

Finnish Society for Celtic Studies 1991–2016 – the First 25 Years

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The foundation of SCN and SFKS in 1990 and 1991

The Finnish Society for Celtic Studies SFKS (Suomen Keltologinen Seura r.y.—Finlands Keltologiska Sällskap r.f., SFKS) is an academic society which was founded on January 18th 1991 and registered on May 4th 1992. It was accepted as a member of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies in 1994. The purpose of the society is, according to its rules, 'to create potentials for Celtic Studies in Finland as well as act as a consultative body and spread knowledge to all interested parties...'¹

SFKS was founded as a national branch to the *Societas Celtologica Nordica* (SCN), set up a year or so before with the aim of promoting Celtic Studies in the Nordic countries.² Present at the meeting when the Board of the new society organised itself were Anders Ahlqvist (president), Micheál Briody (chair), Harri Nyberg (secretary) and Glyn Banks, all from the University of Helsinki as well as Hannu-Pekka Huttunen (vice chair) and Matti Karjala from the University of Turku.³

The foundation of these two societies had been a matter of pragmatics: Matti Gustafson from the Ministry of Education recommended the foundation of a scholarly society to Dr. Ahlqvist on the grounds that an academic organisation would be in a much better position to apply for public funding for its field of study than scholars as private individuals ever would. Previous to that, however, much ground had been prepared in the way of spreading awareness of and interest in Celtic languages and literatures, which were largely unknown in Finnish academia and among the general public.

The teaching of Celtic languages at Finnish universities had begun in the early 1980s when Dr. Ahlqvist started offering courses in Old Irish at the University of

- 1 'tarkoitus on toimia keltologisen tutkimuksen ja harrastuksen yhteistyöelimenä sekä edistää ja levittää alan tietoutta ja tuntemusta Suomessa...' (Rules of SFKS, revised set 2003 § 2).
- 2 The inaugural meeting of *Societas Celtologica Nordica* was convened in Uppsala on May 26th 1990 by Professor Birgit Bramsbäck, director of the Celtic Section at the University of Uppsala, Dr. Anders Ahlqvist, a Finnish linguist and holder of Docentship in Celtic Studies at the University of Helsinki and Dr. Ailbhe Ó Corráin, lecturer in Celtic Languages at Uppsala. SCN held its autumn meeting, *Tionól na Samhna* on November 3rd 1990 in Finland, in Hanasaari, Espoo, where the organization of the Finnish Celticians was already on the agenda, discussed and decided.
- 3 Tuija Kuha, then a student of Linguistics, was chosen as the first treasurer of the society.

Helsinki's Department of General Linguistics.⁴ Modern Celtic languages were also taught in Finland from the early 1980s onwards. Micheál Briody began teaching Modern Irish in the Language Centre of Helsinki University in 1981⁵ and courses in Modern Welsh were offered intermittently by Glyn Banks since the late eighties at the Department of English Philology of the same university.⁶

Thanks to the efforts of these teachers, the group of students who were aware of Celtic languages and literature and had some grasp of the language grew over the years. Scholarships from the Irish Ministry of Education, offered as part of student exchange programme included in Cultural Agreement between Finland and Ireland, gave two students every year an opportunity to pursue their studies in Ireland for a year from 1985 onwards. The flow of students had been strongest to the *gaeltacht* or Irish-speaking areas. Jukka Saarinen, student of Folklore, and Riitta Latvio, a student of Comparative Religion, were the first of Micheál's students to spend a year in Ireland on the scholarship: Jukka in University College Dublin (UCD) in 1984–85 and Riitta in University College Galway (UCG) in 1988–89. They were followed by another student of Religion in 1989–90, Tom Sjöblom, also in UCG. Under the later ERASMUS exchange programme, Glyn's student Monica Sonck studied Welsh at the University in Aberystwyth in 1993–94.

The cultural agreement also enabled Celtic Studies scholars to visit Finland—among the first visitors were Séamas Ó Catháin, Rionach Uí Ógáin, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, and Pádraig Ó Héalaí. Between 1978 and 1982 the Department of Folklore at UCD sent four young graduates to spend a year in Finland. Micheál Briody was one of them. Scholarly links among folklorists were close between UCD and the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki, as well as between University College Cork (UCC) and University of Turku. Many were

4 Ahlqvist also gave occasional courses on the morphosyntax of Modern Irish and introductory courses in Middle Welsh at the same department, but held a regular position as a member of the teaching staff at the University College, Galway.

5 Prof. Matti Rissanen, Director of the Language Centre provided Mr. Briody the opportunity to commence teaching using the premises of the Centre at the instigation of Börje Thilman, the honorary consul of Ireland. The Language Centre also offered some other language course materials, such as tapes, dictionaries, language tutorials and grammar books. Students, numbering usually around ten in the elementary courses and around 3–5 in the continuation courses, came from all faculties: humanities, sciences, political and economic studies etc. Micheál also gave conversation classes to interested students. See Briody 1990.

6 Huttunen 1993, 10–11. Glyn Banks also gave some lectures and tutorials on Welsh literary and cultural topics. A Welsh activist, he had been involved in Welsh Theatre and Television from 1967 to 1982, and an initial member and director of *Cwmni Theatr y Werin in Aberystwyth*—the first Welsh language community theatre group in Wales. In spite of some efforts to remedy the situation, both Micheál and Glyn taught for years without pay.

drawn here by the fame of Finnish Folklore Archives and the so-called Finnish or Historical-Geographic Method.⁷

On the scope of Celtic Studies in Finland and the first activities of the society

Given the breadth of academic fields that the early students came from, it was evident from the beginning that Celtic Studies in Finland would or could not be restricted solely to Celtic languages, literature and culture. At the second symposium of SCN in Oslo 1991, titled ‘Celtic Studies in Scandinavia in the 21st century’, Anders Ahlqvist also stressed that the furthering of scholarly contacts by SCN should not be limited to the minority languages only.

Those versed in Celtic languages and literature were so few and far between in Finland that of necessity the society had to adopt a very broad and inclusive approach to Celtic Studies. This entailed that the society also embraced those with interest in modern Irish, Welsh, Scottish and Breton studies, not only students of Celtic cultures, literature and history in the pre-historical and historical eras. From the beginning one of the most important tasks of the society was to reach scholars and students interested in Celtic cultures and their modern heritage. Information about the activities of the society, of language courses and diverse DIY teaching materials was sent to the members on a fairly regular basis in a circular by ethnobotanist Harri Nyberg, the first secretary of the society.

To achieve its aim of propagating Celtic Studies in Finland, the society was to ‘arrange lectures and presentations to its members and wider audiences, disseminate knowledge of the field in the media, organise research and study visits and exercise publishing activities.’⁸ The first scholarly meeting, ‘Mitä on keltologia?’ (Celtic Studies - what [on earth] is that?), of the newly established society was arranged by Hannu-Pekka Huttunen under the auspices of the Department of Folklore and Study of Religions at the University of Turku on September 18-19 in 1991. Papers were read on aspects of folklore and its collection in Ireland, Celtic ideas of plants, Gaelic influence in Iceland, and the anglicization of Welsh followed by students’ experiences of their studies in Ireland and Wales. The presentations were published as *Entering the Arena: Presenting Celtic Studies in Finland* in a series of University of Turku department. of Folklore and Study of Cultures in 1993, edited by Hannu-Pekka Huttunen and Riitta Latvio.

7 On the early contacts between Irish and Finnish folklorists, see Huttunen 1993, 9-10.

8 ’Tavoitteensa toteuttamiseksi yhdistys järjestää luentoja ja esitelmää jäsenilleen ja yleisölle, välittää alan tietoutta lehdistön avulla, järjestää tutkimus- ja opintomatkoja sekä harjoittaa julkaisutoimintaa’ (Rules of SFKS 1991 § 3).

Societas Celtologica Nordica organised frequent symposia in the beginning of the 1990s, once or even twice a year, most of them in Sweden, in Uppsala and Gothenburg. On a number of years, the SFKS succeeded in securing travel grants for the whole board, including students, to participate in the symposia. That provided excellent opportunities for deepening our interest in Celtic Studies, for meeting Celticists, and for exploring possible topics for theses. Thrilled to acquaint ourselves with the ways of academia, we could also avail ourselves of the much larger collections of Celtic books and journals in the Scandinavian University libraries during the symposia.⁹ The Main Library of the University of Helsinki housed around 500 works of Celtic interest covering philology, literature, history, hagiography, archaeology and folklore (having been catalogued by Mícheál), but there was no systematic acquisition policy for Celtic Studies. The new Embassy of Ireland in Finland was informed of the meagre resources and donated books to the University Libraries in Turku and Helsinki.

In 1995 the society organised a fairly large symposium in Helsinki, funded by the Academy of Finland, the Ministry of Education and the Embassy of Ireland, with more than 50 participants from the Nordic countries, Europe and Scandinavia. The meeting brought together prominent Celticists, young scholars and even students from the Nordic countries. The papers were organised around three themes: history and religion, linguistics and philology, and folklore and ethnology. Edited by Anders Ahlqvist, Harri Nyberg, Tom Sjöblom, Glyn Banks and Riitta Latvio, the proceedings of the symposium, *Celtica Helsingiensia*, were published in one of the most important Finnish series in Humanities, *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum*, by the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters.

Tom Sjöblom had been the first of Mícheál's students to complete his Master's thesis on a Celtic topic, the conceptions of death and worldview of the Celts, in 1992. He subsequently became one of the driving forces in the society, as he carried on to doctoral studies in 1994 at the Department of Comparative Religion at Helsinki University and started lecturing in Celtic cultures, mythology, narrative and religious traditions from autumn 1997 onwards.

While the senior scholars were responsible for most of the contacts and visits from abroad, students were also active in arranging lectures and courses. Having heard and met Celticists in person made it much easier for us to approach some of them and ask them to come and teach in Finland. One of the most memorable visits from the earliest years was that by Dr. Máire Herbert in 1995, not only for the breadth and quality of teaching but also for the legacy it left. Her intensive course 'Cultural Transitions in Early Ireland: Religion, Learning and Literature c.

9 Extra fond memories of the librarians in Uppsala's Carolina Rediviva who forthwith supplied me with a reader's ticket/ library card and allowed me to check out books. The books later travelled back from Finland by mail.

500–1000 AD’, a week in duration, was a major success. Many of the participants took such a shine in matters Celtic and Irish that they came to play important roles in the society for years. One of the students who acquainted herself with medieval Ireland with Máire was Katja Ritari, the present president of the society. She and another student from the course, Kanerva Heikkinen, went on to study in Cork on an Erasmus programme and chose Celtic topics for their theses.¹⁰ Others like Kirsi Yläne and Päivi Raitio went to Connemara on a summer language course, got involved in establishing the British and Irish Studies Programme at the Renvall Institute, and organised and ran a student society WISE (for Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England) for the programme.

In the middle of the 90s Celtic Studies were on the rise in Finland. They suffered a serious loss, however, when Micheál Briody, the former chair of the society, stopped offering courses in Modern Irish. The teaching of Irish diminished drastically in the subsequent years. Elementary courses in Modern Irish were offered every now and then¹¹ but not with any frequency for it to be called regular despite the combined efforts of the society and the Irish Embassy to remedy the situation. Glyn Banks carried on teaching Welsh until the early years of 2000s.¹² The society was also exerting influence towards the inclusion of Celtic and Irish Studies in academic curricula in Finland, and also met with some success, for instance in the formation of British and Irish Studies (BIr) at the University of Helsinki, including study modules in Celtic mythology, literature and history. In addition, a new teacher exchange programme was set up between the Department of Early and Medieval Irish at the University College Cork and the Faculty of Theology of the University of Helsinki in 1998.

Partly as a tool for mapping out academic teaching resources in and around the field of Celtic Studies the society initiated a lecture series called *Studia Celtica Minora*. The title of the series also sought to imply that the topics did not need to belong to the ‘hard core’ of Celtic Studies. The lectures, 5–6 per term, were given in the evenings in order to attract also non-academic public. The first series of lectures was arranged during 1995–1996, and then continued for three terms from spring 1998–1999, coordinated by Riitta Latvio. By that time the society had

10 Kanerva Heikkinen spent the academic year 1995–96 in University College Cork and Katja Ritari the year after. Katja specialised on early Irish hagiography already in her Master’s thesis and after finishing her studies in Helsinki, continued her studies in Cork under the supervision of Professor Herbert. Her PhD dissertation, completed in 2004, was published by Brepols as *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral Theology in the Lives of Saints Brigit and Columba* in 2009.

11 The teachers have included Petri Mirala and Mrs. Antoinette Ó Ceallaigh in Helsinki and Panu-Petteri Höglund in Turku, to name a few.

12 After that Middle Welsh has been taught in reading groups in 2005–2006 and in 2008, initiated by Alaric Hall and Bethany Fox and carried on by Edith Gruber, and in 2012–2014 by Petri Pohjanlehto.

entered into co-operation with the Renvall Institute with its recently established British and Irish Studies. The institute agreed to include the lecture series in its curriculum and contributed towards the travel expenses of the lecturers. The topics of lectures ranged wide and far, from medieval saints, Owain Glyndwr and Constance Markievicz to Celtic plant names, images of Scots, English in Ireland, James Joyce and Neil Jordan, to name a few.

To have a forum for publishing some of the lectures and presentations hosted by the society, SFKS started to issue a bulletin from 1996 onwards, called *SFKS tiedote*, which came out in leaflet form four times a year. The bulletin was in essence still a newsletter holding tidings and reports of Celtic Studies events home and abroad, but with the increase in academic output, also book reviews, summaries of dissertations, and short translations started to appear in it.

The building of an academic and student network around the field of Celtic cultures and heritage had largely rested on the contacts and personal acquaintances of Ahlqvist, Briody and Banks, but new recruits came to our knowledge through the Finnish-Irish Society. Non-academic but hugely popular in the 90s, the Finnish-Irish Society sought out experts of Irish culture for its events and also informed its members about the activities of SFKS in its bulletin.¹³ Those who were interested about Irish music wanted to know more about the Celtic roots of the music and joined our society, while other people inspired by Celtic designs wanted to explore the stories and myths that went with them. Thus—and happily—not all activities of our society have been dryly academic, but the society has hosted film showings, readings of literature, musical and theatre performances, and can even boast having acted as a ‘mental seed bed’ in providing inspiration for visual artists.

Recruits from the Finnish-Irish Society also included Petri Pietiläinen and Pekka Toivanen from the University of Jyväskylä who were very active in the society at the end of the 90s. Pietiläinen studied modern Irish literature and film while Toivanen, an ethnomusicologist, specialised in the Welsh medieval harp. Both contributed to the *Studia Celtica Minora* and the news bulletin of the society with articles, book reviews and conference reports. Together they took the responsibility for organising the third international symposium of the society ‘Expressions of Celticity through the Ages’ in Jyväskylä November 28-30th in 1997, the keynote

13 One should not forget the impact of non-academic cultural exchange and contacts between Finland and the British Isles, in furthering awareness of Celtic cultures in Finland. The Finns had been acquainted with the literary and musical scene of Ireland for quite some years by cultural connoisseurs in a very active Finnish-Irish Society, foremost among them Mr. Olli Pellikka. The originally Helsinki based Irish Music Festival organized by them had grown very popular by the turn of 90s, later to spread to most of the bigger cities in Finland and to breed enthusiasts hungry for all aspects of Irish culture in its wake. Also, a Finnish-Welsh Society was formed in 2001. It flourished for a few years, put on plays and organized Owain Glyndwr Days among other things.

speakers of which included Robin Gwyndaf, Ruiairi Ó hUiginn and Donncha Ó hAodha. The proceedings of the symposium were edited by Petri Pietiläinen, Riitta Latvio and Kirsi Yläne as *Aspects of Celticity* in 2000. Petri Pietiläinen also helped Glyn Banks and others in organising a seminar on Celtic Film in 1997 and 1999.

First generation of students takes over

At the turn of the millennium, the time was finally ripe for the young generation to take over the running of the society as well as some of the teaching responsibilities. Tom Sjöblom, who studied Early Irish religion, Celtic mythology, and magic in the Middle Ages while also specializing in cognitive historiography, narrativity and storytelling, completed his doctoral dissertation in 2000. Sjöblom's study on Early Irish Taboos was the first ever doctoral thesis based on Celtic literary materials submitted in a Finnish University. Petri Mirala, a student of history who had studied both with Micheál and Anders, chose to specialize in Irish history, spent two years in University College Galway 1992–1994 and went on to do a PhD on Irish history at Trinity College Dublin. Mirala was interested in nationalist fraternalism, studying Orangemen and Freemasonry in 18th century Ireland¹⁴ and taught Irish history and politics in Helsinki while working as a researcher at the Renvall Institute's British and Irish Studies programme.

The Renvall Institute of the University of Helsinki was home to several area studies programmes and operated the British and Irish Studies programme between 1995 and 2005.¹⁵ Petri Mirala and Andrew 'Antti' Newby, another historian and a member of SFKS, catered for much of the teaching in the beginning. Their venture was also the Helsinki Irish Seminar, a monthly Irish Studies research group, which also arranged series of lectures between 1998 and 2003, coordinated by Pirkko Hautamäki.

As the chair of the society Mirala was quite pragmatic about the activities of the 10-year-old society—if the wider public does not come to the academic society, let the academic society go to the public—and launched in 2001 the still continuing tradition of arranging Celtic pub seminars (although these are called spring and

14 He completed his doctoral thesis in 1999, supervised by Professor L. M. Cullen. An updated version was published in 2007 as *Freemasonry in Ulster: A Social and Political History of the Masonic Brotherhood in the North of Ireland, 1733–1813* by Four Courts Press.

15 In 2004 the society collaborated with the Renvall Institute North American Studies in organizing the *X Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference on North American Studies: Celtic Connection in North America 5.-7.5.2004*. British and Irish Studies and German Studies were grouped under the heading of *Studia Europaea* and turned into European Area and Cultural Studies in 2005.

autumn seminars in the annual reports of the society).¹⁶ The seminars, not to mention the drink, increased the sense of community and friendships among the members of the society considerably. The academic quality of the talks has varied (quite impeccable most of the times) and quite often some of the speakers have not been able to surpass the din and roar from the crowd. Suffice to say we have seen a fair amount of *caint agus craic* in the pubs of Helsinki over the years.

Moreover, the original rules of the society were revised in 2002–3. From now on, the key members of the Board were directly elected at the AGM, ending the anomaly of not knowing who was chair, secretary or treasurer until the new Board actually met for the first time. As the Internet was rapidly changing the nature of academic publishing, the lofty aim of setting up a ‘Celtic Studies library’ and ‘acquiring and maintaining premises’ for it was dropped. A reference to the then inactive SCN was dropped, the chair drily noting that it seemed to have disappeared ‘into the Nordic twilight of gods’.¹⁷

Young scholars, like Sjöblom and Mirala, raised the visibility of Celtic Studies in Finland considerably in the beginning of the 2000s. They wrote in the popular media, appeared frequently on the radio on matters Celtic and Irish and lectured also outside of academia on Celtic topics, as in community and summer colleges. Active teaching also bore fruit—a number of students from history, religion and theology in Helsinki had chosen Celtic or Irish topics for their theses. Alexandra Bergholm looked at the theme of madness in the Middle Irish tale *Buile Suibne* and Kanerva Heikkinen studied mythic animals, especially the boar in early Irish literature. Kirsi Yläne explored the role of women in Gaelic League. Riitta Latvio studied the idea of female sanctity in St. Brigit’s Lives in comparison with the Merovingian Lives of female saints and earliest Lives of male saints in Ireland. All were active members in the society.

Reorganising and focusing of resources

The beginning of the new millennium also saw the first Academy of Finland research projects in and around Celtic Studies. In a project called ‘*English and Celtic in contact*’, which ran from 2000 to 2002 in University of Joensuu, Markku Filppula, Juhani Klemola and Heli Pitkänen (later Paulasto) studied the historical processes of language shift and other linguistic outcomes of contacts between English and the Celtic languages spoken in the British Isles. The project also organized an International Colloquium on Early Contacts between English and

16 In the beginning everybody was free to join in with a 15-minute-talk, but later the society started to have talks around a theme: Brittany, Scotland, Wales, Celts of the Antiquity, Celtic music, languages, poetry etc.

17 SFKS-tiedote (SFKS bulletin) 1/02 vol. VII, p. 2.

the Celtic Languages in August 2001 in Mekrijärvi in easternmost Finland, which was attended by Finnish Celticists and students alike as the *Societas Celtologica Nordica* symposia had not been organised for a while. Filppula, Klemola and Pitkänen remained active members of the society giving lectures and talks in the events of the society and also contributing to the SFKS bulletin.

The bulletin of the society as a printed newsletter had become outdated and costly to post to members four times per year. In 2003 it was decided to put more effort into creating an email list instead as well as a proper internet site for the society, and to launch a yearbook for the society, called *Studia Celtica Fennica*. The first issue came out in April 2004, compiled by the editor of its predecessor, Riitta Latvio. The yearbook gradually grew in substance, and also gained a more presentable look when a cover including a logo for the society was designed by the new webmaster of the society Ani Marttiini.

The group of those interested in Celtic religiosity, especially in early Irish sources had grown steadily in the society. Looking at Celtic materials through modern methodologies and source criticism from the field of the Study of Religions had not been in the mainstream of Celtic Studies, but was getting attention in Finland. Petri Mirala, at that time working as a postgraduate student adviser at the Faculty of Humanities in Helsinki suggested forming a research group and applying for funding from the Academy of Finland. A suitable group of doctoral students and researchers was formed comprising Katja Ritari, Alexandra Bergholm and Riitta Latvio with Tom Sjöblom acting as the project leader. The project ‘Religion, Society and Culture: Defining the Sacred in Early Irish Literature’ received a two-year funding from the Academy for studying the meanings of sacredness in early Irish sources and the scholarly interpretations attached to the concept within Celtic Studies, starting in 2005.

In February 2005, Professor Anders Ahlqvist turned 60. Most of the active members of the society had either been his students or otherwise benefited from his advice and contacts. As a token of appreciation the society invited Anders’s colleague and friend, professor Tomás Ó Cathasaigh to give the first Anders Ahlqvist lecture in his honour on February 18th 2005.¹⁸ Later in the year the second issue of the *Studia Celtica Fennica* was published as his Festschrift. On the occasion of Anders’s birthday, the society had received several donations from Anders’ family, colleagues and friends, which enabled the society to announce and award four Anders Ahlqvist grants to be given out for Celtic language studies abroad. Both Anders and the society had come of age.

18 Anders had also been made the first honorary member of the society in 2002. Three first Anders Ahlqvist lectures were biannual, but since 2012 they have been given in the connection of the SCN symposia being held in Finland.

In 2006 The Finnish Society of Celtic Studies organised an international SCN symposium in Helsinki with a special focus on religion and mythology. The aim of the symposium was to bring together especially young scholars and postgraduate students from the Nordic countries to present their work and to establish international contacts. It was also hoped that the Nordic research network could be widened to Russia and the Baltic countries. The CfP yielded more than 40 proposals for papers and over 70 participants (from 11 countries in Scandinavia, Europe, America, including Russia and the Baltic countries) attended the event, making the symposium the largest so far in the history of both SFKS and SCN. Keynote lectures were given by Professor Máire Herbert (University College Cork), Dr John Carey (University College Cork), Dr Jacqueline Borsje (University of Ulster/Universiteit Utrecht), and Professor Veikko Anttonen (University of Turku). The proceedings of the symposium were edited by Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm and published in 2008 as *Approaches to Religion and Mythology in Celtic Studies*.

With the academy project under way, Celtic Studies all of a sudden had four paid scholars working on medieval Irish texts in the department of Comparative Religion in Helsinki. Resources, participation in conferences and contacts abroad nearly quadrupled, which also meant more teaching,¹⁹ more students and dissertations, more visiting lectures for the society and more efforts to publish the research done in Finland.

The yearbook had been published each year with domestic contributors, but the next logical step was to develop it into an international academic refereed journal. In order to ensure the visibility and availability of the publication—having been established in what one might call a ‘fringe area’ of a globally marginal academic subject—it was decided to publish the yearbook also on the internet, with a year’s delay to encourage subscriptions to the printed journal. In the beginning much effort was also put into collaboration with the Centre for Exchange of Publications by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies. Currently about 20 academic libraries, institutes and university departments in Europe, America and Japan receive the printed version yearly by exchange or by subscription.²⁰

19 Teaching offered in Study of Religions by Katja, Alexandra, Riitta, Tom and others touched methodological issues (use of sources for the early Irish history, religion and culture and approaches to religion in the study of Celtic cultures) and a range of courses on Celtic Culture and Myths, Celtic Christianity etc. John Carey visited Helsinki several times as part of the teacher exchange between Helsinki and Cork, followed by Kevin Murray, Caitriona Ó Docharthaigh, and Marie-Luise Theuerkauf. The list may not be exhaustive.

20 At the turn of the decade, however, the spread of technologies for open access publishing came to our help. The publication of the yearbook on an Open Journal System platform of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies began in 2012 and the transcription of the back issues for the archives was completed during the same year. The use of the platform has somewhat reduced the correspondence and work involved in editing the

All in all, the academy project enhanced and solidified the Celtic contingent in the Helsinki Department of Comparative Religion (later Study of Religions) for a considerable length of time. It also continued the thriving teacher and student exchange that went on between University College Cork and Helsinki University and gave a boost to other international (ASNAC, Lampeter, Oxford, DIAS etc.)²¹ and domestic (Finnish Literature Society, Glossa—Society for Medieval Studies in Finland, etc.) collaboration for quite some time.²² Collaboration with the research Finnish network of Antiquity and Medievalia brought student recruits from those subjects.²³

Encouraged by the interest from scholars both home and abroad towards reassessing the paradigms, textual tools and the medieval text corpus as a source for religious beliefs both in pre-Christian and Christian eras, Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm organised an international colloquium ‘Methodological Issues in the Study of Celtic Religion’ in 2008.²⁴ Alexandra Bergholm’s doctoral thesis on scholarly reception of *Buile Shuibhne* in 2009 also contributed to analysis of the research history and paradigms prevalent in approaching religious motives in Celtic Studies.²⁵

By the latter half of the 2000s popular books on Celtic topics also started to appear in Finnish. Tom Sjöblom wrote a book on druids and a travellers’ guide to early (and modern) Ireland²⁶ while Katja Ritari published a collection of early Irish

yearbook, even though the system, inevitably, has its boogies and sometimes fails to deliver.

- 21 Ilona Tuomi, who had studied the scholarly interpretations of the *sheela-na-gigs* submitted her Master’s thesis in 2009 after spending an exchange year in Cork, and went on to continue doctoral studies in UCC under John Carey. Riitta Latvio pursued a doctoral thesis looking at a putatively pre-Christian concept of sacredness in early Irish sources supervised by Professor Fergus Kelly from DIAS.
- 22 Some of the many Celtic scholars who had befriended and helped the exchange students as well as visited and taught in Finland over the years, were invited as Honorary Corresponding Members of the society: Donncha Ó hAodha in 2002, Máire Herbert in 2004, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh in 2005 and John Carey in 2007.
- 23 e.g. Antti Lampinen, a Latinist who studies Latin descriptions of religious outgroups—Celts, Germans and other barbarians. His doctoral dissertation *Istae contra omnium religiones. Characterizing Northern Barbarian Religiosity in the Graeco-Roman Literary Tradition from Hellenism to the Later Empire* is available online at <https://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/93639>.
- 24 The papers read at the colloquium were published as *Understanding Celtic Religion. Revisiting the Pagan Past* in a new series *New Approaches to Celtic Religion and Mythology* (University of Wales Press, 2015).
- 25 It was published in 2012 as *From Shaman to Saint: Interpretive Strategies in the Study of Buile Shuibhne*. Helsinki: Academia scientiarum Fennica. (Folklore Fellows’ Communications; vol. CXLIX, no. 302).
- 26 *Druuidit: Tietäjiä pappeja ja samaaneja*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 2006 and *Tuulten saarella: Tarinoiden ja luostareiden Irlanti*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja 2011.

prayers²⁷ and is currently working on a book on Celtic Christianity with Alexandra Bergholm. Social media, internet blogs²⁸ and more traditionally radio programmes and lectures in community colleges etc. have also been actively used as channels to address the ordinary public in Finland by various members of the society.

In 2012 the SCN symposium was again organised in Helsinki, in June 11-13, this time gathering around 30 Celticists from Europe and Russia. Keynote lectures were given by Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (Cambridge University), Professor Thomas O'Loughlin (University of Nottingham), Dr Jane Webster (Newcastle University) and Professor Peter Schrijver (Utrecht University), who gave the 5th Anders Ahlqvist lecture with the title 'The origin of Celtic: how, where and when?' A selection of the papers delivered at the symposium was published in *Studia Celtica Fennica* in 2013.

In 2013 an initiative came from the Irish Embassy to reinvigorate the network of researchers with Irish interest. Andrew Newby, Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm from SFKS were actively involved in setting up the network, which in 2013 took the form of Helsinki Irish Studies Seminar (HISS).²⁹ The seminar has hosted 2-3 lectures per academic term from Finnish and Irish researchers and experts, the main focus having been in literary studies and history. Finally, in 2014 an informal study group in Old Irish was convened for the first time, with the aim of translating early Irish texts into Finnish. The first of these, *Fingal Rónáin*, is included in this volume.

The Finnish Society of Celtic Studies has in 25 years developed into an academic society with established forms of activity: regular symposia, scholarly lectures and presentations addressed to the wider public, an international refereed journal, and forms of international collaboration within Scandinavia and the main areas of Celtic Studies. Yet, the society has not increased its membership, and many of the active members spend long periods away from Finland. Of the present board 3 members live and work abroad: Antti Lampinen is a research fellow at the University of St. Andrews, Alexandra Bergholm is a visiting research fellow at the University of Edinburgh (School of Divinity, Religious Studies) and Ilona Tuomi is a doctoral student and tutor at UCC. Even though the resources in Finnish universities are getting more meagre by the minute with the government cuts affecting the amount of the staff and other facilities, SFKS aims to keep up all the

27 Polku jota kuljen: kelttiläisiä rukouksia. Helsinki: Kirjapaja 2009.

28 Katja Ritari, for example, regularly writes a blog on 'Celtic Christianity' at <https://pyhiinvaelluksia.wordpress.com/>

29 HISS was constituted in 2013 as a collaboration between the Embassy of Ireland in Finland and the Department of World Cultures, University of Helsinki with an aim to act as a focal point for researchers and anyone interested in the broadly-defined field of Irish Studies in the capital region. The seminar also helps to provide information on courses relevant to Irish Studies in the University of Helsinki and in the rest of Finland.

activities it has developed over the years (and God knows who will keep us from developing some more!). Where there are students there is hope for a bright future in Finnish scholarship of Celtic Studies.

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- Rules of SFKS, 1991 original and 2003 revised set.

Appendix

Presidents of SFKS ry

- 1991–1995 Anders Ahlqvist
1995–2002 Harri Nyberg
2002–2009 Tom Sjöblom
2009– present Katja Ritari

Chairs of SFKS ry

- 1991–1995 Micheál Briody
1995–1997 Hannu-Pekka Huttunen
1997–2000 Tom Sjöblom
2000–2001 Tuija Kuha
2001–2004 Petri Mirala
2004–2006 Riitta Latvio

2006–2009 Katja Ritari
2009–2010 Alexandra Bergholm
2010–2013 Riitta Latvio
2013–2014 Alexandra Bergholm
2014–2015 Antti Lampinen
2015– present Jarno Jalonen

Corresponding honorary members

2002 Dr. Donncha Ó hAodha
2005 Dr. Máire Herbert
2006 Professor Tomás O’Cathasaigh
2007 Dr. John Carey

Editors of Studia Celtica Fennica

2004–2006 Riitta Latvio
2007–2010 Katja Ritari & Alexandra Bergholm
2011–2013 Katja Ritari & Riitta Latvio
2014 Katja Ritari & Antti Lampinen
2015–2016 Katja Ritari, Antti Lampinen & Alexandra Bergholm

Anders Ahlqvist lectures

2005 Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (Harvard University): ‘Irish Myths and Legends’
2007 Tom Sjöblom (University of Helsinki): ‘Druidit—tietäjiä, pappeja vai samaaneja?’
(Druids—sages, priests or shamans?)
2009 Markku Filppula (University of Joensuu/Eastern Finland): ‘Kelttiläisten kielten vaikutus englannin kieleen’ (The influence of Celtic languages on English)
2012 Peter Schrijver (Utrecht University): ‘The origin of Celtic: how, where and when?’
2016 Joseph Nagy (Harvard University): ‘A Dog, a Pig, and the Pride of Irish Saga Heroes’