THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER 82 SPRING 2017

PAS Conference: The Northern Picts

Saturday 8 October 2016 – Afternoon Session

The first speaker of the afternoon was **Dr Gordon Noble** with a paper was entitled *The Northern Picts Project: Latest Progress and Results*. Gordon, who is Head of the Department of Archaeology at Aberdeen University, has been the driving force behind The Northern Picts Project, a wide-ranging investigation into the archaeological traces of the post-Roman peoples of northern Scotland.

Over the years, he and his colleagues have investigated many potential Pictish sites in the Highlands and Aberdeenshire. At many of them very little has been found. However, there have also been some spectacular successes.

One outstanding example was the case of the Gaulcross hoard. About 1837, a group of silver objects was found 'in the ring cairn of a recumbent stone circle called Gaulcross at Ley, Fordyce'. Only three items, a handpin, a bracelet and an intricate silver chain survived to find their way eventually to the National Museum of Scotland. A collaboration with researchers from the museum led to the identification of the field where the original find was made. In 2013, work with metal detectorists led to the discovery of at least another eighty fragments of silver, including late Roman coins. Excavations around the area found no features that could be dated to this period, but the collection of silver has provided much material for study.

Another very successful excavation was the sea stack of Dunnicaer on the Kincardineshire coast. In the early 19th century, a group of local youths climbed the stack and found a number of small stones crudely incised with what were thought to be an early form of Pictish symbols. Six of these have been preserved. It has been suggested that these are the remains of ecclesiastical buildings, a monastery or a monkish retreat, but no investigations had been carried out before the Northern Picts Project got involved in some extreme archaeology from 2015. The stack is now very difficult and dangerous to access, but the team found the remains of structures on its summit. With the help of a professional mountaineer, the team got to the summit and found evidence for encircling walls which enclosed buildings, hearths, timber beams and metalled surfaces. Among the finds were Samian pottery and evidence of metal working. It was also obvious that the site had suffered badly from erosion. Occupation of the site dated to the third or fourth centuries AD before it was abandoned. The people who used Dunnicaer may have moved the short distance south to the larger site at Dunnottar.

A site of a different type is at Kinneddar in Moray. A number of fragments of early medieval carved stones have been recovered around here, and there have been some investigations of the site of a possible medieval Bishop's Palace. However, Ian Keillor noted what may be an earlier monastic vallum. A geophysical survey in 2016 confirmed that this may be on the scale of the vallum at Portmahomack.

Finally, Gordon briefly described the team's discoveries at Rhynie. The name 'Rhynie' probably comes from a root meaning 'king' (meaning something like 'royal place') and a number of Class I Pictish symbol stones have been found in the area. Aerial photography has shown the existence of a number of enclosures around the Craw Stane and the find spot of 'Rhynie Man'. Geophysical surveys carried out in 2005 showed that two of the enclosures at the Craw Stane were probably ditched while the third was palisaded, with a total area of about 50x60 metres. Excavations got under way in 2011. The Craw Stane stood at the entrance way to a defended enclosure. There was a socket for another stone by the entrance, one which would fit the Rhynie Man stone, found downslope from here. Rectangular buildings stood within the enclosures and a rich collection of artefacts has been recovered: fragments of glass drinking beakers from France, later Roman period amphorae from the eastern Mediterranean, metalwork including an unusual axe-headed pin as well as evidence for metal working. Dates for occupation of the site show it to have been in use over a relatively short period in the 5th–6th centuries.

The most recent season uncovered an exciting dump of metalworking debris in the outer ditch. As well as metal working residues, there are the remains of moulds for objects such as penannular brooches, pins, a possible sword, other fragments that may have been used to cast ornamental mounts and some for objects not so far represented in finds from the Pictish period, as well as possible stands for crucibles. The evidence suggests that silver was worked at Rhynie. There are plans to collaborate with Gray's School of Art to scan the moulds and use 3D-printing techniques to reveal something of the range of Pictish metalwork manufactured here.

Another local collaboration was with the art collective Rhynie Woman, who organised a combination of art events, exploration of Rhynie's Pictish past and its wider area, and a pop-up coffee shop and information hub to supply all who came to visit. This outreach project aims to see walks around the archaeological sites in the Rhynie environs which will be the targets for future work, culminating at the end of the season in a torchlit procession to the spectacular hillfort on Tap o' Noth.

The second paper of the afternoon session was jointly given by **David Anderson** and Leanne **Demay** and was called *Ploughs, Pictish Stones & Port: Excavations at Dandaleith 2014.* David began by introducing himself as a freelance field archaeologist, and Leanne as the University of the Highlands and Islands Student of the Year, 2015. Together, they went on to give an account of investigations at the find site of the Dandaleith stone.

To briefly recap: the Dandaleith stone is a large pink granite boulder, 1.7metres long and weighing 670 kilograms. It was found during ploughing in May 2013, making its presence known when it broke the plough. When it was eventually removed from the ground, carvings were noticed on the stone so it was taken to the farm barn and Aberdeenshire's county archaeologists were notified. After conservation, the stone has gone on display in Elgin Museum. Unusually, it is carved on two adjoining faces, in the same orientation, with an eagle above a crescent and v-rod on one face and a mirror case over a notched rectangle and Z-rod on the other. The latter pair of symbols can also be seen on the stone from Arndilly, across the Spey from Dandaleith.

A desk-based assessment of the area was carried out in 2014. The meaning of the place name 'Dandaleith' is unclear: it may have a Gaelic origin. The earliest known record dates to the 13th century, and it appears on Roy's map in the mid-18th century. The land is known to have been farmed continuously since about then. Dandaleith was hit by the Muckle Spate of 1829, which carried away many acres of farmland, and may have had enough force to move this massive stone. However, the clarity of the carving suggests that if it were swept here by the flood, it was not subject to much abrasion. That would suggest that it did not travel far.

Gordon Noble carried out geophysical surveys of the location of the find site as recorded by the GPS on the tractor at the time the stone broke the plough. Neither magnetometry nor resistivity showed up anything of significance. Fieldwalking was carried out across the stubble left after harvest – not ideal conditions – but a few much-abraded medieval sherds were picked up. They probably were deposited with the contents of a midden as part of the manuring process. Metal detecting over the area found nothing of early provenance.

Finally, David and Leanne, with a mostly volunteer team, dug five trial trenches. One was positioned at the find spot; another was placed over what was possibly an old field boundary to the west of it. Two others were put in over other possible features. Nothing but modern farming activity was uncovered. The weather was the coldest that David had ever encountered on an excavation, and there was little to suggest where the one remaining trench could most usefully be dug. Finally, the location was decided by the unusual method of dowsing over the area and digging where there was a strong reaction from the rods. This proved the most successful of all: a darker area, roughly 7 x 4 metres showed up, with charcoal and evidence for metalworking. At last, with something to celebrate, the team celebrated with the help of a glass of heart-warming port!

The structure uncovered in the 5th trench appears to have been of turf, rebuilt several times, with no signs of stone footings or any other stone work. There were postholes at the gable end, which may have held timber roof supports. Very few finds were recovered; these included charcoal and iron slag, as well as grains and other plant material which is still undergoing post-excavation investigation. A date of 7th–9th centuries was obtained from the charcoal, which compares with the 6th–8th century date estimated for the stone. No signs of fortifications or enclosure were discovered.

It has been suggested that the name Dandaleith may derive from the Gaelic meaning 'fort of two halves'. The possibility was raised that the Arndilly stone, found on the other side of the Spey and also carrying a mirror case and notched rectangle with Z rod, may be closely related to the Dandaleith stone – perhaps there was once a fort marked by the two stones. David ended by thanking all those who had contributed to making the work possible, especially the local volunteers who braved the elements on the excavation. *Sheila Hainey*

Sunday 9 October – Field Trip

Early morning mist still shrouded the Kessock Bridge as our coach set off from the car park of Highland Council HQ in the centre of Inverness but by the time we arrived at Moniack Castle, our first port of call of the day, any mist on the Beauly Firth had lifted. Moniack is home to the Balblair Stone, found a few miles to the west.

One of those rare Pictish stones featuring a solo walking man, the Balblair Stone stands in the grounds of the Castle, arranged with several other standing stones and boulders to form something of a rockery. A number of cupmarks – perhaps as many as 16 – indicate this was originally a standing stone decorated in the Bronze Age. Being weathered and having a thick covering of lichen, the stone at first glance appeared devoid of any carving but as we got our eye in, the figure became clearer. Soon we could discern his distinctive tunic and headdress/hairstyle, his prominent nose and the club or sword carried in his hand. Discussion centred on said features: Was it a headdress or hair? Was that his nose or could it be a mask? Did he carry a sword or club? We also debated the other examples of this relatively rare symbol at Westerton in Angus, Collessie in Fife, and Rhynie in Aberdeenshire. Moniack Castle is a private residence so we were grateful to the owners for permission to visit.

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Delegates admire the Strathpeffer 'Eagle' stone

Boarding the bus again, we headed to Strathpeffer and its symbol stone. It sits atop a small cairn-like mound on the north edge of the village, thought by some to be its original location. There is no mistaking the bold and well-preserved carvings on this stone: a horseshoe symbol over an eagle. The clarity of the carving and a brightening day gave us the best possible conditions to enjoy this stone.

We then journeyed to Dingwall and another symbol stone erected in front of St Clement's Parish Church. Surrounded now by ring-roads, car parks and a supermarket, this churchyard is a small island of old Dingwall amid a sea of modern development. The symbol stone was first noted in 1880 in use as a lintel above a doorway in the early 19th-century church. It was subsequently removed and erected on the south side of the graveyard. Worn and weathered, it bears symbols on both sides. On one a double-disc and Z-rod over two crescent and V-rod symbols, on the other three circles over a crescent and V-rod. Cup marks attest to the fact that this too was a prehistoric stone re-used by the Picts. On our arrival, the bright late-morning sun raked across the east side of the stone, illuminating the symbols beautifully. As we looked at and discussed this side, the sun gradually moved round and before long it was lighting the west face. We were particularly interested to be reminded by Daniel MacLean, one of Saturday's speakers, that a small metalworking mould in the form of three circles had been found during the excavations at Rhynie

After a lunch break, we boarded the coach again and headed south to Tore and the picturesque self-catering cottage (and former farm) of Cotterton (Cottertown on Canmore). This too is a private residence and we were once again grateful to the owners for permission to visit. A fragment of well-preserved symbol stone was discovered here a few years ago, built into one of the farm buildings. It was perhaps covered with harling prior to discovery and this may have helped to preserve the carving. At the top of the stone, now trimmed back to a straight edge, is part of a crescent. This could be a crescent without rod or perhaps a double crescent. Below this symbol is a Pictish beast along with a comb and part of a mirror. A second incised stone was also found at Cotterton, built into the front wall of the house. It is a small stone and very little carving is evident so it is difficult to say with any certainty what it is or indeed if it is Pictish. However it is possible, with a great deal of conjecture, to interpret this stone as being part of a goose symbol.

Our last stop of the day was Groam House Museum in Rosemarkie with its remarkable collection of sculpture. Up until this point, all the stones we had visited had been incised symbol stones but now we got to admire the skill and craftsmanship that went into Pictish Christian sculpture. With many pieces to peruse, some great and others small, numerous discussions developed simultaneously. The PAS conference field trippers had seen some wonderful examples of Pictish sculpture and had once again been blessed with fine stone-observing weather. *JB*

Autumn Lecture Series

21 October 2016 – Dr Alex Woolf

Rethinking the Pictish East Midlands

Alex Woolf is senior lecturer in history at St Andrews University, with long experience in the history and archaeology of early medieval Britain and Ireland. He stirred up the world of Pictish studies with his 2006 paper, 'Dún Nechtain, Fortriu and the Geography of the Picts', in which he argued that the site of the battle of Dún Nechtain was more likely to have been the modern Dunachton in Badenoch, rather than at Dunnichen in Angus, and that the kingdom of Fortriu lay north of the Mounth, on the shores of the Moray Firth. Ten years after the publication of that paper, Alex came to Brechin to talk on '*Rethinking the Pictish East Midlands*', turning his attention to the consequences of shifting Fortriu and how we might re-think our notions about Perthshire, Angus and much of Kincardineshire in the Pictish period.

Over the next hour, Alex alternated a stream of facts, observations and philosophic asides with a barrage of questions for further research. This was a stimulating performance, and this report has had to undergo much trimming, for which apologies are due.

Lowland Perthshire, Angus and Kincardineshire together form a tract of rich agricultural land that may fairly be compared with the East Midlands of both England and Ireland. (The comparison of a northern Fortriu with Bernicia would be equally apposite.) Early source material gives little indication of what was happening in these fertile lands in the 6thh–8th centuries, but we have some hints as to what was happening around their periphery.

To the south, Bede's 'Urbs Giudi' (Urbs Iudeu) would appear to be a Latinised version of something more akin to 'Iudenburgh'. This may have given its name to the Firth of Forth – sea of Iude – rather than to the river, as has been suggested in the past. The burgh itself would therefore have been more likely to have

occupied a site in the vicinity of Bo'ness, rather than Stirling as was formerly argued. This would place it somewhere between Abercorn (Abercurnig), which Bede notes as a monastery and the see of Trumwine, Northumbrian bishop of the Picts, and Kinneil (Peanfahel or Penneltun), where, he says, the Romans began their wall. What was the nature of the territory that housed these three places? Bede apparently did not find it necessary to tell us any more about the area; was it familiar to his contemporaries and therefore of some significance?

The foundation legend of St Andrews clearly associates the early monastery with Pictish royalty, and the story is reinforced by the quality of the early medieval carved stones there. At St Vigeans and Meigle too, the quality and quantity of the stones bespeak important church sites with possible royal or aristocratic patronage. Further west, there is little evidence linking the early medieval stronghold of Dundurn with the Picts, but the site was occupied at this time. Excavations there were limited, and more evidence may yet come to light.

In the north, Bridei son of Der-Ilei, king of Fortriu and Curetán, bishop of Ross (with his see at Rosemarkie?) attended the Synod of Birr in 697, their names found among the witnesses to the Cáin Adomnáin. Fortriu existed as a kingdom whose importance was recognised by Columban church leaders in the west by the late-7th century.

The question arises: what was happening between Fife and the Mounth? There does seem to have been a shift in the balance of power, from a dominant Dàl Rìata in the 6th and 7th centuries to a pre-eminent Fortiu in the late 7th–early-8th centuries. There is some evidence for changing access to prestigious exotic goods around this time. Imports of Eastern Mediterranean goods (exemplified by finds of amphora sherds) from around 475–530 have a mainly western distribution. Somewhat later (6th–7th centuries), E-ware from Western France appeared at sites further north. The evidence suggests that Dàl Rìata had access to prestigious imports, possibly of wine. This trade seems to have collapsed by the 8th century. With the North Sea dominated by Franks or Frisians, the evidence for trade with Scandinavia and the Low countries around this time is strong in Eastern England, spreading as far north as York. The evidence is weaker but still present at Dunbar and as far north as Portmahomack. It looks as if, at a time when Onuist was bearing down on Dal Riata in the 8th century, one trade network was lost but another was gained.

What are we to make of Abercorn as a bishopric for Picts? Where was its territory? Most of East Lothian lay within the diocese of Lindisfarne. There are precedents for a bishop's see being located towards the edge of its diocese: Worcester, for example was located in the north-east corner of Hwicce, close to the border with Mercia. Question marks hang over the nature of Northumbrian rule around Abercorn: there is neither place-name nor archaeological evidence of Northumbrian settlement in this area. Did the diocese include the Dunfermline area? St Cuthbert is said to have visited the 'Niduarian Picts' – can a case be made for locating them in the East Neuk?

James Fraser has suggested that the men of Fortriu may have chosen to call themselves 'Picts', taking the name from (by then) ancient sources in order to legitimise a claim to 'liberating' folk further south from Bernician rule. This could be seen as masking a straightforward territorial conquest, including the rich lands of Kincardine, Angus and Perth. What was the role of Dunnottar? According to chronicles originating on Iona, it was twice besieged in the 7th century (681 and 694). It was devastated by the Vikings in the late-9th century and in 937 Athelstan's invading forces reached here. Malcolm I was killed in 954 at Fetteresso; Kenneth II at Fettercairn in 995, while Donnchad II died at Mondynes – all in the general area of Dunnottar. Was Dunnottar the royal capital of Alba? Neil McGuigan pointed out that with Fettercairn lying just north of Cairn o' Mount, the Mounth may be seen as a hinge. Given the apparent diphyletic nature of the kingdom at this time, is it possible that we have here the royal inauguration site of the northern line of kings to match Scone for the southern branch? The Mearns is notably lacking in late Pictish stones, with only the Class II stone from Fordoun (Auchenblae) surviving. Angus, on the other hand, has many. The expertly carved stones from sites such as Kirriemuir, St Vigeans and Meigle (just into Perthshire) bear testament to a network of rich, highly cultured monasteries with close connections into the mainstream of European intellectual life. When Donnchad II was killed at Mondynes in 1097, he is said to have died at the hands of Mél Petair, the Mormaer of the Mearns. Could the Mearns have been territory which was retained by the crown and not donated, as the Angus sites were, to the church? After all, the church was well able to hold the land faithful to the king who had gifted it. The Mearns could later have been held as stewartry by the family of Mél Petair.

And what was happening in Fife? The stones from St Andrews lack Pictish symbols, as does the marigold cross stone found at Skeith. Class II cross-slabs were found at Upper Largo and Scoonie, both with hunting scenes and both with Pictish beasts. (The Scoonie stone was trimmed in the past: it is impossible to rule out further similarities with Upper Largo). Only a few Class I stones have survived throughout Fife. Is there any significance in the lack of symbols in St Andrews?

A twelfth-century version of the St Andrews foundation legend appears to include a colophon from an earlier version, stating that it was written at the Royal villa of king Wrad at Meigle. This may be an example

of a royal palace within a monastic site. Alternatively, a royal enclave at Meigle may have been handed over to the church after the death of Wrad in 840. The legend records the donation by Onuist of Kilrymont to the church in response to aid given by St Andrews to the king in battle.

Other examples of what might be regarded as politically motivated donations of land to the church are known: the grant of Northumbrian territory by the West Saxons to the church at Durham for example. St Davids, in south-west Wales was established in the 9th–10th century, at a period when an Anglesey-based dynasty dominated. This is an example of the use of a local saint to establish power over territory from a distance; by vesting the land in a grateful church, the king was unlikely to lose control or to nurture possible rivals. Was this the reason behind the endowments to St Andrews/ Kilrymont and monasteries at Meigle, St Vigeans, Kirriemuir and possibly others? If so, it would seem that control of the lands involved later passed back to the crown, as at least some were donated to Arbroath Abbey (founded 1178) by William the Lion and the Earl of Angus.

Had Dunnottar been a significant power centre at the time when Alba emerged? In the mid-ninth century (849 and again in the 860s), Fortriu was weakened by repeated Viking raids. With the accession of Kenneth MacAlpin, power moved to the Tay basin.

Alex opened up a whole set of questions over what was happening in the Pictish East Midlands in the period of Fortiu's ascendancy. The description of the area is itself pregnant with possibility: the Irish kingdom of Meath covered most of the Irish East Midlands, with Tara, the inauguration centre of the High Kings of Ireland in its territory, while the English East Midlands, the rich eastern half of Mercia, has traditionally played an important part in the history of England. What was the role of the Pictish East Midlands? *SH*

18 November 2016 – Dr Adrian Maldonado

Class IV revisited: new work on simple cross-marked stones in Scotland

The Pictish Arts Society first met Adrian Maldonado six years ago when he gave us a talk on work for his PhD at a conference in Perth. His title then, *The Chicken and the Egg: the Relationship between Burial and Early Christianity,* encapsulated the main strands of what were to be his research interests in the intervening years. After a spell lecturing at Chester, Adrian has returned to Glasgow University as a Research Associate for the Glasgow Iona Research Group, where he is working on a project to publish the excavations carried out on Iona by the late Professor Charles Thomas and on research into the archaeology of early medieval monasteries in Scotland. His was the last talk of the autumn season at Brechin.

Adrian started with a brief overview of the so-called Class IV or simple cross-marked stones in Pictish studies. Isabel Henderson proposed in the late 1980s that these stones were worth studying in relation to the conversion of the Picts. She suggested at the time that they might be labelled Class IV, as a distinct group apart from Classes I, II and III as defined in the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*. Some thirty years later, we still lack a comprehensive published corpus of these stones for Scotland.

Adrian's research work has provoked his interest in these simple crosses, which have been described as burial markers. No detailed study of their distribution in relation to types of early sites such as burial grounds, early monasteries or churches has yet been undertaken and very few sites have as yet been excavated.

Adrian presented us with illustrations of a large variety of examples, including from Pabbay, Barra and St Devenic's Church, Creich, Sutherland (a possible monastic site). At Kiloran Bay, Colonsay a pagan Viking boat-burial, accompanied by a sacrificed horse, included among the grave goods a balance and weight, weapons and other objects. At either end of the stone setting round the burial was a schist slab marked with an incised cross. It has been subsequently suggested that these stones may have been brought from a nearby site, possibly by someone involved in the excavation.

Simple incised crosses appear on boulders, outcrops of rock, pebbles and cave walls. They almost certainly date from different periods, and are unlikely to have all been carved with the same intent. The crosses on some stones, as at Dyce, are very well laid out, with the use of a compass to ensure accuracy. These may be described as elaborated but unornamented, while others have a degree of ornamentation. Are these all grave markers? The variety of stones at places such as Fortingall raises questions such as whether or not there is a distinction related to rank or status within the community. Was there any significance in the position of the stone, whether upright or recumbent?

A number of cross-marked stones are of dimensions that would have been appropriate to cover graves containing extended burials. At Tullich in Aberdeenshire, for example, a cross-marked slab is of similar dimensions to one carrying a double-disc and Z-rod, Pictish beast and mirror symbols, and each would comfortably cover a grave. Parallels to some of the cross-marked stones at Tullich can be found at Cladh a'Bhile, Ellary. The use of such long, flat stones to cover the whole length of the grave endured over an extended time span, but probably began later than the 6th century. The Picts were certainly using such grave stones in the post-conversion period. The shape of the crosses incised on them can be common over widely separated sites – shared motifs link stones from Kirkmadrine, Iona, Cladh a' Bhile and Dyce as

well as others. Such comparisons may most usefully be seen as locating these sites within a wider context of Christianity.

The sign of the cross may have been seen as possessing almost magical powers, as when Columba made the sign of the cross to force open the gates of Bridei's fortress. Its protective qualities may explain the cross-marked quern found at Dunadd, while cross-marked pebbles in St Ninian's Cave may have been votive offerings.

The association of stones marked with simple crosses and burials shows an interesting pattern. None are known from the extensive long-cist cemeteries of the Lothians, indeed there is a curious lack of crosses in the southeast of the country. A few have been found in Fife, more in Angus, and the numbers increase the further north we travel and of course they are found extensively from Carrick through Argyll, and up the west coast.

At most of these sites, only a single cross-marked stone has been reported, but as very few of them have been excavated, we cannot be certain that there were no more present. Or perhaps just one cross-marked stone was viewed as necessary to mark a burial ground. Only a few sites with more than five simple incised crosses are known: Iona, Cladh a'Bhile, Whithorn, Fortingall, Dull and Tullich. These are probably not all contemporary, but were they particularly important sites? Adrian showed an example he had recently found built high into the church wall at Clachan of Campsie, highlighting the fact that many more may remain to be found.

Iona boasts the largest collection of early medieval carved stones in Britain, with over a hundred recorded. The iconic high crosses number only four, a small proportion of the total. At least one stone has been dated to the 6th century, others to the 7th and 8th centuries. Very few crosses have been found in the course of excavation on Iona. Indeed some of the burial grounds do not have crosses. Perhaps not all Christians expected to have such stones; they may have been reserved for monks and other church folk buried in the Reilig Odhrain. The early pavement at St Columba's shrine contained three body-length recumbent stones, one of which was marked by an incised cross. At St Ronans, near the nunnery, there were no crosses found near the early graves. There are signs that ideas about death, burial and commemoration were still evolving. The notion of burial in consecrated ground only came much later in the medieval period.

At Portmahomack, fourteen stones have been described as grave markers, but most of these were found within the church or its foundations. Only two came from the area of the graveyard. Most were of local sandstone. None were found in direct association with graves, and several bore similar crosses to stones found on Iona. At St Ninian's Chapel on Shetland, two of the upright stones found at the heads of the four infant graves bore simple crosses. These probably dated to the 10th century. Another simple cross was found over the foot of the grave of an adult male, carbon dated to 680-890. He may have been a Christian but the stone was not placed at the head and was not east-facing.

At Auldhame in East Lothian, two simple crosses were found in the same area as graves, but not in direct association. On Inchmarnock, west of Bute, most early crosses were found in the area of the church. However, one was marked on a cist slab, and another, facing downwards, on a grave cover – perhaps it was not important that the cross be visible to passers-by. The early monastic site on Ardwall Island yielded simple incised crosses in and on graves and on the 'portable altar', of slate that was found in one grave. A broken cross-marked slab was found buried in front of the altar stone, possibly a deliberate act of decommissioning.

In summary, incised cross-marked stones are difficult, if not impossible to date. The style need not be diagnostic; simple styles may be later. Their presence underlines the active Pictish participation in the wider landscape of conversion. The theological understanding of the soul needing protection after death appears to have developed early here.

Adrian dealt with a number of points raised by his audience. In response to an observation that upright cross-marked stones are widely dispersed, but that recumbent stones seem to have been favoured in Highland Perthshire, he noted that the Picts seem to have adopted their use earlier than elsewhere, suggesting that the Picts were developing a theology of burial independently. There are recumbent stones on Iona, but these are all later.

Other possibilities for the significance of cross-marked stones were raised. The marking of a cross on stone in church to record a prayer or a vow, a form of ritual recording of a binding contract, is known from the later medieval period. Isolated crosses away from church or grave sites may be markers, perhaps of parish boundaries, and are likely to be later than the ones associated with early church or burial sites. (Alasdair Ross is working on these.) The question of whether the choice of incised or relief carving was likely to be significant was raised; perhaps this was related to the nature of the stones available. Time finally cut short the discussion, and brought to an end an enjoyable and challenging autumn series of talks at Brechin. *SH*

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The deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 20 May 2017

Please email contributions to the editor:

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Pictish treasures on the small screen

On St Andrews Day 2016, a very insightful television programme was transmitted on BBC2 Scotland entitled 'Scotland's Treasures', featuring a wide range of objects in the vast collections of the National Museums of Scotland. Even in an hour, it was not possible to do more than create the tiniest of scratches upon the surface of this enormous topic. Glimpses of the galleries in the main museum building and the huge storage facility at Granton gave only a minuscule impression of the scope and volume of the national collections.

The presentation was a hotch-potch of items with no coherent pattern, just a wide-ranging variety which kept the interest level high. Included were meteorites recovered from the Blairgowrie/Coupar Angus area, a version of that Classical icon which is the Warwick Vase (the original being in the Burrell Museum), the chest which had held the ill-fated Darien Fund, Bonnie Prince Charlie's field canteen, and (inevitably) Dolly the Sheep.

So what of Scottish antiquities? Quite some time was devoted to the Lewis chessmen courtesy of an interview with David Caldwell, recently retired keeper at the NMS and current President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. There were brief glimpses of such intriguing items as the Ballachulish wooden figure, the Bute mazer, and the Traprain Law silver hoard (though a naughty piece of editing appeared to move it down to Hadrian's Wall).

Amid all this, would the Picts get a look-in? Happily they did, albeit only momentarily. A glimpse of the magnificent Hilton of Cadboll stone, and a few seconds longer to ogle at the great silver chains with Pictish symbols in evidence, was about all that made it into the programme. Who knows what else may have been left lying on the cutting room floor. It did not amount tomuch, but it was at least something, and any exposure of Pictish material to a wider public can only be for the good of the subject.

Graeme Cruickshank

SWACS @ 30

The group of caves at East Wemyss, on the northern shore of the Firth of Forth a little to the north-west of Kirkcaldy, is one of the most enigmatic of Pictish sites. A number of these caves have incised wall carvings, for the most part of no great artistic merit, yet of considerable interest. Many, if not all, would seem to be of symbolic significance, and some of them are unmistakably Pictish symbols. The only other comparable location in Scotland is at Covesea near Burghead, on the southern shore of the Moray Firth, but the Wemyss caves contain a greater number and variety of these curious artforms.

This remarkable site is most certainly in need of care and protection, what with breakwaters further along the coast altering the direction of the tidal flow, thereby removing significant areas of the foreshore, and cars being purloined by local vandals, dragged into the caves, and set on fire (three times now). These threats to their very existence led to the creation of the Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society (SWACS) in October 1986. Since then, it has engaged in a vigorous programme of conservation, research, publication, and particularly education through engagement with school groups and the wider public.

It was only appropriate, then, that SWACS should celebrate its 30th anniversary by holding a conference in Kirkcaldy's Old Kirk in Kirk Wynd, on 22 October 2016, with the support of SCAPE (Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion) and with financial assistance from Levenmouth Printers of Buckhaven. The event kicked off with an introduction by Mike Arrowsmith of SWACS, who was joined by David Torrance, the MSP for Kirkcaldy, who had instigated a debate about the situation at East Wemyss in the Scottish Paliament in 2013.

Heading the slate of speakers was Fraser Hunter of the National Museum in Edinburgh, who curates the Iron Age and Roman collections. His title was 'Rome and the Southern Picts – new finds and new views'. His basic point was that the Romans used the area of Lothians/Fife as a buffer zone, functioning in a diplomatic rather than a mercantile fashion. Evidence comes from Cupar, Kirkforthar, and elsewhere in Fife, in the form of Roman brooches (though the discovery of a Roman tile fragment on the Isle of May may simply represent an item of ballast deposited in post-Roman times). Most dramatic are the finds of Roman silver, thought to represent bribes to local tribes, often taking the form of hoards of coins, and of vessels hacked into rough pieces and often folded for convenience, generally quite neatly, reckoned to have been done by the Romans themselves.

Two local ladies then developed the SWACS theme. Sue Hamstead is the education officer with the Society, with the responsibility for conducting guided tours of the Caves, and delivering talks to interested groups. She spoke with more than a hint of nostalgia of the halcyon days in the 1980s when 1200 school-children a year visited the Caves. This figure is now sadly reduced because of stringent Health & Safety regulations.

Next up was Joanna Hambly, an archaeologist attached to St Andrews University and manager of SCHARP (Scotland's Coastal Heritage At Risk Project), who gave a brief outline of the Caves' long history. Her presentation was enhanced by the screening of an amusing quasi-antiquarian film featuring a recreation of the efforts of those who had

recorded the sculptures over the past century and a half. She listed sixteen Pictish symbols which appear in the Wemyss Caves, which probably predate the little crosses there, though the location may already have been a sacred site of some sort. Although it can be little more than a guess, it is possible that the symbols may have been devotional, different in purpose from the Pictish symbols which appear on their standing stones, the latter displaying much greater artistry and fluidity of line.

'Rediscovering the Picts of East Lomond' was the task of Joe Fitzpatrick of the Falkland Stewardship Trust. He gave a brief overview of the most recent investigation and excavation just outwith the rampart of the Hill Fort on the summit of East Lomand. Local symbol stones may be seen on display in Falkland Town Hall and the NMS.

Alice Blackwell, Glenmorangie Research Fellow with the NMS, went to the core of Pictish studies with a consideration of 'Silver and Symbols: research on the Norrie's Law Hoard and some implications for Pictland'. She drew attention to a recently-revealed assessment: that in two pairs of supposedly Pictish antiquities, one item is genuine and the other a replica in each case. The first concerns the famous symbol-bearing leaf-shaped plaques, which look identical except that one has a very faint border (genuine), whereas the other has a strongly-engraved border (a 19th-century copy). This also applies to the large fastening pins, and disappointingly it is the one bearing the Pictish symbols which is the repro rogue.

It is a sobering thought that this leaves us with just four confirmed items of Pictish symbol-bearing metalwork: the one Norrie's Law plaque, the two engraved terminals attached to the massive silver chains from Parkhill in Aberdeenshire and White-cleuch in Lanarkshire (which may not necessarily be of Pictish workmanship, possibly representing bounty or treaty-exchange valuables), and the lost bronze crescent from Monifeith. A meagre haul indeed. On the plus side, there is the discovery of a silver ingot at Clatchard Craig, and some evidence of silver working at Rhynie.

Providing a northern reflection of the situation at Wemyss, John Borland, until recently of RCAHMS and now of Historic Environment Scotland, described the artwork in the Sculptor's Cave at Covesea in Moray. There are around eight caves in Scotland with ancient sculpture on the walls, but only at these two locations are Pictish symbols included in the repertoire. While East Wemyss may well have been a sacred site, Covesea (local pronunciation: 'Cow-see') could have had more sinister associations. The discovery of quantities of human bones, mainly the mandibles of juveniles, has given rise to speculation concerning ritual execution, perhaps connected with 'the cult of the severed head'. The speaker was also able to illustrate links between various sites and finds

Tom and Sybil Gray Collection © HES

Jonathan's Cave, East Wemyss SC1458586

relating to Pictish symbols, involving such factors as embryonic/degenerative versions, and non-symbol designs.

Rounding off the programme came Gordon Noble and 'Discovering the Northern Picts', presenting the latest results from the Northern Picts Project run by Aberdeen University. One of the key sites is Rhynie, 'as seen on TV'. Long known for its eight Pictish standing stones (the Craw Stane having a fine symbol pairing, while Rhynie Man cuts an iconic figure in the world of Pictish shamans), recent excavations suggest the settlement to have been of high status, perhaps even royal, as the place-name suggests. Evidence of wine consumption and silver metallurgy does more than merely hint at this possibility.

The afternoon concluded with a most acceptable finger buffet and wine. Productive and enjoyable, the session surely raised the profile of the Wemyss Caves further still, and must be rated as a resounding success. Roll on SWACS @ 40!

Graeme Cruickshank

Forthcoming events Spring 2017

at Brechin Town House Museum

Friday 17 March

Dr Neil McGuigan

Alba and the End of Northumbria

Friday 21 April

Jamie Humble

Excavations at the vitrified hillfort of Dun Deardail, Glen Nevis

Friday 19 May

Sophie Nicol

The Hillforts of the Tay: Recent excavations at Moredun Top, Moncreiffe Hill

Doors open at Brechin Museum at 7.00 pm for a 7.30 pm start. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be available after the talks which are free to members and £3.00 to non-members. All are welcome.