An Ivory Knife Handle from the High Street, Perth, Scotland: Consuming Ritual in a Medieval Burgh

By M. A. HALL

This paper seeks to cast some light on a so-called Green Man ivory knife handle from Perth and on the cultural context from which it sprang. It was made and lost or disposed of during the 14th century and, although its full life-story includes its archaeological recovery and subsequent curation in Perth Museum, its main importance lies in what it can tell us of medieval people. Exploring its material and production, its function as a handle, its iconography and its cultural background reveals this importance. Bringing these strands together gives us a snapshot of medieval cognition, focusing on the way elements of seasonal ritual were consumed in the medieval burgh of Perth.

DISCOVERY AND DESCRIPTION

The handle was one of several thousand objects recovered from Perth High Street during the 1975–7 excavations in advance of the construction of a Marks & Spencer's store (Fig. 1), forming part of an assemblage of 69 worked skeletal-material objects. It was recovered from the South Sector of the site, from Rig VII, a context dated to the early 14th century and which has been described as a metalworker's workshop. From the same context comes an unfinished ivory handle of rectangular section. The full publication of the Perth High Street excavations of 1975–7 is still awaited.[1] The fullest published statement therefore remains the final interim report.[2] As a responsible institution, the Perth Museum & Art Gallery felt it important to publish the handle in question — which has received no detailed study despite being one of the most significant finds of the excavation — in order to bring it to the attention of the wider audience it deserves.

The handle (Figs. 2–3) measures 120.5 mm (length) x 22.6 mm (max. width) x 16.5 mm (min. width) x 14.5 mm (max. thickness). Its socket measures 9 mm x

[1] Publication of the Perth High Street excavations is planned in a series of fascicules (probably 10) encompassing the site history and buildings, the stratigraphy and the various finds categories (leather, metalwork, wood, skeletal materials, baskets, stone, environmental evidence and animal bone, textiles and pottery). Each is written by a subject specialist and the whole series is edited by N. Q. Bogdan, the excavation director. The Manpower Services Commission and private sponsors funded the excavations and early post-excavation work and Historic Scotland is funding the current phase of post-excavation work.

[2] N. Q. Bogdan, *The Perth High Street Excavations 1975–77: Final Interim Report* (Perth, 1992). The finding of the handles is covered on pages 7–8. The relevant fascicule is: A. MacGregor, *The Perth High Street Excavations 1975–77: The Worked Bone* (forthcoming).

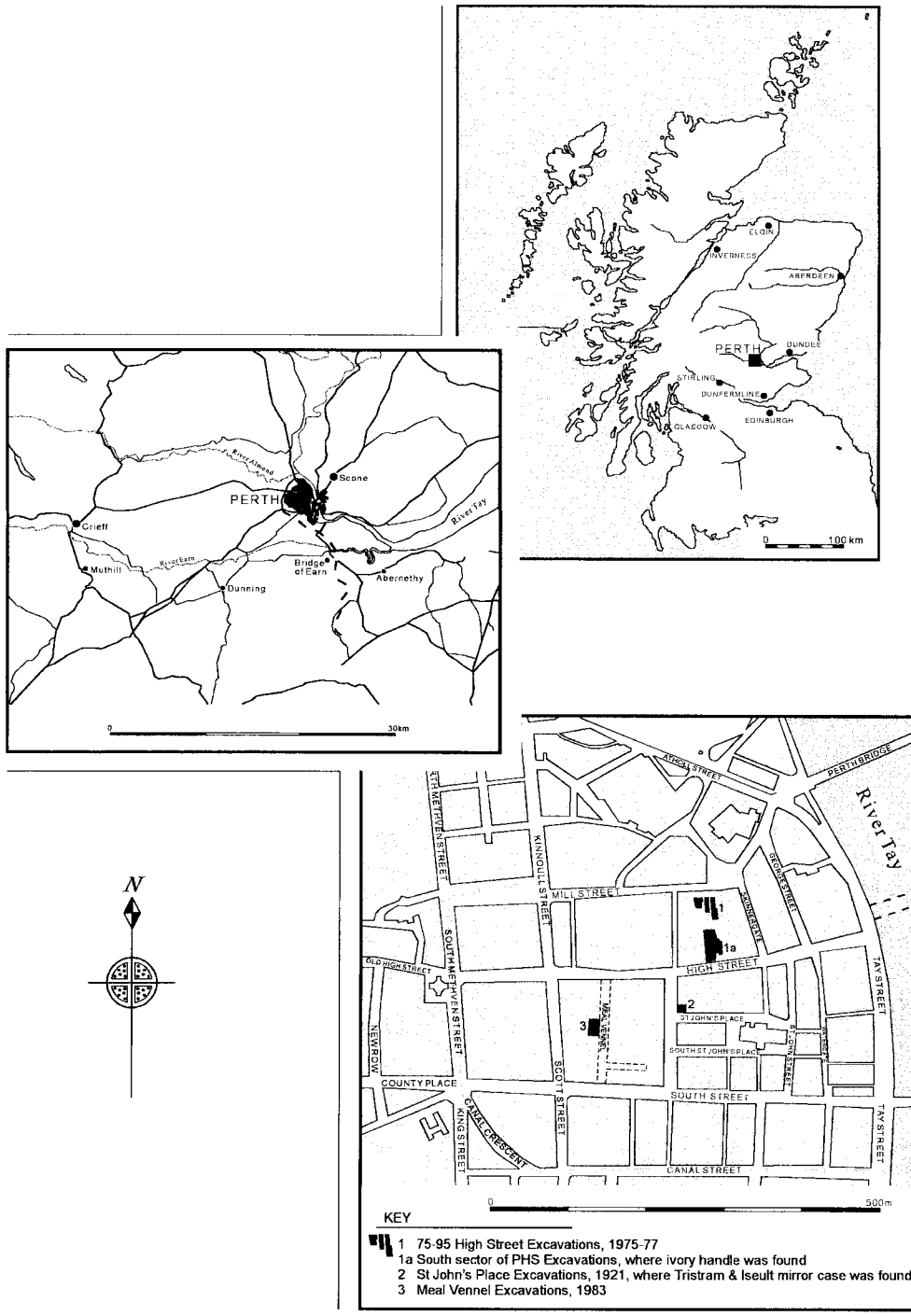

FIG. 1
Location Maps. *Drawn by D. Munro (courtesy of SUAT Ltd).*

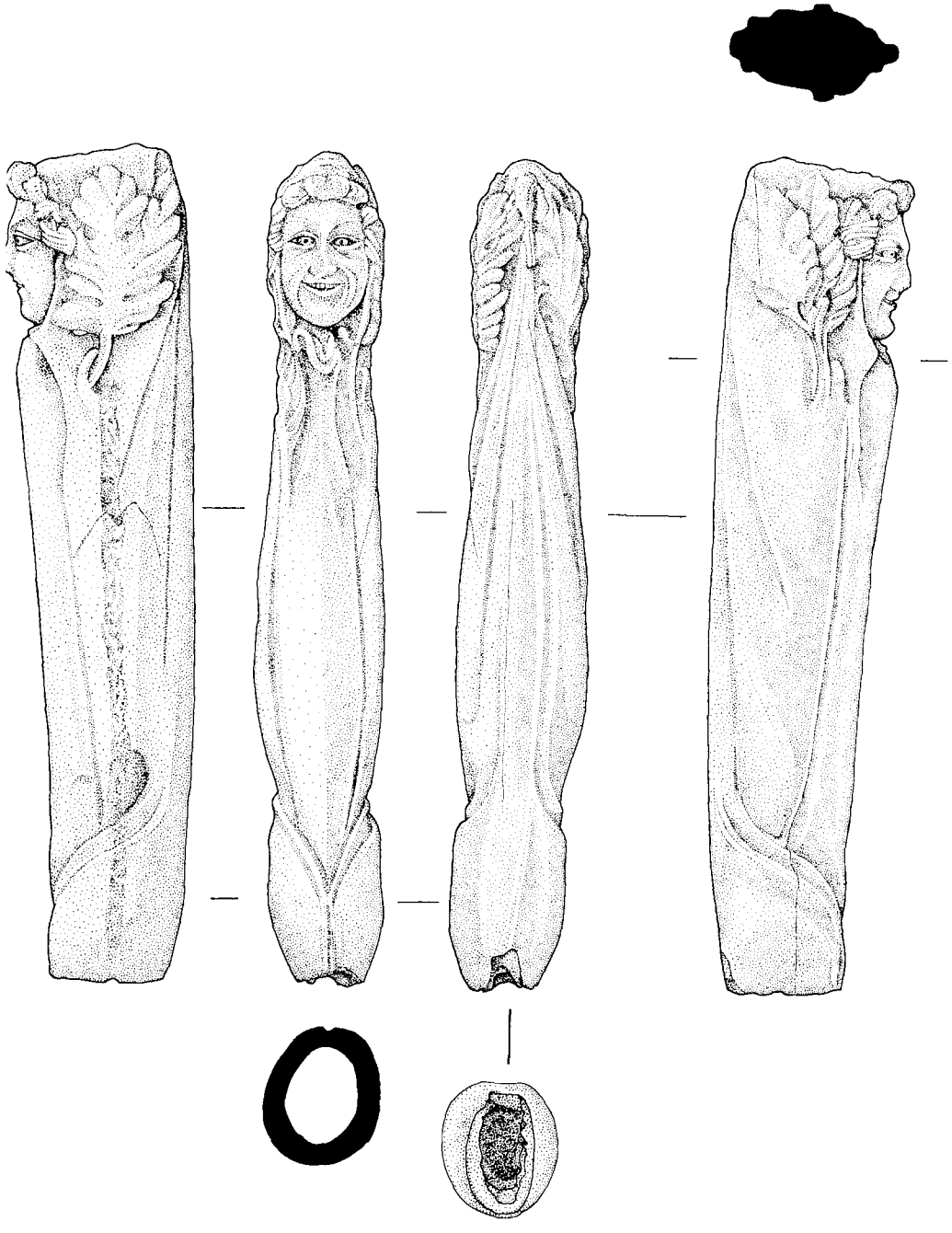

FIG. 2
The Perth ivory handle. Scale 1:1. *Drawn by D. Munro (SUAT Ltd).*

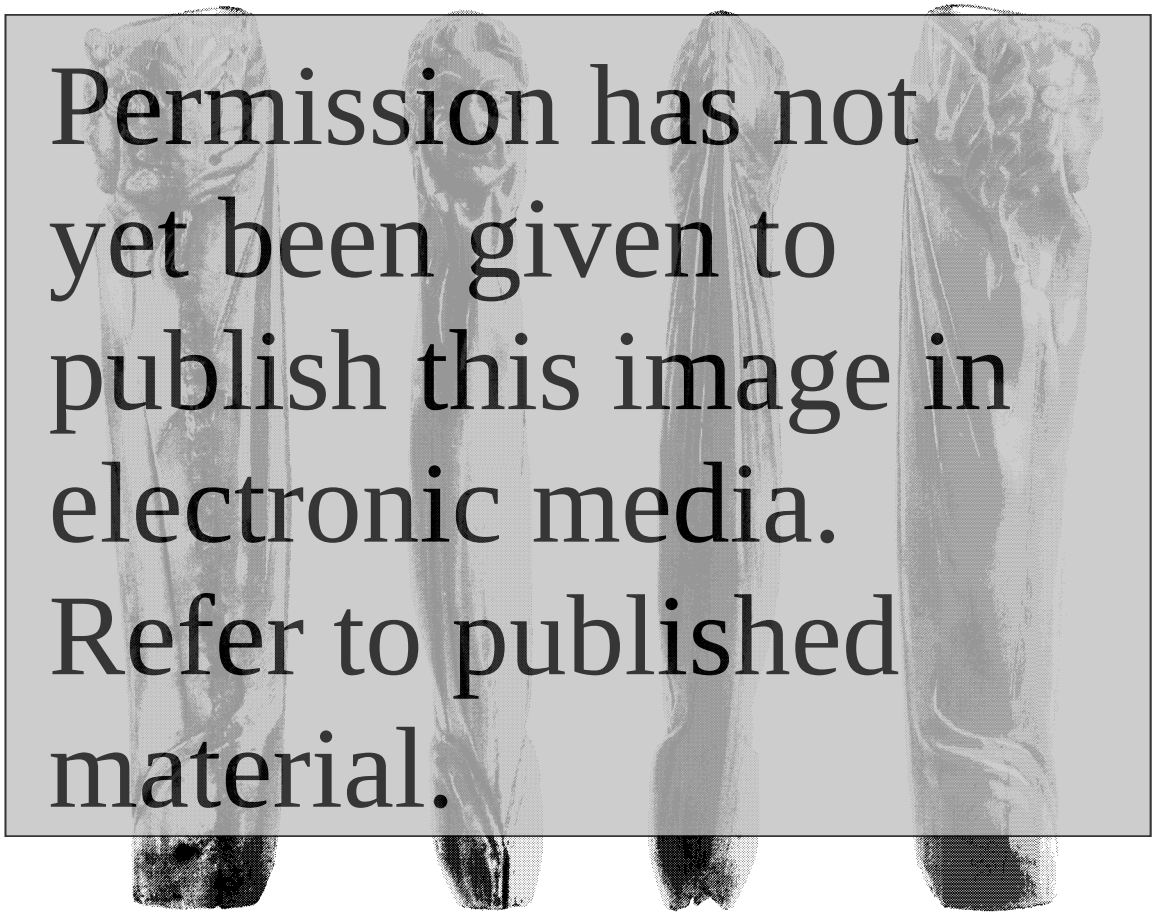

FIG. 3
The Perth ivory handle. Scale 1:1. *Photo: P. Adair (copyright Perth Museum & Art Gallery).*

4.8 mm (internal diameter) and 16.4 mm x 9.9 mm (external diameter); the socket depth is approximately 50.5 mm. The handle weighs 35.71 g and tapers slightly to the mouth of the socket. In cross-section the handle is basically oval, modified by its intricate carving, particularly in the upper portion. The carefully executed carving represents a laughing or grinning male face whose open mouth displays 8 upper teeth. It has wide eyes, with the pupils defined by pits, with lids and brows, smiling cheeks, a slightly flattened nose — in part caused by wear, which has removed the left nostril; the right nostril remains clear — and a pronounced chin. Tight, well-defined curls of hair (a prominent one over the forehead is slightly damaged) frame the face. The curly hair also laps over the edge of the hood that is pulled tightly around the head and under the chin. The cloak of the hood then appears to fall away in a series of loose folds down the length of the handle, clearly defined at the socket-end with a possible collar arrangement, which has a rather

phallic appearance, almost as if the figure were emerging from a phallus.[3] On the right- and left-hand sides of the head are distinct arrangements of naturalistic leaves, possibly rowan or hornbeam and hawthorn respectively. The left side displays three leaves, overlying each other but apparently connected to the same stem or twig. They are elliptical in shape and the uppermost of the three is the most visible. This upper leaf has three serrations either side of the top point and a central vein, while the middle and lower leaves have their right side visible. The right side of the handle has a single, large lobate leaf of asymmetrical form, with two lobes either side of the top lobe; each of the lobes is toothed or serrated. The right side of the leaf has its uppermost lobe extended to partially cover the back of the hood. The naturalistic forms of the leaves supports the contextual dating of the handle, for the shift from stiff formal foliage decoration to more naturalistic forms takes place from the 13th century onwards.[4] Both sets of leaves terminate at around shoulder height, their leaf-stem terminals disappearing into the cloaks or possibly held by very minimally depicted hands. These take the form of single, finger-like projections, one of which (the left) appears to be blunted by damage.

Down the length of the right side of the handle is a band (c. 3 mm wide) of coarse dentine (i.e. the exposed core of the walrus tooth) which somehow seems disfiguring but does not appear to have hindered the full execution of the handle. The sense of disfigurement may well be a modern sensibility and I am indebted to Arthur MacGregor for his observation that the marbled dentine may even have been seen as enhancing the piece, making plain its exotic and precious nature (it is similarly exposed on some of the Lewis chessmen for example).[5]

The handle has a deep, all-over polish. It predominantly has a rich toffee colour but there are more buttery-looking patches on the tip of the uppermost left-side leaf, the left side of the face and parts of the front and right side of the handle. This differentiation is presumably due to its burial environment, perhaps to some degree influenced by its wear pattern. Video-microscope examination at x30 magnification revealed traces of a white crystalline deposit in the eyes and on some of the leaf edges.

THE RAW MATERIAL AND ITS WORKING

On excavation this handle and a second, unfinished, plain handle were identified as walrus ivory, an identification since confirmed by the author and by

[3] I would not wish to overplay its phallic suggestiveness: it could equally be evocative of a tooth erupting from a gum (i.e. a walrus tooth) or even a puppet design. The face is reminiscent of later medieval marotte-heads as used by fools and jesters: see W. Mezger, *Narrenidee und Fastnachtsbrauch: Studien zum Fortlebenm des Mittelalters in der europäischen Festkultur* (Konstanz, 1991). It could of course be deliberately ambiguous. Any phallic suggestiveness need not imply an amuletic function. Compare, for example the discussion on non-amuletic phalluses on medieval pottery vessels and bronze acolipiles in M. R. McCarthy and C. M. Brooks, *Medieval Pottery in Britain AD 900–1600* (Leicester, 1988), 130–1. Note though the very leafy phallus on the Hilton bronze aeolipile discussed in R. Plot, *The Natural History of Stafford-shire* (Oxford, 1686), 433–4, plate XXXIII.12. For a fuller discussion of aeolipiles see W. L. Hildburgh, 'Aeolipiles as fire-blowers', *Archaeologia*, 94 (1951), 35–55 and see also M. Jones, 'Sex and sexuality in late medieval and early modern art', 187–305 in D. Erlach, M. Reisenleitner and K. Vocelka (eds.), *Privatisierung Der Trieber? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 1994), esp. 223–4 and note 224, where they are interpreted as fountain-blowers.

[4] J. Cherry, *Medieval Decorative Art* (London, 1991), 5; G. L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford, 1969), xxi-xxii.

[5] A. MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn: the Technology of Skeletal Material since the Roman Period* (London, 1989), 139 and fig. 74; also pers. comm.; N. Stratford, *The Lewis Chessmen and the Enigma of the Hoard* (London, 1997), pl. 29.

Catherine Smith (Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust) and Mark Simmons (Natural Science Officer, Perth Museum). It preserves the curve of the original tusk from which it was carved. The structure of the dentine conforms to the description of the marble core of dentine typical of walrus tusks.[6] The pulp cavity of the tooth has been utilized as a basis for the handle-socket. It has, furthermore, been remarked that walrus ivory is distinguished by its rich buttery colour and translucent surface, with the ability to take a very high polish,[7] characteristics abundantly demonstrated on the Perth handle.

The history of ivory carving has been outlined by several authors, with an emphasis on the English situation in relation to that on the Continent.[8] Only the salient points need summarising here. From the late Antique world through to the 12th century, ivory was principally used for religious subjects, 'reflecting the growing power and cultural influence of the Church'.[9] The trade in elephant ivory was intermittent and the principal raw material utilized in northern Europe was walrus ivory. The accepted picture is one of an almost complete switch from the exploitation of walrus ivory in the 11th 12th centuries to the exploitation of elephant ivory from the 13th century, with the principal workshops in Paris. It has been observed that 'at the end of the 13th century and early in the 14th century when ivories were again to play an important part in European Gothic Art, elephant ivory was the only material used'.[10] It was also from the late 13th century that the subject matter increasingly embraced secular themes, on such items as mirror-cases, knife-handles, writing tablets, combs and caskets. These were made in large quantities and their imagery draws heavily on tales of romance and chivalry. Religious items continued to be made — including small crucifixes, statuettes, diptychs and triptychs — but they were personal items, suggesting both personal patronage and private devotion.[11] The secular iconography of the Perth handle conforms to this picture but the handle departs from the above script in one key respect: it is composed of walrus ivory rather than elephant ivory. This has important implications. It argues strongly against Continental (particularly Parisian) production. During the ascendancy of the Parisian elephant ivory industry, walrus ivory remained popular in Scandinavian countries (given their proximity to walrus-inhabited seas this should be no surprise) and from there found its way into other parts of Europe. In 1327 walrus tusks from Greenland were used in payment of a tithe to the Archbishop of Trondheim and these tusks were then sold in Bergen to a Flemish merchant from Bruges.[12] However, current indications are that trade between Perth and Scandinavian towns was not particularly plentiful

[6] MacGregor, op. cit. in note 8, 18 and fig. 19.
[7] P. Lasko, 'Ivory carvings', 210 in G. Zarnecki, J. Holt and T. Holland (eds.), *English Romanesque Art 1066 1200* (London, 1984); Stratford, op. cit. in note 5, 40.
[8] P. Williamson, *An Introduction to Medieval Ivory Carvings* (London, 1982), 7–19; Stratford, op. cit. in note 5, 107–13; Lasko, op. cit. in note 8, 210–31; MacGregor, op. cit. in note 5; A. MacGregor, 'Objects of bone, antler and ivory', 355–78 in J. Blair and N. Ramsay (eds.), *English Medieval Industries, Craftsmen, Techniques and Products* (London, 1991).
[9] Williamson, op. cit. in note 8,7.
[10] Lasko, op. cit. in note 7, 211.
[11] Williamson, op. cit. in note 8, 18.
[12] Stratford, op. cit. in note 5, 107.

at this period, though probably commoner than was previously allowed, particularly if one allows for some of the trade being conducted by the ships of the Hanseatic League.[13] This picture seems unlikely to be extensively revised given that Scotland and Scandinavia had economies requiring very similar imports and exports, the net effect being 'a paucity of exchangeable merchandise'.[14] Walrus ivory may have been a raw material traded in to Scotland but two other possibilities seem more likely. One is that the small-scale nature of the evidence, for example from Perth, is consistent with ivory recovered from walrus strandings,[15] or accidental catches by Scottish fishing boats. The other is that the ivory may have accompanied a skilled craftsman on the move, for such skilled craftsmen 'must have worked both in Britain and on the Continent . . .'.[16]

OF HANDLES AND KNIVES

The Perth handle is basically cylindrical in form. This and its anthropomorphic carving place it in MacGregor's group of later medieval handles.[17] The most likely artefact to which the handle related is a knife of the whittle-tang variety. Knives were ubiquitous and essential tools because of their wide variety of potential uses, the commonest being food preparation and consumption. Manuscript illuminations also confirm their use for notching tally-sticks, surgery, hair-dressing, as pen-knives for scribes, and as the principal tool of the cut-purse.[18] Even a limited search over a wide range of manuscripts reveals a wide variation in blade shape and handle form but it reveals nothing with the elaborate nature of the Perth handle.[19] This is confirmed by the survey made by Alison Tinniswood of scribal knives shown in manuscript illuminations,[20] which is accompanied by a discussion by Martin Biddle and David Brown concerning the use of knives by scribes and craft-workers.[21] There may well have been some overlap of design between scribal knives and skinning knives for example, in part due to a shared paring function. A portrait of St Bartholomew dated 1557 (formerly belonging to the Glover Incorporation of Perth, now in the collections of Perth Museum) shows the saint holding a skinning knife (the instrument of his martyrdom) which is in appearance – a convex blade with a long back and thumb hollowing – very like the scribal knives in many illuminations.[22]

Cylindrical handles such as the example under discussion, were associated with whittle-tang knives, i.e. one-piece, socketed handles into which the pointed

[13] D. Ditchburn, 'A note on Scandinavian trade with Scotland in the later Middle Ages', 73–89 in G. Simpson (ed.), *Scotland and Scandinavia 800–1800* (Edinburgh, 1990).
[14] Ibid., 84–5.
[15] As discussed by MacGregor, op. cit. in note 5, 40–1.
[16] Lasko, op. cit. in note 7, 210.
[17] MacGregor, op. cit. in note 5, 170.
[18] J. Cowgill, M. de Neergaard and N. Griffiths, *Knives and Scabbards* (London, 51–61).
[19] C. de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London, 1994); J. Backhouse, *The Illuminated Page* (London, 1997).
[20] A. Tinniswood, 'Appendix: scribes' knives in manuscript illumination', 747–53 in M. Biddle, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester II* (Oxford, 1990).
[21] M. Biddle and D. Brown, 'Knives used by scribes', 738–41 in Biddle, op. cit. in note 20.
[22] For the portrait see D. MacRoberts, 'A sixteenth century picture of St Bartholomew from Perth', *Innes Review*, X.ii (1950), 281–6, plate opp. 279; G. W. M. Wilson, *The Annals of the Glover Incorporation of Perth* (3rd ed., Perth, 1985).

tang of the knife was inserted. Knife production was certainly a significant industry in Perth: the Perth High Street excavation recovered 17 leather knife sheaths (11 of them decorated and dated between the late 12th and mid-14th century), 15 of which have been interpreted as being for everyday knives.[23] In addition, over 20 knives, some with wooden handles intact, were recovered.[24] This is a pattern seen elsewhere in Perth: the Meal Vennel excavations recovered 44 knives (19 of them whittle-tangs, 11 of them dated to the 14th century), and evidence of both metal-working and the working of skeletal materials occurred throughout the site.[25] In writing about the ivory-carving industry in medieval England, MacGregor suggested that the production of ivory items was in the hands of product-based specialists rather than those linked to a particular raw material, as with the working of other skeletal materials in the earlier medieval period.[26] This view would appear to hold true for Perth, where the close association of skeletal materials, wooden handles, knife blades and leather sheaths all point to an integrated knife industry.

The nature of the Perth handle, however, marks it out as unique. None of the key excavated assemblages from, for example London, Winchester, Norwich, Exeter, Sandal Castle (Wakefield), York or Southampton have produced anything similar.[27] However, excavations in Southampton have produced a 13th-century anthropomorphic bone handle, found in 1972 on the St Michael's house site.[28] This handle depicts a female figure and is related to the bone handle depicting a male figure from Crowland Abbey, Lincolnshire.[29] Both handles are part of a wider series of bone and ivory handles from Northern Europe. This series totalled 25 when discussed by M. Bencard,[30] 26 with the addition of Crowland, and has now risen to 32 if we add to it the Southampton example, single examples each from Ludgershall, Hull and Fishbourne, Chichester and two further examples from Novgorod, Russia (one a complete handle showing the siege of the Castle of Love, the other a fragment showing a griffin biting a human head).[31] Bencard's study noted that all the handles were secular in theme, portraying non-ecclesiastical

[23] C. Thomas, *The Perth High Street Excavations 1975–77: The Leather* (forthcoming).

[24] Bogdan, op. cit. in note 1, 8; I. and J. Goodall, *The Perth High Street Excavations 1975–77: The Metalwork* (forthcoming).

[25] A. Cox 'Backland activities in medieval Perth: excavations at Meal Vennel and Scott Street', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 126 (1996), 733–82 esp. 775–7.

[26] Macgregor, op. cit. in note 8, 376–8.

[27] For London see Cowgill et al., op. cit. in note 19; for Winchester see Biddle, op. cit. in note 21, i: 260, ii: 835–61, 864–8; for Norwich see S. Margeson, *Norwich Households: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Norwich Survey Excavations 1971–78* (East Anglia Archaeology 58, Norwich, 1993), 121, 123; for Exeter see J. P. Allen, *Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Exeter 1971–1980* (Exeter, 1984), 351; for Sandal Castle see P. Mayes and L. A. S. Butler, *Sandal Castle Excavations 1964–1973* (Wakefield, 1983), 42–4, 284; for York see A. MacGregor, A. Mainman and N. Rogers, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn from Anglo-Scandinavian and Medieval York* (The Archaeology of York 17/12, York, 1999), 1972–3; and for Southampton see C. Platt and R. Coleman-Smith, *Excavations in Medieval Southampton 1953–64, Vol. 2 The Finds* (Leicester, 1975), 271–4.

[28] D. Brown, pers. comm.: MacGregor, op. cit. in note 5, 170.

[29] M. D. Howe, 'A medieval knife handle from Crowland, Lincolnshire', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 28 (1983), 146–50.

[30] M. Bencard, 'Om et middelalderlight knivskaft fra Ribe', 35–61 in *Fra Ribe Amt 1975, Festskrift til H. K. Kristensen* (Ribe, 1975).

[31] For Ludgershall and Hull see A. MacGregor, 'Objects of bone, antler and ivory', 160–8 in P. Ellis (ed.), *Ludgershall Castle: Excavations by Peter Addyman 1964–1972* (London, 2000). For Fishbourne see B. W. Cunliffe, A. G. Down and D. J. Rudkin, *Chichester Excavations IX: Excavations at Fishbourne 1969–1988* (Chichester, 2000), 210. For Novgorod see E. A. Rybinos, 'Novgorod's links with western Europe', 196–204 in M. Brisbane (ed.), *The Archaeology of Novgorod, Russia: Recent Results from the Town and its Hinterland* (Lincoln, 1992).

figures which he took to be ideal aristocrats, and which he dated stylistically (none of them were closely dateable by archaeological context) to c. 1250–1350 (with an outlier at c. 1400). He also associated them with the Parisian ivory carving school, which he saw as the origin for the ideal aristocrat motif.[32] Martin Howe made a convincing case for non-Parisian production of the seven ivory handles in the group, one of which was identified as walrus ivory.[33] It should be noted that Bencard recognised this example, from Oslo, Norway, as of Scandinavian origin.[34]

Howe further noted that the distribution of the handles was 2 from fortress sites, 4 from monastic sites and 16 from urban sites, with no provenance for the remainder.[35] With the additional examples noted above the urban total rises to 20. The Perth handle, if we add it to the series on the grounds of it being a 14th-century, secular, anthropomorphic knife handle, conforms to this pattern. It extends the distribution to Scotland and is a further example of urban provenance. However, whilst the Perth handle fits broadly within this group (it is secular and could be aristocratic as we shall see below) it has marked stylistic differences: it is much fuller and rounded in its carving and is the only such carving. We must now look at this carving in some detail.

THE GREEN MAN (Fig. 4)

In the limited publication the handle has received thus far its iconography has been interpreted as depicting a 'Green Man' or 'Jack-in-the-Green' and a satyr.[36] Certainly its grin could be interpreted as lascivious but it lacks any other distinguishing feature of a satyr — it has neither budding horns nor goat-like ears — and so this identification does not stand close scrutiny. Equally, Jack-in-the-Green is unacceptable as a description. This term was formerly used synonymously with that of Green Man but has now been shown conclusively to relate to a later, separate tradition, that of London chimney-sweep May Day processions of the 18th century and later.[37] This tradition was erroneously connected by Lady Raglan (in 1931) to the foliate heads carved in medieval churches:

> She attached to these the name 'the Green Man' taken from a popular pub sign displaying a forester and suggested that both the May Day character and the carved heads were representations of pre-Christian deities or spirits of nature and fertility . . . encouraged by the proposal of another member of the Folklore Society . . . Margaret Murray, that some of the more enigmatic images in medieval churches were representations of pagan deities in which

[32] Bencard, op. cit. in note 30, 59.
[33] Howe, op. cit. in note 29, 148–9.
[34] Bencard, op. cit. in note 30, 46 and 59.
[35] Howe, op. cit. in note 29, 150.
[36] The Green Man identification is put forward by Bogdan, op. cit. in note 1, 8. It is repeated in the textile fascicule, where the suggestion is made by Dr Dransart that the leaves resemble dagges – a form of jagged edge decoration for costume in the 14th and 15th centuries. Whilst the nature of the leaves depicted makes this seem unlikely, were it correct it would not support a Green Man identification but would perhaps support the 'Maying' theory outlined in this paper. See P. Z. Dransart, 'Dress: the evidence from the site', in H. Bennett, *The Perth High Street Excavations 1975–77: The Textiles* (forthcoming). The satyr identification was suggested by P. Yeoman, *Medieval Scotland: An Archaeological Perspective* (London, 1995), 13, illus. 56.
[37] R. Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles, their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford, 1991), 314–16 (quoting the work of R. Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green* [Ipswich, 1979]).

FIG. 4
The Green Man. Scale 4:1. *Photo: P. Adair (copyright Perth Museum & Art Gallery).*

much of the populace still believed. The notion was devoid of any research into medieval sources but it so perfectly reflected what mid-20th-century folklorists wished to believe that it became an orthodoxy.[38]

This quotation fittingly leads us on to the term 'Green Man' itself. Although the pedigree of this term has been discredited it does remain in use as a descriptive label covering a wide range of forms and a host of meanings, though sadly it still retains elements of the misconceptions articulated by Lady Raglan. When approaching this term caution is required not least in avoiding the over-reliance on later evidence and the propensity for evolving tradition in this area of belief and ritual practice.[39] One of the recent very full discussions of the Green Man demonstrates the problem well: the range of sculptures labelled as Green Men is wide but William Anderson mars his survey by giving the whole 'series' a veneer of continuity by suggesting that the Green Man could be seen as the 'archetype of our oneness with the earth'.[40] It may be acceptable to interpret the Green Man in ecological terms for today but it cannot be applied retrospectively to the whole of the complex development of the foliate head. We need to review this development before we can be more precise about the Perth handle example which, I suggest, is related to May festivities but is not strictly speaking a Green Man.

The most useful account of the Green Man remains that by Kathleen Basford and I summarise her main points here.[41] The foliate head, now so commonly invoked as a Green Man, has functioned as church decoration since at least the 5th century A.D. Beginning as copied classical designs or re-used classical examples, the concept was gradually modified to suit other needs and flowered particularly during the 13th-15th centuries in ecclesiastical buildings, where some of these heads represent demons and some lost souls or sinners. 'The leaves coming from eyes, ears and mouth may sometimes allude to sins committed by those sensory organs – – particularly the tongue'.[42] In support of this, Ronald Hutton cites the fact that to some Christian writers, leaves were associated with sins of the flesh.[43] Basford suggests that few of the carvings, if any, could be associated with May festivities. Foliate heads on Christian tombstones and memorials continued long after the heads ceased to be carved as Church ornaments: large numbers are to be found in Scottish graveyards, for example.[44] In this context the foliate heads may refer to the resurrection, or perhaps 'to men's fallen concupiscent nature, or to his brief life on earth — a reminder that "All greenness comes to withering" '.[45] Prior to Basford's study, the Green Man was seen by many as a personification of springtime and the imminent arrival of summer, but her close examination of the subject reveals him as a leaf-hidden horror.

[38] R. Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun — A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), 241–3. A concise account of the whole muddle is to be found in M. Jones, 'Green Man', 446–7 in C. Lindahl, J. McNamara and J. Lindow (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Medieval Folklore* (Santa Barbara, 2000).

[39] R. Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, and *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994).

[40] W. Anderson, *The Green Man: The Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth* (London, 1990).

[41] K. Basford, *The Green Man* (Ipswich, 1978; repr. Cambridge, 1996).

[42] Ibid., 20.

[43] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 46 and 314.

[44] B. Wilsher, 'The Green Man', *Scottish Hist.*, 37 (June 1996), 7–19.

[45] Basford, op. cit. in note 41, 21.

The fact that the principal medieval context for the Green Man was ecclesiastical should caution against the design being seen as representing a pagan survival. There is no medieval evidence for this assumption.[46] Today there is a widespread view that sees Paganism and Christianity as oppositional black-and-whites, but as Thomas O'Loughlin has observed in his elegant study of St Patrick, for many Christians paganism was an imperfect precursor to Christianity, one made perfect by the Gospel.[47] It is then rather misleading to look for an oppositional pagan survival undercurrent in medieval church art. There were certainly attacks against sculpture by medieval writers but these were chiefly aimed at over-elaborate ornamentation in Church architecture. St Bernard of Clairvaux's hard-hitting epistolary comments are well known.[48] These and similar comments were not concerned with pagan survivals but with frivolous waste and with an expectation that the clergy should have a more austere standard than the laity. Foliate heads and sheela-na-gigs (seen by some as another supposed pagan survival) are not singled out by these commentaries because they were seen as didactic and moral rather than frivolous. In their study of sexual carvings on Romanesque churches Weir and Jerman provide a convincing case against any prophylactic or apotropaic function for such carvings (though they allow for a later veneer of folk-belief to be applied to them) or for their being fertility symbols.[49] The carvings number hundreds 'all forming part of a huge campaign against sin, mounted in the first instance by the . . . monks and clergy who built the churches and manned the pilgrimage undertakings . . . they were powerful enough too, to have exerted a sort of spell in the folk-mind, long after their primary purpose had been fulfilled'.[50] This view does have some support from later medieval writers. J. D. Given's study of the interior sculpture of Exeter Cathedral quotes the 13th-century French bishop Guillaume Durand: 'Pictures and ornaments in churches are the lessons and the scriptures of the laity . . . for what writing supplieth to him which can read, that doth a picture supply to him that is unlearned and can only look'.[51]

Foliate heads in secular contexts are much rarer and little studied. Their use in 13th-century secular ornament is scanty. Basford illustrates one engraved on a gold and enamel harness ornament probably made in Limoges and now in the Cluny Museum, Paris.[52] Betty Wilsher notes three Green Men from Caerlaverock Castle (Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland) in a list of Green Men in secular buildings that is mostly made up of post-medieval examples: they are certainly more popular in this context from the 16th century onwards.[53] The meaning of the secular examples remains opaque and to those few mentioned already should be added an

[46] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 316.
[47] T. O' Loughlin, *Saint Patrick: The Man and His Works* (London, 1999), 33–4.
[48] J. C. Morrison, *The Life and Times of St Bernard* (London, 1894), 132.
[49] A. Weir and J. Jerman, *Images of Lust — Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London, 1986). Their contention that sheela-na-gigs are not apotropaic and are not found before the 12th century is disputed: see M. Jones, 'Sheela-Na-Gig', 912–14 in C. Lindahl et al., op. cit. in note 38.
[50] Weir and Jerman, op. cit. in note 49, 150.
[51] J. D. Givens 'Internal decorative sculpture', 83–90 in M. Swanton (ed.), *Exeter Cathedral: A Celebration* (Exeter, 1991). As M. Jones has observed (pers. comm.) the problem with Bishop Durand's comment is that he makes no mention of specific types of image.
[52] Basford, op. cit. in note 41, pl. 31c.
[53] Wilsher, op. cit. in note 44, 13.

important literary manifestation, the 14th-century English poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Here the 'Green Man' figure, has been shown to have complex meanings: in his translation of the poem, Brian Stone adds an essay on the Green Knight (drawing on wider elements of medieval culture), noting that his weird colour implied a supernatural, deathly quality, that green was the colour of truth, and that the knight contrasted with the mythic figure of the Wild Man (or woodwose) in such a way as to represent the green of the coming of summer, usually celebrated in May.[54]

The Perth handle's foliate head is an important addition to these secular manifestations and is I suggest an expression of the secular enjoyment of the May festivities. The following survey investigates the general background to such rituals, considers the possibility of related depictions in other media and examines the Perth context for such activities. In focussing this discussion around this single piece of material culture I also put it forward as an informative example of medieval cognition embodied in the physicality of the object.[55]

PERTH AND THE MAY

Although May festivities were largely reinvented in the 19th century they were based on a medieval tradition that was authentic enough.[56] A number of documentary references show such celebration as common across Britain: the earliest is their condemnation in c. 1240 by Bishop Robert Grosseteste.[57] Bringing-in-the-May was one aspect of the May festivities, and may have focused on the hawthorn or May tree, the blossoming of which signalled the imminent arrival of summer. In part it was facilitated by an easing-off of heavy work, coming as it did between ploughing and sowing on the one hand and haymaking on the other.[58] One of the distinctive aspects of the hawthorn blossom is its smell. Richard Mabey notes that the stale element in this rather complicated smell is the chemical, triethylamine; this is also produced when living tissue dies and begins to decay and it also produces the fishy scent that is the smell of sex, something 'implicit in much of the popular culture of hawthorn'.[59] Mabey goes on to refer to the work of anthropologist Jack Goody who:

> suggests that this may be the reason for the differing degrees of tolerance of May blossom inside and outside the house: 'The hawthorn or May was the special subject of attention at May Day ceremonies that centred on the woods, the Maypole and the May Queen . . . In contrast to

[54] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. and trans. B. Stone (2nd ed, London, 1974), 116 and 121–3.

[55] The perceptive characterization of this concept as symbolic storage I derive from C. Renfrew and C. Scarre (eds.), *Cognition and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Symbolic Storage* (Cambridge, 1998).

[56] For the re-invention of May festivities see in particular Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 295–303.

[57] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 226. The condemnation by Grosseteste is usefully discussed by M. Jones, 'Poppinjay, jolly May! Parrot-badges and the iconography of May in Britain, France and the Netherlands', 214–28 in D. Dicken, A. M. Koldeweij and J. R. ter Molen (eds.), *Gevonden Voorwerpen (Lost and Found) — Opstellen over middeleeuwse archeologie voor (Essays on medieval archaeology for) H. J. E. Van Beuningen* (Rotterdam Papers 11, Rotterdam, 2000), esp. 220 1.

[58] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 244–5. It should be noted that Maying was not exclusively associated with hawthorn and a useful discussion of other May-greenery can be found in Jones, op. cit. in note 57, 220–4. In the same reference Jones disputes the identification of hawthorn with May in pre-1500 England.

[59] R. Mabey, *Flora Brittanica* (London, 1996), 212.

Christmastide greenery and Easter willow it is a plant kept outdoors, associated with unregulated love in the fields rather than conjugal love in the bed'.[60]

I have already referred to Weir and Jerman's analysis of sexual carvings in churches. Church foliate heads may have a closer association with the attack on sexual morality than they suggested: a number of foliate heads associated with what may be Maying scenes suggest that those particular Green Men may be a reference to sexual excesses at May time, and so deserving of moral approbation.

In addition to Bringing-in-the-May, the seasonal festivities commonly featured a mock-king, queen or lord to preside over the May Games. In the later medieval period this figure was sometimes replaced by that of Robin Hood, sometimes accompanied by Maid Marian.[61] In Edinburgh in the 15th and 16th centuries the Guild of Hammermen paid a minstrel and a standard-bearer to bring back tree branches from the woods so as 'to bring the summer into town', whilst in St Andrews they appointed a summer king who was sent out to the woods to hide, and who was then sought out and brought home.[62] The monastic chronicle *Flores Historiarum* and a poem or song recording the coronation of Robert Bruce in 1306 both describe Bruce as a summer king.[63] Though associated with greenery these figures were not part of a fertility ritual: a 14th-century *Life Of St Anne* portrays a procession of children 'each a green branch in hand, even like a summer play'.[64] Here we are seeing a natural inclination to seasonal greenery with local 'lords/kings/queens' representing earthly nobility rather than deities. Scotland possessed equivalent figures recorded for a number of burghs and known as 'abbots'. Aberdeen had the Abbot of Bon Accord, Edinburgh the Abbot of Narent, while Peebles, Linlithgow, Haddington and Borthwick all had an Abbot of Unreason. In Perth as in other burghs the Robin Hood figure already mentioned may have had the same function.[65] As an outlaw chief he made an ideal Lord of Misrule and had appropriate green clothing and an association with woodland. The earliest surviving references to Robin Hood stories in Scotland are from the 1420s, 200 years later than in England. From the late 15th century in England Robin Hood was associated in other ways with May celebrations, including archery and the distribution of livery badges.[66]

Such seasonal celebrations were part of a wider dramatic culture, much of it religious in tone but with secular contributions including mumming (in which a champion was killed whilst fighting and then resurrected) and morris dancing, and a rich variety of pageants. These incorporated dramatic elements and allowed guilds to boost their stature through honouring dignitaries and entertaining the urban mass.[67] An important element of this was minstrelsy. There were large

[60] Ibid., quoting J. Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge, 1993).
[61] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 262–76; Hutton, op. cit. in note 39, 31–3; F. and G. Doel, *Robin Hood: Outlaw or Greenwood Myth* (Stroud, 1997), 30.
[62] S. Livingstone, *Scottish Festivals* (Edinburgh, 1997), 30.
[63] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 247.
[64] R. E. Parker, 'Some records of the Somyr Play', 19–26 in R. B. Davies and J. L. Lievsay (eds.), *Studies in Honour of John C Hodges and Alain Thule* (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1961), quoted in Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 248.
[65] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 249.
[66] Hutton, op. cit. in note 38, 273. For the archery association and the livery badges see Jones, op. cit. in note 57, 224.
[67] C. Reeves, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England* (Stroud, 1995), 82–3.

numbers of minstrels, men and women who 'lived by their wits as entertainers at every level of society' and they included 'musicians (composers, instrumentalists and singers), oral poets and tellers of tales . . . fools, jugglers, acrobats and dancers, actors, mimes, and mimics, conjurers, puppeteers and exhibitors of performing animals'.[68] But by far the 'deepest and most ancient stratum of minstrel activity was the bustling panorama of medieval entertainment at the popular level of street and fair'.[69] The accounts of King Edward I often include payments to such minstrels. Thus in 1303 4 a payment of 4 shillings was made to Perth minstrels: 'diverse vielle-players, timpanists and other minstrels going into the presence of the King and on his departure from St John (de Perth) and making their minstrelsies. . .'.[70] In the same year seven women singers met the king not far from Perth, 'on the road between Uggeville and ?Gaskes and sang to him in the way they were wont to do in the time of the Lord Alexander, lately king of the Scots'.[71] Uggeville is probably Ogilvy Castle,[72] like Gask a convenient stopping point on the route through Strathearn between Perth and Stirling. There are several other references to the payment of minstrels in Perth and its neighbourhood.[73]

This rich seam of pageantry and public dramatic performance continued over several centuries. When Charles I visited Perth in 1633 he was entertained with a dance-drama performed by members of the Perth Glover Incorporation — one of the costumes (with later additions) survives in the collections of Perth Museum.[74] This is by way of a later example of a long tradition of the Guilds in Perth. Two of these Guilds in particular have left crucial records for the life of the Burgh: the *Perth Hammermen Book* and the *Perth Guildry Book*.[75] In the latter record three entries for May 1545 record the Guild paying its member James Mackbrek his fee for playing 'Robyn Hwyd' / 'Robeyn Hwyd' / 'Roberne Hwde'.[76] Later entries for 1546 note the fees paid to named individuals for their expenses in connection with the Corpus Christi play and procession, including the use of minstrels.[77] *The Hammermen Book* also has a number of entries recording fees paid in connection with the Corpus Christi play. For the years 1518 and 1553 the Book lists the players and their roles.[78] In 1553 one of the players is the smith Andrew Throskell. In 1557 his son Thomas Throskell was 'denied benefit of church by the kirk session but as he wished his child to be baptised, confessed on 13 August 1577 to be a Corpus Christi player. . .'.[79] For the post-Reformation church religious and secular plays were seen as superstitious and so suppressed.[80]

[68] J. Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel* (Woodbridge, 1989), 3.
[69] Ibid., 9.
[70] British Library Add. Ms. 7966A, fol. 67v; C. Bullock-Davies, *Register of Royal and Baronial Domestic Minstrels 1272–1327* (Woodbridge, 1986), 118.
[71] British Library Add. Ms. 35292, fol. 13v; Bullock-Davies, op. cit. in note 70, 191.
[72] A. Watson, *The Ochils: Placenames, History, Tradition* (Perth, 1995,), 108.
[73] Bullock-Davies, op. cit. in note 70, 13, 14, 28, 46, 58, 89, 130–2, 136, 202, 221 and 226.
[74] H. Bennett, 'The Perth glovers sword dance dress of 1633', *Costume*, 19 (1985), 40–57.
[75] For the Hammermen see C. A. Hunt (ed.), *The Perth Hammermen Book 1518–1568* (Perth, 1889). For the Guildry see M. Stavert (ed.), *The Perth Guildry Book 1452–1601* (Scottish Rec. Soc. New Ser., 19, Edinburgh, 1993).
[76] Stavert (ed.), op. cit. in note 75, nos. 358–60.
[77] Ibid., nos. 114–19.
[78] Hunt (ed.), op. cit. in note 75, 2, 3, 10, 11, 16, 19, 26, 33, 78–9.
[79] Stavert (ed.), op. cit. in note 75, n. 578.
[80] Ibid., xvi.

The picture painted by the guild records is confirmed by the records of the Reformed Church, i.e. the Kirk-Session Register of Perth, which survives intermittently for the years 1577–1709. It includes several entries dealing with attempts by the Kirk-Session to prevent the performance of the Corpus Christi Play and also that of the Bakers Guild, St Obert's Play. The struggle to abolish them was a long closely contested one — in 1589 the Kirk-Session allowed "the play" on condition it was attended with good behaviour. The same records also allow a glimpse of a more secular Maying activity in the shape of customs connected with the Dragon Hole. This is a cave on the south side of Kinnoull Hill, which stands opposite Perth (and little more than a mile from St John's Kirk) on the north side of the river Tay. It is so named from its associated legend of St Serf slaying a dragon there in the 6th century. The Reformed Kirk sought to ban the annual procession (on May 1st) to the cave from Perth, in particular frowning on the opportunity it gave to younger men and women to engage sexually with each other. In 1580 the Kirk-Session passed an Act:

> . . . concerning the discharging of all passing the Dragon Hole superstitiously . . . the resort to the Dragon Hole as well by young men as women, with their piping and drums striking before them through this town, has caused no small slander to the congregation, not without suspicion of filthiness following thereupon, the . . . Assembly, for avoiding thereof in times coming, have with consent of the Magistrates of this town, statute and ordained that no person . . . of this congregation, report or repair to said Dragon Hole, as they have done in times bygone, namely in the month of May, nor shall pass through the town with pipes and drums striking . . .

Prosecutions followed in succeeding years. That the Dragon Hole rituals were connected to Maying is suggested by a 1559 supposed eyewitness account of one Oliver Tullidelph, describing a man dressed all in flowers and standing in the cave entrance as townsfolk processed to it.[81]

This Perth evidence is clearly much later than the Perth handle but it reflects the same broad tradition and illustrates the complexity of the beliefs and rituals being adhered to. Corpus Christi was one of several religious festivals (including Rogationtide, Ascension, Trinity Sunday and Whit Sunday) celebrated in the summer and all tied to the date of Easter, which being a moveable feast made the

[81] The Kirk-Session accounts are described, with extracts, in J. Maidment (ed.), *The Spottiswoode Miscellany: A Collection of Original Papers and Tracts, Illustrative Chiefly of the Civil and Ecclesiastical History of Scotland — Volume II* (Edinburgh, 1845), 233–5, 264 (Corpus Christi and St Obert's Plays) and 238–9, 240 (the Dragon Hole), and in J. P. Lawson, *The Book of Perth: An Illustration of the Moral and Ecclesiastical State of Scotland Before and After the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1847), 124–6, 129, 141 (Corpus Christi and St Obert's Plays) and 132–3, 136 (the Dragon Hole: 132–3 is the quotation in the text above). The Kirk-Session records for St John's, Perth, are held in the National Register of Archives, Edinburgh. The supposed eye-witness account is accepted as such in S. McHardy, *Scotland: Myth, Legend & Folklore* (Edinburgh, 1999), 45, but is problematical. It can be traced back to D. Morrison, *Sketches of Scenes in Scotland* (Perth, 1834), no pagination but in the first of two parts looking at 'Perth'. Morrison prefaces the account thus:

> The substance of the following narrative . . . was obtained many years since, from a lady, a descendant of Principal Tullidelph of St Andrews, one of whose ancestors . . . had warmly espoused the cause of the Reformers. Where her outline of his story has, in any case been filled up, it has been by reference to Mr. Row's M.S., to the local chronicles, and to history.

There is a strong odour of fabrication to the tale of Tullidelph's stay in Perth and his witnessing of the ritual at the Dragon Hole on May 1st: no independent, first hand account outside Morrison's version survives, neither does 'Row's M.S.' and his other sources are so vague as to be uncheckable. It is clearly in part influenced by Sir Walter Scott (to whom Morrison pays tribute) and a desire to castigate the effects of the Reformation. Even so its inclusion of a garlanded figure may preserve the kernel of some truth with respect to the celebrations that clearly took place at the cave.

other feasts moveable within the months of May and June. They were then celebrated generally at the time of the May festivities. Corpus Christi was officially instituted in 1311 by Pope Clement V, to promote the truth of transubstantiation (the miracle of the Eucharist where by the bread and wine becomes the real body and blood of Christ). It was tied to the Easter cycle and so to the season of religious renewal and resurrection. It extended the period of feasts connected to Christ's resurrection held at the season of natural new growth. Thus we have the secular and the spiritual in tune, each confirming the other (though not without undoubted tension).[82] Such feasts as they grew developed a strong capacity to take place beyond the full control of the Church, as demonstrated by the role of the Guilds in processional plays and their reluctance to let go of these activities. As additional evidence of this we can cite the Glover Incorporation's attachment to its patron saint, Bartholomew. Their painting of the said saint was executed in 1557, probably to serve as a reredos for the Glover's altar to St Bartholomew in St John's Kirk. The Reformation required its removal but although it was removed from the Kirk it was not destroyed but retained as an important icon by the Glovers, to be used in their guild ceremonies.[83] This rich cultural mix is not unique to Perth: it was symptomatic of Christian medieval culture. In Denmark the feast of St John the Baptist, celebrated on June 17th, has long been fused with the midsummer celebrations and so is attended by large bonfires.[84]

In the light of this evidence let us return to the Perth handle. It clearly does not conform to the general depiction of those foliate heads described as Green Men. Its human face is distinct from its leaves, indeed these are separated from the head by hair and the hood of a cloak. This would seem rather to be a fully human figure indulging in the May festivities. The leaf on the right-hand side has some superficial resemblance to that of oak but more detailed observation suggests it is meant to be a hawthorn leaf — artistic licence allowing it to appear large enough to cover one side of the head of the figure depicted.[85] This depiction of the leaf conforms to a number of other depictions.[86] The identification of leaves on the left-hand side is more problematical despite their naturalism: the most likely identification seems to be either rowan or hornbeam.[87] One might ask why all the leaves are not hawthorn leaves but it is clear that the celebrating of the May could involve other than hawthorn greenery: in Edinburgh it encompassed birch for example.[88] The crucial element was new greenery. If rowan leaves are depicted this would add its own significance, since the rowan tree has accrued a rich folklore:

[82] The secular-religious fusion may be further demonstrated by the association of (May) greenery with the Virgin Mary. The early 14th-century *Psalter of Robert de Lisle* (British Library Arundel Ms. 83, fol. 131v, J. Alexander and P. Binski, *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400* (London, 1987), 452, cat. 569.) shows the Virgin holding a sprig of hawthorn in her right hand. Similarly the Virgin in the *Peterborough Psalter* (Corpus Christi College Cambridge Ms. 53, fol. 8r) is holding foliage in her right hand, this time wild rose (from the same family — *Rosacae* as hawthorn).

[83] MacRoberts, op. cit. in note 22.

[84] Pers. comm., John Toy.

[85] Compare J. D. Godet, *Collins Photographic Key to the Trees of Britain and Northern Europe: A Guide to Identification by Leaves and Needles*, trans. C. King and H. H. Stevenson (London, 1988), 146, no. 878.

[86] See for example several of the plates in both Basford, op. cit. in note 41 and Anderson, op. cit. in note 40.

[87] For Rowan compare Godet, op. cit. in note 85, 138, no. 566 and for Hornbeam ibid., 200 no. 1042. For different types of Maying greenery see Jones, op. cit. in note 57, 220–4.

[88] Livingstone, op. cit. in note 62, 30.

it has more folk-names than any other tree and was long regarded as highly potent against witchcraft.[89] Hornbeam, however, though a member of the birch family, is not a native of Scotland. This need not be too problematic since art and design travel like everything else: pattern books, the travels of monks, itinerant workmen and skilled craftsmen and the peregrinations of the wealthy and of pilgrims are all sufficient avenues. We have already discussed the possibility of travelling craftsmen who excelled in the working of skeletal material.

Amongst the plethora of so-called Green Men depictions in churches, can we pick out one or two related examples that may indeed refer to the May festivities (and so have been erroneously described as Green Men)? The parish church of Weston Longville, Norfolk, includes a 14th-century sedilia bearing two Green Men (with branches breaking out from their faces) either side of a man carrying foliage.[90] Basford interprets this as a blessing for Rogationtide, a feast celebrated within the May season. Could the figure carrying the foliage in fact be celebrating the May? The accompanying Green Man figures could then be an ecclesiastical caution against excess. The nave of Exeter Cathedral includes a corbel carving of c. 1350 which could be a representation of the May King or Summer Lord.[91] The nave has two other sculptures of note: an early 14th-century vaulting boss has a (female?) face surrounded by, but separate from, oak leaves, while in the Lady Chapel, a late 13th-century roof-boss (repeated in the presbytery) shows four heads (alternately male and female) wreathed by an interweaving vine.[92] These may simply be portraits but they could easily be May revellers. Similarly in Lincoln Cathedral a late 13th-century roof-boss in the Angel Quire shows two female heads with headgear and interweaving vine foliage.[93] The Priory Church of St Mary and St Michael, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, includes amongst its late 15th-century misericords a '. . . man holding a bunch of flowers in each hand. Representing May'.[94] Worcester Cathedral includes amongst its late 14th-century misericords one carved with a 'Man wearing a cap with a hood drawn over his ears and a cloak and sword, and bearing in each hand a large branch of foliage. . .' representing 'May'.[95] The Priory Church of St Michael d'Aigullier, Le Puy, France, has a tympanum-supporting corbel showing a man collecting foliage, probably a gardener but possibly a May foliage collector.[96] Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, we have a clear depiction of Maying in an illuminated manuscript of the 14th century, the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry. The illumination for May is glossed by J. Longnan and R. Cazelles in the context of the French Maying traditions, when all had to wear green or risk being ridiculed:

> In his youth the Duc de Berry liked to take part in this festivity and at the court of the King would distribute clothes made of cloth 'vert gai' in colour and known as 'livré de mai'. In the

[89] Godet, op. cit. in note 85, 52; Mabey, op. cit. in note 59, 302–4; R. Vickery, *A Dictionary of Plant Lore* (London, 1995), 319–22; T. Darwin, *The Scots Herbal: The Plant Lore of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1996), 158–9.
[90] Basford, op. cit. in note 40, pl. 63.
[91] Anderson, op. cit. in note 40, illus. 18.
[92] Anderson, op. cit. in note 40, illus. 20; D. Swanton, *Roof-Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral* (Exeter, 1979), 6; Givens, op. cit. in note 51, fig. 123.
[93] C. J. P. Cave, *Lincoln Roof-Bosses* (3rd edn, Lincoln, 1973), fig. 22.
[94] Remnant, op. cit. in note 4, 168 no. 6.
[95] Ibid., 168 no. 16.
[96] Anderson, op. cit. in note 40, illus. 56–7.

illumination, three of the female riders – Princesses – wear these green dresses and their horse bridles are decked with green; many of the figures – nobility and accompanying musicians – are garlanded with leaves.[97]

The Perth handle, in its completed form as a knife would not have been out of place sheathed in the belt of one of these noblemen.

The Perth handle sits comfortably with this small group (no doubt there are others) of Maying depictions. The handle then does not represent a Green Man and reminds us of the caution needed in using this widely and often casually applied label. The complexity of medieval culture both in general and in its divers local contexts requires the closer examination of each representation.

CONCLUSION

This examination of the Perth ivory handle has reaffirmed the vibrancy of secular medieval culture in the burgh of Perth. In a recent examination of the consumption of Romance culture in Perth it was suggested that the discovery there of a mirror-case depicting the tale of Tristram and Iseult placed Perth in the orbit of a dynamic Europe-wide cultural phenomenon, stressing in particular Franco-Scottish contacts in the 13th century.[98] The mirror-case emphatically and eloquently demonstrates how romance imagery permeated all levels of society and was a key element of well-informed popular iconography.[99] The Perth knife handle extends this cultural vibrancy into the 14th century and beyond the Franco-Scottish orbit. We have seen something of the cultural background, and the rich life of religious and secular pageantry and drama that took place in Perth, along with the widespread celebration of May festivities. The knife handle's imagery readily fits into this pattern. It is an engaging and skilfully executed piece of art that encapsulates the broad social enjoyment of the May festivities. It is also an expensive piece of art, for the high table of a well-to-do Burgh merchant or craftsman or a commissioning dignitary. Its combination of clear indications of wear with its discovery in the workshop implies that it could have been the prized knife of its maker and recalls the very ornate knife from Canterbury, of 10th-century date and probably belonging to a craftsman.[100] Equally it could have been in the workshop for the fitting of a new blade. It is both a tool of very physical consumption and emblematic of the symbolic consumption of the ritual year.

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[97] J. Longnan and R. Cazelle, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (London, 1969), pl. 6 and p. 176. Jones, op. cit. in note 57, 222–3 cites a number of further illuminations depicting Maying activities, from a variety of Books of Hours.

[98] M. A Hall and D. D. R. Owen, 'A Tristram and Iseult mirror-case from Perth: reflections on the production and consumption of Romance culture', *Tayside Fife Archaeol. J.*, 4 (1998), 150–65.

[99] Ibid., 162.

[100] Biddle and Brown, op. cit. in note 21, 740; J. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Age Artefacts: A Select Catalogue* (London, 1980), 135.

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