Fír Fesso

A Festschrift for

NEIL MCLEOD

Edited by

Anders Ahlqvist

&

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SYDNEY SERIES IN CELTIC STUDIES 17
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Introduction

PAMELA O’NEILL
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This volume marks the occasion of Neil McLeod’s retirement from the Faculty of Law at Murdoch University. He has, of course, only retired in the sense of being released from the rewarding but exhausting burden of teaching and the less rewarding grind of academic administration and management. We can be sure of a continuation of his work as a scholar, and we hope that the scholarly qualities he has demonstrated so abundantly, and which have demanded the honour we now seek to bestow on him, will blossom and bear fruit more freely in the future. Fergus Kelly’s foreword eloquently summarises Neil’s major contribution to research and elucidation in the field of early Irish law. Another sort of contribution, less quantifiable but profoundly important in its effect, is his encouragement and nurturing of more junior scholars. I know how much my own scholarly development owes to Neil’s intellectual generosity. As an editor, conference convenor, and academic supervisor, I have on many occasions observed how others thrive under his generous, gentle guidance. This book bears ample testimony to that aspect of his work.

Anders Ahlqvist and I started planning a Festschrift for Neil as soon as we became aware of his firm intention to retire this year. When we made a shortlist of scholars to be invited to contribute, it perhaps predictably turned out to be a long list, which inevitably required pruning and trimming. Some of those invited were unable to contribute, for various reasons, but the present volume bears witness to the wide range of scholars with whom Neil has worked in his professional life, and the diverse scholarly fields in which his works have had an impact. As one would expect, early Irish law is prominently and extensively covered. However, there are also contributions concerned with the Irish in Australia, medieval Welsh law, Anglo-Saxon literature, and early Irish history, literature and linguistics. All of these fields have been enhanced in some way by Neil’s work. Many of the contributors are explicit about ways in which Neil’s publications or his personal guidance have illuminaed their area of study and improved their understanding within it.

The consolidated bibliography which concludes this volume contains a list of Neil’s own publications to date; they bear further witness to his sustained scholarly activity and to the breadth and diversity of his interests.

Our title, *Fír Fesso*, may be left untranslated. It combines the qualities of truth and rightness with the faculties of knowledge and inquiry; the curious are encouraged to explore di.ie/22171 and di.ie/22221. These terms are clearly applicable to Neil and his scholarship. The words themselves alliterate in the fine tradition of Irish learned writing that delights and fascinates Neil.

The world of Celtic Studies was shocked and saddened by the sudden death of my fellow editor while this book was in preparation. Neil will recognise the significance of the fact that the most substantial work which Anders left unfinished (though characteristically in very good shape) was this volume. I know that Anders considered it one of the most important things he had done in the course of his own long and distinguished career.

I have been helped by many people to complete this project that Anders and I had planned so carefully, and I record here my thanks to them all, including but not
limited to those I now single out. Three of Anders’ close friends, William Gillies, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh and Ruairí Ó hUiginn, gave me kind support and helpful advice. Willie advised me in the difficult task of writing this introduction. Tomás helped me resolve a quandary regarding typography. Ruairí accepted the weighty task of seeing Anders’ last piece of academic writing through the proof stages and into print. The contributors and anonymous peer reviewers likewise rallied round to encourage and expedite the final stages of the editorial process, and I am deeply grateful to them for their support. Murray-Luke Peard, Erica Steiner and Anna Usmar helped with last-minute proof-reading. Daniel Anlezark, Elizabeth Boyle, Murray-Luke Peard and David Stifter helped bring the volume into being and enable it to be presented to Neil.¹

It is fair to say that the determination of all concerned to bring Neil’s Festschrift to completion, despite the sad circumstances which attended its latest stages, is a true indicator of the high regard in which our honorand is held by so many.

¹ Neil will deal as he sees fit with the part played by his daughters in the subterfuge required by a project such as this.
O son of abundant hostages: you should not make half-empty contracts. For every emptiness will have to be supplemented by damages. Every deficiency will be [made] complete. Every illicit contract [is] to be impugned. Every disadvantageous contract [is] to be dismantled. Every truth [is] broad, every falsehood narrow when it is not found with true considerations.

Di Astud Chor §37

Neil McLeod, *Early Irish Contract Law* pp.170–171