New research on
Early Medieval silver
and the Norrie's Law hoard

The November speaker at Pictavia was Alice Blackwell, Glenmorangie Research Officer at the National Museums of Scotland. Glenmorangie's sponsorship of studies into the early historic period artefacts in the Museums' collections was extended earlier in the year, and vÛ were delighted to hear from Alice of some of the recent work on Pictish silver.

She began by explaining some of the techniques being applied to the silver Pictish period artefacts in the collections and giving some examples of the kinds of questions which it may be possible to answer. In the first place, it is the intention of Alice and the others involved in the project to use non-destructive assay and inspection techniques on all the early historic silver in the collection to answer questions about the provenance of the metal and the metalworking techniques available to Pictish silversmiths.

So far, eleven massive silver chains, weighing up to two kilograms, have been reported as found at various locations in Scotland. Two of these had Pictish symbols engraved on the terminals, hence they have been attributed to the Picts although the wide distribution of their find sites leaves this open to question. X-ray fluorescence (XRF) testing is a non-destructive way of analyzing the various metallic elements present in silver alloys, often as trace contaminants. Applying XRF to individual links of each of nine of the surviving ten chains so far has shown that some chains were entirely consistent throughout their length: the silver used was from the same source. There was, however, variation between the chains. Indeed, some showed real variation between links. Not all of the chains were made using a homogenous pot of silver.

Little else in the way of silver has been found dating to the gap between the late Roman period and the Viking age in Scotland. The important exception to this is the hoard uncovered at Norrie's Law in Fife, probably in 1819. Twenty years were to pass before the first notice of the find was published, by which time a large part of the hoard had been bought and melted down by Robert Robertson, a respectable silversmith in Cupar.

Some was salvaged by the landowner, and eventually conveyed to the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. The collection comprises a group of whole pieces and a quantity of hacksilver unique in early historic Scotland. Some of the objects are themselves unique, while others had parallels elsewhere. Curiously, there were three sets of paired objects: handpins, brooches and leaf shaped 'plaques'. Prior to the present study, no full catalogue of the silver had been produced. Although the Norrie's Law hoard has been discussed in a number of publications, attention has focussed largely on the paired objects and on the possible date of deposition.

At present, about 170 pieces, ranging from small fragments to whole objects have been identified in the museum's collection. One of the questions posed in the present study concerns the objects which were the source of the hacksilver: is it possible to identify what these were before being cut up? Some pieces can be fitted together, jigsaw-like. Three, for example, seem to form the base of a bowl familiar from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Finglesham and similar continental examples. XRF analysis gives a range of readings for zinc of 0% and gold of 0.4-1.7% for the items found in the late Roman period hoard found at Traprain Law. In contrast, the Norrie's Law silver shows a range of 1-2.4% for zinc and 0.4-0.7% for gold—significantly different in both cases. A few pieces do, however, fall into the late Roman range for both metals. Among these, only a spoon bowl has been identified as being late Roman in form.

Turning her attention to the paired objects, Alice highlighted a number of differences between members of the pairs. The plaques were given museum accession numbers FC33 and FC34. These are leaf-shaped objects, each ornamented with double-disc and Z-rod and the head of an animal (dog or deer?). She described the results of examination of these, taking FC34 first. The border of this piece is hinted at rather than clearly delineated. Examination using a scanning

That woman again

I was pleased to see that my article on the Hilton of Cadboll rider in Newsletter 59 provoked some response, and it would be impolite not to reply, if a little belatedly. I would first like to point out that it was never intended to be regarded as a 'paper', and Isabel Henderson flatters it by describing it as such. During conversations with committee members around the time of the (temporary, we hoped) demise of the Journal, it was suggested that the Newsletter might carry some relevant articles to help compensate for the absence of the Journal. It was to that end that I contributed this and other pieces, in a style admittedly sometimes more journalistic than academic, in an increasingly forlorn hope that they might stimulate some discussion. This one seems to have done the trick.

In brief response to Flora Davidson's comments concerning the original male rider, I would suggest that his spear, if he had one, would have been removed along with the other surplus parts. He wore exactly the same lower garment as the other riders and the remains of it are clearly visible, augmented by some additional folds fashioned from the original saddle cloth. If the woman had been the original rider, the importance of her position would dictate that her saddlecloth would extend rearwards beyond the extent of her skirt. Far from improving her stability, the degree of contortion suggested by Flora would render her unstable, and it is surely more than coincidence that the profile of the torso exactly matches, otherwise inexplicably, that of the male riders. Her skirt does not obscure the abdominal profile of the horse and it was fashioned from the original saddlecloth.

As far as the mirror and comb symbols are concerned, I think I covered that subject adequately in my article in Newsletter 60. However, if anyone is still of the opinion that these symbols are an indication of female gender, then I would refer them to a very revealing group of carvings from an earlier period, to be found on stones in the south-west of Iberia.

Many of these stones from the first millennium BC, which are generally believed to have served some funerary function, are adorned with a depiction of a male warrior (in some cases complete with male appendage, leaving no room for doubting his masculinity) surrounded by martial imagery. And on most of them, amongst the swords and shields, are to be found the mirror and comb symbols (**1**).

A number of the stones are on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid, and others in the various provincial museums of the south-west (**2**). The mirrors on these stones are easily recognised, and though some of the combs, where present, are similar to those depicted on Pictish stones (**3**), others are of the sub-triangular type, and a little harder to spot (**4**).
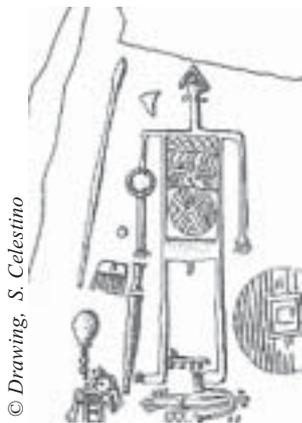
© Drawing, S. Celestino

1 *Ategua stele, Cordoba Museum (detail).*

El Corchito Zarzacapilla La Yuntilla Alta El Visio IV Vega de San Miguel

© Museo de Badajoz

2 *Stones in the Archaeological Museum Badajoz*

The mirror symbol, often accompanied by the comb, is a not uncommon feature of funerary monuments from many different locations and periods. It is regularly found on Hittite funerary monuments and occasionally on those from the Greco-Roman world (**5**). The symbols are clearly part of a long-standing funerary tradition across a wide area, and there is no obvious reason why the Pictish examples should be assigned to a different role. It is also abundantly clear, at least as far as the Iberian examples are concerned, that they do not indicate female gender. Is there any firm evidence to suggest why the Pictish ones should?

3 *El Corchito, Cabeza del Buey (detail),*

4 *Solana de Cabanas (detail),*

5 *Funerary stele from Soa (modern Altintas in Turkey), Roman period 9 detail)*

Turning to Isabel Henderson's comments, she suggests that because my evidence is based on personal observation, it is therefore weaker than the 'new discoveries' revealed at the York conference. Are we to suppose that the forensic evidence underpinning those discoveries was arrived at fortuitously, rather than being initiated as a result of observation? In the case of the Hilton woman, we have seen that the mirror and comb symbols are unlikely to indicate gender. The fact that the rider is sitting side-saddle and has long hair is hardly conclusive, either – Christ had long hair and rode side-saddle into Jerusalem. It would seem that the belief that the rider is female is, itself, based purely on observation, and I have no problem with that. But if we are going to dismiss observation as a valid form of evidence, where does that leave our female rider? Apart from personal observation, what indication do we have of her gender? The truth is, art is a visual medium and so it should come as no surprise that observation often provides the most convincing evidence, and sometimes the only evidence. To describe it as somehow being 'weaker' evidence is incorrect. And to simply ignore such evidence would be academically irresponsible.

While I admit that the second part of the article, concerning the identity of the female rider, was somewhat speculative, adding yet another possibility to the growing list of candidates, the first part was solidly based on observable facts. It is true that the interpretation of wear patterns is difficult and, to some extent, a matter of personal judgement, with the potential for contentious conclusions. However, some of the principal points that I drew attention to, such as the profiles of both the horse and the rider, are not the result of wear, nor is the poor quality carving of the reins. These anomalies are not imaginary and it does not require the eye of faith to recognise them. They are there to be seen, and they cannot simply be ignored. They require an explanation, and the only viable explanation is that the figure has been radically modified at some point. There is considerable room for speculation about exactly when that modification took place and for what purpose, but there can be little doubt that it happened. The woman is not the original occupant of that exalted position on the stone, and her predecessor was almost certainly a male rider of similar type to the riders below.

One important point that I treated rather summarily, in the interest of concision, deserves more detailed attention. It concerns the fact that the puzzling item that the woman is holding was, as I suggested, not necessarily intended to be regarded as representing a three-dimensional object, even though it is carved as such. This is one instance where we cannot trust our eyes. It is not too difficult for an artist to represent a three-dimensional scene or object on a flat two-dimensional surface. There are various techniques that can be employed to enhance the perception of depth, such as perspective and chiaroscuro, but even without these tricks of the trade, the eye usually has little difficulty in resolving a two-dimensional representation into a three-dimensional perception.

However, a serious problem for the sculptor is that this process does not operate in reverse. There is no problem in carving representations of real three-dimensional objects, and if he wishes to represent an object with a smooth surface, for example, a flat disc, then he can easily do so. But if that disc has a design painted on it and he wishes to convey this information to the viewer, then he has no way of representing it in his sculpture other than by carving the flat design in relief, effectively turning the two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional object. Viewers then have no way of knowing if that particular piece of relief carving they are looking at is supposed to be a representation of a three-dimensional object or of a two-dimensional design. And, due to the propensity of the human eye for

interpreting things in three dimensions, they are most likely to assume the former. It therefore follows that we cannot be certain that the object on the Hilton rider's lap is not intended to represent a painted disc rather than some three-dimensional object, even though it is carved in relief.

Change is often difficult to accept, but, as any art historian will be aware, many important paintings have been subject to major modifications in the past, a fact conclusively confirmed in recent decades by the relatively simple expedient of X-raying them. Changes to sculptures are sometimes more difficult to prove. As far as Pictish stones are concerned, we are all familiar with the fact that they were often reused as building stone, or sometimes, with various amounts of modification, adapted as gravestones. In the case of the Hilton stone, we don't have far to look for an example of that. The (former) cross face is proof enough of such change. Nobody denies that that side was once carved with a cross, but the reverse face, it would seem, is considered sacrosanct and immune to change.

Concerning the addendum, I had long been aware of the leg languishing amongst the recovered debris, but I would never have expected to find such a large fragment coming from the riding scene. While the mason destroying the cross face had the luxury of being able to whack off large chunks of stone at will, the poor chap charged with the task of making alterations to the rider would have been struggling to retain enough material to work with, and so would have needed to proceed more cautiously, nibbling away at the stone and 'seeking to conserve as much of the original design as he was able to incorporate into his new creation. His discarded fragments would have been miniscule by comparison.

Nevertheless, in the interests of completeness, I had checked out the relevant fragment, a task made easier by the fact that both Ian Scott's drawing and the fragment illustration in *A Fragmented Masterpiece* were scaled – a rare luxury when making such comparisons. Although it was an approximate match size-wise, it was not possible to reconcile the design on the fragment with any likely configuration of the original rider, so it was discounted.

Having already dismissed the leg fragment, the addendum was no more than an act of pure mischief on my part, done in an attempt to actively engage the attention of those readers whom I knew would be familiar with the leg, and to that end it appears to have been successful.

Due to constraints of time I have not been able to address all Isabel's points on this occasion, but, with the editor's indulgence, I would hope to return to them in the next newsletter. Some of them are even deserving of an article to themselves.

Ron Dutton

Norrie's Law hoard

(Continued)

electron microscope revealed extensive tool-marks on this piece, and an X-ray revealed varying thicknesses of metal suggestive of much reworking. The object is slightly dished, and its dimensions would agree with the notion that it may represent a reworked flattened spoon bowl. The scanning electron microscope revealed tiny traces of red enamel, but the greater part of the red colouring appears to be a substance such as sealing wax.

FC33, on the other hand, has a clear, incised border. The piece appears to have been cast, with little signs of reworking other than polishing. In contrast to FC34, the metal appears to be of a fairly consistent thickness throughout. There were no traces of enamel at all here. Where compass dots on FC34 clearly assisted the drawing of the spirals, one at least on FC33 is

in the wrong place. Finally, the percentages of zinc, gold, lead and tin in the metal were very different between the two. It appears that FC33 is a copy of FC34, cast from an impression.

The story was similar for the handpins and the brooches, although the details varied. Some differences in manufacture, in wear and in trace metal content show the two members of each pair to have been made at different times, one a copy of the other. The 'new' handpin is not an exact copy, in that the reverse of the head of the pin carries a Z-rod symbol. What is not clear at this stage is whether the copies were made in antiquity or sometime after the discovery of the hoard in the early 19th century. It is possible that duplicates were made to be given as souvenirs of the find. At that period, it was not at all unknown for such gifts to be given to favoured friends by antiquarian owners of such treasures, and a 19th-century copy need not have

been made with any intent to deceive future scholars. The uncertain history of the hoard in the years after it was found make it impossible to be certain that this was, or was not, the case. Alice hopes that it may be possible to discriminate on the basis of a minimally destructive analysis of the metal between modern and ancient silver, but this would require the sacrifice of a minute portion of each object. Meanwhile, we should be tentative in assigning the symbols on one plaque and the Z-rod on the back of the hand-pin to the Pictish period.

December at Pictavia

Guto Rhys gave the audience at Pictavia an intriguing puzzle in December: 'So what *did* the Picts speak, then?'

Most of us assumed that we probably knew. The Picts spoke a form of P-Celtic related to Old Welsh, didn't they?

Guto took us through the history of speculation on Pictish language, after describing the kind of evidence and tools that researchers have had at their disposal. Bede told us that five languages were in use in Britain, including a separate one for the Picts. Adomnan told us that St Columba needed an interpreter to speak to Picts. Place names and personal names along with ogham inscriptions found in Pictish territory all form part of the evidence. Tools that have been developed that can help scholars analyse the evidence include dictionaries of current and old forms of languages spoken in nearby lands, and systematic methods of dealing with the scant data at the disposal of those interested in Pictish language.

Interest in the Picts as an historical group began along time ago. George Buchanan's *Rerum Scotticarum Historiae* of 1582 is the first soberly to document the Picts, while only a few years later, Camden in *Britannia* (1586) described the Picts as 'verie naturall Britons themselves'. Jumping to 1707, Edward Lhuyd in his *Archaeologia Britannica* stated that the Picts and Britons spoke dialects of the same language. It would seem that these early writers at least had no problems with the Picts. The nineteenth century saw the question of Pictish language becoming more contentious – and more politicised. Writing in 1789, after the Jacobite rebellions, Pinkerton suggested that the Picts spoke a Gothic language, betraying Germanic origins (much like the ruling Hanoverians). The debate among antiquarians grew heated. Sir Walter Scott's eponymous Antiquary was a staunch believer in the Gothic origins of the Pictish language. Perhaps Mr Jonathan Oldbuck was affected by the Germanic origins of his own family, but his argument was maintained with the verbal violence that characterised the robust public debates between antiquaries of Scott's day.

The 19th century saw the growth of interest and research into Celtic languages.

Johan Caspar Zeuss published *Grammatica Celtica* in 1853. This great work was a landmark in the comparative study of language. Others followed, digging deeper into the history and relatedness of languages.

Over the late 19th and 20th centuries, a consensus that the Picts probably did speak a form of Brythonic similar to Old Welsh grew. Incidentally, scholars throughout the period showed that the problem of how to deal with the early Welsh was a difficult one: Cambro-Britons (as opposed to Anglo-Saxons) being one example of the names used.

The effects of politics on the writers of history can be difficult to ignore.

The problems of the data remain. The evidence is scarce indeed, and much of it difficult to interpret. What are we to make of the common pairing of a Gaelic specific with the (presumably) Pictish 'pit-' in place name formation, for example? It may be that more evidence, encapsulated in medieval documentary sources, has yet to be uncovered, but there is little likelihood of us ever being able to reconstruct a Pictish language.

Guto illustrated many of his points with familiar linguistic examples. In return, his audience turned question time into a lengthy discussion of the difference in dialect than can separate groups such as fisher folk and miners from their neighbours a few miles away, and of how easy it would be to go astray in studying, say, the Scots language of the early 20th century if the surviving clues were as scarce and as biased as those that scholars studying the Picts have to work with. Even if we got no answer to the original question, we were given a great deal of insight to the work that has gone on over centuries into Pictish language.

Deciphering Pictish ogham inscriptions
A new theoretical perspective

Synopsis

The hypothesis of this article is that Pictish ogham inscriptions might be transliterated into a language readily identifiable as akin to Old Irish with, possibly, some Brythonic elements. Furthermore, the translations of the transliterated inscriptions reveal both a context and a meaning that may have the greatest significance for Scottish, indeed British, history.

If there is any value in what follows the conclusions and implications are far too great to be discussed adequately here. It is only my hope that what I suggest will be of value and that academics and scholars far more able than I will be able to advance our understanding of Pictish language, culture and history. This I am certainly unable to do.

The article will, nevertheless, provide evidence that may lead to the following conclusions:

1. The Pictish ogham inscriptions are readable.

2. The inscriptions reveal that the Picts spoke a language similar to Old Irish influenced, perhaps, by Brythonic elements.

3. The inscriptions may demonstrate the dialect of the Picts.

4. I offer hypothetical readings for nine ogham inscriptions and one in the Latin script.

Auquhollie; Brandsbutt; Bressay; Brodie C; Golspie; Gurness Broch; Latheron; Lunnasting; Scoonie; Fordoun (Latin)

5. Bransbutt may be a Pictish ogham inscription written in Latin.

6. The colons that appear in several inscriptions may be misleading insofar as they may simply be ornamental embellishments.

7. The translations reveal several possible new words, all of which translate into either Old Irish or something akin to it.

8. The translations include the name the Picts may have used to describe their monuments.

9. The translations suggest that the inscriptions were, primarily, dedicatory but two of them, Auquhollie and Gurness Broch, may have been employed for evangelical and counter-evangelical purposes.

10. One inscription (Bressay) may be unique in Western European history, the possible translation suggesting an almost imperial attitude towards the unification of Pictish territories from Shetland to Colonsay (possibly Iona?) and Fife.

11. The Pictish inscription on the Fordoun Churchyard Stone, written in Latin characters, may be read to give the original name of the place as, in Anglicized form, 'Pit-Ternon'.

Generally, I conclude that a corpus of new historical information may have become available and that it provides the greatest insight into the Pictish world, its culture and character.

If any of these suggestions have been made previously I apologize. For neither am I a scholar nor have I the time to conduct research to the correct exacting standards. As a consequence only of doing this work I have become aware of the efforts made, particularly by Katherine Forsyth, University of Glasgow, and I sincerely hope what I have done here both supports her work and might have some value in determining the nature of the Pictish language.

I maintain, however, that the primary purpose of this article is to enable our understanding to be furthered for this article itself is not an act of scholarship. It is, rather, an act of intuition and the conclusions require the most rigorous analysis before confirmation.

I am grateful to the Pictish Arts Society, particularly Stewart Mowatt, with whom I have maintained a correspondence more or less from the outset of this extraordinary experience, and to John Borland of the RCAHMS who invited me to publish this work.

Finally, I would like to thank the late Prof. W G Lambert under whom I studied Babylonian cuneiform epigraphy and learned something of comparative linguistics at the University of Birmingham in the early 1980s. I was and I remain a very poor scholar. I am a man of intuition and he is considered by many to have possessed one of the greatest academic minds in the history of British scholarship. Yet, what he taught me remains fundamentally influential to much of my approach to life and he died on the very day I stumbled, inadvertently and without intention, upon what might possibly be the answer to the most significant outstanding question concerning Early Medieval British history.

The Impetus for the Research
Resources and Sources

In November 2010 I was in the process of winding down my interests as a psychotherapist in Birmingham, preparing to move to Cornwall to commence working for a charity that provides help

and assistance to ex-servicemen suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and from their difficulties in adjusting from a military to a civilian life. I had a bit of spare time. My cousin had offended such academic sensibilities as I possess by claiming his surname Guthrie as originally Guthrum and therefore Viking in origin. I was rather sceptical of this assertion.

Now, I consider myself a man of Angus; my father was born in Brechin, my mother in Arbroath, myself in Dundee. From a very early age I was lost in wonder at the place of my birth and fascinated by the history. There was no greater pleasure in my boyhood than to be either in Glen Esk, by St Drosten's Church, or by the coast anywhere from Stonehaven to St Cyrus and Ellon. All that lay between was a landscape which is ever in my heart.

Naturally, I could not avoid consciousness of those mysterious people, the Picts. My delight was to visit the archaeological sites at Carlungie and Ardestie, to investigate the hill forts of the Brown and White Catterthuns, to walk upon the slopes of Finavon and Dunnichen.

Wandering through Brechin and Arbroath my childhood mind thought about those past generations who had built the Cathedral, the Round Tower and the Abbey. It was unavoidable, everywhere you looked, Restennth Priory and all the Pit- names that linked me with the past and continue to do so.

Most of all I was aware of the carved Pictish monuments. Artifacts of such enigmatic beauty that I could spend hours just being in their presence. My deepest love was preserved for the stones of Aberlemno and St Vigeans. Here was fascination and a profound connection that I sought not to explain.

I recount all of this for these experiences have been, perhaps, my greatest resource but, I hope I can assure you, I am not an obsessive. I have never spent any time at all other than in the pursuit of recreation either reading about or studying the Picts and their artifacts. My love of archaeology which came from those experiences of childhood led rather to the study of the Ancient Near East – Assyria, Babylon, Sumer and Akkad.

This aside, my learning of Pictish culture came from reading books generally available to the public – Smyth's *Warlords and Holy Men, Scotland, A.D.80-1000*; Woolf's *From Pictland to Alba;* RCAHMS *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland*. I had not read anything about the language of the Picts other than through these books.

In the early 1980s, following completion of my degree in Ancient History & Archaeology at the University of Birmingham, I spent two years studying for an M.A. in Ancient Near Eastern Studies which I was not awarded. It was clear to me that I did not have the disciplined mind required for academia. Nevertheless, appreciation of those qualities is something I deeply respect and thus it is with some shame that I have to admit my approach to the reading of the stones was from that perspective, unquestionably, dilettante.

Hypothesis

Having been offended by the association of the surname Guthrie with Guthrum, I had spent a bit of time researching a few sources for my cousin, such as might provide him with a better, more balanced, contemporary historical perspective. In the course of this, and because of the Viking element, I by chance encountered again the theory in which the Pictish Oghams were understood to be transcribed and translated into a Nordic language (Cox, R A V *The language of the Ogham Inscriptions of Scotland.* Aberdeen, 1999).

I have never thought of the Picts as being anything other than a Celtic people. The theory that the Picts spoke some extinct indo-European language seems, in my opinion, to be based entirely upon the supposed unintelligibility of their ogham inscriptions. I have always been incredulous of the fact that they otherwise left no evidence of this supposed language in their toponyms. The hypothesis is entirely impossible, strange and incongruous to me, indicative of a cultural extermination so absolute that nothing, not a single iota, remains. That, if correct, would be truly amazing. A pogrom indeed, beyond any other I was aware of in European history.

As regards to historical references to a 'Pictish language', the idea of it somehow not being Celtic appears to have a foundation in the comments by Bede and the story of St Columba requiring an interpreter. This, I think, has proven a great impediment to seeking the obvious. When people talk of language, is that, in reality, what is intended rather than dialect? Have we not all experienced a dialect of English that is beyond our comprehension? What we are hearing is English and remains English but requires interpretation. I have long considered the matter to be, quite possibly, as simple as that.

With these matters in mind, and just out of interest, I decided to have a quick look to see what I could see and until that moment I had never looked at the Pictish ogham inscriptions other than as a casual reader. One of the few words that people

have thought might be understood, transliterated as DATTR, was considered by some to be Norse for 'daughter'. Yet it existed alongside the word MAQQ, considered by some as a loan word from Gaelic with the meaning 'son of'. At that moment, the whole understanding of the problem I regarded as a frightful mess.

I have never treasured an ambition to discover the language of the Picts. When I began to look at them I did not think that the inscriptions would be anything other than the collection of unintelligible letters they had always appeared to be. I anticipated I would find what I had always accepted them to be in the learned opinion of others, utterly incomprehensible, but I thought it worth an hour or two just to confirm this.

I thought I might find a word here and a word there, surrounded by otherwise meaningless letters. I thought if a word did appear it would have little or no contextual relationship to either the monument on which it was written or the Picts and their culture as evidenced from what is currently understood about them. That, if it had been the case, would have satisfied me.

I am ashamed to admit my Pictish ogham sources were neither original nor contemporary transcriptions, but taken from the internet[1]. I acknowledge that this is academically un-acceptable. However, this 'research' was neither intended to be nor intended to become a formal study and I have enough experience and respect for academia to accept that I am not equipped to do this.

My knowledge of 'P' and 'Q' Celtic languages is basic in the extreme. I knew, for example, that the dental consonants 'd' and 't' were interchangeable, that the Brythonic 'tin' becomes the Gaelic 'dun' and I anticipated that a name such as might be found in Cornwall or Wales, like 'Tintagel', may be expected to become something like 'Dundagel' in either Scotland or Ireland. I knew, also, that the 'n' of the definite article, 'an' or 'in', may be elided into the following consonant. That, along with the ability to identify a few words, was about the total sum of my learning. This, I know, is also wholly unacceptable from an academic perspective.

On the positive side I had my intuition from which arose an important assumption. I considered it entirely likely that these oghams were written at a time of proto-literacy, when neither a standardized grammar nor spelling was available to the scribes and sculptors. I thought it quite likely therefore, that the oghams were intended to be read phonetically and that, consequently, elements of the language, particularly the vowels of nouns,

verbs and pronouns, might be either missed out or altered and thus illustrative of dialect.

To translate any possible words that might suggest themselves I was armed with *eDil*[2], the online Dictionary of Old Irish, and the 'Index of Celtic and Other Elements' in W.J. Watson's *The History of the Celtic Place Names of Scotland*[3].

My starting assumption was this. If the ETT of the Drosten Stone in St.Vigeans, a Latin rather than ogham inscription, could be understood in Latin as 'and', that implied the requirement for a further transliteration of the ogham characters ETT enabling them to become comprehensible as 'et'.

Furthermore, many of the Ogham inscriptions contained the word MAQQ and this was translated hypothetically to mean, 'mac', 'son of", as I then understood, in Gaelic. It appeared to me that a similar rule well may have been applied. The transliteration of HH to 'ch', a vital element in the identification of the name Nechton that seems generally accepted also suggested this. Therefore, I applied the obvious. Was it possible that the Picts, for some reason, doubled certain consonants in their inscriptions? Quite simply, what would happen if other doubled consonants were likewise reduced?

I chose the Golspie Stone for it contained the word MAQQ. The ogham combination transliterated as ORREDD was suggestive of the name Uurad. I approached the transcription as if I were reading either unpointed Hebrew or transcribed Akkadian. This task was one in which I had at least some experience. Word and context hunting, I expected nothing.

What I read astounded, no, stupefied me, for the words, a(l), 'lch' and 'al' appeared. 'lch' I knew could mean phonetically, 'gravestone' or 'flagstone' and 'al' was immediately identifiable as 'rock'. It was therefore entirely plausible for the 'a' to be the elided form of the definite article, indicative of pronunciation. Thus, ALLA HHALLORREDD might be understood to mean either, 'the flagstone slab of Ored' or 'the gravestone slab of Ored'.

This I could hardly believe, thinking that someone, surely, must have done this exercise before me and dismissed, for some perfectly good and valid reason I knew nothing about, the whole proposition. Yet I had neither read anything about such an effort nor could I subsequently find any references to such. I understood the inscriptions to be unintelligible from the perspective of any Celtic language. Yet, within an hour of beginning this exercise, three possible words, identifiable maybe as a dialect of Old Irish, had appeared. Most

importantly they had a relevant and cogent meaning with a content and context relevant to both the artifact and the culture of the Picts.

In all my reading I had not encountered anything like this. I still find it very hard to believe. Nevertheless, I immediately tried to contact people whom I considered possessed knowledge far greater than my own as the outcome was quite beyond anything I had expected. As a psychotherapist I earnestly considered my thinking to be either delusional or the product of 'a little learning'.

However, the significance of this reading and those that were to follow could not be dismissed, and there comes a point when the sheer volume of what might otherwise be considered as co-incidental outcomes indicates the possibility of some other conclusion.

I have no academic reputation to lose. Indeed there is everything to be gained by all those likewise interested in our history. Thus, the correspondence with Stewart Mowatt began leading, finally, to this article.

The hypothetical transliteration of Pictish ogham

I am not a linguist and I have virtually no knowledge of Old Irish. I make this effort as the means of forwarding our mutual understanding of the Pictish language and culture. I know there are people, far more capable than me, able to determine the veracity of my observations.

From eight of the nine inscriptions I examined, Auquhollie, Bressay, Brodie, Golspie, Gurness Broch, Latheron, Lunnasting and Scoonie it would appear that the inscriptions may have been written in a form of Old Irish and as the language was spoken. Furthermore, this argument would be supported if the translation of what may be a Latin inscription in ogham on the Brandsbutt Stone were accepted. This has two immediate implications;

1. Vowels are only written when they are voiced and as they are heard. They are not doubled unless this is required for the doubling of the vocalization itself.

2. The writing of a vocalized language seems to have presented problems for the scribes as there were a number of sounds for which no single ogham character existed.

As a means of overcoming this problem it would appear that some of the consonants are doubled as a means of distinguishing, for example, 't' from lenited forms such as 'th'.

The list of values, which I know to be unacceptable scholastically, is nevertheless those values I have employed to obtain the results ;I have.

Consonants

DD = d
D = lenited in some form, dh (?).
TT = t
T = th (?) (e.g. DNNAT = dnn-ath).
HH = ch (as in "loch").
H = i / hi (?) (a vocalization I do not know how to distinguish from the vowel i).
CC = c
C = ?
LL = l
L = ?
RR = r
R = ?
VV = f
V = ooh / uh (?) (a vocalization I do not know how to pronounce. A lenited form of f).
QQ = q
Q = ?
NN = n
N = n
SS = ?
S = s

Vowels

A = a
E = e
I = i
O = o
U = u (UU = u'u as in Fu'unon [Auquhollie]).

The only inconsistency that might be observed is that the N consonant appears to be 'n' when either in a single or doubled form.

I have not attempted a translation of any inscription including SS. The inscriptions I have examined include only single S consonants. It is possible that any double S inscriptions are either indicative of the value something like 'sh' or remain as 's'. I do not know.

The inscriptions transliterated and translated

The translations that follow are not presented in the order in which I undertook them. The translations of the Brodie C and Scoonie inscriptions, which appear to suggest a grammatical construction apparently identifiable as a toponym or declaring the influence of an evangelical missionary, were amongst the first.

When the ogham combination E + name of saint + N was first identified as a possible construction I sought academic advice but my idea was poorly received. The subsequent reading of E + name of saint + N in the Lunnasting inscription, followed

as it is by the possible transliteration of the ogham H for 'i', which may be translated as 'island', was of the greatest significance particularly given the full translation of that inscription with the startling information it appears to reveal.

The translations I think least secure are Auquhollie and Gurness Broch for they seem to reveal something of the religious and cultural conflict between the pre-Christian order and the evangelical missionaries and they are unlike any of the others. If these translations have some veracity it would suggest to me that the other, more complex, inscriptions containing single, and therefore lenited consonants and vowels indicative of Old Irish as pronounced in a Pictish dialect, contain words of some obscurity.

I have provided all the sources and references I used for translating the transliterations within the, 'Commentary upon the Elements' of each inscription.

Paradoxically, I have found the inscriptions containing the doubled consonants the easiest to address. My lack of knowledge of Old Irish and my wholly inadequate understanding of the complexities associated with vocalized lenited consonants makes further progress very difficult.

If there is any truth in what I have done, I hope those equipped with such skills are able to make both better sense of my translations and are enabled to decipher those inscriptions that require a deeper understanding.

All translations originate from either EDil or ICE ('Index of Celtic and other Elements' in W J Watson's *The History of the Celtic Place-names of Scotland*). I have included the exact references for each translated word.

In Old Irish Dialect:

1. Golspie
2. Latheron
3. Bressay
4. Lunnasting
5. Auquhollie
6. Gurness Broch

In Latin:

7. Brandsbutt

In Old Irish Dialect under the title 'A possible Grammatical Construction':

8. Brodie C
9. Scoonie

In Latin Script:

10. Fordoun

The transliterations and translations are:

Golspie

ALLHHALLORREDD.MAQQNUUVVHRRE.RR
A.LLHH.ALL.ORREDD.MAQQ.NUUVVHRRE.RR
A LLHH ALL ORREDD MAQQ NUUVVHRRE RR
a lch al ored maq nu'ufhre ri (spoken)
an lecc ail ored mac nu'ufhre(?) ri (Old Irish)
The flagstone slab [of] ored son [of] nufhre(?) king (English)
The gravestone slab [of] ored son [of] nufhre(?) king (alternative)

Commentary on the elements

A
an = the definite article. (eDil Letter I Column 183 Line 1) an (ICE Letter A p. 11).
In Old Irish this is usually 'in'. The n has elided with the following consonant l. The use of 'an' could be considered as either a Brythonic residue or indicative of the Pictish dialect.
LLHH
lch
lecc = 'flagstone' or 'gravestone' in Old Irish. (Source: eDil Letter L Column 67 Line 26). Variants include 'leac' and 'lecht' (ICE Letter L p.3 & 4)
The transcription and transliteration of HH as 'ch' is hypothesized on the basis of the long standing identification of this pronunciation from combinations of the ogham characters contained with, NAHHT, that have been generally accepted to be identified as Nechton.
ALL
al
ail = 'rock' or 'slab' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter A Column 112 Line 56)
al = 'rock' or 'slab' in Brythonic. (ICE Letter A p.7)
MAQQ
Maq
mac (macc) = 'son [of]' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter M Column 5 Line 62)
This has long been one of the few words people have thought might be translatable from these ogham inscriptions.
RR
R
r[i] = 'king' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter R Column 52 Line 49) (ICE Letter R p.4)

Latheron

DUV NODNNAT.MAQQNAHHTO
DUV NO.DNNAT.MAQQ.NAHHTO...
DUV NO DNN -AT MAQQ NAHHTO
du'uh no dnn -ath mac nachto... (spoken)
do nua dnn -ad mac nachto... (Old Irish)

For renewal donan's people son [of] nechto[n] (English)

Commentary on the elements

DUV

du'uh

do = 'for' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter D Column 171 Line 14) (ICE Letter D p. 7). cf. DOVO from the Auquhollie inscription below.

NO

no

nua = 'new', 'recent', 'fresh' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter N Column 66 Line 40) for nodha variants (ICE Letter N p.5).

DNN

dnn

Donan = Saint associated with Sutherland. Latheron is situated some 20 miles directly from Kildonan.

-AT

-ath

-ad = 'folk', 'people' in Irish. (ICE Letter A p.5) The translation of '-ath' as the suffix indicative of 'tribe' or 'people' has been made in consideration of the association of Donan with the Catti, the Pictish tribe of Sutherland. The change of the final consonant from 'd' to 'th' may be an example of Pictish dialect.

The word I think might be interpreted as 'for' appears to occur twice in these oghams: Latheron, DUV; Aquhollie, DOVO.

If the transliterations are acceptable, the difference may be understood as indicative of either dialect or the inconsistency to be anticipated during a period of proto-literacy.

This hypothesis may be supported by the comparison of DNN = Donan (Latheron) with CHTTANNN = Chtan n-n (Lunnasting). I think this may again indicate the phonetic nature of the inscriptions.

Bressay

CRROSCC:NAHHTVVDDADDS:DATTR:ANN BENISES:MEQQDDRROANN

CRROSCC:NAHHT.VVDDADD.S:DA.TTR:ANN BEN.ISES:MEQQDDRROANN

CROSCC NAHHT VVDDADD S: DA TTR ANN BEN ISES MEQQ DRROANN (spoken)

crosc: nacht fdad s: da tr: an ben ises: maq Droanan (Old Irish)

cros: nacht fodad foss: da tir: an benn ises: mac Droanan (English)

Cross: nechton set immovable: Thy land: glorious on high Jesus: son [of]Droanan (alternative)

Cross: nechton set immovable: Thy land: in high Jesus: son [of] Droanan

Commentary on the elements

CRROSCC

c r o s c

crosc

cros (eDil Letter C Column 548 Line 51)

VVDDADD

f d a d

fothad = 'act of founding or establishing, foundation' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter F Column 393 Line 55)

fodad = 'spade' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter F Column 209 Line 12)

Hence 'set or erected'.

S

s = fhas, ais, os, foss = Old Irish 'rest', 'act of residence', 'stance' or 'station, remaining quiet' or 'stationary', 'immovable'. (eDil Letter F Column 379 Line 52) os (ICE Letter O p. 4) For fhas, ais, varients (ICE Letter F p.2).

DATTR

DA.TTR

da t[i]r

Why is the R not doubled? I assume there is possibly some lenited form of R.

da = 'thy' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter D Column 1 Line 25 & eDil Letter DColumn + Letter 2D Column 176 Line 65).

tir = 'land' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter T Column 187 Line 1).

ANN

an = 'glorious', 'brilliant', 'splendid' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter A Column 315 Line 11). There may be an alternative translation in which an = 'in' (ICE Letter A p.12). This seems to me to suggest a Brythonic influence but you would have to ask an expert.

BEN

benn = 'pinnacle', 'peak' in Old Irish.(eDil Letter B Column 75 Line 54).

Hence, 'on high'.

ISES

ises

Is(s)u = 'Jesus' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter I Column 324 Line 15)

I suggest 'Ises' is the name of Jesus in the Pictish dialect.

Lunnasting

E T T E C U H E T T S : A H E H H T T A N N N : H CCVVEVV:NEHHTONS

E . T T E C . U H E T T S : A H . E . H H T T A N N . N : H.CC.VVEVV:NEHHTON

E TTEC UHETTS: AH E HHTTANNN : H C VVEVV NEHHTONS (spoken)

e tec uchet s: ai e chtan nn: h c fef Nehhton s (Old Irish)

e tech ucht foss: ai e chattan-an: i co fef Nechton foss (English)

He religious house from this place residing: His [is] He Chatanan island (Colonsay) as far as Fife Nechton erected. (alternative)

He religious house from this place residing: His is echatanan (Ardchattan): Iona as far as Fife Nechton erected.

Commentary on the elements

E

e = 'he' in Old Irish (ibid.)

TTEC

tec

tech = 'holy house', 'dwelling' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter T Column 95 Line 63).

UHETT

uchet

ucht = 'from' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter U Column 52 Line 70) (ICE Letter U p. 2). The inclusion of an 'e' may be an example of the Pictish dialect.

S

s = fhas, ais, os, foss = Old Irish, 'rest', 'act of residence', 'stance' or 'station, remaining quiet' or 'stationary', 'immovable'. (ibid.)

AH

ai = 'his' in Old Irish (eDil Letter A Column 87 Line 37).

EHHTTANNN

e.chtan-an

e.Chatan-an = 'He is Chatanan' (see toponym construction E. saint name -an, locative ending). The place Chatanan is here identified with Ardchattan in Argyll.

H

i = 'an island' in Old Irish (eDil Letter I Column 9 Line 22) for variant H(i) see (ICE Letter I p.1). 'hi' appears to be somehow associated with Iona. I am not sufficiently skilled to say for certain whether either Colonsay or Iona is intended.

EHHTTANNN: H may be read as Chattanan Island and therefore quite possibly Colonsay. Alternatively, given the colon separation, ECHTTANNN may be read as e chtan n-n, perhaps Ardchattan, the statement continuing with, 'Iona as far as Fife'.

CC

c

co = 'as far as' in Old Irish (eDil Letter C Column 272 Line 34).

VVEVV

f e f = Fife on the eastern seaboard of Scotland.

Observations

This place standing is Lunnasting in Shetland. He (Nechton) owns everything from there to Ardchattan Island (Colonsay? or maybe Iona?) as far as Fife.

This is, perhaps, the most remarkable of all the inscriptions. The implications for Scottish history I think must be considered in far greater depth than this article can make provision for.

The inscription appears to confirm the Picts' own notions of their dominion. I am reminded, somewhat, of either inscriptions by Shar-ukin (Sargon) of Akkad or the imperial Assyrian inscriptions of the first millennium B.C. I have never encountered the like of this outside researches into the Ancient Near East. I will only say, astounding!

Auquhollie

VUUNON ITEDDOVOB B

Vuunon it ed dovo bb (transliteration)

Vu'unon ith ed do'oh ba (spoken)

Vu'unon(?) ith ed do ba (Old Irish)

Finan corn it for death (English)

Finan food for death (Alternative)

Commentary on the elements

VUUNON

Fu'unon = St Finan

This inscription is from Auquhollie situated near Stonehaven in Aberdeenshire, the area traditionally associated with St Finan and his mission.

IT

ith = 'corn' in Old Irish (eDil Letter I Column 325 Line 10)

ED

ed = 'it' in Old Irish. It may possess, so I understand from eDil, some notion of anticipation. (eDil Letter E Column 55 Line 51).

DOVO

dovo

do'oh. Compare with similar usage in the Latheron inscription, DUV.

do = 'for' in Old Irish. (ibid.)

BB

b

ba = 'death' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter B Column 1 Line 35).

In this inscription the 'ed do(vo)' element is merged phonetically in keeping with the hypothesis that the language was written as it was spoken and heard.

Gurness Broch

INEITTEMEN   MATS

IN.EITTE.M.EN   MAT.S

in eite m en math s (spoken)

in ette mo en math[a] os (Old Irish)

the wing of bird druid erected (English)

the wing of bird bear erected (Alternative)

Commentary on the elements

IN

in = 'the'. The definite article in Old Irish. (ibid.)

EITTE

eite / ette = 'wing' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter E Column 254 Line 31)

M

m

mo = genitive personal pronoun in Old Irish. hence 'of' or 'belonging to'. (eDil Letter M Column 151 Line 47).

EN

en = 'bird' in Old Irish. (eDil Letter E Column 123 Line 6)

MAT

math

math = bear in Old Irish. (eDil Letter M Column 70 Line 17)

Matha = druid in Old Irish. (eDil Letter M Column 70 Line 28)

S

s = fhas, ais, os, foss = Old Irish, 'rest', 'act of residence', 'stance' or 'station, remaining quiet' or 'stationary', 'immovable' (ibid.).

Brandsbutt

IRATADDOARENS

IRAT.AD.DOAREN.S

irat ad doarens (spoken)

erat ad Ternan (Latin)

He was (dedicated) to Ternan (English)

Commentary

When I first translated this inscription into what might be identified as Latin, I was completely unaware of Katherine Forsyth's work (1995) and her translation of the Buckquoy spindle-whorl[4]. I had no conception of this possibility, until I thought IRAT AD might be read 'erat ad' and began making enquiries, that any Pictish ogham had been transcribed and translated into Latin.

The translation, if accurate, further supports the theory that the Picts wrote their inscriptions phonetically.

The transliteration of 'irat ad doarens' to 'erat ad doarens' may be supported by the translations of the inscriptions from Brodie C and Scoonie (see immediately below), both of which appear to be statements of a similar nature.

Either land or the stone is being claimed by what is hypothetically suggested to be St Ternan.

A possible grammatical construction

There are three inscriptions that I have observed to be possibly indicative of a place name. This construction may be evidenced by a combination of oghams thus:

E + name of saint + N

First two examples

BRODIE C (1) SCOONIE (2)

EDDARRNONN... TTI... GNG...

EDDARRNONN

E.DDARRNON.N

e darnon n (spoken)

e Ternan -an

He [is] Ternan (locative ending) (English)

Commentary on the elements

E

e = 'he' in Old Irish. (Source: eDil. Letter e, Column 1. Line 28).

DDARRNON

Darnon = St Ternan

N

n

-an = Brythonic locative suffix. (Source: Index of Celtic Elements, p.12).

St Ternan lived in the late 5th century before the influence of Old Irish was spread eastwards from Dal Riada. The place name, established prior to that, remained until replaced by Brodie and Scoonie respectively.

Discussion

The 'e' element is identified as the Old Irish pronoun for 'he'.

The '-an' is identified as the locative suffix normally associated with Early Celtic place names such as occur in those areas of Eastern Scotland traditionally associated with the Picts, such as Ythan and Brechin, quite possibly Lunan. The locative suffix is, I understand, usually attached to the names of places associated with a religious figure, the place becoming, in a sense, belonging to that named religious authority.

At first it might seem incongruous to have a construction that includes both Old Irish and Early Celtic elements. However, St Ternan is generally considered to have lived and undertaken his mission in the late 5th and early 6th centuries A.D., prior to the influence and spread of the Old Irish language through the expanding cultural influence of the Scots from Dal Riada. In this case the inscription being in ogham implies that it was made sometime later when that influence had spread into the eastern Pictish heartlands of Scotland. The inscription records, however, the original name of the locality as 'Darnon-an'.

It should be pointed out that, assuming this observation has some accuracy, both localities were to lose their original place name sometime

after the inscriptions were made, having them replaced with Scoonie and Brodie respectively. This is entirely in keeping with the further observation of the change in place name associated with St Ternan's cult centre at Fordoun that I have, hypothetically, identified from the Fordoun Churchyard inscription 'PIDARNOIN' as 'Pid-Darnon', thus 'Pit-Ternan'.

The third example

EHHTTANNN

e.chtan n-n (spoken)

e.chatan-an

The construction involving the name of an Irish saint, Chatan, was rather more problematical. St Chatan is normally associated with the early colonisation in the 6th century of the part of western Scotland that was to become Dal Riada and he is particularly associated with the Western Isles. Chapels either founded by him or ded-icated to him stand on, amongst other islands, Colonsay and Lewis. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to suggest it might be possible to identify his name from an inscription associated with the Picts which, furthermore, is located in Shetland.

Toponyms associated with him are, however, consistent with this further possible identification of his name, thus Kilchattan and Ardchattan, which are most certainly expressive of his Old Irish roots.

However, the most significant aspect of this inscription is its location and content, which appears to reveal the claim by a Nechton (probably Nechton Der-llei) to have established some kind of either ecclesiastical or imperial rule from the Shetlands to the island of Chattan-an to Fife.

It may, therefore, be that Nechton resorted to the description Ardchattan in earlier Pictish terms, Chattan-an, as a means of affirming his rule over the people of Argyll, i.e., his authority and majesty over the Scots. Maybe he was simply naming the region as the Picts named it.

Fordoun

PIDARNOIN

PI.DARNOIN

pi darnoin (spoken)

Pit Darnoin (Southern Pictish. Dialect of Brythonic)

Pit Ternan (English)

The use of the Latin script might be explained, perhaps in part, by its requirement for the vocalization of the consonant 'p'.

Fordoun is the reputed birthplace of St Ternan. The stone, set up in the churchyard, may have been erected to mark this as the centre of pilgrimage to St Ternan. Again, I think this might be a unique inscription for it is acting almost as a place name.

Conclusion

In order to understand the Pictish language from the ogham inscriptions I believe all you have to do is read them.

I have not the skills to clearly differentiate between the Old Irish and Brythonic elements but the coincidences of context and cogency in the translations are truly remarkable. There may be so much to reconsider and comprehend that is beyond the scope of this article.

ALLHHALLORREDD reads 'al lch al Ored' and may be interpreted as it sounds, 'the flagstone slab of Ored'. I suggest that the evidence I have may lead to the conclusion that all the Pictish ogham inscriptions may be phonetic and I hope this article is of value.

When I first read the Golspie inscription I could not believe what I had read. I was shaken to my core and filled with doubt. When I completed Bressay and then Lunnasting, with their contexts, cogency and astonishing implications, I thought surely there are too many coincidences here, for I had forced nothing of what I had done.

As to the veracity of this effort, I leave the decision you as an individual, but I hope that academia will pick up the gauntlet.

In a sense I have nothing to lose. If these observations are indeed absolutely wrong, then what I have done remains for me the most astonishing set of coincidences I have ever encountered. If they are correct, even in a small part, then we can only look forward to the dramatic new implications for our understanding of the Picts and their place in history as the story unfolds.   *John Bruce*

Notes

1 http://web.onetel.com/~hibou/Pictish%20Inscriptions.html

2 http://www.dil.ie/

3 http://www.spns.org.uk/WatsIndex2.html

4 Forsyth K ;The ogham-inscribed spindle-whorl from Buckquoy: evidence for the Irish language in pre-Viking Orkney? *Proc Soc Antiq Scot,* 125 (1995), 677–696.

Date for your diary

10–12 April 2012

Iona Research Conference

More information at
< http://www.ionahistory.org.uk/ionaabout/researchconference >

PAS annual conference

Will be held on
6 October 2012
at the A K Bell Library, Perth
Provisional title:
Forteviot to Fortingall and beyond
Details to be announced in the next newsletter

No such thing as bad press?

Once again, matters Pictish have caught the attention of the mass media – well, the *Courier* and the *Fife Herald* to be precise.

Dunnichen? Dunachton? What about Newburgh?

The *Fife Herald* recently featured an article on the research of amateur historian Damian Bullen who believes he can accurately locate the pivotal victory of the Picts over the Northumbrians in 685 to Newburgh in Fife by marrying up Bede's account of the battle with local geographical and historical features. Thus, the hill fort on Clatchard Craig becomes Dun Nechton – fort of the Pictish King. Lindores Loch becomes the body of water mentioned in the account, Abernethy is Nechton's political and religious power base and Mugdrum his royal hunting estate, evidenced by the hunting scene on the Mugdrum cross. Bede's mention of inaccessible mountains is explained by the surrounding hills, which fill the view in every direction. Are there any other possible locations where we have a Pictish site near water and hills? Hmmm, let me think . . .

Pictless Trail?

Not to be confused with Angus Council's existing Pictish Trail, which carefully guides visitors around the county's many Pictish sites, the *Courier* recently reported plans to establish another 'Pictish Trail'. This new trekking route, a joint venture between Angus and Aberdeen Councils, is being seen as an east of Scotland alternative to the West Highland Way. The 107-mile long trail will lead from Pitlochry to Aberdeen, traversing the Angus Glens. Although at the early stages of planning, the likely route does appear to steer visitors well clear of anything Pictish but it is hoped that as plans advance, the PAS may be able to offer some useful advice.

To photograph or not to photograph

Readers may be interested in the following exchange of emails between PAS member David McGovern and Historic Scotland, published here with the consent of both parties.

From: Ailsa MacTaggart (Image Manager, Historic Scotland Images)
To: David McGovern
Subject: St Vigeans Photography

Your enquiry regarding the photography ban at St Vigeans has been passed on from Dr Nicki Scott.

I fully understand your concern regarding the lack of opportunity to take photographs within the museum. However, it is commonplace for museums to ban photography in their galleries; our policy at St Vigeans is no different. This is done for a whole variety of reasons including security, conservation and visitor access, as well as the museum trying to protect its commercial assets.

If anyone would like photographs of our collections of carved stones at St Vigeans or elsewhere, they can obtain these in low resolution format – free of charge – from our image website <www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk>. A modest charge is made for high resolution images.

If they cannot find the exact image they want, please ask them to contact me and I would be happy to help.

From: David McGovern

Thanks for sending me this email back in January. I still don't quite understand why photography is banned at St Vigeans. You state that there are a variety of reasons including conservation. I don't understand how photography affects sandstone negatively. In terms of security, I assume the concern is that someone photographs the alarm system before breaking in? That seems unlikely. It concerns me greatly that you mention the museum 'protecting its assets'. I may have misunderstood the role of Historic Scotland, but I assumed that it looked after these assets on behalf of the Scottish people? Are you to ban photography of other 'assets' made of stone and force the public to rely on your photographs instead if they wish to study them?

I would assert that the stones at St Vigeans belong to us. I strongly disagree with your policy on photography and would ask that you reconsider.

From: Ailsa MacTaggart

Many thanks for your recent email to Deborah Mays regarding photography of the stones at

St Vigeans. She has asked me to set St Vigeans in context and explain our policy further in reply.

I would hope that, as a lover of Pictish stones, you can appreciate why it is necessary to put in place such restrictions. These are equivalent to those in museums and galleries across Scotland where environmental issues and health and safety must be paramount. The stones at St Vigeans are curated by Historic Scotland for the benefit of everyone. Restricting photography at sites is as much an issue of heritage management and responsible curation, as of protecting commercial assets. Impromptu photography of the stones at St Vigeans is also banned from a safety aspect: in such a small exhibition space we run the risk of people tripping over professional equipment, or stepping back and damaging stones.

However, should you wish to arrange to take photographs, then there are procedures in place at Historic Scotland which enable you to organise a time to photograph the stones in an appropriate environment. Our Events department can co-ordinate this once the relevant form has been completed. Site staff will be informed as to when you plan to visit and ensure that you are given the space to take your photographs. There may be a charge involved depending on what you plan to use the images for.

As mentioned in my previous email, we have extensive photography of the stones at St Vigeans, many of which are downloadable from our images website <http://www.historicscotlandimages. gov.uk>.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

From: David McGovern

Thank you very much for the detailed reply. I now appreciate the reasons for the policy – I just don't agree with it!

Perhaps my requirements are unusual. I'm a stone carver and sometimes want to photograph something I see with a stonecarver's eye that others perhaps wouldn't notice. Prior to the refurbishment at St Vigeans I could photograph anything I liked.

Would you object to me sending your reply onto the Pictish Arts Society for their newsletter?

I appreciate you didn't write your reply with wider publication in mind but it does explain a policy that is of interest to some PSA members.

From: Ailsa MacTaggart

Not a problem sending my reply onto the Pictish Arts Society for their newsletter.

Note from the editor:

What do you think? What have your experiences been?

PAS Pictavia lectures 2011–12

The last of an
outstanding series of lectures

16 March – *Oliver O'Grady*

Yew **make me feel so young!**

Recent excavations at Fortingall

Doors open 7pm for 7.30pm start