

***The Children of Dunadd***

***A story for children***

This is the story of two children who lived at a place called Dunadd, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Dál Riata.

Dunadd is situated at the southern end of Kilmartin Glen and if you were to journey to Kilmartin Glen, you would find some of the most important monuments in Scotland which date back to very ancient times.

The children's story takes place at a time when Chiefs and Kings ruled in Argyll over one thousand and five hundred years ago. This was the home of the Scotti, the people who gave Scotland its name.

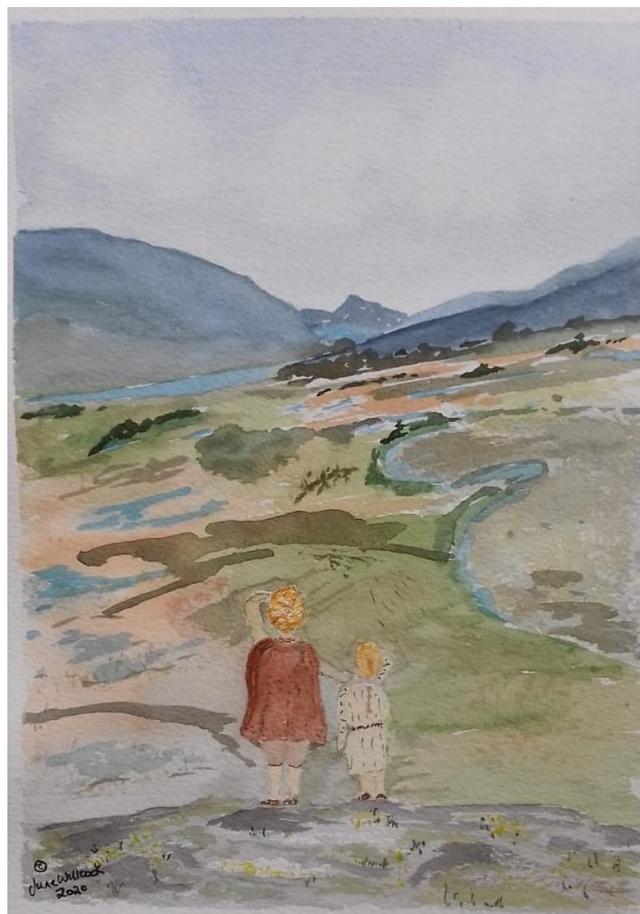


There was once a boy called Fergus who was tall and strong and he could be very funny; he was always laughing and he was very clever, always learning new things every day because he knew that one day he would become the leader of his tribe, just like his father.

There is so much to tell you about Fergus that I think I will let Fergus tell you his story.....

***My name is Fergus and I am 8 years old and I have a little sister called Mhairi who is 5 years old. We stay at a place called Dunadd with our mum and dad in a house built on the very top of Dunadd hill (hill fort).***

***Mhairi and I love to stand at the top of the hill and look out across the moor (Moine Mhòr) and in the distance we can see the mountains of the Island of Jura and the sea lochs and we can also look out into the distance towards the glen and see the place where our ancestors built many special stone cairns. We will visit there later...***



***Below the hill fort are some more houses and byres (cow shed) that make up our settlement (village) and the people who stay in those houses are my uncles, aunts and cousins. Sometimes we have people who come to stay with us who are not relatives, and they may have travelled a long way by sea to visit us, but I will tell you more about that in a wee while.***

*My house is made of stone and it has a roof that is covered in heather. If you went into my house you would see that in the middle of the floor in the centre of the house, there is always a fire burning and guess what, it is my job to make sure that my mum has plenty of wood for the fire.*

*My dad chops wood into smaller pieces outside the house with his iron axe, but it is my job to carry the pieces of firewood into the house for mum. I am very strong for my age, but still not strong enough to use my dad's axe.*

*My mum cooks food in a special iron pot (**cauldron**) over the fire and she can make delicious things to eat like vegetable stew and my little sisters favourite - which is a thick oats porridge; we have a bowl of that every morning and it fills our tummy's for hours. At the end of the day when it is starting to get dark, we go into the house and sit around the fire; the fire gives us light and so I can see exactly what mum has given me and my sister to eat!*

*Yesterday we had fish that had been baked in the fire; my mum is very clever you know. She and Mhairi had caught the fish from the river and they had also collected blackberries on their way back to the settlement. When she had cut and cleaned the fish, she put some berries inside the fish and then she wrapped grass all around the fish. Finally, she covered the fish in clay and placed it in the embers of the fire, it didn't take very long to cook. Mhairi likes to help mum with the cooking, we both do.*

*After we have had something to eat, we all listen to stories and often it is my Uncle Aongas who is the best story teller, but he can also make special noises (music) on the little **bone flute** that he keeps in his leather bag.*

*By this time, little Mhairi is asleep on the heather bed and my mum will always make sure that she is warm enough and that she has her little wool cover (blanket) over her. Mhairi, my mum and some of my aunts all work together to weave sheep's wool to make a new blanket for Mhairi. They are good at weaving and they also made our winter cloaks, but it did take a long time. Before they weave the wool, the wool is spun into yarn and Mhairi likes to help my mum do this.*



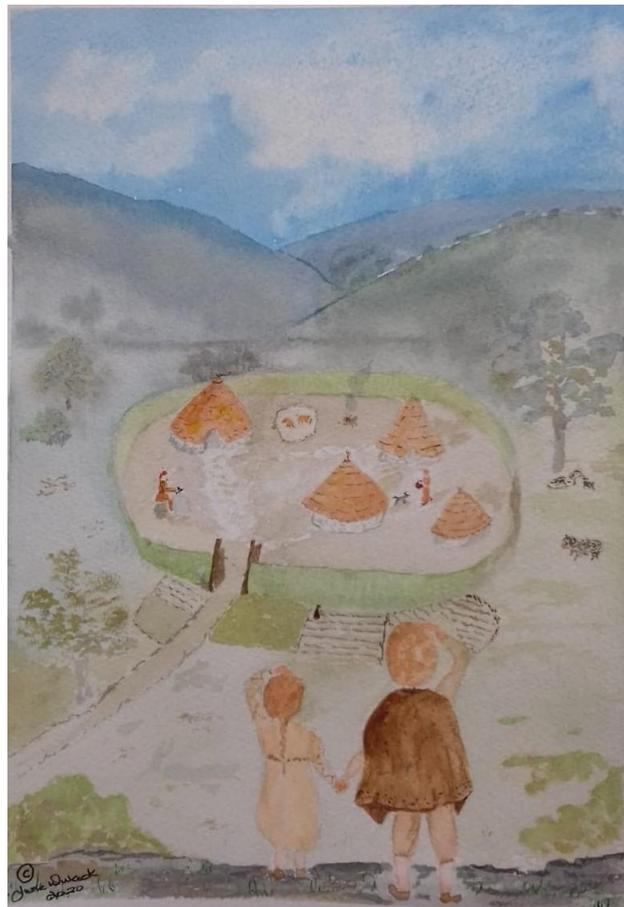
*In the summertime, she also loves to collect the sheep's wool from tree branches, heather, Bog Myrtle and gorse bushes. The sheep have been rubbing their woolly coats (fleeces) against these places trying to loosen the wool because their fleece is starting to make them feel very hot!*

*Mhairi collects the wool in a basket and then my mum helps her to wash the wool in the clear water of the burn, leaving it to dry in the sun. Mhairi and her little friends then pick out all the bits of moss and leaves out of the fleece before it is ready for mum to spin into yarn.*

*Mhairi does keep very busy, doesn't she? Ummm, now what do I do all day?*

*Well, me and my friends help to look after the sheep, cattle and pigs, in fact everyone in the settlement takes their turn to look after and care for the animals, especially when the animals have young ones (calves, lambs and piglets). Someone from the village is always watching over the animals, ready to frighten away a wolf who will be hunting for fresh meat for its own young cubs, and of course our animals would be the perfect meal!*

*From the very top of Dunadd, we can see for miles and miles in all directions and we can easily see if there are wolves nearby but only in the daytime of course. But we can also see strangers walking towards Dunadd, and most often, the people that visit Dunadd are friendly people who belong to another tribe.*



*Remember I told you about Uncle Aongas and his bone flute, well, he is teaching me how to blow the magical **horn**. When I am older, I will blow the horn from the hilltop if I see strangers approaching Dunadd, then everyone will know that strangers are approaching.*

*Oh, I forgot to tell you that my dad is the tribal leader of Dunadd, he is a very important person and he tries very hard to make sure that everybody who lives in our settlement is happy. We keep on friendly terms with other tribes as my dad knows that there are other tribes who would like to steal our lands and our houses. So, to protect Dunadd and our homes, I help my dad, my uncles and cousins to make weapons.*

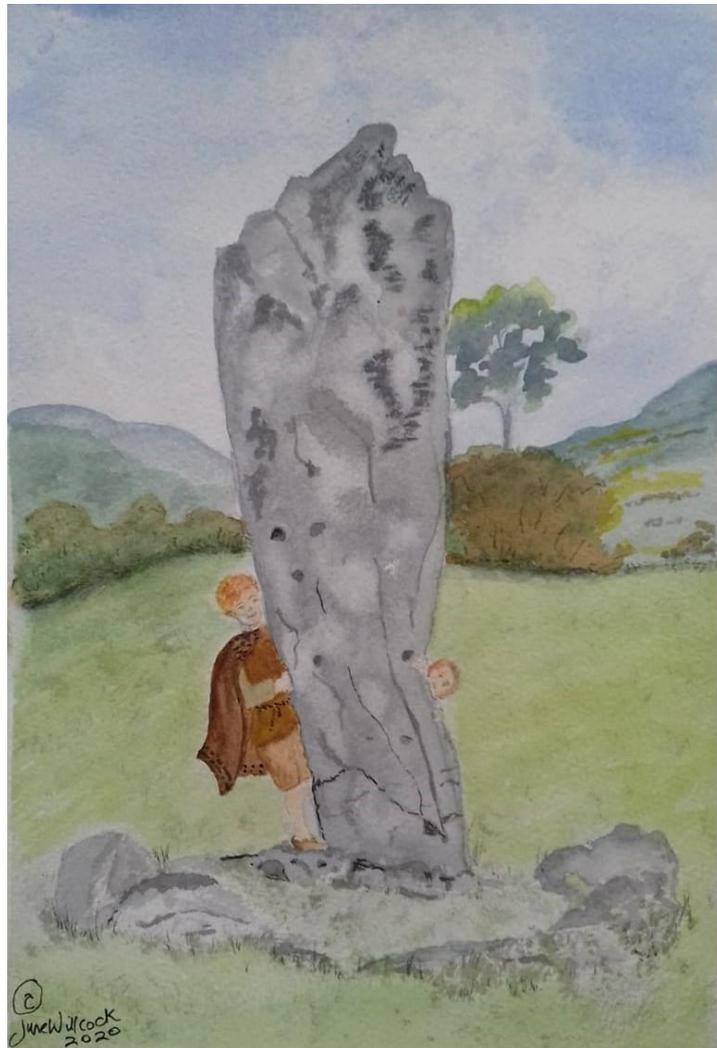
*It does take a lot of hard work to make the big iron axe heads and spearheads, even the little stone arrowheads which are fired from the bows take time to make. We also make very small cloak pins (**brooches**) and these are made using a different kind of metal called silver.*

*The reason we make lots of these brooches is so that when travellers visit the village, we can give them the beautiful cloak pins and they will give us pottery and sometimes tiny glass beads in return. The travellers come to our village from the sea and from lands far away, but they are always friendly with us and we always have a big feast before they leave us to go back to their homes.*

*It is a fun time because I get to go with my dad and uncles out on a hunting trip, and we always bring back a big deer. There will be enough meat on the deer to feed everyone, and best of all, every single part of the deer will be used – its bones will be used to make whistles, big tools and little tools like sewing **needles**. The deer's antlers will be also be used to make tools and even my little sister gets her own **comb** which I help dad make from some of the antler.*

*We do have feasts at other times of the year - springtime and just before the winter and I think it is our way of thanking everyone for working so hard all year, looking after the animals, having good hunting days and fishing days, and we are so lucky to have plenty of fruits and berries that grow here at Dunadd and in Kilmartin Glen.*

*When she is older, my sister will probably have to leave the settlement and live with another tribe, but she will marry the chief's son who will one day become the leader of his tribe. I will miss her, but it means that her new family and tribe will be friends with ours and if our settlement should ever be threatened by another tribe, they will come to help us in battle.*



*My ancestors have lived here in Kilmartin Glen for a long, long time and I know that this is a truly special place. At certain times of the year, Mhairi and I walk down to the standing stones and to the great burial cairns with our father, and I always ask him to tell me stories of the great people that are buried there. They had pottery (**Beaker**) that had fantastic patterns on, amazing!*

*They were people just like us and they must have had their own special celebrations. They left very strange markings on some of the stones, Mhairi thinks that they look like stars.*

*When I grow up I want to be just like my dad, a strong leader of my people; and on the day that I am made leader, my people will ask me to place my foot in the carved stone footprint which is here at the top of Dunadd. I think that the footprint has been used by my ancestors for a very long time, so it is a very special stone. When I put my foot onto the carved stone, my people will hear me promise to protect them all until the day I die.*

*But before that day happens, I would like to go out to sea in a boat and see what is on the other side of the Loch. I would love to walk through the woods and over the hills and mountains to see what is on the other side of the mountains.*

*Now, I must go, but perhaps one day when you visit Dunadd on a beautiful summers day, and you stand at the very top of Dunadd, of course I will not be there, but if you call my name, I may hear you..*

*You will hear the wind as I can hear the wind.*

*You will smell the scent of the Gorse flowers, just as I smell them now.*

*You will see far out across the Loch, the steep hills close by, and the mountains in the distance just as I see them now.*

*You may place your foot in the carved footprint just as I have done....*