THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY

President's Letter

It's been a while since my last letter in May, but there has been so much society activity in the mean time. We went on the Fieldtrip in June, to explore Dee and Donside, with an evening in Marischal Museum hearing about the Pictish treasures in the Aberdeen University collection from Neil Curtis. The best part was enjoying excellent weather with a bus full of Pictophiles. We had a relaxed lunch at Migvie church, entertained by the fiddle playing of Paul Anderson. We stayed long enough to watch the sun majestically creep around from the east face of the Pictish cross-slab, then suddenly bringing the carving into view on the west side. That was a special moment you can only get on site (unless you watch the lights move in the Iona museum). The Conference, focussed on the mystery of the Bullion Man, was well attended with an international roster of both attendees and speakers. We are hoping, with leadership from Victoria Whitworth, to turn this into not conference proceedings but a popular publication for a wide readership. Ian Hislop, creating a radio documentary about the history of British humour for Radio 4 (due end of January 2024), chose to feature the sculpture both because it's so early, and because Pictish humour is, to say the least, an elusive and rare topic. Martin Goldberg and I revealed its nuances and played with the giant replica drinking horn made by the National Museum of Scotland.

In this issue Shiela Hainey writes an obituary for our long serving committee member and V.P., Eileen Brownlee. Another sad loss to our field was the death of Peter Harbison, the great Irish art historian and communicator. His book *The High Crosses of Ireland* (1992) is a gift to all scholars of the early medieval period. The comprehensive volume of photographs, the catalogue and invaluable volume of comparative material are a monument to Irish culture, representing the persistence and vision of one author. Teams of people have worked to complete the Anglo-Saxon corpus, but for Scotland, we still rely so heavily on Romilly Allen, a similar pioneering and persistent scholar, in the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903).

We welcome new members to the committee, people who are able to share the work load and contribute a host of fresh ideas. Sophie Durbin comes from America and has a wide experience in organising conferences, so that will be her remit; Pam Cranston lives in Fife and will be organising next summer's field trip which will focus on the McManus Museum and Wemyss Caves; while Fiona Cambell-Howes is writing her master's thesis on Sueno's Stone and will coordinate the lecture series. She produces a provocative blog as her research progresses; give it a try. *Rabbit Holes of Early Medieval Scotland*. https://fortrenn.substack.com.

ELSPETH REID

Examining the Cross-slab at Crail Parish Church

The parish church in Crail, Fife, is home to a Pictish cross-slab with features not seen on any others discovered to date. Cemented to a wall inside the church, where it once served as a flagstone, it is sadly pitted and worn—much detail on its relief carving has been lost from the passage of time and feet. Yet what we can see invites further examination.

The first of Crail's unusual features is the half 'ring' that connects the arms of the cross. We might expect the customary design consisting of four arcs that form a circle. But here only two arcs have been carved in the upper space and they do not continue underneath the cross arms. This design is unique among Pictish cross-slabs. The two arcs create more of a horseshoe than a half-circle.

Figure 1 Crail cross-slab, upper section (photo: author)

Crail's second and most curious feature is to be found at the base—a human lower torso and legs attached to the foot of the cross shaft. It makes a remarkable hybrid, even by Pictish standards.

This half-body is not static but in motion, walking vigorously to the left. It looks as if a person, half-concealed, is bearing the cross, as Jesus did, or perhaps the cross itself is walking. What at first glance might look like raised arms is simply the frame around the shaft. We have no other examples in Pictish sculpture to help us identify the intended meaning with any confidence.

Figure 2 Crail cross-slab, lower section (photo: author)

In the Book of Kells on folios 291v and 12r (Trinity College, Dublin MS58), a pair of immobile human feet are appended to the bottom of the illustrations and a head appears sticking out at the top, as though the body is hidden behind the image. On folio 188r, two animal legs hang out of the frame at the bottom and an animal head, open-mouthed, juts out at the top. But these animal legs and stationary human feet lack the dynamic movement of the Crail body and are not a close parallel.

If the Crail sculptor were indeed employing a similar conceit, did his cross-slab once have a head carved at the top? The top has been trimmed—presumably to fit into the paved floor, but just conceivably in an iconoclastic act against a human face. So, the question remains unanswered, with no extant examples of such a head in the current Pictish canon. Despite these unique features, the Crail cross-slab does not

receive much attention, as it falls into the Class III category of stones without symbols, although it shares design elements and motifs with others that do bear symbols.

Like the larger cross-slabs of Gask and Rossie Priory in Perthshire—without achieving their quality of design—Crail has vertical rows of assorted beasts, real and imaginary, flanking the cross shaft. In the space under Crail's left cross-arm, only four legs and a head survive of an animal which has been described as a 'lamb'; below that comes what looks like a donkey; then a large long-necked bird perched on the back of and pecking at the face of a high-stepping deer-like beast, albeit with long tail; at the base is a humped animal rather like a camel. Opposite it, on the right side, only traces of animal legs are visible.*

Just like those on Gask, the horsemen on Crail are positioned two riders one above the other on the lower right. But while horsemen depicted on Gask, Rossie Priory and elsewhere are often tagged with adjacent Pictish symbols and tend to exude dignity on their fine mounts, this is not the case for Crail. Far from impressing, the top Crail rider is squashed in under the seat of a large chair with decorated back and zoomorphic terminal. This chair is occupied by a much larger-scale figure, whose feet rest on the horse's head.

Figure 3 Crail. Seated figure and horseman (photo: author)

No symbols accompany this slanting rider and companion below, where only horse hindquarters and tail now remain. Horsemen's heads are known sometimes to extend into the space above, perhaps to emphasise a leader's pre-eminence by showing his subordinates linked to him in a way that signified their allegiance. Lower-status riders are very often smaller. Benvie provides a prime example. Yet horsemen are normally connected to horsemen—in the case of Crail the riders are joined to a different entity entirely, potentially a sign of their subservience to that seated figure.

Figure 4 Benvie in McManus Gallery, Dundee (photo: author)

This dominating, lumpish figure is seated in the large chair facing the cross. Is that hair at the back of the head or is it a cleric's cowl? Hair might indicate a secular figure. It would certainly be unusual to find a cleric on his own like this, or to find a cleric so closely associated with horsemen.

Beyond the Crail figure's prominent position in the composition, it is unclear what that person is engaged in. Two arms are outstretched towards a vertical curved object of uncertain nature. Naturally the Virgin and Child have been suggested, but the Pictish corpus can supply many figures sitting on chairs with a zoomorphic terminal to the chair-back. That said, a solitary figure in profile on such a chair is more of a rarity.

Five figures share these specific Crail characteristics: solitary, in profile, and on a chair with ornamental or zoomorphic terminal. Although they are not necessarily involved in identical activities, they might help interpretation.

One is on the broken Kingoldrum 1 (Canmore ID32255) in Angus, where a solitary figure faces left with hands lying passively in the lap. In front (i.e. to the left) but apart is a large rectangular object with a crossbar. The scene bears similarities to another sculpture located only a few miles away—Kirriemuir 1 (Canmore ID32299), where a front-facing solitary figure sits beside but apart from a rectangular frame placed on the right. It is thought to depict a loom, not a musical instrument, and the figure to be that of a woman. The comparable rectangle on Kingoldrum 1 might also represent a loom, and the headless figure a female.

The second is on Kingoldrum 2 (Canmore ID32256), where a solitary seated figure faces right. The upper part of this small cross-slab is missing and the remainder is so worn that it is extremely hard to establish what the figure is doing. As one arm seems to be extended, while an indeterminate shape appears to rest against the front of the body, it is possible to consider a harpist. Given the abraded stone surface, it is hard to be sure. An alternative reading suggests that St Medan, the church's patron saint, might be intended.

Even less survives of a St Andrews panel that was probably part of a shrine (Canmore SC1951472). The two fragments show only an arm, two hands and a padded cuff belonging to a figure that once sat in profile. The large cupped hands, one below and one above, seem to be holding out a small object for our attention. It was once thought that the hands were playing a harp, but the cupping position makes that unlikely; instead they display something that must have been recognisable and important. And yet in the background are grooves that undeniably look like the strings of a musical instrument, next to a piece of damaged carving that could be the pillar of a harp.

That leaves the fourth and fifth figures with Crail characteristics—and they are thankfully intact: the harp-player on Monifieth 4 (Canmore ID33411) in the bottom panel of a broken free-standing cross, and again a harp-player near the base of the Dupplin Cross, generally thought to represent the biblical David, psalmist and slayer of lion and Goliath.

Figure 5 Comparison of Dupplin Cross harpist and Crail figure (photo: author)

Comparison with other Pictish sculptures of solitary seated figures in profile has thus not proved decisive. We find similarities, but also crucial differences. It supports the identification of David—up to a point. Both arms of the Crail figure are outstretched, one raised higher than the other; fingers and thumb on the upper hand appear splayed, very like someone playing a harp. This could well be a portrayal of David. His other identifying emblems of lion and sheep are not obvious here, although animals to the left of the cross such as the 'lamb' might qualify. No added emblems accompany the Monifieth 4 harpist either.**

The poor condition of the cross-slab with its lack of clear detail is a handicap to understanding the various 'messages' on the Crail stone. In addition, it has only one side to study. The inaccessible side reportedly has no carving, which is fairly unusual and leaves us wondering why.

While the craftsmanship may not be of the highest Pictish order, the Crail sculptor created some unusual effects, especially when presenting a concept not seen elsewhere: a conjoined cross and human half-body. His treatment of horsemen is also noticeably

different. Their prominence and stately dignity have gone; the Crail horse and rider are shown skewed and crammed in under a chair, subordinate to a personage of superior size and status, who is accorded pride of place.

All the indications point to the Crail cross-slab belonging to a very late stage of the Pictish era.

* Below the groundline the stone was blank until a small shield was added in the c.16th-century.

** An unmistakable David, accompanied by sheep, his staff and a bear, rends a lion's jaws on another face of the Dupplin Cross (Canmore DP245568).

If you put DP262533 in the Search bar on the Canmore website, you can get a closer look at a zoomable (magnification) photograph of the Crail parish church cross-slab.

To visit the stone: Crail parish church is open to visitors at particular times and services are held on Sundays. The church website https://www.crailchurch.com gives a contact phone number.

https://canmore.org.uk/site/319290/crail-marketgate-crail-parish-church

https://canmore.org.uk/collection/388562 (black and white photograph)

Book of Kells, Trinity Library, Dublin, MS58:

https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/concern/works/hm50tr726?locale=en

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ROLAND SPENCER-JONES *Chair, Yarrows Heritage SCIO*

A new Pictish stone at Ulbster, Caithness

This article is about a new Pictish stone, the St Martin's Stone, discovered in a burial ground in Caithness in September 2022. It is the same burial ground in which the 'Ulbster Stone' was found in 1770.

St Martin's Burial Ground and Mausoleum. The new Pictish stone is the second from the right on the line of four. (Photo: RSJ)

The first Ulbster Stone

Quoting from Highland Council's Historic Environment Record, that first Ulbster Stone 'once stood in the ancient burial ground attached to the ruined church of St Martin at Ulbster and was subsequently placed over a grave there which assisted in the defacement of one side. At some other unknown date, it was removed and placed upright on an artificial mound in the grounds of Thurso Castle where its exposed position (especially front face turned to Castle and sea) led to further defacement of the sculpture; the front has also been mutilated in the upper third with modern inscription in Gothic letters "The Ulbster Stone" by which name it is also known'. This fine decorated Class II Pictish Stone now stands in a prominent position in the 'Stone Room' on

the ground floor of the North Coast Visitor Centre (formerly Caithness Horizons) in Thurso.

The first Ulbster Stone, partially incised and partially in relief. (Photo: Caithness Horizons Museum and Art Gallery)

The second Ulbster Stone

This stone was found by a local resident with an interest in Family History. Fiona Begg Wade now lives in Thurso but was brought up in the village of Ulbster on the coast just south of Wick.

Fiona Begg Wade & her niece, Sarah. (Photo: David Scott)

With a background in family history, and a deep sense of connection with the area where she used to play as a child, she started to record the memorial inscriptions of the burial markers in the old St Martin's burial ground. Separated from the village by a low hill, the burial ground near Ulbster Mains farm used to surround an old chapel, of which no trace now exists.
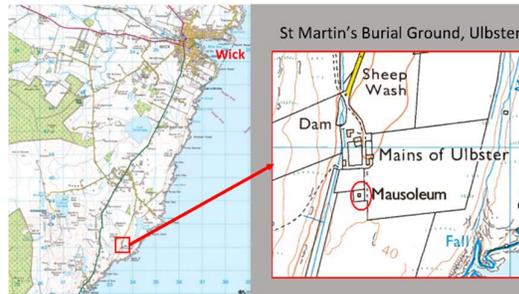
Location map of St Martin's, Ulbster 1

In the early 18th century, a mausoleum for the Sinclair family was built in the burial ground, perhaps on the site of the former old chapel. It bears the inscription 1700 on the weathervane. The burial ground itself bears the name of St Martin, probably the dedication of the now-disappeared chapel.

In early September 2022 Fiona was in the burial ground, cleaning turf and soil off some of the burial markers, in order to see the inscriptions. This is her description of the finding of the stone:

"On one visit to Ulbster burial ground I felt something underfoot, and after removing a little of the soil I uncovered a flat gravestone. This gravestone had an inscription for someone who belonged to my family tree. I continued to remove more soil and uncovered more stones. Not all the flat stones had inscriptions, half of them were blank.

There were two ladies who had recorded most of the cemeteries in Caithness over thirty years ago. I use their books all the time. These gravestones were not visible at that time, so they had not recorded them. I wanted to photograph and record them. I was working along the row of stones that I had uncovered when I came to a flat stone that was mostly under the soil. While brushing away the soil I noticed some wavy lines, my first thought was that this one had an inscription. Once it was fully uncovered the pattern stood out, it looked amazing. I knew that it was a Pictish stone."

Fiona involved her daughter's partner, Hamish Lamley of Pictavia Leather in Perth, who has experience of Pictish markings, and he agreed that the markings seemed to be Pictish. He knew Professor Gordon Noble of Aberdeen University, who then came up to Ulbster to see the stone. Professor Noble confirmed that this was a Pictish stone and wrote a short report about it. So, this was the second Pictish stone to have been discovered in St Martin's burial ground at Ulbster. To acknowledge the difference from the first 'Ulbster Stone' Fiona suggested that this stone could be called the 'St Martin's Stone', in recognition of the name of the burial ground.

Yarrows Heritage and the stone

Professor Noble notified the Highland Historic Environment Team (HET) about the stone and his involvement with it. Kirsty Cameron, the HET Lead for Archaeology, recognised the need for some organisation to manage this newly discovered stone and arrange its eventual display in a museum. She approached Yarrows Heritage, a small archaeological charity based at Thrumster, a village only a few miles from the Ulbster burial ground. The charity has been involved in several archaeological endeavours in Caithness, in particular setting up the Yarrows Archaeological Trail and working with UHI/ORCA to excavate the early Iron Age site of Swartigill over seven seasons.

Part of the reason for approaching Yarrows was because its current Chair is also a trustee of NOSAS who helped to manage the Conan Stone in 2019 when it was discovered in very similar circumstances in a burial ground in Easter Ross. That experience proved invaluable in understanding the practical steps needed to ensure that this stone becomes viewable in a local museum.

The History of the St Martin's Stone

The early history of this newly discovered second stone from the Ulbster burial ground is unknown. The decoration is simpler, suggesting that it is earlier, between the 5th and 7th centuries. In the jargon of Pictish stones this would be a Class I stone, i.e. containing Pictish symbols but not a Christian cross or iconography. Presumably it stood erect somewhere, before it was laid alongside other re-arranged burial markers on the east side of the burial ground.

We don't know whether the stone was originally erected as a Pictish stone at this site, whether it was one of several upright stones within the curtilage of the hallowed space, or whether it was brought from elsewhere to be stored or used in the burial ground. From its position, packed tightly in a row of other large stones, and its lack of inscription, it may be that it was never used as a burial marker. This contrasts with the Conan Stone which had been re-used as a grave marker and bears the names of two individuals who died in 1797.

This is what John Borland, past President of the Society says of the stone:

"Caithness is home to significantly fewer Pictish symbol stones than neighbouring Sutherland. This may in part be due to the acquisitive habits of successive Dukes of Sutherland who actively sought and collected Pictish sculpture in Sutherland. Therefore, a new symbol stone from Caithness is a significant discovery and an important addition to that county's corpus.

Its location, St Martin's Chapel, Ulbster is also notable. The Ulbster Stone, a Pictish cross slab was discovered there in 1770. The correlation of an incised symbol stone and a symbol-bearing cross slab from the same location arguably reinforces the theory that Pictish Christian chapels were often deliberately established on existing pre-Christian ritual sites. This discovery will keep archaeologists and art historians busy for some time to come."

The Stone Itself

The symbols on the upper surface of the stone are an elaborate double-disc and Z-rod at the top of the stone, and a mirror further down the face. The double-disc is damaged with the lower part of the Z-rod missing. The upper part of the Z-rod has a very well-formed termination, in the form of an elaborate 'U'. The

handle of the mirror is deeply incised, but the round face of the mirror is only traceable in certain lights. Other symbols (and perhaps a comb) could have been present on parts of the stone now delaminated.

The symbols are weathered and have now lost the crispness seen on the first Ulbster Stone. However, by using certain photographic techniques the symbols can be highlighted. It has not been possible to get a good view of the underside, although a cursory look as the stone was being removed from the burial ground revealed nothing obvious. We won't know for sure until the stone arrives in the conservator's workshop.

St Martin's Stone (Photo: Gordon Noble, Douglas Ledingham)

The Management of the Stone

The stone was removed from the burial ground by a local builder with a JCB on November 5, 2022. Since then, it has been stored on a pallet in a dry and airy farm building awaiting conservation.

The Conan Stone experience made us realise that there are two big expenses – firstly, cleaning and conserving the stone and then mounting the stone for display in a museum. We started fund-raising almost immediately the news of the find was released with a Facebook

and Paypal appeal. The Pictish Arts Society has generously donated £500. Since then two local windfarm-related funds (Lybster & Tannach Fund and Caithness & North Sutherland Fund) have made magnificent contributions. And, we've just heard that Historic Environment Scotland have contributed the last tranche of the money that we need. We are deeply grateful to

Lifting the stone, November 2022. (Photo: David Scott)

all these organisations for their grants.

So, the stone is about to go to Graciela Ainsworth in Leith for cleaning and conservation. And then? The stone belongs to the landowner, Lord Thurso, who has expressed a wish for it to stay locally. The North Coast Visitor Centre - the Thurso museum - has welcomed the prospective acquisition of the stone and already identified a prominent site for it in the same 'Stone Room' as the first Ulbster Stone. We now have all the money we need to ensure that it is displayed in public for the first time.

The Stone Room in North Coast Visitor Centre, awaiting the St Martin's Stone. (Photo: RSJ)

Bullion Stone, National Museum of Scotland

VICTORIA WHITWORTH

'Wine is a luxurious thing, and drunkenness riotous: whosoever is delighted therewith, shall not be wise': Solitary Excess, the Misuse of Power, and the Bullion Stone

Victoria began by making the point that we would be doing the Picts a disservice to suggest that they were never subversive, showing the Bullion Man side by side with Rowlandson's cartoon of the Prodigal Son on her opening slide. She observed that her previous talk on the Bullion Man had encountered three main areas of disagreement, and went on to deal with each in turn.

In the first place, some have argued that the carving is too late (or too early) for the Pictish period, so should not be included in the Pictish canon. Secondly, it has been suggested that this is an affectionate tribute to a local character and not a moral critique. Finally, some have questioned whether the church would risk offending lay patrons by such a comment on their sinful ways. As an aside on this last point, Victoria pointed out that in the 6th century Gildas felt able to accuse a king of drunkenness along with other sins in his sermon: *De Excidio Britanniae*. Why, therefore, would the church be reticent about criticising powerful patrons in other media?

Relief carving of the type found on the Bullion Stone does not seem to be earlier than the 7th century in this part of the world. The rider's cloak and shield are both of a style found on stones dated to the 8th or 9th centuries. In the context of contemporary riders on Pictish stones, the conventional depiction seems to have been changing, as seen on Constantine's (Dupplin) cross. The Bullion Man, of probable mid-9th century date would be a part of this movement of change in Pictish conventions.

She went on to consider the artist's approach to the stone, and listed fifteen aspects of the image which may be considered as subversive. These include the fact that the rider leans forward, he is bald with a long beard and protruding lips, the horse is stiff legged, its head droops, its mane is rough, and it is ridden uphill with slack reins and so on. The artist was clearly capable: the depiction of the horse's rear and hooves and the precision of the bird's head speak to that. The image is not unintentionally ugly. Victoria noted a number of biblical texts which make it plain that the excessive use of alcohol, leading to drunkenness and the abuse of power were very much a bad thing.

Taking examples from the 11th-century Bayeux tapestry, Victoria drew our attention to a representation of Guy of Ponthieu. He is shown mounted on a gelding or mare with long, mule-like ears. He twists in his saddle, with his feet askew in his stirrups and lacking the spur worn by the erect, forward facing, stallion-mounted riders of whom there are many on the tapestry. In deliberately lampooning Guy, the artist who designed this scene shows him as having lost authority, a figure of scorn.

Another scene on the tapestry shows a group of Englishmen feasting. Carol Neuman de Vegvar has pointed out that this implies that the English are to be seen as old fashioned at best. The use of the drinking horn appears to have died out in the 9th century in France, and by the 11th century its was used by artists there as an attribute of a backward or morally weak individual. However, that it was possible for this satirical form of art to be produced in 11th century England tells us nothing about Pictish artists of the 9th century. In any case, at that period, the drinking horn had no negative connotations.

From the mid-11th century, the Bury St Edmonds Psalter carries some delicate marginal illustrations of adjacent verses. For Psalm 103, verses 14 to 23, there are four illustrations in the right hand margin. The lowest of these refers to verse 23, 'Man shall go forth to his labour…' and shows a man digging. Above that, is a pair of roaring lions, accompanying verse 21 'The young lions roaring after their prey…' The next scene, of a stag attacking a serpent does not quite fit with verse 19 'The high hills are a refuge for the harts…' Victoria suggested that the derivation of these from the Physiologus (an early Christian text imbuing a collection of birds and animals with moral and symbolic meaning), which equates the deer with Christ, and make it and enemy of serpents, allows us to read the lions also as symbols of Christ, from the same source. The final scene, illustrating verse 15 shows two men at a table set with a plate and a bowl. The younger, smaller man holds a knife and looks up at his companion, a bearded older man who drinks from a horn with an elaborate bird's head terminal. In his left hand he holds his knife, resting on the table. The verse begins 'and wine makes glad the heart of man…' The Psalm is concerned with the goodness of god and our need to trust that goodness. However, she suggests that with the image of the stag and snake, the artist is providing commentary, and that we should read the images that bracket this folio in this light, referring to other biblical texts. The man digging alludes to the verses in Genesis where Adam is cast out of the garden, 'by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread…' The scene with the drinking horn may refer to one or any of a number of texts which deprecate the use of wine.

She went on to draw our attention to two other riders with drinking horns on carved stones: one at Dunkeld and one from St Blane's, Kingarth. The block of stone at Dunkeld carries a small Greek cross on its upper surface, and a small image of a rider incised on the side: these need not be contemporary, or even by the same artist. The horse is neatly enough portrayed to suggest that the artist was competent, but the rider is unusual. Moving from left to right, he is shown gripping with his knees. Head and legs are conventionally shown, but the torso is twisted to face the viewer, with a spear in one hand and a horn raised to his lips in the other. The dating of this odd figure is uncertain, and it is impossible to claim a Pictish identity for this stone.

The monastery of St Blane at Kingarth, Bute was probably founded in the 6th century and possibly continued in use until the 8th. The worn image of the rider found here has a spear in one hand and with the other holds up a large horn, with his shield suspended by his side. Bute lies outside Pictish territory. All three images of rider with horn are very different. Victoria suggests that the horns from Dunkeld and Bute may be held up for display (as, for example to witness a land grant) rather than facilitating drinking as is clearly the case for on the Bullion Stone. The latter is, in any case, a more elegant production than the other two.

Found just up the Gowrie Burn from St Peters, and a short distance from Benvie, Bullion falls within a group of stones with riders which are probably contemporary with Constantine's stone. She would place it definitely within the Pictish period, rather than in the era of the 11th century art examined earlier. Nevertheless at that period it would have been disturbing to come across a single image of a rider such as this, unaccompanied by either a cross or anything else, in a landscape where there would have been certain expectations as to what should appear on such stones. The image is large compared with riders on other stones, perhaps adding to the effect. The image may well have been much closer to the ground than it is currently displayed in the National Museum, so that the viewer would have looked down rather than up. The deliberate unfamiliarity of this stone would have induced a contemporary observer to pause and reflect.

Would the church have risked offending lay patrons? Men such as Alcuin and Bede were prepared to lecture kings in writing. We know that by the Georgian period, the Prince of Wales not merely tolerated Rowlandson's caricaturing of himself, he patronised the work. (That came to an end when he became king and

turned against the artist.) In any case, Victoria does not see the Bullion Man as representing an individual, so not a comment directed at a particular king or lord. Rather he seems to make a general statement, warning against a return to the bad old days of drunken warriors.

MÁIRÍN NÍ DHONNCHADHA

Taking the Pledge: clientship, drinking and dying in medieval Ireland.

No contemporary writings have survived to describe the place held by drinking in Pictish culture, nor do we have any indication of Pictish views on the Bullion Man. Máirín's expertise lies in the field of early Irish literature, and she was able to give us a résumé of some of the evidence of how these near neighbours regarded drinking, and to pose the question: how might a Gaelic-speaking contemporary have regarded this stone?

Feasting and drinking are well attested in Irish texts. Poetry and legal texts, secular and clerical authors all refer to such activities. One notable text describes three types of feasting: the 'godly' feast, held on solemn religious occasions, such as marking a special event in the Christian calendar or at a funeral, where the emphasis seems to have been on the food provided. The 'human' feast included the alehouse feast that men owed to their lords as well as the feasts at which leaders gathered together their allies. At such feasts, the bonds of friendship were cemented and hierarchical obligations were reinforced. As well as these secular occasions, there were 'devilish' feasts held by evil persons (including, strangely, a number of different classes of entertainers who appeared at other types of feasts).

The order of seating at a feast held in a king's house was carefully prescribed. However, as Alex Woolf has pointed out, the largest buildings excavated at royal sites in Ireland could hardly have held more than around 25 people; the floor area of around 40 square metres for the hall at Uisneach compares with the largest hall at Yeavering (226 square metres) or the 500 square metres of the Danish putative prototype for Heorot, made famous by the *Beowulf*. There were other possible venues

for feasting in early medieval Ireland. The hostel keeper was a wealthy, but not a kingly, landowner whose cattle were numbered in hundreds and who was obliged to provide feasts from his or her inexhaustible cauldron, with commensurate drink. The hostels where such feasts were held were not within royal (or possibly even any) enclosures, and so far none are known archaeologically. In folk tales, these hostels were often the scenes of violence between warriors. Indeed, alehouses, even when kingly, are often seen as places of strife.

In general, however, both clerics and seculars spoke favourably of drink. The Triads of Ireland include a group of three cauldrons: that of a lord (not necessarily a king). That of a churchman, and that of a *nemed* poet (one of sufficient rank and wealth to provide the feast implied by the cauldron). The feasting hall could be a very civilised place—clean and well ordered, with animals excluded, or it could be a place where men could drink to disordered excess. A Bishop such as Aéd úa Forréid of Armagh could be praised simultaneously for his austerity and wisdom alongside his hospitality and largesse in providing for feasting and drinking by a poet who hoped to be rewarded for his eloquence by the gift of a precious drinking cup.

Several legal tracts which exempt kings from liability for strife at such affairs as gatherings, horse races or in ale houses make it plain that violence could erupt at drinking sessions. Nevertheless, feasting and drinking were a necessary part of the mustering of troops before battle, and were vital in the celebrations for the victors. In the absence of standing armies, a leader in war depended for support on a system of clientship. At the base level, a petty lord's clients were often kinsmen who gave their support and hospitality and received goods, mostly in the form of stock, in return. Further up the hierarchy, petty kings and their overlords maintained bodies of fighting men, their household troops. Provision for the fighting men of a king's household, and for the military feasts that accompanied the gathering together of larger forces, were part of the articulation of royal power. One king who had held his kingdom for ten years of regular

fighting was described as having spent 'ten years at the drinking feast'

Many tales and poems recount battles, their preparation and aftermath. We are told of the close relationships between foster brothers and the bond that could form between warriors more generally. The feast was where their deeds could be recounted, and boasts of future feats proclaimed. Lubricated by ale, mead, and wine warriors listened as poets celebrated heroic deeds. Perhaps they looked forward to the day when they too would be the heroes of the tale. Although poets were excused from fighting, they often accompanied the forces to battle and witnessed the courage and skill of the warriors. In exchange for the mead he drank at the feast (and perhaps in anticipation of being immortalised in song) the warrior was prepared to fight to the end rather than admit defeat. The bitter mead of the feasting hall was bought with death in battle. On the battlefield, the stricken warrior would encounter the ominous black birds that haunted the scene and had the gift of prophecy.

Is it possible that a Gaelic speaking visitor, raised in this warlike culture, would have seen the Bullion Man as drinking his last hornful before he headed uphill for his final battle? Could the bird-headed terminal that gazes balefully from the horn be one of those black birds associated with death and the knowledge of the future? Corvids scavenged the battlefield, and the direful Morrigan, goddess of battle, was sometimes represented as one of them. Could an Irish warrior have viewed Bullion Man as one of his comrades, soon to repay his lord's bitter mead?

CULLEN CHANDLER

Drinking in Frankish Society

A sophisticated court life developed within the Holy Roman Empire, particularly under Charlemagne and his immediate successors in the late 8th-9th centuries. With dominions stretching from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, the Atlantic to the Danube, and subjects speaking a babel of languages, social bonding was an essential function of government. In order to govern this vast area, Carolingian kings relied on a number of advisors. These were often close friends or kinsmen, together with extensive networks of friends and followers. Hunting, feasting and drinking were important in forging bonds, while annual assemblies brought together members of the ruling classes from all over the Frankish lands. Matters of governance and war were discussed while bonds of friendship were reinforced. However, it is from the surviving Capitularies, documents issued at the King's court containing chapters of instructions for the conduct of a wide range of matters of state, that we can see how Charlemagne intended his kingdom to be organised.

Charlemagne eventually created a more or less permanent base for his court at Aachen in the mid 790's. The Capitulare de Villis, issued around that time, gives detailed instructions concerning the management of royal estates, marking a transition from the on-the-spot consumption of produce by a peripatetic court to the need for delivery of provision to the new centre. Crops to be grown, fruit trees, herbs and vegetables to be planted, stock to be raised are all listed in detail. Beer is mentioned four times, mead twice and wine more than twenty times. The estate steward was to employ brewers to make beer, cider and other beverages. Wine of a number of varieties was to be taken as payment for rent, stored in cellars until required. Beer does not appear as a render; instead the steward was to supply malt for brewing at the Palace, reflecting the fact that preservatives such as hops were not in use at that time. The steward was to submit an annual report of all goods produced on the estate. Although Charlemagne struck silver coin, there was no real sense in which the economy was monetised and rents were generally paid in kind.

Wine held a special place among the Carolingian aristocracy. In part this was an inheritance from the Mediterranean food system of the old Roman Empire, but it also had religious overtones. After all, the story of Christ's transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana marked wine as a prestige drink.

Alcuin, the scholarly Yorkshireman who headed the school that Charlemagne established at Aachen, regarded wine as the civilised beverage of Romans and Franks in contrast to beer, the uncouth brew of his barbarian homeland. Status and religion combined to make wine Alcuin's drink of choice. The importance of wine among the clergy, is well evidenced, but it appears to have been also of some significance among the laity.

Consumption patterns have been associated with the articulation of power in various areas and at different times. Conspicuous consumption was often integrated into power hierarchies, with what might or might not be consumed when and by whom often dictated by rank as well as religious constraints. Any notable life-cycle event – birth, marriage death—could be marked by feasting. Religious feasts such as Saints' days were frequent. Easter and Christmas feasts, in particular, brought to an end lengthy periods of fasting. Kings and other powerful men acted as hosts to visiting dignitaries with food and drink. Although feasting appears to have been fairly common, drunken violence does not appear to have been a problem. Religious writers did, however, condemn boisterousness, especially singing. Excessive drinking, leading to a loss of self-control and the dulling of the senses was to be avoided. Charlemagne's biographer, Einhardt, writing while many who knew his old lord and friend were still alive, does not always gloss over flaws in Charlemagne's character but he does portray him as moderate in his drinking.

Single horsemen are rarely encountered in the rich art of the Carolingian Renaissance. There is one exquisite statuette of a mounted king, with an orb held in his left hand and a (missing) sword in his right, crowned but not wearing armour which dates to the mid-9th century and may represent Charlemagne or his grandson Charles the Bald. There is nothing to compare directly with Bullion Man. We do know, however, that loyal hunts could be seen as encapsulating the articulation of power. Horseback chases and the killing of powerful and dangerous beasts such as wild boar could be seen as part of the training for war, not just a pastime. We have at least one account of a feast hosted by Charlemagne in a game forest after the conclusion of a boar hunt. Such hunts were regular features of life in Frankish circles. We have accounts of royal and aristocratic women staging picnic feasts after hunts, their hospitality an important element of these events. Hunting and associated feasting were important activities in generating social cohesion. Could the lone Bullion rider be a member of a king's warband, on a weary horse after a long day's chase, making his way to a post-hunt al fresco feast?

Pictish Arts Society AGM held remotely on Friday October 2023 at 9.00 pm

Apologies for absence were received from: Jennifer McKay, Christina Smith.

Approval of Minutes of 2022 AGM (circulated via Newsletter 108 and email) (proposer Peter Herbert, seconded David McGovern) approved.

President and Secretary's Joint Report (circulated via Newsletter 105) The President gave a brief resume of its contents, and thanked her predecessor, John Borland and Hugh Coleman, the past Treasurer, for their hard work both in the past and throughout the transition period of the past year. Thanks were also due to Nigel Ruckley, for his work on preparing past publications for the website and for his invaluable contributions to the Field Guides and to Kelly Kilpatrick for her work in organising the lecture series. The committee will miss them.

Treasurer's Report. The report had been circulated via e-mail. The Treasurer, Hugh Levey, noted that the surge in membership associated with lockdown had rather abated, but our finances are still in a healthy position. He highlighted the donations: again following lockdown we were able to make grants to Save our Wemyss Caves Society, to Rescuers of Old Kilmadock and to Elgin Museum—all towards conservation and display work. Hugh noted that the current balance of our account as of

October 2023 is approximately £19,000. All our banking is now online.

Appointment of Independent Examiner. The Treasurer suggested that Ralph Levey, a qualified chartered accountant be appointed as external examiner. The meeting approved Hugh's report and this appointment.

Other Honorary Officers' reports

Membership Secretary reported there are 252 members. Over the year we have welcomed 59 new members while we have lost 39, for a net gain of 20.

78 members receive postal and 154 receive on-line communications. Many of our members now renew automatically via PayPal.

Newsletter Editor reported that only three issues of the newsletter were produced, but that the Catalogue of New Symbol Stones has been published as well.

The following officers were elected to the committee

President	Jane Geddes
Vice President	David McGovern
Secretary	Jennifer McKay
Treasurer	Hugh Levey
Membership	Jennifer Wallace
Newsletter co-editor	Christina Smith
Lectures	Fiona Campbell-Howes
Field Trip	Pam Cranston
Conference	Sophie Durbin
Recorder	Sheila Hainey
Archivist	Elspeth Reid
Communications	Lilly Hurd
Committee	Barbara Thompson

AOCB Peter Herbert thanked the Society for its contribution and reported that Murray Cook has received permission to raise Kilmadock 1, and perhaps John Borland's possible hunt scene at the bottom of the stone may be revealed.

Sheila Hainey proposed that the Society recognise John Borland's extensive work, not only in the field of Pictish Studies, and his years of hard labour to produce newsletters and generally keep PAS on track under his long watch as President by making him an honorary member of the Society. David McGovern won the race to second this proposal which was carried enthusiastically by the meeting.

EILEEN BROWNLIE. *Obituary by Sheila Hainey*

Many of our members would have been saddened to hear of the sudden death of Eileen Brownlie at the beginning of May 2023. Eileen was one of our earliest members, and served on the committee in a variety of roles over many years.

Eileen fell under the spell of the early history of Iona during childhood holidays. In the halcyon days of the early 1970's at the University of Edinburgh, students were welcome to attend lectures on other subjects than those required for their degrees, and so Eileen was able to spend a great deal of time in the School of Scottish Studies while studying for her law degree. Her interest in early medieval history remained with her life long, and she was an early member of the Pictish Arts Society, founded in 1988. She became a committee member, taking over the role of secretary in 1995. A small group of people worked hard in those early days to keep the society alive: There was a programme of winter talks, conferences which soon became an annual event, and regular newsletters and journals were sent out to members. An Events Organiser was aided by local members who put together field trips that not only saw gangs of enthusiasts gather around Pictish stones, but also included other early medieval sites. The secretary's role in all of this was to handle correspondence, take names and cash for conferences and field trips, store and handle the despatch of merchandise and back issues of publications and to liaise with the School of Scottish Studies which provided a free venue and allowed the Society to use the School as our mailing address. All this was in the days when very few people had access to computers, email was a rarity, and all mailings (Journals and Newsletters included) had to be addressed by hand. Those same Journals and newsletters were laboriously typed out and photocopied (at the University's copy shop). Eileen's home became a base for the committee, and her

hospitality enticed a number of volunteers to spend time there dealing with mailings or planning trips and conferences.

She did much of the work involved in redrawing the constitution in order to allow PAS to register as a charity, a process she oversaw in 1997. The Society celebrated its tenth anniversary with a new logo (the familiar 'Beastie'), and the creation of a new committee role, when Nick Simpson became our first webmaster. At the same time, Eileen relinquished the role of secretary, only to be elected Vice President. She still had the unenviable task of collecting all regular publications from the Edinburgh University copy shop, and her home was still a base for committee meetings.

She became President in 1999, around the time that Angus Council opened the Pictavia Visitor Centre. To begin with, she was able to encourage the growth of small group field trips, usually organised by members, and to use her contacts to set up a number of joint meetings with other groups. Conferences went on from strength to strength, with a range of themes, with the provision of sales, space for books and crafts and also the inclusion of buffet lunches provided by local caterers. She was soon faced with what could have been a major threat to the survival of PAS. In 2001, we lost the use of the School of Scottish Studies lecture theatre, and then the use of the address there. The University was now focussed on charging for whatever it could, and the Society simply could not afford what was asked. Eileen found an alternative at the Glasite Meeting House in Barony Street, where she provided tea, coffee and 'refreshments' from her own stores. Meanwhile, Norman Atkinson organised a parallel set of PAS lectures at Pictavia, and offered a new postal address. He was elected President that year, and Eileen took on the role of events organiser, a role she combined for a time with that of membership secretary, finally standing down from the committee in 2012.

With her legal training, and her forensic attitude towards evidence, Eileen was often sceptical of the more fanciful theories regarding Pictish history, and especially some of the stranger interpretations of the symbols. However, she rarely committed her views to writing. Instead, long conversations with equally interested friends, were often the hallmark of convivial evenings. Two days before she died, she was planning to book a place on our first field trip since lockdown, and looking forward to meeting up with some of those old friends. She will be sadly missed.

THE GOVAN WARRIOR

Adapted from University of Glasgow press release

During a community Fun Day led by Professor Stephen Driscoll and Clyde Archaeology, part of Glasgow Doors Open Days Festival, a new carved stone was discovered at Govan Old Church.

Govan Warrior. Photo: Viking870

The stone portrays a man side-on carrying a round shield and a shaft, probably a spear or sword, over his shoulder. While much of the warrior's face has been damaged since it was carved over a thousand years ago, remarkable details suggest a flowing pony-tail and a sharply pointed beard.

His unique features have drawn parallels with Pictish art and carvings from the Isle of Man. Unlike the other stones in the Govan collection, whose chunky style of carving is so distinctive that it has been described as a school of carving in its own right (the 'Govan School'), the Govan Warrior is lightly incised, which may bring parallels with famous Pictish

stones like the Rhynie Man from Aberdeenshire.

Professor Stephen Driscoll said: "It's a style that makes us think both about the Pictish world and also about the Isle of Man and it's interesting that we are halfway between these two places. This is probably the most important find that I've made in my 30 years of working at Govan Old. The new stone is very exciting because it takes the collection to a different cultural place as it does not look like the heavier and chunkier 'Govan School' style. The new stone is much more delicate in its execution using finer shallow incisions."

EXCAVATIONS AT OLD DEER

Just in case you missed it, you may be able to catch up on iPlayer. This summer, the Book of Deer came back to Aberdeenshire for an exhibition at Aberdeen Art Gallery. At the same time archaeologist Ali Cameron led yet another excavation at Deer Abbey, searching for the site of the Pictish monastery. You can see what she found, after an enormous amount of work… You can find it on BBC Alba, *The Missing Monastery*. And it's quite strange to hear the programme almost entirely in Gaelic, bringing today's language in touch with the 12th-century Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-67437874

GLEN NEVIS

David McGovern reports the discovery of this bull carving on a stone in the river in Glen Nevis- with little other information about it.

Bull on river stone in Glen Nevis

It's a bit hard to see, but there is an incised bull, his hind quarters rugged with the thigh spiral of the Burghead bulls, powerful shoulders with the second spiral, a long head and somewhat unusual delicate horns carved as a continuous crescent. To the right there seems to be a disc shape. What do you make of him?

A new theory about the Symbols
Our member Alan Weir wishes to announce the publication of his book *The Arrangement of Class I Symbol Stones North of the Tay*, available on Amazon, £9.99.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS
It's your Society. You will shortly be invited by email to fill in an online survey (please don't say, oh no, not another one). We would like to know what the members want in terms of topics for lectures, more of X, less of Y. And most important, the committee is still considering the theme for the conference next October. This year was pretty successful, about just one stone. Maybe a broader topic next time? Maybe you are researching in a particular niche area and would like to spread the joy into an interdisciplinary discussion? One big theme suggested so far is 'Colour'. Make a suggestion, add a comment. We are listening.

Next lecture: 19 January 2024,
19.30 on zoom

Professor Heather Pulliam & Jennifer Wallace, *Rethinking the Dupplin Cross: Place, Space, Image, and Meaning*.

Note: in order to synch our financial year more closely with the AGM, we are **moving the AGM** to 19 April, after the evening lecture.

PAS Newsletter 110
Deadline for receipt of material is
Saturday 17 February 2024
Please email contributions to the editor:
jane.geddes@abdn.ac.uk