

## Appleby Archaeology    October 2010

At their October meeting Appleby Archaeology Group enjoyed a return visit from Sheena Gemmel. Last year she spoke on the Picts. This time her talk was on *The impact and legacy of the arrival of the Scots in Dalriada in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.*

People from the north coast of Ireland mounted raids on the west coast of Roman Britain in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Romans called them the Scotii. After the Romans left Britain the northern part was peopled by three distinct groups. In the north and east of what is now Scotland were the Picts, in the west and in present day Cumbria and Wales were the Britons and in the east, south of the Forth, were the Angles. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Scots had settled and formed the kingdom of Dalriada in what is today Argyleshire, the Mull of Kintyre and associated islands. Over population in Ireland is probably the reason why the Scots sought new territory. The west coast of Scotland was easily reached by sea and there were few Pictish settlements in the area. The Picts occupied the fertile lands on the east coast and a mountain spine similar to the Pennines separated Dalriada from Pictland.

There is very little physical evidence of Dalriada and most information comes from Irish and Northumbrian documents. Significant among these are Adoman's "Life of St Columba" in which sea voyages are mentioned 56 times and a 7<sup>th</sup> century document "The Senechus" which records such details as households, the number of ships and the number of men able to sail them.

Tradition has it that the settlement was established by Fergus mac Erc and his brothers before 501 when Fergus died. The Senechus records that Fergus established himself in Kintyre and formed a kinship group, the Cenel nGagram, and that his brothers formed kinship groups in Lorn, the Cenel Loarin and in Islay, the Cenel nOenagusa. The kinship group was the main unit of society and each group had a leader or sub king who owed allegiance to a high king. There was an unusual form of succession known as "tanistry". The successor, had to be sound in body and mind, was elected before the death of the reigning king. He was chosen from within the kinship group but not necessarily a direct descendant of the king. He might be a brother or nephew.

The Scots were seafarers who travelled south and west reaching as far as the Mediterranean. There is little evidence of their domestic life in Dalriada but what there is suggests that they had small farms where they grew oats and barley, reared cattle which were half the size of today's animals. Fishing was a further food source.

Sheena spoke about two sites of power which were in commanding defensive positions. . Dunollie was a hill fort overlooking Oban Bay and is mentioned in The Irish Annals. Dunadd was on a rocky outcrop, then surrounded by marshland, situated between Loch Fyne and the Sound of Jura.

Both sites have been excavated. The most recent excavation was at Dunadd where small tools, crucibles and casts for brooches were found. Evidence of trading was found in the form of shards of continental pottery, fragments of glass and traces of a yellow dye from the eastern Mediterranean. The Scots were a cultivated people. On the rock face there are intriguing examples of rock art and, in a hollow, there is the deeply carved outline of a human foot. It is thought, by some that the king would place his foot in the carved footprint at his inauguration.

The major legacy of the Scots from Dalriada was the revival of Christianity after the fall of the Roman Empire. It is known that when they arrived from Ireland they were Christian and had adopted a monastic system. In 563 St Columba (521-597), an Irish prince and monk who had studied at Clonard Monastery, in Northern Ireland, came to Dalraida .where he established a monastic community on Iona which became the most influential centre of Christianity in Britain in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Missions went out from Iona to convert the Picts and Angles. Records tell us that St Columba converted the Northern Picts and that in the 7<sup>th</sup> century missionaries from Iona were a major influence in the conversion of the Angles of Northumbria.

There was an emphasis on learning and literature in the monasteries and texts, poems and hymns were written and illustrated on Iona. St Columba is credited with transcribing three hundred books and the monastery library contained Greek and Latin texts as well as early scientific works. With the arrival of the Vikings these texts were lost. Some may have been dispersed

to other monasteries for safe keeping such as the Book of Kells which is thought by some to have been begun on Iona and then taken to Kells in County Meath where it was completed. This book is now a prized possession of Trinity College Dublin.

Dalriadan culture reached its high point in the 8<sup>th</sup> century when its decorative artwork in jewellery, illuminated texts, and carved stone crosses reflected Irish, Pictish and Northumbrian influences.

The Viking raids started in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century and Iona was first attacked in 795. The Scots, whose influence by this time had spread eastwards and southwards reached an accommodation with the Picts and the two kingdoms merged to form the Kingdom of Alba under Kenneth mac Alpin. His successors ruled Scotland until the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Sheena concluded by emphasising the legacy left by the Scots of Dalriada and answering a number of questions. She was thanked and warmly applauded for a fascinating glimpse into a period of history that was new to many present.

The next talk will be on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> November at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall when Ian Miller from Oxford Archaeology North 2008 will talk about the *Excavations at Brougham of the civilian settlement to the east of the Roman fort, Brovacum in 2008*.