Welcome Back!

We at FMRSI are delighted to relaunch Cuttings for another academic year. It’s a great pleasure to have reached issue 30, which seems like a landmark for us since our newsletter began all the way back in September 2008.

It’s been a busy summer for the Forum. We have continued to keep you up to date with events, news and publications from the medieval and early modern worlds. Our community grows every month: we now have 166 members (membership is free, and is open at: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/) so please encourage your new colleagues and graduate student to apply to join us! We also have an increased following on social media, with over 800 ‘likes’ on Facebook and over 1000 followers on Twitter. And our website, at the time of writing, has had over 311,000 hits! This all means that we have a greater capacity to spread your news and notices across a wide audience - so do continue to keep in touch.

Because of the increasing membership and the demands on your email inboxes, Cuttings will now be archived on the website; you’ll still receive an email notification of each new issue, but in future minus the bulky attachment …!

For now, enjoy this new issue of Cuttings, and contact the editor, Carrie Griffin (carrie.griffin@bristol.ac.uk or medrenforum@gmail.com) with your comments and suggestions.

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Sailing with the Sea Stallion from Glendalough

Tom Birkett, School of English, University College Cork

Most research visits I have undertaken in the past have involved manuscript collections and the peaceful environment of a University Library. This year I found myself waiting at Dublin airport with two bright-yellow drybags, filled with an assortment of waterproof clothes, camping gear and a manual on how to sail a Viking ship. Through a fortuitous series of events (and the help of another FMRSI member), I had signed up to join the crew of the Sea Stallion from Glendalough, a replica of the largest of the Skuldelev ships recovered from the Roskilde Fjord in Denmark, and the same craft that undertook the journey to Dublin in 2007. The objective of the sailing this year was not to test the ship’s capabilities over long distances, but to see how it performed in the coastal waters around Denmark, and to take part in a series of heritage events en route to Copenhagen and the Viking exhibition at the National Museum.
My own reason for joining the crew developed out of my involvement in the AHRC-funded project ‘Languages, Myths and Finds: Translating Norse and Viking Cultures for the 21st Century’, which is linked to the Viking exhibition at the British Museum in 2014, and is investigating the different ways communities in the UK and Ireland engage with their Viking past. The localities chosen for the project include Dublin and Cork/Munster, and will involve research visits by groups of PhD students and collaboration with museums, heritage professionals and schools in the production of community-specific resources on Viking culture. In seeking to understand just how deep-rooted community involvement in this aspect of heritage can be, the natural place to look was Denmark – and to the Sea Stallion, which was the focus of so much public interest when it made the heroic crossing to Ireland. It has become an important symbol, not just of the great work being undertaken at the Viking Ship Museum, but also of Danish-Irish connections, and the importance of the Viking Age in bringing communities and cultures across Europe into closer proximity. The ship, with its colourful decoration (based on the Bayeux Tapestry images) and ochre and yellow sails, is immediately recognisable, and has been dubbed the ‘rock star of the sea’ by the Scandinavian press. It is a piece of living heritage, and one which connects people in a very tangible way with their past, drawing out crowds of curious onlookers wherever it goes. Indeed, perhaps the most important lesson I have learned for the LMF Project is the importance of heritage that can be felt and experienced on some level, and how much investment the public has in a visceral connection with the past. For the Sea Stallion Guild, this form of re-enactment doesn’t mean dressing up in Viking clothes and eating Viking food (though both certainly have their place in heritage contexts), but rather reconstructing this most iconic object from the Viking world and learning about the attributes and limitations of a war ship through successive trials and refinements in the way that it is sailed.

The ship could not be kept sailing without the dedication of the crew members, many of whom use their holidays to join the Sea Stallion, and who come from a variety of backgrounds, both academic and professional, including retired sailors, boat builders, scientists and school teachers. Everyone brings something to the ship and contributes to the understanding of how it was sailed and life on board arranged. The hardships almost certainly don’t compare to those experienced by the original crew, but there are few enough concessions to modern living, as these would impact on the way the boat was sailed. On overnight sailings we slept on oars laid across the deck, with just a woollen blanket to protect us from the elements (and the occasional wave breaking over the side), and the ‘facilities’ would not have been unrecognisable to the Vikings.

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The work is communal and at times demanding, particularly in bad weather or big waves, and everyone has to be prepared to take watch at antisocial hours, and to lend a hand in the logistics of feeding and accommodating such a large crew. Of course, the main purpose is the sailing, and we took the opportunity to test out and refine a number of techniques, including the quick deployment of the oars and the adrenaline-inducing approach to harbour under full sail. It is certainly possible, as we demonstrated in the harbours of Kyrkebakken and Anholt, to approach the coast at a relatively fast pace and come to a complete stop within meters of the land. This was presumably the ideal technique for raiding, and an activity that the original Skuldelev 2 ship was almost certainly involved in – built as it is for speed and the transport of large numbers of Vikings.

It is hard to predict the impact that this summer’s sailing and my continuing association with the Sea Stallion Guild will have on my teaching and research, but there are some questions that the hands-on experience of a ship certainly helped to clarify. One is the zoomorphism associated with boats in Norse poetry, which after feeling the way the ship twists and bends with the waves seems more like a natural response to the environment than a poetic liberty. It is small wonder that ships were given names such as Ormr hinn langi ‘The Long Serpent’, and referred to in kennings as the ‘bear of the flood’, the ‘otter of the wave’ or indeed, the ‘sea-stallion’. The overlapping oak planks of the ship are designed to flex and move, and it really is alive beneath your feet – sometimes alarmingly so.
At other points I was reminded of specific episodes in the saga – including the famous refusal of a young Grettir to bail out the boat or trim the sails on the crossing to Norway. The saga author could not have chosen a more appropriate example of teenage petulance – not only is bailing a vital job in rough seas (for obvious reasons), but the sheer audacity of not participating in the work becomes apparent when you realise just how many hands are actually needed to sail a ship such as the Sea Stallion, and the importance of the division of labour. The saga states that this work was ‘his duty to do equally with other men’ – indeed, the Danes still have an expression that the foremen on the ship are simply the best among good men, and nobody is above taking their turns at the hard graft of rowing and reefing. There is certainly no such thing as a passenger on board the Sea Stallion.

Finally, a great deal can probably be surmised about the social bonds that were strengthened on board a ship where everyone is living in such close proximity. Whilst the most famous of the ‘ship’ poems in Old English are the elegies - ‘The Wanderer’ and ‘The Seafarer’ – both dealing with the solitary journey of an exile, and comparing this with the comitatus left behind on land – on the Sea Stallion my experience was that the community was very much taken with you, and even given pronounced expression in the confines of the boat where personal space was in very short supply. Perhaps we should be reading these poems not just in terms of a contrast of life on land and life at sea, but an implied contrast between their (spiritual) isolation and the worldly and reassuring company of a close-knit crew. This communal intensity is probably the aspect of the sailing that I found most profound, and undoubtedly the thing that will draw me back to the Sea Stallion when it makes its next voyage. Of course, the fact that Paris, St Petersburg and New York are now on the agenda makes that decision even easier...

I would like to thank staff at the Viking Ship Museum, and particularly Ivan Jakobsen and the Sea Stallion Guild for allowing me to sail with them this summer, and to the foreship leaders Puk and Lasse for accommodating an English speaker and ensuring our safety and wellbeing.
International Society of Anglo-Saxonists Conference
Dublin 2013

The biennial conference of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists was co-hosted by University College, Dublin, and Trinity College, Dublin, 29th July to 2nd August 2013. The theme was ‘Insular Cultures’. Mary Clayton, as President of ISAS 2011-13, was the lead organizer; Alice Jorgensen was the main organizer for the Trinity part of the programme, and the conference committee was completed by Juliet Mullins, Niamh Pattwell, Brendan O’Connell and Colin Ireland. We were ably supported by Keynote plc. The conference was sponsored by the School of English, TCD; the School of English, Drama and Film, UCD; Bord Bia; Fáilte Ireland; the John Hume Global Irish Institute, UCD; the Royal Irish Academy; the National Museum; the Campus Bookshop, UCD; Hodges Figgis bookshop; the Anglo-Norman History Books Project; and Trinity Association and Trust.

The conference was preceded by a Graduate Student Workshop on Digital Resources: Data and Databases, led by Peter Stokes of King’s College, London. The conference itself opened on the evening of Sunday 28th July with a reception in the National Museum, Kildare Street. In one of his last public readings, Seamus Heaney treated the delegates to a selection of his poems on medieval themes. It was a delight and an honour – even more so in retrospect.

Further receptions were held on Monday, hosted by the British Embassy at the Ambassador’s residence, Glencairn; on Tuesday at the Royal Irish Academy, at which manuscripts on view included the Cathach; and, preceding the conference dinner on Friday, in the Long Room, Trinity College, Dublin. This last reception was accompanied by a manuscript exhibition entitled ‘Transmitting the Anglo-Saxon Past’, curated by Laura Cleaver and Alice Jorgensen with David Woodman.

The academic programme was exceptionally lively. ISAS does not run parallel sessions, and so many abstracts were submitted for consideration that only around 25% could be accepted. The speakers ranged from graduate students to emeritus professors. Among the topics, illustrating the diversity of the programme, were ‘Insular Agriculture: Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections’; ‘Insular Hebraism: Bede and Hiberno-Latin Exegesis’; ‘Sequences and Intellectual Identity at Winchester’ and ‘Material Networks: Belt and Clothing Relics in Early Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England’. Keynote addresses were given by Michael Ryan, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, Jane Hawkes and Charles Wright. There were over 200 delegates from 16 different countries.

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Since this was a jointly-hosted conference the programme was divided between two sites, with Monday and Tuesday’s papers given in UCD and Thursday and Friday’s in TCD. On Wednesday there was a trip to Glendalough and Powerscourt – the weather did not favour us, but this was a popular option with two coach-loads of delegates attending. On Thursday we further encouraged Anglo-Saxonists to grow fins by sending a good batch of them on the Viking splash tour. In a more serious vein, we were also fully booked for the post-conference tour to Kells, Tara, Clonmacnoise and Monasterboice, guided by Edel Bhreathnach and Éamonn Ó Carragáin.

The 2015 ISAS conference will be held in Glasgow, and will have the theme of ‘Daily Life of the Anglo-Saxons’.


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**Petition to Save the Classics Department at University College Cork**

The Classical Association of Ireland has established an online petition against the proposed closure of the Department of Classics at University College Cork, and the transfer of its remaining members to the School of History. The petition may be viewed and signed here:

[http://tinyurl.com/saveClassicsCork](http://tinyurl.com/saveClassicsCork)
How did you come to medieval/Renaissance studies?

Not sure, really. At school, I was surprised to be pushed towards University, when I really wanted to go to the Tech and do photography. If University it had to be (and my mother was of that opinion, so no further discussion was required), I decided that I wanted to take Romance Linguistics (or Spanish and Arabic at Edinburgh), having loathed literature at my Brighton Grammar school (most famous former students were Des Lynam and Steve Ovett, which gives one a flavour of the place). I got in, somehow: Edinburgh and Birmingham rejected me, but then I was called for interview at Cambridge, and this time I rejected them on the grounds that they didn't do a year abroad. I should explain that I had stayed for seven weeks in the summer of 1960 in my penfriend's house in Mosteiro de Meis, in rural Galicia; the following summer I went to a village near Ronda in Andalucía on a work-camp, and repeated that experience the following year: which brings us up to 1962 and my matriculation at Oxford. They charitably gave me a place on the strength of my performance in the Scholarship Exam—but no Scholarship, unfortunately.

Who was your most inspirational teacher/mentor, and why?

Fred Hodcroft, at Oxford, because whenever I dried up in the one-to-one tutorials because I'd written the paper I was to read out to him overnight, he would fill in the gap by explaining the different sensations to be derived from smoking the pipe or the cigarette, or the hazards of being a rear gunner on a plane (Mosquito, I think, but do they have a rear gunner?) in the far east, fighting the Japs.

What is the last conference you attended?

I can't remember. It was something here in Santiago, and most probably the Galician language. We have a right-wing regional government, so that they look always to Madrid, and wish to speak as the madrileños. Reminds one of Ireland in many ways, and this is one of them.
What book(s) are you currently reading?

Brace yourselves. It’s the Nueva gramática de la lengua española: fonética y fonología. Shatters forever the Spanish adherence to their own phonetic transcriptions. The wise men (yes, I fear so) have decided that it makes more sense to use the IPA, after nearly a century.

What are your hopes for the future of early studies in Ireland?

I’m so far away now, that I really couldn’t say. I note that, since my retirement, there are no medieval topics in either language or literature in Hispanic Studies in UCC. A whole heap of books on these areas in the Boole [Library], so it wouldn’t take long to crank them up again. Fortunately a medievalist has been appointed to the Chair of Spanish at Maynooth, so all is not lost.

What achievement in your career are you most proud of, and why?

Pride is a sin, and I am therefore proud of nothing. It was nice to hand over Ireland’s best Spanish Department to my successor, Nuala Finnegan

What is your guilty pleasure when working?

Dipping into the Irish Times, because I work on the computer. Laugh a minute!

What excites you most about teaching medieval/early modern topics to students?

Put simply, the opening of their minds. The Poem of the Cid and the Celestina are two of the great works of Spanish medieval literature, and, with the appropriate apparatus, are easily accessible. I taught the Celestina to the BComm/Spanish crowd, and was pleasantly surprised when they started to enjoy it. The fact the it dealt with a bawd, her whores, and upper-class twits probably helped!

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In your opinion can Irish medievalists do more to promote what they do, and how?

Convey your own enthusiasm, and the rest will follow. Some are too stupid to get the hang of it, but there’s little one can do with them, nor is it worth trying. A man who is now a high falutin’ Judge in UK wrote ‘medieval bollockes’ in the Oxford College suggestion book in response to one of my ‘precious’ contributions. I hope that by now he’s learnt to spell, and has started to read more widely. Bright boy, but no inclination to look at medieval law; so I think it’s got to be a personal thing whereby your classes are interesting and get a reputation as such. There’s always something dry and boring they can avoid--theory?--by taking the medieval option, which has good stories and sexual adventures of various kinds, inter alia.

What is your favourite historical novel/movie/website to do with the early periods?

El Cid with Charlton Heston and Sofia Loren. Although a bit out-of-date in terms of historical accuracy, it’s still pretty close to the poem. The kids like it, without realizing that they’re learning ‘stuff’.

If you could be transported back in time to witness something, what would it be?

Reconquest of Granada in 1492.

Which historical figure do you most admire?

Isidore of Seville. I’ve gone on for too long, so google him!

David Mackenzie is Professor Emeritus of Hispanic Studies, UCC, where he also led the department for several years. He was also the Director of the Irish Centre for Galician Studies, UCC, which was founded by him, in association with the Galician government, in 1988. Over his career he has produced editions of medieval Castilian, Galician and Aragonese texts as well as dictionaries of medieval Spanish and Galician, and works concerned with paleography and manuscripts studies and literature. Professor Mackenzie is a member of the Advisory Board of the FMRSI.
The crucifixion is at the very centre of Christian art and thought. This volume brings together leading medieval scholars from a wide range of disciplines in an assessment of its depiction in Ireland and more generally across the early medieval West. With such a narrow focus, the collection’s range is broad, with discussions of objects and texts from 4th-century Rome to 12th-century Catalonia, and serves to place Irish artistic, literary and theological representations of the crucifixion within a wider European context.

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On the FMRSI Website this October...


News, BedeNet, an online hub for scholars of Bede: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/2013/10/02/news-bedenet-com-a-new-network-for-scholars-of-bede/

Employment, Assistant Professor, Medieval European History, University of Dayton: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/employment-assistant-professor-medieval-european-history-500ce-1450ce-university-of-dayton/


Employment, Assistant Professor of medieval - 16th century French, University of Columbia: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/employment-assistant-professor-of-french-medieval16th-century-columbia-university/

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