



# Face of a Pictish man who was 'brutally killed' 1,400 years ago is reconstructed in stunning detail

- Skeleton was in remarkable state of preservation and found in a cave in the Black Isle, Ross-shire
- The body had been placed in an unusual cross-legged position with large stones holding down his limbs
- Forensic analysis showed that the man suffered at least five blows to the head that fractured his face and skull
- The final blow saw a weapon driven through his skull from one side and out the other as he lay on the ground

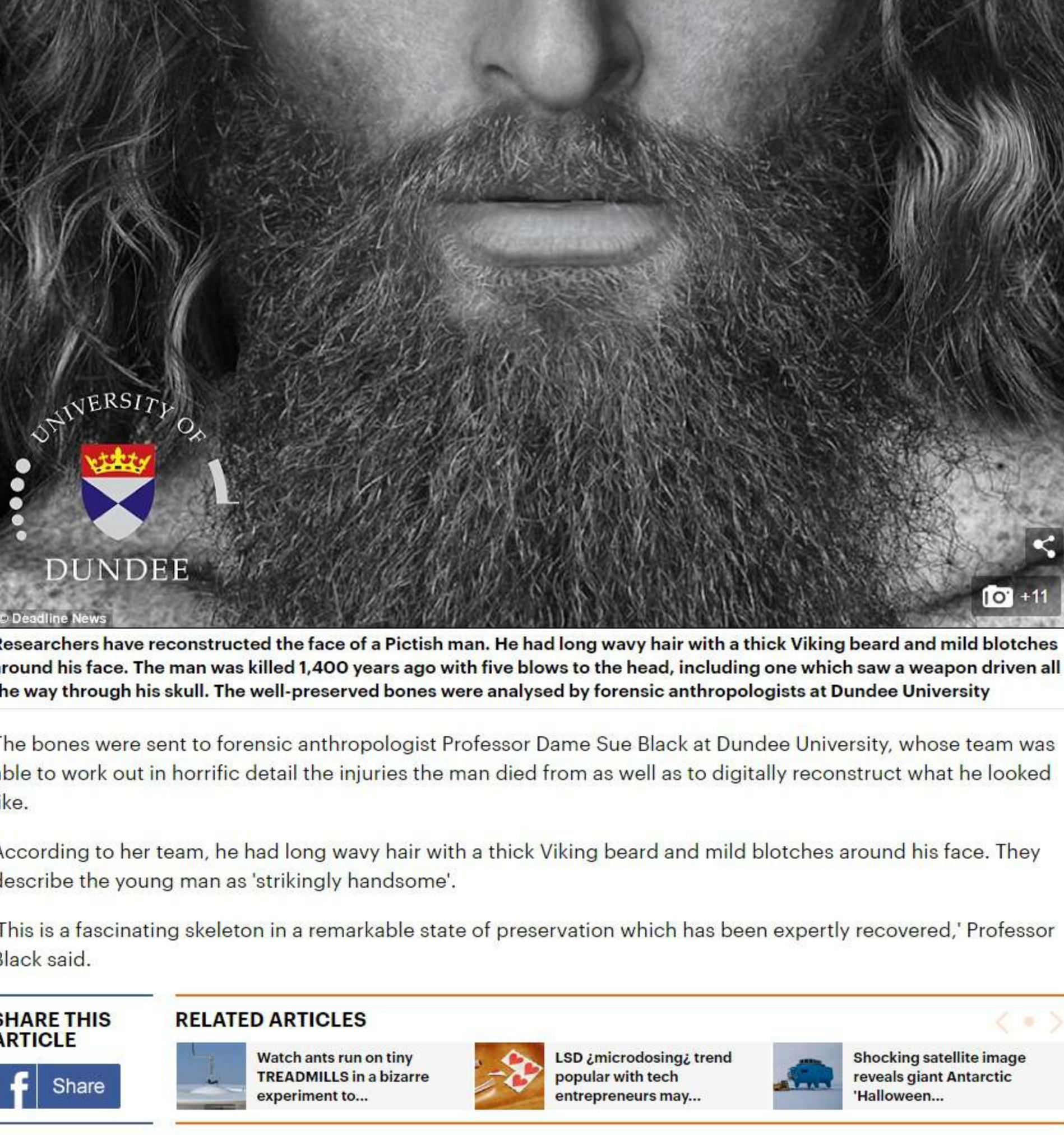
By HARRY PETTIT FOR MAILONLINE  
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Researchers have reconstructed the face of a Pictish young man who was 'brutally killed' 1,400 years ago. Archaeologists excavating a cave in the Black Isle, Ross-shire, were astonished to find a perfectly preserved skeleton of the man buried in a recess of the cave.

The body had been placed in an unusual cross-legged position, with large stones holding down his legs and arms. Forensic anthropologists found that the Pict victim had suffered at least five blows that resulted in fracturing to his face and skull, allowing them to compile a detailed account of how the man's short life was brought to a 'brutal end'.

**Scroll down for video**



Researchers have reconstructed the face of a Pictish man. He had long wavy hair with a thick Viking beard and mild blotches around his face. The man was killed 1,400 years ago with five blows to the head, including one which saw a weapon driven all the way through his skull. The well-preserved bones were analysed by forensic anthropologists at Dundee University

The bones were sent to forensic anthropologist Professor Dame Sue Black at Dundee University, whose team was able to work out in horrific detail the injuries the man died from as well as to digitally reconstruct what he looked like.

According to her team, he had long wavy hair with a thick Viking beard and mild blotches around his face. They describe the young man as 'strikingly handsome'.

'This is a fascinating skeleton in a remarkable state of preservation which has been expertly recovered,' Professor Black said.

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From studying his remains we learned a little about his short life but much more about his violent death.

As you can see from the facial reconstruction he was a striking young man, but he met a very brutal end, suffering a minimum of five severe injuries to his head.

The first impact was by a circular cross-section implement that broke his teeth on the right side. The second may have been the same implement, used like a fighting stick which broke his jaw on the left.



Pictured is a 3D facial reconstruction process. A computer program manipulates scanned photographs of skeleton to produce a model of what the muscles around may have looked like. From there, layers are added to provide the idea of the face shape and features. Researchers have described this young man as 'strikingly handsome'



The skeleton was found in a remarkable state of preservation. He had been laid to rest in the cave with some consideration - placed on his back, within a dark alcove, and weighed down by beach stones. While researchers don't know why the man was killed, the placement of his remains gives an insight into the culture of those who buried him



A bone sample sent for radiocarbon dating found he died sometime between 430 and 630 A.D., commonly referred to as the Pictish period in Scotland. Shown here is a reconstruction of his face, which included the shape of his facial muscles based on the size of the remains found

The third resulted in fracturing to the back of his head as he fell from the blow to his jaw with a tremendous force possibly onto a hard object perhaps stone.

The fourth impact was intended to end his life as probably the same weapon was driven through his skull from one side and out the other as he lay on the ground.

The fifth was not in keeping with the injuries caused in the other four, where a hole, larger than that caused by the previous weapon, was made in the top of the skull.

## WHO WERE THE PICTS? THE TRIBE WHO HELD ON IN THE NORTH

The Picts were a group of wild savages who famously fought off Rome's toughest legions before disappearing from history.

The collection of tribes lived in what is today eastern and northern Scotland during the Late Iron Age and early Medieval periods from around 270-900AD.

The Picts eventually formed a tribal confederation whose political motivations derived from a need to ally against common enemies such as the Britons and the Romans.

The Roman name for the people - Picti - means 'painted people'. It's not known what they called themselves.

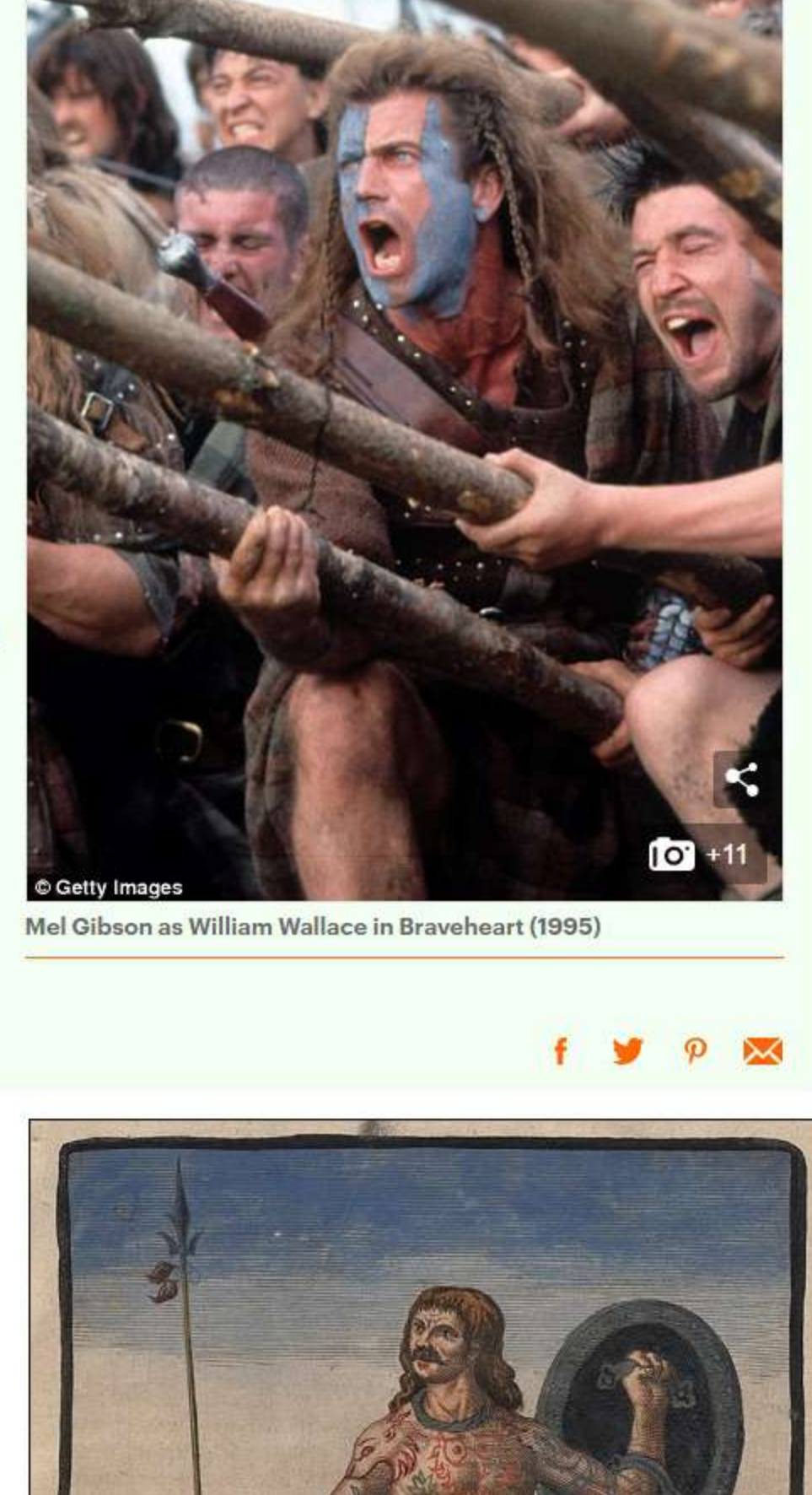
Mel Gibson's blue face paint in Braveheart is a nod to the Pictish tradition of body-paint - but the real Picts fought stark naked, and there are records of them doing so up until the 5th Century.

The habit of fighting naked, especially in the cold Scottish climate, didn't harm the tribe's reputation for ferocity.

Picts held the territory north of the Firth of Forth in Scotland - and were one of the reasons even heavily armoured Roman legions could not conquer Scotland.

The Picts mysteriously disappear from written history around 900AD.

Experts suggest that they likely merged with southern Scots, who already had a written history by that time, and the two clans' histories combined.



Mel Gibson as William Wallace in Braveheart (1995)

A bone sample sent for radiocarbon dating found he died sometime between 430 and 630 A.D., commonly referred to as the Pictish period in Scotland.

The skeleton was discovered when a team of volunteers were digging to determine when the cave might have been occupied.

Below substantial layers relating to cave-use since the turn of the 20th century, they found evidence that the cave had been used for iron-smithing during the Pictish period.

Hearths and extensive iron-working debris indicate that the cave was selected specifically for this use, but the totally unexpected find of the skeleton gave the cave a completely different significance.

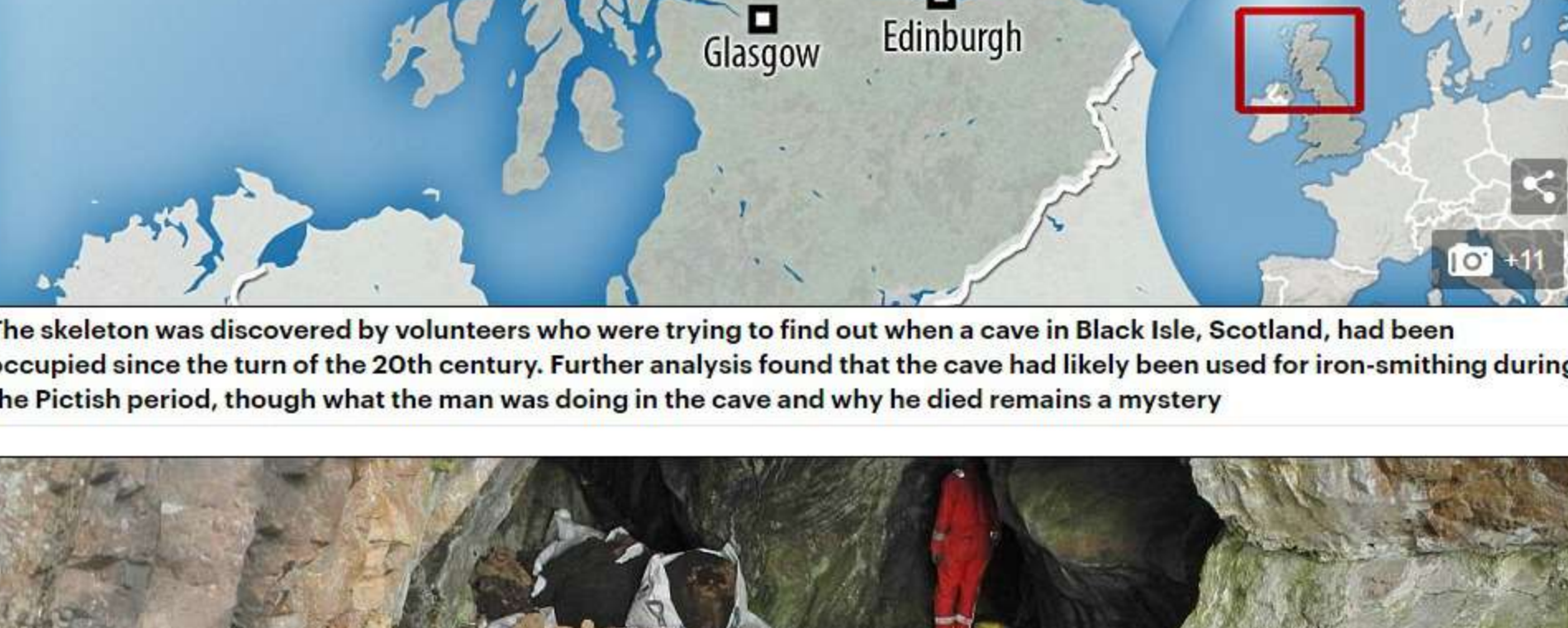
Excavation leader Steven Birch said: 'Having specialised in prehistoric cave archaeology in Scotland for some years now, I am fascinated with the results.'

'Here, we have a man who has been brutally killed, but who has been laid to rest in the cave, with some consideration - placed on his back, within a dark alcove, and weighed down by beach stones.'

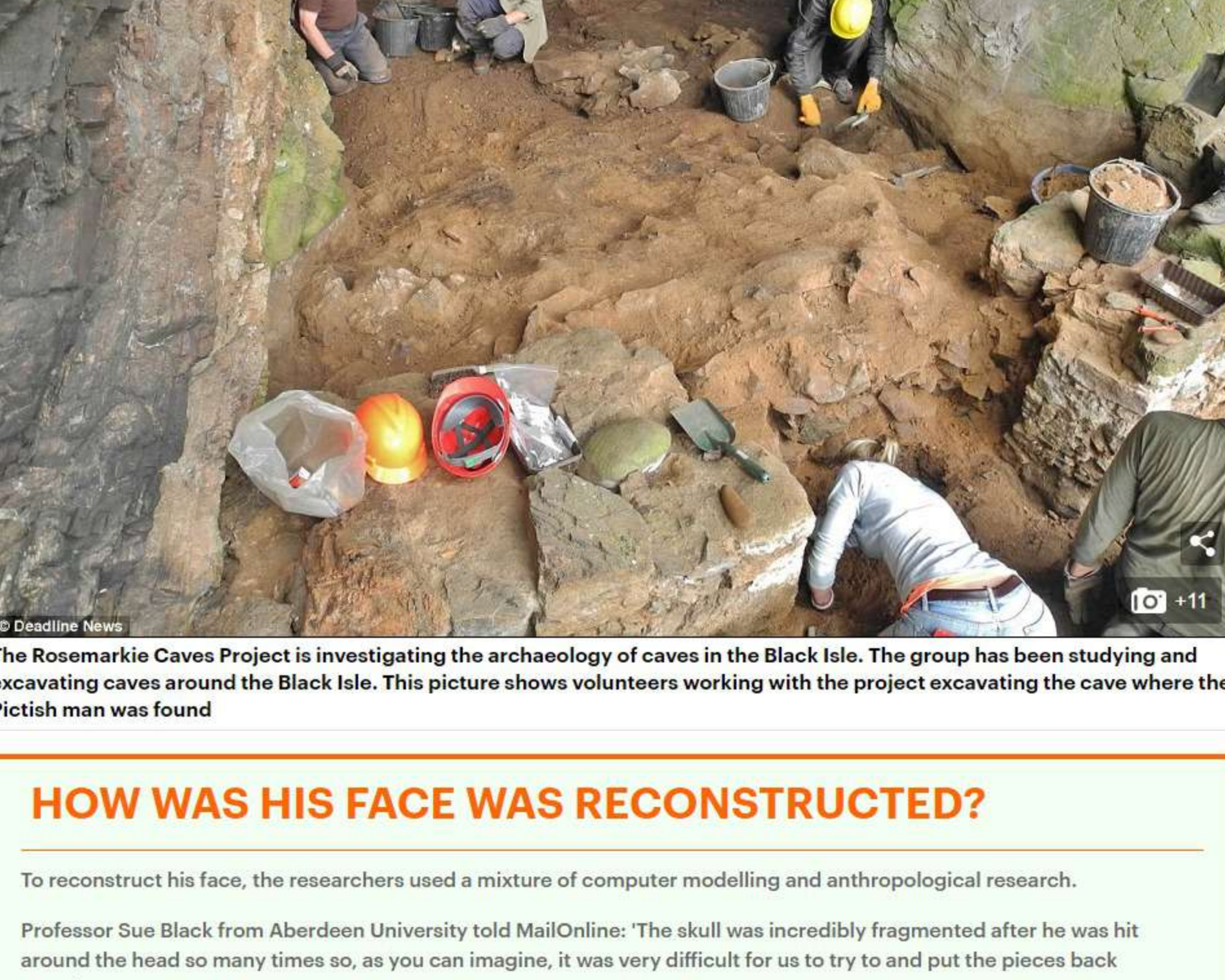
'What we don't know why the man was killed, the placement of his remains gives us insight into the culture of those who buried him. Perhaps his murder was the result of interpersonal conflict; or was there a sacrificial element relating to his death?'



Engraving of a Pict warrior. The Picts were a group of wild savages who lived in eastern and northern Scotland from around 270-900AD



The skeleton was discovered by volunteers who were trying to find out when a cave in Black Isle, Scotland, had been occupied since the turn of the 20th century. Further analysis found that the cave had likely been used for iron-smithing during the Pictish period, though what the man was doing in the cave and why he died remains a mystery



The Rosemarkie Caves Project is investigating the archaeology of caves in the Black Isle. The group has been studying and excavating caves around the Black Isle. This picture shows volunteers working with the project excavating the cave where the Pictish man was found

## HOW WAS HIS FACE WAS RECONSTRUCTED?

To reconstruct his face, the researchers used a mixture of computer modelling and anthropological research.

Professor Sue Black from Aberdeen University told MailOnline: 'The skull was incredibly fragmented after he was hit around the head so many times so, as you can imagine, it was very difficult for us to try to and put the pieces back together.'

'Instead, we used a 3D scanner to upload all of the fragments to a computer.'

The team then used a computer programme to start to build up a picture of the man's face.

'Because we know the thickness of soft tissue for a man of his age, we could then create depth marker so that we know what the distance should be between the bone and skin,' said Professor Black.

The researchers then used the depth pegs to work out where the where the muscle tissue would have been placed.

'All of the musculature can be placed because the bone lying underneath tells us where each muscle was,' she said.

'Over the top, we then placed a layer of artificial skin...We don't know if he was really skinny or fat, so we try to choose something in the middle,' she said.

The process allowed the researchers to get a highly accurate image of what the man's facial features would have looked like.

But to understand how the man's hair and beard might have looked, they had to look back in history.

Professor Black said: 'There's no way of knowing for sure what his hair looked like, but we know from historical records that the Picts had red hair.'

'We also know that Picts often had hair that was either close shaved or left uncut, and were known for their long beard.'

'With a combination of scientific and historical research, we were able to get the best estimate of what he might have looked like.'

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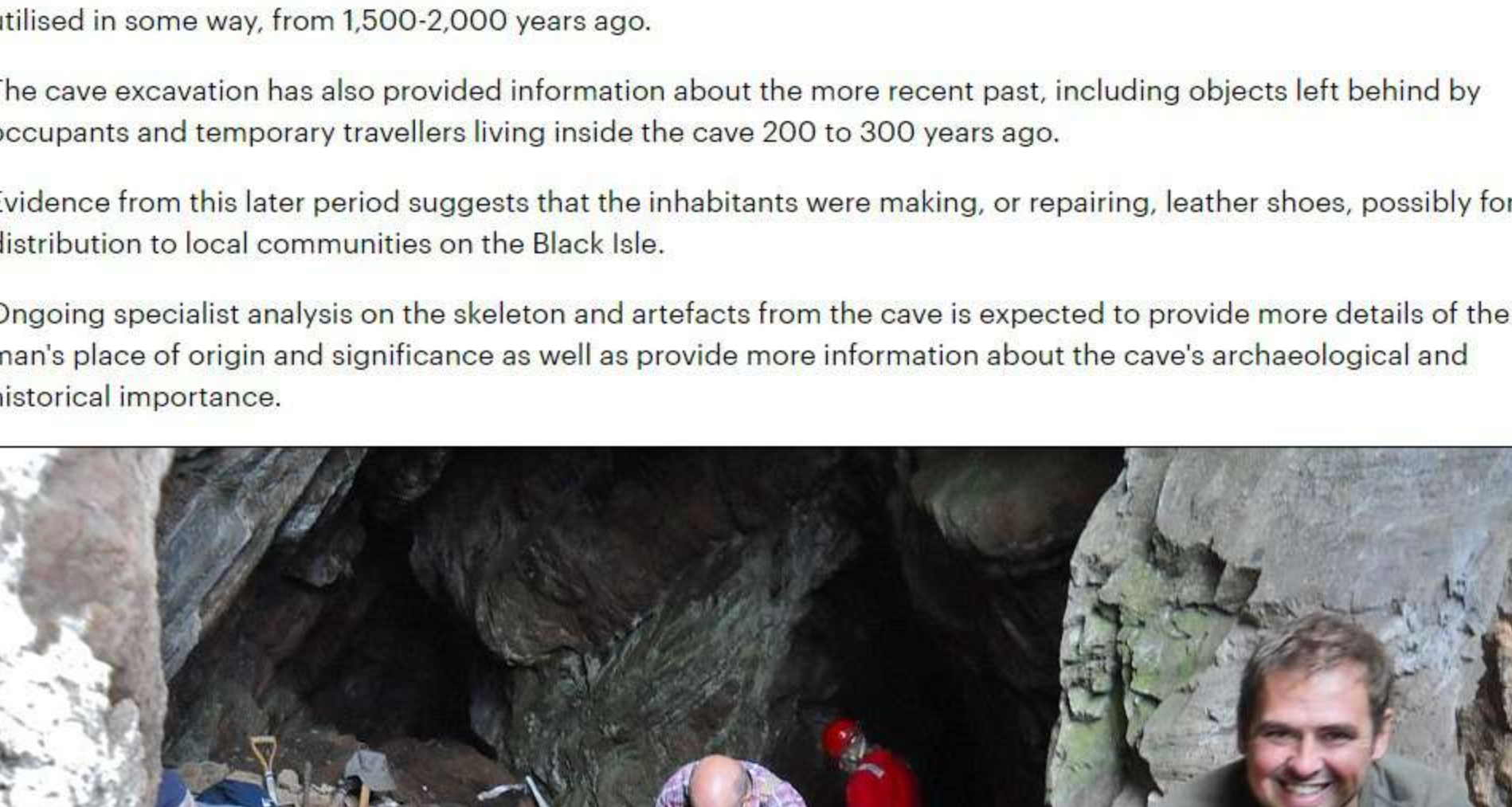
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A number of small test-pit excavations carried out by the team around the Black Isles, pictured here at the site of the Pictish man's murder, have provided evidence that the caves were being occupied, or at least utilised in some way, from 1,500-2,000 years ago

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The Rosemarkie Caves Project is investigating the archaeology of caves in the Black Isle.

The group, for some years, has been locating and accurately surveying the series of caves extending for several miles along the coast of the Black Isle.

A number of small test-pit excavations have provided evidence that the caves were being occupied, or at least utilised in some way, from 1,500-2,000 years ago.

The cave excavation has also provided information about the more recent past, including objects left behind by occupants and temporary travellers living inside the cave 200 to 300 years ago.

Evidence from this later period suggests that the inhabitants were making, or repairing, leather shoes, possibly for distribution to local communities on the Black Isle.

Ongoing specialist analysis of the skeleton and artefacts from the cave is expected to provide more details of the man's place of origin and significance as well as provide more information about the cave's archaeological and historical importance.



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