

APPENDIX 11 FISH AND MARINE MOLLUSCA

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A.11.1 Fish

The fish remains from Parliament House derived from both ‘burial’ and ‘non-burial’ contexts. Eleven non-burial contexts and 53 burial contexts produced fish remains. Nomenclature follows Wheeler & Jones (1989: 122–3). A full catalogue and report can be found in the site archive at the National Record of the Historic Environment of Scotland.

The assemblage comprised marine species; no freshwater fish remains were recovered. Herring (*Clupea harengus*, family Clupeidae) was the main species present together with fishes of the cod family (Gadidae): haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), cod (*Gadus morhua*), whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*), saithe (*Pollachius virens*) and pollack (*Pollachius pollachius*). Other species included gurnard (*Eutrigla Gurnardus*), mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*), the flatfish plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) and remains of Elasmobranchs (shark/ray).

A.11.2 Marine mollusca

Marine shells from Parliament House were recovered from 15 non-burial contexts and 79 burial contexts. A full catalogue and report can be found in the site archive.

The most common species present was the common oyster (*Ostrea edulis*), found in shallow waters. Also present were the common mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), found on rocks in estuaries and exposed shores; the queen scallop (*Chlamys opercularis*), which is found on sand and gravel, on the extreme lower shore; and the common cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*), found on the lower shore burrowed in sand, mud or gravel.

Gastropod species included limpet (*Patella vulgata*), found on rocky shores throughout the Scottish coast; edible periwinkle (*Littorina littorea*), found on rocks, stones and seaweed on the middle and lower shore and by the shore during breeding seasons. Other edible species included the common whelk (*Buccinum undatum*), which is found on sand and mud from shallow water.

Other species recovered and classified as non-edible were the flat periwinkle (*Littorina*

littoralis), rough periwinkle (*Littorina saxatilis*), small periwinkle (*Littorina neritoides*), grey topshell (*Gibbula cineraria*) and dogwhelk (*Nucella lapillus*).

A.11.3 Discussion

The deposition of fish remains at Parliament House site may be due to rubbish disposal, though their use as fertiliser and/or as elements of levelling or fill material is also a strong possibility as large amounts of the material derived from grave fills.

The beaches along the east coast provided an easily accessible resource – most of the contexts contained species which would have been easily collected from these beaches. The oyster in Scotland is particularly associated with the east coast – around the Forth before the 1800s there was productive exploitation of this shell (Lockhart 1997). Mussel is abundant in clean conditions, especially where salt and fresh water meet, such as at the mouth of burns entering the sea; the Firth of Forth was one of the most productive areas in Scotland. In Scotland, mussel was also used as bait for lines (ibid). Limpets are edible and have also been used traditionally as fishing baits. Edible periwinkles, which are found in rock pools along the shoreline and are still gathered by hand, have always been plentiful. Whelks were caught from the sea in baited pots or baskets.

The presence of scallop shell (*Chlamys opercularis*) in this assemblage, within a fill associated with Skeleton 59, is of great interest. The scallop shell is the symbol of St James and the cult of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spanish Galicia. The first literary evidence for the scallop as the badge of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela is the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*. Shells to be attached to pilgrims’ cloaks were on sale around AD 1130 in booths around the paved court north of the cathedral (Hobler 1957). A sermon in the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* indicates that the two valves of the shell symbolised the Two Great Commandments. The earliest representation of a pilgrim wearing the shell is on the western doorway of Autun Cathedral in Burgundy, which dates from between 1130 and 1140. In the cloisters of Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain and Arles in Provence, France, there are sculptures depicting Christ and two of the disciples dressed as pilgrims, the scallop shell being much in evidence. The carvings at Silos date to around 1160

(ibid). A parallel for the presence of a scallop shell with human burial in late medieval Scotland exists within the Cluniac priory church on the Isle of May, where a scallop was recovered from the burial of an adult male, radiocarbon dated to between the late 13th and mid-15th century. The scallop shell appears to have been intentionally inserted within the palate of the inhumed individual (James & Yeoman 2008: 58, illus 5.23 and 5.24).

The species associated with the cult of St James appears to be that of *Pecten maximus*. It is semi-circular, with equal 'ears' and dissimilar valves – the upper are flat and reddish-brown, the lower are convex, cream or fawn with pinkish-brown markings. It can be up to 13cm long. This was the species recovered from the late medieval burial within the Cluniac priory church on the Isle of May (James & Yeoman 2008: 181). *Chlamys opercularis*, the species recovered at Parliament House, is up to 9cm in length and its anterior ear is longer than the posterior one. The only species of *Pecten* which occurs on the Atlantic coast, not far from Santiago de Compostela, is *Pecten maximus* (Rees 1957).

While it is uncertain whether the smaller species of *Chlamys* recovered with Skeleton 59 was symbolic of the cult of St James, it was certainly deliberately fished. Regardless of the significance of this bivalve as a Christian symbol, queen scallops (*Chlamys opercularis*) were extensively fished in the last century, and very large beds, which were fished for bait, existed in the Firth of Forth (Tebble 1976).

A.11.4 Conclusion

Most of the large robust gastropods (eg periwinkles) were well preserved; these usually survive well in archaeological deposits because of their strong sturdy shell. However, oysters, which have a more lamellar and easily broken shell, were also relatively well preserved, particularly in the hand-retrieved material. Most of the other shell remains only survived as broken fragments, a few showing signs of burning. This suggests that these remains were mainly derived from refuse used as fertilisers and/or as levelling/fill; most were recovered from grave fills. The exception to this interpretation was the scallop shell, which may have been deposited with human inhumation for symbolic religious purposes.