

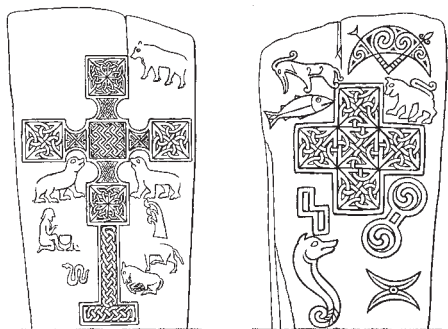
PAS Conference 2007

Please note that our annual conference will take place on Saturday 6 October 2007 at the A K Bell Library, Perth. Look out for details in future newsletters.

Conference in Caithness

The Pictish Arts Society
and
Caithness Archaeological Trust

are holding a conference in the Dunbeath Heritage Centre, Dunbeath on Saturday 1 September 2007.



The Ulbster Stone (ECMS III, p34, figs 31 & 31a)

As part of Scottish Archaeology Month we hope to hold a public lecture at 10.30 am before the conference starts at 11.30 am.

Visits to sites are planned for later that day and on Sunday 2 September. A full programme will be available soon and details will be published in the next newsletter, meanwhile be sure to note the dates in your diary.

For more information and to register your interest in attending please contact Eileen Brownlie at

<eileencbrownlie@hotmail.com>

Northern expansion

Plans are underway to extend the current Inverness–Sutherland Pictish Trail into Caithness. The Caithness Heritage Development Advisory Group (set up by Highland Council) is currently working on this.

Pictish Arts Society

Notice of Annual General Meeting 19 May 2007

The Annual General Meeting of the Pictish Arts Society will be held at the Meffan Institute, Forfar, on Saturday 19 May 2007 at 10.00am to consider the following business:

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Approval of the 2006 AGM minute
- 3 Annual Report – President
- 4 Honorary Secretary's Report
- 5 Treasurer's Report: Presentation and Approval of Annual Accounts
- 6 Appointment of an Independent Examiner
- 7 Determination of Subscription Rates
- 8 Other Honorary Officers' Reports:
 - a Membership Secretary
 - b Editor
 - c Events Organiser
 - d Archivist
- 9 Election of Honorary Officers
 - a President
 - b Two Vice Presidents
 - c Secretary
 - d Treasurer
 - e Membership Secretary
 - f Editor
 - g Events Organiser
 - h Librarian
- 10 Election of Committee
(Minimum six, maximum twelve)
- 11 Any other competent business

Thereafter (about 12 noon) our guest speaker **Professor Ian Ralston** will talk on **The Iron Age Archaeology of Angus**

February at Pictavia

Mark Hall crossed the border from Perth into Angus to give the February talk at Pictavia. His subject, *Playtime in Pictland: the material culture of gaming in early medieval Scotland*, took his audience into the world of Pictish leisure. With the emphasis on board games, Mark traced some of the Roman games such as *latrunculi* and *tabula* which the people of Pictland could have learned either during the period when a Roman garrison occupied forts north of Hadrian's Wall, or from travellers returning from the Roman provinces. At the other end of the Pictish time scale, there are the board games documented from the Viking world, *hnefetaf* or *brandub* in Dalriada. He described some of the evidence in the way of gaming boards scratched on stone (wood was probably far more common, but very few wooden artefacts survive from the Pictish period), and a wide range of counters or gaming pieces. There are some exquisite glass examples from a grave at Tarland, carved bone examples from several Western and Northern Isles sites, and many possible stone examples. Small conical bone pieces, carved to suggest a human figure, may represent the kingpiece from a game such as *hnefetafl*, forerunners of the iconic chess men of Lewis. Mark also touched on the parallelepiped dice, which have a similar geographic distribution to the bone playing pieces. The way(s) in which these dice, with four marked faces and unmarked ends, were used are not clear.

Many of the board games known from neighbouring areas are complex, and quite demanding of their players. There is no reason to doubt that this was also true of the variants of board games played in Pictland. The re-creation of a world in which the rules of the game apply, and the player must devise strategies to overcome his opponent takes the games into the realms of the game as mental training, in much the same way as that other Pictish pursuit, hunting, could be seen as physical training. At this remove, it is impossible to say just how much the role of chance or fate in games mirrored, for the Picts, the interference of the divine or supernatural in the affairs of man. Gaming does not seem to have been frowned upon by the church; indeed, the large collection of boards found at Inchmarnock may suggest

that the pupils of the monks there were learning to play alongside their other lessons. It is impossible to do justice to Mark's wide-ranging scholarship on the subject in this short note, but a full version of his talk will be published shortly.* *SH*

* The Pictavia talk was a version of the 2006 Groom House Annual Academic Lecture which should be available soon.

Kilduncan paper award

Congratulations to Ross Trench-Jellicoe who received the R B K Stevenson Award of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland at their anniversary meeting last November, for his paper, 'A richly decorated cross-slab from Kilduncan House, Fife: description and analysis' (*Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 135 (2005), 505–559).

The Kilduncan cross-slab has been redisplayed in St Andrews Museum since it last featured in PAS Newsletter (see no34, pp6–7).

Guide to museums etc

The approach of Easter and the month of April marks the start of the visitor season for many museums and other attractions. We have prepared the first part of a supplement listing information about museums in Scotland that house collections that should be of particular interest to Society members and we intend to follow this up with a second, mainly detailing access to other locations of carved stones.

The compilation and maintenance of this data involves a lot of time and effort and we are looking for a volunteer (or volunteers) to help source, check and keep our information up-to-date. If any member is willing to help, please contact the Editor (details below).

Newsletter contributions

Have most of you been hibernating, or is there another reason for the dearth of contributions to this newsletter? Please keep PAS informed of your news and views – send articles, reviews, pictures etc. by email to

<pas.news@btconnect.com>

or by post to **The Editor, PAS News** at the Pictavia address. The deadline for receipt of contributions to PAS Newsletter 43 is 19 May 2007.

Groam House Museum

is celebrating the Year of Highland Culture with an exciting exhibition programme featuring the life and work of George Bain.

George Bain – A Highland Homecoming brings together selected items from the museum's own collection of Bain's work with previously unseen items. This exhibition will tour the following Highland venues:

Swanson Gallery, Thurso
24 February – 24 March

St Fergus Gallery, Wick
31 March – 21 April

Iona Gallery, Kingussie
28 April – 26 May

Glenurquhart Community School,
Drumnadrochit
2 June – 22 September

Timespan, Helmsdale
29 September – (tbc)

Theory into Practice:

George Bain and the Celtic Art Revival

Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie
1 May 2007 – April 2008

An exhibition reflecting the ancient influences that informed Bain's Mastery of Celtic Art will be displayed for a year amidst the Museum's collection of Pictish sculptured stones and accompanied by decorated metalwork and jewellery objects, specially loaned by the National Museums of Scotland.

Free admission to the museum in 2007

(See Supplement for opening times)

Talks Programme 2007

All talks in the Fortrose Community Theatre (01381 621252) at 7.30pm £3.00 (Members £1.50)

12 April

The Orkney Picts

Anne Brundle, Curator of Archaeology,
The Orkney Museum

21 June

George Bain - the man and his legacy
Susan Seright, Curator, Groam House
Museum

20 July Annual Academic Lecture

*Picts and Monasteries: the Portmahomack
Story*

Professor Martin Carver, University of York

Sculptor's Cave, Covesea, Moray

First 'sight' of an ancient Scottish children's temple

An ancient Scottish temple cave – dedicated to the child-dead – was 'brought to life' for BBC Two Scotland's three-part series *Art & Soul*, which started at 9pm on 15 January 2007.

According to archaeologist Ian Shepherd, 3,000 years ago, people from across the North of Scotland, the islands and possibly even Ireland, may have brought their dead children to Sculptor's Cave, near Lossiemouth, Moray.

His excavations have led him to believe not only was the cave dedicated to children, but ancient people placed some of the heads of their beloved infants on poles at the doorway.

Shepherd said: "The graphics in the BBC's *Art & Soul* series are, as far as I know, the first time modern eyes will have seen a depiction of the cave as it would have been 3,000 years ago."

These graphics show the opening of the cave – with the indicators of its religious significance, the severed heads of dead children – and into its dark interior to a sacred pool strewn with Bronze age treasures.

Presenter Richard Holloway said: "Our earliest religions, our earliest rituals, are dark in every sense. This cave on the Moray coast hides a ghoulish, 3,000-year-old secret."

Although the severed heads are a macabre memorial to modern eyes, there is no sign that these were ritual killings. "From what we can tell," Shepherd says, "these were simply people mourning their dead children."

His excavation in 1979 uncovered skeletal parts from six children, including skull parts in the doorway, which from the way they lay indicated there had at one time been fleshy heads on poles.

An excavation 50 years previously in 1929, by classical archaeologist Sylvia Benton, uncovered thousands of bone parts largely, she noted, from juveniles.

However, it wasn't until Ian Shepherd's dig that the purpose of the cave became apparent.

Called the Sculptor's Cave because of ancient inscriptions at the entrance, the location of the cave has been known since Victorian times, but it is very remote.

It can only be accessed from the land at low tide along a mile of shingle beach or by scaling the cliff face. The BBC Scotland production team accessed it from the water by boat.

Three thousand years ago it may even have been an island, which would have reinforced its spiritual status.

Richard Holloway said: "Getting into the cave from the sea was exhilarating, if a little scary, but it underpinned the amazing sense of this place. ... It's a story that both thrills and appals. Yet it seems to demonstrate an early fascination with what came after death. ... Three thousand years ago, our ancestors came to this dark, foreboding cave to consecrate their child-dead. In the depths of the cave, there's the first glimpse of the trapped pool of water – this was the bridge to another world, the high altar of a Bronze age basilica. The standing stones at Callanish are older but they suggest a multitude of interpretations, and for me the picture about spirituality and ancient Scottish religious art becomes clearer in this cave. We know this place had spiritual meaning and we know it was decorated by human hand."

Bronze artefacts found in the cave originally come from both the eastern and western areas of Scotland, even possibly Ireland, indicating the cave was probably sacred to people from across the North of Scotland.

Other artefacts placed there originated in Continental Europe, which suggest these were a sophisticated trading people.

Art & Soul, a three-part series, traced the often explosive relationship between Scottish art and religion from the Picts to Protestant destruction of Catholic art, from Howson to Bellany, from standing stones to photography.

Based on BBC press release 12 January 2007

Access to Sculptor's Cave

The cave is at the base of a sea cliff (NJ 175 707) between Burghead and Lossiemouth. It is not an easy place to get to and great care must be taken in planning a visit. Elgin Museum have produced an 8-page printed guide to the cave which contains essential information for visitors. The author, Janet Trythall, who lives at Covesea, suggests that 'You need to be reasonably nimble, and to wear non-slip soles. ... there is no easy

access to the beach, which is itself rocky. Wet grass on the cliffs and seaweed on the rocks are particularly slippery. Gorse is prickly to bare legs. You need daylight and low tide – check in *The Northern Scot*. ...

'A visit is perhaps best made ... on a summer's walk out along the beach between Hopeman and Covesea, and back along the cliff top path. ... To pass dry-shod between Clashach Quarry (164704) and Covesea Quarry (167705), i.e. through Duminsdell Cave and The Bow, past the demolished sea stack, Taylor's Castle, the tide must be near low water springs. For daylight as well, this means summertime. High barometric pressure, and calm, or an offshore wind, also helps. Give yourself plenty of time.' and '**If in doubt take a guide.**' All excellent advice.

For details about Elgin Museum
see the Museums Supplement

Dedication to Saints

Apropos St Johnstone's CIS semi-final clash against Hibs at Tynecastle on 31 January, the *Evening Tekegraph* ran a piece on one of the Perth team's most devoted fans – James Fraser, a Canadian of Scots descent, who has been supporting the club since he came to live in Scotland. Sadly for him that was not a night to remember as Hibs won 3-1 after extra time.

When not following the fortunes of the Saints, James is better known as a lecturer on Scottish history at Edinburgh University. We had not realised that we had deprived him of the opportunity to attend an away game when he spoke at our conference in Cupar on 28 October. So we were the winners on the day, and we spared him the humiliation of witnessing a single-goal defeat to arch-rivals Clyde.

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

THE RHIND LECTURES 2007

Friday 27th, Saturday 28th, Sunday 29th April
Lecture Theatre, Royal Museum of Scotland,
Chambers Street

Living in an age of stone: Neolithic peoples and their worlds

Professor Gabriel Cooney MA PhD FSA
MRIA, UCD School of Archaeology,
University College Dublin

Pictish Arts Society, c/o Pictavia, Haughmuir, Brechin, Angus DD9 6RL

Visit our website at <<http://www.pictart.org>>

Join our forum at <http://ph.groups.yahoo.com/group/PictsArt/>