



THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 107 SPRING 2023

President's letter

Pictish art crops up in many surprising places. Here we have three unexpected examples: Roger White's account of the potential Pictish brooch in Shropshire; the 'Drosten' knot on a plinth beneath St Thomas of Canterbury, carved by David McGovern; and from Jane Coll, motifs from the Skinnet and Ulbster stones adorning the Northern Pilgrims' Way. Jane responded to a request in the last newsletter to share with us new art forms inspired by the Picts. Please keep these coming. Another request was to write a review of *Picts: Scourge of Rome* by Gordon Noble and Nick Evans. Nick Aitchison kindly obliged, so if any of you have hesitated to buy the book, read on.

If you are looking for an Easter outing and are prepared to venture outwith Pictland, a new museum is opening at Wooler, Northumberland (see Notices). It will provide long-awaited interpretation for the outstanding excavation at Yeavering. This was the site of King Edwin's hall, so movingly described by Bede, where Paulinus came to convert the pagans. It was unearthed in the 1950s and 60s by Brian Hope-Taylor, and excavations continue today under the Gefrin Trust, but there is no trace on the stunning wind-swept site. The museum Ad Gefrin promises to fill this gap.

We are holding back material for a bumper issue in the summer. No. 108 will contain a special

pull-out supplement prepared by Elspeth Reid and John Borland. This is the eagerly anticipated catalogue of all the symbol stones discovered since Iain Fraser produced *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland* in 2008. I would like No. 108 to focus particularly on the symbols so if you have some thoughts in that area, please keep it sane and send them in (while mindful of Isabel Henderson's warning to Katherine Forsyth 'Herein lies madness.').

On that account, have you taken a favourite photo of any Pictish stone, with or without symbols? The light might have been particularly sharp or atmospheric, you caught it at the perfect season and time of day. There might be a special reason for the photo, perhaps the moment when it was turned over to reveal its surprise. You might have group photos of PAS members in trusty anoraks collectively peering at a lump of rock. On snowy days in Aberdeenshire, I would whizz out with a soft brush and gently sweep faded stones to reveal their design in greater clarity. It was like those children's picture books where you wet the page and an image emerges. If readers are forthcoming, we could have a corner of the newsletter every time with 'My best shot of Pictish Art'.

Jane Geddes

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ROGER WHITE *Hon Research Fellow,
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Shropshire's Pictish Connection

As we all experienced during the pandemic, humans can react in predictable ways to instability and crisis. One impulse that was evidenced abundantly early in 2020 was the phenomenon of hoarding. In this case, the hoarding edged towards the bizarre – trolley loads of toilet paper being wheeled out of supermarkets were not uncommonly reported – but most hoarders opted for more essential targets, such as pasta or tomatoes, even if more modestly in scale. Hoarding comes in all shapes and sizes, of course, and need not necessarily respond directly to a crisis in society. In an age before banks, how might an individual, family, or kin-group store its individual or collective wealth? Farming communities will naturally store wealth in the food they produce, whether livestock or grain, but more complex societies usually settle on a more subjective perception of value, one that is capable of medium or long-term storage, is widely accepted across different societies and communities, and which (ideally) is portable. Bullion has for millennia been the principal choice for wealth storage, especially gold, as an incorruptible metal, but silver too as it is more abundant. Stores of wealth could be used by societies to wage war, or to oil the wheels of trade and diplomacy; wealth stores are thus also a statement of power.

It is in this context that recent study of the occurrence of silver hoards in Scotland should be seen. As is well-known to anyone who learnt Latin at school, the Romans failed to conquer northern Britain, or rather they conquered it under the Roman commander Agricola, but then the Emperor Domitian 'let it go'. As a result, the northern part of the province of Britannia was perceived to be, or actually was, under threat of attack from the Highlands. The Roman response over time was two-fold: periodic and savage invasions when things got out of hand or pay-offs in the form of silver coins to an allied tribe who could then be used to buffer attacks on the Roman province. This two-pronged strategy had consequences: the smaller tribes learned that co-operation amongst themselves led to them being better able to both attack the Romans and defend themselves, and the inflow of silver fed a growth in power. The Picts may well represent the culmination of such developments in peoples beyond the frontier, so it is no surprise to find that wealth in the Pic-

tish world was based on the conspicuous display of silver: massive and intricately made decorative chains; large plain silver hoop, or penannular brooches; and hand-pins, stick-pins with thick shanks and elaborately shaped enamelled heads that resemble a palm with the fingers held at right angles to the pin. Some of these items are decorated with the Pictish symbols that are also found carved into stone so the connection to their culture cannot be doubted.

These Pictish items of silver have not been found individually on their habitation sites or in other locations but collectively, as hoards of hack-silver – a term used to describe a hoard comprising vessels and objects of silver, and sometimes coins, that have been deliberately cut, crushed and otherwise mutilated. A better term for such discoveries might be 'wealth stores', since that is actually what they are. Three well-known hoards, all in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, offer a tantalising insight into Pictish trade, culture, and economy but also in some ways an enigmatic side-view of power relations in the Roman and immediate post-Roman era. Two of the three hoards were found at hillforts: Traprain Law, East Lothian, the largest hoard; and Norries Law, Fife; while the third was buried among the standing stones of a prehistoric site at Gaulcross, Aberdeenshire.

Traprain was found during an excavation on the hillfort in 1919 and weighs an impressive 23kg. It must have been assembled sometime at the end of the fourth century, or perhaps early in the fifth, and is the earlier hoard since it comprises exclusively Roman objects, mainly open and closed vessels, openware platters and dishes, and some military dress fittings. When first discovered its finder, Alexander Curle, automatically saw it as loot, pilaged from the Roman province by people who couldn't appreciate the beauty of the objects they had seized, instead preferring to simply cut and crush the objects to flatten them so they could be more conveniently carried away. However, recent detailed study that takes into account the many other discoveries of hacksilver hoards on the Continent, both inside and outside the Roman frontier, has led to a very different interpretation.

In the second and third century, the Roman state had paid its protection money to tribes outside its frontiers in silver coins – *denarii* – but during the third century internal and external crises within the

Empire led to a collapse in purity, and thus acceptability, of the *denarius*. Eventually, in the fourth century, a stable silver coinage, the *siliqua*, was introduced, but at a much lower weight of around 1.8g compared to the *denarius* which usually had a weight of around 3.5g. What has been realised about hacksilver hoards is that there is a direct relationship between Roman weights both of the hoards and of the objects within them. It is highly unlikely that the Picts, or for that matter any other tribe outside the frontier, will have chosen to structure hoards in such a way: this smacks of an official, i.e. Roman, way to do things. Instead of handing over bags or chests of silver coins, the authorities called in silver plate, or added scrap silver and coins, weighed out the required amount, and then handed it over to the relevant recipient. This does suggest a certain amount of crisis management: parallels can be pointed to in the time of the English Civil War when Charles I demanded the handing over of silver plate from his aristocratic supporters to be turned into coin or siege money. Thus far from being the loot of a raid, the Traprain Treasure is very likely to be an official subsidy.

Over time, of course, this was a strategy of diminishing returns. There were only so many collections of silver plate that could be called in so what happens is that the objects become more and more cut up, which is why the later hoards such as Gaulcross and Norries Law contain so few objects that are complete. In addition, these hoards show other variations. They include ingots, for instance, both cut-up and complete, which must represent objects that have been melted down into something more convenient to store or used to create other objects such as the distinctively Pictish dress items already discussed. There are also a few coins, and these too have been modified by cutting (the technical term is clipping) around the edge of the thin silver disc. This is a phenomenon seen in the largest of the precious coin hoards ever found in Britain, the Hoxne, Suffolk hoard of 14,865 gold, silver and bronze coins, more than 12,000 of which were silver. Analysis showed that many of these last had been subject to clipping to various degrees which, in its most extreme form, left only the Emperor's head and part of the reverse design surviving. Interestingly, some silver coins, specimens of which were also clipped, were found to be copies of originals. When analysed, the silver in them was identical to that of the original coins, not something a forger would do. In other words, officials seem to

have been using the shavings from the coins to create new ones to sustain the dwindling supply of *siliquae*. This must have happened at a time after Roman Britain had ceased to receive coin into the province, early in the fifth century.

The Traprain Treasure was found intact: both Norries Law and Gaulcross hoards fared less well. The former was found in 1819 and is thought to have weighed as much as 12.5kg, but most was sold to silversmiths as bullion and only 170 objects weighing 750g survive. However, it includes items that are unique to Pictish culture: an enigmatic plaque decorated with embossed spirals, a leaf-shaped plaque decorated with Pictish symbols as seen on symbol stones (a second example is now known to be a Victorian copy), and a substantial silver hand-pin decorated with red enamel. Two other apparently complete objects were a pair of penannular brooches – circular brooches which in this case have twisted hoops and broad, plain flattened terminals. The long pin that would have fastened each brooch to clothing is missing. The brooch works by pushing the free-moving pin through clothing and then rotating the brooch hoop so that one of the terminals is secured under the pin end. The Gaulcross hoard was discovered after the dynamiting of a prehistoric stone circle for agricultural improvement in 1838. After the detonation, it is said that ‘pins and brooches’ were found, but all that survived were a complete hand-pin, a spiral arm-bangle, and part of a complex silver chain. In 2013, archaeologists looking for traces of the stone circles instead found 90 silver objects from the dispersed hoard that allow us to understand it and put it in context. Like Norries Law, the objects have been hacked up and the new pieces include, in addition to ingots and coins, a link from a silver chain, and elements of the twisted hoop and part of the terminal of a Norries Law type penannular brooch.

So, how does Shropshire fit into all this? In 2018, at a metal detector rally near Wem, Shropshire, a silver hoard was recovered by three detectors.

Revisiting the site in 2019 located further objects during an excavation supervised by the author. In total 326 items were found weighing a shade over 0.5kg and comprising 79 coins, and assorted silver pieces comprising hacked up vessels, ingots, brooches and thin sheet metal.



The Wem hoard, Shropshire. The Pictish piece is towards the top, right of the brooch. Photo: Roger White

The hoard was declared treasure and was acquired by Shropshire Museums Service, at which point I started to catalogue and assess the hoard. Most of the pieces were so small and fragmented that it is impossible to securely understand what they were cut from, but vessel and spoon fragments were recognisable, along with finger rings of assorted designs and a complete penannular brooch. There were several ingots, one complete example of which was the heaviest item in the hoard – 26.44g – almost a Roman ounce (*uncia*). Another piece was recognised from the Traprain Treasure as an example of a lattice-work silver vase – only the second found in the whole Empire, but much more commonly seen in a version cut out of glass – the so-called cage cups. The coins were not surprisingly heavily clipped, but uniquely they had then been further altered by cutting into halves and quarters. This suggested to Richard Abdy at the British Museum that the hoard was very late – towards the end of the fifth century, a conclusion that Richard Hobbs also of the BM concurs with due to the very low average weight of the pieces – 1.6g. Alongside the complete ingot and the penannular brooch (10.28g), another heavy item is flat piece of silver weighing 19g.



The Pictish terminal from the Wem hoard. Photo: Roger White

At first, I couldn't understand what it was a part of – it is roughly trapezoidal, but two sides are curving. One end had definitely been cut, the other less certainly so while the curved sides were original. I thought it was an ingot, but then looking at photos of the Gaulcross hoard I noticed another piece exactly alike that is described as a hacked terminal of a Norries Law type penannular.



A penannular brooch from Norries Law (left) and the Gaulcross hoard terminal fragment (right). Photo: Alice Blackwell

Consultation with the staff at the National Museum Scotland confirmed my thoughts. Since then, we have tentatively identified more pieces that may also have come from the Pictish kingdom. We will know more when the staff from the NMS see the hoard for themselves later in February. Once they have examined the hoard, we'll be able to think more about how, and why, these pieces of Pictish culture ended up deep inside the former Roman province, to be buried at around the turn of the sixth century.

Further reading

Blackwell, A., Goldberg, M. and Hunter, F. 2017 *Scotland's Early Silver. Transforming Roman pay-offs to Pictish Treasures*. NMS, Edinburgh

Hunter, F. and Painter, K. (eds.) 2013 *Late Roman Silver. The Traprain Treasure in Context*. NMS, Edinburgh

Hunter, F., Kaufmann-Heinimann, A., and Painter, K. (eds.) 2022 *The Late Roman Treasure from Traprain Law*. NMS, Edinburgh

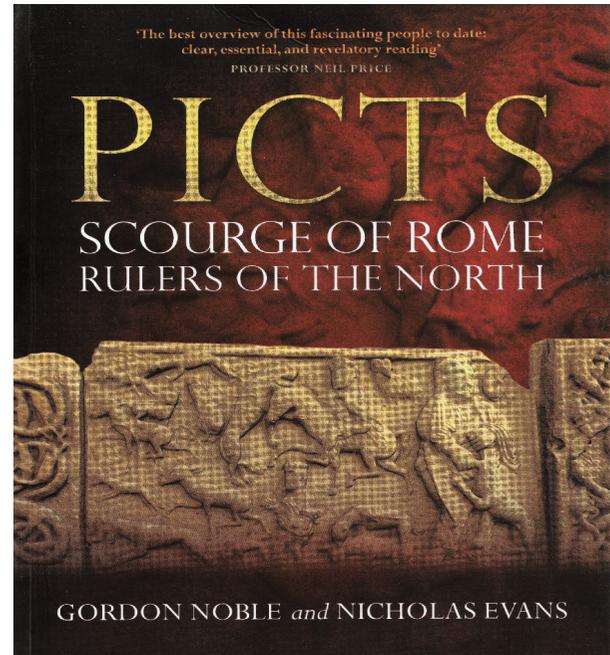
White, R.H. 2020 'A 5th-century Hacksilver Hoard from Wem, Shropshire' *Medieval Archaeology* 64.2, 365-9

NICK AITCHISON *A Pictish Triumph*

Picts: Scourge of Rome, Rulers of the North. By Gordon Noble and Nicholas Evans. Pp xvi + 336, 24 colour plates, 141 figs. Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2022. ISBN 9781780277783. £22 (pbk).

The back cover states that this is 'the first dedicated book on the Picts that covers both their archaeology and their history'. Pictish studies is not a huge field, but is beset by challenges, principally the limited and fragmentary evidence, which is often open to interpretation and has sparked some lengthy debates. The authors are ideally placed to navigate their way through this from their roles in the Northern Picts and Comparative Kingship projects at the University of Aberdeen. Professor Noble has excavated many Pictish sites, while Dr Evans has published several penetrating studies on the historical sources and issues of the period.

This book is divided into eight thematically-based chapters. After an introductory chapter, these cover settlement, fortresses, kings and warfare, religious beliefs, mortuary practices, symbols, the end of the Picts and their legacy. The authors investigate these comprehensively, weighing up and seamlessly integrating archaeological, historical and toponymic



evidence, assessing different theories and possible interpretations before reaching their own balanced and often innovative conclusions. Numerous examples could be cited, but the thoughtful approach to Pictish identity enables a more nuanced and mature debate on the extent of Pictland (pp. 24–8) in which boundaries are recognised as 'aids for analysis' rather than significant material or linguistic boundaries (p. 51). The authors rightly acknowledge uncertainty, conceding that there are problems of definition and that none are perfect (p. 49). One possible inconsistency here is that the many maps define the borders of Pictland with a solid line, rather than distinguishing graphically between areas with much, little or no Pictish evidence. The label 'Atlantic Pictland' (pp. 51–2, 70–80) is useful, although one might have expected a reference to Leslie Alcock's concept of 'peripheral Picts', while a southern border on the Antonine Wall requires more explanation.

Similarly, any chapter could be cited as an example of how much progress has been made in Pictish studies in recent decades. Those on settlement archaeology, funerary monuments, Pictish symbols and the end of the Picts are particularly noteworthy. The number of excavations and historical studies has increased steadily in recent decades, requiring exactly the sort of overview offered here to make sense of wide-ranging evidence and successfully enabling a 'critical mass' to be achieved on all these issues. Throughout the book, the Pictish evidence is placed in context within wider northern Britain, and/or compared with material from Ireland or Anglo-Saxon England. This reinforces the status of the Picts as an Insular Celtic people and ensures the wider importance of this book to early medieval studies.

This is such an impressive publication that it is difficult to make any substantial criticisms. One possible concern is that the authors not only accept Alex Woolf's repositioning of **Fortriu* from Strathern to Moray (and possibly Ross), but that this identification underpins much of their analysis. Although the relocation of **Fortriu* is now widely accepted, this theory has not been subjected to critical assessment. This may leave the discussions of not only political geography in this book, but also the wider cultural issues they are closely associated with, resting on potentially unstable foundations.

In the absence of major flaws, this reviewer is reduced to making minor, even pedantic, points. For example, the discussion on the role and status of women (pp. 87–8) overlooks the sculptural evidence, although there is a later reference to the depiction of 'high-status women' in hunting scenes, 'perhaps a queen or high-born noble' on the Hilton of Cadboll stone (p. 130), and the role of brooches as markers of status and identity on the same sculpture (p. 136). The description of *The Gododdin* as 'Welsh poems with origins in Scotland' that praise the warriors of Votadini (p. 119) seems uncharacteristically clumsy. There is a substantial bibliography (pp. 294–314) and yet there are occasional omissions. For example, the penannular brooch from Aldclune is mentioned (p. 58), but without reference to R.B.K. Stevenson's report (PSAS 115 (1985): 233–9). It is inexplicably lazy to cite a quotation from Pinkerton's *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland* (1814) as 'Isabel Henderson personal comment' (p. 221) rather than giving the actual reference. There is also a substantial index, although not all sites mentioned in the text appear there, e.g. Galson (p. 192). There are only a couple of typos: 'lined' for 'linked' (p. 48) and 'stykes' for 'styles' (p. 74).

The clear exposition of so many complex sites, sources and debates in such an eminently readable style will ensure that this is a book to which readers, academic and amateur alike, will refer and return to again and again. It marks a step-change in, perhaps even a coming of age for, Pictish studies. Anyone who began their Pictish studies with *The Problem of the Picts* (1955) should be both delighted and impressed with the progress made since then. The concept of the Picts as somehow 'problematic' should now be binned. Indeed, this book exposes just how inadequate our knowledge of the other peoples of early medieval Scotland is. In addition, the frequent references to sculptural assemblages reminds us that Scotland, scandalously, still has no project to record and publish its early medieval sculpture in a systematic and consistent manner. Much remains to be done, but Noble and Evans pro-

vide an inspiring model of what can be achieved and a springboard for future studies, not only of the Picts but, hopefully, their neighbours too.

This book is a triumph. It represents a milestone in Pictish studies, and will be the starting place for all those interested in the Picts. We will be indebted to Noble and Evans for many years to come. Attractively produced and heavily illustrated, the publishers should also be congratulated on making such a substantial volume available at an accessible price.

**NORMAN ATKINSON, BRUCE CURRIE,
JANE GEDDES, DAVID MCGOVERN**

Dishlandtown and 'Drosten's knot'



Dishlandtown Catholic church in Arbroath has recently acquired a painted fibreglass statue of its patron saint, St Thomas of Canterbury. He carries the sword which decapitated him in 1170. In 1178 King William of Scotland founded Arbroath Abbey, dedicated to St Thomas. While the cult of St Thomas waned after the Reformation and the abbey fell to ruin, the Catholic church in Dishlandtown was built in his honour by George Mathewson in 1847.

St Thomas on his plinth, Dishlandtown Catholic Church, Arbroath. Photo: Bruce Currie

David McGovern was commissioned to create a suitable plinth for the statue. It is a simple sandstone block, shaped like a Roman altar decorated with the circular four-fold knot.



The plinth, with knot, carved by David McGovern. Photo: Bruce Currie

This motif comes from the Drosten stone (VIG001) at St Vigean, just outside Arbroath. Its reappearance at Dishlandtown ties the practice of Christianity at Arbroath right back to the early ninth century. This elegant design is a relatively rare form of interlace. It fills the double discs on the Drosten symbol and also covers the boss of the St Vigean free-standing cross (VIG009).



The Drosten Stone, St Vigean, VIG001. The four-fold knot within the double-disc symbol. Photo: Historic Environment Scotland

Romilly Allen in *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* only identified one other example, on a cross-shaft at Termonfechin, Co. Louth. Was this just a coincidence or the sign of some closer connection between Angus and Ireland? St Vigean is dedicated to the Irish saint Féchin (d. 665) and Termonfechin is his Irish sanctuary.

Its use was in fact more widespread because the knot is also found within the letter N in the seventh-century Book of Durrow, and on the shaft of a cross No.2 at Aycliffe, Durham, from the later tenth century. Locally there is another example from the old church at Edzell, also carved within a double-disc symbol. Edzell church is dedicated to St Laurence, but nearby there is evidence to the cult of Drosten, an early seventh-century saint. The *Aberdeen Breviary* describes how Drosten spent his early life in Ireland, eventually retiring and becoming a hermit in Glenesk. At Tarfside he is commemorated at 'Droustie's Meadow'. Newdosk church was dedicated to St Drostan, and clearly a site of his cult with Drostan's Well just east of its graveyard. In 1662 Newdosk church and parish were annexed to Edzell. We don't know if the name 'Drosten' inscribed on VIG001 referred to the saint or perhaps a priest or secular patron, but it could be that the North Esk

congregation, at some later date, wished to commemorate their local saint by adopting this knotted 'badge' from St Vigean and that later the stone moved, with its congregation to Edzell.

The motif is a never-ending four-fold knot within a circle. It is not known whether this would have held any meaning, but at the simplest level it represents the quaternities, a cross and eternity or infinity. However the decision to place it within the heart of double-disc symbols and on cross-shafts at kneeling height suggests it was more than just decoration and perhaps a design for contemplation. Its reuse on the St Thomas plinth in 2022 shows its continuing appeal, and a continuing desire to associate with the ancient Christian community at St Vigean.

Further reading

Jane Geddes, *Hunting Picts: medieval sculpture at St Vigean, Angus*, Historic Environment Scotland, 2017

SHEILA HAINEY provides summaries of previous talks:

Cynthia Thickpenny: *Textile Makers from Early Medieval England and Pictish Artists: Shared Strategies for the Transmutation of Patterns*

Cynthia began by defining for us the transmutation of patterns as when a maker physically transformed one abstract pattern at the level of individual strands into another possessing a radically different geometry. An example is the cross-shaft on Woodwrae where interlace shifts to key pattern which then twists into spirals.



Woodwrae, National Museum of Scotland. Photo:

Wiki.

Françoise Henri, in her work on the Book of Kells, described this as the interpenetration of motifs, a term also used by Isabel Henderson in her discussion of these pattern changes in Pictish art, comparing them with those seen in the Book of Kells.

Cynthia ran through a range of patterns with different geometric structures in the repertoire of Insular art. These included interlace, with the familiar over-under-over weaving together of individual strands, zoomorphic and geometric designs. Key patterns are essentially composed of angular spiral shapes, while spirals themselves can be traced back to Iron Age Celtic motifs. Symmetrical arrangements, and alterations in size within the design are possible with spiral patterns, but impossible to achieve in key patterns. Vine-scroll can behave like interlace, often with zoomorphic elements. Spiraliform vine-scroll can also encompass plant and animal forms, as at St Vigean's, VIG 012.

With the caveat that it is almost impossible to assign Insular art to rigid categories, Cynthia identified two main ways in which transmutation can take place. Small scale transmutation involves the movement from a single unit of pattern to another different one—a device illustrated by the moves from knot to spiral in ornamenting letters in the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels for example. It has been described as a useful way of filling in small spaces. Large scale or panel transmutation on the other hand, frequently involves whole panels of ornamentation, as on Meigle 4 where, at the base of the cross-shaft, a panel of interlace transmutes into a key pattern. On the arms of the Clonmacnoise South Cross, key pattern transmutes into two-strand interlace and back around bosses. Cynthia acknowledged that discussions with modern artists, including Michael Carroll, had helped her to understand how the original artists had used these transmutations.

We were shown examples of complex patterns that might be confused with, but are not, transmutation. Some illustrated hybridity; the basic pattern being maintained in the zoomorphic interlace on the front of the Aberlemno churchyard stone, for example, or in the zoomorphic vine-scroll in the Royal Bible in the British Library. Key pattern with curvilinear embellishments can still remain key pattern, as at Rosemarkie. Other examples that are not transmutation include where we see strand terminals in animal or plant shapes. This is decoration, rather than transmutation as we can see on St Vigean's VIG 07. Other instances included inhabitation, where one pattern sits within another without touching.

Having dealt with what is not transmutation, Cynthia went on to give us detailed instances of

where it does occur and how it is achieved, taking as her exemplars paired bosses on the Nigg cross-slab and panels from f.114v of the Book of Kells. The left hand of the two Nigg bosses has a key pattern like that in some of the fields of the Kells panels. At Nigg, the key pattern wraps round the boss, transmuted into a central spiral. The types of joins seen here are 'angle', where a strand meets an angle of the key pattern, or where a strand of the spiral runs directly into a strand of key, or, finally where a 'loose' strand sits neatly over an angle of the key. On the Kells example, the key panel consists of a side-by-side repeat which transmutes into a panel of interlace. Key panel strands form outer corners of the field, which have been used to join into interlace of the next panel ('corner joins'). The interlace has been designed to fit into a space created by the cutting of key strands in the centre of the design. Cynthia emphasised the similarities of techniques used to carry out transmutation by both the stone carvers and the scribes who created the manuscript art.

Given the nature of the medium, few examples of textile work survive from the early medieval period. However, thanks to the work of scholars such as Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh and Alexandra Lester-Makin, we know something about the artists who used textiles as their medium. There is a range of documentary evidence from an Insular context which shows that these were mainly women. One Irish legal text tells us that embroiderers and flax or linen workers were to have their entitlement to nursing care adjudicated by three judges, an indication of the high status of these women. The ninth-century Anglo-Saxon Bishop Denewulf of Worcester granted a two hundred acre farm to Eanswitha as a recompense for renovating, cleaning and adding to the furnishings of the church and the bishop's vestments. Embroiderers could be business women in their own right: it has been pointed out that Eanswitha probably needed a team of assistants to carry out the work for which she obtained her farm. Embroiderers could also be wives or daughters from high status families who entered nunneries and produced works for the church in that environment. Æthelthryth, the wife of Ecgrith who left her marriage to become a nun and gained fame as the founder of Ely, was noted for the outstanding gold-work embroideries that she produced. Other wives and daughters of kings and nobles remained members of the laity but donated their works to churchmen.

The relationship of the church, as a commissioner or receiver of their work was important in allowing points of contact between the (female) embroiderers and (male) sculptors, metalworkers and scribes who produced works in their own media for the same patron.

Cynthia then introduced us to the fragmentary embroideries held in the church of St Catherine, Maaseik, Belgium. This work dates to the late eighth or ninth century, and was probably made somewhere in England before being taken to the Continent. Two strips decorated with arcading were worked in couched gold thread on a background of colourful stem stitch, which when new would have been jewel-bright behind the gold pattern. The embroiderers had first laid down an outline of the pattern in red thread then infilled with stem stitch before adding the couching. Focussing on one panel, Cynthia pointed out a 5-strand interlace panel of which one strand transmuted into a spiraliform vine-scroll on the arch to the right. Three ‘cut strands’ from the top merge into interlace on the left hand arch. This is reminiscent of interlace on the Nigg boss, but the embroiderer seems to have been more adroit in handling her transmutation than the sculptor—perhaps a reflection of the difference in the media used by the two artists.

Also among the Maaseik textiles are narrow tablet woven bands. Cynthia demonstrated how tablet weaving could be used to produce a variety of patterns, including key patterns. The technique lends itself to the transmutation of pattern as is seen on the examples from Maaseik. This fascinating aspect of her work is ongoing; perhaps we may hear more soon.

Her work with transmutation in the more familiar media of stone and manuscript and in the less well-known field of embroidered and woven textiles led Cynthia to ponder an important question. To what extent did the women who worked in textiles influence the designs of the men who worked in other media or vice versa?

James O’Driscoll: *Head for the Hills—Native large scale Hilltop Settlement in Late Roman Iron Age/Early Medieval Northern Britain*

James’ talk relates to work carried out by the Comparative Kingship Project based at the University of Aberdeen. He began by focussing on Tap o’Noth and the nearby early medieval (EM) sites at

Barflat and Cairnmore, before going on to consider possible parallels elsewhere.



Tap o’Noth, Aberdeenshire. Photo: O’Driscoll

For more than a decade, since Gordon Noble started work at Barflat, archaeological exploration has continued in the area. Briefly, the two-phase enclosure at Barflat near Rhynie yielded some evidence for settlement with Roman pottery and moulds and metalwork among other finds. The use of the site dates to around the fifth to sixth centuries AD. A barrow cemetery and Pictish carved stones have also been revealed in the vicinity.

During lockdown, when it was impossible to take a team of students on site, excavation was carried out at Cairnmore, a small hillfort site a couple of kilometres south of Barflat. Two banks and three settings of palisade posts were uncovered, possibly contemporary although the palisades may have been earlier. The post-holes were huge, over a metre across and a metre or more in depth, with some packing stones. Packing stones remained in some, and at the base of one hole the outline of a massive squared timber was still clear. A trench on the summit brought to view a great hearth, with knife-sharpening marks on the stones. Post-holes possibly once held roof supports while the walls may have been of turf, which would leave little trace. Just outside the enclosure, a floor area of 7-8 metres in diameter testified to extramural activity. Both the internal and external structures gave dates of around the fifth to sixth centuries, roughly the same as at Barflat.

The summit of Tap o’Noth is surrounded by an outer bank enclosing 16.5 hectares, making this one of the largest hilltop enclosures in Britain. The walls of an inner oblong fort are vitrified. This has been regarded as a likely Late Bronze Age (LBA) enclosure. Lidar scanning showed U-shaped banks to the south-east within the inner fort. To investi-

gate a potential Pictish period occupation of the site, four large trenches were excavated in this area: two against the fort wall, another over what appeared to be a large hut platform, and the fourth was a re-excavation of the well first explored in the nineteenth century.

Good dating material was obtained from the base of the vitrified wall and from the U-shaped bank which, it appeared, was constructed to hold back the collapse of the burnt wall. In places, low in the wall, slots which had once held large timbers were seen. Nothing was found over the potential house platform, while some fairly secure *in situ* dating material had been left by the nineteenth-century diggers in the well. This comprised wood and moss, apparently deliberately placed at the base of the well, perhaps to act as a filter. Forty-two samples were collected and dated, all within the range 400-200BC. This agrees with earlier suggestions: the walls were built, used and burnt within this period, with some attempt made to hold back the collapse of the burnt wall soon after. Nothing here suggested a later use of the site.

The outer enclosure exists as a 6-7 metre wide band of rubble still standing up to 1.2 metres high in places. An RCAHMS drawing of the site showed the enclosures and possible trackways servicing house platforms cut into the natural slope. None of these traces appear on the flatter area to the south-east. Ian Ralston had identified approximately 220 of these platforms; LIDAR and photogrammetry surveys have pushed this to more than 800. Ranging in size from 3-11 metres in diameter, the majority fall into the 6-8 meter range. The larger appear to lie towards the edge of concentrations of smaller platforms. Neither where the ground was either very steep nor on the flat area were any visible. Elsewhere, the ground seemed to have been fairly densely covered.

The outer enclosure and two house platforms were tackled in 2019. A kerb-defined stone bank, a remnant of wall and the remains of a palisade trench gave further indications of a further house not seen on the surface. This suggests that the potential number, taking into account the flat area of the enclosure, is more than a thousand. The first of the house platforms to be excavated had two well-defined hearths and showed evidence for several phases on the same stance. Late Roman Iron Age (LRIA) pottery and a mould fragment similar to one from Barflat were found here. Walls and house platform returned C^{14} dates of between 200-400 AD, with the

lower level floors belonging to the first half and the upper to the second half of the period.

So far, ten platforms have been excavated, with further work planned. One had good evidence for a turf bank and roof supports with pottery, bone deposits, metal working and iron nails. Hand-made pottery from the upper layers was of native origin, possibly even made on site. One fragment, the base of a pot, appeared to have been modelled in the shape of an amphora base, with lines incised to imitate the marks characteristic of wheel-thrown work. Another platform had four sequential hearths, showing multiple phases, and turf outer bank. This also yielded pottery and iron artefacts. Roman, or at least imported, pottery came from the lower layers, while native pottery and stone palettes were found in the upper layers.

Among other finds from these excavations were a painted cobble with a crescent shape, a fragment of Roman glass, glass beads and a fragment of bronze as well as more native pottery and worked stone. Horse bones were found at one spot within the terrace material.

The evidence points to this as being an extensive LRIA/EM (late Roman Iron Age/Early Medieval) settlement which expanded from the third to the fifth/sixth century AD before it collapsed and was abandoned. By the fifth/sixth century, a timber palisade, 1.5 kilometres long, enclosed the largest (known) hillfort and settlement in northern Britain. Is it unique?

The answer is: probably not. James ran through a series of large hilltop enclosed settlements potentially occupied in the LRIA/EM period, beginning with Eildon Hill North which bears some resemblance to Tap o'Noth. RCAHMS survey drawings show a rampart surrounding 18.5 hectares of hilltop, with a second enclosure around the hilltop and another lower down. A flat area within the main enclosure has been given over to forestry. Olwyn Owen carried out excavations here in the 1970's, obtaining evidence to suggest an LBA date for the inner rampart and postholes. She favoured this date for the construction and occupation of the site despite finding Roman period artefacts both within the enclosure core and at three house platforms. Photogrammetry survey suggests that the third enclosure on the RCAHMS plan is in fact a trackway servicing some of the more than 500 house platforms on the site. The Comparative Kingship group have carried out some investigations here, examining the enclosing structures and uncov-

ering some midden material. While still waiting the results of C¹⁴ dating, James suggested that this may be an example of a large-scale EM enclosed settlement, perhaps with re-use of some existing structures.

At Traprain Law, there are at least four enclosing elements to the 16 hectare site. The ‘Cruden Wall’ has been dated to the third, fourth or possibly fifth century AD. The early twentieth century excavations of Curle and Cree identified numerous hearths from LRIA/EM levels, and this appears to be another LBA site reused and refortified with extensive settlement in the LRIA/AM period.

At Burnswark, a native hillfort lies between two Roman camps. The complex has been variously interpreted as the site of a Roman practice siege of an earlier, abandoned native site or as evidence of a real siege of a large native settlement. C¹⁴ dates suggested occupation in the EIA for the earlier phase, with potential re-use. Jobey’s work here points to dense internal settlement in the Roman Iron Age (RIA). Was the settlement large enough to attract the attention of the Roman army?

Another hilltop site at Yeavinger Bell in Northumberland has been assumed to be of LBA date, but the only artefacts found here were dated to the RIA. The site is tantalisingly close to the Anglo-Saxon site at Yeavinger.

Other potential sites yet to be investigated in the border area include Hownam Law and Old Fawdon Hill, both with the characteristic non-overlapping house platforms served by trackways within a large enclosure.

In Wales, the 4.5-5 hectare hillfort of Foel Drygarn was densely settled around the LIA/RIA period. Artefacts from the small enclosure on the east side of the large site at Garn Boduam also yielded artefacts dating between the first to seventh centuries, while early twentieth-century excavations at Tre’r Cairi uncovered artefacts from 150-400AD at another potential large scale settlement.

Brusselstown Ring, the 42.5 hectare bivallate hillfort in County Wicklow has at least 480 non-overlapping house platforms, and may well be the Dún Bolg referenced in the Bórama Laigen and Fingal Rónáin, as well as several Irish annals. This would date at least one phase of occupation here to the early medieval period.

Sites similar to Tap o’Noth, and dating to the same period of occupation, are known from across a wide area. But they pose a number of questions. Were these permanent year round settlements, or

seasonal camps, or assembly places? Their size, scale, density and layout of internal occupation might suggest that these are proto-urban towns. On the Continent, the first urban centres north of the Alps appear to have been the *Furstensitze*—the princely seats that first appeared around the sixth century BC. However, in north Britain, the first signs of urbanisation were not thought to have appeared before the end of the first millennium AD. James had assembled evidence for a number of large-scale settlements date to the LIA/LRIA/EM period across northern Britain, in Wales and Ireland and asked the question—could these be urban?

A number of criteria have been put forward for defining urban centres, and we have archaeological evidence to show that a number of these are met by the northern large-scale settlements. These include a dense and compact layout, variability of architecture, long-lasting continuity of spatial layout, defined public spaces, evidence for crafting and trade, and long distance contacts. Other features of urban centres have not as yet been identified. While these settlements were dramatically different from the small independent farmsteads familiar from this era, it is not clear that they acted as regional centres, or were home to religious institutions, or played a role in protection and lordship for example. Was the RIA/EM period the beginning or the peak of a phase of large-scale settlement? James left us in no doubt that there are still many more questions about this period of the history of northern Britain waiting to be explored.

Mark Hall: *The Art & Archaeology of Play: Insular Board Games and Beyond*

(I must preface this report with an apology for the lack of much detail. Unfortunately, there were problems with the sound quality during Mark’s talk.)

Mark began by acknowledging that his talk was, in part, based on work carried out jointly with Katherine Forsyth. He also thanked Anna Ritchie for her inspiration, which he traced back to her paper ‘The Picto-Scottish Interface in Material Culture’ in *The Picts—a New Look at Old Problems*, grounded in her work on Orkney and the Northern Isles. He also noted her work on the graffiti gaming boards found at Inchmarnock, Bute. Although ‘Picto-Scottish’ as a term was only fashionable for a short while, the emphasis on interaction remains valid.

Moving on to his main theme, Mark traced the origins of board games in an Insular context to

Roman influences. Aspects of Roman culture, including gaming, found their way to Britain through diplomatic and trade contacts before the invasion. Evidence comes from bone dice and counters and pegs in stone, bone and glass found in a number of early graves, such as the ‘Doctor’s Grave’ at Stanway, Colchester, and an early one at Welwyn, St Albans. Such items are known from graves across Europe, including the ‘Gambler’s Grave’ at Knowth, in Ireland. That included bone dice and gaming pieces as well as smooth pebbles that may have been game counters.

Parallelepiped dice are among the earliest gaming pieces to have been found in Pictland. These are rectangular, elongated cuboid in shape, and marked only on the long faces. Most have come from undated contexts, although at Scalloway a date of around 500 AD is possible. The Pictish examples are mainly of bone and have come from the western and northern isles. As David Clarke pointed out, this pattern may reflect the availability of raw materials: more perishable wood may have been used elsewhere. Parallelepiped dice probably derived from astragali, small bones from the lower leg of quadrupeds. These have been found in contexts suggesting their use in divination or in games of chance across a wide area, dating back several millennia at sites in the Near East and elsewhere. Two astragali marked with Pictish symbols have been found at the Broch of Burrian. Each of the four long faces of an astragalus is distinct; each of the four long faces of a parallelepiped die were numbered (1, 3, 4 and 6 on dice used in the Roman game of Twelve Lives).

Cubic dice developed in the context of Roman gaming, and their use spread across the Continent. This led to the appearance of accessories to minimise the player’s contact with the dice (and hence the opportunities to cheat). Mark showed a replica of the rare gaming tower found at a Roman villa site at Froitzheim, near to the imperial border. Dice were put into the top of the tower and then fell through a series of baffles, setting little bells jingling as they landed on steps flanked by dolphins at the base. Famously, this bears a fretwork inscription ‘*Pictos victos hostis deleta ludite secure*’ (The Picts conquered, the enemy destroyed, play safely) on the front face and the injunction ‘*Utere felix vivas*’ (Use happily, may you live well) around the top of the other three sides. This item may have come to Froitzheim in the baggage of a high ranking officer in the Roman army—there is a fort nearby—or

been a diplomatic gift to an influential landowner. It would certainly seem to be the property of someone of high rank in society.

Returning to Pictland, graffiti gaming boards are relatively frequent finds, often in the company of shells or naturally polished stones that served as gaming pieces. While these may indicate that gaming was widespread across society, we also have some evidence for games played by members of an elite. Quite sophisticated gaming pieces have been found at a range of sites across the Insular world and beyond, wrought in wood, metal, bone, glass and ivory. From the Anglo-Saxon grave at Taplow came elegant pieces worked in ivory and ornamented with gold; those from Sutton Hoo are sadly degraded. A spectacular wooden board was found at Ballinderry crannog in central Ireland with elegant playing pieces of gilded wood, bone and ivory. Playing pieces from Mail and Scalloway in Shetland are among the earliest anthropomorphic versions, dating from around the early sixth century. Although Anglo-Saxon evidence is rare, an elaborately decorated board and gaming pieces from an eleventh-century context at Gloucester Castle show elements of Insular art in their ornamentation.

Written evidence from across the Insular world and beyond gives us some clues as to how board games were viewed and who played them. There is an element of sympathetic magic in the description of a king of the Heruli playing a board game in an unsuccessful attempt to influence the outcome of a battle with the Longobards. Arthur, in the tale of Culwch and Olwen, sweeps the pieces from the board as he sits playing, and so ensures the victory of his army in a battle. Norse legends register a connection between board games, creation and the post-Ragnarok world. The use of pegged pieces, held in place on the board by an attached peg or spike, is confirmed in several tales from both Ireland and Iceland, where individuals are wounded or blinded by being struck by the point of a gaming piece.

Board games fell into two main groups, both for two players. The first, exemplified by the Roman Game of Twelve Lives was the forerunner of backgammon and similar games, while the second probably owes its origins to *ludus latrunculorum*, a game of strategy that perhaps developed from earlier Greek games. This gave rise to the ‘*tafl*’ family of games in the north—*hnefatafl* among the Vikings, *gwyddbwyll* for the Celts of Wales and *fidcheall* in Ireland. These seem to have

been local developments from a common ancestor. The layout of the boards for these two groups of games were very different.

Mark showed examples of exquisite trailed glass gaming pieces.



Glass stud from a pegged gaming piece, Dundurn hillfort. Photo: M A Hall, courtesy Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow

Some of these showed marked affinity with continental samples. However three of these, from Dundurn, Much Wenlock and Lindisfarne were almost certainly imported, possibly from Ireland. The latter two are among a number of finds which point to gaming in religious contexts. The graffiti boards at Inchmarnock, for example, may have been used in the teaching of board games to young high-ranked pupils, or alternatively indicate gaming as pastime for the monks themselves.

This led on to the question of games in a Christian context. From early days, there is evidence of tension in the attitude of the Church towards game playing. Dice were associated with the scene at the foot of the Cross, where soldiers threw to determine the division of Christ's clothes among them. As such, writers like Isidore of Seville disapproved of games that involved dice. On the other hand, Augustine of Hippo sanctioned the use of dice in the form of divination known as the *Sortes Apostolorum*. The *Sortes* may reflect Christian use of earlier means of seeking divine advice or foretelling the future by casting dice to decide between a variety of possible outcomes.

On the other hand, the playing of board games as pastimes was also controversial. Gregory of

Tours, in his lengthy account of a rebellion by some of the nuns in the convent of the Holy Cross founded by St Radegund, tells us that one of the complaints against Abbess Leubovera was that she played board games. The Abbess admitted this charge to the bishops who were asked to adjudicate the matter, but pointed out that she had played in Radegund's time and that she was unaware of any prohibition in the rules governing the nunnery. It should be noted that all of the women involved were of royal or aristocratic status and almost certainly had played board games before entering the religious life. Powerful guests and patrons, staying temporarily in monasteries, expected to be able to play during their residence; monks and nuns, not infrequently themselves children of royalty or nobility, expected to be able to continue to play and were expected to be able to teach gaming skills to their young pupils from similar backgrounds.

Given these circumstances, the Church adapted board games to its own use for theological propaganda. Mark went into some detail about the game of *Alea Evangelii*. A drawing of a board for this game, in an eleventh-century manuscript held at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, is believed to have been copied from a version taken to Ireland from Athelstan's court by Dub Innse, Bishop of Bangor, around the middle of the tenth century. It would seem to have been a rather long-drawn out affair, taking many hours to play, but it is redolent of Christian allegory.

We hope that Mark will be able to share further thoughts on this intriguing topic in the not-too-distant future.

Victoria Whitworth: *The Bullion Stone in Context*

Victoria began by examining attitudes towards the Bullion Stone since its rediscovery. Not so very long ago, the Bullion Rider featured on a wide range of National Museums of Scotland merchandise, including hips flasks; the image obviously picked up as marketing tool. She also showed a Tweet from NMS, inviting followers to 'party like it's 950AD' with the familiar image of the Bullion rider. The twenty-first-century interpretation of the man portrayed on the stone, as marketed by NMS, would appear to be that of a drunken party animal.



The Bullion Stone, Invergowrie. National Museum of Scotland

In 1934, the *Courier* reported the uncovering of the stone under the headline 'Relics found in Carse'. The stone had lain a metre below the surface of a gravelly ridge to the north-west of Invergowrie, and was uncovered during the extension of the Dundee bypass, on the eastern edge of the Carse of Gowrie. The find spot is a short distance from the site of the old St Peter's Kirk, Invergowrie. With its own examples of Pictish sculpture, the site is plausibly one of a group of ancient Petrine dedications, of the same period as Restenneth and Tealing. Both the church and the find spot of the stone lie close to the Gowrie burn and an ancient route way may have followed the path of the burn from the coast at Invergowrie, to Benvie, where a Pictish cross-slab with riders on the reverse was found. In the account of the discovery in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* of 1934, the Bullion Stone was simply described as of 'a type quite new in Scottish archaeology', without enlarging on why the stone was so unusual.

Almost from the point at which the stone was rediscovered, it was seized on for marketing purposes. The Ordnance Survey, whose original remit of mapping the country for military reasons had been considerably enlarged, employed O.G.S. Crawford as its first archaeological officer in 1920. Following the success of his map of *Roman Britain* (1924), a range of historical maps appeared, with *Dark Age Britain* (north sheet) appearing in 1938. In his introduction, Brigadier MacLeod, Director-general of the OS, stated that the design on the cover was 'intended to suggest the culture of the period'. The recently uncovered Bullion Stone takes centre place, set on a patch of grass, flanked by interlace from Bewcastle and Hilton of Cadboll, and with a selection of images based on symbols and other design elements from early medieval carved stones

above and below. The Brigadier refers to the Bullion Stone as a 'grave slab,' but there was nothing to support this description at the find site. In 1938, defining the 'Dark Ages' in north Britain was regarded as problematic, and there was also uncertainty over the dating of carved stones incorporating crosses. Thus, although symbol stones, symbols in caves, and stones bearing bulls at Burghead and the Ardross wolf were marked on the main map, cross-slabs with and without symbols and crosses and cross-slabs with vine-scroll were shown on small accompanying outline maps. However, the Bullion Stone, the central feature of the cover, is missing entirely.

The 1966 edition of *Britain in the Dark Ages* was produced as a single map covering north and south, with the cover based on the Sutton Hoo helmet. Although cross-slabs (with and without symbols) and crosses were among the additions to the main map, the Bullion Stone was still missing.

Victoria went on to consider the stone against the background of Pictish sculpture. She examined the poses and activities of riders on other Pictish monuments. It is rare for Pictish riders to be shown doing anything but ride: a huntsman at Kirriemuir spears a deer, while on the St Andrews sarcophagus David is shown with his sword raised in his right hand to parry the attack of a lion. On his left hand is balanced a bird of prey. In other instances, the rider's seat is shown to be adapted to the gait of his horse, as on the Rossie Priory stone where one horse stands still, one appears to be jumping and three trot. The position of the riders varies accordingly. On the ninth-century Constantine's Cross at Dupplin and at Benvie, the horsemen appear to be taking part in a dignified procession. In most cases, these riders move from right to left (their left hand side is towards the viewer). The Pictish stone carvers were capable of realistic representation of horses. Victoria contrasted Pictish horses with examples from Hornhausen in Central Germany, picture stones from Gotland and the Repton no. 1 cross fragment. The Pictish examples are skilled products of a culture interested in the representation of horses and riders.

Although the National Museum of Scotland gives an unexplained mid-tenth century date for the Bullion stone, it is placed at the dark entrance to 'Early Peoples', on a different floor from the Inver-

gowrie cross-slab at the brightly-lit entrance to the 'Kingdom of the Scots'. Pictish stones were usually dressed by the eighth century. Set beside, for example, the Aberlemno Roadside cross-slab, the rough-surfaced Bullion stone would look archaic, more in company with the symbol stone there. There are other features that set the Bullion stone apart: the trapezoidal setting, for example. Here we have a stone that is neither shaped nor dressed as was the norm by the eighth century. There is no cross, nor any lettering, but the carving is accurate and detailed. Victoria sees this as a conscious choice, and suggested that the artist had deliberately inverted the norms of heroic masculinity. The rider is bald with a large beard, unlike the curly hair and neat beards of other riders. His shield is suspended on the right hand side of his body, not held on his left. However, what may be the tip of the scabbard suggests that his sword hung on his left side, so that he may have been right handed. Again, if this is indeed a scabbard, its position and representation are unusual. Unlike most of the other representations of riders on Pictish stones, this one moves from left to right. The horse appears stiff legged, its head hanging as if tired, whereas other Pictish horses generally seem alert and lively, and their riders have a firm grip of the reins. The Bullion man drinks from a large drinking horn (the NMS replica could hold a gallon), reins loosely flopping over the horse's neck. He rides and drinks alone, contrary to the heroic image of feasting and drinking in the shelter of a great hall.

The Bullion Stone is not the only uncategorisable piece of Pictish sculpture: there are a number of other fragmentary stones which are difficult to place. Lacking the hallowing of the cross and whatever social benediction symbols conveyed, the Bullion rider is solitary, outside the supporting framework of both church and society. The stone, in the immediacy of the carving and in its transgressive qualities is unique. It contrasts vividly with the Invergowrie 1 cross-slab: there the exquisitely ornamented cross face is striking in its regular perfection, while on the reverse, three clerical figures face out from a panel over a pair of fantastic animals whose intertwined limbs repeatedly make the sign of the cross.

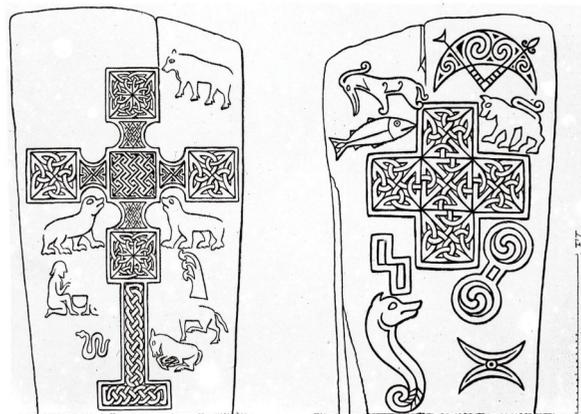
Alcock suggested that this was a caricature of a real individual, although it is hard to imagine any

wealthy individual commissioning such a representation of himself. Was it perhaps a satire on the heroic conventions of aristocratic life? Or plausibly a sermon in stone, in the tradition of Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae*, with its awful warnings against drunkenness and accumulation of sins directed at Maglocunus? Sited as it was between the more conventionally represented Pictish riders on Invergowrie 2 and Benvie, both ascribed to the mid-ninth century, was this meant as a pointed warning to the aristocratic Picts of the area?

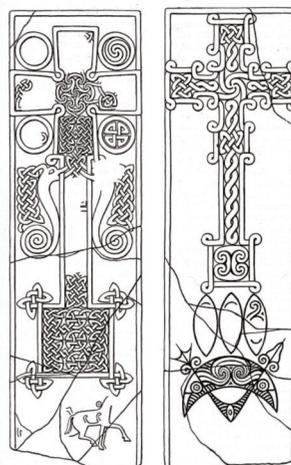
When it was found, the carving was still crisp, with very little sign of weathering, although broken. Had someone objected to seeing this drunken elderly figure prominently displayed and had the stone levelled and concealed?

Art work from Skinnet and Ulbster sent in by JANE COLL.

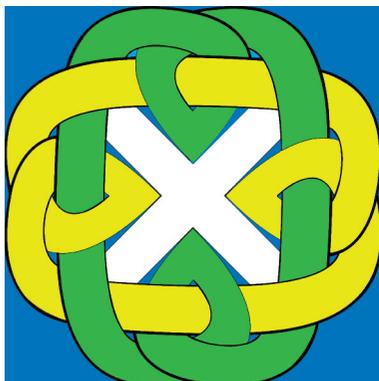
These stones inspired motifs for the Northern Pilgrims' Way and the Northern Saints' Trail: <https://www.northernpilgrimsway.co.uk/>



Ulbster, now in Thurso Museum. Allen and Anderson, 1903, p.34, figs. 31, 31A.



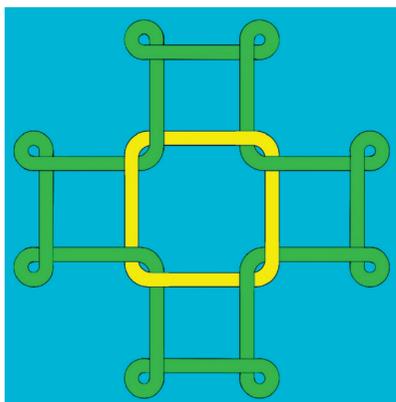
Skinnet, now in Thurso Museum. Allen and Anderson, 1903, p.32, figs. 29, 29A.



Northern Pilgrims' Way logo, inspired by Ulbster



Wooden pilgrim token, also available as a knitting pattern



Northern Saints' Trail logo, inspired by Skinnet

SPRING LECTURES 2023

Friday 17 March - Dr Mark Hall
Early Medieval Sculpture from Dunkeld and its region

Friday 21 April - Dr Adrián Maldonado
Pictish hoards revisited: Croy in its Viking-age context

Friday 19 May - Cormac Bourke
The Early Medieval Hand-bells of Ireland and Britain

Lectures will be online, starting at 7.30pm. Zoom links will be circulated to members in advance.

AD GEFRIN OPENING

The museum of Ad Gefrin, Wooler, Northumberland, opens **25 March**. <https://adgefrin.co.uk/> The site of King Edwin's Anglo-Saxon hall at Yeavinger has finally got its own museum, combined with a new distillery and café. The archaeological site is a spectacular location but has nothing to show above ground; the museum promises new interpretations and vivid display. For a reminder of the excavation, viewing Brian Hope-Taylor's original movie 'The Lost Centuries' is highly recommended. It is on the web site for the Gefrin Trust. The start will make you smile! <https://gefrintrust.org/the-lost-centuries/>

FIELD TRIP

Aberdeenshire, up the Dee and down the Don

We shall be organising a field trip on **Sunday June 18, 2023**. The route is not quite fixed yet so I'm open to suggestions. We would start at Aberdeen station so members can arrange to come by train. Ideas include Beannachar (to see the Dunningcaer stones) Formaston (Aboyne, has toilet beside stone), Tullich new display, Ballater for toilet, bring own picnic to eat en route, Migvie, Rhynie, Leith Hall new display, Dyce. This is probably too much, so detailed plans will include a timed schedule to get back to a decent train at Aberdeen.

Meantime, I would be very grateful if the membership could get back to me if they are potentially coming. I can't get a final price for the bus unless we know how many are wanting to join us. I will of course put out a firm and costed invitation for the trip nearer the time.

People coming a long way may wish to spend Saturday night in Aberdeen, in which case we'll make sure we have a good PAS evening out. Please send views/ wish to attend to j.geddes@abdn.ac.uk.

CONFERENCE 2023

The conference will be held by Zoom across two afternoon sessions on **Sat 7-Sun 8 October 2023**. If you would like to suggest a paper, please contact Jane Geddes: j.geddes@abdn.ac.uk We warmly invite international speakers to join in now that we are all virtual.

PAS Newsletter 108

Deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 20 May 2023

Please email contributions to the editor.

jane.geddes@abdn.ac.uk