A sculptured fragment from Pittensorn Farm, Gellyburn, Perthshire

Mark A Hall, Isabel Henderson and Simon Taylor

Introduction

A fragment of presumably Pictish sculpture was discovered at Pittensorn Farm and reported to Perth Museum and Art Gallery in August 1994. It was subsequently allocated to the museum after due treasure trove process. This paper sets out the circumstances of the discovery, describes the sculpture and offers an assessment of its artistic connections, function and location in its landscape.

Discovery

Chance and serendipity played a large part in the fragment coming once more to light, as with its companion pieces found in Gellyburn and now in Perth Museum and Art Gallery (Calder 1951) and the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh (Hutcheson 1886). It reminds us, if reminding is necessary, of the need for constant vigilance and, perhaps, for more sympathetic and better resourced field-work (in line with national and local research agendas).

In July 1994, Bob Jarvie (Principal Officer, Exhibitions, Perth Museum and Art Gallery) was seeking a garden shed. Placing an advert in a local newspaper, The Courier, elicited a reply from Mr Davidson of Pittensorn Farm, near Gellyburn, Murthly (see Illus 1). Mr Jarvie went to see the shed. Whilst discussing the transaction Mr Jarvie noticed a carved stone fragment lying beside the back door. Mr Davidson said he had found it within the last 5 years whilst gardening close to the west wall of the farmhouse (NGR: NO 0860 3905). Mr Jarvie suggested an official visit from Perth Museum and Art Gallery staff, to which Mr Davidson agreed. He was more than willing to part with the stone there and then, saying it had no real significance to him beyond looking nice enough to retain by the house. His ready cooperation was appreciated.

The following day Mr Jarvie informed Mike King (now with Fife Council Museums) who made a follow-up visit to Pittensorn Farm. On 1 August 1994, Mr Davidson gave the stone into the care of Perth Museum, pending treasure trove allocation, and the find was reported in Discovery and Excavation 1994 (see King 1995). By 30 January 1995 the Queen’s and Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancer had endorsed the Treasure Trove Advisory Panel’s decision of allocation to Perth Museum (with a reward valuation of £750) where it now has the accession number 1995.319. In 1996 a photograph was supplied, on request, to Dr I Henderson. Subsequently, at the request of Perth Museum, Dr Henderson provided a preliminary assessment of the artistic context of the Pittensorn fragment. From this it was clear that the piece was of sufficient interest to publish a fuller account not least because what survives does not appear to be part of a readily identifiable type of monument.

Description

The stone is a grey, cross-bedded sandstone, sculpted in relief, on one side only. The fragment as a whole measures 335mm (max) in height x 250–350mm in width x 100mm (max) in thickness. The carving is set within a frame varying in width from 20–23mm. The frame is incised with a single medially placed line. The surface of the carving is badly worn but the depth of the frame seems to match the depth of the figurative and animal relief carving. The relief carving is flat and level with the frame, that is to say the relief has been achieved by removing the background to the designs. The effect is of one-plane relief, but it is possible that the extent of the surface wear could be deceptive in this matter. For the description that follows see Illus 2 and 3.

The fragment is dominated by two confronted profile figures filling the uppermost angle of the framed area. They appear to be unclothed. Their heads touch the top of the frame and the back of
the left-hand (facing) figure touches the side edge of the frame. The backs of the heads of the figures are rounded in outline. Their noses are protuberant. The hair-line, ear and eye of the left figure are just traceable. Both figures have their arms raised to shoulder height. They grasp each other’s right wrists with their left hands. The left-hand (facing) figure may hold aloft a rectilinear object, possibly a
book, but the straight edges are more probably created by the folded over fingers of the figures’ clenched knuckles. The legs of the figures are elongated to form a six-cord plait with two animal-headed snakes that bite their genitals (a motif observed independently in November 1997, by Isabel and George Henderson, and, at a later date, by Ian G Scott). All the ‘strands’ of the interlace are double contoured. Although one cannot tell for how long the plait was extended, the balance of the motif would allow for it to be virtually complete. The legs of the figures would have ended in feet naturally disposed, moving respectively to the right and left. The nearside feet of the figures would have met in a heel to heel position at the centre of the bottom of the motif. The offside feet would be symmetrically placed, facing outwards, at the corners. The snakes’ bodies would have ended in simple points or possibly fish tails. Both types of loose-ended snake-plaits are found on an edge of the symbol-bearing slab at Rosemarkie (Allen and Anderson 1903, III, 67).

To the right of this motif there are remnants of further sculpture. The bottom right of the fragment shows the hindquarters and long coiled tail of an animal moving to the right. The monument would, obviously, at least have extended in height to allow for the completion of the legs of this animal. The space required for this would conform to the length of the extension of the legs and serpents interlace conjectured above. At the top right of the fragment is the haunch of a smaller animal whose curved tail touches the back of the right-hand figure. There may be carving between the two animals but the forms are not decipherable.

Artistic context

The motif of confronted profile men, holding each other’s wrists and with their legs interlaced, occurs
Illus 3. Drawings of the Pittensorn sculpture (Ian G Scott).
on a number of carvings and in decorated manuscripts of the early medieval period. The closest analogy for the Pittensorn pair is on one of the broad faces of a cross-shaft (no 19) in the St Andrews Cathedral Museum (Hay Fleming 1931, 22-5, frontispiece). Here the confronted figures clasp wrists and have interlaced legs (Illus 4). The proportions and disposition of the figures are very similar to the Pittensorn version of the motif. At St Andrews, however, the serpent assault is not directed at the figures’ genitals but at their heads. Two intertwining thick-bodied serpents attach their jaws, like suckers, to their crowns. This version of monstrous attack is paralleled exactly on fol
188r of the Book of Kells (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 58 (A.1.6)). The figures inserted among the letters of ‘Quoniam’, the first word of the gospel of St Luke, are depicted in varying degrees of entanglement and disarray. Within the letter ‘m’ two clothed, confronted, figures with legs interlaced have the tops of their heads locked in the jaws of fanged creatures. Elsewhere among the letters, half-naked confronted men with legs interlaced, pull at each other’s beards. At the top of the folio a lion-like beast has the head of a man well down into its throat (Meehan 1994, 72–3). Clearly the whole folio represents Hell-mouth and the fate of the wicked in Hell. A similar conjunction of the beard-pulling motif and a monstrous assault on the crown of a man by a fierce quadruped appears elsewhere in the manuscript (Meehan 1994, pl 80). There is little doubt that mutual beard-pulling had a sexual implication, although its significance may also have extended to a more general symbol of disordre in a personal and social context (Mérindol 1994).

Confronted, wrist-holding and beard-pulling fill the initial ‘Q’ of psalm 79 (80) on fol 73r of the Corbie Psalter (Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 18) a late 8th-century manuscript produced in a milieu familiar to the artists of the Book of Kells (Henry 1967, 65–6). The psalm concerns the distress of the people of Israel at their current state of confusion; they are as a vine devoured by a wild beast. The psalter initial was copied in a much later manuscript of the Gospel Homilies of Gregory the Great (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat 13392). In this later manuscript the tail of the ‘Q’ is made in the form of a fantastic carnivore with a human hand and leg hanging from its jaws. A fantastic quadruped functions in the same way in the Corbie Psalter, but details round its head appear damaged (Mérindol 1994, pls 103 and 104). Given the subject matter of the psalm, it too may have had a devouring image. The homily concerns the necessity of strict avoidance of dissoluteness and wrong-doing generally, for otherwise the divinely given dignity of a human being is impaired, and the consequence will be condemnation (Gregory the Great, 40 Gospel Homilies, 50–3). Elsewhere in his writing Gregory made it clear that being assaulted by monstrous creatures was part of that fate.

Wrist-holding pairs of men with interlacing legs are carved on a number of Irish monuments. The pair on a pillar at Banagher, Co Offaly, closely resemble the Pittensorn motif (Henry 1965, pl 93). A more loaded version of the motif, consisting of two pairs of beard pullers at either end of a mat of interlace made up of their legs, is carved, perhaps significantly, on the underside of the ring of the Market Cross at Kells. Harbison notes that the men appear to be holding severed human legs (1992, I, 104; II, fig 341). A less grisly and thoroughly naturalistic rendering of the theme is carved in high relief at the bottom of the shaft on the north side of Muiredach’s Cross at Monasterboice, Co Louth (Harbison 1992, III, fig 985).

The only other example of this motif in Pictish sculpture occurs on the north side of Suino’s Stone, where two pairs of adjacent figures with interlaced legs hold each other’s wrists and whose legs interlace to end in what may be fish tails (illus 5). These pairs appear more decorative, less close to the symbolic meaning of the motif. In contrast, the Pictish examples of single naked exhibitionist figures pulling their own beards and touching their genitals clearly relate to the symbolic type. The naked figure, typically positioned, on the narrow side of a fragment of a cross-slab at Applecross, Wester Ross, has his knees turned out and he covers his genitals with his right hand while his left hand holds his right wrist (Mac Lean 1997, 177, pl 1b). On the edge of an arm of a free-standing cross at Strathmartine a naked figure with knees splayed pulls his beard with his right hand while his left hand holds his right thigh (Henderson 1997, pl VII (a)). This figure closely resembles the enigmatic exhibitionist figure within the central column of canon 1 of the English manuscript known as the Rome Gospels (Rome, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barberini MS Lat 570). The figure pulls his beard with his left hand and touches his genitals with his right hand. Two long-necked winged dragons from above bite at his moustache while two from below nuzzle his testicles (Alexander 1978, illus 173). The motif recalls a panel on the Rothbury Cross where animal-headed reptiles bite at the underparts of little hominids and entrap a naked man (Cram 1984, I pt 1, 220, II pt 2 pl 1224). The only partially surviving naked figure on the edge of the accomplished Pictish carved fragment, Forteviot 1 (Alcock and Alcock 1992, 223, illus 4), the crown of whose head is being encroached on by a creature or creatures, is another example of this motif. The clothed figure, carved on a slab on the Hebridean island of Canna, with a serpent twining round his outwardly bent legs as it approaches the hem of his garment, is a later more restrained image of the same theme (MacLean 1997, 179, pl 4a). To our knowledge Pittensorn is the only version in early medieval art of the motif of the confronted men with interlaced legs that rejects the coded beard-pulling, selecting only the wrist-holding and the overt assault on the genitals, the latter apparent, as we have seen, in the single figure in the Rome Gospels, and implied by the protecting hands of the figures at Applecross and Strathmartine. The Pittensorn variant of the motif, however, falls comfortably within the existing repertoire of forms, so that one would hesitate to claim invention for the Pittensorn sculptor. All the images discussed above provide a firm context for this.
Illus 5. Detail from Suuno’s Stone, Forres, Moray (photo GDSH).
aspect of the Pittensorn fragment, both in meaning, the fate of the wicked, and in date, the mid-8th to mid-19th century. The fate of the wicked, in other guises, was an important and motivating element in the iconography of Pictish sculpture (Henderson 1997, 44–50).

Function

The back of the slab is rough and flaking but the left edge is very smoothly dressed. There is no sign of a tenon or rebate. It would seem that the fragment was part of a complete monument carved on one face only. The format, with the paired men fitted closely into the top left-hand corner and the animals moving off to the right, is more likely to have been a horizontal panel rather than an upright slab, but this cannot be determined with certainty. There is a surprising amount of Pictish sculpture carved on one face only, and the function or functions of such sculpture have yet to be discussed systematically. The smooth dressing of the edge resembles the treatment of the edges of a decorated panel at Rosemarkie (Allen and Anderson 1903, III, 85–6). The narrow framing across the top is reminiscent of a similar framing of the horizontal panel from Dull, also in Perthshire (Allen and Anderson 1903, III, 315) and on the panel from nearby Murthy, both now in the care of the National Museums of Scotland. The proximity of the Murthy carving tempts one to see the Pittensorn fragment as part of a panel belonging to a hypothetical corner-post shrine of which Murthy was a long panel, and this temptation has not been resisted (Henderson 1997, 47). The long panels with figurative carving in such composite monuments as the St Andrews Sarcophagus (Ritchie 1989, 38) and Papil (Moar 1944, pl IV) measure just over a metre and this is the length of the Murthy panel and probable length of the Dull panel which is incomplete at both ends. The carved area of the Murthy panel is approximately 400mm high, which compares well with the 335mm height for the possibly only slightly truncated Pittensorn fragment. None the less a considered statement about the relationship, if any, between the new piece and the Murthy panel must wait until the panel is available again for study.

Some observations on the art relations can, however, be noted. The Murthy panel shares a number of features with the heavily decorated recumbent gravemarker, Meigle no 26 (Allen and Anderson 1903, III, 303–5, fig 318). Both have the motif of a naked man looking back over his shoulder at a creature in pursuit of him. At Meigle the creature is a human-headed quadruped, at Murthy it is a bear with its forelegs stretched out ready to pounce on its victim. This position of the forelegs is used for one of the man-eating bears on the left side of the monument. The way in which its tail lies along its back is also paralleled. The pair of confronted hippocamps with their forelegs crossed, carved on the top surface of the recumbent, appears in identical form on the Murthy slab. The light incised patterning on the body of the bear gnawing at a human leg recalls the surviving incised designs on the body of one of the Murthy hippocamps.

The Pittensorn fragment also shares features with Meigle no 26. The low-slung coiled tail of the fragmentary beast at the bottom right of the fragment is arranged in the same way as the tail of the beast following the griffin on the right side of the monument. The head type of the naked men forming a swastika pattern, and of the severed human head between the bears, both on the left side, are markedly like the heads of the men of Pittensorn. The double contour lines of the interlace made up of legs and serpents at Pittensorn are paralleled on another monument at Meigle, no 4, where incomplete panels of serpent interlace at either side of the bottom of the cross-shaft show the same treatment (Allen and Anderson 1903, 299, fig 313a).

From these similarities of style and repertoire it is apparent that both sculptures, Pittensorn and Murthy, relate to what may be termed the Meigle ‘school’. There is also a similarity of quality, for the surviving motif at Pittensorn is laid out and carved in a controlled, professional fashion, the arms swinging out vigorously over the formal, static interlace.

Artistically the Pittensorn fragment is an important find. It may add to or complement the existing tally of composite monuments or conceivably be part of an architectural scheme. On balance, its iconography seems more suited to a funerary purpose than to a liturgical or space-defining one. The fragment’s physical relationship to the Murthy panel will be the subject of a later report. On the broader issue of its cultural implications, the occurrence at Pittensorn of the confronted men motif reinforces the view that sculpture at Meigle and sculptors working in the tradition of the Meigle workshop shared aspects of the artistic repertoire of the Book of Kells. This is not to imply that the Book of Kells was written and illuminated in a Pictish scriptorium but that works of art, whether in precious metals or on vellum, with similar repertoires, were in use in the Pictish church and available to skilled sculptors to draw on when meeting commissions from their patrons. Linear anthropomorphic motifs with symbolic intention, such as the Pittensorn pair, is typical of the Book of Kells (Meehan 1994) but there should be no hesitancy in contemplating the possibility that its appearance on Pictish sculpture is directly relatable to a lost native book art of the late 8th century produced at prestigious ecclesiastical centres (Henderson 1997, 37–8).
Landscape context: sites and artefacts

Pittensorn Farm stands atop a slight plateau, at 262ft (80m), immediately south of the River Tay, opposite Caputh, at the south-western limit of Strathmore. To the north, the land falls sharply away to the Tay in a series of stepped ridges. To the south and east the land dips and rises gently forming a wide, undulating landscape. Across the Tay to the north and west are the foothills of the Highland Line, the Tay’s exit from which is marked by Dunkeld. The dominating feature here is the River Tay, meandering but never slothful, an integral element in the region’s long story of human occupation. There are commanding views all around, and the present landscape south of the Tay is a mixture of large arable fields, extensive conifer plantation, remnants of the Murthly Estate landscaping, isolated pockets of deciduous woodland and one or two patches of remnant, pre-drainage marsh/peat bog. This landscape suggests Pittensorn may have been a relatively isolated piece of high ground suitable for occupation in being away from what was predominantly wet ground prone to river flooding. This in itself does not prove that the fragment under discussion originates from this immediate area but it is made somewhat more probable if we consider other evidence, material and place-name (see Illus 1 for places mentioned in the text).

Pittensorn Farm is approximately 1 mile from Gellyburn, Murthly where two other fragments of Pictish sculpture have been found over the last century. One is a cross fragment found in 1949, during house renovations at a property approximately half a mile from Pittensorn Farm, now in Perth Museum (accession number: 6/1949) (see Calder 1951, 174–5). The second piece – discussed briefly above – is the Murthly panel (NMS accession number: IB/101) found on the site of a former mill works (Hutcheson 1886, 252–6; Allen and Anderson, 1903, III, 305–6). Whilst a morning spent examining field walls, building exteriors and bridges produced no further sculptural fragments it seems likely that others remain to be discovered. Close by, at Moonsnade, near Cargill, two standing stones, one decorated in a Meigle style, were discovered circa 1793 only to be deliberately re-buried out of the reach of the plough (Simpson 1868, 66; Jervise 1861, 329). All the Gellyburn pieces are sandstone and it is appropriate to consider their geological significance, which does support a local origin.

The geology of this part of Strathmore comprises two distinct elements. It lies at the southern end of the Strathmore syncline comprising a cross-bedded sandstone sequence of lower Devonian age. To the north, between Caputh and Birnam, this sequence is cut through by the Highland Boundary Fault and beyond this complex fracture zone are much older metamorphic rocks of the Dalradian formation (marking the start of the Highland massif). The three pieces from the immediate Gellyburn area are all of micaceous sandstone consistent with the local sandstone series just described. The feasibility of local production of these sculptures is supported by the quarrying evidence. There are a number of sandstone quarries in the immediate area and their history has been assessed (Pitts and St Joseph 1985, 47). Whilst Kirkton of Lethendy and Middle Gourdie quarries are comparatively recent, that at Gourdie Hill has been identified as the site of a Roman quarry for Inchtuthill legionary fortress, with the possibility of further quarrying at Cargill (ibid, 47). There is a more immediate quarry in Gellyburn itself (NO 093 389) which has been identified as the probable source of the grey sandstone with which Dunkeld Cathedral was built (Armstrong et al 1985, 94). Quarrying activity, then, in the Roman and later medieval periods would suggest that the probability of local production for the Gellyburn sculptures is high. In addition M A E Browne (British Geological Survey, Scotland) has observed (pers comm) that exposed surfaces in the River Tay and its tributaries could produce adequate material for the production of such sculptures.

Outside the immediate Gellyburn locus there are further fragments of early medieval sculpture spread in an arc from Dunkeld following the northern side of the Tay to Cargill. In Dunkeld (approximately 6 miles to the NW) are three fragments: The Apostles Stone, a plain cross slab and a possible cross-base or architectural fragment bearing a single horse and rider (RCAHMS 1994, 89 and 96–7; Allen and Anderson 1903, 284–5 and 317–9; Ritchie 1989, 34). There is also a lost cross-slab fragment from Dunkeld (Allen and Anderson 1903, 319; Stuart 1867, II, pl 16, no 2). In the Tower of Lethendy (approximately 4 miles to the NE) there is a 10th-century Picto-Scottish slab formerly incorporated as a staircase lintel (Fisher and Greenhill 1974, 238–41) recently removed to the main house-block. Finally, near Cargill (approximately 4 miles to the east), in the garden of Balhome House, is a symbol stone discovered in 1884 (Hutcheson 1884, 313–8; Allen and Anderson 1903, 283–4). As this paper went to press N Robertson (pers comm) pointed out the early Christian cross added to one of a pair of standing stones at Staredan, near Bankfoot, just to the west of Pittensorn and see Coles 1908, 152–54). To this catalogue of sculpture we can also add the evidence of two brooches and the fragment of a third found at Clunie Castle (approximately 5 miles to the NE) all of 8th-9th-century date (Youngs 1989, 114–5; RCAHMS 1994, 90–1). This concentration of Pictish material within a 6 mile radius of Gellyburn, with a chronological span of
7th-10th century may be taken as indicative of the possibility of a site/centre in this mid-Tay valley area, though it is far from conclusive. The savage destruction of Dunkeld Cathedral at the Reformation provides an adequate context for the dispersal of fragments to Gellyburn, Lethendy and Balholmie (supported by the re-use contexts of all these pieces). A second piece of much later medieval sculpture at Tower of Lethendy – part of a graveslab which may have originated in Perth, its removal due to Reformation frenzy directed at the Carthusian priory (Fisher and Greenhill 1974, 240–1) – reminds us that pieces can indeed travel a good distance as a result of such activity. Movement of sculpture continues in our own time. Numerous examples have been moved to distant museums. In the late 19th century the Gask stone (Allen and Anderson 1903, 290–1) was moved from Gask to Moncrieffe House, and then, in 1974, closer to Moncrieffe House to make way for the M90. In 1978 a fragment of a 9th-10th-century cross-slab was found in Scone and is now in Perth Museum (accession number: 1979/5). This proved to have been brought there from a family home in Kinnoull, Perth. The same family had a grocery business based in North St John’s Street, Perth, adjacent to St John’s Kirk. The family may have acquired the cross fragment when the 1920s Lorimer renovations to the kirk took place (Lye and Fisher 1981, 521–3; Moloney and Coleman, forthcoming). It is important to sound this cautionary note but this does not preclude thinking about other reasons for the dispersal of sculpture. If the Pittensorn fragment is part of a Gellyburn / Murthly shrine it may be that the contents of that shrine were at one time removed (eg to Dunkeld), possibly rendering the shrine redundant. This could leave it open to re-use in various contexts (such as grave lining, or wall foundation) not necessarily a long way from its original context of use. At least one of the Applecross early monastic boundary crosses survived in situ until c 1870, when it was deliberately destroyed by a local mason (MacLean, 1997, 117). All of this is not to forget the attention the Dunkeld area received from the Vikings in the 9th-10th century (see Appendix II).

If we broaden our perspective a little, the likelihood of a local centre grows. Immediately to the ENE across the Tay (2 miles) lies the Roman legionary fortress of Inchtuthil, which shares its gravel plateau with a native fortress and burial site, with a post-Roman occupation phase. (Pitts and St Joseph 1985, 247–8). It has been suggested that these may have been elements of a Pictish caput (RCAMHMS 1994, 92; Foster 1996, 46–8). This suggestion is given further support by the name Inchtuthil, meaning ‘Tuathal’s haugh’ or ‘Tuathal’s inch’, (Watson 1926, 238; Pitts and St Joseph 1985, 39). There is no proven connection, but for AD 864 the Annals of Ulster record the death of Tuathal, abbot of Dunkeld and ‘prime-scop’ or chief bishop of Forthriu (Stuart 1867 II, 10). A minor, rather than a major caput seems more likely given its proximity to Dunkeld, ‘fortress of Caledones’ (RCAMHMS 1994, 89). Both Dunkeld and Inchtuthil are later Gaelic names for Pictish/native places. Hillforts to the NW – eg Kemp’s Hold, Caputh; King’s Seat, Dunkeld; and King’s Seat, Birnam – are all contenders for long-lived settlement into the early medieval period. To this we cannot add the Murthly Castle chapel dedicated to St Anthony the Eremite, as the dedication seems to be a later addition accompanying the renovation of an older chapel (NMR no NO 45 SE 14; Macaulay 1997, 33 and fig 3.7). Finally there are three other early medieval artefacts we need to bear in mind in considering a focus of activity in this area. In 1921 a disc-headed copper-alloy pin (National Museums of Scotland FC 234) was found at Blackhill House (midway between Dunkeld and Clunie). Laing (1973, 53–71) argues for a 9th-century date for this type but Newman (in Rideout 1995, 155–7) argues for an 11th-century date for its most accomplished form. A second pin though more certain is perhaps less helpful as it serves mainly to confirm Viking interest in the area. It is a bronze ring-headed pin (National Museums of Scotland FC 325) of well-known Viking form (Fanning 1983, no 29) found in Dunkeld prior to 1922. The third artefact is the cast-bronze handbell in Little Dunkeld Church. Bourke (1983, 466) dates it to c 900 typologically (ibid, 464) and suggests possible associations with either the reign of Constantine son of Pergus or Kenneth mac Alpin and their church building in Dunkeld. When it arrived in Little Dunkeld is unknown (it was there by 1866) but its presence there does not mean its association with Dunkeld is automatic. The place-name evidence discussed below (p 140) includes references to St Ernêne and possibly St Ewan, who may have had chapels in the area.

Taken together this evidence does suggest an original rather than dispersed presence of Pictish stones in the Gellyburn area. Perhaps we should not be surprised at this seeming concentration of activity given that Pictish territorial organisation used the Tay as its boundary between the territories of Forthriu, Atholl and Gowrie (RCAMHMS 1994, 88; Henderson 1975, 9–10, and 1996, 52). Dunkeld may have relied on this for its development as an ecclesiastical centre where once it was a secular centre, at the boundary between Forthriu and Atholl. The nature of any Gellyburn centre is harder to discern. Was it secular or ecclesiastical, or somewhere in between? If we are dealing with a shrine, then its occupant could of course have been ecclesiastical or (royal) secular (or both) and in either case a shrine would still require an ecclesiastical centre. Further we should
bear in mind that there was a mutual reliance between church and state. The great churches of eastern Scotland were all royal initiatives (including Dunkeld), stemming from a lay anxiety to promote and encourage the church (Macquarrie 1992, 110–33). In later times Clunie was the ‘country-house’, ie secular property, of the bishop of Dunkeld (RCAHMS 1994, 90–1). Returning to Meigle (an important religious foundation), Ritchie (1995, 1–10) has shown this to be an important site of lay patronage. Much later than the period under consideration, in 1207, the patronage of Meigle was successfully claimed by the bishop of Dunkeld and the parish of Meigle was in the medieval diocese of Dunkeld (Macquarrie 1992, 123), indicating an as yet undetermined relationship between the two (ibid, 125). The Pittensorn fragment, along with the other pieces of sculpture referred to above all fall, at least spatially, within this Dunkeld-Meigle orbit and it has been shown above how the Pittensorn sculpture relates to the Meigle ‘school’. What is ultimately difficult to prove, on the present evidence, are the original locations of the sculpture listed above. Whilst occupation of Dunkeld and Inchtuthil and probably (but not yet proven) Clunie (RCAHMS 1994, 90–1) support a local origin they are not absolute proof of an unidentified centre. However, a closer look at the place-name evidence may help to sharpen the focus.

Landscape context: place-names

Place-names can give important clues to early landscape and settlement, as well as to aspects of religious and social organisation otherwise unrecorded. Most of the settlement names in the Murthly area of the parish of Little Dunkeld are of Celtic origin, as would be expected from this part of Scotland, since Pictish would have been spoken here until around AD 900, followed by Gaelic until the later Middle Ages. We can assume that Scots was the chief language of the lowland parts of the parish in the early 16th century, since we are told explicitly that ‘Irish’ (‘ydioma Hibernicum’ ie Gaelic) was still being spoken in the upper parts of the parish, especially in and around Dowally (Myln, Vitae, 43; translated in Dunk Rent 312–3). The parish at this time included Caputh and Dowally, but excluded Strathbraan. As late as the 1790s more than three quarters of the parish (defined by its modern bounds) were still Gaelic-speaking, all in fact except the Murthly district (south-east of Inver), where ‘the people speak the Scottish dialect of the English’ (OSA 12, 412, footnote). In the charter concerning the marches of the baronies of Murthly and Strathord in 1337, out of the eight features mentioned, only one, ‘le Forester-hill’, is of Scots origin (see Webster 1982, no 56). Only one of the farms in the Murthly part of Little Dunkeld has a Scots name traceable to the medieval period: Bradyston. This first appears as Gaulbristoun / Galbrystoun 1390x1406 (see Appendix I for early forms of this and other place-names mentioned in this section). It seems to contain the personal name Galbraith along with the Scots habitative element loun, not introduced north of the Forth until the late 12th century.

Pittensorn itself first appears relatively late in the record, in 1506. It must however have been coined much earlier, possibly in the 10th or 11th century, when the generic element pett, a loan-word from Pictish into Scottish Gaelic to designate a land-holding or (dependent) estate, was still generating place-names. We are assigning it to the Gaelic- rather than the Pictish-speaking period (ie after c 900) since the second element appears to be Gaelic sorn (genitive sùirn), ‘klin’, referring either to a corn-drying or pottery kiln. However, any interpretation must remain tentative, given that no forms exist from before the 16th century, by which time re-interpretation could have occurred, and also given our extremely limited knowledge of Pictish. Whenever the name was coined, whether in a Pictish- or Gaelic-speaking environment, it must always be borne in mind that a settlement can be older than its name.

The detailed description of the marches between the baronies of Murthly and Strathord in 1337 mentioned above refers to the stone of Madeforne (‘petra de Madeforne’), probably one of the several standing stones in the area. This contains the same element as is found in Muir of Thorn, through which runs the parish boundary between Little Dunkeld and Auchtergaven; it appears as ‘mor[um] de Forne’ in 1541 (Fraser 1868 i, no 48). I am unsure as to the original meaning of this element, but it has nothing to do with Scots and English thorn, and is an appositive reminder of how prone to re-interpretation place-names can be. The lands of Pittensorn lie immediately north of the Muir of Thorn, and it cannot be entirely ruled out that the same element originally lay behind all three names (Madeforne, Muir of Thorn and Pittensorn).

On the west Pittensorn lies contiguous with the lands of Murthly, which formed the centre of a secular barony at least by the second quarter of the 14th century. Murthly is derived from the Gaelic mór thulach ‘big mound, big hillock’, and is found as a place-name at least five times throughout eastern Scotland, including the important early church centre of Mortlach BNF. There is some evidence that in Ireland tulach can have the meaning of ‘assembly mound, mound of judgement’ (Swift 1996, 19–20, 21), and this meaning cannot be ruled out here, given Murthly’s important role in the secular history of the area. The Scots word for such mounds was moodhill, and it is on one (Mwtehill) that we are told the kirk of the newly
erected parish of Caputh was built c 1500 (Myln, *Vitae in Dunk Rent*, 312). Although in secular hands from an early period, it should be noted that the sub-dean of Dunkeld held part of Murthly, which he sold c 1540 to Alexander Abercrombie laird of Murthly (Fraser 1868 i, no 48).

The two other carved stones, the so-called Murthly panel and the Gellyburn fragment, were both found on what appear to have been part of the lands of Burnbane. This is a difficult name to interpret: the second element is probably Gaelic *bain* 'white'; but the first element is more problematic. It may be Pictish *þren* 'tree', with voicing of initial *p* found also perhaps in Burnturk, Kettle FIF (Brenterk c 1245) 'boar-tree'? (7). However, since we have as yet no certain example in Scotland of *þren* in initial position becoming *þren* etc, it is wiser to see it as related to Gaelic *braon* 'dampness, wetness; rain-drop, shower' (Old Irish *brienn*), which gives rise to such place-names as Birnie MOR (see Watson 1926, 141–2, 189). Although its original meaning is not clear, its proximity to the flood-plain of the Tay makes a derivation from *braon* highly plausible.

There is certainly nothing in the place-names in the immediate vicinity of Pittensorn or Burnbane which explicitly suggests a religious foundation. However, it would be rash to argue from silence, since many ecclesiastical sites, even important ones, do not have religious names. Two have already been mentioned: Morilach BNF and Birnie MOR, an early episcopal centre of Moray. Dunkeld itself provides another example. Although an important religious centre as early as the reign of Constantine son of Urquguist, king of the Picts 789–820, if not earlier, the place-name means '(hill-)fort of the Caledonians' (see Jackson 1954, 14–6, for a detailed linguistic analysis of this place-name; Broun 1997 for a good survey of the earliest recorded history of Dunkeld and Appendix II of this paper for a summary of the earliest historical records relating to Dunkeld).

If we widen our focus slightly, there is one group of names along both banks of the Tay which show explicit ecclesiastical connections: these are the names in *dail* and *innis* to which is attached the name of a saint. Both the first elements refer to valuable water-meadows or haugh-land which would have been flooded in winter but which would have provided excellent hay and pasture in summer. Most of them have personal names as the second or specific element, three of which we can say with some confidence refer to saints or holy persons, since they contain the Gaelic *mo*, literally 'my', but equivalent to English 'Saint'. These are:

**Dalmarnock**, Little Dunkeld, *(Dummenoch in Strathlacy 1236).*

**Inchmaganachan**, Little Dunkeld, immediately south of Dalmarnock *(prebend of Inchmaganach 1274).*

**Dulmernock**, Kinclaven parish *(Dummenach 1153x61, one of the lands belonging to the church of the Holy Trinity at Dunkeld; Dulmerloch c 1300).*

Two of the above contain the saint’s name Ernê, perhaps the well-known saint of that name mentioned by Adomnân in his Life of Columba (see Watson 1926, 291–2 and Taylor 1996, 97 for further discussion of this saint’s name in place-names). I am unable to identify the saint of Inchmaganachan. The religious association could simply be that produce from these lands went towards supporting some aspect of the named saint’s cult.

In addition to these three place-names containing the names of saints, there are three which contain personal names, two of which might or might not have ecclesiastical connections. These are:

**Inchewan**, Little Dunkeld, an extensive estate stretching along the Tay immediately downstream from Birnam, and divided into three holdings by the early 16th century (Easter, Middle and Wester – what was originally Easter Inchewan is now known as Dalpowie). In the Middle Ages it belonged to the bishop of Dunkeld. *(See Dunk Rent 40 and Fraser 1868 i, no 54 and pp xxx–xxxx).* It probably contains the Gaelic personal name Eoghan *(Ewan).* The NMRs records an unlocated St Ewan’s Chapel in Caputh parish *(NO 04 SE 28).*

**Inchtuthill**, Caputh parish *(originally Little Dunkeld) (Inchethulyhyl c 1300 Dunf Reg, no 332; Inchethothill 1358 ER i, 553).* This contains the Gaelic personal name Tuathal. It cannot be ruled out that this is the Tuathal son of Artgus who died in 865 as chief bishop of Fortriu and abbot of Dunkeld *(Annals of Ulster)*, but it is totally unproveable. It seems to be a rare name. Black *(1946, 780–1)* mentions only two other occurrences of it in the medieval Scottish record: one is the name of a bishop of St Andrews in the mid-11th century; the other held lands in Moray 1187x1203. The first named abbot of St Andrews *(Cimnrighthmonaidh)* in 747 *(Annals of Ulster)* is Tuathalain, a diminutive of this name. It occurs elsewhere in place-names: Watson *(1926, 238)* mentions three instances. Of these, one is this Inchtuthill; the other, Auchtertool FIF, is incorrect – it in fact contains the burn-name now known as the Tiel Burn *(see Taylor 1995, 111–2).* This leaves Dún Mac Tuathail 'fort of the sons of Tuathal' near Aberfeldy PER. Not in Watson 1926 are: Druntuthill, Dunfermline parish FIF *(Druntuthall 1493)* and Inchtuthel *(now obsolete)*, near Auchtermuchty FIF *(Inchtuthel 1781).* Inchtuthill, Caputh, was royal not episcopal land in the Middle Ages.

**Inchturfin**, Kinclaven parish *(Inchethurfin 1153x61 Dunf Reg no 123).* This contains the Scandinavian personal name Torfin *(Porfinn)*, and is unlikely to have been coined before the 11th century. It is also highly unlikely to have any
direct religious associations, although it is first mentioned as one of the lands belonging to the church of the Holy Trinity at Dunkeld (1153 x 61 Dunf Reg, no 123).

Conclusion

The art of the Pittensorn fragment is closely comparable to the Meigle recumbent monument no 26. Iconographically speaking, the confronted men on the fragment accord very well with the imagery on both the Murthly panel and Meigle 26. In general terms the iconography represented on both these sculptures is that of hell, with a mitigating note represented by the benign, protective hippocamps (Henderson 1997, 44 ff). Such iconography is very suited to a tomb-shrine. It is not surprising that sculpture at Murthly should relate to the Meigle ‘school’. The Pittensorn fragment is of considerable importance not only because of the possibility of its being part of a Gellyburn / Murthly (or rather Burnbane if we follow the place-name evidence) shrine, or of its adding to the number of Pictish shrines, but also because of its iconography, which forms yet another link between Pictish sculpture and the Book of Kells.

Placing the Pittensorn sculpture in its wider landscape context expands the argument. Combining evidential indications from archaeology, place-names and geology (and recalling the necessary cautions noted in the text) allows us to postulate a hitherto unrecognized centre in the Gellyburn area (within a 3 mile radius of Gellyburn?). Artistically, such a (probably ecclesiastical) centre, as evidenced by its sculptural fragments, was connected to the Meigle school of sculpture. Presumably it had wider connections in the Dunkeld-Meigle axis, perhaps ultimately having been superseded by the ecclesiastical development of Dunkeld.

Bradyston
- (‘terrae de’) Gawbristioun / Galbrydstoun
  1390x1406 RMS i app no 2 no 1841
- (teinds of) Galbridestoun 1506 Dunk Rent 75
- Calbridstoun ‘alias’ Litil Burnebane 1510 RMS ii no 3423 [part of barony of Glasschune]
- ? Brydestoun 1680 Fraser 1868 ii, no 183 p 250

Burnbane
- (‘terre de’) Brinbane (‘in baronia de’ Murthie); (the late Robert de Ireland lord of) Brinbane c 1419 Fraser 1868 i, no 111*
- (John de Irlande de) Burnban 1445 Fraser 1868 i, no 8
  Calbridstoun ‘alias’ Litil Burnebane 1510 RMS ii no 3423
- (men of....) Ester Burnbane, Wester Burnbane ....
  1515 Dunk Rent 292

Murthly
- Adam de Morleley; Robert de Capeth suitor of Murth[le] and with him William Kalenterach’
  and servant (‘serviens’) of Morth[e] c 1300 Dunf Reg no 332
- (barony of) Morthley 1337 (1342) Webster 1982, no 56 [belonging to John of Ireland]
- (the forester of; the wood of) Murtlie 1515 Dunk Rent 292 [note that Wood of Murthly is shown on Pont ms 24 c 1595, immediately south of Murthly Castle]

Pittensorn
- (teinds of) Petburn 1506 Dunk Rent 75
- Petburn 1507 Dunk Rent 83
- Petburn 1508 Dunk Rent 95
- Petburn 1514 Dunk Rent 136

Appendix II

Earliest historical records of Dunkeld

In view of the suggested date for the Pittensorn fragment of AD 750–850, and its possible Dunkeld connection, the following is a summary of the historical sources for Dunkeld, for this period.

The building of Dunkeld is attributed to Constantine son of Uerguist, king of the Picts 789–820, although the source of this may be as late as the 13th century (Anderson 1980, 100–1). The transportation of relics of St Columba to Scotland in 818 has been linked to this first foundation of Dunkeld (Clancy 1996, 114). Bannerman, however, remains unconvinced (1997, 30 m9 [see Brown 1997, 119 note 37 for references]). The first unequivocal mention of Dunkeld is during the reign of Cinaed son of Alpin, when we are told that the Danes (‘Danari’) laid waste Pictland as far as Cluny and Dunkeld (Anderson 1980, 250). As this attack is mentioned just before Cinaed’s death,
which occurred in February 858, we can perhaps assume that it took place in the later 850s. Around ten years before his death, however, Cinaed had the relics of St Columba brought to a church which he had built, and it is generally assumed that this church was at Dunkeld (see for example Bannerman 1997, 28–9). A O Anderson, on the other hand, suggests that the destruction of Dunkeld may have preceded the building of the church by Cinaed (ES i, 279–80 n4).

An Anglo-Saxon document of the early 11th century, with what appears to be a mid-9th-century core, states that Columba’s relics were in Dunkeld. This corroborates the supposition that Dunkeld was the church to which Cinaed had Columba’s relics brought. See Broun 1997, 120 note 38 for references.

An important monastic establishment existed there by 865, as the Annals of Ulster record the death of Tuathal son of Artgus, chief bishop of Fortriu and abbot of Dunkeld. And in 873 the same annals tell us that the death occurred of Flaitberchtach mac Muirchertaich, abbot of Dunkeld.

In 875 Dunkeld must again have been under Viking attack, since the Danes ("Danarii"), after the battle of Dollar, wreaked havoc as far as Atholl, after which they remained in Pictland for a whole year (Anderson 1980, 250; Broun 1997, 118).

In 903 the Norse ("Normanni") plundered Dunkeld and all Alba (Anderson 1980, 251; [Broun 1997, 120 n39].)

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Abstract

A fragment of early medieval sculpture found at Pittensorn Farm, Murthly, Perthshire is assessed in terms of its artistic connections, its function and its landscape context.

Keywords: Pittensorn, Pictish, sculpture, shrine, place-names, Tay