THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY
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Winter Lecture Series

16 October 2015 – Joanna Hambly

From rubbings to lasers: 150 years of documentation and research in to the Wemyss Caves

Joanna manages the Scotland's Coastal Heritage at Risk Project (SCHER), a partnership involving SCAPE Trust (Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion <**www.scharp.co.uk**>), Historic Environment Scotland and St Andrews University. Her Brechin talk described the work of Wemyss 4D, a joint venture between SCAPE, Save the Ancient Wemyss Caves Society (SWACS) and a number of other sponsors and collaborators. The project combines new research with work carried out by a number of antiquarians, archaeologists and historians who have studied and recorded the caves over the past 150 years.

Joanna began by describing the Wemyss Caves. Located on the Fife coast between East Wemyss and Buckhaven, they were formed by the action of the sea about 8,000 years ago. At least ten have been studied, and are variously named. Over many centuries, such caves have been put to many uses: places of ritual or religious practices, places of retreat, housing, workshops for metalworkers, stabling for domestic animals, hiding places, boat sheds. The Wemyss caves were no exception, with evidence of their use spanning more than three millennia.

A number of other Fife coastal caves carry traces of use in the early Christian period in the form of carved crosses and symbols on the walls. The Wemyss Caves, however, have a particularly rich and varied collection of carvings. Some date back as far as the Bronze Age but around a hundred of these represent Pictish symbols. The Doo cave (named for its later use as a doocot) contains, among other symbols, a double disk and Z-rod, an animal head reminiscent of that on the Norrie's Law plaque and a 'flower' resembling that on the Dunnichen Stone. By comparison with symbols on stones or silverwork, the carvings in the Wemyss Caves are fairly crude. Indeed, that is the case wherever Pictish symbols have been found carved on the walls of caves, as at Covesea in Moray. However, unlike most carved on stones or portable objects, the original site of those on cave walls is beyond dispute. The Pictish symbols which have been recorded on the walls of the Wemyss Caves include 16 double discs and five Pictish Beasts. Other symbols include the wolf, leaping salmon and animal head as well as a creature in Jonathan's Cave variously identified as a horse, lion or bull. Geese or ducks are also present. A carving of a boar is also likely to be Pictish. A club-carrying figure accompanied by an animal has been identified as Thor, but bears a strong resemblance to a Roman-British figure carved on living rock in Northumberland.

Moving forward in time, the Caves contain many examples of small Christian crosses, such are also seen in a number of other sea caves, including Constantine's and the Caiplie Caves further east along the coast. Many later carvings of monograms and graffiti date to the 19th century. Particularly notable are those in the Well Cave, where a Handsel Monday purification ritual was observed from pre-Christian times into the modern period.

Almost a hundred years ago, Sir James Young Simpson (1811–1870), famous for introducing the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic, was an active Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Interest in cup and ring marks led him to visit the Wemyss Caves in search of examples there. He was the first to identify Pictish symbols among the carvings on the cave walls, publishing his discoveries in 1866 and adding more, with illustrations by James Drummond, in an appendix to a study of cup and ring marks published in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* of Scotland in 1867. Simpson's work sparked a great deal of interest in the Caves. In 1866 George Seton, whose rubbings of the carvings are now held in the HES (formerly RCAHMS) archive, accompanied John Stuart. The latter's account of the Wemyss Caves in the second volume of his *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (1867) was illustrated by Andrew Gibb.

The formidable Christian MacLagan also visited the Caves with Stuart, who, in his role as Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, read her paper on the Caves to one of their meetings. Miss MacLagan also took rubbings of the carvings. These were presented with her archive to the British Museum but have not been accessible for the current project to study. Joseph Anderson and J Romilly Allen included the Wemyss carvings in their *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903). On visiting the caves, Allen used photography and rubbings to make accurate records of the carvings. Most importantly, he took measurements of the height of each carving from the floor and of the distances between carvings and used these to locate the carvings on planned drawings of cave walls.

John Patrick (1830–1923) was a Buckhaven baker turned photographer who eventually opened a studio in Edinburgh. He was the first to photograph the cave walls systematically, and, by igniting magnesium powder to provide illumination, he was able to obtain

the first photograph of the boat carving in Jonathan's Cave. This figure has proved controversial, as Allen did not include it in his record. Simpson noted a large figure in 1864 that he thought might have been a boat, although he seems to have confused the names of the Caves, adding to the debate. The boat is in a dark area of the cave and may easily have been missed and is now fairly well accepted as an early carving. Patrick also recorded the Hansdel Monday tradition, along with ghost stories and other local lore about the area.

Double-disc & Z-rod and animal head symbols, Dovecot Cave. SC 949282

Interest in the Caves (and, indeed, in the Picts) waned for a while in the 20th century. However, George Deas (1875–1961), a Kirkcaldy architect, photographed the Caves in detail. He continued to record discoveries here, notably in the Michael Cave, uncovered in 1929 during work to repair a boiler at the Michael Colliery. In this 'new' cave, he found a crouching figure aiming an arrow at a deer as well as cup and ring marks. Sadly, this cave was rapidly filled in to stabilise the overlying machinery.

Other caves have also been rendered inaccessible by landslip and coastal erosion in the post-mining period. The Michael Colliery closed in 1967. Before that, coal bings had supplied sediment which had contributed to beach formation; in the absence of such a supply, and with sea walls along the coast which interrupt natural processes of coastal development and recycling of sediment, the coast has retreated many metres. In the 19th century, the high water mark was a hundred yards away from the caves; now the sea laps at the cave mouths.

In 1986, in an act of wanton vandalism, a car was driven into Jonathan's Cave and set alight, damaging some of the carvings. This incident sparked the founding of the Save the Wemyss Ancient Caves Society (SWACS). Frank Rankin, Bill Barker, Ann Watters and their colleagues and successors have since then fought hard to raise awareness of the importance of the heritage here, and to highlight the dangers from erosion and vandalism.

In 2013, Wemyss Caves 4D was launched as a collaborative project between SWACS and SCAPE, with assistance from Scotland's Coastal Heritage at Risk, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Fife Council, the Crown Estates, York Archaeological Trust and St Andrews University. Experts from several contract archaeology companies were called in to conduct specialist surveys. Wemyss 4D is an ambitious undertaking, comprising what is probably the biggest digital recording project in Scotland, with input from laser scanning, photography, structured light scanning and reflectance transformation imaging used to create 3D images of the Caves. The plan is to cover the area between East Wemyss and the Gasworks Cave. At the same time, a major effort has been made to record memories, stories, poems and photographs from local people, and this archive has been digitised and added to the website, contributing elements of the fourth dimension, time, to Wemyss 4D. The legacy of antiquarian recording in the Caves over the past hundred and fifty years has made a major contribution also, enabling assessment of the changes that have occurred here over that period and filling gaps in the record for those caves that are now inaccessible.

By creating a large 3D virtual image, including the caves, shoreline and the land around, Wemyss Caves 4D has produced a powerful tool for study. Of immediate practical use, it can help inform management of the Caves and the immediate area. For example, in 1986, a survey carried out by the Local Authority indicated that the roof of the Well Cave was showing signs of laminating. There were fears that a collapse would lead to the loss of the ruins of MacDuff's Castle, on the cliff above, and it was proposed that the Cave be filled with sand slurry to prevent this happening. Although funds were never made available, it remained Fife Council's preferred option as late as 2014. However, through the use of 3D imagery, it has become quite clear the Castle is not above the Well Cave, with 15 metres of bedrock clear between. The Castle is at far greater risk from its current clothing of vegetation than any potential cave collapse.

Another practical application is to explore the potential survival of carvings in collapsed caves. By mapping Romilly Allen's measured sketch plan of the Wester Doo Cave onto the 3D image of that area, it is possible to assess the potential for survival of any carvings on the walls of the cave in the area of the collapse.

The 3D image can be used to model the impact and progress of erosion, incorporating details from past recordings. Other lines of research include computer modelling to re-create, for example, the Iron Age

appearance of the area. It is also possible to replicate the way that sunlight falls on the cave walls throughout the course of the year – could this help to explain the location of carvings? By creating a 'biography' of carvings, noting rock erosion, algal growth and so on, it may be able to project future changes and better inform management of the caves.

Over the past 150 years, the importance of the caves has been attested by the interest they have attracted. They may, for a short period, have slipped off the

radar as far as archaeologists were concerned, but since SWACS started working to raise their profile, recognition of their importance has been growing. Their website <**www.wemysscaves.org**> gives details of the opening times of the Wemyss Environmental Education Centre, home to the Society's museum and of their guided tours of the Caves during the summer months. The current degree of erosion makes visiting the caves without a guide a hazardous undertaking. Wemyss Caves 4D, however, has not only provided a great tool for management and research, but by recording the caves, their setting and, vitally, their carvings in 3D, and adding the local lore of the area to their website <**www.4dwemysscaves.org>** has made it easy for those who are unable to visit the caves in person to appreciate just how fascinating the Caves and their carvings are. *SH*

20 November, 2015 – Dr Rebecca Jones

On the March: Roman Camps in Scotland

Currently Head of Archaeology Strategy at Historic Environment Scotland, Beccy Jones' research interests have focussed on the Roman army and Roman frontiers with particular respect to Scotland. Her *Roman Camps in Scotland* was published in 2012, and in her talk to the Society at Brechin in November, Beccy brought us up to date with current thinking on the Roman camps of Scotland.

In this context, a camp was simply a temporary fortified enclosure housing troops away from base. The troops in question may have been on campaign in hostile territory, or policing unsettled areas. The men may have been carrying out construction work, as was probably the case for those identified by cropmarks along the line of the Antonine Wall. Other camps may have been temporary homes for troops carrying out other labour, as for example, at Steed Stalls near Inchtuthil, associated with what were possibly lime kilns there. Camps were also constructed to house armies besieging enemy positions. Good examples of these are known in other parts of the Roman Empire, as at Numantia and Judea. The two camps on either side of the native fort at Birrenswark are the only two possible examples known in Scotland. Further research is being carried out there, as the purpose of the camps is still debated.

Marching camps may have been occupied for a single night, while a siege camp may have been occupied for months. A number may be practice camps, built to teach the soldiers construction techniques. An area around Llandridnod in Wales is particularly rich in examples that are too small for any practical uses, but have well-built entrances. That at Llyn Hiraethlyn in Merioneth is just over 14 square metres in extent. By contrast, the camp at St Leonard's in the Scottish Borders covered a hundred and seventy acres, making it one of the largest on record. (Two larger camps are known in Syria, where it is possible that a large gap between the perimeter defences and the tent lines was left to offer some protection from the famous Syrian archers).

Roman camps generally followed the same playing-card shape as Roman forts, and may have followed the same general internal layout. However, local factors resulted in modifications to the general plan, so that in practice, camps often did not conform exactly to the ideal layout. Camps were defended by banks and ditches, perhaps with palisades and stakes to deter enemy attack. Entrances could be defended by one of several methods: the 'titulus' being a straight earthwork defence which screened the entrance, so that anyone approaching had to go around the ends of the titulus, presenting themselves as targets for the defenders within the enclosure. The 'clavicula' was an extension of the camp rampart that swung in or out in an arc to screen the entrance. The 'Stracathro' entrance, named after the camp where it was first observed, is peculiar to Scotland and consists of a clavicula on one side and a straight extension angled out from the opposite side of the gateway. Variants are known, such as at Wardlaw in Dumfries, where at least one entrance appears to have two tituli, one in front of the other. This may indicate a site that has been reused, with a new entrance defence. At Grassy Walls, a slight change in the angle of the defences clearly occurs at one gateway.

It is possible that the different types of entrance belong to different campaigns, but the timescale over which the clavicula and the titulus were in general use is lengthy. Claviculae were used in Republican period camps in Syria, long before the Romans came to Scotland, and appear on Trajan's column, celebrating his exploits in Romania in the second century AD. New evidence from the Czech Republic, where the end of the Soviet Union has allowed aerial survey to proceed, suggests that this fashion carried on until perhaps the AD180s. Tituli were used by Caesar to protect the entrances of some of his camps in Gaul, but continued into the third century AD. Stracathro-type entrances appear at camps of widely varying size spread from Annandale to Aberdeenshire, although confined so far to Scotland.

The first systematic search for Roman camps here was carried out by Robert Melville (1723–1809) who went looking for them around 1750 with his copy of Tacitus' *Agricola* in hand. Travelling on horseback, he explored sites such as Wardykes and Campmuir, where place names suggested possibilities, and where visible traces did, indeed, remain. Melville was in touch with William Roy (1726–1790), who worked on the military surveys of Scotland carried out in the aftermath of the '45 Jacobite Rebellion and who lobbied hard for the establishment of the Ordnance Survey. Roy's posthumous *Military Antiquities of the Romans in Britain* (1793) contains maps and sketch plans of Roman sites in Scotland, including a number that may have been drawn to his attention by

Melville, including Lintrose, Kirkbuddo, Keithock and Battledykes.

Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian writing in the late first century AD, noted that Roman troops set fire to camps, which could be easily reconstructed, before they moved on. What was true in Judea was probably true in Scotland, where upstanding remains are generally scarce and slight. In addition, ditches and ramparts of turf and earth are easily levelled by centuries of cultivation in areas of good arable land. Despite avid antiquarian interest, it was 1930 before OSG Crawford, the first archaeological officer with the Ordnance Survey, sparked a wave of new discoveries. That year, he first recognised the cropmark evidence of a camp at Gallaberry in Dumfries-shire, although it was 1939 before he flew over the site again with a camera to record his observation.

In the years following the Second World War, the use of aerial survey led to a rapid expansion in knowledge of Roman camps in Scotland. Kenneth St Joseph, based at Cambridge, was influenced by Crawford and, in turn, became responsible for a programme of aerial survey which led to the discovery of many archaeological sites across Britain. St Joseph spent his summers flying in search of new sites, and his autumns were spent digging across the ditch lines to confirm the existence of new Roman sites. In 1976, Gordon Maxwell, of The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, instigated a programme of aerial survey focusing on Scotland, resulting in many new discoveries.

In the main, camps cluster along the lines of Roman roads. Outliers have been noted, such as at Girvan and Dunragit, which both lie at some distance from any other known Roman sites. As the majority of camps have been spotted as cropmarks, it is possible that others did exist in parts of the country where the underlying conditions are not conducive to cropmark formation. In a number of places, there are still physical traces. At Pennymuir in the Borders, for example, the earthwork ramparts still stand two metres high in places. At Kirkbuddo, where a plantation covers the line of defences, the ditches can still be seen. At Battledykes and Oathlaw, the earthworks were still visible in Roy's time, but have since been ploughed out, leaving only cropmark evidence today. Over the years, the number of Roman camps recognised in Scotland has grown to exceed the total known for England and Wales.

The study of Roman camps in Scotland has largely focused on the morphology of the remains as visible on aerial photographs. Excavation has largely been limited to the perimeter defences and the entrances to the camps; as a result, finds are rare and secure dating has rarely been obtained in this way. Nevertheless, groups of camps have been associated with some of the campaigns known from literary sources.

St Joseph noted that many of the Scottish Roman camps could be assigned to groups based on size. A string of camps approximating each to 110 acres in extent are spaced at a day's march apart: Kintore, Normandykes, Ythan Wells and Muiryfauld. Raedykes, somewhat smaller at 96 acres, and Logie Durno, the largest camp north of the Antonine Wall at 144 acres appear to form part of this series. Logie Durno has been associated with the gathering together of Agricola's forces before the battle of Mons Graupius, which Tacitus places at AD86. Thanks to developer-funded excavations at Kintore, we have learned a great deal about this site. It appears to have been in use in the late first century AD. Evidence from a bread oven shows it to have been fired six times, which suggests a six week period of use, so it is clear that the Roman camps were not all simply used overnight by armies on the march.

Hadrian's Wall was begun in AD122, with the next move north into Scotland dating to the late AD130s and the building of the Antonine Wall beginning in AD142. That was abandoned around AD162, and the next expedition north was that of Septimius Severus in AD208. However, it has been suggested that the withdrawal from the Antonine Wall was associated with unrest in the south-west of Scotland, and that some at least of the camps in that area date to this period. The numbers involved in the recorded campaigns were large, perhaps around twenty-one thousand for Agricola and maybe as many as forty thousand for Severus. The 165-acre camp at St Leonards, near Melrose, may have held all of Severus' forces, which would probably march in smaller bodies as they made their way north. However, new archaeological evidence is casting doubt on the traditional account of Roman activity in Scotland, suggesting that it began earlier and was rather more sustained. Indeed, the story appears rather more complex than the scanty records suggest.

The issue of supplying food for armies of this size must have been a major one. The evidence from the fort at Bearsden suggests that the soldiers lived on a mainly vegetarian diet. It is probable that most of their provisions were carried with them, although this is still an open question. The Roman fleet shipped food north to ports at the ends of Hadrian's and the Antonine Walls, and possibly re-provisioned the army on the march whenever that was possible. For example, the camp at Dun, situated on the north shore of the Montrose Basin, may have received provisions by sea for onward transmission. Access to fresh water was an important factor in siting a camp; some of the larger camps have streams running through them. At several sites, there are enclosures that may have been annexes to camps. While it is possible that in some cases these belong to different periods of use, it is also possible that they were built to hold

something (animals, perhaps) that it was not desirable to have inside the camp itself. Very little is known about the use of animals to carry loads for the accompanying troops, or about the organisation of facilities for the horses of mounted units on the march.

A great deal of work remains to be done on the interiors of camps. While it was assumed that little evidence of occupation would remain, particularly on the site of marching camps occupied for a single night at a time, the discoveries at Kintore indicate that not all of the Roman camps in Scotland were so used. Recent work in the Czech Republic, where excavation and research is being carried out into newly-discovered camps, also suggests that planned excavations in the interior of camps may yield much useful knowledge. Clearly there is huge potential to learn a great deal more about the activities of the Roman army in Scotland from further investigation of their camp sites. *SH*

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22 January 2016 – Martin Goldberg

Celtic art and Early Medieval Scotland

When PAS was first invited to co-host an event with the Perthshire Society of Natural Science (PSNS) in Perth Museum & Art Gallery on 16 October 2013, my first thought was to book Martin Goldberg, Senior Curator for the Early Historic and Viking collections at National Museums Scotland (NMS). A regular speaker at PAS events, Martin's contributions are always enlightening and thought-provoking and the paper proposed for that night, *Carving Pictish Symbols: Conventions and Competences*, promised to be just that.

Then, with only a few weeks' notice, Martin got in touch to say that unfortunately he would have to cancel. The date of the talk clashed with an important meeting in Stuttgart to arrange the loan of artefacts for a major forthcoming exhibition on Celtic art being organised by NMS and the British Museum (BM).

Martin's place on 16 October was ably filled by Gordon Noble of Aberdeen University, who spoke to a packed house on *Uncovering the Northern Picts*, an overview and update of his excavations at Rhynie (see *PAS Newsletter* 69). The following spring, Martin made good on his promise and gave his excellent paper on Pictish symbols to the PAS in Pictavia on 18 April (see *PAS Newsletter* 71).

Thanks to the good offices of Jennifer McKay, PAS was again invited to co-host another event with PSNS on 22 January this year. My thoughts again turned to Martin Goldberg who thankfully was only too happy to oblige. Martin offered a selection of topics for consideration but one in particular stood out: a foretaste of the Celts exhibition, currently running in the BM and due to open in the NMS on 10 March. This was the very exhibition the arrangements for which took Martin away from the joint event in October 2013, so it seemed very apposite that it should be the topic of his talk to both Societies this time round.

Perth Museum's excellent lecture theatre was packed out for Martin's talk on *Celtic art and Early Medieval Scotland*. He started out by explaining that the exhibition coming to Edinburgh would not be exactly the same as that currently on show in London, because the space available in the two museums differs and because some artefacts were not on loan long enough to come north of the border.

The exhibition will take a comprehensive look at Celtic art down through the ages, from its central European origins in the La Tène culture (500-100BC), with its distinctive motifs of triskeles, curvilinear scrolls and interlocking spirals. It will examine the effects of the Roman Empire on Celtic art and the development of Ultimate La Tène style in Ireland, which lay outwith Roman influence. It will explore the remarkable blossoming of Insular art during the early medieval period in the British Isles, which became the last bastion of a once widespread art genre. This part of the exhibition includes of course the art of the Picts and their contemporaries. The exhibition will then look at the revival of Celtic motifs in the late medieval and early modern periods and ultimately the Celtic revival of the 19th century, inspired by the studies and discoveries of Victorian antiquarians.

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1 *Gundertrup Cauldron, carnyx players*

One of the star exhibits is the Gundestrup cauldron, a large silver vessel elaborately decorated with figurative images in low beaten relief (*repoussé)*. Dating from the late La Tène period (c300-100BC), this remarkable object was found in northern Denmark but is thought to have been made in south-eastern Europe – neither of which was part of the Celtic world. However, some of its imagery is considered Celtic, such as the man with antlers, seated cross-legged, thought to represent the horned Celtic god Cernunnos. He wears round his neck a

distinctively Celtic torc and holds another in his right hand. On another panel, three men march in procession playing carnyx, the Celtic war horn. So right from the beginning, we see that Celtic art is a story with Europe-wide connections.

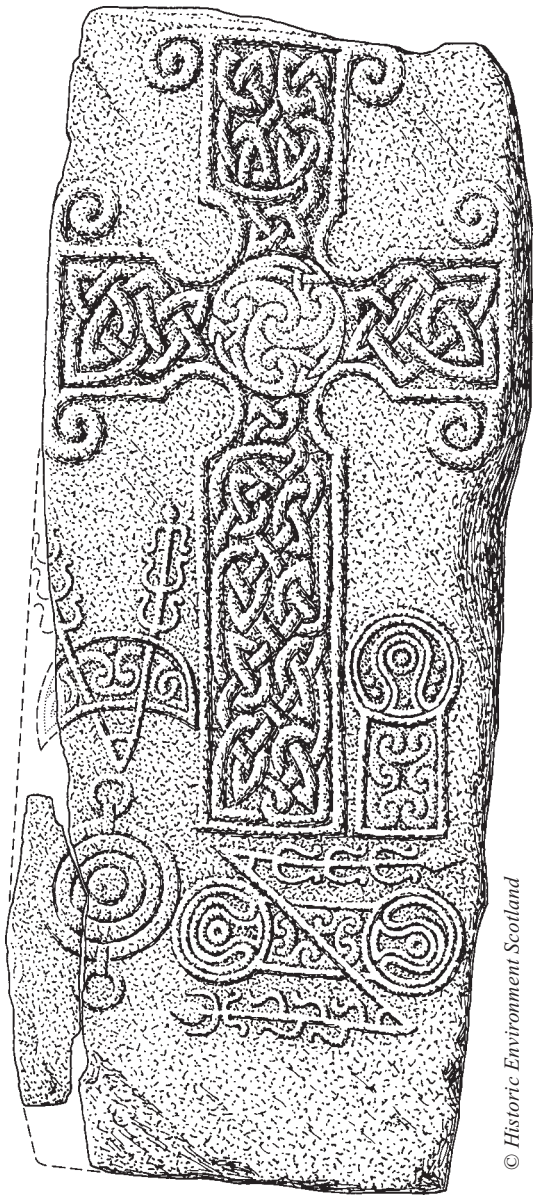
2 *Snettisham Great Torc*

Martin then discussed two exceptional but contrasting Iron Age torcs from Britain, the Great Torc from Snettisham in Norfolk and a much more delicate one from Blair Drummond in Stirlingshire. Both were part of a hoard, placed in the ground deliberately as an offering and both are made from twisted coils of gold wire but they could not be more different. The Snettisham torc is big and bulky and its large terminals are decorated with distinctive La Tène ornament, typical of the late Iron Age of c100-75BC. The Blair Drummond torc however is somewhat of a hybrid of styles and is much more delicate in construction and appearance. Dating from c300-100BC, the filigree work on its terminals displays a strong connection with the Mediterranean region, suggesting this high-status object was made by someone who learned his craft in southern Europe. Once again we see those Europe-wide connections.

Various torcs and combs showed that native Celtic art continued to be made throughout the British Isles during the Roman conquest, some in the south showing influences still rippling out from Roman Gaul. The Balmaclellan mirror, found in Kirkcudbrightshire, shows a distinct Roman influence in the form of its handle, which resembles that of a patera or cooking vessel. The post-Roman period saw a resurgence of Celtic art in the British Isles and this was the main focus of Martin's talk. This renaissance coincided with the spread of Christianity and resulted in a whole new array of religious objects upon which to apply Celtic motifs. Interlace is a prominent component of early medieval art in the British Isles and is often viewed as being quintessentially Celtic. But this decorative motif does not have its origins in Celtic art and only makes an appearance here with the advent of Christianity. In due course, as they were converted to Christianity, the peoples of the British Isles; Picts, Scots, Irish, Britons, Angles, Saxons and Norse, all incorporated interlace into their art, as is evident in early medieval stone sculpture.

However, triskeles and spirals, reminiscent of the La Tène style, only continued to play a prominent part in early medieval art in Ireland and Britain north of the Forth-Clyde isthmus – coincidentally (or not?) those parts of the British Isles that were never subjugated by Rome. They are a prominent feature of Irish, Scottish and Pictish sculpture but are completely absent from Anglo-Saxon stones. Even when Anglo-Saxon motifs such as vine scroll are adopted by the Picts (e.g. Hilton of Cadboll cross slab, Drosten Stone, St Vigeans), there isn't a two-way traffic of ideas; triskeles and spirals remain, as far as stone sculpture is concerned, conspicuously absent south of the Forth and Clyde. The one medium in Anglo-Saxon Britain which did incorporate triskeles and spirals was the illuminated manuscript. The Lindisfarne Gospels and Book of Durrow both display them in their carpet pages and illuminated capitals.

Martin postulated that triskeles may have retained a special significance where they remained in use. The front of the Hunterson Brooch is ostentatious in its execution, with amber beads and panels of filigree and animal interlace. However, on the back are two



3 *Dyce 2 Pictish Cross slab; Scale 1:10*
John Borland SC1080221

panels filled with spirals and triskeles, unseen by all and known only to the wearer. Did this ornament, worn close to the heart, have special significance? Our attention was drawn to the similarity between a roundel, filled with interlocking spirals, at the centre of the cross on Dyce 2 cross slab (understandably not part of the exhibition) and the interlocking spirals filling the upper body of Christ on the Rinnagan Crucifixion Plaque from Ireland. Are these just decorative motifs or, given their locations right at the heart of the cross and the crucified Christ, are they something more significant?

4 *Rinnagan Crucifixion Plaque*

Coming more up-to-date, we looked at the continued use of Celtic themes in the late medieval/early modern period, in the form of a carved wooden cask (c1500) and some dirks (c1500–1700), all decorated with Celtic motifs. The work of 19th-century antiquarians in examining and recording early medieval sculpture, and the discovery of artifacts such as the Norrie's Law Hoard also rekindled an interest in Celtic art. The exhibition's time-line concludes with the painting 'The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe' (1890) by George Henry and Edward Atkinson Hornel, a rather exotic Victorian take on the ancient Celts and their ceremonies which, by the looks of some of the characters in it, owes more to African and Native American cultures than it does to anything Celtic. *JB*

'Celts' runs in the
National Museum of Scotland
Chambers Street, Edinburgh
from 10 March to 25 September 2016

'Cradle of Scotland'

The exhibition 'Cradle of Scotland', which has now moved from the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, to Perth Museum and Art Gallery, showcases 10 years of work by the University of Glasgow's Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot Project (SERF).

The exhibition sections are entitled, in the first room, Prehistoric Forteviot, Iron Age Hillforts, and Caledonians and Romans, followed in the second room by Royal Forteviot.

SERF has established that there was almost continuous activity in Forteviot from around 3000BC until the start of the Iron Age around 800BC. A sequence of 'burials, building and burning' can be traced, including the construction of a massive palisaded enclosure, one of the largest in prehistoric Europe, and massive henges. Cremation burials, barrows burials and cist burials have all been found. A most impressive find is the bronze Forteviot Dagger, dated around 2100BC. The dagger's handle comprises a horn grip, a gold band and a sperm whale tooth pommel; large ornamental rivets held the handle to the blade. It was found in a cist, which contained among other objects, including a bouquet of meadowsweet – one of the earliest surviving floral tributes from a grave in Britain. The cist and its contents have been recreated within the exhibition.

A dense concentration of hillforts surrounds Forteviot. Hillforts were at their peak from the late Bronze Age (c1200BC) until the late Iron Age (c200BC). From radiocarbon dating, the SERF Project has been able to demonstrate how these settlements were reused and replaced over time. The artefacts on display, mainly domestic items from daily life, illustrate the long-lived occupation of the hillforts.

Contact with the Roman Empire from late in the 1st century AD brought a time of conflict, social change and trade. Imported Roman goods, such as glass, brooches and bangles, have been discovered on a few sites, and some of those found in Castle Craig broch are on display, including a fine Roman bronze patera. The display boards make the point that Caledonians eventually became Picts.

The time-line now takes a leap forward. The second room is devoted to a 3D animation of the Dupplin Cross (renamed Constantine's Cross), the Forteviot Hand Bell, a reconstruction of the Forteviot Arch – and, most excitingly, the sculpted fragments from Forteviot and Invermay. They are thought to be surviving parts of at least three other sculpted crosses, which are shown as they may have looked when whole: a Forteviot free-standing cross resembling the Dupplin Cross, a Forteviot ring-headed cross, and cross slab at Invermay. Ian G Scott's drawings of the fragments, enlarged to full-size, are also on display and are a useful aid to interpretation, as some pieces are fairly worn.

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1 *'Cradle of Scotland' exhibition, view of the Royal Forteviot display*

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2 *Forteviot 1, carving on back of fragment*

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3 *Forteviot 3, fragment of freestanding cross*

In addition there are life-sized replicas of the Gask cross slab and the Dupplin/Constantine Cross, also based on Ian Scott's drawings. The function of these large crosses in the landscape is described as: 'commemorative territorial markers for the royal centre at Forteviot, marking the boundaries and main approaches to the palace.' Sadly, the location of a Pictish royal palace remains unknown.

To quote from the University of Glasgow's website:

> Forteviot was a royal residence of both the Pictish kings and the first kings of Alba. It was at its most important in the 9th century when it was the seat of the dynasty of king Kenneth mac Alpin.
>
> Forteviot formed the political and spiritual core of the Pictish kingdom which evolved into the medieval kingdom of Scots. It derived some of its authority from the ancient ceremonial landscape it was situated in and proclaimed this authority through its own monuments, including prominent burials and a concentration of high quality monumental sculpture. Surviving fragments, on display here, help us to understand developments in Pictish society between the 8th and 10th centuries.

Elspeth Reid

'Cradle of Scotland' exhibition runs from 2 February to 26 June 2016 in Perth Museum and Art Gallery, admission free

Pictish Stones: a fresh historical perspective

In the autumn of 2015, BBC Television screened a series of four programmes under the banner of '**History of Scottish Art**', written and presented by **Lachlan Goudie**. He is himself an artist of some repute, with a distinctive figurative style and a love of colour. Not yet 40, he has won a number of prestigious awards.

The programmes were essentially concerned with painting, but to the credit of the presenter, he started at the true beginning of art in Scotland, long before brush hit canvas. Going back to prehistoric times, and working his way towards the Medieval period, Goudie had no option but to consider artwork in a variety of media, much of it rather different to that of his home patch, though his breezy style admitted no hint of discomfort at straying into unfamiliar territory, pursuing his subjects with zest and confidence.

The first half-hour and more of the initial programme in the series, broadcast on 7 October and entitled 'Living Dangerously', dealt with ancient art in three dimensions. First came the rock carvings of Kilmartin Glen in Argyll, then up to the stone circles of the Orkneys, concentrating on the Ring of Brodgar. After a glimpse into Maeshowe and a flash of the Westray figurine, it was on to the beautiful yet enigmatic carved stone balls concentrated in Aberdeenshire. As might be expected, Iona featured large in the story through illuminated manuscripts on vellum (the Book of Kells being the prime example) and the iconic Celtic high crosses which dominate the island. This took the viewer within touching distance of our Pictish stones, though they were preceded by artworks in other media: the Monymusk reliquary, the Hunterston brooch, and the St Ninian's Isle treasure.

And so, at last, we came to what Pictophiles had been waiting for. So had it been worth the wait? I suppose the answer would be a qualified 'Yes'. Lachlan Goudie adopted something of a scatter-gun approach, though it could be argued that it was beyond the scope of the programme to offer a comprehensive review of the topic, and an impression was all that could be reasonably expected, and indeed was all that was required. A strong start was made with the Aberlemno Class I stone, followed by a quick glimpse into the National Museum at the Easterton of Roseisle and Dores stones of the same type. Many others were overlooked.

The next stop, almost inevitably, was Meigle, yet it was but a momentary pause before moving further north to Nigg, and the Pictish monastic site of Port Mahomack, with reference to manuscript art again. Goudie lamented the unfulfilled potential of the site, which has been the subject of recent archaeological excavations, noting the discovery of "all the equipment required for making vellum – the Picts must have had manuscripts, but we've lost them all". It sounded almost like a blanket condemnation of collective cultural carelessness.

From the complex stone at Nigg (brief interpretive comments being supplied by Dr Sally Foster), it was then back to Aberlemno, with an examination of the wonderful cross-slabs at the Crosston and the Kirkton, though without a mention of the famous battle scene, apart from a split-second glimpse in the introduction. This section of the programme concluded with two remarkable but atypical pieces of late sculpture – the St Andrews sarcophagus, and Sueno's Stone at Forres. Of the former, Lachlan commented that its subject matter "might just look like another Pictish hunting scene" (not to the initiated it doesn't), "but would have been recognised by an audience who was really well versed in understanding and identifying symbols", the irony being that on this particular monument, there is an evident absence of Pictish symbols.

However, it was the latter example (which I prefer to regard as Picto-Scottic because of the number of essentially un-Pictish characteristics which it displays) which drew more discussion from Goudie than any other stone, his attention focusing on the narrative which it presents. Odd, then, that he did not tell us where it was, just that it was located "to the east of Inverness". He described it colourfully as "a carved picture-book, telling us about a battle, when two armies come together". Armed conflict is present, certainly, but it may not be a battle in the conventional sense; this is not to be paired with the Aberlemno battle-scene. He confidently asserted that four sequential scenes may be identified on the Forres pillar; reading upwards (unconventionally), these are (1) the gathering, (2) the conflict, (3) the retribution, and (4) the triumphal parade. Maybe.

Romilly Allen only identified three scenes, one of which he divided into five components, making seven in all. I would go along with that number; or it could be even more if every dividing cordon is taken into account. While Allen describes the composition in great detail, he declines to offer any opinion as to what is going here, and for good reason, for there is no way of telling which, if any, of the several theories which have been put forward is the correct one.

In the book *Invaders of Scotland*, authors Anna Ritchie and David Breeze wryly comment: 'Interpretation of the great battle scene has led to many happy hours of argument'. They seem convinced that 'the densely packed scenes of intense activity' do illustrate a battle, and imagine that everyone is like-minded: 'Scholars agree that these scenes tell the story of some great battle', but this writer is not alone in suspecting that Sueno's Stone speaks of something altogether darker. Goudie went no further into what the narrative may represent,

being more impressed by the sheer goriness of the sculpture with its "pile of growing bodies" ('growing' qualifying the wrong noun, it would seem), concluding: "If this was made of flesh, not stone, the blood would be oozing through the pores."

When it came to a consideration of the Pictish symbols, Goudie commented that "it has recently been realised that this is almost certainly the Pictish script that we were told the Picts never possessed, used for writing names and nothing else, but a script nevertheless." Recently? Names only? That sentence is certainly open to challenge. Interested in the geometric qualities of the symbols, unaccountably he ignored their artistic merits except for a passing mention: "If we go to one of the many places where Pictish stones have been gathered together, we can get an even greater sense of the sheer variety of Pictish stone carving, of how they went beyond that simple alphabet into a world of art." Thus the opportunity to eulogise the artistic attributes of the symbols was created – then spurned.

The chosen 'gathering place' was Meigle (none better), which members of the PAS had visited just four days earlier as part of the annual conference – yet it did not even receive a name-check. Quite a number of the stones which are displayed there appeared on screen at length, yet the commentary always seemed generalised rather than specific. The equally fine collection at St Vigeans was not accorded a mention.

Goudie made some powerful points, disinclined to shy away from the controversial implications of some of his statements: "The Pictish cross-slabs were the work of priests or monks [and not, he thus reckoned, of lay sculptors] who supported Pictish kings, and they travelled the country [from a single central school?], sculpting stones that projected the power of the Christian god and the kings of the Picts – for them, the message was clear – the Pictish nobility and the Church were two halves of the same slab of life; they were The Power."

The final summation ensured controversy to the end: "In the last twenty years, the big story in the art of Scotland's Dark Ages has been what we've learned about what we thought never existed – the art of the supposedly savage, illiterate Picts." The time-scale of this realisation is closer to two centuries than two decades, while the concept of the Picts as 'barbarians' (in accordance with Gordon Childe's classic definition) has always been favoured over 'savages'. Nonetheless, Lachlan Goudie is to be congratulated in giving the Picts a fair crack of the whip by allowing them to occupy a substantial part of his opening programme, thereby heightening public awareness of the splendours of their art.

Graeme Cruikshank

An incised cross slab at Fowlis Wester

Fowlis Wester is rightly renowned for its small but impressive collection of Pictish sculpture. For its better preservation, the cross slab which once stood in the centre of the village is now located inside the church, its place outdoors taken by a very convincing replica. Although greatly eroded by exposure to the elements for a thousand years and more, careful examination reveals it to be richly carved on both sides. On the front, a cross decorated with human and zoomorphic figures, knotwork, key pattern and spiral bosses fills most of the stone's 3.15m height. The cross is surmounted by two figures now too badly damaged to be identified with any certainty but they appear to be winged so could be birds or perhaps more likely, angels.

The arms of the cross project beyond the edges of the actual slab. This is a unique feature among Pictish sculpture but a few examples can be found in the west of Scotland and in Ireland, suggesting that the Pictish sculptors of Fowlis Wester were, to some extent, influenced by ideas coming from the Scots' kingdom of Dál Riata or perhaps further afield.

On the back, the top of the panel is filled by a large Pictish double-disc and Z-rod symbol. Below this, a single horseman is given prominence. It seems he is on the hunt as he is accompanied below by his hounds and two more horsemen, riding abreast. Below them is a procession on foot: a man leading a cow with a bell round its neck, followed by six marching soldiers armed with swords, shields and spears. Below this parade is a second Pictish symbol, a crescent and V-rod and what may be a third symbol, an eagle. Finally, a scene now badly damaged depicts a large lion-like creature biting a man's head.

The second cross slab, also on display within the church, is only half as big, bears no Pictish symbols and is, unusually, carved on only one face but it is no less impressive. It came to light during renovation of the church in 1927 and, having been incorporated into the fabric of the building for perhaps as long as 700 years, is in a remarkably good state of preservation.

A ringed cross filled entirely with interlace rises from a rectangular base decorated with key pattern and spirals (see *PAS Newsletter* 76). The head of the cross is flanked by two sea serpents, one attempting to devour a man (Jonah?) whilst the other watches over his abandoned sword and shield. Flanking the shaft of the cross are two enthroned figures, thought perhaps to represent the Desert Fathers, Saints Paul and Anthony. The figure on the left sits in the shade of a fruit-bearing tree with another tree- or plant-like motif in front of him. The figure on the right has a winged angel hovering over him. The robes of both seated figures and their thrones are lavishly decorated

with fine detail. To the left of the cross base are two tonsured monks, again in ornate robes. This sumptuously detailed carving is a feast for the eyes. Two small wall-mounted fragments, each bearing part of an interlace-decorated cross, complete Fowlis Wester's acclaimed collection of Pictish sculpture.

Much less well known is a slab bearing only an incised cross, which is incorporated into the path leading from the north-west gate of the graveyard to the door of the church. This unprepossessing stone was first noted way back in 1988 by local archaeologist and PAS stalwart Niall Robertson, who has been responsible for the discovery of a great many such stones in Perthshire. Measuring 1.38m long by 0.9m wide, this irregular slab is oriented roughly east-west, with the incised cross at its west end. The proportions of the stone suggest it was always intended to be a recumbent rather than an upright cross slab. A number of linear scores along one edge of the stone have been interpreted as possible plough scars, suggesting it lay outside the churchyard at one time. However, as some of these scores bifurcate, a passing plough may not explain their origin.

The stone's uncelebrated existence is not simply due to its unimposing appearance. When a new path was laid about 15 years ago, the cross slab was covered over by modern concrete slabs. It went from being largely overlooked to being overlain.

Having recently completed a photographic and drawn record of the four Pictish stones inside the church (part of an on-going programme to record all of Scotland's Early Medieval sculpture), the Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) was keen to record the incised cross slab too. But where to begin?

A chance meeting at Fowlis Wester with former colleague Daniel Parker helped. He put us in touch with James McColl, local resident and Fabric Convenor on the Kirk Session. James confirmed that, as far as he could remember, the cross slab was still *in situ*, underneath the modern paving slabs at the highest point on the path. On our behalf, James spoke to the Kirk Session and we were given permission to uncover and record the cross slab as long as we reinstated the path. That just left the problem of lifting and re-laying concrete slabs.

As of 1 October 2015, RCAHMS merged with Historic Scotland to become a new heritage body, Historic Environment Scotland. With this merger we inherited a great many new colleagues, not least those who make up the work squads looking after Historic Scotland's properties in care. This seemed like a likely source of the expertise required. A phone call to Stirling Castle put us in touch with Iain Rutherford at Doune Castle.

On the appointed day in October, Iain and colleague John McPake met us at Fowlis Wester, equipped with

1 *Steve Wallace photographing the newly uncovered cross slab using oblique peripheral flash to synch out the daylight and model the stone's surface and carving. DP226485*

2 *The incised recumbent cross slab. DP226482*

a handy device for lifting slabs. Things got off to an unpromising start. They lifted three slabs at the highest point on the path but there was no sign of the cross slab underneath. We were just considering the prospect of lifting every slab in turn when James McColl's wife Audrey arrived on the scene. Her recollection was that the stone was further down the path from where we were looking. A fourth concrete slab was duly lifted where Audrey suggested and there, under a protective layer of sand was part of our carved stone. A further two slabs had to be lifted, one either side, before it was fully uncovered.

With that done, my colleagues Steve Wallace and Zoe Ballantine proceeded to make a photographic record of the stone, using oblique peripheral flash to synchronise out the daylight and model the carving. I then took the necessary dimensions and orientation to make a measured drawing of the stone before Iain and John expertly reinstated the path. The day was a model exercise in successful collaboration.

In the absence of other dateable ornament, it is very difficult to say with absolute certainty how old this incised cross slab actually is. However it sits comfortably within a corpus of similar sculpture in north-west or 'Highland' Perthshire. There is a clear trail of linear, sunken and outline cross slabs, many of them recumbent, leading out of Argyll, down Strath Fillan, along Glen Dochart and eastward along the glens and straths of Perthshire. Examples can be found at St Fillans Priory, Suie, Balquhidder, St Fillans, Comrie, Killin, Fearnan, Fortingall, Dull,

3 *John McPake (left) and Iain Rutherford (right) lifting a slab back into place once the recording has been completed. DP226487*

Old Faskally and many other sites. Many of these stones are located at known early chapel sites and those at Fortingall and Dull sit alongside Pictish sculpture.

These cross slabs may represent the spread of Christianity from the Scots' kingdom of Dàl Riata into southern Pictland. It is entirely possible this simple carved stone at Fowlis Wester, visually unimpressive as it is, represents the coming of Christianity there and thus pre-dates the Pictish sculpture on display inside the church.

John Borland

Spring talks at Brechin Town House Museum

7.30pm – doors open at 7.00

Friday 18 March

JOHN SHERRIFF

Pictish Forts: Some new thoughts as a result of recent research

Friday 15 April

KELLY KILPATRICK

A Pictish symbol in an Irish manuscript? Pictish influence on Irish marginal decoration

Friday 20 May

DAVID STRACHAN

Excavation of the Pictish structures at Lair, Perthshire

PAS Newsletter 79

The deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 21 May 2016

Please email contributions to the editor:

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