REVIEWS:

Anna Ritchie: *Picts: An introduction to the life of the Picts and the carved stones in the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland.* HMSO, for Historic Buildings and Monuments, 64pp. illus. in colour, £3.95 paperback.

In recent years, interest in Scotland's archaeological heritage has expanded greatly. Much of this is due to the development of the museum "industry" in all its varied aspects, the increase in tourism, and the emergence, albeit at a late stage, of a national consciousness which goes some way towards redressing our past deficiencies in the documentation and preservation of these important reminders of our early history.

Anna Ritchie's expertise in presenting the Pictish monuments as both historical material, and as artistic sources, is unsurpassed. This little volume, with its splendid photographic plates and its lively yet scholarly commentary, should find a ready market. Both the general reader and the scholar will benefit from having a clear idea of the physical nature of the carved stones of Pictland, as well as receiving the most recent thinking on the subject.

The book is divided into five major chapters – "Myth and Reality: Who Were the Picts?"; "Communications in Stone: What are Pictish Symbols?"; "Impact of Christianity: The Art of Pictish Cross-slabs"; "Life and Death: Picts at Home and at War"; and "A Culture Obliterated: What Happened to the Picts?". The first four chapters are expanded by "Spotlight" features, where four sites, Burghead, Aberlemno, St Andrews and the Brough of Birsay are investigated and illustrated in further detail. There is, finally, a short reading list, together with an index map.

The most striking aspect of the book is the photographic coverage. This will certainly be the principal appeal to the layman. The complicated tracery of the Glamis Manse stone (p.32) and the lively battle scenes on the reverse of Aberlemno churchyard cross (pp.34-5) are effectively portray ed by David Henrie, who is responsible for most of the photographs.

David Pollock's sketches of the Pictish house at Gurness, Orkney are especially vivid, and there are excellent aerial shots of the Brough of Birsay (p.53) and Dundurn in Strathearn (p.42).

The description and commentary, however, complement the illustrations effectively. A brief historical survey in a publication of this kind is never an easy task, and Dr Ritchie's economic yet scholarly prose never allows our concentration to lapse.

A small motif on the back cover informs us that the book has been supported and sponsored by the food chain, Gateway. At a time of increasing economic difficulty for academic publishing, it is encouraging that the production of little volumes such as these is being assisted in such a manner. This particular offering is excellent value, presented in a highly readable and attractive format and therefore, highly recommended.

Ian A Fraser

Finlay MacLeod (ed): *Togail Tir, Marking Time. The Map of the Western Isles.* Acair Ltd. and Lanntair Gallery, 1989, 160pp. illus. £11.50 paperback.

This most unusual book can best be described by quoting the words of the preface: "This book is concerned with the many ways in which a given landscape – in this case the Western Isles of Scotland – may be experienced, depicted and described". Some twenty contributors have assembled, under Finlay MacLeod's editorship, a collection of scholarly articles, personal accounts, poetry and artistic notes in both Gaelic and English which deal with the varied methods used to map the Hebrides since the first printed map of Scotland appeared in 1566.

The most obvious part of the historical record consists of the maps themselves. Diana Webster's account of surveying in Scotland before 1820 begins by quoting John Napier's introduction to his explanation of land measuring in 1597: "there be knawin to expert Mathematiciens mony and divers wayes to mette (measure) land ... bot of the vulgar people there is bot ane forme of metting used and understand, to wit, be rod and raip (rope) . ..." This contrast, between the scientist and the common man, and their response to the problems of delineating the environment, characterises the dual role of the book. The maps and the survey methods which involves their making is discussed by Diane Webster in two sections – one dealing with early survey as mentioned earlier, the other analysing Murdoch Mackenzie's contribution to nautical survey in the Northern and Western Isles from 1744-8. Jeffrey Stone looks at Timothy Pont, the father of Scottish map-making, and his influence on later cartographers, with particular emphasis on his Western Isles maps. James B Caird examines "Early 19th Century Estate Plans", covering surveys made form Lewis to Barra, and including a valuable bibliography, together with a series of useful maps. Margaret Wilkes, head of the National Library of Scotland Map Library gives an account of "missing" manuscript maps of the Hebrides which have been "found" in recent years, and there is a short description of the work of Captain Henry C Otter and Captain Fredrick W L Thomas by Gillian Maclean and Finlay MacLeod. These two men figured prominently in the Admiralty's Hydrographic Survey of the Western Isles (1846-1863).

The Gaelic contributions include Finlay MacLeod's Cumadh nan Eilean where he surveys the history of mapping in the islands, from Alexander Lindsay 's "Rutter of the Scottish Seas" of 1540, to the modern offerings of the Ordnance Survey.

It is not entirely, however, the visual quality of the cartographer's art which is the focus of this collection of essays. The "descriptions" which characterised many early modern writings are discussed by Iain F MacIver, in "A 17th Century Prose Map". This gives an account of the remarkable John Morison (c1630-1708), tacksman of South Bragar who was the first Lewisman to write a geographical description of his own island, as part of a project by Sir Robert Sibbald to publish a volume, "Topographical Notices of Scotland", c1685. Morison's account, of which Iain MacIver gives the full text, is fascinating, referring to local customs, wildlife and fishing, as well as occasional allusions to Hebridean antiquities. "In several places there are great stons standing up straight in ranks, some two or three foot thick and 10, 12 & 15 foot high: It is left by traditione that these were a sort of man converted into stons by ane Inchanter. Others affirm that they were salt up in places for devotione; but the places where they stand are so far from anie such sort of stons to be seen nor found either above or under ground that it can not but be admired how they could be carried there".(p.28)

The second part of the volume is largely devoted to a series of essays on place-names on maps of the Western Isles, and to studies of the conceptions that Hebrideans, and others, have of their environment. The spatial relationships between individual topographic features, and how individuals cope with this concept; the way in which the surveyors performed their mysterious scientific rites among a people who were often puzzled by the significance of the survey (an extract from Brian Friel's Translations); the role of the place-name informant in the first Ordnance Survey operations in the islands; all these subjects are discussed.

The chapters by Domhnall MacAmhlaigh and Richard Cox are partly concerned with the topic of Anglicised Norse and Gaelic place-names, an issue which goes right to the heart of the very nature of such names. While maps give us the measure of a place and the relationship between physical features, the people who walk the ground, tend their livestock, fish the waters and till the soils can impart much more of the spirit of the landscape. This is well expressed in Tim Robinson's chapter on Connemara, and Hugh Brody's piece on the Inuit of Canada, where he reveals the Inuit's knack of constructing "dream-maps" which are "guides to the most elusive terrain, both descriptions of and metaphors for the ultimate journey". It is this comparative material, looking at other remote areas and cultures, which makes Togail Tir such an important publication. The implications for the historian and the geographer are obvious, but the overall theme is one of a unique culture, and how it is approached by the cartographer. It is a real attempt to place the history of map-making in the Western Isles in a cultural context, with all that this implies.

The book is splendidly illustrated, and attractively laid out. The financial assistance provided by the Scottish Arts Council and the National Gaelic Arts Project has certainly been put to good use.

Ian A Fraser

C D Morris: *The Birsay Bay Project Volume I Brough Road Excavations 1976-82* Department of Archaeology. University of Durham, 1989 ISBN 0 905096 08 8

Members of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies will feel a particul ar interest in the publication of the first volume of Christopher Morris' excavation reports of the Birsay Bay Project. Over many years we have followed the activities and discoveries of his students and colleagues as they pursued an ambitious programme of research on the West Mainland of Orkney and provided a steady stream of accounts of the excavations in *Northern Studies*. Now we have the whole story – or part of it, for this is only the first volume to appear, and it is concerned with the research programme on the Mainland coast opposite the Brough of Birsay. There is still the report of the Beachview excavations to come as well as the Investigations which have been undertaken on the Brough itself – in an attempt to help elucidate that most complex and baffling collection of historical remains.

The Birsay Bay Project has in many ways involved a new approach in the excavational history of Scottish archaeology, – certainly in the Viking sphere. Its immediate aim was to record the number of sites in the locality, many of which were at risk from erosion, development and even rabbits; to sample soils from different areas in order to analyse middens, buildings and other