

The background of the cover is a textured, light grey surface. In the center, there is a bright red square. To the left of the red square is a grey, irregular shape. Above the red square are three grey, irregular shapes stacked vertically. To the right of the red square is a large, dark grey, irregular shape. The overall composition is abstract and minimalist.

ANCIENT LIVES

OBJECT, PEOPLE AND PLACE IN EARLY SCOTLAND.

ESSAYS FOR DAVID V CLARKE ON HIS 70TH BIRTHDAY

edited by

Fraser Hunter and Alison Sheridan

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Sidestone Press

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Dr David V Clarke in March 2011, just before his retirement as Keeper of the Department of Archaeology, National Museums Scotland (and its predecessor institutions), 1981-2011. Photograph by Doug Simpson

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Dr Sally Foster has been a lecturer in Heritage and Conservation at the University of Stirling since 2014. She previously worked for the RCAHMS, Historic Scotland, the University of Glasgow and the University of Aberdeen. While at Historic Scotland she initiated a partnership with D V Clarke and his NMS colleagues on the Hilton of Cadboll project. Her current main research interests are Early Medieval Scotland in its wider context, especially the church, antiquarianism, historiography and later uses of Early Medieval material culture.

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Mark Jones worked at the British Museum, first as Curator of Medals and then as Keeper of Coins and Medals before becoming Director of the National Museums of Scotland in 1992. From 2001 to 2011 he was Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and is now Master of St Cross College, Oxford.

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Alan Saville retired in 2015 from National Museums Scotland where he had worked since 1989 in various roles, most recently as Senior Curator for Earliest Prehistory. Having specialised in prehistory at university, his early career focused on lithic artefact studies and field archaeology, including the rescue excavation of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age sites in south-west England. He has served in an honorary capacity as President of the Council for Scottish Archaeology and President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Sadly Alan died while this book was in press.

Ronnie Scott

Ronnie graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1966 where he specialised in ceramics and design. He taught Art and Design in Glasgow and became Principal Teacher of Art and Design at Nairn Academy in 1979. He started studying Archaeology with Aberdeen University outreach programme. He gained an MA in archaeology in 2007 and has worked on many archaeological projects, mainly on the Scottish mainland and in Orkney. He has worked with GUARD, the National Trust for Scotland and Reading Archaeology.

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A graduate of Stuart Piggott's Edinburgh Department of Archaeology, Alexandra (Lekky) Shepherd was one of the original team of excavators at David Clarke's excavations at Skara Brae in 1972-3. She worked on the early post-excavation stages, and acted as assistant director from 1977-81 at Skara Brae and at Links of Noltland, Westray. Since 1992 she has worked on the project to bring the excavations to publication. This work overlapped with the 20 years she spent as editor of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph Series. She has published a number of journal articles and contributions to monographs principally on late Neolithic/Chalcolithic (Beaker-related) material, many of these together with her late husband, Ian. Her most recent publication details the patterning within burial orientation and accompanying artefacts in the Chalcolithic – Early Bronze Age of northern Britain and the wider European sphere.

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Alison Sheridan has worked with David Clarke ever since arriving at what is now National Museums Scotland in the spring of 1987, initially as a ceramics specialist working on the Grooved Ware pottery from his excavations at Links of Noltland, then as a curator, and now as a facilitator assisting him with his work on publishing Skara Brae. She was a member of the curatorial team that worked on the *Early*

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Introduction: ‘If I can put it like that...’

Alison Sheridan and Fraser Hunter

This is a book for a man who frequently expresses his disdain for the *Festschrift* as a literary form (despite having co-edited one himself: O’Connor & Clarke 1983a), complaining that contents are usually so diverse that there is little of interest for any individual reader. It remains to be seen whether he changes his mind on being presented with this particular volume on the occasion of his 70th birthday in May 2016. It would be hard to create a book honouring David Clarke’s achievements in, and contributions to, Scottish archaeology and museology without there being a broad range of subject matter, such is the breadth and depth of these achievements and contributions.

Our story starts back in 1968 – ‘before Christ left Partick’, to use one of David’s favourite phrases – when the young David Victor Clarke BA, a native of Trowbridge in Wiltshire and a graduate of the University of Cardiff, arrived in Edinburgh to start work as a Research Assistant at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS)¹ in Queen Street, under the formidable and sage leadership of Robert B K Stevenson. David had become interested in archaeology while still at school, cycling to Avebury to participate in some of the 1960s excavations there. At university and immediately afterwards, when he worked on the finds from Cadbury Castle, Somerset as the Cadbury Research Fellow, David had learned from his mentor, Professor Leslie Alcock, the importance of adopting a rigorous approach to fieldwork and to artefact studies – skills that would be the hallmark of his future work. On joining NMAS David was permitted to undertake part-time doctoral research at Edinburgh University under Professor Stuart Piggott, and it was here that his interest in the history of archaeology and antiquarianism flourished. He was awarded a PhD for *The Barrow Diggers: Aspects of Archaeology in the 18th and 19th Century* in 1975.

1 There have been several institutional and museum name changes since then. In 1985, upon amalgamation with the then-named Royal Scottish Museum in Chambers Street, NMAS was renamed ‘Royal Museum of Scotland (RMS) (Queen Street)’, under the organisational umbrella ‘National Museums of Scotland’. The museum closed in 1995 and in 1998 a new building, the ‘Museum of Scotland’, opened in Chambers Street, adjoining the RMS there. The two buildings were renamed the ‘National Museum of Scotland’, and the umbrella organisation became ‘National Museums Scotland’, in 2006.

Maintaining a wide range of archaeological interests was a necessary part of the job at the thinly-staffed museum: early in his career, David was told by Stevenson ‘not to get any fancy ideas about specialising: you have to cover everything from earliest times to the Vikings’. That this exhortation was taken to heart is reflected in the wide range of subject matter in his publications, ranging chronologically from the Neolithic (eg ‘Rinyo and the Orcadian Neolithic’, 1983 and ‘The construction of narratives for Neolithic Scotland’, 2004) through the Bronze Age (eg ‘A hoard of Late Bronze Age gold objects from Heights of Brae...’, Clarke & Kemp 1984), and the Iron Age and Roman periods (eg ‘Bone dice and the Scottish Iron Age’, 1970; ‘Four Roman bells from Scotland’, 1971a), to the Early Historic/Medieval period (eg ‘Reading the multiple lives of Pictish symbol stones’, 2007a; *Early Medieval Scotland: Individuals, Communities and Ideas*, Clarke et al 2012). There is even a publication on a plough pebble (1972a). Other publications deal with the history of archaeology (eg his Rhind lecture on Joseph Anderson, 2002), with fieldwork methodology (eg ‘Defining and integrating sequences in site analysis...’, 2001a), with approaches to artefact study (eg ‘Small finds in the Atlantic province: problems of approach’, 1971b) and with museology (eg ‘Managing hegemony: the archaeological collections of the National Museums of Scotland’, 2007b); but arguably his best-known publication is his hugely influential *Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge* (Clarke et al 1985), which accompanied a major international exhibition of the same name and to which we shall return.

From his earliest days at NMAS, David played a part in the wider world of Scottish archaeology. His long association with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland began when he became a Fellow in December 1968, and he went on to serve as Editor of its *Proceedings* for volumes 110 (1978-80) to 112 (1982); as a Councillor from 1983 to 1986; as a Vice President from 1987 to 1990; an Assessor from 1990 to 1992; and an *ex officio* Councillor from 1978 to 1982 and 1992 to 2005.

David is best known, however, for his museum work, which spanned 43 years including 30 as Keeper of the Department of Archaeology (1981-2011). His early days as a curator were mostly spent cataloguing and researching parts of the collection, handling queries, organising study visits and loans and undertaking excavations – including those at the Late Neolithic Orcadian settlements at Skara Brae (1972-3 and 1977: see Shepherd, this volume) and Links of Noltland (1978-81: Fig 1). He was also responsible for establishing the former Custom House in Leith as the main store for the NMAS reserve collections, and for setting up the Artifact Research Unit (ARU) – first in Randolph Crescent, then Coates Place and finally Queen Street – as a centre for developing and sharing specialist expertise in studying archaeological artefacts, including those from his excavations (Clarke & Wickham-Jones 1981). Alumni and alumnae of the ARU include Caroline Wickham-Jones, Andrew Foxon, Ann Clarke, artefact illustrator Marion O’Neil and one of the current authors (JAS). Custom House was finally evacuated in 2015 and the ARU, sadly, did not survive the office move from Queen Street to Chambers Street in 1996.



Figure 1. David Clarke (centre, with mug) and his excavation team at Links of Noltland, Westray, Orkney, 1980. Alexandra (Lekky) Shepherd is to his right and Niall Sharples is fifth from the right in the back row, while Andrew Foxon and Caroline Wickham-Jones, then of the ARU, are the first two figures on the left in the middle row. Photograph taken by the late Ian Shepherd

In addition to building up the staff complement of the Archaeology Department, including the current authors (JAS in 1987, FJH in 1991), much of David's efforts during the 1980s and 1990s were directed towards creating memorable exhibitions, principally *Angels, Nobles and Unicorns* (1982), *Vienna 1900* (a highlight of the 1983 Edinburgh International Festival), *The Enterprising Scot* (1986) and the aforementioned, internationally-celebrated *Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge* (1985; Fig 2). The last, bringing together Neolithic to Early Bronze Age treasures from much of north-west Europe, was justifiably hailed by Neal Ascherson as '...a revolutionary act. It breaks with the old traditions of British archaeology. It nails up a recklessly bold manifesto about the nature of the past. It challenges us to reason about both past and present in a new way.' (*Observer*, 1 September 1985.) The associated book is now much sought after and must be one of the most frequently-mined volumes for its superb photographs by Ian Larnier, Mike Brooks and Doreen Moyes. All this stood David in good stead for the greatest challenge of his career: for six years from 1992 he played a major role, as Head of Exhibitions, in the development of an entirely new Museum of Scotland, which was built beside the Royal Museum of Scotland in Chambers Street and which opened in 1998. The *Early People* gallery in the basement, dealing with Scottish archaeology to AD 1100, effectively presents David's vision and again takes an uncompromising and stimulating approach: eschewing the tired and limiting chronological approach used by so many other museums, *Early People* presents its narrative on a thematic basis, allowing many different facets of objects to be explored in different parts of the displays (Clarke 1998a). It also, prominently, features the work of modern artists – Eduardo Paolozzi, Andy Goldsworthy and Tim Chalk – and this integration of modern art and ancient artefacts leaves a

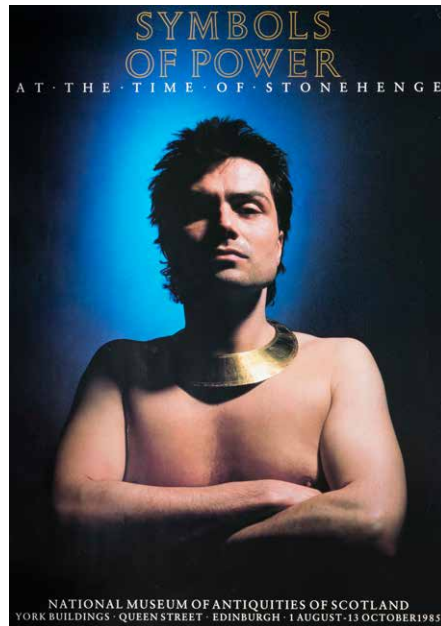
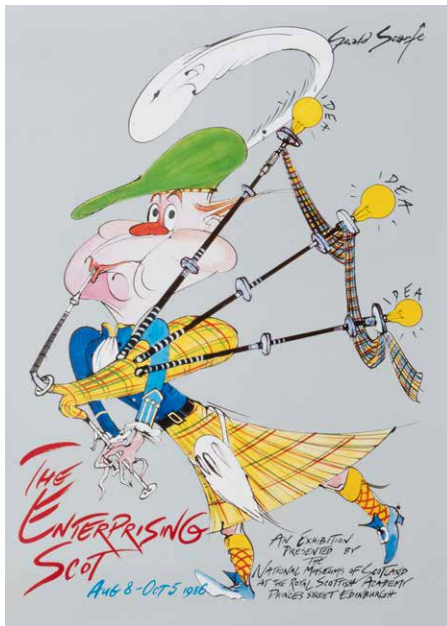


Figure 2. Exhibition posters for *The Enterprising Scot* and for *Symbols of Power* at the Time of Stonehenge. © National Museums Scotland

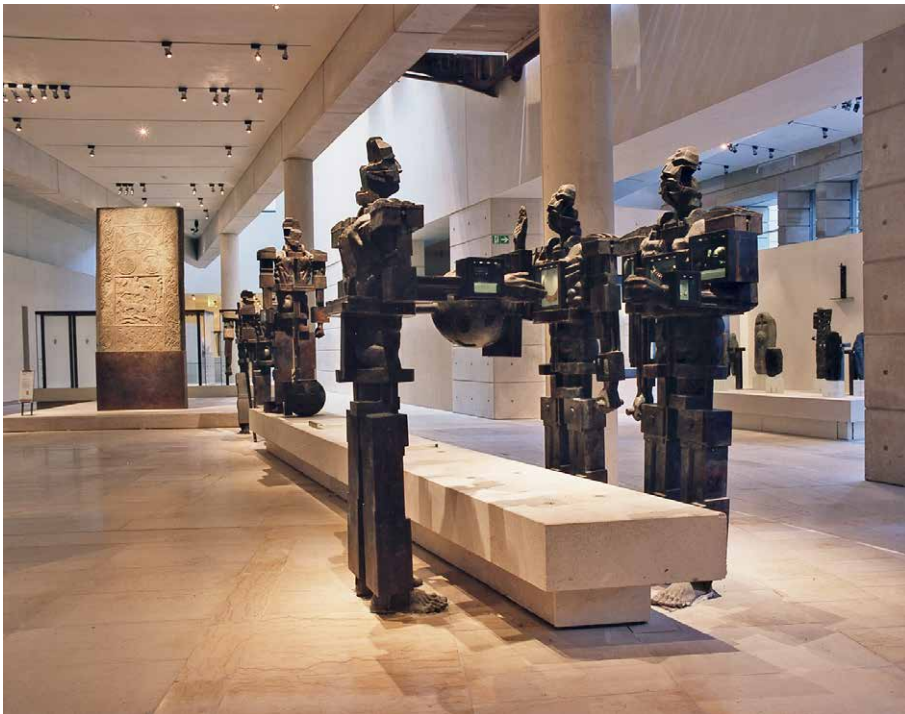


Figure 3. Some of the Paolozzi sculptures in the Early People gallery of the National Museum of Scotland. © National Museums Scotland

lasting impression on the visitor (Fig 3).² David's use of modern art to illuminate the past is not limited to *Early People*; he had previously used it to great effect in the poster for *The Enterprising Scot*, with its superb cartoon by Gerald Scarfe, and he is including a chapter by artist Philip Hughes in his Skara Brae *magnum opus*. It is a particular pleasure to have been granted permission by Philip Hughes to reproduce, on the cover of this volume, his 'House 1: Skara Brae' print, a copy of which takes pride of position in David's front room.

The latter part of David's museum career saw him advise on the creation of the Caithness Broch Centre (as described by Heald, this volume) and serve as a Trustee of Kilmartin House Museum. He also took an active interest in the development of multimedia heritage presentation, participating in various international initiatives including *Electronic Visualisation and the Arts*. A lasting legacy for his Department and for National Museums Scotland (NMS) more generally was his securing, in 2007, of generous sponsorship by the Glenmorangie whisky company for a research project into Early Medieval Scotland (Fig 4). This project, now in its third phase, has sponsored a research post and produced a series of exciting research and presentation initiatives (Clarke et al 2012). Some of the fruits of this NMS – Glenmorangie Partnership are presented in the contribution to this volume by Alice Blackwell, the Glenmorangie Research Fellow.

David's retirement on 31 March 2011 signalled a change of focus, as his formal educational work – which had already included providing external supervision for doctoral students (eg McLaren, this volume) and lecturing on the Scottish Blue Badge tourist guide training course – intensified. He was made an Honorary Visiting Professor in the Institute of Archaeology, University College London in 2012 and an Honorary Research Fellow at Edinburgh College of Art in the same year. He also teaches American students in Arcadia University's summer school 'Interpreting heritage' course. And his *magnum opus* on Skara Brae, undertaken with Alexandra (Lekky) Shepherd, is currently nearing completion; the long delay between excavation and publication, while too readily decried, has allowed David to take advantage of advances in scientific analysis to create a richer and more nuanced account of this iconic site.

The hallmark of all of David's work has been an unwavering commitment to excellence, with clarity of thought matched by precision in expression. David has never been afraid of swimming against the tide intellectually, or of airing views that have won him few friends in the Establishment, or of calling a spade a spade. His critiques – of ideas, publications, suggestions and pretty much anything else – have been trenchant but valuable: one learns far more from such 'tough love' than one would from a more diplomatic approach. Phenomenally well-read and with a near-photographic memory, David has been the first port of call for arcane information, and his departure from the Museum in 2011 – with the effective loss of 43 years of expertise – was keenly felt.

2 Goldsworthy's cracked-clay walling also made an impression on one of the workmen who was finishing the building in the run-up to its opening: David went down to the gallery one evening, to find the workman trying to smooth over the cracks!

Figure 4. David Clarke (left) with Hamish Torrie of The Glenmorangie Company, raising a toast to a Pictish throne recreated as part of the Glenmorangie Partnership activities. In the background is the Hilton of Cadboll stone, part of whose design forms the Signet logo of Glenmorangie whisky. © National Museums Scotland



That departure was marked by a fine and unconventional party in the *Early People* gallery, organised by his staff (who were informed by the authorities that they would be held personally responsible were any reveller to choke on a peanut), and by a day conference in his honour. Many of the presenters at that conference went on to contribute to the current volume, while some who had not spoken have now written chapters.

The volume is divided into three sections that mirror some of David's many interests. We start by considering ways of presenting the past, with Mark Jones posing the basic question: 'What are museums for?'; Andy Heald explaining the genesis of the Caithness Broch Centre; and Steve Driscoll exploring the conceptual and strategic issues involved in converting Govan Old Church into a heritage attraction. In line with current thinking about engaging the public – a topic dear to David's heart – Heald's and Driscoll's contributions emphasise the central importance of the community.

The second section – 'Ancient lives and multiple lives' – explores some of the antiquaries and archaeologists whose work has shaped aspects of archaeology in Scotland and beyond, and the impact of such antiquarian work on the biographies of objects. Strat Halliday picks up the Caithness theme with his consideration of the

work of Robert Innes Shearer; Trevor Cowie describes Vere Gordon Childe's work at the Early Bronze Age cairn at Ri Cruin, Kilmartin; and Alan Saville describes the life and achievements of Scotswoman Mary Elizabeth Boyle, who worked alongside Miles Burkitt and the Abbé Henri Breuil. Hugh Cheape's contribution discusses a different kind of historical personality, the Medieval prophet Thomas the Rhymer from the Scottish Borders, and traces the different ways in which his life and legacy were used, remembered and reinvented in different contexts. Sally Foster's authoritative account of the 19th-century replication of the St Andrews Sarcophagus introduces us to the concept of 'expiscation' – the process of finding out by skill or laborious effort, something that applies to much of David's researches. The contribution's focus on the creation of casts of archaeological monuments is germane to the research which David has recently been carrying out with Sally, and also pays tribute to the numerous casts of important monuments and structures that David commissioned during his museum career.

The final section – 'Pieces of the past' – offers accounts of specific research contributions to Scottish archaeology that all resonate with David's own work, primarily focusing on material culture and covering Neolithic to Medieval times. One of the current authors (JAS) assesses our current understanding of Scottish Neolithic pottery; Lekky Shepherd dispels some myths about Skara Brae; and Richard Bradley et al return to David's observation about the remarkably high density of prehistoric finds from Culbin Sands, Moray (Clarke 2004), and explore one possible reason for it. Dawn McLaren picks up on David's observation (2012a) that the past can be evoked through artefacts and stories as a way of negotiating the present, and applies this idea to the study of heirlooms and amulets in Early Bronze Age children's graves. David Breeze then examines evidence for corruption and venality in the Roman army in Scotland, while Martin Goldberg discusses the use of lithomarge in Roman and non-Roman Iron Age northern Britain, returning to a topic first discussed by David's mentor, Robert Stevenson. One of the current authors (FJH) then tackles antiquarian sources which reveal the existence of an Early Medieval centre for the manufacture of shale bangles at Portpatrick, Dumfries & Galloway. Susan Youngs investigates some of the classic pin types of the later Iron Age, proto-handpins and handpins, and discusses their occurrence and their remarkable frequency in silver, while Alice Blackwell takes a fresh look at Early Medieval figural sculpture from Aberlady (East Lothian), placing newly-discovered evidence for insets in the eyes into a wider context. Niall Sharples' and Ian Dennis's contribution focuses on another artefact type of interest to David (cf Clarke & Heald 2002), namely combs, and describes an important 13th-century comb-making workshop at Bornais, South Uist. Finally Mark Hall reviews the evidence for the use of jet and jet-like materials for gaming pieces from the Iron Age to the Medieval period in Britain and beyond.

As a major figure in Scottish archaeology, never afraid to 'tell it as it is', to challenge preconceptions, to play Devil's advocate and to combat mediocrity in all its forms, David has left an indelible impression on many people and we, the editors, are delighted to place on record our thanks to this inspiring contrarian who starts so many conversations with 'If I can put it like that...'

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all who spoke at the 2011 conference, the authors of the current volume and those who contributed to its publication costs, along with Corné van Woerdekom and Karsten Wentink of Sidestone Press, for their patience and for helping to keep this *Festschrift* a secret from the honorand. Mary Kemp Clarke and Niall Sharples are thanked for providing vital details; Neil McLean, for photographing the exhibition posters reproduced here; and Doug Simpson, for his portrait of David, used as the Frontispiece.

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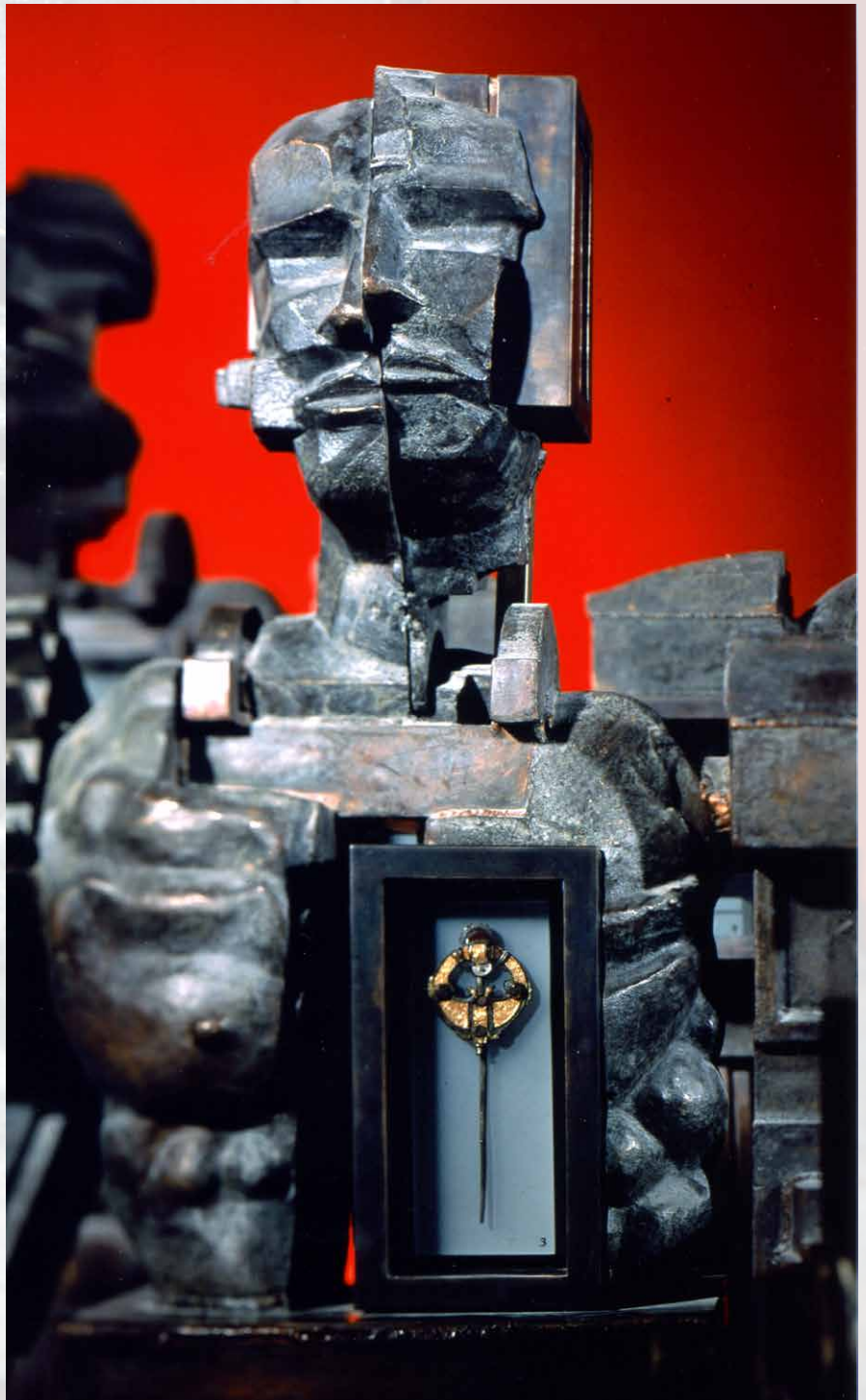
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*Bronze figures by Sir
Eduardo Paolozzi
in the Early People
gallery of the
National Museum of
Scotland. © National
Museums Scotland*



Section 1

Presenting the past

Museums and their collections

Mark Jones

Abstract

Discusses the formation and development of museums and their collections, importing insights from archaeology, anthropology and evolutionary biology to suggest explanations for the apparent contradictions in their development and behaviour.

Keywords: *Museums, collecting, handicap theory, aesthetics, competitive consumption*

This paper asks some naïve but fundamental questions about museums and collecting: in particular about differences between their declared purposes and intentions and their actual behaviour. My purpose is to ask whether we really understand museums and their collections: why they exist and what they do. I want to ask if there are existing approaches, developed by anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and even evolutionary biologists, which could help us to widen our understanding of their role in human society, and whether insights from these disciplines might help us to reconceive and so more effectively tackle some of the intractable problems that museums face.

What do we mean when we use the term ‘museum’? The International Council of Museums (ICOM)’s 1974-2001 definition of a museum was ‘A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.’ In 2007 this was replaced by ‘A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.’¹ The UK Museums Association says that ‘museums are public-facing, collections-based institutions that preserve and transmit knowledge, culture and history for past, present and future generations’.²

1 http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html (accessed 1.2.2016).

2 *Code of Ethics for Museums*, 2; issued with the January 2016 *Museums Journal*.

So it seems that all museums want, or claim to want, their collections to be enjoyed and in some sense learnt from and that they collectively intend to represent, preserve and transmit a rounded representation of human heritage, culture and history. But do they in fact do this, either individually or collectively? My contention is that museums are more mysterious, less straightforward, than they seem and believe themselves to be. So what do we not currently understand? What are our Rumsfeldian known and unknown unknowns? Where are the revealing half-truths, anxieties and silences in our discourse about museums that reveal what we consciously or unconsciously hide?

In what sense do museums collect and contain 'the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment'? This phrase suggests that we might hope to find in museums a picture of people's life and culture in the round as evidenced by and told through 'tangible and intangible heritage'. But that does not seem to represent the reality of the museums I know best. I was told, quite severely, when I joined the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) 'this is not a social history museum'. Fair enough. But doesn't that raise a question? Where are the museums that seriously collect and represent 'the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment'? Let us look briefly at the national museums and galleries based in London and see what they say about their purpose and their collections.

Tate says that its mission is to 'promote public understanding and enjoyment of British, modern and contemporary art'.³ Curiously its collections are not really visible on its website, which foregrounds its new building and current programme. It seems a stretch, though, to describe Erwin Worm's 'One minute sculptures' illustrated by a picture of him with his head and feet in buckets as promoting public understanding of contemporary art.⁴ The National Gallery says of itself that it houses the national collection of western European painting from the 13th to the 19th centuries and that its 'aim is to care for the collection, to enhance it for future generations, primarily by acquisition, and to study it, while encouraging access to the pictures for the education and enjoyment of the widest possible public now and in the future.' Very straightforward and easy to understand, and yet in their way both these statements are mysterious. Neither Tate nor the National Gallery attempt any explanation of why they have what they have: its value is simply assumed, and their collections have little to do with ICOM's 'evidence of people and their environment'. Among the first images encountered on the National Gallery website is Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520-3) (Fig 1). Religious, mythological and history painting on the one hand and contemporary art/performance on the other do not seem to represent the tangible and intangible heritage of people at large.

The British Museum is more promising. It says of itself that it is 'grounded in the Enlightenment idea that human cultures can, despite their differences, understand one another through mutual engagement. The Museum [it goes on] was to be a place where this kind of humane cross-cultural investigation could

3 <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/our-priorities> (accessed 1.2.16).

4 <http://www.tate.org.uk/> (accessed 1.2.16).



Figure 1. Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1520-3. National Gallery: NG35. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the National Gallery

happen. It still is.’⁵ The British Museum represents itself, indeed, as being in a very special and meaningful way ‘a universal museum’, a museum of and for all humanity, located in a world city and available to everyone from all over the globe.⁶ But if we go to the British Museum do we find any serious attempt to represent the human cultures that have shaped contemporary culture? We do not. Where, in the permanent displays, is the culture of the United States, or of modern China, or of the majority population of Brazil, of post-imperial India or post-war Germany? There only marginally and by exception in exhibitions of prints and drawings or medals or 20th-century design. The cultures strongly represented are ancient, medieval or marginalised. There is more in the British Museum about American Indians than there is about the dominant American culture that has shaped our

5 http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/management/about_us.aspx (accessed 30.1.16).

6 ‘The British Museum is a universal museum holding an encyclopaedic collection of material from across the world and all periods of human culture and history.’ From its acquisitions policy: <http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/acquisitions.pdf> (accessed 30.1.16). ‘The Trustees of the British Museum ... firmly believe that [a disputed Turkish stele] should remain part of the British Museum’s collection where it can be seen in a world context by a global audience.’ From a press release issued in 2012: http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/statements/the_stele_of_antiochus_i.aspx (accessed 30.1.16).

world over the last century. Not really universal then, and perhaps not the best place to understand the genesis or the complexities of the world we inhabit now. So how interesting that the British Museum continues to claim ‘universality’, and even more interesting that it is able to command public assent to this claim.

The Science Museum’s ‘mission is to make sense of the science that shapes our lives.’⁷ But actually its collection is rich in prototypes and rare examples of dead-end technologies, and expensive but unused scientific instruments. Very nice, but do they really make sense of the science that shapes our lives? The Natural History Museum in its turn says ‘Our vision is to advance our knowledge of the natural world, inspiring better care of our planet’, and, ‘Our mission is to maintain and develop our collections, and use them to promote the discovery, understanding, responsible use and enjoyment of the natural world.’ But what they highlight is a scary dinosaur, which died out more than 65 million years ago, not as a result of anthropogenic climate change – a rather indirect route to inspiring better care of our planet.⁸

The V&A’s stated aim is ‘To enrich people’s lives and inspire individuals and everyone in the creative industries, through the promotion of knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the designed world.’⁹ But actually its collections



Figure 2. Grinling Gibbons, Wooden Cravat, c 1690. V&A Museum: W.181:1-1928

7 National Museum of Science and Industry *Annual Report and Accounts 2010-11*, 5. http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/about_us/smg/-/-/media/52964446160A4783BD157A909EBD6B7E.pdf (accessed 30.1.16).

8 <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/> (accessed 1.2.16).

9 V&A *Mission and Objectives*. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/v-and-a-mission-and-objectives/> (accessed 30.1.16).

and displays are full of beautiful works of art which have little if anything to do with most people's understanding of design. The first object on its website used to be Grinling Gibbons' *Wooden Cravat*: marvellous, mad virtuosity which has as little to do with the history of design as any object could reasonably have (Fig 2).

Visible in the dissonance between the ICOM and Museums Association conception of museums and the reality, between the declared purpose, particularly of non-fine art museums, and their actual behaviour is a tension at the heart of museums, a tension which has a very considerable impact on their dealings with and interpretation of material culture. I can best illustrate this from the history of the South Kensington Museum (V&A) because it, like the Industrial Museum of Scotland (from 1864 the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art), was founded at a utilitarian moment, a moment when it was fashionable to question and define the purpose and usefulness of public institutions: so any gap between stated purpose and actual behaviour will be clearer for the V&A than for most other museums.

Set up as the teaching collection for the School of Design, established in 1837, this museum was originally intended to provide good examples and so to educate designers who could help create the goods needed to make Britain more competitive in international markets. When Henry Cole became director of the School in 1852 he enunciated a new and wider tripartite purpose for it: to educate and provide resources for designers as before, but also to sensitise the public to matters of taste and to raise the ambitions of manufacturers (Burton 1999, 23). To begin with the museum behaved as its founding purpose and expressed policy dictated. A committee, whose members were Augustus Pugin, Owen Jones, Richard Redgrave and Cole himself, was set up to spend £5,000 of public money on acquisitions from



Figure 3. Sandalwood jewel box, Mangalore, 1851. V&A Museum: 17-1852



Figure 4. R W Winfield, Gas jet, 1848. V&A Museum: M.20-1974

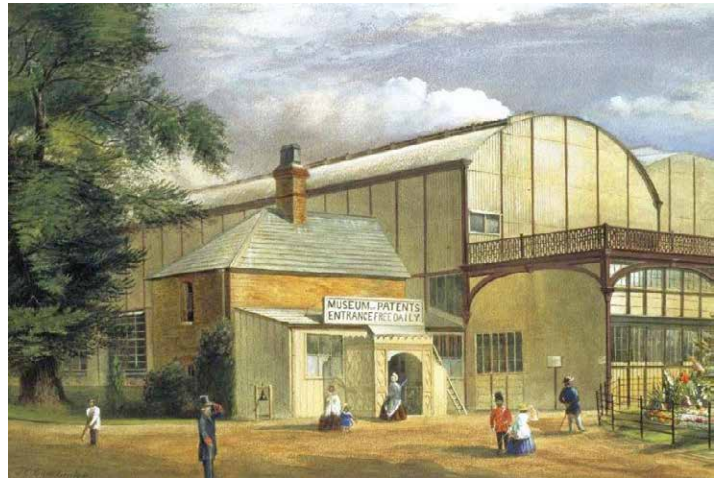


Figure 5. J C Lanchenick, Exterior of Brompton Boilers, South Kensington, 1863. V&A Museum: no 2816

the Great Exhibition. They set themselves to ‘choose whatever appeared especially meritorious or useful....in exemplifying some right principle of construction or of ornament, or some features of workmanship to which it appeared desirable that the attention of our students and manufacturers should be directed’ (ibid, 29). This was collecting with a clear purpose, a purpose to which they referred in the notes justifying each acquisition. This sandalwood jewel box (Fig 3), bought for £30-10s, was valued because ‘the decoration is admirably subordinated to the leading lines and members of the composition...[and] deserving of study by the decorative artist’ (Wainwright & Gere 2002, 40).

Visitors to the displays which opened in Marlborough House in 1852 encountered a clear statement of the proper principles of decorative art, beginning ‘The true office of ornament is the decoration of Utility. Ornament, therefore, ought always to be secondary to Utility’ (Burton 1999, 30). They could then visit a ‘Chamber of Horrors’, with explanations as to why each object was in error. A gas jet made and exhibited by R W Winfield at the Great Exhibition (Fig 4) was dismissed as ‘gas flaming from the petal of a convolvulus! – one class of ornament very popular but entirely indefensible in principle’ (ibid, 30).

The museum’s new home in South Kensington was designed, after a sketch by Prince Albert, in accordance with this philosophy: a prefabricated cast iron and glass structure that used new manufacturing techniques to provide the space and light that the displays required. It was ugly, economical and fit for purpose: quite unlike any other museum building before or since (Fig 5). And the collection was used actively for teaching (Fig 6). ‘The museum is intended to be used,’ stressed Cole, ‘and not only to be used physically, but to be talked about and lectured upon’ (ibid, 80). As John Charles Robinson, the first curator of the museum, explained in his *Introductory addresses on the Science and Art Department and the South Kensington Museum* delivered in 1857, ‘practical utility in an educational point of view is its most important function’ (ibid, 79).

Figure 6. A lecture
on ironwork, using
specimens, 1870

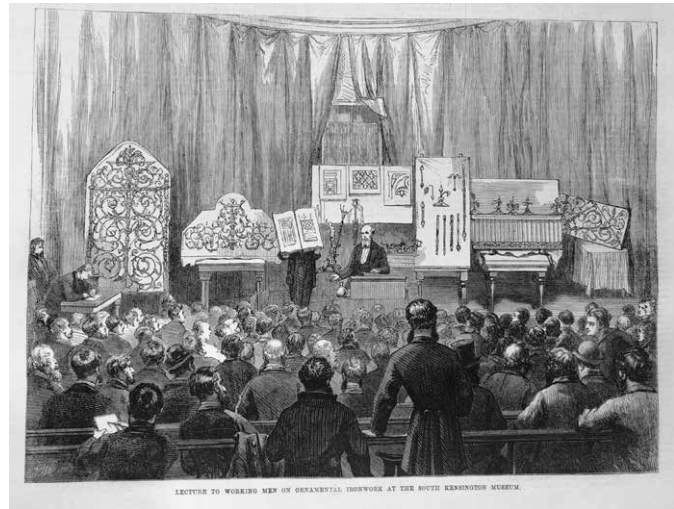


Figure 7.
Francis Danby,
Disappointed Love,
1821. V&A Museum:
FA.65. Given by John
Sheepshanks



The new buildings were to contain, besides the Art Museum from Marlborough House, an Educational Museum, a Patent Museum, an Architectural Museum, displays of food and animal products, a museum of construction and the Sculptors' Institute Collection. So more space was sorely needed. But the first addition, in 1857, was neither for the existing collection nor for the rational expansion of that collection. Instead it housed a new private collection which had nothing to do with design: John Sheepshanks' collection of paintings. Francis Danby's *Disappointed Love* (1821) is typical of its content: charming but not obviously relevant to the education of designers or the improvement of public taste in design (Fig 7). The tension between the museum's desire to fulfil its public purpose and its desire to collect, and in particular to collect fine art, was already being felt.

This tension was most clearly expressed in the struggle between Cole and the young Robinson, described by Anthony Burton (ibid, 37) in his history of the V&A as 'a curator of genius'. Robinson declared, in his 1855 introduction to one of the circulating exhibitions drawn from the museum, that it was 'clearly a

national duty to countenance and encourage the collector' (ibid, 38 n76). And collect he did, in his own words 'ransacking' Europe for works of art, acquiring 1,400 objects in 1854 alone and mounting a massive display of 9,000 works of art from 500 private collections at the South Kensington Museum to coincide with the Great Exhibition of 1862 (ibid, 64). His passion for collecting seemed to many to be in clear conflict with the core purpose of the Museum. 'What is the use of such rubbish to our manufacturers?', asked the then Prime Minister Lord Palmerston when importuned by Cole to sanction the purchase of Jules Soulages' wonderful collection. In 1865 even *The Art Journal* was asking 'what use to the practical workman of the present day is the reliquary purchased recently ... in Paris for the enormous sum of £2,142', and by 1868 students at the London School of Design were complaining that the South Kensington displays were of 'limited utility' (Yallop 2012, 84). In 1875 *The Telegraph's* charge was that 'the gravest accusation which ... must be brought against South Kensington is that it has failed as a rule to rear accomplished practitioners of the crafts which it was avowedly founded to teach' and has instead turned out 'a distressingly large quantity of more or less mediocre picture painters' (Burton 1999, 127). Du Maurier wittily encapsulated the problem in his *Chinaman* cartoons which appeared in *Punch* magazine:

Pale enthusiast: this is the cream of my collection, ladies and gentlemen. It is quite unique. It was made by the Fallowbrook Pottery that was started in 1870. It took them three years to produce this plate, their only one, and then – and then – Ruddy philistine 'And then they shut up I suppose'. Pale enthusiast 'Er yes'. Ruddy philistine 'And I don't wonder' (Punch, 17 December 1874)

The very opposite, obviously, of the commercial success the South Kensington system was supposed to foster. Eventually Robinson was sacked. But Robinson outlived Cole. Soon after Cole's retirement in 1873 he was once again advising and buying for the museum, and in 1880 the 'modern examples of Art manufacture' were sent away from South Kensington to Bethnal Green (Burton 1999, 129).

The V&A, then, was founded with a purpose. Its staff, public and paymasters remained aware of that purpose and yet, obeying a profound and unstated compulsion, it quite rapidly and decisively moved away from it – further perhaps than many people realise. It is often thought of as a museum of useful things. But, putting aside its collections of fine art (art is of course defined as fine if it serves no practical purpose, just as maths is 'pure' when it provides no solution to practical problems), it is in fact full of things that belong to categories of useful object but which were not really intended for use: state beds not to be slept in (Fig 8), snuff boxes not to contain snuff, presentation swords not to be fought with, clothes for ceremonial occasions only. Mantuas,¹⁰ never seen except at Court, are better represented in the V&A's collections than the clothes women wore every day. And they are there because the collectors who gave their collections to the museum and the curators who collected on its behalf have always been more attracted by the rare and exceptional than by the everyday. It is no different with modern and

10 Mantuas, which originated as loose overgowns, became a highly stylised element of court dress.



Figure 8. Melville Bed, V&A Museum, W.35:1 to 72-1949. Given by the Rt Hon the Earl of Melville

contemporary design. How often have I heard argued the desirability of acquiring a rare prototype, never put into production, and how rarely seen arguments for objects whose design quality is attested by their success in the market and evidenced by the wear and tear of regular use?

And yet for many it would be exciting to have, not only what tends to survive in museum dress collections – which is overwhelmingly what is made for best, for show, for the special occasion, wedding dresses worn once only or embroidered waistcoats – but also the whole of what a particular person was actually wearing on a particular day. Museums have become better at understanding the importance of the history of objects, but they still quite often acquire dress without any history at all, brand new from the designer or the shop. How can one talk of the history of design or of dress without being interested in the evidence of the ways in which real people deploy it? Couldn't historians of dress, or for that matter of interior decoration or decorative arts, apply the disciplines applied to collecting by anthropologists so that our successors would be left with a real understanding of the place and function of such objects in people's lives?

I used to work in the collection of coins and medals in the British Museum: a magnificent resource for understanding the history of money, and represented as such in the *Citi Money* gallery. 'The history of money can be traced back over 4,000 years... Looking at the history of money gives us a way to understand the history of the world', read the rubric on the British Museum website when the gallery reopened in 2012. But with some exceptions the collection has been formed and honed in such a way as systematically to exclude evidence of wear: that is to say the evidence of coins' actual use as a medium of exchange, the very thing



Figure 9. Gold Mancus of Coenwulf, British Museum: CM 2006, 0204.1.
 Photo © Trustees of the British Museum, reproduced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International licence

that makes them so historically important. ‘This gold coin of Coenwulf, king of Mercia (796-821),’¹¹ read the caption on an image with which the department illustrated its collection (Fig 9), ‘is unique, and one of only eight gold British coins known from the period AD 700-1250.’ Interestingly the caption insisted that it was ‘currency’ which, for the reason just given, sounds unlikely. The exceptions of course are archaeological finds – hoards – which are kept intact and therefore represent coinage in quite different states of wear from the rest of the collection. Why are the methods and insights of archaeology, so effective in the study of prehistory, so rarely applied to the historical period? Why are the insights and methods of anthropologists, so effectively represented in museum collections of ‘the other’, of distant or threatened cultures, so rarely applied to our own? When I was Keeper of Coins and Medals I initiated the collection of a transaction, that is to say, the coins and notes actually used for a particular purchase: something which had never been done before.

In the 1960s and 1970s the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland collected, under the guidance of its director, Sandy Fenton (who later set up the European Ethnological Research Centre), the complete contents of a shepherd’s house and of a chemists’ shop, but there is little sign of these rare survivals in the collections online.

This may sound like criticism, but it is intended more as an observation of behaviour: an attempt to understand what museums really are and what they really do so that, ideally, ways can be found to enable them to be more reflective and effective.

Having discussed the collections, their formation and representation, we should also look at museum buildings, the containers or vehicles for the objects and see how they relate to their public purpose. The continuing tension between stated purpose and actual behaviour is perfectly exemplified by Aston Webb’s building for

11 <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/gold-mancus-of-coenwulf/JwGvdDXWCPb1ew> (accessed 30.1.16).

the V&A (Fig 10). Over the main entrance is carved Sir Joshua Reynolds' assertion, 'The excellence of every art must consist in the complete accomplishment of its purpose'. But what is the purpose of the dome above it or the minarets that so splendidly decorate its roof? If museums were simply to house and display objects they could look like the 'Boiler House' or Dia Beacon, the collection of minimalist art in upstate New York that is housed in what was once a Nabisco factory (Fig 11). But in fact they conspicuously consume space, and then need to create the art to fill it. As can be seen in a wide range of recent museums from the Bilbao Guggenheim (Fig 12) to the Soumaya Museum, built by Carlos Sim in Mexico City (Fig 13), they assume unlikely and exciting forms that are difficult and expensive to build



Figure 10. Victoria and Albert Museum © Peter Kelleher



Figure 11. Dia Beacon, New York. Wikimedia Commons

and which go beyond the practical needs of collection display. Their buildings and collections are peculiar in ways which they struggle to explain, and their public can often be left with a false or partial impression of what they are seeing within them.

It is obvious, I hope, that many of the objects in museums are products of competitive consumption and competitive display. This does not need to be argued for silver dinner services, gold-embroidered clothes or diamond-encrusted snuff boxes. It is perhaps marginally less obvious for fine art. But consider that



Figure 12. Guggenheim, Bilbao, 1997. Wikimedia Commons



Figure 13. Soumaya Museum, Mexico City, 2011. Wikimedia Commons

the definition of ‘fine’ art is that it has no useful purpose and that its value bears no relation to its intrinsic worth. The creation and collection of fine art is the perfect way in which to demonstrate surplus wealth, power and discernment. And the containers of so much conspicuous consumption, museum buildings, are themselves acts of competitive display, designed to demonstrate by the conspicuous consumption of space, by their expensively idiosyncratic design and their lavish use of materials, that their owners and progenitors can afford them.

What is the drive behind this? Museum collections, as we can see even from the V&A, a museum which originated with a purpose but no inherited collection, derive from an urge to collect that goes way beyond and often defies any notion of utility. Collecting can be seen as a pure example of competitive or conspicuous consumption, the phenomenon so brilliantly analysed by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in the United States more than a century ago (Veblen 1899). Essentially his observation was that people, even poor people, consume more to assert status than to fulfil basic needs. According to him wealth determines status, and people desire status above all else. So thrifty goods are in his word ‘humilific’ while ‘conspicuously wasteful honorific expenditure that confers spiritual well-being may become more indispensable than much ... which ministers to the “lower” wants of physical well-being or sustenance only’ (Veblen 1979, 181). He points out that our sense of what is beautiful is often informed by our knowledge of what is expensive and rare. A silver spoon is considered more beautiful than an aluminium spoon, a hand-made spoon with its marks of imperfection, more beautiful than a perfectly machine-made one (ibid, 126-7). Kelmscott Press books with ‘obsolete spelling, printed in block-letter, bound in

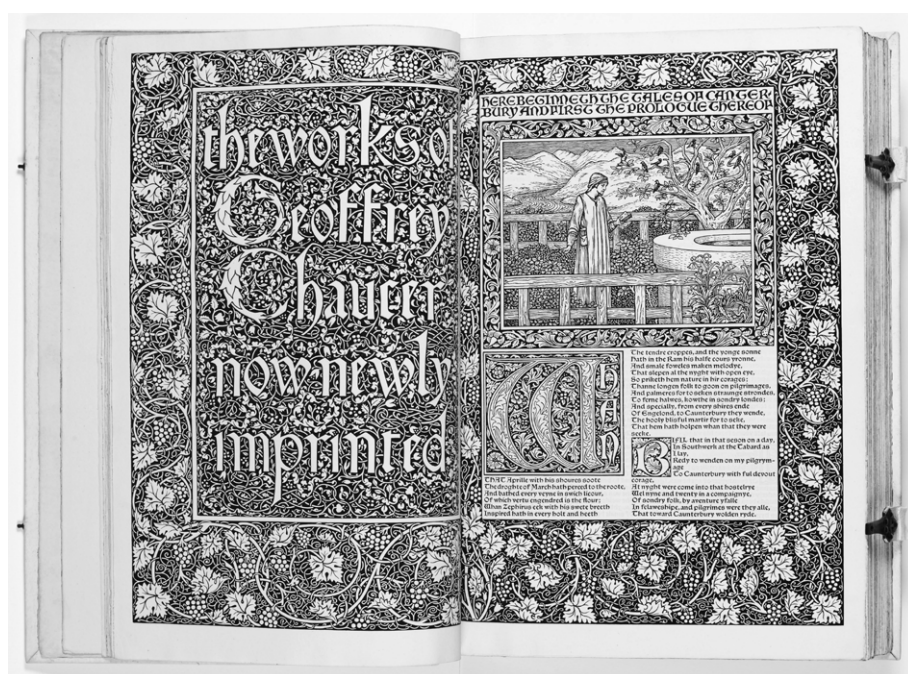


Figure 14. William Morris, Kelmscott Chaucer, 1896. British Library C.43.h.19

limp vellum fitted with thongs' in limited editions were regarded as the acme of taste although, in his opinion, quite useless as books (ibid, 163) (Fig 14).

Veblen's description of conspicuous consumption as a behaviour, and of its relationship to our aesthetic sense, was and remains convincing though widely ignored: it is surprising that the theory that markets are ruled by competition on price has lasted so well in the face of overwhelming evidence that consumers are motivated by other considerations. What is the reason for this behaviour? His formulation is 'conspicuous waste and conspicuous leisure are reputable because they are evidence of pecuniary strength; pecuniary strength is reputable or honorific because, in the last analysis, it argues success and superior force' (ibid, 181). Why is success so sought-after? Because, in the context of evolutionary biology, human beings are primates and like all primates, indeed all mammals and birds, are highly status-conscious and hierarchical. In his book *Status Syndrome*, Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London, demonstrates how fundamentally status affects every area of wellbeing. His work demonstrates that 'Where you stand in the social hierarchy ... is intimately related to your chances of getting ill and your length of life ... In other words health follows a social gradient' (Marmot 2004,1). This is not just about the difference between the poor and the rich. American presidents live longer than vice presidents, Oscar winners live longer than those merely nominated for an Academy award, Permanent Secretaries in the Civil Service longer than Deputy Secretaries (ibid, 23, 39).

Veblen was very aware of this and used language drawn from Darwin's theory of evolution. 'The life of man in society, just like the life of other species, is a struggle for existence', he wrote, 'and therefore it is a process of selective adaption. The evolution of social structure has been a process of natural selection of institutions' and they are 'in their turn efficient factors of selection' (Veblen 1979, 188). Indeed he argued, in a passage presaging Richard Dawkins' (1976) theory of memes, that 'in whatever way usages and customs and methods of expenditure arise, they are all subject to the selective action of this norm of reputability; and the degree in which they conform to its requirements is a test of their fitness to survive in competition with other similar usages and customs' (Veblen 1979, 166).

Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, published in 1871, argues that to give their offspring the best chance of surviving and thriving females need to choose males with the best genes. And males in their turn need to attract females by demonstrating their fitness. This can be done by physical competition, so size and strength will impress rivals and assert power and status (Fig 15). We can see this reflected in representations of power: ceremonial dress, which has the purpose of denoting status, often exaggerates the size and shoulder width of the wearer as can be seen in many European ruler portraits,¹² and in the conventions that govern military uniform¹³ (Fig 16). It is notable too that, even in European art which appears to obey the rules of perspective, the figure of the ruler

12 See for example Hyacinthe Rigaud's portrait of Louis XIV (Fig 16) or Winterhalter's Napoleon III (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franz_Xaver_Winterhalter_Napoleon_III.jpg, accessed 30.1.16)

13 Epaulettes are used to exaggerate the breadth of the wearer's shoulders.

is almost always larger than that of anyone else. Louis XIV was about 1.6 metres in height, though the high heels that he wore at Court (visible in Rigaud's portrait) and his wig made him appear taller. Despite this he is always represented as bigger than those who surround him even when this requires that the rules of perspective are ignored (Jones 2015, 167-8).



Figure 15. Hereford bull. By user Robert Merkel on en.wikipedia



Figure 16. Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louis XIV, 1701. Louvre, inv 7492. Wikipedia

There are other kinds of display, most famously the peacock's tail, which do not demonstrate but detract from the owner's ability to fight or flee. Amotz and Avishag Zahavi have developed a 'handicap' theory which essentially suggests that fitness is often demonstrated by the ability to bear a handicap (Zahavi & Zahavi 1997). The peacock with the biggest and brightest tail attracts most females because the ability to grow and sustain a showy tail suggests good genes. The tail is of no practical use to the peacock: it is a handicap, and it is the ability to bear a handicap and to thrive despite it that is an advertisement and guarantee of fitness. The same is true of a blackbird's song. The singing male is demonstrating that he is so fit and such a good forager that he does not need to spend time searching for food; also that he is unafraid of showing himself on a high place, thus attracting the attention of predators as well as potential mates. The female can judge the quality of his genes from the perfection of his song. If every note and interval is right then he must indeed be fit and his genes good.

The peacock and the blackbird tell us, I think, why we love music and beautiful things. The exercise of discernment, aesthetic judgement if you like, is so important and advantageous in evolutionary terms that it delivers a dopamine reward. We are made to take pleasure in beauty.

Display or handicap behaviour is widespread and varied. Birds of Paradise and Bower birds have interestingly different strategies. The former have big bright plumage, a handicap of the same kind as a peacock's tail. The latter are dowdy. Instead of growing glorious plumage they build bowers and decorate them. The rarer and harder to procure the decorations are, the more they attract females, because the ability to collect rare objects demonstrates fitness. Archbold's Bower bird collects the plumes of a bird of paradise known as the King of Saxony. As Jared Diamond puts it, a female Bower bird who finds a male that has decorated his bower with King of Saxony plumes knows 'that she has located a dominant male who is terrific at finding or stealing rare objects and defeating would-be thieves' (Diamond 1991, 105; quoted by Ridley 2000, 143). The local human population in the mountains of New Guinea prize and collect these plumes too.

The idea that handicaps can display fitness, in an evolutionary sense, is also present in Veblen's work. According to him, in 1899, the 'high heel obviously makes any ... manual work extremely difficult' while 'the corset is, in economic theory, substantially a mutilation, undergone for the purpose of ... rendering [the women who wear it] ... permanently and obviously unfit for work' (Veblen 1979, 171-2). Amotz Zahavi would, I think, describe corsets or high heels as handicaps, demonstrating the superior fitness of those who are able to wear them, while Veblen, in 1899, believed them to be displays of fitness by proxy, reflecting the wealth of masculine consorts.

Collecting rare, expensive and high-status objects is a display behaviour for Bower birds (and other animals) and I would suggest that it is a display behaviour among humans as well. Collectors typically compare their prized pieces with those of others, often with the hope that theirs is better, and like to show their collections, particularly to those who will appreciate their quality and rarity. These are classic examples of competitive display. Just as the magnificence of St Peter's Basilica or the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, or the intricate beauty of the

Sainte Chapelle¹⁴ in Paris, reflects and is justified by the importance of the relics they contain, so the magnificence of museums reflects and reinforces the status of the objects which they contain. And, as pilgrimage to see and experience relics was the main driver of medieval ‘tourism’, so travelling to see and experience ‘relics’ in museums is a motive for much contemporary tourism.¹⁵

The well-known art critic, the late Brian Sewell, reflecting a commonly held view, asserted in one of his *Evening Standard* articles that museums or galleries turn their contents into ‘futile curiosities’ ‘neutered of purpose’.¹⁶ That is to say that museums remove objects from their original context and purpose and so drain them of life and meaning. This is the opposite of the truth which is that objects made for display, as most things in museums are, reach their apotheosis in the temples created to show them.

Such objects are found not only in modern times and in western culture but all around the world and through the course of human history. In prehistory stone axeheads played a centrally important functional role and they are found in large numbers. Alongside them are also found purely ceremonial axeheads (Fig 17) made from rare or exotic stones such as jadeitite. This meticulously polished Neolithic axehead, said to have been found near Canterbury, was made from stone found far away in the north Italian Alps (MacGregor 2010, 84-9). Enormous labour was needed to achieve its smooth, unblemished surface. Such objects, neither used nor intended for any utilitarian purpose, are found all over the world – in Europe, China, America and elsewhere. David Clarke, in his 1985 exhibition *Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge*, proposed a new perspective on such objects (Clarke et al 1985), as did the Marischal Museum, Aberdeen in a brilliant display of the same period which systematically analysed and deconstructed the status-enhancing function of much modern European material culture. It is perplexing and saddening that such lively and illuminating approaches to the interpretation of objects have not been more widely imitated.¹⁷

The importance of objects in establishing and maintaining status is often noted by anthropologists. Marcel Mauss in *The Gift* noted that in many societies around the world, rank within a community and relations between communities were governed by the accumulation of high-status objects (Mauss 1925; Stewart



Figure 17. Jadeitite axehead, probably deposited c 4000 BC, said to have been found near Canterbury. British Museum BPE 1901 0206 1. ©Trustees of the British Museum

14 Built 1242-8 to house the crown of thorns and other relics of the passion acquired by Louis IX.

15 The ten most visited tourist attractions in the UK are museums; ALVA 2014 visitor figures (<http://alva.org.uk/details.cfm?p=423>, accessed 30.1.16).

16 *Evening Standard* 6.1.11.

17 'The award-winning displays of Marischal Museum have been closed to the public since 2008'; <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/museums/exhibitions/marischal-museum.php> (accessed 30.1.16). Clicking on 'Marischal Virtual Museum' in 2016 brought up the single word 'Forbidden'.

& Strathearn 2002). Giving, he argued, creates an obligation which can only be discharged by returning a larger gift. Competitive giving is therefore aimed at reducing the status of others. Ritual giving equally plays an important part in European culture and it is striking how high a proportion of the objects in museums are gifts. Medals, with which I am familiar, were almost always made to be given, sometimes by a city to its sovereign, more often by a ruler to an inferior, sometimes between equals. Prize medals and for that matter military medals are conventionalised gifts. So were the presentation swords and the snuff boxes discussed earlier. It would be worthwhile, I think, to bring out more fully than we have done the particular significance of gifts and gift giving in relation to museum collections: to identify and expose the quite elaborate conventions, obligations and inhibitions that surround gift exchange in modern and contemporary western culture as well as in the culture of the other.

The Castlereagh Inkstand in the V&A (Fig 18) is one example among many of an object which would be better understood if its significance in relation to such conventions were more fully explained. It bears an inscription reading 'This inkstand is composed of the gold taken from the portrait snuff boxes which were presented by the SOVEREIGNS of Europe whose Arms are engraved hereon to Viscount Castlereagh upon the signature of the several treaties concluded in the Years 1813, 1814, & 1815'. The arms engraved on top of the platform of the inkstand are those of the four great Continental powers: Austria, Prussia, Russia and restored Bourbon France. On the sides are the arms of the Roman States, Bavaria, Portugal, Saxony, Sardinia, Hanover, Sweden, Württemberg, Naples, Spain, Denmark and the Netherlands. Twenty-one of the gold boxes which Castlereagh had received from the sovereigns of these states were deposited with Rundell's, the royal goldsmiths, on 6 March 1817 and turned into the object you see here. The V&A's description of the object treats it as a commemorative piece. And so it is. But it is also a statement. The gift of gold boxes was a standard way in which rulers rewarded those who had served them. They contained a portrait of the giver, thus establishing a personal link between giver and recipient, and were of very significant intrinsic value, often made of gold and set with gems. As Mauss noted, the receipt of such a gift created an obligation and reduced the status of the recipient. Conventionally the recipient of a gold box was expected to keep and display it (rather like a signed photograph of the Queen). It was understood that if times were hard it might silently be melted down and turned into cash. But what Castlereagh did was deliberately and publicly to reject the connection and the obligation. He destroyed the portraits of every ruler in Europe, an action which in preceding centuries could have been interpreted as deliberate *lèse majesté*, and incorporated the gold in an elaborately useless and showy object. No wonder the British Foreign Secretary was famous for his arrogance.

Anthropologists note that increase in supply can be a problem in any gift-exchange society. In fact of course it is also a problem in monetised economies, and cultures that place monetary value on high-status goods have categories of object such as fine art or high end fashion, the price of which can vary more or less arbitrarily as the quantum of surplus cash varies: the question 'is Munch's *The Scream* really worth \$120 million?' has meaning, if at all, only in relation to the



Figure 18. Paul Storr, Castlereagh Inkstand, 1817-9. V&A M.8:1 to 7-2003

purchase of other works of art. The way in which gift-exchange societies deal with the problem of oversupply is most famously exemplified by the potlatch, in which the distribution of gifts by north-west coast native Americans is accompanied by the ritual destruction of large quantities of ceremonial objects. Franz Boas, writing in 1897, described the Kwakiutl system of ‘fighting with property’ thus:

The rivalry between chiefs and clans finds its strongest expression in the destruction of property. A chief will burn blankets, a canoe, or break a copper, thus indicating his disregard of the amount of property destroyed and showing that his mind is stronger, his power greater, than that of his rival. If the latter is not able to destroy an equal amount of property without much delay, his name is ‘broken’. He is vanquished by his rival and his influences with his tribe lost, while the name of the other chief gains correspondingly in renown (Boas 1897, 353-4).¹⁸

The potlatch does more though than simply restore the necessary scarcity of the relevant category of object. Gift-exchange is an inherently unstable way of creating hierarchies. If I give you ten stone axeheads you are in my debt and I am on the way to being recognised as more important than you. But if you then, after a suitable interval, give me or someone else fifteen, our roles are reversed. Through a potlatch, or sacrifice, though, I can gain a longer-lasting advantage over you. If I slaughter pigs as a sacrifice to the deities, if like the Kwakiutl I burn blankets, I gain the prestige which would attach to the gift of such objects while at the same time increasing their scarcity and reducing your ability to respond. Objects in stone and metal cannot be so easily destroyed. For such things the equivalent action is to drop them into a lake or river, or to bury them in a ceremonial in a way that prevents their recovery. It is for this reason surely that we find widespread evidence of what are called ‘votive offerings’ or ‘ritual deposits’ in the archaeological record, across cultures and through time. Ritual

¹⁸ In some cases broken coppers were thrown into the sea.

deposition often involves preliminary dismemberment of the objects to be buried, and deposition in or near lakes or rivers or mineral springs,¹⁹ or in ceremonial sites where custom is likely to have presented strong social and religious deterrence to disinterment. A typical example of ritual deposition is the hoard of bronze spearheads, swords and a bucket-ring found in Duddingston Loch (Edinburgh) in 1778: all the weapons had been broken or bent before deposition and some had been burned (Coles 1960, 117). What is clear is that disposing of precious, ceremonial or non-functional objects in ways intended to preclude their recovery is a widespread human behaviour. But though the concept is an archaeological one it is often discussed by archaeologists rather tentatively and in the context of one particular culture alone.²⁰ Anthropologists have encountered it quite widely. Evolutionary biologists have not, so far as I know, identified it as a behaviour, but it might very well be. The widely noted failure of hoarding animals (such as squirrels) to recover their hoards may suggest that it is both a utilitarian (survival-oriented) and also a display (or handicap) behaviour. Ritual deposition is hardly discussed though, or even recognised, by students of western material culture. Take the medals of the Val de Grace and of the Louvre, the two largest and finest medals by Jean Warin, both made in solid gold (Jones 1988, 208, 239). What was actually done with these very precious and beautiful objects? They were buried under a big stone. And that is a behaviour which is widespread and which continues today. We intentionalise it, by calling it commemoration when it involves medals. But what about the equally widespread pattern of immuring shoes and indeed other objects? And why were the medals both made of gold? Wouldn't bronze, widely regarded in the 17th century as the ideal commemorative medium, have served as well? For commemoration yes, but for potlatch no. We intentionalise the gift of valuable, high-status objects to religious foundations as piety. The *Goldenes Ross* (Fig 19), one of the most expensive and glamorous of late mediaeval works of art, originated as a gift from Isabeau of Bavaria to Charles VI – a behaviour that we have already noted. But her brother later placed it in the holy chapel in Altötting. Might we not understand this also as a form of ritual deposition, the placement of precious things in a sacred context from which they ought not to emerge?

I hope that the relevance of all this to behaviours exhibited in relation to collecting and museums is not too obscure. I would argue that these behaviours can be understood as forming part of a widely encountered pattern of competitive display and that the gift of collections to museums can be understood as a form of ritual deposition, as a variant of the potlatch strategy for dealing with problems arising out of the accumulation of high-status goods. The wealthy collector buys Impressionist paintings or Chinese porcelain or contemporary art. This is an act of competitive consumption. It demonstrates that the purchaser can devote considerable resources to the acquisition of 'useless' things, and in that sense bear

19 Richard Bradley in 'Hoard as place: the example of Bronze Age archaeology' (2015) argues that the reason that Bronze Age metalwork hoards are frequently buried near flowing water is that they are 'votive deposits rather than caches of valuables'.

20 Richard Bradley (2013) argues the importance of looking at the whole picture from the Neolithic to the medieval; Roger Bland (2013) suggests that votive deposition occurred in the Roman and medieval periods as well as during the Iron and Bronze Ages.

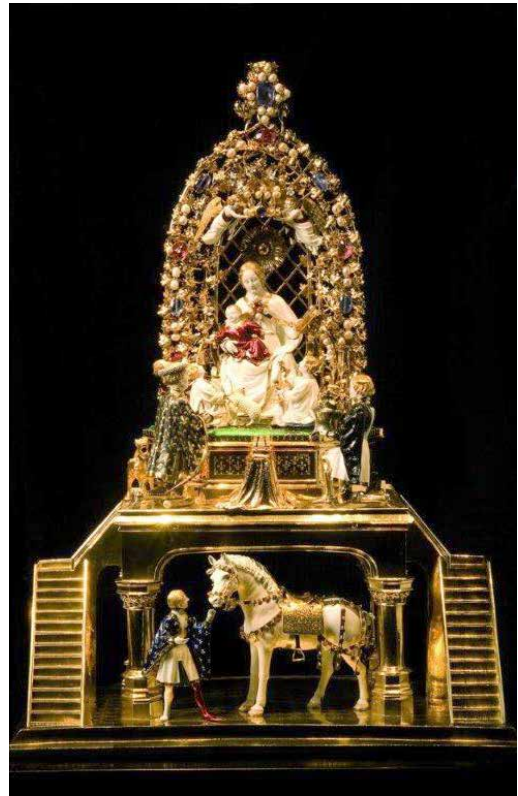


Figure 19. Goldenes Rossl, 1404.
Altötting church, Bavaria. Wikimedia
Commons

a handicap that demonstrates fitness. The acquisitions will be displayed, in the public rooms of their residences, through loans to exhibitions and in the media. This is competitive display. It establishes rank and power. At a certain point the collector may wish to find a way to retain the prestige that owning such objects confers, while putting them out of rival collectors' reach. This can be done by placing them in a museum where the collector's name will continue to be associated with them, on the label or in the naming of the gallery, and every time they appear in a publication. The collector might even, as in the case of Carlos Sim, name the whole museum. Donors frequently specify that their donation or bequest is never to be split up or disposed of: like gifts to medieval church treasuries, their treasured objects are to be removed from the market and the reach of potential rivals for ever. It is, I think, because museums function as sites of ritual deposition that de-accessioning (such a revealing euphemism, rather like annulment of marriage: you cannot divorce but you can annul, you cannot sell or dispose but you can deaccession) arouses such anxiety.

But giving to museums, and indeed the creation of museums as people's palaces containing treasures belonging 'to the nation' or 'the city', also serves another vital purpose. All life depends on sustaining a balance between competition and

collaboration²¹ and in every human society there is a tension between competition for status, which serves the interest of the individual, and cooperation and altruism which help ensure the survival of the group. Periods of excessive competition for status through conspicuous consumption and lavish display arouse disquiet, often expressed through sumptuary legislation, and sometimes fierce reaction: think of Iconoclasm, of Savonarola and before him Bernardino da Siena's 'Bonfire of the Vanities' (Fig 20), the English Civil War or the French Revolution, each of which involved widespread destruction of the high-status objects, of sculpture and works of art. Philanthropy, potlatch and ritual deposition can be seen as responses to this anxiety. Giving high-status objects to museums conveys a willingness to share the status conferred by ownership with others, indeed a binding promise to transfer that status from the individual to the community, if not in the donor's lifetime then thereafter. The creation of museums such as the V&A and the National Gallery was explicitly motivated by the need to fend off the revolutionary disorder so frighteningly present across the Channel by sharing status through collective ownership of the most prestigious objects. Having earlier argued the value of collecting the ordinary, it must also be recognised that it is the possession of the extraordinary that makes museums powerful and attractive and effective. And it is a considered mixture of the two that will enable them best to fulfil their role as emblems and promoters of social cohesion.

Awareness of this tension, the tension between love of beauty, luxury and display, and anxiety about the effect of competitive consumption on social harmony, can be seen in works of art themselves. In medieval and early modern Europe pride, greed and vanity were seen as sinful; in fact pride and avarice were regarded as prime among the deadly sins. These, if you like, are the sins of competition which threaten social solidarity. The prophylactic and cure for avarice was generous giving. So the sin associated with acquiring precious objects could be atoned for by giving them away. Display of all kinds was equated with pride and vanity, regarded as being at the root of all sin and represented as a beast with a peacock's tail (Bloomfield 1952), making exactly the connection that I have made in this paper.

Hans Burgkmair and his wife wanted a portrait, but they did not want to display the sins of pride and vanity, so instead of her regarding her features in a mirror, they both contemplate their own mortality.²² Meditating on death was widely prescribed by late medieval preachers as the best prophylactic against sin. The same is true of Jan Scorel's portrait of a man holding a skull and a pansy (or pensée): his portrait is not to be seen as a sign of vanity or pride because he is thinking of death. (Fig 21). Humility also guarded against pride. So Sir Thomas Restwold and his wife could alleviate their anxiety about having themselves portrayed in the stained glass window of St Peter's Church, Stockerston (Leics) by being shown on their

21 Ridley 2000, 19: 'The balance between co-operation and conflict' is 'one of the great recurring themes of human history'. 'It isone of the oldest themes in the history of life, for it is repeated right down to the level of the gene itself'. Wilson 2012, 243: 'an iron rule exists in genetic social evolution. It is that selfish individuals beat altruistic individuals, while groups of altruists beat groups of selfish individuals. The victory can never be complete; the balance of selection pressures cannot move to either extreme.'

22 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv No GG_924.



Figure 20. Agostino di Duccio, Bernardino da Siena's Bonfire of the Vanities, c 1460. S. Bernardino, Perugia. Photo by I. Sailko. Wikimedia Commons

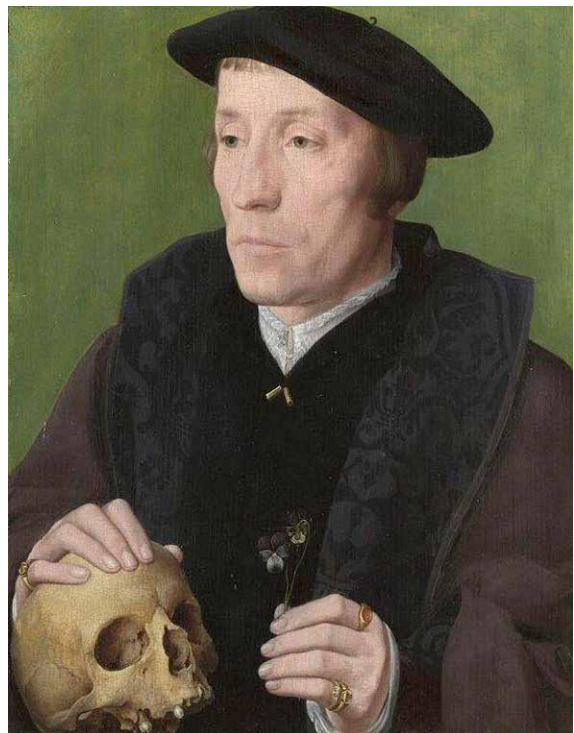


Figure 21. Follower of Jan Scorel, Man with Pansy [pensée] and skull, c 1535. National Gallery, London 1036

knees as donors (Marks & Williamson 2003, 402, cat 290). And so too could Jos Vijd and Elizabeth Borlant in Jan van Eyck's *Ghent altarpiece* (1432).²³

This kind of reading of objects and images is readily available and yet seldom done. The V&A, rightly I think, prided itself on the new approach to the interpretation of material culture in its British Galleries, opened in 2001. There was a return to questions which had interested the museum in the middle of the 19th century: how are things made? how is taste determined? And there was a new interest in showing things in the context of other material of the same period, of

23 Saint Bravo Cathedral, Ghent.

society and of international trade. The response to these galleries proved that these new approaches were enjoyable and stimulating. But they also, interestingly, created anxiety that great works of art were diminished and demeaned by being treated in this way. Still more challenging and under-appreciated is the way that David Clarke, in the archaeological displays in the (then-named) Museum of Scotland, brought out the long continuities in material culture: the fact that a 6,000 year old bow found at Rotten Bottom, near Moffat in Dumfries and Galloway, is so very similar to bows made in the 19th century and a Roman scythe is almost indistinguishable in form from its 20th-century equivalent. These observations challenge people's strong but unexamined assumptions about the nature of the past and the inevitability and continuity of progress, the so-called ratchet effect (advances once made are never lost) which is sometimes claimed to distinguish humans from other animals.

This was very evident in responses to surveys done in preparation for the Medieval and Renaissance galleries that opened at the V&A in 2009. Not surprisingly, most people believe that life in medieval Europe was nasty, brutish and short. They would be surprised to know that life expectancy was shorter in the 17th than the 15th century, and shorter again in the 1830s and 1840s in Britain, or that people were on average taller before the invention of agriculture than after it (Hermanussen & Poutska 2003). It might be thought that the beauty, technical accomplishment and tenderness of some of the medieval objects might challenge and change this belief but I am not sure that it does, any more than the work of Van Eyck and his contemporaries challenges the idea that the concept of the individual was invented in Renaissance Italy, or the abundance of images in the V&A's Islamic gallery puts to rest the canard that Islamic art is aniconic. But perhaps it should. Perhaps museums should be more forceful in insisting that material culture provides valid evidence on its own account, not just in prehistory or non-literate societies, but in all times and places.

To do that is not entirely easy, but the climate is favourable. There are more and more historians who use objects and images as a primary source of evidence. Neil MacGregor and the British Museum's *History of the World in 100 Objects* has brilliantly demonstrated that close reading of individual things can be fascinating, intellectually challenging and popular (MacGregor 2010). It enabled the telling of stories, for example about slavery, which could hardly be told if they had not been anchored in the irrefutable materiality of the thing. Literary historians such as Paula Byrne in her book on Jane Austen (2013), and novelists such as Winfried Georg Sebald (2001) have demonstrated the liberating power of focussing on and meditating around objects.

We cannot all be Neil MacGregors, and not every museum has the British Museum's deep-rooted commitment to history, but decorative art and paintings can also, and usefully, be treated as historical documents. Take two objects, both gifts, one in the British Galleries of the V&A and one in the National Museums Scotland collections, both of which could provide significant evidence for the political ideas and strategies of George III as Prince of Wales in the late 1750s.

The first is a painting, in the British Galleries of the V&A. It is exhibited for its very fine frame by Paul Petit (Fig 22). But the image is also interesting. It shows George as Prince of Wales pointing at a globe. If you look closely you can see he is pointing to California, depicted as an island called Nova Albion. The second is a snuff box by G M Moser (Fig 23) containing a miniature portrait of George III, which depicts scenes from the life of Alexander the Great. Both are manifestos against the continental policy of George III's grandfather George II and in favour of Britain's maritime, international and commercial destiny. That is why George points to New Albion (Britain renewed and returned to its maritime and commercial destiny) on the west coast of North America. The portrait formerly hung at Hornby Castle in Yorkshire, which gave rise to the speculation that it belonged to the Dukes of Leeds. But that makes little sense of what was clearly a gift with a purpose. It must in fact have been given by George to Robert D'Arcy, Earl of Holderness, whose seat Hornby Castle was, after his resignation and reinstatement in 1757 as Secretary for the North (foreign minister) and consequent estrangement from George II. Clearly the Prince of Wales wished both to motivate and mark Holderness's move towards the opposition centred on the Prince of Wales' household, and the reality of that link is demonstrated not only by the gift of this portrait in its elaborate and expensive frame, but also by Holderness's subsequent appointment as Governor of George III's two oldest sons. The painting would then have passed to the Dukes of Leeds through the marriage of Holderness's daughter to the 5th Duke.



Figure 22. George III as Prince of Wales, c 1756. Frame by Paul Petit and painting after George Knapton. V&A Museum: W.35: 1,2-1972



Figure 23. G M Moser, Bute Snuff Box, c 1760. NMS: A.1996.376

The second is a snuff box given by George III to his tutor and later Prime Minister, Lord Bute. The lid shows Alexander the Great at the moment when, having crossed the Hellespont and reached the ruins of Troy he sacrificed to Priam at the altar of Zeus of Enclosures, praying Priam not to be angry with the race of Neptolemeus (also known as Phyrus), of which he himself was a descendant.²⁴ On the base is the moment when Alexander and Hephaestion entered Queen Sisygambis' tent after defeating her son Darius. She fell on her knees before the wrong man and was covered with confusion, but Alexander raised her to her feet, reassuring her that she had made no mistake because Hephaestion was 'another Alexander'.²⁵ These are extraordinary compliments to Lord Bute, a Stuart, to whom George thus apologises for the wrongs done by his family to the Stuarts and who he identifies as his alter ego and equal. The sides of the box, like the painting in the V&A, outline a future in which Britain will turn its back on George II's continental adventures and open up to its global maritime and colonial future.

What does all this mean for our understanding of museums and their collections? First collecting is a competitive display behaviour, and museums are hardly less prone to the competitive instinct than private collectors. Look at the language of museums' collecting policies which often describe collections as 'important', 'outstanding', of national or international significance; but seldom as useful or interesting, let alone, as might sometimes be more truthfully said, over-large and slightly dull. Museums and their curators depend for their prestige, their relative rank in the hierarchy of museums, on the status of 'their' collection. It is significant that the personal pronoun is frequently used: it is more often 'my' or 'our' collection than 'the museum's' or 'the public's'. This means that museums may be reluctant to collect low-status material and slow to focus on the evidential rather than the display potential of their collections.

Second, display behaviour advertises fitness. And according to evolutionary biologists, game theory predicts that in the long term such advertisement will tend to be truthful. So communities that are not fit will tend not to put up display buildings and will not accumulate exotic high-status objects from around the world. It is no particular surprise then that Chinese museums have begun to exhibit material from all around the globe, or that the amount devoted to acquisition by the public purse in Britain is less than a quarter of the sum provided in 1980. Economic arguments for art and/or for museums will seldom make much impact, no matter how methodologically sound, because they commit a category error. The whole point of display is that it demonstrates that you can afford to flaunt without thought of return. Asking why museum buildings aren't fitted for a utilitarian purpose is missing the point. Museum buildings, like the collections they contain, are acts of collective or individual display.

24 In Arrian of Nicomedia's account of the campaigns of Alexander 'He is also said to have sacrificed to Priamus on the altar of Jupiter Hercius, that he might thereby avert the wrath of his manes from the progeny of Phyrus, whence he deduced his pedigree' (Le Clerc & Rooke 1727, 27).

25 Based on 'The family Of Darius before Alexander' commissioned by Louis XIV from Charles Le Brun, and the tapestries which reproduced it.

Third, collecting is inseparable from philanthropy. The secretive collector gloating over his hidden hoard (probably stolen to order) is a myth. Collections are made to be seen, to be displayed. The gallery or museum is the natural destination for a proud collection. By giving their prized pieces to the public the collector desists their accumulation, while retaining and enhancing their prestige. By creating sacred spaces, filled with prestigious objects, and declaring that they are held in common, the rich protect themselves from envy and societies demonstrate that wealth can be held in common and that status goods can unite as well as divide.

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Presenting someone else's past: the Caithness Broch Centre

Andrew Heald

Abstract

This paper's central aim is to present an overview of the displays in the Caithness Broch Centre which opened in Auckengill in 2010. As well as outlining the main structure of the Centre's displays, it also discusses how this structure was conceived. The starting position was that conventional ways of presenting brochs to the public were inappropriate: these extraordinary tall round houses embody far more stories than mere chronology and function. They encapsulate the complex and enduring legacies not only of the individuals and communities who built and lived in them, but also of the individuals and communities who studied and continue to study them millennia later. Brochs can engage current and future local communities with their heritage. It is argued that if we are to present Caithness' rich broch remains in an appropriate way these legacies must play a central role.

Keywords: *Caithness, Caithness Broch Centre, broch, Sir Francis Tress Barry*

Introduction

The Atlantic area of Scotland, defined here as the Northern Isles, Caithness, Sutherland, Argyll and the Inner and Outer Hebrides (Fig 1), is one of the richest cultural landscapes in Europe. The relative geographical isolation of the area, combined with use of stone as the main building material since earliest times, has ensured the survival of a wide range of upstanding and well-preserved archaeological monuments. Although there is evidence for regional variation that should not be underplayed, it can be argued that Atlantic Scotland shares broadly similar cultural trajectories from *c* 8000 BC to AD 1100, manifested in largely similar assemblages of archaeological sites, deposits and remains.

Academic interest in the Atlantic area has focused heavily on Orkney with some of archaeology's best known scholars, such as Gordon Childe, Stuart Piggott and Colin Renfrew, studying its rich remains. Other regions in the far north of Scotland have seen far less activity, with Sutherland's archaeological sites largely untouched for over a hundred years. This variation in archaeological endeavours is mirrored in the way the remains have been presented and enjoyed. The archipelago of Orkney continues to be the most archaeologically studied area in Scotland, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. Although other regions

within the Atlantic area are locally rich in archaeological remains, there are fewer sites that are presented in such a way that visitors can engage with them, experience them and enjoy them.

One such area is Caithness, the most northerly county in mainland Britain (Fig 1). The landscape contains a wide variety of archaeological remains such as chambered cairns, stone settings, brochs, Pictish settlements, wags, castles, harbours and post-medieval settlements (Omand 1992; Heald & Barber 2015). Levels of investigation and appreciation of this diverse heritage have varied over the centuries. In recent years, interest in the county's archaeology has undergone resurgence with scholars investigating the Mesolithic (eg Pannett & Baines 2006), Bronze Age (Cowley 1999; Baines et al 2003), Early Medieval (Baines 1999) and Viking/Norse periods (Batey 1987a & b, 1993; Morris et al 1995; Pollard 1999). Nevertheless, the visitor to the county still searches largely in vain for well-presented archaeological sites: most appear as featureless mounds or unintelligible stone ruins. Of the 3000 known monuments in Caithness only five are under the direct care of Historic Environment Scotland, and few areas have designated and maintained archaeological trails. Most people go to Caithness to get to Orkney. While Orkney wears her jewels around her neck, Caithness keeps hers locked firmly in her handbag.

In order to redress this issue the Caithness Archaeological Trust (CAT) was established in 2002. CAT is a charity set up by the local community and was funded initially by modest financial contributions from Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, Leader Plus, the then-named Historic Scotland and Highland Council.

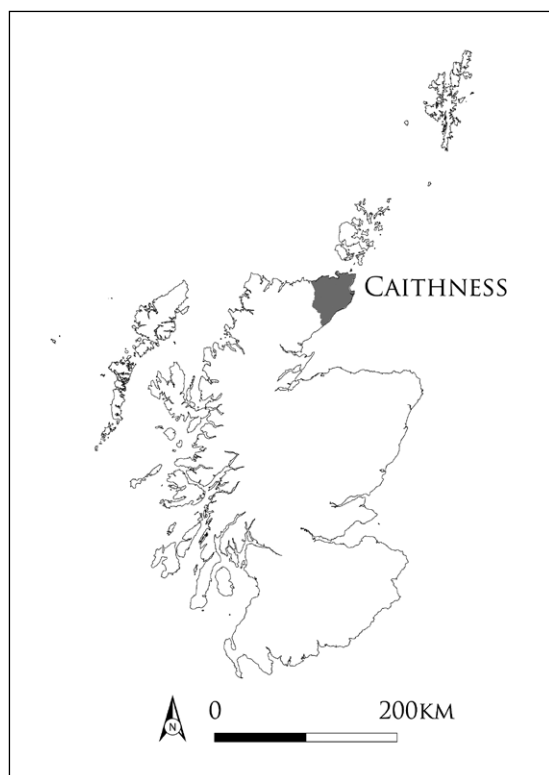


Figure 1. Map showing Caithness within the Atlantic area of Scotland

The principal aim of the Trust was, and remains, to promote the archaeological remains of the county to local communities, visitors and academics.

In the first instance broch sites – the enigmatic Iron Age stone towers of the north that have captured the imaginations of visitors for centuries (Fig 2; see Armit 2003) – were chosen as the foremost sites to present in Caithness. The selection was an obvious one. Brochs are one of the icons of Scottish heritage and Caithness has many examples. Alexander Rhind’s precocious work at Kettleburn heralded some of the first academic publications on such sites (Rhind 1853; 1854), and the two subsequent decades saw more than 20 brochs being investigated (eg Anderson 1890; 1901; MacKay 1892). Brochs, therefore, are central to any narrative of Caithness archaeology.

In 2004 CAT and various stakeholders turned their attention to the closely grouped cluster of brochs around Sinclair’s Bay on the north-east coast of Caithness (Fig 3; Heald & Jackson 2001; 2002). A central component of the programme was a series of small-scale excavations at Nybster, Whitegate, Keiss Harbour and Keiss Road. Together with recent work at Thrumster, this new work has revealed fresh insight into the brochs of Caithness, specifically the composition and chronologies of the buildings (Cavers et al forthcoming; Barber et al forthcoming).

While renewing academic interest in the Caithness roundhouses was an important factor in undertaking new work, there were other equally important considerations. Surveys and Conservation Management Plans were created to inform possible future presentation projects. Involving the local community was also a key aim, the project culminating in visits by hundreds of volunteers and others, both young and old, to the sites.



Figure 2. The icon of Iron Age Scotland; Mousa broch, Shetland. © Tanja Romankiewicz

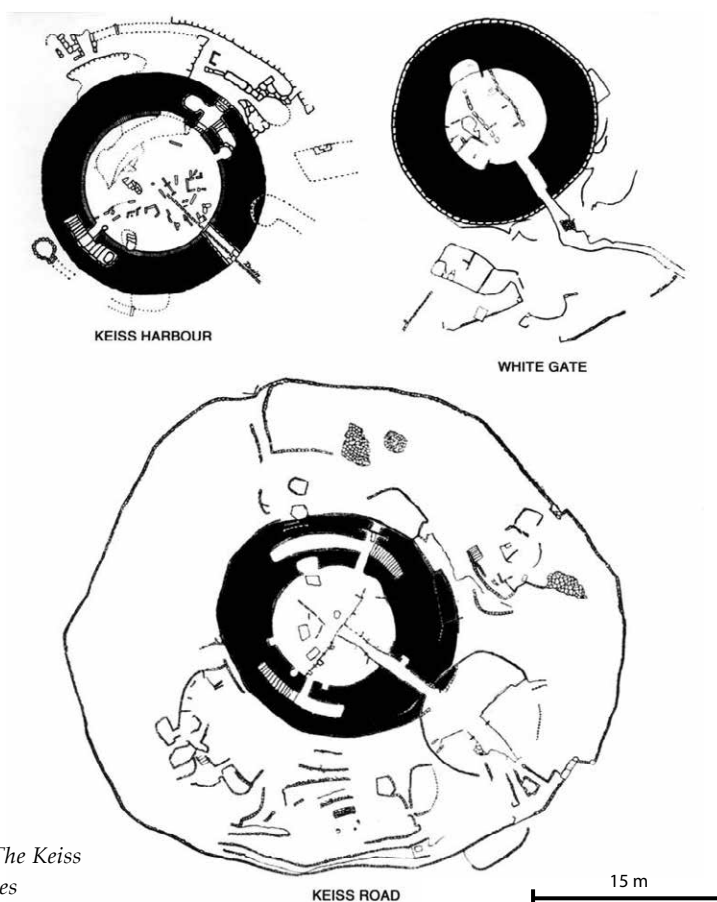


Figure 3. The Keiss roundhouses

Arising out of the excavations and community archaeology initiatives was the desire to create a temporary summer exhibition on Caithness brochs. The initial idea was to create a small display somewhere near the actual brochs so that any visitor could visit the exhibition and the archaeological sites. Thoughts turned to the existing Northlands Viking Centre (previously the John Nicolson Museum). Situated in the Old School House at Auckengill, it was located right at the heart of the Nybster/Keiss broch cluster, perfectly positioned to present information on Caithness brochs. This led to a partnership programme between CAT, Highland Council and National Museums Scotland.

Of relevance to this publication, the project also brought David Clarke into the county. David is, of course, internationally renowned for his design and delivery of ground-breaking museum displays such as *Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge* (1985, at the then-named National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS), Queen Street) and the *Early People* gallery in the National Museum of Scotland. Although the latter is now almost 20 years old its conceptual thematic design, rejection of a simple chronological narrative, and use of art and architecture as signifiers are as innovative today as they were when it opened on St Andrew's Day 1998. David was the obvious person to approach to help with the display. As anyone who has ever worked with David will know, his tenacious and relentless

demands for quality often result in the scope, budget and timescale expanding during the design process. This project was no different – a small, temporary summer exhibition on excavations of brochs in northern Scotland turned into the Caithness Broch Centre.

This paper has two main aims. The first is to give a brief overview of the displays within the Caithness Broch Centre. The second is to explain the rationale behind the displays, why they are structured and organised in the way that they are. In doing so I hope to highlight some of the key passions that were central not only to the Caithness project but to David throughout his career, such as: how archaeological information can be presented in a more exciting and meaningful way than traditionally done; how one must try to present the complex biographies of sites and artefacts through museum displays; how individuals and communities should be at the centre of the narrative, not sidelined behind sterile, academic discussions of chronology or typology; and the key role that antiquaries played – and continue to play – in understandings of Scottish prehistory.

The rationale behind the displays

Before presenting an overview of the displays in the Caithness Broch Centre let us consider the rationale behind the displays. Ironically, although political expediency dictated that it was to be called the Caithness Broch Centre, from the outset it was clear that the Centre should not be a museum whose central focus was brochs. There would be no grand reconstructions or complicated discussion of Atlantic roundhouses. If people were going to the Centre solely to learn about brochs, they would leave disappointed. The central theme had to be the community. Engagement of the existing local community had already begun during the recent excavations and this highlighted the importance of grounding any narrative in local people. But the link with individuals and communities went back a further hundred years.

The archaeology of Caithness had been extensively investigated in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Survey and excavation was undertaken by some of the most important scholars then working in Scotland, including Alexander Rhind, Joseph Anderson and Alexander Curle. These individuals were the first to grapple with the complexities of the county's archaeology. Indeed, many recent excavations are reinvestigations of previous antiquarian work (eg Camster (Masters 1997); Freswick (Batey 1987b; Morris et al 1995)). Our understanding of Caithness, and indeed of Scottish, archaeology relies heavily on these dominant characters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Some of the earliest recorded work was undertaken by Rhind (1833-63), a wealthy and brilliant young man who lived at Sibster near Wick. At the age of 18 Rhind made a list of the significant monuments in the Yarrows and Watenan district (published posthumously by Stuart 1868, 292-5). In the 1850s Rhind investigated a number of these sites, particularly the chambered cairns at Warehouse.

A decade later Joseph Anderson, aided by Robert Shearer, conducted a remarkable series of excavations of seven Caithness chambered cairns including South Yarrows, Ormiegill and Camster (see Davidson & Henshall 1991, 6-8 for useful summary;

Halliday, this volume). Anderson also found time to excavate other structures, for example the broch at Yarrows (Anderson 1890). Rhind's and Anderson's work put the county's heritage at the forefront of archaeological research and brought the county's rich and diverse archaeology into the libraries and museums of Britain. However, it would be misleading to suggest that the information gleaned from the ground was gathered solely by scholars and academics. Local businessmen, estate owners, retired miners, farmers and artists played an equally important role.

Sir Francis Tress Barry is the central figure in the story of Caithness broch archaeology. Barry's involvement in Caithness archaeology started in 1890, after he had made his fortune in mining copper in Portugal, although his interest in the county started before then: he had purchased the Keiss estate in 1881 (Baines 2002, 11). He spent much of his time excavating in and around his estate on the north-east coast with a particular focus on brochs (see Anderson 1901). Barry also investigated other sites including the chambered cairns at South Yarrows and Shean Stemster.

History has not been kind to Barry, with later scholars often treating his investigations as second-class archaeology. Referring to his investigations of chambered cairns, Davidson and Henshall (1991, 9) stated:

In the early years of this century three chambers in the north of the county were ineptly investigated by Sir Francis Tress Barry, an elderly English MP who had brought (sic) Keiss Castle.

This is a harsh judgement. Barry did not view himself as a competent archaeologist and, conscious of his weakness, he regularly sought advice from Rev J M Joass and from Joseph Anderson, Keeper of the NMA in Edinburgh. Furthermore, he was happy to entrust interpretation and analysis to more highly qualified individuals such as Anderson (see RCAHMS 1998, 6; Baines 2002, 13). No other brochs have been located within the north-east coastal margin since Barry's work, suggesting that he had an organised approach to the identification of the sites that interested him (Batey 1984, 2). He was also one of the first individuals to use photography extensively on archaeological sites in Scotland, while sketches and watercolours were crucial to his method.

Not only were the plans and sketches integral to the story of the brochs, they also link us to John Nicolson, a little-known but extremely important local figure in late 19th- and early 20th-century Caithness archaeology. Nicolson was a renowned sculptor and artist who spent much of his life at the Half Way House in Auckengill. He went to school in the very building that now houses the *Caithness Broch Centre*. During the salmon fishing season, Nicolson collected salmon with a horse and cart from all the small harbours between Mey and Keiss and delivered them to Wick. It was on these journeys that he made observations of possible archaeological sites across the north and east coasts. As well as farming, Nicolson had a keen interest in prehistory and history. This passion led to him working with Sir Francis Tress Barry on many excavations, particularly those in and around his north-east homeland. Nicolson's role in Barry's work cannot be overstated and his sketches and watercolours were central to much of Barry's record. Indeed, they are in some cases the only surviving record of the structures and artefacts recovered.

After Barry's death in 1907 Nicolson continued to investigate the archaeology of Caithness. His knowledge of the county was highly valued and in 1910 A O Curle consulted Nicolson about Barry's work, specifically enquiring whether he had any plans or photographs that the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) could include in their *Inventory*; his assistance was duly acknowledged in the publication (RCAHMS 1911, iv; 1998, 7). Nicolson was evidently an engaging personality, described in a delightful passage in Curle's journal as:

one of the most amusing characters I have met in my wanderings... By nature he is an artist. He can draw, paint and sculpture. Though amateurish his pictures are full of humour and character, and his drawings of antiquities neat and accurate.... and Caithness is much indebted to him for the exploitation of its ancient structures.
(The National Record, Historic Environment Scotland MS/36/2)

An important legacy from this early antiquarian work was the formulation of close and enduring relationships between local communities and their archaeological heritage during and after the process of investigation. In many antiquarian endeavours, particularly Anderson's and Barry's, local people were central to many of the outcomes. This involved taking part in excavation, granting permission for people to work on their land, recording and disseminating information, and even constructing commemorative monuments. The relationship between Barry and Nicolson stands out as an exemplar. The fact that Nicolson worked with Barry for a number of years demonstrates that, whatever their social differences, they relied on each other during and after the excavations. Not only did Nicolson appear to take responsibility for much of the excavation, he also recorded the structures and artefacts. Nicolson also took great pride in the monuments and discoveries after the excavation seasons were long over: anecdotal information suggests that he was responsible for ensuring that the grass on some of the sites, particularly Nybster, was kept down in subsequent years.

The strong relationship between the Nicolson family and their archaeological heritage continues today. John Nicolson's grandson Alisdair Sutherland now lives in the very house occupied by Nicolson during Barry's investigations. In recent decades Alisdair Sutherland has attempted to maintain the bond between the Auckengill community and the roundhouses, resulting in his creation of the John Nicolson Museum in the 1970s. He has also recently donated the extensive Nicolson watercolour and photographic collection to the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS). Alisdair continues to take immense pride in the archaeological remains at Nybster and beyond.

In summary, between about 1850 and 1910 different individuals deployed different methodologies to investigate, analyse, publish and present Caithness archaeology. Like today, not everyone followed the same theoretical or methodological approaches and not everyone saw eye-to-eye (Baines 2002; Clarke 2002, 5), but one thing is clear: the 19th-century communities who were engaging in their archaeology were central to our understanding of Scottish archaeology, particularly brochs. Further, much of the work was inextricably linked to local communities and individuals. Public Archaeology is not a 21st-century creation.

The museum displays

This local connection with heritage began over 120 years ago, and in preparing the displays for the Caithness Broch Centre we wanted to place individuals and communities at their heart. Thus one of the guiding principles was to present the story of the personalities who excavated the brochs and the communities who lived and continue to live among them.

This seemingly obvious concept is fairly uncommon. Numerous brochs in Atlantic Scotland were excavated in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many are now maintained and presented to the public by various national or local bodies, Dun Carloway (on the Isle of Lewis) and the Glenelg brochs (in the former county of Inverness-shire) being obvious examples. Most of the best-known brochs were excavated (and/or re-excavated) with the intention of presenting them to contemporary visitors, precisely the ideal espoused at the Broch Centre. However, many of the presentational schemes at, or about, brochs across Scotland, are characterised by:

- single narrative themes on each site;
- the preoccupation with the ‘monument’ which fosters a perceived need for ‘pristine sites’, and;
- the depersonalisation of the individuals whose excavations revealed what is now counted as the monument.

These strands combine to present an apparently unified approach to the presentation of interpretations founded largely on issues of date and function, and occasionally on the secondary use of brochs. The depersonalisation of the investigative process means that the individuals who excavated the sites, whether Victorian landowners or 21st-century school teachers, have been excluded from the presentational narratives.

The Caithness Broch Centre opened in 2010. The displays are housed in a single white room. On entering the exhibition the visitor is met by an etched glass wall dominated by an aerial view of Nybster broch (Fig 4). He or she is immediately grounded in the local story and subconsciously reminded of the richness of the county’s archaeology. Walking past this glass barrier, the visitor encounters two exhibition cases of contrasting proportions (Fig 5). The first is small and elegant, housing the Kettleburn tweezers, a moustache comb and a mirror. This represents the individual, and reflects that person’s standing in the community. The second, larger case is a huge, grey see-through monolith representing the materiality of the brochs as buildings. These are the only cases in the display, and they house 150 of the key archaeological objects excavated by Nicolson, Rhind, Anderson and the local community.

The conceptual structure of the displays is straightforward. It is divided into three sections, each centred on individuals and communities and their associations with the brochs. The first section considers the 19th- and early 20th-century individuals and communities who first excavated the brochs. The second considers the people who lived in the brochs some 2000 years ago. The final section considers the legacies the brochs leave to present-day communities and their modern relationship with their heritage.

*Figure 4. The entrance to the Centre
(© Graham Scott)*



*Figure 5. The exhibition cases
(© Graham Scott)*



Brochs and 19th-century individuals and communities

The introductory part of the displays is focused on portraying the 19th-century hotbed of scientific and intellectual activity in Caithness and outlining the pioneering work undertaken by the local community and their associates. By utilising photographs, watercolours and sketches from antiquarian excavations, the displays outline the rich architecture and artefacts that were uncovered (Fig 6). This emphasises how the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries were a hectic period in the study of Caithness brochs, with more than one a year being excavated. As noted above, activity was dominated by two key individuals with strong ties to the local community: Sir Francis Tress Barry and John Nicolson, who excavated more brochs than any other individual. Nineteenth-century photographs of volunteers underline the local contribution and show graphically how individuals and families were critical to the discovery, recording and curation of some of these most important monuments and assemblages from Scottish prehistory.



Figure 6. The introductory panels
(© Graham Scott)



Figure 7. Examples of the objects on display
(© Graham Scott)

Living and dying in the brochs

The second section of the display is concerned with the communities who built, lived and died in the brochs around 2000 years ago. Artefacts, rather than photographs and watercolours, are used to convey the story of these Iron Age people (Fig 7). Stone and bone objects tell the visitor that brochs were homes. In an inhospitable climate people need somewhere warm and dry to live. On entering the broch the light and heat from the hearth and from lamps around the living spaces lit up your surroundings and welcomed you. A maze of wooden and stone uprights partitioned the space into areas used for specific purposes, leisure and work. The hearth was the most important feature of the interior – its focus, not just physically but symbolically. This, the centre of the home, was where friends gathered to socialise and discuss community matters and others came to negotiate, to make and seal alliances.

The displays suggest how brochs dominated their surrounding landscapes. Imposing structures often surrounded by village-like settlements, they exercised psychological power over the minds of the community. They were beacons of belonging. Artefacts demonstrate how the communities who lived in and among

the brochs were farmers, fishermen, fowlers, gatherers and hunters of wild animals. The plentiful bounty of the local environment provided resources for eating and drinking and also other useful materials. Bones from deer, whale and cattle were transformed into a variety of objects. Stone was used in almost every area of life; iron ore was extracted and turned into tools and weapons. Nothing that could be used was overlooked.

The artefacts and displays also convey how the maintenance of contacts and relationships with other groups and individuals was vitally important. The broch communities did not live isolated lives. Their contacts with their near and more distant neighbours, such as Sutherland and Shetland, brought different objects, rare materials and new ideas into Caithness. From further afield came exotic materials such as amber from the Baltic, while glass and pottery fragments speak of connections with the Roman world to the south. Objects were also bound up with ideas about making contact of a different sort, with a world beyond. Many objects are related to mysterious systems of rituals and beliefs. Caithness, then, was far from peripheral.

Legacies and communities

The third and final section of the display continues the underlying theme of communities. It states how the work of the local communities from the 19th to the 21st century has left a formidable legacy for their successors. Although in disrepair, many of the brochs – and the commemorative monuments built in the 19th century – are still visible today, and modern-day communities still live and work within the shadow of the brochs. These monuments in the landscape spark curiosity and encourage research. There had been little new excavation of brochs in Caithness since Barry and Nicolson stopped work, but recently the brochs on the north-east coast have re-emerged as a central focus for community activity. As well as taking part in the recent excavations (Fig 8) the local inhabitants have built replica brochs in their local primary school, created and run designated ‘broch weeks’ and created teachers’ packs on brochs. Images and stories of the 21st-century community engaging with their broch heritage complement the stories of the 19th-century communities in the first section of the display. The exhibition



Figure 8. Recent community excavations at Nybster. Photograph by Andrew Heald

ends by reaffirming how the area around Sinclair's Bay has been of tremendous importance to understanding the broch, one of the most iconic monuments in British archaeology. More than that, however, this section is a celebration of the ways that local people, through seeking to understand their own heritage, have contributed to national and international understanding, while simultaneously enhancing and celebrating the life of their communities.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined some key aspects of the Caithness Broch Centre and the conceptual design behind the displays. David and I believe that its recognition of the involvement and relationship of local communities with their heritage is critical to creating an appropriate narrative of Caithness brochs, and by doing so it avoids being a sterile academic presentation.

Such an approach has far more than merely academic value. A presentational approach that places the individuals and communities who investigate(d) and care(d) for the archaeology in a central role can make a positive contribution to local community development, as the success of the Caithness Broch Centre demonstrates. This helps to present what is unique about particular areas and communities, and fosters community identity and development. There is much to be gained from presenting objects and sites within their community context – actively interpreted and reinterpreted in situ – as opposed to treating them as neutral, depersonalised entities which appear to the visitor to have little or no connection to modern communities and places.

Indeed, this approach should arguably be brought outside the exhibition centre and into current presentational schemes of many ancient monuments in the landscape. Conventional presentation models on many archaeological sites across Scotland present simple, often simplistic statements of definition, date and function. Giving precedence to single-narrative presentations, usually on artificially and falsely pristine sites, only opens a very small window into our rich and varied heritage. The individuals and communities who excavated the sites should be central to such presentations, not whitewashed from our narratives.

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Reading Govan Old: interpretative challenges and aspirations

Stephen T Driscoll

Abstract

This paper explores the conceptual and strategic issues raised during the transformation of Govan Old church into a heritage attraction and community cultural centre. This exceptionally important Gothic revival church houses the largest collection of early medieval sculpture that is not in state care in Scotland. The quality and depth of Govan's cultural assets and its historical traditions provide great interpretative opportunities, but come with great expectations. Govan is in the early stages of post-industrial urban regeneration and the church has been identified as its prime cultural resource. So the success of the transformation of Govan Old has the potential to have a significant influence on the future growth and prosperity of the community.

Keywords: *sculpture, British, Early Medieval, hogback, gravestones, churchyard*

David Clarke's affinity for Early Historic sculpture can probably be traced to two of his intellectual guides. His museum mentor, R B K Stevenson (O'Connor & Clarke 1983), was at heart an early medievalist who produced critical works about artefacts, field monuments, and perhaps most lastingly, about sculpture. His academic guide from Cardiff, Leslie Alcock, who also shared a close connection with Stevenson, redefined 'Dark Age' Scotland through a programme of excavations which stimulated David's late blossoming of interest in the Early Historic period (Clarke et al 2012). Of course he nurtured a prehistorian's interest in monumentality and an appreciation of the consequences of monuments being reused over a long time span. I detect an awareness of the multiple lives of prehistoric standing stones as far back as the 'Symbols of Power' exhibition, which incorporated images of impressive monuments alongside dazzling artefacts. This notion of conscious reuse was eventually articulated in an influential discussion of Pictish sculpture (Clarke et al 1985; Clarke 2007).

It is a pleasure to record my appreciation for David's contribution to Scottish archaeology: for my generation he has been the dominant intellectual figure in the Edinburgh establishment (although one suspects that he would prefer to be thought of as anti-establishment). As a young archaeologist making my way in the

world I found the critical atmosphere of the Café Royal an agreeable alternative to the seminar room. I have chosen to present these reflections on Govan for several reasons. Firstly, I know David is attracted to the unlikeliness of Govan as an ancient power centre, second Govan is richly endowed with monuments with ‘multiple lives’, and third these monuments present serious practical and conceptual challenges of interpretation and presentation. All of these will, I hope, make what follows of interest to him.

The challenge of Govan Old

Govan Old church (Fig 1) houses a unique collection of sculpture dating from the ninth to 11th centuries. Arguably this is the most significant single collection of Viking Age sculpture in Britain and Ireland, but it is little known outside the parish and a narrow specialist community. Since the middle of the last century the collection has been cherished and cared for by successive ministers and their congregations. However, in 2007 when the three Govan parishes were consolidated into one, the fragility of this curatorial arrangement was exposed. Despite Govan Old being the original ecclesiastical foundation, it was not selected as the seat of the amalgamated parish, a decision which raised questions about the future of the splendid Gothic-revival building and the long-term security of the sculpture collection.

While the historical significance of the Govan collection has long been known to some scholars, its potential value to the local community was scarcely recognised. I have been involved in recent efforts to draw on this potential in order not only to secure the future protection of the monuments, but also to transform Govan



Figure 1. View of Govan Old church, designed by James Smith in 1826

Old into a cultural resource for the community, the city and, indeed, the nation as a whole. This paper explores the key interpretative themes and challenges which have emerged through these initial efforts.

Govan itself is one of central Glasgow's more deprived districts: well off the tourist trail and with virtually no casual footfall, its most fundamental challenge is to attract visitors. However, the hidden quality of Govan Old church can be considered an asset in that for many people a visit provides a powerful sense of discovery, not to say wonder. What is this architectural masterpiece doing in Govan of all places? Why does it house this very large collection of ancient sculpture? How did the historic churchyard survive industrialisation? The answers to these and other questions are to be found in the material remains, which form the basis for a compelling multi-stranded story which begins with the earliest Christian activity on the Clyde and includes, in addition to the familiar story of industrial greatness, periods of royal patronage, commercial philanthropy, religious leadership and community-based social justice movements.

Although the Govan collection is substantial both in terms of numbers (44 known monuments, of which 31 survive) and the scale of the individual monuments, their presentation poses challenges, compounded by the fact that most of the sculpture dates to the late Viking Age (10th-11th centuries), a particularly obscure era in the west of Scotland. Although the collection consists of boldly executed pieces in the Celtic style, the passage of time has left its mark: many are broken or heavily worn and all require explanation if the lay visitor is to appreciate their significance and beauty. The majority of the collection consists of cross-inscribed slabs large enough to cover a grave, but there are also four free-standing crosses, none of which is complete. Only the famous sarcophagus has a self-evident function. The rest are not easy to 'read' visually; the ornamentation is mostly geometrical and the figurative representations are stylised to the point of abstraction.

Antiquarian background and contemporary scholarly context

There is ample evidence that the ancient sculpture was valued in the past, albeit in ways which inspired treatment which would be considered close to vandalism today. The first historical notice of the Govan sculpture is linked to the new church built in 1826 to a design prepared by parishioner James Smith. In gratitude for Smith's efforts the congregation presented him with the most visually arresting piece of Govan sculpture, the finely carved shaft of a freestanding cross now known as the 'Jordanhill Cross' as a result of its lengthy presence in the garden of his home, Jordanhill House (Davidson Kelly 1994, 15-16; illustrated in the garden by Macquarrie 2006, 3). This provides one indication of how the sculpture was valued at a particular moment in the antiquarian era. Inscriptions added in the 17th and 18th centuries to the majority of the surviving early medieval recumbent grave stones attest to their reuse as grave-markers for the leading landowners of the parish. Although defaced, this use ensured their preservation as the elite sought to display their status through the use of ancient monuments, providing an exceptional, unambiguous example of monuments with 'multiple lives' (Clarke 2007).

Govan Old has enjoyed ministers of high calibre over the centuries, a number of them learned men who were acutely aware of Govan's antiquity and its political importance within the medieval diocese of Glasgow, although it is only recently that its royal British origins have been understood (Davies 1994; Driscoll 1998; Broun 2004). The Reverend John Pollock (minister 1791-1820), for instance, in his contribution to the *Statistical Account* drew attention to the great artificial mound at Water Row, known as the 'Doomster Hill', which in the distant past had served as an open air law court (Pollock 1795, 294; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 40-1). His successor Rev Matthew Leishman (1821-74) was particularly sensitive to Govan's heritage, having witnessed the initial stages of industrial expansion and its impact on archaeological remains. His description of the excavation of the Doomster Hill by the local dye works, which revealed bones and wood at its core, displays an awareness of the vulnerability of the monument (1845, 690; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 40-1). Leishman was also attuned to the power of the stones: his decision to use the Jordanhill Cross as a prestigious token of gratitude confirmed its antiquarian value. He also witnessed the sensational discovery of the sarcophagus in 1855, which brought the Govan sculpture to the attention of a national (scholarly) audience via John Stuart's *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (Fig 2; Stuart 1856, 43, plates 134-7).

It was not until 1899, however, when Govan was at the peak of its industrial phase of greatness, that a complete record of the collection was made (Fig 3). This was initiated by Sir John Stirling Maxwell, MP of Nether Pollok, who commissioned Thomas Annan to make a photographic record and plotted the location of the stones within the churchyard where they were still marking burials. This slim but lavish volume not only made pioneering use of photography, but constituted a distinct civic statement about the antiquity of the burgeoning industrial powerhouse on Glasgow's south-west periphery. So effective were Annan's carefully lit photographs, made in the studio from plaster casts (Fig 4), that they were

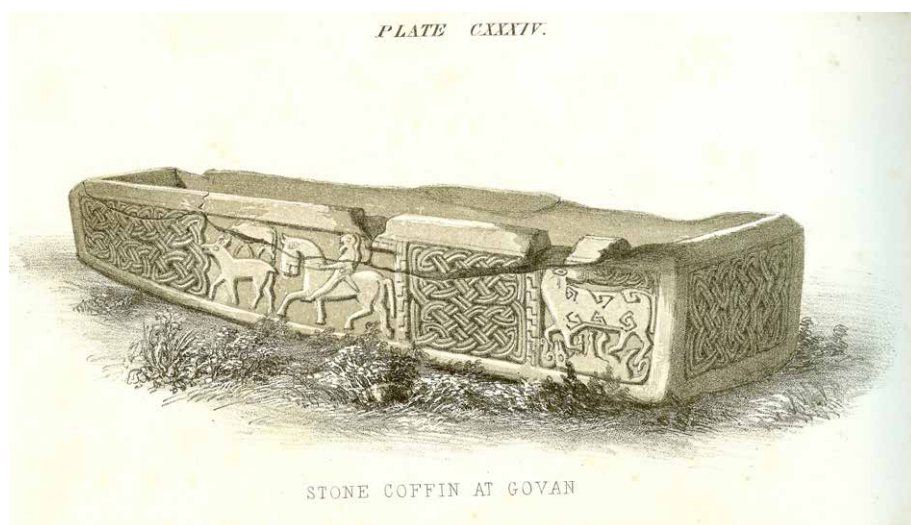


Figure 2. Lithograph of the sarcophagus, from *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland* (Stuart 1856, plate 134)

recycled in Allen and Anderson's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903, 451-75) with very limited additional comment. As the 20th century progressed and the shipbuilding declined, Govan's sculpture slipped into obscurity, despite the promotional efforts of T C Brochie (1938), director of the Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery and a tireless Govan-booster, who engineered the return of the Jordanhill Cross to Govan in 1928. Until C A Raleigh Radford's reconsideration of the Govan sculpture (1967a, 1967b) the stones remained obscure local treasures. His was the first sustained scholarly discussion to consider the whole collection and it was he who coined the term 'Govan School' to refer to its makers, but in spite of this they remained largely unknown. In the late 1970s it was possible for the Anglo-Saxon historian Patrick Wormald to astonish his friend Michael Wood (then a PhD student researching Viking Age England) by bringing him to Govan Old via the Underground without prior warning of the scale or magnificence of the collection. Wood recounted this revelatory experience when he featured Govan in his 2012 BBC series 'The Great British Story: a People's History'.

Although Radford rekindled limited academic interest in Govan's antiquity, the most significant advance of the modern era can be linked to the ministry of Tom Davidson Kelly (1989-2002), who saw the sculpture as a spiritual as well as cultural resource. Davidson Kelly reasoned that by promoting Govan's historical significance he could enhance the self-esteem of Govanites in the depressed post-industrial era. Using antiquities to further a ministerial agenda had, of course, been pioneered by one of his predecessors, George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community (Ferguson 2001), while Davidson Kelly's concern for community social justice followed the tradition of another of his predecessors David Orr, champion



Figure 3. Photograph of Govan churchyard in the 1890s showing a hogback in situ. Source: Wylie Collection, University of Glasgow Library



Figure 4. Photograph of a cast of the Jordanhill Cross taken by Thomas Annan (Stirling Maxwell 1899)

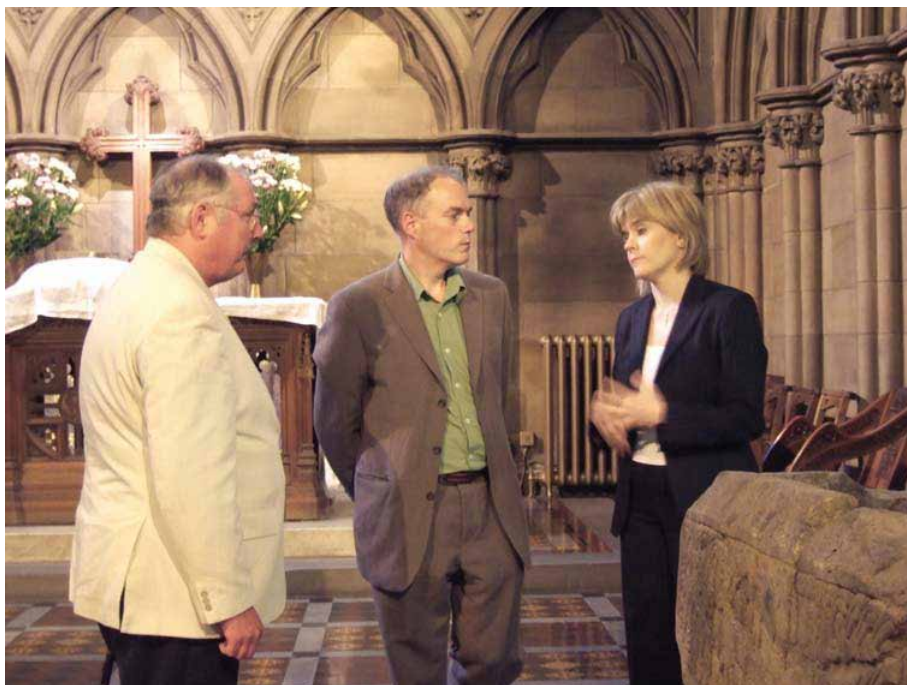


Figure 5. Tom Davidson Kelly and the author discuss the Govan sarcophagus with the Govan MSP Nicola Sturgeon. Source: Govan Workspace

of the Govan Housing Association (Young 2003, 2012; see below). To promote awareness of the sculpture Davidson Kelly established the Friends of Govan Old and persuaded a group of distinguished scholars to direct their expertise to consider *Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture* at an influential conference in 1992. The subsequent publication surveyed archaeological, artistic and historical aspects and established the importance of the collection to a wider scholarly audience than ever before (Ritchie 1994). Building upon this, the Friends of Govan Old have made the collection more publically accessible by publishing guidebooks, coordinating volunteer guides, and hosting events including a successful annual lecture series. Tom Davidson Kelly was also responsible for initiating archaeological investigations at Govan Old, first by Colleen Batey (see Ritchie 1994) and subsequently by myself. The Govan sculpture was introduced to an international audience in 1989 when a fibreglass cast of the panels was included as part of the British Museum/ National Museums of Scotland (as then-named) exhibition entitled *'The Work of Angels': masterpieces of Celtic metalwork 6th–9th centuries AD*.

These exploratory excavations of 1994–6 established that the heart-shaped churchyard enclosed one of the oldest Christian sites in Scotland and exposed the key features of the Strathclyde royal site (Driscoll 2003; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 35–40). Two burials outside the south-eastern corner of the church, dated to the fifth-sixth centuries, are thought to be Christian from their orientation. Various deposits dated to the eighth-ninth century provided evidence for industrial activity and a buried road surface in the south-east of the churchyard. The excavations also revealed that the curvilinear 'Celtic' churchyard was originally enclosed by a massive ditch and bank which was silting up by the ninth-tenth century, when the sculpture began to be carved. It was recognised that the buried road led towards the Doomster Hill which suggested that there was a link between the 'royal' burial ground, the court hill and the royal residence across the Clyde in Partick; in short, the framework for the political capital of Strathclyde. Above all, these excavations established the national importance of Govan Old and the integrity and coherence of the churchyard's archaeology, and led to its designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument by Historic Scotland (Owen & Driscoll 2011).

While interest in and awareness of Govan Old's historic importance was growing at the end of the 20th century, church attendance was diminishing. By 2007 this had reached a critical level and it was decided to amalgamate the three congregations – Govan Old, 'Govan New' (St Mary's at Govan Cross, the former Free Kirk) and Linthouse. In that year a Church of Scotland arbitration panel determined that the united parish of Govan and Linthouse would be housed at 'Govan New'. The controversial decision to abandon the original ecclesiastical centre shocked both members of the congregation and interested observers, not least because it raised concerns over the future of the sculpture and the architecturally significant church. In the short-term, the prospect of an unoccupied church was alarming, such buildings being highly vulnerable to vandalism. In the longer term there was a widespread perception that without Govan Old at its cultural and social heart, Govan would lose an invaluable community resource, one capable of stimulating heritage-based urban regeneration. These concerns quickly galvanized a consortium of interested parties to consider how best to fashion a sustainable

future for Govan Old. Following discussions with heritage bodies and consultation with local decision-makers an Options Appraisal study was undertaken in 2008 by Govan Workspace Ltd, a local regeneration agency (Fig 5).

The Options Appraisal study argued that the long-term interests for the regeneration of central Govan depended upon a healthy Govan Old and identified the sculpture as a major community resource, access to which should be improved as part of a strategy to develop a sustainable future for the church building (Cassidy 2010). Govan Workspace Ltd took the lead in applying to a range of funding bodies including Historic Scotland, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Church of Scotland to redisplay the sculpture. The funding for this interim redisplay was secured in 2011, allowing Northlight Heritage/York Archaeological Trust to undertake the 'Govan Stones Project', its aim to make the collection more accessible, more visually appealing, more intelligible and, above all, better known. The resulting redisplay, 'The Govan Stones', opened by the then-Deputy First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon in July 2013, is seen as the initial stage in the process of transforming Govan Old into a viable cultural centre for Govan. The success of the project has stimulated Glasgow City Council to make improvements to the churchyard environs and commission a churchyard conservation management plan (Buckham 2013). The final stage of the redevelopment of Govan Old, which will involve the reconfiguration of the church for a permanent display and to house commercial tenants, requires a major capital injection. During the period of the Heritage Lottery Fund-funded project visitor numbers increased fourfold to over 8000 per annum and a new body, the Govan Heritage Trust, has assumed ownership of the church building. This success in attracting visitors and the change in ownership have allowed the Heritage Lottery Fund to make the necessary capital investment as part of the second phase of the Govan Townscape Heritage Initiative (planned for 2017).

The setting of Govan Old

Govan is located on the south side of the Clyde opposite the mouth of the River Kelvin, where the configuration of the two rivers made this a convenient natural crossing point which, prior to the dredging of the Clyde, could be forded at low tide. This remained an important ferry crossing until 1963 when the opening of the Clyde Tunnel rendered it redundant. The settlement occupies a low-lying and fertile tract of ground which prior to industrialisation was recognised as being one of the most productive stretches of the Clyde. As Glasgow expanded and prospered through its participation in the Atlantic trade, the small village of Govan acquired riverside villas and a reputation as a rural idyll, complete with picturesque country church (Fig 1; Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 21-7, 51-79).

Handloom weaving was Govan's original industry and by the 18th century its success had transformed the old hamlet into two lanes of thatched cottages straggling over a kilometre upstream from the ferry crossing. From the end of the 18th century this cottage industry began to be displaced by textile factories, which from the 1860s were in turn replaced by shipbuilding yards (Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 81-6). Although the Clyde here was narrow and shallow, the local

availability of iron, engineering expertise and cheap labour placed Govan at the centre of what became a global shipbuilding industry. One consequence of this was that the river itself was industrialised: deepened, straightened, and revetted with stone to cope with intense traffic. Another consequence was that Govan's population grew exponentially: the rural parish of 1793 had a population of 2518; a little over a century later in 1910, two years before its annexation by the Glasgow Corporation, it had risen to 89,725, a 45-fold increase (Maver 2000, 98). The material evidence of these industrial changes remains the defining physical characteristic of Govan today. Sheer embankments restrict access to the riverside and the legacies of shipbuilding occupy much of the waterfront still. The historic townscape of tenements is punctuated by public buildings which reflect the high level of prosperity and philanthropy of the late 19th century – Govan has the third highest density of listed buildings in Glasgow after the City Centre and the West End. Conspicuous amongst these distinguished buildings are Govan Old Church, Robert Rowand Anderson's Gothic revival masterpiece (1888), and his adjacent essay in Scottish Baronialism, the Pearce Institute (1904), endowed in memory of William Pearce, owner of the Fairfield shipyard, to serve as a social and educational centre and to provide offices for the church. Together these two buildings provide a social and spiritual core for Govan and, despite the construction of Govan Town Hall (1897-1901) elsewhere, they remain the geographical and institutional heart of Govan.

Rowand Anderson's church confounds the Presbyterian stereotype. It is lavishly detailed and organised like a medieval church with a distinct nave, chancel and side chapels and an extensive cycle of stained glass. Built during the ministry of Rev John Macleod (1875-98) which spanned the period of rapid population expansion, it became known as the 'People's Cathedral' because of its grand scale and is now recognised as one of the most influential Gothic Revival church buildings in Scotland. This new church incorporated a suitable place for the sarcophagus, which was brought inside to stand on a stone table designed by Anderson himself in 1905. It was another two decades before most of the rest of the sculpture was brought within the church in 1926 and mounted with wrought iron brackets fashioned by local craftsmen. The last stones remaining outside were brought in during the ministry of Tom Davidson Kelly.

In addition to protecting the stones, bringing the sculpture inside the church allowed Govan Old to assert its local importance through the display and curation of these antiquities. In this respect the bulky presence of the hogbacks served as the most forceful symbol of the church's ancient origins. While the organic display of the stones that evolved in the 20th century had a homespun charm and exhibited a genuine regard for the monuments, arguably it was primarily addressed to other members of the Church of Scotland rather than the public at large. When the stones were brought inside Govan Old was a thriving church, not a museum, so there was no interpretative display and explanation was communicated by word of mouth. Latterly the Friends of Govan Old changed all this; they trained volunteer guides and published guides, but the crisis of 2007 brought home the need to improve the presentation of the sculpture and to address a wider audience.

Interpretative themes

From an archaeological point of view the most obvious interpretative themes relate to the Kingdom of Strathclyde. Being short-lived and obscure, few are aware that it was the last independent British kingdom in these isles (Broun 2004; Clarkson 2010). This obscurity creates an air of mystery, and learning about Strathclyde gives the visitor a sense of new discovery. Even fewer people are aware that in the 10th and 11th centuries, the seat of this kingdom was in Govan, where there was a royal burial ground and open-air court site (the Doomster Hill) and that in Partick, on the north shore but still within the parish, was a royal residence. The sculpture is critical to recognising Govan's royal status; no place in Britain has a larger or more imposing assemblage dating to this period. Despite its imposing scale, understanding the collection requires a great deal of explanation to draw out its significance. For instance, the most magnificent piece, the monolithic sarcophagus (Fig 6), is without close parallel in Britain, and it is only through close consideration of Scottish dynastic histories and wider British trends in patterns of the culting of royal martyrs that it has been possible to identify for whom it was made. John R Davies has argued convincingly that it was fashioned to hold the corporeal remains of Constantine I 'the Martyr', king of the Picts and son of Cinead mac Alpín, who died in 876 fighting Vikings (Davies 2010). The full-body size of the sarcophagus and the possible drain hole are taken to indicate that it



Figure 6. The Govan Sarcophagus as displayed in the chancel. Source: Northlight Heritage

was made not long after his death. Clearly the general public cannot be expected to have much prior knowledge of this material, nor is it clear how much appetite there is for such fine-grained detail or how best to deliver it.

The five hogback grave stones are perhaps the most familiar of Govan's monuments. They constitute the most numerous group of hogbacks in Scotland and include the largest examples known anywhere. Together these massive carvings of buildings protected by dragon-like beasts are an imposing and perplexing group. Traditionally hogbacks are regarded as Viking colonial monuments and there has been a tendency to regard these as the earliest of the Govan sculptures, although this has been called into question by Davies' dating of the sarcophagus to the late ninth century (Lang 1974; 1994; Davies 2010). Recent research has emphasised the longevity of the hogback monument type (Ritchie 2004). The redisplay of the stones now allows this evolution to be better appreciated. Two of the hogbacks have been reworked by cutting away portions to allow new, more up-to-date carving to be introduced, changes that Ritchie argued occurred within a few generations of their original execution (2004, 15). This intriguing evidence for 'multiple lives' should be considered alongside a more dramatic development from the simplest of the hogbacks (which might be interpreted as a 'chieftain's hall') to the most complex and arguably latest (which appears to be modelled on a church-shaped reliquary shrine). Such a development from a 'secular' to a more 'ecclesiastical' monument would be consistent with an increasingly institutionalised kingship in this period in which the church played an influential role. Interesting though these transformations and their implications for early medieval social and political development might be, we need to question how meaningful such topics are for contemporary visitors and for the Govan community. The potential to alienate and exclude the non-specialist audience would seem to be quite high.

For many local people, the dominant ideas at Govan Old church relate to it as a centre of reformed worship which has contributed significantly to the development of the Church of Scotland. This goes back to the earliest days of the Presbyterian church in the 16th century, when Andrew Melville was the minister (1577-80). Govan played a central role in securing the social position of the new church: the first four reformed ministers (1577-1622) were also principals of the University of Glasgow (Reid 2012). However, little physical evidence survives from this era, apart from the inscriptions dating from the 16th-19th centuries on the recumbent grave stones which emphasise a continued interest in and reverence for the monuments in their continued use as burial or lair markers. Again, we might wonder in this epoch of diminishing church membership how best to articulate and animate these strands of the Govan story: perhaps by drawing connections with historic social upheavals and with the modern church mission.

Without doubt Govan's industrial history is the most immediately accessible aspect of the past to the local community and contemporary visitors, but despite the imprint of shipbuilding on the fabric of Govan, the industrial past cannot be equated simply with ships. Before the arrival of heavy engineering, Govan was known as a centre of weaving. In modern times the Govan Weaver's Society has become purely a philanthropic and social organisation, but it was founded in 1756 to protect the interests of the independent weavers in a volatile economic

environment (McNab 2006). This cottage-based industry encouraged the development of bleaching and dying, the most important of which was Reid's Dye Works at Water Row. These industrial buildings transformed the centre of Govan from around 1822 and radically altered the landscape by obscuring the Doomster Hill (Dalglish & Driscoll 2009, 61-2). The church ceased to be the dominant structure in the village. The transformation from a rural farming community to a commercial manufacturing one is documented in the churchyard. New forms of monument appear from the late 17th century associated with the new trades – most frequently represented are the weavers. These new monuments take the form of upright headstones, distinguished by their classical architectural detailing, their post-Reformation *memento mori* imagery, by the use of trade symbols and by their verticality. Visually they are distinct from the earlier gravestones – the horizontal ledger stones and reused Early Medieval recumbent cross-slabs which continued to be favoured by the local gentry into the 19th century. Taken as a group the old and new stones reveal that the churchyard was a social arena where different groups asserted identity by erecting challenging monumental forms. The notion of social tension between different classes and occupations is a theme which has contemporary resonance and creates a genuine link between the distant past and recent times. Unfortunately, the rehousing of the medieval stones indoors has made it harder to appreciate the interplay of these contrasting monuments. It is hoped in the long term to place replicas of the early medieval stones in a restored churchyard, allowing this connection to be re-established.

In post-medieval times the Church was the social centre of the community par excellence: it provided spiritual support, moral guidance, education and poor relief. As the population grew new 'daughter' churches were established to cater for Gaelic-speakers and non-conformist sects. This proliferation was exacerbated by the Great Disruption of 1843 which split the Church of Scotland. Despite this, membership of the Church continued to grow rapidly and in response the parish of Govan was subdivided into numerous smaller parishes, eventually numbering over 30 daughter parishes – the most to be generated by a single parish anywhere in Scotland (Davidson Kelly 2007). This period of expansion is most strongly associated with John Macleod, who personally established 13 daughter churches within the ancient parish. Funds intended to finance a colossal spire for Rowand Anderson's church were diverted to this missionary activity of Macleod's, with the result that following his untimely death the spire was never completed (MacFarlane 1965, 50-1).

Following the First World War demand for ships declined. The slump deepened during the Great Depression, creating misery and deprivation for many working in shipbuilding and related industries. That crisis inspired an extraordinary response from the incumbent minister Rev George MacLeod (1930-8) who sought to make the Church of Scotland more relevant to local communities by engaging in practical tasks to improve living conditions. In the context of the churchyard, the most conspicuous was the creation of a memorial garden between the Pearce Institute and the entrance to the churchyard which featured a replica of the Jordanhill cross (its head restored on the model of the Barochan Cross: Fig 7). MacLeod followed this with a scheme to restore the ruined Iona Abbey as a means of bringing together



Figure 7. The replica of the Jordanhill Cross modelled on the Barochan Cross, erected in 1933 as a feature of the memorial garden. Photograph by Stephen Driscoll

trainee ministers and ordinary working men. Out of this inspired initiative grew the Iona Community, which remains a thriving social justice organisation with an international membership but retaining a particular commitment to Scotland: it celebrated its 75th anniversary in Govan Old in 2013.

The radical social justice agenda established by George MacLeod inspired a succession of Govan Old ministers, most notably David Orr (1960-80), who was instrumental in establishing the New Govan Society, an organisation dedicated to improving living conditions for Govan's disadvantaged (Young 2003). These efforts to alleviate poverty led to the establishment of the Govan Housing Association (1971), which worked alongside and sought to empower the local community, becoming the model for the Scottish Housing Association movement which has done some much to improve people's lives across Scotland. The prominence of Christianity in the narrative of modern Govan is easily overlooked, but it remains influential and alive. One of the most remarkable survivals of John Macleod's ministry is the daily service – unusual for the Church of Scotland – which has continued unbroken since 1888 when the existing church was opened.

Conceptual and pragmatic challenges

Leaving to one side the very real financial and organisational challenges to presenting the churchyard at Govan Old, there remain several obstacles to overcome in successfully interpreting the place. The overarching challenge is that in its current and developed form Govan Old is fundamentally a rural churchyard, albeit one embedded within a dense urban townscape. Over the course of the 19th century the open aspect of the churchyard was gradually closed down. The

process accelerated in the 20th century when the Pearce Institute was built (1904) and shortly thereafter the Harland and Woolf (1912) plating shed was erected on its eastern boundary. Tenements to the north and west effectively surrounded the churchyard. In recent years most of these large buildings have come down, but the urban setting remains dominant. The layout of the churchyard is loose and organic. Its loose character is formed by the early division of the cemetery into lairs, the boundaries of which are documented in detail in an 1809 plan by Thomas Kyle, and many remain visible. The structural looseness has been exacerbated by the removal of the ancient stones into the church and by considerable attrition to the later monuments over the years, not least through vandalism.

An associated challenge is that the churchyard has limited connection with the existing community as a place of burial and remembrance. The cemetery ceased to be used actively in the mid-19th century (Buckham 2013) and such has been the population mobility in the past century that there are few, if any, residents of Govan now who have family connections to those buried in the cemetery. Re-establishing connections with the community presents a major obstacle to the active and respectful usage of the site. One means of reconnecting with the community is to find alternative uses; perhaps cultural activities offer the most attractive way of constructing a new social presence. By drawing upon the existing qualities of the sculpture, architecture and ecclesiastical tradition it should be possible to enhance and invigorate the quality of the place. Because Govan Old is Church of Scotland and the majority of Govanites (if religious) identify with Catholicism establishing a spiritual connection is not straightforward; the majority are ignorant of Govan Old's historical and cultural significance. Sectarian hostility threatens to obscure wider interest in the church despite the high Presbyterian aesthetic of the building which makes it seem familiar to those raised in either a Catholic or an Anglican tradition. In this respect the decline in active churchgoing is perhaps a benefit for Govan Old as people become less subject to sectarian prejudices and more accustomed to new immigrants and asylum seekers. In time this problem may evaporate, but in the short term it needs to be addressed by adopting an ecumenical approach and emphasising the site's ancient (pre-Reformation) origins and the powerful social justice legacy. The fact that Govan Old is also no longer the centre of the Christian parish may contribute to making it seem less threatening to some. The transfer of ownership to the Govan Heritage Trust brings an additional benefit: secular ownership of the cultural assets opens up new sources of public funding such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Finally, while in an increasingly secular society there is general decline in interest in churchgoing, ironically there is healthy interest in churches as wedding venues and settings for entertainment, an interest which has been of significant financial value to numerous historic churches elsewhere in Glasgow (eg St Andrews in the Square, Cottiers, Oran Mor and Queen's Cross).

Towards a sustainable future

Although the Govan Stones redisplay project was intended to raise the site's profile and attract visitors, it is not expected that tourism alone can sustain a building of this scale, nor would it be desirable to be dependent on external resources. The sympathetic display of Govan's cultural heritage has the potential to reshape public perceptions, but the museum approach will not be sufficient; other activities and funding sources are necessary if it is to contribute to shaping the centre of a new Govan. The Govan Stones project was conceived of as a preliminary stage to a more ambitious and complex redevelopment of the building, which would include a high-quality 'permanent' redisplay of the sculpture (Fig 8). The proximity of the new Riverside Museum connected to Govan by a seasonal ferry, and the shipbuilding display in the refurbished Fairfield Shipyard offices, establish Govan Old as a viable heritage destination. However, it is hard to imagine that heritage interest could generate sufficient income to sustain the building, so central to the redevelopment strategy is the reconfiguration of the internal space to provide lettable space for a commercial tenant, ideally a social enterprise with cultural or religious connections to Govan Old. As well as creating commercial facilities, it is intended to maintain the church as an active centre of worship. This last feature will, it is hoped, keep the building alive and protect it from becoming a 'dead' museum or a glossy backdrop. In this long-term vision, Govan Old would serve as an anchor for community regeneration by providing a cultural as well as a spiritual focus and it would project an unexpected, positive account of Govan's distinctive contribution to Scottish identity.



Figure 8. View of the nave from the Govan Stones reception area with the repositioned Jordanhill Cross in the foreground. Source: courtesy of Tom Manley

The academic instinct is to think of the permanent redisplay in scholarly terms, but this would be misguided. On the one hand, Early Historic Scotland is obscure and difficult to understand, few people have heard of the Kingdom of Strathclyde, and the precise relationship between the sculpture and the historic narrative is uncertain and debatable. On the other hand, the monuments have massive material presence which conveys a powerful sense of authority. The artistic details of form, decorative motif, and figural imagery provide an authentic vehicle to explore ideas about belief, cultural identity and destiny. This is a story which did not stop in the 12th century; although royal patronage moved elsewhere, Govan remained a place of regional importance through the Middle Ages into the Reformation era. The sculpture is central to this argument too because the prominent inscriptions from the 17th-19th centuries reveal that the stones retained their value over the centuries. This biographical approach to the monuments is particularly important because it allows the discussion and interpretation to extend out into the churchyard where a dynamic interplay can be observed between different monument types. This interplay reflects economic and social developments of modernity as the new (post-medieval) monument forms, with their classical motifs, trade symbols and spiritual message, effectively convey the changes of world view which accompanied the Reformation. This idea of continuous religious activity is also critical because the modern ministry has been important for shaping post-industrial Govan and, through the Iona Community, has also been central to notions of social justice which are characteristic of modern Scotland.

To serve as a genuine community asset, Govan Old will have to be more than economically self-sufficient, it will have to generate and nurture community activities. To a large extent this will depend upon how people respond to the reconfigured building. By emphasising the artistic legacy it may be possible to build upon existing interest from the local artistic community. By retaining the living community of worship it is hoped to keep the building spiritually alive.

In some ways, the natural features of the churchyard provide its most appealing quality, of the site as an oasis of secluded green in the centre of the city. The area is unique within Govan, where green spaces are widely separated by gritty post-industrial urban townscapes. Elder Park, the largest park, is open and highly public, and therefore not conducive to reflective activities, while other green spaces are closely linked to domestic housing and again not natural repositories of calm. In contrast Govan Old, being set back from the road, is surprisingly secluded, making it ideal for contemplation or, unfortunately, *al fresco* boozing. Naturally the church itself is suited to reflection, but the ancient churchyard is more accessible to a wider section of the community. By improving the condition of the churchyard, by enhancing its approaches and by discouraging anti-social behaviour it can be reclaimed by the community.

Looking beyond the banks of the Clyde, Govan has the potential to serve as a portal to other places of early Christian significance. There already exists a palpable link between Govan Old and Iona through the effort of George MacLeod

and successive leaders of the Iona Community. The great internal space of the nave could easily accommodate more examples of early Christian monuments, perhaps utilising casts of the major monuments currently in storage in various museums across the country. Properly displayed, these casts could serve both as a place to celebrate the unique Scottish contribution to medieval sculpture and as an orientation centre for ecclesiastical tourists.

Govan Old has an important contribution to make to redefining Scottish identity. Cultural sophistication and antiquity are unexpected attributes of Govan; the most obscure of the early peoples of Scotland, the northern Britons, had their virtually unknown royal centre at Govan; the legacy of this obscurity and mystery is a remarkable collection of sculpture which being located in a city (with its own underground station) is far more accessible than the Celtic crosses of Iona, the symbol stones of the Picts or the St Andrews' sarcophagus. Placing Govan at the centre of that arguably serves to redefine Scottishness.

Throughout this essay the intellectual debt to the concept of 'multiple lives' (Clarke 2007) is obvious. I was initially inspired to think of how this idea could inform understanding of the sculpture and thereby make it more engaging for the visitor; the initial results of this can be seen in the Govan Stones redisplay. Further thinking about the pragmatic issues posed by using the monuments as a means of resurrecting Govan Old made it clear that the 'multiple lives' concept applied equally to historic buildings and places. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that Govan Old's next life is beginning.

Acknowledgements

This seems like a suitable place to record publicly the debts I have accumulated over many years of working in Govan. Tom Davidson Kelly provided the initial invitation to excavate and continues to supply encouragement and guidance in equal measures. Just as important he introduced me to the Govan congregation and the Friends of Govan Old, who have done remarkable work keeping the place alive in very trying circumstances. Pat Cassidy of Govan Workspace has made the idea of the Govan Stones project a reality and has given me the rare opportunity to translate academic interests into a tangible cultural benefit. David Robertson, the champion of adaptive reuse of Glasgow's Gothic revival churches, has ensured that the building was not overlooked. Ingrid Shearer, a long-term collaborator in exploring Govan's archaeology, has led the way in linking archaeology with meaningful artistic engagement. Finally, over the years Katherine Forsyth has supported and enhanced my work. None of them is responsible for any errors or misunderstanding that might be found here, but all are guilty of providing inspiration.

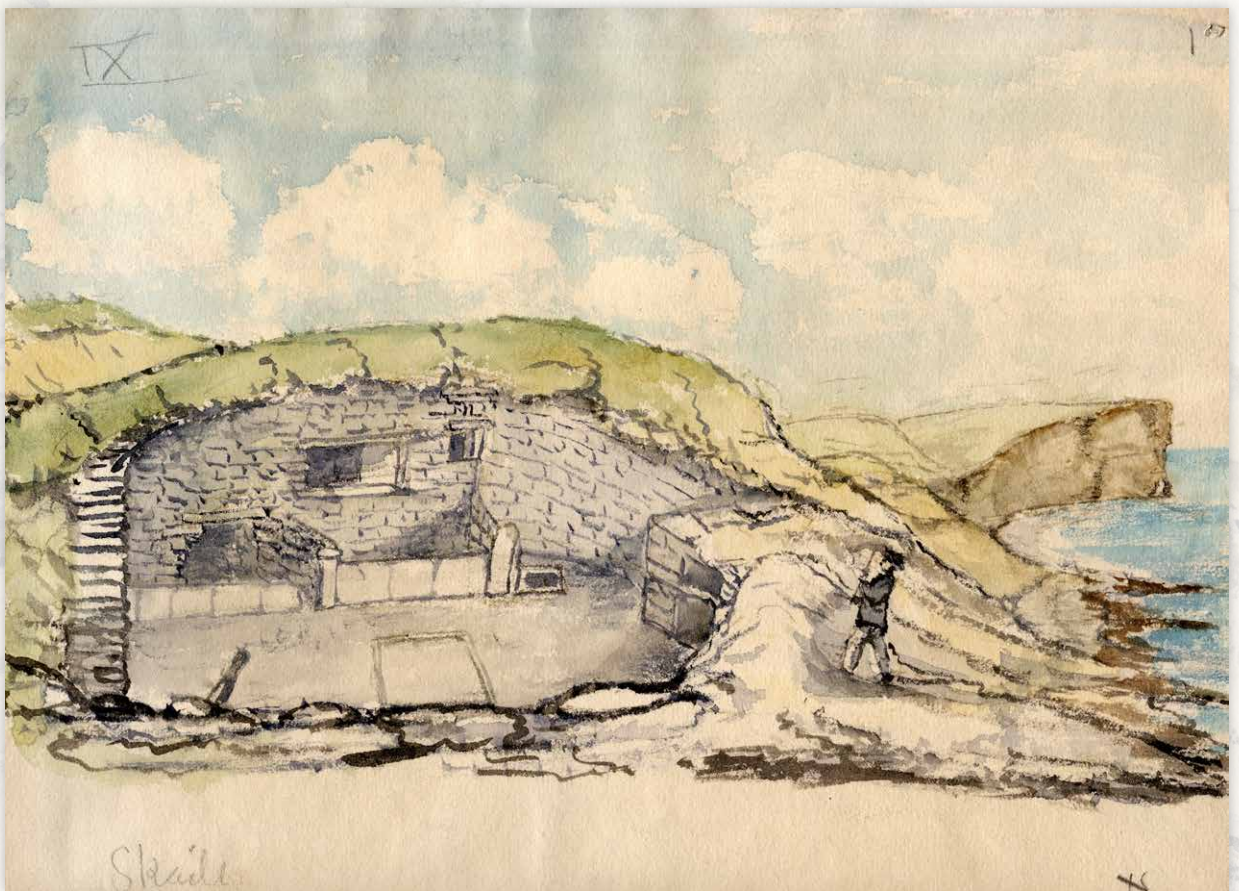
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Section 2

Ancient lives and multiple lives



*Watercolour showing Skara Brae after it was first exposed in 1850.
From Society of Antiquaries of Scotland manuscript collection,
reproduced courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*

Robert Innes Shearer: a lost antiquary from Caithness

Stratford Halliday

Abstract

Joseph Anderson's central role in Scottish archaeology during the late 19th century was initiated by a series of excavations of chambered cairns and brochs in Caithness in collaboration with a local man, Robert Shearer. While better known as a naturalist, Shearer was also interested in the prehistoric monuments scattered around his home, and having previously 'wrought' with Henry Rhind, he not only brought experience of excavation but also a range of practical skills that would prove essential in first bringing Anderson to the attention of other antiquaries, and thereafter providing the platform upon which he built his career. Having died young, Shearer is largely forgotten, but a small collection of drawings reveals something of his talents.

Keywords: *antiquaries, survey, Caithness, Joseph Anderson, Robert Innes Shearer*

It is with some trepidation that I offer this short essay on Robert Innes Shearer to our honorand, the more so because it encroaches upon Joseph Anderson and his world, territory with which David is entirely familiar (Clarke 2002). But while Anderson became a giant of Scottish archaeology, Shearer is largely forgotten. And yet, it seems likely that Shearer may have provided a spark of practical endeavour that served to launch Anderson on his way. Indeed, anyone who has dipped into Anderson's Rhind lectures for 1881 on the Iron Age (Anderson 1883), and for 1882 on the Bronze and Stone Ages (Anderson 1886), cannot miss the way that the excavations in Caithness loom large, and though the text is mainly written in the first person it occasionally slips from 'I' into 'we', quietly acknowledging that he was not entirely alone in his discoveries.

Anderson's unprecedented four series of Rhind lectures 1879-82 were a triumph and created a framework of the Scottish past that is still instantly recognisable today. After ten years' hard work in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, he had come a long way from his days in Caithness, where he had arrived in 1860, aged 28, as the newly-appointed editor to the *John o' Groats Journal*. (See Graham 1976 and Clarke 2002 for the general outline of his life.) His appointment in Wick following a three-year sojourn teaching in Constantinople perhaps suggests that he was charting a new course for his career, but at the time it seems unlikely

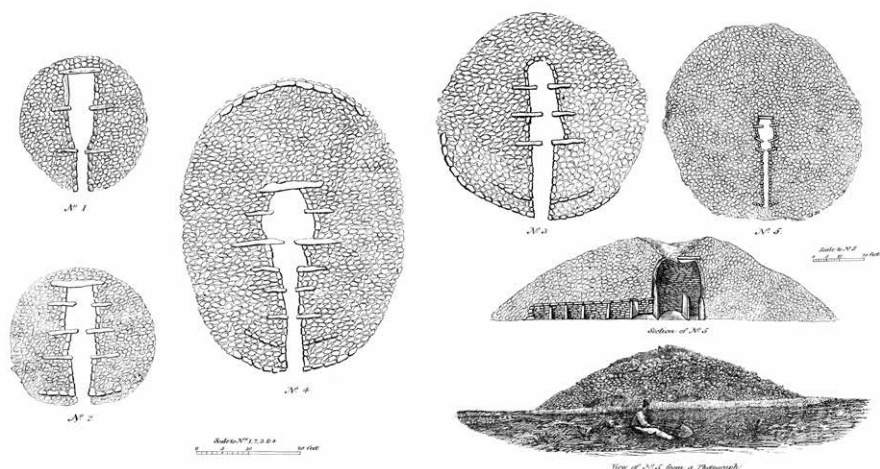


Figure 1. The Plate titled 'Chambered Cairns at Yarhouse, Thrumster, Caithness, opened by Mr Rhind and at Camster, opened by Messrs Anderson & Shearer', which illustrates Joseph Anderson's first paper reporting their excavations in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (1866a, pl xxvii)

that anyone, himself included, might have guessed exactly where that might lead. And while his anonymous obituary in *The Scotsman* on 29 September 1916 (Anon 1916) might recall the deep impression that the Early Medieval carved stones at St Vigean's had made upon him in his youth, this finds no detectable expression before he reached Caithness. Indeed, it seems that he did not become a Corresponding Member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for another six years, marking it with the publication of his first paper in its *Proceedings* 'On the Chambered Cairns of Caithness, with results of Recent Explorations' (Fig 1; Anderson 1866a).

His arrival on the archaeological stage thus appears both sudden and spectacular, and in these respects the role of the excavations in Caithness can hardly be doubted. Sir Arthur Mitchell, soon to be a Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (elected 1870), visited the excavations at South Yarrows (Mitchell 1880, 81), and in the September of 1866, in company with the Reverend James Joass, John Stuart was afforded a guided tour of the monuments in the area by Anderson and Shearer; Stuart was touring Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross in preparation of a report for the Society on the 'Application of a Fund left by the late Mr A Henry Rhind, for Excavating Early Remains' (Stuart 1868). These senior figures in the Society's affairs were evidently impressed and it is not unreasonable to guess that the structured approach and analysis of the monuments that characterises Anderson's written accounts in the Society's *Proceedings* and elsewhere (Anderson 1866a; 1866b; 1868; 1869a; 1869b), coupled with communication skills honed in the classroom, were the hallmarks of his presentation in the field. Indeed, Stuart was so impressed that he recommended to the committee considering Rhind's bequest that the immediate solution to its fulfilment was to provide funds to assist Anderson and Shearer:

The excavations conducted by Messrs Anderson and Shearer have been mostly made under their own inspection by two steady workmen, who are now thoroughly acquainted with what is required. I propose that, as far as possible, we should avail ourselves of their services, under the superintendence of the gentlemen just referred to. They have offered to aid the Committee in every way, and I need hardly say that their experience and taste for the pursuit render such aid more than usually valuable. They will be able not merely to superintend, but to suggest to the Committee the most desirable objects for excavation. The chambers in cairns near to Wick, which have already been opened by Mr Rhind himself, and under the eye of Messrs Anderson and Shearer, disclose peculiarities of structure of which the details ought to be carefully preserved.

It appears to me, therefore, that the Committee ought to obtain careful ground-plans and architectural drawings of these chambers, so as to show the construction of their walls and vaulting. (Stuart 1868, 304-5)

And while Stuart was wary of the cost of emptying out the rubble from broch towers in Sutherland, he recommended excavating a 'Pict's House' in Caithness, thus paving the way for the excavation of the brochs at Loch of Yarrows and Brounaban reported by Anderson in 1871 (published 1874; see also Heald, this volume). Stuart's report and recommendations were adopted by the committee chaired by Cosmo Innes on 19th December 1866 and Stuart was instructed to make the necessary arrangements (Stuart 1868, 307). From that point on the elision of Anderson's career and the affairs of the Society was probably almost inevitable.

So what happened in the five years after his arrival in Wick in 1860 to divert his career so dramatically? In the first place he had arrived in a town that, by its own judgement, was no intellectual backwater (Clarke 2002, 4). The past was certainly on the agenda among the various personalities involved, both in geological and human timescales, and this may well have prodded a latent historical interest into life. In 1863 Samuel Laing had started excavating in the 'Harbour Mound' at Keiss (RCAHMS 1998, 5; Laing 1866) and it was certainly his ideas about human history in general, and the character of early man in Caithness in particular, that sparked a vitriolic debate whose ripples would be felt as far afield as London (Laing 1865; Various 1865; Anderson & Carter Blake 1865; Anderson 1866c; Shearer 1866a; Cleghorn 1866). But while Anderson may have realised even before they were published that the key to refuting Laing's ideas was by further excavation, by his own admission he had no practical experience of excavation to draw upon (Anderson 1886, 234). And it is in this arena that Robert Shearer supplied the vital link, not only having excavated with Rhind in 1853 and emptied several cists since (Shearer 1866a, clvii), but also bringing a combination of local knowledge, contacts, organisation, interest and other practical skills that were to be essential. In 1865-6 they excavated no fewer than twelve Neolithic chambered cairns on the moors around the Loch of Yarrows and eastwards to Camster (Fig 1). They also explored the stone rows and a Bronze Age cairn at Garrywhin, and a burnt mound at Brounaban. They followed these with excavations in brochs at the Loch of Yarrows and Brounaban.

What little is known of Robert Shearer's life has been ably set out elsewhere (Clark & Sellers 2005, 6-13). At its simplest it is a story of local boy made good. The eldest of eleven children, he was born on 8 November 1826 at Upper Thrumster. At that time his father, James, is described as a grieve (farm foreman), but went on to become the tenant of Ulbster Mains, occupying the fine if now sadly derelict farmhouse there (Fig 2). Robert appears in the census of 1861 as 'farmer's son', as eldest presumably working the farm with his father, but by 1866 he seems to have achieved some professional standing and had become the factor of the Thrumster estate; he is styled 'factor' in various entries in the *Ordnance Survey Original Name Book* for Caithness when he was consulted by the surveyors preparing the first edition of the 6-inch map (Caithness, No 13, Parish of Wick), though in the census of 1871 this becomes 'estate agent'. This professional elevation certainly fits with other clues. The small collection of drawings held by The National Record, Historic Environment Scotland (hereafter TRNHES) includes a large folded sheet of cartridge paper that appears to bear two separate field plans, though in fact they are conjoined, plotted out in pencil and partly inked, depicting the farm and fields of Upper Thrumster adjacent to the march of the Hempriggs estate (TNRHES DC44314). Of little historical or archaeological interest in themselves, they nevertheless show that he had acquired the professional surveying skills that would have been the stock-in-trade of a factor or estate agent. With this professional status also came some measure of social elevation, revealed for example by his role as Chairman of the Ulbster and Thrumster Subscription Library. Latterly he lived at Thrumster Cottage, dying on 21st February 1872 of a 'serious effusion of the brain' at the age of 45.



Figure 2. Ulbster Mains, Caithness

Man and boy he had roamed this tract of country to the south-west of Wick, ranging from the cliffs at Ulbster across Thrumster and Yarrow to Warehouse and Camster on the moors beyond. This was his landscape, and he must have known it like the back of his hand. It was not only his home, but the fabric of his working life, and he was interested in it in every sense, from the creatures that inhabited it to the 'grey' and 'green' cairns with which it was liberally studded. Such a range of interests is commonly found among those born and bred in the countryside, but in Shearer's case they were evidently tinged with a strand of curiosity. We learn from Anderson that in 1853, then aged 27, Shearer had 'assisted Mr Rhind in his explorations' of the chambered cairns on Warehouse Hill (Anderson 1866, 444), Shearer's own allusion to this experience being that 'I wrought with him, and we opened four large cairns and several smaller ones' (Shearer 1866a, clvii). Rhind's report (1854) mentions no names, so we are none the wiser as to whether Shearer was simply a labourer engaged for the operations from the estate, or possibly the foreman, but it is more than likely that Shearer was volunteered for the work by his own curiosity about these mysterious monuments on his home ground. So much so, that one cannot help but wonder whether perhaps he was that 'intelligent person who passed that way shortly after the [earlier] work of demolition had been completed, and who himself saw, lying among the ruins, two skulls, one much decayed, and the other fresh and perfect in every respect' (ibid, 103). The attempt to preserve the skulls by re-interring them in the ruined chamber would certainly have been in keeping with someone who cared about this landscape and its history.

But for these retrospective commentaries, written over a decade after the event, we would know nothing of the seeds of Shearer's archaeological interests, and another six years were to elapse before he exposed his other passion to public gaze, publishing in the *John o' Groats Journal* for 24th February 1859 the first of a series of letters containing his observations on the birds and mammals of Caithness. The focus of these letters, as was to be that of his and Anderson's excavations, was again his home ground (see Clark & Sellers 2005). Clark and Sellers speculate that he may have been encouraged by his young friend Henry Osborne, who had an article published in *The Field* in 1858, and this may well have been so, but in the light of Shearer's overall career these letters and articles are probably also a manifestation of growing self-confidence and the aspiration to professional qualification, which would lead to respect and recognition within the community.

The timing of the submission of these first letters was providential. It established Shearer as a regular correspondent whom Anderson inherited with the editorship of the paper. And though Shearer was some six years his senior, this was as nothing against the twenty years or more that separated Anderson from others of that Caithness circle. In 1860 James Traill Calder, author and poet of Canisbay, was 66, while John Cleghorn, geologist, was 59, Robert Dick, geologist and botanist, was 49, Charles William Peach, naturalist and geologist, was 60, and Samuel Laing, at various times the Member of Parliament for Wick, was 50; within a few years both Calder (*d.* 1864) and Dick (*d.* 1866) had died, and by 1865 Peach had moved away. Henry Rhind, with whose legacy Anderson's future would be so intimately entwined, would have been Anderson's direct contemporary, but was no longer permanently resident in Caithness and in any case died in 1863. And while we

can detect the active engagements between these various personalities in asides in published papers, the disparity in the ages of this company was unlikely to have created a close circle of friends for Anderson. Shearer's one reference to 'My friend Anderson' (1866b, cxxxii) is merely to convey their alignment to readers and betrays nothing of any real friendship that may have existed between them. Nevertheless, it would seem likely that this underlay their campaign of excavation. Certainly the commentaries by visitors such as Stuart and Dr James Hunt (below) mention their names as one. At the very least they were sharing all their observations of the past in the development of their ideas, and they certainly shared a platform in their condemnation of Samuel Laing's *Prehistoric Remains of Caithness* (1866), albeit that each presented his view in very different tones.

As far as we know, it was Shearer who initiated their excavations together, starting work in anticipation of a visit by Hunt, co-founder of the recently-formed Anthropological Society of London, who was passing through Caithness on his way northwards (Anderson 1866a, 234). And it was as a direct result of this visit that the Anthropological Society made an immediate grant of funds raised by subscription among a number of their members to allow the work to continue (Hunt 1866a, lviii; 1866b, cxxxi). Whether this was on Shearer's own initiative or part of a grand scheme in which Anderson was implicated is not recorded, but it is noticeable that in the following year the grant of £10 was made to Anderson (Hunt 1867, xl). Furthermore, while the titles of the reports of their work to the Anthropological Society are styled Anderson and Shearer, they are communicated by Anderson, who had also become the Local Secretary for the Anthropological Society. The first two papers in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* are likewise written by Anderson (Anderson 1866b; 1868), and neither cites Shearer's name in its title, though his status as co-director is stated plainly enough in the opening sentences. A third paper, however, does not mention Shearer's name at all (Anderson 1872), while Anderson's report read in June 1871 and published in *Archaeologia Scotica* on the excavations of the brochs at Loch of Yarrows and Brounaban, and a few observations salvaged in the destruction of those at Old Stirkoke and Bowermadden, only thanks him for his contribution to the Caithness section of the gazetteer (Anderson 1874, 178).

At this remove it would be quite easy to read more into this than perhaps we should. In the marriage of skills and knowledge, Shearer was probably not competing with Anderson and was content to meet the practicalities that the excavations entailed, in order to find out more about the landscape that had provided the context of his entire life. Anderson's contribution was to shape the intellectual framework within which they pursued this goal, and almost certainly supplied a greater breadth of view of the past they were exploring. This is not to say that Shearer felt that he was in any way the lesser partner, and he had the confidence to present his own views and interpretations of their observations and discoveries. Thus, in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society* he wrote 'My friend Anderson and myself are rather inclined to differ in opinion as to the original intention of these cairns and the value of the remains found in them' (Shearer 1866b, cxxxii). He then elaborates an observation that in essence underpins a question that we might still be asking today: 'I can see nothing in the pieces of

broken pottery, burnt and half-burnt bones, and weapons or implements found in the “floors” of the cairns, but a refuse heap or kitchen-midden on a small scale, and the fact of human bones mixed in the heap does not alter my opinion’ (ibid). Nevertheless, the controversy over Laing’s excavations is quite revealing. While Anderson expresses his commentary in reasoned and measured paces to reach a series of argued conclusions to attack Laing’s ideas, Shearer launches into a seven-page diatribe that is personalised and laced with overt contempt, though based on the same shared observations made in company with Anderson and Cleghorn (Shearer 1866a). At its core lies the local outlook of a man who objects to this transient incomer impugning the roots of his Caithness ancestry with claims of cannibalism and savagery. This is not the outlook of one who had aspirations to build on his archaeological work to take his career elsewhere. Whatever Anderson’s ambitions by then, Shearer’s aspirations were all firmly rooted in Caithness and his standing in its community.

It is unfortunate that we have no letters to throw further light on their relationship, particularly following Anderson’s appointment as Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1869, and no way of judging whether his new life in Edinburgh was all-consuming to the exclusion of Caithness and his friends and acquaintances there. In his later life Anderson was snared by the excavations of another transient MP, Sir Francis Tress Barry, who had bought the Keiss estate and between 1890 and his death in 1907 excavated at least 25 monuments, though estimates of the overall tally vary (RCAHMS 1998, 7). In all at least 14 brochs were disinterred in a series of crude operations that were mainly superintended by John Nicolson, another talented local man who, in an echo of Shearer’s life, had been diverted into archaeology and prepared measured drawings and watercolours to complement Barry’s own remarkable photographic record of the work (RCAHMS 1998, and see also Heald, this volume). Barry believed in going to the top for his advice and made persistent demands on the knowledge and experience of Anderson and Joass. Anderson seems to have been a relatively frequent visitor, and in a handful of letters exchanged with Barry in 1900 (TNRHES MS28/470/3-4) and with Alexander Curle in 1910, when the latter was preparing the *County Inventory* for Caithness (MS37/17), we catch a glimpse of Anderson revisiting his former stamping ground around the turn of the century, including the scene of his first excavation with Shearer at the Yarrows South long cairn (Ferguson et al 2005).

In little over two years following Anderson’s departure Shearer himself would be dead. It would certainly have been understandable if the growing stature of Anderson’s reputation as a leading archaeologist had strained their friendship, but in truth we have no evidence that this was the case, other than the way Shearer’s role seems to have been receding in the papers reporting their discoveries. It is difficult to know how to interpret this, partly because the precise dates of some of their excavations are not recorded and we do not know whether they were still digging together as late as 1869. The date of the barely-reported excavation of the Brounaban broch, for example, is not recorded, though it can only have been started following the completion of work at Loch of Yarrows in 1867 or 1868. In any case, Shearer seems to have been withdrawing in other ways at this time,

possibly because factoring the Thrumster estate was making greater demands upon his time, or else it was the death in 1868 of his friend Henry Osborne after many years of illness (Clark & Sellers 2005, 6). Whatever the case, his final letter on natural history to the *John o' Groats Journal* appeared on 31st January 1867. The only written notes known to survive from after that date are the handwritten annotations to the collection of drawings held by The National Record, Historic Environment Scotland. The only dated one is of the broch at Thrumster Mains, which is boldly titled 'No. 1 Thrumster Broch Old Garden 1871' (Fig 3; TNRHES DC443000). With the notable exception of a plan of what is almost certainly the western half of the stone rows on the Hill o' Many Stanes, Clyth (DC44313), the monuments on the other drawings are also numbered.¹ Implicitly this was a survey with a grand objective, initiated at one of the monuments closest to his home at Thrumster Cottage. Its intention must surely have been a form of inventory of the monuments of Caithness some forty years before Curle drew up the *County Inventory* (RCAHMS 1911); this was perhaps what Anderson was alluding to in his thanks to Shearer in 1871 (1874, 178), though the idea for a gazetteer of brochs to establish their distribution is contained in Stuart's recommendations for the Rhind bequest (Stuart 1868, 306).

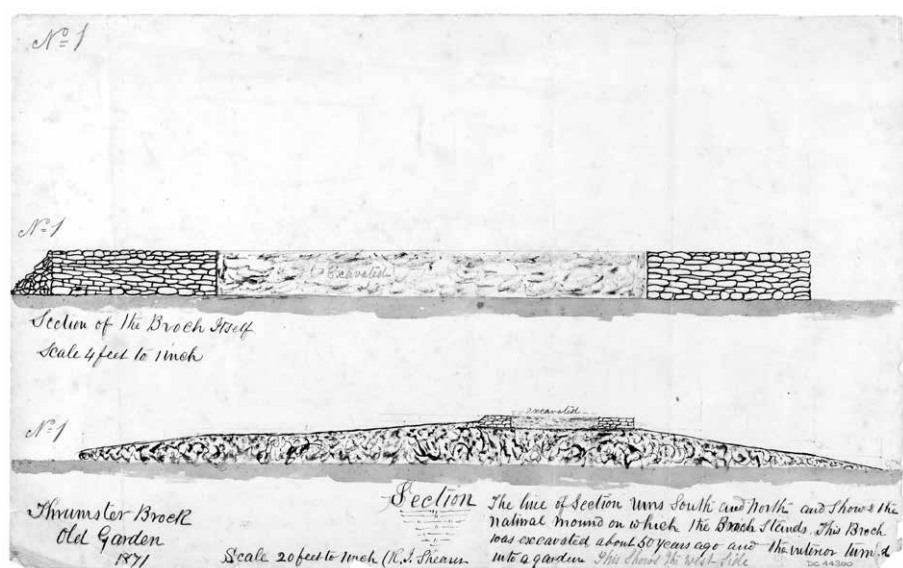
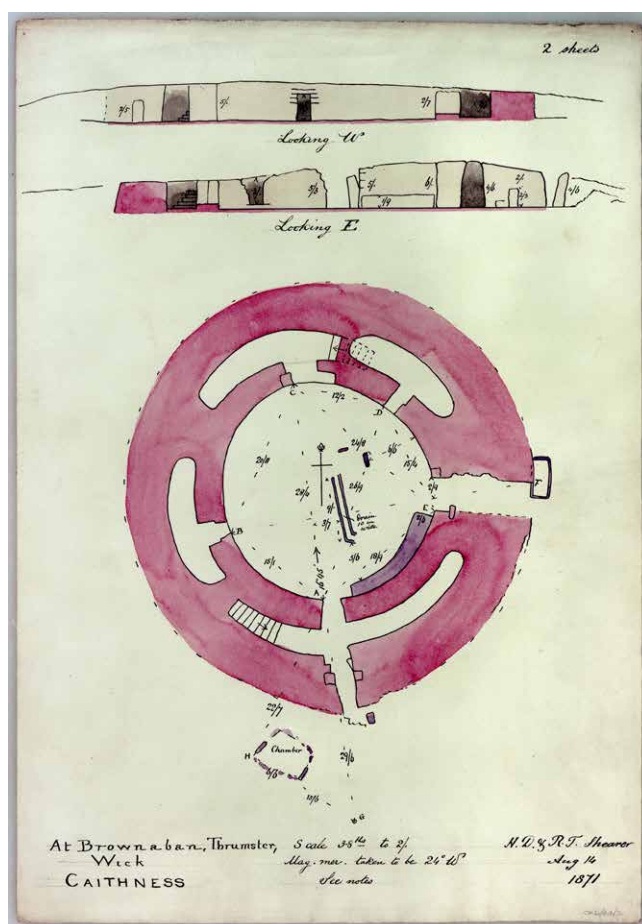


Figure 3. Robert Shearer's drawing of the broch at Thrumster Mains. © Historic Environment Scotland (R I Shearer Collection). Licensors canmore.org.uk: DP090944

1 The broch at Thrumster Little is No 2 and a burnt mound nearby, No 47 (TNRHES DC443001); broch mounds at Borrowston, No 3, and Gansclet, No 4 (DC443002); Cairn of Elsay, Staxigoe, No 12 (DC443003); The Pap, Hillhead, No 13 (DC443004); Cairn of Humster, No 14, and a burnt mound nearby, No 15 (DC443005); further broch mounds at Tannach Mains, No 17, and Cairnquoy, No 49 (DC443006); the Brounaban long cairn, No 21 (DC443007); a burnt mound at Brounaban, No 45 (DC443008); a standing stone at Gansclet, No 48 (DC443009); and two mounds on Ackergill Links, Nos 43-4 (DC443010).

Figure 4. Sir Henry Dryden's plan of the Brounaban broch was measured with Robert Shearer. © Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Collection).
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For Shearer's part, however, this burst of new archaeological work was perhaps a repetition of earlier events, and the initiation of the excavations at South Yarrow in anticipation of James Hunt's visit in 1865. In this case the distinguished visitor was Sir Henry Dryden, the link to Shearer almost certainly forged through the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland by Anderson. A stickler for accuracy, Dryden had been surveying detailed plans of megaliths and brochs in northern Scotland since the 1850s and visited Caithness for a little over a week from Monday 9th to Thursday 17th August 1871, pursuing a remarkably tight schedule.² Doubtless Shearer afforded him the sort of local tour that had been given Stuart, but his initials also appear on some of Dryden's plans and sections, showing that he collaborated in the surveys of the Battle Moss stone rows on the Wednesday, the Achkinloch avenue on the Friday, the Brounaban broch (Fig 4) on the following

2 He drew, on successive days, plans of: the cairn and stone rows at Garrywhin (TNRHES CAD69/1-2) and the stone rows at Battle Moss (CAD66/1-2); Garrywhin fort (DC25437); the stone rows on the Hill o' Many Stanes (CAD70/1-3); a megalithic avenue at Achkinloch (CAD70/13-14); and the stone circle at Guidebest (CAD67/2). Pausing to rest on the Sabbath, the following week he surveyed: the Brounaban broch (CAD64/1-2; DC51168) and the stone rows at Camster (CAD71/1-2); the Loch of Yarrow broch (CAD65/1-2; DC51155); and St Mary's Chapel (CAD58/1-3) and the broch (CAD68/1) at Crosskirk.

Monday and the Loch of Yarrows broch on the Tuesday. He may have been present on other occasions, but he also had a job to attend to and may not have been able to get away; ever it was thus, which is why Anderson had earlier taken Hunt to see the Hill o' Many Stanes without him (Shearer 1866b, cxxxii).

At a guess, and it can be no more than that, the numbered plans that form the mainstay of Shearer's own surveys were drawn up before Dryden's visit. Thus they betray no influence from Dryden's meticulous hand, and nothing of his architectural style with delicate coloured washes. As such they are an insight into skills that Shearer introduced to Anderson, in the first instance to create measured plans of the Neolithic chambered cairns they excavated, though none of this collection relates to those monuments. Whereas Dryden seems to have produced dimensioned sketches of the monuments in the field, with measured triangles to fix their shapes, Shearer's drawings are probably based on booked offset measurements, though without any surviving notebooks this is mere supposition and there may well have been supporting sketches. Of the seventeen archaeological drawings, mainly two to a sheet, only three are plans, and one of these is schematic (Thrumster Little broch). The remaining fourteen are all sections, mainly showing the profiles of broch mounds, but including three burnt mounds which represent some of the earliest records of these curious sites. In part this probably reflects the difficulties with which surveyors still struggle, of creating sensible field records for shapeless mounds; Shearer's solution was an annotated profile drawing. These are all drawn up in much the same way, and though inked up and filled in with curly scrubbed ink strokes and grey washes to represent the body of the mound and the ground below, they often betray traces of the geometry of their construction in partly erased pencil, sometimes including now-illegible notes (eg TNRHES DC44300). Each has been drawn up from a horizontal baseline in stepped measurements, which have been pricked through onto the paper at irregular height intervals, perhaps suggesting that something more than a simple level mounted on a T-shaped staff was employed in the field.

Of the three plans, the inked drawing of the Brounaban long cairn (DC44307) and the pencil drawing of the western half of the stone rows on the Hill o' Many Stanes, Clyth (DC44313) are the more informative, providing some insights into the field craft that Shearer brought to the plans that he and Anderson prepared for the chambered tombs they excavated. The Brounaban plan (Fig 5) in particular reveals how he approached the survey of a long cairn. Using the same curly scrubbed pen convention for the cairn material as appears on his sections, the plan has again been drawn up in pencil first. What is left of the pencil work reveals that the outline was plotted from measurements along eight transects across the axis of the cairn, which have been pricked through onto the paper. The transects are offsets from one of the two lines shown on the plan, one roughly along the axis of the mound, the other 4 inches (16 feet at scale) to the south and only clipping the south-eastern angle of the cairn. The northern line is not only roughly down the axis of the cairn, but also lies roughly parallel to the central section of its northern margin. This is probably the survey baseline that he first pegged out down the

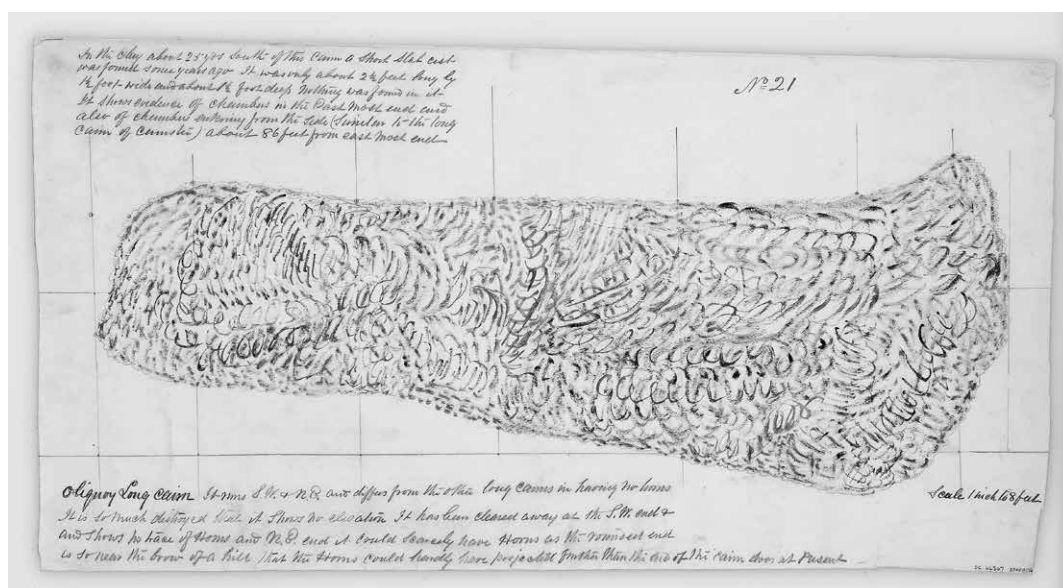


Figure 5. Robert Shearer's plan of the Brounaban long cairn. © Historic Environment Scotland (R I Shearer Collection). Licensors canmore.org.uk: DP008136

length of the cairn, recording the first measurement at the east end where the baseline passes through the eastern extremity of the cairn material.³

This is essentially a pragmatic approach to drawing plans without the aid of any instrumentation, and it works perfectly well on fairly level sites, such as the heavily robbed mound with a low profile at Brounaban, but it is much more difficult to control the accuracy of horizontal measurements on a relatively undisturbed cairn standing several metres high. This probably explains why the position and axis of the chamber slipped adrift on their plan of the horned long cairn at South Yarrows South, though this was not demonstrated until the cairn was resurveyed, using modern equipment, by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in 2004 (Ferguson et al 2005).

The unfinished plan of the Hill o' Many Stanes, Clyth, reveals a similar pragmatic technique. Drawn in pencil on a sheet of folded cartridge paper bearing a watermark date of 1864, it is neither numbered nor captioned, and may not have been conceived as part of this series of drawings. Its identity, however, is reasonably secure, based on a comparison to Dryden's plan drawn up in 1871. Though the number and disposition of the stones is by no means exact, this is entirely understandable to anyone who has attempted to record one of these monuments in heather moorland. We know from Shearer himself that he had intended to make at least a sketch plan of these rows for Hunt (Shearer 1866b, cxxxii), and it seems likely that this plan is based on earlier fieldwork. Measuring half the site was presumably as much as he could do by himself in a day so far from home. In the

3 In drawing up the measurements, he may simply have drawn the second line to help construct the alignment of his offsets without a set-square, pricking through all the measurements onto the paper with a pin or pair of compasses.

event, he never found the time to come back and record the eastern half and was eventually overtaken by Dryden.

The plan itself shows thirteen rows and about 149 stones.⁴ These have been drawn up from seven radiating lines, the uppermost, which lies roughly parallel to the edge of the paper, forming a baseline set out on the central axis of the setting to divide the site roughly into two. Two lines have then been set off square at either end of the baseline to fix the positions of the other six rays, each of which picks up a row of stones. These have been plotted individually by measurements running down each ray, probably following the splay of the setting. The intermediate rows of stones were presumably offset from these rays and recorded likewise. In essence, this is simply a variation of the technique employed at Brounaban, measured with offsets from a baseline pegged out through the centre of the monument. It is not unreasonable to suppose that this also is the way in which they drew the plans of the chambers they excavated, though the plan of the Loch of Yarrows broch must have proved altogether more challenging.

So what do these drawings add to the sum of our knowledge of Robert Shearer? It would be difficult to argue that they display any finesse in the man, though the designs for a doorway on another scrap of paper in the collection (TNRHES DC44311) show a contrasting and more refined aspect of his talents. Nevertheless, the choice of grey washes and penstrokes scrubbed onto the paper for his archaeological subjects creates a crude impression akin to scribble, and they all struggle to please in any aesthetic sense. They are workmanlike, and any comparison with Dryden's plans, for example, is unflattering at best. And yet his drawings show precision in their construction, a precision that is born of the applied pragmatism of a practical man. This was a man of the soil who was probably most at home out in the countryside, but had bettered himself by a mixture of intelligent curiosity, reading and hard work to become the factor of the estate on which he was born. And while on occasion he had travelled as far afield as Cornwall, he probably had no desire to be anywhere other than Caithness, an aspect of his character that consistently shines through his articles on its wildlife in which his home county is both the form and the focus for everything that he writes (Clark & Sellers 2005). Of course it was his native curiosity about this landscape that also led him to its archaeological monuments long before Joseph Anderson arrived in Wick. Whether the latter had already made his intellectual engagement with archaeology, or whether that was a touchpaper lit by the claims of Samuel Laing, we will probably never know, but Shearer provided all the practical means to develop and further Anderson's ideas about the past and how it was best interrogated in the field – an intimate local knowledge of the landscape and its monuments, an entrée to the various estates, experience of excavation, surveying skills, and probably the simple shared enthusiasm for finding out. So much so that one might wonder whether Anderson would ever have made the leap without him, for without the series of happy accidents and coincidences that flowed from their excavations together he would not have known where to start and might never have made that link to Sir

⁴ There is some room for doubt on account of several faint pencil marks that may be erased stones originally drawn on pricked survey points.

Arthur Mitchell, John Stuart, the Rhind bequest and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, en route to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

It would be sad if this was the sole reason we remembered Robert Shearer. In virtually any other part of Scotland his drawings would stand out as an antiquarian treasure trove, and it is only in an area such as Caithness, with fine sets of contemporary plans by Sir Henry Dryden and the series of later excavation drawings by John Nicolson for Sir Francis Tress Barry, that our appreciation is so dulled. It would be another fifteen years before David Christison embarked on his great survey of early fortifications in Peeblesshire, and Christison never learned the disciplines of measured survey, preferring to pace and sketch his plans. In this respect Shearer's drawings are of interest in their own right and in their own time, the more so because his internal numbering system suggests that they are but a handful of a much more extensive record; they were probably accompanied by other sketches and notebooks. These may well survive unrecognised somewhere, perhaps interleaved in bundles of other papers (cf Clark & Sellers 2005, 3). Were they to come to light we might find that Shearer was ahead of many of his better known contemporaries in the creation of a systematic district survey with measured plans and sections documenting all the different types of ancient monument. Had he completed this survey his name would probably be more familiar to us and would have helped shape the approach to the county surveys adopted some forty years later by the Royal Commission. The irony of his untimely passing was that it came only six days after he was elected a corresponding member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, this itself tacit confirmation that if his interest in archaeology had indeed waned, it had surely been rekindled.

Acknowledgements

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Original Drawings and References

Shearer Collection held by The National Record, Historic Environment Scotland

DC44300 – Thrumster Mains, broch (DP090944; Canmore 8963)

DC44301 – Thrumster Little, broch (Canmore 8972), and a burnt mound nearby (Canmore 273195)

DC44302 – Borrowston, broch (Canmore 9090), and Gansclet, broch (Canmore 9079)

DC44303 – Cairn of Elsay, Staxigoe, broch (Canmore 9197)

DC44304 – The Pap, Hillhead, broch (Canmore 9182)

DC44305 – Cairn of Humster, broch (Canmore 9639), and a burnt mound nearby (Canmore 273200)

DC44306 – Tannach Mains, broch (Canmore 8975), and Cairnquoy, broch (Canmore 8976)
 DC44307 – Brounaban, long cairn (DP008136; Canmore 9037)
 DC44308 – Brounaban, burnt mound (Canmore 9041)
 DC44309 – Gansclet, standing stone (Canmore 9020)
 DC44310 – Ackergill Links, mounds (Canmore 9135)
 DC44311 – Doorway, location unknown
 DC44312 – Design for sleigh
 DC44313 – Hill o' Many Stanes, Clyth, stone rows (Canmore 8604)
 DC44314 – Upper Thrumster, farm and field plan

Sir Henry Dryden drawings in Society of Antiquaries Collection held by The National Record, Historic Environment Scotland

CAD58/1-3 – Crosskirk, St Mary's Chapel (Canmore 8005)
 CAD59/13-15 – Achkinloch, megalithic avenue (Canmore 8271)
 CAD64/1-2 & DC51168 – Brounaban, broch (Canmore 9039)
 CAD65/1-2 & DC51155 – Yarrow, broch (Canmore 8982)
 CAD66/1-2 – Battle Moss, stone rows (Canmore 9021)
 CAD67/2 – Guidebest, stone circle (Canmore 8114)
 CAD68/1 – Crosskirk, broch (Canmore 8019)
 CAD69/1-2 – Garrywhin, cairn and stone rows (Canmore 9016)
 CAD70/1-3 – Hill o' Many Stanes, Clyth, stone rows (Canmore 8604)
 CAD71/1-2 – Camster, stone rows (Canmore 8708)
 DC25437 – Garrywhin, fort (Canmore 9034)

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‘Thanks to you the best has been made of a bad job’: Vere Gordon Childe and the Bronze Age cairn at Ri Cruin, Kilmartin, Argyll & Bute

Trevor Cowie

Abstract

Ri Cruin is one of the series of Early Bronze Age cairns that make up the well-known linear cemetery in Kilmartin Glen, Argyll. The aim of this short paper is to make more fully accessible an account of the work undertaken by Gordon Childe in the summer of 1936 when the site was prepared for public access. Although both the scope of the work and the archaeological results were limited, it adds previously unpublished detail and touches of local colour to the record of Childe’s time in Scotland.

Keywords: *Vere Gordon Childe, Bronze Age, cairn, Argyll, Kilmartin Glen, Ri Cruin*

Introduction

I first met David Clarke as a student when I had the unusual privilege of working as a volunteer at the excavations at Skara Brae in 1972-3. Working there, it was easy sometimes to feel that Gordon Childe was still a spirit presence on site – even if most days we were rather more forcefully reminded of his association with the place by the custodian’s wife, as she led tours within earshot of the trenches and regaled visitors with the information that the original excavator had been ‘Professor Victor Gordon Childe’. Mrs Aitken had such a lovely Orcadian lilt we could forgive her for her slight inaccuracy!

The aim of this short paper is simply to make more fully accessible an account of the work undertaken by Childe at Ri Cruin cairn in Argyll in the summer of 1936. Although the scope of the work was limited and the archaeological results patchy, to say the least, nevertheless it adds previously unpublished detail and some extra touches of local colour to the record of Childe’s time in Scotland (for which, see Ralston 2009). Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile fully his account of what he found with what can be seen on the ground at the monument at the present day, adding to the problems of understanding what remains one of the more intriguing archaeological sites in the Kilmartin area. In a small way, Childe’s minor tussle with the interpretation of features he uncovered at Ri Cruin resonates

with the challenges he had faced on a much larger scale at Skara Brae, where the scope for excavation and interpretation had often to fit in with the overarching demands of preservation, consolidation and presentation of the site.

In view of his long-standing interest in VGC, I therefore hope this short account of one short episode in Childe's career will be of some interest to DVC!

Ri Cruin cairn: setting the scene

Ri Cruin belongs to the well-known series of Early Bronze Age cairns making up the linear cemetery strung out along the floor of Kilmartin Glen, Argyll (RCAHMS 1988, 14-16; 72-4, inventory no 76; Cook et al 2010, 199-200). Excavations were undertaken by the Rev R J Mapleton in 1870, by J H Craw in 1929, and finally by Childe in 1936 when the site was prepared for public access. As Childe soon discovered, the cairn had been seriously disturbed by quarrying for gravel and the construction of a lime-kiln in its south-west quadrant. Although Childe identified intermittent traces of kerbstones on the south and east arcs which allowed him to extrapolate the original diameter, the present cairn is almost entirely a reconstruction (Fig 1).

The focus of the excavators before Childe was mainly on the three cists still visible today (Mapleton 1870a & b; Craw 1930). Childe did not investigate these further but a brief summary of their main features is necessary here to enable Childe's work to be set in context (Fig 2). The cairn may originally have been intended to cover the most northerly cist visible at present, which was set in a pit at the centre of a gravel mound (Cist A, following the lettering of Craw 1930). Aligned NNE-SSW and formerly capped by a massive slab, the cist had been very well constructed, with side-slabs grooved for the reception of an end-slab in the manner typical of a number of cists in the region (RCAHMS 1988, 16). When investigated in the 19th century, Mapleton had found only some cremated bone on the basal slab; however, it seems very likely that any grave goods would have been rifled during unrecorded investigations some forty years previously.

The collapsed remains of Cist B lie to the SSE just within the projected line of the kerb of the cairn. Although an end-slab remained in position in the 19th century, the cist is now represented only by its two side-slabs, aligned roughly ENE-WSW; as in Cist A, these had been grooved at their west end to receive an end-slab. There is no record of any finds from the cist.

Cist C, the most southerly of the three cists, lies just outside the line of the kerb and is set into a pit (Fig 3). Aligned approximately east-west, it is the largest of the three, measuring 2m in length, 1m in breadth at the west end, 0.6m in breadth at the east end (which is known to have been disturbed in the past), and 0.8m in depth. As well as its location and size, its built construction also sets it apart. It is this cist that contained the carved slabs for which Ri Cruin has long been known (Mapleton 1870a & b; Allen 1880). The slab at the west end is decorated with depictions of Early Bronze Age flat axeheads and is still in situ; a narrow vertical slab which was formerly set into the east end was decorated with carvings which have in the past variously been interpreted as a boat or a halberd (Stevenson 1997). Unfortunately, the original of the halberd pillar was lost in a fire

at Poltalloch House, but happily a cast was made and presented to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in the 19th century (NMS X.IA 13). A detailed re-assessment of that cast has recently resulted in re-interpretation of the carvings as a palimpsest of features, with the depiction of a halberd being seen as a late element, which has been superimposed onto a rake-like motif possibly of much earlier date (Needham & Cowie 2012).



Figure 1. Ri Cruin: view of the cairn from the north. Photograph: Trevor Cowie

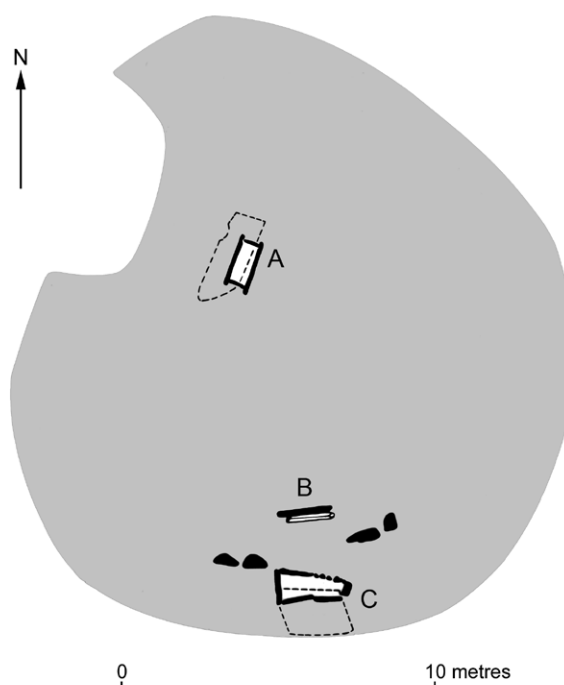


Figure 2. Ri Cruin: simplified plan of the cairn (after RCAHMS 1988)



Figure 3. Ri Cruin: view of cist C – the ‘axe-head’ cist. Photograph: Trevor Cowie

From 1914 to 1940 the protection, presentation and care of ancient monuments was the remit of the Ancient Monuments Branch of His Majesty’s Office of Works (hereafter abbreviated to OW) - the predecessor of what was ultimately to become Historic Environment Scotland which cares for the site today. As noted in the Introduction, the focus of this paper is Childe’s involvement with the site in 1936, when the monument was prepared for public access. Central to this account has been the original OW file dealing with this episode, now in the National Archives of Scotland (NAS/MW1/628). This has been drawn upon selectively twice previously for purposes of publication, initially by the RCAHMS in preparing the entry for its inventory of prehistoric and Early Historic monuments in Mid Argyll (RCAHMS 1988, 72-4, inventory no 76), and more recently in connection with the reconsideration of the decorated slabs from cist C just mentioned (Needham & Cowie 2012). It may also be noted here that one of Childe’s original notebooks contains field notes relating to Ri Cruin (University College London Special Collections, Childe Archive, Notebook N7 (1936)); however as all the key information is subsumed within his reports to the OW, the contents have not been considered in detail here.

The OW file opens with some brief memos relating to approval of funds, the key one being a note dated 25 May 1936, signalling the OW’s intention to undertake work on monuments in the Kilmartin area which it had then only relatively recently brought into Guardianship: ‘The sum of £110 is included in the current year’s estimates for special & general maintenance of the monuments in the Poltalloch district’. Specifically with regard to Ri Cruin, the memo notes that ‘the IAM [the Inspector of Ancient Monuments in Scotland, J S Richardson] has

secured the services of Professor Childe to supervise the work of carefully clearing away the dangerous tree roots and debris and the general repair and treatment at Ri-Cruin [sic] and I attach a blue estimate for £50 to cover the expense of labour for this work. The general maintenance in the district will be carried out at the same time’.

The aims of the work at the site were subsequently spelt out in more detail in a memo to the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments (at that time London-based; the position was held by J P Bushe-Fox):

CIAM

You may remember inspecting a cairn in a wood near Ri-Cruin [sic], Kilmartin, Argyll, where it was decided that further investigation and clearance of tree roots etc should be undertaken whenever the services of an archaeologist could be obtained to supervise. As another excavation project [Rahoy] on which he was to have been engaged in June has fallen through, Professor Childe is prepared to go to Kilmartin and has kindly offered to pay his own expenses.

A sum was included in the estimates and the Architect can make arrangements for the work to begin early next week after some trees have been cut down. Three cists have already been exposed (see Proc Soc Antiq Scot vol LXIV p 131) and one has a slab with axe head carvings. The features of the cairn have not been satisfactorily proclaimed, however, and it is possible that further archaeological data may be obtained.

MEBS

26/5/1936

MEBS, the author of this memo, was Miss Margaret Simpson, who was Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments and based in the OW in 122 George Street, Edinburgh. She had been a member of Childe’s First Ordinary Class in 1928-9, and she was to become the first Secretary of the ‘Edinburgh League of Prehistorians’ after its formation in late 1929. She had to resign that office on taking up her post as Assistant Inspector; as Ian Ralston has remarked, this meant that not only was she Childe’s first student to obtain employment in archaeology but also she was the first female professional archaeologist in Scotland. She was to remain with the OW until 1948 when she moved to Surrey on her marriage (Ralston 2009, 83-4).

The business of Ri Cruin was then taken forward by James Richardson, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Scotland, who noted in a subsequent memo that, following discussion, Childe had arranged to begin work on the second of June. At this point too, a letter was sent to the landowner, Sir Ian Malcolm of Poltalloch, notifying him that the excavation was due to commence the following week; the short notice appears to have prompted a slightly peevish letter from Sir Ian’s factor, J G Mathieson, suggesting that the Office of Works should have informed Mr Duncan Campbell, secretary of the local archaeological society. Mathieson’s letter also refers to the possible interest of two Cambridge students then in the area; unfortunately their names are not given. Richardson replied to

Mathieson, accepting that notice of the excavation had been short but hoping that Sir Ian would approve and would also recognise that the department would be only too ready to accept the voluntary help of such a renowned archaeologist as Childe. He added rather curtly that it was unnecessary to inform Campbell. Richardson also mentioned that he had been interested to hear of the two Cambridge students – but warned about the dangers of undertaking fieldwork without prior permissions or notifications to avoid complications of the kind that had happened in the past when work had been undertaken by outsiders. Unfortunately, from our perspective, whatever circumstances he had in mind were left unspecified.

Fieldwork, June 1936: ‘thanks to you the best has been made of a bad job’

Work then apparently got underway. While at Poltalloch, Childe stayed at the Kilmartin Hotel, from where he wrote to Richardson on 7 June to report on early progress:

My dear Richardson

So far we are still groping among fieldstones in a search for the Ri Cruin cairn. I first trial trenched in the direction of the cists but these revealed not even an edge to “the cairn” still less a peristalith or kerb. We are now clearing down to virgin soil all round the cists. Cist 1 [subsequently renamed as Cist C by Childe, following the terminology of Craw 1930] is sunk deep into the undisturbed gravel as is 3 [Cist A]. The grooved cist 2 [Cist B] alone is at a higher level. It doesn’t therefore seem very likely that we shall get fresh cists. We have, however, got three horizontal stones in line on virgin soil continuing the line of one side of cist 1 [Cist C]. We also found the stump of an old field wall (limed) running along one edge of your land. Relics to date a knocking stone (chipped) & on virgin soil among stones from “cairn” about 6’ [1.8m] from cist 1 [Cist C], lots of broken china and a little not very old iron. A number of the stones lying about are evidently just scourings off the fields.

Childe was already familiar with the monuments of Argyll, having visited the area with Stuart Piggott in 1930 – with Childe at the wheel of his Austin 7 – and two years later, he and his student Howard Kilbride-Jones visited chambered cairns in the region (Ralston 2009, 59 & 65; Childe 1932). As well as supervising the work at Ri Cruin, Childe therefore appears to have been very willing to make time to assess some other local sites on behalf of the OW. In the same letter, Childe reports that he had undertaken a preliminary inspection of a cairn at Achnamara, where there had been reason to suspect recent interference with a cist:

I have been down to look at the cairn near Seafeld, Loch Sween, and found it easily. Its outline seems quite clear and one (or perhaps) two cist(s) is/are exposed. I plan to check it out perhaps this week if Ri Cruin does not occupy my time more fully. There may be a second cairn very close by: there are several old walls in the vicinity & against one a minute rectangular building which might be taken for a cairn on superficial examination.

At the instigation of Richardson, fuller investigation of the denuded cairn at Achnamara was undertaken by Childe (apparently from 15 to 20 June, once the work at Ri Cruin was nearing completion) and was published the following year (Childe 1937; RCAHMS 1988, 52, inventory no 24; the finds are in the collections of National Museums Scotland, NMS X.EQ 520-1).

Childe seems also to have been asked to assess a site near Kilmartin itself, for in the same letter he writes 'I agree that the mess in the wood across the Burn from the garage may well conceal the ruins of another cairn. The latter is however well made up with fieldstones as at Ri Cruin'. This is clearly a reference to the large flat-topped spread of stones, c 35m across, situated just west of the village (Canmore ID 39469, NR89NW 28); although recorded by Marion Campbell as a possible chambered cairn (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 9, no 48: 'below Corlarach'), this was later discounted by Audrey Henshall (1972), and, in the absence of any entry in the Mid Argyll Inventory, presumably also by the RCAHMS. The amorphous nature of the pile of stone appears to be more in keeping with field clearance.

Childe also fitted in a visit to the chambered cairn at Nether Largie South (RCAHMS 1988, 48, inventory no 19), possibly to his regret on this occasion, for he closed his progress report on a charming if rather painful note:

The weather has so far been delightful. But I cut my lip badly and loosened 2 teeth in a ritual prostration before the sill of Nether Largie. Chamber floor is deeply stained with my gore.

Yours ever

V.G.C.

Another short report followed a few days later in the form of a further letter, written on Kilmartin Hotel notepaper and dated 10 June; a rough sketch on the reverse (not illustrated here) conveyed the main features which had been encountered by that stage:

Dear Richards [sic]

Further to my letter. It is now clear that the cairn has been hopelessly wrecked on the W and SW. We have just cleared out a lime-kiln dug into subsoil under former site of cairn about 15' [4.6m] SW from Cist A. I propose filling in this kiln and erecting on its inner margin a cairn with ragged edge round cist A. It seems unlikely that C was included under this cairn. However NE & E of A we are getting a bit of: the original kerb – interrupted by tree roots. This shall be made margin of cairn on this side as far as it is traceable or can be inferred. The line of stones continuing N side of Cist C shall be left exposed on the S and made into S margin of our faked cairn round A. We shall finish clearing the site by end of week easily so please let me have any comments ere then.

Yours ever

V.G.C.

In his reply to Childe (file copy of typed letter), Richardson commiserates with Childe:

Dear Professor

I am very sorry that the dig is not turning out more exciting but without your help there is no saying how long this monument would have remained in the condition in which it was handed over. Thanks to you the best has been made of a bad job.

Have you any ideas as to the best method of protecting the "axe-head" cist. [Fig 3] Robb and I will endeavour to visit before you leave but the work in Orkney and Shetland is crying out for my return. Presumably you will be going down to the Achnamara cairn and I do hope that it will yield better results.

Yeoman is recovering a few relics from underneath the site of the "Shamrock" building at Aikerness and these are coming from immediately on the broch chamber floor.

Yours sincerely

A final progress report from Childe dated 13 June indicates that he felt that his work at Ri Cruin was drawing to a close:

My dear Inspector (tgw Inspectoress) [Childe's salutation to Miss MEB Simpson is in parentheses, and barely legible]

I enclose herewith undeveloped film pack containing I hope

1 Views of cist C with newly found extension

1 [ditto] of lime kiln & cists B & C

2 [ditto] kerb in NE quadrant

If your department can get these developed at leisure I will make no charge for the negatives.

We have now got two segments of kerbing showing that the cairn original [sic] had a diameter of 60' to 64' [18.3-19.5m] with its centre at Cist A. Cist B lay on extreme edge of cairn; cist C (axes) lay definitely outside it. On the W. the cairn must have extended beyond the boundary the Dept's land but save under a tree at SW corner which I would like to have explored I think the cairn has been totally destroyed by 2 dykes and lime kiln. The axe-slab does not seem to be feeling the weather seriously: the carvings show up splendidly. If damage by frost is feared the only thing will be to box it as in Cairn II Nether Largie [Nether Largie North, RCAHMS 1988, 68-70, Inventory no 68].

I am going to start Achnamara ~~tomorrow~~ [sic] on Monday but will keep an eye on Ri Cruin too. I do not anticipate any further discoveries in clearing the N corner. I propose reconstructing the cairn over the pencilled area [referring to a rough sketch not illustrated here] – it looks quite nice already. The

margins will be left clear the edges of the cut sloped off. No attempt should be made to reconstruct cairn on W side below slope. Visitors can get into the cists from this side without scrambling over cairn.

Childe rounded off his letter with a plea to the Inspectorate regarding the chambered cairn at Kilchoan – another of the local sites investigated by Mapleton in the 19th century (ibid, 47-8, inventory no 17):

May I in conclusion urge upon your Dept the desirability of preserving the segmented long cist near Kilchoan Lodge between Poltalloch and Duntroon. The monument is beautifully situated and even now looks very impressive. If tidied up it would look superb. The capstones are gigantic as are the portals. I have just photographed and planned all I could recognise.

Yours sincerely

V G Childe

Childe was obviously particularly taken with Kilchoan, perhaps viewing it rather wistfully after all the ‘groping among fieldstones’ at Ri Cruin!

In Richardson’s absence – presumably back off north to Orkney – a reply, dated 16 June, was sent to Childe by MEBS, in which she noted:

As Mr Richardson is on trek once more I opened your parcel which arrived this morning. The film pack has been handed to Mr Graham. [Unfortunately attempts to trace these photographs have been unsuccessful.]

I am afraid it has not been a very exciting dig for you but it is good that the cairn is taking shape. If you have time to continue your investigations it seems a pity that the site should not be fully developed and I have therefore spoken to Mr Robb about the offending tree. Would you kindly point it out to Liveston the foreman and he will arrange with the factor for it to be cut down?

I hope that the Achnamara site will yield more interesting trophies. Mr Richardson hopes to visit Kilmartin before you leave so you will doubtless discuss the Kilchoan Lodge cist with him. I have an idea that there was some hitch in the guardianship negotiations in the past but I may be entirely wrong.

Childe brought his work at Ri Cruin to a close with a handwritten letter to accompany his short typed report (reproduced below), sent from the University of Edinburgh Department of Prehistoric Archaeology and dated 29 June 1936:

My dear Inspector

I have the honour to enclose herewith a report on operations at Ri Cruin June 2-23, 1936 together with a rough plan. With the exception of the east side slab of cist A and the N & W slabs of cist C the cists were not surveyed but your draftsman can doubtless fill in the details from Craw’s plan. True N can be obtained by reference to the OS sheet as the base line AB continues line of field dyke marked thereon (more or less). The kerb is correctly plotted. I revisited the site on 22nd but no additional kerbing had come to light.

I must thank you for the opportunity of watching these operations and your Department's foreman Liveston & Colin Campbell for their help and co-operation. I am now off to Rahoy.

Yours sincerely

V G Childe

Childe's report on Ri Cruin

Childe's typed report has been transcribed here in full, together with the partially-measured sketch plan which accompanied it (Fig 4). The bold numbers in parentheses refer to notes by the present writer: these have been appended so as to avoid interrupting the flow of the original text.

Cists at Ri Cruin

An area of 65 ft. N – S by 60 ft. E – W [19.8 by 18.3m] was demarcated so that the western edge, AB, continued the line of the field-dyke from the garden of Ri Cruin house, A being 100 feet [30.5m] from the end of this dyke at its junction with the plantation wall; AB ran 21 ft. [6.4m] west of cist A (using Craw's letters for the cists) [1]. This whole area was deturfed and cleared of tree-stumps and nettles, and trenches were then dug inwards from the boundary towards cist A. These trenches failed to expose any kerb or other boundary to the "cairn", stones extending patchily in all directions. The whole area was then cleared down to virgin soil in segments, the stones from each segment being stacked in the segments previously cleared and the earth carted away. As a result it appeared that cist A stood practically on the crest of a ridge of gravel. This ridge sloped away only gently on the east, the subsoil 30 feet [9.1m] east of cist A being 2.20 ft. [0.67m] lower than that at the edge of the cist. Ten to twelve feet west of the cist, the subsoil now slopes away in a steep bank, but this declivity may be due to recent disturbance of the site. 25 ft. [7.6m] West of cist A we found the footing of an old dyke, continuing approximately the line of the present field dyke from Ri Cruin already mentioned and presumably antedating the existing curved wall round the plantation. This old dyke stood in a layer of hard lime, 2.50 ft. [0.76m] below the crest of the gravel ridge. From this level a lime kiln had at some time been dug into the bank to a depth of 2½ feet [0.76m]. The kiln ended about 18 ft. [5.5m] south of cist A and was at this point 3½ feet [1.1m] wide. The lower courses of its walls were intact and the end wall rose above the level of the subsoil to a height of 3½ feet [1.1m] above the kiln floor. The kiln contained lime, coal and charcoal, and coal was encountered among the cairn stones at many points on the site. Evidently the building of the kiln and the dyke must have destroyed any kerb or other construction on the western side of the cairn. Indeed between the kiln and the cist hardly any cairn stones were encountered, the subsoil being covered with loose gravel presumably dug up from the site of the kiln [2].

On the east however two segments of the original kerb were found intact save for minor derangements through tree roots. These show that the original cairn had a diameter of 60 to 64ft [18.3-19.5m] and its centre near the middle of cist A. Cist B would have lain on the extreme margin of the cairn and Cist C outside it

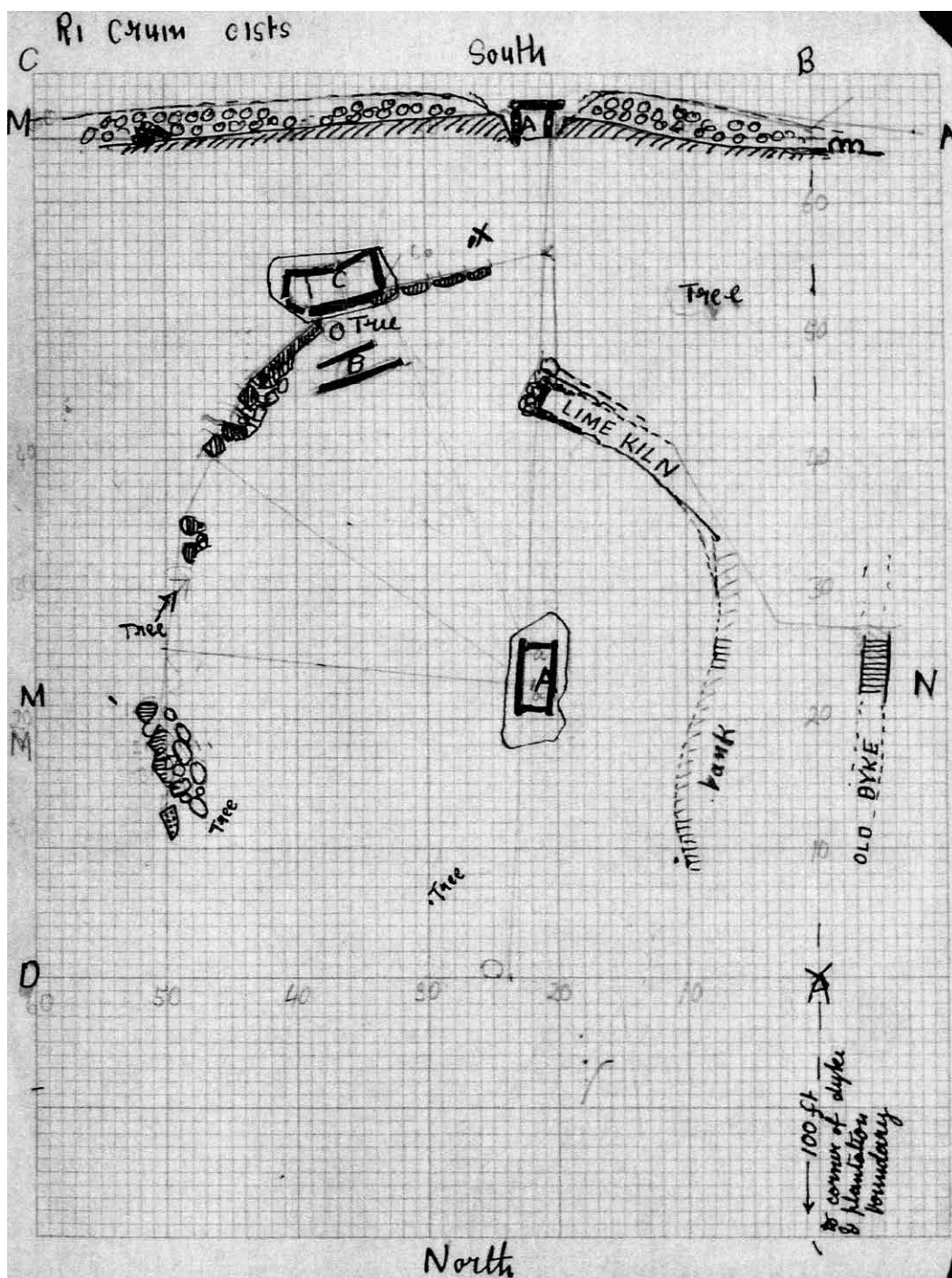


Figure 4. Childe's plan (ink and pencil on graph paper), showing the main features revealed in the course of his excavation at Ri Cruin in 1936. NAS: MW1/628. © National Archives of Scotland

altogether. In the north eastern segment the outer margin of the kerb consisted of large slabs, set slightly tilted, in the subsoil, the largest surviving measuring 27 x 15 x 8 inches [0.68 x 0.38 x 0.20m]. Behind these came some large boulders, one measuring 32 inches [0.81m] in length. In the southeast segment the margin was formed chiefly of large blocks set on edge. The largest, which abuts on the northern side of Cist C looks like a prostrate menhir [3]; it is 6'8" [2.03m] long and a foot [0.3m] thick. About 3 feet [0.91m] in from the outer edge of this kerb of big stones there are traces of a setting of very thin slabs tilted obliquely. The intervening space was filled with substantial boulders.

The cairn was evidently designed to cover Cist A which had been dug to a depth of a foot or two [0.3-0.6m] into the subsoil. Cist B is certainly secondary. There is no evidence to show whether the cairn had been erected before Cist C. The latter is entirely sunk in the subsoil the surface of which is flush with the upper edge of the sculptured west end slab. West of the cist a line of three large blocks resting on the subsoil was found, the largest being 3ft long, 1'3" wide and 13" high [0.91 x 0.38 x 0.33m]. Together with the end of a slab on the N side of cist A [4] these blocks form a continuation westward of the north side of cist C for a distance of 8'8" [2.64m] [5]. These slabs form no part of the kerb of the cairn over cist A, but no counterpart to them on the south side of Cist C survives. It cannot therefore be asserted that they represent a degenerate survival of the entrance passage to a burial chamber but no other interpretation suggests itself.

Apart from cist A no deposits were detected under the cairn in the area available for excavation [6]. The less disturbed portions were covered with boulders, 6-9 inches [0.15-0.23m] in diameter to a depth of 18 inches [0.45m], but all the component stones were small and water rounded.

At the point marked X on the plan a broken "knocking stone" was found lying among other stones on virgin soil. [7]

Notes

[1] Childe decided to follow Craw's terminology in lettering the cists from N to S (Craw 1930), but several inconsistencies occur.

[2] The details of the kiln structure have not previously been published. Following restoration, no trace of this feature is now visible.

[3] At this point, Richardson has inserted a handwritten annotation in the margin: 'presumably the socket could not be identified; otherwise the stone might have been set up'. Childe's observation is of particular interest in view of the discovery of two small upright menhirs, one of them carved, on the southern sector of the cairn at Nether Largie North (Craw 1931, 270, fig 2).

[4] This should be Cist C, not Cist A (which makes no sense in the context)

[5] Childe's original notebook includes sketches of these large stones (University College London Special Collections, Childe Archive, Notebook N7 (1936); copy in Library of the former RCAHMS, now Historic Environment Scotland)

[6] Childe's meaning here is not entirely clear: he may simply be referring to the fact that undisturbed gravel mound deposits were encountered only under or in the immediate area of Cist A.

[7] The present whereabouts of the 'knocking stone' are not known.

Meanwhile, writing to a colleague at OW Stirling on 26th June, the foreman Liveston had noted that the offending roots had been removed except for one between two cists, presumably Cists B and C; that turf and stones had been removed to a depth of 12" [0.3m] below ground level; that part of the kerb had been uncovered on the east side and left exposed; that stones had been placed on the cairn as work progressed and that the soil and debris had been removed to a distance 9' [2.75m] away from the cairn. The total cost of the work had been just over £50! However, Liveston also mentioned that Childe had not been seen since 19 June and had not left definite instructions.

Aftermath

The OW file closes with some internal memos summarising the work undertaken, acknowledging receipt of the report from and requesting that thanks be sent to Childe. By 22 July, Richardson was able to record that it was '... satisfactory that the site is now properly proclaimed for visitors' (Fig 5).

To recap, the main remit had been careful clearance of dangerous tree roots and debris and the general repair and preparation of the site for public access. It was clear from an early stage that the cairn had been very heavily disturbed, but Childe located two partly-intact segments of the original kerb on the east and was



Figure 5. Ri Cruin: as a result of Childe's work, the site was deemed to be 'properly proclaimed for visitors'. Photograph: Trevor Cowie

able to extrapolate that the original cairn had a diameter of 60-64ft [18.3-19.5m], centred on the northernmost cist (cist A). In his view, the collapsed, middle cist (B) would have lain on the extreme margin of the cairn and the cist with the carvings (C) outside it altogether. Although Childe did not undertake any new excavation work on the cists, to the west of cist C he located a line of three large blocks resting on the subsoil. As Needham and Cowie (2012, 94) have noted, Childe clearly tussled with the interpretation of this feature: in his report he clearly felt that these slabs formed no part of the kerb of the cairn. While admitting that no counterpart to them was present on the south side of Cist C, he must have felt that they represented something integral to the cist rather than the cairn structure: 'It cannot therefore be asserted that they represent a degenerate survival of the entrance passage to a burial chamber but no other interpretation suggests itself'. At the very least, Childe's observations hint at the much greater underlying complexity of the monument, reinforcing the apparently unusual significance of Cist C and the associated southern sector of the cairn.

Unfortunately, the features revealed by Childe are not readily visible today. While the line of stones continuing the north side of Cist C remains partly exposed, they are now contained within the spread of stone associated with the southern margin of what Childe himself described as the 'faked cairn' around Cist A. In its current form the cairn shows intermittent traces of kerb stones on the south and east arcs; however, the large stones depicted in the southern sector on the RCAHMS plan do not correspond well with Childe's plan. It is tempting to wonder whether there has been some smoothing out of what might be termed Ri Cruin's 'rough edges'. There is a possible hint, in a brief and cryptic note by Richardson initialled and dated 22 September, written on the reverse of the file copy of the letter from OW thanking Childe for carrying out the work at the site: 'I have seen this monument since Prof Childe completed his work and gave instructions to the Architect on the site concerning the adjustment of certain details and the lay-out of the area concerned'.

Childe had closed his letter of 29 June with the words: 'I am now off to Rahoy'. He was as good as his word. Within a few days, he and Wallace Thorneycroft had commenced excavations at the vitrified dun at Rahoy in Morvern, marking the start of what were to be two seasons of work at the site (Childe & Thorneycroft 1938a and b). After what had amounted to a relatively unproductive watching brief at Ri Cruin, Rahoy was a project which Childe was to find much more rewarding, with its agreeable combination of excavation, dating evidence in the form of a range of artefacts (cf Green 1981, 62-3) and ground-breaking experimental archaeology undertaken to investigate the causes of vitrification.

Acknowledgements

My warm thanks go to Stuart Needham for instigating my interest in Ri Cruin and the archival research from which this is drawn. Lesley Ferguson and Kirsty Lingstadt kindly made archival material available in the RCAHMS (now Historic Environment Scotland) while staff at the National Archives of Scotland facilitated access to former Office of Works files. Finally, I am very grateful to David Breeze for helpful comments on a draft of the paper and to Lekky Shepherd for various snippets of information incorporated in the text.

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Mary Boyle (1881-1974): the Abbé Breuil's faithful fellow-worker

Alan Saville

Abstract

This paper looks at the life and work of Mary Elizabeth Boyle, a Scotswoman and poet who by chance found her way into archaeology, firstly through meeting and working with Miles Burkitt and then, most importantly, by her encounter in 1920 with the Abbé Henri Breuil, the famous French prehistorian, whose companion and aide she became for the final 37 years of his life.

Keywords: *Mary Boyle, Henri Breuil, Miles Burkitt, prehistoric art, Scottish poetry, history of archaeology*

Introduction

At the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, in June 1957, during the ceremony to celebrate his 80th birthday, monsieur l'abbé Henri Breuil, France's premier prehistorian of the earlier 20th century (Cohen 1999), paid the following tribute:

Toute cette vaste enquête et l'expression de mes observations en langue anglais, mes relations de toute nature avec les «Européens» du crû, et leur service indigène, etc., me furent grandement simplifiées grâce à la constante présence de ma collaboratrice, Miss M.E. Boyle, qui me suivit partout, comme interprète, négociatrice, et auxiliaire de mes relevés. (Breuil 1957, 491)

This tribute was paid in the context of Breuil's major later-life project, started during World War 2, to study, record, and interpret rock art in southern Africa. Mary Boyle was involved closely in this project, to which she remained committed for several years after Breuil's death in 1961 and, as this paper will describe, it was an aspect of this project which proved detrimental to both of their academic reputations.¹

Elsewhere, in the same context of his work in southern Africa, Breuil referred to Mary Boyle as his 'faithful fellow-worker' (1949a, 15), his 'secretary and assistant' (1955, 3), and even, as quoted in the Johannesburg *Star* newspaper in 1942, as 'his

1 As Jacquetta Hawkes (1955, 723) warned rather floridly when reviewing their publication *The White Lady of the Brandberg*: 'when knowledge cuts the wings of speculation we shall all have to come down to earth. Should the evidence prove to be against them, no one will have so far to fall as the Abbé Breuil and Miss Mary Boyle. They have soared too high'.

right-hand man'. In fact, from their very first meeting in 1920, when Breuil was aged 43 years and Mary Boyle 38, this Scottish woman was to play a very significant role in Breuil's life, and even more so vice versa. Whilst this was commonly, albeit relatively *sotto voce*, recognised at the time, the full extent to which their lives were entwined and mutually influential is only now coming to be more fully understood and appreciated as archival information is examined (eg Rodriguez & Danion 2006, 46; Le Quellec 2010; Arnould 2011, 157-9; Hurel 2011, 291-2).

This contribution makes a preliminary attempt at illuminating Mary Boyle's life in rather more detail than exists in the few available obituaries (eg Anon 1975; Mora-Figueroa 1975), and it is divided into four sections: life before she met Breuil; the period up until World War 2; the southern African adventure and its aftermath; and the final years. In terms of this volume and the conference from which it derives, the Mary Boyle story fits well with David Clarke's interest in the history of archaeology in general and in the interpretation of prehistoric and early historic art in particular, and it is for this reason that it is offered here.

Boyle before Breuil

Mary Elizabeth Boyle (hereafter MEB)² was born on 11 August 1881 at Pittchar, on the outskirts of the small town of Crieff in Perthshire, central Scotland. She was the second daughter of Agnes and Robert Boyle, who already had two sons, but her mother Agnes (née Lumsden) died after giving birth to a third daughter, Dorothy, when MEB was only four years old. Her father, a Royal Navy officer who by the end of his life had reached the rank of Rear-Admiral, remarried and MEB became very attached to her stepmother, also named Agnes (née Harris). Particularly as her father died in 1892 when she was aged ten, MEB must have felt keenly the invaliding and subsequent death of her stepmother in 1899, when she was still only 18 years old. However, as part of a large family, both immediate (Fig 1) and extended, MEB did not lack for companionship and support. Her uncle, the Reverend Richard A Boyle, her father's brother and co-executor, became her guardian.

The census of 1891 records MEB as living with her two sisters, two half-brothers, a governess, and four servants, in Greenock, Renfrewshire, on the River Clyde and an important port with naval connections. Much later, to round off their education (which had already included learning 'a fair amount of French'),³ her uncle Richard organised that MEB and her elder sister, together with their chaperone cousin Agnes Pelly, should go to Italy to learn something of art and Italian. The two winters 1900-1 and 1901-2 were therefore spent in and around

2 For reasons of space and convenience, and to assist readability, I am referring to Mary Boyle as MEB in this paper. The Abbé is always recorded as calling her Miss Boyle, or Miss M E Boyle, as did his contemporaries although, as the address on the postcard in fig 3 shows, Breuil was aware of her Christian name. To her family MEB was known as Mai or Mémé.

3 This, and all references in the text for which (Boyle 30.8.1971) is hereafter cited, relate to an unpublished autobiographical note compiled by MEB at this date and sent to her nephew John Boyle on 8.9.1971 from Le Vieux Chateau, Crosne, France, in order that the family might understand something of her life. I am very grateful to Fiona Stanley, John Boyle's daughter, for access to this note and permission to quote from it.



Figure 1. Mary Boyle and her siblings. From left to right: Archie (half-brother), Agnes Margaret, David (half-brother), Mary Elizabeth, Robert, Harry, and Dorothy. Date not recorded, but probably early 1900s. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy Margot and Sylvia Large

Florence. When she returned from Italy in 1902, aged 20 years, her uncle became concerned about MEB's health and took her to see specialists in London, who diagnosed tuberculosis and warned that she might not have more than a few months to live. Asked by her uncle what she would like to do – asked that question 'for the first time in my life' (Boyle 30.8.1971) – MEB expressed the desire to return to Scotland. This was arranged so that Agnes Pelly, MEB, and her sister were found accommodation near to her cousins, the Campbell Colquhouns, who had a house in Dunblane, Perthshire, with MEB receiving treatment from the same doctor who was treating the youngest Colquhoun daughter for tuberculosis.

A chance encounter with yet another Agnes, Agnes Smith, an acquaintance of Agnes Pelly, led to MEB being taken to convalesce, from October 1903, into the household of Agnes Smith and her father at Kinbuck, near Dunblane. Agnes's father was the distinguished preacher and poet, the Revd Dr Walter Smith,⁴ a senior minister of the United Free High Church in Edinburgh. Apparently still in indifferent health and continuing to receive treatment from her doctor, though clearly recovered from imminent danger of fatal illness, MEB stayed with the Smiths for almost ten years, though Dr Smith himself died in 1908. Her contact with Dr Smith, who encouraged her to make full use of his extensive library – and MEB recalled reading 'all the classic Balzac novels in French and all the classic Russian novels in English' (Boyle 30.8.1971) – as well as exposure to his intellectual circle, must have been an influence in starting MEB off as a published poet. Not all the

4 Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908). *Dictionary of National Biography Compact Edition Vol 2* (1975), 2894.

time during convalescence was spent in Dunblane; visits to Italy in 1906, France in 1907, and Italy 1908 are recorded.

Her first major poem, *Pilate in Exile at Vienne*, was published in 1915 by Heffers of Cambridge, followed by *Aftermath* in 1916. *Drum-na-Keil* in 1921 and *Daisies and Apple Trees* (a book of children's verses) in 1922 were produced locally in Scotland by printers in Stirling, and a final extended work, *Herodias Inconsolable*, was published in London in 1923. Some shorter poems appeared elsewhere (eg Boyle 1929), and her poetic works garnered some interest in the local and national press and received some favourable critical reviews at the time. *Aftermath* is particularly affecting, being a series of sonnets written in remembrance of her much-loved younger half-brother David (Fig 1), who was killed in action at Le Cateau, France, on 26 August 1914, leaving MEB bereft. Some of these poems are fairly obscure – both in terms of their content and their availability – and had been largely forgotten, although feminist studies in recent years have, because of *Aftermath*, discovered MEB as a war poet (Khan 1988, 146-8; Plain 1995), and her work has begun to appear in new anthologies (eg McMillan & Byrne 2003).

By 1912-13 or thereabouts, MEB's health was fully restored and she travelled once more to Italy with her cousin Agnes and half-brother David. There, in the same guest house near to Florence where she stayed with her sister in 1901-2, she had what turned out to be a very significant encounter with the Burkitt family from Cambridge – Norrisian Professor of Divinity F C Burkitt and his wife, and their son Miles who, as chance would have it, had just recently met Breuil, been taken under his wing as his first British student, and been spirited off to Spain in 1913 to help with the recording of Spanish rock art (see Breuil & Burkitt 1929; Díaz-Andreu 2013). MEB was invited by Mrs Burkitt to stay with her family in Cambridge whenever she was on her way to or from the Continent.

During World War 1 MEB was in Glasgow and, together with Agnes Pelly, for a while took charge of a house of 50 Belgian refugees. Subsequently she was employed in market gardening, but in 1919 she was in France, taking a short certificate course in French literature at Grenoble University. Other information about her life in this period is awaiting research, but the year 1920 found MEB staying with the Burkitts in Cambridge, where she was acting as secretary to Miles Burkitt. He was busy preparing his magnum opus *Prehistory*, published in 1921, and in the acknowledgements to that book he wrote as follows:

For the actual writing of the book I tender my most profound thanks to my secretary, Miss M. Boyle. It is certainly true to say that without her skilful co-operation the book would never have been written; not only was I relieved of the merely mechanical work, but further, the substance dictated was altered and put into a more readable form, and the references have been verified. (Burkitt 1921, vii-viii)

Or as MEB put it herself: 'I knew nothing about prehistory, hardly anyone did, but I knew a little about writing English and each thing he said I said it again in my way' (Boyle 30.8.1971). Burkitt's knowledge and conceptions of prehistory were of course very greatly influenced by Breuil (Burkitt 1921, vi), so the version of prehistory which MEB assimilated in Cambridge, and the stories of life and

work with Breuil with which Miles Burkitt must have regaled her, could have predisposed her to what happened next.

MEB was with the Burkitts when Breuil came to Cambridge to receive his honorary doctorate from the university on 19 May 1920 (as recorded in *The Times* 20 May 1920; cf Clark 1989, 36). Breuil had been invited to stay with them on this occasion as their house-guest and this was when MEB and the Abbé first met. Miles Burkitt, anxious that his non-French-speaking parents might not be able to cope with the Abbé, asked MEB to attend to him whenever Miles was out of the house. As MEB explained, it was during one of the times when she was with Breuil that:

... I ran out of ideas not knowing exactly what one said to Abbés and I asked if he would like to see the Professor's rock garden which he accepted with pleasure and suddenly said 'I don't see why you come to Cambridge to learn prehistory from my pupil when you might come to Paris and learn it from me'. (Boyle 30.8.1971)

MEB records being struck by Breuil's exceptional character (Boyle 1971, 86), and, in the absence of any personal attachments other than to her siblings, and without specific career or other life plans, this invitation from the Abbé did not fall on fallow ground. In fact when MEB subsequently announced that she was going to Paris to study with a Catholic priest her family members were clearly taken aback. Nevertheless, her eldest sister Agnes, after saying 'look here child, you cannot go alone to Paris to work with an unknown priest on an unknown subject' (Boyle 30.8.1971), agreed to accompany her as chaperone while staying in the Latin Quarter (rue Gay Lussac) for her first winter of study in 1924.⁵ Thus began the relationship with the Abbé which was the determining factor of the rest of MEB's life.

Boyle and Breuil before World War 2

Exactly how MEB divided her time between England, France, Italy, Scotland and Spain during the 1920s and 1930s, and how she rapidly graduated from Breuil's student to assistant, to invaluable collaborator and colleague remain to be unravelled in detail. And there are rather surprising episodes for which we lack sufficient background, for example the fact that, in the winters of 1923-4 and 1926-7, MEB made two extensive, four-and-a-half-month-long tours in northern America (Fig 2), presenting her poetry and giving talks on prehistory at universities, clubs, and societies, during which she had as her trump card the presentation of the Altamira plates lent to her by the Abbé (Boyle 1965a).

Suffice it to say that in attending the Abbé's classes at the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine in Paris MEB rapidly came to assume the role of his amanuensis, so that, from at least 1927 onwards, she is described incrementally as being the Abbé's

5 There is some confusion as to whether MEB's first term of study at the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine was in 1922 (Hurel 2011, 291) or 1924 (Arnould 2011, 140). Labarre (1997, 17, n2) is in error in stating 1919 as the date.

Figure 2. Studio portrait photograph of Mary Boyle, assumed to have been taken when in the USA in either 1923-4 or 1926-7. Photograph: Harris & Ewing, Washington D.C. Image courtesy Margot and Sylvia Large



secretary, his technical assistant, translator, photographer, travelling companion, faithful collaborator, devoted friend, nurse, etc, etc. A degree of intimacy is indicated early on by a postcard from the Abbé to MEB in 1924, giving her the details of his time and date of birth, presumably in response to her query (Fig 3).⁶ By no means did she join the Abbé on all of his trips, such as his journey to Africa in 1929 or to China in 1931 and 1935, but the Abbé was an extraordinarily frequent traveller (Balout 1963) and she did accompany him regularly within France and to Italy, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere.

In particular MEB became Breuil's valued accomplice in his *relevés* (ie his reproduction drawings and paintings), produced by his method of direct copying of rock art involving tracing, which required assistance not only in holding the copy-paper firmly in place against the rock surface and registering the junctions when moving from one sheet of paper to the next, but also, in the context of cave and megalithic art, holding the required light source to the Abbé's satisfaction ('L'abbé disait que j'étais son candélabre humain': Boyle 1971, 92, cf Boyle et al 1963, 15).

Also during the 1920s MEB began to publish on archaeology under her own name (Fig 4). The long irregular poem of 1921, *Drum-na-Keil: the ridge of the burial place*, had been a fantasy exploiting the mystique of a Scottish prehistoric monument and its setting, but with no particular indication of archaeological

6 Both MEB and the Abbé were interested in the esoteric and mysticism (Hurel 2011, 304). MEB, a regular subscriber to *Prediction* magazine, was particularly keen on astrology, fortune telling and spiritualism.

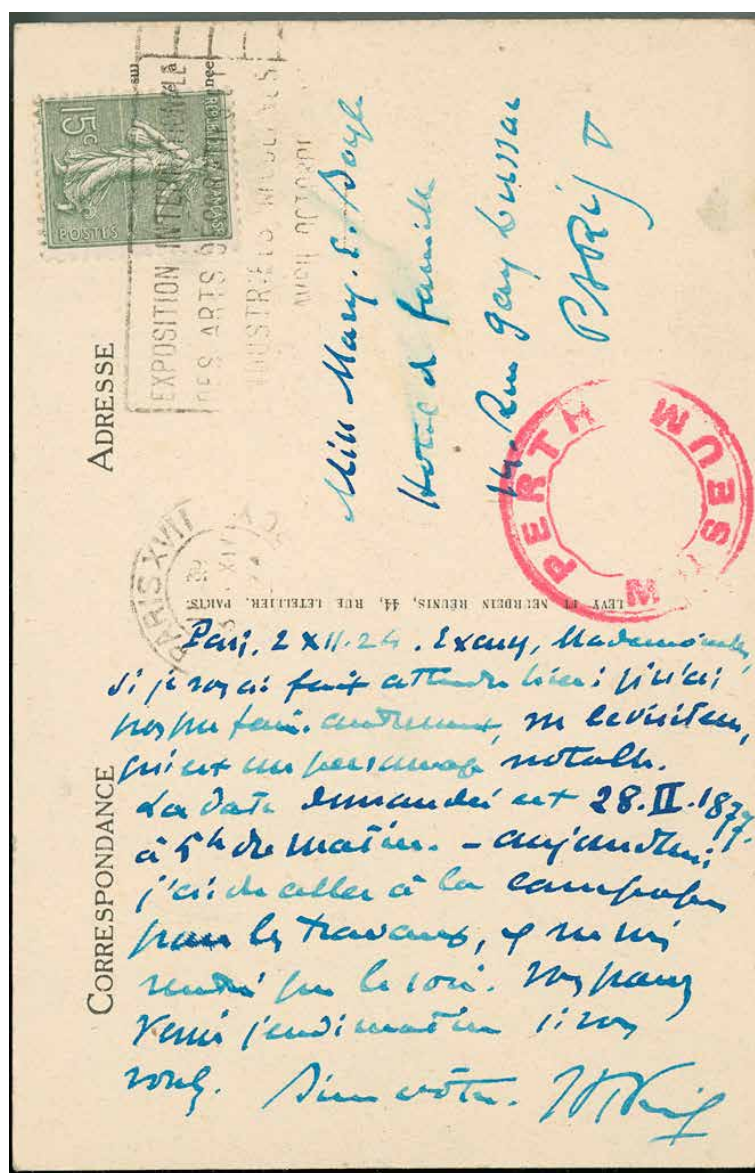


Figure 3. Postcard from the Abbé Henri Breuil to Mary Boyle. The text reads: Paris 2.XII.24 Excusez, Mademoiselle, si je vous ai fait attendre hier: je n'ai pas pu faire autrement, vu le visiteur qui est un personnage notable. La date demandée est 28.II.1877 à 5h. du matin – aujourd'hui j'ai dû aller à la campagne pour les travaux, je ne suis rentré que le soir. Vous pouvez venir jeudi matin si vous voulez. Sincèrement vôtre, H. Breuil. The date mentioned is Breuil's date of birth, 28 February 1877. This is a picture postcard, the image on the front being Breuil's relevé of a bison from Font-de-Gaume. Reproduced courtesy of Perth Museum and Art Gallery. The postcard is part of the Boyle collection donated to Perth Museum and Art Gallery in 1962. I am grateful to Fionna Ashmore, Sylvie Bethmont, Mark Hall, and Dorothy Kidd for assistance with deciphering Breuil's hand-writing, and to Nathan Schlanger for confirming that the signature is indeed that of the Abbé.

awareness, whereas by 1924 she had produced her own introduction to prehistory. *Man Before History: a Short Account of Prehistoric Times* was a work aimed at children (dedicated to her nieces and nephews, and the dust jacket of the 1924 USA edition says ‘for boys and girls 12 to 16’), which gained several favourable reviews and was sufficiently successful to be reissued in the UK in 1930 and again in 1939. After its initial appearance in the USA in 1924, it was republished there in 1931 with a different title *Prehistoric Man: Life in the New and Old Stone Ages*.

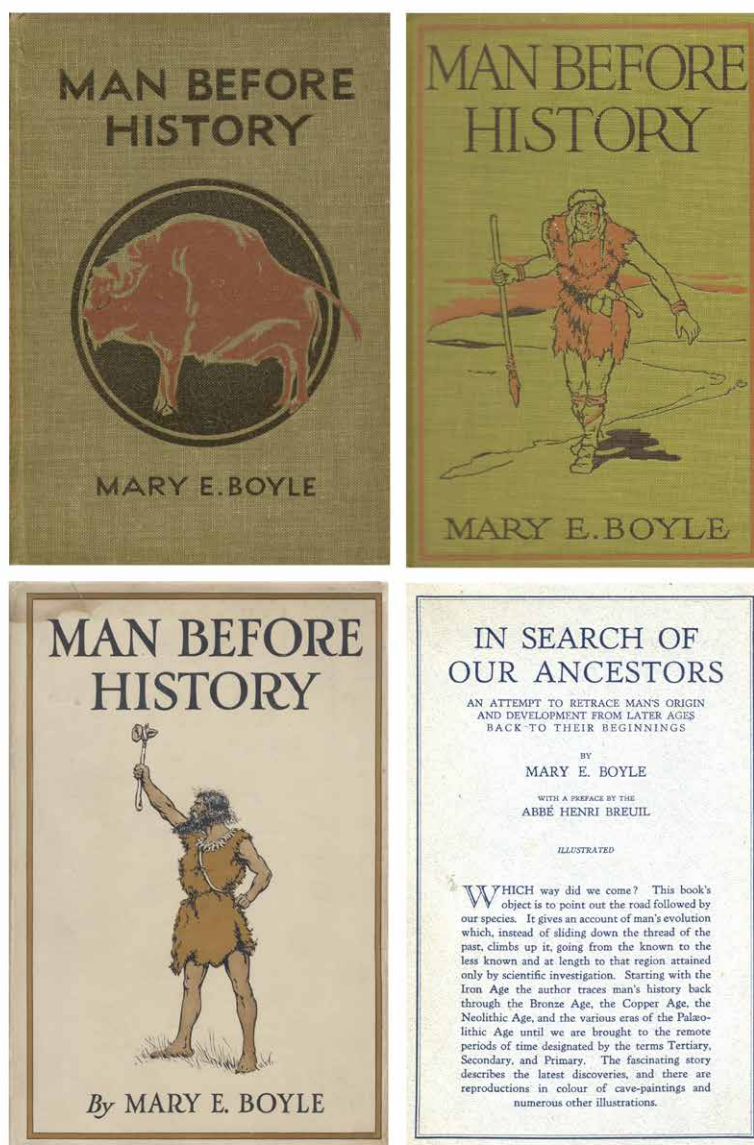


Figure 4. Archaeological books by Mary Boyle. Top left: cover of the 1924 first UK edition of *Man Before History*. Top right: cover of the 1924 first USA edition of *Man Before History*. Lower left: front dust jacket of the 1924 USA edition. Lower right: front dust jacket of the 1927 UK edition of *In Search of Our Ancestors*

The book has an introduction by Breuil and a frontispiece of examples of his Font-de-Gaume artwork, and in the acknowledgements MEB thanks both of her mentors, Miles Burkitt and the Abbé.

Man Before History was followed in 1927 by *In Search of Our Ancestors*, a much more ambitious if highly difficult and frankly ill-advised undertaking in which she follows the Abbé's suggestion of telling the story of prehistory backwards from the Iron Age to geological beginnings. This work was not reprinted, perhaps fortunately, since it is not a success and manages to include mistakes such as ascribing Pictish painted pebbles to the Mesolithic period and peculiar observations such as 'the Neolithic slipped so gradually into the Iron Age that it is often difficult to find the dividing line' (Boyle 1927, 115). Since this last comment was made in the context of discussing the Glastonbury lake-village, it is not surprising that it raised the hackles of Dina Portway Dobson, subsequently of *Archaeology of Somerset* (1931) fame, who in reviewing MEB's book in the journal *Antiquity* did a vicious demolition job (Dobson 1929). To its credit, this book included several colour plates with examples of the Abbé's reproductions of cave paintings from Altamira, Castillo, and Font-de-Gaume, at a time when these were still rather uncommon in popular works,⁷ and it had another preface by Breuil which, in its excursus on evolution, is of more than passing interest given the sensitivity of views on such matters coming from a Catholic priest at that time.

MEB's other monographic publication in her own name was a small booklet about the north Italian cave site of Barma Grande at Grimaldi (Boyle 1925). This was intended as a guide for English-speaking tourists and she was encouraged to write it by the Abbé and by Alfredo Lorenzi, curator of the museum at Barma Grande with whom MEB had spent some time digging 'about in the floor of the cave' (ibid, 3). This digging does not seem to have provided much if any new information, for the booklet retells the story of the early investigations, previously summarised in the popular account by Verneau (1908).

The Abbé became a frequent visitor to England and Scotland during the 1920s and 1930s (Balout 1963, 28), sometimes staying with MEB and her relatives at Kindrochat, near Comrie, Perthshire, where he was unable to resist 'doing archaeology', albeit not without pursuing some red herrings in the quest for local Palaeolithic evidence (Breuil 1937; Saville 1997, 3-4). Also, as Gordon Childe recorded, it was the Abbé who drew attention to the Neolithic chambered cairn at Kindrochat: 'the true significance of the ruins was apparently first recognised by Professor H. Breuil when staying at the farm with Miss M.E. Boyle' (Childe 1930, 264).⁸

Fascinated by his encounter in Scotland with Pictish art, Breuil strongly encouraged MEB to study Pictish monuments, which she did over the course of some seven or eight years, marking her main direct engagement with Scottish

7 For example, both Baldwin Brown's *The Art of the Cave Dweller* of 1928 and Burkitt's *The Old Stone Age* of 1933 only had frontispiece colour reproductions of Breuil's work.

8 There is correspondence in the Perth Museum and Art Gallery archive from MEB to the curator John Ritchie inviting him to visit Kindrochat to see Gordon Childe's excavations in progress in September 1930 (ie the excavations reported in Childe 1931). This was the tomb that MEB's elder brother, Captain Harry Boyle, had delved into with his brothers some time before 1914, as mentioned by Childe (1930, 264).

archaeology. She spoke on this topic, for example to the Glasgow Archaeological Society in 1937 and in the same year at the International Congress for European Folklore and Ethnology in Edinburgh (reported in *The Scotsman* for 21 July 1937), and published her studies in a Spanish journal (Boyle 1933), in a paper in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Boyle 1938) and, more fully but belatedly, in the German periodical *IPEK* (Boyle 1948) which, because of the war, was not actually issued until the 1950s. In these works MEB expounds the notion that some carved stone monuments record historically-identifiable events and are several centuries more recent than conventional dating would permit, taking an iconoclastic, and as it happens erroneous, position in conflict with received opinion (see Stevenson 1959, 33, n3; and the unusual inclusion of counter-comments by Richardson at the end of her 1938 paper). She is rather cavalier in mixing history and folklore, and she makes some wild art-historical analogies, undoubtedly a pointer to problems to come in Africa. Witness in particular her suggestion regarding the derivation of one of the most enigmatic Pictish symbols (the 'Pictish beast' or 'elephant') from prehistoric megalithic art of the Morbihan in Brittany (Boyle 1948, 73). The decorated chamber tombs of the Morbihan were one of the Abbé's major interests at this period. His first major paper on this topic was published in the journal *Préhistoire* with Zacharie le Rouzic and MEB as co-authors (Breuil et al 1938), the Abbé paying special tribute to MEB in a footnote for holding the lamp and the tracing paper, and for taking photographs. A final paper appeared much later in the same journal, with MEB as the co-author (Breuil & Boyle 1959).

The 1920s and 1930s were years of continuing frantic activity for the Abbé, in which MEB collaborated to a large degree. They both attended the First International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences in London in 1932, and the Second Congress in Oslo in 1934, where they both read papers, MEB's being on 'Foreign Influences in Early Eastern Scottish Sculpture'. In autumn 1931 MEB was in northern Spain with Breuil and his friend and fellow priest the German prehistorian Hugo Obermaier;⁹ in summer 1932 Obermaier was staying with MEB at Kindrochat; and in winter 1934-5 she was studying with Obermaier in Madrid and spending Christmas at Arcos de la Frontera, Cádiz (Boyle 1965a). In the spring of 1932 she was with Breuil at Altamira cave for ten days,¹⁰ and in the autumn of 1939 she and Breuil were in Brittany, working at Carnac; there were also many trips to the Dordogne. Nevertheless, MEB was obviously still managing to spend significant amounts of time back at home in Scotland. In November 1937 she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, giving her

9 L'abbé Hugo Obermaier (1877-1946) was a long-standing friend of Breuil. Best remembered for his major 1924 publication *Fossil Man in Spain*, he held a university professorship in Madrid from 1922 to 1936 (see Romanillo 1996).

10 The English version of the new publication on Altamira (Breuil & Obermaier 1935) was a translation by MEB (Boyle 1965a), which helped establish her name more widely.

address as Kindrochat, and she was in regular contact with her local museum in Perth, to which in 1962 her archaeological collection was donated.¹¹

In view of the outbreak of World War 2 MEB left France for Britain in 1940, while the Abbé initially moved to the Dordogne. Thus when he became involved in the early stages of the examination of Lascaux (Delluc & Delluc 2008, 53-5), which was discovered in September 1940, MEB was not able to participate.

To southern Africa and afterwards

In 1941 the Abbé left France for neutral Portugal, where he was granted a visiting professorship at the University of Lisbon. MEB, after an initial period based in Liverpool, achieved a posting to the Bermudas on the other side of the Atlantic, where from February 1941 she was engaged in translation duties for the British Government Censorship. Then, by a chain of events remarkable even in the extraordinary circumstances of wartime, the two of them came to be reunited for work in South Africa, through connections made by Breuil many years previously.

Back in 1929 the Abbé had been invited to participate as a guest at the Congress for the Advancement of Science in Johannesburg, not on this occasion accompanied by MEB. He managed to travel quite extensively while there and got a good grasp of the archaeological wealth and potential of the region, including the rock art, which reminded him of some of the Iberian rock art with which he had worked previously. In Johannesburg another of his friends and pupils, Mrs Alice Bowler-Kelley, showed him a copy of a particularly fine panel from the Brandberg Mountains of what was then South-West Africa (present-day Namibia). This copy had been made in 1917 by a German surveyor, Reinhard Maack, and it would appear that the Abbé was immediately intrigued by what he took to be the focus of the panel – a human figure partly painted in white. This figure, which for the Abbé was *la Dame blanche* (the White Lady), began, in his own words, to haunt him almost to the point of obsession. MEB tells how in subsequent years she would grow impatient with his fixation and would tell him to stop talking of her (Boyle 1966).¹² When in 1937 Alice Bowler-Kelley was returning to South Africa for a year, the Abbé entreated her to try to get to the Maack rock shelter to see this rock art and if possible get a photograph. This she did with the help of Dr Ernst Scherz, a local photographer and rock art enthusiast, and she showed a tiny print of the art to the Abbé when she returned to Paris in 1938. The Abbé craved an enlargement of the photo but this proved impossible in the worsening circumstances of the

11 The Boyle collection in Perth Museum and Art Gallery is composed largely of flint artefacts, often unprovenanced, but including pieces from well-known French Palaeolithic locations such as Cap Blanc, Combe Capelle, La Ferrassie, Laugerie Haute, Laussel, Le Moustier, and La Mouthe (Lyddieth 1965, 51). Earlier, in 1933, MEB donated to the museum what purports to be a lock of the hair of Mary (Margaret) Tudor (AD 1489-1541; daughter of King Henry VII of England and wife of King James IV of Scotland).

12 'I said "what is the use of talking to me of a white woman in S.W. Africa when we cannot get the money to make a proper copy of Altamira? «Ce que vous désiriez de tout coeur rien et personne me peut empêcher» he said. "I don't believe that" I said. "It is only that you have never desired with all your heart" he said. "Perhaps not, it might be too dangerous for a woman" I replied' (Boyle 30.8.1971).

time, and he continued to harbour the desire to visit the Brandberg Mountains and see *la Dame blanche* for himself.

Thus, when in 1941 by various means his former African connections led to an invitation from the South African Premier, Jan Smuts, to leave Portugal and come to South Africa, where he would be granted a position in Johannesburg for the duration of the war, Breuil could not resist the opportunity which would take him within striking distance of *la Dame blanche*. Nevertheless, when the invitation came, the Abbé's first reaction was to say that he couldn't possibly go without MEB: «mais je ne puis songer à aller sans miss Boyle!» (Boyle 1971, 92). So the long arm of Smuts, entirely irregularly, through the emissary of a Canadian airman and much to the displeasure of her superiors, managed to pluck MEB from her post in Bermuda (Boyle 1965b, 140-1; 1971, 94; Garrod 1961, 206; Le Quellec 2010, 63-4).

From the West Indies MEB in 1942 took her first-ever journey in an aeroplane to fly to Lisbon, met up with the Abbé – his greeting when she arrived at his hotel being 'You are late' (Boyle 1965b, 141) – and set about organising their trip south. In November 1942 they left Lisbon by boat for an eventful journey to the neutral port of Lourenço Marques in Portuguese Mozambique, and from there travelled overland to Johannesburg, where they became attached to the Archaeological Survey of the Union of South Africa at the University of Witwatersrand. In South Africa the Abbé embarked on an ambitious programme of studying prehistoric artefacts, both in the lab and in the field with MEB, and amongst other aspects looking at river terrace and raised beach deposits. At the university he was able to see enlargements of Scherz's photographs and other evidence concerning the Maack shelter and its representation of what he took to be a very young woman with a singularly beautiful profile reminiscent of a figure on a Greek vase. He showed the photos to MEB who considered that the figure looked Cretan because of the jerkin and trunks, though the Abbé said he didn't know if the girl was Greek, Cretan or Egyptian, 'but that she is of Mediterranean race is certain' (Breuil 1955, 3).

Despite Breuil's entreaties to Smuts for access to the Brandberg mountains, he was understandably denied entry to South-West Africa while World War 2 was being waged. His disappointment was expressed in person to Smuts before returning to France in 1945, and was repeated when Smuts was in Paris having lunch with the Abbé and MEB in 1946. Accordingly Smuts suggested they return to South Africa in 1947, with the promise that he would facilitate their visit to South-West Africa.

After their return, at the end of July 1947, their small expedition team headed off from Johannesburg on the long journey to the Brandberg. With Dr Scherz as guide and photographer they eventually reached the Maack Shelter, whereupon the Abbé, although now aged 70, announced that he was not leaving the spot until he had recorded the panel; and there he stayed for 10 days until forced to leave because one of the members of the party had to return home. (MEB only camped out for one night, during which a lion perambulated her tent.) They returned to the shelter in August 1948 during another extended series of field trips (Fig 5) and made some slight revisions to the previous copies, and returned again in



Figure 5. Mary Boyle, centre, and the Abbé Breuil, seated right (other figures unidentified) on a field trip near Caiambo, Lunda Sul, Angola, in June 1948. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Margot and Sylvia Large

August 1950 to show the panel to the then Administrator of South-West Africa, Colonel Hoogenhout, who is recorded as making the infamous remark: ‘This is no Bushman painting, this is Great Art’ (Breuil 1955, 7; Le Quellec 2004, 149).

Already in 1947, and much to the disquiet of most local scholars, the South African media had picked up that the famous Abbé had recognised rock paintings in the Brandberg which were not only incredibly ancient – 5000 or more years old, he claimed – but featured figures of Mediterranean affinity, including a white woman. Breuil used the opportunity of producing as his Presidential Address to the South African Archaeological Society a paper on *la Dame blanche*, which was published in the *South African Archaeological Bulletin* (Breuil 1948a).

Glyn Daniel (1981, 235) once remarked on ‘the absurd subjectivity of Breuil’s essay (with Mary Boyle) on the megalithic art of the Morbihan’, and it is clear that South African archaeologists, with justification, felt the same about the Abbé’s remarks in his 1948 paper, in which the ‘White Lady’ is identified – as some elaborate research by MEB is said to have established – as the Diana-Isis persona known in Crete and Egypt, and the painting the result of Nilotic invasions. A response paper in a subsequent number of the *Bulletin* by J F Schofield unashamedly used irony and barely-masked sarcasm to refute the Abbé’s theories, concluding that ‘the generalized resemblance of the fresco to Cretan and Egyptian art forms

is entirely deceptive and fortuitous' and part of the 'lumber of a pseudo-antiquity' (Schofield 1948).

As might be imagined, the Abbé sprang to his own defence in a 1949 issue of the *Bulletin*, writing that 'Mr J.F. Schofield thinks to reduce to nothing, not my material work as a careful copyist of ancient frescoes, but the sum total of those conclusions and hypotheses that long contact with many groups of this art have led me to elaborate'. Mr Schofield is entitled to his opinion says the Abbé, 'but it is not mine nor that of other persons of distinction' (Breuil 1949b).

This quite fascinating and entertaining academic spat (though one with serious socio-political overtones in the African context) might have remained a local issue had not Breuil been keen to publicise and promote his work on a wider stage, with news and articles appearing rapidly back home in France and in the USA, to much academic disquiet. This culminated in the publication in 1955 of the monograph on *The White Lady of the Brandberg* which ignored all the informed local criticism of the Breuil-Boyle theories of dating and foreign influence, with the Abbé now advocating what he called the Nilotic character of the paintings and the chapter by MEB on foreign influences containing wildly unsubstantiated use of analogy and linkage. Most blatantly, Breuil and MEB chose to overlook quite specific evidence that the 'White Lady' figure was neither female nor white! The reviews, while bending over backwards to credit the Abbé for recording the rock art and publishing it so lavishly, and despite the understandable reluctance to be overcritical, were nevertheless forthright in demolishing his and MEB's interpretations and dating (eg Godwin 1955; Hawkes 1955; Malan 1957; Movius 1959; Rouse 1957).

By this stage of their lives, however, both MEB and Breuil must have become inured to criticism, which did not, one feels, bother them unduly. One of the Abbé's most famous and widely used and referenced works – *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art* – published in France in 1952 in French and in an English version translated by MEB, had been reviewed quite mercilessly by O G S Crawford (1953) in *Antiquity*, criticising the accuracy of the Abbé's transcriptions and then rounding on the inadequacies of MEB's editing and translation.¹³ This review was considered so vituperative and in many respects so unfair by Breuil's former pupil Dorothy Garrod that it elicited a response from her in its defence, published in a subsequent issue of *Antiquity* (Garrod 1953), though interestingly she defended the Abbé rather than MEB, whom she also knew very well.

Even when the *White Lady* volume was republished in 1966, with MEB taking the opportunity to write a new preface explaining more about the South African venture, she failed to mention any of the criticism their interpretations had attracted or to add any references to new research. The main body of the text, including her own chapter, with all its flaws, was simply reprinted, suggesting she was by this

13 Crawford possibly had pre-existing 'axes to grind' in undertaking this review, but other people have made the point that MEB's English versions of the Abbé's work may sometimes not have been exact translations (eg Hurel 2011, 414, n10). This is perhaps particularly so with some of the African project publications, where one often wonders exactly what was written by Breuil and what by MEB (eg Breuil 1948b). One could also mention the very similar criticisms of Burkitt's *Prehistory* (Smith 2009, 27), where some of the problems referred to could in part lie with MEB's role in that work.

stage as thick-skinned, even as ‘pig-headed’, as her mentor had become. Modern commentators have clearly felt no compunction about forcefully expressing their opinions about the ‘White Lady’ episode, when Breuil: ‘*Face à la peinture qui l’«avait hanté depuis dix-huit ans», il perd toute rigueur scientifique*’ (Mulot 2006, 73). Some quotes from Peter Garlake (1993) will suffice:

They are the fantasies of someone obsessed, imagining all sorts of exotic elements, rather than attempts at accurate reproduction ... These are extraordinarily naïve, obtuse and perverse conclusions ... Breuil was above all argument and simply dismissed or ignored local prehistorians who disputed his interpretations.

The ‘White Lady’ episode has come to overshadow anything else the Abbé and MEB did in southern Africa (Davis 1990, 281-3; Barnard 2007, 49), but, as MEB has written, for the Abbé: ‘*Le point culminant de ces expéditions, et peut-être de toute sa carrière, fut sa rencontre avec la mystérieuse «Dame Blanche de Brandberg»*’ (Boyle 1971, 94). One must not forget that Breuil was 70 years of age by the time he first encountered *la Dame blanche* face to face, and 78 when the monograph was first published in 1955 (when MEB was 74). Le Quellec (2006a & 2006b; see also Mulot 2006, 73) has hypothesised that they were both, but especially MEB, influenced by concepts of a lost race, the *White Goddess* syndrome and a Rider Haggard *She*-type myth. My own feeling is that they actually took a rather casual intellectual approach to interpretation and simply built on those very first impressions that the figure reminded them strongly of half-remembered images of pre-classical antiquity, coupled with the desire to assign an early, and prehistoric, date to the rock art and a bias towards diffusionism. The Abbé was apparently quite content to leave most of the speculation on the White Lady’s pedigrees to MEB.¹⁴ As we have seen, MEB, who claimed expertise in comparative religion, was predisposed to see external influences in her approach to ancient art – admittedly a common academic position in her generation – and was clearly as stubborn as Breuil in refusing to consider any revision of her opinions once formulated. In this, as in other respects, MEB and the Abbé were a good match.

The final years

Breuil had retired officially from his teaching post in 1947, aged 70, spending much more time in his house and beloved *jardin* at L’Isle-Adam, just north of Paris, where he and MEB indulged their mutual love of flowers (Arnould 2011, 153-5). Here and in Paris the Abbé and MEB continued to work on his publications and his archive and also continued, though less frequently now, to travel and participate in conferences together.

MEB assisted in the 1954 exhibition of the Abbé’s drawings in London (Arts Council 1954) and is thanked and quoted in the catalogue of the 1966-7 Breuil exhibition held in Paris by the Fondation Singer-Polignac (Sonolet 1967). One

¹⁴ The South African archaeologist Clarence van Riet Lowe expressed his opinion to Breuil that MEB’s ‘views were exerting an undue influence’ on him in this regard and warned him that it would be advisable not to include any of MEB’s interpretations in the final White Lady publication. The Abbé ignored this and MEB reacted angrily to van Riet Lowe’s remarks (Le Quellec 2010, 85-6).



Figure 6. Visit to the excavations at Arcy-sur-Cure, Yonne, France, in 1946. The Abbé Breuil is in the centre with André Leroi-Gourhan on his right. Mary Boyle is the figure with hat and long coat at the far left of the photograph (incorrectly identified as Renée-Louise Doize in Soulier and Wilhelm-Bailloud 2011, 419). Photographer unknown. Image courtesy Margot and Sylvia Large

special visit in 1957 was to London, where MEB was invested with the red ribbon of the *Légion d'honneur* at the French Embassy, in recognition of her contribution to Breuil's work.

As had whenever possible been the regular pattern (Fig 6), trips together to sites and excavations, particularly in the Dordogne, continued most years, including 1952 as recalled amusingly by Alain Roussot (2001) and 1959 when they visited the excavations of the American archaeologist Hallam Movius Jnr at the Abri Pataud in Les Eyzies-de-Tayac (Movius 1965, plate I).

Archaeological trips elsewhere occurred whenever possible: for example in 1958, on MEB's 77th birthday, they were visiting La Grotte de La Vache in the Ariège (Ripoll Perelló 1994, 234, plate XLII). In the winters of 1959 and 1960, they both spent a month in Lisbon where the Abbé classified stone tools. Then in 1961, when Breuil passed away at his home, aged 84, MEB was there to comfort his last moments, three days after her own 79th birthday, and she has left a moving account of his death (Boyle 1971, 97; Boyle et al 1963, 18; Arnould 2011, 294).

After his passing MEB continued to live in France, devoting much of her time to further volumes in the Abbé's southern Africa rock art series, and sorting his archive with a view to publishing a biography of him. This never transpired. There are conflicting views over whether she collaborated in any way with Alan Brodrick, the author of the only book-length biography in English of the Abbé (Brodrick 1963)¹⁵ – but whatever the case he effectively wrote her out of the script, for she gets barely three mentions in his book – and he does not acknowledge MEB as

15 Fiona Stanley (pers comm) says MEB wrote very disparagingly of Brodrick; but Labarre (1997, 16) says MEB helped with his book.

a source but does acknowledge the Abbé's sister, Marguerite de Mallevoüe, with whom MEB apparently had difficulties (M Morrison, pers comm; Hurel 2011, 431).¹⁶ Brodrick's biography is generally regarded as unsatisfactory for various reasons (eg Garrod 1965), and certainly his treatment of MEB contrasts glaringly with the Abbé's own public recognition of her role as quoted at the start of this paper.

Although she never completed her biography of Breuil, MEB did publish a short reminiscence of the Abbé (Boyle 1971), and she participated in the BBC Radio programme on 5 March 1962 introduced by Glyn Daniel, which included Henry Field, Kenneth Oakley, Miles Burkitt and Dorothy Garrod reflecting on the Abbé's life. (The transcript of this programme was published: Boyle et al 1963.)

MEB died in a nursing home at Crosne on the outskirts of Paris on 22 December 1974, aged 93. Some of her own papers and those of the Abbé which she held, including a copy of his unpublished autobiography, were passed to Arnold Fawcus of Trianon Press, the publishers of the African rock-art volumes, and after Fawcus's death his widow Julie donated them to the Musée des Antiquités Nationales at St-Germain-en-Laye (Labarre 1997). Other relevant Boyle archives are in the care of the Musée Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, in the castle at Arcos de la Frontera, Spain, where she was a frequent guest (Mora-Figueroa 1975), and probably elsewhere since she was a prolific correspondent.

Conclusion

Any reader who has persevered thus far with this account will have realised that it is patchy; there is a great deal about MEB still to be researched and discovered. For example, how did MEB finance herself from the 1920s onwards? She had some income from investments, but was not wealthy and lived relatively frugally. I have seen no evidence that she was ever actually employed by Breuil, in fact quite the contrary,¹⁷ though because of Breuil and his standing she was the recipient of allowances from the French Government and other payments and grants (eg towards the end of her life from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) and royalties from the African rock art volumes (F Stanley, pers comm).

There are also what now appear as unexplained inconsistencies where MEB's absence seems a little strange. For example, she is not credited with involvement in the *Hommage* volume of 1957 prepared to mark the Abbé's 80th birthday, which included his bibliography and list of titles and distinctions, the latter compiled by Renée-Louise Doize, another of Breuil's female collaborators and a good friend of MEB (Lantier et al 1957). Neither, despite having consistently translated the Abbé's work into English, was she the translator for the published English version

16 Brodrick is not alone in ignoring MEB; so too did several of Breuil's obituarists (eg Burkitt 1961; Clark 1962; Lantier 1961; Vaufrey 1962). The silence of Burkitt on this point is particularly noticeable. Chantraine (1961, 277) did at least extend condolences to the Abbé's friends and colleagues.

17 'There was never any question of money between us. I wanted his knowledge and to travel, he wanted my English style for the translation of his books and my speech in Africa and other places where it was needed. The various Governments paid our journey. We both got what we wanted and I found the life interesting and got my lunch in his flat with his sister and brother-in-law as long as we were working in Paris' (Boyle 30.8.1971).

(Breuil & Lantier 1965) of the French original *Les Hommes de la pierre ancienne*,¹⁸ although a typescript translation by her exists amongst papers in the archives at St-Germain-en-Laye (N. Schlanger, pers comm; cf Labarre 1997, 14)). One guesses at periods of absence or illness, perhaps some personality clashes or concerns over her efficacy as translator, and one hopes for the eventual publication of the Abbé's private diaries and autobiography to shed more light on this (Labarre 1997).

There is also the question, without wishing to probe insensitively, of the personal relationship between MEB and Breuil. It is apparent that MEB was the Abbé's devoted companion for the last 37 years or so of his life and, by common consent, whatever one feels about the academic calibre of Breuil's work during this period, she was undoubtedly the main rock of support which allowed him to maintain his prodigious publication output, to keep up his worldwide contacts, to communicate with the Anglophone world – the Abbé spoke Spanish but not very good English – and to retain his position and renown as the premier prehistorian of his generation (at least in popular and amateur perception; after World War 2 and his return to France his reputation was undoubtedly in decline amongst professional archaeologists; see comments by Daniel 1986, 358-9).

As emerges clearly from the paintings of Madeleine Luka, the daughter of Breuil's cousin Maurice Bottet, there were two main women in the Abbé's later life, *la Dame blanche* and MEB.¹⁹ The former was the Abbé's obsession and certainly led him astray, the latter was his bedrock but was perhaps somewhat taken for granted. I think, however, when the Abbé and MEB first became associated, there was more than just a meeting of minds, there was a very deep, a very intense friendship, more than a hint of which can be found in the early correspondence between them (see especially the letter from Breuil to MEB quoted by Rodriguez & Danion 2006, 46; cf Arnould 2011, 157-9). It may be over-interpretive to read a degree of intimacy into the photograph of MEB at the entrance to la Grotte de la Mouthe in the early 1930s, one of the very few photographs which Breuil may have taken himself (it was usually MEB behind the lens), although what is presumably the Abbé's walking stick leaning against the stonework is powerfully symbolic (Fig 7). But some of the late photographs in particular are wonderfully expressive of their closeness to each other and capture that 'serene comradeship' to which MEB referred (Boyle et al 1963, 15).²⁰

18 Perth Museum and Art Gallery archive: letter from MEB at Kindrochat to the curator, John Ritchie, 22 July 1933, records that Raymond Lantier and his wife are coming to stay with MEB at Kindrochat.

19 Madeleine Luka's wonderfully psychologically-loaded painting of Breuil in his garden at L'Isle Adam, with the bust on the wall behind him transformed into that of MEB, and the 'White Lady', marching in the wrong direction in the background (Poirot-Delpech 1976, 146), hints at much (see Rodriguez & Danion 2006, 54-5). Another of Luka's paintings based on the well-known photograph (eg on the rear dust-jacket of the 1966 reissue of *The White Lady*) of Breuil and MEB standing looking at the Abbé's reproduction of *la Dame blanche* also demonstrates her insight into the significance of both 'women' for Breuil (Le Quellec 2006a, 123). MEB was very fond of Madeleine Luka, but not an admirer of her art.

20 Eg the photos taken at Montignac in 1953 (<http://albuga.free.fr/im/prehistoire/rousso/photos/im22>); at La Grotte de La Vache in 1958 (Ripoll Perelló 1994, 234, plate XLII); and at Les Eyzies-de-Tayac in 1959 (Danion 2006, 39). In a recent, rather ill-considered, comment on the relationship by an American author, MEB is described as 'the last Victorian virgin' (Curtis 2006, 74).

Figure 7. Mary Boyle outside the entrance to La Grotte de La Mouthe, Dordogne, France, c 1928. Photographer unknown but possibly l'abbé Henri Breuil. Image courtesy Margot and Sylvia Large (cf Mora-Figueroa 1975, 319)



Other than the White Lady episode, is it possible to detect any way in which MEB had a direct influence on the Abbé's life and work rather than the other way around? Alice Kehoe (1992, n1) has tentatively suggested the possibility that she and Dorothy Garrod were a factor in raising his 'consciousness of the importance of prominently considering gender roles in human history', as reflected in the 'naïve' drawings in the *Beyond the Bounds of History* volume (Breuil 1949a). The Abbé tended to collect loyal disciples rather than students (Hurel 2011, 290), and many of them were female (eg Marthe Chollot 1961, 7: '*A mon Maître l'Abbé Henri Breuil*') and non-French (eg Alice Bowler-Kelley, Renée-Louise Doize, Dorothy Garrod, and Cecil Mowbray), which itself may have had an influence on his general outlook, but it would be stretching the evidence to impute any kind of modern gender awareness in Breuil's work, or indeed that of MEB.

As more archive research is undertaken and more information is forthcoming, I am sure that a clearer picture of MEB's life and her contribution to Breuil's work will emerge. Academically this picture may not be an entirely complimentary one for either of them, but nevertheless, it will help accord deservedly greater recognition and a higher profile for MEB in the UK, and in Scotland in particular, something which has already begun to happen in France as a result of her being featured extensively in the excellent Breuil exhibition of 2006 at L'Isle-Adam and Nemours, and in the invaluable associated publication (Coye 2006).

Acknowledgements

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Evidence and artefact: utility for protohistory and archaeology in Thomas the Rhymer legends

Hugh Cheape

Abstract

An historical figure of the 13th century, Thomas the Rhymer, is recorded as poet and prophet but rarely merits mention in Scottish historical studies. This essay argues for the importance of the Rhymer as liminal figure for Scottish history and prehistory, as much for broader insights offered by him than for history of the individual. The Rhymer is commemorated in song and story, and is linked to the supernatural from where his gift of prophecy is said to derive. Markers in the landscape, especially in the Scottish Borders, may be ‘memorates’ serving present needs rather than original evidence, and prophecy may be indicative of cultural and political resource rather than individual cult. The extraordinary longevity of the Rhymer story is demonstrated by evidence in Scottish Gaelic in the 20th century showing how tradition shifted in response to circumstances or realpolitik. The subject has been developed in the research domain of a national museum with ready access to both historical and archaeological material and the benefit of a measure of independence from the constraining boundaries of academic disciplines and institutions.

Keywords: *Prophecy, liminality, memorates, Thomas the Rhymer*

Personae

I offer this topic to David as an eclectic but informed mix of sources that I believe will appeal. As longstanding colleagues, I always enjoyed our conversations which customarily ranged across disciplines in ways that I believe reflected the intellectual inheritance of the National Museum.

Thomas the Rhymer was, in brief and as far as we now know, a 13th-century Border landowner and a poet attributed with the power of prophecy. His reputation long outlasted him, telling us about attitudes to prophecy and its supposed efficacy, a phenomenon that is prominent from this time until the 17th century when the ‘scientific’ exploration of prophecy began (Cohn 1970; Hunter 2001). Consideration of this intriguing aspect of the human make-up has tended to be kept firmly outside mainstream Scottish history, the material rarely

to be considered as a source and the written evidence to be confined, even firmly relegated, to literature. Even as 'literature', doubts remain over textual integrity and dating of the Rhymer's surviving compositions, and they seem not to merit attention even in Scottish literature's recent scholarly treatments. (See McDiarmid 1989, 29.)

Thomas the Rhymer might be said to demonstrate 'liminality', both so far as an historical *persona* can be established and also in the consideration and treatment of his literary compositions. In the context of conventional scholarship and sustained separation of disciplines, Thomas the Rhymer seems to be marginal or invisible on the cusp of history and prehistory or times beyond documentation. In the field of folklore or its notional forerunner of 'popular antiquities', he was raised to cult status and his utterances reworked and conflated. What we know of Thomas the Rhymer offers particular insights into popular belief in Medieval Scotland and may suggest hypotheses for the understanding of past lives in prehistoric Scotland.

There are historical sources to substantiate Thomas the Rhymer as a real person. These records were collected into the introduction and notes to Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* to demonstrate that Thomas was a historical character (Scott 1803, 251). Thomas Finlayson Henderson brought such information that was known up to date in a four-volume edition of the *Minstrelsy* (Henderson 1932, IV, 79-137). It is suggested that he was born about 1225 at Earlston in Berwickshire, 'Erceldoune' being an earlier form of the name and appearing as appellative in the form 'Thomas of Erceldoune'. He died about 1297, making him a venerable 72. The sobriquet 'Rhymer' may be a surname like Rimor or Rimmer, though he was said to have had the surname 'Learmont' (Scott 1803, 262; Scott 1819, vii-viii; Chambers 1870, 212). The name 'Rimor' appears elsewhere in the record and might have had significance *per se* as denoting membership of a family of hereditary chroniclers, poets or rhymer minstrels, as a class of high status (G F Black 1946, 707). As witnessing a charter in the Melrose Chartulary, he may have been a scholarly man in his own right as well as belonging to the medieval learned orders. Other details behind a figure such as Thomas the Rhymer do not figure in the historical discourse but have a relevance for history and proto-history. This was a 'multicultural' region at the time with a possible complexity of languages. Boundary areas may have been socially and culturally, even linguistically, turbulent with languages in varying stages of advance or decay. Thomas the Rhymer may have been a speaker of Anglian or Scots, Norman-French, Cumbric or Welsh, and Gaelic; the Gaels had gained the Borders Kingdom of Strathclyde in 1018 and Gaelic speech was still current in Thomas' day.

The modern and lasting fame of Thomas the Rhymer – as prophecy went out of fashion or was outlawed by the church – seems to derive from the ballad of this name in Scott's influential *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* which perhaps conclusively transformed previous oral tradition into literary artefact, at least for the anglophone world. The 'Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer' derives from a number of versions collected in the Scottish Borders and elsewhere in the early 19th century

and emerged as a composite text in a process of restoring what Scott believed to have been the original language. The ballad, as a form of song that tells a story, has also been the domain of ‘ballad scholarship’ that vigorously debates ‘origins’ and the evolution of the ballad form (Buchan 1997). The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer is set in the Borders and an undeniable part of its mystique is that Thomas the Rhymer lies sleeping in the Eildons which in turn form a door to the world of the supernatural. The appeal of this was also transformed for modern generations in the imagery of Thomas the Rhymer and the Queen of Elphane by Kate Greenaway (1846-1901), children’s books illustrator.

How the Ballad emerged or was composed, varied and survived in oral tradition and for how long is a matter of speculation and part of the debate of ballad scholarship. *Inter alia* the debate, which started with the premise of the separation between oral tradition and literacy, wrestles with the ambiguities of ‘oral tradition’ or ‘folk literature’ and a probable reality of the word of mouth traditions of a largely literate society (Crawford 1979; see also Lyle 2007, 10). Scott seemed to use written versions and named one of his sources as ‘a copy, obtained from a lady, residing not far from Ercildoun’, and another as Mrs Brown of Falkland whose own collection of ballads continues to be a matter of research (Scott 1803, 268). Mrs Brown (1747-1810), or Anna Gordon, was the daughter of the Professor of Humanity at King’s College, Aberdeen, and has added the ingredients of the literary and the creative to the ‘traditional’ song debate (Buchan 1997, 62-73). The Edinburgh printer and publisher, Robert Chambers, with a family background in the Borders, claimed a prevalence of belief in Thomas throughout Scotland in the early 19th century and the ready quoting of his prophecies in rhyme. Chambers, with the more worldly savvy of the journalist, commented that the Rhymer’s name had added a useful cachet: ‘During the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to fabricate a prophecy in the name of Thomas the Rhymer appears to have been found a good stroke of policy on many occasions’ (Chambers 1870, 212).

Ballads, or in other words song-poems or narratives in song, were enthusiastically collected from the 18th century onward, one of the first significant markers of the genre being Bishop Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* of 1765 which had inspired the young Walter Scott (Crawford 1987, 123). The modern study of ballads began with the Harvard scholar Francis James Child (1825-96), who re-collected and classified each item in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1857), which appeared in a new five-volume edition between 1882 and 1898 (Child 1898). He looked for ‘traditional’ versions of ballads and discounted (even rashly dismissed) the agency of printed sources such as broadside ballads and chapbooks. His canonical collection included a version named as ‘Thomas Rhymer’ under ‘Number 37’. This has given a system of classification so that the Ballad is generally cited as ‘Child 37’ and the ‘Child Ballads’ remain vital works of reference. This is the text as printed by Scott in the *Minstrelsy* and the scene is set for the twenty-stanza song:

*True Thomas lay on Huntlie bank,
A ferlie he spied wi his e'e,
And there he saw a lady bright,
Coming down by the Eildon tree.¹*

Prophecy

As a prophet figure, Thomas the Rhymer seems to come to the fore in his own lifetime with his reported prediction of the death of Alexander III on 19 March 1286, an event ushering in a long period of destructive confrontation with England. This fundamental change is inferred in John Barbour's *The Brus*, compiled in the 1370s, which represents a view that the years before the death of Alexander III were a 'golden age', couched in a style of writing suggesting that he drew on established tradition and contemporary belief. From the moment of Edward I's invasion in 1296, Scotland was a country at war through the 14th and 15th centuries. The kings of England from Edward I to Henry IV laid claim to rule Scotland and every English king in this period led armies into Scotland. This sense of continuing catastrophe was exacerbated by civil war and continuing local warfare in a period in which millenarianism flourished and bodies of millenarian belief can be identified throughout Europe (Cohn 1970, 282). Prophecy could be a device by which the individual or the group consoled, fortified and asserted themselves in times of crisis when confronted by the threat or reality of oppression. The future was considered to be knowable and fiction supplied a need or could be used for social and political ends. Prophecy was a cultural resource in an uncertain world. For the historian's retrospect, prophecy holds a mirror to this past and a world picture of those living at the time, preserving their memories and stories, their passions, traumas and preoccupations and forms of what might be described as spiritual belief.

The death of the king in 1286 was an event reported in terms of signs and portents and a warning that the Day of Judgement was at hand. This sort of prophecy falls into a pattern of 'tokens of cataclysm' familiar in the medieval period. Prophecies would typically include a list of signs that would precede the Day of Judgement, varying between death-dealing disasters and Christ's Second Coming as eschatology of poetic power in the Book of Revelations (Cowan 2009, 6-11). The succession of Robert the Bruce to the kingship in 1306 came out of the inter-regnum and Edward I's adjudication of the 'Great Cause' of succession to the Crown of Scotland. Thomas the Rhymer's prophecies were used in the Bruce cause and drew the opposition of the rival Comyns. John Comyn, Earl of Buchan, called him a liar following the Red Comyn's murder by Bruce in the Greyfriars in Dumfries, and a reference to Thomas in John Barbour's *The Brus* in the 1370s points to Thomas having prophesied the coming of a king (Duncan 1997, 82).

1 The 'Child Ballads' are still at the centre of the canon of traditional music and latter-day recordings of Child 37 have been part of the folk music revival of the second half of the 20th century. Popular examples are by Ewan MacColl, Silly Wizard and Steeleye Span, and their versions from a live recording made in Leeds in 1974 and by Maddy Prior in a 'comeback' and the Quest Tour of 2006 are available on the web; see www.youtube.com/watch?v=fo3VxbJOR14 Steeleye Span: Thomas the Rhymer (accessed 22.02.16).

Other well-known Rhymer prophecies were the defeat of James IV at Flodden in 1513, the defeat of Mary Queen of Scots at Pinkie in 1567, and the Union of the Crowns in 1603 (Geddie 1920, 8-22).

Thomas the Rhymer has been credited with the authorship of 'Sir Tristrem', a metrical romance on Tristan and Iseult in Middle English belonging to the Arthurian Cycle. The story of Sir Tristrem belongs to the reign of Alexander III and the 'golden age' before the death of the King in 1286. The text appears only in a 14th-century copy or transcription, the 'Auchinleck MS', and its authorship is disputed. Scott printed the text first in 1804, attributing it with confidence to Thomas (see Scott 1819). The amount of detail, true or false or somewhere in between, enlarges our understanding of the role and character of prophecy in this period. It has points of comparison in the supernatural elements of Thomas' relationship with the Queen of Elfland as told in the later 'Romance of Thomas of Erceldoune' edited by James Murray (Murray 1875). In the 'Romance', Thomas meets the Queen of the Fairies when hunting on the Eildons at Halloween and is abducted by her. He enters the 'Otherworld' under Eildon, a place in neither 'Heaven' nor 'Hell' in which time does not exist. This locus characterises Halloween as a sort of crack in time when you can see into the future, and therefore a mortal who comes to inhabit the Otherworld will have knowledge of the future. The Queen of the Fairies offers Thomas the gift of the tongue that can never lie, hence his other name in the literature as 'True Thomas'. Though Thomas entered Fairyland for a night, in reality his sojourn lasted years. Going into the Otherworld or Fairyland for years suggests, in other words, that he kept on disappearing; Thomas the Rhymer appears as a liminal figure. He returns after seven years bringing back the gift of second sight or prophecy. As a secular prophet, he earned the disapproval of the church, prominent in the nearby Cistercian Melrose Abbey, but he became a popular hero and cult figure. The widespread geographical distribution of prophecies evident to us now suggests journeys and places visited in Ayrshire, Annandale, the Eastern Borders and Berwickshire, East Lothian, Fife, Angus, Mearns, Aberdeenshire and Buchan, Moray and as far north as Cromarty. One specific reason for the spread of a cult can be seen in links with the Gordon family with origins in Berwickshire and subsequent rise to prominence in Buchan.

Genius loci

The Eildon Hills in Roxburghshire form a dominant feature of Scotland's Central Borders country. Their name is Old Welsh or 'Cumbric'. Their three tops are evoked in *Trimontium*, the Roman fort and complex of military remains spread over a site of nearly 150 hectares (Curle 1911; Hunter & Keppie 2012). The local strategic importance of this major series of military installations is memorised by the alignment of the modern A68 on Dere Street. A massive Iron Age fort and Roman watch-tower on Eildon Hill North rank it as a key late prehistoric site in northern Britain, and a hoard of bronze axeheads from the vicinity, comparable with Late Bronze Age finds from other sites, has prompted speculation about the significance of a possible scatter of 'central places' such as Eildon, Traprain Law, Arthur's Seat, and other sites in the Forth and Tay valleys (O'Connor & Cowie

1985, 156-8).² Material culture in the archaeology of these hilltops is enigmatic and suggestive of ritual but necessarily must remain outside the scope of this paper. Folklore and tradition might be adduced to enlarge our view of a landscape of inter-tribal gatherings, seasonal or yearly, though the concept of continuity is all too seductive and possibly fallacious (see for example Lyle 1969, 65-71). Parallels might be seen, however, in *Lughnasa* gatherings, typical on hilltop sites such as Ireland's Croagh Phadraic every July (MacNeill 1962, 71-84).

The Eildons have a distinctive place in Scotland's history, literature and folklore. They were the favourite view of Walter Scott. His viewpoint is recollected as 'Scott's View' and here, it is said, the horses pulling his hearse stopped on their journey to his burial at Dryburgh Abbey. The 'View' is immortalised by painters such as Thomas Girtin (1800), James Ward (1807) and J M W Turner (1831). Scott had an obsessive enthusiasm for them, their landscape, stones, names, songs and ballads. Other figures associated with the Eildon Hills were Merlin and Michael Scott, the 'Wizard', as well as Thomas the Rhymer. These were figures who required an entrance to the 'Otherworld' where time did not exist. Merlin was a secular prophet popularised by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century in his *Vita Merlini* and *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Possible links between the Rhymer and the 'pseudohistory' genre of Geoffrey of Monmouth have still to be identified but this may point to the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth on the Rhymer as collector and propagator in turn of the prophecies of Merlin. Michael Scott was a 13th-century academic tutor to the Prince Frederick of Germany, later the Emperor Frederick II (1220-50). Scott and subsequent writers perpetuated (or created) a tradition that the three tops of Eildon were 'platforms of prophecy' of the trio, Merlin, Michael Scott and Thomas the Rhymer. In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (Canto 2 Verse 13), Michael Scott is credited in Borders' folklore with splitting the Eildons into three hills.

Memorates

One or two objects which offer popular evidence of ancient lives are so-called 'Rhymer's Stones', the best known of which are at Earlston in the Borders and at Inverugie in Buchan. Objects such as stones or trees are markers in the landscape. They are points of reference with a meaning to people of different ages, or 'memorates' as part of 'community memory'. Memorates are part of a culture of memory, giving past events present meaning and amounting to something shared and unambiguous. The Earlston Rhymer's Stone is known to be modern (or 19th-century) and another Rhymer's Stone, near Melrose, is said to mark the site of the 'Eildon Tree' where Thomas trysted with the Fairy Queen. The 'Tree' is named in the Child Ballad and in the 'Thomas of Erceldoune' metrical romance and is therefore credibly referred to in the fourteenth century (Lyle 2007, 15-16). A stone beside the A6091 road is said to be on the site of the tree and the inscription describes it as the tree beneath which Thomas delivered his prophecies. The stone

2 I am very grateful to my former colleague in National Museums Scotland, Trevor Cowie, for guidance on the archaeological exploration of the Eildons and on the hypothesis of 'central places'.

was erected by the Melrose Literary Society in 1929, moved in 1970 and moved again to allow cars to park more safely on a busy main road. Heritage becomes commodified and truth becomes relative under the imperative of road safety:

*This stone marks the site of the Eildon Tree where legend says Thomas the Rhymer met the Queen of the Fairies and where he was inspired to utter the first notes of the Scottish Muse.*³

The Inverugie Stone is in the parish of St Fergus, Aberdeenshire, from where Thomas the Rhymer made his prophecy about the forfeiture of Dunottar and the hereditary lands of the Keiths, Earls Marischal, whose lands stretched from the Moray Firth to the River North Esk in Angus. The Stone was removed and built into the church of St Fergus in 1763. The Inverugie lands were forfeited after the 1715 Rebellion, bought back and then finally sold in 1764. The approximate site of the former Stone is said to be recalled by a field name, 'Tammass' Stane' (Eeles 1913, 470-88). Another example among several is the 'Rhymer's Hill' in Morayshire, mentioned in connection with its erosion in the 'Moray Floods' of 1829 (Barron 1880, 245).

The influence of Thomas the Rhymer on the intellectual and cultural landscape of Scotland is without doubt and we gain insights into how people saw themselves and the world around them. Identifying markers as 'memorates' and, in particular, drawing on Rhymer legends, we may understand more about public memory in history and how selective this may be in the face of adversity (see also Huyssen 2003). With evidence in the landscape and in the literary canon, the Rhymer seems securely seated also in concepts of national identity. Apart from the sweetly romantic imagery of Kate Greenaway, another memorate of Thomas the Rhymer marks him as national icon. A late-19th-century representation of Thomas the Rhymer is to be seen in William Hole's processional frieze in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery where Thomas is seen on the west balcony wall of the Ambulatory.

Thomas the idle wanderer

Thomas the Rhymer is named in Scottish Gaelic as *Tòmas Reumhair* or 'Thomas the idle wanderer', a sobriquet suiting a liminal figure or somebody who was prone to disappearing. He has a significant presence in the Gaelic world, a dimension of the subject which has tended to be ignored in the general discussion. Thomas the Rhymer had in fact a huge impact on the Gaelic consciousness, more so than other *personae* of a national pantheon such as Bruce and Wallace or other medieval figures. Curiously too, Thomas the Rhymer seems to have been seen as a Gael himself with a particular identity. From the point of view of Gaelic culture, Thomas was Scotland's most famous and celebrated prophet, his high status as prophet deriving evidently from his visit to the Otherworld. He appears to have been displaced by the 'Braham Seer' who does not figure extensively in the Gaelic oral tradition but who emerges paradoxically in the Gaelic and wider consciousness with the publication of Alexander Mackenzie's *The Prophecies of the Braham Seer*,

3 The 'Eildon Tree' recalls other traditions of trees with magical powers and associations going back in time (Ross 1967, 40).

first published in 1877 and, significantly, still in print (Mackenzie 1877). This offers a typical gathering of traditional lore, typical because it is so difficult to judge between history and artifice. It represents a version of Highland history encoded by a Victorian Highlander writing for an expectant English-speaking readership. Such writers have done their countrymen and Gaelic posterity no favours.

Information for Thomas the Rhymer in Gaelic is found in Rev John Gregorson Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* of 1900. This is among the most important British or European folklore collections ever published, comparable to Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* (Carmichael 1900) and to other compilations of the first generations of 'folklorists' and of 'scientific folklore' as a then international movement (R Black 2005, xix–xxi). In an interesting aside, it is notable that Campbell himself rejected the term 'folklore' in favour of the longer-established or familiar 'antiquities'. For the minister, perhaps, 'folklore' had connotations of a modern triviality or of untruth:

The object of the writer has always been, in all matters affecting Celtic antiquities, to make whatever he deems worthy of preservation, as available and reliable to the reader as to himself, without addition, suppression or embellishment.

(J G Campbell 1889, 50)

Gregorson Campbell was collecting between 1850 and 1874 and his representation of Thomas the Rhymer included the concepts that the Rhymer received the gift of prophecy from an Otherworld woman, that he was still in the Otherworld, and that he would in due course return. Of these motifs, the last was very much to the fore in the Highlands and in the Gaelic tradition, with *Tòmas Reumhair* seen as a messiah figure who at a certain time would reappear and save the Gaelic race. The concept of national redeemer can be seen in analogues such as Merlin's Arthur and Wales' Owain Glyndwr. This return from the dead was a messianic quality reinforced by tales of a posthumous birth, for example, as *Mac na mnatha mairbh* or 'the dead woman's son' (J G Campbell 1900, 269). Similar concepts formed part of a version recorded in South Uist by the late John Lorne Campbell of Canna in 1938 (J L Campbell 1939, 10–11).

As Thomas the Rhymer lies sleeping in the Eildons according to Borders' tradition, Gaelic tradition held that he was in Dumbuck Hill, near Dumbarton and in Tomnahurich – *Tom na h-Iubhraich*, 'The Hill of the Yew Wood'. This is the site of Inverness' municipal cemetery laid out in 1863. Thomas the Rhymer's name is attached to the ecotype legend of the 'sleeping warrior' and he rests here in the hill together with his men-at-arms and his white horses awaiting an apocalyptic summons. Tomnahurich is the focus of an alternative tradition of the 'sleeping warrior' type, that it is Fionn or 'Finn MacCumhail' and his war-band who sleep there. At the moment of summons, Thomas the Rhymer would become mortal again and would fight a great battle on the Clyde (D Mackenzie 1914, 59–61; Matheson 1938, 130). This was an area associated with the former British kingdom and might have been perceived as a frontier. Gregorson Campbell recorded the rhymed prophecy:

*Nuair a thig Tòmas le chuid each
Bidh latha nan creach air Cluaidh*

....

*(When Thomas comes with his horses,
There will be a day of spoils on the Clyde,
Nine thousand good men will be slain
And a new king will be set on the throne)* (J G Campbell 1900, 270)

The prophecy of the last battle is a repeated element of Thomas the Rhymer traditions in Scottish Gaelic. The location of the last battle according to the ‘Romance of Thomas of Erceldoune’ was a ‘Sandy Ford’, describing a ford in the river, a brae, a well, a stone and three oaks growing near the well. A ‘Sandyford’ on the Clyde, in the Glasgow district of Yorkhill, was on the river approximately where Queen’s Dock and Princes’ Dock were created in 1877 and 1897, obliterating the site.⁴

Thomas the Rhymer is introduced into songs of Montrose and the Civil Wars and then becomes identified with Jacobitism which itself became an important element in the cultural life of the Gael (A Mackenzie 1964, 28, 52, 212). The songs acted as propaganda piece and demonstrate the powerful and rhetorical function of verse and song in a society with an oral tradition (Watson 1932, 149). Dr John MacInnes has summarised the messianic view of Thomas the Rhymer and its psychological significance in Gaelic:

... the prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer, cited by a number of poets from the seventeenth century onwards, and still current in oral tradition, that one day the Gaels of Scotland will come into their own again. This formulation of the messianic hope of Gaelic nationalism, here firmly identified with Jacobitism, must have been already well-known before the Montrose Wars give it a new dynamic – Iain Lom refers to it casually as an established tradition. (MacInnes 2006, 315)

The formulation of a messianic hope for a pan-Gaelic nationalism, that the Gaels of Scotland would come into their own again, was sustained in different circumstances in the 19th century. Dr John MacLachlan of Rahoy (1804-74) was a physician in Morvern and North Argyll who published a book of songs in 1869. He wrote compellingly about a devastated landscape, the iniquities of the Clearances and Thomas as prophet and messiah (Gillies 1880, 33-4; Meek 2003, 50-4, 403-4). A complex of changes, particularly in the 19th century, was ascribed in the Gaelic psyche to the balance or harmony of former times being destroyed; significantly, the Gaelic term *caochladh* with its range of meanings from ‘change’ to ‘death’ was used for this trauma.⁵ Another cryptic prophecy ascribed to Thomas the Rhymer concerned the Highlands and the Clearances, inferring perhaps that this massive injustice couched in such banal terms could be reversed: ‘The jawbone of the sheep will put the plough on the hen roost’, or alternatively, ‘the teeth of the

4 The last battle motif is used by Sileas MacDonald in 1715: *Gu bheil Tòmas ag ràdh ann a fhàistneachd* (‘Thomas says in his prophecy that it is the Gaels who will win the victory, every brow shall sweat blood, fighting the battle at the River Clyde.’) (O Baoill 1972, 42-3)

5 It is difficult to find contemporary voices from within Gaelic culture to substantiate this but see Diarmad 1876, 298, under the pen-name used by D C Macpherson of the Advocates’ Library.

sheep shall lay the plough on the shelf' (*Cuiridh peirceall na caora an crann air an fharadh*) (Nicolson 1951, 159; Chambers 1870, 220; Gillies 1880, 34).

Prophecy in print

Prophecies ascribed by tradition to Thomas the Rhymer were printed in 1603 by Robert Waldegrave of Edinburgh in *The Whole Prophecie of Scotland, England, & Some Part of France, and Denmark*. Marking the ascending of James VI to the English throne, the *Whole Prophecie* recalled the coming of a single king, a second Arthur, to unite all Britain. This was, of course, a form of state-sponsored prophecy. Naturally too there were many editions of *The Whole Prophecie* from 1603 and it continued to be printed in chapbook form down to the beginning of the 19th century (Geddie 1920). It can be claimed that chapbook literature was the probable catalyst for the spread of stories and beliefs about Thomas the Rhymer and their dissemination in Gàidhealtachd culture. The medium was the message and easily crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries. The question of how he then becomes a Gael is more complex but doubtless the Rhymer answered a need.

Conclusions – the long view

Thomas the Rhymer prophecies have been narrated, analysed and explained by 19th-century editors and packaged for a modern audience. They seem anodyne and even divorced from popular belief. Can we reconstruct a context for remote origins of this belief? A context might be a response to the dramatic imposition of order and authority in the form of the 12th-century church and the foundations of David I. The nearest manifestation of a new order to Earlston was Melrose, founded by the Cistercians about 1136-44 and colonised from Rievaulx. Other major foundations in the region were Kelso (Tironensian), Selkirk (Tironensian), Dryburgh (Premonstratensian), and Jedburgh (Augustinian). Symbols of authority were new, 'foreign' and pervasive. It may be difficult for us to appreciate fully these elements when the visual aesthetic presented by Historic Environment Scotland dominates our view. Was the new church disliked? Was it even hated and detested? Excavations at Melrose have revealed that the establishment was vast, with accommodation for 140 choir monks and 500 lay brethren. The 360-foot west range is said to have been the longest in Europe (Cruden 1986). If an individual – and there must have been many *nativi* – chose to take a stance against this invasion, how might they undermine it? The secular prophet seems to offer an insight into disputatious and anarchic tendencies in us all. Another difficulty in the way of understanding is that belief would be more nuanced than opposites or a dichotomy between Christianity and Paganism (see, for example, Clarke 2007, 19-39).

A study of a liminal topic such as Thomas the Rhymer may be more valuable for the questions it raises than the answers it provides. Such a topic, residing in a more liberal approach to historical studies, should be allowed to take conceptual risks or challenge conventional understanding. (See also Burke 2001, 11-12.) In the domain of material culture and museum studies, the boundaries set by disciplines and academic institutions may be more readily crossed and interaction between

archaeology and history more energetically espoused. With a figure who might be said to reside in proto-history, can lessons be drawn from Thomas the Rhymer for archaeology? Thomas the Rhymer tells us about belief and how people viewed and valued what they were saying, whether in fact they believed it or not. This is to enter the 'dark places'. In terms of belief or 'folk belief', we understand an often intense interest in prophecy, expressing hopes and fears and supplying a fiction when needed. The time element supplies a view of a putative future and it may lend corroboration to interpretations of monuments and megaliths also as views of the future. Discounting modern literature, the Rhymer phenomenon lasts more than six hundred years, from the 1280s to the 1930s, and produces an oral literature whose form and message changes according to variables such as ideology and issues of identity and ethnicity. Further analysis of the Rhymer material may suggest insights for Iron Age 'ethnic constructions'. Objects such as trees and stones serve as points of reference and might be classified as the 'folklore of sites and objects'. With a new interest in memory, in collective memory and 'commemoration', we are now tuned to ask what these mean to people. An intensive questioning of memory of course may tell us more about the present, and circumstances where markers and 'memorates' represent people giving an account of places and looking for explanations. Memorates offer a sense of purpose, synchronic perhaps as opposed to diachronic, and reflect the discovery of the past in the 19th century, a process possibly skewing or exaggerating popular belief or at least reminding us of phases of recall such as might be represented in the rehearsal of Thomas the Rhymer legend.

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Expiscation! Disentangling the later biography of the St Andrews Sarcophagus

Sally M Foster

Abstract

Replicas may complicate but also help to complete the biographies of their parent objects. Disentangling the antiquarian history of the St Andrews Sarcophagus introduces an unexpectedly precocious and productive programme of early 19th-century replication of archaeological objects for the purposes of archaeological science ('expiscation'), and its subsequent commodification. Credit for this goes to the pioneering actions of George Buist, a newspaper editor and intellectual then based in Fife (eastern Scotland). New archival and documentary research, physical examination of surviving plaster casts and scientific analysis of the original Sarcophagus provide a tantalising glimpse into the interest and energies of early antiquarian societies and their web of connections across Britain and Ireland. They also highlight how the poor or non-existent documentation of past conservation and display practices can hamper our ability to understand the composite biography of both the casts and the subject being cast. This study also demonstrates how the fabric of plaster casts can tell us more about their stories too, not least about their technology and the decisive role of the under-appreciated craftspeople who made them.

Keywords: *Antiquarianism, cultural biography, Early Medieval sculpture, entanglement, facsimiles, plaster casts, replication, George Buist, St Andrews Sarcophagus*

The production and exhibition of replicas of archaeological material was a very significant and serious enterprise for museums, art schools and international fairs, particularly between the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London and the First World War (Foster & Curtis 2016). The majority of the replicated objects were plaster casts of sculptures (Classical, Late Medieval and Renaissance, but also some Early Medieval: McCormick 2010; 2013). In Britain and Ireland much of this activity was driven through the offices of the Department of Science and Art in London and its South Kensington Museum (what we now know as the Victoria & Albert Museum). They promoted a correct way of teaching art that would improve

design and architecture as well as improve public taste, and they did so through the use of reproductions (Levine 1972; Morris 1986). Facilitated by government grants, the production of such plaster casts of sculpture flourished in Victorian and Edwardian times. This powerful and influential bureaucratic engine (Foster 2014) risks masking the very specific and local sets of relationships that were responsible for much of what happened on the ground and at the institutional level elsewhere. It is clear that individual antiquaries, landowners and local societies also played a very important and largely independent role in creating replicas (Foster 2013). In this respect, the production in 1839 of plaster casts of the so-called St Andrews Sarcophagus (henceforth Sarcophagus), one of the most accomplished surviving Pictish sculptures, testifies to an unexpectedly precocious programme of replication of archaeological material culture for the purposes of archaeological science. The story of these casts also contributes to the birth of interest in Early Medieval material culture, and to the international demand for, and trade in, its replicas.

There are a number of reasons to revisit earlier work on the modern history of the Sarcophagus and the casts that were made of it (Foster 1998a). These include further research as part of a project looking at the composite biographies of plaster casts and their parent objects (Foster & Curtis 2016), McCormick's (2010, 65) revelation that casts of the Sarcophagus were on display at the Dublin Industrial Exhibition of 1853, and Goldberg and Blackwell's (2013) exploration of the different histories of the Norrie's Law hoard. The latter serendipitously led us to recognise linkages within a wide network of people, places and objects, where a certain George Buist (1805-60) is the key figure and is revealed as an unsung archaeological pioneer. (Foster et al 2014 brings these stories together and provides a wider context for what follows here.)

'Expiscation' (literally translated as 'fishing out') – the process of finding out by skill or laborious effort – was one of Buist's trademark terms. It sounds old-fashioned now but encapsulates what he saw as the overall purpose of 'multiplication of fac simile models ... of remarkable relicts' and, indeed, of publication (Muniments of the University of St Andrews UY8528/1/21(a)). As a fellow expiscator of carved stones and their biographies, with his work on recasting the earlier significance of the Sarcophagus (see below), I hope David Clarke will therefore enjoy what follows and, between this and the complementary joint paper that it has spawned, will appreciate my fun and tribulations in attempting to expiscate this monument's *later*, antiquarian biography through a re-examination of the histories of its mid-19th-century casts.¹

The backbone of this research is new information obtained through detective work in museum and other archives (see Acknowledgements), wider reading (including more extensive use of contemporary newspapers than hitherto), re-examination of the surviving casts from the perspective of what their fabric tells us about their manufacture and later history, and scientific analysis of the

1 Perhaps surprisingly for such a very important monument, there have been no further attempts to cast or replicate the Sarcophagus in its entirety. The only other casts in the collections of National Museums Scotland (NMS) are those made in 1922 (NMS X.IB 192) and 1937 (NMS X.IB 245); these are parts or all of stone 3 (Foster 1998a, 40-1).

surfaces of the original Sarcophagus (courtesy of the Historic Environment Scotland Conservation Directorate) to explore the extent to which the fabric of the Sarcophagus bears witness to its post-discovery history.

Disentangling the histories of the casts

To date, scholars generally interpret the Sarcophagus as a composite stone shrine, probably of the second half of the eighth century, built for and on behalf of at least one Pictish king, perhaps Oengus son of Fergus (d. 761), within the royal monastery of St Andrews (Fife, eastern Scotland). Surviving are one long panel (stone 1), one complete short panel (stone 2) and parts of what is thought to be a second short panel (stone 3), and three corner-slabs (stones 4-6), each decorated on their outer surfaces only. Assuming that it *was* a shrine – and Clarke et al (2012, 45, 95) suggest architectural alternatives – the so-called Sarcophagus originally comprised nine components: two long side panels and two short end panels, held together at the corners by tenons on their lateral edges that slotted into the grooves of four corner-slabs. The broad faces of the corner-slabs would frame the long panels, the narrow faces the short panels (Fig 1a). A presumed lid does not survive (Henderson 1998).

The casts are born

Interested ‘gentlemen’ established the Fifeshire Literary, Scientific and Philosophical Society (henceforth Fifeshire Society) in late 1837. Among its objectives was the opening of a ‘Library and Museum open to all members ... in the County Town [Cupar] as soon as possible, in order to be able to procure and preserve communications and specimens illustrative of the subjects [of the Society]’. Mr. Thomas Shaw ‘Writer, Cupar’ and Mr. Ewing ‘Nurseryman’ were elected ‘Conservators of the Museum’ (*Fifeshire Journal* 16 Nov 1837, 1, 3). The chair highlighted the potential of the county for research and discovery – an emphasis on the local that later Society documentation reinforces (eg *ibid* 10 May 1838, 1). November 1837 also heralded the arrival in Cupar of George Buist as editor of the *Fifeshire Journal*. The son of the Rev J Buist,² born at Tannadice in Angus, Buist was educated in St Andrews and Edinburgh before going on to edit newspapers in both Perth and Dundee. Buist quickly dominated Fife literary and scientific circles, just as he did when he arrived in Bombay in 1840 to edit the *Bombay Times* (Campbell 2009, 42-5; Morrison-Low 2005). By 8 May 1838 when the Society’s museum opened, he was a curator, the self-acknowledged lead figure (*Fifeshire Journal* 10 May 1838, 1; Buist 1854, 234).³

2 This corrects Foster 1998a, 50, where I followed Hay Fleming in his suggestion that Rev George Buist, Professor of Church History at St Mary’s College, St Andrews, and convenor of the St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Museum, was Buist’s father (Hay Fleming 1931, 3). Confusingly, George Buists abound in the records of the Fife antiquarian societies.

3 Notices in the contemporary newspapers are the main source of evidence for the workings of the Fifeshire Society (*Fifeshire Journal*, *Fife Herald*); while its list of subscribers and album of visitors to the museum survive in Cupar Library, its minute books are lost (Fifeshire Literary, Scientific and Antiquarian Society 1838-67; 1838).

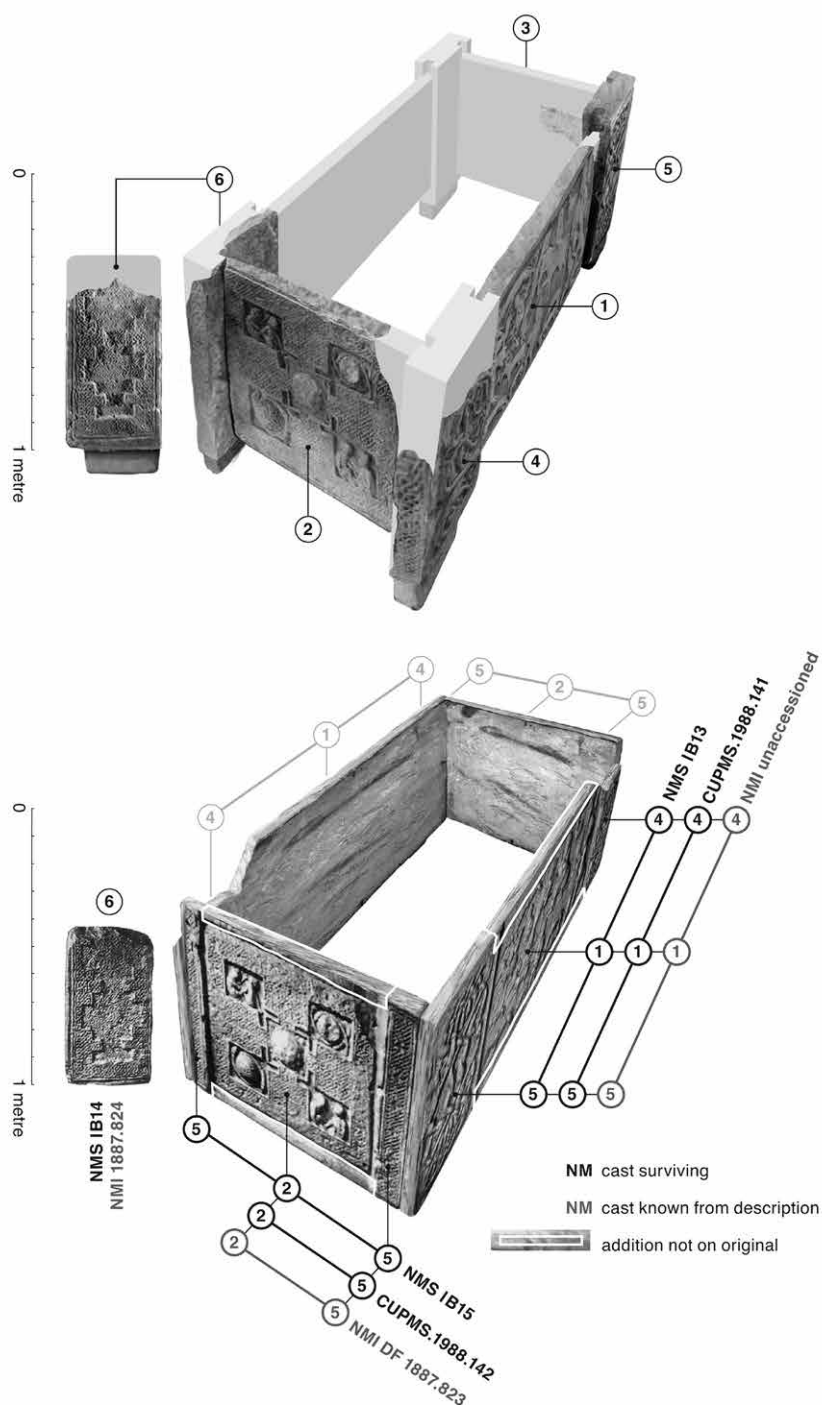


Figure 1. Schematic reconstructions summarising the form of (a) the St Andrews Sarcophagus as presently displayed in St Andrews Cathedral Museum with (b) the reconstructed Cupar cast, based on the surviving casts and descriptions. Graphic by Christina Unwin, © Sally Foster (incorporating photographs in (a) that are Crown Copyright (Historic Environment Scotland). Licensors canmore.org.uk and B Keeling; and in (b) © National Museums Scotland)

The burghal pride attached to the Museum in Cupar is apparent in the Society's desire to enlarge and improve their museum within a year, opening it 'with as much éclat as possible before the Caledonian Hunt, so that it may be seen to advantage by the strangers then in town' (*Fifeshire Journal* 15 Aug 1839, 2; the Royal Caledonian and Fife Hunt ran over Cupar Race Course on 1-2 Oct 1839). When it reopened in 1839, the museum included the Sarcophagus, sharing a space with Cape deer, antelope and goats' heads, and an elk head from Nova Scotia, alongside local fossils (*ibid*, 3 Oct 1839, 2). The Sarcophagus was on loan for a few weeks from the St Andrews Literary and Philosophical Society (henceforth the St Andrews Society), itself only founded in April 1838. Buist had already tried to get a cast made, failed, and wanted to borrow the Sarcophagus to have another go, although it was only on 6 November that he suggested to the Fife Society that they get a cast made. This, he informed them, would cost about £4, or roughly £3,000 in present day terms (*ibid*, 14 Nov 1839, 4; *Fife Herald* 14 Nov 1839, 3):⁴

There is no modeller or moulder in St Andrews; – but were the slabs removed for a few weeks to Cupar where abundant in-door accomodation [sic] can be provided for these & for those who may be engaged in copying them models in clay or casts in plaster could easily be procured & multiplied ad libetum [sic] without damage to the sculptures ...by which means a step will have been taken for the expiscation of information in reference to one of the distant and least known branches of Archaeology' (letter in Buist's hand: Muniments of the University of St Andrews UY8528/1/21(a) 1839).

On that same day, Buist announced his resignation from the Society. He was about to move to India, but clearly found the time beforehand to oversee the production of the casts, for they were on display by 19 Dec 1839, as reported in the *Fife Herald*. Buist himself is the undoubted author (*pace* Hay Fleming 1931, 5 n1). His full statement, an extract of which follows, is rich in description and explains the pragmatic philosophy behind its reproduction and display:

MAGNIFICENT SARCOPHAGUS. – Now stands the sarcophagus, or at least there stands its plaster image, a fac-simile of the original, complete in all its parts, even to the colour of the blocks – a splendid resting-place for some of the mighty of Scotland's earlier days. It is 6 feet in length; over the middle its breadth is 2 feet 10 inches; and over the extremities, which project in the form of pilaster to support the top, it is 3 ½ feet. Its depth throughout is 2 feet 4 inches ... The undiscovered portions have been very judiciously supplied by the Cupar Society, causing duplicates to be cast of those which are entire; not that there is the slightest reason to believe that any two portions of the stone were alike, where variety was so much courted, but that this completes and exhibits at once the form and size of the sarcophagus, without the slightest tendency to mislead – the fact being noted on the descriptive ticket – as a conjectural restoration would have been sure to have done. In future, no one desiring to illustrate the antiquities of Fife will dare venture to do so without giving a faithful drawing of the Cupar Restoration of the St Andrews Sarcophagus.

4 Calculated using the website *Measuring Worth*, www.measuringworth.com, accessed 31 January 2016.

We hope that the liberality of its members, and the extension especially of the system of life membership, will speedily relieve the funds of the Society, which have been drained by the expense attendant upon this valuable relic. The St Andrews Society, we trust, will no longer allow the “disjecta membra” [scattered fragments] of this monument of the fourth century to be scattered about. The artist (Mr Ross of Cupar) who has executed the cast, deserves the highest credit for the fidelity and beauty of the execution (my emphasis).

Replicating the manufacture of the casts

The subsequent history of the casts is very much a story of two halves and a bit – and more, as we shall later see. Although details of their provenance have not travelled with them, casts that accord with the *Fife Herald* descriptions survive in the St Andrews Museum (CUPMS.1988.141 and .142) and in the collections of National Museums Scotland (henceforth NMS) (NMS X.IB 13-15).⁵ Examination of these casts provides important clues for their manufacture. As will unfold, we can be confident that the Ross workshop in Cupar made both these sets of casts. Just as examining the casts tells us about aspects of their manufacture and later biographies, the surviving original carved stones also have their story to tell about the casting process and its aftermath.

Reconstruction

The surviving casts indicate what Ross did to reconstruct the form of the original monument. He took moulds of the decorated outer faces of stones 1, 4 and 5 and created a single plaster cast from these of the long side, minus tenons. For the cast, Ross swapped stones 4 and 5 around; this arrangement could never work in practice but may have been an aesthetic decision, since the broken corners of stones 1 and 4 could then ‘match up’. Since the long panel is less tall than the surrounding corner-slabs, he added blank space above and below the outer carved mouldings. He took several casts of the narrow face of stone 5 and one of the short panel, stone 2. Framing stone 2 with stone 5 on the left and right sides, he again created a single plaster cast, this time for the short end of the ‘coffin’.⁶ For display at Cupar, we assume he created two versions of his composite casts, to complete the reconstructed box form (Fig 1b). How the Fifeshire Society mounted the casts for

5 At some point after the move of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland to its premises in Queen Street in 1890, and during R B K Stevenson’s tenure (as Assistant Keeper 1938, then Keeper 1946-78), Museum staff carefully cut up the long and short sides of their cast into three sections each, at the junctions of the panels and corner slabs, and then painted their fronts and sides after remounting. The reason for this seems likely to have been the recognition that the composite cast was inaccurate in the way in which it arranged (and duplicated) the component parts of the Sarcophagus. These actions suggest that the intrinsic value of the 1839 cast was less valued than the ability to recycle the existing casts for display, but the resultant cross-section is a boon, revealing aspects of Ross’ manufacture (see below).

6 Stone 3 was undoubtedly deemed too fragmentary to cast (assuming that it travelled to Cupar) and the largest part (3a) was in York at this time, having been removed there by a visiting antiquary in 1836 (Foster 1998, 40-1).

display is not clear from the surviving examples but there is certainly no evidence for the introduction of a modern lid. Since they would have been visible, it seems likely that Ross painted both the inside and outside of his casts.

Plasterers' techniques

More aspects of the individual plasterers' techniques and hand(s) are visible in the fabric of the casts, not least a series of rather obvious plasterers' tool marks on the sculptured surface of the long side in St Andrews Museum. Gelatine moulds were particularly useful for moulding sculpture with deep undercuts (Billbey & Cribb 2005, 163) and would be the obvious choice for stone 1, at the very least. If plaster moulds were used, there was one mould per face, since no vestigial seams from piece moulds are visible on any of these. Having obtained a mould of the carved surfaces of each face, the gaps between these moulds needed to be joined (probably with pliable clay) to enable a single-piece casting of either the long or short sides of the Sarcophagus. A similar material would have been used to extend the height (top and bottom) of stone 1. A distinctive recess around all the edges of the long side in St Andrews Museum demonstrates the use of thin fillets of wood to define the edge of the overall cast (Fig 2), presumably held in place by a larger wooden frame during the casting process. There is little surviving evidence for use of timber fillets on the surviving casts in the NMS collections, the side and upper edges of which have instead been reworked using a tool with broad serrated teeth while the plaster was green. To strengthen the heavy casts, about halfway through



Figure 2. The lower right-hand corner of the cast of the long side of the Sarcophagus in St Andrews Museum (CUPMS.1988.141), showing the distinctive ledge around its edge and layers of paint. Photograph © Doug Simpson

pouring plaster into the mould Ross laid a series of apparently unmeshed iron rods (7 mm square in section) lengthwise, presumably coated to prevent rust. These are only visible because the NMS casts have been cut up (as described in footnote 5).

It is to the original Sarcophagus that we have to look for more details of the casting process, specifically how Ross cast such a three-dimensional sculpture. Research by Welander in 1996/7 first paid attention to an unusual whitish deposit, with an occasional blue-green tinge, that is visible on the front of stones 1 and 5 (Welander 1998). A single X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis by the British Museum identified the surface treatment as lead white, while a Historic Scotland stone conservator noted that small plugs of potter's clay underlay this white layer in certain places, particularly in heavily undercut or perforated details. Welander suggested the clay represented vestiges of the casting process, being used to allow easy release from undercutting or other obstacles. He also noted that the white layer must be later, but how much later was unknown.

For this project, Historic Scotland (as it was still then known) kindly widened the chemical analysis of the surfaces of the surviving fragments of the Sarcophagus using portable XRF (27 readings) and Near Infrared spectroscopy (NIR: 151 readings) (Historic Scotland Conservation Group 2012). Their results, when indicating cultural as opposed to natural (geological) factors, can be interpreted as follows.

First, the XRF confirms that the whitish layer largely still covering stones 5 (broad face, some slight traces on narrow face) and 1 is likely to be lead white ($\text{Pb}_3(\text{CO}_3)_2(\text{OH})_2$, hydrocerussite) with some barium sulphate. Lead white was a common inorganic pigment. Barium sulphate was used as a colourant in its own right and as a substance to extend paint from the late 18th century, becoming more common in the early 19th century (Bankart 1909, 7; Campbell 2000, 159-60). Its low concentrations here suggest it was a contaminant rather than a deliberately-applied substance. The NIR analysis showed no discernible chemical difference between the white and blueish areas of the front of stone 1. No chemical trace of this was found on stone 4, despite the visibility of the same surface treatment in earlier photographs (eg Allen & Anderson 1903, III, fig 365). We can probably attribute this to the stone having undergone a different conservation history from stones 1 and 5, which involved the removal of this layer. Conservation records for the Sarcophagus as a whole prior to 1996 are slight to non-existent (Welander 1998), yet its display history is demonstrably complex (Foster 1998a, 50-62), involving reconstruction and removal of previous attempts to construct the incomplete stone 4.

Second, the XRF data suggest that a faint white deposit observed on the back of stone 1 is likely to be gypsum ($\text{CaS}_4.2\text{H}_2\text{O}$). This was widespread on all the stone surfaces that Ross cast in 1839. NIR also suggested the presence of gypsum on the rear of stone 1 and both sides of stone 2, but there was a difference with the front of stone 1. Ross used gypsum to create the casts, but what is less certain is whether he used gypsum to take the moulds from the Sarcophagus, particularly when gelatine was more practical for at least one of the stones. The Sarcophagus was in a plasterer's workshop and would have come into contact with gypsum-

covered surfaces. The wash used to clean the stones after moulding, to remove the releasing agent, could also have contained some gypsum. But if the moulds were made with gypsum, and the lead-white coating post-dated the casting, it could explain why gypsum levels were lower on the face of stone 1. Stone 3 was not cast by Ross; and it had a very different conservation history to the other stones. The XRF only analysed stones 3a and 3c, but the SO₃ levels which indicate gypsum were very low relative to most of the other samples, and the NIR signals were also mostly from stone rather than from any patina or surface treatment.

Clearly then, at some point during or after the 1839 casting process, the front of stones 1, 4 and 5 (the impressive, long side of the Sarcophagus) were painted with a product that included lead white. Who did this, why, when, and on whose authority? The most obvious reasons for applying it are:

- a. as a releasing agent to help lift the mould from the original;
- b. as a pigment to cover any residual materials left after the casting process on what, with its deep relief, would have been a technically challenging series of faces to cast; and/or
- c. as a pigment to improve the appearance of the main surviving face of the monument.

We cannot exclude the possibility that the St Andrews Society applied the white lead to the Sarcophagus on its return; but Ross' workshop, with its undoubtedly ready access to decorators' paint, seems the most likely place for this to have taken place, immediately after the casting. Welander (1998, 66) doubted that the custodians would have been 'so cavalier with their new prize ... for any reason as prosaic as "improving" its appearance'. Option (a) is unlikely because there is relatively little gypsum on the lead white surface, although the presence of some supports the argument that the layer was applied in the plasterer's workshop. The good condition of the surviving white layer suggests to me that it was not damaged or discoloured by the casting process, which makes options (b) and/or (c) more likely. As well as using clay to plug the undercut sculptures,⁷ a clay slip is a likely releasing agent for Ross to have used. Since Ross could easily have washed this off with water, we can conclude that the paint was a deliberate attempt to improve the appearance of the Sarcophagus' most impressive side. Conceivably, the moulding process also caused some discolouring that Ross wanted to mask (*pace* Welander 1998, 67), perhaps even damage caused by Buist in his earlier failed attempt to cast it (see above). The final resemblance, closer to more familiar classical sculpture, may be telling, too, of the normal expectations for ancient sculpture: we are within a generation of the arrival of the Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles in Britain, of which Edinburgh's Trustees Academy already had an extensive cast collection by the mid-1830s (see Naik & Stewart 2007). I suspect that this hypothetical whitening of the stone was all at Ross' initiative rather than on Buist's instruction.

7 The St Andrews Sarcophagus is the only Pictish sculpture that is undercut to any extent: I G Scott, pers comm.

The 'thicker' histories of the casts from Cupar

I now question my 1998 theory that the four sides of the 1839 Cupar cast were later split up and ultimately ended up half in Edinburgh and half in St Andrews. From the stories of individual casts that follow – which are very difficult to reconcile – it seems that Ross' workshop produced casts additional to those displayed in the museum in Cupar.

Newcastle upon Tyne

Hay Fleming (1931, 5) refers to a cast in Newcastle, in the Black Gate Tower, which he thinks was probably made in 1839 too, but offers no opinion on provenance.⁸ We know that Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan, a Northumbrian antiquarian (Goddard 1929, 161-3), donated a cast to the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle in 1848. It may be significant that this coincides with when the Society first leased the

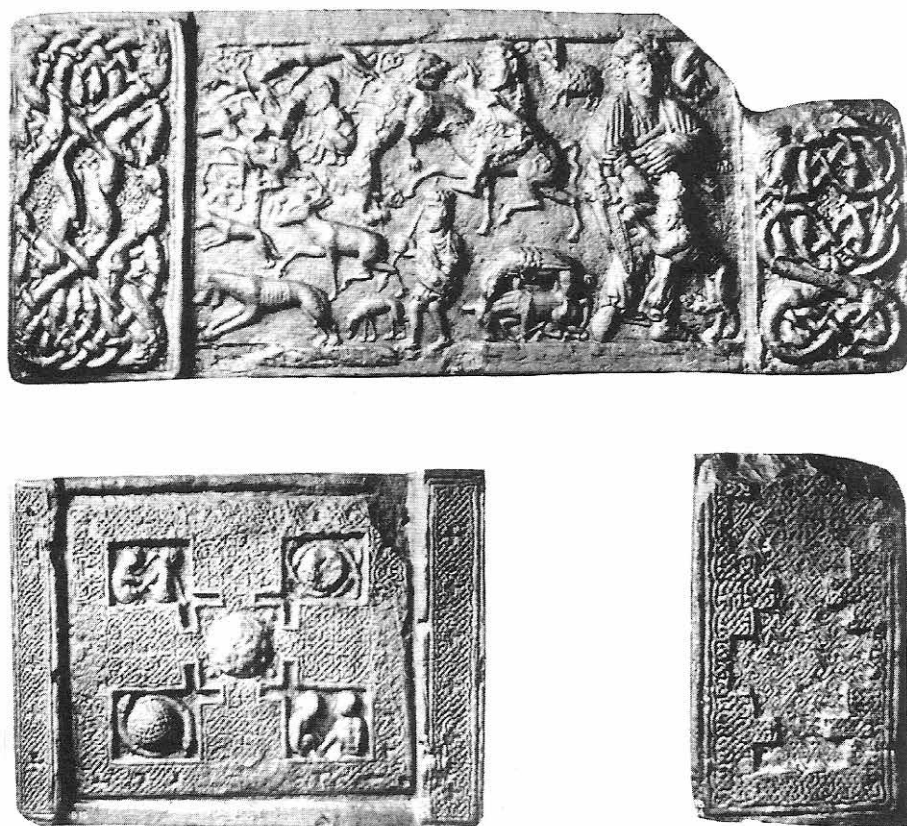


Figure 3. The Sarcophagus casts held by the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland as photographed in 1936 or before (Mowbray 1936, pl I). © National Museums Scotland

8 Radford (1955, 5 fn) is probably reading Hay Fleming wrongly when he states that a part of the actual Sarcophagus went to the Black Gate Tower.

Norman Castle Keep for its activities, so its museum must have been redisplayed at this time. The Newcastle cast was last recorded in their collection in 1931 and lost by 1956 (detail in Foster 1998a, 53).

Edinburgh

The surviving casts in the NMS collections were ‘presented by subscription of Fellows of the Society [of Antiquaries of Scotland], 1849’ (Wilson 1849, 73 nos. 5-7) (Fig 3).⁹ We must therefore consider the significance of this acquisition in the context of Daniel Wilson’s efforts to establish a national museum of archaeology, a key plank in his ambition to popularise archaeology and generate nationalism (see eg Ash 1981, 101-3). At this time he was actively seeking new material from across Britain for the Society’s collections, which he redisplayed and catalogued in 1849. To judge from subsequent Catalogues (*Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 1863, 50 no 17; 1870, 84 no 19; 1876, 118 no 31; 1892, 260 nos IB 13-15), the casts were on permanent display (Fig 4) and only taken off display in the 1970s (David Clarke, in litt).

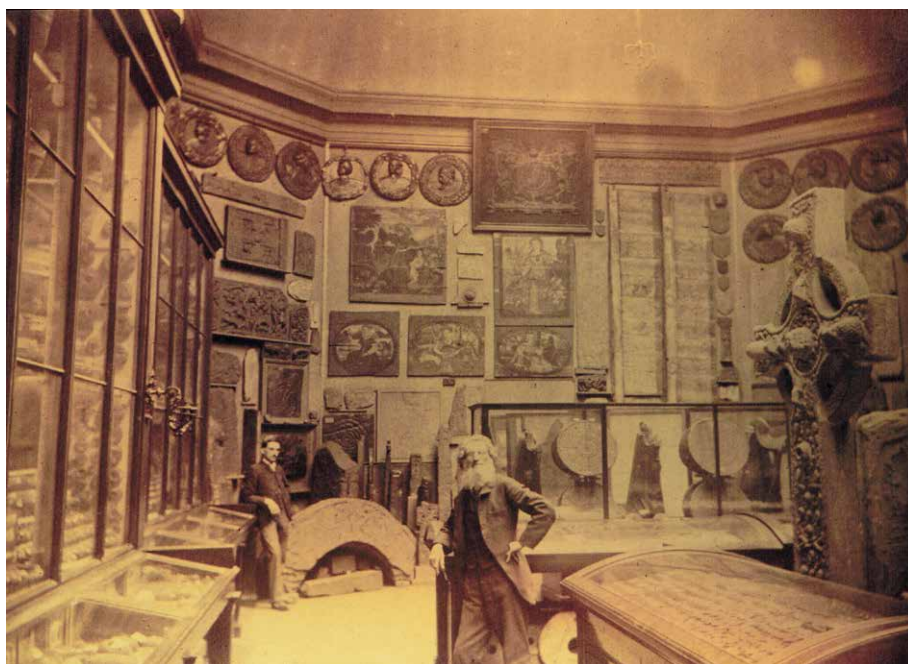


Figure 4. Wall-mounted casts of the St Andrews Sarcophagus on display in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in George Street, before the 1890 move to Queen Street. Keeper Joseph Anderson in foreground, with the casts above his assistant, George Black, in the corner. © National Museums Scotland

⁹ At the time of writing, the NMS electronic catalogue does not include this information and my earlier research also missed it. I have gleaned no further information about this from the Society’s minutes, correspondence or communications, bound copies of which survive in the library of the NMS. The Society’s 1890 retrospective list of donations for this period omits the casts.

Dublin

The descriptions of the casts displayed in the Dublin Industrial Exhibition of 1853 suggest that these matched those now in Edinburgh (Anonymous 1853, 143-4, cat nos 1877-9; Sproule 1854, 477 no 33): a long side (like NMS X.IB 13), a short side (like NMS X.IB 15, although from the description it is not clear if the end panel was framed by any narrow faces of the corner-slabs); and a cast of the broad face of stone 6 (like NMS X.IB 14), ‘decorated with the same intricate knotwork’ as the end panel.

When the Crystal Palace Company purchased casts of sculpture from Dublin for permanent display at Sydenham (London), so that visitors could see examples of art and architecture of all civilisations (Kenworthy-Browne 2006), they did not purchase the Sarcophagus casts. All or parts of the cast were on display in the basement of the Royal Irish Academy’s (henceforth RIA) Museum of Irish Antiquities in 1876 (Royal Irish Academy 1876, 8) and two portions were later displayed in the Science and Art Museum in 1890 (Ball 1890, 37-8). The present database of the Art and Industry section of the National Museum of Ireland (henceforth NMI) has a record of two items each described as a ‘plaster-cast, part of the ancient cross at St Andrews, Scotland’ (DF: 1887.823 and .824).¹⁰ The 19th-century museum register notes that these were transferred from the museum to the RIA in June 1894, but neither they nor the NMI can now trace any further record of them. Their recorded dimensions of 2’ 8 ½” x 2’ 4 ¼” (82 x 72 cm) and 1’ 2” x 2’ 1” (37 x 64 cm) are telling, however. The first of these closely matches the dimensions of the cast of the end panel now in St Andrews Museum (CUPMS 1988.142; see below). The St Andrews Museum cast notably includes only one narrow face of a corner-slab in its composite cast, is mounted in what looks to be a 19th-century wooden frame, and is not painted on its rear.¹¹ The second set of measurements is very close to the NMS stone 6 cast (NMS X.IB 14: 37 x 61 cm). By 1890 the Dublin cast of the long side of the Sarcophagus was therefore no longer on display and the absence of an 1887 accession number for anything matching its dimensions would suggest it had disappeared beforehand.

Fortunately, we have a relatively full appreciation of the context in which the Sarcophagus casts were acquired for display in Dublin, and the behind-the-scenes activity that led to this. The Dublin Industrial Exhibition of 1853 was the first international exhibition to include a section devoted to antiquities, and it was particularly noted for its prominent promotion of ancient Irish art (Ó Floinn 2012, 149). The Sarcophagus casts were part of a group of casts and stones selected by the Fine Arts Committee of the exhibition, under the chairmanship of Lord Talbot de Malahide, a politician and prominent antiquary who was active in both Ireland and Britain (Seccombe 2004). De Malahide’s objectives and methods are documented in various sources, including the business-reporting pages of *Antiquaries Journal* (9 (1852), 381, 396-8; 10 (1853), 65). The aim was to ‘popularise [the] ... objects of archaeology’, ‘illustrate the natural connexion [sic] between the aboriginal

10 The short end of the Sarcophagus and the broad face of stone 6 could well be described as such by someone unfamiliar with their background and detail of their form.

11 Without removing the cast from its frame it is not possible to tell if it was intentionally cast this way.

inhabitants of Great Britain and those of Ireland’ and to ‘unite the display of monuments’ that could not otherwise be displayed together, noting the value of creating faithful representations because the originals were ‘becoming every day more dilapidated, and exposed to injury’.

Very few British antiquities, whether casts or original, were selected for display, so the question is why the Sarcophagus was included, and how the casts were obtained. We know that to encourage contributions in general, the Dublin exhibition’s Executive Committee sent its two secretaries to Britain and around Europe. The Assistant Secretary John C Deane visited Edinburgh, Kirkcaldy, Dundee and Stirling while in Scotland (Sproule 1854, 9), actively seeking casts of objects:

An application from Mr J. Deane, for permission to take casts of certain objects in the Museum, for the Dublin National Exhibition of 1853, with the offer of other casts in exchange, was submitted to the Council, and it was remitted to Mr. Chambers and Dr. Wilson, to meet Mr. Dean [sic] in the Museum, with power to authorise the taking of any casts that might be desired, provided they could be done without any risk of injury to the originals (Society of Antiquaries Council minutes, 5 Nov 1852)

In 1851, Wilson’s *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* had first brought the Sarcophagus to serious antiquarian attention, so Deane and his colleagues could have been aware of the Sarcophagus from this, and in visiting the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland they could also have seen their Sarcophagus casts, acquired in 1849. If he hatched the idea in Edinburgh, Deane must have made arrangements for the casts to be made in Fife rather than using Edinburgh’s existing copy, since the Dublin catalogue (Sproule 1854, 479, no 96) does not list the Sarcophagus among the casts that the Society of Antiquaries supplied per its Secretary, D Wilson.

St Andrews Museum

In 1988 the casts now in the St Andrews Museum were passed to North-East Fife Museums from the McManus Museum in Dundee, who have no surviving record of when or how they acquired them, but we can infer that this took place after 1911.¹²

Glasgow

The minutes of the Glasgow International Exhibition Association of 10 September 1900, planning for the 1901 Exhibition, refer to the intention to cast a stone or stones at St Andrews, per Messrs D and J Mackenzie, but there is no evidence that this took place.

12 The catalogue of [cast] sculptured stones of Scotland that was published to coincide with the opening of Dundee’s new Sculpture Galleries does not mention them (Martin 1911).

Mapping the casts

The early Victorian production and circulation of casts of the Sarcophagus is therefore far more complicated than I had previously realised, and the documentation is patchy (Fig 5). We know that:

- Ross made two each of the composite casts of a long and a short side in 1839, two each of the long and short sides, immediately displayed in Cupar;
- Trevelyan had a cast of some part of the Sarcophagus by 1848;
- the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland had a composite long side and short side, and a broad face of a corner-slab by 1849, which NMS still have; and
- the NMI had the same (or near version of same) from 1853 to 1894 (although their long side disappears from the record some time beforehand) and there is no record of the casts in either the NMI or RIA after that;
- North-East Fife Museums Service had a cast of the long side and short side (with one narrow face of a corner-slab only) by 1988, which Dundee acquired at an unknown time and from an unknown source.

This begs the question of how many casts were ever made, when, where and by whom, which is critical if we are to populate the biography of the Sarcophagus. The options for the casts first mentioned in 1848, 1849 and 1853 are:

- a. purchase/gift of a *duplicate* cast already made in 1839, whether from Ross or the Fifeshire Society;
- b. purchase/gift of a duplicate cast from Ross, *made to order* from the surviving 1839 moulds;
- c. purchase/gift from the Fifeshire Society of a part of the 1839 cast formerly on display in the Cupar Museum; or
- d. purchase of a newly completed casting from the original, or from a cast.

To seek answers, we must return to the physical evidence for the surviving casts themselves, as well as consider what more we can glean about the individual circumstances in which the casts, or their acquisition, might have occurred. Slight but significant differences exist between the casts surviving in St Andrews and the NMS, differences that are common to each of the separate cast pieces in their collection, confirming that each assemblage of Sarcophagus casts was made at the same time and by the same hand. For example, all the edges and reverse of the casts in NMS bear distinctive comb marks (see above; Fig 6). Original paint survives on all the original faces of the NMS casts, although modern paint overlies the fronts of NMS X.IB 13 and NMS X.IB 15.¹³ I could not inspect the reverse of the long side in St Andrews so I do not know whether it is painted, but the reverse of the short side, which is mounted in a wooded frame, is *unpainted*, so we might assume it was intended for wall mounting only. The long side has a cast recess

13 The latest paint may date from when the designer Charles Burnet had the interior of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland redecorated: D V Clarke, pers comm.

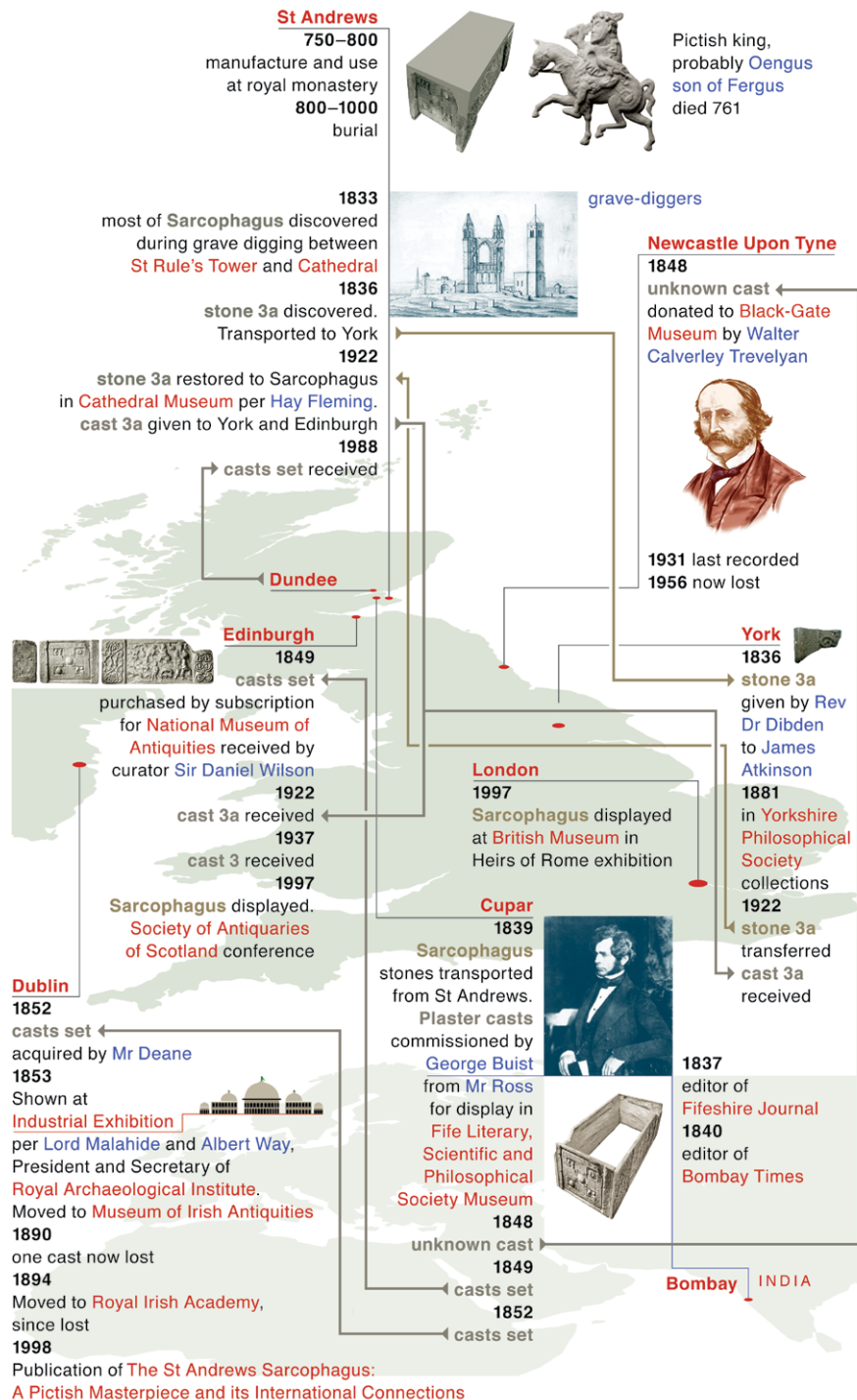


Figure 5. A summary biography of the St Andrews Sarcophagus. Graphic by Christina Unwin, © Sally Foster, incorporating images that are © B Keeling, Sally Foster, © Courtesy of Historic Environment Scotland (Artist Alexander Archer). Licensors canmore.org.uk, © Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland and © Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department



Figure 6. An example of the distinctive comb marks on the outer edges of the casts in NMS. The smooth edge to the right had been cut in modern times and reveals the iron rods inside the plaster cast (painted over). Photograph: Sally Foster

all around its outer edge, a characteristic of its casting process (see Fig 2). The distinctive comb marks visible around all the NMS casts are not visible on the edges of the St Andrews Museum long side (where accessible) but are visible on the rear and rear upper edge of the short end. The paint on the front of each of the St Andrews Museum casts is similar and looks to be of some antiquity, probably early Victorian; but the exposed lower edge of the long side in St Andrews Museum shows that there are two layers of paint (Fig 2). The lower may be an undercoat (perhaps shellac), rather than indicating a major time difference between the two, but the brown-green underlayer is similar to the earlier paint visible on the reverse of the NMS casts.

So far then, we can be confident that both sets of the surviving casts come from Ross' workshop and from moulds made in 1839, but how much time passed between casting them? The slight physical differences need not imply that the casts date from very different times – a day's difference might bring a slightly different approach or hand to their manufacture. The single surviving cast (NMS X.IB 14) of stone 6, although apparently painted a different colour from NMS X.IB 13 and NMS X.IB 15,¹⁴ has the same distinctive manufacturing characteristics and was clearly made at the same time. We have to consider, however, whether the casts in Newcastle, Edinburgh and Dublin could be from a late 1840s' dismantling of part of the Cupar cast, and whether the casts now in St Andrews could have come from Newcastle or Dublin, or alternatively directly from Cupar. Or did Ross, at his own initiative or at the request of his patrons, multiply his casts (as Buist's initial proposal for casting had suggested) with the intention of selling them at a later stage? Assuming the Sarcophagus was not recast, gelatine moulds would have allowed the fabrication of a small number of repeat casts within a year or so of the moulding, while plaster casts would have been more durable.

14 Although does their modern paint seal a similar paint, leaving us only to see the undercoat elsewhere?

To judge from the Album of the Fifeshire Society, its museum, and by implication the Society, did not prosper for long. Like many early learned societies founded across Britain in the first half of the 19th century, it fairly quickly entered into terminal decline.¹⁵ We can only guess what Buist thought when he visited it on 18 August 1846 while back on leave from India, but J M Mitchell visiting on 7 September 1847 left his verdict: 'Let the entirety be labelled & dusted!' (Fifeshire Literary, Scientific and Antiquarian Society 1838-67, f 18r, 20r). In 1871 its properties were transferred to Cupar's Duncan Institute (*Fifeshire Journal* 13 Jul 1871, 5) with at least a part of the Cupar cast, if Hay Fleming is correct in claiming that a cast of the Sarcophagus disappeared from the Duncan Institute shortly before 1931. If other parts of the Cupar cast assemblage were 'up for grabs' or worth grabbing in the mid-19th century, antiquarian circles are likely to have known this. Trevelyan, donor of the 1848 Newcastle cast, was elected an honorary member of the St Andrews Society in 1841 and in return stated his eagerness to promote the interests of the Society (letter from Trevelyan to P Mudie, 16 Jan 1841: Muniments of the University of St Andrews UY 8528/3 1846-98); acquiring and displaying a cast of such an important local monument would have been a generous and visibly demonstrative way of doing so. If he ever visited the museum in Cupar, he did not sign the visitor's book, so we have no record of whether he was aware of the existing casts in Cupar; but he knew people who would have been. It does appear to be the case, however, that both the Newcastle and Edinburgh casts were specially acquired for refurbishments of Society museums, where we can reliably assume the ambition was to include a representative range of important material for display.

The lack of correspondence with the Irish cast descriptions/measurements suggests that the RIA did not pass its casts to Dundee; it also requires the RIA to have rediscovered its long side and lost its cast of stone 6. Theoretically, the Newcastle museum could have transferred its casts to Dundee between 1931 and 1956. Still, it might seem simpler for the casts now in St Andrews to have been acquired from the Duncan Institute in or before 1931. Prior to 1976 the museum in Dundee had a wider regional remit than now, so accepting an object from Fife was not impossible (Christina Donald, pers comm). Yet even this requires further explanation. It remains unknown why the cast of the short side is not complete, why it is only painted on one side, and why it is mounted for wall hanging. The casts in Dublin are not the same as the ones now in Edinburgh, since they remained in Dublin until at least 1890.

Conclusions

The stories associated with the later history of the Sarcophagus provide a tantalising glimpse of the interest and energies of early antiquarian societies, and the significance attached to casts of important objects for exhibitions, both permanent and temporary. Taken in tandem with the replication of the Norrie's Law hoard

15 According to the entries in its album, numbers of visitors were never high and decreased significantly within a few years of opening, the last entry being in 1867.

(Foster et al 2014), the pioneering actions of one man – George Buist – reveal an unexpectedly advanced and early programme of replication of archaeological material for scientific – ‘expiscation’ – purposes.

My confidence in 1998 about the present location of the two long sides and two short sides that formed the ‘coffin’ on display in Cupar was premature. While a part of it *could* have been sold to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1849 or to Dublin in 1853, this cannot apply to both halves of the whole ‘coffin’ because Hay Fleming would not have been able to report in 1931 that the casts (whatever had survived) in the Duncan Institute had only recently disappeared (Hay Fleming 1931, 5). The casts now in St Andrews Museum could be part of it, although this is not without its own problems of interpretation. On these grounds, the simplest explanation is that Ross made more than two copies of each casting. Future work to establish the precise relationship between the NMS and St Andrews Museum casts would clearly benefit from side-by-side comparison of these with each other and with the Sarcophagus itself, laser scans of each, and scientific comparison of the plaster and paints of the casts. This does however mean we are witnessing for the first time the commodification of plaster casts of Early Medieval sculpture, as opposed to Classical and other sculptures.

This research has illustrated new ways in which the fabric of original monuments can illuminate their later biographies, but has highlighted how poor or non-existent documentation of past conservation and display practice can hamper our ability to assess this properly.¹⁶ The white layer painted onto the Sarcophagus, probably in 1839, is a critical part of this monument’s biography (*pace* Welander 1998, 70) that merits mentioning in its interpretation.

We have also seen how the fabric of the plaster casts can tell us more about their stories: the technology and the decisive role of the plasterers themselves. The craftsperson’s role too often goes unrecorded and unacknowledged. While there is a swelling appreciation of their value within architectural and art-historical circles (eg Glasgow West Conservation Trust nd; *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951*), their individual role in the creation of replicas for museums is very largely unsung (but see Bilbey & Cribb 2007, 167-8; Malone 2010; Dwyer 2011).

While many objects may be relatively static, replicas tend to circulate and be exchanged more widely, building histories around and onto themselves as they do so. This expiscation of the Sarcophagus and its early 19th-century casts has disentangled elements of their composite biography but thrown up new questions too. Such replicas are of interest in their own right, but also can impact directly on the thing at their heart, the original antiquity. More broadly, they offer critical insights into the early emergence of archaeology as a discipline, of the activities of antiquarians, and the development of curatorial practice, subjects of keen interest to our honorand.

16 In line with modern conservation practice, Historic Environment Scotland curates the reconstruction of the missing upper panel of the ‘deer-heads’ corner-slab (stone 4), removed in 1996, as part of the monument’s history (ibid, 65).

Acknowledgements

David Clarke provided me with information about various specifics but hopefully did not guess why I asked. I am particularly grateful to Martin Goldberg and Alice Blackwell for access to the NMS collections, feedback, exchange of information about Norrie's Law and shared enthusiasms; Ian G Scott for talking me through the manufacture of casts in general, and helping me explain the visible features of the St Andrews casts in particular; Morag Cross for proffering information on lead whitening; Betsy McCormick for access to her unpublished thesis; and Historic Environment Scotland (Craig Kennedy, Clare Torney and Maureen Young) for very kindly agreeing to trial their new XRF and NIR equipment on the Sarcophagus. Christina Unwin's creative and graphic skills have exceeded my expectations of what was possible (Figs 1 and 5). The following provided information and/or facilitated access to their collections: Andrew Dowsey, Janice Wightman (Cupar Library); Christina Donald (The McManus, Dundee); Padraig Clancy and Ragnall Ó Floinn (National Museum of Ireland); Clare Sorensen (RCAHMS); Sophie Evans and Siobhán Fitzpatrick (Royal Academy of Ireland); Gavin Grant and Lesley Lettice (St Andrews Museum); Moira Mackenzie, Briony Aitchison and colleagues (St Andrews University Special Collections); Adam Parker (York Museums Trust). Rod McCullagh held my hand and guided me wisely through this second Sarcophagus romance. I gratefully acknowledge both the Principal's Excellence Fund of the University of Aberdeen and the John Robertson Bequest of the University of Glasgow for financial support with travel to museums and archives. The Henry Moore Foundation grant-aided Figure 2. Barbara Keeling very kindly allowed me unrestricted and free use of her images, per Tim Clarkson. The Editors and Referee made keen observations that improved the text.

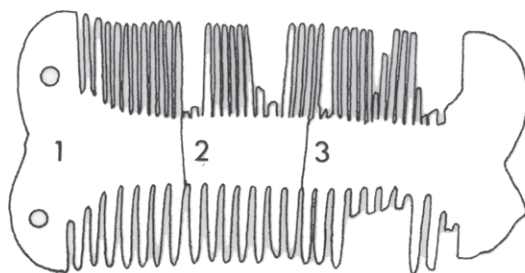
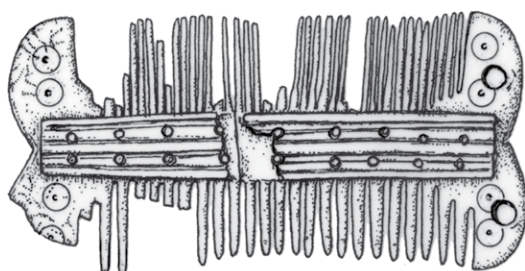
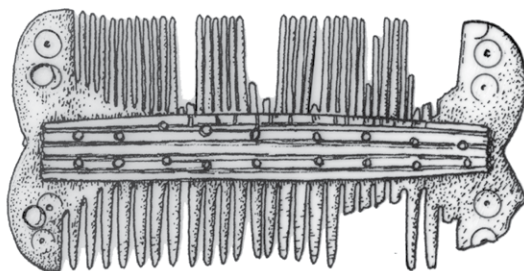
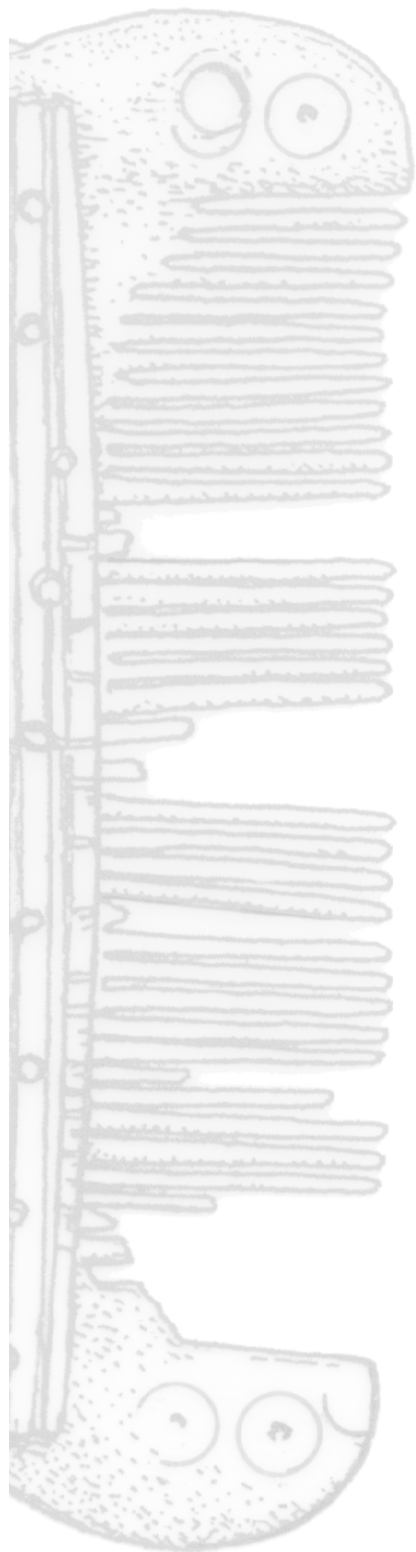
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Section 3

Pieces of the past



*Bone comb from the Sands of Brecon, North Yell, Shetland
(NMS X.BN 1). Drawing by Marion O'Neil*

Scottish Neolithic pottery in 2016: the big picture and some details of the narrative

Alison Sheridan

Abstract

This contribution summarises our present state of knowledge about Scottish Neolithic pottery, emphasising its dual origins in the Continental Middle Neolithic ceramic traditions of Brittany and the northernmost part of France, and tracing the subsequent expansion in its use within Scotland and some of the complexities of its developmental trajectories. The dynamics behind these developments are considered, including the patterns of inter-regional contacts (both within and beyond Scotland) that were established and perpetuated during the fourth millennium BC. The significance of the emergence of Grooved Ware pottery in Orkney towards the end of that millennium, and its rapid and widespread adoption elsewhere, is explored.

Keywords: *Scotland, Neolithic, pottery, Castellar, Carinated Bowl, Impressed Wares, Unstan, Grooved Ware, pottery terminology, ceramic traditions*

Introduction

Some 29 years ago, in the spring of 1987, I was commissioned by David Clarke to write a report on the Grooved Ware pottery from his excavations at Links of Noltland, Orkney (ultimately published as Sheridan 1999), and that is the reason why I came to Scotland from Belfast, where I had previously researched Irish Neolithic pottery. Following that three-month contract, I was fortunate enough to be appointed as a curator in the Archaeology Department of what is now called National Museums Scotland and it has been a privilege to work with David, in one capacity or another, ever since then. This contribution, summarising our current understanding of Scottish Neolithic pottery, is offered in gratitude to David for having encouraged and supported my research over all these years. In its subject matter, it echoes David's own tribute to his Museum mentor, Robert Stevenson (Clarke 1983).

Perhaps surprisingly, there has been no attempt to present an overall narrative of Scottish Neolithic pottery – other than a summary statement by Ian Kinnes in 1985 – since Isla McInnes published her brief review in 1969, nearly half a

century ago (McInnes 1969). There have indeed been some studies of specific ceramic traditions (including Henshall 1983a on the north-east Scottish variant of Carinated Bowl pottery, Sheridan 2007 on Carinated Bowl pottery more generally, Cowie & MacSween 1999 on Grooved Ware, MacSween 2007 on Impressed Wares and Grooved Ware and Copper 2015 on Hebridean Neolithic pottery), and reviews of certain regional developments (eg Scott 1964 on pottery in south-west and western Scotland, Cowie 1993a on early to mid-Neolithic pottery in east central Scotland and Sheridan 2014a on Shetland Neolithic pottery), but no attempt has been made to define the ‘big picture’ or to explore the dynamics of ceramic developments in Neolithic Scotland in any detail. The brief contribution to the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF) that appeared in 2013 (<http://www.scottishheritagehub.com/content/51-ceramics>, accessed 20.3.16) merely offered some pointers.

The time is ripe, however, to attempt this ambitious review. In the 47 years since McInnes’ study, the amount of Scottish Neolithic pottery has increased enormously, with the Orcadian Late Neolithic sites of Links of Noltland, Pool and Ness of Brodgar alone having produced challengingly large assemblages comprising many thousands of sherds. Developer-funded excavations have filled in some geographical gaps, for example in North and South Ayrshire (eg Maybole: Sheridan 2009b), and have also confirmed the relatively high density of Early Neolithic assemblages in parts of Aberdeenshire and around the Moray Firth (eg; Lochrie 2010; MacSween 2008; Sheridan 2014b; further examples have recently been discovered as a result of the Aberdeen by-pass roadwork project). Furthermore, many assemblages are associated with reliable radiocarbon dates, allowing us to form a better (albeit far from perfect) picture of chronological developments; and Professor Alasdair Whittle’s current radiocarbon dating project, *The Times of their Lives*, has been transforming our understanding of the genesis and development of Grooved Ware in Orkney (MacSween et al 2015; Richards et al in press). Our understanding of the use of Scottish Neolithic pottery has also advanced significantly, with the recent application of lipid analysis having revealed evidence for the use of dairy products as well as meat from the earliest Carinated Bowl pottery and from its ceramic successors (Cramp et al 2014).

Constructing a broad overview, and defining the various regional and chronological trajectories that lend detail to it, is also desirable as a way of achieving greater clarity and consistency in nomenclature; terminology matters because it influences the way we interpret the past. Over the years, a plethora of terms have sprouted up, ranging from the regionally-specific, such as ‘Becharra Ware’ (Piggott 1954, 170-3), ‘Rothesay style’ (Scott 1977), and ‘Unstan Ware’ (Callander & Grant 1934, 335), to descriptors of specific pot types (‘Unstan Bowl’: Henshall 1963, 106-9; ‘Achnacree Bowl’: Henshall 1972, 100-2), and to broader categories such as ‘Impressed Wares’ (Gibson 2002; MacSween 2007), ‘Carinated Bowl’ (Sheridan 2007) and ‘Bowl’ (Kinnes 1985), in addition to the more archaic ‘Western Neolithic’ and ‘Grimston/Lyles Hill Ware’ (both cited in Alexander 2000). Some of these terms (eg ‘Becharra Ware’, ‘Rothesay Ware’ and ‘Unstan Ware’) mask the fact that certain elements in the ceramic repertoire have a supra-regional distribution. Kinnes’ term ‘Bowl’, while admirable in its neutrality, runs the risk

of being too imprecise; ‘Grimston/Lyles Hill’ conflates two variants of Carinated Bowl pottery; and ‘Western Neolithic’ is a throwback to Childean broad-brush European ceramic categorisation. Unfortunately, however, there is no ideal set of terms to use. Essentially, the people who made the pottery were not doing so for the benefit of future researchers constructing ceramic typochronologies, even though their choices in design and manufacture will have been anything but random. But what modern researchers can try to do – whatever terminology is used – is to characterise the ceramic traditions that were kept alive by generations of potters and to investigate the ways in which those traditions changed, and the possible reasons for those changes. This requires tacking, in geographical perspective, from the local to the large scale in order to identify divergences and convergences in trajectories over time. It also requires an understanding of the broader context of Neolithic developments within which these ceramic trajectories were situated.

This contribution will begin by outlining the earliest pottery to appear in Scotland. It will then trace the geographical expansion in pottery use and the various regional trajectories that can be traced, highlighting where these reveal evidence for the inter-regional sharing of design ideas. The final section will address the issue of Grooved Ware pottery, ‘as an invented Orcadian tradition and will explore reasons for its widespread adoption elsewhere in Britain and Ireland.

Beginnings

The currently-available evidence indicates that the earliest pottery to appear in Scotland belongs to two discrete, well-established Continental ceramic traditions that were in use in different parts of northern France during the late fifth and early fourth millennia, and that its appearance relates to two strands of Neolithisation through small-scale colonisation, as discussed at length elsewhere (eg Sheridan 2010a; 2013).

The first tradition (Fig 1) is that of Late Castelic (and associated) pottery, as used mostly in the Morbihan area of south-east Brittany during the local Middle Neolithic II (Cassen 2000). This is currently represented, in its earliest Scottish manifestation, only at Achnacreebeag, Argyll and Bute, on the west coast although its current unique status can only be a function of archaeological happenstance; there is a pressing need for fieldwork to locate the settlement sites, and to explore the other closed megalithic chambers and simple passage tombs that will have been associated with this Atlantic façade strand of Neolithisation in this part of Scotland. The closed bipartite form of the most complete of the Achnacreebeag pots, together with its ‘rainbow’ arc design surmounting a fringe of short vertical lines, the thinness of its walls and the fineness of its fabric, are absolutely typical of Late Castelic pottery as found in the Morbihan and also (as a northerly outlier) at Vierville in Normandy (Fig 5.3). The issue of the dating of the Achnacreebeag pottery has been discussed elsewhere (eg Sheridan 2010a); essentially, in the absence of relevant radiocarbon-datable material from the findspot context, we currently have to rely on the dating evidence for Late Castelic pottery in Brittany and Normandy (Cassen et al 2009, 761, fig 13). This places the likely date of its appearance in Scotland at some point between *c* 4300 BC and *c* 3900 BC (pace Whittle et al 2011, 850).

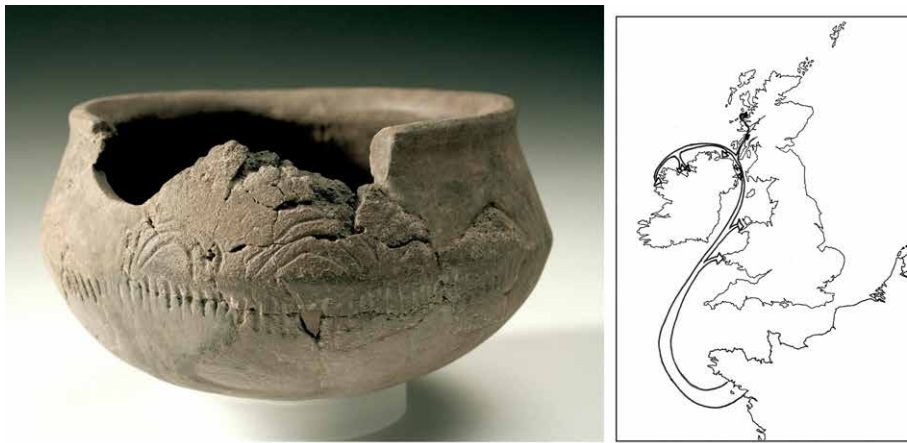


Figure 1. The Late Castellar decorated bipartite bowl from Achmacreebeag, Argyll and Bute. The map suggests the route taken by the putative groups of immigrant Breton farmers, with the northernmost tip of the arrow indicating the location of Achmacreebeag. Photo © National Museums Scotland; map from Sheridan 2010a

The second (Fig 2), which this author terms the ‘Carinated Bowl’ tradition (Sheridan 2007), can be related to the pottery found in and around the Nord-Pas de Calais region in the centuries around 4000 BC (eg at Étaples: Praud 2015) – that is, during the local Middle Neolithic II. This constitutes a mixture of elements from the Chassé and Michelsberg traditions. The existence of such ‘Chassé-Michelsberg’-like pottery, and its regionally-variable expressions (eg the Spiere group in Belgium: Vanmontfort 2001), is increasingly being accepted on the Continent, and it appears that the ‘Carinated Bowl’ tradition seen in our archipelago constitutes one such regional variant that had emerged in the area closest to the south-east English coast. The geographical extent of the earliest form of this Carinated Bowl pottery in Scotland was mapped by the current author in 2007 (Sheridan 2007, fig 1), and subsequent finds have merely reinforced this distributional pattern. It seems to have appeared at various points along the eastern coast of Scotland, with particular concentrations in the fertile agricultural lands of south-east Scotland and around Aberdeenshire, Moray and the Moray Firth; an early variant form is known from as far north as Camster Long in Caithness (Henshall 1997). It is also present in south-west and western Scotland as far north as Islay; and if, as suspected, there had been a rapid westerly and south-west spread of the colonising farmers who made this pottery, then one major route will have been the Forth-Clyde river systems, to judge from the cluster of finds in South Lanarkshire (eg at Biggar Common: Sheridan 1997). The main features of this ceramic tradition – which shows a marked and geographically-widespread consistency in its earliest form, in both design and manufacture – have been described in detail elsewhere (eg Sheridan 2007; 2009a) so do not need to be repeated here, other than to recall that uncarinated forms are present alongside various kinds of carinated and S-shaped forms; that the pottery has been skilfully made, with some vessels having walls as thin as 4mm; and that coarseware, while present, tends to constitute a minor part of the repertoire. As

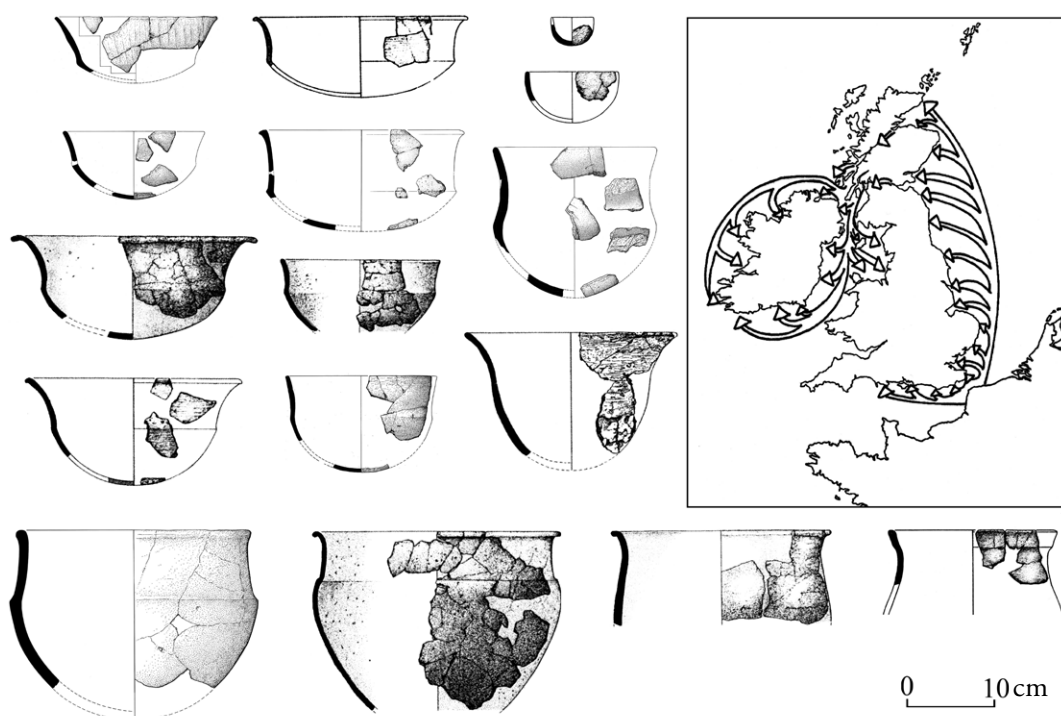


Figure 2. Examples of 'traditional Carinated Bowl' pottery from various sites in Scotland, and map indicating the hypothetical route taken by immigrant farming groups from the northernmost part of France and their descendants. Based on Sheridan 2007 and 2010a, with additions and amendments

for the date of its appearance in Scotland, there are now a considerable number of relevant radiocarbon dates. Bayesian modelling of these dates for Alasdair Whittle's *Gathering Time* project (Whittle et al 2011, 822-4) concluded that, for Scotland south of the Great Glen, Carinated Bowl pottery appeared in 3825-3750 cal BC (at 95% probability; 3810-3775 cal BC at 68% probability). However, as remarked elsewhere (Sheridan 2012a), any such modelling depends on the ability to define an end to the phenomenon being modelled, and since we know that the process of style drift from 'traditional' to 'modified' Carinated Bowl occurred at different rates and in different ways in different areas, one needs to bear in mind Whittle et al's dictum that a dating model is only as good as the assumptions that are fed into it. Be that as it may, it is clear that this kind of pottery was being made in Scotland by c 3800 BC.

Subsequent developments during the fourth millennium, 1: to c 3500 BC

For the centuries following this initial, dual appearance of pottery, two main processes can be discerned: firstly, the emergence of regionally-divergent trajectories – albeit with elements of inter-regional design sharing that echo other evidence for inter-regional exchange – and secondly, a geographical expansion in the use of

pottery that encompassed (inter alia) the Northern and Western Isles. The latter seems to have taken place after the former had begun, and this – along with a continuation of the regional ‘style drift’ – accounts for the differences between the Early Neolithic pottery of those archipelagos.

Space does not permit an exhaustive description of all of the regionally-specific ways in which the ceramic repertoire changed; some idea of this is given in the aforementioned ScARF web resource, and a discussion of the sequence in Shetland has recently been published (Sheridan 2014a; cf Sheridan 2003 for west and south-west Scotland). Suffice it to note the following key aspects:

- The process of ‘style drift’ in the manufacture of Carinated Bowl (CB) pottery started very early in north-east Scotland, as is clear from a comparison of dates for ‘traditional’ CB pottery with those for the ‘modified CB’ pottery of Henshall’s ‘North East style’ (1983a) – in particular from Balbridie (Whittle et al 2011, 824-8, 832-3). This is all the more striking given the spatial, as well as chronological proximity of the large house (‘hall’) at Balbridie to its counterpart just across the Dee at Warren Field, Crathes, where an assemblage of traditional CB pottery was found (Sheridan 2009a).
- As noted above, the nature and tempo of the ‘traditional’ to ‘modified’ CB style drift varied from region to region and over time. Trevor Cowie’s review of developments in east-central Scotland (Cowie 1993a), for example, highlighted the shift there to thicker-walled and generally coarser vessels, with heavier rims and occasional lugs, while in north-east Scotland the novelties include elements of what was later to become the Orcadian ceramic repertoire. In particular, the genesis of the ‘Unstan Bowl’ – a bipartite bowl with an upright, straight, decorated, collar-like neck – can be traced back to the 38th century BC assemblage at Balbridie, where the vessels in question stand out as examples of local design innovation (Ralston 1982). Figure 3 offers a ceramic ‘family tree’ for this particular and distinctive vessel type. Another of the elements of the Orcadian repertoire that had its origins in the modified CB pottery of north-east Scotland is the undecorated bipartite bowl with a vertical or near-vertical neck, heavy rim and well-defined carination, as seen for example at Urquhart, Moray (Henshall 1983a, fig 5.3).
- Other examples of the CB tradition style drift that transgress regional boundaries – and which complement other evidence for inter-regional contact, for example the distribution of Antrim porcellanite stone axeheads (Sheridan

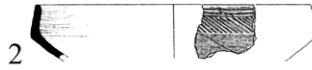
Figure 3 (next page). The ‘Unstan Bowl’ and its origins in the ‘North-East’ style of modified Carinated Bowl pottery. 1 Balbridie, Aberdeenshire; 2 Spurryhillock, Aberdeenshire; 3 Culduthel, Highland (Inverness-shire); 4 Urquhart, Moray; 5 Grandtully, Perth and Kinross; 6 Garrywhin, Highland (Caithness); 7 Ord North, Highland (Sutherland); 8 Eilean Dòmhnuaill, Loch Olabhat, North Uist; 9 Allt Chrisal, Barra; 10-16 Orkney: 10 Taversoe Tuick, Rousay; 11 Midhowe, Rousay; 12 Rowiegar, Rousay; 13 Knap of Howar, Papa Westray; 14 Blackhammer, Rousay; 15 Isbister, South Ronaldsay; 16 Unstan, Mainland. Sources: 1 Ian Ralston; 2 Alexander 1997; 3 Headland Archaeology; 4 Henshall 1983a; 5 Simpson & Coles 1990; 6 Davidson & Henshall 1991; 7 Henshall & Ritchie 1995; 8 National Museums Scotland; 9 Branigan & Foster 1995; 10-12, 14-16 Davidson & Henshall 1989; 13 Ritchie 1983

Mainland Scotland, south of the Great Glen

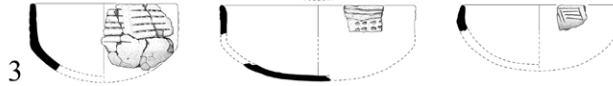
38th C BC



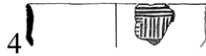
38th to 36th C BC?



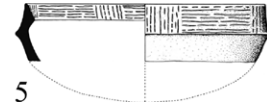
3600 to 3500 BC



Probably
between
3600 BC and
3300 BC



Some time
between
3500 BC and
3100 BC



Mainland Scotland, north of the Great Glen

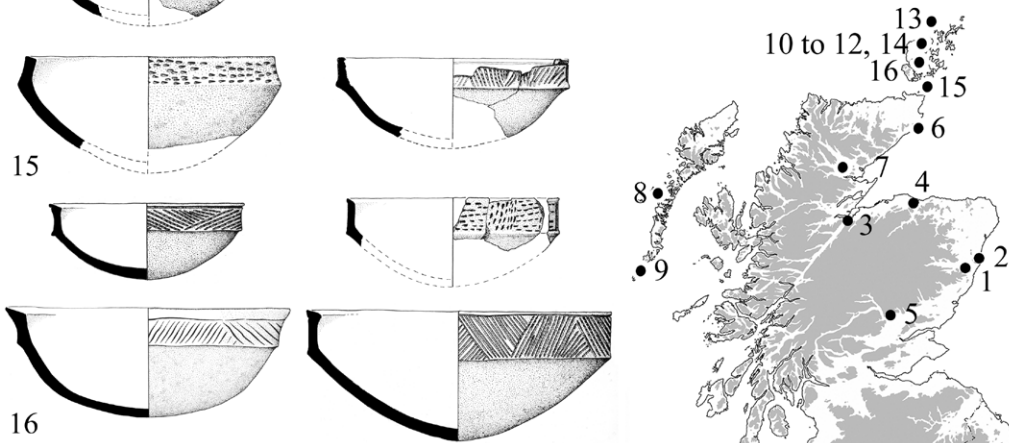
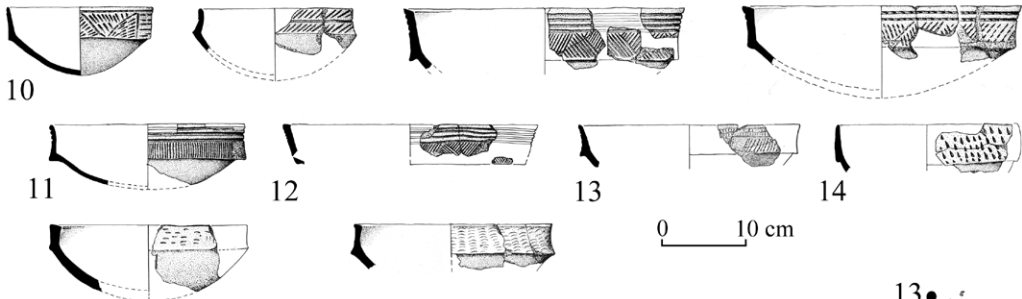
Probably between
3600 BC and
3300 BC



Western Isles, possibly from late 38th/37th C BC; floruit c 3600 BC to 3300 BC



Orkney: floruit between 36th and 33rd C BC



1986) and of Arran pitchstone (Ballin 2009; 2015) – include the extensive use of fingertip fluting (a minor element in the traditional CB repertoire) and its glossier version, ripple burnishing, on carinated bowls. This is a feature of modified CB pottery that extends from north-east Scotland to east-central Scotland, south-west Scotland and northern Ireland (eg at Lyles Hill, County Antrim: Sheridan 1995); within Ireland its period of use included the late 38th/early 37th century ‘house boom’ (Smyth 2014). A particularly clear example of this inter-regional design sharing can be seen in the distinctively-shaped, low-carinated bowls with long straight upright necks, heavy rims and extensive fluting (or, in some cases, grooving) that Henshall termed ‘Achnacree Bowls’ (Fig 4; Henshall 1972, 100-2). An example from Culduthel, on the outskirts of Inverness (Sheridan 2010b), offers a striking match for others at the opposite end of the Great Glen and beyond, in Argyll and Bute: at the passage tomb of Achnacree, for example (Henshall 1972, 303); in the Clyde cairns at Geirisclett, North Uist (Dunwell et al 2003), Nether Largie in Kilmartin Glen and Glenvoidean on Bute (Henshall 1972, 302, 306); and

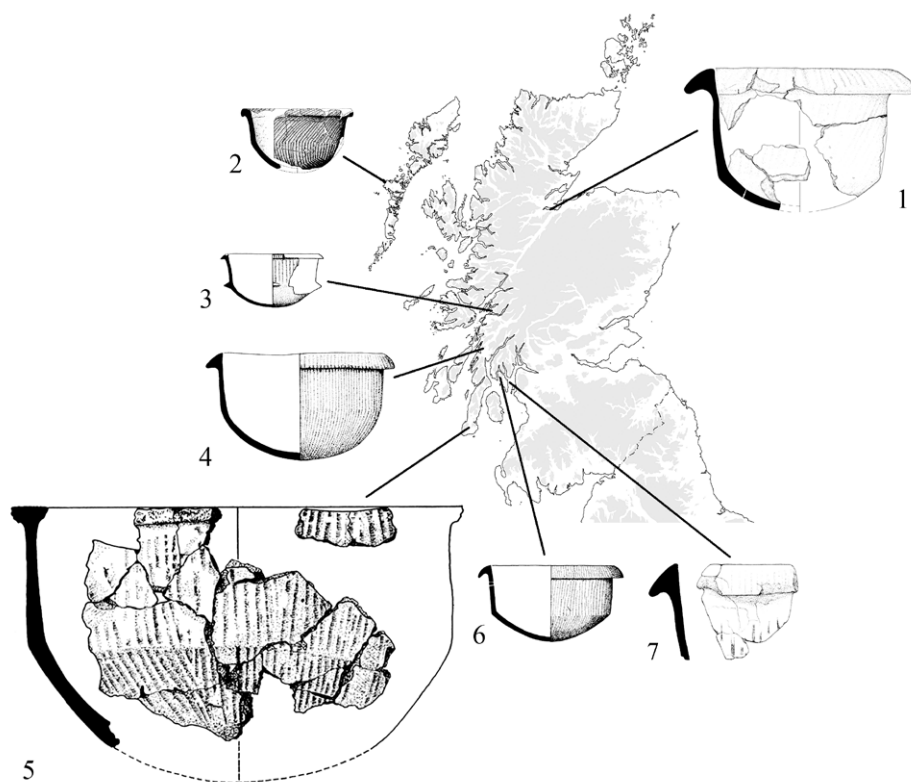


Figure 4. A specific vessel type within the modified Carinated Bowl repertoire, demonstrating inter-regional sharing of design ideas: the ‘Achnacree Bowl’. 1 Culduthel, Highland; 2 Geirisclett, North Uist; 3-7: Argyll and Bute: 3 Achnacree; 4 Nether Largie; 5 Balloch Hill; 6 Glenvoidean; 7 Townhead. Sources: 1 Headland Archaeology; 2 Dunwell et al 2003; 3,4,6 Henshall 1972; 5 Yarrington 1982; 7 Scott 1977

at settlements at Rothesay on Bute (Scott 1977) and at Balloch Hill on the Kintyre peninsula (Yarrington 1982). The Culduthel example is from a context radiocarbon-dated to 4870 ± 30 BP (SUERC-17222, 3640-3520 cal BC at 95.4% probability: Ross Murray, pers comm).

- The regionally-specific ceramic trajectories seen in western and south-west Scotland demonstrate not only the process of style drift in the CB tradition (including this sharing of design elements with north-east Scotland), but also a continuation in the use of Late Castelletic-style pottery and the adoption of design elements from further afield, probably including south-west England, during the first half of the fourth millennium (Sheridan 2003, fig 2.5). As noted above (and in Sheridan 1995), the repertoire also reflects design sharing with north-east Ireland. The fact that the distinctive decorated bipartite bowls of unmistakable Late Castelletic ancestry (Fig 5) are found alongside modified CB pottery in Clyde cairns – including at the recently-excavated monument at Blasthill on the Kintyre peninsula (Cummings & Robinson 2015, illus 5, pot 1) – implies that the descendants of the two sets of original immigrant farming groups to colonise this part of Scotland cohabited happily, their ceramic repertoire acknowledging this duality of origins. (It is assumed that the population mix also included the descendants of the indigenous – and non-pottery-using – communities of hunters, gatherers and fishers who seem

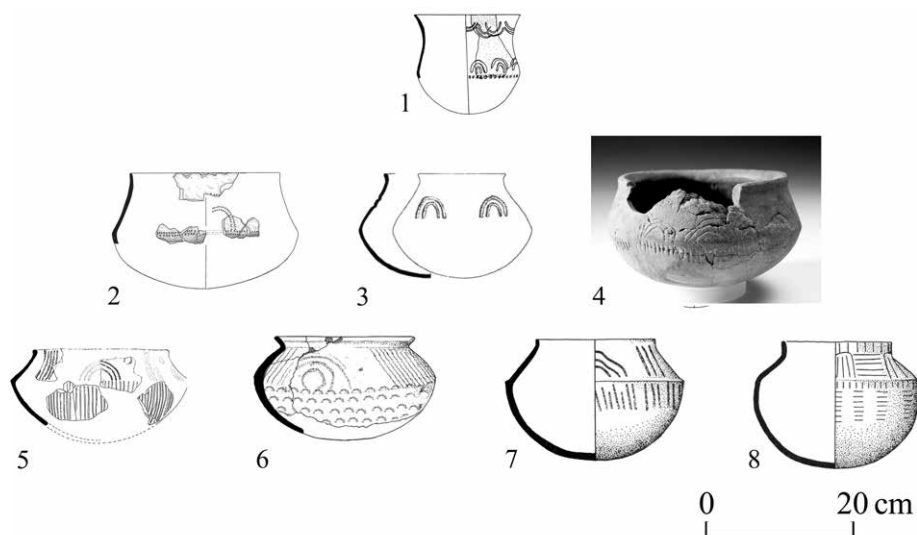


Figure 5. Ceramic 'family tree' for closed bipartite bowls featuring a 'rainbow' motif, with or without a fringe: 1 Early Castelletic (c 4700/4600-4300 BC), from Castellet, Morbihan, Brittany; 2-4 Late Castelletic (c 4300-3900 BC): 2 Er Grah, Morbihan; 3 Vierville, Normandy; 4 Achnacreebeag, Argyll and Bute; 5-8 Early Neolithic examples from Clyde Cairns and from a related type of monument in Northern Ireland: 5 Ballymacaldrack, County Antrim, Northern Ireland; 6 Blasthill, Argyll and Bute; 7-8 Beacharra, Argyll and Bute. For further developments in this ceramic 'family tree' in Ireland, see Sheridan 1995, fig 2.3. Sources: 1-4 after Sheridan 2010a (where original sources cited); 5 Collins 1976; 6 Thompson & Peterson 2015; 7-8 Henshall 1972

to have acculturated.) The presence of the same mixture of Breton-derived and modified CB tradition pottery in court and portal tombs in north-east Ireland – where the decorated bipartite bowls had previously been labelled ‘Ballyalton bowls’ (Sheridan 1995, fig 2.3) – reflects the intensity and regularity of contacts across the north channel of the Irish Sea at this time. The elements of the ceramic repertoire in western and south-west Scotland, and north-east Ireland, that find their closest match in ‘Hembury ware’ (also known as ‘South-western style’ Early Neolithic pottery) in south-west England include deep baggy lugged jars (Sheridan 2004a, fig 2.5). These jars differ from the lugged jars of the north-east Scottish modified CB repertoire (eg at Leggatsden Quarry, Aberdeenshire: Henshall 1983a, fig 6.10) in having ledge-like, rather than knob-shaped, lugs. Such long-distance connections up and down – as well as across – the Irish Sea should not surprise us, given all the other evidence that exists to show that the establishment and maintenance of networks of contacts was important to these early farming communities (Sheridan 2003; 2004a; 2010a).

As for the other major development mentioned above – the spread of pottery-using to the Western and Northern Isles – this is likely to have been part of a more general expansion of farming groups as these communities flourished, grew and decided to colonise other areas. The currently-available evidence from monument types, pottery and other material culture suggests that the Outer Hebrides were colonised from those parts of western and south-west Scotland where both Clyde cairns and passage tombs were being built,¹ while Orkney’s first farmers are most likely to have come from the north-east Scottish mainland, probably Caithness, and Shetland’s first farmers are most likely to have come from western Scotland. The episodes of expansion will have been independent of each other, but the underlying reason is likely to have been population growth allied with a willingness, desire or perceived necessity to colonise new areas.

All these expansions are likely to have occurred during the second quarter of the fourth millennium, although the date and duration of the process requires further clarification. As argued elsewhere (Sheridan 2014a, 69), the arrival of pottery-using farmers in Shetland could have occurred as early as the late 38th or 37th century BC. The earliest pottery in Shetland consists of just four featureless sherds found at West Voe, and beyond noting that they lack any obvious diagnostic features of the CB tradition there is little that can be said about them, other than that their forerunners are likely to have been made in western Scotland, in view of the similarities in passage tomb types between that part of Scotland and Shetland (ibid, 69-70 and fig 1).

Regarding the expansion to the Outer Hebrides from western/south-west Scotland, there is an increasing number of radiocarbon dates – including several deriving directly from encrusted organic residues on Hebridean incised vessels (Sheridan et al 2014) – confirming that pottery use had been established in the

1 It is currently unclear whether the earlier, ‘Atlantic façade’ strand of initial Neolithisation had extended as far as the Outer Hebrides.

Western Isles by 3600/3500 BC. Indeed, recent Bayesian modelling of Hebridean Neolithic pottery dates from several sites including Eilean Dòmhnuaill (Loch Olabhath, North Uist) by Peter Marshall has produced estimates of as early as *3845-3590 cal BC at 95.4% (3745-3645 cal BC at 68.2%*: Copper 2015) for a start date for pottery use in this part of Scotland. The origin of the Hebridean Neolithic pottery tradition in the regionally-specific repertoire of early fourth millennium west/south-west Scotland is very clear, as Scott had pointed out (Scott 1964, fig 10), and as has been discussed at greater length by others (Sheridan 2003; Copper 2015). There are elements of modified CB pottery among the undecorated vessels, while the fine, highly-decorated closed bipartite bowls (such as the example from the hybrid Clyde cairn/passage tomb at Clettraval, North Uist: *ibid*, ‘Beacharra II’) derive ultimately from their Late Castellaric forbears, and the design ancestry of the deep baggy lugged vessels may well lie in the Hembury/South-western tradition, via south-west Scotland, as described above. Other elements of the Hebridean Neolithic ceramic repertoire, including heavily-decorated ridged jars, represent a local development, while the occasional presence of unmistakable Unstan Bowls (eg at Eilean Dòmhnuaill: Fig 3; Armit 1989; Copper 2015) reflects the adoption of a specific vessel type whose origins, as noted above, lie in north-east Scotland. The closest comparanda for the Hebridean Unstan Bowls are in Orkney and it is tempting to interpret their presence in the Western Isles as resulting from interactions between the early farming communities in these two archipelagos. However, the currently-available radiocarbon dating evidence suggests that these bowls may have been in use in the Western Isles earlier than in Orkney: they have been found in the earliest dated layer at Eilean Dòmhnuaill, associated with a date of 4895 ± 50 BP (OxA-9085, 3711-3639 cal BC at 68.2% probability, 3792-3537 cal BC at 95.4% probability: Bronk Ramsey et al 2000, 467; Copper 2015). If the pots were genuinely contemporary with that underwater layer – and had not fallen down from a higher, later layer – then their use may have been adopted from contacts with communities in Caithness or Sutherland, rather than Orkney. Only the accumulation of further dates from the Northern and Western Isles can help to confirm whether this had been the case.

Finally, the question of when pottery-using (and of the farming lifestyle with which it is associated) first appeared in Orkney has recently been discussed in a volume presenting the results of several recent excavations there (Richards & Jones 2016). At Varme Dale, willow charcoal stratigraphically associated with grains of einkorn wheat, naked barley and linseed (Richards et al 2016, 232) – but no pottery – has produced two dates with a weighted mean of 3710-3630 cal BC (95.4% probability: Griffiths 2016, 296) and this currently constitutes the earliest date for the presence of farming on Orkney. The earliest dated Orcadian pottery, however, is that from the settlement on Wideford Hill (Jones et al 2016, 357-75) and the relevant radiocarbon dates relating to the start of its use there have been modelled at *3590-3310 cal BC at 95.4% probability (3500-3360 cal BC at 68.2% probability*: Griffiths 2016, 287). Whether pottery-using had begun any earlier than that in Orkney remains to be seen; in the meantime the closeness of the similarity between the Wideford Hill pottery (plus other early round-based Orcadian pottery from settlements and chamber tombs) and the regionally-specific ceramic repertoire

that had developed in north-east Scotland, particularly the former counties of Caithness and Sutherland, cannot be overstated, as Fig 3 illustrates. To cite just one example: the use of paired-thumb nail rusticated decoration on deep-bellied vessels from Wideford (Jones et al 2016, fig 11.4.1, nos 26, 266, 271 and 563) can be matched on a similar vessel from Kenny's Cairn chamber tomb, Caithness (Davidson & Henshall 1991, 71) and on a sherd from the settlement at Dubton Farm, Brechin, Angus (Cameron 2002, vessel V41). The Dubton Farm vessel is associated with a radiocarbon date of 4735±40 BP (GU-9094, 3632-3384 cal BC at 68.2%, 3636-3377 cal BC at 95.4%), which is comparable with the date of its counterparts from Wideford Hill (Griffiths 2016). The question of whether to use the term 'Unstan Ware' to describe the overall repertoire of forms in Orkney will continue to be debated – see Jones et al 2016 for a novel definition, for example – but the main point remains that the roots of Orcadian pottery in north-east Scotland are clear.

Subsequent developments during the fourth millennium, 2: c 3500 – c 3000 BC

Arguably the most striking ceramic development of the second half of the fourth millennium was the deliberate creation of a distinctive new style of pottery – Grooved Ware – in Orkney during the 32nd century and its subsequent rapid adoption over much of Britain and Ireland. This will be dealt with in the next section.

The other ceramic developments within the c 3500 – c 3000 BC time frame show regionally-specific trajectories that perpetuate the geographical variability that had developed during preceding centuries. Some novelties – such as the use of trunconic vessels with narrow flat or saggy bases, mostly decorated with impressed designs, along parts of the east coast and in the Southern Uplands between c 3300 BC and 3000/2900 BC (Fig 6) – reflect the sharing of design ideas with areas outside what is now Scotland. The umbrella term 'Impressed Ware' (or 'Impressed Wares') (McInnes 1969; Gibson 2002; MacSween 2007) has been used to describe much of the Middle Neolithic pottery on mainland Scotland, but like the term 'Peterborough Ware' which it replaced, this may have outlived its usefulness – or at least requires redefinition, as previous commentators have acknowledged – as it currently encompasses a variety of regionally- and chronologically-variable developments.

Space does not permit a detailed description of all the developments in Scottish Middle Neolithic pottery here; suffice it to offer the following handful of regional snapshots, to provide a flavour of their diversity:

- Shetland: this has its own distinctive trajectory – from which Grooved Ware is absent – that features the use of undecorated, round-based vessels of various forms, sizes and degrees of coarseness, as described elsewhere (Sheridan 2014a). The first sign of any interruption of what is essentially an insular, long-term process of style drift (including a switch to using flat-based pottery at some point after 3000 BC) does not come until the appearance of Beaker pottery there late in the third millennium BC.

- Orkney: to judge from the currently-available dating evidence, the ceramic tradition featuring undecorated and decorated vessels of various forms that seems to have been introduced from Caithness and/or Sutherland by c 3500 BC (Fig 3) continued to be used at least throughout the third quarter of the millennium, if not longer; the long-standing question of whether the use of round-based pottery persisted in Orkney after the appearance of Grooved Ware during the 32nd century BC, and if so for how long (and in what form), still remains to be resolved. One development that is suggested by assemblages from Stonehall Knoll and Stonehall Meadow (Jones et al 2016, figs 11.2.5 and 11.2.7), and is echoed to some extent in the Period 2 assemblage from Knap of Howar (Henshall 1983b), is a shift towards a repertoire dominated by undecorated, deep-bellied bowls and jars, some fairly coarse, with medium to thick (10-20mm) walls and, in some cases, almost pointed bases. The dating evidence from Stonehall Meadow suggests that this occurred from c 3300 BC (Griffiths 2016, fig 10.3).
- North-east Scotland, Tayside and Fife and parts of central Scotland: between c 3600 BC and c 3300 BC, the pre-existing process of style drift within the 'modified CB' tradition continued, taking different forms in different areas. Some of the assemblages of undecorated 'modified CB' pottery as described by Cowie (1993a) were produced within the third quarter of the millennium, as is clear from the dating of the Cowie 'Group 2' pottery at Balfarg Riding School (Cowie 1993b), for example. Other assemblages feature the addition of modest amounts of decoration – often, but not exclusively impressed – to various vessel forms within the 'modified CB' canon, as exemplified at Kinbeachie on the Black Isle, Highland (Barclay et al 2001), Dubton Farm, Brechin, Angus (MacSween 2002, illus 22 (v41) and 23) and Alloa, Clackmannanshire (Johnson 2010a, illus 8, P49). At Culduthel Farm, Highland (Sheridan 2010b) and Grandtully, Perth and Kinross (Simpson & Coles 1990), a narrow range of decorated and undecorated vessel forms were in use, including shallow-bellied bipartite bowls that are relatable, in their different ways, to the 'Unstan Bowl' vessel type (Fig 3.5). And at Forest Road, Kintore, Aberdeenshire, deep-bellied jars decorated with a narrow band of false-relief diagonal lines just below their rim (MacSween 2008, fig 142) were in use at this time. Between c 3300 BC and c 3000 BC, trunconic vessel forms – some bipartite, and many with impressed decoration on their upper part – with narrow flat or saggy bases are a prominent feature of many assemblages in this part of Scotland (Fig 6); they were used alongside round-based vessels in varying ratios. The assemblages in question include those from Stoneyhill (Johnson 2010b) and Deer's Den, Kintore (Alexander 2000) in Aberdeenshire and Brackmont Mill (Longworth et al 1967, 67-75) and Balfarg Riding School in Fife (Cowie 1993c, pots P83-114). Of key importance, because of its size and association with several reliable radiocarbon dates, is the unpublished assemblage from a settlement at Meadowend Farm (Upper Forth Crossing), Clackmannanshire (Fig 6.5; Sheridan 2009c). Here, the repertoire consists almost entirely of trunconic, thick-walled bowls and jars, many with heavy, collar-like rims decorated with impressed designs. Comparanda can be found not only within

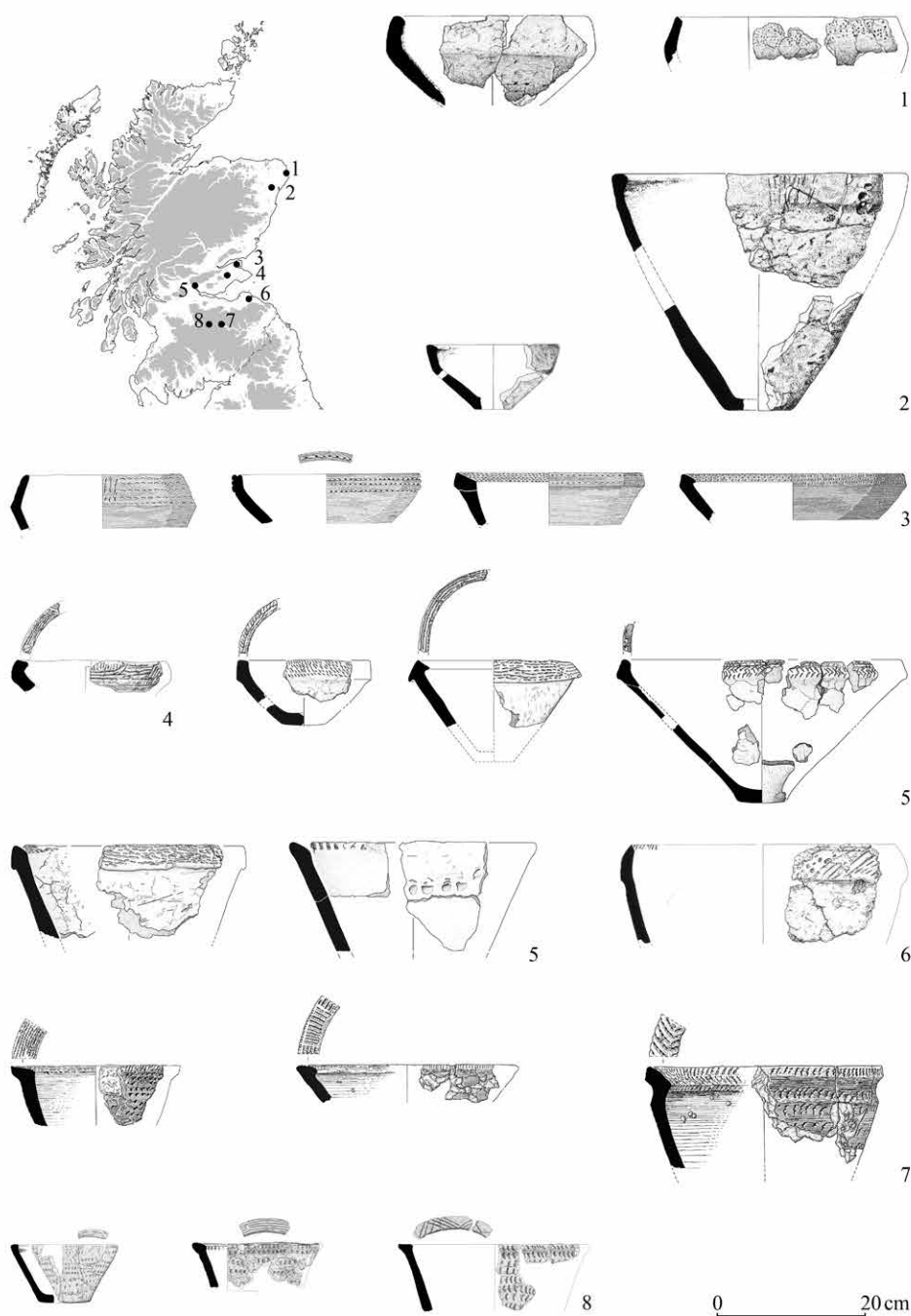


Figure 6. Trunconic bowls and jars in eastern and southern Scotland, c 3300-3000 BC.

1 Stoneyhill, Aberdeenshire; 2 Deer's Den, Kintore, Aberdeenshire; 3 Brackmont Mill, Fife;

4 Balfarg Riding School, Fife; 5 Meadowend Farm (Upper Forth Crossing), Clackmannanshire;

6 Overhailes, East Lothian; 7 Meldon Bridge, Scottish Borders; 8 Wellbrae, South Lanarkshire.

Sources: 1 Johnson 2010b; 2 Alexander 2000; 3 Longworth et al 1967; 4 Cowie 1993c; 5 Headland Archaeology; 6 MacGregor & Stuart 2007; 7 Johnson 1999; 8 Trevor Cowie & Derek Alexander

the region in question but also in southern Scotland and farther afield (eg at Thirlings, Northumberland, for a jar with dragged-thumb nail decoration: Miket 1976, fig 7.12); indeed, the jars include examples that fall within the definition of 'Fengate Ware' as used in England and Wales. The Deer's Den, Kintore assemblage also includes a tall, undecorated jar reminiscent of Fengate Ware (Fig 6.2).

- South-east, southern and south-west Scotland: a similar trend towards the increasing use of decoration, especially impressed decoration, from *c* 3500 BC and towards the use of trunconic vessel forms from *c* 3300 BC (either alongside, or superseding other vessel forms: Fig 6) can be discerned in this part of Scotland, but there are also some differences. There is a much greater use of cord (usually whipped cord) impressions here, and more pots have decoration that extends over the whole of the exterior surface; there is an even stronger affinity between the pottery in southern and south-east Scotland with its counterparts in northern England and beyond (Burgess 1980; MacSween 1999; Sheridan 2006); and in south-west Scotland, especially around Glenluce in Galloway, there are close parallels with contemporary developments in north-east Ireland, as previous commentators have noted (eg McInnes 1964; 1969; Sheridan 1995; Cowie 1996). The numerous assemblages in question include Hedderwick, Dryburn Bridge and Broxmouth in East Lothian (Callander 1929; Cool & Cowie 2007; Cowie 2013); Dalkeith, Midlothian (Henshall 1966); Meldoun Bridge, Scottish Borders (Johnson 1999; MacSween 1999); Wellbrae (Alexander & Armit 1992; Cowie, pers comm) and Melbourne Farm (http://www.biggararchaeology.org.uk/pdf_reports/BAG_MELBOURNE.pdf, accessed 1.4.16), South Lanarkshire; and Blairhall Burn (Cowie 1998) and Glenluce (McInnes 1964; Cowie 1996), Dumfries and Galloway. Fine-tuning the narrative is hampered by various problems with the frankly inadequate radiocarbon dating evidence: for example, the suite of dates for Meldoun Bridge, Scottish Borders, has hopelessly wide standard deviations (Speak & Burgess 1999, table 10 and ill. 48), while a plateau in the calibration curve pertaining to this period can give other dates with a narrow standard deviation a wide calibrated range. Thus, in the case of two nearby but distinctively different assemblages from East Lothian – Knowes Farm (Shearer & McLellan 2007) and Overhailes, the latter with a classic 'Fengate'-style jar (Sheridan 2006; MacGregor & Stuart 2007, fig 4.6, V1) – it is hard to tell whether the observed variation is due to chronological difference or to localised design preferences; the former is suspected.

Space does not permit discussion of the origin of the trunconic form here; suffice it to note Cowie's suggestion (1993a, 18) that it may represent a particular development of the pre-existing bipartite bowl vessel form that had been present over much of north-east Scotland. Additionally, there had been a more widespread adoption of the trunconic form elsewhere in Britain, the specific manifestations in different regions reflecting prevailing patterns of interaction, and so the popularity of the form in parts of Scotland could also relate to these interactions with communities

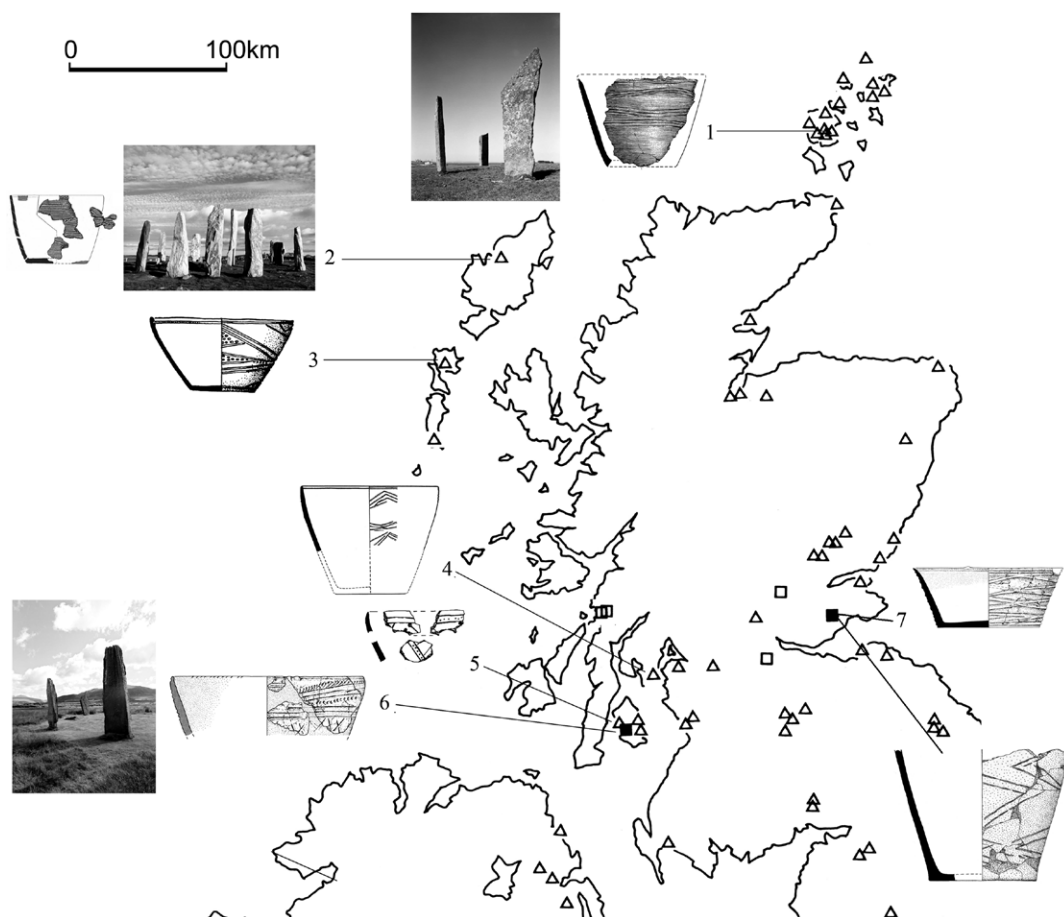


Figure 7. Selection of Grooved Ware finds from Scotland, illustrating the widespread adoption of this Orcadian pottery tradition around the 30th century BC and its association with timber and stone circles. Triangles: Grooved Ware; open squares: Late Neolithic timber circles, with no Grooved Ware present; filled squares: Late Neolithic timber and stone circles with Grooved Ware. 1 Stones of Stenness stone circle, Orkney; 2 Calanais stone circle, Isle of Lewis; 3 Unival passage tomb, North Uist; 4 Townhead, Rothesay, Bute, settlement; 5 Tormore stone circle, Arran; 6 Machrie Moor timber and stone circle, Arran; 7 Balfarg henge and Riding School and Balbirnie stone circle, Fife. Based on Sheridan 2004b, with additions; note that there are more finds of Grooved Ware in Scotland than are shown on this map

further south. The network of contacts that linked southern Scotland with northern England, for example, was also responsible for the northward diffusion of Whitby jet sliders (Sheridan 2012b) and of Yorkshire flint (Ballin 2011).

Grooved Ware in Scotland

The appearance and subsequent rapid spread of a new type of pottery, Grooved Ware (Fig 7), marks a significant change in the story of Scottish Neolithic pottery for two reasons: firstly, it appears to have resulted from a conscious desire to create a novel style of pottery; and secondly, its very widespread adoption across much of Britain and Ireland cuts across the pre-existing, regionally-divergent trajectories

of pottery development. The ‘when?’, ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ questions for Orcadian Grooved Ware are currently being pursued through Alasdair Whittle’s *The Times of Their Lives (ToTL)* radiocarbon dating project (www.totl.eu, accessed 1.4.16) and the final publication in the suite of project publications will present a detailed discussion of those questions as they relate to Grooved Ware in general in Scotland. In the meantime, the project has established that this type of pottery was in use at Pool (MacSween et al 2015) and Barnhouse (Richards et al in press) by the 32nd century BC, and all the evidence points towards its invention in Orkney. The Pool assemblage demonstrates a process of evolution from undecorated, round-based pottery and to date this is the only location where the genesis of this tradition can be discerned: elsewhere, Grooved Ware appears as a ready-formed tradition that contrasts starkly with the pre-existing ceramic repertoire. Its invention can be understood within the context of a highly competitive society, in which innovation in material culture was matched by innovation in ceremonial practice (as seen in the creation of the Stones of Stenness henge with its stone circle, a novel monument type) and by acts of conspicuous consumption (eg the construction of Maes Howe-type passage tombs and other large, special-purpose buildings at Barnhouse and Ness of Brodgar). No doubt the decorative motifs and schemes on Grooved Ware, with their echoes of Boyne Valley passage tomb art, had specific symbolic meanings, and these played a part in this creation of a new social order. Within this scenario, and given that elites in Orkney and elsewhere certainly undertook long distance journeys, one can understand the rapid southward spread of Grooved Ware use – and of the practice of building open-air circular monuments, together



Figure 8. Large portion of Grooved Ware pot found at Powmyre Quarry, Glamis, Angus.
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with the associated ceremonial acts – in terms of other communities emulating the influential Orcadian trend-setters, and adopting their beliefs, rituals and vocabulary of esteem.

What happened in the following centuries was a process of regional divergence in the Grooved Ware developmental trajectories, one strand of which – in Ireland – was explored by this author some time ago (Sheridan 2004b). The details of these trajectories still remain to be documented and much more radiocarbon dating of the kind undertaken by the *ToTL* project needs to be carried out in Britain and Ireland, but it is clear that cross-cutting the regional specificities of Grooved Ware development during the first half of the third millennium are strong elements of inter-regional interaction and design sharing. This is manifested, for example, in the fact that a pot such as the one illustrated in Fig 8, and found in Angus, can be paralleled not only in northern England but as far away as Wessex. And similarities can be found not only in material culture, but also in monumental architecture – in the widespread use of ‘four-poster’ timber structures; in the resemblance, pointed out by Mike Parker Pearson, between houses at Durrington Walls and those at Skara Brae; and even between the massive henge monuments of Avebury and the Ring of Brodgar.

Conclusions

Clearly our understanding of Scottish Neolithic pottery has advanced enormously since Isla McInnes attempted her ‘big picture’ narrative in 1969. There are still many gaps in our knowledge, however, especially regarding the chronological fine-tuning of the story, and various conundra remain. Why, for example, is Grooved Ware pottery apparently never found in secure association with pottery of other traditions? For how long did these other traditions persist after Grooved Ware began to be used; and when did it cease to be used? Was its demise linked to the appearance of Beaker pottery and its associated ‘package’ of Continental novelties, or to internal social dynamics? These and many other questions will no doubt continue to challenge Scottish Neolithic pottery researchers for many years to come.

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Skara Brae life studies: overlaying the embedded images

Alexandra Shepherd

Abstract

An image of Skara Brae has become imprinted on the consciousness of both the general and archaeological public over the 160-odd years since the site was first revealed. This paper presents a revision of some crucial aspects of its perceived identity, a product of the author's collaboration – and lively disputation – with David over the major work of publication of his 1970s excavations at the site. The paper follows the evolution of some fundamental perceptions of the site and sets out to eradicate their more misleading aspects, primarily by addressing elements of the terminology traditionally used to define the site which have given rise to some of the more entrenched misconceptions. Chief among these are the use of the terms *subterranean* and *midden* and the employment of the singular – the mound, the midden – rather than the more accurate plural – accumulations, deposits – to define the site. It demonstrates how the current work of preparing the definitive report on the site – combining analysis of the 1970s excavations with reassessment of Gordon Childe's work and earlier explorations – enables the overlaying of these embedded images with more accurate representations of the life-story of the settlement, emphasising its gradual organic development and the accumulation of varied occupation and construction deposits of which clay, rather than midden *per se*, was the major component. Lastly the paper looks at issues arising from post-depositional activity and alteration, both in more recent history and in antiquity, examining the way in which these raise questions of the exact nature of the abandonment, managed or enforced, of the site. As part of this the role of the 'Marie Celeste' or, more accurately, Pompeiian model for the site and the conferring of a special status on the House 7 structure are examined together with representative elements of the material culture used to signify the identity of the site.

Keywords: *Skara Brae, Neolithic, subterranean, clay, midden, settlement, construction, abandonment*

Introduction

The 2011 conference for David offered the chance to present some revised aspects of Skara Brae which have arisen from the work of bringing to publication his excavations at the site in 1972-3 (Clarke 1976) and 1977 (Clarke & Shepherd in prep). The results of these excavations at the centre and periphery of the site triggered a major project of archive and development which he has overseen and with which this author has collaborated. In spite of the stark maxim 'Never apologise', this seemed like the right time and place to offer some form of apologia for the publication's long gestation. Apart from 'Events, dear boy, events', the chief rationale for the project's longevity has been David's commitment to full publication: his contention that the integrity of the project rests on the full integration of all retrievable data from the site in recognition of the responsibility this unique monument lays upon the excavator. Consequently it has not simply been a matter of writing an excavation report of a handful of trenches – albeit with upwards of 4m of stratigraphy – but the much wider undertaking of the melding of the data from those trenches with the extracted information still contained within the Childe-excavated and earlier assemblages, to enable the rebuilding and re-presenting of the whole site.

The name of Skara Brae has become a familiar one in the 160 or so years since its discovery. Seen by upwards of 70,000 visitors a year, consistently in the top four Historic Environment Scotland visitor attractions in spite of its comparative remoteness, its physical presence has become embedded in the public consciousness, its visual image, sculpted and enveloped in its smooth turf, being a product of the 1927-30 work of preservation and consolidation at the site by the then Ministry of Works. It holds nationally-important status, reflected in its designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, international significance recognised by its incorporation as a key site within the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site and an iconic status (Fig 1), made evident by its featuring in a film scene (*Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*) with the public's best-known (fictional) archaeologist Indiana Jones, one professed archaeological icon of the 20th century speaking of another.

Although the work of more recent years has made it increasingly clear that the Skara Brae settlement did not stand alone in the landscape of Neolithic Orkney but shared a terrain populated with equally substantial sites (such as Barnhouse and Ness of Brodgar; Richards 2005; Towers et al 2015), the fact that it is no longer unique has not lessened its iconic status. Its special quality has always been its level of preservation: standing structures, deep stratigraphy and objects in abundance. And one might think that, given the wealth of evidence the site offers, it should be an easy task to present the total lived experience of Skara Brae. Yet the very fact that so much is there on view, so much already accessible, carries its own constraints. There are real difficulties in presenting afresh a site whose perceived image, both real and virtual, has become implanted in the literature and the imagination, both public and professional, to the point that it has become common intellectual property.

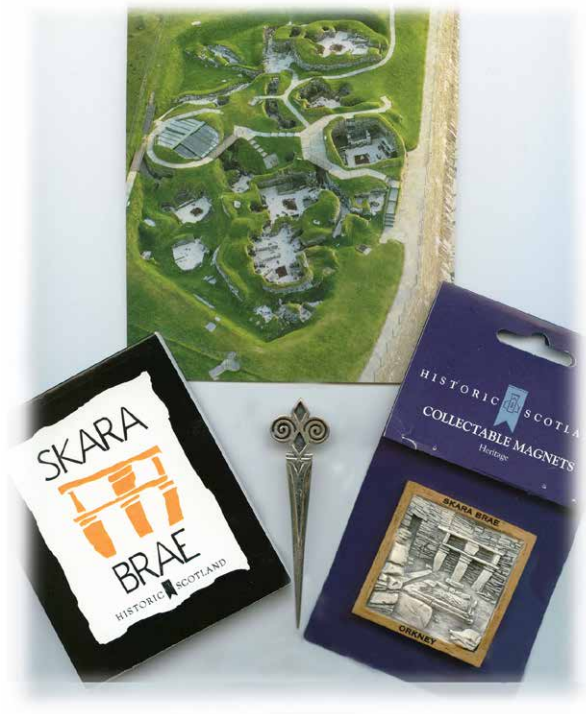


Figure 1. Skara Brae, the iconic site: postcard image and souvenirs with spiral-and-lozenge pot motif reproduced in silver

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that some of these fundamental fixed images are at best misleading, at worst completely false. In some cases it is simply a matter of the terminology employed; in others the problem is more deep-rooted, one of interpretation, resulting from the distorting effect of that entrenched terminology, distorted to the point that one leading archaeologist could recently characterise the site as a settlement of ‘hobbits’ in ‘burrows’ (Miles 2014, 22). Consequently there is much which requires eradication or redefinition to recreate a truer image of the site. We will look primarily at three major inter-related aspects: firstly the use of *subterranean*, or *semi-subterranean* as a principal descriptor of the site, with the sub-text of the settlement existing beneath a single *mound* (with historic implications of a troglodytic, squalid existence); secondly the categorisation of the bulk of the deposits comprising that perceived mound under the blanket term *midden*; and thirdly interpretations of the excavated state of the site with implications for the nature of abandonment, among them the use of a ‘Marie Celeste’ or more accurately Pompeiian model for the site’s survival, and the conferring of a special status on the structure House 7, based on an assumed difficulty of access, high level of decoration and significant artefact collection left *in situ*.

Weighed down by terminology

The bulk of the terminology employed to characterise Skara Brae became embedded with the work of Gordon Childe and his subsequent publications (Childe & Paterson 1929; Childe 1930; 1931a; 1931b; 1950) but the process of

image creation had begun within a year of the site's discovery when the sandhills covering it were ripped away by the great storm of 1850. The categorisation of the site as *subterranean* or *semi-subterranean* – in keeping with a 19th-century vision of the rude and the primitive – begins with the first published reference to the site by Daniel Wilson in *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1851, 143), with news rushed to him by the antiquary George Petrie in time for publication. He describes Petrie's exploration of '... a subterranean dwelling or weem at Skara, in the Bay of Scales [sic]...'. Later that year, notification of the site formed part of a paper read to the Society of Antiquaries of London by Captain F W L Thomas of the Royal Navy (1852, 134-6) who had visited the site as part of a naval survey. Thomas employs the prevalent term 'Picts [sic] house' which he qualifies as 'a small ruinous chamber'. James Farrer's examination of the site some eight years later was only published as a letter to *The Orcadian* newspaper (1861). His work, although dismissed by Childe as unmethodical, includes some perceptive contributions. He expands the single Pict's house to 'several chambers and passages'. He employs the terms *weem* and 'earth dwellings' with their implication of underground structures, but counters this with:

... though I think it probable that there were chambers appearing above the surface of the ground. (Farrer 1861)

George Petrie's publication (1867) of the campaigns of the landowner, William Watt, in the years following Farrer's work, presents what were by then five Skara Brae houses, describing them as 'ancient' or 'primitive dwellings', *buried* (this author's italics) within the mound (1867, 202). The following year William Traill discusses and elaborates on Petrie's report (1868). He reinforces the sense of underground dwellings by conflating the 'mound' and associated structures with chamber tombs:

I use the term 'Pict's house' merely because it is the local name of the common form, of chambered mound... (Traill 1868, 428)

... the ruined buildings at Skerrabrae [sic] differ, not so much in kind as in degree, from the 'Picts' houses' found in other parts of Orkney. There is still the rectangular central chamber and passages in the walls leading into side cells... (ibid, 431)

Munro, in his *Prehistoric Scotland*, reiterates this, placing 'Skerrabrae' under the general heading 'Underground Dwellings' and describing it as consisting of '... a series of underground chambers connected by long winding passages' (1899, 344).

This was the categorisation still in place at the time of the major work of excavation and consolidation overseen by Childe. In the publications which record his work, Childe, rather than dispelling this 19th-century image of buried chambers, rather compounds and perpetuates it. He describes 'the peculiarities of our village and in particular its "subterranean" character' (1931b, 95), allowing this image to persist in spite of his own arguments to the contrary: for example, 'Though Skara Brae is often termed a weem it is not really subterranean and has little in common with the simple weems beyond drains' (1931b, 171). As the sense of the settlement as subterranean became fully embedded so too the concomitant

image of the rude, savage and indeed squalid existence lived in a semi-troglodytic fashion underground, a scenario enthusiastically espoused by Stuart Piggott:

These semi-subterranean houses were roofed probably by sods over a low conical structure of driftwood or even whales' bones, and in the later stages of the settlement were covered by layers of accumulated midden soil and drifted sand: when you live half underground the best place for the rubbish dump is on top. Beneath it, in semi-darkness and inconceivable squalour, where the light would come from the peat fire or at best blubber lamps, and where the floor was slippery with stinking filth and a calf's head could get lost among the bedding, the Neolithic inhabitants of Orkney could at least be warm and out of the wind ... (Piggott & Henderson 1958, 36)

Neither Childe nor Piggott (and others) find any paradox in describing the occupiers of a settlement supplied with a well-constructed drainage system as living in inconceivable squalour surrounded by stinking filth. A contributory factor to this image of a squalid existence was the assumption that the state of the floors as found was exactly the state as occupied (a 'Marie Celeste'/Pompeian model considered below). The description of 'slippery and stinking' persists in spite of the evidence from earlier commentators: Farrer (1861) observes that 'the chambers were in most instances flagged at the bottom'; Traill confirms this, describing how Watt 'carefully lifted every flat stone of the floor, especially near the corners of the apartment' (1868, 439).

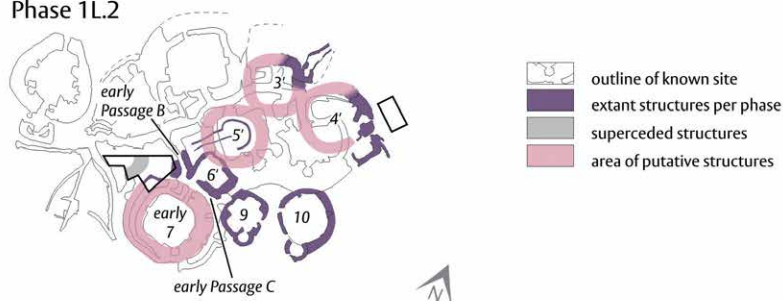
The conflation of 'subterranean' with 'squalid' is one aspect of misrepresentation. More damaging is the false model the term presents for the nature and development of the settlement's construction. It is important to examine the reality of this process and to do this it is helpful to look separately at the house structures and passages, or rather *passageways*.

Reviewing the structures

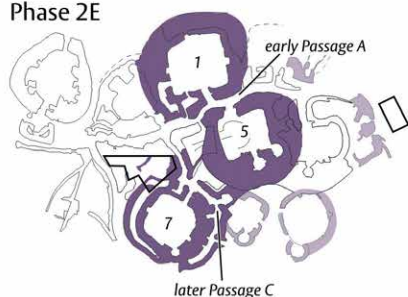
The passages or passageways

An accurate understanding of the development of passage construction is necessary to contradict their inherited identity as a system of 'tunnels' through an assumed midden heap (RCAHMS 1946, 255). 'System' suggests both a planned entity and an independent existence as separate structures linking the houses. In reality the passages developed incrementally rather than being constructed to a single plan (Fig 2); they are not passages leading to house units but *passageways between* those units, not driven as adits into an existing mound. Passage A, built in at least three stages, exists for the greater part of its length simply as the aggregate of the outer walls of the flanking houses (1-6); only the southern side of its final western segment appears to have been built as an independent unit. It, like the later stages of Passage B, was initially free-standing, backed with clay against which deposits accumulated (Fig 6a below). Passage B also represents the amalgamation of at least three phases of construction, its early segment again formed by outer house walls (of House 5¹ and other structures not surviving). Passage C, likewise, does not link separate houses but is formed primarily of the outer wall of House 7 to one side

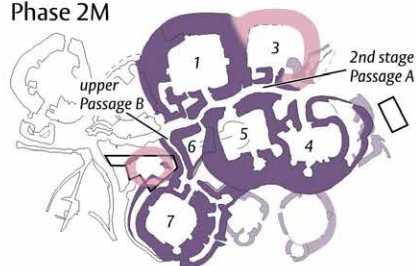
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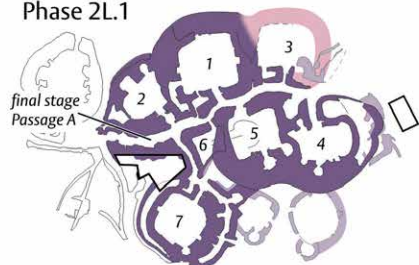
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Phase 2M



Phase 2L.1



Phase 2L.2

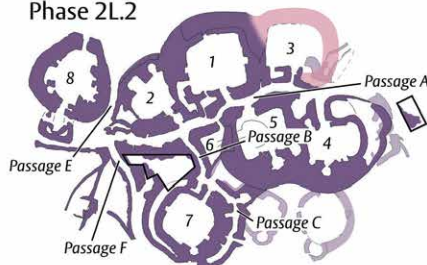


Figure 2. Plans from phases within the settlement development demonstrating the aggregate construction of the passages

and earlier versions of Houses 9 and 6 to the other; ‘Passage’ E simply represents the gap between buildings House 2 and Hut 8; ‘Passage’ F similarly is a label only, given to the walkway between the walling of the final remodelling of the main entrance to the settlement and the remnant wall *a*.

The transformation of *passageways* to passages is achieved by the roofing of the space between buildings with flagstone slabs. It is the subsequent accumulation of material above these which is interpreted by Childe as part of his single midden mound: ‘the top midden ... spreading uniformly across passages A, B and C’ (1931b, 27). In reality it is an agglomeration deriving from an initial covering of clay and an established turf (in the manner of traditional Orkney flagstone roofs; Fenton 1978, 189) augmented with combined deposits from the debris and run-off of the overhanging house thatching to either side and the accumulated material of sand and trample; the top of passageways would have acted both as large gutters as well as upper routeways. Much of this overburden would not have

existed at the point of occupation but is part of the post-abandonment weathering and accumulation: just how much of a proportion it is impossible to tell.

The nature of house construction – encased, not buried

The roofed passageways can thus appear as subterranean, buried beneath this overburden, but the house structures themselves were never covered in the same way. Paradoxically, Childe himself acknowledges this: ‘... the top midden ... is conspicuously absent over the areas of the huts just documented [1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7]’ (1931b, 27). The only actual burying of structures which takes place is the inundation of the buildings of the earlier phases by the deposits and construction of the later phases of the settlement. These early houses were not subterranean but freestanding as Childe again acknowledges: ‘The village was not originally subterranean’ (1931b, 95). Problems have arisen when the antiquarian/archaeological term for the state in which found – buried – is projected on to the state in which lived when occupied. It is this post-construction/occupation build-up which gives the *appearance* of – rather than reflecting the *reality* of – a subterranean existence.

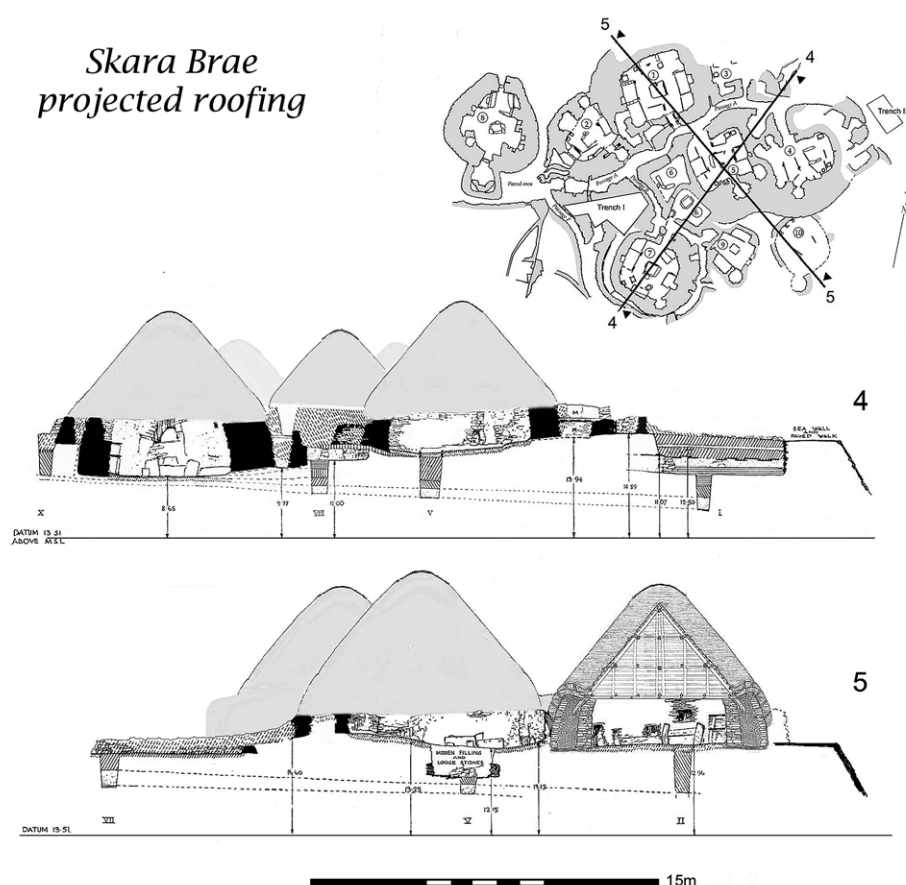


Figure 3. Somewhat more than pimples: Childe’s sections 4 and 5 through the site with the indication of current estimated roof lines and construction superimposed



Figure 4. Alan Sorrell's atmospheric interpretation of the then vision of the site (Jessup 1967). Reproduced by kind permission of the Sorrell family

The fact that the structures are windowless, with no immediate access, ingress or exit, to the outdoors is better interpreted as lending them an internal nature – rather than subterranean *per se* – much like an internal cabin on a liner, or an internal room within thick castle walls. Entry is on ground level, not dropping below ground (apart from one significant exception looked at below). Most crucially the roofs, far from simply ‘protruding like pimples to break the smooth curve of the rubbish heap’s outline’ as Childe has them (1931b, 1), would have sprung from the wallheads creating an upper house space well above ground surface (Fig 3). Present thinking on the likely roofing (Walker forthcoming) is of a (probably) eel-grass thatch with smoke dissipating through it, providing a diffused light without an open central smoke hole, a scenario very far from Childe’s ‘excrescences [from which] wisps of smoke would be rising ... so that the whole hillock would resemble the cone of a volcano’ (1931b, 28). Images of open smoke holes were to continue (Fig 4).

So a subterranean label is misleading in terms of the settlement’s physical nature and misleading in terms of the nature of the life lived. Why, then, has it held such sway? Perhaps it is the effect of the reference to the settlement as buried beneath a single mound that allowed the subterranean or semi-subterranean quality, the 19th-century concept of the ‘weem’, to take such a hold. It is easier to see now how such an image is difficult to shake with the present visitor experience of standing on the wall-heads above the site looking down into the depths below.

Deconstructing *the* mound and *the* midden

The singularity of the mound was not an initial construct. The site was first described by Thomas (1852) as ‘an immense accumulation of ashes’ and by Farrer (1861) more accurately as ‘in alternate layers of sand and ash’. It is Petrie (1867) who conflates these to a single ‘immense Kitchen midden’, with the ultimately damaging singular concepts of both *the* mound and *the* midden. It is this description of the site which is perpetuated by Childe in his ‘domical mound’ of midden (1931b, 27) and which skews so much of his interpretation, its use encapsulated in his description of the inhabitants as working on ‘the surface of their dunghill’ (1931b, 171).

The use of *the* mound with a qualifier – the *settlement* mound – with its inbuilt sense of plurality, would be acceptable. It could be characterised as the equivalent of a farm mound (Davidson et al 1986) or more nearly a *tell* – the mound itself singular but representing multiple events, deposits and structures. It is the eliding of the single mound with the concept of a single midden which is such a damaging one because this has led to the false model for the construction and development of the site as an initial mound of midden into which houses were inserted: ‘All these huts and passages were situated within *the* midden’ (RCAHMS 1946, 257; this author’s italics).

The reality of the midden

The singularity of the midden becomes embedded with Childe’s discussion under the heading ‘II.6 THE MIDDEN’ (1931b, 24). In spite of his distinctions within this of variations in colour (brown/ordinary, red/ash and black) and texture (loose and tough), and in spite of recognition that the loose midden is in reality sand with intermixed debris (ibid, 25), the deposits are consistently given the identity of a single deposit: ‘... *a* deposit that we shall term *the* midden’ (Childe 1931b, 6; this author’s italics). David Clarke’s 1972-3 excavations at the centre of the settlement (Trench I) were thus conducted under the preconception that this was the apex of Childe’s single midden mound and examination was of a ‘portion of the midden [...] left intact between Hut 7 and the paved area’ (RCAHMS 1946, 257). Consequently the on-site excavation recording followed Childe in labelling the bulk of the contexts which contained refuse debris as ‘midden’ and as a result the main section has unfortunately previously been misleadingly presented as a single homogenous deposit (eg Clarke 1976, fig 3).

A revision of this blanket ‘midden’ categorisation is crucial to the fuller interpretation of the site. This is part of a more general recognition of the unhelpful nature of the undifferentiated use of the term. Needham and Spence (1996, 243) exhort excavators ‘to resist employing the term midden in order simply to denote the existence of refuse-rich deposits’, recognising that ‘such use is [...] of no value in promoting the understanding of settlement debris’. Recommending the use of ‘*occupation deposit*’ as the suitable generic term to cover all contexts interpreted as relating to settlement debris, they stress the importance of differentiating the

elements within these deposits to facilitate the ‘reconstruction of site organisation and maintenance routines’.¹

The 1972-3 detailed on-site matrix descriptions and subsidiary labelling has enabled this necessary re-evaluation and re-classification of the individual deposits (Fig 5). The exact nature of each context has been refined further by the quantification of its contents (both artefactual and ecofactual), with gross values adjusted according to the relative volumes of each context. This has allowed the identification of the multivariate categories of deposit present, ranging from actual midden (ie specific accumulations of actual waste material), to construction deposits incorporating midden-derived material, consolidation/stabilisation layers over sand-blow or over the residue of earlier phases, and actual floor or occupation deposits incorporating accidental debris. Within this differentiation the individual components of the matrix have been more accurately identified: ash, clay, sand and humic material.

The section illustration demonstrates the distribution of these components through the stratigraphy, showing that the bulk of the deposits comprise clay or clay-rich constructional material and ash-rich domestic waste and consolidation products (Simpson et al 2006); these are interspersed with major sand accumulations but actual midden exists as only one deposit (context 155) in this area.² This image should redress the false characterisation of the Skara Brae site matrix as, for example, ‘...walls set into midden consisting mostly of shells with animal bones, pottery and other rubbish’ (Ashmore 1996, 66).

The role of clay

Crucial among the misconceptions, or lacunae, within Childe’s interpretations of the site is his failure to recognise the fundamental role of clay – fundamental, in every sense. His notebooks (1928-30) document the frequent occurrence of clay, alongside that of his ‘midden’, in a ratio of midden:clay of approximately 3:2. However, in his final monograph publication (Childe 1931b), the role and frequency of clay is downplayed: the ratio of reference to the two materials is now 4:1 midden:clay. Such clay references as do appear are principally to foundation layers beneath structures; there is virtually no mention of the other constructional uses such as flooring, wall cladding and packing. Nowhere does Childe appear to recognise the pivotal role of clay as the parent material to the bulk of the deposits, in spite of his reference to the ‘midden’ as having the ‘tenacity of tough clay’ (Childe 1931b, 24). He does not revisit Petrie’s reporting of Watt’s description of the walls he had observed as ‘coated over by a layer of clay’ (1867, 209) nor his consideration as to whether ‘excavations round the landward side of the ruins would probably show whether they had been plastered all round with clay’. He does not acknowledge Balfour Stewart’s recognition of this:

1 I would re-categorise the Beaker-period ‘midden’ excavated by my late husband and myself at Rosinish, Benbecula (Shepherd & Tuckwell 1977), as a ‘midden-enriched ploughsoil’.

2 More substantial deposits of pure midden (Childe’s Black Midden) were found in Trench II on the periphery of the settlement.

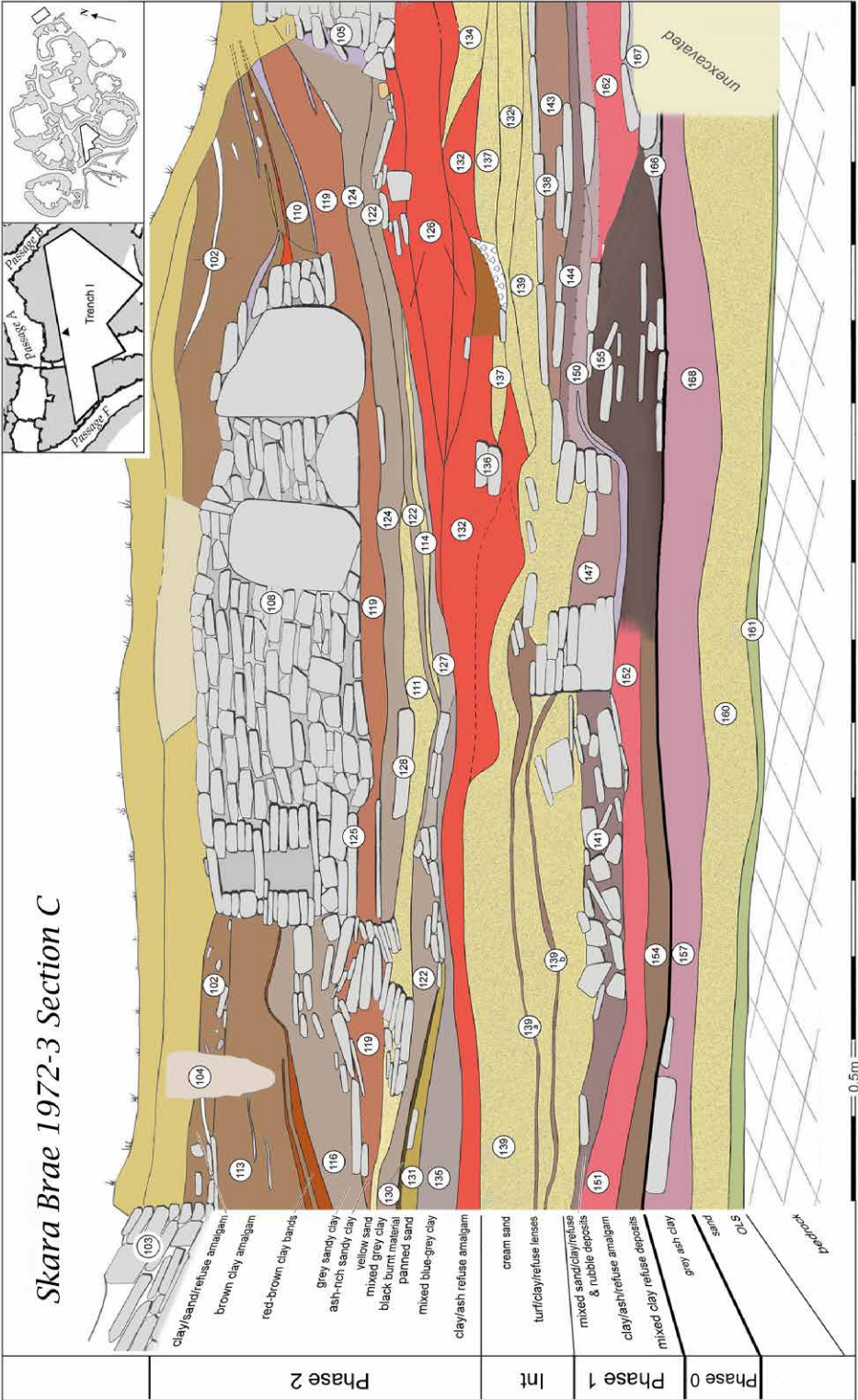


Figure 5. The main 1972-3 (north) section C through Trench I at the heart of the settlement showing details of the matrix of contexts. Approx date brackets: Phase 0: c 3360 to 3160 cal BC; Phase 1: c 2910-2880 to 2860-2840 cal BC; Phase 2: c 2800-2700 to 2550-2420 cal BC, Dating: Sheridan et al 2013

Quantities of clay appeared against the base of the wall. This proves Mr Petrie's view that on opening the landward portion of the dwellings clay was to be found brought there ... to plaster or bind their walls. (Stewart & Boyd Dawkins 1914, 346)

In the 1972-3 excavations large quantities of this characteristic blue-grey clay were found throughout the deposits and structures examined. Within the on-site record there are numerous references to large clumps of 'blue-grey clay' occurring within those contexts otherwise universally described simply as *midden* (volunteers' notebooks, Skara Brae Project archive). In addition to this random appearance within these mixed 'midden' contexts it existed as discrete layers, both as foundation deposits beneath structures (eg context 147) and as the basis of floors within them. Further to these it appeared as thick cladding to the stonework at the back of passages A (Fig 6a) and B; as packing between inner and outer walls of an early stage of House 7; as remnants of the coating of casing walls; and as material sealing the stub of an earlier Phase 2 wall whose stonework was cut by the walling of Passage A for which it subsequently acted as a buttress. Large deposits of clay sealed the actual organic midden deposits in Trench II (Childe's Black Midden) on the periphery of the settlement. It is this clay – as the foundation of paving, as cladding for walls, baked red by the spreading of hot ashes (either deliberately or incidentally), stained purple-brown by the dumping and admixture of actual midden material and thatch drip, puddled and trampled by human and animal traffic, churned into a morass in the narrow gaps between houses – which forms the basis of construction and the accumulating deposits. These scenarios until now have been lost in the image of a single 'midden' substance. The source for this clay is most likely to have been the sloping ground to the south-west of the bay where characteristic blue-grey deposits outcrop between bedrock and the turf cover (Fig 6b).

Beyond Skara Brae, clay is observable as a fundamental building material more widely within the Neolithic monuments of Orkney, *inter alia* in the construction of the settlement at Barnhouse (Richards 2005, 174) and the chamber tombs of Maeshowe (Richards 2005, 247) and Howe (Ballin Smith 1994, 12-17). The

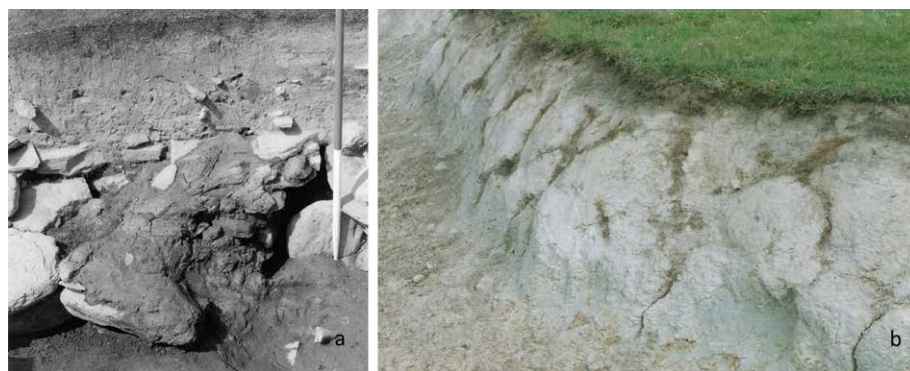


Figure 6. a) clay cladding on the stonework of the back of Passage A; b) the characteristic blue-grey clay outcropping above Skail Bay; depth of deposit c 0.40-0.45m)

continued use of clay in Orcadian house construction until the recent past (Fenton 1978, 144; Walker & McGregor 1996, 79) is a factor worthy of note.

The nature of abandonment and the ‘special’ case of House 7

The stratigraphy recorded during the 1972-3 excavations therefore demonstrates a revised picture, showing the house structures encased as part of a constructional package with clay or a clay/sand/refuse amalgam which is amalgamated with, and absorbed by, subsequent deposits. So the houses were not buried but encased: why then such a strong historical attachment to a (semi-)subterranean model for the settlement? The catalyst for this seems to lie with a single structure: House 7. It provides the one location within the settlement where the label ‘semi-subterranean’ appears to have some validity. It lies at a lower level than the rest of the final settlement, served by its covered passageways, in particular Passage B, dropping down like cellar steps from the height of the main passage. Its separation, the only structure of the final village apparently served by a separate passage, has in turn led to its being awarded special status (Richards 1991, 41). Further features have been interpreted as conferring special rank on the building: the supposed heavy decoration of its stonework (ibid, 36) against which this author has previously argued (Shepherd 2000, 141-3),³ and the possible ritual foundation burial of two adult females within a sub-mural cist beneath the right-hand bed. This last need not be deemed unique: only limited instances of sub-mural excavation have been possible at the site (by necessity to preserve the stability of existing structures); thus there is no way of assessing whether the House 7 interments were a significant deposit, a special case, or an example of what may have been the norm for all houses.

The further special pleading for House 7 derives from the conviction that only in that house were the contents left in place on abandonment:

...the other houses at Skara Brae were comparatively clean and House 7 was the only house where large numbers of artefacts were found (Noble 2006, 200).

This comparative cleanliness of individual houses, however, has little to do with their original Neolithic state but is rather a product of pre-Childe activity. The 19th- and early 20th-century records present a history of continuous clearance, refilling and re-clearance of the structures. Within a year of its discovery Thomas reported that ‘many relics have been procured at various times from the debris’ (1852). Petrie details the ‘clearance’ by Watt of three houses (Childe’s Houses 1, 3, and 4) and refers to the ‘clearing out’ (after his publication) of a further house (House 5; Petrie 1867, 203 footnote 1). The ‘clearance’ referred to was of those ‘several chambers and passages’ already explored by Farrer, refilled with sand and debris in the intervening years. Stewart and Boyd Dawkins reinforce this history

3 This may need to be reassessed in the light of Antonia Thomas’ recent discovery (2015) of a further 14 incised stones within House 7 and this author’s identification of a previously-unlabelled decorated slab (held in the National Museums Scotland collections) as the end-slab of the sub-mural cist (Shepherd in prep).

of cumulative post-exploration alteration, describing how ‘A large quantity of sand and weeds had to be removed’ (1914, 344).

So for houses 1-6 we cannot make any firm assumptions about the quantity and quality of such assemblages as had been deemed worthy of leaving in their place, and certainly cannot state (*contra* Ashmore 1996, 66) that ‘Most of the houses seem to have been emptied of their contents before the settlement was abandoned’.

Where we do have information of the actual abandoned state, ie those fragments of the other houses which had not been subject to historic clearance before their floors were exposed by Childe (houses 9 and 10, plus the segment of the early western house, Structure 2, excavated in the 1970s), the assemblages appear not so different in scale and quality – and are possibly even superior – to that found in House 7 (Table 1). The richness and diversity of the Structure 2 contents (Fig 7) are especially striking considering the small percentage of the estimated floor area actually excavated.

House 7	House 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • axehead • 4 bone pins [awls/pins] • carved stone ball • decorated rimsherd • 5 large cooking pots • several walrus tusk pendants • large cetacean bone basin • 2 whale vertebra cups • 2 stone mortars • 2 bone picks [mattocks] • scapula shovel • cache of bone beads • other beads of bone and fish vertebrae • 2 bone spatulas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 ‘celts’ [axeheads] • 2 fine though broken pins [awls/pins] • several ‘more commonplace’ bone tools, including two B3 [blunt-nosed implements] • scrapers and chips of white or orange flint • many sherds, often very ornate • 4 ornate pots against walls ‘as for House 7’ • at least one complete antler • haematite • vertebra dish • pin with bulb at side • bone spatula
	Early western house (Structure 2)
House 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decorated pot base • pottery sherds • axehead • edge-ground stone knife • 2 x flint scrapers • bone awl • shaped boar’s tusk • astragalus polisher • bone pin with lateral bulb • perforated ox phalange – possible whistle • bone slice/chisel • bone bead • incised Skail knife (discoidal stone knife struck from a cobble)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 ‘picks’ [bone mattocks] • several ‘pins’ [awls/pins] • several broken ‘pins’ [awls/pins] • perforated antler haft for a ‘celt’ [axehead] • grooved ball of volcanic stone [camptonite] • rough whalebone basin • ball of camptonite carved with spikes • worked antler tine • incised sherd • sherd decorated with small applied circles 	

Table 1. Comparison of assemblages from Houses 7, 9 and 10 and the segment of the early western house (Structure 2) excavated in 1972-3; Childe’s original artefact terminology quoted with gloss in brackets

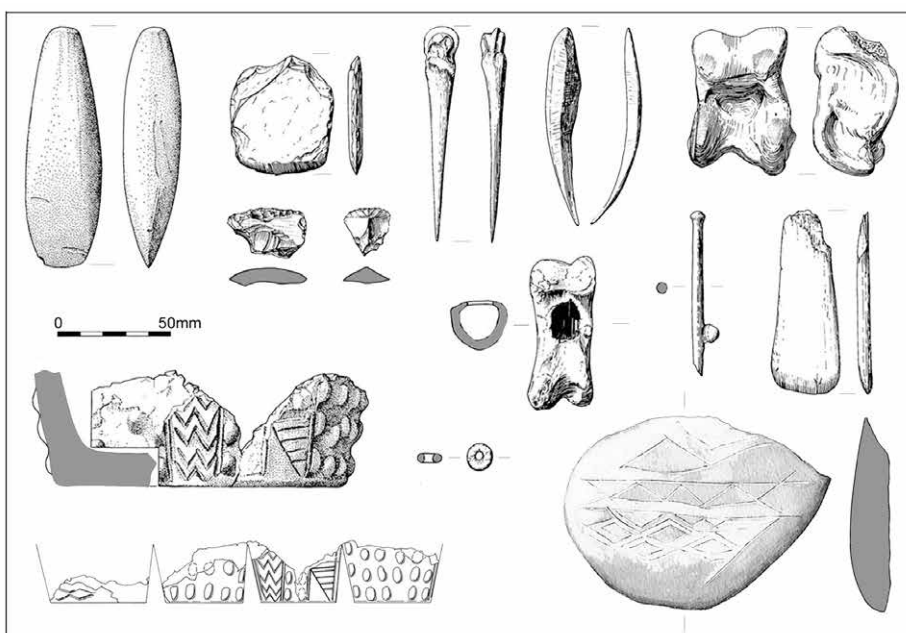


Figure 7. Casual losses or deliberate deposits: the assemblage recovered from the segment of the early western house (Structure 2; Phase 1M, c 2890-2830 cal BC)

Reviewing the nature of House 7

Beyond the contents, the structural details of the western house show it to be at least as substantial as House 7 with a comparable width of its double wall measuring c 1.4m. The alcove, paved and edged with an upright slab, has previously been designated (Clarke 1976, 11) as a bed recess, inset, like those of the early House 9, within the wall; however, the curvature and thickness of the wall and angle of the upright suggest a greater correspondence with one of the ‘pens’ from House 7 (Fig 8). Estimates of the size of Structure 2, through projection of the wall curvature, suggest that it was of a similar overall size to House 7. The two buildings were in close juxtaposition; they coexisted for some time as part of the core of the Phase 1 settlement, substantial buildings rather than the ‘flimsy’ structures (cf houses 9 and 10) previously assumed (Childe 1931b, 93) for this early development.

This coexistence ended when Structure 2 was felled or abandoned; by contrast House 7 was retained – refashioned and refurnished – throughout the subsequent lifetime of the settlement. It is this aspect, its longevity, which makes it exceptional; it might well have acquired the status, if not of an ancient monument, then at least a ‘listed building’ (to use the modern parlance of heritage conservation) within the settlement. Conversely it is possible to argue that the house finished its days merely as a workshop, full of pots, basins and the like, the slime on the floor perhaps a remnant of its last use as a leather workshop, the skull found in the ‘bed-place’ having supplied the brains for the skin-curing process.

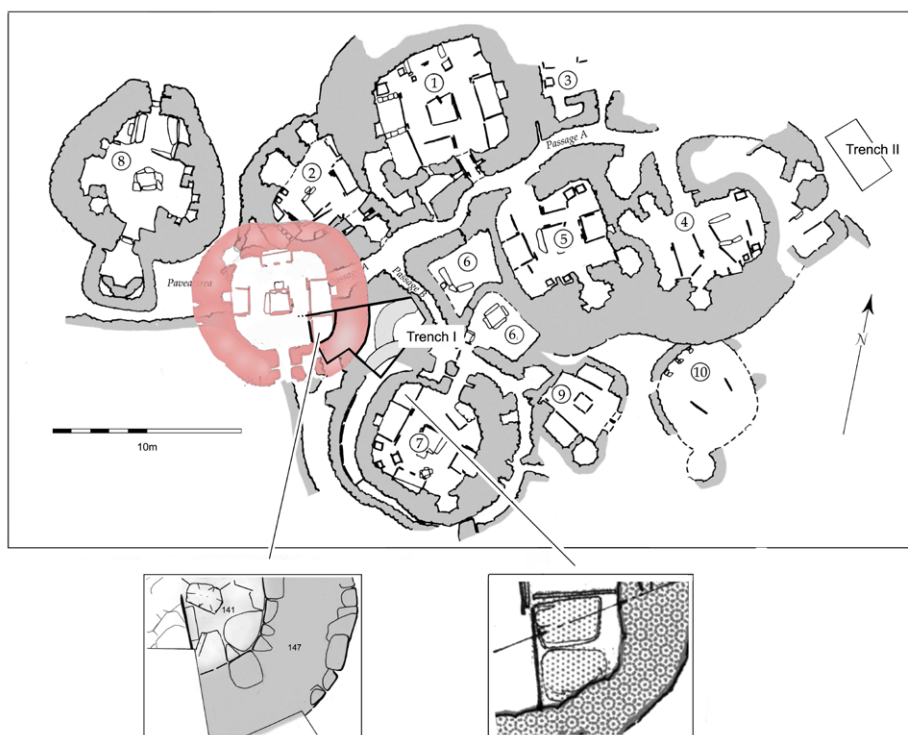


Figure 8. Site plan showing an estimated size for the early western house (Structure 2) superimposed (in pink), based on comparison between the excavated alcove of the structure and the north-west 'pen' of House 7 (insets)

The nature of abandonment

Whatever their exact nature and function, the material remaining within House 7 and the assemblage recovered from the western house throw up basic questions of loss, abandonment or structured deposition which would require a further paper to explore. The imbuing of the site with a 'Marie Celeste' (or more accurately, Pompeiian) quality, a single episode of sand inundation – an equivalent of the Pompeiian blanket of volcanic ash – preserving the settlement exactly as it was left, is one which Childe espouses:

... finally the inhabitants, deserting their dwellings in precipitate haste, have left them exactly as they were during their occupation with implements, ornaments and vessels all in place... (1931b, 1)

This embedded image has long since been challenged: the continuous sand deposition, evidenced by the stratigraphy, throughout the life-time of the settlement suggests that the inhabitants would have had a familiarity with its constant effect such that it would have demanded a truly cataclysmic event of tsunami proportions, rather than a single storm – however savage – to remove them. In addition such a model makes little allowance for any alteration to the post-abandonment state, either by more recent explorers or in antiquity. It makes the

presence of both artefactual and ecofactual material a product of enforced desertion with no allowance for reasons of managed departure, destruction or redeployment. Moreover it leaves the artefacts themselves as so much detritus. Incidents such as the reuse of broken, decorated, stones within later structures (Shepherd 2000, 146), or the loss or deposition of a decorated Skaill knife (ibid, 145-6, fig 12.12; Fig 7 above) within the ruins of a substantial house, raise questions of the intrinsic value and meaning of these objects. Were decorated Skaill knives a common place – of the early period at least – and this one a single loss among many or did it hold far more significance, placed as a valedictory gesture to the house?



Figure 9. A decorative identity rooted in bedrock? The design schemes of early Skara Brae stonework compared with the natural fissuring of Stromness flagstone

Whatever its meaning, the survival of the incised Skaill knife helped transform the perception of the decorative suite in use by this early phase of the settlement (Phase 1E). Together with the spectacular incised slab, broken and reused as part of paving in early phase 2, these demonstrate that decorative schemes as opposed to simple isolated motifs are a major component of the repertoire fully established from the earliest stages of the site's development (in its Grooved Ware-associated incarnation: Shepherd 2000, fig 12.13). These also underline the overwhelmingly geometric nature of the Skara Brae decorative style. Perhaps it is one of these images, whose origins appear to be rooted in the flagstone bedrock (ibid, 149-52; Fig 9), which should replace the embedded image of the double spiral and lozenge to stand as the embodiment of the site's identity.

Acknowledgements

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The earlier prehistoric collections from the Culbin Sands, northern Scotland: the construction of a narrative

Richard Bradley, Aaron Watson and Ronnie Scott

Abstract

During the 19th and early 20th centuries the Culbin Sands produced one of the largest collections of Neolithic to Early Bronze Age artefacts in Scotland. Their presence has been difficult to explain. Comparison with the results of fieldwalking surveys in the surrounding area confirms the unusual nature of this material, which may have been restricted to an isolated promontory or even an island associated with a sheltered harbour. Some of the finds provide evidence of arrowhead production. Others had been imported over considerable distances. Although the area occupied by the Sands would have seen some domestic activity, the exceptional character of the assemblage found there suggests that it also functioned as a beach market, as it may have done in the Pictish period.

Keywords: *Culbin Sands, Moray Firth, fieldwalking, settlement patterns, harbours, beach markets*

An introduction to the Culbin Sands

In 2004 David Clarke contributed to a book on *Scotland in Ancient Europe* (Clarke 2004). He was concerned with the extent of regional variation and highlighted a series of anomalies that had been overlooked in accounts of the Neolithic period. Among them was the enormous collection of artefacts recovered from the Culbin Sands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In his article he called for the construction of ‘narratives exploring local phenomena’. Our contribution is an attempt to meet his challenge.

The Culbin Sands extend for 16km along the southern shore of the Moray Firth – a deep inlet of the North Sea reaching westwards from Fraserburgh to Inverness (Fig 1; Ross 1992, 1-21). The dunes extend between the mouths of the rivers Nairn and Findhorn. At their eastern limit there is a harbour fed by two rivers, and a former wetland. The Culbin Sands accumulated through the movement of sediment downstream to the coast, where it was reworked by the sea. This process led to the formation of a series of coastal bars which are still developing today.

As sea levels fell, areas of sand were exposed and blown inland. The chronology of these processes is poorly understood. On the one hand, it is known that a channel at the southern limit of the dunes had dried up by the mid- to late third millennium BC (May & Hansom 2003, 529-30 and 567-75), but it is uncertain when the sand spread inland. On the other hand, it is known that a Middle Bronze Age shell midden overlay a deposit of this kind (Coles & Taylor 1970).

The main period in which the dunes developed was the Middle Ages. There are traces of plough furrows beneath areas of blown sand, and there is historical evidence for the loss of productive soils as the dunes spread inland from the coast (Ross 1992). It is recorded that the settlement of Culbin itself was buried by a storm in 1663. The dunes continued to grow until the 20th century, by which time some of them had attained considerable heights, but they were never stable and their positions shifted in strong winds. It was this process that exposed large numbers of prehistoric artefacts (Black 1891; National Museum of Antiquities of

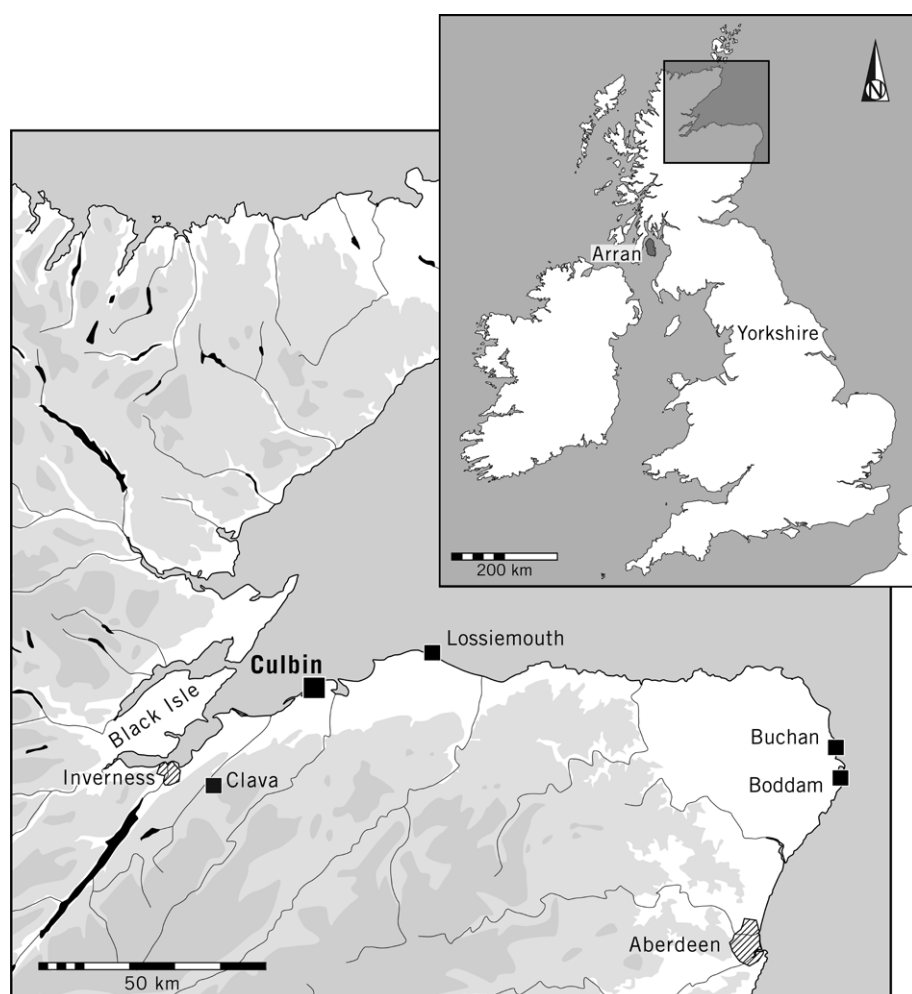


Figure 1. The location of the Culbin Sands in relation to the sources of the lithic raw materials found there. Drawing by Aaron Watson

Scotland 1892, 90-5; Callander 1911). Many of them were collected before the ground was stabilised by planting trees. As a result there have been fewer finds during recent years.

The largest collection of finds from the Culbin Sands is held by National Museums Scotland (NMS) in Edinburgh and this provided one of the starting points for David's article (Fig 2). The quantity and quality of this material are exceptional but it is difficult to study, for it is clear that it represents only a fraction of what was originally recovered. It is obvious that certain artefacts – particularly arrowheads – could have been collected at the expense of others, and few of the findspots were recorded in any detail. As a result it is impossible to tell where individual objects were discovered or which items were found together. What is clear is that they came from a series of concentrations which were exposed on shingle ridges when the sands moved in the wind (Ross 1992, 91-2). Others could have been more scattered, and the condition of the museum material suggests that many were reworked by natural processes in the dunes and were not in their original positions. The only items which were obviously *in situ* were Early to Middle Bronze Age cinerary urns containing cremated remains.

Even with these limitations, the extraordinary character of these collections is clear. The sheer number of artefacts is out of all proportion to the quantities known from excavations along the Moray Firth. It is estimated that 29,500 artefacts came to Edinburgh (ibid, 88). There is an exceptional number of flint arrowheads, and the chronological range of this material is unusual too. It extends from a few Mesolithic microliths to numerous artefacts of Chalcolithic / Early Bronze Age



Figure 2. A selection of flint arrowheads from the Culbin Sands. © National Museums Scotland

character. They provide the focus of this chapter, but the same sites produced other objects, including fine metalwork of pre-Roman Iron Age, Roman Iron Age and Pictish dates.

Although their distribution was never recorded in detail, it is known that all the finds came from the eastern section of the dunes in an area bounded by Findhorn Bay, a series of fossil beachlines and the shore of the Moray Firth. This area covers approximately 10 square kilometres. The dunes and gravel bars extend for another 10km as far as the mouth of the Nairn, but they probably formed after the prehistoric period as sediments were carried westwards by the current.

How should this material be explained? In his original discussion David rejected the argument that this collection was so large because attractive artefacts would be easy to find in sand; there are similar dune systems around the Scottish coast where they do not occur. A particular problem is that little was known about the distribution of similar artefacts in the surrounding area.

The results of fieldwalking in 2014

One way of approaching this problem was to compare the artefacts recovered before Culbin Forest was planted with those in the nearest cultivated land to the original findspots. It could show whether the material held in Edinburgh was truly anomalous. With that in mind we undertook a programme of fieldwalking immediately south of the area where the original discoveries were made. It covered a former wetland between the Findhorn and another river, the Muckle Burn, and

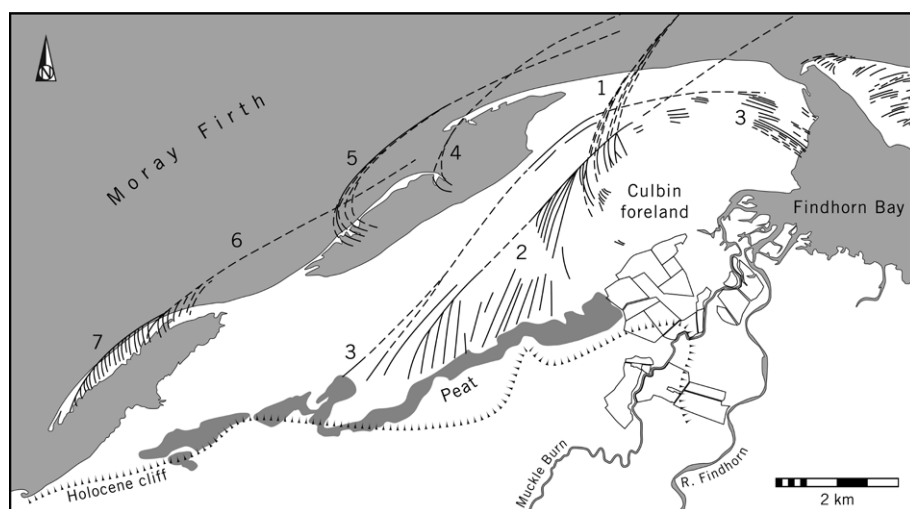


Figure 3. Map of the Culbin Sands, showing the successive shingle bars, numbered from 1 to 7 after May & Hansom (2003). 1 is the oldest and 7 the most recent. The map also shows a fossil cliff running parallel to the modern coastline and the river Findhorn, and a deposit of peat forming part of a former wetland. The 'Culbin foreland' is where artefacts were found in great numbers in the 19th and earlier 20th centuries. The fields shown south-west of Findhorn Bay are those surveyed in 2014. Drawing by Aaron Watson

extended onto the well-drained land to their south and west. The fields were walked at 20m intervals. Metre-wide transects totalling nearly 500km were examined in April 2014 (Fig 3).

How do the finds from this project compare with those from the Culbin Sands? And how similar are they to the finds from earlier fieldwalking projects close to the Clava Cairns 30km to the WSW, and on the Black Isle roughly the same distance to the west (Bradley 2000, chapter 9; Phillips & Watson 2000; Phillips 2002, 270-94)? The second question is especially important as these surveys were conducted by the same method and, to some extent, by the same people.

It is clear that the density of artefacts was of the same order of magnitude in all three projects, although their quantity varied across each of the areas studied. The new project identified an even scatter of lithic artefacts on the more fertile soils overlooking the drained wetland extending inland from Findhorn Bay (Fig 4). A few isolated finds also came from islands of slightly higher ground in the reclaimed land between the River Findhorn and the Muckle Burn. The quantity of artefacts

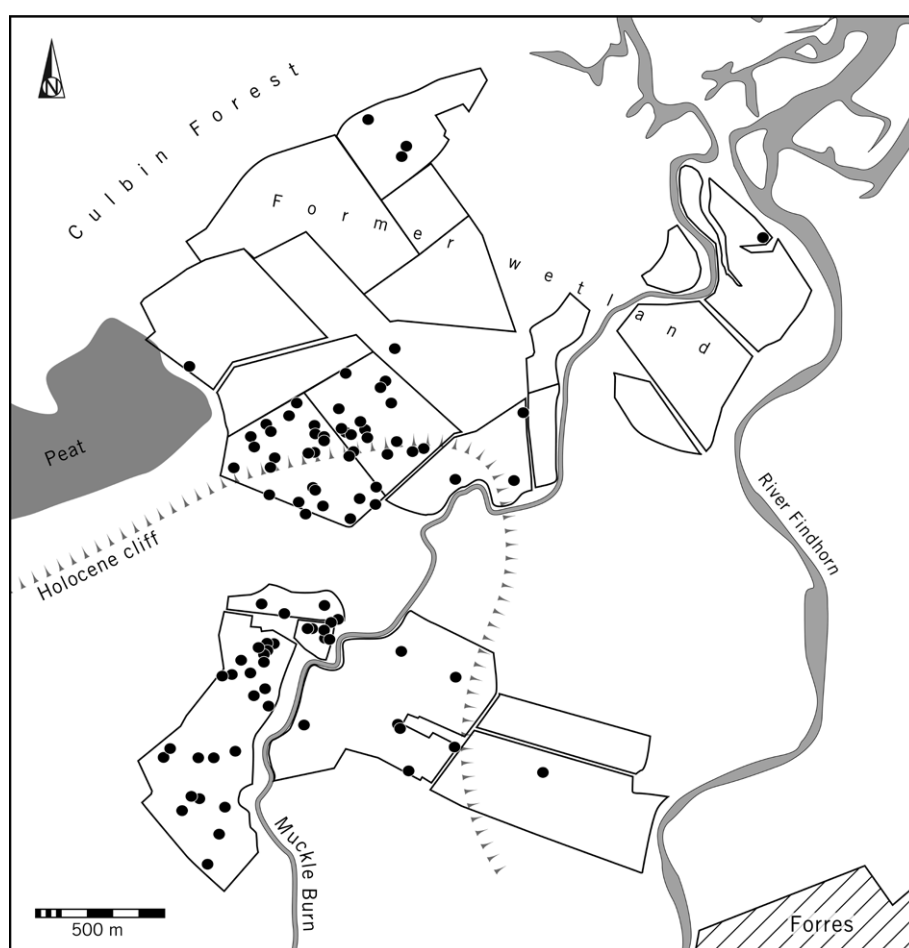


Figure 4. The fields surveyed in 2014, showing the distribution of lithic artefacts focussing on the fossil cliff line above a former wetland. Drawing by Aaron Watson

recovered was remarkably low, as it was in both the projects undertaken further to the west. Only 101 finds were recovered from a total of 22 fields, although some of those areas may have been underwater or subject to flooding in the earlier prehistoric period. The overall pattern was like that around the margins of the Great Moss of Petty investigated during the Clava survey.

The spacing of the transects means that they recorded 5% of the material exposed on the ground surface. It is necessary to multiply the results by 20 to provide an accurate estimate of the total. On that basis the overall density of surface finds from the Clava field survey was 5.2 per hectare; this figure includes areas where no artefacts were found. It was lower on the Black Isle (3.6 artefacts per hectare) and still less in the fields at the eastern end of the Culbin Sands (2.1 artefacts per hectare). There are various estimates of the proportion of artefacts exposed by ploughing (Lewarch & O'Brien 1981), but adopting a conservative estimate that 5% of the objects in the ploughsoil are visible at any one time gives the following estimates: 104 lithic artefacts per hectare for the area around the Clava Cairns; 70 for the Black Isle; and 43 for the fields investigated in 2014 (this figure may be lower than the others because the study area included an area of former wetland where little was found). It seems possible that they represent the normal pattern of earlier prehistoric occupation in the Inner Moray Firth. The only difference between the results of the new work and those of the other projects was the rarity of Mesolithic material from Culbin. The finds from the arable land beside the Sands lack chronologically diagnostic forms, but, like those from the other two projects, they can be dated on technological grounds to the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age periods.

The results of all three surveys in the Inner Moray Firth are consistent with one another. They were obtained using the same methodology, and in the case of the Clava field survey, the patterns identified by walking at 20m intervals were verified by repeating the exercise on a 5m grid. One reason for accepting this conclusion is that very different results were obtained by three similar projects undertaken in inland parts of north-eastern and eastern Scotland. In each case the density of surface finds was considerably higher (Phillips 2002, 346-51; Bradley 2005, chapter 4).

Of the Culbin fieldwalking material, a few pieces are too small for the raw material to be identified, but 60% of the identifiable artefacts are of flint and 32% are of quartz or quartzite. The proportions of these materials in the Clava field survey were 68% and 30% respectively. There are comparable figures for finds from the Black Isle where 60% of the artefacts are of flint and 35% are of quartz. The finds from fieldwork close to the Culbin Sands also included 8% of silcrete – a raw material which has only recently been identified and can be mistaken for flint (Ballin 2014). By contrast, the finds in NMS are dominated by worked flints, suggesting that quartz artefacts were not recognised when the prehistoric deposits were still accessible. Torben Ballin (2014) has identified worked silcrete among the finds from Culbin.

How are the results of surface collection related to the lithic artefacts from the Culbin Sands? Estimates based on fieldwalking suggest that the area from which worked flints were recovered would have contained about 43,000 finds. (The results

of the Clava survey provide a higher figure, and this might be realistic as more of the study area was suitable for settlement.) It is recorded that 29,500 worked flints from Culbin were sent to the then-named National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. They include 1,100 arrowheads and over 4,000 flint scrapers; smaller collections went to other institutions and many finds remained in private hands. Since they were not acquired by systematic survey and were found only where the dunes were eroding, there must have been many more. It is likely that worked quartz was overlooked by the original collectors. In the fieldwork undertaken in 2014 flint accounted for 60% of the artefacts. If that was representative, as the figures from the other survey areas suggest, it would account for around 25,000 of the estimated total of finds from the Culbin Sands. That is less than the quantity in the Edinburgh collection alone. It seems most unlikely that it accounts for the entire assemblage from the Sands. If the figures are adjusted to follow the higher density of artefacts found by the Clava survey, the number of finds from beneath the dunes still remains exceptional.

The results of this modest project answer one of the questions raised in David's article. If lithic artefacts were sparsely distributed across the fertile soils of the Moray Plain and the Black Isle, the finds from the Culbin Sands must have a different explanation. There is an obvious contrast between the early finds, many of which never reached public collections, and the material recovered by field survey.

The results of fieldwalking also shed light on the topography of the Culbin complex. Most of the land south of the original findspots is currently under the plough, but some fields are bounded by deep ditches and are characterised by alluvial deposits which may have formed at a time when the sea level was higher. Shingle ridges protrude through the water-lain sediments, but, unlike their counterparts within the Culbin Forest, they are without finds of prehistoric artefacts. Instead this area includes sherds and building material of Post-Medieval date, suggesting that the land was reclaimed at this period. The estate maps published by Sinclair Ross in 1992 support this interpretation. It is on the higher, better drained land further to the south and west that most prehistoric artefacts were found in 2014.

The ground surfaces that have been observed beneath the sand dunes suggest that the area with the largest number of finds would not have been subject to flooding. The zone in which the 19th and earlier 20th century discoveries were made was separated from the Moray Plain by a large area of wetland. There seems to have been a sheltered inlet at the mouth of the river Findhorn. It may have been protected from stormy conditions by a series of shingle bars (Ross 1992). The prehistoric artefacts were associated with an offshore island at the end of the Mesolithic period and with an isolated promontory as the sea level fell between then and the Early Bronze Age (Fraser Sturt, pers comm). The precursor of Findhorn Bay would have offered a safe haven for people travelling along the coast. It also provided easy access to the hinterland.

Earlier prehistoric artefacts from the Culbin Sands

These factors help to explain two unusual characteristics of the earlier prehistoric material. One is the unusual composition of the collection from the Culbin Sands, and the other is the evidence it provides for contacts with distant areas.

The first point is best illustrated by the Early Bronze Age phase. There are two stone moulds for making flat axeheads from this area, although their findspots are not known in detail. They recall similar discoveries from north-east Scotland, as well as a similar find from the henge monument at Quarrywood, 15km away (Needham 2004). Not only do they provide evidence for the production of specialised objects, the process depended on obtaining access to non-local materials. The same applies to the production of faience beads at Culbin (Sheridan & McDonald 2001). This is especially important as they contain tin from Cornwall or Devon, as well as copper that is likely to have come from Ireland.

Similar arguments apply to the lithic artefacts from Culbin. There are problems in establishing the sources of the raw materials. Sinclair Ross conducted a detailed study of the composition of eight beaches or shingle ridges at Culbin or locations to its east and west (1992, 174). Flint accounted for a minute fraction of just two of these deposits and was entirely absent from the other six. It is clear, however, that the coastline has been changing since human activity began in the Mesolithic period, and it would be wrong to rule out the possibility that pieces of flint could have been collected from deposits of which no trace remains today. That would account for the use of poor quality pebbles among the artefacts in NMS, as well as those found in fieldwalking in 2014.

The arrowheads are particularly informative. Their representation varied over time. Barbed and tanged examples are commonest, followed by leaf-shaped arrowheads. Oblique examples also occur, but are less frequently represented in the Edinburgh collection. Some of these pieces were broken or abandoned because of flaws in the raw material. Others could not have been used as they would never have been aerodynamic. That is especially true of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age examples. The number of incomplete objects has an important implication. Although there were an unusual number of arrowheads at Culbin, this could be misleading as the figure is augmented by the presence of unfinished artefacts. There is no way of telling how many more had been made without encountering problems. They could have been taken away from the site.

It is clear that large quantities of debitage were observed beneath the sand dunes, adding weight to the argument that much of the flint was being worked at the site. Burnt pieces are common, suggesting that other activities were taking place there, possibly including the heating of raw material to make it easier to work. The presence of numerous scrapers suggests that there were periods of what could have been sustained activity on these sites. Similar artefacts were found during fieldwalking in 2014, but arrowheads, arrowhead fragments and other specialised forms were absent.

Other material in the Edinburgh collection is more exotic. The silcrete items are likely to derive from an exposure at Lossiemouth, on the coast 25km to the east. There are also pieces of high-quality flint that appear to have come from the Neolithic mines at Den of Boddam more than 100km away. They are quite distinct

from the surface pieces of Buchan flint which were introduced from the same area. Even more striking is the presence of chalk flint, finely worked into transverse arrowheads and other artefacts using a distinctive technology that typifies the Late Neolithic period. They are in a distinctive material which is believed to originate in Yorkshire – a distance of 550km (Ballin 2011). Because of the circumstances in which these collections were formed, it is impossible to estimate the percentage of non-local material at Culbin, but its presence is remarkable. The same applies to a few fragments of Arran pitchstone which came from 240km away. By contrast, there is little evidence of non-local axeheads – or axeheads of any kind – although the few fragments that can be recognised in the Edinburgh collection are from Perthshire, Northern Ireland and Cumbria. There was no clear evidence for the use of exotic materials in the collection recovered by fieldwalking.

Lastly, the collection in NMS includes a few objects of exceptional character which must have been introduced to Culbin. The most obvious examples include a Neolithic laurel leaf point, an especially large leaf- or kite-shaped arrowhead, parts of three discoidal knives, six tanged or barbed and tanged arrowheads of unusual size, and the tip of a flint dagger.

Conclusions: the construction of a narrative for the Culbin Sands

What kind of narrative would account for these observations? Despite the uncertainties attending the original discoveries at Culbin, certain observations seem to be securely based.

The material collected from the dunes in the 19th and early 20th centuries is quite different from the surface finds discovered by fieldwalking in the Inner Moray Firth. These contrasts may extend to the density of finds and their composition, but the absence of worked quartz from the Culbin Sands could be deceptive.

The area associated with collections of earlier prehistoric artefacts was cut off from its surroundings by an expanse of wetland. It was also separated from the settlement areas discovered during recent fieldwork. It seems possible that the material in NMS came from an isolated promontory. With a higher sea level at the end of the Mesolithic period, it may have been an island.

The location of Culbin would have made the area as easy to access by water as it was by land. It is associated with a sheltered bay and also with two important rivers which provided access to the hinterland. The margins of the Culbin Sands may have offered a safe haven for people travelling along the North Sea.

Earlier prehistoric activity at Culbin is associated with the production of artefacts, some of which failed in the course of manufacture. This is especially true of the numerous barbed and tanged arrowheads. There is also evidence for the making of bronze axes and faience beads. Finished objects may have been taken away, biasing the composition of the collection from the site.

The inhabitants of Culbin were in contact with people in distant parts of Britain, and the area that was eventually covered by the Sands contains artefacts of Late Neolithic date originating from north-east England. The museum material includes a small number of finely made objects from other areas.

There is no reason to suppose that all the artefacts from the Culbin Sands resulted from specialised activity. The land was suitable for cultivation until it was buried by sand during the Middle Ages. It could have supported year-round settlement, and that may explain the presence of Early to Middle Bronze Age burials. At the same time it seems obvious that the inhabitants were involved in a wider pattern of artefact production and exchange.

These features would raise little problem in a later prehistoric context, or even in the Early Medieval period. It is accepted that by the pre-Roman Iron Age a series of locations on the British coast played a specialised role in production and exchange. Like similar places in other parts of the world, they provided neutral locations where strangers could come into contact with the local population (Mack 2011, chapter 5). Examples in southern England include Hengistbury Head where the remains of domestic buildings have been found by excavation (Cunliffe 1987), and Mount Batten which has been identified as the offshore island where traders obtained tin from the inhabitants of south-west England (Cunliffe 1988). Drawing on a similar model, Martin Carver has proposed that Culbin was used as a beach market during the Pictish period (1999, 57). What is new is to suggest that the same interpretation might be appropriate to the archaeology of even earlier periods.

If so, then it is unlikely that Culbin was the only site of its kind in earlier prehistoric Scotland. In his original paper David argued that the finds from the Glenluce Sands and Littleferry raised similar problems to those considered here. It would be worth taking this enquiry further. Having constructed our narrative for Culbin, we must decide whether a similar approach would be appropriate in other cases. That is the next stage of a project that began in the ploughed fields beside the river Findhorn.

Acknowledgments

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The provision of amulets and heirlooms in Early Bronze Age children's burials in Scotland

Dawn McLaren

Abstract

This case study explores the presence of grave goods considered to be possible amulets or heirlooms associated with the burials of a small number of children in the Early Bronze Age, focussing on the evidence from Scotland but drawing in examples from Yorkshire, Wessex and beyond. Many of these items consist of ornaments, particularly beads of special materials, some of which are argued to derive from much older necklaces, curated and reused, possibly passed down within families as heirlooms and, in some cases, taking on the role of a talisman or amulet because of the special qualities of their material. Although previous studies of potential amulets and heirloom ornaments in association with Early Bronze Age burials have largely focused on those found with adults, this association is repeated throughout Britain during this period in both adults' and children's burials alike.

Keywords: *Bronze Age, children, amulets*

Introduction

In David Clarke's recent consideration of communities in Early Medieval Scotland, he identified four that have left traces on the archaeological record: those of place, of craft and craftsmanship, of the imagination, and of memory, where the past is evoked through artefacts and stories as a way of negotiating the present (Clarke 2012, 69). It is this final theme that will be explored further here, with the focus shifted from Early Medieval Scotland to the Early Bronze Age.

This essay focuses on the rare but recurring association of artefacts with potential amuletic qualities from Early Bronze Age children's burials. Many such items, which include beads and other ornaments, appear to be heirlooms or objects with extended biographies. Their importance within a burial context is argued here to be twofold: they were used to create, manipulate and control social memory and connections with the past; and they were deposited with the deceased in the belief that they could protect her or him, and/or bring good fortune, in the afterlife. This case study primarily uses Scottish examples but provides an avenue

into much broader and more complex issues emerging from current research into Early Bronze Age funerary practices in Britain as a whole.

Early Bronze Age children's burials in Britain

This paper draws on a broader study (McLaren 2012a; forthcoming) which examined the funerary rites of 780 burials of children (defined as individuals fifteen years of age or under) from Scotland, Yorkshire and Wessex (taken here as Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire, following Yorke 1995, 1). The aim was to determine whether broad trends in the formal burial rites afforded to children during this period could be identified and whether significant differences could be detected compared to the funerary treatment of adults. The term 'Early Bronze Age' is a shorthand to cover the period from the end of the Chalcolithic to the end of the Early Bronze Age, c 2200 to around 1500 BC, following the chronological scheme set out by Needham and others (Needham et al 2010, 365, table 1; Sheridan 2008, 57).

Past narratives of Early Bronze Age burial rites have largely focussed on adult burials, with the more exceptional richly furnished examples dominating the picture. More typical, commonplace, poorly-furnished graves have seen less concentrated study (although see Hunter 2000, 171-6; Shepherd 1986) and perceptions of the child within the community by reference to the burial rites they were afforded are rarely addressed or explored although notable exceptions include discussions by Brück 2004; Burgess 1980, 161-5; Garwood 2007; Hanley & Sheridan 1994; McLaren 2004; Sanchez Romero 2008; Shepherd 1988, Small et al 1988; Turek 2000; and Woodward & Hunter 2015, 493-4. An under-representation of children in the funerary record, due in part to taphonomic problems, and a perception that children were typically not eligible for the same funerary rites as adults has perpetuated a notion that children's burials are rare (Mays 2000). This in turn has created a barrier to their study and has placed inevitable limitations on our understanding of the complexities of social dynamics and wider cosmologies embedded within the funerary record of this period. (For consideration of the reasons that have led to the marginalisation of children in archaeological research, see Lillehammer 1989; McLaren 2004; Scott 1999; Sofaer Derevenski 1994; 1997; 2000, *inter alia*.)

Scottish grave assemblages

It has been suggested that two structuring principles can be observed with regard to grave assemblages of this date in Scotland (Hunter 2000, 175). The first is the marking of the deceased as part of the community according to local traditions, and the provision of items that the community saw as the essential everyday equipment of life, or death, such as pots and tools. The second highlights aspects of identity (*ibid*, 175), whether real or imagined. It is clear that this vision of identity is not a simple correlate with the activities or roles undertaken by the individual during life. It may include elements projected by the mourners in order to ensure the person's recognition or acceptance by the collective ancestors into whose realm they would soon enter (Needham 2012, 19). This was achieved by the provision

of more specialist equipment (eg archery equipment, such as that from Culduthel, Highland (Inverness-shire); Clarke et al 1985, 267) and ornaments, as well as high quality 'exotic' goods (Hunter 2000, 175; Needham 2012, 19; Pierpoint 1980).

Possible heirlooms are key elements here: objects that have seen extended use, perhaps curated and maintained in circulation for a number of generations (Lillios 1999). Such items can be complete or fragmentary, functional or broken, but their retention across generations suggests they were valued beyond their material worth (Thomas 1999, 141-82). In addition to their extended biographies, the histories that such heirlooms embodied and their portability made them highly charged objects. Analysis by Ann Woodward and colleagues suggests that heirlooms and relics were a more common feature of Bronze Age material culture than has previously been acknowledged, and where found in association with adult burials they are often interpreted as having amuletic qualities which enhance the social value and significance of the objects further (Sheridan & Shortland 2003; Woodward 2000, 116-9; 2002; Woodward et al 2005, 55; Woodward & Hunter 2015, 472-5). Yet there has been little consideration of whether such items are found in association with children's burials. Can any similar items be identified with children? And if so, how should these be interpreted?

The role of ornaments: adornment or protection, or both?

Before exploring the potential role of heirloom ornaments within children's burials it is worth outlining broader trends in the deposition of jewellery and ornaments within graves of this period. Ornaments are relatively uncommon grave goods in Early Bronze Age Scottish burials, being present in approximately 13% of graves (Hunter 2000, 175, table 11 & 12). A similar proportion is assumed for Britain as a whole, although very few detailed, systematic, regional-specific studies have been conducted (notable exceptions being regional studies of funerary rites in Yorkshire and the Peak District (Pierpoint 1980; Barnatt 1996), and more recently Woodward & Hunter's (2015) comprehensive study of Early Bronze Age grave goods from England).

Previous studies have detected two very distinct depositional practices involving jewellery and ornaments during the Early Bronze Age. The first, confined to the earlier half of this period, consists of the deposition of complete and impressive spacer-plate or disc-bead necklaces and other items of adornment of jet, jet-like stones and amber. Sheridan and Davis (2002, table 1) categorise jet and jet-like artefact types used in Scotland between c 2200-1800 BC into nine broad categories: V-perforated buttons and studs, spacer-plate necklaces and bracelets, disc-bead necklaces, disc-&-fusiform-bead necklaces, a disc-&-fusiform-bead belt, 'pulley' belt rings, plain belt or strap rings, 'napkin rings' and other miscellaneous items.

The material used to produce such ornaments was important, and the potential magical qualities of jet and amber, as well as that of faience (a rare glass-like material produced by heating sand or crushed quartz containing or coated with a copper-based colourant until the surfaces vitrified, creating a vibrant turquoise-coloured glaze) would undoubtedly have added to their perceived value (Sheridan & Davis 2002, 824; Sheridan & Shortland 2003; Woodward 2000, 109-13). Sheridan and

Davis argue that the Scottish elite may have ‘commissioned’ impressive spacer-plate necklaces from Whitby jetworkers to emulate Irish gold lunulae as well as to appropriate the special ‘magical’ qualities of the material itself (2002, 816). The level of craftsmanship displayed in these multi-strand spacer-plate necklaces is amongst the most accomplished of prestige items produced during this period in Britain and Ireland, and the electrostatic properties of jet have been argued to enhance their importance, elevating them from impressive, ornate items of jewellery to symbolically charged objects (*ibid*, 812).

The burial of such impressive spacer-plate and disc-bead necklaces, typically associated with adult females, represents a very visible and striking display of social standing within the community (Holden & Sheridan 2001, 97; Sheridan & Davis 2002, 824; Sheridan 2015, 341-62). Their inclusion within graves as key status- and culture-defining artefacts (Needham 2012, 19) removed such items from circulation and effectively prevented them from being involved any further in the accumulation of wealth and power by the surviving community or family members (Woodward 2000, 103; Woodward et al 2005, 31).

A marked decline in the production, use and deposition of jet and jet-like jewellery such as V-perforated buttons and spacer-plate necklaces around 1800 BC (Sheridan & Davis 2002, 819) coincides with an increase in the currency of faience, composite necklaces, groups of beads and even single items which often include re-used beads from earlier necklaces (Woodward 2000, 116-9). This trend continues until around 1400 BC (Sheridan & Davis 2002, 819). As fewer complete necklaces remained in circulation, surviving elements, in the form of single beads, plates and fasteners, appear to have become more valued and important.

Woodward’s study of collections of beads of mixed materials from burials of this date concludes that these potentially re-used ornaments were more than simple items of jewellery. Many, particularly single beads or small groups of beads, are likely to have been amulets, charms and talismans (2000, 1043; Woodward et al 2005, 51), forms of apotropaic jewellery worn or carried on the person to guard against misfortune or to encourage good fortune (Cheape 2008, 105).

The special qualities of the earlier spacer-plate and disc-bead necklaces are demonstrated by the frequency with which elements from them were kept in circulation: they are often recovered from graves as collections of individual beads from different necklaces brought together to form new composite necklaces or, perhaps, simply small groups of unstrung beads. These beads are likely to have been valued not just for their material and colour but also their extended biographies, passed down from generation to generation. The known or imagined biography of the beads was probably enhanced by connection to the previous owner or owners. The combinations of colours and special materials suggest that their later re-use was not simply as objects of decoration but as amulets or charms to protect the wearer as well as forming tangible links to the past (Sheridan & Davis 2002, 824; Woodward et al 2005, 51). A consistency in the combinations of colours chosen for inclusion in such composite groups suggests that their selection was deliberate rather than being determined by surviving or available beads. Their display on the body, whether during life or after death in a funerary context, may have marked out the individual’s connection to important lineages as well as providing protection to

the wearer in the form of an amulet or charm. These ornaments are typically beads produced from a range of materials, including amber, faience, natural fossils, shell, jet, shale and most exceptionally, gold. Although ornaments of bone, antler, ivory, horn and wood may have been part of this practice, their post-depositional survival is so variable due to local soil conditions that patterns of re-use are difficult to discuss with any confidence.

Ornaments in children's burials

Many analyses of Early Bronze Age grave goods have considered the potential role and importance of ornaments within graves, but past studies have tended to focus on items which appear valuable to our modern eyes, either due to the complexity of their production or the exotic qualities of the raw material (Woodward 2002, 1040). Other seemingly mundane forms of Scottish Early Bronze Age ornaments, such as those of worked bone and stone, have seen less concentrated study, making it hard to assess comparative rates of association with adults and children.

Jewellery or other ornaments are rarely associated with children in the Scottish dataset. Over 75% of a total of 103 child inhumation burials included in the study were accompanied by at least one grave good (McLaren 2012a, 61) but only five, ranging in age from a perinate to an 11- to 12-year-old individual were firmly associated with ornaments or items of jewellery. In contrast, 16% of a total of 135 cremated children in Scotland are associated with ornaments (McLaren 2012a, 92). These are principally prosaic dress fasteners such as toggles or pins produced from worked bone and antler which may have been used to secure the funeral garment on the pyre rather than being strictly items of personal ornament or jewellery. Despite the small numbers of individual burials involved, the association of ornaments with children's burials is a recurring pattern across Britain as a whole and they remain one of the most typical artefact associations with immature individuals, after ceramic vessels and flint tools.

Most categories of jet and jet-like ornaments identified by Sheridan and Davis (2002) found with Scottish burials dating to between 2200 and 1800 BC are absent from children's graves in Scotland. Examples are restricted to a single complete disc-bead necklace, individual or small groups of re-used disc- and fusiform-beads, spacer-plates and more unusual miscellaneous pieces. A slightly wider suite of jet and jet-like ornaments is found with children in Yorkshire and Wessex, including bipartite studs, V-perforated buttons and plain rings, but the number of associations remains small (McLaren 2012a, 125; forthcoming).

Ornaments associated with children in Scottish graves range from single beads, such as a fusiform jet bead found with a child at Holly Road, Leven, Fife (Lewis & Terry 2004, 25), to an exceptional two-string, cannel coal disc-bead and lead bead necklace associated with a child at West Water Reservoir, Scottish Borders (Hunter 2000). Despite the restricted range of such ornament types associated with children's graves and the small number of burials involved, the depositional practices follow the two broad chronological trends noted by Sheridan and Davis (2002, 815-9): early burial of complete impressive necklaces as prestige items, and

the later burial of collections of beads including possible heirloom items deriving from broken-up spacer-plate and disc-bead necklaces.

The only complete disc-bead cannel coal necklace known to be associated with a child's burial in Scotland comes from West Water Reservoir (Hunter 2000); spacer-plate necklace associations are confined to individual beads or groups of elements rather than intact necklaces although two spacer-plate necklaces found in association with the unburnt skeletons of an adult female and child at Cow Low, Derbyshire are known (Bateman 1848, 91-5; Sheridan et al 2015, 295-304). The West Water Reservoir necklace consists of 181 cannel coal disc beads and a second strand of 31 tiny lead beads, possibly once separated by organic beads or knots. It was recovered from around the neck of a three- to five-year-old child in a short cist within a small cemetery dominated by immature individuals (Hunter



Figure 1. The cannel coal and lead bead necklace from West Water Reservoir, Scottish Borders.
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2000, 124-5, 136-41, illus 7, 14-16; Fig 1). The strand of lead beads is unique and represents the earliest use of metallic lead (as opposed to a galena bead from the Neolithic chamber tomb at Quanterness, Orkney; Schulting et al 2010, 10) in Britain and Ireland (Hunter & Davis 1994, 827). The rarity of the materials used in the production of this necklace must have enhanced its value and prestige, and by implication suggests that the child who wore it to the grave was perceived as an important member of the community (Fig 2).

Disc-bead necklaces of jet and jet-like materials are not typical Early Bronze Age grave goods and they are understood to be special items of limited availability rather than ornaments for everyday wear (Holden & Sheridan 2001, 97; Hunter 2000, 173). Like the more ornate spacer-plate necklaces, the limited production of disc-bead necklaces suggests that they were desirable, sought-after objects. This in turn implies a certain level of social standing and influence within a community would have been required to attain or be afforded such an item.



Figure 2. Interpretative reconstruction of the funerary rites afforded to the child at West Water Reservoir. Drawing by Alan Braby

Disc-bead necklaces are almost exclusively found with adult females (Holden & Sheridan 2001, 98; Sheridan & Davis 2002, 816, table 1; Sheridan 2015, 341-62). The association with a child, such as that at West Water Reservoir, is extremely rare and only one parallel is known from Britain (although examples with older adolescents are known): a disc-bead necklace comprising 163 individual jet beads, found around the neck of a child, recently reclassified as an adolescent, at Folkton, Yorkshire (Greenwell's barrow CCXLV: Kinnes & Longworth 1985, 116; Sheridan et al 2015, 350, table 7.3.2).¹ In both cases, other aspects of the grave furnishings imply that the deceased had been accorded high status. At West Water Reservoir, this is expressed by the unique second strand of lead beads (Hunter 2000, 125), and at Folkton, by the inclusion of multiple Beaker vessels (Kinnes & Longworth 1985, 116). In neither instance does any re-working of individual beads, or the necklace as a whole, appear to have taken place prior to being placed in the grave. Unlike many of the examples to follow, there is no evidence that the necklace from the grave at West Water Reservoir nor that from Folkton were of any antiquity at the time of their inclusion in the burial.

In contrast to the complete, impressive necklace worn by the child at West Water Reservoir, other ornaments associated with child inhumation burials in Scotland appear modest. Single beads come from two separate child burials at Holly Road, Leven, Fife (Lewis & Terry 2004, 25, 30). One, from the grave of a 6.5- to 12.5-year-old child (Fig 3c) consists of a naturally hollow fragment of fossil crinoid which had been used as a bead (Sheridan 2004a, 33-4, illus 13, no 2). Its unusual form and the fact that this is a geological freak have been taken as an indication that this had probably been ascribed supernatural power (*ibid*, 34). Although the ridged external surface bears a strong resemblance to the form of faience and bone segmented beads (Sheridan & Shortland 2004; Piggott 1958) it is unclear whether this similarity was of added significance to the selection of this fossil for inclusion in the burial with the child. Further associations of children and fossils are found throughout Britain, such as that from Seamer Moor, Yorkshire (Smith 1994, 153, fig 123:8) or a fossil sea-shell associated with the burial of an infant (possibly accompanied by an adult and a deposit of cremated bone) at Cop Heap, Wiltshire (Hoare 1812, 67-8; Thomas 1954, 315; Grinsell 1957, 197). Unusual items, such as a fragment of ammonite and a segmented spindle of jet, argued to be an ammonite skeuomorph, accompanying the burial of an 8- to 12-year-old child from Garton Slack barrow 53, Yorkshire (Mortimer 1905, 218; Woodward & Hunter 2015, 137, 140, fig 4.14.3) could also be considered talismanic or amuletic.

The second relevant grave at Holly Road, Leven, Fife contained the remains of a 12-year-old child accompanied by a single fusiform jet bead (cist L: Lewis & Terry 2004, 25). It is likely that this bead, made of Whitby jet, was originally from a multi-strand spacer-plate necklace and could have been several generations old at the time of its final deposition (Sheridan 2004b, 34).

1 A jet disc-bead necklace was also found in association with an older adolescent at Goodmanham barrow 121, burial 6, East Yorkshire (Greenwell & Rolleston 1877, 329-31; Kinnes & Longworth 1985, 89, no 121, burial 6,3; Sheridan 2015, 350, table 7.3.2) but the age of this individual falls outwith the parameters of the current study.

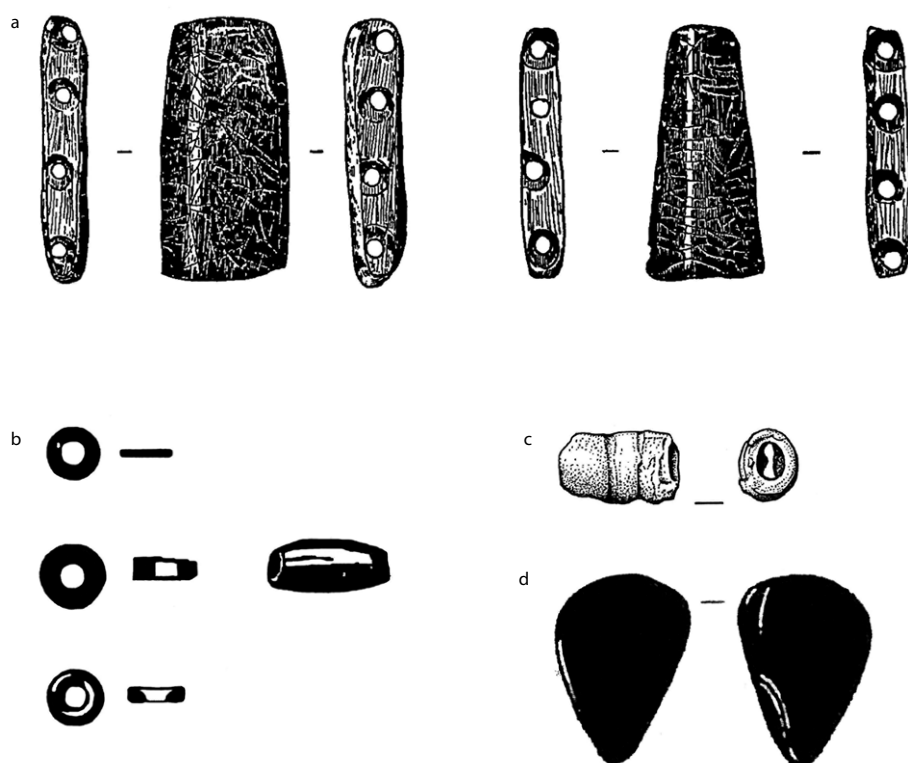


Figure 3. A selection of ornaments associated with child burials in Scotland. a) diminutive jet spacer plates from Barns Farm, Fife (after Watkins 1982, fig 18 nos 113a–b; scale 1:1); b) disc and fusiform beads from Embo, Sutherland (after Henshall & Wallace 1963, illus 4; scale 1:1); c) fossil crinoid from Holly Road, Leven, Fife (after Lewis & Terry 2004, 33, illus 13, no 2; scale 1:1); d) Auchenharrow jet-like ‘plectrum’ (after Morrison 1971, fig 2.1; scale 1:2)

Potentially similar re-use of spacer-plate beads is indicated at Embo, Sutherland and Barns Farm, Fife (Henshall & Wallace 1963; Watkins 1982; Fig 3a–b). At Embo, two disc beads, one annular and one fusiform bead, all made of cannel coal or jet, were found in cist I, associated with an adult female and a foetus (Henshall & Wallace 1963, illus 4). Recent osteological re-evaluation of the skeletal remains confirms the child was a third trimester foetus/perinate who, alongside the adult female, plausibly the baby’s mother, perished as the result of complications in childbirth (A Sheridan, pers comm). In this instance it is difficult to argue that the beads were directly associated with the child and are more probably associated with the adult female whose status was marked by the inclusion of these items. At Barns Farm, two diminutive undecorated jet spacer-plates (Figs 3a, 4) were recovered from a short cist (cist 5) which contained the disturbed unburnt remains of an 11- to 12-year-old child (Watkins 1982, 68, 104, fig 18 nos 113a – b). The number of perforations on the plates indicates that they were originally from a four-strand jet necklace but no further beads were recovered from the grave to suggest that a complete necklace had been deposited, although the cist had been disturbed in the late 19th century, so the original presence of further beads cannot

be ruled out (ibid, 62). Unfortunately, little of the child's unburnt skeleton survived to enable precise direct dating, making the chronological relationship between the date-range of death of the individual and the estimated date of production of the plates undetermined. Although the Barns Farm spacer plates may not have been of any particular antiquity at the time of deposition, the potential dismemberment of these elements from an intact necklace suggests a biography prior to inclusion in the burial, one which may have been of special significance to the mourners, influencing their decision to include the ornaments in the grave of the child.

This pattern of reuse of possible heirloom beads in association with children's burials in Scotland is also demonstrated in the other two case study areas. In Yorkshire, a fairly wide range of ornament types is associated with children's inhumation burials including biconical and fusiform jet beads (Woodward & Hunter 2015). Many of these beads, including those from Pinderdale Wood, accompanying a 14-year-old individual (Hayes 1963; Smith 1994, 101) and a perforated triangular jet toggle from Painsthorpe Wold barrow 118, associated with a 13- to 16-year-old, are also likely to derive from broken-up spacer-plate necklaces. A similar pattern of reused spacer-plate necklace beads is found in Wessex, such as the fusiform Kimmeridge shale bead found in front of the chest of a child at Cow Down, Wiltshire (Lukis 1867, 90; Annable & Simpson 1964, 63, no 498) as well as those from cremation burials at Snail Down, Blakes Fir and Easton Down, Wiltshire (Thomas 2005, 37-8; Ride 2001, 167; Woodward et al 2005, 51) and Stockbridge Down, Hampshire (Stone & Gray Hill 1940, 42-6, fig 2).

Clearly not all ornaments were old when they entered the grave, such as that from West Water Reservoir, but many appear to have been re-used from older, dismembered necklaces and could be considered to be heirlooms. As discussed, those in association with adult burials are considered to be special, valued, possibly amuletic objects which were selected, curated and sometimes even re-worked over generations (Woodward et al 2005, 54; Woodward & Hunter 2015, 472-95). Rather than suggesting that children with singular or small groups of older re-used beads were furnished with worthless hand-me-downs or token ornaments it seems likely that, as with adult burials, the perceived supernatural or magical qualities of the materials and the ancestry of the individual beads, and by reference the ancestors who previously wore them, gave them power and value.

If we turn away briefly from Bronze Age Britain and look a little further afield, can any similar practices in the archaeological record be detected that may enable an alternative avenue into understanding the social implications of this practice? A group of extended adult female burials dating from the third century AD were investigated within a cemetery at Skovgårde in the southern part of Zealand in



Figure 4. Undecorated jet spacer plates from Barns Farm, Fife. © National Museums Scotland

Denmark (Fernstål 2007). At least eight of the women at Skovgårde were associated with a suite of ornaments arranged on their chests which included glass beads of various colours, amber beads and a range of metal tubes, discs and pendants (ibid, 266). Analysis of the ornaments revealed that many of the beads were exotic and old already at the time of burial, similar to the composite necklaces known from Early Bronze Age contexts (Woodward & Hunter 2015, 389-428). It was suggested that these women were skalds, or 'poet maidens', and that the beads were used as mnemonics during the composing of stories and poetry (Fernstål 2007, 263). There is no suggestion here that beads and ornaments associated with Early Bronze Age children's burials fulfilled a similar purpose to those in the skald graves of Denmark as it seems unlikely that the ages of the associated children would have enabled them to have attained the status of a story teller or poet within their communities. Yet, the beads from Skovgårde emphasise the need to look beyond the aesthetic qualities of many ornaments and ornament groups in Early Bronze Age funerary contexts and to consider the social and symbolic role they may have been perceived to embody due to their special materials and connections to previous wearers.

Other possible charms and talismans

Further potential totemic or talismanic objects found in association with children's graves merit attention. A small plectrum-shaped pebble of lignite or other jet-like material was found with a Food Vessel-associated child's burial at Auchenharvie, Ayrshire (Morrison 1971, 9, fig 2 no 1; fig 3d). There was nothing to suggest that the object had been deliberately shaped but the excavator argued that the surfaces were smoothed from wear or handling (ibid, 9). As Stocks (2004, 17) suggests, 'a favourite pebble can become a talisman' to both child and adult alike. Perhaps the handling sheen noted on the Auchenharvie pebble resulted from being such a trophy for the child during life.

Although crudely worked and perforated to allow suspension, a similar lozenge-shaped natural pebble of Whitby jet was associated with a deposit of burnt bones of an adolescent from a barrow near Bradeham, East Yorkshire (Mortimer 1905, 126, fig 312). Despite the association with cremated human bone, this item showed no discolouration or distortion from the pyre, suggesting it was only added to the deposit after cremation, perhaps being made specifically for the burial. In both instances it appears the material rather than the shape or the level of craftsmanship was significant, echoing the conclusions drawn by others over the potential magical or curative powers of jet and jet-like stones (Allason-Jones 1996; Sheridan & Davis 2002, 824; Woodward 2000).

Another comparable item to the Auchenharvie find was noted at Little Kilmory, Bute, where a lump of black lignite or similar material was found within the cist of an older child (Marshall & Bryce 1934, 427). Although apparently unworked, it may have been deliberately included within the cist as an amulet or charm, as suggested for the stone pebble found in association with a young adult male at Holly Road, Leven (Sheridan 2004c, 34, illus 13 no 3), and the unworked pebbles found in the cists of children at Hillhead of Fechil, Aberdeenshire (Shepherd 1986, 29) and West Water Reservoir, Scottish Borders (Hunter 2000, 125, 151).

One of the most intriguing items associated with a child's burial in Scotland was recovered during osteological analysis of the cremated bones of a nine-year-old child at the unenclosed Early Bronze Age cemetery at Skilmafilly, Aberdeenshire (burial 04/06: Johnson & Cameron 2012, 15; Smith 2012). Amongst the fragments of cremated human bone, two talons of a golden eagle were identified, along with part of a second phalange of the foot (Smith 2012, 30). Also found amongst the human remains was a small perforated burnt bone short pin or toggle (McLaren 2012b, 26). The talons were burnt but they had not been as badly affected by heat as the other bone artefact, suggesting that they had been protected from the intensity of the fire on the funeral pyre, perhaps amongst the folds of the deceased's garments or in a bag, or had been added after the cremation whilst the remains were still hot. No other parts of the eagle were recovered to suggest the burial of a complete bird; if the talons formed part of a necklace or other item of personal ornament, they may still have been encased in the horny outer sheath of the claw (Smith 2012, 30).

The association of golden eagle talons with a burial of this date is unique, although the head and beak of a hawk are reported to have been recovered from an adult male crouched inhumation burial excavated in the mid-19th century at Kellythorpe, Yorkshire, accompanied by a stone wristguard (Clarke et al 1985, 263-4). At Kellythorpe the hawk bones and wristguard were taken to imply the deceased male was a falconer but at Skilmafilly, a similar interpretation was considered unlikely as the individual is a young child (Smith 2012, 30); however, this should not be ruled out. Claws and talons of powerful animals and birds, including eagles, have a long history of use as talismanic devices. These are believed in some cultures to contain the life-force of the animal and by wearing them close to the body, the qualities and power of the animal could be transferred to those that possessed them (Paine 2004, 108). The power and majesty of a bird of prey such as a golden eagle has long been revered (Gordon 2003, 152) and it is not difficult to imagine the potent symbolic potential that the talons of such a bird may have imbued upon the wearer. Whether the talons associated with the young child at Skilmafilly were present in the burial as a sign of the child's earthly connection with falconry, as a symbol of the child's family or rank, or as a powerful talisman or amulet to ward off danger or sickness is unclear.

Ethnographic insights

This connection of children and amulets is not unfamiliar; children across the world today are still adorned with amulets to protect them from sickness and other perceived dangers (Paine 2004). Although caution should always be applied in using ethnographic sources to inform aspects of prehistoric life, the traditions of particular modern communities can be worth exploring as potential avenues into looking at past practices a little differently.

The Beng of the Ivory Coast, West Africa, have a rich tradition and mythology surrounding their children (Gottlieb 2004). Children in this society are revered from the moment of their birth; each baby is said to be a reincarnation of someone

who has died, and children are believed to be direct ancestors returned from the primordial forest (ibid, 79-81). Infant mortality rates amongst the Beng are high but this does not stop attempts to guard them from danger in the form of amulets, charms and daily rituals. Perceived dangers such as physical and spiritual sickness, spirit kidnapping and many other risks are challenged with age-old techniques: the babies are painted with mixtures of special medicinal pigments and their bodies are adorned with beads and strings. These necklaces, bracelets, anklets, knee-bands and waist-bands are not simply decorative: each colour and material of bead has a different meaning and their combinations are specially designed to ward off particular dangers (ibid, 113-5, figs 22-6). Even the material used as cord to string the beads is significant (ibid, 114).

Does this modern practice, observed amongst the Beng and other communities, allow us to re-evaluate the significance of the beads within Early Bronze Age children's graves, and see them not simply as ornaments but potentially as charms to ward off sickness and danger? This suggestion is speculative but worthy of consideration. Very little information is currently available about the health of or care-giving strategies for children in Britain during this period. Yet the grave of a slightly older individual, a young adult male aged 16-18 years excavated at Snail Down barrow cemetery in Wiltshire may serve as an example to reinforce this link. Analysis of his bones revealed that the young man had suffered from a tumour in the region of his left eye (Thomas 2005, 124-5, fig 37). Although this was not the cause of death, it is likely that he would have suffered from impaired vision as well as a very visible slumping of the eye itself. During excavation three beads, two of amber and one shell, were found with him, perhaps used during life as amulets against his loss of sight or in death to protect him in the other world.

Conclusions

The purpose of this short note has been to draw attention to the presence of grave goods considered to be possible amulets, including some 'heirlooms' items within the graves of a small number of children in Scotland during the Early Bronze Age. This association can be demonstrated across Britain as a whole, illustrating the existence of a nation-wide tradition. Many of these heirloom and amuletic items consist of ornaments, particularly beads of special or valued materials, which are argued to derive from much older necklaces.

The combination of beads of different conditions and ages with distinctive life-histories suggests that such beads were valued, special objects which were curated and reused, possibly passed down within families as heirlooms and, in some cases, taking on the role of a talisman or amulet because of the special qualities of their material. Such special heirloom ornaments could also have been used as mnemonic tools in the maintenance of ancestral ties.

Although previous studies of potential amulets and heirloom ornaments in association with Early Bronze Age burials have largely focused on those found with adults, this association is repeated throughout Britain during this period in both adult and children's burials alike.

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On the edge: Roman law on the frontier

David J Breeze

Abstract

The view of a beneficent Roman empire promulgated by Edward Gibbon is examined in relation to Roman law and to the evidence for corruption and venality in the Roman army in order to illustrate life on the northern frontier in Scotland.

Keywords: *Roman army, Roman law, corruption, civil settlements*

They [the provinces] might occasionally suffer from the partial abuse of delegated authority; but the general principle of government was wise, simple, and beneficent.
(Gibbon 1845, 20)

Thus spoke Edward Gibbon, and this view permeates the opening pages of his *magnum opus* where he reviewed the state of the empire in the second century AD under the series of ‘good emperors’ from the accession of Nerva in 96 to the death of Marcus Aurelius in 161. This period almost coincided with the Roman occupation of Scotland in the late first century and the middle decades of the second. My intention is to explore Gibbon’s view in relation to the people who lived in Scotland at the time of these two Roman occupations.

This is an appropriate subject for a volume of essays dedicated to David Clarke for David has always been interested in both the minutiae of archaeological research and their wider implications, not least in relation to the exercise of power. In this case the minutiae and the focus of power find their expression in a Roman altar sitting in the museum to the service of which he has devoted his adult life. My contribution is also an acknowledgement of over 45 years of friendship.

Rome and the enemy

The first certain Roman military contact with the area we now refer to as Scotland was by the army of the Roman general Julius Agricola (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 22). According to his biographer, his son-in-law the historian Tacitus, Agricola in his third season reached the river Tay, that is in the year AD 79. On his arrival in Britain late in the season of the year AD 77, prior to his northern campaigns, Agricola had dealt with a revolt by the tribe of the Ordovices in north Wales, which he put down firmly, according to Tacitus, exterminating the population

(Tacitus, *Agricola*, 18). The same expression is used 130 years later in relation to the campaigns undertaken by the two emperors Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla from AD 208 to 211 (Cassius Dio, *History of Rome*, 76, 15, 1). In the final season of campaigning Severus ordered Caracalla into the field to exact retribution following an uprising of the Caledonians and Maeatae with whom the Romans had signed a peace treaty the year before. The use of the word 'extermination' has excited the interest of modern archaeologists and scholars. It needs to be understood within the framework of wider Roman actions.

Although Rome is widely perceived as having extended her empire through military conquest, she also acquired territory through peaceful means. From the second century BC she was given kingdoms. As a people who saw their role as ruling the world, the Romans sought to assimilate new acquisitions into their empire with the minimum of trouble. But a newly conquered people who subsequently rose in revolt placed themselves into a different category and were dealt with harshly, as we can see in the account of his conquest of Gaul by Julius Caesar; extermination was the word and the action, because the submitted people had broken their word and challenged Rome. (For a recent discussion of rebellions see Gambach 2015.) How far such people were exterminated is a moot point. Gallic tribes dealt with harshly by Caesar certainly survived and their descendants prospered under Roman rule (Caesar, *The Gallic War*, II, 4; VII, 5; the Nervii were almost annihilated in 57 BC, but five years later contributed 5,000 men to the campaign of Vercingetorix; *Gallic War*, VII).

The Roman view of the world is, of course, also reflected on the monuments erected to mark their victories (Ferris 2000; 2009). The two great columns erected in Rome, those of Trajan and Marcus, depict no dead Romans, only the occasional injured soldier, but dead 'barbarians' are many (Ferris 2000, 67). The columns also graphically depict the way the Roman army waged war, burning villages, taking prisoners, beheading captives – a head is offered to the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, widely regarded as one of the most cultivated rulers of Rome (Ferris 2000, 70; 2009, 135-43). The same attitude to the enemy is displayed on the distance slabs from the Antonine Wall. Three show bound captives, while a fourth bears a scene of a Roman cavalryman riding down four enemies, or perhaps one enemy shown in a cinematic process of being run down and beheaded (Keppie & Arnold 1984, nos 68, 84, 137, 149; Ferris 2009, 138-9). There can be no doubt who was the winner (Breeze & Ferris forthcoming).

This picture must be balanced by some comments on the actions of Rome's enemies, though these are normally from Roman sources. (Alföldi 1952 remains useful in his examples.) They include the murder of Roman traders by Mithridates, the treacherousness of Arminius in AD 9, and the trickery of enemies apparently offering submission and then turning on the Romans (Alföldi 1952, 9-11). Trajan's Column offers a particular example of 'barbarian' cruelty. In one scene Dacian women torture captured Roman soldiers. This is unique and therefore difficult to interpret. Is it a particular event during the Dacian War, or does it reflect a general Roman attitude to their enemies, or even an attempt to justify the war by depicting the Dacians as particularly cruel (Ferris 2000, 68-9)? While we cannot know the

answer to that question, we should be careful in being one-sided in our assessments of these events.

Roman law – and taxes

The people now brought into the Roman empire were subject to the rule of law. Forts were built to control them, but Frontinus, the governor of Britain immediately before Agricola, and a writer on military matters, remarked that the emperor Domitian ordered farmers to be compensated for the loss of their crops when land was requisitioned for the building of forts (Frontinus, *Stratagems*, II, ix, 7). Incidentally, our word ‘requisition’ is not entirely appropriate when considering actions in the Roman Empire. Goods might be requisitioned, but they were paid for at set rates which might be above their market value (Mann 1985, 21-3). Tacitus also remarked that it was the duty of the governor to ensure that his provincials were not fleeced (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 19).

Other rules to which the new provincials were subject included the payment of taxes, submission to the census and the control of marriage. Taxes were normally paid in cash, but could be commuted into kind. In the first century, the Batavians, for example, paid their taxes in the form of recruits for the Roman army, and the Frisii in hides (Tacitus, *Histories*, V, 25; *Annals*, IV, 72). It would appear that the Roman official Haterius Nepos undertook a census in an area interpreted as Annandale about the year 100 probably as a preliminary to taxation (*ILS* 1338; cf *Tab Vindol* III, 611; A R Birley 2001).

When it came to marriage, until the early third century, soldiers were not allowed to marry according to Roman law while in service, but the state took the pragmatic view that they would enter into relations and perhaps marry according to local custom or take civil law wives, an arrangement which would be recognised by the state on retirement. The record of privileges for which auxiliary soldiers could apply when they retired stated that they were granted Roman citizenship together with their children and the right of marriage with the wives they had when the citizenship was granted to them, or, if they were unmarried, with those whom they married afterwards, limited to one wife for each man. In AD 140, coincidental with the time the army moved back into Scotland, and for reasons which we do not know, the grant of citizenship was restricted to children born after discharge, and in AD 166, about the time that the Antonine Wall was abandoned, the formula was again changed, allowing citizenship to children born to women whom they proved to have lived with them in accordance with ‘the permitted custom’, a wording which emphasises the state’s appreciation of reality, and perhaps also that privileges were being abused (Campbell 1994, 198).

Civil settlements

These wives and children, together with craftsmen, priests, prostitutes, publicans and traders, lived in the civil settlements outside the forts in the frontier zone – assuming that they did not live in the forts, for which there is increasing evidence (A Birley 2013; Breeze 2015, 224-5). Roman regulations governed the operation of the civil settlements which sprang up across Scotland. Thirty years ago, several of

us struggled with the archaeological evidence which failed to show any relationship between the people living in what were effectively urban areas – that is the forts and their attendant civil settlements – and the rural communities (Breeze 1989, 230; Higham 1986, 175). Very little Roman cultural material has been found during the excavation of rural sites. It has been assumed that young men from the farms were recruited into the Roman army and indeed that may have happened, but if it did they certainly did not send any nick-nacks home to their families (Breeze 1989, 230). This paucity of Roman artefacts on rural sites is the pattern which pertains across the whole of North Britain, that is northern England and southern Scotland. In some ways it is not so different from southern Britain where there is a fall-off in Roman artefacts as the distance increases from the town or fort, whereas in the Lower Rhineland the penetration of Roman material culture appears to have been deeper (White 2014; Millett 2014; Roymans 2014).

In trying to understand the relationship between soldier and civilian, a good starting point is the inscription found at Carriden in 1956 (Fig 1; NMS X.FV 48; *RIB III* 3503; Richmond & Steer 1959). This is a dedication to Jupiter Best and Greatest by the civilians living at Fort Velunias. The wording suggests that

Figure 1. The altar found in 1956 at Carriden and now on display in the National Museum of Scotland. It is dedicated to Jupiter Best and Greatest and reads in the third, fourth and fifth lines: vikani consistentes castell[o] Veluniate, that is, the villagers living at the fort of Veluniate (or Velunias). Height 930mm. © Trustees of National Museums Scotland



the civilians were organised into a self-governing body (*consistentes* literally means ‘the people who are living together’). The dedication is particularly interesting. It is to the tutelary deity of Rome, the god before whom all Roman soldiers swore an oath of allegiance to Rome and to the emperor on the third of January and on the accession of the emperor each year. The events are described to us by Pliny the Younger when governor of Bythnia in his letters to the emperor Trajan (Pliny, *Letters*, 35, 36, 100-3). He wrote in one year, AD 113, that in addition to the soldiers, the civilians took the oath of allegiance. I believe that it is possible that here at Carriden we see the civilians swearing that oath of allegiance to the emperor Antoninus Pius.

But where did these civilians come from? The answer, I believe, lies in a rescript of the emperor Vespasian dating to AD 77. In that year, he allowed the citizens of Sabora in the province of Baetica in modern Spain to move from their hill-fort (*oppidum*) and build a new town on the plain, confirming their revenues awarded by the emperor Augustus (*ILS* 6092; Breeze 2008, 71). It seems to me that the implication of this document is that it was possible for a group of people to take their status and privileges with them when they moved from one place to another. In the case of the Roman army, it is well recorded that camp followers accompanied the army. This is attested, for example in relation to Caesar’s army operating in Gaul in the 50s BC (Caesar, *The Gallic War*, VI, 37), and outside most Roman forts in Britain lay some form of extra-mural settlement (Salway 1965, 36). When the unit based in that fort moved on, we can only presume that the people living in the external civil settlement, the dependents of the soldiers in every way, moved too – there was no point in staying – taking with them, I would argue on the basis of the rescript of Vespasian, their privileges. This would help to account for the fact that the people living outside Fort Velunias at Carriden had relatively quickly acquired some form of community status – in fact, they had brought it with them. If this interpretation is correct, we can see that it was not just a fort which had suddenly sprung up on the shore of the Forth but an equally alien community of civilians. In turn, this affects how we see the relationship between the Roman ‘urban’ centre and its surrounding rural communities. Some local people may have been drawn to the urban centre, but they are likely to have formed only a small part of it and they would certainly have felt themselves ‘outsiders’ within a Roman environment. Indeed the arrival of the new, integrated military and civilian complex may go some way to explain the lack of evidence for contact between urban and rural communities in the frontier areas.

Soldiers and civilians

All of this gives the impression of a well-ordered state of affairs. We do, however, have different perspectives. Juvenal in his satire on ‘The Advantages of Army Life’, offered a particular view. ‘First consider the advantages common to all [soldiers]. Not least is the fact that no civilian would dare to beat you up; indeed, if he’s beaten himself he will try to keep it in the dark. He will never dare to show the judge the gaps in his teeth, the black lumps on his face, the numerous swollen bruises, the one eye left, about which the doctor will make no promises. If he seeks

redress, a hob-nailed judge is assigned to the case ...’ and so on: the case is heard within the fort, its date arranged to suit the soldiers (Juvenal, *Satires*, 16). Nor is this literary statement alone. Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* (9.39) and Petronius in *Satyricon* (82) offer anecdotes about the aggression of soldiers (Campbell 1984, 243-5). In Apuleius, a centurion tried to steal the ass and, when thwarted, used the local magistrate to procure the animal. As Campbell remarks, the authenticity of the story by Apuleius gains strength because it is set in a fantastical plot using plausible incidents from real life (ibid, 245).

Where money is involved, there is likely to be corruption. The taxation of the Frisii just across the North Sea is a case in point. One Roman officer, Olennius by name, was constructive in his interpretation of the payment of taxes in the form of hides, producing the hide of a wild ox and using this as the standard. The Frisii sought to meet the demand and in order to do so sold their cattle, then their lands and finally their wives and children, ultimately rising in rebellion; it cost the Romans over a thousand soldiers before the revolt was quashed (Tacitus, *Annals*, IV, 72).

There are many other documents which demonstrate that living in close proximity to the Roman army had its disadvantages (MacMullen 1963; Fuhrmann 2012, 228-37). Roman soldiers, like all soldiers even to the present day, could and did act corruptly. Exactly at our time, the governor of Egypt stated in a decree, ‘As I have learned that many soldiers without written requisition are travelling about in the country, demanding ships, beasts of burden, and men, beyond anything authorised, sometimes seizing things by force, sometimes receiving things by favour ... to the point of showing abuse and threats to private citizens, the result is that the military is associated with arrogance and injustice’ (*PSI* 446 dating to AD 133-7). Also contemporary with the life of Antonine Scotland is a list of expenses which includes items for bribes to a soldier on demand, for a ‘shakedown’, and so on (MacMullen 1963, 89). In the middle of the third century, the people of the village of Skaptopara in Thrace (modern Bulgaria) were forced to provide soldiers with hospitality and supplies for which they paid no money, with their complaints ignored (*CIL* III 12336; MacMullen 1963, 86-7). Across in Asia, the people of Araguë were subject to extortion, pillage, attacks, beatings and the theft of plough animals (*CIL* III 14191; MacMullen 1963, 87). The fact that some soldiers did act in this way is indicated by a law which stated that ‘the governor of the province must ensure that persons of humble means are not subjected to injustice by having their solitary light or meagre furniture taken away for the use of others, under the pretext of the arrival of officials or soldiers. The governor of the province should ensure that nothing is done in the name of the soldiers by certain individuals unjustly claiming advantage for themselves, which does not relate to the communal benefit of the army as a whole’ (Ulpian, dating to the early third century and cited in the *Digest of Roman Civil Law* 1, 18, 6, 5-7; translation by Campbell 1994, 176). Emperors too took steps to prevent abuse and stop corruption (Fuhrmann 2012, 147-51, 158-64). The former included sexual abuse. The somewhat suspect source, the *Augustan History*, records two such episodes both dating to the third

century in which emperors took action. Macrinus punished soldiers who had sex with a slave and Aurelian a soldier who committed adultery; in both cases the soldiers were billeted in the houses where the offences occurred (*Life of Macrinus*, 12, 4; *Life of Aurelian*, 7, 3-4; Fuhrmann 2012, 229-31 offers further examples). Yet the mere fact that decrees against abuse continued to be issued demonstrates how difficult it was to stamp out corruption. This was no doubt partly because it could extend to the highest levels. Governors and procurators could themselves be corrupt, as demonstrated by a document from Africa which reveals the procurator of the imperial estates using soldiers to arrest and torture tenants and beat Roman citizens (*ILS* 6870; Campbell 1984, 252).

The Vindolanda writing tablets provide an example from closer to home. One document is a letter of complaint by a man from overseas at his treatment by soldiers when he was beaten; unfortunately, we do not know the nature of the official to whom he complained (*Tab Vindol* II, 344). The action is strikingly similar to St Paul's complaint (as recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles*, 22, 25). Paul was beaten and then pointed out that the action was illegal because he was a Roman citizen and thereafter applied for redress to the emperor. The New Testament offers several examples of the civilian view of soldiers (Campbell 1984, 248).

Perhaps the soldiers did not treat the civilians living in the settlements outside their own forts badly, but we are offered a chilling view of life for those who were not connected so intimately with the army. Any farmer must certainly have dreaded the tramp of the military boot. But was the picture offered here so different from life before the arrival of the Romans? That is another question.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Professor Brian Campbell for allowing me to use his translations of certain texts.

Abbreviations

<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>ILS</i>	Dessau, H 1892-1916 <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> . Berlin: Weidmannos
<i>PSI</i>	<i>Publicazioni della società italiana per la ricerca dei papyri greci e latini in Egitto: Papiri greci e latini</i> , 1912-57
<i>RIB III</i>	Tomlin, R S O, Wright, R P & Hassall, M W C 2009 <i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, Volume III. Inscriptions on Stone found or notified between 1 January 1955 and 31 December 2006</i> . Oxford & Oakville: Oxbow
<i>Tab Vindol II</i>	Bowman, A K & Thomas, J D 1994 <i>The Vindolanda Writing-Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)</i> . London: The British Museum

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The Colour Purple: lithomarge artefacts in northern Britain

Martin Goldberg

Abstract

This paper revisits an artefact type, lithomarge beads, last studied 40 years ago by Stevenson and Collins (1976). The rare purple colour produced by the naturally occurring mixture of haematite and kaolinite is the key characteristic and made this material desirable. Lithomarge beads are widely distributed across Northern Britain, but there are also numerous examples from Roman forts that help in dating the type. A tentative connection to purple pigment use within the Roman province of Britain is also suggested.

Keywords: *lithomarge, Iron Age, Roman, Early Medieval, colour, purple, jewellery*

The first week I started work with National Museums Scotland in 2008 I naively told David that although I recognised I was a bit of a Jack-of-all-trades, I wanted to be a master of one – the Early Historic and Viking collections, of which he had appointed me curator. David, in his own inimitable style, told me not to be so bloody stupid! Curators in his Department of Archaeology were expected to have a broad-ranging knowledge of Scottish material culture and although they might be specialists they were not to be blinkered by period specialism. Consequently, lithomarge beads were the first object-type I was encouraged to study, prompted by a recent find. This paper would not have been possible without the advice of Fraser Hunter and a file studiously compiled by him, both of which he generously shared with me. The more speculative remarks and any mistakes are of course my own.

Recent finds

Since the last survey of artefacts made of lithomarge some forty years ago (Stevenson & Collins 1976), new finds and the publication of examples from older excavations have shed fresh light on the use of this intriguing material. This note was triggered by a casual find of a disc bead of purple and white mottled lithomarge with red veins (Fig 1) from Blackhouse Farm, Scottish Borders (formerly Berwickshire: NT 826 603; see *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland 2009*, 161). Possible prehistoric linear features and pit alignments are known from aerial photography (Canmore

ID 59911) to the north of the findspot although any relationship between these and the bead is uncertain. The bead was claimed as Treasure Trove (TT168/09) and allocated to National Museums Scotland in 2009 in the absence of a local museum bid (NMS X.FJ 200). It has straight vertical sides with only slight rounding of the outer edges and flattened surfaces around the perforation (external diameter 15mm; thickness 8mm; perforation diameter 4mm; weight 3.5g). The central hole has been bored from both sides to leave a smooth, marginally hour-glass perforation.

A further fragment of a lithomarge artefact (pendant or bead) was recently recognised among old collections in Elgin Museum (Fraser Hunter, pers comm; reg no 1967.52; Miss J M Young bequest). Half of the object survives (overall external diameter 39mm; circular section, thickness 12mm). It is a stray find from Culbin Sands, Moray, whose eroding sand-dune surfaces have produced many thousands of artefacts of widely varied dates, as discussed in Richard Bradley's contribution to this volume.

Previous work

Lithomarge is an old name given to a smooth, compact form of kaolinite (an hydrous aluminosilicate mineral), containing inclusions of quartz and iron oxide (haematite), in varying amounts. The presence of haematite is what gives the stone its red veins and various mottled hues from pink to purple (Stevenson & Collins 1976, 55). Robert Stevenson initially identified the northern British lithomarge beads as being made of bauxite (Stevenson 1955, 229-30), but marked differences between the appearance of the beads and this material led him to test the beads' chemical composition in comparison to samples of Antrim bauxite using X-ray diffraction and X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (Stevenson & Collins 1976). This revealed that the bauxite has a greater concentration of aluminium than the beads (due to its de-silication) and that most of the artefacts contained 'appreciable strontium', whereas the Antrim bauxite samples did not (ibid, 55).

Stevenson and Collins (1976) noted three finds from Roman forts in Scotland that assist in dating this type of artefact. A bead from Newstead (Scottish Borders, formerly Roxburghshire – NMS X.FRA 908) was stratified in a mid-second-century context and another came from the early third-century legionary fortress at Carpow (Perth & Kinross – NMS X.FRC 113). A third Roman find comes from the Flavian and Antonine fort at Camelon (Falkirk – NMS X.FX 163), very similar in appearance to the Blackhouse Farm bead, but at 25mm diameter considerably larger. The current distribution of lithomarge artefacts is neither restricted to Roman military contexts nor to Scotland. Beads from as far afield as Cnoc Rioch, Oronsay (Argyll & Bute – NMS X.FN 165), from the river Lyon near Fortingall (Perth & Kinross – NMS X.FN 18) (Fig 2), and from Culbin Sands (Moray) suggest non-Roman contexts. Although many stray finds lack supporting contextual information, an indigenous context is clearly indicated by the bead from



Figure 1. Lithomarge disc bead from Blackhouse Farm, Scottish Borders. External diameter 15mm. © Trustees of National Museums Scotland

the small fort at Wester Craiglockhart (City of Edinburgh); associated material dates occupation of this enclosure to the first two centuries AD.

Stevenson noted two beads from Roman forts in Northumberland, at Housesteads and Corbridge; to these can now be added a more recent discovery of a large broken ring (external diameter 41mm; circular section, thickness 11mm) from excavations at Castle St, Carlisle, found in late Roman (period 10) deposits post-dating the mid-third century AD (Padley & Caruana 1991, no 590 – not recognised as lithomarge, but conscientiously illustrated). The ring from Roman Carlisle is of comparable size to one from Rainton, Gatehouse of Fleet (Dumfries & Galloway, formerly Stewartry of Kirkcudbright) which Stevenson (1955, 230) originally considered to be a spindle whorl due to its size (42mm). Another lithomarge artefact from Yair Hill Forest (Scottish Borders, formerly Selkirkshire) was also originally interpreted as a spindle whorl (38mm) although this was later reclassified as a bead (Stevenson & Collins 1976, 56). The broken rings from Carlisle and Culbin Sands also fall within this size range. The range of bead diameters varies considerably, with the recent Blackhouse Farm find being the smallest (15mm). Their annular form and the fact that they have been perforated suggest that most lithomarge objects were meant to be carried or worn on a cord, whether as a bead or ring-pendant, but there are also unperforated egg-shaped objects from a cache of charmstones at Cairnhill, Monquhitter (Aberdeenshire – NMS X.EQ 768) and from Housesteads (Stevenson & Collins 1976, plate 1; see also Hunter 1993, Appendix).

Further finds have emerged from older excavations. From Charles Daniels' excavations at Housesteads, a disc bead (diameter 26mm; thickness 9mm; cat no 634) and a smaller flat disc (diameter 19mm; thickness 5mm; cat no 637; Allason-Jones 2009, 480), can be added to the egg-shaped object and bead previously known from this site (Stevenson & Collins 1976, 55, plate 1). Both additional finds are from Building XIII, one of the barrack blocks in the north-east corner of the fort that had been modified into chalet-style accommodation at the beginning of the fourth century AD. The flat disc came from the phase 2-3 deposits of collapsed debris from a clay-lined oven superstructure, itself a modified phase 2 furnace pit



Figure 2. Lithomarge beads from Cnoc Rioch, Oronsay (left; external diameter 35mm) and the river Lyon near Fortingall (right). © Trustees of National Museums Scotland

for a hypocaust-heated room (H13:1:6). No more than a vague fourth–early fifth century AD date has been assigned to these deposits and even without the broad chronology there remains the issue of how the disc came to be incorporated into the clay used for the oven. However, there is clearer dating evidence for the disc bead which came from the primary floor of room 9, Building XIII (H13:9:10). This Phase 1 context was dated to approximately AD 300.

Sources

Stevenson and Collins (1976, 56) concluded that the trade in lithomarge may have been of Continental origin, as deposits of the raw material are widespread throughout the north coast of the Mediterranean from the Adriatic states, through Italy and France to the Pyrenees. However, no examples have yet been noted in Continental Roman contexts and a literature search and enquiries of colleagues working on Romano-British small finds confirmed the particular type of variegated material under discussion here is not apparently known south of the Hadrian's Wall zone. Moreover, sources of lithomarge are known from several locations in Britain and Ireland: for instance, there are notable variegated formations of lithomarge rich in iron oxide in inter-basaltic layers at the Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland and on the Isle of Staffa off the west coast of Scotland.

The artefact distribution suggests that a northern British source is likely to have been used. The widespread deposits referred to by Stevenson and Collins may be somewhat different from the vividly coloured lithomarge used for the objects of northern Britain. A general search for lithomarge through the geological literature produces a range of results, but most frequently it appears as a blanket term used for a variety of kaolinite-related deposits. In older sources the term is especially linked to the white china-clay industries of Cornwall and the related *Steinmark* of Germany. The lithomarge beads and objects considered here are visually different from the more widespread white china-clay deposits, due to the presence of haematite in the former. Future research into lithomarge needs to be clear about the material being studied; otherwise, conclusions are likely to be misled by terminological problems and by the huge variety of kaolinite deposits.

A series of lithomarge artefacts associated with Medieval ecclesiastical and other sites in Dumfries & Galloway have been identified (Williams & Cormack 1995), and a source has been located at Lower Knockglass, near Stranraer. A chipped stone disc of lithomarge, smoothed on one side, was found on the floor of a church at Barhobble, Mochrum (in former Wigtownshire), in a 12th/13th-century context, and a similar disc was recovered at the Early Historic and Medieval church at Hoddum in Annandale (former Dumfriesshire). Two fragments of lithomarge spindle whorls came from 11th- to 13th-century contexts at Whithorn, and more than a dozen other spindle whorls from the old county of Wigtownshire are present in the museum collections of Stranraer, Glasgow (Glasgow Museums) and National Museums Scotland. (See Williams & Cormack 1995 for a catalogue.) Six additional beads of varying dimensions were also noted in museum collections and this encourages the possibility that others may exist, unrecognised, in other collections.

The Dumfries & Galloway material generally appears visually distinct from the Roman Iron Age beads, being of paler hue and more muted contrast, although samples taken from the source at Lower Knockglass by Williams and Cormack showed considerable variation in colour (1995, 108) due to their varying haematite content. The vivid variegation of the Hoddum disc, however, makes it similar to the Roman Iron Age beads and particularly to the Cnoc Rioch, Oronsay bead (NMS X.FN 165; *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 66 (1931-32), 20 and fig 8). The question of visual categorisation must be affected by variation in the raw material and the selection of particular compositions. The Hoddum disc was accompanied by flakes, suggesting that the material was worked on site. These were, however, more muted in colour like the other Dumfries & Galloway artefacts (Williams & Cormack 1995). It may be that a particularly variegated sample of raw material had been selected to make the disc. A related point can be made about the variability in chemical composition of the lithomarge artefacts. The Hoddum disc contains strontium but the visually similar Oronsay bead does not, and although the other Dumfries & Galloway material may be visually different from the Hoddum disc, it shares strontium as a significant trace constituent. Similarly, all the objects in Stevenson's analysis were visually of the highly variegated, vibrantly-coloured type, but only four out of the six contained strontium. Despite visual similarity, the chemical signature may be different, while visual difference may disguise chemical similarity. This is surely a result of the varied composition of the source material: while multiple sources are a possibility, indicated by the presence or absence of strontium, appearance may also vary within the same source.

The function and significance of the lithomarge's colour

The desire for lithomarge may have been a direct consequence of its colour, ranging from pink to red to purple. Its aesthetic appeal is complemented by the ease with which the material can be shaped. Stevenson and Collins (1976, 56) suggested that the variegated lithomarge might have been considered to have apotropaic properties, a theory supported by its use in fashioning the 'eggs' from Housesteads and the cache of charmstones from Cairnhill, Monquhitter (cf Hunter 1993). The distinctive colouration of the material seems to me to be of utmost importance. Purple is not a common naturally-occurring colour and its noble/royal associations in the ancient world stem from this rarity. Any material producing a purple colour in antiquity was a rare and valuable commodity and many hardened types of clays/earths used as pigments were traded throughout the ancient world.

Kaolinite and, primarily, haematite were significant components revealed in the analysis of a purple pigment from second-third century AD contexts at the villa site of Rushton in Northamptonshire (Edwards et al 2002). Purple pigments were very rarely used in Roman wall paintings, with only 14 examples being noted in over 550 samples (Bearat 1996) and only two of those using a rare naturally occurring type of haematite referred to in ancient sources as *caput mortuum*. A major disadvantage of using *caput mortuum* for painting is its poor adhesive qualities. The purple pigment used at Rushton was found to contain haematite, and for lack of a better term, the authors described it as *caput mortuum* (Edwards

et al 2002, 279), despite the British material being significantly different from its Continental counterparts as it was a 'very tenaciously adhesive' pigment (ibid, 280). The improvement in adhesive quality was related to the presence of kaolinite in the Rushton pigment, never previously noted in Roman wall painting materials (ibid, 281). Kaolinite was not present in the red or pink pigments, only in the purple, and it was the kaolinite-haematite combination that allowed the artists to obtain this rare and desirable colour. The conclusion was reached that a specifically British material containing haematite and kaolinite allowed the artists to develop a new technology for the stabilisation of purple pigments on wall painting. Lithomarge was not mentioned in this analysis as a possible naturally-occurring source of this pigment, but this cannot be ruled out. We cannot directly connect the northern distribution of beads with the use of purple pigment on wall paintings at Rushton, but it seems a striking coincidence that the specific combination of kaolinite and haematite producing a purple-coloured pigment was known in southern Britain during the same time period as the purple-hued beads made from a naturally occurring combination of kaolinite and haematite (lithomarge) were circulating in northern Britain.

Conclusion

This summary confirms the distribution of lithomarge objects on and beyond the northern frontiers of Roman Britain, with six from Roman forts in the Hadrian's Wall zone, and the latest examples from Blackhouse Farm and Culbin Sands bringing the Scottish total up to 15. The distribution indicates that a northern British source should be considered. The objects were widespread throughout Scotland, from the Hebrides to the Highlands and the Moray Firth to the Solway Firth. The density of the distribution is weighted towards southern Scotland and the Roman frontier in northern England. However, many of the beads are stray finds that lack sufficient context to determine whether they were being produced earlier in Iron Age Scotland. The dating evidence provided by beads from Roman forts in Scotland suggests that exploitation of lithomarge sources was certainly occurring in the second and early third centuries AD. The Housesteads and Carlisle examples suggest that trade in the material continued into the fourth century AD, long after the consolidation of the frontier at Hadrian's Wall. Such southwards movement of material from Scotland to the Hadrian's Wall frontier zone in the late third or fourth century AD is rare, but other examples are known, such as the black jewellery made from Midlothian torbanite (Allason-Jones 1994, 265-72). The lithomarge objects' small size belies the significance accorded to their rare colour, of naturally occurring shades of purple to pink. This significant colour probably lies behind its extensive but rare distribution and its desirability to both Iron Age and Roman societies.

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‘Coal money’ from Portpatrick (south-west Scotland): reconstructing an Early Medieval craft centre from antiquarian finds

Fraser Hunter

Abstract

Late 19th and early 20th-century finds of the debris from shale bangle manufacture at Portpatrick in south-west Scotland occasioned considerable interest at the time. The early discoveries were found in grave-digging, giving rise to folk traditions of the material as ‘coal money’ placed with the departed, but these were soon dismissed by antiquaries. Surviving material is split among at least seven different museums and has seen no recent study. This paper synthesises the finds to reconstruct the chaîne opératoire of the making of bangles by removing a central core, and a secondary process of reworking these cores. The extensive secondary use arose because the material was imported, and thus had an enhanced value. The technique of core removal is unusual in Scotland, and wider study identifies a regional cluster around the Firth of Clyde in the Early Medieval period. The technique is widely attested in Ireland at the same time, and it is argued the technology spread from there as part of wider Irish influences. Taken with other strands of evidence, this suggests that a significant Early Medieval centre lies under the modern village of Portpatrick, a site well-placed for Irish connections as it provides the traditional harbour at one end of the shortest sea route to Ireland.

Keywords: *Oil shale, bangles, antiquarian study, craft processes, Early Medieval, Irish connections*

Introduction

The drawers in the archaeology stores of National Museums Scotland are full of surprises. When I joined the museum in 1991, David encouraged me to go and explore them in order to learn. One thing I kept coming back to was jewellery of black shiny materials, mostly bangles of shale, cannel coal, lignite and occasionally jet. This has been an understudied and unloved category in later prehistoric studies in Scotland, mostly because it is seen as chronologically undiagnostic. But a find can tell us about much more than chronology – a point David stressed in his



Figure 1. Prepared blank, bangle roughouts, removed core and reused core from Portpatrick. © Trustees of National Museums Scotland

innovative non-chronological structure for the *Early People* displays in the new-built Museum of Scotland in 1998, presenting Scottish prehistory up to AD 1100 as themes under a series of overarching topics.

This black shiny jewellery is a subject to which I have kept returning, and the finds from one particular site have fascinated me: Portpatrick in south-west Scotland (Fig 1). It has a resonance because I was born and brought up only a few miles away, and a fascination because it was poorly-studied. In the late 19th and early 20th century this material was well known, but it has fallen from view in recent scholarship. This paper aims to rehabilitate and re-examine this undervalued material. We shall examine technology, raw material, and the nature of the findspot, but first must disentangle the web of antiquarian information which casts light and shadow on their discovery. Over 180 finds from the site survive in seven different museums, reflecting the fascination of the material for early collectors.

History of study

Portpatrick is a small coastal village on the western side of the Rhins of Galloway in south-west Scotland (Fig 2). It forms one end of the shortest sea route between Scotland and Ireland, from here to Donaghadee. Traditionally it was a fishing village huddled around a good natural harbour on an otherwise rocky coast, but its ancient topography is hard to appreciate today owing to the large-scale engineering works of the late 18th and early 19th century which reshaped the harbour area for ferry traffic. General William Roy's military survey of 1752-5 gives a better idea

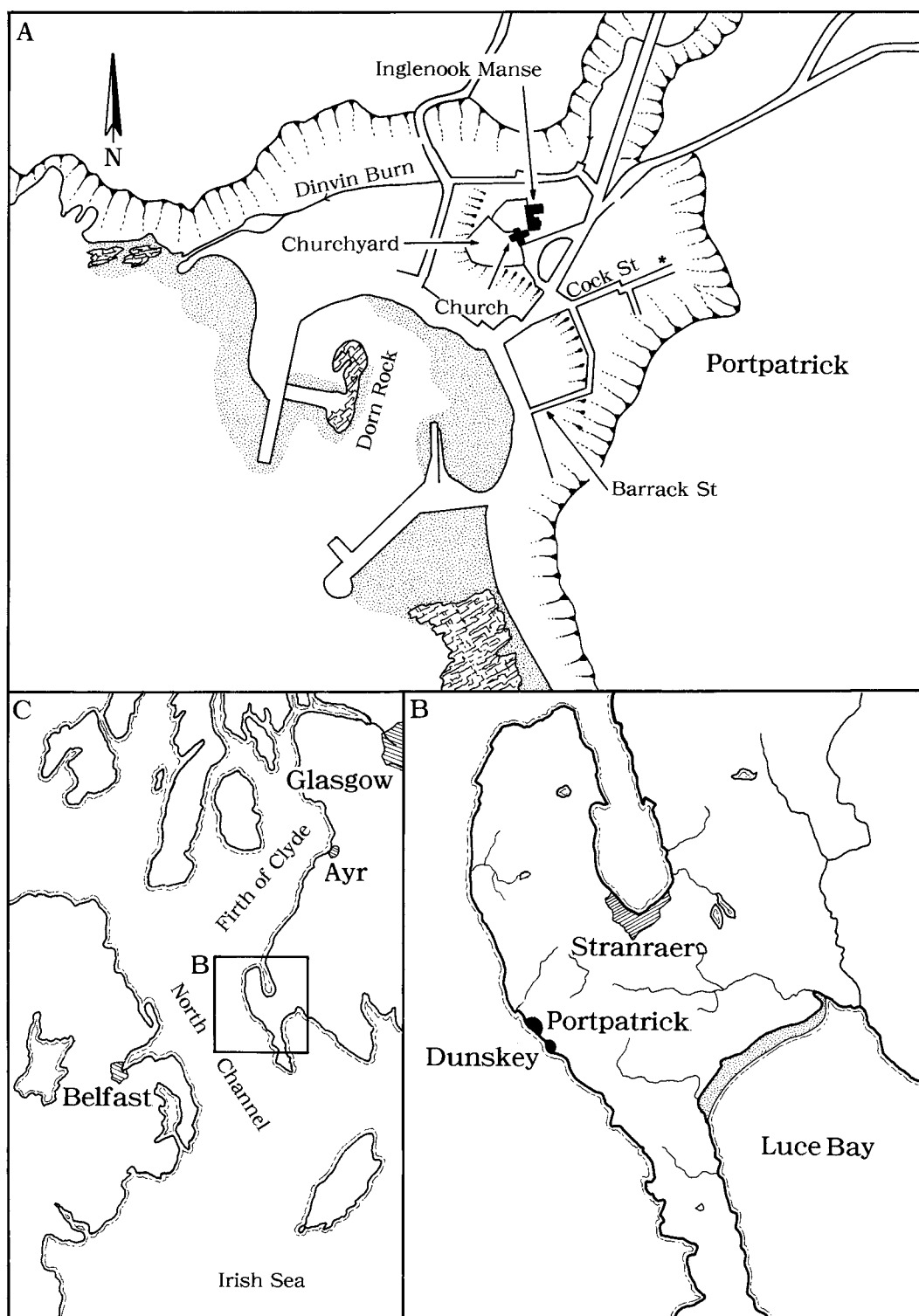


Figure 2. Location of Portpatrick, with key findspots marked. The star at the east end of Cock Street marks the 1901 building plot. Street plan based on the 1849 Ordnance Survey map, with topography added from various sources. Drawing by Alan Braby

of the village before extensive industrialisation, with a curve of buildings around the bay and a burn running into the sea to its north. The bay is backed by steep cliffs some 25m high; settlement sits on a low terrace at about 8m OD, probably a post-glacial raised beach, with the Dinvin burn cutting between this terrace and the northern cliff line. The post-Medieval church, which may sit on an earlier foundation, lies near the northern edge of this terrace, and is the setting for the first act in our story.

Early finds in the churchyard

The material is first recorded by the Rev Andrew Urquhart in a contribution on the parish for the *New Statistical Account*, written in 1838 and published in 1845:

Circular pieces, from two to three inches diameter, cut out of a black slate not found in the parish, are frequently dug up in the churchyard, along with rings, out of which these pieces seem to have been cut. Both of these are supposed by the people here to have been used at one time as money. (1845, 142)

Daniel Wilson (1851, 138, 297-8) noted this reference in his overview of Scottish archaeology, and confirmed Urquhart's identification from analogy to similar material found around Kimmeridge (Dorset) as waste pieces from bangle manufacture. The only early discoveries known to survive are three pieces in the National Museum of Ireland, donated in 1865 and noted to be 'from graves'. The link to graves became an issue of confusion; some sources assumed they were associated with ancient burials rather than being found in digging modern ones.

The 1890s saw a further flurry of collecting and discussion. The source of the fresh finds, where named, was John Pirie, who sold material to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for their museum, the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS)¹ and to the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow (now Glasgow Museums, henceforth GM) in 1893-5 and 1899. This led to renewed antiquarian interest which both added information and confused matters.

John Duns, Professor of Natural Science at New College, Edinburgh, holidayed in Portpatrick and discussed the shale with the Rev Urquhart, author of the early account, who remained minister in the town until his death in 1890. From this Duns learned that they were 'met with in some, not all, of the oldest graves, not near the surface, but at a considerable depth from it' (Duns 1894, 127). Duns contacted the person who had sold material to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland; he sent further examples, saying such discs were found 'only in one part of the old churchyard – that part opposite the tower of the old church ... – and that the area where they are found is only about 12 square yards ... Two of the

1 The items are now part of the National Museums Scotland (NMS) collections. Pirie was definitely the source of the 1894 acquisitions; no name is associated with surviving records of the 1893 acquisition, but there are good grounds to argue it was also him (see Appendix). He is recorded as John Sargeant Pirrie in the Glasgow records; it is possible that this confuses his occupation with his name, as a Sergeant Pirrie is recorded in Stranraer police around this time (J W Hunter and J Rafferty, pers comm; the information comes from the index to the *Wigtown Free Press* in Stranraer library and from census records). However, no secure connection has been verified.

rings and discs were found at a depth of 4 feet 6 inches ... In one grave were 17 discs and 4 broken rings; in another, 16 discs and 3 broken rings'.²

The informant continued: 'There is no tradition that I know of but what old people say, that they were used for money, to place in the coffin, and in the hands of the dead persons, to pay their way to the better land whence no one has yet returned'.

Duns linked this to the tradition of obols for the dead to give to Charon, the ferryman, for crossing the river Styx. He agreed, from comparison with material from Kimmeridge, that the discs were refuse from making ornamental rings (ibid, 128), but argued that they were cast into 'the graves of a class of persons who were characterised by some moral or social peculiarities'. This is echoed in the initial catalogue entries in GM, probably because the same source (John Pirie) provided the information. The 1893 GM acquisition is recorded as being 'associated with the burial customs of the Roman Catholics'; the 1899 acquisition as 'associated with early burial customs'.

The story was now developing in unusual directions. The link to bangle manufacture recognised by Urquhart in 1838 was increasingly obscured by two folk-traditions: the idea of the discs as money, and an association with the dead. Both are understandable given the form, quantity and find circumstances of the material. The concept of 'coal money' occurred in the similar finds of cores from making lathe-turned bangles in Dorset, using Kimmeridge Shale. These had been termed 'coal money' in local tradition since at least 1768; an 1826 article suggested they related to barter with Phoenician and Carthaginian traders, while others saw them as toys (Calkin 1955, 45-6). The numismatic theory was repudiated in 1839, but they were still known locally as Kimmeridge pennies.

A fresh discovery – the Cock Street finds

Yet a head of antiquarian steam was building against the Portpatrick speculations. From comments in later sources, it is clear that Duns' theories were not well-received, but it took a fresh find to bring these concerns into the public domain and give the interpretation stronger foundations. The first outpourings appeared in the columns of the local newspaper, the *Wigtown Free Press*, for 5 December 1901. This source has not been drawn on before, and is worth quoting in full.³

Find of Jet Ornaments – During the digging operations which were carried on while preparing the foundations of the large block of houses now being erected in Cock St by the prop. of Dunskey, some very fine specimens of shale or jet bracelets and discs were found. Hitherto these have only been found in the old churchyard, and they were supposed to have been tokens used at interments. In the foundations referred to the bracelets and discs have only been found in the clay strata 4–6 ft from the surface. Some of these were submitted to Dr Anderson, curator of the

2 By the 1890s the main focus of burial had moved to a new graveyard, but family burials continued in the old one. The recorded distribution of grave memorials from this period covers much of the churchyard (DGFHS 1998), so one can be reasonably confident that the observation of a concentration of shale debris in one area is not due to burial being restricted to this limited area. The area noted by Duns' informant saw burials in both the 1830s and the 1890s.

3 I am most grateful to the late R Ross Cunningham for drawing this to my attention.

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and he says they are interesting as coming from outside the churchyard, and thus demolishing the notion that they had something to do with the burial of the dead. He adds that the explanation is very simple. There was an extensive manufacturing of shale or jet bracelets at Portpatrick long before the churchyard was made. The discs are the circular insides cut out of the rings. The rings were first roughly shaped by cutting out from crude pieces of shale and finally worked to the roundness required, and finished by polishing. The discs are thus the waste pieces thrown away in the process of the manufacture of the rings. The set submitted illustrated all the stages except the first crude cutting of the slabs from which the rings were formed. Dr Anderson puts the query – Where did the shale come from? Did it exist in the strata anywhere near, or was it brought from a distance? These rings and discs are to be found in different parts of Wigtownshire. The bracelets are rarely whole, but are found in pieces, while the discs are from 1" to 5" dia. One of the latter, evidently a rare specimen, has some carving on one side, and a representation of a boat carved on the other. These relics are certainly very interesting, and point to an earlier age than that of metal ornaments.

The site, now known as Hill St, lies some 90m ESE of the old kirkyard, at the top end of the same terrace; the block of houses involved lies at the east end of the street, against the old cliff line. Anderson was correct in virtually every aspect bar the date, as we will see. As if he had not poured enough cold water on earlier speculations, J G Callander (1916, 237) completed the job in his review of jet and related materials in Scotland:

A very important manufacturing centre ... was at Portpatrick ... Large numbers of discs, chips of jet, and fragments of rings in the rough have been found in the old churchyard there, and also in other parts of the town. At least one perfect polished ring has been found. The churchyard, for the very obvious reason that it has been dug into for a considerable depth over and over again, has proved the most fruitful field for the finding of these relics, but there is no doubt that the jet workshops covered a considerable area which extended beyond the confines of the burying ground, as waste pieces have been recovered in excavating the foundations of houses in the town. Some extraordinary stories have appeared in print regarding the association of the Portpatrick discs with human skeletons, but they seem to be quite apocryphal. There is not the slightest doubt that the churchyard occupies the site of an ancient jet factory, and as it has been in use for many centuries, the debris from the workshops has got mixed up with human remains, and so their association is purely fortuitous.

The Cock St discovery marks a new phase in the Portpatrick story. The material sent to NMAS did not enter its collection, but another antiquarian, Ludovic McLellan Mann, took full advantage to collect a sample of this material, now in GM. His own records do not make the source clear, but the careful reporting of the *Free Press* gives the clue: the ‘rare specimen [with] some carving on one side, and a representation of a boat carved on the other’, recorded as coming from Cock St, is reported by Mann (1911, 870, no 9; 1915, 138-9, fig 8) as being in his collection.

Mann’s records are limited, but he loaned a good selection of material to the 1911 *Palace of History* exhibition in Glasgow, and the summary listing there indicates he had the bulk of his collection by this date (Mann 1911, 870-1).

However, notes on the artefacts themselves indicate he was still gathering material some years after these flats were built, in 1908 and 1914. He obtained much material through intermediaries; a local informant reports that Mann build a strong link to a local history society in Lochans, near Portpatrick, where he would often lecture. When he was due to come down, the members would scour the area for finds for him, both from fieldwalking and from contacting other finders (Donnie Nelson, pers comm).⁴ His finds cannot have been restricted to Cock St, as ground disturbance after construction work would be limited, so presumably material turned up elsewhere in the village: one 1914 finds says ‘Drain Back street’.⁵ Mann also owned material from the churchyard (one piece labelled thus in Glasgow (GM A1955.96.cce), and the finds he gave to Chicago), so it seems this remained a productive source; interments largely ceased around in 1890 with the building of a new cemetery, but burials were still inserted into existing plots (DGFHS 1998, 3).

Later finds

The material has seen little subsequent work. There was a continuing trickle of discoveries, though few entered museums and knowledge of them rarely reached archaeological ears. A locally-based antiquary, the Rev R S G Anderson (active 1919-39), had a range of Portpatrick pieces in his collection, though there is no record of where or how he acquired the material. A small group of finds from the churchyard was donated to NMAS in 1922 by Andrew McCormick, a local Newton Stewart solicitor with an interest in the area’s heritage, but whether he obtained them directly or from a client is unclear. A small collection bequeathed to NMAS in 1969 likewise lacks any detailed provenance. Local enquiries revealed that Jimmy Torbet, the owner of ‘Inglenook’, the former manse which lies immediately adjacent to the Old Kirk, occasionally found bits of shale in his garden and gave them to children as ‘Roman pennies’ in the mid-20th century, a novel variant on the ‘coal money’ idea (Ian Cerexhe, pers comm, December 2010; enquiries in 2007 established that the current owners have found nothing similar). In the 1980s an electricity cable trench from Braefield Rd to the Old Kirk found rings in St Patrick St, but none came to archaeological hands (R Ross Cunningham, pers comm, Nov 1994). An appeal in the *Wigtown Free Press* (3 May 2007) and accompanying display in Stranraer Museum produced no new information on recent finds. However, two ‘discs of sea coal’ reported to Dumfries Museum in 1976 were found on the beach at Castle Point, where Dunskey castle sits, a kilometre SSE of the other findspots.⁶ This indicates a further production locus.

4 Two names written on artefacts, Beckett and Cumming, are likely to be such intermediaries. Alexander Beckett was a regular supplier of finds to Mann, and worked as an excavator for him on several sites; recorded addresses put him at several farms around Portpatrick (Katinka Dalglish, pers comm; Ritchie 2002, 53). A Cumming family are recorded in Portpatrick around this time, including a spell as owners of the Crown Hotel which is immediately beside the old kirk (J Hunter, pers comm; information from *Wigtown Free Press* index).

5 No Back Street is known in Portpatrick, either on a map or on local tongues. It may be an abbreviation or mis-recording of ‘Barrack St’, which runs along the main terrace.

6 Sadly they were returned to the finders and are now lost.

There was clearly an antiquarian enthusiasm for the material, leading to its widespread dispersal. The appendix, while undoubtedly incomplete, notes finds from five Scottish and two overseas collections, Ireland and Chicago (the latter related to Ludovic Mann’s business interests; Ritchie 2002, 61).

The material

The surviving material is dominated by debris of bangle manufacture – roughed-out discs, cores removed from them to create perforations, and bangles in various stages of completion. Finished items are extremely rare, with only two completed bangles known, but this is no real surprise as by definition finished items are rarely found at workshops.

The different collections present rather different ranges of material owing to collecting bias, but Ludovic Mann’s material allows the chaîne opératoire to be reconstructed; other collections focussed on ‘trophy finds’ rather than seeking a representative range. As well as the main bangle production sequence there was secondary use of detached cores as roughouts for smaller items; the chaîne opératoire of this is discussed below.

Primary products: making bangles

Fig 3 outlines the process, while table 1 characterises the overall assemblage and the three largest collections in terms of these categories. It is clear that the NMS collection focuses strongly on cores and near-finished bangles while both Stranraer Museum and GM have a much more representative range. The steps in the production sequence were as follows.

- Preparing a squared block. As Anderson noted in the *Free Press* report, there are no gathered unworked blocks and very few squared blocks to represent the first stage of the process; this may be a collecting bias, but given the broad nature of Mann’s collection it is more tenable to argue that the material came to the site in prepared discs.
- Converting this to a disc-shaped roughout. These were neatly shaped, initially by flaking and then with regular bifacially cut edges. The surfaces were typically smoothly split or flaked.

	GM	NMS	Stranraer	Overall
blocks	3			3
discs	11	4	2	22
core removal	1			1
cores	37	32	10	87
finishing	15	5	5	26
ornaments			1	2
other	1			1
working debris	32		4	36
totals	100	41	22	178

Table 1. Character of the three main assemblages and the overall surviving assemblage of shale-working finds from Portpatrick

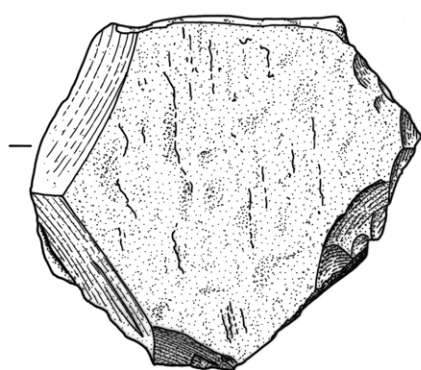
- Marking out the intended perforation. There are few surviving indications but these would inevitably be removed in the subsequent process, so the few which do survive must stand as indicators of an essential element in the story.
- Perforating the disc by removal of a solid core. Carving to remove the core took place bifacially, and was usually roughly symmetrical. Surviving toolmarks indicate a tool with a blade some 16-22mm broad, probably a chisel, presumably of metal; no tools have been recovered. The core could then be knocked out of the centre. It is surprising that so few accidental fractures are recorded at this stage, with only one instance. This must be due to selective retention: in debris from a similar hand-cutting process for Kimmeridge shale at Rope Lake Hole, Dorset, the ratio of partial cut-outs to cores was 1:1.3 (Cox & Woodward 1987, fig 87, categories 3cii and 3ciii).
- Shaping the perforated roughout. Surviving toolmarks indicate that it was initially flaked followed by rough knife-trimming, then by fine circumferential knife-trimming, and finally by abrasion (probably with sandstone tools) and then polishing. The outside was completed or near-completed before the interior was finished off. Most breakages occurred at the fine trimming stage.

The debris is notably consistent, and it seems this process was followed closely, though there are some variations arising from the habits of individual craftworkers or responses to the way in which the material behaved. The occasional disc was not particularly circular, while some split during preparation and attempts were made to reshape them (Fig 3.5-6). One bangle roughout shows attempts to repair or reuse it, with one fractured end rubbed and rounded off (GM A.1955.96.cej). Two items represent different processes. One disc (GM NN3351) has clear marking-out lines for the perforation and had been prepared differently, with a smoothed surface and vertical edge. Another, from a private collection, had been perforated centrally with the aim of expanding this to the desired diameter rather than cutting out a core; it is so different from the remainder that it is likely to be unconnected to the main industry, and its precise findspot is unknown.

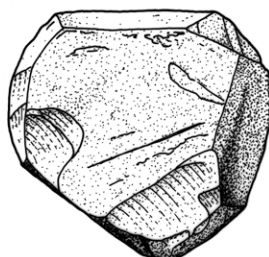
Reasons for abandonment are clear in some cases, such as fracture of the roughout; in other instances it is likely that the working properties proved too irregular, for instance with the way in which a roughout flaked or spalled. Some discs split and were then reused; although they would be too thin for bangles, other occasional products are known, such as perforated discs acting as weights (GM 1899.79t).

The near-complete bangles show some variety in their intended section, from circular to D-shaped (Fig 3.11-16); they are not distinctive apart from the characteristic internal bifacial angle from core removal, which generally survives as a hint even when polished. None was decorated. Internal diameters can act as a guide to the intended user, as variation in hand size with age and sex conditions what size of bangle one could wear. This is harder to assess with roughouts, as the bangles

Figure 3 (next pages). The chaîne opératoire for bangle manufacture at Portpatrick. 1–2 blanks; 3–4 discs prepared for working; 5–6 discs which split during working and were reshaped; 7–10 removed cores; 11–16 unfinished bangles. GM, Glasgow Museums; NMS, National Museums Scotland. Drawing by Alan Braby

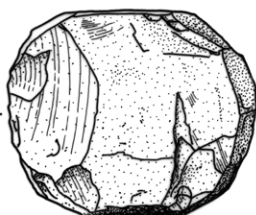
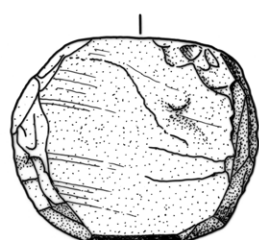


1 GM NN3353

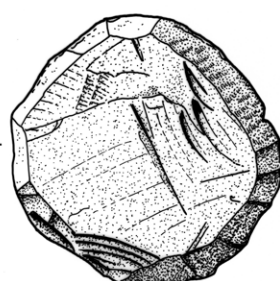


2 GM NN3353

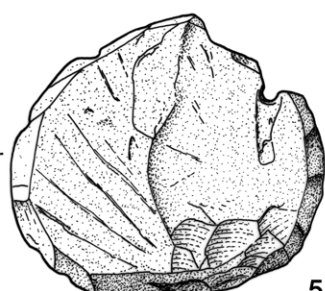
0 50mm



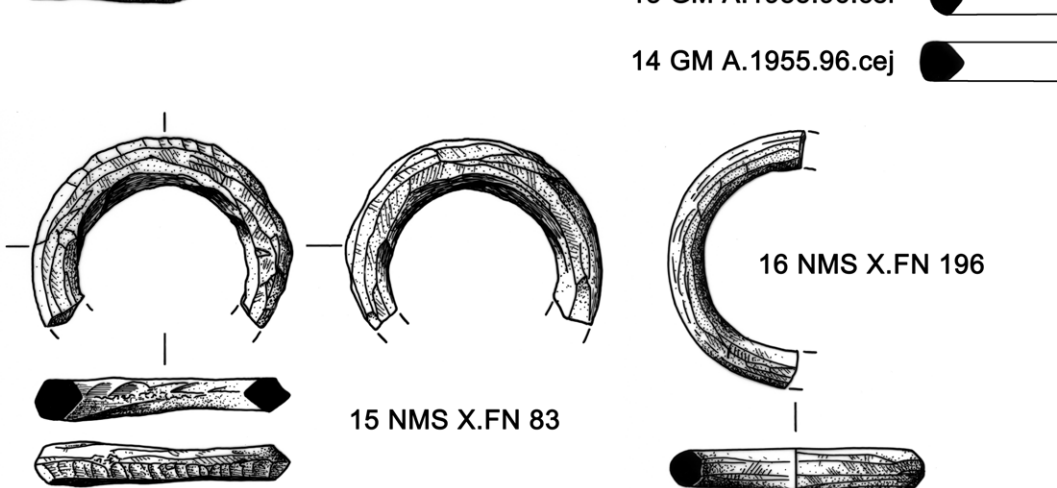
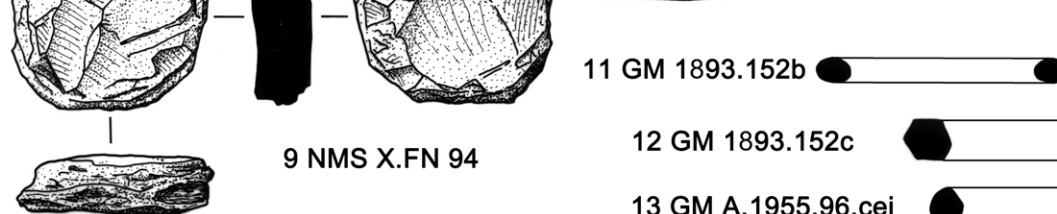
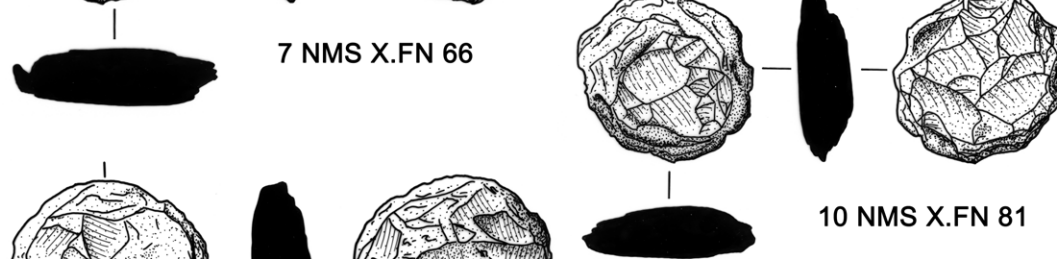
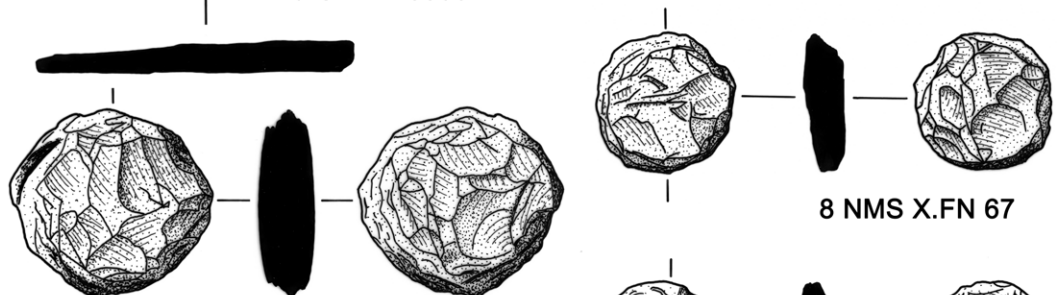
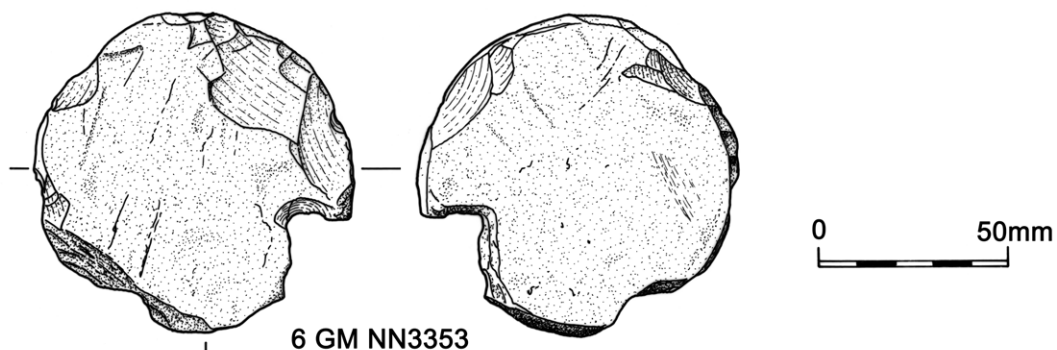
3 NMS X.FN 69



4 GM 1899.79d



5 GM 1899.79c



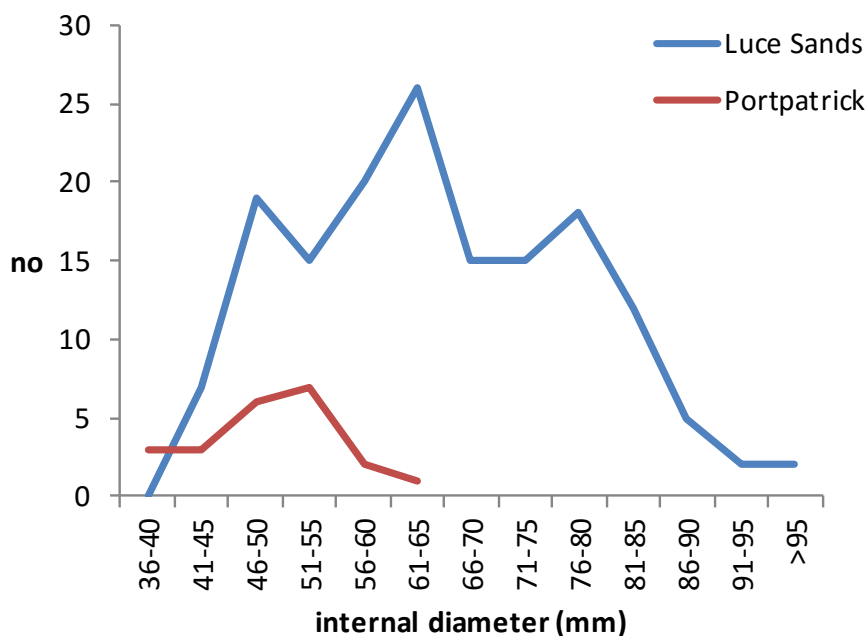


Figure 4. Internal diameters of bangles from Portpatrick compared to those from the nearby assemblage of Luce Sands

had not yet reached their final diameter, but the spread of recorded diameters (Fig 4) sits predominantly between 45-55mm, which is a little under the typical female range of 55-65mm (Hunter 2008a, Table 1; Hunter et al forthcoming for local comparanda from Luce Sands). It indicates that these were intended primarily as female ornaments, with small 'tails' above and below suggesting occasional use by males and children.

Reuse

There was extensive secondary use of the waste cores to make smaller perforated objects, with 40% showing signs of reuse. This notably high percentage reflects the fact that the material was not locally available and thus had to be exploited to the full (see below). The chaîne opératoire of this second-phase use can be reconstructed as follows (Fig 5).

- The rough edges were bifacially trimmed, flaked, or channelled.
- The edges were then smoothed.
- The intended perforation was marked out and the core was perforated, usually by gouging out chunks of material.
- The perforated roughout was trimmed, abraded and polished to its final shape.

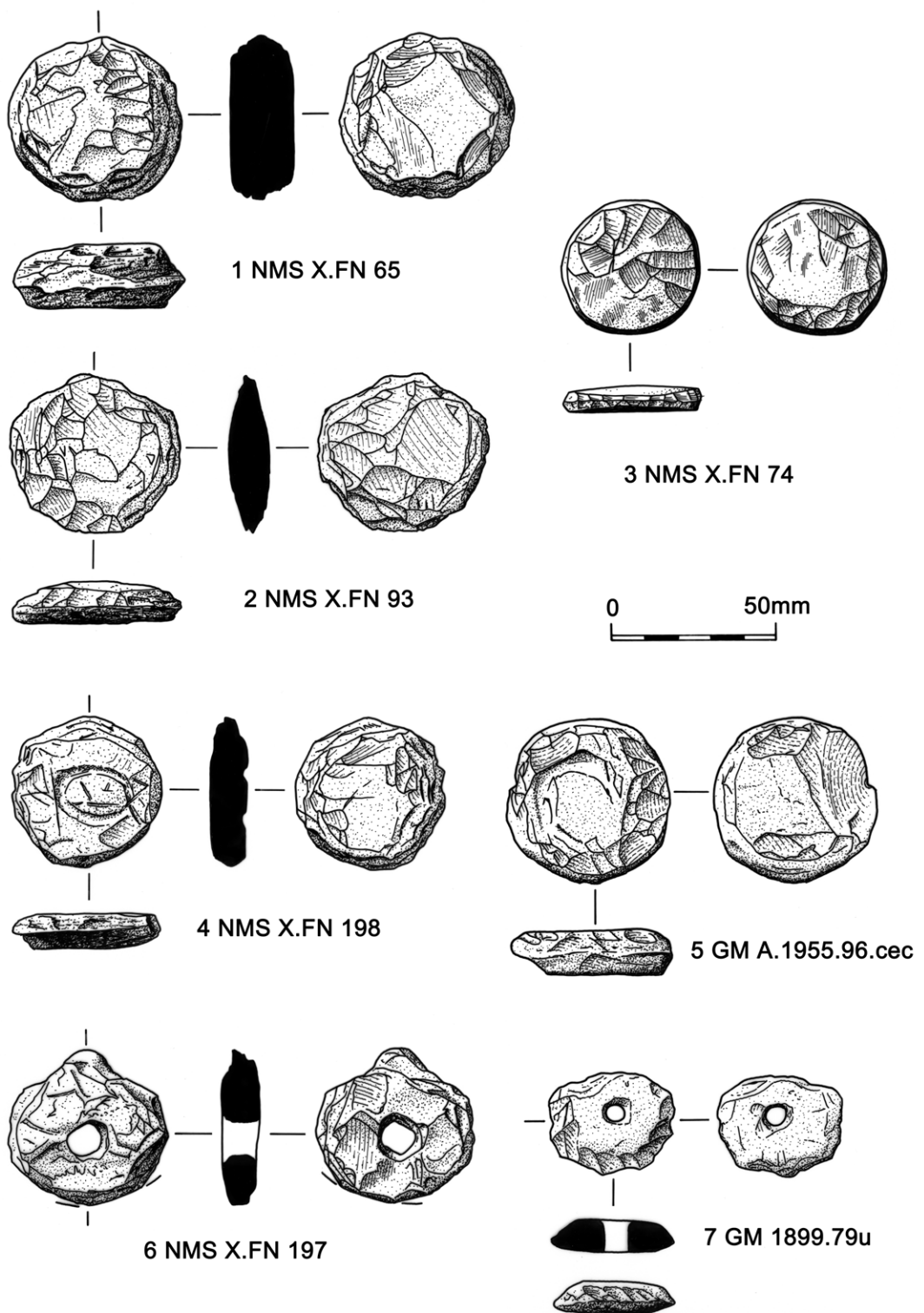


Figure 5. The chaîne opératoire for core reuse at Portpatrick. 1–2 trimmed cores; 3 smoothed core; 4–5 marked-out cores; 6–7 perforated cores. GM, Glasgow Museums; NMS, National Museums Scotland. Drawing by Alan Braby

Some cores were split in half to create thinner items. Few near-complete items are present; the size of one (Fig 5.7) suggests it was a spindle whorl, while others are likely to have been finger-rings, pendants or beads. One large core (GM A.1955.96ced) was reused to make another bangle, but with the perforation made by gouging rather than removal of a further core.

Hints that the raw material was valued are confirmed by evidence that waste cores were exchanged: one reused core came from Luce Sands, 10km east of Portpatrick (Stranraer Museum 2009.31.6).

Raw material

The material is very consistent, with a clear laminar structure and some conchoidal fracture. It can be identified as an oil shale or canneloid shale, and is not locally available. The Rev Urquhart noted it was ‘a black slate not found in the parish’ (1845, 142); in fact, it is entirely inconsistent with the geology of Galloway as a whole, as such organic black rocks are more typical of Coal Measures deposits of Carboniferous date.⁷ Pinning down a precise source remains tricky, but the most local source would be the Ayrshire Coal Measures deposits (Gibson 1922). While contact to Ireland would be easy, the dominant raw material in Northern Ireland is lignite rather than oil shale (Parnell & Meighan 1989), though coal deposits are recorded in the cliffs around Ballycastle, Co Antrim (Sevastopulo 1981, 291) and an Irish source cannot be ruled out without detailed geological study. Portpatrick’s coastal location certainly gave it the necessary connections to obtain non-local raw materials.

Date and parallels

My starting assumption was that the Portpatrick material would prove to be Iron Age in date, since core removal was the dominant form of manufacture across the European Iron Age (eg Venclová 1998). This has turned out to be wrong. The predominant bangle-making technology in the Scottish Iron Age was by perforation and expansion rather than core removal (Callander 1916, 235; Hunter 2015, 232). Portpatrick is thus rather unusual in a Scottish context. So what is the evidence for its date?

Callander collated most of the relevant comparanda one hundred years ago (1916, 237). The evidence is curiously split. There is an anomalous group from northern Scotland, from the broch of Carn Liath in Sutherland and its immediate vicinity. This is likely to be Iron Age in date, but other Iron Age finds in the area do not share the technology, and it stands as something of an enigma. The bulk of the evidence for core-removal comes from the opposite corner of Scotland, in the south-west (Fig 6). Callander noted prepared discs⁸ from Whiting Bay (Arran; NMS X.FN 13), Dunadd (Argyll & Bute; NMS X.GP 269) and the churchyard

7 ‘Sea coal’ is regularly recovered by trawlers off the coast to the north of Portpatrick, and is found on the beach at Larbrax Bay some 6km to the north-west (Ian Cerexhe, pers comm). This is likely to be material washed from deposits which outcrop in Ireland, and is unlikely to be workable.

8 These are distinctive to the core-removal process because the roughouts used in the expansion process typically had an initial perforation made before transport (Hunter 2007, 208-10).

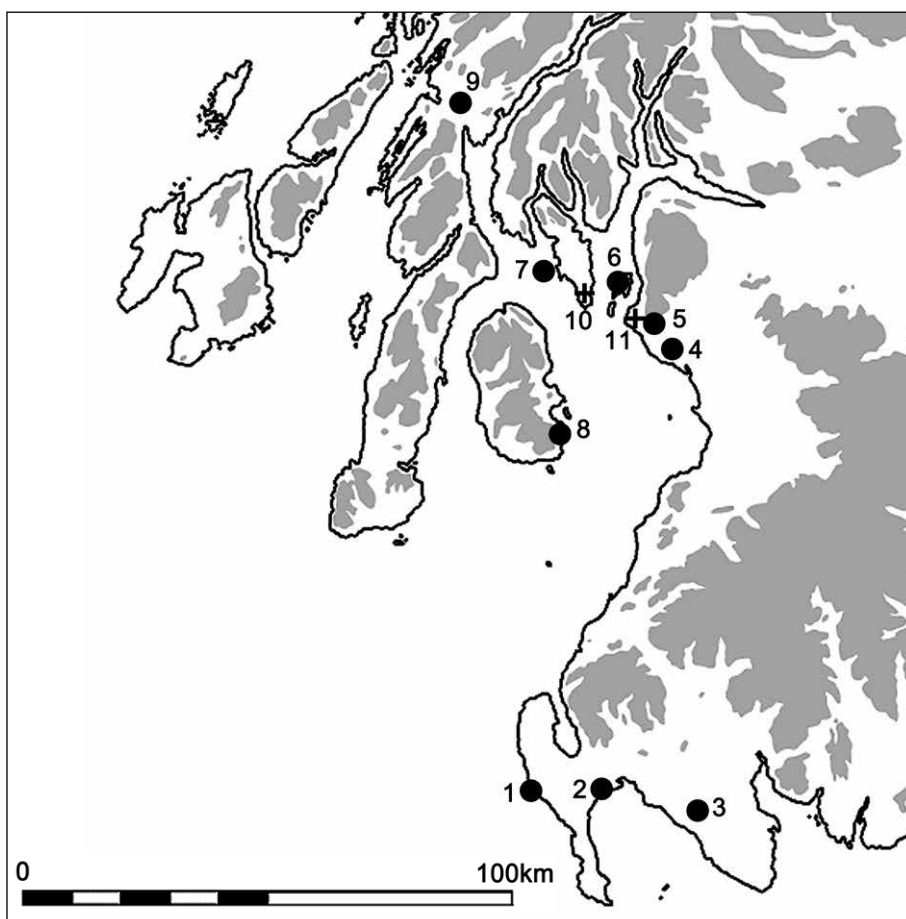


Figure 6. Distribution of evidence for core-removal technology and bangles made by this technique in Scotland (Irish evidence is not mapped). 1 Portpatrick; 2 Luce Sands; 3 Barhobble; 4 Stevenston Sands; 5 West Kilbride; 6 Great Cumbrae; 7 Inchmarnock; 8 Whiting Bay; 9 Dunadd. Crosses mark sites where a variant technique is found: 10 St Blane's; 11 Auldhill, Portencross

on Great Cumbrae in the Firth of Clyde (NMS X.FN 80), while removed cores are recorded from West Kilbride and Stevenston Sands (North Ayrshire; Smith 1895, 41, figs 109-10); Stevenston Sands has also produced a roughout with the core part-removed (NMS X.FN 51). This south-western distribution has been confirmed by subsequent finds, with examples from Inchmarnock (Bute) and Barhobble (Dumfries & Galloway; Cormack 1995, 72, fig 36.5; Hunter 1995; 2008b). The available dating evidence is consistently Early Medieval: the fort of Dunadd and the church sites of Barhobble and Inchmarnock, while the Great Cumbrae find is also likely to be Early Medieval given the quantities of contemporary sculpture from the site (Fisher 2001, 70-2).

A rare variant of core removal has a similar date and distribution. At St Blane's on Bute and Auldhill (Portencross, North Ayrshire) a plano-convex disc was removed from one side of the blank, with the resulting sunken area then perforated

and expanded (Callander 1916, 236; Hunter 1998, 51-2). The reasons for this unusual process are unclear, but it is distinctive to the Firth of Clyde region in the Early Medieval period.

This later first millennium AD date is supported by Irish evidence from a number of Early Medieval religious and secular sites. There is no detailed synthesis, but examples may be noted from Armagh (Co Armagh), Cahercommaun (Co Clare), Clonmacnoise (Co Offaly), Doonmore (Co Antrim), Oldcourt (Co Cork) and Scrabo (Co Down) (Crothers 1999, fig 13; Edwards 1990, 96; Hencken 1938, 42, fig 25 no 727; Doonmore and Scrabo finds in Ulster Museum; Clonmacnoise find in National Museum of Ireland, 1984:19). These are distributed widely across Ireland, and it is tempting to suggest that the habit spread into that part of Scotland closest to Ireland with increasing Irish influence in the Early Medieval period.

Core removal was not the only bangle manufacturing technique used on Early Medieval sites. It is dominant at Portpatrick, but at Inchmarnock it was a minor element alongside the perforation-and-expansion technique, while it is not apparently represented in the material found at Govan (Glasgow).⁹ Given the absence of core removal in the Scottish Iron Age, it is tempting to read this difference as reflecting an indigenous versus an introduced craft tradition, with the staged removal process of St Blane's and Auldhill a hybrid between the two.

There are few associated finds from Portpatrick itself to confirm the date, but the indications are consistent with an Early Medieval period. Mann (1915, 78) recorded finding a crucible at the site (noted more cautiously in the *Palace of History* catalogue [Mann 1911, 870 no 10] as a 'Small clay cup, possibly a crucible, from the Portpatrick workshop'). This does not survive in any known collection, but indicates other industrial activity. The donation record of some items noted 'also two Bronze Age sherds', but the phrasing implies they were not associated (PSAS 102 (1969-70), 295). More telling are two finds from Ludovic Mann's collection. Among the material in GM is a stone spindle whorl with lathe-cut decoration (GM 1899.79s), a technique found on Scottish whorls only from the Roman period onwards.

The other noteworthy find is a disc with carvings from the Cock St site (Fig 7). This has not been traced in any public collection, but was illustrated by Mann (1915, 138-9, fig 8): 'On one face ... is cut a rectangular figure divided into seven compartments, each filled with a running script-like design. The other face [not illustrated] is etched with a figure like a boat with sails set. An enlarged photograph of this object has been submitted to various authorities, but no suggestion has been made as to the meaning (if any) of the script-like design'. It was also mentioned by Callander (1916, 234): 'The disc resembles one of the waste pieces found in the locality, but the edge is trimmed'. He suggested the marks resembled runes, but noted that Sir John Rhys (professor of Celtic at Oxford) had been unable to make sense of them. The design on the other side 'may be a representation of an eye or a crudely drawn boat with a mast'. This finds generalised parallels among the inscribed pieces of shale and slate from the monastic sites of St Blane's and Inchmarnock on Bute, where such material was used as sketch-pads for drawings,

9 The evidence from the major monastic site at Whithorn (Dumfries & Galloway) is insufficient to characterise the technology (Hunter & Nicholson 1997).



Figure 7. The inscribed disc from Cock Street, Portpatrick. Scale unknown, but larger than life (from Mann 1915, fig 8)

inscriptions, and what may be termed para-literate scratching (Forsyth & Tedeschi 2008; Lowe 2008, 151-75; Anderson 1900, figs 7-16). This supports the broadly Early Medieval context suggested by other evidence.

The site

Given the links to Early Medieval church sites elsewhere, with shale assemblages dominated by working debris (Hunter 2008b, fig 6.51), is this a plausible context at Portpatrick? The finds from the churchyard might hint in this direction, but the early history of this site is poorly known. The surviving church with its enigmatic circular tower was built in 1629 (MacGibbon & Ross 1892, 191-3; the tower may be older), supposedly on an earlier foundation (Urquhart 1845, 142; McLean 1997, 102-3), but there is no Early Medieval sculpture in contrast to other early church sites. The distribution of findspots indicates a dispersed series of workshops along the terrace above the harbour, over a distance of at least 100m, while the finds from Dunskey suggest a second focus at what is likely to have been an Early Medieval promontory fort.

The nature of Early Medieval Portpatrick is opaque owing to later development but there are tantalising hints, reviewed elsewhere, to suggest it was a significant site (Hunter & Hunter forthcoming). Key to this argument is a lost footprint stone

from an island in the bay which suggests it was a Medieval royal inauguration site. This royal link is supported by the likely early form of the placename as Portree (*Port Ríg*, the king's port; Watson 1926, 157-8; MacQueen 2002, 80-1). All this points to Portpatrick as a place of considerable significance in the Early Medieval period.

Conclusions

I hope this paper has shown what may be extracted from the less glamorous end of museum collections. Lurking in stores across the land are little-loved finds which are full of stories. In this case, insights into technology link the material to a wider picture of south-west Scottish links to Ireland in the Early Medieval period – a reminder that this corner of Scotland sits on natural sea corridor, and the Irish connection is a fundamental one. The finds rehabilitate Portpatrick as a significant Early Medieval site which has been lost to view. I hope this offering will provoke David's interests, both from the antiquarian trail which lies behind it and the attempt to tell tales from 'small things forgotten' (Deetz 1977).

Appendix: history of research and collecting of the Portpatrick shale

Date	Person	Findspot	Notes	Museum details
1838	Rev Andrew Urquhart (1805-90): minister at Portpatrick 1832-90	Churchyard	First publication of material (Urquhart 1845, 142)	None survive
1851	Daniel Wilson (1816-92)		Collated and correctly identified material (Wilson 1851, 138, 297-8)	n/a
1865	Rev Dr Reeves (1815-92): antiquary; Bishop of Down; President of Royal Irish Academy	Churchyard: 'found in graves'	Donated finds to National Museum of Ireland	NMI R1912-1915
1893	John Pirie (fl 1890s)	Churchyard	Finds purchased by Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for 30/- (Purchase Committee <i>Minutes</i> , 25.2.1893; <i>PSAS</i> 27 (1892-3) 373)	NMS X.FN 62-79
1893	John Pirie	Churchyard	Finds sold to Kelvingrove Museum. Probably the material referred to in Society of Antiquaries Purchase Committee <i>Minutes</i> 30.9.1893: 'A collection of 14 discs and part of a ring of cannel coal dug from a grave in the old churchyard of Portpatrick offered by Mr John Pirie was declined'	GM 1893.152
1894	John Pirie	Churchyard	Finds purchased by Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for 10/- (Purchase Committee <i>Minutes</i> 3.6.1893; <i>PSAS</i> 28 (1893-4), 6)	NMS X.FN 81-4
1894	John Duns (1820-1909), Professor of Natural Science, New College (Edinburgh) 1864-1903	Churchyard	Published and discussed material (Duns 1894, 127-8)	
1895	John Pirie	Churchyard	Material purchased by Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for 10/- (Purchase Committee <i>Minutes</i> 15.12.1894; <i>PSAS</i> 29 (1894-5), 276)	NMS X.FN 85-96
1899	John Sargeant Pirrie	Churchyard	Material sold to Kelvingrove Museum	GM 1899.79
1901		Cock St (now Hill St)	Material found in building houses by Dunskey Estate: <i>Wigtown Free Press</i> 5.12.1901	Submitted to NMAS but not retained

Date	Person	Findspot	Notes	Museum details
1908, 1914	Ludovic Mann (1869-1955)	Cock St – one piece securely tied to this by its description	Some 1908 material acquired from Mr Beckett; some 1914 material from Mr Cumming. Exhibited at the 1911 <i>Palace of History</i> exhibition & donated to Kelvingrove Museum in 1922 (see below)	
Pre-1911	Lady Augusta Orr Ewing (1876-1967)	Findspot not stated, but the <i>Free Press</i> account notes that the Cock St houses were being developed by the proprietor of Dunskey, who was Lord Orr Ewing.	Exhibited at Palace of History (Mann 1911, 871 no 25). Now lost (enquiries with family members drew a blank)	Lost
1911	<i>Palace of History</i> exhibition in Glasgow	Various	Good selection of material exhibited, mostly from Mann's collection (Mann 1911, 870-1)	
1916	J G Callander (1873-1938)		Included in synthetic publication (Callander 1916, 237)	
1922	Andrew McCormick (1867-1956); lawyer in Newton Stewart	Churchyard	Donated to the National Museum; <i>PSAS</i> 57 (1922-3), 13	NMS X.FN 148-51
1922	Ludovic Mann	Various	Donation of material to Kelvingrove Museum; see <i>Journal of the British Archaeological Association</i> 28 (1922), 275	GM NN2201, 3351, 3353
1933	Ludovic Mann	Churchyard	Donation of material to Chicago Field Museum (Ritchie 2002, 61)	218391A – B
Pre-1940	R S G Anderson (1867-1939); minister in Isle of Whithorn and then Castle Kennedy, 1919-39; noted local antiquary	Uncertain	Bequest to Stranraer Museum	SM 1945.141-2, 193, 196-7, 207
1955	Ludovic Mann	Various	Bequest of material to Kelvingrove Museum	GM A.1955.96
Post-war	Jimmy Torbet (fl. 1920s – 60s), owner of 'Inglennook'	'Inglennook'	Finds from garden given away as 'Roman pennies' (information from Ian Cerexhe)	
Post-war	Bert McHaffie (fl 1950s – 80s)	Uncertain	Seen in private collection by the writer in 1997, but not in the McHaffie collection now in Stranraer Museum	Lost
1968	Ministry of Works	Uncertain	CANMORE ID 60337 records material given on loan to Stranraer Museum, apparently at this date (1968 MW 13); it is no longer traceable in Stranraer collections or those of Historic Environment Scotland, the successors of the Ministry of Works	Apparently lost
1970	J M Purves (fl 1940s – 60s?)	Not specified	Donated to NMAS by his heirs; <i>PSAS</i> 102 (1969-70), 295. Local informants remember a Purves family, one of whom was factor of the Dunskey Estate, the main local landowners (Donnie Nelson & Ian Cerexhe, pers comm). Dunskey Estate built the Cock St flats.	NMS X.FN 196-200
1976	Neill Balfour & Stuart Wood	Finds at Castle Point (=Dunskey Castle), on beach	Reported to Dumfries Museum (1976.79) but returned to finders	Lost
1980s	Electricity cable	St Patrick St, near churchyard	Information from R Ross Cunningham	Lost
2007			Enquiry in local paper revealed no recent knowledge of discoveries	
?	Unknown	Unknown	Material in Aberdeen University Museum, registered in 1972 but an antiquarian find	19261
?	Unknown	Unknown	Material in East Ayrshire Museum (Dick Institute, Kilmarnock); acquisition details unclear	KIMMG ARIA 129, 130, 132

The chronology of acquisitions identifies John Pirie as the source of all the 1890s material now in NMS. Finds were acquired from an un-named source at Purchase Committee meetings of 25 February 1893 and 3 June 1893; Professor Duns (1894, 127) contacted ‘the person from whom they were bought’, who sent him further examples; Duns read his paper on 12 February 1894, and the Society acquired a further batch of material on 15 December 1894, specifically noted as being from Pirie. It is likely this is the material sent to Duns. Note that the entry in *PSAS* 28 (1893-4), 6, describing 19 discs and 3 rings is a typographic error; 1 disc and 3 rings were donated.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jack Hunter, Ian Cerexhe, the late Ross Cunningham, Donnie Nelson and Joe Rafferty for local information, to Mary Cahill, Neil Curtis, Jane Flint, Jamie Kelly, John Pickin, Katinka Stentoft Dalglish and Jason Sutcliffe for access to material in other museum collections, and to Simon Howard and John Faithfull for geological advice. I am grateful also to David for ferreting out information from the Purchase Committee minutes of the Society of Antiquaries, though I hope he did not guess its ultimate destination!

Abbreviations

CANMORE	https://canmore.org.uk/ (accessed 6 February 2016)
DGFHS 1988	Dumfries & Galloway Family History Society 1988 <i>Portpatrick Old Kirkyard: Memorial Inscriptions</i> . Dumfries: Dumfries & Galloway Family History Society
GM	Glasgow Museums
JBAA	<i>Journal of the British Archaeological Association</i>
NMAS	National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland
NMI	National Museum of Ireland
NMS	National Museums Scotland
PSAS	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</i>
SM	Stranraer Museum

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Silver handpins from the West Country to Scotland: perplexing portable antiquities

Susan Youngs

Abstract

A very few dress items were adopted in Britain and Ireland in the object-poor post-Roman period. One was the handpin, a distinctive pin with offset head. Made primarily in silver, the first handpins were to occur in hoards and as stray finds very widely distributed inside and beyond Roman Britain in the later fourth and fifth centuries. Some were richly decorated in a distinctive late Roman style, a local hybrid produced to a high standard. The basic pin type, however, was already manufactured beyond the Imperial northern border. Recent finds and new research into the design and materials have added to our knowledge but not solved the challenge of their origin and significance both inside and beyond the Roman frontier.

Keywords: *silver, hoards, dress pin, Ireland, Roman Britain, Scotland, late Roman Iron Age, Early Medieval, Military style, enamel, niello, handpin, disc-headed pin*

In the period of the withdrawal of Roman resources and authority following AD 400 there was movement from south to north in Britain of valuable materials with the redistribution of some of the portable wealth accumulated under the Empire. The massive Traprain Law (East Lothian) silver hoard is a demonstration of this process at work (Curle 1923; Hunter & Painter 2013). Silver is a metal widely agreed to have circulated in Britain and Ireland through the agency of Roman economic activity: at this British stronghold north of Hadrian's Wall about 22 kilos of silver, largely Roman plate treated as bullion rather than for its original function or artistry, had been gathered into a mighty heap and buried probably in the first quarter of the fifth century. In contrast, what must be one of the smallest identifiable silver hoards of that century now consists of two pieces buried near Castletown, Kilpatrick, Co Meath in Ireland, with a total weight of about 12g (Ó Floinn 2001, 5). These pieces are both pins of a particular type: handpins, one being an early variant of the form of the other. From the fifth to the seventh centuries AD in the lands beyond the Anglo-Saxon territories, the frequent evidence for silver gives



Figure 1. Location of pins, hoards and manufacturing sites mentioned in the text (excluding Hallum Terp, Netherlands) (Drawn by A Beckles Willson for the author)

rise to the question of why handpins occur so regularly in silver hoards and other contexts, and why are so many early examples of silver. (In contrast, gold is almost invisible at this time.) The challenge lies in understanding the origins and spread of the finely decorated and inlaid silver versions of this distinctive form of pin, which spanned the former Roman frontier in time and space.

Defining handpins

Handpins have a robust shank which carries a hand-like head offset on a short, thick arm and held roughly parallel to the shank (Figs 2, 4). There are many Roman Iron Age bronze pins with offset ringed heads, some made of bent wire, others being cast variants with moulded and beaded heads (Clarke 1971; Foster 1990 for Scotland; Raftery 1984, 157-75, for the Irish ring-headed types). The finds from Sculptor's Cave, Covesea, Moray are a good illustration of the range of head forms in Roman Iron Age Scotland (Benton 1931, 195; Hunter 2010, 100).

One of these variants has now been shown to be made of silver (Fraser Hunter, pers comm; NMS X.HM 69; Benton 1931, fig 16.1). The silver handpins, however, are derived from only one variant, with beads above a flat zone at the base of the ring (Figs 2, 3, 6; Youngs 2005, 252-3). They are all either proto-handpins or fully developed handpins – that is, where beads, later developed as projecting ‘fingers’, sit above a semi-circular plate (Figs 2-6). While not identical in size or ornament, they are variants of just one form out of many found in Roman Iron Age Britain and beyond.

The common Romano-British pin had been the ubiquitous hair pin in a variety of forms and materials, with an undercurrent of some much longer and more substantial native dress or ‘stick’ pins (Cool 1990; Kilbride-Jones 1980a, 5-8; Youngs 2005; Youngs 2010). The handpin’s function becomes clearer as larger forms were developed: they were cloak fasteners rather than hair pins, a deduction from the thick shanks and projecting heads. Later enamelled bronze handpins in the early Middle Ages in Ireland and Scotland often have substantial heads, with shanks which could be up to 24cm or more in length (such as the pin from Craigyarwarren Bog, Skerry, Co Antrim; Youngs 1989, 125). The pin type was adopted with enthusiasm, embellished with enamels, millefiori inlays and foils in the sixth and seventh centuries in both Scotland and Ireland (Laing 1993, 77-80; Kilbride-Jones 1980b, 212-5; Duignan 1973; Youngs 1989, 23-5).

One of the two earliest enamelled examples of the pin type ancestral or relevant to the whole later handpin ‘family’, was part of what was predominantly a large hoard of bronze coins found near Oldcroft, Gloucestershire (Johns 1974; Youngs 1989, 23; Hobbs 2006, 221, cat 1360; Youngs 2005, 249-50; British Museum(BM) 1973,00801.1). This small silver and enamel proto-handpin was the shape of things to come. The other early example, a good match in scale and form, comprised half of the two-pin hoard from Castletown, Kilpatrick, Co Meath, noted above; with it was a handpin (Ó Floinn 2001, 5). An undecorated proto-handpin in silver from an unknown findplace in Ireland has a bronze equivalent in the curious deposits made in Sculptor’s Cave, Covesea, Moray (Mahr & Raftery 1932, pl 1, 6; Benton 1931, 195, fig 16.5 = NMS X.HM 68). Another bronze proto-handpin, this time tinned to make it resemble silver, was found at Traprain Law (NMS X.GVM 118).

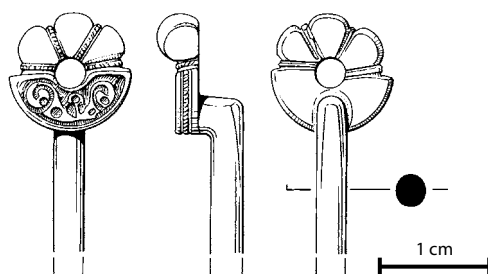


Figure 2. Silver proto-handpin with niello inlay from Welton le Wold, Lincolnshire (Drawn by James Farrant. Courtesy of the British Museum)

The dominance of silver

The silver handpins represent the recycling of Roman silver, and most of those analysed show a high silver percentage. A handpin from Hadrian's Wall at Denton, by Newcastle, gave a qualitative analysis of over 95% silver (Clogg 1996); the Norrie's Law handpin NMS X.FC 31 contains around 94%, but the Gaulcross pin only approximately 75% (the last two figures courtesy of Martin Goldberg). The results for pins found in Ireland are on the low side (with 90% silver) compared with Roman plate of around 94% and above, which reflects Imperial control of silver. Fiona Gavin argues for the deliberate addition of base metal to aid fine carving (Gavin 2013, 431).

The finding of silver handpins in hoards could be a statistical quirk, as we are dealing with a very small evidence base, but I had begun to expect that any new examples of late Roman or Early Medieval handpins would be made of silver wherever they turned up, as with a silver and niello proto-handpin from Welton le Wold, Lincolnshire, a handpin head from Chilton Trinity, Somerset and a handpin reported from Leicester (Figs 2, 3; Youngs 2005; Laing 2001). Whereas the more numerous contemporary penannular brooches are made of copper alloy with only two silver exceptions, in Britain and Ireland the present tally of proto-handpins and early handpins in silver is sixteen, against four early handpins of copper alloy (one of which is described as tinned). This is not to be expected of the later, mainly larger, more numerous variants of handpins which are all of copper alloy with a variety of inlays, although one could argue about where 'early' and 'later' divide before the sixth century (Irish finds in Duignan 1973; Kilbride-Jones 1980b, figs 67, 71). Of seven later handpins in the British Museum, qualitative X-ray fluorescence analyses identified six of leaded bronze, one brass and one leaded gunmetal (P Craddock & S Youngs unpublished survey, BM Research Laboratory).

In her study of Roman hair pins in southern Britain, Hilary Cool commented that silver examples became relatively more frequent in the late Roman period although the use of hair pins in general had declined (Cool 1990, 149). Was this a period of boom before bust, or personal extravagance in the face of decline? Were the decades either side of AD 400 periods of relative affluence for some, despite the growing shortage of coin? Or did a finely decorated silver handpin on your clothing indicate something beyond modest affluence and fashion? Was it going native, throwing off the classical veneer? This is a view strongly championed by Neil Faulkner, among others (Faulkner 2000; Esmonde Cleary 2013), but one that chooses to ignore, among more fugitive evidence, the post-Roman spread of a Latin-based historical religion promoted by emperors, Christianity. On the contrary, I am beginning to suspect that silver dress items may have become a mark of official favour and status in the later fourth century, one that in later centuries continued to convey such a message.

Manufacturing and dating evidence

It would not at first sight appear to be a challenge to identify where these pins were made, as manufacturing evidence survives only and richly in Scotland, a phenomenon that is true also for other non-ferrous metalwork such as knobbed

spearbutts (Heald 2001; Campbell & Heald 2007). Traprain Law in East Lothian has produced two mould fragments proving manufacture of proto-handpins on the site in the third to fourth century, though ‘none are for true handpins’ (Close-Brooks 1983, 217; Campbell & Heald 2007). Among other handpins there is a tiny silver example from this site (Close-Brooks 1982, fig 98 no 47; Burley 1956, 170, no 120; NMS X.GVM 120). Traprain Law was used in the fifth century for the deposition first of the great Roman silver treasure and at some unknown time thereafter, of a massive silver chain (Hunter 2013, 6-8; Youngs 2013, 403-7). This does give some support to the emergence, around AD 400, of the full handpin and a fourth century context for the earlier pin form.

The coin sequence in the Oldcroft hoard ended in AD 354-9, although the possibility of hoard curation makes this a likely but not certain *terminus ante quem* for the pin (Johns 1974). The Irish Castletown hoard suggests that the proto- and full handpin variants may not be widely apart in date, at last pulling back the sixth- to seventh-century dates that were once given to full handpins. To this evidence can be added the radiocarbon date range of AD 250-450 for the deposit of both proto- and full handpin moulds from Lough na Beirgh, Isle of Lewis (Harding & Gilmour 2000, 63-4, 66; Heald 2001, 689-90). There a mould for a full handpin and a crucible used for silver were excavated, confirming the presence in Atlantic Scotland of the full form back in the first half of the fifth century, if not earlier. Handpin moulds have been excavated at three other sites in the Northern and Western Isles (Campbell & Heald 2007, 177), and questions remain over refining the dating and the question of how they fit into the complex history of the developed handpin. This material, together with that from Traprain Law, demonstrates a Scottish origin for the earliest forms of some of these pins somewhere in the third-fourth centuries AD (Burley 1956, 139, 219 nos 552, 554). This is not the full picture, however.

Wider distribution of handpins and proto-handpins

At first sight, a cluster of Scottish finds provides confirmation of the mould evidence. There is the small silver pin from the settlement on Traprain Law itself noted above, while larger decorated and inlaid forms were included in Scottish silver hoards found at Norrie’s Law, Fife, and Gaulcross, Aberdeenshire (Fig 3 right; Youngs 2013, 413-6).¹ These hoards contained three examples of silver handpins of more than one decorative type, even though only small parts of the original deposits now survive. There is, therefore, important evidence for manufacture in Scotland during the late Roman Iron Age and for the presence of highly decorated versions in two Scottish hoards. The presence of a silver handpin of later style in Caithness at Freswick Links is part of this pattern (Laing 1993, cat 124; NMS X.FC 254), as is the ornament of the overlooked smaller silver pin from Norrie’s Law, NMS X.FC 32.

1 Norrie’s Law NMS X.FC 30 has been confirmed as a post-medieval copy; Goldberg & Blackwell 2013, 323, 330.

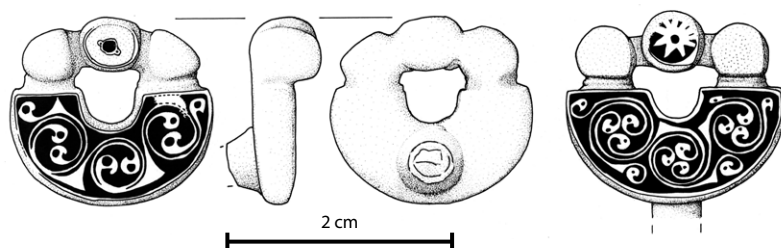


Figure 3. Head of a silver handpin found at Chilton Trinity, Somerset, with (right) detail of the silver handpin from the Gaulcross hoard, Aberdeenshire (Drawn by Brenda Craddock for the author)

But the distribution goes far beyond Scotland. Further examples of silver handpins and their prototypes are scattered up and down Britain and beyond in the late and post-Roman period (Fig 1). Find-places range from modern Somerset to Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Northumberland, and include a plain pin from a coastal terp in Friesland in the Netherlands (Fowler 1963, 126-7, 152-3; Laing 1993, 35-7; Gavin 2013, illus 27.4). Many are richly decorated and inlaid (Figs 2, 3 left, 4, 5). If bronze examples of the small, plain early type are allowed into the picture, the distribution expands to take in further finds from Northumberland, Cumbria and Nottinghamshire too (namely Corbridge, Northumberland: Kilbride-Jones 1980b, fig 60, 5, from R A Smith's manuscript notebook H.5, in the archive of the British Museum Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory (henceforth BEP); Moorsby, Cumbria: BM 1898,0618.17; Blidworth, Nottinghamshire: finds.org.uk/database DENO-D10511, accessed 18 February 2016).

The Somerset find from Chilton Trinity has been noted above. The area, with its Roman lead and silver mines, has produced another enamelled silver handpin found near Long Sutton in a funerary context (Fig 4; Somerset Museum 53.A.135). It was 'in some kind of grave, & many interments found close to it', wrote Thomas Kendrick in 1915, referring to a letter from A R Turing (British Museum, BEP archive 'Brown Scrapbook' Note Book 17). There is no suggestion that these were graves furnished in the Anglo-Saxon way. The Chilton Trinity pin was not a unique southern stray. An undecorated small silver handpin was excavated in the late Roman cemetery beside the medieval cathedral at St Alban's, Hertfordshire, a provenance equivalent to the Long Sutton grave find, if in a more unequivocally Christian context (Biddle & Kjølbye-Biddle 1984, 12, fig 14). Pins have also been found in late Roman settlements: the *Tripontium* proto-handpin was excavated in a collapsed major building at a former *mansio* on Watling Street near Rugby, and a decorated silver handpin is said to have been found not far away in Leicester, Roman *Ratae Corieltauvorum* (Fig 5; Lucas 2005, 115; Laing 2001). Denton Burn milecastle on Hadrian's Wall produced a small decorated silver handpin from 'post-Roman plough soil' (Batey 1996, 51). Taken with the northern manufacturing evidence, these finds from further south help broadly to define the first period of production to the century AD 350-450, whether within or well beyond the old frontier.

The presence of the small hoard in County Meath and a single find of another proto-handpin from Newtonbond, County Longford, show that this pin type was introduced to Ireland (National Museum of Ireland 1944:95; Ó Floinn 2001, 5, fig 1.3; Gavin 2013, 427-8). This coincided with the spread of penannular brooches from Britain to Ireland, and both introductions proved popular, as evidenced by the subsequent manufacture of many bronze versions in Ireland (Kilbride-Jones 1980a; 1980b, 71, figs 67, 69, 71; Duignan 1973). The prevalence of enamelled dress items, including pins in the lower Severn area, has been interpreted as demonstrating that this was their area of origin as Romano-British pieces, whence they were taken to the north Leinster region of Ireland (Ó Floinn 2001, 6-7). This picture, however, has to be modified by subsequent finds, particularly if the distribution of fourth to fifth-century enamelled zoomorphic brooches is taken into account. Recording of metal-detector finds and a sharper definition of the Roman forms has expanded the evidence (Mackreth 2011, vol 1, vi, 215-33). These have been found in some density in East Anglia for example, with brooches from the English midlands and further north (Green 2012, 69-71 and note 42; Youngs 2012).

Like the zoomorphic penannular brooch, the handpin is a distinctive dress item that had also been taken into the bosom of the Romano-British world in proto-handpin form, where it was certainly made in the local idiom, as seen in the ornament of an unprovenanced proto-handpin and the niello inlay detected in the proto-handpin found at Welton le Wold, Lincolnshire (Figs 2, 6; Youngs 2005). If the Somerset and other southern finds were imports into *Britannia Prima* in the later fourth and fifth centuries, going in the ‘wrong’ direction from north to south, they appear to conform to similarly wide, if object-specific, distribution patterns now identified for other pins and specialised artefacts in the third and fourth centuries (Heald 2001; 2005). The related distributions of beaded pins and other classes of native metalwork from the Roman period and later have been illustrated and discussed with typically nuanced views in a major review by Fraser Hunter, although describing most of these classes as ‘essentially northern’ in origin he does suggest that the pins ‘are best seen as developing and diversifying in multiple

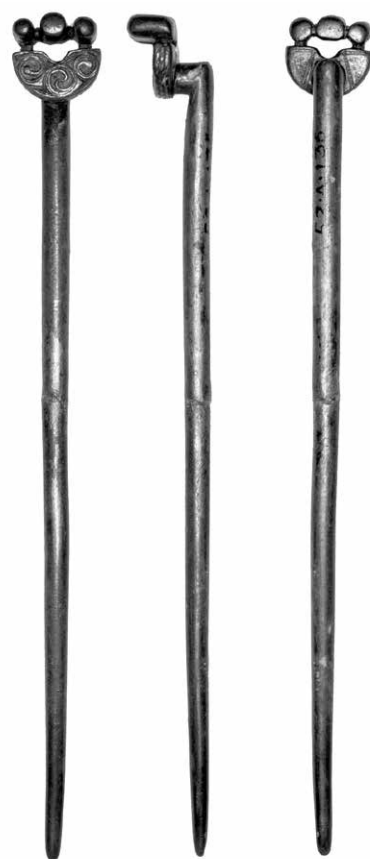


Figure 4. Silver handpin with traces of enamel from a grave at Long Sutton, Somerset; head width 12mm, shank length 112mm (Courtesy of Somerset Museums Service)

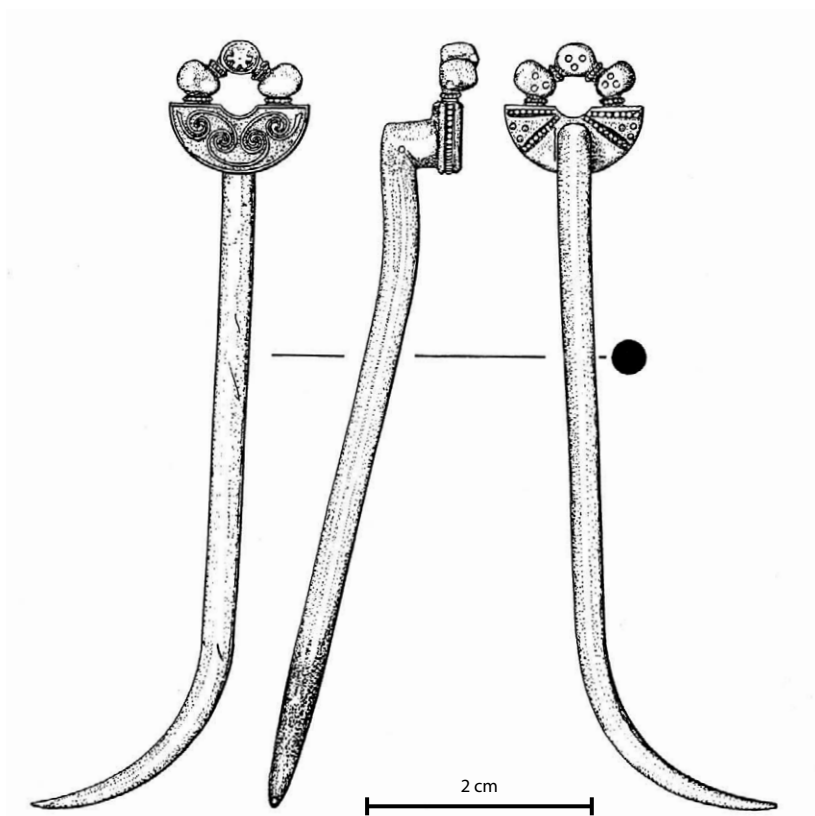


Figure 5. Silver and enamel proto-handpin excavated at Tripontium, Leicestershire, Rugby Museum; shank length 80mm (Drawn by Henry Wattam. Courtesy of Jack Lucas)



Figure 6. A silver proto-handpin from a London sale room, the shank flattened; head width 12mm (National Museum of Ireland 2009:10. Photo author)

centres' (Hunter 2010, 100-4, at 103). 'At the moment [2007] the significance of this disjunction in production and distribution is unclear' (Campbell & Heald 2007, 177).

Decoration

The decoration on some of these silver pins may contain the key to the discrepancy between their distribution and known places of manufacture and merits further consideration. The closest parallel to the fine ornament on the head of a handpin from Gaulcross, Aberdeenshire, is the metal-detector find of a battered head of a silver proto-handpin found at Chilton Trinity, in Somerset (Fig 3 left; Somerset Museum 97/2009). This invites the question as to which one had travelled furthest from its place of manufacture, the hoard item or the oddment? This is not to assume that they necessarily came from one workshop, but rather that they shared a common cultural background which must, by this period, have gone beyond mere fashion to a shared and precise decorative vocabulary.

It seems likely, on the evidence of the niello inlay in the Welton le Wold pin, that finely decorated silver versions of the handpin itself were developed in a Romano-British environment not necessarily beyond the *limes*. They carry the same limited range of fine secondary decoration which they share in part with one other contemporary pin with offset head, the disc-headed pin, discussed below. Handpins are more numerous and widely distributed in the Early Medieval period in both Ireland and Scotland. Where they carry ornament on the head, it looks purely native Celtic: the dotted lobe or 'dodo head' is a key ingredient, with other zoomorphs from the Roman Iron Age in Ireland and Scotland, combined with peltate and spiral forms.

The techniques of decoration, carving and stamping, as well as some of the motifs, have however been shown to come from the Roman world of the fourth century, as seen on military accoutrements found on the north-western frontier and also fine plate and jewellery (Laing 2005; Gavin & Newman 2007; Gavin 2013). The pelta and spiral were part of the Roman silversmith's repertoire. While some of the patterns on the pin plates are symmetrical, most are based on classical running scrolls, as on the pins from *Tripontium*, the Castletown handpin, both Somerset finds and the Gaulcross pin (Figs 3, 5). The contrast in both scale and ornament between early silver and later bronze pins was well illustrated by Haseloff (1990, 159). Opaque red enamel contributes to the Iron Age look, although this too was a material of the Roman period in Britain and its recipe had already changed by the time the Oldcroft pin was made to the formula used in post-Roman enamelling in the west, a vitreous by-product of the recovery of silver from base alloys (Stapleton et al 1999). There was also much careful tooling when they were decorated, not only in cutting the main fields, but with the application of small stamped annulets (Figs 4, 5). On the back of the head and elsewhere a pile of three tiny circles is a common element, as are stamped ladders dividing the fields and around the heads. One of only two silver fourth to fifth-century zoomorphic penannular brooches, an enamelled terminal from Caistor, Lincolnshire, is similarly stamped with small annulets in threes and ladders (Youngs 2009, 57, fig 16). Although framing dots

are present in La Tène art, annulets formed part of the texturing characteristic of Roman silverware and jewellery in the fourth century. What did it signify in the decades around AD 400 if one wore such a grand version of a British pin?

The range of motifs, most particularly those worked on the disc-headed pins, has been explored by Gavin and Newman and identified as an insular part of Böhme's Roman 'Military style', late imperial art of the western borders (Böhme 1986; Gavin & Newman 2007; Gavin 2013). Twelve disc-headed pins are known at present, eleven from Ireland, including one made at Garranes, County Cork, and one found in Britain at Broxbourne near St Albans (Gavin 2013, 436-7, footnotes 13 & 61). Four are over 30cm long; two are in silver, the rest of copper alloys. This pin appears to be a relatively rare type but exhibits a wide range of Roman fine metalworking techniques. The disc-headed pins share a systematised decorative vocabulary, and a silver chip-carved example from an unidentified Irish site is now known to have been inlaid with niello (NMI 6.W.36; the inlay was identified by Fiona Gavin (2013, 434)). Dr Gavin approaches an origin inside Britannia in relation to the six decorated silver pins found in Ireland, but appears hesitant: 'this *Irish silver is derived from* late Roman art', although 'doubtful whether .. Irish artisans could have made these objects', and again '*as yet* no proof that silver pins found in Ireland were actually fabricated there' (my italics), but she acknowledges that they are 'part of a school of highly accomplished late Roman provincial art' (ibid, 427, 434, 436).

The silver handpins share elements of this repertoire and could be substantial: the Gaulcross find is 14.3cm long and weighs 28.1g. They do not, however, exhibit the chip-carving technique with its glittering facets. The high quality and uniformity of ornament on these prestige pieces of local type suggests that such items were originally made for a particular market, even as official gifts, some catering for regional barbarian tastes (Hunter 2010, 98-100). Two chip-carved, massive silver disc-headed pins make sense as diplomatic gifts from an official source in the provinces of Roman Britain to allies within and beyond the old frontiers. This strategy of presenting targeted artefacts was used elsewhere for official imperial gifts such as gold medallions, and in Britannia the range of gifts included stamped but apparently semi-official silver ingots recovered in Britain and Ireland (Guggisberg 2013). The evidence from Ireland for this process includes part of an inscribed gold neck ring from the votive deposits at Newgrange, an item purpose-made within the Roman Empire for giving to *barbaricum* (Ó Floinn 2012, 11, 15-17). Whatever they first signified in the fifth century, handpins remained prestige items for two more centuries, far longer than the massive disc-headed pins.

Conclusions

It was asked of the Romano-British hoards 'why so many spoons?' (Millett 1994, 104; Johns 1994; reviewed in Hobbs 2005). Why proto-handpins and then handpins were made in silver and appear in hoards, the first with coins, the later ones with varied artefacts, remains a puzzle. It is not only the presence of silver pins in hoards from Gloucestershire, Meath, Aberdeenshire and Fife, few though they are, but the fact that they are all one distinctive pin type. At Norrie's Law

the big and smaller handpin survived a 19th-century melting pot possibly because they were complete and decorative, two among many items of varied dates which did indeed include the bowl of a Roman spoon (Goldberg & Blackwell 2013). But why were there only handpins? That the finest, highly decorated and inlaid pins came enhanced with a Roman pedigree is surmise. Perhaps the puzzle is one of modern perceptions, attempting to make patterns and to see very thin material evidence through a historical filter. The distribution of proto-handpins and early full handpins apparently conforms to the broad patterns of doorknob spearbutts, large terrets and ibex-headed pins in the third and fourth centuries (Heald 2001, fig 3; Hunter 2010). Andrew Heald summarised the challenge produced by his re-evaluation: ‘the range of objects highlights an interest in personal ornamentation and transport, display and games which is rather at odds with conventional images of marauding warlords’. As David Clarke wrote in 1971, ‘It is my contention that the same, or similar, problems experienced in interpreting these objects will be met with in interpreting other exotic objects from the Atlantic Province’ (Clarke 1971, 32). That is still true in the case of a ‘Scottish’ pin that in the fourth and fifth centuries was also to be found, made of silver and elaborately decorated, far to the south inside the old Roman provinces of Britain, and also in Ireland, but was at the same time locally made and which was to remain a feature of Scottish and Irish dress. Small finds and problems of approach are still with us and as challenging and fascinating as ever. It is a pleasure to offer these thoughts to David Clarke.

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Gleaming eyes and the elaboration of Anglo-Saxon sculpture

Alice Blackwell

Abstract

This paper presents the results of the analysis of an Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft fragment from Aberlady, East Lothian that confirm the long-suspected belief that the drilled eye sockets found among Northumbrian and Mercian sculpture originally contained separate eye insets. A tin lining was positively identified in one of the drilled eye sockets on the Aberlady stone, thus providing the first analysed evidence for how these insets were affixed. Eye insets are a small but significant addition to the means of embellishment of Anglo-Saxon sculpture, and their potential iconographical significance is explored.

Keywords: *sculpture, Anglo-Saxon, polychromy, colour, iconography, Early Medieval, Insular*

Introduction

David Clarke was responsible for the establishment, in 2007, of the Glenmorangie Research Project on Early Medieval Scotland, the fruit of a partnership between the whisky company and National Museums Scotland. Since 2008, I have been lucky enough to hold the resulting research position, and I have David's foresight, seeing an opportunity to create a bespoke partnership centred around academic research, to thank for this. I have fond memories of our working together, and particularly, along with colleague Martin Goldberg, of our huddles around Early Medieval sculptured stones, where we questioned, observed and bounced ideas around freely. We all three brought different backgrounds and perspectives to the project, but were agreed in the need to approach sculpture (and other media) from a perspective that prioritised their form, function and meaning. I offer this small contribution on those same themes to David, in memory of many happy sculptural voyages together.

In addition to the gesso and pigments that occasionally survive on Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture,¹ some monuments originally featured significant (but now missing) metal embellishments, or skeuomorphs of these additions carved in stone (Bailey 2009, 26-7; Hawkes 2003, 27). For example, the fragmentary Reculver 1 (Kent) cross-shaft has pegholes and subtly moulded channels that imply that it was originally elaborated with metal strips which may have carried inscriptions (Tweddle et al 1995, 49, 156-7; Bailey 1996, 7), while pegholes and copper-alloy staining on a crucifixion scene at Breamore (Hampshire) imply a lost metal halo (Tweddle et al 1995, 252; Bailey 1996, 8). Holes on the Rothbury (Northumberland) cross-head may have held fixtures for candles (Cramp 1984, 221), while the North Cross at Sandbach, Cheshire originally featured sizeable metal insets, possibly intended to contain a relic (Hawkes 2002, 84, 146; 2003, 26).² Reconstructing these lost embellishments can help us better understand the uses and meanings of the pieces of sculpture involved.

The subject of this paper is a further type of now-lost embellishment of Anglo-Saxon sculpture: the eye inset. Drilled eye sockets are a fairly common feature of Mercian and Northumbrian stone sculpture, and it has generally been assumed that these drilled holes originally accommodated coloured insets (eg Bailey 1996, 7-8; 2009, 26; Rodwell et al 2008, 66-7, 92, 94; Hawkes 1999, 213-5). As early as 1927, W G Collingwood remarked 'one proof of decadence is the deep drill-hole in every eye, intended to hold a bit of bright glass or crystal and give a sparkle in the midst of the network of colour which was pretty certainly added to the carving and, to the eye of the public, covered deficiencies' (Collingwood 1927; reprinted 1989, 73). However, no eye insets survive among the corpus of Anglo-Saxon sculpture. Glass eye insets are preserved on contemporary carved ivories (as well as on metalwork where they are usually amber or glass, discussed further below): a carved ivory from San Vincenzo al Volturno, Italy (Rodwell et al 2008, 66-7; Mitchell 1992) portrays a monk's head with dark glassy eyes,³ and bright blue opaque glass eyes feature on two ivory panels from St Martin's Church, Genoels-Elderen, Belgium (Webster & Backhouse 1991, nos 141, 180-2).⁴ Yet evidence of their use on sculpture has rested on a single published observation of a substance, said to be lead, surviving within carved eye sockets on a 9th-century sculpture from Romsey Abbey (Hampshire; Green & Green 1951, 35, pl 10A). This observation, while confidently made, does not appear to have been confirmed by analysis (and

1 Pigments, gesso or gold leaf are preserved on, for instance, the Lichfield angel (Rodwell et al 2008, 91-2; Howe 2006); the Breedon-on-the-Hill angel, Leicestershire (Howe 2006, 33, figs 39-41); the vine-scroll-decorated arch with three-dimensional beast-head terminals at Deerhurst, Gloucestershire (Gem & Howe 2008); the crucifixion from Breamore, Hampshire (Tweddle et al 1995, 251-3); the Reculver 1 cross-shaft, Kent; and on plaster fragments from Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, County Durham (Cramp & MacMahon 2006, 8-15).

2 Such a relic may alternatively have been secured by a wooden boss such as that from Dublin (Lang 1988, 4, fig 1).

3 These insets are described as beads, but it is unclear from the report whether perforations are visible or assumed. The left eye is blue, the right deep violet, although this is only apparent when the piece is held up to the light and thus probably was imperceptible when originally fastened to an object (Mitchell 1992, 69, pl 1A, B).

4 The date and origin of these ivories has been extensively debated, summarised by Leslie Webster (Webster & Backhouse 1991, nos 140, 179-80), although no mention is made of the significance of the glass eyes.

no mention is made within its *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* catalogue entry; Tweddle et al 1995, 261-3). No such paste or lining survives within the drilled eye sockets of the otherwise extremely well-preserved and thoroughly analysed Lichfield angel (Rodwell et al 2008, 92).

The Aberlady cross-shaft fragment

The eighth century Anglo-Saxon sculptured fragment from the village of Aberlady (East Lothian) is carved in deep relief with a series of intertwined birds, beasts, a single angel, key pattern and vine scroll, each framed in a separate panel (Figs 1-4; National Museums Scotland NMS X.IB 298). It is one of a small cluster of pieces of Anglo-Saxon sculpture with drilled eyes from northernmost (now Scottish) Northumbria.⁵ It was found built into a garden wall of Aberlady Manse in 1863 (Allen & Anderson 1903, 428-9), and has been regarded as part of a tall sandstone free-standing cross,⁶ similar to that which once stood at Abercorn (West Lothian; Cramp 1984, pls 266-7) in terms of the design and execution of its carved decoration. Each of the surviving beasts, birds and the sole remaining figure – an angel – feature drilled eye sockets. In addition, the angel has a carved niche located in the chest area; this might perhaps be a relic cavity, although on the basis of its condition and impact on the original design this seems likely to be a later modification (of uncertain date). The broad face that features four intertwined birds and part of a key-pattern panel (A on Fig 1) survives in good condition, whereas the face decorated with the angelic figure and interlaced beasts (C, Fig 3) is badly weathered.

Visual examination of face A identified what appeared to be a dark grey residue in one of the bird's eye sockets. Given the sculpture's weathered condition, and the fact that at least one cast of the stone has been taken in recent memory, it seemed unlikely that any identifiable residues would have survived. Nonetheless, when the sculpture was temporarily removed from display for photography an opportunity to undertake exploratory analysis arose and surface X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis was undertaken (Tate & Kirk 2010). The results were surprising: tin was detected in the three best-surviving birds' eye sockets on Face A. Analysis of control areas of the stone immediately adjacent to the eye sockets did not reveal any tin, nor did areas cut to a similar sedimentary plane. No tin was detected in the more weathered angel's eyes, the carved niche in the angel's chest or the beasts' eyes on face C. The birds' eye sockets on face A were then examined under magnification. Within the best-surviving socket is a clearly visible metallic lining (Fig 5). The sculpture was also viewed under ultra-violet light, which revealed what appear to

5 In addition to the Aberlady fragment, drilled eyes are a feature of the crosses from Abercorn (West Lothian) and Ruthwell (Dumfries & Galloway), as well as the carved panel from Jedburgh (Scottish Borders). Drilled eyes do not appear to have attracted comment among the extensive literature on the Ruthwell Cross, but seem to survive among the inhabitants of the vine scroll. The figural ornament is worn and no facial features survive, though John Stuart's 1867 illustrations suggest some figures may originally have had drilled eyes; see note 10, below. In addition, the animals on the very worn Boatford sculpture (also known as the Thornhill or Nith Bridge cross, Dumfries & Galloway) are described as having 'punched eyes' although there is no further discussion of the feature (Craig 1992, vol 2, 16).

6 Though, like Bewcastle, it could instead be reconstructed as an obelisk (Orton 1999, 219-20, 225, notes 1, 2 & 5).



*Figure 1. Aberlady (East Lothian) Face A.
Photo: Neil McLean. © Trustees of National
Museums Scotland*



*Figure 2. Aberlady Face B. Photo: Neil
McLean. © Trustees of National Museums
Scotland*



*Figure 3. Aberlady Face C. Photo: Neil
McLean. © Trustees of National Museums
Scotland*



*Figure 4. Aberlady Face D. Photo: Neil
McLean. © Trustees of National Museums
Scotland*

be small patches of surviving surface treatment or pigment on protected surfaces of the interlacing birds, although more work is needed to confirm this.

The tin lining identified in the Aberlady fragment would seem to confirm that the deeply-drilled holes on Anglo-Saxon sculpture were indeed intended to contain insets, and this is the first confirmed evidence for the method of their fixing. The discovery of tin was slightly unexpected.⁷ Ongoing examination of Early Medieval Insular metalwork, undertaken as part of NMS's Glenmorangie Research Project, suggests that both lead alloys and silver alloys played a role in the securing of glass insets into cells on copper-alloy objects. Recent XRF investigation of the Monymusk Reliquary, a house-shaped casket manufactured around AD 800, in NMS collections (NMS H.KE 14), identified traces of lead at the base of an empty setting used in combination with a silver-alloy sheet lining around the setting's walls (Troalen 2013). There is also an account, dating to around AD 1100, of the use of molten lead to hold two pieces of a broken stone cross together (Symeon of Durham's *Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis* I.12; Arnold 2012; Meyvaert 1992, fn 20).

Two possible means of applying the tin can be suggested. First, tin is soft and malleable, and might easily be worked into a thin sheet and wrapped around the inset to form a collar which could then be pushed into the drilled socket, the tin collar helping to secure a snug fit. This method could be used either while



Figure 5. Tin lining identified within a well-preserved eye socket of a bird on Face A, Aberlady. Photo: Jim Tate. © Trustees of National Museums Scotland

⁷ Tin was used in similar ways in other periods, including to secure sheet gold shields on a Middle Bronze Age shale model boat (Davis & Townsend 2009).

the stone was horizontal (during carving) or vertical (once it had been erected). Second, as tin has a low melting point (232°C), the other option would be to pour a small quantity of molten tin into the socket and quickly push the inset in place before the metal cooled. Realistically this would need to be done while the stone was horizontal, before it was erected. Experimentation by the author and the sculptor Barry Grove tested both methods, and both were found to be successful. The molten tin caused no damage to the sandstone block in which test eye sockets were drilled, nor to the glass (although more delicate materials such as amber were not tested). The tin did not adhere or bond to the glass but allowed a tighter fit within the naturally uneven drilled socket and contracted as it cooled, securing the inset. It seems that this method would produce the snugest fit, with no air gaps for water to penetrate, reducing the risk of loss due to frost-thaw damage.

Discussion

Eye insets are a small but significant embellishment of Anglo-Saxon sculpture. Their use does not appear to have been restricted to a particular type of sculpture or genre of decoration: they can embellish figural scenes, zoomorphic interlace and the animals inhabiting plant scrolls, and are found on free-standing crosses and architectural fittings. On some pieces it is clear that drilled eyes were used selectively for only some of the figures or creatures: for instance, on Easby 1 (North Yorkshire) the creatures inhabiting the vine have drilled eyes but the figures do not (Lang 2001, 98-102). On others, such as a cross-shaft fragment from Dewsbury (ibid, no 5), drilled eyes are employed widely, featuring on Christ, the Virgin, St John and two further, unidentified figures (Coatsworth 2008, 135-9). While the presence of drilled eyes has been noted within the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* catalogue entries, there has been no general synthesis or analysis, with the result that it is not yet possible to identify any broad patterns or conventions in where and how they were used.

How might their presence have affected the appearance and meanings of the pieces that originally featured them? At a basic level, small shining eyes would immediately draw attention to the various forms of life depicted within complex and sometimes ambiguous decoration which could then be considered – visually untangled – at leisure. On a deeper level, such additions might have helped convey emotion: for example, the emotive effects of the iconography of the Rothbury Cross have been noted (Cramp 1984, 221), and could be heightened – in, for example, the crowd held in awe and amazement in the unidentified scene in the top cross arm – by this kind of embellishment.

Given the complex, subtle and multivalent symbolism found amongst Anglo-Saxon sculptured monuments, it is very likely that eye insets had symbolic value. In the Early Medieval period, vision was understood to result from rays of light emanating from the eye, reaching and touching an object, and returning to the eye, bringing an impression of it back to the body; vision thereby connected viewer and object, the soul projecting the ray and absorbing the image (Miles 1983, 127-30; Pulliam 2013a, 61). Physical vision was often used as a metaphor for spiritual vision (Miles 1983; O'Reilly, 1988; Pulliam 2006, 117), a means of

bringing Christ into the heart, mind and body. Indeed, the personification of sight is given dominant status above the other senses on the ninth-century Fuller brooch (Bruce-Mitford 1952; Webster & Backhouse 1991, 280-1) and vision, witnessing, insight and recognition play an important role in the iconographical programme of sculpture such as the Ruthwell (Ó Carragáin 1988, 49; 2005; Meyvaert 1992) and Sandbach crosses (Hawkes 2003, 21, 24).⁸ As a metaphor, vision allowed for concentration and training: Divine illumination was not sufficient for spiritual insight; initiative lay with the viewer (Miles 1983, 130). Eyes were frequently associated with light and truth, for instance within the psalms where God is repeatedly called upon to 'enlighten my eyes' (*illumine oculos meos*, Psalm 12:4; Pulliam 2013a, 62). Eyes were sometimes given special emphasis in Insular art, as in the Corbie Psalter where in the Canticle of Simeon Christ frames the priest's eyes with his hand, a reference to the text's emphasis on vision (Pulliam 2011, 255). Eye insets in sculptural iconography provided not only a means to emphasise the seeing, understanding and knowing of Christ but could also literally help the figures to fill their eyes with light. Likewise, visual blindness could serve as a metaphor for spiritual blindness, as in one of the miracle stories of St Ninian where the saint cured a king's blindness, literally 'restored lost light to his eyes', that had been brought on by the king's actions in exiling (spiritually and physically) the saint (Clancy 1998, 128-30). Similarly Longinus, the blind lance-bearer at the Crucifixion, is shown in the St Gall Gospels being healed by a drop of Christ's blood (O'Reilly 1988, 95). This raises the possibility that some drilled eyes might deliberately be left empty if the figure was to be portrayed as being spiritually blind.

It was not just physical sight that was linked with spiritual insight, but specifically sight of Christ's wounds, and Jennifer O'Reilly has drawn attention to the variety of ways that this has been exploited within Early Medieval crucifixion iconography (O'Reilly 1988). This includes emphasis on the eye in order to distinguish physical sight from the eye of the mind, as in the Stuttgart Psalter where a seated figure below the crucified Christ points to his eye to make clear that he sees Christ's wounds with only the eye of his body (ibid, 94-5). Here, the physical sight of those who crucified Christ is contrasted by what was discerned by Longinus and St John, and the spiritual insight required by the faithful to 'look on him whom they pierced' as a revelation of Christ's nature. Eye insets could provide one means of distinguishing between these different ways of 'seeing'. This chain of exegesis rendered on a cross gains extra resonance – the eye of the mind was required to see Christ's wounds, not depicted explicitly but alluded to on scenes covering the very means by which they were inflicted.

8 Ambrose (2007) has suggested a similar emphasis on sight within the depiction of the Temptation of Christ in the Book of Kells, expressed in the unique depiction of a crowd paying witness to the scene and the inclusion of a front-facing figure holding crossed floriated rods similar to those held (uncrossed) by the personification of sight on the Fuller brooch. In the Book of Kells these floriated rods have a central 'iris' in the same blue-green colour used to depict eyes elsewhere on the page, strengthening the case for this interpretation.



Figure 6. *The Rothbury Cross, Christ in Majesty (Northumberland).* © Great North Museum and Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne



Figure 7. *The Rothbury Cross, Raising of Lazarus.* © Great North Museum and Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne

Examination of the use of eye insets on the Rothbury Cross (Figs 6 & 7) allows us to look at the role that eyes play within a single monument's iconographic programme (Hawkes 1996). All manner of figures on this iconographic bricolage, both human (Christ, the apostles, Martha, a crowd, the damned in Hell) and animal (including reptiles representing the monsters of Hell), feature drilled eyes, making clear that eye insets do not symbolise spiritual insight here. The depiction of a single figure without drilled eyes provides a key to their significance on this monument. This figure is part of the miracle scene at the top of the cross which has been reinterpreted as depicting the Raising of Lazarus (Fig 7; *ibid*, 85-7). The lifeless Lazarus, depicted with carved eyes, lids clearly closed, and wrapped in shrouds, is brought back to life by Christ, who here points towards his eyebrow. Watching the miracle is Martha, whose drilled and once glass-inset eyes would provide a visual contrast with Lazarus. This depiction of Lazarus with eyes closed is unusual, though not unparalleled, and Hawkes has argued that this distinction between open and closed eyes, together with the way it has been emphasised by Christ's outstretched finger touching Lazarus' eyebrow, is a deliberate adaption of the iconography (*ibid*, 87). The purpose of this adaptation is to emphasise that while Lazarus was dead, he was to be regarded as only sleeping, a symbol for humankind before the Final Resurrection (*ibid*). Eye insets can therefore be seen as distinguishing between the alive and dead, between the conscious and unconscious on the Rothbury Cross. This symbolism was also used to heighten the impact of the scene depicting the Damned in Hell; those souls suffering are shown with drilled eyes, alive and conscious, underlining the pain of their torment.

With so little surviving, it is not clear what specific symbolic role(s) eye insets played on the Aberlady shaft. Like at Rothbury, all the (surviving) living creatures – an angel, interlacing birds and beasts – have drilled eyes. Aberlady

bears a particularly naturalistic expression of zoomorphic interlace found in the Lindisfarne and Lichfield Gospels and thought to originate in a scriptorium (Brown 2003, 377-8), and gleaming eyes would enrich this intended realism. The creatures and angel decorate the broad sides of the fragment, the narrow faces containing uninhabited vine scroll, and by analogy with more complete monuments we can suggest it was likely to have been orientated with these broad sides facing east and west, toward the sunrise and sunset (Ó Carragáin 1988, fn 4).⁹ The solar cycle was anchored to early Christian thought and practice: Christ was both conceived and crucified on the Spring Equinox and, although the Julian calendar had slipped, Christ's incarnation and birth was still associated with the 'growing days' and contrasted with that of John the Baptist during the 'lessening days'. On the Bewcastle shaft this imagery (Ó Carragáin 2005, 83-4, 106-7) is combined with a sundial (Orton et al 2007, 131-43) and four types of vines representing the passing seasons and the resurrection (Denton 2012, 204-8). The Ruthwell Cross also referenced the daily and yearly passing of the sun (Ó Carragáin 2005, 285), and was designed to be read sunwise in a logical development of iconographical scenes and texts alluding to the liturgy of Holy Week and relevant to the Lenten catechumenate; preparation for baptism on the east side and the Eucharist on the west (Ó Carragáin 1988, 39, 41). While we have lost the iconographical programme of the Aberlady monument, the play of light over the course of the day would enlighten the eyes on first one broad face then the other and would, like any other sculpture so orientated outside, provide a reflection of the changing solar cycle and the balance between light and dark.

As on the Ruthwell shaft, Aberlady's vine runs up the narrow sides, likely to face north and south (although unlike Ruthwell the surviving sections are not inhabited, nor need they have covered all of both faces; borders suggest panels of discrete ornament on all four faces). On the Ruthwell Cross the drilled eyes survive amongst the creatures inhabiting this vine; not orientated so as to face the rising or setting sun – the broad faces with figural iconography occupy this position¹⁰ – but framed by the inscribed poem presenting the Crucifixion as a revelation of Divine power that required stripping and emptying (ibid, 30-1, 34-5) – revealing his body before all men and draining his body of blood. The Eucharistic vine springs up both sides, fed and feeding by this act of human will and Divine power, and eye insets within the inhabitants of the vine may have had a symbolic role in reinforcing the vigour and life, sight and insight that this act made possible. The inhabited vine on the carved panel from Jedburgh (Scottish Borders; Fig 8) is particularly effective in this respect, using very naturalistic modelling of the creatures (for example the mouse, caught mid-way through turning), each of which has drilled eyes and their mouth around either stem or fruit. Perhaps an altar frontal or other

9 Because the fragment was built into an outside wall (in an unknown orientation), the better preservation of face A (interlacing birds) is no guide as to whether it originally faced east or west.

10 John Stuart's 1867 illustrations seem to suggest drilled eyes for Christ and John the Baptist (see comparison in Ó Carragáin 2005, figs 2 & 4), including Christ healing the blind man, an image of enlightenment through faith and associated with Lenten Catechumenate (Ó Carragáin 1988, 39). Heather Pulliam has explored the related symbolism that rain on an outside monument could produce, in particular evoking tears of repentance on Ruthwell's image of the Woman who was a Sinner (Pulliam 2013b, 271).

church fitting, the Jedburgh slab was not intended to be read in conjunction with the passing sun but in an interior setting. Something of its original appearance, elaborated with eye insets and perhaps also with the gesso, pigment and gold leaf found on the Lichfield angel, is evoked by an Irish apocryphon, *in Tenga Bithnua*, ‘The Evernew Tongue’. Thought to have been composed around the tenth century, this text describes the tree that produced the wood for Christ’s cross and provides a link between cross and inhabited vine:

*The brilliance of the moon and sun and the shining stars, shine from its blossoms
... Three-hundred and sixty-five birds, with the brightness of snow, with golden
wings, with gleaming eyes, sing many songs in many languages from its branches*
(Carey 1998, 85-6; 2007; Dumville 1973).

This text serves as an evocative reminder of what is lost to us, the colour that so rarely survives on Early Medieval sculpture. Apart from selective bestowing of eye insets, their material and colour could function as either a general or a specific attribute: a means to distinguish a figure from others, to identify them as a particular character, or to imbue them with further layers of symbolic meaning. Even in media where colour survives, its relationship to iconography and meaning



Figure 8. Jedburgh (Scottish Borders). Photo: Alice Blackwell

has only relatively recently been addressed. Pulliam's analysis of colour within the Lindisfarne Gospels has highlighted the layers of meaning that this could bring to complex iconography (Pulliam 2012; 2013a). There are indications, for instance, that the four evangelists may each have been associated with a different gemstone (Pulliam 2013a, 56-7); this could perhaps have been referenced on sculpture through the use of different materials or colours of insets. Within the Lindisfarne Gospels, particular emphasis was given to the eyes of the evangelists and their symbols; all have pale green-blue eyes (including the ox; the lion has similarly-coloured highlighting around black eyes). Books depicted within the gospels are also shown with green covers, and Pulliam makes a case for a symbolic link with the evangelists' eyes: they look and draw back into the body the word of God, represented by the colour green (portraying emeralds, thought to be the brightest gemstone), and it in turn shines out from their eyes to the viewer's (ibid, 62-3). There are hints, too, of conventions in eye colour within Insular metalwork, for instance in the use of amber (eg the Hunterston Brooch, Youngs 1989, 75, 91-2) or amber-coloured glass (eg the Crieff mounts, ibid, 119-20) to depict birds' eyes. Most surviving eyes are monochrome, with only a few polychrome exceptions; the beast's eyes on one of the St Ninian's Isle chapes (NMS X.FC 283) are made from two glass inlays creating a blue eye with an inlaid red glass iris around a blue pupil. This polychrome eye is very rare amongst Early Medieval metalwork and only otherwise found on the Sutton Hoo purse lid (where the colour combination is reversed; Bruce-Mitford 1978, pls 13-14), and on the abstract beasts embedded in the design of the 'Tara' brooch (Youngs 1989, 77). I have argued elsewhere that these are themselves part of a Christian iconographical programme related to vision, an expression of the recognition of Christ between two living things from the Canticle of Habakkuk (Blackwell 2011, 234-5).¹¹

This moves beyond what is possible for sculpture of course; we have lost both the coloured eyes and their polychrome context, the colour schemes of the surrounding iconographical scenes. Multivalent symbolism might, within gospel books, be aimed at a specialist audience well-versed in exegesis, though early Christian images were clearly meant to be read at different levels of sophistication (O'Reilly 1988) and monuments like the Rothbury Cross demonstrate that complex chains of exegesis could also be rendered on what has sometimes been dismissed as a more popularist medium of sculptured crosses.

Conclusion

Eye insets are a small but significant aspect of the polychromy of Anglo-Saxon sculpture which has been rather neglected to date. In this context, colour can be seen as more than an end in itself – it was an important part of communicating meaning in early Christian art. This has been emphasised within discussions of Byzantine art (eg James 1996; Connor 1998) and is relevant in an Anglo-Saxon context too. On sculpture, colour could be used to highlight and draw the eye

11 This interpretation could also be applied to the second St Ninian's Isle chape (NMS X.FC 282) where an inscribed contraction of *in nomine dei*, in the name of God, is placed between and behind two open-jawed beasts.

to important or otherwise hidden details, or to make links between what might otherwise appear to be unconnected scenes. The presence of colour will have dramatically altered the original appearance of a piece of sculpture, which has wide implications regarding how we interpret and understand it today (Hawkes 2003). The addition of precious metal, glass or gem embellishments to sculpture, eyes included, should be seen within this context, and as an integral part of understanding the expression and communication of early Christianity.

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Combs and comb production in the Western Isles during the Norse period

Niall Sharples and Ian Dennis

Abstract

This paper explores the significance of an assemblage of combs and comb-making debris from a Norse settlement, Bornais, in the Western Isles of Scotland. The excavation of an 11th century AD house recovered a substantial assemblage of combs which appear to have been brought to the house to be dismantled systematically. It is argued that many of the combs were reworked into decorative pendants and reusable fragments were extracted to create repair kits. On the basis of a series of experimental reconstructions the process of comb production is reconsidered and the insight gained is applied to a comb-makers' workshop found at Bornais that dates to the 13th century AD. The presence of this workshop and of several Norwegian-style combs suggests the continuation of contacts with Scandinavia beyond the Scottish takeover of the islands.

Keywords: *Composite combs, curation, decoration, deposition, genealogy, manufacture, recycling, red deer, rivets, tools, types, whalebone, workshop*

Introduction

From his arrival at the (then-named) National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1968, David Clarke has led research into the development of artefact studies in Scotland. His work has been crucial in emphasising the complexity of meanings that can be contained within even the most humble artefact, and from his earliest to his latest papers he has tried to explore the contribution that artefacts make to our understanding of past societies.

Among his earlier papers is *Bone dice and the Scottish Iron Age* (Clarke 1970) and this is a good example of the approach taken. It begins with a detailed examination of the corpus of objects which reviews the contextual integrity and chronological significance of the objects. This legitimately took a critical view of some chronological schemes that were then prevalent in Scottish Iron Age studies. The chronological problems are a little clearer now, due to the occurrence of more extensive well-recorded excavations and the substantial increase in the number of radiocarbon dates, and the new evidence has highlighted some of the other

issues originally identified by Clarke. For example, why are most of the Scottish paralleloiped dice from contexts dated to the middle of the first millennium AD (Sharpley 2012, 270), when the examples from southern Britain are clearly pre-Roman?

The second, and perhaps more important aspect of this paper, was to demonstrate that material culture should be understood in its own right; the purpose of the objects requires detailed consideration and should not just be assumed. It was not sufficient simply to treat objects as type fossils that provide a chronology for the more important structural remains. Clarke demonstrated that understanding the function and social significance of dice was not a simple question; even the basic understanding of whether they were thrown or rolled was open to debate. These issues have been examined in detail in the last two decades and the social importance of gaming and the significance of gaming pieces have now become a topic of considerable significance (Hall 2007, and see Hall, this volume).

Clarke's approach to material culture was reconfigured for the 21st century in a paper concerned with the significance of composite combs in the late Norse period (Clarke & Heald 2002). This paper follows the template of the bone dice paper, and involves the examination of a distinctive object type: double-sided 'fish-tailed' combs. The classification of the combs is explored, a corpus of examples from Scotland is presented and the context and chronology are critically examined. The paper then proceeds to explore 'how material culture was used as a metaphor for developments in the wider socio-economic and political arenas', and how combs 'were manipulated to define, build and maintain emerging social differences' and 'were used to express and reconcile issues of identity at a number of different levels' (Clarke & Heald 2002, 84). This contrast with the more limited functional analysis of the dice paper indicates how artefact studies have developed over the three decades between the publication of these papers.

Despite the discovery of two relatively complete 'fish-tailed' combs in the Western Isles we have no intention of debating the interpretations suggested in the 2002 paper and indeed do not find the central metaphor that these combs represent split dried fish convincing. However, the key argument that the social significance of these combs is a crucial aspect of their purpose and that they carried symbolic messages is accepted. The symbolic meaning of comb form and decoration might well be opaque, and what seem implausible metaphors to contemporary archaeologists could have been blindingly obvious to the inhabitants of 13th-century Caithness. The form, decoration and display of combs would certainly have referenced issues of status, gender, identity and profession, and would have been cultural capital called upon in different contexts for different purposes.

Nevertheless, in this paper we want to make a more limited interpretational exploration of composite combs that is more akin to the earlier papers of Clarke. We will undertake a detailed analysis of two groups of material from the site of Bornais in the Outer Hebrides (Fig 1). The first group comprises combs and comb fragments from the floor of a large 11th century AD house. The second group comprises comb-making debris from an ancillary building dating to the 13th century AD. Bornais is a major Norse settlement that was excavated between 1994 and 2004, and the excavations are currently in the process of being written

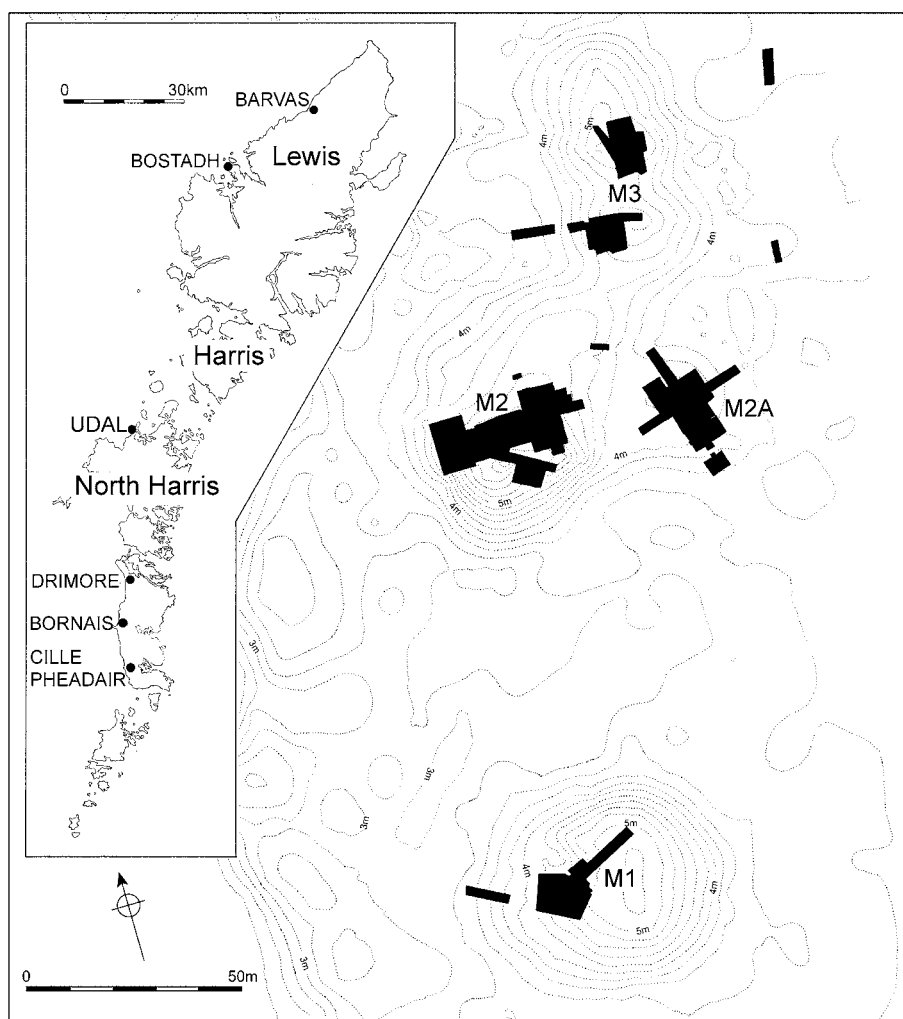


Figure 1. The location of the Western Isles and a contour map of the settlement mounds showing the excavated areas

up. Two volumes have appeared (Sharples 2005, 2012) but the main core of the Norse settlement is still to be published fully and provides the evidence discussed here. This is a joint paper written by the excavator (NS), who has undertaken the contextual analysis, in partnership with the illustrator (ID) who, in the process of drawing these objects, has made detailed observations and undertaken a series of experimental reproductions of composite combs. NS worked with Clarke at the beginning of his career in archaeology and has fond memories of the Artefact Research Unit in its early days in Randolph Crescent.

Research on the techniques of antler working and composite comb production are fairly well established and documented in the archaeological literature (eg Ambrosiani 1981; Ashby 2006; MacGregor 1985) and substantial assemblages of composite combs have been analysed and interpreted from Dublin and Waterford (Dunlevy 1988, Hurley 1997), Whithorn (Nicholson 1997), York (MacGregor

et al 1999) and Novgorod (Smirnova 2005). However, the detailed examination of the composite combs, comb fragments and comb manufacturing debris from Bornais has revealed numerous tool marks and manufacturing techniques that provide important new detail on the methods of comb production. This has led to the development of a project studying comb production from raw red deer antler to finished object. During this process it was possible to make a series of observations about the craft, fully engaging with the physicality of the material and the different stages of comb production.

The production of combs has provided a deeper understanding of the stages of antler comb manufacture, the potential and limitations of the material and the decisions made regarding resource choice. It has also become apparent that Norse craftspeople had access to a range of specialised tools that do not survive, or have not been recognised, in the archaeological record. This paper summarises some of our results and considers the role of resources (both antler and tools), and the skills of craftspeople in the production of the composite combs represented at Bornais and more broadly within Norse assemblages of north-west Europe.

Terminology

Composite comb: a comb made of several components to form one completed item. They can be either single-sided or double-sided.

Side plates:¹ the connecting pieces of antler placed on either side of a set of tooth plates to hold them in position, normally using rivets. They vary considerably in size and shape, are often decorated, and also served as a hand grip.

Tooth plates: the rectangular-shaped pieces of antler between the side plates, which have teeth cut in to them.

End plates: terminal plates at either end of the comb, frequently carefully shaped and decorated; much of the plate can have teeth cut into it but there is normally an uncut portion next to the edge of the plate.

Rivets: small, often cylindrical pieces of either iron or copper, used to hold and fasten together the side, tooth and end plates. Their width and length vary depending on the size of the comb.

The most recent typological analysis of medieval bone/antler combs has been undertaken by Ashby (2006). This included a detailed examination of the assemblages from northern England and Atlantic Scotland, and therefore provides the most relevant classification for our purposes. However, reference will also be made to Ambrosiani (1981), MacGregor (1985) and Dunlevy (1988) as these are frequently used by authors working on comparable assemblages.

1 One author (ID) would prefer to use the term *brace plates* as these plates are specifically used for the bracing of individual components to hold and secure them in place.

Deposition

The settlement at Bornais has produced an unusually substantial assemblage of combs and comb-making debris, and the analysis of this material has produced some very striking and informative perspectives on the nature of comb use and production on Britain's Atlantic fringe.

The total assemblage of combs and comb fragments amounts to roughly 250 pieces, but in this paper we are going to concentrate on the 172 pieces from Mound 2 and the 67 pieces from mound 2A, as these are the most interesting and informative. The chronological distribution of the comb fragments is illustrated in Fig 2. The assemblage includes a range of comb types. The sequence begins with a fine example of an Ashby type 11 comb from the Late Iron Age deposits on mound 2. The Norse deposits contain fragments of Ashby types 5 and 6 (Ambrosiani class A and B) combs indicating early Scandinavian connections in the tenth century; a large assemblage of Ashby types 8 a, b and c indicating the importance of the Irish Sea connections in the 11th and 12th centuries; and some distinctive Ashby type 13 (fish-tailed) combs, indicating continued Scandinavian influence in the 13th century.

The distribution indicates a clear concentration of combs in the middle Norse (11th–12th century) phases. Most of these were recovered from the floor of house 2, on mound 2. This house has produced a remarkably diverse and substantial assemblage of artefacts (see Sharples 2004; Sharples & Smith 2009). Radiocarbon dates indicate that the occupation dates to the second half of the 11th century and that the house went out of use at the end of the 11th century or possibly in the first quarter of the 12th century (Sharples et al 2015).

The assemblage and its distribution is illustrated in Fig 3. The combs vary widely in their degree of completeness, ranging from a couple of almost intact examples to small fragments and isolated teeth. An important point to emphasise is that all of the deposits from this house were sieved through a 0.5 mm sieve, and although not all the accompanying fine residues have been sorted, the recovery is almost total. The larger pieces were identified during excavation and are accurately located inside the house.

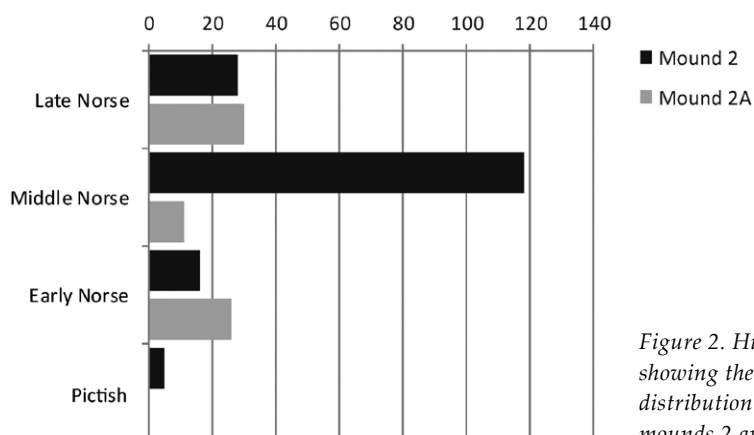


Figure 2. Histogram showing the chronological distribution of combs from mounds 2 and 2A, Bornais

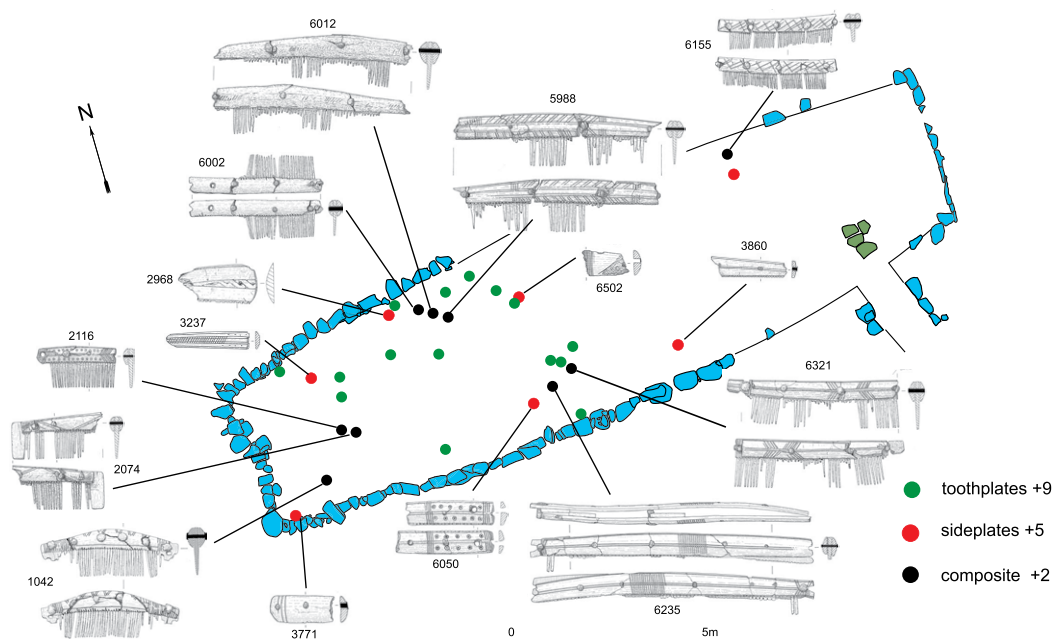


Figure 3. The distribution of combs from the floor of house 2, mound 2 at Bornais, illustrating all the well-preserved examples

Most of the large comb fragments are of Ashby's type 8b, and this seems to be a consistent feature of 11th–12th century Hebridean settlements as this type also dominates the Cille Pheadair assemblage (Parker Pearson et al 2004). There is one Ashby type 8c comb present (6002) but these become more common in the immediately succeeding deposits which fill the abandoned house. There is also a variety of combs which appear to belong to earlier periods. The most important is a short comb with a plano-convex profile and side plates with steep plano-convex sections (Fig 3, 1042) which is an Ashby type 6 (Ambrosiani class B; Dunlevy F2 short), normally dated to the 10th–11th centuries (Ashby 2006). Three small side plate fragments (2968, 3771 and 6502) are probably of earlier types. The most interesting is the end of a large Ashby type 5 comb (Fig 3, 2968; Ambrosiani type A), which should date to the eighth–ninth centuries. This is a small fragment and all three of these pieces could be residual, possibly representing accidental disturbance of the house deposits that immediately underlie the 11th–12th century house. However, there are good reasons for suggesting that this is not the case for 2968 and this will be discussed below.

An important issue that needs to be addressed is how this assemblage of combs and comb fragments came to be deposited on the floor of this house. It is clearly an unusually substantial assemblage of combs and there is nothing like it from any of the other houses at Bornais. However, it is not unparalleled, as an assemblage of almost complete combs was recovered from Cille Pheadair (Parker Pearson et al 2004). The nature of the objects and their location in the house provide some important clues as to how they were being exploited by the inhabitants.

A distinctive feature of the Bornais assemblage is the variable condition of the material; there is one relatively complete comb (1042), which typologically appears to be one of the oldest combs present and may have been kept as an heirloom. The teeth of this comb are relatively well preserved, and though worn, most of the central tooth plates survive intact. Only the end plates have been broken, which is strange as these end plates are arguably the most robust parts of the comb. Another well-preserved comb is 6155, which appears to be just over half of a simple comb with all the teeth intact, though again the evidence suggests this comb was heavily used as many teeth have been worn down.

Most of the remaining pieces are fragments, some of which could still have functioned as combs, but some of which had been transformed into other objects. Comb 6002 is an interesting example which has been considerably altered but might still be functional. It consists of a central segment of an Ashby type 8c, and one would expect this originally to have been a relatively long comb. One half of the surviving comb has a complete set of teeth, whereas the other half has none; it is possible that the original comb has been deliberately modified to create a handled comb, a well-known type in northern England (Ashby type 3).

Some of the larger combs were clearly no longer functional when they were deposited. Comb 6235 comprises the largest surviving pair of side plates, but it only contains three tooth plates with very few surviving teeth. The worst-preserved comb in some respects is 6012, which has a heavily pitted and eroded surface, possibly indicating that it was left exposed to the elements for a considerable period of time. Most of the teeth in the centre of the comb have been eroded down to stubs, though if this is through use it must represent a considerable period of combing a particularly robust head of hair. It is difficult to imagine that this comb had any further role to provide and yet it clearly was brought into the house for a purpose.

The more fragmentary combs are just as interesting and perhaps tell us even more about what is taking place in the house. Adjacent to comb 6235 was a pair of side plates (6050). These were not attached to each other and were not associated with any tooth plates. One end appears to be roughly cut across a rivet hole, and immediately adjacent to this is a larger off-centre hole cut through the decoration that clearly indicates a secondary modification. The other end is more unevenly broken. 2116 is another fragment comprising an elaborately-decorated side plate which appears to have had both ends carefully trimmed. It also has a large freshly cut hole at one end which is not in the right place for a rivet hole. In both cases, the holes suggest that they were intended to be suspended, possibly as ornaments. Another possibly ornamental piece is 2968, the end of the large Ashby type 5 comb. This comb has been carefully trimmed to create a neat convex end. The other end is broken but it may have had a perforation and this cut-down side plate may have been a pendant. The well-executed incised interlace pattern would have made this quite an attractive piece.

The distribution of these combs suggests the presence of three concentrations in the house, identified by the grouping of the larger composite comb pieces. The largest is on the north side of the house, in the third quarter, and comprises three largely complete combs as well as two side plates and five tooth plates. On the

south side, to the west of the house centre, is a cluster of two largely complete combs, a pair of side plates and four tooth plates. The third cluster lies at the west end of the central hearth zone, in a location that was arguably used for cooking (Sharples 2004), and comprises one complete and two composite fragments. There is a general scatter of smaller fragments between this cluster and the northern cluster. One notable outlier is comb 6155, which is one of the few interesting artefacts from the east end of the house.

The composition of the assemblage and its clustered distribution inside the house suggests that the combs represent curated collections brought in by individuals. Some of these combs may have been used by these individuals to comb their hair but many appear to have outlived their role as combs. Some of these pieces appear to have been selected for their decorative qualities and were in the process of being transformed into ornaments. Others may have been treated as raw material; perhaps good-quality tooth plates were being removed to repair other combs. The assemblage can be interpreted to suggest that the occupants of the house had restricted access to new combs and limited access to good raw materials, and therefore had to maximise the resources available to them. However, it is also possible that the comb fragments had symbolic capital, that they had a meaning and value that transcended their function as combs. This is certainly an argument that could be made for the fragment of the large early comb (2968). In its original form this comb may well have been associated with an ancestral figure, one of the initial colonists of the island of South Uist perhaps, and it seems likely that it had been passed down several generations before it was finally deposited in this house. The close association of combs and people is indicated by their presence in pagan Viking graves (eg Owen & Dalland 1999). Other objects with genealogical significance were recovered from the floor of the house, most noticeably an antler sleeve decorated with a Ringerike-style animal (Sharples 2004). This object was probably produced in Scandinavia at the beginning of the 11th century and would have passed through a couple of generations before it was buried here.

This analysis does not explain why these combs were left behind to be excavated by archaeologists. One of us has in previous papers discussed the significance of the material from House 2 (Sharples 2004; Sharples & Smith 2009) and suggested a couple of explanations. The first scenario is that the life of the house ended abruptly, perhaps because the family head was killed in an inauspicious manner and this meant the house could not be reoccupied but had to be abandoned. In this scenario the material could indicate possessions put down casually for collection later but then abandoned, but it is also possible that selected objects were deliberately placed in the house to underline its association with significant individuals. There certainly was a period of disuse when the house was abandoned, as the floor deposits produced an enormous collection of mouse bones (Adrienne Powell, pers comm), probably representing owl pellet material. However, this does not account for the vertical distribution of the objects. The house had several floor layers, and a probable period of occupation of 40 years (according to the modelled radiocarbon dates, at 68% probability: Peter Marshall, pers comm).

Some of the comb fragments come from early deposits confirming that the combs were not deposited in a single event. An alternative interpretation is that the number of artefacts in this house represents a period of conspicuous consumption in the 11th–12th centuries when the occupants were sufficiently well-equipped simply to dispose of artefacts in a casual fashion. The latter explanation does not, however, seem to fit the character of the comb assemblage which, as argued above, indicates the maximisation of the resource. The interpretation, therefore, remains problematic.

The assemblage of fragmentary combs from Bornais house 2 is exceptional and provides an unusual insight into the complexity of comb use and deposition in the final period of the Norse occupation of the Hebrides. The occupants were clearly a significant family though one which had probably seen better days. The style of the combs indicates strong contemporary Irish influences, but a Viking legacy was also clearly visible in the reuse of early combs and the presence of an important piece of Ringerike art from Scandinavia.

Comb-making debris

Antler waste was a common discovery during the excavations at Bornais, being present on most settlement mounds and throughout the life of the settlement. Approximately 463 pieces of antler waste (not including shavings) were recovered. The accepted process in the stages of comb construction are illustrated in Fig 4 and outlined below.

1. The antler was sawn into sections, or beams, of varying length. Extremities, such as burrs and tines, were discarded at this point if they did not provide suitable straight sections of usable compact tissue.
2. The antler beams were split to create segments which were roughly chiselled to remove the cancellous core.
3. The compact tissue was carefully chiselled and filed to create shaped blanks that could be used for the production of tooth, side and end plates.
4. The side plates (and, sometimes, end plates) were decorated. (This could also occur after stage 5.)
5. The side, tooth and end plates were assembled and riveted together.
6. The tooth plates were shaped, and the teeth cut and sharpened/rounded for use.

Previously published examples of comb production sequences have sometimes oversimplified the chaîne opératoire, with only a brief discussion of the craftsmanship involved at the various stages. To counteract that, the following paragraphs outline some of the observations made during the production of a series of composite combs that were designed to replicate the combs and comb-making debris from Bornais.

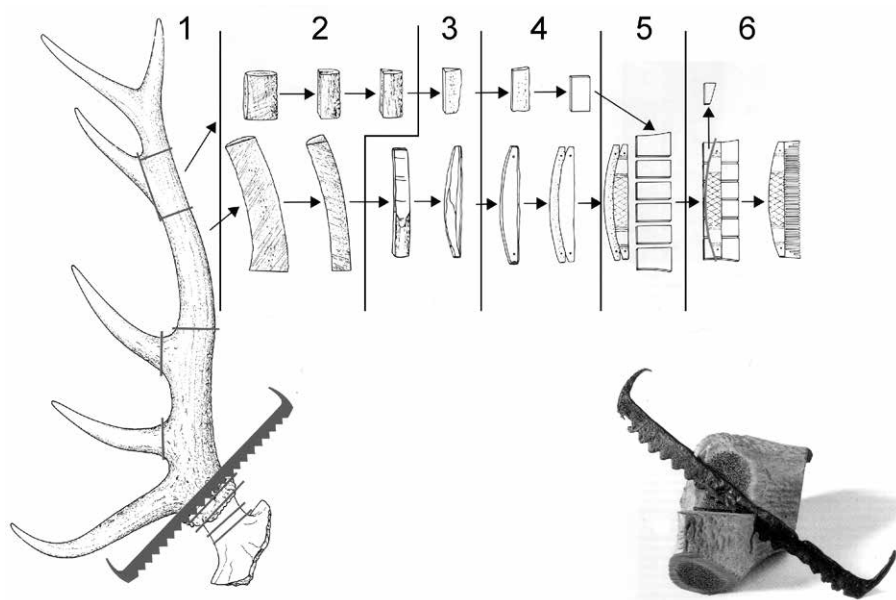


Figure 4. A schematic view of the cutting up of raw antler to produce the various components for a composite comb (after Elsner 1992)

Manufacture of the side and tooth plates

The first stage in the process of creating a tooth plate is to take an antler beam cut to the required size and saw four cuts in a cross through the compact tissue until the cancellous core is reached, quartering the beam (Ambrosiani 1981, 111-3). The beam is then split into four segments by hammering a fairly straight antler tine off-cut into the soft cancellous tissue (Fig 5, A-C; MacGregor 1985, fig 34). The mark left by the tine tip can be seen on some of the Bornais roughout plates (Fig 6, A2); it shows as a depression of crushed cancellous tissue.

For the next part of the experimental work a stop block was made by cutting a block out of a piece of wood. A segment split from a beam of antler could then be butted up to the stop block, allowing the use of a flat-bladed chisel to remove the cancellous tissue and the rough outer surface of the antler to the point where the compact antler becomes visible. Using this technique the distinctive flat chisel marks found on the Bornais tooth plate blanks (Fig 6, A-C) were replicated (Fig 5, D-E). The marks can be described as flat chamfers, ending with an abrupt line where the chiselling stops and the shavings have been broken off. A large number of 'shavings' have been recovered from Bornais which are directly comparable to those produced during the experiment.

The chiselled plates were then cleaned and prepared for use by squaring the long edges of the tooth plates to produce flush edges for placement next to one another. The faces of the plates were also cleaned to remove any traces of the rough outer surface or cancellous core (Fig 5, I). This was achieved by using a flat grinding stone to prepare the long edges and a fine abrasive paper to clean the plate

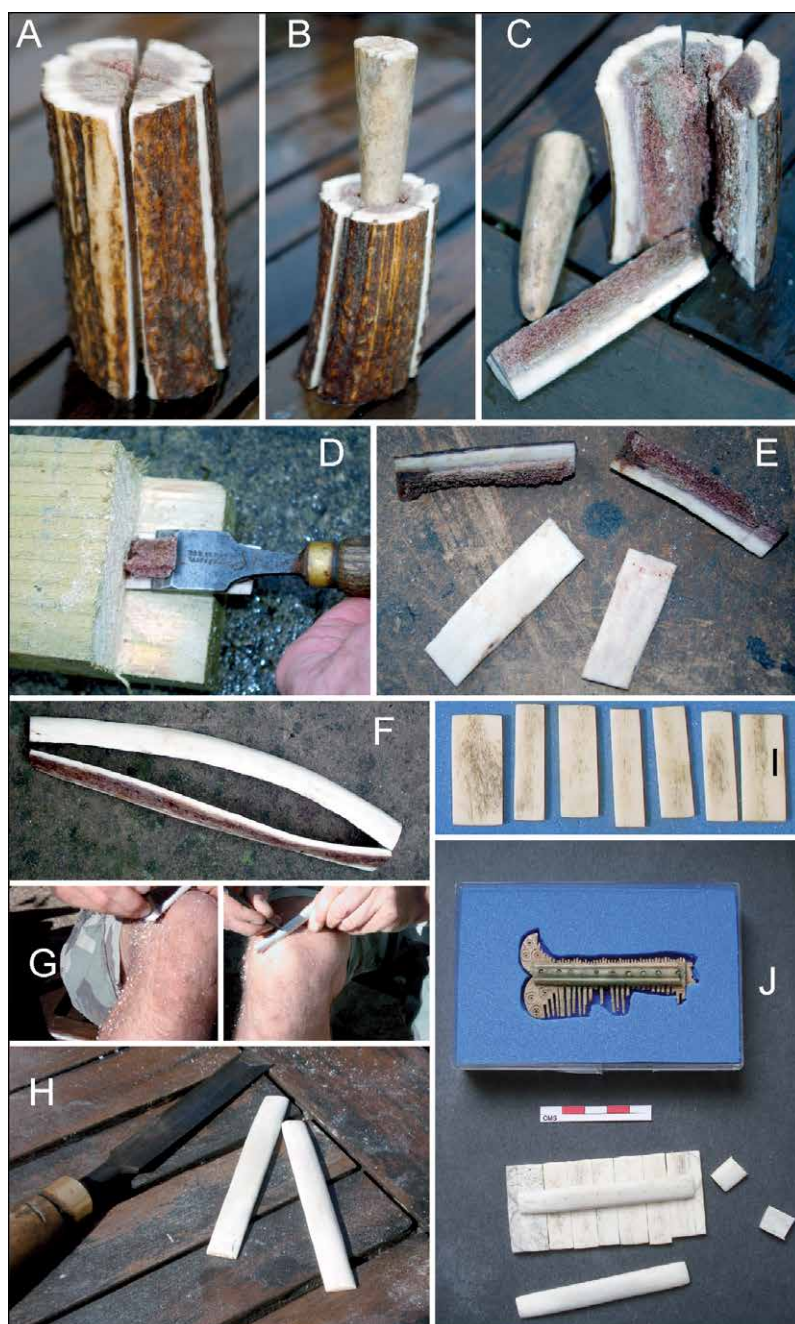


Figure 5. The various stages of manufacture to produce tooth plates and brace plates. A–C: the cross saw cuts and splitting of an antler barrel with the end of a tine to produce primary wedge segments for tooth plates; D: removal of the rough exterior and cancellous core using a chisel and wooden stop block; E: two blank tooth plates after chiselling; F: two brace plates after chiselling; G: shaping the two brace plates for the fish-tail comb using a chisel with the back of the blade; H: the two brace plates finished and ready for decoration; I: several tooth plates finished and ready for use; J: the finished brace and tooth plates for the fish-tail comb

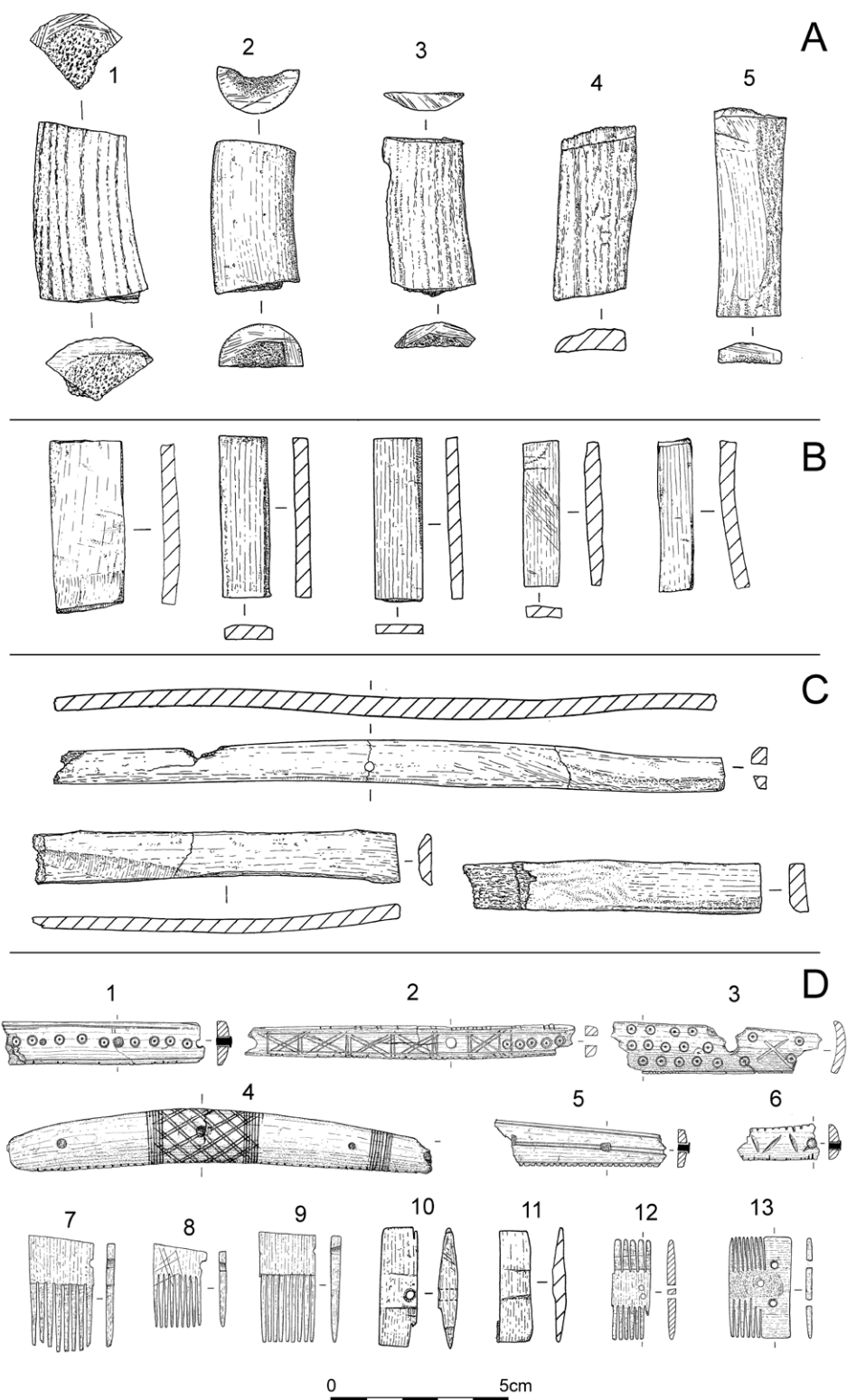


Figure 6 (previous page). Antler comb components from Bornais. A: blank primary segments; B: finished tooth plates ready for use; C: finished side plates prior to decoration; D: finished and used side and tooth plates; 1-3: ring and dot motif accompanied with incised criss-cross decoration; 4: lattice decoration bound by vertical incised lines; 5: marginal and central parallel line decoration; 6: incised v-cut decoration probably using a knife; 7-9: finished single tooth plates; 10-11: blank double tooth plates (plate 10 may have been removed from the comb during construction as the initial teeth seem to have broken during cutting. The drill hole and the ridge where the side plate was located were created by filing and shaping the plate prior to the cutting of the teeth); 12-13: finished and used double brace plates

faces. Dogfish skin (*Squalus acanthias*) was used as the abrasive paper, and a flat grinding stone with wet fine sand was also used.

The Bornais side plates also showed distinctive chisel marks (Fig 6, C) and a stop block and chiselling was used for their initial preparation. However, the two side plates produced after chiselling were misshapen and warped and clearly required straightening to function effectively (Fig 5, F). There has been prolonged discussion on whether antler was softened by the use of water (or other substances) to allow it to be more easily worked (Ambrosiani 1981; Cnotliwy 1956; MacGregor 1985, 63-4; Ulbricht 1978). During this experiment it was found unnecessary to soften the antler to work it. However, to correct and straighten the side plates they were held in steam, which rendered them malleable enough to straighten by hand. This was a quick and easy process which was completed within ten minutes for each plate. It also avoided the antler becoming over-saturated and therefore requiring a lengthy drying time. After straightening, the plates were initially shaped using a fine hand file similar to those in the Mästermyr chest (Arwidsson & Berg 1983).²

The side plates of the Bornais composite combs, in common with combs from Norse sites across northern Europe, have oval, triangular or trapezoidal profiles. The further shaping of the plates in this experiment was done by rotating the chisel and using the back of the blade to hone, or chamfer, the side plate into the required shape (Fig 5, G, H). The finished tooth and side plates, along with the end plates, were then ready for selection to form the comb required (Fig 5, J) and the side plates could now be decorated.

Decoration

The most common form of decoration found on the combs from Bornais is incised line and ring-and-dot motif. The incised lines vary in pattern and can be vertical, horizontal criss-cross or lattice decoration; they are sometimes accompanied with ring-and-dot motifs that form various patterns (Fig 6, D1-6). Many of the side plates have marginal lines running along the outer edges of the side plate and single and double lines running across its centre (Fig 6, D1-3 & 5); Ulbricht (1978) and MacGregor et al (1999, 1936) suggest the use of two- or three-pronged tools to create these incised lines.

² A rasp was used by Ambrosiani (1981), but in our experiment the teeth on this type of file were found to be brutal, ripping rather than smoothing and shaping the antler.

It was noted that the lines on a large number of the combs had a rectangular-shaped profile with a flat base, not a V-shaped cut which would indicate the use of a knife. Knife-cut decoration does occur, but only on a small number of the Bornais side plates (Fig 6, D6). The rectangular profile suggests that these lines were cut by a saw or some other form of denticulate tool (as observed on some of the side plates from Coppergate; MacGregor et al 1999, 1935). To examine this hypothesis further, the side plates of the combs made during this experiment were decorated using a fine razor saw of 0.35 mm thickness, with 32 teeth per inch. These decorated plates were then photographed using a microscope in order to allow closer examination of the cut marks. A side plate with possible saw-cut decoration from Bornais was also examined under the microscope (Fig 7, A–B original, C–D replica). The experimental work using a fine razor saw matched the decoration of the original Bornais comb almost exactly, though it is clear that the Bornais comb was decorated using an even finer saw blade.

To recreate the marginal lines, a small version of a woodworker's marking gauge was made,³ one with one point and another with two points set about 1.5 to 2 mm apart. This tool, when pressed flush with the side of the side plate and moved slowly up and down the length of the plate, scored lines very similar to those found on the Bornais side plates. The side plates from Bornais with marginal decoration had all been decorated and finished before riveting.

Another recurring form of decoration is the ring-and-dot motif (Fig 7, E). Examples on the end plate of a 'fish-tail' comb (Ashby type 13) from mound 2A were examined under a microscope to identify the tool mark signature. The ring motif has a flat-bottomed groove similar to a saw cut, with the central pivot hole being slightly conical in shape as a result of drilling. To recreate this, a two-pronged tool was fashioned with one prong longer than the other. The prongs were sharpened, with the shorter outer point filed to a flattened end, similar to a very small chisel or saw tooth, while the inner one was shaped to a point. The longer prong acted as the pivot point that drilled the central hole while rotating the outer prong at a slight angle to cut or score the concentric circle (Fig 7, F–H). To recreate the double concentric rings (Fig 7, E–G) a two-pronged tool was made with a smaller diameter. Again the results on the experimental comb matched the ones from the original Bornais 'fish-tail' comb and others from the site that were also examined.

Tools

A large assemblage of iron objects was recovered during the excavation of the Bornais settlement (Sharples & Smith 2009), but unfortunately most were fittings and the number of tools identified was rather limited. The most important finds were knives, but as we have discussed these seem to have had a minimal role in the production of composite combs. Tools that could have been used in comb-

3 *Marking gauge* is used in woodworking and metalworking to mark out lines for cutting or other operations. The purpose of the gauge is to scribe a line parallel to a reference edge or surface. The gauge consists of a beam, a headstock, and a scribing or marking implement, typically a pin. The headstock slides along the beam, and is locked in place by various means: a locking screw, cam lever, or a wedge. The marking implement is fixed to one end of the beam.

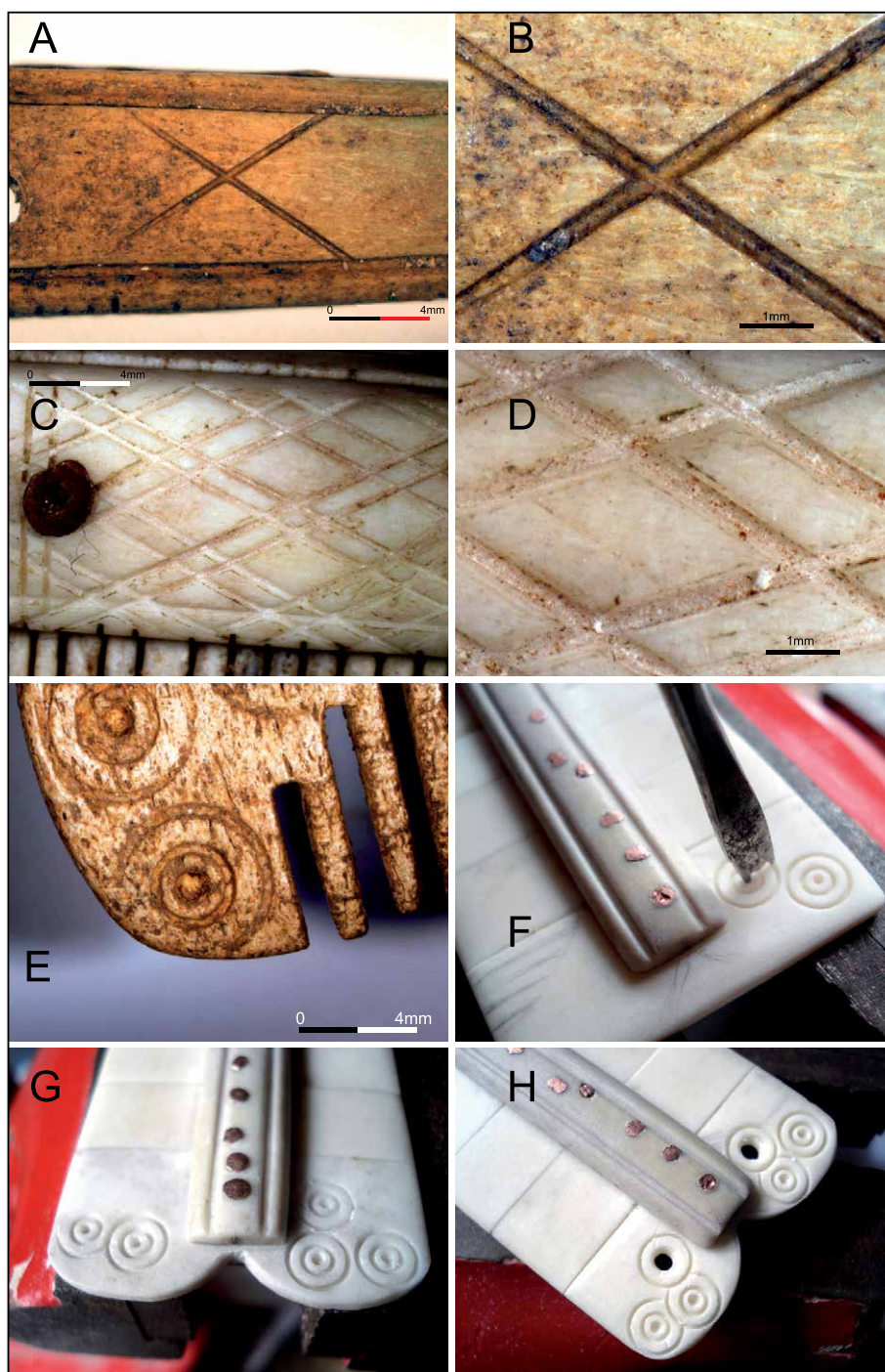


Figure 7. Close-up photographs of the saw-cut incised lines and ring-and-dot motifs found on the side and tooth plates from Bornais. A–B: saw-cut criss-cross motif and a close-up of the saw-incised lines; C–D: replicated saw-cut incised lines on the experimental comb brace plate; E–H: a close-up of the ring-and-dot motif on the fish-tail comb and the tool used to recreate this decoration

making are punches, chisels and a small axe. However, we have not conclusively identified any files or saws, which would be essential tools for the final stages of comb production. The only possible indication of the presence of a fine saw is an unusual antler tine handle which contained the tang for an iron blade that had snapped off (Fig 8, A). This tang was short and thin, 0.6-0.8mm thick, and very unlike a knife tang, despite the substantial antler handle. It is possible this held a fine saw.

The use of a clamp to grip and hold raw materials is an important aspect in working as it frees one's hands to enable cutting and shaping. In the experimental work undertaken by Ambrosiani (1981) a vice was used to hold the tooth and side plates for shaping and to facilitate the cutting of the teeth. However, no equivalent of a modern-day vice has been recovered from the Norse period although it is a tool that most people take for granted today. It is possible that a stirrup/knee clamp, as used in leather-working and saddle-making, may have been used.⁴ However, in experimental work this type of clamp proved too cumbersome for the production of antler blanks. A shave horse was also considered, but again this proved unsuitable.

Bone clamps are known from a number of sites in Europe, and MacGregor (1985, 172) recorded examples from Haithabu in Germany, Trelleborg in Denmark and Ytre Elgsnes and Trondheim in Norway. In Scotland there are examples from Burrian, Pool and Skaill on Orkney (Ashby 2006, 208) and an object from Bornais mound 3 appears to be a fragment from this type of clamp made from whalebone (Fig 8, B4). A replica of the Bornais clamp was produced using wood, as whalebone is difficult to obtain, and was found to work simply and effectively. To produce the clamp two pieces of wood are chamfered to form a fairly wide Y shape; if the Y is too narrow the antler comb is not gripped tightly enough to prevent slippage. A hole was then drilled two-thirds of the way down and the two pieces bolted together. To use the clamp, a hole the size of the base of the clamp is chiselled into a work bench and the clamp is then pushed tightly into this hole. This proved to be a very effective tool for holding the comb, freeing one's hands to hold the comb steady, allowing rotation of the comb and the cutting of teeth with relative ease (Fig 8, B3). For this experiment a wedge driven into the bottom of the clamp to increase its grip was not used (as suggested by MacGregor 1985, 172). The wedge had little effect on increasing the grip, and in fact caused a large amount of stress at the pivot point where the clamping bolt was located, causing one of the clamp sides to fracture.

Copper rivets

The majority of rivets found in the Bornais combs as well as other combs from Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia are of iron, with a minority being of copper. In Britain copper rivets are uncommon in earlier periods. Examination of the rivets in the combs from Bornais revealed that they were not made of solid copper wire

⁴ *Stirrup/saddler's clamp*: made of two pieces of shaped, laminated wood that act as a sprung vice. Must be used with a stool because they are about 1m high. They have provision for attaching a stirrup leather and iron to allow the user to clamp work very securely.

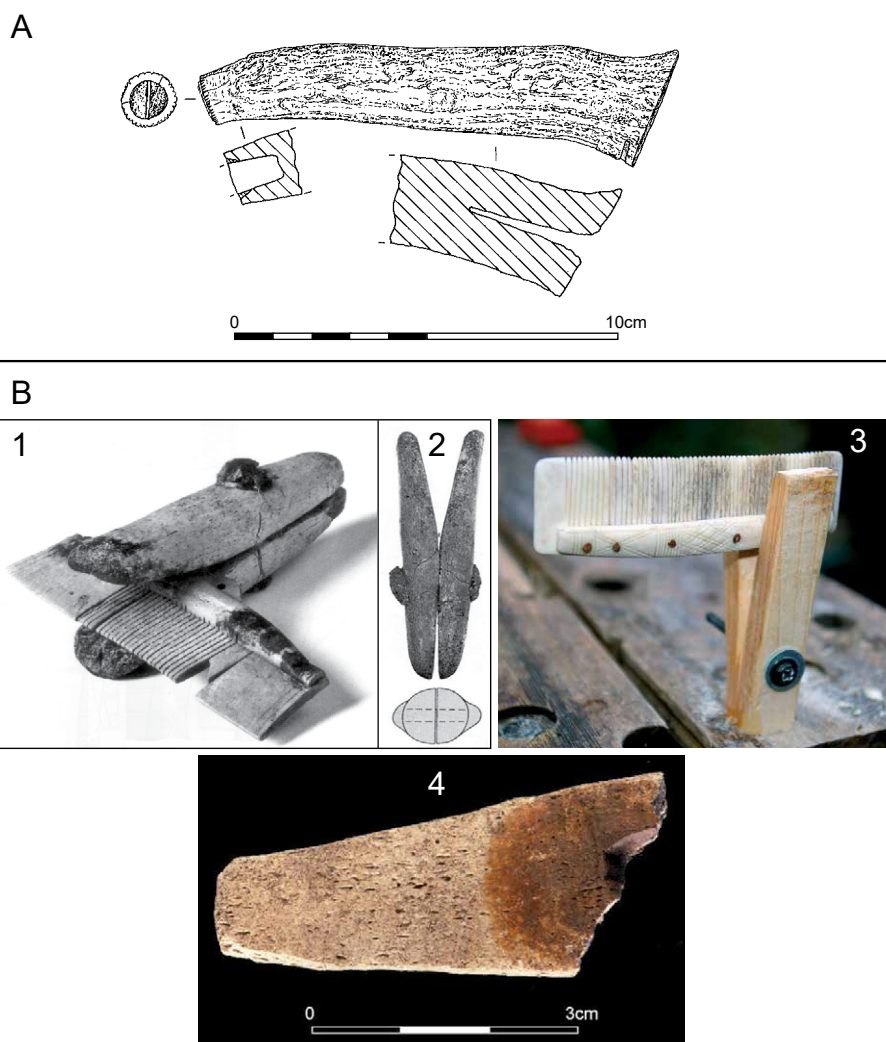


Figure 8. A: an antler tine handle with the possible broken saw blade. B: 1-2 the Haithabu clamp; 3: a reproduction of the clamp in wood, fixed into a hole with a comb inserted; 4: the whalebone clamp fragment from Bornais

but were very thin rolled sheet metal. Fig 9, A–B shows microscope images of the rolled sheet rivets of two separate combs. Making rivets from copper sheet is a traditional technique observed for a long period of time, up to the production of copper cookware in the 19th century.

The process of making a small copper rivet is shown in Fig 9 as part of the construction of an Ashby type 13 ‘fish-tailed’ comb. A piece of copper was beaten very thin on an anvil (Fig 9, C). The copper sheet was hammered gently to form a cylinder (Fig 9, D). The now roughly rounded rivet was driven through a rounding hole (Fig 9, E) and a flat head was formed by a gentle tap with a hammer on one end of the rivet (Fig 9, F). Fig 9, G shows the finished rivet ready for use.

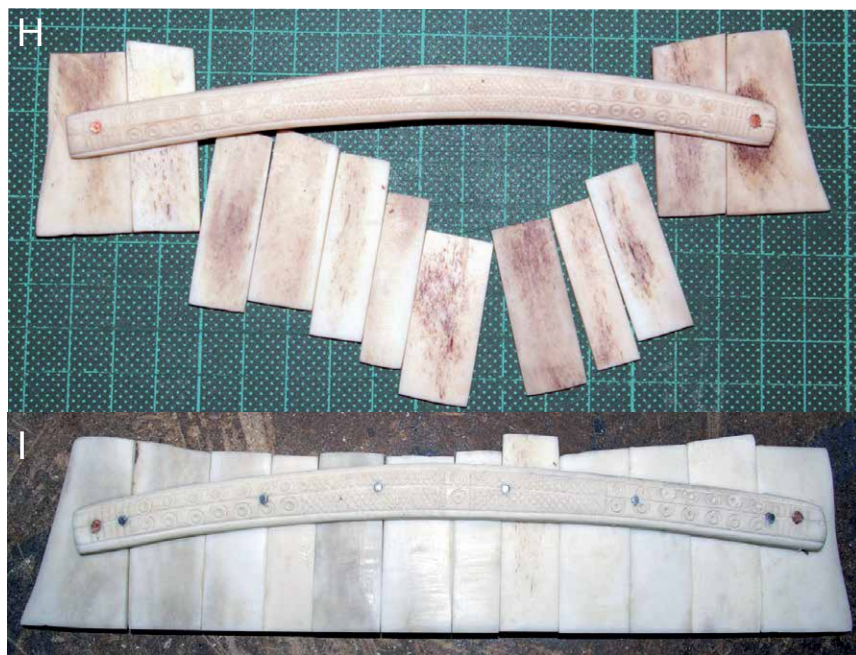
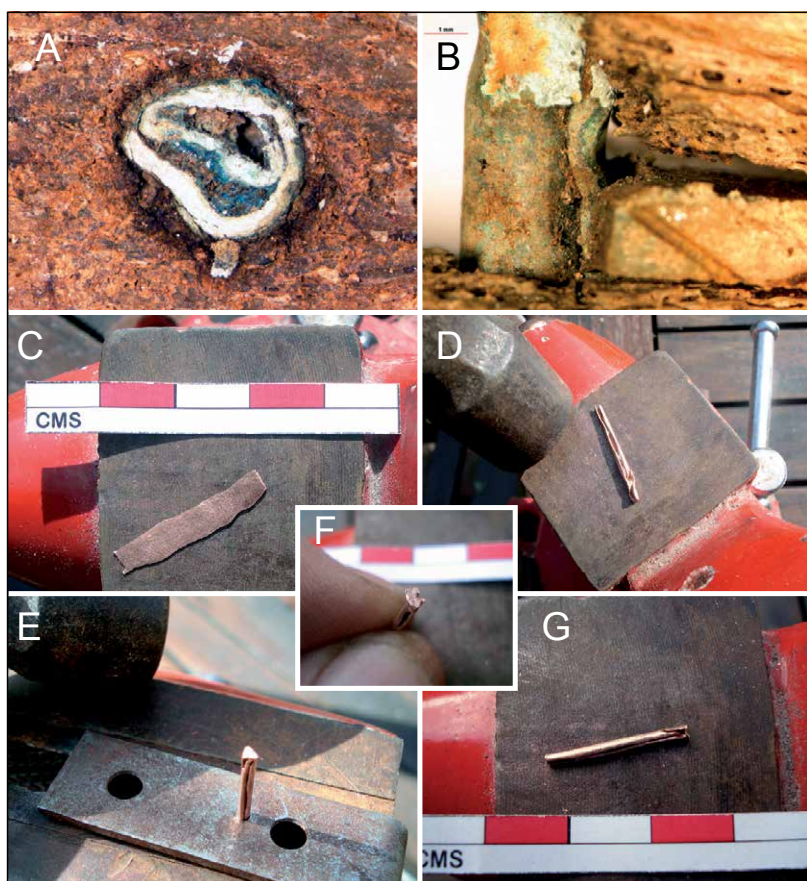


Figure 9 (previous page). A–B: magnified view of the rolled copper rivets used in riveting side and tooth plates at Bornais. C–G: the sequence used to make a rolled copper rivet. H: the two end plates and side plates riveted together first, allowing the blank tooth plates to be inserted ready for drilling and riveting; I: the comb after the riveting has been completed

The majority of the Bornais combs, and combs from other similar sites, display alternative edge riveting (Ashby 2006, 71), where two tooth plates are held in place by one rivet. The exception to this is the two end plates, which are riveted through the individual plate. It has been suggested that shared riveting may have been dictated by requirements of effort, cost, weight, and minimising damage to the decorated side plate (MacGregor et al 1999, 1931), and there have been suggestions that different riveting techniques can be regionally diagnostic (Smirnova 2002, 37).

During the construction of the combs in this study the most effective sequence of riveting was to secure the two end plates with individual rivets to the side plates. Then all of the selected tooth plates were slotted in between the side plates and the end plates. These inserted plates need to form a comfortable tight fit, in order to prevent the plates falling out when the comb is picked up (Fig 9, H). The drilling of the holes at the juncture of every other plate is then carried out; this can be done by using a pump drill or hand drill.⁵ The first two drill holes and rivets are done between the end plate and first plate at both ends of the comb. This prevents movement of the other tooth plates. Drilling and riveting is then done between every other tooth plate (Fig 9, I). This method produces securely fitted tooth plates. Figure 10 shows finished replicas of two single-sided combs and a double-sided ‘fish-tailed’ comb based on Bornais finds.

It was found that the technique of shared riveting was a highly effective method for holding tooth plates firmly in place. During the riveting process the rivet diameter expands as it is hammered into the drill hole through the side plates and tooth plate. This pushes the tooth plates fractionally apart, and they are then held tight against each other and the two fixed end plates. This experiment indicates that shared riveting is the most effective method of tooth plate riveting, regardless of considerations of cost, weight, effort and aesthetic, though these considerations could also have been significant.

Antler working at Bornais

The analysis of antler waste from Bornais can, for simplicity, be divided into primary (Fig 4, stage 1) and secondary working debris (stages 2–6). Primary material consists largely of the unusable offcuts (burrs, tines and twisted beams) that do not indicate conclusive evidence for the production of composite combs.

⁵ Rivet holes can be created using a hand drill (a drill bit inserted into a wooden, antler or bone handle) or a pump drill which can be used with one hand, freeing the other to hold the comb while drilling. A bow drill was found to be unsuitable, as the need to exert a downward pressure and keep the drill steady took both hands, allowing the comb to move about excessively.

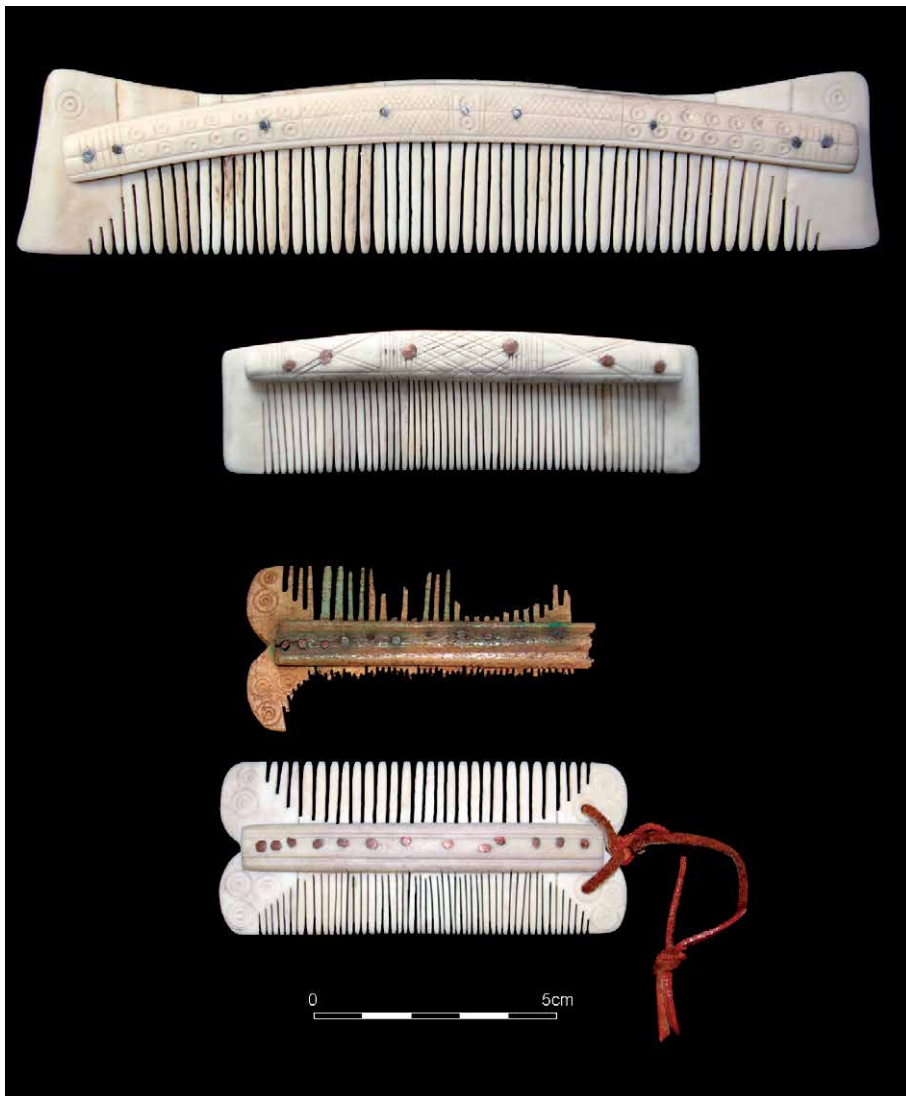


Figure 10. Two completed replica single-sided composite combs and the original and replica double-sided 'fish-tail' comb (made by Ian Dennis)

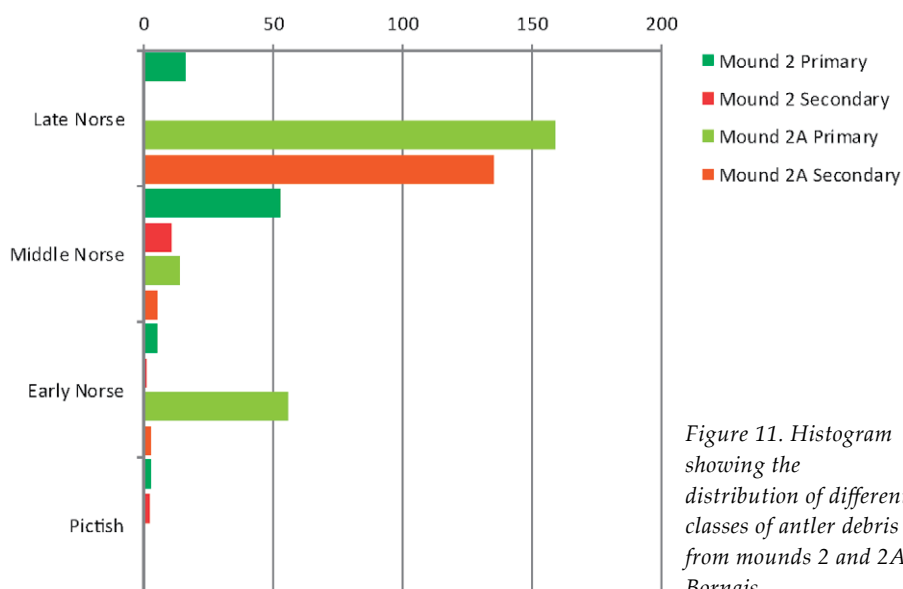
Antler was used to produce a range of objects at Bornais and the debris could be related to the production of knife handles, ornamental ferrules, gaming pieces and other objects.

The secondary debris contains three classes of material: segments, which represent split beams, shavings, and blanks, which represent preliminary shaping to produce composite comb pieces. The shavings are not necessarily an indication of comb production as they could be a by-product of the production of any shaped antler objects, but at Bornais most appear to be the result of comb manufacture. Segments are a more likely indication of comb production as they are produced to create a usable length of compact tissue, and measurements indicate that these

lengths correspond to those of the blanks. Nevertheless, the blanks are the clearest indication of comb production. These rectangular plates of compact antler are shaped to be used as tooth plates, end plates or side plates. All were present in the Bornais assemblage (Fig 6, B–C), but most of the blanks were for tooth plates and a few pieces indicated the production of double-sided combs (Fig 6, 10–11). The preponderance of tooth plates may simply represent the relative numbers of tooth and side plate fragments in a comb, but it possibly also represents the greater care taken over the production of side plates. Long side plates are more difficult to produce, particularly in the Western Isles where the size of the antlers on the island deer is much smaller than on mainland deer (Mulville 2009).

The chronological distribution of the antler waste is shown in Fig 11. The distribution indicates a clear concentration of debris, primary and secondary, in the late Norse occupation of mound 2A. Primary waste is widely distributed across the settlement, with a substantial concentration in the early Norse phase on mound 2A (which was deposited as manuring debris in a cultivation soil) and a reasonable quantity in the middle Norse occupation of mound 2 (house 2 floor). These deposits included a few pieces of secondary debris but nothing that conclusively indicated composite comb production. Only four plate blanks came from deposits before the main phase of deposition and it is quite possible these indicate recording errors. The very limited quantities of antler debris from the Pictish and early Norse deposits on mound 2 indicate the limited access we had to deposits from these periods. It therefore seems likely that comb production at Bornais was limited to a short period of time.

The distribution of accurately-located comb-making debris belonging to the late Norse occupation is shown in Fig 12. The main structural elements of the settlement mound in this phase were a rectangular house which was only partially exposed at the south end of the settlement mound, and a poorly-defined ancillary structure at the north end of the mound. The ancillary structure had a well-defined



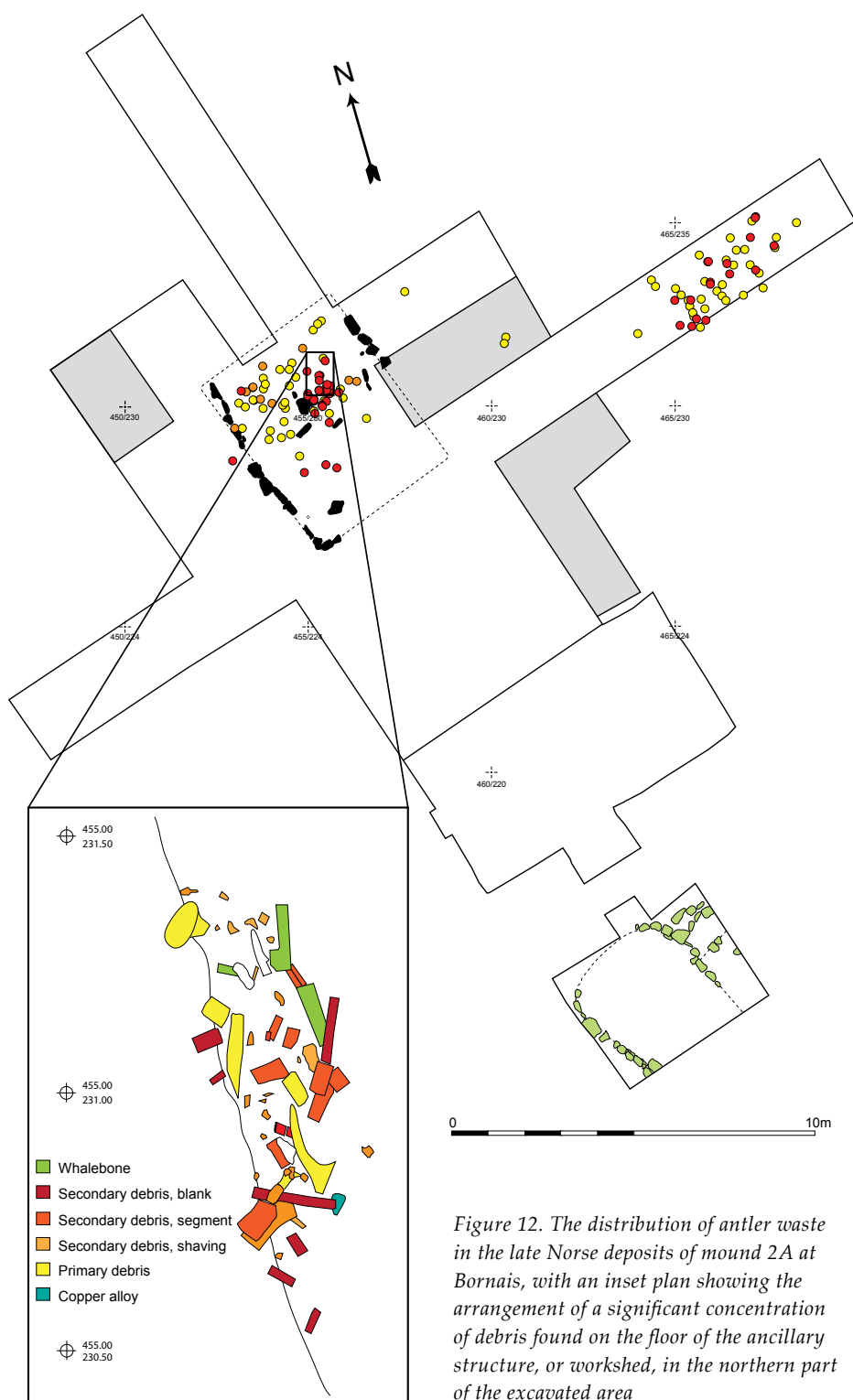


Figure 12. The distribution of antler waste in the late Norse deposits of mound 2A at Bornais, with an inset plan showing the arrangement of a significant concentration of debris found on the floor of the ancillary structure, or workshed, in the northern part of the excavated area

west wall, a partially-defined east wall, a north wall that survived as a gulley and a south wall that had been removed by the construction of a later house. This later house also truncated the floor deposits in the southern half of the ancillary structure. Radiocarbon dates indicate that the ancillary structure was constructed in the middle of the 13th century and was in use until the end of the 13th century, or possibly the first decade of the 14th century (Peter Marshall, pers comm).

The distribution of the antler waste is clearly restricted to two areas: the midden deposits on the east edge of the settlement and the occupation deposits inside the ancillary structure. The blank areas around the latter contained deposits dating to the late Norse period that were completely excavated; the absence of antler waste from these areas is therefore a significant feature of the distribution. The most obvious interpretation of the distribution is that the activity inside the structure represents debris produced by a craftsman working inside a workshop, associated with the domestic dwelling to the south. The deposits on the midden to the east suggest a restricted area of dumping by the craftsman in the structure. The midden originally accumulated close to the structure but gradually moved further and further to the east. The comb debris comes from some of the latest midden layers that occur close to the edge of the settlement mound. Again the concentrated nature of the debris clusters in the midden layers suggest a fairly limited period of comb-making activity. An alternative interpretation of this group of material is that it indicates the secondary deposition of floor layers from the northern structure that had been removed when a later house was constructed. There is also an indication that soil layers containing comb-making debris were redeposited above the floor deposits inside the northern structure.

The distribution of primary comb-making debris inside the workshop clusters to the north and east of a stone placed in the centre of the house, and this may have been a seat on which the comb maker sat (Fig 12). During excavation a concentration of waste was located at this location. Unfortunately only after a large part had been excavated was the significance of the deposit understood and the material carefully exposed and planned. The pattern of the excavated area appears to indicate a circular concentration of waste, possibly representing a bag of material laid on the floor. The contents comprised a very distinctive group of primary and secondary antler waste and one finished tooth plate, but the assemblage was dominated by secondary debris, including ten blanks for the production of side and tooth plates. There were also two tines, possibly tools for splitting beams, and a piece of sheet copper that could have been used as raw material for making rivets.

An interesting feature of the material present in this concentration were three whalebone blanks. The rectangular shape of these pieces was very suggestive of use in comb production and their presence in this context conclusively demonstrates that they were intended for making composite combs, though as yet no finished combs including whalebone have been located. The use of such a resource is unusual and this is, to the authors' knowledge, the first documented instance of its use in comb-making. It may indicate the limitations of antler resources on the island but it could also be an indication of the importance of whales and possibly whaling to the Hebridean communities (Mulville 2002). The wild nature of deer

is likely to be recognised and important and it may have given combs a particular social significance. Whales could certainly be considered analogous animals; non-domesticated, living in special areas of the landscape and potentially hunted by significant individuals.

Discussion

The evidence from Bornais is exceptional in Scotland. Only the comb assemblages from Jarlshof in Shetland (Hamilton 1956) and Cille Pheadair in the Western Isles (Parker Pearson et al 2004) are comparable in size but both lack the extensive evidence for comb-making debris. The Bornais assemblage debris can be compared to the assemblage from Whithorn, in Dumfries & Galloway (Nicholson 1997), but Whithorn is a much larger assemblage which appears to indicate a prolonged period of comb production. The Whithorn excavations produced very few combs.

In his analysis of comb production in Scotland Ashby (2006) was sceptical that the sporadic and limited evidence from Scotland was sufficient to draw any substantial conclusions. Ashby suggested four models for the production of composite combs: the factory, the workshop, the household and the itinerant craft worker (Ashby 2006, 220-1), and his analysis of the Scottish evidence suggested the nature of production changed through time and could be broken down into four phases (Ashby 2006, 223):

- An *initial phase* (c AD 500-850), involving small-scale manufacture of 'Pictish' combs.
- A *secondary phase* (c AD 850-950), in which 'native'-style combs continued to be produced, though in the north of Scotland raw materials were acquired via Scandinavian contacts. Scandinavian settlers brought their own distinctive combs with them.
- A *tertiary phase* (c AD 950-1100), in which combs may have begun to be manufactured locally, but in the Northern Isles they were more likely imported from Scandinavia, whereas the Western Isles saw close contacts with the Irish Sea region and/or England.
- A *final phase* (c AD 1100-1400), in which combs were produced en masse in Scandinavian 'factories'. The north of Scotland was clearly an important part of this Scandinavian economic system, but few exports reached the Western Isles which by now were largely incorporated into an Irish Sea cultural, economic and political milieu.

The evidence from Bornais is clearly insufficient to comment on the first two phases but it does make an important contribution to our understanding of the latter two phases and of the organisation of comb production in Atlantic Scotland.

The tertiary phase probably continued up to the middle of the 12th century, and the evidence from Bornais suggests that this settlement was almost certainly dependent on 'workshops' in the Irish Sea area, which may have included Whithorn,

for the supply of combs. However, an aspect that is seldom considered in these discussions is the ability to repair combs. It seems likely that the basic antler- and bone-working skills present in a large settlement would be sufficient to enable the replacement of broken tooth plates, and this is arguably among the activities taking place in house 2. The occurrence of sporadic but limited scatters of antler-working debris, which include blank plates, may be evidence for the presence of repair kits that could be used for running repairs rather than for the production of new combs. This pattern is clearly visible in the analysis of the comb production debris from Novgorod (Smirnova 2002), which includes small quantities of red deer antler that had to be imported.

The evidence of the final phase, in contrast, suggests a different pattern. The settlement at Bornais appears to have reasonable access to the Norse 'factory'-produced combs (type 13) and indicates that these have a wider distribution than initially thought. Politically this is quite interesting as the Western Isles become divorced from Norway and incorporated into the kingdom of Scotland in the middle of the 13th century when the type 13 combs were being produced. The evidence for comb production at Bornais seems to indicate the presence of an itinerant craftsman working in a workshop. The workshop is located on a settlement mound that is clearly subsidiary to the principal high-status residence on mound 2. It is difficult to be certain what type of combs are being produced on mound 2A but these include double-sided combs with copper rivets which are best seen as local versions of the Ashby class 13 factory products. This is again an important indication of the continued significance of the Norse homelands and a turning away from the Irish Sea province that was so important in the preceding tertiary phase.

This paper has provided a detailed contextual analysis of two groups of comb material from the site at Bornais in the Outer Hebrides. This relatively limited analysis has illuminated our understanding of comb production and maintenance in the Norse period. We have not attempted to push the boundaries of interpretation that Clarke and Heald did in 2002 but instead maintain the tradition of detailed critical analysis that Clarke did so much to develop in his career in Scotland.

Acknowledgements

The initial work on the comb-making debris was undertaken by Rachel Smith in her undergraduate dissertation at Cardiff University and she has developed her analysis as part of the post-excavation report on the finds assemblage from mounds 2 and 2A. Both authors have used her analysis as a springboard for the work undertaken in this paper. Mary Davis and Kirsty Harding provided invaluable support in reading text and Kirsty sorted and located many of the important artefacts.

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Playing the dark side: a look at some chess and other playing pieces of jet and jet-like materials from Britain

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Abstract

An exploration of the materiality and social biography of gaming pieces, based on the analysis of 101 gaming pieces and dice made of jet or jet-like materials. The geographic context is Britain (with some Irish and Continental examples of putative British origin). The paper examines the use of jet for gaming pieces, the range of pieces and the amuletic, apotropaic reuse of some of the pieces.

Keywords: *Amulets, board-games, chess, dice, jet, play, Iron Age, Medieval*

Introduction

David Clarke made a foray into the world of gaming material culture with his 1970 paper on parallelopiped bone dice from the Scottish Iron Age. Though I shall not return to those dice here (but see M A Hall 2007 and forthcoming) they are significant in confirming the validity of the biographical approach to material culture – another of David's interests. In the context of the biography of gaming items, such dice had at least two lives that at times were co-terminous: as playing pieces used to gamble and as elements in lot-casting, fortune-telling and divination, a practice of dice-use that lasted throughout the Medieval period, sometimes sanctioned by the church, sometimes not. In this paper I wish to acknowledge David's interest and contribution by exploring a largely later class of evidence, that of gaming pieces made of jet and jet-like substances, and teasing out some of their biographical nuances. The paper is also biographical in the sense that it explores one aspect, one chapter if you like, of the cultural biography of play.

The focus of this paper is the use of jet and jet-like materials¹ for gaming pieces and the transference of that use into other cultural spheres, but in studying the deployment of black as a gaming colour in the Medieval archaeological record we would do well to start with the black, socketed, hemispherical objects from various sites in Scotland (with examples also from the north of England and Wales), spanning the second/third to the ninth centuries AD. They include examples from Traprain Law (East Lothian), Mote of Mark (Dumfries & Galloway), and Hill of Crichtie (Bruce's Camp, Aberdeenshire), re-identified as gaming pieces rather than pin-heads by Close-Brooks (1986, 166; see also M A Hall 2007, 13-15, illus 11 and Hunter 2006, 78-9, table 2). They are pegged pieces (with the peg element generally lost), used to play on a board marked with holes for their insertion. This would make the whole game much more stable (especially when on the move – whether over land or water – or in the event of a dispute knocking the board). The most likely game in which they were used is *fitchill* or *hnefatafl* (in Irish *brandubh*), both variants being inspired by the Roman game of *ludus latrunculorum* (M A Hall & Forsyth 2011). We do not have enough pieces from any one find spot to confirm the colouring of sets but the existence of pieces in other media, including bone, suggests the possibility of black versus other colour sets. Some of these pieces come from burial contexts (ibid) and suggest that selected pieces, rather than full sets, may have been regarded as sufficient for the after-life. It may be that favourite or otherwise powerful pieces that had been retained in life were then committed to the grave.

The use of black materials (generally labelled as 'jet' in the literature) for gaming pieces continued into the Medieval period, and Table 1 (see Appendix) summarises a detailed catalogue of such pieces that has been compiled by the author. While it has not been possible in the current project to confirm the identity of the raw material analytically, many if not most of these items are suspected to be of jet, and compositional analysis has confirmed this in the case of the bishop from Perth (Table 1, No 40; Fig 1) and the pawns from Ancrum (No 42; Fig 2, left), Merton (No 43; Fig 2, right) and Whitehaugh (No 44; Fig 3). However, the use of other materials is attested, with one chess/*hnefatafl* pawn from York (No 62) found to be of shale. The table also includes all the currently known examples from Europe labelled as jet (but it has not been possible in the current project to search for the jet correlates from across Europe). Table 1 also includes a suspected gaming piece from Perth that is made of haematite (iron ore) (No 41; Fig 4). This was not published in the excavation report (Cox 1996) but its shape is highly suggestive of a gaming piece and its wear pattern and sheen is consistent with regular handling. It comes from a later phase (associated with metalworking) than the jet bishop from the same site (No 40; see below), and is plausibly a simple, possibly improvised, chess pawn: compare the pawn from Great Yarmouth (No 39; Fig 5). While haematite is less similar to jet than other substances such as cannel coal or oil shale, it may nevertheless have served as a 'black' piece.

1 The term 'jet' will henceforth be used as a short-hand for 'jet and jet-like'. Very few of the objects discussed here have had their material identified analytically (even though it is likely that many, if not most, are indeed of jet), and the text and Table 1 will make it clear where the identification has been thus confirmed. The principal non-jet materials likely to have been used are cannel coal, oil shale and lignite.

When setting out on this research the intention was to look at jet chess pieces only, which appeared to be unique to Britain. I soon learned, however, that others had beaten me to this observation (Kluge-Pinsker 1991, 44, followed by Riddler 1995, 107) and that there are both some outliers beyond Britain and a wider range of playing pieces made of jet. This paper seeks to open up a discussion on the dating, social context and gaming context of the pieces, with a view to gaining a clearer understanding of when and how they functioned. Jet's electrostatic property – often accorded magical powers – will also be taken into account. This property is



Figure 1. Chess bishop from Meal Vennel, Perth, confirmed through compositional analysis to be of jet. © Perth Museum & Art Gallery, Perth & Kinross Council



Figure 2. Possible chess pawns from Ancrum (left) and Merton (right), Scottish Borders, confirmed through compositional analysis to be of jet. © National Museums Scotland



Figure 3. Possible chess pawn from Whitehaugh, Scottish Borders, confirmed through compositional analysis to be of jet. © Crown Office



Figure 4. Possible gaming piece of haematite from Meal Vennel, Perth. © Perth Museum & Art Gallery, Perth & Kinross Council



Figure 5. Chess pawn of jet or jet-like material from Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.
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also important when considering the other uses to which gaming pieces were put, as their identity and biography changed: several have been pierced for suspension as pendants, presumably perceived as having amuletic qualities.

Jet and similar-looking materials

Jet is formed from araucarian wood – the family to which the monkey puzzle tree belongs – that was diagenetically altered under pressure during the Jurassic period, losing its lignin and having some of its wood elements replaced by organic derivatives (Rayner & Hemingway 1974, 175). It is a carbonaceous material containing about 12% mineral oil and traces of aluminium, silica and sulphur; ranging in colour from a rich dark brown to black, it is light and warm to the touch, and can both float and burn. The principal source in Britain is the coast and inland area around Whitby in Yorkshire (Rayner & Hemingway 1974; Muller 1980); on the Continent, significant deposits are to be found in Spain in the regions of Asturias, Galicia (including around Santiago de Compostela) and Aragon (Cardín Toraño 2013), and it was also exploited in the Swabian Alps in southern Germany (especially around Schwäbisch Gmünd), and around Sainte-Colombe, in the Aude region of France (Resi 2005). During the Medieval period much Continental work in particular was of a religious nature (Muller 1980, 10).

Other similar-looking materials that have been used as substitutes for jet (and, in some cases, exploited in their own right) include lignite, which is also a wood-derived substance; cannel coal; and oil shale. (The last two contain inorganic material as well as diagenetically-altered plant remains.) Often it can be hard to tell the difference between these materials by eye and various scientific methods have been used to differentiate them, some – such as petrological thin-sectioning, oil immersion reflectance microscopy (Allason-Jones & Jones 1994) or compositional analysis using neutron activation analysis (Pollard & Bussell 1981) – involving destructive sampling, others (including X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF)

and X-raying: Hunter et al 1993; Davis et al 2015) being non-destructive. Indeed, it has been possible, using XRF, to differentiate between Whitby jet and Iberian jet (Hunter & Russell 2001). While it has not been possible to undertake analysis for the current project – and while a non-destructive programme of analysis is highly recommended – nevertheless it is not unreasonable to suppose that the various jet-like materials are likely to have been treated materially in the same way as jet during the Medieval period.

Eight jet or jet-like pieces in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Table 1, Nos 69-76) have been given a Western Islamic attribution presumably on art-historical grounds, but on the face of it there is no reason why they should not be of a British origin. It would be particularly useful to determine their material using XRF analysis.

The functional groupings and their distribution

The material can be divided into three functional groupings: non-disc and disc forms of playing pieces, and dice.

Playing pieces i) Non-disc forms (Table 1, Nos 1-76)

This largest of the three groups comprises 76 pieces. Thirty-seven of these are pegged *hnefatafl* pieces. The majority of the remaining are certain chess pieces and probable chess or *hnefatafl* pieces. They fall into three groups: plain abstract, decorated abstract and figurative pieces. Seventeen plain abstract pieces (Table 1, Nos 38-44, 60, 62, 65-8, 71-4) comprise sixteen pawns (several previously suggested to be for *hnefatafl*) and one bishop. Twenty-one are decorated abstract pieces (Nos 45-59, 61, 63, 69-70, 75-6): one fragment of a possible gaming piece, four pawns (one previously identified as for *hnefatafl*), four kings or queens, six rooks, four knights, one knight or bishop, one knight or rook (fragment). The figurative category is represented by just one piece, probably a *hnefi* or king piece for *hnefatafl* (No 64). It has no provenance, coming to light in a country house sale in Suffolk around 2009, subsequently submitted as an enquiry to Colchester Museum Service and its current whereabouts are unknown. The majority of these non-disc form playing pieces are British finds in shapes that are well known in Britain and on the Continent in other materials (wood, bone, ivory, stone, rock crystal, and metal), though generally less elaborately decorated (see, for example, Kluge-Pinsker 1991; Baart 1977; Riddler 1995; Chapman 2005.) Some of the apparently non-British pieces have no known provenance, and thus are not necessarily of non-British origin (notably the eight pieces in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, described as ‘Western Islam[ic]’, Nos 69-76), while the dice and discs from Trondheim and Dublin described below (Nos 86, 88, 100-2) could all have been made in York and could have travelled through Scandinavian contact networks. Resi (2005), Shetelig (1944) and Petersen (1940) have previously argued that a range of jet artefacts found in Norway demonstrate contacts (including monastic links) with the east coast of England – particularly Yorkshire and Lincolnshire – in the Viking and later Medieval periods.

The theory that chess was introduced to Britain through Anglo-Norman lordship (Riddler 1995) is given some support from the more limited evidence from Scotland. A bone, abstract knight from the Scotto-Norman stronghold of Rothesay Castle, Bute (M A Hall 2011, 151, fig 6.3) is no earlier than the 12th century. The piece is in the collections of Bute Museum and comprises a tapering cylindrical form with an upper projection representing the horse's head. An ivory chess piece of abstract form, probably a king or queen, on display in Orkney Museum, Kirkwall, is unlikely to predate the 12th century. It was recovered from Mounthoolie Street in Kirkwall in 1974; later excavations (McGavin 1982) established that this was part of the later Medieval expansion of the town, with the earliest deposits being of 15th-century date. There is also an abstract ring-and-dot-decorated 19th-century find of an antler king or queen from the graveyard of the parish church in Coldingham, Berwickshire, now in the collections of NMS (Noble 1894; NMS H.NS 30). But the jet material from Scotland also helps to tell a wider story. In particular the late dating of the abstract bishop (a faceted, tapering piece with a curved head terminating in two horn-like projections representing a bishop's mitre) from Perth, from a 14th-century context (Fig 1; M A Hall 2011, 151, fig 6.4; Cox 1996, 782), suggests not just that we should move away from the notion of abstract chess pieces being Anglo-Saxon (as suggested by Riddler), but also that we must accept a longer chronological span for them beyond the Anglo-Norman period, through the 12th to the 15th centuries, with ongoing use of abstract pieces alongside figurative ones rather than the former being replaced by the latter in a neat succession. This is supported by the seven abstract bone and antler chessmen from London, all dated between *c* 1200 and 1400 (Egan 1998, 291-3), and it is also implied through the presence of both abstract and figurative pieces in the Lewis hoard of gaming pieces (Caldwell et al 2009).

It is far from clear-cut to distinguish between the pawns that were used for chess and for *hnefatafl*, especially as the protracted transition in popularity from *hnefatafl* to chess, broadly spanning the 11th to the 13th centuries, saw them being played in the same households and probably given as parts of the same gift sets. Arguably the most likely *hnefatafl* or other *tafl* variant pieces are the pawn from Bawdsey, Suffolk (No 63; Fig 6) and the king piece also from Suffolk (?), now in private hands (No 64). The Bawdsey pawn was a casual find with no archaeological context but decorative elements give a plausible date in the mid-tenth century (Wilson 1970; Margeson 1997, 23); indeed, elements of its decorative repertoire can be found on Pictish sculptures in Scotland of the late ninth century (Lye & Fisher 1981; ECMS i, 358, no 995; ii, 113; Close-Brooks & Stevenson 1982, 39). The king piece is a sitting male figure, shown apparently pulling his beard. A small perforation through the figure from top to base may indicate that it had been the upper portion of a pegged piece. The base is cut away to form a rectangular, concave area possibly indicating that the figure was fixed to a further base of some description, perhaps reflecting a different phase of use. It has a Scandinavian look to it, especially the beard-pulling which can be paralleled on an 11th-century ivory piece for *hnefatafl* from Lund, Sweden, a tenth-century bone piece (also *hnefatafl*)



Figure 6. Pawn for *hnefatafl* from *Bawdsey*, Suffolk. © Ipswich Museum Service

from Baldursheimur, Iceland and a 12th–13th century ivory chess king, now in the Louvre, Paris (McLees 1990, 58, figs 23–4). We cannot rule out that such king pieces were used interchangeably in *hnefatafl* and chess.

Playing Pieces ii) Disc forms (Table 1, Nos 77–89)

This is the most opaque group as there are no absolutely certain gaming pieces within it, although a playing function seems highly credible. Of the 13 pieces recorded, two are from York (Nos 77–8), six are from Whitby (Nos 79–84), one is unprovenanced (now in the British Museum: No 85) and the remainder are single finds from Trondheim (No 86), Reiestad (No 87), Dublin (No 88) and Bute (No 89).

No 77 is from the site of the Vicars' Choral, Bedern, York (Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2952; R A Hall 2002, 2685–8), and while it could easily be a religious medallion/amulet given its crucifixion imagery, there is no means of suspension; such a gaming piece would not be unexpected in the context of a secular College of Vicars' Choral. The piece is unstratified but the association with the Vicars' Choral means it cannot be earlier than the 13th century. The earliest is the half-disc from York (its upper surface cut with concentric grooves), dated stratigraphically to between the ninth and the 11th century (no 78; Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2567). The six discs from Whitby – two with simple incised crosses – come from unstratified midden deposits and may date to the 11th–13th century (Peers & Radford 1943, fig 24). The disc from the Isle of Bute (Suidhe Hill, a suggestive

folkloric name meaning Fairy Hill) was found casually during tree planting operations. It bears a graffito design on each face of three irregularly incised concentric circles. In one instance the circles are linked by radiating horizontal lines, creating a spiral-like effect. The form and the graffiti suggest a possible Early Medieval date and invite comparison with the extensive corpora of graffiti from St Blane's and Inchmarnock (both Bute) (eg Lowe 2008, 151-75) and the Scottish series of symbol and other graffiti-bearing stone discs and worked bone of Pictish association. Those disc pieces catalogued here are generally identified as for the 'tables' group of games (most recognisable today as backgammon); the dating of most makes identification as draughts pieces unlikely, but it is possible some could have been used as merelles/morris counters.

Playing Pieces iii) Dice (Table 1, Nos 90-103)

There are twelve cubic dice and one each of oblong and long-hexagonal form. The cubic dice comprise seven of what Brown classified as Type A (1990, 692-3), on which the opposite faces (1:6, 2:5, 3:4) add up to 7 (Nos 90, 91, 93, 96, 100-102), and four (Nos 92, 95, 97 and 99) of Type B, in which the opposite faces (1:2, 3:4, 5:6) add up to 3, 7 and 11 (a sequence of odd primes which increase by 4). Brown observed a chronological distinction: Type B dates to the 13th century or later, while Type A started earlier (continuing the typical numbering on Roman dice) and overlapped in date. Brown speculated that Type B might be a northern European type, in contrast to the more widely dominant (Europe and the Mediterranean area) Type A, remarking that the type A method of numbering is the one described in Alfonso the Wise's *Book of Games*: this was written in 1283, and the majority of Type B dice did not appear until after this date. One of the York dice (No 97) is published as Roman (Allason-Jones 1996, 49) but the numbering convention of 1:2, 3:4 and 5:6 is not, as far as I am aware, known on Roman dice and it is more likely to be a Medieval die of the 13th century or later (MacGregor 1985; Brown 1990).

The unusual hexagonal long die (No 94) comes from a 15th-century context at the lordly residence of Sheffield Manor. The opposite faces are numbered 1:6, 2:3 and 4:5. I have not been able to identify a comparable die from Britain, and it adds to the growing number of atypical dice, including a bone hexagonal die from Whichford Castle, Warwickshire, England (M A Hall 1999) and a lozenge-shaped bone die from Dryslwyn Castle, Wales (Caple 2007, 265). Both bear comparison with forms of dice illustrated in Alfonso's book, used in various versions of tables (Schädler & Calvo 2009, 267-9, reproducing folios 82v, 84v and 85v). None of the jet dice are directly associated with jet chess pieces but the uses of jet dice could have included moving chess pieces (of jet or other materials). There is a form of long die known from later Medieval and post-Medieval Britain, the 'Long Lawrence' or 'Lang Larence', but this was more a teetotum (a long die mounted on an axle so that it could be spun) for a Put and Take game: it was generally marked with a series of symbols (various patterns of crosses and strokes) over eight (sometimes four) sides. The name may have derived from the resemblance of some of the strokes to the bars of the gridiron on which St Lawrence was martyred

(Gomme 1894, 326-7; Parlett 1999, 26-7). The closest parallels for the Sheffield long die are geographically very distant. Since the Medieval period a range of bone long dice have been used in the Near East (especially Iran) and India, where the type is still in use today (Parlett 1999, 26). Trading, military and pilgrimage links could explain the presence of this type of die in Britain.

The distribution of all the jet pieces is strongly weighted to the east coast from Aberdeenshire down to Suffolk, suggestive of coastal trade networks. This pattern holds for all the classes of playing piece, not just the chess pieces. The key concentrations are in Norfolk and Yorkshire which, given that the principal source of jet was around Whitby, is of little surprise; it also lends support to the idea that most of the pieces are indeed made of jet. The material could have spread inland from Whitby, or further afield via east-coast trade routes to sites such as Perth, Norfolk, and perhaps round the south coast to reach Winchester. Perth had well-attested links with both Yorkshire and East Anglia in the Medieval period. For example, Nicholas of Scarborough, burgess of Perth, witnessed charters for Inchaffray Abbey in 1245 (Lindsay et al 1908, nos 70 and 72), and Waryn of Whitby, also a Perth burgess, did homage to King Edward I in 1296 (*Cal Doc Scot* ii, 197). Among Perth merchants, a group with the name Lenn or Lynn must themselves (or through their ancestors) have come from the Norfolk port of Lynn (later Kings Lynn), which specialised in exporting grain (Duncan 1973, 47). Such links are further attested, for example, in the shared design traits of the seal matrices of Lynn and Inchaffray Abbey, four miles west of Perth (Glenn 1999, 151-60). There are two significant outliers, Bristol (Nos 45-6) and Warrington (Nos 38 and 48). Given Bristol's significance as a Medieval port, the two pieces from there do not seem out on a limb, while Warrington is a relatively easy overland trip from Whitby (if the material is indeed Whitby jet, and if we assume such a direct and straightforward transit). The Warrington and Bristol material gives a clear indication of a more widespread use of such material, not confined to east-coast trade links.

Changing lives: amulets, heirlooms and spindle whorls

It was long thought that jet was a solidified resin, like amber (Muller 1980, 4). Because of the similarity in lightness and electrostatic properties between jet and amber the Romans called jet 'black amber' (ibid). This ability to carry a charge helped to create the perception that jet was magical (ibid). The medical, with a hint of magical, quality of jet is attested as early as the first century AD, when Pliny in his *Natural History* (book 36, chapter 34) wrote of *gagates* (the Roman term for jet):

Gagates is a stone, so called from Gages, the name of a town and river in Lycia. It is black, smooth, light and porous and differs but little from wood in appearance. The fumes of it, burnt, keep serpents at a distance and dispel hysterical afflictions; they detect a tendency also to epilepsy and act as a test of virginity. A decoction of this stone in wine is curative of toothache and in combination with wax is good for scrofula. (Quoted in Muller 1980, 3)

Its amuletic quality at this time is testified by its use for several Roman Medusa pendants found in York and elsewhere (Allason-Jones 1996, 15). The belief in its magical efficacy remained through the Medieval period and beyond. In Whitby Museum is a 14th-century jet cross that had been found on a witch post in a cottage at Egton, near Whitby. In the 19th century (and earlier) ‘curing stones’ of jet and jet-like materials were frequently used to treat animals. A large smooth round example, with a maximum diameter of 63mm, collected in Rannoch, highland Perthshire, now in the collections of Perth Museum (accession number 69), was a partly-worked pebble of cannel coal or canneloid shale, abandoned after being roughed-out for a ring or ring pendant. It is likely to be of Iron Age date, picked up much later and used as a healing stone for animals. When collected in the 19th century it was recorded as having been placed into water which was then given to sick cattle to drink.

The magical, medical and religious qualities of jet were recorded in Medieval lapidaries, notably the late 12th-century *De Lapidibus* of Bishop Marbode of Rennes, Brittany (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005, 89; Redvers-Jones 2003). Marbode extolled its efficacious properties if worn on the body or consumed in various ways. The book became very popular and its descriptions were copied into other texts, including some bestiaries. *The Aberdeen Bestiary* (Aberdeen University Library Ms 24) for example, written in England c 1200, includes a description of jet in the following terms:

Jet comes from Lycia. The better kind is found in England. When it is made warm it attracts straw; it burns in water; it is quenched in oil. Anyone who is wearing who suffers from a swelling between the skin and the flesh [ie dropsy] will benefit, if it is poured in. Ground and mixed with water, it fixes loose teeth in place. By means of inhalation in hot baths it restores menstrual flow. The odour given out by jet when it burns will, if inhaled, get rid of epilepsy, and it puts snakes and demons to flight. It helps those with an upset stomach; it is good for ringing in the ears; and it offers protection against spells; it is said to be a test for virginity. A woman who suffers from the flux, if it is not of the womb, will be healed by water in which jet has been soaked for three days. (McLaren 1995)

It is thus clear that jet was perceived by the Medieval mind as a suitable material for amulets, affording magical and religious protection (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005, 88-90; see also Pierce 2013 for discussion of a range of jet crosses). With respect to gaming pieces, the perceived material qualities of jet, the personal nature of gaming pieces and the linkage of games with divination would have made individual pieces suitable as amulets. One very clearly did serve in this capacity. A fragment of a probable chess piece from Bristol which had been re-cut as a pendant was found beneath the lower jaw of a male skeleton (aged 30-40) buried in the cemetery of St James Priory (Burchill 2006, 142, no 160). The same body had a bent coin placed on each of its shoulders, a further indication of amuletic practice relying on the altering of an existing object. (See M A Hall 2012 for a discussion of such coin use.) In addition, several of the jet rook pieces listed in Table 1 are perforated, presumably for suspension, which makes an amuletic, adornment function very likely. The jet rooks in question (Nos 51, 54 and 58) are from Weeting, Norfolk (Fig 7; Waterman 1959, 94); Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire (Dunning 1965, 60;

Kluge-Pinsker 1991, 151-2) and York (Rogers nd). In addition, pierced rooks exist in other materials:

- a wooden rook from Carlisle (the unpublished report held by Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, errs in calling it a bishop)
- an antler rook from London (Egan 1998, 292, no 959)
- a bone rook from Tempsford Park, Bedfordshire (Chapman 2005, 79-80)

A painted wooden rook from Novgorod (Rybina 2007, fig 21.1n, photo 28) is probably of 15th-century date and has an elaborate triangular opening at the base of the notch. This is clearly part of the design but this does not preclude it from also facilitating suspension. The only other pierced piece known to the author is an antler knight from Helpston, Cambridgeshire (Kluge-Pinsker 1991, 149, no A50; MacGregor 1985, 137-9). This has a round, well-worn hole about a third of the way up from the base. If worn suspended from the neck it would have hung upside down (although the right way up when observed by the wearer). The jet chess piece from Great Linford, Buckinghamshire (a king piece rather than the bishop suggested by Gower 1992, 166-8) has both original decoration of inlaid ring-and-dot and a lattice-work of lines applied post-manufacture. Wheeler (2010, 220) has taken this lattice-work as an indication of re-use as an amulet: 'Having been separated from its fellow chessmen, the piece may well have been adapted for a second life as a lucky amulet deriving its power not only from its much-prized jet but from its new decoration'. A fragment of a chess piece from Winchester (No 50) has traces of a similar lattice-work (but no ring-and-dot; Brown 1990, 704-5).

Jet is known for its amuletic qualities but the range of pierced pieces in other media suggests that the playing pieces themselves were deemed special, in particular the rook. The particular use of bishop pieces as amulets might not be unexpected given the perceived holiness of (some) bishops – their endorsement by



Figure 7. Chess rook piece from Weeting, Norfolk. © Norfolk Museums Service

God perceived as extending to their representations as playing pieces. Some pieces may have served as heirlooms, perhaps the favourite pieces of a family member, and there is a blurred boundary or overlap between an heirloom becoming an amulet and vice versa.

There is no contradiction in playing pieces having an amuletic/apotropaic function within a social Christian context where a wide range of amulets are known, some of which incorporate pre-Christian folk mentalities (for a wider discussion of the overlap between gaming pieces as amulets and heirlooms see M A Hall 2014, 229-37). The jet *hnefi* or king piece from Suffolk discussed above clearly reflects pagan belief about the material's – and the piece's – amuletic/apotropaic value. The style of the piece, with its crossed legs and beard-pulling, is shared by several similar figures in whale bone, walrus ivory, bronze and amber from the Scandinavian world, all likely to be king pieces for *hnefatafl*. Examples include Baldursheimar, Iceland; Rohalte, Denmark; Rällingo and Lund, Sweden, and Černaja Magila, Ukraine (Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, cat nos 71, 77, 182, 602 and 309 respectively), along with an unprovenanced Scandinavian example in the Louvre, Paris (Wichmann & Wichmann 1964, 284 cat 44; M A Hall 2014). They are all 10th–11th century in date and their additional amuletic function is suggested by the identification of four of them with the god Thor and one (Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, cat no 186) with the god Freya. The beard-pulling is a symbol of growth/fertility, while the example from Ukraine comes from an elite burial, bringing with it an after-life dimension.

In his analysis of the piriform *hnefatafl* pieces from excavations in Trondheim, McLees (1990, 190-1) noted that several had been re-worked in a manner suggestive of re-use as spindle whorls. All the items in question are of walrus ivory. There are no obvious examples of such re-use in the jet pieces identified here, though some of the discs from Whitby may have been intended as spindle whorls; a jet whorl may have been perceived as imparting apotropaic protection to the spinning activity.

The colour black

On the chess board the fundamental purpose of colour is to distinguish one side from the other. The opposition of black and white is one that is very familiar to us and seems natural. There are two different types of black abstract gaming piece – plain, and inlaid with tin, orpiment or calcium carbonate. It is perfectly possible that such contrasting pieces could have opposed each other on the chess-board, as well as being alternate black choices to range against bone, wood or stone pieces of another colour. At Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire, both a 'black' jet piece and a 'white' bone piece were found (Dunning 1965), albeit from different parts of the site and in different sizes, but they support the idea of an opposition between black and white sets. But on the chess board the opposition of black and white was not fixed: well beyond the 12th century, chess was played with red and white pieces as much as with black and white pieces. Red, black and white predominate in the illuminations of the Alfonso Codex: the depictions of chess show black and white

pieces on red and white/pale chequer boards. (See Schädler & Calvo 2009, 85-190 for reproductions of the illuminations; for a discussion of colour in chess see M A Hall 2014.)

In attempting to assess the range of colour meanings in chess and other playing pieces – in this instance, primarily the black of jet – it is necessary to have some sense of the wider context of such meanings, which were never fixed and have always been subject to a variety of interpretations (Pleij 2004). To summarise Pleij, in the Middle Ages colour was closely connected with the person or object bearing it, for colour said something significant about the very essence of a person or thing. This colour connection could be revealed (by the application of light and heat) or applied at will by adding layers of colour, and therefore layers of meaning, to an object. Before the 12th century Pleij's analysis suggests that culturally the dominant colours were red, white, and black. For centuries red, not black, was thought to be the opposite of white. The devil and demons were often portrayed in red and black, but we should note there was no single fixed colour for them – they came in all colours, including blue eventually. The Medieval penchant for showiness was based on ethical, aesthetic, medical and scientific considerations, all elements of a pervasive theology, meaning that colour was viewed as an important part of God's grand design, set down in nature. Because of their divine power of expression, specific colours could be linked to certain social classes or age groups. Extravagant use of colour provoked jealousy in the less fortunate and many clerics increasingly blamed the devil for this colourful distortion of Creation. The anti-colour movements presumably explain the rise in the popularity of blue, whose reflection of heavenly hues made it a very otherworldly colour. Black soon joined blue as a means of expressing earthly abnegation, extreme asceticism, deep sorrow and supreme humility. Black and blue became the colours of princes and of the urban aristocracy. Bright colours gradually came to represent worldly pleasures, which every civilised God-fearing person was supposed to avoid. Black, dark blue and later white became non-colours, deployed to defeat the devil and his arsenal of colourful weapons. Is it possible that part of the attraction of black gaming pieces was as an ascetic gesture – helping to put a serious, intellectual stamp on chess, perhaps, as a piece of anti-frivolous rhetoric, designed to deflect clerical censure? Certainly by the 15th century black was a very fashionable colour for the upper nobility with connotations of a retreat from public exposure, respectful silence, and penitence, in part deriving from its chivalric use as symbol of the mournful, rejected lover.

The purpose of this excursion into Medieval colour is to demonstrate that there is no set group of meanings that remain fixed in time and context. However, there may be allusions to be teased out if, for example, we compare the social status of sites where pieces are found with the available range of meanings. The mentalities displayed in castles, for example, are likely to have been different from those in monasteries, although one has to allow that the individuality of the people using the pieces at either type of site makes it very hazardous to suggest straightforward uniformity in this respect. Can we, then, really get beyond the shared mentality of enjoying the game?

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Appendix

Table 1 (following pages). Jet and jet-like gaming pieces from Europe, primarily Britain. Only Nos 40 and 42-4 have been scientifically identified as jet (by the National Museums Scotland laboratory) and 41 as haematite (by Perth Museum & Art Gallery). No 62 has been scientifically identified as shale by York Archaeological Trust. The remaining items have, at the time of writing, only been identified by visual examination. The term tafl is used to encompass hnefatafl, fitchill and their variants

	TYPE OF PIECE	DATE AD	CONTEXT	PLACE	REFERENCES
i) Playing pieces – non-disc forms					
1-14	Pawns for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–5th C	Hillfort (elite settlement)	Traprain Law, East Lothian (Scotland)	Curle & Cree 1921, 72, 83; Cree & Curle 1922; Hall 2007, 47
15	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	6th–7th C	Hillfort (elite settlement)	Mote of Mark, Dumfries & Galloway (Scotland)	Curle 1914, 11-12; Laing & Longley 2006, 104, 120
16	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	4th–7th/9th C	Settlement (broch)	Howe, Orkney (Scotland)	Ballin Smith 1994, 188
17-30	Pawns for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–5th C	Burial (?) or hoard	Hill of Crichtie, Aberdeenshire (Scotland)	Callander 1927, 245; Ralston & Inglis 1984, 57-8
31	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–3rd C	Settlement (fort and broch)	Hurly Hawkin, Angus (Scotland)	Henshall 1982, 231
32	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–7th C	Hillfort	Kemp Law, Dundonald, South Ayrshire (Scotland)	Kay 1963, 23
33	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–7th C	Hillfort (beneath Medieval castle)	Dundonald, South Ayrshire (Scotland)	Hunter 2006, 78-9
34	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–7th C	Unknown	Culbin Sands, Moray (Scotland)	Unpublished but seen on display in Dunrobin Castle Museum by MH, 2015
35	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	3rd C	Roman fort	South Shields, Tyne & Wear (England)	Hunter 2006, 78-9
36	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–7th C	Iron Age settlement	Merthyr Mawr, Bridgend (Wales)	Hunter 2006, 78-9
37	Pawn for <i>tafl</i>	2nd–7th C?	Hillfort	Dinas Powys, Glamorgan (Wales)	Alcock 1963, 179-7, fig 39.4
38	Chess (?) pawn; plain abstract	11th–12th C	Urban (castle)	Warrington, Cheshire (England)	Kendrick 1853; 1856, 180-1; Harrison 1896, 24; Bu'Lock 1972, 63
39	Chess pawn; plain, abstract	12th C	Urban domestic	Great Yarmouth, Norfolk (England)	Rogerson 1976, 166; Gower 1992, 167

	TYPE OF PIECE	DATE AD	CONTEXT	PLACE	REFERENCES
40	Chess bishop, plain, abstract	13th–14th C	Urban domestic (backlands)	Perth, Perthshire (Scotland)	Cox 1996, 782; Hall 2002, 298
41	Chess pawn (?), plain, abstract	15th C	Urban domestic/industrial (backlands)	Perth, Perthshire (Scotland)	Not published in final report (Cox 1996)
42	Chess pawn (?), plain, abstract	14th–15th C	Rural/unknown	Ancrum, Borders (Scotland)	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</i> 64 (1929–30), 9; Hunter & Russell 2001, 120 (table 6)
43	Chess pawn (?), plain, abstract	14th–15th C	Rural/unknown	Merton, Borders (Scotland)	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</i> 64 (1929–30), 9; Hunter & Russell 2001, 120 (table 6)
44	Chess pawn (?), plain, abstract	14th–15th C	Rural/unknown	Whitehaugh, Borders (Scotland)	Hunter & Russell 2001, 120 (table 6)
45	Chess piece fragment, decorated, abstract	11th–12th C	Urban domestic	Redcliffe Street, Bristol (England)	Gower 1992; Jones 1986
46	Chess king or queen (?), decorated, abstract	12th C	Urban monastic (grave)	St James Priory, Bristol (England)	Burchill 2006, 142; Jackson 2006, 76
47	Chess king or queen, decorated, abstract	c 1250–1400	Rural domestic (farmhouse)	Great Linford, Herts (England)	Gower 1992, 166–8
48	Chess knight, decorated, abstract	10th–12th C	Castle (urban)	Warrington, Cheshire (England)	Kendrick 1853; 1856, 180–1; Harrison 1896, 24; Bu'Lock 1972, 63
49	Chess knight, decorated, abstract	13th C	Urban tenement plot	Hull, Humberside (England)	Evans 2012, 45
50	Chess knight or bishop, decorated, abstract	13th C	Urban domestic (town house)	Winchester, Hampshire (England)	Brown 1990, 704–5
51	Chess rook/castle, decorated, abstract	12th–13th C?	Unknown, rural	Weeting, Norfolk (England)	Waterman 1959, 94
52–3	Chess king or queen, decorated, abstract	11th–12th C	Unknown, rural (manor house?)	Thelton, Norfolk (England)	Manning 1872, 354; <i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London</i> (second series) 3 (1867), 385; Bryant 1915, 266; Riddler 1995, 101–2
54	Chess rook/castle, decorated, abstract	12th C	Monastic rural (frater/dorter area)	Rievaulx, North Yorkshire (England)	Dunning 1965, 60; Kluge-Pinsker 1991, 151–2 (A53)
55	Chess rook or knight, decorated, abstract	12th–13th C	Monastic urban (midden)	Whitby, North Yorkshire (England)	Peers & Radford 1943, 70
56	Chess rook/castle, decorated, abstract	1066–1200 /13th C	Monastic urban (redeposited)	Whitby, North Yorkshire (England)	Jennings et al forthcoming
57	Chess rook/castle, decorated, abstract	11th–12th C	Urban	Nessgate, York, North Yorkshire (England)	Kluge-Pinsker 1991, 153–4 (A55); Waterman 1959, 94
58	Chess rook/castle, decorated, abstract	12th C	Urban (castle ditch)	York Castle, York, North Yorkshire (England)	http://www.mondes-normands.caen.fr/angleterre/archeo/Angleterre/stone/chess.htm , accessed 19.3.2016
59	Chess knight, decorated, abstract	Unstratified Medieval	Urban	Union Terrace, York, North Yorkshire (England)	Gower 1992, 167; Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2567

	TYPE OF PIECE	DATE AD	CONTEXT	PLACE	REFERENCES
60	<i>Hnefatafl</i> /chess pawn, plain, abstract	9th–13th C	Urban	Coppergate, York, North Yorkshire (England)	Gower 1992, 167; Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2567
61	<i>Hnefatafl</i> /chess pawn, decorated, abstract	9th–11th C	Urban	Coppergate, York, North Yorkshire, (England)	Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2567
62	Chess rook/knight, plain, abstract	11th–16th C	Urban	Coppergate, York, North Yorkshire (England)	Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2567
63	<i>Hnefatafl</i> /chess pawn, decorated, abstract	10th C	Rural (?)	Bawdsey, Suffolk (England)	Wilson 1970; Margeson 1997, 23
64	<i>Hnefatafl</i> king, figurative, plain	10th–12th C	Unknown	Suffolk? (England)	Unpublished
65	<i>Hnefatafl</i> pawn, plain, abstract	Late 11th–early 12th C	Urban	Trondheim (Norway)	McLees 1990, 188
66	<i>Hnefatafl</i> pawn, plain, abstract	11th–12th C	Urban	Trondheim (Norway)	McLees 1990, 189
67	<i>Hnefatafl</i> pawn, plain, abstract	12th–16th C	Burial mound	Brimsåy (Norway)	<i>Stavanger Museums Årbok</i> 1944, 34–5; Resi 2005, 101
68	<i>Hnefatafl</i> /chess pawn, plain, abstract	Medieval	Urban	Skagen 3, Stavanger (Norway)	<i>Stavanger Museums Årbok</i> 1944, 34–5; Resi 2005, 94, 100
69	Chess/ <i>hnefatafl</i> pawn, decorated, abstract	9th–14th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452524?pos=3&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
70	Chess/ <i>hnefatafl</i> pawn, decorated, abstract	9th–11th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452525?pos=4&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
71	Chess/ <i>hnefatafl</i> pawn, plain, abstract	9th–11th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452390?pos=5&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
72	Chess/ <i>hnefatafl</i> pawn, plain, abstract	9th–11th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452392?pos=8&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
73	Chess/ <i>hnefatafl</i> pawn, plain, abstract	9th–11th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452391?pos=9&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
74	Chess knight, plain, abstract	8th–10th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452519?pos=1&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)

	TYPE OF PIECE	DATE AD	CONTEXT	PLACE	REFERENCES
75	Chess knight, decorated, abstract	8th–10th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452038?pos=6&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
76	Chess king, decorated, abstract	8th–10th C?	Unknown	'Western Islam' area	http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/452222?pos=7&rp-p=20&pg=1&ft=jet+chess (accessed 19/3/2016)
ii) Playing pieces – disc forms					
77	Tablesman/ draughtsman (?)	Unstratified Medieval	Urban/ecclesiastical	Vicar's Choral, Bedern, York, North Yorkshire (England)	Gower 1992, 167; Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2567
78	Tablesman (?)	9th–11th C	Urban	York, North Yorkshire (England)	Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2952; Hall 2002, 285-8
79-84	Tablesman (?)	11th–13th C?	Monastic (urban) (unstratified midden)	Whitby, North Yorkshire (England)	Peers & Radford 1943, 74
85	Tablesman / draughtsman (?)	13th–16th C?	Unknown	Unknown	Unpublished, British Museum, 1915, 1208.169 (F Ransom collection)
86	Tablesman	12th–13th C	Urban	Trondheim (Norway)	McLees 1990, 234
87	Tablesman/ draughtsman	12th–16th C	Urban	Reiestad (Norway)	<i>Stavanger Museums Årbok</i> 1940-4, 59, fig 5; Resi 2005, 101
88	Tablesman	11th C	Urban	Dublin (Ireland)	Unpublished, NMI, Dublin (E122:13484)
89	Tablesman (?)	8th–11th C	Rural	Suidhe Hill, Bute (Scotland)	Unpublished, Bute Museum (ROYBM A00-14)
iii) Dice					
90	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	12th C	Rural domestic (house)	Cullykhan, Aberdeenshire (Scotland)	Greig & Greig 1989, 286
91	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	Mid-16th C	Urban/ecclesiastical	Wolvesey Palace Winchester, Hampshire (England)	Brown 1990, 694, 699-701
92	Die (cubic) [1:2, 3:4, 5:6]	Late 18th C	Urban – ecclesiastical (graveyard)	Winchester, Hampshire (England)	Brown 1990, 694, 699-701
93	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	c 1290–1375	Urban domestic (timber hall)	Beverley, East Yorkshire (England)	Foreman 1991, 122, 188
94	Die (long) [1:6, 2:3, 4:5]	14th–15th C	Rural domestic (manor house courtyard)	Sheffield, South Yorkshire (England)	Unpublished, excavation archive held at Sheffield Museum
95	Die (cubic) [1:2, 3:4, 5:6]	12th–13th C	Urban domestic	York, North Yorkshire (England)	Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2949
96	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	12th–13 th C	Urban domestic	York, North Yorkshire (England)	Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2949
97	Die (cubic) [1:2, 3:4, 5:6]	13th C or later	Urban domestic (?)	York, North Yorkshire (England)	Allason-Jones 1996, 49 (published as Roman but numbering convention suggests Medieval)

	TYPE OF PIECE	DATE AD	CONTEXT	PLACE	REFERENCES
98	Die (cubic) [6:1, 5:2, 4:3]	13th–15th C	Rural domestic (manor house)	Weoley Castle, Birmingham, West Midlands (England)	Mould 2011, 21
99	Die (cubic) [1:2, 3:4, 5:6]	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown (UK?)	Unpublished, British Museum 1888,0719.127 (Londesborough collection)
100	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	c 1275	Urban	Trondheim (Norway)	McLees 1990, 239
101	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	c 1275	Urban	Trondheim (Norway)	McLees 1990, 240
102	Die (cubic) [1:6, 2:5, 3:4]	c 1275	Urban	Trondheim (Norway)	McLees 1990, 240
103	Die (oblong) [1:6, 2:5,3:4?]	c 1050	Urban	Dublin (Ireland)	Unpublished, NMI, Dublin (E122:9804)

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