

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

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Having proved its capacity for survival during a six-year infancy, the time has come for the Scottish Society for Northern Studies to demonstrate its ability to grow. There has been something of a proliferation of late of historical societies and archaeological societies as well as those concentrating on literature, medieval studies and the rest, but S.S.N.S. remains the only forum in which historians, literary critics, linguists, archaeologists, geographers, anthropologists, place-name experts, etc. can indulge their common septentrional interests.

There has been, in this country, a revival, if not a birth, of interest in the culture and history of the North, in recent years. A spate of publications in English on Scandinavia in general has invigorated waters stagnant for close on a century. The Vikings have spear-headed the attack in some dozen books over as many years. Saga translations, as well as other works of literature, are now widely available. The public at large is increasingly demanding information on Scandinavian history, society, systems of government and economic policies. University curricula

now tend to take more account of Norden, notably at Newcastle and Aberdeen, where there are facilities for the study of the languages, literatures and politics of modern Scandinavia; Dundee pursues historical geography; Glasgow offers Norwegian; St. Andrews has specialists in medieval history; Edinburgh has courses in Old Norse and in Scandinavian history. Extra-mural departments are also in on the act. Edinburgh alone has mounted courses on Denmark, Danish, Sweden, the Icelandic sagas, Viking ships, and Scandinavian archaeology in the past two years. In addition, the first-ever International Saga Conference was held in Edinburgh last year and was attended by scholars from all over the world.

We, in Scotland, and not only in Orkney and Shetland, have always been peculiarly conscious of our Scandinavian neighbours, particularly, for good historical reasons, of Norway and Denmark. The archaeologists have established links with them in prehistoric times. The long ships sought out the Northern Isles as well as Caithness, Sutherland and the Hebrides, where their legacy in place-names and language remains to the present day. Anglo-Scandinavian migrants from the north of England left their mark on Lowland Scotland in the course of the Middle Ages. Diplomatic links were close from the thirteenth century onwards and at

least two Danish princesses became queens of Scotland. Scots traded across the Norwegian sea throughout the centuries, while a significant number of Scots merchants and mercenary soldiers made their permanent homes in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. From the eighteenth century Scotsmen played a not inconsiderable part in the British discovery of the literatures of Scandinavia; men like John Pinkerton, John Jamieson, Robert Jamieson, Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Laing and Thomas Carlyle, not to mention those early intrepid "explorers" of Iceland, George Mackenzie and Ebenezer Henderson. Of recent years not a few Scotsmen have cast envious eyes on the successful independence of our Scandinavian neighbours, in this age when "bigger" always supposedly equates with "better".

The Scottish Society for Northern Studies exists to foster interest in the Scandinavian countries and in Scoto-Scandinavian relations, not only within the Universities but throughout the country at large. Since the society was founded, we have enjoyed the strong and much appreciated support of Professor Mennie's department at Newcastle. It had long been realised that the London-based Viking Society for Northern Research could not reasonably be expected to cater (in terms of distance alone) for its northern members, and when the late Dr. A. B. Taylor suggested

establishing a separate, but affiliated society, he was rewarded with an enthusiastic response.

There is a widely held view within the present membership of the society that we should do more to publicise our activities, to broaden our appeal, and at the same time perform a useful service for all who are interested in the North. We shall, of course, continue to hold lectures in Newcastle, Aberdeen or Edinburgh, or indeed anywhere which seems a reasonable venue, but we are also attempting certain innovations. The first of these is before you and should serve to keep all interested in touch with developments on different fronts. It is always difficult to find out exactly what is going on in other fields; we hope that the appearance of this bulletin will obviate some of the difficulties and anyone with potentially relevant information is urged to send it to the editor. Secondly, the society hopes to hold small conferences (possibly on an annual basis) in different parts of what might be described as "Scandinavian Scotland". The first of these will be held in Orkney from April 2nd to April 7th this year on the theme of "Orkney in the Saga Period". The programme will consist of papers and excursions to relevant sites. It is hoped that many Orcadians will join us at these sessions. In future years we may be able to organise similar events in such

places as Shetland, Caithness, the Hebrides and the Lake District. Thirdly, the society may be able to provide lecturers for meetings of local history and archaeological societies. Many of us already give lectures in various parts of the country, but it may be thought worthwhile to compile a register of lecturers prepared to travel to the more distant parts of the country. Such lists might then be made available to local societies who cared to subscribe to our bulletin. Anyone with views or ideas on any of the above points is warmly invited to communicate them.

It remains to be seen how successful our different ventures will be, but we all have a contribution to make. If you are not already a member of the society why not become one? If you are a member you must know someone who would like to join. Much is being done, much remains to be done in the field of Scandinavian studies. The Scottish Society for Northern Studies exists to disseminate information through papers, meetings, conferences and this newsletter, to all who are interested in the affairs of the North.