

The Well-Dressed Pict

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The most simultaneously interesting and frustrating part about Pictish history is that it often seems that there is so little evidence to be studied. The Pictish period occurs at the very beginning of recorded history in Northern Britain, roughly 500-850AD, and the remaining evidence of that time and place is scarce. There are few definitively Pictish burials that have been excavated in modern times and there are no extant documents, paintings or illuminations from Pictish Scotland. This leaves us to extrapolate much of Pictish culture from stray artifacts, carved symbol stones, Pictish documents preserved in later sources, comments about the Picts in documents from other cultures of the time period, and educated guesses based on what the other peoples of Britain and Scandinavia were doing during the same period. Happily, there have been a few recent excavations, like the ones at Tarbat¹ and Rhynie,² that are starting to shed more light on the period. While direct evidence for Pictish clothing is extremely scarce and it is nearly impossible to say anything absolutely conclusive about Pictish dress, this need to carefully piece together the information that does exist makes for very interesting research. In the absence of extant garments, we must collect bits and pieces of evidence from Pictland and related areas in order to construct garments, nevermind a whole outfit. However, I do believe this jigsaw puzzle does come together to paint a colorful and beautiful picture.

Sources

The sources considered for piecing together Pictish garments include:

- Images on the Pictish Symbol Stones
- Textile and leather garments or garment fragments from or predating the Pictish period in Scotland
- Images in insular manuscripts (particularly those with Scottish ties, like the Book of Deer)
- Garments from contemporary cultures that had contact with the Picts, including the Irish, Anglo-Saxons (particularly the Northumbrians), and Scandinavians
- Textual referenced to garments

Materials and Methods

Both linen and wool were used extensively throughout Britain during the Pictish period.³ Linen is generally not found in Scottish finds because the soil conditions do not favor its preservation. In at least one case, there is a fabric where it seems that a linen stripe has degraded, leaving gaps in a primarily woolen fabric.⁴ However, there are impressions of weaves and oxidized cloth on metal objects that may be linen, but it is difficult to determine.

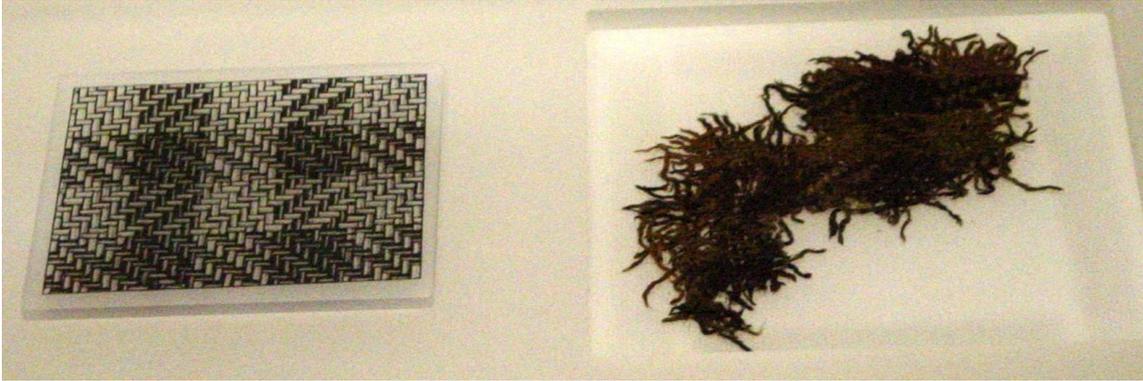
¹ Portmahomack

² Rhynie report

³ Henshall, other sources?

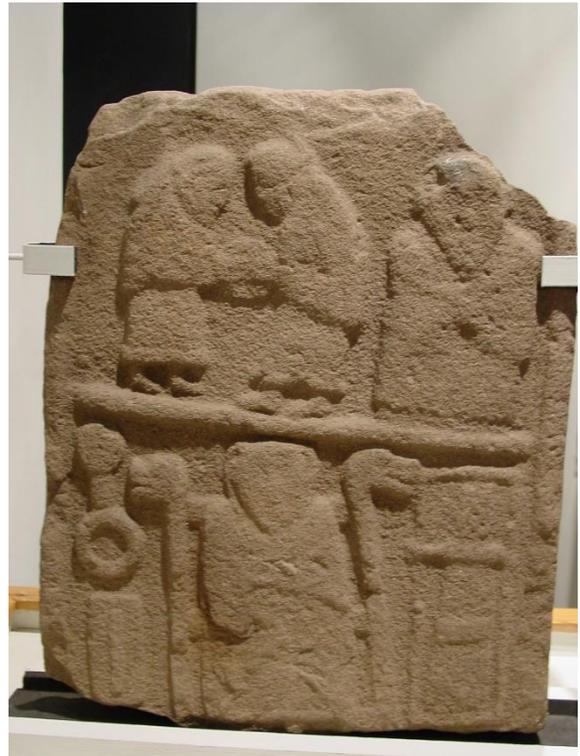
⁴ Henshall p2

Most examples of probable linen are tabby and most examples of wool are twill, but both linens and wools are known in tabby, twill, and even diamond twills.⁵



There are few fibers that survive from early Scottish sites and one of the most “significant” appears above – the Falkirk fragment, a third century find from Stirlingshire.⁶ (Apologies - The photo is taken in low-light, the fibers are black and light grey/white.) Silk was occasionally known to be used,⁷ particularly as trim, but I am unaware of any extant silk from Pictish contexts.

The weaving technology available to the Picts appears to be similar to that used by their contemporaries. One Pictish stone in particular is illuminating – Kirriemuir 1 shows a seated woman with a mirror and comb to her right and what appears to be a loom to her left. It has been argued that this is a large lyre, not a loom, but the Picts seem to prefer a triangular harp when depicting a stringed instrument, so I find that unlikely. Some people argue that the woman is spinning (scrutinizing the carving at the front of her dress, one can pick out elements that could be construed as a drop spindle) however, I think the evidence is too faint for absolute identification. However, if there is weaving, there would need to be spinning, so regardless of pictorial evidence, we have to assume the Picts both spun and wove.



⁵ Henshall, page 16, number 14

⁶ (Henshall, p 8.)

⁷ Silk for the Vikings

Garment Construction



With the lack of surviving garments, even less can be said definitively about the construction of garments. The most complete garment from early Scotland comes from St Andrew's Parish, Orkney. The Orkney Hood is dated to about 200-615AD and so may be earlier than the Pictish period, but evidence is so sparse it is hard to be picky. The entire hood is made of wool and the body of the hood is a 2/2 herringbone twill while the bands are tablet woven with two or four hole tablets. The fringe is woven as part of one of the two tablet woven bands and is as long as 11-12 inches. The primary construction stitches are running stitches, hem stitches, and overcast or whip stitches. Based on the wear on the fibers and that the fringed tablet weaving does not seem to be quite long enough, it seems that the fibers may be recycled from other garments. Jacqui Wood has performed an exceptionally detailed evaluation of this textile and her

reproduction of said piece which is available in [Sea Change](#) as well as for free on the web (see bibliography).

Colors

The colors that would have been easiest to obtain would have been those which naturally occurred on the garment fibers. For linens, a range of beige-y, oatmeal-y to whitish would have been naturally occurring to easily produced with bleaching. On woolens, sheep come in a lovely range of colors, including the golden brown and black we see on the St Andrew's Hood and the white and dark grey on the Falkirk Fragment.

Despite the common misconception that early clothing was always drab earthen colors, many colorful dyes are known from the early period in Britain and Europe. I am unaware of any color analysis of early Scottish fibers, but from Anglo-Saxon and other similar finds, we can anticipate the following dyestuffs and colors as at least being possible. Yellows could be produced by weld or dyer's broom. Woad produces a blue quite familiar to modern people – it has the same color-producing chemical as indigo, which is used to color traditional blue jeans. Madder produces a red that can range from pink to brick red to orange red. Browns can be obtained from oak and various nuts. Colors like green and purple would have been possible to obtain by over-dyeing one color over another and different shades could have been produced by either using more dyestuffs or overdyeing different colored wool. Rarer dyes include sea mollusks that are available off the coast of Ireland or lichen which produce a range of purples. Different mordants can be used to modify the results of dyes, producing a whole spectrum of colors. (See also Jenny Dean's webpage for additional historical dyes).

Below: dye samples from British Archaeological Reports 1351

1		undyed wool
2		indigo
3		madder (alum)
4		madder (alum), top-dyed with indigo
5		madder (alum), post-mordanted with iron salt
6		madder (alum), post-mordanted with copper salt
7		dyer's broom (alum)
8		dyer's broom (alum), top-dyed with indigo
9		dyer's broom (alum), post-mordanted with iron salt
10		dyer's broom (alum), post-mordanted with copper salt
11		oak bark (direct)
12		oak bark (direct), top-dyed with indigo
13		oak bark (direct), post-mordanted with iron salt
14		oak bark (direct), post-mordanted with copper salt

Garments

Tunics

From the images available on the Pictish stones, it seems that a tunic was the most common piece of clothing. While we do not see clear evidence for layering, it is likely that the Picts used a similar method of linen undertunic and woolen overtunic that we see in many early British contexts.

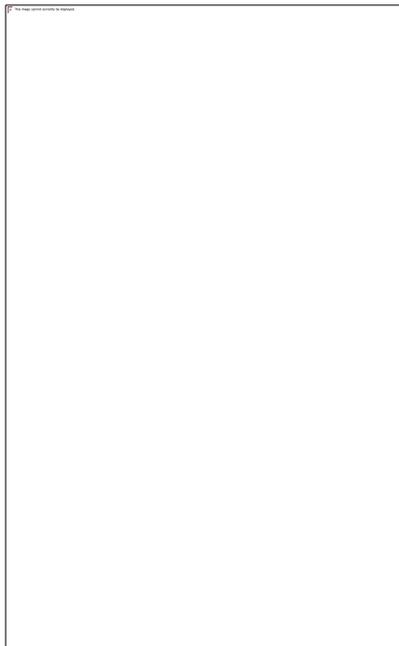
While the Orkney Hood is cut from fabric that was at least a meter wide, based on the weaving technology of the time, a width of about 24 inches was probably more common. Narrower fabric would require piecing and the artists carving the Pictish Stones oblige us by occasionally showing clothing details, including the seams of garments.

Side gores

Based on the evidence, there were a variety of cuts available to the Picts. Short triangular gores ended near the waist and a separate underarm gusset would have been necessary to prevent constant tearing (see Balblair below). Other side gores seem to narrow only gradually, if at all. These could have been wedge-shaped gores that came to a flat top where they joined the sleeve or they could have been triangular gores which continued up the body and onto the sleeve, terminating in a point before the elbow (see Golspie Stone below). The Mail Stone figure is a human-bodied, dog-headed figure with a very clearly delineated middle seam in the side gore, which suggests how the pieces may have been cut to conserve fabric. The double line along each seam may also imply that the seams were meant to be either flat felled or embellished with seam finishings, but embellishment of the basic form will be discussed in a later segment.



Balblair – short gore



Golspie – tall gore



Mail Stone

Probably the best argument for multiple gore styles is the Brough of Birsay stone which depicts three different men and each has a slightly different construction to his tunic.

Length

While men's tunics seem to be able to be anywhere from thigh to ankle length, women's tunics seem to be uniformly ankle length. (See Kirriemuir 1 above under Weaving and Hilton of Cadboll below under Hairstyle.)



Brough of Birsay – note the multiple gore lengths

Sleeves

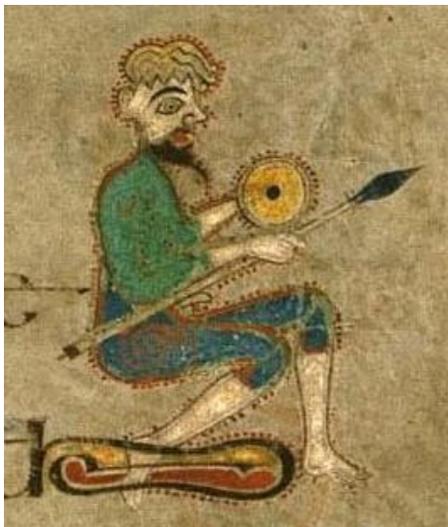
All the tunic sleeves seem to be long (to the wrist) and between tight and moderately loose. Some of the sleeves have thick decoration at the wrist and are tight-fitting, making the argument for sleeve closures or cuffs a plausible one.

Pattern

I have developed my own theory for a long-gored Pictish gown. It is simple and very fabric conservative and available at: <http://eithni.com/reference%20desk/pictishgown.doc>

Pants

The Pictish men either went barelegged or wore very tight-fitting trousers, it's impossible to tell from the symbol stones. There are some suggestions of leg wraps or pants (see St Madoes below under Outerwear), but the stones are usually too damaged to be sure. The below images are from the Book of Kells and show skin-tight trousers on some fellows that have sometimes been identified as Picts. It is possible that the Pictish Stones were painted and that the details of the tight-fitting pants were painted on, but no proof remains.



Outerwear - Cloaks, Coats, Hoods, and more...

A number of outerwear garments are seen on the Pictish Stones.



Eassie – Warrior with spear, shield, and cloak



Kirriemuir 2 – Striped shoulder cloak (top) and short coat with contrast (bottom)



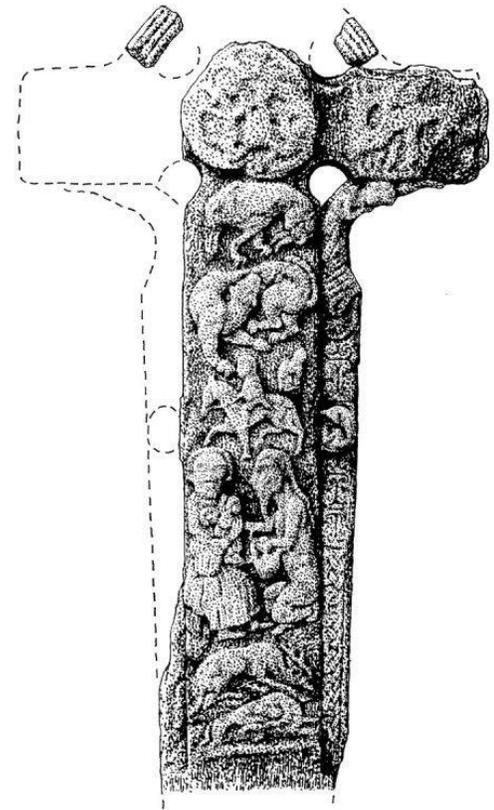
Left – St Vigeans 11 – Two clerics in coats with angled fronts. Some of the fibers appear to be striped or pleated.

Top – St. Madoes – Rider wearing a hooded cape, possibly a monk.

Coat

The construction of the coat appears to be very similar to the gown and undergown, except for being cut more generously in the body and the sleeves and split down the front. The bottom rider on Kirriemuir 2 wears a waist-length jacket with wide contrasting bands around the opening (discussed in further detail under contrast bands). The Monks on St Vigean's 11 wear coats with a front opening that ends just below knee length and the front hem is slanted so that it becomes full-length at the side and back. The Monifieth stone shows a woman in a full length coat or overgown, but it is unclear whether the coat is laying open at the hem or if it is also cut with a frontal slant. The similar stone from A'Chill which also shows a woman in a coat or overgown seems to imply a straight hem falling open. Based on my experience wearing a similar coat, I also believe it is likely to be a full length, straight-hemmed garment on those stones, but a slant-front coat is clearly also possible.

Left and center: Monifieth 2 (left: my photo, center: from the NMS website). Right: A'Chill stone (early Christian Scottish (near Skye), not Pictish). In both cases, the Madonna is wearing a coat and brooch and has interesting hair. On the A'Chill stone, the center opening has a zig-zag decoration on either side of the opening.

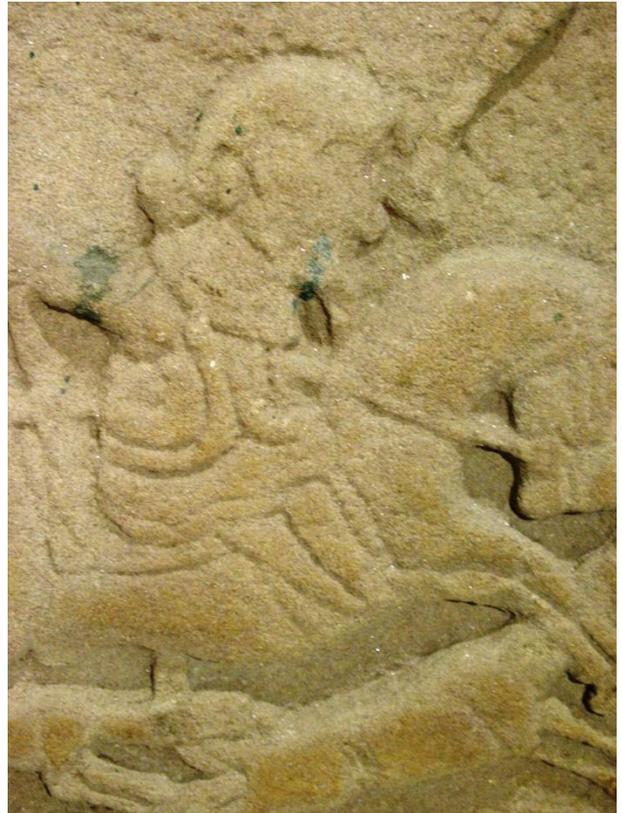


Garment Embellishment

Now that you have your lovely garments, how can you go about decorating them in a pleasing, but definitely Pictish manner? On many Pictish stones no ornamentation or details are evident, however, this could simply be due to the significant loss of detail from erosion. There is also a plausible argument that the stones were painted, and so such details could have been added by pigments, even if it is not included in the carved detail. There is also the possibility that some garments simply did not have any specific decoration. However, in several cases, embellishments are quite evident and you have several lovely options.

Contrast Bands

Contrast bands are strips of contrasting colored fabric around the edges of the garment, i.e., the hem, cuffs, and neckline. Good examples of contrast hems can be seen on Golspie, Birsay, and Balblair stones and Kirriemuir 2 has clearly defined contrast bands on a coat as well.



The evidence for a contrasting neck facing is more sparse, since in most frontal views the neckline is covered by a cloak and brooch and the neckline is not visible in profile views. However, on St Mary's Cross (currently in Brechin Cathedral), there is evidence of such a facing on the Virgin's gown. Additionally, looking at parallel examples from cultures with contact with the Picts, the use of a contrasting neck band on Pictish tunics are easily supportable.

Trim

Tabletweaving is certainly a known technology in the Pictish period and, while no example of Pictish tabletweaving survives, the stones show some pretty clear evidence of tabletwoven decorations on garments. Several Pictish stones show signs of either tablet weaving or similar decoration on cuffs and hems and some are even clear enough for the patterns to be discerned. Key and knotwork patterns are seen and other patterns, like stripes, may be represented. Some trims seem to include a fringe, like on the St. Vigean's stone below or the extant example on the St Andrew's Hood above.



Inchbrayock 1 – stripes at hem



Wester Denoon – knotwork at hem



Kirriemuir 4 – key at hem



St Vigean's detail of cast – band and fringe

See also the numerous other examples on the other pages of this documentation.

Embroidery

With no Pictish garments, there is no textile evidence for Pictish embroidery. However, excellent examples of embroidery are known from the Oseberg ship burial, the Mammen burial, St Cuthbert's mantle, and many other sources in the cultures that had contact with the Picts, so it is supportable that the Picts used embroidery as well. It is possible that some of the decorations at the hems and cuffs of tunics is embroidery as opposed to tablet weaving. Seam finishings are another possible form of decoration. There are examples of decorative seam finishings in the Oseberg ship burial and the doubled lines on the Mail Stone's tunic may be meant to represent seam finishing embroidery. However, if you want to stay clearly documentable, stick with the tablet-weaving for which the evidence is clearer.

Belts

There is scant evidence for Pictish belts, either leather or tablet woven, other than the odd find of a buckle. However, from the Pictish symbol stone it is clear that belts were indeed worn (see also the Golspie, Mail, Inchbrayock, and Brough of Birsay stones above). In some cases, it is even possible to observe the cinching effect of the belt and the slight blousing of the tunic, as with the Rhynie Man below.



Rhynie Man



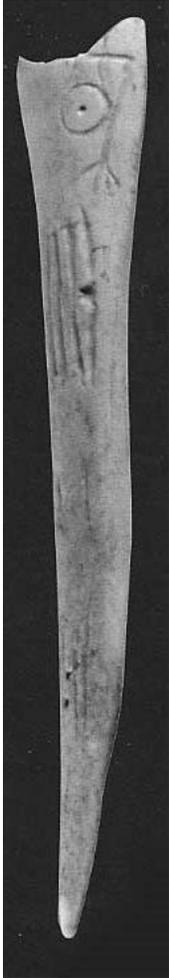
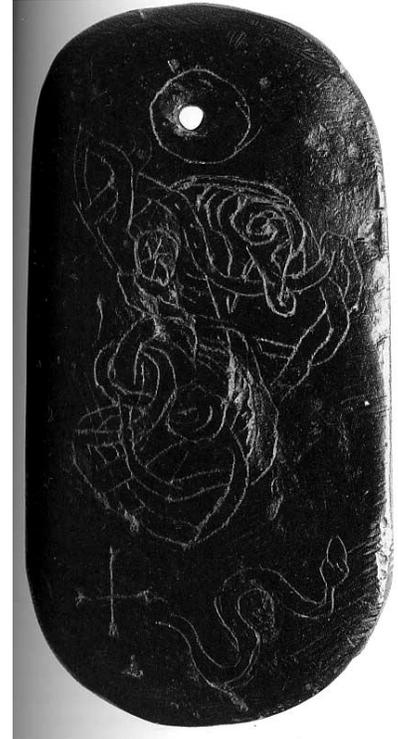
The Nigg Stone

However, there are no belt pouches evident on the Pictish stones. Small items may have been carried in shoulder bags instead. (See the section on Satchels.)

Jewelry

Carved Amulet

A particularly exciting find is a small, but definitely Pictish, brooch from Erchless, Breakachy. It is made from shallowly incised shale and is currently displayed in the Inverness Museum. On one face is a cross and knotwork that nearly fills the surface, much like on a full-sized cross-slab. The other side of the pendant is graced by a zoomorphic knot, a Pictish snake symbol, and a small cross.



Straight Pins

Straight pins could be used to fasten any number of garments as well as hairstyles. (Pennanular brooches will be handled separately.) Bone, wood, and silver pins are known from early Scotland and several of them are clearly Pictish as evidenced by their incorporation of Pictish symbols in the design. Left is the bone pin from Pool with a rectangular symbol beneath a partial Double-Disk and Z-Rod (image from *Art of the Picts*, page 171). Right is a silver pin from Norrie's Law. This style of pin is called a hand pin because it sort of looks like a hand's palm with the fingers curled above. One of the Norrie's Law pins has a Pictish symbol on the back, but most hand pins are decorated only with spirals, triskels and other geometric designs.

Amber Beads

There are several Pictish finds that include amber including the find from the Broch of Brodgar, included "great number of amber beads, from 3 to 4 diameter down to the size of a pea, including many of half-crowns." While that particular hoard has the Pictish amber beads we have tend to be well polished, not "chip" or "nugget" amber, but the quality range from bright yellow to dark red and clear to opaque.

Glass Beads

There are several extant examples of Pictish beads, including are currently on display at the Marischal Museum in Aberdeen National Museums of Scotland (see following page). Artifacts that are associated with glassmaking have also been recovered workshop in the Pictish monastery at Tarbat, Portmahomack.

Silver beads are apparently also known from Skaill, Orkney but I details on sizes, shapes, etc or photos of the beads themselves.



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Pictish Beads

Marischal Museum:

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN



UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN



Beads from the North-East

2nd century BC – 6th century AD

Marischal Museum



National Museums of Scotland



Amber bead from Croy



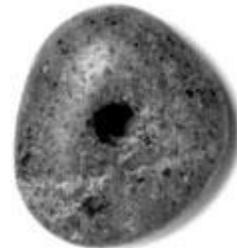
Amber bead from Sandness,
28 mm diameter



Glass bead from Croy



Amber bead from Kildonan



Amber and serpentine beads from Oronsay, Inner Hebrides

Penannular Brooch (Cartait)

Brooches appear on many, many Pictish stones and we are fortunate enough to have several examples of extant Pictish brooches as well. Indeed, there are enough examples to identify a few characteristically Pictish elements. They usually have an oval cartouche in the middle of the ring, “U” shaped decorative elements immediately before the terminals, and the pin is attached by bending its extended top back over the ring to form a bail. While very little of the Pictish language is known, the Irish Cormac’s Glossary tells us that the word for such brooches was “cartait” which is defined as “a brooch, i.e. in the Pictish language, i.e. a brooch the pin of which turns back/turns away.”



Above: Wester Denoon detail

Left: A brooch from the St Ninian’s Isle Hoard

Below: brooch from the Met – note the little birdies on the terminals!

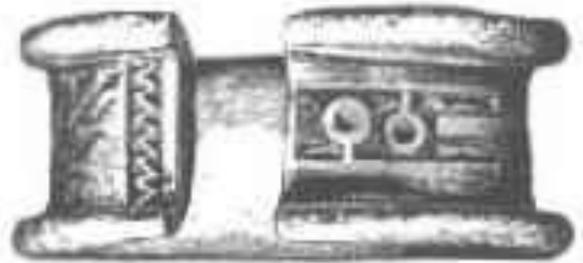
Penannular brooches were worn by both men and women. Men do not always appear with a brooch but it is usually placed on their shoulder when they do. On the other hand, figures that seem to represent women are usually shown with a very prominent penannular brooch in the center of the chest fastening a cloak or other overgarment.



Mysterious Jewelry?

Some of the most famous pieces of Pictish jewelry may not be jewelry at all!

Heavy Pictish chains like the Parkhill chain pictured at the right are found in the south of Pictish territory. They are made of pure silver, sometimes with enamel fill in the incised designs of the terminals. Such a costly item would be expected to be a major status symbol, however, while they clearly have Pictish symbols on their terminals, there are no images of their being worn on any of the extant Pictish symbol stones, even those depicting kings. Also, they do not occur in the northern range of Pictland at all, so there is some question as to their purpose and position in Pictish society.



Above: Whitecleugh Chain Terminals - Double-Disk and Z-Rod and Notched Rectangle, plus zig-zag ornament (image from ECMS Part I, page lxxxvii).



The Norrie's Law Plaques are another puzzling set of metalwork pieces. There are two practically identical small leaf-shaped silver and enamel plaques, but they have no clear purpose. They are carefully wrought out of precious materials, but there does not seem to be any method by which to attach them to any other item nor any clear purpose for them as an independent object.

The Norrie's Law Pins also present a slight enigma – there are two nearly identical hand pins, but the one that appears to be an imitation of the original has a floriated rod on the back, the only time a floriated rod appears independent of a Pictish Symbol on any surface.

Left: Norrie's Law Plaque from the National Museums of Scotland - Double-Disk and Z-Rod and Beast's Head - Silver with red enamel (Apologies – photo taken on about a 45 degree angle due to the restrictions of the case & reflections)

Shoes

In a field where so little is known about so many costume details, Pictish shoes are a great relief! There are abundant examples of Pictish carvings where the shoes are still reasonably clearly defined. Additionally, several examples of shoes from the early Scottish period have been found, including some from Iona. (The Iona shoes have been published and an outline of the extant upper is included in the journal article, providing an excellent pre-made pattern.)

While Pictish shoes appear to be quite similar to other early period shoes, many of them have a peculiar feature that is shared with some Irish shoes – a long tongue that sticks up the back of the ankle. Often this back tongue is also paired by a tongue to the front of the foot as well. These tongues seem to be purely decorative and are not used to actually attach the shoes to the foot or as bases for ties.



Detail of a shoe from Meigle 27

Shoes from St Andrews Sarcophagus

Front and back tongues



Shoe from Iona c.500-800 CE

No frontal tongue, ? back tongue



Shoes and tools from the NMS

Hairstyle and Headcoverings

Women

There are very few women depicted on Pictish stones, so it is somewhat difficult to say how they arranged their hair. To further complicate matters, women on the Pictish stones seem to either represent aristocratic ladies or the Virgin Mary, so there is no guarantee that their depiction is “typical” for all Pictish women. That aside, most of the women seem to be depicted with their hair long and loose, like on the Hilton of Cadboll stone (right) and the Kirriemuir 1 stone (above, under Weaving).



Since long pins that could be used to restrain hair have been found in Pictish contexts, it is also possible that they put their hair up in a bun or a knotted ponytail like seen on women on Norse stones and tapestries. The Inchbrayock 1 stone to the left may depict the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah.

Another may not hairstyle, Mary's Contrast (right, website), under may be an example of hair being the head, some sort of unusual artistic error. While it looks somewhat unlikely that an artist degraded exemplar without any looked “right” in the current social when the other details of the image



sort of clothing and symbolism.

option, which may or represent a real is that seen on the St Cross (above, under Bands), Monifieth 2 image from the NMS and a'Chill (above, Coat) stones. This pulled up to the top of headdress, or a simple outlandish, it seems would blindly copy a regard for what context, particularly represent an expected

The only women on Pictish stones I have found with definite headwear are these nuns (or possibly the three Marys at the crucifixion) from a cross shaft in the National Museums of Scotland. They seem to be wearing a band across their foreheads and a veil or hood over the hair. However, again, this needs to be interpreted with caution. This could be a sort of monastic veil, the artist's attempt to show women in ancient and foreign dress, or a convention copied from some imported work of art depicting the crucifixion.





Men

There are many more examples of men on symbol stones and likewise more information about their hairstyles and headgear. The default seems to be hair that is of moderate to long length and worn loose. However, much more elaborate variations were possible.

Left: Fragment from Elgin Museum

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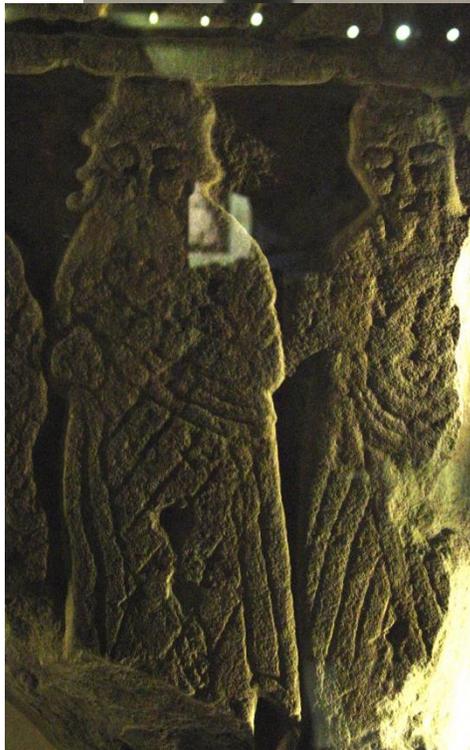
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men on the Brough of Birsay stone parade from left right with the man on the left having no facial hair very simply cut hair to the man on the right having a beard and a rather elaborate curled hairstyle, with the in the middle being intermediate on both length and dressing. The Kirriemuir riders have longish hair that in a pronounced curl. Many monks appear to have a tonsure, but some saints (like on the Nigg Stone or Dragon Stone, below) are blessed with abundant and curly hair. The fellow on the Golspie pin is somewhat fortunate, as his hairline seems to be receding quite alarmingly and his forehead is covered in wrinkles instead of hair. See multiple examples throughout handout.



Headgear seems to be limited to hoods attached to cloaks or capes. Helmets are seen on the Aberlemno II stone in the context of a battle, but seem to only be worn by the Northumbrians depicted and the Pictish warriors go bareheaded.

Above: Golspie Pin, NMS

Left: Apostles from the Dragon Stone, Tarbat, Portmahomack

Satchels

In many Pictish carvings, monks and travelers are seen to be carrying rectangular satchels. There are no extant bags from Pictland, but some similarly shaped protective book bags are known from Ireland, where they are known as budgets or polaires. These bags were generally made of leather and were highly ornamented. The book satchels are mentioned in a number of sources, including Adomnan's *Life of Columba* where a book and its protective satchel are specifically mentioned as belonging to a Pictish monk. It appears that a case for a single book was called a Polaire and a satchel for carrying multiple texts was a tiag.

However, unless books were exceedingly common in Pictland, there seem to be a disproportionate number of monks with satchels, and indeed, some of the bags appear to be larger than you would expect a book bag to be. Therefore, I suspect that in at least some cases, the bags could actually be travelers' packs which could have been made out of linen or wool and dyed or ornamented with embroidery.

A relatively common Pictish symbol is the imaginatively named "rectangle." Books were a precious commodity in early medieval Britain and clearly important symbols on the Christian Pictish stones. There is no way to prove that the rectangle symbol is a book or book satchel, but I think there is a very good argument in favor of such a reading.



Above: The Pupil Stone

Left: Polaire of the Book of Armagh (Irish, post-9th c?)



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A'Chill Cross from

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Online resources:

Database of Anglo-Saxon fibers, including linen cords and twill :

http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/clothing_eh_2007/index.cfm

Surviving Garments Database

<http://heatherrosejones.com/survivinggarments/index.html>

The National Museums of Scotland – Images on SCRAN

<http://nms.scran.ac.uk/>

LEMUR database for Marischal Museum

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CANMORE monuments search

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