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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

MEIGLE STONES (AND MUSEUM)

We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

MEIGLE STONES (AND MUSEUM)

CONTENTS

1   Summary

1.1   Introduction
The corpus of Pictish sculptures in Meigle comprises a museum, in a Victorian schoolroom, that houses a large collection of 8th-10th-century Pictish sculptures (3 large cross-slabs; 13 smaller cross-slabs, 4 recumbent gravestones, 1 architectural fragment, 1 hogback, and 4 miscellaneous fragments) and one fragment that may be later in date. A further eight stones from the site were lost/destroyed before the end of the 19th century.

1.2   Statement of significance
The combination of range, quantity and quality of Pictish sculptures gathered in Meigle is unsurpassed for Insular Britain. They provide a rare sensory and intellectual opportunity to engage with the fabulous cultural inheritance left to us by the Picts, whose mastery of Insular art put them at the heart of its achievements across the British Isles. The sculptures testify to the importance of Meigle as a secular and ecclesiastical power centre and place of aristocratic, possibly royal, burials. When taken in combination with the large and complex assemblages at St Andrews and St Vigeans, the importance of the east coast region around the Tay estuary and the Strathmore Vale is strongly communicated.

The sculptures were in the main found around or built into the parish church and as a consequence retain a strong physical association with the place. This enhances our ability to appreciate the significance of the early ecclesiastical establishment at Meigle, as well as the later uses of the sculpture.

The Pictish sculptures have a rich biography and furnish uniquely surviving evidence for the cult of King Arthur in the later medieval period and beyond. Several of the sculptures were re-fashioned as a tomb monument for Arthur's Queen, in local dialect 'Vanora', in association with the mound in the churchyard, known as Vanora's mound. The cross-slab Meigle no. 2 was also known as Vanora's stone as it was believed to depict the queen's fate.

The iconography provides an insight into the beliefs and religious practices and mentalities of the Picts and on the basis of the size, nature and quality of the sculpture collection, and the size of the sub-circular enclosure around the present church, it can be assumed that there was an important early Christian foundation at Meigle.

The above short statement encapsulates the key significances of the Meigle sculptured stones collection. A more detailed description and assessment of the broader range of values of the collection is given in the following paragraphs.

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2   Assessment of values

2.1   Background

A 12th-century document implies that Meigle was part of a royal estate in the 9th century, under the patronage of the same Pictish king as neighbouring St Vigeans (Angus).

No Pictish churches are known to survive (with the possible exception of the E wall of the crypt at Portmahomack), but Meigle has produced several rare architectural fragments and these imply a building of some architectural sophistication.

The sequence of churches is poorly understood. The Pictish stone church was succeeded by a possibly 12th-century cruciform plan (dedicated to St Peter?), which may itself have been replaced before the 16th century. A late 18th-century church burnt down in 1869, and was replaced shortly afterwards by the present one. At this time the surviving sculptures were collected from the churchyard by the local laird and placed in the Old School. Late 18th- and 19th-century antiquarian interest in this site was strong, and their records enhance our understanding.

The schoolroom and the sculptures passed into Guardianship in October 1936.

2.2   Evidential values

The graveyard of the parish church is presumed to be on the line of the earliest church at Meigle (dedication unknown). An important establishment such as this may well have had an outer enclosure too, but nothing is known of this, nor indeed its associated secular power centre. Undeveloped parts of Meigle may therefore retain significant archaeological potential.

Almost all of the sculptures were found in or near the parish church; the collection therefore retains a strong physical association with the place where it was used and later found.

The complex biography of many of the sculptures is recognised (e.g. the monuments reused in 'Vanora's Grave') but knowledge is patchy. The original location of the sculptures is uncertain, although it is suggestive that two of the cross-slabs originally stood on the churchyard perimeter, by an entrance, and this would make sense as their original location.

Non-invasive geological analysis demonstrates that the sculptures are made from local sandstone sources (the sculpture falls into six possible source areas, but the precise sources are not confirmed though work is on-going in this area – see Ruckley and Miller in Geddes forthcoming).

2.3   Historical values

On the basis of the size, nature and quality of the sculpture collection, and the size of the sub-circular enclosure around the present church, it can be assumed that there was an important early Christian foundation at Meigle.

Though the suggested relative absence of biblical iconography on the sculpture may have been over-estimated still it strengthens the argument that the monastery at Meigle may have been a major centre of lay power and patronage, supported by the aristocracy associated with the royal estate. It may, conceivably, have functioned as the 'mother church' for a wider network of churches.

The iconography provides an insight into the beliefs and religious practices of the Picts. At Meigle there would appear to be a particularly strong interest in life and death (including violence), which is supportive of a burial function for many of the monuments.

Since the early-16th century there has been a recorded local tradition, possibly under-way by the 12th century, associating the cross-slab known as Meigle 2 with the burial of Vanora/Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur. Some of the Pictish sculptures were gathered up and reworked into a composite, decorative monument beside this cross-slab. This is strong evidence for one of the most northerly surviving traces of the 12th-century (and on-going) interest in the Arthurian cycle. For more detail on this aspect, see Appendix 2.

This biographical value, demonstrative of how those living in Meigle have re-invested the sculpture with new and changing meanings, is also evidenced by the incorporation of some of the sculptures into the fabric of the later medieval church. Several were revealed in this capacity by the late 18th century rebuilding of the church and then in 1869, by the fire that destroyed that church. Little remains of the medieval parish church aside from its richly carved font, though the present church may retain elements of the medieval ground plan.

2.4   Architectural and artistic values
The Picts are internationally recognised for their distinctive sculpture. This is the largest collection of Pictish sculptures in the care of Historic Environment Scotland and one of the most important site-specific assemblages of early medieval sculpture in the British Isles.

The collection relates historically and physically especially to Historic Environment Scotland's other large collection at St Vigeans: there are some public monuments but the carvings, including the distinctive recumbent monuments, are mainly elaborate personal gravemarkers made for an aristocratic elite by a school of sculptors.

The Meigle collection is particularly distinctive for reasons that include:
- the number of surviving sculptures, their diversity, and the number of complete or near complete sculptures that have survived;
- there is architectural sculpture (Meigle 22 is interpreted as a possible element of a string course above the entrance of a baptistry; Meigle 10 is lost, possibly part of a screen);
- Meigle 10 bore one of only two known Pictish depictions of a wheeled vehicle (the second is on the Skinnet stone on display in Thurso

Museum [Hall 2014, 24] and for Insular comparison see the Cross of Scriptures, Clonmacnoise, Ireland);

- the recumbent graveslabs are the best surviving examples of a small but very important group of burial markers. These have been called bodystones by Allen and Anderson (1903, I, 32-34) and Henderson and Henderson (2004, 197) and for the latter they represent a unique Pictish sculptural form (though not without parallels in Anglo-Saxon and Continental sculptural forms). See Appendix 2 for more detail.
- The Meigle corpus has also been noted as having a unique outlier in the hogback category of recumbent monuments but recent analysis (Hall 2014, 19-22; Whitworth forthcoming) suggests this particular label may be a misnomer when applied to Meigle 25.
- Some significant sculpture was destroyed in the 19th century, but we have antiquarian records that help us to appreciate what it was and how it contributes to our understanding of Meigle.

The Picts were masters of Insular art and at the heart of its achievements. Little of their art survives in media other than sculpture (we have no definitively Pictish manuscripts or textiles and relatively small quantities of metalwork – see Henderson & Henderson 2004, 87-122), and we therefore look to their sculpture for clues as to what may have been lost: e.g. Meigle 4 has been described by Henderson and Henderson as 'a handbook of Insular art motifs', Meigle 9 has direct parallels in the Book of Kells, Meigle 2 bears skeuomorphic decoration inspired by lost metalwork.

Such sculpture provides us with an insight into the minds of the Picts, their cultural resources and foreign contacts. It also reminds us that the Picts were a part of early medieval Europe, not remote barbarians. For Henderson and Henderson, Meigle is the 'most valid show-place for the proper cumulative impact of Pictish sculpture'.

The individual sculptures are not only technically accomplished, but much of their design and layout demonstrate a highly refined artistic sensitivity which still appears of high merits to present-day observers. As with other Pictish sculpture, there is no surviving evidence to confirm if they were originally painted or not.

2.5   Landscape and aesthetic values
The former schoolroom that now forms the Museum is Category A listed. The surrounding graveyard (not in HES care) is Category C(S) listed, and contains a range of interesting gravestones dating from the 17th century. The former School building which houses the Museum was built circa 1876 to the designs of John Carver, a local architect. It is a relatively plain rectangular building constructed in pink sandstone rubble with ashlar quoins and Tudor detailing such as hood-moulded windows. It forms a group with the nearby church, also by Carver. Apart from its simple but pleasing architectural quality and its former role within the social history of Meigle, its primary interest lies in its association with the Museum collection.

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Within the Museum, the sculpture is starkly displayed in a simple space with lots of natural illumination: the focus of attention is, rightly, the sculpture. However, carefully designed artificial illumination could further enhance the appreciation of the sculpture. The space available is limited and has also to accommodate visitor orientation and retail space.

Outwith the museum, there was clearly a busy early medieval landscape round about Meigle. In 2012, less than 2km from Meigle, at Bankhead of Kinloch, a series of Pictish burials were excavated. Closer still is the Roman fort of Cardean, whose relationship with Meigle has yet to be explored. The immediate landscape of viewsheds and related monuments also includes Barry hillfort (Alyth), Nevay church and the Pictish sculptures at Eassie, Kettins, Alyth, Bruceton and Keillor. While we remain uncertain as to the original locations of the stones on display, their relationship and relevance to this wider landscape cannot be overlooked.

2.6   Natural heritage values
Not assessed

2.7   Contemporary/use values
Social Values
All the sculpture from the site is overtly Christian: there are no symbol-incised stones (these do not bear Christian imagery), although one of the cross-slabs is a re-used prehistoric standing stone.

Spiritual values for a modern population have not been formally assessed but the value of the stones in helping to define the sense of local identity is evidenced in the survival of the various traditions around the stones and their inspiration for other artistic endeavours, as with, for example, the early 20th century Meigle Women's Rural Institute branch banner, which depicts Vanora in an Art Deco style fused with Insular Art influences. It still hangs in the Village Hall (constructed, like the school-house that is now the Meigle Museum, through the patronage of Sir John Kinloch). It was closely followed by a book produced by the Meigle branch, *Our Meigle Book*, which also included Vanora, who symbolised pride in an ancient past and exemplified a strong woman with whom a women's society could identify (Hall 2014, 32)

Use Values
The collection at Meigle, although in Perthshire, is promoted as an adjunct to the Angus Pictish Trail. It has also hosted visits as a sometime contributor to Perth & Kinross Archaeology Month, and for occasional conferences held by various bodies, including The Pictish Arts Society and the Scottish Society for Northern Studies. As well as celebrating and sharing the cultural value of the stones with the local community and keeping the stones in national and international perspective, such visits always have a small direct economic impact on the village through visitor spend.

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3   Major gaps in understanding

The scope for future research in and around Meigle remains compelling and exciting, both in terms of fresh analysis of the sculptures and in trying to archaeologically prove some of the context in which those sculptures were erected and reinterpreted and to help define a more precise chronological framework. Other aspects include biography, sensory perceptions and performance aspects. Priority initiatives could include:

- A full analysis and cataloguing of the sculptures (including models and interconnections), with selective 3-D scanning.
- Further work would be needed to establish precise geological sources and how/if different sources were used at different time or for different types of monument, and so on. More work could also establish whether other Pictish sculptures in the area were sourced from the same quarries (very little is known about this subject in general) and developing the work by Ruckley and Miller to elucidate some of these issues around the St Vigeans corpus (Geddes forthcoming)
- Finer details of procurement of stone for carving
- A detailed understanding of the place names of the Meigle area would add immeasurably to our understanding of the cultural landscape and its time depth
- Seek to elucidate the precise nature of the architectural elements that made up the site, both in timber and stone. Was it primarily a church site or an estate centre or a royal palace? Survey and excavation in and around the churchyard and around the village would undoubtedly begin to yield answers to these key questions. The work at Portmahomack and by the SERF project in and around Forteviot are valuable benchmarks for the implementation of such work and suggest a landscape approach under a 'Strathmore' label taking in Dunsinane, Barry Hill, Glamis, Kirriemuir, Forfar, Aberlemno, Brechin, St Vigeans and Arbroath and Monifieth.
- What was the extent of the burial ground and how did the bodystones relate to each other and the cross-slabs within that space? What does the proximity of other Pictish burials such as at Bankhead of Kinloch tell us about burial in the Meigle area.
- Recovering more of the biography of the Meigle monuments, adding precision to the Arthurian elements and supporting innovative work to recover the late medieval Arthurian landscape (including Barry Hill and Arthur's Stone) and its performative elements. Such investigations should give consideration to investigating Vanora's mound in the churchyard, a significant monument in terms of Meigle's invented Arthurian landscape but undoubtedly important in terms of Pictish and/or prehistoric burial traditions.
- Did the abandoned Roman fort at Cardean influence the development of Meigle in anyway?
- The architectural history, context and function of the Victorian schoolroom

4   Associated properties

Meigle is on a par with, and connected to, St Vigeans. They are an obvious *joint* nodal site for Pictish sites in Historic Environment Scotland's care in eastern Scotland (see Historic Environment Scotland's *Interpretation for Early Medieval Carved Stones in Historic Scotland's Care* by Sally M Foster). In terms of a wider contextual understanding, comparable and contrasting groups of sculpture in St Andrews, Dunkeld, Tullich, Portmahomack (and the Tarbat peninsula), Govan and Iona.

For the landscape understanding of the Arthurian legends Barry Hillfort is significant.

5   Keywords

Picts, early medieval, Insular art, carved stones, sculpture, cross-slabs, body stones, royal and aristocratic patronage, Pictish church, burial monuments, Vanora, Arthurian legends

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APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Timeline

Before c. 500 - occupation is attested for Meigle by a souterrain (discovered in the 19th century), and possibly prehistoric burials (including Vanora's Mound and cists uncovered in the 19th century)

c. 700-1000 - the assemblage of Pictish sculpture at Meigle is created and deployed in the construction of a church (possibly with a baptistery), a hall (possibly a royal palace) and perhaps a monastic house.

839-842 – reign of King Pherath (or Uurad or Ferat)

c.839-c.842 – scribe Chana (son of Bargoth) writing in Meigle for King Pherath

c. 1175-c.1185 – earliest surviving record of the parish church at Meigle

c. 1150-c.1700 – reordering of some of the sculptures to create an Arthurian tomb said to be that of Queen Vanora, with on-going (but not necessarily unchanging) rituals around an Arthurian cult,

c. 1200-c.1500 – incorporation of some of the sculptures into the fabric of the later medieval church

c.1789c.1791 – Meigle parish church rebuilt

1795 – the so-called tomb of Vanora is recorded as being in ruinous condition

1869 – Meigle parish church destroyed by fire; several Pictish stones identified and recovered, others lost.

c.1880-c.1888 – Meigle schoolhouse acquired as venue to display the surviving Pictish sculptures, becoming the Pictish Stones Museum.
1936 (October) - the collection of sculptures and the school were passed into Guardianship

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Appendix 2: A Closer Look at Meigle 2 and the Recumbent Monuments

Meigle 2 and its biographical trajectory

The towering cross-slab Meigle 2 is a powerful example of the biographical trajectory of much early medieval sculpture, that is the facility of such sculpture to reveal the way communities of and inheritors applied changing meanings to the understanding of those sculptures. Rarely the bound property of individuals they served as heirlooms of community tradition and changing interpretation (Hall 2015). The label 'early medieval' remains useful. In many instances it stresses the historical significance of that particular episode (often the 'birth' episode) in a longer story and articulates the academic necessity to periodize the past so as to help to get to grips with it. With Meigle we are fortunate in being able to still see a particular episode of culturally significant re-purposing which is not always the fate of Insular sculpture and it is recognised that the economic, utilitarian use and reuse of early medieval sculpture was commonplace and that it encompassed deliberate destruction to provide building material and a straight forward recognition of aged permanence (Maclean 1997, 117; Fraser 2005).

In terms of the early medieval origin, birthing if you will, in the 8th-10th century, of Meigle 2 it tells us about materials and the network of different media of materialized communication and how they related to and influenced each other. The long acknowledged defining characteristic of the Meigle assemblage is its robust imagery of animals and hybrid monsters, often with a violent tone and a sense of imminent threat of damnation, which seems to go hand-in-hand with a largely (but not exclusively) burial monument function. However, that does not mean that the carving lacks the vigour and humour of human creativity, both of which are triumphantly demonstrated by one of the collections masterpieces, Meigle 2. The clear parallels this cross-slab has with metalwork models has been long recognised – reduce it in size, cast it in gold and bedeck it with jewels and precious stones and it would grace any altar. However the cross-slab also has clear affinities with manuscript models. The way one of its human figures adapts itself to the available space, wrapping itself around the cross shaft as if it were an opening initial letter in a manuscript, is a breath-taking execution. It reinforces the cross as salvation because the figure reaches down to offer a helping hand to a second person, to pull him up beyond the reach of the jaws of a denizen of Hell. It has the space-pushing and subversiveness we tend to associate with later manuscript marginalia, particularly in the continuation of the story on the other side of the cross, where the ever ready-to-pounce creatures of sin are making their way up and over the shaft. Certainly these are amongst the most compelling scenes the Meigle sculptures have to offer.

Meigle 2 is a cross-slab, the most plentiful surviving monument type at Meigle and of which there is a huge diversity in size and subject matter. Of course, the use of some of them as grave markers, either in a primary or secondary role, cannot be ruled out, and we can perhaps incline to accept some of the smaller examples as being eminently suitable as upright grave markers. For size, range of imagery, and sheer ebullience, Meigle 2 is one of two (the other

being Meigle 1) key slabs from the site. Its slab-filling cross is redolent, as noted above, of metalwork crosses covered in precious stones, known in Latin as a *Crux Gemmata* or 'jewelled cross.' (Henderson 1982). Combined with this are many of the familiar elements of Pictish art: hybrid monsters; scenes of the hunt; and, on no. 1,mirror and comb, snake and horizontal z-rod, salmon, Pictish beast (which occurs several times at Meigle, including on at least one lost stone) and horse's head Pictish symbols.

The other face of Meigle 2 bears an image of a standing figure, arms outstretched and placed in the midst of large, lion-like quadrupeds. It readily bears the conventional Biblical interpretation of Daniel in the Lion's den, certainly the most likely meaning it was meant to convey when first carved, when Daniel imagery was popular in metalwork and manuscripts across Europe. This was especially the case in conversion contexts, where the taming of wild beasts by God's messenger could convey the sense of conversion from paganism to Christianity. But this image is also deeply ambivalent in terms of the stone's whole history and is at the crux of the re-interpretation (or re-telling) of the stone from the later Middle Ages onwards, when Meigle becomes an Arthurian cult centre. Documentary references going back to the early 16th century and the pen of historian Hector Boece described the so-called Vanora's Mound (a low tumulus in the churchyard), furnished with elements of Pictish sculpture (Stuart 1867, 22). These were probably at least numbers 2, 10, 11 and 12 and possibly some of the smaller fragments, some of them probably added over time rather than in a single construction phase. This sepulchral monument was regarded as being the tomb of King Arthur's Queen, Guinevere, known locally as Vanora or Wanda. The story narrates that she had been abducted by the evil Pictish king Modred and held prisoner at Barry hillfort, 3 miles to the north. Rescued by Arthur she was deemed to have been somewhat too willing a captive of Modred's and so she was sentenced to be torn apart by wild beasts, the folk interpretation put upon the Daniel in the Lion's Den scene on the back of Meigle 2. This legend is variously reported by later antiquarians, giving us a glimpse of the later medieval re-purposing of at least some of the sculpture. Rather than dismiss this imaginative reinvention of the mound and its attendant sculpture as a misguided local episode, a different view of regards it as one rooted in international cultural ideas and demonstrative of the fluidity of meanings that attach to material culture (Hall 2014). Such meanings frequently change with alterations in social context and circumstance.

One element of the story recorded by Boece notes that if any woman walked across the mound she would become barren. Later accounts (discussed below) suggest an inscription to that effect. This rather smacks of a late addition to the story, one aimed at trying to control folk practice around the site, a practice more likely to invoke the mound as bringing fertility rather than barrenness, one which perhaps proto-Reformation and Reformation Church authorities sought to control. A fertility ritual is much more in keeping with medieval folk practices, which as popular expressions around Arthurian legends across Europe were current from at least the 12th century. Such interest is certainly testified to by the monk historian Lambert of St Omer,

Normandy. He wrote his encyclopaedia, *Liber Floridus*, or 'Book of Flowers', between 1090 and 1120 (Delisle 1903; http://www.liberfloridus.be/). The universal history section of the *Liber Floridus* notes that there was a 'palace of the soldier Arthur in Britain, in the country of the Picts, constructed with marvellous art and variety, in which may be seen sculptured all his deeds and wars.' This has been widely accepted as a description of Arthur's O'on, a Roman temple at Carron, near the Antonine Wall. It was visited by King Edward I *c*1296, one legend suggesting he renamed it after King Arthur, in reality probably an acknowledgment of an existing attribution. There is also a reference to the site as '*furnum* Arthur' in a 1293 charter of Newbattle Abbey, Midlothian (Hall 2006, 61). Such supposed royal ovens were not uncommon in Britain and attracting foreign visits from at least the twelfth century. In AD 1113, for example, a party of nine monks from Laon, Brittany, travelling between Exeter (Devon) and Bodmin (Cornwall) and across Dartmoor were shown the oven or 'furnum' of King Arthur (now identified as the prehistoric cairn close to the Warren House Inn) and his as yet unidentified chair ('cathedrum') (Greaves 1995). It is tempting to wonder if Meigle as an Arthurian cult centre was being described by the *Liber Floridus* (Hall 2014, for wider discussion of Arthur cult).

Meigle certainly had other elements of such a cult. Three miles south-east of Meigle lies the mansion of Arthurstone, originally Scots, *Arthur Stane*, its name derived from the huge standing stone (presumably a glacial erratic) which was removed in 1791 for the construction of Arthurbank Farm, and its location recorded (as 'Stone of Arthur') on Stobie's 1783 map of Perth and Clackmannanshire. *Arthurstane* occurs in the documentary record as early as 1460, when it is cited in the rental book of Coupar Angus Abbey (along with a *Croftarthur*); solid evidence that the Meigle Arthur stories were not literary inventions by Boece (though he may have introduced elaborations of course). Medieval people then, appear to have accepted figures such as Arthur as being as historical as Charlemagne or Alexander, but also used them 'as a way to enter an ideal and imaginary world which they could try to reproduce or at least copy and paste to their own present society.' (Cangemi and Corbellari 2012, 52).

The Vanora episode continues beyond the later medieval period and excites antiquarian interest in Meigle from the late 17th century. At that time the Rev. Kirkwood recorded the Vanora legend, briefly describing cross-slab number 2 and Vanora's death-scene. He also described a second gravestone, presumably cross-slab no. 1, as marking the place where her servants were buried. Around the same time an anonymous account collected for *MacFarlane's Geographical Collections* reported the Vanora connection and noted her dwelling place as Barrey (*sic*) Hill, 3 miles to the north. In 1726 and 1727 antiquary Alexander Gordon published his account of Scotland's Roman remains, the *Itinerarium Septentrionale or A journey through most of the counties of Scotland and those in the north of England* and in it noted the Vanora tradition connected to several stones in the churchyard at Miggle (*sic*). In 1772 Thomas Pennant wrote, in his *Tour of Scotland,* of the belief that the grave had once been surrounded by three stones forming a triangle although

by the time of his visit they had been 'removed to different places'. In connection with this, Pennant's illustrator, Moses Griffiths, produced an engraving of the Meigle 10 slab. In 1765 the poet Thomas Gray, in his words '…passed through Megill, where the tomb of Queen Wanders, that was riven to dethe by staned-horses for nae gude that she did, so the women there told me, I'm sure.' In 1795 the *Statistical Account* described Vanora's tomb as a grand sepulchre, but interprets it rather than describes it, as having been composed of lots of stones skilfully bound together. It goes on to note that 'many other stones, which originally belonged to the monument, have been carried off or broken in pieces, by the inhabitants of this place.' Before the end of the 18th century then we seem to have the end of folk practices (or at least their giving ground to Enlightenment antiquarianism) around the so-called Vanora's Mound. With the loss of this significance a more utilitarian re-use of the sculptured fragments took over and various fragments were built into the church, the manse, a malting kiln and a stables building. Skene's drawings of 1832 record some of these remains in situ. Skene notes that Meigle 10 was built into the wall at Stable Court or mews, cross-slabs 1 and 2 were in the churchyard, recumbent 12 was built into the manse, recumbent 11 was upright in the churchyard, where recumbent 9 was prone, with both being built into Stable Court shortly afterwards.

There is at least one other Vanora episode in Meigle. In the 1920s the Meigle branch of the Scottish Women's Rural Institute made themselves a new banner, of blue felt with sewn-on silk panels. The border panels of animals and abstract motifs are stylistically influenced by a variety of 'iconic' examples of early medieval art, including the Book of Kells and the Bayeux Tapestry. The central panel depicts Queen Vanora in a contemporary Art Deco style (the Meigle branch was founded in 1928) with a lion to right and left and in poses of worship rather than immanent violence. At the same time the branch worked on a book, *Our Meigle Book*, published in 1932, encompassing local history and folklore, including Vanora. The local interest in Vanora was clearly strong and, as depicted here, she is a symbol of pride in an ancient past, one that could be seen to exemplify a strong woman with whom it was suitable for a women's society to be identified.

Bodystones: remembering the dead with recumbent stones
The most distinctive assemblage of stone monuments to survive in Meigle, the recumbents, defines Meigle's importance as a place of high status burial, at least between the 8th-10th centuries. The early medieval burial ground is presumably, at least in part, beneath the present, long-standing graveyard. This is certainly given credence by the concentrated presence of the sculpture here, by the presence of Vanora's Mound in the graveyard and by the discovery of cist burials close to this mound in the early 19th century (and possibly in association with cross-slabs 1 and 2). A suggestion that the earliest phase burials were close to the settlement site is raised by the report of a souterrain, observed in 1878 partially beneath the manse garden and under the road in front of it.

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Pre-Christian and then Christian burial in Meigle may have focussed on what became known as Vanora's Mound. Clearly a burial mound, it could be prehistoric in date and almost certainly represents the earliest phase of Pictish burial on the site, either as a new cairn or as a re-used prehistoric one. Recent study of the landscape context of the Inchyra symbol stone and the St Madoes cross-slab demonstrated that early medieval church foundations and sculptures were no strangers to prehistoric cemeteries. The Inchyra stone was found capping a burial next to a Bronze Age cairn and less than half-a-mile away a further such cairn was visible until its excavation in the late 19th century. We know that the Picts living in Meigle were attuned to an ancestral presence as they re-used a prehistoric standing stone with cup-marks for the magnificent Meigle 1 cross-slab.

We know that for people of high status burial under round and square barrows was not uncommon in the mid-first millennium AD. From aerial photography of cropmark sites, over 70 barrow cemeteries have been identified across Scotland, with a noticeable concentration across Tayside.[1] Significant examples have been excavated at Redcastle, Lunan Bay, Angus; Forteviot, Perthshire and, most recently in local terms, at Bankhead of Kinloch, just 3km, less than 2 miles, west of Meigle, and excavated in 2012. The site included both round and square barrows, which appear to be Pictish but closer dating is pending post-excavation analysis and carbon dating.

We can readily envisage such a cemetery in Meigle being utilised by several generations of privileged, elite individuals (cf. Redcastle). Within the mounds, bodies may have been interred in textile coverings, in stone-lined cists or in wooden coffins. The organic materiality of these traditions rarely survives. We know though from a tenth-century Irish elegy that in the late 7th century, the Pictish king Bridei was buried in a 'block of hollow withered oak'. Folk of much lower status were less elaborately dealt with; close to Redcastle, at Hawkhill, three female burials of the 6th-9th centuries were found in a simple pit dug into the site occupied by an Iron Age round-house and souterrain.

The sculpture at Meigle is certainly a product of Christianisation, representing a later phase of burial tradition in Meigle serving the needs of the social elite in an evolving political context. The new traditions had a measure of respect for previous ones, as a sense of ancestry lent legitimacy to a new political structure. The deliberate retention of what later became known as Vanora's Mound is an indication of this, as is the creation of Meigle 1 if we can assume its incarnation as a standing stone marked some aspect of an older cemetery. Whilst the Pictish stone burial monuments in Meigle may well have furnished entirely new graves, we cannot rule out that some were additions to reused graves, with or without the insertion of new burials. The later Vanora tradition is an important reflex of this, indicative of an existing cemetery landscape of mounds and sculptures, adapted to Arthurian tale-telling as a method of defining a community identity (as will be discussed further below). We might,

in fact, think of the sculptures as community heirlooms, an important way in which new meanings could be articulated for old things.

This brings us to the recumbents, the defining monument type at Meigle. The importance of this group has been long recognised and no one has done more to explore their meanings than Isabel Henderson. Across Scotland there are some 12 or so such presumed gravestones, though none has yet been found in association with a contemporary grave. Meigle has four examples, numbers 9, 11, 12 and 26. Generally they are wedge-shaped, tapering towards the foot end. Meigle also has a variant (in no. 25) of the so-called 'hogback' gravestone, in origin from an Anglo-Scandinavian recumbent tradition. This is in some respects perhaps the most unique monument to survive in Meigle (see Illus 2a-b). It is certainly very different from the other early members of the Scottish hogback corpus, so given how poorly understood the whole group is and the fact that it encompasses a variety of monuments that is rather obfuscated by the title, it is perhaps time we did not think of the Meigle example as a hogback but simply a recumbent monument or bodystone (to use the term favoured by Allen and Anderson in *ECMS*). This problem has been recognised for some time and re-conceptualisation of the term and the sculptures is underway. The tegulated or tile pattern on Meigle 25 is the key link to hogbacks, but in this case does not define this monument as a hogback. Its overall shape echoes the Pictish recumbents and the defining serpent or dragon that runs the medial length of the upper surface also carries Pictish echoes. It was noted above how little we still know about burial monuments and furniture just before and during the conversion period. It was also noted that documentary sources indicate that King Bridei was buried in a wooden coffin. It may have been such established traditions that informed this idiosyncratic monument at Meigle. Other parts of Europe are more fortunate in having survivals of these traditions. Instructive here is a series of Alemannic wooden coffins from SW Germany. One of them, a child's, is on display in the Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart. It dates to the sixth century and was excavated (as grave 259) in Kreiss Tuttlingen, Oberflacht. The coffin lid has sloped slides and the flat upper surface is filled with a two-headed serpent or dragon (with a head at either end), clearly protective in the manner of Meigle. A total of 58 wooden coffins were excavated, several bearing this two-headed serpent design. Although the Meigle serpent does not have two heads Pictish art was no stranger to dual headedness; Henderson has observed that 'all Pictish representations of griffins have heads on the end of their tails'. The 6th century was a period of conversion in Alemannia and such coffins as well as preserving an older tradition may have been understood differently in a conversion episode. The shaping of the wooden coffin, through a skeuomorphic process, may have led to stone monuments comparable to that at Meigle. Continental traditions also include tegulated, recumbent monuments. In the church of Saint-Loyer-des Champs, near Argentan, Normandy is the raised tomb of St Lotharius (Loyer). Long-house shaped with a tegulated roof and plain, hipped, short sides, it also has an access hole cut through at one end where the roof meets the straight side beneath. Crook suggests that this gave the faithful access to the holy relics beneath, possibly including strips of cloth, so-called *brandea.*

Crawford discusses the spread of similar shrine tombs in Scandinavia, citing several 11th century examples including Botkyrkja, Sweden, and Norderhov, Norway, noting the ultimate inspiration as Late Antique 'houses of the dead'. The house-shape and the use of tiling need not exclusively signal Scandinavian taste; it may be drawing inspiration from existing house-shaped recumbent monuments (paralleled by elaborate house-shaped metalwork shrines) and older traditions in wood. However as part of the process of Scandinavian acculturation and assimilation we are seeing, these elements clearly had an appeal in northern Britain. Hogbacks may in part be a response to or be inspired by already established monumental stone shrines in and around churches. In some cases bears were added as end supporters and possibly serving to express a new cultural context, a bringing in of something to the Christian fold. However, where we encounter such monuments, as at Meigle, we are not necessarily seeing Scandinavian burials or patronage but an expression of older indigenous tastes, possibly hybridised with developing Scandinavian fashions in northern Britain.

The Pictish recumbents exhibit a narrow slot cut into the head end of the upper face, a feature that also defines recumbents as composite monuments. In other words the slot was primarily intended to hold an upright cross, possibly of wood or perhaps a small, elaborate housing for a relic. Being removable, these may have facilitated the addition, on special occasions, of objects associated with the deceased. The large, square, off-set recess on the end face of Meigle 11 is often regarded as a much later modification of the stone, possibly related to reuse as masonry, but, as the Hendersons have observed, 'it could have held a metal attachment to secure a venerable object to the surface of the slab. There were two such attachments on the west face of St John's cross on Iona.' Thus we can also say that it is possible that recumbents also served a secondary, reliquary, role through these recesses.

Meigle 26, like the other recumbents, has a rich repertoire of images including a hunt scene, fabulous monsters and devouring beasts. This is often interpreted as violent and secular and thus in keeping with the presumed secular nature of the site. That said, we should be a little wary of not seeing Christian storytelling and symbolism in secular and violent scenes. The hunt, for example, was a widely recognised metaphor of Christian conversion from Late Antique times. The bears devouring a human on side panel A are fully amenable to a Christian, Biblical interpretation. In *Kings* 2 (23-25) the Elisha Cycle tells of the incident at Bethel: 'while he was on the road-up, some small boys came out of the town, and jeered at him. 'Go up bald head!' they shouted, 'Go up bald head!' He turned round and looked at them, and he cursed them, in the name of Yahweh. And two she-bears came out of the wood and savaged 42 of the boys.' In addition, *Wisdom* 11:18 talks of God exacting vengeance on idolaters by unleashing savage lions or hordes of bears upon them.