

Abernethy Project 1997 and beyond...

Ancient part of Pictland to form Focus of Investigation

At Edwina Proudfoot's recent lecture to the PAS, entitled *Abernethy and Mugdrum in Context* it became obvious that she was in certain respects following an approach similar to that which I had outlined at the previous PAS lecture, *Picts in Place*. In essence this is to investigate one particular area in depth, employing all levels of scholarship rather than adopting a time-based, stratigraphic, specifically, archaeological approach to place. The current review of society activities I am undertaking has already made it clear that our membership are interested in a more active, hands-on style of activity. We therefore had a discussion after Edwina's lecture which led to the suggestion that the society takes on **The Abernethy Project**.

This is a project which would involve Edwina herself, the society as a whole, local historical societies and interested individuals. All aspects of relevant study should be incorporated in this project which will possibly last several years, allowing us several field trips and a great deal of ongoing hands-on activity. One of the main points of interest Edwina raised was - Where is the major site (or sites) in Abernethy? For a place of such significance well into historical times there is little to be seen on the ground other than the tower and a handful of stones in the area. One direct approach has already suggested itself - we should, in common with the local people mount a visual survey of every building in Abernethy itself to try and locate any Pictish fragments. Beyond this we should be looking at the immediate area of influence of the establishment at Abernethy which covers a substantial area.

The project would be controlled by Ms Proudfoot as Co-director, having specific archaeological oversight and a member of the Committee as the other Co-director, reporting back to the Society. Ms Proudfoot has declared her willingness to act as liaison with the relevant local historical society, TAFAC etc. Those members who belong to relevant societies we hope will provide a further level of contact. It is hoped that because of their specific areas of interest that we will be able to call on the expertise of Professors Geoffrey Barrow and Bill Nicolaisen.

Specific Approaches **Archaeology:**

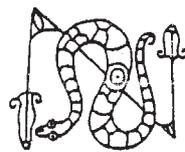
- a) Visual survey by groups and individuals, in Abernethy, other hamlets and the countryside - potential for extensive fieldwalking.
- b) Investigation of aerial photography.
- c) Investigation of likely sites in the area of "Abernethyshire", a term coined by Professor Barrow to define the area of immediate influence and control. Prof. Barrow has compiled a map of this area which will be of inestimable value.
- d) Perusal of all archaeological reports from the defined area.
- e) Specific examination of all local symbol stones including collation of references: comparative analysis of motifs and styles of stones.

Historical:

- (a) Investigation of archive material in Perth Library, Scottish Record Office and other locations. Perth and Kinross Libraries Chief Librarian, Archivist and Local Studies Librarian have already expressed an interest in providing whatever assistance they can.
- (b) Reading of all early sources to amass references to Abernethy.
- (c) Particular attention to be paid to the period of the Reformation in order to ascertain the level of destruction of religious

materials which might have a bearing on the Pictish period.

- (d) Reading of estate papers, family histories etc. to extract relevant references and possible continuities with the far past e.g. the sanctuary aspect of the Mugdrum cross.
- (e) Close investigation of largest scale maps and oldest maps to locate possible sites of interest.



Folkloric:

- (a) Investigation of all local histories of area for folklore/placename information.
- (b) Enquiries among local populace for fragments of folklore relating to Abernethy and area - will include references to witches and other motifs.
- (c) Placename analysis of area.

Abernethy Source Book

Once the information has been gathered we can consider the creation of an Abernethy Source Book which could become a valuable academic tool for the future. Such a work could provide the possibility of providing a new and possibly clearer idea of how the provinces of Fife and Fortriu actually worked. Likewise information could possibly be found relating to the relationships

between Abernethy and other Pictish capitals such as Scone, Forteviot etc. The organisation and collation of this information will be a major task and we should now consider the registering of the PAS as a charity in order for us to approach trust funds and other bodies to try to obtain financial support for this worthwhile project.

Education.

There is a possibility of involving schools in the area in this major project and as I already work closely with the new Authority's Education Department I will investigate this further. By utilising the local press we can I believe ensure a great deal of local support for this project. It is important that if this project goes ahead that the PAS is not seen as dictating to the local people but working hand-in-hand with them. The fact that we can hopefully provide a considerable number of committed volunteers to such a project should ensure us a friendly welcome

The adoption of a multi-disciplinary approach will I believe allow us to find out a great deal of information about the Abernethy area and hopefully lead to the identification of specific sites of interest. Such sites might in time be subject to archaeological investigation. We have to date provided the platform for new ideas and current developments through our annual lecture series and conferences. This project if carefully controlled could see us making an even more direct contribution to Scottish Dark Age Studies. Stuart McHardy PAS Chairman

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pictish arts society programme

Saturday 5th October, 1996

Joint Outing to Govan, Dumbarton Castle & Luss
with Renfrewshire Local History Forum (those wishing
to attend should have already returned the booking
forms sent out recently to all members).

Thursday 17th October, 1996

Dr Sally Foster

"Picts Gaels & Scots"

Thursday 7th November, 1996

Bill Grant

"Introduction to Pictish Ogam"

Thursday 5th December, 1996

details still to be confirmed

Thursday 9th January, 1997

Members Night with guests

Jim Macaulay *"Stone Mirrors"*

David Clement *"Language of the Picts"*

with others still tbc.

*All PAS meetings are held in the School of
Scottish Studies, 27 George Square,
Edinburgh, at 7.30 pm*

Editorial Dubs

Well here we are at the start of another Pictish Year. The Celts hae theirs on November eve, the Britons on January eve, and the PAS sometime after the summers over! I have to confess that I've taken time out from the PAS over the summer months, between developing new business ideas and course work for teaching commitments there hasn't been much time anyway. So there's no Newsletter as yet (although I must thank all those who contributed over the Summer months).

The next full Newsletter will be published around the beginning of November and will feature the usual mish mash of news, gossip and letters that we have grown so accustomed to. We will also feature an advertisers section as part of our continuing Yuletide Pictish Corner - if you'd like to place an advert please contact Nick ASAP to discuss your requirements.



- Advertisers Notice -

Anyone wishing to include an advert in our "Yuletide Pages" to be published in the November Edition of the PAS News should contact Nick ASAP.

Advertisements cost from
£6 per 1/4 page.
Typesetting & Graphics
service available.

Other dates and speakers for 1997 are still to be confirmed and details will be published in the next Newsletter. There will also be several visits and talks introducing the Abernethy Project. As well as field trips and the now annual PAS Conference later in the year.

Newsletter Contributions :

If you know of any Local Exhibitions, Talks, Displays or News of Dark Age interest please contact : -

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