

PAS Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held at the Meffan, Forfar, on Saturday 19 May 2007.

The following Office Bearers were elected:

President: Norman Atkinson

Vice Presidents:

David Henry, Stewart Mowatt

Secretary: Sheila Hainey

Treasurer: Andrew Munro

Membership Secretary: Joy Mowatt

Librarian: Joy Mowatt

Editorial Committee:

David Henry, John Borland,
Niall Robertson

Events Organiser: Eileen Brownlie

Committee member: Liz Tosh



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Stewart Mowatt, winding up his three-year term as Secretary, with Norman Atkinson starting another term as President

A short report will appear in the next Newsletter prior to our first meeting of the season at Pictavia.

PAS Annual Conference

PLEASE NOTE

THE DATE AND VENUE

Saturday 6 October 2007

A K Bell Library, Perth

DETAILS IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

The Picts in Caithness

PAS & Caithness Archaeological Trust

Conference and Field Trip

Saturday 1 September 2007

Dunbeath Heritage Centre, Dunbeath

Registration from 9.15am.

Conference starts at 10.30 with a Public Lecture

‘Pictish Sculpture & Lay Patronage’

delivered by LLOYD Laing. Pulling on a lifetime of research and a taster of research just beginning on the Pictish past of Caithness – including work on the chapel site of Ballachly.

Thereafter:

Alex Woolf

The Picts in Icelandic Tradition: Norse Settlement in Caithness Revisited

Niall Smith

**“Blessing of Sun, Rank blessing. Blessing of Moon, Honour Blessing”:
A Re-interpretation of the Pictish King Lists**

Raymond Lamb

The Pictish Art of Equitation

tbc

A talk on Pictish Place-name evidence

Lunch

A buffet of local food and time to look around the newly-renovated Museum.

After the talks (weather permitting) there will be a guided tour of Ballachly Chapel site – a short distance from the museum.

Evening

Ceilidh at Dunbeath (venue to be confirmed) – don’t forget your musical instruments. Stories provided on site.

Sunday 2 September

Tour of the county’s rich archaeology, including the rare privilege of visiting the private Sandside estate to see the Sandside symbol stone.

For more information and to register your interest in attending please contact Eileen Brownlie at

<eileencbrownlie@hotmail.com>

PAS Membership

We have regularly published reminders about subscription payments in the Newsletter, and ultimately given notice of removal of non-payers from our mailing list, but as these have been generally ignored, we decided recently to contact individual members whose subscription had lapsed. This direct mailing has involved a lot of extra effort and expense, but we are happy to report its success, as more than fifty members have returned to the fold.

We do understand that there has been some continuing confusion since the change of our subscription year from April to September, but nobody had to pay for those six months and this seemed to be an adequate period of adjustment; there had also been a problem identifying standing orders and direct debits but this has now been cleared up. Our Treasurer, Andrew Morton, and new Membership Secretary, Joy Mowatt, will ensure that our records are accurate and up-to-date. You too can help them by paying subscriptions promptly and heeding any information about membership that appears in future Newsletters. Any enquiry or issue regarding membership should be sent to the *Membership Secretary, Pictish Arts Society* at the Pictavia address.

The Iron Age Archaeology of Angus

Professor Ian Ralston gave a talk on the archaeology of Angus to the AGM at the Meffan on 19 May.

With its fine collection of Pictish stones, Angus might be expected to have a great deal of Pictish archaeology, however, as Professor Ralston revealed, it has proved so far difficult to find. Much of the work on which he based his talk was carried out by the Centre for Field Archaeology, which targeted several types of landscape in Angus over a number of years.

Sites occupied in the Iron Age and the Roman period include promontory forts at Castle Rock and West Mains of Ethie, spectacularly sited on the cliffs north of Arbroath. The classic Angus souterrains, such as those at West Grange of Conon and Tealing, as well as smaller versions found at Dalton and Auchlishie were being



© Joy Mowatt

Sheila Hainey our new Secretary with Professor Ian Ralston at the Meffan

built by the end of the first millennium BC and also continued in use through the Roman centuries. Earlier inhabitants of Angus built the great hillforts at Finavon and the Caterthuns; limited excavations have so far failed to provide evidence of use in Pictish times.

At several of the well-defined cropmark sites in the coastal lowlands, repeated ploughing has removed most of the traces of former occupation, leaving only features such as post-holes and ditches that were cut deeply into the original ground surface. Material that can be dated rarely survives under these conditions. At least one possible timber-built structure at Newbarns may represent the lowland version of the Pitcarmick-type buildings which almost certainly date to the Pictish period.

An unpromising splodge visible on aerial photographs at Hawkhill covered a much greater depth of archaeology than at most of the sites with much sharper lines. Here there may have been a below ground storage area, in effect a cellar, with living area on a timber floor. The remains of three women were dumped in a pit overlying the last phase fill of a souterrain sometime around AD 900, their remains helping to date the use of the site, but raising more questions as to why and how they were disposed of in such a seemingly casual manner.

More formal burials are represented by the Pictish graves uncovered at Boysack Mills and Redcastle. These consist of low round or square barrows raised over extended burials in coffins or long cists. The barrows were surrounded by ditches, broken at the corners in the case of the square type. At Boysack Mills, the coffin was placed in a deep pit; at Redcastle, some of the graves appeared very shallow, perhaps as a result of plough damage.

There are some indications that much Pictish period archaeology in lowland Angus may have been lost over many years of arable farming. The discovery that indistinct cropmarks may cover considerably greater depth of archaeology than clearly delineated ones must give cause for concern. It may well require a new strategy to dealing with the vanishing resource that is lowland archaeology across much of Scotland. Professor Ralston, in collaboration with Andrew Dunwell of CFA, has written a book *Angus: Archaeology and Early History*, the first modern synthesis of the archeology of the county, which is due for publication by Tempus within the next few months. Look out for it.

Sheila Hainey

Field Trips

While we are not having a field trip attached to the Perth conference in October for those who would like a trip around some stones and carvings in Fife/Perthshire we thought we might arrange a couple of day trips in July /August.

We will have quite a few site visits following our conference in Caithness in September and for more information on that or if you wish to receive info about the summer trips please contact me either by email on

<eileencbrownlie@hotmail.com>

or by telephone 0131 332 0277 (this number has an answer machine).

Look forward to hearing from you.

Eileen Brownlie, Events Organiser

West Angus field trip

Following the AGM, several participants went on a mini-jaunt to the west of Glamis. First stop was Denoon Law, which, according to Ian Ralston, is the most likely of the Angus hillforts to provide evidence for its use in Pictish times. We enjoyed the views from the blustery summit and, under Norman's direction, looked down on the site of the discovery of the Wester Denoon stone. This is a potential venue for another trip to see if any traces remain of a former chapel on the site.

Next we went to Kirkinch where the consolidated ruin of the former parish church of Nevay, dedicated to St Ninian, stands within a circular burial ground on a prominent mound

which was formerly an island in an extensive mire. This sacred site – a pre-Christian *nemeton* – was adopted and sanctified in Early Christian times. Two early cross-carved stones were discovered and recorded by Niall Robertson in 1988 but one of these mysteriously disappeared shortly afterwards; the other is on display at the Meffan, Forfar. In the absence of these stones at the site, our attention was drawn to a curious gravestone preserved within the ruins, which has a goatee-bearded head carved on both sides of a projection from its top (see below).

Our last stop was at Eassie old church – another ruin on a mound – to see the Pictish cross-slab housed there. At least that was our intention, but the glass-walled protective shelter around it makes this well-nigh impossible. In most conditions it is possible to view the cross-face reasonably well, but this is not the case with the reverse because of its angle to the shelter wall and the obtrusive nature of the glass and its reflections. As this face is badly damaged it is important that it can be examined closely and in controlled lighting to optimise the evidence



YOU HAVE BEEN FRAMED

Curious beardies at Kirkinch. The editor looking into the church with Kinpurney Hill and its conspicuous tower behind.

Photos © Joy Mowatt

that can be gleaned from what remains of the sculpture.

Some members of the party consoled themselves at by buying up the last of that day's crop of the famed Eassie asparagus.

Promoting PAS

Our new leaflet, copy enclosed, has just arrived from the printer. We are grateful to Marianna Lines and Ron Dutton for their efforts in producing this, and to Bob Henery for supplying most of the photographs.

Stewart Mowatt our ex-Secretary has taken over responsibility for promoting PAS and in the next Newsletter he will explain his plans and probably will be seeking your help in local distribution of the brochure. He will continue to publicise the activities of the Society through press-releases which have played a great part in the past in ensuring a good turnout to our Pictavia lectures.

Pictavia re-enactment

Meet the Picts at Brechin

Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 July 2007

Fighting off the Vikings and demonstrating their way of life in a Living History event at Pictavia, in the Brechin Castle Centre Country Park. Entry via Pictavia.

Pictavia organisers would welcome the participation of PAS members on these days – perhaps if only to correct a few misconceptions and set the clock right – the following illustrations having inexplicably appeared on their 'advance notice'!



'Museum on the Move: Picts'

Young people in Angus will be able to find out more about the Picts thanks to a new museum pack. National Museums Scotland have created a new hands-on pack about the Picts, specifically for use by schools, families and communities in Angus.

Museum on the Move: Picts is the result of two years' collaboration between National Museums Scotland, Angus Council and Tayside Museums Learning and Access Partnership. The resource has been funded entirely by National Museums Scotland but will be managed at local level by Angus museum staff. The pack consists of four crates, each containing a range of activities, replica objects and fascinating facts about the Picts, with the emphasis on the Picts in Angus. It has been designed to be used in museum galleries or in the classroom and will be available to Angus schools.

There are eight activity areas in the resource, including *Dress Like a Pict* with replica cloaks, plaid, trousers and dresses; a jigsaw timeline and map to help find the Picts in time and place; *Daily Lives* with the chance to grind grain using a quernstone, spin wool with a spindle and whorl or make a replica pot.

Other activities focus on the main source of evidence for the Picts – their carved stones. There are worksheets to design and print symbol stones, clues to unlock the secrets of Pictish scenes, and jigsaws to try and assemble the complex Christian scenes on two of the Aberlemno stones. Christine McLean, access and outreach officer at National Museums Scotland, said:

We are delighted to launch *Museum on the Move: Picts* in Angus. We have worked hard with Angus Council staff to design a learning resource that will meet the needs of local schools and communities. Where possible, we have used Pictish stones from Angus to illustrate our key themes and stories.

We hope that people will be encouraged and inspired to go and visit these stones, in the landscape across Angus, in their local museums and of course at the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Lottery award

How they brought the good news from G2* to PAS

The winter lectures at Pictavia are a continuing success but it has been obvious for some years past that modern technology was leaving us behind. Up until only a few years ago it was perfectly acceptable for the Pictish Arts Society to provide a slide projector and screen for visiting lecturers whilst they brought their own photographic transparencies. More recently, however, the trend is for text and visuals to be part of a multimedia production, created as a PowerPoint presentation or similar and probably stored on an external disc or memory device.

The advantage for the lecturers is that all they have to bring is a disc or memory stick but we need to provide a multimedia projector and laptop computer from which to display the images. Some of the lecturers kindly agreed to bring the necessary equipment but where this was not possible, Vice President Sheila Hainey came to our rescue and provided it.

It was obvious to the committee that this situation could not continue if we wished to maintain the quality of our lectures. We also recognised that if the laptop computer were loaded with the appropriate software, we could catalogue the Society's written resources and photographs in order to make them available for all to study. This presented a challenge in terms of cost and it was quickly realised that the thousands of pounds involved would be beyond our financial means. It was also known that other heritage societies had made successful applications to Awards for All (part of the Lottery Fund) for projects similar in nature to ours, so it was agreed to submit an application.

Whilst the application form was not unduly complicated it took some thought as to what software would best meet the cataloguing task and Angus Council provided much assistance with advice on matching the technical specifications to our requirements.

Delays followed whilst a new treasurer was confirmed in place and an independent referee found, as required by the conditions. In due course I received a call in early 2007 from Awards for All seeking assurance that, though our preferred start date for the award had been given as October 2006 (the date of the first 2006/

07 lecture), we had not yet purchased any equipment. I was able to assure the caller that we were struggling on as we had done in the past and nothing had yet been purchased, a situation that would have invalidated our application. She advised me that the application would now go forward to the next panel and I should have a response by mid March.

To my delight, I received a letter in early March advising me that the full amount of £3,500 requested had been awarded but could not be made public until 30 March. This amount covers the purchase of a laptop with case and software, a printer, a wireless projector, a replacement lamp, a storage cupboard and consumables. It will be a task for the new committee elected at the AGM on 19 May to source and purchase this equipment. Awards for All Scotland requires that everything is purchased within 12 months of the award being granted. The task of cataloguing our papers etc. will be scheduled after the equipment is in our possession. You will hear more details of this and further developments in due course.

Stewart Mowatt

*G2 is the postal district of the Big Lottery Fund office in Glasgow.

St Vigeans Museum plans

At last the long-awaited plans to modernise and extend St Vigeans Museum are the subject of an application seeking listed building consent from Angus Council.

The famed collection, comprising 38 stones and fragments, 32 of which are early medieval in date, is currently housed in a converted cottage at 3 Kirkstyle and it is proposed to extend the display area through the mutual gable into the adjoining property, 4 Kirkstyle, which is presently used as a store. This will allow for a greatly improved display of these treasures and a new and up-to-date exhibition of the stones should make the collection a popular visitor attraction in Angus. Also, as it is hoped to have a member of staff at the museum to give help and information to visitors, a new extension housing a small office and toilet is proposed to be built at the back of the buildings. It is hoped that the new-look museum would be open in spring or summer of next year.

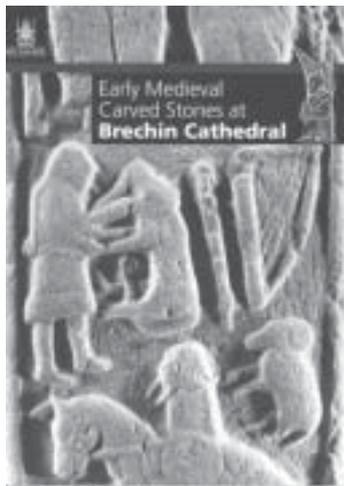
Graeme Bell, district architect at Historic Scotland said:

The Pictish history of Angus is one of its great attractions, bringing visitors from all around Scotland and the rest of the world. The St Vigean's stones are one of the area's hidden gems and we want to give more people the chance to see and enjoy them.

The changes are modest and involve a light touch but would transform the way we can exhibit this collection. We want to create more room for people to move around, present the stones so visitors can see them really well and update all the information to include the latest research on their origins and history.

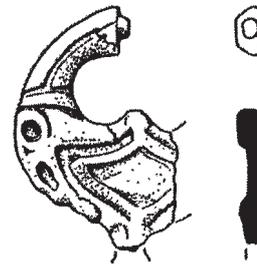
This is exciting news and, following the undoubted success of the re-display of the Whithorn carved stones, presents Historic Scotland with an opportunity to show what it can do to transform the display of a more diverse collection of material. Of course other collections are crying out for similar treatment; most notably that housed at St Andrews Cathedral. The Meigle collection too requires much more research and a radical re-display with improved interpretation for visitors. Perhaps after all this, enough lessons will have been learned to allow for the realisation of a truly worthy solution to house and display the magnificent carved stones of Aberlemno.

Brechin cathedral collection



The display of early medieval carved stones in Brechin Cathedral is anything but satisfactory, however the collection can now be readily appreciated from your armchair, having been brought together in an attractive new booklet published by RCAHMS. As PAS was one of the sponsors of this publication we are pleased to send a copy to members along with this newsletter.

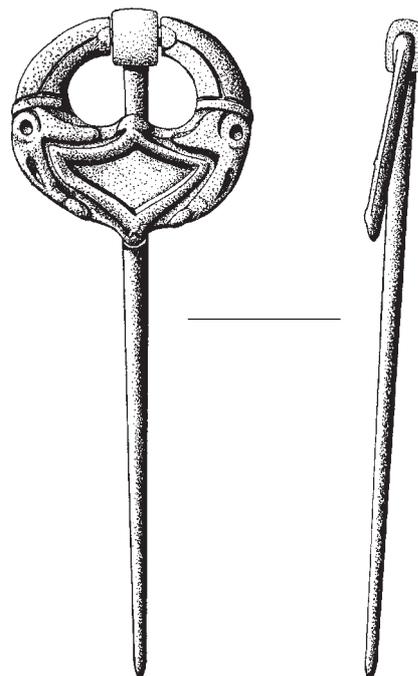
Birnie excavations



© Alan Braby

The latest report of the ongoing excavations at Birnie (see PAS News) has been published¹. Amongst the finds described (pp36-7) is the exciting news of the discovery, by metal-detecting, of a fragment of Pictish metalwork –

the first secure piece of Pictish evidence from the site. This is the hoop of a brooch-pin or hinged-pin – a development of the pennanular brooch, where the hoop is reduced to a decorative device (Stevenson 1989²; Youngs 1989, 92³). A little over half the hoop survives, with a pair of snarling dragons or similar monsters facing one another, their gaping jaws forming a diamond-shaped device in the middle. Similar animal designs are found on late Pictish metalwork, such as pennanular brooches from St Ninian's Isle, Shetland, and Freswick, Caithness (Wilson 1973, 96–7, pl XXXIVa, XLIXd⁴); these suggest a late eighth–ninth century date for this item.



© Alan Braby

Speculative reconstruction of the Pictish brooch-pin

¹ Hunter, F *Excavations at Birnie, Moray, 2006* (Edinburgh: Dept of Archaeology, National Museums Scotland, 2007)

² Stevenson, R B K 1989 'The Celtic Brooch from Westness, Orkney, and hinged-pins', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 119, 239–69

³ Youngs, S (ed) 1989 *'The work of angels': masterpieces of Celtic metalwork, 6th–9th centuries AD*. London: British Museum

⁴ Wilson, D M 1973 'The Treasure', in A Small, C Thomas and D M Wilson, *St Ninian's Isle and its treasure*, 45–148. Oxford: OUP

Drawings by Alan Braby. Thanks to Fraser Hunter for granting permission to reproduce text and illustrations from his report.

**Birnie excavations will continue this year
from 19 August – 14 September**

visitors are welcome within working hours:
9–6 daily except Saturdays

Open day 2007

Sunday 9 September

with guided tours on the hour and
various craft activities

The site is at NJ 208 589 on the Birnie to Elgin road. From Elgin, heading for Thomshill, drive past the turn-off to the church and take the next right, opposite a small cottage. Just before some trees on the right, turn right into a field and park by the Portakabin. If wet, park at the church and walk down.

Govan Old Church

A community has been left in shock after a historic Glasgow church was forced to close under merger plans.

Govan Old Parish Church, which was built in 1888, is part of a site of religious worship which dates back to the sixth century. Its relics predate Glasgow Cathedral and are as culturally significant as artefacts at St Andrews and on the holy isle of Iona.

But the Church of Scotland has decided the church building will no longer be used as a place of worship under plans to amalgamate three Govan parishes. Linthouse St Kenneth's Church will also close its doors and all parishioners will move to New Govan Church.

The minister of Govan Old, the Rev Norman Shanks, described the church as a 'national treasure' that was 'internationally known'. He added:

Families have been coming here for generations and they see themselves not just as worshippers

but as custodians of everything that is here. There are a lot of wounded feelings at the moment. People are in shock, they are angry but they have been remarkably gracious.

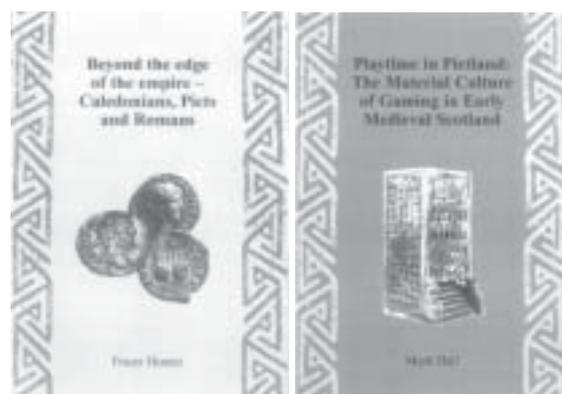
But Mr Shanks believes the A-listed building could form the centrepiece of a major historical tourist attraction.

It will close as the principal church of worship on Sunday mornings and it will be up to the new kirk session to decide what happens to the building. Govan Old is a national treasure and it is conceivable a solution will be found to keep the building open for a number of purposes including worship. There have been services held here since 1888 and there is no reason why it could not have a future as a national tourist attraction. It could be a community facility, a meeting place, a performance venue. Govan is changing with the BBC at one end and the new Southern General Hospital at the other. Within the new Govan there is an action plan for a conservation area and the church could easily be a feature of that.

Dr Stephen Driscoll, professor of archaeology at Glasgow University, said the decision to close Govan Old – made by the Kirk's arbitration committee – was 'extraordinary'.

And an ex-minister of the church, the Rev Tom Davidson Kelly, said: "I can think of no country in Europe where a church community would willingly give up a sixth-century place of burial, worship and service."

Publication imminent



Two recent academic lectures in the Groom House series, one given by Fraser Hunter the other by Mark Hall, are due to be published soon.

Beyond the Edge of the Empire – Caledonians, Picts and Romans by Fraser Hunter

ISBN 978 0 9540999 2 3

Playtime in Pictland: The Material Culture of Gaming in Early medieval Scotland

by Mark Hall ISBN 978 0 9540999 1 6

This is the same lecture that Mark delivered to PAS at Pictavia in February.

Both titles can be ordered from Groam House price £5 each including postage. This year's lecture will be delivered by Professor Martin Carver (see below).

Arbuthnott kirkyard wall



Concrete blocks protect the steel supports holding up Arbuthnott churchyard wall

The carved stone fragment at Arbuthnott church (see PAS News 40, 9) may be under threat, as the churchyard wall in which it is located has become dangerous and is to be rebuilt. The wall had started to bulge outwards due to its age and the weight of about seven feet of soil in the graveyard behind it. Last autumn, the kirk session alerted Aberdeenshire Council, the owner of the cemetery, and, after consultation with Historic Scotland, the wall has been shored up for safety pending repair work. It will be rebuilt using concrete faced with natural stone and the work will be done without disturbance to the cemetery.

The writer of the press report in the *Courier* (16 April 2007) couldn't resist the temptation to use the following puns in describing the operation and its delay: 'grave concern', 'right unholy mess' and 'unearthly time'.

Meanwhile the fate of the fragment is not known

Groam House Museum

is celebrating the Year of Highland Culture with an exciting exhibition programme featuring the life and work of George Bain.

George Bain – A Highland Homecoming brings together selected items from the museum's own collection of Bain's work with previously unseen items. The next venues of the exhibition's Highland tour are:

Glenurquhart Community School,
Drumnadrochit

26 June – 22 September

Timespan, Helmsdale

29 September – (tbc)

Theory into Practice:

George Bain and the Celtic Art Revival

Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie

1 May 2007 – April 2008

An exhibition reflecting the ancient influences that informed Bain's Mastery of Celtic Art will be displayed for a year amidst the Museum's collection of Pictish sculptured stones and accompanied by decorated metalwork and jewellery objects, specially loaned by the National Museums of Scotland.

Free admission to the museum in 2007

Annual Academic Lecture

20 July 2007

Fortrose Community Theatre
at 7.30pm £3.00 (Members £1.50)

Picts and Monasteries:

the Portmahomack Story

Professor Martin Carver, University of York

Groam House Museum, High Street,
Rosemarkie, Ross-shire IV10 8UF

Tel: Museum 01381 620961

Office 01463 811883

Newsletter contributions

Please keep PAS informed of your news and views – send articles, reviews, pictures etc. by email to

<pas.news@btconnect.com>

or by post to **The Editor, PAS News** at the Pictavia address. The deadline for receipt of contributions to PAS Newsletter 43 is 19 August 2007.