

Strathmartine fragments return to Angus



Strathmartine 8 (© Angus Council, Cultural Services)

After an absence of many years two of the ‘lost’ stones from Strathmartine have returned to Angus having been tracked down to a location near Jedburgh and subsequently donated to Angus Council by Mr C Hall. This is not the first time Angus stones have travelled to the Borders – shortly after its discovery in 1819 the Woodrae, Aberlemno, stone was sent to Sir Walter Scott and remained in the garden at Abbotsford until 1924 when it was donated to the Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh and is now displayed in the Museum of Scotland.

In this issue we feature John Borland’s drawing and description of another ‘lost’ and well-travelled stone, the Castle of Fiddes, Kincardineshire, cross-slab fragment, which, after a sterling piece of detective work by John, was traced to Devon.



Strathmartine 3 (© Angus Council, Cultural Services)

Castle of Fiddes cross-slab – an old discovery re-discovered

In 1969, the Ordnance Survey noted that ‘part of the head of a Celtic cross-slab ... found ... amongst rubble, after renovations to farm outbuildings at Castle of Fiddes ... in 1964 ... is preserved inside the castle.’ Up until now, this was the only record of the stone that existed.

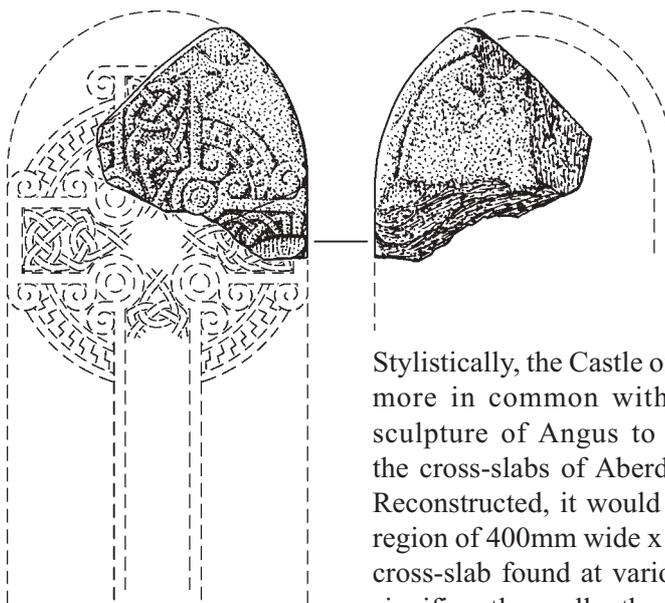
By March 2005, having almost completed the Commission’s measured survey of all the early medieval sculpture of Aberdeenshire (including the former county of Kincardineshire), the Castle of Fiddes cross-slab was amongst the last few to record. However, the stone hadn’t been recorded since the above O.S. report was made and was no longer at the Castle. After a bit of detective work, I tracked down the stone’s finder, who filled me in on its current location – Devon. He kindly agreed to negotiate access with the stone’s present owner who contacted me in February 2006. I arranged to visit her home and travelled to Devon in early March. A long journey perhaps, but I wasn’t disappointed.

The small fragment of course-grained red sandstone, measuring approximately 275mm wide x 290mm high x 110mm thick, is sculptured in relief on two sides. On the front is the top right-hand corner of a cross with round hollows in the angles between the arms, which have spiral terminals at their ends and a connecting ring between them. The cross, including the terminals, is formed by a band and is filled by interlace. Spiral terminals on the arms of the cross are found on a number of cross-slabs, from Dyce in Aberdeenshire to Kilrenny in Fife. Uniquely in this case, the spirals also emanate from the round hollow, filling the space within the connecting ring. The carving within the connecting ring is worn and lacks definition. It could be an alternating version of a pellet decoration, such as that found on Inchbrayock 1, but is probably diagonal key-pattern. Although only slight traces of the right spiral on the top arm of the cross survive, enough of it and the interlace can be made out to confirm that we do have the top of the cross, which clearly stops well short of the rounded head of the

slab, unlike most round-headed slabs, such as Meigle 4 and 7. The round hollow is also decorated with an internal ring and central dot.

The relief carving on this face is not deep, the cross, terminals and interlace, projecting only about 6mm from the background surface. The connecting ring and its decoration sits below this, projecting only about 3mm. The illusion of further fields of carving is created by the ring and dot within the round hollow, which are formed by incised lines. Such subtlety and economy of effort and the pleasing layout of the decoration show a high degree of technical proficiency and artistic ability on the part of the sculptor.

On the back, most of the carved surface is lost except the remnants of a broad margin arcing round the curve of the slab. Close examination



Castle of Fiddes cross-slab fragment and partial reconstruction drawn by John Borland. Scale 1:10 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMS)

of this face under studio conditions may reveal traces of other carving. There is no decoration on the edge of the stone but some droving marks are visible.

Stylistically, the Castle of Fiddes cross-slab has more in common with the early medieval sculpture of Angus to the south, than with the cross-slabs of Aberdeenshire to the north. Reconstructed, it would have measured in the region of 400mm wide x 800mm high, a size of cross-slab found at various sites in Angus but significantly smaller than any of the cross-slabs in Aberdeenshire. Of the slabs to the north, only the Maiden Stone has a decorated connecting ring, a motif which features on at least ten stones in Angus. This would tend to reinforce the belief that the eastern end of the Grampian Mountains was more than just a physical barrier between north and south. I would suggest the stone dates from the ninth – tenth century AD. Within a local context, the Castle of Fiddes cross-slab is one of less than a dozen pieces of early medieval sculpture from the former county of Kincardineshire and one of only ten cross-slabs from the whole of the northeast.

John Borland

Survey & Recording Section RCAHMS

Fresh Pict: problems revisited in Aberdeen



Saturday 18 November, 2006 — Kings College, Old Aberdeen

This summer there is a session at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds (10-13 July) called *Fresh Pict: fifty years of Pictish studies* (PAS News 37, p7). It looks at the state of research half a century after Wainwright's publication *The Problem of the Picts*. Leeds is a long way from Pictland, so many of the speakers have agreed to deliver their papers again to a north-east Scottish audience. Additional speakers are also contributing. The conference is sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and the Research Institute for Irish and Scottish Studies, Aberdeen University.

Themes to be covered are *Text and Society; The World of Work; Landscape, wide and narrow; Art and Meaning*. Speakers include David Dumville, Lloyd Laing, Andrew Heald, Steven Driscoll, Strat Halliday, Mike King, Gordon Noble, Jane Geddes

Mark the date for your diary. Notice about applications will be issued in the next PAS Newsletter. Any queries or advance requests for application forms to Jane Geddes, History of Art Dept, Kings College, Aberdeen University, AB24 3UB. <j.geddes@abdn.ac.uk>

Angus extravaganza

Picts! is the title of a truly memorable exhibition staged by Angus Council Cultural Services at the Meffan, Forfar, during May, with part of it transferring to Montrose Museum in June. Bringing together carved stones from Angus, most of which are rarely on public view, and artwork of ten invited women artists, this was an inspired choice of theme to display in Museums Month.

Norman Atkinson and his staff are to be commended in providing this rare opportunity to appreciate and easily compare so many of these little-known sculptures which, together with the permanent collection, show just how rich and varied the sculpture of the area is. Even without taking the collections at St Vigeans, Aberlemno and Meigle into consideration, no other area can boast such a diverse range of styles of carving and monument types. The loaned stones will return to their keepers but happily two will be staying on (see p.1) The Glamis fragments have had plinths made for their future display in Glamis kirk and we are pleased to report that PAS has paid for these to be made.

Unfortunately there was no catalogue of the exhibition so we reproduce the labels below for those not fortunate enough to have attended this unforgettable show.

Picts!

Angus has a nationally important collection of Pictish sculpture and as part of Museums Month this exhibition is an opportunity to bring together some *fragments of significance* which are rarely seen in public.

While the Picts are known from documentary sources between the third and tenth centuries, their ancestors were here long before that, and much Pictish blood doubtless still courses in the veins of Angus residents whose forebears have lived here since.

Angus is not mentioned in any historical source until the 10th century, yet these sculptures testify to it being an important province of the Kingdom of Fortriu or the Southern Picts, although we do not know what they called it. The collections at Aberlemno, Kirriemuir and St Vigeans are

three of the most significant in the province, but the sculptures in this exhibition from Arbroath, Glamis, Kinblethmont, Kingoldrum, Monifieth, Murroes and Strathmartine demonstrate that there were other Pictish centres throughout Angus.

The Picts left us a list of their kings and from this we know that sons did not directly follow fathers, at least until near the end. Royal succession could, however take account of the maternal lineage of a claimant and this and depictions of high status women on some sculptures shows that the Picts held the status of women in high regard. As part of this exhibition we have invited ten women artists with Angus connections to exhibit contemporary works of art inspired by our Pictish heritage to complement some fine examples of Pictish sculpture.

We are extremely grateful to them, and to Mr & Mrs R Ramsay, Mr C Hall, Mrs E Reid and Glamis Parish Church and to staff at the National Museums of Scotland for their assistance in assembling this exhibition.

Arbroath Harbour

Signal Tower Museum, Arbroath

Work on the seawall at Arbroath in 1989 may have disturbed the materials used and this reshaped fragment was discovered. When the wet dock was initially constructed materials from the Lady Chapel were used in the construction, but these could have been brought in from elsewhere.

The front of the stone shows the lower part of the armpits of a cross but is very damaged. The reverse has a rectangular design in which sits a circle.

St Fergus of Glamis

Saint Fergus, more likely Uurgust to the Picts, was a native Pict who attended a Council of Rome in 721 as a Bishop of Scots.

The Aberdeen Breviary tells of Saint Fergus founding churches in the west, Caithness and Buchan before he moved to Glamis and built a final church, where 'full of years' he 'slept in the lord'. A cave, now infilled, and a well, recently restored are named in his memory.

At Glamis is also a magnificent Pictish cross-slab of an 8th-century date. Four further fragments of early medieval carved stones have

also been found here, all of which are on display in this exhibition.

The grave of Saint Fergus was held in high regard, and the Abbot of Scone placed the sacred relics in marble after carrying off the head to Scone Abbey. In the Royal Treasurer's accounts is a payment for a silver case being made for it by James IV. An arm also made its way to Aberdeen and other fragments to St Andrews.

Saint Fergus is commemorated on 18 November.

Glamis 2

On loan, Glamis Parish Church

Found in the kirkyard in 1967, this fragment may have been built into a wall. It was moved into the church where it has been displayed since.

Much mutilated, this would appear to be part of a cross-slab with the shaft of the cross ornamented with interlace. On the left is the lower part of a warrior and on the right are the rear quarters of two animals.

Glamis 3

On loan, Glamis Parish Church

Found in the churchyard whilst digging a grave in 1911, this stone was subsequently lost and rediscovered in 1983 in the manse rockery. It is the lower part of a cross-slab, the shaft decorated with interlace with perhaps part of a 'flower' symbol to the right.

It was moved into the church in 1994 when the rockery was removed.

Glamis 4

On loan, Glamis Parish Church

This fragment was noticed in the manse rockery in 1984, but was not seen again until 1994 when the rockery was removed when it was moved into the church.

A 'triple oval' or 'concertina' symbol with a 'double comma' decoration is incised on what may have been a decorative panel in the Pictish church.

Glamis 5

On loan, Glamis Parish Church

This column with its scrolled decoration was first noted in the rockery in 1985. It was moved into the church from the rockery in 1994. It may be part of a stool or item of furniture from the earlier church.

Kinblethmont

On loan, Mr R Ramsay

Discovered whilst ploughing in a field north of Kinblethmont House in 1952. A small excavation revealed a socket cut into the bed-rock but the missing fragment was not found.

This magnificent symbol stone depicts a 'crescent and v rod' in which there are two crescents and a linking curved line. Below this is a 'Pictish beast' with part of its hindquarters missing. At the bottom is the top part of a 'mirror' symbol and part of the handle of a 'comb' symbol. A battle recorded in the Irish Annals on Friday 12 August 729 between Fergus and Drust for the Pictish Kingship was fought at *Drum deargg blathmuug* (the red flowery ridge) and Kinblethmont translates as the head of the flowery hill.

Saint Meddan of Kingoldrum

When the sun came up on this exhibition it was Saint Meddan's day. Meddan was the saint who is commemorated at Kingoldrum Kirk, as well as its close neighbours, Airlie and Lintrathen.

In addition to the three sculptured stones from Kingoldrum there is also a Celtic bell, all now in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland. Lintrathen, too had an iron bell, St Madie's bell, which survived until the beginning of the nineteenth century when it was sold!

Lintrathen also has a fragment of a cross, known as St Meddan's cross which may have stood on St Meddan's toft. On its rediscovery in 1875, the fragment was built in to the church wall, just above the vestry door, where it can still be seen today.

Airlie also has a later medieval effigy of a churchman, known as St Meddan which sits in an alcove in the churchyard wall. Sadly it is now headless, probably as a result of vandalism at the reformation.

Just who Saint Meddan was and what these three early churches were like we may never know, but the surviving fragments of sculpture give us a tantalizing glimpse of our Pictish past.

Kingoldrum 3

On loan, National Museums of Scotland

One of three broken cross-slabs discovered when the old church of Kingoldrum was demolished in 1840, and subsequently donated to the National Museums of Scotland.

The front bears part of a Maltese Cross, while the reverse has a representation of a crucifixion, with only the head, one arm and the upper part of the body remaining.

Monifieth Parish Church

Monifieth appears on the historical record as one of the wealthy churches donated by Gilchrist, Earl of Angus in the first few years of the thirteenth century.

When his grand-daughter, Matilda, confirms this gift in 1242/3 she defines the abthane as 'the land to the South of the church which the Culdees held in my father's time'. Malcolm was Earl of Angus between 1214 and 1242, and it seems that the Céli Dé community had been secularized by 1220 when he made the gift of the abthane of Monifieth to Nicolas, lay-abbot of Monifieth.

The southern boundary of the abthane can still be traced by walking along Maule Street where there are still five later medieval boundary cross stones fixed into the wall. To the north-west there was probably a free standing cross, now lost, although its base socket survives, now known incorrectly as the font stone.

The Grange of Monifieth was to the north, and in 1322 was given by Robert I to Sir William Durham.

A fair was held on the second Tuesday of October, known as the Trewell Fair. This has been linked with St Rule whose feast day is 17 October, but is more likely to commemorate St Tredwell's fair on 8 October. Triduana was a somewhat hazy figure of the early eighth century linked with the Boniface legend and the bringing of Christianity to the Picts by King Nechtan.

Monifieth 3

On loan, National Museums of Scotland

One of four broken cross-slabs found in the foundations of Monifieth Church in 1812 and subsequently donated to the National Museums of Scotland.

This cross-slab has damaged sculpture on both sides but both the top and bottom of the slab are missing. The front has the shaft of a cross decorated with interlace. Parts of zoomorphic creatures flank the shaft. The reverse has a hunting scene with a horseman and deer, plus other zoomorphic creatures.

Monifieth 5

On loan, National Museums of Scotland

Found at the bottom of the kirkyard in 1928, this fragment of a cross-slab was also donated to the National Museum of Scotland.

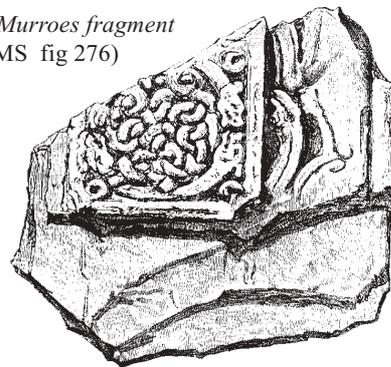
A crucifixion scene shows Jesus clothed in a tunic but the top part of the scene is missing. On each side of his legs is a human figure, thought to be John and Mary.

Murroes

On loan, National Museums of Scotland

This fragment was discovered in Murroes Kirkyard in 1896, and later donated to the National Museums of Scotland.

The Murroes fragment
(ECMS fig 276)



It is a tiny fragment of a cross-slab with intertwined beasts within a panel and the body and legs of another beast to its right.

Strathmartine 3

Donated by Mr C Hall

This is the top half of a Pictish cross-slab, the front bearing a cross with some surviving interlace. Intertwined beasts fill both panels above the arms of the cross.

On the reverse is a stepped rectangle which is ornamented with spirals and designs. Below this is the top part of a most beautiful Pictish beast

Strathmartine 4

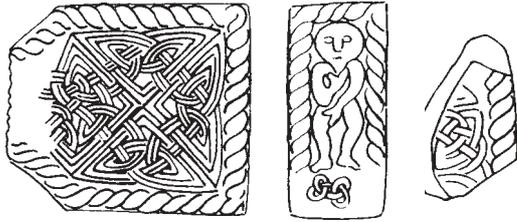
On loan, National Museums of Scotland

One of thirteen sculptured stones found at Strathmartine found by 1889, this fragment was donated to the National Museums of Scotland. Both faces are carved. The front has a portion of a cross decorated with spirals and flanked with interlace. The back has part of an animal depicted.

Strathmartine 8

Donated by Mr C Hall

This is the arm of a free-standing cross bordered with rope-moulding.



*Strathmartine 8: front, end, underside
(ECMS figs 277a/b/c)*

A St Andrews cross is formed with triangular interlace on the main face, and further interlace is on the underside. On the end is a depiction of Adam, apple in one hand, attempting to cover his nakedness with the other.

Norman Atkinson

Pictavia volunteering opportunities

Cataloguing library

Over the summer period I hope to make a start on cataloguing the library materials in Pictavia. This will be done manually in the first instance until we are able to acquire some IT equipment. The timescale I am looking at is during the latter part of July and the first half of August, either weekdays or weekends. If anyone would like to come and help, please contact me at the Pictavia address indicating availability and I will arrange a few sessions around those responses.

Volunteer librarians

As advised by the president at the AGM the long-term plans are to make these materials available for reference at Pictavia and I will be recruiting volunteers to be available to act as our librarians. If you are interested and would like me to arrange an orientation session, please let me have some dates to get a group together.

Volunteer guides

When the situation regarding the successor(s) to the local tourist boards and their relationship with Angus Council becomes clearer, I plan to re-introduce our volunteer guides and will be setting up training sessions. If you are interested, please indicate your availability from 11 July onwards and I will set up dates to take this forward.

In all cases, please let me have your full contact details including e-mail addresses which I shall use only for the aforementioned purposes and no other without your express consent.

Joy Mowatt

Pictish arts Yahoo group

<<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PictsArt/>>

This is the web address for a new email forum for discussion of Pictish Arts and related subjects.

The following is the summary that appears on the website.

The Pictish Arts discussion list is supported by the Pictish Arts Society. However, the Society does not necessarily support the views expressed in any mailings.

THE PICTS were the true ancestors of the Scottish nation - our indigenous people. While it is known that they lived in Scotland in the first millennium AD, and their territory was taken over by the Scots in the 9th century, little else is definite. What has mainly survived is the great heritage of their carved symbol stones which remain for us to study and cherish. The Pictish Arts Society forms a focus for study and discussion of all aspects of Pictish and Early Scottish history.

This group provides an international forum for the exchange of information and ideas about Pictish arts and things inspired by Pictish art. All issues that relate to Pictish Art, historical and cultural significance, design, technical issues and ways of bringing the subject to a wider public are all welcome. The discussion of religion and politics as it relates to the artform are OK, but the moderator reserves the right to cut off discussion that gets off-topic or offensive.

Promotion of relevant events, books, courses and conferences is welcome, but please do not use this group for product advertising.

In order to prevent spam and to keep the list on-topic, new subscribers must be approved by the moderator. The archives and messages are public. Anyone may read them, even if not a member of the group. You must be a member to post messages and to access the group files. The files are mainly photos and scans that relate to the discussions. Please use your real name when signing messages.

You can register for free with Yahoo and join the group. You have a choice of whether you wish to receive all messages to the group, a daily digest of messages, or to read the messages on

the website. There will be albums in which members can upload photographs for others to access, folders in which we can access files and so on.

For the group to be successful it needs lots of members, and particularly people who are prepared to ask questions, suggest theories, recommend books, and so. Please sign up and help to make the discussion forum a useful addition to the more traditional means of gaining understanding of our subject. *Ruth Black*

Migvie

Last month I stopped to look at the Migvie cross-slab. As you know this stands in the old churchyard of Migvie, and I was intrigued to see that a man (rather craftsman) was at work inside the old church. He was very helpful, and informative, and I was able to see round the interior of the church, which has been beautifully decorated by local craftsmen. If ever you get the chance, you should take a look inside.

I was surprised to see the Mill of Newton (*Tom a'Char*) stone inside the church. Apparently it has been there for some time, and there is even a faint chance that the Migvie cross-slab will join it inside the church. However, when the owner of Tillypronie House (Philip Astor, who is also the owner of the old church) enquired of Historic Scotland what the probable cost of moving the stone would be, he was told that a full restoration of the stone would be needed, involving thousands of pounds, and, not surprisingly, he seems to have dropped the idea. There is at least one other early carved stone, a Class III fragment, inside the church, which is well worth a visit. *Bob Henerey*

Scottish names

A new scholarly journal, *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, editor Simon Taylor, has been established, which will publish articles and reviews on place and personal names relating to Scotland, its history and languages. The Journal will be refereed and an editorial advisory board of experts has been formed.

The inaugural volume of *JNSS* is due for publication in the first half of 2007. Articles to be considered for publication in this and future issues should be sent to the publisher's address

below. Short articles, reviews and reports on work in progress will also be considered.

Notes for contributors are available at <www.clanntuirc.co.uk/JSNS.html>

Clann Tuirc, Tigh a' Mhaide, Brig o' Turk, Perthshire FK17 8HT

Birnie excavations

The tantalising possibility of the discovery of a Pictish house is reported from last year's excavations at Birnie

Excavation of a sub-rectangular feature showed it was the sunken floor of a turf-walled building with no earth-fast foundations. It went through a series of phases, the latest with a cobbled floor. Similar features have been interpreted as medieval, but the finds from this structure suggest a late Iron Age or Pictish date. This is the first hint of Pictish activity at Birnie, but radiocarbon dates are needed to confirm this.¹

Excavations continue this year from 6 August to 1 September. Visitors are welcome – work is from 9–5.30 daily except Saturday, or when the weather is really bad. There will be an **Open Day** on 27 August, with guided tours on the hour and various craft activities. The site at NJ 208 589 is on the Elgin–Birnie road. Coming from Elgin after the turn-off to Birnie church take the first right (opposite a cottage) and park by the Portakabin in the field to the right. If wet use the church carpark and take the path from the south side of the kirk down to the road beside the site – a walk of about 10 minutes.

¹ Hunter, Fraser *Excavations at Birnie, Moray, 2005* Edinburgh: Dept of Archaeology NMS, 2006, 1.

Constantine exhibition – York

Seventeen hundred years ago, a Roman emperor died at York. Some say he was there to lead his army against the Picts, but we have no records of his campaigns. His eldest son was with him, and his soldiers promptly proclaimed the young man emperor in his father's stead. Unfortunately, this was in conflict with the planned succession introduced by the emperor Diocletian, and Constantine had to fight for his empire. On the way, he is said to have invoked the help of Christ before going on to win the battle of the Milvian Bridge; he certainly made Christianity the official religion of the empire. This summer, York celebrates the seventeen-hundredth

anniversary of Constantine's accession with a spectacular exhibition at the Yorkshire Museum.

A range of magnificent objects are on display: silver from Traprain and Water Newton, jewellery fit for an empress, delicate fabrics from fourth century Egyptian graves. One particular object is of particular interest to Pictophiles: a small black metal openwork gaming tower found in a fourth-century context in Germany. On the front are the words:

PICTOS
VICTOS
HOSTIS
DELETA
LUDITE
SECURE

As pointed out by Fraser Hunter in talks to the Society, this small object is clear evidence for awareness of the Picts outside of Roman literary circles, and that they were regarded as an enemy to be feared. The sentiment expressed (the Picts are defeated, the enemy destroyed, play in safety) may be seen as somewhat premature. Long after Rome fell to the barbarians, the Picts were creating splendid works of art.

The exhibition is well worth a visit for anyone in the neighbourhood of York over the summer. *SH*

PAS – AGM

The AGM was held at the Meffan, Forfar on 20 May when the following office-bearers and committee members were elected:

President: Norman Atkinson

Vice-Presidents: Sheila Hainey; David Henry

Secretary: Stewart Mowatt

Membership Secretary: Ruth Black

Committee: John Borland; Eileen Brownlie;
Marianna Lines; Joy Mowatt

Subscriptions reminder

Following some confusion among members as to when subscriptions should be paid, the system was changed last year from April to September, they are due, therefore, this year on 1 September.

PAS autumn conference

will be held on Saturday 28 October 2006 at Elmwood College, Cupar, Fife. Full details of the programme and booking will appear in the next newsletter. We are also trying to arrange visits to some of the Fife stones on the Sunday.

Pictavia programme

The Pictavia Friday evening programme will be published in the next newsletter. Dates:

20 October; 17 November; 15 December;
19 January; 16 February; 16 March

Groam House Museum 2006

High Street, Rosemarkie, Ross-shire, IV10 8UF
01381 620 961 Office 01463 811 883
groamhouse@ecosse.net

TALKS

All talks in Fortrose Community Theatre
at 7.30pm (01381 621 252)
Admission £3 (Members £1.50)

Thursday 29 June

*Unique Rock Art from a Bronze Age Context
at Balblair, Beaully: some further thoughts*
Andrew Dutton, Headland Archaeology Ltd

Thursday 5 October

*Dealing with the Romans –
latest news from the Birnie trenches*
Dr Fraser Hunter, Department of Archaeology,
National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

EXHIBITIONS

in Groam House Museum

1 May 2006 – April 2007

*Don't sniff at history – the intriguing tale of
a local worthy* featuring items loaned from the
National Museum of Scotland, as well as
objects from our own collection

FREE Admission to Museum for 2006

Opening hours

1 May–31 Oct Mon–Sat 10.00–17.00

Sun 14.00–16.30

1 Nov–mid Dec Sat Sun 14.00–16.00

PAS Newsletter contributions

The deadline for receipt of contributions to PAS Newsletter 40 (Autumn 2006) is **19 August**.
Email to <pasnews@btconnect.com> or post to: **The Editor, PAS News** – at address below.

Pictish Arts Society, c/o Pictavia, Haughmuir, Brechin, Angus DD9 6RL