

INTRODUCTION

This project was inspired by the work of Deacon John Woodside and his book 'Together in Christ: Following the Northern Saints'. A small book group, based at St Anne's RC church in Thurso, Caithness, read this book and were surprised at the number of saints with connections to Caithness. A fairly light-hearted comment about the desirability of bringing these saints to the attention of modern Caithnesians developed a life of its own and grew into a work that we think has answered Deacon Woodside's own wish, expressed in the final paragraph of his introduction 'It is hoped that

this short book will inspire you to do some saint researching of your own and discover the Christian genes that inform the history of several peoples who would eventually unite to become the Scottish Nation.'¹

In addition to the general aim of making the early Christian history of Caithness more widely appreciated, we added other aims. Firstly, we are keen to remind the various Christian denominations of our common heritage in the hope of furthering the already positive ecumenical spirit in Caithness and the Highlands in general.

Another aim that was adopted early on was to persuade tourists to spend some time in the county. We need to give them a reason to pause and explore Caithness rather than treating it as a place to go through on the way to somewhere else.

Our first task was to find a structure through which to present our material. The most cursory of initial researches had shown that there was an embarrassment of material on our subject. Every corner of Caithness had its ruined chapels, holy wells and ancient graveyards. The list of saints with Caithness connections grew and grew. The dilemma was how to present this material in a logical manner. So we decided to construct several pilgrimage routes. Then we realised that we could not limit this to Caithness, or even Caithness and North Sutherland. How could you talk of Maelrubha's² connection to Farr without mentioning Applecross or Duthac's connection to Killimster Moss without mentioning Tain? So we decided to look at the North Highlands in fairly general terms and have more detailed routes based in Wick and Thurso.

For the Highland-wide route, we have followed the normal practice of moving in a clockwise direction. If you are not doing this, please read this guide to the end and adapt the information to your own plans. You may well simply be travelling from Inverness to Wick/Thurso/John O'Groats. There are several sites of interest on this road – the Black Isle deserves a whole week-end to itself (see the entries on the cloutie well, Fortrose, Rosemarkie,). Portmahomack is a well-researched Pictish settlement. Further North there are Brora and Clyne (which also includes the Clynelish distillery!), Golspie, Helmsdale and Dunbeath before coming to the various places mentioned in Route C, based in Wick.

¹ J. Woodside, *Together in Christ: Following the Northern Saints*, p. 3.

² Pronunciation varies but is roughly a cross between 'Mulrua' and 'Moolrua'

Caithness also has a rich heritage of brochs and chambered cairns. It would be well worth the reader's time to check the various web pages giving details of these and include any that fall within easy reach of their chosen route. We have not included details of them in our descriptions, partly in the interests of clarity but also because this information is readily available from other sources.

A list of appropriate web sites is included. This will not be complete as the information changes rapidly. There is a surprising amount of material available and we aim only to give the reader some starting points. If we can pass on our enthusiasm for the subject and encourage others to delve into the past with us, then we will be well pleased.

Some hints on travelling in the Highlands

The Caithness routes are very suitable for cyclists. Some stretches can even be walked. However we are assuming that the majority of travellers will be driving. Many of the roads mentioned are single-track and it is important to adapt your driving accordingly.

The following is taken from the Highway Code:

Rule 155: Single-track roads.

These are only wide enough for one vehicle. They may have special passing places. If you see a vehicle coming towards you, or the driver behind wants to overtake, pull into a passing place on your left, or wait opposite a passing place on your right. Give way to road users coming uphill whenever you can. If necessary, reverse until you reach a passing place to let the other vehicle pass. Slow down when passing pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

In addition, here are a few tips:

- If you are unsure of your reversing abilities, take a few lessons before your journey
- passing places are usually, but not always, marked by white diamond-shaped signs. If you realise that you have several cars on your tail or the car behind is crowding you, pull into the first available passing place and let them overtake. If the nearest passing place is on your right, stop opposite it and let the other car pass you by going into the passing place.
- Remember that you are on holiday, with time to spare, but the car behind you may not be so lucky. The local GP/district nurse/harassed mother/delivery driver on a tight schedule will appreciate your courtesy in pulling in and letting them pass.
- When cars are approaching each other, the rule is that the car nearest to a passing place stops there and lets the other car past. If one car has to reverse, it should be the one nearest to a passing place. If the oncoming car flashes its lights, this is an unofficial signal to say that they want you to proceed.
- On hills, the upcoming traffic has priority (but also consider the distance from a passing place for each car).
- Do not expect a vehicle towing a caravan/trailer/farm implement to reverse even if they are the closest to a passing place
- Do not stop on the road, no matter how stunning the view or appealing the Highland cattle – continue to the next passing place, park the car and walk back

- If you want to leave your car in a passing place for a few minutes, make sure that there is enough space left for another vehicle to pull in to allow passing/overtaking
- And lastly it should not be necessary to include this but sadly it is - if you hear a siren, get off the road as soon as possible as an emergency vehicle is trying to get through.

Do not let the fuel tank get low – it may be quite a long drive to the next source of fuel. Few garages are open in the evenings and Sunday trading is still uncommon in many areas.

Public toilets are also scarce – make the most of any that you see.

If you take a walk off the road, do not be tempted to swim, paddle or collect wild flowers from any of the small lochans – they have very soft, muddy bottoms and you could sink a surprising distance into them.³ There have been cases of people disappearing altogether. Also, it is illegal to pick wild flowers. Even the surrounding bogs can be dangerous, being far less solid than they look! Walking off-road also incurs the risk of picking up a tick (those small black blood-sucking insects that attach themselves to any exposed skin. While they are normally harmless, they can cause Limes Disease and must be removed with care. A special tool for the purpose can be bought at most chemists and is a useful addition to the standard first aid kit.

Many of our sites are on farm land. In order not to tarnish the post-mortem reputations of our saints, please do not do anything to upset the farmer/crofter/landowner. All the standard Country Code rules apply. In addition, please remember the following:

- while there is a Freedom to Roam law in Scotland that allows the public access to all land, other than private gardens, as long as they are not doing any damage, this must be applied with courtesy towards the farmer/crofter/landowner
- another law guarantees the public's right of access to graveyards, even private ones. We have tried to identify the least-intrusive access routes and to gain the co-operation of the farmer/crofter/landowner. Sometimes the site is in the middle of a field and access cannot be guaranteed without disturbing stock or damaging crops. You may wish to just view from afar or, if you really want to stand on the site, please consult the local farmer/crofter/landowner first.

And last but by no means least – the Highland midge. If you are travelling between mid-July and mid-September, remember to take insect repellent with you. You might want to consider buying a midge hood that provides a net over the face. Midges thrive in the cool, damp climate of the North and West of Scotland. The West-coast midges have been scientifically proven to be the most vicious in the world. While they do not carry diseases, they can force the most stoic person indoors and ruin any outdoor pursuit. Some people are more sensitive to their bites than others but it is rare to be totally immune and even born-and-bred locals do not build up an immunity. Fortunately they do not like hot, sunny weather or strong winds. While sunlight cannot be guaranteed, Caithness does have more than its fair share of wind, so the midge is not a permanent problem.

³ For anyone interested in wild swimming, see the table of safe and unsafe inland waters in Appendix 1.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Defining a saint

In the early Church, there was no formal process of canonisation. People were declared to be saints by popular acclamation. By the time of St Magnus in the 12th century various conditions had to be met, mainly the wishes of the local people, the support of the local bishop, evidence of miracles taking place at the grave and some evidence of the incorruptibility of the person's remains. Of course, politics also played a part as the site of saintly relics gave both prestige and tourism value to the area.

Linked to this process of canonisation was the organisation of the country into diocese with a bishop in charge of appointing local priests, organising church buildings, gathering tithes, setting up systems for the care of the traveller and the destitute and generally assisting the political leaders in maintaining order. This process occurred mainly in the 12th century, with Bishop Gilbert being responsible for organising the diocese of Caithness. The bishop⁴ would own land in his area and the revenues from this supported both the lives of himself and his priests and the charitable activities in the diocese. The Caithness bishop owned land at Scrabster, Lythmore, Dorrery and Durness. The place name 'Papigoe' at Wick may also indicate Church land. There are also records of the Bishop of Orkney receiving tithes from Dunnet and Canisbay, suggesting ownership of land there. As life became more complicated, centralised and bureaucratic, the local bishop became more involved in secular matters as the bishop's palace was often the only centre of learning, of secure storage for important documents and even of secure accommodation for people awaiting trial.

While Gilbert was bishop of Caithness, he moved his cathedral to Dornoch, deeming it safer than either Thurso or Halkirk, despite this being in Sutherland. The situation regarding what land belonged to whom was complicated by conflicting loyalties for the local earls, who owed allegiance to the Scottish king and/or the Norwegian one, depending on the state of the current power struggles. This topic is outwith the scope of our study and all we can say is that, while Caithness and Sutherland have always been recognised as distinct land masses, they have been treated as one unit for ecclesiastical purposes.

The Synod of Whitby

An important event in the history of the early Church in Britain⁵ was the Synod of Whitby. This was called by the King of Northumbria in 664 in order to standardise various practices throughout the land. The king had a problem – his branch of Christianity (Celtic) celebrated Easter according to different calculations from those used by his wife's (Roman) branch. The date of Easter also fixed the dates of the forty days of Lent and it was the custom then for couples to abstain from marital relations during Lent. The King was having to abstain for his own forty days and for those of his wife. As they did not exactly overlap, he felt that he was having to overdo his penance. There were several other practices where some areas did one thing and other areas did another – the shape of the monk's tonsure being the best known.

⁴ A note on terminology: the literature sometimes refers to abbots where modern usage would refer to bishops. Similarly, priests may be referred to as monks even when they were not attached to a monastery.

⁵ The title 'Britain' does not signify a political entity but is being used as a convenient label for a recognised land mass.

These differences have been used to support the idea that the Celtic and Roman communities represented two different Churches. In fact, they simply represent the effect of increasing distance from the administrative centre. The Synod was not discussing the amalgamation of two previously independent bodies but the standardisation of some of their practices in order to facilitate co-operation both within Britain and between Britain and Europe. There were no theological issues at stake. Some representatives of the Celtic tradition supported changing to the Roman usages, others vehemently opposed any change – Adamnon, Abbot of Iona supported the changes but Colman, Abbot of Lindisfarne, resigned his position rather than accept them. The king himself eventually supported the Roman practices, as did a majority of the delegates.

An interesting note on the Synod of Whitby is that the community there was a dual one, consisting of a convent for nuns and a monastery for monks. The senior figure was not the abbot but the abbess, Hilda.

Ancient routes

We have, of necessity, restricted our trails to existing roads fit for the modern car. However the saints whom we are interested in had no such limitations. They moved about by boat for longer journeys and on foot when this was not possible or when ‘at home’. They probably used coracles to navigate the larger rivers, such as the Naver, Thurso and Helmsdale. It is unlikely that the early saints used horses, partly because of the cost and partly because the climate and terrain did not suit these animals⁶. Because of the different modes of transport, the actual routes also varied from the modern ones. An experienced walker can cope with rough hillsides, peat bogs and rivers that even modern road-building techniques struggle with. Also, until the clearances, much of the population lived in the inland straths where it was easier to find shelter for both man and beast. So the standing stones, burial mounds, brochs, chapels and other signs of human activity that to us seem to be scattered at random in inaccessible corners actually mark sites where people lived, worked and died.

There is a very plausible argument that the ancient pilgrimage routes, which would have followed everyday routes used for work and leisure, can be reconstructed by linking the ancient chapel sites. Specifically, chapels at the banks of rivers seem to consistently occur at fording points.⁷ The rivers were significant influences on travel routes. They were reliable navigational aids but they were also natural barriers and had limited crossing points. No main bridges existed North of Inverness until the beginning of the 19th century.⁸ So fords, consisting of stepping stones, turf mounds or natural shallows that could be waded through, were used. These occurred most frequently near the sources of the rivers or at their mouths. Where rivers were too deep to allow for fords or simply wading, it is possible that coracles could have been used.

Rivers and burns were also popular sites for buildings designed to house groups of people larger than the average family. There were two reasons for this – they provided a convenient source of water for cooking and washing and they made it easier to dispose of waste in a

⁶ Once farming methods had developed to include enclosed fields and substantial farm steadings, Caithness did breed horses and they became a regular export to Orkney.

⁷ See work done by George Watson ‘Roads and Tracks through Local History Part 3’ in the Caithness Field Club archives, available on-line.

⁸ A.R.B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland*, p. 105.

hygienic manner. While there do not seem to be any remaining examples of toilets built over burns, this was a common arrangement in other parts of the country and there is no reason why it could not also have been used here.

Pilgrimage trails

Despite the lack of ‘proper’ roads, our saints, and probably many others too, managed to move around the county and the country and even abroad. Pilgrimages were made to local shrines or holy wells, to centres such as Tain and even to Rome and Jerusalem. From the 12th century onwards, a popular pilgrimage route linked St Magnus Cathedral on Orkney and St Duthac’s in Tain. These pilgrims will have walked through Caithness. There is no firm evidence of what route they took but several clues exist, leading to the possibility of three slightly different routes, converging at either Dunbeath or Helmsdale. Crosskirk, Thurso and Canisbay all have chapel sites dating back to the 12th century or before and make logical starting points.

Route One could have been used by people from Reay and points West. They would have started at St. Mary’s chapel, Crosskirk. Depending on wind and tide, pilgrims from Orkney could have joined them there. They would then go South via St Magnus Chapel at Shebster and the House of Blessing at Shurrery. At first, we assumed that they would then follow a fairly well documented route to St Magnus chapel and hospital/hostel at Spittal, from where they would follow the path of the modern A9. The Shurrery to Spittal route has chapels at strategic points, compatible with a specific route rather than random building. Within recorded history, it was used as a coffin route, bringing the dead from Broubster and area to the traditional burial ground of the Gunn clan at Spittal.⁹ However further reading suggested that a more likely route would be to go South West from Shurrery through the hills to Braemore and Dunbeath or even Helmsdale.¹⁰ Just up the strath from the modern village of Dunbeath is the remains of what must have been a substantial settlement, known as the House of Peace, a plausible meeting point for pilgrims from various points North and West. Helmsdale also has a strong claim to being a gathering point for pilgrims as it had another hospital/hostel with chapel and holy well, all dedicated to St John the Baptist. It was also within comparatively easy reach of the important centre of Kildonan and had associations with several other saints – Peter, Earnan, Rectair, Ninian and possibly Ian (but this would have been John).

Route Two could have started at St Peter’s in Thurso, followed the river through the important centre of Halkirk and so to the hostel at Spittal. From here the pilgrim could either go East to Latheron and follow the coast or take the coffin road inland and follow the route to Dunbeath or Helmsdale.

Route Three could have started at Canisbay, giving pilgrims from Orkney the shortest crossing. If we accept the principle of chapels marking routes, they would then take a fairly straight line through Brabsterdorran to around Watten and on to Spittal. They could also simply follow the coastline. Perhaps the weather played a part in deciding what route to take.

⁹ See the Caithness Field Club archives for details

¹⁰ See Caithness Field Club archives,

From the Classical Sources

Donald Sage '*Memorabilia Domestica* or Parish Life in the North of Scotland'

'Here the river receives an addition to its waters from the burn of Suisgill, which rises six miles to the NE, in a deep morass, on the SW shoulder of a hill situated on the borders of Sutherland and Caithness, called "Cnoc-an-Eireannaich" (or "the Irishman's Hill"), from a tradition that an Irishman had there perished in the snow'.¹¹

'Surrounding the wood ... is a fairy-like plat called Achahemisgach, at the upper end of which is a rock with the form of a cross engraved upon it. This evidently must have been some place of sanctity in popish times, especially as the name of the adjoining wood is Coille Chil Mer or 'the wood of the cell of Mary'. Learabail, on the opposite bank, was a township of considerable extent.'¹²

Calder, James T. *History of Caithness from the 10th century* 2nd edition. Wick: William Rae. Thurso: John Malcolm and Miss Russell; 1887. Re-published 1973 by Stansfield Fortrose. Reproduced photolithographically by Aberdeen University Press.

This is mainly a secular history. The following notes are relevant to our topic.

p. 73 'Much about this time [1160], Earl Ronald was basely murdered at North Calder, in the parish of Halkirk, by a villain of the name of Thiorbiorn Klairke, whom he had banished for his misdeeds from Orkney. He and Harold, his colleague in the earldom, had come over, as was their usual practice, on a hunting excursion to Caithness. It was this Ronald who, in conjunction with his father Koll, founded the cathedral of Kirkwall. He was a nobleman of many excellent qualities; and on account of his eminent piety, and the share which he had in erecting that splendid edifice, was canonized by the Pope. Klairke, the assassin of Ronald, did not escape with impunity. After committing the murder, he fled to a place in the neighbourhood called Assary, where he was overtaken and put to death by some of the Earl's retainers. The body of the Earl was conveyed from Thurso to Orkney, and buried in the church of the holy virgin in South Ronaldsay. His remains were afterwards transferred to the cathedral of Kirkwall, and were among the first that found a resting place in that celebrated northern minster.' (A slightly different version of this tale is to be found in Crawford p. 220, where it is described as a battle between two groups, not an assassination attempt by one man. A saga was written of the event which describes Rognvald's blood staining a boulder and the stain remaining fresh.)

p. 75 Chapter IV includes the story of Bishop John, who lived near Scrabster by Thurso, and had his tongue cut out and both eyes put out. Calder does not mention the bishop's miraculous cure when he was taken to the resting place of St Triduana at Ballachly, Achavanich. He does give the story of Bishop Adam, Bishop John's successor, who lived at his palace at Halkirk in 1222 and was burned alive by the people when he tried to increase the butter tax. (A more detailed description of the events surrounding this event can be found in Crawford p. 268.)

p. 102-103 describes the link between the Sinclairs of Caithness and Roslyn Chapel.

¹¹ At the 13th page of 21% of the content of the Kindle edition. There is another 'Irishman's Hill' near Reay which is assumed to refer to St Donan. This Irishman may well have been another missionary.

¹² At the 7th page of 22% of the content of the Kindle edition

p. 216 mentions the introduction of the penny tax raised from every household, first by Earl Harold in the 12th century and continued by the various bishops, which was sent to the pope. Could this be the source of the name 'Pennyland' for that part of Thurso so called? At the time, the bishops owned land at Scrabster, Lythmore, Stemster and Dorrery; also Durness.

p. 219 Calder gives an account of the drowning of Rev Merchiston after he destroyed the statue of St Fergus in Wick. In a footnote, he gives the following information on St Fergus 'St Fergus ... came to Caithness about the middle, it is supposed, of the eighth century, and did much to convert the natives... to Christianity. His residence would appear to have been in Wick, or its neighbourhood. After labouring for some time in that district he went to Buchan, in Aberdeenshire, and thence to Glamis, in Angus, where he died. His remains were deposited in the Abbey of Scone. "The great house of Cheyne," says Cosmo Innes, "so much connected with Caithness, was proprietor of the parish in Buchan, which derives its name of St Fergus from the Caithness saint".'

Some more modern sources

Houston, Anne. (ed) *Lest We Forget: The Parish of Canisbay*. The Congregational Board of Canisbay Parish Church; 1996

p. 62 'The oldest part of the village [of Canisbay] lay around the present pre-Reformation Church built on the site of an earlier church dedicated to Saint Drostan'

p. 101 'Another structure of interest is the chapel with fine round windows which was built about 350 years ago on the site of St Modan's (10th century?) Roman Catholic Chapel [Freswick]. Old customs die hard and one can sympathise with parishioners for crossing themselves and going on their knees around the ruins, but this was very much frowned on by the ministers and elders of Canisbay Church.'

p. 318 'The present church [Canisbay] stands on top of a prehistoric mound, the site of an earlier Celtic church dedicated to St Drostan. Drostan headed a mission to Pictland in the sixth century. There is mention of the church in an ecclesiastical document of 1222.'

p. 343 'St Drostan's Chapel, Brabstermyre. The site of the chapel dedicated to St Drostan lies on the West side of the road and to the North West of Brabster House. It was excavated and showed a small building of the chancelled type. The nave was 19 feet by 11 feet and the chancel eight feet by eight feet and it was said that the baptismal font was taken to Brabster House. The ruins are now entirely covered over.'

p. 370 gives a detailed description of the location of St John's chapel on St John's Point and the results of the excavation of the chapel in 1919. A carved slab from the site is now kept in the Northlands Viking Centre.

Barbara E. Crawford, *The Northern Earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from AD 870 to 1470* Edinburgh: John Donald, 2013.

p. 220 the murder of Rognvald by the exiled Thorbjorn.

Caithness Field Club archives

These archives are well worth investigating. Of particular interest here is the work by George Watson on possible walking routes through Caithness. We quote a small sample here:

‘Perhaps the most surprising and interesting result arises when the many chapel sites are plotted on the reconstructed road map. If we look in detail at the road from Rumsdale to Spittal, 'n' to 'o', then as the road crosses Rumsdale Water at St Ciaran's it divides into Thurso and Spittal branches. The next sizeable burn to be crossed is Allt a'Mhuilinn at Dalnawillan where there is a burial ground of uncertain age. The track follows the North bank of the river Thurso to Dalnaha (Dale or Meadow of the Ford) and within a short distance, on the South side of Loch More, is St. Bridget's at Achscoriclate. Continuing along the South side of the Loch and river, the next ford called Ath nan Leac (Ford of the Slabs) lies between Strathmore Lodge and the small cemetery at Acharynie. The line of the track runs on to Westerdale, where St. Trostans, near Balantsionnach, lies a short distance below the road-bridge. Some maps show a second un-named chapel near Dale House, immediately opposite St. Trostans. There are no further water hazards from Dale, over Achanarras Hill to Spittal. The pattern which emerges is that there is a known chapel site, or a graveyard which could be a secondary development of an earlier chapel, at or close to each of the larger fords.’

J.B. Craven, ven. D.D. ‘Journals of Bishop Forbes’ London: Skeffington & Son, Ltd., 1886.

p. 57 ‘The earliest notices of Christianity to be found of Ross and Caithness are connected with the name of Lugadius, or Moluog of Lismore, who founded a Columban monastery at Rosemarkie, on the North shore of the Moray Firth. Saint Maelrubha, who was of the race of the northern Hy Neill, in the year 673 founded the church of Aporcrossan, now Applecross, from which he evangelised all the region lying between Loch Carron and Loch Broom, as well as parts of the Isle of Skye, and from the numerous dedications of churches to his memory, his missionary labours must have been most laborious. The church of Dornoch, for many generations the Cathedral of the diocese of Caithness, had associated with it the name of S. Bar or Finbar. The Aberdeen Breviary appears to identify this saint with one of that name who was the disciple and an intimate friend of Columba. Thus the whole of the Northern regions of Scotland, now comprehending the counties of Ross, Cromarty, Sutherland and Caithness, were brought under the sway of Christianity by the missionaries of Iona or their associates.’

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF SAINTS

The following abbreviations have been used for the sources – Eccl Hist is *Ecclesiastical History of Caithness and Annals of Caithness Parishes*; Cat is *The History of the Province of Cat (Caithness and Sutherland), From the Earliest Times to the Year 1615*; Inv is *Third Report and Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the County of Caithness*. Full bibliographical details are in the Bibliography.

Anne

There is only one reference to Ann, the maternal grandmother of Jesus. It is in the Ecc Hist, which gives a short summary of her history. ‘According to Sir John R. G. Sinclair, Bart. of Dunbeath, the church at Dunnet was a dedication to St Anne.’ (p. 315). There is no hint as to why Sir John said this. A more plausible suggestion is that the church in Dunnet would have been dedicated to Mary as the local summer fair is called the Marymas Fair and, until recently, was held on the first Saturday after the 15th August – the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady.

See Eccl Hist p. 315.

Adamnan (7th century)

Adamnan was brought up in Donegal. He was the abbot of Iona apr 100 years after Columba and is most famous for his biography of Columba. He travelled between Scotland and Ireland regularly. He is associated with Inverness, Abriachan, Glen Urquhart (where there is a chapel and croft dedicated to him) and Damsey Island in Orkney. He supported the reforms agreed at the Council of Whitby.

See Towill p. 1, MacQuarrie p. 160 and Woodside p. 39.

Andrew (1st century)

Dedications to Andrew are more common in the central belt and Southern areas than in the Highlands. He superseded Malie as patron saint of the parish of Golspie. (Malie may be a corruption of Maelrubha.)

See Towill p. 10 and Cat p. 36.

Benedict (480-547)

Two of our sources give Benedict as the dedication for a site at Shurrery. However, as explained below under the heading ‘Shurrery’, this is almost certainly a mis-translation of the Latin *Benediction* – a blessing.

See Cat p. 37 and Eccl Hist p. 39, 315 and 333.

Bridget (c. 451 – 525)

There are several Brides, Brigits, Bridhdes – pagan goddess, cultic goddess/saint and historical figure. The most famous is Bridget of Kildare. There are dedications to Bridget all over Scotland, especially around the Solway. The Solway ones may well be referring to the Irish Bridget but those in the Highlands and Islands, where there is the most folk-lore associated with the name, may be referring to a local figure as Bride is a Pictish name (Brude being the male version). A heap of stones about 100 yards from Achscorrielett, on the Eastern shore of Loch More mark the remains of a chapel dedicated to Bridget. There is also a holy well to the NNW of the stones. Bridget is also commemorated on the Orkney islands of Stronsay and Papa Stronsay.

See Towill p. 29, Cat p. 31, Ecc Hist p. 62 and 313 and Inv. no. 168.

Catherine/ Katherine (14th and 4th centuries)

Catherine of Siena and Katherine of Alexandria both have their main centres in Edinburgh but with other dedications throughout the country. As Catherine of Siena is a 14th century saint and most of the sites that we are interested in pre-date this, they must refer to Katherine of Alexandria, who was martyred in the 4th century.

There is a historical link between Caithness and Katherine of Alexandria. Towill tells the legend of William St Clair of Roslyn, at the time of Robert the Bruce, who prayed to St Katherine to help him to catch a white deer before it escaped across a river as its escape would mean his death. A hound appeared and turned the deer back. The Sinclair family had belonged to Roslyn before becoming the hereditary earls of Caithness. As Caithness has several sites dedicated to Katherine, it is possible that the Sinclair family had a special devotion to this saint, explaining William's instinctive appeal to her.

There was a convent and well at Murkle, close to the shore, referred to as Cloisters by the locals and near a place later called Redland's well. There was also a monastery on the South side of the bay at Murkle House. Another joint convent, well and monastery dedicated to Katherine lay to the West of the manse at Watten. Murkle was an important political site, possibly because of these religious houses – Earl John of Caithness gave his oath to a representative of King Edward 1 of England there in 1296 and Earl Arnfinn died there, possibly on the orders of his wife, Ragnhild.¹³

There is a chapel dedicated to Katherine at Gerston, on the outskirts of Halkirk and possibly at the Sibster Burn near Georgemas Junction station. Some sources also mention a chapel dedicated to Katherine near the bishop's palace in Halkirk, near Quoycrook.

See Towill p. 120, Cat p. 37, Ecc Hist p. 44, 45, 57, 60 and 334, Inv no. 490 and 491.

Ciaran (d. 617/618)

Ciaran was a follower of Donan and was one of the Eigg martyrs. He founded chapels and burial grounds at Strathmore and Dalnawillan, Caithness. The Daldawillan site is close to the upper reaches of the Thurso River, near where the Glutt and Rumsdale Rivers join it. He is also associated with the site at Rangag where the remains of a broch or castle can be seen from the road, and Latheron, where there was a chapel near the shore and a carved cross.

See Cat p. 33, Woodside p. 50, Ecc Hist p. 62, Inv no. 176.

Clement (d. c.100)

There is a link between St Clement and Danish seafarers, as this dedication is found in several fishing towns on the East coast which had trading links with Denmark in the early Middle Ages (including East Anglia, where there are painted screens depicting him). This suggests that the Clement in question is the 4th bishop of Rome as he is said to have been killed by being thrown into the sea with an anchor round his neck and angels then made a tomb for his body on the sea bed. Clement is the patron saint of Dingwall, which was a trading post for Danish seafarers and whose name has Viking links.

¹³ See Crawford p.112 and p. 311.

Colman (7th century)

Colman is a very common name throughout Scotland, Ireland and England. Here we refer to the Colman who was a monk on Iona before becoming the 3rd bishop of Lindisfarne. After the Synod of Whitby he resigned rather than accept the new dates for Easter. He returned to Iona and then went to Tarbet, Easter Ross where he built a chapel dedicated to S Aidan. This was later changed to his own name. He is also linked with Kintyre and Caithness, where he founded a chapel at Old Reay close to the sea. He is linked to the Reay parish church that was in use until 1739. He may be buried at Portmahomack, whose name means 'Colman's Port'.

See Towill p. 40, Woodside p. 58, Ecc Hist p. 39 and 80.

Colum

There is much confusion over who is being referred to here as some sources assume that 'Colum' is a corruption of 'Columba' or 'Colman' or even 'Coomb'. However there was a Colum who worked on Orkney, so the sites at Dunnet Links and Odrig (St Coomb), and Dirlot (Columba) may well have originally been founded by Colum.

See Cat p. 35 Ecc Hist p. 83.

Columba/Columcille (d.597)

Columba was probably born in 521 and came to Iona in 563 or soon after. He studied under St Finnian. May have founded the monasteries at Durrow and Derry. He was a political exile as much as a religious one and continued to be involved in politics at some level in both Ireland and Scotland. He returned to Ireland several times. He visited King Bridei at his fortress at Craig Phatric, Inverness, when he asked for safe passage for Cormac who was seeking a hermitage, possibly on Orkney, and for others of his followers.

Dedications to Columba occur in several places North of the Great Glen, although Columba himself did not travel past Inverness. Some of these dedications may be to sites founded by his followers, others may be to saints with similar-sounding names, as discussed above. The so-called Columban monasteries and communities along the Moray Firth may possibly be attributed to St Colm of Buchan, one of 'The Drostan Three'. Other Columban-related sites include Eilean nan Naomh, (Isle of Saints, off the mouth of the Naver), where there was a monastery; Rig of Columba at Skerray on the mainland opposite the above island; a chapel and well at Dirlot, Halkirk as there is a *Tobar Choluim-Cille* at Dirlot, suggesting the dedication is to Columba (but see the entry for Colum above); a chapel and well at Kilchalumkil, Strathbrora, Clyne and *Clachan Chollumchille* in Invermoriston.. Columba's missionaries may also have visited Orkney and Shetland.

See Towill p. 42, Cat p. 33, Woodhouse p. 17, .MacQuarrie p. 74, Ecc Hist p. 62, 83, 314, 335, Inv no. 169 and 170.

Comgan (pr. Cowan)/Congan/Coan/Cowan (8th century)

Comgan ruled as a prince in Leinster for a few years. He came to Scotland with his widowed sister, Kentigerna, and her son, Filian. They settled in the Lochalsh area, where his nephew built a church in his honour. He then moved to Turriff but was buried on Iona. Dedications

include Kilchowen in Kiltarn (Ross and Cromarty), Kilchoan or Kilcongan (Isle of Seil), St Coan in Strath (Skye), Kilchoan, Ardnamurachan and Knoydart,

See Towill p. 51, Woodside p. 63.

Coomb/Colm (? 6th century)

While some dedications to Coomb/Colm are assumed to be to Columba, they are more likely to be to either St Colum of Orkney or Colm of Buchan, a follower of Drostan. A site which seems to be associated with Colm is that near the Burn of Mid-sands, Dunnet, also called Links of Old Tain. This site was buried under sand during a storm. When the Links road was being built it was slightly turned to avoid the site.

See Ecc Hist p. 45, 83, 314 and 333, Inv no. 331.

Cormack

Sources differ on whether Cormack was a follower of Columba or Adamnon, as both are credited with persuading King Brude to give him the regulus of Orkney. He may have settled on Colme Isle (Eilean nan Naomh) and dedicated it to Columba.

See Cat p. 40-41.

Curitan/Boniface (c. 7th century)

Curitan had the religious name 'Boniface'. Just as he had changed his own name, so he did not hesitate to change the names of chapels dedicated to the early Celtic saints. His favourite dedication was to Peter, the most notable being at Rosemarkie on the Black Isle. Many miracles there are attributed to him. When he was ordained a bishop, he built his cathedral at Fortrose. Dedications include Glen Urquhart, Avoch, in a fair at Loth called Carden and perhaps at Eyartan in Braemore, Latheron.

See Towill p. 57, Cat p. 36, Woodside p. 48.

Cuthbert (7th century)

St Cuthbert came from the borders and is best known as the Prior and Abbot of Lindisfarne. There is one site dedicated to him in Caithness. It lies 200 yards ESE of Upper Haster farm house at the lower end of a cultivated field on the Burn of Haster and about 100 yards W of the Achairn burn.

See Towill p. 61, Cat p. 37, Ecc Hist p. 56 and 315, Inv no. 593.

Devenic (6th century)

Devenick was a contemporary of Columba and Machar. He is mainly associated with the Don and the Dee but travelled around Caithness, where he died. His remains were taken to Banchory-Devenick for burial. There is also a connection to a fair at Creich.

See Towill p. 61, Cat p. 37, Woodside p. 14.

Diman (7th century)

Diman was named in a letter of pope-elect John in 640 regarding the controversy over the dating of Easter. He was associated with Daimsey, Orkney but died in Strathnaver in 670.

See Cat p. 35.

Donan/Donnan (d. 617)

Donan was one of the most important figures in early Church history in the Highlands. He was probably Irish and a contemporary of Columba. He spent time on Iona before travelling North, where he and his followers were based at Suisgill, Kildonan. They founded eight churches, including Fordyce in Banffshire (Talorcán), Reay (Colman), Halkirk (Tarlogan), and Strathmore in Caithness (Ciarán). He is also commemorated at Auchterless, Aberdeenshire, where his 'bachail' or staff was kept. There are many 'Kildonan's up the West coast e.g. Eilean Donan, Cil Donan (Loch Garry). Donan and many of his followers moved from Kildonan to Eigg, where their settlement also became known as Kildonan. In 617/8 all 52 of them were martyred. There are conflicting stories of the martyrdom but the most popular is that they were trapped in a cave while saying Mass and were burned to death by Viking raiders. (This might not be historically accurate, as the Viking raids were typically late 8th century and after. Iona Abbey was first plundered in 794.) The community later re-established itself under the leadership of the Iona monks. A cave on the island is known as the cathedral cave but it is not clear whether this is because it was the one used for saying Mass or because of its shape.

See Towill p. 70, Cat p. 33, 40 and 51, Woodside p. 50, Ecc Hist p. 78-82.

Drostan (see also Trothan/Trostan/Tear/Teer) (c. 6th century)

Drostan is a Pictish name. It appears in many forms – Trostan, Tristan, Tustan, Trothan, Tear and Tears. (The mutation of D to T and vice-versa is common to both Pictish and Old Welsh usage). He is associated with many places in Aberdeenshire and the North East, also in Glen Urquhart, Galloway and Fife. He was head, possibly the founder, of the monastic institution at Deer in Buchan. According to the Book of Deer, Columba taught Drostan at Deer but this is disputed.

Note: Columba's foundations at Derry and Durrow both derive their names from the same Gaelic source as Deer. If Deer was deliberately named after Durrow (*which also produced famous books*), this may explain the Columban connection.

Drostan's followers in Caithness, where he was known as Trostan, were Fergus, Colum/Colm and Modan/Madan. The Chapel of Teer, near Ackergill, is connected with Deer in Aberdeenshire. Teer is a Caithness form of Deer, even as Trostan is of Drostan. The abbot of Deer had lands and tenants in Caithness, which may have been gifted from the Keiths of Ackergill, whose original home was near Deer.

An aside about the Chapel of Teer: in a clan dispute between the Gunns and the Keiths, it was agreed to meet to settle the matter at the chapel of Teer, near Wick. The Keiths cheated and murdered the Gunns. This must have happened after 1461. (See Cat p. 103.)

Dedications to Drostan occur at: Westfield, where there was a chapel to the East of the burial ground. The baptismal font is on the South wall of the burial ground; Westerdale, where there are two sites. Between Olgrinmore and Westerdale is a burial ground and chapel, opposite a place called Aisle. A little further to the NW is St Trostan's well. There is also a chapel and unenclosed graveyard at the edge of a field to the E of the road that leads from Westerdale to Balindannich and ½ m N of the former place; about ½ mile N of Olig House are the ruins of the parish church of Olig known as St Trothan's at the entrance to the old graveyard; the present church at Canisbay is on the site of a church dedicated to Drostan; further along the coast at the farm of Shorelands near Ackergill there are the foundations of a larger than usual chapel; inland, at Brabstermire on the W side of the high road to the NW of Brabstermire House is another chapel. The baptismal font is in Brabster House.

See Towill p. 73 Cat p. 35, 42, 103 Woodside p. 20, Inventory no 57, 159, 167, 175, and 317, Ecc Hist p. 45, 49, 51, 58, 62 and 82.

Duthac (11th century)

Duthac was born in Tain, where he was renowned as a miracle worker. He studied in Ireland but came back to be bishop of Moray and Ross. He died in Armagh in 1065. Tain rapidly became a pilgrimage centre, including several visits by King James IV. Three medieval churches were built to meet the demand. The modern St Duthac's Way runs from Tain to St Andrew's via Aberdeen. There is a modern heritage centre in Tain with details of Duthac's life and work.

In Caithness, St Duthac's (or St Duddock's) chapel was built on some raised ground near the Burn of Kirk Stanes on Killimster Moss, about 1 mile to the West of Loch Killimster. There had been a lull in Christian missionary work in the North due to Viking raids. The work of Duthac in the area marked a revival and devotion to him continued well into the post-Reformation times. 'At Wick, folk used to take food and silver to the ancient St Dudoch's kirk.'

There is also a chapel dedicated to Duthac at Pickaquoy, Orkney with a charter dated 1448 granting right of patronage to the earls of Orkney.

See Towill p. 75, Cat p. 36, Woodside p. 83, Ecc Hist p. 50 and 83, Inventory no 592.

Erchard/Irchar/Yrchar/Merchard (5th century)

A Pictish bishop of the 5th century. Studied under St Ternan at Banchor. Travelled with two companions to the Great Glen. Found three bells in Strathglass (Dunbeath?). Settled in Glen Morriston. Travelled to Rome and was made a bishop by Pope St Gregory.

See Woodside p.11

Ernan (d.617/618)

A chapel and burial ground in the Strath of Kildonan are dedicated to him. He was one of the 52 followers of Donnan who were martyred on Eigg.

See Cat p. 33

Faolan

He has a dedication in the parish church at Clyne. He is also associated with Loch Earn Head.

See Cat p. 32.

Fergus (6th, 7th or 8th century)

Fergus is associated with the North-East and with Drostan (6th C), Medan and Colm. He is also associated with Donnan (d. 617) and his name is on the Tallagh list. This is a Pictish name and dedications cover almost exactly the same area as the great Pictish stones. He seems to have spent time in Ireland, then Strathearn, then Caithness, then Buchan. He is the patron of Wick. Other dedications occur at Halkirk and Moy (Inverness-shire), also in Wigtownshire and Dundee (but there was another Fergus, or Fergustus, a Pictish bishop who attended a council in Rome in 721). The knoll at Halkirk on which St Fergus church stands was known as Tore Harlogan, indicating an earlier dedication to Talorc/ Tarloc/Tarlogan, another follower of Donan). These two names are also linked in Banffshire. His image, kept in Wick, was destroyed in 1613 by a local minister, who was then drowned by the locals. (See the extract from Calder's *History*, above.) A replacement effigy was placed in what was the Sinclair aisle of the old church of St Fergus and is now in the current St Fergus church. The shape at his feet is the heraldic lion *couchant*. A baptismal font purportedly from the old St Fergus church is also in the St Fergus Church, Wick.

St Fergus supported the reforms agreed at the Council of Whitby.

See Cat p. 36 and 43, Towill p. 86, Woodside p. 65, Inventory no. 493 and 582, Ecc Hist p. 5, 54, 9, 81, 314 and 334. See also Calder's *History*, above.

Finian/Finbar/Bar/Finnian (6th century)

The sources suggest that there were two saints of the same name, both associated with Ninian and Whithorn. One was born in Ulster and was educated at Candida Casa. He returned to Ireland, where he taught Columba. In the South, his name becomes Winning, Wynnian, Barr. In the North, his name becomes Fymbar or St Bar. It may have been his psalter that Columba notoriously copied.

The other Finbar may have been born on the banks of the Berrydale Water (Barr's valley) at a green spot not very far from the high road that runs between Helmsdale and Wick. He trained in the North, possibly at Ninian's House, Edderton or Fearn - Fearn Abbey. (Other sources suggest that he trained at Whithorn, but this may be a confusion with the Irish Finbar.) He founded a church at Dornoch adjacent to the modern cathedral and also founded a church in Caithness. When Gilbert built his cathedral in Dornoch, he dedicated it to Finbarr although this was later changed to St Gilbert. There seems to have been a strong cult of St Finbarr in the Dornoch area at that time. A royal charter from King David gives the monks based there protection in their travels through Caithness and Orkney.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Crawford p. 185

The name 'Achvarasdal', where there is a well-known broch, means Barr's valley.

See Cat p. 40, Towill p. 94, Ecc Hist p. 66, 73-78 and 334.

Francis

A convent at Dornoch and a nunnery at Cloisters, Wick are dedicated to Francis. This could be Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order, whose followers came to England in 1224. The order spread rapidly throughout the country and devotees may well have reached the far North. The site of the nunnery is not marked on the maps but was most likely to have been at Mount Hooley.

See Cat p. 37

Fumac (c. 6th century)

He is associated mainly with Keith, Banffshire. Also at St Fumac's Fair at Dinnet and at Chapel of Dine, both on the outskirts of Watten, Caithness.

See Woodside p. 35.

Gavin (4th century)

The only recorded saint of this name was an early Christian martyr, an ex-Roman centurion, decapitated in 300 AD and whose head was thrown in the Mediterranean sea before being reunited with his body. There are no known links between him and Caithness.

About ¼ m SE of Dorrery Lodge and within an enclosed graveyard are the ruins of a small chapel called Gavin's Kirk or Temple Gavin. The surrounding land once belonged to the bishops of Caithness.

See Cat p. 37, Ecc Hist p. 61, Inventory no 90.

George (4th century)

George is associated with Palestine. He may have been a soldier and was probably martyred during the persecutions of Diocletian. Devotion to him flourished during the Crusades after a vision of him was seen just before an important victory during the 1st crusade.

None of the sources listed above mention George but there was a Georgemas Fair near the site of Georgemas Junction railway station.

Gilbert (d. 1245)

He started his priestly life in Moray. He may have encouraged the cult of St Duthac of Tain and himself worked many miracles. He succeeded Bishop Adam, who had been murdered, as bishop of Caithness in 1222/3. He built an episcopal palace at Burnside, Thurso and the cathedral at Dornoch, which was dedicated to St Finbarr. Gilbert had been given large tracts of Sutherland by a relative as a personal gift and presumably felt safer here than in the rebellious North. The bones of the murdered Bishop Adam were taken to the cathedral in 1239. Gilbert was an excellent administrator and set up a complex system of diocesan

administration as well as dividing his diocese into parishes.¹⁵ A century after Gilbert's death, the cathedral was dedicated to him.

See Cat p. 73 and 81, Woodside p. 90.

Ian (d. 617/618)

Dedications occur in the church of Kilean, Strathbrora, Clyne and in a well near Helmsdale. Ian was a disciple of Donan and was martyred on Eigg.

Note: Ian/Iain/Killean is the Gaelic form of John, so this dedication is probably the same as the one mentioned below under the heading 'John the Evangelist'.

See Cat p. 34.

James

An altar in Dornoch Cathedral and a fair (*Lafeill Sheamuis* or Jamesmas) are dedicated to James.

See Cat p. 36

John

This is a popular dedication. It is not always clear whether the dedication refers to John the Baptist or John the Evangelist. Festivals at midsummer (24 June) or 29 August suggest John the Baptist. Local tradition in Dunnet is that St John's Loch is so called after the Baptist as its waters were used for baptisms. The name is associated with Urquhart, Perth, Kirkcudbright, Edinburgh, the high cross on Iona, Cheyne in Sutherland. The knights of St John of Jerusalem (Hospitallers) had a chapel dedicated to John in Inverness. Caithness and Sutherland dedications exist in Dunnet, St John's Head and Helmsdale, where it is specifically John the Baptist.

See Cat p. 37, Ecc Hist p. 46 and 48, Inv no. 56, 79, and 88, Towill p. 113 and 116.

Cat: in a hospital at Helmsdale, a church near the Loch of Dunnet and a chapel at St John's Head, Canisbay.

Ecc. Hist: the hermit of Chapel Geo, Dunnet Head, who built himself a shelter and small chapel. At the East of St John's Loch is the site of the chapel of St John, near Corseback. Tradition that unbaptised children were buried in the graveyard.

At St John's Head there is a chapel dedicated to St John, once protected by a moat and dyke.

Inventory: At the landward end of St John's point, toward the E side of it and partially transversed by a modern wall, is a foundation ... In the interior two slabs protrude, which may have formed the ends of a long cist. The building is not correctly oriented and its designation is doubtful.

¹⁵ See Crawford p. 267

There is also the site of a chapel about ¼ mile N by W of the W end of the Loch of Bushta, Dunnet Head. The adjacent ground bears the name of ‘chapel hill’ and the inlet of the sea on the W is known as ‘chapel geo’.

The site of St John’s Chapel is recognisable on a grassy knoll of slight elevation at the SE end of St John’s Loch.

Kenneth (6th century)

Kenneth was born in Derry about 525 and studied in Wales. He was a companion of Columba and went with him to King Brude in Inverness. There are many dedications to him, particularly in Fife. See Towill p. 125.

Kessog (6th century)

Kessog was Irish. He worked in what is now East Dunbartonshire, mainly around Loch Lomond and Callander. He retired to Monk’s Island on Loch Lomond. There are two sites dedicated to him near Inverness – North and South Kessock. The South Kessock ferry (run by Dominicans) to North Kessock was used by pilgrims going to Tain.

Note: the ferry was replaced by a bridge in 1982, called the Kessock bridge.

An aside – the Highland surname ‘MacIsaac’, which is also found around Callander, may be a corruption of Kessog.

See Towill p. 138, Woodside p. 27.

Madan

Madan is remembered in a chapel at Freswick and perhaps at Bowermadden. He and Colum/Colman were popular in Aberdeenshire.

See Cat p. 35.

Maelrubha (b. 3 Jan 642)

Maelrubha, (*Sagairt Ruadh* , the red priest) was born in Derry in 642 and came to Applecross in 671. He was a contemporary of Adamnon. There are many variations on his name, including ones that could be mistaken for Mary, for example Maree. Many dedications exist, including Urquhart, Forres, Fordyce, Keith, Contin, Arisaig, Gairloch, Loch Maree, Portree, Lochcarron, Lairg, Durness, Farr. His main base was in Applecross, where he was the abbot of a monastery for 50 years. There was a legend that he was killed by Vikings in Glen Urquhart. This has been discounted and the current belief is that he was killed by Vikings/Danes at Skail, Farr where he had a cell. (One source gives Bettyhill.)

See Towill p. 148, MacQuarrie p. 160, Cat p. 34, Woodside p. 42.

Note: there is a heritage centre in Applecross (opposite Clachan Church) that has information on the saint. Latest scholarship suggests that he was killed by Danes, probably at Teampull (chapel), about nine miles up Strathnaver from Farr, where he had a cell. He was buried near the cell and the place is marked by a standing stone with a rough cross carved on it.

Magnus (d. 1117)

The life of St Magnus is well documented as he was the joint earl of Orkney, murdered by his cousin and commemorated by his nephew, who had the cathedral in Kirkwall built in his memory. His remains, and those of his nephew, are buried in the pillars of the cathedral. He is commemorated at Banniskirk by Watten, Shebster and Spittal. Banniskirk may be a corruption of his name. His fair was formerly held at Watten-Wester in Caithness around the time of his feast on 16th April, known in the Middle Ages as Magnusmas. There is also a link with Dunbeath as records show that there had been plans to create a trading burgh at Inver called Magnusburgh.¹⁶ There are no other known dedications to Magnus in Scotland. There are a few in England, the main one being at Southwark Bridge, London.¹⁷

The canonisation process for Magnus has been studied in detail.¹⁸ The main point of interest to us is that the record of cures attributed to Magnus include far fewer Orkney and Caithness names than Shetland ones. The Shetland people were sufficiently removed from the centre of power of the Earldom that they did not have to worry about the sensibilities of Earl Paul, whose father had murdered Magnus. So there are many more dedications to Magnus on Shetland than in Caithness.

See Towill p. 155, Cat p. 37 and 81, Woodside p. 85, Ecc Hist p. 39 and 60, Inv no. 89.

Inventory: chapel and hospital at Spittal some 250 yards NW of the farm of Spittal Mains.

Malie/Mairie (d. 617/618)

Remembered in the church of Kilmalie, formerly the parish church of Golspie and in a well, *Tobar Malaig* below Melvich, Farr. Malie may be a corruption of Maelrubha or may be Mairie, one of the martyrs of Eigg, as Mairie and Malie are similar in Gaelic. Also *Tobar Malaig* is very similar to Mallaig, the modern port for ferries going to the island of Eigg.

See Cat p. 33

Martin of Tours

Towill: the name linked with Ninian,

Martin (4th century)

Martin of Tours (4th Century) is linked with Ninian, who is said to have had a devotion to the saint. Modern scholars dismiss the theory that Ninian met Martin while travelling to Rome. There may have been another Martin as the sites at Ulbster and Farr both had carved stones but of different styles. A Martin is associated with Donan on Eigg but is not listed as one of the martyrs. The site of St Martin's chapel in an old graveyard to the S of Mains of Ulbster is

¹⁶ Crawford p. 224

¹⁷ The auxiliary bishop of Southwark acknowledged this connection by attending the St Magnus 900 celebrations on Orkney in August 2017. He was joined by all the Scottish bishops and those of Oslo and Copenhagen.

¹⁸ See Crawford p. 199

occupied by a mausoleum, dated 1700. The site at Farr is *Tobar Martain* near Grumbeg burial place.

See Cat p. 37 and 81, Ecc Hist p. 39 and 60, Inv no. 596.

Mary (1st century)

Dedications to Mary, the mother of Jesus, multiplied after the 12th century, sometimes replacing older ones. Kilmory is common but may sometimes be a corruption of e.g. Maelrubha. Sites include the church and well of Crosskirk, Reay (some sources refer to Lybster, Reay which is not to be confused with the village of Lybster on the East coast but refers to the area just South of Crosskirk Bay); at Marykirk, Duncansbay; a well and burial place at Scouthal, Watten and at Marykirk of Sibster, Wick. The baptismal font from the Sibster chapel is at Stirkoke House. For long after the Reformation, people would visit this chapel on the first Sunday after the new moon. The Marymas Fair, held in Dunnet in August, suggests a dedication to her in the area.

See Towill p. 170, Cat p. 37, Inv no 39, 55, 338 and 594. Ecc Hist p. 39 and 55.

Inventory: 338 – on the West side of Crosskirk Bay is the ruined chapel of St Mary's. Is the oldest ecclesiastical structure in Caithness. May date from the 12th century. Some sources say it was dedicated to St Peter. Close by is St Mary's well.

St Mary's chapel ½ mile South of Sibster House on low ground near Wick river. Called Marykirk.

Ecc Hist: St Mary's is the most interesting ruin in the parish. Others speak of a dedication to Peter. 12th century. St Mary's well. Door similar in structure to chapels at Weir, Linton in Shapinsay, Uyea in Shetland and some early oratories in Ireland. Doorway may have had animal hide curtain.

To the West of Wick, directly to the South of Sibster and almost opposite where the Burn of Haster joins the Wick River, stood a chapel dedicated to St Mary.

Modan/Medan (c. 6th century)

There seem to have been two Modans, one associated with Loch Etive, Falkirk and Roseneath and the other being a companion of Drostan in Caithness. At Freswick, stood St Modan's or Madden's chapel, not far from chapels dedicated to St Drostan at Ackergill and Brabster. Devotional practices linked to St Modan's chapel continued into the 19th century.

Modan was a common family name of the Earls of Caithness in the 11th century.

See Towill p. 155, Cat p. 37 and 81, Woodside p. 33, Ecc Hist p. 49 and 333.

333 on the North side of the house (Freswick) a burn or brook runs into the sea, over which is a bridge of one arch over against the gate. At the further end whereof is a lately erected chapel with a vault for burying, in the place where a popish chapel stood.

Moluag (d. 592)

Moluag was a contemporary of Columba. He founded a community on Lismore and is credited with founding the community at Rosemarkie.

See Towill p. 187, Woodside p. 31.

Ninian (6th century)

Ninian is one of the best-known names among the Scottish saints. However there are conflicting stories of his life. Traditionally, he was believed to belong to the 4th/5th century, to have travelled to Rome, meeting Martin of Tours on his travels, been ordained a bishop there and returned to Whithorn, where he built Candida Casa and founded a monastic community. However the latest archaeological evidence suggest that Ninian belongs to the 6th century and was not the original founder of the community at Whithorn. He probably did travel to Rome and build Candida Casa and is certainly the community's most famous member. Dedications to him exist at Wick, and burial grounds at Navidale and Glen Urquhart.

See Towill p. 195, Cat p. 31, 39, 40 and 134, MacQuarrie p. 50, Woodside p. 1, Ecc Hist p. 52, 68-73 and 334.

Ecc. Hist: 52, 334 at the head of Wick is the chapel of St Ninian – could be the North Head or the Head of Wick Bay near where the service bridge spans the river. The second is the more likely.

Peter (1st century)

Dedications to Peter began with Curitan/Boniface and were often supercessions of earlier names. They can be found in the church of Clyne, which was a supersession; a chapel at Olgrinbeg, Halkirk, contiguous to which the field is called 'an Abair', showing that an earlier Celtic saint was superseded; the church and fair of Thurso; the church of Kirkiboll, Tongue, which shows the Norse form kirkin-boll, indicating a foundation during the Norse period. Kilpheddar is a church of St Peter in the Strath of Kildonan, which lends its name to Kilpheddar Moss and the burn of Kilpheddar in the parish of Latheron.

The main site in Caithness is St Peter's church, Thurso. It is supposed to have been founded by Bishop Gilbert. A vault was used as a prison in 1726. In the West wall, there is a grave stone dated to the middle of the 14th century. It was used as a place of worship until 1832.

See Towill p. 218, Cat p. 37, Inv no. 154, 418 and 443, Ecc Hist p. 39 and 55.

'Proceeding along the Thurso river and crossing it at one of the new footbridges, we come to Braehour Burn and following it for some distance, we reach the ruins of a chapel dedicated to St Peter, at a short distance from the farm stading of Olgrinmore.' P. 61.

Inventory: chapel at Olgrimbeg Burn on the left bank about 1/2 mile above its junction with Thurso River.

No 418 A detailed description of the structure of St Peter's, Thurso. The apsidal cell is typical of 12th century, the nave and transept belong to the 16th or 17th century. May have been founded by Gilbert, bishop of Caithness. Used as a parish church until 1832 and early in the 18th century used as a court-house and prison.

Rectaire/Reet (d. 617/618)

Remembered in Kilreel at Navidale, Kildonan. Rectaire, whose name indicates an official, was a disciple of Donan and was one of the Eigg martyrs.

See Cat p. 33.

Tarlogan/ Talorcan (7th century)

(also Talarican/Talorgan/Tarquin/Tarloc/Tarlork/Tarloga/Tarkin)

Here is another name with many variations. It was a common Pictish name. He was a follower of Donan and was with him on Eigg. He is said to have been ordained by Pope Gregory. He founded a chapel at Fordyce in Banffshire and is associated with Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire where Beaulieu Priory is; a burial ground to the North of Portree and the outer islands. In Caithness, he is remembered at Watten, Tarlogan's hill (*Torr Tharlogain*) and Tarlogan's church (*Teampull Tharlogain*), Halkirk.

See Woodside p. 53, Towill p. 230, Cat p. 35, Ecc Hist p. 9, 59, 80 and 334.

Thomas (?12th century)

Situated about 1/3 mile to the NE of Skinnet Farm and about 4m S of Thurso, are the ruins of the chapel of St Thomas. This is the original site of the Skinnet stone. There may have been two ecclesiastical buildings at Skinnet - a church dedicated to St Thomas and an abbey. Gaelic speakers referred to the site as *An Abair*, (Abbey), showing a superseded Celtic foundation. This is quite possible, as Thomas a Becket had been a friend of King William (1165 to 1214), when the king was in exile in England and the king encouraged dedications to him.

See Cat p. 37, Ecc Hist p. 42-43 and 61, Inv no 91 and 445. Towill p. 231.

Triduana/Traddles/Tredwell/Tradwell/Trallev/Trallen/Trollhaena (Norse)

There are legends of Triduana coming from Greece with St Rule (4th century) and with St Boniface (8th century). She settled at Rescobie, Angus She is associated with Edinburgh and the Highlands. A legend of her plucking out her eyes to repel an unwanted suitor is very similar to that of St Bridget. She is famed for curing eye diseases. She is mentioned in the Orkneyinga Saga as curing Bishop John, who had had his eyes plucked out but had them restored when he was taken to her resting place at Ballachly, Achavanich near Loch Stemster¹⁹. Part of the adjoining land was known in ancient times as *Croit Trolla*, the croft of St Triduana. (This resting place would have been the site of a relic, not her grave, which has been excavated at Restalrig, Edinburgh.) Her gravesite used to be a place of pilgrimage and

¹⁹ See Crawford p. 251 for details of the story of why Bishop John was attacked.

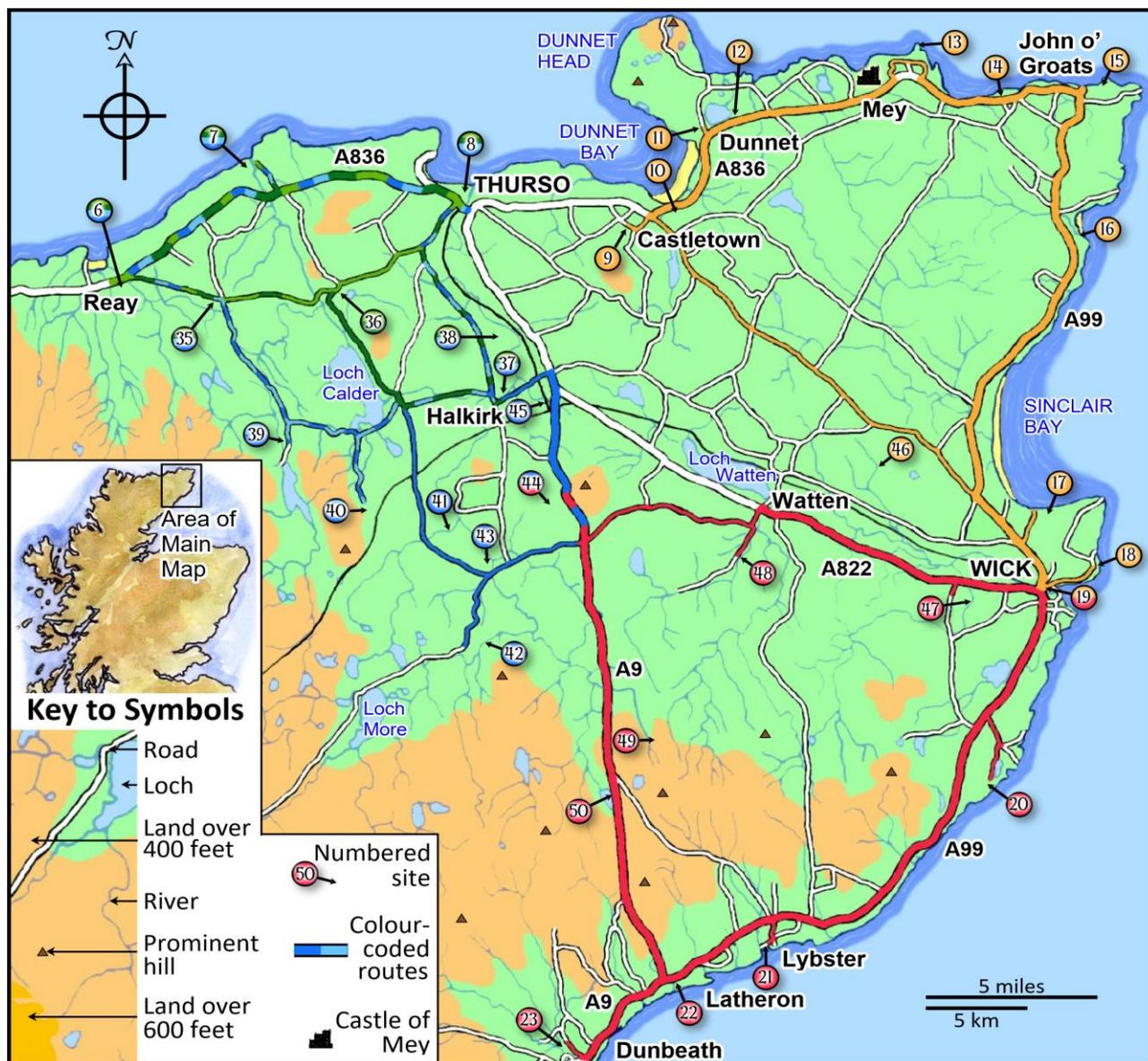
has recently been restored. There are dedications to her at a chapel in Kintradwell (Loth, South of Helmsdale), the House of Peace at Dunbeath and Papa Westray, Orkney.

See Towill p. 183, Cat p. 36, Woodside p. 60, Ecc Hist p. 63 and 64.

THE SAINTS IN THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This section is still to be added.

ROUTES



The sites have been allocated numbers according to the following plan – numbers 1 to 5 are Inverness, Beaulieu, Applecross, Balnakiel and Strathnaver. Then 6 to 23 follow the Caithness coast. Numbers 24 to 34 continue South to the Kessock Bridge and Inverness. From 34 to 45 are the inland sites on the four routes based in Thurso and 46 to 50 are the inland sites on the two routes based in Wick.

Route 1, marked in light green, has 5 sites over 22 miles = Thurso-Crosskirk-Reay-Shebster-Westfield-Thurso Site numbers 8- 7-6-35-36-8

Route 2, marked in dark green, has 7 sites over 32 miles = (Thurso - Crosskirk-Reay - Shebster-Westfield –Halkirk-Skinnet-Thurso. Site numbers 8-7-6-35-36-37-38-8

Route 3, marked in light blue, has 7 sites over 35 miles = Thurso-Crosskirk-Reay-Shebster-Shurrery-Halkirk-Skinnet – Thurso. Site numbers 8-7-6- 35-39-37-38-8

Route 4, marked in dark blue, has 12 sites over 38 miles = Thurso-Crosskirk-Reay-Shebster-Shurrery-Dorrery - Olgrinbeg-Dirlot – Westerdale - Spittal- Halkirk-Skinnet – Thurso.
Site numbers 8-7-6-35-39-40-41-42 – 43 – 44 – 37 – 38 – 8.

Route 5, marked in gold, has 12 sites over 46 miles = Wick-Killimster-Olrig-Dunnet Links - Dunnet-St John's Loch - St John's Point-Canisbay-John O'Groats-Freswick-Ackergill - Papigoe - Wick
Site numbers 19 – 46 – 9 – 10 – 11 – 12 – 13 – 14 – 15 – 16 – 17 – 18 - 19

Route 6, marked in red, has 8 sites over 42 miles = Wick-Haster-Watten-Spittal -Achavanich - Rangag-Latheron-Lybster – Ulbster - Wick
Site numbers 19 – 47 – 48 – 44 – 49 – 50-22-21-20-19

Where the map shows multi-coloured routes, this indicates that several routes overlap.

TOTAL NUMBER OF SITES = 50, 33 of them in Caithness

TOTAL NUMBER OF SAINTS NAMES = 50, 32 of them in Caithness (not including Strathnaver, Kildonan or Helmsdale)

As you walk around these sites, you may like to say this traditional Celtic prayer:

God over me, God under me,
God before me, God behind me,
I on thy path, O God,
Thou, O God, in my Steps.

The North Highlands

1. Inverness Local Saints: [Columba](#), [Adamnan](#), [Kenneth](#), [John](#), [Kessog](#), [Ernan](#)
Inverness is known as the capital of the Highlands and Inverness Castle makes a dramatic starting point for any tour of the North.

St Erchard (or Irchard/Yrchard/Merchard) could also be listed as belonging to Inverness as his strongest links are with the Great Glen, especially the Glenmoriston area. Some sources also link him with Strathglass, not too far from Brora, and with Caithness.

2. Beaulieu Priory Local saint: [Tarlogan](#)
The name (*beau lieu* or 'beautiful place') was given to the area by the French monks who founded the abbey in about 1230. They belonged to the Valliscaulian order, as did the monks of Pluscarden Abbey, founded at about the same time. After the Reformation, the building was left to become a ruin and the land was given to the Episcopal bishop of Ross.

3. Applecross Local Saints: [Maelrubha](#)
From Beaulieu to Lochcarron, there is no information on specific local saints. From there onwards through Applecross, North to Durness and along the North coast as far as Farr, the only name is that of Maelrubha.

4. Balnakiell Local Saint: [Maelrubha](#)

5. Strathnaver Local Saint: [Maelrubha](#), [Donan](#), [Martin](#), [Cormack](#), [Diman](#)
The village of Farr lies at the mouth of Strathnaver and hosts the Strathnaver Museum, where much can be learnt about the history of this area. There is also a copy of the magnificent Farr Stone. There is a Strathnaver Trail following the river inland and showing the site where Maelrubha is thought to be buried.

Cormack's connection to this area rests on a rather vague claim that he settled on Colm Island (Eilean nan Naomh – The Saint's Island). He has stronger connections with Orkney. Diman also has links with Orkney (Daimsey) but dies in Strathnaver in 670.

CAITHNESS Local Saints: see the detailed routes B and C

Leaving Caithness to the South of the Berrydale Braes, the A9 continues through East Sutherland.

23. Dunbeath House of Peace, [Donan](#), [Triduana](#)

The dedication to Triduana may be due to confusion between the place names as both the sites of her 'resting place' near Achavanich and the House of Peace are called Ballachly.

24. Helmsdale Local Saints: [Donan](#), [Peter](#), [Rectair](#), [Ninian](#), [Ernan](#), [Iain](#) ([John](#))

The area around Helmsdale is rich in early Christian sites. Lying at the mouth of the Strath of Kildonan, it was a natural meeting point for travellers coming South across the moors from the Caithness coast, from the inland communities of Broubster, Shurrery and Dorrery and from Kildonan itself. They would then follow the coast to all points South. It shares with Spittal the distinction of having a chapel and hostel/hospital. Here they are dedicated to John the Baptist and, along with a holy well, were situated where the current Free Church Manse is, near the station.

Following the river inland, the Kilphedir Broch is apr four miles upriver, the Kilphedir Rurn joins the Helmsdale River twelve miles upriver. Phedir is a corruption of Peter. Kinbrace railway station is apr sixteen miles upriver and it is possible to take the morning train from Thurso to Kinbrace, walk from there to Helmsdale station and take the evening train back to Thurso. (This has not been tested! Please consult a map and the latest train times before setting off.) On the way, you will pass a section of the river going through an area called Achahemisgach on the East side and Learabail on the opposite bank. The East side of the river has a rock with a cross carved on it. The adjacent wood is called Coille Chil Mer or ‘the wood of the cell of Mary’.

The various sites around Helmsdale, given with the reference on the HER map, are

St Peter’s Chapel MHG9539 Kilphedir Burn MHG9852/5; MHG9900

Kilphedir MHG11531, 13166, 19368 Kilearnan Hill MHG9878/9; 17876

St Ernan’s Chapel and Cemetery MHG9970 St Donan’s Chair MHG9969

St John the Baptist Well, Chapel and Hospital MHG10118 MHG 10119

Holy Well, Glen Loth MHG10208 St Iain’s (?John) Chapel, Gartmore MHG10165

St Ninian’s Chapel and Cemetery, Navidale MHG10290, MHG45522, MHG45523

St Rect’s Chapel, Navidale MHG10136 (Rect=Rectair/Reet)

25. Brora Local Saints: [Faolan](#), [Columba](#), [Peter](#) and [Iain](#)

The area now occupied by the Clyneleash Distillery is associated with Faolan, Columba, Peter and Iain. Iain is the same saint as listed above. He was a disciple of Donan and was martyred with him on Eigg. The dedication to Peter will be a supersession, possibly of Faolan, of whom little is known. The dedication to Columba does not mean that Columba himself visited Brora.

26 Golspie Local Saint: [Malie](#), [Andrew](#)

Andrew is the patron saint of Golspie parish, possibly superseding Malie. Malie may be a corruption of Maelrubha. Golspie is far away from Maelrubha’s usual sites, so this would presumably be an attribution to him by one of his followers.

27. Dornoch Local Saints: [Finbar](#), [Gilbert](#), [James](#)

34 The Kessock Bridge Local Saint: [Kessog](#)

Before the modern bridge, there was a small ferry linking North and South Kessock. Originally, it was used by pilgrims on their way to Tain.

Routes 1-4 (Thurso)

8. Thurso (Thor's river) Local Saint: [Peter](#).

Dedications to Peter began with [Curitan](#)/(Boniface).

Start at Caithness Horizons, where there is a display of carved stones and other artefacts from early times. These include the Ulbster Stone, the Skinnet Stone, the Watenan stone, baptismal fonts from St. Thomas' at Skinnet and old St Peters, Thurso, a cross slab from Canisbay and two memorial stones from old St Peter's.



Then follow Shore Street towards the river and admire the ruined St Peter's church (see above). *Inventory No 41 gives a detailed description of the structure of St Peter's, Thurso.* The apsidal cell is typical of 12th century, the nave and transept belong to the 16th or 17th century. In the West wall, there is a grave stone dated to the middle of the 14th century. It may have been founded by Gilbert, bishop of Caithness, about 1220. It was used as a parish church until 1832 and, early in the 18th century, was used as a court-house and prison.

A path, Victoria Walk, follows the shore-line from the harbour at the mouth of Thurso river towards Scrabster. The original bishop's palace was built at the mouth of the Wolf Burn along Victoria Walk. Any remains have been washed out to sea. It had probably been built when Caithness was overseen by the bishop of Orkney, who owned lands in Caithness and continued to receive tithes from Dunnet and Canisbay for some time after the separate diocese of Caithness was created (c.1150).²⁰ Looking back towards the town, the modern

²⁰ See Crawford p.149

houses are on [Pennyland](#) estate, possibly so called because of the penny tax paid by householders to the bishop.

Take the A836 from Thurso towards Reay. Approximately five miles along this road and just before the wooded dip that is the Forss burn and bridge, turn right.

7. Crosskirk (suggests a dedication to the Holy Cross or Rood) Local saint: [Mary](#) or [Peter](#)

This is among the oldest still-visible church buildings in Caithness, dating from the 12th century. It is known as St Mary's Chapel. However some records give the dedication as to St Peter. There is a spring nearby known as St Mary's well and a graveyard where grave stones can still be seen.

Just 30 yards from the chapel, near the sea, was the remains of a large Iron Age broch. A symbol stone, originally said to have been in the broch, was given to the king of Denmark by Sir George Sinclair. The broch itself was investigated and then bulldozed into the sea (see Caithness Field Club Bulletin 1985, available on their web site).

Return to the A836 and turn right towards Reay. Care is needed when approaching the A836 as there is no 'give way' sign on the minor road, which continues in a straight line on the other side of the A836, and the driver could easily not realise that he/she is approaching a junction where other drivers have priority.

6. Reay Local Saint: [Colman](#).

Note the market cross in the centre of the village.



The current church, to the North of the road, is similar in style to those in Dunnet and Canisbay. They all date from the 15th or 16th century and are on the sites of older churches. In Reay, the older church is on the South side of the road opposite the school.

Remains of the original church can be seen in the NE corner of the old graveyard, which also contains several tombstones with heraldic shields. The stone known as Reay 1, which was found over an 18th century grave, is set into the West wall of these remains (see picture on the left). It is decorated with a fine cross. There are two Pictish stones at Sandside House, Reay. As this is a private house, the public cannot see them. Information about them can be found at

<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM616> and <https://canmore.org.uk/site/318979/creagan-a-bheannaich-chapel-and-graveyard>.

Various local names indicate that the area was a significant religious centre – *Lochan a' Chleirich* (the loch of the clergyman), *Cnoc-an-Eireannaich* (the Irishman's Hill, probably Donnan).

Turn back along the A836 and turn right just after the Isauld Bridge on the road to Shebster. (There may have been a chapel among the sand dunes to the NE of the Isauld burn, 300-400 yards from its mouth.)

35. Shebster Local Saint: [Magnus](#)

There was a chapel here (map reference MHG997) dedicated to Magnus, suggesting that this site was on a pilgrimage route to/from St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall. It is known that there was a pilgrimage trail between Kirkwall, Tain and points further South but the exact route is unclear. (See the section 'Pilgrimage Trails' for suggested routes.)

At Shebster, the traveller has two options – Routes 1 and 2 or the longer routes 3 and 4. For route 1 and route 2, continue Eastwards for just over three miles to Westfield.

36. Westfield Local Saint: [Drostan](#)



Not far from the road on the East of the village and in a field behind farm buildings is a graveyard which was in use until recently. There is a sign 'St Trostan's Cemetery 600m, Achnavast 1.8Km'. It is accessed via a track that turns off the road to the right through the farm steading and along to a parking/turning point. Leave the car here and walk along the fenced-off path through the field to the gravesite. Built into the SE wall is an oval block of

sandstone, presumed to be the font of the chapel dedicated to St Drostan that once stood here (see picture above).

Route B1 now returns to Thurso, via Glengolly. Route B2 back-tracks to the left-hand turning for Halkirk via [Calder](#). About 1 ½ miles down this road, there is a bench on the verge and a small parking place. Here one can sit to admire the view or take the path down to the lochside.

37. Halkirk (In the Orkneyinga Saga, this is Ha Kirkia/Kirkja – the High Kirk) Local Saints: [Fergus](#), [Gilbert](#), [Tarlogan](#), [Katherine](#) (with sites dedicated to [Ciaran](#), [Peter](#) and [Colum](#) nearby).



On the edge of Halkirk, a road branches to the right towards the river at Gerston, where there was a chapel dedicated to St Katherine. There is nothing left to see. Continue to the main road and turn right into the village. Turn left into Sinclair Street and drive along to the site of the old church (pictured above).

Halkirk became the main residence of the bishop of Caithness after Scrabster. His palace was on the opposite side of the river from the present Braal castle, near the current ruined church building, where an ancient chapel existed. It was made famous by the burning of Bishop [Adam](#), in 1222. It is possible that the chapel was the private place of worship of the bishop and his household but the main bishop's cathedral was on the Thurso side of the village at Skinnet.

Return to the main road and turn right towards Thurso.

38. Skinnet Local Saint: [Thomas](#)



Skinnet Farm is just outside Halkirk on the right hand side of the road as you go towards Thurso. The site of the cathedral lies between the modern farmhouse and the River Thurso. The claim of this site to be the cathedral rests partly on the quality of the sculpted stone found at this site and now kept in Caithness Horizons. Other clues are the number of dedications in the area and the remains of earlier buildings, one of which may have been an abbey, as the Gaelic place-name is *An Abaid*.

Route 2 now returns to Thurso.

Routes 3 and 4 follow routes 1 and 2 to Shebster. Then they turn right towards Broubster and Shurrery.

39. Shurrery House of Blessings (not [Benedict!](#))

The site is sometimes assumed to have the dedication ‘Benedict’ but this is a mis-translation of the Latin ‘*Benediction*’ and the Gaelic ‘*Bheannaich*’, both meaning ‘blessing’. The croft land (HER map reference MHG18167) is known as *Tigh a’ Bheannaich* (House of Blessing) and is said to be the site of a chapel, well and burial ground (HER map references MHG39490 and MHG39489). This title suggests a rest-house for travellers, hence the suggestion that a pilgrimage route existed through Shurrery.

Ecc Hist p. 333 tells us that ‘The chapel, as the Rev John Kerr, Shurrery, informs me, stood close to the river. Two corner stones are still visible. There was a burial ground here also; the last burial in it took place about eighty years ago. About 150 yards to the South is *Tobar a’mhannaich*, the monks well. To the Westward stand the ruins of the Priests House (*Tigh a’ Mhannaich*) which was occupied as late as some fifty years ago.’

40. Dorrery

Local Saint: [Gavin](#)

From Shurrery, follow the road Eastwards to meet the B870. Apr. half way along this road, past Brawlbin Farm, there is a road turning right towards Dorrery. This road ends after two miles, with the entrance to Dorrery Lodge ahead. There is a small parking area to the left. A track to the left leads towards fields. At the second gate the traveller can see a walled-in graveyard in the distance. Within this graveyard are the ruins of Gavin’s kirk or Temple Gavin. The surrounding land once belonged to the bishops of Caithness. (Please do not go through these fields if there is livestock in them or if doing so might damage crops or otherwise upset the owner.) To the right of the entrance to the Lodge is a path signposted ‘Dorrery Hill’. At the corner of the Lodge garden and just before the farm buildings, this path branches, with the right branch going up the hill and the left meandering inland until it eventually disappears. It is worth going along the meandering path until you are clear of the buildings as you then get an attractive view over the fields. On a good day, it is also worth following the path up to the top of Dorrery Hill, where there is a panoramic view of Caithness.

Just past the junction with the B870, Routes 3 and 4 separate. Route 3 continues on to Halkirk and joins Route 2.

Route 4 branches off to the right and continues on the B870 for 1 mile to Olgrinbeg.

41. Olgrinbeg

Local Saint: [Peter](#)

Access to this site is through Olgrinbeg farm. There are the remains of a chapel dedicated to Peter on the bank of the Olgrimbeg Burn about ½ mile above its junction with the Thurso River. The field beside the chapel is called An Abair and a nearby hill is Appat Hill. Some sources suggest that this indicates an earlier dedication to a Celtic saint, others that it suggests that the land was owned by the abbot/bishop. Perhaps this is one of the dedications influenced by Curitan/Boniface.

42: Dirlot

Local Saint: [Colum/Columba](#)

From Olgrinbeg, travel towards Westerdale for a few miles. Where the B870 takes a sharp turn left towards Mybster, there is a minor road branching off to the right. This leads to Loch More. About two miles along this road an even smaller road branches off to the left towards Dirlot. There is a ‘Private’ sign at the junction but it refers to the fishing rights on the river, not to the road. At the farm buildings a gate to the right leads into a field and the path goes to the walled-in graveyard. Within the graveyard was a chapel dedicated to Colum (or possibly Columba) although no trace of it can be seen now. This would not be Columba of Iona but the Colum who worked mainly in Orkney. There was a holy well North of the graveyard near the shepherd’s house called *Tobar Chalum-Cille*. An attractive view of the river passing through a gorge can be seen from the path just past the graveyard.

This site is in a field used by the farmer to graze animals and care must be taken not to disturb them.

An optional extra: Return to the minor road, turn left towards Loch More and continue for about three miles, passing Strathmore Lodge. Keep to the left until close to the loch, where there is space to park the car. The track continues for over a mile to Achscoraclate, where the remains of a cottage can be seen, but is too rough to take a car. Achscoraclate was the site of a chapel and holy well dedicated to St [Bridget](#).

43. Westerdale

Local Saint: [Drostan](#)



St Trostan's Chapel and graveyard can no longer be seen. They lie under vegetation ½ mile North of Westerdale, near the Westerdale Mill (pictured above) but on the opposite bank of the river.

Continue on the B870 until it meets the A9 at Mybster. Turn left and you are almost at the village of Spittal.

44. Spittal (hospital or hostel for travellers) Local Saint: [Magnus](#)

The dedication to Magnus indicates that this was on a pilgrimage route to and from St Magnus Cathedral on Orkney. The site consisted of a hospital, chapel and graveyard, the

remains of which are 250 yards NW of Spittal Mains farm. They can just be seen from the main road but there is no safe stopping place.

The graveyard was the traditional resting place of the Gunn clan. The earliest known reference to the hospital is a charter dated 1476 granted by King James III to William Sinclaire, son of William, Earl of Caithness.

From Spittal, continue on the A9. At Georgemas Junction, you can stop at the station.

45 Georgemas Local Saints: [George](#), [Mary](#), [Katherine](#)

The station is so called as it is near the hill where the St George's Day Fair was held. It is also near the Sibster Burn, associated with chapels dedicated to Mary and Katherine. The sources are rather confusing here, as they place the Marykirk ½ mile S of Sibster House near Wick River, which is not in this area. They may also be confusing St Katherine's chapel with that at Gerston, not far away but on the other side of Halkirk.

George is not a local name. Perhaps the dedication came from someone returning from the Crusades, which do have a connection with St George.

On leaving Georgemas, follow the A9 to the turn-off for Halkirk and join routes B2 and B3. If you are in a hurry, you can stay on the A9 into Thurso and the end of the trail.

Routes 5 and 6 (Wick)

Route 5 (the North loop)

19. Wick (from the Norse 'Vic', a bay).

Local saints: [Fergus](#) (6th or 8th century),
[Ninian](#) (6th century) [Francis](#) (?13th century)



Wick has been a Royal Borough since 1589 and is the administrative centre of Caithness. The North loop starts at the Parish Church, dedicated to St Fergus, on the main road at the Northern end of the town.

The original chapel in Wick may have been in the area known as Mount Hooly, now Mount Hooly Terrace off Shore Street, which is a very steep street leading from the end of the pedestrianized centre of the town up to Girnigoe Street. The name may also signify that this land belonged to the bishop. Later a new chapel was built near the present parish church. Papigoe, to the NE of the town was probably also land owned by the bishop.

The current St Fergus church contains a replacement for the effigy of the saint mentioned in Calder's History of Caithness (see the entry for Fergus above). This had been kept in the local museum (in the library) but was moved to St Fergus church recently when the library was moved to the new High School. With it is the baptismal font from the original St Fergus church. This had been given to the United Free Church but ended up in their garden, then in a field being used for animal drinking water. The shape of the rim suggests that it had been used for many years as a sharpening stone for knife blades.

46. Killimster Local saint: [Duthac](#)

From St Fergus church, take the Thurso road – the B876 – for five miles to Killimster. Pull into the lay-bye on the left just at the top of a rise (there is a group of modern houses to the right). You are now looking over Killimster Moss to the South, sometimes known as the Kirk Moss, where St Duthac's chapel (or Dudoch's as it was known locally) was. The chapel was built on some raised ground about a mile West of Loch Killimster and near the Burn of Kirk Stains. It is now surrounded by very boggy ground and is not readily accessible.

9. Olig Local saint: [Drostan](#); [Colum](#)

Having admired the view and wondered at the dedication of those early saints who lived and worked here so long ago, continue towards Castletown. On the edge of the village, turn left with the primary school on your right and drive approx ½ mile on a single track road. Take the first turn right and continue a short distance to Olig graveyard on the left. Just past the road taking you to the entrance of the old graveyard is a parking space for the new graveyard. You can park here and walk through the new graveyard to access the old one. In this graveyard was a chapel dedicated to Drostan/Trothan. This was built in 1663 to replace the chapel near the shore on the Dunnet Links, dedicated to St Coomb (or Colum or Colm – see next entry). It was used as the parish church until 1840. A socketed plinth of an ancient churchyard cross is on the South side of the building beside the Witches's grave. This grave has a concrete border identifying it. It is reputed to never dry out as the witch was actually a seal woman (or selkie in the local dialect). Another legend is that Drostan, or Trothan as he is known at this site, is buried on the same site, which would explain the cross.

This graveyard can be treacherous in damp weather as much of the ground is covered in graveslabs which themselves are covered in moss, making them slippery to walk on.

Traces of a building which may have been a monastery and/or nunnery have been found in the field to the East of the graveyard.

10. Dunnet Links Local saints: [Colum](#); [Colm](#)



Return to the main road, turn left and follow the curve round to the junction with the Thurso-John o' Groats road – the A836. Turn right and continue past the garden centre on the right. Ahead is Dunnet Bay. There is a small parking area just off the road to the left where you can get a view of the sweep of the bay. If you are walking along the beach, be aware that, depending on the tides and the amount of rainfall, there is an area of sinking sands not far from the car park. It is safer to keep to the stones and grass until the first burn.

As you drive along the edge of the bay, known as the Dunnet Links, you will notice sand dunes on either side of the road. Some of these are just that – sand, but some contain ancient settlements, possibly equivalent to Scara Brae on Orkney. There is also a post-reformation manse that was completely covered by sand during a storm and a chapel site dedicated to Colum. The manse may have been built on the site of a chapel dedicated to St Colm of Buchan, a follower of Drostan.

Towards the East end of the bay and on the right is Dunnet Forest. If you have a dog in the car, this is an excellent place to give it some exercise, especially if the weather does not lend itself to a walk on the beach. Just past the forest entry and on the left is Dunnet Caravan Park and the Seadrift Centre. The Centre is run by the Highland Council Ranger Service and contains displays on local geology, flora and fauna. It is only open in the Summer.

11. Dunnet and area Local saints: [John](#); [Mary](#)

Continue past the caravan site to Dunnet village. Just before the hotel and behind its car park is Dunnet Church of Scotland parish church. This building dates back to the 15th century and is similar to the churches at Reay and Canisbay. While one source says that it was dedicated to Anne, it seems more likely that the dedication was to Mary as the local fair is still known as the Marymas Fair and until recently was held on the first Saturday after the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady on 15th August. It is now held on the last Saturday of August to ensure that it does not clash with the school holidays.

Dedications to Mary and the apostles suggest a post-Celtic beginning or a re-dedication. We have seen that the area to the West of Dunnet is linked with Drostan, Colum and Colm, so perhaps they could also lay some claim to the village itself.

12. St John's Loch Local saint: [John](#) the Baptist

Just past the village lies St John's Loch. Local tradition says that it is so called after John the Baptist because its waters were used for baptisms. It is one of several local places that was thought to have healing powers and there was a tradition of walking round the edge of the loch three times on Midsummer morning and praying for a cure. The edge of the loch is still a right of way but is used today by fishermen rather than penitents (to fish, you need a permit, obtainable at the hotel or fishing tackle shop on the edge of the village). Access can be gained via either the new harbour on the North shore, off Hunspow Road (B855), or the old harbour on the South side, off Corsback Road (A836). There was a chapel at the South East end of the loch now only a slightly raised area. It can be accessed by following the edge of the loch in an Easterly direction from the old harbour. The loch drains by a small burn that runs close to the church and into the bay. Traces of an early settlement have been found near the mouth of the burn.

In order to include Dunnet Head in your travels, you need to turn left just past the hotel and distillery and follow the B855 round the sharp bend and along to Brough with St John's Loch on your right. At Brough, turn left and continue to the end of the single-track road.

On the West side of Dunnet head is an inlet known as Chapel Geo. Here a hermit built himself a shelter and chapel. If you are interested in visiting this site, you will need stout walking boots and preferably a map. As you will be walking along the edge of a cliff, please keep all pets and children close at hand and do not attempt the walk in poor visibility or a strong wind. Having said that, it can be a lovely walk! Take the B855 from the village but, instead of going round the curve, go straight ahead following the sign for Mary Anne's cottage. At the T junction, turn up the hill and park the car at the end of the road. Follow the path to the top of the cliff and, instead of going down to the Peedie Sands, follow the cliff edge to your right, past the Loch of Bushta until you come to an indent in the cliff face – Chapel Geo.

Return to Brough and continue along the coast through Ham, Scarfskerry, Harrow and Mey. On the left at Ham are the ruins of chambered cairns, called souterrains on some maps. These have a unique structure and their description is reminiscent of Tolkein's hobbit houses. Once past Harrow, you will see the Castle of Mey on the right. Now a Trust and open to the public in the Summer, this was for many years the holiday home of the Queen Mother. It originally belonged to the Sinclair family who also owned the estates around Roslyn Chapel in East Lothian and there are various legends linking the two buildings.

13. St John's Point

Local Saint: [John](#)



Once past the castle, the promontory ahead is St John's Point and the remains of a chapel and wall can be seen. Access is possible by parking at the corner where the road takes a sharp turn South and walking back through the field. The usual warnings about damaging fencing and livestock apply.

14. Canisbay

Local saint: [Drostan](#)



From St John's point the road joins the A836 and passes through Gills to Canisbay. The third of the county's pre-Reformation churches stands at the side of the road. The building is usually open to the public during the summer. It is built on the site of an ancient chapel dedicated to Drostan, and there are records of it going back to 1222. Drostan belonged to the 6th century and is the most-named saint in Caithness, suggesting that Canisbay was an important centre.

15. John O'Groats

Local Saint: [Mary](#)



From Canisbay, continue through Huna to the T junction. Turn left to John O’Groats. This was thought for many years to be the most Northerly point on the British mainland but more modern measuring techniques have re-allocated this honour to Dunnet Head. However it is still the end of the road – or the beginning, depending on your direction of travel. So do spend some time here before moving to the site of St Mary’s chapel. This is on the ‘John O’Groats Way’, which is signposted. The chapel was sited at the far end of the beach (see picture above). As you walk towards it, look for the rare cowrie shells (known locally as Groaty Buckies).

On a clear day, it is worth continuing your walk up the hill towards the lighthouse. Then follow the cliff edge (but not too close!) for a spectacular view of the Stacks of Duncansby. A short distance along is a geo whose cliff faces teem with bird life.

16. Freswick

Local Saint: [Modan](#)



On returning to the main road, take the A99 South to Freswick with its sweeping bay. The first left turn after the one to Skirsa is a private road to Freswick House. Here there is a comparatively modern (about 350 years old) chapel and mausoleum built on the site of an ancient chapel dedicated to St Modan. The mausoleum is easily identified by its round windows (on the far left in the picture above). The original chapel was much venerated and

local people continued to practice ‘popish rites’ here long after the Reformation (see ‘Lest we Forget’ p. 101 and others.)

17. Ackergill Local Saint: [Drostan](#)

From Freswick, continue on the A99 to the junction with the Thurso-Wick road. To the left just before the junction is Ackergill bay, where there was a chapel dedicated to Drostan. There is easy access to the site but nothing remains. At the junction, turn left towards Wick. Turn left into Henrietta Street and follow the road signs for Papigoe. They will take you right onto Girnigoe Street and then left onto Willowbank, which takes you out of the town and towards Staxigoe and Papigoe.

18. Papigoe Local Saint: [Ninian](#)

St Ninian’s chapel was situated on the cliff edge but nothing remains. Some researchers believe that this chapel was actually situated closer to the centre of town at the lower bridge, but the name ‘Papigoe’ suggests church-owned land and is a more probable site. The dedication to Ninian does not necessarily mean that Ninian himself visited Wick although some researchers argue that he could have done so while returning from a mission to Orkney and Shetland. Others point out that the prefix ‘papi’ is associated with the Northumbrian wander-cult of St Ninian and that it is far more likely that some of this group found their way up the coast to Wick and dedicated a chapel to their patron.

Return along Willowbank and take the Scalesburn road to the left down to the lower bridge, take right at the mini roundabout and again at the next mini-roundabout, follow the road across the bridge, through the traffic lights and round the corner to take you back to St Fergus Church, your starting point.

Route 6 (the South loop)

19. Wick Local Saints: [Fergus](#), [Ninian](#)



The start point for this route is the same as for the Northern loop – St Fergus church. The picture shows the effigy recently moved to the church from the library. This time, head towards the town centre. At the mini roundabout, turn 2nd left up the hill and past the hospital on your right. At the traffic lights, turn right towards Thurso on the A882 and drive two miles to the village of Haster.

47. Haster Local Saint: [Cuthbert](#)

St Cuthbert came from the borders and is best known as the Prior and Abbot of Lindisfarne. The site dedicated to him lies 200 yards ESE of Upper Haster farm house at the lower end of a cultivated field on the Burn of Haster and about 100 yards W of the Achairn burn. There is no obvious means of access.

48. Watten Local Saints: [Katherine](#), [Fumac](#), [Magnus](#), [Tarlogan](#)

From Haster, continue on the A882 to Watten. This seems to have been an important centre as it had a joint convent and monastery, with holy well, dedicated to St Katherine. It was situated West of the current manse. Watten may have been a cross roads for travellers going to and from Canisbay or Wick via Spittal to points South. Information on the sites is unclear and very little remains to be seen. Here is a summary of what the source books have to say:

area called Pennyland, to the South East of the village, suggesting that it was owned by the church.

chapel, graveyard and well at Clow on the Scouthal Burn would have been the site dedicated to Mary, as identified on the HER map.

St Fumac's Fair presumably took place at Markethill just off the B870

chapel just South of Didhall House in the area of Dunn may have been the chapel of Dine dedicated to St Fumac. Neither Dine nor Dinnet are marked on Landranger maps, so we can only assume that they are corruptions of Dunn – or Dunn is a corruption of them.

St Fumac: Also at St Fumac's Fair at Dinnet and at Chapel of Dine, both on the outskirts of Watten, Caithness.

[Magnus] is commemorated at Banniskirk by Watten, Shebster and Spittal. Banniskirk may be a corruption of his name.

[Mary] a well and burial place at Scouthal, Watten and at Marykirk of Sibster, Wick. The baptismal font from the Sibster chapel is at Stirkoke House. For long after the Reformation, people would visit this chapel on the first Sunday after the new moon.

[Tarlogan] In Caithness, he is remembered at Watten

On entering the village, take the right turn onto the B870. At the sharp corner, a narrow road goes off to the left to the site of the chapel at The Clow on the banks of the Scouthal Burn. This road is narrow and twisty, with deep ditches on either side and unfriendly barbed wire on fences but without a proper turning place. So, while the remains of the chapel are still visible near the farmhouse, the site is perhaps best visited on foot, if at all. The following directions are currently awaiting further exploration.

Continuing a short distance on the B870, the area of Wester-Watten is on the right at the edge of Loch Watten but Wester-Watten Moss is further South, to the right at the end of the track going past Scouthal and The Clow. One of these sites was where a fair used to be held around the time of the feast-day of St Magnus on 16th April, known in the Middle Ages as Magnusmas. This suggests that it was on a pilgrimage route to and from St Magnus Cathedral on Orkney. Assuming that the pilgrims were meaning to pass through Spittal, they could have passed through either site as there are chapels at The Clow and at Dunn, along the loch-side from Wester-Watten. We are following the B870, which by-passes both of these areas. As it moves inland away from the village, it takes sharp left and right turns. The second road on the right after these turns leads to Markethall and the area of Dunn.

49. Ballachly by Achavanich

Local Saint: [Triduana](#)



Continue on the B870 until it joins the A9 at Mybster, just South of Spittal. Turn left and follow the A9 to Achavanich, which is clearly signposted. Take the single-track road to the left and park at the shore of Loch Stemster. Admire the standing stones, then turn and take the track along the West side of the loch, branch left again and continue to the ruined graveyard at Ballachly. Here is the site of the ‘resting place’ of St Triduana where Bishop John was cured of blindness. St Triduana has a well authenticated grave in Edinburgh, so the site at Ballachly is not her grave but may have had a relic of her buried there.

There is a gate across the entrance to the track to Ballachly and the track itself is rough and could only be driven in a vehicle designed for going off-road. The graveyard is apr four miles from the car park.

50. Rangag Local Saint: [Ciaran](#)

Continuing a short distance on the A9 Southwards you will see Loch Rangag on your right. There are the remains of a building clearly visible on a spit of land not far from the road. Some sources refer to this as a broch, others as Greystell Castle. The literature of the Caithness Broch Project calls it a castle, so that is the most likely description.

This area is associated with St Ciaran, who is also linked with Latheron, and the inland areas around the heads of the Thurso and Rumsdale rivers.

22. Latheron Local Saint: [Curitan](#), [Ciaran](#)

There was a chapel between the road and the sea, where the road curves towards the sea on its way to Latheron. The site can be accessed by following the sign to the Old Church in the village, which is now the Clan Gunn Heritage Centre.

At this point, the route goes North but the traveller might want to take a diversion South a few miles to Dunbeath where there is a heritage museum, tea room and toilets. A short distance up the Dunbeath River is the House of Peace, site number 23. The Laidhay Croft Museum is just North of Dunbeath.

21. Lybster Local Saint: [Mary](#)

There was a chapel dedicated to Mary at the harbour. No remains of the chapel exist. However the Waterlines Visitor Centre at the harbour is well worth a visit.

20 Ulbster Local Saint: [Martin](#)



The Ulbster stone is now kept in Caithness Horizons, Thurso and there are no remains locally. The old Thrumster Railway Station is now a museum.

19. Wick Local Saints: Fergus, [Ninian](#), [Francis](#), [Cuthbert](#)

As you approach the centre of the town, you will pass the hospital on your left. At the bottom of the hill is a mini-roundabout. Go ahead onto Bridge Street and follow the road through the town to your starting point at St Fergus Church.

Optional extra – turn right at the mini-roundabout, park wherever is suitable and walk to the gable end of the MacKay’s Hotel, which is on Ebenezer Street, the shortest street in the world.

Another optional extra (again, this has not been tested recently, so check the route on a map before setting off) – take the first turn to the left after the traffic lights and park at the car park on the riverside. On the hill behind the hotel is St Fergus church, your starting point. If you have the time, and the weather is reasonable, you can walk up the North bank of the Wick River to the point where the Achairn Burn (which passes under the bridge at Haster) joins the Wick River. Just above the river bank is the remains of St Mary’s chapel. The site can also be reached by leaving Wick on the Castletown road and taking the B874 Sibster road. Past Altimarlach Farm and just before Sibster Cottages, there is a track to the left (but where to park the car?). Follow it to the river, taking due care when crossing the railway line, and the site of the chapel is near a fence on your right above the river bank.

HOW TO GET THERE

Many of our sites are not readily visible from the road or no longer have any physical remains. However records of their existence do exist and the sites can be identified with the help of maps. The most detailed and accurate map for our purposes is that compiled by the Highland Council Archaeology Department, to be found at www.her.highland.gov. Ordinance Survey maps also mark many of the sites that we mention. Post codes are the least accurate guides. However they can be useful to reassure the traveller that they are in the correct general area. The post codes may refer to a nearby building rather than the actual site.

arranged by route

	Place	HER ref (preceded by MHG)	O.S. reference (preceded by ND)	Post code
SITES IN THE NORTH HIGHLANDS, outwith Caithness				
1	Inverness	15838		IV2 3DU the castle
2	Beauly Priory	31423	527 464 priory	IV4 7BL main street
3	Applecross	7637	713 458	IV54 8ND Heritage Centre
4	Balnakiell	9482, 31413		IV27 4PT craft village
5	Strathnaver	10761		KW14 7SS museum, Farr
Routes 1-6 cover the sites between Farr and Dunbeath (No. 6-23 and 35-50)				
23	Dunbeath	39563, 1145	898 053	KW6 6ED heritage centre
24	Helmsdale	10118-9	026 154	KW8 6JJ Timespan
25	Brora/Clynleash	10816	159 295	KW9 6LR distillery
26	Golspie	10894 school	10894 school	KW10 6TH public toilets
27	Dornoch Cathedral	11675 witch stone	797 897	IV25 3SO Castle St.
28	Tain	31456 St Duthuc's chapel		IV19 1DY museum
29	Dingwall	31381, 42038		IV15 9PB St Clement's manse
Some extra sites, diverting from the circular route				
30	Portmahomack	7141 no.1 slab		IV20 1YB Main St.
31	The Cloutie Well	33096, 7109	641 537	IV8 8ND Munlochy p.o.
32	Rosemarkie	25214 monastic settlement		IV10 8UF museum
33	Fortrose	8878 St Boniface's well	727 565	IV10 8SU cathedral
34	Kessock Bridge	3849 S. Kessock pier	666 476	IV3 8AZ nature reserve

	Place	HER ref (all preceded by MHG)	O.S. ref (all preceded by ND)	Post code
ROUTES STARTING AND FINISHING IN THURSO				
8	Thurso	13628, 1434	119 685	KW14 8AJ Caithness Horizons
7	Crosskirk	1226, 1055	025 701	KW14 7XY Forss House Hotel
6	Reay	1611, 2470, 2518	969 648	KW14 7RG Bridgend House
34	Shebster	997	017 639	KW14 7QZ the garage
35	Westfield	980, 39492	066 641	KW14 7QN Bridge of Westfield
36	Gerston	1332	123 594	KW14 6XQ houses
37	Halkirk	1346, 1676	135 597	KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
38	Skinnet	19410	131 621	KW12 6XF the farm
39	Shurrery	18167	041 577	KW14 7RB Shurrery Kirk
40	Dorrery	180, 39446	077 547	KW12 6YW the lodge
41	Olgrinbeg	39780	111 536	KW12 6XJ the farm
42	Dirlot	1307, 1310	126 487	KW12 6UP Dirlot Cottage
43	Westerdale	1356, 39779	127 524	KW12 6UP old church
44	Spittal	1350, 42410	158 549	KW1 5XR the quarry
45	Georgemas	1427 Sibster chapel	151 596	KW12 6XA station house
ROUTES STARTING AND FINISHING IN WICK				
19	Wick	2026, 30292, 39656	362 511	KW1 4BS St Fergus Church
46	Killimster	2310	293 563	KW1 4RX Killimster farm
9	Olrig	1377, 1391, 31473	187 671	KW14 8UA C'town primary school
10	Dunnet Links	1885, 13716	207 682	KW14 8TX garden centre
11	Dunnet Church	2263	220 712	KW14 8XD Marymas Cottages
12	St John's Loch, Dunnet	2270	233 722	KW14 8XQ Old Schoolhouse
13	St John's Point	38219	311 753	KW14 8XL
14	Canisbay	1723, 25061 chapel	343 729	KW1 4YB Kirkstyle
15	John O'Groats	1710	387 735	KW1 4YR tourist info point
16	Freswick	695, 39390 chapel	377 671	KW1 4XX castle
17	Ackergill	2551	367 545	KW1 4RG farm
18	Papigoe	29312	385 516	KW1 5SZ farm
47	Haster	2149	330 503	KW1 5SZ farm
48	Watten	1976, 42454	234 524	KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
	<i>Spittal – see site no 44</i>			
49	Achavanich	1318, 42022	196 447	KW5 6DX farm
50	Rangag	1588	180 416	KW5 6DX farm
22	Latheron	1159, 1912, 31350	202 333	KW5 6DG farm
21	Lybster	25107	244 351	KW3 6AE main street
20	Ulbster	2196, 31351	336 419	KW2 6AA schoolhouse
P SITES ON POSSIBLE PILGRIMAGE ROUTES				
1	Brabstermyre	1794, 39860	317 694	KW1 4YD Brabster
2	Bowermadden	679, 39389	262 648	KW1 4TW Bower
3	Achscoraclate	39459, 877	081 443	KW12 6UP Strathmore Lodge
23	Dunbeath	1145, 39563	898 053	KW6 6ED Heritage Centre
24	Helmsdale	10118-9	026 154	KW8 6JJ Timespan

arranged by number

No.	Place Name	Associated Saints	Post Code
1	Inverness	Columba, Adamnon, Kenneth, John, Kessog, Erchard	IV2 3DU the castle
2	Beauly Priory	Tarlogan	IV4 7BL main street
3	Applecross	Maelrubha	IV54 8ND Heritage Centre
4	Balnakiell	Maelrubha	IV27 4PT craft village
5	Strathnaver	Maelrubha, Donan, Martin, Cormack, Diman	KW14 7SS museum, Farr
6	Reay	Colman	KW14 7RG Bridgend House
7	Crosskirk	Mary	KW14 7XY Forss House Hotel
8	Thurso	Peter	KW14 8AJ Caithness Horizons
9	Olrig	Drostan/Trothan, Colum	KW14 8UA C'town primary school
10	Dunnet Links	Colum, Colm	KW14 8TX C'town garden centre
11	Dunnet Church	Mary, John, Ann	KW14 8XD Marymas Cottages
12	St John's Loch	John the Baptist	KW14 8XQ Old Schoolhouse
13	St John's Point	John	KW14 8XL
14	Canisbay Church	Drostan	KW1 4YB Kirkstyle
15	John O'Groats	Mary	KW1 4YR tourist info point
16	Freswick	Modan	KW1 4XX castle
17	Ackergill	Drostan	KW1 4RG farm
18	Papigoe	Ninian	KW1 5SZ farm
19	Wick	Fergus, Ninian, Francis	KW1 4BS St Fergus Church
20	Ulbster	Martin	KW2 6AA schoolhouse
21	Lybster	Mary	KW3 6AE main street
22	Latheron	Curitan, Ciaran	KW5 6DG farm
23	Dunbeath	Donan, Triduana	KW6 6ED heritage centre
24	Helmsdale	Donan, Peter, Rectaire, Ninian, Ernan, Iain/John	KW8 6JJ Timespan
25	Brora/Clyne	Faolan, Columba, Peter, Iain	KW9 6LR distillery
26	Golspie	Malie, Andrew	KW10 6TH public toilets
27	Dornoch	Finbar, Gilbert, James	IV25 3SO Castle St.
28	Tain	Duthac	IV19 1DY museum
29	Dingwall	Clement	IV15 9XH business park
30	Portmahomack	Colman	IV20 1YB Main St.
31	Cloutie Well	Curitan/Boniface	IV8 8ND Munlochry p.o.
32	Rosemarkie	Moluag	IV10 8UF museum
33	Fortrose	Curitan/Boniface, Peter	IV10 8SU cathedral
34	Kessock Bridge	Kessock	IV3 8AZ nature reserve
35	Shebster	Magnus	KW14 7QZ the garage
36	Westfield	Drostan	KW14 7QN Bridge of Westfield
37	Halkirk	Fergus, Gilbert, Tarlogan, Katherine, Ciaran, Peter, Colum,	KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
38	Skinnet	Thomas	KW12 6XF the farm
39	Shurrery	<i>Tigh a' Bheannaich</i> (not Benedict)	KW14 7RB Shurrery Kirk
40	Dorrery	Gavin	KW12 6YW the lodge
41	Olgrinbeg	Peter	KW12 6XJ the farm
42	Dirlot	Colum	KW12 6UP Dirlot Cottage
43	Westerdale	Drostan	KW12 6UP Old Church
44	Spittal	Magnus	KW1 5XR the quarry
45	Georgemas	George, Mary, Katherine	KW12 6XA station house
46	Killimster	Duthac	KW1 4RX Killimster farm
47	Haster	Cuthbert	KW1 5SZ farm
48	Watten	Katherine, Bridget, Fumac, Magnus, Tarlogan	KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
49	Achavanich/Ballachly	Triduana	KW5 6DX farm
50	Rangag	Ciaran	KW5 6DX farm
P1	Brabstermire	Drostan/Tustan	KW1 4YD Brabster
P2	Bowermadden	Madan	KW1 4UD Lyth Art Centre
P3	Achscoraclate	Bridget	KW12 6UP Strathmore Lodge

arranged by place

No.	Place Name	Associated Saints	Post Code
P3	Achscoraclate	Bridget	KW12 6UP Strathmore Lodge
17	Ackergill	Drostan	KW1 4RG farm
49	Achavanich/Balachly	Triduana	KW5 6DX farm
3	Applecross	Maelrubha	IV54 8ND Heritage Centre
4	Balnakiell	Maelrubha	IV27 4PT craft village
2	Beauly Priory	Tarlogan	IV4 7BL main street
P2	Bowermadden	Madan	KW1 4UD Lyth Art Centre
P1	Brabstermire	Drostan	KW1 4YD Brabster
25	Brora/Clyne	Faolan, Columba, Peter, Iain	KW9 6LR distillery
14	Canisbay	Drostan	KW1 4YB Kirkstyle
31	Cloutie Well	Curitan/Boniface	IV8 8ND Munloch y p.o.
7	Crosskirk	Mary	KW14 7XY Forss House Hotel
29	Dingwall	? Clement	IV15 9XH business park
42	Dirlot	Colum	KW12 6UP Dirlot Cottage
27	Dornoch	Finbar, Gilbert	IV25 3SO Castle St.
40	Dorrery	Gavin	KW12 6YW the lodge
23	Dunbeath	House of Peace ?Triduana	KW6 6ED heritage centre
10	Dunnet Links	Colum, Colm	KW14 8TX garden centre
11	Dunnet Church	Mary, John, Ann	KW14 8XD Marymas Cottages
33	Fortrose	Curitan/Boniface, Peter	IV10 8SU cathedral
16	Freswick	Modan	KW1 4XX the castle
45	Georgemas	George, Mary, Katherine	KW12 6XA station house
26	Golspie	Malie, Andrew	KW10 6TH public toilets
37	Halkirk	Fergus, Gilbert, Tarlogan, Ciaran, Peter, Colum, Katherine	KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
47	Haster	Cuthbert	KW1 5SZ farm
24	Helmsdale	Donan, Peter, Rectaire, Ninian, Ernan, Iain/John	KW8 6JJ Timespan
1	Inverness	Columba, Adamnon, Kenneth, John, Kessog, Erchard	IV2 3DU the castle
15	John O'Groats	Mary	KW1 4YR tourist info point
34	Kessock Bridge	Kessog	IV3 8AZ nature reserve
46	Killimster	Duthac	KW1 4RX the farm
22	Latheron	Curitan, Ciaran	KW5 6DG farm
21	Lybster	Mary	KW3 6AE main street
41	Olgrinbeg	Peter	KW12 6XJ the farm
9	Olrig	Drostan/Trothan, Colum	KW14 8UA C'town primary school
18	Papigoe	Ninian	KW1 5SZ farm
30	Portmahomack	Colman	IV20 1YB Main Street
50	Rangag	Ciaran	KW5 6DX farm
6	Reay	Colman	KW14 7RG Bridgend House
32	Rosemarkie	Moluag	IV10 8UF museum
35	Shebster	Magnus	KW14 7QZ the garage
39	Shurrery	<i>Tigh a' Bheannaich</i>	KW14 7RB Shurrery kirk
38	Skinnet	Thomas	KW12 6XF the farm
5	Strathnaver	Maelrubha, Donan, Martin, Cormack, Diman	IV27 4PT museum, Farr
12	St John's Loch	John the Baptist	KW14 8XQ Old Schoolhouse
13	St John's Point	John	KW14 8XL
44	Spittal	Magnus, Diman	KW1 5XR the quarry
28	Tain	Duthac	IV19 1DY museum
8	Thurso	Peter	KW14 8Aj Caithness Horizons
20	Ulbster	Martin	KW2 6AA schoolhouse
48	Watten	Katherine, Bridget, Fumac, Magnus, Tarlogan	KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
43	Westerdale	Drostan	KW12 6UP Old Church
36	Westfield	Drostan	KW14 7QN Bridge of Westfield
19	Wick	Fergus	KW1 4BS St Fergus Church

arranged by saint's name

No.	Associated Place	Saint's Name	Post code
1	Inverness	Adamnon	IV2 3DU the castle
27	Dornoch	Andrew	IV25 3SO Castle St.
11	Dunnet Church	Ann	KW14 8XD Marymas Cottages
39	Shurrery	<i>Benedict</i>	KW14 7RB Shurrery kirk
49	Watten,	Bridget	KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
P3	Achscoraclate		KW12 6UP Strathmore Lodge
22	Latheron	Ciaran	KW5 6DG farm
37	Halkirk		KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
50	Rangag		KW5 6DX farm
29	Dingwall	Clement	IV15 9XH business park
6	Reay	Colman	KW14 7RG Bridgend House
30	Portmahomack		IV20 1YB Main Street
10	Dunnet Links	Colum	KW14 8TX garden centre
37	Halkirk		KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
43	Dirlot		KW12 6UP Dirlot Cottage
25	Brora/Clyne	Columba	KW9 6LR distillery
28	Tain	Comgan/Congan/Coan/Cowan	IV19 1DY museum
10	Dunnet Links	Coomb/Colm	KW14 8TX garden centre
5	Strathnaver	Cormack	KW14 7SS museum, Farr
22	Latheron	Curitan/Boniface	KW5 6DG farm
31	Cloutie Well		IV8 8ND Munloch y p.o.
33	Fortrose		IV10 8SU cathedral
47	Haster	Cuthbert	KW1 5SZ farm
	Caithness	Devenic	Caithness
5	Strathnaver	Diman	KW14 7SS museum, Farr
5	Strathnaver	Donan/Donnan	KW14 7SS museum, Farr
23	Dunbeath		KW6 6ED heritage centre
24	Helmsdale		KW8 6JJ Timespan
9	Olrig	Drostan/Trothan/Trostan/Tear/ Teer/Tustan	KW14 8UA C'town primary school
14	Canisbay		KW1 4YB Kirkstyle
17	Ackergill		KW1 4RG farm
36	Westfield		KW14 7QN Bridge of Westfield
43	Westerdale		KW12 6UP the Old Church
28	Tain	Duthac	IV19 1DY museum
46	Killimster		KW1 4RX the farm
1	Inverness	Erchard/Irchar/Yrchar/Merchard	IV2 3DU the castle
24	Helmsdale	Ernan	KW8 6JJ Timespan
25	Brora/Clyne	Faolan	KW9 6LR distillery
19	Wick	Fergus	KW1 4BS St Fergus Church
37	Halkirk		KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
27	Dornoch (possibly Berrydale, Achvarasdale)	Finbar/Finian/Bar.	IV25 3SO Castle St.
19	Wick	Francis	KW1 4BS St Fergus Church
27	Dornoch		IV25 3SO Castle St.
48	Watten	Fumac	KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
40	Dorrery	Gavin	KW12 6YW the lodge
45	Georgemas	George	KW12 6XA station house

27 37	Dornoch Halkirk	Gilbert	IV25 3SO Castle St. KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel
24	Helmsdale	Iain/John	KW8 6JJ Timespan
27	Dornoch	James	IV25 3SO Castle St.
1 12 13 24	Inverness St John's Loch St John's Point Helmsdale	John	IV2 3DU the castle KW14 8XQ Old Schoolhouse KW14 8XL KW8 6JJ Timespan
48	Watten	Katherine	KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
1	Inverness	Kenneth	IV2 3DU the castle
1 34	Inverness Kessock Bridge	Kessog	IV2 3DU the castle IV3 8AZ nature reserve
16 P2	Freswick Bowermaddan	Madan/Medan/Modan	KW1 4XX the castle KW1 4UD Lyth Art Centre
3 4 5	Applecross Balnakiell Strathnaver	Maelrubha	IV54 8ND Heritage Centre IV27 4PT the craft village KW14 7SS museum, Farr
35 44 48	Shebster Spittal Watten	Magnus	KW14 7QZ the garage KW1 5XR the quarry KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
26	Golspie	Malie	KW10 6TH public toilets
5 20	Strathnaver Ulbster	Martin	KW14 7SS museum, Farr KW2 6AA schoolhouse
7 11 15 21 45	Crosskirk Dunnet Church John O' Groats Lybster Georgemas	Mary	KW14 7XY Forss House Hotel KW14 8XD Marymas Cottages KW1 4YR tourist info. Point KW3 6AE main street KW12 6XA station house
32	Rosemarkie	Moluag	IV10 8UF museum
18	Papigoe	Ninian	KW1 5SZ
8 24 25 37 41	Thurso Helmsdale Brora/Clyne Halkirk Olgrinbeg	Peter	KW14 8AJ Caithness Horizons KW8 6JJ Timespan KW9 6LR distillery KW12 6XY Ulbster Arms Hotel KW12 6XJ the farm
24	Helmsdale	Rectaire/Reet	KW8 6JJ Timespan
2 1 48	Beaully Priory Inverness Watten	Tarlogan/Talorcan	IV4 7BL main street IV2 3DU the castle KW1 5XN Dunn Farm
39	Skinnet	Thomas	KW12 6XF the farm
49 23	Achavanich/Balachly ? Dunbeath	Triduana	KW5 6DX farm KW6 6ED heritage centre

APPENDIX 1: Lochs and Rivers

Water has never been in short supply in Scotland and we tend to take it for granted. Today, we have a seemingly-limitless supply coming directly into our houses and have waterproof clothing to protect us from the source of this supply. The saints whose lives we are thinking about had a more complex relationship with the environment around them. One aspect that tends to be forgotten, which we have mentioned briefly already, is that the lochs and rivers were used as navigational aids, not just to be walked beside but to be travelled on. It would have been far easier to take a coracle up the river Thurso and across Loch More towards Achscoraclate than to walk there and even easier for the downward journey. Where walking was unavoidable, the lochs and rivers with which Caithness is so generously provided must have been useful for taking a refreshing bath at the end of a days tramp. They must also have been an important source of fresh food for both the permanent resident and the traveller.

Today, we are not so dependent on the water-ways for transport but still use them for swimming and fishing. For the benefit of those of you who would like to share this experience with the saints of old, we include the following guides. Swimming in the rivers has not been covered – they can be fast-flowing and cold! It could also upset the fishermen.

Swimming

The following information is taken from ‘Hills of the North Rejoice!’ by Ralph MacGregor, available online from curlwecottage.com. We repeat our warning from the introduction that small, peaty lochans can be dangerous, as can the peat bogs surrounding them. Ralph MacGregor is a very experienced mountaineer, canoeist, cyclist and swimmer. Only try to emulate him if you are equally fit and experienced.

This is a greatly edited list – we have removed lochs that are too distant from our routes or are unsuitable/dangerous for swimming. We have left some that are a good walk from our routes if they are particularly appealing and/or have a path to them. The numbers in brackets are grid references.

Loch Calder (070610) No shortage of places to swim.

Dunnet Head Lochs:- some fifteen, most very good for swimming, but Courtfall Loch 214740 and Northern Gate Loch 209719 are reedy pools not suitable for swimming or paddling. We have edited Ralph’s list down to the following:

Loch of Bushta (195726) Good for swimming from South end where there is a nice sloping sandy bottom.

Black Loch (near Red Geo) (185736) Surprisingly good loch for swimming, like a large swimming pool, went in from North bank, peaty bottom but soon out of depth and fine for swimming. Nice location

Grassy Loch (near road) (207743) Went in from South-East bank – a surprisingly good swim, stony/peaty bottom then deep, swam across to far shore which is a deep/floating bog suddenly ending in five-foot deep water. Could do widths!

Black Loch (near road, above Many Lochs) (203745) A good swimming pool, stony at South bank but shelves quite quickly into deep water, nice swim, some weed towards far shore.

Loch of Muirs (202734) A surprisingly good loch for safe swimming. From South-East bank, peaty/stony floor soon deep enough, could swim right across but still just touch bottom. Nice location

Loch Eilanach (070475) Nice swim to island.

Loch Gaineimh (050470) A very good loch for swimming with a sandy beach and sandy bottom.

Loch of Killimster (308560) A surprisingly good swim from the fishing jetty at the eastern end of the loch.

Loch Meadie (090480) Overlooked by the road so it is best to go in half way up the Western shore where a forestry track gives access. Good swimming.

Loch a Mhuilinn (Dorrery) (060568) Small but a good safe swimming pool, firm but soft bottom, about four feet deep.

Loch na Moine (938658) Good swimming, unusual clifftop location.

Loch More (080460) The classic swimming loch; you might even meet somebody else in the water off the sandy beaches along the Eastern shore.

Loch Rangag (178418) Shelves very steeply from the broch to deep water.

Loch Sarclet (343430) At the Southern end, you need to push through thick undergrowth to reach the bank. Once in, the stony bottom soon shelves to deep enough water for a good swim.

Little Loch Scye (012554) Remarkably good for swimming – sandy shore, deep enough, not very stony, good setting.

Loch Shurrery (045555) Best to swim from the Southern end of the loch on the Dorrery side where there is a small sandy beach and you are not overlooked.

Loch Stemster (Achavanich) (190425) Stony.

The Trinkie (376495) Excellent salt-water outdoor swimming pool.

Loch Toftingall (190525) Now surrounded by plantations but still good for swimming from boat landing to West.

Loch Tuim Ghlais (978525) Perhaps the best loch of all.

Loch Watten (230560) The crannog at the Eastern end makes a nice objective (but was overgrown with nettles on my last visit!)

Loch of Yarrows (310440) Nice at Southern end where not overlooked.

Fishing

Caithness has often been described as an angler's paradise, a county comprising somewhere in the region of 714 square miles of what can be best described as predominantly flat open moorland with big skies and breath-taking views. There are in the region of 100+ lochs in the county which, together with smaller lochans, rivers and streams of varying descriptions, provide a home for Atlantic salmon and sea trout returning to their natal rivers to spawn and resident brown trout, all wild indigenous fish. An almost impossible choice for an angler in deciding where to fish and what to fish for!

The start of the salmon fishing season varies from river to river usually in the months of January and February and ends in September or the first week in October. In the main, fly fishing is the permitted method for catching salmon although the skilled worm fisher can practice his/her art on one of the rivers in Caithness. Access to all rivers for salmon fishing is controlled and subject to local, and on some rivers, legally mandated catch and release policies which do vary between rivers. Advice on fishing for salmon in the county and the necessary permits can be obtained from a number of sources including Hugo Ross' tackle shop in Wick, Harpers emporium in Thurso and from websites run by the river fisheries and estate offices. These sources can, of course, also advise on fly and line choices and the currently productive parts of the rivers.

Sea Trout fishing is also available on one or two rivers and lochs in Caithness and details of this, together with season dates, tackle and flies can be obtained from the sources mentioned above.

The trout season starts on the 15th March each year and runs through until the 30th September although a small number of lochs in Caithness remain open until the 6th October. In the main, trout fishing is undertaken on the lochs but where the intention is to fish for trout on a river, advice should be sought from the relevant fishery or estate office to avoid conflict with fishery or estate staff and their associated activities.²¹ The referenced Act below provides for access over land and water but not necessarily to undertake any other activities on that land/water. Bank fishing is permitted on most of the lochs whilst a number also have boats which can be hired and details of these, together with associated permits, flies and directions can also be obtained from the Caithness tackle shops and the Dounreay Fly Fishing Association website (www.dffa.co.uk). One loch is an "any method" loch where spinning and bait fishing is also permitted. When considering fishing from a boat on any loch irrespective of size, it is essential to be aware of weather conditions and to wear a buoyancy aid, or preferably a lifejacket, at all times. If in doubt about the weather – don't go out. There is always another day!

²¹ Statutory Access Rights (Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society)

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (which came into force in 2005) gives everyone rights of access over land and inland water throughout Scotland, subject to specific exclusions set out in the Act and as long as they behave responsibly. These rights are sometimes referred to as 'freedom to roam'.

If the plethora of loch and river fishing is not enough, there is always high quality sea fishing to be had from either the Wick or Scrabster harbours. Depending on the time of year, cod, ling, haddock, mackerel and pollack can be found in good sizes and quantities. Shark fishing might also be available. Details of the boats and the dates/times for sea fishing trips can be obtained from either Hugo Ross in Wick or Harpers in Thurso.

APPENDIX II: Plants and wildlife to look out for
This section is still to be added

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If anyone is interested in modern scholarship surrounding the Celtic Church, there is much to choose from. We can recommend the following:

To get an introduction:

Olsen, Ted. *Christianity and the Celts*. [Downer's Grove, Il.: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

For a more detailed approach:

Meek, Donald. *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*. Boat of Garten: The Handsel Press, 2000.

Some Useful Web Addresses

<http://www.wickstferguschurch.org.uk/page16.html>

<http://her.highland.gov.uk>

www.caithness.org/caithnessfieldclub

www.castletownheritage.co.uk

www.scottishchurches.org.uk

<https://archive.org/stream/.../churchdedication>

<https://canmore.org.uk>

www.visitscotland.co.uk

www.archiuk.com

saintsplaces.gla.ac.uk

www.stravaiging.com

www.cushnieent.force9.co.uk

www.jbutler.org.uk/e2e/csw/index.shtml

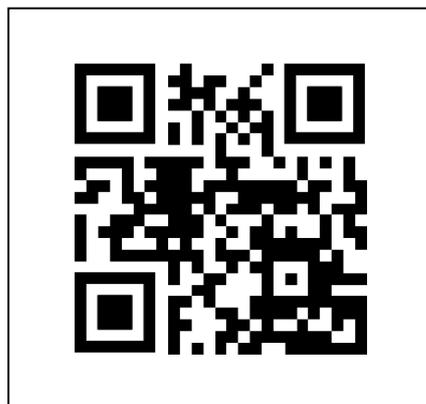
<https://dingwallstclements.wordpress.com/>

Two long distance walks overlap with some of our costal sites – the John O’Groat Trail covers site numbers 15 to 22 and the North Coast Way covers sites 6 to 15.

www.jogt.org.uk

www.northhighland-way.com

This QR sign will link you to our page on the web site of St Fergus Church, Wick – if you are not already there!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our first vote of thanks must go to those brave and dedicated people who left home and family to spread the gospel message among strangers. That Caithness has active Christian churches today is a testament to their dedication.

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Wick St Fergus Church, who are hosting this material within their website, bear no responsibility whatsoever for the content of this material and accordingly have no liability whatsoever in connection therewith.

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