

## URSWICK'S CHRISTIAN ORIGINS EXPLORED

In the Spring of 2003 whilst a new central heating system was being 'piped' in St. Mary and St Michael's Church, Great Urswick, part of an early Christian inscription was revealed. A local archaeologist, Steve Dickinson, was on hand to take photographs of what was going on; but unfortunately he did not discover the fact that the stone had elements of an inscription on it until his photographs were developed - by which time the floor had been re-laid and the stone left in situ!

So could this stone finally reveal the identity of the founder of the first church on this site (or at least to whom it was dedicated)?

Steve says not: evidence from similar stones in other places suggests that it might contain the name and status of the local dignitary who gave the land for the purpose of building a church / monastery here. The dedication to Mary would most certainly have come much later, either at the time when the Roman rite took ascendancy after the Synod of Whitby in 664 or later when the church was extended/ rebuilt by the Normans in the early 1100's, (*more probably after 1107-11 when Michael le Fleming took direct local control of the manor, and prior to 1127 and the foundation of the Abbey of St Mary, when many masons would have been looking for work at the Abbey itself*)

### ***What do we know and upon what evidence do we base our claims?***

We know from recent survey work and local exploration that the church walls contain substantial evidence of weathered Roman masonry. In addition, in the north wall of the nave some broken fragments suggest a post-Roman imperial dedication stone (see Steve's *The Beacon on the Bay* report, v.01, Ulverston 2002, p40-42); although not enough survives to allow us to reconstruct it from present evidence. There is also possibly a part of a Roman pagan religious altar built into the south nave of the church, and other evidence remains to be analysed in more detail from surrounding field walls.

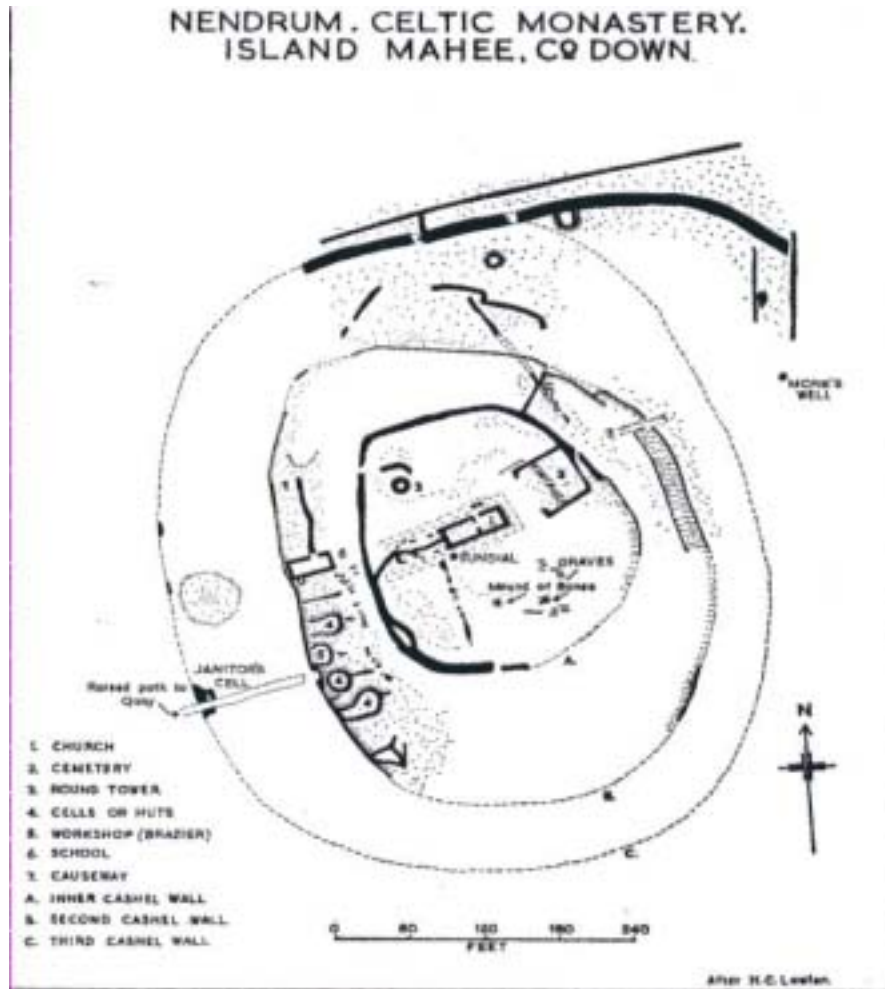
With these finds adding to long-known evidence from Roman coins found in Furness, and evidence from air photography, Steve has presented a persuasive argument for the existence of a Roman Fort not far from the church site (we await geophysical survey to confirm this). There is certainly worked Roman masonry in the walls and buildings of Low Furness that allows us to infer a substantial military and civilian site in the area. The Furness coins, which range from Republican to late Roman issues, suggest a trading community growing up around the fort. We do know that Urswick was a trading centre for many years even before the Romans came but it would be the lure of substantial amounts of iron ore which made the area particularly attractive to the Romans, and of course, its access to the sea made transportation much easier all round.

This evidence does not necessarily imply a church building here in Roman times; rather, the re-use of masonry, etc. in building the church and/or repairing the church. (*We don't know enough about the early construction phases that are clearly visible in the church fabric to allow us to suggest dates – yet -for the building sequence*).

### ***Which came first – community or church?***

Steve Dickinson has begun to build up a geographical picture of the past landscape in and around Urswick and its Tarn, covering periods including the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Norse. In his interpretations from local maps, aerial photography, and from evidence 'on the ground' he has managed to identify the outline of an early 'estate' and the inner precincts of an early Christian monastery with the current church building of St. Mary and St. Michael's near the centre. The layout is similar to that on Iona and at Lindisfarne (Holy Island) and this element of the site suggests an 'Irish' template of the 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. This discovery by itself does not prove clear links but it does suggest a style and a period that is helpful to our further enquiries. We widely regard the earliest monastic communities as occupying small circular or rectangular wooden structures in small compounds that would be unlikely to leave much evidence behind. This picture may be correct for some sites based on the *eremitic* (hermit-centred) movement that came out of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD Egyptian desert, but for the early Christian *coenobitic* (community-centred) movement, reconstructions of sites and founder/development sequences is a much more complex problem (for a mainly

document-centred discussion placing this in the context of early monastic rules; see Dunn, M., 2003; *The Emergence of Monasticism; From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Blackwell). Bowen, 1969: *Saints, Seaways and Settlements in the Celtic Lands* (University of Wales) provides a detailed illustration of the Irish Celtic monastery at Nendrum, County Down, established in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Mochaoi, as a good representative picture of the lay-out of a large Celtic monastery in the 'Age of the Saints'. This, too, provides a helpful model for the more likely origins of the Urswick site.



Later inhabitants built more permanently upon earlier foundations; so we could still consider a monastic community being established here with a wooden church during the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (see below) and the extended site developed more permanently with a stone church later on. However, the early Christians here may have reversed this process; with a stone church coming first in the sequence.

***So who are the main contenders for the founding of the community and the earliest dedication of the church?***

Obviously, the first temptation is to link the more famous 'saints' with a particular settlement. This is possible, but it is equally likely to be one of their followers or a group of monks associated with them; with a dedication following. However, we should highlight several features that suggest that Urswick was a very important - and early - foundation. The sheer size of the site at Urswick, (the outer boundaries enclose an area of 180-200 hectares), is much larger than known early eastern Irish and western British monastic sites (although comparisons may be invidious when the naturally bounded hinterlands of islands such as Iona are taken into consideration). Urswick's intimate later prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman connections that landscape archaeology is beginning to reveal all give a demonstrable longevity of community settlement in a sheltered and well-resourced location. Furness itself, from prehistory until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was 'islanded' by its position between the Duddon Sands, the Irish Sea, Morecambe Bay and the fells, lakes mires and rivers of Cumbria's mountain core.

This would have been a prime site for a very early foundation at the northern end of the critically important western seaways; with their vital links to early foundations in Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Gaul, Spain and the Mediterranean.

Let's go back to the roots of Christianity in Cumbria to find possible contenders for the foundation. We know that there were Christians in the Roman Army, although Christianity initially was more tolerated than approved. For wealthy early Roman Christians services and worship would take place in private, perhaps in the home of a villa or estate owner with a 'house church' of his or her own. Equally, it could have come here independently of the Romans since there was trade between the Mediterranean, Europe, Ireland and Britain. *Archaeological evidence for this is plentiful (in the form, for example, of amphorae (Roman wine containers) from sites bordering the western seaways at the close of the Roman occupation of Britain.*

We can say with some confidence that there was considerable activity along Hadrian's Wall and in and around Carlisle in particular; there was a monastery there in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century and Carlisle had its own Bishop in 250AD, Bishop Nelior, (Rees, 2000) because he was martyred with Bishop Nicholas of Penryn near Glasgow during the time of Emperor Diocletian. He would, of course, have had his 'diocese' in what is now southern Scotland and northern England. A Bishop suggests a Christian community, an abbot and other monks called, trained, educated and 'sent' to evangelise the area around Carlisle. They would travel mostly by foot along established paths and routes; some would follow the course of a river either by boat or along the banks. There is no evidence to date that anyone came this far south and west over land.] (Steve Dickinson cites, for example, *Prof. Charles Thomas, Prof. Cramp, historian Charles Pythian-Adams and the ex-director of the Carlisle Archaeology Unit as not supporting Rees with respect to this 3<sup>rd</sup> century Carlisle monastic site. He states that 'the earliest ecclesiastical site for which there is clear historical evidence in Carlisle is a 7<sup>th</sup> century AD foundation – the one visited by Cuthbert as part of the Lindisfarne diocese'. ( See, for example; Pythian-Adams, C.; 1996, *Land of the Cumbrians; A study in British provincial origins A.D. 400-1120* (Scholar).*

### ***St Ninian***

There is much speculation as to where St.Ninian (also known as St.Nynia) was born and educated. Thanks to Bede we know he was a Briton; perhaps from Cumbria. He certainly received much of his education in Rome, (this recorded by Bede), was consecrated as Bishop and evangelised amongst the Picts, (in Southern Scotland) where he was successful in converting many. It is believed that he visited, or was a contemporary of, St.Martin of Tours, (this is, however, disputed by some historians and is not mentioned by Bede). If we accept this, he was impressed by the monasticism developing in Gaul at the time and determined to bring it back with him. Tradition has it that he established a monastic community at Whithorn based on the disciplines of St.Martin, and, following the death of Martin in 397, dedicated his first church to him - a white, stone, mortared church, which was unusual for its time and context. It is understood by some that he mounted missions to the south, (probably into Cumbria) and ordained priests and consecrated bishops to manage the area on Roman diocesan lines. Several churches are dedicated to St.Ninian in the north of Cumbria, e.g.; Penrith Ninekirks, and probably St.Martin's at Brampton.

Ninian supposedly died in about 432 – but his dates are disputed by historians. Most of the reliable information that we have about him was written by Bede, some three hundred years after he lived.

This account, however, raises some interesting questions – particularly about the nature of the 'church' at Whithorn and the status of the early monastic community there. To take the latter first; excavations in the 1980's near the site core failed to resolve critical questions of post-Roman date and building sequences. Earlier excavations in the site core have never been fully published, making it impossible to impartially assess observations and evidence from them. Large quantities of lime for the mortar and limewash for a substantial stone church would also have had to have been transported to Whithorn from the nearest sources 22 miles (35.4 km) to the east – a prodigious logistical nightmare for an early Christian community. Historians have also queried such an early foundation to St Martin. Leading historian of the early church in Scotland, Alan McQuarrie, points out problems with the early dates for Ninian, and stresses (following Prof. A.A.M.Duncan) that Bede never made Ninian builder of the first ecclesiastical site at Whithorn, and he never called him its first bishop: indeed; 'there is a measure of agreement that Nynia came to a church and see already in existence.' (McQuarrie, A., 1997; *The Saints of Scotland; Essays in Scottish Church History AD*

450-1093 (John Donald); p55). Whithorn has all the appearance of an early Christian mission station, and not a major 5<sup>th</sup> /6<sup>th</sup> century AD monastic base. We shall revisit this shortly.

Such successes as the early clerics had in Galloway and SW Scotland were, apparently, short-lived. The facts show that their ministry and successes were only temporary because, when St.Kentigern was recalled from Wales to be Bishop of Strathclyde in what is now Glasgow in about 573, he found that paganism had returned and struggled to convert the natives! No wonder he took his time travelling back home. However, much of what we know about Kentigern is based on twelfth-century AD documents, such as the *Life* written by hagiographer (writer of a saint's life) Jocelin of Furness, and, as Alan McQuarrie shows (*op.cit.*; p117-144); we have to treat these and their claims with suitably qualified respect (for example, the Welsh episode is regarded by Prof. Jackson as being unhistorical; McQuarrie, *ibid.*; 133).

### ***So what price St.Patrick?***

There are many claims for where St Patrick might have been born. As with Ninian and Kentigern, much of what has been written about Ireland's patron saint dates to periods long after he was alive. A lot of this late material was also written with particular political and proselytising objectives in mind, (for example, to bolster Armagh's early historic claims for Irish church supremacy); so it must be examined very critically.

Fortunately, we have some writings considered by the majority of serious scholars to be absolutely authentic—written by Patrick himself (Howlett, D.R., 1994; *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Four Courts Press). Patrick names his birthplace as *Bannaventa Berniae*, which Howlett translates (from the Latin original) as referring to a town (*op.cit.*, 52-3). Other scholars see Patrick's term for a town – *uico*, referring to a *vicus*, (a Roman settlement) or an estate. Birdoswald Roman fort, (known to the Romans as *Banna*), has long been a favourite location for Patrick's birthplace, but the director of recent excavations there, Tony Wilmott, doesn't see the topography of the site relating to interpretations of Patrick's description. Prof. Charles Thomas suggests the *Berniae* element of the latter relates to a mountain pass, (Wilmott, T., 1997; *Birdoswald; Excavations of a Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall and its successor settlements 1987-92* (English Heritage); p231). No evidence has been presented from Birdoswald for an early monastic settlement.

Patrick's dates, as with Ninian, are a matter of dispute. We know from Patrick's writings that he came from an influential Romano-British family, his grandfather Potitus was a Christian priest, as was his father; Calpornius. Patrick's father is also considered to have been a senior administrator, perhaps for the town council of *Bannaventa*, or for the Roman Army; hence strong links with Roman places and centres of occupation. Some consider that he undertook part of his education in a monastery where St.Ninian taught—again, perhaps, significant for our explorations.

Patrick himself tells us that he was kidnapped by Irish slave traders at the age of 16

Tradition has it that on escaping and managing to get a boat back to England the boat was wrecked in Morecambe Bay and Patrick came ashore at Heysham with other monks in his party (hence St.Patrick's, Heysham).

Excavations at St.Patrick's Heysham (Potter, T.W. and Andrews, R.D., 1994; Excavation and Survey at St Patrick's Chapel and St.Peter's Church, Heysham, Lancashire, 1977-8, in; *The Antiquaries Journal*, 74, 55-134) have revealed no evidence for a 5<sup>th</sup> or even a 6<sup>th</sup> century AD monastic foundation; although the chapel's dedication is curious. We do know, again from his writings, that Patrick received training in holy orders based on a British church. With an evangelical zeal and a 'call' to return to the land of his captivity, he then returned to Ireland.

If he had landed at Heysham on the other side of the Bay, his most likely land route would have been 'over sands' from Heysham to Cartmel then to Conishead Bank, along the shores of Low Furness, inland to cross over the Duddon and back to Carlisle area perhaps following the coast line.

Although it is most unlikely that he would stop long enough to establish a community at Urswick because he was anxious to get back home, it is quite possible that some of his monks could have stayed here, perhaps meeting up with others already here, and evangelising Low Furness from here and building on the Irish monastic lines.

*Steve Dickinson indicates that his current research is building a case for a late Roman settlement and estate at Urswick supporting the foundation of a sub-Roman, early historic, British church. His case for Patrick's*

*origins at Urswick centres on a number of factors, including finding archaeological evidence there for a previously 'lost' or misidentified Roman site named Glannibanta, Clanoventa, Cantiventi or Glannoventa. Whilst this in itself would not 'prove' an association with Patrick's Bannaventa Berniae, it would certainly strengthen the case for it.]*

There is a tradition that many Irish monks and travellers knew about a significant monastery in the north of Britain; known as a major teaching centre. The scale of the monastic 'estate' at Urswick compared with others would suggest a place of considerable importance.

Patrick was consecrated Bishop in 431 by Pope Celestine and returned to Ireland in the footsteps of Palladius who had had a short and unsuccessful mission in 430. Patrick died in about 461. *David Dumville, one of the pre-eminent Patrician scholars, estimates Patrick's death-date to be 493 ; Dumville, D.N.et.al., (1999); Saint Patrick (Boydell Studies in Celtic History XIII).*

We have to remember that this period in Ireland was one of great monastic developments, of monks travelling all over the known world taking the Christian message far and wide; it could be that this was a prime time for Urswick, as we shall see.

### ***St.Kentigern (Mungo)***

Let's consider St. Kentigern again briefly. We know that several churches in the north of Cumbria were dedicated to him, but he does not have further dedication in the south of the county. Kentigern trained as a monk in Serf's community at Culross on the Fife coast. He established a base in Glasgow but fled south when an anti-Christian party came to power (Rees 2000). We are told that on the death of Fergus, a 'holy hermit' who was buried at Cathures (now Glasgow) Kentigern settled there and after some time the King and clergy of region Cambrensis 'besought him to be their bishop' and 'having summoned a bishop from Ireland after the manner of the Britons and Scots of that period, they compelled him to be consecrated' (AD543). On hearing at Carlisle that many people living in the mountains were pagans, he stayed in the area for some time, ministering as far down as Crosthwaite near Keswick.

Rees suggests that it was possible that other Christians lived in that area and further south, perhaps as a result of mission and ministry by Ninian and by Irish monks working there after Patrick. It is thought that he then went northwest towards Aspatria and then south- could it be via Urswick and then 'over-sands'?

Rees (2000) notes another small church dedicated to St.Kentigern 'on the mud flats where the River Eden flows into the Solway Firth' in Grinsdale and wonders if he in fact sailed to North Wales from there. Richard Ferguson, Chancellor of Carlisle Diocese ( Diocesan Histories,1889) referred to the account of the *Life of St.Kentigern* by Joscelyn of Furness written in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century in which he states that on leaving Crosthwaite, 'the saint directed his steps by the sea shore, and, through all his journey scattered the seed of the Divine Word, gathered in a plentiful and fertile harvest unto the Lord'. If it is Crosthwaite, near *Kendal*, which is referred to then it is possible that Urswick could be part of his outward journey....

As noted above Kentigern was successful in setting up a monastic community at Llanelwy in North Wales but was summoned back north by Rydderch, nominal sovereign of Strathclyde. His return was not rushed because he is not recorded as getting back until 574, a year later!

He was accompanied by St.Nidan, his cousin and St. Finan and a group of monks, 665 of them in all, according to Joscelyn of Furness Abbey. Can we find evidence of their activities in our area? Well, a quick glance at the map suggests a possible link because within a day's walk of Urswick we have *Finsthwaite* and several settlements around *Nibthwaite* and of course across the Bay we have *Kents Bank*, the *River Kent*, *Kendal* and *Kentmere*. *Steve Dickinson shows, however, that Finsthwaite = Old Norse personal name = Finn's clearing. Nibthwaite = Old Norse - 'the clearing by the new farmstead'. Kent- names originate in a British name, considered by specialists to perhaps relate to hills; Cunetio/Cunetju. See Smith, A.H.; 1967; The Place-Names of Westmorland, Pts. I and II (CUP);specifically Pt I, p9-9).* Further investigation of place names, etc. might help us but without clear evidence in the form of a yet undiscovered stone cross or other ecclesiastical artefact we have to leave that one lying around for the time being at least. Kentigern died in 612.

### *St. Columba*

We must not leave out the great St. Columba of Iona who was born in about 521 and died in 597. We make no claim to his ministry here, but Steve Dickinson, in *The Beacon on the Bay* (*op.cit.*) suggests a number of links with Columba and Iona, and this should be explored a little.

In the church at Urswick there is a cross fragment containing runic inscriptions and images of two persons (see illustration). When this was discovered in 1911 W G Collingwood dated it as being from about 850-870AD, and considered it to be of no great quality or significance. Steve Dickinson re-examined the inscription and concluded that runes in key locations naming the original maker and original commissioner of the cross had been overcut. He makes a case for this stone depicting a particular ecclesiastical event in the latter years of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, and suggests that two figures depicted on the cross's 'inscription face' are in fact Archbishop Theodore (7<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury), and a prior named Luigne; named in the runic inscription panel above them. This, if true, would place Urswick at the centre of the massive political and ecclesiastical changes in the church during that period as the Roman rite gained final ascendancy over the Irish rite - or did it?



Within the runic text is also Trumwin/i, a significant northern bishop to the Picts in 681 to whom we must return later.

The figures, one of whom appears to be a bishop, (he is holding a crosier) both have Pictish/Irish tonsures – but why would an archbishop affirming the Roman model have an Irish tonsure – unless of course we remember that it was done by a ‘local’ sculptor and is representative of what he imagined? *This, Steve would argue, is an artistic convention, and indicates the artist’s political leaning.*

It would be easier for us if the figure was Bishop Trumwini himself, but we don’t know that. We are told that his predecessor had the cross erected to honour his ‘Lord’ Torotheo which derives from *Theodoros* - Greek (‘God-given’) for Theodore. What is known from history is that Archbishop Theodore consecrated Trumwini as Bishop to the Picts in 678, having divided the large and troublesome Northumbria Diocese into two - and we know that Theodore died in 690.

If it is Theodore as seems probable, then who is the other person in animated conversation with him and if it is ‘Luigne’, which is he and what did he do? When did he arrive at Urswick?

Steve Dickinson quotes widely from Adomnan’s *Life of St. Columba* (trans. Richard Sharpe, Penguin 1995) to demonstrate that this gentleman was in fact Columba’s steersman who had become a prior in a large monastery ‘in the island of Elen’ in his old age.

There is reference to the ‘monks of Mag Luinge (Luigne?)’ on the island of Tiree not far from Iona where penitents were often ‘banished’ to find their place of resurrection; the monks were ‘attacked with a deadly plague, the effects of which were mitigated by prayer and fasting’ ( Adomnan’s *Life of St. Columba*).

The fact of the matter is that in Adomnan’s ‘Life’ there are three separate Luignes and what we have is a composite of the three! *The linkage of three individuals into one person is supported by Prof. Ó Riain, though Sharpe disputes this (Sharpe, op.cit., p288-289, fun 133)*. Luigne, incidentally, was the name of a tribe in Ireland and not uncommon, so although we can perhaps trace their roots, we can’t identify exactly which Luigne we are dealing with although the ‘evidence’ would seem compelling..

We can perhaps place Bishop Trumwini as having visited Urswick in the 680s because we have to remember that he was evicted or rather fled from Abercorn in 685 and went to settle at a monastery commonly supposed to be Whitby [ *Steve Dickinson makes the case for Bede’s terms - Streanæshealh/Sinus Fari - that have previously been linked with Whitby applying in actuality to Urswick and this is detailed in Beacon on the Bay p47-8*].

I do not propose to pursue that issue here.

We could equally well place Theodore on a pastoral tour during the same period since he worked hard to unite the Church under the Roman rule. So, if the cross was set up by Trumwini in commemoration of ‘his Lord Torotheo’, what was the event and was it linked to the monastic community here?

Could it have been an earlier summit meeting between Theodore and the prior Luigne from the Isle of Man (see below) which might have taken place during Theodore’s first pastoral visits a little while after a critical mid-7<sup>th</sup> century AD Synod, in an attempt to persuade the Isle of Man to ‘go Roman’? That would still make Luigne very old but it lends some credibility to the event.

Of course, Urswick *could* be Luigne’s mystical ‘Isle of Elen’, God’s ‘trysting place’, and we mustn’t dismiss that one yet!

Steve Dickinson suggests the following scenario: that Luigne commissioned the cross with its original inscription in anticipation of his and Theodore’s death. It was presumably only part-finished when Luigne died, and Trumwini, evicted by the Picts from Abercorn, arrived and arranged for its completion in 690 AD, or shortly thereafter.

At least that would seem to confirm the importance of the monastic community at Urswick and its significance as a ‘staging post for ecclesiastical traffic’ between Britain and Ireland and other places!

So far we have found no firm evidence for Urswick’s monastery being established overland from any direction; that one awaits further archeological evidence and interpretation. We should, though, perhaps consider further the possibility that the settlers came from the sea into the Bay because clearly this was one of the strengths of its location and a regular feature of its early trading history. Successive ‘raiders’, eg the Romans and later on, the Vikings, came from there. Whilst Ireland was no great distance from Southern Scotland, the Cumbrian coast and North Wales, as we have seen, we must not discount the Isle of Man’s significant position as a ‘staging post’ between Ireland and here and often providing a ‘haven’ for fleeing Christian monks. It is also of interest to speculate that another name given to the Isle of Man was ‘Elen’

[however, there's no place-name evidence supporting this from the Isle of Man, or Roman and Irish literary sources]

Our Luigne is alleged to have been prior of an important monastery 'in the Isle of Elen' during his later years, ie: mid 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Could it, then, be that our Luigne went from Iona to the Isle of Man via Tiree as prior and then as hinted above, he met with Theodore as its representative? Again Steve Dickinson is very helpful in that he refers to *the Irish historian Dáibhí Ó Crónin who presents the Isle of Man as a scene of conflict between the Irish Scots and the Irish, citing its abandonment by the Irish in the later 6<sup>th</sup> /early 7<sup>th</sup> century; 1995; Early Medieval Ireland; 400-1200 (Longman), p50. This would not suggest stable conditions for a 7<sup>th</sup> century early Christian Irish monastic community on the Isle of Man. Available evidence currently indicates that the island housed no substantial 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century AD Christian community on the 'Ionan' model – for example; there's no historical, place-name or archaeological evidence.*

So we still have several intriguing possibilities, one, that a very early Christian community existed at Urswick during the late Romano-British period and grew to be of sufficient importance and stature to be a place to which 'wandering saints' would come, stay, study and wander on; that the 'template' was transferred to Ireland as a basic monastic model (or perhaps more likely that it was re-developed from the Irish model later on), that this really was the place they knew as Rosnat *and with the tantalising possibility of it being home to St.Patrick!*

The second possibility was that it was established later on during the 6<sup>th</sup> century perhaps on the Irish model by Kentigern or his contemporaries and was of sufficient strategic importance around AD670 for Archbishop Theodore to meet with an important Irish/Ionan cleric in order to reinforce the decision implemented at the AD664 Synod of *Streanæshealh/Sinus Fari*. This changed the nature of the established Church in the whole of the north of Britain and Ireland, and Bishop Trumwini arguably wished to record this highly significant meeting for posterity (and as a reminder perhaps to future wandering saints!) *However, Trumwini, being a Northumbrian supporter of the Roman rite, would presumably have insisted upon Bishop Theodore's tonsure being Roman, which suggests that he might not have initiated the sculpture, rather made additions/ changes to it!*

There is another intriguing possibility which presents itself, although there is no evidence for it, and that is that Trumwini spent time here at the monastery at Urswick during the 660s under the authority of Luigne (who established the monastery in the early part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century).

Perhaps he succeeded Luigne as prior, and Theodore 'called' him out to be a Bishop to the Picts from here! Now that would be worth recording....

Ian Bradley in his book on the life of Columba suggests that it was quite usual to have high standing crosses, initially of wood and later of stone, scattered among the monastery's various buildings, which commemorated 'important events in the history of the monastery or the life of the founder' (*Ian Bradley 'Columba: Pilgrim and Penitent' (1996) Wild Goose Publications*). Is this a further clue to the 'Iona' connection?

### **Links**

It might be helpful to explore a little further some other 'Irish connections' because it is clear that there was considerable 'traffic' between Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Britain over this critical period, indeed since the emergence of monasticism after Martin of Tours. It is astonishing to record the distances and the frequency of travel undertaken by bishops, monks and their students alike; tracking them is in itself a fascinating journey which might throw more light on the origins of Urswick itself. So let's begin....

Nora Chadwick (*The Age of the Saints in the early Celtic Church (1960), published by Llanerch*) refers to the 'Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae' to outline the different Orders within Irish monasticism, the First Order, the 'most holy' bishops, those who received their 'missia' or order of service from Patrick himself. The Second Order, mainly presbyters and a few bishops, who had received their missia from the Holy Men of Britain, ie David, Gildas and Docus (or Cadoc according to D.S.Dugdale -*Manx Church Origins (1998) published by Llanerch-* and others).

The Third Order were hermits and desert dwellers.

'Gildas auctor' was referred to by Columbanus in a letter to Pope Gregory the Great as one whose advice was sought after in a matter of church discipline by a certain 'Vennianus auctor' (Irish- perhaps Finnian of Clonard) who was traditionally considered to be the founder of the great monastic movement in Ireland. Finnian, born in Leinster, spent some years in South Wales at the School of Cadoc, returned to Ireland to teach, eventually transforming an old church in Clonard into a monastery at a date somewhere between 520 and 530. He died of the plague in 548/549.

Gildas (510-570), dismissed by Bede as 'their (Britons) own historian', was the teacher of Vennianus of Findbarr (Finnian above) who in turn was a teacher of Columba.

A further link with St. Patrick which enhanced the position of Columba was a prophesy by a 'stranger of British race, a holy man and a disciple of the Holy Bishop Patrick', named Mauchte, who said:

*'In the last years of the world there will be born a son whose name Columba will become famous through all the provinces of the islands of the ocean, and he will shed a bright light over the last years of the earth'* (Adamnan's Life of St.Columba).

In the 'Annals of the Four Masters' Mochta/ Mauchte is listed in the 'family of Patrick as Patrick's priest, next in importance to Sechnall, Patrick's bishop. Mochta died in 534, bishop of Lughmghagh.

Bede records that Columba (born in AD521) studied under St. Finbarr (Finnian), the bishop, 'during his youth'.

We know that before about 550AD Columba had founded a 'noble monastery' in Ireland known as Dearmach (Field of Oaks) and both from there and later from Iona his disciples were sent out to establish further monasteries in Britain and Ireland. Columba left Ireland with his twelve 'disciples' in about 557AD and landed on Iona to begin a major work which would have an enormous impact for Christianity.

We also know that Cadoc was teacher of Gildas at his School at Llancarvan only a short distance from Llanilltyd (Llantwit Major, Glamorgan) the monastery set up by the Breton Illtyd in the latter years of the fifth century, so the early links with the Christian Celtic movement on the Continent to Wales and with emerging monasticism in Ireland are clearly made.

Cadoc later undertook missionary work in Brittany.

We have yet to include Enda who was a principle character in the monastic movement in Ireland. He was persuaded to go to Rosnat to study under abbot Maucennus and then returned to Ireland in about 500AD to set up his School on the island of Aran Mor in Galway Bay; he died about AD530.

Despite the considerable influence of the Welsh Schools it seems that the 'monastic template' was based on the Irish / Iona 'template'. We have yet to establish the location of Rosnat- could it be in South Wales where there clearly was significant activity during the latter part of the fifth century ( the St.Patrick's Church website [www.saintpatrickdc.org](http://www.saintpatrickdc.org) suggests that this is so, probably St. David's foundation at Pembroke) or was it, as we considered briefly above, actually at Urswick? The Celtic Orthodoxy website [www.celticorthodoxy.org](http://www.celticorthodoxy.org) places Rosnat at Whithorn and that is supported by Watson (*History of Celtic Placenames of Scotland, 1926, reprinted by Birlinn (Edinburgh) in 1993*), who suggests that Rosnat (Little Cape) and Futerna are the same place, as are Teach Martain (Martin's House), Candida Casa, Magnum Monasterium, Hwiterne (Whithorn), Futerna being the latinized Gaelic form of the old English Hwiterne. He emphasises the strong links between Ireland and Scotland (Galloway and Dumfries). Watson states that Candida Casa 'remained long an important centre of religious life and learning, widely known and much frequented'. He then re-states the importance of the links between the kingdom of Northumbria and Iona and makes the point again that 'long before Hi (Iona) was founded by Columba, Candida Casa formed a very important link between Ireland and Scotland'.

Dugdale (1998) refers to the 'Liber Hymnorium' which describes how Finnian of Moville and his colleagues Talmach and Rioc studied under abbot Mugint at Futerna; since Finnian of Moville died 'at an advanced age in AD579' the date of the above incident may have been between 510 and 530AD with the clear implication that a monastic community existed at Whithorn with definite Irish connections. Dugdale concludes that the period envisaged for the *British* monastic phase at Whithorn/Futerna was approximately 530-630AD.

It is therefore quite likely that Urswick monastery/ community is neither Futerna / Rosnat but rather another significant monastic site developed or perhaps more likely re-developed by colleagues/ disciples /

contemporaries of Columba who brought the 'Iona Family template' with them either directly from Iona or from Lindisfarne.

Steve Dickinson tells us that the 'Ionan family' monastic sites were: in Scotland (3), in Ireland (9), and Northumbria (Lindisfarne) and that the landscape and sculptural evidence from Urswick's core makes for a British Ionan family member- with Northumbrian designs upon it.

*Could it be after all Luigne's 'Isle of Elen- God's trysting place'?*

In the coming years the archaeology will perhaps reveal more for us about the dates and sequence of church/ monastic building and developments at Urswick and its links with other major centres of Christianity. *Can't help thinking that the 'early dedication stone' lying under the inside entrance into the Tower might provide the 'key' to so much more- however, we'll have to be patient.*

### ***What was the Columban church like?***

Now that we can state with some confidence that the Urswick monastic site belongs to the 'Iona family template' we can begin to describe what life would have been like there during the 7<sup>th</sup> century because not only was the 'template' clearly defined, so was the 'rule' of Columba (most of the abbots of his monasteries were trained at Iona and were often family members). Columba's 'rule' (in both senses of the word) continued for well over 100 years after his death, in fact considerably longer than that because it was not really overtaken fully until the Benedictines took ascendancy in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

For many St. Columba was the true 'patron saint of Scotland'!

We must remember also that King Oswald of Northumbria had been educated and converted at Iona and brought Iona's influence to Lindisfarne/ Northumbria via St. Aidan when he regained his kingdom. Egfrith, King of Northumbria, at the time of St. Cuthbert also had earlier links with Iona.

Those looking for more information about Iona itself would benefit from reading '*Chasing the Wild Goose: The Story of the Iona Community*' by Ronald Ferguson (1998) published by Wild Goose Publications. For a source book on St. Columba and the nature of the Columban church then '*Columba Pilgrim and Penitent*' by Ian Bradley (1996) published by Wild Goose Publications is helpful; here we can only provide an outline of monastic life *Iona familiae style* and of Columba's 'rule'.

Imagine if you will a community of considerable numbers who lived, worked, prayed and slept in a collection of wooden huts and wattle and daub shelters. The church would probably be of wood also, although at Urswick there is a possibility that it 'bucked the trend' and had a stone church from earlier times; that would be unusual and very significant. The community would be surrounded by a rectangular *vallum* for protection (also indicating a spiritual boundary). Some monks would live alone whilst others would live communally in dormitories or similar. Around the central church would be the guest house, kitchen/ refectory, library/ scriptorium, barns for storing grain, and the smithy and workshops. Beyond the *vallum* would be large areas of fields where the community farmed, kept cattle and sheep, grew crops and hewed wood.

The community would have been divided into three main groups: *seniores* who would be largely responsible for the services in church; *working brothers* who would do most of the manual labour in the workshops and fields, and the *juniores* who were novices under instruction. In addition to the resident community there would be students, pilgrims and a steady flow of visitors, including other monks on pilgrimage and penitents seeking atonement.

*Bradley states that it would be that the 'resident community of monks who constituted the heart and soul of the monastery, their lives of self-mortification and daily offering of the sacrifice of praise, provided its raison d'etre'. (Page 71) He also states that in common with the inmates of most Irish monasteries the monks would have followed a lifestyle that was a good deal more strict and austere than that pursued by those founded by St. Benedict and his followers- by no means the whimsical and romantic picture of the Celtic Church often depicted today!*

It would be quite usual to have a combination of *eremitical* and *cenobitic* practices within the same community, with solitary anchorites and married monks living alongside one another, a feature of the balanced rhythm of life within the community as a whole. There would be an emphasis upon study. A further significant feature would be the prominence of the abbot as 'ruler' even over any bishops who were living in community.

Columba's 'rule' prescribed three daily labours; reading, work and prayer. The rule divides work into three parts also : 'thine own work, and the work of thy place as regards its real wants; secondly, thy share of the brethren's work; and lastly, to help thy neighbours, viz. by instruction, or writing, or sewing garments or

whatever they may be in want of' (Bradley page 73). The third daily work, of prayer and devotion, occupied the largest part of the 'rule'.

Prayers, both individual and corporate, was at the heart of the community's life; the monks would spend long spells in solitary prayer in their cells; at set times during the day and night the bell would summon them to church to recite Divine Office (largely the Psalms). The Psalms played a large part in the devotional life of the Columban Church- chanted, recited, copied, studied and used heavily in prayer and poetry- and in its missionary work and evangelism.

There were *five canonical hours* during the day- *prime, terce, sext, nones and vespers* and at night there were *three separate services- Ad initium noctis (at nightfall), Ad medium noctis (at midnight) and Ad matutinam (very early in the morning towards daybreak)*. Mass was celebrated on Sundays and Feast Days at *sext*, the midday service.

The main weekly celebration of the Eucharist would have happened in the church and other services probably around the high crosses dotted around the community.

Bradley tells us that the Columban Church exemplified the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*- a worshipping community which believed that God was to be found through prayer and contemplation rather than through debating societies and arguments. Their church was clearly centred on worship and the *felt* presence of God among them.

There was an emphasis upon pastoral care and practicing the presence of God by their availability to others, in a ministry of healing and reconciliation, of hospitality and welcome. This pastoral care would have extended to the local community, another distinctive feature of Columba's monasteries and general to Irish monasticism. As recorded earlier there was a strong and apparently harsh penitential discipline because penitence was linked to a substantial healing and wholeness ministry. Bradley states that 'sensitive pastors that they were, Columba and his contemporaries combined prescription, instruction, advice and empathy in seeking to cure sick souls' (Page 83). A vital part of this approach was the role of the *anamchara or soul friend*.

A final point to be made (and very important to understand) is that although they would have practiced the real presence of God they were not a fixed or static community, rather a Church 'on the move' in outreach, in journeying, in *peregrinate* and pilgrimage to find that 'place of resurrection'. The Columban Church had no interest in buildings as monuments or in leaving their mark behind them; they were content to worship God wherever and whenever! It is for others to discover their inheritance.....