

‘THEY MADE IT A LIVING THING DIDN’T THEY’: THE GROWTH OF THINGS AND THE FOSSILIZATION OF HERITAGE.

Siân Jones

- Christine: *[...] I think everything has feelings. Even a piece of stone that was carved all those years ago. I feel that it's, well they made it a living thing didn't they?*
- Siân: *Mmmm*
- Christine: *When they did that.*
- Siân: *Yes, when they created it?*
- Christine: *Yes. They made a living thing. So I feel, yes, I think when it goes back into the ground it will be home.*
- Siân: *Yes, that's really interesting.*
- Christine laughs.
- Christine: *I do, I feel it's waiting to go back. We've taken it out, disturbed it, we've looked at it and it, I mean I know it has to have lots of things done to it to preserve it erm, but I think once it goes back I feel it'll shine in its own ...*
- Siân: *In its place?*
- Christine: *Yes. And I hope it goes back where it was found. Because I feel that that's right.*¹

The piece of stone at the heart of this conversation is the long-lost lower section of a famous Pictish sculpture dating from around AD 800 (Figure 1). It was re-discovered one bitterly cold afternoon in February 2001 by three archaeologists excavating a ruined medieval chapel in the small village of Hilton of Cadboll, where Christine lives on the north-east coast of Scotland (Kirkdale 2001; Figure 2). Hailed as one of the most exquisite and important examples of early medieval sculpture in Scotland, and indeed western Europe, the upper section of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab was the focus of an acrimonious ‘repatriation’ debate in 1921, when it was offered to the British Museum by the landowner and sent to London. Within the same year it was returned to Scotland to be incorporated into the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh, and it is now a cherished exhibit in the new Museum of Scotland (Figure 3). However, the lower section and thousands of carved fragments from the cross-face had been lost since the seventeenth century; broken and dressed off the upper section by a ‘barbarous mason’ commissioned to convert the stone into a burial memorial (Miller 1835 [1994]: 40). Their excavation in August 2001 (James 2002) re-ignited tensions between the local community and national heritage bodies about ownership, conservation and presentation of the monument (see Jones 2004; 2005a; 2005b). Most of the heritage professionals involved with the monument argued that the conservation needs and research potential of the new finds justified their removal to the national museum in Edinburgh. This position was also in keeping with national guidelines for the allocation of excavated remains, which privilege the integrity of the object or assemblage and recommend that fragments from the same object or assemblage be kept together (Foster 2001: 16; Scottish Executive 1999: 6). Yet, Christine and many others within the local community were opposed to this course of action. From their perspective, as Christine eloquently explains, the monument is conceived as a ‘living thing’, and, as many others pointed out, it ‘belongs’ in Hilton, because, as far as they are concerned, that was where it was ‘born’ and where it ‘grew’. Furthermore, for Christine at least, although the lower section ‘has to have lots of things done to it to preserve it’, it will only ‘shine’ and ‘breathe’ when in the ground.² The well-publicised conflict that emerged around the excavation of the lower section thus revealed the monument’s ongoing symbolic,

¹ Citations from fieldwork interviews are in italics. To protect the identity of those concerned, all names used in relation to interview citations and fieldwork are pseudonyms. This does not apply to individuals speaking or acting in an official capacity either in (or in relation to) public forums, as their identity is intimately tied to that official position. See footnote 7 for further information on the fieldwork itself.

² The lower section of the cross-slab was uplifted during the excavations in the summer of 2001 (on 10th September), about a week before this interview with Christine took place.

economic and political value. It also highlighted the perplexities and challenges facing archaeologists and heritage managers when conservation principles and practices come into conflict with contemporary meanings and values.

The contested meanings and identities surrounding the Hilton of Cadboll stone capture a theme at the heart of Peter Ucko's work: the role of the past in contemporary society. Only two to three decades ago this was an area of apparent irrelevance for most archaeologists and Ucko was one of the leading figures in bringing it to the forefront of the discipline. Through his research and publications he has emphasised the social and political contexts of archaeology and the importance of engaging with issues of ownership, power and identity, particularly with respect to the archaeology of indigenous communities and non-western societies (e.g. Ucko 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1987, 1994; 1997; 2000). Importantly, he has combined this concern with a critical examination of the ultimately western principles, assumptions and methods that are so often taken for granted in archaeological enquiry and heritage management. Without such challenges regarding, for instance, the objectivity of archaeological interpretation (Ucko 1983a, 1989a, 1989b) or the ability of archaeologists to distinguish past ethnic groups from material culture (1989a, 1989b, 1997), research on the contemporary socio-politics of the past is artificially divorced from the nature of archaeological enquiry, and hence limited in its insights and impact. Equally important is Ucko's (1983b, 1985, 1987, 1994) recognition of the need to review institutional and legislative systems that structure archaeological enquiry and heritage management, so that decision-making can be opened up to a wider range of communities whose interests, identities and values are not always served by western academic principles and practices. Above all this wide-ranging body of work is driven by the argument that:

To isolate a remote past investigated by archaeology from the more recent past (to which archaeology is not considered relevant) may be useful for government and the elite of a country, but it runs the risk of either leaving the study of archaeology where it so often is – outside public consciousness – or of disenfranchising the more distant past from any living reality or contemporary relevance.

(Ucko 1994: 238)

Conservation and social value: the fossilization of heritage

Here, I intend to explore one specific sphere of heritage management that often contributes to this disenfranchisement: the intersection of conservation and social value and the tensions and problems that surround it (for related discussions see Foster 2001; Johnston 1994; Walderhaug Saetersdal 2000). There is an important thread *within* the philosophy of conservation, which emphasises the organic life of historic remains and I will return to this below. Nevertheless, as Ucko (1994: 261-3) has argued, the traditional western approach to the conservation and presentation of archaeological remains has been to isolate them from contemporary social life and create static protected sites and artefacts, valued primarily with relation to their original meaning and use, and actively conserved with respect to specific, usually distant, points in time. This situation is the product of a number of key principles underlying western discourses of conservation, which underpin international heritage charters (see Bell 1997; Clavir 2002: xxi; McBryde 1997: 94). First, that the preservation of cultural heritage for posterity is a moral imperative and beneficial to both present and future generations. Secondly, that the authenticity of heritage is primarily associated with the fabric of artefacts and monuments, even though intangible dimensions are increasingly acknowledged. Thirdly, that the original meanings and uses of artefacts and monuments are of primary importance in determining the significance of cultural heritage and appropriate modes of conservation, despite long-standing arguments that later developments also contribute to their authenticity. Thus, on the one hand, heritage management is suffused with rhetoric about our responsibilities to a faceless abstract public who, it is assumed, will derive meaning and value from cultural heritage. On the other hand, the authenticity and significance of cultural heritage, as defined by heritage management practices,

becomes frozen at particular points in time, abstracted from ongoing social and cultural processes, and of necessity only subject to expert assessment and stewardship (see Walderhaug Saetersdal 2000 for a similar argument).

Over the last few decades, research in multi-ethnic contexts, usually non-European nation-states with colonial histories, has highlighted the contradictions inherent in this situation. Meanings, values and identities produced in relation to cultural heritage do not necessarily coincide with the expert assessments of heritage managers and conservators. Furthermore, attitudes towards permanency and appropriate ways of looking after heritage places and objects are culturally specific, thus leading to considerable complexity in multicultural contexts (see Clavir 2002; Larsen (ed.) 1995; Mellor 1992; Ryne 2000). Ucko (1994) highlighted this complexity in his study of the treatment of sites and monuments in Zimbabwe. For instance, Great Zimbabwe, a site of immense national symbolic significance and a focus of international cultural tourism, has been subject to extensive conservation and reconstruction schemes. However, up until the early 1990s at least, conservation reports had been concerned exclusively with method and technique apparently based on the assumption that it is self-evident which particular moment in the history of the monument should be preserved (ibid.: 271). As Ucko points out, this is not straightforward as the monument has a dynamic social life and is subject to a multiplicity of meanings (ibid.: 272). A survey at the monument, for example, found that some visitors would like its collapsed walls reconstructed in what they perceive to be an 'authentic' manner. Yet such reconstruction would disregard the beliefs of rural Zimbabweans that such wall collapses are the result of the deliberate actions of spirits destroying their own homes just as living people do when they wish to move to a new area (ibid.). How such competing social values should be dealt with is not at all clear-cut, but in 1992 it seems the dynamic social life of Great Zimbabwe was not prominent on the agenda of the National Museums and Monuments Service, whose Master Plan still referred to the site as an ancient medieval structure (ibid.: 275).

Arguments in favour of an approach to conservation that recognises the dynamic social lives of objects and monuments have been evident in some of the literature on heritage and authenticity since at least the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, reacting against the restoration of historic buildings through the removal of later accretions, the Victorian anti-restoration movement associated with Ruskin and Morris held that authenticity lies in the sequence of developments associated with buildings or monuments, and that they should not be tampered with except for essential repairs (Lowenthal 1995: 129; Stanley Price et al. 1996: 309-11). Nevertheless, with the ratification of the *Venice Charter* in 1964, a respect for authenticity in the sense of the 'genuine', the 'original', uncontaminated by intrusions of another age held sway (Pye 2001: 58). The same emphasis also underlay the development of the 'test for authenticity' as a key tool in evaluating nominations for the World Heritage List (McBryde 1997: 94). Similarly in museum conservation there has been an emphasis on the integrity or 'true' nature of objects defined in relation to their origins, original fabric, and the intentions of their makers (Clavir 2002: xxi; see also Pye 2001). Over the last two decades, however, western approaches to authenticity and conservation have been seriously challenged by alternative perspectives derived largely, though not exclusively, from non-western contexts that highlight diverse approaches to conservation and deterioration. In the case of some monuments or artefacts, it is acceptable or appropriate that they deteriorate and decay, for instance, as with Great Zimbabwe, North-West Coast Native American totem poles (Clavir 2002: 153-57; Ryne 2000), or Zuni Ahayu:da (Merrill and Ahlborn 1997). In other instances, rather than preserve the original fabric of a site, building or artefact, it is deemed appropriate to rebuild or retouch it, as in the case of the Aboriginal tradition of repainting Wandjina sites to renew the spiritual power of the image (Mowaljarlai et al. 1988; contributions to Ward (ed.) 1992).

Increased recognition of this cross-cultural diversity has brought about the modification of conservation principles as expressed in codes of ethics and heritage charters (Clavir 2002: xxi; McBryde 1997: 94; Lowenthal 1995: 129). There is increasing emphasis on the ongoing social and spiritual value of heritage, such as in the *Burra Charter* (ICOMOS Australia 1979, latest revised

version 1999). In this document the emphasis on the present is clear: 'Places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to *lived experiences*' (ibid. 3; my emphasis). Furthermore, whilst upholding the Venice Charter, the *Nara Document on Authenticity*, arising from a UNESCO World Heritage Conference in 1994, stresses the need to acknowledge diverse cultural beliefs in conservation practice, including how it is safeguarded, presented, restored and enhanced:

All judgements about values attributed to heritage [...] may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of value and authenticity on fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that cultural heritage must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which it belongs.

(Larsen (ed.) 1995: xxiii)

Despite these developments, there are a number of unresolved problems in bringing together conservation principles and practices with the new emphasis on present-day meanings and values. Research has shown that the meanings and values attached to monuments are often heterogeneous and contested. Furthermore, in the ongoing social life of any particular monument the meanings and values surrounding it tend to be transient, fluid and 'in the making'. Thus, for instance, Native American attitudes to the care of totem poles have been subject to considerable change over the course of the twentieth century (Clavir 2002: 153-57; Ryne 2000), and the revival of repainting Wandjina art in the western Kimberly region of Australia in 1987 took place in a radically altered social, cultural and political context (see Ward (ed.) 1992). In contrast, conservation practices still involve the identification of specific points in time almost always *prior to the present*, which are deemed worthy of preservation, in some cases with reference to a traditional 'source' culture which is often constructed as static and homogeneous. This was highlighted at the UNESCO conference in Nara by conservation practitioners who argued that critiques of definitions of authenticity do not remove 'the need for practical tools to measure *the wholeness, the realness, the truthfulness of the site* on which they work to improve the effectiveness of proposed treatments' (Stovel 1995: 396, my emphasis). Thus, despite recent developments, conservation practices still lead to a fossilisation of the past, and are consequently often at odds with acknowledging the diverse and often transient meanings and values that are associated with historic places. Here, I will argue that issues of contemporary cultural significance and social value cannot merely be recorded and tacked onto existing frameworks. Instead, these issues require a more radical rethinking of the principles of conservation underpinning heritage management. Should we be preserving particular points in the life of monuments or artefacts and thus inevitably arresting further developments? Or should they be allowed to grow, change, rejuvenate, collapse, and decay if these processes are integral to the ongoing meanings and values surrounding them?

The conservation of early medieval sculpture

I want to turn now to the conservation of early medieval sculpture in Scotland. Perceived as a product of a formative period in the history of the Scottish nation, many such monuments have been attributed national and international significance (Foster 2001: 1; Historic Scotland 2003: 3). Indeed, the role of early medieval sculpture in the construction of Scottish national identity was highlighted in the late nineteenth century by Joseph Anderson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities (1869-1913), who argued that the formation of a gallery of such 'indigenous' art materials would '...restore to the native genius of the Scots the original elements of that system of design which are its special inheritance' (Anderson 1881: 134). Given this significance, it is not surprising that such sculpture has been subject to a lengthy history of attempts to conserve and present it. As with parietal rock art and carved stone on buildings, preservation has been a particular concern. In the case of early medieval sculpture it is vulnerable to a range of naturally-occurring threats, particularly from water, frost action and storm damage, as well as to a lesser extent accidental and deliberate human actions (see Historic Scotland 2001, 2003; Muir 1998). Over the course of the last two centuries, private individuals,

charitable and subscription bodies, as well as heritage institutions have engaged in a range of preservation strategies involving removal to private houses or museums, relocation to historic buildings (usually churches), enclosure in purpose-built shelters, and maintenance in the landscape. However, all of these strategies have aroused varying degrees of conflict and controversy (see Foster 2001).

In Scotland, as elsewhere, conservation policies and charters, such as the *Stirling Charter* (Historic Scotland 2000: 3), stress the importance of preserving historic remains for posterity. Yet, in keeping with the international developments discussed above, recent documents also emphasise the significance of all phases of development (ibid.: 4), and the importance of present-day social, economic, recreational and educational values (ibid.: 1). Similarly, in Historic Scotland's (2003: 6) revised policy guidance notes for the conservation of carved stone (including early medieval sculpture),³ there is an emphasis on social value alongside historic and aesthetic value: 'The cultural significance of a carved stone is embodied in its fabric, design, context and setting; in associated documents; in its use; in people's memories and associations with it'. Furthermore, setting is attributed particular significance in the policy guidelines with a presumption in favour of maintaining the association of monumental carved stone with its locality (Historic Scotland 2003: 6-7). Here too it is stressed that the history of the monument is important and secondary locations can accrue significance of a social and economic nature as well as for historical reasons:

Where a carved stone still possessing monumental qualities is believed to be *in situ* or in a place of significance, the presumption is that it will not be moved unless the importance of retaining it there is outweighed by demonstrable conservation needs that cannot be satisfied in any other way. Such considerations need to take into account not simply archaeological and historic factors, but also social and economic ones.

(ibid.: 7)

Nevertheless, despite this acknowledgement of social value, the overriding emphasis in the conservation of carved stone in Scotland is still focused on the historic significance of any particular monument and on the preservation of the original fabric of the stone. In part this is because methodologies for assessing social value have yet to be embedded in routine heritage management processes, with the result that social value is often outweighed by historic and economic value (Bell 1997: 14; Jones 2004: 5-6, 66-67; de la Torre and Mason 2002: 3). More fundamentally, as the above quotation highlights, the overriding emphasis is still placed on the 'demonstrable conservation needs' of the carved stone itself (Historic Scotland 2003: 7). The implication is that ultimately authenticity is assumed to lie in the fabric of the monument and only secondarily in setting, use, meaning and value. The physical fossilisation which results from techniques aimed at addressing 'demonstrable conservation needs' can thus conflict with the contemporary meanings and values associated with monuments. This tension, which is inherent in current conservation policies and practices, often underlies the controversy surrounding early medieval sculpture and the critical public response.⁴

Monuments as 'living things': the case of Hilton of Cadboll

³ Historic Scotland (2003: 4) estimate that there are about 1,600 early medieval carved stones surviving in Scotland today. About one third of these come under Historic Scotland's jurisdiction, 350 as properties in the care of Scottish Ministers and a further 180 or as scheduled ancient monuments (ibid.). Furthermore, Historic Scotland's operational policy on carved stone is designed to provide guidance to local authorities, landowners and third parties with an interest in carved stones.

⁴ In the sphere of heritage management there has been a persistent debate about whether such sculptures should be treated as art objects and placed in museums, or regarded as monuments and preserved within the landscape (Foster 2001). In many instances this issue also intersects with the wider cultural significance and social value attached to early medieval sculpture (see Jones 2004: 56-58). However, as we shall see there are other conceptual and symbolic issues at stake.

The Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, with its complex and fragmented biography, arouses conflict equal to, if not exceeding, other examples of early medieval sculpture. As we have seen above, the excavation of the lower section of the cross slab along with thousands of small carved fragments in 2001, resulted in tensions between local residents and national heritage agencies over its conservation and presentation. Local residents claimed ownership of the new discoveries and strongly resisted first the excavation of the lower section from the ground, and later its removal from the village. In response, heritage professionals emphasised the threats facing the lower section whilst it remained in the ground, and the historical knowledge that could be gained from research in a museum context. A heated public meeting between local residents and representatives of the funding bodies⁵ at the excavation resulted in an agreement that the lower section could be excavated, as long as it subsequently remained in the village until such time when ownership had been established through legal channels.⁶ During 2003 the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) were eventually attributed ownership, and have subsequently proposed long-term display in the village. However, ownership is still contested by the local Historic Hilton Trust, and to date the lower section remains in Hilton of Cadboll in a secure location. Here I do not intend to focus on the complex issues surrounding ownership (for a detailed discussion see Jones 2004; 2005b). Instead I wish to draw on field research carried out in Hilton of Cadboll to explore the tensions between conservation principles and practices on the one hand, and the contemporary meanings and values surrounding the monument in local contexts on the other.⁷

At the heart of the meanings and values surrounding the ‘the Stone’ in local contexts is the way in which it is conceived of as a living thing. Sometimes such meaning is produced through the use of metaphors. For instance, it is referred to as having been ‘born’, ‘growing’, ‘breathing’, having a ‘soul’, ‘living’ and ‘dying’, having ‘charisma’ and ‘feelings’. A few informants were more explicit about this symbolic dimension drawing direct similes rather than relying on metaphor. For instance, after it had been uplifted Christine noted that the lower section of the cross-slab:

was like something that was born there and it should go back [...]. It's like people who emigrate or go away, they should always come back where they were born and I feel that that stone should go back.

Another local resident, Duncan, remarked that if the upper part of the cross-slab returned from Edinburgh:

There'll be a party maybe and there'll be things going on here that'll be absolutely unbelievable like a, how would I put it now, an ancient member of the village coming back, if that came through here on a trailer and everybody would be here. [...] Coming home where it's always

⁵ Four organisations funded the excavation in the summer of 2001: Historic Scotland, National Museums of Scotland, Ross and Cromarty Enterprise, and the Highland Council. Local protest in Easter Ross largely focused on the former two Edinburgh-based, as opposed to Highland, organizations. As Withers (1996, 328) points out, these two regions maintain a core-periphery relationship associated with oppositions in many aspects of social and political life, including the construction of identity.

⁶ Initially, it had been anticipated by heritage managers that future ownership would be legally determined by Treasure Trove. However, in early 2002 the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer (the Crown's representative regarding Treasure Trove) declared it to be outwith Treasure Trove, as he did not regard the new finds as ‘ownerless’, being derived from an object that is already owned. Although, the identity of the ‘owner(s)’ was not initially specified, in 2003 the Q<R declared that they belong to the National Museums of Scotland on the basis that the organisation already owns the upper portion of the monument.

⁷ The field research took place between 2001 and 2003 and involved participant observation and in-depth qualitative interviews (52 in total) carried out whilst living in Hilton of Cadboll and the adjacent village of Balintore for a period amounting to six months in total. The research was grant-aided by Historic Scotland and aimed to investigate ‘the meanings, values and interests associated with the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, and the ways in which these are manifested in the debates and commentaries concerning its conservation, location and presentation’. Funding was also provided by the University of Manchester. See Jones (2004) for a full discussion of the results.

been [...] If the stone had a soul it would be saying oh there's the Port Culac you know, there's so and so's house you know. I'm going over to the park and there's, there's the other bit of the stone and it broke off a hundred and fifty years ago or whatever.

Furthermore, as the last quote highlights, the monument is seen not merely as a living thing, but crucially as *a living member of the community*. Not only is a direct analogy drawn between the cross-slab and an 'ancient member of the village', but it is also attributed the kind of social knowledge that is essential to establishing a person's membership within the community.

The application of discourses of kinship and 'belonging' also reinforce the cross-slab's place as a living member of the community. 'Belonging' is a key concept in the identification of kinship relationships in the Highlands of Scotland (see Macdonald 1997), particularly amongst people who are born and brought up there. Thus the term regularly crops up in conversation, for instance, in an interview with Maggie: *'she belongs, they're both Sutherland in their name'*, or *'it was the first of the Sutherlands that belong to my granny'*. Such statements do not simply relate to actual kin, but are also extended to others who are considered part of the community. Indeed, rather than a reflection of static relationships they provide a means of articulating and negotiating 'who is and who is not "part of the place"', and who is and is not authentically "local" (ibid.: 131). Given such usage, the extension of the concept of belonging to the cross-slab carries a connotation of kinship. For instance, one woman noted in an interview, *'I still think that the stone belongs to the people here'* (Mary), and another, *'... it's still not where it should be, it should be back up home where it belongs'* (Janet). Birth place is also important in 'placing' people and negotiating degrees of 'belonging'. Being born in Hilton, or related to someone who was born there, is central to being accepted as an insider or a 'local'. Again, like people, the cross-slab 'belongs' in Hilton because, as Christine puts it, it is *'like something that was born there'*, and *'that's where it was created'*.

Thus, the body of metaphorical and symbolic meaning surrounding the monument in local discourse concerns its place within the community. In this way the monument provides a medium for the expression and negotiation of identities and boundaries. Categories of 'local' and 'incomer', and through them the boundaries of community as a whole, were continuously negotiated in relation to the monument at the height of the conflict in 2001.⁸ Conceived of as a living member of the community, the monument also provides a mechanism for expressing the relationship between people and place; a relationship that is fraught and contested in the Scottish Highlands where the dislocation and alienation wrought by the Clearances remain prominent aspects of social memory (see Jones 2005a). The monument acts as an icon for the village as a whole, as expressed metaphorically by one local activist in the statement: *'it belongs to the village, it is Hilton'*. Indeed, it is sometimes even positioned as constitutive of place and therefore part of the fabric of people's existence. Associations between the monument and features such as rocks and sea, serve to place it as an ontological component of the landscape as expressed by Màiri:

the Hilton stone, you almost feel attached to it, it's almost like being attached to rocks or the sea or it's always been here, it's part of the place and for generations, I don't know, it was a close community you know...

So how does this body of symbolic meaning surrounding the monument in local contexts come into conflict with conservation principles and practices? I should first stress that the symbolic conception of the monument as a living thing is not a product of a static and homogeneous framework

⁸ For instance, in the debates over the new discoveries in 2001, 'locals' could negotiate relative positions of authority and status through their association (and their parents' and grandparents' connections) with the biography of the monument. 'Incomers' on the other hand, could negotiate greater degrees of 'insiderness' through adopting, or respecting, the socially constructed authoritative community position, demanding that the new discoveries remain in Hilton. For other studies illustrating similar processes see Macdonald (1997) and Nadel-Klein (2003).

of meaning uniformly shared throughout the local community. Rather it is a dynamic discourse that draws upon existing frameworks of meaning concerning community and the relationships between people and places in the Highlands. Such meanings are particularly resonant amongst people with long-term, often multi-generational family connections to the Highlands. It is also these individuals, particularly those historically associated with the village of Hilton, who came to occupy positions of authority regarding the local campaign to keep the lower section and in representing the relationship between monument and community. Paradoxically, the excavation itself was particularly important in the crystallisation of local discourses in which the cross-slab is conceptualised as a living member of the community. Being able to witness the lower portion of the cross-slab being revealed in the ground through excavation reinforced a sense of intimacy and kinship as expressed by Mairi, a woman in her 40s who was born and brought up in the village:

When I was up on the [excavation viewing] platform there on Saturday and looking down on it ... and I was able to see it, and the fact [she laughs] it's in there, it's in the earth and it's been there for so long ... you actually feel for it, you have a feeling for it. I can't put it any other way. It's part of your culture and therefore it's part of the people, its part of the community.

Similarly, Duncan, another Hilton 'local', recounted how he felt an intimate connection with the base of the cross-slab tied into feelings of ancestry:

... they were excavating all round it for a few weeks and I didn't ask anyone because I thought it would be stupid [...] but the one thing I really wanted to do was just to touch it, put my hands on it. [...] I think we were connected with it, going back down the years they were connected with it. [...] to know that my people were here and that stone is there just to touch it you know they must have seen it, they must have touched it, you know going back these years, it was like something holy I just, I just needed to touch it.

The excavation also reinforced people's sense of that the cross-slab was 'born' there, irrespective of the fact that archaeological evidence revealed it to be in a secondary context (probably of medieval date) (James 2002). For some the close association between the lower section and the soil was also important in terms of the life-force metaphorically attributed to the cross-slab, by references to it being able to 'breathe' and 'grow'. Indeed, in this sense the soil seemed to offer protective qualities. For instance, one local resident noted that 'the elements are killing the stone' once the soil around the lower section had been removed through excavation. And Christine metaphorically hinted at the positive qualities of the soil:

Christine: *I think being in the ground gave it something [...] whatever was in the ground was good for it [...] I feel if it is back in the ground it'll breathe.*

Siân: *You think it can't breathe when it's out here*

Christine: *It's just a cold piece of stone.*

Ironically, the very same processes of discovery and excavation brought the lower section, and smaller fragments squarely within the sphere of conservation principles and practices. Not surprisingly, within this framework primary emphasis was placed on conserving the physical fabric of the lower section, which, once exposed, was threatened by the action of water and the leaching of salts. Acute conservation needs were addressed on site (see Figure 4), but many heritage professionals also stressed that it was in the best interests of the stone to uplift it and take it to the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh where it could receive expert conservation.⁹ Despite the metaphorical safety offered by the soil, most local residents accepted that the lower section had to 'have lots of things done to preserve it'

⁹ Interestingly, this argument was often more prevalent amongst heritage managers than professional conservators who were prepared to consider a wider range of conservation options (for further discussion see Muir 1998).

and there was high level of consensus about the sources of threat, including ice, frost, wind, air blown sand and salt. Tensions surrounding conservation thus stemmed from the broader implications attached to it, i.e. the dislocation of the relationship between monument and community wrought through the historic removal of the upper section in the mid-nineteenth century and now by the threatened removal of the lower section to Edinburgh. As Alan remarks with respect to the upper section of the cross-slab in Edinburgh:

I look at the Hilton stone when it's in the Edinburgh museum and it's just a dead headstone among other headstones, just a dead you know, whereas in Hilton it could be a living stone, hopefully as a focus for a living community again and also indirectly basically the catalyst for more development in the place.

Thus, by dislocating its relationship with community, physical displacement of the monument thereby negates its social life. For some, uplifting the stone for conservation purposes resulted in a form of symbolic violence to the social life of the monument, as it is the soil itself that provides a metaphorical source of protection and life for the lower section. For others, however, the relationship between monument and community appears to be preserved whilst the lower section remains physically present within the village, which may well be achieved by NMS's proposal that the lower section be lent to the community for long-term display, although ownership remains a problem (see Jones 2005b).

Another problematic aspect of conservation is the tension that exists between those with professional conservation expertise and those who have 'feeling' for the monument on the basis of relationships of kinship and 'belonging' (as expressed by Mairi in the interview citation above). Inevitably there was considerable suspicion amongst local residents about the possible manipulation of conservation in the conflict over ownership and presentation of the new discoveries. More subtly though members of the local community, again particularly those with long term family associations, are imputed a privileged role in the protection of the stone, in possessing 'feeling' for what it needs. Thus, the authority vested in conservation experts and heritage professionals from without the community can create tensions, as these individuals cannot be located in local sets of social relationships and hence by definition cannot possess the same 'feeling' for the stone. Such tensions were expressed by Alan, first in commenting on the landowners decision to take the upper portion to his castle grounds in Invergordon in the mid nineteenth century, an action partly legitimated, at least retrospectively, on conservation grounds:

Well I think what really came across [in the stories told within the village] was just the negativity of the fact that the people that moved the stone had no feelings for the stone themselves you know and they'd no feelings for the people in the place, and I think that's the sort of feeling that came through is that, eh, it was something that was important to the place, but basically those that had the power basically had, it's like, it's like a lot of these people that come into the place can be interested and whatever, but well one thing about Hilton, eh, you can be here fifty years and if you're no 'born here you're still an outsider.

And later with relation to the heritage professionals currently involved with the new discoveries:

You know Historic Scotland as far as I'm concerned is a faceless quango. I mean I would like to basically know the guys. I wouldn't mind a list of them so I know what they are, who they are, where they're from, eh, that are making decisions about our stone.

Hence, in the process of taking care of the Stone and making decisions about it, there is a need to 'place' people and locate them within sets of social relationships. This concern, I suggest, is not merely a mechanism for establishing trust, but more fundamentally stems from the conception of the monument as a living, breathing, thing, embedded in social relationships and conceived as 'an ancient member of the village'.

Conclusions

Earlier, I asked whether monuments and artefacts should be allowed to grow, change, rejuvenate, collapse, and decay if these processes are integral to the ongoing meanings and values surrounding them. The answer to this question depends, in part, upon what we want to prioritise through conservation practices; the physical integrity of objects, or their wider cultural significance and conceptual integrity, which may be linked to intangible and transient values (Clavir 2002). If the emphasis is shifted towards the latter then the answer will be yes in the case of some objects. However, as we have seen cultural context is of the utmost importance. Traditionally, in North-West coast Native American cultures some totem poles, erected as memorials, were allowed to decay and return to the earth, and in the Kimberly district of North-West Australia Wandjina rock art was retouched in order to renew its spiritual power. But neither cultural tradition is static or homogeneous, both being subject to discontinuity, revival and transformation in colonial and post-colonial contexts, in part, through engagement with western conservation policies and practices (see Clavir 2002 and Ward (ed.) 1992).

In the case of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, its significance in local contexts does not depend upon the gradual deterioration of the monument. Indeed, local residents often express concern over the well-being of the Stone, and, as we have seen, identify similar environmental hazards as heritage and conservation professionals themselves. However, members of the local community also identify other threats, namely dislocation of the physical relationship between monument and community,¹⁰ and removal of control and care of the monument from the sphere of authorised 'locals' into the hands of 'outsiders'. These threats are not primarily harmful to the material integrity of the monument as far as local residents are concerned, although this is implied at times. They do, however, endanger the intangible cultural significance of the monument in terms of the meanings and values created through it in local contexts. As indicated above, the Hilton Stone is only 'alive' when it is in Hilton. Out of the ground, and certainly in Edinburgh, it becomes just a 'cold dead stone'. Thus, prolonging the object's existence materially is not necessarily equivalent to continuing its social 'life'; sometimes these two things coincide, but all too often they can run counter to one another.

There are many, perhaps surprising, parallels between the Hilton of Cadboll case and the conflict often surrounding the conservation of First Nations heritage. In her book, *Preserving What is Valued*, Miriam Clavir (2002: 145) compares First Nations' and museum conservators' perspectives and concludes that:

Both perspectives value 'preservation'; however, this term has two different meanings: (1) that favoured by museums, which involves using physical and intellectual means to ensure that material fragments from the past do not disappear, and (2) that favoured by First Nations, which involves continuing and/or renewing past traditions and their associated material culture; that is preserving the culture's past by being actively engaged in it and thereby ensuring that it has a living future. Within Western culture, heritage is often described materially, in terms of a cultural product or production; within First Nations cultures, heritage is often described culturally in terms of 'process' rather than 'product'.

Clavir's distinction between heritage as 'product' and as 'process' is a useful one, but the Hilton of Cadboll case challenges the idea that western culture is characterised by a uniform tradition or set of values as regards the conservation of cultural heritage. In many ways, this commonplace notion is

¹⁰ Dislocation of the relationship between monument and community was posed by the proposed removal of the new discoveries to Edinburgh at the time of excavation. The agreement between Historic Scotland and the local community that the lower section would not be removed from the village until ownership had been legally established postponed this event. However, a sense of the threat of imminent removal remained strong and has not been alleviated by the proposal by the National Museums of Scotland to facilitate local display.

preserved by the assumption that European nation-states are for the most part culturally homogeneous (with the exception of immigrant communities) and that there are no minority indigenous 'source' communities. As a result, those who conserve and present national heritage are assumed to represent a homogeneous majority culture, and likewise the historic and aesthetic expertise and assumptions that inform their decision-making are regarded as part of the core values of the wider culture. I am not suggesting that the local population of Hilton of Cadboll or the wider region be regarded as a minority or indigenous community equivalent to First Nations communities of Canada, New Zealand and Australia.¹¹ Rather, if we look more closely at the meanings and values attached to monuments and artefacts in many parts of Britain and Europe we will find a similar emphasis on their social lives, and on heritage as 'process' rather than 'product' (see, for instance, Bender 1998; Holtorf 1996; Riegl 1903 [1996]; Walderhaug Saetersdal 2000).

Of course, the authenticity of meanings and values surrounding heritage today can often be challenged if they are judged with respect to cultural continuity and the original intentions of those who produced the remains in question, as is still the current heritage orthodoxy. It is unlikely that current conceptions of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab as a living thing reflect the symbolic meanings attached to it in early medieval contexts. The Reformation wrought a significant dislocation in the religious beliefs and traditions associated with early medieval and medieval Christianity, thus undermining claims to cultural continuity between 'source' and present-day populations. Moreover, the forced population movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought about massive dislocation of communities and were largely responsible for the creation of marginal fishing villages, such as Hilton of Cadboll, in the West and far North-East of Scotland (Richards 2000). The point is that such processes of dislocation accompanied by the transformation and (re)invention of tradition are present in almost all cultural contexts to a greater or lesser degree; they lie at the heart of people's engagement with the material remains of the past, and ensure their continuing significance.¹² Indeed these processes are even part and parcel of the development of western traditions of collecting and preservation that underpin modern conservation principles. Rather than constituting universally-relevant values, these principles represent historically and culturally specific modes of engagement with historic remains, deriving from the landowning and 'polite' classes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European societies, and intimately tied to political movements such as nationalism and imperialism.

Thus, I suggest that we need to shift our approach to conserving cultural heritage away from the current emphasis on the material fossilisation of heritage as 'product', towards a focus on heritage as 'process', whether dealing with the historic remains of disenfranchised indigenous and post-colonial cultures or those of European nation-states. If heritage conservation is redirected towards 'process', on the dynamic and transient (re)making of meaning and tradition, then this will go some way towards addressing the contradiction inherent in current frameworks, which stress the importance of social value and contemporary cultural significance, whilst still privileging preservation of the material fabric of historic remains. Indeed, it will be necessary to break down the artificial dichotomy that is often created between the conservation of physical fabric using specialised scientific techniques, and the conservation of meanings and values as if the latter were simply applied to the surface form of objects. As the Hilton of Cadboll Stone reveals, the social lives of objects are not merely created through the attribution of new layers of meaning and value that are wrapped around them in changing social and historical circumstances. The materiality of artefacts and monuments is implicated in, indeed lies at the heart of, their biographies: things are born, they grow, breathe, live and die; they are conceived as having a soul and a personality, and as being nourished and harmed by other substances

¹¹ Although, it can be argued that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political and economic relationships between the English/southern Scottish and the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were framed by the same discourses of race and primitivism that informed the colonial conquest of non-European peoples.

¹² For a discussion of the ways in which eighteenth and nineteenth century processes of dislocation and displacement associated with the Highland Clearances inform the symbolic and metaphorical significance of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab see Jones (2005a).

such as air, soil and water. Their substance and identity is no longer discrete but related through birth, kinship and belonging to other things and to people. They are often implicated in the fabric of place and community, and like organic things, the materiality of artefacts and monuments is expected to change with time. The material fabric of artefacts and monuments must therefore be considered an integral part of their social lives and should not be frozen in perpetuity at a particular moment in time. That is not to suggest that monuments should be abandoned in a blanket fashion to 'the continuous and unceasing cycle of change in nature' as argued by adherents to the late nineteenth century cult of monuments (Riegl 1903 [1996]: 73-74). Instead, each case should be contextualised in terms of the dynamic, culturally specific meanings and values attached to it. Furthermore, to do so it will be necessary to open up the preserves of significance assessment and conservation planning to greater dialogue and negotiation. This may not be a consensual process; the creation of meaning is often heterogeneous and contested. However, as Ucko (1994: 247) has argued with respect to Zimbabwean 'culture houses', tensions and disputes can be seen as signs of success, demonstrating genuine involvement in heritage and highlighting its role in the reproduction *and* transformation of cultural traditions.

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1: The lower section of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, in situ outside the west gable end of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel (photograph, the author).

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Figure 2: Map of Easter Ross and the Black Isle, north-east Scotland, showing key sites mentioned in the text (drawn by A. Mackintosh).

Figure 3: The Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab in the Museum of Scotland (photograph, the author, © The National Museums of Scotland).

Figure 4: Conservation taking place during the excavation of the lower section at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel site in August 2001 (photograph, the author).