

Pilgrimage Places in Scotland: Summary of the lecture given to the Society by Peter Yeoman

Pilgrimage and the cults of saints was as popular with the Pictish, Irish, Norse and Scots peoples of Scotland as with any others in Christendom, with major shrines at the heart of important reliquary churches at Tain, Iona, Kirkwall, Whithorn, Glasgow, Dunkeld, Dunfermline, and St Andrews. Most of these shrines are now monuments in the care of Historic Scotland. Scotland had more than its fair share of patron saints, ranging from the apostle St Andrew, to national, indigenous saints such as Ninian, Columba and Kentigern, to a multiplicity of lesser holy men and martyrs.

From the earliest times, Scots were recognised on the pilgrimage roads of Europe by their characteristic clothing, which included the tying of their shoes around their neck, rather than wearing them, to accentuate the pain factor! The archaeology of pilgrimage can illustrate an aspect of medieval life with which we can still connect and even replicate, providing a rare 'shiver of contact'. Although the evidence is fugitive, much can still be found of the routes and roads which led to the great shrines.

This research has established a new understanding of how Scots' pilgrims were able to move through their land, taking advantage of a dedicated transport network. By revisiting these churches, armed with an understanding of the remains, we can reconnect with their lives, reaching a better understanding of the personal faith and devotion of these people who, during the first 1000 years of Christianity, shaped the land and national identity which we have inherited.

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