The Pictish Arts Society

NEWSLETTER 99 SPRING 2021

Autumn Lecture Series

20 November 2020 – Dr Nicholas Evans

The origins and growth of Pictish identity: Glass half full or glass half empty.

Nick began by noting that evidence from surviving texts suggests that by around AD 700 the Picts ('Picti' in the Latin of the time) were recognised as one of the main groups of people living in what is now Scotland. The others were the Scotti (speaking Old Gaelic) in the west, the Brittones (speakers of Old Welsh) who occupied a territory that stretched from Dumbarton to Cumbria and on into Wales, and the Angles of Northumbria whose lands reached as far north as the Forth.

Picts first appeared in Latin texts of the third century and the last mention of them appears to be in the early tenth century. They have been regarded as the last major people to become extinct in Britain. However, more recent research has involved questioning ideas of Pictish identity, drawing on work in a number of disciplines including studies of texts, art history, archaeology and so on. There has been a rejection of the notion that the Picts were a people living in isolation at the northern edge of Europe, static in terms of identity and culture over a period of centuries. Instead, the idea that Pictish identity was not necessarily continuous from the Roman period to the medieval has gained traction. James Fraser has suggested that 'Picti' was a Roman term only adopted in northern Britain very late in the seventh century, catalysed by the rise of Fortriu following the victory at Dunnichen in AD 685. These seventh century Picti would have been a group of P-Celtic speakers, part of a continuum of linguistically similar neighbours. Alex Woolf has described 'Pictishness' as something of a veneer, not necessarily felt to be a very important descriptor of identity and suggested that it began to wane after the disastrous battle in AD 869 which spelled the end of Verturian dominance..

Nick made the point that, given the scarce and fragmentary nature of our sources, it is not possible to make a definitive statement about the status of Pictish identity in the years AD 300-700. He set out to consider the problem from four aspects: the origins of the term, its use in Late Antique or Early Medieval texts, the possibilities of continuity or transmission and, finally, connotations and resonance.

Derivations from both Latin and a possible P-Celtic source have been suggested for the Picti who first appear in late third century Latin panegyrics. If of Latin origin, it may have been derived from the past participle of the verb meaning 'to paint', nominalised to mean something like 'the painted ones'. On the other hand, it has been argued that an original sounding something more like 'Pecti' was adopted into Latin. There is some support for this in the apparent interchangeability of 'e;' and ''i' in Pictish or northern British words recorded by writers in Old English. Any meaning of such an original remains open to question. On the whole, Nick favoured a Latin derivation, describing the people of northern Britain as barbaric and tattooed, outside of the civilised bounds of empire.

From the Late Antique/Early Medieval period (covering the late third to late fifth centuries), Nick had tracked down fourteen textual references to Picts in works by ten individuals, with several others which are possible. A significant proportion of the texts were panegyrics celebrating the victories of emperors over barbarian foes. Two authors, Patrick and Gildas, were natives of and wrote in Britain. Their works show that Picts were recognised in Britain after it ceased to be part of the Roman Empire. Nick also referred to the famous fourth-century dice tower from Vettweiss-Froitzheim, with its three-line inscription 'PICTOS VICTOS/HOSTIS DELETA/LUDITE SECURI' (Picts defeated, Enemy deleted, Play in Safety) as evidence for an awareness of the Picts within the western empire.

Over the next couple of centuries, the only continental writer Nick has found who mentioned Picts was Isidore of Seville. A late sixth/early seventh century bishop, his *Etymologia* or *Origines* is a compilation of extracts and summaries from many earlier works. His account of Picts, Scots and tattoos shows a degree of some confusion probably deriving from his earlier source material. Isidore's work was known in seventh-century Ireland.

British sources from around this time also refer to Picts. The anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert* (written 699x705) recounts Cuthbert's sailing trip that included a visit to the land of the Picts and to Niuduera, probably in Fife. This took place before he became abbot of Lindisfarne and well before 685. Both Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, and Eddius Stephanus, in his *Life of St Wilfrid*, quote a letter from Pope Agatho in support of Wilfrid written in 679. In this, the Pope referred to the islands inhabited by the English, Irish and Picts. Bede also informs us that Abercorn was established as a bishopric for the Picts, presumably those north of the Forth, again before the defeat of the Anglians at Nechtansmere. The *Amra Choluim Cille*, for which a date around 600 has been argued, and Adomn·n's *Life of St Columba* (around 700) both make references to Picts. Adomn·n, in fact, mentions a king of Picts. Yet very few of our surviving sources of the 500-700 period predate 685 and the rise of Fortriu, and it is difficult to be sure whether or not these works are accurate in their descriptions of earlier periods.

We do however, have Irish chronicles which contain material dating back earlier than 600, including items from a lost Iona chronicle. The Annals of Ulster refer to individuals described as kings of Picts under the years 580. 584, 629, 631 and 635, while other references to Picts are to be found among the entries for 669 and 676. Some of these may be identified with individuals appearing in the much later Pictish king lists. Conversely, not all individuals in the king lists are mentioned in Irish annals. This it appears that some people were being described as Pictish kings before Fortriu rose to dominance. Nick traced the written evidence from continental, British and Irish sources to show that from the Roman period through to the eighth century, there was a more or less continuous awareness of Picts associated with northern Britain.

He went on to suggest that the connection of the Picts with northern Britain could have been maintained in three different ways. The concept could have been handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. Alternatively, Late Antique texts which indicated a northern location could have been used to establish the connection. Finally, a combination of the two was also possible.

Nick used the example of Gildas and his known networks to suggest how such transmission of ideas could work. Gildas, who lived around 500-570, was a British monk who eventually moved from a monastery in Wales to a new foundation at Rhuys in Brittany. His sphere of influence extended considerably beyond his original base; he was certainly in correspondence with Uinniau/Finnian of Movilla in Ireland. He also influenced Columbanus, who trained in Bangor before setting out for continental Europe. All three wrote closely related penitentials. Columba was also said to have trained with Finnian, and probably encountered Gildas works (including *The Ruin of Britain*, with its scathing reference to Picts) before he left for Iona.

These ideas about the possible transmission of 'Picti' as a concept fail to consider the continuing influence of Rome and a possible earlier spread of Christianity. Over recent years there has been a growing recognition of the influence of Rome beyond the boundaries of empire generally. An upsurge in rescue archaeology in Ireland, which was never under Roman control, has led to widespread discoveries of trade goods that reveal contacts with the continent throughout the Roman/Late Antique/ Early Medieval periods. We can also infer an early familiarity with Latin literacy. The creators of the alphabetic ogham script were clearly influenced by Latin written material. Anthony Harvey has shown ogham in use by the fifth century, and probably developed earlier than that. Based on the Latin alphabet, this was created and adapted to suit local needs. Parallels can be found in Scandinavia where the development of runic script, perhaps as early as the second century, also betrays familiarity with the Latin alphabet. A number of finds in southern Scandinavia also point to trade with the empire.

There were periods in the second and third centuries when the Roman army was sporadically active north of the Forth, establishing a network of roads and forts. Even when the army withdrew and relations were reduced, there was still significant contact with imperial Rome. One possible area in which this contact influenced the Picts may have been in the carving of symbols: Fraser Hunter has suggested that carving on stone may have been inspired by Roman army marker slabs etc. It is worth noting that the potential earliest dates for Pictish symbols have been pushed back to the third or fourth century on the evidence of excavations in the caves at Wemyss and Covesea, and at Dunnicaer.

There is a growing body of evidence for widespread contacts across Britain and Ireland in the post-Roman period. Nick illustrated this

point by means of distribution maps of finds of ring-headed pins, knobbed spear butts, massive terrets and hemispherical gaming pieces. The spread northward in British and Pictish territories of west-east aligned cist burial in cemeteries, which may have been associated with the spread of Christianity, can be dated to this period. These, he suggested, are merely the physical manifestations of relationships that probably included a range of contacts: trading, raiding, taking captives as slaves or hostages, formation of alliances, payment of tributes or bribes and so on. He put forward the case for the continued use of Latin as a lingua franca to facilitate such transactions between the various peoples of Britain and Ireland.

Among Latin speakers, there was probably a retention of some degree of literacy, useful in the conduct of diplomatic relations, recording of treaties, and so on. This would allow for some awareness in the north of 'Picti' in a literary context in works from outside the area (as well as an awareness of 'Scotti' in the west of Scotland and Oreland). The eventual spread of Christianity may also have increased access to continental texts. Sites such as Dunnicaer, Rhynie, and Tap o' Noth provide evidence for long distance contact and the possibility of social organisation on a fairly large scale. It is possible that the personnel of these sites included a learned class, literate to some degree and that levels of literacy were boosted by the spread of Christianity.

There is, however, no evidence that can date the arrival and spread of Christianity in Northern Britain. The *Annals of Ulster* record the death of Abbot Uinas of Ner in 623, implying that the Abbey of Ner (probably near Fetternear) was in existence by them On the Isle of May, skeletal remains of men, possibly monks, have been radiocarbon dated to as early as the mid-late sixth century. However, it has proved difficult to find any archaeological evidence for the existence of early church buildings, and there is the problem of lack of textual evidence from this period in northern Britain. It is uncertain whether or not Adomn·n's reference to pagans at the court of Bruide refers to his own time or strictly to that of Columba. It is possible that pagans and Christians co-existed side by side for an extended period. While Saint Patrick's *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* makes reference to 'apostati Picti', this is not evidence that there were Christian Picts in or before Patrick's time: 'apostati' can imply rebels against empire as well as those who have renounced their religion.

Nick turned to Roman sources to suggest that missionary activity was being encouraged at least by the fifth century, citing Prosper of Aquitaine's account of the successful quashing of heresy and the spread of Christianity in Britain and Ireland. By 432, Celestine had appointed Palladius as a bishop to the Scots of Ireland and northern Britain. Nick thought that this activity probably extended into 'Pictland', by at least the mid –fifth century.

Finally, Nick touched briefly on possible contemporary connotations of the term 'Picti'. The problems of lack of textual evidence apply to such considerations too. The evidence is at best sparse and vague. It does not see, at least initially, to imply a specific discrete ethnic group, but rather to be a general term for barbarian people in northern Britain. Ammianus Marcellinus divided the Picts into two 'gentes', Maeatae and Dicalydones. Therefore the term 'Pict' means something other than the tribe or clan, as implied by 'gens'. This may reflect multiple layers of identity, with 'Picti; an overarching term that included several groups. Nick suggested that it meant something rather more than simply' the barbarians in the north'.

By around 700, he suggested that we could think in terms of a broad ethnic identity similar to the Gaels or Anglo-Saxons - and early identity but not necessarily referring to a single kingdom. While we lack any evidence for the political situation in the north at this time, it may we'll have been similar to that of these neighbouring groups, where a broader identity subsumed many small kingdoms. 'Picts', like 'Gales' and 'Anglo-Saxons', may have been a grouping that shared cultural, linguistic and social characteristics and may not necessarily have, at an early stage, referred to a single political entity. The notion of Pictishness was something that was already available to Bridei of Fortriu, claiming hegemony over a wide area much in the manner of the high kings of Ireland.

- **18 December 2020 – Dr Alex Woolf**

From Pictland to Alba 13 years on - Rethinking the disappearance of the Picts

The second volume of The New Edinburgh History of Scotland series, published by Edinburgh University Press, was released in 2007 and was titled *From Pictland to Alba, 789-*

1070. In this talk the author, Alex Woolf, reappraised his work thirteen years later. Although in the ten years preceding publication, Alex had taught courses in early Scottish history at the Universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews, and one specifically on 'Pictavia to Albania,' he has since chosen not to teach this period. He had reservations about students possibly regarding the book as the definitive text on the period and being unwilling to challenge his ideas.

Now, thirteen years on, it probably is time for a reappraisal. Alex noted that Thomas Charles-Edwards had not only reviewed the book, but had quietly sent him an eight-page list of typing and other minor errors – a valuable starting point should a revised edition be contemplated. Would there be any need for major alterations? Briefly, the book consists of a substantial introduction, six chapters of political narrative, one dealing with the area of Scandinavian settlement, and the final chapter, Pictavia to Albania. Alex was happiest with the introduction, and also felt that there would be little alteration to the Scandinavian chapter, as there are no contemporary sources for events in the areas dealt with there. He would stand by his argument for the nature of a gradual language shift, although here again more evidence would be useful and may yet come from place name studies.

So far so good, but Alex felt less happy with the political narrative. In the past, Cinaed son of Alpin's reign (848-58) had been seen as marking the beginning of the end of the Picts. In 2007, Alex had agreed with a view that refocussed attention away from Cinaed to the reign of Giric son of Dungal (878-89). On reflection, the nature of the evidence may call the stress on this later period into doubt. The last mention of 'rex Pictorum' in Irish annals was in 879. By about 900, a 'rí Albain' appears. This need not indicate a disappearance of the Pictish kingdom; it may simply represent a change in the language used in the records from Latin to Irish which occurred about this time. A similar move to the use of Old English from Latin appears around then in Anglo-Saxon documents too.

Quite aside from the change in language, there is the question of what was meant by 'rex Pictorum' or 'rí Albain.' We should take note of the fact that we have no surviving documents produced at the courts or in the territories of any such individuals. We do not know if they would have styled themselves as 'rex Pictorum' or 'rí Albain.' Whether these were titles or descriptions is far from clear. Various meanings are possible: rex Pictorum could be the king of the Picts, a king of the Picts, a king of Picts – the lack of a definite article renders the Latin phrase ambiguous and rí Albain could likewise be 'a king of Alba' or 'the king of Alba.' We should also accept that these are external ideas, a mid-ninth century view from the Irish midlands where the Irish annals were recorded, not an indication of how the individuals referred to themselves. We do have some evidence from further south, however. We call Ine a West Saxon king, reigning from about 688 to 726. Of the fifteen or so of his charters that survive, only about half describe him as 'king of the West Saxons'. In the remainder he is titled 'rex Saxonum' – king of Saxons, there being probably 9 or 10 other Saxon kingdoms at that time. In his law code, he refers to the people he ruled as 'Anglisc' and 'Wylisc', not 'Saxones'. One Northumbrian king, in a letter to the pope, referred to himself as 'rex Saxonum.' In these cases, individuals were using a style found in Irish annals to refer to themselves. Wendy Davies has pointed out that the Annales Cambriae never refer to kings of X or Y kingdoms. In fact, the title 'king' is rarely given, usually only names and patronymics, allowing identification with names appearing in later genealogies or king lists. No Welsh charters of the period survive, and rarely do Anglo-Saxon counterparts give indication of territories or kingdoms in theirs.

This is not uncommon: our monarch was proclaimed Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at her coronation, but many people refer to her as 'Queen of England', which is no part of her official style or title. We should be extremely cautious about reading too much into the terms used in chronicles which were written at some considerable distance from Pictavia/ Albania. We have simply no idea what these men styed themselves, or if they did indeed think of themselves as 'king of anywhere'. We might look to Ceolfrith's letter to Nechtan on the dating of Easter for some assistance, but he simply referred to Nechtan as 'lord king.' Indeed, it is not until the twelfth century that we have evidence of any northern king using a style (rex Scottorum or rex Scotiae) to refer to himself, and this is thought to have been influenced by usage becoming current in France and England at the time.

The last mention of Pict or Pehtes in surviving records are to be found in the Anglo-Saxon

Chronicle (ASC) which records the death of Constantin son of Cinaed in 878, and in the Irish annals where the death of his brother Aed is noted in 879. The later Chronicle of the Kings of Alba (CKA) refers to Pictavia in the reign of Domnall son of Constantin, whom the Annals of Ulster designates 'rí Albainn' in the notice of his death in 900.

Thirteen years ago, Alex coined the term 'Alpinids' to refer to Cinaed and his descendants. The intention was that this should be ambiguous, leaving open the question as to whether the family was Gaelic or Pictish in origin. By 920, Constantín son of Áed was referred to in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as Scotta cyning – king of Scots. At that period, 'Scotta' was used in the ASC to refer to people from Ireland. This Constantîn, the last Pictish king mentioned in the Annals of Ulster, was seen by the author of this portion of the ASC as a king of Gaels. This suggests that we are not dealing merely with a change of name (Alba as the Gaelic for whatever the Picts called Pictland) but that from the English point of view there had been some transformation. The sons of Cinaed were the last to be described as 'reges Pictorum' in their death notices in the Irish chronicles.

Following Áed's death, power seems to have passed to Giric son of Dúngal, who was mentioned in contemporary annals. His father's name suggests he was a Gael. However, the later Chronicle of the Kings of Alba introduces an Eochaid son of Rhun and grandson through his mother of Cinaed, hence an Alpinid. Alex suggested that this Eochaid, to whom Giric apparently stood in some sort of foster-father relationship and who is not vouched for in contemporary sources, may have been included here because Giric son of Dúngal could not claim Alpinid descent. At any rate, Cinaed's grandson, Domnall son of Constantín succeed Giric. It is at least possible that following the death of Constantín son of Cinaed and the Viking activity of the late 870's, refugees from the west may have fled into Pictland and that Giric, as one of them, may have launched a successful coup in which Áed son of Cinaed died. Alex had suggested that the two grandsons of Cinaed may have found refuge with their aunt, Máel Muire, who had married two successive High Kings of Ireland. Giric may have had sufficient time to introduce changes in Pictland, bringing Gaelic forms and practices to church and rule. Through their time spent at their Aunt's court, these would have been familiar to the younger Constantín and Áed, and so found it natural to keep them in place when they returned to resume Alpinid control. Alex compared this to the way in which Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred the Unready, retained the patterns laid down by Cnut and his successors and did not seek to reinstate Anglo-Saxon practices when he regained the English kingdom. From this point of view, Giric was the instigator of change, while Cinaed was important as a legitimating ancestor for the competing dynasties founded by his grandsons. While this remains a possible scenario, it may be that the importance of Cinaed son of AlpÌn has been downplayed. Was he really only just another king of Picts?

The CKA portrays Cinaed as mainly active in the south of Pictland and beyond its southern borders. He averaged one invasion of Northumbria in every two years of his reign, burning both Dunbar and Melrose. As he died in 858, the Northumbria he attacked was still a force to be reckoned with, long before it fell into disarray in the aftermath of 'great army' which took York and ravaged Northumbria in the late 860's. CKA places none of Cinaed's activities north of the Mounth. He died at Forteviot, of cancer, and his brother Domnall was also active there. We have no direct indication of whether Cinaed was a Pict or a Gael. He was described as 'king of Picts' by foreigners, but then William the Conqueror was described as king of English, although he himself was not.

Under 878, the Annals of Ulster records three deaths: Rhodri son of Merfyn, king of the Britons, ¡ed son of Cinaed, king of the Picts, and GairbÌth son of Mael Brigte, king of Conaille. A short poem follows:

> Rhodri of Manu, splendid here,
> Áed from the lands of Kintyre
> Donnchadh lustrous stuff of sovereignty
> Gairbíth, diadem of smooth Macha.

In the cases of both Rhodri and Gairbith, the references are to territories associated with their ancestors. It seems that the poet thought that Áed's ancestors were Gaels from Kintyre. A second quatrain may suggest that the poem was written at St Finnbar's monastery of Moville, fairly centrally placed between Man, Kintyre and Macha.

Alex now suggested that the transformative date may be even earlier that Cinaed's reign. He showed a portion of the king list roughly as follows:

839-42	Uurad son of Bargoit
842-3	Bridei son of Uurad
843	Cinoid son of Ferath
843-5	Bridei son of Uuthoi (otherwise unattested)
845-48	Drest son of Uurad
848-858	Cinaed son of Alpín/Cinoid son of Elphin.

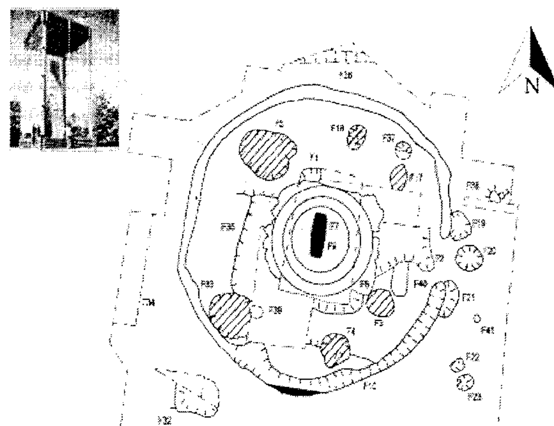
This may bear witness to a struggle for power between Uurad and his sons and Cinaed after the fall of Fortriu. The territory north of the Mounth may have remained in Viking hands for some years following the defeat and deaths of the sons of Oengus in 839. If this were the case, Cinaed must eventually have taken control of the southern part of Pictland, which may explain his focus on his southern borders. External observers may have had little understanding of what was happening and possibly tried to describe vaguely reported events in familiar terms.

Alex briefly described events following the break-up of Charlemagne's empire in the late ninth century as an aid to understanding how different names could be applied to the same broad territory. After the death of Louis the Pious in 840, the lands were split between his three sons, the eastern portion passing to Louis the German. Over the next hundred years or so, the ruler of this territory was variously referred to as the king of Saxons, of Franks, of Ost Franks, of Saxons and Franks. Indeed, around 890, Alfred in England described himself as king of the Anglo-Saxons, to clearly distinguish himself from what appeared to be a new Saxon kingdom on the continent. Previously, 'Angles' and 'Saxons' had been more or less interchangeable terms. 'Saxon' was to disappear from both contexts: Alfred's successors eventually ruling over the English, while the Ottonian dynasty settled for rex Teuticorum, a Latinised version of a Germanic word meaning 'the people' which eventually became 'Deutsch'. It took something like a hundred years for the name to become settled. All this vagueness suggests that what was important to a king was to have followers and territory. The terminology – how they chose to describe themselves – was far less important.

Alex pointed out that the Irish Annals present a very hibernocentric view of the world. While 'Alba' seems to have originally meant the whole of Britain, that changed over time. The English speaking world frequently uses 'America' as shorthand for a specific part of the Americas (the English-speaking USA), and the Visigoths referred to Septimania as Gallia (in other words, the part of Gaul nearest their territory in Spain). It is possible that Alba eventually came to mean that part of Britain inhabited by Gaelic speakers whose customs and way of life were familiar to the monks of the Irish midlands. Initially, that would probably have been Kintyre and Dál Riata. The annalists also seem to have believed that Cinaed or his family came from Kintyre. When he and his successors settled down into ruling that part of Pictland that lay south of the Mounth, introducing Gaelic customs and practices in both rule and religion, it must have become obvious that this was not merely a bad patch for Fortriu that would eventually lead to a restoration of the dominant north. Alba was no longer simply Dál Riata or Kintyre, but the name became attached to the new kingdom founded by the Alpinids. *Sheila Hainey*

A revisit to Sueno's Stone

An attempt to establish the chronology of Sueno's Stone using field evidence and to ascertain what art historical and archaeological parallels can be found



Sueno's Stone stands at the edge of the town of Forres, near the Moray Coast in northern Scotland, and represents the largest and most impressive sculptured monument in early medieval Scotland. The stone stands almost six metres tall with stark iconography of mounted and foot warriors, leaders and beheadings on one face, and on the other, a huge cross, under which it has now been established is a depiction of the Old Testament scene of the anointing of Solomon. The stone remains enigmatic, in that there has been no consensus on interpretations of the scenes carved upon it and what they could represent, nor on the date of the stone itself. My research revisited the stone in an attempt to try and resolve some of these enigmas in a three-pronged approach:

- Acquiring new radiocarbon dates from two of the posthole sites using original samples taken during the excavations around the Sueno's Stone in 1991/92 (McCullagh 1995).
- Undertaking an in-depth analysis of the art historical and historical archaeology parallels to the stone in an attempt to determine the inspiration and influences behind it in order to provide a plausible date for Sueno's Stone itself.
- Finally, by looking at the setting and the area of Forres in detail seeking to establish the likelihood of the area as having been one of great importance, indeed maybe having an elite status during the Pictish period.

A conclusive date from the setting around the stone would potentially provide the date of the erection of the stone itself. The postholes uncovered during the original excavation were in a penannular shape around the stone which could reflect the derrick, or scaffolding used to raise it. Samples from all the postholes were retrieved from the Falconer Museum in Forres, and it was established that all of them contained dateable material which provided an exciting possibility of success. Due to time constraints, only three initial samples from the large posthole F5 and F18 located next to it were sent for dating. The results that were returned showed that 11th/12th century dates for F5 were consistent with those returned from the original radiocarbon dating of the same feature from the 1990/91 excavation. The late 4th century date returned for the sample from F18 was, in contrast, far too early to be considered and was excluded as it most likely reflected the re-deposition of earlier charred material. This led to the following proposed scenarios as an explanation of what the dates were reflecting:

- That either one or all of the postholes have been recut at some point.
- That the perceived penannular group of postholes around the stone were in fact random.
- That the postholes represented an enclosure or structure around the stone, possibly of 11th/12th century date or at least were refurbished in this period.
- That the stone had been moved to its present position in the 11th/12th century.

The results clearly did not relate to Sueno's Stone's erection, but instead they illustrated the exciting premise that the stone remained significant in the landscape for centuries after its erection and had a long afterlife.

The art historical analysis raised lots of interesting parallels with various aspects of the iconography on Pictish sculptured stones. In particular, the iconography found on the sides of the stone amongst the vine scrolls, including fishtailed men, had close parallels with Meigle stones. The important anointing scene of

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Solomon at the base of the cross side of Sueno's Stone was found to also be reflected on the cross shaft at St Andrews (NRHE 34307) and shown in the 9th century Utrecht Psalter. The martial themes and warrior imagery evidently have close links and possible inspiration sources from stones such as the Dupplin Cross (NRHE 26954) and the Aberlemno cross-slab (NRHE 34863). The leader figures were interpreted as signifying a ritual element and an elite status. An overall analysis was then undertaken using the probable dates of the Pictish stones that had been used in

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1&2 *Extracts from John Borland's survey drawings*

comparisons to Sueno's Stone and it was found that the majority reflected 8th/9th century dates. This led to a conclusion that the Sueno's Stone was itself likely to date to the late 9th century and could therefore be included within the corpus of Pictish sculptured stones.

The investigations into Forres and its surroundings uncovered a rich prehistoric landscape with now lost stone circles, enclosures, and a hill fort looming over Sueno's Stone. Prehistoric monuments are a conspicuous feature of elite centres in the early medieval Celtic world (Driscoll 1998, 142) and such sites reveal longevity of use, uncovering a strong ritual character of the sites which can in some cases be linked to important acts such as inauguration (Newman 1998, 129). On the other side of the town to Sueno's Stone, but on the same major routeway is the Pictish monumental cemetery at Greshop Farm (NRHE 15813), probably dating at the latest to the 7th century (Mitchell et al 2020, 6). The presence of similar barrow monuments at sites such as Rhynie and the later royal centre at Forteviot in Southern Pictland implies that the barrow at Greshop was a high-status cemetery. In Ireland, some cemeteries were also sites of assembly (Gleeson 2015, 40), which is of importance, as it suggests that Greshop could have played a similar role, with the erection of Sueno's Stone perhaps superseding that of the cemetery. Next to Sueno's Stone is a known gallows site suggest-ing that the stone was located on a major boundary, as other such gallows sites have been found by highways and in highly visible places and are further linked with Judicial sites (Reynolds 2009, 179). Additional evidence for the importance of Forres is in historical sources which identify it as a sheriffdom and royal burgh, which were few in number when formed. Although they appear later in the historical period, new studies are showing how early medieval territorial and social structures lay at the root of later feudal structures of rule (Driscoll 2002). This implies that Forres was a place of importance from much earlier times. An attempt to link the name itself of Forres with known Pictish elite sites such as Forteviot proved to be inconclusive but warrants further investigation. This, along with Southwick (1981) and Douglas (1934) talking of a ruined fortress dating to the 9th century, all suggest a settlement with a prolonged existence and importance.

Possibly the most exciting aspects of the stone, however, are the sword marks seen underneath the anointing scene, which have been interpreted as probable markings or swearing of oaths, and the depiction of a possible crowned leader on the stone. If it is indeed a crown then it would be one of the earliest depictions of a crowned figure in stone sculpture in Britain and Ireland. This all suggests that the stone was the probable site of ceremonial events and potentially even inaugurations with its location and place upon a mound marking it as a probable assembly site. The evidence also marks it as an important boundary marker and one which perhaps endured into later periods as reflected in the 11th/12th century dates for the postholes.

There are three main interpretations of the 'story' that the stone portrays:

- That it commemorates a battle in which the Picts were vanquished by the Scots under Kenneth MacAlpin.
- That it commemorates a battle between a Pictish/Scottish force and marauding Norsemen.
- That it commemorates the death of King Dubh in 966AD.

The proposal that it is acting as a commemoration to Kenneth MacAlpin, or a member of his dynasty is perhaps the most convincing, with the beheading scenes on the stone symbolising the fruitlessness of rebelling against the newfound power of a newly emerging Alba. Whilst acknowledging that MacAlpin and his successors continued to be identified as Kings of the Picts for some time, and with the transition to Alba not occurring until around 900 AD, it was nonetheless a time of great change, both socially and culturally (Woolf 2007, 320-1).

According to historical records, there were accounts of the Norse killing Kings of Picts or Alba in 839AD, and perhaps in 876 and 900, and that the Norse stayed in Pictland for considerable periods during 866 and 875. Their occupations would have involved living off the Picts and forcing them to pay tribute, causing financial strain and undermining royal power (Evans 2019, 36). This persuasively suggests that the transformation process to a unified Alba was in response to Norse activity (Woolf 2007, 116-34; 312-42; Evans 2019, 36) and that this is Sueno's Stone's 'message'.

So, what are my conclusions? The comparisons and parallels found in 8th/9th century Pictish sculptured stones and in manuscripts strongly suggest that Sueno's Stone was raised in the late 9th century which would place the stone within the Pictish sculptured stone corpus. The 11th/

12th century dates for the postholes indicate that the site remained important long after the stone's erection. They could represent an enclosure around the stone, demarking it clearly as a boundary marker, or even that they reflect a platform to be used at significant occasions. Finally, it is suggested that the iconography depicted upon Sueno's Stone represents a commemoration to peace, reflecting a series of events, or stories, to deliver a specific message defining the end of an era and the new political structure being formed with the forging of Alba. Its enduring materiality, size, and shape rendered it a fixed point in the landscape and as such a visible and active part of the landscape and society. The evidence put forward for the importance of Forres is compelling and evidently suitable for such an impressive stone, which was the probable site of ceremonial events, an assembly site, and potentially even a site of inaugurations, a purpose which perhaps endured into later periods as reflected in the 11th/12th century dates for the postholes.

Ruth Loggie

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The missing 'fourth' symbol on the Dunfallandy stone

Two contributors writing in *PAS Newsletter* 98 alluded to the blank space on the Dunfallandy stone, above the left-hand seated figure, and were uncertain whether a symbol might have been erased from there. Generally, photographs and sketches do not make it clear, but a visit to the stone shows that the blank space, where another symbol would be expected, has not been reduced in height to match the surrounding area of stone. The space was ready to receive a carving, but for some reason it is still waiting.

When you visit the Dunfallandy stone, it is apparent that a symbol (or anything else) could not have been removed given that the surrounding area, where the carving was completed, is at a lower level than the higher, uncarved empty space. The 'fourth' symbol was left undone.

We could speculate on which of the Pictish symbols might have fitted into this particular shape of space, had it been filled, but this stone carver allowed himself freedom in placing the symbols. They were angled to fit, not simply vertical or horizontal, making it very difficult to guess the 'fourth' symbol.

Elspeth Reid

Forthcoming Events

PAS Spring Lecture Series 2021

Lecture will continue to be delivered online via Zoom until further notice. Details of how to access the lectures will be circulated by email to members prior to each lecture.

Friday 16 April – Dr Benjamin Hudson

The intellectual background of the sculpted stones

Friday 21 May – Dr Anouk Busset

Carved stones and places of devotion in early Christian north-western Europe: Pictish perspectives

More on Pictish Symbol Usage

PAS Newsletter 96 (pp.7-10) carried a lengthy discourse by Hugh Levey setting out some of his thoughts on how to develop a set of 'rules' (his inverted commas) for Pictish symbol usage. This is a weighty and complex subject to tackle, and he must be congratulated for confronting it head on, for its importance cannot be over-estimated in our attempts to better understand the Picts and their culture.

The article contained a great deal of material, and it did not shy away from issues of a controversial nature. Upon reading it, I found myself applauding some parts for their insightful deductions, while furrowing my brow at others for their wayward (in my opinion) analysis. I therefore decided to issue a critique, which appeared in *PAS Newsletter* 97 (pp.13-16), which turned out to be slightly longer than the original piece! I ended with a reminder, both to myself and others, that the article was no more than a preliminary summary of Hugh's M.Litt. thesis, entitled 'Towards establishing the rule book of Pictish Symbol Usage', and that more would follow in due course.

Indeed, an accompanying editorial note promised a detailed presentation at the future online conference on the Conan stone, which is impending at the time of writing and may well have happened before the publication of the this *Newsletter*. In the meantime, Hugh Levey countered with a spirited and detailed response in *PAS Newsletter* 98 (pp.8-15), which included photographs and tables. It may be considered prudent to hold back any rejoinder until after the coming conference, but with the *Newsletter* returning to its regular less-frequent pattern of publication, perhaps some reply is appropriate at this point, certain in the knowledge that it will not be the last word on the subject!

Charts 1a and 1b in Levey's last article illustrate and name some 70 Pictish designs (down on the 81 of the previous paper), plus mentions of other categories, all of them regarded as potential symbols. However, the numbering system – and there does seem to be a system – has proved somewhat baffling. There are clear sequences in some places, but not in others where this might be expected. Why, for instance, is the mirror (at 24) so far away from the mirror-case (at 6)? It is fair enough to present the mirror & comb together, even though their tags are rendered separately, but why should symbol pairings be included in this list at all, even if only two? Do sub-numbers indicate derivative symbols?

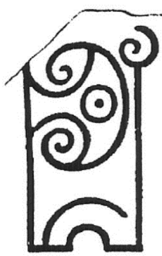
This aspect is frequently rather perplexing, such as the familiar 'notched rectangle & Z-rod' (no.23) being followed by the unique 'rectangle with rod' (no.23.1), even though they only bear the slightest of superficial similarities to each other. The second of these, discovered at Newton of Lewesk too late for inclusion in Romilly Allen's monumental survey, has the appearance of a rectangular shield with a central boss (similar to that being carried by the spear-bearing figure on the Collessie pillar), perhaps overlying a sword (which may be likened to a design on the west wall of the Covesea cave). This does not connect at all with the possible interpretation of the other symbol as representing a pony and chariot burial. Anyway, the stone has become so besmirched with lichens that it is hard to make anything out for certain.

1 *Rothie Brisbane*

While there may be question marks over the legitimacy of a few of these designs which are put up for adoption as symbols (the centaur being a prime example), it is the names which are applied which concern me more. I cannot really see the 'arch' as being architectural " 'arc' might be a safer geometric alternative, though looking to material culture, I prefer the notion that it may be a hinged bronze collar. Such a possibility is strengthened when versions such as those on the stones at Crosskirk and Rothie Brisbane (**1**) appear to give visual emphasis to the hinge; it certainly does not look like a key-stone on those examples, though conceivably it could be regarded in such a light at Percylieu. This raises the question: should those examples exhibiting a (?)hinge be regarded as comprising a genuine variant of the smooth arc, and consequently merit a separate listing?

The reduction in the overall number may be due, at least partially, to the decision to list some variants but not others. The text explains that rodded symbols were treated as separate designs rather than variants, of which four are noted, to which the notched rectangle may be added. Its major notch is an inherent part of the design, while examples with little notches which may be seen as qualifying elements are omitted,

which is a pity. They include the round-notched versions of the ogee shape on Kintradwell 2 (but not Kintradwell 1), the rectangle on North Redhill (**2**), the crescent on Easterton of Roseisle, the disc (being one of a double) at Mill of Newton, and the mirror-handle on Fyvie 1, but not the square indents on some mirror-case symbols, which may be regarded as naturalistic representations of a device to allow the handle of the mirror to be more easily gripped when withdrawing it from its case. The matter, we are told, is dealt with elsewhere, but the question must be asked: what is the significance of the semi-circular notch? It may be seen as having the power to alter the meaning of the un-notched examples, and thus it should be legitimate to recognise such an element as another type of qualifier in the canon of Pictish syntax.



2 North Redhall

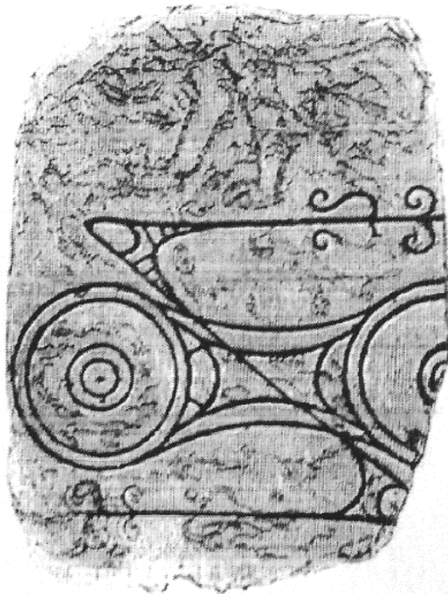
Quite often Levey follows Romilly Allen " not a bad guide, but there are occasions when a follower can be led astray. He repeats Allen's symbol sequence of stepped rectangle (here reduced to 'step'), stepped rectangle with curved ends (therefore not a 'step'), and notched rectangle with curved end, ludicrously called a 'tuning fork', which it cannot possibly be. I have previously presented the case for it being a partial sword with the pointed half missing, in my review of Anna Ritchie's HMSO publication *Picts* [1], and in a subsequent issue of the *PAS Journal* [2]. If this interpretation is rejected, then Allen's prosaic description is at least geometrically accurate.

Levey's continued adherence to the newly-named 'placard' symbol on the Cargill stone is difficult to accept, and the best that he can manage in its defence is that "the name itself is irrelevant to the study's findings", adding that "the study considered non-fauna Pairing Symbols as non-representational, so the name is purely descriptive" so why not call it something like 'rectangle and straight line', as others have done. He mentions, but does not illustrate in the tables, a similar design on Invereen, perhaps regarding it as a variant, the rectangle having been replaced by a circle (see Levey's figures 9 and 10 last time). If this is also to be regarded as a placard, one wonders what the text would read this time: 'Stop Children Crossing'? At least my worst fears were not realised, and it has not been given a 'lollipop' tag. Please note: this light-hearted banter has a serious underlying purpose.

I had intended to reference this design along with an example of the type of object which might have inspired it, but both items are in the National Museum of Scotland and currently out of commission due to coronavirus restrictions. Sadly, the same applies to a third 'placard' candidate which has emerged, a crude little boulder from Pool, where the pole is markedly curved. A placard being held by a Pict out protesting on a windy day, perhaps, or is the curved line simply following the outline of the stone at this point? Where I do support Hugh Levey is in his stance against those scholars who claim the first two designs to be later additions, on the basis of no evidence whatever. That is tantamount to saying 'I don't understand it, I can't explain it, so I'll just pretend that it is irrelevant to the discussion'.

Another stone which cannot currently be visited in the NMS because of lockdown is Huntly 2. I mentioned this one last time as carrying a possible symbol pair *viz.* a double-disc & Z-rod, sharply incised, and what might be a bear, though only faintly visible. Other scholars have been inclined in that direction. Joseph Anderson, when writing up its discovery in *PSAS* in 1889, saw "faint traces of what may well be the figure of an animal",[3] while Iain Fraser detected "what appears to be the fore-paws of an animal of indeterminate identity",[4] as stated in his 2008 RCAHMS inventory. (That work illustrates the stone by way of Anderson's article, plus a truly dreadful modern photograph which barely allows the main symbol to be made out, let alone anything else; alas, no stipple drawings on this occasion.) I talked last time about those powerful forelegs being suggestive of a bear. All this, yet Levey says that "all readily available photographs and sketches of the stone were consulted, and none shows any trace". How can this be?

The answer, it would appear, is that Hugh and I have been examining the same drawing but using different versions of it. Anderson's initial report in *PSAS* was accompanied by a high-quality wood-cut illustration in which it would require an unjustified leap of faith to claim that any form of design may be discerned above the clearly-rendered symbol. Allen apparently used that same woodcut in *ECMS* to illustrate the Huntly stone, though oddly he ignores Anderson and makes no reference in his text to any possible representation of an animal. Even odder, his version of the illustration shows an animal as described by others more clearly and it is possible to discern a quadruped with powerful fore-limbs walking from right to left (**3**).



3 *Huntley 2 (Leys of Dummuies)*

It would thus seem that the Anderson woodcut was altered to show at least the suggestion of a bear-like creature, where none had existed before. Allen can hardly have been responsible, or surely he would have mentioned the newly-visible animal in his text. Instead, he is silent on the subject, beyond saying that Anderson's illustration is accurate. Even so, his description does not match the Anderson woodcut in every respect, so it must be the result of his direct observation of the stone. An antiquarian mystery. On the basis of lack of evidence, Levey quite rightly felt that he could not accept the existence of a possible bear "even at the lowest confidence level". Perhaps, in the light of the above revelation, he might reconsider.

There are a few other worries, such as the likely fastening pin at Anwoth still being listed as a dubious 'sword' (with no grip), the lion (of St Mark) being touted as a Pictish symbol, even though Romilly Allen did just that, plus the Class II Golspie 'dog'. That latter animal may or may not be a dog, but its extremely close proximity to the weapon of an angry-looking Pict is suggestive of it being part of a narrative scene and therefore not a symbol at all. The table still employs the pejorative word 'serpent', sometimes justifiable in Class II art, but in Class I terms, it's just a snake, or adder if you want to be precise, unencumbered by quasi-religious trappings.

For different reasons, the 'dog's head' symbol is unconvincing; dogs don't have flippers in place of fore-legs. A seal would make more sense, the creature's muzzle providing a pointer. Why are three examples shown of the 'flower' symbol (inverted commas, please, because it doubtless isn't), and then given non-sequential numbering? The 'wheel' needs inverted commas too (see my comments last time). Why is the same 'bull's head' (or bovine skull) from Mortlach shown twice? Are all of those likely doodles really worthy of inclusion? There are some more quandaries, but this is quite enough for the time being.

Again, I am supportive of Levey's criticism of scholars who draw up lists of single symbols without regard as to whether the stones are complete or fragmentary. In this respect, I should perhaps withdraw my promotion of the deer's head on Dunachton as a lone symbol, thanks to Hugh's reminder that this stone "had been trimmed for use as a lintel on a later building". Actually, Allen merely states that the stone "was found in 1870 [in use] as a lintel over a door in the old steading" without reference to any trimming, though the distinct possibility of that procedure having taken place, with a second symbol having been lost in consequence, is very real.

The short-hand assessment of the condition of each stone (given in Levey's second table) is thus a valid approach. My 'hornets' nest' comment last time was directed more at the potential dangers of adopting a 'confidence' triage (the gradings shown in the third table), which would seem to be more open to subjective judgement. Nonetheless, it is a factor seldom given any consideration and so worthy of attention here. The graphic explanation of the three levels of confidence (his figure 4) is well made, as is the nine-step programme of analysis. Without this robust methodology, the framework might prove inadequate to support the weight of the conclusions. The results are presented in tabular form (his figure 5), just 42 of the 70 designs making it to this stage. To my mind, the most valuable outcome of the exercise, at least on the surface, is the recording of the prevalence of each potential pairing symbol. I admit to experiencing a number of mild surprises, including both more and less than the number I would have anticipated.

Of course, such a scheme is bound to generate exceptions, and these were recognised by having them accommodated in a separate column, appropriately headed '**?**'. In all, 13 designs fell into this category, which is almost one-third. Four of these were rejected as not constituting symbols, leaving nine examples of paired symbols which did not behave in the expected

manner. We are reminded that three of these were described last time, where mirrors appear without pairing symbols – but the mirror itself does not appear in the table, being only a qualifier, so presumably the total remains at nine. The strange case of St Madoes gets a special mention and a photograph as well, showing three very similar horsemen boxed in an oddly compressed fashion, accompanied by three boxed symbols. This arrangement does not support the pairing hypothesis, causing Levey to speculate that each horseman may be represented by a single symbol, and he could well be right. Hugh also makes a stout defence of the auxiliary symbols as selected, with which I largely concur.

Perhaps not every question has been answered, but considerable progress towards that end has been made, and for that I am grateful. Once more, our thanks must go to Hugh Levey for producing a further instalment of his detailed and stimulating study of the Pictish symbols, which lie at the very core of what Pictish society was all about. His explanations are much appreciated (and mostly agreed with), and the mouth-watering prospect of more to come is eagerly anticipated. These symbol studies tend to ebb and flow over the decades, and it is most exhilarating to find ourselves on the crest of a new wave. *Graeme Cruickshank*

References

1. Graeme Cruickshank, *An appraisal of* Picts, *a new book by Anna Ritchie* (Pictish Arts Society Occasional Paper No.1, 1990, p.4)
2. Graeme Cruickshank, 'Of Pictish Helmets and Other Objects' in *Journal of the Pictish Arts Society* No.7, 1995, pp.22-28. Beware a host of typesetting errors, caused apparently by an unsupervised spell-checker. A Corrigenda appeared in No.9, p.41, listing the important ones.
3. Joseph Anderson, 'Notices of some undescribed sculptured stones and fragments in different parts of Scotland' in *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* vol. XXIII, 1889, pp.345"47.
4. Iain Fraser (comp.), *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland* (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 2008, p.24)

Corrigenda

Also in *PAS Newsletter* 98, I was taken to task by Alan Briggs, and rightly so, when he picked up on a couple of clangers which I had carelessly dropped. While dealing with the possible instance of a single main symbol plus an auxiliary, I cited Craigton 2 as an example of this unusual circumstance. That is quite wrong, for more than one reason. Craigton (there is only one stone there) bears no close resemblance to my description, but Briggs correctly identified the stone which I had intended to cite, *viz.* Clynemilton 2. Why the mistake? I can only guess that it occurred because those two stones are illustrated in *ECMS* on facing pages, and I must have glanced at the wrong caption while my brain was engaged elsewhere. That is more than likely, considering at that moment I had no fewer than four editors pressing me for promised copy covering widely-divergent subject matter, with the submission dates forming a fairly tight cluster. That said, there is no excuse for sloppy scholarship, so I hang my head in shame.

There was more, however, as Alan Briggs pointed out that Clynemilton 2 might well be incomplete. It is depicted in *ECMS* with a horizontal line immediately above a couple of symbols, to which I did not pay sufficient attention, because Allen comments that the stone is broken at the top. Indeed, this is shown in the photograph in Iain Fraser's RCAHMS inventory, and in John Borland's HES stipple drawing which accompanied Briggs' letter. Hugh Levey has made the point (alluded to above) that incomplete stones must be treated with caution when assessing what they once may have contained in the way of artwork which may now be missing, citing Dunachton as a case in point. I did the same myself last time while considering a trio claimed to represent examples of mirror&comb only. We can see that the tip of the upper spear-end at Clynemilton has been broken off, and the mirror may have had a millimetre shaved off its rim as well. Under these circumstances, it would be imprudent to assume that there was not another symbol positioned higher up the stone before the damage was sustained, so I should withdraw it as a possible example.

Moreover, another example which I cited of this same circumstance may also have to go. I referred to the stone at Park in Aberdeenshire, that being the local place-name, though for the sake of clarity, it might be preferable to call it Park House, with reference to the wooded property where it now stands. The difficulty here is that the stone has been brutally trimmed for reuse, destroying most of the topmost symbol, the base of which has a notch which resembles that seen on some mirror-cases, while there is an indeterminate angular element beside it. The Victorian sculptor who attempted to recreate the symbols on the pedestal upon which the stone now rests made a right dog's breakfast of this design. Put more graciously, James Ritchie said of the reconstruction that "it was so incorrectly carved as to bear only a general resemblance to the original".

Ritchie photographed the stone under optimum conditions, no easy task, around 1915 (as shown below), commenting "This shows that the upper symbol on the stone is not 'the two-legged rectangle crossed by a Z-shaped rod' [quoting Romilly Allen in *ECMS*], but rather that symbol which has been

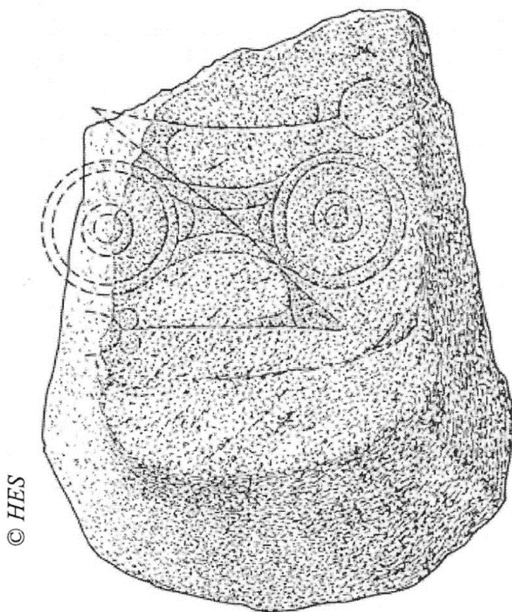
variously taken to represent either a flower or an ornamental cap". It certainly looks like the drooping end of a 'stamen' in the photo. Iain Fraser, although not mentioning Ritchie's work in his mini-bibliography on the Park House stone, nevertheless uses his photograph, alongside John Borland's stipple drawing, the reconstructed part of which follows Allen's interpretation. Iain sits cautiously on the fence, mentioning both but preferring neither. John's drawing accompanied Alan's letter last time. Either way, there does seem to be a symbol there in some form, in which case this stone from Park House should not be taken as an example of a single main symbol plus a qualifier. That only leaves Kintradwell 3 of the trio which I cited, but its surface is so battered and pocked that I would not deny the possibility of the erstwhile existence of another symbol there too. What price now a single symbol plus qualifier?

Alan Briggs, if you listen hard, that chomping sound you can detect is me consuming a large slice of humble pie. Thank you for reading my piece with such a keen eye. I fervently believe that getting things right should always take precedence over the discomfort of a dented ego.

Graeme Cruickshank

A comment from the Editor

In the above article, Graeme Cruickshank refers to the legs of an animal noted by Joseph Anderson on the Huntly 2 symbol stone (Canmore ID 17740 – referred to as Leys of Dummuies), an observation backed up by a contemporary illustration (his fig 3). Cruickshank notes that Rommily Allen and subsequently Hugh Levey both dismiss this feature and asks "How can this be?"



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1 *Leys of Dummuies drawn by John Borland scale 1:10 SC1359934*

The answer is quite straightforward. Presumably Allen and Levey believe this feature to be spurious. I certainly do. Having studied and made a scale drawing from the actual stone, I saw no such feature. Some surface pitting exists in the area with the supposed animal but this does not resemble or depict limbs and claws. I would also disagree with Graeme's interpretation that the illustration which accompanies both Anderson's original article in *PSAS* and Allen's entry in *ECMS* has been doctored or amended. I think what we are looking at here is merely a difference in the quality of reproduction, the former being poorer than the latter.

As for the stone, I think the 19th century illustration shows it upside down. The end with the putative animal carving is rounded and smooth – not a strong candidate for a broken edge but more likely the part of the stone that was set into the ground. Careful observation of the rod's "spearhead" terminal on the double disc and Z-rod confirms my orientation. The edge that is now at the top is ragged – a strong contender for the break which likely robs us of a second symbol (**1**). As great as these antiquarian scholars were, we should not fall into the trap of having unwavering faith in their record. *JB*

St Andrews Cathedral, early carved stones catalogue and Statement of Significance

Languishing in the museum at St Andrews Cathedral is one of the largest collections of early medieval carved stones in Britain, only exceeded by that at Iona. Amongst the collection of about 80 carvings, the St Andrews Sarcophagus is rightly one of the most illustrious art works to survive from the eighth century, but the rest of the sculpture has been generally overlooked. Among the very few people who have bothered to look at them, R.B.K Stevenson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities, briskly passed over saying 'We must not spend too much time on these dregs of Pictish tradition'. Mrs Curle reckoned 'the majority of these [cross-slabs] are of no special interest; they have neither figure nor animal carving, nothing but stereotyped designs of spiral, interlace and key-pattern'. Isabel Henderson began to appreciate their potential, observing that it was not fair to judge them alongside the monumental isolated Pictish cross-slabs; rather, these were the output of a tight religious community, mainly grave

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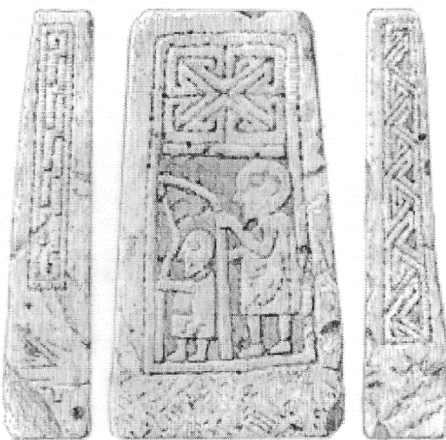
slabs for monks sworn to obedience and humility. The catalogue by David Hay Fleming, *St Andrews Cathedral Museum,* published in 1931, while providing the only list of the finds, did them no service with his grainy black and while illustrations.

Historic Environment Scotland, as part of its rolling programme to update its museum displays, has begun to invest in the St Andrews Cathedral challenge, at least by organising the initial research if not yet daring to contemplate a new interpretative exhibition. John Borland has completed his outstanding drawn record of the collection which, for the first time, allows scholars to gain an oversight of its contents. My task was to create the written catalogue. Access was pretty difficult. The museum is dark, cold and dank at the best of times, the stones are packed cheek by jowl and often set in concrete, so it is almost impossible to take a decent photograph of them. I had to make most of my notes lying on the floor, dragging a bright builders' lamp beside me. This painstaking accumulation of information took several months, learning about each stone one at a time. Then eventually the portfolio of John's entire drawings arrived. I could lay them all out on the floor together, 81 stones, each with 6 sides, and start to review the contents. They quickly sorted themselves into 11 categories: composite monuments made up of panels like the St Andrews Sarcophagus; the house-shaped shrine; free-standing crosses; a carved cross base; the 52 cross-slabs in the 'St Andrews style' of spirals and key-pattern; a square cross-slab; truncated obelisk blocks; an outline cross grave marker; recumbent grave markers; a prayer talisman and trial piece.

Each item has a unique story to tell about its form, function and craftsmanship. Perhaps the most exciting discovery is the potential dating of the 'St Andrews style' cross-slabs. Long dismissed as 'probably late' or post-Pictish because they lack figurative art, these emerge as 'cross carpet-pages in stone', a Pictish re-sponse to the Lindisfarne Gospels. The fashion for carpet pages, climaxing between the Lindisfarne Gospels and Book of Kells, tails off sharply into the ninth century and ultimately disappears from Insular manuscripts by the tenth century. This suggests the major investment in stone carving at St Andrews, as indicated in the Foundation Legends, was in its early days, in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. It also allows speculation that the foundation possessed a revered gospel book illuminated with such a carpet page, something like the Maihingen Gospels (Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. I. 2. 4ʃ. 2 , f.126v) decorated with exclu-sively abstract forms.



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a&b *Two of the more unusual Pictish sculptures from St Andrews Cathedral. Survey drawings by John Borland scale 1:10*

Many other highlights are brought out in the Statements of Significance which have been written for the Sarcophagus and the Collection. Judith Anderson from Historic Environment Scotland writes:

> 'HES is committed to publishing Statements of Significance for all the sites it manages. The documents aim to provide an overview of the range of heritage values that make each site significant, guide conservation decisions and highlight areas for future research. They are freely available to download from HES website and can be accessed from the Visit page for each site e.g.
> <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=0f6ccb1c-be43-4cc3-a97a-a57000dc04cb>
> There is a rolling programme aiming to update Statements so you will find that the examples online will vary somewhat in format and level of detail.'

The revised St Andrews' Statement will be published, hopefully this year, but publication schedules are somewhat disrupted by the†current public health crisis.

Professor Jane Geddes

Arts & Crafts

The Picts and the Clearances: an unusual perspective

Ian Fleming (1906-1994) was an east coast Scottish artist whose work is sadly under-rated these days. He is best known for his finely detailed black and white line engravings, such as 'Gethsemane' and 'Thistles in the Sun', but he also worked extensively in oil and watercolour. He was Warden of the Patrick Allan-Fraser School of Art at Hospitalfield in Arbroath from 1948 to 1954, and thereafter Principal of Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen until his retirement. He was thus well-placed to become familiar with Pictish symbols and cross-slabs, and occasionally he incorporated them into watercolour paintings, as in this work 'Requiem for the Clearances', where a ruined croft, half-hidden by thistles, is watched over by a ghostly cross-slab. This is clearly based in part on the Aberlemno churchyard stone, but its top appears to be shaped to give the impression of shoulders in a vestment fit for a bishop, and it is separate from the ruined cottage both in colour and setting as if in another dimension. Two other paintings on the theme of Picts and clearances exist to my knowledge (type 'Requiem for the Clearances Ian Fleming' into your browser to find them), but in these the Pictish stones are truly part of the modern landscape around the ruined settlements. They were painted in Fleming's last years, when he was living in Cullen on the Moray coast, probably from memory. There may be other such paintings and I wonder if any PAS members know of them?

Anna Ritchie

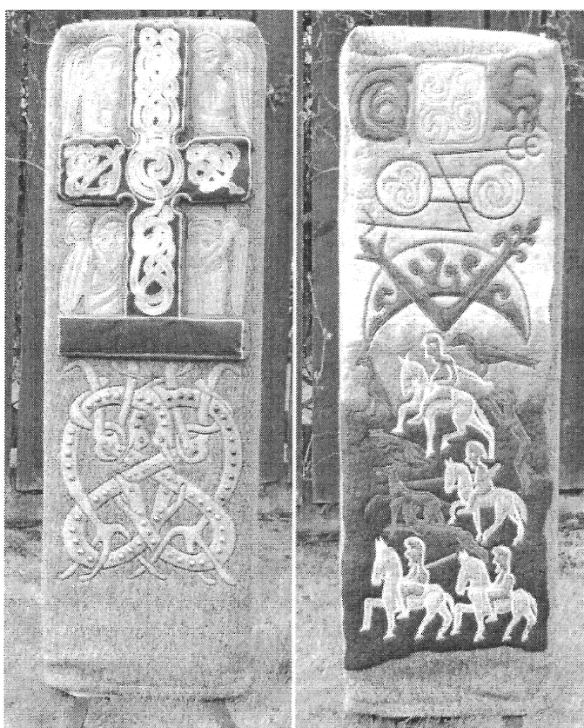
Sugar and spice and all things nice

PAS member Eira Ihalainen created this wonderful gingerbread model of the Camus Cross last Christmas, complete with all its carved details depicted in finely piped icing. Eira, who works at St Andrews Castle & Cathedral, has made gingerbread renditions of those and other architectural gems in previous years (St Rule's Tower was particularly impressive). But having attended the PAS conference in Forfar in 2019, when our fieldtrip took us to Camus, she was obviously inspired to try her hand at something different. Who knows, maybe a St Andrews Sarcophagus awaits this Christmas.

Camus Cross gingerbread by Eira Ihalainen

A stitch in time

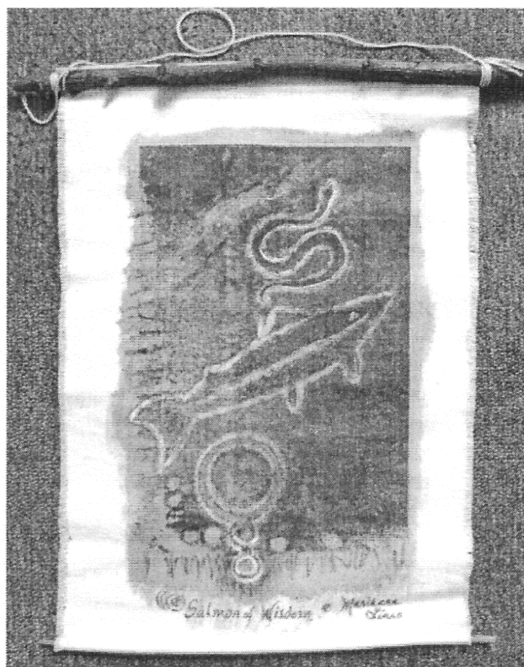
Ruth Black created these superb interpretations of the Elgin Cathedral cross slab using Harris Tweed, hand-made felt and velvet. Venturing beyond the bounds of Pictland, she has also created a stunning image of St John's Cross on Iona. Ruth is currently working on a rendition of the Conan Stone. We can't wait to see that!



Elgin cross-slab by Ruth Black

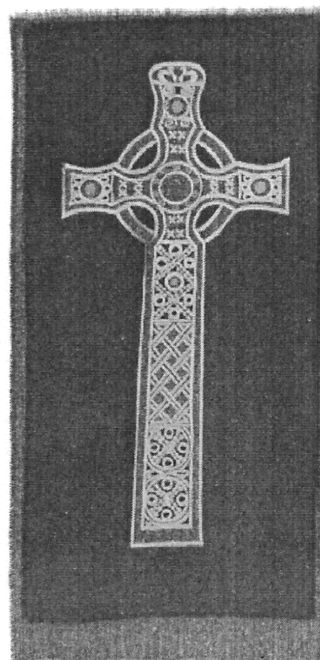
Marianna Lines artwork for sale

A PAS member is putting one of the late Marianna Lines' artworks up for sale. The piece, entitled *Salmon of Wisdom,* is inspired by the symbols on the reverse of the Glamis Manse cross slab.



It is painted on fabric – canvas or linen – and measures 39cm x 29.5cm. A colour image will also be posted on the PAS Facebook page. The seller is open to reasonable offers and will send the picture by Royal Mail tracked service at cost. If you are interested, please make your offer by email to:

<info@thepictishartssociety.org.uk>



St John's Cross, Iona by Ruth Black

The Face of the Symbols (Part 2)

Order and the Mirror

The symbols usually occur in a pair, and for symbol stones that do not also have a mirror+/-comb, the pair of symbols will usually sit in a given order. For example, the crescent and V-rod usually sits above the double-disc and Z-rod. By taking the order of pairs and combining them, it is possible to re-create a list of the symbols in their relative order of precedence. By relative order is meant that we can tell that the crescent and V-rod sits above the double-disc and Z-rod in the ordered list, but we can't always tell how many other symbols might be located *between* those two symbols.

For the common symbols, the relative order can be fairly well established, but for the less common symbols we can often only determine a partial position. For example, we might only be able to say this symbol occurs 'above the crescent and V-rod'. Hopefully as new symbol stones are found, the order can be further defined. If a symbol stone's pair is in the same relative order as the ordered list, the order is here termed 'normal', if back to front it is termed 'reverse'. Here, for demonstration purposes, is a selection of symbol stones showing how a relative order can be established. **(1)**

RELATIVE ORDER

South

Kintradwell1 Ronaldsay Dunnichen Navidale Balluderon Brandsbutt Invereen

Kintradwell2 Inverallen Cairnton Kintore1 Dyce1 Dingwall3

1

Below is the result of attempting to recreate the relative ordered list of all symbols. The animals are not included but sit between these two parts of the list. Symbols which have a good relative position identified are in an outlined box, those with less or no information have been placed as best as possible. (**2**)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

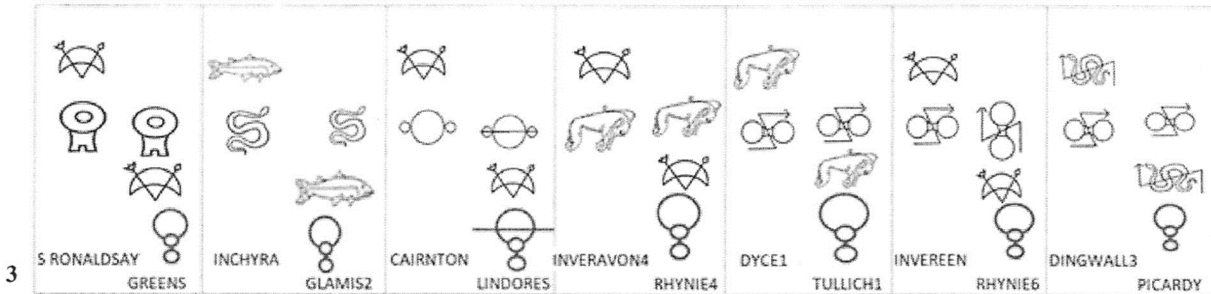
2

Having re-engineered this ordered list, at least partially, we find that the single mirror placed below a symbol pair indicates that the normal expected order has been reversed on a particular stone.

A mirror beneath a symbol pair is effectively reflecting the symbols back into their 'normal' order, the same function a mirror plays in reality.

There are 16 examples of a single mirror without a comb, although 6 of these may have a comb no longer visible. There are no Class II examples, with the possible exception of the two cross slabs at Glamis with incised symbols, which may originally have been Class I stones.

The next diagram shows a series of symbol pairs, first with the normal order without a mirror, compared to the same symbol pair reversed with a mirror below. This is not a complete list of stones with a mirror alone, as some don't have another known 'normal' order stone with the same symbol pair to compare with. However, most stones with a sole mirror and no comb show this reversed order. (**3**)



3

However, there are a few exceptions where the order of the symbols appears to be normal, not reversed as expected: Fyvie1, Clatt1, Knowe of Burrian, and Clynemilton1. On the Fyvie stone, we see a rare Class I left-facing beast symbol (there being 27 right-facing Class I beasts to only 2 left-facing beasts). The beast gives the clear impression of looking into the mirror, thereby reversing its face from LH to RH, rather than reversing the order (upper and lower) of the two symbols.

Clatt1 also has a mirror sitting beside a lower LH double-disc and Z-rod, so it is likely to be acting in the same manner as Fyvie1. The proviso here though is that both Clatt1 and Fyvie1 are cut down around the edges and may yet have held a mirror+comb. So the idea that a single mirror reverses the face of a symbol is not fully provable at this point.

Clynemilton1, however, has a RH arch over a RH crescent and V-rod, and a mirror to the left of the lower symbol. Knowe of Burrian similarly has a RH eagle over a RH crescent and V-rod, again with a slightly displaced mirror below. It may be that the configuration of these last two stones is meant to indicate that the crescent and V-rod is to be considered LH here, but as we only have these two possible exceptions to the use of a single mirror, it is hard to be certain. **(4)**

normal order both RH	reversed order + mirror below	normal order + mirror before LH Beast
INVERAVON4	RHYNIE6	FYVIE1

4

Lastly, we need to test this re-created order by looking for any stones which have symbols in the 'incorrect' order (as we've identified so far), without any modifying mirror+/-comb. While most of the 202 available symbol pairs conform to the symbol order when not accompanied by a mirror+comb, there are a few symbol stones which do not, although there may be others with rare symbols that have not so far been identified.

Two of the Logie Elphinstone stones both have symbol pairs in the 'wrong' order, and a third shows evidence of being a practice piece. All were found lying together in one spot, suggestive that we may have a location for stone carving practice, not valid symbol stones. The only two fully validated symbol stones with the 'incorrect' order not accompanied by a mirror+comb are Crichie and Clynekirkton1. Either Percylieu or Strathpeffer will also be 'wrong', but as I can't separate the placement in order between the arch and ogee, I cannot as yet tell which stone is 'wrong', just that one of them must be. This gives a minor total of only three 'wrong' stones that do not conform to the general rules. Why these three stones have the 'wrong' order isn't clear, except that they are an exception to the rule. And perhaps we shouldn't expect the Picts to rigidly follow rules in all cases, as we expect of modern standards. Alternatively, the order of the symbols may be a secondary effect caused by another outside factor, which happens to play out differently in just these three cases.

So far, we have seen that the symbols seem to have an inherent order to them, which is reflected in a symbol pair. If whatever is driving the choice of symbols for a particular stone requires that their position in relation to each other be the reverse of that in the normal order, then the reversed order is acknowledged on a stone with a mirror below. Also, a mirror beside a symbol may be used to effectively reverse the face of that symbol, although this last cannot yet be established with certainty.

In Part Three, I will discuss the idea of dominance and the role of the mirror+comb.

Helen McKay

Picts in the North

The Conon Stone in Context, a virtual conference, 13-14 March

The joint efforts of the North of Scoltand Archaeological Society and the Pictish Arts Society that enabled the raising, conserving and display of the Conon Stone were finally marked by a Zoom conference with third partner, the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, almost a year on from the planned conference in Inverness. An audience of over two hundred was able to view the original programme of speakers iver tw afternoons.

In a short film by James McIComas, Anne MacInnes told the story of her *Discovery of the Conon Stone*, and introduced some of those involved in the eventual display of the stone at Dingwall Museum, giving an idea of its local importance. Graciela Ainsworth then shared her enthusiasm, skill, expertise and care for stones evident in *Conserving the Conon Stone*.

After a short break, John Borland drew on his years of close observation and recording of carved stone across the country in *Pictish Cross Slabs of Northern Scotland: the Conon Stone in context*. Our final speaker on Saturday was Dr Kelly Kilpatrick, with a thought-provoking look at *The Pictish Gods on carved stones*.

Sunday afternoon began with Hugh Levey describing his work *Towards Eastablishing the Rule Book of Pictish Symbol Usage*. Sally Foster then described her multidisciplinary approach to *Admitting New Voices: letting St John's Cross and its replica speak*.

The final session opened with Dr Eric Grant's account of one of the largest known Pictish cemeteries in the north – *Barrowloads of Barrows: investigating a monmental Pictish cemetery at Tarradale*. Professor Gordon Noble finished the conference by giving us the broader archaeological context of the Conon Stone in *Picts in the Highlands*.

At the close of each afternoon, speakers were assigned a 'break-out room', where the audience could join with any of them to pursue further discussions and questions and answers. A general conversation space, 'The Conon Stone Arms' remained open until 6pm, a virtual bring-your-own-drink pub to replace the convivial end to a conference day.

Thaks are due to all those involved in the discovery, planning, fundraising and skilled work that went into raising, conserving and displaying the Conon Stone, to all conference speakers, and to Ian Giles and Chris Cooijmans of SSNS who handled the 'techy bits' of the conference so well. *SH*

What do Picts mean? Picts mean Prizes!

Professor Gordon Noble's Northern Picts Project has once again received plaudits, winning him the Principal's Prize for research and engagement at Aberdeen University. This is all the more impressive when we remember that he has achieved this against a background of a Covid pandemic during a year spent largely in lckdown.

< https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn5fTuQBXSo >

Following the recent series of *The Dig*, a Netflix film about Basil Brown's excavation of Sutton Hoo, we predict a sequel about the Northern Picts project clled *Noble*. Ralph Fiennes plays the hero of Anglo Saxon archaeology but who to play the precocious young Professor of all things Pictish? James McAvoy perhaps? James Cosmo would bring gravitas to the role whilst Ewan McGregor would certainly bring box-office appeal. One thing is for certain: at an appropriate juncture in the film, the star will look into the camera and say "We're gonna need a bigger trophy cabinet".

In all seriousness, we send hearty congratulations to Gordon. The Northern Picts project has shed so much light on the Picts and continues to do so, going from strengt to strength. Well done Professor Noble! *JB*

Forthcoming Event

PAS Annual Conference 2021

—— online ——

Save the date!

Saturday 2nd – Sunday 3rd October

Details to follow

PAS Newsletter 100

The deadline for receipt of material is **Saturday 21 May 2021**

Please email contributions to the editor: **<johnborland60@aol.com>**