

Centre for Nordic Studies newsletter

January 2016

A grand tour

In December and January, Professor Donna Hedde undertook a “grand tour” of Orkney, lecturing on the Vikings. The lecture, entitled ‘From the fury of the Northmen, good Lord, deliver us?’ explores the various facts and fictions about Norse influence in Scotland.

Donna has aimed to reach most of the inhabited islands of Orkney, and it has been some very busy weeks lecturing in North Ronaldsay, Eday, Shapinsay, Sanday, Stronsay, Rousay, Westray and Hoy, as well as the mainland locations of Kirkwall, Stromness, St Margaret’s Hope and Deerness.

The talk has been very well received, with good numbers attending and lots of interest and questions from the audience. Donna has even received fan mail!



Colleen Batey made Honorary Reader

The Centre for Nordic Studies team is pleased to announce that Dr Colleen Batey of the University of Glasgow has joined the Centre as an Honorary Reader. Dr Batey's is an archaeologist specialising in Viking and Late Norse archaeology with particular reference to the Northern Isles, Caithness and the wider North Atlantic region. A major area of her work focuses on the promotion of the Northern Isles as centres for cultural tourism and she is committed to ensuring that the archaeology of the region is showcased to the largest possible international audience. For more information, please visit the CNS website: <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/cultural/centre-for-nordic-studies/staff/dr-colleen-batey>



North Highlands Green Badge Tourist Guiding course going strong

Our Green Badge students have now entered their second semester. Course leader Lynn Campbell has made exciting plans for them to visit sites throughout the North Highlands, allowing them to gain the practical skills they will need as guides.

A packed programme for the 3rd International St Magnus Festival



When announcing the call for papers for the Third International St Magnus Festival, due to take place in Kirkwall in April on the theme “Visualising the North”, the Centre for Nordic Studies was caught in a landslide of paper proposals. The conference had to expand to another room, now running three parallel sessions over two packed days.

This year and next year celebrates the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Magnus in 1116 or 1117, and the conference is one of a series of events

planned in Orkney to mark the occasion. We are especially pleased that the Gregorian choir led by Ben Whitworth has agreed to sing from the Office of St Magnus to us at the conference.

The theme of “Visualising the North” spans many topic and time periods. One strand focuses on sagas, another on contemporary literature and film. An open evening panel led by PhD student Becky Ford is planned to explore creative responses to climate change in Orkney. There is a strong section on archaeology, with exciting topics including for example “rune stones located close to waterways”. Other topics include the Hanseatic trade in the Northern Isles, and how the “Old North” was visualised in 19th and 20th century Europe through novels, poetry, stage performances, Viking Clubs and more.

We are very pleased that in addition to delegates from across the world, several of our current and former students are also making the journey to Orkney to take part in the conference.

Creative Writing module leads to publication for CNS graduate

Tim Morrison, who was chosen as the Orkney College Student of the Year when he graduated from CNS, has gone on to become a published author. His novel, “Queer Bashing”, which was launched on the 28th January, was begun while studying creative writing with us. The book promises to be an exciting, but tough read. The preview on Amazon reads:

“‘The first queerbasher McGillivray ever met was in the mirror.’ From the revivalist churches of Orkney in the 1970s, to the gay bars of London and Northern England in the 90s, via the divinity school at Aberdeen, this is the story of McGillivray, a self-centred, promiscuous hypocrite, failed Church of Scotland minister, and his own worst enemy. Determined to live life on his own terms, McGillivray’s grasp on reality slides into psychosis and a sense of his own invulnerability, resulting in a brutal attack ending life as he knows it. Raw and uncompromising, this is a viciously funny but ultimately moving account of one man’s desire to come to terms with himself and live his life as he sees fit.”

Silke Reeploeg has had her viva

In November, our staff member since 2009 and recent winner of a UHI teaching award, Silke Reeploeg, defended her PhD thesis “Nordic Regions of Culture: Modern Intercultural links between Shetland and Norway,” which was supervised by Professor Donna Heddle and Professor Stefan Brink (Aberdeen). The theme of Silke’s



research is how Nordic regions of culture and memory are created and maintained over time within Northern Europe. She explains: “The history and culture of Scotland has been shaped by its relationships with other cultures across the North Atlantic and the North Sea, with North America, Ireland, Continental Europe and Scandinavia, but in particular with Norway. The research focuses on understanding the continuing intercultural connections between Norway and Scotland after 1707 by examining national and regional historiographical contexts alongside cultural narratives (both national, sub- and transnational), and relating them to the wider, sometimes conflicting, but also converging, regionalisation or ‘identity management’ dynamics of European regions and states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this, the thesis examines the transnational ‘cultural region’ connecting Scotland and Norway well beyond the Viking period. Using case studies from the Shetland Islands and Western Norway, the thesis argues for the existence of an intercultural history that connects the two countries over a much longer period of time as has previously been thought, but in particular the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By showing how both hidden and obvious transnational “regions of culture” can be documented, the thesis critically explores both direct structural links, such as coastal trade, but also socio-cultural activities such as boatbuilding traditions, and relates them to political and ideological cultural phenomena such as national and regional historiographies. “

Silke has now left the Centre for Nordic Studies, and we wish her all the best in pursuing her academic career elsewhere.

Baby ghosts and fish bones



The CNS seminar series has been running for the last six years. The idea is to invite speakers whose research excites us, and over the years we have had many deeply interesting speakers and topics.

As our invited speakers for December and January, we chose Tom Muir from the Orkney Museum, and Jen Harland from the UHI Archaeology Institute.

Tom Muir gave a fascinating insight into the folklore theme of “the ghostly child” and how this theme can be found in folk stories across Scandinavia and the North Atlantic, including Orkney. Jen Harland chose the title “From the fish middens to the herring: Archaeological and historical evidence for later medieval and early modern fishing in the Northern Isles “ which proved to be very interesting and was well received by the audience.

Kirkwall Viking Walk

The Centre for Nordic Studies has developed a new “Viking Walk” funded by the Kirkwall Townscape Heritage Initiative. The walk is intended for established tourist guides who would like to add more Norse material to their Kirkwall tours.

The tour looks at Norse Kirkwall (“Viking” in a broad sense of the word) from 800—1263 AD. We aim to transport our minds back in time to when Kirkwall was a bustling Norse harbour, with trade and workshops keeping the little “burgh” busy. We speculate on where Earl Rognvald Brusason’s hall might have been, and learn about his church to St Olaf, before following Kirkwall’s rapid cosmopolitan development in the 12th century when the new St Magnus Cathedral was built.

The tour was developed and given by Ragnhild Ljosland, using research by CNS staff and others.



Hrolf Douglasson as a Viking. Photo from the CNS Viking Feast, 2013, by Iain Cochrane.



Victoria Whitworth’s continued success as historical fiction author

As this newsletter goes out, Victoria Whitworth is about to fly off to London for a photo-shoot for the back cover of her new book, “Daughter of the Wolf”. This is Victoria’s third historical novel, after the great successes “Bone Thief” and “Traitors’ Pit”, which have won much acclaim. We rarely see Victoria in Kirkwall these days, as she is always off somewhere as a sought-after speaker, both as a researcher and as a writer.

The blurb for “Daughter of the Wolf” sounds no less exciting than the previous two books: “In England before the Norman Conquest, a girl usually had only two choices - to marry, or to take the veil. But Elfrun of Donmouth in Northumbria is no ordinary girl. She is the only living child of the charismatic and fearless lord, Radmer, whose wife and two sons have died. When the king sends Radmer overseas on a mission to Rome, Elfrun is left to hold the fort, to lead her people out of danger from marauding neighbours and to protect herself. All around her predators are circling, waiting for their chance to seize her lands, her people - and her. Will her father return in time to save both her and the people of Donmouth? Or can Elfrun find the strength to take matters into her own hands?”