

The Pictish Life Handling Box contains replica objects that will help pupils to explore Pictish life through some of the evidence that the Picts left behind.

INVESTIGATING OBJECTS FROM THE PAST

PICTISH LIFE





Contents

P2–3

About this resource

P4–7

The contents of the Handling Box

P8–9

Integrating the Handling Box with classroom studies

Handling guidelines

P10

Suggested handling session

P11

Object investigation sheet

P12–14

Notes on the objects

P15–16

Suggestions for follow-up activities

P17–18

Background information for teachers

P19

Additional resources

About this resource

Introduction

The Pictish Life Handling Box has been created to support a class visit to the St Vigean's Museum of Carved Stones in Arbroath or to Meigle Museum, Meigle, Angus. The replica objects contained in the box will help pupils to explore Pictish life through some of the evidence that the Picts left behind.



Using the Handling Box

There are two identical Handling Boxes. One is kept at St Vigean's Museum and the other at Meigle Museum. The Handling Box is designed to allow the group leader the flexibility to use it as appropriate to the needs of the class. Some suggestions for activities using the box are included in this booklet. A session with the Handling Box can be led by a teacher or by museum staff, if available, as part of a visit to the museum. Please ask when booking.

To book your visit and a session using the Handling Box, please contact Historic Scotland on 0131 668 8793 or contact St Vigean's Museum direct on 01241 433739 or Meigle Museum on 01828 640612.

For schools in Angus Council only: Angus Council Educational Resources Service have their own boxes of replica Pictish objects which may be borrowed for classroom use. Please telephone 01241 435008 or email education@angus.gov.uk

Downloadable teachers' notes for a visit to St Vigean's Museum and wider site are available from the Historic Scotland website at <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/learning/freepublications.htm>

Pictish symbol stone, Meigle Museum, Angus

Supporting learning and teaching

Use of the Handling Box, as part of a visit to St Vigean's Museum of Carved Stones or to Meigle Museum, will help pupils to develop in the four capacities of A Curriculum for Excellence.

It will enable pupils to:

- develop an understanding of how Scotland has developed as a nation, resulting in an appreciation of their local and national heritage within the global community
- broaden their understanding of the world by learning about human activities and achievements in the past
- develop their understanding of their own values, beliefs and cultures
- learn how to locate, explore and link periods, people and events in time and place
- learn how to locate, explore and link features and places locally and further afield

It will also contribute to the development of the following Social Studies skills:

- observing, describing and recording
- comparing and contrasting to draw valid conclusions
- exploring different types of evidence
- curiosity and problem-solving
- interacting with others and developing an awareness of self and others
- the capacity for critical thinking through accessing, analysing and using information from a variety of sources
- discussion and debate
- putting forward reasoned and justified points of view
- an awareness of sequence and chronology



A swimming elephant on the Maiden Stone, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire



The contents of the Handling Box: Layer 1



Bone comb



Mirror



Pennanular brooch



*Cooking pot
(contains belt for tunic)*



Necklace



Drinking horn



Hooded cloak



The contents of the Handling Box: Layer 2



Shoes



Bone pins



Tunic



Spindle and whorl



Shield (supplied separately; not contained within box)



Integrating the Handling Box with classroom studies

Before leading a handling session using the box, you might want to prepare your class with a couple of simple activities to get them thinking about how to look at evidence and what objects can tell us about people's lives.

The rubbish game

Bring in a selection of some of your own personal, everyday objects. Be careful not to choose anything that is obviously yours, though; the idea is that the class have to build up the picture of a character from the objects.

Feel free to use your own imagination when selecting items, but some that can work well include:

- a bus/train ticket
- an ear-ring
- an empty drink bottle
- a food wrapper
- an old book
- an item of clothing (for example, a shoe)
- a cinema/theatre ticket (or similar)

Organise the class into small groups and pass the objects around. Ask the groups to consider each item in turn and discuss what they think the objects tell us about the owner. They can then report back their conclusions to the rest of the class.

After they have looked at several objects they will have built up a picture of the type of person that the evidence points to, for example their sex, hobbies, nationality, where they live, occupation, etc. You might actually be surprised by some of their conclusions! In the end you can reveal the identity of the mystery person (you).

The important point to emphasise here is that this is just how an archaeologist works by piecing together evidence from people's lives and coming to informed conclusions about the lives they led.

The skeleton game

Explain the job of an archaeologist to the class. Emphasise their role as 'history detectives', finding clues from the past that tell us about people's lives.

Tell the class that they are going to become time travelling archaeologists, working 1500 years in the future.

Select a volunteer to be a 'burial' from the 21st century. Get the volunteer to lie down on the floor and ask the class to imagine that they are archaeologists in the 36th century and have just discovered this 'burial'. What evidence would they find that still remains?

This will encourage the class to consider materials that decay and those that survive. Things that would possibly survive might include:

- the skeleton and teeth (including fillings)
- parts of shoes (leather would obviously rot, but plastic and rubber parts might survive)
- plastic or metal buttons, zips, belts and fastenings
- money
- jewellery and hair bands/clips (it's often good to pick a girl for this exercise)
- spectacles

From the evidence that the burial leaves behind, what can they work out about that person's life? Possible deductions might include the person's:

- gender
- height
- age
- diet
- fashions
- length of hair
- period when they were buried

From objects found in graves we know that in the past people were often buried with some of their favourite things. As an added exercise you could ask the class to think about which favourite items they would want to be buried with.



Two boys in deep discussion over an activity

Mystery object

Another good way of getting pupils to really think about an object is to give them a 'mystery' object to investigate.

Bring in objects that the pupils are unlikely to be familiar with. Organise the class into groups. The groups can discuss each object and come up with their best idea as to what it might be.

Encourage the groups to think carefully about each object in front of them, consider all of its possible uses and agree on their best idea.

Finish with a feedback session with the whole class and open up all the ideas to debate. Each group can contribute their own ideas as to what each object might be, and perhaps even persuade others around to their point of view.

Handling guidelines

All of the objects in the Handling Box are replicas and most of them are fairly robust. However, by following the simple guidelines listed in the next column you will help to ensure that any damage or wear to the objects is kept to a minimum.

You could even ask the pupils to think up their own set of handling rules before starting a session.

Guidelines

- Before a handling session examine the objects and assess any potential risks to the children in your group. This might, for example, involve careful monitoring of delicate or sharp objects.
- Take care when carrying the Handling Box. Use both hands and always ensure the box is the correct way up.
- Supervise the handling of the objects at all times.
- Ideally, handle the objects using both hands over a firm, clean surface such as a tabletop.
- If the box is being used on the floor, seat the children in a circle and pass the objects one at a time to and from the facilitator.
- Before returning the box after a session, please check that all the objects, and any accompanying material, are placed correctly in the box.
- Accidents do happen and the objects are replaceable. Please report any missing or damaged objects to Historic Scotland immediately. Please do not attempt to repair a broken object, but do return all the broken pieces.



Making an artefact from clay



Suggested handling session

There are various ways that you can organise a handling session using the box, depending on the size and ability of your class. Of course, it is entirely up to you how you want to use the resource, but the following suggestions might provide some useful pointers.

- Organise your class into small groups – ideally with no more than five to a group.
- Each group could concentrate on a different theme, for example 'Daily Life' or 'Looking Good'.
- Then you can either give each group three or four objects to look at and discuss, or give each group one object to look at and discuss in detail.
- Allow each group 5–10 minutes to talk about and/or draw the objects.
- You can help to lead discussion by getting the class to list for each object:
 - What they see/feel, for example:
 - What shape is it?
 - What colour is it?
 - Are there any patterns or decorations on it?
 - Is it heavy or light?
 - Is it rough or smooth?
 - Does it smell of anything?
 - What they think, for example:
 - Who might have used it?
 - How does it work?
 - What might it have been used for?
 - What is it made of?
 - Is it broken? Is there anything missing? If so, how did it happen?
 - What is it?
 - What they wonder, that is, any questions they still have about an object, for example:
 - Who owned it/used it?
 - What would you be doing if you were using this object?



Why is it made of these materials?

What is it?

How was it made?

Where might it be used?

- Of course, pupils will often ask their own questions about the objects and this should be encouraged. It might be useful to get someone to make a note of these questions so that they can carry out their own research, either on-site or back at school.
- The objects can then be rotated around each group.
- You can follow this up with a group discussion session where the pupils can share their ideas, discoveries and thoughts about the objects.



Object investigation sheet

Make a sketch of the object.

What do you think the object is made of?

Does it look like anything that we have today?

What might the object have been used for?

*Is there any decoration on the object?
What does it show?*

Do you think this was a valuable object?

*Does the object tell us anything about the people
who used it?*

Describe the colour.



Notes on the objects

The following notes are intended to help group leaders to run a handling session. They provide information on each of the objects in the Handling Box.



Bone comb

Bone, normally from deer antlers, would have been used to produce all sorts of items for daily use – like this comb.

Combs would have had different purposes. It is likely that the Picts had long hair, which they would probably have worn in elaborate styles. You can clearly see hairstyles on the figures carved on the stones. Combs would have been important for tidying hair and keeping it clean from pests. They were also used as hair ornaments.

The comb is one of the most commonly found symbols on Pictish stones. This suggests that combs were considered to be important personal items.



Mirror

Before glass, mirrors would have been made from bronze or iron, like this one, and highly polished so that you could see your face in them.

Mirrors were frequently carved on Pictish stones, almost always alongside a comb. This would certainly suggest that appearance was important in Pictish society.



Drinking horn

The Picts would have used every part of an animal that they killed. As we know from the carved stones, deer hunting was an important part of Pictish life, as the deer would have provided a source of food, clothing and materials. Items such as this drinking horn, combs and pins would have been made from the deer's antlers.



Cooking pot

The Picts would have cooked in simple clay pots like this one. These wouldn't have been made on a potter's wheel, but from 'coils' of clay built up and then smoothed into the right shape before being hardened in an open fire or a kiln. A pot like this would have been used for cooking in over a fire or for storing and serving food and drink.



Necklace

The Picts – men and women – would have worn necklaces with beads made from stone, glass and amber. Glass and amber were prized possessions and made into expensive jewellery by Pictish craftsmen. Most amber was probably imported from the Baltic region.



Penannular brooch

Brooches are commonly seen in depictions of Pictish men on carved stones. You might just be able to make some out on the figures on the stones in the museum. Brooches like this were used to fasten cloaks together at the shoulder. The design of a brooch would be a sure sign of someone's importance.



Hooded cloak

Some of the characters depicted on Pictish stones wear hooded cloaks like this one. These cloaks were made from wool and were possibly oiled as well to provide both warmth and waterproofing. A cloak would have been fastened with a simple pin or a brooch like those in the box.



Spindle and whorl

The Picts would have spun wool to weave their own clothes using basic spindles like this one. Spindle whorls were hung at the end of wool as it was spun into yarn using a spindle. The spindle is made of wood and the whorl of stone. This is how the cloak and tunic would have been made. Clothes would then have been dyed using natural plant materials.



Bone pins

Pins like these may have been used for a variety of purposes. They may have been used as jewellery, to fasten clothing, or even as dressmaking pins. Some pins had quite decorative heads, suggesting that they were more than just functional.



Leather shoes

Not much evidence survives of the type of footwear that the Picts wore, as leather objects very rarely survive. However, the style of clothing can clearly be seen in the depictions on the carved stones. The Picts would probably have worn thin leather shoes like these. They are more like slippers compared with the sturdy shoes we wear nowadays.



Tunic

Both men and women would have worn long tunics like this one, made of wool or linen. The tunic would have been tied at the waist with a simple leather belt like the one in the box. We don't know if the Picts would have worn any underwear, though men did wear woollen trousers for extra warmth.



Shield

The Pictish warrior fought with a distinctive small shield or buckler. Pictish carvings show that these shields could be round, square, or H-shaped. A shield could also be used as a striking weapon in hand-to-hand fighting.

The shield is made from oak planks covered with embossed leather. A central bronze boss protects the hand.



Suggestions for follow-up activities

The following suggestions can be used as ideas for further work back in the classroom.

Creative writing

A visit to St Vigean's Museum or to Meigle Museum and use of the Handling Box can inspire opportunities for creative writing exercises. Possible topics could include:

• Stories of the stones

Pupils can imagine that they are Pictish artists working on one of the carved stones. Why are they carving these designs? Who are they being carved for? Pupils can use their imaginations and interpret the stones in their own way.

• War band

Pupils can imagine that they are being threatened by an invading army – they could be Romans, Northumbrians or Vikings. Describe being a Pict going into battle. What weapons might they use?

How would they feel – scared? excited?
What was the eventual outcome?

• Pictish life

Pupils can imagine that they are living in a Pictish settlement. Write about a day in the life of a Pictish character. What chores have to be carried out? What sights, smells and sounds are all around? How do people dress and look after themselves? What do they eat? What do they do in their spare time?

Role play

A visit and use of the Handling Box might inspire plenty of group role-play ideas.

You could possibly use the ideas in the creative writing section to get the class to create and perform their own role plays.

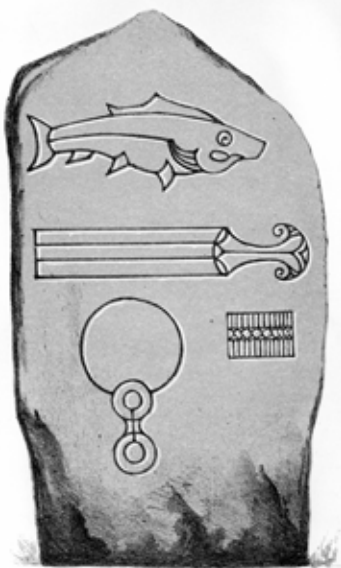


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Some of the most common symbols found on Pictish stones

Back in the classroom – these boys are completely absorbed in clay work.





An illustration of the Dunrobin Stone. No one really knows what these symbols mean. One theory is that they are a kind of alphabet, with each symbol standing for a sound in the Pictish language. On stones these symbols make up names so the symbols on this stone could perhaps be interpreted as 'Here lies Mrs Sword-fish'.



Back in the classroom – making a record of a favourite object

Drawing and writing

Encourage pupils to make a record of one of the objects that they have worked with. They could choose a favourite object and record it by:

- making a detailed sketch of it
- researching information and creating their own interpretation label
- writing a short descriptive piece about it, for example:

My favourite object was the ...

I liked it because ...

I thought it was interesting because ...

Another alternative might be to create a souvenir postcard for a gift shop with their favourite object as the subject. Again, this would require a detailed drawing of the object and a short sentence to describe what it is.

Class museum

The class could set up their own mini-museum or gallery in the classroom, based on their drawings and what they have learned about the Picts.

Using the Handling Box as inspiration, they could even make their own artefacts, for example Pictish stones made from clay or jewellery from craft materials. They could then organise their own displays with supporting labels, diagrams and photographs.



TIMELINE

AD 297 – The word 'Picti' first used to describe the people living in Scotland.

AD 367 – The Picts push the Romans back from Hadrian's Wall.

AD 565 – Saint Columba meets Bridei, King of the Picts. Christianity begins to spread throughout Pictland.

AD 685 – The Picts defeat the Northumbrians at the Battle of Nechtansmere.

AD 731–761 – The reign of Oengus mac Fergus sees the Picts become stronger and win important battles against people who threatened them.

AD 843 – After years of fighting and the threat of the Vikings, the Scots and the Picts unite under Kenneth mac Alpin, King of Scots, and 'Scotland', as we now know it, is born. Pictish culture and language begin to decline.

Background information for teachers

To this day the Picts remain a mystery to historians and a topic of some debate because they left so little primary evidence behind. What we do know about them is largely derived from their carved stones and the accounts of others who lived during the period – people from Ireland, southern Britain, Romans and even Vikings.

What we can be sure of, from the evidence we have, is that a people who became known as the 'Picts' occupied a large area north of the Forth and Clyde rivers, with the heartland in the east of this region, between the 3rd and 9th centuries.

The first written mention of them comes from a Roman poem written in AD 297, which refers to the 'Picti' – possibly meaning painted people – living north of Hadrian's Wall. This description suggests that the Picts decorated their bodies with tattoos or body paint. The Irish had another name for them – 'Cruithni', meaning 'people of the designs'. Was

this in reference to their carved stones or to the same body art referred to by the Romans?

After the Roman withdrawal by the 5th century, it seems that the tribal nature of Pictish life began to become more organised and centralised under one 'high chief' or king. This organisation progressed further with the coming of Christianity in the 6th century. Saint Columba, in particular, is attributed with having influenced the Picts to convert from their pagan beliefs. One legend tells of his meeting with the powerful Pictish King Bridei near Inverness, where he won a magical duel with Bridei's chief magician, Broichan. He is even credited with defeating a fearsome water horse that inhabited Loch Ness. The first sighting of Nessie, perhaps?

By the 7th century Pictland was firmly established in the north and east of Scotland, with the Scots of Dal Riada in the west and the Britons in Strathclyde and the Lothians. However, another



Is the bull on this stone, found at Burghead, Morayshire, a symbol of strength or aggression?



DID YOU KNOW?

At Burghead in Morayshire archaeologists in the 19th century found a flock of more than 30 bulls! They were carved on individual boulders at the site of this Pictish fort. Today only six remain. Perhaps these carvings were part of a warrior cult celebrating strength and aggression.

tribe – the increasingly powerful Angles of Northumbria – were proving to be more and more of a threat to the Pictish way of life.

After many years of invasion, triumphs and costly defeats, the Angles had settled in large parts of Pictland. However, under the leadership of the fearsome King Bridei, the Angles were eventually driven south again in AD 685 after a decisive Pictish victory at Dunichen, or Nechtansmere, which is thought to be near Forfar. The victory is celebrated in one of the most famous Pictish stones found at nearby Aberlemno.

This triumph re-established Pictish power and Pictish kings sought to expand to the west at the expense of

the Scots of Dal Riada. Years of conflict ran alongside intermarriage between the Picts and Scots until a new threat threw them together against a common enemy. The Vikings became regular invaders and crushed a united army of Picts and Scots in AD 839. It was time for the two people to unite properly to safeguard their lands and by AD 843 Kenneth mac Alpin, King of Scots, moved his centre of royal power into the heart of Pictland and became a united King of Picts and Scots. Scotland, as we now know it, was born. However, it was the Gaelic language of the Scots which prevailed, and Pictish culture declined, leaving us with little but their mysterious stones as a legacy of their once powerful society.



Pictish symbol stone, showing a battle scene, Aberlemno, Angus.



Additional resources

For teachers

BOOKS

Investigating Carved Stones Historic Scotland 2009

This resource explores carved stones in Scotland from the earliest times through to the Picts and the early Christian period and includes background information, suggestions for on-site activities and classroom work. The resource is downloadable from www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/learning/freepublications.htm

Investigating St Vigeans Museum of Carved Stones Historic Scotland 2009

This resource provides information on one of the most important collections of Pictish sculptured stones in Scotland. The resource is downloadable from www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/learning/freepublications.htm

Hands On. Learning from Objects and Paintings: A Teacher's Guide Museums Galleries Scotland 2008

This excellent guide to working with objects in the classroom can be purchased from Glasgow Museums, Communications Section, Martyrs' School, Parson Street, Townhead, Glasgow G4 0PX Tel: 0141 271 8307

Martin Carver: Surviving in Symbols: A Visit to the Pictish Nation Historic Scotland/Birlinn 1999

Lively, well-illustrated and lucid, this is perhaps the best introductory book for the non-specialist.

Duncan Jones: A Wee Guide to the Picts Goblinshead 1998

Anna Ritchie: Picts Historic Scotland/Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1997)

A useful guide to the Picts, with detailed information on certain stones and good illustrations.

Learning From Objects: A Teacher's Guide English Heritage 1990

An extremely useful handbook for teachers, with plenty of advice and guidance on working with objects and running handling sessions.

WEB SITES

For further information about school visits, activities and resources for teachers, visit:

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit

A downloadable tour of the site at St Vigeans can be found on the Historic Scotland website at:

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/learning/freepublications.htm

OTHER HISTORIC SCOTLAND PICTISH SITES

As well as the museum at St Vigeans and the museum at Meikle, other Pictish sites are under the care of Historic Scotland and are well worth a visit. These include:

- Brough of Birsay (Orkney)
- Aberlemno Sculptured Stones

For more information about access and contact details for these sites, check www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/places/propertysearch.htm

For pupils

BOOKS

Allan Burnett Columba and All That Birlinn 2007

An informative and readable take on the life of Columba.

Terry Deary Cut Throat Celts Scholastic 1997

One of the ever-popular *Horrible Histories*. Lively, engaging and provocative.

WEB SITES

www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory

An excellent library of resources for pupils relating to various eras in Scotland's history, including the Picts. Useful for personal research projects. Includes games and information.

www.nms.ac.uk/education/kids.aspx

Pupils can explore Pictish life through a series of interactive activities on this National Museum of Scotland site.

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