

Art in the Cromar Hills

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St Kilda Wake

I live at Boultenstone, near Strathdon, and I have become familiar with the country surrounding my home. A favourite walk is to Baderonach Hill, where there is a fine cairn in memory of Gavin Astor, former owner of the Tillypronie Estate. The estate is now the home of the Hon. Philip Astor, and it is he who, with a perceptive eye for things artistic, has commissioned artists to produce art in the hills. On one visit to Baderonach, I was astonished to see intriguing faces peering at me, carved on a granite boulder beside Overlook Loch (map reference 433086). On enquiry, I discovered that this was the work of Ronald Rae¹, an Edinburgh sculptor. The title of the carved stone is 'St Kilda Wake'. It forms a striking foreground to the small lochan and the distant hills.

Another artistic find was on the northern approach to Morven. I have often walked up along the Deskry Water to Pennystone Green on my way up the mountain. On one occasion, I explored a left-hand branch in the wide track wending upwards from the ford over the stream, and I was amazed to see an eagle perched on a rock to the left of a shooting cabin (map reference 384058). Anxious not to disturb the bird, and hoping to get a fine close-up photograph, I gingerly approached, only to find that I was looking at a cast-iron sculpture of the bird. I got my photograph more easily than I had anticipated(!), and found later that the object was the work of Helen Denerley, who lives quite near me. It is very realistic and striking in its mountain setting.

Perhaps, however, Philip Astor's patronage has found its fullest expression at lower levels. Migvie Church had lain unused and derelict for some time, when he engaged the well known artist, Peter Goodfellow, owner of the Lost Gallery at Strathdon, to create a plan for the restoration

of the building as a shrine, partly in memory of his parents, but also to be a place of beauty where visitors could find a haven of peace for meditation. Some of the interior art work takes up ideas from the carvings on the Pictish Stone in the churchyard, particularly the figure of a horseman, which features, for instance, in the stained glass windows created by Jennifer Bayliss. Other local artists involved were Gavin Smith, a wood carver, whose work can be seen in the beautiful door, and Louise Gardner, whose four throne-like chairs, carved out of stone, occupy a central place in the 'nave'. Round the walls are a number of inscribed plaques with quotations from a wide variety of sources from William Penn to Basil Hume. Peter Goodfellow's

work is also prominent, in his portrayal of six early Saints associated with this area, and in the many wood panels. Perhaps his most charming contribution was the frescos of the two birds which had their nests in the church as it was being restored. Visit the Church if you are in the area – it is always open, and the lights come on automatically once you open the door and step in. Finally, you may have noticed on entering Tarland from the Aboyne direction, three carved stones on the right as you come to the bridge. These are the work of Janet McEwen, and were placed there to commemorate the advent of the Millennium.



The Eagle

Reference

1. Ronald Rae's best known work is his "Lion of Scotland", at present entrusted as part of an outdoor exhibition of his work in Holyrood Park, near to the Scottish Parliament. This exhibition runs to 20th July 2007.