Urswick And Its Christian Origins Explored

Fred Barnes (1968) states that ‘man and human culture reached Britain from the Continent in a series of waves beginning with Old Stone Age man about 30,000 years ago.’ and that because of the isolated position of Furness ‘on the fringe of Cumberland and isolated by arms of the sea, it was peculiarly ideal for the sheltering of superseded civilisations. As New Stone Age man pushed out Old Stone Age man from about 2500BC only to be evicted in turn by Bronze Age man after about 1900BC, so the men of the Iron Age began to expel the Bronze Age peoples about 500BC. It was, he suggested, ‘ always a case of gradual pressure by a more advanced civilisation on one less able to survive; the older civilisations gave ground slowly’ and therefore once this slow progression is understood it ‘becomes easy to see that in Furness the onset of new civilisations could be much later than in southern England; and furthermore, since to this secluded promontory would come in turn as refugees Neolithic and Bronze Age men and later Early Iron Age men (Celts), one is not surprised to find a considerable mixing of cultures.’ In Furness there appear to have been groups still living a hunting, food-gathering life while other groups had taken up farming and reached a relatively high standard of civilisation.

Barnes states quite emphatically that the habitation sites of the earliest inhabitants of Furness have been totally obliterated but the more substantial stone-built settlements of the period around the Roman Conquest-those of the ‘Ancient Britons’- have survived at Stone Walls (Urswick), at Appleby Slack, at Foulna (Holme Bank); another at Stone Close (Stainton) has been totally destroyed by the Devonshire Quarries. A hill-fort at Skelmore Heads, Urswick, was excavated in 1957-1960. *These settlements suggest small tribal or family units of perhaps fifty individuals engaged in crude cultivation and possessing livestock.*

Millward and Robinson (1976) too, found scant evidence for evidence of occupation of Furness in Neolithic times but cite the remains of a burial chamber in Little Urswick. The say that’ the archaeological evidence for the presence of Neolithic man in Furness is slight, but it seems likely that several essential pieces of this prehistoric jigsaw have been lost down the centuries’ but that ‘*recently a different kind of proof has emerged to show that agricultural communities were exploiting the landscape of Furness in Neolithic times. A boring 240 inches (600 centimetres) in depth was made through the shell marls and peats that have accumulated on the southern edge of Urswick Tarn in 1960. Professor Oldfield has suggested that the pollen record hints at the widespread clearance of forest in Furness at this time, and he believes that the Neolithic settlers of this district were mainly engaged in pastoral farming. (page 193)*. They then go on to show that abundant evidence survives from the Bronze and Iron Ages of the importance of settlement on the limestone hills around

Urswick. They state significantly that ‘the richness of the countryside around Great Urswick does not end with the abundance of prehistoric sites on the hills that encircle the tarn’. Whilst evidence is ‘thin’ they suggest that ‘down the centuries of prehistoric time, man fought an uncertain and wavering battle against the wilderness. Pollen records throw up several important hints about the evolution of the landscape; for instance, an extensive phase of woodland clearance is indicated in the Middle Bronze Age, with a sharp reduction of elm and lime in the pollen count, and an increased evidence of weeds and bracken. They think it possible that this was the time of the creation of Birkrigg Common- a shared pasture whose antiquity is confirmed by the presence of a tumulus to the north of the summit and the stone circle of Middle Bronze Age date at Sunbrick.

The former open field system at Urswick is difficult to date but it is thought to be down to the Anglian settlers of the seventh century although they state that it is ‘not impossible that we are faced with a landscape feature that dates from the late Roman Iron Age (page 197), with the possibility that the core of settlement at Great Urswick moved from an Iron Age camp on a hill-top, down to an Anglian village on the shore of the tarn. They suggest a similar development of the adjoining settlement of Little Urswick. Whilst the names ‘Great’ and ‘Little’ suggest a parent and daughter relationship of primary and secondary Anglian settlements, it is also possible that Great Urswick and Little Urswick were founded by Anglian colonists at the same period of time and that we should look towards Urswick Stone Walls for an explanation of the development of this ‘daughter’ village. Urswick Stone Walls and the adjacent terraced field represent the primary settlement of Iron Age and Roman date. The rectangular enclosure at Urswick Stone Walls has tentatively been dated to the Roman period. They conclude that both Little Urswick and Great Urswick might well represent Anglian settlements on the edge of clearings that had been made between three and four centuries earlier, at the close of the Roman period (page 199).

Final words hold out intriguing possibilities where they state that ‘apart from a few stray coins, the Romans have left no trace on the region. The Iron Age communities here seem to have been left undisturbed. The landscape of Low Furness exhibits a continuity that links prehistoric times with the Middle Ages; Anglo-Saxons and Vikings were both absorbed by this remote and isolated peninsula’ (page 200)

Barnes picks up on the remoteness of Low Furness and the difficulty of travelling in his description of a very ancient road across Furness ‘used from time immemorial: it links up with the oversands route from Cartmel at Conishead at the only place along the coast where peat-mosses or steep cliffs could be avoided. From Conishead the track winds round the shoulders of the hills across Furness to Ireleth, always crossing the valleys at the narrowest point; it goes by way of Urswick to Dalton, across the Goldmire Valley to Ireleth, where it links with the oversands route across the Duddon estuary to Millom. He states that ‘it was mistakenly called a Roman road in the past, but excavation at Red Lane, Conishead, revealed that the metalled surfaces were medieval, not Roman’ (page 11).

Barnes in fact dismisses any hint of occupation of Furness by Romans or of a military post there. He states that they knew the inhabitants of Lonsdale and Furness as the Setantii, a tribe subject to the Brigantes who ruled the north of England from Northumbria to Lancashire. He says that Furness was in Highland England, was not required for colonisation, did not contain any real threat to Roman communications, so it was by-passed. A chain of forts along the roads combined with the operation of the Roman fleet, completely isolated the Britons around Millom, Furness and Lonsdale. 'Probably', he continues, ' the natives traded with the Romans, perhaps Roman tax collectors or punitive expeditions penetrated Furness, *it is none the less safe to say that no Roman occupation occurred' (page 12).* Barnes concludes that 'no other Roman relics have been found in Furness- no tiles, pottery, tools, ornaments, inscriptions or masonry; the few Roman coins found, eg. in Sowerby Woods, at Urswick, etc. may either be witnesses to trade between the natives and Romans, or may be souvenirs dropped long after Roman times'.

He does point out an *indirect connection* however, in that in 138AD the Britons in the Lake District revolted and were suppressed by the Romans and that after 220AD 'there were continual raids into the area by pirates from Ireland and Scotland, till Roman authority was again fully restored towards the end of the third century; again during the latter part of the fourth century the raids were repeated, and about 410AD the Romans withdrew altogether.

David Shotter, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Lancaster published several papers in the 'Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society' during 2000 to 2004 on the subject of Roman activity in the North West of England. He wrote about the existence of a treaty between the Brigantian leaders and Rome 'which remained tolerably firm' until the 'betrayal' of Caratacus in AD51 (Article 111.Vol.C, 2000) and raised the question of how and when the Roman armies became involved in the politics and territory of the Brigantes. It would appear that 'substantial areas of territory were bypassed by Cerialis, including the Lake District and outlying areas like Furness, and also by Agricola, governor from AD77-83. Cerialis was governor AD71-74. Shotter suggests little if any Roman activity during the first century AD in the Furness area.

Colin Wells, in Transactions Volume 11,(2003), writes that 'it is conceivable that the Duddon Estuary (along with the rest of the South Cumbrian fringe), being more isolated from the main policing grid of Roman forts may have suffered from more political instability' (page 75). He was writing about evidence from pollen cores, etc for a reduction in land clearance and a consequent period of forest regeneration which in the post-Roman period suggested 'a recession in activity at and just after the end of the Roman period', meaning the 5th century.

Whilst there are several 'hints' in relation to possible Roman activity in Low Furness there appears to have been no *substantive evidence* of such activity or occupation until a local archaeologist, Steve Dickinson, began his own investigations first at the church of St Mary

and St Michael in Great Urswick and then subsequently in the landscape of the surrounding area from 2002 onwards, an amazing 'fallow period' of something like 30 years. In 'The Beacon on the Bay' (2002) he reports on the discovery of several fragments of a Christian dedication slab of a late- or sub-Roman period (c.398-450AD) in the church fabric recording a dedication under a late Roman emperor's reign. He develops a strong argument for there being an as yet undiscovered early Roman fort, Glannoventa/ Glannibanta/ Clanoventa/ Cantiventi located on the Furness Peninsula.
He concludes *'To recap, we have demonstrable prehistoric and early historic-period evidence for a major early estate at Great Urswick; connected with significant Roman and sub-Roman place-names that match a Furness location. The inscribed stones built into the church fabric strongly suggest a late or sub-Roman church foundation.' (page 49).*

In subsequent investigations he claimed to have identified via an air photograph a significant Roman fort in fields south of the church and outside the boundaries of an inferred seventh century monastic site (see illustration below).

During 2004 the 'Furness Moles' a local volunteer archaeology group, undertook a survey of 'foreign stones' in the field walls around Urswick and its immediate neighbourhood. The group catalogued upwards of 150 fragments of dressed and worked St.Bees red sandstone and additional gritstone masonery which according to Dickinson 'allows the inference of demolition, salvage and re-use of worked masonery from pre-Norman structures in the investigation area' (UODP Interim Report 1, 2004-5 Summary).

See also Hidden Light-Low Furness website www.explorelowfurness.co.uk .

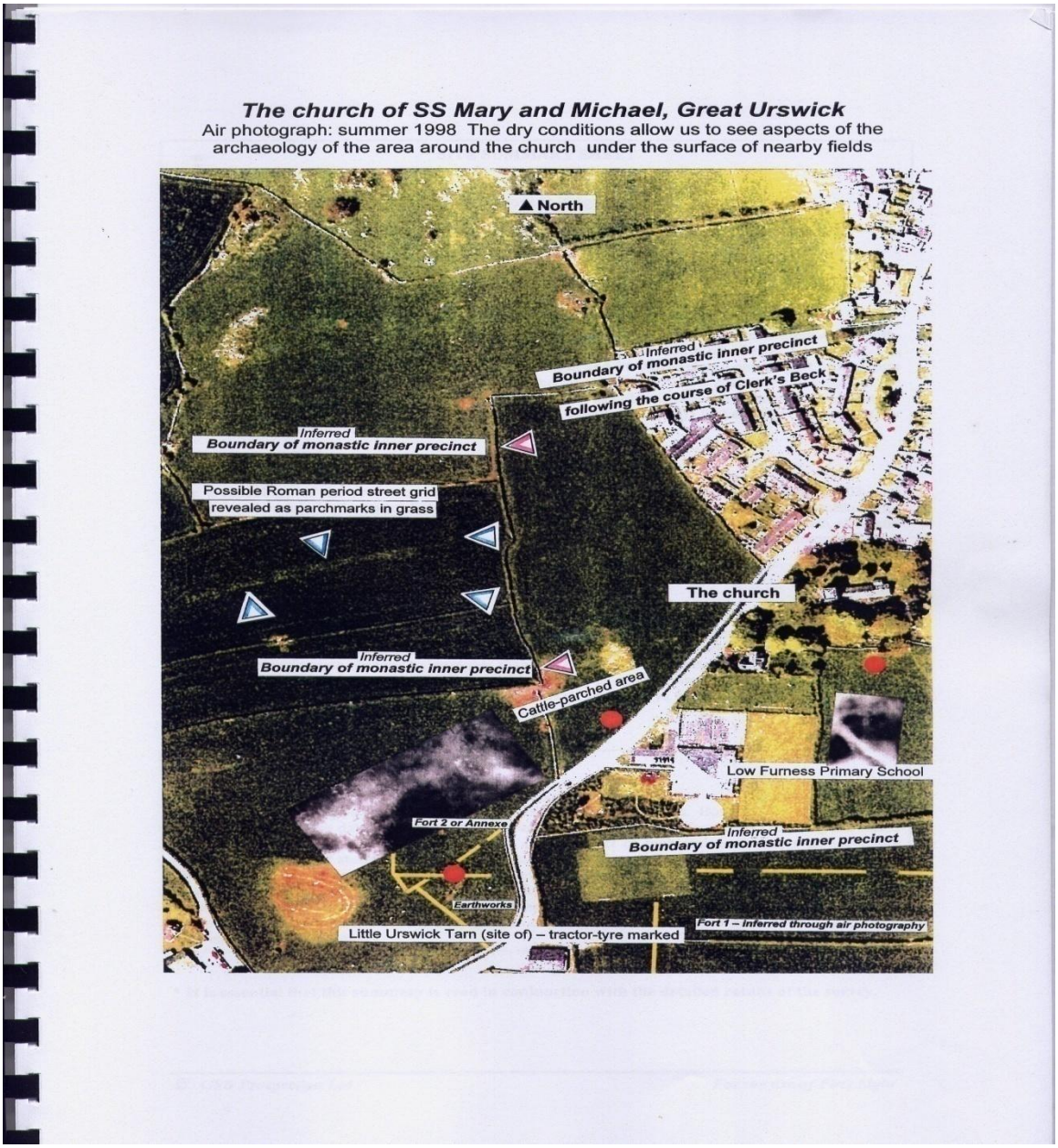


Illustration above (Steve Dickinson) taken from 'Life Before Barrow' Part 1: Urswick Origins Discovery Programme Interim Report 1-2004-5 Summary.

Dickinson failed to produce a report on the excavation in 2005 of an 'early-period' Roman fort at Urswick in the area south of the church identified as 'fort 1' on the above illustration so we are really none the wiser.

In a developing local project called 'Celtic Christians: Spirituality and Sea Travel', George Henson and friends (2004) make it clear that 'Great Urswick is near the centre of a network of Celtic sea ways, which served and may have helped to shape Celtic Christianity'. They cite Cunliffe (2001) who provides a masterful summary of developments from 8000BC to 1500AD of peoples and communities along the Atlantic seaboard of Europe; local trading by sea and the exchange of gifts, good practices and ideas began early in this period. They

comment that ‘although the northern Celts, Bretons, Galicians and others developed differently, there remains a clear kinship. Bowen (1969) shows how long distance travellers used the Atlantic seaways during the Bronze Age and subsequently. Henson suggests that Bowen requires updating because more recent discoveries of remains of major boats and ships, along with growing use of computer simulation of sailing capacity and seaworthiness, suggest that planked construction and curraghs about 60 feet overall with sails were both capable of long voyages offshore without undue risk.
He goes on to say that ‘with the suggested role of seaways Urswick, the Cumbrian hills and lowlands seem less isolated. Seen from the sea they are near the highway, with excellent shelter within an archipelago off a major promentary available at all states of the tide’.

Barnes (1951) continues by stating that ‘in the readjustment following the withdrawal of the Roman legions from Britain, the Celtic inhabitants of Furness were absorbed by the kingdom of Strathclyde which then covered the west side of the island from the Mersey to the rock of Dumbarton beyond the Clyde’ (page 17). Angles conquered and occupied the territory to the east of Cumbria about the middle of the sixth century and founded the powerful kingdom of Northumbria and Furness would have received an influx of Celtic refugees.

Again Barnes shows that Lancashire south of the Ribble was wrested from Strathclyde in AD613 and then for 70 years there was a series of struggles between the English of Northumbria and the Britons of Strathclyde.

In AD684 Carlisle was taken by the English and burnt, and all East Cumberland submitted to King Ecgfrith of Northumbria; this split Strathclyde into two but in AD685 Ecgfrith was killed by the Scots and the Northumbrian conquest halted.

Ecgfrith ‘gave Cartmel and all the Britons in it’ to St Cuthbert; if this was ‘our’ Cartmel and Furness this could in part explain the significance and ownership of the church at Urswick well before the time of Michael le Fleming and the Norman occupation (of which more later).

West Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness were never *conquered* yet the multiplicity of Anglian place-names in Low Furness proves that there must have been considerable Anglian *colonisation (*eg Dalton, Ulverston and all the ‘tuns’. Aldingham, Bardsea, Leece, Dendron are all Anglian names. Place-names like Roose (Celtic for moor) tell us that the Britons remained among the Angles.

Barnes suggests that Furness was penetrated by small groups of Angles who settled on empty land; they possessed heavier ploughs than the Celts which could turn the heavier rich soils; whereas the Celts had been forced to settle on easier worked uplands or gravel patches on river banks. In time some of the Britons would be absorbed, others pushed, more or less peacefully, into the fells.

The only 'hard' evidence for this transition, according to Barnes, is the Tunwini Cross fragment at Urswick (dated initially by Collingwood as about AD900 but more recently dated by Dickinson from about late 7th Century) and the transition from Anglian to Northumbrian and the arrival of the Viking settlers, many via Ireland and the Isle of Man, evidenced again by a fragment of a typical wheel-headed Scandinavian cross dating from about AD950-AD1000, also found at Urswick.

Barnes' summary of the complex 'ethnic mix' of Furness is worth recording here:
'In Furness they (the Norse refugees from Man) found one of the least populated and wildest parts of England, the most outlying and least regarded part of Anglian Northumbria, thinly colonised by Anglian settlers and still tenanted in places by Celts, part of the scattered and dwindling Cumbrian race. The proximity of Deira (Chester), now held by the Danes, made Furness a neglected borderland unlikely to be defended by the Northumbrians. Thus Furness was an ideal refuge, it offered fair field for colonisation and the needs of the Vikings did not clash with those of the Angles since the Viking was essentially a sheep farmer concentrating on hill pastures in the Fells, requiring grazing land of little use to the Anglian farmer.' (page 20)

Place-names give strong clues to their movements and indicate how the Scandinavian names cluster thickly in the fells whilst skirting the Anglian settlements such as Urswick and Aldingham.

The origins and the antiquity of the church at Urswick has yet to be fully explored or explained but that it was of considerable significance is beyond doubt as evidenced in the cross fragments referred to above and the variety of dated materials used in its construction and its links with the Northumbrian Church of Cuthbert and his predecessors. . The migration of the Norse refugees from Ireland and Man might well have been but the latest from those shores and the roots of the Christian church at Urswick found in the monastic communities of Patrick's Ireland.

In the Spring of 2003 whilst a new central heating system was being 'piped' in St.Mary and St Michael's Church, Great Urswick, part of an early Christian inscription was revealed. A local archaeologist, Steve Dickinson, was on hand to take photographs of what was going on; but unfortunately he did not discover the fact that the stone had elements of an inscription on it until his photographs were developed - by which time the floor had been re-laid and the stone left in situ!

So could this stone finally reveal the identity of the founder of the first church on this site (or at least to whom it was dedicated)?

Dickinson says not: evidence from similar stones in other places suggests that it might contain the name and status of the local dignitary who gave the land for the purpose of building a church / monastery here. The dedication to Mary would most certainly have

come much later, either at the time when the Roman rite took ascendancy after the Synod of Whitby in 664 or later when the church was extended/ rebuilt and the tower added by the Normans in the early 1100's, (*more probably after 1107-11 when Michael le Fleming took direct local control of the manor, and prior to 1127 and the foundation of the Abbey of St Mary, when many masons would have been looking for work at the Abbey itself*)

What do we know and upon what evidence do we base our claims?

We know from recent survey work and local exploration that the church walls contain substantial evidence of weathered Roman masonry. In addition, in the north wall of the nave some broken fragments suggest a post-Roman imperial dedication stone (see Steve Dickinson's *The Beacon on the Bay* report, v.01, Ulverston 2002, p40-42); although not enough survives to allow us to reconstruct it from present evidence. There is also possibly a part of a Roman pagan religious altar built into the south nave of the church, and other evidence remains to be analysed in more detail from surrounding field walls.

With these finds adding to long-known evidence from Roman coins found in Furness, and evidence from air photography, Dickinson has presented a persuasive argument for the existence of a Roman Fort not far from the church site (we await geophysical survey to confirm this). There is certainly worked Roman masonry in the walls and buildings of Low Furness that allows us to infer a substantial military and civilian site in the area. The Furness coins, which range from Republican to late Roman issues, suggest a trading community growing up around the fort. We do know that Urswick was a trading centre for many years even before the Romans came but it would be the lure of substantial amounts of iron ore which made the area particularly attractive to the Romans, and of course, its access to the sea made transportation much easier all round.

This evidence does not necessarily imply a church building there in Roman times; rather, the re-use of masonry, etc. in building the church and/or repairing the church. (*We don't know enough about the early construction phases that are clearly visible in the church fabric to allow us to suggest dates – yet -for the building sequence*).

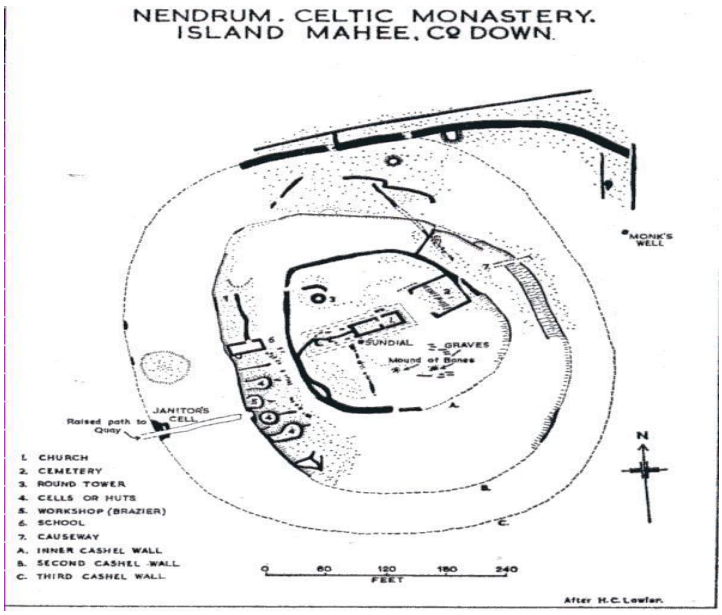
Which came first – community or church?

Steve Dickinson has begun to build up a geographical picture of the past landscape in and around Urswick and its Tarn, covering periods including the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Norse. New evidence is emerging in relation to pre-Christian religious practices and the use of sacred wells, standing stones and perhaps druidic groves, one on the lower slope of Birkrigg Common in close proximity to the stone circle (locally called the 'Druids Temple but more likely to do with a burial site because cremated remains have been found within the circle), and another well/ grove in Bower Wood under the Little Urswick Crags in close proximity to the Stone Walls Iron Age settlement.

In his interpretations from local maps, aerial photography, and from evidence 'on the ground' he has claimed to be able to identify the outline of an early 'estate' and the inner precincts of an early Christian monastery with the current church building of St. Mary and St. Michael's near the centre. The layout is similar to that on Iona and at Lindisfarne (Holy Island) and this element of the site suggests an 'Irish' template of the 6th - 7th century AD.

This discovery by itself does not prove clear links but it does suggest a style and a period that is helpful to our further enquiries. We widely regard the earliest monastic communities as occupying small circular or rectangular wooden structures in small compounds that would be unlikely to leave much evidence behind. This picture may be correct for some sites based on the ***eremitic*** (hermit-centred) movement that came out of the 4th century AD Egyptian desert, but for the early Christian ***coenobitic*** (community-centred) movement which would be more appropriate in the Urswick setting, reconstructions of sites and founder/development sequences is a much more complex problem (for a mainly document-centred discussion placing this in the context of early monastic rules; see Dunn, M., 2003; *The Emergence of Monasticism*; *From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Blackwell).

Bowen, 1969: *Saints, Seaways and Settlements in the Celtic Lands (*University of Wales) provides a detailed illustration of the Irish Celtic monastery at Nendrum, County Down, established in the 5th century by Mochaoi, as a good representative picture of the lay-out of a large Celtic monastery in the 'Age of the Saints'. This, too, provides a helpful model for the more likely origins of the Urswick site.



Later inhabitants built more permanently upon earlier foundations; so we could still consider a monastic community being established at Urswick with a wooden church during the late 4th century AD (see below) and the extended site developed more permanently with a stone church later on.

So who are the main contenders for the founding of the monastic community and the earliest dedication of the church?

Obviously, the first temptation is to link the more famous 'saints' with a particular settlement. This is possible, but it is equally likely to be one of their followers or a group of monks associated with them; with a dedication following. However, we should highlight several features that suggest that Urswick was a very important - and early - foundation. The sheer size of the site at Urswick, (the outer boundaries enclose an area of 180-200 hectares), is much larger than known early eastern Irish and western British monastic sites (although comparisons may be invidious when the naturally bounded hinterlands of islands such as Iona are taken into consideration). Urswick's intimate later prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman connections that landscape archaeology is beginning to reveal all give a demonstrable longevity of community settlement in a sheltered and well-resourced location. Furness itself, from prehistory until the 18th century, was 'islanded' by its position between the Duddon Sands, the Irish Sea, Morecambe Bay and the fells, lakes mires and rivers of Cumbria's mountain core.

This would have been a prime site for a very early foundation at the northern end of the critically important western seaways; with their vital links to early foundations in Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Gaul, Spain and the Mediterranean.

Let's go back to the roots of Christianity in Cumbria to find possible contenders for the foundation. We know that there were Christians in the Roman Army, although Christianity initially was more tolerated than approved. For wealthy early Roman Christians services and worship would take place in private, perhaps in the home of a villa or estate owner with a 'house church' of his or her own. Equally, Christianity could have come here independently of the Romans since there was trade between the Mediterranean, Europe, Ireland and Britain. *Archaeological evidence for this is plentiful (in the form, for example, of amphorae (Roman wine containers) from sites bordering the western seaways at the close of the Roman occupation of Britain.*

We can say with some confidence that there was considerable activity along Hadrian's Wall and in and around Carlisle in particular; there was a monastery there in the 3rd Century and Carlisle had its own Bishop in 250AD, Bishop Nelior, (Rees, 2000) because he was martyred with Bishop Nicholas of Penryhn near Glasgow during the time of Emperor Diocletian. He would, of course, have had his 'diocese' in what is now southern Scotland and northern England. A Bishop suggests a Christian community, an abbot and other monks called, trained, educated and 'sent' to evangelise the area around Carlisle. They would travel mostly by foot along established paths and routes; some would follow the course of a river either by boat or along the banks. There is no evidence to date that anyone came this far south and west over land.] (Steve Dickinson cites, for example**,** *Prof. Charles Thomas, Prof. Cramp, historian Charles Pythian-Adams and the ex-director of the Carlisle Archaeology Unit*

as not supporting Rees with respect to this 3rd century Carlisle monastic site. He states that ' the earliest ecclesiastical site for which there is clear historical evidence in Carlisle is a 7th century AD foundation – the one visited by Cuthbert as part of the Lindisfarne diocese'. (See, for example; Pythian-Adams, C.; 1996, *Land of the Cumbrians; A study in British provincial origins A.D. 400-1120* (Scolar).

St Ninian

There is much speculation as to where St.Ninian (also known as St.Nynia) was born and educated. Thanks to Bede we know he was a Briton; perhaps from Cumbria. He certainly received much of his education in Rome, (this recorded by Bede), was consecrated as Bishop and evangelised amongst the Picts, (in Southern Scotland) where he was successful in converting many. It is believed that he visited, or was a contemporary of, St.Martin of Tours, (this is, however, disputed by some historians and is not mentioned by Bede). If we accept this, he was impressed by the monasticism developing in Gaul at the time and determined to bring it back with him. Tradition has it that he established a monastic community at Whithorn based on the disciplines of St.Martin, and, following the death of Martin in 397, dedicated his first church to him - a white, stone, mortared church, which was unusual for its time and context. It is understood by some that he mounted missions to the south, (probably into Cumbria) and ordained priests and consecrated bishops to manage the area on Roman diocesan lines. Several churches are dedicated to St.Ninian in the north of Cumbria, e.g. Penrith Ninekirks, and probably St.Martin's at Brampton.

Ninian supposedly died in about 432 – but his dates are disputed by historians. Most of the reliable information that we have about him was written by Bede, some three hundred years after he lived.

This account, however, raises some interesting questions – particularly about the nature of the 'church' at Whithorn and the status of the early monastic community there. To take the latter first; excavations in the 1980's near the site core failed to resolve critical questions of post-Roman date and building sequences. Earlier excavations in the site core have never been fully published, making it impossible to impartially assess observations and evidence from them. Large quantities of lime for the mortar and limewash for a substantial stone church would also have had to have been transported to Whithorn from the nearest sources 22 miles (35.4 km) to the east – a prodigious logistical nightmare for an early Christian community. Historians have also queried such an early foundation to St Martin. Leading historian of the early church in Scotland, Alan McQuarrie, points out problems with the early dates for Ninian, and stresses (following Prof. A.A.M.Duncan) that Bede never made Ninian builder of the first ecclesiastical site at Whithorn, and he never called him its first bishop: indeed; 'there is a measure of agreement that Nynia came to a church and see already in existence.' (McQuarrie, A., 1997; *The Saints of Scotland; Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450-1093* (John Donald); p55). Whithorn has all the appearance of an early

Christian mission station, and not a major 5th /6th century AD monastic base. We shall revisit this shortly.

Such successes as the early clerics had in Galloway and SW Scotland were, apparently, short-lived. The facts show that their ministry and successes were only temporary because, when St.Kentigern was recalled from Wales to be Bishop of Strathclyde in what is now Glasgow in about 573, he found that paganism had returned and struggled to convert the natives! No wonder he took his time travelling back home.

However, much of what we know about Kentigern is based on twelfth-century AD documents, such as the *Life* written by hagiographer (writer of a saint's life) Jocelin of Furness, and, as Alan McQuarrie shows (*op.cit.;* p117-144); we have to treat these and their claims with suitably qualified respect (for example, the Welsh episode is regarded by Prof. Jackson as being unhistorical; McQuarrie, *ibid*.; 133).

So what price St. Patrick?

There are many claims for where St Patrick might have been born. As with Ninian and Kentigern, much of what has been written about Ireland's patron saint dates to periods long after he was alive. A lot of this late material was also written with particular political and proselytising objectives in mind, (for example, to bolster Armagh's early historic claims for Irish church supremacy); so it must be examined very critically.

Fortunately, we have some writings considered by the majority of serious scholars to be absolutely authentic–written by Patrick himself (Howlett, D.R., 1994; *The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Four Courts Press). Patrick names his birthplace as *Bannaventa Berniae*, which Howlett translates (from the Latin original) as referring to a town (op.cit., 52-3). Other scholars see Patrick's term for a town – *uico*, referring to a *vicus*, (a Roman settlement) or an estate. Birdoswald Roman fort, (known to the Romans as *Banna*), has long been a favourite location for Patrick's birthplace, but the director of recent excavations there, Tony Wilmott, doesn't see the topography of the site relating to interpretations of Patrick's description. Prof. Charles Thomas suggests the *Berniae* element of the latter relates to a mountain pass, (Wilmott, T., 1997; *Birdoswald; Excavations of a Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall and its successor settlements 1987-92* (English Heritage); p231). No evidence has been presented from Birdoswald for an early monastic settlement.

Patrick's dates, as with Ninian, are a matter of dispute. We know from Patrick's writings that he came from an influential Romano-British family, his grandfather Potitus was a Christian priest, as was his father; Calpornius. Patrick's father is also considered to have been a senior administrator, perhaps for the town council of *Bannaventa*, or for the Roman Army; hence strong links with Roman places and centres of occupation. Some consider that he undertook part of his education in a monastery where St.Ninian taught- again, perhaps, significant for our explorations.

Patrick himself tells us that he was kidnapped by Irish slave traders at the age of 16

Tradition has it that on escaping and managing to get a boat back to England the boat was wrecked in Morecambe Bay and Patrick came ashore at Heysham with other monks in his party. Excavations at St.Patrick's Heysham (Potter, T.W. and Andrews, R.D., 1994; Excavation and Survey at St Patrick's Chapel and St.Peter's Church, Heysham, Lancashire, 1977-8, in; *The Antiquaries Journal*, 74, 55-134) have revealed no evidence for a 5th or even a 6th century AD monastic foundation; although the chapel's dedication is curious. We do know, again from his writings, that Patrick received training in holy orders based on a British church. With an evangelical zeal and a 'call' to return to the land of his captivity, he then returned to Ireland.

If he had landed at Heysham on the other side of the Bay, his most likely land route would have been 'over sands' from Heysham to Cartmel then to Conishead Bank, along the shores of Low Furness, inland to cross over the Duddon and back to Carlisle area perhaps following the coast line. Although it is most unlikely that he would stop long enough to establish a community at Urswick because he was anxious to get back home, it is possible that some of his monks could have stayed here, perhaps meeting up with others already here, and evangelising Low Furness from here and building on the Irish monastic lines.

There is a tradition that many Irish monks and travellers knew about a significant monastery in the north of Britain; known as a major teaching centre. The scale of the monastic 'estate' at Urswick compared with others would suggest a place of considerable importance, although Whithorn is the 'preferred' location for this.

Patrick was consecrated Bishop in 431 by Pope Celestine and returned to Ireland in the footsteps of Palladius who had had a short and unsuccessful mission in 430. Patrick died in about 461. *David Dumville, one of the pre-eminent Patrician scholars, estimates Patrick's death-date to be 493*; Dumville, D.N.et.al., (1999); *Saint Patrick* (Boydell Studies in Celtic History XIII).

We have to remember that this period in Ireland was one of great monastic developments, of monks travelling all over the known world taking the Christian message far and wide; it could be that this was a prime time for Urswick, as we shall see.

St. Kentigern (Mungo)

Let's consider St. Kentigern again briefly. We know that several churches in the north of Cumbria were dedicated to him, but he does not have further dedication in the south of the county. Kentigern trained as a monk in Serf's community at Culross on the Fife coast. He established a base in Glasgow but fled south when an anti-Christian party came to power (Rees 2000). We are told that on the death of Fergus, a 'holy hermit' who was buried at Cathures (now Glasgow) Kentigern settled there and after some time the King and clergy of

region Cambrensis 'besought him to be their bishop' and 'having summoned a bishop from Ireland after the manner of the Britons and Scots of that period, they compelled him to be consecrated' (AD543). On hearing at Carlisle that many people living in the mountains were pagans, he stayed in the area for some time, ministering as far down as Crosthwaite near Keswick.

Rees suggests that it was possible that other Christians lived in that area and further south, perhaps as a result of mission and ministry by Ninian and by Irish monks working there after Patrick. It is thought that he then went northwest towards Aspatria and then south- could it be via Urswick and then 'over-sands'?

Rees (2000) notes another small church dedicated to St.Kentigern 'on the mud flats where the River Eden flows into the Solway Firth' in Grinsdale and wonders if he in fact sailed to North Wales from there.

Richard Ferguson, Chancellor of Carlisle Diocese (Diocesan Histories, 1889) referred to the account of the *Life* of St.Kentigern by Joscelin of Furness written in the 12th Century in which he states that on leaving Crosthwaite, 'the saint directed his steps by the sea shore, and, through all his journey scattered the seed of the Divine Word, gathered in a plentiful and fertile harvest unto the Lord'.

As noted above Kentigern was successful in setting up a monastic community at Llanelwy in North Wales but was summoned back north by Rydderch, nominal sovereign of Strathclyde. His return was not rushed because he is not recorded as getting back until 574, a year later!

He was accompanied by St.Nidan, his cousin and St. Finan and a group of monks, 665 of them in all, according to Joscelin of Furness Abbey. Can we find evidence of their activities in our area? Well, a quick glance at the map suggests a possible link because within a day's walk of Urswick we have *Fins*thwaite and several settlements around *Nib*thwaite and of course across the Bay we have *Kents* Bank, the River *Kent, Ken*dal and *Kent*mere. *Steve Dickinson shows, however, that Finsthwaite = Old Norse personal name = Finnr's clearing. Nibthwaite = Old Norse – 'the clearing by the new farmstead'. Kent- names originate in a British name, considered by specialists to perhaps relate to hills; Cunetio/Cunetju. See Smith, A.H.; 1967; The Place-Names of Westmorland, Pts. I and II (CUP); specifically Pt I, p9-9).* Further investigation of place names, etc. might help us but without clear evidence in the form of a yet undiscovered stone cross or other ecclesiastical artefact we have to leave that one lying around for the time being at least. Kentigern died in 612.

St. Columba

We must nor leave out the great St.Columba of Iona who was born in about 521 and died in 597. We make no claim to his ministry here, of course, but Steve Dickinson, in *The Beacon*

on the Bay (*op.cit.*) suggests a number of links with Columba and Iona, and this should be explored a little.

In the church at Urswick there is a cross fragment containing runic inscriptions and images of two persons (see illustration). When this was discovered in 1911 W G Collingwood dated it as being from about 850-870AD, and considered it to be of no great quality or significance. Steve Dickinson re-examined the inscription and concluded that runes in key locations naming the original maker and original commissioner of the cross had been overcut. He makes a case for this stone depicting a particular ecclesiastical event in the latter years of the 7th Century, and suggests that two figures depicted on the cross's 'inscription face' are in fact Archbishop Theodore (7th Archbishop of Canterbury), and a prior named Luigne; named in the runic inscription panel above them. This, if true, would place Urswick at the centre of the massive political and ecclesiastic changes in the church during that period as the Roman rite gained final ascendancy over the Irish rite - or did it?

Within the runic text, he claims, is also Trumwin/i, a significant northern bishop to the Picts in 681 to whom we must return later.

The figures, one of whom appears to be a bishop, (he is holding a crosier) both have Pictish/Irish tonsures – but why would an archbishop affirming the Roman model have an Irish tonsure – unless of course we remember that it was done by a 'local' sculptor and is representative of what he imagined?

It would be easier for us if the figure was Bishop Trumwini himself, but we don't know that. We are told that his predecessor had the cross erected to honour his 'Lord' Torotheo which derives from *Theodoros* - Greek ('God-given') for Theodore. What is known from history is that Archbishop Theodore consecrated Trumwini as Bishop to the Picts in 678, having

divided the large and troublesome Northumbria Diocese into two - and we know that Theodore died in 690. If it is Theodore as seems probable, then who is the other person in animated conversation with him and if it is 'Luigne', which is he and what did he do? When did he arrive at Urswick and why?

Dickinson quotes widely from Adomnan's *Life of St.Columba* (trans. Richard Sharpe, Penguin 1995) to make his case that this gentleman was in fact Columba's steersman who had become a prior in a large monastery 'in the island of Elen' in his old age.

There is reference to the 'monks of Mag Luinge (Luigne?)' on the island of Tiree not far from Iona where penitents were often 'banished' to find their place of resurrection; the monks were 'attacked with a deadly plague, the effects of which were mitigated by prayer and fasting' (Adomnan's Life of St. Columba).

The fact of the matter is that in Adomnan's 'Life' there are three separate Luignes and what we have is a composite of the three! Dickinson argues that *the linkage of three individuals into one person is supported by Prof. Ó Riain, though Sharpe disputes this (Sharpe, op.cit., p288-289, fun 133)*]. Luigne, incidentally, was the name of a tribe in Ireland and not uncommon, so although we can perhaps trace their roots, we can't identify exactly which Luigne we are dealing with although the 'evidence' would seem compelling. There is nothing in the 'Life' to suggest that Elen was anything more than a small island in the Outer Hebrides.

We could perhaps place Bishop Trumwini as having visited Urswick in the 680s because we have to remember that he was evicted or rather fled from Abercorn in 685 and went to settle at a monastery commonly supposed to be Whitby *[Dickinson makes the case for Bede's terms - Streanæshealh/Sinus Fari - that have previously been linked with Whitby applying in actuality to Urswick and this is detailed in Beacon on the Bay p47-8].*

I do not propose to pursue that issue here.

We could equally well place Theodore on a pastoral tour during the same period since he worked hard to unite the Church under the Roman rule. So, if the cross was set up by Trumwini in commemoration of 'his Lord Torotheo', what was the event and was it linked to the monastic community here?

Could it have been an earlier summit meeting between Theodore and the prior (Luigne) from the Isle of Man (see below) which might have taken place during Theodore's first pastoral visits a little while after a critical mid-7th century AD Synod, in an attempt to persuade the Isle of Man to 'go Roman'? That would still make Luigne very old but it lends some credibility to the event.

Of course, Urswick *could* be Luigne's mystical 'Isle of Elen', God's 'trysting place', and we mustn't dismiss that one yet!

Dickinson suggests the following scenario: that Luigne commissioned the cross with its original inscription in anticipation of his and Theodore's death. It was presumably only part-finished when Luigne died, and Trumwini, evicted by the Picts from Abercorn, arrived and arranged for its completion in 690 AD, or shortly thereafter.

At least that would seem to confirm the importance of the monastic community at Urswick and its significance as a 'staging post for ecclesiastical traffic' between Britain and Ireland and other places!

So far we have found no firm evidence for Urswick's monastic community being established overland from any direction; that one awaits further archeological evidence and interpretation. We should, though, perhaps consider further the possibility that the settlers came from the sea into the Bay because clearly this was one of the strengths of its location and a regular feature of its early trading history. Successive 'raiders', eg the Romans and later on, the Vikings, came from there. Whilst Ireland was no great distance from Southern Scotland, the Cumbrian coast and North Wales, as we have seen, we must not discount the Isle of Man's significant position as a 'staging post' between Ireland and here and often providing a 'haven' for fleeing Christian monks.

Our Luigne is alleged to have been prior of an important monastery 'in the Isle of Elen' during his later years, ie: mid 7th century AD. Could it, then, be that he went from Iona to the Isle of Man via Tiree as prior and then as hinted above, he met with Theodore as its representative? Again Dickinson is very helpful in that he refers to *the Irish historian Dáibhí Ó Crónin who presents the Isle of Man as a scene of conflict between the Irish Scots and the Irish, citing its abandonment by the Irish in the later 6th /early 7th century; 1995*; *Early Medieval Ireland; 400-1200* (*Longman*), *p50. This would not suggest stable conditions for a 7th century early Christian Irish monastic community on the Isle of Man. Available evidence currently indicates that the island housed no substantial 6th/7th century AD Christian community on the 'Ionan' model – for example; there's no historical, place-name or archaeological evidence.*

However, Rod Geddes writing in Rees (2000) about the influence of the Columban church on the Isle of Man states that when King Aedan captured Mann in 583AD the island came under the influence of the Columban church; by taking control of Mann, Aedan had secured the southern sea routes in the same way that an expedition to the Orkneys in 580 had secured his northern borders. The following 50 years brought political alliances which helped the mission of the Church. Columba and Kentigern had forged a personal link with each other which had brought Dalriada and Strathclyde together both politically by treaty and ecclesiastically through their commitment to a common mission. They also drew in, by

association, Ulster, Mann, the British territories of Rheged around Carlisle and North Wales. Urswick could have held a strategic position in this new spirit of co-operation and it would be 'safe' to establish a community there perhaps; the time sequence fits well for an early Iona familia development.

So we still have several intriguing possibilities, one, that a very early Christian community existed at Urswick during the late Romano-British period and grew to be of sufficient importance and stature to be a place to which 'wandering saints' would come, stay, study and wander on; that the 'template' was transferred to Ireland as a basic monastic model (or perhaps more likely that it was re-developed from the Irish model later on), that this really was the place they knew as Rosnat *and with the tantalising possibility of it being home to St.Patrick!*.

The second possibility was that it was established later on during the late 6th century perhaps on the Irish model by Kentigern or his contemporaries and was of sufficient strategic importance around AD670 for Archbishop Theodore to meet with an important Irish/Ionan cleric in order to reinforce the decision implemented at the AD664 Synod of *Streanæshealh/Sinus Fari.* This changed the nature of the established Church in the whole of the north of Britain and Ireland, and Bishop Trumwini arguably wished to record this highly significant meeting for posterity (and as a reminder perhaps to future wandering saints!)

There is another possibility which presents itself, although there is no evidence for it yet, and that is that Trumwini spent time here at the monastery at Urswick during the 660s under the authority of Luigne (who established the monastery in the early part of the 7th Century).

Perhaps he succeeded Luigne as prior, and Theodore 'called' him out to be a Bishop to the Picts from here! Now that would be worth recording….

Ian Bradley in his book on the life of Columba suggests that it was quite usual to have high standing crosses, initially of wood and later of stone, scattered among the monastery's various buildings, which commemorated 'important events in the history of the monastery or the life of the founder' (*Ian Bradley 'Columba: Pilgrim and Penitent' (1996) Wild Goose Publications*). Is this a further clue to the 'Iona' connection?

Links

It might be helpful to explore a little further some other 'Irish connections' because it is clear that there was considerable 'traffic' between Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Britain over this critical period, indeed since the emergence of monasticism after Martin of Tours. It is astonishing to record the distances and the frequency of travel undertaken by bishops,

monks and their students alike; tracking them is in itself a fascinating journey which might throw more light on the origins of Urswick itself. So let's begin….

Nora Chadwick (*The Age of the Saints in the early Celtic Church (1960), published by Llanerch)* refers to the 'Catalogus Sanctorium Hiberniae' to outline the different Orders within Irish monasticism, the First Order, the 'most holy' bishops, those who received their 'missia' or order of service from Patrick himself. The Second Order, mainly presbyters and a few bishops, who had received their missia from the Holy Men of Britain, ie David, Gildas and Docus (or Cadoc according to D.S.Dugdale -*Manx Church Origins (1998) published by Llanerch*- and others).

The Third Order were hermits and desert dwellers.

'Gildas auctor' was referred to by Columbanus in a letter to Pope Gregory the Great as one whose advice was sought after in a matter of church discipline by a certain 'Vennianus auctor' (Irish- perhaps Finnian of Clonard) who was traditionally considered to be the founder of the great monastic movement in Ireland. Finnian, born in Leinster, spent some years in South Wales at the School of Cadoc, returned to Ireland to teach, eventually transforming an old church in Clonard into a monastery at a date somewhere between 520 and 530. He died of the plague in 548/549.

Gildas (510-570), dismissed by Bede as 'their (Britons) own historian', was the teacher of Vennianus of Findbarr (Finnnian above) who in turn was a teacher of Columba.

A further link with St. Patrick which enhanced the position of Columba was a prophesy by a 'stranger of British race, a holy man and a disciple of the Holy Bishop Patrick', named Mauchte, who said:
'In the last years of the world there will be born a son whose name Columba will become famous through all the provinces of the islands of the ocean, and he will shed a bright light over the last years of the earth' (Adamnan's Life of St.Columba).

In the 'Annals of the Four Masters' Mochta/ Mauchte is listed in the 'family of Patrick as Patrick's *priest,* next in importance to Sechnall, Patrick's bishop. Mochta died in 534, bishop of Lughmhagh.
Bede records that Columba (born in AD521) studied under St. Finbarr (Finnian), the bishop, 'during his youth'.

We know that before about 550AD Columba had founded a 'noble monastery' in Ireland known as Dearmach (Field of Oaks), and both from there and later from Iona his disciples were sent out to establish further monasteries in Britain and Ireland. Columba left Ireland with his twelve 'disciples' in about 557AD and landed on Iona to begin a major work which would have an enormous impact for Christianity.

We also know that Cadoc was teacher of Gildas at his School at Llancarvan only a short distance from Llanilltyd (Llantwit Major, Glamorgan) the monastery set up by the Breton Illtyd in the latter years of the fifth century, so the early links with the Christian Celtic movement on the Continent to Wales and with emerging monasticism in Ireland are clearly made.

Cadoc later undertook missionary work in Brittany.

We have yet to include Enda who was a principal character in the monastic movement in Ireland. He was persuaded to go to Rosnat to study under abbot Maucennus and then returned to Ireland in about 500AD to set up his School on the island of Aran Mor in Galway Bay; he died about AD530.

Despite the considerable influence of the Welsh Schools it seems that the 'monastic template' was based on the Irish / Iona 'template'. We have yet to establish the location of Rosnat- could it be in South Wales where there clearly was significant activity during the latter part of the fifth century (the St.Partick's Church website www.saintpatrickdc.org suggests that this is so, probably St. David's foundation at Pembroke) or was it, as we considered briefly above, actually at Urswick? The Celtic Orthodoxy website www.celticorthodoxy.org places Rosnat at Whithorn and that is supported by Watson (*History of Celtic Placenames of Scotland, 1926, reprinted by Birlinn (Edinburgh) in 1993*), who suggests that Rosnat (Little Cape) and Futerna are the same place, as are Teach Martain (Martin's House), Candida Casa, Magnum Monasterium, Hwiterne (Whithorn), Futerna being the latinized Gaelic form of the old English Hwiterne.

He emphasises the strong links between Ireland and Scotland (Galloway and Dumfries). Watson states that Candida Casa 'remained long an important centre of religious life and learning, widely known and much frequented'. He then re-states the importance of the links between the kingdom of Northumbria and Iona and makes the point again that 'long before Hi (Iona) was founded by Columba, Candida Casa formed a very important link between Ireland and Scotland'.

Dugdale (1998) refers to the 'Liber Hymnorium' which describes how Finnian of Moville and his colleagues Talmach and Rioc studied under abbot Mugint at Futerna; since Finnian of Moville died 'at an advanced age in AD579' the date of the above incident may have been between 510 and 530AD with the clear implication that a monastic community existed at Whithorn with definite Irish connections. Dugdale concludes that the period envisaged for the *British* monastic phase at Whithorn/Futerna was approximately 530-630AD. That corresponds well with other developments in the Irish church.

It is therefore quite likely that Urswick monastery/ community is neither Futerna nor Rosnat but rather another significant monastic site developed or perhaps more likely re-

developed by colleagues/ disciples / contemporaries of Columba who brought the 'Iona Family template' with them either directly from Iona o, more likely, from Lindisfarne.

Dickinson tells us that the 'Ionan family' monastic sites were: in Scotland (3), in Ireland (9), and Northumbria (Lindisfarne), (*we could perhaps now add 'Man'),* and that the landscape and sculptural evidence from Urswick's core makes for a British Ionan family member- with Northumbrian designs upon it.

So can we begin to 'pin down' the sequence of events at Urswick within the historical context and in relation to the one clear piece of sculptural evidence, the Trumwini Cross?

Having established that the political conditions were right for some degree of 'mission expansion' into the north of England during the period approximately AD590- 660 and in the knowledge that at the request of King Oswald, Aidan M'Libher *and others* set out for England from Iona, in 635 'to convert his people to Christianity'. Bede records that once Aidan, the first monk/bishop arrived and was accepted at Lindisfarne, then 'many Irishmen arrived day by day in Britain and proclaimed the word of God with great devotion in all the provinces under Oswald's rule'. He also notes that Churches were built in several places and that the King 'of his bounty gave lands and endowments to establish monasteries'. St. Aidan was succeeded in 651 by Finnan as bishop (the Gaelic name for Lindisfarne was Eilean naomh- Holy Island) who was bishop for ten years. We are told that Finnan built a wooden church there which was later consecrated by Archbishop Theodore. This could mark the gentle divisions between the role of bishop and abbot and provides the 'possibility' that Lughe M'Cumin, listed among Columba's disciples, described as a 'monk of Hy' (Iona) became abbot of Eilean Naomh - is this our Luigne? Finnan was succeeded as bishop by the former abbot of Iona, Colman, in 661. It was Colman, of course, a fiery Irish Celt, who got caught up in the controversy which led to the fateful Synod of Whitby in 664. It would appear that the roles of bishop and abbot had now been divided because we note that Cuimine Ailbhe became abbot at this time.

So did Lughe (Luigne) then move across to establish or develop Urswick, his 'trysting place' on similar lines to Holy Island (Eilean Naomh)? That could place Luigne- not the one of myth and legend but another Luigne because the list of Columba's first 151 'disciples' records at least three others named Lughe!

Now, as far as Trumwini goes could it be that he came with Luigne as prior or in a similar position as part of his own preparation for high office? There is a precedent for this sort of progression in the life of Cuthbert who followed Eata to Ripon as 'guest master' and then back to Lindisfarne as prior when Eata became abbot there in 664. The monastic 'hierarchy' very strongly supported insider appointments!

Moving on, we need to be reminded that after his 'defeat at Whitby' in 664 by the 'Roman' Bishop Wilfred, (the champion of Alchfrid, son of King Oswy), who incidentally had been

offered Ripon (In-hrypum) when Eata refused the Roman ways and returned to Melrose, Bishop Colman, (who was championed by King Oswy who had himself been baptised and instructed by the Irish and had a complete grasp of their language) returned to Iona as abbot and three years later returned to Ireland. Tuda, a monk from the South of Ireland and by implication, in favour of the Roman practices, became bishop of Lindisfarne with Eata, a convicted Celtic monk as abbot.

It was Wilfred who held the bishopric of Northumbria after 664, that is, until King Egfrid fell out with him and removed him from office in 678. He was replaced by two bishops both former monks, Bosa, Bishop of Deira with his 'see' in York and Eata, Bishop of Bernicia with his 'see' at Lindisfarne; Eata continued as abbot at Lindisfarne with Cuthbert as prior. In 681 Theodore took the opportunity to break the power of the huge Northumbria diocese by appointing two more bishops, Tunbert to the see of Hexham and Trumwine to be bishop of 'those Picts who were subject to English rule' (Bede). It was Trumwini, of course, who is believed to have persuaded Cuthbert to become a bishop in 685, the same year he was removed from office as a result of a Pictish revolt and victory against King Egfrid.

So, to take Dickinson's deductions, for whatever reason, and we can but speculate, Luigne, Trumwini and Theodore could possibly have had a common event at Urswick from which a significant sculptural memorial was produced. Did Theodore meet with Luigne in his attempts to bring the Celtic Christians into line after the Synod of Whitby in 664 or to persuade them to stay rather than follow Colman? Did he seek advice and support from an old and wise Ionian monk/abbot? Or did he meet with him to persuade him to let Trumwini go to be a bishop to the Picts? Did he perhaps travel to Urswick to dedicate its newly built stone church-was that the event for which the cross-memorial was commissioned by Trumwini?

Was Urswick, then, the last of the Columban Iona familia and the last bastion of the Celtic Church in Britain?

In the coming years the archaeology will perhaps reveal more for us about the dates and sequence of church/ monastic building and developments at Urswick and its links with other major centres of Christianity. *Can't help thinking that the 'early dedication stone' lying under the inside entrance into the Tower might provide the 'key' to so much more- however, we'll have to be patient.*

Observations at Urswick have relied very heavily on conclusions reached by Steve Dickinson drawn from 'field archaeology' which whilst giving general 'clues' cannot be as definite or as scientific as more lasting artefacts. It may be that as this and other projects continue across a wider spectrum of site that those observations can be challenged.

The same applies to the central 'artefact', the Tunwinni cross fragment and its 'Pictish' portraiture; Dickinson has produced impressive, detailed and well-argued conclusions in his

‘Beacon on the Bay’ (2002), and appears to have brought the ‘facts’ and the ‘field evidence’ closely together.

It has to be said that some of his conclusions seem like ‘a leap in the dark’ alongside that given to date by other experts in the field.

There could be a different interpretation of this once it is subjected to more accurate examination of the runes (are they overcut?) and dating of the work itself. It could be that it is not influenced as heavily as suggested by the Northumbrian Church and the ‘Iona template’ and that the early Celtic Irish site/monastery was further developed during the Anglian expansion of the church and the changing monastic movement.

There is a further possible explanation which could be usefully explored, that the cross fragment indeed is a memorial stone erected in the graveyard of a ‘field church’ in the 8th century or even later (Collingwood originally suggested ninth century) and a church was erected on the site at a later date dedicated to St. Mary in the Field.

Dickinson does, however, offer further ‘clues’ which help this particular study when he describes the church ‘fabric’ at Urwick. Whilst rightly stating that dating church building and building ‘phases’ is incredibly difficult, Urswick being no exception, he suggests that ‘We could state that the nave’s infilled small, round-headed windows are similar to complete examples from Anglo-Saxon churches elsewhere’ (page 31). He also suggests that there are ‘two previous chancel arches’ and that ‘infilled twin apertures are also visible high in the wall’ and then concludes that perhaps ‘most interesting of all is the extremely steep roof pitch’. This is added to by the discovery of the ‘eroded remnants of at least one historic sundial, divided into six sectors (with a single part-subdivision of one sector)’. In his footnote he makes comparisons with a church at Isel in North Cumbria and with the Saxon sundial at Escomb.

Perhaps we can see much that is found in an Anglo-Saxon build.

The figures on the cross fragment could hold the key to possible events being depicted; Dickinson has made his case at length and in impressive detail, Collingwood and others also have made observations of a simpler, less flattering nature. Collingwood, for example, deduced that the cross was Anglian, although he considered that the spiral carved on the shoulder of the right-hand figure below the runic panel gave it a ‘touch of Celtic style’. He dated it at c850-870AD. Dickinson argues for the period around 690AD.

Perhaps it is the ‘Pictish nature’ of the carvings that intrigues most. Dickinson states that ‘their simple profile heads have been compared with figures carved on Pictish stone monuments in Scotland, but are regarded by Cramp as rare in Northumbrian stone carving.’ (page 16). He goes on: ‘Heads with scrolled ears and tip-tilted noses are found in insular manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, and, indeed, a background of Hiberno-Saxon

manuscripts is seen as the source for much of the iconography of Great Urswick 1' (the cross fragment).

Dickinson also suggests that if the original translation is accurate then 'Tunwini' as maker or setter of the cross' could possibly be 'Tundwini' who is named on a grave marker from Hexham in 672-6AD. The original translation reads:

'Tunwini put up (this) cross in memory of his lord (son?) Torhtred. Pray for the/his soul'.

Dickinson's reinterpretation should be placed alongside that of Collingwood because here we have two very different 'conclusions' based on the one artifact.

Students of archaeology will know from their reading of the Journal of British Archaeology that many of Dickinson's broader claims were seriously contested by other local experts during the period 2005-6 and despite Mr. Dickinson's own defence of his conclusions, the issues remain unresolved and await further research and perhaps revisiting of his work at some time, especially in relation to the Tunwini cross, his suggestions that the runes were 'overcut', and particularly his claims for a Roman military and trading presence in Furness.

However, more recent discoveries have cast further light on the history of Low Furness and could perhaps spur other work in the future.