



## Report on the Society's Activities – 2011–2012

The winter programme of talks at Pictavia goes from strength to strength, and this year's has been widely acclaimed as one of the best, as well as being at the cutting edge of recent research of the period. Gordon Noble opened the season with an account of recent excavations near the Craw Stane at Rhynie. Alice Blackwell next gave details of a re-examination of the Pictish silver hoard from Norrie's Law. December's meeting heard Guto Rhys give a brief history of research into the Pictish language. In January, Fraser Hunter described work on a new site at Clarkly Hill, close to the Pictish fort at Burghead. Stephen Gordon gave some insights to the work of the stone conservators at Historic Scotland. The season ended with Oliver O'Grady's description of excavations at Fortingall. All the talks were reported in newsletters: all covered new and exciting work in the field of Pictish Studies.

2011's annual conference was held in Dunfermline on 1 October. Seven speakers talked on themes related to transportation in Pictland by land and water. Again, full reports of each talk appeared in newsletter 61.

At the AGM, held on the same day, David Henry stood down as editor, having produced almost half of the Newsletters published since the Society began. We are grateful to him for raising and maintaining the standards for so long. John Borland has stepped into his shoes, and we are happy to see how well they fit. Although we live in hope that we might see a sufficient flow of suitable material to justify even an occasional Journal, 2011 has been another year when that has not happened.

After years of struggling to produce an all-singing, all-dancing website, we have accepted the fact that a simple site, aimed at members and easy to maintain and update is not only possible, but the best way forward. Some of you may be aware that the Picts have finally arrived in the 21st century, with a Facebook page that we hope will enable us to reach a wider audience. We are also working towards offering an e-version of the newsletter, which we hope will

*Continued on p.16*

## PAS Annual Conference

Saturday 6 October, 2012

A K Bell Library, Perth

## Fortingall to Forteviot and Beyond

### Programme

9.30–10.00 — Registration

10.00 — Welcome

10.30–11.00

*Mark Hall*

Landscape of Crosses: Re-assessing the Forteviot sculptures for the SERF project

11.00–11.40

*Oliver O'Grady*

New from Pictish Fortingall: research and community archaeology in Breadalbane

11.40–12.10

*John Sherriff*

Pictish forts in Perthshire:  
where, what and why?

12.10–12.50

*David Strachan*

Excavation of a Pitcarmick-type building  
in Glenshee

12.50–14.00 — Lunch

14.00–14.30 — AGM

14.30–15.10

*Heather James*

A Celtic stronghold on the Roman frontier:  
the newly discovered broch at Castle Craig,  
Auchterarder

15.10–15.50

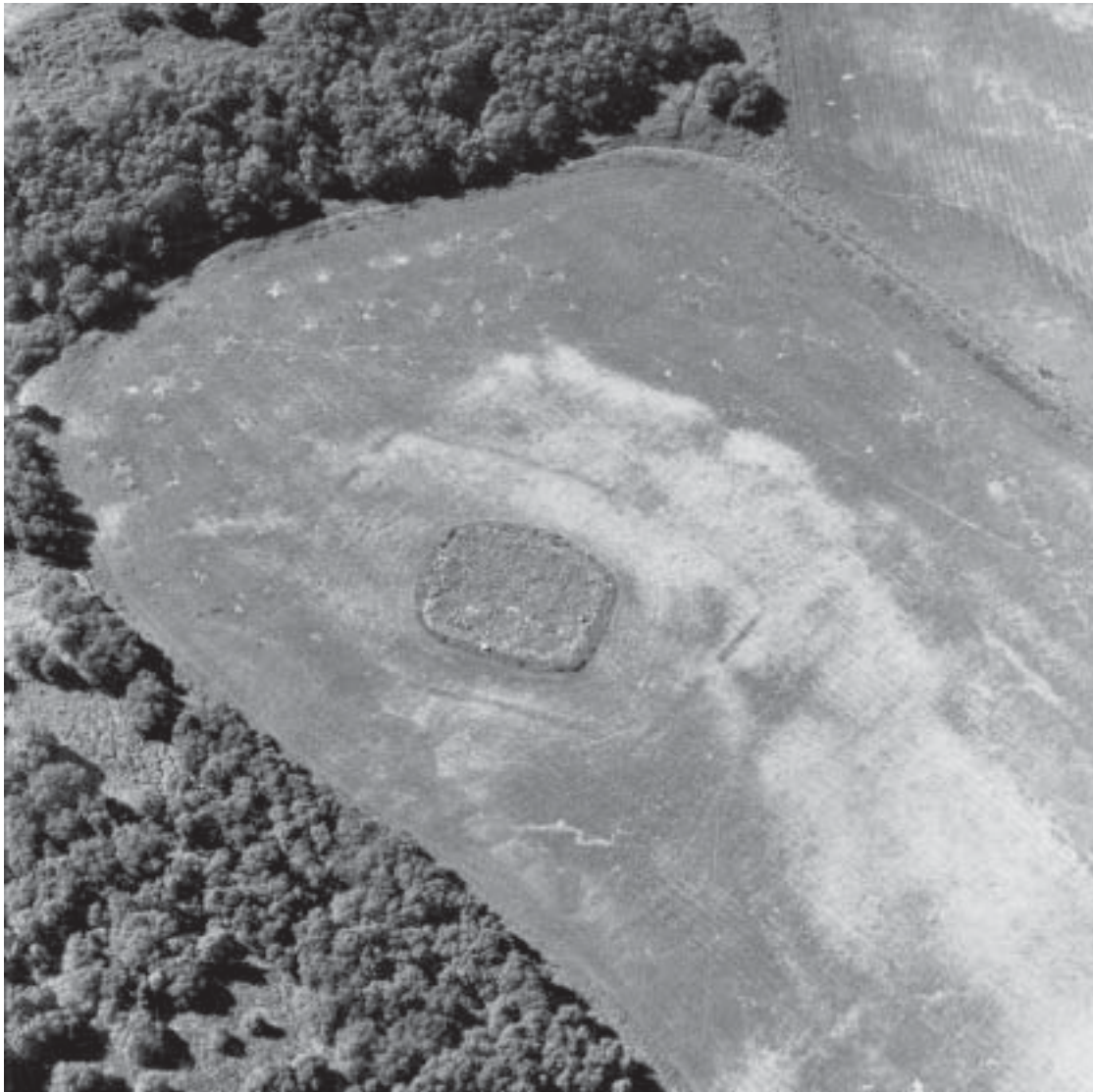
*Cormac Bourke*

Early insular hand-bells – making, using,  
keeping

15.50–16.30

*Niall Robertson*

A large obelisk, on which a cross is cut:  
Early Medieval and Pictish Stones in Highland  
Perthshire.



1 Aerial view of the Congash site

## A Christian stone at Congash

PAS members will no doubt be familiar with the two fine Pictish symbol stones from Congash, near Grantown on Spey but few will be aware of the cross-slab from the same site.

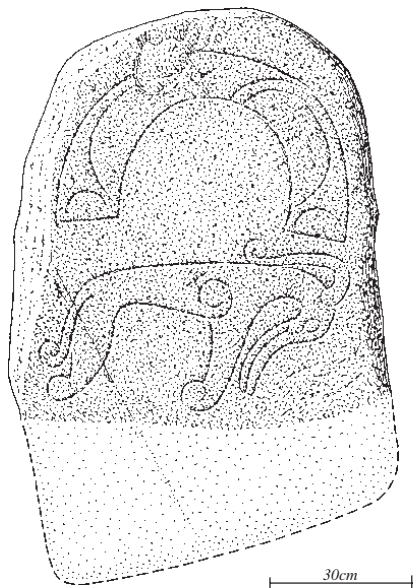
In a field known locally as *Parc-an-Caipel* (Field of the Chapel), a stony bank forms a sub-rectangular enclosure with rounded corners, measuring 35m north – south 29m east – west. Aerial photography has revealed that this lies within another probably ditched enclosure, which is now only visible as a crop mark (1).

The bank of the inner enclosure and much of its interior are strewn with stones, the result of years of field clearance, which serve to confuse the picture on the ground. However it is thought that the footings of a rectangular building – the chapel – can be discerned at the centre.

On the south side of the enclosure, the two

Pictish symbol stones flank what appears to be an entrance through the bank. Congash 1 has a horseshoe symbol with internal decoration over a Pictish beast (2). Congash 2 has a double-disc and Z-rod over what has been likened to a helmet transfixed by an arrow (3). This second symbol is one of three which so far remain unique to Strathspey: the others are the fine stag from Grantown and the S-shaped curvilinear symbol from Mortlach.

Many, indeed the majority of Pictish symbol stones from Strathspey were found in early chapel sites, burial grounds or demolished pre-Reformation churches. This distribution pattern points to a close association between the Picts and Christianity, suggesting for example that many Pictish cemeteries became sites of early Christian burial and worship. The symbol stones were then incorporated into the subsequent later medieval chapels, only to reappear when these



2 Congash 1



3 Congash 2

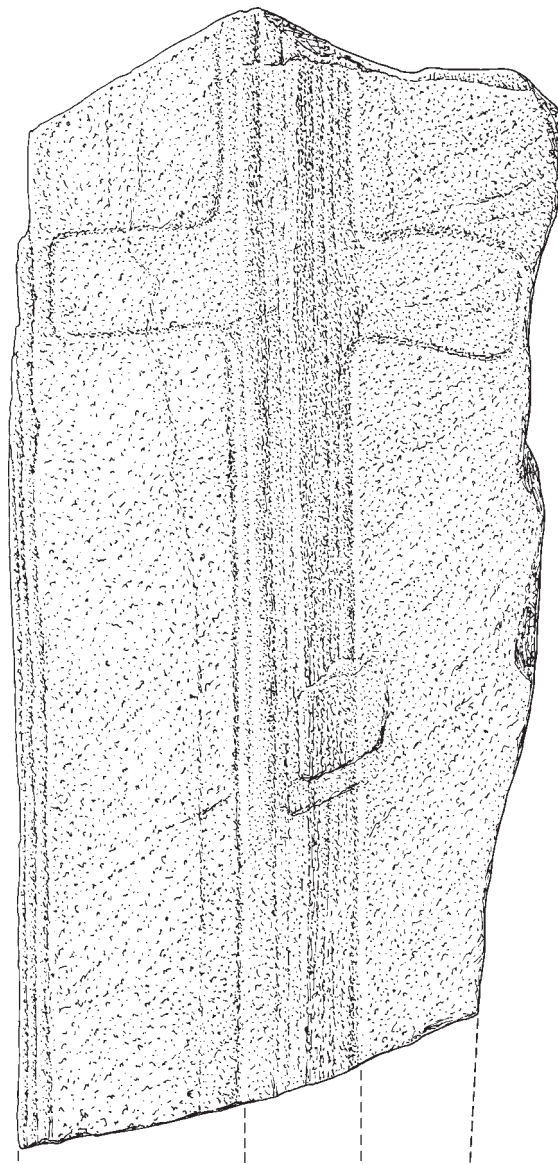
were demolished or rebuilt after the Reformation. However one major flaw in this theory is the almost complete absence of early Christian sculpture in the area.

Inverallan has a Pictish symbol stone and an incised cross slab (as well as a possibly early font) whilst Mortlach has a symbol stone and a Pictish cross-slab. A possible but now lost symbol stone from Tom na Heron stood up the slope from the chapel site at Bridgend of Livet with its fine, incised cross-slab, but that could not be described as close proximity.

So the presence of Christian sculpture associated with two Pictish symbol stones at Congash is a welcome affirmation of this connection although Allen clearly exposed or removed both symbol stones for recording and in doing so, may have destroyed any chance of us knowing whether or not they are *in situ*.

The cross-slab (4) lies in the north-west corner of the enclosure, on its side and partly covered by turf. The carved surface of the stone is convex with two angled facets. At the junction of these is a prominent geological feature – a broad quartz intrusion which runs the length of the slab. The incised lines of the outline cross encompass this feature, giving the cross a quartz shaft and head. The stone would obviously benefit from close geological examination but it does appear to have been selected in order to utilise this natural feature. Visitors to Congash should check with the farmer as the field more often than not is full of cattle.

John Borland



4 Congash 3 cross-slab. Scale 1:10

Drawings by John Borland © Crown Copyright RHCAMS



---

## A Reappraisal of the Northern Isles Symbol Stones

### Part 1 – Shetland

The latest discovery of a Northern Isles Pictish symbol stone was in the Mail cemetery on Shetland Mainland (*The Shetland Times*, 9 June 2008; *PAS Newsletter*, 49 (Winter 2008), 7–8; 54 (Spring 2010), 6–7). It was brought to the writer’s attention by Anna Ritchie who was writing up the new find for the Shetland Museum and preparing a paper for the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Ritchie 2010). In this paper, the stone is shown (1) with the double-disc and Z-rod symbol regarded as the lowest element and therefore running parallel to the ‘base’ of the fragment and not the other way about. It is also illustrated, along with every other surviving piece of Pictish and Viking-Age carving (and also the lost Sandness stone), in Scott and Ritchie’s comprehensive corpus published in 2009.

Although there was a belief, once shared by the present writer, that the Northern Isles were devoid of ‘Class II’ symbol stones, that is symbol stones bearing more than incised symbols, the recent Mail discovery has brought about a necessary reappraisal. Readers well-versed in *ECMS* opinions may disagree with this ‘new-found assessment’, but examination of the ‘new’ Mail stone will cause them to revise such thinking.

It is a fragment of what appears to have been a Class II stone. On it is a *double-disc and Z-rod*

the ‘joining-bar’ of which is a pair of almost parallel bars. Class I ‘joining-bars’ are almost all concave-sided. (The two possible exceptions, those on Logie Elphinstone 1 and 2, contain concave-sided inner bars. There are no such features, or indeed any, within the Mail ‘joining-bar’.) Moreover, the symbol’s discs are decorated. Although the discs of five Class I examples of the symbol contain decoration (Mack 2007, 197 fn), none is as complex. Nor do any examples, whether Class I or Class II, contain what is in the Mail discs. In each there is a cross.

This form of decoration within the discs of a *double-disc and Z-rod* is unique. Although there is in one of the remaining discs of the *double-disc and Z-rods* on the Torgorm/Moniack fragment (*ECMS* III, 106, fig 110) an X-like ‘cross’ and in the left-hand disc of the apparently rod-less *double-disc* on an Edzell slab (Edzell 1, Fraser 2008, 52 and 53, fig 59) is a ‘cross-like’ feature, neither can be said to be true crosses. The Torgorm/Moniack ‘cross’ is no more than a small ‘X’ with a solid circular centre, and the Edzell feature is a set of interlace which is only ‘cross-like’ because it is line-divided into four segments.

In contrast, the Mail symbol has what are certainly crosses within its discs. Both resemble the cross on the Raasay stone (Mack 1997, 113, fig 31; Fraser 2008, 95, fig 133) – except that Raasay’s may be intended as a cross-headed *flabellum*. Mail’s apparent crosses may not only place the carving of the fragment within the Pictish ‘Christian Period’ but make it even more certainly part of a Class II stone.



© Shetland Museum and Archives Services

1 Mail 2

In addition, the fragment appears to have been part of a shaped slab, and the symbol on it was within a frame. Parts of the latter still exist. Most of the frame's left side can be seen, there is a little of the frame's base below the symbol and there are the remains of a short length of the right-hand side. Perhaps the 'short length', which is a twin-lined 'bar', is some of the frame's top, but this separates the symbol from a patch of interlace and may be the lower edge of whatever the interlace is a part. The interlace is in low relief and most of the symbol itself is in pseudo-relief. All these, including the frame, are Class II features. But the fragment lacks a cross – or does it?

The low-relief interlace and twin-lined bar above the symbol may have been part of a cross base (like that on Migvie). Alternatively it may be either part of a *rectangle* symbol or the remains of a panel of decoration. (If it is *other* than part of a cross-base, the *double-disc and Z-rod* could be either above or below the interlace.) But, cross-carved or not, the Mail fragment can still be declared to be Class II. Although one of Joseph Anderson's descriptions or definitions of Class II stones is that they were 'slabs regularly shaped, elaborately ornamented in relief as well as in incised work, and bearing the unknown symbols, along with ... the cross' (1881, 78), another was 'Monuments with symbols and Celtic ornament carved in relief...' (ECMSI, xi). This is an adequate description of the Mail fragment. As it is the second stone to be found, at Mail, it is henceforth entitled Mail 2 in this article. The other, Mail 1, was discovered in 1992 (Fraser 2008, 134, fig 197; Scott and Ritchie 2009, fig 6).

Whatever 'definitions' there are of the 'Class II' group of stones, a simple one is that they are symbol stones that cannot be described as 'Class I'. Class I stones proper are those bearing incised symbols and nothing else. If so, the *flabellum*-bearing Raasay and Birsay with its three relief-carved figures in addition to its four symbols (Mack 1997, 30 and 132) must become Class II stones (although Ritchie regards the latter as 'transitional' (*pers com*) and Fraser plotted Raasay on his distribution map (2008, 11) as a Class I stone). (Yet Fraser found Pabbay to be Class II (ibid), despite its cross being almost certainly not contemporary with its symbols (Mack 2008, 15). Pabbay's cross is off-centre in relation to them and is more deeply incised.)

This 'nothing but symbols' definition of Class I stones may drive the figured Newton of Collessie (ibid, 42–3) and Rhynie 3 (ibid, 88) out of the Class I group. Perhaps not, as Newton of Collessie is a re-used standing stone with its figure and its symbol both incised, a combination unlike that on any known Class II stone. Rhynie 3, which is also only incised, has two other defending factors. Firstly its figure is of very similar stance and weaponry to Newton of Collessie's; secondly the stone was discovered in a solely Class I milieu. It is possible that the so-similar figures are *symbols*. (If so, the Westerton of Balgavies standing stone (Mack 1997, 43) can be recognised as a symbol stone. What remains of its figure is very like Newton of Collessie's.)

But this does not result in the three other known figure-incised stones, Balblair (Inverness-shire) (ECMS III, 95–6), Rhynie 7 (Aberdeenshire) (Ritchie and Fraser 1994, 10) and Mail 1 (Shetland) (Fraser 2008, fig 197) becoming 'symbol stones'. Their figures are not only unlike each other but are very different from those on Newton of Collessie, Westerton of Balgavies and Rhynie 3 – especially the figure on Mail 1. Either 'dog-faced' (ibid, 134) or 'wolf-headed' (Ritchie 1997, 43) it 'looks altogether more heathen' than that on Rhynie 3 (ibid). Its only similarity to the Rhynie 3 figure is that both are clothed.

Despite its lesser heathenism, the Rhynie 3 figure, like the Newton of Collessie and Westerton of Balgavies figures, may indeed be 'heathen'. All three may be representations of a 'warrior-god' (Mack 2007, 168). They may therefore date from Pictish *pre-Christian* times and may be of 'home-grown' heathenism. The strange Mail 1 figure may have been incised rather later – perhaps in *Norse* heathen times.

It is also possible that Mail 2 is not the only surviving Shetland Class II stone. In the light of its discovery, Romilly Allen's classification of two other Shetland stones can be reconsidered:

- 1 Although he regarded both the Bressay Stone (ECMS III, 5=10) and also the Papil stone (ibid, 10=13) as Class III, both have a feature which rings a bell. Figures 2 and 3 show that their crosses are not very different in structure from those in the Mail 2 discs. Each is a cross pattée.



© Bob Henery

2 Bressay



© Bob Henery

3 Papil

2 On both stones also is a beast with its 'tail curled over its back' (Bressay, *ibid*, 8 and Papil, *ibid*, 11). These beasts are very like the *beast* on the Ulbster Stone and the *beast* on Craighton 2 (*ECMS* III Golspie), both with the 'tail curved over its back' (*ibid*, 35 and 50). Both the latter, which are shown in figures 4 and 5, are symbols. The Ulbster *beast* is 'paired' with a *crescent and V-rod* (Mack

1997, 131) and is certainly a symbol. So is the Craighton 2 example. Although it has been described as a 'snarling dog' and just part of the 'scene' on the stone (Mack 2007, 60), it is now thought not only that it is a symbol, a *beast*, but also that it is 'paired' with the *salmon* below it. (The great *double-disc* near the stone's foot would therefore be either a 'singleton' or be 'partnered' by the inter-





4 The Ulbster Stone, first face

twined serpents (or *serpents*) below it.) Perhaps the Bressay and Papil beasts are also examples of the *beast* symbol, particularly the beast on the Papil slab. It is in a very distinct frame which separates it from the other carvings on the stone.

Bressay's *beast* may have been 'partnered' with the 'fat pig' (*ECMS* III, 8) (or ?*boar*) below it, but that Papil's has no 'partner' does not disqualify *it* from being a symbol. There are at least four other Class II examples of 'singleton' symbols (Mack 2007, 269) – five if one includes the Edzell slab.

Yet another point of considerable interest concerning the Papil beast or *beast* is one cited by Allen: 'The spiral curves on the body of the beast ... are exactly like those on the lion of St Mark in the Book of Durrow' (*ECMS* III, 13). As the *Book of Durrow* has been dated to the late-seventh century AD, it is possible that the 'lion of St Mark' pictured in it is the progenitor of the Pictish Class II *beast* symbol. Nor has the Durrow 'lion' only 'spiral curves on the body'; it too has a 'tail curled over its back' (6). The *beast* symbol might be better called the *lion*.



5 Craigton 2, reverse

But this may be less disputed if the '*beast*' nomenclature is retained. Dr Anna Ritchie has seen too many differences between the Durrow and Papil beasts.

But did the Papil *beast/lion* precede its Caithness and Sutherland fellows on Ulbster and Craigton



6 The Durrow beast or lion

2? It is a more faithful reproduction, but it may be somewhat later in execution than was theirs. It may have been incised not long before or even after the tenth century Norse absorption of Shetland – although Stevenson (1981, 284) wrote of Papil and of the Birsay stone from Orkney that ‘both probably date from the end of the eighth century. ‘Anna Ritchie accepted Papil as ‘earlier’ than the Bressay slab (1997, 38) – which from its comparative appearance it must surely be. (Scott and Ritchie described it as having been ‘probably created around AD 900’ (2009, 4) .)

In spite of his ‘end of the eighth century’ dating, the Bressay slab also seemed to Stevenson (1981, 284) ‘to be a considerably later copy’. It also seemed to Scott and Ritchie to be ‘a design derived from the earlier cross-slab from Papil’ (2009, 7). Stevenson concluded that ‘there were in Shetland active Christians erecting sculptured monuments in the tenth century, and most probably about the middle and end of the ninth century as well, while the Papil cross-slab was still standing’ (1981, 289).

A useful clue in attempting to date either stone may be that the human figures on both Papil and the almost certainly later Bressay all seem to be ecclesiastics. There are four hooded and crozier-bearing figures relief-carved on Papil (Scott and Ritchie 2009, fig 29) and four more on Bressay (ibid, fig 54). Even the small horseman between the pair on Bressay’s *beast/lion*-carved face may be other than a ‘lay patron’; he seems to have a pointed hood. The Norse attacks on and eventual occupation of Shetland do not seem to have obliterated the *Papae* or *Papar*, the men of the Church.

Not only do stones like Bressay and Papil show this but also some place-names. Although almost every pre-Norse place-name in the Northern Isles has disappeared, the ‘*papar*’-name (meaning ‘priest’ or ‘monk’ or ‘holy man’), which is Norse, seems to acknowledge a native Christian survival – and the ‘*pettr*’ element, meaning ‘Pict’, in some of the Northern Isles place-names may show some *lay* Pictish survival (Ritchie 1997, 35).

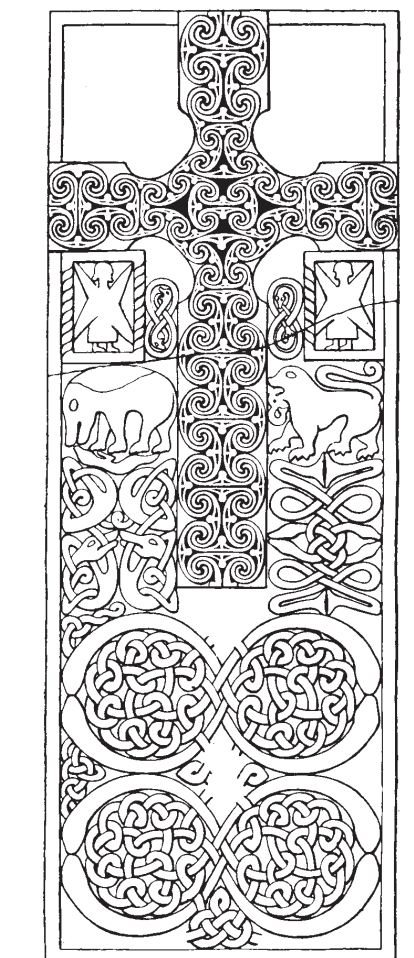
(The Norse effect on pre-Norse place-names in ‘Norsified’ areas of Scotland has been described as akin to a ‘vacuum-cleaner’ (Mack 2007, 44) – a term probably cribbed from Professor Nicolaisen. At the 1999 Pictish Arts Society conference in Aberdeen, Nicolaisen likened the

Norse effect on earlier place-names to an all-absorbing, or suffocating, ‘blanket’.)

But Papil may, and Bressay more certainly may, demonstrate that at least some of the Northern Isles ecclesiastics survived the Norse onslaughts and subsequent settlement. Some are pictured on the stones. Perhaps, however, they were not only ecclesiastics. Some may also have been some of the survivors of the Pictish aristocracy in the Northern Isles, survivors of the symbol-bearing classes.

Papil and Bressay may have been raised in memory of Pictish noblemen who were also churchmen. Some concept like this might explain why both stones not only bear symbols but are also carved with almost only ecclesiastical figures. But there is perhaps yet another solution.

Despite its appearance in a ‘symbol-pair’ on both Craigton 2 and Ulbster, the *beast/lion* which Papil and Bressay share may not in itself be evidence of the survival in the Northern Isles of *lay* Picts of prominence. On the cross-face of



7 Shandwick, cross-face (ECMS III, fig 66B)



Shandwick (7) is ‘a beast with its tail curved over his [*sic*] back’ (ECMS III, 69). The latter beast has, like the ‘*beast/lion*’ on Papil, Craigton 2 and Ulbster, feet or paws with claws. Opposite it, on the other side of Shandwick’s cross-shaft, is a bulky beast – perhaps another version of Bressay’s ‘fat pig’? Whatever the latter may be, above *each* of the two Shandwick beasts is ‘an angel or cherub with four outstretched wings’ (ibid). It is possible that the two beasts on Shandwick are in some way attributed to *saints*, are in effect the ‘symbols of saints’, one being the symbol of St Mark, the other the symbol of an un-named saint. If so, the Bressay beasts can be similarly assigned and the Papil *beast/lion* can be more clearly allotted. It may indeed be ‘the lion of St Mark’.

Bressay bears not only what may be a representation of ‘the lion of St Mark’ but also an inscription which may indicate that there was some fusion of the Norse incomers with the Shetland Picts. The Ogham on Bressay, which is not only complete but colon-punctuated, reads:

[line 1] CRROSCC : NAHHTVVDADDS :  
DATRR : ANN

[line 2] BENNISEF : MEQQDDRROAN

and appears to be in a variety of tongues (Mack 2007, 75–6). ‘Crrosc’ may be Early Irish/Gaelic for ‘cross’ ‘Nahhtvvdadds’ Latin/Romance for ‘nativity’, ‘Bennisef[?s]’ in either for ‘blessed’ and ‘Meqqddroann’ in presumably ‘Pictish for ‘son of/descendant of Drostan’, but ‘Datrr : Ann’ is Norse. The Bressay inscription points not to murder and mayhem but to a blend of cultures. Its colons may further indicate a ‘Norse’ or ‘runic’ influence, that there was indeed a ‘blend of cultures’. The translation made by Scott and Ritchie, although slightly different – ‘the cross of Necrudad, daughter of An (in memory of her husband) Benises son of Droan’ also bears this out (2009, 7).

Whatever, the Shetland Symbol Stones are not only the earlier-known four Class I stones, Breck of Hillwell, Old Scatness 1 and 2 and Sandness (all listed in Mack 2007, App A and illustrated in both Fraser 2008, 133–5, figs 194, 198.1, 198.4 and 199.1, and Scott and Ritchie 2009) but include the Class II Mail 2 and the possible Class II Bressay and Papil.

A point of considerable interest is that Mail 2 is the only known example of a Northern Isles symbol stone bearing the *double-disc and Z-rod*

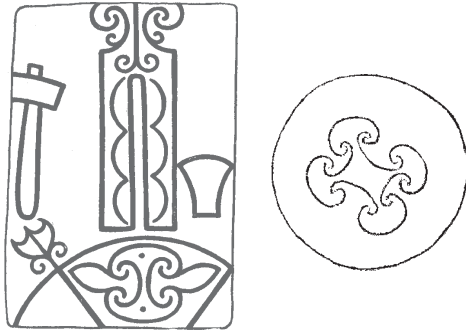
– and is indeed the only *symbol stone* found north of the Dornoch Firth that bears the *double-disc and Z-rod* (Mack 2007, 159 fn). It was thought that this symbol, which had only two symbol-stone examples outside the Pictish Mainland, Fiscavaig and Tote (Fraser 2008, 94), was perhaps a ‘late’ addition to the symbol-stone set and did not reach the North before the Norse onslaughts.

Not only has Mail 2 proved this concept wrong; disregarded had been the *double-disc and Z-rods* on two, more recently three, small Northern Isles artefacts. The writer (who had overlooked them all) was ‘reminded’ of their existence by Dr Ritchie and later advised by Dr Henery that they are illustrated in Fraser 2008. One is a fragmentary bone pin from Pool in Orkney (ibid 2008, 139, fig 211.1), and the others are Shetland artefacts, the Eswick and Jarlshof steatite (soapstone) discs (ibid 139 and 140, figs 212 and 213). (The Jarlshof disc is better illustrated in Scott and Ritchie 2009, figure 17, and perhaps their figure 21 is a more accurate rendering of the Eswick disc.)

The Pool pin may not be of local manufacture, but the Eswick and Jarlshof discs cannot be easily challenged as being other than *Shetland* productions. There are apparently only four places in Scotland where steatite was quarried or otherwise extracted for further working, and all are in Shetland (Canmore and *pers com* Bob Henery). It seems that the *double-disc and Z-rod* had reached the Northern Isles not only on Mail 2 but perhaps a lot earlier.

Or perhaps, as ventured by Dr Henery (*pers com*), rather later; they may have been artefacts inscribed in memory of earlier times, inscribed *after* the carving of symbol stones had ceased in the Isles. There is another Shetland artefact, the Gletness disc (Scott and Ritchie 2009, fig 22), which may indicate such memories. On it is a design which recalls some of the incisions on a symbol stone far-distant from Shetland. The *tuning-fork* handle and the ‘double-ended *pelta*’ within the *crescent and V-rod* on the Abernethy symbol stone (Mack 2007, 24, fig 27) are very similar to the devices that cap or cup the corners of the ‘diamond’-shape on the Gletness disc (8).

It is worth wandering off at this stage to examine the two *double-disc and Z-rod* Shetland artefacts, *vis-à-vis* a feature (or features). The central arm of each of their Z-rods is either at a right-angle to the symbol’s axis (Jarlshof) or at



8 The Abernethy symbol stone (ECMS III, fig 299) and the Gletness disc (after Scott and Ritchie 2009, fig 22)

more than a right-angle (Eswick). There are almost right-angled central arms in a few symbol-stone Z-rods, in particular on the Edderton symbol stone (ECMS III, fig 56) and also on artefacts like the Whitecleuch joining-ring (Fraser 2008, fig 215) – but whatever are the central arms' angles in relation to their symbols' axes, the Z-rods on the two Shetland artefacts have a unique feature. The angles between their central rods and their upper and lower rods are obtuse.

Before returning to Mail 2, there is another interesting diversion, one brought home to the writer by Dr Henery. The Z-rod of the double-disc and Z-rod on perhaps only one Class I symbol stone, Rhynie 2 (Mack 2008, 168 and fig 101 (from Logan 1829, pl IV, fig 1)) and on only five Class II stones, Alyth, Meigle 7, St Vigean's 1 and 6, and Strathmartine 5, is true-Z in shape, but almost every known artefact bearing the double-disc and Z-rod, including the Doo Cave, Fife (ECMS III, fig 389), has a 'true-Z' Z-rod. The said artefacts are, in addition to the Eswick disc and the Whitecleuch, South Lanarkshire, joining-ring, the lost bronze 'plate' from The Laws, Monifieth, Angus, and the two silver plaques from Norrie's Law, Fife (Fraser 2008, figs 204 and 206.1).

(The only artefact 'exceptions', that is those with a backward-Z Z-rod, are the bone pin from Pool and the Jarlshof disc. (Yet another 'artefact' double-disc and Z-rod is listed by Fraser (2008, 138–9 and fig 208), but the symbol on its artefact, the Carn Liath brooch, was not thought to be a double-disc and Z-rod (Mack 2007, 201 and fig 129). Cessford, in his article on the Carn Liath brooch, regarded the device on it as 'a double-disc symbol' (1997, 19), but he stated that it was one without a Z-rod (ibid, 21).)

Perhaps this diversion is pertinent. Although Rhynie 2's double-disc and Z-rod may be as

'early' as any, it lacks, as does Fiscavaig's, the common 'constructional features' of the symbol, the 'inner bar' within its 'joining-bar' and the 'rimming' of its discs or the internal disc within its discs (or both).

Fiscavaig's double-disc and Z-rod has a 'backward Z' Z-rod but lacks the more usual features – although they occur in the other Skye example on Tote. (Tote's double-disc and Z-rod has not only an inner bar but rimmed discs containing internal discs.) Are Rhynie 2's and Fiscavaig's 'late' additions to the Class I symbol stone array of double-disc and Z-rod, their lateness shown by their lack of detail?

The metal-engraved examples of the double-disc and Z-rod almost certainly post-date the bulk of these (Mack 2008, 191 and 223), therefore one wonders if the 'true-Z' Z-rod is a sign of lateness? Although the stone-carved symbol on the Class II Alyth (ECMS III, fig 304B) has a 'true-Z' Z-rod, it is an almost 'pure' example of the double-disc and Z-rod, but that on the Drosten Stone (ibid, fig 250B) is certainly not – and the stone may be dated to within the first half of the ninth century (Mack 2007, 119). The versions, all true-Z, on St Vigean's (ECMS III, fig 257B), on Meigle 7 (ibid, fig 316B) and on Strathmartine 5 (ibid, fig 247B) may be slightly earlier but are certainly well beyond the simple Class I styles. It is therefore possible that the oddly-incised Eswick disc may also be 'late' – and be some kind of memory of earlier times, of times when the Northern Isles Picts were not Norse-dominated. (This is, of course, a very 'slim' argument – John Buchan's Richard Hannay and, of course, Peter Pienaar (and, beyond doubt, Colonel von Stumm) would have described it as 'very slim' – but it's worth thinking about.)

However, back to Mail 2: it shows not only that the double-disc and Z-rod had reached Shetland in symbol stone form but also that it did so in Class II form.

Two other stones of interest have been discovered in the Mail cemetery. One is not a symbol stone but the other is almost certainly a fragment of one. It is the first below this:

Cunningsburgh 2, Mail (9). Carved in low relief on the fragment is what 'has been interpreted as part of a rectangle symbol' (Fraser 2008, 133, fig 195). Although the present writer chose to disregard it (Mack 1997, 145), it may well be part of a rectangle. The rectangle is a very

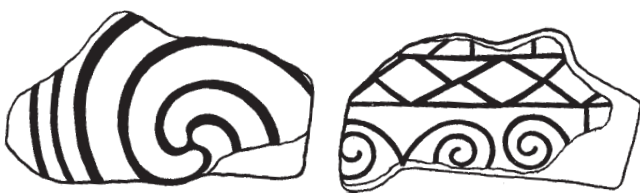


9 Cunningsburgh (Mail)

common ‘northern’ symbol, so common that the Mail 2 interlace may have indeed been within a *rectangle*. There are perhaps no less than ten *other* examples of it on symbol; stones found north of Inverness or far to the west, a total only exceeded by those of the two most common Pictish symbols, the *crescent and V-rod* and the *mirror or mirror-and-comb*.

The other is ‘Mail’ or Mail 1 (Fraser 2008, 134, fig 197; Scott and Ritchie 2009, fig 6). The dog-faced/wolf-headed axe-bearing man is the fragment’s only carving and is thought by the writer not to be a symbol. (Although, as has been said, the figures on Rhynie, Newton of Collessie and Westerton of Balgavies should perhaps be regarded as *symbols*).

In addition to the lost Sandness, Romilly Allen recorded two more fragments from Shetland as ‘Class I’, but their classification is uncertain.



10 Uyea fragment (ECMS III, figs 3 and 3A)



11 Lerwick fragment

Both are carved/decorated on both sides –unlike all Class I stones other than those which were reused.

One is Uyea (10) (ECMS III, figs 3 and 3a). The decoration on this fragment ‘has been compared to that infilling some rectangle symbols’ (Fraser 2008, no. 200) but is perhaps rather too complex. The other is Lerwick (11). (ECMS III, figs 1 and 1a). The decoration on it is as complex and unrecognisable as that on Uyea. Neither is regarded here as part of a symbol stone. (Although the writer hesitates to disagree with Ritchie (1997, 37).)

Mail 2 demonstrates that Shetland *did* have a ‘Class II Period’. Perhaps this should have been anticipated. Although the carving of Class II stones may not have begun until after c.AD700 (Mack 2007, 231), the Norse settlement of the Northern Isles does not seem to have occurred in any great volume until the first half of the ninth century. If so, there was rather more than a hundred years, the duration of three or four generations, in which the practice could have been adopted. It may have also, as has been suggested above, continued after the Isles were ‘Norsified’. Although many members of the symbol-bearing classes may have either fled or been ‘terminated’, some, perhaps the churchmen among them, seem to have remained – and survived. Whatever, the Norse raids and invasions does not seem to have terminated the setting up of symbol stones.

(But perhaps some of the Cunningsburgh (Coningburg) Mail natives neither fled nor were terminated. They might have remained as slaves, quarrying for their Norse masters the steatite used for various artefacts (Ritchie 1997, 40). They spoke, even a thousand years later, ‘their own dialect’ (ibid). (Was this merely a *Norse* survival or did it contain elements of a vanished *Pictish* tongue? Whichever, this survival of at least parts of a ‘slave’ tongue must be unique. Perhaps some of the Shetland Picts, although now only remembered now by ‘*pettr*’ and ‘*papar*’, were a unique race.)

Be that as it may, their Aberdeenshire and Angus cousins who marched south with Brude in 685 were equally ‘unique’. At Nechtansmere/ Dunnichen they eliminated Pictland’s English invaders. ‘Not four miles from Aberlemno 2 a great battle was fought and won by Picts’ (Mack 2007, 105). Ecgrith, the Anglian king, lay dead amid the ruins of his army.



## Part 2 – Orkney

Unlike in Shetland there have been no recent discoveries of symbol stones in Orkney, but two examples may, in the light of the Shetland discovery, be re-assessed.

One, which is in the Tankerness House Museum in Kirkwall and named as Ness (Mack 1997, 134) or Tankerness (Fraser and Ritchie 1999, 38), is a fragment of sandstone dug up about 1986 that bears a *fish-monster* (or ‘hippocamp or seahorse’ (ibid)) (12). As its symbol is in low relief and was perhaps inside a frame, the fragment can be promoted from Class I to Class II. (Or can it? Ness/ Tankerness has been *omitted* from the stones listed in Fraser 2008.) The other is the Birsay stone (or fragments). Its reconstruction (13), named Birsay by the author (1997, 132), has not only three relief-carved figures below its symbols but is perhaps too unique to be a ‘Class I’ stone. On it are the remains of no less than four symbols, perhaps in two pairs. There is no other Class I stone with as many contemporary symbols – and none with relief-carved figures. All other Class I stones with more than one pair or set of symbols are re-used stones (Mack 2007, App D), i.e. symbol stones used yet again as symbol stones. The Birsay reassembly/reconstruction differs. It has not only more than one pair or set of symbols but none is a later addition. However, it is the figures carved in relief that must bar it from the ‘Class I’ group. They give it more than incised symbols. It must therefore be recognised as Class II.

That there was little room on its original structure for a cross on the symbolled face has prompted thoughts that the stone once had a cross-carved face which was somehow stripped from it (the stone’s remaining fragments are only c.3cm thick). But there is no surviving evidence of this ‘stripping’, and had there been a ‘cross-



12 Ness

© Bob Henery

carved face’ at least some of its fragments would have been discovered when the symbolled fragments were unearthed.

Cross-carved or not, Birsay is outside the strict definition of a Class I stone. It is a symbol stone that is more than symbolled. It must therefore be recognised as Class II.

Not only may Ness (Tankerness), despite its omission from Fraser 2008, be evidence that Orkney, like Shetland, had a ‘Class II period’ but Birsay can reinforce this concept.

In addition, there are certainly two Orkney ‘Class III’ stones, the Holm and Flotta cross-slabs (ECMS III, 21–3). Their crosses look as ‘Pictish’ as any. There seems, therefore, to have been an *Orkney* progression, first the Class I stones, Burrian and Firth etc, then the Class II Birsay and Ness and, presumably later, the ‘Class III’ Holm and Flotta.



13 Birsay – the reconstruction

There is little doubt that the Orkney Class I and II stones preceded the Norse onslaught, Another symbol-rendering, this time on bone, very certainly did. The result of the carbon-dating of the Broch of Burrian bone fragment, one side incised with a *crescent and V-rod*, the other with a divided *mirror-case* (ibid, figs 22 and 22a), has been published (Clarke and Heald, 2008, 219–16). The bone can be dated, with a 95% certainty, to between AD570 and AD655. So can, almost certainly, its symbols. These are likely to have been incised when the bone was ‘fresh’. Even ten or twenty years later the bone would have hardened and been much less easy to incise.

As the decoration in the *crescent* is fairly simple and as the *V-rod* is without any decorative features and is unmistakably a flighted arrow, the Broch of Burrian *crescent and V-rod* may be an early example of that universal symbol. The *mirror-case*, which is as plain as that on South Ronaldsay, also seems early of its type. Perhaps the bone was incised close to the ‘starting date’ of Class I symbols, close to the time when they were first incised on stone.

The bone’s (?and symbols’) date also agrees with many writers’ assessments of the *starting* date of Class I symbols. It bears out Anderson (7th century) and Curle (6th century) and Stevenson. (mid-7th century). It is also *within* Radford’s bracket (4th/5th to mid-8th century) – but may be far from his ‘starting date’. (All these opinions *vis-à-vis* the dating of at least ‘Class I’ Pictish symbols are summarised in Mack 2007, 221–2 – but without the findings of Clarke and Heald.)

The Orkney Symbol Stones are:

Class I: Burrian, Firth (Redlands), Greens, Orphir 1 and 2, Oxtro, Sands of Evie and South Ronaldsay

Class II: Birsay and Ness (Tankerness)

(all listed in Mack 2007, App A and all described therein as Class I)

Disregarded are two of the stones listed in Fraser 2008: Broch of Gurness (ibid, 115, fig 165). It is a ‘small stone’ and not a ‘symbol stone proper’ (Mack 2007, 162 (Gurness)), not what Bob Henery would describe as ‘a monument’.

Pool, Sanday (Fraser 2008, 117, fig 171) has (in the writer’s opinion) no symbols (Mack 2007, 199 fn).

### Part 3 – A brief summary

The *double-disc and Z-rod* had been thought (at least by the writer) to have been a ‘late’ addition to the ‘symbol set’. It did seem ‘late’:

- 1 Although it is the third-most common of the symbols, a considerable proportion, about two fifths of its examples, are on Class II stones (25 Class II to 35 Class I) (Mack 2007, 277 revised). This is disproportionate. The total of the known or presumed Class II stones (69) is just over one quarter of all known or presumed symbol stones (now 251).
- 2 There *were* no known examples of the symbol on symbol stones north of the Dornoch Firth – in other words, none in what became Norsified Scotland. The Norse had arrived; the *double-disc and Z-rod* hadn’t.

But then the tables were turned, the appletart upset. The discovery of Mail 2, and its recognition by Anna Ritchie, not only showed that the *double-disc and Z-rod* had reached the Northern Isles when symbol stones were still being erected there, but that it had done so in Class II form – and also three *double-disc and Z-rod*-bearing artefacts were (at last!) noted by the writer.

As Mail 2 gave Shetland a ‘Class II period’, which was almost certainly before the Norse occupation, its other decorated stones were re-examined. Bressay and Papil might have remained within the Class III bracket, a natural progression from Mail 2’s Class II, but both have what might be a Class II feature. On both is what might be a *beast/lion* symbol.

Both have also almost unique features. On them are carved the figures of ecclesiastics. Perhaps neither stone was dedicated to a layman (especially as the symbol-bearing classes may have either fled before the Norse settlement or had been eradicated) but to a religious figure. Indeed, the *beasts/lions* on them may have been representations of the beast in the *Book of Durrow*, the ‘lion of St Mark’. Are the two Shetland stones’ apparent symbols the ‘symbols’ of saints?

In addition, the Bressay Stone is ogham-inscribed with perhaps a mixture of languages. One ‘word’ (or name), ‘meqqddrroan’, may be Pictish, ‘crrosc’ and ‘benniseff[?s]’ may be Old Irish – and also Latin-based, ‘nahhtvvdadds’ is more certainly Latin or Romance, but ‘datrr : ann [?Ann]’ is almost certainly Norse. Such a translation of the Bressay Ogham (and also the Scott and Ritchie translation) does seem to indicate a Norse/Pictish *blend* in Shetland.

Mail 2 may also have on it the remains of a *rectangle* rather than a cross, but if the interlace was part of a *rectangle*, the latter could have

been either above or below the *double-disc and Z-rod*.

The Orkney stones lack ecclesiastical figures but otherwise seem to demonstrate a Class I to Class II progression. Although Birsay's symbols are incised in a 'Class I style', it has more than symbols; it has figures, not a singleton figure but three and which are not incised like the symbols but carved in relief. These lift it into the 'Class II' category. Ness, despite its recent dismissal from the ranks of symbol stones, can reasonably be described as Class II. There also seems to have been an Orkney 'progression' from Class II to Class III. Orkney's Holm and Flotta slabs may be evidence of this.

Although no Orkney stone is carved with ecclesiastical figures, there is a common factor. Shetland's Papil and certainly its later Bressay seem to show a continuation of, an acceptance or toleration of the Christian Church in lands perhaps engulfed by heathen raiders/settlers. Orkney's Holm and Flotta seem to be evidence of the same.

Earlier assumptions of the writer's have been confounded. There was *no* disappearance of symbol stones in the Northern Isles at the end of the Class I period. In both Orkney and Shetland there was a progression into Class II carving. Even after the Norse onslaughts the Christian Church in the Isles did not disappear. In Orkney it remained – as the cross-carved Class III Holm and Flotta demonstrate. In Shetland too it survived. While Mail 2 is certainly a Class II stone, Bressay and Papil seem to be either Class II stones or *stones with symbols dedicated to saints*. Bressay, the latest of the three, may in particular demonstrate that, although the majority of the symbol-bearing classes may have either fled or perhaps been eliminated, the Pictish Church in the Northern Isles endured.

#### Addendum

(Some of its details are more fully explained in Mack 2010.)

Which way up is the Mail 2 fragment? The visible arm of its *double-disc and Z-rod* is neither floriated nor otherwise decorated as are almost all the fully-shown upper arm of the Class II *double-disc and Z-rod*. It can, perhaps, be compared to the 'lower' arm of the *double-disc and Z-rod* on the Norrie's Law plaques (ibid, fig 387). Neither it nor they are 'decorated', and all three have very similar terminals.

It may be impossible to be certain which way up the fragment should be seen (Ritchie 2010, 187) but, as there is a suggestion of a leaf-shaped terminal beneath the left-hand disc (ibid) and as the terminal seems to be that of an arm fractionally longer than the visible Z-rod arm, it is possible that the fragment should be viewed with the interlace *below* the *double-disc and Z-rod*. It is the almost-vanished arm that may have been floriated or otherwise decorated. Almost all of the Class II *double-disc and Z-rod* **upper** arms are (variously) decorated.

It may nevertheless be impossible to be certain which way up the fragment should be seen (ibid). Most of the fragment's surface 'below' the remains of its *double-disc and Z-rod* is flaked away.

These factors and the similarities of the devices on the disc from Gletness and the Abernethy symbol stone, a stone that can be described as being within the 'Kingdom of Fife', may demonstrate some common ground between Shetland and Fife, one influencing the other. As has been said above, the *tuning-fork* handle and the 'double-ended *pelta*' within Abernethy's *crescent and V-rod* are very similar to the devices that cap the corners of the 'diamond'-shape on the Gletness disc (8).

However the spread of these similar devices appears to demonstrate a northern rather than a southern influence.

Almost half of the occurrences of the *crescent and V-rod* containing *pelta*-design are on Orkney stones, three more are on Caithness and Sutherland stones, and elsewhere there are only two undisputed examples. Both are in the south, on stones in or close to Fife. One is the Abernethy stone, the other the Lindores stone (ECMS III, 343–44, fig 357). On the stone, which is now in the morthouse of Abdie Old Kirk (Mack 1997, 40–41), are three symbols. One is a *crescent and V-rod* containing a central *pelta* – somewhat defaced by a surveyor's bench mark.

The *pelta*-decoration within *crescent and V-rod* therefore seems to have originated in Orkney but, after penetrating Caithness and Sutherland, seems to have *leapt* from there to the extreme South. This apparent 'leap' makes it quite possible that the Mail *double-disc and Z-rod* was the design that inspired the craftsman who created the Norrie's Law plaques – although the plaques, being portable artefacts, could, of course, have been manufactured in Shetland or



elsewhere in the North and have been transported, perhaps in a hoard of Viking loot, to Fife. Another Shetland/Fife link may be apparent by virtue of the device on the Gletness disc and the similar scrolls within or part of the Abernethy stone's symbols. The Gletness device is composed of what may be four *pelta*-shapes; on the Abernethy stone are three.

The evidence may be slim – or even von Stumm-like – to link Shetland with Fife but there are no less than three concomitant factors. One is the part-similarity of the Mail 2 *double-disc and Z-rod* to those on the Norrie's Law plaques, another is the *pelta*-shape capping each corner of the Gletness device and forming the Abernethy *tuning-fork* handle, and the third is the *pelta*-decoration within *crecscant and V-rod* symbols. Four out of the seven Orkney *crecscant and V-rod* symbols are *pelta*-decorated, three more *pelta*-ed examples come from close by (Caithness and Sutherland), and the only other examples of a *pelta*-decorated *crecscant and V-rod* are on the Abernethy and Lindores stones.

This third apparently excludes Shetland. **But does it?** Look at the Breck of Hillwell drawings in Scott and Ritchie 2009, figure 2 or in Fraser 2008, figure 194. In the centre of its *crecscant* is an upside-down arc with certainly one scrolled point. It is almost certainly the remains of the upper part of a *pelta*.

In short, there are a number of Pictish symbol features which are shared by Shetland and Fife. There is some similarity of the Mail *double-disc and Z-rod* to the same symbols on the Norrie's Law plaques (and none to any other *double-disc and Z-rod*); there are the *peltae* on the Gletness disc and in the Abernethy and Lindores symbols; and finally there is the apparent *pelta* within the only Shetland *crecscant*.

One similarity may be dismissed as 'happencence'; a second may be relegated to 'coincidence'; but three in a row has rather more to say for itself. 'Slim' is the evidence – but where are any counters? Colonel von Stumm's great weakness was that he had already made his mind up, which let Hannay and Pienaar outwit him. The writer advises the readers to assess the information for *themselves* and not to copy von Stumm. *Reasoned* conclusions are needed, conclusions reached by *their own* examination of the evidence.

Further ideas will be welcomed by the author.

## Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Anna Ritchie for not only bringing the discovery of Mail 2 to his attention but also giving much other help. The assistance afforded by Bob Henery too has been invaluable – almost all the photographs are his, as are many of the ideas. The writer is indebted to Dr Ian Tait of The Shetland Museum and Archives Services for the excellent photograph of Mail 2 – and also to the editor of the Pictish Arts Society.

Alastair Mack

## Bibliography

- Anderson, J 1881 *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, Second Series. Edinburgh.
- Cessford, C 1997 The Crossbow Brooch from Carn Liath. *Pictish Arts Society Journal*, 11 (Summer 1997), 19–22.
- Clarke, D V and Heald, A 2008 A new date for 'Pictish' symbols. *Medieval Archaeology* 52, 291–6.
- ECMSIII: Allen, J R and Anderson, J 1903 *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, 3 parts. Edinburgh. (Reprinted, 2 vols Balgavies, Angus, 1993.)
- Fraser, I (ed) 2008 *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland*.
- Fraser, I and Ritchie, J N G 1999 *Pictish Symbol Stones: An Illustrated Gazetteer*. Edinburgh.
- Logan, J 1829 Observations on several monumental stones in the North of Scotland. *Archaeologica*, 22 (1829), 55–8.
- Mack, A L 1997 *Field Guide to the Pictish Symbol Stones*. Balgavies, Angus.
- 2007 *Symbols and Pictures*. Brechin.
- 2010 'The Mail symbol-bearing fragment: which way up?', *The Pictish Arts Society Newsletter* 54, Spring 2010, 6–7.
- Ritchie A 1997, The Picts in Shetland, in *The Worm, the Germ, and the Thorn*. 35–46, Balgavies, Angus.
- 2010 'A fragment of a Pictish symbol-bearing slab with carving in relief from Mail, Cunningsburgh, Shetland', *Proceedings of the Antiquaries of Scotland* 138 (2008), 185–91. Edinburgh.
- Ritchie, J N G and Fraser, I 1994, *Pictish Symbol Stones: A handlist*. Edinburgh.
- Scott, I G and Ritchie, A 2009, *Pictish and Viking-Age Carvings from Shetland*. Edinburgh.
- Stevenson, R B K 1981 *Frodskaparrit*, 28–9 (1981), 283–92.
- The Shetland Times* 9 June 2008.

also help improve communication. It should offer greater flexibility to the editor, and allow for colour illustrations which up till now have been regarded as too costly.

Again, both the President and Secretary would like to thank our fellow committee members for all their hard work. We are aware that several have indicated their intentions to stand down as soon at the end of the term. If you feel that you can help, please send your name to the Secretary at Pictavia, or speak to any of the committee members at the Conference. *SH*

---

## Stuart Ogilvy Kermack

**9 July 1934 – 8 August 2012**

Stuart Kermack was born in Edinburgh but brought up in Glasgow where he attended Glasgow Academy. After leaving school he studied jurisprudence at Jesus College, Oxford and later graduated LLB at Glasgow University. He was called to the Bar in 1958 and appointed Sheriff in Moray and Nairn in 1964. In 1974 he became Sheriff in Angus and Perth, and moved to Forfar. Stuart retired from this office in 1993, by which time his already poor eyesight had deteriorated to the extent that he could no longer keep up with the amount of reading involved in his work. His years on the bench are distinguished by an understanding approach to offenders and a commitment to rehabilitation rather than retribution. He was an active supporter of the Howard League for Penal Reform, the establishment of the children's hearing system, Sacro (Safeguarding Communities – Reducing Offending), Family Conciliation and alcohol education.

In his leisure time, Stuart enjoyed outdoor pursuits and was an enthusiastic, if not a naturally gifted, skier. He met his future wife, Barbara, on a ski-club outing, and the couple celebrated their golden wedding last year.

Stuart's abiding interest in early Scottish history was nurtured by his love of W J Watson's classic *The History of the Celtic Place-names of Scotland*, particularly the identification of Pictish place-names, and Stuart was well placed in Moray and Angus to explore those sites and the wealth of Pictish stone monuments in these areas.

It was his inspired initiative to commemorate the 1500th anniversary of Battle of Dunnichen with a major conference that led to 'The Picts: A new look at old problems' being held in Dundee in 1985. This in turn provided the impetus that gave rise to the formation of the Pictish Arts Society of

which he was an enthusiastic and active member – one remembers that, on a PAS Perthshire field-trip, he eagerly sacrificed his toothbrush to clear earth from the freshly upturned carved face of the cross-slab, Logierait 2. His own interpretation of the symbols resulted in a booklet, *The Pictish Symbols and the Vita Sancti Columbae*, which was distributed to members in 2009.

Stuart was also a good poet and, following the tragic, untimely death of his son Gavin, from illness at the age of 25, he wrote and later had published *Sonnets for My Son*; this publication was runner-up in the prestigious annual Callum Macdonald Memorial Award for pamphlet poetry in 2002.

Stuart bravely faced his final years despite impaired mobility and the loss of both his sight and hearing. He struggled to get to meetings and historical conferences which he had so much enjoyed attending, especially in Ireland where he revelled in gaining native status as his middle initial was invariably mistakenly rendered Irish-style, O'Kermack. He had a great sense of fun and, probably to the surprise of many members of the legal profession present at his funeral, the committal took place to the accompaniment of Jelly Roll Morton's 'Turtle Twist' – a fitting, upbeat farewell to a rich life, much of it, perforce, more staid and conventional than this quirky number would suggest.

Stuart is survived by his wife, Barbara, daughter Janet, sons Lewis and Calum, and two grandchildren. He will be greatly missed. *DH*

---

## Joy Dorward

We were saddened to hear of the recent death of Joy Dorward. PAS members may be aware of her late husband's work on place-name studies. Joy saw his last book, *The Sidlaw Hills*, through the latter stages of the publication process after David's death. She was a regular attender at TAFAC conferences, and had a lively interest in the study of history, being one of those rare people who brought a legal mind to its problems. Our sympathy goes out to her friends and family. *SH*

### PAS Newsletter 65

The deadline for receipt of material is

**Saturday 10 November 2012**

Please email contributions to the editor

<pas.news@btconnect.com>