

Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Alumni Newsletter

Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic

Issue 11, September 2020



[A moment from the ASNC Alumni Reception 2020, held on Zoom on 26 September.]



A Message from the Head of Department

A thousand Hwæts!, and welcome to the 2020 Alumni Newsletter.

I'd like to begin this year's Newsletter by expressing my admiration for the amazing colleagues, students, alumni and friends of the Department who have coped with the events of the last few months with supreme patience, grace and kindness. I know that foremost in all our thoughts at this time are those we have lost over the last twelve months. In March we were deeply sorry to learn of the death of our dear friend and wonderful colleague Richard Sharpe, Professor of Diplomatic in Oxford, who began his distinguished academic career in Cambridge in the 1970s, doing Part II and a PhD in ASNC; you can read tributes to Richard and his outstanding contribution to medieval studies [here](#). Then in May we were immensely saddened by the loss of a much more recent alumnus, the brilliant, kind, talented and funny Rhodri Hughes, who was an undergrad (at Caius) in 2013–16 and a much-loved member of the ASNC community. We miss them both hugely, and our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with their families and all those close to them.

Please forgive the home-made nature of this year's Newsletter. As I write this in late September, the lecturers in the Department are all still working from home — which means that, although cups of tea (and in some cases apples!) are plentiful, the IT resources are thinner on the ground. We're hoping to be back in the Departmental building at 9 West Road very soon, adjusting to some new socially-distanced modes of teaching but offering, for all that, no less warm a welcome than we always do to all our new and returning students.

Looking back to earlier in the academic year, for Michaelmas 2019 and most of Lent 2020 it was business as usual, with all the ASNC mirth and occasional mayhem that you would expect. As ever we marvelled at the bonkers genius / genius bonkersness of the annual Yule Play on 4 December; and it was wonderful to see so many of you at the heartwarming Black Tie Dinner at Jesus on 1 February, organized so well (as always) by the brilliant ASNC Society. In December we were treated to a memorable Quiggin lecture by Professor Bill Miller (Michigan), who spoke about 'Of cursing, prophesying, advising, and anxieties of causation: *Laxdæla saga* chapter 75 and beyond'. The Chadwick and Hughes lectures, which were to have been given by Professor Sarah Foot and Dr Caroline Brett respectively, were postponed owing to the pandemic. Please keep an eye on the ASNC website for news of when these events will be rescheduled, and for our other public lectures this year, which will be online (via Zoom) for the next little while. The upside of this change is that of course it's possible for more of our friends from around the world to join us for these lectures, and we really hope that very many of you will. This year's Alumni Reception, held online on 26 September (and pictured above), was a very enjoyable event; many thanks to Rosalind Love for organizing, to Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Elizabeth Rowe, Ben Guy and Francesco Marzella for speaking, and to everyone who attended.

I'm pleased to say that a range of research projects are going strong in the Department. Máire Ní Mhaonaigh's 'Text and Meaning: Contributions to a Revised Dictionary of Medieval Irish' (with the assistance of Sharon Arbuthnot) has gone out with a bang with the amazing spin-off book *A History of Ireland in 100 Words*, which you can read more about below; its public engagement successor, 'Spreading the

Words', begins in October. 'The *Gersum* Project: The Scandinavian Influence on English Vocabulary' (with Brittany Schorn as chief word-wrangler) reaches the conclusion of its engagement phase in October. Thanks to everyone who attended the launch event for the main *Gersum* project in February, where we celebrated jointly with the wonderful Vikings and medieval Irish schools resources [outreach projects](#) by Becky Shercliff, Ben Allport and Jon Hui. Rosalind Love's 'Latin Arthurian Literature and the Rise of Fiction', which featured in our last Newsletter, kicked off in January with Francesco Marzella as Research Associate. Also new since last year are: Judy Quinn's 'The Íslendingasögur as Prosimetrum', with Research Associate Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh's 'Mapping the Medieval Mind: Ireland's Literary Landscapes in a Global Space', which welcomes back Marie-Luise Theuerkauf and David McCay as researchers; Paul Russell's 'The Writings of Gerald of Wales'; Rory Naismith's 'Foundations of Gold and Silver'; and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh's 'A Digital Framework for the Medieval Gaelic World'. You can find brief descriptions of these new projects in the pages below, as well as news of an important series of exchange events between ASNC and LMU Munich. We are also thrilled to be associated with the 'Augmented Vocality: Recomposing the Sounds of Early Irish and Old Norse' project, involving ASNC alumnus Edmund Hunt of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, which starts in November and which you can read more about [here](#).

Also for 2020–21, we're delighted to welcome back Ben Guy as he moves from being a Junior Research Fellow at Robinson College to a Teaching Associate in the Department, covering the History of England Before the Norman Conquest for Rory Naismith as Rory takes a sabbatical to focus on his research project. Many of you will have enjoyed the conference organized by Ben, 'The Borders of Early Medieval England' (11–12 July), which featured several ASNC alumni. There is also news of two books by or featuring Ben (plus Georgia Henley, Owain Wyn Jones and Rebecca Thomas) later in this issue, alongside *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, which includes contributions by our own Judy Quinn, Elizabeth Rowe and Brittany Schorn, and *A History of Ireland in 100 Words* co-authored by Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Sharon Arbuthnot.

Massive thanks to Brittany for all her help with making these newsletters over the last three years, and to all those who have supplied material, and heartiest greetings to ASNCs everywhere. Please keep on keeping in touch and letting us know what you've been up to — we really do appreciate hearing from you.

This is my last newsletter message as Head of Department. As I hand over to my successor, Elizabeth Rowe, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone — colleagues, students and alumni — for keeping me and the Department going over the last three years. Believe me when I say that it's been a privilege, a pleasure, and only occasionally a bungee-jump into Grendel's mere. But ever mindful of my favourite Old English proverb — 'Ne mæg man muþ fulne melewes habban and eac fyr blawan' ('You can't have a mouth full of flour and also blow on the fire') — I'm looking forward to doing at least a little bit less multi-tasking for a while.

Richard Dance
Head of Department
29 September 2020

RESEARCH NEWS

New projects and collaborations

The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum

The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum is a collaborative project led by **Dr Judy Quinn** and Professor Stefanie Gropper (University of Tübingen), funded by the AHRC and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, from 2020 to 2023. Through a thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of the corpus we will explore the literary mode of the sagas and the generic qualities of saga prosimetrum as well as the compositional habits of the (anonymous) authors of individual sagas. Among the aspects we will focus on are the number and distribution of the stanzas quoted in each saga; the social position of speakers of verses; the addressees (present and absent) of the stanzas; the metre and style of the quoted stanzas and their relation to the surrounding prose; and patterns across the corpus within the content of stanzas. You can read more about the project [here](#).

Working as research associate on this project is the multi-talented **Dr Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir**, who also teaches Modern Icelandic in the Department. Brynja is a specialist in Old Norse literature who recently completed her PhD ('Emotions in *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*: Approaches and Literary Analysis') in ASNC, following an MA in Comparative Literature at the University of Iceland in 2015. Before that she worked as a broadcast journalist and editor in Iceland, including making three award-winning television series on the history and wonders of the Icelandic language (*Orðbragð*).

Mapping the Medieval Mind: Ireland's Literary Landscapes in a Global Space

This is a new five-year research project based in the Department, led by **Professor Máire Ní Mhaonaigh** and funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Dr David McCay and Dr Marie-Luise Theuerkauf (see below) are the researchers on the project. Together the team will examine an extensive body of medieval literature in which the history of Ireland is construed as an overarching narrative of place. The corpus known as *Dindshenchas Érenn*, which can be translated 'Knowledge of Ireland's Notable Places', is a composition in prose and verse of about 10,700 lines, dealing with over two hundred places and natural features and surviving in about twenty manuscripts. It constitutes a map of the medieval Irish landscape, both real and imagined, but also of the medieval Irish mind. Electronic editions of much of the material will be prepared and the narratives will be situated in their broader context, reflecting the engagement of their authors with wider learned trends. In this way, a genre rooted in the Irish landscape will find a place within the pan-European contemporary culture of which it formed an integral part. Echoing through the centuries, the intimate interaction with the environment embodied in *Dindshenchas Érenn* is of enduring interest, as we continue to probe and articulate our engagement with landscape today. The project features in the current edition of the [Leverhulme Trust magazine](#).

We are delighted to welcome back **Dr Marie-Luise Theuerkauf**, who was based in ASNC as the research associate for the 'Text and Meaning' project in 2018–19, before returning to Trinity College, Dublin (where she had previously completed her PhD in 2015) for a post-doc position. We're also very happy indeed to welcome back **Dr David McCay**, who has this year completed his PhD in the Department on the *dindshenchas* in the Book of Leinster. David came to us to read for MPhil in 2015, following a very successful undergraduate career at the University of Edinburgh.

The Writings of Gerald of Wales

This is a five-year project funded by the Leverhulme Trust and based at the University of Oxford (2020–25), with **Professor Paul Russell** as Co-Investigator. It aims to publish authoritative editions of most of the works of the twelfth-century Cambro-Norman cleric, Gerald of Wales. The project was originally due to be led by Professor Richard Sharpe, and Professor Thomas Charles-Edwards assumed the role of Principal Investigator after Professor Sharpe's untimely death in March 2020. The project's website can be accessed [here](#).

Foundations of Gold and Silver

Beginning in October 2020, **Dr Rory Naismith** is undertaking a Leadership Fellowship funded by the AHRC to pursue research into the transformation of the monetary economy in Western Europe between the 5th and 12th centuries. This period saw the quantity of coin in circulation decline considerably. But in relatively few areas did it vanish entirely, and later in these centuries the making and use of coin expanded significantly. Rory's project examines why coined currency persisted as it did, and how the contraction and expansion of the monetary economy affected early medieval societies. This research will result in a monograph and an edited volume based on a final conference. There will also be a workshop on coin-finds in the Fitzwilliam Museum and a series of associated exhibits and activities that present the research for a wider audience.

Spreading the Word(s): Engaging with eDIL

This is a year-long project focussing on medieval Irish words which aims to deepen awareness of the importance of words and their meaning for an understanding of cultural heritage, with reference to the history of Ireland and Scotland in particular. Working with schoolteachers, librarians and others working in the heritage sector, project leader **Professor Máire Ní Mhaonaigh** and researcher **Dr Sharon Arbuthnot** are developing resources linked with school curricula in Britain and Ireland (north and south), as well as material for museums and other cultural bodies. You can see some of our activities on [YouTube](#) and follow us on Twitter [@eDIL_Dictionary](#) and on [Facebook](#). If you are interested in working with the team, please do get in touch. Resources and activities build on previous research undertaken collaboratively between the Department and Queen's University Belfast and leading to a revised version of the electronic Dictionary of the Irish language, [eDIL](#). Both *eDIL* and Spreading the Word(s) are funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

A Digital Framework for the Medieval Gaelic World

This one-year project is examining the impact of digitisation on research into medieval Ireland and Scotland. How have digital projects changed the nature of scholarship undertaken and how can various digital resources be linked? The project is funded jointly by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Irish Research Council and led by two scholars in Queen's University Belfast and Maynooth University; **Professor Máire Ní Mhaonaigh** is Co-Investigator on the project. The project's website is [here](#).

Exchange between ASNC and LMU Munich

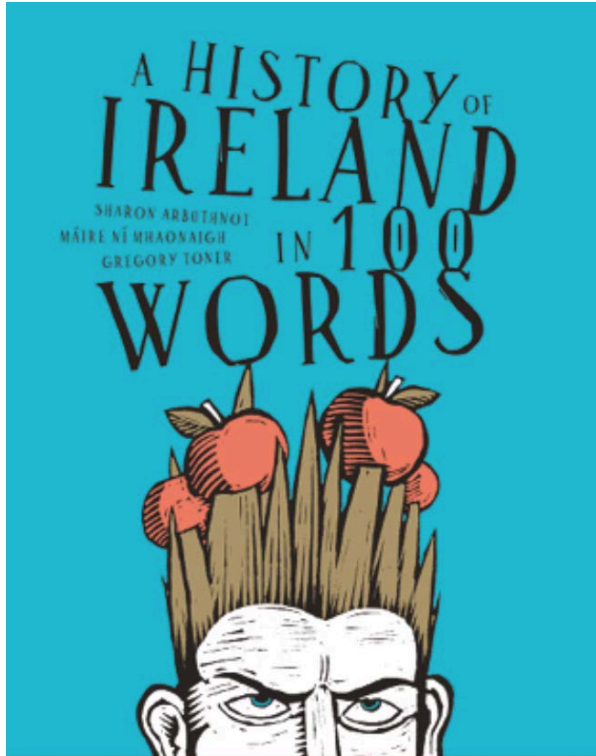
In 2019–20 the ASNC Department embarked on a series of exchange visits with staff and students of Ludwig Maximilians Universität, Munich. These events have been funded by the two universities as part of a Strategic Partnership programme, and organized by Professor Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Dr Erik Niblaeus in Cambridge, and Professor Ursula Lenker, Dr Carolin Schreiber and Dr Matthias Egeler (former Research Fellow in ASNC at St Catharine's College) in Munich.

Events began in May 2019 in Cambridge, with a hugely enjoyable graduate research day on 'Cultures in Contact'. The day consisted of papers by ASNC graduate students Calum Platts, Brittany Hanlon and Sven Rossel and students from Munich, followed by a manuscripts workshop in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College and a dinner in St John's College. This was followed on 4–6 November by a return visit to Munich, for a series of events subtitled 'In the footsteps of Fergal/Virgilius', where staff and students were joined by our old friend Professor Helmut Gneuss. ASNC PhD student Calum Platts writes: 'The visit was an excellent blend of hearing research papers, tourism and, of course, sampling Munich's excellent pubs and restaurants. The real joy was the opportunity to get to know the medievalists of LMU further and both hear how their research was developing and share our own. Papers were given on a wide range of ASNC topics, including the Irish impact on the Norse world, unicorns in bestiaries, runic writing and law in Anglo-Saxon England. Our hosts also arranged visits to the Bavarian National Museum and the State Library, a particular highlight being a page from a seventh-century Northumbrian bible, in gorgeous half-uncial script. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and productive trip and we all look forward to continuing to develop the links with LMU.'

Thanks to the continued support of the Strategic Partnership programme, collaborative work will continue in a second phase which will focus on manuscripts. Scribal records preserved in Germany relating to scholars and pilgrims from Britain and Ireland who lived and worked in central Europe in the Middle Ages will form the basis of discussion beginning in 2021. We look forward to strengthening our ties with Munich students and colleagues.

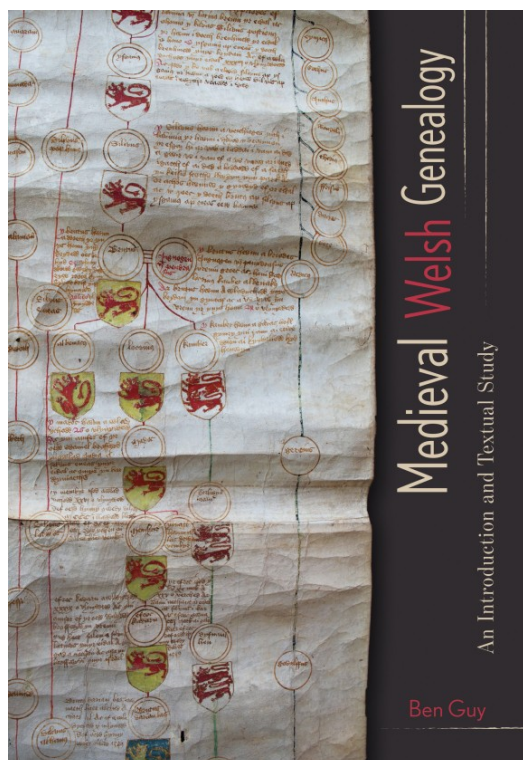
BOOKS BY ASNCS

***A History of Ireland in 100 Words*, by Sharon Arbuthnot, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Gregory Toner**



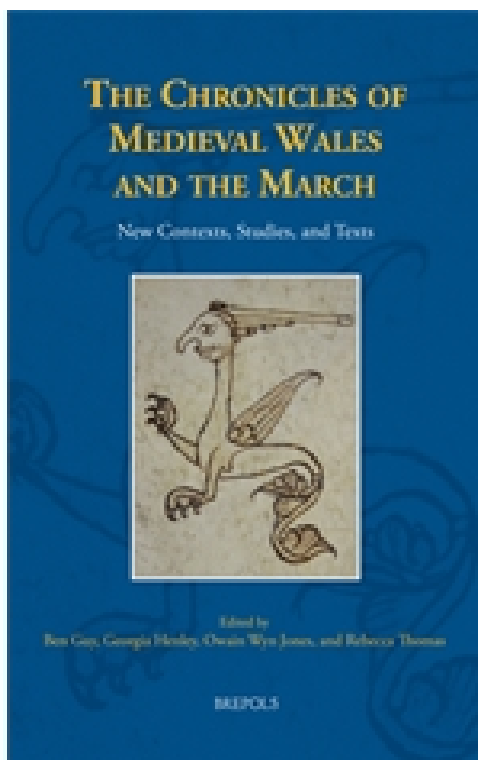
This book tells a history of Ireland through the examination of 100 key words from the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, the most comprehensive dictionary of Irish in existence. The book is aimed at a popular audience and is intended to increase awareness and understanding of the Irish language for the period spanning the seventh to the seventeenth century, but it assumes no prior knowledge of the language on the part of the reader. It is divided into themes, including writing and literature, food and feasting, technology and science, the body, and other worlds, and each entry explores a word or group of words related to a particular idea or object, such as 'home', 'death', 'people' or 'book'. Entries are short, c. 500 words, and self-contained, so that readers can dip into the book where they please. The book was shortlisted for 'best Irish-published book of the year' at the *An Post* Irish Book Awards 2019.

Medieval Welsh Genealogy: An Introduction and Textual Study, by Ben Guy



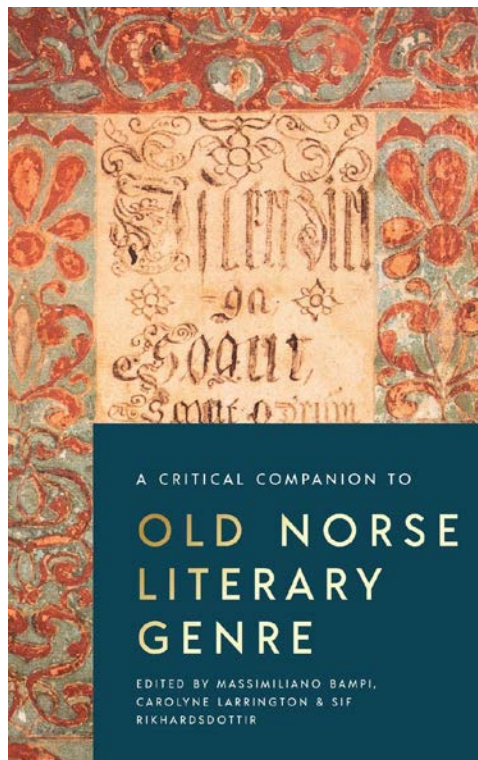
Folk of an ASNC persuasion have long pored over the tantalising lists of names in medieval genealogies for the sidelights they throw on the murky early medieval past. Genealogies seem to offer what most texts don't: a structure on which to hang our understanding of the emergence of kingdoms and dynasties from Late Antiquity onwards. Sadly, matters are not so simple. Like all texts, genealogies must be read as products of their times of writing. In complex ways, they reflect the tacit assumptions, fitful aspirations, and even downright skulduggery of their makers, compilers, and redactors. But it is because of, rather than despite, these factors that so much can be learned from them when they are approached with the right questions in mind, especially questions about the exercise and representation of political power, or the interplay between literary and dynastic visions of the past. In medieval Wales, genealogies form a major category of evidence that first emerges into view in the eighth century and reaches its crescendo in the sixteenth. Ben Guy's book is the first comprehensive study of this corpus, bringing together principles of manuscript studies, textual criticism, and historical and literary analysis to situate the surviving medieval texts in their original contexts. The book includes fresh critical editions of the entire medieval corpus of vernacular secular genealogies, including several texts that were previously unknown or unrecognised.

***The Chronicles of Medieval Wales and the March: New Contexts, Studies, and Texts*, edited by Ben Guy, Georgia Henley, Owain Wyn Jones and Rebecca Thomas**



As with so many fruitful enterprises, this book began in the steamy backseat of a car driving through Michigan, following the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo in Spring 2014. There, current ASNC Ben Guy and ASNC alumn Owain Wyn Jones agreed that something should be done about the chronicles of medieval Wales. This is a rich and yet understudied corpus of texts that was then only beginning to creep back into the scholarly limelight. What followed was a series of small symposia in Bangor, Glasgow, and Cambridge, where experts on the chronicles of medieval Wales as well as its Insular neighbours were brought together for some rewarding debate and discussion. In the process, Ben and Owain were joined by two further ASNC alumnae, Georgia Henley and Rebecca Thomas, to form the team that the world didn't know it needed: the 'Welsh Chronicles Research Group'. This book combines the fruit of the group's labours with selected papers from other distinguished contributors. The book offers fresh surveys of chronicling in medieval Wales, historical writing in medieval Europe, and scholarly approaches to Welsh chronicles over the past two centuries; insightful new discussions of well-known texts like the chronicles in the *Annales Cambriae* and *Brut y Tywysogyon* families; and five new editions and studies of Latin and vernacular chronicles that have never previously received critical attention.

***A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, edited by Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdóttir**



We cannot read literary works without making use of the concept of genre. In Old Norse studies, genre has been central to the categorisation, evaluation and understanding of medieval prose and poetry alike; yet its definition has been elusive and its implications often left unexplored. This volume, including contributions from Elizabeth Rowe, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, opens up fundamental questions about Old Norse genre in theory and in practice. It offers an extensive range of theoretical approaches, investigating and critiquing current terms and situating its arguments within early Scandinavian and Icelandic oral-literary and manuscript contexts. It maps the ways in which genre and form engage with key thematic areas within the literary corpus, noting the different kinds of impact upon the genre system brought about by conversion to Christianity, the gradual adoption of European literary models, and social and cultural changes occurring in Scandinavian society. A case-study section probes both prototypical and hard-to-define cases, demonstrating the challenges that actual texts pose to genre theory in terms of hybridity, evolution and innovation. With an annotated taxonomy of Old Norse genres and an extensive bibliography, it is an indispensable resource for contemporary Old Norse-Icelandic literary studies.

ALUMNI NEWS

Huge congratulations to Becky Shercliff and her husband Michael, whose daughter Tilda was born in July. Becky is currently a Junior Research Fellow at St John's.

Congratulations also to Katherine Olley, who has been appointed to the V. H. Galbraith Junior Research Fellowship in Medieval Studies at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Her three-year research project is on 'Birth in Old Norse Literature and Society'.

Rebecca Merkelbach's latest book *Margins, Monsters, Deviants: Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, co-edited with Gwendolyne Knight, has just appeared with Brepols. Rebecca is a DFG-funded post-doc at Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, working on a project entitled 'The Other Sagas. A New Reading of the 'Post-Classical' Sagas of Icelanders'.

Joanna Sleight released her first EP of her own compositions at Easter: *The Ebb Tide: 5 Robert Browning songs for voice, cello & piano*. It is available on streaming services, including [Amazon Music](#). Joanna tells us that she is currently working on another set of songs (for voice and piano) based on autobiographical poems by the Persian poet Forugh Farrokhzad.

STAYING IN TOUCH

All ASNC Alumni are welcome to attend the ASNC Society Black Tie Dinner, the ASNC Summer Garden Party, the ASNC Alumni Reception and the Quiggin, Chadwick and Hughes lectures. Please check the [ASNC website](#) for dates and details.

You are warmly invited to join the ASNC Alumni **Facebook** group (**Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic Alumni**) for further announcements and updates, and to keep in touch!

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](#).

