

On this day...

FRIDAY, MAY 7

1765: HMS Victory, Nelson's flagship, was launched at Chatham having cost £363,176 and three shillings. It is now preserved at Portsmouth.

1833: Johannes Brahms, German composer, was born in Hamburg, Germany.

1840: Peter Tchaikovsky, the great Russian composer, was born in Kamsko-Votkinsk.

1915: The Cunard liner Lusitania was torpedoed by a German submarine off Ireland with the loss of 1,198 lives.

1919: Maria eva Peron, "Evita", legendary Argentinian, was born in Los Toldos, near Buenos Aires, Argentina, the illegitimate daughter of a cook.

1945: Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies at Rheims.

2007: The tomb of Herod the Great was discovered by Israeli archaeologists south of Jerusalem.

SATURDAY, MAY 8

1701: Captain Kidd went on trial at the Old Bailey for piracy. He was hanged on May 23.

1828: Jean Henri Dunant, philanthropist and founder of the International Red Cross, was born in Geneva.

1902: Mount Pelee erupted on the island of Martinique, destroying the town of St Pierre and killing more than 30,000 people in just three minutes.

1945: VE Day. The Second World War in Europe officially ended at one minute past midnight.

1970: The Beatles' final album, Let It Be, was released.

1980: The World Health Organization announced that smallpox had been eradicated.

2008: Vladimir Putin was appointed Russian Prime Minister.

2013: Sir Alex Ferguson announced his retirement as Manchester United's manager at the end of the season.

SUNDAY, MAY 9

1671: Irish adventurer Capt Thomas Blood made an unsuccessful attempt to steal the Crown Jewels from the Tower Of London.

1800: John Brown, US abolitionist, was born.

1860: JM Barrie, Scottish playwright and author of Peter Pan, was born in Kirriemuir, Angus.

1955: West Germany joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato).

1971: Elizabeth Bonner ran the female world record marathon in a time of 3:01:42.

1978: The body of former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro was found in the boot of a car in central Rome, a victim of the Red Brigade.

1988: Australia's new parliament house was opened by the Queen in Canberra.

2012: United States President Barack Obama officially stated his support for same sex marriage.

2020: Rock 'n' Roll star Little Richard died aged 87.

Seabed search for sacred history in Loch Fyne

By Gordon Neish

AN UNDERWATER Loch Fyne search for ancient Celtic crosses and sacred tombstones looted from Iona's early Christian heritage has already unearthed some onshore mysteries.

The seabed off Strachur is being grid-searched over the summer for "priceless" relics spotted by early steamship crews and passengers in Victorian times.

Their forgotten existence resurfaced last year during a new international re-examination of the country's largest Gaelic anthology of a word-of-mouth "people's history". The Dewar Manuscripts were compiled for the 8th duke of Argyll who employed John Dewar as his personal roving reporter to chronicle the lives and times of his vast territory from the days of his ancestor, the Black Knight of Loch Awe.

A new translation and transcription of the 150-year-old archived records at Inveraray Castle contained a mysterious Gaelic reference to the sinking of a vessel "containing the crosses and grave slabs" in the Creggans area on the Strachur side of Loch Fyne.

Dr Ronnie Black, honorary fellow at Edinburgh University's department of Celtic and Gaelic studies, was mystified and circulated the information to Dewar project participants.

It struck a chord with Argyll heritage researcher and writer Gerry Burke. He recognised the story but had previously understood at least one sunken cargo was lost forever in very deep water off the other Creggans on the opposite side of the loch.

He believed there may have been two separate shipments involved - one involving a capsized after a Reformation-period "rescue" when ancient artefacts were being destroyed on Iona. A later incident referred to deliberate dumping during a chase by a revenue cutter.

Dewar's notebook record now provided a fairly concise area tying in previously unconnected landmarks including the new Strachur House and cargo handling development in the late 1700s by general John Campbell. This prompted a series of articles last year by Gerry who investigated the trade in Iona artefacts linked to St Columba and early Scottish royalty. Iconic memorials are believed to have been snapped up by wealthy lairds and township nobility from the Outer Hebrides to Donegal.

He has since discovered a likely middleman was the infamous "Baron Munchausen" hoaxer who gained further notoriety as the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's "Antiquary" plot.

Wreckspeditions, the Sandbank dive charter

company, has already conducted a preliminary underwater survey and, separately, recent recovery of an ancient religious stone off Arran at the other end of the loch indicates the sea has preserved inscriptions and carvings

Claire Hallybone, Wreckspedition partner with Jason Coles, is a trustee and instructor with the Nautical Archaeological Society and worked on the excavation of the ancient Oakbank crannog in Loch Tay and the Colossus protected wreck off the Scilly Isles.

She said: "It's all very intriguing and exciting and, hopefully, we can shed some new light on an old mystery."

They are planning to include the project in training exercises for the new Cowal dive club.

See a perspective from "tombstone territory" by Gerry Burke and a theory on oages 14 and 15.



Dunoon Observer and Argyllshire Standard

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We look forward to hearing from you.