## Bringing stone circles into being: practices in the long 19th century and their influence on current understandings of stone circles in north east Scotland

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This thesis discusses the material histories of stone circles in Scotland to consider the practices that have brought them into being as monuments in the early twenty-first century. Focusing on stone circles in North-East Scotland, this study is the first to examine the influence of the long nineteenth century on current thinking and practices about an important aspect of Scottish prehistory.

Cultural historical, archaeological and anthropological approaches provide a framework for the analysis of visitors’ practices between the later eighteenth century and the present. This includes the analysis of the publications and archives of archaeological societies and field clubs, and was complemented by ethnographic fieldwork to investigate current practices and understandings. This took the form of semi-structured interviews with archaeologists, artists and others, participant observation during the excavation of a stone circle in Aberdeenshire, field visits to stone circles elsewhere and a survey in 2006 with questionnaires which were completed by about 700 people, and disposable cameras which were used to take some 300 photographs by visitors.

I argue that the analysis of the sensuous experience of being at a stone circle cannot be separated from understandings of the non-material aspects of these sites, particularly ideas of the ‘sacred’, ‘art’ and ‘heritage’, to broaden their biographies beyond that of solely being archaeological monuments.  Considering the many different meanings they engender shows that North-East stone circles are not places of contention or conflict, but places where different views are accommodated alongside governmental efforts to manage and interpret them. A particular focus of the thesis is a discussion of how stone circles have been seen and visually recorded. I argue that many aspects of recent views, including photographs by visitors, published photographs and interviews with artists and archaeologists, have been influenced by illustrations and attitudes that developed during the long nineteenth century.