

The Galloway Picts Project

To mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society (DGNHAS) in 1862, DGNHAS is undertaking an excavation of the Dark Age stronghold at Trusty Hill just outside Gatehouse of Fleet, between 19th May and 2nd June this year, and is inviting anyone who may be interested in taking part.

Trusty's Hill is conspicuous amongst the hillforts of Galloway for the Pictish symbols, comprising a double disc and Z-rod and a 'fish monster' and 'sword', carved on an exposed face of bedrock at the entrance to the fort. There may also be an Ogham inscription along the edge of this stone. What has intrigued archaeologists is that the stone dates from the first millennium AD when south-west Scotland was inhabited by people usually perceived to be Britons; not Picts or Scots. The Pictish symbol stone at Trusty's Hill is unique in Galloway and potentially represents crucial evidence for the early cross-cultural exchanges that forged Dark Ages Northern Britain and led to the emergence of the Kingdom of Scotland.

An excavation of this site was done in 1960 by Charles Thomas at the encouragement of DGNHAS, using the (relatively) unsophisticated archaeological techniques of the time, but did not recover the archaeological evidence that could now be used to date the occupation and destruction of the fort; to demonstrate the status of its inhabitants; or to explicitly link the occupation of the fort with the carvings. The principle objective of the new excavation is therefore to recover archaeological evidence from Trusty's Hill and subject this to modern analysis. This will enable better understanding of the Trusty's Hill symbol stone in the context of the surrounding settlement, which is important for understanding why the stone was inscribed and by whom, and what this means for our understanding of cross-cultural interactions in the middle of the first millennium AD, a time when Scotland was emerging as a distinct country within the British Isles.

The excavation of Trusty's Hill is a rare opportunity to make a real difference to understanding past identities in Galloway and the formation of national identity in Scotland during the first millennium AD.

An initial training day will take place in Gatehouse of Fleet on Saturday 19th May, to be followed by the start of the excavation on 20th May, which will continue until Saturday 2nd June. Volunteers are welcome to join in, for the entire excavation or simply for a day.

Anyone interested in taking part can contact: Dr F. Toolis, President DGNHAS, Belmont, 25 Dalbeattie Road, Dumfries DG2 7PF; Or email: president@dgnhas.org.uk

