

Pictish Art

Or “Dragons and Griffins and Bears, Oh My!”

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Kim Iverson Headlee (M)
Natania Barron, Mena Nizam,
Jonathan “JD” Davenport, Brian Grinnell

INTRODUCTION

- Created by people the Romans called Picti (“Painted People”) in what is now Scotland
- Most art survives as stone carvings; also jewelry and cave paintings
- Several iconic symbols include comb & mirror, V-crescent, Z-rod, cauldron, salmon, and “Pictish Beast”
- Purpose of earliest stones is unknown; could represent clan territories, marriages & other alliances, or religious significance.
Later stones are grave markers and battle monuments.



The Artisans

People the Romans called *Picti* (“Painted People”), aboriginal inhabitants of what is now Scotland.

No one today knows what they called themselves, though “Caledonian” (or some variant thereof, such as “Caledonach”) is likely.



Art survives as:

- Carved stones (vast majority)
- Cave paintings
- Jewelry

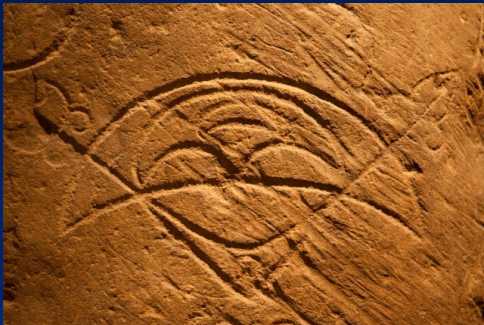
Tattoos are surmised based on contemporary Roman reports.

“The True Picture of One Pict”

Wood engraving circa 1585 by Theodor de Bry

(public domain images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The Art GEOMETRIC



Arch and V-Rod, Invereen,
Invernesshire, Museum of Scotland



Back of Meigle 7 by Simon Burchell (Wikimedia
Commons; Meigle Sculptured Stone Museum)



Early Cross, Dyce
4 stone, Dyce



Norrie's Law silver plaque;
photo by Johnbod,
Wikimedia Commons



Princess Stone a.k.a. Dunrobin 2, Dairy Park
(image courtesy of Pictish Stone Database)

The Art DOMESTIC



Cauldron detail of
Aberlemno 2 stone, Angus



Aberlemno Serpent stone (Aberlemno 1), Angus




Comb and mirror detail of Dunnichen
stone, Angus



Ax, tongs, wedge, and geometric
design; Abernethy, Perth. Ax and
wedge also interpreted as hammer
and anvil.

The Art MYTHIC



Pictish Beast
detail of
Meigle 5 by
Simon
Burchell;
Meigle
Sculptured
Stone
Museum,
image
courtesy of
Wikimedia
Commons



Hound and griffin on side panel of Meigle 26,
Meigle Sculptured Stone Museum



Dragon on front of Meigle 4, photo by James Canal,
Meigle Sculptured Stone Museum



Kelpies, Beast, and Z-rod on the Brodie
Stone, Wikimedia Commons



Dragon Stone, Portmahomack

The Art ANIMALS



Lying Deer, St Vigean's Museum,
Arbroath



Bear, Scatness,
Shetland Isles



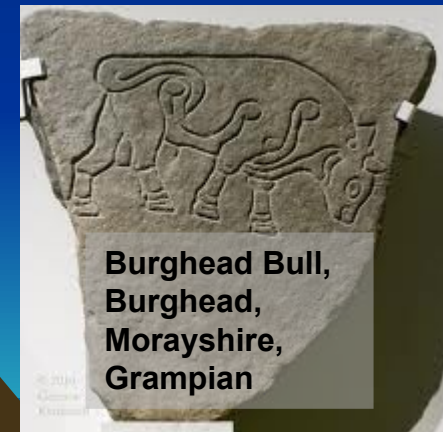
Horse on Inverurie 4, Inverurie
Wikimedia Commons



Dunadd Boar (enhanced),
Dunadd hill fort, Kintyre



Cat detail of Meigle 5, Meigle
Sculptured Stone Museum



Burghead Bull,
Burghead,
Morayshire,
Grampian

The Art PEOPLE



Clerics, detail of Invergowie stone, Angus, Pictish Stone Database



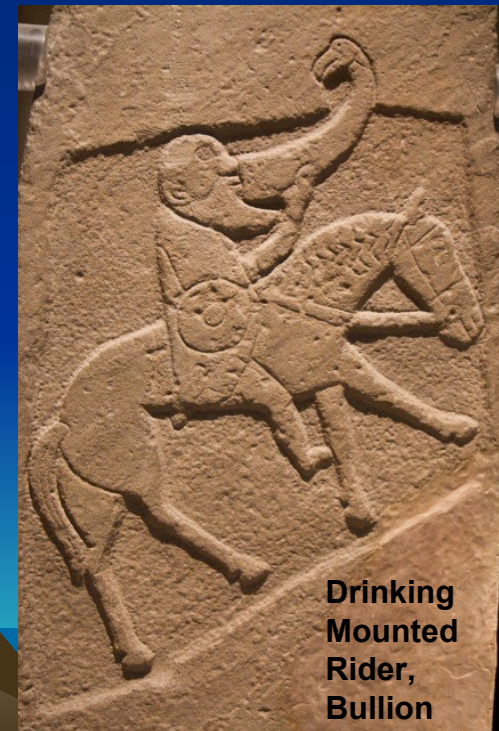
Pictish kings, detail of Brough of Birsay stone, Orkney



Detail of battle scene on Aberlemno 2, Angus



Pictish Queen detail on Hilton of Cadboll stone, image courtesy of Historic Scotland



Drinking Mounted Rider, Bullion

Class I

- Unworked stones
- Symbols only; etched
- No cross on either side
- Created in the AD 6th, 7th, or 8th century



Goose, Mirror,
and Mirror
Case on
Tillytarmont 1,
Pictish Stone
Database

Class II

- Stones have approximately rectangular shape
- Cross on one or both sides
- Symbols fill areas around cross(es) and are carved in relief
- Created in the AD 8th or 9th century



Dunfallandy Stone front, Pitlochry by Simon Burchell, Wikimedia Commons



Dunfallandy stone back, Pictish Stone Database

Class III

- No / few idiomatic Pictish symbols
- Most often recognizable as grave or battle markers, cross slabs, free-standing crosses, and composite shrines
- Created in the AD 8th or 9th century



Front and back of Inchbrayock stone, Angus; image courtesy of Pictish Stone Database

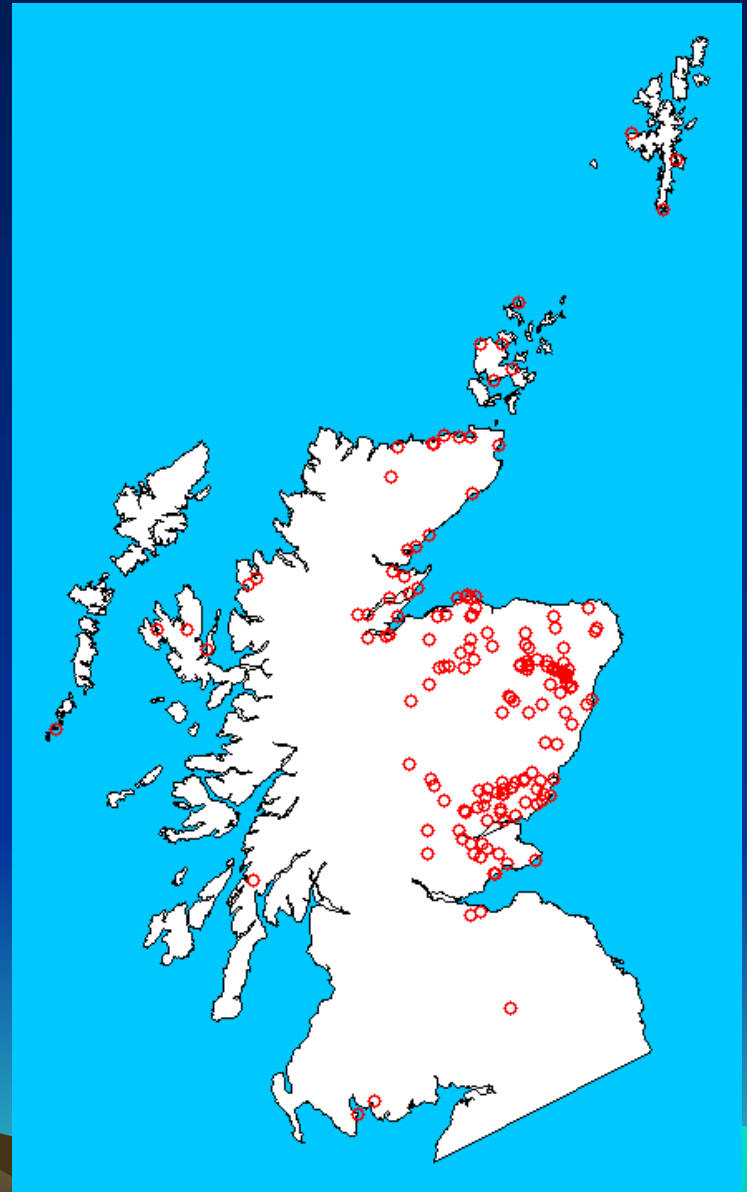
Stone Locations

Pictish Stone Database (University of Glasgow/Strathclyde) location map.

Red circles represent stone locations.

Online version is interactive:

<https://outreach.mathstat.strath.ac.uk/outreach/pictish/database.php>



Collections of Stones

- Dunrobin Castle Museum, Golspie — collection of over 20 Class I and II Pictish stones collected by the Dukes of Sutherland.
- Elgin Museum, High St, Elgin — large collection, largely from Kinneddar churchyard.
- McManus Galleries, Dundee. Collection of class I and III stones.
- The Meffan Institute, Forfar
- Meikle Sculptured Stone Museum, Meikle, near Forfar. Collection of 27 stones on permanent display; open 1 April to 30 September, and by appointment.
- Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh
- Montrose Museum
- Perth Museum, Perth — collection of 3 Pictish stones, St Madoes 1, Inchyra and Gellyburn.
- Pictavia, near Brechin
- St Vigean's Museum, Arbroath — collection of 38 Pictish and medieval stones. Includes the Drosten Stone, a class 2 cross-slab, one of only two Pictish symbol-stones to carry a non-ogham inscription. Open by appointment only.



Whitecleuch Chain

- Found in Whitecleuch, South Lanarkshire, central Scotland in 1869; one of 10 existing examples
- Created in the AD 5th–8th centuries
- 44 silver links in 22 pairs; 50 cm (~19.5 in); 1.8 kg (~4 lbs)
- Probably worn by a chieftain or priest for ceremonial purposes
- Clasp features double disc and Z-rod symbols



Whitecleuch chain (above) and clasp detail (left).
Images (c)2010 by “Catfish Jim and the soapdish” via Wikimedia Commons

Wemyss Caves

- Located on north shore of Firth of Forth near East Wemyss
- Bronze Age cup marks (circular indentations)
- Pictish Class I carvings
- Designs cataloged in Allen & Anderson's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903)
- 6 of 11 caves remain; not all contain carvings



Clockwise from left: Pictish warrior (Court Cave), boat (Jonathan's Cave), fish (Jonathan's Cave). Images (c) by Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society

Belsac Leather & Wood Art

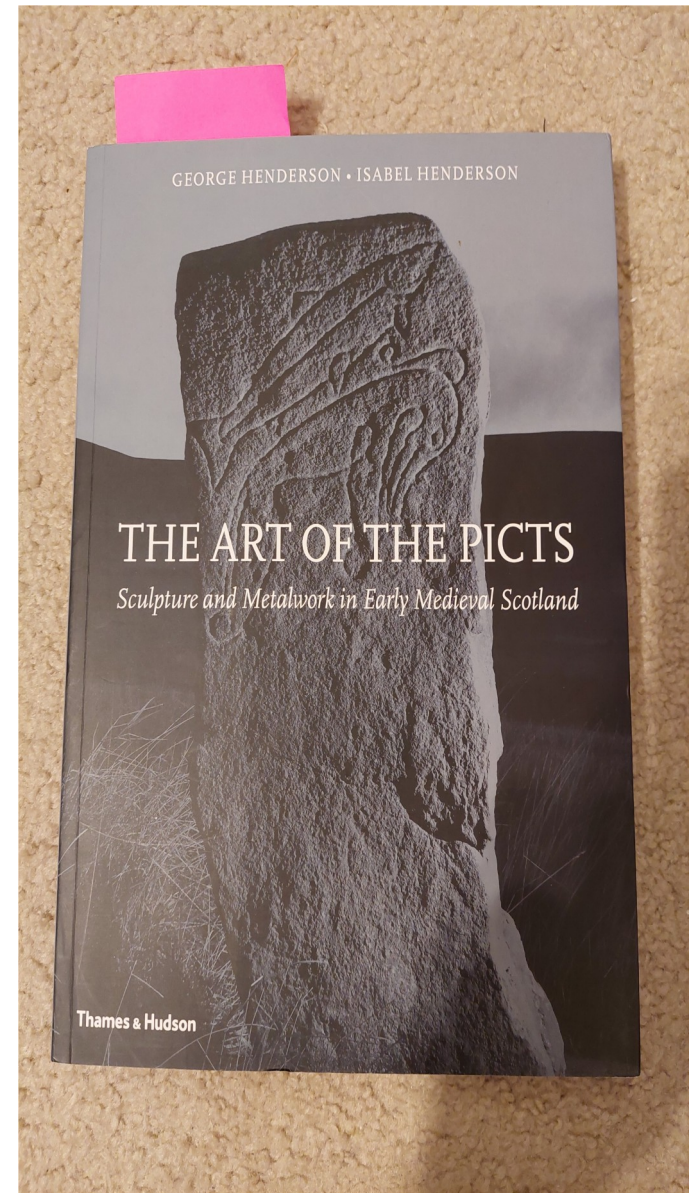
*Exploring the imagery
of the past with a
focus on early Britain.*

Belsac creates original
designs incorporating
ancient symbols and
images found in jewelry,
carving and manuscripts.

**He is best known for his
Homicidal Rabbit series.**

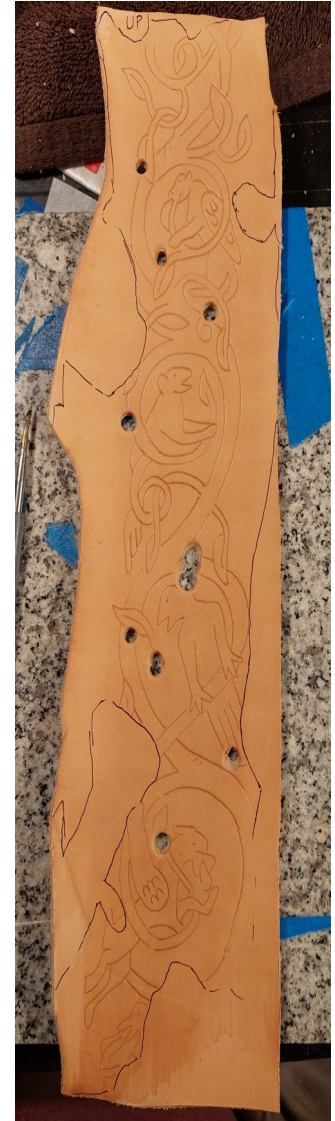
Brian Grinnell (Belsac) has been carving leather for 30 years. His work can be found in the 2025 Worldcon art show and at Norwescon every year.





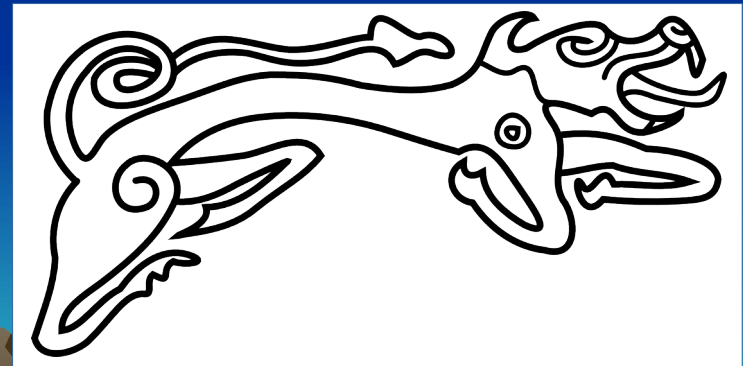
Most of my
source material
is found in
books

The Transfer Process





Adaptations



References

- **Dunrobin Castle Museum:** <https://www.dunrobincastle.co.uk/castle/#museum>
- **Elgin Museum:** <https://elginmuseum.org.uk/>
- **Historic Environment Scotland:** <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/>
- **McManus, The:** <https://www.mcmanus.co.uk/>
- **Meigle Sculptured Stone Museum:**
<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/meigle-sculptured-stone-museum/>
- **Montrose Museum:**
<https://angusalive.scot/museums-galleries/visit-a-museum-gallery/montrose-museum/>
- **National Museum of Scotland:** <https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-scotland/>
- **Perth Museum and Art Gallery:**
<https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/perth/perthmuseum/index.html>
- **Pictish Stone Database:**
<https://outreach.mathstat.strath.ac.uk/outreach/pictish/database.php>
- **St Vigean's Stones and Museum:**
<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/st-vigeans-stones-and-museum/>
- **Senchus (Wemyss Caves):** <https://senchus.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/pictish-carvings-at-the-wemyss-caves/>
- **Subterranea Britannica (Wemyss Caves):**
<https://www.subbrit.org.uk/db/1448708835.html>
- **The Kings in the North (general Pictish stone art trip planning):**
<https://www.tailormadeitineraries.com/post/discover-your-backyard-the-kings-in-the-north>
- **Undiscovered Scotland:** <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk>