



PAS events 2013–14

Last year we trialled a different timetable for our winter season of talks at Pictavia, taking a break from December to February so that speakers and members didn't have to run the gauntlet of winter weather to get there. Ironically last winter was exceptionally mild and there was very little snow. However the trial worked well, with good attendance before and after the break, so we will use that timetable again this year, with meetings on the third Friday of the month during September, October, November and March, April, May.

Last October, we co-hosted a joint talk in Perth Museum with the Perth Society of Natural Science, where a packed house of both society's members, and a fair few non members were treated to an excellent presentation by Dr Gordon Noble on his most recent season of digging at Rhynie. By any measure, the evening was a roaring success and our thanks must go to those PAS members who are also PSNS members for putting the two societies in touch with each other. If you are a member of another local history or heritage society and think that its members might enjoy linking up with PAS, do please put them in touch with us (or vice versa). Our first collaborative event was too successful to be our last.

Pictavia lectures 2014*

19 September

Samuel Gerace

Moving Heaven on Earth:
Material, Form and Function
of Insular House-Shaped Shrines

17 October

Dr Clare Ellis

Early Historic Baliscate, Isle of Mull:
The Archaeological Evidence for
a Monastic Establishment

21 November

Norman Atkinson

The Dunnichen Stone – Lost and Found

* See p. 3, col 2, para 2

Conference reminder

Remember to book your place for the 2014 Pictish Arts Society Annual Conference on Saturday 4 October in Caithness Horizons, Thurso.

With the theme *Northern Picts, Northern Neighbours*, this year's conference has a stellar line-up of speakers including Dr Barbara Crawford, Dr Anna Ritchie, Dr Victoria Whitworth, Dr Donna Hedde, Dr Ragnhild Ljosland and Dr Graham Cavers to name but some.

For those travelling north by road on Friday 3 October, there is a rare opportunity to gain free access to Dunrobin Castle Museum to see its unparalleled collection of Pictish symbol stones, courtesy of the Duke of Sutherland. Spaces are limited so advance booking is required.

On Friday evening, delegates can preview the newly refurbished and extended display of Pictish and Early Medieval sculpture in Caithness Horizons

Intending delegates can sign up for a field-trip on the Sunday morning, which will take in a number of stones not readily accessible to the public. Spaces on the coach (£10 per person) are limited so pre-booking is essential. Delegates are advised to bring appropriate footwear and waterproofs. The fieldtrip will return to Thurso by noon for those travelling by train. For those not rushing away, there may be an opportunity to visit the ruins of St Peter's Church.

A **conference booking form** is included or book on-line at:

www.thepictishartsociety.org.uk

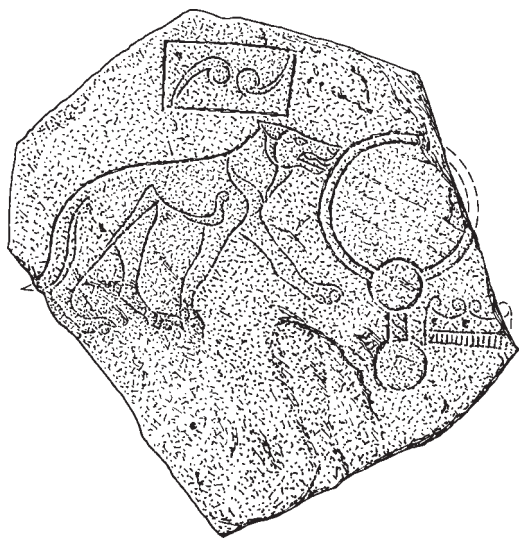
NTS redisplay symbol stones at Leith Hall

The National Trust for Scotland has redisplayed two Aberdeenshire Pictish stones in the grounds of Leith Hall.

Until recently, Newbigging, Leslie (1) and Percylieu (2) had been displayed in a low lean-to shed in the gardens of Leith Hall, along with numerous other unrelated stone artefacts, such

as quern- and mill-stones. However, following conservation the symbol stones have been set into purpose-built niches, allowing them to be seen at close quarters whilst protecting them from the worst of the elements (3).

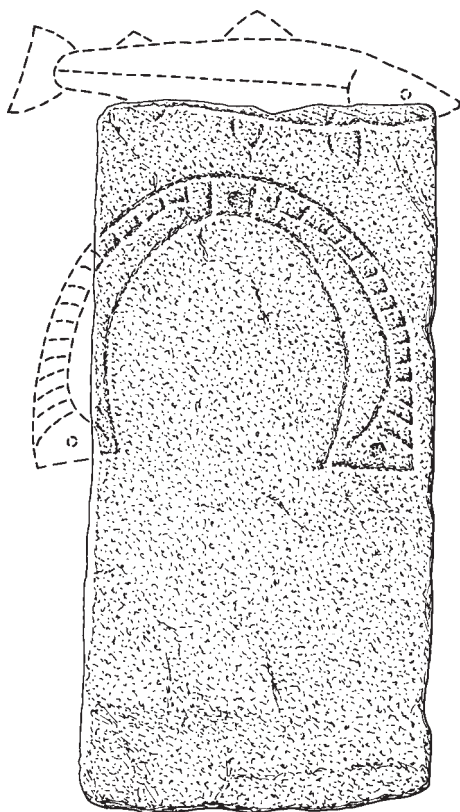
J Borland © Crown copyright RCAHMS



1 *Newbigging, Leslie, scale 1:10*

Following on from the new protective barrier and interpretation board for Rodney's Stone at Brodie Castle (*Newsletter 67*), it is encouraging to see the NTS taking steps to better care for and present their small but important collection of Pictish sculpture.

J Borland © Crown copyright RCAHMS



2 *Percylieu, scale 1:10*



© Shannon Fraser

3 *The stones in their niches in the grounds of Leith Hall*

Notice of PAS AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Pictish Arts Society will be held at Caithness Horizons in Thurso on Saturday 4 October at 5.00 pm to consider the following business:

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Approval of the 2013 AGM minutes (see Newsletter 69)
- 3 Annual Report – President
- 4 Honorary Secretary's Report
- 5 Treasurer's Report: Presentation and Approval of Annual Accounts
- 6 Appointment of an Independent Examiner
- 7 Determination of Subscription Rates
- 8 Other Honorary Officers' Reports:
 - (a) Membership Secretary
 - (b) Editor
- 9 Election of Honorary Officers:
 - (a) President
 - (b) Two Vice Presidents
 - (c) Secretary
 - (d) Treasurer
 - (e) Membership Secretary
 - (f) Editor
 - (g) Events Organiser
 - (h) Archivist
- 10 Election of Committee: minimum six, maximum twelve
- 11 Any other competent business

Note: Business will begin at 5.00pm prompt.

Please send nominations for committee members, and note of any matters you wish to raise, to the Honorary Secretary at Pictavia.

President's & Secretary's combined report 2013–14

It is hard to fathom fluctuations in attendance at our Pictavia lectures. During the 2011–12 season, we found ourselves laying out extra seats for almost every lecture yet despite speakers of equal calibre and topics of equal interest, numbers for the 2012–13 season were variable and on occasion, downright low. This variance was not solely because of adverse weather but storms and blizzards during the darkest winter months have been a recurring problem for members and speakers alike. So for the 2013–14 season, the committee decided to try a change in schedule and we met September – November and March – May, avoiding darkest winter. Thankfully all six of last season's lectures were better attended than in the previous year, which is encouraging for both speakers and the organising committee. We thank all the speakers, members and guests who make those Friday evening trips and encourage those of you within travelling distance to continue to support these events.

The 2013 conference was also successful, with a respectable number of members attending the AK Bell Library, Perth to hear an excellent line-up of speakers covering various aspects concerning 'Southern Picts, Southern Neighbours'. Likewise, we thank all the speakers, our morning and afternoon chairpersons and all the members who attended for making it a memorable day.

Last year PAS also organised a lecture in conjunction with the Perth Society of Natural Science. The event, held in Perth Museum's excellent lecture theatre, drew a full house to hear about Pictish matters. There is an obvious benefit to our society in holding joint events which increase our reach so please get in touch if you know of another society with which we might link up.

During the summer of 2013, the committee became concerned about the plight of several Pictish stone fragments that lay on the floor inside Glamis church, so initiated discussions with the Glamis minister, Parish Council and Kirk Session. A small delegation from PAS had an initial meeting with the Parish Council but failed to reach consensus on a way forward. However a subsequent meeting with the Kirk

Session proved constructive and after exploring all options without prejudice or rancour, an agreement was reached to allow the Meffan Institute in Forfar to hold the stones in care, until such time as arrangements can be made in Glamis for the stones to be safely displayed there. Letters between the Kirk Session and Angus Council were exchanged and the stones duly transferred to the Meffan. We consider this a very good outcome. We would like to thank the members of Glamis Kirk Session for the invitation to discuss the matter with them, for their warm welcome and co-operation.

In May of this year, Angus Council instituted a consultation process about the future of Pictavia, where footfall has been disappointing. PAS was invited to contribute to this process so the President attended, along with other stakeholders. A decision on whether Pictavia will continue in business is imminent, with obvious consequences for our Society should we lose our lecture venue. If we do find ourselves looking for a new lecture venue, we will endeavour to give members as much notice as possible of any change via local press and on the website. We will keep members posted.

The Society's online presence has again grown over the past year, with our Facebook community of 'likers' reaching more than 3,000. Our website now carries 22 back numbers of *PAS Newsletter*, with more coming soon. There is also a useful index.

None of the last four editions of the *Newsletter* have been lacking in content, thanks to your support. Thanks as ever should also go to David Henry for his enormous input to the *Newsletter's* layout, production and distribution.

In recent years a lone champion has doggedly raised the issue of reviving the *PAS Journal* at our AGM and indeed he does so again in writing in this edition. Graeme Cruikshank's letter starts and finishes with a question: Is there a future for the *PAS Journal*? If discussions at past AGMs are anything to go by, Graeme may feel he is addressing that question to the committee. But it should be addressed to, and hopefully will engender a response from you, the membership.

*John Borland (President)
& Dr Elspeth Reid (Hon Secretary)*

Is there a future for *PAS Journal*?

Once upon a time, there was a publication called the *Pictish Arts Society Journal*. This sprang from the *PAS Newsletter*, which had grown out of its socks, developing in areas beyond what was expected, or even intended, at its inception.

The first issue of the *Newsletter* came out in the autumn of 1988, when the Society was still wet behind the ears. It opened with an article by Stuart McHardy posing the question ‘Why the Pictish Arts Society?’, followed by David Clement examining ‘Who were the Picts?’, while Marianna Lines upheld the current aspect of the Society’s interests by looking at ‘Pictish Artists Today : who’s doing what where?’. Newsy bits followed, with illustrated press extracts featuring the Pictish stones at Ulbster and Shandwick, the start of a Rescue File, and details of PAS activities, starting with a field trip to Strathmore and Meigle on 1 October, and the lecture series kicking off later that month with Graeme Cruickshank presenting his appraisal of the Battle of Nechtansmere (as most folk called it back then).

Having laid down the Society’s building blocks in print, subsequent issues of the *Newsletter* concentrated on news, though not exclusively, and other topics got an airing on a regular basis. Indeed, issue No 2 contained an examination of the Inchbrayock stones by Norman Atkinson which ran to five A4 pages, occupying almost 25% of the magazine. Reports, reviews, and letters to the Editor became a feature of further issues, which were growing in size; No 7 (Winter 1990), without any sizeable articles, exceeded 30 pages in length. No 8, issued some six months later, was even larger, though it did contain an article on ‘Women in Pictish Sculpture’ by Niall Robertson which ran to 14 pages out of 33. No 9 (maintaining the six-month interval) was 43 pages long, and contained a catalogue of the Pictish stones of Orkney superbly illustrated by Jack Burt (8 pages).

Could such a vehicle for disseminating various types of Pictish material really continue to be called a newsletter? This question exercised the minds of the PAS Committee, and in the absence of Chairman David Clement (on sick leave), the Vice-Chairman, Graeme Cruickshank, and the Secretary, Tom Gray, came up with a plan to split our single publication into two, the *Newsletter* continuing but limiting itself to actual

news, plus some stimulating if half-baked jottings, distributed to PAS members only, with a new *Journal* comprising well-researched and fully-referenced articles of a standard which would be of interest to the wider academic world and would find a place on library shelves accessible to the public.

PAS Journal No 1 made its appearance in the spring of 1992, though ironically its 43 pages (that number again) contained more news items than serious articles! The same applied to No 2 (of exactly the same length) which appeared that autumn. By issue No 4, however, the *Journal* had come into its own, now exceeding 50 pages, with the great majority being devoted to in-depth studies. Meantime, the *Newsletter* continued, reflecting its new freedom in its exhilarating style of presentation. There was a little confusion over the numbering of the first of the new breed, as it was called No 2 (?) whereas it was actually No 10. The next eight issues of the *Newsletter* were unnumbered, the sequence picking up again in the winter of 1998/9 with No 17 (actually No 19), and righting itself with No 20 appearing in the spring of 2000. The length was dependent upon the availability of material, and varied between two and 20 pages.

The *Journal* went from strength to strength, the quality of its articles winning respect from a broad spectrum of interested parties. It came out mostly at six-monthly intervals until the end of the twentieth century, but in the year 2000 (the numerate among you will realise that is not yet in the twenty-first century) there was a change in the tide. Having chalked up a highly creditable 15 issues in less than a decade, the present century has seen but two volumes to date – No 16 (claiming a publication date of 2001, but actually issued in 2004), and No 17 in 2008. There, alas, it has stuck.

Inevitably, this has had an effect upon the shape of the *Newsletter*. Frustrated at the temporary (?) demise of the *Journal*, some authors have sought a route to the publication of more substantial articles through the *Newsletter*. This may be regarded as inappropriate, in theory at least, but a justifiably pragmatic approach in practice. A case in point is the work of John Bruce on ‘Deciphering Pictish Ogham Inscriptions : a new theoretical perspective’ in 2012. It occupied nine pages of the 16 which comprised *Newsletter* No 62, and a further 16 pages (in the form of a supplement) out of a total of 24 in No 63. The trend continued, with

Alastair Mack's 'Reappraisal of the Northern Isles Symbol Stones' occupying 12 of the 16 pages of No 64. Had the *Journal* still been in operation, it would surely have been the natural home for these detailed studies.

Concerned that we were returning to pre-*Journal* days when the *Newsletter* was not just that but much more besides, I started to press the Committee on the matter of the *Journal*, with little success. In an apologia which fronted *Journal* No 17, PAS President Norman Atkinson spoke of 'the decision to cease production of the *Journal*', citing the small number of people who were active in running the Society, which inevitably meant prioritising what he termed 'our main events – lecture series, conferences, and field trips'. The *Journal* did not make the final cut, and although it was not dead and buried, he was forced to conclude that 'we cannot commit to producing a *Journal* in the foreseeable future'.

Much of the success of any publication is due to the personal commitment and boundless energy of its editor, as those responsible for the first dozen *Journals* demonstrated: Niall Robertson (Nos 1 to 5), Eileen Brownlie (Nos 6 and 7), and Jack Burt (Nos 8 to 12). After that, it tended to be more of a team effort; highly commendable on the part of those involved, but less cohesive than a single force. With the aim of resolving this and arousing the *Journal* from its dormant situation, I persuaded a former editor to stand for the position again, he now being free of the personal obligations which had caused him to withdraw a dozen years earlier. He should have been present to speak for himself at the 2011 AGM in Dunfermline, but was prevented by last-minute professional duties; nevertheless, the meeting accepted the suggestion *nem con*, though what was interpreted as a less than enthusiastic welcome from the Committee caused him to withdraw.

It was arranged that the issue be discussed at the 2012 AGM, but for some reason that did not happen, even though the Society's Annual Report (published shortly before the meeting) contained the optimistic statement 'We live in hope that we might see a sufficient flow of suitable material to justify even an occasional *Journal*'. I therefore raised the matter once more at the 2013 AGM in Perth. In an effort to promote the importance of having a *Journal*, it was pointed out that in some ways, the *Journal* might be seen as the flag-ship of the PAS, in that, by going out to **all** members, it reaches more people

than come to lectures, conferences, and field trips, and also a wider public through its take-up by libraries, university departments, and the like. It performs a crucial function in allowing the publication of lengthy and carefully-researched studies of Pictish topics, some with extensive bibliographies, in a form inappropriate for the *Newsletter* and awkward for it to accommodate. To expect this of the *Newsletter* is to invite a return to the days of having a lop-sided publication which cannot properly perform the task inherent in its title.

In the discussion which followed, various suggestions were made, including having occasional papers, and on-line publication. I still favour the return of the *Journal*, even if it comes out say every three years, and has to rely on a temporary editorial team. There are articles at hand which did not make it into No 17, and for sure more material would be forthcoming if the word got around that the *Journal* was to be resuscitated. So, going back to the question posed at the start – is there a place in the grand scheme of things for the *PAS Journal*?

Graeme Cruickshank

Cross-slab discovered at Killin

While visiting the village of Killin at the west end of Loch Tay on 10 May this year, I took the opportunity to look round the old kirkyard behind the Killin Hotel (NN 574 333). There are many Cill- place names associated with early Christian sites (eg Kilbride, Kilmarnock, Kilmartin) and Killin is certainly somewhere one might expect to find an early church site and sculpture. In Gaelic Cill Fhinn, means simply 'white church', but in the great majority of cases, Cill- is followed by the name of a saint (as in the three other examples given: Brigid, M'Ernóc and Martin). Watson suggested the commemoration of a local 'saint' Fionn as a possibility, but such a figure is otherwise unrecorded (1926, 323).

Killin is more firmly associated with Fáelán: 'St Fillan's Healing Stones' are preserved in the Old Mill (now 'Breadalbane Folklore Centre') (Fraser 1973, 122–3), and Féill Fhaoláin, St Fillan's Fair, was once held in the village (Taylor 2001, 205). The survival of a massive primitive font of early type, found in the old kirkyard, is another indication of an ancient site, comparable with examples at Ardeonaig, Balquhidder, Dull, Fortingall and Foss, all

formerly (like Killin) in Highland Perthshire. It is now preserved in the parish church, built slightly west of the former site in 1744 (Gifford & Walker 2006, 551–2).¹

The old kirkyard's situation too is suggestive, as it lies on a spit of land between the confluence of the rivers Dochart and Lochay, which unite very shortly before their mingled waters flow into Loch Tay. The enclosure lies directly above the banks of the Lochay. This placing can be compared, for instance, with that of the church at Struan (NN 809 653), with its Pictish symbol stone, pair of simple cross-slabs, 'Celtic' bell and dedication to St Fáelán, which lies between the confluence of the Errochty Water with the Garry.

Given these strands of evidence, it was both disappointing and a little puzzling that no early medieval sculpture (apart from the font) was known at Killin. The old kirkyard is a large one (another possible indication of an early site: a large kirkyard is one that may well have been extended over the years). There is no visible sign of the pre-1744 parish church but there are many headstones of the 18th and 19th centuries, and an enormous number of flat slabs, many of them covered in turf, which grows luxuriantly at this damp site.

It would seem that, before my own visit, someone had been doing a little peeling back of the turf to reveal the slabs underneath, as many (though by no means all) had been partially uncovered – enough in many cases to reveal the inscription (if any). I had no time to make a detailed investigation, but did have a look at quite a number of slabs to see if anything early



© N M Robertson

1 Position of the cross-slab in the kirkyard

had been revealed by this informal archaeology. Almost the last slab I examined turned out to have a simple cross of early medieval type, very deeply carved, along with a pair of initials no doubt added during some 17th- or 18th-century re-use.

The cross-slab lies part way down the slope which divides the kirkyard into two distinct levels, below an eighteenth-century headstone with a pointed top (1). It is an irregular, undressed slab of local schist, maximum dimensions 161 cm x 47 cm, with a small, deeply-marked equal-armed cross incised somewhat arbitrarily towards the narrower (east) end of the slab. Initials DC, also deeply marked, were added at some point in the other half of the stone. The cross measures 12 cm x 12 cm, and is of the simplest form. A fragment at one of the angles has broken off, probably helped to do so by the unusually deep incision (2).

Such simple forms of monument are essentially un-datable, but a date broadly within the early medieval period seems likely. Comparable recumbent monuments are found at a number of sites in former Highland Perthshire, eg Balquhidder, Dull, Fortingall and Strathfillan,² though few have the cross so deeply incised. Two slabs, Fortingall 9 and 10, recently illustrated in *PAS Newsletter* (Halliday & Borland 2012, 4–6) may be compared in particular to the Killin slab.

It is to be hoped that further investigation at Killin will bring more early material, preferably of more artistic interest, to light.

Niall M Robertson



© N M Robertson

2 The cross-slab viewed from the south

Notes

- 1 This font has been described as ‘seven-sided’ (Fraser 1973, 119), and hence unique. Close inspection, however, suggests that it was once eight-sided – but that one of the ‘points’ has been knocked off.
- 2 Indeed, recumbent – as opposed to upright – slabs with simple crosses are particularly characteristic of this part of Scotland and somewhat uncommon elsewhere, perhaps because the local schist splits readily into slabs needing little dressing of an appropriate size to lie along a grave.

References

Fraser, D 1973 *Highland Perthshire*, Standard Press, Montrose.

Gifford, J & Walker, F A 2006 *The Buildings of Scotland: Stirling and Central Scotland*, Yale UP.

Halliday, S & Borland J 2012 ‘Cross-incised stones at Fortingall Parish Church, Perth and Kinross’, *PAS Newsletter* 63, 4–6.

Taylor, S 2001 ‘The Cult of St Fillan in Scotland’ in Liszka, T R & Walker, E M (eds) *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 175–210.

Watson, W J 1926 *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, Edinburgh (reprinted Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1986).

A new symbol stone in Strathspey

Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service (ACAS) has given notification of a new Pictish symbol stone discovered last year at Dandaleith, near Craigellachie in Moray. Weighing in at more than a ton, the 1.7m long granite boulder was discovered during ploughing last May when, not surprisingly, it broke the plough.

Dandaleith has two pairs of symbols, an eagle over a crescent & V-rod, and, a mirror case over a notched rectangle & Z-rod. There are a few examples of a second pair of symbols carved on the back of a stone, often in a different orientation. However, this is thought to be the only example of a stone with symbols carved on two adjacent faces and in the same orientation.

The pairing of a mirror case and notched rectangle & Z-rod also occurs on Dandaleith’s nearest neighbour at Arndilly, where the symbols are unusually carved side by side. Indeed, of the 16 symbol stones found along the Spey, no less than five bear the notched rectangle & Z-rod.

The stone was declared as Treasure Trove and in March of this year was allocated to Elgin Museum, where it will go on display following conservation.

In the near future, ACAS hopes to collaborate with Elgin Museum, The Moray Society and the University of Aberdeen’s Archaeology Department to undertake some on-site investigation of the find-spot.

See ACAS website for more details:

<<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology/>>



© Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

The adjacent carved faces of the Dandaleith stone

Pictish ‘carvings’ modelled in clay

Ceramicist Andrew McCulloch describes his inspiration and process

I have been working with clay for over 20 years. From the beginning, I immersed myself in learning my craft and discovered that I have a gift for making clay look like anything but clay. An interest in standing stones predates my love of Pictish sculpture because, as a young child in the south of England, I spent many hours at Stonehenge (before the fencing went up).

But there is something that draws me to Pictish art and today, many pieces of my work are inspired by it.

It took a while to marry Pictish imagery with my work, which started with Z- and V-rods carved into basic pots. But there are only so many pots you can decorate with symbols before you need to dig deeper.

Later, when I was trying to find a different way to use clay, I decided to combine my abilities with the artwork of the past and created my Pictish hanging slabs. Essentially, I build a hollow clay slab and impress it with real stone until it looks like rock. Some slabs even have flakes of mica embedded in them. The back is pierced to allow the slab to hang. Then I carve the Pictish-inspired animal as it would appear on a stone, using a jagged rock to give the carved lines a pecked and aged appearance. Finally, I bring the carving to life with a realistic three-dimensional sculpture. I create hollow figures, refining the head and body details from photographs of the actual animal. I airbrush oxides onto the slab to make it seem like stone and leave to dry. After firing, the sculptural portion is painted in oils so that it looks as if the animal is coming to life. Finally a patch of lichen is painted on to the stone.

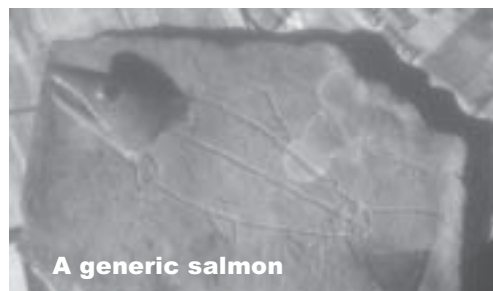
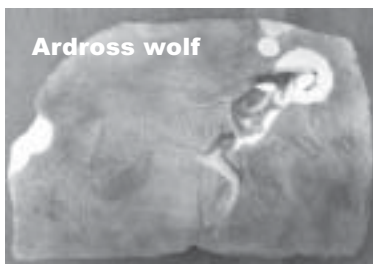
To date, I have modelled the Ardross wolf, the Grantown stag, one of the Burghead bulls, the Dunadd boar, the Scatness bear, the Inverurie horse, the Roseisle goose and the Pictish ‘beast’, as well as a more generic serpent and salmon. I even had a go at the Collessie warrior and a cauldron symbol. Although no such carving exists, I recently decided to design my own Pictish wildcat.

With the exception of the cauldron and the serpent, which are both tabletop slabs, the others are designed to hang on the wall, thus breaking the commonly held myth that pottery needs a table or shelf to display it.

The question I am asked most frequently is, ‘How do I attach the sculpture of the animal to the slab of rock?’ That’s a trade secret.

One thing I have surely learned by making these images in three dimensions is the answer to THAT eternal question: what is the Pictish Beast? I am certain that it is in fact a dolphin, which I believe explains why it can appear as a vertical and horizontal figure. That has probably put the Pictish cat amongst the modern day pigeons, so I will sign off by saying that images of my Pictish-inspired artwork are on my website: www.stormdancercreations.co.uk and should anyone feel the urge to contact me, my email address is there.

Andrew McCulloch



Thoughts on some Highland hill forts

Close by the River Spey, just south of Aviemore, on top of *Torr Alvie*, stands an imposing stone column – the Duke of Gordon’s monument (1). Hidden away at the base of the hill, invisible from the road, is another monument, this time to the Duchess of Gordon. Feminists have sometimes cited this unequal juxtaposition as a blatant example of male chauvinism – the Duke gives himself a fine phallic column, rising boldly from a lofty eminence, while his poor old wife is condemned to an obscure and lowly position, far beneath him. The truth, however, is somewhat different.



© Ron Dutton

1 *Torr Alvie from south of Aviemore*

The Duke did not ask to have a memorial erected on top of the hill. It was paid for by public subscription, following his death, and the site chosen by a committee of local worthies. The monument to the Duchess, who was his mother, not his wife, lies in a secluded spot entirely of her own choosing, down by the river, on the holy site of Saint Eata’s chapel. There was no sexism involved.

What is surprising, though, is to find a dedication to Eata, that most Northumbrian of seventh-century saints, deep inside former Pictish territory. Eata, a pupil of Aidan at Lindisfarne, went on to become abbot of Melrose, and then Lindisfarne, eventually being elected bishop there. He later famously swapped sees with Cuthbert, becoming Bishop of Hexham.

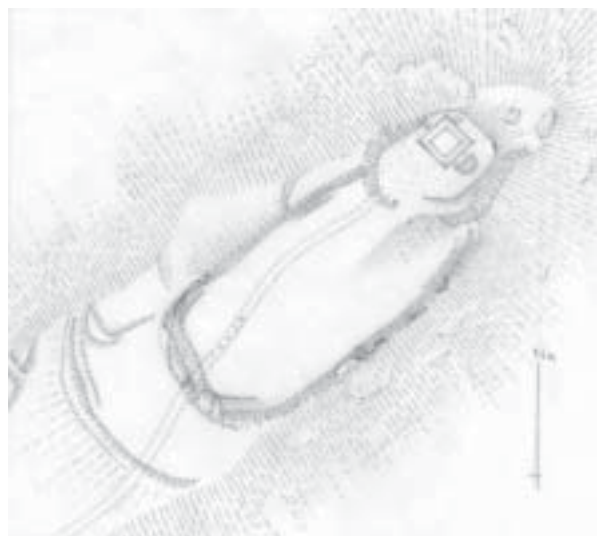
The most likely explanation for the dedication is that the chapel was founded later in the medieval period. The location is quite unlike that of any of the several early Christian sites in the area, and has all the hallmarks of a Cistercian

foundation. Cistercian monks from Kinloss Abbey are believed to have been involved in missionary activities locally in the 12th century, and as Kinloss was populated by monks from Melrose Abbey, where Eata was still revered, a dedication to him on the banks of the Spey is perhaps not so surprising after all.

Not to be outdone, the Duke’s monument rests on top of its own little surprise – a hill fort, thought to date from the early first millennium AD. However, this particular colocation is by accident rather than design, the remains of the fort having gone unrecognised until discovered by the present author, in 2007. Early in 2014, the site was surveyed in detail by the RCAHMS team of Adam Welfare and Ian Parker. This confirmed its credentials and dimensions, but not its purpose or precise date (2).

The fort, 85 metres long and 30 metres wide, is located on the highest point, the north-eastern extremity, of a ridge which is orientated north-east/south-west. The Duke’s monument overlies the north-eastern end of the fort and the ground falls away precipitously on three sides, but to the south-west the ridge slopes away gently. Twenty metres out from the south-western rampart are the remains of an earthen, or perhaps turf, bank. The area between the two structures has soil which shows signs of having been cultivated at some point. It is unclear whether this was contemporary with the original structure, or represented later re-use of the site.

It is often assumed that all hill forts served a military purpose. While this may have been so in some cases, particularly the larger forts, it is



© Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

2 *Plan of Torr Alvie fort*

likely that many of the smaller ones were constructed to fulfil a more domestic role, perhaps as the fortified abode of some local chieftain with wealth, probably in the form of cattle, to protect; or maybe they had some other purpose.

The walls of *Torr Alvie* appear to have been deliberately destroyed, the upper stones having been pushed outwards off the foundation course. The resulting stone tumble is most evident at the SW end. Most of the stones from the other sides are absent, possibly because they have rolled down the steep slopes directly beneath those walls.

Adam Welfare has suggested that the walls were probably demolished in recent times in order to extract stones suitable for reuse. While this could well have been the case, there is no evidence for their employment in any other structures in the vicinity. It is possible that the destruction occurred much earlier. Excavations at many sites throughout the north east of Scotland suggest widespread destruction and abandonment taking place around the beginning of the third century. Could the destruction of *Torr Alvie* be part of this pattern?

It is tempting to ascribe all this laying-waste to the activities of the Romans, particularly the punitive northern campaigns of the emperor Severus which took place at this time, though the evidence for any connection remains circumstantial. The uncertainty surrounding Roman incursions into the north is matched by a similar lack of knowledge concerning the area's hill forts and the people who built them. This ignorance about the late Iron Age makes it difficult to hypothesise, with any real confidence, about the emergence and development of Pictish society in the north, and in particular, the rise to power of the kingdom of Fortriu.

Twenty-five miles upstream from *Torr Alvie* there is another fort, much larger, but of similar age, which exemplifies these shortcomings. *Dun da Lamh*, stands prominently above the main A86 road, close to the Spey, two miles southwest of the village of Laggan (3). This is one of the finest and best preserved hill forts in the whole of Scotland, and yet it has baffled, or been almost completely ignored by, generations of archaeologists. Much of this massive structure remains standing. Its skilfully constructed drystone walls are still more than three metres

thick in places, and once stood more than five metres high. The quality of workmanship and style of the masonry are similar to, and of the same standard as, the very finest of the brochs which adorn the north and west of the country. It is generally agreed that it dates from somewhere in the first half of the first millennium AD, so who might have constructed it?

It has often been suggested that it was a border fort guarding the important cross-country route from Lochaber to Strathspey. It is certainly well-placed to fulfil such a function but if it was a border fort, then whose border? A military border fort serves little purpose unless it is garrisoned, preferably on a permanent basis, and that implies a standing army. Only empires and large states can afford to maintain a standing army. *Dun da Lamh* was certainly not Roman, so that probably rules out empires.

Could it possibly be a nuclear fort, located at the centre of a small kingdom, the seat of some minor king, since lost to history? Maybe, but there is no immediately obvious source of wealth locally, so where would the resources have come from to enable a small kingdom to support such a grand edifice? The construction methods employed are suggestive of a west coast provenance – Dalriadan, perhaps? But that would involve substantial changes to the traditional map of Dalriada and a major, and otherwise unjustified, rewrite of history. The style of masonry could be simply a reflection of the building materials, and possibly the skills, that were available locally.

Given its location and the date ascribed to it, if it is none of the above, then it can only be Pictish. Why, then, does it not feature in any account of Pictish history? Many publications, while discussing all the other important Pictish



3 *Dun da Lamh from the Spey near Laggan*

© Ron Dutton

forts, and many smaller ones besides, do not so much as mention *Dun da Lamh*. One even states quite categorically that, 'no major hill forts are known in Strathspey'. It seems that no particular speciality wishes to claim ownership of *Dun da Lamh*, even to the point of denying its very existence. It is an orphan, an outcast. Its real problem is that it does not fit readily into any of the favoured narratives for the history of the Highlands, or the Picts, and so it is simply ignored.

In order to begin to appreciate its likely role, it is first necessary to acknowledge the importance of the route which it dominates. The main east/west route across the Highlands is often assumed to have been the Great Glen, extending in a direct line from Fort William on the west coast to Inverness on the east. However, this was not the case. The Great Glen is a deep glacially scoured trough, following an ancient geological fault line, its bottom filled with a series of lochs, of which Loch Ness is by far the largest, stretching for more than twenty miles along the northern end of the glen. For much of its length, the rocky hills on both sides of the loch plunge steeply from a considerable altitude, straight down into the deep waters, and left no possibility of travelling along its shores and through the northern part of the glen, between Fort Augustus and Inverness, except by boat.

The main A82 road, along the north-west shore of the loch, was carved out of the rock as recently as the 1930s, and then only with the aid of modern high explosives. It replaced an earlier road constructed by Thomas Telford in the early 19th century. Until then, the only road past the loch was the one on the opposite side, the present B862, passing not along the shore, but high over the hills, reaching a height of more than 300 metres. Even this route was a fairly recent creation, a military road constructed by General Wade, with considerable difficulty, in 1726. Prior to that time, the loch had always been an insurmountable obstacle to any travel along the glen, by foot, hoof, or wheel.

It is clear that the Great Glen was not the great natural highway that it might first appear when casually perusing a modern map of the Highlands. We must also take into account the fact that few travellers in the first millennium would have had reason to go to Inverness. Any settlement there at that time would have been very small, and certainly no metropolis or major

power centre. The presence of *Craig Phadrig* hill fort to the west of Inverness should not be allowed to lull us into thinking otherwise. As with *Dun da Lamh*, there is no evidence to suggest that any significant settlement grew up around it, and probably for the same reasons, which will become apparent later. It was on the opposite, east side, of the River Ness that Inverness eventually developed, later in the medieval period, eventually rising to prominence as a Cromwellian garrison town in the 17th century. In the first millennium, the main centres of power, population, religion, commerce, and even foreign trade, were to be found, not in Inverness, but further to the east, towards the Elgin area.

For any traveller wishing to reach Elgin, or any other settlements on that part of the Moray coast, from Dalriada, Strathclyde or even Ireland, the most obvious route would have been along Glen Spean, Strathspey, and Glen of Rothes. The distance is about the same as the Great Glen route, but it is more gently graded, and at its highest point it reaches an altitude of 250 metres, compared to the Great Glen, where any land route would have involved much sharper climbs, and gone up to an altitude of 300 metres or more, in order to bypass Loch Ness. Most importantly, and in contrast to the Great Glen, the wide and easily accessible Spean/Spey route did not involve any major river crossings, always an important consideration in the days before bridges. It is perhaps worth noting that, after Culloden, many of the defeated Jacobites, presumably not lacking in local knowledge, and certainly in a hurry, chose to return to the west via the Spey, rather than the Great Glen.

Amongst the various items of trade which are likely to have passed along this route, would have been livestock, especially cattle. They were one of the mainstays of upland economies all across the British Isles, and had been for several millennia. As in later centuries, when cattle were driven south each autumn to the trysts at Crieff and Falkirk, so in the early centuries of the first millennium, the cattle raised in the north and northwest of Scotland were driven to markets in the rich lowlands of Moray.

However, this otherwise relatively straightforward operation was faced with a serious obstacle – Loch Ness, which extended across their line of approach in to Moray, and at right angles to it. It was therefore necessary to

circumvent the loch, passing round either the north or the south end. Owing to the mountainous nature of the nearby terrain, the only practicable northern route was along the coastal strip, fording the River Ness close to the modern city of Inverness. The only southern option was by way of the Glen Spean/Strathspey route. This southern route necessarily involved passing directly beneath the walls of *Dun da Lamh*, while the northern route unavoidably passed below the fort of *Craig Phadrig*. At this point, a likely role for these two forts, once a total enigma, becomes rather more apparent.

It is clear from the many accounts of droving in more recent times that landowners along drove routes took exception to large herds of cattle being driven over their land, devouring their pasture (and often their crops, too) as they passed by. There are numerous records of altercations and court cases which bear witness to this. But they soon learned how to turn the situation to their advantage – they levied a toll on the drovers, usually under threat of force, for the privilege of passing through without hindrance.

It is easy to imagine that, perhaps in the early years of the first millennium, perhaps even earlier, the small tribes or kingdoms that occupied the lands around *Craig Phadrig* and *Dun da Lamh* adopted a similar course of action, charging a levy on cattle being taken through, and any other goods besides. Their ability to impress and intimidate their ‘customers’ into complying would have been strengthened by the building of the forts, while the income from the levies would have financed their construction.

Later, as the nascent kingdom of Fortriu, based on the Moray coast, expanded its sphere of influence, it is almost certain that it would have absorbed these profitable enterprises located on its western margins. Later still, after further expansion into the north and west, many of the cattle and other goods would have come in to Fortriu as tribute rather than trade. The forts are then likely to have become centres for receiving that tribute, a practice known from later examples.

For many years, the forebears of that same Duke of Gordon commemorated by the tower on *Torr Alvie* collected tribute in this way, though by this time it was called ‘rent’. For example, the Gordon rent roll for 1603, which still survives,

informs us that rent for their lands in Badenoch, which, by coincidence, stretches from *Dun da Lamh* to *Torr Alvie*, was paid mostly in livestock, which had to be presented each year at Ruthven Castle.

While there is no evidence that *Torr Alvie* was ever put to this particular use, its location is entirely consistent with its having originated, like *Dun da Lamh* and *Craig Phadrig*, for the purpose of extracting levies from passing drovers and others. A combination of natural obstacles conspires to constrain the Strathspey route, and to funnel it through a very specific location, directly below *Torr Alvie*.

Here, the northern shore of Loch Alvie sits hard against the rough slopes of the strath’s flanking hills, where rough ground and the several large streams pouring into the loch make this area unsuitable for travel. Most of this inflowing water seeps away as groundwater, and, except in times of flood, there is only a shallow exit stream from the loch, on its southern shore, which flows over a firm gravelly surface and forms an excellent natural ford. But almost immediately after leaving the loch and crossing the ford, the stream disappears into an impenetrable morass, the *Bogach*, which extends all the way to the Spey. The only passage along the strath at this point, which is otherwise blocked by the loch and the bog, is via the ford. And *Torr Alvie*, on its lofty crag, towering above, is well placed to exercise control over it.

If the foregoing account is correct, then it would appear that at least some of the hill forts served a fiscal rather than a military purpose. In such cases, it is likely that they would only be fully occupied at certain times of the year. This might explain why some of them did not have settlements springing up around them. It is only by considering them in their broader economic and social context that we will be able to understand their purpose, and perhaps be able to shed some light on the emergence of Pictish society in the north of the country.

Ron Dutton

PAS Newsletter 73

The deadline for receipt of material is

Saturday 15 November 2014

Please email contributions to the editor

john.borland@rcahms.gov.uk

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

<<http://www.thepictishartsociety.org.uk>>