Highland Crannogs and Odo Blundell

Author: Susan Kruse

No study of Highland crannogs can ignore the influence of Odo Blundell (1869-1943). While a monk at the Benedictine monastery at Fort Augustus, he passionately investigated crannogs throughout the Highlands, asking local people about the stories of islands in the lochs, and even using a diving suit to investigate some himself. Born Frances Blundell in Lancashire, he took the religious name Odo when he joined the Benedictines. Ordained in 1896, he then was in charge of the Abbey Farm for twenty years, but often away researching buildings and evidence of Catholic Highlands. He was a president of the Inverness Field Club, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and considered to be an expert on artificial islands. He also had an interest in Scottish architecture, publishing books on *Ancient Catholic Homes of Scotland* (1907) and the *Catholic Highlands of Scotland* (1909 and 1917).

He clearly relished being in the field and investigating sites. His diving kit was initially borrowed from the Caledonian Canal authority. There are a number of crannogs along the Great Glen, and he investigated many of them. Other landowners got in touch inviting him to visit, and he gradually extended his reach in the Highlands. The British Association helped by printing flyers asking for knowledge of crannogs. He gave talks to historical societies, published articles in local newspapers as well as *PSAS* (Downs and Roberts 2005).

Many of the crannogs that Blundell recorded have since been either submerged or drained, with his account providing the only evidence of their possible use. He generally named his sources, so that it is clear whether he investigated the site personally or was just relying on information supplied by others. His recording of oral tradition of buildings or occupation in the post medieval period was also extremely valuable, if impossible usually to confirm. In some cases later investigation has concluded that the islands were natural, but in others his assessment was concurred with. Of the crannogs or probable crannogs listing in the HER, almost two-thirds were listed by Odo Blundell; if one adds possible crannogs, it is still over half. Many of these sites would repay further work, to assess their identification and to elucidate use and re-use.

Further information:

Blundell, Odo 1909-1910; 1912-1913   
Downs, Pascal and Roberts, Alasdair 2005 ‘Dom Odo Blundell OSB (1868-1943): a different kind of historian’, *Innes Review* 56, 14-45.

Image: from one of Blundell’s publications, if quality can be improved