

**THE WAY FORWARD
THE WHITHORN TRUST RESEARCH SEMINAR
(Edinburgh: 28 February 1998)**

Report on the proceedings of the Whithorn Trust Research seminar,

compiled by Dr Christopher Lowe on behalf of The Whithorn Trust

INTRODUCTION

The work of the Whithorn Trust in general and Peter Hill's achievement, in particular, were recognised by the seminar group and heartily applauded. The recently published excavation monograph, *Whithorn & St Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town 1984 - 91*, represents the culmination of the first phase of the Trust's work. It also represents an appropriate point at which the work to date can be reviewed and assessed, and a strategy developed for the future directions of the Trust. The Research Seminar was thus organised with the view to addressing three basic themes:

- to offer the monograph up to peer review;
- to establish an outline framework in which the future research directions of the Whithorn Trust could be developed;
- to identify new sources of funding or partnerships.

This report presents a summary of the major issues or conclusions which were raised at the seminar, organised in accordance with these three basic criteria. A transcript of the proceedings is contained in Appendix 1. Correspondence from Professor Charles Thomas, who was unable to attend the seminar, is transcribed at Appendix 2. Additional comments in correspondence from Professor David Dumville are transcribed at Appendix 3. Comments from Dr Timothy Holden on the macroplant assemblage and an outline of the potential for further work are attached at Appendix 4.

PEER REVIEW: ACADEMIC ISSUES

It was clear from the general consensus among the assembled audience that the publication of *Whithorn & St Ninian* marks a significant landmark in our understanding of the Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain. In terms too both of technique and presentation, it is clear that the work ranks alongside classic excavation reports of this period, such as Brian Hope-Taylor's *Yeavering*. Academic journal reviews of the monograph will be eagerly awaited.

Areas of dispute were few and far between. Possibly this was a little disappointing because the work contains much that either is or could be considered provocative. The fundamental academic issues to be addressed can be summarised as:

- the organisation of the site;
- the ecclesiastical status of the settlement;
- the urban quality of the settlement;
- the ethnicity of Galloway and Whithorn's cultural contacts.

An outline of the basic conclusions reached is summarised below. Full details are contained in Appendix 1.

The organisation of the site: enclosures & zoning

Whithorn has presented the best evidence to date for the enclosure, organisation and zoning of a major early *monasterium*. It would appear not to be insignificant that similar evidence for the enclosure and zoning of an early Northumbrian *monasterium* has also been discerned, independently, at Hoddom. Hoddom lacks the stratigraphic depth and finds produced at Whithorn: it also of course lacks detail for its 'centre', such data as exist and the models proposed deriving solely from remote sensing and fieldwalking. Nonetheless, it is clear that there are parallels in the layout of the two sites.

It has been frequently remarked or assumed that the multiple enclosure and zoning of ecclesiastical sites is an Irish phenomenon. Certainly comparanda are known. The key Irish sites, however, lack the chronological detail of Whithorn (and Hoddom). Could the appearance of this phenomenon in south-west Scotland represent an early or contemporary aspect of the type which we see preserved as upstanding earthworks in Ireland? There was no take-up of PH's question of whether or not the curvilinear / zoning plan could represent a British 'export' to Ireland. This is an area which would repay further consideration. After all, where were the Northumbrians, at the very beginnings of their adoption of Christianity, getting their ideas from about how a *monasterium* should be laid out, how it should look and how it should function? The British or sub-Roman contribution might well have been underestimated.

The ecclesiastical status of the settlement: monastic, episcopal or chieftain site?

Firm conclusions concerning the ecclesiastical status of the settlement proved elusive. This is a difficult subject and one which recalls debates in the 1970s about the identification of monastic sites (*Scottish Archaeological Forum* 1973). The problem then, principally with reference to the Atlantic seaboard areas, had been how to distinguish archaeologically between a farm-church complex that was simply a farm and a church, and others that were monastic settlements or, indeed, episcopal in the case of the site at Gardur in Greenland. In the case of Whithorn, the matter is compounded manifold: by the stratigraphic complexity of the site, extensive post-depositional disturbance and by the very presence of the burgh, regardless of its ultimate origins.

The archaeological distinction between monastic and episcopal is not easily made: the distinction between ecclesiastical and secular is equally difficult to define archaeologically. These are clearly areas which could be worthy of further consideration.

The urban quality of the settlement: The Monastic Town

Aspects of the Monastic Town concept were addressed by several speakers. Cathy Swift noted that the Monastic Town was a theoretical concept which had been advanced without excavation. Both Richard Hall and Alex Woolf considered that the urban aspects of the settlement interpretation could be down-graded and given less emphasis. These views might have an immediate impact on the proposed refurbishment of the Whithorn Exhibition.

The ethnicity of Galloway and Whithorn's cultural contacts

This subject was not explored in any detail as a separate theme during the course of the seminar. The apparent 'Irishness' of the pre-Northumbrian settlement, in the context of enclosure and zoning, is summarised above. There was a general consensus that the 'Irishness' of 12th century Whithorn represents Hiberno-Norse activity.

POSSIBLE AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following *possible* areas for further research were mentioned by various speakers during the course of the proceedings:

- detailed examination of the Whithorn hinterland, particularly in terms of a palaeoenvironmental reconstruction (pollen analysis) for the area in the prehistoric, Early Historic and Medieval periods;
- survey of the Early Christian site at Kirkmadrine;
- survey and/or excavation on the Isle of Whithorn;
- further excavation in Whithorn itself: targeted excavation to test some of the hypotheses proposed in the excavation monograph: re-examination of available areas on the summit;
- excavation of selected sculpture sites;
- re-examination and publication of the Roy Ritchie records;
- investigation / research into early sea-ways;
- further analysis of the 1984-91 finds: glass analysis, metalworking;
- monitoring of water-logged samples on the site, to assess their current condition;
- preparation of a new edition of the Old Scots Life of Ninian, with new introduction;
- further research into inscriptions and art-history / sculpture / metalwork.

FUNDING

The following *possible* areas of funding or partnership were mentioned by various speakers during the course of the proceedings:

- European Union funding: via RAPHAEL, LEADER and other programmes (in hand by JB / AG);
- Heritage Lottery funding;
- increased turnover of visitors to The Whithorn Trust through refurbishment of exhibition and displays, continuing development of on-site experimental work;
- HS funding/assistance for specific and targeted non-excavation projects eg. palaeoenvironmental and survey work;

- fund-raising: via St Andrews Societies in the USA, incorporating a lecture tour by Peter Hill, together with promotion and sales of the monograph;
- liaison with Channel 4 Time Team: promotional and profile-raising.

CONCLUSIONS

- strengthen the Whithorn Trust Research Committee;
- development of a medium to long-term research strategy (Project Design);
- development of enhanced visitor attractions;
- development of a programme of lecture tours, in tandem with establishment of an Internet site, to promote and raise the profile of The Whithorn Trust;
- exploration of other potential sources of funding and partnership.

APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPT

Participants / contributors

DB	Daphne Brook	Whithorn Trust
JB	Janet Butterworth	Whithorn Trust
DC	Derek Craig	University of Durham
RJC	Rosemary Cramp	University of Durham
BC	Barbara Crawford	University of St Andrews
DD	David Dumville	University of Cambridge
IF	Ian Fisher	RCAHMS
AG	Antony Graham	Whithorn Trust
DG	Doreen Grove	Historic Scotland
RH	Richard Hall	York Archaeological Trust
JH	John Higgitt	Edinburgh University
PH	Peter Hill	Whithorn Trust
FH	Fraser Hunter	National Museum Scotland
CL	Chris Lowe	Headland Archaeology
MMC	Mike McCarthy	Carlisle Archaeological Unit
AN	Andy Nicholson	Whithorn Trust
RO	Richard Oram	Independent consultant
CS	Cathy Swift	NUI Maynooth College
AW	Alex Woolf	Edinburgh University

Notes on the transcript

The transcript derives from my written notes, which have been expanded where necessary into proper sentences. It is believed to be a fairly accurate record of the day's proceedings and the comments made by the various speaking contributors. The quality of the tape recording is variable (poor to very poor) and has only been checked where points appeared to require some clarification. Where appropriate, for example to qualify points made by the various speakers or to clarify the period or association being referred to, I have sometimes added my own comments to what was said: these additions are shown italicised in square brackets thus *[comment]*.

(1) INTRODUCTION (Peter Hill)

Outlined the aims of the seminar:

- to establish future research directions at Whithorn and elsewhere;
- to reconsider questions arising from the extant data (Phases 1 and 2);
- to consider the content of a second monograph: to contain the Phase 2 excavations (1995/96) and further work undertaken (eg. industrial debris);
- to consider the content, scope and completeness of a new exhibition at the Trust;
- to bring new recruits into the Whithorn Trust Research Committee;
- to identify new sources of funding / partnerships etc.

Summary overview of Whithorn's development: principal themes to be considered

- the organisation of the site;
- the ecclesiastical status of the settlement;
- the urban quality of the settlement;
- the ethnicity of Galloway and Whithorn's cultural contacts.

(2) THE WORK OF THE YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST 1995-96 (Richard Hall)

Summary of the work of the York Archaeological Trust, to complete the 1992/93 trench (Trench A) in the Fey Field, to the south-west of the priory church, and excavation of Trench B (not bottomed), further to the south-west. Resistivity survey identified a large high-resistance rectangular anomaly, immediately to the south-east of Trench A: interpreted as a stone building, roughly 30 x 10 m, with off-set entrances near the centres of the long walls.

Summary (YAT 1996, I, 48)

Excavation, stratigraphic analysis and assessment of archaeological deposits within Trench A, on the hilltop west of the ruined nave at Whithorn Priory, have now been completed. The archaeological deposits span the period from approximately the 6th/7th century to the 13th/15th centuries.

The earliest clearly identifiable archaeological remains are those of a series of structures; subsequently, perhaps in the 6th/7th century, the area was utilised for human burials. These two forms of use continue to dominate the remainder of the subsequent archaeological record. At times there is evidence for boundary features, delimiting particular usages, within the excavated area; and there is evidence for episodes of craft or industrial activity, particularly non-ferrous metalworking.

References:

YAT 1995 Archive Report Volumes I & II.
YAT 1996 Archive Report Volume I.

(3) CHRONOLOGY, CULTURE, CONTINUITY & CHANGE

Chair: Barbara Crawford

(3a) Whithorn in the 5th century

Summary: (PH)

What are the origins of the settlement ?

Both MacQueen's model for a monastic origin of the site in the early 5th century and Thomas' episcopal model for the mid 5th century assume that the basis for either was provided by an extant Late Roman settlement in the area. There are Roman finds from the site: what do they represent / how should these be interpreted ?

Possible reconstruction of the ecclesiastical site at this period, assuming a central focus on the summit of the hill, would be a curvilinear enclosed site (extrapolated from a short length of ditch fragment which was excavated at the north edge of the site), structure(s) abutting the outside of the enclosure and an area of ploughing (plough-pebbles) to the south-west. Drew attention to the new interpretation of the *Latinus* stone by Charles Thomas and its important implications for the site.

What was its ecclesiastical status ? Monastery, *monasterium*, town or chieftain site ?
Why is it where it is ? Whithorn is not in a topographically dominant location: 'invisible' from the Isle. What is its relationship to the Isle and its 'Iron Age' fort ?

Rural technologies in Whithorn *circa* 500:

- **plough-pebbles** & mould-board plough for working heavier soils;
- **lime**: association assumed to be for building;
- **iron-smelting**
- **mill-stones**

Where are these technologies coming from ? Do they represent a coherent cultural economic package ?

Subject: rural technology (mill-stones & querns)

DG Commented that earliest mill-stones in Ireland are known from the 7th century [*this is probably a reference to the dendrochronological dating of excavated Irish timber mills*].

CS Expanded upon by CS who referred to a PhD thesis by Niall Brady, on Irish mill-stones, where earliest datable contexts with mill-stones have apparently been dated to

the first half of the 6th century.

- RJC Observed that contemporary English ecclesiastical sites do not have many hand-querns: possible inference might be that Roman milling technology continued, preserved into or through the sub-Roman period at ecclesiastical settlements or centres such as Whithorn. RJC went on to note that there were residual mill-stones in late contexts at Jarrow and that it is only an accident of excavation that we have not yet found mills that are earlier than Tamworth [8th century].
- PH Noted that hand-querns reappear at Whithorn in the 10th century. Reiterated the question of where was this rural technology coming from? Questioned whether this was from Britannia or Gaul? Or Ireland?
- CS Commented that appropriately early mills [ie 5th century] have not been excavated in Ireland [or indeed elsewhere in British Isles].

Subject: rural technology (lime burning)

- RJC Asked MMC when the use of lime in buildings ceases in Carlisle.
- MMC Replied that we cannot demonstrate the existence of such a post-Roman 'gap' with any actual examples.
- PH Reminded audience that the core problem was one of technologies in search of origins. Whence, when and how did these relatively advanced rural technologies, evident at Whithorn by *circa* 500, arrive?
- BC Referred to the geographical position of Whithorn and the Solway / Irish Sea basin.
- PH Reiterated the point that the introduction of these new rural technologies has the appearance of an organised group coming from elsewhere with new ideas. Where are they coming from? [Parallel for a later period at Hoddom 7th / 8th century, Tim Holden's work on the macroplants has suggested that the short-lived appearance there of wheat represents the adoption of / experimentation with an 'ecclesiastical cultural package']
- FH Noted that there are no parallels for this type of assemblage at this time from either Iron Age or Roman sites in Scotland. Clarification sought on the source of the stone used in the Whithorn mill-stones.
- PH Replied that the 1984-1991 millstones were of carboniferous sandstone: the millstone found during the YAT work is of local Merrick granite. Likely source would be eastern Dumfries & Galloway.
- MMC Referred to Maryport on south side of the Solway as possibly a useful context or source for the kind of technology apparent at Whithorn: although he noted that Maryport had not been extensively excavated, nor excavated to modern standards.
- PH Questioned the relevance of Maryport, given lack of evidence for its continuation down to 500.
- MMC This was acknowledged. However, for the early - mid 5th century (ie contemporary with the Whithorn chi-rho stone) raised the possibility of the material (ie mill-stones, and ?lime) coming to the site as builders' rubble, although he accepted that such an argument would presuppose that we knew for sure what settlements or contexts existed in the Solway area during the 5th and 6th centuries.

Subject: topography

- RO With regard to the topography of the site at Whithorn, RO noted that St David's, SW Wales, was located in a similar topographical location, in a low valley around from the

coast.

Subject: Secular / episcopal / monastic

- AW Raised the point of why do we make the assumption that rich assemblage chieftain site, noting (as Ewan Campbell has in his discussion of imported goods in the Whithorn report) parallels between Whithorn and Longbury Bank, both high-status undefended sites.
- RJC Made the point that surely all we know for the 5th or 6th century, by what comes later, is that there was probably very little difference between how clerics related to either secular or ecclesiastical groups.
- DD Felt this was fine from the secular viewpoint but questioned, from the monastic point of view, how one was supposed to draw a line around what was a bishop.
- CS Pointed out that the work of Patrick involved converting the sons and daughters of chieftains.
- AW Commented that bishops were attaching themselves to chieftain groups.
(END)

(3b) Whithorn in the 6th - 7th century

Summary: (PH)

Finds in this period are concentrated in the Inner Area. Did the inhabitants have the ability to make glass vessels on site ?

The finds' assemblage for this period has been considered by Ewan Campbell as atypical for an ecclesiastical site: eg gold and silver and the considerable technical skill required, suggesting that there were both secular and ecclesiastical interests being served on the site in this period.

Population size for the site in this period ? A figure of 400, 500 or 600 could be extrapolated. Do these criteria of technical ability / services and size more adequately reflect an ecclesiastical settlement or a small town ?

Cultural change in the 6th / 7th century also noted: change in burial 'furniture', from stone / wooden cists to log coffin burials (parallels noted at Armagh and Quernmore, Lancashire).

'Proliferation' of compass-drawn stones and close sculptural links between Whithorn and Maughold (Isle of Man) in this period have been noted by Derek Craig. Important to remember that whilst Northumbrian control was extended into SW Scotland in the late 6th and 7th century, Whithorn, however, was still linked culturally to the Irish Sea Province or British 'West' well into the 7th century, as evidenced by the distribution of imported goods.

Cultural change at Whithorn comes around AD 700: dendro evidence for construction of Northumbrian-period buildings in the period 685 x 716. Clear comparisons evident between the small buildings at Whithorn and Hartlepool (*circa* AD 700). There is also a change in the animal bone assemblage at around this time:

7th century and earlier: predominantly cattle, sheep rare;
700 and later: bone assemblages more varied, including fowls and geese.

Bone assemblages interpreted as remains of food renders / rents.

Subject: The status of the settlement in the 6th/7th century

- DD Asked what is the earliest point at which it can be clearly demonstrated that the site is principally ecclesiastical.
- PH Replied that if we accept that a graveyard could have been attached to a secular site, then the earliest point at which a principal ecclesiastical association can be clearly demonstrated would be the 12th century.
- RJC Interjected that surely an 8th century date could be proposed on the basis of the evidence for the Northumbrian church and burial chapel.
- DD Commented, starting from first principles, that the Northumbrian bishops are the first definite starting point for the historical evidence. Remarked that it might be possible to describe the 8th century settlement at Whithorn as a proto-bishopric or as a mixed high status ecclesiastical / secular settlement.
- AW Reminded audience of the Flixborough debate and the difficulty of identifying / distinguishing monastic / secular sites.
- DD Referred to Whithorn's 'distant invisible monastic origin'. If the site was an undefended secular settlement and an adjunct to a coastal settlement at the Isle of Whithorn, then we lose the monastic element. It is simply a case of 'either/or'. If the settlement was an adjunct to the Isle, what sort of an adjunct was it? Marmoutier would be the obvious answer or provide an appropriate parallel, although DD acknowledged the risk of circular argument.
- RJC Acknowledged that the problem at Whithorn, in common with other Early Historic sites, is that the historical evidence gives us a generalised account of an area or site: archaeology, on the other hand, gives us a specific slice of that site and it is very difficult to tie the two together.
- DD Questioned whether we really have historical documentary evidence for the site at Whithorn. We have literary evidence (eg Bede's reference to Ninian and Candida Casa) but we don't have documentary evidence until Northumbrian period (Bede and appointment of bishop). Prior to this it's prehistory.
- AW Asked what evidence DD would accept as demonstrating that an indisputably and principally ecclesiastical settlement was operating on the site.
- DD Replied that he was not able to do that: that there was nothing of substance that could be interpreted as non-ecclesiastical. There is a choice between a shadowy monastic presence or the site was wholly secular: one or the other, but not both.
- CS Asked if we were in danger of being too extreme here, referring to the Richard Sharpe paper in *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (1992) which proposes an alternative model for ecclesiastical organisation, in place from the 7th century in Ireland. This envisages ecclesiastical church settlements headed by bishops or abbots but intermixed with secular administration / society / chieftain sites.
- DD Replied that the Irish evidence was too late for 5th century Whithorn.
- CS Asked how far it was legitimate to push this model back?
(no reply)
- JH Stressed that ecclesiastical settlements were not isolated places: contacts with

Merovingian Gaul. Literacy evident by presence of styli from early 6th century contexts, plus more later.

- DC Pointed out that there are clearly 6th century graves at the site.
PH Remarked that presence of early graves does not necessarily help to distinguish between an ecclesiastical and secular association.
DD Posited whether the site at this period could have been an unattended cemetery, not requiring an ecclesiastical presence on-site.

(END)

(3c) Irish aspects of the pre-Northumbrian settlement

Outline summary (PH)

Evidence for the zoning of the site: comprising a central church / churches within an inner precinct, and an outer zone beyond. This type of arrangement has been viewed by Alcock, among others, as a typically Irish phenomenon. But where is the contemporary evidence ?

Cathy Swift's unpublished paper at the recent Cumbernauld conference has stressed how little real field evidence there is for 5th or 6th century Christianity in Ireland. Instead of influence from Ireland, could the curvilinear / zoning plan represent a British phenomenon which was taken to Ireland ?

Was there Irish influence at Whithorn in this period ? There probably was and an appropriate context might be afforded by the standard view of Irish settlement along the western seaboard in the 5th and 6th centuries. Material culture at Whithorn in the 11th and 12th centuries is overwhelmingly Irish but this is not evident or apparent at this earlier period.

The known distribution of plough pebbles in Ireland is concentrated in the east of the country: chronologically, however, these have been found in deposits which cannot be dated earlier than the 12th or 13th century.

Subject: curvilinear enclosures & zoning

- CS Commented that there are Irish parallels for curvilinear-and-zoned ecclesiastical sites but that much of this evidence derives from aerial survey, particularly Leo Swann's work. She also made the point that Early Christian archaeology in Ireland is somewhat 'stuck' in the Scellig Michael / Reask mode and that there has been very little excavation work done on ecclesiastical sites in recent years: certainly no major or extensive excavations. Thus although the parallels may exist in Ireland, the lack of modern excavation evidence means that their chronology and development is by no means clear. Ireland does have better historical documentation: Old Irish / Latin documents (7th / 8th century) which describe central churches, surrounded by an open space with the manag further outside, tied into the church settlement but not nucleated. The earliest documents, on the basis of the language, are dated to the 7th century or later.

- RJC Commented on several Irish ecclesiastical sites which display evidence for curvilinear enclosure and/or zoning: Armagh, Kilkenny (?iron-working), Iniscealtra, Kiltiernan [*but a closely defined chronology is lacking for all/most of these sites*]
- IF Remarked that there is a similar problem at Iona: possible evidence for the zoning of activities might be represented by the leather waste / workshop near Relig Oran (Barber excavation), and the discovery of metalworking evidence some 100 m to the north (Rees & McCormick excavations). But this also takes us back to the question of status: clearly high-status but is it ecclesiastical or secular ?
- CL Remarked that the evidence for curvilinear enclosure and zoning at Hoddom is clearly part-and-parcel of the Northumbrian settlement on the site, set out *circa* AD 650 and maintained at least down to the later 9th or 10th century. There is no evidence for Irish influence at Hoddom: the pre-Northumbrian British phase, such as it is represented at Hoddom, would appear to have been fairly insubstantial in terms of what came later

Subject: Irish settlement in south-west Scotland

- DG Stressed the role of the seaways: facilitating settlement, movement of peoples and goods.
- DD Questioned the role / current interpretations of Ardwall Isle.
(no reply)
- DD Suggested that Nicolaisen=s Irish place-names in SW Scotland have been arbitrarily assigned to the 5th/6th century as a kind of ‘dumping ground’. DD or A N Other, however, pointed out that these place-name elements include some very obscure Ulster saints [*examples not given*].
- IF In defence of the *sliabh* place-name, remarked that Nicolaisen put *sliabh* into the 5th/6th century because the place-name element has a very restricted distribution (roughly SW Dalriada) and that it stops being used at an early stage in the Dalriadan settlement of Scotland.
- CS Questioned, however, whether we could be sure that *sliabh* did not arrive until much later, perhaps in the 12th century or later ?
(no reply)
(END)

(3d) Northumbrian Whithorn

Summary: (PH)

Reconstruction of church and contemporary settlement. Persistence of boundaries over the 8th/9th centuries: evidence for rigid planning in the layout of the Northumbrian settlement. For example: correlation between the west gable of the YAT ‘geophysic’ building and the west gable of the Northumbrian church, between the central opposed doorways in the church and the central doors of the buildings to the south. Evidence of grid-layout, operating on both north-south and east-west (site) axes.

Finds distributions: coins, pins, tags.

Changes in distribution of coins, from area south of church subsequently into church, roughly at time of the second reign of Aethelred II.

Place-name evidence: Northumbrians were not at Whithorn before the end of the 7th century. Place-name evidence suggests that they were there in sufficient numbers or were of a sufficient status to change the language and place-names used in the area: but there is not an over-dominance of Anglian place-names. Does this represent a Northumbrian enclave ?

We tend to see the Northumbrian conquest as a single event. Would prefer to see it as a longer process, lasting over 100 years, culminating with the annexation of Kyle in 750. Suggested that ecclesiastical estates were acquired first, leaving secular estates in native hands.

.....
Subject: site layout & mensuration units

- JH Enquired whether there were any parallels for alignment on this scale ?
PH Noted lack of comparanda on this scale. Commented that the analysis had not succeeded in identifying any common units of mensuration [*cf Hope-Taylor's Yeaving units, Biddle's work at Winchester, and Rodwell and others' work on ecclesiastical sites elsewhere*]

Subject: artefacts general, dress-pins & identification of gender

- AW Enquired where the pins were coming from, from visitors to the site ?
PH Assumption that such were coming from visitors to the site, not from nuns or females associated with the *monasterium*.
RJC Agreed that dress-pins do not indicate the presence of a female community on the site, that there is no correlation between dress-pins and female ecclesiastics. Suggests that such represents a secular 'dress-code': that ecclesiastics would not have worn cross-gartering which required pinning. Dress-pins thus represent an aspect of the secularisation of the monasteries which, on other evidences, is perceived to be an aspect of the 9th century.
PH Remarked that the Northumbrian period at Whithorn is characterised by a limited and specialised range of finds (coins, window glass, coffin fittings) and very sparse workshop debris. Spindle-whorls start to appear at this time but there are none of the objects associated with the processing of wool. The workshop areas must lie outwith the excavation area: there is clearly a change in the layout of the site between the pre-Northumbrian and Northumbrian period, and likewise with the later Northumbrian settlement.

Subject: cultural affinity / comparanda for the platform underlying the church

- RJC Questioned how early this feature was at Whithorn (PH: later 6th century at earliest) and discussed Irish parallels for this feature and its potential for identifying contemporary ecclesiastical sites: possible parallels at Glendalough, Killabounia, possibly Isle of May.
CS Commented that platforms have not been dated in Ireland; that the Irish examples were a functional response to construction on a slope and were smaller.

Subject: site formation processes

- MMC Noting that the excavations at Whithorn, in terms of their stratigraphy and stratigraphic depth, were comparable to an urban site questioned whether issues of site formation processes had been addressed. Can the finds be used for interpretation ?
PH Replied, noting distinction between *in situ* finds and those displaced to a higher

stratigraphic level: analysis of finds x/y distributions, however, has shown remarkable persistence of significant patterning, despite any vertical displacement.

(END)

(3e) Whithorn and the Machars 850 - 1300

Summary: (PH)

Periods III and IV

Introduction of flimsy wattle-built structures, the 'basket-house' theory: single room buildings with a central hearth and a single doorway in the end-wall.

Flooding of site in the later 9th century.

Comb-making introduced at the end of the Northumbrian minster period, *circa* 850 x 875.

Enamelling introduced.

Site layout changes: buildings aligned in respect to non-physically marked boundaries.

Later reorganisation of settlement: irregular planning, less ordered than previously.

What happens to the site in the second quarter of the 9th century ? Does it become, in Richard Hodges' terms, a nascent town ?

How accurate is the settlement model of an Anglian enclave, surrounded by small satellite Viking [*Hiberno-Norse* ?] settlements, established by treaty around the core of the site ?

How do the Whithorn school of sculptures and related metalwork / sculpture from the Western Isles and Isle of Man fit into the overall context of Whithorn in the 10th century ?

How accurate / realistic / relevant is the term 'Monastic Town' ?

.....
(no separate discussion section for Part 3e: the following comment was incorporated into Peter Hill's summary introduction)

Subject: Whithorn in the 10th / early 11th century

DB There are changes in the top hierarchy of the Church in Galloway in the 10th / early 11th century: the arrival of the Hiberno-Norse and new church dedications, including four or five dedications to British saints. This supports PH idea that there is something obscure going on at this time. Does the site fall under Manx or Strathclyde control ?

(4) DISCUSSION

Chair: Mike McCarthy

MMC The Whithorn Trust and Peter Hill were congratulated upon the production of the Whithorn report: a scholarly work of high quality. The report, however, should not be

seen as a 'one off'.

Outline of agenda: further areas of research, both inward (using the 1984-91 excavation data) and outward, developing new projects within the Whithorn area. Felt that the current situation was reminiscent of urban archaeology in the 1970s/80s when excavation had been focussed on city centres. Now clear that we should look at centres in the context of their hinterland, in terms of the town and beyond. What was the effect / impact of prehistoric settlement on the landscape ? What was the landscape that the Church came into ?

How do we decide what the next stage should be ? Perhaps archaeological evaluation programs for fieldwork, pollen etc. founded on project designs or proposals which are integrated with the strategic aims of the Whithorn Trust: where should the Trust be going, both locally and regionally ?

RH Presumed that the Whithorn Trust would wish to cast its remit as far as possible in conjunction with local economic development, in dealing with some of the academic issues raised here today. What does the Trust want ? Is anything other than small scale work feasible given the economic / financial situation ?

MMC Reminded audience that archaeology should not be taken on lightly.

DB Suggested that we should concentrate on the beginnings of Whithorn. In the forthcoming *Whithorn Lecture*, it is suggested that the two Kirkmadrines and Kirkmaidens in the Rhinns and Machars were specifically involved in the beginnings of Whithorn. This raises two question marks: is Whithorn the first place of Candida Casa and its diocese, with Kirkmadrine as a second, or is the Isle of Whithorn important from the beginning ? If we were to excavate, the Isle would be more feasible, given the legal status / potential difficulties of excavating at Kirkmadrine.

DG Clarified current legal status of Kirkmadrine: the church is currently private property but is about to come to Historic Scotland: the churchyard is the responsibility of the local authority.

DC Remarked, on the basis of the sculpture evidence, that there is an apparent continuity of settlement at Kirkmadrine, from the Early Christian period down to the 10th century [*assumption that this would allow us to compare / contrast with Whithorn over this period ?*] Some sculpture sites would also offer potential for excavation.

AG Outline of the Whithorn Trust=s intentions: economic development / revival of Whithorn and its immediate environs. The Trust is at a cross-roads: with the first phase (the 1984-91 excavations) completed, and in the process of completing Phase 2 (the York Archaeological Trust excavations).
Noted that the Trust was very dependent on local authority funding: that the Trust had to encourage visitors to come to the area and to continue to come: current visitor numbers (10,000) were insufficient. Current initiatives include non-ferrous metalworking and similar reconstruction / experimental work.

Problems, however, were envisaged if the Whithorn Trust became focussed on work ouwith the burgh, for example at Kirkmadrine.

RJC If the focus is to continue, the Trust must bring together a co-ordinated and structured approach, in terms of developing a medium/long-term project design. For example:

- long-term projects feeding into the centre;
- things taking place in Whithorn (eg. further work on the finds)
- the need for someone who is dynamic enough to keep the whole thing going or else nothing will work, regardless of money;
- development of an Early Christian trail;
- get groups together who are interested in the early sea-ways;
- have a new project at Whithorn every year;
- get Corning Glass to analyse the Whithorn glass;
- long-term research on sites in the area, focussed on Whithorn and seen to be feeding into Whithorn.

CS Referred to the Mayo Centre / Mayo Abbey Group and other similar projects in Ireland. Based around interested local family, with students, with development of academic research programme. Availability of European LEADER money. Development of an Internet site for the Trust.

RH Referred to York=s recent work of self-promotion in the USA: spent a lot of time on this but it has generated a significant income. Suggested approaches to American St Andrews Societies. Also questioned whether the waterlogged deposits at Whithorn were still safe / intact ? Stressed that determining their current condition should be accorded a high priority.

RJC Questioned what Historic Scotland's position was likely to be.

DG Replied that there would be problems with HS financing research excavation, their budgets being restricted to rescue. HS could not fund a major excavation programme. On other hand, a palaeoenvironmental programme would probably be quite well received. Or a programme of targeted survey: Kirkmadrine etc.

MMC Commented that even small-scale evaluation can be very cost-effective: we should not necessarily think only in terms of full scale excavations.

DG Mentioned the possibility of Scottish University field-schools: eg Glasgow University in Dumfriesshire.

FH Added reference to the Mount Beauvais project (France) where Edinburgh University is involved: a large-scale multiple excavation by different bodies.

RJC Also stressed university links: to develop specific projects on, for example, questions of sea-level change / palaeoenvironmental work, under the aegis of the Whithorn

- Trust.
- CS Stressed the importance of developing cross-country links eg. Galloway / Queens University Belfast / Ireland, both for academic and financial reasons (access to or qualification for EU funding).
- DB Enquired what the audience wanted the Trust to do.
- RJC First step would be the creation of a 'wish-list'.
- RO Proposed a problem-orientated exercise of small-scale evaluation, on the Isle or elsewhere to resolve particular outstanding issues.
- AW In favour of directing resources towards the Isle: to understand how the Isle was related to Whithorn in the Early Historic period.
- PH Desirability for excavating more of Whithorn.
- RJC Small-scale projects within the burgh could involve testing the line of the enclosing ditch, or determining what was on the summit in/around the area dug by Radford. These limited exercises would be easily resolvable.
- RO Suggested that an appropriate area to investigate (and one where the James Smith ruling would not be invoked) would be beneath the area of late medieval collapse at the west end of the nave of the church.
- AW With reference to Martin Carver's work at Portmahomack, potential for lifting the interior of the church should not be overlooked.
- AN Reminded audience of the unpublished data from Roy Ritchie's excavation and desirability of bringing it into the public domain.
- RH Suggested that there is a perception that big excavations are too expensive, whilst small excavations don't tell you anything. Small-scale, targeted work, however, would be relatively inexpensive and could tell us much: the Isle, Kirkmadrine and pollen work are but three examples. It would be important, however, that the longer-term desirability of undertaking large-scale work was not lost sight of.
- IF Enquired whether it was the Trust's intention to produce a popular publication of the Whithorn reports.
- AG Replied that there was an intention to convert Chapter 2 into a popular text.
- FH Enquired whether this would be eligible for HS funding.
- DG Replied that it would be appropriate for a rewriting of the HS booklet, after the completion of the York Archaeological Trust work.

- MMC Suggested that this would be a good time for HS to get Peter Hill to convert the monograph into a Batsford or Batsford-type book.
- DG Outlined current plans for the Priory Museum at Whithorn: HS intention to bring the museum up to date, to provide a 'seamless experience' to those visiting the Priory Museum and the Trust shop / exhibition. Awaiting outcome of a lottery bid to enable new interpretation boards on-site and in the Priory museum.
- CS Noted possibility of promoting Whithorn in Ireland: Society of Medieval Irish Archaeology annual conference first weekend in July 1998. Facility would be available for poster / photograph display.
- JB Noted possibility of a link-up at the end of August - October 1998 to draw down funding from Irish Scottish Arts Link.
- PH Few of the big ideas about the site are currently incorporated into the Trust exhibition: refurbishment and updating of the exhibition would wish to incorporate some of the big ideas from the monograph report. Are there any areas of the report where there is anything overtly wrong / misguided etc ?
- RH Felt that 'towns and crafts' aspects of the settlement interpretation might be one area that could be 'downgraded'. Urban development is typically characterised by fluidity and change: persistence of, for example, comb-making in the same spot over time does not look like a feature of typical urban development.
- AW Agreed. And felt that the hunt for 'urban origins' was something of a lost cause, and that the whole 'urbanism' thing should be avoided.
- RH Expressed slight worries over the Irish link and questioned whether this was Dublin or just the Whithorn locals [*meaning I think: is the 'Irishness' of the 11th/12th century material culture the result simply of trade from Dublin or locally organised trade around the Irish Sea or the result of Hiberno-Norse settlement in the Whithorn area?*]
- CS Commented that the recent publication of the Waterford excavations might provide useful comparanda / contrast.
- AN Noted that the evidence of the combs and comb-making is strongly suggestive of a link with Dublin.
- RH Did not agree with conclusions / cultural affinity of the comb evidence [*no alternatives given: implication of parallels with York ??*]
- MMC Stressed that we should not overlook [*possibility of ?*] comparative material from Carlisle and York.
- CS Reminded audience that the concept of the Irish Monastic Town was proposed without

excavation.

- DD Reminded audience that archaeology is not everything. The advantage of historical and linguistic research can be cheap since University salaries are already covered.
- AW (passing on memo from T.Clancy) that useful work could come of a new edition of the Old Scots Life of Ninian, plus new introduction.
- JH Referred to further research that could be undertaken into inscriptions and art history.
- RO Criticism of current historical models for SW Scotland: desirability of a review of the historical documentation of the area and revision of current models.
- AG Summing up: vote of thanks. Appeal to re-invigorate the Whithorn Trust Research Committee.

APPENDIX 2: CORRESPONDENCE FROM PROFESSOR CHARLES THOMAS

Correspondence dated: 30.01.98

Early Christian Whithorn (5th - 7th century)

In order to understand a slightly wider historical perspective of Whithorn and area, it is now clear that Kirkmadrine is of crucial importance. Given Derek Craig's demonstration that the three inscribed stones do come from the old kirkyard, what *is* the site? Fieldwork and aerial photography have drawn a blank. Is it conceivable that a planned invitation to the Channel 4 Time Team would introduce, for free, what might be a useful first exploration?

Further areas of research

The Isle of Whithorn remains, more or less, a blank. With the dubious exception of the Chapel, no site there has an archaeological date. I have in the past searched the low cliff exposure all around, with no result. Aerial photography reveals a good many features. If more excavation is planned, should not the Isle be a high priority target?

APPENDIX 3: CORRESPONDENCE FROM PROFESSOR DAVID DUMVILLE

Correspondence dated: March 1998

The seminar was very interesting: Peter's presentations were fascinating, as ever, but we really needed a two-day meeting so that the principal academic issues could be thrashed out properly. In that sense, we didn't get properly into seminar mode: the crucial questions for further work never got thoroughly debated. It therefore seems to me that Mike McCarthy's suggestion was an excellent one - that we get something on paper to serve as a focus for debate. If, say, eight or ten people would write 1 - 3 pages on the crucial subjects on which progress could be made, the whole could be circulated to the same group as the agenda for a new seminar. This could be done either simply thus or by making them a new Whithorn pamphlet, duly numbered.

More progress seemed to me to have been made on discussing funding. One thing it occurred to me to wonder is whether Whithorn has any formal twinning arrangements with foreign towns. What about using the Martin connexion to twin with somewhere in the diocese of Tours and with university-towns where there are principal churches dedicated to Martin in other European countries? This must be one way of building both tourist-links and connexions with foreign universities. Furthermore, there must be places in N. America and Australasia to which people from the Whithorn area once migrated - your local historians should know this. There may even be a Whithorn in one of those four countries or a place named after St Ninian: to make connexions with such places (perhaps using the St Andrews' Societies in N. America as a means of making identifications and contact). Perhaps even the 'St Trinian's' angle could be exploited! Certainly the suggestion that Peter should be put on the N. American lecture-circuit was an excellent one.

I wasn't quite sure about the burden of Tony's various remarks concerning vacancies on the Trust and the (hypothetical or existing?) Research committee. If I can be of any help in promoting the Whithorn cause, in whatever capacity, I should be glad and honoured to be of service. Certainly a research-committee of some sort is necessary to keep problems, options and opportunities constantly under review, to co-ordinate research bearing on Whithorn, and to try to take a strategic view on academic issues.

APPENDIX 4: COMMENTS ON THE PLANT MACROFOSSILS

Dr T G Holden (*Headland Archaeology*)

A small number of samples have already been analysed from the site by Huntley *et al* revealing something of the potential that these botanical assemblages have for adding to our understanding of the site. Excellent organic preservation has been noted from South Sector Pits 1 and 9 while relatively high concentrations of charred remains have been identified from the church (nave and chancel) and from outbuildings.

There are a number of particularly important aspects of the site economy that can be addressed by these plant remains. If the monastic settlement at Hoddum is anything to go by then specialist areas of the site might be concerned with the storage, processing and redistribution of cereal products. The cereals and agricultural techniques used should be evident from the nature of the charred plant remains. The scale of processing activities would be of significant interest. At Hoddum, for example, large scale storage and processing was implied by the number and size of the drying kilns on the site. This should readily be distinguishable from small scale >subsistence= type processing provided that an appropriate sampling strategy is incorporated into any future work. Experimental wheat cultivation on the west coast of Scotland during the Anglian period was also implied from Hoddum and contrasts with Whithorn would prove very interesting.

Apart from cereal processing the work at Whithorn has identified other features associated with economic activities. Pit 9 (South sector) for example revealed the presence of large quantities of blackberry seed probably associated with dyeing.

One outstanding feature of the site is the potential for the recovery of waterlogged organic remains. Pit 1 (South sector), a probable cess-pit has already provided important information regarding diet, lifestyle and potential trade with the continent through the identification of such things as the Mediterranean herbs, dill and coriander. These are probably the earliest finds of such herbs in Scotland since the departure of the Romans. They have also been recovered from the slightly later contexts from Buiston Crannog indicating that they are not just a monastic phenomenon. Any further information on the trade and the use of such exotic species would add a further dimension to the analyses of other classes of artifacts (eg glass and ceramics) with respect to contacts with the continent. Certainly, if evidence from Carolingian France is anything to go by a much wider spectrum of plants might be expected.

In order to recover the type of information outlined above it will be necessary to include a programme of sampling and focussed analysis as part of any future excavation at the site. The samples already examined have highlighted the potential of the plant remains but a site of this importance would warrant a much greater >environmental= input than has hitherto been the case.