

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment 28B - Modern Languages and Linguistics: Celtic Studies
Title of case study: Sculptured stones: Transforming monument management policy and visitor experience at ancient Christian sites
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Sites of medieval carved stones attract thousands of visitors per year to Scotland. Katherine Forsyth's research at Glasgow has led the redevelopment of some of the most important collections of stones open to the public, unlocking carvings never displayed before and transforming the visitor experience of these ancient cultural icons. Her research transformed Historic Scotland's current policy on the management of carved stones, which applies to around 1,800 monuments and has redesigned the visitor experience at Iona Abbey, which attracts 50,000 visitors per year.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Katherine Forsyth has worked in early medieval inscriptions since the mid-1990s and has published extensively on the history and culture of the Celts and their surviving texts. In particular, she worked to create a new record of all the early Christian stones in Munster, building an impressive knowledge of early carvings and stonework. On the basis of this expertise, in 2001 Historic Scotland invited Forsyth to undertake research on some early medieval sculpture (5th-12th century) in their care. This led to a total of three projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – work on a newly recognised ogham-inscribed cross-slab from Dyce, Aberdeenshire (2001); – the nationally significant collection of c.50 carved stones from Whithorn, Galloway (2003-4); and, – the research potential of 3D laser scanning and replication of early medieval sculpture with case studies from Dunadd, Argyll and Dupplin Cross, Perthshire (2010-11, in collaboration with the Centre for Digital Documentation and Visualization, Glasgow School of Art). Two further projects were assisted by Dr Adrian Maldonado, post-doctoral fellow in Archaeology, School of Humanities: an internationally significant collection of c.120 pieces of sculpture on Iona (2012-13) and a nationally significant collection of c.12 carved stones from Kirkmadrine, Galloway (2013). <p>Her research drew on the disciplines of epigraphy, archaeology, art history and history, involving extensive recording and analysis of monuments in the field, and built on previous published work by the authors (Forsyth 2001, 2008, 2012). The research focussed on the form, function, date and significance of stone sculpture of early medieval date, situating it in its landscape context and giving due consideration to the complete biography of individual monuments, including their subsequent history of reuse and modification. This allowed a complete reassessment of the sculpture and its significance which revealed it to be, in each case, a far richer and more complex body of material than previously thought.</p> <p>Forsyth's work promotes the significance of interpreting the totality of the collection at each site, including fragments and apparently lesser material, and emphasises the importance of the biographical approach to the ongoing use and abuse of sculptured stones. Stone sculpture is a key body of evidence for understanding the history and culture of Britain and Ireland in this period, not least because in many cases it is the only early medieval evidence to survive from a site. Carved stones provide insight into, for instance: the nature of post-Roman society and culture in Britain,</p>

the date and context of Christianisation, the nature and spread of monasticism, organisation of craft production, development of religious iconography especially the cult of the Cross, relationships between secular and ecclesiastical power, ethnic and linguistic change, cultural and artistic/intellectual relations between different regions of Britain and between Britain and Ireland, and the monumentalisation of burial.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Katherine Forsyth and Elisabeth Okasha, (2001) *Early Christian Inscriptions of Munster: A Corpus of the Inscribed Stones (Excluding Ogham)*, Cork: [Cork University Press](#). [ISBN 1-85918-170-8] [374pp] [available from HEI]
2. Katherine Forsyth (2005a) 'HIC MEMORIA PERPETUA: the inscribed stones of sub-Roman southern Scotland', *Able minds and practised hands': Scotland's early medieval sculpture in the 21st century*, (eds) Sally Foster and Morag Cross, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph series, Oxford, Oxbow, 113-34. [ISBN 1-904-350-74-7] [available from HEI]
3. Stephen Driscoll, Oliver O'Grady, and Katherine Forsyth (2005b) 'The Govan School revisited: Searching for meaning in the early medieval sculpture of Strathclyde', *'Able minds and practised hands': Scotland's early medieval sculpture in the 21st century*, (ed.) Sally Foster, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph series, Oxford, Oxbow, 135-58. [ISBN 1-904-350-74 7] [available from HEI]
4. Katherine Forsyth (2008) 'The Stones of Deer', in *Studies on the Book of Deer* (ed.) Katherine Forsyth, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 398-438. [ISBN 978-1-85182-569-1] [REF2]
5. Katherine Forsyth (2012) 'An Ogham-Inscribed Slab from St Ninian's Isle, Found in 1876', in *The Chapel and Burial Ground on St Ninian's Isle, Shetland: Excavations past and present*, by Rachel Barrowman, with contributions from K Forsyth, and P Ashmore, et al, 2011, (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 32), Charlesworth Press, Wakefield, 15-25 [ISBN 978-1-907975-46-2]. [available from HEI]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Historic Scotland is responsible for some of the most significant early Christian monuments in the world, including the Latinus Stone at Whithorn, perhaps the earliest post-Roman Christian monument in Britain, and the world-famous collection of Iona, which includes the earliest High Crosses in the world. These stone carvings hold some of the only testimony of the people of this time that still exists, and a large part of our knowledge of their history comes from interpreting their carvings. Moreover, sites of carved stones attract thousands of visitors per year to sometimes otherwise remote sites, boosting tourism to the areas. However, many of the collections managed by Historic Scotland are inaccessible, hidden away in storage or inadequately displayed, with their potential left untapped. Forsyth has provided a modern and visitor-friendly vision for displaying the monuments that is now used by Historic Scotland in its policy for caring for these artefacts, notably in driving the refurbishment of some of their most important visitor sites, including Iona Abbey, which attracts 50,000 visitors per year.

Changes to Historic Scotland's policy on displaying carved stones

Conservation, maintenance and display of all carved stones in Scotland is governed by Historic Scotland's '[Carved Stones: Scottish Executive Policy and Guidance](#)', published in 2005. It draws heavily on Historic Scotland's approach – devised by Forsyth – to the stones at Whithorn Priory. Guidance section 3.5.9-3.5.13 directly reflects Forsyth's research, noting the need for site-specific interpretation plans and paying particular attention to the relevance of fragments of stones, as well as to the importance of the full collection in understanding and interpreting the site. The work done at Whithorn was written up by Historic Scotland's Head of Cultural Heritage, who refers explicitly to Forsyth's influence on the revisions to the display in his paper 'The Evolution of an Interpretative

Approach', stating that 'this evolution [in the approach taken] has been significantly influenced by the involvement of Dr Katherine Forsyth as consultant to the Historic Scotland project team.'

Implementation of the new policy in specific sites

Historic Scotland used Forsyth's approach in the redevelopment of Iona Museum in 2013 as well as St Vigean's Museum in 2009 and Whithorn Priory in 2005. Specific findings about individual monuments and about the over-arching significance of each collection as a whole underpinned Forsyth's interpretative plan for each site and formed the basis for the redisplay strategy and design, including the ordering, grouping and orientation of monuments, interpretative approach and themes, and content for panels and labels, written guide-books and audio-guides and heritage management databases.

Whithorn Priory redisplay

The sculptured stones at Whithorn Priory include the oldest Christian monuments in Scotland, dating from the 5th to the 12th centuries. Whithorn is known as the 'cradle of Christianity' within Scotland, a cultural, political and social centre in the early Christian Era and for the next thousand years. The new displays create a more accessible experience for visitors and locals, enhancing their understanding of and connection with the people who carved the stones. As one reviewer noted:

Early medieval sculpture is notoriously difficult to display with complete success, as many museums can testify. For this reviewer the sensitive handling of the material served to remind me of how significant and regionally distinctive this assemblage of sculptures is. It is a more successful approach for example than the similar lapidarium display at Margam Abbey, South Wales (CADW) and hopefully bodes well for future redisplays of Historic Scotland collections in Meikle, St Vigean's and Iona. ('Exhibition Review: Whithorn's Medieval Material Culture on Display', *Scottish Archaeological Journal*, 2005.)

Forsyth drafted the text for the information boards within the museum following her work piecing together the damaged stones and reinterpreting them and provided the new layout plan, as well as advising on locating and lighting the stones. Between 2008 and 2012 more than 40,000 people had the opportunity to view the new displays while visiting the Whithorn Priory Museum. The revised display was runner-up in the Museum and Heritage Awards for Excellence in 2008, beating entries from much more prominent visitor sites throughout the UK.

Iona Abbey and Museum new display

Iona is one of the most popular tourist sites in Scotland, and has a collection of stones which are unparalleled in Europe. The Museum reopened in May 2013. Iona regularly receives 150,000 visitors per year, and the Abbey is one of the key attractions. The museum's reinterpretation of the history of Iona now reflects Forsyth's work on identifying the most significant stones and most notably, her discovery that the layout of the original stones was intended to mirror that of holy sites, including Calvary and Christ's burial place in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Head of Cultural Heritage for Historic Scotland says: 'it has changed the way we look at Iona. Its layout is far more significant than we thought... the four key components of Christ's sacrifice on the cross are here, because the monks wanted to contemplate the Passion of Christ in their workshop.' Forsyth also assisted in piecing together and reconstructing the major crosses, which are now on display. Historic Scotland notes that her report:

was groundbreaking and innovative, rich in evidence-based interpretation, which was precisely what we required to provide the firm foundation for the now completed redisplay of the site museum. That work was completed in summer 2012, but since then Kate has

continued to play a key role as an adviser to the project on an ad-hoc basis. Her work has had a direct and positive impact on most aspects of the project 'hardware', including the new interpretation panels, audio guide, as well as the site museum. The museum has attracted plaudits from our visitors, and will successfully allow people to engage with the evidence of the distant past and thereby take away a far better understanding.



Figure 1. Iona Abbey and Museum display

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Evidencing influence on display policy

1. Yeoman, Peter, 'Proposals for the re-display of the early medieval sculpture collection at Whithorn: The evolution of an interpretative approach', in *Able Minds and Practised Hands: Scotland's early medieval sculpture in the 21st century*, eds Sally Foster and Morag Cross, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph series, Oxford, Oxbow, 113–34, 2005. [ISBN 978-1-904350-74-3](#). [available from HEI]
2. Historic Scotland. 'Carved Stones: Scottish Executive Policy and Guidance', 2005 [[PDF link](#) or available from HEI]
3. Katherine Forsyth (2011) *A preliminary investigation into the scholarly potential of 3D digital documentation of Early Medieval sculpture*, June 2011 (commissioned by the Centre for Digital Documentation and Visualization and Historic Scotland) [available from HEI]

Evidencing implementation of policy at specific sites

4. Hall, Mark, 'Exhibition Review: Whithorn's Medieval Material Culture on Display', *Scottish Archaeological Journal*, 2005 [[PDF link](#) or available from HEI]
5. Testimony re contribution at Iona Abbey & Museum: Peter Yeoman, Historic Scotland [available from HEI]
6. Katherine Forsyth and Adrian Maldonado (2013) *Report on Early Medieval carved stones from Kirkmadrine, Galloway in the care of Historic Scotland*, March 2013 (commissioned by Historic Scotland) [available from HEI]
7. Katherine Forsyth and Adrian Maldonado (2012) *Report on Early Medieval carved stones from Iona in the care of Historic Scotland*, March 2012 (commissioned by Historic Scotland) [available from HEI]
8. Katherine Forsyth (2003) *Report on Early Medieval carved stones from Whithorn and vicinity in the care of Historic Scotland*, September 2003 (commissioned by Historic Scotland) [available from HEI]
9. *The Telegraph*, reopening of the Iona Museum, 2013 ([link](#))