



The University of Melbourne Department of History

Between Invasions Conference

Britain and Ireland between the Romans and the Normans

Thursday 4th and Friday 5th September 2003

Conference Committee

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Celtic Council of Australia

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Professor Elizabeth Malcolm
Mr Mark Leakey
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Program

Thursday 4th September

9:00 am: Registration

9:30 am: Plenary

Chair: Ms Julianna Grigg

Associate Professor Ann Trindade (University of Melbourne)

[*Future directions in medieval Irish Studies*](#)

10:45 am: Morning Tea

11:15 am: Objects

Chair: Ms Kristen Erskine

Paper 1: Ms Melanie Van Twest (University of Melbourne)

[*They were there: an overview of the Anglo-Saxon population of Sedgeford, Norfolk*](#)

Paper 2: Ms Katharine Burke (University of Melbourne)

[*Valkyries in Caithness: An exploration of 'Darradarliod'*](#)

Paper 3: Ms Tessa Morrison (University of Newcastle)

[*Concealed reflected symmetries of Insular manuscripts*](#)

12:45 pm: Lunch

12:45 pm: Session 1

Special Viewing

Rare Books Collection, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

Introduction by Julianne Simpson, Rare Books Librarian

(includes newly acquired Lindisfarne Gospels facsimile)

1:30 pm: Session 2

Special Viewing

Rare Books Collection, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

Introduction by Julianne Simpson, Rare Books Librarian

(includes newly acquired Lindisfarne Gospels facsimile)

2:15 pm: Panel Discussion

Chair: Dr Pamela O'Neill

The Manuscript Tradition

Ms Deidre Hassad

Ms Julianne Simpson

3.15 pm: Afternoon Tea

3:45 pm: Ecclesiastics

Chair: Ms Julianna Grigg

Paper 1: Sr Denise Doyle (University of Sydney)

[*Brigit: goddess to saint*](#)

Paper 2: Professor John Martyn (University of Melbourne)

[*Augustine's failure as a mission leader*](#)

Paper 3: Dr Dianne Hall (University of Melbourne)
[*Women and the twelfth-century church reform in Ireland*](#)

5.15 pm: Drinks

5:30 pm: Plenary

Chair: Ms Kristen Erskine

Dr Lyn Olson (University of Sydney)

[*The absorption of Cornwall into Anglo-Saxon England*](#)

7:00 pm: Conference Party

Upstairs Function Room, Prince Alfred Hotel, 191 Grattan Street

Traditional Irish music by Eamon Crosby and Michael McClintoch

Friday 5th September

9:00 am: Literature

Chair: Dr Pamela O'Neill

Paper 1: Mr David Wilson (University of Melbourne)

[*Heroic epic as propaganda: the manipulation of honour in the Táin Bo Cuailnge*](#)

Paper 2: Mr Greg Byrnes (WEA Sydney)

[*The poems of Blathmac: recent developments*](#)

Paper 3: Mr Chris Bishop (Australian National University)

[*Westen: tenth-century Wessex and the birth of 'The Wasteland'*](#)

10:30 am: Morning Tea

11:00 am: History

Chair: Ms Kristen Erskine

Paper 1: Mr Martin Grimmer (University of Tasmania)

[*Memories of the Celts in Bede's Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*](#)

Paper 2: Associate Professor Constant Mews (Monash University)

[*The ambivalent image of Celtic Christianity in Gerald of Wales*](#)

Paper 3: Dr Val Noone (The Australian Irish Network)

[*Culhane of Brunswick on early medieval Ireland*](#)

12:30 pm: Lunch

1:30 pm: Panel Discussion

Chair: Ms Julianna Grigg

The Metalworking Tradition

Mr Bill Perrin

Professor Neil McLeod

2:30 pm: Afternoon Tea

3:00 pm: Picts

Chair: Ms Katharine Burke

Paper 1: Ms Julianna Grigg (Melbourne)

[*Aspects of kingship in Pictland and early Scotland*](#)

Paper 2: Ms Kristen Erskine (University of Sydney)

[*A sense of place: sacred sites in Pictland*](#)

Paper 3: Dr Pamela O'Neill (Melbourne)

[*Dimensions and distribution: aspects of Pictish sculpture*](#)

4:30 pm: Multimedia Presentation

Chair: Ms Julianna Grigg

Professor Bernard Muir (University of Melbourne)

Studying scripts and manuscripts in the multimediam aevum

5:15 pm: Drinks and notices

5:30 pm: Plenary

Chair: Dr Pamela O'Neill

Professor Neil McLeod (Murdoch University)

[*The blood-feud in medieval Ireland*](#)

ABSTRACTS

Mr Chris Bishop
(Australian National University)

Westen: Tenth-century Wessex and the birth of “The Wasteland”

When Eliot utilized the image of *The Wasteland* to represent his won feelings of despair and hopelessness he was self-consciously borrowing from a literary tradition that traced its genesis through romantic poetry and medieval romance, back into the songs of his Insular ancestors.

The representation of *westen* – the wasteland, the desert, ruined cities, ruined halls – was of deep significance to late West-Saxon society. Modern perceptions of the heroic nature of Anglo-Saxon culture have rested on no more than five poems, several of them fragmentary, whereas *westen* occupies a central position not only in a good many poems, but also in figurative and sculptural art, and in West-Saxon redactions of classical authors such as Boethius and Orosius. Despite this, its power as sign to these peoples is still relatively unexplored.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the importance of the *westen* motif – in particular the image of *Ruin* – in late West-Saxon poetry and to examine the ways in which an appreciation of this theme might augment our understanding of later Anglo-Saxon society.

Ms Katharine Burke
(University of Melbourne)

Valkyries in Caithness: an exploration of ‘Darradarliod’

“A wide warp
warns of slaughter
blood rains
from the beam's cloud' (Darradarliod, 'Njal's Saga')

Here is the gruesome loom in Caithness, where twelve valkyries weave the fates of Viking men at war in Ireland. This supernatural vignette, from the Viking-age poem 'Darradarliod', mirrors and distorts the activities of Scandinavian women from their earliest British and Irish settlements. The poem offers a space where women's tools acquire grisly potency, and are inextricably linked with the actions of men. An exploration of Viking home life, material culture, textile work, division of labour and industry complicates and elucidates an understanding of the Scandinavian impact on the British Isles.

Mr Greg Byrnes
(WEA Sydney)

The poems of Blathmac: recent developments

The National Library of Ireland MS G50 contains some 300 quatrains of Old Irish verse ascribed to Blathmac Mac Con Brettan. Most of these were published in 1964 but it was not until 1999 that the remaining fragmentary quatrains appeared in print. This paper offers a brief critical survey of research on Blathmac and a tentative interpretation of the new material. Relevant to the conference theme are the links noted by several scholars (Carney, Byrne, Tristram, Breeze) between these poems and Old English poetry.

Sr. Denise Doyle
(University of Sydney)

Brigit, Goddess to Saint

Brigid is a saint who exists in time and in the other world of timelessness. Celtic deities were neither abstractions or fiction, they were essential and inseparable aspects of daily life. Myths are the symbols by which mankind has expressed the deepest insights about ourselves and our universe. Time is irrelevant in myth. The original mythic Brigit was a solar goddess, at whose shrine burnt an eternal flame. The historical Brigit was Abbess of Kildare, a place whose name indicates an oak grove, undoubtedly once sacred to the Druids. As this mysterious, many faceted figure, Brigit is revered as a tripartite goddess and saint, grounded in the common humanity of all women, in whom natural, cultural and ritual functions coalesce.

Ms Kristen Erskine
(University of Sydney)

A sense of place: sacred sites in Pictland

Gathering together is a ceremonial reaffirmation of community across time and space. Bringing the extended community together on traditional land not only maintains but reinforces a sense of place for each individual within the community and within the world. In Pictland, the kingdom of northern Scotland that sprang from a fusion of the indigenous tribes of the region and flourished between the fifth and ninth centuries CE, people no doubt gathered for these reasons. Examining archaeological, historical and onomastic data together builds on current theories by highlighting hitherto neglected aspects of Pictish culture. Knowing the location of gathering sites, especially in relation to settlement sites, royal residences and later Christian foundations, expands our knowledge of the evolution of community interactions.

Ms Julianna Grigg
(Melbourne)

Aspects of kingship in Pictland and early Scotland

The Pictish regnal lists offer a rare, if sober, insight into a heroic society. Confirmation of their legitimacy comes through contemporary observations by the Picts' neighbours. Bede, Adómnan and Irish monastic annals provide an insight into a society not dissimilar to their own. Kingship in Pictland appeared to develop into single leaders administering to a federation of tribes and communities. While there is no documentation of how the Picts viewed the office of king, the sites used for

inauguration bear a strong similarity to those used in Ireland. This paper will examine the documentary and material evidence available to illustrate the requirements of kingship in Pictland and early Scotland. It will also investigate the primary inauguration site, Scone, and the methods used to legitimise the reign of a king.

Mr Martin Grimmer
(University of Tasmania)

Memories of the Celts in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*

Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* is the major text which informs modern understanding of Anglo-Celtic interaction in the early Anglo-Saxon period. The *Historia* also provides the basis for how the early medieval Celts have been viewed by historians. It has typically been assumed that Bede promulgated a negative view of Celts which complemented a more general socio-cultural milieu of antipathy and aggression between them and the Anglo-Saxons. Yet, such a conclusion obscures and trivialises a deeper complexity in Bede's thinking about the Britons, the Scots and the Picts. Indeed, Bede regarded the different Celts differently, adopting an eclectic attitude which was inspired by what he perceived as their respective contributions to the success story of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Bede wrote with due attention to the different roles played by the Celts in the story of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, lambasting the perfidious Britons and praising the God-fearing Scots and Picts. This paper will explore how Bede memorialised the Celts of early medieval Britain.

Dr Dianne Hall
(University of Melbourne)

Women and the twelfth-century church reform in Ireland

Reforming Irish churchmen and Gaelic Irish secular leaders were instrumental in transforming the shape of the Irish church in the early to mid twelfth century. Little or no attention has been paid to how these reforms affected women. This paper will examine the reforming synods, and writings of the reformers, to analyse the ways that some women were able to renegotiate their roles within the institutions of the church in twelfth-century Ireland.

Professor Neil McLeod
(Murdoch University)

Neil McLeod is with the School of Law at Murdoch University in Western Australia. He began research into medieval Irish law in 1977. He has written a book on Early Irish Contract Law and more than a dozen articles on aspects of medieval Irish law in conference proceedings and in journals such as *Eriu*, *Peritia*, *Studia Celtica*, the *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, and the *Irish Jurist*. Last year he was a visiting professor at the School of Irish, Trinity College Dublin, and at the School of Celtic Studies in the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. He is currently writing a book on bloodshed and death in Medieval Ireland.

The blood-feud in medieval Ireland

As a legal institution, the 'blood-feud' entitles the kin of a slain man to exact revenge from the kin of his slayer. But this entitlement is usually defined in such a way that it actually discourages such violence from taking place. This paper will examine the mechanisms of the 'blood-feud' in medieval Irish law. It will examine the social institutions and legal mechanisms which allowed the 'blood-feud' to act as a restraint on violence within individual kingdoms. It will also note that the absence, or relative weakness, of many of those social and legal restraints led to a greater level of violent disputation between opposing kingdoms and opposing dynastic segments.

Associate Professor John Martyn
(University of Melbourne)

Augustine's failure as mission leader

Pope Gregory's mission to England had been very carefully planned over several years, when in 596 a party of monks left the monastery of Saint Andrew in Rome to convert the English. Bede wrongly saw this as a sudden decision, and in his use of the Pope's letters, he deliberately distorted the few of them that he quoted to favour his hero, Augustine, while omitting sections that would harm him. He also minimised the almost total contribution of Pope Gregory to the establishment and later management of the English Church.

This paper will analyse the unflattering language used repeatedly by the Pope to describe his one-time fellow-monk, showing how he avoids praising Augustine even at his moment of triumph, and how he condemns him for the deadliest of sins, arrogance, shown in his stiff-necked approach to the French bishops and towards the Welsh churchmen. If Mellitus had been available at the time, he would have been a far more trustworthy, determined and conciliatory leader, as he showed with the second body of monks sent to England five years later, with more English prisoners trained as monks acting as interpreters.

Associate Professor Constant Mews
(Monash University)

The ambivalent image of Celtic Christianity in Gerald of Wales

Gerald of Wales provides a fascinatingly ambivalent attitude towards the Christian culture of pre-Conquest Ireland, in that he is both intrigued by its traditions and repelled by what he perceives as the barbarism of its populations. Gerald has never enjoyed a good reputation among scholars of medieval Ireland, because he is so often associated with the prejudices of a ruling class, and with wishful projection of his fantasies on to a local population. This paper argues that Gerald needs to be perceived as much more than a story teller. While he was shaped by the values of his class, I suggest that his account of the Kildare manuscript (similar in many ways to the Book of Kells) needs to be situated within a wider context of his discussion of Brigid, Patrick and Columba, and that his writing provides valuable insight into the ambivalent fascination of a culture that has often been over simplified as "Celtic Christianity", without appreciation of its debt to Roman and other traditions.

Ms Tessa Morrison

(University of Newcastle)

Concealed reflected symmetries of Insular manuscripts

The construction methods of the exquisite Celtic borders and motifs, which illuminate the pages of the Insular manuscripts, have been examined in detail over the last hundred years. These constructions generate continuous symmetrical patterns, yet the symmetries of the borders and motifs are restricted by the alternating crossings of the thread. However, these crossings have underlining symmetrical patterns of their own. Multithreaded motifs in the insular manuscripts whether geometric, figurative or zoomorphics have interesting underlying symmetries, which are coursed by the alternating crossings of more than one thread and these symmetries are often obscured by the decorative detail. The purpose of this paper is to reveal these concealed reflected symmetries of the Celtic border and patterns. These hidden symmetries reveal a consistency throughout Insular manuscripts that could not be accidental.

Dr Val Noone
(The Australian Irish Network)

Culhane of Brunswick on early medieval Ireland

Thomas Francis Culhane (1891-1969) was a Gaelic scholar who migrated from Limerick, Ireland, to Brunswick, Victoria. He found no academic work in Australia but did his research and writing in spare time while working on a farm and then in office jobs. This paper analyses thirty articles of high-level popularisation which he contributed to the Melbourne Catholic Advocate; and discusses his views on early Irish history, poetry and music; on the role of Hiberno-Latin texts; on Irish links to continental Europe; and on European scholars of Ireland such as Zeuss, Meyer and Bieler. The example of Culhane in finding outlets, however limited, for scholarly work in the humanities outside the universities and seminaries is timely. His learning and writing about early medieval Ireland is remarkable, and deserve to be better known.

Dr Lyn Olson
(University of Sydney)

Lyn Olson (Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Sydney) has studied at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies and the Centre for Medieval Studies in Toronto, and the Institute of Cornish Studies in Redruth. Her research has focussed on early medieval Cornwall and Brittany, but her interests are Europe-wide and include the use of archaeological research in historical study, religious change as cultural change, and women in the early middle ages. Publications include *Early Monasteries in Cornwall*, 'A Tenth-Century List of Cornish Parochial Saints' (with O J Padel), *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture* (edited), and a forthcoming monograph on Dol in Brittany as a religious, political and cultural centre to 1199AD (forthcoming).

The absorption of Cornwall into Anglo-Saxon England

The paper will present fragments of evidence that when taken together indicate that the Cornish 'establishment' - landed layfolk and leaders of the church - was absorbed into the English system, in the process reorienting itself to the new English power. There are four main indications of this: the profession of obedience to the Archbishop of Canterbury of the Cornish bishop Kenstec in the mid-ninth century, the 'restoration' of the bishopric of Cornwall in the tenth century, the incorporation of the Cornish landed gentry shown in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters, and the fate of the early monasteries of Cornwall which were assimilated with English minster churches. Thus Cornwall became a Celtic part of England by the time of the Norman conquest.

Dr Pamela O'Neill
(Melbourne)

Dimensions and distribution: aspects of Pictish sculpture

Much has been written about various aspects of the enigmatic stone sculpture of the Picts. This paper leaves aside the content of the sculpture, and looks rather at the dimensions of the stones upon which it appears, and the distribution of those stones across the landscape. For reasons of brevity and coherence, only the class II and III stones in Allen and Anderson's 'East Central' region will be considered. The paper assesses common dimensions which recur throughout the corpus, and questions whether knowledge of those dimensions can alter our perspective of the corpus. It then considers the distribution pattern of the sculpture and what light can be shed on questions of provenance.

Associate Professor Ann Trindade
(University of Melbourne)

Ann Trindade, MA DPhil, Dip Theol (Oxon) recently retired from her post as an Associate Professor of Medieval History at the University of Melbourne. Her publications cover Anglo-Norman England and Capetian France as well as Early Christian Ireland. She is particularly interested in the language, literature and culture of these areas.

Future directions in medieval Irish Studies

'Ireland before the Normans', as GH Orpen labelled it, was for many years studied mainly by church historians and philologists. Gradually other perspectives intruded. This paper traces some of this history and singles out important approaches favoured by leading scholars in Ireland and elsewhere. These include wider issues such as identity: central or peripheral; religious inculturation; questions of interface: pagan and christian, oral and written; as well as targeted study of institutions and cultural products.

Ms Melanie Van Twest
(University of Melbourne)

They were there: an overview of the Anglo-Saxon population of Sedgeford, Norfolk

The village of Sedgeford, West Norfolk, has hosted the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project for the past eight years. While aiming to research the history of the entire parish, the Project has concentrated on excavation of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery, in use during the 8th and 9th centuries. This paper will present a brief overview of the excavation in general, and will discuss the findings made to date in the study of the human skeletal remains from this site. A tentative reconstruction of the health and lifestyle of the living population in the Anglo-Saxon period will also be presented.

Mr David Wilson
(University of Melbourne)

Heroic epic as propaganda: the manipulation of honour in the *Táin Bo Cuailnge*

The heroic epic tales of the Irish Ulster Cycle present a picture of an archaic tribal society, delighting in cattle raiding, fighting, and preserving the heads of their slain enemies. However, the stories that have been preserved in manuscript form have been through the hands of educated men, trained in Christian monastic schools. The early redactors have been careful to ensure they did not introduce Christian anachronisms, giving the impression the stories have been preserved unaltered from the early oral traditions. However, they had ulterior motives - to introduce into the stories O'Neil dynastic propaganda. They did this in a very subtle manner.