THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER 106 WINTER 2022

President's letter

It is a great honour to take over the presidency from John Borland, after his ten-year stint at the helm. The Society always seemed to glide ahead effortlessly and I enjoyed being a fellow traveller and occasional speaker. Now I realise just how much work both John and your committee put in to creating such a vibrant and stimulating society. It is thanks to John (or was it covid?) that the Society has turned itself around from a small group of people struggling to reach meetings on dark nights at Brechin, to a world-wide zoom audience for both the lectures and conference. The extraordinary increase in membership rose from a steady 80-ish to the currently over 200. A virtuous circle began to emerge. On-line conferences do not cost much to host, so the conference fees have boosted our treasure chest for good causes. As a result, the Society is now able to take on projects to support Pictish art in many ways. Our primary focus is on stone conservation, but the remit of the constitution allows us to support other initiatives which promote the knowledge and appreciation of Pictish art. More projects are set to follow our success with conserving the Conon stone.

I hope to build on this type of investment with your support. In that regard, please see a notice later on about permitting your subscription to allow gift aid. Over all, this could make a difference of at least £300 p.a. to our coffers.

While zoom has been an amazing boon, nothing beats a good field trip and in the past these have been a mainstay of the Society, not least for the social enjoyment. We are proposing to reinstate a field trip day, but now separate from the conference. Please see below about further information. The date is Sunday 18 June 2023, starting at Aberdeen railway station, and proceeding up the Dee and down the Don by bus.

During my tenure as president, I hope to build up the national and international profile of the Society. Because we have funds to spend on conservation, we can make a good public story about the Society's activities and membership. We should also try to become a first port of call for anyone who makes a new Pictish find: tell us, tell your county archaeologist, tell the National Museum and we may be able to help with publicity, research and conservation. Our membership provides a strong network of experts in the field, with many different skills and passions.

For those of you who don't know me (yet), here's a bit of back story. I studied history and history of art, writing a PhD on medieval decorative ironwork in England (actually door hinges). I became an Inspector for Ancient Monuments for English Heritage, and for several years my job included plenty of archaeology. I dug around Norway and Germany as well as SE England. We moved to Aberdeen in 1984, and I eventually started to teach history of art at the university while getting increasingly sucked into the wonders of Pictland. My recent Pictish research has been on the collections at St Vigeans and St Andrews for Historic Environment Scotland, and an appraisal of Tullich churchyard. In the pipeline is a book on '*The Lost Civilisation of the Picts*' for Reaktion Press.

Jane Geddes

Conference

1-2 October 2023

A summary of the papers is provided by **SHEILA HAINEY**. More will follow in the next newsletter.

MEGAN KASTEN: *OG(H)AM: Ancient script in a digital dimension*

OG(H)AM: Harnessing digital technologies to transform understanding of ogham writing, from the 4th century to the 21st is a joint project between the University of Glasgow and Maynooth University, Ireland. It aims to extend the earlier work of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies *Ogham in 3D* project, which recorded all the ogham inscriptions on Irish

stones to include inscriptions on other media and the examples known from outwith the Republic of Ireland. Megan is one of the team based in Glasgow, and she focussed on what we can learn from the physical characteristics of the digitally recorded stones.

She began by briefly introducing us to ogham, a script based on an arrangement of lines and notches. A stem line is cut or abutted by groups of 1-5 lines, each group and its position relative to the stem line representing a letter, and is usually read vertically, beginning at the bottom left of the inscription. The script is probably Irish in origin: the letters correspond to sounds in early Irish but there is a possibility that it arose among Irish speakers living in Wales. Inscriptions are found on formal stone monuments, as well as on small portable objects, occasionally scratched as graffiti and also in manuscripts. It appears to have been in use from the fourth century to around 1850. Most common in Ireland, examples are known from Wales, Scotland and the Northern Isles.

Megan briefly introduced us to the use of Epi-Doc, a set of guidelines used to describe texts consistently, to make them machine readable. This has been used to group together items such as linguistic analyses, explanations for missing letters, interpretation, measurements and descriptions of physical characteristics of the inscriptions, allowing the development of a searchable database that will be available on the project website. The website includes an og(h)am of the month and blogs from members of the team, as well as an explanation for those brackets in the project title.

There are a number of problems when it comes to using two dimensions to record ogham inscriptions. Not infrequently, use was made of an edge or a corner instead of creating a stem line. Using three-dimensional recording techniques can overcome some of these problems. Megan uses photogrammetry to record stones—a technique that has a number of advantages: she can photograph through glass, to almost any height on a monument that she chooses, and even in the dark confines of a damp souterrain. As it is possible to remove colour and surface texture from the 3-D image, to enhance the contrast and to rotate the item so that it can be viewed from different angles, inscriptions can become far clearer. Megan showed examples of this, including the inscription on the edge of the Auquhollie stone and that at Poltalloch, where the edge does not form a 90º angle. On the stone from Burrian, an almost invisible inscription became clear after colour removal and intensification of contrast.

Side-by-side comparison of objects currently located far apart becomes possible. Comparison of the Scoonie and Loch Goilhead stones shows that the ogham on the latter was smaller and finer. Such observations may be useful in studying the development of the script over time. Interactions with other design elements can also be studied. The Scoonie figures, with the exception of the Pictish beast, all look towards the ogham, the stemline of which appears to have been cut to respect the muzzle and leg of the foremost deer. It may be part of an original design, but it may have been a later addition. On the Latheron stone, too, the fish and eagle look towards the ogham.

Scoonie stone, showing ogham inscription.
© National Museums Scotland

Groove analysis, first developed to study Swedish rune stones, can be used to identify individual carving signatures. This involves taking detailed measurements over cross- and longitudinal sections of the groove. These are repeated to obtain an average and standard deviation, the latter giving us a measure of consistency. Megan showed examples from PhD work on the Govan stones, using a comparison of the Inchinnan 12 and Govan 1 stones to illustrate the technique. Similarities in style and content of these two monuments had led to the suggestion that they may have been the work of the same carver, but groove analysis, as well as some other lines of evidence, strongly points to the work of different hands. Megan demonstrated how she came to this conclusion, before returning to the rather different problems encountered with ogham stones.

In order to take the required measurements through the depth of the groove, it is necessary to work down from a level surface. Intersections

in the carving, where an ogham stroke cuts across the stem line or junctions the Latin script for example, can introduce irregularities in the carved line and so are best avoided. The use of an edge or corner as a stem also presents difficulties. These constraints restrict the choice of areas available for measurement.

Megan illustrated this from her work on the Newton Stone. This has a line of ogham that reads from the top down. At the lower end, there is an odd curve and another (or a continuation) line slopes off up with more ogham lettering. The stone also carries an enigmatic inscription in what appears to be a debased Latin script, as yet undeciphered. Megan demonstrated how the irregularities in the stone constrained where she was able to carry out measurements of the grooves in each of these three targets. Her tentative conclusions were that the Latin script was probably all cut by the same person, and the main part of the inscription was also probably the work of an individual, the same being true for the lettering on the upcurve. Although it is possible that all were the work of one carver, Megan was not yet in a position to rule out the involvement of as many as three in the ogham and Latin lettering on the stone. Her ongoing analyses may lead to more secure conclusions about the number of individuals involved.

Photogrammetry and 3-D modelling can aid in a deeper awareness of the variability of the ogham inscriptions, both in different contexts and over time. On the level of individual monuments, it can contribute to our understanding of the ogham stones and help in the construction of their biographies. Megan ended by again emphasising the multi-disciplinary nature of the OG(H)AM project, with archaeologists, linguists and an array of digital specialists all involved.

For further information, see https://ogham.glasgow.ac.uk/ .

HEATHER PULLIAM: *Books and Bodies in Pictish Art*

Although much of her talk would draw on Pictish Art, Heather explained from the beginning that she would draw examples from a broader Insular context. Religious figures are shown 'wearing' books on several Pictish stones, as well as on objects such as the Lismore crozier and in manuscript illustrations.

It is possible that the objects are either small book shrines or satchels designed to carry a psalter or gospel book. Examples of both have survived, with most coming from Ireland. Scottish examples of satchels tend to be badly degraded. The eleventh-century book shrine known has the Misach has a finely-wrought carrying chain still attached; in other cases the remains of buckles suggest that straps of leather or fabric were used. The combined weight of the wooden box, covered in metal and the psalter or gospel book it contained would have made wearing the chain or strap around the neck painful without some degree of padding. Regardless, it would be difficult to carry for any lengthy period. Some indications of wear patterns suggest that book shrines could have been carried much in the fashion of a cinema attendant's ice-cream tray, and possibly raised to be held against the chest for special display. The book shrine ('cumdach' in old Irish) could be opened to reveal the book. In some cases, such as the eighth-century example from Lough Kinale, the shrine was sealed, suggesting that the book had taken the status of a relic.

As far as we can tell from surviving satchels or satchel fragments and from textual descriptions, these were ornamented and closed with elaborate knotwork. Figures carved in stone carrying books or book shrines mostly wear these round the neck and over the chest. The monks from the Northern Isles wear the straps over raised hoods, while the figures at St Vigeans are bare-headed. St Ciaran, depicted on the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise, carries his book on his back, presumably for ease of working as he and King Diarmaid are shown setting the foundation stake of the Abbey. On the Lismore crozier, the figure (perhaps Christ) is shown with the retaining straps crossed over the breast, while on the West Cross at Kilfenora the figure (Christ crucified or Christ risen?) also has the straps crossed over the breast while the book rests against the belly.

Heather reflected on the rarity of examples of carried books. Only late in the Middle Ages do we found books being carried about the person in Europe—Books of Hours or girdle books worn on belts around the waist. Ornately ornamented books could be carried in procession, held against the breast on special occasions, but

wearing books, strapped to the body, appears to have been an insular phenomenon. There is one other place where holy books were (and still are) carried round the neck: Ethiopia. There is a major difference in the lack of ornamentation in the Ethiopian satchels, which are plain and functional. Although the prime texts in both Ethiopian and Insular studies which deal with this practice cross reference these widely separated examples, Heather did not suggest that the two were related.

The practice of wearing protective texts as amulets dates back to late antiquity. We have physical evidence of this custom as well as written evidence that some of the early churchmen regarded this as inappropriate behaviour for Christians. The use of extracts of scriptures as amulets is not confined to Christianity, however. Heather showed examples from both Judaic and Islamic traditions, these generally coming from areas where the survival of artefacts is better than in the conditions to be found in the wetter lands of the north. Is the wearing of books an Insular extension of this practice? Or should we view the wearing of books within broader literary and theological, visual and material contexts?

We can think of the exterior as the public face of the book: access to the text and illustrations inside is restricted. Its prominence marks the wearer as a Christian, a bearer of the word. Where the wearer goes, so goes the book. These were books on display and on the move. The monks on the stones are dressed and hooded for travelling, carrying staffs or croziers as they go. We know from literary sources that books were carried in procession: the Cathach of St Columba, for example, was processed around armies to invoke blessing and protection before they went into battle. Books may have been seen as extensions of monastic power and protection. Certainly, we have evidence that land charters and maledictions against those who threatened monastic property could be included within gospel books, the book becoming a witness to and guarantor of the power of a monastic community.

Words had power. The words of Ephesians, commending the Christian to the armour of God, to the breastplate of justice find resonance in the group of prayers known as Loricae. The best known of these is the Lorica of St Patrick, beginning 'I bind to myself today/ The strong power of the invocation of the Trinity….' Textual references to Loricae being kept above the altar suggest that these were physical objects, possibly books. The Lorica was also seen as armour against magic. Heather suggested that the 'roof' in representations of books or book shrines in the Book of Deer may represent the type of breastplate known in Latin as *lorica squamata*; the books held by the evangelists could be seen as physical armour. The figures on the St Vigeans stone have been interpreted by Jane Geddes as contrasting Christianity with a misguided pre-Christian past. St Paul and St Anthony share bread—the emblem of Christian sacrifice, above a figure drinking the blood of a beast in a pagan ritual. On the left of the cross, is what appears to be a representation of Simon Magus, his head dashed against a square stone above a pair of bare-headed clerics one of whom carries a square book satchel, perhaps a dual representation of Christ as the word and cornerstone.

A processing monk carrying a satchel on St Vigeans VIG007. © Historic Environment Scotland

There are several references in the bible to the heart as a secret place to contain words. Perhaps the best known is in Luke's gospel, where

Mary, after the Annunciation, pondered and kept the words of the angel 'in her heart' – a guarded treasury. The idea of the chest, the torso, as a place of concealment was current in the early medieval period. We also have the image of St John, resting his head on Christ's breast, absorbing the word. John "of the Breast" is singled out in Insular gospels, his book held against his uncovered hands in the Book of Kells, where he appears to be contained or framed within the body of Christ. In other gospel books, he is shown as holding the book close to his body, or shut to conceal the writing, again differentiating him from his three fellow evangelists. John is associated with the idea of secret, inner knowledge. Perhaps this is reflected in the way that some gospel books were sealed within their shrines. The elaborate decoration and the knots which secured book satchels may reinforce these ideas of enclosure of something very precious.

There are other ideas at play here, too. The person who carries the book strapped to his chest or over his heart controls access to the book, but he also becomes in a sense a vessel for the word. And as the word is memorised, it imbues both body and spirit. We should be aware too, of the metaphors of eating and digesting associated with reading of the gospels. The word was thus absorbed into the body of the reader

The books shown on the Pictish stones are inscribed on figures carved in low relief. It is possible the books were highlighted in paint, marking their carriers as following in the footsteps of the evangelists. The carriers are always shown as walking, with a crook or crozier in hand, and are never alone. They either form part of a procession, or meet one another, possibly moving towards a cross. Some of the book shrines carry legends around the book, designed to be read sunwise. Perhaps this gives us a clue as to the direction of procession followed by the book carriers as they carried the word of God.

JO CLEMENTS: *The George Bain Collection: a largely untapped resource*

Groam House Museum is home to the most complete collection associated with George Bain. Bain is best known for his *Celtic Art; the Methods of Construction*, also published as a series of six booklets each covering a particular facet of the theme. The collection may provide answers to many questions about the man, his work and his influence.

George Bain was a native of Caithness, born in 1881. His family moved to Edinburgh, where he began to study art part-time while working for a firm of printers. Over the years leading up to the First World War, he continued his studies while supporting himself (and his wife Jessie and family) by working as an illustrator and newspaper artist, eventually taking up teaching. After serving in the armed forces, he returned to take up the post of Principal Art Teacher at Kirkcaldy High School, where he remained until his retirement in 1946. On retiring, he moved to Drumnadrochit, where he set up the short-lived College of Celtic Cultures. In 1952, Bain and his wife moved to Codsall in Shropshire, to live with their daughter and her husband. He had a studio in the house, and continued to work and lecture from this base. His wife, Jessie died in 1957, while he died in 1968.

From the mid-twenties, Bain experimented with teaching ways of constructing Celtic motifs with his pupils, and later went on to hold vacation classes for teachers. He wished ordinary people to be able to draw Celtic designs and to create new designs in the genre, giving rise to modern Celtic art. Different crafts would be employed to realise these patterns. The methods of construction could be taught in schools or passed from person to person within community settings. Individuals could benefit personally from being creative, and could take a new pride in a national art which also stimulated the rural economy. In Bain's vision, this art was distinctly Scottish.

The collection comprises over 2,700 items. As well as drawings and writings relating to the methods of construction and to his teaching there is a substantial body of correspondence together with ephemera relating to Celtic design. There are items of wood, leather, textiles, ceramics and paper incorporating his designs, executed by himself, members of his family, pupils and others influenced by his work.

George Bain's methods of analysing Celtic key patterns. From G.Bain, *Celtic Art, the methods of construction.*

One important question is: to what extent has the work of George Bain coloured the understanding of Insular art in the 20th and 21st centuries? Jo shared with us her early experience as a youngster buying a copy of *Methods of Construction* to pass the time during a very wet holiday and working her way through the book. When, many years later, she encountered the Hilton of Cadboll stone, it was with a sense of familiarity rooted in this youthful acquaintance with Bain. Through his work, she felt a sense of connection with the sculptors and artists of the Pictish period.

Bain organised his methods of construction into clear categories, neither reflecting transformations from one to another nor acknowledging the inaccuracies that we sometimes see on stones and in manuscripts. Bain perhaps elided any tendency to frailness, anything less than precision in execution. Having laid claim to discovery of the methods of construction, he expected adherence to its principles, and was scathing when others failed to live up to these standards. But notes on his sketches of horses to the effect that these were 'for artists, not facsimiles,' suggest that in his other work he believed himself to be faithful to his sources,

And yet, for example, his representation of St John on his wife's gravestone, which was a 'copy' of the image on the opening page of St John's gospel in the Book of Kells, has been subtly altered from the original. His drawing of the horse from Inverurie differs from the carving on the stone in the set of the head and neck, with other minor changes. How many other examples of slight alterations, variations from originals, are to be found in Bain's work? And how have these impacted our view of Insular art? His geometric patterns, for example, are more regularised than many to be found on stones or in manuscripts. Cynthia Thickpenny's work has shown how selective he was in his reproductions of key patterns. Jo showed us several examples of how he often tidied up his reconstruction drawings of Pictish stones.

For Bain, key patterns, knot work and interlace were completely segregated. In his work, there is never any transition from one to the other. He was not unique in tidying up his reconstructions, but he was trying to provide a method for use by others. And he may also have been selective; he ignored a relatively high proportion of the available Northumbrian examples. Perhaps this was due to his desire to elevate a distinctly Scottish tradition of Celtic art.

Much more research is needed to assess Bain's impact. His work probably reached more, and more different kinds of, people than the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, although Romilly Allen had already begun to categorise and sketch out the different patterns to be found on the stones. The collection gives us a chance to question how people encountered Bain's work. There were his texts, the series of small books each dealing with a different type of pattern, as well as the large compilation of the *Methods of Construction*. We can inquire how widely these were distributed, how many copies may have been sold, circulated or read as well as how many editions were produced. Objects made to designs by Bain and his pupils (either by the artist or by others) also reached a wide audience. For example, those lucky enough to frequent the cabins of Cunard liners may have walked on carpets by Quail and Tranter of Kidderminster, made to a Bain design. How many of the visitors to the Empire Exhibition of 1938

saw the J & P Coats stand, with its examples of Bain-inspired needlework? Did any of them feel moved to emulate any of these pieces?

We know that Bain wrote in 1933 of having opportunities to experiment with both school pupils and adults on methods of construction. He also interacted with adult students through the College of Celtic Cultures during his Drumnadrochit years. In 1948, students of art classes held in Latheron and Dunbeath were photographed for a local newspaper proudly displaying cushions bearing knotwork panels. These clearly followed panels of designs simplified by Bain for beginners. How many other classes or groups also made use of Bain's instructions? A trawl through local newspapers may give some idea of the spread in this fashion. The record books of the various societies and groups which invited Bain to lecture may also give us some information as to his impact in his later years, as may the collection of objects made by his pupils and others. We may also ask how his impact has changed since his death. This is made easier by our ability to question living artists and craftsfolk. Over the past couple of years, a team from Groam House has been working on a website that combines the work of Bain and contemporary arts/crafts workers. Alongside a Facebook discussion group dedicated to Celtic arts, this provides ample material for anyone wishing to research Bain's more recent legacy (See p. 13). There is a great deal of material available, all that is needed is a dedicated researcher to take on the work.

DAVID McGOVERN: *Something Old, Something New—Recreating the Conan Stone*

Shortly before lockdown, David was commissioned to carve a recreation of the Conan Stone (found near Conon Bridge in 2019) to be placed near the original find site. As around half of the stone was missing, there were two options. The top half of the stone could be recreated, leaving the bottom half blank. There were problems with this option—not least the danger of vandalism to the blank space. On the other hand, there was the chance to re-imagine what might have been present in the original. David has had considerable experience of recreating images from carved stones, and he showed us examples of his work—the beheading scene from Sueno's stone, Kirriemuir 1 and Monifeith 2. He has also created several new monuments within the conventions of Pictish art—a new cross-slab for Forteviot as well as a new stone for St Vigeans. His belief that it is possible to create new Pictish art, within the parameters observed by the original craftsmen is well justified. It was decided that he should create a design for the lower half of the stone that would fit with the remaining original, in a Pictish idiom.

The "easy" part of the design, replicating what is on the remaining part of the stone, involved studying what remains of the original using drawings, photogrammetry and scans to get as much of the detail as possible. Before creating the new design for the lower half of the stone, David spent time studying other stones which bear imagery similar to that on the upper half. He decided that a hunting scene would be appropriate, for the Highland location, and as there were some affinities with stones in Perthshire and Angus which also carry hunt scenes.

There are few quarries operating at present which can produce a large block of stone of the quality necessary for work like this, and none can provide an exact match for the original. David arranged for a block of St Bees sandstone, 2.4 metres long, 0.63 metres wide, and weighing 0.85 tonnes to be delivered to his workshop. There it rested on supporting columns that could be raised or lowered as necessary to provide a convenient working height. He transferred his design as a line drawing to the surface of the stone and began carving the symbols: a snake and Z-rod and double disc and Z-rod on the upper part of the stone. Then, after a week of intense labour, disaster struck. A fault running the full length of the stone was revealed. Nothing could be done except negotiate the delivery of a replacement block of sandstone from the quarry and start again.

David showed us various stages in the process as carving on the image side of the slab progressed. Beginning with the symbols, the next stage was carving the outlines of the figures that we can see, before going on to work on a design that fits with the dog-headed figure, centaur and cattle that fill the upper part. A hind, with her fawn fitting beautifully into the space above and behind her back, is pursued by two fierce dogs, above a set of three mythical animals. His ap-

prentice, Tristan Cameron-Harper, was seen hammer and chisel in hand. David claims that competition with Tristan drives him to work even harder.

The Conon stone, recreated by David McGovern. Work in progress. © David McGovern

The carving of the sides was probably the most pain-inducing part of the work. Crouching beside the stone to work on a vertical surface causes neck and back muscles to tense and ache. David has timed the creating of these intricate patterns, aiming to get some data on how long it may have taken to carve the original Pictish monuments.

The most nerve-wracking episode in the creation of the new Conan Stone involved turning the stone over so that work could begin on the cross face. This involved the use of heavy machinery to move the stone, first out of the workshop to a large shed where there was space to manoeuvre, then raising the stone on slings that could be adjusted in height to tilt the stone and gently turn it, then returning the stone to the workshop, ready to begin on the cross face.

Designing this side of the stone has involved collaboration with John Borland. The cross itself will be filled with intricate interlace patterns, but the first pictures we saw showed only the outline. Beginning with the framing beasts, whose tongues form interlace down the sides of the cross head, the progress seemed rapid. A "stop press" shot of the central boss on the cross head brought us up to date with the latest stage of carving. The intention is to finish the new stone this year, and hopefully next year we should be able to visit it on site as well as the original stone which is in Dingwall museum.

David concluded by inviting us to get in touch with him if we wished to arrange a visit to his workshop—a mysterious place where the wind blows away the dust as the music of ACDC plays out above the sound of hammer on chisel, chisel on stone and new Pictish art emerges to the light. Contact: https://www.monikie-rockart.co.uk/

JOHN BORLAND *Objects whose function is uncertain. Really?*

In her article entitled *Fonts and Footbaths in Pictish Times* (PASN 105), Jane Geddes refutes my assertion that there are fonts, of likely Early Medieval date, at Tullich, Dull and Fortingall. She proposes the name 'boulder bowl' as a "neutral term for such an object whose function is uncertain".

Jane refers to an article by A. D. Lacaille, published in 1953 in the *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society, Vol 12* titled 'Stone Basins (Some examples from the West of Scotland as guides to typology)'. Lacaille was concerned that many stone basins (Jane's 'boulder bowls') often get wrongly attributed as having an ecclesiastical function and sets out to define their many different forms and functions, covering mortars, pot querns, knocking stones, natural rock basins and even cross bases. Jane rightly observes that "such stones can accumulate long biographies of secular and holy uses".

There is an Early Medieval cross base in a garden in Monifieth known traditionally as the Font Stone (Canmore ID 33406) and another south-east of Birnie Kirk called the Bible Stone (Canmore ID 16430). The socket on the former does indeed fill with rain water whilst the size of socket on the latter is reminiscent of a large seventeenth- or eighteenth- century bible. I suspect both names reflect a post-Reformation tradition which acknowledges each stone's ecclesiastical origins whilst conveniently steer-

ing them away from their original and contentious pre-Reformation function of supporting freestanding crosses bearing potentially idolatrous images.

I feel quite certain however that we can dismiss any notion the examples at Tullich, Dull and Fortingall are or were mortars, querns or cross bases. Are they knocking stones for husking barley or bruising oats? If so, they are significantly larger than the many knocking stones found in deserted fermtouns, on display in folk museums and filling the shelves of museum stores.

Given their non-portability, the Tullich, Dull and Fortingall 'boulder bowls' are likely to be *in situ* and an ecclesiastical function seems likely. Lacaille's article helpfully illustrates examples of later medieval fonts, none of which are hollowed out of unshaped boulders, so we can be fairly certain they are not fonts of the twelfth century or later. Although incomplete, the font in Kildrummy Kirk (Canmore ID 76816) shows the form typical of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

Addressing the matter of early baptisms, Jane rightly points out that when the first pagan Picts were converted, stone fonts may not have been to hand and that springs, wells and rivers – any and every natural water source – were probably used. I don't disagree. Citing several references of baptisms performed by Columba whilst travelling through Pictland from Adamnán's *Life of St Columba,* she states "For these early rituals of the conversion period neither the formalities of a church nor stone font were required."

But the absence of fonts in sixth-century Pictland is surely to be expected. Columba was travelling through an essentially pagan land so neither church nor font were at his disposal. Whether he required their formality or not, neither was an option. These accounts of baptism in the sixth century do not preclude the use of fonts in subsequent centuries. Even if the practice of using natural water sources continued beyond the 'first flush' of baptisms (it probably did), that still doesn't preclude the use of stone fonts as well.

Jane states that "Anglo-Saxon stone fonts are noticeable by their absence, with only a few recognizable objects from the later tenth to eleventh centuries, their proliferation beginning in the twelfth century." Yet she illustrates an ornately carved example from Deerhurst dated to the ninth century. It may be a rarity but surely it proves the existence and use of stone fonts in the Anglo-Saxon church as early as the ninth century. Indeed, given that the paired spiral ornament on the Deerhurst font has been compared to Pictish sculpture, it offers a tantalising glimpse of what we may have lost from Pictland. No one is in any doubt that Pictish monasteries housed and produced manuscripts despite the fact that not even a single Pictish folio survives. We should not rule out the possibility that ornate stone fonts may have existed in Pictland. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Jane also cites the story of Rumwold, an Anglo-Saxon saint. At his birth, attendants were instructed to "fetch a hollow stone lying a little distance away". This "hollow stone" was clearly small enough to be portable (unlike those at Tullich, Dull and Fortingall) but the account does point to the possible use of a stone font being used for baptism in the mid-seventh century.

Detailing several accounts of foot washing as part of the baptism ceremony, as an act of purification and as a ritual performed to welcome pilgrims and visitors to Iona, Jane draws our attention to the cross-marked trough outside Iona's west door and cites other examples from Ireland. The size and form of the Iona trough certainly lends itself to its ascribed function - one could easily stand or sit beside it whilst ones feet were bathed. The stone vessels at Tullich, Dull and Fortingall would not accommodate this process readily so we can be fairly sure they were not designed with this ritual in mind.

Jane expresses concern as to how such large fonts would be used. She paints a picture of adults awkwardly "bending the [catechumen's] head over the basin with holy water wastefully splashing about". Creeky-hipped priests also get a mention as they struggle to baptise babes. She postulates that if these fonts were located outside the church, it would be difficult to keep their contents sanctified. Having emptied out numerous fonts located outdoors in order to

measure and draw them, I can testify to the putrid nature of their contents. Rain water and years' worth of fallen leaves and grass clippings make for a foul-smelling green soup. The brew filling Dull font even included the bloated decomposing carcass of a small rodent. However we don't know for certain if these fonts were located outside their respective churches in their time. If they were, they were surely subject to a maintenance regime – a regular if not daily ritual of cleaning, of replenishing the water and blessing it. As for awkward, wasteful splashing and creaky hips, Jane had already mentioned carvings depicting the use of a ladle to scoop and pour baptismal river water. Could Fortingall not have boasted a fine gilded ladle along with the now stolen hand bell?

Adult baptism or possibly the sacrament of ordination, using a ladle. Durham 5A © Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, University of Durham. Photographer: Tom Middlemass

Jane concludes that whilst there is plentiful evidence for the washing of feet in the Early Medieval period, there is no mention of fonts being used in the early baptism ritual. But taken as a whole, the evidence is scant. That's not to question its value or validity – it has both. But a few references about Columba in pre-Christian Pictland don't prove that fonts weren't used in subsequent centuries. Accounts of baptisms taking place in rivers in Ireland don't prove fonts weren't in use somewhere in contemporary Pictland. Images on sculpture of ladles being used in rivers don't preclude them being used in association with fonts. Plentiful sources for ritual foot washing don't preclude the use of fonts for baptism, albeit undocumented. What's missing of course is contemporary evidence from Pictish sources and as ever, the lack of any written account from Pictland leaves a gaping hole in our knowledge. But absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

We should also consider the three locations in question and their associated sculptural assemblages. Each is firmly located in Pictland and some Pictish sculpture is present at all three sites. Yet each assemblage consists largely of simple crosses, Dalriadic in style. So unlike Meigle, St Vigeans, St Andrews or Kirriemuir, which were Pictish churches through and through – of the Picts, by the Picts, for the Picts, Tullich, Dull and Fortingall represent something different. They appear to be major centres of the Dalriadic church in Pictland but with only some Pictish patronage. Were they Christian mission stations amidst a sea of pagan Picts? If so, perhaps the need to convert an adult population by baptism required the adoption of new practices.

The straths and glens of Highland Perthshire teem with simple crosses. Many others are dotted throughout Aberdeenshire, especially along the River Dee. But the numerous chapel sites with one or a few sculptured stones don't all boast a massive 'boulder bowl'. Something different was happening at Tullich, Dull and Fortingall.

In truth, I can offer no scholarly arguments to counter Jane's documentary and art historical evidence. I can only offer circumstantial evidence in support of my argument but I believe it is persuasive. There may be no mention in historical sources of fonts being used in the early baptism ritual but the 'boulder bowls' at Tullich, Dull and Fortingall could be considered

as physical evidence. They are all located at churches. There size makes it unlikely they are agricultural knocking stones moved to their present locations from the surrounding countryside. Indeed, knocking stones of this size and form do not proliferate in the countryside anyway. Therefore an ecclesiastical function is more likely than a domestic one. They do not fit the model of Early Medieval troughs for the laving of feet or that of bullaun stones. Nor does their crude form fit the model of post-twelfth-century fonts. That leaves fonts of Early Medieval date. And all three locations have large assemblages of Early Medieval sculpture which, despite being located in Pictland, are quite different in nature from other overtly Pictish assemblages.

In light of this evidence, it seems wholly unsatisfactory to opt for a neutral term such as 'boulder bowl' and settle for the definition of "an object whose function is uncertain". Prudence may steer us away from absolute certainty but is it too much of a stretch to say where the evidence points? It looks like a duck, it waddles like a duck, it quacks like a duck and it's located where would expect to find a duck but because nobody wrote the word duck, we'll just shrug our shoulders and say "dunno what it is"?

[*Your Editor comments*: This discussion can usefully be taken further by plotting out all the bowl/ font sites mentioned on Canmore, correlating them with early medieval religious foundations and early sculpture. There are many smaller 'boulder bowls' also at church sites which could more conveniently be placed on a stand, or used indoors, so a chart of relative sizes would also help to stack up the evidence. This would be an excellent dissertation topic, or neat article.]

NEW DISCOVERIES in PICTLAND

NIGEL RUCKLEY sent in this report from *Arkaeonews* 22 November 2022.

"A Pictish carved stone cross slab with a rare inscription in the early medieval ogham language has been discovered in Scotland's Old Kilmadock Kirkyard near Dunblane. It is one of only 30 known ogham inscriptions found in all of Scotland, and the first discovered in the Forth Valley.

The stone's surface was first uncovered in 2019 by volunteers from the Rescuers of Old Kilmadock (ROOK), but it wasn't until September of this year that volunteers and archaeologists were able to fully excavate the slab, exposing its edges and ogham symbols.

The stone measures 47 inches high by 32 inches wide and has a rounded top. A knotted cross is carved into the stone's surface. The terminals of the enlaced scrolls are shaped like bird heads. They have flamingo-like sharply curved beaks, but if they are representations of actual birds rather than stylized abstractions, they are most likely pelicans in piety, popular symbols of Christ's sacrifice.

Ogham on the edge of the Old Kilmadock stone ©Stirling Archaeology

One of the oldest cemeteries in central Scotland is Kilmadock. Although the kirkyard dates to the ninth century, the Pictish cross slab is older. It was raised on a hilltop overlooking the Rover Teith sometime between 500 and 700 A.D. Archaeologists think a monastery once stood on the location. The presence of ogham characters on the cross-slab suggests the monks may have been literate.

Ogham characters first appear on monumental inscriptions in the fourth century AD. Nearly a third are found in England, Wales, Scotland, and the Isle of Man, but the majority are from Ireland.

Dr. Kelly Kilpatrick, a historian and expert in Celtic epigraphy, will use photogrammetry to create a 3D model of the stone and try to decipher the newly discovered inscription. She said: "It's a hugely important find. It tells us that in the early medieval period there were literate

people here who could read and write, potentially in Latin, but who were also familiar with the ogham alphabet.

A Pictish cross thought to be up to 1,500 years old has been found at Old Kilmadock Kirkyard near Doune, in Perthshire. Photo: Mike Day/Saltire News and Sport

"As soon as it was found I took one look and said 'that's ogham'. The inscription is likely to go all the way around, although I can't be certain until the stone is lifted. They tend to say personal names. I can say with reasonable confidence we've got some e's and t's in there."

Stirling archaeologist Dr. Murray Cook, who led the recent dig, said funds would now have to be raised to lift the stone so that it could be examined in full and experts could assess the cost of its conservation before it can be displayed."

NIGEL RUCKLEY sent news about the stone found in Ulbster. The point to note about this story is that the stone was in fact discovered in 2014 by Fiona Begg, cleaning grave stones in search of her ancestors at Mains of Ulbster graveyard. It was sketched in 2016 by David Brenner, and memos sent to relevant local authorities at that time. But it significance was not fully appreciated until recently. Yarrows Heritage Trust has removed it for conservation. Watch this space for further news.

The stone displaying a double disc and V-rod uncovered at Ulbster graveyard. ©Yarrows Heritage Trust (see picture above right)

JANE GEDDES

News from Aberdeenshire and Moray

Another carved fragment has emerged at Tullich cemetery. The site already has a prolific sculpture collection, now housed in a bespoke display created by Aberdeenshire Council on site. After the display shelter was designed, more carved stones emerged from repairs to the chapel walls. Then, after all the conservation efforts were tidied away, one more fragment was found on the surface under a tree. Up to now, the collection consisted of one mighty symbol stone and a wide range of simple incised cross-marked stones of Dalriada type, and the mighty 'boulder bowl' (see p. 8). The latest discovery is the front part of a horse, his legs, neck, bridle and the rider's leg. Figurative Pictish sculpture is rare on the Dee but there is another mounted rider at nearby Migvie.

The horse and rider at Tullich. ©Claire Herbert

Hidden in plain site is the carving on a front door lintel of a cottage in Marypark, near Ballindalloch and Inveravon. It is incised on the soffit with scrolled patterns which I can't quite make out but seem to include a mirror. Those of you who live near the A95 have probably driven right past it.

A lintel at Marypark, Moray, with incised mirror symbol and more. ©Claire Herbert

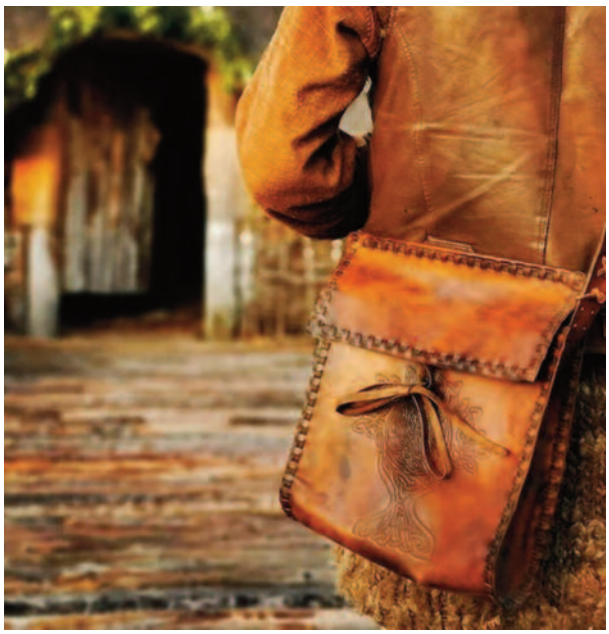
The Inspiration of George Bain

The conference paper by Jo Clements (p.5) refers to ongoing work at Groam House Museum about the George Bain Collection. The museum has an exemplary website which is a mine of information about the Pictish stones https://groamhouse.org.uk/ . The George Bain Collection has its own website https://george-bain.groamhouse.org.uk/ where you can delve into artworks produced by Bain. They not only have excellent zoom images and catalogue descriptions but also lead you through to related works. You can search by specific object or wallow in images of the entire collection (so far) in many different media.

A 'Hunting Rug' carpet designed by George Bain for carpet manufacturers Quayle and Tranter of Kidderminster. ©The George Bain Estate and Groam House Museum

One of my favourites is the child's jumper made by George's daughter Claire Bain, making good use of the key pattern. ©The George Bain Estate and Groam House Museum

A further tab leads to The Community, a platform for modern artists to display their work inspired by Pictish art and George Bain's tutoring. These artists have piled into the gap by working in media which have disappeared from our archaeological record. Gordon Andrews applies Pictish designs through pyrography to wooden objects like a chess box and wooden bowl, inscribes knotwork into terracotta dishes. Hamish Lamley carves leatherwork, belts, a roll which wraps and buckles around a bunch of tools, a beautiful backpack fastened by antler buckles.



A satchel fit for Heather Pulliam's books and relics but also for a laptop, by Hamish Lamley.

© Hamish Lamley, Pictavia Leather

Marc Quinn produces tattoo designs. https://www.treubhan.com/

The Groam House website invites all artists working with Celtic designs to join their community, so it's worth checking up for new inspiration.

Pictish Arts Society AGM held remotely on Friday, 21 October 2022 at 9.00 pm

Minutes

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from: Anne Graf, Alan Briggs, Lilly Hurd, Annie Anderson.

2. **Approval of Minutes of 2021 AGM** (circulated via Newsletter 102) Approved.

3. **President and Secretary's Joint Report** (circulated via Newsletter 105) The President gave a brief resume of its contents, highlighting the popularity of on-line lectures, their increased reach and consequent higher membership. Joint conferences with other groups had also been successful. With more money coming in the Society had been able to give financial support to several conservation projects.

The President thanked all committee members for their commitment and work over the past year and the previous nine years of his tenure. He wished the new committee well and would always be available to provide advice.

4. **Treasurer's Report.** The report had been circulated via e-mail earlier in the day and was accepted by the meeting. Since the adoption of on-line lectures income from membership fees has doubled. Production of newsletters had been the only significant cost over the year. Funds are £4,000 higher than at the 2021 AGM. The president proposed that the membership fee should remain unchanged.

5. **Appointment of Independent Examiner.** The Treasurer reported that this is in hand.

6. **Other Honorary Officers' reports**

(a) **Membership Secretary** reported there are 219 members. When she took on the position 7 years ago, there were 80 members.

90 members receive postal communications and 129 receive on-line communications.

There are 31 overseas members: 26 USA, 1 Canada, 1 Australia, 1 Ireland, 1 Belgium, 1 France.

This is renewal season and, so far, around one third of members have renewed. Renewal can be done on-line via the Society's website or a cheque can be sent.

(b) **Newsletter Editor** reported that despite the constraints of covid, no issue had been missed. He thanked the members who had sent in contributions. He asked members to keep submitting copy in order to give his successor a choice of material for publication.

Election of Honorary Officers and Committee

President Jane Geddes

Proposed J Borland Seconded D McGovern

Vice President David McGovern

Proposed J Borland Seconded E Reid

Vice President Kelly Kilpatrick

Proposed J Borland Seconded E Reid

Secretary Jennifer McKay

Proposed J Borland Seconded H Coleman

Treasurer Hugh Levey

Proposed J Borland Seconded H Coleman

Membership Jennifer Wallace

Proposed J Borland Seconded E Reid

Newsletter Editor Jane Geddes

Proposed J Borland Seconded B Thompson

Events organiser Kelly Kilpatrick

volunteered to arrange lectures for next autumn

Archivist Elspeth Reid

Proposed J Borland Seconded J McKay

Communications Lilly Hurd

Proposed J Borland Seconded D McGovern

Report Writer Sheila Hainey

Proposed J Borland Seconded E Reid

Corresponding member Nigel Ruckley

Proposed J Borland Seconded D McGovern

Corresponding member Hugh Coleman
Proposed E Reid Seconded J McKay

Committee Barbara Thompson

Proposed J Borland Seconded E Reid

8. **AOCB** There was lengthy discussion of the pros and cons of various approaches (on-line, hybrid, in-person) to the delivery of lectures, conferences and field trips, with the added suggestion of study days. It was agreed that on-line lectures work well but in-person/hybrid events are also needed. The topic was deferred to the next committee meeting.

SPRING LECTURES 2023

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

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

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

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

FIELD TRIP
Aberdeenshire, up the Dee and down the Don

We shall be organising a field trip on Sunday June 18, 2023. The route is not quite fixed yet so I'm open to suggestions. We would start at Aberdeen station so members can arrange to

come by train. Ideas include Beannachar (to see the Dunnicaer stones) Formaston (Aboyne, has toilet beside stone), Tullich new display, Ballater for toilet, bring own picnic to eat en route, Migvie, Rhynie, Leith Hall new display, Dyce. This is probably too much, so detailed plans will include a timed schedule to get back to a decent train at Aberdeen.

Meantime, I would be very grateful if the membership could get back to me if they are potentially coming. I can't get a final price for the bus unless we know how many are wanting to join us. I will of course put out a firm and costed invitation for the trip nearer the time. People coming a long way may wish to spend Saturday night in Aberdeen, in which case we'll make sure we have a good PAS evening out. Please send views and/or wish to attend j.geddes@abdn.ac.uk

CONFERENCE 2023

The conference will be held by zoom across two afternoon sessions on Sat 7-Sun 8 October 2023. If you would like to suggest a paper, please contact Kelly Kilpatrick kelly.kilpatrick@glasgow.ac.uk. We warmly invite international speakers to join in now that we are all virtual.

GIFT AID

Members will shortly be circulated an email message regarding gift aid. All you have to do is say 'yes', give your consent, and the Treasurer will ensure that the Society gets tax back on your subscription. Across the full membership, this becomes a serious amount extra, over £300 p.a. , at no cost to yourself. Thank you for helping in this way.

The NEWSLETTER: moving forward

I would like to develop some new features which will enable more members to participate in creating the Newsletter. So far our regular fare includes the inimitable reports from Sheila Hainey on our talks and conferences; significantly informative and/or combative articles about Pictish art; updates on our activities; and hopefully some news shots of recent discoveries. The articles are intended to be a safe space to air your latest research, perhaps before it is fully evolved, and get robust feedback from readers in the next issue. The editor however retains the right to hold back submissions which may sustainable evidence.

I would like to see notices about recent creations: if you have made something in a Pictish style, or spotted something particularly fetching in terms of craftwork or perhaps new display in a museum, send a photo and a short account of it.

I would like to see regular notices about publications: if you have published something yourself elsewhere or spot an interesting article, please tell us about it. You can be sure to reach a dedicated readership. Either just send us a notice of the title, or write a review. I can't guarantee to scour all sources myself, but here's a starter for Christmas:

PICTS, Scourge of Rome, Rulers of the North, by Gordon Noble and Nicholas Evans, published by Birlinn in November 2022. We would love to publish a review of this for the next Newsletter in February. It's essential Christmas reading anyway. If you would like to write a review, please send it in.

PAS Newsletter 107

Deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 17 February 2023

Please email contributions to the editor.

j.geddes@abdn.ac.uk

Printed by City Press, Brechin Tel 01356 626766