



Aerial view of SERF excavations at Forteviot © Historic Environment Scotland

royal centre of national significance. c.500 AD, when Forteviot became a foundation of the Pictish Kingdom of Roman occupation – and onto the later Iron Age – including the period Bronze Age (2000 – 1000 BC), to the the Later Neolithic period (3000 – 2700 BC). The heritage advances through the Both the medieval and Pictish times, to However, the area's archaeological the middle ages.

religious focus on Forteviot throughout confirms that there was an important the important collection of sculpture it building. When considered alongside stood just to the south of the present timber and an accompanying cemetery that an earlier Pictish church built of when it was built in 1778. Excavations in the extension to the cemetery showed Some parts of this building were incorporated into the present-day church. a 13th century predecessor, possibly on the site of an earlier monastic church. The SERF investigations indicate that Forteviot Church stands on the site of

the origins and development of the Scottish nation" – SERF Report.

The archaeology of Forteviot and its hinterland holds the key to understanding the University of Glasgow SERF (Strathearn Environs & Royal Forteviot) Project. here has been gathered from existing publications and displays arising from the the Pictish and medieval eras within the Strathearn valley. The information given Displayed within the church are several fragments of carved stonework from

## Display of artefacts and local archaeology

# FORTEVIOT CHURCH

# FORTEVIOT

## The Birth of Alba

# NEOLITHIC FORTEVIOT

## Prehistoric Ritual & Power

Also dating from this era is a cremation cemetery, an incredibly rare find – especially in Scotland – and similar in scale to one found within Stonehenge. This cremation cemetery had initially a 40m diameter palisade around it, denoting its importance to the community. Over the centuries the wood decayed and was replaced by a hedge – a space for ritual gatherings defined by a ditch and earthen bank. The Forteviot hedge dates from around 2500 BC and was an undertaking of monumental proportions, with its ditch up to 3m in depth and 9m wide.

Highlighting the continuance of ceremony and ritual to the hedge and the Forteviot area, was the discovery of a Bronze Age cist dating from around 2000 BC, or some 500 years after the hedge was constructed. The cist's capstone weighed some four tons and inside were grave goods indicating that this was the last resting place of a high-status person. Although the body had decayed to nothing, excavators found the remains of wooden vessels, animal hides, meadowswallow flowers (a medicinal herb), a knife and bronze dagger with a gold band around the hilt. Also a fire making kit of flint, iron ore nodule and tinder.

To the south of the village lay one of Europe's largest Neolithic monuments, an awe-inspiring palisaded enclosure over 250 metres in diameter. This was created around 2700 BC, without the use of metal tools, from over 200 towering oak posts or tree-trunks up to 1m in diameter and 6m tall. The entrance was through an avenue of trunks only 4m wide, making for a dramatic arrival at the mouth of the vast clearance of the enclosure. The scale of the enterprise would have demanded a large workforce over many years, with a major impact on the area's natural resources.

### Contacts and Further Reading:

The Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot Project (SERF). Website at: [www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/serf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/serf)

Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, The Lodge, 4 York Place, Perth PH2 8EP  
Tel: 01738 – 477080 [www.pkht.org.uk](http://www.pkht.org.uk)

Neolithic Scotland: Timber, Stone, Earth and Fire. Gordon Noble, Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Picts, Gaels and Scots. Sally Foster. London: Batsford, 2004.

Forteviot: A Pictish and Royal Centre. Nick Aitchison, Stroud:Tempus, 2006.

Son of Alba written and illustrated by Alfie Pound [www.taylp.org](http://www.taylp.org)

Thank you to Ian Scott and David Simon for the use of their images in this leaflet and the exhibition and to Stephen Driscoll and SERF in sharing their results and supporting the delivery of this project.

The conservation and display of these objects was funded through the Tay Landscape Partnership, a Heritage Lottery funded project led by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust.



from painting by David Simon ©





# PICTISH FORTEVIOT

## A Royal Centre

The recent work of the SERF Project, and other sources, have highlighted Forteviot as a major Pictish royal centre from the mid-9th century AD, with the area firstly becoming important to them as a regional ceremonial centre from the 8th century. At its peak, Forteviot was the seat of Cinaed mac Ailpin (Kenneth, son of Alpin) whose descendants ruled Scotland until the 11th century. Southern Pictland – today's Angus, Fife and Perthshire – was the core of the Pictish kingdom, which was to become the medieval kingdom of the Scots.

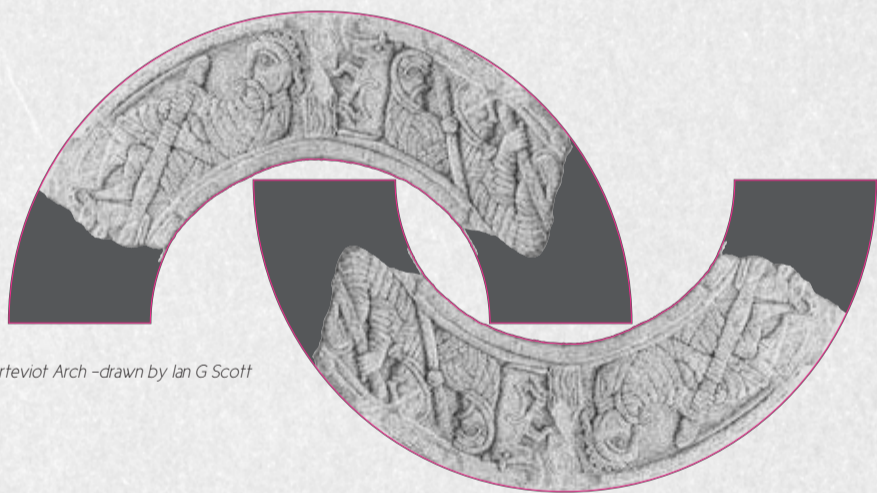


Portrayal of Cinaed Mac Alpin by Alfie Pound ©

The kings were attracted to Forteviot, not only because of the bounty of the land, but also because of the cultural links to the landscape's ancestral power. This is striking evidence of a continuation over millennia of the area's importance as a focus for ritual and ceremony, from the Neolithic and Bronze Age eras.

Still a mystery is the exact location of the building known as the Pictish Palace. It is recorded in The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba that Cinaed died (858 AD) 'in palacio Fothuir-tabacht' – 'in the palace of Forteviot'. Although geophysical surveys have identified outlines of post-medieval buildings in and around the village and manse, nothing has been found to confirm the location of the palace. An extensive survey and detailed excavations were undertaken at nearby Haly Hill – traditionally thought to have been the site – but no pre-modern finds were made.

However, what we do have is a nationally significant collection of Pictish-era carved stonework, an enduring legacy of Forteviot's heritage. Some elements of this collection are on display in other settings – for example the unique Forteviot Stone Arch, from the earlier church, is now in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.



Forteviot Arch – drawn by Ian G Scott

In nearby St Serf's Church, by the village of Dunning, is the magnificent Constantine's Cross also known as the Dupplin Cross. Dating from c. 850 AD it celebrates the life of Constantine, son of Fergus, king of the Picts. Probably originally painted to represent a huge jewelled altar cross, it would have been a dramatic, highly visible feature in the landscape – enhancing the King's authority as it looked out over Forteviot from a position on the valley slope above the north bank of the River Earn.



Dupplin Cross in the landscape © Historic Environment Scotland (Tom and Sybil Gray Collection)

## Royal Boundaries

Other territorial markers for Royal Forteviot were the Invermay and Gask crosses, denoting boundaries and main approaches to the palace. The Invermay Cross, originally placed to the south-east of Forteviot – where its base remains – was broken into fragments in the late 18th century. Four parts survive as part of the Forteviot Church display. The Gask Cross is carved from a slab of stone and was moved in the 19th century from its original site at Trinity Gask, four miles east of Forteviot, to Moncreiffe House at Bridge of Earn. It survives today but is badly weathered and is in a fragile state.



3D scan of Forteviot Cross fragment. This image is thought to evoke a sense of Christian triumph over sin.

The other items of stonework on display within the church are fragments from what we call the Forteviot Cross and the Forteviot Ring Cross. Both were probably from free-standing crosses, rather than 'slab crosses' (as Gask) but the design of the latter suggests it is from a ring-headed cross, as the stub of a ring projects from one face.

The original locations of these crosses is unknown, but it is suggested they were free-standing crosses within the boundaries of Royal Forteviot and used to denote the approaches to the church, palace or ancient cemetery complex.

South-east of Forteviot village there was a burial ground which contained graves arranged in rows alongside round and square barrows. The reconstruction below shows a representation of the square barrows, which are distinctly Pictish in form. The burials were covered by a structure supported by four posts. It is likely the graveyard predates the royal settlement at Forteviot.



from painting by David Simon ©

## The Forteviot Handbell

Also part of the display within the church is a rare survival of a cast bronze handbell, typical of the Irish and Pictish churches of the 9th and 10th centuries.

Bells were important for time-keeping and other liturgical practices. Associations with saints made them holy and this meant they were often perceived as having supernatural agency and so treated as relics. Their sound was thought to ward off evil.

Bells were commonly recast if they became damaged or lost their musical tone. This seems to have been the case with the Forteviot bell. It is marked with an letter 'M' composed of two inverted 'V's. This mark typical dates from the 17th century when the bell was recast in its original form using the original metal; it could either be a devotional sign to the Virgin Mary or simply the marker's mark.

