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Preface

Pamela O'Neill

This collection consists of many of the papers that were presented
at the Sixth Australian Conference of Celtic Studies, convened by
Sybil Jack at the University of Sydney in July 2007. The theme of
the conference, reflected in the title of this collection, was 'The Celts
in legend and reality: ancient and modern'. As series editor of
the Sydney Series in Celtic Studies, I have a strong commitment to
the publication of papers from this conference series, and so, when
Associate Professor Jack asked whether I would be willing to edit
the papers for publication in the Series, I was happy to oblige. The
process has been attended by more than a few difficulties, including
communication breakdowns of the technical and human kinds and
employment difficulties and a period of ill-health on my own part. I
am therefore delighted that the collection presented here has taken
such fine shape.

Overall, the collection represents the diversity of scholarship
and identities in Australia — and beyond — with a Celtic flavour.
This is very much reflective of the support base for Celtic Studies
at the University of Sydney. Until the arrival of Anders Ahlqvist
(about a year after this conference) as the inaugural Sir Warwick
Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies, Celtic was taught in an admirable
but somewhat ad-hoc way by staff in various other academic
departments, who taught according to their own scholarly interests,
some of which were central to the discipline of Celtic Studies, others
somewhat more peripheral. Similarly, the strong community
campaign to establish the Chair saw support from many quarters,
some closer than others to the centre of the discipline. The result is a
valuable and varied group of supporters and scholars, who combine
in their support for the existence of a Centre for Celtic Studies at
the University of Sydney, and provide a broad, rich cultural and scholarly background against which the Centre's teaching and research work is carried out.

Celtic Studies is defined by peoples identified as having a common linguistic heritage, and expands to considerations of the cultural and historical development of those peoples. Australian manifestations of this have a natural tendency to encompass divergent modern strands of Celticism. The papers in this volume pre-date the arrival of Professor Ahlqvist, and whilst they represent the wide range of interest and energy devoted to Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Cornish topics in support of Celtic at Sydney, they perhaps also demonstrate how beneficial the arrival of Professor Ahlqvist will prove to be. His ability to reinforce the linguistic core of Celtic Studies at Sydney has been an essential development for the longevity of the discipline here. Without this core, one loses sight of the unifying principle by which it can be argued that these diverse strands share a common culture.

Papers in this collection explore aspects of peoples, things and ideas which have been considered ‘Celtic’ in a diversity of contexts. *Celts in the Material Record* sees plenary speaker David Caldwell and his colleagues seek a new paradigm for the classification of West Highland medieval stone sculpture, while other papers ponder the physical appearance of a nemeton, consider the Celtic presence on the continent, and debunk the myth of ‘Celtic’ mummies in the Gobi desert. In *Celts in History*, specific moments in time and space amongst ‘Celts’ are described and analysed, from professional-historian and personal perspectives. In *Celts in Law*, native Welsh law is considered, both as the legal system of Welsh rule and in the colonised context, and plenary speaker Ewen Cameron considers land law in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Celts in Literature* includes discussions of early Celtic literature, as well as papers which take on the phenomenon of present-day literature with Celtic themes. Finally, *Celts in the Diaspora* includes studies of various manifestations of ‘Celtic’ identities in the Antipodes, including papers by plenary speakers Brad Patterson and Philip Payton.

The editing and production of this book have been done entirely by unpaid workers. I wish to thank the contributors for their papers, for their patience and understanding in the face of delays and infrequent communication, and for the professional way in which they have responded to requests for amendments and clarifications. Thanks are also due to the anonymous referees, who gave generously of their time and expertise to read and comment on contributions. I am grateful to Anders Ahlqvist and Tony Earls for support and assistance of various very welcome and unselshful kinds. Finally, the lion's share of the copy-editing and layout was carried out to an immensely high standard by Bran MacEachaidh, and I extend to him my heartfelt thanks for this very important contribution.