

**Achill Island Maritime Archaeology Project:  
Report on Archaeological and Historical Investigations,  
2004-2005**



by

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## Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b> .....	iii
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	vii
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	viii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b><i>La Rata Encoronada</i></b> .....	7
Historical Background.....	7
Location of the <i>Rata Encoronada</i> .....	10
Archaeological Activity at Fahy Point, 2004 .....	10
<b><i>El Gran Grin and San Nicolas Prodaneli</i></b> .....	12
Historical Background .....	12
The Cloghmore Shed Anchor .....	14
Diver Investigation of the Anchor Site .....	22
<b><i>Sceptre (1588), Sceptre (1841), and Sceptre of Limerick (1841)</i></b> .....	24
Background.....	24
The <i>Sceptre</i> Anchor.....	27
<b><i>William &amp; George</i></b> .....	31
<b><i>Neptune</i></b> .....	33
Historical Background.....	33
The <i>Neptune</i> Anchors.....	35
Diver Investigation of the <i>Neptune</i> Site.....	38
<b>Boycott's Salvage Wreck</b> .....	42
<b><i>Jenny</i></b> .....	46
Historical Background.....	46
The <i>Jenny</i> Anchors.....	47
Diver Investigation of the <i>Jenny</i> Site.....	52
<b><i>Flying Cloud</i></b> .....	55
Historical Background.....	55
Salvaged Ship's Timbers and Vernacular Architecture on Achill Beg Island.....	55
<b>The Fishing Trawler <i>Successful</i> (Bleannahooley Strand wreck)</b> .....	62
Historical Background: Fishing Trawlers in Britain and Ireland.....	62
Local Memory of the <i>Successful</i> .....	65

Location and Site Description.....	66
Field Investigation: Objectives and Methodology.....	68
Hull Remains.....	71
Cement Ballast.....	77
Steam Propulsion Equipment.....	80
Other Shipboard Equipment and Fittings.....	82
Personal Artefacts.....	82
<b><i>Charles Stewart Parnell</i></b> .....	85
Historical Background.....	85
Diver Investigation of the Wreck.....	85
<b><i>Aghia Eirine</i></b> .....	90
Historical Background.....	90
Diver Investigation of the Wreck.....	90
<b>Investigation into Other Aspects of Achill’s Maritime Landscape</b> .....	96
Introduction.....	96
Seasonal Fishing Village at Annagh.....	96
Commercial Fishing Complex at Annagh.....	98
Coastguard Stations.....	102
Vernacular Watercraft: Curraghs and Yawls.....	110
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	117
<b>References</b> .....	118

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of Achill Island and the surrounding area, showing the approximate location of various historic shipwreck sites and places mentioned in this report.....	2
Figure 2. Painting by El Greco believed to be that of Don Alonso de Leyva, commander of <i>La Rata Encoronada</i> .....	7
Figure 3. Doona Castle, located at Fahy Point near Ballycroy, overlooks the site of shipwrecked <i>La Rata Encoronada</i> .....	9
Figure 4. Nautical chart of Blacksod Bay, just northeast of Achill.....	9
Figure 5. Large anchor, 3.60 m in length and 2.06 m across the arms, stored in a privately-owned shed near Cloghmore pier, Achill.....	15
Figure 6. Both halves of the anchor’s wooden stock survived intact.....	15
Figure 7. Project archaeologist and College of William and Mary graduate student Brendan Burke recording the curvature of the arms of the Cloghmore Shed Anchor.....	16
Figure 8. Cloghmore shed anchor.....	17
Figure 9. Characteristic features of 16th century Spanish anchors, as seen on one of the ten anchors recovered from the 1554 <i>flota</i> wrecks lost at Padre Island, Texas.....	19
Figure 10. Anchor in Vero Beach, Florida from one of the wrecks of a Spanish fleet lost off the coast of Florida in 1715.....	20
Figure 11. Typical mid-18th century French anchor, from Diderot’s <i>Encyclopedia</i> .....	20
Figure 12. Report from the 29 April 1841 edition of the <i>Achill Missionary Herald</i> of the loss of the <i>Sceptre of Limerick</i> , and also that of an unnamed hooker.....	25
Figure 13. Anchor, approximately 2.5 m long, raised from an area off Saddle Head in the late 1960s.....	25
Figure 14. Side view of <i>Sceptre</i> anchor, displaying a rounded shank and the one remaining arm or fluke.....	28

Figure 15. Detail of the proximal end of the anchor, showing the ring and stock keys.....	28
Figure 16. The wooden stock from the <i>Sceptre</i> anchor.....	29
Figure 17. Detail of the anchor’s wooden stock, showing the word “SCEPTRE” burned or branded into its exterior surface.....	29
Figure 18. Anchor # 1 from the 1860 <i>Neptune</i> wreck, being recorded by students in the Achill Archaeological Field School.....	36
Figure 19. Scaled drawing of the <i>Neptune</i> Anchor # 1.....	37
Figure 20. Anchor # 2 from the <i>Neptune</i> , lost in 1860.....	39
Figure 21. Detail of the left palm of <i>Neptune</i> Anchor # 2.....	39
Figure 22. Diagram from an 1856 treatise on ships’ anchors, showing four standard anchor types in use at the middle of the 19th century.....	40
Figure 23. Site of the 1860 <i>Neptune</i> shipwreck, under the Minaun Cliffs in Keel Bay.....	41
Figure 24. Two views of <i>Jenny</i> Anchor # 1. Scale is one metre.....	48
Figure 25. Scaled drawings of the two anchors raised from the wreck of the <i>Jenny</i> .....	49
Figure 26. Two views of <i>Jenny</i> Anchor # 2.....	51
Figure 27. Archaeologist Brendan Burke snorkeling directly over the site of the <i>Jenny</i> wreck, in a cove on the western side of Achill Beg Island.....	52
Figure 28. Hull lines for a Galway and Kinsale hooker, 1849.....	56
Figure 29. Abandoned stone house on Achill Beg Island whose left-side room featured roofing beams fashioned from salvaged ship timbers.....	57
Figure 30. Collapsed roofing beams from the Achill Beg house; they are two fragments from the keel of a wooden-hulled vessel.....	57
Figure 31. Project Director Chuck Meide records the salvaged keel.....	59
Figure 32. Closer view of the keel.....	59
Figure 33. Cross-section of keel, as seen from one end.....	60

Figure 34. Trawl net used in the mid-19th century.....62

Figure 35. Depiction of a sailing trawler designed for the Irish trawling industry, ca. 1848..... 64

Figure 36. Location of the *Successful* shipwreck as depicted on Admiralty Chart 2667.....67

Figure 37. View of the *Successful* as it appeared when initially discovered, covered with a thick layer of kelp and exposed at low tide on the foreshore..... 67

Figure 38. View of the wreck, facing forward or towards the bow, showing the curvature of the port side of the hull..... 69

Figure 39. Scattered debris exposed on the mud inside the vessel..... 69

Figure 40. Removing kelp from the wreckage in order to record the exposed remains..... 70

Figure 41. Preliminary site plan of the *Successful* wreck site.....72

Figure 42. View of the foremast step.....73

Figure 43. Project archaeologist Katie Sikes inspecting the port side futtocks protruding upwards from the mud..... 74

Figure 44. Photomosaic of the rider area, just aft of midships..... 76

Figure 45. Detailed view of Rider Frame 7..... 76

Figure 46. Steering apparatus, collapsed to one side of the vessel at the stern..... 78

Figure 47. A wooden knee, an elbow-shaped timber used in conjunction with beams to support the upper deck.....78

Figure 48. Remains of a winch, possibly steam-powered, used to haul in nets and other equipment..... 81

Figure 49. Small ceramic figurine exposed within the wreck..... 83

Figure 50. Medicinal bottle observed near the figurine above..... 83

Figure 51. Typical view of the debris scatter characteristic of the <i>Charles Stewart Parnell</i> wreck site.....	86
Figure 52. Two iron knees on the wreck of the <i>Charles Stewart Parnell</i> .....	86
Figure 53. Diver observing an intact framing member, a futtock protruding upwards from the seafloor.....	88
Figure 54. Detail of the futtock head pictured in Figure 53.....	88
Figure 55. View of the abandoned salvage equipment—a derrick and steam-powered winch—used by the Sweeny family to salvage the remains of the <i>Aghia Eirini</i> in 1941.....	91
Figure 56. View of the cliffs and derrick, directly above the wreck, from the water.....	91
Figure 57. Closer view of the derrick used in the 1941 salvage operation.....	92
Figure 58. Steam-powered winch used to haul material up from the wreck.....	92
Figure 59. One of the few articulated pieces of hull structure remaining on the <i>Aghia Eirini</i> wreck site: a section of deck beams and plating.....	93
Figure 60. A section of outer hull plating, with rivet holes, on the <i>Aghia</i> wreck.....	94
Figure 61. Hull fitting of unknown function; possibly a hawsepipe or similar device.....	94
Figure 62. Machinery or device of unknown function amid the <i>Aghia</i> wreckage.....	95
Figure 63. Detail of brass hardware on the unknown machinery pictured above.....	95
Figure 64. Two stone structures at the transhumance village at Annagh, used in the late 19th century for seasonal occupation by fishermen from the neighboring Inishkea Islands.....	97
Figure 65. View of the “Scotch House,” a 19th century ruined fishing complex associated with Alexander Hector’s commercial salmon fishing operations.....	99
Figure 66. Preliminary site plan of the Scotch House, June 2005.....	99
Figure 67. The later Keel Coastguard station, built ca. 1863, as it appears remodeled and operating today as the Achill Sheltered Housing centre.....	104

Figure 68. The Coastguard Station at Bullsmouth was probably similar to that at Keel.....	104
Figure 69. Project archaeologists Katie Sikes and Chuck Meide documenting structural details inside the Keem Coastguard station using a total station to record its outline in three dimensions.....	106
Figure 70. Ruined Coastguard station at Keem Bay, built ca. 1830s. The white building in the background is a later Coastguard station dating to ca. 1910.....	107
Figure 71. Plan view of 19th century Keem Bay Coastguard Station.....	107
Figure 72. Two views of the Keem Bay Coastguard Station.....	109
Figure 73. The Achill curragh, from Keel, recorded by James Hornell in 1936.....	110
Figure 74. An Achill curragh being drained of water after landing, as depicted on a postcard dated 1903.....	112
Figure 75. Late 19th century scene of the beach at Dooagh taken by William Lawrence.....	113
Figure 76. Achill yawl, ca. 1890s, in a photograph taken by William Lawrence at Kildavnet.....	114
Figure 77. Taking the lines off the Gallagher yawl, believed to be around 100 years old, on Corraun Peninsula.....	115

### **List of Tables**

Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on various shipwrecks around Achill Island, arranged by Dive/Survey Licence.....	4-6
Table 2. Description of the ten structures at the Annagh transhumance village.....	98
Table 3. Census of Achill Curraghs undertaken in August 2005.....	112

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# **Achill Island Maritime Archaeology Project: Report on Archaeological and Historical Investigations, 2004-2005**

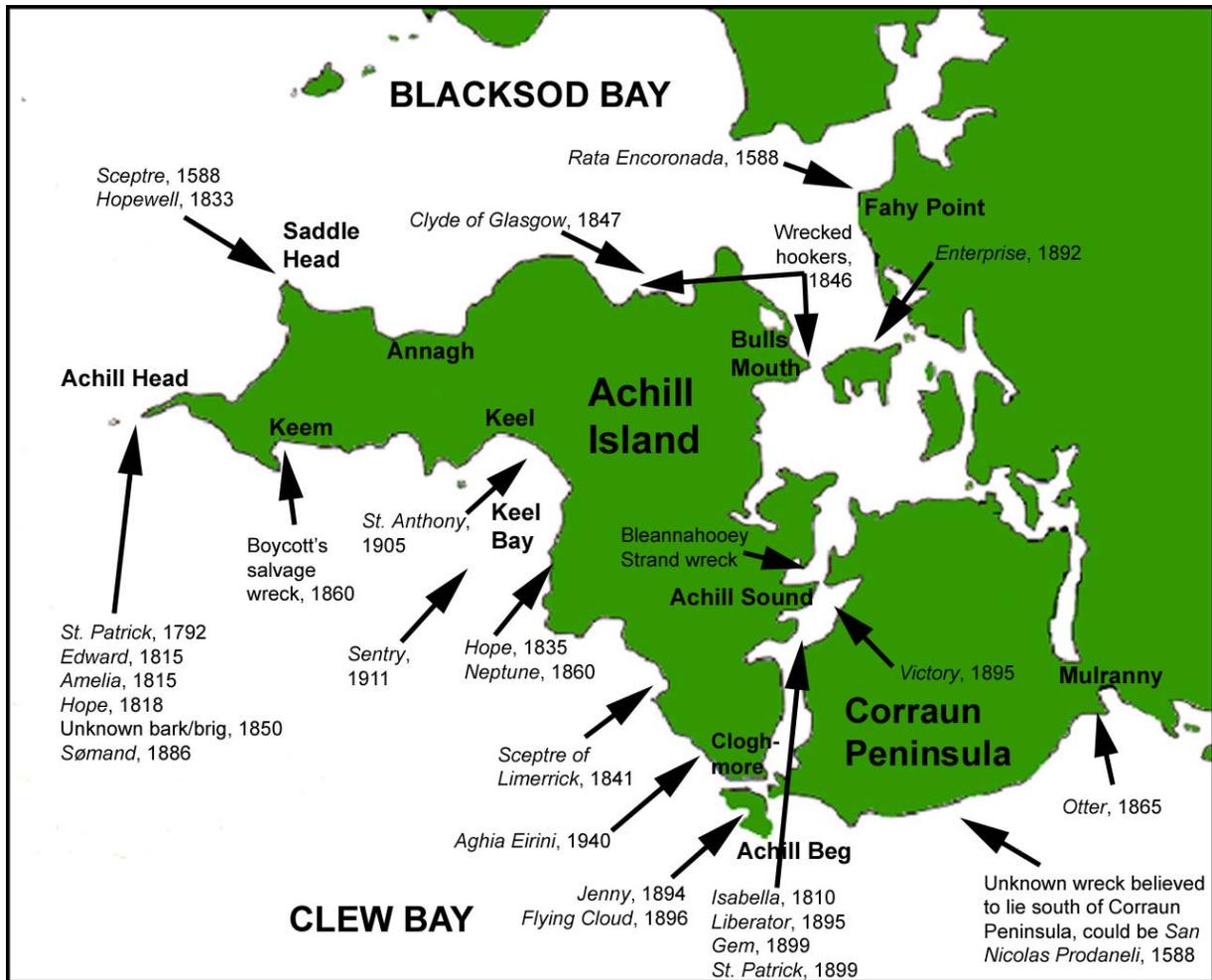
## **Introduction**

In 2004 the College of William and Mary initiated a research project focused on an archaeological survey of the maritime cultural landscape of Achill Island, Co. Mayo, Ireland. This project was directed by Chuck Meide, a maritime archaeologist and Ph.D. student at the College, in close cooperation with his academic advisor, Dr. Audrey Horning. The Achill Island Maritime Archaeology Project was also a cooperative effort with the Achill Folklife Centre, directed by Theresa McDonald. The Folklife Centre has sponsored the Achill Archaeological Field on an annual basis since 1991, and while this outstanding excavation programme has brought much attention to the many archaeological sites across Achill's rugged landscape, until recently the island's rich maritime heritage has been mostly under-appreciated

Achill is Ireland's largest island, located off the traditionally remote coast of Co. Mayo between Clew and Blacksod Bays. Long renowned for its magnificent vistas, dynamic coastline, and friendly communities, Achill today sees a regular influx of visitors during the summer months while still retaining an atmosphere of isolation. Thousands of years of human activity on Achill have left their traces along the seafloor, foreshore, and coastline. Prehistoric settlement sites flooded by rising waters and nearby coastal sites reflect ties to the sea of an ancient island people. The ships of Viking raiders, medieval traders, pirates, privateers, and foreign invaders have all plied the waters around Achill, and their shattered hulls and cargos remain undiscovered offshore. While the most famous wrecking event in the area is undoubtedly the three Spanish Armada ships lost in September 1588, most of the shipwrecks in the region date to later periods, especially the 19th century.

In addition to providing avenues of conflict, commerce, colonial expansion, and Diaspora, the sea has provided life and livelihoods for countless generations of islanders. Rocky shores, sandy beaches, tidal flats, and natural harbors have fostered subsistence and then commercial fishing by boats, nets, and weirs, seaweed cultivation, salt production, and shipwreck salvage. Irish boatbuilding dates as far back as 7,000 years, when dugout canoes were used by prehistoric mariners, and has evolved into two distinct Irish watercraft traditions: the planked boat, and the skin boat. The latter, known as *currachs*, were noted as early as the 3rd century AD by Roman chroniclers, and are still regularly used on the island. The maritime environment, as a provider of subsistence and as a connection to England, Europe, and the greater Atlantic world, has always played a major role in the shaping of the Irish sociocultural landscape.

The purpose of the Achill Maritime Archaeology Project is to explore these issues and document and investigate relevant archaeological sites along Achill's maritime



**Figure 1. Map of Achill Island and the surrounding area, showing the approximate location of various historic shipwreck sites and places mentioned in this report.**

landscape. This research is intended to form the basis of the author's dissertation research at William and Mary. While the project retains its broad scope, the focus for the author's dissertation research has narrowed to an investigation of 19th century economic relations between imperial Britain and Achill islanders as played out on the maritime landscape. This shift in focus was brought about by a number of factors, not least among them a growing interest in this dynamic period of Irish history. In addition, Achill has many extant archaeological sites on land and underwater dating to this period, and because of its isolation, geography, and unique history Achill is particularly well-suited to explore these kinds of issues. Of 161 individual shipwrecks documented in the region identified by the author, only 22 were lost before 1800 (those in the immediate vicinity of Achill are shown in Figure 1). During the 19th century, a period fraught with religious, economic, and political strife, Achill islanders who relied on the sea for their living saw a fundamental shift from traditional, kin-ordered maritime subsistence activities, to participation in a capitalistic, wage-labour based fishing industry. These processes involved both coercive and conciliatory actions from Britain's imperial government, the influence of outside capital and entrepreneurs, and both resistance and acceptance from

various islanders at various times. Many 19th century archaeological resources on the coasts, foreshores, and seas reflect these changes, as will be seen in this report.

This report offers a detailed summary of project activities during the 2004 and 2005 field seasons. These took place between late May and late August in 2004, and between early June and early September in 2005. In addition, historical and archival research has been conducted by the author in Ireland, England, and the U.S., and these historical investigations are also summarized here. This report is also intended to fulfill the requirements of 29 individual Dive/Survey Licences issued to the author by the Irish government (Table 1). These permits are required in order to dive on any shipwreck over 100 years of age in Irish waters, under Section 3 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1987.

The report is divided into twelve sections. The first eleven each deal with one or more related shipwrecks, and these sections are intended to fulfill the reporting required by the Dive/Survey Licences. The twelfth section is an overview of other aspects of this research project that are not directly related to shipwrecks.

Table 1 lists the 29 Dive/Survey Licences issued to the author, and it summarizes the activities carried out on each of these wrecks, and whether or not each individual shipwreck is addressed in this report. Of the 29 shipwrecks that project archaeologists were licenced to dive and survey, only three were actually visited in either 2004 or 2005. Six more of these licenced shipwrecks, however, are addressed in this report, because of archival research conducted concerning their histories, or because artefacts possibly associated with them were located on the island and documented. In addition, during the 2005 season two additional shipwrecks—the *Charles Stewart Parnell* and the *Aghia Eirine*—were dived without Dive/Survey Licences in 2005, because they were less than 100 years old. Summaries of the activities carried out on these wrecks are also included as separate sections in this report.

**Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on various shipwrecks around Achill Island, arranged by Dive/Survey Licence**

<b>Licence No.</b>	<b>Wreck name</b>	<b>Year lost</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Activity on wreck</b>	<b>Summary in this report</b>
05DO41	Unknown wreck near Clare Island; "Train Shipwreck"	19 <sup>th</sup> or 20 <sup>th</sup> century	North of Clare Island	Wreck location known to local divers but was not visited during 2005 season	None
05DO42	<i>St. Anthony</i>	1905	Somewhere in Keel Bay	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO43	<i>St. Patrick</i>	1792	Off Achill Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO44	<i>St. Patrick</i>	1899	Somewhere in Achill Sound	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO45	<i>Sømand</i>	1886	Off Achill Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO46	<i>Sceptre of Limerick</i>	1841	Off west coast of Achill	No attempt made to find this site	Yes
05DO47	<i>Sceptre</i>	Reported to be 1588	Off Saddle Head (previously believed to be Achill Head)	No attempt made to find this site; an anchor raised from this site in the 1960s was observed and photographed	Yes
05DO48	Unknown wreck off Corraun; possibly <i>San Nicolas de Prodaneli</i>	Possibly 1588; could be a later wreck	Off Corraun Peninsula	Archaeologists in 2004 dived the approximate site where an anchor was raised in 1993 but no wreckage was observed. The anchor was located and recorded in 2004.	Yes
05DO49	Unknown bark or brig	1850	Off Achill Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO50	<i>La Rata Encoronada</i>	1588	Off Fahy Point in Tullaghan Bay, near Doona Castle	Archaeologists in 2004 conducted a snorkel survey in the vicinity but no wreckage was observed. No attempt made to find this site during the 2005 season.	Yes
05DO51	<i>Otter</i>	1865	Near Mulranny	No attempt made to find this site	No

**Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on wrecks by Dive/Survey Licence (continued)**

<b>Licence No.</b>	<b>Wreck name</b>	<b>Year lost</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Activity on wreck</b>	<b>Summary in this report</b>
05DO52	<i>Neptune</i>	1860	Keel Bay, under Minaun Cliffs	Two anchors raised from the site in 1980 by local waterman were located and recorded. Also archaeologists dived on the approximate location of the site but no wreckage was observed.	Yes
05DO53	<i>Liberator</i>	1895	Near Achill and Corraun	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO54	<i>Jenny</i>	1894	Achill Beg Island	This site was identified by archaeologists in 2004, and was snorkeled at that time. Two anchors, raised by local divers, were located and recorded in 2004. No attempt was made to dive this site in 2005.	Yes
05DO55	<i>Isabella</i>	1810	In Achill Sound	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO56	<i>Hopewell</i>	1833	Saddle Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO57	<i>Hope</i>	1835	Possibly Keel Bay	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO58	<i>Hope</i>	1818	Achill Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO59	Unnamed hooker	1846	Dugort	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO60	Unnamed hooker	1846	Bullsmouth	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO61	<i>Gem</i>	1899	Achill Sound	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO62	<i>Flying Cloud</i>	1896	Achill Beg	No attempt made to find this site	Yes
05DO63	<i>Enterprise</i>	1892	Inishbiggle	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO64	<i>Edward</i>	1815	Achill Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO65	<i>Clyde of Glasgow</i>	1847	½ mile east of Dugort	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO66	Boycott's salvage wreck	1860	Offshore Achill, possibly off Keem or Dooagh	No attempt made to find this site	Yes

**Table 1. Summary of activity undertaken on wrecks by Dive/Survey Licence (continued)**

<b>Licence No.</b>	<b>Wreck name</b>	<b>Year lost</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Activity on wreck</b>	<b>Summary in this report</b>
05DO67	Bleannahoey Strand wreck, identified as the fishing trawler <i>Successful</i>	1950s, but poss. 19 <sup>th</sup> century construction date	On foreshore in offshoot of Achill Sound across from Bleannahoey Strand	The intact and exposed hull remains were recorded in detail using traditional techniques (baseline and offsets) and photography; some artifacts recorded but not removed	Yes
05DO68	<i>Amelia</i>	1815	Achill Head	No attempt made to find this site	None
05DO69	<i>Victory</i>	1895	Achill Sound at Belfarsad (Corraun)	No attempt made to find this site	None