

## St Columba's cell revealed?

**R**adiocarbon dating analysis has confirmed that a wooden structure on Iona, first excavated 60 years ago and traditionally linked to St Columba, does indeed date from his lifetime in the late 6th century.

Columba is widely considered to be a key figure in the Christianisation of Scotland, having arrived on Iona from Ireland in AD 563. A hagiographical account of his life, written 100 years after his death by a later abbot of Iona, Adomnán, describes how he had a little hut at the Hebridean monastery where he would pray, oversee the monks' day-to-day activities, and produce works like his *Cathach* – a 6th-century psalm manuscript attributed to the saint.

In 1957, Professor Charles Thomas led a major excavation on Iona (CA 292), during which he discovered the carbonised remains of a simple wood-and-wattle structure. At the time, it was suggested that this could be Columba's cell, and samples of hazel charcoal were taken – but in the 1950s radiocarbon dating was in its infancy and little analysis could be done. Until recently, it was thought that the samples had even become lost, but they have since been



**LEFT** Originally excavated by Charles Thomas in the 1950s, charcoal samples from a timber structure on Iona have dated the building to the lifetime of St Columba.

relocated in a Historic Environment Scotland-funded project led by University of Glasgow archaeologists Dr Ewan Campbell and Dr Adrián Maldonado. Now analysis of the original samples by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre has placed the hut in AD 540-650.

'Thomas always believed he and his team had uncovered Columba's original wooden hut, but they could never prove it because the technology wasn't there. So for us, 60 years later, to be able to send the original samples off to the radiocarbon dating labs and have them come back showing, within the margin of error, that it was something which may have been built in the lifetime of St Columba is very exciting,' said Adrián. 'This is as close as any archaeologist has come to excavating a structure built during the time of St Columba, and it is a great vindication of the archaeological instincts of Thomas and his team. It is a remarkable lesson in the value of curating excavation archives for as long as it takes, to make sure the material is ready for the next wave of technology.'

For more information on the project, visit <http://ionaresearchgroup.arts.gla.ac.uk/> for updates and preliminary reports from the team.

IMAGES: University of Glasgow

## Roman diploma names 2nd-century seafarer

**T**he first complete Roman fleet diploma to be found in Britain, bearing the identity of one of the country's earliest-named sailors, has gone on display in Durham.

Although now broken into eight pieces, the diploma – which was found by a metal-detectorist near Lanchester, Co. Durham, last year and recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme – originally comprised two rectangular bronze plates bound together with wire.

In the Roman period, military or fleet diplomas were issued to honourably discharged non-citizens on their retirement from the army or navy, and granted them citizenship as a reward for their service – initially, Roman citizenship was very selective, until the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, an edict issued by Caracalla in AD 212, bestowed citizenship on all men in the empire except slaves and freed slaves.

**BELOW** Pieces of the first complete Roman fleet diploma to be found in Britain, which names its recipient as Tigernos, a native of Lanchester, Co. Durham.



This diploma was issued by the emperor Antoninus Pius (AD 138-191) to Tigernos, a native of Lanchester, in c.AD 150. His name has not been previously seen in Roman Britain, though it is well attested in post-Roman Celtic names, reports Dr Roger Tomlin of Oxford University. In this case, it clearly derives from the name of the man's father, which is also recorded: Magiotigernos.

The text is still in the process of being translated by Dr Tomlin, but from it we know that Tigernos had served in the *Classis Germanica* – the Roman fleet in Germany – for the standard period of 26 years (for the army, standard service was 25 years). The diploma grants him and his descendants Roman citizenship and the legal right of marriage. Research will continue now that conservation has been carried out, with a particular focus on further elements of Tigernos' name which are still to be interpreted.

The diploma is now on public display at the Museum of Archaeology in Palace Green Library, Durham.

IMAGE: Durham Museum of Archaeology

[org.uk/about-us/search-news/archaeologists-return-to-tintagel-castle](http://org.uk/about-us/search-news/archaeologists-return-to-tintagel-castle)

### UK gains 31st World Heritage Site

The Lake District has been granted UNESCO World Heritage status, making it the 31st site in the UK and overseas territories to be inscribed on the list. The announcement was made at the 41st annual session of the World Heritage Committee, which this year was held in

Krakow, Poland. The committee praised the Lake District's natural beauty, evidence for human activity, and the inspiration it has given artists and writers. The listing can be found at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/422/>

### Jane Austen's will displayed

Two centuries after the celebrated author died, Jane Austen's original will, bearing her signature, has gone on display at the National Archives in Kew. Dated 27 April 1817, three months before Austen died in Winchester at

the age of 41, it reads: 'I Jane Austen of the Parish of Chawton do by this my last Will & Testament give and bequeath to my dearest Sister Cassandra Elizth everything of which I may die possessed, or which may be hereafter due to me, subject to the payment of my Funeral Expences, & to a Legacy of £ 50. to my Brother Henry, & £ 50. to Mde Bigeon—which I request may be paid as soon as convenient. And I appoint my said dear Sister the Executrix of this my last Will & Testament.' The will is on display in the Keeper's Gallery until October.