Rossie, the coach took us back into the Perthshire heartland and to Kettins, our last stop of the day. This monumentally big cross slab was discovered in use as a footbridge over the local burn before being erected in the kirkyard. Over the years it was extensively swallowed up by ivy until a recent initiative by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust saw the ivy removed. It had always been assumed that the face of the slab which had been uppermost when it served as a footbridge was entirely devoid of carving, having been worn smooth by years of footfall. But in true PAS style, close examination of the now ivy-free back revealed hints of carved detail: a short horizontal border, in line with the arm of the cross on the other face suggests that both faces may have borne a large cross whilst lower down there were hints of animal and maybe human legs, carved in relief.

There is no doubt (in my mind at least) that a coach is far better than a convoy of private vehicles when it comes to organising a fieldtrip of this nature. Not only is it safer, greener and more considerate for other road users, but it also engenders a greater *esprit de corps* amongst the participants. Our thanks for an excellent day out go to: Norman Atkinson for organising the trip and 'coming out of retirement' for the day to be our guide, Caroline Best for granting us access to Rossie Priory, the minister and congregation of Alyth Parish Church for allowing us to mob the vestibule of the kirk on a Sunday, the farmers at Keillor and Bruceton for allowing our coach to park up on their driveway (and especially Bruceton for leaving the field in stubble) and last but not least, our coach driver George who navigated us through many a narrow and winding road with great skill.   *JB*

Brechin Lectures 2015-16

Resisting Temptation:
Farnell's 'forbidden fruit'.

In September the Pictish Arts Society returned, courtesy of Angus Council, to Brechin Town House Museum for our winter season of talks. Our first speaker was David Henry, the driving force behind Pinkfoot Press. His subject on this occasion, Farnell's 'forbidden fruit', was a scene that has been often described as depicting the Temptation – the only one surviving on a Pictish cross slab. This was, for David, a return to ideas first expressed during the course of a Pictish Arts Society Field Trip in May 1998. The trip was organised by David himself, and combined visits to the sites of a number of Angus stones with a trip to Montrose Museum. Thus both the old church at Farnell, where the cross-slab was found, and the stone itself, then in Montrose, were visited. Recently, it has been suggested that the Adam and Eve scene from the stone should be replicated as part of the decorative programme for Brechin's new flood defences, provoking David once more to voice his doubts. In his talk, he challenged that identification, with more detailed argument than he had advanced back in 1998.

Farnell was a residence and grange of the bishops of Brechin. The church and churchyard stand on high ground above the meandering Pow Burn. Two early cross-head fragments found at the site in 1870 have since been lost, and a stone incised with part of a medieval consecration cross is built into the wall of the present church. To the north was the site of the missing St Rume's Cross, possibly hinting at the original patron saint of the ancient church at Farnell. The earliest notice of the Farnell cross-slab was by its finder, Andrew Jervise, who reported that it was uncovered in the line of the foundation of the old church at Farnell in 1849. The Earl of Southesk had the stone removed to Kinnaird Castle, where he

displayed it for several years before donating it to Montrose Museum. (The stone was later moved to Pictavia, and its next site for display is now under discussion.)

As Jervise noted, the stone is much mutilated. On the front, there is a large ringed cross, flanked by intertwining beasts. Key pattern decorated the ring, while the cross is filled with interlace. Interlace also fills the spaces below the beasts. On the reverse a pair of sinuous monsters with gaping mouths opposed at the top and their elongated bodies form a pelleted frame for the other elements. (This type of decoration is also a feature of sculpture at Brechin – on the St Mary cross-slab and also round the doorway of the round tower.) An angel is visible above a large mutilated area, below which is a smaller ringed cross. Beneath that is the scene which formed the subject of David's talk.

Courtesy Historic Environment Scotland

Detail of Farnell cross slab by Tom Gray.
SC1432614 (Tom & Sybil Gray Collection)

A tree, composed of a single trunk from which spring four pairs of branches and one apical branch, each terminating in a round 'fruit', shelters two figures that stand either side of the trunk. The figures are clothed in long tunics, and the one on the viewer's right clutches something in its right hand, held in front of the body. On either side of this group is placed a serpent, head down and tail stretching up level with the lower limb of the cross. Although both Chalmers and Stuart noted the stone, they appear to have been at least initially doubtful of the identification of this as a Temptation scene. However, the identification is clearly made in Allen and Anderson's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, where the figures are described as: 'the temptation of Adam and Eve … the figures clothed, standing on either side of the tree, Eve having an apple in her hand and the serpent duplicated to fill the vacant space on both sides of the central group.'

Elsewhere, Anderson noted the differences between this and the Temptation scene on St Matthew's Cross at Iona – the only comparator from early medieval Scotland. On the Farnell stone, the figures are clothed; on St Matthew's Cross, they are naked, as described in chapter 3 of Genesis and as they are usually shown. On St Matthew's Cross, the single serpent coils round the tree, as it does in most conventional representations of the scene; on the Farnell cross-slab, there are twin serpents occupying the spaces on either side, 'for the sake of symmetry' according to Anderson.

Thomas Wise, in his *Paganism in Caledonia*, put forward the suggestion that the scene represents the sacred tree of Buddhism with two priests meditating below. We would do well to remember that observation can be accurate while interpretation may be wide of the mark. Although Wise' views seem eccentric to us, he was not disregarded by his contemporaries. In the 1850s, he worked with Jervise examining and recording stones in Angus, and he was in communication with Stuart. He saw the stone not long after its discovery and observed that the 'missing apple' and the so-called 'apple' being grasped by the figure on the right were recent modifications to the carving and ignored them in his drawing. David believes that this was done by someone who was intent on making the dubious scene better fit conventional representations of the Temptation.

The tree beneath which the Farnell figures stand bears more than a passing resemblance to trees on other stones. David showed us examples from Fowlis Wester and from Eassie, where he pointed out that the 'pot' from which the tree has been described as growing may, in fact, be a square shield carried by the foremost of the three figures to the left and lower than the tree. This group bears comparison with that on the Birsay stone and the marching group at Fowlis Wester. Other developed, more stylised examples of trees are present at Rosemarkie and Hilton of Cadboll, while the centaur figures from Aberlemno and Meigle carry similar branches.

Identification of the paired serpents at Farnell with the single serpent of the story of the Temptation is open to doubt. Paired serpents are also found in Angus at Strathmartine and Kinnell. David suggested that the pairing may refer to the concepts of rebirth and redemption symbolised by the sloughing of the snake's old skin. Anderson saw the scale of the serpents at Farnell as dictated by the need to fill the spaces on either side of the central tree with the figures beneath it. It may be instead that the serpent is no longer simply associated with the temptation of Eve, but is forever crawling, conveying the message that we need to be constantly vigilant.

Rather than an isolated representation of Adam and Eve, unusually fully clothed and looking remarkably similar, David suggests that what we have here is part of a programme that is replete with images of redemption, with the angel of the resurrection above the cross, below which two saints or ecclesiastics, each holding a book, flank the tree of life to which they, as adherents to the word of God, have access to its fruit, which was denied to Adam and Eve whose disobedience led to their expulsion from the garden. The snake, in its dual forms – life and death – represents resurrection and everlasting life.

A lively discussion followed. Among other comments from the floor came the suggestion that the two figures bore a far greater resemblance to the pair usually identified in Pictish art as Saints Paul and Anthony. David sees the Farnell figures as a very close match for the pair flanking the Aldbar cross-shaft. The observation was made that the notion of the serpents being placed and sized merely to fill up space would be a very un-Pictish approach. The space is a consequence of the design. Also, if the snakes are intended to convey ideas of redemption, they do not appear protective of the central figures, nor in any form of conversation with them.

David hoped that this talk would inspire further debate. It certainly provoked much thought among the audience.   *Sheila Hainey*

Note from the Editor:
Please feel free to air any views on the subject through the columns of this Newsletter.

Forthcoming events in 2016

Perthshire Field Trip

Measuring in at 1.97m, Graeme Cruickshank proves a handy measuring device at Keillor symbol stone (Photo M Lines)

Norman Atkinson looking less than impressed by the badger theory at Keillor (photo M Lines)

The group examine the back of Rossie Priory by torchlight while the front is bathed in late afternoon sunlight streaming through the mausoleum window (photo D McGovern)

Norman Atkinson leads the discussion of Bruceton symbol stone while Nigel Ruckley examines the stone's geology (photo M Lines)

The group assemble in front of Kettins cross slab as Norman Atkinson describes the surviving detail (photo D McGovern)