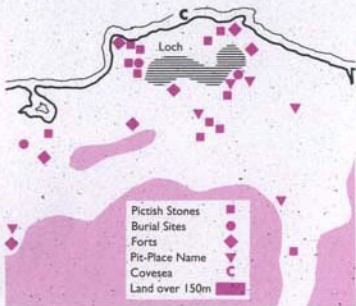


## Pictish forts

The Burghead fort encloses 3 hectares and is three times as large as any other fort of its period in Scotland. It was the centre of the Pictish kingdom of Moray which straddled the Moray Firth. The division of the interior into upper and lower wards may reflect differences in social rank between the inhabitants. The fort was built and occupied between approximately AD 450 and 850 when it was destroyed by fire. Pictish kings and chiefs used craggy hilltops or coastal promontories not only for defence but also as places in which to encourage, and control, the prestigious crafts of fine metalworking and stone-carving.



## Pictish Moray

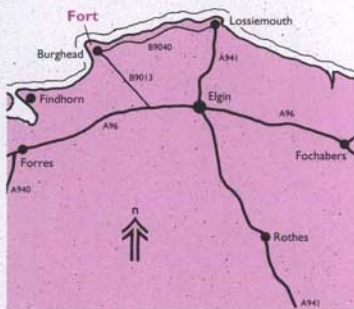
The sandstone ridge between Burghead and Lossiemouth shelters several rare sites that emphasise the importance of the province of Moray in Pictish times. From west to east: Burghead, a massive fort with its own distinctive animal symbol; an almost unique cave site, the Sculptor's Cave, Covessea with a range of symbols carved at the entrances, and Kinneddar, Lossiemouth an early ecclesiastical site where early Christian cross slabs were made. Finally, on the western approaches to this Pictish power centre, there is the elaborately carved Sueno's Stone at Forres.

## A Pictish citadel

Fourteen hundred years ago a traveller approaching the headland of Burghead would have been faced with an immense wall of earth and stone cast across the neck of the promontory. Behind this rampart was another, then another, equally massive. Looking up, high in the rampart wall, the traveller would have seen a line of stones carved with the symbol of the inhabitants, a powerful bull pawing the ground. This mighty entrance, lined with bull stones, led into Burghead fort, the capital of the Pictish province of Moray. Within the traveller would have found the Pictish king of Moray, his war-band and his craftsmen and servants. There would have been feasting, the telling of heroic tales, law-giving and divination.

## How to get there

The fort lies at the seaward end of Burghead, at the top end of Grant Street.



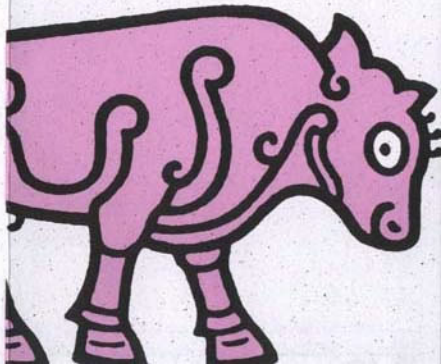
Please respect these ancient structures.



Economic Development and Planning  
Department

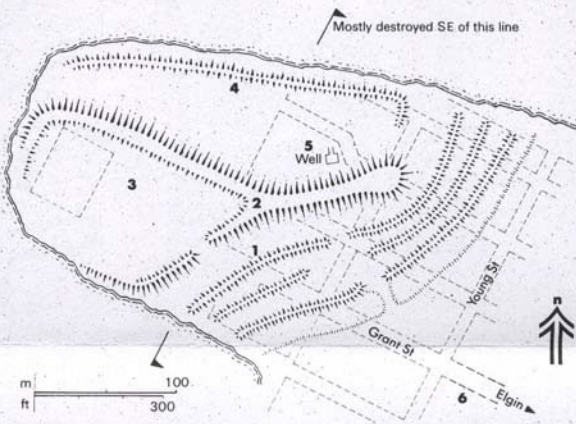
# Burghead

*Third in a series of leaflets  
on the Archaeology of N.E. Scotland*



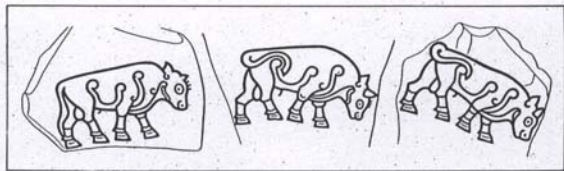
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The building of the regular grid-plan fishing village of Burghead in 1805-9 destroyed all but one fragment of the three lines of ramparts which ran across the neck of the promontory between Young Street and the headland.



**WARNING** Please take great care when near the cliff edge on the headland

- 1 The graveyard overlies one of the ditches; Pictish carved stones found here are now in Burghead Library (see 6 below).
- 2 Doorie Hill: this green mound is all that remains of the inner cross rampart, still 6 m high and c 8 m wide. The blackened pillar on its summit is the mounting for the Clavie, the tar barrel still carried blazing round the town on 11 January to mark the new year by the old calendar.
- 3 Upper ward and cross wall. Note the view across the Firth to the Black Isle and east along the coast to Coveasa. The Burghead/Lossiemouth sandstone ridge would have formed an island of Pictish power. The Pictish fleet may have sheltered in the lea of the headland.
- 4 Lower ward and north rampart. The best preserved stretch of rampart, which appears to have been reinforced with timber beams nailed together. This may be the only example of a *murus gallicus* (gallic wall) in Scotland, but could also have supported a wall walk. The ground level of the interior was lowered last century.
- 5 Well: an elaborate rock-cut chamber, 4.9 m square and 3.7 m high, containing a tank, whose shape has been altered since its discovery last century. There has been much debate about its original use. It was not a 'Roman' well but most likely the impressive water supply for an important fort. The care taken in its construction may reflect the interest of the ancestors of the Picts in water spirits.  
(Note the key for the well is kept in the bungalow opposite the entrance.)
- 6 Museum and Library: containing two of the famous Burghead bulls, as well as fragments of other Pictish carvings and a rare early Historic slab shrine.



### The Burghead Bulls

Only six bull stones survive of the 25 to 30 known to have been found during the destruction of the fort for the building of the harbour and village. Two are in Burghead Library, two are in Elgin Museum and the Royal Museum, Edinburgh and the British Museum, London have one each. They are unique to Burghead (although related carvings have been found in Inverness and Fife) and among the most impressive of all the Pictish animal symbols. They were probably carved in the sixth or seventh centuries AD.

### Further reading

- KJ Edwards & IBM Ralston, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 109 (1977-8), 202-10.  
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 A Small, *Scot Archaeol Forum*, 1 (1969), 61-8.  
 A Small (ed) *The Picts: a new look at old problems*, Dundee (1987).