

## PREFACE

We in Scotland, and not only in Orkney and Shetland, have long been peculiarly conscious of our Scandinavian neighbours — particularly of Norway and Denmark. Archaeologists have established links in prehistoric times; Viking long ships sought out the Northern Isles, Caithness, Sutherland, the Hebrides and elsewhere, leaving a legacy in place-names, language and material culture that remains to the present day; Anglo-Scandinavian migrants from the north of England left their mark on Lowland Scotland in the course of the Middle Ages. From the thirteenth century onwards diplomatic links were close and at least two Danish princesses became queens of Scotland, whilst Scots and Scandinavians have for centuries traded across the Norwegian sea. Indeed, a significant number of Scots merchants and mercenary soldiers made their permanent homes in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

From the eighteenth century, Scotsmen played a not inconsiderable part in the British discovery of the literature of Scandinavia — men like John Pinkerton, John Jamieson, Robert Jamieson, Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Laing and Thomas Carlyle, not to mention those early intrepid 'explorers' of Iceland, George Mackenzie and Ebenezer Henderson. And of recent years not a few Scotsmen have cast envious eyes on the successful independence of our Scandinavian neighbours — the Faroes and Iceland included — in this age where 'bigger' always supposedly equates with 'better', but where 'small' has come increasingly to be linked with 'the common weal'.

The Scottish Society for Northern Studies was founded in 1968 out of a desire to see in Scotland a group that would have much in common with the Viking Society for Northern Research, but which would be Scottish-based. It aimed to provide a Scottish forum for specialist papers and informal discussions on themes concerned with Scandinavian and related cultures, to interest University students with a view to encouraging them to pursue such studies after graduation and to further an informed interest throughout the country. Founder-members included Dr. S.P. Oakley, Dr. A.B. Taylor, Miss Margaret Orme, Professor D.M. Mennie, Mr. Hermann Pálsson, Miss Irene Scobbie and Professor Gordon Donaldson.

In recent years there has been something of a proliferation of historical and archaeological societies, as well as those concerned for example with literature, mediaeval studies, oral history and folk life. The Scottish Society for Northern Studies remains, nonetheless, the only forum in Scotland where historians, linguists, ethnologists, archaeologists, geographers, educationalists, place-name specialists, musicologists, literary critics and others besides can indulge their common 'northern' interests and profit from inter-disciplinary stimulation and discovery.

Since the mid 1970s, the Society has sought consciously to expand its work and to disseminate new research as widely as is possible for a voluntary group — across Scotland, in Scandinavia and further afield. In so doing, it hopes to encourage local societies and individuals to develop a wider appreciation of their heritage, past, present and future, and to explore locally aspects of the Scandinavian, Celtic and Scots cultures. A regular lecture programme based in Edinburgh and — in rotation — Aberdeen, Dundee, St. Andrews, Glasgow and Newcastle-upon-Tyne is supplemented by a journal, *Northern Studies*, first published in 1973.

By way of exploring further such inter-relations and influences, the Society has, again since 1973, initiated an annual Easter Conference, generally in a part of

Britain noted for the interaction of Norseman, Celt and Scot. Conferences have been held in Orkney, Lewis, Shetland, Skye, the Isle of Man, Islay, Caithness, Angus and Cumbria; and in each area many local people have participated, as speakers and as members. Contributions to the Manx Conference featured in *Man and Environment in the Isle of Man* (ed. P. Davey. BAR British Series 54. 1978. 2 vols.); contributions to the Shetland Conference appeared as the Society's first monograph, *Scandinavian Shetland: An Ongoing Tradition?* (ed. J.R. Baldwin. 1978). *Caithness: A Cultural Crossroads* represents a further such venture, to be followed shortly by *The Scandinavians in Cumbria*.

If you are not already a member of the Society, why not join us? If you are a member, you must know someone who would like to join? If you belong to a local society you may wish to enquire about possible speakers for meetings? We would certainly do our best to help. Though much is being done, there remains much yet to do in the integrated field of Scandinavian, Celtic and Scottish Studies, and the Scottish Society for Northern Studies exists to encourage all who are interested in the affairs of the North.

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Edinburgh.*

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