



Common Ground: an online conference in honour of Anna Ritchie

This conference was a joint venture between the Scottish Society for Northern Studies (SSNS) and the Pictish Arts Society (PAS), held to celebrate the remarkable career of Dr Anna Ritchie, a longstanding member of both Societies.

Over the past couple of years, viewing talks and conferences online has become commonplace. One positive of this has been that so much has become accessible to people for whom travel to a live venue is impossible, whether for reasons of distance, cost, time or health. On the other hand, buzz that comes from joining up with like-minded folk to enjoy an in-person event has been sadly missing. In my experience over the Covid years, Common Ground came the closest to providing that buzz. As a Festschrift including contributions from all of the speakers is planned, what follows is rather more of an overview of the two-day event than a detailed report, in which I have tried to convey something of the admiration, respect and affection which all of the speakers (and session chairs) feel for Anna - feelings shared by the audience. PAS President John Borland began his introduction to Saturday's session by recounting how he first became aware of Anna, through being instructed to read *Scotland: Archaeology and History*, one of a number of works jointly published by Anna and her late husband Graham, and a book that was to inspire many young researchers in the field.

Our first speaker was the Abercrombie Professor Emeritus of Archaeology in the University of Edinburgh, Ian Ralston. Ian and Anna first met when they were graduate students of the then Abercrombie Professor, Stuart Piggot, in the late 1960's, and have been colleagues and friends over many years since. Ian briefly touched on many aspects of Anna's work, beginning with an excavation with her new husband, Graham, at Achnacreebeag in Argyll. Anna was soon involved in excavations in Orkney, where she first uncovered the



Anna Ritchie at the excavation of Knap of Howar on Papa Westray, Orkney, circa 1973

Pictish/Viking site at Buckquoy before going on to work on earlier sites on Papa Westray as well as the Orcadian mainland. Anna did not restrict herself to any single area or any narrow period. Throughout her career she wrote not merely exemplary excavation reports, but texts that covered many sites and many areas in Scotland, bringing information to a wide readership from younger readers, the general public, students and fellow research workers. Her clear and fluent style has been much appreciated. But in addition to all this, and raising a family, Anna also appeared on television, in schools programmes and on popular shows designed to inform in a light-hearted way, such as a version of 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral' and a spectacular episode of Time Team. And then there was her work as an editor: preparing for publication a number of monographs on archaeological sites as well as a couple of spells of editor of the Proceedings of the Antiquaries of Scotland. In addition, she took on many responsibilities, among them as a trustee of both the National Museums of Scotland and the British Museum. She served both as Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries and as the first woman

President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. A large number of other organisations has also benefited from her expertise. All in all, Ian found it hard to compress the highlights of an extraordinary career in the short time available. Our second speaker, Professor Katherine Forsyth began by conveying something of Anna's impact on her own career. As a teenager, Katherine was faced with teaching herself about Scottish early medieval history (her school history teacher knowing little about the subject) and Anna's *The Kingdom of the Picts* was one of her first texts. At a time when there were few role models for young women academics, Anna showed that it was possible to be an active archaeologist, a clear and fluent communicator, a respected editor, involved in the governance of major institutions, and combine all of this with the roles of wife and mother. As such, she was a significant influence on the career of the younger woman.

Katherine began her talk, *The Ogham Inscriptions of Orkney*, with a brief description of Ogham script and its origins and use in Ireland, drawing our attention to the Ogham in 3-D Project, which can be accessed at www.ogham.celt.dias.ie. She then went on to discuss the inscriptions found (mostly on carved stones) in mainland Scotland, before focussing on the Orkney group. While some of these were carved on stone (examples from Pool, Sanday, the Brough of Birsay and the Brough of Burrian), others were marked on smaller portable items - a bone knife handle from the Broch of Gurness and a spindle whorl found by Anna during her excavation of Buckquoy. Katherine went on to suggest that these inscriptions tell us something of cultural exchange, probably predominantly secular rather than simply indicating the presence of Irish missionaries. They also indicate a level of literacy which extended beyond the world of clerkly learning. There are questions of what form of Celtic was spoken here as well. The ogham inscriptions of Orkney still have much to teach us.

Christina Cowart-Smith followed on with *The Abercorn Assemblage: New Insights into the Sculptural Repertoire of a Central British Monastery*. Christina noted the value of Anna's work on the carved stones records in Canmore. As much of Christina's work on Abercorn was carried out over the past few years, her contacts

with Anna have mainly been via email, and she expressed her gratitude for Anna's help and comments as the work progressed. Abercorn is one of the great collections of early medieval carved stones found in Scotland; that it has been little studied is in part an accident of history, neither studied as part of the Anglian corpus nor considered alongside the early medieval stones of Pictland. Abercorn is the site of Bede's Abercurnig, which became the seat of Trumwine, the Anglian 'Bishop to the Picts' in 681 - and from which he retreated after the battle of Dunnichen in 685. None of the carved stones from the site appear to date as early as the 7th century, however. Charles Thomas conducted a brief excavation at Abercorn in the mid 1960's, noting that the site was back in Anglian control by the time the 8th-century stones were carved. Given that Ewan Campbell has pointed out that Thomas' identification of pottery fragments from this site as E ware is at fault, no clear evidence for an early monastery has been uncovered, although there is evidence of later medieval pottery and glass fragments.

The assemblage itself, currently stored in the basement of the church or in the session house consists of 12 fragments - a odd figural carved stone, which is not a cross shaft, 3 tegulated recumbent monuments (hogbacks), 2 medieval floriated cross-slabs and 2 possible recumbent grave slabs, all of which are later than the remaining fragments which represent 8th- or 9th-century cross-slabs or free-standing crosses. The collection here has been regarded as falling within the Anglian tradition. Christina noted that Abercorn stands out among the south-eastern Scottish high crosses in terms of the number found at the site - single examples are known from 9 sites, while only Jedburgh boasts more than one. She compared the earlier examples here to the better studied corpus of stones from Northumbria and Cumbria which date to around the same period, finding many features which would link Abercorn to this tradition. There are points of distinction, however, and indications that the sculptor (or commissioner) of the Abercorn stones was aware of traditions prevailing north of the Forth. The stones highlight Abercorn's position in a boundary zone between the Pictish traditions to the north and the Anglian to the south, before there seems to be a break towards the end of the 8th or beginning of the 9th century.

Our next paper, *Commensality in Context: An Onomastic Review of the Socially Embedded Economies of Scotia Scandinavica* was delivered by Dr Alan McNiven. Over 30 years ago, when he enrolled on an archaeology course taught by Ian Ralston, he found that the required text was *Scotland: Archaeology and History*, another whose early career had been influenced by Anna. Alan referred to that area of the north and western isles impacted by Scandinavian activity in the early medieval period, suggesting that the names of places can be treated as a source of evidence as much as that uncovered by archaeologists. We really have very little evidence about the nature of Viking activity in these parts: did they come as raiders, or as traders, or settlers? He went on to outline some of the difficulties in mining place-names for history: there is a large corpus of surviving Viking place-names, which has been studied over many years. Some elements, such as *staðr* may indicate a phase of early land take, while *bólstaðr* is likely to point to a period of intensification of settlement. But on Islay, *bólstaðr* may date to a period of political restructuring. There are layers of language, and layers of place types, the vocabulary used in place-names and their combinations both being fairly limited. We may also find it difficult to determine which language was used to coin a name. And we face the question of the societal context in which the names were first used. We have a view of the period around the middle of the 8th century as an ‘heroic’ age, a subsistence economy with warrior kings and their elite trained warriors at the apex of society, cementing dependencies and alliances by mutual gift giving. This was not a cash-driven economy. But saga material is not a reliable source of history: we may learn more from the archaeology of middens about feasting and the active control of production and consumption that may have transformed farmer republics to petty kingdoms. And place-names have their contribution to make here. Words relating to husbandry can indicate the importance of rearing pigs and cattle - *kví*, which later becomes *quoy*, for example means a cattle fold, and is often found near to high status sites such as the Earl’s Bu, or Skaill, or the Brough of Birsay in Orkney. As Alan noted, there is much more work to be done. Our final speaker of the day was Dr Kelly Kilpatrick, whose topic was *Finding and Interpret-*

ing the Lost and Forgotten Early Inscribed Stones of Pictland. As Kelly observed, there are around 300 symbol stones, but the Picts (who disappear from contemporary mention around the 10th century) had other ways of conveying meaning on stone. Katherine having already spoken on ogham inscriptions, Kelly drew our attention to a handful of stones carrying inscriptions in Latin script. Although there are very few of these, they exhibited a range of styles: on the Drosten stone we have a reflection of the manuscript book hand of the 7th to 9th centuries. At Tarbat, we have an example of display script, while on the Newton stone, dating from the 6th to 7th centuries, the inscription appears to be a vernacular script, of the type inscribed by stylus on a wax/wood tablet. These differences may indicate that the scripts were introduced by different routes: perhaps by traders and then by churchmen. Three stones, one each from Burghead, Greenloaning and Kilmadock were photographed in the 19th century, and have fallen out of mind. All seem to have carried inscriptions in a Roman alphabet. Kelly introduced us to the work of Edward Williams Byron Nicholson, Bodley’s Librarian at the University of Oxford from 1882 to 1912. Nicholson was one of a group of scholars who, from the 1890’s turned their attention to the Keltic (sic) revival. Nicholson himself produced two books relevant to our inscriptions: *The Vernacular Inscriptions of the Ancient Kingdom of Alban* and *Keltic Researches: Studies in the History and Distribution of the Ancient Goidelic Language and People*. A methodical man, he bound copies of his extensive correspondence with other antiquarians, and included details of his costs in obtaining rubbings and photographs of inscribed stones. He regarded both the Kilmadock stone, and one found nearby and known as the Coillechat stone as carrying inscriptions - disagreeing with Anderson over the latter. Kelly went on to describe how she traced the Kilmadock stone to the Ashmolean Museum, and to offer her transcription of the lettering. Again, we were given an account of work in progress, and some insight into the problems that Covid and its attendant lockdowns has caused. The afternoon closed with each of the speakers hosting a chatroom for the audience to drop in and out on an informal basis - a virtual ‘pub session’.

Colleen Batey introduced the first speakers on Sunday afternoon. She shared with us that Anna had first been her external PhD examiner and became a good friend and colleague, before handing over to Professor Stephen Driscoll, who spoke on *The Govan Hogbacks in Context*. Again, another archaeologist paid tribute to *Scotland: Archaeology and Early History*. Although the stones were found in the 19th century, Steve recounted how it was not until the early 1990's that work on understanding the significance of the stones and their settings really began, driven by the enthusiasm of Tom Davidson Kelly, then the parish minister. He organised a conference and set up the Friends of Govan Old (FOGO), in order to train volunteer guides, run lectures and to raise money to research, preserve and display the stones. One outcome of the conference was *Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture*, edited by Anna Ritchie. In 1996, Time Team came to Govan, where a team from Glasgow University including Steve, had already begun investigations in the area around the church. Mick Aston, the senior archaeologist on Time Team, had broken a leg, and Anna took his place (the episode can be viewed on Time Team's YouTube channel). Her association with Govan continued over a period of years. She delivered the first of the FOGO lecture series (recently renamed in honour of Tom Davidson Kelly, who died in 2017) and produced *Govan and its Carved Stones* in 1999. Over the years, many others have worked here, too. Tom Gray, Ian G Scott and John Borland have all worked on recording the stones, while Megan Kasten has used photogrammetry and other 3-D technologies to identify the work of individual sculptors. Jamie Barnes and Heather James have both included Govan in their broader studies of carved stones. In 2007, the Church of Scotland abandoned Govan Old Parish Church. Ownership has since passed to Govan Heritage Trust, and the stones have been redisplayed in a proper museum setting since 2011. Anna's support throughout this period was invaluable. At the pre-pandemic peak, 16,000 visitors per year visited the site, but as with so many other things, Covid has delayed the implementation of plans which will generate income at the site and provide links with the Riverside Museum across the Clyde. But, as Steve concluded, there are still many questions posed by the

stones, some of which may never be answered. Dr Val Turner, Shetland's Regional Archaeologist for the last 35 years, delivered *Hidden in Plain Sight: Pictish Shetland*. Val noted that in Shetland, the Pictish period is seen as belonging to the Late Iron Age, rather than the Early Medieval. Also, there is a popular belief that the Picts were responsible for building the brochs and, indeed, most prehistoric remains are seen as Picts' houses, the Picts being small people who lived underground, merging with the descriptions of Trowies, the Shetland Trolls.

From 1958, with the discovery of the St Ninian's Isle treasure, the tally of Pictish art in Shetland has grown. It appears that there was widespread Pictish influence from a fairly early period. Their presence is also suggested by a handful of Norse 'petta' place names. But where did the Picts really live? Val took us on a whirlwind tour of sites in Shetland that have yielded evidence dating to the Pictish period in at least one phase of occupation - Shetland wheelhouses and structures incorporating linked cells as at Old Scatness and Jarlshof, and structures with some resemblance to Anna's Pictish buildings at Buckquoy. This was the context for considering a number of other Shetland sites, where there are known to be semi-subterranean cellular or wheelhouse structures that might belong to the same period. Val treated us to an extensive selection of sites, at some of which there has been remodelling of older structures in the Pictish period. At a number of others, excavations have returned no good dating evidence, and the question of whether or not these were Pictish settlements or much earlier remains open. At least one had been reused in the 5th century or later. At one site, where excavations were limited, a shrine corner-post and a rune stone were found, complementing a portable cross-slab of the 7th or 8th centuries which turned up nearby.

Perhaps 'petta' place names may indicate the presence of Pictish settlement. Val went back to the standing stones of Yoxie, at Pettigarth's Field on Whalsay. This site has yielded evidence of Neolithic to Bronze Age use, with some Iron Age material also found here. Val suggests that the excavation report could be interpreted as showing a Late Iron Age reuse of a much older site. This may also be the case for other sites, for example at the Ness of Gruting. Several unexcavated sites appear to include cel-

lular structures and are candidates for further investigation. Perhaps an examination of sites in the vicinity of the find sites of Pictish carvings would also be profitable. Val added a caveat that some cellular buildings have been dated to around the beginning of the first millennium - this would appear to be a Shetland tradition that developed further in the Late Iron Age. However, as she remarked 'we don't see what we're not looking for' and more evidence for Picts in Shetland is still hidden in plain sight.

Sally Foster took over as Chair, introducing Adrian Maldonado, currently Galloway Hoard Researcher at the NMS who spoke on *Brough of Birsay Revisited: A New Look at the Pictish Workshop*. Adrian began by setting the context for a revaluation of work on the Brough of Birsay, close to Anna's site at Buckquoy. At that site, there was nothing to suggest a violent takeover by Norse invaders; occupation at the site appears to have continued tranquilly across the Pictish/Norse transition. And at this site, Anna first defined 'Pict' and 'Pictish' as separate from their art. At the Brough, Curle's excavations found zones of finds rather than associated structures. The 10th- to 12th-century structures at Birsay would seem to be late for Vikings.

None of the finds from the Brough predate the 7th century, and radiocarbon dates suggest a more or less continuous use through to the 12th century. Adrian commented on a degree of ambiguity in the Norse finds. A runic inscribed bear's tooth, for example, would have been rare in Norway by the Viking period, where such objects were more common in the pre-Viking period. It also appears that objects were imported to the Brough from a wide area, and over a long period of time. Carnelian from Kaupang in Norway, rings from Dublin, other material from the Danelaw and the Irish Sea zone. As well as glass mosaic tesserae, there were small pieces of green porphyry, but finds of the latter generally date elsewhere to the 11th century.

However, some finds can be confidently assigned to the Pictish workshop here, especially the clay moulds. Some of these could have been used in the casting of brooches similar to those found in the St Ninian's Isle hoard, others are unique. Some have bird's head terminals similar to those on the late 8th- to 9th-century Cluny brooch. There is a great deal of variety

in size and design, including some with confronting beast-head terminals of a type found in Viking burials well into the late 9th century in Western Norway, perhaps indicating contact with Birsay. Similar brooches have been found in burials on the Western Isles too. Ingot moulds from Birsay also have parallels at 7th-century sites such as Clatchard Craig and Whithorn. By the 860-70's, the 'Great Army Generation' a multi-metal economy prevailed from Ireland across to the north of England, and over the next century standardised weights of metal appear to have been the norm.

Adrian compared what seems to have been happening at the Brough of Birsay with other sites, including Dublin and Portmahomack. Over time, the workshops progressed from producing items that were Pictish, to 'almost' Pictish, to incorporating distinctly Scandinavian elements. This suggests that the Viking incomers were initially commissioning the resident craftsmen to produce work of a type they were already making, and over time commissioning rather different patterns. The Viking takeover was not accompanied by wholesale genocide.

Our final speaker was Professor Gordon Noble of the University of Aberdeen, who detailed work jointly carried out with Dr James O'Driscoll in Aberlemno Environs; *New Work by the Comparative Kingship Project*. Gordon began by posing a question: why are so many carved stones to be found in the landscape around Aberlemno? These include symbols stones and cross slabs from sites at Woodwrae, Auldbar, Flemington farm, Aberlemno church and roadside and the warrior figure from Westerton. The area contains a number of significant remains: a series of forts on Turin Hill, a vitrified fort at Finavon, other enclosures, cists, cairns and Roman camps. Lidar exposed a funerary landscape by Aberlemno and just south of Balbinny which is reminiscent of Greshop. Excavations on the forts at Turin Hill returned dates no later than the first century AD. However, at Balbinny, a section across the ditch of an enclosure reminiscent of Rhynie retrieved some dateable material which placed activity at the site in the 5th to 6th century. A wider area was stripped and mapped, and material submitted for radiocarbon dating.

Shortly before lockdown, James and a party of students carried out geophysical surveys of the area between the roadside stones and the

church. They found indications of settlement to the north of the church, while to the east there appeared to be a square or sub-rectangular palisaded enclosure of dimensions approximately 60x40 metres, with indications of activity within it. Evaluation in April 2021 showed that there had been two palisades with an intervening bank, and turned up a quantity of metal-working debris. And one day, when Gordon himself was absent, James and a co-worker were investigating a test pit towards the centre of the enclosure. They started to uncover a large paved area, and lying close to the entrance of what may have been a building or a courtyard, they found the mirror and comb of a new symbol stone. Further clearing revealed a double disc and Z-rod, a triple oval and a crescent and V-rod as well. The stone has some odd features: the surface bearing the symbols is not flat, but the carver has ignored this. It was placed facing upwards, fairly close to a cup-marked stone which bears a carved circle or spiral at the entrance to the paved area. Currently, the symbol stone has been raised and is stored with Graciela Ainsworth, while funds are raised to conserve and display it in a suitable location. Below the paving, there appear to have been a series of floors, with further evidence of metal working and timber post holes. The paved structure has been dated to the 11th or 12th century, while dates of around the 7th to 8th century have been obtained for activity below the paving and also for the palisade.

John Borland drew the formal proceedings to a close by thanking all the speakers, Chairs and his fellow conference organisers in SSNS for their contributions to an enjoyable and informative weekend before handing over to the speakers' chat rooms.

Sheila Hainey

A Classical Source for the story of the birth of Saint Kentigern¹

The story of the birth of Saint Kentigern of Glasgow is first found in two 12th-century accounts, Jocelin of Furness's *Vita Kentigerni* (*VK*, written sometime between 1175 and 1199) and the so-called 'Herbertian Fragment' (*HF*),² a short account of Kentigern's conception and birth commissioned for Bishop Herbert of Glasgow (1147-1164). This latter piece has long

been thought a fragment of the earlier *Vita* mentioned as a source by Jocelin of Furness though Dauvit Broun has suggested (pers. comm.) that it may have been a stand-alone account perhaps in itself trying to correct the unorthodox things that Jocelin claims to have found in the *Vita* in use in Glasgow Cathedral when he was commissioned to produce his own.³ He described this earlier, now lost life as 'tainted throughout [and] discoloured by an uneducated language and obscured by a poorly written style; and before all of these faults certainly a wise man would more shrink back because in the beginning of the narrative itself are stories obviously contrary to certain doctrine and catholic faith.'⁴

What I would like to deal with here is material common to both these, our earliest surviving, texts and which therefore must have been part of the source material. This relates to the bare bones of the account of the conception of the saint, his birth and his fostering. The first element is the apparent virginal conception of the saint. Both Jocelin and the Herbertian author clearly found this in their source, and it is likely one of the things that Jocelin regarded as 'contrary to certain doctrine and catholic faith'. Jocelin suggests (*VK* I) that the saint's mother, Taneu, had been impregnated by a man while drugged and unconscious, and thus genuinely believed herself to be a virgin (and was innocent of any lust herself). In the Herbertian text a male suitor who has befriended her dressed as a woman impregnates her but convinces her that she is still a virgin as this was lesbian encounter (*HF* II). Both of these 12th-century accounts seem to be the product of reformed clerics trying to explain an embedded tradition that the saint was begotten without male intervention. The second element is the casting of the girl adrift by her father after her pregnancy is discovered (*VK* III, *HF* VI) and the third is her washing up on the shore at Culross where mother and child are taken in by Saint Serf (*VK* IV, *HF* VII).

In 1955 John McQueen noted the similarities between this story and events connected to the conception and birth of the Greek hero Perseus, citing various Greek accounts of the story. McQueen's perceptive identification of the ultimate source of this story seems to have been largely forgotten by scholarship, in part perhaps because it was hidden away in an article largely treating other topics.⁵ A further problem lay in the fact that his proposed sources were Greek and un-

likely to have been available to the authors of our lives or the putative common source.⁶

My proposition here is fairly simple and that is that these elements were lifted from an account of the conception and birth of the Classical hero Perseus through a Latin intermediary that can be demonstrated to have been current in early medieval Europe. The best candidate for the source I have found is chapter 63 of the *Fabulae* of Hyginus:

§ 63 DANAE: Danae was the daughter of Acrisius and Aganippe. A prophecy about her said that the child she bore would kill Acrisius, and Acrisius, fearing this, shut her in a stone-walled prison. But Jove, changing into a shower of gold, lay with Danae, and from this embrace Perseus was born. Because of her sin her father shut her up in a chest with Perseus and cast it into the sea. By Jove's will it was borne to the island of Seriphos, and when the fisherman Dictys found it and broke it open, he discovered the mother and child.⁷

*Danae Acrisii et Aganippes filia. Huic fuit fatum ut quod peperisset Acrisium interficeret; quod timens Acrisius, eam in muro lapideo praeclusit. Iouis autem in imbrem aureum conuersus cum Danae concubuit, ex quo compressu natus est Perseus. Quam pater ob stuprum inclusam in arca cum Perseo in mare deiecit. Ea uoluntate Iouis delata est in insulam Seriphum, quam piscator Dictys cum inuenisset, effracta ea uidit mulierem cum infante.*⁸

Gaius Iulius Hyginus (c. 64 BC – AD 17), was a freedman of the emperor Augustus and the superintendent of the Palatine Library. He published on a wide range of topics but only two works, *Fabulae*, cited here, and *De Astronomica* survive.⁹ *Fabulae* survives through a bottleneck represented by a manuscript in the Beneventan script of south-central Italy and dated to c.900 that was preserved in the episcopal library at Freising in Bavaria.¹⁰ The survival of this manuscript informs us that the text was known north of the Alps in the early medieval period and may have been the direct source for the episodes in the common exemplar to our surviving vitae. This said, the story of Danae and Perseus was widely known in the classical world and although Greek texts are very unlikely to have been the direct source for

our story, I may have overlooked an alternative Latin version.

The parallels that I see between Hyginus' account of Danae and the account of Taneu include her name (Jocelin gives Taneu, the Herbertian text Thaney), the virginal conception, the angry father, the setting adrift at sea and finally the similarity between the name Seriphos (the island where mother and baby come ashore) and the name of Saint Serf. This last may at first sight appear slightly problematic as the form of the saint's name found in the Latin lives is 'Servanus' but the Middle Gaelic form was Serb, perhaps already with an epenthetic vowel between the 'r' and 'b'.¹¹ Taken together it seems to me that this assemblage of similarities is too great to ignore, and we must assume a direct influence from Hyginus or a similar account of the vicissitudes of Danae.

Finally, one may be allowed to speculate as to how Hyginus' account of Danae came to be brought together with the Kentigern material. We are unlikely to ever know for certain, but my guess would be that while reading the text a cleric in northern Britain was struck by the phrase *insulam Seriphum* and put in mind of Saint Serf's Island in Loch Leven (though the earliest surviving attestations of this name are from the 13th century¹²). Loch Leven being landlocked, Culross then springs to his mind as a site connected to Saint Serf where a coracle cast adrift in Lothian might come ashore. This remains, however very speculative.

Alex Woolf

¹ Thanks to Dauvit Broun, Thomas Owen Clancy and Neil McGuigan for comments on drafts of this piece.

² Both texts in Forbes A P (ed, trans) 1874 *Historians of Scotland volume V: Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern compiled in the twelfth century*, Edinburgh.

³ For the view that the *Herbertian Fragment* was from the *vita* referred to by Jocelin see R. Gardener ' "Something contrary to sound and to Catholic faith": a new look at the Herbertian fragment of the Life of St Kentigern', *Innes Review* 49.2, 115-126.

⁴ From the prologue of Jocelin's *Vita*, Green C W (trans) 1998 *Saint Kentigern, Apostle to Strathclyde: a critical analysis of a northern*

saint, Masters Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Department of English, University of Houston. Available online from the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook.

⁵ McQueen, J, 1956 ‘Yvain, Ewen and Owein ap Urien’, *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 3rd ser. xxxiv, 107-31, at pp.122-124.

⁶ My thanks to Thomas Owen Clancy for drawing my attention to McQueen’s article when I sent him a draft of this piece.

⁷ Grant M (tr.) 1960 *The Myths of Hyginus*, Lawrence.

⁸ Marshall P K (ed.), 2002 *Fabulae: Hyginus*, Munich, p.63.

⁹ *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford, 2016, s.v. ‘Hyginus (1), Gaius Iulius’.

¹⁰ Marshall, vii.

¹¹ For the Gaelic form of Serb’s name, recorded in a 9th- or 10th- century list of the mothers of saints, see Taylor S with Clancy T O, McNiven P and Williamson E 2020 *The Place-names of Clackmannanshire*, Donington, 62-63. I am grateful to Neil McGuigan for reminding me of the Gaelic form.

¹² Taylor S with McNiven P and Williamson E 2017 *The Place-Names of Kinross-shire*, Donington, p.544.

Pictish stones back on the small screen

A new arts series appeared on BBC2 television in Spring 2022, with the advent of *The Art that Made Us*, adopting a novel approach of combining old art with contemporary thought, presented in fairly dramatic fashion. Fronted by sculptor Anthony Gormley, the ‘story consultant’ was James Hawes, well known as a television drama director, whose influence was readily apparent throughout. There was an evident keenness that the series should reflect the development of art in various parts of the British Isles.

Episode 1, entitled ‘Lights in the Darkness’, was aired on April 7. Fourteen minutes in, we were given this: “Other lost kingdoms lay beyond the borders of Anglo-Saxon England. To the north, the Picts were the largest, but they left no written records at all, only mysterious records of paganism and power-battles [plural] with the Anglo-Saxons, carved in stone.” This

section was headed “ABERLEMNO STONES, unknown artists, 6th-9th century”, and we were immediately provided with glimpses of the central roundel of the Kirkyard slab, part of an adjacent biting beast, the infantry group from the battle-scene on the other side, the mighty symbols and hunting scene on the Crosston slab, and also the Class I stone nearby (not that the programme went anywhere near the Classification system).

The commentary immediately hit a controversial note: “The Aberlemno stones are four [yes, four] carved monumental stones in eastern Scotland”, their location being left imprecise. The fourth stone in the group has long been regarded with suspicion, even scepticism, and those compiling inventories are not keen on it. Romilly Allen (1903) ignores it, as does Alastair Mack (1997), though Ian Fraser (2008) is prepared to give it house-room. I prefer the opinion of Anna Ritchie as given in her *Picts* (1989), who dismisses it as being “either an unfinished symbol stone or a relatively modern fake, and will not be mentioned again” (p.22). Would that the producers of the programme had heeded her sage words.

Those chosen to speak about the Aberlemno stones were Dr Heather Pulliam of Edinburgh Art College, and Murray Pittock, professor of English literature at Glasgow University whose specialist period is many centuries later than the Picts. The technique of presentation was that of the one-sided interview, where the viewer is unaware of the questions asked, but the responses indicated that the purpose of the stones was regarded as a major topic for discussion. Unsurprisingly, this approach proved somewhat unrewarding.

Pulliam could only manage “We don’t know what they’re for; we think they are marking something”, though she did describe them neatly as “performance pieces”, while Pittock offered the opinion that “The orthodoxy has been that that the Aberlemno stones [plural] commemorate the Battle of Dunnichen Moss/Nechtansmere, but I’m not sure if anyone quite knows the truth of the matter. They are, like so much of Pictish Scotland, a mystery”. Neither speaker seemed familiar with, or even

aware of, PAS publications which might have been of assistance. Local environmental artists Louise Scullion and Matthew Dalziel, who were able to draw inspiration from the stones, detected an important religious aspect, Scullion commenting: “This represents a period of cross-over between importing a kind of Christian belief on top of a more pagan belief, so I guess you would have to cleverly overlap these things”.

This theme was pursued by the other speakers. Heather Pulliam noted that two of the stones were pre-Christian, “so they don’t have any Christian imagery, and then we start to see the Christian ones going up, also with the Pictish symbols, so they are a hybrid [type]. When they [the Picts] became Christian, they don’t feel that they have to destroy these older stones. Just because your grandpa wasn’t Christian, doesn’t mean you hate your grandpa, so you’re willing to keep him on the stone, and keep his memory.” Murray Pittock was in broad if less precise agreement: “If the stones [plural again] do date from the 7th century, Christianity had made its way into parts of Scotland by that time.”

There are two points of concern here. One is that the Aberlemno stones, forming a tight geographical group as they do, should also be read as a linked group in cultural terms. It is quite legitimate to make the broad general claim that they stand as indicators of the importance of Aberlemno to the Picts over several centuries, but the wide span of plausible dates argues against the likelihood of any common theme in the messages they are intended to convey. Remember that the programme dated them to a period spanning the 6th to 9th centuries, and in broad terms I would not wish to quibble with that assessment. Stylistically, they are well separated, comprising a pure Class I, a Class I/Class II hybrid, and a pure (and late) Class II.

The second point relates to paganism. Yes, we can assume the Picts to have been pagan prior to becoming Christians, but that designation should not necessarily be applied to the stones as well, because it assumes a religious reason for creating the Class I stones in the first place,

which is quite unproven, and (many would argue) unlikely. Even so, the commentary, which goes on to concentrate on the battle scene, continues in the same vein, claiming that it “tells a wordless story of pagan warriors on one side and the beginning of a Christian tradition on the other”. This assessment is justified in separating the two sides of the Kirkyard stone, cleverly using a split-screen technique to illustrate both sides simultaneously, though not for the correct reasons. In terms of the combatants, just who is regarded as being pagan? It should not be the Picts, because the contemporary Dunnichen victory song, composed by Riaguil of Bennchor, credits Christ for helping to secure victory at the Battle of Dunnichen by sparing ‘Bruide the brave’.

Nonetheless, the commentary continues to assert that the Kirkton stone “shows conflict as well as creative fusion”, adding that “this was a time of warring tribes, not nations”. Such a statement is debatable. Northumbria, the invader in this case, was sometimes split between Deira and Bernicia, but when Ecgrith led his mighty army north in 685, it was drawn from his united kingdom. Likewise, when Bruide massed his forces to repel him, the evidence (scant though it may be) suggests that he was king of a united Pictland. To represent the conflict at Dunnichen as constituting a spat between warring tribes is a misreading of the situation, and an unjustified downgrading of its significance.

Nonetheless, exposing the Aberlemno stones to a UK audience in this way does the reputation of the Picts no harm at all, and illustrating some of the more sophisticated elements of their artwork can only assist in dispelling notions of them living an uncultured lifestyle. The producers, ClearStory and Menace Productions, deserve credit for this, though had they consulted more widely, the story presented might have been that much clearer, without the menace of the Picts being compelled to forever wear the mantle of impenetrable mystery.

Graeme Cruickshank

Spring Lecture Series
15 April 2022 –Dr Catherine Swift

*Royal Munster Exiles at
pre-Norman Scottish courts.*

Cathy began by reflecting on her reactions to the recently uncovered symbol stone at Aberlemno. What, she wondered, did the people who incorporated the stone in the paving of a large 11th- to 12th-century building make of the symbols, face up as they walked over or past them? What was the perception, in Scotland and abroad, of the Picts from the viewpoint of the 11th to 12th centuries?

She noted that much emphasis in the study of Irish genealogies had been on reconciling different versions. According to Ralph O'Connor, foundation legends and stories about early members of the kinship that may have accompanied the genealogies or were collected with them, were often left out, when these very stories make the rather sterile lists come alive.

Cathy's main source for this talk was the *Book of Leinster*, a compendium of manuscripts gathered together in the 12th century which includes many texts on a wide variety of topics. One of these, Tech Midchaurta, gives details of the houses of kings at Tara before the time of Niall Noigiallach (who flourished probably in the 5th century). The largest of these belonged to Cormac, and housed a large paid following as well as men of art and satirists. In addition, 'Gaill and Romans, Franks and Frisians, Lombards and Albanaig, Saxons and Britons and Picts all came...'. When this was written, the Picts were still seen as distinct from, and contemporary with, the men of Alba, the Albanaig. And the large feasting hall was seen as a necessary appanage of a king. Was this something similar to the paved hall at Aberlemno?

The *Book of Leinster* contains a large collection of Irish royal genealogies, organised with some sense of geography. However, between the genealogies of the kingly families in Leinster and South Munster, are placed those of several royal families in Alba. The first named in this section is David, who was on the throne between 1124 and 1153. His line was traced back via Constantine son of Culen to Domnall who died as a king of Picts in 862. Domnall was a son of Cinaed son of Ailpin. The genealogies of the descendants of two other sons of Ailpin follow, before the genealogies of Lulaig of Moray and MacBeth, whose list of ancestors is brief, taking him to a common ancestor with Lulaig. This order is altered in the manuscript known as

Rawlinson B502, where the genealogies of the kings of Alba come towards the end of this section. Only three are given: those of David, Lulaig and MacBeth. These are followed by the genealogies of the Fomoir, who were said to have come to Ireland before the birth of Christ, and who became associated with the people of the Sidh, the fairy people of Ireland. Multiple dynasties are allocated to them, and one king is said to have been able to call on all the forces from Lochlann westwards. Is there some notion that the Fomoir were connected with Norse Vikings or perhaps the Picts? Leaving us with that thought, Cathy returned to the *Book of Leinster*.

Many of the key ancestors of Irish kingly genealogies are well known from stories and legends from the ancient heroic past. Thus although the great Cu Chulainn, the Ulster hero of the Tain bo Cualgne and other stories had few children to found dynasties, his foster brother Conall Cernach had at least six sons. One of these, Irial, was ancestor to the Dal nAraide of Antrim, the Ui Echach Ulad of Down, the Emnaille Murithemne of north Louth and the Sogain of Meath and Roscommon. Significantly, Irial Glunmar's mother was a Pict, Lonchaidh daughter of Eochu Echbeoil. Other stories underline the perceived connections between the men of the north of Ireland and Scotland. For example, there is a Middle Irish legend that tells how the wife of Eochu of Leinster was staying with him in exile at the court of Gabran. She bore two sons, at the same time as Gabran's wife bore two daughters. The women swapped, so that they appeared to have each had a son and a daughter. The Irish woman went back to Leinster, where her son eventually became king, while his brother remained in Scotland and grew up as Aedan mac Gabran, succeeding Gabran as king. This curious tale seems designed to underline the closeness of the relationship between kings of Leinster and kings of Alba.

Connections between kings of Munster and Pictish kings, or kings in Alba also appear in some of the sagas contained in the Book of Leinster. Long ago, in pre-Christian times, a conflict arose between Eogan son of Aillil Aulom and his foster brother Lugaid, over which should count an otherworld musician as a member of his household. The quarrel led to a battle, and Lugaid was defeated. He and his retinue of 26, a band fit for a king, fled to Alba where they concealed their identity, saying only that they were Gael. The king gave them hospitality, a house for themselves. They were given a

cooked ox and a pig each day, and settled in to the normal occupations of the king's household - fighting battles when called to do so, taking part in assemblies, playing sports and board games and so on. They continued to remain anonymous, fearing that Aillil would send to the king to have them killed if it were known who and where they were. One day a stranger, a poet with knowledge, came to the court. He was welcomed and the king asked for news of Ireland. When he asked about Munster, the poet told him that Eogan had taken over from his aged father, who was no longer fit to rule. Lugaid's people languished in bondage and slavery. Lugaid, when he heard this, crushed the gaming piece he held in his hand. The king thought he detected concern for relatives, but Lugaid would not be drawn to admit who he was. Stratagem was called for: the king instructed his steward to give the band a live ox and a live pig, and watch to see how the Gaels dealt with the slaughter, cooking and portioning out of the meat, hoping to detect which of the 27 was the leader. In vain. So the next night, the king watched as, at his command, each was served a dead mouse, raw, and told to eat. After a pause, Lugaid began, encouraging his men to follow suit. One was almost sick before he could swallow the tail, but Lugaid threatened him: "My sword at your throat! The eating of a mouse includes the tail" and his follower managed to choke down the last of the mouse. At which the king declared that the leader must be Lugaid, naming him. It all turned out well for Lugaid; the king revealed that his mother was a daughter of a king of the Britons, his wife the daughter of a king of the Saxons, and he would call their forces to join his and sail to Ireland to restore and avenge Lugaid. So many boats gathered at Purt Rig that they made a bridge between Alba and Ireland, and after fighting their way to success, saw Lugaid installed as High King of Ireland.

From this story, we can gather that the lifestyle of the kings of Alba was seen as similar to that of the kings of Ireland. We learn that older kings could retire in favour of their sons. Separate houses were provided for guests who took part in the normal activities of the king's retinue, fighting for him, attending assemblies and keeping active in sports and games. Visiting poets were treated with respect, and passed on news of what was happening elsewhere. Exiled leaders could find military assistance including ships. Finally, it was believed that the connections between Alba and South Munster went back a long way.

Another exile became the ancestor of three key Eoganacht Munster dynasties. This was Corc ma Lugdech. Corc had been gathering tribute in Leinster, and used some of this to have Gruibne, who was held prisoner, ransomed. Gruibne crossed to Alba, to the court of the king of Picts. Sometime later, Corc annoyed his overking by not delivering a large enough share of tribute - and especially by not conveying to the queen what she believed was her due. Corc was sent to Alba in turn, with a message on his shield in cryptic ogham, telling Feradach Findfechtach, king of the Picts, to kill him. Fortunately for Corc, he was found sleeping on the Alban shore by Gruibne's servant, a man of learning who could read the message and who promptly changed it to ask Feradach to welcome Corc and give him his daughter in marriage. This Feradach duly did, but Corc was persuaded to spend years in Alba before he was able to go back to Ireland, leaving his wife and son behind for the time being. There is a curious episode in which, as Corc is about to leave, he passed blood on the beach, and this is said to account for a urinary disorder which was hereditary among the Pictish descendants of Corpre, his son. More time passed in which Corc eventually became King of Cashel, overking of Munster. Corpre joined him in Ireland, and became High King of West Munster, the area around the Lakes of Killarney. Pictish ancestry was acknowledged among this branch of the Eoganacht kings.

In a later version of the story, the reference to the Picts disappears. Feradach is unwilling to hand his daughter over to a wandering mercenary, and the young couple take matters into their own hands. Corc has to convince the king that he is a worthy son-in-law, and that his wife and son should not suffer for the fact that he and she went against her father's wish. A number of legal points are introduced to the tale, and Corc's mother-in-law also intervenes. It would seem that by the time this version was written (around AD 1000) royal exiles who were prepared to hire themselves out as mercenaries were commonplace and not suitable as partners for royal brides. In both versions, the Pictish king and his court are seen as very similar to their Irish contemporaries, with only the slight hint that perhaps the Pictish mother-in-law is more powerful than we might expect.

By the early 12th century, the Ui Briain of North Munster were in contention with the Eoganacht for overlordship of Munster as a whole. That the Ui Briain sought to create or strengthen ties with Alba appears in a version

of the Battle of Clontarf. The Eoganacht claims to friendship, and indeed kinship, with kings of Alba go back to a much earlier period. There is nothing in any of these works to suggest that the Irish literati at the time the *Book of Leinster* was compiled thought of the Picts as in any way exotic. Indeed, their kings were seen as belonging very much to the same milieu as their Irish counterparts.

20 May 2022 –

Dr Shirley Curtis-Summers

Set in stone and seeped in bone- diet and health in medieval Scotland.

Shirley is a palaeo-biologist who talked on some of her results from work with skeletal material recovered at Portmahomack during the excavations led by Martin Carver between 1994 and 2007. She began by outlining the three main areas of her talk: evidence for trauma, for disease and for diet. The remains came from five periods of occupation at Portmahomack:

P1 - Lay Pictish community dated to the 6th - 7th centuries.

P2 - Pictish monastery dated to the 7th -9th centuries.

P3 - Scotto-Norse trading settlement dated to the 9th -10th centuries.

P4 - Township with a parish church dated to the 12th-16th centuries.

P5 - Burials of the Reverend William McKenzie and (probably) his wife, as well as 15 child burials, post-1600.

There are a number of basic analyses carried out by bio-archaeologists. They look for evidence of sex, age at death, stature and markers of disease and trauma. Chemical analyses of bone and collagen can give a range of other information.

From P1, 9 males and 4 females, all adults, were recovered from long cist burials. The monastic phase (P2) yielded 51 adult males, 2 females, 2 whose gender could not be determined and one child from a mixture of long cist or head support burials. Only adult males were represented among the head support burials in P3, while the shrouded or coffin burials of P4 included 39 adult males, 25 females, one indeterminate adult and 25 children.

Shirley noted that there has to be an understanding of the expected variation within the normal biological range before labelling features in the bone as abnormalities that might reflect infection, disease or trauma. Only very rarely can

the cause of death be unequivocally identified. This was illustrated by the first of her examples of individuals who had suffered traumatic injury. The man, in the 26-35 age range when he died, was from P2. There were three blade wounds to his skull, one at least of which could have been fatal. None showed signs of healing: death must have followed very soon after these wounds were inflicted. However, it is possible that the cause of death may have been a wound to soft tissue - a stab through the heart for example, that would not leave any mark on the skeleton. Another, older, man from this monastic period had also suffered sharp force trauma to the skull, but this time the bone had healed, and so the wounds were not fatal. It is tempting to associate these signs of trauma with a possible Viking raid that saw conflagration at the workshops and smashing and dumping of carved stones. We know of Viking raids on Lindisfarne in 793 and Iona in 795 and later, it seems likely that Portmahomack was also visited.

The later medieval period was one in which violent conflict was common, with the Norse still defending their sway over much of northern Scotland in the 12th century. Clan warfare, cattle raiding and iron working (for weapon production?) all intensified throughout this period, with non-specialists (farm workers and so on) being drafted into fight. Perhaps the adult male who died sometime in the 12th to 13th centuries with unhealed blade wounds to his head, legs and hip and a fracture of the right wrist that hinted at an inexperienced swordsman was one of these. On the other hand, another who died sometime between the late-13th and mid-15th centuries seemed to have been a seasoned fighter: broken ribs, fractures to his right wrist and thumb (sustained during bare-knuckle fighting?) and a blade wound to the back of his head had all healed before he died.

One curious burial from late in P4 was of note. The tallest male of all from Portmahomack had suffered sharp force trauma to the face and head, unhealed when he died, aged between 46 and 59, and was laid in an oak coffin. Around his head were placed four adult skulls, two on each side. There were two males and a female who had probably died somewhat, but not a great deal, earlier than the accompanied man, while the final skull was of a young man from P2 - the Pictish monastic period. At some time after the body had decayed to a skeleton, the coffin was opened and the second tallest man from Portmahomack, aged between 36 and 45 at death, was inserted. Ancient DNA analysis

suggests that the female skull probably belonged to this man's mother, while the two skeletons were related in the third degree (great-grandfather-grandson, great-uncle, great-nephew or cousins). An intriguing group!

Turning to the evidence of disease, Shirley described some of the evidence to be found on the vertebrae of many of the individuals from Portmahomack. Outgrowths of bone in response to herniation of intervertebral discs were fairly common, and not restricted to the oldest age group. This can be a response to stress caused by a variety of activities. The men of P2 and P3 were more likely to show these lesions than the men of the later medieval period, suggesting that they were accustomed to different activities. The monks at Portmahomack seem to have been involved in strenuous manual labour - building or farming for example. Osteoarthritis can leave traces on the bones of the spine. Both males and females were affected, especially in the older age group. Involvement of the thoracic region in spinal damage was more common in females than in males, pointing to differences in work carried out by men and women. It also left its mark on shoulders and hips (mainly among males) and shoulders and elbows (mainly females), with P2 and P4 adults more frequently affected than those from P1. This too is likely to reflect repetitive and strenuous activity, although what exact form this took is open to question.

In a few of its manifestations, cancer will leave traces on bones, and this seems to have been the case in four males at Portmahomack. One older man from P2 had metastatic prostate cancer, while a younger man from P4 had metastatic carcinoma. Some diseases, such as tuberculosis, also leave traces in bone, and this was suggested by the appearance of the bones of an 18 to 25-year-old from P2 and an 11 to 15-year-old from P4.

Dental pathologies were common, detected in 64 adult males, 11 females and 20 children. Extreme wear, grinding down the surface of the teeth to expose the underlying dentine can be attributed to a diet high in the consumption of coarsely ground grain. The particles of grit included in flour and meal caused serious wear on tooth enamel, more obvious in the early periods. Ultimately, the removal of enamel can allow for painful infection. The build-up of calculus around the teeth was also noted in many cases and was likely due to a combination of a high protein diet and poor dental hygiene. Periodontitis (infection of the gums) results again from poor oral hygiene, the presence of calculus and

a diet high in carbohydrate. While males were more likely to have a significant build-up of calculus, P4 females were more prone to periodontitis, perhaps reflecting a difference in diet. Caries, caused by infection eating into the enamel, was noted in P2, but was more prevalent among the females of P4. Such infections can lead to abscess formation - not merely painful, but potentially lethal if the abscess does not drain through the mouth and the infection spreads into the bloodstream leading to sepsis. Dental enamel hypoplasia shows as fine lines in the adult tooth caused by interruptions to the normal process of enamel deposition in childhood. This may be caused by episodes of infection or malnutrition, and was most common in P4, with males more likely to be affected than females.

Chemical analyses can shed some light on the diet. Shirley reflected on a number of dietary prohibitions laid down by various authorities in the medieval period, from the Rule of St Benedict, banning the flesh of quadrupeds on fast days, and including secular laws enjoining householders to prevent the eating of flesh on fast days within their properties. These restrictions had largely faded by the 16th century, and throughout there was no obligation to eat fish on fast days, only an option.

Both carbon and nitrogen, basic components of protein in the diet, have isotopes (rare variants of the basic atomic structure) which are stable over extremely long periods of time. Carbon-13 and nitrogen-15 are present in tiny amounts in the food consumed by animals and fish, becoming more concentrated the higher up the food chain the individual creature is located. When considering the results from the human remains at any given site, it is advisable to include a range of samples of local and contemporary animal and fish species if at all possible. Shirley presented her data in the form of two-dimensional graphs, showing $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ on the y-axis and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ on the x-axis.

The values for terrestrial herbivores cluster closer to the lower left of the graph (ie have lower values for both) while the values for marine fish and mammals appear in the upper right (having higher values). Where the protein in the diet has largely derived from terrestrial sources, human values appear closer to those of terrestrial mammals, with an increasing contribution from marine sources, the human values shift towards higher values too. For P1 and P2, the evidence points to a diet based on terrestrial sources of protein -meat from farmed or wild-caught animals as opposed to fish. One indi-

vidual from the monastic P2 appears to have had a significant marine component in his diet. In the later medieval period, there was more of a variety, with some individuals favouring a terrestrial-based diet and others evidently consuming more marine protein.

The pattern of consuming mainly terrestrial protein (domesticated animals and game) with little fish in the diet is seen at a number of other Pictish sites. (Newark Bay in Orkney is an outlier in that fish seems to have been a more important part of the diet there; elsewhere fish appears to have become popular only after the Norse settlement of the north). At Portmahomack, the evidence of animal remains bears out this preference for meat - very few fish bones were recovered from P1-P3, although considerable numbers were found in P4 levels.

Shirley briefly summarised recent work carried with Jyoti Stuart-Lawson. Samples were extracted from the tooth roots of a number of the adult male skeletons of P2, and these were analysed and compared with the results from skeletal material from the same individuals. This new analysis focussed on material laid down in childhood, while the adult material represents the diet over around the twenty years preceding death. It appears that in late childhood these individuals (several of whom have been shown to have come from different parts of the country) consumed an elevated amount of fish. Much more work on other individuals from other Pictish period sites needs to be done to establish the meaning of this pattern.

Sheila Hainey

¹ The abbreviations indicate the differences in the ratios of N¹⁵ to total nitrogen, C¹³ to total carbon from those of agreed international standards.

The Newark Project: the story so far

A Pictish symbol stone is on display at the Orkney Museum for the first time this summer as part of an exhibition exploring the history of Newark, in the parish of Deerness. Although perhaps best known as the site of an extensive medieval cemetery, Newark is a complex, multi-period site with evidence of human activity going back to the Bronze Age. It is, however, badly affected by coastal erosion and its archaeology under constant threat.

It was erosion that led to the discovery of the symbol stone, which was spotted eroding from a bank in 2016 (Fig. 1). A rescue excavation, funded by Historic Environment Scotland and led by the Archaeology Institute UHI, was



Fig. 1 The cross slab emerging from the eroding bank in 2016. © Isobel Gardner

launched to recover the stone before it was lost or damaged.

Featuring a cross on one side and Pictish symbols on the other, the Newark stone is one of two Class II symbol stones found in Orkney in recent years. The first was unearthed on the island of Sanday in 2011. Both were examined by Dr Anna Ritchie, who believes the two are so similar that they were likely to have been made in the same workshop, or by the same stone carver. The Newark stone was buried near the remains of a stone-built church that may date from the 10th century AD. The cross-slab and the presence of Late Iron Age burials suggest this church replaced an earlier chapel.

One side of the slab is dominated by an ornamented cross filled with a key pattern. A great spiral at the centre of the cross-head is similar to a decorated lead disc from the Brough of Birsay, an island off Orkney's West Mainland. A dog-headed creature stands to the right of the cross shaft. The motifs on the opposite side include a large creature with elongated jaws and what may be a representation of a wild boar (Figs. 2 and 3).

The Newark Pictish stone is but one element of a complex multi-period site. An Archaeology Institute UHI project, funded by Historic Environment Scotland and led by a steering group from the Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology (ORCA) team and community volunteers, has been drawing together the threads of the Newark story based on past excavations, surveys and modern scientific analysis of the human remains. And what a remarkable story it is, one of Bronze Age burials, of Picts, Vikings, Norse and the descendants of kings and Orkney's merchant lairds.



Fig. 2 Newark cross slab, face a. © Hugo Anderson-Whymark

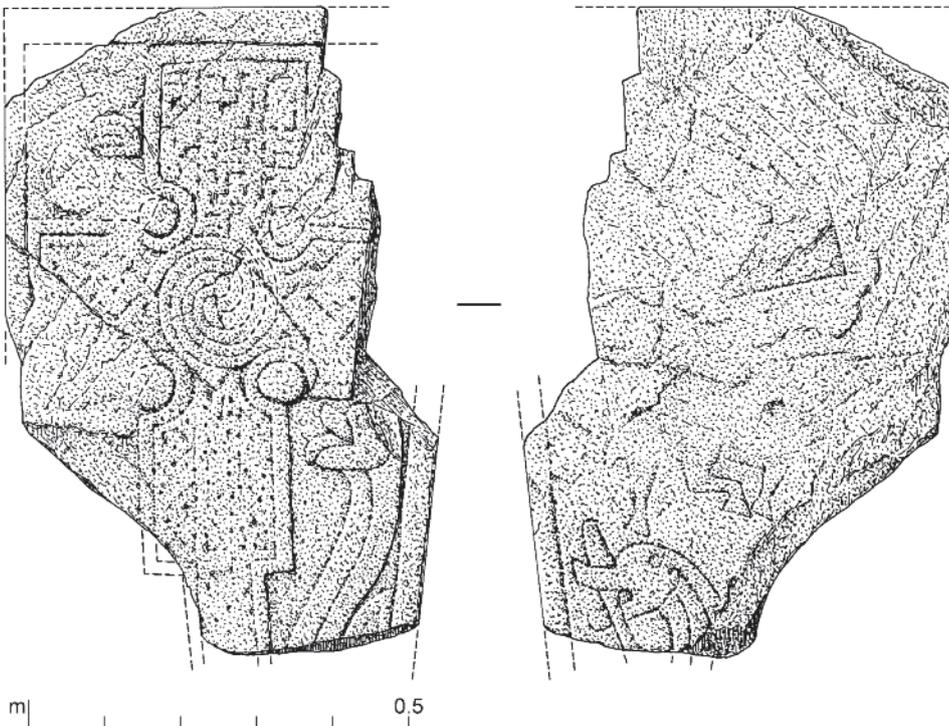


Fig. 3 Newark cross slab, face a & b, 1:10 scale. © John Borland

A Bronze Age burial is the earliest evidence so far with several suspected barrows also detected in a recent geophysical survey. In the Iron Age, two underground structures were built, one of

which had human remains deposited within. As we have seen, the Newark cross-slab may relate to an early Christian chapel that was replaced by a stone-built church. Although used from around AD 600 until 1400, most of the burials in a surrounding cemetery date to the Norse period.

Newark eventually appears on maps as the site of a late medieval manor house owned by Lord Lindores, son-in-law of Robert Stewart, Earl of Orkney. Although some of this building was uncovered during excavations in the 1960's, not enough was exposed to fully establish its size or style. By the late 1790's, one of Orkney's leading merchant laird families, the Balfours, owned the dilapidated building. At some point after, it was demolished.

The Newark Project: the story so far runs at the Orkney Museum until October 29, 2022. The opening hours are Monday-Saturday, 10.30am – 5.00pm from May-September and 10.30am-12.30pm and 1.30pm-5pm in October. Admission is free.

Sigurd Towrie

Nicholas Martin Simpson 1966-2022

Nick Simpson, artist and graphic designer and an early PAS stalwart has passed away after a long and debilitating illness. In the early days of the Society when there was strong emphasis on the artistic legacy of the symbol stones, Nick contributed extensively to a wide range of the Society's activities. His own art was greatly influenced by the art of the Picts and in the exhibitions which were part of the first few annual conferences, his striking batiks always stood out. His role in the organising and presentation of these exhibitions was considerable but his contributions to the production of the PAS Journal and

Newsletter were of even more significance.

Nick, who was originally from Aberdeen, had come to Edinburgh in 1985 to study town planning. However his childhood fascination with all things artistic led him on to another path and he became a busy and influential free-lance

designer/artist. A man with an ever-inquiring mind, Nick had early become aware of the possibilities inherent in the use of computers in both design and art, and his skills were of great benefit to the development of the Pictish Arts Society's outreach. He was the de facto production manager of the Journal, his IT skills being invaluable. A man who never did anything by halves, he was very much a hands-on character, and in the early days when the Journal's production facility was Edinburgh University's photocopying department, he was always to the fore, ensuring that the latest edition went out to the membership. Nowadays we perhaps take it for granted but when the Society was founded in 1988 its primary role was understood as raising the profile of the Picts. To this end, the conferences certainly played their part, but I would suggest that the role of the Journal and Newsletter were of even more importance. In the late '80s there were no books in print on matters Pictish. Much of the upsurge in interest in First Millennium Scotland since then can be traced back to PAS activities and although the academic content of our publications has made a substantial contribution, the actual dissemination of them was effectively a labour of love for quite a few of us. Nick's role in that cannot be underestimated.

Alongside his contributions to PAS activities, which included conference posters and merchandise design, Nick worked free-lance for many of the capital's Indy and folk bands. His skills, both as an artist and as an IT wizard were often in demand and at different times he worked as an IT technician for Edinburgh University and as a tutor in Computer Aided Design (CAD) for Napier University. In addition, his skills were called on by various architectural firms developing and creating 3-D walk-through presentations. Nick's initial fascination with IT pre-dated most structured courses in IT design, and in true Scottish auto-didact style he taught himself. That capacity to learn as he went along was something that never left him. His fascination with the possibilities of IT led to him being every bit as adept in building and repairing as using computers, an increasingly appreciated talent amongst his wide circle of friends.

From an early age Nick had a love of walking in the Scottish hills and mountains and this was matched by his interest in our nation's past which in time led to him joining the PAS. He was also a man of strong beliefs, espousing the Vigil for a Scottish Parliament that sat from 1992-97 on Edinburgh's Regent Road, promoting the cause of devolution. He was also involved with the Dunichen Pictish Music Festivals in the 1990's and was a close friend of their organiser Robbie the

Pict. Robbie put it on record at Nick's funeral that Nick, along with his partner Amanda, provided vital support in his ongoing legal battles with the Establishment over the tolls on the Skye Bridge, a cause which like the Vigil, eventually proved successful.

Not long after coming to Edinburgh Nick had met Amanda Stuart, his lifelong partner, and their two daughters, Katie and Molly have grown up to have their father's enquiring outlook and what can best be described as his *joie de vivre*, dancing while cooking being something of a family speciality. Nick's enquiring mind and voracious appetite for knowledge were of great help in him developing considerable skills both as a gardener and an exceptional cook. He was a foodie long before the term was even thought of. In his latter years his debilitating illness stopped him going off to Scotland's hills but his mind was never restricted and his humorous, if occasionally acerbic, take on life never wavered. His role in the development of the PAS in its early days, like that of Marianna Lines, reached out beyond the limitations of archaeology and history and played a significant role in the wider, and ongoing culture of Scotland. A loving man of great character, he was a friend to many and will be much miss

Stuart McHardy

Forthcoming Events

PAS Annual Conference online 2022

Saturday 1 & Sunday 2 October

Details in the next newsletter and on the PAS website/Facebook page

PAS Autumn Lecture Series 2022

Friday 21 October –

Professor Elizabeth Okasha

Early medieval stone sundials in Britain and Ireland

Friday 18 November – Dr James O'Driscoll
Head for the Hills: Native Large Scale Hilltop Settlement in Late Roman Iron Age/Early Medieval Northern Britain

Friday 16 December – Dr Chris Cooijsmans
They Search for Fortune by Ship, and Inhabit the Sea: Viking Hydrarchy in Francia and the North Sea World

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Deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 20 August 2022

Please email contributions to the editor:

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