

Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic Alumni Newsletter



Issue 7 August 2014



Paul in his natural habitat, with a Welsh manuscript in his hands, at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (© Myriah Williams).

This is my last Newsletter as Head of Department, as my term ends in September (to be precise 11.59 p.m. on 30th September – not that I'm counting). It has been a challenging, rewarding and exhausting three years, and I am grateful to my colleagues for their forbearance; if I have learnt anything (my colleagues may doubt even that ...), it's that a small department's success relies on the whole-hearted contribution of everyone, from senior members to the newest students. That success is reinforced not only by our remarkable record in winning graduate funding, but also by our graduates competing for and often gaining those few hard-fought-over academic jobs. In contrast with many Arts and Humanities departments we're as thriving as we can be in today's climate, achieved by constantly striving to do all those professional things which mark ASNC out as a leader in the field.

The Department has been as busy as ever: we continue to work on attracting the best candidates, and that's important when, given our size, a tiny variation in numbers looks huge in the statistics the University uses. As well as another widening participation trip (see page 3), we are still fruitfully involved in the Sutton Trust Summer Schools which have brought us several excellent students. Thanks are due to colleagues willing to give time and energy to these activities.

We are deeply grateful to Mr J.P. Roed for his financial support for Scandinavian History over several years now, and it's fantastic to see our younger alumni getting in on the act, with Shelby Switzer's generous donation to support the teaching of Modern Irish (see p. 9).

Continued overleaf



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Many congratulations to Richard Dance who was made a Reader in the latest round of Academic Promotions. Fiona Edmonds returns from maternity leave in October to work part-time, so we're delighted that Phil Dunshea has been appointed a part-time lecturer to work alongside her for the next two years (more about Phil opposite). Congratulations also to Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, who won a major collaborative grant for the 'Text and Meaning' project (see opposite), for which there will be postdoctoral researcher based in ASNC.

There have been changes among the admin staff: Charlotte Watkinson moved back to Lancashire, and was replaced by Lauren Kennedy who has settled in so well we forget that she hasn't done a full year's cycle yet. Warm congratulations to Lisa Gold

While on maternity leave **Fiona Edmonds** has nonetheless managed



Edible palaeography: the fantastic cake baked by PhD student Myriah Williams (*Corpus*, 2011) for the graduates' end-of-symposium cocktail party. The style of the manuscript was inspired by Peniarth 1 ('The Black Book of Carmarthen') which Myriah is working on, but the text is a passage of the Welsh laws about the rights of the bakeress, from Peniarth 29 ('The Black Book of Chirk').

whose daughter, Freya, was born in March. And, no, it isn't compulsory that ASNC babies have ASNC names (cf. Fiona's Aidan, and little Cuthbert Baker), it just happens like that, though we do expect them to grow up into ASNaCs... Rebecca Lawes has joined us

to bring to fruition some work on the kingdom of Strathclyde/Cumbria. It will

to cover Lisa's maternity leave. You will probably encounter either Lauren or Rebecca in your contacts with the Department: we hope to see many of you at our various events listed at the end of the Newsletter.

Paul Russell, Head of Department

soon be published in two articles: 'The Emergence and Transformation of Medieval Cumbria', *The Scottish Historical Review* (2014); and 'The Expansion of the Kingdom of Strathclyde', *Early Medieval Europe* (2015). Fiona also discussed the medieval Cumbrian kingdom in a BBC2 programme: 'Border Country: the Story of Britain's Lost Middleland' (episode 2), 6 April 2014, presented by Rory Stewart, MP for Penrith and the Border.



Phil Dunshea writes to introduce himself

I arrived in St Andrews in 2002 for a degree in English Lit but soon found myself slipping sideways into History: perhaps something to do with learning to read *Dream of the Rood* in the first term and then being forced to do a course on 'Comedy and Society' in the second. Once safely ensconced in Mediaeval History I headed for the courses on early things, taught by Julia Smith, Alex Woolf and Simon MacLean. I wrote a dissertation on the 'Northern Alliance' at Brunanburh, a label I like to think I coined. Then I came to ASNC in 2007 for an MPhil. That led to a PhD on the North Britons, supervised by Fiona Edmonds. And so I found myself last September in the daunting position of 'being' Fiona for a year while she went on leave, looking after Part I Brittonic and Gaelic history, 'Sea-kings and the Celtic World' and 'Law and Lawlessness' for Part II.

Nine months on I still don't know how Fiona does it, but I'm delighted to be staying around next year as half a lecturer in Celtic history, not least because I'll finally get to teach on early medieval Scotland, the topic which got me into all this in the first place.

Text and Meaning:

Contributions to a Revised Dictionary of the Irish Language



With Professor Gregory Toner of Queen's University Belfast, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh was awarded funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a five-year project to develop the electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (affectionately known as eDIL). Based on a Dictionary published by the Royal Irish Academy between 1913 and 1976, eDIL has over 35,000 entries, and is indispensable for anyone researching medieval Ireland and Scotland. Some of the Dictionary is a century old and needs revision. Toner and Ní Mhaonaigh, with postdoctoral researchers in Belfast and in ASNC, will examine texts edited since the Dictionary's print edition and thereby add new words, excise ghost words and revise definitions of others.

Examining word-development involves studying the culture of the peoples who used those words, and the project's research has already uncovered some interesting facts. For example, Old Irish speakers had a word for 'alcohol-free' (*ainmesc*), discovery of which might cause some stereotypes to be revisited. And the Modern Irish word for the internet (*idirlíon*) was used in the medieval period with the meaning 'trap', an irony not likely to be lost on today's parents. By engaging with poets, authors and translators who use Irish and Scots Gaelic, the team hopes to encourage them to dip into eDIL for their work. The Dictionary's new website will have a 'word of the day' for those with a general interest in how words change, and an app for mobile devices is also being developed. Suggestions from ASNaCs for a word to describe that app gratefully received!

Away-Day to Wrexham

As part of our constant quest to remind schools and pupils that ASNC and medieval studies exist and that both are fantastic fun, in January Debby Banham, Richard Dance, Rosalind Love, Phil Dunshea and Paul Russell (with Maddy Lawrence-Jones, Magdalene's Access Officer) headed to Wrexham for a day of talks on 'Medieval Cultures in Contact'

Departmental News & Events

for a group of 74 pupils (and 5 teachers) from state-schools all over North Wales, hosted by Coleg Cambria (we are very grateful to Tim Guy for making the local arrangements at the college). The activities had a local theme including 'The Welsh Border in Early Medieval History', and 'Ruins



in Old English and Medieval Welsh literature'. It was a very good day with lots of positive feedback – one complaint being that it was not long enough and did not have enough different sessions! We are off to do the same in Northern Ireland early next year.

Workshop at Aber

In mid-January, eighteen ASNaCs made a day-trip to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth for a behind-the-scenes visit to the Library's exhibition, *4 Books: Welsh Icons United*, featuring some of the most important manuscripts from medieval Wales. Maura McKeon (Homerton, 2012) describes the highlights:

Within the exhibition room the excitement was palpable, as we came face to face with the likes of the Llyfr Taliesin, Llyfr Aneirin, Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin and Llawysgrif Hendregadredd, as well as

the newly-acquired Boston Welsh law manuscript; none of us will forget the experience of being in the same room as two famous books now usually far separated, namely the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest (which lives in Oxford). We then went into the Library's education room for a workshop [photo below] on some of Aberystwyth's other manuscripts, led by Paul Russell, who took us through a wide range of books including facsimiles of Peniarth 28 (a Latin version of the Welsh laws associated with Archbishop Pecham), the Welsh and

Latin lives of Gruffudd ap Cynan, and (for some the day's high point), the Book of Llandaf. We were able to pass them around for a closer look [photo below, Becky Shercliff (John's, 2010) and Alex Sigston (Corpus, 2010)]. ASNaC PhDs also took a leading role including Myriah Williams who discussed the Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin (see the cake version on page 2) with the aid of a facsimile, and Ben Guy (Selwyn, 2009), who introduced the Book of Llandaf. We are very grateful to the National Library of Wales for such a memorable day, and to Phil Dunshea and Paul Russell for driving us there and back.



Departmental News & Events

Millennial Musings by Máire Ní Mhaonaigh

As all ASNaCs know (and a few others besides), the Battle of Clontarf was fought near Dublin just over a thousand years ago in 1014. As all ASNaCs know (and few others besides) it was not a mighty struggle between Celts and Vikings, but rather Irish and Scandinavians fought on both sides. To mark the date associated with the battle, 23 April (Good Friday in 1014), on a wet and windy Wednesday at the start of Easter term the University's website ran a feature on my research into that encounter. *The Cambridge Evening News* picked up the story: I had acquired fame at last. Cambridge news travels widely, however, and a trickle of emails with links to accounts of my research in the likes of the *London Evening Standard*, the *Irish Independent* and the *Belfast Telegraph* had become a near torrent by the next day. The prize goes to a friend (who clearly spends longer surfing than any of us knew) who spotted an Argentinian website proclaiming 'Una historia mítica del nacionalismo irlandés pudo copiarse de Troya', citing my work. Many of the articles drew directly on the academic piece on the University's website; others



A 19th-cent. Depiction of the Battle of Clontarf by Hugh Frazer (© Isaacs Art Centre).

felt more creative on a wet and windy April day. And the research? Well, you can read all about it in the papers, but just remember: don't believe everything you read!

Máire's work features in the current issue of the University of Cambridge's *Research Horizons* magazine (pp. 11-12): linked from here: www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/irelands-troy

1014, 1015 and 1016

To mark a series of key anniversaries, ASNC is hosting three events focused on battles in historical memory. This December (5-6) a conference will mark the Battle of Clontarf and the death of Brian Boru;

Professor Keith Jeffery (Queen's University Belfast) will also examine Ireland's participation in the First World War. In 2015 the focus will be Scandinavia and the millennium of St Olaf's accession and of Cnut's invasion of England, alongside a lecture on the 1915-16 Gallipoli campaign. Centre-stage in 2016 will be the deaths of both Æthelred the Unready, and his son, Edmund Ironside, in 1016; an invited speaker will reflect on the loss of life in war, with the Somme in mind. Alumni are very welcome at all of these conferences (details on our website in due course).



Languages, Myths and Finds: Translating Norse and Viking Cultures for the Twenty-first Century

By Eleanor Rye (St John's, 2005, PhD student at the University of Nottingham)

Current and former members of ASNC took part in Languages Myths and Finds (LMF), an AHRC-funded programme involving PhDs and academics working in Old Norse-Icelandic and Viking studies. LMF, like the Orkney Viking Heritage Project featured in the last newsletter, aims to help participants work with partner organisations to bring their research to non-academic audiences. After an initial workshop in ASNC, we had an introduction to the British Museum's *Vikings: Life and Legend*, from its curator, Gareth Williams, and were very lucky to visit the exhibition as a group in March before the crowds came; all excellent preparation for the field-trips to areas which had a Viking-Age Scandinavian presence. Teams travelled separately to Dublin, the Isle of Man, Munster, Cleveland and the Hebrides in late spring, and explored Scandinavian activity by visiting museums and historic sites, but also by working with local people. The Cleveland team, of which I was a member, saw some impressive Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, was taken up the Scandinavian-named hill, Roseberry Topping, which dominates the local landscape, and also ventured north to Lindisfarne. Each team talked to local audiences in the area, working with schools, giving public talks and, for the

Isle of Man team, staging a Viking burial with the help of a re-enactment group. Groups also produced a guide to the Scandinavian history of the areas visited; these will be available on our website very soon. As I write, we're gearing up for our closing conference at the University of Nottingham, 'Unlocking the Vikings: Norse and Viking Cultures in the Twenty-first Century', when teams will report on their areas of study. To find out more about the project – and (shameless plug!) to read about the Cleveland team's rather exciting discovery – visit the LMF website at languagesmythsfinds.ac.uk.

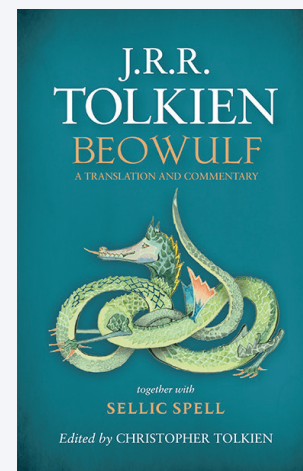
Vikings: Life and Legend

ASNCs will have enjoyed the wide press coverage given to the BM's big *Vikings: Life and Legend* exhibition, which has just finished; indeed some fought through the crowds to see for themselves the magnificent reconstruction of the Roskilde 6 ship. Current ASNC PhD Jo Shortt-Butler (Girton, 2006) did just that and wrote a thoughtful account for the ASNC Blog (anglosaxonnorseandceltic.blogspot.co.uk 16 May). The show provoked quite a variety of reviews and opinions, including, of interest to pre-2005 ASNCs, a characteristically provocative piece in the London Evening Standard by David Dumville, 'Let's tell the bloody truth about the Vikings' (25 February 2014, still available to read on the LES website).



One of many selfies taken at the BM shop—here David Baker (Magdelene, 2010) and his new wife Nicola Lugosch. [stop press - congratulations to them on the birth of baby Edmund this July]

In May, Harper Collins published for the first time J.R.R. Tolkien's 1926 translation of *Beowulf*, with notes from his Oxford lectures on the poem. The book will be gobbled up by devotees of his fantasy fiction; but it is also of special interest to all students of the Old English masterpiece. ASNCs who have worked on the poem (especially takers of *Beowulf* Part II paper) are therefore well placed to assess Tolkien's first-hand response to the text which inspired so much of his Middle-Earth, and the study of which he did so much to advance. Writing somewhat later, Tolkien famously said that 'If you wish to translate, not rewrite, *Beowulf*, your language must be literary and traditional ... because the diction of *Beowulf* was poetical, archaic, artificial (if you will) in the day the poem was made'. In his own rendering, he is as good as his word; its flamboyantly archaic diction (on the first page alone, notice *foemen*, *throve*, *hearken* and *gallant*) unashamedly broadcasts Tolkien's delight in the poem's verbal artifice. Yet it also largely stays close to the original, and one can often detect the voice of Tolkien the philologist and teacher, curating and glossing the text. A nice example comes at lines



702b–3a of the Old English (many students' favourite bit), 'cwom on wanre niht / scriðan sceadugenga', which in Tolkien's version becomes 'There came in darkling night passing, a shadow walking'. The 'darkling' is a typically romantic flourish, aptly conjuring mood and setting, even if the corresponding Old English word (*wanre*) is much less showy. But Tolkien's sentence is difficult to parse: one could be forgiven for thinking, at first glance, that the subject of 'passing' is 'darkling night', which does not make good sense; so Tolkien must be following the original word order precisely ('came ... passing' for *cwom ... scriðan*), privileging it even at the risk of making

his own version slightly obscure. The subject of the clause is actually, then, the same as in the original, the *sceadugenga*, a compound which Tolkien (alive to the etymological connection between the second element and the root of the verb *gangan*) cannot resist explaining, as 'a shadow walking'. In short, this new old translation is a literary and philological conversation between the *Beowulf*-poet and one of his most engaging interpreters – ideal holiday reading for ASNCs everywhere.

Richard Dance

A trinity of books has appeared in the last year representing the fruits, sometimes well fermented, of ASNC PhDs, so we can compliment **Helen Foxhall Forbes** (Trinity, 2001), **Levi Roach** and **Emily Thornbury** (Trinity, 1999) on the publication of *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England. Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (Ashgate), *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (CUP) and *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (CUP). And that's only the ones that the newsletter editor knows about!



ASNC Society

Bret Cameron (Corpus, 2013) describes this year's ASNC Society trip: 'Under the able helmsmanship of our Presidents, Sarah Mercer and Katie Haworth (both Newnham, 2011), ASNaCs (a selection pictured above) made a mead-fuelled January journey across the Southwest. We met in Winchester, dining in a building which once belonged to Emma of Normandy, before touring the cathedral. Next came Malmesbury, King Æthelstan's burial place, and home of Aldhelm and William. After a night at the seaside town of Beer (its association to ASNC needs no explanation), we visited Tintagel, seat of generations of Dumnonian royalty and stuff of Arthurian legend [stuff of ASNC legend too: some readers may recall a night-time break-in to

Tintagel led by Oliver Padel. Ed.]. Inspired by the cliff-top ruins, we staged a Celticist v. Germanicist standoff (winner still disputed! see photo; Bret on the left) Last stop was Bath scene of King Edgar's second coronation. Many thanks to all who made the trip such a pleasure.'

The Society's black-tie dinner was also in January, one of the best-attended ever, with a goodly number of alumni. We were especially delighted to see so many former ASNC Soc. presidents step up to drink from the mead-horn, including Morag Loader (née Wilson, Newnham, 1983).

Voth Valediction

Chris Voth (photo right; Newnham, 2010) bids a fond farewell as she moves to Frankfurt with her family: 'It's a dangerous business,

Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.' Well, isn't that the truth? Four years ago, I stepped through ASNC's door as that elusive being, a MATURE student (cue Prof Russell's thunderous laugh as I remind him that refers to one's **age!**). I had no idea how I'd juggle a PhD and raising two children in a new country, and was sure it would be very lonely. How wrong I was about that last part! I leave having made great friends, worked with the best of mentors, and taught some of Britain's smartest (and certainly most fun!) students. ASNC is really special for fostering close interaction between staff, postgrads and undergrads and it has been my greatest pleasure to study and teach here. It seems like only yesterday we arrived, and now we're off. Oh, but this adventure has been a great one! Goodbye for now!



What ASNaCs Do Next

A while back, we included news from **Edmund Hunt** (Peterhouse, 2002; photo below left) about his career as a composer, and it's great to be able to bring the story up to date by reporting the premier of Edmund's orchestral piece, *Argatnél*, on 9 June, by the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Edmund is working with the LPO as part of their Leverhulme Young



Composers programme. The new piece was, like many of Edmund's compositions, inspired by Medieval Irish literature, in this case more abstractly, as *Argatnél* has no lyrics, but the word, literally 'silver cloud', is an early Irish poetic term for the otherworld, as depicted, for example, in the *Immram Brain* ('The Voyage of Bran'), a tale of the mythical hero's remarkable trip to the Land of Women. There's an interview

with Edmund here www.lpo.org.uk/news/getting-to-know-debut-sounds-composer-edmund-hunt.html. A review described *Argatnél* as 'the most delicately beautiful piece of the evening, its sinuous clarinet and trumpet melodies leaving traces in the form of drifting string chords' (Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph*, 10 June 2014). Bravo, Edmund!

ASNaCs have made a splash in other ways too: last autumn, **Mairead Kelly** (St



Catherine's, 2007; photo above © Vanessa Mills) hit the headlines, including in the *Daily Mail* (11 September 2013), by becoming a professional mermaid, a career-change she chose after recovering from a rare kind of tumour diagnosed just as she was doing Part II. One of her fellow mermaids is Frankie Dubery (Newnham, 2007). To book, see www.realmermaids.co.uk

Last year **Shelby Switzer** wrote about life since graduation. Recently she sent an update which led to her fascinating contribution to the ASNC Blog, 'A Career in Coding' (anglosaxonnorseandceltic.blogspot.co.uk February 2014), reflecting on the skills gained during her time in ASNC and how they feed into her current work in software development. Shelby has very generously decided to make an annual donation to ASNC, which will help fund

Alumni News

Rich Booth (Clare, 2004) and **Amelia Downs** (Selwyn, 2004) were married within a fortnight of each other in May, but many miles apart (Malvern and Cape Town), to Rachel Ingram and Kirstein Combrink respectively. **Eleanor Perkins** (Trinity, 2004) was one of Amelia's bridesmaids, and **James Appleton** (Girton, 2004) was the photographer for Rich and Rachel [one of his classic light-effect photos, middle]. Amelia's 'hengagement' party in London was a bit of an ASNC reunion [see photo top, with, left to right, **Cornelia Zeh** (Caius, 2004), **Rachel Hilditch** (Sidney, 2004), Amelia, Eleanor and **Ruth Ward** (née Wallace, Robinson, 2004); and bottom for a photo of Amelia and her groom].

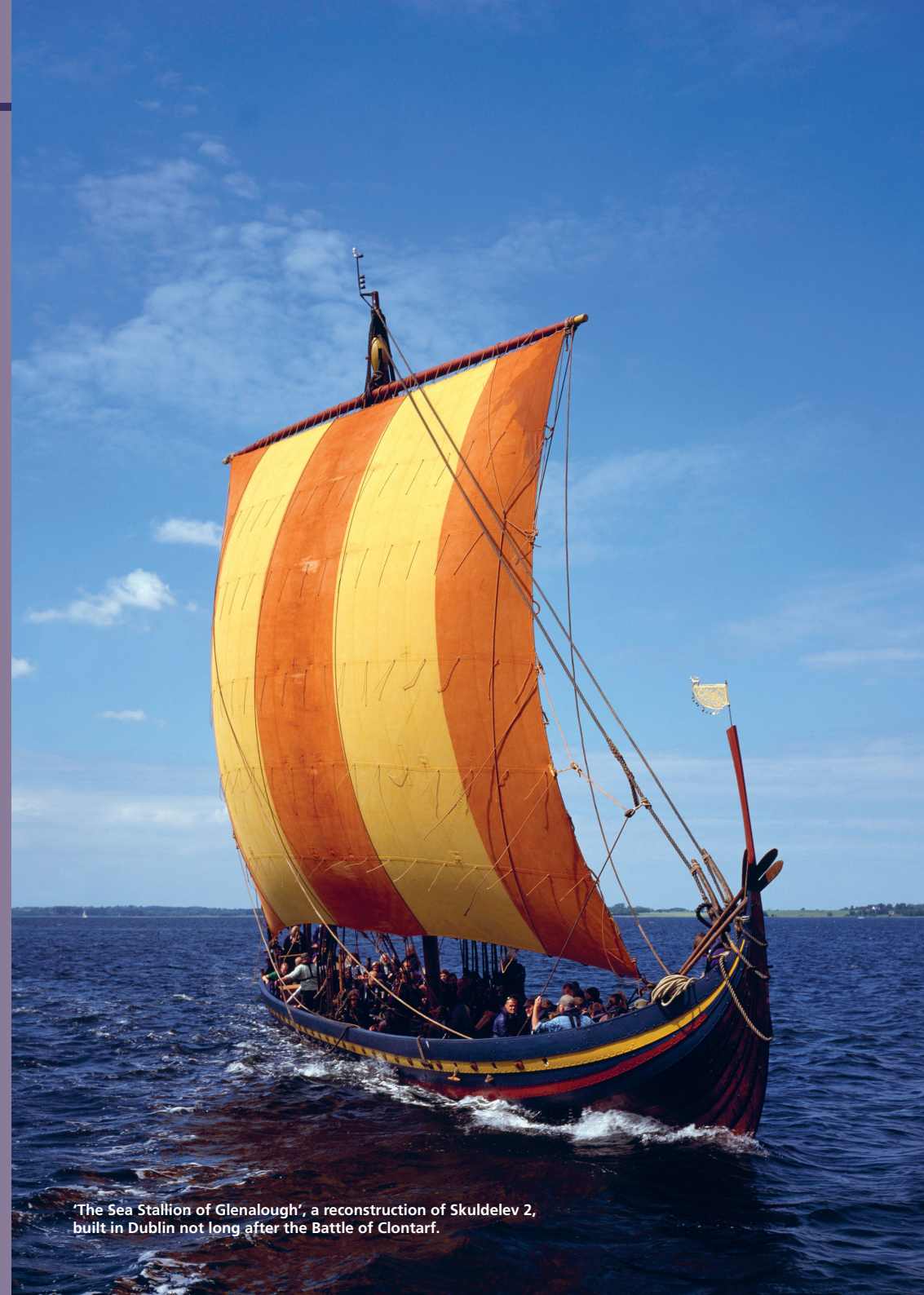
Amelia has written in with further news of her activities since graduation, teaching music at an international school in Arusha, Tanzania, and then, this past year, studying the place of music and the arts in social and community development as an 'El Sistema' Fellow at the New England Conservatory in Boston (Mass.). Her new husband, Kirstein, is a South African missionary pilot, also based in Arusha. Next Amelia will be working for the music department at Makumira University, the only Tanzanian university offering a B.A. in Music, training local teachers to use music to serve their communities. She says that she is happy that her



study of Germanic languages in ASNC is helping her learn Afrikaans.

Rich, meanwhile, is now a fully trained barrister and working for a legal charity called The Bar Pro Bono Unit. There must be a good many ASNaC lawyers out there and given that we now have a Part II special paper called 'Law and lawlessness', we hope to run a feature on ASNC and law in the next newsletter, so please be in touch if you would like to contribute.

Warm congratulations go to **Erik Niblaeus** (Sidney, 2002) who has just been appointed to a Lectureship in the History Faculty of the University of Durham, where an outpost of ASNC is slowly building up (Helen Foxhall Forbes and Eleanor Barraclough are already there, getting the ball rolling). Just a little further south, at Lincoln Cathedral, **Philippa White** (née Cox, Corpus, 2005), was ordained a deacon at Petertide: all the best to you, Philippa!



'The Sea Stallion of Glengalough', a reconstruction of Skuldelev 2, built in Dublin not long after the Battle of Clontarf.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY (all in 9 West Road unless otherwise stated)

ASNC Alumni Reunion:

27 September 2014, 5–7 pm drinks in the ASNC Common Room

University Festival of Ideas:

20 October – 2 November 2014, including an evening lecture by Dr Phil Dunshea on **22 October** ('A Tour of Cambridge and its Surroundings before the University') and ASNC-themed talks, performances and hands-on activities on **25 October** (details: www.cam.ac.uk/cambridge-festival-of-ideas)

Quiggin Lecture:

Thursday 4 December 2014, 5 pm: Dr Matthew Townend, University of York

ASNC Conference: 1014, Ireland and the Wider World

5–6 December 2014: details to be advertised on the website

ASNC Society Black-tie Dinner:

Saturday 17 January 2014 (location tbc): for details check the alumni events section of the ASNC website

Chadwick Lecture:

Thursday 12 March 2015, 5 pm: Professor Catherine McKenna, Harvard University

Kathleen Hughes Lecture (at Hughes Hall, Pavilion Room):

Monday 27 April 2015, 5.45 pm: Dr James Fraser, Edinburgh University

ASNC Summer Garden Party:

Wednesday 17 June, 6 pm: Trinity College, Fellows' Bowling Green

ASNC Alumni are warmly welcome to attend any of these events (see www.asnc.cam.ac.uk for updates)

From the ASNC Alumni Outreach and Fundraising Committee

If you are interested in finding out more about our current research and teaching or our future plans, or would like to tell us news that you would like reported in future newsletters, please contact us through the Departmental Secretary at asnc@hermes.cam.ac.uk or by post: Dept of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 9 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DP, United Kingdom. The Departmental website also has an alumni section (www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/alumni/index.htm).



Moa Hoijer (Hughes Hall, 2008), Robin McConnell (Clare, 2008) and Kate McQuillan (Caius, 2008) at the Alumni reunion



Attendees at the 2014 CCASNC post-conference dinner at Newnham College (including the plenary speaker, Oliver Padel (Peterhouse, 1967))