

Foreword

WITH a pivotal position in the Firth of Clyde, Bute commands sea-routes into and out of much of inland Argyll, west-central Scotland and beyond. It displays quite distinct landforms and habitats that are more characteristically rough and boggy north of the Highland boundary fault (Rothesay to Scalpsie Bay), and generally more gentle and fertile to the south. Not unlike Arran, albeit less rugged, it is a fine mix of Highland and Lowland, and embodies so much of what can be found more widely across Scotland.

The name, too, has created much discussion. Rothesay reflects Viking activity: most probably ON *Ruðri* + *ey*, Ruairidh's island, with *Rothersay* (1321) a scotticised alternative for *Baile Bhòid*, the township of Bute. If not pre-Celtic, Bute (Gael. *Bòd*, ON *Bót*) may originate in OIr *bót*, fire, hence a possible **Inis Bòit*, the island of fire, with reference to 'watch' or signal fires once used as a means of communication. Or may it be related to Welsh *bod* and Irish *both*, a dwelling, a term that could also apply to a church or chapel? Simon Taylor and Gilbert Márkus have noted that the distribution of *both* in Scotland suggests a link with onetime British- or Pictish-speaking areas, in which case the word may originally be P-Celtic rather than Q-Celtic and the island called after an early ecclesiastical site, most likely Kingarth. Looking outward, Gaelic links *Bòd is Ìle is Arainn* (Bute and Islay and Arran), which W J Watson and others have suggested may indicate an ancient island grouping corresponding to Ptolemy's *Eboudai*. And in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, agriculturally-productive Stewart lands were grouped as Bute, Arran and the Cumbraes (along with Cowal and Knapdale).

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Bute was best known for agriculture and tourism. Creameries and holiday-hordes from Scotland's industrial heartlands are now gone, but the island is regaining a reputation for its natural and cultural heritage, and its diverse and accessible landscapes. Farming remains a mainstay of the economy; and small-scale industry includes a mix of old and new: boat-building, boat-repairing, quarrying and fishing alongside speciality foods, fashion fabrics, printed circuit boards, a call centre, visitor attractions and community-focussed initiatives.

These essays were presented at the Scottish Society for Northern Studies' conference on Bute in 2010, and happily complement *The Archaeological Landscape of Bute* (Edinburgh: RCAHMS 2010). They focus on varying aspects of Bute's eventful past: Viking raiders and settlers; sagas; the interaction of Norseman, Celt and Scot; early Christianity, saints and cults; agricultural fertility and Stewart ownership; the Bute or Bannatyne Mazer; seventeenth-century witch-hunts; pre-improvement settlement and landholding; and radical eighteenth-century changes in agriculture and farm buildings that quite changed the face of the land. For today's rural landscape would be as unrecognisable to seventeenth-century Brandanes as any prehistoric landscape.

Historic Bute: Land and People

It gives great pleasure to thank all involved in helping to organise the conference, not least the Buteshire Natural History Society, the Discover Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme and fellow committee members, in particular Bridget Paterson, Paul Duffy, Angus Hannah, Anne Speirs, Isabell McArthur, Craig Borland, Linda Riddell and Molly Rorke. The Scottish Society for Northern Studies is volunteer-run, and no conference or publication appears without the commitment and dedication of many. We owe a huge debt not only to contributors who so freely share their research and to those who have helped to fund publication, but also to Anna Ritchie for her painstaking approach to editing the essays. We are grateful to all, and very much hope that *Historic Bute: Land and People* will not just please, but stimulate further investigation both on Bute and further afield.

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Edinburgh
March 2012