

## PREFACE

The title of this volume, for which we can thank its editor, Christian Cooijmans, is clearly descriptive of its content. But it also serves as an invitation to reflect on the various other journeys – in time, space, and outlook – that have led to its publication. First and foremost, it is brought to you at a point where the publisher, the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, prepares to celebrate fifty years of learned activity. Although the significance of this span may not be immediately apparent to younger readers, this is a journey whose relative brevity in historical terms belies some pretty fundamental changes in the practice and dissemination of academic research. Founded in Edinburgh in 1968, the Society is dedicated to the idiosyncrasies and interplay of the cultures of the North – broadly defined as Scotland and Scandinavia along with their diasporas and close neighbours. Over the past five decades, these themes have been pursued diligently on a number of fronts. Through regular day-conferences and workshops held around the country, we have striven to promote new research offering fresh insight into the history, archaeology, ethnology, literature, and place-names of the northern world.

The Society's peer-reviewed, paper journal, *Northern Studies*, soon to reach its fiftieth issue, has been the main vessel for the broader dissemination of this work. In common with the wider academic community, however, we are also beginning to embrace the benefits of computer-mediated communication and the internet. As we hurtle ever onwards into the digital age, our annual newsletter for members has evolved through a brief phase and an e-mail circular into a suite of online outlets, including a growing social media profile and a website packed with digital resources. Anyone making the journey to [www.ssns.org.uk](http://www.ssns.org.uk) will find our back-catalogue scanned, archived, and available at no cost and very little effort beyond a few swipes or clicks and perhaps a short wait for the files to download.

Whilst moving boldly into this digital future, *Northern Studies* is nevertheless reluctant to cut all ties with the world of physical publishing. For the time being, we remain convinced by the tangible benefits of the printed word, and for the foreseeable future – and the ire, no doubt, of tablet manufacturers – committed to the production of physical books. With this goal in mind, our ongoing mission to

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create and share knowledge will also continue to prioritise our steadily growing body of monographs. These edited volumes of individually authored chapters and articles are developed, as a rule, from the high-point of the Society's calendar, our extended residential conferences. From the very beginning, the Society's residentials have sought to spotlight the heritage of as broad a sweep of the country as possible. In so doing, they have taken the membership to a range of locations from Castlebay to Forres, from Lerwick to Newton Stewart, and even, on occasion, across the border or the North Channel. Wherever possible, close collaboration with local groups has been secured to help deliver a more holistic experience of local culture and traditions. Through careful planning, expertly guided tours of local heritage landscapes and collections are dove-tailed with public addresses, recitals, and performances of poetry, music, and song to foster the congenial and stimulating milieu within which both lectures and wider discussions can flourish. By the time Northern Studies' residential conferences have run their course, the seeds of the ideas presented have not only been planted, but grown and blossomed.

Over the past five years, the Society has hosted three hugely successful residentials. With scores of speakers from a dozen different countries addressing audiences reaching into three figures, these have been truly cosmopolitan affairs. I have been fortunate enough to participate in all of them as both organiser and speaker. In 2012, we visited the Isle of Islay for four enlightening days of presentations on themes easily justifying the strapline *From Gall to Gael and Gallowglas*. Although based in Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle (The Columba Centre), with its sweeping vistas across Loch Indaal, sessions were also held in the majestic Round Church in Bowmore, the conference suite at Ardbeg Distillery, and the impressive medieval-modern fusion of Ballygrant Community Hall. Visits to the high-cross at Kildalton, the churchyard at Kilchoman, the *Carragh Bhàn* traditionally thought to mark the burial of Manx king Godred Crovan, and the MacDonald residences on Eileann Mòr in Loch Finlaggan and at Dunyvaig were balanced with a traditional Ceilidh in Ballygrant, and a more formal whisky-tasting session at Ardbeg.

In 2014, the destination was Northern Ireland, this time for five days devoted to the *Hinterlands of the North Irish Sea*. The conference was co-hosted by Geography and Environmental Sciences at the University

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of Ulster. Although based at the University's Coleraine and Magee campuses, sessions in the Bushmills Community Centre, where we received a warm welcome from the Bushmills Historical Society, along with a number of venues in Port Stewart and Port Rush, provided a thorough introduction to the 'Triangle Town' area. In addition to the pristine streets and city walls of Legenderry (!), our excursions covered Ballycastle Bay, Bonamargy, and Fairhead. Visits to the late medieval and prehistoric fortifications of Dunluce and Dunseverick were brought to life by scholars involved in their excavation and conservation, as was our final trip to Belfast City airport via the stunning Antrim Coast and Carrickfergus Castle.

In 2015, another five-day residential saw the Society relocate to the isles of Coll and Tiree. Based at An Cridhe on Coll, which provided both conference facilities and accommodation, the weather remained unseasonably fine throughout, allowing us to strike out temporarily to Tiree. Although limited to one day, this expedition was particularly fruitful, taking in a session at the Community Hall, An Talla, with access to the historical centre, An Iodhlann, and visits to the Hynish Centre and Ballephuill Bay. Back on Coll, time at An Cridhe was supplemented with sessions at the Hebridean Centre at Ballyhaugh (courtesy of Project Trust) and at Breachacha Castle, kindly hosted by the present custodians, the Maclean-Bristols. Guided tours of the island revealed the unadulterated beauty of the landscape, as well as the secret life of the corncrakes at the RSPB reserve near Arinagour.

The main connecting factor in all three of these events was undoubtedly the sea. Ever-present as a calming backdrop on our tours and sometimes during the lectures and talks themselves, it lent the proceedings a soothingly atmospheric quality. As someone who was responsible for the logistics of these conferences, it became clear to me at a relatively early stage that the root of that atmosphere was not the water *per se* but the relative difficulty of access it presented to the modern traveller, and the glorious isolation that comes along with it. However, when standing at the coast at Fair Head in County Antrim, or high on the hillside at Dùn Bhoraraic on Islay, or Ben Hogh on Coll, the intervisibility of these places with their neighbours was striking, and went a very long way to explaining their historical connections. Until the days of health and safety and vehicle licences curtailed less reliable forms of transport, the 'Inner Seas' between the Hebrides, Ireland,

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and the Scottish mainland were far less of a barrier to communication than a fast-track towards it – a pre-modern superhighway for people, resources, and ideas. And it is for this feeling of interconnectedness and commonality of formative experience that we have decided to explore all three conferences in this single volume.

The ten papers included here are representative of the best given. They may come to you shorn of the cultural and social matrix from which they originally sprung to life, but they have been greatly expanded and improved with the help of double-blind peer review and subsequent reflection. Viking-themed topics dominate, which is only to be expected for an area comprising the western hub of *Scotia Scandinavica*. Between them, they also cover the full range of source materials and approaches which have come to be associated with Northern Studies, touching on history, archaeology, place-names, and more. Given the cross-disciplinary nature of most of the papers, however, the distinctions are not always especially clear-cut! To help you navigate this material, we have decided to group them into three sections, reflecting their geographical relationship with the area under discussion: Those which concentrate on a specific locality *along* the Inner Seas; those whose observations span a number of different locations *across* them; and those where a significant part of the discussion plays out in the lands *beyond*.

Focusing primarily on discrete locations along the Inner Seas, we have John Holliday, Alan Macniven, and Mark Hall. The volume opens with Holliday's presentation of the fruits of his life-long collection of place-names and folk culture in the Gaelic-speaking environment of Tiree. Despite the overwhelming Gaelic bias in recent material, his discovery of a widespread, and potentially blanket Old Norse substrate are thought-provoking to say the least. The idea of a complete Norse take-over even further south in the Hebrides is explored by Macniven in his overview of Scandinavian place-names in Islay. Contrary to previous assumptions, his work suggests that the Viking impact on Islay was as transformative as it had been in the Northern Isles. This opening section concludes with Hall's investigation of the origins and importance of board games in the region through to the high Middle Ages, including their use at Lordship centres like Finlaggan.

With perspectives linking multiple locations within the Hebrides, or exploring their connections with the North of Ireland, the Scottish

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mainland and beyond, we have Claire Downham, Ryan Foster, Nicholas Evans, and Alexandra Sanmark. Downham begins with a review of later insular accounts of Scandinavian activity in the west, including the Battle of Clontarf, arriving at surprising conclusions. Foster follows with an analysis of place-names in the Outer Isles building on the Old Norse generics *sætr* and *ærgi*. His combination of onomastics with physical geography points to distinct and contrasting agricultural associations, and the potential adoption of those encountered at *ærgi* sites from a preceding Celtic tradition. Evans then demonstrates how an innovative analysis of the Irish annals can be used to trace lines of transmission of news, and with it influence in general. This second section is brought to a close by Sanmark's presentation of the Scottish dimension of a major European survey of Scandinavian administrative centres, known in Old Norse as *þing* or 'assembly' sites, whose many findings include a checklist of key attributes by which hitherto unrecorded examples might be identified and verified.

The final section is devoted to the area beyond the Inner Sea, with contributions from Arne Kruse, Jamie Barnes, and Ian Peter Grohse. Kruse opens with an exciting new perspective on the origins of the medieval kingdom of Norway, or *Laithlind* as it appears in the Irish annals. Barnes then considers the provenance and cultural import of the so-called 'Hammerhead' crosses of the Viking Age, sculptures whose apparent cultural hybridity appears to blend pagan and Christian symbolism. The volume concludes with Grohse's investigation of the Viking-like raids of later-medieval Hebrideans on Orkney, pointing to a longstanding continuity of practice connecting the latter-day Gaels of the Long Island with their Scandinavian ancestors, and showing that old habits really do die hard.

So there you have it, three main themes, ten authors, and a multitude of insights. We hope you enjoy them. If you are not already a member of the Society, we also hope that they will inspire you to consider joining via the website, attending one of our residentials yourself, and contributing either directly or indirectly to the next edited volume.

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