

INTRODUCTION

Galloway 1986

The Annual Conference of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies has become something of an institution. The Society exists to foster links, historical and contemporary, between Scotland and the Scandinavian world. The Conference has taken on a life of its own and functions both as an annual social event and as a local history travelling roadshow. At its best it provides a forum where amateur and professional can meet, relax and speculate across a wide range of disciplines — history, geography, archaeology, place-name studies and others. When the Conference takes place in the Gaidhealtachd, as in Benbecula in 1985, it functions as a *ceilidh* in the best and widest sense, and draws inspiration from the Gaelic tradition. But the Scandinavian credentials of the Society are never forgotten. In the Northern Isles and in Caithness they are very much to the fore. In other parts of Scotland Scandinavian connections can be uncovered where least expected. However, the reverse is also true: the rumour of Scandinavian influence can prove to be much exaggerated. Such was the case with Galloway.

The belief that the Vikings once played a key role in Galloway is widespread, fostered by such local historians as M'Kerlie, Wentworth Huyshe, W. G. Collingwood and John E. Robertson. At the Conference, however, speaker after speaker searched for Scandinavian influence, but could find little or none. The Society's past president, Ted Cowan, now professor of History at Guelph, Ontario, launched a particularly telling attack on the Scandinavian hypothesis, the swash-buckling delivery of which did not entirely mask its scholarly credentials. His strictures were not confined to historians, but extended also to allied disciplines. 'It is truly alarming,' he writes in his published paper in this volume, 'to note the extent to which archaeologists are imprisoned in historical structures totally fabricated by local historians'. 'The overwhelming conclusion,' he believes, 'must be that the Viking presence in Galloway was not significant'.

Despite this, the tone of the Conference was far from negative. On the contrary, it was remarkable how well conclusions pieced together from stray clues in one discipline tallied with those from another and helped to form a composite picture. If the Vikings were hard to find, one surprise was the strength of the evidence for Cumbric survival throughout the Dark Ages. Several papers — John MacQueen, Craig, Brooke and Fellows-Jensen — point towards this conclusion. One difficulty which faces the historian of early Galloway, apart from the lack of record evidence, is the sheer complexity of the settlement pattern within a relatively short compass: Britons, Angles, Gaels and Vikings (both Danish and Norse), Normans

and Gall-Gaidhil all stalk through these pages. So too do Fergus, lord of Galloway, and his unruly sons and grandsons.

In this volume, based mainly on papers read at the Conference, Ian Morrison sets the scene with a finely judged piece on landscape and locality. His description of Galloway, viewed by the modern airborne traveller, is a memorable one: the uplands 'a rumpled tweed coast in rich moorit browns' and the coastal lowlands 'a neatly worked scarf patterned in many greens, tossed down between the tweedy roughness of the interior and the sleek grey skein of the Solway'. Professor John MacQueen returns to the study of St Ninian after many years; not indeed to Ninian himself, but to the early medieval *Lives* of the saint, which he considers throw an 'interesting light on the literary culture of Whithorn in the eighth century'. Whithorn is to the fore again in Derek Craig's study of the pre-Norman sculpture in Galloway. Given the lack of record evidence, sculpture is a valuable historical source. He argues for 'an organised professional school of carving' operating in Galloway, and he believes that its strength points to the 'continued survival of Whithorn as a regional centre in the undocumented period between 802 and 1128'.

One archaeologist to whom Professor Cowan's strictures do not apply is Peter Hill, director of the dig at Whithorn. At the Conference he gave a report on work in progress, but his paper in this volume rests mainly on excavations carried out since that date. In it he considers the archaeological record in the light of recent research and postulates 'a settlement of Hiberno-Norse artisans and traders at Whithorn' in the dark years between 802 and 1128. This is an exciting suggestion which brings the Vikings right back into contention.

In another paper Daphne Brooke is sceptical about received views on the Gall-Gaidhil, and tentatively proposes a new etymology for the place-name 'Galloway'. Her appendices listing the main reference to the Gall-Gaidhil in Irish sources and the forms of the name for both province and people of Galloway in early record sources should prove an invaluable quarry for future scholars. The paper also touches on the lordship of Galloway in the twelfth century. Gillian Fellows-Jensen reviews the place-name evidence for Scandinavians in Dumfriesshire and Galloway. She finds considerable evidence for Scandinavian settlement in Dumfriesshire, probably mainly Danish laid on an Anglian foundation; the name 'Tinwald', however, with its strong Norse associations, remains something of a puzzle. In Galloway, there is far less evidence for settlement, although there are pointers to Norse influence in centres of power. She argues that the much-discussed inversion compound names beginning 'Kirk' reflect Scandinavian influence overlaid on Gaelic, although some may be ascribed to twelfth-century parochial reorganisation.

Three papers direct our attention to the Galloway of Fergus and his sons. Richard Oram reflects on the likely antecedents of Fergus and the

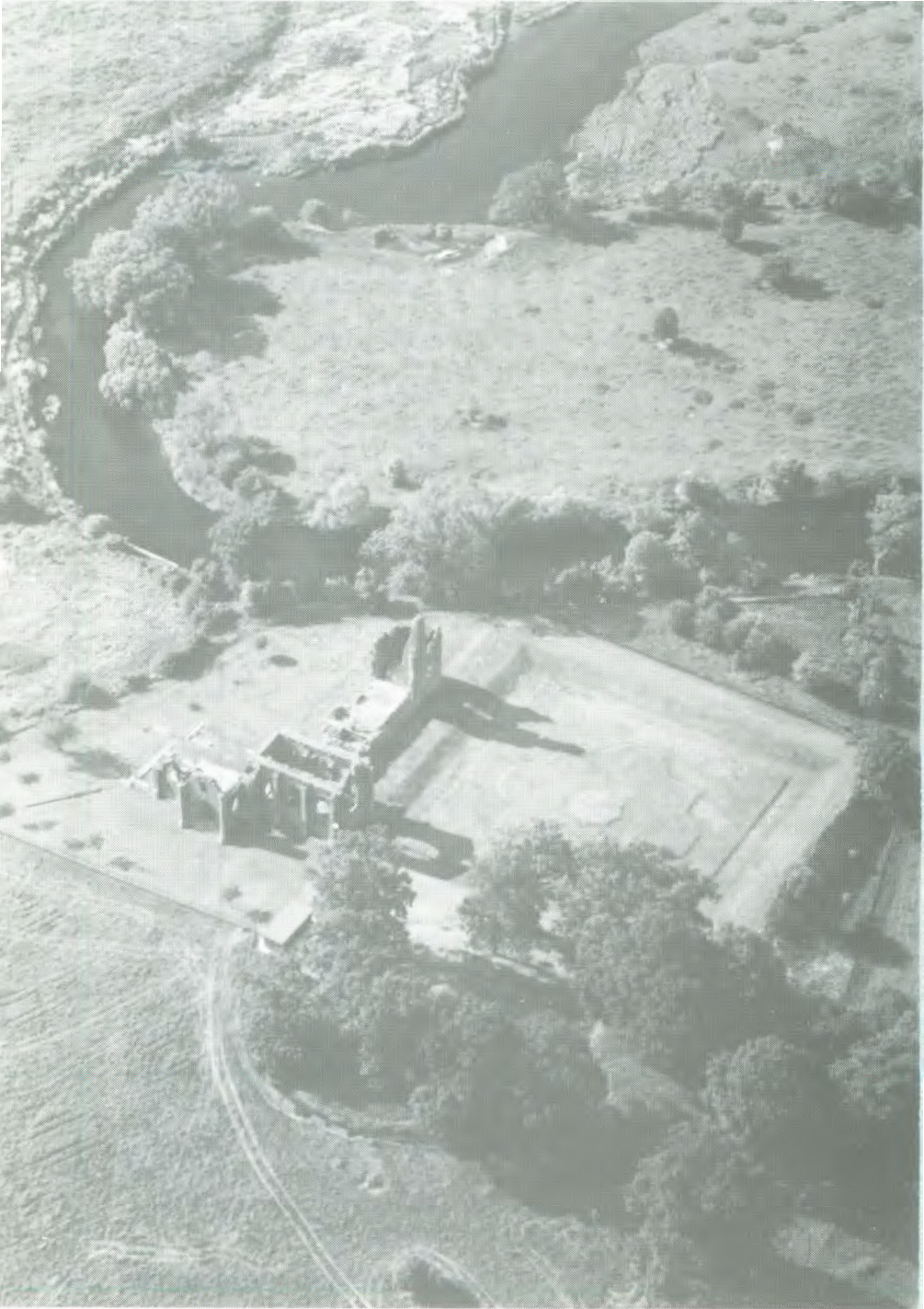
composition of his principality. He conjectures Fergus to have been of mixed Norse-Celtic origin, and portrays him as an independent lord of Galloway proper, west of the river Urr. Kirkcudbright and Cruggleton may have been his centres of power. Geoffrey Stell comments on the 'size and sophistication' of the three Cistercian monasteries founded by the lords of Galloway — Dundrennan, Glenluce and Sweetheart; and argues for conservatism and continuity in the structures associated with secular lordship. He notes the great antiquity of many castle sites, including Morton, Buittle and Cruggleton, and comments on the number of island fortifications. In a paper commissioned for this volume, Hector MacQueen gathers what is known of the 'laws of Galloway', the separate existence of which was acknowledged and confirmed by the Scottish Parliament in 1384. He is able to draw many parallels between these laws and the laws of the Gaelic-speaking Scots elsewhere, providing valuable clues to the social and administrative structure of Galloway under its native lords. Like other contributors, he also raises the possibility of Cumbric survival.

The Murray Arms Hotel at Gatehouse-of-Fleet provided a most congenial base for the Conference. One of its many claims to fame is that it was here that Robert Burns wrote 'Scots wha hae . . .'. It is therefore most appropriate that in his second paper in this volume Ian Morrison, discarding the mantle of geographer for that of musicologist, should investigate the tune to which Burns composed the words. In Burns's own day the tune was known as 'Hey, tuttie taitie', and was popularly believed to have been the air to which the Scots army marched to Bannockburn. In a fascinating piece of detective work Ian traces the tune back through Alexander Montgomerie and Gavin Douglas in the sixteenth century to William Dunbar in the fifteenth, thus establishing that the traditional account may not be so far-fetched as might appear at first sight.

At the Conference, Alfred Truckell gave a spirited and erudite account, liberally spiced with extracts from chronicle sources, of the tough nature and fearsome reputation of Galwegians in the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to reproduce that account here, but the editors and organisers of the Conference wish to record their deep gratitude to Mr Truckell for his willingness to share with them — in the lecture-hall and on site visits — his encyclopaedic knowledge of his native province.

Finally I should like to thank the editors of this volume, Richard Oram and Geoffrey Stell, for their patience and persistence in gathering the papers and seeing them through the press. This is, remarkably, the first of the Society's monograph series in which John Baldwin has not played a leading part, but I hope that readers familiar with the earlier volumes on Shetland, Caithness, Cumbria and the 'firthlands' of Ross and Sutherland will agree that the high standard set there has been admirably maintained.

DAVID SELLAR, President 1986



Lincluden College: aerial view from south-east.