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Perthshire Picts 1: Strathearn And Gowrie

More to visit and read...

Visit Meigle Museum - showcases Scotland's best collections of Pictish carved sculpture. For opening hours and information go to <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/meigle-sculptured-stonemuseum/>

Visit St Vigeans Stones and Museum - discover another fantastic collection of Pictish carved sculpture near Arbroath. <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/st-vigeans-stones-and-museum/>

The Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot Project (SERF). Website at: www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/serf

Rare Pictish longhouses made from turf, stone and timber, dating back to 500-1,000 AD, have been excavated locally by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust and Northlight Heritage. For further information on local early medieval buildings visit <http://www.glenshee-archaeology.co.uk>

Picts, Gaels and Scots. Sally Foster. London: Batsford, 2004.

Forteviot: A Pictish and Royal Centre. Nick Aitchison, Stroud: Tempus, 2006

This leaflet was produced as a legacy project of the Tay Landscape Partnership. TLP has engaged over 82,000 people with their natural, built and cultural heritage.

To find out more about the project and for more info, go to www.taylp.org

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St Madoes Stone. ©Perth Museum and Art Gallery, Perth and Kinross Council

Explorer Guide 4

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Set in Stone

The Picts are best known for their exquisite stone sculptures which form a key body of evidence that tell us about highly skilled craftsmanship, the process of conversion to Christianity and the political control of church and state.

Stones which carry only symbols are generally regarded as earlier, approximately 500-800 AD. They are often carved on un-shaped or minimally shaped stones and boulders.

The classic and unique Pictish monument type is the cross-slab. They come in a variety of sizes and combine the cross on one side (sometimes with human or animal figures) and either symbols or a combination of symbols and figurative scenes on the other. Broadly speaking these date between 700-950 AD.

Sculptures without Pictish symbols form the third grouping and encompass cross-slabs, freestanding crosses and recumbent monuments. These date from approximately 800-1000 AD. Carvings of just a plain cross or a cross with geometric decoration, often on a smaller scale (and possibly connected with pilgrimage or route marking) may have slightly broader date range of c. 600-1000 AD.

There is no hard and fast chronology for the sculptures. Whatever their type they gave intelligible messages to their audiences about belief in the world and the world beyond, about the holding of power and the landscape and about respect and commemoration for the dead.

Reading the Stones...

The art of the Picts is part of a wider insular tradition shared across Britain and Ireland and also in touch with Europe and beyond. Pictish sculpture has three key elements: the so-called Pictish symbols, which many see as a form of pictographic written language, figurative scenes of humans and animals and images of the Christian Cross, sometimes decorated and sometimes plain.

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The Picts – who were they?

Picts is the name given to the Late Iron Age / Early Medieval tribe people by the Romans who encountered these Picti, or "painted ones".

They lived in the North and East of Scotland but we know very little about their daily lives and society and much of the information we have comes from the carved stone sculpture that survives to this day.

The Picts were groups of native chieftoms who shared a common Celtic language and controlled much of Scotland. In Perthshire and Aberdeenshire, they were preceded by the Caledonians, whom the Romans famously defeated at the battle of Mons Graupius in 83-84 AD. Rome inflicted further heavy defeats on the Pictish enemy including in the early 3rd century AD under the Emperor Severus and in the 4th century AD under Theodosius.

The Pictish kingdoms emerged after the departure of Rome, and the southern part of Perthshire was amongst the most enduring and powerful of those kingdoms. Forteviot has been identified as a Pictish power centre and location of a Pictish royal palace. Abernethy was an important monastic centre and Score, with its Moot Hill, was a royal assembly place and location for the inauguration of kings, especially for Mons Graupius in 83-84 AD. Rome inflicted further heavy defeats on the Pictish enemy including in the early 3rd century AD under the Emperor Severus and in the 4th century AD under Theodosius.



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Visiting info

01 Abernethy

The museum and round tower are both **free entry**. For museum opening times go to www.museumofabernethy.co.uk

The key to the Tower can be obtained from the Museum or the tearoom opposite.

02 Moot Hill, Scone Palace

For opening times and admission prices go to www.scone-palace.co.uk

03 Perth City

Perth Museum and Art Gallery – **Free admission**. For details on opening times visit www.culturepk.org.uk

FREE!

FREE!

04 Forteviot

St Andrews Church & Forteviot New Cross. Please do not park on the main road; there is **free parking** available in the village car park. The church can be open by appointment. Please see www.aberdalgieandforteviot.co.uk for more information.

05 Dunning, St Serfs Church

Parking in Dunning village. For opening times and more information see www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/st-serfs-church-anddupplin-cross

FREE!

Forteviot

A sculptural inscription and Scottish and Irish chronicles identify Forteviot as a major Pictish royal centre from the early-8th century AD. Archaeological research has shown that it emerged as a regional ceremonial centre from the 8th century.

It was still a royal estate in the 12th century AD but its key significance appear to have been in the 9th century, particularly under King Constine (r. 790-820 AD) and King **Cináed** mac Ailpin (Kenneth MacAlpin) (r. 843-858 AD), who died there. Southern Pictland – today's Angus, Fife, Kinrossshire and Perthshire – formed the heartland of this Pictish kingdom, from which the kingdoms of Alba and then Scotland grew and expanded.

The kings were attracted to Forteviot not only because of the bounty of the land but also because of the cultural links to the landscape's ancestral power. There is striking evidence of a continuation over millennia of the area's importance as a focus for ritual and ceremony from the Neolithic and Bronze Age eras.

Text references and the sculptural repertoire from Forteviot give us tantalising glimpses of the presence of the royal palace and attendant church, but the precise location remains a mystery.

Sculpture to visit:

St Andrews Church, Forteviot.

Three fragmentary crosses survive and are displayed in this church. One of which is the Invermay Cross that marked

the southern approach but now only survives in these fragments and the cross-base at Invermay.

Village Square, Forteviot.

Contemporary carving by David McGovern. This cross was inspired by the rich designs found in the sculptures of Forteviot, Strathearn and Iona.

What does the name mean?

The name Forteviot or Fothuirtabaicht and its variants is recorded from the 9th century AD onwards. It's meaning is obscure but perhaps adapted from Pictish for 'territory' or 'slope, lowland, region'.

Dunning, St Serfs Church:

One of the most impressive pieces of Pictish sculpture that survives in Scotland is the Cross of Constantine. This 9th century AD cross dedicated to King Constantine (d. 820 AD), son of Fergus, King of the Picts, was originally located near Dupplin Castle and it marked the northern approach to Forteviot. Probably originally painted to represent a huge jewelled altar cross, it would have been a dramatic, highly visible feature in the landscape opposite the Invermay Cross, enhancing the King's authority as it looked out over Forteviot from a position on the valley slope above the banks of the River Earn.

The Dupplin Cross was moved for safekeeping and conservation to the nearby St Serfs Church, Dunning, where it can be visited in summer months. For more information see <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/st-serfs-church-and-dupplincross/>



©Museum of Abernethy

Abernethy Village

The Pictish Chronicle records that King Nechtan reigned from here in the 5th century AD and links him to the foundation of the church, with its early dedication to St. Brigid or Brigit (meaning 'exalted one'). Abernethy remained a centre of power as a monastery and probably a royal palace for several centuries. In 1072 AD, Malcolm Canmore, king of Scotland, and William the Conqueror of England signed a treaty right here. Malcolm kept his lands in England in return for paying homage to William.

Museum of Abernethy

The Museum is located in an 18th AD byre and stable, which was renovated in the 1990s AD to house the Museum. It probably stands within the lands of the early medieval monastery.

The Stones

Abernethy Stone No. 7:

This stone bears a plain cross and was found in the graveyard during the 19th century AD. It may have been a grave marker for one of the Pictish monks.

Abernethy Stone No. 9:

This stone is decorated on both sides. One is a very simple cross shaft, carved in high relief. The other bears a cross shaft with traces of interlace.

Abernethy Round Tower

One of only two Irish-style round towers to survive in Scotland (the other is in Brechin, Angus), this tower is thought to have been built in around 1100 AD, possibly as a bell tower for the neighbouring church. It stands 22m high, and the view from the top commands a fantastic vantage point of the surrounding town and landscape.

Can you see the Pictish stone? This 7th century AD carved stone was discovered close by and mounted onto the wall of the tower in the early 20th century AD. It bears the Pictish symbols of a crescent and V-rod and hammer and anvil, separated by a 'tuning fork'.

PURE WATER? You probably know that *aber* is a common Celtic word for a river mouth. In this case, it refers to the Nethy Burn. *Nethy* may come from a Pictish river name meaning 'pure one'.

Old Scone

Moot Hill

The Moot Hill in the Scone Palace Estate is located northeast of the current Palace and is an artificial flat topped mound thought to have been a royal assembly and ceremonial site for the inauguration of kings - a ceremony which included sitting on the Stone of Destiny. Scone comes into the historical record in the early 10th century AD, when Constantine II and Bishop Cellach meet there and confirm their hold on power. Like Forteviot, it probably combined a royal palace with a major monastic church site. The monastery was re-founded as an Abbey in the 12th century AD close to the Moot Hill.

Scone is Pictish in origin meaning 'place of the lump like hill' and probably refers to the inauguration mound (Moot Hill). Moot Hill itself is a corruption of Motehill denoting 'place of meeting'.

Scone Place is a privately-owned visitor attraction and there are admission fees to visit this site. For more information go to www.scone-palace.co.uk

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

St Madoes Stone

This is a large cross-slab that was originally found lying face-down at the churchyard in St Madoes in the 1830s AD. It was re-erected beside the kirk and in 1990 AD, after concerns for its condition;

it was donated to Perth Museum. Largely complete, it bears magnificent carvings on both faces and across the top. The front of the slab is dominated by a large, ring-headed, equal-armed cross filled with a range of interlace, key and spiral patterns, probably inspired by Insular manuscript art.

Filling the space around the Cross are several typically Pictish hunting dogs with wolf-like heads and spiral tails. Across the top of the Cross are two fierce lions facing each other; they may have guarded an element placed between them now lost.

The reverse of the slab has three cloaked figures on horseback, probably clerics. Below them are several Pictish symbols: a crescent and v-rod, a Pictish beast and double-disc and z-rod.

The place name St Madoes derives from the name of a 6th century AD Irish Christian saint, Aedán, in its intimate nickname form of Mo Aedóc ('my Aedán'). The presence of a churchband Pictish sculpture in St Madoes reflects the later spread of the cult of Aedán rather than any personal visit by the saint. The church was built on the site of an extensive Bronze Age and later cemetery, partly to make Christian an already sacred, pagan landscape.



St Madoes Stone.
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