

PAS AGM 4 October 2014

The AGM of the Pictish Arts Society was held in Caithness Horizons, Thurso..

Apologies for absence were received from Norman Atkinson and Stewart Mowatt.

The Minutes of the 2013 AGM were accepted as published in Newsletter 69.

The President John Borland read out the Annual Report, prepared jointly with the Secretary, Elspeth Reid. This was accepted.

The Treasurer, Hugh Coleman, presented the annual accounts and answered questions from members. The apparent fall in subscriptions was only due to last year's accounts consisting of two years' worth of subscriptions. The accounts were then approved.

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

The Treasurer proposed that there be an increase in the Society's subscription rate, which had remained unchanged for years. Costs were rising, e.g. for postage, and could rise further now that Pictavia was no longer available as a free venue for lectures. In addition it would become necessary to update equipment as existing equipment ages. Nigel Ruckley seconded the proposal to increase rates from £14 to £16 (concessions) and from £16 to £18 (full rate). The change would take effect from September 2015. This was agreed by the meeting.

In his other role as Membership Secretary, Hugh Coleman reported that new members had been won thanks to the website and very active Facebook page. The current membership total stands at 113. Facebook 'likers' have increased to over 3,000. Nigel Ruckley suggested that thanks to David McGovern be recorded. Overseas members have only the option of receiving PDF copies rather than mailed hard copy of newsletters; even so, overseas membership had risen.

Speaking as Editor, John Borland thanked all contributors to past newsletters and asked the room for new submissions for future issues.

The President then left his seat and Hugh Coleman took over proceedings for the election of the Society's President. David McGovern proposed John Borland, seconded by Sheila Hainey. The current President was returned unopposed with the agreement of the meeting.

There followed the election of other PAS officials: Stewart Mowatt was elected in his absence to continue in the role of Vice President; Vice President, David McGovern; Secretary, Elspeth Reid; Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Hugh Coleman; Editor, John Borland; Archivist, Elspeth Reid. Duly elected

as Committee Members were Sheila Hainey and Nigel Ruckley. The position of Events Organiser remained vacant.

Any Other Competent Business: Graeme Cruickshank spoke on the subject of reviving the PAS Journal in paper form, which he favoured. There followed a lengthy discussion of what material of appropriate standard was in fact available for publication. The Editor considered that currently there was not enough pending for a printed journal, and he issued an invitation for further contributions to be submitted to him, as the publication of a journal would depend on both quantity and quality.

The discussion also encompassed the lack of peer review, which David Henry suggested might hold back some academic writers producing exciting new material from publishing it in a PAS Journal. Katherine Forsyth put forward the view that peer review was not essential, but that an editorial committee should be convened to issue guidelines to contributors and to assess the suitability of submissions. She supported digital publication rather than hardcopy as the easiest method of dissemination, since the Editor would not need to wait for a critical mass of articles before uploading. She also suggested that the current numbering system of PAS Journals should be continued in the new electronic versions. Isabel Henderson suggested that a postgrad student would benefit from the opportunity of gaining editorial experience and agreed that notes for contributors were essential. Anna Ritchie suggested a working party could also produce the criteria for acceptance/declining. Marianna Lines called for the PAS to advertise for papers.

New member Scott Gray felt there was also room for humble articles given the wider audience that came with PAS's online presence. He pointed out that the Society may have over 100 members but was reaching thousands online.

The meeting embraced the idea of digital publication, as well as an editorial committee to work on guidelines for future digital publications. John Borland stated that a heading already exists for Occasional Papers on the PAS website and could be added to incrementally. He commented that the situation had changed a great deal in the 26 years since PAS's inception. Where once there was a dearth of research in the early medieval field, this was no longer the case, as exemplified by *PSAS* now containing frequent articles on early medieval topics.

It was then agreed that, since PAS material was being made freely available online, a donations button would be a worthwhile addition to the website. David McGovern mentioned that the newsletter index

would be clickable by next year. In response to a query he stated that PAS already promotes the Broch Project on its Facebook page and Twitter.

Next, John Borland described the situation of the Logierait 2 cross-slab, which has been lying for years on Logierait Church floor. He outlined recent discussions with the kirk session to raise the stone so that both of its sides could be seen. The kirk session had welcomed this proposal. He suggested to the meeting that PAS could help with fund-raising, so that the stone can be conserved and then displayed in an appropriate fashion within the church. The stone conservator Stephen Gordon from Historic Scotland is to assess the stone.

David Henry wondered whether some proviso could be made about access. John Borland replied that the Church of Scotland is apparently considering reversing its policy of locked churches. It was then decided that a donations button for restoring and raising the Logierait 2 stone could be featured on the PAS website.

Finally, the problem of gaining access to the Glamis manse stone was highlighted by various members who had experienced difficulty. It was hoped that access will be granted by the home owner at least on the next Doors Open Day.

The AGM concluded with the President thanking the committee for all their work over the past year.

Elsbeth Reid

PAS Conference 2014

The 24th Pictish Arts Society Annual Conference was held in Caithness Horizons in Thurso (formerly Thurso Museum) on Saturday 4 October 2014. Last year's conference had explored aspects of *Southern Picts, Southern Neighbours*, so to balance that theme, we decamped this year to Northern Pictland to explore *Northern Picts, Northern Neighbours*.

On the Friday afternoon, around 20 PAS members and conference attendees met at Dunrobin for a pre-arranged visit (courtesy of the Duke of Sutherland himself) to the Castle's museum and its exceptional collection of Pictish sculpture, assembled over the 19th and 20th centuries by successive dukes. In the evening, a larger number attended a reception at Caithness Horizons, giving them a chance to enjoy at their leisure its refurbished and enlarged display of Early Medieval sculpture, including the beautifully conserved and displayed Skinnet and Ulbster Pictish cross slabs.

On Saturday morning, PAS President, John Borland, welcomed a full house to Caithness Horizons for what was to be an enjoyable and enlightening day, chaired ably by Katherine Forsyth.

Our first speaker of the day was **Victoria Whitworth** from the Centre for Nordic Studies, Orkney College, University of the Highlands and Islands, with a paper entitled: 'The Skinnet and Ulbster Cross-Slabs, Psalm 148 and the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew'.

Victoria outlined for us her current research into the motif of animals that flank the cross on cross-slabs, illustrating her points with a wonderful array of images. While her study encompassed all surviving Pictish cross slabs, she highlighted in particular the two fine examples that are on display in Caithness Horizons. The Skinnet and Ulbster cross slabs both display symmetry, with matched pairs of animals flanking the cross, whilst the Dunfallandy cross slab exemplifies asymmetry with its assortment of angels, recognisable animals and fanciful creatures, but none flanking the cross in matched pairs.

There was a development from the portrayal of dragons attacking Christ in early Continental illustrations to the Insular depiction of dragons praising Christ. Victoria's research has thrown up some particularly interesting new conclusions that she shared with us about the possible origins of the flanking animals motif. They may provide an explanation for its prevalence in Pictish sculpture. Victoria has kindly provided us with a summary of her talk.

Elsbeth Reid

In this paper, which I am presently rewriting for publication, I attempt to set the Skinnet and Ulbster cross slabs from Caithness in some kind of wider context. I concentrate on the parallel motifs shared by both: the paired inward-facing creatures flanking an ornate cross. Ulbster has lions, while Skinnet has S-dragons. The Skinnet S-dragons are unique in that their long jaws extend into and form a component of the complex interlace of the cross itself, and that interlace itself contains smaller crosses in its negative space. This suggests that they – and specifically their jaws – are engaging with the cross in a meaningful way.

I had a series of research questions:

- Is this motif of similar paired inward-looking creatures flanking a cross common on Pictish sculpture?
- When this motif occurs, what creatures are depicted?
- Is there an existing explanatory framework which can make sense of these images?
- What can they tell us about the Pictish Church?

I first surveyed Pictish cross-slabs, and demonstrated that typically the creatures shown either side of a cross exhibit strong asymmetry. Characteristically, they are of different types, they face in different directions, they vary between realistic and highly stylised or fantastic depictions. It therefore seemed worth enquiring further as to what creatures *were* shown in this format.

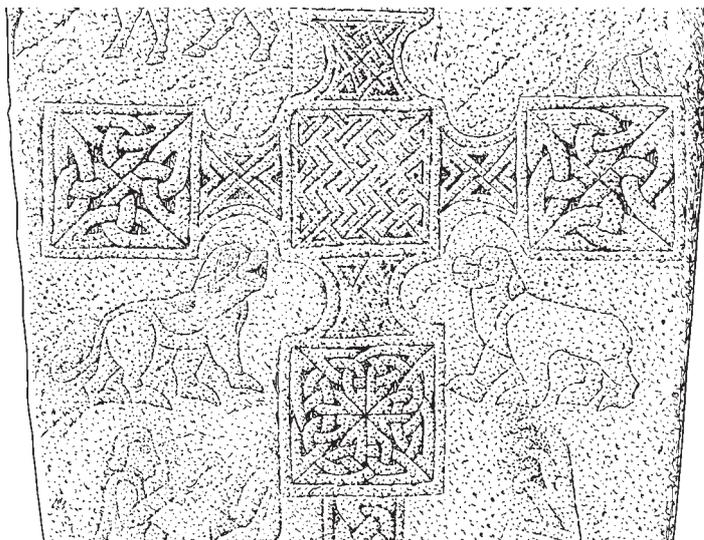
A further survey indicated that where such images survive, they are overwhelmingly either humanoid (clerics in profile, clerics facing front, or angels, all often carrying books or depicted with book satchels), or lions, or S-dragons. This further suggested that there is a consistent underpinning theology to the formula, possibly centred on praise.



Skinnet detail

I then changed focus to survey the state of scholarship on the theme of an image or symbol of Christ flanked by two creatures in early medieval art. I showed how much of the focus has centred on the exegesis of Psalm 90, which describes God (and in Christian commentaries Christ) defeating evil by trampling on ‘the lion and the basilisk’. I showed how this is illustrated very literally from an early date in a mosaic from Ravenna and later in two Carolingian Psalters, the Utrecht and the Stuttgart Psalters. In the latter the illustration combines the psalm text with the theme of Christ being tempted in the desert and overcoming evil.

I then surveyed the literature on the image of Christ and beasts from the Northumbrian Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses to show how this concept is transformed visually, and combined with an element from the Temptation narrative, to show Christ not trampling on evil beasts but being venerated by peaceful beasts who recognise His divinity. This theme has been explored in greatest detail by Éamonn Ó Carragáin, who integrates his reading of this image into a wider programme (most convincing at Ruthwell) of the liturgy of Holy Week and Easter, stressing the importance of a line in the Old Testament Canticle of Habakkuk in which God (and in Christian understanding Christ) is ‘recognised between two beasts’. Ó Carragáin’s reading of Ruthwell has been widely applied to many other images in contexts where it is much less convincing, and in 2011 Richard Bailey published a critique of this, which I wholly endorse.



Ulbster detail

Having rejected Psalm 90 and the Canticle of Habakkuk as a specific context for the Skinnet and Ulbster cross-slabs, I then proposed two related texts as a new interpretative context. These are Psalm 148 (the first of the three Laudate psalms) and the related material from chapters 18 and 19 of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.

Psalm 148 refers to beasts, birds and ‘dragons of the deeps’ praising the Lord. In the Utrecht and Stuttgart Psalters it is illustrated by Christ in a mandorla flanked by angels, with animals below, including in both cases lions and dragons. Although there is no similar tradition of illustrated psalters in the Insular world at this period, I was able to show that of the nearly 200 decorated initials in the eighth-century Vespasian Psalter, the only initial in the whole manuscript to have a pair of inward-looking heads (an animal and a bird) flanking a cross is the L of Laudate opening Psalm 148.

This provides a link between the more literal illustrative traditions found on the Continent and the more symbolic and schematic depictions often characteristic of Insular art, and especially Pictish art, which is reluctant to deploy literal and figurative images of the sacred.

Although Psalm 148 is in itself capable of explaining the emphasis found in Pictish cross-slabs on lions and dragons as mediators of praise, I then suggested that the reading could be further nuanced by setting in the context of the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. This early medieval narrative expands the brief canonical Gospel account of the Flight into Egypt by adding stories of how the Holy Family encountered dragons, lions and panthers who praised Christ in the desert. Images connected to Pseudo-Matthew are found on the Ruthwell and Moone (Co. Kildare) crosses¹, and although the text itself cannot be proven to have circulated in the Insular world, a Hiberno-Northumbrian commentary on the Psalms preserves a references to this episode in its exegesis of Psalm 148.

I therefore concluded that Psalm 148, which would have been known and sung daily in every ecclesiastical institution which observed the Offices, is an attractive context for this motif on the Skinnet and Ulbster cross-slabs, and elsewhere. I also suggested that the apocryphal traditions connected with the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew connect the theme of the lions and dragons praising Christ with the period spent by the Holy Family in the desert, and this would appeal to an ecclesiastical tradition which much other evidence suggests had a great interest in eremitism and desert theology.

Notes

1 The Moone cross depicts a donkey with rider and baby, and a walking figure, representing the Flight into Egypt of Mary and Joseph. A panel on the Ruthwell cross bears a similar scene and is inscribed 'Maria et Io[ssephus]'. There may in fact be a comparable example in Pictish sculpture, although the stone is badly weathered, making interpretation uncertain. The large recumbent at Kincardine, Easter Ross, bears an animal seemingly mounted by two figures with a third figure on the far side of the beast (not leading).

This unusually shaped monument has been studied by Ross Trench-Jellicoe and his findings (with excellent, rare photo) published in 'Pictish and Related Harps: their form and decoration' pp.159–72 in *The Worm, the Germ, and the Thorn* (1997, The Pinkfoot Press, Balgavies, Angus). He is confident of the Flight into Egypt identification (pp.169–70). ER

Our second speaker of the day was **Barbara Crawford** with a paper on Norse power centres and the role of castles in the Caithness earldom. Barbara has spent much of her life at the forefront of Norse studies in Scotland. She is an Honorary Professor at the University of the Highlands and Islands and Honorary Reader at St Andrews University and a former President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

She told us that the earldom of Caithness is unique: it formed one half of a dual earldom with Orkney, held in the case of Caithness from the Scottish crown while Orkney and Shetland formed a Norse earldom. The dual earldom remained in the hands of a single family throughout a remarkable 800 years. Such joint earldoms, held from different crowns are rare and usually unstable. The fact that one family held on to power here for so long makes these northern earldoms extraordinary.

The Norse used water as we use roads. Thus, far from dividing Orkney and Caithness, the Pentland Firth formed a link between the two. An understanding of how the Norse operated between the two territories may give some insight into how the Picts also used the Pentland Firth as a means of communication when their territories extend north into the islands.

Barbara quoted the Orkney historian, J.S. Clouston as saying of Caithness, that 'No part of Scotland is worthier of study or more likely to yield fresh and

valuable historical information', and went on to demonstrate that there is some truth in that remark. Originally, the territory probably comprised little more than the eponymous Cat Ness, but the earls (and later the bishops) expanded this west and south. Its strategic importance lay in the control of the approaches to Orkney, both from the west and south. The joint earldom also controlled the sea routes to Norway.

The *Orkneyinga Saga* tells of strife in the early centuries between the earls and the local Pictish chieftains. Sigurd the Mighty, the first earl, fought his way to the Dornoch Firth in partnership with Thorstein the Red from the Irish Sea zone. There, around 892, he defeated the mormaer Maelbrigte 'Tusk,' whose head he tied to his saddle before heading north again. Maelbrigte's tooth is said to have scratched Sigurd's leg; the ensuing blood poisoning resulted in Earl Sigurd's death and his burial beneath a mound on the north bank of the River Oykel. It is possible that the Earl died of battle wounds with the 'avenging head' motif, common in Celtic folklore, brought into the story later. At any rate, the name of the farm of Cyderhall on the banks of the Oykel probably derives from 'Sigurd's Howe', although the traces of his burial mound are no longer to be seen.

Sigurd's successors had difficulty in maintaining control over the area he had overrun. There is evidence, however, of more peaceful interactions between the Norse and the native Picts. Aud the Deep-Minded, mother of Thorstein the Red, stayed in Caithness awhile before sailing west to become one of the early settlers in Iceland. While there, she was involved in arranging the marriage of her granddaughter (Thorstein's daughter), Grelaug, to Dungadr of Duncansby. The daughter of a high ranking Norse family married a local Pictish ruler, based in the very north of Caithness. Their daughter, Groa, married Earl Thorfinn I 'Skull-splitter'. Marriages such as these indicate alliances between the Norse and Celtic (Pictish) chieftains of Caithness.

When Earl Thorfinn died about 963, Caithness became the setting for some of the major events of the turbulent struggle between Thorfinn's five sons for the earldoms. There was never any suggestion of separating the earldoms in the course of dividing the inheritance – they fought for a share (preferably all) of both. At this point, an interesting character, Ragnhild, daughter of Erik Blood-Axe, sometime King of Northumbria, enters the tale. Married first to Thorfinn's son, Earl Arnfinn, she had him killed at Murkle—the first mention of an earldom power centre in Caithness. Murkle is situated on a sheltered bay opposite Hoy. The name is an unlikely one for such a place – *myrk-hóll*, the dark mound, but it remained an important centre as late as 1296, when Earl John's seal was attached to his formal submission to Edward I of England there.

Meanwhile, Ragnhild worked her way through two more of Thorfinn's sons, and conspired with two nephews. Ljot, her third husband, fought and defeated his brother Skuli, who had sought support from a Scottish king and who died in battle in the dales of Caithness. Ljot himself also died of wounds received in battle in Caithness. Around 978, he encountered an Earl Macbeth at Skitten, where the Scots retreated but Ljot was wounded. He survived long enough to cross to Orkney. His brother, Hlodver escaped both Ragnhild and death in battle, to die in his bed. He was laid to rest in a burial mound at Hofn (Ham) in Caithness, presumably in his own land and probably in a re-used prehistoric burial cairn. Again, like the earlier Sigurd's Howe, the mound was in a prominent location on the frontier of earldom territory.

Sigurd the Stout, Hlodver's son fought in a second battle at Skitten, this time against a Scottish Earl Finnleik, sometime between 991 and 995. Other sources suggest that the battle was fought 'above Dungalnipa.' Sigurd's Celtic opponents, whether indigenous Picts or Scots pushing up from Moray (Finnleik may have been mormaer of Moray) were able to take the battle against Sigurd deep in earldom territory. He subsequently moved back to Orkney. His youngest son, Thorfinn 'the Mighty' was grandson of Malcolm, a king either of Scots or of Moray, and had to fight his half-brothers for a share of the earldom. Fostered by his grandfather, by the 1030s he was based at Duncansby. The precise location of the earldom centre here is unknown. Barbara suggested that Sannick Bay (*sand wic*) is a likely location for the place where Thorfinn drew up his five longships, although there is no visible evidence for any building there now. Perhaps the area would repay detailed survey.

By the twelfth century, the Viking era was over. The earls were more concerned to keep the peace within their territories, and the period of castle building had begun. The earls' men had to be paid from the land, not from the plunder of Viking raids. Some of the castles built by the earls and their followers in Orkney and Caithness are among the earliest stone castles in Scotland, and date from a time before any such were built in Norway. Earl Harald Maddadson probably began the castle at Old Wick around 1200. He had been for a time a prisoner in Roxburgh castle, and may have brought the knowledge he gained there to bear on his new building. The saga writers differentiated between the castles of the earls and the strongholds of their powerful followers, such as Lambaborg, built by Svein Asleiffson, possibly at the Brough of Ness. This unruly character's career, detailed in the *Orkneyinga Saga* illustrates how influential some powerful men were in support or defiance of the earls.

By the late 13th century, the caput of the Caithness earldom had been moved inland, five miles up Thurso dale to Brawl (*breidvöllr*), by Halkirk. In 1375, it was named first among the possessions of the

earldom when that was resigned to the Scottish crown. We have evidence from the sagas that the earls had a base near Halkirk in 1222, and this may have been at Brawl. The earlier castle at Thurso was destroyed by a Scots army in 1198, and may not have been rebuilt. The move to Brawl may have much to do with the increasing dependence on manorial estates as a source of wealth; a stationary household supplied by locally grown food replacing the earlier movement from one place to another to consume food renders.

The two parts of the dual earldom present a sharp contrast: the earls built castles in Caithness but not in Orkney. Was Caithness seen as a more violent or a more risky place for the earls? There were certainly struggles between rivals for the earldom in Orkney as well as Caithness, but from the eleventh century, we have records of violence between claimants to the earldom, their followers, the clergy and the Scots king in Caithness. Here the clashes included a much wider cast of characters.

Caithness had been included in the Norse bishopric of Orkney until the 12th century. The imposition of a separate Scottish bishopric appears to have been unwelcome. Bishop John had a castle at Scrabster where he was captured, blinded and had his tongue cut out, probably with at least the connivance if not the active encouragement of Earl Harald Maddadson. This was hardly the wisest move on Earl Harald's part: the Pope could scarcely condone such treatment of a bishop, even if that bishop had refused to collect the tithe known as Peter's Pence which Earl Harald's people in Caithness and Orkney were accustomed to remit to Rome. He duly declared a suitably barbarous punishment for the leader of the raid, but perhaps softened the impact by making the bishop of Orkney responsible for seeing it carried out. William the Lion, King of Scots, however seized the opportunity to descend on Caithness in force to punish this attack on a man of God, and for good measure blinded and castrated Harald's son Thorfinn.

Some lessons are never learnt. Bishop John's successor, Adam, had his residence at Halkirk ('the high church'), by the principal church in Caithness. He set about increasing the bishop's tax on the husbandmen of Caithness. Harald's son Jon is said to have sat by in his hall while the local farmers burned the bishop to death in his own kitchen. This time it was Alexander II of Scotland who marched north to avenge his bishop. Adam's successor prudently removed the seat of the bishopric to Dornoch.

The power centres and the later castles were important symbols of the struggles to control the earldom, whether involving rival earls, bishops or kings and more can be learned by studying them. The relationship between the Norse newcomers and the native Picts of Caithness still poses a number of questions, with much work still to be done to answer them. As well as giving us a broad insight into a dim

period of Pictish history, Barbara laid down a challenge for future research. Much more information about the joint earldoms can be found in Barbara's recent publication, *The Northern Earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from AD 870 to 1470* (Birlinn).

Sheila Hainey

Our third speaker of the morning was **Ian Maclean** on 'The Future of our Past: The Caithness Broch Project'. Ian has intimate connections with Dounreay, the home to the iconic nuclear reactors west of Thurso: his great-grandfather worked at the site when it was an airfield, his grandfather helped build the reactor buildings, his father worked at the reactor and now he is working on the decommissioning and dismantling of the facility. The economy of Caithness is a fragile one: over a thousand people are employed directly or indirectly in the dismantling of Dounreay. This represents more than a tenth of the population of Thurso (the nearest town) and the surrounding area. The need for locally driven regeneration of the economy was the impetus behind Ian's setting up of the broch project.

One way of stimulating the economy would be to increase tourism. Other areas of Scotland use their heritage to attract visitors: why not Caithness? To do that successfully, Caithness needs a unique selling point as it shares so much with other successful tourist destinations. Caithness has a great collection of Neolithic remains (as a party of conference attendees who visited Camster Cairns at dusk would agree). Unfortunately, Orkney already boasts World Heritage Status for its Neolithic heart. Caithness had Vikings – but the Shetlanders got there first with Up Helly Aa. There are castles aplenty here – but castles are found all over Scotland, and Edinburgh and Stirling are prime tourist attractions. However, Caithness can lay claim to more brochs than any other area, as a cursory glance at a distribution of known or suspected broch sites makes clear. Along the coasts, up the river valleys, and wherever there is arable land, Caithness has brochs, over three hundred and fifty of them. True, there are brochs elsewhere. Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles, and even Galloway in the far south can all boast examples, but Caithness has *more*.

Ian described how his own fascination with brochs developed, from spending time across the water in Orkney, often waiting for ferries with little to do but visit local sites such as brochs. His first, and still major, source of information on these monumental structures was Ian Armit's *Towers in the North: the brochs of Scotland* (Tempus, 2001), which gives a detailed account of their development and construction. Ian ran through a number of features which are common among the Caithness brochs. In most of them, the walls are solid for the lower level with intramural galleries above. Ground-galleried walls are found on the west coast and in the Western Isles. Possibly the solid lower walls of the Caithness

brochs conveyed a greater degree of stability. Where remains stand to a sufficient height, the scarcements that once supported upper floors are visible. The architect, John Hope has suggested that the intramural stairs and galleries may have been supplied for access to these upper floors, but in some cases at least, the access would have been difficult if not provided by stairs or ladders giving more direct access. The curious ladder-like openings in the internal wall skin of the upper floors of some brochs obviously had some function, as they probably detract rather than add to the stability of the construction. He also suggested that these were created to aid the ventilation of the upper floors by drawing out hot, smoky stale air. This would also have reduced damp within the wall itself. He also addressed the question of roofing over the space within the broch tower.

The function of the brochs has often been considered in a frame of a need to aggressively defend territory. The distribution of brochs in Caithness (and elsewhere) argues against this: in many cases brochs are such close neighbours that it is difficult to contemplate their construction by hostile communities. It seems far more likely that the brochs were built to house small communities and their animals, giving them protection against the northern winter weather.

So what could Brochs do for the tourist industry of Caithness? Ian suggests the building of a new broch, complete with upper floors and roof. This would make it possible to test out how the structure functioned, giving a chance at the same time to train young drystane dykers in this dying craft. It would also form the nucleus of a visitor attraction based on life in the brochs. Just as an accretion of buildings developed around the ancient brochs, the modern broch could become the focus of a community of crafts people and an educational venue. The Crannog site on Loch Tay is just one example of how experimental archaeology can develop a successful tourist attraction.

The Broch Project has identified three individual projects. In the first place, there is a need to raise interest in the conservation and presentation of all the readily accessible sites. Alongside this, there is the need to create an archaeological trail to attract tourists to sites which are at the moment unfamiliar. And finally, the most ambitious project of all is the building of a new broch to secure Caithness' status as the Land of the Broch.

At the moment, The Broch Project is in the process of becoming a Social Enterprise. Once this status is achieved, then fundraising and detailed planning will begin in earnest.

Progress will be reported on the website:

www.caithnessbrochproject.com

and on Facebook, and help will be welcome. *SH*

Our final paper of the morning was on the Early Medieval Carved Stones of Orkney and Shetland by **Anna Ritchie** and **Ian Scott**, two individuals who have each made huge contributions to Pictish studies, especially in bringing Pictish art to a wider audience. Anna is a well-known archaeologist whose work has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the past and whose skill as a communicator has made the early medieval period in Scotland accessible through a long list of publications. Ian, formerly of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, is a skilled recorder whose meticulous scale drawings of early medieval stones have helped revolutionise the approach to studying Pictish sculpture.

Part of the work that Anna presented to Conference has been published by RCAHMS under the title *Pictish and Viking-Age Carvings from Shetland*, with drawings by Ian. We look forward to publication of the Orkney component of their work. Throughout the talk, generous acknowledgment was paid to the work of scholars whose contribution over the years has influenced thinking about and interpretation of the stones of the Northern Isles. These included J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson, George and Isabel Henderson, Charles Thomas, Ian Fisher, Cecil Curle and Kelly Kilpatrick.

The carved stones in question cover a range of forms: symbol stones, cross slabs, and church furniture comprise the bulk of the material, although there are other types such as crosses, decorated discs and hogbacks. Shetland has about 90 known examples, while Orkney has around 30. Remarkably, there are none known from Fair Isle, which lies between the two island groups. For the most part, the stones chosen for carving are sandstone, with a number of slate or schist.

Although the total number of symbol stones is not great, there are some interesting observations that can be made. The crescent and V-rod is the most common symbol in both Shetland and Orkney (and in Caithness too). At St Peter's Church, South Ronaldsay, a symbol stone carrying two, non-contemporary sets of symbols was reused as a lintel. One face bears a very finely incised rectangle and a crescent and V-rod, the other with a crescent and V-rod and disc with indented rectangle is plainer and more worn. Charles Thomas suggested that the rectangle symbol may have represented a book satchel, as carried by the hooded monks on the stones from Papil and Bressay. The absence of serpents and salmon from the repertoire is unsurprising, given that there are neither snakes nor salmon rivers on the islands. None of the Northern Isles mirrors are accompanied by a comb, although bone combs of the types represented on stones elsewhere have been found during excavations on both island groups. Anna prefers 'disc with indented rectangle' to 'mirror-case'; it seems presumptuous to declare for the latter when no examples are known from

Scotland. This symbol has been found in Orkney (and in Caithness and Sutherland), but not in Shetland.

From the Shetland islands of Yell, Unst and Fetlar comes a group of small cruciform grave markers, probably of the Norse period. Although none has so far been reported elsewhere in the Northern Isles, similar stones have been found in the Western Isles and on the Scottish Mainland. A few bear incised or relief crosses, but most are plain. These simple crosses are the equivalents of the simple wooden crosses used as grave markers in Norway.

Cross slabs from both archipelagos exhibit a range of technique, from the finely-incised example at Burrian, through the deeply-incised slab from St Ninian's Isle and the relief of Bressay. The carvings on the cross slabs clearly show that the carvers (or their patrons) had links with ecclesiastical centres both among the Iona *familia* and in the south east of Scotland. For example, the eagles found on cross slabs from the Knowe of Burrian and the Brough of Birsay bear a distinct resemblance to the late 7th/8th century eagle of St John in the missal held at Corpus Christi, Oxford. From the similarities between the unusual curl behind the legs of both birds, it has been suggested that one was derived from the other, while the resemblance between the Birsay eagle and that in the Book of Durrow has also been noted. Attention has also been drawn to similarities between the animal on the Papil (West Burra) cross slab and the lion of Mark, also in the Book of Durrow. On the other hand, it has been suggested that this, and the beast on the Bressay stone, may represent Cerberus guarding the gates of Hell.

There are other interesting features on northern stones. The cross-of-arcs, for instance, appears on two stones from St Boniface Church on Papa Westray and at Bressay. It also appears to ornament the discs of the double disc and Z-rod from the slab base at Mail. Is it simply a cruciform design of no significance there, or is this really our only example of a Christian cross in such intimate relationship to a Pictish symbol? The triquetra, the knot pattern held to represent the Holy Trinity, appears on the Ulbster cross slab from Caithness as well as on the Papil and Bressay slabs from Shetland. The design is frequently found on cross slabs further south, on the west coast as well as to the east of the country. It is tempting to see this as having been adopted as a Pictish symbol. The S-dragons (the term preferred to hippocamp as many of them do not have a horse's head) of the Appiehouse and St Ninian's Isle stones have similarities to examples at Ulbster, Brodie, and as far south as Kilduncan in Fife. The reverse of the Appiehouse slab has a roundel with a triple spiral reminiscent of that on the Hilton of Cadboll stones, dating from around AD800.

Other links appear between stones and other objects found on the islands. The lost stone from Papa Stronsay, illustrated in *ECMS*, was probably a small upright grave marker. The stone was inscribed with

an elaborate little double-outline cross with scroll terminals which had a cross-within-a-cross effect, and the letters *dne di* in miniscule. This abbreviated *domine de* finds a parallel on the sword chape from St Ninian's Isle treasure, found in the remains of a probable 8th-century monastery.

Finds of carved stones can indicate the whereabouts of early ecclesiastical sites. The Orkney island of Flotta is remarkably poor in known archaeological sites, despite the amount of building work carried out there both during the World Wars and in connection with the oil terminal. However, George Petrie, Sheriff-Clerk of Kirkwall around the 1870s, obtained a stone which, he was told, was found in the remains of an old kirk on Flotta. The stone, now in the National Museum of Scotland, is a rectangular slab of sandstone, with a panel on one side containing an equal-armed interlaced cross. It appears to be part of a piece of church furniture, probably an altar. The two grooves would hold the slab in place over a pair of upright slabs. A cross-marked slab that may have served as a portable altar was found during excavations at the 8th century monastic site on Papa Stronsay. Another was dredged up off the coast at Wick – was a northern cleric shipwrecked there?

While so far no altar slabs have been recovered in Shetland, it does boast evidence for at least five corner-post shrines: two from St Ninian's Isle and three from Papil, both early monastery sites. Although we have no evidence for such shrines from Orkney, carvings on shrine posts from Papil have stylistic links to stones from Orkney and Caithness.

The early medieval carved stones from Orkney and Shetland supply evidence not only for the skill of the craftsmen working in the Northern Isles, but for the existence of otherwise unattested ecclesiastical centres of the Pictish period. They further reveal a pattern of contact that extended through the Western Isles and far south on the Scottish mainland. *SH*

The afternoon's proceedings got underway with **Ragnhild Ljosland's** paper: Writing in the North: Runic Inscriptions in Scotland. Ragnhild is a Lecturer at the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of the Highlands and Islands in Orkney, teaching a varied programme. One particular specialism is runology and Old Norse. She began her talk by describing the writing system of the runic alphabet and how it developed into two main groups.

The Elder Futhark, as the name suggests, is the oldest form of runic alphabet and can be found carved on stones as well as objects such as weapons and jewellery. It was in use between c.AD100–700, before being superseded (after a transitional period during the 7th and 8th centuries) by the Younger Futhark. The script of the Younger Futhark was simplified and reduced, so as to employ far fewer runes. It was in use from the late 8th century up to c.1500 and is easily distinguishable from its predecessor.

The other main group is that of Anglo-Saxon runes. They were in use c.AD450–1000 and are similar to the Elder Futhark, but with additional runes. You can expect to find the Anglo-Saxon type of runes in Old-English speaking areas.

Ragnhild informed us about the Scandinavian database of Viking Age and Medieval runes (Samnordisk Runtextdatabas). This is a project involving the creation of a comprehensive database of runic inscriptions, catalogued and freely available online.

In relation to Pictish times and places, the Elder Futhark overlaps chronologically (AD100–700) but not geographically, being used only in Scandinavia and Germanic areas (the highest concentration is in Denmark). Anglo-Saxon runes partially overlap chronologically (5th–11th centuries) but not geographically, belonging to areas settled by Anglo-Saxons (effectively southern Scotland). It is the Scandinavian Younger Futhark which is found in Norse-settled areas of Pictland.

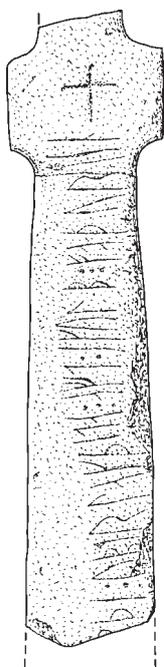
The earliest runes in Scotland are Anglo-Saxon. A cross slab at Whithorn Priory, near Wigtown in Dumfries & Galloway, bearing an inscription that encourages the reader to pray for Hwitu probably dates to the 700s when Northumbrian Angles ruled the area. The runes might be part of the original design, with two small crosses flanking the shaft of the larger cross in order to draw attention to the words.

The great Ruthwell Cross, also in Dumfries & Galloway, has a runic inscription which may have been added later, possibly in the 10th century. It is not a formulaic memorial text but a poem, seemingly quoting the Old English verses of a crucifixion story, told surprisingly from the viewpoint of the cross itself (*The Dream of the Rood*).

However, there is one Anglo-Saxon find from further north at Cramond, close to Edinburgh. It is a small brass ring inscribed with Anglo-Saxon runes, made sometime between AD800 and 1000. The only surviving word can be read 'WORHTE', meaning 'made'. Whoever wrought it may originally have been named.

Ragnhild explained that Scandinavian runes were in use at the other end of the country, occurring in areas of Norse settlement. Clusters of runic inscriptions in the Younger Futhark are found in Shetland, which boasts seven and Orkney, with an impressive 56. The majority of the Orkney corpus – 33 inscriptions – is in effect Viking graffiti, inscribed on the walls of Maeshowe Neolithic chambered cairn. There are about 20 inscriptions distributed around mainland Scotland and the Western Isles, with c.35 on the Isle of Man and c.20 in Ireland. The total number of runic inscriptions in England, of both Anglo-Saxon and Norse, is in excess of 100.

Ragnhild discussed in detail the two stones with runic inscriptions in Thurso, both displayed in Caithness



Thurso 1 rune-inscribed cruciform stone. Scale 1:10

Horizons museum. She told us that these were memorial inscriptions in Old Norse. Thurso 1 is an incomplete cruciform stone, missing the lower portion of the cross shaft and the beginning of the inscription, which reads ‘... this overlay in memory of Ingolf, his father’. The missing bit would have contained a name and a word meaning ‘made’. This kind of standard formula is common: [Name of sponsor] raised this stone after [= in memory of] [Name of deceased] and [the sponsor’s relationship to the deceased]. The sponsor might be

a comrade or a family member. Sometimes there is an addendum asking for the reader’s prayers or giving more information, such as the place of death. Above the inscription on Thurso 1 is an incised cross at the centre of the cross head. This stone was found placed on the site of a grave near Old St Peter’s Church in Thurso in the late 19th century.

Thurso 2 is an incomplete cross slab, again with an incomplete memorial runic inscription. On the front, three arms of a slightly irregular incised equal-armed cross with splaying arms survives. The text, which runs up the narrow edge of the slab, can be interpreted as ‘Gunnhild his wife’. The rest of the inscription has been lost, but it was probably of a similar formula to that used on Thurso 1. Thurso 2 was spotted built into St Peter’s Church, high up in its 13th-century tower, with only its narrow inscribed face visible (and upside down). After it was removed from the wall, a replica took its place and the original is thankfully now safe in the museum.

The 12th-century graffiti on the walls inside Maeshowe, Orkney, do not differ in substance from the modern variety, e.g. ‘Ofram the son of Sigurd carved these runes’ or ‘Tholfir Kolbeinsson carved these runes high up’. But the inscriptions provide more information about those who carved the runes than just their names. There is manly boasting: ‘These runes were carved by the man most skilled in runes in the western ocean’. There is a reference to a saga story that features a strong axe, which tells us that the rune carver was perhaps an educated person. Another carving looks like words but is unintelligible. Is it in a runic cipher code, or was the carver illiterate and ignorant of his runic alphabet?

The art of carving runes is not dead! Ragnhild told us about beautiful, big runes recently discovered on the shore near Auckengill Harbour, Caithness. Cut into the rock in a small cave is the name ‘Sweyn

Asleifarson’, a famous character from the *Orkneyinga Saga*, who lived in the 12th century. However, if he carved his own name, he was using an alphabet that was 500 years out of date. Judging by the crisp condition of these Elder Futhark runes, they are quite modern.

Less clear cut (in both senses) is the runic inscription on a large boulder found by schoolchildren in 1996 near the beach at Portormin, Dunbeath in Caithness. This short inscription, only eight characters in length, contains elements found in the Elder and Younger Norse Futhark as well as one character peculiar only to Anglo-Saxon runes, so Ragnhild considers it very unlikely to be authentic.

She finished with the good news of a real find. In 2013 a stone with runic inscription was found at Naversdale farm, Orphir, Orkney. Measuring approximately 8cm by 24cm, it turned up in a field. Since the finder’s daughter was by chance an archaeologist, its importance was recognised at once. This runic stone carries a religious inscription: ‘...s in caelis, sanctificetur’. These Latin words belong to the Lord’s Prayer: ‘...who art in heaven, hallowed’.

By now Ragnhild had infused us all with her infectious enthusiasm for runes and we ended hoping that the rest of the Naversdale inscription might soon be found for her and us to enjoy. ER

Graeme Cavers of AOC Archaeology followed with a paper entitled: Light in a Dark Age? LiDAR survey evidence for first millennium AD settlement in Caithness. Over the past few years, AOC has been involved in a number of projects in Caithness; these include the re-examination of a number of the sites dug by Sir Francis Tress-Barry from his base at Keiss Castle in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. A major problem for those interested in the period when the Picts flourished in the north is the lack of evidence for their settlements. From an archaeological point of view, the early medieval period in the North remains a Dark Age. Excavations at broch sites suggest that the use of such sites – either occupation of the brochs or of buildings in or around them – cannot account for a population comparable with that suggested for Caithness in the earlier Iron Age or in the Bronze Age. Graeme illustrated how LiDAR survey could indicate new possibilities for targeted excavation that might shed some light on this period.

LiDAR essentially combines data from an aircraft-mounted laser scanner with positional information provided by differential GPS to generate a fairly precise 3-D image of the ground over which the scanner is flown. Features on the ground can be reconstructed to an accuracy of about 10 centimetres. The technique reveals the ground surface below any vegetation – grass, heather, moss, even trees can be stripped away to give a ‘bare earth’ image of the area

overflowed. Graeme showed us astonishing comparisons between conventional aerial photography and the images generated by LiDAR scans of the same area.

AOC Archaeology has carried out two LiDAR surveys in Caithness: one in the Baillie Hill area and the other at Yarrows. The Baillie Hill survey revealed about a hundred hitherto unknown sites, including probable Bronze Age hut circles, Iron Age brochs and a possible late prehistoric promontory fort. Identifying anything that may represent structures from the first millennium AD was much more difficult.

At Yarrows, sites ranging from Neolithic chambered cairns, through hut circles and brochs to improvement period enclosures, show up clearly. While a number of these was already familiar, in territory that has been much studied in the past, there was a handful of candidates for investigation as possible early medieval sites. What appears to be a large building sits on an escarpment near Groats Loch, close to the find site of a fragmentary symbol stone bearing a crescent and V-rod, which was associated with a low, round, 'Pictish' cairn. There is also a possible promontory enclosure/fort. These sites are worth investigating as candidates for Pictish period sites. There are a number of brochs in the area. It is known from excavated examples that broch sites may have been used over long time periods (a classic case being that of Howe near Stromness in Orkney, where occupation extended into Pictish times). However, at Nybster the figure-of-eight building believed typical of the Pictish/Norse period was short-lived and dated to the early centuries of the first millennium AD.

Graeme questioned the suggestion that brochs could account for all the missing settlement sites. However, the landscape around the broch at Warehouse was revealed as far busier than had been discovered by programmes of field walking and aerial photograph, with enclosures and structures revealed by LiDAR. At Garrywhin, also, there were more hut circles and other traces of buildings than had been recorded by RCAHMS during that organisation's survey in 2004. LiDAR has the capacity to reveal these even although they are invisible at ground level. It is even possible to pick up traces of hut circles below the lines of later rig and furrow. A number of rather indeterminate features may also conceal the remains of domestic buildings from this period. One reason for the lack of evidence for Pictish period occupation may be that sites of this period are not recognised, and are thus ignored by those planning archaeological campaigns. It may simply be a problem of identification.

New types of sites also came to light, some of which appear as clusters of scrappy buildings on the edges of historic sites. These will require archaeological testing. So far, a small excavation at Warehouse South to test an apparent Bronze Age/Early Iron Age hut circle produced a radiocarbon date of the mid

Iron Age for its abandonment. However, the scrappy traces which are difficult to classify, and difficult to detect in any other way, may prove to include the remains of the missing Pictish period buildings in Caithness. LiDAR can identify targets for future investigation.

Graeme went on to field a lively question-and-answer session. He confirmed that the data captured by LiDAR can be manipulated to view the landscape from different angles, as the image generated is 3-D. At the moment, only very specialised equipment can be used to penetrate through water, to give an image of what may lie offshore or on the bed of lochs. Further advances in techniques such as thermal mapping, currently effective in hot climates, may lead to its use in northern areas. Clearly, new technologies have much to offer for the future.

For more information and examples of the LiDAR surveys, visit the AOC website:

www.aocarchaeology.com/Baillie SH

David Henry: A 'lost' Pictish symbol stone from Caithness: A cold case review.

David, as proprietor of Pinkfoot Press, is well known for his publication of important volumes in the field of Pictish studies. He is also known for his own researches in the field.

The symbol stone in question is that said to have been found at Crosskirk broch. John Stuart, in his *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (1856), has this to say in his notes to the lithograph prepared by P.A. Jastrzebski, a Polish artist who produced many of the illustrations for him:

The drawing of the stone at Thurso Castle was made from a fac-simile of it; the original having been presented by Sir George Sinclair to the King of Denmark. The Stone is said to have been found at Libster, about seven miles from Thurso, in a Pict's house, but I have been unable to obtain a distinct account of the circumstances.

The drawing in question is of a squared slab of stone incised with a crescent and v-rod above an arch, both with fairly simple decoration.



'At Thurso Castle', lithograph by P A Jastrzebski in J Stuart (ed) *Sculptured Stones of Scotland, I*, (Aberdeen, 1856), Pl.30. No.2.

So all is clear, or so it would seem. The stone was found at Lybster, about seven miles from Thurso ‘in a Pict’s house’, it was copied and the copy was kept at Thurso Castle whilst the original was given to the King of Denmark. By the time Allen and Anderson produced the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), the copy had disappeared from Thurso Castle and nothing was known of the original at the Museum in Copenhagen. However, at Allen’s hand, the account changed slightly, with the stone now coming from Lybster in Reay, six miles west of Thurso, where it was found ‘just outside the enclosure of the burying-ground attached to the ancient church of St Mary’ (i.e. Crosskirk). All subsequent accounts repeat and thus reaffirm the Crosskirk connection.

Mystery surrounds the disappearance of both the original stone and its copy. Where are they now? Why was the original stone given to the King of Denmark? Was Stuart’s ‘fac-simile’ a cast or a carved copy? If the latter, how accurate was it? The copy appears to have been a regular almost square block but what was the size and shape of the original stone? And where, exactly, was it found? Was Stuart’s Lybster Allen’s Lybster? Details that are missing from the first account of this stone appear in *ECMS*; how reliable are they? To make matters more confusing, the Ordnance Survey name book notes another stone as having been found in a cairn at Sibster in 1841. Is this a different lost stone, or a confused memory of *our* lost stone?

Over the years since Allen noted that the stone did not appear to be in the collections of the National Museum in Denmark, there have been many attempts to raise the question with authorities in Copenhagen. Even the then Princess (now Queen) Margrethe was approached. Having studied archaeology herself, it was hoped she might have been able to trace the stone in the Royal collections. She feared that it might have been lost in a disastrous fire at Christianborg palace. This seems unlikely – a major fire there in 1794 preceded the finding of the stone. The mystery is now over a hundred years old: a cold case to tax the ingenuity of any aspiring Wallender.

Detective Henry stepped into the picture. Approaching the question from the beginning, he gave us the link to the King of Denmark. A young man in the early stages of a glittering career, Jens Worsaae was a twenty-five-year-old archaeologist who had already published the first major study of Danish prehistory, as well as an account of his researches in Sweden. Without any income, he turned to King Christian VIII for sponsorship. In 1846, he was sent to Britain, in response to a request for a Danish archaeologist to study Scandinavian antiquities there. At the time, Denmark was well in advance of the rest of Europe in the study of prehistory and Worsaae was a rising star. In 1852, an English translation of Worsaae’s account of his research in Britain appeared as *An Account of the Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland and*

Ireland. In 1995, our intrepid investigator published the Irish section of this, together with a number of Worsaae’s letters referring to this part of his journey and his lectures to the Royal Irish Academy. Had circumstances not deflected his intention to produce a similar volume on the Scottish part of Worsaae’s travels, including the Scottish correspondence and diaries, the mystery of the Crosskirk stone might have been unravelled sooner. For Worsaae was a visitor to Thurso Castle as a guest of Sir George Sinclair in 1846.

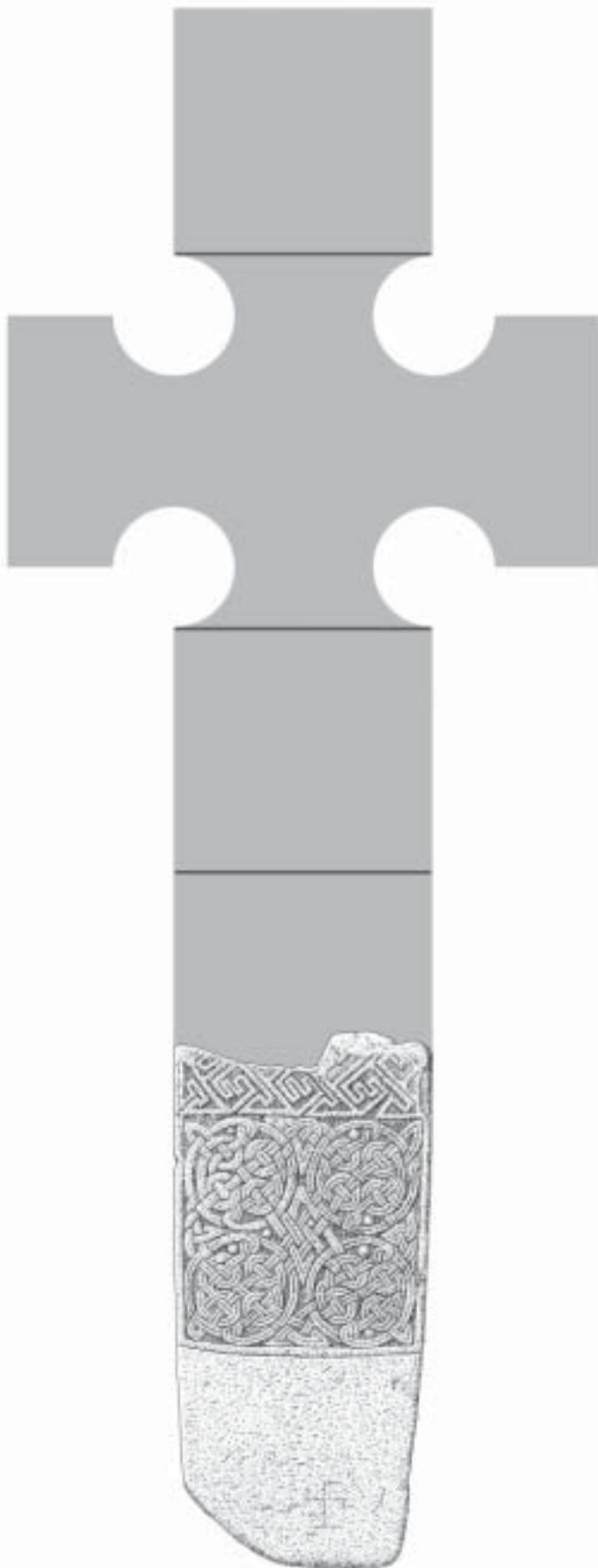
David recounted his painstaking research on the track of the stone. He answered many of the questions surrounding the lost stone – where exactly it was found, by whom it was found, who sent it to the Danish consul in Edinburgh, and what might have happened to the copy. The details of how he was able to answer these and the other questions surrounding the stone will be published by David himself. Suffice it to say that the curtains parted on the next best thing to a photograph of the original stone – a drawing of the actual stone made by Worsaae. And yes, David is still on its track! *SH*

Two speakers, Donna Heddle of the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of the Highlands and Islands, Orkney and Nan Bethune had to cancel their appearance at the conference due to ill health and we hope that both have made a full recovery. So PAS President **John Borland** prepared a last-minute paper on a topic he had been mulling over in his mind for some time and offered us some thoughts on: A New Pictish Freestanding Cross, perhaps the most northerly?

John started by outlining the huge variety of size and shape in which Pictish cross slabs come and how rare freestanding crosses are in Pictland by comparison. Unlike cross slabs, which are found throughout Pictland, freestanding crosses appear to have a very definite bias towards the south. There is only one complete Pictish freestanding cross – the magnificent Dupplin Cross. All the others survive as just fragments: cross shafts, arms, heads and, less well documented, socket stones.

John illustrated a few examples that are dotted throughout Angus and noted that when freestanding crosses occur as part of a large assemblage, they never account for more than 10% of the total: two or maybe three freestanding crosses out of St Vigean’s 30-plus stones, four or five out of St Andrews’ 50-plus stones. However he noted that they don’t always appear among the large assemblages, and freestanding crosses are conspicuous by their absence at Meigle (30-plus) and Kirriemuir (18).

The one exception to this 10% rule is Monifieth. Although not a large assemblage by any means, two of its five stones are freestanding crosses and a socket stone indicates the presence of a third. Indeed John emphasised the importance of recording in detail such socket stones as they not only fill in gaps in



Collieburn cross conjectural reconstruction by John Borland

distribution but also give an indication of size. In the case of the Monifieth socket stone, known traditionally as the Font Stane, it clearly held a cross bigger than Dupplin.

Moving north into Aberdeenshire, there is only one contender for a freestanding cross – a decorated ‘column’ built into the gable wall of Fyvie Church. However John pointed out that whilst this interpretation is most likely, the profile of this granite block is not dissimilar to the Ogham-bearing edge of the Dyce cross slab or lower portion of the Maiden stone.

Proceeding north and west into Moray, another socket stone near Birnie indicates a freestanding cross there, and there are two or three fragments amongst the Drainie assemblage, two of which are probably part of the one cross (so again not exceeding the 10% mark).

There are no Pictish freestanding crosses known in all of the central Highlands or Western Isles, until and unless you count the Canna Cross or the possible fragment from Berneray. John knew of no examples from Rosemarkie but acknowledged that he did not know that collection well. The recently discovered large assemblage from Portmahomack in Easter Ross could well be a contender to include some freestanding crosses but as John pointed out, a detailed record of this material was not yet in the public domain.

Nothing was known of in Wester Ross and John illustrated the massive freestanding cross from Inchnadamph in Sutherland just so he could dismiss it as being obviously not Pictish. Some regard the column carved on all four sides from Reay in Caithness as the shaft of a freestanding cross but John also dismissed this as it had a key-pattern filled cross on one side, similar to a ‘pillar’ cross from St Vigean. With no known Pictish freestanding crosses in either Orkney or Shetland, the most northerly example would be Drainie in Moray, unless a Portmahomack example is yet to make a public appearance.

John then unveiled his contender for Pictland’s most northerly freestanding cross, a stone hitherto considered to be the lower part of a cross slab and one which many conference delegates had gazed upon the day before in Dunrobin Museum: Collieburn.

John’s contention was that the large panels of interlace knot work which fill front and back of this large fragment show no sign of accommodating a cross yet occupy what would have been a large percentage of a cross slab’s surface, unless one were looking at something of the nature of the Sueno Stone, which he concluded was unlikely. He explored the possibility of one or other of the faces having a small cross surrounded by ornament, like an example from Rosemarkie but concluded that Collieburn’s ornament was of a very different nature. He also

noted the stone's girth – 240mm – was significantly greater than was common or indeed necessary for a sandstone cross slab of around 650mm in width.

John cited a recent collaboration with Mark Hall and Ian Scott, who have been working on the sculpture from the Forteviot area. To help them, John had recorded the socket stone at Invermay and helped prepare Ian's drawings for publication, including the fragments of Invermay's cross shaft. Although much is missing, these fragments go together to suggest a cross shaft measuring around 650mm wide by 300mm deep, sizes confirmed by the socket stone and similar to those of Collieburn.

John concluded by saying that one could only speculate as to the size and proportions of a reconstructed Collieburn freestanding cross but working on the assumption that its shaft consisted of 3 square panels of decoration and its head a fourth, it was potentially in the region of 4m high, singling it out as a truly remarkable monument in northern Pictland on a par with anything in the south.

The conference ended with a vote of thanks to all our speakers, our chairperson Katherine Forsyth, our hosts at Caithness Horizons and all the members and delegates who had attended.

The conference 'weekend' concluded on Sunday morning with a full mini-bus plus Elspeth Reid's camper van with the overspill, visiting cross slabs and symbol stones at Reay Old Parish Church, Sandside House and Skinnet Chapel, before dropping off the train travellers at Thurso station in time to catch the only train of the day heading south. Those travelling by car (and camper van) managed to squeeze in one last treat, with a walk around St Peter's Church. *JB*



*Skinnet Chapel 2 cross slab. Scale 1:10
Image from laser scan showing what remains
of interlace-filled cross-of-arcs on a shaft. The
left side of the shaft survives as a raised edge,
the surface of the shaft itself having
delaminated. Only a shallow remnant of the
incised line defining the right side of the shaft
is visible, thanks to the high-res scan.*

Pictavia No More!

The long-awaited axe finally fell when Angus Council closed Pictavia to the public at the end of October. Even at its peak in the early days, the troubled visitor attraction failed to attract the anticipated number of visitors and as time passed, footfall dropped to around the 4000 mark. The anticipated closure of Visit Scotland's tourist information desk, which also serviced admission into Pictavia, would have meant Angus Council incurring more cost to staff the desk themselves. Closure has been widely discussed and anticipated so it probably won't come as a surprise to many. Back in April, PAS was invited to contribute to a consultation process on Pictavia's future and we did put forward some ideas to refresh and reinvigorate what was on offer but whilst investment to improve was considered the preferable option by most stakeholders on the day, Angus Council clearly felt they could not afford that reinvestment. This is a disappointing decision but as someone working in the public sector, I know only too well the effects of budget cuts and the tough decisions all public bodies are being forced to make.

It was perhaps a flawed endeavour from the outset but without doubt, Pictavia's greatest success was its involvement with local school children, thanks in no small part to the enthusiasm of its small but dedicated team. No doubt Angus Council's Education Department will be keen to see if they can salvage some of that facility. What the future holds for the collection of Pictish sculpture housed in Pictavia, time will tell but with an excellent network of local museums, including the fine display in the Meffan, it seems likely the stones will find new homes.

The closure also had an impact on PAS, depriving us of our central 'headquarters' mailing address and of a venue for our winter talks, both provided at no cost thanks to the co-operation of Angus Council. Thanks to the efforts of Vice-President Stewart Mowatt, we have agreed a continuing partnership with Angus Council and as of November, our winter talks will be held in the elegant setting of the upstairs gallery of Brechin Town House Museum. Watch out in the next newsletter, on the website and in local (Angus) press for details of upcoming talks in March, April and May. JB

Please note that henceforth, all general communications to PAS should be sent to:

**John Borland, Little Craighall
Newbigging of Craighall
by Ceres, Cupar, Fife KY15 5LB**

Pictavia Lectures 2014

19 September – Our winter season opened with a talk from **Samuel Gerace** entitled *Moving Heaven on Earth: Material, Form and Function of Insular House Shaped Shrines*. Sam is currently working towards a PhD at the University of Edinburgh, and his talk was based on his research to date. His work has taken him across Europe, where most of these shrines are held in museums and churches, and back to the US where one is held in Boston Museum.

Sam began by defining house-shaped shrines. These are small boxes whose hinged lid is in the form of a ridged roof, fastening with a pin opposite the hinge. Provision is made for a carrying strap. These are not large objects, ranging in size from about 10–20cm long by 3–8cm wide and around 6–16 cm high. Many of us will be familiar with the Monymusk Reliquary held in the National Museums of Scotland and illustrated on their website. It is a fairly well preserved example but in a number of cases only fragments have survived. Their place in insular art is attested by the relationship between the decoration of the exterior, and by their inclusion in illustrations in some insular manuscripts.

By studying the characteristics of these lovely objects, it may be possible to get a better understanding of what they represented to those for whom they were created and who viewed them in their original state. It may be possible to answer

questions of how access to them was controlled, how they were used and how people engaged with these objects – what meaning did they have for contemporaries?

Sam first considered the choice of material used in construction against what is known or inferred about the attitude to, or valuation set upon, various different metals, stone, glass and enamel over the period when House Shaped Shrines (HSS hereafter) were crafted. This can be approached both by considering other surviving objects of the period, and by consulting the work of contemporary or near-contemporary authors such as Isidore of Seville or Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury. It has become clear that the use of silver for ecclesiastical objects was much more common in the pre-Viking period than hitherto believed. However, both the Derrynaflan chalice and the St Ninian's Isle bowl, both from the period before the Viking raids began, contain a high admixture of copper. There is evidence to suggest that the supply of both silver and gold in Western Europe was relatively restricted in the period that saw the flourishing of Insular art; gold more so than silver. In both the HSS from Amiata and Emly, a lead-tin alloy which has the appearance of silver was used, while the shrine at Bologna incorporated gilt over copper. There are no known instances of the use of cast gold, although in some cases, gilding has been used to add highlights to cast copper alloy. In some cases, such as the Bobbio shrine, panels of metal were soldered together to form the HSS, before decoration was added, in others, metal panels were applied to a wooden box core, with frames riveted on to hold the panels in place.



The Monymusk Reliquary, perhaps the best-known of Scotland's House Shaped Shrines

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In the early medieval period, the precious metals carried allegorical meanings. Gold, for example, rare and treasured, was associated with holiness, virtue and spiritual worth, and the appearance of gold on an HSS would convey these associations. Writers such as Isidore give us the clue, and the appearance of liturgical objects of precious metals confirms the value set on the metals for what they represented, not merely an intrinsic value. Sam suggests that early Irish descriptions of shrines of gold, silver or bronze were probably aspirational. An appearance that suggested such materials was more likely to have been the norm, as the use of tin/lead alloys to give the appearance of silver suggests.

The use of glass and gemstones in the decoration of HSS was also imbued with allegorical meaning. Gemstones in this sense include the amber on the Loch Erne HSS, garnet over gold in the eyes of the beasts on the house ridge at Amiata and rock crystal found on the Bobbio shrine. The choice may have been made both on the basis of the colour and the meanings associated with the stone. Isidore of Seville is a useful source of such meanings. He connected amber with the sun, for example. He also compared clear glass to gems, likening it to crystal. Glass was seen as a valuable material, not a cheap substitute for gems. Adomnan's account of the angel with a book of glass chastising St Columba could be referring to a highly decorated cover of a gospel book, or simply be intended to convey the image of a book of great value.

The choice of colour and material and its placing within the decorative programme was probably intended to enhance its meaning. Blue in the eyes of zoomorphic bird-like creatures may convey the notion of messengers of heaven. Red, on the other hand, was often associated with blood, or with God's love or Christ's passion. This association of meanings applies not only to the use of gemstones and glass, but to the incorporation of enamelled panels into the metalwork decoration of HSS.

Turning to the interior of the HSS, a wooden core survives in nine of the known examples. Surviving charters and accounts of saint's lives make it clear that in the early medieval period, wood could be set aside for church use. It has been suggested that in some cases, the original wooden box core may have been the work of a saint, later decorated as a revered object in its own right. The shrine held at Moissac had a core of oak, while Messon's example was of beech. The other seven were all of yew, traditionally associated with ecclesiastical spaces and churchyards, and notably more common in Ireland than in England. Aldhelm's riddle on *Taxus* (the yew genus) underlines the importance of the yew. In most cases, the wood is hidden by the casing of the shrine. Objects that look like HSS appear in representations of baptism in some gospel books. Aldhelm's riddle on the Chrismal could very well describe an HSS. The fact that these little boxes were carefully

constructed to prevent the loss of their contents while allowing easy access and transport suggests that they were indeed used to carry the Eucharist or possibly holy oil.

A variety of continental examples of small reliquaries from the early medieval period has survived. Although comparable in size, the shapes vary considerably from the HSS. The HSS are distinguished by opening from the top, and clearly it was intended that their contents be easily accessible. They also exhibit features lacking in the Byzantine sarcophagi that have been suggested as models. Sam noted the presence of similarly shaped objects on some of the Irish high crosses. He drew our attention to the depiction of Christ and the temple in the Book of Kells: Christ is represented as the head and the temple or church as the body. The temple here bears a strong resemblance to a house shaped shrine. Sam suggested that the term 'house-shaped shrine' may be a misnomer: these little boxes may in fact have been church-shaped - the shape of the body which carries the spirit and thus wholly appropriate to contain objects of liturgical significance. *Sheila Hainey*

Dr Colin Ironside

The Society regretfully announces the recent death of member Dr Colin Ironside.

Born in Paisley, Colin moved to Buchan before relocating to Angus where he taught. After teaching, Colin was employed by Glaxochem in Montrose. He was a lay reader in the Church of Scotland and a long-time elder.

Dr Ironside considered the Society's winter lectures to be a highlight of his month and cherished the lifts from Montrose to Brechin provided by kind friends. His other interests included playing the fiddle in a small local ensemble, an activity that he pursued until a few months before his death. He especially enjoyed Scottish music.

Colin died in Stracathro Hospital near Brechin and is survived by his wife, Sheila, and three sons.

Facebook by numbers

We started our PAS facebook page back in January 2012 with the aim of publicising our lecture series at Pictavia and picking up a few new members for the society.

Since then we have grown to a global audience of over 3600 fans. We share a mixture of Pictish interest posts by other pages and our own events, photos and activities.

The most surprising thing is the number of overseas fans we have acquired: we have more followers in Istanbul than Inverness, more fans in Albuquerque than Arbroath!

Most of our fans are in the US (1160), then the UK (784), Australia (165) and India (160). Until recently

we even had a fan in Antarctica (at the research base). Some of our hotspots include Tehran and Mexico City and we are pretty big in Mumbai too! Some of our posts have been viewed more than 8000 times. We typically reach around 6000 people per week.

Social Media has allowed our small society to extend its reach to a truly global audience. We use it to promote the aims of the Society, to raise public awareness of the Pictish stones, and to encourage various arts inspired by the symbols and designs depicted on them. We can now take that message around the world.

David McGovern

The Travellers Guide to Sacred Scotland

Marianna Lines

Gothic Image Publications

ISBN 978 0 906362 76 1 £16.99

This new book by PAS founder-member Marianna Lines is published just in time for Christmas and claims to be the first guidebook to combine the cultural, historical and spiritual aspects of Scotland's ancient past. This is the second guidebook in a series by Gothic Image Publications, following *The Travellers Guide to Sacred England*.

Each county of Scotland is represented by its own chapter, starting in the borders and finishing in the Western Isles, with maps, OS map references and wonderful photographs of the featured standing stones, cairns, crosses, temples, circles, chapels, mounds, cathedrals, wells, tombs, abbeys, cists, brochs and souterrains.

It is an excellent practical guidebook and excels at including lesser-known and out of the way sites but it is equally of interest from the comfort of an armchair. As one would expect from this author, there is plenty of Pictish material to be enjoyed, including a short essay on 'Who were the Picts?' in the book's introduction. There is also a very useful chronology and glossary.

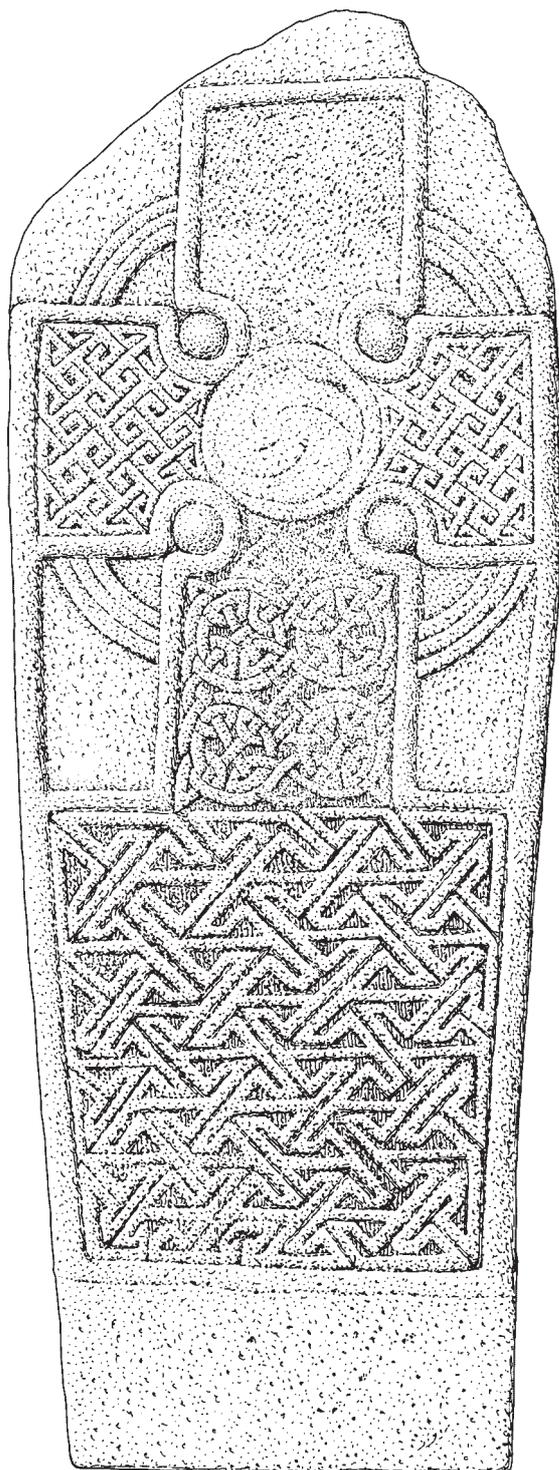
Many PAS members are name-checked in Marianna's 'Acknowledgements' section and many of the photographs in the book were taken by PAS members. Marianna takes us on a diverse and interesting journey around Scotland in a very entertaining book and if it's not already on your Christmas list then you should start dropping hints now.

David McGovern

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The deadline for receipt of material is
Saturday 14 February 2015

Please email contributions to the editor
john.borland@rcahms.gov.uk



John Borland © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

Reay 1 *One of the stones visited on the Caithness field trip. The cross-slab is 1.93m in length by 0.70m wide and 0.09m thick. Sculptured in relief, it shows a cross in the centre, with a short shaft and wide, rectangular base. The arms are square ended, with round hollows in the angles between arms and shaft and a ring around the junction. The arms carry a key pattern ornament, while the lower shaft carries knot work. The head of the cross was damaged by an 18th-century inscription: 'ROBERT MCKAY 17..' and for something over a hundred years, the stone stood (lay?) in the old burial ground above a grave, presumably that of Robert McKay. More recently, the stone was damaged again when someone removed the McKay inscription.*

Pictish Arts Society

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