

Three Pictures of Picts - What did the Picts look like?

Three pictures from the symbol stones of Northeast Scotland give an indication of how the people viewed themselves during the historical Pictish era and in the proto-Pictish tribal era that preceded it.

The three carvings featured here (there are others) are the *Rhynie Man*, now on display in Aberdeen; the *Collessie Man* on a standing stone in Fife; and the 'mother and child' shown on the *Inchbraoch Stone*, which was used as a cover illustration for my 1998 book: *Picts and Ancient Britons*.*



The Rhynie Man

on a stone found on a farm near Rhynie, Buchan, shows a quite unique view of an older man in a tunic carrying a ceremonial axe. The age of the monument is uncertain, but it is assumed to be AD 500-700.

The proportions of the Rhynie figure are significant. The head takes up a quarter of the figure rather than a seventh part as most modern artists are taught to draw the human form. His head clearly shows a long beard, a hooked nose and prominent eyebrows. He has a bald (or perhaps shaven) head; and his ears and teeth are visible. It is not clear whether he has long hair or is wearing some kind of head-dress. It has been suggested that he is a miner, or perhaps a tonsured monk.

The 'hooked' nose can be observed among many modern people in the north-east triangle.

Other Pictish Studies by Paul Dunbavin:

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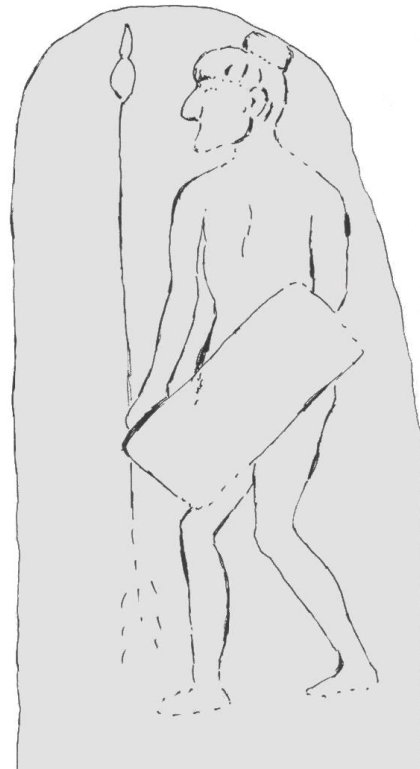
The Collessie Man

A much-worn figure on a standing stone set in the middle of a field near the village of Collessie, Fife.

It depicts a naked warrior carrying a shield and spear with an 'apple' on the shaft. It matches the description of Dio Cassius (third century AD) and may represent a soldier of the Maetae (Miathi) or the Venicones.

Again the proportions of the figure and his short legs are evident, as is the prominent nose. He too has long hair, but tied-up in a top-knot. Tacitus describes a similar hairstyle among the Suebian Germans, to give the impression of height

<http://www.brand-dd.com/stones/fife/collessie.html>



The Inchbraoch Stone

The relief carvings on the **Inchbraoch stone** show us what appears to be a woman, styling the hair of a young child. However, we should avoid the assumption that the stylized figures are female.

As with the other two figures discussed above, both exhibit short legs (or a long body) and again with long hair in the process of being tied-up. The nose is again given prominence although both figures are cartoon in nature.

A stocky build with broad muscular legs was remarked-upon by the Roman historian Tacitus as a characteristic of the Caledonian tribes who faced Agricola in the first century AD and whom he likened to the Suebian Germans.

In 2017 another stone depicting a naked Pictish warrior was discovered during construction of the new A9/A85 road junction in Perth and Kinross. Although the face is somewhat damaged we can just about make-out again the top-knotted hair, together with a spear reminiscent of the Collessie Man. Of more significance again are the proportions of the figure and the thickset limbs of the warrior.

A summary report and illustration is available at:

<https://www.thenational.scot/news/15629182.workers-discover-significant-pictish-artefact-while-constructing-road/>

It is interesting that none of the figures offer any evidence of tattooing. Fashions of hair-style or body art are cultural and could have entered the region with an immigrant population; however, morphology is genetic. The short thickset build can be observed in many modern Scots and less frequently further south. It will be interesting to see whether geneticists can one-day associate such characteristics with a native 'Pictish gene' or whether it can be traced to immigrants from Baltic Scythia as the legends suggest. Some of the native tribes named by Ptolemy may have occupied northern Britain since the Ice Age and strictly, they would be neither Picts, nor Scots, rather we should consider them native Caledonians.

* Longer extracts of all the literary sources are given in:

Dunbavin, Paul (1998) *Picts and Ancient Britons*, Third Millennium Publishing, ISBN: 978-0-9525029-1-7

Tags: Picts, Caledonia, Pictish language, Pictish history, Pictish sources, Collessie man, Rhyne Man, Inchbraoch Stone

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