



Pictish Arts Society Conference 2017: Pictish Fife (morning session)

Fraser Hunter, Principal Curator of Iron Age and Roman collections at the National Museums of Scotland, opened the PAS annual conference in Cupar on the 7th October with a paper entitled *Rome and the Southern Picts - New insights from new finds*. He began by giving us some of the reasons why the Pictish Arts Society should be interested in the impact of Rome. The Romans first recorded the name 'Picts', both in literary sources and on the ornate fourth century dice box from Germany. Our earliest knowledge of the peoples of Scotland comes from Roman sources with over a dozen tribal names associated with areas of the country on Ptolemy's map, probably based on late first century information. We next have Caledones and Maeatae apparently north of the Forth/Clyde line and by the late fourth/early fifth centuries we have Picts and Britons. There are, however, big blanks on the map. Fraser suggested that the tribes in these areas may have given the Romans no cause for concern, and their names were therefore of little importance. Fife is one of these blank areas. It has been suggested, however, that the element 'Uep', contained in the name 'Uepogenus' is an early version of 'Fib,' our familiar Fife. This is attested on a third century copper plaque from Colchester, dedicated by 'Lossio Veda nepos Vepogeni Caledo'—Lossio Veda, a descendant of Uepogenus, a Caledonian.

Commenting on the limitations of the written sources, Fraser wryly stressed our dependence on archaeology in coming to an understanding of the impact of Rome on the social, economic and political development of the peoples of Northern Britain.

Despite the enthusiastic claims of nineteenth century antiquarians, there are no Roman towns or forts in Fife, although a few marching camps have been identified. Nevertheless, Roman artefacts have turned up both as stray finds and at excavated sites here, and the number of such finds has nearly doubled over the past ten years. This has increased the spread of find-sites across the country, changing the apparent distribution pattern quite dramatically. Many of the new finds have been made by metal detectorists. Among the more unusual of these is a Roman four-ounce lead weight from Boarhills, suggesting that some trading may have been going on near the mouth of the Eden. The range of items indicates that the people of Iron Age Fife (and the rest of Scotland) made a selection of Roman goods that fitted in with their way of life. Roman pottery from Clatchard Craig and a glass cup from Hollowhill were items to

be shown off during feasting. The wearing of jewellery was a pre-existing way of showing rank or status; finds of Roman brooches or bracelets point to their use by locals in the same way.

Maps of Roman Scotland show some gaps in the distribution of roads, forts and other Roman installations; two such gaps are in Fife and East Lothian. It has been suggested that Roman forts in Scotland were positioned to screen fertile land from hostile neighbours. Different people, faced with possible invasion, made different choices. Some may have arrived at a peaceful accommodation with the Romans, as has been suggested for the people of East Lothian, centred on Traprain Law. Was that true of Fife? If so, how did things change? Over forty coin hoards, with more than 6,000 silver coins dating from the period after the Romans withdrew from the line of the Antonine Wall, have been found from south and central Scotland, Fife and further north along the east coast. These finds follow a trend seen elsewhere: such coin hoards were buried across northern Europe at this period as the Romans turned to bribery to control their northern frontiers. Fraser showed maps of the distributions of hoards dating to the periods just after the abandonment of the Antonine Wall, the Severan invasion and then its aftermath. There is little overlap between the three, but Fife sits in what seems to be 'boundary' territory in each of these periods. The suggestion is that payoffs were given where the threat was greatest, but the loyal people of Fife, in a frontier region, continued to be rewarded throughout. Ten years ago, Fraser argued in a Groam House lecture that ultimately the flow of silver was disastrous, leading to localised tensions and divisions which set leading tribes against each other. Over the intervening years, a supply of new finds of 3rd- and 4th-century artefacts from both Moray and Fife have helped our understanding of what may have been happening at this time.

In 2015 schoolboy David Hall joined a metal detectorists' outing to a field near Dairsie. On that occasion he turned up silver fragments from a significant Roman hoard. After two hundred fragments were collected across the field that day, NMS staff worked over the field again. No previous finds from this field had been reported, nor were there any traces of structures visible on aerial photographs. However, plotting the find sites of a final total of 402 fragments allowed the identification of the original place of concealment of the hoard, and excavation revealed the stumps of two (possible Bronze Age) standing stones on one side of the hoard, and the site of a small bog on the other. This was not a stray spot in a random field. Both the standing

stones and the wetland may have had religious associations.

The piecing together of the fragments revealed four vessels, broken into hacksilver in the Roman period and further fragmented by Fife ploughmen. One vessel appears to have been a flawed casting, rolled up and cut into fragments. An ornate platter of a type dated to the late third century had been cut in quarters, and two of these were again cut and folded, while a washbasin had been halved and then chunks cut from the halves. The fourth vessel, of thin silver with a hammered pattern designed to be viewed from the inside when drinking, had been inverted over the rest as a cap on the original deposit.

Such treatment of silver is known from other hoards, notably the Traprain Treasure. It was once claimed that this was the work of barbarians, who had looted beautiful silver works only to cut them up. However, such hoards are found on both sides of the Roman frontier, and careful study shows this to be a normal element of Roman economic behaviour in times of stress. Costly silver objects were cut and folded to convenient packages, often to fairly exact Roman weights. Such treatment shows that the bullion value of the silver, not the workmanship, was the important thing. Although the distribution of hoard finds dominated by hacksilver of the late third and fourth centuries shows most of these to have been found beyond the empire's northern border, this was essentially a Roman practice. Various suggestions have been made as to how the silver came into the hands of those who buried it. Perhaps it was payment for military services; perhaps it was being used to buy peace on Rome's northern borders. There have over recent years been a number of Roman finds from further north, as well as in south west Scotland. Some of these, like the crossbow brooch found at Kincapple, were badges of authority in the late Roman period. Does the strong concentration of such finds along the east coast indicate an attempt to create a buffer zone?

In local hands, Roman hacksilver became the raw material for small pieces of fine jewellery as well as larger objects such as the massive silver chains. Examples of such reworked silver are known from other hoards. The symbol-marked plaque from Norrie's Law is one obvious example. The function of this enigmatic piece of silverwork has long been debated; Fraser showed two plausible reconstructions of what might be the earliest known Pictish helmet, adorned with such plaques held in a frame around the headpiece. This is a most exciting interpretation.

The four distribution patterns of small finds, hoards of late Roman silver, the massive chains and jewellery (the latter two made by local craftsmen from recycled silver from Roman sources) tend to follow similar broad outlines. There are concentrations of all types of finds in the lowlands of Aberdeenshire and Moray, presenting one coherent region. To the south, an area encompassing Fife and

the Lothians is suggested by the finds of Roman silver, but when it comes to silver chains and smaller personal ornaments, the Forth appears to subdivide the area. Fraser suggested that these patterns may reflect the development of new political entities among the Picts from the third century onwards.

(Much of the silver Fraser described is included in 'Scotland's Early Silver,' a stunning exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland running until 25 February, 2018. The accompanying book, *Scotland's Early Silver: Transforming Roman Pay-offs to Pictish Treasures* co-authored by Alice Blackwell, Martin Goldberg and Fraser Hunter is an NMS publication.)

Joanna Hambly works with Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion (SCAPE) and has carried out research on a number of Fife coastal sites. In particular, she was involved in a collaborative venture with Save the Ancient Wemyss Caves Society (SWACS) and other partners, of which more later. Although the Wemyss Caves are the best known, there are other Fife caves which have carvings on their walls which may date to the Pictish period, so Joanna's paper was entitled *Pictish Symbols in Fife Caves*.

Kinkell Cave near St Andrews, excavated in 1915, was reported as having carvings of crosses and a possible deer on the roof. Photographs were taken of a loose slab found on the floor of the cave with crosses and a possible human figure, but Joanna has not been able to locate this cave and asked for any additional information. Constantine's Cave, on the edge of Crail golf course, was also excavated around the same time, and also had early simple crosses incised on its walls. The two animal shapes shown in John Stuart's illustration of the second half of the nineteenth were not identified by Joanna. At Caiplie, 'Chapel Cave' has numerous simple crosses, as does 'Mortuary Cave', which also has an arch symbol on the sloping wall opposite to the entrance.

The Wemyss caves (Court, Sliding, Doo and Jonathan's) contain a wide range of carvings: Pictish symbols, Christian crosses, abstract designs, animals, and others such as the five-oared boat in Jonathan's cave and the human figure in Court Cave. Joanna resisted the temptation to enlarge on the Wemyss caves, given that she spoke on that topic to PAS in Brechin recently (see *Newsletter* 78), but advised the audience to look at <www.4dwemysscaves.org> for a virtual tour and further details. This website was created by a group of collaborators from SWACS, SCARF and other organisations, and included the use of Romilly Allen's field notes, which were unearthed in the British Library, among other early recordings of the caves. The team were able to reconstruct carvings lost to cave collapse, making for a fascinating virtual tour.

Another famously carved cave is to be found at Covesea, on the Moray coast. The carvings here, in

the Sculptor's Cave, bear resemblances in technique and to a certain extent in content to those at Wemyss. Here can be found the same incised, rather crudely shaped Pictish symbols which have been assigned to an early part of the Pictish period. Other carvings in living stone are to be found at Dunadd, with its boar, and Trusty's Hill, where a double-disc and Z-rod and a sea-beast, possibly pierced by a sword, adorn the rock face at the entrance to the hill-top enclosure. These carvings at high-status hillfort sites are of a different quality to the cave carvings, and are probably much later in date.

By comparison with the images carved on the symbol stones, the cave carvings seem rather crude, but this perhaps does not do the latter justice. However, the symbols carved on plaques found in the nineteenth century at Dunnicaer, a sea stack to the south of Stonehaven, are similar in style and execution to the engravings at Wemyss, with some content in common (double-disc and Z-rod, fish, scroll, crescent and triangle). Gordon Noble with the Northern Picts project excavated at Dunnicaer in 2015 and 2016, sealing this sea stack to investigate the remains of a fortified site. Although much has been lost by erosion, they were able to obtain radiocarbon dates for occupation in the third or fourth centuries. The only radiocarbon date from the Wemyss caves is from Sliding Cave. Barley from a trampled surface gave a date of AD 240-400, which compares with the early dates obtained from the stack fort of Dunnicaer.

From further north, possible gaming pieces from sites in Shetland find echoes in carvings in West Doo, Court and Jonathan's Caves. A slab found at Pool, Sanday, Orkney has a double-disc symbol very similar to one in Jonathan's Cave. It was found in a layer radio-carbon dated to between the fifth and seventh centuries. Closer to home, the steer from East Lomond Hill has affinities with an animal carving again in Jonathan's Cave. Although the carvings on the walls of Fife caves can be shown to be quite typical of a range of carvings on objects other than symbol stones, the fact remains that a majority of these etchings do not represent classic Pictish symbols. The animals found on the walls in Fife have parallels over a wide area. Joanna compared animals from Constantine's and Jonathan's Caves with similar incised examples from King's Cave, near Blackwaterfoot on Arran, on a slab of rock at Eggerness in Dumfries and Galloway and at Goatsrag rock shelter in Northumberland. An example of a figurine very similar to that in Court Cave is to be found at Carr Edge, again in Northumberland. These carvings link the craftsmen who worked in the Fife caves firmly to a broader Iron Age tradition.

The crosses found in Fife caves find parallels elsewhere too. Examples came from St Columba's Cave, Ellary and Scoor Cave, Mull, to compare with crosses from Caiplie, Constantine's and Jonathan's Caves, while the odd arrangement of cup-marks in

Court cave is reminiscent of those in St Columba's cave. The use of the Fife caves by early Christians seems to have been only part of a long sequence of use. Joanna summarised the Fife caves that can be shown to have had some early medieval use (recording the groups of caves as at Wemyss and Caiplie together): six had Saints associated with them, Christian crosses were etched on the walls of four, four had wells within, Pictish symbols were carved on the walls of three, burials were found close to three, and Roman artefacts were found at two.

Joanna suggested that we have traces of influences from different political groups operating at different periods. Fife seems to have lain on the edge of all their spheres of activity, forming an area of overlap, between the Britons, whose territory stretched from the west coast, the Anglian Northumbrians from the south and the Picts from the north, with traces of their various influences to be found on cave walls.

As a sobering afterword, Joanna showed examples of some modern graffiti in the Wemyss caves. The historic caves are already at serious risk from coastal erosion; it is disturbing that they should be the target of such vandalism. She made a plea for better education and a robust management plan for these precious sites.

After morning coffee break, Peter Yeoman gave a paper entitled *Sick Picts at the May Island Monastery*. The Isle of May lies in the mouth of the Forth estuary, accessible by boats from Anstruther and North Berwick. It is a National Nature Reserve, with a small visitor centre (open from April to October) and a large bird population.

It is now twenty years since Peter and his colleagues excavated on the May Island (1992-1997). Some members of the Society may still recall a glorious day when we made a PAS field trip to see the work in progress there. Since then, Peter has been associated with the magnificent redisplay of stones at St Vigean's, Whithorn and Iona. For his paper, he drew on recent work on some of the remains uncovered on the May focussing particularly on three individuals.

By the time the original report on the excavation was published (TAFAC monograph #6, 2008), it was clear that there was an above average level of illness and disease that left traces on the bones of those buried here. However recent technical developments, such as stable isotope analysis which can yield information about diet and where the individual was born and raised, have made it possible to learn much more. Peter pointed out that with such advances in technology, we can obtain much more information about the lives of those whose bones are recovered in the course of archaeological investigations and made an eloquent case for the respectful and careful preservation of remains rather than reburial.

The excavations on the May were centred around a Cluniac/Benedictine priory that was established on

a much older site, dedicated to St Ethernan. This was probably the Ethernan whose death (along with Corindu) 'among the Picts' was recorded in the Annals of Ulster at AD 669. At any rate, it is likely that the May and Inchcolm, the other island on the Forth with signs of early Christian activity, were on the route between Iona and its daughter house of Lindisfarne, founded in 635. Perhaps Ethernan and his companion were trained at Iona and were making their way to Lindisfarne. His shrine was preserved on the May for almost a thousand years, although it is not clear that this was the place of his death and/or burial. Nevertheless, the belief that his relics were there led to the Isle of May becoming a pilgrimage site.

Traces of his cult can be found in the ogham inscriptions on the Brodie and Scoonie stones, and in place names and church dedications such as Madderty, Aithernie, Leuchars, Kilrenny and others. On the Fife coast near the island, it is possible that there was an early monastery at Kilrenny, where the 7th century Skeith stone may have been a monastic boundary marker. Andrew Wyntoun, writing in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century specifically linked St Ethernan with the cross-marked Caiplie Caves, which look directly out to the Isle of May.

The construction of the later medieval priory damaged much of the earlier site; the early cemetery extended under the church and cloister area. A pebble storm beach had been revetted on its east side, and the early burials were found dug into it. These lay to the north, east and south of the earliest church structures and three main distinct groups could be distinguished.

In the first of these the earliest dated back to around AD500, with burials continuing for a lengthy period. This group consisted of rows of cists containing mostly the remains of older males. The second group, dated between the 7th and 10th centuries, consisted of neat rows of cists sharing side slabs. Some cists contained shell sand and into others, later burials had been inserted. The third group belonged to the period of the Benedictine abbey and included far fewer burials than the earlier parts of the cemetery. These were simple, uncisted interments.

Drawing on studies carried out by Marlo Willows, Peter went on to tell us about three individuals who were buried on the May. The first, from grave #814, was a lad of somewhere between fourteen and sixteen years of age. His home was somewhere in southern Scotland or Tayside – he may well have been from the coast fairly close by. His diet, however, had been mainly terrestrial, with marine-derived food making up only perhaps 10%. He had suffered from tuberculosis (or another similarly serious pulmonary condition), and lived and died sometime between AD 775–980. Did he come here seeking treatment for his disease?

From the same area of the cemetery, and grave #859, came the remains of a man aged somewhere between

forty-five and fifty-nine. He had been raised in the south/central highlands, having travelled perhaps a hundred and fifty miles to be buried here. Living some time between AD 655–773, he had the first case of prostate cancer attested in Britain, with signs of other cancers elsewhere in his body. If he came here hoping for a cure, he was disappointed.

The third individual, laid to rest in grave #997 among the second major group of burials, was another young man, between fifteen and seventeen years old. Another native of southern Scotland or Tayside with a largely land-raised diet, he had lived between AD 660–860. It was evident that he had been nursed throughout his short life, as he was crippled by the terrible atrophy of his leg bones consequent on congenital syphilis, the earliest known example of the condition in Britain. Again, there was no cure for him, but someone had tended him to the best of their ability. Henbane and greater celandine, both valued as medicinal herbs until recent times, still grow on the May. Were these used along with other herbs to treat patients who came here?

Another body, in grave #444, dated to between AD 650-880 had been laid on or was wearing charred wool. Had this man come (or his body been brought) in penance, hoping for the intercession of the saint? Fifty-eight articulated burials were uncovered, perhaps only 10% of the individuals buried in the cemetery. The most intensive period of use was before the establishment of Cluniac or Benedictine monks on the island in the 12th century. With 85% males, and almost 50% aged over thirty-five at death, this could look like a monastic graveyard. However, the proportion of individuals suffering from diseases that left marks on their bones is three times that found at other secular burial sites in Scotland of the same period. The cemetery was bounded to the west by a road that may have led to Saint Ethernan's shrine, possibly a wooden building on the same site as the first stone-built church. There may have been a monastery here, but there were also a large number of sick, who bequeathed us the best evidence we have of illness and of care taken of the sufferers in early medieval Scotland. The earliest known cases in the UK of prostate cancer and congenital syphilis were buried here. They, and others who were disabled through a range of conditions, witness continuing care.

Although we have learned a great deal about people who were buried on the Isle of May at an early period, there are still many unanswered questions. Were invalids brought here in the hope of a miraculous cure at the shrine of a revered saint? Did they expect expert care? Or were both true? Were bodies of the dead brought here to be buried close to the shrine? Was this location chosen for those who died here while hoping for a cure?

There are curious features at this site. Did the earliest burials predate the coming of Christianity to Fife? Although it has been argued that burial in long cists

was a Christian practice, it may have earlier origins. Remarkably, no early medieval carved stones were found during the excavation, although white quartz pebbles were present in some of the graves. Does this indicate that the Isle of May lay outside Pictish territory? Was it seen as a liminal place, an island in the sea between territories north and south of the Forth, and therefore a site to which the sick of both sides of the estuary could come as pilgrims? If this was indeed an early monastic site, what was its significance in the early period, before the rise of Kinriment/St Andrews in the eighth century? There is still much to ask of the enigmatic and lovely Isle of May.

Meg Hyland is a recent graduate of St Andrew's University. Her talk, titled *Cross slabs, Cists and Cill- Names: The Early Medieval Church in Fife*, was based on her undergraduate dissertation submitted for her degree in Medieval History.

Meg took as her starting point Simon Taylor's work on the *cill-* names of Fife. These are of Irish rather than Pictish origin. *Cill-* as a place name element is common in western Scotland but a significant isolated cluster occurs in east Fife. This may reflect the influence of the monastery of *Penrimonid (Simon Taylor's reconstruction of the original name of the monastery founded in the early eighth century at St Andrews).

James Fraser has suggested that Fife was not included in the greater Pictish kingdom until towards the end of the seventh century, when it fell into the hands of Bridei mac Der-Ilei, thus expanding the dominion of Fortriu to the south. This Bridei was a contemporary of Adomnán, Abbot of Iona. Bridei was a signatory to the document promulgating the *Cáin Adamnán*, (the Law of Adomnán) at a time when Iona was at its most influential. Bridei and Adomnán may have worked closely together. Such co-operation may provide the context for the extension of Ionan influence into eastern Fife and the foundation of a number of *cill-*named churches in the early eighth century.

Meg noted that there are eleven *cill-* names in eastern Fife: Kilconquhar, Kilduncan, Kilminning, Kilrenny, Kinglassie, Fettykill, Kilgour, Kilmany, Kilmaron, Kinglassie and Methil. She also noted that there have been many reports of finds of long cists, either as isolated instances or in organised cemeteries, from the same area. She went on to develop an idea based on a suggestion from Adrian Maldonado that long cists largely date to the period between the fifth and seventh centuries (and acknowledged that Peter Yeoman's evidence from the May Island presented earlier argues somewhat against that). She also acknowledged the suggestion that the earliest long cist burials may not be Christian, but a response to the coming of Christianity and the concern directed towards the treatment of the dead. The presence of isolated long cists can tell us very little in the absence

of direct dating evidence. However the presence of a long cist cemetery argues for the presence of an active Christian community in the vicinity before the extension of the Verturian kingdom into Fife. A long cist cemetery in the vicinity of a *cill-* name may indicate an earlier foundation renamed in the early eighth century.

Finds of long cists were reported near Kilmany, probably representing a cemetery there and suggesting an early date for a church there too. Simon Taylor has argued for the church at Boarhills as the successor to Kinglassie. A single long cist was found under the floor of the church here – not a cemetery, but suggestive nevertheless. Further south, Ross Trench-Jellicoe has suggested that a stylised Chi-Rho on the Skeith stone finds its nearest parallels at Whithorn and on the Isle of Man and western Ireland. Perhaps this lends credence to Bede's story of the southern Picts being converted by St Ninian from Whithorn.

The Skeith stone lies close to Kilrenny, with its links to Ethernan and the May. Meg noted that Thomas Clancy has argued that the translation of 'Iternan et Corindu apud Pictones defuncti sunt' in the Annals of Ulster for AD669 should read: 'Ethernan and Corindu died at the hands of the Picts' instead of the more usual 'Ethernan and Corindu died among the Picts,' suggesting that the meaning of 'apud' had changed in the Hiberno-Latin of the period. If we can accept this shift in translation, then Ethernan's death may have been recorded in the original source on Iona because he was a martyr, and not necessarily because he was a monk of Iona. After all, martyrs were rare, and many monks died unrecorded on Iona. While there was a strong tendency not to report what was happening at other monastic *familia*, perhaps a significant martyrdom would be noted. It may be that a martyred Ethernan from the seventh century was transformed into an Adrian martyred by Vikings in the ninth century as the story became later garbled. Ethernan's name does not appear to be Irish: it may in fact be of p-Celtic origin. The name, or something close to it, appears in several Welsh genealogies. Was his home perhaps on or close to the May? The May Island cemetery certainly predates any eighth century foundation at St Andrews, and it seems probable that there was a church at Kilrenny with May connections at that distant period.

At least two of the *cill-* names commemorate Dónchad, eleventh Abbot of Iona, these being Kilconquhar and Kilduncan. So far, there has been no suggestion of any pre-eighth century material at either of these two places.

Meg suggested that perhaps we should see Fife before AD 700 as lying on the northern periphery of North Britain, rather than on the southern periphery of Pictland. Around that time, it was brought under the sway of the ruler of Fortriu, an ally of the then Abbot of Iona, Adomnán. The close relationship between the Pictish king and the Ionan *familia* seems to have

survived possibly until the death of Dónchad in 716. By the mid-eighth century, Onuist son of Urguist had taken control of the Pictish kingdom, and during his reign, the monastic settlement at St Andrews seems to have flourished. The magnificent St Andrews sarcophagus may date to this period, and there is ample evidence for the production of elaborate carved cross slabs here. It is possible that Acca of Hexam, an exiled bishop from a see dedicated to St Andrew, may have brought the saints relics to the site at this time. Onuist may have richly endowed the monastery at Rigmonaid/St Andrews in order to proclaim the legitimacy of his rule; he may even have commissioned the sarcophagus for his own burial. Certainly the iconography links the sarcophagus with ideas of Davidic kingship. It probably was one of the royal centres visited regularly by a peripatetic court.

The Kilduncan stone bears features which find parallels on the Brodie stone in Moray and much further north on the Bressay and Papil stones from Shetland. Can this be seen as a central influence spreading north and south to areas recently added to Pictland?

Meg suggested that we might be more nuanced in our thinking about Picts in Fife. Although there are Pictish symbols here, there are also indications of possible links south to Whithorn and Strathclyde. Thinking of Pictland as a political entity expanding out from Fortriu in the eighth century, we might wish to re-evaluate the use of the term 'Pictish' applied to Fife before this period. At any rate, the *cill*-names point to a change in ecclesiastical organisation in the early eighth century.

Sheila Hainey

The afternoon sessions of the conference and the Sunday fieldtrip will be reviewed in the next newsletter.

PAS AGM

SRUC Elmwood Campus, Cupar, Fife,

Saturday 7 October at 17.00

1. Apologies for absence were received from Norman Atkinson, Constance Chisholm, Sarah-Louise Coleman, Bob Diamond, Ron Dutton, Sheila Hainey, John & Phyllis Mackay, Stewart Mowatt and Barbara Thompson.

2. The Minutes of the 2016 AGM were accepted as published, proposed by David McGovern and seconded by Anna Ritchie.

3. The President's and Secretary's Joint Report as published in Newsletter 84 was accepted by the meeting. They regretted the lack of progress in raising Logierait 2, a large Class II stone, from its current position lying flat on Logierait Kirk floor. Although the Kirk Session had generally supported the plan, an obstructive individual had effectively prevented their meeting again with PAS to discuss what could be done to put the stone on display, or even just to place it upright. There is a current impasse. If the stone could be housed in Perth City Museum and

displayed there, that would resolve the situation – but this is a long way off.

4. Copies of the Annual Accounts were circulated by the Treasurer Hugh Coleman, who explained that the figures for 2016 looked very similar to those of 2015. The rise in membership subscription rates should show up in next year's accounts, but on the other hand membership numbers had dropped. The accounts were approved.

5. It was agreed that the present Independent Examiner should continue in the role.

6 a) Elspeth Reid explained that she had not been Membership Secretary during the past year but was happy to resume the role if elected. She could only report on membership numbers at that point: 35 members who received postal hardcopy newsletters had renewed their subscription and 28 members who received electronic pdf copies. This total of 63 was down on previous years. The drop was probably due to the fact that reminders were not sent out last year. The good news was that 4 new members had come to the conference and one lapsed member had re-joined. The President John Borland asked her to continue a campaign of contacting previous members to try and bring them back to build up membership numbers again.

6 b) As Editor, John Borland thanked those who had submitted articles for the quarterly newsletters and invited those present to send in their work. An article by Graeme Cruickshank in *Newsletter* 84 giving his opinion on the new interpretation boards that added colours to Pictish stones might trigger a debate on the topic, to judge by comments from the audience. The Editor said that he would welcome a discussion of the merits or otherwise from members, with a view to publishing opinions in the pages of the quarterlies. It was mentioned that because of the steep rise in the cost of hiring Brechin Town House Museum, the lecture series could not possibly cover its costs. This situation was then discussed by the meeting, many people being surprised if not shocked at the high cost of the venue (£57.50 per evening). Marianna Lines suggested the McManus Museum in Dundee might be cheaper and was asked to look into it. Other suggestions were Brechin Cathedral Hall and Aberlemno Community Hall. John Borland pointed out that Brechin had the advantage that several active volunteers lived within an hour or so of the venue and could be relied upon to put out chairs, man the refreshments table, set up the equipment, etc. The Edinburgh branch of PAS had dwindled to nothing from a lack of such support. But he was nevertheless open to other ideas. He mentioned that it was difficult to foresee the popularity of events, as numbers fluctuated greatly, e.g. the attendance at Cupar conference was only two thirds of that in Inverness in 2016; some lecture evenings were much busier than others. Jane Geddes suggested holding a one-day conference (in addition to the annual October weekend conference) instead of the series of six evening lectures in Brechin, an idea that found favour with several members.

Scott Gray wondered if the conference could be streamed for the many who followed the Pictish Arts Society on Facebook. Webmaster David McGovern said that this idea had already been examined and the feedback was that many of the talks contained new pre-publication material, and that speakers would not be willing to have their work on the internet; also their illustrations were often copyright. David McGovern added that most of the 4,000+ Facebook ‘likers’ were in the USA, and yet we had only one paid-up member in the USA.

A discussion followed about sharing photographs on MyCanmore. You can upload images and contribute text directly into Canmore to enhance the collection for others.

David McGovern also mentioned that in future renewing subscriptions could be made easier by having an ‘automatic renew’ feature on the website.

7. As no nominations for office bearers had been received, there followed the re-election of John Borland (President, Editor, Events Organiser), David McGovern and Stewart Mowatt (Vice Presidents), Hugh Coleman (Treasurer), Elspeth Reid (Secretary, Membership Secretary, Archivist).

8. Sheila Hainey, Nigel Ruckley and Barbara Thompson had offered themselves for re-election to the committee and were duly re-elected. Marianna Lines nominated Dave Moir from the floor; he accepted and was elected.

9. Jane Geddes brought up the subject of how to display stones in a way that protects them from weather and other damage, yet still makes them accessible for close-up study. Glass cases make it impossible to photograph the stones, as do metal cages. She sought creative solutions to the problem of finding a self-sustaining structure that would require no maintenance or lighting.

Finally, Nigel Ruckley proposed a vote of thanks to John Borland for all his work to make the conference such a success, which prompted a round of applause from the audience.

The AGM ended.

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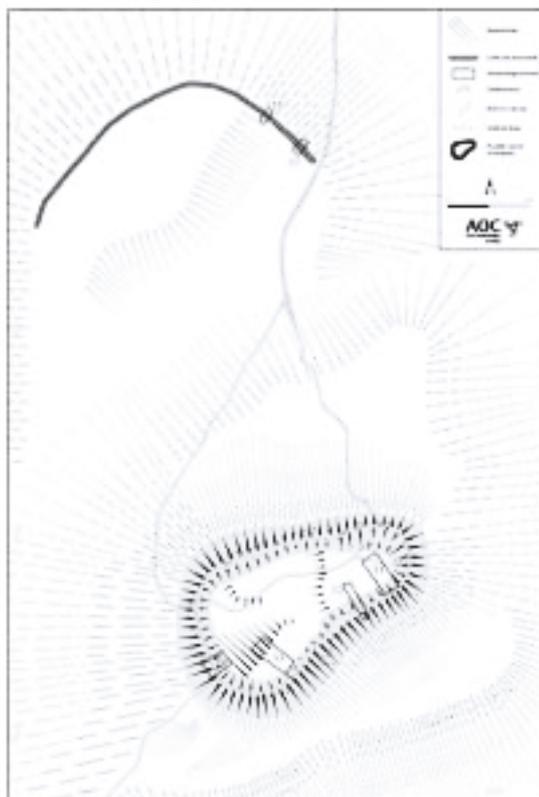
Autumn Lecture Series

15 September 2017 - Jamie Humble

Excavations at the vitrified hillfort of Dun Deardail, Glen Nevis

Jamie Humble of AOC Archaeology opened the Autumn 2017 PAS lecture series with his talk on Dun Deardail, a vitrified hillfort on a knoll overlooking Glen Nevis at 300 metres above sea level. Three years of investigation have been completed with the help of volunteers, as part of the Nevis Landscape Partnership managed by Forestry Commission Scotland.

The walls of the hillfort were constructed of stone interlaced with transverse timbers which stabilised the structure. The walls were of monumental construction being at least 5m wide and 2.5m high,



1 Plan of trenches T1-T6

in all probability topped by a timber walkway and palisade creating an even more impressive structure. There is no clear entrance. Possibly it was raised and reached by wooden steps. The area within the fort is divided into terraces, the uppermost like an inner ‘citadel’. A possible outer wall or enclosure lies to the north of the fort separated from it by a narrow flat terrace.

Six trenches were excavated.(1) They provide evidence of a consistent sequence of activity in distinct phases: first the enclosure wall is constructed; then there is early/pre-vitrification occupation of the hillfort; there follows the vitrification event and collapse of the ramparts; finally comes levelling of the collapsed material and post-vitrification occupation.

In the upper ‘citadel’ area, trench 1 revealed a series of stone-based hearths set on an extensive area of paving which pre-dates vitrification and the collapse of the rampart.(2) Layers of soil overlay these



2 Excavating hearths

features, suggesting a lull. But activity picked up again and a further series of hearths were built. Burnt animal bone and a small quantity of metal-working slag were found implying that small scale iron-working took place on the site, at least in the later phases. The hearth/furnace probably sits within the same structure as a post-pad in trench 2.

In trench 2 the team found rich organic material underneath the destruction layer associated with vitrification. It contained a huge amount of burnt barley which was freshly harvested and stored unprocessed. This concentration of grain gives us evidence of agricultural surplus being stored within a hillfort.

Two more trenches were excavated over the slight bank on the lower knoll to the north. This lower bank is much slighter than the main hillfort rampart, being c.2m thick rather than 5m. This feature dates to c.750-400BC, but its place in the sequence of ramparts is currently not clear. The best metal-working evidence was found on these lower terraces, namely a fragment of a ceramic crucible for non-ferrous metal-working. It has a projecting spout, broken after extensive use. The interior of the crucible is coated with metallic residue and the exterior is coated in a glassy brightly stained residue. There is a hint that it has been relined to extend its use.(3)



3 *Fragment of ceramic crucible*

Charred timbers of the interlaced timber construction are present in trenches 4 and 6, which should allow for good dating during post-excavation analysis. Voids are also present within the mass of vitrified stonework, one of which has impressions of the wooden timber that once lay within it.

Although the team has a number of C14 dates, they are awaiting some key dates to allow a dating scheme. The radiocarbon dates that have been returned so far relate to later phases of occupation from 4th to 1st centuries BC.

Timber lacing was employed as a technique for the strengthening of rubble cored ramparts from the later Bronze Age onward. It is now generally accepted that vitrification is a consequence of the destruction of such ramparts rather than an intentional method of strengthening them. Transforming stone by



4 *Vitrified stone in the ramparts*

extreme heat into fused lumps cannot be achieved accidentally.(4)

There are 118 sites listed in the National Monuments Record with the presence of vitrified stone, around 90 of which relate to probable later prehistoric or early historic fortification. There is a tendency to consider the sites characteristic of the later Iron Age and Early Medieval period of central and eastern Scotland. For example, Craig Phadraig, the oblong fort overlooking Inverness, was apparently occupied in the Early Historic period, leading to the perception that hilltop vitrified sites are associated with Pictish settlement. This view is supported by evidence from vitrified ramparts at other Early Historic fortifications like Urquhart Castle, Dundurn, Mote of Mark and Trusty's Hill. But, in truth, vitrification cannot be taken as diagnostic of any particular period, since vitrification has been observed in enclosures dating from 1st millennium BC through to the medieval period.

As for geographical spread, vitrification is found across Scotland from Galloway to Sutherland, and across Europe in prehistory and history. Scotland has a similar number of vitrified forts to France. The process is likely to be related to the calcined ramparts of the Welsh Marches.

Vitrified forts contain timber laced ramparts that were subsequently set on fire and needed to be kept burning for sufficient time to allow the stone to reach temperatures of 1000° C, before the stone would melt and fuse, in extreme cases into large blocks. The process is hard to achieve and unpredictable in its effect.

For an enemy to destroy hillfort ramparts required the application of fire maintained over days, which must have consumed vast amounts of wood and the labour of a large workforce. Timber would have to be carried up to the summit of the hill. Even given dry weather and high winds, the ramparts of lofty hillforts were difficult to burn down. But, although vitrification and collapse were unpredictable, the smoke by day and the fire by night, visible for miles, would have made an impressive statement of power. Modern experiments to recreate the process in summer at a low altitude have failed to achieve any vitrification. This unsuccessful result sparked many questions from the audience. Perhaps the heat can

only be produced during strong winter winds at hilltop level, and perhaps only using seasoned timber?

Vitrified hillforts have previously been considered to be evidence for the systematic and complete destruction of a site after conquest by an enemy force. However, in the absence of supporting evidence, other interpretations are possible. Might it be the closing of a site to mark a momentous occasion, such as the death of a revered chief?

Although Bronze Age finds in Glen Nevis are numerous – barbed and tanged arrowheads, axes and daggers, a halberd and a mould for casting rings – the only evidence of settlement is a few hut circles in Glen Nevis c.2km to the NE of Dun Deardail.

Ballachulish Moss, on the other hand, offers a wealth of depositions. The famous wooden female figure was found near a work site for flints within a wattled building. Animal bones and horns, bog butter and wooden basins, platters and bowls have turned up from time to time in antiquity. Several burial mounds, cairns and cists can be loosely attributed to this period.

In the Iron Age and Early Historic period, activity is more sparse and consists of enclosed sites in the form of forts, duns and crannogs. The dun at Onich, the fort at Torr an Cuin, and the crannog on Eilean Loch Arkaig, all have amounts of vitrified material visible. The hillfort of Dun Deardail is thought to be named after Deirdre of the Sorrows, the heroine of ‘The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu, a legend recorded in AD 1160 in the Book of Leinster as part of the Ulster Cycle. It is a fore tale to the Táin Bó Cuailnge – The Cattle Raid of Cooley.

Early medieval Irish myths have been said to offer a ‘window into the Iron Age’ featuring fighting and feasting, bards, champions and demigods. This tale of Deirdre of the Sorrows tells of a young girl, fleeing to Scotland with her young lover and his brothers, from an old but powerful suitor. The old king promises the brothers a pardon if they return to Ireland, but has them murdered on the way in order to marry Deirdre, who then kills herself. *ER*

Colour My World

Three responses to Graeme Cruickshank

1. Colourful Picts: a Chromatic Fantasy?

Graeme Cruickshank’s article in *PAS Newsletter* 84 is quite scathing in its criticism of both Historic Environment Scotland and Perth Museum, and rightly so. Nevertheless, although he raises a number of concerns, and argues them at great length, this is far from being the whole story. There are several other factors which provide further cause for misgivings.

While it is right that we should take seriously the possibility that Pictish carved stones were originally coloured, the emphasis in any academic consideration of the matter needs to be on that word

‘seriously’. And any account wishing to seriously suggest that the Picts coloured their stones needs to explain the practicalities of how they set about achieving that end. Put simply, what sort of paint, or other substance, are they supposed to have used, and to what purpose?

There are three crucial aspects to this problem, none of which appear to have been fully addressed by the ‘experts’, and certainly not explained. The first question is what, if any, suitable colouring mediums were available to the Picts? For example, oil paint, as far as we know, was not invented until several centuries after the Pictish era, and so could not have been used. Egg tempera was certainly available, being widely employed for manuscript illumination throughout the Early Medieval. Unfortunately, it was entirely unsuitable for outdoor use in the northern climate – it would go mouldy within a few weeks. Indeed, it was during attempts to combat this tendency, by using oil-based varnishes, that oil painting eventually evolved in northern Europe. And that was just for indoor use of the tempera medium. As for outdoor use – forget it.

Casein, a milk-based medium, would provide a better alternative to egg tempera. Its use is known from as long ago as ancient Egypt. Its later employment in northern Europe is attested to by Theophilus Presbyter, writing somewhere in the 11th or 12th centuries, but there is no evidence that the Picts had knowledge of it, though it is quite possible that they did. Unlike egg tempera, casein is too inflexible to be used on vellum, and so its absence from manuscript illuminations of the period cannot be taken as an indication that it was unknown at that time. It is a medium which would have been entirely suitable for painting relatively rough stone surfaces, having good adhesive properties and sufficient body and opacity to hide any minor imperfections, while benefiting from the rigid support provided by the stone.

On the downside, there are some doubts over its weather resistance. This would have depended to a large extent on which of the several methods of preparation was employed. A major problem with casein, certainly with regard to some of the colours which have been suggested for the Pictish stones, is the fact that it is what artists refer to as a ‘blonde’ medium – that is, it is not capable of providing deep or intense hues. This fact, together with the limited pigments available at the time, means that it would have been restricted to muted pastel shades.

Fish glue was occasionally employed for manuscript illumination, but would have been totally useless for outdoors, as would any of the other available glues made from animal skins or bones.

Beeswax would possibly have been suitable. It was used extensively by the ancient Greeks and Romans for colouring their marble statues. Indeed, that is why they favoured the use of white marble for their sculpture – it formed an ideal base for the wax medium. However, it required a great deal of skill to

master the technique of applying it, and there is no evidence to suggest that those skills were present in Early Medieval Europe. Furthermore, how many Pictish stones were carved in white marble?

The Picts certainly used colour on small metal objects, such as jewellery. However, this was achieved with enamel, and although it is technically possible to enamel onto some types of stone, this would have required popping the weighty stone into a kiln for an hour or two. Simple enough with a small brooch or pendant, but an entirely different matter with a typical Pictish cross slab. They would also be risking catastrophic damage to their carefully carved stone if it proved to be of a type which was unsuitable for firing. Anyway, enamel is exceptionally durable and had it been used on the stones, then traces would undoubtedly have survived to the present day. This is another medium that can be safely ruled out.

If we were to go on to critically consider every known colouring medium from the period, we could probably narrow the number of possible candidates down to somewhere close to zero. This fact alone brings into serious question the belief that the stones were once coloured. Unless, that is, the Picts used some other colouring medium which we had not previously suspected.

A suitable candidate might have been something like pine resin. This was certainly available locally, and has some potential as a painting medium, though there is nothing to suggest that it was ever employed in this way by the Picts or their contemporaries.

Nevertheless, in order to progress the case for coloured stones, it will be necessary to assume the use of some such medium, despite the fact that there is currently no evidence to confirm it. We must, though, remain mindful that we are proceeding on the basis of an assumption, rather than established fact.

The second aspect that needs to be considered is that this imagined medium, whatever its composition, would still require the addition of pigments to give it the variety of colours suggested. However, the range of pigments available to the Picts was, by modern standards, extremely limited.

A pigment can be any finely ground solid substance which is insoluble in the medium in which it is to be used. This necessarily excludes the various and often vivid hues available from plant and insect sources. These soluble organic materials can produce excellent dyes for colouring textiles, for example, but they are not suitable for paints, being neither a solid capable of being ground down to form a pigment, nor stable enough, in terms of their lightfastness.

Several of these organic colourants were employed in manuscript illumination, in conjunction with aqueous mediums, such as egg tempera or gum, in which they were dissolved, technically forming an ink rather than a paint. Used in this way, they were quite suitable for their manuscript role, as they were not subjected to prolonged periods in bright daylight, which would have caused them to quickly degrade.

In particular, there are three organic colourants of importance which are known for certain to have been available in northern Britain during the Early Medieval.

The first is folium, which gave pink and purple colours, and was obtained from various plant sources, principally from the turnsole plant, *crozophora tinctoria*. Another is kermes, which was an intense crimson and came from an insect, *kermes vermilio* (later replaced by another insect dye, cochineal). And then there was indigo, which provided a deep blue from the plant *indigofera tinctoria*, known to the Romans as indicum (a reference to the fact that it was imported from the Indus valley) and sometimes, especially in Europe, from woad, *isatis tinctoria*. Together, these dyes account for many of the bright and intense colours present in Early Medieval manuscripts, but none of them would have been suitable for outdoor use, further limiting the colours available to the Picts for stone painting.

Of the mineral pigments in use in the Early Medieval period, and which would have been available to the Picts, though not necessarily in large quantities, the best known is probably lapis lazuli. This intense blue pigment earned its common name, 'ultramarine', due to the fact that it was imported from its only known source, across the sea in present-day Afghanistan. Due to the distance it had to travel, and the number of hands it had passed through on the way, in addition to the many hours of labour involved in grinding down this hard gemstone material, it is not surprising that it was incredibly expensive to purchase in western Europe. Its value was further enhanced by its scarcity.

It was used sparingly in, for example, the *Book of Kells* and the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, but is completely absent from the *Book of Durrow*. In fact, the Durrow manuscript employs no blue at all, being designed entirely in red, green and yellow. This is surely not from choice. It strongly suggests that no blue pigment was available to them, or at least not at a price which they could afford. It also serves to remind us that even though a pigment is present in one particular piece of work, it would be wrong to assume that it was therefore widely available to all.

The three pigments employed in the *Book of Durrow* are common to several other manuscripts. The red is a lead oxide, which is relatively stable, but with a tendency to darken with exposure to light and air. The green pigment is copper acetate, known as verdigris, which is permanent when used alone, but reacts with other pigments and the atmosphere. The yellow is orpiment, arsenic sulphide, which happens to be incompatible with both copper and lead, the main constituents of the other two pigments. Consequently, although all three are suitable for outdoor applications when used in a suitable medium, they cannot be mixed together to provide any intermediate colours.

White lead was also known, and could have been safely mixed with red lead to provide a pink. Black

was readily available, normally being made from burnt animal bones. Material for various earth colours was, of course, immediately to hand locally, but does not appear to have been utilised to any great extent, although yellow ochre, perhaps imported, has been identified in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*.

This general absence of earth colours is quite surprising, and suggests that pigments were not being sourced locally. Although these earths would have been the most suitable materials for external use, the fact that they were mostly of similar colours to the stones themselves might have made their use appear pointless, but that does not explain their absence from manuscript pages. It is possible that their lack of any symbolic value, as discussed below, is what made them redundant.

Whichever pigments were used, they would be needed in large quantities. Whereas usage for manuscript illumination could be measured in milligrams, the quantities required for many of the larger stones would be measured in kilos. Some of the mediums mentioned earlier would only be suitable if the Picts were prepared to repaint their stones on a regular basis, perhaps once or twice a year, and thereby consuming even more materials. This would certainly rule out the use of any of the exotic and inordinately expensive imported pigments, reducing still further the range of colours available.

We could always consider the possibility that some of the stones were only coloured temporarily for special occasions, such as Easter or midsummer celebrations. In that case, durability would not be an issue, and some otherwise unsuitable medium, such as egg tempera, or even a greasepaint based on animal fat, would suffice. This would also permit the use of short-lived vegetable dyes. If this was indeed the way in which the stones were treated, it would be interesting to know how they went about repainting Sueno's Stone each year.

Having established the availability of a rather limited range of pigments to play with, the third point to be considered concerns the precise use of those colours, which, had they been employed by the Picts, would certainly not have been chosen on a whim. Nor would they have been selected merely to comply with some aesthetically inspired 'colour scheme', as suggested by the Perth Museum explanatory panel.

The concept of colour schemes and 'art for art's sake' are largely a product of the 19th and 20th centuries. Prior to that, colours were often an important element in the symbolism which was at the heart of most works produced. This was certainly the case during the Renaissance and Medieval periods, and probably in the Early Medieval, too, though here it would sometimes have been modified by the lack of availability of certain colours.

A straightforward example of the use of colour to enhance the meaning of a symbol comes from ancient Egypt. Here, the symbol for representing the sun was a simple disc. No problem there, except for the fact that the moon was also represented by a disc, of

identical size. Only the correct use of colour made it possible to distinguish between them. Red or orange identified the disc as representing the sun, while pale yellow or white indicated the moon. Using the wrong colour would change the meaning of the symbol, while using any other colour, such as blue or green, would cause confusion.

In Medieval and Renaissance Europe, Christian iconography required that Mary, mother of Jesus, be represented in a blue robe with gold trimmings. The blue was supposed to symbolize heaven, while the gold represented the stars. (A more cynical view might be that it was just an excuse for the Church to flaunt its wealth through the use of the most expensive materials.) The matter is complicated by the fact that this symbolic requirement was not rigorously adhered to. Was this due to the difficulty in obtaining supplies of the scarce blue pigment, lapis lazuli, or was it evidence of a different iconographical interpretation in some sections of the Church? Without an awareness of the symbolism involved, it would not be possible to even pose these questions. HES has chosen to apply colours to the Pictish stones in a manner which does not appear to take any account of their likely symbolic significance. For example, a convention that was common to many civilisations was that purple was a regal colour denoting kingship, and which nobody else was allowed to wear, on pain of death. It is not unreasonable to believe that this might also have applied to Pictish society. However, looking at the battle scene panel on the stone in Aberlemno kirkyard, it is clear that no account has been taken of this possibility.

At the top right of the panel is a fleeing rider, usually believed to be the Northumbrian King Ecgrith, being pursued by another rider. The fleeing rider is undoubtedly a king, as is denoted by his extra-large saddlecloth, a common symbol of supreme importance. The pursuing horseman, as is apparent from the smaller size of his saddlecloth, is some lesser noble. Nevertheless, his saddlecloth is painted purple, suggesting that he too was a king, and thus contradicting the evidence of the original carved image.

More outrageous is the rider at the bottom left of the panel, who is clearly just an ordinary mounted warrior with nothing in the carving to suggest any hint of nobility, yet he is given a purple tunic. This shows a total disregard for, or ignorance of, the likely symbolism of the colour purple.

Perhaps most disturbing of all is the use of colour on the Pictish symbols appearing on some stones. Unless they are privy to the meanings of the symbols, it seems irresponsible to apply colours which might have the effect of modifying, or even nullifying, the intended message of the symbols. It only serves to add yet another layer of confusion to an already difficult subject.

It is true that many cultures, from various periods and locations, used colour on their carved stones. Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome all routinely

painted their sculpture. But, equally, there are others such as the Maya (contemporaries of the Picts) and the Armenians, whose cross slabs (khachkar) are still being carved to this day, who undoubtedly produced uncoloured stones. Closer to home, there is evidence that some stone carvings from Early Medieval Northumbria and Mercia were painted. However, these appear to have been for display inside churches, not outdoors. As the majority, if not all, of the Pictish carvings were located outside, exposed to the elements, the English examples do not provide a valid comparison.

It is evident that some cross slab designs were copied from manuscript sources, so that might seem to imply that the colours of the originals were copied, too. But if kirkyard stones were ever coloured in the past, then the tradition must have been lost somewhere along the way – there is nothing to suggest that carved gravestones of recent centuries have ever been coloured.

On balance, it seems likely that Pictish stones were not coloured, at least not on a permanent basis. The supposed colouration, certainly in the crude form it is being presented to us, is no more than a naive fantasy – a fantasy that is being portrayed, or so it might appear to any uninformed observer, as historical fact. And that is something we are right to be concerned about. Surely a more responsible attitude to the subject is to be expected, particularly from a body specifically charged with the task of protecting and interpreting our carved stone heritage? It would appear to be nothing more than an attention-grabbing exercise targeted at gullible culture tourists. A ‘big idea’ dreamed up by some HES employee seeking to justify their own existence. There is a real danger that it could catch on and become fashionable. It would seem that Perth Museum has already been seduced by the idea – who’s next?

In their own quaint manner, these colourful confections are reminiscent of the outrageously fanciful depictions of Picts from earlier centuries, by John White and others, and are likely to be ridiculed in the same way by future historians. They are an insult to those who strive tirelessly towards a better understanding of Pictish art, and whose work is being trivialised by this misguided attempt to spice up the carvings.

In his article, Graeme Cruickshank queried why the Pictish Arts Society was not consulted on the matter. It is surely not too late for PAS to take a proactive approach and to convey our misgivings to HES, either directly, or via the news media – a topic for discussion at the next committee meeting, perhaps?

Ron Dutton

2. Colour My World; comments

Thanks are due to Graeme Cruickshank for his warning in the Autumn *Newsletter* as to HES noticeboards appearing at some of the sites of carved stones. Without having seen them I share his dismay, not at the suggestion that the stones may have been originally coloured, but at the illustrations offered.

It seems obvious that the actual colourist retained to realise the effect was poorly briefed, firstly as to the range of weatherproof colours that would be available to the Pictish painter and secondly to the clean break in style between the incision technique of one series and the relief carving of the other.

The modern colourist has used the resources of his/her paintbox to the full. Knocknagael and St Madoes are given bright simple colours, while the stone at Aberlemno kirk is made to exhibit a wide range of subdued tints, all cast into the shade by a considerable extent of blank yellow at the base.

Colours surviving elsewhere are confined to black and red. These were the possibilities available locally: black, iron oxide made from burnt bones, and red to orange, arsenic oxides (realgar) imported from the mines of Central Europe or volcanic hot springs.

In addition, the colourist recognises no difference between the outlines of figures incised into the stone as grooves, where one would expect to find colour confined to those grooves, and the relief carving of cross-stones, where the solid figures stand out against a sunken background. And then some stones combine both techniques, with panels of incised spirals below panels in relief.

In his book *Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts* Martin Carver notes on p.102 that some excavated stones bore traces of black and red paint and on p.116 he mentions that seven pieces of recovered stone, all carved with interlace, still bore evidence of having been coloured red. This preservation, he argues, ‘can be attributed to painting on the original monument’.

Flora Davidson

3. Colour me pink

Pictish stones, in all their glory, are now dull and monochrome. Mottled with patches of lichen, it is hard to see what designs are there for us to consider. But surely this is not the way they always were. The Egyptians used vivid natural mineral colours on their inscriptions and tomb art. This is verified. Other ancient cultures also used colour to illuminate their stones. It is a widely accepted belief that Pictish stones must also have been coloured in some way. After all, they used woad to paint their bodies with symbols before battle, so we are told in legend. St Andrews Cathedral Museum has several later Anglian stones that show traces of red ochre.

However, in regard to Graeme Cruickshank’s lengthy article in *Newsletter* 84, to complain about Historic Environment Scotland (HER) and their recent garish colour interpretations is another matter. HER is not exactly watching the ball, it seems, and this cartoon colouring of our ‘sacred stones’ is rather offensive and disturbing. But as I see it, the job was given to some novice graphics employee in HER who was not given much of a brief, who knew nothing about Pictish stones, and no one seemed to care about the end result. End of story. Perhaps HER would like to answer this issue or explain further. Otherwise, so what? Let’s ignore it and move on. *Marianna Lines*