The Pictish Arts Society
NEWSLETTER 71 SUMMER 2014

Pictavia March 2014

Peter Yeoman

Making Meaning out of Myth: Columban Iona before the Viking Age

A particularly high turnout greeted our speaker Peter Yeoman, the Head of Cultural Resources at Historic Scotland, for the March lecture in Pictavia. The latest stage in his distinguished career was to lead the Iona project, which was completed and opened to the public earlier this year. Its aim was to increase physical and intellectual access to the carved stones through their redisplay and to offer improved interpretation on the basis of current knowledge about the life and times of St Columba. Peter was keen in his talk to dispel myths and replace them with what has now been learned. The kings of Scotland are not buried on Iona. Macbeth was not buried there. Another myth, that the monastery was abandoned in the early 800s and its treasures dispersed, is similarly untrue, since Iona has numerous cross-marked stones dated to the 800s. Indeed the Book of Kells is now generally considered to have originated in an Iona *scriptorium* during this period.

Iona might be at the edge of the Christian world, but water routes were cultural accelerators. Adomnan termed Columba the 'island soldier for Christ' but Columba knew Rome and became an enormous influence on Western Europe. The monastery was in the forefront of linking the role of the Church with the making of kings. It invented the high cross with its representations of Christ. It carved in stone new forms of decoration. It was carrying out metalwork for reliquary purposes. The monastery held a substantial library and was active in scholarship, creating books of sacred texts and canon laws, copies of which still survive from the 600s.

The area surrounding Iona Abbey has a long history of settlement. The current church is built on top of an earlier one. Peter described how excavations have revealed the existence of a double ditch vallum forming the perimeter of a rounded enclosure, built between AD500 and AD800. Outwith the vallum lay a monastic burial ground. Excavations also showed that there had been earlier settlement at the site dated from BC40 to AD220. Peter speculated that when Plutarch made a reference to holy men on an island around the 1st century AD, he may conceivably have meant Iona. It was perhaps already a sacred site with old druidical associations, later to be absorbed into the new Christian church.

A geophysical survey around the enclosure found lots of industrial waste, slag and a small crucible suitable for gold and silver working. Traces of an extraordinarily large roundhouse were also discovered at the enclosure entrance. Might this be the 'magna domus' [great house] referred to by Adomnan?

Peter also drew our attention to Adomnans's *De Locis Sanctis* [Concerning Holy Places] where Constantine's basilica in Palestine is described. The elements of its liturgical landscape were recreated on Iona in an attempt to form a 'perfect' monastery. A stone-paved road was built in Roman style leading past 3 high crosses to the church and a small shrine. The shrine contained two stone cists, with early grave covers. A well outside the church could be pre-Columban and later incorporated into Christian pilgrim ritual. Steps down the well would serve at the baptism of new monks entering into religious life. Outside the church lie turning stones, still in use today, and a trough-shaped stone, known as the Cradle of the North Wind, with an early cross on one end.

According to Bede's writings, Columba was in his grave in AD730, but by AD750 we can read that the saint's relics were being taken round Ireland. In this interval his bones must have been lifted, no doubt with great piety, and transferred to reliquary boxes, perhaps akin to the church-shaped Monymusk one. At this time, mid 700s, the concept of elevating saints' bones and making them portable foci of ritual became an appropriate form of veneration.

Our speaker moved on to discuss the three high crosses on Iona today: known as St Oran's, St John's and St Martin's Crosses. That is their chronological sequence. St Oran's was carved first and the stone jointing was carried out using wood-working technology. It was also a poor choice of stone and it failed. St John's Cross was the first ring-headed cross in the world, but the ring was added later to support the weight

© Crown copyright, courtesy of Historic Scotland

1 *St Oran's Cross and St Matthew's Cross being prepared for display at Historic Scotland's stone conservation lab in Edinburgh*

of the arms, a sign that the sculptors were learning to deal with stone. It broke too and nowadays it is a concrete replica that you see outside the church.

Stonemasons at length gained the new knowledge necessary to avoid past mistakes. When they carved St Martin's Cross they used one piece of stone, brought from 50 miles away. Instead of long arms, the arms were kept short and had slots at their ends to fix additions, removed perhaps during gales. Peter thought there may have been gold end pieces. The shaft of the cross contains discrete panels of Bible stories, some easier to interpret than others. Daniel in the lions' den and David the psalmist are motifs shared in common with several Pictish cross-slabs. The lowest panel is filled with snake bosses, thought to represent resurrection and healing, which are also a feature found in Pictland. There was a Pictish takeover of Dalriada around AD750 and Pictish influence may have come to bear via Pictish carvers who were also devotees of Columba. The centre of the cross head contains a Madonna, *Maria Angelorum*.

Peter described for us how Historic Scotland had to construct bespoke mounts to hold St Oran's stone upright. This involved careful hoisting of a tonne of stone. In its new housing and standing 4.4m tall [14.5ft], the cross is illuminated in a lighting sequence that highlights different parts of the stone at different times. This is designed to bring out the meaning of the separate parts of the cross and convey the real-life function of crosses as a vital component of the religious community's liturgical life. The visitor will experience how changing lighting simulates the 24-hour cycle of religious worship, and the effect is enhanced by the sound of monks' chants. The new interpretation boards are designed to explain to visitors the how and why of the Columban monastery and the role played by its high crosses – and so help debunk those distorting myths.

Peter Yeoman and his team from Historic Scotland can be congratulated for adding new levels of meaning and understanding to an Iona visit.

Dr Elspeth Ried

© Crown copyright, courtesy of Historic Scotland

2 *The newly refurbished Abbey Museum on Iona, with St John's, St Oran's and St Matthew's high crosses taking centre stage.*

Pictavia April 2014

Martin Goldberg

Carving Pictish Symbols: Conventions and Competences

Dr Martin Goldberg is Curator, Early Historic Period at the National Museums of Scotland. His work with the Glenmorangie project is familiar to many Pictophiles from his contribution to *Early Medieval Scotland: Individuals, Communities and Ideas*, published last year by NMS, and from his talks to PAS and other Societies.

Martin introduced his talk by confessing that he had been warned to avoid too close a study of Pictish symbols 'for that way lies madness'. However, close study of RCAHMS' *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland* over many hours of commuting between Glasgow and Edinburgh had drawn him in. He hastily pointed out that he did not look to understand the 'meaning' that the symbols may have had for their carvers, nor to trace an origin for each. Instead he hoped to recognise the conventions which regulated the handling of the symbols and to consider the competence with which they were executed within these conventions. The scholarly polymath, Robert Stevenson, who was Director of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland from 1946 to 1978, had studied the artefacts relating to early historic Scotland both in his care and sited elsewhere in meticulous detail. In his contribution to *The Problem of the Picts* (1955), he outlined his proposition of the declining symbol in Pictish art. The argument was largely based on the ornamentation of crescent and V-rod, the most common symbol and the only one usually decorated with any degree of elaboration. Stevenson felt that this decoration had a common starting point in the version found on the Golspie stone. Repeated copying by more or less competent followers led to a decline from the type version, and this decline could be used to trace a temporal relationship between stones from earlier to later. While paying tribute to Stevenson's great contributions to Pictish studies, Martin suggested that sixty years on from *The Problem of the Picts*, it is worth reconsidering his approach to the symbols.

As a starting point, he accepted Katherine Forsyth's observation that the symbols represent a coherent, widespread system of communication, of which we have no understanding as to meaning. This locates the symbol stones within a wider tradition of using similarly shaped stones for inscriptional purposes within an insular context. Martin studied the stones (or more properly, the illustrations of the stones) to see what could be observed about the conventions applied to the handling of symbols, including decoration and how these were observed – a first layer of competence. He also examined them to see what could be discerned about the craftsmanship involved in the carving – the second layer of competence.

For examples of what he meant by conventions, he turned first to the treatment of animals and birds. On Class I stones, all mammals and all geese face to the viewer's right, and the animal symbols are paired with a very limited number of other symbols. (He drew here a parallel to early Welsh king names, where animals are combined with a limited range of other qualifiers to give a range of names. This observation fits well with the suggestion that the symbols may represent names.) The majority of Pictish beasts, fish and eagle symbols also face right. In the case of the beast, 24 out of 26 so far recorded on Class I stones do so, but the proportion facing left rises with Class II stones. The eagle faces right on Class I, but left on Class II.

The mirror and comb symbols also follow some fairly clear patterns. Combs from early historic sites fall into three main groups: single sided, single sided with an elaborately decorated and pierced back (like the example from Dun Cuier) and double sided. Mirrors, although considerably rarer finds, fall into two main categories: circular mirrors with attached handles incorporating rings (with or without bars linking the rings) or circular mirrors with integral solid handles formed from a single sheet of metal similar to the one found in a peat moss at Balmaclellan. Martin made no attempt to read a meaning into these symbols. Instead, he made the observation that mirrors with the circle and bar type handle only appear on Class I stones. The type resembling the Balmaclellan mirror appear on Class II and on a few Class I. As for the combs, single sided only appear on Class I while all Class II and a few Class I are double sided. Pairings of the 'later' form of mirror with right facing animals are known, while instances of 'early' mirror types with right facing animals are also found. These may illustrate a gradual transition from the use of one set of conventions

to another. Using these as a rough guide to the placing of stones in a temporal sequence, it becomes clear that elaborate decoration of symbols is not an early characteristic. The eagle and mirror case on Inveravon 1, for example, are paired with a later mirror and comb, and are much more elaborately ornamented than the crescent and V-rod paired with an earlier mirror and comb on Inveravon 2. At Drumbuie, the scaly fish and floral decoration on the mirror case paired with a late mirror and comb contrast with the simple clean lines of the left-facing serpent and z-rod and double disc from the same site. These would appear to be carved by different hands. The right facing serpent and Z-rod on the Newton stone, again paired with a double disc, has scaly detail in contrast.

Martin suggests that the conventions which dictated the handling of the symbols (which way the symbol 'faces', for example, which pairs are found together and so on) may have changed over time. In the earlier period, the conventions were set more rigidly, changing or relaxing over time. As well as temporal variation, there appears to have been some regional variation as well.

With the introduction of the new Christian symbol of the cross in the Class II stones, there was increasing elaboration accompanying the increasing technical development involved in relief carving. At the same time, there was a reduction in the range of Pictish symbols represented. The differing competences in the handling of the symbols, moving away from a rigid adherence to conventions which may have lost their meaning over time, together with the tendency towards a greater level of skill required in carving as the artists moved from an incised to a relief mode, show broad temporal changes overlain by local and individual differences – a far more complex view of the carvings than Stevenson's original idea of the 'declining symbol', and one far more nuanced in its treatment of the individuals who worked or commissioned the stones.

Technical competence does not equate with over-elaboration of design. It can be much more difficult to produce perfect simplicity. Although stone carving techniques developed over time in the hands of Pictish sculptors, there was always a degree of variation in the ability of individual artists. *Sheila Hainey*

Pictavia May 2014

Lynda McGuigan

A New Look at Some Old Stones

Our final talk of the 2013–14 season was given by Lynda McGuigan. Lynda, who is currently working towards a PhD at the University of Liverpool on the 19th-century Antiquarian Networks in Scotland with a focus on Pictish Stones, is familiar to many as the manager of Meigle Museum. Her knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the collection there have been appreciated by many visitors to the stones in her care. Her talk, 'A New Look at Some Old Stones', focused on the small group of stones at Logie Elphinstone which is near to her home in Aberdeenshire.

Katherine Forsyth's expression 'a cool breeze of revisionism is blowing through Pictish studies' certainly applies to the area of Aberdeenshire around Bennachie. Following on from Moira Grieg's work with aerial photography, Gordon Noble and Megan Gondek have excavated an enclosure at the Craw Stane at Rhynie. The stone appears to be in its original location, while the original sites of the other seven stones from Rhynie are unknown. (See Newsletters 61 and 69 for reports on the excavations.) Moira's own work on the group of five stones from Donaldson's Haugh, Tillytarmont, also influenced Lynda's thoughts on the Logie Elphinstone group.

The Logie Elphinstone stones were mentioned in the Rev Simpson's account of the parish of Oyne in the Second Statistical Account of Scotland in 1845, and they were also noted by Stuart in 1856. Only three of the reported four stones survive; the fourth was said to have been used in the construction of a kiln. Apparently the three remaining blocks of whinstone lay in a horizontal position on the Moor of Carden until 1809, when they were set up on the west side of a new plantation. They are now to be seen in the grounds of Logie Elphinstone House.

Lynda summarised a few of the features of the three surviving stones. Logie Elphinstone 1 is of whinstone, with a crescent and v-rod and double disc incised and a pointed top to the stone. Logie Elphinstone 2 is of whinstone with quartz veins, with a circular ogham above a crescent and V-rod and double disc and Z-rod. These are incised over a palimpsest double disc and Z-rod, on the rounded face of a pointed

stone. Logie Elphinstone 3 is also of whinstone, with a Pictish beast and crescent and V-rod incised on a stone of roughly rectangular shape. The crescent and V-rod is the second most common symbol after the mirror and comb pairing, and is particularly common in Aberdeenshire.

At Tillytarmont, all five stones were found on haughland by the confluence of the Isla and the Deveron. The earliest recorded location of the Logie Elphinstone group, the Moor of Carden, is also haughland and also by a confluence, this time of the Urie and the Gadie. This may represent ritual space associated with liminality. This can be expressed in other ways, as at Covesea where the symbols were carved at the boundary between the light of day and the darkness of the cave. Here, in close proximity to the Moor of Carden are the well of Carden (an ancient sacred well?) and a river crossing on the routeway from Aberdeen passing Brandsbutt and Crichie. It also lies close to the boundary between the parishes of Oyne and Chapel of Garioch. Unfortunately the original setting cannot be known for certain.

Lynda went on to suggest that Class I stones may have been chosen for their shape – a topic which requires further study, especially of stones whose original position is known; there may be significance not only in the shape but in the positioning (orientation) of the stones and their carvings within the landscape. It is particularly noticeable that Logie Elphinstone 2, with its quartz veining is voluptuously curved on one side and flat on the other. The quartz shows on the rounded side, which had been used twice for carving. Elsewhere re-use of a stone usually involves utilising a different side for later carvings. Was there a special significance in the shape of this one?

Although the exact location of the Logie Elphinstone stones may be unknown, the wider area is worth considering. As Fraser and Halliday pointed out (In the Shadow of Bennachie), stones were set up to be seen in a landscape already inhabited. Here, the towering forms of Bennachie and Tap o' Noth dominate a wide landscape. The vicinity of the Don and the Urie is rich in symbol stones, with over twenty per cent of those currently known found in this area. Archaeologists have turned up evidence for occupation of Bennachie and several hillforts in this area contemporary with the carving of symbol stones (See Newsletter 66 for a summary of some of Murray Cook's work). The area is rich, too, in stone circles, where, in some cases a single stone has been selected later for the incision of Pictish symbols. Skilled craftsmen were carving the hard local granites and whinstones for a lengthy period.

A number of stones carry ogham, thought to date to the Christian period. However, there are questions over what appears to be circular ogham on Elphinstone 2. Katherine Forsyth, in her 1996 corpus of ogham inscriptions in Scotland noted ten different readings offered by earlier scholars, and concluded that there is no assignable literary meaning. Possibly this is not really ogham, perhaps simply a talismanic rendering by one who was illiterate in that script.

There are many suggestions as to the functions of symbol stones: markers of the dead, boundary markers or claims to the ownership of territory, pillar stones set up to commemorate significant events. These suggestions are not necessarily exclusive. It may be that more study into stones in their original settings, where these can be recognised, will prove enlightening.

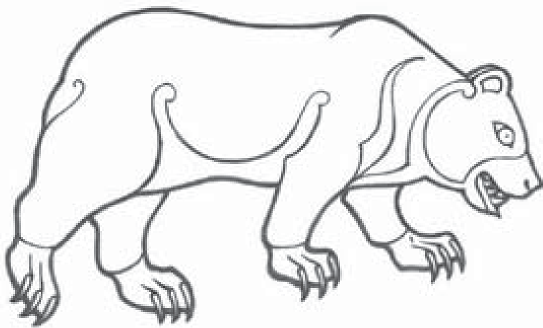
Sheila Hainey

Craig Low – 'Pictish artist'

Craig Low is a talented artist with a very healthy obsession with all things Pictish. He has been drawing and designing Pictish-inspired pieces since 2000 when a chance encounter with Wainwright's *The Problem of The Picts* led him into the world of Pictish art. He describes himself as a 'Pictish Artist'.

1 *The reconstructed Logierait 1 horseman owes much to 'Pictish' heads from elsewhere!*

2 *Craig's 're-imagining' of the lost Meigle 10 stone. The style owes much to the other Meigle stones although the bowman owes more to St Vigeans.*

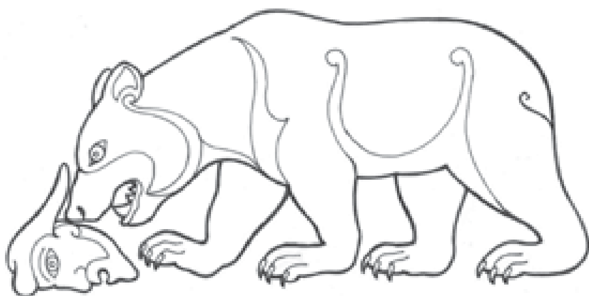


3 *Craig's drawing of the bear from the Drosten Stone at St Vigeans owes a great deal to one of the bears from Meigle.*

I suppose we should call Craig's drawings of individual motifs and scenes from the Pictish stones 're-imaginings' as they rarely simply copy or record the image – there is always an element of 'filling in the blanks' or augmenting the piece to look the way Craig wants it to look.

He is particularly good at overlaying a degraded or lost image with the style of the area it came from. See for example his 're-imagining' of the lost Meigle 10 stone (**2**). Similarly, he can apply the style of a similar image from elsewhere when the detail of his subject has been lost. For example his drawing of the bear from the Drosten Stone at St Vigeans (**3**) owes a great deal to one of the bears from Meigle (**6**).

Perhaps distance lends perspective or helps him to imagine what the original work could, would or should have looked like (in Craig's mind). There's certainly no shortage of distance involved as Craig lives in Christchuch, New Zealand and, although his family originally came from Dunnottar, he has never seen a Pictish stone in real life, relying instead on books, photographs and RCAHMS images online.



4 *The bear from the very top of the Glamis Manse cross-slab is easy to miss when looking at the stone itself and no scrolls are discernible.*

5 *Equally at home with 'dot drawing', sketching or computer design, his work can be accurate, or reconstructive or downright playful. This image of a Pictish rider with hawk he attributes to the stone at Elgin Cathedral but there's little real resemblance beyond the subject matter. There's a little bit of Fowlis Wester in his drawing but really it's a fine fantasy.*

All images: © Craig Low

I've known and loved Craig's work since 2012 when we collaborated on a carving of the Drosten Stone Bear. His mixture of keen observation, comparison and imagination is a powerful one. I'll share more of his work in the next newsletter. *David McGovern*

***6** The toothless grin of the bear on Meigle 26 is augmented with a full set of teeth in Craig's dot-drawing*

Pictish Genes?

This note arose from a plea for a note of caution over claims that had appeared in the press that genetic research had shown that 1 in 10 Scotsmen were genetically Picts and that the highest concentration of Picts was in Aberdeenshire. It was suggested that I might be able to sound such a note, as my doctorate is in genetics. My first attempts were highly technical and totally unsatisfactory.

Rather than start from the genetics part of the question, it may be easier to start with the question of what precisely we mean by Pict, if in fact that has any meaning at all. We have evidence that over a period of about six hundred years (c. late 3rd–9th centuries AD), there were people living somewhere in the area of modern Scotland whose neighbours, when writing in Latin, referred to as 'Picti'. Exactly where these Picts lived is still open to question, as are other details such as whether the term had any political or territorial meaning for the people so designated. Was it a name that referred to a group linked by kinship ties, or to one whose link was occupation of a single territory? I have deliberately avoided the use of the late concept of nationhood – that almost certainly would not have been recognised by our Picts with anything like the meaning that it has at the present time.

Even if we were to be successful in defining the Picts in a way that would have made sense to them and their neighbours at any time throughout the hundreds of years during which they appear in contemporary literature, there are other problems. Archaeological evidence clearly points to movement between northern Britain and its neighbours both further south and over the sea from a far earlier date than that at which we first encounter Picts in the written record. Migration even on the scale of the odd trader who settled, or the Roman auxiliary who was paid off far from home anywhere within the empire and settled near the fort that had been his last base, ensured that there was no such thing as a 'pure bred' Pict. The idea that the Picts were somehow unique and a race apart simply does not hold water.

Setting the problem of the Picts to one side for the moment, what can DNA sequencing tell us about our ancestors? By far the greatest proportion of the DNA in our cells is packaged up in chromosomes contained in the cell nuclei. In humans, each cell nucleus contains 46 chromosomes. In females, these comprise 23 matched pairs; in males, one pair is mis-matched – the so-called sex chromosomes, labelled X (two of which are found in females and one in males) and the much smaller Y (the 'male' chromosome). For almost as long as we have known about chromosomes (over a hundred years), we have known that, during the process by which sperm and eggs are formed, genetic material can be exchanged between members of each matched pair. One of each pair goes into every egg or every sperm cell: each can carry genes from either parent in the previous generation. The exception to this is the Y chromosome. Although the Y chromosome aligns with the X in males, there is no exchange between them. The Y chromosome passes from father to son altered only by the relatively rare process of mutation.

The same is true of the tiny amount of DNA contained in the mitochondrion, a microscopic body that exists in a variable number of copies outside the nucleus of each cell. Sperm contribute no mitochondria to the fertilised egg – both males and females inherit their

mitochondria from their mother. Thus the mother passes on a tiny, discrete package of genetic material, altered only by rare mutation, to all her offspring. Analysis of Y-chromosome DNA is useful in tracing paternal inheritance; mitochondrial DNA is a marker for female inheritance.

My mitochondrial DNA is unlikely to differ much if at all from my mother's, that of my siblings or my aunts or their offspring, or my grandmother (on my mother's side). It is likely to differ much more from my father's, or from that of my paternal relatives in general or my grandfather on my mother's side. Similarly, my brother's Y chromosomal DNA is very similar, or identical to, our father's, and very similar to that of our paternal uncles, their sons and our grandfather. Differences accumulate, and are passed down, via the mother for the mitochondria or the father for the Y chromosome. As the other chromosomes exchange genetic material in each generation, it is rarely possible to detect from which ancestor we inherit any particular gene carried on any of them. The Y chromosome, with around 2% of the total DNA, is known to carry around 350 genes, while mitochondrial DNA carries only 37 genes and represents less than .001% of the total DNA in each cell.

It is possible to fairly cheaply and easily analyse Y chromosome and mitochondrial DNA. Such analyses may be useful in determining close family relationships. Y chromosome comparisons between 'father' and 'son' can readily prove non-paternity, for example. Mitochondrial analysis can detect that there is relationship through the female line – mothers and daughters, sisters and brothers, cousins where the mothers are sisters and so on. The nature of the relationship is not necessarily clear.

By comparing the results of many such analyses, it is possible to identify mutations that occurred hundreds of generations ago and to create a tree of relationships (think of the sort of branching tree that describes the relationships between man and the apes). It is possible statistically to define broad patterns of spread. There are, however, problems with labelling DNA as having been passed on by an ancestor who lived in any particular area only forty or so generations ago and therefore can be retrospectively designated as 'Pict ' or 'Scot', 'Angle' or 'Saxon', 'Briton' or 'Viking'. For one thing, the geographical separation between these groups was not large enough, nor did they live long enough ago, for clearly separate lineages to develop. Our earliest surviving insular documents talk of local strife, and notices of battles and raids are a familiar feature of Early Historic annals from Ireland and Wales. As is all too evident from modern experience, rape and pillage routinely accompany such raids, and the traces are left in the paternal genes of any resulting offspring. Slave raiding was recorded by both St Patrick and Adomnan, and resulted in numbers of women in particular leaving genetic traces far from family and birthplace. Our early literature also shows that intermarriage was a feature of the Early Historic peoples of northern Britain, as in the case of Bruide mac Bile, a Pictish king whose father was a Briton. And over the thousand years or so since the last contemporary literary mention of the Picts, migration has been a constant feature of life in the area (however far it extended) occupied by the historic Picts, to say nothing of plagues and wars and all the other hazards that impact on the transmission of genes from one generation to another. (If you want a bit of fun, start with two, one for each parent, then multiply by two to get the number of grandparents, and by two again to get the number of great-grandparents, and so on. Long before you encounter your Pictish ancestors, the total number of *potential* ancestors has exceeded all the humans that have ever lived. Throughout the whole period, our ancestors found mates among relatives as well as strangers.)

Tracing the relationships between Y chromosome or between mitochondria may be a fairly lucrative business, but it has the potential to tell nothing at all about the many thousands of those other ancestors who lived the forty or so generations ago that separate us from a time when our Picts were living somewhere in our part of the world and who all contributed to our genes.

Sheila Hainey

Picts on-line

We founded our PAS facebook page back in March 2012 and since then our audience has grown steadily and become increasingly global. We now have over 1400 facebook fans in 45 countries including Ecuador, Iran, Antarctica (presumably at the research base), Vietnam, Brazil and Bhutan.

We have some surprising hotspots – Istanbul for example, where we are unusually popular.

Tehran and Sao Paulo also have significant clusters of PAS fans. By far our largest facebook contingent are in the US, followed by the UK, Canada, Spain, Italy and Ireland.

Our record post in terms of audience was viewed over 28,000 times. All of our facebook posts are automatically shared on Twitter (@PictishArts) and together facebook and twitter represent a significant audience for us to share our news and photographs, and to further the aims of the Society. We also recruit new members along the way and attract new conference attendees.

If you haven't visited our page you can find it at **www.facebook.com/ThePictishArtsSociety**. Please 'like' the page and join in the discussions.

David McGovern

Obituary Robert Brydon

Robert Brydon, a founder-member of the Pictish Arts Society and member of the first PAS committee, died recently at the age of 83.

Bob Brydon was born in 1930 in Portobello, where he spent his formative years. Living in Portobello he was never far from the sea; something that was to become an enduring interest for him. With the beachcombing instinct of a young boy, Bob became a treasure-hunter from an early age. After the outbreak of WW2, he could be found collecting uniform badges and other items from German soldiers in return for broken biscuits that he gave to them.

With his National Service, his interest in the sea and the war came together. He served in the Marine Craft section of the RAF based in Bridlington, whose aim was to conduct air-sea rescue missions for pilots forced to come down over the sea. Ironically, Bob himself had to be rescued from the North Sea on one occasion, when the boat he was in drifted onto a sandbank at night.

After a stint in the family printing business he set up his own antiques business in Stockbridge and was instrumental in saving St Stephen Street from demolition and helping to revive the fortunes of the area in the post-war years. His eye for treasure stood him in good stead as an antiques dealer. He was particularly interested in items of military history, and in ethnic artifacts from around the world.

Bob was also a storyteller, a philosopher, a mystic, and an historian. He was President of the Theosophical Society of Edinburgh, exploring comparative religion and 'belief systems'. He was a founding member of the Commandery St. Clair of the Grand Priory of Knights Templar in Scotland, and was also their archivist. The inauguration took place in Rosslyn Chapel in 2006. Long before this, however – and before Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* had put Rosslyn on the map – Bob was advocating bringing the plight of the decaying Chapel to the world. He created a small exhibition of artifacts to help visitors learn about Rosslyn's connections to the wider world. He led specialist tours of Rosslyn Chapel for many years, and was considered one of the top experts on the chapel, its symbolic iconography and the Sinclair family. Bob led a research project on the Sinclairs and their connection with Prince Henry Sinclair of Orkney, and contributed to several books on the subject.

Another field of interest brought together Bob's love of history, treasure, and the sea. In the 1990s a team of Scottish and American divers set out to find the wreck of *The Blessing*, which sank in the Forth in 1633 carrying many of King Charles I's priceless possessions while he was visiting Scotland on his coronation tour. Bob was involved in original research for the investigation, and contributed to the film of the expedition made by Discovery.

In 1988, Bob was a founding member of the Pictish Arts Society, along with Stuart McHardy, Marianna Lines, David Clement, Graeme Cruickshank and George Fraser. Three years previously this group had all met at the Pictish Conference at Dundee University, held to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the publication of *The Problem of the Picts*. With his lifelong interest in ethnology and his wide range of social contacts, Bob was vital in 'spreading the word' of the new society and ensuring that it established a solid membership from the beginning. He was an active committee member in those first few years, enabling PAS to proceed with its aim of raising the profile of the Picts and Pictish Studies, through lectures, conferences and publications. An early PAS Conference held in Letham featured Bob giving a resounding display of Pictish weaponry and how it was used.

A military historian, a Templar, a Pict, Bob Brydon's enthusiasm kindled our spirit.

Rev Duncan MacLaren,
Marianna Lines & Stuart McHardy

The deplorable pagan of St Vigeans 7

St Vigeans Museum holds an outstanding collection of Pictish Christian carvings, which are housed in two cottages in the little hamlet of St Vigeans on the outskirts of Arbroath, Angus.[1] This is one of the finest and largest collections of Pictish stones, 34 in all, including cross-slabs, free-standing crosses, grave-covers, grave-markers, and part of a shrine. Some display Pictish symbols and one has an inscription in Roman lettering. Sadly not one stone is complete.

The sculptured stones have been collected from in and around the little church perched on top of a high conical mound. This remarkable knoll is thought to be natural, though perhaps enhanced by human hand.[2] In early medieval times the now quaint, quiet spot must have been an important centre of faith and activity. A 7th-century Irish abbot called Vigean (or Fechin in Irish Gaelic) is mooted as the original inspiration for the monastery established with this name. Ecclefechan and Torphichen are other examples of the name and are also early Christian sites.[3]

The cross-slab catalogued as No.7 once stood over 2m tall, before its top, bottom and side sections were removed (**1**).[4] It once had a cross both front and back, but the 'back' has had its carving 'ruthlessly destroyed'.[5] A particularly attractive feature on the shaft of the front cross is the spiral work, for example, a spiral made of three nose-to-nose heads of men, one made of three bird heads circling around a berry, another made of three beaked birds, each grasping its neighbour by the throat.

© Bob Henery

2 *St Vigeans 7: right panel*

To the right of the cross shaft is an interesting pair of contrasted motifs, one above the other (**2**). Above, although they have lost the top of their heads, the desert fathers, Saints Anthony and Paul, are recognisable holding a large circular disc between them, i.e. bread, flown in by a raven. The two saints were deemed the first hermits and founders of the monastic way of life, and so a popular subject for carving. This motif is found on other Pictish cross-slabs, on the Ruthwell cross in Dumfriesshire, and on many Irish free-standing crosses.[6] The saints do not appear in the Bible but in apocryphal works: *The Life of St. Anthony* by Athanasius, and *The Life of Paulus the First Hermit* by Jerome.

© Bob Henery

1 *St Vigeans 7*

On the St Vigeans 7 cross-slab, the saints are depicted in profile, facing each other, knee to knee, seated on chairs (usually termed thrones in modern descriptions). Their feet rest on a mat.

The saints are clad in full-length robes, with patterned hems. On top they wear a shorter over-garment. They are shod in what are usually termed slippers, like the figures to the left of the cross shaft. One saint has a pointed beard.

Although living in the desert, they are miraculously fed by a raven, who brings down food for them to share. The message in the iconography is that God provides for his faithful servants.

Below, in direct contrast, a small-scale, solitary figure half sits, half kneels on the ground.

This figure is completely naked and bare-foot. He is beardless and his hair is short and spiky.

His legs are so thin that the knee joints stand out by comparison. This emaciated figure with his scrawny neck and distended belly displays all the signs of starvation.

As he holds up a knife to the chest of a cow, his long tongue curls upwards. This signals that, in his abject state, he is reduced to bleeding the beast and drinking its blood for nourishment.[7]

The iconography would seem to say: What a contrast between those devoted followers, to whom ample sustenance is given by God's agency, and that starved, unclothed, primitive unbeliever having recourse to drinking animal blood. The saints' bread has Eucharistic significance.[8] The visual depiction of the richly attired, comfortably seated, well-fed, well-groomed Christians above a little naked, squatting, emaciated, ill-coiffed, uncivilised pagan – the godly haves and the have-nots – makes the spiritual point clear.

It has been suggested that the lower scene shows a pagan priest performing a blood sacrifice. This interpretation does not account for his malnourished body. Nor is it a bull sacrifice, because to my eyes it is not a bull but a heifer. In the hunt for a Biblical origin of the tableau it has been suggested that the beast might represent the Golden Calf being worshipped by an idolater, although this interpretation does not fit the imagery.

© Bob Henery

3 *St Vigeans 7: left panel*

To the left of the cross shaft are a further two scenes carved one above the other (**3**). Unfortunately only part of the upper motif remains, leaving a tantalising, mysterious fragment: between two tall, standing figures is carved the head and torso of an upside down figure. The head appears to rest on a square-shaped object. The two upright figures wear slippers like those of Anthony and Paul and long robes with patterned hems, which would indicate ecclesiastics (but also lay dignitaries, such as the three armed men on the Brough of Birsay stone are presumed to be).

The upside down figure has an open eye, big nose and chin, and hair. There is a round curl? at his forehead. It is not obvious that he is clothed. What is going on? Is a new monk being baptised in something symbolising a well, since his head is on a level with the adjacent feet, making the square object below floor-level. Another suggestion is that someone is being put to death, based on chronicle references to Picts drowning their enemies. Moreover, a Biblical source could be found in the story of boastful Simon Magus, who fell from a roof to the ground.

But it may well be that this image depicts another scene from the lives of Saints Anthony and Paul. In his extensive work on Irish high crosses, Peter Harbison deduces that the saints are here 'overcoming the devil in human form', as described by Athanasius, the upside down 'devil-faced figure' representing the devil 'in naked human form'.[9] A similar scene appears on the North Cross at Castledermot, Ireland (**4**).[10]

© Peter Harbison

4 *The panel with the inverted figure on the North Cross at Castledermot*

However, there is no square-shaped object and interpretation remains problematic.

The lower motif on the left hand of the cross shaft of St Vigeans 7 again portrays two ecclesiastics, this time one behind the other, facing towards the cross, with the square-shaped object obtruding between their heads. Shod in slippers and clad in full-length robes with

decorated hems and long, hooded over-garments, they are tonsured. A book satchel hangs from the shoulder of the rear figure. A similar motif of ecclesiastics looking to the cross is found on the Fowlis Wester 2, Papil and Bressay stones, i.e. covering a range from south to northmost Pictland.

The dignity of their pose is in direct contrast to the squatting little pagan with outstretched tongue; naturally he turns his back to the cross. Where they hold emblems of religious life, he wields a knife. The emphasised richness of their vestments contrasts with his nakedness and probably that of the upside down 'devil'. He fulfils his function admirably, which is to personify the non-Christian way.

Dr Elspeth Reid

Notes

1 Admission by contacting Arbroath Abbey.
2 Personal comment Dr Oliver O'Grady.
3 J Harden, *The Picts*, Historic Scotland (no date).
4 Sculpted from Old Red sandstone; now 168cm x 91cm (5ft 6ins x 3ft).
5 JR Allen & J Anderson, *ECMS*, III, 268 (reprint 1993). The front is shown in Fig.278.
6 Kirriemuir 1 and Nigg cross-slabs. P Harbison lists 10 definite and 2 uncertain examples in Ireland in *The High Crosses of Ireland, An Iconographical and Photographic Survey*, vol.1, p.304 (1992).
7 For general interest, I include a report from *The Old Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99). The Rev. Mr Dugal McDougal in Argyll wrote of the recent past: 'They often felt what it was to want food … to such extremity were they frequently reduced, that they were obliged to bleed their cattle, in order to subsist for some time upon the blood' (vol.3, no.20, p.185). Referring to the 19th century, Neil Gunn wrote about granny returning from the cowshed with a dish of blood when food was running low (*Butcher's Broom*, 1934).
8 G Henderson & I Henderson, *The Art of the Picts*, p.153 (2004).
9 Harbison, op. cit., vol.1, p.307.
10 Ibid., vol.3, Fig.749, top of the west face of North Cross at Castledermot, Co. Kildare.

Stop Press

PAS members will be pleased to learn that our very own Norman Atkinson has been awarded an OBE in the Queen's birthday honours list for services to the community in Angus (a note to mark his retirement from Angus Council appears in Newsletter 70).

Hearty congratulations Norman – well deserved!

JB

Northern Picts, Northern Neighbours

Pictish Arts Society Annual Conference
Saturday 4 October 2014
Caithness Horizons, Thurso

To balance last year's conference theme of 'Southern Picts, Southern Neighbours', the 2014 PAS conference is titled 'Northern Picts, Northern Neighbours'. And with such a title, it is entirely appropriate that we head north to Thurso and our conference venue, Caithness Horizons.

For those travelling north by road on Friday 3rd, there is an opportunity to meet up in the afternoon and visit the unparalleled collection of Pictish symbol stones in Dunrobin Castle Museum. By courtesy of the Duke of Sutherland, conference delegates will get into the museum for free but advance booking is required so we can confirm numbers.

Those in Thurso on Friday evening can preview the newly refurbished and extended display of Pictish and Early Medieval sculpture in Caithness Horizons. Again this is free to conference delegates but advance booking is required. There will of course be an opportunity to see this display during break times on the day of the conference.

Those staying over in Thurso on Saturday night can join a field-trip on Sunday morning which will visit Reay Village, Sandside House and Skinnet Chapel, taking in a number of stones not readily accessible to the public. This is by coach only, at a charge of £10 per person. Numbers are limited so pre-booking is advised. Access to Skinnet involves covering some potentially wet/muddy ground so delegates are advised to bring appropriate footwear.

The field-trip will return to Thurso by noon for those travelling by train. For those not rushing away, there may be an opportunity to visit the ruins of St Peter's Church.

The Conference Programme and Booking Form is enclosed

PAS Newsletter 72

The deadline for receipt of material is
Saturday 16 August 2014
Please email contributions to the editor
john.borland@rcahms.gov.uk