THE PICTISH ARTS SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER 65 WINTER 2012

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Pictish Arts Society

Held at the AK Bell Lecture Theatre, Perth on 6 October 2012.

Thirty members of the Society being present, the meeting was quorate.

The minutes of the previous annual general meeting were accepted as accurate. There were no matters arising. The joint report of the President and Secretary, published in Newsletter 64 were accepted by the meeting.

The Treasurer's report, encapsulated in the accounts presented to the meeting, was accepted. No change was suggested to the membership subscription rates.

The Membership Secretary reported a slow growth in membership, noting that over the last year we have sadly lost several of our oldest members.

The Newsletter Editor noted, in reference to the previous remarks, that several members had contributed obituaries to the newsletter over the year. He thanked all who had contributed and re-iterated the need for material for publication.

The President noted that we are still working on the website, and that PAS now has a Facebook page, where information about meetings and other events can be obtained.

Before proceeding to the election of the committee, the President asked the meeting if he might propose that David Henry be made an honorary member of the Society in recognition of his services over many years. This proposal was enthusiastically carried.

Norman Atkinson then announced that he would be standing down as President and from the committee, along with Eileen Brownlie (Membership Secretary) and Andrew Munro (Treasurer). He went on to oversee the election, at which John Borland was elected President of the Society.

Norman then handed over to John, who thanked Norman for his long years of service, both as President and member of the committee. John then asked if there was any other business. Marianna Lines asked if it would be possible to make the winter meeting accessible to a wider audience rather than having Pictavia as the sole venue. The President replied that there were two main factors affecting the location of winter lectures. One was the availability at low cost of a suitable venue. The other is the presence of a group of people who are prepared to do the necessary work to make it happen. The committee has already spent some time investigating alternative venues in Angus in case Pictavia should no longer be available. It has proved difficult to find suitable venues close to good public transport.

Some venues in Edinburgh have been suggested. However, the decision to stop running lectures in Edinburgh was taken on the grounds that audiences in the last few years of operation there rarely reached double figures. If any group of members were to put together a proposal which detailed a possible venue, with a core of volunteers prepared to do the work (making sure the place is set up for the audience and speaker, looking after and introducing the speaker, providing refreshments, clearing up afterwards, taking responsibility for safety, etc) then he would be happy to arrange speakers for venues other than Pictavia.

Irene Hughson asked if it would be possible to organise 'one off' joint lectures with local history societies or other groups. John welcomed this idea, asking for any suggestions to be put forward, again with local members who were prepared to be involved in the organisation of such events.

David Henry thanked the meeting for his honorary membership and asked that we formally record our gratitude to Norman Atkinson for his work for PAS over many years, He went on to voice confidence in John Borland's ability to match the high standards Norman has set for the Presidency of the Pictish Arts Society. *SH*

PAS Membership 2012–13

REMINDER

Subscriptions for the current year fell due on 1 September 2012. If you have not yet renewed please do so using the enclosed form, otherwise this is the last PAS mailing that you will receive.

PAS Conference 2012

This year's conference was held on 6 October in the AK Bell lecture theatre in Perth. As the theme of the conference was 'Fortingall to Forteviot and beyond', we were located in the heart of the area under discussion. Some of our speakers dealt with work carried out as part of the Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project, while others dealt with sites in the Tay valley and beyond. Our chairman for the day was **Strat Halliday**, formerly with the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland. He is now working on the Atlas of Hillforts in Britain and Ireland project, based at Edinburgh University. Coincidentally, this year marks the centenary of the death of David Christison, who began the recording of hillforts in Scotland, publishing much of his work in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Our first speaker was **Mark Hall**, currently History Officer at Perth Museum and Art Gallery. Among Mark's areas of research are the cults of saints, the culture of play (with emphasis on board and dice games) and early medieval (Pictish) sculpture. His talk, *Landscape of crosses: Reassessing the Forteviot sculptures for the SERF project*, described work carried out in collaboration with Ian Scott on crosses and fragments from Dupplin, Invermay and Forteviot. Most of these were published in Allen and Anderson's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*.

The Annals of Ulster record the death of Donald son of Constantine, king of Alba in AD900, the first record of the new kingdom. Four years later, his successor, Constantine the Second and Cellach, bishop of St Andrews swore to preserve the laws and disciplines of the faith at Scone. Constantine, in his long reign, went on to consolidate the kingdom. Despite its associations with St Columba, and the reference to the Scots in the account of the oath at Scone, Dunkeld appears to have become subordinate to St Andrews. It is possible that, in parallel, the site at Forteviot was subordinate to Scone in terms of public ceremony. The site has earlier associations, with the palace at Forteviot given in the Chronicle of the Kings of Alba as the place of Kenneth MacAlpin's death in AD858.

The name 'Forteviot' is of uncertain derivation. Watson suggested that it comes from 'fother', a slope, together with 'tobach', which he suggested as a personal name. No individual with this name is associated with the area.

At least seven fragments of carved stone were associated with the church at Forteviot, in addition to the carved arch found in the bed of the Water of May. The suggestion that the latter came from a doorway or chancel arch has been generally accepted, although the arch seems rather narrow for such a purpose. Mark drew comparisons instead with the arched facings of niches, such as one at Housesteads, or the superstructures of late antique baptistries in northern Italy. He noted that the iconography of the Forteviot fragment may find parallels among his Italian examples, strengthening his suggestion that this may have featured in an important church with royal patronage. Forteviot 1 (using ECMS numbering) appears to be the lower portion of a cross-slab but it could be part of a hybrid or free-standing cross. Forteviot 4, with its relief carving of a horse-man, appears to be a cross fragment. These two may be parts of the same free-standing cross, probably of 9th century date. Forteviot 3 also appears to be a fragment of a free-standing cross, likely to date to around the same period or later. Commissioning of elaborate stone carving clearly persisted at Forteviot over a lengthy period of time.

Fragments 1a and 1b from Invermay join perfectly, although they show different weathering patterns. They survive as evidence of another impressive free-standing cross, whose base still stands *in situ*. In contrast, Dupplin cross is remarkably well preserved. At this distance in time, it is no longer possible to be sure of the subtle messages conveyed by the programme of carving here. David, the harpist, slayer of the bear and the lion, and prefiguring the model of a Christian king, appears to be represented here. His presence on the Dupplin cross hints tantalisingly at the relationship between church and state, but the nature of that relationship remains obscure. Isabel Henderson has suggested that the roundel with its four surrounding doves may indicate a Columban connection, perhaps referring back to Dunkeld. Unusually for Pictish crosses, Dupplin bears a name, that of Constantine son of Fergus, dating it to either Constantine's reign (AD789–820) or soon after.

It is possible that Dupplin and Invermay once formed a pair of crosses. Both probably stood

at around the same level on rising ground, one to the west and the other to the east within a mile of Forteviot. They shared the depiction of a single horseman. It is not exactly clear that the Dupplin cross's hillside location, whence it was removed for conservation before eventually being placed in St Serf's Church in Dunning, was its original position. However, it stood close to a small chapel, dependent on and in the parish of Forteviot, and there is no record of its having been moved. The crosses and sculpture from around Forteviot may relate to the account in the St Andrews foundation legend of the sons of Constantine son of Fergus's successor meeting with St Regulus at Forteviot and subsequently founding a church and setting up a cross there. The Forteviot sculptures add to the documentary evidence of Forteviot as an important royal centre in the late Pictish period.

Oliver O'Grady took us to the other end of our range, with *New from Pictish Fortingall: research and community archaeology in Breadalbane.* An archaeologist with a broad range of experience behind him, Oliver's long-standing interest in medieval central places and the role of the church therein led to his involvement with excavations at Scone, and forms the impetus behind his latest project investigating the role of lesser known early Christian monasteries in southern Pictland. Until fairly recently, little was known about early monastic sites on mainland Scotland. Martin Carver's work at Tarbat Old Church, Portmahomack uncovered an early Christian site where skilled metalworkers and scribes were working, and gave impetus to the study of other early sites. The Culdee Project, run by OJT Heritage, working with amateur groups, was designed to further our knowledge of the lesser known ecclesiastical sites of southern Pictland. The first to be tackled was Fortingall, where the Breadalbane Heritage Society and the local Kirk Session lent their help and support.

Aerial photographs taken over Fortingall by RCAHMS in 1986 led the late Ian Smith to suggest that there was an enclosure here that could be compared with that of the monastic site at Iona.

Approximately 200 by 150 metres, the curvilinear crop mark encloses the church and the glebe field, and extends west towards a small mound known as Carn na Marbh. The southern edge runs along a break in the slope above the River Lyon.

A number of small-scale investigations took place over the following years: a limited geophysical survey, archaeological monitoring of work associated with pipe-laying within the area of the enclosure, and a study of the carved stones found in the vicinity of the church. Oliver's own practical involvement with the site began in 2010.

Fortingall sits close to the route towards Iona and the west in an area with a high concentration of early medieval ecclesiastical remains. Handbells were preserved at Fortingall, Balnahanaid and Cladh Bhranno. Medieval parish churches were recorded at Fortingall, Dull and Balnahanaid, and there are many stones marked with simple incised crosses in the vicinity.

The present church at Fortingall was built as part of an Arts and Crafts period remodelling of the village, although it probably occupies the site of a much older foundation. Close by, the Fortingall Yew has a good claim to be the oldest living tree in Europe, at somewhere between 3,000 to 5,000 years of age. Oliver raised no more than the possibility that this venerable tree may have been revered in pre-Christian times. Pope Gregory the Great had recommended that pagan sites be taken over by proselytising priests and monks, and this may be an example of one of these.

Oliver's practical involvement began in 2010, with geophysical surveys across the possible enclosure. The field where AOC Archaeology had found traces of walls and a revetment during a watching brief as a trench for a sewer pipe was dug showed little trace of any remains. Further west, traces of an enclosing bank and ditch were picked up, with the suggestion of an entrance close to Carn na Marbh. There were also signs of internal divisions and a possible second entrance. In the glebe field at the east end of the enclosure, there was further indication of the enclosing ditch and of internal divisions.

Permission was granted to open two small trenches in 2011. As the site is a scheduled ancient monument, excavation is restricted. The trench in the glebe field was designed to investigate the apparent junction of an internal division with the enclosing ditch. The latter had been cut into the natural sand and gravel soil, and was 3 metres across, with a basal drain. A spread bank showed suggestions of a stone revetment and possible post settings. The ditch itself had been recut after it had partly filled, and the internal division was of a later date than

the ditch and bank. A quantity of vitrified material was found in this area, and several artefacts were recovered, including a possible copper pin or stylus head, perhaps of the early historic period. Fragments of green glazed pottery of the 13th century were found in the upper fill of the ditch.

The other trench was placed over the possible entrance between the kirk and Carn na Marbh, where remains of a metalled road surface were uncovered. At least three courses of the revetment of a bank were found beside the road. From this part of the site came a rare imitation traffic-light bead, opaque yellow glass with trails of light green and bands of red. These are known from Anglo-Saxon sites, and are believed to date to the late 5th or early 6th century. A silver penny of John of England was also recovered from this area.

The presence of Pictish relief-carved cross-slabs indicates that the site was in use around AD800 or later. The evidence suggests that the site was not short-lived, but that it remained in use over an extended period. The dedication of the church to St Coeti, a bishop of Iona who died in AD712 and who was associated with St Adomnan, also appears to confirm the early existence of a Christian site here, perhaps a monastery modelled on Iona. It is worth noting that Euan Campbell has drawn attention to the possible link between 'Coeti' and 'cad', meaning wood or tree, perhaps also referring to the yew. The curvilinear form of the enclosure resembles the pattern found at St Blane's and Iona, rather than the circular enclosures found at Irish monastic sites. The proximity of the Carn na Marbh, which may well be an early justice mound, similar to that found at Scone, is interesting. Some of the eastern early monastic sites have features which suggest an association with political power.

St Serf's Island in Loch Leven was next to be tackled as part of the Culdee Project, and Oliver gave us a brief report of the work there so far. Documentary evidence from the writings of Andrew de Wyntoun and the later monastic cartulary shows that the island was believed to be the site of an early monastery. Physical evidence for the existence of an important early Christian site takes the form of the Portmoak cross-slab, found in the old burial ground by the chapel site at Portmoak farm on the edge of the loch.

As at Fortingall, the first practical step in investigating this site was to carry out geophysical investigations. The original extent of the island was clearly revealed: the loch was partly drained in the early 19th century, lowering the level by around 12 feet. On the old island, a boat-shaped enclosure with possible internal buildings was revealed. A limited excavation over the possible vallum revealed the presence of a ditch and bank. Some pottery was recovered here, including a possible fragment of E-ware. In recent years pottery of this type, manufactured in western France in the 6th/7th centuries AD, has been recognised at an increasing number of sites of the Pictish period. So far, the preliminary results of work at St Serf's Island suggest that this is another early foundation.

John Sherriff's *Pictish forts in Perthshire: where, what and why?* was, he stressed, a personal view based on years of fieldwork. Currently leading a small team of surveyors working on several projects for the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, John has been an Archaeological Investigator with RCAHMS for more than 20 years. He began by defining what he meant by Pictish forts: thick walled structures which were clearly not designed to support a roof, preferably associated with a ditch, dating from the first 800 years of the first millennium AD and located north of the Forth and east of the Great Glen.

R.W. Feachem recognised the heterogeneity of this large group many years ago and attempted a classification. While his 'nuclear' type, with a central citadel at the focus of lower enclosures is fairly easy to identify, many forts do not have uniquely identifiable features allowing them to be neatly classified. There are also serious problems with dating. Clatchard Craig, believed to be a prehistoric example, was being quarried out as *The Problem of the Picts* was in the process of publication. Evidence from pottery and metalwork recovered here placed the fort firmly in the Pictish period. At other locations, there is evidence for reuse after a long period, as at Carn Dubh, or for longevity of a particular building form, as in the case of the roundhouses at Hawkhill. Just as there is no single archetypal form of Pictish dwelling, there is no typical Pictish fort. Domestic buildings were influenced by use, topography and materials available, and the same is probably true for the forts.

John made a strong case for the utility of careful survey of Pictish forts in order to establish a relative chronology of the structures involved.

At Castle Law, Forgandenny, for example, a plane table survey of this impressive fort allowed the clarification of the sequence, showing that the final phase here was an open settlement, with roundhouses spreading over the innermost of the fort walls. However, survey alone cannot supply dating evidence. He made the case for further investigation of sites such as the fort on Moncreiffe Hill, across the Earn Valley from Castle Law to the north. This has been assumed to be Pictish, although there is no evidence to support the date. It may have been preferred over the site at Castle Law as a fort because it has a far better overview of passages through the hills into Strathearn.

Topography can, on occasion, be seen to overwhelm other considerations when it came to choosing the site of a fort. Outstanding landscape features may have originally attracted people to build fairly modest structures which later saw additions which defied the topography – walls built on crazily steep slopes as at Dundurn, for example. If the development of such nuclear forts in defiance of topography was intended to display hierarchical relationships, should we not see many more hierarchically organised structures on sites where the topography is less challenging?

Chronology can often be difficult to establish. Murray Cook's work at Maiden Castle, Bennachie, for example, revealed that a site which was assumed to belong to the first century BC was occupied in the 6th/7th centuries AD. At Barra Hill the innermost wall dated to the 6th/4th centuries BC but the site was probably refortified in the 5th century AD. A site that 'looks' prehistoric may in fact date to a much later period or may have been re-used. While a careful survey is likely to reveal such re-use of a site, hard dating evidence is needed before we can establish any patterns which would allow us to begin to answer the questions John posed in his title.

Over his years of experience as a professional archaeologist, **David Sneddon** has developed a special interest in the field practice, techniques and methodologies applied to Scottish rural sites. This he shared in *Excavation of a Pitcarmick-type building in Glenshee*.

Named after examples found at Pitcarmick in Strathardle, this type of building is a long house with rounded ends. Extensions may be attached to the long sides, and enclosures are sometimes located at the ends of the building. The remains are rarely prominent – a low light and a covering of snow gives the best chance of picking up the remains on the ground or on aerial photographs. As turf was the basic building material, the remains at best are slumped and decayed. On land that has been under the plough, no trace would be likely to remain. The distribution of Pitcarmick-type buildings is largely confined to Strathardle and Glenshee, with only a few known west of the Tay. *North-east Perth: an archaeological landscape* (RCAHMS) details many of them.

Two structures were excavated at Pitcarmick in 1993/94. A full report of the work has yet to be published, but some facts are clear: the primary building material was turf laid on stone footings which were fairly substantial in some places but missing in others. A central drain led to the suggestion that at least part of the building served as a byre. An early medieval date was obtained from a hearth in one building.

RCAHMS survey work revealed an area at Lair in Glenshee that is rich in archaeological remains. Traces of hut circles, shielings and cairns are to be found, as well as the remains of post medieval farm buildings. A small group of Pitcarmick-type buildings are set on the side of a low knoll, looking out over an 18th-century military road. One of these, abutting what appears to be an earlier cairn, was selected for investigation. Trenches were opened across the degraded walls, close to the cairn and at the end furthest from the cairn where the building appeared to continue over a steeper slope. In order to disentangle what was left of roofing material from the wall turfs, X-ray fluorescence, was used to analyse the elemental components of samples of the remains. There was no trace of a stone footing; the turf walls appear to have been laid directly on the ground surface. A concentration of gravel may mark an entrance. Some stones and a few metal artefacts were incorporated in the turf walls. Even where the ground sloped away beneath the curved end of the building, there was no sign of any stone foundation. No internal features have been uncovered, but excavation of an area showing as a geophysical anomaly on the outside of the building uncovered a patch of dense charcoal and scorched earth, predating the turf wall. This may date to the clearance of the site for building the longhouse, but it may instead be associated with the cairn.

Close to the end by the cairn, a pit was uncovered which may be a posthole for a timber supporting the roof. Further details and results of radiocarbon analyses will be found on the website: **www.glenshee-archaeology.co.uk** (These have been reported as all within the 7th to 9th centuries AD.)

David left us with a selection of illustrations of present day turf and wood structures in Iceland. Substantial and well-insulated buildings from such materials would leave as little trace as the Pitcarmick-types, but careful excavation and sensitive physical chemical analyses of the remains can reveal a great deal about these elusive structures.

Heather James has been involved in a number of projects of Pictish interest, including excavations on the Isle of May and a major study of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab. In *A Celtic stronghold on the Roman frontier: the newly-discovered broch at Castle Craig,* Heather reported an unexpected find made when her team excavated a 'fort' as part of the SERF project.

Castle Craig had been the target of limited excavations by John Sherriff in 1978, when he uncovered paving, neolithic pottery and jet. These discoveries were used to back a campaign to prevent the site being quarried away.

The site appeared as a rocky knoll, topped by an upper enclosure and with a great deal of scree on the slopes. Geophysical investigations had found some interesting anomalies in the centre. In the first season of Heather's excavations, the outer banks were sectioned. Possible hut circles were encountered near the site of John Sherriff's excavations. The upper enclosure was surrounded by a substantial rock-cut ditch. Remains of the bank and an entrance way with a large stone lying nearby were also uncovered. Within the enclosure a compacted stony surface lay immediately below the turf. Here, relatively shallow postholes and patches of burning in the remains of an earth bank indicated a timber and earth wall or palisade. From this level, a possible 9th-century pin, a razor and knife or dagger, together with fish bones and charcoal which may give radiocarbon dates were recovered. An early medieval date for the upper enclosure is likely.

Very large blocks were encountered below the stony layer. On investigation, these proved to be part of a large curving wall 5m thick and surviving to a height of at least 1·5metres. Well-dressed stones, slightly tilted to the interior, faced a solid rubble core. The outer face exhibits a clear batter. From this layer came a worn Roman patera, a stone bowl, glass bangle fragments, melon beads, spindle whorls and a possible unused crucible. Bone preservation was surprisingly good, and fragments included part of the hand and head of a robust adult man. Further work revealed more of the wall, which appears to have been truncated to a uniform level, although the surviving height from its foundation on bedrock varies. Just inside the wall there was some evidence for the presence of dung and straw below a layer of dense ash, which contained a number of beads and metal work. Over this was a layer of rubble, perhaps the inner face of the wall, then a compact layer of smaller stones which probably originated in its rubble fill.

A number of finds suggest that the broch was occupied in the late 1st to 2nd century AD by people who had access to Roman goods – Samian ware, a worn patera, fragments of a glass bowl and jewellery. The site lies to the south of the Gask Ridge, where a chain of roman watchtowers oversaw the road leading to the Roman fort at the junction of the Almond and the Tay.

Some time after the mid 2nd century, the broch was burnt (the ash layer representing an upper floor which had collapsed over a ground floor stable, evidenced by the straw and dung). The subsequent deliberate demolition of the upper floors seems to have followed quickly, possibly crushing the remains of the individual whose bones were recovered. The effective sealing of the lower layers may account for the good preservation of the bones and organic material despite the fact that the local stone used on the site is a rare acid lava. (The local geology has led to this area being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest.) In the early medieval period, the levelled site was reused as a palisaded enclosure.

The excavations at Castle Craig revealed a hitherto unknown broch. The numbers known from south of the Highland Line remain few, but several have been added in recent years.

The site has been scanned, with a view to preparing a 3-D visualisation and Heather and NorthLight Heritage are now studying alternative strategies for dealing with it. Some of the local residents wish to see the broch uncovered, with a reconstruction designed to act as a tourist focus. This raises questions of maintenance and access among other problems.

NorthLight will present the alternatives to the local community before any decision can be made as to the fate of this newly discovered broch.

Cormac Bourke spent 26 years as the Curator of Medieval Antiquities at the Ulster Museum in Belfast, and is still very much involved in Irish Archaeology. In *Early insular hand-bells – making, using and keeping*, he introduced a topic of cultural importance in both the Forteviot-Fortingall area and his native Ireland.

The early hand-bells in question have survived in reasonable numbers, suggesting that they have been valued over the centuries. The earliest were made of iron, with later examples cast in bronze. By far the largest number is in Ireland, where around 50 iron and 30 bronze bells are known. However, a larger proportion of the Scottish bells are kept in churches as opposed to museums. Uniquely for metal objects of liturgical significance that have survived the Reformation, hand-bells still have homes in Welsh Anglican, Scottish Presbyterian and Irish Catholic churches. In the hand-bells, we have objects that have been cared for by succeeding generations for up to 15 centuries – the only class of object in these islands for which this is true.

There is an affinity with the bells attached round the necks of animals, where there seems to be some sort of apotropaic function as well as their obvious use in locating the animals. The use of bells on animals in the early Christian period is well attested in the insular context, both in Irish law tracts, on stone monuments as at Fowlis Wester and, arguably, in the finds of small bells from archaeological sites both in Ireland and Scotland. Perhaps the sense of a protective function carries over into the hand-bells.

Although small bells are known from the Roman world, including examples from Roman sites in Scotland, none are obvious precursors of the Christian hand-bells. By the 6th century AD, the evidence of the writings of a Carthaginian churchman shows bells being used to mark the passage of time, giving shape to the monastic day. In the Christian milieu, the bells had both a time-keeping and a pastoral association. The importance of the pastoral role of the churchman is underscored by the use of the crozier – the shepherd's staff.

The preponderance of iron over bronze bells is marked. This is unlikely to be an artefact of differential survival. Reports of iron bells as casual finds are more common than of bronze: this is the reverse of what would be expected if the underlying numbers were equal or biased in favour of bronze. In general, objects of iron are less likely to be reported. It appears that not only were iron bells made earlier than the bronze ones, but that more of them were made.

Manufacture of iron bells was remarkably uniform, with only small variation in size. Each bell began as a sheet of metal up to 70cm long and between 4 and 6mm thick, from a single charge of a crucible. Getting to this stage was itself a technically advanced feat. The bell was cut and folded to shape, with holes drilled for the handle. Finally, the bells were brazed on the outside. Holes in some of the surviving bells may have been caused at this stage of their manufacture.

The later bronze bells were made using a model dipped in a beeswax mixture to create a mould. The greater variation seen in the bronze bells as opposed to the iron ones has allowed the identification of possible workshops or individual itinerant workers who cast to a pattern. The bells from Loch Shiel and from Insh, for example, appear to have been made by the same man, and are therefore more or less contemporary.

The bell at Forteviot belongs to a small but interesting group. The inverted 'W' mark on the face of this bell is unique if this is an early medieval cast object. The form and handle fit the early medieval pattern, but the manufacturing technique belongs to a later period. A similar mark appears on a bell from Armagh that also appears to be late. Cormac suggested that these represent replicas of original bells possibly even cast from the original material, preserving the continuity as an act of piety

Over the centuries, hand-bells were used in a variety of church rituals – to punctuate the service, to regulate the day, and to animate a variety of festivals or other events. We know from a variety of sources that bells were used in processions – the Bayeux tapestry shows a bell in the procession at Edward the Confessor's funeral for example. St Kentigern's bell appears on the seal of the bishop of Glasgow, and charters show that in the 14th to 16th centuries, this bell was carried in perambulations which included prayers for the city. Interestingly, it appears that the keeper of the bell was probably not a member of the Cathedral chapter. We know

from other sources that the care of a particular bell could be passed down through a family. In Ireland, there are 18th-century gravestones in Fermanagh and Monaghan which carry clear representations of hand-bells. It is possible that these commemorate keepers of ancient bells. Cormac concluded with a request that any of the audience who were aware of similar examples in Scotland should let him know the details.

Our final speaker of the day was **Niall Robertson**, who has a long involvement with PAS. Over the years, he has discovered many early medieval and Pictish stones, sometimes to the great delight of other members on PAS field trips. He rounded off the conference with *A large obelisk on which a cross is cut: Early Medieval and Pictish Stones in Highland Perthshire*. Niall's talk was a lavishly illustrated guide to the carved stones of the period in an area stretching north and then west from Dunkeld, the gateway between highland and lowland Perthshire on the Tay. In the early medieval period, the fertile, glacier-cut valleys and straths of this region were home to a fairly large population, spread throughout the area and making good use of the rivers and lochs to provide lines of transport and communication. Some of the stones that Niall described still stand in their original location, such as at Staredam, where a cross was deeply cut on a standing stone, while others, such as those Gellyburn, Pittensorn and Murthly have been broken and moved, possibly some distance. This group may have come from an unknown site in the Murthly area, or possibly even from Dunkeld itself. In some cases, imported, fine-grained sandstone was used for intricate carving; in others, local stones were incised with simple crosses.

Dunkeld held an important place in the early medieval church; dedicated to St Columcille, it provided a place of safety for his relics before Vikings raided up by the Tay, and the surviving elaborately carved stones there attest to its continued importance. It is highly likely that many more fragments of the early period were later incorporated into the fabric of the cathedral. Niall rapidly described and showed illustrations of the surviving stones from Dunkeld, then from sites following the line of the Tay north, diverting briefly into Glen Garry then back to Tayside, visiting sites including Dunfallandy and Moulin, Old Faskally and Old Blair, before arriving at Struan. There stands a re-used standing stone, with incised latin crosses on its narrow east and west faces, which the Reverend James McLaggan described in 1790 as 'a large obelisk on which a cross is cut', supplying Niall with his title. Here also is a symbol-marked stone.

On past the stones of Logierait, Tullypownie and others before sweeping west to Dull and Fortingall, where there are clear associations with Iona: Dull dedicated to St Adomnan and Fortingall to St Coeti. The journey among the stones went on through Glen Lyon then south to Killin, passing relief cut and incised stones, with a variety of cross shapes represented. By Crieff, where a 10th-century free-standing cross was later pressed into service as a mercat cross, the trail carried on through Balquhidder to Strathfillan, where a carved arm with a circle cross cut on a recumbent slab may commemorate a dewar (keeper) of the saint's enshrined arm.

The early medieval and Pictish carved stones of Highland Perthshire include simple and more ornate grave markers, free-standing crosses, simple crosses cut on stones for reasons now lost, fragments of grand pieces that once adorned important churches and simple stones that stood by the wayside. Together, as Niall's swift tour of over 40 sites showed, they bear witness to the early links between this area and Iona, and to its continuing wealth and importance of the church here long after the days of Adomnan and Coeti. *SH*

A note from the Editor

As if trying to fill David Henry's boots as Newsletter Editor wasn't challenge enough, I agreed at this year's AGM to take over from Norman Atkinson as PAS President. I now have two very hard acts to follow. As noted in the AGM minutes, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to both David and Norman for their many years of service on the PAS committee (and members should note that David continues to do everything else for the Newsletter apart from edit it). Indeed PAS is blessed with a number of committee members of many years standing but subsequent to the AGM Hugh Coleman and Elspeth Reid approached us offering to help. Both have been co-opted, Hugh in the dual role as Treasurer and Membership Secretary and Elspeth 'shadowing' the Secretary and their nominations will be ratified at the next

opportunity. So we have old hands and new blood – the best of both worlds.

David McGovern is currently reworking the PAS website. We are not aiming for anything fancy but it will at least be kept up-to-date so that members and non-members alike can obtain current information about the society's activities. We are also looking into making pdf copies of previous publications available online. David has also launched a PAS *facebook* page:

www.facebook.com/ThePictishArtsSociety

which has already attracted a small but growing number of followers. This may help us reach a new audience and hopefully grow our membership.

At the AGM the question of PAS events beyond Pictavia was raised and this is something the committee is keen to support. However the demographic of our membership means that it could prove difficult to ensure a reasonable turnout. The idea of a shared event with another society was suggested and this may well offer a way forward. So if you are also a member of another society (local history or field club, friends of etc), make some enquiries if they would be interested in hosting a joint event. I am willing to help with booking a speaker and PAS can cover their expenses. If you want to get involved, contact me directly:

john.borland@rcahms.gov.uk

Finally, I would reiterate my call to you all to support your newsletter by contributing to it. News items, press cuttings or more in-depth pieces – all are welcome. You can submit direct to me or to: **pas.news@btconnect.com** *JB*

David Munro Finlayson

2 May 1919 – 21 May 2012

David Finlayson was born in Caithness but lived for many years in Kingsbarns, Fife. As well as being a senior lecturer of physics at St Andrews University, he was a keen historian and antiquarian and was one of the driving forces behind The Society for Northern Studies, organising their conferences from Caithness to Sweden.

David was also a keen 'Pict' (being of the Cat tribe of Caithness) and was a long-time member of The Pictish Arts Society and a regular attendee of the Dark Age Studies Conferences in St Andrews.

He was a gifted gardener, keeping his cottage garden at Kingsbarns brimming with every fruit and vegetable known to Scotland and a few from beyond these shores, including peaches, grapes and figs. His asparagus was the best in town.

David was a cheery and modest person and never seemed to age throughout the 30-odd years that I knew him. He was a great supporter of my Pictish artwork and helped to keep me in bread and water by regularly buying greeting cards!

David was a true gentleman, of the sort that you don't often meet and his passing marks the end of an era. He died peacefully in the spring of this year at the great age of 93. He will be missed, quietly, by many.

Marianna Lines

Pictavia lecture series 2012-13

14 December 2012

Murray Cook

A new look at the activities of Pictish Potentates: the Hillforts of Strathdon

18 January 2013

Alice Blackwell

Christian symbolism on the Hunterston brooch and related motifs on Insular sculpture

15 February 2013

Strat Halliday

Spaces and places in the Pictish landscape

15 March 2013

Martin Goldberg

The Rider and Hunt Scene in Pictish Art: Secular Symbol or Christian Icon?

Doors open at 7pm and lectures start at 7.30. Tea/coffee and biscuits are available before and after the meeting.

Invergowrie – a flawed masterpiece

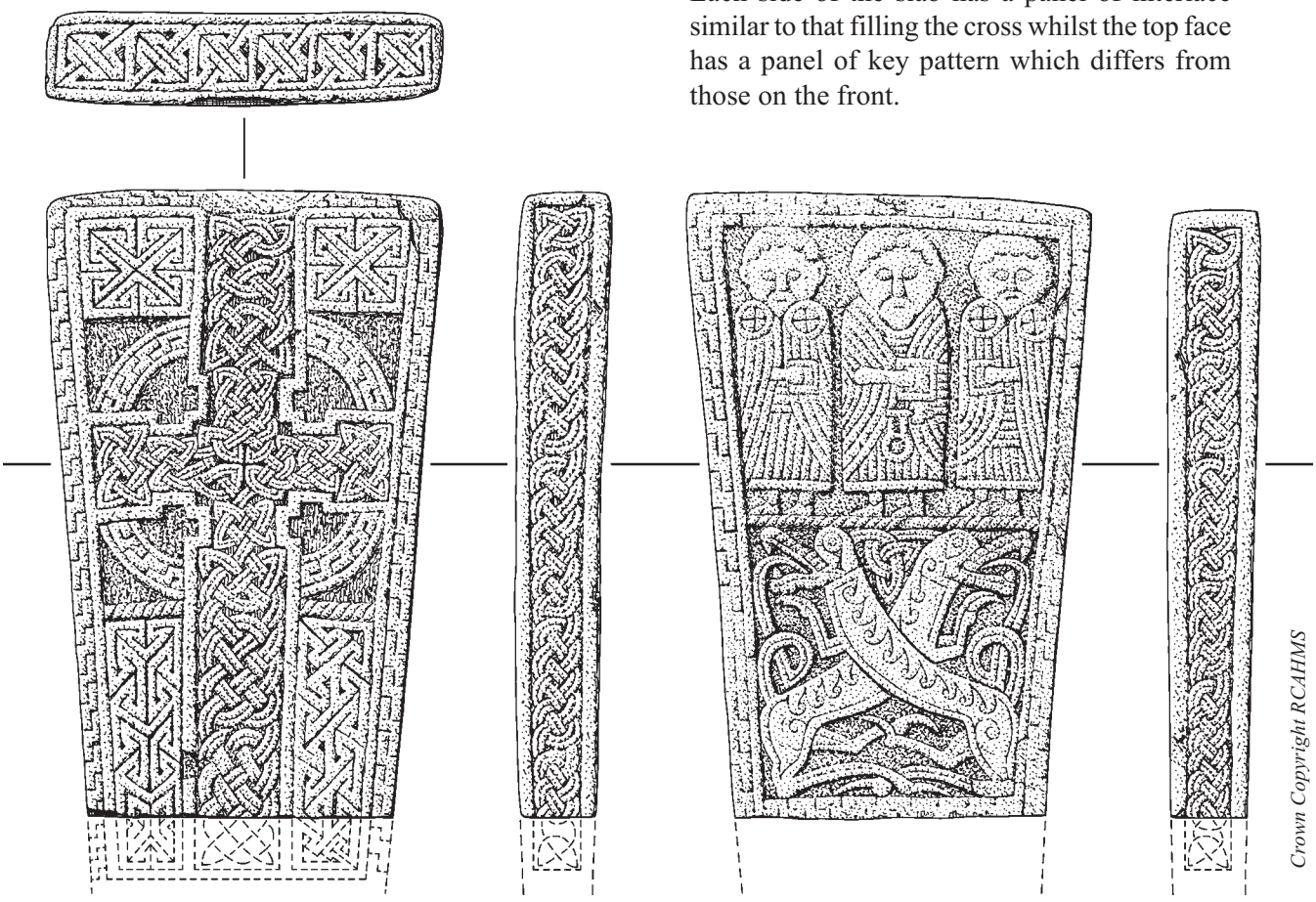
Invergowrie cross-slab (**1**), which now stands at the entrance to the Kingdom of the Scots display in the Museum of Scotland, is one of a small but very select group of cross-slabs which are carved on all five sides. This group, which includes Kirriemuir 2 and Kirriemuir 18 (was this a phenomenon of southern Pictland?) consists of small- to medium-sized slabs for one obvious reason: there would be little point in decorating the top face of a stone which was above eye level. However, given that the vast majority of Pictish cross-slabs are small- to medium-sized, this group seems remarkably small.

The provenance, decoration and interpretation of Invergowrie are all thoroughly covered by Anna Richie in the excellent *People of Early Scotland from contemporary images* (Pinkfoot Press) but for the purposes of this paper, I will briefly reiterate a description of its carving.

On the front, carved in relief within a decorated margin, a ringed cross with double-square hollows spans the height and width of the slab. Like the margin, the ring is filled with stepped key pattern whilst the cross is filled with well executed interlace. This is carefully contrived to bring four sharp angles together to form a second cross at the centre of the first, reinforcing that most potent of Christian symbols. Each quadrant around the cross contains a panel of diagonal key pattern, together showing three designs. The lower panels are separated from the ring by a border of rope moulding.

The back is divided into two panels, again within a margin of stepped key pattern and separated from each other by a rope moulding. In the top panel, three robed and tonsured figures, obviously holy men, look out. The importance of the central character is signified by the fact that he, particularly his head, is slightly bigger than the others. Each carries a book and the central character also holds what may be a key or a seal. In the panel below, two overlapping dragon-like creatures rear up on their hind legs and bite the tip of each other's tail with pointed teeth. They have clawed feet and scaly snouts and their bodies are decorated with a line of incised spirals.

Each side of the slab has a panel of interlace similar to that filling the cross whilst the top face has a panel of key pattern which differs from those on the front.

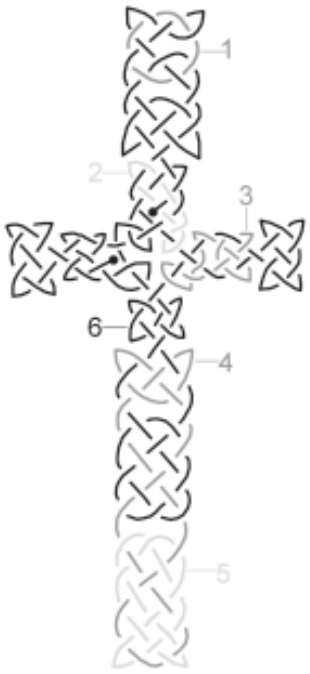


1 *Invergowrie cross-slab, scale 1:10*

Invergowrie cross-slab may be small – with its missing strip reconstructed it would still have been less than a metre high – but what it lacks in stature, it more than makes up for in richness of detail. This situation is helped by the fact that, with the exception of that missing strip along the bottom and a small area of damage to the margin on the front, it is remarkably well preserved. Invergowrie is without doubt a superb example of late-Pictish stone carving and its richly carved surfaces offer a sumptuous feast for the eyes.

So given the degree to which this stone has been decorated and the obvious care taken to lay out the design, it is perhaps surprising to find a 'mistake' in the interlace. Interlace can be formed from either intertwining loops that have no beginning or end, or conversely intertwining cord with a very definite beginning and end, often marked by a zoomorphic head and tail.

The schematic diagram of Invergowrie (**2**) shows its interlace to be the former, with five smaller loops (shown in lighter grey and numbered 1 to 5) and a larger sixth loop (shown in black and numbered 6). This large loop runs into all four arms of the cross and intertwines with four of the smaller ones. It is loops 2, 3 and 6 that come together carefully at the centre of the cross to create that second small cross in the gap between them. However if we look closely at loop 6, we see that it isn't a loop at all. It is in fact a cord with a beginning and an end, each of which tucks under itself but then fail to reappear. These ends are emphasised on figure **2** by enlarged dots but the carving itself does not make a feature out of them, so the eye was clearly never meant to be drawn to them.



2 *Schematic diagram of interlace filling the cross*

Some might argue that this 'mistake' was deliberate – a display of piety in acknowledgement that only God can create perfection. Given the obvious care that went into the layout and carving of this stone, such an argument might sound persuasive: this is certainly no slipshod 'anything will do' sculpture (of which there are a few) so an error does seem out of place.

However, what if the sculptor just couldn't get the interlace to work, particularly if his priority was to bring those four angles together at the centre to create the cross within a cross? If closing the loop meant sacrificing this detail, perhaps he chose instead to perform a sleight of hand by carefully loosing the loose ends in the overall effect. The flaw certainly isn't immediately apparent and I doubt if many visitors to the Museum of Scotland are aware of it. In fact I wonder just how many scholars of Pictish sculpture have spotted it? Perhaps then, just as now, Invergowrie's 'wow' factor allowed its sculptor get away with it.

John Borland

PAS online

Work is underway to revamp our website and tie it in with our new facebook page. The new website should be simpler for us to manage and easier for visitors to navigate and we hope to have the Paypal membership payment option reactivated.

We also hope to offer the option of an email version of the PAS newsletter which would allow us to eliminate the membership premium for overseas members. We intend to offer an example newsletter for download to new 'likers' of our facebook page in order to promote membership.

It should also be possible to offer members access to the newsletter archive via the website at some point in the future and committee member Elspeth Reid is bringing the newsletter index up to date.

Please take a minute to visit our facebook page:

www.facebook.com/ThePictishArtsSociety

And the website at:

www.thepictishartssociety.org.uk

David McGovern

Surveying and the symbol stones

They say that nothing is certain in life except death and taxes. Much has been written about the symbol stones in relation to death – and other rituals – but, so far as I know, nothing has been written about their relation to taxes. With the coming of agriculture there was a need for land boundaries to be fixed and the various Welsh, Irish and Breton codes detail how the areas of land-holdings related to the amount of tax to be paid. Taxes could be paid in cattle, grain, slaves or silver. The Picts were Celtic tribes of the same general type and must have needed a similar code.

Since the Neolithic, the inhabitants of Scotland have been able to erect large monoliths and position them accurately. They did not find it necessary to carve them in any way. Yet when Pictish symbols appear in stone they are fully formed, suggesting they had developed in another medium. Resemblances to metalwork and manuscripts have been widely discussed but there is also the possibility that they had been developed in some more transient medium.

When and why did the Pictish authorities decide to carve symbols in the stones? This paper suggests that the when and why are closely related.

In the year of his consulship, 44BC, Julius Caesar sent out surveyors to the four quarters of the Roman Empire to collect data on which to base a map. Thirty-two years later all the surveyors had returned and their data were collated – most notably by Claudius Ptolemy. The data consisted of lists of co-ordinates for two types of sites – coastal sites and *oppida* or *poleis* – important inland settlements.

Clarke has argued that the creation of the symbol stone system was a response to some external threat which he equates with the arrival of Christian missionaries. The presence of the Roman army to the south was a much greater threat and the relationship between the Romans and the Picts has recently been discussed (Hunter, 2012 and Woolliscroft, 2006).

Unlike those interpretations which have tried to decode the symbols into languages, this paper only presents the meanings of the symbols. It shows how the stones relate to sites of the same two types as those of Ptolemy – coastal sites and inland civic centres – and how the symbols indicate the relationships between stones and the landscape in which they stand.

The interpretation of the most common symbols is given here along with examples of how they work together on specific stones to indicate lines of sight which would have been used by the surveyors to mark out boundaries by off-set measurement and to calculate the areas of land-holdings. The approach is empirical because that is how I came upon the meaning of the symbols. For those who would like to read more about the history of surveying I have provided two references.

When referring to each stone, I have used the numbers from Ian Fraser's book (RCAHMS, 2008). If you do not have a copy you can use the RCAHMS website (www.rcahms.gov.uk). Allen and Anderson numbers for the symbols (ECMS, I: 48–78) are also given in brackets when referring to each symbol.

I The symbols as surveying instruments

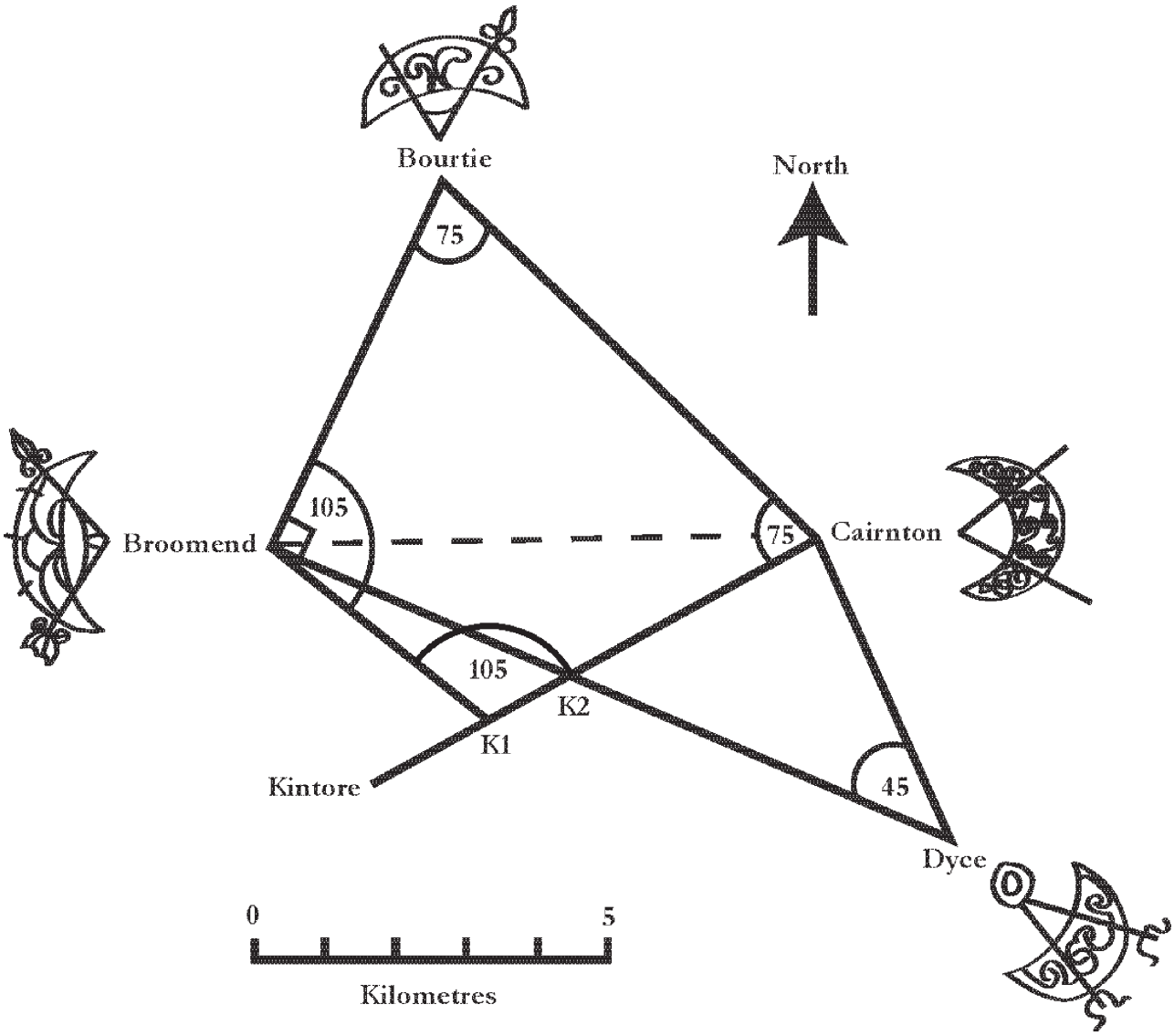
Crescent and V-rod (124): Two lines meet at the angle shown by the V-rod.

Why has no-one paid attention to the difference in angle between the V-rods?

By measuring all the angles I found that they belong to a restricted range of measurements in our unit of 'degrees'. In fact they represent a system based on a unit of 15 degrees; this is in itself significant in that it divides the circle in to 24 equal segments.

Measuring the v-rod angles in this system you only need to be accurate enough to indicate whether the line is 45, 60, 75, 90 or 105 degrees. So at Dyce (1) we have an angle of 3 units (45 degrees). Draw a line to the nearest stone to Dyce – Cairnton (9). Now draw a line at 45 degrees to this line – it reaches Broomend (8). So the V-rod angle indicates the position of two of the neighbouring stones. Checking the V-rod angles of other stones in the area produces a similar result. Interestingly the V-rod at Kintore (29) has an angle which would make it fit the position marked on the map as K1. The movement of some stones makes exact lines difficult in some cases.

The lines join to form triangles or quadrilaterals whose areas could be calculated (example in the map). Boundaries could be fixed and mapped by using a pre-stretched knotted rope at right-angles to the lines of sight. A map would be created by using a string knotted at equal



intervals. For example: if the rope was knotted at two-pace intervals the string might be knotted at one thumb width so that the scribe's drawing would be to the scale of one thumb width to two paces.

Double-disc and Z-rod (121): Continue the line in the same direction.

In Strathmore we find very few examples of crescent and V-rod because the lines of sight are much longer. To extend a line in the same direction the surveyors would use the method indicated by the double disc and Z-rod. Stretch one rope back along the line and use the other to continue by using the parallel lines of the Z-rod in the vertical position – the two discs are two reels of rope.

The stone at East Balhaggardy has only this symbol, making it difficult to fit into the system. On other stones it occurs with more informative symbols.

If there are any surveyors who used two cloth tapes in the age before GPS please check out my methods.

Notched Rectangle and Z-rod (138/9): Need to measure/adjust levels along this line.

The notches represent the tubes of liquid which would have been used to achieve a level. The other levelling method was to use plumb line and the man at Rhynie 3 (43.3) might as easily be holding a plumb line as a spear.

Again there is a contrast between the flat land of Strathmore where this is not needed and the hilly area of Donside. The Maiden Stone (33) is a good example. The Pictish beast indicates a line running east – to Bourtie (6) and the notched rectangle indicates two changes of

level. The OS map will show you that there is a hill between the two sites. Again I have not found any sites where the notched rectangle is not relevant to the topography.

Notched Rectangle with Curved End [Tuning Fork] (137): Entrance to a new system, need for careful sighting of the line from this point.

In order to lay out the lines accurately the surveyors needed a sighting mechanism. The two types of sight are circle or slit. An interesting one from ancient Egypt called a *merkhet* uses a slit sight, a plumb line and a ranging rod**.**

In following up my line of reasoning this was the strangest coincidence that I found – I was looking at the mercat crosses of Scotland and this instrument was called a merkhet!

In the area of the map the tuning fork is found only at Kintore (30). Does this mean that the system was set up from Kintore?

Triple-Disc and Cross Bar [sometimes referred to as a cauldron] (120)

Found at Dyce, Cairnton, Kintore and the Maiden stone. The question of how the lines were laid out over long distances can be resolved by reading Woolliscroft's book (2010) on Roman signalling systems. The use of fire and smoke over up to 30 miles is feasible. This can take the form of either beacons – over longer distances – or braziers – is this what is signified by the triple-disc? Did the men who set up the system send assistants with braziers to various points? There is some interesting experimental work to be done here.

A number of other geometric symbols may represent surveying instruments.

II Reference points

In order to fix the position of the lines some fixed external reference point is needed. This can take the form of a landscape feature or an astronomical measurement.

Astronomical references

The north-south lines are based on three stars which are bright in the northern hemisphere at different times of the year. They are the Eagle, the Dog and the Fish.

Wolf (154) **and Beast's Head** (155): the Dog Star (Sirius). This star is one of the vertices of the winter triangle

Bird-Eagle [Aquila] (156): This star is one of the vertices of the summer triangle.

Fish (157) [Pisces]: This star is bright from September to January.

Alignment on the eagle star is seen at St Vigeans, the line runs from Arbroath Harbour to Kinblethmont due north, easting 639, 6384, and 6380.

In the area of the map animal symbols are rare. The fish at Keith Hall – easting 7799 – indicates a line running north from Broomend – easting 7798. But we might expect it to have gone further either north or south. The extent to which lines join up over long distance remains to be resolved. The fish at Kintore may be relevant given that the Kintore stones have been moved.

Someone with expertise in astronomy may like to look at the other animal symbols – and to see whether the inaccuracies are due to movement of the constellations over time.

Beast with Long Jaws (147): Line running to/from the coast, i.e. east/west.

The east-west lines run from a line of coastal sites starting with East Wemyss in the south and including river mouths, cliffs and caves and supplemented by stones where no natural feature exists to provide a landmark. Where a line joins a stone to another stone or a landscape feature to the east the symbol of the Pictish beast appears.

The Pictish beast is obviously a sea creature – possibly a dolphin – so it makes perfect sense to use it to indicate a line running towards the sea.

In the mapped area beasts abound. First from Broomend to Cairnton – northings 1970/1971, then Dyce to Monymusk – northings 1541/151, Maiden Stone to Bourtie – northing 2471/2485. Again the movement of the Kintore stones has disrupted the system.

Cross with Plain Square Angles (96 & 96a): Point at which a north-south and an east-west line cross.

The assumption that the cross is necessarily a Christian symbol has to be questioned. The symbol exists in many non-Christian contexts and particularly in mathematics. This will upset the division into Class I and Class II stones and has implications for dating.

Crosses on the map are at Dyce, the Maiden Stone and Monymusk.

It will now be apparent that the grid lines on the map are not OS lines but Pictish Survey lines.

The question remains as to whether these existed before the symbols were carved – on unmarked 'prehistoric' stones or if they were set up de novo with the symbol stones.

Landscape features

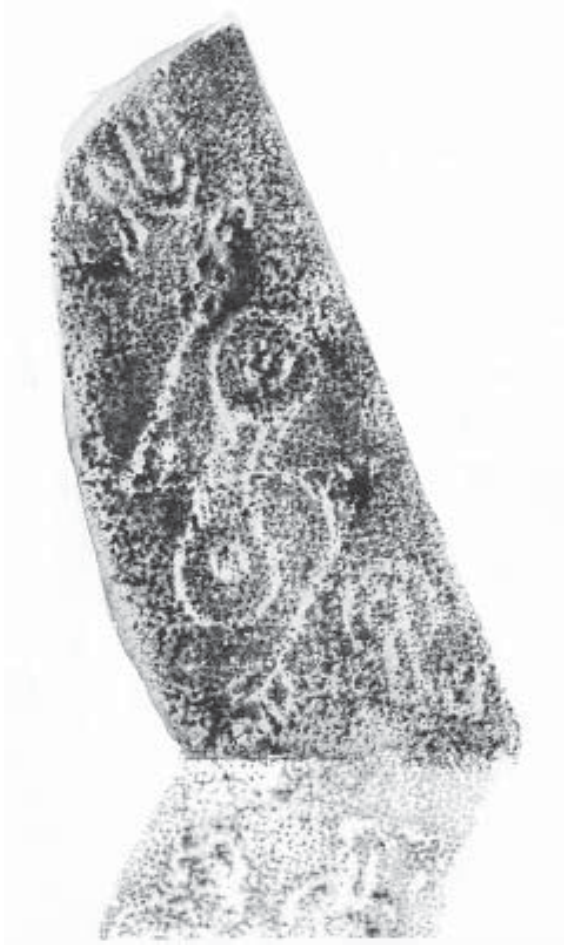
Serpent (160): Draw the line to the river.

Serpent and Z-rod (161): Run the line along the river.

At Aberlemno and Glamis the line runs to the river.

On the map serpents with v-rods are at Brandsbutt (7), Inverurie (26.1) and Newton House (38.1) – all lines running along the river.

The importance of crossing points on rivers make it possible to see in the ogee (130) and the horseshoe (128) fords and bridges. More field-work is necessary to check these out. In the area of the map the ogee occurs at Drimmies (16) and the horseshoe at Inverurie (26.2).



Aberlemno 1: 'The line runs from the hillfort on the ridge – Finavon – to the river South Esk'

Mirror and Comb (140)

The last piece of the theory to fall into place was the mirror and comb. In a book on Mons Graupius I had found reference to the use in old Welsh of the same word for comb and for rocky ridge – did the comb symbol indicate a hill and the mirror a hillfort? We know that mirrors were objects of great importance but did they indicate power and the mirror symbol a power centre? Mirror and comb equals hillfort on a ridge – Aberlemno stone says 'The line runs from the hillfort on the ridge – Finavon – to the river South Esk'. To the west of the area on the map you will find the hillfort of Dunnideer and around it a lozenge created by stones with mirror and comb symbols.

Again wherever I found mirrors I found hill-forts. In the area on the map we should note that there are two versions of the mirror with different handles – one at Bourtie, Daviot, Drimmies and Keith Hall and a different one on the Maiden Stone. Do these refer to different hillforts? There are four in the area of the map – Bennachie and Maiden Castle in the west and Barra Hill and Bruce's Camp in the centre.

There is also a mirror case symbol (122, 123) at Dyce and Inverurie. John Sherriff reported at the PAS conference on the re-occupation of the hillforts and raised the possibility that some enclosed settlements were also civic centres. It seems possible that the mirror case and rectangle symbols may relate to other important buildings.

Conclusion

The quadrilateral Broomend – Bourtie – Cairnton – Kintore and the right-angled triangle Dyce – Broomend – Bourtie lead into a system which can not be gainsaid. These lines could not have fallen into this system by chance. I have applied the interpretation to the central areas of Angus and Aberdeenshire and have not found any flaws in the structure of the argument. There may be flaws in the detail and there is much more to be found in the detailed design of the symbols and in their positioning. Does it matter whether the V-rod is in front of or behind the crescent? Why does the beast sometimes change position? Those with more expertise in survey-ing or astronomy may be able to take this theory much further but I have enjoyed bringing it this far.

Helen Mulholland

‘Pictish Stories’
Natural-dye archival work by Marianna Lines

Reverse of the cross-slab from Golspie, Sutherland

Marianna Lines lives in the Kingdom of Fife and has long been recording Pictish Symbol Stones in a unique and often ‘controversial’ way. However, her work has stood the test of time, and now a collection of original wall-hangings, made with natural dyes from flowers and plant materials and taken directly from the carved stones over 25 years ago, are to be shown at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, 43–45 High Street, Edinburgh.

The exhibition will run from Friday 18 January to Saturday 16 February, 2013, 10am–6pm Monday–Saturday, admission free.

‘St Martin’s Stone’: carved face of the cross-slab at Balluderon, Angus

The Bullion stone from Invergowrie, Perthshire, now in the National Museum of Scotland

Illustrations copyright © Marianna Lines

PAS Newsletter 66

The deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 9 February 2013

Please email contributions to the editor

john.borland@rcahms.gov.uk

or to **pas.news@btconnect.com**