

Lecture Summaries

The Northumbrian church at Whithorn

Peter Hill

Whithorn is traditionally regarded as the home of the earliest Christian community in Scotland and the site of a stone church built by St Ninian. The Venerable Bede, writing in AD 731, gives the earliest account of these traditions, adding that Whithorn had come under Bernician control and that a Northumbrian bishop, Pecthelm, had recently been appointed to the see of *Candida Casa*. Subsequent Northumbrian sources record the succession of bishops until AD 802, while a final Northumbrian bishop, Heathred, is recorded in an episcopal list of AD 840 x 845. A copy of a verse life of St Ninian, written at Whithorn, was sent to the Northumbrian scholar Alcuin in the late eighth century; his reply thanks the brethren and encloses a silk veil for the shrine of St Ninian. *This life and Alcuin's reply give unequivocal evidence of a Northumbrian monastic community and attest to the development and propagation of the cult of St Ninian by the Northumbrian church.*

Previous excavations at Whithorn have revealed no certain evidence of the Northumbrian community. There was, indeed, scant evidence of Northumbrian occupation in western Galloway. The absence of Anglian sculptures indicated that Northumbrian cultural influence was limited.

Excavations by *Historic Scotland* in 1984 and by the Whithorn Trust in 1986–91 have transformed this picture. The ground to the south of the medieval priory has revealed abundant evidence of Northumbrian occupation. The most important discovery is a range of ecclesiastical structures comprising a large timber church, a clay-walled burial chapel and a children's graveyard. These structures were well preserved and a detailed history of their construction, modification, maintenance and abandonment has been adduced. They overlie a sequence of earlier ritual structures indicating continuity of ritual *foci* from the fifth or sixth century. Ranges of large and small timber buildings to the south may have been part of the monastery or an associated secular settlement. A rich assemblage of finds includes stained glass, iron coffin fittings and Roman objects, possibly venerated as relics in the church. Sixty-five coins have given unusual chronological precision to the development of the site in the mid-eighth to mid-ninth centuries.

The settlement underwent a crisis in the mid-ninth century (probably in the 840s) when the ecclesiastical buildings burnt down and the ground to the south was ploughed. While the burning may have been accidental, these events pertain to a period of intense Viking activity in western Britain and perhaps reflect an otherwise unrecorded disruption in Galloway. The church and chapel were rebuilt but did not survive long. Their demise in the late ninth or early 10th century probably marks the end of Northumbrian Whithorn. The emphasis had already shifted to a new settlement of small buildings to the south. These probably represent a secular trading station which was to survive until the 13th century.

Monuments on record: the work of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland at the end of the 20th century

Roger Mercer

This paper sought to examine why the work of the national body of survey and record was more relevant and necessary to our societal well-being in the late 20th century than ever before. It traced the conflict between change and stability within our historic built environment and observed how, arising from that conflict, the earliest conservationist 'pressure groups' sought the foundation of an independent inventorizing body in the late 19th century. The solution was pressed for, and found, in Scotland where, as a direct outcome of the publication of Gerard Baldwin Brown's polemic *The Care of Ancient Monuments* in 1905, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland was established in February 1908, with English and Welsh equivalents being founded eight months later in October. Key figures in this process were Baldwin Brown himself and Sir John Sinclair, Secretary of State for Scotland, 1906–9.

The paper explored the nature of the Inventory visualized by Baldwin Brown and the practicability of such an Inventory. While fully accepting that the contribution of the British Royal Commissions in this area had been second to none, it was concluded that the target set was not attainable.

The Royal Commission, it was concluded, had come of age with the delegation to it of the maintenance and husbandry of the National Buildings Record in 1966, and it had finally reached its present potential with the absorption of responsibilities for Ordnance Survey mapping information and the maintenance of the National Non-Intensive Record in 1983. There followed a description of the formal creation of the National Monuments Record of Scotland and the seeds of its developments to become the new constantly updated Inventory – first delineated in the KPMG Report of 1988.

Thereafter the paper examined the ways in which this new National Inventory could be made as accessible as possible to the public and to interested corporate bodies. The development of field sections within the two oversailing Divisions of Architecture and Archaeology as a support for the National Inventory were set out, as were the objectives over the next decade of inter-Sectional and inter-Divisional co-operation leading to a more integrated interaction with NMRS. This will in turn create, it is hoped, a more directly orientated and clearly defined service to our sponsoring body, Historic Scotland (from which had come much of the inspiration for the recent augmentation of our duties) and to all other bodies and individuals of good intent operating in the Heritage area.

Canadian Ethnology and the Wilson Brothers

Dale Idiens

Interest in Canadian ethnology did not coincide with initial European contact with the Indian and Inuit peoples of Canada. Native Canadian artefacts had been collected to a limited extent prior to the mid-19th century, but such material generally derived from fleeting encounters by European explorers with coastal rather than interior groups, and few objects were accompanied by useful information. By the middle of the 19th century frequent contact with the coastal peoples had

changed their material culture considerably, while the interior groups, who were the last to encounter Europeans, had not altered their customs radically.

It was at this crucial point that George Wilson (1818–59) and Daniel Wilson (1816–92) turned their attention to the collecting of Canadian ethnology, engaging the support of the Hudson's Bay Company. As a consequence, over 300 artefacts collected among the Athapaskan (Dene) peoples in the Sub-Arctic area of Canada were sent to the museum in Edinburgh between 1858 and 1862. This material, acquired in response to specific collecting instructions by George Wilson, resulted in the earliest systematic documented collection of ethnology from the interior of Canada.

The collection is important because it was made at the beginning of new systematic attitudes to material culture; the documentation includes provenance and identification of raw materials; processes are directly illustrated by series of objects; and many of the objects demonstrate change due to European influence. The Wilsons may have developed some of their collecting attitudes and practices from Professor Robert Jameson, who had greatly influenced the University of Edinburgh's Museum of Natural History in the first half of the 19th century. George Wilson, as a professor of technology, was also concerned to acquire 'industrial arts' from all over the world. Together, the Wilson brothers were in the vanguard of new approaches to ethnology and material culture studies. Today this collection is widely known and acknowledged as a unique record of an ethnology or way of life that no longer survives, and a tribute to the inspiration of two remarkable individuals, George and Daniel Wilson.

Fleas, Flies and Farmers, an entomology of archaeology

Paul Buckland

Only the most self-assured of archaeologists would fail to acknowledge that more information is thrown away on an excavation than is actually gathered. In part this is a reflection of availability of funds and relevant expertise but it is equally the consequence of a pigeon-holing of disciplines. In one such pigeon-hole, or at least bird's nest, live a group of invertebrates able to provide quite detailed images of past farming practices and living conditions. The bug in the pigeon's nest is difficult to distinguish from the bed bug, found by Peter Osborne in Roman Alcester. Man's other ectoparasites are not infrequent in suitable anaerobic sediments. The so-called human flea, despite its apparent South American descent, appears in Neolithic Skara Brae and his lice are widespread on Norse sites from Orkney to Greenland; crab lice appear in the floor deposits of the post-medieval Manse at Reykholt, Iceland (the publication of this information has led to a protracted discussion of the likely individual host). Man and pigeons are not the only animals to provide homes for ectoparasites and the presence of domestic animals may be evident on their pests. The wingless, parasitic fly, the ked, which lives in the fleece of sheep and sucks their blood, is particularly frequent in archaeological contexts; its presence, with the sheep fleece louse, has been used to argue for wool preparation, a convoluted tale of barrels of urine, rather than milk products, in the larder.

The bird's nest also provided homes for a range of insects which essentially feed either on mould fungi or are predatory upon those animals which exploit this food source; this element found a massive expansion of its available habitat as stored products, particularly hay for the overwintering of domestic stock, became an integral part of the human scene. This characteristic assemblage finds its earliest occurrence again at Skara Brae. More typical stored product pests

may have had to await large-scale movements of grain to expand out of the Mediterranean world, where the grain weevil must have begun life in the wild cereal stores of Fertile Crescent rodents. The Roman army took it at least to Bearsden on the Antonine Wall and it reached Iceland, at least to the Governor's residence, during the medieval period. Like many of the species able to exploit the artificially warmed and superabundant habitats created by storage, it is now, with house flies and stable flies, virtually cosmopolitan.

The creation of a landscape of culturesteppe over the past 6,000 years makes the present interglacial unique in the Quaternary, and this will only be tidied up by the next glaciation. The impact of farming systems has not only been to expand available habitats for the ecological opportunists but also to restrict, even destroy, those of less mobile species. The disappearance of wolf, elk, auroch and boar is common knowledge, but the loss of many insects is less widely acknowledged; some only hang on in the European mainland by the tips of their tarsi, as their last remaining old forest habitats are replanted. Most local extinctions are from dead-wood habitats, victims of procurement of kindling by hook or by crook at least since the medieval period and, more recently, of overtidy forestry. Faunas from Neolithic and Bronze Age trackways in England show the beginnings of these processes. The Elm Decline is marked not only by the single unsurprising appearance of the elm bark beetle at Hampstead Heath but by a massive expansion in the faunas of dung and open ground as herbivores are concentrated more than ever before. Temporary increases in the dead-wood fauna may reflect the process of ring barking and burning of the larger trees. Increased silt input to rivers, consequent upon clearance, has modified the freshwater faunas, but many inland and clear water species appear to have survived surprisingly late, falling victim to industrialization and its effluent. To misquote, the one thing we learn from palaeoecology is that we never learn from palaeoecology.

High Society on the Antonine frontier

David J Breeze & Susan Walker

Shortly after the accession of the Emperor Antoninus Pius in 138, the Romans reconquered southern Scotland and built the Antonine Wall. The decision to move north was taken within months of Pius' accession: building work started at Corbridge in 139. This was the only time that the emperor accepted the acclamation of Imperator – Conqueror – in spite of extending the frontier of the Roman empire elsewhere later in his reign. This presumably indicates the importance which he attached to the events in Britain.

While the army of conquest will have been mainly composed of Britons or men from the neighbouring provinces across the Channel (one of the soldiers to be based at the fort at Mumrills on the Antonine Wall was Nectovellius, a Brigantian by origin), the generals were from a more cosmopolitan world. The governor of Britain, who presumably led the invasion, was Q Lollius Urbicus, from Cirta (modern Constantine) in North Africa. The commander charged with the construction of the Antonine Wall was Aulus Claudius Charax of Pergamon in modern Turkey, also known as a historian and as priest of the cult of Asklepios in his native city. Charax's personal history shows how it was possible for Greek intellectuals to pursue a full Roman career without losing touch with their roots. From his contemporaries we gain insight into how the Roman world was perceived in his day as a privileged community, its cities unwalled but protected by distant frontiers such as the Antonine Wall, designed to keep out those peoples who sought access to the benefits of Empire but were to be denied such advances.

A history of the Arts & Crafts movement in Edinburgh, 1885–1939

Elizabeth Cumming

Since the 1970s, design historians have begun to unravel the complex history of the Arts & Crafts movement which is now viewed not simply as the period of rationalization within Victorian design and a necessary prelude to modernism, but also as a reform movement dominated by social (and at times political) ambition. In Scotland, recently published research on the Glasgow Style, such as *Glasgow Girls* (1990), has tended to eclipse the history of turn-of-the-century Edinburgh design and craft which had an equally lively, but totally distinct, character and which in its time was appreciated at least as much in London as in Scotland's capital.

The beginnings of Edinburgh Arts & Crafts lay within the Victorian philanthropic movement of the mid-1880s. The Edinburgh Social Union, set up by the social philosopher, evolutionist and botanist Patrick Geddes, decorated public buildings and organized craft classes for the city's underprivileged in the 1880s, but by 1890 its directors were more concerned with the reform of professional design and sought practical support from London designers such as C R Ashbee. The 1890s and 1900s saw the peak of the post-Morris Arts & Crafts movement within Britain, a period dominated by the reform of design education and the emergence of craft as an acceptable leisure activity. Edinburgh was at the forefront of it. For 16 highly productive years, from 1892 until 1908 (when the present College of Art opened in Lauriston Place) Edinburgh had no fewer than three art schools and numerous workshops, such as the Dean Studio, all professing the Arts & Crafts. The Old Edinburgh School of Art, set up by Geddes with John Duncan as director, even established international cultural links. The Edinburgh craft movement, although relatively fragmentary, did have a recognizable corporate identity. For many designers a proper and sensitive understanding of national culture was the essential prelude to modernism. Contemporary London journals such as *The Studio* frequently commented on Edinburgh designers' clever use of colour and mastery of materials, the figural and symbolist qualities of their work and their deep respect for tradition.

In architecture, taught at Robert Rowand Anderson's School of Applied Art from 1892, there was greater emphasis on traditional form and materials than on the crafts. In the 1890s the Lawnmarket area was transformed by Stewart Henbest Capper, whose picturesque style was a mix of English Arts & Crafts principles and Scots vernacular. The same may be said of Robert Lorimer, regarded by many as Edinburgh's outstanding architect of the 1890s and 1900s. His Thistle Chapel, designed in 1909 and built in 1910–11, was the peak of revivalist Arts & Crafts. Combining work by a number of independent city craftsmen, from the brothers William and Alexander Clow to the sculptor Joseph Hayes, it emphasized both the collaborative spirit of the movement and its emphasis on figural design and quality craftsmanship.

The First World War failed to extinguish the movement. The inter-war years in Scotland, as elsewhere in the British Isles, were marked by a resurgence of amateur crafts alongside the professional studio workshops such as the Dovecot Tapestry Studio. The integration of art with a way of life, so relevant 40 years earlier to Arts & Crafts ideology, survived only in amateur work serving to satisfy economic needs as much as fulfil artistic desires.