

The Institute for Northern Studies UHI warmly welcomes you
to the Seventh International St Magnus Conference

Borne on a Carrying Stream: How Water has Shaped Heritage, Identity and Power



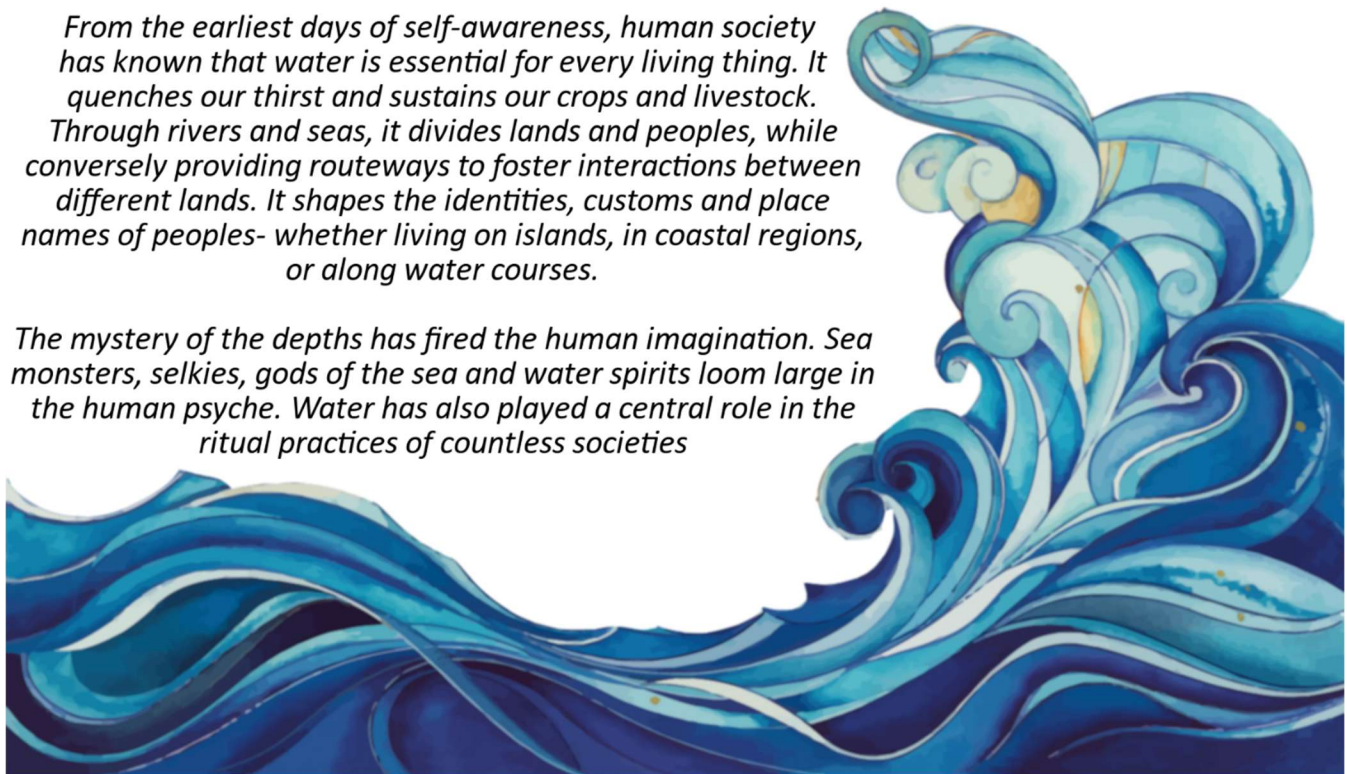
St Magnus. Unknown artist. Copyright Stromness Museum. By kind permission.

15-17 April 2026

UHI Perth

From the earliest days of self-awareness, human society has known that water is essential for every living thing. It quenches our thirst and sustains our crops and livestock. Through rivers and seas, it divides lands and peoples, while conversely providing routeways to foster interactions between different lands. It shapes the identities, customs and place names of peoples- whether living on islands, in coastal regions, or along water courses.

The mystery of the depths has fired the human imagination. Sea monsters, selkies, gods of the sea and water spirits loom large in the human psyche. Water has also played a central role in the ritual practices of countless societies



A message from the organising team

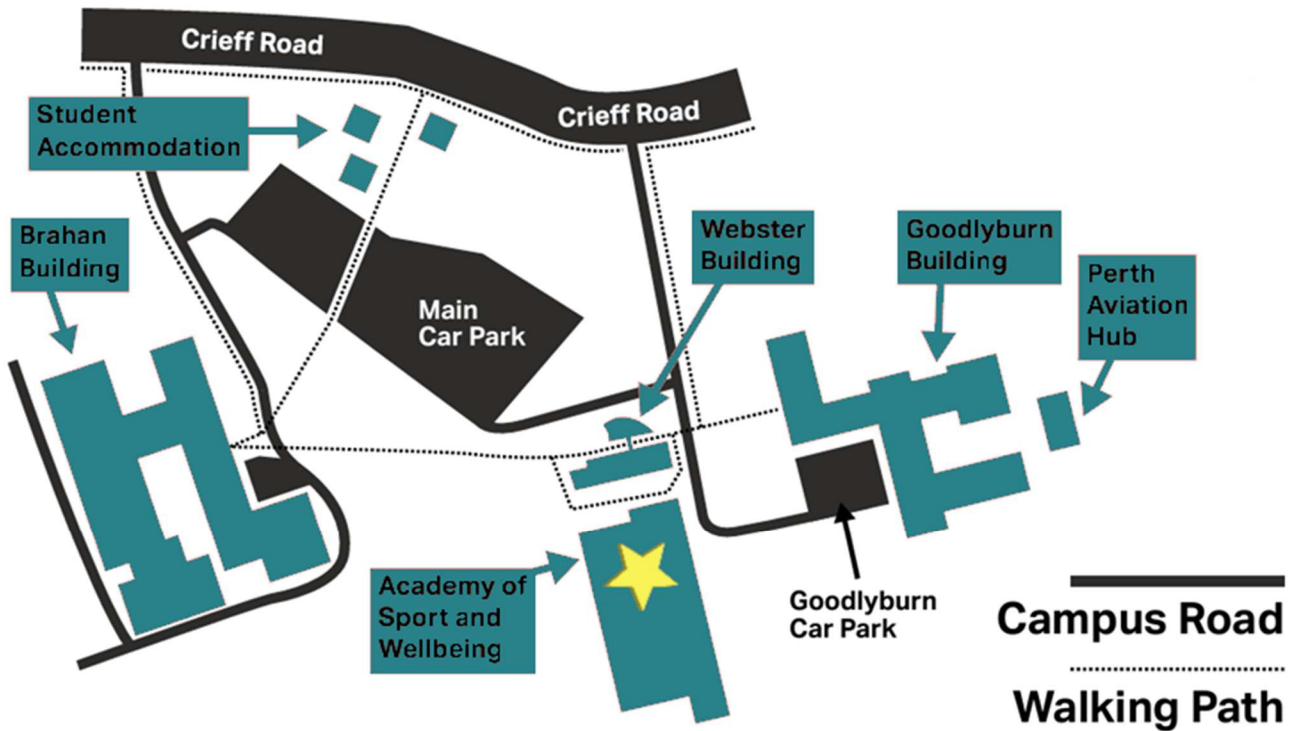
We are delighted to welcome you to the seventh St Magnus Conference. The first to take place at the UHI Perth campus. We are thrilled by the variety of submissions we have received and are sure that you will agree that the result is a truly interdisciplinary showcase of research and artistic output.

We have done our best to bring together complementary papers into panels which will help to fuel interesting discussion, but that does not detract from the unique angle taken by each contribution. We strongly encourage everyone to attend panels outwith their usual areas of interest. Hopefully this will bring new perspectives and new interests!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask any of the organisers.

Have a wonderful conference!

UHI | PERTH



Conference Location

The conference takes place in the upper corridor of the Academy of Sport and Wellbeing. When you enter the building you will see the stairs ahead of you. Alternatively, there is a lift located on the right once you have walked past the reception desk.

The field trip will leave from the main car park

Parking is free on campus

The main buses serving the campus from the city centre are the 1, 2 15 and 70, operated by Stagecoach

Wednesday 15th April

Coffee and registration in Bradán Room (963) from 9am-9.25am

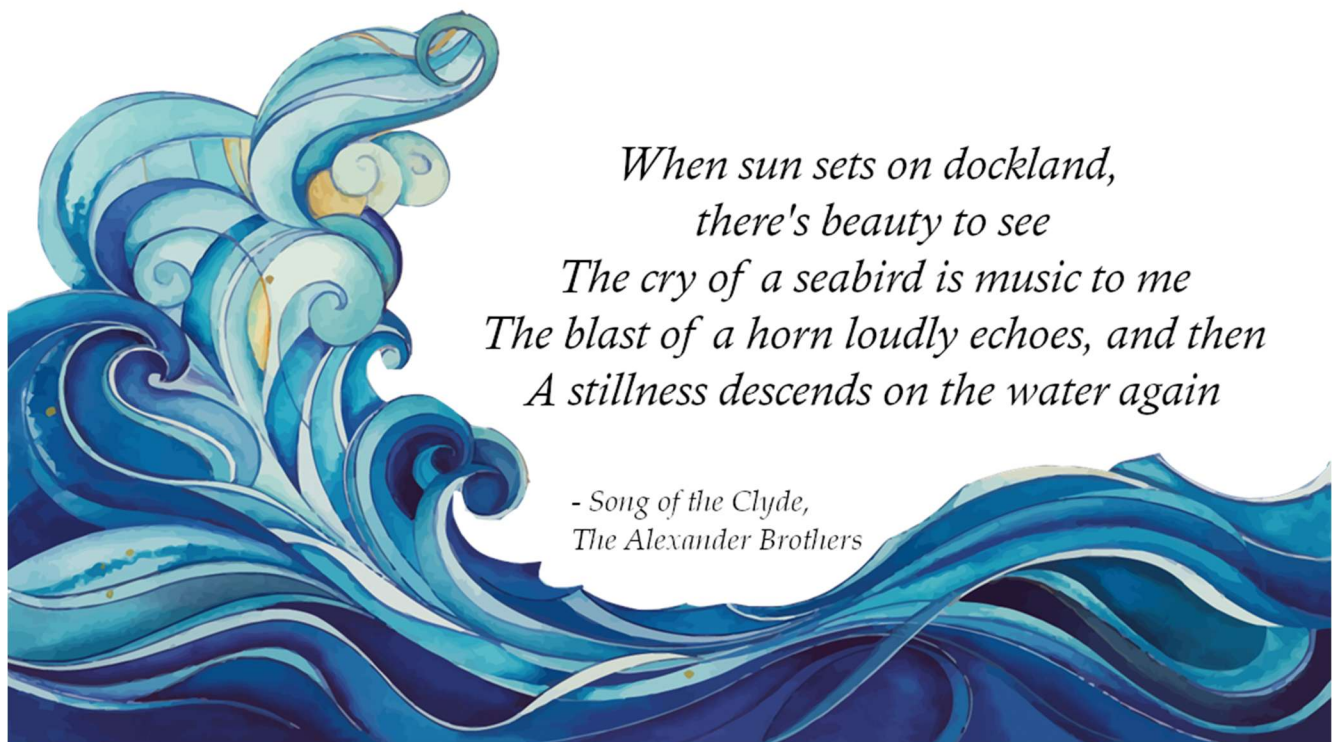
	<u>Drakkar Room 959/960</u>	<u>Selkie Room 961/962</u>
9.30am	<p>Session 1D. Portages and Sea Communication in the Norse world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alex Sanmark - Sea travel and the use of inland waterways in Norse Scotland • Harley Nicole Botham - Islands, Rivers and Raiders: Viking Presence on the Guadalquivir • Claire Stokes - The Solent Strait in the Viking Age 	<p>Session 1S. Water, Sustainability and the Anthropocene.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maureen Whalen - Impacts of Nature-based Arctic and Sub-Arctic Island Tourism (Shetland Islands, Faroe Islands, and Iceland) • Chris J Spray and Thomas Spray - Where to for rivers, rewilding and restoration – from past histories to possible futures on Tweed • Jack Dyce - “I’ll sing of a river I’m happy beside. The song that I sing is a song of the Clyde”. Personhood, exploitation, pollution and protection • Siobhán Beatson - Harvesting the Tides: Traditional Marine Practices of the Early Modern Sea Loch Inhabitants (<i>Session ends 11.10am</i>)

Coffee Available in the Bradán Room (963) from 11am

11.30am	<p>Session 2D. Water and Norse Place Names</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abigail Lloyd - Structuring space and perceiving place: water, medieval settlement and identity • Stefan Brink - The Maritime Aspect Regarding the Background to Early Scandinavian Polities <p>(12.20pm) Session 3D. Rosie Bonté (Brepols) - Publishing for early career academics</p>	<p>Session 2S. Water, Community and Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kelly Morrison - The Sea as Exile and Belonging: Women’s Stories of Scotland’s Coasts • Linda Cracknell - Sea Marked: Throwing a Line to a Coastal Past. • Sarah Squire - Keep it Convivial: Watershed as bioregional patch. • Linda Johnson-Bell - Sacred Waters, Shared Worlds: Cosmology and Maritime Mobility in the North Atlantic
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Lunch served in Bradán Room (963) from 1pm

Afternoon Sessions		
	<u>Drakkar Room 959/960</u>	<u>Selkie Room 961/962</u>
2pm	<p>Session 4D. Norse Community and Spirituality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Em Horne - Water-based communities in the Íslendingasögur • Tara Athanasiou - Forging ties at sea: negotiating non-kin social relations during Viking Age maritime migration • Alicen Geddes - Earl Rognvaldr the sea-king: the spiritual dimension of Orkneyinga Saga 	<p>Session 3S. Cultural Archipelagos.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane Trowell – From islomaniacs to archipelagians: indoing the moat-in-the-head • Lesley McKay – Narrating Archipelagic Absence: Fiction as Historiographic Recovery in Late Medieval Unst • Anna Souhami - ‘Stuck on a rock, out in the North Sea’: identity and power in remote island police work
<i>Coffee available in the Bradán Room (963) from 3.30pm</i>		
4pm	<p>Keynote: Dr Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson</p> <p>Living with the Sea - people and waterscapes in the Viking Age Baltic</p>	



*When sun sets on dockland,
there's beauty to see
The cry of a seabird is music to me
The blast of a horn loudly echoes, and then
A stillness descends on the water again*

*- Song of the Clyde,
The Alexander Brothers*

Thursday 15th April

	<u>Drakkar Room 959/960</u>	<u>Selkie Room 961/962</u>
9.00am	<p>Session 5D. Early Medieval Celtic Seafaring in Reality and Memory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane Logan - Shetland's earliest Christians • Rebecca Madlener - Gaelic place-name elements for 'bay' and Norse-Gaelic linguistic contact • Freya Smith - Peril, Punishment and Salvation: the role of the sea in Sechrán Cléirech Choluim Chille 	<p>Session 4S. Fluvial Poetics and Imaginaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danila Sokolov - The Fluvial Poetics of Early Modern Lyric • Rebecca Drake - Medieval-Contemporary Hydropoetics at St Nicholas Fields • Arianna Introna - A lambing ewe doesn't care if there's a drought or not': Interspecies Grief in Rachele Atalla's <i>Thirsty Animals</i> • Ullrich Kockel - The Mourning of Staburags and the Rise of the Latvian Nation: Ethnological Observations on the Banks of the Daugava River <i>(session ends at 10.40am)</i>
<i>Coffee available in the Bradán Room (963) from 10.30am</i>		
11am	<p>Session 6D. Fantastical Sea Creatures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ronny Spaans - The transformation of the Troll Whale into the Kraken and Sea Serpent in the Early Modern Period • Liv Helene Willumsen - The whale mentioned in witchcraft trials • Sine Halkjelsvik Bjordal - The Scientific Afterlife of the Norwegian Sea Serpent c. 1750–1880 	<p>Session 5S. Gaelic Riverbanks and Shorelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carolyn McNamara - Shellfish, Shorelines, and Shared Identity: Linking Gàidhlig and Marine Biodiversity • Mairéad Nic Craith - Sea Words and Coastal Expressions: An Ecological Exploration of Sea Tamogotchi • Katherine Wren - Musicalising the power of water in a Highland Community
<i>Lunch served in Bradán Room (963) from 12.30pm</i>		

Afternoon Sessions		
	<u>Drakkar Room 959/960</u>	<u>Selkie Room 961/962</u>
1.30pm	<p>Session 7D. Northern Scotland from the 18th-20th Centuries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebecca Cornwell - What does botanical writing reveal about the 'terraqueous' island archipelago of Shetland? • Leila Cheurfa - The Debt of the Sea: Credit and Debt Practices Shaped by the Maritime Spaces of Northern Scotland in the Eighteenth Century • Edward Graham - Threads across the water: How oceans, rivers and the fur trade connected northern Canada and northern Scotland during the age of the Hudson's Bay Company • Andrew Comley - The strange tale of George, a Monster and Duplex Tanks 	<p>Session 6S. Water, Folklore and Spirituality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir - Selkie Metamorphoses and the Sea: Trauma, Exploitation, and Memory in C.J. Cooke's A Haunting in the Arctic • Madalaine Blyth: Sodden Cloth - The ritual relationship between textiles and water in the Scottish Witchcraft Trials • Jane Austin - Liminal: A Directors Chat and Poetry Film Screening • Ness Bosch - The Aquatic Sacred: An exploration of the spiritual ties between water and humanity, and the global crisis
<i>Coffee available in the Bradán Room (963) from 3.10pm</i>		
3.30pm		<p>Keynote: Professor Peter Mackay</p> <p>"feumaidh barrachd cuspairean a bhith ann airson dàin na clachan, eòin marbh, muir 's cànan?" / "There must be more subjects for poems than these: stones, dead birds, language, the seas?": water, poems and watery poems</p>
5.30pm	St Magnus Conference Dinner	

Friday 17th April

9am	<p>Tour of Perthshire</p> <p>Starting from UHI Perth, hosted by the organisers</p>
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List of Abstracts

Drakkar Room

Session 1D. Portages and Sea Communication in the Norse world

Professor Alex Sanmark - Sea travel and the use of inland waterways in Norse Scotland. Much research on Norse communication using boats has focused on sea travel, with some attention paid to travel along the major rivers in the east. An aspect that has not yet received full attention is the existence and use of smaller, inland waterways. There is increasing evidence of regular use of inland waterways in Norse Scotland, as seen for example in Orkney and in the Uists. Some of these routes stretch across whole islands, at times in combination with portages, and some are shorter. The use of these routes demonstrates that islands were not viewed as 'blocks' of land that could only be crossed on foot or horseback. Instead, land and sea should be seen as two integrated parts, with water routes providing access from the sea to inland settlements and other key sites. As a consequence, the traditional map divisions between land and sea must be reconsidered.

Harley Botham - Islands, Rivers and Raiders: Viking Presence on the Guadalquivir. Ninth-century Viking incursions in the Iberian Peninsula are often overshadowed by more extensively documented incursions in northern Europe and the British Isles. Yet, river routes in Iberia served as important waterways for travel, trade, and military activity during the early medieval period. This paper examines Norse-Iberian interaction along the Guadalquivir River, drawing on contemporary literary sources to explore the nature of these interactions and the power dynamics that they reveal. Particular attention is given to the possibility of a temporary Viking settlement on Isla Menor, considering strategic motivations and the role of the river in facilitating mobility and access across al-Andalus. The paper also investigates the impact and consequences of Viking presence in the Guadalquivir for local political and economic structures in al-Andalus, demonstrating how even short-term incursions could prompt changes in the landscape and influence military strategies for defending centres of power. By focusing on the Guadalquivir River, this paper sheds light on an underexplored aspect of Viking seafaring and contributes to a broader understanding of early medieval mobility and connectivity.

Claire Stokes - The Solent Strait in the Viking Age. The Solent strait both separates and connects the Isle of Wight and the south coast of Britain. Although only 1-5km wide has the Solent shaped the identity of the island and islanders as distinct and different to those from the mainland? This presentation will suggest that this separation was significant to Scandinavian seafarers during the Viking Age. The 9th century Anglo-Saxon Chronicles indicate Scandinavian sea journeys that passed the island raising the question of whether these seafarers used it as a navigational landmark and temporary landing-site to replenish resources. Whereas the late 10th century Anglo-Saxon Chronicles are explicit in naming the island as a base from which Scandinavian forces conducted attacks along the south coast. Did the Solent offer security for their camp within Wessex and did the island's strategic location offer accessibility along sea routes from Kent to Ireland and Normandy? Although seemingly crucial to the system of beacons that warned Wessex of sea-borne incursions, the island was excluded from the early medieval Tribal Hidage records. Was this an indication of Wessex also perceiving the islanders as something separate, as well as them being recognised as a distinct entity by Viking Age Scandinavians?

Session 2D. Water and Norse Place Names

Abigail Lloyd - Structuring space and perceiving place: water, medieval settlement and identity.

Historical place-names reveal much about the identities and motivations of the inhabitants of a place (cf. Coates 2012, 2013). They represent invaluable evidence, not limited to reflecting a centralised, ruling or religious elite (cf. Cox 1976, Baker 2005). Names are the means by which communities structure their cognitive landscape as it interrelates with the physical, external landscape. The research underlying this paper demonstrated that certain topographic place-names, in fact, tell us much more about human interaction with a place than about topography alone, critiquing Gelling (1998), (2000) [1984], Gelling and Cole (2014) [2000]. This paper explores certain landscapes – ‘island’ sites, bounded in some way by water – which were repeatedly selected by communities for settlement in the early to late medieval period. It sheds light on the interplay between natural topographic constraint and the human perception and definition of place, as inhabitants structured the environment to meet their needs. Having assembled a national corpus of Old English and Old Scandinavian place-names, this paper combines detailed linguistic analysis with topographic, geological, historical and archaeological datasets in an innovative, GIS web application designed specifically to illuminate this topic.

Prof Stefan Brink – Water in early medieval Scandinavia. It seems obvious that “water” has been of utmost importance in early Scandinavia, and to understand the political and organisational units of early Scandinavia, one has to change the perspective and observe land from the sea. So for example the names of the coastal “*land*” (provinces, i.e. the earliest organisations we know of) are given from the perspective from the sea, and the political units, which eventually become Norway, Denmark and Sweden, can easily be seen as “constructed” as sea-based organisations, with a background in three distinct cultural regions, from where their influence has expanded (i.a. using methods of the influential Swedish Geographer, Torsten Hägerstrand, and his terminology of innovations center, diffusion etc.).

Session 4D. Norse Community and Spirituality

Emma Horne - Water-based communities in the *Íslendingasögur*. This paper aims to explore the impact of bodies of water, especially freshwater bodies, on the shaping of communities and identity in the Icelandic Family Saga corpus. It will explore saga episodes and their geographical concentration in the Icelandic landscape. It suggests that many of the sagas which depict an interconnected community - Droplaugarsona, Fljotsdæla, Floamanna, Laxdæla, Ljósvetninga, Reykdæla, Svarfdæla, Vatnsdæla, and Vápnfirðinga sagas – are narratologically and geographically focused on a central body of water. This pattern contrasts with sagas about individuals - such as Egill, Njáll, or Hávarður - which are more geographically disparate and lack the obvious sense of a cohesive people or community identity. Overall, this paper suggests that the topography of Iceland shaped the identity of settlers, the lived landscape of communities, and the eventual geographical framing of saga narratives in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Tara Athanasiou - Forging ties at sea: negotiating non-kin social relations during Viking Age maritime migration. The experience and impact of maritime migration went far beyond the simple movement of people and goods between different geographical places. The process of maritime travel, from securing or building a ship, to the selection of the crew and demographic composition of the travelling group, drew on the pre-existing social, political and economic networks to which individuals were part of. Rather than being static collectives, social groups and networks were dynamic forces that evolved during and after the migration process, both in terms of composition and from a relational perspective. The experience of seaborne travel forged new social groupings bound together through the shared experience of travel. During this process the concept and lived experience of the household maintained its centrality as the key social organisational principle. Although the process of travel and migration fractured and reformed households in terms of geographical placement and membership, the evolved household was eminently mobile and flexible. This paper will explore the composition of the social

groups who migrated together, their agency in the process and the ways in which relationships and hierarchies were negotiated within the spatially confined and time-bounded communities forged whilst travelling by ship to new homes.

Alicen Geddes - Earl Rognvaldr the sea-king: the spiritual dimension of Orkneyinga Saga. The Skaldic verse by Earl Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson's expedition to the Holy Land in Orkneyinga Saga reveals the argument that there is a perpetuating manifestation of the sea within Viking poetry. Furthermore, the union of poetry together with the sea forms a spiritual dimension to be illuminated in both the pagan and post-pagan eras. This concept is an exploration to establish that the Vikings' perception of the sea possesses the distinguishing trait of a heathen nature and is debated through the lens of the earl's isolated stanzas. Orkneyinga Saga is a body of mediaeval material caught up in the flux of the pagan to Christian transition. These theological dynamics test the definition of a spiritual dimension by projecting upon the sea its intrinsic Christian and pagan properties. Through evaluation of the poetry, its dróttkvætt form, The Holy Bible and the sagas concluded that the sea left Christianity at the shore and that the great body of water is a pagan domain.

Session 5D. Early Medieval Celtic Seafaring in Reality and Memory

Jane Logan - Shetland's earliest Christians. This paper argues that Christianity was introduced to Shetland by priests or monks from the Irish tradition in the seventh century AD, and that it was sufficiently well established, prior to the coming of the Norse at the beginning of the ninth century, for there to be church buildings, churchyards, and monastic sites. Early documents relate the writers' perception of life and the political situation in the sixth and seventh centuries AD, and tell of monks setting out into the ocean in search of 'white martyrdom'. Cross-slabs and other stones found in Shetland reveal the presence of Christians in the seventh and eighth centuries, and connections with the Columban *familia* and the wider world. Ship technology available at the time was well able to tackle the sea between Scotland and Shetland, and further north to Faroe and Iceland. Scrutiny of the *Pap*- named places in Shetland has revealed little evidence of Irish priests or monks in association with those sites, but the evidence of eighth century shrines demonstrates that churches were built housing relics, which argues that monks reached the islands well before the Viking Age.

Rebecca Madlener - Gaelic place-name elements for 'bay' and Norse-Gaelic linguistic contact. People have been travelling on and settling along the waters of the Hebrides for a long time. Norse and Gaelic speakers met along these waters and this contact resulted in an exchange of ideas which included the borrowing of Norse terminology into Gaelic. It is likely that Gaelic speakers also adopted new concepts alongside these borrowed terms. However, the Norse influence on the Gaelic coastal vocabulary has not previously been investigated in detail. This paper investigates the meaning of four Gaelic place-name elements for 'bay': *bàgh*, *camas*, *geodha*, and *òb*. It brings together information about the physical reality of the places these elements are applied to, how Gaelic speakers use these terms outside of place-names, and the terms' etymologies. Understanding the semantic differences between these terms provides insights into how Gaelic speakers perceive the waters along their coastline. Three of the investigated terms (*bàgh*, *geodha*, *òb*) were borrowed from Norse into Gaelic. The Gaelic perception of the coastal landscape thus appears to have been at least partially influenced by contact with Norse speakers and their perception of the coastal landscape.

Freya Smith - Peril, Punishment and Salvation: the role of the sea in Sechrán Cléirech Choluim Chille. The sea is a central component of Medieval Gaelic voyage literature. It is an imagined space that is the site of real voyages and creative otherworlds. Voyage narratives are part of the shared literary heritage of Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, with a range of secular and hagiographical narratives as active parts of the written tradition from the early medieval period to the nineteenth century. This paper will focus on one narrative. Sechrán Cléirech Choluim Chille is an early modern reworking of a medieval voyage

narrative, found as part of a sixteenth century Gaelic life of Colum Cille (St Columba) written in Donegal. The paper will explore how the sea is used creatively within the narrative as a setting for human peril, divine punishment and salvation. The sea is a site of natural and divine power in the narrative, central to the dual themes of retribution and salvation. The natural power of the ocean is balanced against its use as a location where salvation can be achieved through pilgrimage. The framework of the voyage is a series of imagined islands, where encounters with fantastical creatures, banished murderers and a magnificent church combine to give the narrative its distinct Christian identity and allegorical purpose.

Session 6D. Fantastical Sea Creatures.

Ronny Spaans - The transformation of the Troll Whale into the Kraken and Sea Serpent in the Early Modern Period. On the famous map of the Swedish Bishop Olaus Magnus from 1539, *Carta Marina*, the Norwegian coast is covered with many types of sea monsters. One of the most dangerous monsters is called the troll whale by Olaus Magnus, and it is likely that other sea monsters in *Carta Marina* are also variants of this dangerous whale. The term troll whale originates from the vernacular in Norway, and the whale is mentioned in poetry, natural history, and topographical texts in Danish-Norwegian culture throughout the early modern period. However, at the beginning of the 18th century, the troll whale more or less disappears from written culture. At the same time, the characteristics of the troll whale become linked to other sea monsters that enjoyed popularity throughout the 18th century: the kraken and the sea serpent.

In this paper, I study this transformation undergone by the whale. I examine the rise and fall of the troll whale in the works of the following authors, both poets and natural historians: Anders Arrebo, Petter Dass, Erik Pontoppidan, and Knud Leem.

Liv Helene Willumsen - The whale mentioned in witchcraft trials. This presentation deals with descriptions of the whale in court records from witchcraft trials. During the 1600s, which was the period of witchcraft trials around the North Sea, the meaning of the 'troll whale' undergoes a change. The portrayal of the wonderful 'troll whale' in the North Atlantic was reduced and demonized. The wonderful whale of the North Atlantic had new qualities attributed to him. In two trials in landscapes bordering the North Atlantic, references to the concept of a dangerous whale are found. Due to the learned European doctrine of demonology – the intellectual study of demons and their powers – the whale is turned into an evil creature. The whale is not any longer an agent acting on his own but is used by a witch to perform *trolldom*, 'witchcraft'. The demonological doctrine included shapeshifting. And here the whale comes into the picture. A woman interrogated during a witchcraft trial might tell that she used shapeshifting in order to reach a gathering place or to perform collective witchcraft. We hear about shapeshifting into animals, birds, and whales, the last to overturn boats and cause shipwrecks.

Sine Halkjelsvik Bjordal - The Scientific Afterlife of the Norwegian Sea Serpent c. 1750–1880. In 1752, Bishop Erik Pontoppidan, in his work *The Natural History of Norway* (English translation 1755), forcefully argued for the existence of the Norwegian sea serpent. About two decades later, the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters posthumously published an article by the highly respected naturalist Bishop Johan Ernst Gunnerus, who judged such reports improbable and unscientific. Yet, the serpent did not vanish as a natural-historical object. Discussion of sightings and evidence continued well into the nineteenth century for scholars in Norway and abroad. This paper explores the Norwegian sea serpent's afterlife within late Enlightenment natural history and nineteenth-century zoology, based on a variety of both published and handwritten sources. The paper attempts to answer two questions: Why did the Norwegian sea serpent attract such sustained interest? And why was it so difficult for naturalists and scientists to declare it a mere product of imagination?

Session 7D. Northern Scotland from the 18th- 20th Centuries

Rebecca Cornwell - Watery beings in watery places: What does historical botanical writing reveal about terraqueous Shetland?

What does botanical writing reveal about the 'terraqueous' island archipelago of Shetland (Fielding 2021: 273)? The late Shetland botanist Walter Scott and his colleague Richard Palmer wrote that 'Shetland habitats shade into each other in a quite bewildering way' (Scott and Palmer 1987: 7). These habitats include salt water, fresh water, sand dunes and beaches, sea-cliffs, pastures, bogs, marshes, moorland, heath, and even desert-like fellfield. Plants are watery beings and so make water perceptible, especially in the liminal spaces that defy easy classification, and indicate changes to water in the environment. I argue that plants and botanical writing are a way to understand, to make sense of, and to reposition ourselves in the more-than-human world during this era of climate change and biodiversity loss. I will explore this by drawing upon historical recordings of Shetland plants including the surviving manuscripts of James Roberston's 1769 and Charles Fothergill's 1806 voyages to Shetland, stories of present-day observations, and my own fieldwork in Shetland.

Leïla Cheurfa - The Debt of the Sea: Credit and Debt Practices Shaped by the Maritime Spaces of Northern Scotland in the Eighteenth Century.

In Northern Scotland, daily exchanges relied on credit ties, both among local inhabitants and with more distant trading partners. The scarcity of ready money created strong social and economic relationships, particularly in Orkney, Shetland, and certain parts of the Highlands where the sea determined the circuits of exchange. Credit rested on chains of trust that stretched across distances. Water also shaped the identity of these communities. Fishing and the leasing (tack) of rivers generated debts and legal disputes of their own. The northern towns, such as Inverness and Aberdeen, structured their commercial networks around rivers and ports, essential to the flows of imports and exports (linen, tobacco, wine, spices), which were often bound together by credit contracts. Maritime uncertainties carried significant risks: immobilized capital, lost cargoes, delayed payments. The sea thus became a true infrastructure of credit, forcing individuals to rely on trusted intermediaries. It could be perceived as a factor of isolation for these societies, making them dependent on and vulnerable to credit. Courts then emerged as a central tool for transforming trust into legal constraint, even across distances. Yet the islands could also serve as a refuge for debtors on the run. Water therefore appeared as both a resource and a constraint: opening up economic flows while simultaneously creating dependencies. It formed a material and symbolic pillar of socio-economic relations, power, trust, and vulnerability in eighteenth-century northern Scotland.

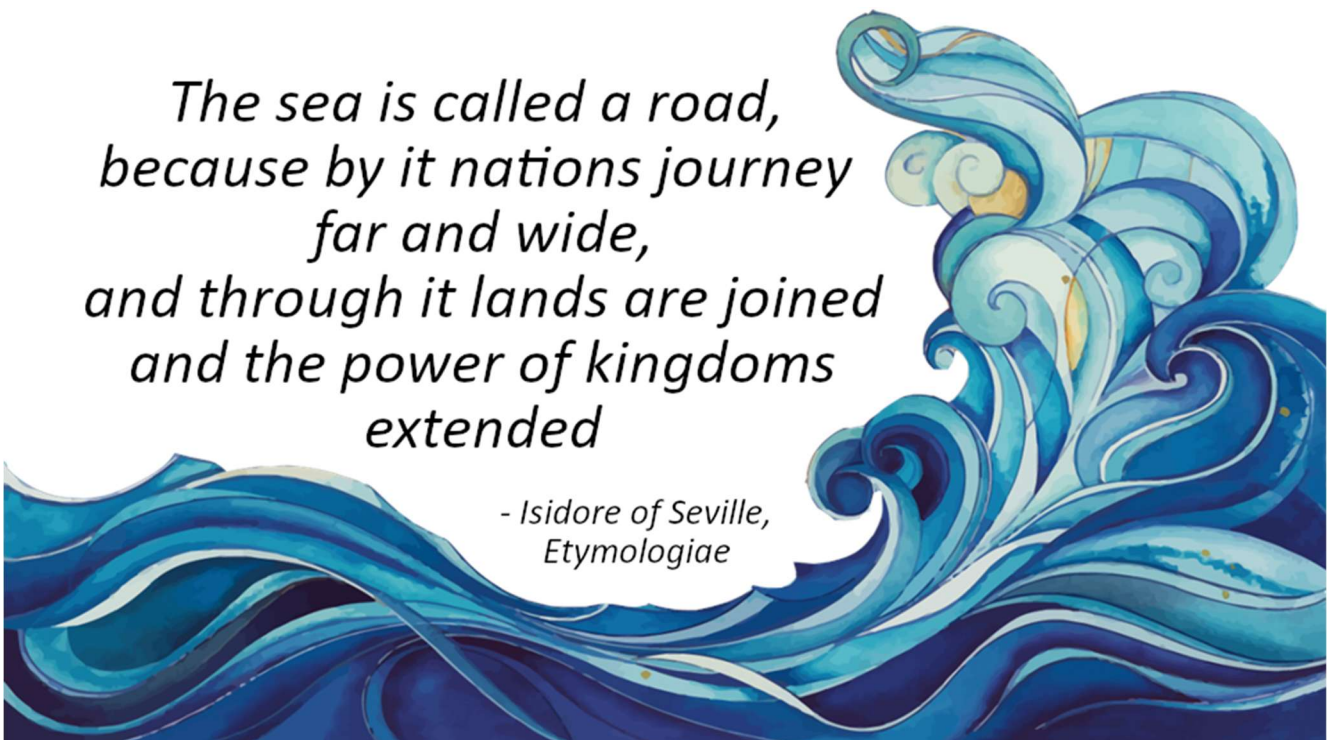
Dr Edward Graham - Threads across the water: How oceans, rivers and the fur trade connected northern Canada and northern Scotland during the age of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Founded in 1670, in a concession awarded to Prince Rupert of the Rhine by Charles II, the Hudson's Bay Company was granted a monopoly to exploit the rich fur country northwest of Lake Superior, a huge area encompassing all waters draining into Hudson Bay. Consequently, the company grew in power & influence, operating as the *de facto* government of British North America until the establishment of Canada in 1867. In 1799 more than 80% of HBC's staff were recruited through its office in Stromness, Orkney (Goldring 1980). Travelling up rivers by canoe into the region's heartlands, Orcadians met, traded with, and often married the Indigenous peoples who were vital partners in the fur trade, and in surviving the harsh northern Canadian environment. Following the Highland Clearances, Lord Selkirk sponsored settlement in the area later to become Winnipeg, a haven for displaced and emigrant Scots and Irish, their Indigenous partners, and their descendants who became the Métis nations of Canada. Here we look at how water and climate shaped the connections, communications, and building of communities between Scotland and Canada through the agency of the HBC.

Andrew Comley - The strange tale of George, a Monster and Duplex Tanks. In 1943 during the build-up for Operation Overlord, better known as the invasion of Normandy or more simply D-Day, the coastline between Findhorn and Nairn was used for amphibious invasion practice as it resembled Sword beach on the eastern side of the planned invasion front. At the same time, landing craft crews were being trained at Fortrose at the aptly named HMS Monster and Duplex tank crews were training out of Fort George. As part of this Duplex Drive Valentine tanks with canvas skirts to make them buoyant also underwent secret trials off Culbin sands, with up to eight of them being lost, of which only two have ever been found. This paper will therefore explore the direct and indirect importance of the waters of the Moray Firth in the success of the Allied invasion of France, from the aforementioned invasion rehearsals through to Operation Fortitude North that kept German troops tied up in Norway during the critical period.

*The sea is called a road,
because by it nations journey
far and wide,
and through it lands are joined
and the power of kingdoms
extended*

*- Isidore of Seville,
Etymologiae*



Selkie Room

Session 1S. Water, Sustainability and the Anthropocene.

Maureen Whalen - Impacts of Nature-based Arctic and Sub-Arctic Island Tourism (Shetland Islands, Faroe Islands, and Iceland)

I am embarking on a PhD research project exploring the complex mosaic of relationships between a) nature-based polar tourism providers, including water-borne cruise tourism; b) the wider tourism industry; c) science entities; d) island communities, businesses, local government, and transport operators; and e) tourists themselves. I will be looking at three Arctic and sub-Arctic island areas (Shetland Islands, Faroe Islands, and Iceland). I'm interested probing/documenting the tensions between societal/economic benefits stemming from polar tourism and the associated stress on culture/infrastructure/natural resources, to gain insights which may be used to support initiatives to go beyond 'extractive' tourism towards 'sustainable/regenerative' tourism. Is there an opportunity for co-creation of the touristic experience by communities, tourism providers, scientists, and tourists themselves? Given that many of the organisations involved have an online presence, firstly I will examine how they 'present' themselves as 'places' for nature-based tourism. I will follow up with surveys/interviews/focus groups to elicit a more nuanced understanding of the gifts and gains between these entities. I will explore opportunities to engage with island communities, perhaps as an immersive experience in a few locations to deepen appreciation of the challenges and benefits presented by tourism to island communities.

Professor Chris J Spray and Thomas Spray - Where to for rivers, rewilding and restoration – from past histories to possible futures on Tweed. Currently, there is increasing interest in the concept and practicalities of rewilding and habitat restoration, from both European and UK perspectives. This raises some important questions, not least as to what past 'state' such restoration efforts should be focussed and how habitats come to be in the poor state many of them now are. Rivers are the subject of many such restoration initiatives, not least as they are very visible and connected elements of the landscape, many in poor condition impacting on the social, environmental and economic conditions of their local catchment. We use an examination of the historical geography of the Eddleston Water, a tributary of the Tweed to explore the drainage and landscape changes that have framed its current environment. Part of Scottish Government's long-term study of catchment restoration, we use evidence from the historical record for upper Tweed in trying to answer these questions, complemented by more recent studies of land management changes using aerial photography, and the ever-present threat of flooding. Looking to the future, we consider what river restoration can learn from the past and how this can be translated in to creating new river visions for a future dominated by rapid climate change.

Dr Jack Dyce - "I'll sing of a river I'm happy beside. The song that I sing is a song of the Clyde". Personhood, exploitation, pollution and protection. Our title quotes a once familiar popular Scottish song, *A Song of the Clyde*, celebrating the river's renown for industry (shipbuilding and engineering), and for recreation (sailing 'doon the watter' on holidays), yet also there's a story of emigration, empire and enslavement. For many, myself included, our relationship to the river has been personal - through family life, residence and work. But there is mythic personification too in the form of the "local" Brittonic goddess Clōtha/ Clutha, binding, in sacred relationship, deity, waterways and populations. Clōta/ Clutha symbolises cleansing, protection and healing, for humanity and the natural world. Yet, our river has often been viewed and treated in instrumentalised and exploitative ways, locally and globally, now needing healing and recovery. In legal terms, there is a developing eco-jurisprudence in which rights have been recognised as belonging not to humankind alone, but to wider Nature. In ecological consciousness, we are increasingly alert to environmental violence perpetrated by governments and corporate actors, and

impacting particularly on the poor and powerless. How may governance, law and imagination sing a new song of the Clyde?

Siobhán Beatson - Harvesting the Tides: Traditional Marine Practices of the Early Modern Sea Loch Inhabitants. This paper examines how communities that inhabited the North West sea lochs of the early modern Highlands harnessed marine resources to build sustainable local economies and secure dependable food supplies. It investigates the extent to which the sea contributed to the resilience and prosperity of these communities through practices such as fishing, the use of fish traps, and the exploitation of a diverse range of coastal and marine resources. Despite their historical importance, these communities and their maritime economies remain significantly under researched within Highland historiography, with little attention given to any settlements in Wester Ross. Drawing on a combination of traditional historical sources, including maps, estate and commercial records, and contemporary legislation as well as a robust archaeological methodology informed by recent excavations and surveys, this study sheds light on both well documented and lesser-known maritime industries. By moving beyond conventional narratives of traditional fishing, the paper highlights the deep ecological knowledge, technical skill, and adaptive strategies of sea loch communities, revealing a complex and resourceful relationship with their marine environment.

Session 2S. Water, Community and Identity

Linda Johnson-Bell - Sacred Waters, Shared Worlds: Saami and Norse Indigenous Traditions as Models for Arctic Stewardship. This paper explores the cultural and spiritual role of water in Saami and Old Norse societies from the late Iron Age to the early medieval period (c. 500–1100 CE), showing how ritual and daily practice intersected to form resilient systems of stewardship. Archaeological evidence from Saami sieidi sites, as well as island and lakeside offerings, illustrates how water was approached through ritual negotiation rather than ownership, while ethnographic sources, including Johan Turi's *Muitalut sámiiid birra* (1910), preserve memories of these practices into modern times. Comparable Norse traditions appear in the Poetic and Prose Edda, where wells grant wisdom and fate, and mythic rivers mark thresholds to other realms. Saga references and votive deposits in bogs and springs reveal water as both a sacred resource and a portal to other worlds. In both societies, ritual offerings and taboos framed water not as commodity, but as shared, limited, and as spiritually bound. This worldview inherently embedded restraint and obligation into daily use, curbing over exploitation and ensuring resilience. In today's Arctic where hydroelectric dams, mining, and shipping routes drive conflict over water rights, these indigenous frameworks offer critical insights for rethinking ownership, usage, and sustainability as matters of worldview as well as policy.

Kelly Morrison - The Sea as Exile and Belonging: Women's Stories of Scotland's Coasts. For Scotland's coastal communities, water has long been a restless force of exile and belonging. Stories gathered through *The Coast that Shaped the World (COAST)* project reveal how identity and heritage are continually unsettled and remade by the sea. This paper explores three women's stories — historical, remembered, and legendary — to show how water shapes power, survival, and community on the Scottish coasts. At Arichonon in Mid Argyll, widow Catherine Campbell led resistance against eviction in 1848, when tenants were forced from their homes to make way for sheep. The riot ended in dispersal, some families crossing the Atlantic — a story of defiance turning to exile. In Torridon, Isabella Ross recalled the herring economy where women's communal labour — gutting, packing, and childcare shared between neighbours — sustained belonging and pride even in hardship. Folklore too echoes these dynamics: Gormshùil Mhòr na Maigne, a Lochaber 'wise woman,' was said to bless fishermen and even command shipwrecks, embodying the sea as both protection and peril. Together, these stories reveal how water carries not only people but identity itself — as loss, sustenance, and power.

Linda Cracknell - Sea Marked: Throwing a Line to a Coastal Past. "Sea Marked" by Linda Cracknell is a beguiling and inspirational book that succeeds in bringing the author's experiences to life on the page. This is a book about the sea, about family and family history, and about boats. It tells the story of one woman's efforts to learn more about her origins and about those who came before, and in particular about the women in the generations that preceded her. The best books are those that open up new worlds in a way that transports their readers across time and place. This is one of those books. You may never have sailed a boat and you may have ancestors who never saw the sea. After reading "Sea Marked" you'll have a deeper understanding of the author's background: and the quality of her writing is such that you'll emerge having shared the experiences she describes.

Sarah Squire - The Findhorn Watershed Initiative and the 'patchy Anthropocene'. In considering the role of water in the (ongoing) history of the people and landscape of Scotland, I propose to consider a watershed as a meaningful 'patch' of eco-cultural community. The geographical formations that causes running water to form into burns, and then a river that reaches the sea, also shape human and more-than-human communities that engage with each other in myriad ways. As they all depend on and share the fate of the river in some way, it behooves these communities to collaborate with their up- and down-stream relations with care. Thinking in terms of landscape 'patches' for human and more-than-human relationships draws on the work of Anna Tsing and others. The 'patchy Anthropocene' offers a way of engaging with global/planetary processes of climate change and other entangled issues, while bringing into focus local specificity and particular relationships. As a case study of the watershed as eco-cultural 'patch,' I propose to develop a case study of the Findhorn Watershed Initiative, a project that brings together "land owners, land managers, communities, businesses, and other river users" to work in the areas of nature recovery, nature connection, and nature-positive economy.

Session 3S. Cultural Archipelagos.

Jane Trowell - From islomaniacs to archipelagians: undoing the moat-in-the-head. We are in an era of surging racism and xenophobia. In Britain as elsewhere, new sections of the 'white' population feel legitimised in scapegoating and terrorising people they perceive to be 'foreigners', nourished by populist media and ethno-nationalist state policies. They are particularly enraged by people who arrive on England's shores by 'small boats'. Winston Churchill spoke of 'our island story', reinforcing the singular 'island' and 'story', a united homeland, the sea as moat (1940). Virginia Woolf described Daniel Defoe's island castaway novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as 'perennial and immortal' for Britain, comparing its significance to 'Stonehenge' (Woolf 1919). Yet, the island in *Crusoe* was one of a Caribbean chain. 'Britain' itself comprises c.6000 islands: only the southeast of one has dominated the rest, and - through empire - the world. An archipelago is watery and relational. Tides, sandbars, rocks and reefs create instability. They necessitate mutuality, plurality, co-existence. Could Edouard Glissant's 'archipelagic thinking', emerging from the Creole context of complex Caribbean histories, help undo the moat-in-the-head of white British ethno-nationalism (Glissant 1990)? The island story of *Crusoe*, the adventuring ex-trader in enslaved Africans and anxious yet supreme white castaway, is not all it seems, and therein lies some hope.

Lesley McKay - Narrating Archipelagic Absence: Fiction as Historiographic Recovery in Late Medieval Unst. This paper explores the creative-critical methodology behind a novel set in Unst, Shetland's northernmost island. It dramatises submerged histories, legal ambiguity, and Norse cultural persistence sixty years after Shetland's 1469 pawning to Scotland. Drawing on archipelagic, aquapelagic, and tidalectic theory (Stratford et al., Hayward, Brathwaite), the novel reimagines Unst not as a remote outpost but as a relational node within the Shetland–Norway–Scotland triad. The resulting novel dramatises submerged histories and maritime entanglements, using tidal movement as a narrative structure and a dialect-rich dialogue to evoke relational belonging. The piecing together of Unst's late

medieval history provides an opportunity for fiction to enact historiographic recovery. This creative-critical approach is supported by a multi-disciplinary research methodology which engages with academic collaboration, historical and linguistic research, and phenomenological and poetic inquiry. It offers a model for creative research in island studies, where fiction becomes a method of knowing, belonging, and narrating what the archive cannot, island identity at a particular period of its history. It allows for broader conversations on water's power to mediate cultural memory and relational belonging.

Dr Anna Souhami - 'Stuck on a rock, out in the North Sea': identity and power in remote island police work. What does it mean to be a police officer in a remote island, two hundred miles by sea from the mainland centre of Police Scotland? Drawing on an extended ethnography of policing in two remote Scottish archipelagos, this paper explores the importance of the sea in shaping officers' sense of identity and power, and the form of policing that emerges. The sea has a powerful effect on island police work, both in practice and imagination. However, these effects are complex, contradictory and fluid. First, the sea is a multisensory reminder of powerlessness and disconnection: of abandonment by the powerful urban centre of Police Scotland. Second, it signifies confinement with those that officers police, and the consequent difficulties in exercising power. Third, it allows for creativity and resistance: a barrier to unwelcome ideas and people, and a means for island officers to establish a separate identity. And fourth, it is a routeway that connects. Despite officers' claims of separation, ideas travel from the mainland, transforming as they cross the water. The result is power and identity in flux, producing a form of policing that is at once separated, connected and translated.

Session 4S. Fluvial Poetics and Imaginaries

Professor Danila Sokolov – The Fluvial Poetics of Early Modern Lyric. Early modern lyric poets are drawn to the riverbanks, where they like to listen to the sound of the stream, look at their reflections in the water, and feel the wet touch on their bodies. While rivers and other waterways bore political, economic, social, and theological connotations in early modern England, in this paper I will suggest that textual engagements with water currents also shaped the idea of lyric form in the period. I will consider three seventeenth-century poems, Thomas Carew's 'To My Mistress Sitting by a River's Side', Henry Vaughn's 'To the River Usk', and Thomas Traherne's 'Shadows in the Water', to argue that their poetics is shaped by running water as an object of erotic desire and a source of poetic inspiration. To capture the fluvial alterity of the poet's shifting self-image by a reflection in the water, these poems translate the mutability of moving water into discretely shaped, rigidly localized objects habitually associated with lyric poetry. Written from the threshold of land and water, of matter and form, of subject and object, of organic and inorganic life, of substance and meaning, fluvial texts constitute sites of rumination on the co-constitution of human and non-human in lyric poetry.

Dr Rebecca Drake - Medieval-Contemporary Hydropoetics at St Nicholas Fields. This paper presents the findings of an ongoing critical-creative community engagement research project into the historical hydropoetics of St Nicks Nature Reserve in York. I consider its water-based environmental crisis from the Middle Ages to the present day. St Nicks is historically a site of fluid and straying environments – it has been fishpond, marsh, meadow, landfill, and now nature reserve. The way we understand our relationship to this environment is also in flux, moving from land management for resource use to land management in conservation in a city that is prone to flood. My research for this paper is deeply rooted in the landscape of St Nicks through a series of community engagement workshops taking place over the course of 2023 and 2024. Leading UK eco-poets guided interdisciplinary arts community and poetics groups in embodied exploration of St Nicks through visual and place-based encounters, exploring the ways poetry entangles us with aqueous environments such as becks, flood plains, and marshes. Intersecting with translation theory, Blue Studies, tidalectics, and eco-poetics addressing water crisis, this timely engagement with critical-creative conversations surrounding our cultural, symbolic, and

archetypal understandings of water breaks new ground in interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary poetics and the environment.

Dr Arianna Introna - 'A lambing ewe doesn't care if there's a drought or not': Interspecies Grief in Rachelle Atalla's Thirsty Animals. Questions of multispecies community and survival are central to Rachelle Atalla's dystopian novel *Thirsty Animals* (2023), set in the rural countryside of a near-future, drought-stricken Scotland. They are tackled through the lenses of the impact of drought on human and non-human animals, ultimately suggesting that if all life depends on water, interspecies relations deepen moral dilemmas faced when survival itself is at stake. My presentation will explore the ways in which grief over the loss of human and non-human life is intensified in the interspecies space of the farm where *Thirsty Animals* is set. I will argue that interspecies grief brought on by drought-related loss of life exposes the injustice structural to capitalist systems of valuation. Attending to the materiality of the oppression of non-human animals naturalised by capitalism, *Thirsty Animals* offers an organization of sense experience dominated by interspecies grief which forces us to confront the question 'Why do we value things as we do, and could we choose to value them differently?' (Battistoni 2025, p.14). If interspecies grief in the novel foregrounds the expendability of human and non-human animals, I will suggest, it does so while gesturing towards alternative ways of taking care of each other when the water runs out.

Professor Ullrich Kockel - The Mourning of Staburags and the Rise of the Latvian Nation: Ethnological Observations on the Banks of the Daugava River. Staburags was a scenic cliff on the banks of the Daugava River in Latvia. After 1965, the cliff has been submerged due to a dam built for the Pļaviņas Hydroelectric Power Station. Its construction sparked wide-spread opposition to the flooding of historical sites and the Staburags cliff. On an island between Staburags and the confluence of the rivers Daugava and Pērse, a monumental landscape ensemble was created from 2005 onwards, called 'Garden of Destiny' (*Likteņdārzs* in Latvian). In a 2023 blog post, photographer Katya Balaban narrated how the fight to save the Daugava's natural riches kicked off Latvia's independence movement. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the parish of Koknese, where this ensemble is located, the paper examines narratives surrounding the river landscape, especially the Garden of Destiny, and its significance for the geopoetics of the Latvian nation, drawing on Heidegger's metaphorical description of the river as a 'standing-reserve', a perspective he sees as revealing an understanding of nature as resource to be used and manipulated, which obscures the true essence of our human being as dwelling in the world.

Session 5S. Gaelic Riverbanks and Shorelines

Carolyn McNamara - Shellfish, Shorelines, and Shared Identity: Linking Gàidhlig and Marine Biodiversity. For centuries, the sea has shaped community and culture in the west of Scotland. It has served as a means of travel, a locus of work, and a source of valuable resources and food. Shellfish, and oysters in particular, were used not only in local diets, but were also valued by the well-to-do for their commercial viability. Today, efforts to safeguard both Gàidhlig and marine biodiversity have increasingly converged, recognizing that language and ecology are intertwined within coastal identity. Reconnecting communities to their cultural heritage through stories, songs, and ecological knowledge of oysters strengthens both cultural and ecological resilience. This is evidenced in the work of Project Eisirean, a Co-Development Project with Bowmore Primary School, Islay.

Professor Mairéad Nic Craith - Sea Words and Coastal Expressions: An Ecological Exploration of Sea Tamagotchi. In February 2020 Manchán Magan set out along the coastal roads of various *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking) regions in Ireland seeking traditional sea words from fishing communities. The output of his research was entitled "Sea Tamagotchi". It was named after a game that was popular in the late 1990s that challenged users to keep digital pets alive. My presentation explores the insights that Magan's

collection of sea words gives on traditional practices of fishermen on the west coast of Ireland. I examine the connection between humans, animals and the spirit world that is implied in the sea vocabulary and the relevance of relationships between humans and the natural world for biological biodiversity. My presentation queries whether the collection of coastal expressions is simply a gathering of obscure relics or whether there are insights to be gained of relevance in the future for climate change. The Irish case-study is set in the context of selected indigenous contexts.

Katherine Wren and Dr Lisa Robertson - Musicalising the power of water in a Highland Community. On a Wing and a Prayer Morvern was a musical project undertaken in 2024 by Katherine Wren and Morvern resident Lisa Robertson. It included a residency and local performance for string trio, field recordings and film of Ar Lùths (our power), a piece by Lisa that is central to the project. While working together in Morvern, we observed the power of water and the power of community. Amid threats from the climate crisis, positive community action reflects good stewardship of the land going back thousands of years. In 2021 a community-owned hydro scheme opened at Barr, reclaiming the site of a Clearance village and empowering the community. Rain in Morvern generates green energy, benefiting both the planet and the community. Morvern now produces approx. 9 times the amount of electricity that it uses. We will discuss the creation process of Ar Lùths, community involvement and impact of the project as well as overarching themes and discoveries, illustrating with musical examples. The music includes the rocking rhythm of a local screw turbine hydro scheme and fragments of the tune of Don Chuthaig (To the Cuckoo) by Morvern bard Dr John MacLachlan (1804-74), reflecting this community's reclaiming of power and the longstanding connection between people and nature in Morvern.

Session 6S. Water, Folklore and Spirituality

Dr Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir - Selkie Metamorphoses and the Sea: Trauma, Exploitation, and Memory in C.J. Cooke's *A Haunting in the Arctic*. In C.J. Cooke's novel *A Haunting in the Arctic* (2023), the selkie myth is woven into a multilayered narrative that explores trauma, memory, gender-based violence, and environmental exploitation. Set primarily in 1901 aboard a Dundee whaler, the story follows the harrowing experiences of a young woman who is abducted and subjected to repeated sexual abuse. When one of the crew members begins to refer to her as his "selkie wife," she begins to gradually transform into a selkie. This metamorphosis operates as a powerful metaphor for the protagonist's psychological and emotional trauma while also foregrounding the role of the sea as both a site of suffering and of transformation. As a Gothic historical novel, *A Haunting in the Arctic* participates in the genre's current tendency to reinstate marginalised voices, particularly those of women whose histories of violence have often been silenced. By aligning the woman's victimisation with the destructive practices of the whaling industry, Cooke draws a parallel between gendered violence and ecological exploitation, exposing the interlinked dynamics of patriarchal power over both women and nature. The protagonist's observation on the "rape of the ocean" (p. 334) underscores this connection, situating the sea as a medium that shapes both human and non-human identities. Cooke's stated intention to explore memory and trauma through ghost stories is evident in the novel's layered structure, which juxtaposes the historical narrative with a contemporary haunting linked to the abused woman's fate. This structure highlights the nonlinear persistence of trauma across time, much like the sea itself carries and transmits traces of the past. This paper argues that the selkie motif in *A Haunting in the Arctic* reflects not only individual trauma but also the entanglement of gender violence and environmental exploitation, revealing how water mediates identity and power in the novel.

Madalaine Blyth: Soddan Cloth - The ritual relationship between textiles and water in the Scottish Witchcraft Trials. The sacred nature of water in Scotland was long established before the rise of witchcraft accusations, with holy wells, healing lochs and cloutie trees attached to natural springs playing

integral roles in community living. Bodies of water provided sacred spaces, places of pilgrimage between worlds, the above and below, where an object may be cast beneath the surface and so leave one world and be received by another. The journey to and action at the water sources also provided additional layers of meaning to the accessing of sacred water spaces. The journey was often part of the ritual, where those seeking healing or enacting a charm would instruct the person to visit the site through specific movements, paths and repetitions. The accusations, confessions and other associated documents of the witchcraft trials reveal how waterscapes became part of a cultural language of healing, magic and the otherworld. This paper will explore the ritual connection between charming and the adaption of waterscapes as active tools in cultural beliefs present in the Scottish witchcraft trials. Using close studies of individual cases where practitioners interact with water, the discussion intends to highlight the fluid understanding of water, the body and transformation and transactional engagements within the human/nature relationship.

Jane Austin - Liminal: A Directors Chat and Poetry Film Screening. This presentation offers a screening of *Liminal*, an experimental poetry film by Jane Austin, followed by a director's chat exploring the sea as a site of transformation, refuge, and spiritual reclamation. Inspired by a recurring dream, *Liminal* emerged through arts-based enquiry using dreamwork — a praxeological method that honours the unconscious as a source of creative and ecological insight. The story follows Mélusine, a girl who flees an ogre and blossoms into a mermaid in the silvery seaweed. When caught by a fisherman, she chooses to dissolve her flesh from her bones — a Jungian act of agency and metamorphosis. A young girl replenishes her with sea water, returning her to the sea. Created in collaboration with choreographer Francoise Angenieux, the film weaves poetry, illustration, and dance to evoke the sea's life-giving and mythic qualities. It has been shown internationally, including at the Magical Charmed Experimental Video Festival (NYC), Dream Network Australia, and the IASD Dream Art Exhibition (Netherlands) and conference presentation at IASD Conference (Arizona). The director's chat will reflect on the mermaid archetype, the liminal space between worlds, and the sea as a psychic and ecological threshold. Drawing on deep ecology, the presentation explores the intrinsic value of oceanic life and the mermaid's refusal to be commodified — a symbolic act of resistance and renewal.

Vanesa Bosch - The Aquatic Sacred: An exploration of the spiritual ties between water and humanity, and the global crisis. For our ancestors, water was sacred; water had a spirit; water was an important part of human spirituality across the planet. Many ancient deities were a body of water; the element was worshipped in its many forms; water represented health, life, and power. A power that extended to different spheres, from the control of water resources, the importance of water sanctuaries, to the control of trade routes. Water deities even controlled the fate of humankind, and yet today, far from that sacred character it once possessed, water is defenceless against the power of multinationals and governments. They try to control something that was much more than sacred; it was divine. This sacred connection to water is barely preserved by societies that retain some of the tribal animistic knowledge of their ancestors, while it is widely ignored. As the world witnessed the battle at Standing Rock, a window to water consciousness opened for the global community, but we need to do much more than watch, for the future of water and our own on this planet, and the answer might be in the past.

Keynote Speaker Biographies

April 15th – Dr Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson (University of Uppsala)

Charlotte is a core member of the World in the Viking Age (WIVA) Centre of Excellence at Uppsala University. She serves as a researcher and co-investigator for the Viking Phenomenon research project, where she coordinates the sub-project Viking Economics. This project aims to explore the economy and organisation of Viking raids and their impact on shaping Scandinavian identities. Key issues addressed include the structure of the raids, the role of women, and the significance of slave-taking and trafficking, both during raids and in society as a whole. Charlotte studied at the Archaeological Research Laboratory at Stockholm University, where she presented her PhD thesis in 2006 on the Birka Warrior, exploring the material culture of a martial society. With a background in field archaeology, she has served as a senior curator at the Swedish History Museum (SHM) and has held research fellowships at SHM, Stockholm University, and the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum (RGZM) in Mainz. Her previous research projects have focused on themes such as warfare, identity, mobility, and material culture in Late Iron Age and Viking Age societies. Most recently, she contributed to the interdisciplinary ATLAS project, which aims to uncover human prehistory in present-day Sweden by integrating archaeology, physical anthropology, and genetics. Charlotte recently appeared on the BBC News World Service discussing whether our modern-day gender biases influence the way we look at women's lives in ancient societies.

April 16th – Professor Peter Mackay (University of St Andrews)

Peter Mackay is Professor of Literature in the School of English at St Andrews University. Originally from the Isle of Lewis, he specialises in Scottish and Irish literature from 1800 onwards, particularly in Scottish Gaelic literature. In 2024, Peter was appointed as the Scottish Makar (or poet laureate). He is the first Gaelic poet to hold this position. The role is authorised by the Scottish Parliament and can be traced back to the medieval period when poets were appointed by the royal court and expected to compose works for significant occasions. He has authored two monographs: *This Strange Loneliness: Heaney's Wordsworth* (McGill-Queen's 2021) and *Sorley MacLean* (RIISS 2010) as well as an anthology with Iain S. MacPherson, titled *An Leabhar Liath: 500 Years of Gaelic Love and Transgressive Verse* (Luath 2015), which won both the Donald Meek Prize for Gaelic literature and the Saltire Scottish Research Book of the Year. He also published another anthology, co-edited with Jo MacDonald, *100 Dàn as Fheàrr Leinn / 100 Favourite Gaelic Poems*, which won the Duais Ruaraidh MhicThòmais in 2021. Peter's poetry collections, *Gu Leòr / Galore* (Acair 2015) and *Nàdar de / Some Kind of* (Acair 2020), were shortlisted for the Saltire Scottish Poetry Book of the Year, with *Nàdar de* also making the longlist for the Highland Book Prize. As an AHRC/BBC Next Generation Thinker, he frequently appears on Radio 3 and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal as a broadcaster.

*The sea-road
brought men
together, both
for peace and
for strife.*

- The Orkneyinga Saga





Thank you for being part of the 7th International St Magnus Conference 2026.

In addition to the speakers and attendees, the organisers would like to extend gratitude and appreciation to our post graduate students who have volunteered their time toward the hosting of this conference.

We hope to see you again at the 8th International St Magnus Conference, due in 2028!



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